

The New Jazz—

# Black, Angry, And Hard to Understand

By NAT HENTOFF

**A**RCHIE SHEPP, a tall, black tenor saxophonist was roaring through a solo at Mother Blues, a Chicago night club. At its climax, the sound from Shepp's horn was more a scream than a recognizable note—a dark, clotted scream which a waitress tried to shut out by putting her hands over her ears. "I feel," she said to a customer, "personally insulted whenever he plays." The waitress was protesting the purely sonic assault on her sensibilities. The new jazz, of which Shepp is a primary exponent, is indeed often harsh, jagged and disdainful of conventional standards of tonal "beauty." There are other listeners, white, who also feel insulted when confronted by Shepp because they have heard or read of his blazing contempt for most of the citizenry of their color.

"Jazz," he has proclaimed in Down Beat, "is the product of the whites—the ofays—too often my enemy. It is the progeny of the blacks—my kinsmen. By this I mean: you own the music, and we make it. By definition, then, you own the people who make the music. You own us in whole chunks of flesh. . . . I play about the death of me by you. I exult in the life of me in spite of you. . . . That's what the avant-garde is about. We're not simply angry young men—we are enraged. And I think it's damn well time."

Actually, not all the young men in the jazz vanguard are as furious as Shepp. There are those like trumpeter Don Cherry who consider their music a singular force for countering divisions by race or nationality. "Nowadays," says the thin, gentle Cherry, "you can bring the whole world into one room, and this capacity for unity is an element that jazz has always had for me."

However they regard the function of jazz, the new players are linked by a conviction that their music is art, not a form of show-biz fun and games after dark. But they are not pretentious or portentous in insisting on respect from audiences and entre-

preneurs. There is still much wit and unabashed lyricism in the music, and few of its players are given, as is Shepp, to extended, sulphurous polemics.

**T**HEY do feel enormous pride in the music. For the blacks among them—and Negroes continue to be the key innovators in jazz—this pride is also part of a rising black consciousness among young Negroes in all kinds of milieu. Shepp, for instance, has written and recorded a threnody for Malcolm X called "Malcolm, Malcolm—Semper Malcolm." He points out: "Malcolm knew what it is to be faceless in America and to be sick and tired of that feeling. And he knew the pride of black, that negritude which was bigger than Malcolm himself."

Cecil Taylor, a bristling composer-pianist who has been a seminal influence on the new jazz, tells, in A. B. Spellman's revealing book, "Four Lives in the Behop Business," of the difference between the white British singer Petula Clark and James Brown, a Negro rhythm-and-blues personage: "Like, it got very humorous because she was screaming and she was trying to look composed at the same time. But when James Brown goes into his thing, he goes; it's like a complete catharsis. He goes. Everything goes and there ain't no holding back. And it's beautiful. That's the technique of rhythm-and-blues singing, man, and no academy but the genuine tradition of a people can give it to you."

