

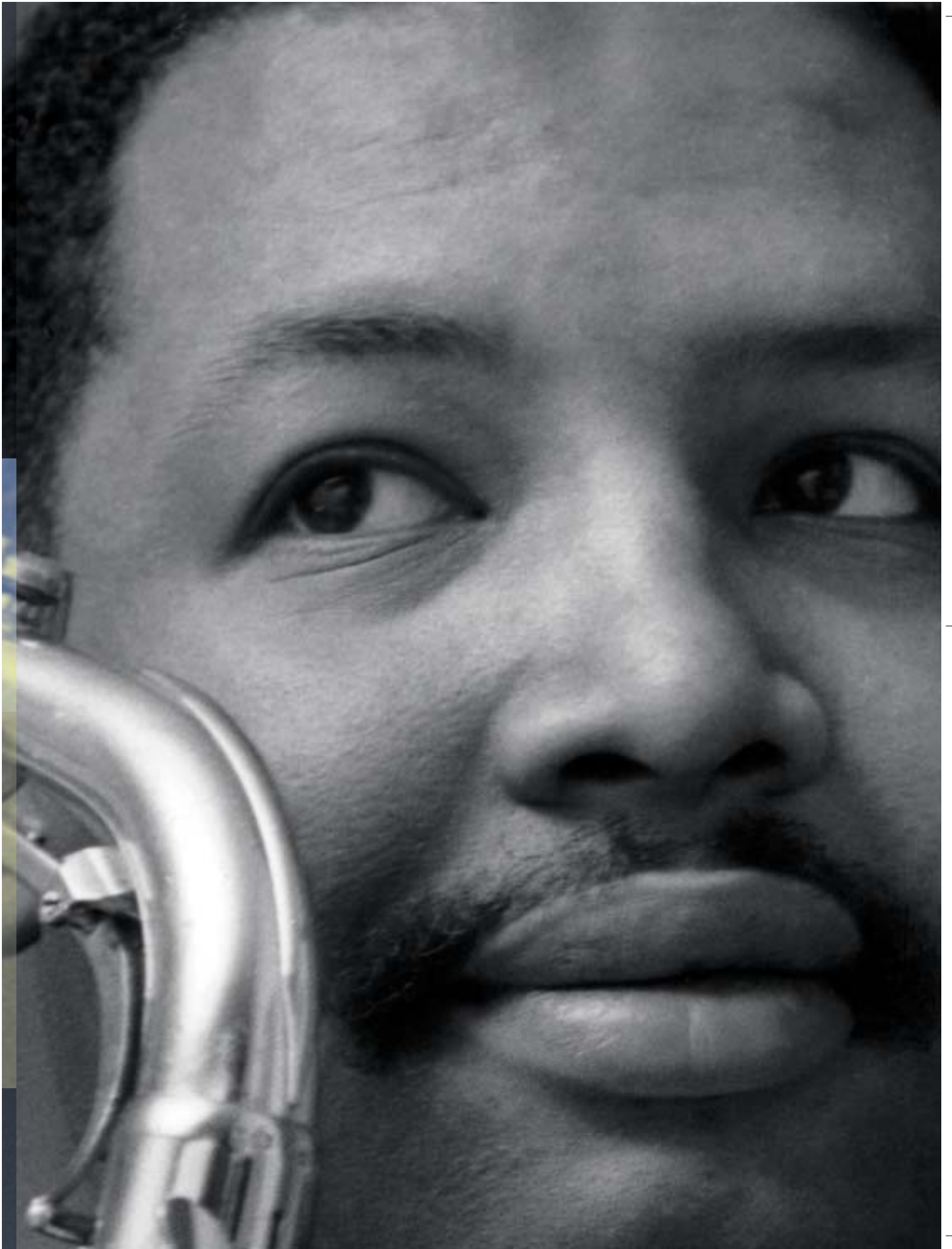
Cult of Cannonball

Among a cross-section of renowned musicians and industry veterans, there's a unifying belief that Julian "Cannonball" Adderley has not received due credit. Those who knew him are fervent in their praise for him, not just as one of the greatest improvisers to master the alto saxophone, but as a charismatic leader who spread happiness wherever he went. Soulful, articulate and blessed with a larger-than-life personality to match his rotund physique, the Florida native and former school-band director burst onto the scene in 1955 and enjoyed one of the most enduring careers in jazz. So why hasn't Cannonball been properly appreciated? Nearly 28 years after his premature death—and approaching what would have been his 75th birthday—friends and admirers seek answers and pay tribute to an extraordinary man who is never far from their thoughts.

