



# HERB BUSHLER

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Herb Bushler was one of the busiest bassists in New York from the mid '60s into the '80s. With a classical background, he discovered jazz at the dawn of the '60s and worked with prominent artists while becoming very busy in the recording studio business.

Born in Brooklyn on Mar. 7th, 1939, Bushler took piano lessons for a couple years before looking to join the band in junior high school. "So, I went to the band director and I said I'd like to join the band. He said, 'what do you play?' I said, 'piano'. So, he said, 'okay, sit down at the piano.' He put a John Philip Sousa march in front of me and said, 'play that'. So, I played it and he said, 'I got just the thing for you.' He came out with a fucking tuba. (laughs). That's what he needed, you know?" Finding the tuba repertoire somewhat limited (and marching in the cold not much to his liking), Bushler soon switched to bass and got deeply into classical music. His brother, David, was a student at CCNY and they were doing concerts at Town Hall. "They'd need a bass player, so, next thing I knew I was going in and doing concerts in New York when I was a sophomore in high school. Legit, you know? Taking the train in to play Beethoven's *8th Symphony*, *El Amor Brujo* by Manuel de Falla, Franck's *Symphonic Variations* and Bartók's *Divertimento*." He went to Long Beach High School in Long Island, where he played in different community orchestras and twice a year played in the Catholic church: Handel's *Messiah* at Christmas and Bach's B minor mass at Easter.

Right out of high school, Bushler went into the Navy. He purposely did not want to be a musician in the Navy because he'd had enough Sousa in junior high, so he was a radioman and learned Morse Code. When he got out, he got a job with the New York Central

Railroad, but he started hearing jazz music, quit his day job and just started practicing the new music every day. "There was something creative going on here. I came to a bunch of realizations then. I was not being satisfied with the classical music. There really isn't anything creative about being a classical musician. I mean, Mozart wrote the G minor symphony 200 years ago. That's the creative process right there. And he's dead. If there's anything that can be even considered slightly creative, it's the interpretation of the work and that's up to whatever prima donna is standing on the podium, you know? It certainly isn't up to the second chair bass player or the third chair violist. So, I decided I just had to get into jazz and that creativity. I quit my job at New York Central Railroad and I just started practicing and washing dishes for a living, which is a very interesting thing to do: it's like trying to get calluses on your fingers and then [softening] your hands in hot, soapy water every night."

At that time, around 1960, there were a lot of places where he could go sit in every night, learn to play standards and get up and blow. "One thing that always killed me about young musicians back then is that all the trumpet players wanted to sound like Miles Davis. And my premise was who the fuck needs another one? And all the bass players, especially the white ones, wanted to sound like Scott LaFaro. I didn't want to do that. I mean, if you don't have a certain sound of your own, you know, all you're gonna do is be...just stay there, right in the middle."

While Bushler was getting his chops together, he used to go to the Showplace and hear Charles Mingus' band with Ted Curson. The latter said he had work in Europe but you had to pay your way over there. "My mentor at that point was Warren Smith. Of course, he was an excellent percussionist and was heavy into the recording business. He used to take me to all the gigs that he was doing. So, I find myself in a band room, at Basin Street East when he was working for Peggy Lee. Or else I'd meet him at Columbia 50th Street Studios and watch him do a recording. He opened up a lot of doors for me that way. As a matter of fact, he loaned me the money for the first gig I had with Ted Curson."

In Europe, Bushler practiced five to eight hours

and played a gig just about every night. He got used to the lifestyle. "Not like here, where people treat you like a second-class citizen. In Europe they really appreciate you as an artist. I got very spoiled, man. The first time I was over there, I was there for ten months. I got used to the idea of having a gig every night and then I got back to New York and reality reared its ugly head (laughs)." A recording of that group, which also included tenor saxophonist Bill Barron and drummer Dick Berk, was made in Paris in August of 1964 and subsequently released as Curson's *Tears For Dolphy* (Fontana). Back in New York they recorded *The New Thing & The Blue Thing* (Atlantic, 1965) with the same group augmented by French pianist, Georges Arvanitas.

