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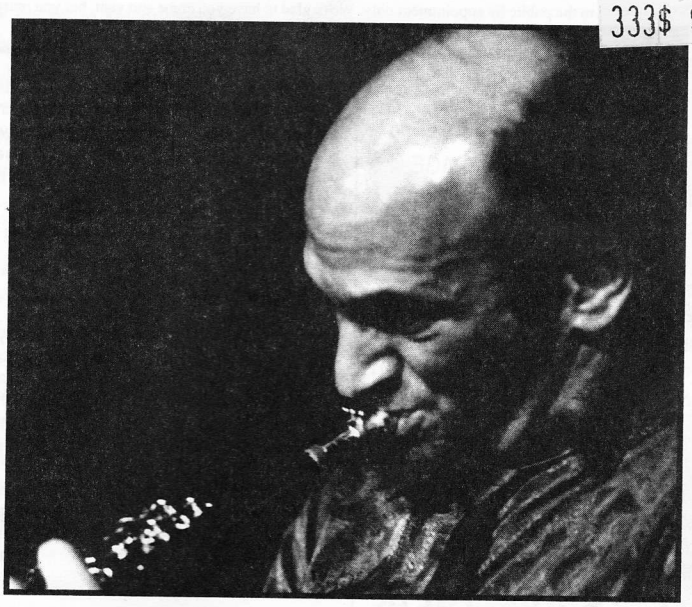
Cadence

THE REVIEW OF JAZZ & BLUES: CREATIVE IMPROVISED MUSIC

Interviews With:



David Liebman
and
Jason Hwang

News::Book Reviews::Record Reviews

e falling, and he goes, "YOU
LL YOURSELVES SAXO-
AYERS!!?? WHAT ARE YOU
BOUT??" (laughs) And then I
he did it to everybody. And all
like, "Aw, that's Sonny doin'
nd then Elvin said, "Oh, don't
e's always been like that, he's
herfucker!"
e we are with Monk, who didn't
This was his last tour, and from
as, like, in bed for ten years. He
aying on a table, or the floor, flat
sed, hands straight to his side
nice, Nellie, very nice, very
very verbal, very sociable, but
olutely looked like the walking
like green, his color was unbe-
d he never said a word. One
d him, and I said, "Hello, hello
nd he went (emits long groan),
cat was like Lon Chaney, man!
e the cat who was cool, above
, who of course was Mr. Person-
verybody feel comfortable.
n the first tour of your life with
..I didn't even know what was
cause we were in the middle
in never treated us that way;
Steve and Gene (Perla) and
really a nice feeling. We had
camaraderie, we loved be-
, it was obvious, we were in
m, and privileged to be with
e was in love with our energy,
us there. It was really a new
or him, I mean, we replaced
Frank Foster, and George
was a good marriage at the
nd he never gave us a vibe of
cension. He used to get high
ith us, we had nicknames for
nd stuff like that. And then to
ese cats, Mingus, and Can-
Sarah Vaughan. I mean they
ting, because by then when-
t anywhere, they were treated
This was in Europe, so they
isked in and whisked out, like
were kind of like peons. It was
great impressions.

Stroudsburg, PA,
3/16/98

Interview

Jason Hwang

Taken & Transcribed by Ed Hazell

CADENCE: When were you born and where?
JASON HWANG: I was born May 12, 1957 outside Chicago, born in Lake Forest hospital, but grew up in Waukhegen, which is about 40 minutes south of Chicago.
CAD: Are you first generation American?
J.H.: Yeah, my father came here in 1943 from Changsa, Hunan, China. He had won a Boxer Rebellion scholarship for medicine. The Boxer Rebellion happened around 1898 in China. It was a peasant uprising, which the dynasty used to try to its advantage to fight the foreign powers that were dividing China. Actually the whole history of the rebellion is clouded because so much of the journalism at the time was tabloid. What exactly happened is still debatable. But China lost and had to pay an indemnity. The United States used their portion of it to create a scholarship fund. So that's how my father came to America while the exclusion laws were still in effect. I think at its height, they only allowed 40 or 50 Chinese into the States in those years and you had to be a scholar or something like that.
CAD: And your mother?
J.H.: She came in 1950 on the last U.S. transport ship to leave mainland China just before the Communist take over. She, too, came under the exclusion laws, so my father had help from his employers to do the paper work. I guess I can say it now because they won't deport her (laughs). They created a job and a bank account and all that. It was very tough to get her in.
CAD: So they had known one another in China.
J.H.: Yeah, yeah. The War separated them for all those years. They were married here, in Chicago.
CAD: Did you feel any kind of cultural gulf between home and say, your school mates?
J.H.: It was there, but not something I could be conscious of until I matured into an adult. My sisters couldn't speak English when they first went to school – I'm the youngest – so they're bilingual. They had trouble communicating and understanding things in school. Being the youngest, at that point my parents decided that I should only learn English and would try to teach me Chinese later. Which of course, failed abysmally. For a lot of Chinese in the early '50s there was still the hope that the U.S. was going to re-invade the mainland and they would go back home. By the time I was born, it was clear that wasn't going to happen.
CAD: When did you start playing violin?
J.H.: I started playing classically in the school system in Waukhegan when I was eight. Then I came to New York to go to NYU – for film school, actually – and the loft Jazz scene was all around, in full bloom. Well, actually, in retrospect,

in the late '70s, I'd have to say that it was in its last phase.

