

Manhattan Jazz Quintet – My Funny Valentine Paddle Wheel

I received a nice surprise in the mail a few days ago from a dear friend who knew I've been hunting the LP submitted for your consideration to begin the month of April for quite some time. This one comes from an excellent ensemble that also shares the initials, MJQ. They are The Manhattan Jazz Quintet and the album up for discussion is My Funny Valentine (Paddle Wheel K28P 6410), a full digital recording released in 1986. The quintet was formed in 1984 by pianist David Matthews who was asked by Swing Journal, the Japanese jazz magazine and King Record Company to put together an all-star quintet. The other members are Lew Soloff on trumpet; George Young on tenor sax; Eddie Gomez on bass and Steve Gadd on drums who are some of the best musicians in New York. My copy used in this report is the original Japanese Stereo pressing by the label's parent company, King Record Company, Limited.

The album kicks off with an uptempo rendition of Mr. P.C. John Coltrane's tune honoring his bassist at the time Paul Chambers, making its debut on the 1959 album, Giant Steps. The quintet takes off together on the invigorating melody, stepping aside for Eddie who leads off the soloing with propulsive bass-playing illustrating the passionate fire he exhibits throughout the album. George follows with an exquisite performance featuring an intensely driving rhythm delivered convincingly. Lew ignites the music on the next interpretation with a blazing fire, then Steve finishes with a clever reading wrapping up the Coltrane classic. 'Round Midnight, the 1944 jazz standard by Thelonious Monk, Cootie Williams and Bernie Hanighen is one of the most beautiful and most recorded songs in jazz. The quintet pays homage with a tender theme by the trio smoldering like a burning ember in the fireplace. Soloff opens with sweetness in every note of a gentle chorus that's deeply appealing before turning the tempo up to medium speed giving a wonderful display, improvised beautifully. Young

presents a perfect closing solo with a bluesy commentary leading to the sublime ending.

On a Clear Day, You Can See Forever was written in 1965 by Burton Lane and Alan Jay Lerner as the title tune for the Broadway musical of the same name. The ensemble dresses up this old favorite with an exciting new arrangement at a brisk pace for the melody. Lew sizzles with exhilaration and immense lyricism on the opening statement. George delivers a feisty reading next that's nearly a scene-stealer with a delightful, danceable beat. David takes his first solo opportunity to give a marvelous presentation of rhythmic vitality. Eddie closes with a rapid-fire interpretation into the closing chorus and finale. The title tune is a popular jazz standard written in 1937 by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, first appearing in the Broadway musical Babes In Arms. It opens Side Two with Young leading on the introduction with just Gomez, Matthews, and Gadd on the uptempo opening chorus. Soloff gets the spotlight first with a muted performance glowing with incandescent heat. Matthews works his musical magic on the next solo with crystal-clear clarity, then Young struts his stuff with a red-hot tenor statement heard to fine advantage ahead of the climax.

The 1976 pop song, New York State of Mind by Billy Joel is given a beautiful ballad treatment by the MJQ opening with a very pretty muted melody by Lew who expresses the softer emotions of the song complementing the trio's sensitive supplement. Young opens with a tender, reflective lead solo followed by Matthews who answers with a profoundly beautiful performance that's touching. Soloff makes a final elegant comment possessing poignancy and warmth leading to a gentle coda. S.U. Blues by David Matthews brings the album to a close as a fun tune from the first few notes. The quintet delivers an enticing midtempo melody; David unleashes a happy, effervescent lead solo exhibiting a great touch that swings brilliantly. Lew is supremely confident on the next reading, laying down an infectious groove that's a crowd-pleaser. George responds with a stunning statement that doesn't waste notes and Eddie concludes with a short solo of substantial agility flowing efficiently to the out-chorus and a very fulfilling finish.

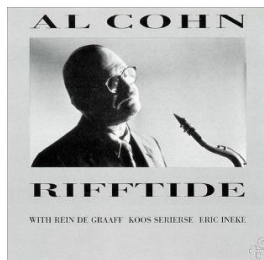
The album clocks in at just short of forty-eight minutes and for a full digital recording, the sonics are a sensation with crystal-clear clarity across the highs, midrange, and bass. The men behind the dials on this record are two of the best in the business, Tom Jung and Hatturo Takanami. Jung is a digital pioneer, he



was President and Chief Engineer of DMP Records and Digital Music Products, Inc. A co-founder of Sound 80 Recording Studio and currently the owner of Road-80, a mobile recording unit. Takanami is a Japanese Engineer with a large resume of excellent classical and jazz recordings on Electric Bird, GNP Crescendo, King Records, Paddle Wheel, and Seven Seas. As for the music on My Funny Valentine, The Manhattan Jazz Quintet are five masters who've recorded a perfectly balanced collection of reharmonized standards and jazz classics that are an absolute delight to sit back, listen to and enjoy. Being a Japanese pressing it may be difficult to find, but your diligence will be rewarded with a title worthy of a spot in anyone's jazz library!

