

HEINER STADLER

A TRIBUTE TO MONK AND BIRD—Tomato TOM-2-9002: *Air Conditioning*; *Au Privave*; *Ba-lue Bolivar Ba-lues-are*; *Straight No Chaser*; *Misterioso*; *Perhaps*.

Personnel: Thad Jones, cornet, flugelhorn; Cecil Bridgewater, trumpet (cut 3); George Adams, tenor sax, flute; George Lewis, trombone; Stanley Cowell, piano; Reggie Workman, bass; Lenny White, drums; Warren Smith, tympani (cuts 5, 6).

Tribute is a brilliant mixture of arranged and free jazz, with the strength of the compositions providing a firm foundation. Arranger Stadler, according to Robert Palmer's album notes, even warns in his score of *Bolivar* "don't improvise too long in order to avoid losing the continuity of the melody."

The 36-year-old Polish born Stadler, who settled in New York in the mid '60s while in his early 20s, studied harmony, composition and piano in both Europe and this country. His previous recorded work includes an arrangement for a James Moody Milestone album (*Mainstem on The Blues And Other Colors*) and several albums of his own on his label, Labor Records.

On this two record set he shows a strong debt to George Russell (who recorded his own version of *Au Privave* 16 years earlier) while never losing sight of the original works by Bird and Monk. Stadler even writes out, for the horns, Monk's solo on the original Riverside recording of *Bolivar* and then has Cowell improvise over it.

Obviously, these are far more than arrangements—recompositions would be a better term. The original melodies are broken up or pulled away from their original chord structure and often expressed polytonally. Stadler not only reworks the melodies (without ever losing sight of them) and the harmonies, sometimes having musicians play in different keys; he also plays with tempos and rhythms. The tempos as played by the different musicians sometimes get out of phase and different rhythms occasionally are layered together.

As important as Stadler's innovative writing is the playing by musicians who brilliantly handle all of the complexities of the scores, stretching out on solos and imbuing exciting musical ideas with exciting content.

Their solos do not always fall in traditional places. On all three Monk tunes, Stadler places drum solos at the start. The opening line of *Misterioso*—with its bouncing back and forth between parallel ascending and descending single note lines roughly three-fourths of an octave apart—is chaotically fragmented and leads into a duet by White and Smith on drums and tympani. (Monk himself used tymps at least once, on his *Bemsha Swing*.) Cowell interrupts with hints of the original melody which is finally stated by the horns. But again things are broken off, this time by Workman's bass. His solo begins with a breathy toned pizzicato, the notes alternately rushing and slowly throbbing out. Then it bursts into a mournful arco line, a falsetto-like cry which drops to a deep tone that leads back to the pizzicato throbs as the horns individually cut in with theme fragments.

A leaden drum solo—joined by bass and then the horns, all sounding as if the music was being dragged down—starts off *Bolivar* which sounds as much like Monk's blues as it does *Old Time Religion* or *The Star Spangled Banner*. Monk's music does not clearly enter until after Cowell begins his solo, when the horns play that transcription. The piano gets more rocking as the whole group bursts forth with a twisting, jerking rock section that would never be heard in any disco.

The remaining Monk piece, *Straight No Chaser*, is the freest piece on the album, with collective improvisation inserted between the tune's phrases. When the theme is finally stated in full, each horn plays it in a different key, coming in on a different beat. (Palmer's notes incorrectly refer to this as a canon.) A more traditional line-up of solos by Jones (with a clear, bright tone), Cowell and Workman (who even plays some walking bass) follows but with shifting tonal colors. A brief section of free improvisation brings the classic tune to an end.

The three Parker tunes, in comparison with Stadler's reworking of the Monk material, seem downright traditional—bright, swinging fare. Yet Stadler is still free with his use of time and tone and creates thick textures with the sextet.

These pieces open and close the collection, paving the way for the more abstract Monk tunes and then, at the conclusion, bringing the listener back down to a more familiar musical world. Here Lewis (on *Au Privave*) and Adams (on flute as well as tenor sax on *Perhaps*) get their best opportunities to express themselves, as well as Bird and Stadler, brilliantly handling the shifting tones and tempos.

But all eight performers handle themselves and the music with not just understanding but also appreciation and excitement from the young Lewis to, at more than twice his age, elder statesman Jones. Palmer refers to Stadler's work as giving "younger jazz musicians some great new ideas." But Lewis and White were the only musicians under 35 at the time of this recording—three were over 40 and three in their late 30s—and that is a tribute to the vibrancy of the music and its practitioners.

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