

BOOKS

by Forrest Bryant

Miles Davis Rediscovered Through His Records

Miles Davis still looms over the jazz world. The jazz sections of bookstores are increasingly crammed with Davis biographies. So why should we take interest in Richard Cook's recent addition to the stack, *It's About That Time: Miles Davis On And Off Record* (Oxford)? The book stands out for two reasons: its unique focus and the clear-headed approach of its author.

This is not a standard biography. Cook, co-author of the *Penguin Guide To Jazz On CD*, zooms from Davis' birth to his emergence in Charlie Parker's quintet in less than two pages. Three more are sufficient to reach Davis' early 20s and the famed *Birth Of The Cool* sessions. Instead of a biography of Davis, Cook has written a biography of the music itself, as revealed through those performances preserved on record. As a running commentary on the evolution of the musician's art, the book slides between biography and discography, illuminating rather than delineating Davis' life story.

The narrative centers on 14 key recordings, spanning four decades and all the phases of Davis' career. Each title receives an in-depth, blow-by-blow analysis, showing insight and honesty. Cook moves sequentially through all the known works in Davis' canon, offering thoughtful takes on each.

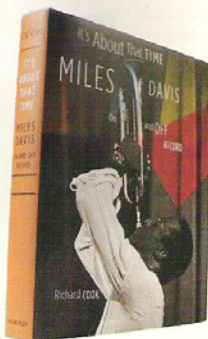
If you have trouble comprehending what Davis was all about after *Bitches Brew*, or want to understand where all those seemingly sudden revolutions in his music came from, *It's About That Time* is an invaluable work. Moving methodically from album to album, Cook bares the hidden logic and happy coincidences behind Davis' complex evolution. Cook also explores the odd disconnect between Davis' studio and live recordings—Davis' live set list could stagnate for years even as his studio output pushed boldly into new musical realms, and yet the live albums also bear an intensity never matched in the studio.

Cook describes performances in clear, everyday language that makes the albums come alive. The near-poetic treatment of Cannonball Adderley is especially fine, as are appreciations of pianist Wynton Kelly and drummer Tony Williams. But Red Garland comes in for some tough critique, and Cook's repeated sniping at percussionist Airtio Moreira seems unnecessarily harsh.

Still, nobody can accuse Cook of being reticent. There are no sacred cows here. Describing *Sketches Of Spain*, for instance, Cook gives "Concierto De Aranjuez" an unflinching assessment as an "awkward" piece, "effortful and oddly lacking in grace."

The book is not without its own awkward moments. An abbreviation of album titles to numerical references creates such sentences as: "Anyone... was as likely to be dismayed as fascinated by the likes of [5]." And by focusing so strongly on recordings over biography, some of the most turbulent or important periods in Davis' life get short shrift. Regardless of such quirks, Cook treats the entirety of Davis' recorded output with a dextrous combination of depth and accessibility that's too rare. **DB**

Ordering info: oup.com



Frank Gratkowski and Misha Mengelberg

Frank Gratkowski Vis-À-Vis
Misha Mengelberg
LEO 476

★★

Dutchman Misha Mengelberg is notorious for his wry humor, and a peek at this album's song list provides reassurance that it hasn't deserted him. Presumably they are entitled "Mixes" in tribute to John Cage's practice of doing the same, but if Cage ever confronted digestive concerns in his music, I don't know about it.

German multireedist Frank Gratkowski seems like an ideal partner for Mengelberg. They both transitioned from the conservatory to jazz, each man's music mixes improvisation and composition, and Gratkowski has a sense of humor. Unlike Mengelberg, he rarely plays his music for laughs, which ought to improve the duo's chemistry, since too much attitudinal consonance can cancel things out. For much of this record, cancellation seems to be what Mengelberg wants. Certainly he's not aiming for combustion. While Gratkowski gets in some fiery licks, especially when he resorts to his deeper-voiced horns, the pianist's accompaniment is determinedly poky. He replies to some particularly dramatic bass clarinet orations on "Mix Vis À Vis," with repetitions of almost bone-headed simplicity, then follows them with note selections so elegant and a propos that they seem to deflate his own strategy. But there he's got you: You thought you knew what he was doing, but only he did. —Bill Meyer

Frank Gratkowski Vis-À-Vis Misha Mengelberg Geburtstags Mix; Gehackter Preis Mix; Mix Digestiv; Mix Vis À Vis; Mix Fraktal; Mix And Match. (67.57)
Personnel: Frank Gratkowski, alto saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet; Misha Mengelberg, piano.

Ordering info: leorecords.com

Rashied Ali Quintet

Judgment Day Vol. 1
SURVIVAL 121

★★½

The music on drummer Rashied Ali's *Judgment Day Vol. 1* suggests there's nothing about which to worry. This onetime 1960s musical revolutionary leads his band through a set of nine tunes that swing in the best post hard-bop sense. Not until toward the rear of the program does Ali's characteristic arrhythmic flow become heard.

There's some fast-paced straightahead swing upfront, with intermittent solos from the leader on Jaco Pastorius' "Dania," the followup to a medium-tempo stroll through Frank Lowe's "Sidewalks In Motion," the album's opening track. A déjà vu feel emerges, a resurgence of acoustic swing reminiscent of the late 1970s.

