

CHARLINE MESSA / COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



WALLACE RONEY

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Wallace Roney is a trumpeter known for his work with Tony Williams, Ornette Coleman, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Sonny Rollins, Curtis Fuller, Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Dizzy Gillespie, to name a few. He's also the only trumpeter personally mentored by Miles Davis. At times he's been accused of simply imitating his idol, but listening to Roney quickly reveals a unique virtuoso artist. A documentary on him is currently in production, centering around Wayne Shorter's "Universe", which Roney performed to open the Wayne Shorter Weekend at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in April of 2017.

The New York City Jazz Record: Do you practice every day? Is it a routine?

Wallace Roney: Yes. I play my horn every day. It's more than a routine. You have something you're trying to say and you're trying to push to keep evolving. The only way to keep evolving is keeping the horn in your mouth. Life, to me, is about evolving. You don't stop evolving 'til you're not here anymore and even then you evolve into something else. So, the trumpet is my life. There's always something more that could be done: we're just scratching the surface of what can be played, or what is music. If you have a love for it, you're constantly trying to evolve and that's what I do. I'm trying to discover. Always evolve. Always make use of what you discover.

TNYCJR: Who were some of the people in your Philadelphia community who influenced you?

WR: My musical influence came from the giants who were playing the music. They weren't necessarily living in Philadelphia. I was such a fan of jazz music. My heroes when I was growing up were Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Robinson and Earl Monroe. Those were my idols. I was buying Miles Davis records. Lee Morgan was from north Philadelphia and he was an idol of mine. Malcolm X came to the mosque two blocks from where I lived on Susquehanna Avenue. My father was a boxer. I started boxing when I was 10 years old. So I would look at all the great fighters all the time. Those are my heroes.

TNYCJR: Cedar Walton was the first one to hire you?

WR: It was the winter of 1976. I was in high school and Mickey Bass was one of the music teachers. Bass took me down to see Cedar Walton at Blues Alley and told Cedar, "you gotta hear this little trumpet player." We played "Moment's Notice" that night. The following year he called me to play at One Step Down. He had Bob Berg, Sam Jones and Billy Higgins the first week and the second week it was with Louis Hayes and Sam and Louis' brother, Gerald. He was the first to really officially hire me.

TNYCJR: I know that you worked with Blakey later and I couldn't help but draw a line from Cedar Walton to Art Blakey...

WR: Actually, now that you remind me (laughs). I played with Art first. I sat in with Art the year before that at a club called the Childe Harold and Bill Hardman was the trumpet player. Bill Hardman, David Schnitter, Walter Davis and "Chin" Suzuki. Art let me sit in on "A Night In Tunisia". And then Art asked me to join the band! I was 15 years old and I said, "Yeah!" I didn't do the gig because...something between me and my father. When Art decided to get a big band and all of the promising young cats that he had heard throughout his travels, I was one of them that he called.

TNYCJR: And the Miles tribute, when you met, was in 1983?

WR: Yup. [When Davis received] An honorary degree from Fisk University. Now, Miles was my idol, ever since I was three years old. So, meeting him at that point was beyond anything I could ever encounter. Because that was my hero.

TNYCJR: I can only imagine. It's unbelievable, right? He's larger than life.

WR: He's beyond that. This is a guy whose pictures I had on my wall, whose records I listened to every day, I followed every article that was ever written about him. My idol. You know, we had the same birthday. And now I'm meeting him. It was incredible.

TNYCJR: Considering what a tremendous influence he is, I imagine you had to be speechless. I guess you got around to asking him questions, but how did that relationship develop?

WR: It developed because my love for him and respect for him. I didn't have to ask questions, to be honest. He just said what he needed to say. He would just say things. I did ask things of Miles, don't get me wrong, but a lot of times he would just tell me, volunteer stuff to me that I guess he thought I needed to know or hear. He would show me stuff that would blow my mind. I would just take it all in.

TNYCJR: The night of the Miles Davis tribute at Radio City Music Hall was the time you met Tony Williams too? Though you didn't work together until some years later, how did that relationship develop?

