



A TRIBUTE TO **FRANK LOWE**

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

I spent some formative years in my twenties exploring music with saxophonist Frank Lowe during the last nine years of his life. He hired me when I was just 23 years old and gave me my first opportunities to tour abroad and to appear on a record that got some decent distribution. We were close, but a number of details are unclear as his story hasn't quite been written before, and there are fewer people left to fill in the blanks. A group of dispersed musicians met up in Brooklyn on June 15th & 16th, 2019 to play and record some of Frank Lowe's music. The results have been released by Mahakala Music on an album called: *Nothing But Love: the music of Frank Lowe*.

This story has two main parts: a biographical sketch of musician Frank Lowe and a story about how a group of musicians close to him in his later years came together to record a musical tribute.

PART ONE

Frank Lowe was a native of Memphis, Tennessee born on June 24, 1943. He was from the Bellline or Lundee neighborhood, between the fairgrounds and Liberty Bowl to the west, and Memphis Country Club to the east. That's right across the tracks that run parallel to Southern Avenue just north of Orange Mound. I believe Frank attended Melrose High School in Orange Mound, which was known for several notable athletes including Super Bowl champions Sam Walton and Cedrick Wilson. He would have gone there because geographical zoning determined what school one attended, but he sometimes spoke about the other high schools because of the great musicians who came from them. Messick High School, where the original house musicians at Stax Records went to school, was further east, and I'm not sure any Black kids went to school there in those days. Booker T. Washington High School was to the west, south of Memphis, and that's where Phineas Newborn, Booker T. Jones, David Porter, Rufus Thomas, and Maurice White went to school. The high school famous for great jazz musicians, Manassas High School, was north of Memphis. In his autobiography, Miles Davis mentions the school, but not by name: "Before I left New York I had had tryouts for the band and that's where I got all those Memphis musicians [George] Coleman, [Frank] Strozier, and [Harold] Mabern. (They had gone to school with the great young trumpet player Booker Little. I wonder what they were doing down there when all them guys came through that one school?)." Frank used to talk about that school because he admired all those musicians, which also included, Hank Crawford, Charles Lloyd, and Isaac Hayes, among others, but that's another story.

I never learned too much about Frank's parents. Visiting his family home, I met his mother briefly, but his father was gone before I had a chance to meet him. I believe his father spent at least part of his career as a golf pro, maybe everything from caddying to instruction. I do know that Frank was a golfer as a kid, and even earned some kind of golf scholarship. Many

years later he recommended Titleist golf balls to master drummer Michael Carvin for their even balance. Frank's Mother, as I recall, was a hair stylist.

His folks were not musicians, but Frank was drawn to music early on the radio, records, anything in the air. The draw became magnetic and just got stronger and stronger. He saw Hank Crawford perform when he was just a kid, maybe around 10 years old, and the whole scene knocked him out. Crawford's persona was every bit as great as the music. It was all part of the whole. Growing into his teen years, Frank had numerous musical heroes, and their personal style, as well as the music, was what made him want to be, as he put it, "a hip jazz musician." He started playing the saxophone around the age of 12. He used to talk about Gene Ammons from Chicago, who seemingly could do anything with a tenor saxophone. He had a robust sound and could play bebop and ballads, but had so much blues in his sound, and even R&B in his music. Bennie Green's *Soul Stirrin'*, with Gene Ammons and Billy Root on tenor saxophones was a favorite record. The title track is credited to Babs Gonzales, who, as a vocalist and poet, evoked that "hip" world of jazz that filled Frank's dreams. As a teenager, he was obsessed with music, and did all he could just to be near it, listening to the radio and all the records he could get his hands on. He would even find his way to rehearsals that he could listen to from outside.

