

# Woody Shaw: Trumpet In Bloom

By Chuck Berg

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This is destined to be the year that the boundless energies of Woody Shaw come into focus. In the first place, his playing has never been better. Coupling the bop-oriented idioms of Clifford Brown, Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard with the avantgarde dialects of Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane, Shaw has added a technical virtuosity and fiery intensity that make his stylistic approach second to none.

In addition to being a masterful stylist, Shaw is a leader with strong musical convictions. After a highly successful two-year tenure as co-leader of the Woody Shaw/Louis Hayes Quintet, the trumpeter has organized a group even more responsive to his musical design. Along with the leader, there are saxophonist Carter Jefferson, pianist Onaje Allan Gumbs, bassist Clint Houston and drummer Victor Lewis. It's a dynamic unit already making waves.

Moreover, Shaw's career has benefited from the wise counsel of his manager and wife, Maxine Gregg, and has taken a leap forward due to the support of Bruce Lundvall, President of CBS Records. So, with a major label recording contract, a hot new album (*Rosewood* Columbia JC 35309), top-notch management and a group of kindred musical spirits, Woody Shaw is now sittin' on top of the world.

But Shaw's accomplishments have not come by playing to the marketplace. Eschewing the fusion phenomenon, Shaw has steadfastly marched to the beat of his own drummer. As a result, Shaw's talents have been in demand by other uncompromising artists like Eric Dolphy, Horace Silver, Art Blakey, Max Roach, McCoy Tyner, Andrew Hill, Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, Jackie McLean and, most recently, Dexter Gordon.

Born in Laurinburg, North Carolina, on Christmas Eve in 1944, Shaw is as open and energetic as his music. Playing it safe is not Woody's way. Our conversation took place in Shaw's East 31st Street apartment with the sounds of John Coltrane and traffic from nearby Lexington Avenue counterpointing our dialogue.

*What kind of influence did your family have on your musical development?*

Well, coming from the traditions of the deep South, there was always a lot of music around. I had a cousin who played classical piano, you know, Chopin and Mozart. Every Christmas she would come down and play for the family. I got very jealous. I guess I was about nine or ten years old. So I was determined to show the family what I could do. I picked up a trumpet when I was about 11 and gradually learned to play it. I had a close affinity with the instrument. It just felt natural. So that's more or less how I became involved with the trumpet.

*Why trumpet instead of saxophone or piano?*

Actually, I had started playing bugle. I used to be in the Washington Carver Drum and Bugle Corps. This was an all black senior corps which was affiliated with the Masons. When you say "bugle," people think in terms of the military bugle. But a lot of bugles have one rotary valve which produces a series of chromatic notes. When I was playing bugle, though, I had to use the tuning slide for chromatic notes. Anyway, because of the bugle, I was attracted to the trumpet.

*Who was the first trumpet player that you listened to and identified with?*

Louis Armstrong. I loved Louis. Also, Harry James. I liked the flashy trumpet players. And Dizzy É so, I had a close affinity with the instrument and became the best trumpet player in school. This was in the sixth grade.

There was always a wide variety of music around our house. My father, Woody Shaw, Sr., was involved with gospel music. We listened to Tito Puente and all of that Latin stuff because we liked to dance. I remember a record by Lester Young and Howard McGhee on trumpet. Our friends would come over and we'd dance. So you can see it was a good environment for music-religious, dance, everything.

*What was your dad's gospel music experience like?*

Well, he belonged to the Diamond Jubilee Singers. They were very popular in the South. They were affiliated with the Fisk Jubilee Singers who came from Fisk University. But the Diamond Jubilee Singers developed a reputation of their own. I was fascinated. I'd sit down with my mouth open and just listen to those guys sing, man. The rhythms and the feelings they generated were terrific. I'd sit there and just go to sleep every night. So that was my first real close contact with live music.

*When did you move to Newark?*

When I was about two months old my family had already moved to Newark but my mother went back to North Carolina to have me. When I was a little stronger we went back to Newark. In the meantime my father was holding the fort down.

*Who were you listening to in junior high?*

I was still into Louis Armstrong, Harry James, the flashy trumpet players. I remember Ray Anthony. I used to watch him on television. Then my mother took me out one day and bought a \$1.25 record at the A&P. I'll never forget it. On it were Benny Goodman, J.C. Higginbotham, Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra. It came all the way up to 1945 with Dizzy Gillespie playing "Night In Tunisia." This fascinated me.