It was a different world, an era when jazz was well-represented on commercial radio. In the early 1960s, late-night jocks graced the airwaves with music by Miles Davis, John Coltrane and funkier strains of jazz pouring forth from Horace Silver, Hank Crawford or Stanley Turrentine. At the top of their playlists were often the latest songs from Cannonball Adderley and his stellar bands. Well before Joe Zawinul wrote "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy"—the 1966 crossover success forever identified with Adderley—Cannonball had several smaller hits under his belt. One of the first was pianist Bobby Timmons' catchy waltz "This Here," which the Adderley quintet recorded at San Francisco's Jazz Workshop in 1959. It captured continual radio play, which says a lot for a live instrumental nearly 13 minutes long.

Joel Dorn remembers those days fondly. At 19, he became a disc jockey at a Philadelphia radio station. Just months earlier, he had been buying Cannonball's records; now he was spinning them on the air. Better yet, he got to interview Cannonball whenever he came to town, and befriended a man who is invariably described as affable, worldly and uncommonly intelligent.

By John Janowiak
Photo by Charles Stewart



Back then, getting radio play depended on forming genuine relationships with local DJs, and that was something which, like so many things in life, came naturally to Cannonball.

“When Cannon came and did an interview, he made you feel like a king. He knew how to work you in a way that you didn’t feel worked,” recalls Dorn, who went on to become producer for several labels, from Atlantic to his current imprint, Hyena.

Imagine the young Dorn’s thrill of seeing Cannonball’s band perform live. Earlier on, there was the quintet with Timmons on piano and the dynamic duo of Louis Hayes and Sam Jones on drums and bass. A constant fixture in the band was cornetist Nat Adderley, who is said to have idolized his older brother and who contributed such popular numbers as “Work Song” and “Jive Samba” to the band’s songbook. Later, beginning in 1962, Cannonball had his sextet with Zawinul on keyboard and Yusef Lateef on tenor, who was succeeded by Charles Lloyd. “That sextet, to me, was second only to the one that Cannon came out of, which was Miles’ sextet,” Dorn says. “When Cannon came to town, there was a line around the block at Pep’s or the Showboat. Everyone knew they were going to be entertained.”

The sheer volume of the band was staggering for its day. The energy level was so high that Lloyd says he had trouble keeping up when he joined the group in 1964. “[Cannon] had a philosophy—he didn’t articulate it on a competitive level—but he felt that his band didn’t take any prisoners,” Lloyd recalls. “We’d get on the bandstand, and you wouldn’t want to follow that band. Lou Hayes would be up there poppin’, and Sam would be walkin’ and swingin’ so hard it would make you hurt yourself, and Zawinul punching ’em out. Folks would be up on the roof.”

The fire kept blazing like that until 1975, the year when musicians everywhere wept at the news of Cannonball’s fatal stroke. Though his personnel had evolved over time—with Hayes and Jones eventually giving way to Roy McCurdy, Victor Gaskin and Walter Booker, for instance—Cannonball had a way of earning loyalty from his sidemen. Like veterans of bands led by Miles and Art Blakey, the musicians who passed through Cannonball’s ranks equate it to an institution of higher learning. “You don’t want to get Joe Zawinul and me in a room talking about Cannonball,” George Duke laughs, “because we both enjoyed the experience so much.”

Hal Galper, who played keyboard in the group in the early ’70s, misses what he calls the “Big Beat” that propelled the band. He describes it as the kind of fat, wide beat that was typically heard in the swing era, but rarely since then and never today. He says, “It was the most intense rhythm section I’ve ever played with.”

