

Stich Wynston

Drummer – Composer – Arranger – Improviser – Demon

Articles / Reviews / Excerpts

Stich Wynston's Modern Surfaces: Transparent Horizons

<https://www.allaboutjazz.com/transparent-horizons-stich-wynston-tcb-music-review-by-robert-r-calder.php>

The intro emerges as heavy bowed bass—buzzy, ominous, sustained. Suddenly there's a thunderstorm, rock drumming, electric guitar and tenor saxophone. A synthesizer (seldom-used here) wails, but less than the guitar and saxophone, then makes bell sounds and more while the bass goes thudding and bells like a stag before things devolve into the slower, quieter space of the original mood.

Thus develops Stich Wynston's "Outward Bound". "I Think This Party's Over" seems a faintly sardonic title for the second track's doomy storm noises, bleating tenor, and integration of textures in which it's hard to say who does what as the group surges into movement, booming backgrounds to the tenor, burgeoning guitar, and bass together in the underlying storm. Is this "party" the whole modern world?

This music favors intros. Jim Vivian's massive, buzz-edged, echoey bass, punctuated by Wynston, opens Young's "Existential Departures." Drums supply rhythmic patterns below a three-man bass cembalom imitation. A quasi-oriental theme, thundercrack drumming, bowed bass, and amplified guitar and gentler tenor slow into meditative interplay. The bass swells above, gigantic. Undramatic this ain't. The three melody instruments harmonize and play ominous lines, cut and tempered at times by crack-of-doom drumming. Superficially more playful, with a darting guitar/saxophone/bass prelude, "Surf Aces" becomes a tour-de-force upper register tenor saxophone feature. Passionate stuff.

"Spiral Nebula," with pedalled, echoing solo piano, is a firmly struck etude, three plus minutes of European concert music (played by Wynston). "Evanescence" opens with the three front line instruments together, intense yet again. Behind the subsequent guitar/bass duet, Wynston helps the bassist sound doomier before the tenor/bass duet lightens things a little. Wynston belabours his drum kit, like the voice of fate. Bass and drums stalk the closing guitar/tenor unison.

It's all exciting... darkness with spirit. "Caboose" is a complex work for solo percussion, preceded by a band intro. What is Wynston hitting, scratching, and playing drum rolls on (or maybe inside)? Solo percussion with tone colour? Yes! The ensemble ending is like the twanging of a vast string.

Guitar, bass and drums open "Automatic Entry," with a bow applied to the strings of the upright bass. And when guitarist Geoff Young decamps, the bass goes way, way down, rising undefeated to join a tenor excursion, with Wynston the tragedian's drums. The

guitarist picks up on the tenorist's feeling for beauty in desolation, creating organ chords unaccompanied before the bass comes back from below into a mighty conclusion.

"Intergalactic Spheres" features a minotaur yowling, a sustained pedal note, and a chiming music box figure repeated and re-repeated as the saxophone rises into high weaving. "New One" hints at Bach before turning into a religious-sounding ballad a shade like Lovano/Motian/Frissell, but supercharged with gargantuan bass. The guitarist's more hymnal section suggests mainstream jazz credentials before a passage in tenor unison, in fugal business with bowed bass.

[...] The CD insert's yellow spine means that this set belongs in TCB's "contemporary series." It's music for black days, sustaining undefeated spirit: there's no discouragement here.

Robert Calder
AllAboutJazz.com
Dec 2005

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<https://www.allaboutjazz.com/transparent-horizons-tcb-music-review-by-paul-olson.php>

Toronto musician Stich Wynston takes drumming about as far from its timekeeping role as it can possibly go on *Transparent Horizons*, his first CD since his 1999 eponymous debut on Buzz Records. Wynston and his group *Modern Surfaces* (saxophonist Mike Murley, guitarist Geoff Young, and bassist Jim Vivian) maintain almost the same lineup as the previous album—only guest pianist Paul Bley is missing. Here they dispense with a pianist, with the exception of "Spiral Nebula", where Stich himself plays a Debussy-esque solo piano etude, and "Intergalactic Spheres", where the group plays around a looped piano arpeggio that provides the recording's only rigid time.

