

MUSICIAN



Robert Adenoff

WAYNE SHORTER

The trailblazing saxophonist waxes philosophical about the future of jazz

By Jeff Tamarkin

THOSE WHO'VE HEARD WAYNE SHORTER BLOW A SOLO know the legendary jazz saxophonist seems to reside in a world of his own creation. Burrowing deep inside of a melody, he finds a nugget that intrigues him, grabs it and runs with it—the music twisting, turning, climbing, falling and ultimately journeying to a place far from where it began ... or perhaps finding its way back.

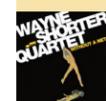
A conversation with Shorter often takes a similar path. Ask a question and he may start with a direct response, but before long the answer will likely become elaborate, layered, convoluted. The Newark, N.J., native may be perplexing, but he's at once brilliant, original and endearing. And his abilities as player, composer and innovator remain incontestable.

At 79, Shorter is one of the last of a breed of jazz giants who reconfigured the genre in the 1960s and '70s and singlehandedly spawned new jazz movements along the way. And he's far from

done: Formed in 2000, the Wayne Shorter Quartet—with pianist Danilo Pérez, bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade, each titans—remains one of the most inventive and incendiary in jazz today.

With that knowledge, Don Was, president of Blue Note Records, signed Shorter, reuniting legendary label and musician after more than four decades. Shorter's albums for Blue Note—*Juju*, *Speak No Evil* and *Adam's Apple*—each became classics, but were only part of an unfolding story. As a member of Art Blakey's *Jazz Messengers* and Miles Davis' *Second Great Quintet*, and as a co-founder of fusion pioneers *Weather Report* in the '70s, Shorter established himself as one of the most respected names in jazz.

Without a Net, the Wayne Shorter Quartet's new release, pulses with risk, power, wonder—and, yes, some blemishes in the soaring brilliance. It isn't so much Shorter coming full circle or picking up where he left off, but rather pointing straight ahead, just as he always has.



'What we thought back in the '60s—jazz might be dead 30 years from now—was wrong.'

How did you re-sign with Blue Note?

I had a talk with [former Blue Note president] Bruce Lundvall. He came to my house and we said, "Let's keep in touch." Bruce was always the go-to guy on the mission of creativity. Then Don Was got on the mission train. I'd met him when we were working in the studio with the Rolling Stones [Shorter played on 1997's *Bridges to Babylon*].

What's it mean to be back on the label?

It means that what we once thought back in the '60s—that jazz might be dead 30 years from now—was wrong. That was when I was recording with Art Blakey and Lee Morgan, doing albums like [Blakey's] *The Freedom Rider*. Art said, "Jazz might be dead. There's a concerted effort to kill it, so let's make this count." Even with all the resistance that faces all kinds of creativity, it seems young kids come out of nowhere, and they're into stuff that you can't believe.

Why release a live album?

A live album is what life is. The studio is OK, but there's a certain amount of sterilization. When you're talking about jazz or the creative process, you try to be in the moment

'You can't be concerned with your musical credentials.'

in any situation. I don't like doing take after take, especially when you're playing music without rehearsing. My saying now is, "How in the hell do you rehearse the unknown?"

How else do you know what to play?

Just get up there, maybe look at the paper, and start playing. Don't play what you see on the paper. What's behind that music? Look for the face, look for the dialogue, which is actually you. The music is like once upon a time—what the hell are you going to say after "Once upon a time ... "?

Is each piece you write a story?

Yeah—or each piece is once upon a time. In other words, I'm saying it in another language, but it's still once upon a time. In a movie you see the title, like *Giant*, starring James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson. *Giant* is like once upon a time. Or *Lincoln*—once upon a time. What is Daniel Day-Lewis going to do, besides being one of the greatest

actors of this century? How is he going to tell it? We know the story of Lincoln, but there's another aspect, another dimension that comes out. That's why nothing ever begins or finishes. There's no such thing as a beginning or ending to me. When we step on the bandstand, we play—the music just starts. The music is actually going on all the time, and the person who puts on the record is opening a door and hearing.

What does "without a net" mean to you?

You can't be concerned with your musical credentials and everything you've studied. You put your best foot forward and go out there naked. There's no such thing as a mistake.

When you write for the quartet, are you considering what each musician is capable of creating?

When you're writing something, you're not anticipating what they're going to do. If Miles said anything at all, he'd say, "Surprise me." If someone was practicing, he'd call them up and say, "Don't rehearse. Don't practice. Surprise me."

What else did you learn from Miles?