WR: I met him that night at Radio City and we had seven or eight trumpeters play with the rhythm section of Herbie, Tony and Ron. That was '83. In '85 Tony Williams decided to do a recording for Blue Note Records and they called me to do the record. Tony didn't know me at the time, or he didn't remember me, but when he saw me he kept looking at me as though

he knew me. He kept on asking me "who've you played with?" I didn't want to tell him too much information, because at the time I was playing with Philly Joe Jones. He might like me had I told him I was playing with one of his heroes. I wanted him to make his own mind up, so I didn't tell him that much. We did the record. I loved his music and took great care to try to do my best. When it was over, a couple months later I got a call from Michael Cuscuna. "I've got some good news and some bad news," he said. "The bad news is, we're not going to hire you for Blue Note Records right now" because whatever his bullshit was. "But the good news is Tony Williams is starting a band and he wants to

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 38)

KATIE BULL JAZZ VOCALIST THE HOPE ETUDES

"Despair demands less of us, it's more predictable, and in a sad way safer. Authentic hope requires clarity — seeing the troubles in this world—and imagination, seeing what might lie beyond these situations that are perhaps not inevitable and immutable." - Rebecca Solnit

new jazz vocal compositions & upending takes on standards

"...a lyrically and musically adventurous jazz vocalist..." - Nate Chinen, NYT

"Katie Bull writes arresting, original songs, full of presence and atmosphere..." - Brian Morton, UK Critic

#6 NPR BEST VOCAL JAZZ ALBUM 2015 for All Hot Bodies Radiate



Friday February 1st 7:30-8:30 pm
One long set of The Katie Bull Group
Project: "The Hope Etudes"
Katie Bull, vocals and new compositions;
Mara Rosenbloom, piano; Joe Fonda, bass;
George Schuller, drums; Jeff Lederer, saxes

Middle Collegiate Church, NYC
Community Room/Performance space
(downstairs; elevator accessible)
Side entrance: 50 E. 7th Street Off 2nd Avenue
FREE ADMISSION & REFRESHMENTS
(MCC Entrance Requires I.D. & Bag-Check)

KATIEBULL.COM

THE VILLAGE VANGUARD

www.villagevanguard.com

★ JANUARY 29TH - FEBRUARY 3RD ★
BILLY HART QUARTET
MARK TURNER, ETHAN IVERSON, BEN STREET

★ FEBRUARY 5TH - FEBRUARY 10TH ★
GEORGE CABLES TRIO
DEZRON DOUGLAS, VICTOR LEWIS

★ FEBRUARY 12TH - FEBRUARY 17TH ★
VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA
53RD ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

★ FEBRUARY 19TH - FEBRUARY 24TH ★
DAYNA STEPHENS QUARTET
AARON PARKS, BEN STREET, GREG HUTCHINSON

★ FEBRUARY 26TH - MARCH 3RD ★
TERELL STAFFORD QUINTET
TIM WARFIELD, BRUCE BARTH
PETER WASHINGTON, BILLY WILLIAMS

COMING IN MARCH

★ AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE ★
★ MIGUEL ZENÓN ★
★ THE BAD PLUS ★
★ BROKEN SHADOWS ★

**MONDAY NIGHTS ARE RESERVED FOR
THE VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA**
MONDAY THRU SUNDAY
8:30PM & 10:30PM
178 7TH AVE. SOUTH AT 11TH STREET 212-255-4037

(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

start the band around you." He gave me Tony's number and we talked. He already knew he wanted Mulgrew Miller. He said, "Who should we get on bass and who should we get on saxophone?" Tony wanted Miroslav Vitous on bass, but he couldn't make the first gig, so we wound up getting Charnett Moffett. Tony didn't want Charnett, but...then, on saxophone, I was trying to recommend my friend Gary Thomas and Gary didn't want to do it. I think he was a little nervous; he was comfortable playing with Jack [DeJohnette]. So we got Bill Pierce and that's how Tony's band was started.

TNYCJR: You have a residency at the Blue Note in February. Can you tell us what you're going to bring to the club?

