



photograph of Sunny Murray by Valerie Wilmer

originality lies, where he relates to conventional schools of jazz drumming and where he differs from most other drummers working in the avant-garde today. Also, I think it is always best to begin on a mechanical basis with drummers because what they do and how they do it is virtually inseparable, and an understanding of one leads to a greater appreciation of the other.

In the basic bop style of drumming the drummer worked with his right hand on open cymbal, his left hand providing accents and contrasting patterns on snare drum and his right foot providing further accents on bass drum. Hi-hat was operated by the left foot for occasional accents, and in the mid-1940's and sometimes later right hand and left foot were often used to provide a swing-style hi-hat beat behind piano solos; this stylistic throwback, however, didn't affect the basic principles of bop drumming, not at any rate at the level of generalisation we are dealing in here. Such things as tom-toms, extra cymbals etc. were used to enrich the texture of the drumming, but like the hi-hat beat they were not significant to the basic principles of the style. All this created a style in which a steady cymbal beat was decorated with the subsidiary implications of other rhythms, other metres, and other time-signatures. The hard bop movement altered this a little, introducing as an important factor the hi-hat operating on two and four in the bar and sometimes increasing the boldness of the subsidiary rhythms, but basically the hard bop drummers were using the same style.

With the work of Elvin Jones, particularly with his work in Coltrane's group, we had the emergence of the left-hand snare drum patterns—what were previously the subsidiary patterns imposed on the stated beat—to a position where they dominated the time-keeping and beat-stating function of the drummer and became the basis of a denser, more truly polyrhythmic line of which the cymbal beat was only a part, a part dispensed with altogether when the necessity for keeping the rhythmic flow of the line going dictated it. Elvin's work broke with established precedent on the point that before him the cymbal beat was generally kept inviolate; if a particular rhythmic pattern began to involve the drummer to the extent that he couldn't keep the beat going it was almost inevitably dropped or quickly resolved: with Elvin the cymbal beat went instead.

On a manual level Elvin's style involved a great deal of snare drum and bass drum work, these two instruments being used as much as, if not more than, open cymbal and hi-hat. Musically, his principle that people didn't necessarily need to hear a beat stated in every bar to be able to keep up with what was going on, provided the breakthrough for a whole generation of young drummers who expanded this view to the idea that it wasn't necessary to state the beat at all, and then further expanded it to the idea that it wasn't necessary to work to a fixed tempo either; as long as the drummer provided rhythmic movement within a group he was fulfilling his function. This of course brings us to the work of such a drummer as Milford Graves and the idea of an essentially non-repetitive series of patterns or designs in which any part of the kit is equally valid and useful and no particular duties or functions are assigned to it or associated with it and in which considerations of tempo, metre and bar-line are secondary to the rhythmic and textural development of the overall design.

Within this style the drummer is not only free musically but free manually, able to work all over his kit with his only limits imposed by his technique and his imagination.

WHEN I first wrote about Sunny Murray I thought he was working towards this very free style of a series of figures set out in succession, a conclusion based mainly on his work with Cecil Taylor, particularly Volume One of the Café Montmartre recordings. I think this was a fairly valid conclusion on the evidence available at the time, but when Murray's records with Albert Ayler began to appear it became clear that this wasn't so: Murray was using a very restricted tonal range in a way that could at times sound just short of conventional yet which seemed to have at its base an entirely fresh view of jazz drumming. He was improving also the techniques necessary to sustain his style and as his work continued it became obvious that what he was doing was not quite what anyone else was doing. Now with this new record one can say with certainty that he is offering a personal and highly original alternative to, or re-interpretation of, the post-Elvin line of development which, while it maintains all the musical freedom of this school, still retains within it certain elements of more traditional jazz drumming.

The basis of Murray's style, like that of Elvin Jones or Milford Graves, is a reorganisation of the mechanical elements of drumming, but whereas Elvin and Milford represent a move towards greater manual freedom Murray has taken the vastly different step of intensifying the specialised function of each hand, and with this greater specialisation has drastically cut down the size of his kit to the maximum his techniques will accommodate. As anyone who has seen photographs of him will know, he uses only one open cymbal, snare drum, bass drum and hi-hat, and though in this way he loses some of the potential tonal and textural values of a complete kit, on the other hand he gains from the fact that he is completely the master of the instruments he uses; there is nothing in his kit that need ever lie idle.

