



HENRY FRANKLIN

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Henry Franklin has enjoyed a career as a prolific jazz bassist for over 60 years, performing with a range of artists including Freddie Hubbard, Hampton Hawes, Dexter Gordon, Gene Harris, Doug Carn, Archie Shepp, Willie Bobo, Blue Mitchell, Marcus Belgrave, Al Jarreau and Hugh Masekela, among many others. A native of Los Angeles, Franklin has lived there virtually his entire life and has always been surrounded by music. His father Sammy was a trumpet player who led a band called The California Rhythm Rascals. "There was always music. He had a couple rehearsals a week and when I got to be [a teenager] there was the radio all the time. We had a great jazz station, KLon [now KKJZ], at that time. My dad started me very early, at three or four years old, tap dancing, from there to the piano and then the clarinet and saxophone."

As a teenager, Franklin played baritone saxophone in the Los Angeles Police Department Junior Band. "That band was sponsored by the L.A.P.D. You got to meet musicians from around your age from all the different high schools and junior high schools and we would rehearse every week with the orchestra and do a couple parades a month. We played for all the public events [and did] the Rose Parade a couple times. It's a shame they don't have it anymore. It was really enlightening."

Although he was always taking lessons and playing an instrument, he was never really happy with it until he discovered the bass in high school. "I had a formal teacher from high school for a couple years and he taught me the legitimate side. I was in my early 20s when I would hang out with Al McKibbin a couple times a week and he would show me everything about the bass that he knew - he had it all covered: the Latin

side, the jazz side and he had the classical side too - he was very warm and very beautiful. David Dyson was a great bass player, he helped me quite a bit and George Morrow also."

Franklin started gigging pretty quickly, working with Roy Ayers while still in high school and then saxophonist Curtis Amy soon after. "Roy and I went to high school at the same time, [different schools] in what they called the Southern League. He started a band with a couple great players: Carl Burnett [drums] and Bill Henderson [piano]. That was from the last year in high school to about, I guess, two or three years after high school. Then Roy moved to New York with Herbie Mann, so that started his career off. Curtis was after Roy. I was about 21. That was really great because he was like the big jazz star in L.A. at the time and he was always working."

Willie Bobo heard Franklin in 1964 and bought him a ticket to New York. "For a young musician in L.A., that was their dream, you know? It's like, cats wait their turn to go. I was happy to get the call to go to New York with a big-time group and hanging out with Willie in New York City, that was amazing. I got to meet a lot of cats. We worked uptown quite a bit at Count Basie's and all the cats would come through there. Plus, you got to travel, it was a working band. So, I was elated." They worked New York and the East Coast and Franklin performed with Shepp in between, before Bobo's band made a West Coast appearance and Franklin decided to stay home. It just so happened that Masekela caught the band and practically hired Franklin on the spot. "That was so great, man. 'Cause I had put in my notice and Willie fired me too at the same time and in the audience Masekela came to me the next night, I think, and he offered me a job. We went out there almost four years, traveled around the world, made a lot of money and had a lot of fun."

Franklin performed with Masekela at the Monterey Pop Music Festival in 1967. "That was completely different for me [laughs] man, I was listening to Miles and Trane and Monk and I come to this festival, man, with millions of people and Otis Redding and Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix - I got to meet all of them - and people are going mad and everybody's getting

high and smoking weed and some people got clothes off. It's just a whole different scene." The following year Franklin had a number one single with Masekela called "Grazing in the Grass". "We moved on up, from coach to first class on everything...moving on up to better hotels and we did better gigs, more concerts, Avery Fisher Hall and Carnegie Hall, you know. I was 27, 28, on top of the world, man. It was big for a long time, then we went back to coach and back to cabs again [laughs] 'cause we never did get that second hit...to stay up there. It was a wonderful year."

Soon after Franklin joined pianist Gene Russell's trio, who became one of the founders and producers of the Black Jazz label. He also met Michael Carvin right around this time and they made their first European tour with Hawes and recorded a few albums. "Can't remember how I met Michael, but we became friends right away, started doing a few gigs around town together and then he moved into my house. Then I got a call to go with Hampton Hawes who needed a drummer so, of course, I recommended Michael. Hamp was very loose, he wanted us to express ourselves and he wanted the band to be loose. We stayed over there for three months. Playing with Hamp was very prestigious because Hamp was the man, you know? He knew all the musicians and all the musicians loved him and appreciated him."

Sometime between meeting Carvin and going to Europe with Hawes, Franklin met Carn. Franklin had recorded the first Black Jazz album with Russell, *New Direction*. Franklin and Carvin appeared on the label's third release, Carn's tour de force, *Infant Eyes*, before Franklin got to make his own. "I kept telling Gene I wanted to record my band, because we were working around L.A. quite a bit as a matter of fact. So, Gene said, 'Sure!' I got my favorite guys that I'd been working with for a year or so." Franklin released *The Skipper* in 1972 and *The Skipper at Home* in 1974. He went on to release about 23 more albums as a leader and has over 150 album credits.