Wynston is obviously influenced by Jack DeJohnette and Paul Motian; he's got DeJohnette's muscularity and Motian's painterly approach. Like fellow Toronto drummer Barry Romberg—who produced the CD—he uses rolling fills and explosive accents to adorn musical space, not to provide metronomic time. Wynston and Young share the compositional credits (four and six tracks each, respectively), and their pieces are of a similar intuitive, impressionistic hue. I've sung the praises of Young many times, and his distinctive, spidery lines have never been more appropriate than in this ensemble. Vivian (who plays in Young's own trio) contributes ruminative lines and rich, resonant arco statements, and Murley's tenor and curved soprano add an otherworldly, keening presence.

Because this is otherworldly, even cosmic music. It is not, however, a New Age kind of cosmos; it's too unsettling. Young's long "Automatic Entry" may be the sparsest tune here, with Young's almost spaghetti-western twanging guitar cagily stating the theme against Wynston's no-time fills before Vivian (on arco bass) and Murley (on curved soprano) play meditative, glacial solos; meanwhile, Wynston's drums and hand

percussion fill in space, like a painter putting blue here and magenta there. The players seem to be toying with Monk's "Round Midnight" in the theme and solos.

Individual accompanied solos aren't common here, though; there's really nothing that qualifies as comping in the traditional sense. Instead, we get the simultaneous four-way interplay of, say, "Existential Departures", where all the musicians are in a sense soloing at the same time—a sort of space polyphony. This actually requires an acute awareness of what the other musicians are doing; this is a listening band. This peculiar polyphony is also utterly unclaustrophobic: the fifth member of the group on this album is silence.

The overall impression is often a contradictory one of past and present intersecting. Wynston plays a fascinating, visceral solo on kit and what sounds like sheet metal on "Caboose" (although the song's bookended with a tenor/guitar/rattling-popcorn-drums theme, the solo's in essence the tune) that is both deeply modern and oddly atavistic-like Yanomamo Indians armed with Blackberries and samplers.

The disc ends with Young's gorgeous "New One," an absolutely lovely, melodic (and comparatively conventional) Spanish-tinged number that gently lowers the listener back to terra firma after sixty minutes in an eerie and occasionally frightening deep space. It's not a journey for the timid—but it's one very much worth taking.

Paul Olsen
AllAboutJazz.com
June 2005

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One time Shuffle Demon, drummer Stich Wynston has got together with long time cohorts Mike Murley, Geoff Young and Jim Vivian for a daring and challenging set of modern jazz.

Avant-garde to the max, this is not a record for the casual passerby, replete as it is with complex time changes, atonal soloing and possibly illegal rhythm patterns.

Although Stich is the bandmaster he doesn't let his Jack DeJohnette influenced percussion get in the way of the other performers. [...] the saxophone work of Mike Murley is, at times, otherworldly. A description that is highly appropriate considering the highlights include "Existential Departures", "Spiral Nebula" and my particular favourite "Intergalactic Spheres".

Sometimes moody, always challenging, sometimes magnificent, this is a superb album of instrumentals which gives you something new with every listen.

Zeitgeist – Edinburgh, U.K.
June 2005

Stich Wynston's Modern Surfaces: Transparent Horizons

Modern Surfaces comes to us with a certain amount of pedigree, as their guitarist is Geoff Young of Barry Romberg's very notable over – there - somewhere jam band, Random Access (reviewed by yours truly in the June 2005 Jazz Now and favourably, I might add).

Recorded and produced in Ontario (by Romberg), we begin "Outward Bound" with a lengthy bowed largo intro from Jim Vivian that draws us into a sound world parallel to, say, later Rosco Mitchell's, and once Wynston kicks in with no small authority Young and saxophonist Mike Murley enter as well.

I like the spacing of the instruments here [...]. It's a sort of rotating shattered Y arrangement: Wynston occupies, amoebalike, the center of the tone field, Vivian bubbles and cooks beneath him in the mix, and the two melodic instruments splutter (Murley) and float (Young) around them.

Murley tests his tenor's capabilities sparingly with scraped pedal points of a kind, while Young prefers to let bowedlike chords drift across the improvising. Very strange. In but not in. Out but not out.

