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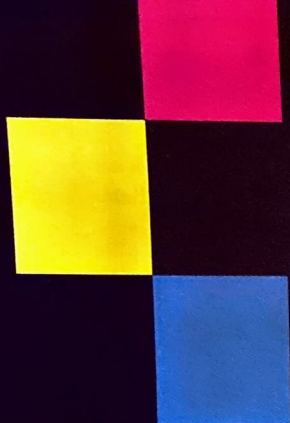
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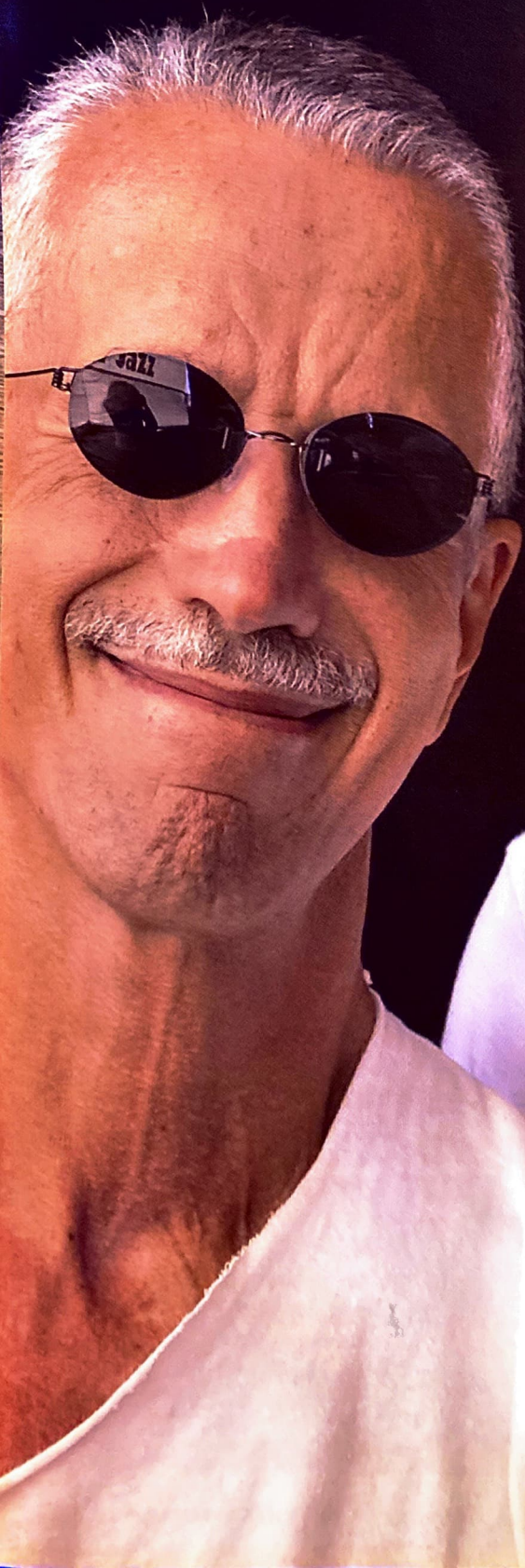
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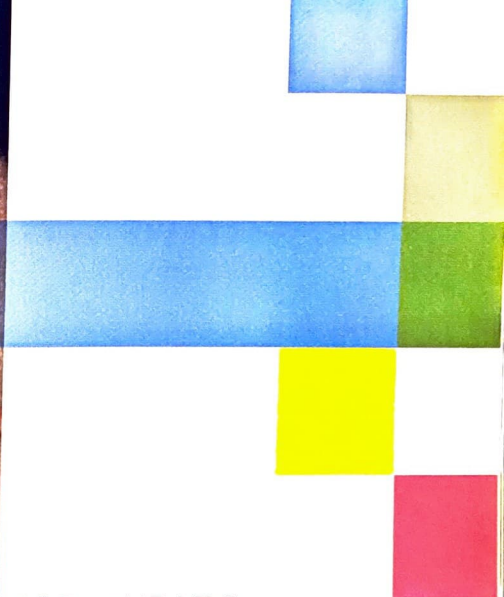


STANDARD






BEARERS



FOR 25 YEARS,
KEITH JARRETT,
JACK DEJOHNETTE
AND GARY PEACOCK
HAVE TRANSFORMED
FAMILIAR MELODIES
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"There's width and depth in a player's ability," says bassist Gary Peacock, reflecting on 25 years spent exploring standards with Keith Jarrett and Jack DeJohnette. "Width involves technique, sense of time, all the objective aspects of a person's playing. Plenty of musicians have width.