From these self-imposed restrictions it would be easy to get the idea that Murray is something of an ascetic in his attitude to drumming, and that may be true to some extent; I think certainly he is something of a purist, and certainly too his style demands a great deal of discipline and a highly developed technique of its own if it is to work at all well. However, on a musical level his work has great freedom of movement and a variety of texture of a rather specialised kind that is greater than one can at first discern, and when he is really playing well there is a tremendously impressive sense of immediacy and urgency in his work.

His style is essentially stratified, built up in a series of layers; inevitably so considering the nature of his techniques; which involve almost no movement around a kit which in itself precludes much movement anyway. Murray finds the beginnings of his effects in the number of things he can have happening simultaneously, and so one of the marks of his style is its great density. The top layer is the cymbal sound, and this is a truly remarkable thing. It can't be called a beat in the jazz sense of a maintained rhythmic figure since it marks no specific time; apart from a clear, stinging single

beat used as a random effect here and there Murray uses no precise articulation at all in producing this sound. What he does get is a continuous ringing, probably produced by the side of the stick against the cymbal edge, floating above the ensemble with a slow, indeterminate pulse in a continuous crescendo and diminuendo. The snare drum he uses to state a series of rhythmic patterns against the cymbal, often laid out as rows of evenly-spaced rapid beats, while his bass drum he uses in classic fashion to reinforce or contrast with what his hands are doing. Hi-hat he uses least of all, bringing it in as an occasional random effect. All this as a matter of mechanical usage is not too far removed from the style of the early bop drummers, though on a musical level Murray's work is far different, involving a totally new conception of time and rhythmic movement.

ONE of the integral factors of Murray's work, the unifying element that gives it so much movement and cohesion, is his sense of dynamics. The level of his drumming varies endlessly, sometimes within a limited range, sometimes widely, and this constant variation of dynamic level is extended over his whole kit so that no two layers of his drumming are ever following the same dynamic pattern. In a very real way this dynamic scheme gives depth and shape to his drumming and provides yet another dimension of rhythmic activity within his work. There is little indication of a basic tempo in any Sunny Murray performance; his cymbal sound implies a slow pulse, while his snare and bass drum work is essentially geared to a faster pulse, though the relationship between them is in no way the elementary one of a simple multiple. With the introduction of the dynamic factor the various speeds and patterns move in and out of focus, gain or lose momentum, so that a vast range of tempo, rhythm, and metre is held constantly in implication.

A further factor that greatly affects the mobility of Murray's drumming is his ability to vary his snare drum sound from beat to beat, so that the rows of fast beats to which his style is so committed are not only varied dynamically but texturally, which further reinforces the variety of his style.

Murray has provided a complete alternative to the standard line of development in jazz drumming despite, or maybe even because of, the disciplines and restrictions he has placed on himself, but if his style is difficult to play it is maybe also difficult to listen to, for though the basis of his style is to some extent that of conventional jazz drumming the techniques he uses within that basis are unfamiliar and the often deliberately blurred edges of his style need some degree of familiarity if a true picture of his originality is to emerge. Also, this unfamiliarity with the details of his work has been aggravated by the fairly indifferent recording standards he has often met with in the past, though here, finally, he has the benefit of a really good engineering job which allows one to hear all the subtleties of his work. Finally it should be said that Murray, like his previous leaders, Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor, organises his work on a cumulative basis, so that the overall performance is more important than any of the parts, and so his work demands concentrated listening throughout the length of any of his performances for its full effect to register; one has to listen through the layers of his work to find the logic that keeps it together rather than expect to be

regaled on the surface by a feast of immediately attractive figures and patterns.

MURRAY apart, there are other good things on this album, and it would be as well to mention them here. His group has an impressive sound and features some newcomers of distinction. A strong reference to the style and techniques of Albert Ayler exists throughout the music: inevitably the factors that Murray's work introduced into Ayler's group and which coloured Ayler's music to a considerable degree are present in a heightened form here, and such writing as there is also owes something to Ayler, but this response shows itself most particularly in the work of the two saxophonists. Both Lancaster and Graham have been strongly influenced by Ayler, and though their work hasn't the organic strength of Ayler's own playing they are showing some imagination in their application of his principles; the different tonal qualities and the amount of variation they can find while improvising within the same basic approach is some indication of the growing width of application of Ayler's work and it does seem that his idiom, from being an individual and innovatory style, is becoming a widespread musical influence in jazz.

