

### **REFLECTIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS, 50 YEARS LATER... MY FIRST FORAY INTO NEW YORK CITY IN PURSUIT OF THE JAZZ MUSE**

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I finally feel ready to write about this early endeavor, to approach it as, if not history, hopefully at least of historical interest. Despite copious, heartfelt efforts to do so at the time, I was in too much of a hurry to put my newly-minted Journalism degree to use: I had not lived long enough to have anything to say. Now, I've had enough time to begin figuring out where I am coming from, and thus also what I can bring to it, and to put things into some perspective, hopefully before the accuracy of memory has evaporated. One thing will lead to another, if seldom in a straight line...

In May, 1974, at age 22, I was beginning to realize that I did not own the world, nor did it owe me a living, though I had yet to completely give up on either prospect. Worse than that, I had aspirations of becoming a jazz snob, not yet aware that term is a synonym for "asshole". I no longer felt at home in the rock of my earlier youth, no matter how progressive, too much of which had descended into an over-amped vortex of decadent, noisy excess. Even the Allman Brothers Band, the eminent cultural icon native to the world this southern white boy had grown up in, whose original groove is still in my blood (for which I am glad), had devolved into disarray after two of its founders died tragically early deaths. Carlos Santana was the only rocker I found worthy of keeping up with, since his rendering of Joe Zawinul's "In a Silent Way," had turned me on to Miles Davis' album of the same name, and with "Marbles", he had turned me on to its composer, John McLaughlin. My final live music pilgrimage before graduating from college was to hear Weather Report, then still in full I Sing the Body Electric exploratory mode, and at that Nashville gig, a table tent touting the next month's offerings at the Exit/In included a new quartet, Oregon, on Midsummer's Night, which indeed worked out like a dream...

A much earlier chance encounter with the Winter Consort - via Herb Alpert, off all people - had led me to their seminal third album Road, a live, lively recording which included, besides Paul Winter himself on sax and the late cellist David Darling, all four members of the yet-to-be ensemble Oregon: guitarist Ralph Towner, bassist Glen Moore, oboist Paul McCandless and sitar player and percussionist Collin Walcott. Here was acoustic music that could whisper with as much power as any amplified walls of sound could pound the foundation. Their music was conversational, witty and engaging, bubbling up from a deeper wellspring than much of what I'd been hearing - and it was not deafening! Their pebble hit my pond at a most opportune time. The ripples have since been spreading ever wider, enabling so many other doors in the jazz world to open for me. I couldn't get enough of those guys then, and I still can't. I was lucky to be able to hear them several times, in several states of mind and in the USA, before visiting them on their collective home ground: Manhattan.

The 400 or so miles didn't seem like all that far, but I'd never seen so many toll roads. A newly-ascendant OPEC's squeeze had resulted in even/odd-day rationing

## Reflections and Recollections

*\* Larry Karush (1946 - 2013) and Glen Moore had been friends and musical colleagues since the mid-1960s. Both had migrated from Portland OR to New York by the early 1970s. He and Moore recorded a duet album, May 24, 1976 (JAPO), and he appeared, along with saxophonist Bennie Lee Wallace and David Earle Johnson, on Oregon's 1977 album Friends (Vanguard). Karush was also a member of Steve Reich's Piano Ensemble. He would later be part of the trio MoKaVe, comprising Moore, Karush and percussionist Glen Velez, which recorded 3 albums (Audioquest). Karush also recorded a solo album, Art of the Improviser (Naxos), and Piano Crossroads with Velez, Howard Levy and Djimo Kouyate (Nomad). He was easily as gifted a player as any jazz or classical pianist of his day, but with a wider vision than most, and a greater interest in the music itself than in the music business, which is why you may well not have heard of him. It's not like he tried to remain under the radar, it just worked out that way. Karush did not like to be photographed, and I respected his preference, a decision I now regret.*

for gasoline, at prices 50% higher than the year before, but still below one dollar per gallon. Nixon remained in the White House, but not for long. En route to NYC, I'd caught a rare East-coast performance by L.A.'s Firesign Theatre in Washington, DC, just a few blocks from the White House, during which Tricky Dick was righteously skewered, lambasted and lampooned. I laughed so hard it hurt.

