



Oliver Nelson – Sound Pieces  
Impulse!

The first LP from the library to begin January 2020 is by one of jazz's finest arrangers, composers, and multi-instrumentalists that's too good to leave sitting on the shelf. Few performances on LP ever reached the heights of Oliver Nelson's 1961 album *The Blues* and *The Abstract Truth* producing his biggest hit, *Stolen Moments*. *Sound Pieces* (Impulse A-9129) is one that did, and in the process, became one of the best albums in Nelson's discography. Side One places him in a large ensemble for three works of orchestral jazz. On Side Two, he's in a more intimate setting leading a quartet. My copy used in this report is the original 1966 US Stereo release (AS-9129).

The personnel includes John Audino (tracks: A1 to A3), Bobby Bryant (track: A1), Conte Candoli, Oliver Mitchell (tracks: A1 to A3), Al Porcino (tracks: A2, A3) on trumpet; Bill Byers (tracks: A2, A3), Dick Noel (track: A1), Ernie Tack (tracks: A1 to A3) on trombone; Red Callender (tracks: A2, A3) on tuba; Bill Hinshaw, Richard Perissi (tracks: A1 to A3) on French horn; Gabriel Baltazar Jr. and Bill Green (tracks: A1 to A3) on alto sax; Plas Johnson, Bill Perkins (tracks: A1 to A3) on tenor sax; Jack Nimitz (tracks: A1 to A3) on baritone sax; Oliver Nelson (tracks: A1 to B3) on soprano sax; Gabriel Baltazar Jr., and Bill Perkins (tracks: A2, A3) on clarinet; Steve Kuhn (tracks: B1 to B3), Mike Melvoin (tracks: A2, A3) on piano; Ray Brown (tracks: A2, A3), Ron Carter (tracks: B1 to B3) on bass; Shelly Manne (tracks: A2, A3), Grady Tate (tracks: B1 to B3) on drums.

The album opens with *Sound Piece For Jazz Orchestra*, an unforgettable story of music told in two main themes: the first one is a calm state of tranquility. The second is a searing portrayal originally written for The Stuttgart Radio Dance Band in 1963. The song commences with the bass clarinets sounding a commanding call and an exceptional utilization of brass and winds to announce the majestic chorus with strong

statements. Originally written for alto saxophone, Oliver is featured on soprano sax and the song's only soloist in both sections. When the pace slows down to a softer tempo, he delivers a thoughtfully sensitive ballad treatment, caressing each phrase with the clarinets and horns discreetly in the background culminating into a tender finale. The rhythm section shifts the song back to uptempo for the orchestra to restate the melody, stepping aside for Nelson who gives an intense workout on the closer before the stunning finale.

The pace moves to midtempo for *Flute Salad*, an original by Nelson that as the title suggests, places the flutes in front, leading the orchestra on the sprightly opening and ending melodies. Trumpet player Conte Candoli is the featured soloist and his muted horn delivers an air of assurance that flows sonorously with the brass section in support. *The Lady From Girl Talk* is a midtempo original by Oliver written for Actress Virginia Graham who hosted *Girl Talk*, a syndicated talk show from 1962 to 1970 using this tune as her theme. The trombones announce the introduction first, before evolving into the orchestra's full-bodied melody. Pianist Mike Melvoin begins a taut opening solo of rhythmic joy illustrating his nimble hands at work. Oliver follows, his soprano moving gracefully with soulful precision on the closer for a compelling reading that's extremely satisfying.

*The Shadow of Your Smile* was written in 1965 by Johnny Mandel and Paul Francis Webster, making its debut in the film *The Sandpiper*. Also known as *Love Theme From The Sandpiper*, it's one of the most enduring standards of all time and a much-loved vocal and instrumental favorite. Oliver is joined by Steve Kuhn, Ron Carter, and Grady Tate and together this foursome presents a Bossa Nova version opening with tender tones on the introduction as if the quartet is playing the standard at a slow tempo. The mood moves upward to midtempo for the melody with a sprightly swing led by Nelson. Steve charges the opening statement with mild energy and agile phrases exhibiting the cohesive harmony between himself, Carter, and Tate. Oliver closes with an affectionate performance of deep emotion, rich harmony, and warm phrasing that to these ears captures the essence of expressing love the lyrics depict.