Toward the end of high school, Frank landed a job at Stax Records. The original name of the label was Satellite, but in 1960 they moved into the old Capitol movie theater at 926 E McLemore Avenue at College Street, and it was not long before the record company became Stax after the sibling owners: Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton. The concession area of the new venue became the record store, and they called that Satellite. Frank landed a job as a clerk at the Satellite record shop. He was in heaven. The shop was the hangout, especially for young music lovers, and a lot of the musicians coming through were around Frank's age or just a few years older. Booker T and the MGs were not yet the studio band, but they were just about all there. Steve Cropper and Donald "Duck" Dunn, along with Charlie Freeman, Don Nix, and Charles "Packy" Axton were part of the original Royal Spades. "The name's racist overtone smacks of teens believing they're getting away with something, and reveals society's blunted sensibility," Robert Gordon says in his book about Stax, "the name would soon change." With the help of Packy's Mom, Estelle Axton whose last name supplied the "ax" in "Stax" they came up with the Mar-Keys as their name in time for their first record release. A number of the kids that hung out in the record shop found their way into the studio one way or another. Frank got back there serving as a gofer to augment his position as a record store clerk. He befriended Packy who taught him R&B licks and even some Gene Ammons phrases.

After high school, Frank attempted a practical path forward, enrolling at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, as a social science major. Listening to John Coltrane fanatically, he did not complete his degree.

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson stepped in and focused on the "the battle against communism." In 1964, student groups organized protests to the draft and to the war and burning draft cards became a symbol of resistance. Based on false testimony, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

on August 7, 1964, granting President Johnson authority to retaliate against bullets and torpedoes that were never fired. Legal justification for military involvement without having to declare war was important because the U.S. wanted to avoid war with China, who, it was believed, would engage if war was declared. The deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam quickly rose as bombing campaigns commenced across North Vietnam and Laos (and they dropped literally millions of tons of bombs over the next several years). So, it was in this climate of the growing conflict that Frank was sent overseas. Somehow, he had been arrested and had to make the choice between jail or the war. He spent 1965 in Vietnam, and was there when the U.S. Marines arrived near Da Nang, South Vietnam, and the American ground war commenced. However, by some stroke of good fortune he was made a military police officer, and stationed in Saigon, where he had the luxury of listening to a collection of jazz records. It did not feel either like good fortune or luxury, even though he could listen to records in the city. The conflict was escalating, and Black soldiers were disproportionately drafted and sent into combat. Luckily, Frank's service was short, but, as with most veterans, the trauma stayed and never went away. Many years later, Billy Bang provided an outlet for he and his fellow veterans, including Frank and Michael Carvin, to address this with his albums *Vietnam: The Aftermath* (2001), which led to subsequent recordings and performances. Bang acknowledged that this was an attempt to exorcise the demons that haunted him for decades, and Frank said it was therapeutic, even cathartic, to face the nightmares they always tried to ignore.

After Nam, Frank settled in San Francisco and the Haight-Ashbury scene, in tune with the "make love not war" ethos. In San Francisco, he worked at a record shop with Jerry Garcia and became a trolley operator. He continued to pursue music, and studied saxophone with Bert Wilson, who was part of a free jazz scene that included Sonny Simmons and Donald Rafael Garrett. Frank gravitated toward the latter because he had worked with Coltrane, and he credits Garrett with teaching him breathing techniques for relaxation, which he found quite valuable because Frank could be an intense character. He brought that intensity to his performance, his listening, his devotion to and reverence for the music and musicians.

Carvin, who always refers to Frank as "Doctor Too-Much," (the title of Frank's 1977 LP), recalls meeting him in San Francisco:

"I met Doctor Too-Much when I first moved to San Francisco. He was walking down Haight to Divisadero because on the corner of Haight the hill is straight up, and Divisadero, when you come down Haight, it flattens out. Now, on Haight Street during that time this was back in the middle of the hippie thing all the way up Haight St all the street signs had been painted over the word "Haight" and wrote "Love." Doctor Too-Much, let me see, I was 26 so, we're the same age, so Doctor Too-Much must've been same age. Very handsome man, Dr. Too-Much. He's coming down Haight Street on his way downtown to Market Street in San Francisco, because Market Street is where the trolley car turns around to go back down. Because Doctor Too-Much, during that time, operated the trolley. So, he was on his way to work. So, Doctor Too-Much is coming down the hill with his Army fatigues on, some beautiful loafers, and he had on the combat hat from China with the red star on it. So, I'm coming up Haight Street on my stroll, so I say, "Man, this a different looking cat, man." But he had that, "I'm somebody vibe."

