

Lois Gilbert's article for the now-defunct Musician magazine, including material conducted for WRVR in New York City.

Woody Herman Shaw successfully weaved together superb technique, a confident and purposeful approach, and a sensitivity filled with raw emotion and gut-wrenching passion into his own individual sound which influenced and impacted on the veterans of jazz as well as its rookies. "Woody added to the vocabulary of the trumpet," comments Wynton Marsalis, "He had a real concept about the organization of group music that often utilized many different and complex harmonic progressions. He was very serious, disciplined and respectful towards jazz. His whole approach influenced me tremendously."

By the time Woody graduated from "The Art Blakey University of Jazz," "The Horace Silver School," and "The Max Roach Academy," he had a full understanding of the importance of carrying on and passing forward the jazz heritage he was part of; and he tried to instill in the members of his groups, their responsibility to keep the "jazz torch" burning while fueling it with their own individual flames.

"Woody was one of the most imaginative and creative musicians, I've had the privilege of being around," reflects pianist Mulgrew Miller, "He was also one of the youngest and perhaps one of the last great conceptualists that came in the wake of John Coltrane and Miles Davis. In Woody's band, we dealt with so many different ways and different styles of playing; modal, free, way-out, standards and bebop. It was quite an experience to be around somebody who found new ways of playing all those kinds of music and play it with new concepts."

Keyboardist Onaje Allan Gumbs, who was in Woody's band from 1980 to 1983, states, "Woody always knew how to pace a performance; whether it was the selections of tunes, order of solos, length of tunes, or the number of tunes, he was never at a loss in making the choice that would ensure a smooth, cohesive and exciting set. In addition, he was a master at the art of improvisation and probably one of the last great innovators on his instrument. He was also a great teacher."

Trombonist and conch master Steve Turre was part of Woody's Concert Ensemble for several years. He credits Woody with having one of the greatest influences on his musical development, "He always encouraged me to be myself. I remember times, Woody would come over to me as soon as I finished taking a solo, he'd pull me aside and whisper in my ear, 'Remember that turn around you played coming out of the bridge on the second chorus of your solo...and such and such intervals you played...well Steve, that's you. I've never heard anyone else do that, it's your stuff. Take that and develop it.' I miss Woody a lot, but in a way he's still with me. He planted a seed in me and taught me so much, and I keep many of his concepts in the lineage alive in my own way. I see the lineage as first; Clifford Brown, Lee Morgan and Dizzy and next came Freddie Hubbard, and then Woody. I hear now Jon Faddis and Wynton developing their own sound, and that's very encouraging. But I'll tell you, no one gets close to what Woody was doing harmonically."

Saxophonist Gary Bartz, vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson and pianist George Cables were all long-time, close friends with Woody. And they all readily agree, that from their friendship the music grew and vice-versa. "Music is only a reflection of other things going on in your life, and our music reflected our friendship," recalls Hutcherson, "We used to stay up all night and talk about playing even, finishing phrases, being fluid and getting the right sound on ballads...and all of a sudden, it all came together. We were such good friends and I think because of that friendship came such good music."

George Cables adds, "When I think about Woody, I think of him as a great musician, as well as a great friend. We felt the same way about the music; we didn't want to destroy a tradition, we wanted to build on it. But no matter what phase our musical development was in -- Woody always had his own voice and a strong sense of what he wanted to say which instilled in me an understanding of how important it is to have your own sound."

Although, Woody was several years younger than Gary Bartz and still a teen-ager when they first played together, Gary believes that in many ways they grew up together. He fondly remembers, "Woody and I had an immediate connection. We spent all our time either talking about music or playing it. Woody and I would have our horns and George Cables would be at the piano, and we'd work out different ideas and different approaches that we had to the same tune. We'd discuss what it meant to be a jazz musician; our participation in the music's development, and what we wanted to do in the future. Woody was the next step that began with Louis Armstrong, Buddy Bolden and King Oliver, followed by Dizzy, Roy Eldridge and Miles and then by Lee Morgan and Clifford Brown, and the next step was Woody. I miss him very much. We had more things to do together, and there was so much more to hear and learn from Woody."

