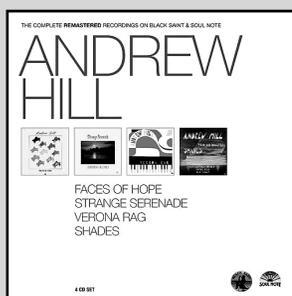


## BOXED SET



*The Complete Remastered Recordings on Black Saint & Soul Note Andrew Hill (CAM) Jazz*  
by Anders Griffen

Late pianist Andrew Hill, who would have turned 85 this month, recorded seven amazing albums for Blue Note from September 1963-June 1964: Joe Henderson's *Our Thing* and Hank Mobley's *No Room For Squares* along with his own visionary sides *Black Fire*, *Smokestack*, *Judgment!*, *Point Of Departure* and *Andrew!*. While the progress of jazz continued to fracture convention, Hill burst forth with a sound all his own. He is best known for this prolific period, but his later oeuvre is not to be missed.

This set consists of two solo piano discs, one trio record and one quartet session. The album titles on the box appear in the order they were released, not the order they were recorded. Jun. 13th-14th, 1980 produced the music for *Strange Serenade* and *Faces Of Hope*, in that order, while Jul. 3rd-4th, 1986 resulted in *Shades* and *Verona Rag* was recorded on Jul. 5th, 1986. The group sessions were recorded prior to the

piano solos in each case.

Hill's music emphasizes group improvisation but demands attention to form and harmony. The Spring 2011 issue of *Journal of Jazz Studies* contains an insightful article by Jeffrey Lovell called "Out of the Ordinary" in which he points out: "Features of Hill's style include shifting tempos and meters, expressive dissonances, percussive chords and angular melodic lines with elastic rhythmic phrasing." He goes on to observe that, "Hill's compositions tend to be well-conceived roadmaps, with specific (and quite taxing) parts and roles assigned and a definite sense of harmonic direction and climax...this compositional forethought hardly makes his performances safe or predictable." These remarks can be applied to virtually all of Hill's music.

After 1975, with his *Hommage* (East Wind) and *Live At Montreux* (Arista/Freedom), solo piano is a recurring vehicle. *Faces Of Hope* opens with "Rob It Mohe" and exhibits Hill's trademark language and percussive touch. Lee Morgan's "Ceora" (from 1965's *Cornbread*, Blue Note) is well obscured by reharmonization and changing rhythms. The softly geometric "Bayside 1" and "Bayside 2" call to mind Hill's informal study with composer Paul Hindemith, about which Hill has said: "What we talked about was musical shapes and spaces more than harmony."

Alan Silva (bass) and Freddie Waits (drums) are phenomenal on *Strange Serenade*, one of Hill's most 'free' group performances. Merriam-Webster defines "Serenade" as "a complimentary vocal or instrumental performance; especially one given outdoors at night for a woman being courted." The record in hand, then, is indeed "strange". The title track becomes rather boisterous and probably too

fraught for courtship. "Reunion" is a swinging affair and "Andrew", written by Hill's second wife, organist Laverne Gillette, is mellower than the other pieces.

When listening to *Verona Rag* without first noting the content of the set, "Darn That Dream" and "Afternoon In Paris" are surprising and revelatory. The melodies are not as obscured as with "Ceora", but these unique readings evince tradition in various guises. The aforementioned Lovell article contains a thorough analysis of Hill's "Verona Rag": "This employment of standard chord relationships makes 'Verona Rag' something of an anomaly among Hill's compositions ...standard chord relationships strengthen the link to the historical ragtime model."

*Shades* is a quartet with Clifford Jordan (tenor saxophone), Rufus Reid (bass) and Ben Riley (drums). "Monk's Glimpse" consists of not only Monk's rhythmic influence, but also features his three-note chromatic phrase ending from "Bye-Ya". "Tripping" further demonstrates thematic development and rhythmic elasticity. Jordan tears apart the upbeat 12-bar blues of "Chilly Mac". And, with its magnificent modulation from 4 to 3, "Ball Square" is illustrative of what Richard Cook and Brian Morton described in *The Penguin Guide to Jazz* on CD as tempos "too subliminal to be strictly counted."

In the '90s, returning to the East Coast and to Blue Note, Hill broadened his influence and solidified his place among the masters. As Anthony Braxton wrote, "These compositions are sonic gold and can be mined for musical secrets forever." Andrew Hill resonates with vitality throughout.

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