

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHERMAN FERGUSON

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(music — "On the Stairs," Pat Martino)

"ON THE STAIRS," WHICH FEATURES GUITARIST PAT MARTINO, EDDIE GREEN ON THE PIANO, TYRONE BROWN ON BASS AND DRUMMER SHERMAN FERGUSON, WHO IS WITH US HERE THIS EVENING. YOU WERE JUST ABOUT TO TELL ME THAT "ON THE STAIRS" WAS WRITTEN ON THE STAIRS...

Literally on the stairs, yeah.

IN WHAT WAY? DID YOU WRITE IT?

No, that's Pat's tune. But we were working in Grendal's Land, Philadelphia, and we were on our way down to do the second set, and he started, you know, fooling around with something. And (laughs) he literally, he wrote it going down the stairs! And it's a real nice tune. And it's a lot of fun to play.

I listen to a little bit of everything.

YEAH! AND GOOD TO LISTEN TO AS WELL. PAT MARTINO ON THE GUITAR. AND AGAIN, WELCOME TO SHERMAN, WHO HAS BROUGHT IN A WHOLE BUNCH OF ALBUMS. AND WE'RE GOING TO BE LISTENING TO SOME OF SHERMAN'S MUSIC FOR THE NEXT LITTLE WHILE. AND THE STUFF THAT HE LIKES TO LISTEN TO. WHEN YOU LISTEN, WHO IS IT THAT YOU LIKE TO LISTEN TO?

I listen to a little bit of everything, you know. As far as jazz is concerned, I listen to all of it. Like everything that's good.

DO YOU HAVE LIKE A — SOME MUSICIANS USE A REFERENCE POINT, OTHER DRUMMERS OR OTHER HORN PLAYERS. DO YOU LISTEN TO OTHER DRUMMERS SPECIFICALLY?

You mean, for inspiration? I listen to all the other drummers for inspiration! Yeah.

ANY PARTICULAR DRUMMER? BILLY HART IS ONE WHO IS—

Oh, Billy Hart, he's like a brother to me. I love him. He's been a major influence on me.

YOU WROTE A SONG FOR HIM.

Yeah I did. A couple of years ago. Boy, it's been more than a couple of years. About 10 years ago. Boy, how time flies!

THAT WAS IN PHILADELPHIA.

Yeah, with the Catalyst band. On our very first album. That was my very first composition to be recorded. It was very exciting for me.

LET'S TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT PHILADELPHIA, BECAUSE THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE LISTENING WHO MIGHT HAVE LIVED IN PHILADELPHIA AT THE TIME. AND MIGHT HAVE KNOWN THIS BAND CALLED "CATALYST."

Yeah, well Eddie Green was the piano player. And Odean Pope was the saxophone player — he's with Max Roach now — he'll be in town in a couple of weeks, and I'm looking forward to seeing him. And Tyrone Brown was the bass player. But the original bass player was Alphonso Johnson.

Eddie Green kind of discovered Alphonso Johnson. We were working with Ronnie Dyan,

and he was the bass player. And we would play a couple of tunes before Ronnie would come up. And one night Eddie said, 'Man, that bass player is a bad cat!' You know, and I was so busy reading charts and stuff, you know, the music felt alright. So the next night I really paid attention to him. I said 'Yeah, that's a baaad cat!' You know? And that's how the Catalyst band got started.

NOW THAT WAS A HOT BAND IN PHILADELPHIA.

Yeah. Uh-huh.

WHAT KINDS OF PLACES DID YOU PLAY THERE? WAS THERE A HEAVY CLUB SCENE?

We played all the major clubs in Philadelphia, we did concerts. We did openings for the Crusaders at different colleges and stuff. We did anything that came along that was really good for the band. Because we wanted exposure.

TEN YEARS AGO NOW.

Yeah, around '71, I think.

Drummers write tunes that are very rhythmic, usually.

AND AN ALBUM WAS JUST REISSUED ON MUSE RECORDS BY CATALYST — WHICH WE'RE GOING TO FEATURE NEXT. AS A MATTER OF FACT I'M GOING TO PLAY THE COMPOSITION THAT YOU WRITE FOR BILLY HART.

Yeah, it's entitled "Jabali." It's a tune that most drummers like, because drummers write tunes that are very rhythmic, usually. And because the tune is about a drummer, I thought it was very apropos. It goes in different feelings, and it has — well, let the music speak for itself!

OK, YEAH. EDDIE GREEN IS ON PIANO, AL JOHNSON IS ON BASS — ALPHONSO JOHNSON. ODEAN POPE IS ON THE VARIOUS REEDS. WHAT DOES HE PLAY ON THIS NUMBER?

He plays tenor saxophone on this number.

AND SHERMAN FERGUSON ON DRUMS, WITH "JABALI."
(*music — "Jabali," "Athene," Catalyst*)

WOW. THAT'S "ATHENE." CATALYST IS THE GROUP. THAT'S ABOUT ALL THAT I CAN SAY FROM THAT. WHO WROTE THAT?

That's Tyrone Brown's composition, and his arrangement and orchestration and everything.

YEAH WE HEARD EVERYTHING ON THAT! (LAUGHS)
JOHN BLAKE WAS THE FEATURED VIOLIN SOLOIST ON THAT, AND HE'S SOMEONE WHO THESE DAYS PLAYS ALOT WITH MCCOY TYNER.

Right. Formerly with Grover.

REALLY?

Yeah, he was with Grover for a long time. Yeah, in the Locke-Smith Band. He plays funk too. He's a good writer, good piano player, synthesizer player. He's a hell of a composer. He's a bad little cat. I love John!

I SAW HIM WHEN HE WAS AT THE LIGHTHOUSE ABOUT A YEAR AND A HALF, TWO YEARS AGO. AND THAT WAS INCREDIBLE TO WATCH HIM PLAY.

