Wavelength (December 1980)

Connie Atkinson

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Wavelength

Johnny Vidacovich
Fess's Drummer Is a Jazz Master

Also—
Bruce Springsteen
Albert Collins
Huey 'Piano' Smith
B.B. King

DECEMBER 1980 VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2
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Cover photo by Owen Murphy

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Johnny Vidacovich Fess's Drummer Is A Jazz Master

BY YORKE CORBIN

Johnny Vidacovich is one of the brightest people I've met. His musical intelligence is obvious, of course, to anyone who's heard him play--and in this town plenty of people have. Vidacovich is a virtuoso jazz drummer who works, one of the few progressive jazz musicians in New Orleans who always has a gig. Along with bass-man James Singleton, he's the driving force behind most of the ensembles that play at Tyler's; on Saturdays he's sometimes sitting in with Ramsey McLean and the Lifers at Faubourg. In the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg. I n the ten days before I talked with him, he'd played dates at Faubourg.

An album he played on last year, Professor Longhair's Crawfish Fiesta, recently won the W.C. Handy Award as the best blues album of the year, and Vidacovich has just wrapped up work on Ron Cuccia's new album, which is due out in January. At thirty-one, this bantam rooster of a drummer, John Vidacovich, doesn't need to crow; his accomplishments testify eloquently to his ability.

But the man can talk. "Just toss your coat on a drum," he told me genially when I showed up at his house on one of his few nights off. Breaking out a bottle of wine, Vidacovich held forth for a couple of hours, kept on after my tape had run out. He had a good deal to say about music, as the excerpts that follow will show, but he kept the talk focused on the thinking behind his music as well, on the reslient humor that frees him to take necessary risks in his art.

It's the sense of humor, man--when you're playing music, if you use a good bit of humor, it's easier to play with other musicians; things don't become so serious and maybe frighten one's expression. If you're intimidated by the seriousness of another performer on the stand, sometimes that might freeze you up. It's hip to use a good percentage of humor so you can communicate with the other musicians more readily, and make the music happen easier. Humor's very important in any kind of art, especially an art where it's going to take more than one person to do it.

I don't know a lot about music, but there are other elements that you can respond to, that you can key yourself toward. Humor works that way for me. There are nonmusical things that you can pick up on...

Right, definitely. Communication is the secret word. Anytime you can respond to anything, communication has been made. That's the first thing you're supposed to do in playing music, is communicate.

It's hard. The audience has to communicate back. You're putting in a hell of a lot of input, and if the audience doesn't respond, it's like pissing in the wind.

Do you feel that way a lot?

Well, barrooms can make you feel like that. Sometimes you feel that the audience isn't really listening. But I don't feel like that a lot. Usually there's people out there listening to you. I've been lucky enough to play good gigs. Lately I've felt that people listen when we play.

Are the audiences in other places much different from the ones in New Orleans?

Yeah. People here are a little more rowdy, and they're smarter, a little more particular, sometimes. I'm not going to say critical, but you have to be a good musician around here to get somebody to listen to you, let's put it that way. I'm not patting myself on the back; I just think that it's a good test. If you can get some of the people in Tyler's to listen to you, then, hey, you're doing all right.

By the third set, you usually separate the men from the boys, when it comes to listening. It's the listeners who come in. Either that or the really outrageous drunks--but it tends to be more listeners in the latter part of the evening.

What did Mose Allison think of playing at Tyler's?

He seemed to be happy the whole time he was playing. He doesn't say much, you have to just get the feelings from him, and the feelings I got were on the bandstand. He had momentum, so I guess he was comfortable. He didn't like all the cigarette smoke.

We'd never worked together as a band, we were just backing him up, so he had to help us a little bit too. He always had a smile on his face. He always sounded really good to me, so he had to help us a littl bit too. He always had a smile on his face. He always sounded really good to me, so he had to help us a little bit too. He always had a smile on his face. He always sounded really good to me, so he had to help us a littl bit too. He always had a smile on his face. He always sounded really good to me, so he had to help us a little bit too. He always had a smile on his face.
Humor's very important in any kind of art, especially music

humor, and you might stand a better chance. When you get too serious, you scare people. We don't want anybody to see God; we just want them to see the light. They're liable to feel enlightened; they're liable to feel the joy.

Allison really seemed to enjoy the interspersed drum and piano, the dialogue he was doing with you. What felt so amazing was in the moments he picked to come in precisely. It always had the feeling of being the right moment, but there was no way I could figure out any pattern to what he was doing.

Right. That's one of the things about Mose's music. It has an arrangement or a pattern; it's like country music, in a sense. But it won't follow that pattern precisely. The music is flexible. When you start improvising with Mose, start that counterplay, we know that we're getting ready to come back in, and we've got to find just the right spot.

I think I have a pretty good picture of what Mose's music is like, even though I don't think I have it coped. It's a hard style because he's such an individual. Around here I've been fortunate enough to play behind a lot of different people, and do a fairly decent job of coping the style they're into, but Mose's music is more of a challenge, because of the individuality and the primitiveness of it, the basic thing about it. Pretty challenging.

You seemed much more subdued playing with Mose Allison than you did with Joe Henderson at the Toulouse. It seemed like you were right up there challenging Joe Henderson.

Well, not challenging. There was more room for me to stretch out as an individual. With Mose, you're definitely playing his music, his style. Mose is a singer; you have to make sure the words are getting across, you can't be bashing away, playing all kind of crazy stuff while somebody is trying to sing a message.

Joe Henderson is a bebopper, straight-ahead bebop. "Let's go, now we're playing bebop, boys. Let's play, time to play now." So you just put on your shoes and start going.

Was playing with Professor Longhair hard?

At first, yeah. You've got to cop the style, the music has a style of its own;
you are secondary. You have to make sure you're doing the music justice, playing the style of the music the way the man wants it played. It's not like playing a be-bop gig where you can just go in and play a blues in F and everybody can stretch out. The challenge is in the task, in the job. When you take a job like playing with Fess you're not worried about expressing yourself, but about doing a good job. Through your good job is the way you express yourself.