Perhaps fellow trumpeter Lester Bowie sums up best, the impact Woody Shaw has on jazz and on its people; "I think of Woody as one of the great neglected talents of this century. He also had a bad run of luck. As a trumpeter, his development was profound, but it always happened at times when he was getting the least recognition. For instance, towards the end of his life, Woody had developed a very mature sound and approach, but by then few people were listening. But as an instrumentalist and as a person, he was very beautiful.

"He played with great technique which had great feeling and meaning. He found his own voice by going through one of the most difficult schools of trumpet playing. He went through the hard bop school and developed a unique style within that realm, and that was hard to do.

"Woody was like a great many musicians. He was trained in music but not in life, and the reality is one must deal with both. It was very sad to see the way his life developed, but if we can take what he did with his music and observe what happened in his life maybe we can learn to carry on in the spirit of this person."

The narrative (from Woody)

"Most people think I was born in Newark, New Jersey because I'm so heavily linked to the jazz legacy of Newark, but actually I was born in Laurinburg, North Carolina on Christmas Eve in 1944. You see, my mother and father had already moved up to Newark from North Carolina but they went back to have me. I'm not aware of too many other musicians who were born in Laurinburg. Several of them were schooled at Laurinburg Institute including Grachun Moncur and Dizzy Gillespie, and my father.

"My father and Dizzy met again for the first time in 40 years when I took my parents to see Dizzy at the Monterey Jazz Festival. At first, Dizzy didn't remember my father and asked him if he was sure about his dates at Laurinburg. So my father laid some names on Diz which just astonished him. Dizzy couldn't believe my father remembered so much, and by the end of the night, they were hugging and kissing! Man...it was beautiful.

"That night in Monterey was very special to me. Standing side by side were the two men who influenced and inspired me more than anyone else. The tremendous impact they've had on me extends beyond music -- to the kind of men they both are; it's the kind of man I strive to be.

"I officially became a resident of Newark at about the age of 1 month. When I was 9 years old, I played bugle with the Junior Elks Drum and Bugle Corps, and when I was 11, I officially started playing the trumpet.

"The trumpet was not my first choice for an instrument. In fact, I ended up playing it by default. When we were asked what we wanted to play in the Eighteenth Avenue School Band, I chose the violin, but I was too late since all the violins were taken. My second choice was the saxophone or the trombone but they were also all spoken for. The only instrument that was left was the trumpet, and I felt why did I have to get stuck with this "tinny" sounding thing.

"When I complained to my music teacher that I didn't think it was fair that all the other kids got to play the instruments they wanted, he told me to just be patient. He said he had a good feeling about me and the trumpet, and he assured me I'd grow to love it.

"Of course my teacher was right, and it didn't take long for me to fall in love with the trumpet. In retrospect, I believe there was some mystical force that brought us together. I had a natural ability which was noticed immediately by many of prominent and distinguished people in New Jersey, and they immediately started making plans for my musical future. But it didn't hit me, until I learned of my connection with Clifford Brown.

"I was about 14 or 15 and hip to many great trumpeters, but when I heard Clifford Brown with Max Roach, I completely flipped. I felt an immediate connection and affinity with Clifford. It's difficult to explain specifically what it was about his playing that struck me so deeply. All I know is, when I heard his playing, I immediately got a sense of the jazz legacy, and I had a desire to be part of it. Then, when I found out that Clifford died in June, 1956 -- the same month and year I started playing -- I realized there was a mystical force that drew me to the trumpet, and I knew the reason I was here was to be a jazz musician.

"It's kind of funny to me that I knew I wanted to be, and I knew I would be, a jazz musician long before I had any real experience. I had been playing along with records, and I could imitate Louis Armstrong and Harry James almost perfectly. But when I heard Clifford, Dizzy, Miles and Donald Byrd, I realized I needed to gain a fuller understanding of jazz, and I needed to start playing with jazz musicians.