'Cause I didn't know him. But what's makin' me check him is he's coming down the street like in a cute Castro kind of the thing, but with a Mao Zedong cap on. I said, "Hmm. This cat is in everybody's army and shit." So, as we're getting ready to pass, I say, "Hey, man, how you doing?" He says, "I'm fine, man." Then I notice he has a neck strap on. I say, "Man, you play saxophone?" He say, "Yeah, yeah, man, I'm Frank Lowe." I said, "Yeah, I heard of you. I'm Michael Carvin." He said, "Oh, yeah" and we exchanged numbers. So later on, we hit, but right after that he told me, he said, "man, I'm going to New York." And right after, I think I saw him two or three days after that, we hit and shortly, maybe a month after that he was off."

Actually, Frank was a year older than Carvin, but this meeting probably took place around 1970 or 71. It was right around this time that Frank had gone to the Both/And Club, which they all called the B.A., and saw one of his heroes, Ornette Coleman, perform with his quartet. After the show, Frank went and played for him, and Ornette said he should move to New York. Frank and his wife Carmen packed up and were soon in the big city where things started happening quickly. He went to visit Ornette in pursuit of study, and Ornette told him he needed a gig, and introduced him to Alice Coltrane. Coltrane hired Frank on Ornette's recommendation, they started performing together, and he soon made his album debut appearing on Alice Coltrane with Strings: World Galaxy. "I listened to John Coltrane so hard", he said, "until I listened my way right into his band!". Of course, John had been gone four years by then, and Frank sometimes shared the stage with Archie Shepp or Pharoah Sanders. His association with the Coltrane band gave him instant legitimacy, and soon he was performing with Don Cherry, Rashied Ali, Milford Graves, and everybody on the nascent loft scene.

Frank formed a partnership with drummer Rashied Ali, and together they recorded Duo Exchange for their own label, Survival Records. Their business partnership as label owners was short-lived, and Rashied took over the label, but they were dear friends to the end. As one might guess from the title, Duo Exchange was performed by just the two of them. Frank told me that when they made this, he knew nothing of Rashied's 1967 duo recording with John Coltrane, Interstellar Space. I thought this was impossible, given Frank's obsession with Trane, until I learned that it wasn't actually released until 1974, the year after Frank's recording with Rashied. In January 2020, Duo Exchange was given a beautiful reissue, mastered from the original tapes, expanded with never before heard music, and released as a double LP set.

In 1973, Frank finally got make his own album, Black Beings. It was a dream to release it on ESP, simply because Albert Ayler had produced his groundbreaking sides with ESP. After this, Frank would record regularly. He loved performing live, but he always had a new idea to explore, and making records was the best way to have something to show for his work. His discography is well represented on discogs.com and elsewhere.

Don Cherry was Frank's main man. He loved him dearly, and penned the musical tribute "Don One" for him. His approach resonated deeply his communal ethos, his incorporation of world musics, his overall focus on peace and humanity, and even his clothes. Frank had a profound respect for Don.

He got to perform with him in the '70s, and appeared on *Relativity Suite* (1973) and *Brown Rice* (1975). Those album covers feature colorful textiles or quilts, which influenced a couple of Frank's album covers. *Exotic Heartbreak* (1982) and *Decision In Paradise* (1985) feature artwork sewn together by Frank's wife Carmen.

