

JEROME RICHARDSON

Photo by Gerard Futrick

by Bob Bernotas

Multi-instrumentalist Jerome Richardson is a lead player, a jazz player, a studio and pit veteran, a sought-after sideman, the leader of his own groups, a clinician, and a composer. Along with Frank Wess and Herbie Mann, he pioneered the use of flute in modern jazz and even has soloed on piccolo. His soprano saxophone lead became one of the musical trademarks of the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra.

Richardson also was a mainstay on Quincy Jones' recordings of the 1960s and 70s. (Check out his soprano solo on *Walkin'* from Q's 1970 album, *Gula Matari*.) In the early 1970s, he scored a surprise hit record with his tune, *Groove Merchant*. And recent gigs with Art Farmer have shown that, although Richardson is now in his mid seventies, he still can stand up there and blow strong, swinging tenor.

Born on Christmas Day, 1920 in Oakland, California, Richardson grew up in the Bay Area. He landed his first big time gig with Lionel Hampton in 1949, came to New York in 1954, and soon after broke into the studios, performing on many early rock and roll dates that, he recalls with a smile and a shrug, "I'm not too proud of." Still, Richardson admits, it was a welcome way to supplement the tenuous



income of a jazz musician.

Eventually, he attained first call status as a New York studio player. But by the early 1970s, that well began to dry up, so Richardson headed for California, where he worked in films and, whenever possible, would take a small combo into a local club. He

returned to New York in 1989 and, except for a bout with illness a couple of years ago, has kept up a steady presence, playing (and often contracting) concerts and shows, and gigging with Art Farmer whenever the trumpeter is in town. Currently Richardson is working toward the release of a new

recording, which would be his first as a leader in over twenty years.

When did you begin music?

The first time I played any music I was eight years old. I heard a classical saxophone player when I was seven and begged the folks for a saxophone. They gave it to me on my birthday in the next year, when I was eight.

That was an alto?

Yeah. And then I studied and studied; I played primarily classical saxophone. I gave concerts in churches and over the radio, classical concerts and so forth.

One time, I was supposed to have been playing a classical concert and one of the pieces was supposed to have been a classical treatise on the *St. Louis Blues*. Now I had always memorized my pieces, but I got into that one and forgot it! I went completely blank.

And that was the first time I played "jazz." I played everything I could think of; I just played and played. And my accompanist tried to stop me. She was going nuts and finally I stopped. But the people didn't notice the difference. It was in a church too.

In other words, you played what you thought was jazz.

I played something! But the first time I really played any jazz was when I was fourteen and Lionel Hampton had his first band, the one that came up from Los Angeles. He needed an alto saxophone player because, I heard later on, the one that he had was a junkie and got busted or something. They were playing in Oakland at the T & B Theater and they needed an alto saxophone player that could at least read the music.

Hamp found out that I was the only one in the area that could at least read the music. He came to my house and asked my father if I could play with the band. So Dad took me there and brought me back. I was scared to death, but I played the music anyway. Then after that, Hamp wanted me to

JEROME RICHARDSON'S EQUIPMENT

SAXOPHONES

Selmer Mark VI soprano, alto and tenor saxophones: "I used to play baritone, but I sold it 'cause I did not want to carry that thing around. I like to play baritone, but I like to play jazz on it. I don't like to play in a big band with it."

MOUTHPIECES

soprano: Selmer hard rubber
alto: Otto Link hard rubber
tenor: Otto Link metal

REEDS

soprano and alto: La Voz medium or medium-hard
tenor: La Voz medium

OTHER INSTRUMENTS

Powell open-hole flute
alto flute: "I did have a beautiful Haynes alto flute, but it was stolen."
Rudall-Carte bass flute
Weismann piccolo
Buffet clarinet
bass clarinet: "I sold it."

go out with the band, but Dad said, "No, no. You go to school."

You also had a chance to join Jimmie Lunceford's band in the early 1940s, didn't you?