In New York, I saw a flyer for this organization, Basement Workshop in Chinatown. It was a rock poets group. I went there for the poetry workshops and met other American-born Asians there for the first time. When I grew up, we were the only Chinese family in the town. There was a lot of isolation, although I wasn't aware of it. So a lot of political awareness came from Basement Workshop, a lot of nationalist thinking and Asian-American awareness. It was a group of artists dedicated to writing their own history and their own music and trying to define oneself on one's own terms in a more honest and broader way. I think that dream began with that generation that I was meeting. This was 1977 or 1978. I met a few people like Fay Chiang and Richard Oyama. This was at a time when federal and state funding was in full bloom, so Fay had raised almost a quarter of a million dollars and was providing day care, English classes, arts programs, all in Chinatown. There was a huge need for it. Of course, all that is gone now. It exists in different forms, now. And they had a jam session. I brought my violin and started playing at the jam sessions.

At the same time in college, a friend of mine, Kevin Jordan, was playing me records. I didn't listen to a lot of Jazz until I went to college. My parents didn't listen to music at all. So the first record Kevin played was Albert Ayler.

At the jam session, I met Will Connell, Jr., who was part of the California wave that included David Murray, Stanley Crouch, Arthur Blythe and those guys, who all arrived at about the same time. He introduced me to music. He liked what I was doing, even though I really didn't know what I was doing and introduced me to everybody. Denis Charles was just starting to play again, after not playing for many years, so he was at those sessions. Jay Oliver was the bass player.

We had a trio called Commitment. Commitment began as Will, Jay Oliver and myself. We started playing the lofts as much as we could. Later Jay started working with Steve Lacy and we started using William Parker. And Denis Charles joined us, but, well, we weren't making any money (laughs) and he started playing with James Newton at that time, so Takeshi Zen Matsuura played drums. The scene had a lot of the lofts, Lady's Fort, Environ, different galleries that are no longer around. Soundscape. Verna Gillis started to help us and we got into all her events within the Kool Jazz Festival. Eventually, after our record, we went to Moers and Groningen. That was our first time in Europe. We were around for the last of the loft scene. By '83, a lot of the lofts were being lost because of the high rents and the real estate conversions. Mayor Koch started to make Manhattan more upper class, basically.

CAD: The Commitment album came out in 1980, right?

J.H.: Yes, 1980, and we were together for two or three more years after that.

CAD: I remember seeing the band at the Sound Unity Festival in the summer of 1984.

J.H.: Really. Then we must have broken up in 1984 (laughs). I can't remember. We did record again, but we weren't happy with it and it was never released. I listened to it recently, and it's okay, but it didn't have the spark that I would want in a recording.

CAD: You went to college for film instead of music?

J.H.: I didn't know what I was doing (laughs). Film has had an influence on me. All the art forms kind of converge, and when I got older and had to figure out a more substantive way to make a living, I used my knowledge of post-production to write film scores. *Emperor's Eye* was my first real professional job. I just did a big job in January, *Born Under the Red Flag* by Sue Williams. It was just on PBS this year. It's a documentary about China after Mao and it completed her trilogy about China in the 20th Century.

From that, someone heard it and recommended me to Philip Glass, who was scoring *Kun Dun* for Scorsese. Out of the blue, they subcontracted me to do eight cues, basically in the style of some of the source music they were cutting to. That's what I did in August [1997]. It was really challenging. It was for orchestra, choir, and Chinese orchestra together. I had 55 people in the session, doing overdubs, so it actually sounds like a 100-piece orchestra. And one number with children's choir and orchestra. It was a tremendous experience. They haven't mixed it yet, but Philip came by for the rough mix and he is really a genuinely warm person. He'd hear a take and slap me on the leg and congratulate me like an old friend. Michael Riesman conducted most of the cues. His experience and his ears for multitrack production are amazing.

CAD: So you didn't conduct yourself?

J.H.: I conducted two of them. The more traditional Chinese pieces he asked me to conduct and he conducted all of the orchestral stuff. I was glad, because he's very experienced at that. He has a really gifted team.

CAD: You also made a film yourself, called *Afterbirth.* Tell me about it.