Soon after arriving, one of the first things heard through the grapevine was that Duke Ellington had died. Even among the more 'out' players I was hanging with (who hadn't yet been at it long enough to be labeled the 'traditional avant-garde', a non sequitur if ever there was one), Duke's departure was respectfully lamented. Few figures had towered so high for so long in the jazz world. With the cluelessness of youth, I had nary a clue about all that history, and went about my merry way in a new land I found strange, slightly dangerous, and filled with wonders. Adapting to the relentless pace of New York City, every day brought explorations in new directions.

As a guest of Glen Moore, I was headquartered in a corner of Glen's corner of the loft of pianist Larry Karush\* and his wife, multi-media artist Michelle Berne. Their sparsely-furnished spacious studio sat on the southern cusp of Soho, at 3 Mercer Street, just above the ever-bustling crosstown artery Canal Street. From there, it was only one block east to Broadway, and Dave's Luncheonette, home of great egg creams, a 24/7 hang for the pioneering folks living in SoHo's old industrial lofts, the same people who were just beginning to be priced out of the area by yuppies with hot tubs. Dave's usually had a waiting line for its phone booth, the quietest in the neighborhood. McCandless, who lived all the way over on East Broadway, came there to call his lady friend (later his wife) in Atlanta.

Dave's corner was also the western end of a multi-block subway station complex serving several lines. You could connect to anywhere from there. The fare was 35 cents (it is now \$2.90). One block south lay Frank and Jay Clayton's Lispernard Loft, a performance space as well as their residence, where I was granted, as a friend of Glen, use of the washer and dryer. There was very much a feeling of sharing, of being in a community of creative spirits making common cause, a sort of small town within The Big City.

## Reflections and Recollections

It was a few blocks up, north of Houston Street, to fabled Greenwich Village, specifically the West Village, most of our stomping grounds being within a couple of blocks on either side of 6th Avenue: Bleecker, where Porto Rico Importing had the best price on coffee beans roasted and ground fresh daily. The Blue Note wasn't there yet on West 3rd. Up Mercer, at West 4th, there was a brand new venue called The Bottom Line.

A few blocks further to the north, and west, was Chelsea, where Towner and Walcott had apartments in the same building, albeit on different floors. Right around the corner from them was Mi Chinita, at the time billing itself as a Chinese - American - Filipino restaurant, though it was more like a diner. Regardless of ambiance, the food was great, and affordable. I have yet to experience more scrumptious bean sprouts. The "Mi Chinita Suite" closes side one of Oregon's 1973 recording *Distant Hills*, featuring five discrete group-improv miniatures in styles as varied as its namesake's cuisines, yet, in like manner, all fitting nicely together, with flavors contrasting rather than conflicting.

Minetta Lane, all two blocks of it, will always stand out in my memory. It spans from MacDougal to 6th Avenue, with Minetta Street dropping down diagonally from its midpoint to meet Bleecker at 6th. Those were convenient short cuts between lots of places, though the first time I traversed the greater Minettas, I got a serious case of the Willies, for I happened upon a building I recognized as a location from the recent movie *Serpico*. I had just seen that film shortly before heading to New York and its depiction of the NYPD scared the bejesus out of me. I hit town more frightened of the police than of criminals. As it turned out, I had no bad experiences with either.