Yeah, he's something else. He's one of the giants.

AND HE WAS THERE IN 1974 TO RECORD THIS NUMBER ALONG WITH EDDIE GREEN ON KEYBOARDS, ODEAN POPE ON THE FLUTE HERE. TYRONE BROWN THE BASSIST AND COMPOSER, AND SHERMAN FERGUSON THE DRUMMER. AND ALONG WITH YOU ON THAT PARTICULAR NUMBER IS BILLY HART.

"Jabali."

JABALI.

There were other string players, and —

YEAH, THERE OTHER PEOPLE WHO JOINED ON THIS PARTICULAR NUMBER.

On the last two or three albums the Catalyst band did, we expanded on one or two tunes by using larger ensembles. Because that's how Tyrone was hearing it, so we had the freedom. The producer was going crazy saying 'That's

costing too much money!' But that's what we wanted.

THIS IS MUSE RECORDS, BY THE WAY, SPEAKING OF PRODUCERS AND ALL OF THAT. AND THE ALBUM TITLE IS "UNITY." I'M CAUGHT NOW, I'M WONDERING WHERE THE NAME "CATALYST" CAME FROM.

Uh, I came up with the name of "Catalyst." Because, you know what a catalyst is, what a catalyst does—

IT'S SOMETHING WHICH HELPS TO CREATE, IN CHEMISTRY, CHEMICAL REACTIONS, WITHOUT ITSELF BEING USED UP.

Yeah, but, you know, that's exactly what the band was about. Because everybody was a catalyst for the other three members. Without losing his own individuality.

AND THAT'S REAL STRONG THERE.

And there were no ego problems, or anything. The music is what came first, you know. That was a really special experience being in that band. I'll cherish it for the rest of my days.

A SPECIAL TIME. YEAH. AND IT WAS RECORDED, WHICH IS ALMOST UNUSUAL IN JAZZ THAT A COLLECTION OF FINE MUSICIANS CAN GET TOGETHER AND PUT TOGETHER MUSIC LIKE THIS AND BE RECORDED AT THAT TIME.

Yeah.

THERE'S THREE ALBUMS THAT I HAVE IN FRONT OF ME RIGHT HERE.

Well, there's four albums altogether.

THERE'S "UNITY," "PERCEPTION," WHICH IS ANOTHER INTERESTING NAME...

I was the one that always got the job of naming things. You know I have a talent in that area, as far as nailing, you know —

WORDS.

Yeah, so, most of the time, cats, you know, for example Eddie, would always come to me and have the tune written and, say, 'I don't know. What should I call it?' We'd have it at a rehearsal and say 'I don't know.' And I'd say, 'Well, I'll take it home and listen to the tape and whatever

it brings to my mind, we can throw it around and see what happens.' And nine times out of ten, well, I'd say almost ten times out of ten, I would get it. And the cats would say 'Yeah! That's what... I can hear that.'

THAT'S DEFINITELY A TALENT TO HAVE. THAT'S SOMETHING THAT YOU'VE PROBABLY ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO DO TOO.

Well, I don't know. I mean, there's a tune that we'll get into later on — I'd like to play later on from one of the other Catalyst albums called "Maze." And I think it conveys a maze. It's something that you get into, and the more you get into it, it's harder to get out of. It's a puzzle, but a pleasant one. (Laughs)

AS A DRUMMER, YOU MIGHT HAVE A SPECIAL RELATION TO THAT. DID YOU WRITE IT OR—

No, I just named that one.

Logic is the most important thing I strive for, as far as my concept in playing.

AND PLAYED ON IT, TOO. SO YOU HAD A REAL SPECIAL ASSOCIATION WITH IT.

Yeah, but usually what I do is, I take it and just listen to it and see what it conveys, what images it brings to mind. You know, and if it sounds good and feels good. Sometimes I'll say, 'No, no, I think I'll try that one again.' But eventually it comes out. I get the essence of what a tune is about.

DO YOU FIND THAT YOU CAN PLAY YOUR VOCABULARY AS WELL AS YOU CAN PLAY YOUR DRUMS?

No, because the only vocal similarity to playing is as far as phrasing is concerned. Sentences, paragraphs. But I don't usually think in terms of words.

AS YOU PLAY.

Yeah, it's phrases, it's like a sentence. Putting it in a way that makes sense, so that it's logical. Logic is the most important thing I strive for, as far as my concept in playing. Is where it's logical and musical. Where it makes sense, where you say 'Yeah, I can understand that!,' or 'I can see where, how he got to that,' or 'That fits there, yeah. OK.'

AND BEAUTIFUL AS WELL. AND A WORD THAT COMES TO MY MIND FOR YOUR DRUMMING IS 'SENSITIVE.' AND THAT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH LOGIC AS A MUSICIAN.

It's funny that you should mention that, because you were asking me earlier, while we were listening to the music, about the names. We have other names on the albums, we have African names. My particular African name — it was given to me by Mtume — is 'Onaje,' and that means 'the sensitive one.' You know. So I guess you hit it. You know, that's what I've been accused of mostly. And I like that.

YEAH, AND YOU'VE PLAYED WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN SO MANY DIFFERENT SETTINGS, BUT EACH ONE — YOU'VE PLAYED WITH MANY VOCALISTS. JIMMY RUSHING. IT'S NOT EASY TO PLAY WITH A VOCALIST LIKE JIMMY RUSHING.

I've played from Bo Diddley to Jimmy Rushing to Leon Thomas and Johnny Hartman, Little Jimmy Scott...

PLAYING WITH ALL THOSE PEOPLE, THERE HAS TO BE A CERTAIN UNDERSTANDING. AND GUITARISTS: PAT MARTINO, KENNY BURRELL.

Yeah, I'm finally known as "the guitarist's drummer." That's what they call me at GIT, at the school up in North Hollywood. Because I've worked with so many of the great — I've been fortunate enough to work with so many of the greatest jazz guitarists.