There was some sort of presagement to this on Random Access 3 (see the June issue): one track, "Serenity Now," (Is Romberg a Seinfeld fan? No, I asked that one before) had Young radiating clouds of notes from the center of the piece, fitting willy-nilly through barlike clicks of synthesized marimba.

It was a bit like we've heard British guitarist Brian Godding do in his band Mirage [...] or with the Mike Westbrook Orchestra. Again, very strange. To quote Danny DeVito in Taxi, "But Memorable!"

Young's "I Think This Party's Over" is a strangled Eliot Sharp-like blues that opens and closes with a distant if approaching gale of industrial noise. Murley and Wynston flurry at the edge of this massive tube train of sound, Vivian slipping in-under with slow-picked, dreamy figures, and Wynston's double downbeat sort-of coalesces the actual tune. But only sort of. It's a nervous sort of détente that the musicians here have worked out and the not – exactly – nailed – down air of the music makes it singular.

Anyone who reads too many of my reviews (you'll decide how many or few that is) usually notes that I moan comically how bassists are usually undermiked. Not so here, and Vivian's dark, Schnittke-like tone does the continuum many good turns. One such is his atmospheric picking during the slow antibossa section of "Surf Aces," under Young's neutral-drive Jazz-club phrases and Murley's relatively peaceful alto. Love that head melody, kind of Monk – meets – Laurindo – Almeida.

I also go for this group's sense of time. "Existential Departures" runs over eleven minutes, and here it's Vivian and Wynston's turn to hover at the edges; Murley and Young (on acoustic guitar) do long, twinned, serpentine phrases a la Terje Rypdal's

1980s ECM releases (especially *Descendre*). Beautifully odd. Again, in but not in, out but not out. Not clinically so, either, not like, say, Schoenberg's *Verklarte Nacht*.

The closing ditty "New One" also has a tentative air, thanks to Wynston's commenting melodically as much as anyone else on the wintry central chorale trotted out by the remainder of the band.

[...] there's lots more good stuff up ahead, like Young and Murley holding "Evanescence" together while Wynston and Vivian wig out around them; or Wynston's hail of dropped baseballs detonating all around and throughout "Caboose"; or the piano ostinato that gives one something to hang onto for dear life as Young's ballooning sustained synclavier notes strain to contain multitudes.

Here it's Vivian, Murley, and Wynston who overlap, converse, and talk past one another in a hunt for common ground of the sort you'd see in a Joe McElroy novel. Missed connections, indeed. But memorable.

It's all really good, really weird stuff that shows the quartet form isn't dead just yet. Care must always be taken in the finding or re-exploring of new or familiar ground, but this CD shows that the ragged space between in and out also has a few more secrets to cough up.

Ken Egbert
Jazz Now Interactive Vol 15 No. 5
September 2005

Shuffle Demons – Crazy Time

<https://thatcanadianmagazine.com/reviews/cd-reviews/shuffle-demons-crazy-time/>

"Of course, the Shuffle Demons would be nothing without the rippling and funkily beautiful groove laid down by Stich Wynston – who is to the Demons what Zigaboo Modeliste is to The Funky Meters of New Orleans. Playing deep in the pocket Mr. Wynston allows the soloists go to the moon and back as he – unwavering – is always there to welcome them back to the house of funk."

Raul da Gama
That Canadian Magazine
November 2020

Shuffle Demons – Crazy Time (Stubby)

<https://jazztimes.com/reviews/albums/shuffle-demons-crazy-time-stubby/>

"Ultimately, though, the real driver of the Shuffle Demons' sound is the spark between drummer Stich Wynston's visceral pulse and alto saxophonist Richard Underhill's sly cerebral melodic lines. Wynston is one of those rare players whose timekeeping

manages to square the difference between melodic elaboration and gut-level groove, ensuring that the sophistication of Underhill's tunes (not to mention his rapped vocals) is inevitably met with head-bobbing assent."

J.D. Considine
JazzTimes
March 2020

Shuffle Demons – Crazy Time (Stubby)

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/music/music-reviews-rufus-wainwright-kacy-hill-dma-s-and-shuffle-demons-20200706-p559cn.html>

"You hear that edge in Richard Underhill's urgent alto solos, in the three-part horn lines that could cut you off at the knees if you came too close, and in the restless propulsion of Stich Wynston behind the drums."