It took me about three weeks of being on the road to learn the music; he was a very patient man. He also insisted that the drummer keep him going. Like he told me in the studio, "Just keep kicking. Keep going right on me. Keep going right on me. Just keep pushing." I'd say, "Okay, Fess. Let's go, babe."

He used to call me Jawaski. Couldn't say Vidacovich. Where he got Jawaski from I'll never know. Johnny Jawaski. Cracked me up. I'd say, "Okay, bra, that's my name. Okay, Fess."

One New Orleans musician I always associate with you is Ramsey McLean. When did you meet him?

It was several years ago. We were both a couple of hippies. I had just quit playing at the Playboy Club. It must have been around '74, maybe '75. He was playing very free music, and I had been coming from the traditional side, but I decided to try to approach this music, get into it. That's how we got together. He talked to me one day in a health food restaurant on Maple Street. We got together, had a rehearsal at his house. We've been in and out ever since then.

That was the first time he started to get together concerts of his own music, to the best of my knowledge. And we were really out there with the stars, man—I mean the stars in space. Really free.

I'm glad that he became successful, and I'm glad that I worked with him in his very beginning stages, because, like I said, I was a cat coming from a real traditional, established side of music. Here I was hooked up with this guy. I kind of think that his ouitness and my illness at the time made a perfect vehicle for the community...to make no decisions.

You know what I'm saying? I'm sick of giving people the opportunity to make a decision. I like to put them in a place where they can't make no decision; they just have to be part of it. The people had to think, "Huh? Whatever you two guys say..." At that time in the beginning, I think he and I had a strong meaning for our meeting. He didn't know nothing about the inside, and I didn't know nothing about the outside. But together we figured it out.

What kind of developments do you see for the future? How do you figure the jazz scene here will look in the next five years or so?

I don't know, man. I think a lot of people are going to change. I just have a feeling. I think it's going to get better, because there's going to be more out-of-town people coming in, more name people. People are getting used to it. Tyler's started to do it. Alvin Batiste started to bring in guys like Joe Henderson and Jack Dejohnette. Just what we've done in the last two years, as far as bringing special people down with the help of the Contemporary Arts Center, and Batiste, and thank God for Tyler's, that's pretty much shown that the people here will respond, and do have a healthy attitude to go out and support special events. I think special events will get better because of that. It'll stimulate a more active attitude for the local people.

It has for me. Before I'd just go out and play any gig. Now I can be selective. Lately I have been fortunate enough to make a living playing good music. If things get rough I might wind up having to play anything that comes along. I've done that too; I've played circuses and a million weddings. But lately I've been lucky enough to have gigs where I could play what I want or play behind hip people. Lucky. I'm a lucky guy.

What makes a difference is that you're performing and somebody's listening to you. Yeah, that's what's hard to get across down here, too. When you can achieve that, when you get one person to listen to you, you've done it, man. You've made that sacred act of communication, the ultimate in any art.

If you expose people to something, you stand a better chance. Expose them to the light. Just a little light, that's all they need, man. Show somebody a little light, and you stand a pretty good chance.
James Booker, the self-proclaimed "Piano Prince of New Orleans," is probably the finest keyboardist in our city. That's quite a claim, considering New Orleans also boasts of a populace that includes the likes of Roosevelt Sykes, Fats Domino, Tuts Washington, and Allen Toussaint, among others.

Ironically, Booker's reputation is weightier abroad than it is in America, and even in this city! All of Booker's available recordings originate from Europe. However, one of these, Junco Partner, is to be reissued this month by Hannibal, a subsidiary of Island Records, and will be distributed domestically. Good news for Booker fans!

Booker's reputation as a wizard on the keyboards is widespread as he is an in-demand session man who has appeared on albums as varied as Huey Smith, Maria Muldaur, and even Ringo Starr. In fact, Booker can impersonate just about anyone, and manage to improve on the original performance. When he gets behind the 88's Longhair, Huey Smith, Ray Charles, or even Beethoven never sounded better.

James Carroll Booker III was born in New Orleans on December 17, 1939, at Charity Hospital. He was raised by his mother's sister in Bay St. Louis but visited his folks in New Orleans. Booker's gift for music became apparent at an early age and he was an acknowledged child prodigy. Tuts Washington remembers going to Booker's parents' house and instructing a pre-adolescent James Booker in the rudiments of the piano. His oldest sister Betty Jean (later of the Booker Gospel Singers) and his father, who was as minister, also taught Booker some early lessons.

He received classical piano training from his sister's teacher until he was 12. Booker had been giving classical recitals since he was six, but the rascal Booker would sneak off and teach himself boogie-woogie, his real interest. At the age of 11, the juvenile Booker took to hanging around radio station WMRY (now WYLD) on Dryades Street, while visiting his parents on weekends. His sister, by now an accomplished gospel singer, took Booker to meet the disc-jockeys and show him the studio.

Booker was allowed an audition,
attraction, playing blues, or gospel, depending on the type of show that was broadcast. Once he got his foot in the door, Booker returned every weekend to New Orleans and soon recruited a band to accompany his live performances. Booker must have been quite a hustler; suddenly there was a gang of teenagers on the air broadcasting every Saturday!

Booker's father died in 1953, and the 14-year-old permanently moved back to New Orleans and enrolled in high school. While at school, Booker became friends with Art Neville and sax player Curtis Graves. Their association resulted in the formation of a group, "Booker Boy and the Rhythmaires." Booker also managed to secure airtime for the Rhythmaires.

Booker's sister, Betty Jean, in turn got her ex-boyfriend, Edward Frank, (himself an accomplished pianist) to introduce Booker to Imperial's Dave Bartholomew. Bartholomew was impressed and he brought Booker into the studio to record. Imperial released "Doing the Hambone" and "Thinkin' About My Baby," both tough jump numbers. The vocals were frankly poor, but his piano was strong enough to hint that the 14-year-old would be a force to reckon with.

Although Booker's record sold poorly and Imperial didn't issue any more James Booker records, Dave Bartholomew had a keen ear, and, noting that the teenager could mimic anyone he pleased, saw that Booker's talent could be used in other ways. Bartholomew was reponsible for writing and producing sessions for Imperial's big hit-maker, Fats Domino.