"Then there's depth," he continues. "Depth is a very big variable. One of the first things I heard when we started playing together was the depth. Every single note, the whole being went into it. There were three individuals, but there was one mind expressing itself. We knew that there was something very special there."

By David R. Adler
Photos by Rose Anne Jarrett



Flash photography permitted: (L-R) DeJohnette, Jarrett and Peacock

In January 1983, Jarrett and his new cohorts entered the studio to record *Standards, Vol. 1*, not knowing they would become one of the most successful touring units in jazz. Since then they've made 16 more albums and counting, nearly all of them live. "There's a trust that's been established over all these years," says DeJohnette. "And there's also the element of surprise."

It is sometimes thought that the songbook idiom has exhausted its surprises. But this entity continues to prove otherwise. The group began an outstanding streak in 1999 with the two-disc set *Whisper Not*, their first release since Jarrett's recovery from myalgic encephalitis (chronic fatigue syndrome). "I think it was music that fed Keith, helped him heal," offers DeJohnette. The subsequent efforts—*Up for It*, *The Out-of-Towners*, *Inside Out*, *Always Let Me Go* and a new two-disc standards document, *My Foolish Heart*, recorded in Montreux in 2001—convey a sense of steady momentum. In his recent book, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*, Ben Ratliff describes Coltrane's late-'50s work after kicking drugs as "victory music." There's something of that quality in Jarrett's current phase as well.

This month, ECM will reissue the first three trio albums—*Standards, Vols. 1 and 2* and *Changes*—in a three-disc box titled *Setting Standards*. Jarrett and his co-leaders, having reached this promontory, are poised to look back on where they've been and what they've achieved.

"IN JAPANESE FLOWER ARRANGING," Jarrett says, "two flowers is wrong, four flowers is wrong. Three flowers is OK." He is sitting at a cluttered mahogany desk, in the secluded New Jersey home he shares with his second wife, Rose Anne. DAT recordings of all his recent performances are carefully labeled in a rack on the wall. The back shelves can barely contain all his audiophile stereo components,

including a frequency converter, tube and solid-state headphone amps, even a laser LP player. As we talk, he douses his eyes with drops, then swallows about 20 charcoal pills in half an hour, trying to stamp out any vestige of illness.

Now 62, Jarrett has spent much of his career as a single flower, an improvising solo pianist. On his 2002 *rarum* retrospective for ECM, we hear solo piano, clavichord and organ; the famed "European" quartet; and such multi-instrumental tangents as "Spirits." Only three Jarrett/Peacock/DeJohnette tracks, all originals at that, made the cut. "I didn't feel standards fit the concept [for *rarum*] at all," he explains. This raises the question: How does Jarrett understand the place of the trio in his enormously varied output?

"The rhythm section is the standard grouping in jazz," he begins. "It's situated in the center of the earth, as far as the streams that can converge there from the periphery. So I think a little miracle occurred, and I found two people whose openness was so profound that nothing was wrong with playing any certain way. In every other group I've been in, I've had to deal with players' preferences. You're always subtracting from what you hear to suit the others. But that's a situation where I'm the leader. What I wanted to find was some way of everyone being a sideman, of eliminating the leader syndrome."

Jarrett may renounce leadership of the trio, but he'll assent to being called the musical director. By this point, every trio release has all three players' names on the front cover and spine. "It's way better than calling it 'the something trio,'" Jarrett insists. "It's passé. It's three master musicians."

For a taste of the collaborative ethic at its best, Jarrett points to two ballads from the new release, *My Foolish Heart*. The title track "goes just about everywhere a ballad can go," he comments, "and it's the

There is another uncanny example of restraint during "My Foolish Heart" itself: When DeJohnette changes to sticks and swing takes over, Jarrett plays the melody, and only the melody, for the first time in the tune, from roughly bars six through eight of the chorus. Rather than launch a fusillade as one might expect, he pressurizes the time, keeping it relaxed and explosive all at once. With just a melodic fragment, he opens a secret door. Peacock and DeJohnette follow him through it, gladly.

