

» RIFFS



- » **Good Company:** Jazz prodigy Eldar Djangirov, 17, recently spent time with piano legends Dr. Billy Taylor and Marian McPartland to celebrate his debut major label release, *Eldar*, out March 8 on Sony Classical. Taylor and McPartland were early supporters of the young pianist, featuring him on "CBS Sunday Morning" and "Piano Jazz," respectively.
- » **Vanguard @ 70:** The New York club Village Vanguard celebrates its 70th anniversary from Feb. 14–20 with six special one-night performances by Roy Hargrove, The Bad Plus, Jim Hall, the Heath Brothers, Bill Charlap and Wynton Marsalis. **Details:** villagevanguard.com
- » **DeJohnette's Directions:** Drummer Jack DeJohnette rang in the New Year by debuting a new quartet at New York's Birdland from Jan. 4–8 that featured pianist Danilo Perez, bassist John Patitucci and Jerome Harris on guitar and six-string banjo. In addition to the new group, 2005 will see the launch of DeJohnette's own record label, Golden Beams.
- » **Beacons Set:** New School University's Jazz and Contemporary Music program will honor vocalist Ruth Brown, tenor saxophonist Jimmy Heath, pianist Hank Jones and jazz pianist/educator Dr. Billy Taylor at the 2005 Beacons in Jazz award benefit Feb. 22 at New York's Pierre Hotel.
- » **Himalayan Jazz:** The air may be thin in Kathmandu, Nepal, but it'll be filled with music from March 11–27 at the fourth annual Kathmandu Jazz Festival. With the theme "Music For Peace," the festival features artists such as Urban Connection from Norway, Max Lolo from Benin, Indo-jazz fusion from Louis Banks Brotherhood and even the Jazz-mandu Peace Parade. **Details:** kathmandujazzfestival.com
- » **Hersch Meets Whitman:** On March 11, pianist Fred Hersch will present "Leaves Of Grass" at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall. The concert features his music composed for Walt Whitman poems, which was released on CD Feb. 22 by Palmetto Records.

Backstage With ...

By Mark Ruffin



In December, trumpeter Chris Botti was in Chicago to play a gig for the annual Christmas show by his smooth jazz saxophone buddy Dave Koz. The irony wasn't lost on Botti that when he was in town to play one kind of music for which he's known, his current album, *When I Fall In Love* (Columbia), a more traditional jazz release, had sales well into six figures, the biggest-selling album of his career.

YOU'RE FROM PORTLAND, ORE., WHERE JEFF LORBER, KENNY G AND DAN SIEGEL WERE MORPHING FUSION MUSIC INTO SMOOTH JAZZ. BUT YOU WERE INTO BEBOP.

I was into Woody Shaw and 1960s Miles Davis and Art Blakey, the bands with Wayne Shorter and Freddie Hubbard. I was gigging in Oregon with drummer Ron Steen, who had played with Joe Henderson. He got me into all that stuff, and kept me there until I moved to New York in 1986.

WHAT CHANGED IN NEW YORK?

I used to sit back and appreciate the career of a guy like Randy Brecker, because he was doing cool pop gigs at the time but he also had a great jazz career. I thought that maybe if I moved to New York, I could break into the studio scene. I realized there are some talented artists making "popular" or pop music, and not all pop music had to be mindless. That led me to this place where I would mix the elements I was doing at the time, especially mixing English pop music into jazz, like Peter Gabriel, and moodier stuff like The Blue Nile. I tried to marry that lyrical sensibility and the way the chords move. Slowing the musical

imagery and the chords more like pop music allowed me to be more relaxed. I've developed a style that felt right for me.

CONSIDERING YOUR PAST RECORDS, A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE SURPRISED BY *WHEN I FALL IN LOVE*. WITH THE CONTENT, ARRANGING AND YOUR PLAYING. IS YOUR PLAYING ON YOUR PAST RECORDS COMPARABLE?

Anytime you put an instrument on something that sounds electronic, you run the risk of turning off some listeners. That's why we wanted to make sure that this record was a classically approached record in the way that Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Frank Sinatra and others made records. An arranger comes in with everything in mind; there weren't any demos. I walked up to the microphone and we played. A lot of musicians, people that have heard me play, never thought that I could play as well as I do on this record. We tailored all of the arrangements for the way that I play. It's not note-filled, macho trumpet playing, but there are parts where I display control and content that is superior to any other work that I have done. The vehicle behind me opens me up and allows me to swing, which I haven't done on my other records.

THERE SEEMS TO BE A TIP OF THE HAT TO GIL EVANS AND THE CTI ERA OF THE '70S.

There are a few tunes where there's Fender Rhodes throughout and the lushness of strings leaning up against a Fender Rhodes is the classic CTI sound. I loved those records. Chet Baker's *She Was Too Good To Me* is one of my favorites. The Miles and Gil thing, it's hard to pull that off. But Billy Childs and Gil Goldstein did an amazing job in that style for this album, writing for me and letting me stretch my wings.

YOU'VE BUILT AN AUDIENCE PLAYING WITH STING, PAUL SIMON AND WITH THE SMOOTH JAZZ FOLKS, AND NOW YOU TAKE A LEFT TURN AND HAVE A HUGE SUCCESS. DO YOU NOW TURN YOUR BACK ON THAT STYLE NOW THAT, TO SOME EXTENT, YOU'VE BEEN LEGITIMIZED?

What makes the success of this album even more thrilling is that it's being appreciated as a whole. This is my breakthrough record, and I'll make more records like this, like a moody bossa nova record or a classically oriented record before I go back to anything electronic. The way my trumpet sounds in this environment is more flattering and, arguably, it's being received better. **DB**