Yeah. Willie Smith left the band in Oakland, and I was always a great admirer of that band. I was like the mascot. Whenever they came, I was the first one in the door and the last one out. I stood behind the saxophones all the time. During the time that they were there and playing, Lunceford used to let me hold that big flute he had. I didn't know what it was. Of course, it was an alto flute.

I loved the band so much, I had memorized everything they played. So when Willie left, I got an audition; the first thing Lunceford asked me, he said, "Can you play loud?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Do you like Willie Smith?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, come join us at the Oakland Auditorium."

So I had remembered all the saxophone stuff especially and I read everything. Then I kept asking Lunceford, "Play the Chopin *Prelude*," which was a great saxophone thing. He said, "We don't have the first part." I

said, "Play it anyway." And I played it from memory. I was gonna make sure I got this gig.

Of course, he wanted me to be in the band. But before he gave me a uniform he said, "What draft status are you?" I said, "Uh, oh. 1-A." He said, "I'm sorry. As soon as I give you a uniform, they'll call you.' Sure enough, I stayed with him two weeks and two weeks later they called me. Instead of joining the Army, I went into the Navy.

At least you were able to get into a band, which was not a bad way to spend the war.

It had two jazz units, a Number One unit and a Number Two unit. Marshall Royal was head of the first unit and I was in that unit. We used to play concerts every Friday night, played football games and stuff like

that, as well as playing with the concert band and raising the flag every morning, all that.

I was there for three years. In the meantime I was going to San Francisco working secretly, which was against the rules, and they caught us. But we told them, "Oh, we were just over there jamming." So they asked us not to do that again.

What did you do after the war?

Well, right after the war, all the people that I knew in Oakland whom I could go to and ask for work were not there anymore, which meant that I had to start all over again and cultivate new people, which was a pain in the ass. So for a while I didn't do much work. Finally I started working with Vernon Alley, a famous bass player in San Francisco.

I had worked before the war with Wilbert Baranco, who was a pianist. In fact, he gave me my first job in a nightclub. I worked with him and I worked with Saunders King. Eventually I had my own group around the town. But there wasn't that much.

Then along came Lionel Hampton again. In the meantime I was married

and I had to find a way to support my family. So I went out with Hamp from '49 to '51.

I've heard that Hamp had just about the biggest book in the business.

And he never played it! Bobby Plater was the first alto player and I was second. Bobby was the straw boss. There'd be a lot of times when Hamp wouldn't be on the stand or we'd be in a theater and Hamp wouldn't be in the wings or something. So Bobby would call a couple of the real good charts. We'd be playing them and Hamp would come running in. Right in the middle of it he would start to play *Hamp's Boogie Woogie*, no matter what it was. That was the end of that.

His wife, Gladys, was known as a tough business person. But in his autobiography, Hamp said that "Gladys took a particular liking to Jerome Richardson. When he asked her if he could borrow money, she'd give it to him. She wouldn't do that for most of the guys." Is that true?

Well, I'll tell you, I don't understand why, but she took a liking to me. There were a few junkies in the band, and she didn't even like any people who were smoking dope, you know. I did smoke a little pot, but she didn't catch me doing it!

And I was sort of brand new to the band. When I came into the band I sang, I played flute, and I played jazz alto, so I guess she thought I was particularly talented or something. I don't know what it was she liked about me. But there were times when I had to send some money back home, 'cause we weren't making a lot of money with that band, and she'd give it to me. But on payday she would take it all out.