IT'S NOT EASY! I WANTED TO TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT "JABALI," BILLY HART. DID I SAY IT RIGHT?

You're getting close...closer!

(LAUGHS) IT'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE; I'M TRYING TO DO SOMETHING WITH THE WORD THAT DOESN'T NEED TO BE THERE.

Yeah, you're just putting an accent on it that doesn't need to be there, so...

YOU STARTED TO TELL ME WHERE YOU MET. ACTUALLY, THE TUNE THAT WE JUST LISTENED TO, "ATHENE," FEATURED BOTH YOU AND BILLY HART. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT ON THE TUNE?

He was going to play percussion. He played some percussion on some of the tunes, anyway. And when Tyrone wrote this tune, he thought about, he said, 'Well, maybe I'll have you overdub something.' And I said, 'Well, man, if you're going to have Jabali here, why are you going to overdub? You don't have to overdub! Just have the both of us play!'

And it's very difficult to play with another drummer. You have to be, you know, getting back to the sensitivity and the love that the two of us have for each other. And it didn't sound cluttered or anything. It sounded like — percussion.

My particular African name is 'Onaje,' and that means 'the sensitive one.'

ALMOST LIKE ONE DRUMMER.

Yeah! That's what it's about.

AND TWO EARS.

Using, if you have the same idea in mind, you know.

AND YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE FACT THAT YOU FEEL VERY CLOSE CONCEPTUALLY.

Yeah, we are, yeah. There's been times where we've been listening to each other. And one of us will laugh, and the other will say, 'What 'chu laughing at?' And he'd say or I'd say 'I'd play the same thing there!.' (Laughs) 'I heard the same thing!' You know. And he's been very influential

to me. He's kind of moulded a part of my concept, and he's helped my sensitivity, because he's very sensitive, too. Extremely so. He's played with everybody you can name. When I met him he was working with Jimmy Smith.

AND YOU MENTIONED THAT WAS IN ATLANTIC CITY.

That was in Atlantic City. In 1965.

SO THAT'S A FRIENDSHIP THAT GOES BACK ALONG WAY SPIRITUALLY AS WELL AS MUSICALLY.

Yeah, he's helped me out. Tells me the right things to eat, what not to eat, you know. And what vitamins, you know. He's just always had helpful information to give me. He tells me about, he recommends books for me to read, helps me spiritually, helps me musically, he just helps me in all — I just feel richer every time we hang out. The last time we saw each other was in Berlin, last summer. Hanging out in my hotel room all hours of the morning, just having fun and hanging out. And getting off each other. You know.

JUST BEING TOGETHER WITH SOMEONE LIKE THAT IS REAL SPECIAL.

Yeah, and it's funny how things...I was the first one to get into writing. He's always envied the fact that I started writing. And there's a tune — he has an album out, on Artists' House, I believe — and he has a cut on there called Layla-Joy, a very beautiful tune.

WE HAVE IT IN FACT, RIGHT HERE AND READY TO GO. IT'LL BE NICE TO HEAR AFTER —

Yeah, you can get an idea of, really, what Jabali is like from this tune. If you don't know already, this tune gives you a beautiful example of the inner beauty of this man.

LAYLA-JOY. BILLY HART ON DRUMS.

(music — "Layla-Joy," Billy Hart; "Celestial Bodies," Catalyst)

(LAUGHING) AS WE'RE COMING ON, SHERMAN SAYS, 'AND YOU THOUGHT SUN-RA WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO PLAYED 'SPACE MUSIC.'

That's right, played out in outer space.

BOY! THAT WAS SOMETHING ENTITLED "CELESTIAL BODIES."

Yeah, that's Odean Pope's composition.

BEAUTIFUL WORK BY HIM. HE'S JUST A MARVELOUS PLAYER. HE MUST BE WONDERFUL TO WORK WITH.

Yeah, but I think the greatest thing about that particular band is that a composition, you forgot that somebody else, one person was featured, because there was such a group effort in concept and interplay and everything. That's what made the whole — the whole composition had to hang together.

So consequently, sometimes we'd be in the studio, and a cat might like his solo on one take, but the overall tune hung together better, maybe on another take. We got to the point where a cat would just have to make that sacrifice and say, 'Well, I'll have to live with the fact that I know I had a better solo,' But for the sake of the tune...you know.

The whole group is what always came through, no matter who was soloing or who wrote the tune.

And as great as Odean plays, the overall thing of the whole group is what always came through, no matter who was soloing or who wrote the tune. The group worked everything out.

YOU CAN REALLY HEAR IT TOO. IN ANY OF THE PIECES WE'VE FEATURED TONIGHT, IT'S GOT THAT FEELING ABOUT IT: YOU KNOW EVERYONE IS REAL FAMILIAR WITH THE PIECE.

Yeah, you'd have to say, 'Oh, there is a violin solo. But so much other stuff is going on; the solo is just as much a part of the composition. It's not detached. It's not like, you play the head, then the cat's solo, then you take the tune out; that's not what it was like with that band. It's like, I'm in another band here in town, the John

Heard Trio, and we've gotten the same concept as that. The overall thing has to work together. It's not just...

"INTERWOVEN" IS A GOOD WORD.

Yeah. It makes better music that way. It's not boring to us and it's not boring to the audience. And that's really what Catalyst did, and that's starting to happen with the John Heard Trio. It's really a great band.

AND ANY OF THE WORK THAT YOU'VE DONE WITH KENNY BURRELL, AS WELL. ALSO THAT GROUP HAS HAD THE FEELING OF A CLOSENESS, CLOSE-KNIT.

Yeah, well that's what you have to, you know, the overall thing has to work. It has to be everyone working for the same goal. Not just somebody accompanying somebody else.

That's what jazz is about to me – when you can have constant communication, and can go in a lot of different directions.

