



ALVIN QUEEN

BY JIM MOTAVALLI

Drummer Alvin Queen, born in the Bronx 70 years ago this month, is a great storyteller and so what if many of his compelling stories are from before he settled permanently in Europe circa 1979? As he enjoys his Swiss government pension and takes long walks in the Alps, he has no regrets about leaving the American cauldron behind.

Queen was a child prodigy on drums. He recorded his first album (still unreleased!) when he was only 11 or 12 years old. Lest you think it was a kid's record, consider the personnel: Zoot Sims played saxophone, Art Davis was on bass and Harold Mabern on piano, with Joe Newman acting as music director and playing trumpet. "I remember that Clifford Brown's 'Daahoud' was on it," Queen said. "We recorded it at Nola Rehearsal Studios in Manhattan. Joe Newman was on my back all the time. I'd love to hear it again—I think it would sound beautiful."

Queen's grandmother was music director at the Bronx church whose parishioners included Denzel Washington. His brother was a percussionist in school parades and young Queen used to steal his drumsticks and bang on the concrete. He joined the marching band himself at around age eight and remembers the orange and black uniforms. One Christmas, Queen's mother took him shopping and he saw a kid playing drums in a store window. He wanted that for himself and was soon taking lessons with that kid's teacher. An immersion in jazz happened when his father, a bar manager, took him to the Apollo Theater. "We heard Art Blakey with Olatunji there, Nancy Wilson with Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane playing 'My Favorite Things'. And we also saw Big Maybelle, The Jackson Five, Stevie Wonder, Moms Mabley, everybody."

Young Queen used to take his radio to bed, listening to Symphony Sid with the volume turned low. "You had to really love jazz to do that," he said. By this point, Queen's family had moved to Mount Vernon, NY. When he was 10 or 11, the band at a bar his father was managing lost its drummer and the musicians wanted to know if they could "use the kid". A delegation was sent to Queen's house and the little prodigy was brought out. "What kind of music do you play?" was the only question he asked. When he learned it was jazz everything was fine and he went and got his best suit for the evening's session. The drum pedals had to be adjusted.

Queen, still very young, would take the subway down to Grand Central Station, get off and go over to Frank Wolf's drum shop on 48th Street, where people like Gene Krupa, Cozy Cole and Buddy Rich would hang out. Anything to be close to the music. He remembers the cheap food and drink that maintained many a musician at the original Beefsteak Charlie's.

The gigs started coming. The names Queen mentions are too numerous to list. When he was just 16 he played with Wild Bill Davis' Trio and the pianist Don Pullen (not yet famous for his Mingus stint) and backed singer Ruth Brown in Atlantic City. In 1969, still a teenager, he played with trombonist Benny Green and guitarist Tiny Grimes, then replaced Billy Cobham in Horace Silver's group.

Queen's musical associations are myriad. He rehearsed with a quartet led by Coltrane bassist Jimmy Garrison that also included pianist Ronnie Mathews but then in 1976 Garrison died. He played with Oscar Peterson for years between 2004 until the pianist's death in 2007—after first saying no because "I'd heard that Oscar could be a hard one."

Queen first went to Europe in 1971 with trumpet player Charles Tolliver, a collaboration documented on the *Live at the Loosdrecht Jazz Festival* and *Impact* albums. Queen wasn't quite ready to move to Europe yet, but he had the wanderlust, spending part of the '70s in Montréal, Canada, playing jazz and R&B with musicians like American expatriate pianist Sadik Hakim (born Forrest Argonne Thornton). He also played with nearly every organ player, since the sound

was big then—especially in Harlem. "All the clubs in Harlem had Hammond organs," Queen recalls.

Queen was a confirmed bebopper, but when he began playing in Europe he had to acquaint himself with some earlier styles. "A lot of the older musicians, some of them ex-Duke Ellington, had come to Europe as individual players and I had to fit in with what they were doing," he said. He name-checks Jimmy Woode, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Red Holloway, Buddy Tate, Benny Bailey and Clark Terry. "I started playing all over Europe, so I asked myself, 'Why should I go back to New York?'," Queen said. He became the house drummer at the Antibes Jazz Festival and also recalls friendly relations with some of the avant garde musicians in Europe at that time—Sunny Murray, Alan Silva. But he wasn't going to play in their style. "They'd tell me I had to play more free, but I'd say that before I bake a cake, I want to know what all the ingredients are," Queen said.