Some have observed that Frank went from amateur to high-profile without some of the prerequisite paying of dues. That may be true, but sometimes the motive for mentioning it is suspect. The question is, if not by paying dues, how did he get there? What was it that Ornette Coleman recognized that gave him the idea to suggest to Frank he move to New York? What was it that Alice Coltrane and Don Cherry recognized in him that made them embrace him into their ensembles? This has everything to do with what Frank Lowe had to bring to the music. It is not based on the written word and it is not what you learn about in school.

Frank was not and is not easily understood. I don't think Bert Wilson understood Frank all that well while instructing him out in the Bay Area (though perhaps a bit better later on). Frank was on his own path: he took what he needed and left the rest. Among the famous quotes from Miles Davis is: "Sometimes it takes you a long time to sound like yourself." This may be at once deep insight and simple truth. Playing like oneself comes from the focus on one's own inspiration. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of bards and sages." Frank did this almost single-mindedly, and he poured his love and devotion into his instrument in an intensely personal way. What Frank had to bring to the music was himself. These great artists recognized that he was ready to bring that.

Frank passed away on September 19, 2003 due to complications of lung cancer. He seemed to have beaten the cancer once, but it either came back or was never quite removed. I was around him a lot for the first bout. When he was home from the hospital, I brought him some healthy foods, and I remember bringing him a jug of juice with lots of greens in it that he would never drink because it was green. "Frank, it's sweet, it's got apples and bananas in it too," I told him. "You should drink it, there's a lot of nutrition in there." But every time I came back, that bottle remained unopened in the fridge. When the cancer came back, I didn't know about it. He didn't want to trouble me with it. Frank wasn't expecting to survive, and his priority was making peace with his ex-wife Carmen. His childhood dream of becoming "a hip jazz musician" largely came true, but didn't jive well with being a family man. Pianist Chris Parker, who first introduced me to Frank in New York, called me to tell me Frank had passed, and I was shocked. I had no warning. "Mike Marcus took me and Kelley to the hospital and we sneaked in: he wasn't really having visitors," Chris said. "He was drawn up and more pale than normal. Carmen was there."

PART TWO

Bernard Santacruz was born in Algiers in 1956. His mother was French, and his father Spanish. At that time, and until the end of the War of Independence in July 1962, Algeria was a French colony. So, as Bernard puts it, "I am legally French, but my heart remains Algerian." They moved to France in August of '62. He was a self-taught bass guitarist playing in alternative rock and fusion bands around Marseille, France until he entered the Conservatoire d'Avignon in 1986, attending Joseph Fabre's double bass class, and André Jaume's jazz class. He also had the opportunity to study with Charlie Haden in 1989, and Ron Carter in 1990. After his debut with the "Soma" trio (with Jean Sébastien Simonoviez and Marc Mazzillo) at the end of the 80s, he started collaborating with many African American musicians, including Charles Tyler, who had rose to prominence performing and recording with Albert Ayler in the '60s. Together they recorded *A Scream For Charles Tyler* with drummer Denis Charles and guitarist Rémi Charnasson. After Tyler's untimely death in June of 1992, Santacruz performed a duet with Denis in a tribute at Saint Peter's Church in New York. Denis introduced him to Frank. "When I heard Frank play that night I was overwhelmed by his playing, his sound, his physical involvement in every note," Bernard recalled. "We met again during my stay and talked a lot about music and life, philosophy." Thanks to the French record label Bleu Regard and a festival in the South of France, Bernard had the support to propose the project "Latitude 44" to Frank with Denis and Senegalese percussionist Cheick Tidiane Fall. They made their recording debut in April 1994 and it was the beginning of a fruitful partnership.



L to R: Denis Charles, Bernard Santacruz, Frank Lowe. Juillet 1996 au Festival de La Seyne sur Mer. Avec Denis Charles et Frank Lowe.
Photographe - Thierry Trombert.