"At Cleveland Junior High School, I had a very fine music teacher named Jerome Ziering. He had a keen interest in jazz and a keen interest in me, but when I went to him for help on developing a jazz concept, he really didn't offer much assistance. In fact, he really tried to dissuade me from pursuing jazz. You see, he wanted me to go to Julliard and play with the New York Philharmonic, and he was afraid I wouldn't have the tools and the discipline to be a Classical player if I started playing jazz.

"I've never understood why jazz is met with such negativity, or just not met at all. Because most schools don't include jazz in their music programs, there are fewer and fewer young people playing jazz, and I'm very concerned about that. It's also a tragedy when a young person expresses a special interest in any one area; whether it's zoology or mathematics or jazz, and a teacher doesn't encourage that interest.

"It was impossible to grow up in a city like Newark and not be involved with jazz. Growing up, the jazz influence was a more natural thing for me. I also believe musicians who aren't necessarily school educated, especially Black musicians, improvise as they learn to play an instrument. Reading, theory and harmony come later. So being Black, and being in Newark, the culture was all around me, and it was natural that I was drawn to jazz. I began hanging out, missing classes, and by the time I was 16, I was embedded in the Newark jazz scene, and I dropped out of school.

"Jazz was in me and all around me. I went to hear everybody who came through Newark, and I sat in with anybody I could. The older musicians really took a liking to me, and they instilled a lot of knowledge to me. There was Johnny Coles, who really helped me with my tone and aided becoming a fast reader, and Jimmy Anderson, a very fine saxophonist who also

played piano and taught me a lot about harmony and chords, and there was Lou Donaldson, Kenny Dorham and the great Hank Mobley. The bassist, Art Williams used to run jazz sets in different places around Newark and took me under his wing. He seemed to recognize my potential and introduced me to the Newark nightlife.

"Jack Onque and his brother Carl got me into the Newark YMCA band. We played different stock arrangements of tunes by Count Basie and Duke Ellington. I remember when we first Page played, "We'll Be Together Again", I fell instantly in love with that tune and I promised myself I'd record it someday. I finally put it on my For Sure! album. Carl and Jack also got me my first professional gig with the Brady Hodge Rhythm and Blues Band. I was paid 30 dollars a night which was pretty good for a kid not yet 17!

"I began playing quite a bit in and around New York and Newark and I started to gain a reputation as one of the up and coming jazz trumpeters on the scene. I also started working in Larry Young's band with Tyrone Washington, Eddie Gladden and a fine, young saxophonist named Herbie Morgan. We were playing tunes like "Giant Steps", "Countdown" and "Monk's Dream" before anyone else. Those tunes are jazz standards today, but back then there was hardly anyone playing that music.

"Larry Young was a truly brilliant musician who could play anything on the organ that was played on the piano. It was also amazing to watch him play -- here was this 6 foot 4, 250 pound guy sitting at this relatively little instrument. He hardly looked delicate, but man...he was something else!

"Larry was the first musician I worked with who utilized the pentatonic scale, and he turned me onto African and Oriental music to hear the many different kinds of music made in this scale. I realized after listening to these records, you don't need a lot of notes to make complex, intricate and brilliant music, and less is often more.

"I attribute much of my harmonic knowledge to Larry Young, who got it through Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. It's all part of tradition which is very much part of my music and always will be. But there seems to be many young musicians who don't respect the jazz tradition, and the legacy of this music. They don't realize it's part of the basics of playing and comprehending jazz.

"Besides understanding the basics of jazz and the music's history, the musicians of today need to talk with each other more. When I was younger, I'd stay up all night discussing, listening and playing with people like George Cables, Terumasa Hino, Lenny White, Gary Bartz and Larry Young. We'd share ideas and music which was integral in my growth as a creative musician.

"I hear, see and talk with so many young musicians who are concerned only with their own sound. They don't realize if the group sound isn't happening, no one's going to be around to listen to their solos. They also don't realize that there's a structure and form within improvised music and to play it, takes planning, experimenting and communicating.