Since Fats spent a lot of time crisscrossing the country doing shows, he was away from New Orleans and hence away from Cosmo's studio. So Bartholomew used Booker to put down piano tracks with the studio band when Fats was on the road. All Fats had to do when he got back to town was lay down the vocal over the arrangement.

By 1956, the record companies became keenly interested in rock and roll and were quick to capitalize on any new music trend. Many labels actively pursued young artists and were ignoring older R&B artists. In 1956, Chess Records came into the picture. Booker did a session produced by Paul Gayten, Chess's local A&R man. "Heavenly Angel" was released by Arthur and Booker but again it didn't sell. Arthur was supposed to have been Art Neville but he couldn't make the session so Arthur Booker (no relation) substituted.

Booker kept plugging, though, and in 1957, after graduating from high school, Booker went on the road with Joe Tex, who was then on King Records. It was this experience with Joe Tex that led Booker into the R&B circuit. Joe was working out of Atlanta but quite often worked gigs out of town.

When Joe Tex signed with Ace Records in Jackson, Mississippi, Booker met Johnny Vincent and Johnny used him on numerous sessions, Joe Tex included.

Thanks to Bill Doggett, and records like "Honky Tonk," the organ became a popular instrument and Booker soon became the foremost organist in the Crescent City. In fact, Booker was the first to bring the organ to Bourbon Street. In 1958, Vincent decided to cut a couple of instrumentals for Ace, with Booker on organ and piano. Under the guise of "Little Booker," "Open the Door" and "Teenage Rock" were released with Lee Allen and Red Tyler in tow. Vincent overdubbed Joe Tex's vocal on "Teenage Rock" but the record was credited to Booker. Again the disc was a financial flop.

Booker split with Ace and Tex, and hit the road with Shirley and Lee before returning to New Orleans. He also took Huey Smith's band on the road, impersonating Huey, who preferred to stay at home. While in New Orleans, Booker rejoined the Cosmo's studio unit and played the organ in various French Quarter bars, both solo and with small combos. It was during this time Booker taught much to Dr. John and Allen Toussaint.

Suddenly, Booker chucked his musical career, and enrolled at Southern University in Baton Rouge, hoping that college studies could help him solve a developing drug problem, nurtured by a hectic life on the chitlin' circuit. Booker was now 20, probably far older than his age.

Don Robey, of Duke records in Houston, came to town in 1960 in search of an A&R man. He had heard of Booker's reputation and sought him out. Booker wasn't interested but returned an old favor by suggesting Edward Frank be hired. Although Booker turned down the offer, his interest in music was rekindled when Dee Clarke and Phil Upchurch came through town in need of an organist. Well, he still had a month of school left, but his mother covered for him and he hit the road with the Phil Upchurch group, which was riding high with "I Can't Sit Down."

Unfortunately, the tour broke up in Houston, after a financial disagreement, and Dee Clarke pawned his organ to Don Robey. Robey saw that Booker was in a jam so he asked Booker to stick around and play a few dates at his club. Robey also worked on some Duke sides by Bobby Bland and Junior Parker. Unfortunately, Booker's drug problem was resurfacing again.

While playing around the studio, Robey suggested Booker tape a few instrumentals to see if they could come up with a single. Robey was impressed by the success of many instrumentals that were being cut at that time. This was the time that Booker T. and the M.G.'s were beginning to gain popularity. They finally came up with something but no one could think of a title for the single. Finally, Edward Frank came up with "Gonzo," which was Booker's nickname. Actually the name originated with a character from the movie The Pusher. Booker suggested the flip be called "Cool Turkey." Surprisingly, Robey missed the record's obvious drug references. But the biggest surprise was that "Gonzo" climbed all the way to number 10 on the national R&B charts.

"Gonzo," though nothing out of the ordinary, was a spontaneous tune that succeeded. However, conscious efforts to recapture the hit formula produced nothing. By 1962 Booker was back on the road as a sideman working with countless R&B units. Booker at one time or another worked with the likes of Roy Hamilton, B.B. King and Little Richard out in California and Las Vegas.

The year 1963 saw Booker sitting in on the Lloyd Price "Misty" session

Continued on page 14
Rock

Springsteen Speaks—But Not To Us

BY CHUCK BAUERLEIN

The River
Bruce Springsteen,
Columbia, PC2 36854

When I was a junior at Loyola I took a philosophy course that was entitled "Philosophy and Literature." It was easily the most challenging college course I've ever taken. For 16 weeks we studied just two textbooks, The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty, a French phenomenologist, and James Joyce's Ulysses. I can't begin to go into the intricate ways we tried to dissect language in an effort to get to the kernel of meaning. I didn't understand the quest eight years ago and I can't possibly recall it all now. But I do remember one essential tenet that my bespectacled, bearded philosophy prof drilled into us: good writing was mostly a way of describing a universal experience in a unique way.

Writers are often told to search for "a style of your own." When they have finally found that "style," what they have really discovered is a new way of telling some very old stories.

It is then with some unhappiness that I must discuss Bruce Springsteen's latest album, The River, as an overall disappointment. Springsteen has been my favorite rock 'n' roll performer since I first heard Greetings From Asbury Park in 1973. He is the closest personification of a writer that rock 'n' roll has ever produced. But whereas Asbury Park and The Wild, The Innocent, and the E-Street Shuffle were poetic classics in the rock genre, The River isn't much more than a dime-store pulp novel. That is, Springsteen is no longer a writer who opens new dimensions to our experience of life.

It is not necessarily Springsteen's fault. There is enough writing on The River to prove that the man is still capable of reaching a special spot in all of us. The title track, "Point Blank," "Independence Day," and "The Price You Pay" are songs capable of touching one's soul. But in a catalogue of 20 tunes, that is not nearly enough to quell the vague feeling of horror in my gut that Springsteen is opting for generic rock 'n' roll. The River is loaded with great rockers of the Top 40 variety. Bruce has never crashed the top ten with a single and I'd be surprised if he doesn't do it at least three times with songs from The River. What disappoints me is that Springsteen seems to be aiming at that standard of excellence, instead of his own.