Giant Steps (Atlantic 1311/SD 1311); 'Round Midnight, My Funny Valentine, Tom Jung, Hatsuro Takanami, DMP Records, Digital Music Products, Inc., Electric Bird, GNP Crescendo, King Records, Paddle Wheel, Road-80, Sound 80 Recording Studio, Seven Seas – Source: Discogs.com

Mr. P.C., New York State of Mind, On a Clear Day You Can See Forever, Swing Journal – Source: Wikipedia.org



Al Cohn – Riff tide
Timeless Records

Up next from the library is a 1987 album by the arranger, composer and tenor saxophonist, Al Cohn, Riff tide (Timeless Records SJP 259) finds the multi-talented musician in the very good company of three excellent Danish musicians, Rein De Graaff on piano; Koos Serierse on bass; and Eric Ineke on drums. The album was recorded during the saxophonist's 1986 European tour and my copy used in this report is the original Stereo LP and only release on vinyl. The album opens with Speak Low, a popular song written by Kurt Weill and Ogden Nash. Also, a jazz and pop standard for many years among musicians and vocalists, this tune debuted in the 1943 musical comedy, One Touch of Venus. The trio launches the

song with a lively intro leading to the quartet's brisk pace on the theme. Cohn tells his story first with wailing intensity, then De Graaff raises the temperature with a marvelous statement. Nash takes the final spot with a vigorous conversation between himself and the leader into the out-chorus and fade into silence. Blue Monk is a slow blues Thelonious Monk wrote in 1954, making its first appearance on the Prestige album, Thelonious Monk Trio. It's one of the pianist's most recorded songs and was his personal favorite. The ensemble opens the slow-tempo melody gently, segueing into an attractive opening statement by the tenor man. Rein hits his stride next on a remarkably graceful reading and Koos shows his lyrical side on the closer with a lovely, restrained reading preceding the finale.

The beat moves back to upbeat on Hot House to end the first side, this bebop standard was written in 1945 by Tadd Dameron and first performed by Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker as the B-side of a Guild 78-rpm single. The foursome starts with a blistering theme before Cohn produces a stream of fire from his tenor sax on the opening statement. De Graaff responds to this challenge with four choruses of unbounded energy. The Thing by alto saxophonist, clarinetist, and bandleader Al Cooper starts Side Two with the quartet's moderate theme treatment. Al opens the solos with a stunning performance that's drop-dead gorgeous. Rein answers with a fascinating reading that builds well to its conclusion. Koos executes a dazzling closing chorus noteworthy for his precise articulation before the close. We'll Be Together Again is an alluring ballad by Carl T. Fischer and Frankie Laine that was written in 1945 when Carl was Frankie's musical director and pianist. This jazz and pop standard has been a beloved tune over the past seventy-four years. Cohn opens and ends the solos with two intimate stories of tranquil tenderness. De Graaff is also featured in a haunting reading gently caressing each note into a tasteful climax.

The title tune written by tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins in 1945 ends the album with a speedy beat. Riff tide was originally released as a 78-rpm single for Capitol Records and became a hit for Hawk appearing on the 1963 compilation album, Hollywood Stampede. Cohn cooks right out of the gate, putting a fresh set of clothes on this evergreen at a speedy velocity. De Graaff also generates a considerable amount of heat on the second reading. Ineke follows in a vigorous exchange with the saxist before the climax. Cohn's career lasted nearly fifty-years, recording thirty-five

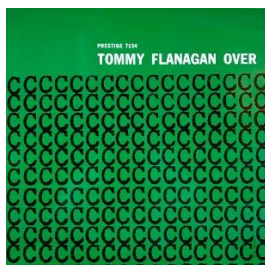


albums as a leader playing and recording with some of the greatest musicians in jazz including fourteen years co-leading a quintet with another tenor man, Zoot Sims. When he wasn't playing, his skill as an arranger was put to good use, working on two Broadway productions, *Raisin'*, and *Sophisticated Ladies*. He also did the arrangements of his tunes for the big bands of Bob Brookmeyer, Maynard Ferguson, Terry Gibbs, Quincy Jones, and Gerry Mulligan. On February 15, 1988, Cohn passed away from liver cancer at the age of sixty-two.