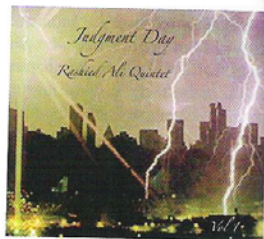
The title track, by trumpeter Jumaane Smith, returns the band to full force, the tandem of trumpet and tenor making the theme statement as pianist Greg Murphy's McCoy Tyner-esque urgency leads the charge toward more soloing. On "Raw Fish," the inclination to veer off from standard time creeps in; with Ali busy on brushes, the tempo becomes a plaything, as the band members weave in and out. Don Cherry's "Multi Culti" recalls a more familiar, restless Ali, as his churning, ongoing drum solos offer a faint echo of days gone by.

—John Ephland

Judgment Day Vol. 1 Sidewalks In Motion; Dania; You're Reading My Mind; Judgment Day; Shied Indeed; Raw Fish; The Big Push; M.O.; Multi Culti. (60:13)

Personnel: Rashied Ali, drums; Jumaane Smith, trumpet; Lawrence Clark, tenor saxophone; Greg Murphy, piano; Joris Teepe, bass.

Ordering info: myspace.com/rashiedali



WINNING SPINS
- By George Kanzler

Judgment Day Vol.1, a Survival Records release by the Rashied Ali quintet, is propelled by the leader's forward-leaning beat in a program of hard-bop and slower tunes, plus a finale that ventures into the avant-garde turf Ali explored during the 60s and 70s. His quintet features all players a generation or more younger than their leader, with two comparative veterans – bassist Joris Teepe and pianist Greg Murphy – in the rhythm section, and the fiery youngsters – trumpeter Jumaane Smith and tenor saxophonist Lawrence Clark – out front.

Teepe and Ali are a perfect combine, as both lean into the beat with fervid enthusiasm and drive. With their example, the band is ferocious as it barrels through a program highlighted by fast burners leavened by ballads and blues. This is a record that affirms jazz traditions by doing what's considered quite familiar, really, with verve and drive that makes it special again.

February 2007, Hot House Magazine

Judgment Day Vol. 1
Rashied Ali (Survival)
- By Jeff Stockton

Rashied Ali has always been unfairly typecast as the guy who usurped Elvin Jones from Coltrane's Classic Quartet, the dividing line between A Love Supreme and Trane's final phase when the leader became all dissonant and difficult. Trane knew better than us, of course, but Ali's career after Trane didn't do much to change the perception that he was strictly a free jazzer thanks to first-rate duet work with the late Frank Lowe, stellar performances in trios led by Peter Brotzmann, Ivo Perelman and Charles Gayle and by leading Prima Materia, a band that assayed the work of Coltrane and Albert Ayler. So it comes as a bit of a surprise that the music on Judgment Day is much more inside than out, carrying echoes of the sound of the spiritually questing Coltrane before Ali joined, the introspectiveness of mid'60s Wayne Shorter and the hard bop of the Jazz Messengers. Ali puts himself in Art Blakey's role of the elder statesman to the young horn men Lawrence Clark on tenor and Jumaane Smith on trumpet, both who play with fiery conviction and the technical virtuosity of seasoned veterans, blaring their instruments in unison so that the peaks are frequent and each tune is rendered as a high point. As it should be with drummer-led quintets, the rhythms are key: swaggering on Shorter's "The Big Push," laid back and swinging on Lowe's "Sidewalks in Motion" and hard-driving on Jaco's "Dania." Nothing burns hotter than the title track, though, when young Clark meets Coltrane head on and pianist Greg Murphy drops clusters of notes like propaganda bombs.

February 2007, ALLABOUTJAZZ-NEW YORKMUSIC REVIEW

At Avant-Garde Jazz Series, Rashied Ali and a Reunion
- By NATE CHINEN
February 13, 2007 The New York Times

The Sculptured Sounds Music Festival adheres to an appealingly pure-hearted ideal. Organized and anchored by the bassist Reggie Workman, it presents adventurous jazz groups every Sunday night in February. The concerts take place at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Midtown Manhattan, familiar to a certain breed of New Yorker as the site of countless jazz memorial services. That sounds morbid, but it didn't feel that way on Sunday. Well, maybe just at first, as a quiet, expectant rustle could be heard in the pews.

Notably, those pews were nearly full despite the Grammy Awards, which were on television. According to Mr. Workman, this attendance was in stark contrast to the previous Sunday's concert, which competed with another broadcast event, the Super Bowl. (Take those comparative results and draw your own conclusions about jazz fans.) Add that the audience was not only robust but also diverse — in sex, race and age — and you have the

kind of turnout that would make any producer happy.

Musically, the evening was a mixed bag. Its high points were very high, its low points were fairly low, and there was a lot of moderate stuff in between. The evening, thankfully, yielded mostly positive results and had enough propulsion to shake off whatever wasn't working.

The headliner was Great Friends, a group that included Mr. Workman. (He makes no pretense of objectivity as a producer, appearing on each of the festival's installments.) Formed in the 1980s by the drummer Billy Hart, the reunited ensemble featured its charter members: Mr. Hart and Mr. Workman, as well as the tenor saxophonist Billy Harper and the pianist Stanley Cowell. A later member, the alto saxophonist Sonny Fortune, had bowed out at the last minute, Mr. Workman said.

After getting off to a shaky start with the calypsolike "East Harlem Nostalgia," the group delivered one of the evening's standout moments. It was "Equipoise," an anthem by Mr. Cowell with a leaping-interval motif. It was an ideal showcase for Mr. Cowell, who fashioned a saloon-style introduction and later improvised a more ardent stream of arpeggios and cascades.