John Shand
The Sydney Morning Herald
July 2020

Shuffle Demons – Crazy Time (Stubby)

<http://inablue mood.blogspot.com/2020/02/shuffle-demons-crazy-time.html>

"One cannot ignore just how crucial bassists Downes and Vivian, along with drummer Wynston are to the success of the music here. Wynston is an especially exciting drummer playing with explosiveness at times."

Ron Weinstock
In A Blue Mood
February 2020

The Shuffle Demons – Clusterfunk

<https://www.seattlepi.com/lifestyle/blogcritics/article/Music-Review-The-Shuffle-Demons-Clusterfunk-3851243.php>

"Stich Wynston's "Fukushima," dedicated to the Japanese quake victims, is a raucous scream at what would seem to be a nature indifferent to man and his suffering. It is a heart wrenching piece. His "Strollin'" makes for a swinging contrast."

Jack Goodstein
Blogcritics.org
September 2012

"Toronto drummer Stich Wynston brings together Canadian avant-garde figurehead Paul Bley's piano, Geoff Young's guitar and Mike Murley's sax for a 14-tune exploration of where 21st-century mainstream might end up. The compositions, all by band members, seek new form and content, often succeeding in enigmatic, wry, extravagant and imaginative ways. Bley sets the mood with dashes into stylistic corners, sax and guitar wander in unison with chattering drum commentary and labyrinthine puzzles are solved by clear expositions on such tunes as Young's "Kolbo" and "Merrmonator". Murley has never played so far out and Wynston, responsible for eight works (including "Environments 1", which includes birdsong) is an equal partner in these fascinating excursions. "Catharsis" is an airy Bley solo meditation, "Hamentosh McFarfel" offers an essay in stern guitar-drum dissonance, soprano and piano rebellion and then more horror. Young's "Unaware Of The Sound She Was Making" is percussive and turbulent, symbolizing this intelligent foray by four inquiring minds."

Geoff Chapman, jazz journalist
Toronto Star, Canada
August 1999

Drummer Stich Wynston made his name in the '80s anchoring a constantly changing group of former Toronto street musicians called the Shuffle Demons, who managed to cross over into rock club success with a zany stage show, costumes and a handful of catchy songs. During Wynston's nine-year tenure, The Demons were as rhythmically based as their name suggests, so the drummer's re-emergence as a composer of skittery pieces filled with free improvisation is somewhat surprising. Also surprising is that one of his bandmates is fellow ex-Demon Mike Murley. The saxophonist is more commonly found these days playing like he's been studying the recording of Sonny Rollins meets Coleman Hawkins, and it's a joy to hear him exploring the outer range of his horn again.

[...] Bley's ability to manipulate time, create drama from silence and execute sudden changes of direction informs the band improvisations and his spirit infuses the writing of Wynston and guitarist Geoff Young as well. Wynston even contributes his own solo piano piece, the pretty "Looking Glass," which has all the earmarks, if not quite the intuitive touch, of Bley.

The trio performances are marked by frequent unison passages of sax and guitar and a constantly shifting underlay of percussion. Like Bley, Young has a well-tuned sense of dynamics, dropping jagged, jarring accents into his composition "Mermonator" and unleashing some raucous bursts of noise behind Murley's skronking horn on Wynston's whimsical "Hamentosh McFarfel."

James Hale
Down Beat magazine, USA
February, 2000

"It would be damned hard not to stand up for this CD 'with special guest Paul Bley' - free improvised music from a Canadian trio: saxophone, guitar and drummer Stich Wynston who also occasionally plays piano. Piano and drums take over the more lyrical part whilst sax and guitar come along most on the more raucous parts. Nevertheless, it is not brutally played, but tone conscious and sensitively communicated."

Rolling Stone Magazine (Germany)
reviewer unknown - translated from German
February 2000

Wynston is one of those rare players whose timekeeping manages to square the difference between melodic elaboration and gut-level groove, ensuring that the sophistication of Underhill's tunes (not to mention his rapped vocals) is inevitably met with head-bobbing assent.

J.D. CONSIDINE, JAZZ TIMES