That was just about the time I made my way back home to New York after spending some time in college. After two years at the University of Cincinnati, I attended Memphis State University (now the University of Memphis) for one semester in the fall of 1993. My academic focus was audio production, but I also played 2nd trumpet in the B band, as I remember it. We did a bunch

of R&B and funk music. Kelley Hurt was one of the singers in that band and Marc Franklin played 1st trumpet. I spent all of my time in Memphis hanging out with pianist Chris Parker. We went to Huey's every Sunday afternoon to hear saxophonist Jim Spake play, and to The North End every Sunday night to hear Ed Finney's band. We also went to the Adam's Mark Hotel where we could sit in and play standards. Tim Goodwin was the bassist (one of our instructors at school), Rene Koopman was on piano and the drummer was Clort McClinton. They seemed more than happy to let us play. I was quite green. I grew up playing trumpet in school, but I had only been playing drums for a couple years, and hadn't taken any lessons. Sometimes lessons took the fun out of playing the trumpet, so I didn't want anyone to tell me how to play the drums. I wanted to love the drums on my own terms. Thank goodness for these guys and anyone who ever gave me the chance to play. That's how I've learned.

Chad Fowler lived in the same house as Chris. We got to make music too. We made a subversive appearance at an open mic, "at a shitty little bar on the Highland Strip," Chad recalls. We signed up and told the organizer we were going to cover a Pearl Jam song. Chad continues:

"Instead, we first played Happy Birthday for a sorority girl who was there and fully trashed, then we launched into a very long rendition of "Theme From a Symphony" by Ornette Coleman. I think it was you, me, Marc Franklin, Steve Holley, and Keith Salley. Jay Morris was there with us listening and was the only audience member left after a few minutes. I'll never forget watching him laugh so hard he was choking."

We completely emptied out what was a completely crowded venue. Memphis was a short-lived experiment for me. I lasted less than a year there before making my way back home to New York by the autumn of 1994. I met some good people in Memphis though, and created some lasting friendships.

Before he went to Memphis, Chris Parker had spent many Saturdays sitting right next to Charles Thomas on his solo gig at the Holiday Inn West in Little Rock. "The atrium lounge would be empty, except for me, him, and the bartender," Chris says. "It was like lessons, but more informal. I could ask about some changes, tunes, etc. and he would show them to me." Charles Thomas, along with Phineas Newborn, Jr., four years his senior, were a major influence [to a generation of Memphis piano players], including James Williams, Mulgrew Miller, Donald Brown, and Harold Mabern, who was only a year younger.

Chris had also met pianist Sonelius Smith while still in high school. Sonelius moved to Memphis from Hillhouse, Mississippi when he was 6, and attended college in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, just down the river from Little Rock. He moved to New York in 1969 and worked with a host of jazz greats, among them Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Kenny Dorham, Frank Foster and Charles Mingus. During Chris's first years in college, he visited Sonelius in New York and went to his ongoing rehearsal with Fred Hopkins and J.R. Mitchell. They became his musical uncles. Fred and J.R. lived in the same building as Frank Lowe, and Chris met Frank at J.R.'s place.

Chris also got to catch his old mentor Charles Thomas a couple times at Bradley's in New York.

The second time was in December of 1994. Thomas had an engagement at Bradley's with Ray Drummond and Ed Thigpen. I went to go meet Chris there, and he had brought Frank with him. That's the first time I met Frank Lowe. Bradley's had a strict quiet policy, which was great, so everybody could really hear and feel the music. We were seated at the bar and, we couldn't talk, but Frank and I seemed to chuckle at the same moments in the music. At the end of gig, explaining that he didn't have a phone, he gave me his address. It just so happened he lived in Manhattan Plaza just a block away from where I worked at Michael Levine's studio on 43rd Street. So, after work, instead of jumping into the rush hour fray, I would stroll over and hang out with Frank. He had this fluid collection of cassette tapes with jazz music for days. He would just talk and play tapes until I was ready to go get on the train. Seems like I did this almost daily.

