

Your past keeps popping up on the musical landscape, as on the new Miles Davis Quintet box set *Live In Europe 1969: The Bootleg Series Vol. 2*. This set features Miles' band with yourself, Chick Corea, Jack DeJohnette and Dave Holland. What are your memories or reflections on that period?

That was around the time I was leaving. Miles said, "Why don't you get your own band?" Then, before he passed away [in 1991], he was saying, "You know, I was thinking, what would it be like if we all got together?" This was at Montreux. He was actually talking about us getting [back] together ... I was wondering what that would sound like. Herbie would bring all his experience with the Weather Report and all that, and I had some of that Weather Report sound. It wouldn't be like we would play as if that stuff never happened, and went back to where "On Green Dolphin Street" was [laughs].

You are working on a new piece, *Gaia*, commissioned by the L.A. Philharmonic, and *Lotus*, for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Are these larger projects and orchestral works a fulfillment of a dream you've always had?

Yeah, because when I went to NYU, as a major in music education, I had the audacity to bring a piece of music in there, to a concert band rehearsal. I called it "Universe," or something like that. It was for all brass. The music director had me conduct it. It got all tangled up. I said, "OK, OK, that's enough." It was just horns, with a canon kind of thing, but then it got off track, "Whoa" I'm going to dig it out sometime. What saves it is that nothing is ever finished. We have all the time in the world. Being in the moment is quite a practice.

Now you have your first album out since 2006. Is it a big deal for you, or just one step along the long creative path?

It's another step. It's a continuation. Here it comes now, we'll do it now. But I'm not huffing and puffing and thinking, "Gotta do another one!" We are going to do another one. We're working on a larger project, with more instruments and more colors. I like to fulfill that thing that Bird and Trane were working on. They wanted to do something larger, with oboes, say.

Miles used to talk about that. He said, "You know, in jazz, small groups are OK, but you don't have enough colors in there. They thought synthesizers would do it, but synthesizers won't do that shit." [laughs]

You do a version of your old Weather Report song "Plaza Real" on your new album. It's an exercise in tension—building and releasing and building again. But you leave off the resolving, relaxed melody of the Weather Report rendition. Is that a case of rethinking an old idea?

Oh, yeah. There's going to be another departure. I'm going to work this thing with an orchestra and have it grow. My whole idea is that there's

Making the Invisible Visible



It's a paradox that the man often called the greatest living composer in jazz—who has written dozens of genre-expanding pieces for groups large and small, including many standards—prefers to go onstage and just wing it. According to members of the Wayne Shorter Quartet, that's because the theme of love and connection to others has become so central to his music. By definition, he can't create this music alone.

Fans who flock to see Shorter in concert do not expect to hear faithful renditions of familiar tunes. "Sometimes it's even difficult to remember what we played after a show," bassist John Patitucci says, "because there's so much improvising going on. Any one of us can cue one of Wayne's pieces. They have such beautiful themes, but he never wants us to play the piece strictly as written. He always wants us to expound on it."

Performing "without a net," as the title of the group's new album puts it, is "exciting and scary," pianist Danilo Pérez says. "I still feel on the edge ... it never feels safe." Pérez calls this way of working "comprovisation."

Adds Patitucci, "We're improvising, but we're also developing themes, harmonies and rhythms together in real time. We're trying to blur the line between written and improvised music. This is something that Wayne has wanted to do for years."

It can be risky, of course. "We're flying by the seat of our pants," Patitucci says. "When you're willing to risk it all, the magic can happen. If you don't risk anything, you don't get the magic."

"Wayne taught us to be vulnerable," Pérez explains. "He says, 'Play as if you were practicing onstage; they are the same. If you are playing a solo and someone else comes in with an idea, it is not an interruption—it is a constant dialogue.' He told me, 'Don't let all the rules you have learned be a false witness to the celebration onstage. Let's celebrate life to music.' That for me was scary—like throw-

ing yourself in a pool [and] not knowing if there's water in it. It takes courage."

Being in the quartet has changed their lives, the players attest. "After the immeasurable time we have spent together, listening, laughing and traveling, the relationships have grown deeper, and the music has as well," drummer Brian Blade says. "I believe that the trust between us outweighs any notion of having to prove something. When you know you have that kind of love on your side, there's nothing you can't play."

Before they perform, Shorter and his band members join together in a circle and literally put their heads together. Says Pérez, "We've done that now before all the gigs for the last 12 years. It's like we are trying to connect our brains on a cellular level."

Pérez says he has complicated feelings toward Shorter—"like a son, like a brother, like an apprentice. I feel very emotional about it. The invisible thing has become visible for me. And I think that's the magic of the quartet. We make invisible stuff become visible."

Patitucci agrees: "It's not just about the music. It's way more than that. I love them. They're my family." The music serves a greater purpose, he says. "Jazz—improvised music in a group setting—is for me, spiritually, the way I wish the whole world functioned: trusting each other, being selfless and ... creating something as a community that is much more powerful than what each of us could come up with alone."

"Wayne wants not only to create new music every night, but to create cinematic experiences, to take people places. The music makes them dream and think and react in different ways. He wants to change people's hearts and inspire people. And when people share like that onstage, and you can't believe the things that happen, it's [only] an arrogant person who thinks, 'Well, you know I did that.' I think it's more like, 'We were part of it.' And so was the audience." —Allen Morrison

no such thing as something that is begun or finished.

It's a challenge to play that stuff. Everything we're talking about, it doesn't go away. Kids say, "Where do our words go?" People argue about the chicken and the egg, or how do things begin? What was before the beginning? Is there such a thing as a beginning? For me, now, it's convenient to say that before there is the beginning of anything, there is potential. When a kid isn't

doing so well in school, one teacher says, "You're not using the brains that God gave you." Another teacher says, "You're not using your full potential." I choose number two. At least that can hint that you have more time to develop things.

It seems that you, as an artist, are always interested in the "what's next?" factor.

Yeah. And potential is a better mystery than what came before the beginning. DB