Mr. Harper took a similarly stellar turn on "Insight," a breakneck number composed by Mr. Hart with a chord progression borrowed from "Autumn Leaves." Mr. Harper's solo was a relentless sweep of eighth notes, each crisply articulated despite the daunting tempo. In the rhythm section, Mr. Workman and Mr. Hart made their frantic swing feel less so, shifting their accents to create clear spaces whenever the music needed to breathe.

During an earlier performance slot, the drummer Rashied Ali applied the same strategy to an almost comically turbocharged rendition of "Joshua," a Victor Feldman song associated with Miles Davis. Mr. Ali, best known as the chief percussionist in the squalling late-period groups of John Coltrane, was leading a quintet featuring Jumaane Smith on trumpet and Antoine Roney on tenor saxophone.

Defying his reputation for fearsome avant-gardism, Mr. Ali drove his group in a hard-bop direction; the reference point seemed to be Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. This was the case not only on "Shied Indeed," a crackling opener by Mr. Smith, but also "Saturn," a movement from "Interstellar Space," the duet album Coltrane made with Mr. Ali. It was a strange translation; Mr. Ali seemed intent on normalizing something treasured precisely for its utter lack of compromise.

KFJC On-Line Reviews

What KFJC has added to their library and why...

Ali, Rashied Quintet - "Judgment Day Vol. 1" - [Survival]

Very solid effort from this NYC quintet led by the Art Blakey of our day. Drummer Ali has played with the likes of Coltrane (John and Alice), Pharaoh Sanders, Sonny Fortune and James Blood Ulmer, but he is also known for nurturing young upcoming talent. This disc features great blowing by Jumaane Smith (trumpet) and Lawrence Clark (tenor) along with the very McCoy Tyneresque tinkling of Greg Murphy (piano).

Hard bop is the subject at hand. And much of this disc sounds like it could have been recorded in 1957, which is entirely a good thing. A lot of hard blowing swinging jazz came out of that period, right around when the avant-garde was starting to bubble and burst forth from the be-bop scene.

Standout tracks are:

4. Judgment Day (8:17) Middle Eastern sounding theme, fast hard swinging be-bop.
6. Raw Fish (5:58) Slow, quirky, dissonant, but nicely held together by harmonic horns.
9. Multi Culti (6:28) Gorgeous take on a multi-tempo Don Cherry composition.

—Jawbone January 24, 2007

OPENING CHORUS Overdue Ovation

- By Chris Kelsey

Rashied Ali

SOUND JUDGEMENT

John Coltrane knew a thing or two about drummers. During his apprenticeship with Miles Davis, he played with Philly Joe Jones, who surely whetted his appetite for the percussive petulance – so much so, that when it came time for Coltrane to form his own group, the saxophonist one-upped his former boss and hired Elvin Jones, maybe the only drummer of the era who could out-ass-kick Philly Joe. When Elvin couldn't make it, another fire-breather, Roy Haynes, took his place. But Elvin usually made it. He stayed with Trane until the saxophonist

needed something else from a drummer. When that time came, Coltrane turned to his fellow Philadelphian-turned-New Yorker, Rashied Ali.

Ali gave him that "something else."

From the time he joined Coltrane in late 1965 until the saxophonist's death in July 1967, Ali helped enable Trane's final, most radical break with convention. The drummer's skittering, high-energy playing fractured the pulse into tiny shards, which he reassembled, mosaic like, into something quite different. Ali staked out new areas of rhythmic independence and sound exploration.

On late Coltrane recordings such as *Live at the Village Vanguard Again!* and *Interstellar Space*, Ali's splintering of time paralleled the asymmetrical note groupings and convoluted phasing that the saxophonist explored in full late in his career. Ali's primary role was not to provide a rhythmic context, but to freely interact, to shadow and challenge Coltrane's every turn of phrase.

Rashied Ali is one of the fathers of free-jazz drumming. Every free-jazz drummer (and to an extent, every free-jazz musician) who followed owes him a debt.

After Coltrane's passing, Ali became one of the leading figures on the New York avant-jazz scene, a position he holds to this day. In the '70's, he founded his own record label, survival, for which he's recorded a string of raw and risky albums featuring such prominent avant-gardists as the late saxophonist Frank Lowe, violinist Leroy Jenkins and guitarist James "Blood" Ulmer. For several years he ran his own club in downtown Manhattan, Ali's Alley, which was a major venue during the loft-jazz era of the '70s. He's led innumerable bands and played with everyone who's anyone in the free-jazz community.

Today Ali's an elder statesman, yet he's playing better than ever. And he's still capable of surprising us, as proven by his latest releases on survival, *Judgment Day Vol.1 & Vol. 2*. This is not the formally open, structurally abstract free jazz for which he's best known. There's plenty of blowing room, to be sure, but the tunes themselves are meticulously composed and arranged. It swings in a way guaranteed to make the Lincoln Center cats swallow hard and take notice. At times it's nearly straight ahead, yet unlikely latter-day hard bop, it is music of the here and now--with hints of jazz to come.

"If you really listen to it, I'm trying really hard not to just play time," says Ali. It's true. He's playing "out" and "in" simultaneously, generating enough energy to light the East Coast. "You can hear that the drums are breaking it up a lot," he says. "It's not like I'm playing really straight-head drums. It might sound like that on the surface, but underneath you'll hear a lot of stuff that says I'm really an avant-garde player," albeit one who studied with Art Blakey and Philly Joe and therefore knows modern jazz in all its manifestations.