By 1966, Bushler realized that to work in the studios he had to play the electric bass. "A lot of bass players were furious, you know. They would refuse to deal with the electric bass. So, I just had to get my chops together on it and I realized, damn, I gotta do some different shit because [the] positions on the bass don't work [the same way]. On instruments [with a history], there are certain method books that have been around for years and years that you can use, or teachers will use to teach you; but a lot of people don't understand that it was every man for himself with the electric bass. Everyone had their own technique. Nobody learned from any method. So, I just had to woodshed that thing all of a sudden. And that's some of the happiest times that I ever had, was when my chops on electric and acoustic were commensurate." He started getting studio work in July and August when so many of the first-call musicians would take their vacations. That's how people started to hear him and his name spread. By 1966-67, there started to be so much work that he turned down more jobs than he accepted. "These were the days when everybody was making records. There was no oil embargo yet. I mean, they were grabbing anyone off the street and giving them record contracts, you know? Record dates were like a dime a dozen in the studio and I mean I made so much garbage that if you squeezed it all together and reduced it to its original petro-chemical base and got a quart of oil out of it you'd be better off."

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## LEST WE FORGET



# HAROLD LAND

BY MARK KERESMAN

Harold Land was an ace tenor saxophonist who, while never becoming a real star, made his mark as a reliable, first-rate master of his craft. He made several fine albums under his own leadership but is perhaps best known for his membership in the seminal Clifford Brown/Max Roach Quintet (he recorded five albums with this ensemble) and later on for co-leading a band with Bobby Hutcherson (nine albums). Land has a song named after him on the debut disc of UK progressive rock band Yes. Of this, the band's drummer at the time, Bill Bruford, said in 2010, "[He] was a hardbop tenor saxophone player, dead now, but quite why we named a song after him I can't remember."

Land was born in Houston, Texas on Dec. 18th, 1928 and grew up in San Diego, California. Sweet 16 found him taking to the big-toned swagger of the tenor and he made his first recordings via the modestly-monikered Harold Land All-Stars for Savoy. In 1954 the big city, namely Los Angeles, and the big time

beckoned: Land joined the Brown/Roach Quintet, one of the big-time bop groups of the West Coast era. He also found the time to brighten the bands and recording sessions of Herb Geller, Cal Tjader, Victor Feldman, Elmo Hope and Frank Rosolino, among others.

Land was a true son of the bebop generation and possessed—or was possessed by, depending on one's point of view—a surging and confident sense of swing. British writer John Fordham said Land had an "affection for elegant improvising without hyperbole or hurry, careful crafting of a melody line to maximize its narrative impact without blunting its spontaneous immediacy and a patient use of space, rather than postwar jazz' more familiar inclination to fill every chink with hurtling fusillades of notes." Or to put it more coarsely: Land knew when to testify and when to chill, when to wail and when to let the quiet(er) spots do the talking for him.

While a son of the bebop generation, he was not artistically hemmed-in by its orthodoxies. Land diversified, releasing *Jazz Impressions of Folk Music* (Imperial, 1963) with a quintet including the somewhat underrated Carmell Jones (trumpet) and bassist James "Jimmy" Bond. There were also sessions with Art Pepper (the [ahem] ambiguously titled *Smack Up*), Gerald Wilson, Thelonious Monk, Wes Montgomery, Curtis Counce, Chico Hamilton, Les McCann and singers King Pleasure and Jimmy Witherspoon. Land also appeared on the soundtrack to one of the more

notorious movies of the early '60s, *The Manchurian Candidate*, starring Frank Sinatra and music written by David Amram.

In the '70s Land co-led outfits with vibraphonist Hutcherson and helmed sessions for assorted labels including Mainstream, Muse, Concord and Galaxy. More recently, an excellent collection of archival recordings has come to light courtesy of the redoubtable Reel To Real label: *Westward Bound!* collects material recorded at Seattle, Washington's The Penthouse in 1962-1965. Originally recorded for live broadcasts, the performers include trumpeter Jones, pianists Hampton Hawes and Buddy Montgomery, bassist Monk Montgomery and drummers Philly Joe Jones and Jimmy Lovelace. (Sonic quality is excellent but the bass could be a touch louder, perhaps.)

Highlights include the Land-penned midtempo medley "Happily Dancing/Deep Harmonies Falling," wherein he goes to town with rich, deceptively easygoing bop dissertation. He croons a little like Sinatra in world-on-a-string swaggering mode and a lot like Dexter Gordon careening with easy grace in the Scandinavian Northern lights but he blends these influences so deftly, so seamlessly, he sounds like no one else. Near the conclusion Land and Jones join for some inspired, zig-zagging, joy-charged unison passages. By its very title Joseph Kosma's "Autumn Leaves" evokes mindsets mellow and wistful but Land

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amount of facility to put your opinions out there. If you don't, those ideas never come out. That's what's so remarkable about the thinking process of great drummers. We only hear the end result, but you can bet they worked on the nuts and bolts to move us with the music.