In 1995, Frank's Mom became ill back in Memphis. I don't recall what it was, but she was getting older, and he was worried about her. I had a car, so I said, "why not go see her?" We jumped in the car and went to Cincinnati. We stayed at my brother's house, and I set up a gig with my old band, the Prophets of Suspicion (a phrase I thought I heard a professor utter, which stirred me back awake in some morning class). We were a kind of free-funk outfit inspired by 70s Miles. Frank sat in with us, wandering in and out occasionally while we did our thing. That must have been the first time we played together at all.

Chris had three gigs set up for Frank in Memphis. The first night was at The North End with Ed Finney, Chris Parker, Kevin Sheahan, and Don Patterson.



L to R: Kevin Sheahan, Chris Parker, Don Patterson, Frank Lowe, Ed Finney. Photographer - Mike Kelley

Next was at Rich Trosper's house. The middle of the house was open to the second story and there was a walk-through, like a bridge, above the first floor. After the first set, Frank asked if I would play the second set. I said I would, but he would have to clear it with Rich, whose house, drums and gig it was. Rich was cool, and this was the first time I really played with Frank. He asked me to play straight 4/4 swing, just to keep a simple groove and let him blow. But at the time, for my young ears, what he played was so surprising I couldn't just hold down 4/4.



L to R: Kevin Sheahan, Frank Lowe, Rich Trosper. Photographer - Mike Kelley

The last gig was at Marshall Arts. I don't remember this one, but Chris says it was Jim Duckworth, Alex Obert and maybe Earl Lowe (no relation) that played that one.

Back in New York

The first time I saw and heard Frank perform with his peers was at the Knitting Factory on Leonard Street at what must have been the What Is Jazz Festival in 1996. I was blown away. By this time, I had established a way in with his records *The Flam* and *Exotic Heartbreak*, but these guys were on another plane. Frank had Billy Bang on violin and Charles Moffett on drums. Instead of a bass, they had Bob Stewart on tuba, and he really blew my mind, because I never knew a tuba could do anything like that. And the truth is, it can't. Bob Stewart is a rare artist. In the coming years I met Moffett again before an upcoming tour with Frank. He talked to me about practicing on the road and showed me playing brushes on a phone book.

In October 1996, Frank organized a small tour of France and Portugal with Bernard Santacruz and brought me and Chris along to form a quartet. Chris and I met Bernard when we showed up over there. We had a week-long engagement at the B-Flat Jazz Club in Matosinhos, Portugal, which was the centerpiece of our journey. I brought a portable Sony DAT recorder and a stereo mic and recorded every night. Afterwards in the hotel Chris and I would listen through headphones. Even though we had just played it, to my ears it sounded otherworldly and my mind was swimming in wonder. What a great time.

Back home in New York, Frank had a record date set just a few months later, on February 19th and 20th at the Cadence building for the CIMP label for a trio with bassist Steve Neil and Charles Moffett on drums. Sadly, Moffett passed away on February 14th. I don't recall the cause. Frank kept the date and used me instead, and I drove the three of us up there. Frank was in the early onset of pneumonia during that session and thus the tracks on the album are all rather concise. Frank's health was always somewhat in flux during the years that we knew him. As a result, his performances were somewhat inconsistent compared to the prior decades when he always brought the fire.

Some of the more "straight-ahead" folks in Memphis, and elsewhere, were not really open to the looser kind of music that Frank played. He received a mixed reception when we went down there in '95. However, on his last tour, he returned to Memphis with Billy Bang and the Vietnam project playing a curved soprano saxophone instead of tenor, after cancer surgery left him with one lung. By all accounts, they were phenomenal. As Chris put it, "he finally honed in on the clarity he was seeking musically."