"ONCE WE STEP ON THE STAGE, WE'RE NOT GENTLEMEN. WE'RE FEROCIOUS MUSICAL BEINGS."
—KEITH JARRETT

On another level, Jarrett doesn't think of the trio's music as piano-centered at all. "Early on I didn't even like chordal bands," he declares. "I liked Gerry Mulligan's band, I liked Ornette's band, I liked all these pianoless groups. And I'm thinking, This is going to be hard to be a pianist and not play piano, so what do I do? That's where the percussion and soprano sax and all that stuff arose. But how would I find a place where the piano could actually perform the role of a non-piano band?" Jarrett feels he's managed this with the current trio. "It's not a pianist, bassist and drummer," he muses. "It's three musicians who hear the music as a linear and harmonic process. But linear without the harmony is cool. So that means I can actually be a horn if I want to, and that takes all the weight off this 'What else can I play?'"

We get a tantalizing early glimpse of Jarrett playing standards from *Buttercorn Lady*, a 1966 album by Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.

With Motian and Haden, Jarrett went on to record *Life Between the Exit Signs, Somewhere Before* and *The Mourning of a Star*. This trio played originals, marrying tender lyricism and free-form adventurism, exemplified by the *Exit Signs* tracks "Love No. 1" and "Love No. 2," respectively. But they also played standards, including "Everything I Love" (another Bill Evans vehicle) and "Dedicated to You," along with material by Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell (Jarrett anticipated the current jazz practice of covering rock-era songs by some three decades). "The earlier trio was more individualistic," Jarrett concludes. "We were very concerned with our stylistic signatures. We were trying to be ourselves. In the trio now, nobody's trying anything."

of Another session. He approached the pianist soon after about some time, but Bennett declined, preferring to focus on solo concerts.

Peter Rüedi, in the liner notes to *Setting Standards*, explains that Jarrett's intention was to turn to "other people's music," to defy the prevailing assumption that artists ought to be playing their own. "I wanted to detox the possessiveness thing," Jarrett elaborates. "I wanted to play something we already knew. These songs have a soul that can be found."

Jarrett recalls, "I thought, Hmm, there's no money and there's no Jack ... let me give Paul [Motian] a call." Thus was the Bill Evans grouping of the early '60s reunited, with Jarrett, formerly the teenage fan, at the piano. "We were going to play three sets, but we decided to play two long sets," Jarrett says. "After the first one, Paul said, 'I think we should play eight long sets.'"¹⁰

The resulting album, *At the Deer Head Inn* (1993), is an anomaly in the trio catalog, warm and beautifully realized. Lucky for us, it is possible to compare four of the tracks—"Solar," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "You Don't Know What Love Is" and "It's Easy to Remember"—with the DeJohnette versions on *Tribute*, *Bye Bye Blackbird* and *At the Blue Note*. Two master drummer/composers, two distinct approaches to swing and ballads: DeJohnette, playing a larger kit, is more apt to fill space and break up the pulse, whereas

Motian zeroes in on the ride cymbal and snare and coaxes an even, flickering rhythmic flame. Jarrett responds exuberantly, but differently, to both. In freer contexts, of course, Motian is the furthest thing from a straight-time player. To spin *At the Deer Head Inn* back to back with the 1999 album *Not Two, Not One*, featuring Motian and Peacock with Paul Bley, is to straddle the space between parallel worlds.

Notwithstanding repeat appearances of "When I Fall in Love" in the Jarrett library,

the trio's repertoire has strayed far from the mellow, impressionistic world of Bill Evans. Blues plays a significant role, as does bebop ("Groovin' High," "Scrapple From the Apple," "Bouncing With Bud"). The Tin Pan Alley songwriters are in there, but so are Oliver Nelson, John Lewis, George Shearing, Ahmad Jamal, Benny Golson, Clifford Brown, Gerry Mulligan and Billy Strayhorn. *My Foolish Heart* even includes two Fats Waller tunes, and a stride intro on "You Took Advantage of Me." "The ragtime thing came about because that's what I occasionally do while I'm practicing," Jarrett reveals. "But it's not the typical stride because my hands are so small."

There also exists a body of original trio music, to be found in the crevices of the standards records or on *Changes* (1984) and *Changeless* (1989). Some of these are written tunes; others are spontaneous, vamp-based, harmonically static, part of another vocabulary. In a 1996 interview with pianist Ted Rosenthal, Jarrett speaks of the vamp music (including some of the solo piano work) as flowing from an Eastern "ecstatic tradition" that can be lost on American audiences. "It's a tradition where the state of ecstasy is the goal," Jarrett told Rosenthal. "We [Americans] don't have that."

