Stan Getz and Arthur Blythe

Two albums exemplify the soul and freedom that is jazz: Stan Getz’s *At the Shrine* from 1954 and Arthur Blythe’s *Lenox Avenue Breakdown* from 1979. What characterizes Stan Getz’s playing on the live recording, *At the Shrine*, is a looseness with regard to song structure and melody. This allows Getz to utilize a full rush of ideas that are not bound by formality or strict adherence to a rule. This is the master caught at the beginning of his tenure at Verve Records. The roughly hewn aspect of his work here, reveals Getz as a vibrant, restless creator. He maintains a consistently high level of invention throughout due to his ability to improvise countermelodies with expertise and maintain a delicate balance of tension and release.

This album plays close to a kind of freedom not usually associated with Getz’s work or with the West Coast sound with which he was, at this time, affiliated with. His lyricism never falters, yet he rides the circumference of the outer reaches often. At the conclusion of the second track, “Lover Man,” Getz admits, “We almost lost it there,” but he never does. His ideas have a logical, albeit surprising, continuity, that allow for an organic development of the tune. Trombonist Bob Brookmeyer accompanies Getz throughout, adding just the right amount of bonhomie and tension to allow for some interesting counterpoints. His piece, “Open Country,” displays a New Orleans-style, easy swing. Brookmeyer demonstrates the abilities that establish him
as an effective partner for clarinetist, Jimmy Giuffre, later in the record. The partnership of Getz and Brookmeyer, reprised in later years, makes this album one of the most revealing and experimental in Getz’s very large discography.

Arthur Blythe’s *Lennox Avenue Breakdown*, immediately recalls the jazz experiments of Charles Mingus. Over imaginative and soulful riffs, the group’s improvisations break into free improvisations, radically departing from the song structure with a particular blend of soul. Blythe, on alto sax, injects fierce blues into his own personal equation, that is quite free. His solo on “Odessa” is a majestic and inventive take on the blues.

On the title track, flutist James Newton is particularly striking, playing in the tradition of Eric Dolphy and even taking it farther Out. Guitarist, James “Blood” Ulmer, lays down an accompanying chorus like a shaman casting the proper temperature, inciting the soloists. His solo on “Odessa” is quietly fierce and determined. Drummer Jack DeJohnette’s skill fuses the parts to the whole with fire and authority. Bassist Cecil McBee has a dark, soulful sound. However, the real shocker is Bob Stewart on tuba! His innovative use of the tuba in 1979 was an important contribution to jazz because of the demands the instrument makes on its musicians. The brilliance of this record is that through imaginative instrumentation, Blythe and company create a particular urban energy, one that blends deep soul with jazz freedom.

I’d like to close with a quote from soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy: “Music is just out there, and you have to leap, take a chance, go off the ledge, off the edge.” Both Getz and Blythe, on these two albums, take chances and take the music far out, with their feet firmly on the ground.

**Recordings**
