

can hear on 'Flight Time' (*Blackbyrd*, 1972); 9044 Tango was my serial number on the plane. I used to fly the Blackbyrds around.

Didn't a lot of musicians – Patsy Cline, Buddy Holly, Otis Redding – die in plane crashes? Did you need a lot of insurance, since you were under contract?

They were all fast asleep. I taught two of the Blackbyrds how to fly. When I taught at Oberlin conservatory there was an airport about half a mile away and I used to ask the students everyday, who wants to go up? A couple of them became flyers. We have a flight programme at Delaware State too.

You are interdisciplinary, not a purist, but you must have been attacked in the 1970s by the hard-bop clan when you switched to jazz-lite.

They know better than to say anything. The greatest compliment I had coming here was from Larry Coryell, he knew all about me and he said 'thank you!' Lenny White and Victor Bailey said 'thank you'. Everybody likes the idea that I was one of the first musicians to go all the way through university and study.

The poster for the Nisville Festival has a stereotyped image of the jolly black jazz musician on it, playing some kind of local flute, how do you feel about that?

That shows you that Louis Armstrong was the most popular musician wherever he went in the world. Africa, Europe, Asia, wherever he went everybody knew Pops.

Miles Davis would have thought it smacked of minstrelsy.

(With affection) Fuck Miles! I knew Miles since I was about 14 – we were very close. Dizzy too. Miles wouldn't say shit to me; I know his sons, his wives, know them personally.

Wouldn't you admit that after Clifford and Dizzy, you were influenced by Miles, when you started cutting down on the notes, giving the ballads a certain sangfroid?

(Avoiding the question) When I think I played with Max Roach and the fact that I played with Charlie Parker, Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke... Kenny Clarke wanted me to leave New York when I had first arrived; I said 'Kenny, I just got here!' But I was with him till the time he died in Paris... I was there... I met Eric Dolphy in Paris.

Who do you miss the most, Pepper Adams, Duke Pearson, Joe Gordon?

They got new ones coming up! Kenny Garrett, Terence Blanchard; who is that kid in New Orleans? I used to teach summer school in New Orleans... Trombone Shorty, he's a screamer, oh yeah, I knew him years ago. I am on good terms with Wynton Marsalis and his father Ellis, his brother the saxophonist, Branford, all of them.

When do you think you were most on your game in your career?

With the people here. I'm always growing. I didn't know this was going to happen right. What did the people say? They loved it. Well, what the hell else do you want?

So which of your achievements are you the most proud?

I am busy writing on my laptop, because they want me to go back to the university and start some new classes. I will teach my M + M = A: Math plus Music equals Art. I can take any numbers, telephone numbers, whatever, and make creative projects. ■



THE WORD ON BYRD

HAROLD SMITH

"Dr Byrd's teaching is very meticulous. I didn't have anything before like that. He taught me proper warm up techniques, buzzing your long low notes, gradually going up; how to lean back, hold your horn in the air and let 'em have it with the high notes. I used to rap on the corner and Doc said, 'Go for it!' [he] made up rhymes for us. The (Delaware State) Jazz Combo didn't all make it to Nis. The percussionist had to attend a funeral; four kids were shot back in Newark, execution style. Wrong place, wrong time. One of them was in the band. Music prevented me getting sucked into the crime life, cut me out of a lot of trouble. My parents thought Serbia was some kind of war zone but Doctor Byrd bringing me here has opened my eyes; it's a big world out there, I want to come back."

FREDDIE HUBBARD (1938-2008)

"Donald Byrd is my big brother, he's the

greatest trumpet of that era, he helped me out so much when I first signed to Blue Note. We made a few jobs together. Once he sent me as his replacement for a big band date at the Apollo, the conductor looked at me and said 'Damn, you are not Donald Byrd, who are you?' Byrd also introduced me to Coltrane at a jam session at Count Basie's nightclub. Donald Byrd was very influential and I have so much admiration for all he's done. I wrote a tune for him, 'Byrdlike'."

HERBIE HANCOCK

"I'm eternally indebted to Donald Byrd. He took me on my first professional gigs. Onetime, Duke Pearson was sick and I took his place at a gig in Milwaukee. We had to turn back the first night because of snow, we barely got out of Chicago, so Donald took me to a jam session and I was nervous, sounded terrible. When we got to Milwaukee I did OK on the medium tempos and ballads, but had trouble with 'Cherokee'. I asked if there was