*Patterns* is an uptempo original that first appeared in Oliver's 1966 *Book, Patterns For Improvisation* (Jamey Abersold), a collection of improvisational jazz patterns in various meters and feels that spells out some of the



basic building blocks of the jazz language. It's the most adventurous and interesting tune on the album beginning with a thematic statement that the quartet takes as far as it will go. The opening solo by Nelson is strong, sure, and well-developed. Kuhn heightens the mood by supplying a scintillating closing presentation, held firmly by the always energetic foundation of Carter and Tate into the quartet's reprise and climax.

The final track is Oliver's *Elegy For a Duck* that he recorded earlier in the year on *Peter and The Wolf* with organist Jimmy Smith. Based on the original work by Russian composer, conductor, and pianist Sergei Prokofiev, Ron and Grady establish the introduction with a bouncy beat that's maintained through the entire song. Oliver and Steve join them for a bit of relaxed spontaneity on the theme, then the saxophonist settles in for a beautifully articulated opening statement that's brisk and merry. Kuhn closes with a refreshing performance of intriguing ideas, subtle moods, and impressions on each chorus that's a deft musical portrayal. The East Coast orchestra tunes were recorded by Bob Simpson of RCA Studios in New York and the man behind the dials on the West Coast quartet sessions was Jim Lockert of Western Recorders. I was very impressed with each man's work on *Sound Pieces* and the sound quality is spectacular on both sides of the album. It's especially impressive during the orchestra tracks, the brass, reeds, and drums are accurately captured by Lockert and as near to the real thing as I've heard. The highs are crystal clear, the character of each instrument at midrange is crisp and natural, and there's ample response in the bass region.

Oliver Nelson recorded six small group albums for Prestige playing the alto and tenor sax, and nine more albums for Impulse that also affirm his inspired leadership. He scored background music for films and television shows after moving to the West Coast in 1967. Oliver also recorded several excellent orchestra albums including *Afro-American Sketches* in 1962 and *Full Nelson* in 1963 that are two of his finest LP's alongside *The Blues* and *The Abstract Truth*. He arranged and produced albums for some of the elite pop stars during the latter half of the sixties. It's no wonder why the Jazz and Pop communities mourned him deeply after his death from a heart attack at the age of forty-three on October 28, 1975!

I was fourteen when I first heard this album; it made quite an impression on me then and I still find

something new within the music each time I listen to it now. Impulse LP's also set a high standard for their releases with laminated gatefold covers, a distinctive spine color, incredible photography, knowledgeable liner notes, and great music. *Sound Pieces* is a tour-de-force of brilliant arrangements, incredible artistry, superb writing, and unparalleled listening pleasure by Oliver Nelson. A remarkable talent who whether on record or in concert, always gave jazz fans exciting performances and albums that are still considered a must-have for any library!

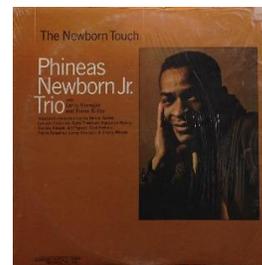
Patterns For Improvisation – Source: Amazon.com

*Afro-American Sketches* (Prestige PRLP 7225/PRST 7225); *Full Nelson* (Verve Records V-8508/V6-8508); *Peter and The Wolf* (Verve Records V-8652/V6-8652); *The Blues* and *The Abstract Truth* (Impulse! A-5/AS-5). Bob Simpson, RCA Studios, Jim Lockert, Western Recorders – Source: Discogs.com

*Sound Piece For Jazz Orchestra*, *The Stuttgart Radio Dance Band*, *Flute Salad*, *The Lady From Girl Talk*, *Patterns*, *Elegy For a Duck* – Source: Album liner notes by Nat Hentoff

