

STEREO

Blue Note **ST-84090**

MOSAIC ART BLAKEY AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS

**FREDDIE HUBBARD, trumpet; CURTIS FULLER, trombone; WAYNE SHORTER, tenor sax;
CEDAR WALTON, piano; JYMIE MERRITT, bass; ART BLAKEY, drums.**

Side 1: MOSAIC — DOWN UNDER — CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

Side 2: ARABIA — CRISIS

1961 was an eventful year for Art Blakey. It was the year of his most triumphal tour overseas — a memorable trip to Japan — and of unprecedented musical successes at home and abroad. It was also the year in which his Jazz Messengers underwent an important personal transformation.

The Japanese debut of the combo, jubilantly reported by Art in a *Down Beat* interview with Don De Micheal, offered a striking demonstration not only of the inroads made by this brand of contemporary jazz among enthusiasts overseas, but also of the amazing lengths to which fans in certain countries will go to make the musicians' visit memorable. From the first moment Art and his men were made to feel joyously at home. Their records were played on airport loudspeakers while Japanese fans buried the men in flowers. "They wanted me to make a speech," Art recalls, "but I couldn't. I just cried."

During their tour, which included concerts in Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto, the degree of absorption of their music among local jazzmen soon became stunningly clear. On one occasion, when they thought somebody was playing a Messengers record backstage, it turned out to be a live performance by the Japanese group that preceded them onstage. The Japanese hadn't merely received Art's message; they had relayed it, in their own eloquent terms.

"The Japanese are very advanced in color TV; we did an hour program, and the cameramen had to know everything we were going to do, so they could chart what camera angles and colors were to be used." (Can you imagine the equivalent in this country — a whole hour in color offered to the Messengers by NBC?)

At one concert in Tokyo no less than 17 ambassadors attended, according to Art.

The type of audience reached by Art and his men in Japan, the sensitivity of the reaction, and the economic success of the tour, made the return home seem sadly anticlimactic. "We've played a lot of countries," said Art, "but never before had the whole band been in tears when we left."

It would be an exaggeration, of course, to pretend that our jazz prophets are entirely unhonored in their native land. Art's records have been consistently well received ever since the historic *A Night at Birdland* session, in February of 1954, with the late Clifford Brown (BLP 1521 and 1522). The group has done well in American night clubs, at festivals and on concert dates; but as Art points out, too many of the festivals at home have been top-heavy in content, and too little television is aimed at an audience with any serious concern for artistic values.

If the Japanese visit was the high spot of the Messengers' travels to date, the personnel changes in the group in the summer of 1961 marked a comparably meaningful milestone in the group's career. When Bobby Timmons left to form his own trio and Lee Morgan also developed leader eyes, Art did more than merely replace them. True, the men who took over their chairs, Cedar Walton and Freddie Hubbard — both, coincidentally, former members of the J. J. Johnson Sextet — were ideally suited to the unit in terms of style, attack and group feeling. But the face of the Messengers was changed still further when Art decided that the time had come to enlarge the front line. For the first time since it officially got under way as an organized unit seven years ago, Art's combo was recast as a sextet with the addition of Curtis Fuller on trombone.

The presence of a third horn in the front line, while not changing the basic character of the Messengers, has enabled them, as the present sides make admirably clear, to accomplish in ensemble terms certain objectives that were beyond them in the quintet format. Three-part voicings in the ensembles, two-part horn backgrounds for the soloists, and other devices heard here, enrich the group's overall sound while still reflecting as completely as before the personality of the compact dynamo who leads it — the "unquenchable fire-stoker," as *Down Beat* once called him.

Curtis Dubois Fuller is no stranger either to Art or to Blue Note. First heard in his native Detroit with Kenny Burrell and Yusef Lateef

in 1955, when he was barely out of his teens, Curtis came to New York in 1957, worked briefly with Miles Davis, spent six months with Lester Young in 1958, and in the next couple of years played with Dizzy Gillespie, Gil Evans, Benny Golson and Art Farmer. He has recorded for Blue Note with Bud Powell, Sonny Clark and John Coltrane as well as with his own group.

