

Here's Jaki, the title of this album says, and many people might add that it's about time. Many of you, when you see this record in the stores, will be unfamiliar with Jaki Byard's name. He may be known to those familiar with the fortunes of Herb Pomeroy's Boston band, or Maynard Ferguson's newer one, and he made a stunning contribution to Eric Dolphy's first LP (*Outward Bound*, Prestige/New Jazz 8236), but it is safe to say that many will never have heard of him.

Only the public, though, not musicians. Pianist Cecil Taylor, for instance says that he heard Jaki in Boston ten years ago, playing almost as well as he does today. Jaki (the name is a diminutive of John, and is pronounced as if it were spelled Jackie) was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1922, and has been around longer than you might think. But often, if a musician plays in a certain unaccepted style, it takes whatever is necessary for the style to become popular in order for the musician to become known.

That is Jaki's case. There is, at present, a musical revolution going on in New York. It has been coming for quite a while, as anyone who spends much time in the clubs can tell you, but it is always necessary for one person to make a breakthrough so that the others can follow. The breakthrough, in this case, was made by Ornette Coleman, and because of the attention focussed on him, many other excellent young players were given a hearing who might previously have been ignored. There is no name yet for the new style, and if we are fortunate there never will be, but two of the outstanding players are Dolphy and trumpeter Don Ellis, both of whom have been closely associated with Jaki (Jaki will appear, by the way, on a forthcoming Prestige/New Jazz album with Ellis).

But Jaki Byard is no musician to be easily categorized. For one thing, the piano, which he plays exclusively here, is far from his only instrument. He has played both alto and tenor sax on his big band jobs, and is also conversant with trumpet, trombone, guitar, and drums.

Even on piano, he resists category. He can play, when so inclined, as aggressively uncompromising a

contemporary style as anyone around, but he is also possessed of a strong sense of tradition and a sense of humor, coupled with an accurate ear for nuances of style that combine to make him delight in imitating the work of other musicians. "You can say," he remarks with amusement, "that I'm a man of many musical moods." Those who love to play the hippie's parlor game of "influences" would have a difficult time with Jaki, because if there's a stylistic reference in his work, it's there because he intended it and put it in deliberately. While listening to the tapes of this album, he would call out the name of the pianist as a reference to his style came up, and chuckle happily to himself. There is, on this album, one complete track dedicated to this sort of affectionate tribute: it is, as the title would indicate, *Garnierin' A Bit*.

"I've been influenced by everybody who ever played," Jaki says, but undoubtedly the main influence on his musical development was the late Thomas "Fats" Waller. Jaki bears a certain physical resemblance to Waller, and certainly shares his infectious sense of humor and the "put-on". Jaki's ultimate ambition, he says, and one is more than a little inclined to take him seriously, is to star in a motion picture based on Waller's life. To this end, he says, he is going to try to find time to take acting lessons. It is unlikely that that will happen in the near future, though, because Jaki has become increasingly more in demand as a musician, and there is every reason to believe that this album will make that situation more the case than ever before. If he does become more in demand, it will be, to repeat something that bears repetition, about time.

There is still another facet of Jaki Byard's musical ability to be heard in this album. Five of the seven tracks are devoted to his own compositions, and they reveal a much fresher musical mind than most of the so-called "originals" — "derivatives" would really be a better word in most cases — that appear so transiently.

The first, *Cinco y Quatro*, is, as the name implies, a Latin-based piece in 5/4 time. Unlike many pieces written in complex meter, this one continues the rhythmic base throughout the improvisation, rather than employ it only for the thematic statement. Bassist Ron Carter has a difficult and exacting task on this piece

which he fills to perfection, and drummer Roy Haynes is equally impressive.

Mellow Septet is a section of a suite which Jaki has written, the only part to be recorded thus far.

Garnerin' A Bit is the previously mentioned tribute to Errol, done in tongue-in-cheek fashion. Jaki switches with ease back and forth between his own style and emulation of Garner's.

To My Wife is not the chunk of lush romanticism that one might expect from such a title, but is, rather, a happy, medium-tempo swinger that is perhaps even a greater tribute than overwrought sentiment.

The final Byard composition is also involved with his family. D.D.L.J. are the four initials of Jaki, his wife, and their two children. Jaki's technical brilliance is shown to better advantage here than elsewhere, showing the mastery that he keeps in reserve unless he really feels that it is needed to express the musical thought.

The two remaining tracks are drawn from the work of others. One, **Giant Steps**, is by John Coltrane. Jaki plays it in a way that displays his sense of the continuity of musical tradition. Coltrane is the most advanced tenor saxophonist of our time, but Jaki finds elements in the piece to justify use of a particular technique of which he is particularly fond. This is the "gallop", a favorite device of the Harlem stride pianists, the lightning fast, leaping section with which he closes the performance.

The remaining track on the album is the longest and the most carefully worked out. It is a medley composed of **Bess You is My Woman and It Ain't Necessarily So**, both from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. The first of the two tunes gives Jaki his only opportunity on the album to display his ability with ballads, the second is unique in that it gives the melody to bassist Ron Carter.

This might be the best place to pay special attention to Carter's work. A very young musician, he has been

much involved in the musical trend being advanced by Byard, Dolphy, and Ellis. One of the most technically adroit and musically sure of the new bassists, Carter will also appear on the Don Ellis album. Previously, he has recorded for Prestige on several occasions. The most startling of these recordings is undoubtedly Eric Dolphy's album *Out There* (Prestige/New Jazz 8252), on which Ron leaves the bass work to George Duvivier, and devotes himself to the most exciting jazz cello you have ever heard.

The third member of the trio, Roy Haynes, has recorded so frequently that it would take most of the available space to compile a list. He shows here, as he has innumerable times before, his ability to serve beautifully and unobtrusively in any musical situation.

The album, though, is Jaki Byard's, and perhaps the best appraisal of his talent would be to tell the truth, which is that even though there are several different sides of the "man of many musical moods" shown here, those sides are just the beginning, an initial scratching of the surface of a very deep multi-faceted musician. It would take many more LP's than this to suggest the full scope of his potential contribution, and if there is any justice, he will make them. In the meantime, this is a most impressive introduction. And now that he has been introduced, it seems more than likely that Jaki will be here for quite a while.

—Joe Goldberg

Notes reproduced from the original album liner.