*Was Diz the first bop trumpet player you listened to?*

He was the first "modern" jazz trumpeter. At that time Dizzy was playing things that were impossible. Imagine me at 11 years old hearing Dizzy Gillespie. It sounded impossible to my ears. Nevertheless, Diz made me feel I had to be a jazz trumpet player.

Other people? Shorty Rogers, Pete Candoli, everybody, you know. I just loved the trumpet. There was another record that had a variety of jazz artists, like Sarah Vaughan. It also had Clifford Brown and Max Roach playing "Cherokee." I'll never forget it. It just haunted me. Such a beautiful dark tone. Clifford more or less shaped my conception of what I wanted to sound like. I was about 13 when that happened.

When I was in junior high I met a teacher who took a profound interest in me. His name was Jerome Ziering. He was a legitimate trumpet player who also played a lot like Harry James. He noticed my talent and took me under his wing. He said, "Woody, you're going to have to learn how to read. There are a lot of good white trumpet players out there who are going to make it competitive." He actually wanted me to become a classical trumpet player. I told him my folks couldn't afford trumpet lessons. He said, "Okay, instead of charging you \$10, I'll charge you \$5. You must study with me." I was still about 13 and Mr. Ziering was steadily helping me get my sound and technique down. So the whole legit world of trumpet started to open up. A little later I was starting to get into Lee Morgan, Donald Byrd, Kenny Dorham. That was around '58 or '59. Mr. Ziering knew I had this interest in jazz, so in addition to making me study out of legit books, he brought in solos by Dizzy and Bix Beiderbecke and Bunny Berigan. So he helped shape my concept of jazz.

*He was really an extraordinary man.*

Just beautiful. As far as the trumpet goes, I have as much respect and love for Mr. Ziering as I have for Clifford Brown and Dizzy Gillespie. He's a very big part of my background. He was such a great trumpet player. He's now a school teacher in New Jersey.

*So he was your first teacher.*

My first real idol, you know. He had a great interest in the students and made them learn about the basics of music. He wanted me to sit in the New York Philharmonic because I was a natural with the trumpet. One day he said, "Woody, can you hit this note?" He played a high G. I hit it. I can hardly hit it now, but I hit it then. I must have been about 13. Anyway, he made me try out for the all-city junior high and all-state junior high orchestras. He told me what to practice.

*Did you make those?*

Yes I did. I was playing 3rd or 4th trumpet but I was in there. After junior high, I went to the Arts High School in Newark. It's like the High School of Performing Arts in New York. Anyway, that's where people like Wayne Shorter, Sarah Vaughan, Scott La Faro and Connie Francis went. I then started to really grow as a jazz musician. I was also starting to meet people like Hank Mobley and Kenny Dorham.

*Had you started coming into New York to go to clubs?*

Not yet. I'd sneak into Birdland occasionally when I was about 15. I'd dress up and look older. I've always looked older than my age. I guess it's from growing up so fast. I had very good marks at school during that period. I was a super student. I even skipped a couple of grades—from 7B to 9A. But then came the thing with girls. Also, I started to hang out a little bit. Actually, growing up too fast. My parents said, "Woody, Mr. Ziering wants you to study, to get good marks and to develop your trumpet technique." But I thought I knew it all.

In high school there was a fantastic variety of trumpet players. I'll never forget it. They were all Italian too. These guys would really get tone, man. They were into Mendez. So that shaped and rounded my perception of what the trumpet should sound like. I still believe the main thing about trumpet is that tone. I like to hear a big fat round pretty sound. I don't care what a cat's playing, if he's got a big round pretty sound, he's got me.

I'm about 16 now. I'm growing up. I run into musicians like Buddy Terry and Art Williams. Art Williams, who later passed away, took an interest in me. He was a bassist and used to play in

different spots around Newark. There was another gentleman by the name of Jimmy Anderson who taught me about chords. When I was about 16 or 17 he said, "Well, you've got to learn piano." So I started working on piano. In the process I discovered I had perfect pitch. At this point I was thoroughly engulfed in music and really into Lee Morgan even more than Clifford Brown. To me, nobody played better than Lee Morgan. I was also into Donald Byrd. Dizzy, of course, had always been my man. I was also starting to discover people like Clark Terry and Maynard Ferguson.