JEROME RICHARDSON'S SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>AS LEADER <i>GOING TO THE MOVIES WITH JEROME RICHARDSON</i> United Artists * <i>GROOVE MERCHANT</i> Verve * <i>MIDNIGHT OIL</i> Prestige/New Jazz 8205 <i>ROAMIN' WITH RICHARDSON</i> Prestige * * currently out of print</p> <p>WITH OTHER ARTISTS <i>CANNONBALL ADDERLEY</i> <i>AFRICAN WALTZ</i> Riverside 377 <i>BEGINNINGS</i> Emarcy 2-204 NAT ADDERLEY <i>THAT'S NAT</i> Savoy 12021 GENE AMMONS <i>THE BIG SOUND</i> Prestige 7132 <i>GROOVE BLUES</i> Prestige 7201 KENNY BURRELL <i>ALL NIGHT LONG</i> (w/Donald Byrd) Prestige 7073 <i>ELLINGTON IS FOREVER, VOL. 1</i> Fantasy 79005 KENNY CLARKE <i>BOHEMIA AFTER DARK</i> Savoy 12017 JIMMY CLEVELAND <i>A MAP OF JIMMY CLEVELAND</i> Mercury 60117 TADD DAMERON <i>THE MAGIC TOUCH</i> Riverside 9419 EDDIE "LOCKJAW" DAVIS <i>COOKBOOK, VOLS. 1-3</i> Prestige 7141/7161/7219 <i>SMOKIN'</i> (w/Shirley Scott) Prestige 7301 <i>TRANE WHISTLE</i> Prestige 7206 MILES DAVIS <i>PORGY AND BESS</i> Columbia 40647 DIZZY GILLESPIE <i>FREE RIDE</i> Pablo 2310-794 TINY GRIMES <i>TINY IN SWINGVILLE</i> Swingville 2002 CHICO HAMILTON <i>THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF EL CHICO</i> Impulse 9114 LIONEL HAMPTON <i>THE BLUES AIN'T NEWS TO ME</i> Verve 2-2543 <i>HAMP'S BIG BAND--LIVE!</i> Glad-Hamp 1020 <i>MOONGLOW</i> Decca 8230 <i>REUNION AT NEWPORT</i> Bluebird 66157 <i>SWEATIN' WITH HAMP</i> MCA 1331 JOHNNY HARTMAN <i>ALL OF ME</i> Bethlehem 30032 JON HENDRICKS <i>LOVE</i> Muse 5258</p> | <p>MILT JACKSON <i>FEELINGS</i> Pablo 2310-774 J.J. JOHNSON <i>SAY WHEN</i> Bluebird 6277 HANK JONES <i>BLUEBIRD</i> Savoy 12053 QUINCY JONES <i>BODY HEAT</i> A&M 3617 <i>THE GREAT WIDE WORLD OF QUINCY JONES</i> Mercury 60561 <i>GULA MATARI</i> A&M 0820 <i>MELLOW MADNESS</i> A&M 4526 <i>QUINCY JONES AND HIS ORCHESTRA LIVE AT NEWPORT '61</i> Mercury 60653 <i>THE QUINTESSENCE</i> Impulse 11 <i>ROOTS</i> A&M 4626 <i>SMACKWATER JACK</i> A&M 3037 <i>WALKING IN SPACE</i> A&M 3023 THAD JONES/MEL LEWIS <i>CENTRAL PARK NORTH</i> Solid State 18058 <i>CONSUMMATION</i> Blue Note 84346 <i>LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD</i> Solid State 18016 <i>MONDAY NIGHT</i> Solid State 18048 <i>PRESENTING THAD JONES, MEL LEWIS & "THE JAZZ ORCHESTRA"</i> Solid State 18003 CLIFFORD JORDAN <i>DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS</i> Milestone 9197 MICHEL LEGRAND <i>LEGRAND JAZZ</i> Columbia 8079 CHARLES MINGUS <i>THE BLACK SAINT AND THE SINNER LADY</i> Impulse 5649 <i>MINGUS DYNASTY</i> Columbia 52922 OSCAR PETTIFORD <i>OSCAR PETTIFORD ORCHESTRA IN HI-FI, VOLS. 1 & 2</i> ABC Paramount 135/227 BENNY POWELL <i>WHY DON'T YOU SAY "YES," SOMETIME?!</i> Inspire 0002 ZOOT SIMS <i>HAWTHORNE NIGHTS</i> Pablo 2310-783 BILLY TAYLOR <i>BILLY TAYLOR WITH FOUR FLUTES</i> Riverside 1151 DINAH WASHINGTON <i>THE FATS WALLER SONGBOOK</i> Emarcy 818 930 <i>QUEEN & QUINCY</i> (w/Q. Jones) Mercury 60928 <i>THE SWINGIN' MISS D</i> (w/Q. Jones) Emarcy 6336 714</p> |
|---|---|

While you were with Hamp you made a record called Kingfish, which is probably the first modern jazz flute solo. How did that come about?