The River is loaded with hit potential and it will undoubtedly make the record company people very happy. It's chock full of the kind of rock 'n' roll standards that Springsteen has been giving away to other people for years. Southside Johnny got "The Fever" and didn't do it justice. Robert Gordon got "Fire" and the Pointer Sisters covered it and neither of them did it justice. Patti Smith got "Because of the Night" and she came close. But none of them did them as well as the Boss. Maybe Bruce just decided he was sick and tired of seeing other folks land in the top ten with subpar versions of his material. Whatever his reasons, the new record is uncharacteristic of Springsteen's previous recordings--although it does seem to fit into a developing pattern of his music since Jon Landau took control of Springsteen's productions.

It is a shame that The River does not test Springsteen's writing abilities because thematically, he has bitten off quite a challenge: the subject of marriage. Broken promises, disappointments, dreams that didn't pan out, they have all been part of Springsteen's writing repertoire before. But The River is a bit more than that. It's not operatic, in the sense that The Who's Tommy or Quadrophenia follow a plot and characters, but The River is certainly much more than just 20 rock 'n' roll songs spaced out over two records. The first album deals almost exclusively with man's search for love and affection, finding the perfect partner for a lifetime commitment. The song, "The River" (easily the most poignant moment of "No Nukes") seems to turn that search around on itself.

The singer/protagonist claims to be a secret agent rocker, takes a trip to the Cadillac Ranch which eulogizes...
James Dean, Junior Johnson and even Burt Reynolds—heroes all of the open road. He steals a car, takes his new baby to town in "Ramrod," drives all night and finally encounters a wreck on the highway that makes him appreciate the fact that he'd better slow down a little bit or he'll end up there too, a bloody stump on a dark, deserted road.

Springsteen has been going in this direction with his writing ever since Landau got into his ear. I can't really fault Landau because Bruce has found a national audience with his music since he's made his lyrics more universal in tone, less evocative of the Jersey Shore and big city life. And yet, it strikes me as a damn shame, because in finding his record-buying audience, Springsteen has forfeited his eloquence.

The River addresses a serious, adult subject, marriage and its unfulfilled promise, in the vernacular of a youthful idiom, rock 'n' roll music. Perhaps Landau believes that rock and roll will always be an idiom of the teenager and that the only way to make a living in that circle is to address yourself to that audience. I disagree. There are a lot of baby-boomers out there who are in their late 20's and 30's now and they still hold rock 'n' roll dear to their hearts. I can't imagine a day when I won't want to be affected by the medium that Elvis Presley and Mick Jagger and Bob Dylan and John Lennon and Bruce Springsteen have exploited for their artistic statements. It doesn't have anything to do with growing old. These men are artists who have something to say to me and dammit, it irritates me when they don't try to talk to me in a way that might illuminate my own experiences. I can't believe that there's not an audience out there that wants to be challenged as Springsteen's earlier music challenged us.

Bruce Springsteen could be T.S. Eliot with a guitar strapped on his back, James Joyce in sneakers if he really wanted to be. The man has the spark of genius in his soul but he hasn't lit any fires with it in The River. I will always love Springsteen for what he has already given to me. But I'd much rather listen to his version of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man than The Betsy. C'mon, Boss, talk to me.
Travel

Marrero Christmas!

IT'S CHRISTMAS AS USUAL ON CAMP STREET...

THERE'S A LULL IN THE ACTION OUT ON JEFFERSON HIGHWAY...

AND SOMEONE LOSES ANOTHER QUARTER IN ARABI...

PLEASE COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS CHARLES BROWN

JINGLE BELL ROCK

BY BUNNY MATTHEWS
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Tipitina's serves lunch and dinner daily, 11:30 AM to midnight (no lunch weekends). Soups, gumbos, salads, sandwiches, and homemade desserts. The bar has a variety of fruit juices, mineral waters, imported beers and longnecks, as well as the usuals.

Cookie Survey

New Orleans informal poll of 47 local chocolate chip cookie gourmets has revealed that 11 preferred Chips Ahoy, 12 for Public School Lunch and 22 for Sheila Murphy's (of Tipitina's) bakery giant chocolate chip cookies. Upon contacting the head dietitian, L.S.U., it was learned...
Rare Records

Rock 'n' Roll Banned For Christmas

BY ALMOST SLIM

'Twas The Night Before Christmas
Huey "Piano" Smith, Ace 1027

With Santa just around the corner, we thought we'd feature a Christmas album this month. Since New Orleans has always been hot on making "gimmick" records and with Christmas songs always popular around this time of year, it only makes sense that sooner or later someone would get around to putting the two together. Well, this one came out in 1962, and there is as very interesting story behind it.

Recorded by Johnny Vincent on Ace, this was Huey's third album. Released to capitalize on the yuletide season, it unfortunately crashed before it could get off the ground. Promotional copies of the disc were sent to radio stations across the country, but d.j.'s and programmers were so offended by Huey and Clowns' rock and roll treatment of such sacred songs as "Silent Night" and "White Christmas" that it was banned from radio stations in many parts of the country. (Remember, this was 1962.)

Continued from page 8

Vincent was forced to withdraw the album from release, and apparently it only hit the market in parts of the Carolinas.

Musically the album is predictably Huey Smith; lots of foot-tappin' rhythm and plenty of spontaneous vocal excitement. A young Dr. John can also be heard on guitar. The album has since been reissued with Dr. John's name printed over the original cover. It's available in many local record shops and would make a fine Christmas gift.

Available Albums by James Booker
Boogie-Woogie and Rag-Time Contest, Cold Records 1035
James Booker—Piano Prince of New Orleans, Aves International, 146.506
Junco Partner, Hannibal HA 1303
Who is Albert Collins, the uninitiated might ask? Anyone who has ever seen the man perform will never forget who he is. This performer has the sheer intensity and showmanship to be compared to James Brown and Jimi Hendrix, with a heavy dose of Gatemouth Brown and Albert King thrown in. His performances have led him to be called such names as "The Ice Picker," "The Razor Blade," "The Gunslinger," "The Houston Twister," and "The Master of the Telecaster."