J.H.: I have big hair in it! It was the '70s and my hair – it didn't get long, it just got big. (laughs) I always wanted to grow my hair down to my shoulders, but it never got long, it just mushroomed. Actually it wasn't in full bloom in the film.

CAD: Your hair is a bit large on the cover of *Commitment.*

J.H.: But definitely not at its full potential.

The film had a poetic structure, with several themes weaving in and out. I had a Caucasian woman speaking Chinese to the camera, saying, "I was born in China and educated there, why don't you ask if I'm Chinese or not?" And then a Black character, who says, "I grew up across the street from her, is it because of my skin color that you say I'm not Chinese?" What I was trying to do was invert the American minority experience of what makes you. Is it your appearance? If you are born in a country and socialized in that country, as I was as a Chinese in America, what survives? This is how I was assimilating ideas from Basement Workshop about cultural identity.

There's another part in it where one of my classmates is talking to his grandmother, who's doing some Buddhist chants. She tells a story of how Buddhism saved her life during this one incident in a plane. It's not sinking in to him. It's meant to show some of the differences. Another one is Fay looking for her father's grave in Queens and getting lost because the cemetery is so huge. She does this ritual for him, but she doesn't know what it means, but she was taught this. That to me is the question, I guess. There has to be a certain spiritual faith in who you are.

Now, it took me many years, but I hear it in the music. People ask me what in my music is Asian and I think that there is evidence of cultural survival that accounts for why I play with a certain feel or quality, all those intangibles that you can't quantify. I think I watched how my father moved his head when he talked or how my mother walked across a room, body language. I think that creates your instincts and it's your instincts that your music flows through.

It's possible to train it all out of you. But it may not be possible. I saw this video in a restaurant of a Broadway-type singer in Japan. And she was singing standards. Was she singing in Japanese? She might have been. Anyway, beautiful voice. But at the end of certain phrases, her vibrato would slow to a certain tempo much slower than a Westerner and it was a little more guttural, deeper in the chest. And it sounded to me like *gagaku.* It would just be for me in the shadow in her tone, in the vibrato. But I said, ah ha! You didn't get rid of *that,* did you?

CAD: I've heard you acknowledge Borah Bergman as an important figure in your career.

J.H.: When did I meet Borah? When did I start playing with Butch Morris?

CAD: The first recording I know of you with Butch is from 1989.

J.H.: Yeah, so I must have started in the mid '80s. Oh definitely. I think by '84 I was playing with him. In fact he heard me with Commitment at the Ladies Fort, our very first gig. So I played with him all through the '80s. I'm terrible with years. Anyway, Borah came to a concert I did with Butch at Roulette. And he invited me up to his apartment for one of his legendary sessions. Everybody's been to Borah's apartment and played with him. Borah's a very giving person. He's obsessive about his technique and the music. And I think obsessive in the best way; he's trying to attain his potential at the highest level possible. And that resonated with my personality. He was good to have as a mentor for a period. For someone to say, "You can do that better. Don't be like the rest of these guys. If you want to play that phrase and play it with authority, you need to do this. You need better bowing technique."

CAD: He's not shy about offering advice.

J.H.: No, no. But at a certain period of my life, that was good for me. A lot of guys talk about playing from the unconscious. Which is a lot of the yoga influence from Coltrane onwards. Satchidananda. And I still believe in that and in Zen and everything. It's very much a part of the improvisational process. But Borah encouraged me to master conventional knowledge more. And I started to do that, reading books about harmony and orchestration, taking classes with different people to get information. Which at my age isn't easy – even my age then, when I was in my 30s – if you want information to grow it's rather humbling. If you say you want to grow, then you almost have to strip yourself down and say I don't have this together yet. You have to break out of a mold. And actually there's a pain quotient there. It's difficult stuff to take. And I hope I'm not still afraid to do that. There's a lot of pressures in society *not* to do that. You have to present yourself as if "I'm it and deal with it!" When what you *don't* know is your strength. I could give you examples of musicians who have done that, but I don't want to make them sound bad. I think that's conditioned by the market place.

CAD: You recorded on a couple of Henry Threadgill's Very Very Circus albums.

J.H.: Yeah, just on the records, to add a sound here or there. I only performed with them once or twice. I first performed with Henry at the Public Theatre in the early '80s for music he wrote for a costume designer who made those 19th century puffy dresses made out of garbage bags. So they staged this fashion show.

CAD: Tell me about *Glass Shadows.*

J.H.: It was Sirone on bass, Zen Matsuura on drums, Tsuji on percussion, two vibes players, Wilson Moorman and Brian Carrott. We played around the city in 1985. I know we played the Kool Jazz Festival that July, so I must have formed the band that year. Then, a few years after that, *Sky Sing* with Elliot Sharpe on double neck bass-guitar and bass clarinet on one piece, Carol Emanuel on harp, and Jeff Gordon on hand percussion. In fact Howard Mandel recorded a concert by that band and did a radio show of it. On the radio show Elliot actually plays a solo bass clarinet version of a kind of lyrical piece that ended up on *Urban Archaeology,* "Mizu." I don't mean this as an insult to Elliot, but he has this lyrical side that he doesn't play that often (laughs). He sounded good.