Now there was a gentleman by the name of Wayman Carver who was with Chick Webb's band way before, in

the '30s, who actually was the first real jazz

flutist. But according to what I can figure, I was the first one to record a flute solo in my era. Maybe there were other people playing flute then. I'm sure Frank Wess was, but I think I put out the first jazz flute solo of the era. (I understand Herbie Mann claims that he did, but I don't think he put anything out in 1949 or '50 even.)

How did it come about? It was because of Quincy Jones, really. The band had gone up to Seattle and picked up Quincy Jones, was a good, young trumpet player who was also an arranger and composer. I can't remember exactly what town we were in, but he had written a piece called *Kingfish* for a small group. We were rehearsing it and I was playing the alto part. Bobby Plater was standing and listening.

About that time, I got a phone call from my wife. So I said, "Bobby, go ahead and play my part. I gotta answer the phone." When I came back, I picked up the flute, went over to the trumpet part, transposed the trumpet part and played that on top. Quincy said, "That's it!" and he decided that I would play a flute solo on it. For a long time he used that sound of the flute blending with the trumpet, but that's how it came about, really by accident.

You know, I learned a lot from being in that band. I learned a lot from Hamp, as

crazy as he was.

Like what?

I learned how to judge what people liked when you play for an audience, whether they are dancing or just listening. Hamp had an uncanny way of finding out what the people liked. And

if he couldn't find out, he'd do something almost extreme to find it out.

One time we were playing at the Brooklyn Armory. It was a dance and most of the people, we found out, were Latin people. We were this big band, and the band was roaring and sounding good. They all came up to the front of the bandstand, listened, and enjoyed the music.

But after we finished, here comes "Bop-bop-bop-tu-bop," a little Latin group, about eight pieces. They wore us out. They played and the people were dancing their cans off. You know who it was? Tito Puente.

I saw Hamp walk all the way around the edge of that ballroom. Then when we got ready to play again he said, "Jerome, can you play *Begin the Beguine*?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "On flute?" I said, "Yeah." I played *Begin the Beguine* on flute and everybody danced. We played the whole repertoire in Latin style. He would do all kinds of things like that. He was an entertainer, and he knew how to entertain people. He'd get to 'em every time.

What did you do after you left Hamp?

I left Hamp on July the 4th, 1952. I came back to Oakland, and fairly soon after that, I joined Earl Hines' band. He had, I think, an eight- or nine-piece group. But by this time, after being with Hamp, coming to New York, and hearing all this music, I said, "That's where I gotta be." I went with Earl Hines for eight months and left him in New York.

As soon as I got to New York to stay, I ran into Oscar Pettiford. Oscar was now working at the Cafe Bohemia and I had met him in San Francisco. I came in and he said, "Hey man, I need a tenor saxophone player. You want to play?" So I worked in his band for a while.

In the meantime, I started working around. I worked at the Apollo and did the whole scene, the Savoy and all of that. But during the time I was working with Oscar Pettiford, I had an occasion to do my first record date with someone. It was a commercial date, you know.

I told Oscar, I'd be back about 11:00. So he said, "OK." When I came back, there was an alto player sitting in and I

said, "Oh, Jesus." A great player. The walls were just shaking; he was playing so good. And I thought to myself, "Well, I just lost my job." I didn't lose the job, but do you know who it was? Cannonball Adderley. That's one of the reasons why I was on some of Cannonball's first albums. And, of course, he and I were friends for years after that.

How did you start working in the studios?

I was at Minton's with Kenny Burrell, we got fired about two weeks to a month before Christmas of 1955. My wife at that time was pregnant. And I said, "Jeez, this is a hell of a time for me to get fired."

A guy named Lou Wax, whom I'd never heard of before, happened to be the contractor with the Roxy Theater, a big theater that had ice shows. He told me they wanted somebody to play "rock and roll Christmas tenor" and sing some Christmas blues. I said, "You got the right man."