Collins' earliest recordings in the late 1950's and early 1960's were always imprinted with the curious signature "The cool sound of Albert Collins." From those legendary first recordings such as Frosty, The Freeze, Sno-Cone, Icy Blue, Thaw Out, and Don't Lose Your Cool right into the 1980's with his two most recent record albums Ice Pickin' (nominated for a Grammy award in 1979) and Frostbite, the "cool sound" has lost none of its "fire."

What is the cool sound? It is both the soul of the man and his knocked-out guitar style. Maybe it is best expressed on the back of one of his albums: "It burns like dry ice, like cold fire. A jagged blend of shattering, ringing high notes, icy echo, jarring attack, the blistering power of an arctic storm. The Cool Sound. The creation of a high energy guitarist who blew out of Texas with a battered Fender Telecaster, an explosive stage show, unlimited energy, and a whole new concept of blues guitar. Albert Collins."

This bluesman is not your average blues performer. His music combines elements as diverse as driving blues shuffles, rock, funk, and even a twist of what is known as the Motet Sound. Here we have a performer who is impossible to upstage not because of how many notes he plays, but what notes and how he plays them. The authority and conviction of his playing as well as his stage presence makes him a headturner.

Albert Collins' concept of music is totally his own and perhaps the most modern sound in blues guitar today. One of the unique ingredients in this man's style of guitar is his unorthodox tuning: he tunes his guitar to an open D-minor chord. Another ingredient is his percussive right-hand attack: he plays with his bare thumb and index finger in the Texas picking style pioneered by Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. Collins' special combination of amplifier settings, guitar strings and technique allows him many special effects. From grunts, groans and talking sounds to automobile imitations, his excellent control of feedback effects and his tendency to stretch out more than most blues guitarists puts Collins' music in the more abstract vein.

As soon as you feel Mr. Collins has done all he can do, he suddenly jumps off the stage with his 200-foot guitar cord, throws the band into a propulsive number and stalks through the audience with a demonic look in his eye. In no time he has covered the room, held conversations, walked outside, maybe boarded a bus, constantly soloing on the guitar and not missing one bar of music. Collins is in perfect meter with the band when he again hits the stage.

Today Albert Collins is 48 years old, and it's hard to tell. He has been a professional musician since 1949 when he formed the Rhythm Rockers at the Manhattan Club in Galveston, Texas. Through the 1950's he worked variously with the Malcolm Moore Orchestra and the Piney Brown Orchestra, as well as a few stints with Gatemouth Brown out of Houston. Collins' recording career did not get off the ground until 1958 when he recorded "The Freeze." A number of regional hits followed through the 1960's. Bob Hite of Canned Heat got Collins a recording contract with Imperial Records in 1968 and soon he moved to Los Angeles. These events introduced Collins to ecstatic audiences at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles and the Fillmore and Matrix in San Francisco. Next, Bill Szymczak (The Eagles' producer) founded his short-lived Tumbleweed label in 1972, and signed Collins as his first artist.

Continued on next page.
What A Gift!

For just $5, send a little bit of New Orleans to your snow-bound friends out-of-town!

Continued from previous page

The Ice Picker did not record again until 1978 when he signed with Chicago’s Alligator Records, which united Collins with the current premiere blues label and the talents of producer Bruce Iglauer. The success of that collaboration produced Ice Pickin’ (Alligator 4713) and its follow-up album, Frostbite (Alligator 4719). Both albums represent Collins’ best recorded work since his earliest records and feature his all-star touring band, the Icebreakers.

The band is a treat in itself. The saxophonist is the legendary A.C. Reed (famous as a session man and his vocals identify him as Jimmy Reed’s brother). The top-notch rhythm section is rounded out by Louisiana guitarist Marvin Jackson, with Johnny Gayden on bass (formerly with the Staple Singers and Al Jarreau) as well as powerhouse drummer-vocalist Casey Jones (a veteran Chicago studio drummer).

Recent months have seen European tours as well as a tour of Greece where Collins and the Ice Breakers played to audiences of up to 8,000 people. Coupled with these tours have been the group’s constant touring of the United States, including a recent New Orleans appearance at Tipitina’s and a certain return in the near future. Check out this performer and his fine band; Albert Collins will certainly “break the ice” with you and your friends!

Bar Talk

Will I be forty and wear a faded blue jean jacket and turn the collar up?

I left a woman last summer just left her, she said why’re you leaving? and I said cause I’m leaving and I did.

Me and a guitar player travelled all over Colorado. “Did you grow a beard?” someone asked.

“Yes,” I said.

He said, “Did it help?”

Ron Cuccia
Pop quiz: what band is doing the most to spread the New Orleans funk sound to the surrounding southern states? Well, let's see, ya got yer Neville Bros and Meters and Joyride, ya got yer Radiators and Percifiers, let's see, is Leroux funk, where are they from anyhow, uh what's Milk Chocolate up to these days...

The answer is Satisfaction. Chances are you've heard of them, as they have played at Tipitina's once a month as long as Tip's has been around. Chances are just as good you haven't seen them. For one reason or another, people do not turn out in droves for their gigs around town.

So Satisfaction goes wherever there is an audience. They regularly load up their Southside Church of Christ bus, the one with "Happy" as its destination (before that it was a Tom's Snacks delivery van), and tour the southland-something surprisingly few New Orleans bands are willing or able to do-to the tune of 40,000 miles in the last three years.

With their travels has come some critical acclaim. A Houston paper raved about lead singer Pepper Elskoe, remarking that she exuded the energy of 10 people. And in Austin the local daily gave them the kind of treatment a multitude of Texas musicians would have traded their new GMC pick-up for, with such comments as "everybody who's seen them has gone absolutely nuts over them" and "miss them at your peril." Now they have gone into the studio (Ultrasonic) to work on an album produced by Gary Edwards (of Is Music in St. Bernard).

The question naturally arises why they have had such a hard time developing a following in their home town.