Though touristy shops offering sandals, water pipes and the like had taken over many of the Village's storefronts, there was still haute street cuisine to be had at reasonable prices for those willing to dine al fresco. Within one same block were two enterprising below-the-sidewalk vendors, one using the spelling 'falafel' and the other 'felafel'. Emanating from both of those quasi-subterranean pita palaces were exotic aromas, from grills where piles of green peppers and onions awaited sizzling sausages, all served up for a couple of bucks. We were there one day with Karush, who asked for one without the sausage. When told it would still cost the same, he said that was fine, to just stuff in a few more peppers and onions, and the chef looked at him like he was crazy. He was not. He was a vegetarian.

At the corner of Minetta and MacDougal was the venerable Café Wha, storied site of local debuts for the likes of Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix, where I would hear Oregon, again, in August, just after Nixon's resignation. Two doors up was the even more-venerable Café Reggio, where I've sipped many a cappuccino over the years, first as Moore's guest, and, in 1982, hosting another kid new in town, a guitar player named Bill Frisell...

The Karush/Berne loft was plenty big enough for musicians to gather, and gather they did. Early one afternoon, it was just Moore on bass and Jan Hammer playing a drum kit which I helped him cart up the stairs from his yellow Volkswagen squareback. Their exchanges moved in an upward spiral, energetically setting sparks flying. Another time, guitarist John Abercrombie joined in, along with a personably earnest if still rather angry-sounding young man then known as Marc Cohen on tenor sax – the same man we now know as a gentler soul, pianist Marc Copland. There was much joyful noise. I had never witnessed so much

## Reflections and Recollections

spontaneous creative combustion up close in one place at one time. I was hooked. Evenings were a time for walks. A mile or two was nothing: good exercise and a subway fare saved. Going north several blocks, into the Village, we traversed Washington Square Park, where the loft impresario, saxophonist Sam Rivers, he of Studio Rivbea, could usually be found leaning against what seemed to be his own personal tree, quietly observing the scene: couples necking, folkies busking and dealers moving dime bags.

Another few blocks north, up University Place, brought us to Bradley's, where, that evening, pianist Mike Nock was holding forth with bassist Rick Laird, who, on upright, was still recovering his hearing after playing hundreds of concerts on electric bass, as part of the original incarnation of the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Nock spun solidly exotic melodies over the firm foundation of Laird's subtle muscle in an open-ended conversation. He was not a showy pianist, but deep and thoughtful, and glad to be back in New York after several years' sojourn to the Bay Area and adventures with The Fourth Way, which had included experiments with things like Ring modulators, a device which he introduced to Cannonball Adderley's piano player - Joe Zawinul...

I didn't even try to photograph in either of those situations, but did manage to catch up to all of those guys, camera in hand, within a few years, amen.

Then there were the evening sessions at studios, both rehearsal and recording. At Blue Rock we heard pianist Paul Bley, with whom Moore had played and recorded within the last couple of years, and session drummer Bruce Ditmas, along with two barely twenty- somethings Bley had recently summoned from Miami: Pat Metheny and Jaco Pastorius. They had one side of the room to themselves, and their collective electric conversation had elements of both shredding and thrashing as they prodded and pushed one another further and further. Bley, in an aside to Moore, said he hoped to capture the spirit of the newbies' fearlessness on tape. Who was aiding or abetting whom hardly mattered. They kept the ball in the air. Just two kids with big ideas, new to the big city, hoping to find niches of their own, which, to put it mildly, they did. They were trying out different routes through the tunes they would record soon thereafter, including several by Carla Bley. The resultant album would be issued under all of their names on Paul Bley's own IAI label (and later bootlegged on others, under Jaco's name).

Another evening we ventured further north, into midtown, to The Record Plant, at fellow Oregonian Collin Walcott's invitation, where he was playing tabla duets with Badal Roy - on a shag rug, no less - as part of a 12-man roster, including Abercrombie, for Drum Ode, saxophonist Dave Liebman's second recording on the still-nascent ECM label, with producer/owner Manfred Eicher in the house, all the way from Munich, to follow up on Liebman's 1973 label debut, Lookout Farm. As we were coming in, a visibly disgruntled man in a straw cap, carrying a pair of conga drums, was heading out. Moore greeted him by name but I didn't catch it, and the man kept going without much more than a mumbled grunt.