At the same time, I was studying flute and was practicing every day at the theater. I guess someone said, "Why don't you keep Jerome here, 'cause he can play flute and so forth?" They asked me if I would like to stay and I said, "Sure." I stayed in the band there for two years.

At first, all these classical players didn't think too much about being with a jazz player. But they found out that I could play their music, commercial music, and so forth. That's how I started playing commercial records and doing all kinds of other things. After that, most of my work was studio work, but I always kept some kind of a jazz group.

In 1966, you became an original member of one of the greatest big bands of alltime, the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra.

That was a great band, but it never got the publicity it deserved. When I left him in 1970 and went to Los Angeles, everybody was asking me, "Jerome, you got any Thad Jones arrangements?" I had no idea the people even knew the band. It did it all by itself. All it needed was a good push, but it didn't get it.

Most of the musicians who played in that band were making a living in the studios.

You mean the original band.

Right, guys like yourself, Jerry Dodgion, Pepper Adams, Snooky Young, Bill Berry, Jimmy Nottingham, Jimmy Knepper, and Richard Davis. So they could afford to play with Thad.

Well, it wasn't a matter of affording it. Thad got the guys together and everybody said they wanted to do it, but then I wondered, "When can we rehearse?" Everybody was working in the daytime in studios. So they finally said, "Why don't we try to rehearse at midnight somewhere?" Everybody said, "Yeah, OK. Let's do that." But I didn't believe that was gonna happen. Then, when I went up there, everybody was ready to play.

I guess we rehearsed a month, just rehearsing Thad's charts. And a disk jockey, who's now out in Las Vegas (he's not a disk jockey anymore; I forget what he's doing now), he told Thad and Mel, "I can get you in the Vanguard for two Mondays. Would you want to do it?" They turned to us and said, "Would you guys want to do it?" "Yeah!"

So here it was in the middle of the winter. We went to the Vanguard to set the band up and the people were lined up almost around the corner. We didn't believe it. Every Monday we loaded that place up. For as long as the band was there, we loaded up that place.

What a band, the spirit and everything! But we didn't do anything. We did go to Japan under very dire circumstances, went to Europe, and did a few little things. But here was this band that made these great records and didn't even get a smell at something decent. Had anybody really produced the band, advertised the band, we could have been playing in colleges and concerts all over the country and all over the world. That's what we could have easily done.

One of the trademarks of that band was the soprano lead.

That was an accident, too. Thad brought something up with clarinet lead. Well, I don't like to play clarinet anyway, and there was Eddie Daniels, who was a graduate in clarinet, sitting

next to me. Plus the way he had the clarinet written, it wasn't easy to lead the section because it wasn't pronounced.

So I said, "Thad, where you placed the notes will not be very prominent as a first part. Why don't you let me play it on soprano saxophone and see what happens?" We did, and he said, "Yeah, that's it," and there came the soprano lead thing. That was another accident.

Why did you leave New York and move to California in the early 1970s?

God knows I hated to leave Thad, but, around 1969 and '70, the bottom fell out of New York. Theaters were closing. Television had gone to Hollywood. Recording had gone to Mussel Shoals, Alabama, or wherever it was going to. And that just about wrecked anything.

At one time you would be called in to play for a singer. Or they'd put a band around a soloist and you'd come in and play. But then it got so that the soloist would get his own group or the singer would get his own group and bring his own people. They would come in with their own people and record what they wanted; that knocked us out. So I said, "There's nothing for me to do except get out of here."

Quincy Jones was in Hollywood. I talked to him and he said, "Well, come on." So I worked with Quincy and a few other people about five, six, or seven years. But then the people I knew, for some reason or other, who would call me eventually either came back here or went to Europe. Quincy went into another phase of his career and so there wasn't much left.

I stayed there for seventeen years and was trying to do this, trying to do that. I even had a group of my own there too. But things were not very good 'cause they didn't want to pay a small group anything, especially a small group that didn't have a "name." They would pay me just as they would pay all the local guys. So I said, "Hey, I gotta get out of here."