The man behind the dials on *Riffide* is Dutch drummer and engineer, Max Bollerman, who owns and still operates Studio 44 in Monster, Netherlands. The sound is simply stunning throughout the album and the quartet demonstrates its ability to swing with creative energy from first note to the finale of each song. Though recorded late in his career, *Riffide* showcases Al Cohn still at the height of his powers on a provocative album worth hunting on your next vinyl expedition that's sure to please even the most discriminating, serious jazz fan of Cool Jazz and Post-Bop!

Hollywood Stampede (Capitol Jazz Classics Series M-11030); Hot House (Guild 1003); Thelonious Monk Trio (PRLP 7027); Max Bollerman – Source: Discogs.com

Hot House – Source: jazzdisco.org



Tommy Flanagan Trio – Overseas
Analogue Productions

One of my favorite Hard-Bop pianists, Tommy Flanagan steps into the spotlight for my next discussion with his 1958 debut album, *Overseas* (Prestige PRLP 7134). It was recorded during his 1957 tour with J.J. Johnson's group and introduces Wilbur Little on bass with the electrifying Elvin Jones on drums. My copy used in this report is the 2012 Analogue Productions Mono reissue (APRJ 7134-A). The album starts at a fast pace for *Relaxing At*

Camarillo by Charlie Parker. It was written in 1947 and is named for Bird's six-month stay at Camarillo State Hospital where he was recuperating from alcohol and drug addiction. The trio makes a fast dash through the melody, affording everyone a chance to solo. Tommy takes off briskly on the lead statement, then Wilbur walks tunefully through the second interpretation. Elvin caps off the closer with exquisite brushwork while conversing with the leader into the ending. *Chelsea Bridge* is one of Billy Strayhorn's best-loved compositions and has been recorded frequently as an instrumental and vocal. Lyrics were added to the song in 1958 by Bill Comstock, one of The Four Freshmen. The vocal quartet sang it on their album released that year, *Voices In Latin*. Flanagan is the only soloist and gives a gorgeous reading leaving a lingering impact.

Eclypso is the first of six originals by the leader featuring a Caribbean flavored rhythm for the main theme and closing chorus. He also performed this tune on the 1957 album *Flute Flight* by Herbie Mann and Bobby Jaspar. Tommy brings something significant to the table with a cheerful opening solo. Elvin follows exchanging some exuberant comments with the pianist before the song fades gracefully. *Beat's Up* is another original by Flanagan showcasing the pianist and drummer again in two spirited solos with brief interludes by Little that spices things up nicely. *Skål* Brothers winds-up the first side with a short and sweet midtempo blues by Tommy cruising leisurely on the melody, solo statement, and coda secured by the comforting foundation Wilbur and Elvin provide. The pianist's *Little Rock* is a traditional blues that opens Side Two with an impeccable statement by Little alone. Flanagan and Jones join him, then Tommy serves up some down-home cooking on a luscious performance that's also delicious. Little delivers a second stimulating reading with a mellow tone and firm bass lines into the final reading by Elvin who is soft, but stately on the final reading asserting his mastery of the drums.

Flanagan's *Verdandi* brings them back to uptempo with an electrifying opening solo by Tommy and a fiery showcase for Elvin who gives a masterful demonstration before the out-chorus. *Delarna* is Tommy's final tune on the album and dedicated to the province in central Sweden known for its breathtaking landscape. The trio begins with a very pretty melody starting at a slow tempo but moves upward for Flanagan's execution of a solo of extraordinary beauty into a soothing conclusion. *Willow Weep For Me*, the final stop of our nine-song trip *Overseas* was written in



1932 by Ann Ronell who also composed the lyrics. Originally written as a dedication to fellow composer and pianist George Gershwin, this ageless classic is one of the immortal treasures in The Great American Songbook and a favorite of musicians and vocalists over the past eighty-seven years. The melody is presented with a quiet demeanor collectively followed by a passionate performance by Tommy and a touchingly, poignant presentation by Wilbur into the finale marking the beginning of a forty-five-year career as one of the most respected and revered musicians in jazz.