OTHERWISE IT'S NOT JAZZ.

Yeah. Well, some people think that's the way they like it. You know, 'Accompany me.' I don't like to accompany people, I like to play with people. And I play with them. And spur them. Have them spur me.

You know, that's what jazz is about to me – when you can have that constant communication, and it can go in a lot of different directions when there's open communications among all the different participants. More so than when one cat is soloing and everybody's listening to him. It's better the other way, I believe.

COMMUNICATION IS AN IMPORTANT WORD. IN JAZZ, IN MUSIC AND IN LIFE, IN GENERAL.

But in some instances, like I said, it doesn't work out that you're given the freedom to express fully what you're about. You know, sometimes you're in a certain framework. And you have to express yourself within that framework. And you don't have the complete freedom that you have, like I say, like I had with the Catalyst band.

HAVE EVER REALLY FELT RESTRICTED THAT WAY, AS A DRUMMER? HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU REALLY COULDN'T WORK OUT OF THAT KIND OF RESTRICTION, EVENTUALLY?

No, because if I'm ever in a situation like that, I get out of it. Because music has to be comfortable to me, you know? It has to feel good. And if I can't express, you know, 'me,' within the concept of what the person desires, then I just have to go on to other things.

I'm very flexible; don't misunderstand me. I guess you know that, you know. But there has to be a certain bit of 'comfortability' for me to really stick around. Because I have to be able to express myself the same way the other person wants to have their freedom. I give them the freedom to express themselves to the best of their ability, and they in turn have to give some of that back to me and let me, you know, get my cookies off! You know? (laughs)

SHERMAN FERGUSON, YES! I WOULD ONLY WANT TO ADD TO THAT SHERMAN FERGUSON IS A DRUMMER WHO HAS PLAYED WITH MANY MANY MUSICIANS AND I JUST HAVEN'T HEARD ANYONE EVER SAY ANYTHING BUT WHAT A FINE, FINE PERSON TO BE PLAYING WITH ONSTAGE.

Oh, good, I won't tell you about the other people! (Laughs)

ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO IT'S ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO HEAR YOU PLAY WITH — AND WE'RE GOING TO HEAR NEXT — IS WITH KENNY BURRELL. YOU PLAYED WITH KENNY BURRELL REGULARLY.

The last four years.

AND A COUPLE SESSIONS AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD.

Yeah, that was like a dream come true. Record a live album at the Village Vanguard, are you kidding? Man, when I was a kid I dreamed of doing that!

AND THERE IT IS. WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?

I believe that was in December of '78 was when that was recorded. There's supposed to be another volume coming out, but you know, Muse Records is a little strange with their releases, and you never know when their, uh. They take a lot longer to release albums.

YOU'LL PROBABLY GET IT WHEN EVERYONE ELSE GETS IT.

I mean, I don't know when. I've done albums for Muse Records that, by the time the record came out, the arrangements we were doing of the tunes had completely changed. I mean it took just that long for the record to come out! Usually it takes three months for a record to come out. And I've had instances where it took as long as a year for the record to come out.

WELL THIS THING WASN'T RELEASED UNTIL 1980. AND IT WAS RECORDED IN 1978!

I rest my case!

THERE YOU GO! WE'RE GOING TO LISTEN TO KENNY BURRELL ON GUITAR WITH LARRY GALES ON BASS AND SHERMAN FERGUSON ON DRUMS, LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD, A DREAM COME TRUE FOR THIS FELLA.

That's right. We did two albums that night. I mean we got enough material for two albums.

AND IT'S BEAUTIFUL MUSIC. "IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT" IS WHAT WE'RE GOING TO LISTEN TO, THE KENNY BURRELL TRIO—

Right! How many in your Trio? (Laughs)

(music — "In the Still of the Night," Kenny Burrell)

KENNY BURRELL, IN A TRIO THAT HE PUT TOGETHER WITH SHERMAN FERGUSON ON DRUMS AND LARRY GALES ON BASS, RECORDED IN 1978 AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD. SHERMAN FERGUSON IS HERE WITH US, AND SPEAKING, I THINK ON THE LEFT CHANNEL — OR, IS THE RIGHT CHANNEL? SAY SOMETHING!

Hellooo. (Laughs)

(LAUGHS) THEY KEEP ON CHANGING THE SET-UP HERE. I CAN NEVER TELL WHAT CHANNEL. I THINK—

Yeah, I'm not sure what channel I'm on — ever! (Laughs)

NO, ITS...BUT AS A DRUMMER, YOU HAVE TO FIND THAT SPOT SOONER OR LATER. WHATEVER CHANNEL YOU SOUND BETTER ON.

I'd better!

***I like to play melody.
People tell me that they can
hear the tune when I solo.
And that's good.***

DO YOU HAVE ANY PREFERENCE FOR WHERE THE DRUMS SHOULD BE HEARD IN A STEREO PHASE AT ALL?

Nah. It doesn't phase me at all. As long as you can hear 'em. When they blend in good with the rest of the music. I've never been one of those cats who has to have long drum solos all the time. That's funny I just said that right after a real long drum solo.

WELL, THAT WAS LONG, PERHAPS, IN COMPARISON WITH THE REST OF THE STUFF THAT YOU DO. HOW DO APPROACH DRUM SOLOS?

I like for a drum solo to be a part of, blend in well with the rest of the composition. What went on before I play has an awful lot to do with what I play.

YOU MEAN WITH THE OTHER MUSICIANS?

Yeah, what preceded me. So I like to take it from there. And I also don't like to do solos that

entail a lot of chops. I like to play melody. You know, people a lot of times tell me that they can hear the tune, when I solo. And that's good. You know, I try to play music. That's the main thing I try to do.

It's very easy to get up there and go through the rudiments as fast as you can play 'em. And hit on every drum and every cymbal. But that's not what music is about.