With his quintet, the 71-year-old free-jazz vet puts to shame drummers half his age--incessantly driving and creating, sidestepping clichés at every turn. And Ali hasn't forsaken freedom, not by a long stretch. Even when playing straight-ahead, there are times in mid-performance when an abandonment of form and structure is the logical next step. Less intrepid musicians skid to a stop, jam into reverse and head home. Ali and his band make the leap without hesitation. Theirs is jazz without borders, an example of what a group can do if they've the will and discipline to embrace a full range of possibilities.

"It does have that kind of catchy thing, where anybody can listen to the music and appreciate it-avant-garde people, straight-ahead people, whatever," says Ali, "They can all hear something in there. I'm glad it works that way, because that's the kinda stuff I want to be doing right now."

Ali talks about his band like a proud papa, and for good reason. "I'm playing with kids who are damn near young enough to be my grandkids!" he laughs. The group-trumpeter Jumaane Smith, tenor saxophonist Lawrence Clark, pianist Greg Murphy, bassist Joris Teepe-has been together for almost four years.

The Ali-Murphy alliance dates back almost two decades. "Greg's been in just about every band I've had since we met in the 80s," Ali says. "Jumaane I just met by chance. I've been knowing him since he was about 19. He's 25 now. He first saw me when I played a concert with the New Art Quartet in his hometown of Seattle. Then he came out here to attend the New School and Julliard. I met him when he was at the New School."

Ali first heard Clark playing at Cleopatra's Needle on upper Broadway. "When Frank Lowe passed, I was really looking for a saxophone player," says Ali. "I invited Lawrence to come down and check us out. He's a dynamite young player, playing a lot more stuff now than he ever has. And I'd met Joris through Frank Lowe." They're all as comfortable playing changes as they are playing free. "When you play with me, you better be able to do it all," Ali says.

Repertoire is one of the band's strengths. All the sidemen write. "I do most of the arrangements and pick most of the tunes," says Ali. "I haven't written for the band as of yet, but we're playing a lot of stuff by the guys. Jumaane's written a lot of the stuff, and Lawrence is writing a lot, and so is Joris and so is Greg. We're playing a lot of original music." All that might go for naught if no one heard it. Fortunately, the band's getting gigs. "We just got back from London, a week ago or two ago. We got really good reviews over there," says Ali. "People seem to dig it. I'm

having very good feedback from just about everybody.

The quintet is his main focus, but Ali keeps irons in other fires, as well. "I'm doing a duo record with Borah Bergman for Soul Note or Black Saint. I played this last Vision festival with Borah, William Parker and Louis Belogenis. That was pretty cool." Another project is By Any Means, his trio with bassist Parker and saxophonist Charles Gayle. The band recorded the critically acclaimed Touchin' on Trane in the early '90s, but until recently had not performed together in almost a decade. "We've just started getting back together. We played the Vision Festival," Ali says. We're a heavy avant-garde band, because we don't play any melodies at all, it's all improvised. We just start and stop. We haven't been into the studio yet, but we plan to this year."

Between the quintet and his other projects, Ali's working more than ever. While he'll always be known for this time with Coltrane, the world's getting hip to the nearly four-decades-worth of beautiful music he's made since. "I think it's the longevity. I've been here long enough for people to think, 'Hey man, maybe this cat really do have something!'" he laughs. "It's just all coming together. In a way, it's a drag, that now that I've become a super-senior-citizen that I got to do all this traveling now, but it's cool, because I'm in shape and ready and-willing to play. I wish I could've been doing this when I was 35, but that's alright. It's just an awesome experience for me right now. I'm really having fun with this stuff.

"I couldn't ask for anything more, except maybe more money and recognition," he continues, "but that doesn't really matter to me; what matters mostly is the music, and I'm definitely in pursuance of the music. I feel really good about what's happened to me. I mean, I've been able to have a wife and a couple of kids and send my kids to college. I was able to own my own place. I'm pretty stable and secure, like a senior citizen should be. The only thing I ever did in my whole life is play drums, man. I never had another job. I played drums my whole life, and that's, like, a miracle."

© JazzTimes November 2006

Excellent! (5 Stars)

I was fortunate to see this same group at Sweet Rhythm in NYC, 12/9/06. I'd gone to see the great Rashied Ali. What I got was much more. This is one of the best working groups anywhere, any place. I bought both Volume 1 and Volume 2 at the gig. Since then I've ordered copies from CD Baby for friends. I cannot recommend these two volumes highly enough. Not just because I was at the show. But rather because they are some of the best recordings by one of the best groups to come along in a very, very long time. This band smokes.....and it's led by a true legend, Rashied Ali. These are not the easiest CD's to locate. CD Baby's got them, and you should have them as well.

- Mike Thompson
Austin, Texas

Electric fire music of the finest sort (5 Stars)

The Rashied Ali Quintet is electric fire music of the finest sort. In 1984 I saw a man in NYC at the 125th St. subway stop holding up a sign that read: "Judgment Day Is Coming. Are you ready?" Now I know what he was talking about. Buy this disc. Listen to this disc. It is music that will be felt and heard. Rashied is Rashied is Rashied. T was ever thus...

- Glenn Weyant

BREAKING NEWS jazzwise.com **24.08.06: Rashied Ali blasts Pizza on the Park into space**

London's Pizza on the Park jazz club took a welcome left turn in its booking policy this week as Rashied Ali and his band completed three rare dates which blasted the club into outer space.