Live shows were bound to dish out at least a few crowd-pleasing hits. By all accounts, Cannonball’s funky, bluesy side was never a calculated means to make him wealthy. “If I knew the way to ‘sell out,’” he quipped in a 1967 *DownBeat* interview, “I’d buy time on Huntley and Brinkley and assure everybody that Cannonball has sold out.” Cannon’s soulful style came from deep within; it was a natural outgrowth of his Southern church-bred upbringing. It was also a product of his ability to read audiences and communicate with them. And yet, as much popularity as he gained from what might be categorized as soul jazz, it tended to overshadow his legacy as one of jazz’s most inventive improvisers.

“We were not that liked by the critics because it was a music for people more or less to have fun. And it was not taken in a great serious way. However, the band could really play. But the choice of material at times, even I didn’t like it. There was sometimes a reliance on hits. In fact, we had a lot of fights about that. I always said, ‘Hey, the band is the hit, not the tunes we play.’”
—Joe Zawinul

“He was typecast in a way that took into consideration only a small fraction of what he had to offer. Because this was not some instinctive, unlettered, from-the-soil kind of funky musician. This was an educated and extremely intelligent musician. And this was a man who made, during most of his career, a conscious effort to have control over his music.”
—Orrin Keepnews



CHARLES STEVART

A close friend of Cannonball’s as well as his producer on the Riverside label from 1958–’64, Orrin Keepnews admits he’s a biased source concerning the altoist’s place in history. Nevertheless, he’s one of the most articulate and well-informed evaluators on the subject. He feels that Cannonball has been underrepresented in the annals of jazz, and offers a theory on why Cannon is overlooked:

“As with every jazz musician who has had any acceptance, his work is considered relatively invalid because it’s popular. He had one of those flame-of-the-moment successes. And all of a sudden, not only was he and his band established, but in about five minutes they were being thought of as spearheading a trend and a whole style. An awful lot of the soul music nonsense of that period was rightly or wrongly attributed to him and his success. Let’s face it: If you are a serious jazz musician, one of the worst things that can happen to you is to become a symbol. You get blamed for all the excesses and ineptitudes of your self-proclaimed followers.”

To simply cast Cannonball in the soul jazz mold is to significantly overlook the breadth of his creative output. In the Riverside period, Cannonball made a decision to alternate each working-band album with a studio project. For almost every live band album—which captured the festive spirit of the band’s club performances—there were ambitious works like *African Waltz* and *Alabama Concerto*. The album teaming Cannonball with Bill Evans, *Know What I Mean*, is often cited as an example of Adderley’s far-ranging potential. As Keepnews recalls, Adderley made a point to play songs from Evans’ repertoire on the album, challenging himself to learn unfamiliar material. “If you look at what Cannon did, there is continuous evidence of musical intelligence and sensitivity in his work,” Keepnews says. “He is one of the most impressive ballad players. He was never in any danger of being swallowed by that soul stuff.”

In the ’50s, prior to his association with Riverside, Adderley grappled with a pigeonhole of a different sort. He was marketed as “the new Bird”—a label he hated; although he drew inspiration from Bird, he had his own approach. “When you listen to Charlie Parker or Cannonball, other than that they’re playing the same instrument, you wouldn’t have any problem telling them apart,” Louis Hayes says. “With both of them, it was lyrical, thought-out and intelligent. But they were different. [Cannonball] definitely had his own voice.”

Cannonball’s earlier recordings received little attention, and his first quintet with Nat failed to make a splash. Fellow musicians were keenly aware of his talents, however. His reputation first spread after his

Cannon's Fuse

Friends and admirers reflect on the soul behind Cannonball's sound.

LOUIS HAYES:

"The way he spoke on the microphone, he made the audience relax and feel comfortable. Cannon sometimes would speak about a composition that we were getting ready to play, and the group might get a round of applause before we started playing the tune. He was a great orator."

JOE ZAWINUL:

"My momma was a world-class cook in Vienna, and in 1966 we went over there to judge an international jazz competition. It was J.J. Johnson, Cannonball, Mel Lewis, Ron Carter, Art Farmer and myself. So I invited those guys to come to my house to eat. Cannon liked my momma's cooking so much, he came every day to eat. He didn't speak any German, my father didn't speak a single word of English. But they were standing around and cracking up. It's a type of communication, deeper than just knowing a few words, and he had that."