In 1998, Frank and Bernard had organized a trio tour in Europe with Denis Charles for April into May. Almost like last year all over again. "Jazz," as we called Denis, died on March 26th. The cause was heart failure brought on by influenza. There were other candidates for sure, but Frank insisted that they bring me along. It was different without Chris there. For one thing, I was more exposed. But by now, I was at another level in my playing and we were at another level collectively. Bernard and I established our rapport and I grew quite a bit on that trip. We had a great tour.



L to R: Anders Griffen, Frank Lowe, Bernard Santacruz at Château, La Tour D'Aigues, Marseilles, France (1998). Photographer - Serge Voisin

After that I didn't perform with Frank too much more. Frank put together a group with pianist Bertha Hope, and we performed at a Don Cherry tribute at Tonic that was headlined by Karl Berger. In January 2000 Bernard came to town and we did a concert at SUNY-Purchase College.

I had already started working with a lot of songwriters, starting with the legendary Ish Marquez in 1998, and then, among others, Jeffrey Lewis, Seth Faergolzia, Paleface, Kimya Dawson, and Regina Spektor. These artists explored in their own unique ways and different from what I was used to. I enthusiastically shared all of this music with Frank and he took a sincere interest. "Ish is dangerous," he said, feeling the power in his music. He was imagining playing with Kimya, and he spent time with Regina and me. Regina recalls:

"Spending time together in NYC was a privilege. Frank's smile, laugh, and conversations were musical - an extension of his playing. He was kind and sweet - a generous older storyteller and guide to a world I was eager to learn about."

Fast forward to 2018.

Chris Parker got in touch on January 3, 2018 to say, "Happy new Ears" and gave me an update on rumblings in the south. He and Chad Fowler were making some music, and they were thinking about a project with Alvin Fielder, and was I in touch with Bernard Santacruz, what was he up to? "Haven't been in touch with Bernard in a minute," I replied. "He used to come over and work in Chicago from time to time. I think with guitarist Jeff Parker, but that's probably been more than 10 years and I think Jeff's in L.A. now. You might ask Alvin about Damon Smith." "Al just recommended we use Damon," Chris replied. Well, that never happened, but they made the Dopolarians record, which ended up being Alvin's last. Alvin Fielder passed away on January 5th, 2019. But the seed was planted, and I got back in touch with Bernard and everything came together. Here is how I put it in the liner notes for the Nothing But Love CD:

This is a dream come true.

For Bernard and me, this materialized quickly. Chad and Chris had been considering possibilities when it just so happened Bernard was coming to New York for the first time in 20 years. I hadn't seen or spoken with Chad in 25 years, and he hadn't met Bernard before. Suddenly, here we are, all together.

Those who knew Frank often describe some kind of interstellar traveler who dropped in to marvel at Earth's blue wonder. He was so unconventional that he struck people this way. At the same time, he imbued an "I am somebody" vibe. He was devoted to music with love and conviction and pursued his craft in an intensely personal way. He expressed reverence for musicians producing positive vibrations, especially his elders and so-called "jazz" musicians. I remember him practically bowing when Harold Ashby passed through the lobby of Manhattan Plaza. "He played with Duke Ellington," he said nudging me and looking serious as hell. But he didn't want to exclude anybody. We were in the south of France when some kids were teasing a boy and girl saying they were in love. Lowe advised the bunch of children, "Everybody Love Everybody." They looked up at him with starry eyes.

Frank Lowe was a dear friend, and a cousin to Kelley. He was like family to all of us in our own ways, traveling and spending holidays together, but especially when it comes to music and this special pursuit of a feeling. Maybe it eludes a satisfying name and we can't quite hold it, but we can allow it to pass right through us, even collectively. Likewise, this project was not realized by the conscious awareness and intention of an individual but collectively, with ...

NOTHING BUT LOVE.



L to R: Kelley Hurt, Chad Fowler, Christopher Parker, Anders Griffen, Bernard Santacruz. Photo credit - Kelly Fowler