*Girl Talk*, Virginia Graham – Source: IMDB.com

Sergei Prokofiev – Source: Wikipedia.org



Phineas Newborn Jr. Trio – *The Newborn Touch* Contemporary Records

This next choice from the library is by one of my favorite pianists, Phineas Newborn, Jr. You may remember him from my September 2019 discussion of the 1961 album by Teddy Edwards and Howard McGhee, *Together Again!* For interpreting ballads or standards his playing was always touching and memorable, revealing their true beauty. On midtempo tunes, his fingers flowed across the keys efficiently, and when he turned the heat up a few degrees for an uptempo composition, he possessed a tempestuous vitality



stamping his style as unique and immediately identifiable. Submitted for your consideration this time is an excellent album titled *The Newborn Touch* (Contemporary Records S7615). He's working alongside two of the best rhythm men in jazz, Leroy Vinnegar on bass and Frank Butler on drums and my copy used in this report is the original 1966 Mono LP (M3615).

Side One opens with *A Walkin' Thing* by multi-instrumentalist Benny Carter that originally appeared on his 1958 album, *Jazz Giant* featuring Mr. Vinnegar. The trio performs this tune at midtempo with a strong rhythm throughout featuring the pianist as the lone soloist. Leroy's bass and Frank's drums provide the power with a steady beat fitting perfectly into a luxurious finale. Pianist Russ Freeman's beautiful composition *Double Play* made its debut as the title selection of Freeman's 1957 album with fellow pianist André Previn. *Newborn* introduces the song with an enticingly haunting melody, then creates a reading tastefully applied with great beauty sustained by the thoughtful accompaniment by Vinnegar and Butler. The trio takes on pianist Hampton Hawes' *The Sermon* next and the most remarkable thing about this performance is Phineas plays the entire song with just his left hand. Hampton originally recorded this midtempo blues on the 1956 album, *Everybody Loves Hampton Hawes, Volume 3: The Trio*. A very short introduction by *Newborn* evolves into an irresistible melody flowing along in a happy, relaxed frame of mind. Phineas turns in a very passionate interpretation gliding gently and serenely with personal touches added by Leroy and Frank in the background.

*Diane* is a very pretty ballad from the pen of alto saxophonist Art Pepper who wrote it for his wife. He first performed it on his 1957 album, *The Art Pepper Quartet* for the West Coast jazz label, Tampa Records and would later reprise it three years later on *Getting Together*. The trio opens with a slow treatment of the melody in unison preceding Phineas' voluptuously lush delivery on a sensually appealing interpretation leading to a tender coda. The first side ends with an uptempo rendition of Ornette Coleman's *The Blessing* that he wrote in 1952 but didn't record until his 1958 debut album, *Something Else - The Music of Ornette Coleman*. After a pleasingly tangy melody by the trio, Phineas springs into an aggressive opening statement that moves like a musical twister through each verse. Frank gets his first opportunity to share solo space with the leader in an exchange of hard-driving explosiveness before the closing chorus. *Grooveyard*,

the midtempo blues by pianist Carl Perkins starts Side Two. It originally appeared on the 1958 LP, *Harold In The Land of Jazz* by tenor saxophonist Harold Land. Perkins who played alongside Vinnegar and Butler on that album began recording professionally at the age of twenty-one in 1949. He was on track to a promising career before a drug overdose ended his life in 1958 at age twenty-nine, leaving the jazz world with an irreplaceable loss of great talent. The infectious melody is taken at a very relaxing tempo and the lone reading by Phineas effectively conveys a carefree feeling that's simple and straightforward. This tune was Carl's final composition before his passing on March 17th that year and for the Stereo release, the title of the album was changed to *Grooveyard* as a dedication and tribute to Perkins.