Without rancor (and they could easily be bitter about it), bass player and chief songwriter Slug Hewitt ticked off some of the possibilities. "New Orleans is a cliquish town. Nearly every band I know of started out with some sort of neighborhood following. Being basically from out of town, we've never had that." (Slug and guitar player Red Holt came down from Canada about four years ago; drummer Paul Henehan came from New Jersey about the same time; Pepper moved here when she was eight. Only new keyboard/sax man Armand St. Martin is a native).

Paul adds that "the New Orleans scene is an old scene. Nearly all the bands feature influences that go back at least to the sixties. There's very little seventies influence." The feeling here is that's exceedingly true of local rock and funk stuff, and a key to...
Satisfaction's peculiar career. New Orleans had an active countercultural scene, and the influences of what you might call psychedelic music can still be felt. But the death of the local music industry in the late sixties might play a part in New Orleans never really getting into the post-hippie genre of heavy metal, a type of music Slug, Paul, and Red cut their teeth on. The stuff has always been big in Texas. Interestingly, Satisfaction is known as a funk band everywhere but here, where they are more often labeled a rock band.

The dead local industry can be discussed ad nauseam, but Slug offered some key contrasts with Austin. “The big thing is that there are no production companies here. In Austin there are five, all making money and competing for top artists.”

And of course, there’s the radio. “Thank heaven for WTUL, but Austin has that kind of programming, and more, from commercial stations,” Slug said. “Last time we were there KLBJ was soliciting tapes for an album of local artists. That had to be done here by a private record store.”

So why is Satisfaction recording here? Slug says simply, “In order to break the jinx.” It’s clear that the Crescent City has had a great impact on their distinctive, hybrid sound. But their days here might be numbered.

Meanwhile, one is hard-pressed to think of a band in town that has been working together longer. Through the eight months on Bourbon Street at Judah P.’s, the countless Friday nights at the Midget on LaSalle and Third, they have also seen all that has gone down at Tipitina’s from their apartments above the nightclub.

“Yeah,” Paul recalled, “maybe the fact that we were always around Tip’s worked against us back then. People would see us working the door or the kitchen and think we were just some weekend band thrown together. Sometimes I felt like grabbing the microphone and saying, ‘Hey, you don’t understand, this is the fantasy, not the other thing.’”

Well, the fantasy seems to be rolling now, and Satisfaction is looking at the future. You can catch them one more time at Tip’s before they go back to Texas for who knows how long.
The Arrival of B.B. King
By Charles Sawyer
Doubleday Books, $14.95

This book review was done for Wavelength by Mr. B.B. King himself while he was in New Orleans for a concert at Ole Man River's.

Well, what can you say about a book that's about yourself? I think I'm a pretty good guy! The book came out officially about the 14th of October. The guy who wrote the book had been talking about doing the book for about seven or eight years but he really started about two years ago.

What happened was that I met Charles Sawyer, a free-lance writer, about six years ago and from time to time we would meet up and he would interview me. He went back to where I grew up in Mississippi. In fact, he dug up things that I don't even remember! Some things that people said about me I didn't even know they felt that way, so I'm pleased with him writing it as he saw it. There might be a few things I might take issue with here and there but there was truth in everything, I felt.

There are a few things I think he might have missed, 'cause a guy can't catch everything with a pen. But he said in the introduction he was writing it the way he saw B.B. King. There were, I guess, some things that he thought were more significant than others. He dug up a lot of old pictures. Some go back 25 years. And of course he took some of the recent ones himself.

But I'm sure glad they have the book out. —B.B. King

Joe Henderson
Toulouse Street Theater
November 13, 14

The Crescent City was treated to a first-time visit by one of the acknowledged masters and giants of the tenor saxophone, Mr. Joe Henderson, at the Toulouse Street Theatre last month.

The date, arranged by the Louisiana Forum for the Arts, Inc., a nonprofit organization committed to uplifting artistic possibilities in the New Orleans community, teamed Henderson with a sterling rhythm section consisting of local musicians David Torkanowsky (piano), James Singleton (bass), and John Vidacovich (drums).

Joe Henderson was born on April 24, 1937, in Lima, Ohio, and began his musical development in and around Detroit, a city which has produced more accomplished bebop musicians than any other of its size, and arrived in New York City in 1962, where he made a strong and lasting impression. He received international acclaim for his work during this period with Horace Silver, and can be heard on the classic LP, Song for my Father, with that quintet. He was also a sideman on many record dates for Blue Note Records, including McCoy Tyner's 1965 debut as a leader, The Real McCoy. Shortly thereafter, Henderson recorded a series of albums for that label under his own name including Page One, Our Thing, In 'n Out, Inner Urge, and Black Narcissus, among others.

Influenced strongly by the domineering stature and sound of John Coltrane, Henderson nevertheless developed a sound that all listeners agree is "distinctive." He utilizes all of the modal, linear, and harmonic techniques which have become the standard fare for modern tenor playing, but after only one or two bars of music, there is no mistak-

ing that you are hearing Joe Henderson.

By the seventies, Joe had become a major musical figure, appearing in concert in Europe, Japan, and throughout North America, and had moved away from the New York jazz mecca to a more peaceful lifestyle in San Francisco. His West Coast residence coincided with a series of LP's for Milestone/Fantasy Records in California, including some live dates such as Joe Henderson in Japan featuring him with a Japanese rhythm section.

Much of Henderson's recent work, in fact, has been as a soloist, playing with local musicians wherever he travels. Last month's collaboration with New Orleans premier jazz rhythm section was such an event. Henderson was so impressed with David Torkanowsky that he was prompted to quip on a live interview show on WTUL's World of Jazz program that he thought Black Russian was a drink.

The concerts were marked by memorable renditions of jazz standards such as "Invitation," "Round Midnight," and "Green Dolphin Street," as well as some Henderson originals like "Recorda Me (Remember Me)." If anyone who wasn't there knows what went down, let's just say it cooked! And in a city noted for its great cuisine, that's saying a mouthful.