Still other originals are in fact improvised codas to standards, such as "Sun Prayer" (following "Solar"), "Up for It" (following "Autumn Leaves") and "Meditation" (following "Blame It on My Youth," from *The Melody at Night, With You* (1999), Jarrett's only non-trio standards recording). There is an exact point, for Jarrett, when the codas become something new, worthy of a separate title. "If they capture something that is not capture-able in the context of the song," he explains, "then they've escaped."

While Jarrett, Peacock and DeJohnette don't necessarily distinguish between playing free or probing a ballad like "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," their two recent albums of open improvisation, *Inside Out* and *Always Let Me Go*, highlight a different aspect of trio history. All three players have roots in the jazz avant-garde. DeJohnette is an AACM man at heart, with a deep affinity for such figures as Lester Bowie and Wadada Leo Smith. Peacock, not two years after his Bill Evans stint, was playing with Albert Ayler. Jarrett's American quartet was part of the Ornette Coleman lineage in terms of personnel, multi-instrumental practice, folk-oriented melodic concept and so forth. The recent free recordings came about naturally: After a lackluster soundcheck in London, the three opted to abandon standards for the night and wing it instead. Less than a year later in

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Tokyo they did the same.

Most of the free pieces on these albums are credited to Jarrett, although two of them bear collective authorship. "We had little conferences about that," Jarrett says. "It was an amicable and interesting process. What happens is if you could tell the germination of the piece came from something I played, that was one thing. If there was an interplay that caused something to become what it did become, then that was a different story." Peacock describes improvising in this way as a kind of inquiry: "What does the next moment want? What does the present moment want?" The degree of empathy required is enormous.

JARRETT HAS BEEN chiding audiences for "getting in the way of their own experience," as he puts it, since at least the early '70s. Music, for him, requires total concentration on the part of players and listeners, and he has never been shy about objecting to crowd noise and other distractions. In *The House That Trane Built*, author Ashley Kahn quotes him inveighing against applause during a Vanguard gig. Jarrett's admirers have come to expect this sort of thing. But there was genuine surprise when he unleashed a foul-mouthed tirade against photographers at the Umbria Jazz Festival, in Perugia, Italy, on July 10, 2007 (the pianist was banned from the Umbria fest for life the very next day, though there are unconfirmed reports that the ban is being reconsidered). What irked people wasn't just the coarse language but also Jarrett's threat to "leave the goddamned city," seemingly a slight to the whole audience and the festival itself. This being the digital media age, the moment was caught by a fan on video and spread around the globe via YouTube. Jarrett's tantrum elicited counter-tantrums; one *DownBeat* reader called for a worldwide Jarrett boycott.

Anyone waiting for contrition on Jarrett's part would be well advised to exhale. "Once we step on the stage, we're not gentlemen," he submits. "We're ferocious musical beings. And our focus is already there. We're not walking onstage for a photo op and then going to our instruments."

One blogger posted the Umbria footage under the headline "the camera never lies," but Jarrett insists that yes, it does. What the clip does not capture, he argues, is the clear and firm announcement, in Italian, that "the artists have one simple request," and hardly an uncommon one: no flash photography. (Peacock, he adds, is light sensitive.) Yet the trio was bombarded with flashes upon taking the stage, another detail not apparent on the

video. Feeling brazenly disrespected, Jarrett lashed back. He does acknowledge, however, that "the audience took the fall."

In Jarrett's view, the Umbria flap says something about modern media. "It proves what's wrong with news," he contends. "The news is one-sided, and you have to figure out the rest. It takes a little bit of thought. 'Why would Mr. Jarrett be this upset? Hmm, could it be that this has happened before?'"

Earlier in our discussion, there is a moment that brings home Jarrett's single-minded

intensity, his need for absolute focus. Rose Anne, his wife, begins to talk on the phone in another room, just barely audible. Jarrett cannot continue. He halts the interview, excuses himself and asks her—gently, lovingly—to close the door or talk somewhere else.