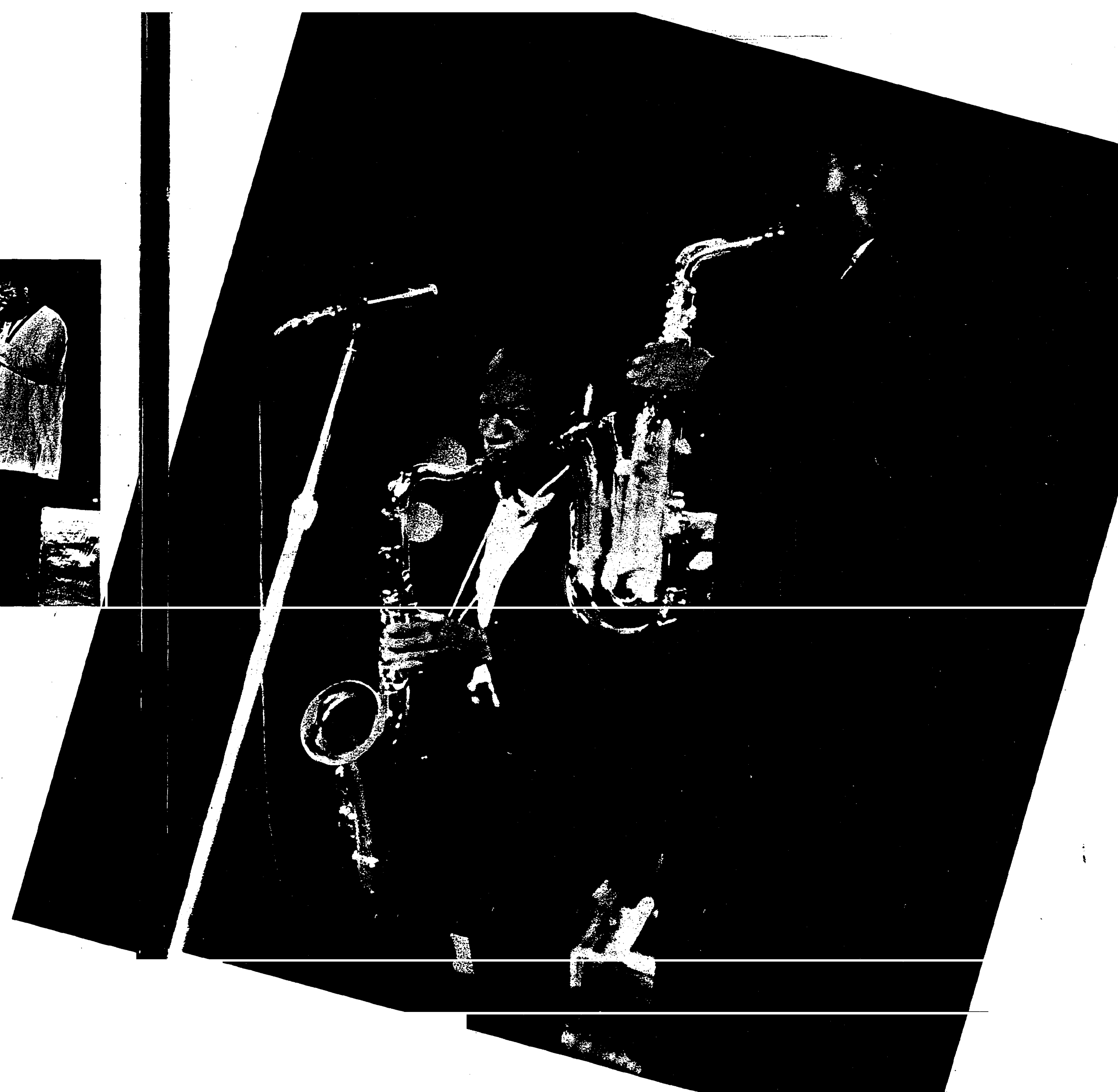
Along with their acute consciousness of being carriers of a tradition of great vitality and worth, the new jazzmen can also be characterized by their insistence that no sound, no device need be alien to their music. Trombonist Grachan Moncur III, who has studied at the Juilliard School of Music, emphasizes, "If it's necessary to use an extended technique to express what I'm trying to say, I'll do it. If I have to bang on a dishpan with a stick, I'll do that too."

James Moody, an older musician who is a member of Dizzy Gillespie's unit, looks with fond understanding at the refusal of the new players to be bound by past criteria of acceptable sounds. "Any sound makes sense to me," he (Continued on Page 36)



**NEW JAZZMEN**—The "squawks, moans and cackles" represent "art, not show biz" and "there is no challenge like being part of it." Clockwise from top: Archie Shepp, Omette Coleman, Cecil Taylor.

Photographs by CHARLES SHARACON



**NAT HENTOFF** writes frequently on jazz, politics, social problems. He recently published "Our Children Are Dying," about a Harlem school principal, and a novel, "Call the Keeper."