The ex-Coltrane drummer and his band, including hot newcomers Lawrence Clark, tenor sax, and Jumaane Smith, trumpet, alongside pianist Greg Murphy and bassist Joris Teepe, wasted little time in raising the performance to an intense, deeply spiritual level the likes of which had never been heard in this venue before. Ali

took pieces by Eric Dolphy, James 'Blood' Ulmer and Don Cherry and reshaped them into sonic launch pads for Smith and Clark to soar deep into the stratosphere, climbing higher and higher over the drummer's galvanic rolling thunder. Watch for an in-depth review in October's Jazzwise, out on 29 September.

Rashied Ali Quintet
Pizza on the Park, London
From the October 2006 issue of Jazzwise Magazine

Billed as "Rashied Ali" Coltrane's last drummer", the saxophonist is inevitably the ghost at this banquet. You have to remind yourself that music such as this is as old as 12-minute guitar solos and liquid light shows. How do you avoid turning it into a Lincoln Center Museum piece? Rashied Ali's answer is simple, play it like it's now, like life depends on it and that's just what his band did for a good-size audience on the last night of a three date run at this excellent, up-market club. It was hard to decide what was most impressive about this group. Tenorist Lawrence Clark has listened well to Trane but unlike his peers has gone deep into the giant's late period as well and trumpeter Jumaane Smith plays as if he's absorbed it all from Louis and Henry "Red" Allen to Don Cherry. On James "Blood" Ulmer's Theme For Captain Black', the two horns soloed simultaneously, weaving around each other like two prize-fighters, while pianist Greg Murphy threw these fantastic tone clusters in to his solo on 'Ulmer's Thing For Joe' that were totally "out" yet rhythmically and dynamically in keeping with the piece. Bassist Joris Teepe is less obviously outstanding but his solo on Dolphy's '245' was rhythmically adventurous and he anchors this craft magnificently, while his mid-paced composition 'Flight 643' swung beautifully. But time and again, you were drawn back to the man behind the kit that was where it all seemed to begin. Loose-limbed, constantly shifting patterns, kaleidoscopes of sound, distant thunder, strange accents but perfect time. Always maintaining momentum but never resorting to the obvious, Rashied Ali was inspired and inspiring.

- Duncan Heining

Seattle Times October 27, 2006 (Earshot Jazz Festival)

The hometown team gave a hearty welcome to Roosevelt grad Jumaane Smith, back from New York to play at The Triple Door Tuesday with drummer Rashied Ali. His set of originals, some written by guitarist James "Blood" Ulmer, bristled with brash urgency, puncturing the skin of post-bop decorum with fierce rhythms and warbling cries. Tenor saxophonist Lawrence Clark was the highlight, especially when he and Ali chewed tenaciously on a phrase, recalling Ali's historic duets with John Coltrane. Smith, though exciting, was stuck in high gear.

Rashied Ali, Pizza on the Park, London
- by Mike Hobart Financial Times
Published: August 27 2006

Rashied Ali's reputation still hangs on being the drummer who played with even higher levels of energy and rhythmic abstraction than Elvin Jones, his predecessor with the legendary saxophonist John Coltrane's "classic quartet". Ali's rhythmic onslaught removed the last traces of jazz' traditional metronomic pulses, and is credited with propelling Coltrane into the further reaches of free-form jazz during the saxophonist's final years – Ali joined Coltrane in 1965, two years before his death.

Though Ali's playing with John Coltrane dispensed with a regular metronomic beat, he never turned his back on the energy and pulse that lies at the heart of the jazz tradition, and his ability to swing in the traditional sense should never have been in doubt. Now aged 71 and with a regular working group, Ali still provides the energy to drive a young sax and trumpet front line, and over two well-received sets, captured the fire and commitment of more incendiary times.

Ali likes his soloists to dig deep into their reservoirs of inspiration and energy – both sets featured only three numbers, and of these two were relatively short original ballads, "Dania" a waltz in the first set and the emotionally astringent "You're Reading my Mind" in the second. These come between extended versions of themes custom built for soloists to build tension that can be released into an urgent but tight swing.

The first set's opening "Judgment Day", title track of their current CD, used a menacing modal pedal to build tension, the second set's "Shied Indeed" a keeningly harmonized counterpoint. Closing covers of "Joshua" and

"Rhythm-A-Ning" also followed this pattern.

With the excellent Dutch bassist Joris Teepe moving telepathically round the beat in synchrony with Ali's dead-centre timing, saxophonist Lawrence Clark was given ample room to showcase his declamatory tone, split harmonics and low note ululations, though it was the technical virtuosity, brash tone and soulful melodic flow of trumpeter Jumaane Smith that really impressed. [4 out of 5 stars]

The Evening Standard August 21st, 2006

Rashied Ali Quintet

Pizza on the Park, SW1X 7LY (London, UK)

HEAVY GOING

by Jack Massarik

"Listen, I was a Muslim long before all this bullshit started," snorted Rashied Ali, the rarely seen free-jazz icon who famously replaced Elvin Jones in John Coltrane's last group.

Born Robert Patterson in 1935, he converted during the civil-rights Sixties, when Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were assassinated and Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali. "Airports have been hassling me for years, but they know I'm from Philadelphia."