CAD: And what about *Unfolding Stone*?

J.H.: Oh yeah, Mark Dresser and Jeff Ford, that was afterwards. It must have been 1989, because I had been playing *M. Butterfly* for at least a year. Butch Morris played a New Music America festival and did a week at the Whitney. He was working with Pedro de Frietas of Sound Aspects, so Pedro got to hear me every day. So after we recorded, Pedro knew me through Butch. And also Borah Bergman was real generous in urging him to release the recording. And I felt really lucky, I think both Butch and Borah were supportive. It's very hard for someone who hasn't released anything to get something out there.

CAD: Some of the music on the album was written for an animated film?

J.H.: That's right, I think I did that before *Emperor's Eye.* When I was out of college, I worked at NYU as a day job for about three years. And I knew the animation teachers Richard Protovin and Franklin Backus. *Unfolding Stone* was Franklin's film. He took a series of about 20 still photographs, and using color Xerography and animation, documented this Noguchi exhibit in Japan. The camera traveled through it using the parameters of these 20 still shots.

CAD: Any larger scale works or ensembles?

J.H.: I've done some work with larger ensembles, but it's hard to pull off, raise money for. I almost feel like I benefited from the end of an era. I got the last NEA grant round, the last New Jersey State Council, the last New York State Council.

CAD: You have a knack for coming in at the end, don't you. The end of the loft scene, the end of government funding (laughs).

J.H.: I really feel that way. The Far East Side Band played at the Whitney. Five months later, the curator has moved on. I was supposed to play at the Composer Forum, but got canceled because it closed. I played at the Alternative Museum, they no longer book music. I played at P.S. 122, they no longer book music.

CAD: That's actually quite appalling when you add it all up.

J.H.: There are six or seven new music presenters in New York, who have simply stopped. I mean, each did 12 concerts a year in their heyday? So 70, 80 concert opportunities a year are gone. And the younger generation don't feel like the old ones remember. So they play in coffee houses for free. In New York, a great deal of that support structure, that elation that an artist feels when you get accepted to play in a paid series, that structure is almost gone. I think. I don't know what the creative response will be.

CAD: You mentioned *M. Butterfly* before. Did you meet Yukio while you were playing *M. Butterfly?*

J.H.: No, we met in the early '80s. I forget who introduced us, but we started playing as a duo. Then this producer, Yuki Watanabe, he'd produced different events in the night clubs, so we started playing at Danceteria, the Pyramid, as part of a package of artists he'd present at clubs. We got some good reviews. But I was so focused on Commitment that I didn't really develop that relationship. We didn't play together again until *M. Butterfly.* And then from the years doing that show – it's a pretty grueling eight shows a week – I thought, when this ends, we'll do something of our own.

CAD: Did you arrange music and act in the play?

J.H.: Well, no, I had an on-stage appearance. Yukio and I were arrangers of the music.

CAD: How did the Far East Side Band come together? I think you've drawn some very diverse approaches into one group.

J.H.: Sang Wong Park I met…I did a film for J.T. Takagi, called *Homes Apart: Korea,* about the separation of families between North and South Korea, and I needed a kayagum on the score and I had heard of Sang Wong Park. He actually lived a block away from me in the Village: I was on 6th and he was on 5th, but I had never met him (laughs). Oh, wait, I did meet him. I was working with Cobi Narita, helping her produce the Asian American Jazz Festival at the Universal Jazz Coalition. A bunch of musicians were helping her, and I was one of them. And we were talking about who to have in the festival and I brought up Sang Wong Park. He ended up doing a solo set

that was just remarkable. He has his own way of making music that's really strong. So then when I got the job with J.T. Takagi two or three years later I hired him for the score. Once again, I could really feel his originality and that edge of creative expression. There's a presence in his sound. Then Yukio and I did *Butterfly*.

And after that, I went to Korea with Sin Cha Hong, the choreographer. She's made a big appearance in New York in the early '70s. New York critics just embraced her and she worked with John Cage and that's how her fame grew in Korea. She's very famous in Korea. She wanted to do some vocal concerts with her dance. I don't know who recommended me to her, but I went over to Korea with her twice. Once alone, and we collaborated with some traditional musicians. The second time with David Simons playing octapads – MIDI; we did a concert with Samul Nori. Both experiences were my first times traveling to Asia. Also Sin Cha is very original. I remember we were invited to a rehearsal of Samul Nori on the first trip, and they were doing a big concert with violinists from the Seoul Philharmonic and Buddhist pianist, with a pensori singer and an opera singer. I was working a lot with Butch Morris at the time and I thought, wow, this is like a group that Butch would put together. So I asked him if he knew Butch and he said no.