You know, if you heard a piano player and on every tune, every time he soloed he played each and every note on the piano, you would think he was crazy. You know? And the same concepts go with the drum solo. Because you have all those drums up there doesn't mean you have to hit every one of them. Be musical! That's the bottom line. Sometimes more is less.

HOW DO YOU RELAY THAT? THESE DAYS YOU'RE WORKING IN WORKSHOP SETTINGS WITH STUDENTS AND YOU'VE ACTUALLY TAUGHT ON AND OFF FOR YEARS.

Yeah, I'd say for the last ten years, I've been teaching off and on.

IS THERE ANY WAY THAT YOU RELAY THAT FEELING TO STUDENTS OF THE DRUMS.

I do it through having them not just think in terms of the drums, but think in terms of the music. You know, hearing the music and hearing form. In hearing the tune, hearing when you're in the bridge of the tune, for example. Know when you're at the last eight. You know? Different things like that are really important. And you use that same concept when you solo.

You have to push your ego aside and just play for the music.

The people that I use as examples are people like Max Roach. I hate to keep coming back to the word "logical." But it seems so musical and seems to make sense. And all you can say is 'Damn right! Yeah!' (Laughs)

And to play something pleasant. Because for the most part, unless you're a drummer, a drum solo can be rather boring, you know. Especially when it's somebody just whirring all around the drums. Almost anybody can do that! You can get a machine to do that!

It's harder to play an instrument softly than it is to play it loudly.

OFTEN PEOPLE DO.

(Laughs) I mean, but there's ways of using chops and technique musically. Because technique is only a means to an end. Technique makes — is supposed to make — things easier. And by complicating the technique, to me, that defeats the purpose of it.

YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO USE THE TECHNIQUE.

And play within the concept of what the tune is about. If the tune is free, take a freer solo. If you're playing be-bop then a be-bop oriented solo fits, more so than a real free "out" solo. Go to what makes the tune gel, what makes it work. And you have to push your ego aside and just play for the music.

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT SUBTLETY. AND YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT AN IMPORTANT WORD — TASTE! BEING ABLE TO DISTINGUISH WHAT SOUNDS GOOD AT A PARTICULAR MOMENT AND WHAT DOES

NOT SOUND GOOD. AND THAT DOESN'T HAVE SO MUCH TO DO WITH TECHNIQUE AS IT HAS TO DO WITH THE ABILITY TO LISTEN TO WHAT'S HAPPENING.

Yeah. Because I've gone to hear cats play, and they take a solo and they play all kinds of interesting things, 'drummistically;' but they didn't play any music! You know, 'It's great! You got good chops.' And, 'Oh man, look at your foot! Oh I like that!' You know, 'Play me some music now!' Play me some music that's going to touch my soul! It's harder to do that playing drums than it is with other instruments.

IT'S TRUE.

Because the design of the instrument is so physical. And the instrument itself tends to be loud. And it's harder to play an instrument softly than it is to play loudly. So there's a lot of subtle things that get involved that people don't realize. And they're the things that I try to deal with. You know, I try to deal with humor, surprise, you know; different things.

IT'S INTERESTING, AS YOU WERE TALKING, I THOUGHT ABOUT THE FACT THAT OFTEN, WHEN I'M LISTENING TO A TRIO OR A SMALL GROUP, AND BEGINNING TO FEEL THAT SOMEWHERE SOMETHING IS NOT CONNECTED WITH THE PEOPLE WHO ARE PLAYING, I ALWAYS LISTEN FOR THE DRUMS. AND THE DRUMS WILL OFTEN SAVE THE TUNE, JUST LISTENING TO WHAT THE DRUMMER HAS TO PLAY. THAT'S MY OWN PERSONAL ORIENTATION.

Well, I think — not because I play the drums but because I kind of feel that this is a fact — that as the drummer goes, or as the bass player and the drummer go, so goes the band. Because if those two cats are not locked in, the music is not going to swing.

And what I mean by swing, I don't mean necessarily in four/four. I've heard some very free music that can swing.

JACK DEJOHNETTE...

Sure! Jack DeJohnette is one of my favorites. You hit on one of the main cats.

AND IT'S A GOOD TIME FOR PEOPLE LIKE JACK, PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF. THERE'S A LOT OF GOOD DRUMMING OUT THERE THESE DAYS.

See, the main thing about Jack, and I hope it's the same thing about me, is that he's always musical. No matter what. If he's playing completely outside, he's always musical.

You know. there was a piano player in Philadelphia that passed recently, that was like that. His name was Hasaan Ibn-Ali. And any staunch old Philadelphians out there in the audience should know who I'm talking about. But anyway, he was a prime example of somebody that was very avant-garde in some ways, but he was always musical. So people of all ages liked his music, even when he played

out. Old people, you know. People you wouldn't think would like it. You'd say 'What's that old man over there listening to Hasaan and pattin' his foot?' You know, because he had that thing, where he had a natural feeling. He got to the thing where it swung no matter what he was doing. That's the same for any music. Even symphonic music. It swings in its own way; and when its working right — when everybody's working in unison — it has a certain swing to it!

IT DOES. THAT'S WHAT MUSIC IS ABOUT.

Because rhythm is. Everything is based on rhythm. The earth and the universe is all connected with rhythm.

Rhythm is. Everything is based on rhythm. The earth and the universe are all connected with rhythm.

AND ANYONE'S RHYTHM WILL DO THE TRICK.

Yeah, well, you don't want to say the old Duke Ellington thing, 'It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing,' but that's a truism. And that's getting back to the whole solo thing. That's another thing. Make it gel, make it swing, make it fit the music!

A GOOD RULE, I WOULD IMAGINE, FOR A MUSICIAN IS, IF IT WORKS RIGHT FOR YOU, IT'LL WORK RIGHT FOR SOMEONE ELSE, TOO.