WR: You're going to hear the development of a band, that's what you're going to hear. You're going to hear it develop week after week. It'll be great one week, greater the next, then even greater. Now, I've invited some people to come down and play with the band. Rodney Jones will come and play on one night and I might have some other people come down, but you're going to hear the development of a band. Every time we play it's new music because whatever we're doing, it evolves into something else.

TNYCJR: What is the collective understanding that fosters that evolution? Especially when you have changing personnel, what can you say to your band so that collectively you can evolve?

WR: Well, first of all, I don't have changing personnel. So when it changes, it's because of a shift or something. I try to keep a stable band, because that's the only way you're gonna get growth or a contribution. If you have somebody one week and someone else next week, you're never gonna really jell, even if it sounds good. It's not gonna be the same as... That's what made the John Coltrane Quartet so great. They got used to each other and trusted each other and they could take things further. With Miles Davis' Quintet or Ornette Coleman's Quartet, Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers... These are bands and that's what I'm influenced by, having bands and whatever virtuoso performances be within the band concept. Make the whole band a virtuoso experience. In my ideology you keep moving forward and to play and interact at your highest level and take creative chances and try to evolve and develop something. So those are the principles that I stand by. I'd just really like for people to come out and hear the music, you know? Come with open ears and support this music.

TNYCJR: It's interesting, there seem to be more and more of these jazz programs in so many different colleges and universities, there are so many kids studying the music in one way or another, learning how to play something. It seems like all of these programs have grown, but the audiences have not necessarily grown. It's kind of a strange thing in my eyes, like the music is being promoted on campus, but...

WR: I hear what you're saying. It's funny you say that. I always thought, for all the schools that are quote unquote teaching jazz, why don't they make it part of their students' curriculum to go out and hear a concert a week. Make that part of their requirement, because that's what they're studying. The clubs would be packed. Let the students come in and then write their song or what they hear. That'd be part of the grade. Imagine that at all colleges in the United States.

TNYCJR: Something missing from so many of these programs is the part of the music you learn from

interacting with the musicians. Some of these instructors have been in school their whole lives, they may not be the musician you seek out.

WR: Right. What you're saying is true. See, to be a great artist, or to be a great anything, you've got to seek the masters of that profession and apprentice under them. So you're going to school and you're learning to play music, you're learning some basic fundamentals but there are things that they're not going to teach you in college because they don't know it themselves. There are other things you're going to learn by going to see your masters. They don't know how Horace Silver came up with the progressions he came up with until he comes up with it. And then, when he comes up with it, then they have to study it. You understand what I'm saying?

TNYCJR: Absolutely. The primary source.

WR: So you go to Horace Silver, who is a studied musician and already has the fundamentals down, to tell you how to go to that next level, but you're only gonna get that from being around Horace or Art Blakey or Miles Davis or John Coltrane or Ornette Coleman. You're not gonna learn harmolodics in a school. You're gonna learn what you heard on the record, but you're not gonna learn what Ornette was thinking and his whole process, unless you go hang with Ornette. And then, when you hung with Ornette, then you're one of those special few that understands. And then you're qualified to have a band and teach the next generation. And that's how that thing works. And it's almost not like you're learning on the street. What it is is that the bandstand is a laboratory that's more advanced than the practice room. It will always be. Even in classical music. You can learn to audition to play for the New York Philharmonic, but what you're going to learn from playing with the New York Philharmonic is going to be way more beyond what you're going to learn in the classes preparing for it.

TNYCJR: Right, like you prepare your audition and that's one thing, but if you get there then you're exposed to this whole other universe It's like, "Oh, I didn't know it was 'all of this'."

WR: Right, and, oh!, when we played Mahler, to articulate this, it had to be like this, because the first violin is doing this and this is something they don't teach you here and to play with them is not like what I was taught in the school orchestra. This is different! We have to spit in the horn before we played. Things like that, that you don't know, that are professionalism or that are languages that are learned in the laboratory called performance.

TNYCJR: I read you talking about Clark Terry and Dizzy Gillespie and how they opened you up to so many things about the instrument that you weren't going to get otherwise.