More of a surprise was to find him playing straight-ahead drums with a formidable young New York quintet. While 25-year-old Seattle trumpeter Jumaane Smith was blowing like a young Woody Shaw and 31-year-old tenorist Lawrence Clark was reproducing Trane's early tone with unearthly accuracy, Ali's cymbals snapped out the tempo as fiercely as Art Blakey ever did. Not by coincidence; it was a Blakey T-shirt Ali wore onstage. Dutch double-bassist Joris Teepe maintained a solid line while Chicagoan Greg Murphy showed the superb keyboard technique you only get by playing eight hours a day for about 15 years.

In two uncompromising sets, they played Frank Lowe's Sidewalks in Motion, Jaco Pastorius's Dania, Monk's Round Midnight (complete with Dizzy Gillespie's intro and outro), Cherokee and Don Cherry's Multi-Kulti, featuring the evening's only out-of-tempo interludes. Knightsbridge will never hear heavier modern jazz than this. [4 out of 5 stars]

RASHIED ALI

Judgement Day, Vol. 1 & 2 (Survival)

For the past 20 years Rashied Ali has been operating like an Art Blakey figure in terms of discovering and nurturing new talent. His current working quintet is another cross-generational affair featuring veterans Greg Murphy (piano) and Joris Teepe (bass) and two new firebrands in Lawrence Clark on tenor sax and Jumaane Smith on trumpet. Together this tightly knit group swings in fairly conventional postbop fashion on rarely covered tunes like Frank Lowe's "Sidewalks in Motion," Jaco Pastorius' uptempo blazer "Dania," Wayne Shorter's "The Big Push" and James Blood Ulmer's "M.O."

Teepe, a powerful, deep-toned bassist in the Paul Chambers tradition, contributes the moving ballad "You're Reading My Mind," while saxophonist Clark, who blows heroically throughout these two discs, offers the exhilarating title track, a modal workout with distinctly Middle Eastern touches that has pianist Murphy dipping deeply into his McCoy Tyner bag. Other highlights in these two energized sets include Murphy's burning "Skane's Refrain" and Smith's frantically swinging "Yesterday (J-Man) Tomorrow," along with dynamic readings of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life," Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" and Don Cherry's "Multi-Culti." Though this band rarely plays outside of New York City, this is one of the more potent working quintets in jazz today.

- Bill Milkowski

"Drum Beat" May 2006

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Dusted Reviews

Artist: Rashied Ali

Album: Judgment Day, Vols. I & II

Label: Survival

Review date: Feb. 26, 2006

These two new quintet dates confirm what I have long believed, that Rashied Ali is one of the most underrated drummers to emerge from the turbulently exploratory 1960s. Only one aspect of his multicolored playing has gotten anything even close to the examination and discussion it deserves, and anyone reading this knows of the fire, brimstone and thunder he brought to Coltrane's final period. Yet, listen to the subtlety, introspection and sublimated magic of his brushwork on a track like "Ogunde" from Expression, or to Marion Brown's second ESP date, and you will have some idea of what else to expect in these more recent ventures.

All of the tunes on Judgment Day are either acknowledged classics or homage's to established masters. Steve Dalachinsky's unerringly perceptive liners quote Ali as saying "If they can play Beethoven, why not Coltrane?" While Coltrane is not represented here – Ali's Prima Materia project paid him beautiful respect – the quotation is apt in that the music of such undeniably influential figures as Monk, Shorter and Strayhorn are rendered with faithfulness and fluent unpredictability. "Round Midnight," from Vol. II, is a stunning case in point. The familiar introduction is treated here with just a hint of the "free" playing associated with Ali's early recordings, bassist Joris Teepe's tasty interjections being particularly noteworthy. Trumpet and sax use vibrato to great effect, a signifier that, in tandem with Greg Murphy's slyly intuitive incorporation of Monk's pianisms, invokes the "swing" at the heart of Monk's rhetoric and rhythm. Lawrence Clark's tenor tone is lush and full, enhancing the allusion. Just as the tune is about to end, Ali breaks into a funky Latin-tinged groove, the quintet sound turning lush and sumptuous all at once. It's a gesture of which Monk would certainly have approved, given his ear for all manner of shifts in arrangement.

Both volumes abound with small but revelatory surprises of that nature. Trumpeter Jumaane Smith's "Shied Indeed" – one for the leader – sports one of the hippest stop-time unison breaks I've heard in quite a while. It jumps right out of the middle of a simple but effectively modal head, broadsiding the unsuspecting listener with a brick-textured chunk of hard-edged compositional prowess. As with the Monk treatment, Dalachinsky is right to point out the temporally multifarious aesthetic of the playing; roots and branches of the creative music tree are often apparent in one sweeping gesture.

Nowhere is the fluidity of temporal perception more evident than in Ali's drumming. Ali has expressed repeatedly his preoccupation with the expansion of time, of his constant development of time elasticity. The Jaco Pastorias tune "Dania," from the first volume, has one of the briefest but most powerful solos I've ever heard from him, and much of its interest is generated by its architecture. Ali breezes effortlessly through some of the most intense circumlocutions and syncopations imaginable, only to return to a steady four, as if he'd never left. Throughout these temporal juxtapositions, his ear is constantly on timbre, key rhythmic moments warranting bullets and bombs from his multivalent arsenal of snare attacks.

The quintet, diverse in age and background, manages to sound unified without any player losing individuality, and part of this is due to the skill with which the albums were recorded and mixed in Ali's Survival Studios. The sound is direct without being overbearing, just as the playing is referential without being idiosyncratic or maudlin. These are fantastic discs that exist inside the tradition while offering repeated opportunities for its fresh appraisal.