It made me realize that certain ideas are of our time and there was this need at this time for people who have been in very separate disciplines to get together to see if we can create. And the experience with Butch, how he put really different people together and through his conductions made music, revealed what might be possible. And meeting some musicians who came out of a very different tradition, but who are modernists in that the modernist is someone who seeks a personal expression beyond any particular tradition. So a drummer like Kim Dai Hwang could use folk rhythms in his drumming, but he had three sticks in each hand so he could strike any of his three drums or cymbals with either stick – mallet, brush, or hard stick. There are a lot of interesting people.

When I came back I said, as an experiment I want to find other Asian Americans who are modernists. Yukio and I are already simpatico; it's always been easy for us to play together. And I thought of Sang Wong Park because he's so original. We gigged around the city developing it. The material was developed out of jam sessions. There are areas where we don't work well, there are areas where we do work well. So as a composer, I started to create structures that employed both areas, within a narrative. Like a lot of the music I'm been involved in, the music is invested by the players. But through the composition or the architecture, it can be shaped into a story of some sort.

They are both such powerful players because they come from the heart and they're very different. Yukio has such percussive colors and his time breathes in a way that is very individual. And Sang Wong, too, has his own way. And after the years of playing with it, I've found my own ways to connect the group, to bridge ideas. I think one of the things I like to do is get inside the other person's language and try to entwine and then emerge in the sound.

And Joe Daley I met a long time ago at MOBI, the Musicians of Brooklyn Initiative. We did one large group thing together. Tuba is an instrument not everyone is familiar with, but Joe worked with Sam Rivers. He's one of the pioneers in reintroducing the tuba to modern music. Joe is a musicians' musician, a complete player.

CAD: It seems like an unusual choice to add to that ensemble.

J.H.: Well, it was and it wasn't. First of all, I knew that Joe was very open-minded. And Joe liked the challenge. He's very erudite, you know, and he knows the history of his instrument and the music and he said, this is something new for the tuba and he wanted to take on the challenge. And because he is a consummate musician, he adjusts to what the band needs or what he hears, but still retains his own thing. He plays different with Gravity. There was that space, orchestrationally for the bottom, and his tone and his lyrical quality has a transparency, so it doesn't obscure anything else in the group. And he was already interested in electronics.

I was interested in that myself from playing in Butch's group with J.A. Deane, a trombonist who is really creative with electronics. He pulled me into it for a bit. For now, I think I'm going to let it rest and I'm going to play acoustically with the band for a while.

CAD: Let's go back and talk about your experiences with Butch Morris some more.

J.H.: Well, sometimes there is music to rehearse and Butch will improvise a structure. A lot of times, rehearsals are to get the ensemble to understand his visual language and learn how to be attentive, too. I'm always grateful to Butch because he gave me a chance to play. When he was developing his music from when he did real Jazz-oriented stuff, when Jimmy Lyons was a featured soloist, we played at JazzMania Society one night and Ahmed Abdullah would take some burning trumpet solos; Philip Wilson was the drummer one night. So when he made the transition to, I don't know, what's called Downtown new music, I did a lot of gigs with him from the holes in the wall to the Whitney. He gave me a chance to play.

CAD: His ensembles could be widely different from one another, too.

J.H.: Right. He had a traditional big band, and he moved to using marimba and vibes a lot. Me and Billy Bang were in a lot of the early groups. Vincent Chancey was always in the group. He always had different configurations. He conducts a flow, but he needs from the band strong ideas and then he can work with them. He needs creative people in his group, because if no one plays anything worth listening to, what's he going to conduct? So he always had interesting people in the band. We haven't played together in a little while, because he's worked more in Europe. Like I said before, New York has less and less to offer people like Butch.

CAD: I'd like to fill in a few of your other important associations. Let's talk about your association with Anthony Braxton.

J.H.: Joe Fonda recommended me. I did a concert with him up at Wesleyan and a great concert with him in Istanbul [issued on Braxton House]. And then I started doing his orchestral stuff after he got his MacArthur, a concert series at the Kitchen, an opera he did at Fordham Law School. Anthony inspires everyone around him; he's just so positive and full of enthusiasm and ideas. When I was working on my own opera, *Immigrant of the Womb,* and I was again working on a deadline situation, I thought about him. I told myself to just write freely, not to worry about good or bad, just write. I think he has that kind of effect. He's the Zen master, he really flows with his gifts. I think that's a big part of his greatness.

