

One Child Left Behind
Ed Palermo Big Band (Cuneiform)
by Ken Dryden

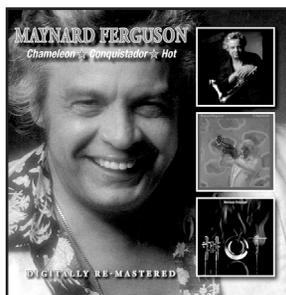
In college Ed Palermo was immersed in the rock music he grew up with in addition to playing jazz. Frank Zappa was one of his favorites and following the rocker's death in 1993, Palermo put together some big band arrangements for a tribute concert. He recorded the first of several Zappa-themed CDs in 1996 and has developed a large book, constantly tinkering with charts and adding new material, with dedicated musicians (many of whom have been playing with him for most or all of the past two-plus decades) and a strong fan base. While *One Child Left Behind* is humorously packaged, it is filled with potent musicianship and inventive charts.

The Zappa selections come from the early to mid '70s, beginning with a straightahead interpretation of "Cleetus Awreetus Awrightus", first recorded by the short-lived Grand Wazoo big band. Ted Kooshian adds a fun touch with his campy piano solo while Bill Straub's quick chorus on tenor saxophone provides icing on the cake. Palermo's arranging gifts are displayed in his thoughtful setting of the lesser-known "Spider of Destiny". Palermo's miniature setting of "The Grand Wazoo" segues into an in-your-face, funky

rendition of "Fifty-Fifty" showcasing Mike Boschen's gritty trombone, a boisterous chorus by long-time baritone saxophonist Barbara Cifelli, along with the spirited playing of alto saxophonist Cliff Lyons and pianist Bob Quaranta, before returning to a brief reprise of "The Grand Wazoo".

Ex-Zappa sideman Napoleon Murphy Brock is a delightful guest on "Pygmy Twylite", "Andy" and the loopy "Po-Jama People". One misfire is multi-tracked vocals in "Village of the Sun". One of the twists is a lounge-like treatment of Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" with a sincere vocal by Bruce McDaniel and thoughtful scoring by Palermo. The leader's own writing can't be overlooked, especially his swinging "Vengeance" and tense, multi-faceted "The Goat Patrol".

For more information, visit cuneiformrecords.com. Palermo's Big Band is at Iridium Aug. 19th-20th. See Calendar.



Chameleon/Conquistador/Hot
Maynard Ferguson (BGO)
by Scott Yanow

Maynard Ferguson, who died 10 years ago this month at 78, was a phenomenon when it came to hitting high notes on the trumpet, doing much of his finest jazz work for the Roulette label during 1958-64 at the head of his hard-swinging and boppish big band. After breaking up his orchestra, he led a sextet, spent time living in India and England, signed with the Columbia label and recorded his *M.F. Horn* series, which found him opening his music to rock and funk while still performing some straightahead jazz.

Three of Ferguson's albums from the '70s are reissued in full on this two-CD set. The most intriguing set is 1974's *Chameleon*, which has Ferguson leading a 13-piece orchestra consisting of five trumpets, two trombones, three reeds and a rhythm section. The music is high-powered and filled with Ferguson's stratospheric blasts. While often funky, particularly during one of the best versions of Herbie Hancock's title track, the latter part of "La Fiesta" and "Living For The City", there is a good mixture of the artistic with the commercial. Ferguson takes a rare vocal on "I Can't Get Started" while the uptempo straightahead minor blues "Superbone Meets The Bad Man" gives him a chance to switch to trombone in a battle with baritone saxophonist Bruce Johnstone.

By the time of 1977's *Conquistador*, Ferguson was seen by the Columbia label as a commercial artist, one who could sell quite a few records. That set begins with the biggest hit of the trumpeter's career, his surprisingly successful version of "Gonna Fly Now" (the "Theme From Rocky"). During most of the other numbers on this album, Ferguson's own group is buried beneath a huge ensemble of guest musicians that include 13 brass, two saxophonists, a large rhythm section, up to eight background singers and 17 strings. The rhythms are often inspired by disco and the music is quite a mixed bag of attempts at other pop hits including the "Theme From Star Trek", "Mister Mellow" (a light funky workout for George Benson) and "Soar Like An Eagle". While the album sold well, it helped lead to the jazz world finding it difficult to take Ferguson's music too seriously.

Hot from 1978 is of even less interest. Whether it is the "Rocky II. Disco Theme" (which features grunts from Sylvester Stallone), a remake of the *Star Trek* theme or such forgettable disco romps as "Gabriel",

Stanley Clarke's "Dayride" or "Topa-Topa Woman", the music sounds quite dated. Only a concise version of "Naima" rises above the innocuous dance music.

After a few more increasingly dismal efforts for Columbia and a couple of albums from his 1987-88 funk group High Voltage, Ferguson performed straightahead jazz with his ten-piece group Big Bop Nouveau. He never lost his ability to amaze audiences with his playing and was a cheerleader for and role model to a new generation of young trumpeters who marveled at his effortless high notes, allowing one to forgive the excesses of *Conquistador* and *Hot*.

For more information, visit bgo-records.com

ON SCREEN



Virtual Tour: A Reduced Carbon Footprint Concert Series (pfMENTUM)
by Ken Waxman

Ever notice that people are never shown watching TV images on television programs? That's because the concept of a viewer watching a screen showing someone watching another screen moves into the surrealistic realm of a René Magritte painting. This is one drawback of *Virtual Tour*, wherein four California-based musicians—pianist Myra Melford, bassist Mark Dresser, trombonist Michael Dessen and flutist Nicole Mitchell—play in real time via high-speed uncompressed audio and high definition video connections alongside separately linked ensembles in Amherst, MA, Stony Brook, NY and Zürich, Switzerland. Oversized video screens are on stage with each, at points providing some arresting close-ups of intricate solo explorations or intense responses to one other's playing. This is especially obvious during lick trading from Dessen and fellow trombonist Ray Anderson in Stony Brook, but throughout the 193[!]-minute program there are many shots of one group or another waiting to play following solos taken elsewhere. That is, visuals of people watching other people on TV.

With a total of 26 technicians on hand compared to 15 musicians, the performances are about as close to a relaxed jam session as a NASA rocket is to a bicycle. In interviews included as extras, Dresser and Dessen admit to the fragility of working with brand-new technology that could crash at any time. "The bandwidth is our instrument in a way," says the bassist. But he admits that one reason these combinations work is the long history most of the players have with one another. Dessen affirms that such experiments teach everyone involved about contemporary music. "Tele-presence has the opportunity to reshape musical traditions and create new ones."

Some of the happenings may be a little too reminiscent of Frederick Banting going through painstakingly controlled experiments before producing insulin. There are passages that don't connect. Don't try to watch the entire video all at once either. Best appreciation comes by isolating individual sets.

For more information, visit pfmentum.com. Mark Dresser is at The Stone Aug. 12th. See Calendar.

SHUNZO OHNO



JOE'S PUB

SAT - AUGUST 13 - 7:00PM

THE PUBLIC THEATER, 425 LAFAYETTE ST, NEW YORK, NY 10003

FEATURING:
PAUL BOLLENBACK
DAVID BERKMAN
DARRYL JOHNS
JEROME JENNINGS

LYDIA LIEBMAN PROMOTIONS