Freddie Hubbard, born in Indianapolis in 1938, is of course a Blue Note artist in his own right. A New Yorker since 1958, he has displayed his remarkable combination of taste, virtuosity and originality on his own LPs *Open Sesame* (4040), *Goin' Up* (4056) and *Hub Cap* (4073). The last of these included in its personnel the Dallas-born Cedar Walton, who came to New York in 1955 at the age of 21 and has worked with Gigi Gryce, Lou Donaldson and the Farmer-Golson Jazztet as well as with Jay Jay.

Wayne Shorter and Jymie Merritt are familiar to Messenger followers through earlier albums, having joined Art in '59 and '58 respectively.

Mosaic, the name of the opening track and title tune of the album, originally meant, according to Webster, a surface decoration made by inlaying in patterns small pieces or colored glass, stone or other material. Since it can also refer to any esthetic work likened to a mosaic, its use for this coruscating Cedar Walton composition is highly appropriate. All the complex decorative elements of the initial statements — the piano's minor vamp, the horns behind the piano, the trumpet shake, the rising 13ths — form an intriguing pattern that is used as a groundwork on which Hubbard, Fuller and Walton build the mood that is accentuated by a setting of ingenious rhythm section variations. Note particularly the suspensions — most effectively used during Wayne's solo — in which the rhythm section (or rather piano and bass; Art rides straight through) punctuates at one-and-a-half-beat intervals. After Cedar's solo, Art takes over for a slow Blakey build, from a simple hi-hat off-beat to rising snare and top-cymbal tension; then back to Cedar's vamp and the theme.

Freddie Hubbard's *Down Under*, after the first 16 bars (eight piano, eight ensemble) segues into an intriguing series of six-bar phrases. Despite this unusual construction, the improvisations in effect are based on the minor blues. Curtis is especially effective in his comparatively simple statement sandwiched between Wayne's wide-swept contours and Freddie's plaintively rising utterances.

Children of the Night, by Wayne Shorter, provides what may be his best representation to date as a composer as well as one of his most strikingly assertive solos. The alternating eight- and 12-bar phrases, and the rhythmic alterations during the solo passages with Charleston beats on every other measure, lend variety to the structure and development of this intense and compelling track.

Arabia, with just a suggestion of the Oriental scale to conform to its title, uses two adjacent chords (in the manner of *Temptation*) for its main passage. Patterned on the regular 32-bar chorus, this offers a striking example of the advantage that Art and his composer-sidemen have taken of the presence of three horns. Both Freddie Hubbard and Wayne Shorter, in their three-choruses of blowing apiece, gain much from the dramatic contrast afforded by background figures, from the rest of the front line, during the second chorus of each solo. Wayne's unexpected intervals, startling effects, tonal variety and most particularly his wild shakes in the second chorus, are a reminder that jazz can indeed be, as Whitney Balliett observed, the Sound of Surprise. Art's symmetrical riffing evolves subtly into more complex figurations in a characteristically flammable workout. After a restatement of the theme, composer Curtis Fuller takes over (with, among other things, a quote from the above-mentioned *Temptation*) for an extended ad-lib conclusion, fading out.

Crisis, another attractive Freddie Hubbard original, has a fine introduction in which Jymie Merritt's opening figure is taken up by Cedar, the horns then entering, taking up part of the figure, later moving into a full-sounding ensemble statement with a downward chordal and melodic movement that determines the character of the piece. The chorus

here is 56 bars long: a 16-bar phrase repeated plus an eight-bar release. Note the sly contrast of the swinging last four bars on each of the 16's. Jymie's articulation and limber movement under the solos is especially noteworthy; Cedar, too, is at his smoothly-phrased best as both Art and Jymie complement his solo brilliantly. Of all the five pieces in this album, *Crisis* demonstrates most pointedly the very solid benefits that accrued to the Messengers when they enlarged their manpower by 20%.

It's not that six men are necessarily more flexible than five, or five more than four; it's rather that the new Messengers, man for man, are an amazingly talented crew, and are able to write an important new chapter in the history of this perennially potent group.

