

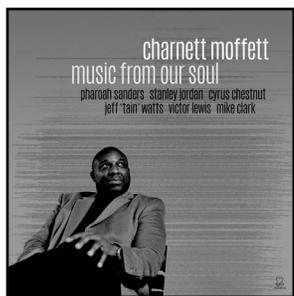
Wade in the Water
**Ellis Marsalis/Harold Battiste/
 Alvin Batiste/Ed Blackwell (VSOP)**
 by Ken Dryden

The American Jazz Quintet existed briefly in New Orleans during the mid to late '50s, featuring four musicians who eventually achieved widespread recognition: pianist Ellis Marsalis, tenor saxophonist Harold Battiste (who died two years ago this month), clarinetist Alvin Batiste and drummer Ed Blackwell. While they were all very familiar with traditional jazz, their interests spread to modern sounds. The band released one LP during its existence but left over seven hours of unissued performances behind, which were eventually acquired by V.S.O.P. This second volume of historical material features one of two bassists (Richard Payne or William Swanson) with the core group, with joint arranging credit to Marsalis, Battiste and Batiste on most selections.

While many of the songs are hymns and spirituals the players knew from church, there is little that is traditional about their interpretations. The title track still has plenty of soul, Battiste's adventurous tenor and the unidentified bassist's walking line sharing the spotlight with the inventive Blackwell. The brisk treatment of "When the Saints Go Marching In" is nothing like the typical cliché-filled performances expected by tourists to the Crescent City; instead there are prominent bop elements in the fluid clarinet and terrific support from the rhythm section takes it into unexpected territory. The dramatic spiritual "Sinner Don't Let This Harvest Pass" is transformed by bluesy piano and forceful toms into a lively jazz vehicle. Another favorite spiritual, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen", puts Batiste's New Orleans roots center stage in a deliberate setting.

There are several originals on the date as well: Batiste's "Valse de Batiste" is a playful, quirky blues waltz filled with surprises and Battiste's "Harold's Church" has a gospel flavor with his soulful tenor preaching to the jazz congregation, Marsalis making the most of his turn in the instrumental pulpit. The date concludes with the infectious minor blues "Selassie" (named for the then-emperor of Ethiopia), in which Blackwell's blazing solo steals the show. It is sad that the group never gained wide recognition but one can hope that more valuable music from the unissued stockpile will be deemed worthy of release.

For more information, visit magnebit.xeran.com/store



Music From Our Soul
Charnett Moffett (Motéma Music)
 by George Kanzler

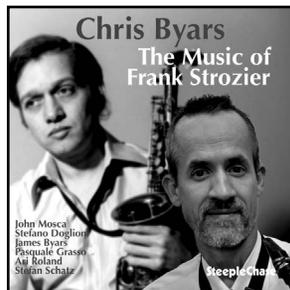
In the '90s I attended a concert by tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson's trio at a festival in Newark. Bassist George Mraz couldn't make it and was replaced by a young Charnett Moffett, who completely changed the

dynamic and sound of the trio (with drummer Al Foster) via his incredible work on an acoustic bass hooked up to an amp with some special effects. Moffett, who turns 50 this month, has gone on to become one of his generation's leading bassists. On this album, a summation and celebration of his three decades on the jazz scene, he brings together music from four groups — three of them recorded at live jazz club gigs — featuring musicians he's played with over his career: tenor saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, guitarist Stanley Jordan, pianist/keyboardist Cyrus Chestnut and drummers Jeff "Tain" Watts, Lewis Nash and Mike Clark.

Moffett plays acoustic bass on 5 of the 14 tracks, one a brief pizzicato/arco solo excursion, the only two standards on the CD, in trios with Chestnut and Nash on "Mood Indigo" and Jordan and Clark on "So What?", plus two originals with the same trios. His pizzicato soloing is up front and center, playing the melody leads, languorous and delicate on "Mood Indigo", brisk in a sped-up (like Miles Davis in later years) "So What?". With Chestnut doubling piano and keyboards, the uptempo "Come and Play" finds Moffett soloing both pizzicato and arco and "Love in the Galaxies" has a rock-march feel and rare reverb from Jordan's guitar.