In 1973, when the original The Three Sounds disbanded, Gene Harris started a new trio with Franklin and his old friend Carl Burnett. Since 2017

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LEST WE FORGET



HARRY BECKETT

BY MONIQUE NGOZI NRI

By all accounts, Harry Beckett was a genial man and an extraordinary musician: a trumpeter's trumpeter with a distinct sound. Certainly, his discography's sheer size and range attest to the fact of his popularity with musicians from bassist Graham Collier, in whose bands he resided for more than 16 years, to the wonderfully named South African-rooted big band Brotherhood of Breath. He was a sought-after musician who played in many big bands including those led by Mike Westbrook, Barry Guy, Mike Gibbs, Alan Cohen and Pierre Dørge and was even on the original *Jesus Christ Superstar* recording in 1970.

Beckett was born in Bridgetown, St. Michael, Barbados on May 30th, 1935 and arrived in London when he was 19, having begun to play cornet in a Salvation Army band at home. When a new generation of jazz players sprang up, Beckett was there to mentor them, taking his place in Courtney Pine's Jazz Warriors in the late '80s. British Trumpeter Kevin G. Davy

recalls, "I feel fortunate to have heard Harry Beckett play the trumpet and, as a young aspirant trumpeter, I found him an encouraging force that many musicians looked up to on the U.K. jazz and improvised music scenes. He was widely regarded as a genius and innovator on the trumpet with his own individual voice, harmonic approach and phrasing."

One of Beckett's albums, *Joy Unlimited*, recorded in 1974 and released on Cadillac, has finally been reissued on CD and streaming platforms for the first time. If ever we were in need of the infectious sound of this music and band of the same name, it is now. Six songs, 40 minutes and 51 seconds of sublime departure from present-day realities.

Opening with the breathtaking "No Time for Hello", Beckett offers a melody that soars over the fast, funky rhythm section of bassist Darryl Runswick and drummer Nigel Morris, replete with Martin David's congas. The first solo by Beckett leans on the horn's upper registers while guitarist Ray Russell pulls the whole ensemble closer to jazz-rock and pianist Brian Miller pulls it back to the melody in the final section of the song. The track is just insistently joyous. "Glowing" and "Ring Within Rings" have a distinctly Caribbean feel, tracks to which you can actually dance around the room. While "Bracelets of Sound" showcasing Russell, has the languid pace of an afternoon on the beach. The short but beautiful ballad "Changes Are Still Happening", features Beckett and Russell in a haunting

duet, and closer "Not Just Tomorrow" are the more reflective, plaintive melodies on the CD.

John Thurlow, whose book *The Many Faces of Harry Beckett* was published in 2020, writes of the album. "Joy Unlimited was Harry's fourth solo album but the first in which he really found his own voice as a composer and a bandleader."

Beckett left the planet on Jul. 22nd, 2010, at the age of 75. In his own words, his legacy is good music. He is quoted on the original liner notes for the album by John Fordham as saying, "My happiest moments are when I'm playing and the important thing is that the guys should be playing it well, whatever it is." ❖

For more information, visit cadillacrecords77.bandcamp.com/album/joy-unlimited

Recommended Listening:

- Harry Beckett - *Flare Up* (Philips, 1970)
- Graham Collier Music (featuring Harry Beckett) - *Songs For My Father* (featuring Harry Beckett) (Fontana, 1970)
- Harry Beckett - *Joy Unlimited* (Cadillac, 1974)
- Johnny Dyani Quartet - *Angolian Cry* (SteepleChase, 1985)
- Harry Beckett - *Passion and Possession* (ITM, 1990)
- Harry Beckett - *Tribute to Charles Mingus* (West Wind, 1999)

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TNYCJR: You could say there's a difference between those who move for the mere sake of it because they don't know how to be still and those who have to be still and let the world blossom around them. You can't be attentive to the spirit, or any spirit, if you're always on the go, because you're either too busy talking down to everyone or shutting them out. We need time for cultivation.

LR: I'm doing a piece right now on technology and I keep coming back to this image of Toto pulling back the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*. That's exactly what I see going on. The mask is coming down and there's desperation out there. We have to be careful with our minds, because the proverbial THEY understand the power of hypnotism based on repetition. Sometimes I hear the classics on the radio and am reminded of how the jazz greats did so much with so little. I'm blessed to have grown up in that time. Not just around jazz, but Black music in general. Gospel, R&B and don't get me started on James Brown, now he packed the party. As soon as he came on, it was hands up. And if you didn't have anybody, you just danced with the wall. But you were still telling a story.

TNYCJR: How did this upcoming live-stream concert come about?

LR: One Breath Rising asked me and I said yes, simple as that. Since then, I've been going through the pieces in my mind, letting them grow. The fact that it takes place on Valentine's Day reminds me of a performance I did for the Provincetown Playhouse at the invitation of Regina Ress, who teaches storytelling at NYU. In that piece, I said I was "looking for an analog love in a digital world". That notion got me thinking about sound. We're living in a world of ones and zeros, kicked off with an electrical connection, but I'm used to striking something, producing vibration.