From his Swiss base, Queen traveled all over, including a fractious stint with Nina Simone and several State Department tours with Tolliver, Silver and others, including eight weeks in Africa. And he started recording music himself, on his Nilva (Alvin spelled backwards) label. "I made so much money playing I was able to open up the label," he said. "We have 19 titles." To know what Queen sounded like back then, check out the 1980 LP *In Europe*.

Married to a Swiss woman and permanently settled in Geneva at the end of the '70s, Queen found he could put youthful bad habits behind him. "I was in a better position over here," he said. "I could cool out better, meet some new people." Eventually, Queen gave up his American citizenship because of tax problems, but that complicates his situation now.

Back in 1969, a car Queen was riding in got stopped and the police found a gun in the trunk. It wasn't Queen's gun, but he spent three weeks on Rikers Island. Grant Green's lawyer got him out. That was that, but when Queen attempted to come back for a Washington, D.C. event honoring the World War I-era Harlem Hellfighters in 2017, he was denied a visa. Authorities brought up that arrest and a drug charge

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LEST WE FORGET



FRANK LOWE

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Frank Lowe was a tenor saxophonist known for his fiery sound and fierce conviction in the post-John Coltrane wave of free jazz improvisers. Born in Memphis, Tennessee, he was obsessed with music by the time he was a teenager and did all he could just to be near it. He started playing saxophone around the age of 12 and toward the end of high school, he got a job as a clerk and gofer at Stax Records. He befriended Packy Axton, a saxophonist just a couple years older, who played in the studio's house band (The Royal Spades, then The Mar-Keys) and taught him R&B licks. After high school, Lowe attempted a responsible path forward enrolling at the University of Kansas, Lawrence as a social science major. Listening to music fanatically, especially Coltrane, he did not complete his degree.

Lowe spent 1965 in Vietnam. He had been arrested and had to make the choice between jail or the war. In Vietnam he was a military police officer stationed in

Saigon. He had the good fortune of listening to a collection of jazz records, but the escalating conflict was frightening and Black soldiers were the first to go. Luckily his service was short, but the effect never went away. Moving to San Francisco he was on the Haight-Ashbury scene. He worked at a record shop with Jerry Garcia and became a trolley operator. He continuously pursued music and studied saxophone with Bert Wilson, who was part of a free jazz scene that included Sonny Simmons and Donald Rafael Garrett. Lowe gravitated toward the latter because he had worked with Coltrane and Lowe credits Garrett for teaching him breathing techniques for relaxation. Drummer Michael Carvin recalls meeting him when he first moved to San Francisco and checking him out because he had that "I am somebody" vibe. Shortly after they met, Lowe went to see Ornette Coleman perform at the Both/And Club. After the show Lowe went and played for him and Ornette said he should move to New York. He and his wife Carmen packed up and were soon in the big city.

Alice Coltrane hired Lowe on Coleman's recommendation and he made his album debut on her *World Galaxy* (Impulse!, 1971). "I listened to John Coltrane so hard," Lowe said, "until I listened my way right into his band!" Of course John had been gone four years by then. His association with the Alice Coltrane band gave him instant legitimacy and soon he was performing with trumpeter Don Cherry, drummer

Milford Graves and everybody on the nascent loft scene, including drummer Rashied Ali. Together, Ali and Lowe recorded *Duo Exchange* for their own label, Survival Records. The label produced a beautiful reissue earlier this year mastered from original tapes and expanded with never-before-heard music. Lowe's partnership in the label was short-lived, but he and Ali worked together periodically into the 2000s.

In 1973, Lowe led his first record date, *Black Beings* (ESP-Disk', also bassist William Parker's first record). In 2012, additional music from that initial date was released as *The Loweski*; and in 2014, a double LP entitled *Out Loud* was released, which was conceived as his second release but never issued. It was important to the artist to have something to show for the work he was doing and from 1975 onward, Lowe regularly produced records with a supporting cast that included, among others, Lester (trumpet) and Joseph (trombone) Bowie, trumpeters Wadada Leo Smith, Butch Morris and Olu Dara, bassists Alex Blake, Fred Williams and Didier Levallet and drummers Charles Bobo Shaw, Steve Reid and Phillip Wilson.