CAD: Tell me more about *Immigrant of the Womb.*

J.H.: I didn't have any money for it at first. But Far East Side Band played at a concert organized by David White at Dance Studio Workshop. He was really encouraging. I was having a tough time financially and wanted to do a large project. My father had been very ill for years and taken a turn for the worse, so it was a very tough time. But he (David) and Neil Brilliant, his development director, helped me write the NEA grant. And I needed help. I had never approached the funding scene before. Years ago I had written off the funding system because I felt what I did didn't apply to it. And it's true. If you're interested in leading an ensemble, the funding system doesn't support that. But they do fund larger projects. And Diedre Murray, the cellist, who I started working with around then, also encouraged me because she had started doing music theater projects. So I said, okay I'll try it. The NEA grant came in June or July, but I had already, without any money, told David to set a date in February for the performance. I said it without a penny. The grant money came in and I thought okay, I have a little breathing room. But then I got the call from Braxton, and I couldn't really turn that down. So I was at it day and night by December.

CAD: What's it about?

J.H.: It's autobiographical to a certain extent. There are two characters who metaphorize into different people. They're loose in that they embody different points of view from which the words can flow. He's a boxer; I was thinking about my father coming here on the Boxer Rebellion scholarship. She is a long distance swimmer. Then later, they change into characters living in the states and there are some incidents from my childhood. In one movement for the boxer, he sets himself on fire. It's the burning of delusions, but also entering a new life. It stems I think from my concern about my father's illness, but also my changing relationship to music. The story of the female character comes from

an incident in my mother's life as a refugee. Her moment of faith comes when she's running down some railroad tracks and bombs were going off, limbs were literally flying past her. When she couldn't run anymore, she stopped by this tree and just prayed until the bombing stopped. I think it was the Japanese bombing at the time. So a lot of stuff like that. It was scored for violin, viola, cello, dhung, pipa, harp, tuba, multiple reeds, percussion, vibes, and instruments designed by a friend of mine, Daniel Nauke, who created this harp sculpture and orchestra chime sculpture. And bass-baritone and soprano singers. I tried to get a second performance, but to really do it the way I wanted, which would be to add more strings and maybe work with a director to stage it, it would cost so much. I called up the Walker Arts Center and they told me they lost $200,000 in funding this year. So taking it to the next level will take new methods. Maybe I'll find a way, but I'm also going to move on, too.

CAD: It strikes me that with your experience in film as well as music, that opera is a natural fit for you.

J.H.: It's fun. It's fun. I think Philip Glass, Anthony Davis, Fred Ho certainly were some of the people I knew about who brought new music into opera. None of us is alone, someone is always there to point the way. I have the beginnings of another project, and I'm talking to novelists for the libretto, I'd like to collaborate on the next one. I'm a finalist for a three-year residency in Chinatown, with Asia Society, Museum of Chinese in the Americas, Music from China. They formed a partnership to write the grant that would support me to work in the community. At the end of the three years, I will create a music theater work, that's part of it. I'm going to create a nondenominational, secular choral repertoire based on the oral histories of the community for the churches in Chinatown. I bring in a group of professional musicians to tour the churches and then have music that a church choir could handle.

CAD: Is there an Asian-American music community in New York that's similar to the one in San Francisco?

J.H.: No, not really. I think our musics are so different. Maybe among the younger players. I mean when I was in my 20s, with Cobi Narita we put together festivals, so we would interact. I mean, there's a pretty wide ranging aesthetic, and we haven't organized in the same way.

What Mark Izu and Francis [Wong] did with the Asian Improv label is amazing. When I was touring Russia with Vladimir [Tarasov], the connoisseurs would approach me and want to know how to contact Asian Improv Records. And they would know about *Commitment*. I mean we pressed about 1,000, we sold about 300 and I've got about 500 in my closet. (laughs) So those are small numbers for a guy in Moscow to ask me about it. So the word of the music gets around.

CAD: Have you had much contact with the Asian-American musicians in San Francisco?

J.H.: I played a solo concert at the festival in 1988, I think. And haven't really played that much with them. When any of them come to New York, we hang out. And I'm going with the Far East Side Band to Chicago next month to play in Tatsu's festival [The Asian American Jazz Festival organized by bassist Tatsu Aoki]. And I'll play a duet with Tatsu. Francis [Wong] will be there. But we haven't really played together much. We should. I jammed with Mark and Miya Masaoka at Asia Society in New York once.

You know some people, like Tatsu and Braxton, have this tremendous drive to record. Same with Dominic [Duval] and Borah [Bergman], they're older guys and they really need to record. I'm trying to learn from them. I just haven't had the same drive to record as them. I don't know why. I guess when I listen to recordings, I'm just too critical.

CAD: When you played last night, did you play compositions or was it all improvised?