In that performance, for which I both spoke and played, I told the story of my bass, which was built in Germany in the 1840s. It was found in a bombed-out building in Berlin and no one knows how it got here. I had a chance to try it out at the luthier's shop when I was getting my plywood model fixed. That night, I couldn't sleep, all I could hear was that sound. I was in love. I ended up trading my bass for the German one and it's still my go-to instrument. I told a more detailed version of that story to an audience once and at the end these two old couples approached me and introduced themselves as German concentration camp survivors. They felt such an affinity for my bass, down to the serial number imprinted on the scroll. As I was giving them a closer look, one of the wives was patting and rubbing the bass like it was a real individual, which it is. I got really emotional. They saw a lot of people in that story and told me to keep playing. That's when I realized the gift ran both ways. You pull in things that so many others take for granted, and you magnify them. This is who we are.

TNYCJR: Speaking of sound, I can't help but feel like you're reciting poetry when you're playing bass and playing bass when you're reciting poetry.

LR: I'll walk with that, too. I live an improvisational lifestyle. Whatever I don't do today, I'll do the next time.

TNYCJR: Finally, I'd like to go back to the beginning of your relationship with the bass.

LR: I didn't pick the bass up until I was 30. When I did, I already knew how I wanted it to sound and where I would go with it. Back then, I was getting poetry gigs in Boston when I ran into a bassist by the name of John Jamyll Jones. We were having a Black History Month program and I wanted him to accompany me while

I read. The performance was even shown on PBS under the name *Say Brother*. After that I joined his band, Worlds, reciting poetry and playing a little percussion. They had two bassists, one of whom pursued other paths in life and sold me his bass. At first, I just had it in the living room, but then I would put on John Coltrane's *Ascension* and start playing along with it. I felt like part of the band. Jamyll showed me the rudiments: how to hold the instrument and plant my feet properly. Then I got some books on fingering and such. I practiced every night. I just wanted to play. I never met my teachers: Jimmy Garrison, Ron Carter, Paul Chambers and Palle Danielsson. Then, a guy from Berklee who'd heard me play called me about joining him at Wally's. He needed someone fast, so I took the risk and developed from there. Aside from studying a bit with Cecil McBee, I was largely self-taught. It was always about the music. It saved my life. I was a listener before I was a player and I'm still listening. ❖

For more information, visit ogijaz.com. Roland live-streams Feb. 14 at onebreathrising.org.

Recommended Listening:

- World's Experience Orchestra – *The Beginning Of A New Birth/As Time Flows On* (World Productions – Now Again, Now Again, 1975/77)
- Raphe Malik 5tet – *21st Century Texts* (FMP, 1991)
- Dennis Warren's Full Metal Revolutionary Jazz Ensemble – *Watch Out!* (Accurate, 1996)
- Larry Roland – *As Time Flows On* (Boston Composers Group, 2001)
- Charles Gayle – *Streets* (Northern Spy, 2011)
- Steve Cohn/Daniel Carter/Larry Roland/Marvin Bugalu Smith – *Voyager* (Tube Room, 2018)

(ENCORE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

Franklin and Burnett have been working in a new trio with pianist Robert Turner, revisiting the foot-tapping positive vibes they felt while working with Harris. This trio recently released a recording of one of their most recent performances from February 2020, *Live at the Gardenia Club* by 3 More Sounds.

Otherwise, 2020 has been quieter than usual, of course. He's done a couple record dates and some live-streaming concerts. This new year kicks off with more recording, including an exciting sextet that Franklin has lined up with Nolan Shaheed (trumpet), Teodross Avery (tenor), Ryan Porter (trombone), Theo Saunders (piano) and Willie Jones III (drums). He's worked with them all before separately in various situations. When asked if he had plans to perform with that band he said no. "Those guys are so busy individually I thought if I could get them together once...Willie's very busy, he lives in New York. Teodross is very busy in L.A. and wherever he's at he's got his own thing happening. Ryan Porter plays with Kamasi [Washington] and when they get started they're going to be on the road all the time. Nolan's pretty busy with his studio. I don't think we're gonna get together again. On an ideal day I'd love to perform with that group, but no plans." ❖

For more information, visit sprecords.com

Recommended Listening:

- Hugh Masekela – *The Promise of a Future* (UNI, 1968)
- Henry Franklin – *The Skipper* (Black Jazz, 1971)
- Henry Franklin – *Tribal Dance* (Catalyst, 1977)
- Dennis Gonzalez New Dallas Quartet – *Stefan* (Silkheart, 1986)
- Azar Lawrence – *Prayer For My Ancestors* (Furthermore, 2008)
- 3 More Sounds (Henry Franklin/Robert Turner/Carl Burnett) – *Live at The Gardenia Club* (Skipper Prod., 2017)

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