Jacques Coursil is a very striking trumpeter; he works easily within the framework of the group and though in some ways he has been influenced by Ayler—*Angels and devils* is not only a typically Aylerish title but is also more closely imitative of Ayler's themes than is Sunny Murray's writing—his trumpet playing reflects a variety of influences, some of them, like his use and timing of half-valve and muted effects, relating quite strongly to the brass players of the swing era. Bassist Alan Silva has worked with Cecil Taylor and is presently working with Albert Ayler; he has a real ability for integrating his work into the fabric of the ensemble without diminishing his mobility or the more spectacular effects of his impressive technique.

Phase 1234, the first track on the album, has no theme, though Murray as leader was presumably responsible for organising the scheme of the performance, and though this involves no writing it seems to me to be as close to composing as writing a line that may have no significance beyond opening and closing a performance. It opens with a short solo from Murray that is identical to his ensemble style before launching into a long collective improvisation rather reminiscent of parts of ESP's earlier *New York eye and ear control*, in which Murray and Ayler were involved. Coursil's contribution here is fairly slow and easy-going and he plays mostly in the middle register, while the altos move in much faster time and constantly use the whole register of their instruments. The ensemble sustains its momentum throughout through this variety of movement and the unflagging flow of invention coming from the horns and from the fierce intensity of Murray's drumming. *Hilariously* brings us the first of Murray's written themes, a rather languorous line, and at the start of the first alto solo—whether Graham's or Lancaster's I can't say since both men's work is entirely new to me—provides a particularly good example of Murray's ideas of time: from this point almost any variety of time and rhythm could have developed and it is part of Murray's achievement that he can sustain this implication of choice once the music has taken a more definite direction.

Angels and devils is the most spacious performance on the record; it has several very fine moments, notably a passage in Courcil's solo where he uses a plunger mute very effectively and in the second alto solo, which is throughout an intense and well-constructed statement. Here also is a chance to hear Silva at his very best, and his high-register arco playing, so effective in Cecil Taylor's *Unit structures* album, comes off well again here, particularly when one or both of the altos is playing in the high register too, and here also it is possible to hear finally what a great variety of sound Murray can get from his snare drum. *Giblet*, Murray's second theme, has an odd, interesting neo-calypto air about it, and taken together with the swaying line of *Hilariously* seems to indicate the development of a consistently original line of thought in the creation of these little sketches. The most impressive horn contribution here is again the second alto solo, played against a truly relentless barrage from Murray's drums.

HOW permanent the group is or was I don't know: if Murray organised it on any kind of steady or even occasional basis then it's clear from this album that it has a lot of potential and might well produce

RECENT DISCOGRAPHICAL PUBLICATIONS

THE third booklet in the series *Duke Ellington's Story on Records*, covering the years 1939-1942, is now available from Peter Seago, 5 Tollet Street, Stepney Green, London, E.1. priced at 10/6d including postage. When reviewing the previous two volumes in the June 1966 and May 1967 issues of this magazine I commented that this was a work of scholarship on a par with Brian Rust's and Walter Allen's King Oliver book, or Howard Waters's Jack Teagarden volume, and the present booklet fully maintains the standard set by the previous ones. Each section of the discography covers a shorter period and in the present instance this is due to the enormous number of transcriptions listed, including such unexpected items as Duke Ellington and Jimmy Blanton making guest appearances with the John Scott Trotter Orchestra on the Kraft Music Hall radio programme, or an enormous session of thirty-six titles taken from an appearance at the Crystal Ballroom, Lake Inn, Fargo on November 7th, 1940. The compilers—Luciano Massagli, Liborio Pusateri and Giovanni M. Volonte—have heard all the transcriptions they list, for they give performance routines in almost every instance. Without doubt this is the definitive Ellington discography.

The *Hans Koller Discographie 1947-1966* is by Dietrich H. Kraner and can be obtained from the compiler at Volksgartenstrasse 2, 8020 Graz, Austria, for 7/6d (including postage). It is well duplicated on one side of the page only, the page size being 11½" x 8¼", and after a biography of Koller by Klaus Schulz the discography proper runs to 17 pages, the last 5½ covering transcriptions of various types, some including such American musicians as Donald Byrd, Lee Konitz and Zoot Sims. Most of Koller's records were made in Austria and

Germany and I am obviously not qualified to comment in any detail, but the discography gives every impression of thoroughness and attention to detail.