"Don't rehearse" was important, but it was more than a lesson. It was an important action. Some people step out and do something like that, and then they step back in as if they've broken the rules, as if you have to ask permission. We like to be part of a new singularity in life where human beings for the first time take on the role of leaders and are not a mass of followers. I'm not just talking about music when I say leaders—I'm talking about a doorman or a cab driver. Everyone's got to be a leader.

Ever listen to your old recordings?

No. I see them, but they have to serve more purpose than to be remembered. I really want to make sure the trajectory of the mission is true. It's true north. Your intention has to be the same.

Are you bothered that people only ask about Miles or Weather Report?

You can't let it bother you when people say you were this or you were that. The true nature of something transcends superficial comments or attachments. In Buddhism, we say attachments can lead to suffering. If I were going to rely on what people say, I'd be in the loony bin.

Is it important how you're remembered?

It's not important to be remembered. What surpasses the memory is the DNA

ESSENTIAL SHORTER



Ugetsu: Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, 1963

Shorter's stay with Blakey's school of jazz was winding down when the outfit recorded this steamy set live at Manhattan nightspot Birdland. Shorter has four of his tunes and numerous solos on the set, which also features Curtis Fuller (trombone), Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Cedar Walton (piano) and Reggie Workman (bass).



Speak No Evil, 1964

Virtually all of Shorter's Blue Note recordings are exceptional, but *Speak No Evil*, recorded the same year he joined Miles Davis' troupe, is where he truly found his niche. On seven original compositions, teamed with Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Elvin Jones and Hubbard, Shorter pushes beyond the reigning hard bop of the day and into new territory.



Live at the Fillmore East, March 7, 1970

Sandwiched between sets by the Steve Miller Band and Neil Young and Crazy Horse, Miles Davis' *Second Great Quintet*—Shorter, keyboardist Chick Corea, bassist Dave Holland, drummer Jack DeJohnette plus percussionist Airtio Moreira—showed the hippies what real psychedelic music was. Relentless, uncompromising, blistering and beautiful.



Alegria, 2003

Shorter has always been an unapologetic experimenter, and many fans and critics gave up on him post-*Weather Report*. But by the turn of the century, Shorter found his footing again. With his still-active quartet taking shape, and with assistance from Brad Mehldau, Terri Lyne Carrington and others, Shorter rediscovers his groove.



Weather Report: The Columbia Albums, 1971-1975

Weather Report didn't invent fusion, but they exemplified it. This boxed set, housing the first six albums they cut for Columbia, is jazz-rock at its most creative and inspired.

MUSICIAN



Onstage in Paris, 2007

Jean Marnisse/Dalib/Landov

'If someone was practicing, Miles would say, "Don't rehearse. Don't practice. Surprise me."'

and the intention that comes from a place of enlightenment. Your intention adds to the greater good of the eternity of life.

Do you always think philosophically? When I was 15 I got a book on metaphysics and said, "Hmm, everything's not in the book." Then I said, "What is music for? What is anything for?" I would look at my hand and say, "What is this? Who are we?" The answer is in the question. And if you cut off the "ion," the answer is in the quest.

What do you still want to accomplish? I just want to see the light on kids' faces. We did a concert on our last tour in Europe, and the place was packed. We went through the stage door to get to our cars, and the street

was loaded with young kids waiting to take pictures and get an autograph. They were 12 or 13. One was about 7, he came to me and said, "My name is Miles." So what we worried about in the '60s didn't happen. Some of these kids went up to Herbie [Hancock] and said, "We play classical music but we improvise, too." They didn't ask Herbie how to improvise or ask, "What is jazz?" They just said, "We improvise, too."

Is the future of jazz bright? The word jazz to me means being in the moment. Jazz is shorthand for the sound of the future. If you think studying music is going to take away your street groove, get out of here!

HIGH NOTES

Wayne Shorter's run on Blue Note resulted in some of the label's most highly regarded releases, but it also signed other sax masters.

Dexter Gordon The embodiment of bop, Gordon's Blue Note period accounted for his most durable contributions. Recommended: *Go!* (1962)

Sam Rivers The avant-garde master recorded a handful for Blue Note, but they're considered among his best. Recommended: *Fuchsia Swing Song* (1964)

Jackie McLean With his 21 albums for Blue Note, this alto player established himself as an insatiable progressive. Recommended: *Let Freedom Ring* (1962)

Joe Lovano A star of the current roster, the 20-year Blue Note veteran is a bold and imaginative player. Recommended: *Folk Art* (2009)

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