J.H.: I was going to write something for the concert, but when I practiced I found it was strongest if I stayed spontaneous. But I practiced vocabulary ideas. I knew I was going to play an arco introduction and somehow transform it into a pizzicato middle section and then come back to arco at the end. I knew I wanted to work with the blues at some part. I practice a lot, and I try to get into a state of mind where I wasn't interested in showing off what I practiced. When you work on technique and then you have a gig, you sort of want to say, hey, check this out! (laughs) And I've done that before without being conscious of it, and it doesn't have the vitality of the moment. So I try to think of personal stories in my head and stay in the moment that way. Because thinking of technique takes you out of moment. And then with technique, I found I didn't get to play everything I practiced (laughs). It's a slow process, it starts to seep into me in a deeper way and come out without my thinking about it. That's the great thing about playing solo, the strength of it is you're free to organize spontaneously. Whereas with a group, to get different personalities on the same wavelength, having something on paper helps.

CAD: I'm intrigued with your association with Vladimir Tarasov. How did it happen?

J.H.: He was collaborating with his old friend, Ilya Kabakov, the social realist painter at BAM. And a theme throughout Kabakov's painting has been his years when he had to share an apartment with another family – housing is terrible in Moscow. With strangers. It's a really uncomfortable life, a lot of fighting, it really brings you down. So a lot of his painting was out of that. He still paints about it. Vladimir knows what that's about, so he wrote music for something they called *The Flies*, about the flies in the kitchen of this apartment, and David Dorfman the choreographer had dancers in fly costumes. He was supposed to do it with Malcolm Goldstein and Mark Dresser. He worked with Mark since they met in the early '80s, when the Ganelin Trio was coming out, I think. I don't know what the connection with Malcolm was. But Malcolm couldn't do it, so Mark recommended me. Actually Malcolm did, too. They both take credit, so I must owe them money or something (laughs). So we hit it off. His material felt familiar to me. I mean it's original, but how he thinks is very congenial to the way I think. We have a shared background in improvisation. And Mark I've known for years. We had long rehearsals, because in the theater they rehearse a lot. And Mark hooked us up with a night at the Knitting Factory and then Malcolm was in town, so we played together, which was great. Afterward, Vladimir called me to tour in a trio with Peter Viel, an oboe player. Peter is a total virtuoso and has written the classic book of extended technique for the oboe. I didn't know him prior to the tour. He was born in Australia, lives in Germany. He met Vladimir at this artist's colony called Solitude in Germany. We played Vladimir's music.

We'll get together again in fall '98 for a tour of Germany and his group, which he now calls the Ensemble for New Improvised Music, we'll go to the Beijing Jazz Festival. Far East Side Band is going to the festival also, so I'll get to play twice. I have some relatives in Beijing on my mother's side whom I've never met. I don't have much of a sense of extended family because my parents couldn't even write to their families until after the Nixon years. I'm just amazed that music is bringing me back.

CAD: Will this be your first time to China?

J.H.: Yes, the first time. I have an uncle who retired and wrote to my mother that since he's retired, he's started writing music. Can you believe it? No one in my family has anything to do with music. So I'll make some tapes – I don't know if he has a CD player – and that should be a kick.

CAD: That might be a good start for your oral history project.

J.H.: Yeah, that's true. I guess I'll have to learn some Chinese before I go (laughs).

CAD: I want to ask you about Jerome Cooper. That quintet album is one of my favorites.

J.H.: We gigged in Nickelsdorf one year and that was it. To prepare for Nickelsdorf we played a few days in the basement of this restaurant that had been a sauna or something like that. The acoustics were a little bouncy! (laughs)

But you know, I've played with everyone in the Revolutionary Ensemble. I played with Sirone for two weeks in Berlin once, I played with Jerome, and I've played with Leroy as recently as last summer with Diedre Murray. And each one of them is so powerful and original. What a group. I remember I played with Sirone in his apartment once, a rehearsal for the gig in Berlin, and the piece we played was so much out of the *feeling* of Albert Ayler.

CAD: You've also been in some of Reggie Workman's bands.

J.H.: If I could put my thanks in to someone, I'd have to start with Reggie Workman, who had a lot of faith in me, and all the players in his bands. He's a great

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kies" and his ballad side on "I Thought ." Saindon does turn in a few impressive ably on his blazing feature in "Avalon," or nterpretation of "Deed I Do." Yet, the ma- e session's memorable playing is done emen.