JAMES MOODY:

"One year we were in Poland together and Cannonball noticed I was feeling low. He came up to me and said, 'You look like you could use a hug.' He gave me this huge bear hug. I said, 'You will never know how much I appreciate that hug.' He said, 'Well, we will just have to do it again sometime.' He was a wonderful musician, but I will always remember him for that hug."

JOHN LEVY:

"I was the only person who ever managed Cannonball. Miles Davis introduced Cannonball to me. I brought him into Philadelphia for the first gig with his own group. He brought up a rhythm section that he'd been working with down in Florida; and at the opening session at this club in Philadelphia, they had a Monday matinee where you'd play for a couple hours and then come back at night. But at the matinee, the rhythm section wasn't making it. I told Cannonball after the afternoon session, 'We're going to have to get rid of these guys.' He said, 'We can't do that, these are my friends.' He was hurt, because he was conscientious and honest to people. But I paid these guys off and sent them back home. This was just one of many instances of how he had relationships that he honored no matter what the cost."

GEORGE DUKE:

"He knew so much about jazz and the history of music, and he was always interested in bringing musicians and music together. His vision was far beyond what then was known as the parameters of jazz. He was into expanding that, and not necessarily for commercial reasons. I learned a lot from that and his appreciation for all forms of music, from classical to Brazilian music, to soul music of the time, to jazz. He was into inclusion."

ORRIN KEEPNEWS:

"He was one of the easiest people to work with in the studio. He and Nat had a good, close working relationship. The standing joke was they were going to have one flare-up between them on each session. It wasn't always true, but we took it almost as a given. So one of my jobs was to see to it that it happened as early in the session as possible to get it out of the way."

VINCENT HERRING:

"If you listen to Martin Luther King's 'I Have A Dream' speech, and if you listen to certain Cannonball solos, both have theme and development, coming back to a certain kind of riff, and the same kind of drive and intensity. The best thing about Cannonball was his ability to communicate with people through his instrument. And no matter what time period of Cannonball you listen to, he was a communicator. To Nat, Cannonball was genuinely his hero. Nat used to joke around and say, 'People always say Cannon's a genius. If I had known all that, I'd have listened more closely.' But in private, he'd be the first to tell you that Cannon was a walking brain on many subjects." —J.J.

New York debut in 1955, when he sat in with Oscar Pettiford's band at the Café Bohemia. "It was just one of those things, being in the right place at the right time and just being ready for the opportunity," says saxophonist Vincent Herring, who plays alto in a style deeply influenced by Cannonball's spirit who played in Nat Adderley's group for several years. An avid Cannonophile, Herring never missed a chance to ask Nat about legendary incidents like the one at Café Bohemia. "As Nat told the story, they called 'I Remember April,' and at the time, that was considered not totally obscure, but a hard tune. When Cannon played that solo, those guys about had a heart attack because everybody in New York thought they were so hip, and here this guy is out of Florida." The Tampa-born schoolteacher (and sometimes car salesman) immediately landed a seat in Pettiford's band, altering the course of his life forever.

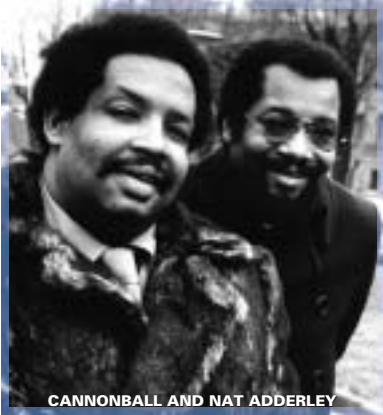
One of his earliest fans was Miles Davis. When the bandleader asked Adderley to join his sextet in late 1957, history was in the making, and suddenly the name Julian "Cannonball" Adderley carried a lot more weight. As he performed alongside John Coltrane, his soloing quickly began to display a higher level of harmonic sophistication. Cannonball was, in at least one way, a very different person from Coltrane. While 'Trane was known for practicing obsessively, even during set breaks, Cannonball seemed to absorb knowledge almost effortlessly. "He could execute anything he heard," Lloyd recalls. "He knew his theory," Galper adds, "he just hated to deal with it." Zawinul goes so far as to say: "Cannon never practiced. He had a cigarette between his fingers, holding it while he was playing, and it was like the old masters played. The old guys like Willie 'the Lion' Smith, Art Tatum and Coleman Hawkins, they used to play with a wit and a looseness. They didn't take this stuff like it was a brain surgery."