**TNYCJR:** Who embodies that philosophy for you?

**BD:** Pretty much anyone who played with Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, Horace Silver, Jimmy Smith, Nancy Wilson, Art Blakey, Jackie McLean and all the others I grew up listening to. Max Roach, Roy Haynes, Jimmy Cobb, Philly Joe Jones...the list goes on. It's all good stuff that I still find today to be the top of the heap in that genre of music. But you've also got to realize that, back in those days, you never saw these guys on television for obvious reasons. The star drummer in the public eye in those days was Buddy Rich, so I was enamored with him because he was billed as the world's greatest and was more of an entertainer and a personality than some of the others I mentioned might have been perceived to be. So there he was, playing the drums and doing it really, really well. This being the early '60s, I was attracted to what was on television. It was a natural thing. You had Batman, the Green Hornet and Buddy Rich.

**TNYCJR:** Who were your more immediate mentors?

**BD:** I would have to point to my parents and my father in particular because, being a former drummer himself, he's the one who turned me on to jazz and the drums. As I look back on it now, he also had an incredible record collection. I was hearing all that music I mentioned as a youngster. I didn't even know what it was, but at that age, you absorb whatever's going on around the house. When I gravitated toward the drums, the two connected like that. Both of my parents were very supportive and encouraging of my endeavors. I was very fortunate in that regard.

**TNYCJR:** How have you changed the most since then?

**BD:** For one thing, I hope that I've improved as a musician who plays the drums and, with that, I hope that coincides with my improvements as a human being. Sometimes, I wish that I could go back and do things a little differently both on the personal and musical sides. For example, I think about being able to play with certain people I played with 30 years ago, only with the mindset I have now. When you're in your 20s, you have a whole different thing going on when you arrive in New York. There's nothing wrong with that; that's the way life is. As we grow older, we hopefully have a better understanding of things pertaining to life. I'm trying to understand by looking at things from a different perspective. You tend to do that when there's a lot less ahead of you than there is behind you. Now it's like, "I've got to get this next stuff as close to right as possible because I've got no time to waste."

**TNYCJR:** How does being a better person make you a better musician and vice versa?

**BD:** You're a human being first and foremost. You're faced and blessed with all the things that humans have to deal with. When you're a musician, especially one who has devoted your whole life to music, it becomes so intertwined with your vocation as such. As someone who has surrendered his whole life to music, music and everyday life are intertwined. You wake up in the morning and a large part of your thought process is about music: playing, rehearsing, writing, listening, all of those things. I don't think people who do certain other things for their livelihood necessarily think that

way. But we creative people think about it 24/7 and that could be a problem because there are other things we have to think about, too. Society isn't set up for creative people because we don't fit into that same foundation.

**TNYCJR:** How does this relate to your life as a composer?

**BD:** I'm working at it. One thing I could look back on and regret is that I didn't take the piano seriously when I had the opportunity to so now here I am at this age, struggling, just to put two notes together that sound listenable! I've had access to a piano for a large part of my adult life and childhood as well, but I don't consider myself a composer. I've written some tunes. Horace Silver, Carla Bley, Andrew Hill and many, many others I've had the pleasure of working with: those are composers.

**TNYCJR:** Have you changed at all as a listener?

**BD:** I've always been a listener of recordings. No one plays in a vacuum. Listening is one of the things I consider that I do well. I can't play anything if I don't listen to what's going on around me. I like to instigate and react to an action. The drummer is the de facto leader in some ways, controlling the tempo and volume, all of which can impede on or contribute to the proceedings. It's also the loudest instrument on the bandstand, at least in an acoustic setting. But beyond that, the drummers that I admire and am influenced by are great musicians and listeners and that's why they're great drummers. I could name hundreds.

**TNYCJR:** What is the best compliment you ever got?

**BD:** Compliments said to me by people whose opinion I have a great deal of respect for. Beyond that, I'd say the greatest compliment is having people hire me to play with them. They could've had anybody, many of whom are pictured up on my own wall of drummers I admire. To be hired from that pool and the many other fantastic drummers out there? There's no greater compliment. That's enough to be grateful for and I certainly am. ❖

For more information, visit [billydrummond.com](http://billydrummond.com). Drummond is at Mezzrow Oct. 1st with Peter Zak, Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning Oct. 2nd with Danny Simmons, The Jazz Gallery Oct. 28th with Jay Clayton and Smalls Oct. 29th-30th as a leader. See Calendar.