*Blue Daniel* by trombonist Frank Rosolino first appeared on the 1960 album, *Shelly Manne and His Men at The Black Hawk, Volume 1*. This is a jazz waltz opening with an easy groove on the melody, piano-led by *Newborn* with Vinnegar and Butler providing the rhythmic backing. The gorgeous solo by Phineas swings with a good driving beat. The only flaw of the song occurs on the closing chorus when the pianist hits one wrong note, but even that doesn't take away from the remarkable interplay all three members exhibit as it unfolds. Alto saxophonist Jimmy Woods is the composer of *Pazmuerte*, a hauntingly lovely original he recorded for his 1963 album *Conflict*. The title, he describes is "a combination of the Spanish words for peace (*Paz*) and death (*Muerte*), the ultimate alternatives in all situations of conflict". The pianist provides a brief solo introduction evolving into an elegant melody by the trio, followed by a dainty presentation of graceful tenderness by Phineas concluding with a delicately subtle fadeout. The finale *Be Deedle Dee Do* is a down-home medium-paced blues by guitarist Barney Kessel who recorded it on a tremendous 1958 trio session titled *The Poll Winners Ride Again*. The trio introduces the song with a concise talk developing into a formal discussion during the opening chorus. Phineas as the only soloist lays down a finger-snapping, toe-tapping groove with exhilarating execution into a vigorous finale.

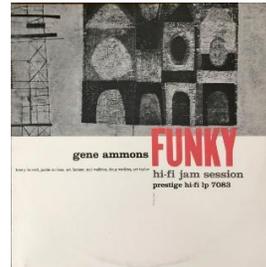
Lester Koenig, founder of Contemporary Records produced and engineered *The Newborn Touch* with one of the label's top engineers, Howard Holzer. Together their work results in a superbly mastered LP with marvelous sound quality that's crystal clear, placing the listener's favorite chair in the studio surrounded by the trio with excellent definition across



the treble, midrange, and bass spectrum. The album is well balanced with a great mix of tunes from nine of the elite jazz musicians worldwide. You can also feel the energy from Phineas, Leroy, and Frank giving you an abundant dose of jazz one would hear in a nightclub with friends or that special someone. If you're a fan of piano jazz, trio jazz, or are just discovering his music, I happily offer for your consideration to audition, *The Newborn Touch* by The Phineas Newborn, Jr. Trio. It's an exceptional example of his genius, every track shines brilliantly, and once heard, I believe it will become a favorite album in your jazz library that you can enjoy repeatedly! The 1986 Original Jazz Classics Stereo reissue (OJC-270) and 1977 Contemporary Jazz 1500 Series Japanese Stereo reissue (LAX 3133) adds one additional track that was omitted on the Mono LP, *Hard To Find* by Leroy Vinnegar.

*Conflict* (Contemporary Records M3612/S7612); *Double Play* (C3537/S7537); *Everybody Loves Hampton Hawes, Volume 3: The Trio* (Contemporary C3523); *Getting Together* (M3573/S7573); *Harold In The Land of Jazz* (Contemporary C3550/S7550); *Jazz Giant* (C3555/S7028); *Shelly Manne and His Men at The Black Hawk, Volume 1* (Contemporary M3577/S7577); *Something Else - The Music of Ornette Coleman* (C3551/S7551); *The Art Pepper Quartet* (Tampa Records RS-1001); *The Poll Winners Ride Again* (M3556/S7556); *Together Again!* (Contemporary Records M3588/S7588). Howard Holzer, Lester Koenig – Source: Discogs.com

*A Walkin' Thing*, *Double Play*, *The Sermon*, *Diane*, *The Blessing*, *Grooveyard*, *Blue Daniel*, *Pazmuerte*, *Be Deedle De Do* – Source: Album liner notes by Lester Koenig



Gene Ammons All-Stars – *Funky*  
Prestige Original Jazz Classics

Up next from the library is the 1986 reissue of a splendid 1957 jam-session led by tenor saxophonist Gene Ammons with a first-class sextet titled *Funky* (Prestige PRLP 7083). His bandmates on this date are Art Farmer on trumpet; Jackie McLean on alto sax; Mal Waldron on piano; Kenny Burrell on guitar; Doug Watkins on bass and Art Taylor on drums. My copy used in this report is the Prestige Original Jazz Classics Mono reissue (OJC-244 – P-7083). The title tune, Kenny Burrell's *Funky* starts Side One with Doug's bass on a brief intro, developing into the ensemble's relaxing opening chorus. Gene solos first, making effective use of his mellow tone for a flawless opening statement. Kenny eases into a delightful reading next complementing the rhythm section efficiently. Jackie cruises methodically into a casually carefree performance by Art bristling with good feelings. Mal comes in next with a slick swinging presentation, then Doug is simultaneously exciting and intriguing on the final concise comment before the ensemble's climax.