It would be several years - long enough that when he told me his version of the story, David Earle Johnson could laugh about it - before I learned that he indeed had been the evictee, and that he had been tossed from the session by producer Eicher, for smoking weed in the studio. In any case, with Johnson now gone for more than 25 years, the entire episode has entered the lore, possibly making him the only musician known to have been tossed from an ECM recording session for

## Reflections and Recollections

smoking reefer!

This transgression also ended up getting Johnson un-invited from Abercrombie's Timeless trio sessions with Jan Hammer (replaced, as it turned out, by Jack DeJohnette) for ECM the next month, though, nearly a decade later, the Abercrombie/ Hammer/ Johnson trio would finally get to record together, resulting in the album *Midweek Blues*, on Plug, a subsidiary of Gene Perla's PM label. Perla was also the bassist for this Liebman session. Small world. There is far, far more to Johnson's legacy than that, but that's another story, one I am overdue to write...

In Eicher's defense, I must say that even though smoking weed most anywhere in New York's jazz world, including recording studios, was a tradition dating back at least as far as a young Louis Armstrong, and had been far from uncommon for decades, it was still illegal, and Eicher may or may not have had his own work permit in order, much less the necessary corporate formalities for ECM Records, and it could well have been that he wasn't willing to take a chance on being nailed as some sort of accessory in a small- time dope bust, for that could lead to larger, costlier legal problems of the federal variety, all this at a time when he was still operating on a constantly-stretched shoestring, for all this transpired before Keith Jarrett or Pat Metheny had burgeoned ECM's coffers.

To say that everyone in the studio was being deferential toward Eicher understates the case. No matter who it is, the producer is always the one who's paying the bills, and in New York, recording studios are like taxis: the meter is running whether or not the car is actually moving. Yet this mysterious, sometimes zen-like navigator was seldom seen micro-managing, or even with his hand on the helm. When he had to, Eicher could make things happen, but seemed to prefer to allow things to unfold of their own accord, as long as they did so at an acceptable pace.

At that point, Eicher was still building the ECM brand, and 1974 was an especially fertile year for the label. On this same USA foray, at another studio in town, he had Paul Motian recording his *Tribute* album, his second for the label. Earlier in the month, up in Boston, Gary Burton and Steve Swallow had created *Hotel Hello*, the latter's label debut, and, on the other side of the pond, April had yielded the debut album for Jarrett's quartet with Jan Garbarek, Palle Danielsson and Jon Christensen, *Belonging*, as well as *Luminescence*, featuring Garbarek playing Jarrett's music with a symphony orchestra. Eicher was on a roll: the summer would encompass not only Abercrombie's aforementioned label debut trio, but also *Ring*, featuring the teaming of Burton and band (including Swallow, Metheny, Mick Goodrick and Bob Moses) with Eberhard Weber. A couple of days after that, he would team Burton with Towner for their duet album *Matchbook*. In the fall, Steve Kuhn would join the ECM roster with *Trance*, featuring Swallow, DeJohnette and Sue Evans, and the solo album *Ecstasy*. By year's end, *Solstice* would also be in the can, the first album for the quartet of Towner, Weber, Garbarek and Jon Christensen. The label's accumulation of accolades was accelerating, with German record-of-the-year awards for Weber's debut album *The Colors of Chloe* and Jarrett's triple solo LP *Bremen/Lausanne*.

1974 was also a pivotal year for Oregon. They were still abuzz from their first European tour, in March (my piece reviewing a recording from that tour, as well as that band in a larger context, appears in *Cadence, Volume 47, #4, Oct/Nov/Dec 2021*). Oregon would record their album *Winter Light* in July and August.