In spite of his nonchalant nature, or maybe because of it, Adderley soared to artistic heights as a key player on two of the seminal recordings in jazz. He more than held his own with Miles and Coltrane, as his magnificent work on *Milestones* and *Kind Of Blue* will attest. Yet while his section-mates are universally regarded as giants of jazz, such a pedestal is rarely reserved for Adderley.

"Miles found it important to keep reinventing himself. Coltrane really only reinvented himself once, but it was a significant move. I don't see any need for comparison [with Adderley]. There was, for almost a year, this absolutely magnificent band which had those three horn players and Bill Evans. We should all thank God that this existed." —Orrin Keepnews

Self-reinvention, altering history, claiming a pedestal—none of these were priorities for Adderley. As he himself said in a DownBeat "Blindfold Test": "There is nothing wrong with a man getting a style and a feeling, and playing his style and feeling of jazz. I don't agree with the theory that jazz musicians have to continue to change. I think that they should grow within their own thing."

If there's a throne Cannonball deserves to sit on, it's as an icon among alto soloists. "If you talk about Cannon and Bird and Johnny Hodges, you're pretty well talking about the troika," Dorn says. Few altoists would disagree. Donald Harrison, who came of age emulating all three horn players on *Kind Of Blue*, says of Cannonball: "He had a way of making the technique seem like an afterthought. Also, each note was an entity all to itself, meaning that he put something special on each note. He might put a slide on one note, he might tongue a note. He had a way of doing that at any tempo. And it sounds as though it's simple, but it's diffi-



CANNONBALL AND NAT ADDERLEY

GIUSEPPE G. PINO

cult. He had the fluidity and the mastery of the alto saxophone to pull it off.”

Gary Bartz describes Cannonball as a consummate altoist: “My approach is more like a tenor, whereas Cannonball’s is really an alto sound. That’s why Trane and Cannon worked so well. Miles told me that he really liked altos better. That’s from Charlie Parker, and the trumpet and the alto are in the same range. And Trane, he’s a tenor who plays like an alto.”

During his improvisations, Cannonball often went outside the changes and superimposed his own chords, a tendency that kept his keyboardists on their toes. Duke was in his early 20s when he took over Zawinul’s spot in the band, and he confesses that he felt intimidated by Cannonball’s vast knowledge of music and his command of improvisation. He recalls an exchange with his bandleader: “I said, ‘I don’t know how to play for you, because as soon as I get a hold of something that you’re doing, you’ve moved somewhere else.’ He said, ‘Just open your ears!’”

Zawinul never failed to be awed by Cannonball’s abilities. “I was in the band nine-and-a-half-plus years, and I never heard Cannonball stutter on the saxophone, hit any wrong notes or have a problem where the reed starts squeaking. The man was amazing. He could do anything.”

Ask any of his sidemen about Cannonball, and they’ll rave for hours. But before they say a word about his musicianship, they’ll speak about Cannonball the man. They’ll describe a well-rounded intellectual who embraced life and loved people. They’ll recount elevated conversations that took place while driving in Pontiac station wagons—discussions that covered everything from classical composers to the Russian Revolution.

Mostly, they’ll describe his ability to connect with audiences, through his saxophone and with his voice. Cannonball Adderley was, above all, a communicator—perhaps the greatest jazz has ever seen. Now there’s a pedestal on which to put him. **DB**

Soul Jazz Essentials

Though it represented only one facet of his career, Cannonball Adderley was part of a movement that combined jazz with gospel-inflected soul. Broadening the definition of soul jazz to include what might be considered funky hard-bop or bluesy jazz-funk—even modern boogaloo and acid jazz—here’s a starter kit of 50 for anyone seeking albums that draw from the jazz tradition and drip with soul.

Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers:
Moanin’ (Blue Note, 1958)

David “Fathead” Newman:
It’s Mister Fathead (32 Jazz, 1958–’67)

Cannonball Adderley: *Cannonball Adderley Quintet In San Francisco* (Original Jazz Classics, 1959)

Jimmy Smith: *Back At The Chicken Shack* (Blue Note, 1960)

Bobby Timmons: *Soul Time* (Original Jazz Classics, 1960)

Ray Charles: *Genius + Soul = Jazz* (Impulse!, 1961)

Gene Ammons–Sonny Stitt–Jack McDuff: *Soul Summit* (Prestige, 1962)

Herbie Hancock: *Takin’ Off* (Blue Note, 1962)

Donald Byrd Band & Voices:
A New Perspective (Blue Note, 1963)

Lee Morgan: *The Sidewinder* (Blue Note, 1963)

The Horace Silver Quintet:
Song For My Father (Blue Note, 1964)

Ramsey Lewis Trio:
The In Crowd (Chess, 1965)

Blue Mitchell: *Down With It* (Blue Note, 1965)

Big John Patton: *Let ‘Em Roll* (Blue Note, 1965)

Shirley Scott: *Queen Of The Organ* (Impulse!, 1965)

Cannonball Adderley:
Mercy, Mercy, Mercy (Capitol, 1966)

George Benson Quartet:
It’s Uptown (Columbia, 1966)

Richard “Groove” Holmes:
Soul Message (Original Jazz Classics, 1966)

Jimmy Smith & Wes Montgomery:
Dynamic Duo (Verve, 1966)

Lou Donaldson: *Alligator Boogaloo* (Blue Note, 1967)

Pat Martino: *El Hombre* (Original Jazz Classics, 1967)

Herbie Mann: *Memphis Underground* (Atlantic, 1968)

Jimmy McGriff: *The Funkiest Little Band In The Land* (LRC, 1968–’74)

Charles Earland: *Black Talk!* (Original Jazz Classics, 1969)

Eddie Harris: *High Voltage* (Atlantic, 1969)

Les McCann: *Swiss Movement* (Atlantic, 1969)

Reuben Wilson: *Blue Mode* (Blue Note, 1969)

Grant Green: *Alive!* (Blue Note, 1970)

Freddie Hubbard: *Red Clay* (CTI, 1970)

Stanley Turrentine: *Sugar* (CTI, 1970)

Grover Washington Jr.:
Inner City Blues (Motown, 1971)

Hank Crawford: *Wildflower* (Columbia, 1973)

Idris Muhammad: *Power Of Soul* (Kudu, 1974)

The Crusaders: *Southern Comfort* (Blue Thumb, 1976)

Gene Harris: *The Gene Harris Trio Plus One* (Concord, 1986)

Maceo Parker: *Roots Revisited* (Verve, 1990)

Charlie Hunter: *Charlie Hunter Trio* (Prawn Song Records, 1993)

Medeski Martin & Wood:
It’s A Jungle In Here (Gramavision, 1994)

John Scofield: *Hand Jive* (Blue Note, 1994)

Lonnie Smith: *Live At The Club Mozambique* (Blue Note, 1995)

The J.B.’s: *Funky Good Time: The Anthology* (Polydor, 1995)

Galactic: *Coolin’ Off* (Fog City, 1996)

Joey Baron: *Down Home* (Intuition, 1997)

Greyboy All-Stars: *West Coast Boogaloo* (Greyboy Records, 1997)

Larry Goldings Trio: *Moonbird* (Palmetto, 1999)

Sugarman 3: *Soul Donkey* (Desco, 2000)

Melvin Sparks Band:
What You Hear Is What You Get (Nectar Recordings, 2002)

Robert Walter:
There Goes The Neighborhood (Premonition, 2002)

YaYa³:
YaYa³ (Warner Bros., 2002)

—J.J.