"Another area of my music development Larry Young inspired me to explore was composing. Larry was the first to record my music, and ironically, the tune he chose was the first one I wrote, "The Moontrane", and it was written in the pentatonic scale. It funny to me that my first composition is not only my most recorded tune, but I played it and recorded it many times as a sideman long before I did it as a leader.

"Sometimes, I think I should have named "The Moontrane", "The Youngtrane" since it was as much a tribute to Larry Young as it was to John Coltrane. But in a way, I came up with the name before I came up with the tune. It wasn't like a

consciously decided my first tune would be called "The Moontrane" the way people pick out a name for their baby before it's born -- nothing like that.

"I came up with the name while I was listening to Symphony Sid's radio show. The show was on really late at night, so I'd pretend asleep until everyone else in the house had gone to bed, and then I'd sneak into the livingroom and put on the radio. One particular night, I was just gazing out the window at this incredible full moon when Sid played John Coltrane's "Cousin Mary". I was immediately knocked out by the music and had this vision of Coltrane circling around the moon I was staring at. Later, when I wrote the music, that image kept on coming to mind, and the name "The Moontrane" seemed to fit the music and make perfect sense.

"Besides Larry Young, another person who was key in my musical development was Eric Dolphy. I met him when I was about 18 and playing with Willie Bobo's Latin jazz All-Stars at the Blue Coronet in Brooklyn. Chick Corea was in the band as well as Joe Farrell, Larry Gale on bass, Sonny Morgan on congas and Willie on jazz drums and timbales. Just hearing those names, you can imagine how hot they were! Anyway, Dolphy came by the club and after hearing just one set asked me to go on the road with him.

"At the time I met Dolphy, I was practicing quite a bit with a young saxophonist named Tyrone Washington. We'd analyze the solos of Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, Jackie McLean and Bud Powell, and we were playing in the bebop tradition. But around 1962, the music began to change. All of a sudden there were people like Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus and Cecil Taylor trying different things. Eric Dolphy was one of those people.

"Eric Dolphy's tunes were really challenging and just to play them provided me with a technical prowess. His music also changed much of my concept about music. I could hear the bebop influence of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie which Dolphy then took one step further. He had a most profound influence on me that ultimately helped me find my own direction in jazz. I wasn't yet 19 when I made my recording debut on Dolphy's The Iron Man. Included on the date was another friend and major influence of mine, Bobby Hutcherson. Eric had wanted both of us to join him in Paris, and he sent me a beautiful letter with my ticket. Unfortunately, he died shortly after I got to Europe. I was 19 when I lost my great friend and teacher.

"While I was working at Le Chat Qui Peche in Paris, I met alot of different types of musicians and orchestra. So I earned a living as a teen-ager in Europe. "While I was in Paris, I met Joe Henderson who along with Freddie Hubbard recommended me to Horace Silver to replace Carmell Jones. So Horace Silver wrote and asked me to come back to the United States for a 3 week guarantee trial. I used the return ticket Eric Dolphy had gotten me...God bless him.

"I got the gig with Horace after just one week, and I stayed with him almost 3 years. I learned alot about phrasing while working with him. I remember trying to record "Cape Verdean Blues" which was written in 16th notes and very difficult to read, and even though I didn't take a solo, it took me 7 or 8 takes until I got it right. Horace is a perfectionist and that's why his records sound so good, and working with him is what initiated me into really planning record dates.

"Besides being in Horace Silver's band, I was also very fortunate to work with Max Roach and Art Blakey. I always wanted to play in those bands because they always had the best trumpet players. My working in those particular bands made me a complete jazz musician; with Horace, I got a chance to learn about playing structured chord changes and forms, with Art, I became a very strong trumpet player, and with Max, I learned about lyricism and playing very fast. It was really an honor playing with Max Roach because he had 3 of my favorite trumpet players before me; Freddie Hubbard, Clifford Brown and Booker Little.

"Being with Horace Silver helped prepare me for the New York scene. I started meeting people like Jackie McLean, McCoy Tyner, Hank Mobley and Booker Ervin, and I started doing a lot of record dates.