Well, sometimes. Sometimes you may not be right. You know. That's why it's good in a group that you have other people to bounce ideas off of. The best groups to me are the ones that are a true democracy. Where, you know, if you're having a rehearsal or something and something's not cool, you can say, 'Well, man,' or 'lady, that's not cool!' And there's no egos involved with it. You have to get all that out of the way for it to really work.

FOR ANYTHING INVOLVING HUMAN BEINGS.

Yeah, for anything. Yeah.

THAT'S COMMUNICATION AGAIN.

It gets right back to that. The same thing again. We keep hitting on things that are important in the solos and communication is the thing that I try to get.

You know, I don't only try to please myself when I'm soloing. I try to communicate something to touch somebody, some people, in the audience. I mean, there's certain devices that a drummer can do — for example, certain flashy things you can do to get a response — but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about where emotionally you get them. Not with flash, but with something that — you know I've had instances where I would play something very softly, and the fact that I was playing soft had an impact, moreso than if I was playing, crossing my hands and playing a hundred paradiddles a second! But because of the fact that I was playing very softly and the notes that I was playing had a meaning. That's what I try to get into my students. The students that I've taught.

THERE'S A LOT MORE AT WORK THERE THAN JUST—

Yeah, than just sitting there beating on them boys! There's a lot more to it. And all the great drummers have that. All of them. Billy Higgins. Max Roach. Billy Hart. Jack DeJohnette. Tony Williams. Danny Richmond. Don't get me started! Roy Haynes. Allan Dawson. We'll be here all night! We'll be into the news and I'll still be naming—

ALL THE MAJOR INFLUENCES ON SHERMAN FERGUSON...

Mickey Roker. Donald Bailey.

HEY EVERYBODY! EVERYBODY THAT YOU LISTEN TO, REALLY, YOU REMEMBER, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

Because the only criteria I use with a musician is whether or not he or she is serious. You know, if a person really doesn't have his or her thing together at that point in time, but if they're serious about what they're doing, then I say 'Well, solid, go right ahead.' But if they're not serious, I don't care if they can play or they can't

play! You have to be serious about it. I love this thing, you know. And it's a lot of fun, but you've got to be serious about it to really get it to work right. And then when you get serious about, then you can have fun! And laugh and put your own, your humor, whatever you want to put into it.

IT HAPPENS AUTOMATICALLY, REALLY.

Yeah.

IT BECOMES AN EXTENSION OF WHAT YOU ARE.

Exactly.

LET'S HEAR SOME MORE MUSIC. YOU MENTIONED EARLIER A COMPOSITION ENTITLED "MAZE."

Yeah, this features Eddie Green, the pianist from Philadelphia. His composing abilities. This is quite a tune.

The only criteria I use with a musician is whether or not he or she is serious...you've got to be serious about it to really get it to work right.

AND YOU NAMED IT.

Yeah. He brought it to rehearsal and we played. And after I listened to it — the overall thing — I said, 'Well, man, that sounds like somebody trying to, that's in a puzzle.' And I had to describe to him what a maze was. You know, a lot of people have never seen a real maze. I'm talking about the kind that you can walk into, like they have in England. And that's what I had in mind. You get into this maze and you get a little hope and you say 'I'm going out...No, no. There's another wall here.' And the tune kind of has a maze-type quality. But it all works.

THAT'S A FASCINATING, FASCINATING IMAGE. I CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR THE TUNE!

OK! (laughs)

THEN WE CAN TALK ABOUT THOSE PLACES IN ENGLAND! (LAUGHS) THIS IS THE GROUP CATALYST, FEATURING HERE THIS EVENING, SHERMAN FERGUSON, ON DRUMS, AND THE ALBUM IS "PERCEPTION," RIGHT?

No, this is the "Unity" album. This features the band. That's how it usually was. It's —

THAT'S IT, YEAH. ODEAN POPE, ON TENOR SAX, EDDIE GREEN ON PIANO AND COMPOSER, TYRONE BROWN ON BASS, SHERMAN ON DRUMS. "MAZE."

(music — "Maze," Catalyst; "The Dream/It's Time," Max Roach)

MAX ROACH! AND THAT'S FROM A BRAND NEW ALBUM THAT MAX JUST PUT OUT ENTITLED "CHATAHOOCHEE RED." BEAUTIFUL. TWO COMPOSITIONS, THE FIRST ENTITLED "THE DREAM," WHICH LED US INTO "IT'S TIME."

Yeah, that's quite a political statement.

OH YEAH.

But Max has always been into political statements. He had an album called "Freedom Now Suite," that was banned in Africa when it first came out, because of its political implications, the things that it was saying.

YOU'RE RIGHT. HE'S NEVER BEEN AFRAID TO SAY THINGS MUSICALLY THAT OTHER PEOPLE HADN'T EVEN THOUGHT OF.

Yeah, he's my drum daddy. He's my drum daddy.

I say 'Man, there's more bad cats coming!'

(LAUGHS) DO YOU KNOW HIM?

Yeah. We're very good friends. That's one of the other joys of my life. To grow up and have your idol become your friend. You know.

THAT'S GOOD. THIS FEATURED ODEAN POPE, APPEARING ON TENOR SAX HERE, AS WELL AS OTHER INSTRUMENTS. WE SHOULD MENTION THAT HE ALSO PLAYS ALTO, FLUTE AND OBOE ON THE ALBUM. WALTER BISHOP, JR. IS FEATURED ON THE ALBUM AS WELL, ON PIANO.

On this cut it's Cecil Bridgewater and Odean and Calvin Hill, and Mr. Roach, as we so fondly call him. He's something else.

AND THE LATE REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, WHO IS SO VERY MUCH A PART OF THE FIRST COMPOSITION. THAT WAS A BEAUTIFUL PIECE.

It's, you know, "The Dream," and "It's Time." It's saying that it still hasn't, you know we're still waiting! (Laughs) It's been a long row to hoe.