- Marc Medwin

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The Phoenix

Swarthmore College's Online Newspaper

November 9, 2006

Night of unforgettable jazz acts at Olde Club

BY NICK GAW

Saturday, Nov. 5, was just one of those "massive nights" of which The Hold Steady would be proud. With so many great performances on campus, Swarthmore was at its weekend best. Students who crowded into Olde Club around 9 p.m. were hugely rewarded with an out-of-this-world performance by The Rashied Ali Quintet with guests The Abraham Lincoln Brigade and Swarthmore students Mark Loria '08, Caleb Ward '07 and Dan Perelstein '09.

The show, coordinated by Olde Club Director Melissa Phruksachart '07, satiated an appetite for variety in Swarthmore's live music scene, "I wanted to do something different. We hadn't had jazz at Olde Club," said Phruksachart. "I thought it would work really well, because it's a very intimate space."

Loria, Ward and Perelstein set the stage for a jazzy night at Olde Club with compositions written a mere two weeks ago and rehearsed only a few times since. Mark Skaden '08 responded to the trio's performance, "it

seemed perfectly on the level with the whole performance that evening.”

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was something of an homage to the Olde Club experience, preparing the space with some accustomed indie sensibilities for a jazz great. At times bizarre but always compelling, the quintet includes two tenor saxophones, one alto saxophone, one guitar and a drum set. Their set featured competing saxophone lines converging in and out of harmony while establishing a sonic barrier which their rhythm section constantly struggled to rupture. Competing elements often devolved into carefully orchestrated noise before instantaneously reassembling into unison and harmony. Each element, dissonance and consonance, brought power and focus to the other.

Impressively, their drummer for the evening, Pete, had never played with the group before, but was seamlessly doing his part with two drumsticks and a rope of whistles. Other high-pitched sounds were added by Eugene Lee, the alto saxophonist, who on several occasions played his mouthpiece disconnected from the body of his saxophone. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was intense, bold and energetic. They took Olde Club for a ride.

The Rashied Ali Quintet took the stage, with Rashied Ali on the drums, Jumaane Smith playing trumpet, Lawrence Clark on tenor saxophone, Joris Teepe on bass and Greg Murphy playing piano.

Rashied Ali is a true innovator and jazz legend, and his career is marked by gigs with some of jazz's biggest names. Ali drummed alongside Elvin Jones for John Coltrane before replacing Jones as Coltrane's singular timekeeper. Ali also has played with the great bassist Sonny Rollins and more recently the saxophonist Sonny Fortune. The Rashied Ali Quintet's performance evidenced his quintet's impressive prowess, their youthful energy and veteran technique. Each chart followed a similar template beginning with a head that catapulted the listener into solos, removing members of the band until Rashied Ali was left to a drum solo before a captivated audience. Loria was impressed by Rashied Ali's performance. "He definitely delivered the goods," he said. "This performance was much more jazzy than a lot of what he does." It was a combination of these jazzier elements, oftentimes straightforward, driving swing that contrasted avant-garde impulses fighting to disrupt and entangle time. Ali's solos highlighted these elements. He would seamlessly weave together a conception of time, utilizing the consistency of classical jazz while suspending fixed time during melodic fills. "I was very affected by it. I wanted to be as close to it as possible," Skaden said. "It was one of the most spectacular drumming experiences I've ever had the chance to encounter."

One of the most provocative numbers was one composed by bassist Joris Teepe, "Raw Fish." One part crawling ballad and another part forceful swing, the composition was complexly layered with each instrument peeling away to find a walking bass line and complex melody within the greater bass line. The Rashied Ali Quintet command respect for their solos and songwriting, and most of all for their bold approach to jazz, at once progressive and retrospective.

Music review: Hot weekend of jazz lights up Rose City

Two storied drummers and other artists keep two critics busy for an entertaining two nights

Monday, October 23, 2006

MARTY HUGHLEY

The Oregonian

"I'd like to introduce you to the youngest member of our group," Javon Jackson said to a packed house Saturday at Jimmy Mak's. "On drums, Mr. Jimmy Cobb."

He was joking a bit. A revered veteran most noted for his 1958-63 stint with Miles Davis, Cobb in fact was the elder statesman -- and not just of Jackson's quartet but of a busy weekend of jazz in Portland.

Fans of the great improvisational art had some choices to make. Cobb made Jackson's two-night stand in the Pearl District hot spot a must-see event, but there was cross-town competition from another storied drummer, Rashied Ali, playing at the Blue Monk on Belmont. Meanwhile LV's Uptown boasted out-of-town guests who were leading piano trios, with Minnesotan Laura Caviani on Friday and New Yorker Roberta Piket on Saturday. And the many talented local players weren't taking the weekend off, either.

It was a good time for two critics to take a swing through the jazz scene. Lynn Darroch and I each hit Javon Jackson and Rashied Ali, but on different nights, then we went our separate ways, to catch as much as possible. Keyed to the piano

The big names belonged to drummers. Though Jackson, a saxophonist, was the bandleader, the great draw to his gig was the rare treat of hearing Cobb, an exemplar of a classic style of hard-bop timekeeping. Ali, most famous for his role alongside John Coltrane on the avant-garde classic "Interstellar Space," brought some historical gravity of his own.

Yet, as things turned out, the pianists were really the key.

That might not have been the perception at the weekend's outset, with Caviani's performance early Friday evening. She played standard mainstream repertoire with a pleasingly nimble touch and well-shaped, melodically sure phrasing. But despite the very able support of Portlanders Gary Hobbs on drums (who added an earthy rhythmic push to Horace Silver's "Peace," hand-drumming on cojon, a resonant wooden box that doubled as his seat) and Scott Steed on bass, the music failed to convey much drive or personality.