I must go back a little bit to about age 14, when I met a man who was responsible for getting people like Wayne Shorter and Walter Davis going. His name is Ladozier Lamar and he directed a big band at the Newark YMCA. We played stock arrangements by Duke Ellington and Count Basie. He was very hard, you know. He really made us play those charts.

Later, through some of the guys in the Y band, I met Alan Jackson and started playing with his r&b band. I was also starting to jam everywhere. So all of a sudden, there's this young kid with lots of potential who loves to play, and it's me. I still love to jam, man.

*When did you start sitting in with established players?*

There was a club on Warren Street in Newark that had Tuesday night sessions that I'll never forget. The first night I sat in, Kenny Dorham and Hank Mobley were playing with a local rhythm section consisting of Larry Young on piano and a bassist by the name of Geronimo who also ran the sessions. Kenny really dug me 'til the day he died. I guess he could hear what was coming next. Anyway, every Tuesday nights there would be different players like Johnny Griffin, Lou Donaldson, Tommy Turrentine, Stanley Turrentine, Shirley Scott, Jackie McLean, all the cats.

Finally, I flunked out of school and the teaching staff couldn't understand it because I had been such a brilliant student. Everybody was worried, so I tried to go back to high school. I'm 18 now. Then I got a call from Rufus Jones -- a chance to go on the road. So I finally quit school and went on the road.

Buddy Terry, the saxophonist, was in the band, which was great because Buddy was one of my idols at that time. He was like the Sonny Rollins of Newark. He taught me about chords. Every question I had, Buddy Terry would answer for me, and he had all the hit records by Sonny, Brownie, everybody.

This was also the time of the avant garde, don't forget. It was fresh then. And I could always go hear Mingus, Trane, anybody, at the Showplace or the Jazz Gallery. That was when I was in my late teens. There were lots of things happening then.

There was a young drummer by the name of Wilson Morgan who used to make me go over to Juilliard. I used to sneak in on brass classes and stand outside the trumpet teacher's door and listen to him give lessons. You know, I couldn't have gone to Juilliard because I didn't graduate from high school, but there I was. It was like a whole new world.

All of us were grasping for knowledge at that time. I knew Chick Corea and Hubert Laws since they first came to New York. I remember this bashful guy that used to play piccolo at jam sessions, Hubert Laws. But a lot of cats who wanted to be jazz musicians left the scene and became teachers and whatnot. Tyrone Washington and myself, and another good friend named John Williams who played trombone, were very tight. We studied the music. We knew everybody's solos. We were listening to Sonny and Trane, and Charlie Parker and Bud, and at the same time this new movement called the new thing, or avant garde. Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy.

So I happened to be playing at the Club Coronet in Brooklyn with Willie Bobo. That band had Chick Corea, Joe Farrell on tenor, Garnett Brown on trombone and Larry Gales on bass. That was my first big time gig. That's also when I met Eric Dolphy.

One night Eric walked into the club. Somebody said he asked about me. Remember I'm only 18 now. A week later, Eric called me to go on the road with him to Pittsburgh to Crawford's Grill. That band had Bobby Hutcherson, J.C. Moses, Eric and myself. Up to this point I was more or less coming out of the Lee Morgan/Donald Byrd thing. But it was Eric Dolphy who really turned me around. The thing about Eric's music is that you could either play the changes or be free on it. He taught me to play inside and outside at the same time. It had form and made a lot of sense. Eric is the one who helped me find my own individual approach to playing trumpet.

I think a lot of people forget where the force of this music comes from. Eric Dolphy knew what he was doing. Ornette Coleman knows what he's doing. John Coltrane wrote "Giant Steps," which is a harmonic masterpiece. It's like classical music. Can you imagine Arnold Schoenberg not knowing about Mozart and Bach? I ask a young musician, "Okay, play the changes," and bam, he can't play the changes. But on a free thing he can play his ass off. I can't accept that. I had to go through it.

I admit that there is new music. Definitely. Nothing stays the same. At the same time there's nothing that's really that new. It's all linked. So I like all kinds of music. It's very important to me to know how to play in all the keys, and to play changes. That's the classicism of the music. At the same time, if I get tired of that I play something free.

So Eric Dolphy was really important. I studied his music like hell, man. A couple of months after the week at Crawford's Grill, I played with him for one night at the Five Spot. And I made the record with him, *Eric Dolphy Memorial*. Then I didn't see him for almost a year. But we used to talk all the time. He was becoming very popular at that time. Very controversial.