WR: Clark Terry used to tell me, "you're a black man and you're a talented black man, but a lot of these teachers are going to teach you because they're teachers, but they're not going to teach you everything, because you're black. They're going to save that for their protégés. I'm gonna show you stuff that they're not going to teach you that's gonna put you on the level with them." And he did.

Sometimes it isn't a class or a race thing. Sometimes you go to a teacher and they might be a great teacher but they say, "I'm not going to waste my pearl!" on this person. But he has this other student, who might not even be that great, but he's gonna give him the gem and he's not gonna give it to you, because he doesn't think that you're going to make it into the symphony anyway. "Why should I give him all, I'll give him

enough to play the instrument, but I'm not going to show him my best stuff." Well, Clark said, "I'm gonna show him this stuff that they won't show him." Miles Davis was like, "I'm gonna show you stuff that they won't show you."

And I remember one time with Miles, we were doing "Boplicity". I was playing it and it seemed like it was good and Miles said, "No, don't play it like that; I want you to phrase it as if you were playing quarter note triplets." I said, "Oh! Okay. That was a simple turn." So instead of playing it like [sings], I went [sings]. Even though I was technically playing eighth notes, I was phrasing so that they were quarter-note triplets. When he died, Gerry Mulligan called and he said that he wanted to do *Re-Birth of the Cool*. He said he had asked Miles and Miles said he would do it, but Miles died. I knew he was telling the truth. Even though Miles would say he would never do that stuff, at that point Miles was ready to do these things. So I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So we had a rehearsal and we played "Boplicity" and I played [sings, with quarter note triplet phrasing] and Gerry stopped the whole band. He looked at me and he said, "How did you know?" And, man, I looked up to the sky and said, "Thank you, Miles." ❖

For more information, visit wallaceroney.com. Roney's quintet with guests is at Blue Note Feb. 11th, 18th and 25th. He is also Smalls Feb. 8th-9th with Darrell Green. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers – *Feeling Good* (Delos, 1986)
- Wallace Roney – *Intuition* (Muse, 1988)
- Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, Wallace Roney, Tony Williams – *A Tribute to Miles* (Qwest, 1992)
- Wallace Roney – *Village* (Warner Bros., 1996)
- Wallace Roney – *No Room For Argument* (Stretch-Concord, 2000)
- Wallace Roney – *A Place in Time* (HighNote, 2016)

(LABEL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

I could break even off of doing tapes then maybe I could expand from there. Also tapes do sound good. Go buy a nice tape player and you'll see; it's not the most pristine FLAC or lossless thing that people chase but it sounds great regardless." Finally, Cross thinks the cassette medium is a way to reach "younger folks, or folks that wouldn't necessarily listen to free jazz/improv to actually take a chance on buying a tape."

Cross is marking Astral Spirit's fifth anniversary through showcase events in Washington D.C. and at Montréal's Suoni Per Il Popolo Festival. And he'll be producing some digital-only releases in 2019, from Macie Stewart and Lia Kohl, the trio of Josh Berman, Paul Lytton and Jason Roebke and more.

Cross adds, "I've always tried to look at Astral Spirits as a long game. It's not just about being the new 'hip' label or even about selling the most records. Labels come and go and I'd love to continue to do this as long as I can. I'm lucky I've gotten as much attention in the short time I've done it thus far. Here's hoping for many many more!" ❖

For more information, visit monofonuspress.com/astral-spirits. Artists performing this month include Michael Foster at MoMA PS1 Feb. 3rd; Joe McPhee at MoMA PS1 Feb. 3rd; William Hooker at Bushwick Public House Feb. 4th; Daniel Carter at Bushwick Public House Feb. 4th and Spectrum Feb. 10th; Luke Stewart at H1010 Feb. 14th, Areté Gallery Feb. 18th, Nublu 151 Feb. 27th with James Brandon Lewis and Merkin Concert Hall Feb. 28th with Irreversible Entanglements; and Brandon Lopez at H1010 Feb. 14th and Bushwick Public House Feb. 18th. See Calendar.