THIS IS AN ALBUM ON COLUMBIA RECORDS BY MAX ROACH. AND BEFORE THAT WE LISTENED TO "MAZE," WHICH WAS SOMETHING THAT THE GROUP CATALYST DID. AND WAS APTLY NAMED BY THE DRUMMER AT THE TIME!

Yeah, it's quite a composition.

YOU, THESE DAYS, ARE LIVING HERE IN LOS ANGELES.

Yeah, I've been living here for the last five years.

AND DOING DIFFERENT THINGS THAN YOU WERE DOING IN PHILADELPHIA. OR ARE YOU?

Yeah, that's why I moved here. To do different things. Get more recognition. Do more travelling. Because I was really deeply into the teaching. I was playing with the Catalyst band and working with Pat Martino and teaching. But I wanted to branch out and do some different things, and had to get out of Philadelphia to do that.

HAD YOU GROWN UP IN PHILADELPHIA?

Yeah. I was born and raised in Philadelphia. My musical beginnings happened there. It's a great environment being in Philadelphia. So

many great musicians past and present and future. Every time I go back I hear about new young cats. And hear new things. I say 'Man, there's more bad cats coming!' It's amazing how that town just grows musical talent!

PHILADELPHIA CAN COMPARE WITH A CITY LIKE DETROIT —

Detroit, Chicago, New York. Philadelphia. When you first go to New York and you tell the cat you're from Philly, they say 'Well, we know you can play!' Just because of the tradition. And the cats that come from there.

McCOY TYNER CAME OUT OF THERE.

McCoy. John Coltrane. Philly Jo Jones. Jimmy Garrison. Mickey Roker. Red Garland. Lee Morgan.

When you first go to New York and you tell the cat you're from Philly, they say 'Well, we know you can play!'

KEEP GOIN'! PHILADELPHIA IS DEFINITELY A GOOD PLACE.

Kenny Barron. Reggie Workman. Jimmy Merrit. So many cats. Tootie Heath, the Heath Brothers — Tootie Heath, Percy Heath, Jimmy Heath. Mtume. So many cats come out of Philadelphia. So it's such a tradition. You had to be able to play in order just to be on the bandstand with the cats. You had to be better. The level of musicality, really, among the jazz players —

DID YOU MENTION CLIFFORD BROWN?

Well, he lived in Wilmington, which is about 30 miles away. But he played mostly, his early start, was in Philadelphia, yeah. Dizzy Gillespie lived in Philadelphia for a while. Stan Getz is

from Philadelphia. Buddy DeFranco. Pat Martino...

AAA, WE'LL HAVE THE NEXT PLANE OUT IN...(LAUGHS)

You'll have to have me come back and we'll do a show on the Philadelphia jazz musicians.

JUST THE PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL. THAT'S A GREAT IDEA! YEAH. AND I'M SURE THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE LISTENING WHO HAVE HEARD A LOT OF THOSE —

Yeah, because I've left so many out. When I'm on my way home, I'll say 'Aww! I should have said... Man, that's right!'

YOU SHOULD WRITE THEM DOWN.

I started to do that one night. And I took up one of those, you know those legal pads? I took up a whole two sides of one. And I was still leaving, I was saying 'Oh, that's right...'

THERE MUST BE A GREAT SENSE OF COMMUNITY THERE. ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THAT COMMUNITY AS A MUSICIAN. KNOWING THAT YOU HAVE A HERITAGE ALL YOUR OWN.

Exactly.

JUST IN PHILADELPHIA. AND JAZZ IS THAT WAY. THAT'S THE WAY IT WORKS. THAT SENSE OF BELONGING TO A PARTICULAR HERITAGE. A GROUP OF MUSICIANS. A PARTICULAR STYLE OF PLAYING. PHILADELPHIA HAS A SCHOOL ALL ITS OWN. BUT YOU'RE IN LOS ANGELES NOW.

Yeah, but Philadelphia. I have a theory about that. You know, when I first was thinking about moving to the Coast. A lot of musicians, especially on the east coast would say, 'Don't move out there, man. Your energy level will go down and the cats are so laid back. And you'll get into this-and-that. You'll lose your fire!' And I believe wholeheartedly that whatever is in you is in you. And no matter what, you know. I still have my Philadelphia stuff in me. And it's going to come out no matter where I go. Because it's as much a part of me like my right arm is! That's me! I wasn't born in Iowa. So I don't know anything about that. But being born in Philadelphia and having that instilled in me—

AND THAT'S SOMETHING YOU CARRY WITH YOU THESE DAYS HERE.

I think so.

I believe wholeheartedly that whatever is in you is in you.

YOU'RE RIGHT. YOU DON'T LOSE THAT SENSE. I DON'T THINK.

Now, If you're not careful you can possibly lose it. Because you forget what you're about and where you came from. But, I come from the school where, when I get on the bandstand and play with somebody, my job is to kick him in the butt! And that's what was going on in Philadelphia. When you got on the bandstand, you had to be able to play! Or don't get up on that bandstand.

THAT'S DIFFERENT FROM A LOT OF THE —

And that's really why with John Heard — I felt very honored that of all the drummers he had to choose from in this town, when he was putting his band together he chose me! And I think part of the reason for that is my east coast energy. Because there is definitely a difference between the east coast energy and the west coast energy.

IT'S TIME TO STOP DENYING IT! (LAUGHS)

It is. But I won't go along with — I won't say that one is better than the other. I think both of them...

NO, THEY'RE JUST DIFFERENT. YOU GET A REAL DIFFERENT FEELING. IT'S WONDERFUL WHEN YOU GET A REAL MIX!

Yeah, I've learned things by living out here. There's a calming influence that has put more of a polish on the fire and stuff that I had before. And taught me a way to harness it better. So there's things to be said for both of them.

SO YOU ARE PLAYING WITH JOHN HEARD.