—Andy Kaslow

Pat Metheny
ECM 2-1180

The incredible sales success of Pat Metheny's first album must have come as a surprise to record company executives, and probably prompted a second look at the potential for a commercial jazz market. The album included no "name" studio musicians, no crossover disco tracks. It was unaccompanied, no single was released from the album, and it was ignored by radio programmers. Yet it achieved great acclaim.

Now Metheny, under the guidance of Manfred Eicher, and the superior
performance of some top studio musicians (Charlie Haden, Jack De Johnnette, Dewey Redman and Mike Brecker) has created a highly programmable album.

The album reflects Metheny's influence by the sixties' rock styles, with homage to the fifties' bebop, as well as the immense experience brought to the project by his accompanying musicians.

It's a two-album package that was recorded in May 1980 in Oslo, Sweden. Side one is in two parts. Metheny opens with a rhythmic pattern that comes right out of the sixties: rock and folksy. De Johnette provides his characteristically intense drumming, Haden provides the harmonic balance on the bass, but Mike Brecker's melody line is right out of the seventies...melodic, sparse, and lilting. A drum break gets us into part two, which was composed by and features Charlie Haden, with a melodic line that sounds like (or is) “I'm an Old Cowhand From the Rio Grande.”

Side two opens with the title track. It is one lone melodic line played in unison by Metheny and Dewey Redman. It goes back to swing but the line is very modern. "The Bat" is next, and its slow, moody theme is an inspiration. The side concludes with Ornette Coleman's "Turnaround," which is given a first-class interpretation.

The most avant-garde selection on the album opens side three. It's free, spacy, with each musician joining in one at a time, building to an emotional climax. It is appropriately entitled "Open." I particularly like "Pretty Scattered" because it's bebop with the long modern improvisations. At times it reminds me of Richard Carpenter's "Walkin'."

"Every Day (I Thank You)" opens side four. It is in two sections, the first slow and moody, with Mike Brecker on sax. The tempo picks up slightly to get us into another guitar line with sixties folk elements. It could be religious but it could also be a love song. Either interpretation will work. The album ends with Metheny overdubbing three parts on "Goin' Ahead."

If jazz music is to reach out to greater audiences, Pat Metheny is just the artist to develop a legion of converts.

—Coril Joseph

Gaucho
Steely Dan
MCA-6102

This is Eighties music, cocaine music slick 'n wierd. More morsels in Steely Dan's continuing quest for strangeness in the pop format. Yes, there are verses and choruses, hooks and bridges, the usual paraphernalia of hit-making, but it's all so intricately folded, spindled, and mutilated; by the time you're able to hum along with the melody the tune already has the staying power so vital to a pop cut.

The focus, more than ever, is Donald Fagen's exceptionally plant oral cavity, and of course the roles that come out of it, as he plays Itman on "Babylon Sisters," "Glamour Profession," and "Gaucho," Upman on "Time Out of Mind," and "My Rival," and Thenman and Nowman on "Hey Nineteen" and "Third World Man."

The level of craftsmanship in the tunes is staggering, the usual careful selection of sessionmen forging the efforts into units as perhaps never before. It's a very fine album, but there's something ever-so-slightly hollow in this release. "Third World Man" is the only tune that surely establishes a mood, the others evolving into simple humors. And that's a bit of a loss, despite the multitude of lovely new edgings. —Tim Lyman

Bruce Springsteen Concert
Baton Rouge
November 11

Springsteen opened with "Prove It All Night." He proceeded to do exactly that. "I've been working real hard, trying to get my hands clean," I believe it. The audience believed it. Springsteen is strong on belief. "And I believe in a promised land."

These are not just songs: they're anthems. People are on their feet, waving their arms, singing along. Bruce is jumping from the top of the speakers to the top of the piano, sliding across the stage and diving into the audience. This is the kind of unbridled enthusiasm that starts religions and wars. Unbridled, but not uncontroll-
ed. It's a river, not a flood. Springsteen knows exactly what he's doing.

If a religion did start around him, Bruce Springsteen would be the chief priest of the First Church of Chevrolet. He has taken the glitter out of rock and roll, and introduced the concerns of the common man: the failures at trying to keep a family together, the frustration of trying to keep up with the economy, and the driving desperation to take charge of his life just once before he dies. His ultimate metaphor is the open road; his ultimate symbol is the car. They may represent an aimless, impulsive escape from the broken dreams of the "Badlands," or a determined attempt to create meaning out of danger in the "Darkness on the edge of town." Or maybe, just plain ol' fun, meeting on the street, picking up something sweet, and ripping and running all night.

Of course, he's back on the job in the morning. Bruce is the working-class hero; his is blue collar rock and roll. His themes are universal; so is his acceptance. Everybody likes Bruce. He doesn't threaten anyone's ego. He's short. He's ordinary looking. He's a whole lot of fun, a real guy's guy, he could organize a football game in the rain. The girls love him because of his obvious vulnerability, the tenderness, that sincere face, the total dedication of lines like "I swear I'll drive all night just to buy you some shoes." I think he means it. He definitely means to give the best rock show rolling. His energy is ferocious. He is relentlessly attentive to the audience, plays a powerful guitar, and never holds back to save his voice. He's all there along with the visible affection and full support of a band that perfectly suits his needs. Some of their horespplay was transparent and corny. Some of Bruce's theatrics were overdone. All in all, though, they were throwing hard and getting hoarse for three hours plus of solid music. The lighting was dramatic but not obtrusive. The sound was as near perfect as I've ever heard in a large hall. A Springsteen concert is always worth the price, even though Bruce himself is nothing special, just a kid down the street, somebody you grew up with, probably a lot like yourself: Once I spent my time playing tough-guy scenes,

But I was living in a world of childish dreams.
Someday these childish dreams must end,
To become a man and grow up to dream again.

—Ron Cuccia

Chameleon
Lionel Hampton
Glad-Hamp GHS 1021

He's seventy-one years young and still swinging!
That's Lionel Hampton, and he's never been heard to better advantage with a big band than on this "live" 1976 European tour recording in France, where he is a beloved idol. Hamp in person with a big band conveys an electric excitement unsurpassed. On ballads, the band acts as a pneumatic, velvet cushion; on up-tempos, it's a charging machine that rolls relentlessly.