## Reflections and Recollections

It must have been June by the time I experienced a monumental evening at the studios of WBAI-FM, the local Pacifica Network affiliate, featuring Moore and Towner playing conversational duets live over the late-night airwaves. They freely roamed the universe, exploring tunes I'd never heard before, completely in the moment yet already part of the permanent firmament, brand new and old as the hills all at once, rendered with, in turn, wit, sinew and filigree. At that point, they'd been at it for another year and a half since recording *Trios/Solos*, and Towner's solo debut *Diary* (both on ECM) had been in the can for several months, though it would not appear until later that year, including several tunes first heard here, and gloriously at that.

Their shared vocabulary was constantly broadening, and their exchanges became even more intricate and intimate. Either could take the ball and run with it, and did, spurring the other into spirited response, not so much finishing each other's sentences as propelling and extending their exchanges in more new directions, not off the grid, but beyond it. They spun tales so engaging that it was as if nothing else existed, much less mattered, while the music was being created. I wish there were a recording of that broadcast.

One day, out on my own, I decided to check out the New Music Distribution Service store, on Broadway below Prince. It was adorned with colorful tapestries, the work of Moki Cherry, trumpeter Don Cherry's wife. There were all sorts of temptations in the LP bins. In retrospect, it's a good thing I didn't have a credit card - I'd probably still be paying it off. Prominently displayed was the 3-LP box set I'd purchased through mail order a couple of years before, Carla Bley's and Paul Haines' *Escalator Over the Hill*, on the house label, NMDS. (My musings on *Escalator* appear in *Cadence*, Volume 49, #3, July/August/September 2023).

While I don't remember much about leaving NYC, or about the trip home, I do remember a great feeling of relief at having escaped unscathed, a feeling which would repeat itself dozens of times, at the end of every subsequent visit, as I emerged from one tunnel or another into New Jersey, through the coming decades, but those are other stories, yet to be told...

Captions: All photographs were made during May or June, 1974, well before my understanding of many photographic technical niceties, especially those allowing one to shoot in what is known as available light, but in fact was more like available darkness... Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are previously unpublished.

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## Reflections and Recollections



CANAL STREET. This was the view across the street to the south, a few steps down the sidewalk from my digs at 3 Mercer Street. My first venture into New York street photography. Photo credit Patrick Hinely, Work/Play®



JAN HAMMER & GLEN MOORE. Informal jam at Karush/Berne loft, earlier on. This is the oldest photograph in my portfolio of jazz people. Previously published in my 2008 Jazz Calendariy (Jazzprezzo, Germany). Photo credit Patrick Hinely, Work/Play®

## Reflections and Recollections



JOHN ABERCROMBIE & GLEN MOORE. Informal jam at Karush/Berne loft, later on. The curlicues in front of Moore's torso are not smoke: they are the strings of Abercrombie's guitar. Previously published in CD booklet for :rarum XIV, Selected Works of John Abercrombie (ECM). Photo credit Patrick Hinely, Work/Play®



## Reflections and Recollections



JOHN ABERCROMBIE, MANFRED EICHER & DAVE LIEBMAN, *Drum Ode* recording session for ECM, The Record Plant. Drummer Jeff Williams is seen in the background. Photo credit Patrick Hinely, Work/Play®



BADAL ROY & COLLIN WALCOTT. *Drum Ode* recording session for ECM, The Record Plant. Everyone in the room stopped what they were doing to listen to these guys get acquainted while the engineers got their mic levels set. Photo credit Patrick Hinely, Work/Play®

## Reflections and Recollections



PAUL BLEY. Quartet rehearsal, Blue Rock Studio. The pools of light were few and small and Bley was moving around a lot, which made nailing this image feel like an accomplishment in itself. Photo credit Patrick Hinely, Work/Play®



RALPH TOWNER & GLEN MOORE. Performing on air at WBAI-FM. Previously published in these pages, Volume 47, #4, Oct/Nov/Dec 2021  
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