A year later, May, 1964, Eric sent me a letter from Paris. He really wanted me to come and work with him. Two days later Bobby Hutcherson calls and tells me Eric Dolphy's dead. I said, "That's impossible! I just got a letter from him with all the details and my ticket. He says he's going to meet me at the airport. You gotta be mistaken, man." But I sent a telegram to confirm his death and it was true. So I really felt out of it.

A couple of days later I got a letter from Joyce Mortici, who was to be Eric Dolphy's bride. She was studying modern dance in Paris at that time. She wrote me a beautiful letter and asked me to come to Paris anyway. I felt very strange about it, so I talked it over with my parents. They said they thought I should go. I talked to friends like Tyrone Washington and Larry Young and all the cats around Newark that I hung out with and they thought I should go too. So about a week later I went and met Joyce. The strange thing about Eric is that no one knew how he died. There were different interpretations, but nobody really knew.

So I'm in Paris now. They had a local rhythm section there for me to play with. I became very close to a young saxophonist who now teaches at the University of Pittsburgh, Nathan Davis. He had been playing with Donald Byrd and Eric. We became very close, almost like brothers, you know. After a while Nathan and I were playing together with Bud Powell, Kenny Clarke and all the cats on the Paris scene, Johnny Griffin, Art Taylor. So I got a change to grow in Paris. I was playing every night, seven nights a week, for six months. I loved it.

In fact, I had grown so much in love with Paris at that time that I made a proposal to the club to bring over Larry Young and a drummer by the name of Billy Brooks. The club went for it, so I sent some money for Larry and Billy to come over. We stayed there for something like seven weeks. But after a while, we were starting to wear out our welcome in Paris. It was time to leave. You can get too familiar with a scene, and you gotta split. So we went to Germany.

We met Joachim Berendt and did some concerts for him. We also did a record for a label that became MPS. That was with Larry Young on piano, Billy Brooks, Nathan Davis, Jimmie Woode on bass, and myself. We were at Ronnie Scott's in London, at Duke's in Berlin, and in France. Then Larry Young decided to go back home. He was on contract with Blue Note and they wanted him to do some recording in the States. A week after he left I got a letter from my father saying that Horace Silver was asking about me. So I wrote him and asked him to pursue what Horace wanted and find out if he wanted me to play with him.

So after a year in Europe, it was time to get back home. Eric had sent me a round trip ticket so I used it to get back home. I got in touch with Horace. Since he had never really heard me, there was a rehearsal. He really dug me and I was in. That band had Joe Henderson on tenor, Roger Humphries on drums, Teddy Smith on bass and Horace and myself. I was very lucky to play with Horace because he was one of my idols. The three bands I always wanted to play with were Horace Silver's, Art Blakey's and Max Roach's. Those were the three for me.

I learned a lot about the basics by playing with Horace-form, structure, discipline and whatnot. Horace's music is very disciplined. It was a good experience for me to grow and become a real professional musician. After Joe Henderson split, I recommended Tyrone Washington. After about a year, Horace decided to disband. The new thing was very prevalent and Tyrone and I were starting to affect Horace's music. I guess he decided it was best to disband.

Just before I left Horace I recorded an album with Chick Corea. It was originally called *Tones For Joan's Bones*. I was on trumpet, Joe Farrell on tenor and flute. Steve Swallow on bass, Joe Chambers on drums and, of course, Chick. We even considered getting a band up but it never materialized. After Horace's group was over I started meeting and recording with people like Jackie McLean, Andrew Hill and McCoy Tyner. So there was a lot of recording for Blue Note. I also started getting into the studio scene around '68 and '69 with Clark Terry and Joe Newman, which was a very good experience. And I started to play shows because I was a very good reader.

*What about your own goals?*

Well, in regard to my trumpet playing, I've been fortunate to be affiliated with Vincent Bach. They helped me to decide which instruments to use to develop my craft. But my big goal is to play the trumpet like nobody else has played it. I don't know if I'll do it, but I would like to sound like Woody Shaw. I come from the tradition of great trumpet masters of the past like Dizzy, Brownie, Lee and

Freddie. But I want to sound like Woody Shaw. I've been heavily influenced by Trane and Eric Dolphy and saxophonists in general, so I see a unique course developing in my own style. I think I sound like Woody Shaw.