On other tracks Moffett is on Moon electric fretless bass, joined by Watts, Jordan and, with one trio exception, either Chestnut or Sanders. The originals with Sanders conjure up early John Coltrane Quartet memories, with rolling, Elvin Jones-like polyrhythms and Sanders in a Trane-ish mode. A popping, dancing bassline infuses "Freedom", a faster, jazz-rock one "Mediterranean" with Chestnut. "Freedom Swing", with Sanders, recalls *A Love Supreme*. This CD is a good argument for Moffett's importance on the jazz scene.

For more information, visit motema.com. Moffett is at *Jazz Standard Jun. 7th*. See *Calendar*.



The Music of Frank Strozier
Chris Byars (SteepleChase)
 by Ken Dryden

Chris Byars has focused on the works of many overlooked artists in his songbook albums recorded for SteepleChase. For his latest project, he chose the music of fellow alto saxophonist Frank Strozier (who turns 80 this month), a Memphis native who played with high school classmates Harold Mabern, George Coleman and Booker Little before they all left to pursue their dreams in Chicago and New York. Strozier was widely acclaimed by his peers, though the decade he spent on the West Coast with Shelly Manne and others before returning to New York probably reduced his exposure. By 1979, he had left music altogether to teach high school math and science.

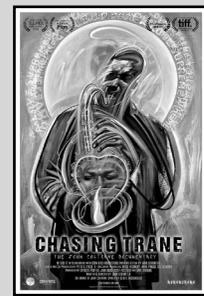
Byars arranged the music for a top-notch group of trombonist John Mosca, bass clarinetist Stefano Doglioni, oboe player James Byars, guitarist Pasquale Grasso, bassist Ari Roland and drummer Stefan Schatz. "Extension 27" is a fluid, extended opener revealing the freshness of Strozier's musical approach, providing plenty of space to showcase each musician. Byars switches to flute for the intricate waltz "Neicy", featuring rich harmonic interaction with the reeds and horn. The flute work in the infectious rumba "For Chris" is reminiscent of Eric Dolphy's sudden twists while bass clarinet is simultaneously adventurous and understated. "Long Night" is a slow, extended blues infused with rich harmonic backgrounds behind weary

alto saxophone. "Some Other Time", not to be mistaken for Leonard Bernstein's popular standard, opens with a repeated funky riff before shifting to playful flute, sassy bass clarinet, engaging guitar and hip arco bass. The exploration of "Ollie", a lush, languid ballad, is highlighted by its call and response between alto and the reeds and horn, darting guitar, a soft bassline and whispering brushes providing a bit of seasoning.

Chris Byars has done a remarkable job reviving these neglected compositions of Frank Strozier while also putting his own stamp on them with his inventive arrangements.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk

ON SCREEN



Chasing Trane
John Scheinfeld (Abramorama)
 by Anders Griffen

Chasing Trane constructs a narrative of John Coltrane's life by deftly weaving together music, still and moving images and dialogue made up of original interviews with family, musicians, writers and others. Actor Denzel Washington reads Coltrane's words from interviews and liner notes. Reminiscing about his contemporary, saxophone great Sonny Rollins states, "you can't describe music with words; it's about hearing it." This film is worthwhile to those familiar with his story and as good a place as any to start for those just discovering the musical genius and spiritual giant.

Saxophonist Benny Golson recalls befriending Coltrane as a teenager in Philadelphia and their minds being blown seeing Charlie Parker in 1945. Saxophonist Jimmy Heath talks about their time in Dizzy Gillespie's band when Coltrane began practicing compulsively. By 1957 heroin addiction got in the way of his music and Miles Davis fired him from one of the great jazz groups of all time. This turning point led to a newfound dedication to his life's purpose. "During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening, which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life," reads Washington from the liner notes to *A Love Supreme*. "At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music."

The film focuses on Coltrane's spirituality and music during the last 10 years of his life, 1957-67. He briefly worked with Thelonious Monk, rejoined Davis and recorded *Kind of Blue* and formed his own powerful band. "We thought that what we were doing, the gift came from the almighty," says pianist McCoy Tyner, speaking of that quartet. "It's what you were put here for." He also married his second wife, Alice McLeod, and fathered three sons. Coltrane's stepdaughters Antonia Andrews and Michele Coltrane and sons Oran and Ravi share stories and we hear from musicians Carlos Santana, Wynton Marsalis and Kamasi Washington, among others. Dr. Cornell West and former president Bill Clinton also offer valuable commentary. Like Coltrane's music, this film is uplifting and beautiful.

For more information, visit coltranefilm.com