"Barbara," well-voiced in Paul Moen's arrangement, has a glimpse of soprano sensitivity from the arranger and Horace Silver's composition is very well presented. There's no anachronism in Hamp's conception, Silver's drafting and Moen's charting. It's a contemporary, homogeneous whole.

"Psychedelic Sally," on the other hand, gives Hampton a chance to show off his perilous, toe-tapping strut, as he skitters and scattersnotes-­plenty, especially on the turnaround. It's a classic example of tension and release, of funk and finesse well befitting the Horace Silver number. It's my favorite track on the whole album. Listen to the fine foundation Gary Mazzaropi builds beneath Hamp!

Herbie Hancock's "Chameleon" shows that though the composer and composition may be as up-to-date as tomorrow, Lionel Hampton can meet the challenge more than ably. Moen does a good job with his tenor solos, and Drewes' trumpet is a fluent surprise. Zeke Mullins' organ fits in well here and fills unobtrusively and properly throughout the album. It's a good solo outing for all.

This album is warmly recommended.
—Rhodes Spedale

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Wavelength
New Orleans' Music Magazine
Professor Longhair's *Crawfish Fiesta* recently won the W.C. Handy Award for best contemporary blues album. Tad Jones reports it's got a good shot at a Grammy. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Bandy Records plans to reissue the *WTIX Presents the Hits of New Orleans*. The package contains some of the biggest hits from Instant Records including Roger and the Gypsies 46-bar classic “Pass Off the Hatchet”...Charlie's massive reissue project includes Betty Harris, The Meters, Lee Dorsey, and more. Watch for reviews next month...Shirley of Shirley and Lee is back in town.

Jessie Hill is still running Poo's Cab Service, running faves from the airport to downtown...Neville Brothers, Wild Tchoupitoulas, Pete Fountain and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band recently appeared on the Mike Douglas Show...Heart has covered Aaron Neville's “Tell It Like It Is”...Neville, on hearing the record for the first time, said he liked it. Watch for the “Tell It Like It Is” story in a future *Wavelength*.

Bunny Matthews, long-time music critic and writer for *Figaro* newspaper, was fired recently. Bunny can be seen behind the drums with the Ballistics and look for his new poster out in January.

December 13-19 is women's week at Tipitina's...Highlights are a benefit on the 14th and the return of the amazing Ellen McAlwaine on the 18th...Also at Tip's in December will be Dr. John backed up by Leo Nocentelli, George Porter, Zigaboo and Sam Henry...At Jed's December 14 is Mission of Burma from Boston.

Tuts Washington is entertaining at the piano bar in the Pontchartrain Hotel every Thursday to Saturday from 8:30 to 12:30. Pretty calm atmosphere for the lively septegenarian...Fats Domino will play at the Court of Endymion Ball for 1981...There's some personnel changes in A Taste of New Orleans: Walter Washington left to work with his own group, and George Porter is filling in on bass...George's own group Joyride is still working around town.

The Krewe of Motha Roux has lined up an impressive array of talent for their Mardi Gras dance. Included are Bobby Mitchell, Earl King, Miss B, and the Lastie Brothers...The late night place to be is the Blues Saloon; Luther Kent and his group Trickbag start at 2 a.m. weekends. Look for an album from the group in January, featuring Charlie Brent and Wayne Devillier.

Mr. Google Eyes is back on the scene. He is reviving the old Dew Drop Inn days MCing Thursday night jam sessions at the Dream Palace. The Las Vegas Connection helps out too...Lloyd Price is back in town helping Don King promote the Leonard-Duran fight.

Eddie Bo and last month's featured *Wavelength* artist Bobby Mitchell were recent guests on Shepard Samuels' *New Orleans show Monday night on WTUL*. Bobby hopes to have another reissue album out on himself in the not-too-distant future.

B.B. King's guitar Lucille was pillared by an over-adoring fan during his three-day engagement at Ole Man River's. Fortunately a keen-eyed patron spotted the culprit and gave his tag number to the police who promptly recovered the priceless instrument.

Wayward Youth is rumored to be disbanding soon...The Sluts have decided to rehearse before their next engagement...RZA and the Ballistics usually working weekends.

Ernie K-Doe had his birthday at Wendy's Lounge on November 24th. Ernie's invited guests included Oliver Morgan, Robert Parker, Irving Banister and David Lastie...

Many will be saddened to hear of the death of R&B shouter O.V. Wright who collapsed after a performance in Biloxi. Some of his biggest hits were "8 Men and 4 Women," "I Don't do Windows," and "I'd Rather Be Blind, Crippled, and Crazy." He performed regularly in New Orleans.

Stevenson Palfi has received a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation for his documentary on the development of New Orleans piano through three generations of piano players: Tuts Washington, Allen Toussaint, and Professor Longhair.

Mr. and Mrs. Larry Sieberth (Stephanie) are singing as a duo now, and sounding great...Lil Queenie and the Percolators are going on a brief tour of Yankee-land, playing Providence, RI, with Room Full of Blues on Dec. 10 and 11, then the Club Eighties in New York on Dec. 12 and 13.

The Urban Spaces Jazz Orchestra, a 20-piece big band, will be debuting in January at the CAC...Rumor has it that Dr. John will join George Porter, Leo Nocentelli, and Ziggy Modaliste at Tip's in December...Also coming to town this month is "X"...despite great success, stayed loyal to its small record company. More on this band next month.

The almost unpublicized Johnny Cash concert at Angola Nov. 6 to benefit the prison fellowship program was videotaped for future television showing. The show was produced by Jeanne Nathan and directed by WYES's John Byers...The new community radio station is now on the air at 90.7 on your FM dial.

New Orleanian Don Kendrick, former Copas Brothers drummer, and L.J. Dimiao ("Can't Win for Losing") won fourth place in the country division of the international competition of American Song Festival in Hollywood with their song "Delta to the Rockies." Becky Hobbs, once with Baton Rouge's Swamp Fox, won first place. Kendrick is now drummer for the Salt Creek Band, which has a single out now, "Honky Tonk Amnesia," on the SCR label.
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