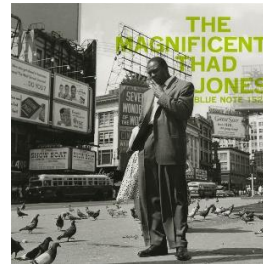
A Detroit native, Tommy Flanagan's first influences were three masters of the piano, Nat King Cole, Art Tatum, and Teddy Wilson, plus two local pianists, Earl Van Riper and Willie Anderson. He's recorded thirty-six albums as a leader and appeared as a sideman on two-hundred records including some of the most important LP's ever made. Miles Davis' Collector's Items and Detroit-New York Junction by Thad Jones in 1956; Sonny Rollins' Saxophone Colossus in 1957; John Coltrane's Giant Steps in 1959; The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery in 1962 and Ella In Hamburg in 1965 to name a few. He also served a total of thirteen years touring as Ella's accompanist and musical director from 1962 to 1965 and 1968 to 1978. Tommy Flanagan also influenced many current jazz pianists, remaining in demand and popular until his passing on November 16, 2001, at the age of seventy-one.

The sound of this Analogue Productions Mono reissue is demonstration class with a superb soundstage in all three areas of treble, midrange, and bass placing you in the studio with the musicians as they're recording each song. In short, Overseas affords the listener a forty-minute trip with The Tommy Flanagan Trio requiring no luggage, passports, or plane tickets, just a turntable, amplifier or receiver, two speakers and your favorite drink to enjoy while you listen!

Collector's Items (Prestige PRLP 7044); Detroit-New York Junction by Thad Jones (Blue Note BLP 1513); Ella In Hamburg (Verve Records V-4069/V6-4069); Flute Flight (Prestige PRLP 7124); Giant Steps (Atlantic 1311/SD1311); Saxophone Colossus (PRLP 7079/PRST 7236); The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery (Riverside RLP 12-230/RLP 1169); Voices In Latin (Capitol Records T-992) – Source: Discogs.com

Chelsea Bridge, Relaxing At Camarillo, Willow Weep For Me – Source: JazzStandards.com

Tommy Flanagan – Source: Wikipedia.org



Thad Jones – The Magnificent Thad Jones
Music Matters Jazz

My final entry from the library for April is the second of three albums released in 1956 by arranger, bandleader, composer, multi-instrumentalist Thad Jones on Blue Note. The Magnificent Thad Jones (BLP 1527) finds the legendary jazzman leading a quintessential quintet of Billy Mitchell on tenor sax; Barry Harris on piano; Percy Heath on bass and Max Roach on drums. For those unfamiliar with him, he comes from a musical family featuring two jazz legends in their own right, his older brother, pianist Hank Jones and his younger brother, the dynamic drummer, Elvin Jones. He taught himself to play the cornet, French horn, and trumpet, becoming a professional musician at the age of sixteen. Thad was also a member of some of the greatest big bands including Count Basie, Gil Evans, Quincy Jones, and Ernie Wilkins to name a few.

Jones also led small groups as well, he co-led an orchestra with drummer Mel Lewis lasting twelve-years, was the leader of The Danish Radio Big Band and also led The Count Basie Orchestra for a time after Basie's death in 1984. His status as an accomplished arranger and composer has given the music world some of the most beautiful compositions ever written including what many feel is his masterpiece, A Child Is Born. Lyrics were added by composer Alec Wilder after hearing it performed by The Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra and it has been recorded as a vocal and instrumental frequently. My copy used in this report is the 2016 Music Matters Jazz Mono audiophile reissue (MMBLP-1527).

April In Paris, written in 1932 by Vernon Duke and E.Y. Harburg begins our five-song journey, making its debut



in the Broadway musical *Walk a Little Faster* that premiered that year. A favorite among jazz and pop musicians and vocalists, it became an even bigger hit after the 1952 Warner Brothers film sharing the song's title. Percy and Max introduce the tune softly, then the front line and piano enter for the main theme with Thad dispensing a mellow tone from his horn. Billy makes a brief comment during the opening and ending chorus, but Jones is the only soloist and makes the most of it, opening with a quote from the English nursery rhyme and children's song, *Pop Goes The Weasel*. The ensuing verses are lyrical phrases flowing at a relaxing pace into the reprise and fadeout. Thad also gives a brief solo using the same nursery quote on the Basie band's version from their Verve LP, *April In Paris* also recorded in 1956, but not released until 1957!