*Pint Size*, the first of two tunes by tenor saxophonist Jimmy Mundy ends the first side leisurely with the septet's tight harmony in unison on the melody. Ammons lays down a compelling opening solo emitting an infectious excitement as it unfolds. Farmer sustains the contagious rhythm next by inviting us to snap our fingers, tap our toes and get up and dance. McLean gives equal amounts of passion and flair on the third reading, then Burrell does a masterful job executing a series of skillful phrases and Waldron approaches the finish line with a sparkling performance culminating into the coda. The 1944 jazz standard, *Stella By Starlight* by Victor Young and Ned Washington opens the second side and first appeared in the supernatural horror film, *The Uninvited*. Their rendition opens deceptively at a slow ballad tempo with a warm, sinuous intro by Wal and a gentle theme treatment by Gene. The pace picks up dramatically for each solo beginning with the leader delivering his message



confidently. Art takes center stage next for some enthusiastic solo work, then Jackie swings with a happy approach, showing remarkable nimbleness. Kenny echoes the merriment of his colleagues with an enthusiastic performance. Mal ends with a quaint comment before the leader's return to the slow tempo for the close.

Jimmy Mundy's King Size ends the album setting up things with a solo introduction by Gene developing into the group's lively theme treatment. Jug swings with immense energy on an exquisite opening solo with Art shadowing him utilizing single notes for one chorus. The trumpeter answers the leader with some down-home cooking for an incredibly flavorful dish, then Jackie soars skyward with avid enthusiasm on the next reading. Kenny's guitar surges with scintillating radiance on the following interpretation, then Mal takes the spotlight last for an adrenaline-fueled solo powered by the rhythm section. The principal soloists share a few final observations into the front line's closing chorus featuring a brief comment by Doug ahead of the song's conclusion. The original LP was supervised by Bob Weinstock and the remastering of Rudy Van Gelder's original mono tapes by Fantasy is superb with an excellent soundstage of all the instruments that emerge through the speakers vividly!

Gene Ammons played and recorded with some of the greatest names in jazz including Donald Byrd, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Duke Jordan, Dexter Gordon, Charlie Parker, and Sonny Stitt. He got his nickname "Jug" from Billy Eckstine whose band he was a member of in 1944. He also played in Woody Herman's Second Herd replacing Stan Getz. In addition to Prestige, Jug also recorded for Aristocrat, Chess, Decca, Mercury, and United. His career as a jazz musician was interrupted twice because of two prison sentences (1958-1960) and (1962-1969) for narcotics possession. He lost his battle against cancer on August 6, 1974, at the age of forty-nine. Gene Ammons is in breathtaking form and tone throughout this album, and the music heard flows as naturally as water downhill into a stream. If you're a fan of his, Bop, or Soul-Jazz, I hope you'll consider Funky for a spot in your library. It's a well-rounded program of great jazz from Prestige, the label known for outstanding jam session LP's during the fifties and sixties!

Stella By Starlight – Source: JazzStandards.com

Gene Ammons – Source: Wikipedia.org



Bill Evans – Bill Evans at The Montreux Jazz Festival Analogue Productions

Submitted for your approval to end January is a 1968 live LP by pianist Bill Evans who's leading an exceptional trio featuring Eddie Gomez on bass and Jack DeJohnette on drums. Bill Evans at The Montreux Jazz Festival (Verve Records V6-8762) documents the group's performance on June 15, 1968, as the special guests for the festival's second year. The program consists of seven standards and two originals by Evans. My copy used in this report is the 2012 Stereo Audiophile reissue (APJ8762) by Analogue Productions. The set opens with the introduction of the trio by Geo Voumard, co-coordinator of the MJF, and a member of Radio Suisse Romande who recorded the album. One For Helen, named for Bill's manager and producer, Helen Keane gets underway with a vivacious melody setting up a rousing opening statement by the leader and vigorous closing reading by Eddie with Jack providing the propulsion behind both soloists. A Sleepin' Bee was written in 1954 by Harold Arlen and Truman Capote, making its first appearance in the 1954 Broadway musical, House of Flowers. The trio treats this standard to a lively rendition beginning with the leader in front of the theme, then his fingers radiate with happiness on the opening statement. Gomez swings with a dazzling display of finger dexterity on the final interpretation, making each note count economically into the climax with the audience's enthusiastic ovation.