Jon Morgan

RDO BARAJ, GA BORGEANA, E 001.

longa Borgeana / De Villa Cramer / Blues Pampa / La asero / Esperando a Juancito / La Barajeda / Tu / Zamba Pan De Dios, Jamón Del Diablo / Batallando Con La Marce / Nostalgias. 62:03.

ss, flt; Alejandro Mansoni, p, accordion; Galimany, b; Maraiana Baraj, vcl, perc; Marcelo uenos Aires, May, 1998.

album is a tribute to Argentinean writer s Borges. Borges was a master at raising ical questions while creating art steeped Any tribute to him, in any format, would be sed to match his spicy wit. Baraj's attempt picy playing with the rough edges removed. esn't satisfy the palate at all. Where Borges to be playful and light without compromis- rt, Baraj only manages to be playful and musicians are more than competent, with t showing through the smoothed over sur- e music; there's plenty here that tries to from beneath those smoothed over edges. surface that makes this album ultimately ssful. All the rough edges have been pol- ay, but it's the rough edges that make art g, that set Jazz apart from pop music. I think n could have been something much more Much of it reminds me of the "spicy" food ved to tourists, with the spice muted for their id palates. Borges wasn't one to write for ted palates. It's a shame that Baraj did so in e to Borges.

Eric Saidel

orrections & Additions

chael Weiss interview Part 2:
st column, line 29: Billy Johnson should be nny Johnson.
nd column, line 16 should read "...paid me an vance..."

p.9, 1st column, line 7 should read "...McLaughlin, I was leaving just after he got there." 2nd column, line 16 should read "...It was at Lush Life, a club across the street from the Village Gate. I got the job,..."

p. 11 2nd column, line 16 should read "I went to Europe with Junior Cook and Bill Hardman in 1986."

p. 15, 1st column, line 28 should read "Then we played together in a tribute to Pepper Adams at Jazz Interactions."

p.20, 1st column, line 4 should read "It was part of the Resident Associate Program series."

8/99, p.121-2: Jim Laniok informs us that Sachi Hayasaka is a woman.

Jason Hwang

Continued from page 29

teacher without saying anything. He says so much on the bandstand. He's one of the great poets on any instrument.

Another great string player I've been working with is Diedre Murray. I was in her string quartet, Unstrung, with Leroy Jenkins and Newman Baker on drums, and Shawn Philips was the bassist.

And as long as I'm mentioning people, I should also mention that I played in Makonda Ken McIntyre's big band for a couple years. He had a loft downtown and led a Saturday rehearsal band. We did a series of loft gigs with guest horn players like Henry Threadgill, Arthur Blythe, and Clifford Jordan. I remember on the gig with Jordan, they decided Clifford would trade fours with the tenor player in the band, a young guy. At the time, Jordan didn't have a very big tone, and this young guy blew him off the stand with this big tone. Right. Then Jordan plays, and by the third or fourth exchange this guy with the big sound had run out of ideas and Clifford's brilliance just shone through. That was a moment that taught you about the music, right there. I feel like I've had just a wonderful destiny to play with the people I've played with and experience the richness of the music.

Cambridge, MA,
September 27, 1997

☆News☆Short Takes

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Center (312/742-1174) hosts **John Wolf Brennan** 9/17 and **Ensemble Noamnesia & John Wolf Brennan (w/Jeb Bishop, Fred Lonberg-Holm)** 9/19 (these shows are free)...Artemisia Gallery presents **Carol Genetti/Eric Leonardson/Andrea Polli** 9/11...Nervous Center features **Jeremy Ruthrauff/Kurt Johnson/Michael Zerang** 9/12 and **Carol Genetti/Tatsu Aoki** Duo 9/19...**The Flying Luttenbachers, Fred Lonberg-Holm** and the **Pomerleau/Ruthrauff/Zerang** Trio appear 9/3 at the Fireside Bowl...The **Terence Blanchard** Sextet performs 9/4 at the Old Town School of Folk Music (773/728-6000)...The Chicago Jazz Festival runs through Labor Day weekend 9/2-5 in Grant Park. On the main stage: **Henry Johnson** 4tet, **Chick Corea** & Origin (w/**Gary Burton**), **Count Basie** Orchetra 9/2; **Maggie Brown, George Freeman** 3, **Masada, Legends** feat. **Tommy Flanagan, Johnny Griffin** & **Phil Woods** 9/3; **Combs/Novak** 8tet, **Lavay Smith, Sam Rivers** Orchestra w/**Ray Anderson** & **Hamiet Bluiett, Danilo Perez** trio 9/4; **Fletcher Basington, The Duke's Men, Marian McPartland** trio, **Asian-American Jazz Orchestra** 9/5. On the second stage: **Marlene Rosenberg** 4tet, Tribute to Hoagy Carmichael, **Barrelhouse Chuck, Stu Katz, Frank Catalano** trio 9/4; "Beltway to Bronzeville" w/**Gallery 37 Jazz Band, Joanie Pallato** 4tet, **DKV Trio** w/**Ray Anderson** & **Hamiet Bluiett, Sir Roland Hanna** w/**Rufus Reid** 9/5. This year the festival features for the first time a Children's stage where various local musicians (**Howard Levy, Jackie Allen, Douglas Ewart**...) will conduct workshops. This festival is a free