**Recommended Listening:**

- Out of The Blue – *Spiral Staircase* (Something Else-Blue Note, 1989)
- Billy Pierce – *Epistrophe* (King-Evidence, 1992)
- Billy Drummond Quartet – *Dubai* (Criss Cross, 1995)
- Carla Bley, Andy Sheppard, Steve Swallow, Billy Drummond – *The Lost Chords* (WATT, 2003)
- Steve Kuhn – *I Will Wait For You* (Venus, 2010)
- Stephen Riley – *Friday the 13th* (SteepleChase, 2018)

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"But there are certain records you make where you say, I really want the credit on that because... I did two albums with Jobim. The first album I did was called *Jobim* (MCA, 1972) and I really enjoyed working with this guy, it was fabulous. So, the album comes out and it says, 'bass: Ron Carter'. I said, 'what the fuck is that? I did half the album.' Nothing I could do about it. Six months went by and the producer, Claus Ogerman, called me up, 'you know, we really enjoyed the way you played on that first album.' I said, 'well, if you enjoyed it so much, motherfucker, why didn't you put

my name on it?' And he went into his lame-ass shit, 'Oh, I wasn't responsible, just following orders' or whatever. So, I did the second one too (*Urubu*, Warner Brothers, 1975) and he did it to me again."

He also cites the self-titled album by Gil Evans and *Penny Arcade* with Joe Farrell among highlights on record. Meanwhile, one of his favorite gigs, creatively, was a duo with Tony Williams. "It was a music shop out in Long Island. He was going to do a drum clinic out there. So, there's nothing but drummers in the audience, right? It's packed and they could give a fuck or less about me. They didn't care who I was. They were there to see Tony. And we just started playing, you know, just sort of feeding off each other. We did this for like 45 minutes or an hour. I had so much fun. That was one of the best gigs, creatively, I can recall."

Bushler was working with everybody, doing record dates, jingles, film scores, you name it. David Horowitz was a longtime associate and dear friend. They met in 1968 and did some records with [folk singer] Tom Paxton and others. Bushler got him into bands with Gil Evans and Tony Williams. In 1979, Horowitz started David Horowitz Music Associates, Bushler did the contracting and they were successful as a leading jingle company in New York.

Bushler appreciates being in the right place at the right time. "It was a great time. I was very, very lucky to be active in the time that I had, you know? Because there was just so much going on and there was, like, a recording studio on every block. I mean, there was God knows how many fucking nightclubs you could play at. I used to go up to Bradley's with Joe Beck and we'd go in there for like six weeks at a time. And the Blue Note or the Half Note or the Bottom Line, the Village Gate, the Village Vanguard, you know? We used to live at the Vanguard, Beck and I with Joe Farrell. That's all gone, man. There's no way for anybody to make a living as a freelance musician in New York City anymore. If there's anything I miss about the old days, it was like being on the top of the pyramid. You know? Knowing that I could play anything anybody wrote for the bass. Without ever having seen it before, I could play it at performance level the first time." ❖

**Recommended Listening:**

- Ted Curson – *Tears for Dolphy* (Fontana, 1964)
- Gil Evans Orchestra – *Blues in Orbit* (Enja, 1969/1971)
- Tony Williams – *The Old Bum's Rush* (Polydor, 1972)
- Joe Farrell – *Penny Arcade* (CTI, 1973)
- Joe Chambers – *New World* (Finite, 1976)
- James Moody – *Beyond This World* (Vanguard, 1977)

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ups the ante with some intensely focused uptempo dissertations. While this standard can fall into the autopilot zone, Land and company give it a verve and lilt that sidesteps coyness and facileness. The pianist is John Houston and he achieves a righteous balance of Saturday night strut and Sunday afternoon stroll.

Land died of a stroke at age 72 on Jul. 27th, 2001. While he never rose to the level of fame as contemporaries Rollins, Getz and Gordon, Land left a rich, vibrant legacy. ❖

**Recommended Listening:**

- Clifford Brown and Max Roach – *Study in Brown* (EmArcy, 1955)
- Harold Land – *Harold In The Land of Jazz* (Contemporary, 1958)
- Harold Land – *Westward Bound!* (Reel to Real, 1962/1964-65)
- Bobby Hutcherson – *Spiral* (Blue Note, 1968)
- Harold Land – *Xocia's Dance* (Muse, 1981)
- Harold Land – *A Lazy Afternoon* (Postcards, 1994)