Surely the LV's setting, its grayish light and dull decor suited more to sales-convention continental breakfasts than to a swinging night of music, didn't help.

The low-ceilinged basement of the Blue Monk isn't posh, either, but it's a more conducive container for musical adventure. At times in Friday's two sets, Ali's quintet pushed the envelope on consonance and structure, especially in a version of James "Blood" Ulmer's "M.O." that peaked with a furious yet trancelike solo from the drummer. But the music was most rewarding when most grounded, as in "Lorraine," a fine ballad by the group's 'Trane-besotted saxophonist, Lawrence Clark, and a spirited take on the classic "Cherokee."

In most cases, it was pianist Greg Murphy who made the difference, injecting light and linearity in what often was overly dense and abstract music.

After the underdone and overheated extremes that Caviani and Ali represented Friday, the following night's sets by Jackson and company were as tasty as Baby Bear's porridge, a superb balance between accessibility and expressive verve. The leader's tone was warm and inviting, Cobb's swinging time was imperturbable, and his solos delivered greater focus and dynamic sense than Ali's. But again, it was the pianist who shone brightest, in this case George Cables, a canny vet whose improvisations sparkled with rhythmic drive and a keen sense of harmony.

-- Marty Hughley Masters and commanders

Command. The ability to take control of unaligned forces and transform them into a brilliant pattern. That's what pianist George Cables and drummer Jimmy Cobb brought to the stage Friday night as part of Javon Jackson's quartet.

Their mastery showed most dramatically on the set's weakest tune, the 1970s soul ballad "Where Is the Love." When the tenor saxophonist played the melody straight, it appeared rather flat compared with previous material such as "Whisper Not." But once in the hands of Cables, Cobb and journeyman bassist Nat Reeves, the tune acquired buoyancy and swinging syncopation. Cables found the blues in the song and set them free, while Cobb transformed the beat into a bouncy stroll.

Keeping his hands low, doing nothing flashy, Cobb's perfect time centered every song. After all, this is the legend who helped shape modern jazz with Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Wes Montgomery.

Cables, too, has been right-hand man for such stars as Art Pepper, Dexter Gordon and Joe Henderson. Now undergoing kidney dialysis three times a week, he nonetheless displayed great energy, piling up an ever-mounting string of notes toward the end of a verse until they seemed to topple forward into the next, leaving you still on your feet but exhilarated, as if you yourself had been tumbling.

At O'Connor's in Multnomah Village on Friday, the prolific bassist David Friesen and tenor saxophonist John Gross, took a risk. Exposed, without a chordal instrument to provide guide and cover, with just single notes and strings, they made challenging music sound full and satisfying. Heads of long gray hair bent seriously to the task, like watchmakers or weavers, Gross created an honest, human sound on tenor and Friesen contributed busy, full-bodied bass figures that made a spare, improvisational approach into something certain and compelling.

Saturday night at the University of Portland's Buckley Center Auditorium, the long-running series DePriest Family Jazz helped pass along the jazz tradition. In years past, Javon Jackson has been featured with drummer Akbar DePriest's band. This time the guest star was 29-year-old Portland trumpeter Farnell Newton, showing the torch has been passed successfully to another generation. Newton is a lyrical player in a classic jazz context, capable of matching the elegant musicianship displayed by bassist Ed Bennett and pianist Jof Lee.

The group closed with former Portland drummer Lawrence Williams' "Song to Lift the Human Spirit" -- a fitting choice, as DePriest is undergoing treatment for cancer, and the small audience came in part to honor the man who began his career on Central Avenue in Los Angeles when bebop giants roamed the street and gave the young drummer a chance to learn, as he's done for up-and-coming players ever since.

Playing Dionysus to Cobb's Apollo, drummer Rashied Ali's quintet was deep into late-period John Coltrane territory by the second number Saturday night at the Blue Monk. With the drummer's crisply articulated, decisive snare shots kicking the rhythm into shards, the young trumpet player squealing into the upper register and the tenor sax running up and down scales, the music's forward motion and high energy was irresistible to the packed house of whooping fans. Pounding a full drum kit -- overtones ringing from the tom-toms! -- Ali offered not the measured groove of mainstream jazz but a cathartic blast of controlled chaos.

- Lynn Darroch
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JazzPodium (Dutch article)

Rashied Ali Quintet

Jumaane Smith – trompet

Lawrence Clark – tenorsax

Greg Murphy – piano

Joris Teepe – bas

Rashied Ali – drums

Ook op festival aanwezig was Rashied Ali, de opvolger van Elvin Jones in het John Coltrane Quartet. Rashied Ali staat vooral bekend als een freejazz drummer en zijn werk bij Coltrane bestond uit het suggereren van een beat en vooral veel geritsel. De man heeft toch wel een bepaalde naam en faam, en kan je eigenlijk als drummer niet om een bezoek aan zijn concert heen. Het werd het hoogtepunt van het festival. Het Rashied Ali Quintet speelde met een power, inzet, overtuiging en diepgang dat het bijna eng werd. In een dergelijke context wordt luisteren een beleving en onderga je de muziek. Hier ook weer dat oergevoel en de noodzaak van muziek maken. Het quintet speelde een mengeling van hardbop en vrije stijlen. Dit alles met een ongelofelijke drive die meer voel dan hoorbaar was.