He also formed a fruitful relationship with Cherry and appeared on *Relativity Suite* (1973) and *Brown Rice* (1975). Later in the '70s he started a lasting relationship with violinist Billy Bang, realizing several projects together including *The Jazz Doctors* (with Garrett and drummer Denis Charles) and in the 2000s, a project

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SH: Oh, it's great. The main impression I get every time I play with them is that there is an internal structure allowing individuals to be themselves. I think the first time I played with them, Marshall Allen came up to me and he said, "you are thinking too much, I can hear you thinking about whether what you are playing is right or wrong." I really took a lot from that. The main thing is he's allowing me to enter into that unit because of who I am, so they don't want me to consider if what I'm doing is right or wrong. They want me to just play and try to express myself as fully as possible. And that is what I feel like within that band, that is a bunch of individuals expressing themselves as fully as possible but with the communal aim of making the best kind of group music as they can. That's something I try to carry through to all the groups in the context of the music that we play.

TNYCJR: Do you have further Impulse! releases planned?

SH: Yeah. Right now we are just about finishing the mixing of the next Sons Of Kemet album, which should be out hopefully at the beginning of next year. We did the recording before lockdown and now lockdown's relaxed a bit we are just pressing on with the mixing and production, getting some horn parts done. I'm really excited with that and it's going to be a great album.

TNYCJR: Excellent! Are there things you want to do that aren't catered for by your current groups?

SH: There's a project that I'm probably going to start towards the end of the year, which is a collaboration between myself and a Martiniquan percussionist and electronic music producer called DJ Noss. He mixes traditional Martiniquan bélé music with electronic music in a very interactive way that I like so there's a lot that can be done with that combination. I just get ideas all the time. I've got books full of ideas. But for me the main thing is just time and what I decide to focus on. So at the moment it's just focusing on the Sons Of Kemet album. After that I think we are going to start recording the next Comet Is Coming album.

TNYCJR: How would you describe the resurgence of jazz on the London scene?

SH: London has always had a thriving jazz scene but I think the factors around it have changed, in that there's a bigger and younger audience at the moment for it than there was 15 to 20 years ago. Certain musicians are playing a lot bigger spaces, so bigger, more commercial, festivals and just bigger venues. The media interest in it just wasn't there before. When I was in college the whole narrative was that we're not able to get instrumental music recognized by the mainstream press. There was a stigmatization around the music that it's not for regular people. One of the big factors in the resurgence is that there seems to be an acceptance of instrumental music from a jazz background that there wasn't before, which is heartening. I think a lot of the music that's being pushed forward as representative of the London jazz scene is music that takes a lot of elements from the American form but uses the music that we are into in London. And I think that the audiences are appreciating that, they are appreciating the creative element to mixing up the music and finding a way of making a lot of people enjoy it in a way that they thought they couldn't before.

TNYCJR: How does reception in NYC compare to London audiences?

SH: The reception in New York is great. I've been going there quite a lot in the last couple of years and feel like the audience is growing and growing. They are starting

to get an idea of what the music is and what the music is supposed to be achieving. But London for me is my favorite place to play. It's the place where the music was formed and the audience is just the best audience. They come there to dance, to listen and be emotional with us. Whereas in the States, as far as I have experienced, there is an idea of reverence for the music in that it's taken in a concert for people to stand and listen to the music in a very reverential fashion. In London there's less of that. People dance to the music. They listen to it but they seem to be more engaged with their bodies. Not that all music has to have that, but for our music it does help, because it has a strong pulse to it. ❖

For more information, visit shabakahutchings.com

Recommended Listening:

- Zed-U—*Night Time on the Middle Passage* (Babel, 2009)
- Sons Of Kemet—*Burn* (Naim, 2013)
- The Heliocentrics—*13 Degrees Of Reality* (Naim, 2013)
- Sons Of Kemet—*Your Queen Is A Reptile* (Impulse!, 2016-17)
- The Comet Is Coming—*Trust in the Lifeforce of the Deep Mystery* (Impulse!, 2017)
- Shabaka And The Ancestors—*We Are Sent Here By History* (Impulse!, 2018-19)