"I got my college degree from Art Blakey's University of Jazz and Life. One of the things he taught me was while no one could guarantee me success, I was doomed for failure if I compromised and played what an audience wanted to hear. Oh, I might be a hit for a minute but it wouldn't last. Art Blakey has never commercialized his music even through some very lean years.

"If there's one piece of advice I'd like to pass on to young musicians, it's to respect the older jazz statesmen. Listen to what they have to say, even if you think their ideas are old-fashioned or outdated. You know, Art Blakey would say to one of us when we'd go off at the mouth at him, 'When you get to be my age, then you can tell me what to do but until then, you should stop talking and start listening. That's the only way you're going to learn more than you know.'" I'll tell you, if it hadn't been for older musicians -- listening and talking with them...well, maybe I'd be playing bar mitzvahs and weddings. So no matter how talented you are, there are no branches without trees.

"Art Blakey instilled in all The Jazz Messengers, an understanding of what a leader is. He's more than just the guy who calls the tunes. He had to deal with different egos and make sure everyone's happy and somehow involved with the creative process. He has to plan and structure performances and records, and there's so much more. Not everybody can be a leader. It takes a lot of guts, depth of personality and character. I became a leader because I had to. I felt at a certain point, I had derived my own philosophy and theories about music, and it was time to set out on my own course. I still enjoyed playing with different people but not as their sideman anymore.

"It's understandable to a certain point why so many young musicians are hesitant to become leaders. It's a lot of responsibility, even if you have a good manager. Besides, you have to form the entity before you seek a manager, and then, even if you're lucky enough to find a good one, the leader still has to be aware of everything that's going on.

"I also believe the leader has a responsibility to bring along his sidemen and aid them in becoming leaders. It's also very important for the leader to listen to his sidemen and allow them to contribute. There's plenty of room for more jazz groups, and I want to encourage young musicians to start working with other talented musicians and form bands. It's a lot of hard work, but if you believe you have something special to say, you can find a way.

"I've written a couple of tunes for Art Blakey including "To Kill A Brick" which appears on Woody III. I wanted a tune which was simple, to the point, and conveyed the feeling of a straight-ahead bebop blues. I also wanted to feature alto saxophonists, Rene McLean and James Spaulding in a jam session in the tradition of Charlie Parker. Some of the elements I put in the tune can also be applied to the kind of person Art Blakey is. I called the tune, "To Kill A Brick" because wherever I traveled with Art, people revered him. Art was like a god, and he used to say, 'They'd kill a brick over me.'" I guess, he was saying instead of killing a person for love, kill a brick instead. I know it's absurd, but so is the saying, "to kill a mockingbird".

"Art Blakey is my idol. He's still going strong and still finding these terrific young players. "Ginseng People" which is featured on my For Sure! album was another tune I wrote with Art Blakey in mind. His vigor, authority and strength remind me of the herb, ginseng. I'm very proud that I was a jazz Messenger, and that I'm still going on with the tradition, and I'm still swinging.

"Almost all my compositions are written with a specific person in mind; either someone who's had an influence or impact on my life or someone I admire. On side one of Woody III, I wrote a suite that perhaps is my most personal composition.

The first part, "Woody I: On the New Ark" is a tribute to my father. It musically conveys my appreciation of my musical heritage.

"Woody II: Other Paths" is also a tribute to my musical past, but is based more on my actual playing experiences. This part has a very creative edge to it, and I think it shows my constantly moving forward and exploring "other paths." The last part, "Woody III: New Offerings" is dedicated to my son, Woody Louis Armstrong Shaw the Third. It expresses my hope for him and for his children. Musically, it's connected to the other 2 parts, but it also stands on its own as a complete tune. I want my son to grow up, feeling that he too, can stand on his own, but always has the support of his family.

"I always loved playing ballads. Actually, I take that back. I didn't always love playing ballads, but I always loved a feeling of a ballad. I remember being on stage with Art Blakey and giving him signals that I was tired and my chops were down. So of course, Art announced to the audience that his trumpet player would be featured on a ballad. And I had to play it, no matter how I felt...the audience didn't want to know I was tired.