I was lucky. In 1989 somebody called me to do *Black and Blue* on Broadway and I helped them get a few people there from Los Angeles. I left, came here, and did that. The only thing I

thought was good that I did out there was buy a house. Inside of two weeks I sold that house, moved, and was on the plane to New York.

Have you done any other Broadway shows since then?

Yeah, one other show, *Jelly's Last Jam*, which I also was the contractor for. Since then I haven't done anything. So I've been doing whatever I can do.

Getting back to the studio thing, a number of people were making good livings doing studio work.

Sure, we all were.

But then all of a sudden it all but ended. Almost to zero.

What role did synthesizers play in that decline?

Oh God, it's put us all out of work! Once when I was in Los Angeles, I saw where three people, a keyboard player, a saxophone player who was synthesized, and a drum machine, were doing a whole television series where they had used from 40 to sometimes almost 100 men. Saxophones, trumpets, and things like that have been cut way down. I heard lately that somebody said that they were finally getting tired of the synthesized sound. They wanted to bring it back to human beings, but who knows about that?

You can tell the difference between synthesized instruments and real instruments.

I think so. But the average person does not distinguish it. They don't listen that well or they can't listen that well 'cause they're not practiced at it. So they don't know whether it's synthesized music or not. I think that's one of the reasons that they got away with it so easily, because the general public really doesn't know the difference in sound.

There was a time when guys were amplifying their horns, sometimes with little machines, and I didn't like that even. I'm a person that prefers to hear the true sound of the instrument and to play with people who do that. You get something from the next player. You get something from the strings when they're there or the horns, when you're sitting there play-

ing. But how can you get anything from a machine?

So for yourself, what percentage of your work in the studios was cut by the introduction of synthesizers?

Almost all of it. As I said, these groups that wanted to record also brought their own people in, which cut down our work, too.

What did the musicians do once that area closed down?

They scattered to the four winds. Some retired, some went elsewhere, wherever they could make money. That's the way this business is. Nothing lasts forever, although you hope it would. I remember when I came back after seventeen years (of course, in seventeen years anything can change), I didn't know anybody. Every now and then I'd see somebody that I used to know, but I hardly knew anybody here when I came back.

What have you been doing lately?

I've been working with Art Farmer whenever he comes over from Austria. And I just did a thing up in Boston with the Slide Hampton and the JazzMasters. That's about all. In the meantime I produced a record of my own, but unfortunately I haven't had enough money to really get it out there. That's the way things have gone. And, of course, in the meantime, I get sick, my wife gets sick, and there goes all the money.

I'd like to get your appraisal of the scene today.

Economically, I wouldn't say it's the greatest. It's not like it used to be. If you can get into some of the jazz festivals and stuff like that, you can make money, a little money. If you like to teach and do clinics (I've done a few clinics in schools and so forth), say like Clark Terry does, you can make good money. That is completely on your own and that's fine.

And what do you think about what's happening musically these days?

Jazz is always going to be and it will always go forward. I think probably there will be another "messiah," in a sense, like there was Charlie Parker, who advanced it, and Dizzy Gillespie.

Then there came Coltrane, who advanced it and advanced it. There will be someone else. I don't know who will be the person or persons. But as we go along you'll see, you'll hear the advancement. The young players coming up today, their attitudes and their approaches to the music, jazz, are different, more advanced, more modern.

There are people who say, "I can't stand that ultra-modern music." But there's always gonna be that, like modern painting. You either like it or you don't like it. Jazz is not gonna stop because you don't like it.

Rock 'n roll and the commercial music that is today, it's there to make a million seller. Certainly we wish that we could make a million seller. It would be great if we could make a million seller. But you make a million seller today and then that person has to make another million seller in the next six months, which he may never do. He may never make another million seller again. The only person who has done it is Michael Jackson, and he's in a great pinch at this moment.

Those things don't last very long unless you find, in the midst of it all, some people who have the talent to go forward, to maintain their integrity in what they do, and there's not a lot of them. And so jazz will always be there. You can find new jazz, new jazz, new jazz, new jazz, new jazz the rest of your life. It will always be. I just hope that everybody perseveres. §