

Biography

Columbia Records

WOODY SHAW

Woody Shaw is a trumpeter, cornetist, flugelhornist, composer, arranger, bandleader, and eclectic original. "I consider myself from the straight-ahead school of jazz," says Woody, and if you've heard him in action, you know what he's talking about. Avant-gardists like Eric Dolphy (with whom he worked) and John Coltrane have made their mark on Shaw's distinctive style, but he has not forgotten his debt to the early modern masters like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. "I'm able to handle any kind of music," he says, "but I think that when jazz stops swinging, it's not jazz."

The music on Woody's latest Columbia album, *Woody III* - like the music on its predecessors, *Rosewood* and *Stepping Stones* - never stops swinging for an instant. And it reveals Shaw as a true triple-threat man - not only is he playing better than ever, but he wrote all but one of the LP's six selections and did all the arrangements.

The album's title has two meanings. *Woody III* refers not only to the fact that it's his third Columbia release, but also to the name of Woody's first child, Woody Louis Armstrong Shaw III, who was born shortly before the album was recorded. The three selections on the first side, performed by an impressive 12-piece ensemble, are designed to tell the musical story of three generations of Woody Shaws.

James Spaulding, alto saxophone and flute, is featured as guest soloist on *Woody III*, but at the core of most of the tracks is Shaw's strong, tight young band of Carter Jefferson on saxophones, Onaje Allan Gumbs on piano, Buster Williams or Clint Houston on bass and Victor Lewis on drums. "I think I've found musicians who can play it all," Woody said of his quintet at the time *Stepping Stones*, recorded live at New York's Village Vanguard, was released, and the critics agreed. Rafi Zabor of *Musician* magazine, for example, praised it as "everything modern jazz should be" and called Shaw "a state-of-the-art trumpeter with a state-of-the-art band."

Similar plaudits have been coming Woody's way for some time. *Down Beat's* Chuck Berg, in a five-star review of *Rosewood*, called him "one of today's leading contenders for the world's heavyweight trumpet crown." Whitney Balliett of *The New Yorker* has called him "a trumpeter of startling invention and intensity." The readers of *Down Beat* voted Woody trumpeter of the year and *Rosewood* jazz album of the year in that magazine's 1978 poll. And the members of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences nominated *Rosewood* for two Grammy awards. Shaw's legion of admirers is growing, and there's no reason to doubt that with the release of *Woody III*, it will continue to grow.

Woody Shaw was born on Christmas Eve in 1944 in Laurinburg, North Carolina, home of Dizzy Gillespie's alma mater, Laurinburg Institute. Woody's father, Woody Sr., was himself a Laurinburg alumnus and a member of the gospel group, the Diamond Jubilee Singers. When Woody was still a

baby, the family moved to Newark, New Jersey, where Woody began studying trumpet at age 11 with Jerome Ziering.

Two years later he began his professional career, playing with Brady Hodge's Newark-based R&B orchestra. He worked with local acts like Alan Jackson and the Jive Five while in high school, where he made the All-City and All-State orchestras in 1959. Woody never finished high school, but he received valuable musical schooling through his work with local jazzmen like organist Larry Young and saxophonist Tyrone Washington. At 18, he got what he calls "the ultimate of my indoctrination" with Latin-jazz pioneer Willie Bobo at a club called the Blue Coronet in Brooklyn (among the other members of the band were Chick Corea and Joe Farrell).

Eric Dolphy heard Woody at the Blue Coronet and asked him to join his band. "Eric's music had a profound influence on me," he says of the late saxophonist. "He taught me a freer way to play and helped me find my own voice." Woody made his recording debut on Dolphy's *Iron Man* LP, and had been preparing to join him in Europe when Dolphy died in 1964. He went over anyway, settling in Paris, where he gained valuable experience playing with expatriate bebop greats Kenny Clarke and Bud Powell. He was also reunited with Larry Young, who played with him at Le Chat Qui Peche, a Paris nightclub, and also toured Belgium and Germany with him. The following year Horace Silver - whose trumpeter Carmell Jones, was himself moving to Europe - wrote to Shaw and asked him to come back to the U.S. and join his quintet.

After three very successful years with Silver, Woody spent the latter part of the sixties working and recording with McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea, Jackie McLean, Andrew Hill and others. The early seventies found Woody primarily on the West coast, where he worked in the bands of Herbie Hancock, Bobby Hutcherson, Joe Henderson and Art Blakey and made his recording debut as a leader with two albums on the Contemporary label. During these years Shaw wrote for almost every band with which he played. Two of his early compositions, "The Moontrane" and "Boo Ann's Grand," are considered by many to be jazz standards.

In 1973, Woody returned to the New York scene, having rejoined Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. The following year he left Blakey to establish himself as a leader and began recording for Muse with a band he called the Concert Ensemble. In 1975, he joined the Louis Hayes-Junior Cook quintet, assuming co-leadership with drummer Hayes when saxophonist Cook left. The Hayes-Shaw group became the band Dexter Gordon used for his triumphant U.S. tour in 1976 (the results are documented on Dexter's first Columbia LP, *Homecoming* - recorded, like *Stepping Stones* and one selection on *Woody III*, at the Village Vanguard. Woody's association with Gordon continued through the great saxophonist's *Sophisticated Giant* LP, after which he committed himself to leading a group full-time.

In the last year or so, Shaw and his quintet - occasionally expanded to a sextet with the addition of a trombonist and a saxophonist-flutist - have toured extensively both in the U.S. and abroad, and Woody himself has performed in Cuba as part of an all-star jazz band. The world, in other words, has been served notice that Woody Shaw has arrived - a fact that *Woody III* forcefully helps to drive home.

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