Part one of the *Lucky Thompson Discography* by Tony Williams covers the years 1944-1951 and can be obtained from the compiler at 22 Compton Road, Winchmore Hill, London, N.21. The price is 7/6 plus postage (6d in the British Isles, 2/6 elsewhere). Like the Koller discography this is printed on one side of the page only, the page size being 10" x 8", and after six pages devoted to a biography and table of abbreviations, the discography proper runs to twenty-one pages. Most of the recordings dealt with were made in the period 1945 to early 1949 when Lucky Thompson was on the West Coast and recording quite prolifically for a variety of small labels, and it is particularly interesting to see details of such sessions as those by the Earle Spencer Orchestra and various Charlie Mingus groups. A second volume will cover the period 1952 to date and the two volumes will give us the definitive work on the subject, but in addition Mr. Williams promises a series of discographies that will include Coleman Hawkins 1939-1967 (3 volumes) Charlie Parker 1940-1954 (2 volumes), Charlie Christian, Dexter Gordon, Wardell Gray, Ike Quebec, John Hardee, Clyde Hart and Allan Eager.

The two latest in the "Jazz Discographies Unlimited" series cover *Ray McKinley* (priced at \$1.00) and the *Claude Thornhill Orchestra* (priced at \$1.35). The format is as before, with a page size of 10½" x 8½", with duplication on one side of the page. The McKinley runs to nineteen pages and covers all known commercial recordings under his name plus transcriptions, with standard discographical format being followed. Band personnels are listed even when no records were made. Although the McKinley band was not of particular jazz interest, such excellent musicians as Nick Travis, Dean Kincaide and Don Ellis worked with it,

consistently good music and develop considerably further. By now of course it might be out of business again, though at least we have one record to remember them by. If however the album was planned as an isolated session then it is perhaps an even greater achievement, for there is here the kind of internal organisation and cohesion that isn't often come by in casual dates. This possibility gives rise also to several points, the main one being that the avant-garde might now be in the process of defining its limits in several important areas, but lack of information makes speculation of this sort not only risky but unrewarding.

It might be more sensible to end with a parallel that might seem at first rather facile but which I think has some validity. I have listened to this record a lot, I like it very much, and it seems to me there is some affinity between it and Blakey's Messengers in their Wayne Shorter version and Max Roach's group at the time when Booker Little was with him. I don't mean a musical likeness, for the music of Murray's group is vastly different, but there is some similarity in spirit, some of the excitement, the involvement in rhythm, and perhaps the sense of security that can come from a group of promising musicians led by a master drummer.

and anyone requiring a discography of its output will find this an excellent publication. The Thornhill booklet has an interesting essay on Claude Thornhill by Jack McKinney, the actual discography covering twenty pages in all. As is usual with this series, band personnels are given for periods when no recordings took place and many transcriptions are listed, a few of which have since been commercially issued. The influence of the Thornhill band on such musicians as Gerry Mulligan and Miles Davis at certain points in their career is too well known to need retelling, and there must be numerous readers who would be interested in this very thorough discography. It, and the McKinley booklet, can be obtained from Ernie Edwards, Jr., 5421 South Carley Avenue, Whittier, California, 90601, U.S.A.

Numerical Catalogue Listings, Number E1 deals with the English Brunswick 1000 series and gives the artists and titles for issues 1001 to 02000 covering the period December 1930 to May 1935. Label listings of this nature are becoming increasingly important, for there is a growing interest in the popular music of the 'twenties and 'thirties as well as jazz, and while I had hoped that the compilers—Jim Hayes, Barbara and Desmond Luxton—would be able to include matrix numbers, one is glad that they are working in this field. There is a tendency in discographical circles to overlook this basic work on what are regarded as common labels until it becomes a major task, and while English Brunswick lacks any esoteric appeal it is surprising to find what a high proportion of issues were of jazz interest. The booklet comprises fifty pages, size 8" x 6½", is well duplicated on both sides of the sheet, and is bound in a card cover. It can be obtained from Jim Hayes at 22 Empire Road, Litherland, Liverpool 21, and the cost is 3/- including postage.