As much as it was hard work, I'm indebted to Art for making me play those ballads. It was excellent discipline; you can't play a ballad on "automatic", you really have to feel what you play, otherwise the audience knows it.

"In recent years, I find myself mellowing and choosing tunes people don't hear so often anymore, such as "We'll Be Together Again". When I play that kind of ballad which really touches people, it's easy to get them on your side, and when I get people on my side, then I can show them my other side!

"I often like to use a flugelhorn on a ballad. It has a richer and darker tone than the trumpet, sort of a cross between the French horn and the trumpet. When I play the flugelhorn, I'm a bit more lyrical as well as cautious because of the tone and the way the sound comes out. If you listen to my version of "We'll Be Together Again", I start off on the flugelhorn, then there's a violin interlude, and then I come back on the trumpet. You can hear the distinct differences between the sound of the two instruments. I also play more notes on the trumpet. By the way, on that particular piece I incorporated a string section for the first time, and I'm proud of the results.

"As I said working with Art Blakey prepared me to be a leader, but it took awhile before I formed my own group. I worked and recorded with McCoy Tyner, Gil Evans, Clark Terry, Chick Corea, Andrew Hill, Bobby Hutcherson, and Herbie Hancock, among others. It was around 1974, when I formed The Concert Ensemble. "I got the name for the group from Jim Harrison, a friend and New York concert promoter. He applied the name, The Concert Ensemble to an orchestra group led by McCoy Tyner in the late 60's. McCoy later used the name for the group he used on his Tender Moments album. I thought the name was very elegant, and I liked that for jazz.

"A concert ensemble aptly describes what I was trying to do. You see, I liked listening to big bands and large orchestras, but I didn't like playing in them. I liked a chamber sound from the Classical tradition because you still achieved an orchestra sound but in the context of a small group. Thus, came the name The Concert Ensemble, which I feel is a unique name for a jazz group, and it allows room for me to add strings and horns or even voices to augment my quintet.

"I think New York is one of the most unique places for a musician to grow and learn, especially if you're a jazz musician and want to play with a variety of people in a variety of settings. I feel musicians have to pay dues, and New York is a good place to do it. I don't mean, they have to live in a cold water flat and starve to death. But I do believe in order to play jazz, you have to live it. It has to mean something. jazz doesn't just come from your brain, jazz comes from your heart and soul, too.

"I think we're realizing jazz is our music; be it Black or White. When I say "our", I'm talking about America's music. People all over the world, except for most of America, realize the creativity and ingenuity of jazz. It's an American art form, started by Afro-Americans, and even though musicians of every color and race can play this music, it is American music. Unless we respect jazz, no one else will.

"Louis Armstrong said, 'There are only two kinds of music -- good and bad.'" I realize, we're living in a time of economic hardship, and musicians are scared to take chances and, they're afraid to just create music and disregard critics and commercial categories. But the only way the system is going to change, is if the musicians themselves, disregard what's expected of them and start creating music that reflects their uniqueness; not just as a musician but as a human being.

"I believe you must always maintain a certain level of awareness of what's happening in your environment, and in the Universe itself. You must also maintain hope when observing the state of affairs in the world, because in jazz, as in all forms of art, what is going on with you and around you, goes into making you a creative artist.

"One of the things I'm most proud of, is the album cover for Woody III. It's difficult to express in words what that photo means to me; to have my father and my son with me on an album that has the prestige and recognition of being on Columbia Records. As I said, I put the feelings into words...all I can say is, I feel very blessed, and whatever the future brings, just seeing that album cover with the 3 generations of Shaw men, makes me absolutely sure. Yeah, that was a pun, but I mean it. I feel very sure that I can handle anything."

When Art Blakey was asked to describe Woody Shaw, he said, "Woody is the kind of musician who will always play; he'll be jamming as soon as he gets into heaven."

Woody's response to Art was, "I hope I'm playing in the celestial orchestra and not the pit band."