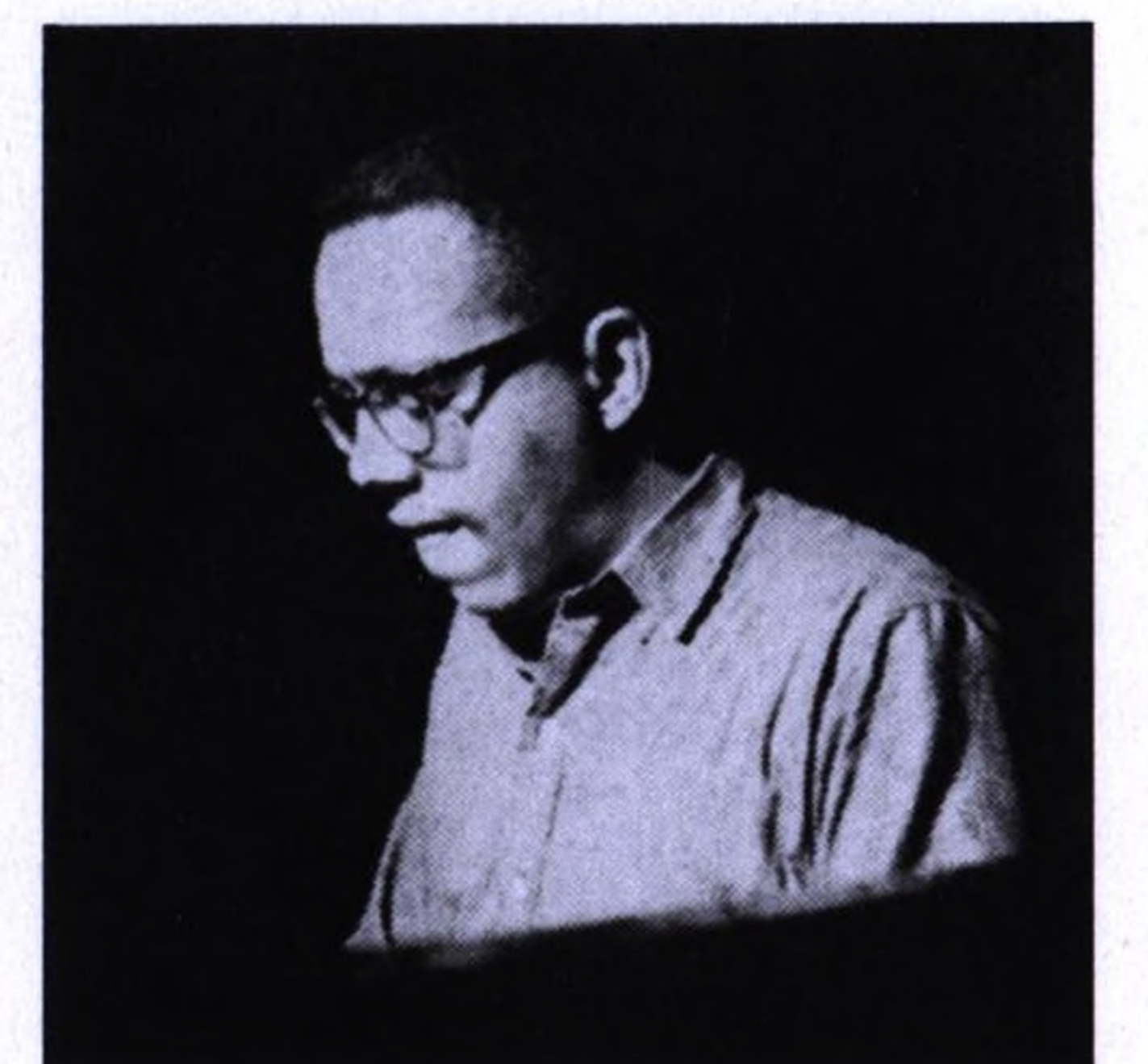
—LEONARD FEATHER

(Author of *The New Encyclopedia of Jazz*, Horizon)

Wayne Shorter performs by courtesy of Vee-Jay Records.

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