The trio consists of John Heard and Tom Renier.

RIGHT, A FINE KEYBOARD PLAYER.

You should come out and hear the band. We're working at the Museum of Science and Industry, Sunday, from 4-6 p.m.

RIGHT THAT'S ONE OF THE CONCERTS THAT SPONSORED BY THE MUSICIAN'S TRUST FUND AND —

And... (Mumbles)

(LAUGHS) AND THE OTHER RADIO STATION.

Yeah, that station! (Laughs)

IT'S ALRIGHT, WE CAN SAY IT!

Yeah, KKGO. But it's a good thing. They've been putting on these concerts. But the band, I'm really excited about the band.

YEAH, I FEEL THAT. AND IT IS AN EXCITING TRIO. JOHN IS JUST IMPECCABLE IN HIS PLAYING. HE'S PLAYED WITH PEOPLE LIKE OSCAR PETERSON.

Aw, he's played with everybody!

There's a calming influence that has put more of a polish on the fire and stuff that I had before.

EVERYONE! AND JOHN IS ONE OF THE FINEST—

He played with Kenny. As a matter of fact, we did an album with Kenny in March, with Lew Matthews on keyboards and John Heard. And Moacir Santos playing percussion. I think it's going to be a good album. But John Heard is something else.

AND THE TRIO IS PLAYING THESE DAYS, THERE, BUT —
We were just at Carmello's.

CARMELLO'S IS ANOTHER PLACE.

And we've been getting excellent reviews. Excellent response. The musicians have been coming, and it's very interesting that the musicians come. And usually the musicians are kind of blase, but we've had cats who have come and stayed all night. And we take that as an extreme compliment. When they come and they lay all night. They must hear something!

WHAT KIND OF STUFF ARE YOU PLAYING?

We're doing originals. Because Tom is a good writer. We're doing music of the masters. We do Monk's music, we do Duke Ellington's music, we do Bird's music. And Tom Renier plays saxophone, too. And he's playing piano and synthesiser. And of course the acoustic bass and the drums. It's just a fresh trio, because the arrangements lend themselves for good stretching out. But they aren't restricting. There's a lot of good interplay. And chance-taking.

AND IT'S A TRIO. WHICH HAD IT'S OWN KIND OF FREEDOM. IT'S OWN KIND OF ABILITY TO CHANGE FROM ONE FEELING TO ANOTHER.

Yeah, we use different textures.

WE HAVE JUST A FEW MINUTES LEFT. I WANTED TO ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR TEACHING AND WRITING ACTIVITIES, TOO.

Writing words?

WRITING WORDS, YEAH. WE DISCOVERED EARLIER IN THE PROGRAM THAT YOU HAVE AN AFFINITY FOR FINDING THE RIGHT WORD.

Yeah, well, I like writing. In that respect. And I've been doing some teaching. I'm doing a clinic at Long Beach Community College the 30th of September. And I'm doing one again next month, the 22nd of October, with Dave Baker down there. I've been doing quite a bit of teaching in that area. Trying to do more clinics and stuff in the colleges.

THAT'S SO IMPORTANT. HOW IS IT THAT YOU'VE COME ABOUT DOING THAT. IS IT JUST A MATTER OF CHANCE, OR —

Well, yeah. I'm connected with the Roger's Drum Company. I helped them design a new

line of drums. The "Heritage" set, to be on the market. And I named the set! You know? (laughs)

HAAH! (LAUGHS) GREAT!

And they have educational materials they call 'fact sheets,' and I just recently wrote one up on 'Tips on Jazz Drumming.' That's the latest writing in that area that I've been doing.

SO YOU'RE WRITING MAINLY IN A TECHNICAL WAY ABOUT THE MUSIC.

Yeah, trying to convey musical terms on paper. Trying to teach the kids how to swing. Which is very difficult. But I think I may have come up with a little trick which may help work it out. Because it's hard for them to understand that.

I'm trying to teach the kids how to swing. Which is very difficult.

I GUESS IT'S A GOOD WAY, MAYBE, TO GO OUT — MAYBE THE BEST WAY — WITH ONLY A FEW MINUTES LEFT, IS TO GO BACK TO A COMPOSITION THAT YOU WROTE, "A COUNTRY SONG?"

Yeah, it's called "A Country Song."

WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT IT. WHY IS IT "A COUNTRY SONG?"

It just has a feeling of being out in the country. Sitting out on a rock or something out in the meadow. You know, laziness, nothing to do. Being, you know, calm time. Nice relaxed time. Getting away from it all.

YEAH! AND THIS IS CATALYST, AGAIN, RECORDED ON MUSE RECORDS. WE'RE ONLY GOING TO BE ABLE TO HEAR A PART OF IT, UNFORTUNATELY. BUT SHERMAN FERGUSON IS THE DRUMMER HERE. THANK YOU VERY MUCH, SHERMAN!

Oh, thank you for having me come down.

YOU CAN SEE SHERMAN AROUND TOWN NEXT
WEEK—

Yeah, the 13th of September, at the Museum.
Come, because there's going to be a lot of people
there, if you want to sit down!

IT'S GOING TO BE HOT. I THINK LES McCANN IS LATER
ON IN THE PROGRAM. THE EARLY PROGRAM, THEN THE
LATE PROGRAM.

No, I think Tommy Newsome comes on after
us. I think.

REALLY? BETTER BE QUIET THEN.

I believe...

O.K. LET'S GET THE MUSIC GOING! THANK YOU AGAIN,
SHERMAN.

Thank you, Bob.

THE PROGRAM HAS BEEN STRICTLY JAZZ. AND MY
NAME IS BOB ROSENBAUM. THIS IS "A COUNTRY SONG."
WE'RE GOING TO TAKE IT RIGHT UP TO THE MORNING
NEWS FROM NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO AT 3.

(music — "A Country Song," Catalyst)