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from a stint with George Benson, as well as a DUI. He was told he'd need a waiver from the Department of Homeland Security. It could be seen as tragic, but Queen doesn't even vaguely resemble a tragic figure. He's actually pretty serene. One reason is the success of his latest album, *OP: A Tribute to Oscar Peterson* (Stunt), recorded in Copenhagen in 2018 with Danish musicians Zier Romme Larsen (piano) and Ida Hvid (drums). "I'm a happy guy," he said. "Happier than ever. I've taken up photography and I hike all the way to the top of the Swiss mountains and take pictures up there." ❖

For more information, visit alvinqueen.com

Recommended Listening:

- Music Inc. / Charles Tolliver—*Impact* (Enja, 1972)
- Alvin Queen—*Ashanti* (Nilva, 1981)
- Alvin Queen/Lonnie Smith (feat. Melvin Sparks)—*Lenox and Seventh: The Definitive Black & Blue Sessions* (Black & Blue, 1985)
- Kenny Drew Trio—*At The Brewhouse* (Storyville, 1992)
- Alvin Queen—*I Ain't Looking At You* (Enja, 2005)
- Alvin Queen—*OP: A Tribute to Oscar Peterson* (Stunt, 2018)

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reflecting on Vietnam with Bang's fellow veterans. In the '90s he formed the Saxemble with James Carter and Michael Marcus, an ensemble consisting of saxophones accompanied by drums. He also formed a relationship with bassist Bernard Santacruz that produced three albums and a number of tours. One of his final bands was formed around pianist Bertha Hope. Lowe died of complications due to lung cancer on Sep. 19th, 2003. ❖

Recommended Listening:

- Frank Lowe/Rashied Ali—*Duo Exchange: The Complete Sessions* (Survival, 1972)
- Frank Lowe—*The Flam* (Black Saint, 1975)
- Frank Lowe—*Decision in Paradise* (Soul Note, 1984)
- Frank Lowe—*Bodies and Soul* (CIMP, 1995)
- Frank Lowe/Bernard Santacruz—*Short Tales* (Bleu Regard, 1999)
- Billy Bang Quintet (featuring Frank Lowe)—*Above & Beyond: An Evening in Grand Rapids* (Justin Time, 2003)



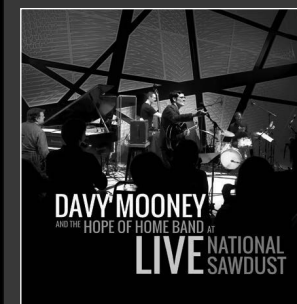
**ADAM NUSSBAUM
LEAD BELLY
REIMAGINED**

SSC 1578

AVAILABLE 8/28/20

Two years ago, Sunnyside released drummer Adam Nussbaum's first true recording as a leader, and fantastic tribute to one of his idols, **The Lead Belly Project**. Nussbaum's band of saxophonist Ohad Talmor and dual guitarists, Steve Cardenas and Nate Radley, ably channeled a program of Lead Belly tunes chosen by the leader, mainly culled from the Folkway Recordings 10-inch records Nussbaum grew up listening to. The project allowed Nussbaum to show another side of his musical character that he hadn't previously been able to showcase regularly during his remarkable forty-year career.

In July of 2019, Nussbaum and the ensemble returned to Talmor's home studio, Seeds, in Brooklyn. They recorded with no separation between the musicians and entirely live. The musicians' comfort with the material and each other can be heard in the results, as the pieces have an emotional intimacy that goes beyond their prior efforts. The result of these recordings can be heard on their new album, **Lead Belly Reimagined**.



**DAVY MOONEY
AND THE HOPE OF HOME BAND**

LIVE@NATIONAL SAWDUST

SSC 1591

AVAILABLE 7/17/20

Guitarist/composer Davy Mooney knows just how special these experiences are and wanted to capture the essence of their magic on his new recording, *Live at National Sawdust*. On the recording, Mooney brings together his incredible Hope of Home band, featuring saxophonist John Ellis, pianist Jon Cowherd, bassist Matt Clohesy and drummer Brian Blade, to play old and new material for a receptive group of listeners at Brooklyn's National Sawdust and to conjure a fabulously warm and heartfelt performance that can be revisited over and over.

Mooney and the Hope of Home Band assembled at National Sawdust on January 27, 2020 with engineer Sascha von Oertzen. Of course, live recordings have their challenges. The performers have to consider the audience and can not just start over again. But that is precisely why live recordings can be amazing. The emphasis on being in the moment supercedes the idea of perfection, typically producing compelling performances.



Sunnyside

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