Thad's *Billie-Do* is a blues characterized by the quintet's chilled out feeling from the brief introduction of the rhythm section into the main theme through its harmonic and phrase structure providing a delightful treat of what's to come. Everyone gets to kick back individually except Max who provides pleasant brushwork behind each soloist that's sure to have the listener's foot-tapping along. Jones opens with a sweet-toned delivery and lilting charm on the lead solo, assisted by Billy who provides a soft riff on two verses. Mitchell conveys a bluesy impression of playful relaxation on the next interpretation possessing a down-home flavor. Harris swings easily on the third reading, then Percy shows off his versatility on an abbreviated closer before the quintet takes the song out.

If I Love Again, the 1932 ballad written by Ben Oakland and J.P. Murray ends the first side at an upbeat pace with the quintet delivering an invigorating melody of high-spirited energy. Barry opens the soloing with a jubilant performance, then Billy takes over for a vigorously brisk workout. Thad gives a captivating performance on the next reading, then Max closes with a clear, crisp attack providing some irresistible musical thrills swinging to the ensemble's finale.

If Someone Had Told Me is a little-known ballad by Peter DeRose and Charles Tobias that I believe was written in 1952 because the two earliest vocals of the song were released that year. A 78-rpm single by vocalist Dolores Gray for Decca Records and a 78-rpm single by Sarah Vaughan for Columbia Records became such a huge hit for Sarah, the label reissued it the same year as a 45-rpm single. The version heard here is a quartet performance and an attractive feature

for Thad who is the only soloist with the trio providing an elegantly lush foundation under him. The trumpeter delivers a performance of beguiling warmth moving delicately through this moving musical experience into an intimately tender finale as good as any you've ever heard or will hear.

Side Two ends with *Thedia*, a cheerfully joyful tune written and named for Thad's young daughter. The trio makes a brief introduction for both horns to walk comfortably at an easy beat during the opening chorus. Billy solos first, establishing a nice momentum in a meticulously neat performance affirming his rhythmic spontaneity at a lower temperature. Barry gives a top-class effort on the second statement with plenty of intriguing ideas efficiently presented. Perry grabs and holds your attention on the next interpretation with two brief choruses making the listener feel right at home. Thad's at the high point of his artistry on the next solo, taking a long, lengthy ride with a riveting presentation. Max shares the final spotlight with Thad in several exceptional exchanges leading to the ensemble's exit.

The sound quality on *The Magnificent Thad Jones* is positively stunning with the superb remastering of the original Rudy Van Gelder Mono tapes by Record Technology, Inc. The LP has an excellent tonal balance of treble, midrange, and bass for a very pleasant soundstage to these ears placing you in the studio to hear the musicians at their best with a crystal-clear sound. The music is great and, in my opinion, worth the price of admission. If you add the incredible attention to detail Music Matters Jazz puts together on every one of their 33 1/3 and 45-rpm reissues including high-definition gatefold photos that are of the highest quality. The exceptional packaging of the front and rear covers is worthy of hanging on the wall in your listening room, and the pressings on 180-gram Virgin Vinyl are superb. In short, Thad Jones and his colleagues together make *The Magnificent Thad Jones* hands down one of the best albums of the Hard-Bop era and a title I'm certain you'll enjoy for a very long time! Please continue to stay safe and take care of yourselves during the Coronavirus pandemic. I'll see you next month and Happy Listening Gang!

During the fifties, Blue Note employed a sales strategy of giving distinguishing names to some of the artists on its label to spark the public's interest in their albums and possibly boost their sales. Four examples of this are *The Magnificent Thad Jones*, *The Fabulous Fats Navarro*, *The Amazing Bud Powell*, and *The Incredible Jimmy Smith*. In the cases of the artists listed above,



the strategy succeeded beyond their expectations and the names stuck. Debut Records used this same method on one of Thad Jones' albums during the time he recorded with them, *The Fabulous Thad Jones* in 1954.

April in Paris (Verve Records MG V-8012); *Bashin'* (Verve Records V-8474/V6-8474); *The Fabulous Thad Jones* (Debut Records DLP-12); *If Someone Had Told Me* (Decca Records 28051); (Columbia 4-39719, 39719); Dolores Gray, Decca Records, Sarah Vaughan, Columbia Records – Source: Discogs.com

April in Paris – Source: JazzStandards.com

If I Love Again – Source: MusicNotes.com

Thad Jones, *Pop Goes The Weasel*, *Something To Remember You By* – Source: Wikipedia.org