There are times, Jarrett maintains, when politeness in public is ineffective or worse. "I could have ignored the cameras and gone to the piano," he allows, "but then I'd be aware that Jack and Gary are seeing flashes, and I'd get looks from them not having to do

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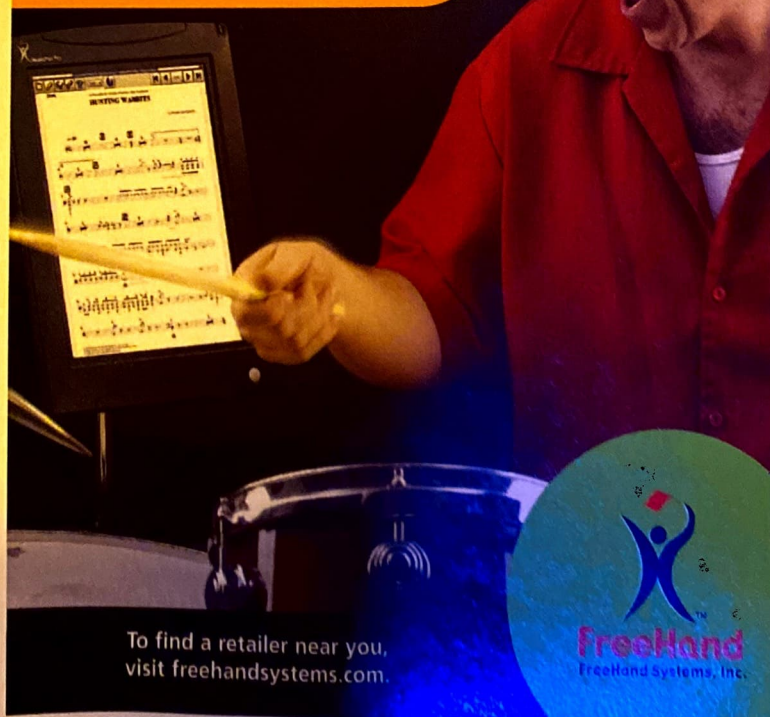
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with the music. I call that the 'play, get your money and leave' approach, and I never do that. I'd rather have a true emotional response that's not even correct, and that's exactly how I feel about playing. In jazz, if you're not who you are—that's what the music asks of you. You don't hide things in your pockets. I wasn't going to hide anything in my pockets that night. If I did, the music would reflect that hypocrisy. It'd reflect some unstable,

unfinished quality that it should never have. People thought the music was great. They didn't realize it was great because I got to say 'fuck your cameras.'"

A GERMAN TELEVISION crew recently visited Jarrett at home, and someone asked him if he is happy: "I realized there was no doubt in my mind that if there is happiness, I have it," he says. "Whatever it was I felt, it had to

be happiness, or fulfillment. One of the reasons I'm out here in this isolation is it's the only way to have something to bring when I play, because I'm not walking past and observing a world in decay."

To maintain an enterprise like the standards trio for 25 years must require some degree of equilibrium, individual and collective. "If someone had told me back then we'd be together this long," Peacock laughs, "I would have said you're out of your mind. We'll be at each other's throats. It's never happened." ("Pretty much," says DeJohnette, coyly.) Jarrett agrees: "From the very first trip, it was paradise compared to traveling with any other bands I'd been with."

Of course, 25 years is but a slice in the careers of these three artists. Age is having a paradoxical effect: Along with the bodily wear and tear—Peacock is 72, with his share of recent health problems—comes a certain spiritual release. "We don't bother with concepts, or theory, or maintaining some image," Peacock insists. "That's of no concern whatsoever. So what that leaves is everything. It leaves the music. Once you get to that point where you don't feel like you have to make a statement anymore, you enter a space of enormous freedom."

Jarrett sounds a similar note, at once resigned and assured, about "the great benefits of being old": "The negative side is you don't have a very long future ahead of you, but the positive side is that you might as well let it all hang out. I'm seeing that occur every time we play. Every minute." **JT**

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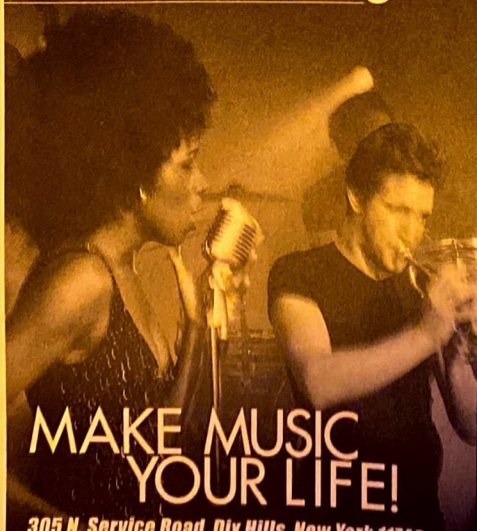
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