House of Earl is the creation of classical and jazz composer Earl Zindars who was also a talented percussionist. Bill starts the song with a very pretty introduction that develops into an elegant opening chorus by the trio. The leader provides an example of his pianistic wizardry with warm lyricism and romantic tenderness on the first reading. Gomez answers with a rich, soothing performance that moves delicately from note to note into a graceful ending. Nardis, the 1958 jazz standard by Miles Davis keeps things moving to operate at midtempo with a spirited theme



treatment by the trio that swings easy. I first heard it on the LP, *Portrait of Cannonball* (Riverside RLP 12-269), also released that year. Eddie walks his bass packing plenty of steady, soaring lines on the lead solo. Bill gives a feisty performance on the second reading, then Jack displays the intensity of a tiger on the final interpretation ahead of the trio's closing chorus and audience's approval. *I Loves You Porgy* by George & Ira Gershwin, and *DuBose Heyward* was written in 1935 and featured in the opera, *Porgy & Bess*. It opens the second side as a solo showcase for Evans who shows the ageless evergreen a gorgeous expression of love and respect with a lovely, lyrical performance that's dreamy and nostalgic.

Ray Noble's romantic ballad, *The Touch of Your Lips* was written in 1936 with several superb instrumental and vocal renditions to its credit. Bill gives a beautiful unaccompanied introduction blossoming into a sprightly theme by the trio. The pianist is the only soloist and he gives a charming reading, propelled by the sturdy rhythm by Eddie and Jack into an appealing culmination. The popular song by George & Ira Gershwin, *Embraceable You* was written in 1928 for an operetta titled *East Is West*. It was published two years later, making its debut in the 1930 Broadway musical, *Girl Crazy*. On this old favorite, Eddie gets the spotlight leading the trio on the opening and closing melodies, and as the song's only soloist in a swinging performance that's worth the price of admission on its own.

*Someday My Prince Will Come* by Larry Morey & Frank Churchill made its debut in the 1937 animated film, *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs*. The trio shifts to fifth and sixth gear with an uptempo romp on the infectious melody. Bill launches into an aggressive reading of creative energy. Eddie steps in next, sustaining the driving pace with a dazzling solo and Jack puts together some nice surprises in a shared dialogue with Bill into the reprise and finale receiving the largest ovation of the set. *Evans' Walkin' Up* ends the album with a stunning introduction of the melody, then delivering robust lines efficiently on the opening statement. Gomez digs into the second solo with authority and DeJohnette takes the final spot with some rhythmic brushwork before the trio wraps it up.

It's a pity that this is DeJohnette's only appearance with the trio because he adds a propulsive lift to the group with effective timekeeping that holds your attention throughout the album. *Bill Evans at The Montreux Jazz Festival* was produced by Helen Keane. The men who

engineered the original recording are Val Valentin whose work can be found on many Pablo and Pablo Live LP's and Verve Records; Jean-Claude Martin and Pierre Grandjean. The mastering of this reissue is by Bernie Grundman of Bernie Grundman Mastering. The music sparkles with stellar, expressive solos and the sound quality is equally superb placing the listener among the audience of this enjoyable set. If there was any doubt that he was one of the finest jazz pianists, Bill Evans at The Montreux Jazz Festival should certainly dispel them. If you're a fan of piano jazz or trio jazz, I recommend Bill Evans at The Montreux Jazz Festival for a spot in your jazz library. It's one of the illustrious pianist's best live recordings in my opinion and a title I hope you'll discover for yourselves. See you next month and Happy Listening Gang!

*Portrait of Cannonball* – Source: Discogs.com

*I Loves You Porgy, Embraceable You, Someday My Prince Will Come* – Source: JazzStandards.com

*A Sleeping Bee, Nardis, The Touch of Your Lips* – Source: Wikipedia.org