



Vincent Chancey

by Anders Griffen

Vincent Chancey is a jazz French horn player and one of the premier soloists on that instrument and in that idiom. He came to New York to study with Julius Watkins in the early '70s and has been a prolific performer and recording artist since joining Sun Ra's Arkestra in 1976. He has worked with jazz greats like Charlie Haden, Carla Bley, Lester Bowie, David Murray, Muhal Richard Abrams, Henry Threadgill, Sam Rivers and many more, as well as popular artists such as Ashford and Simpson and Aretha Franklin, among others.

The New York City Jazz Record: You've just been performing unique orchestra and chorus transcriptions by Charles Tolliver of John Coltrane's *Africa/Brass* with Reggie Workman's African-American Legacy Project at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

Vincent Chancey: Oh, yeah, it was a great event. I don't think that original music was anywhere to be found - so often the music gets performed and then the parts get lost or whatever - Charles had to go to the record and transcribe it. I also did a piece with Charles Tolliver a couple years ago for a Thelonious Monk celebration and we did Monk's Town Hall concert. Charles went to the original recording and transcribed that as well, so he has those abilities.

TNYCJR: I'm sure everybody would be interested in hearing about your experience with Sun Ra.

VC: It was an incredible experience to play with Sun Ra. He was one of the first big name people I played with. I came to New York in '73; I started working with him in '76. The reason I was able to play with him was because Brother Ah, who was Robert Northern [on the original Monk Town Hall Concert], had been playing in his band and left. At the time I was playing with [trumpeter] Ahmed Abdullah, who told me Sun Ra's looking for a new French horn player because the old guy left. So he gave me his number and I called him up, "Hello, Mr. Ra? My name is Vincent Chancey and I understand you're looking for a new French horn player?" and he said, "I'm not looking for a new French horn player, I don't know who told you that, I'm not looking for anybody." I said, "Well, I know Brother Ah left the band" and he said, "He left the band but I just continue on, one man can't change my lifestyle." I said ok and I was about to hang up and he said, "Well, wait a minute, why don't you come down to our rehearsal in Philadelphia next Tuesday" or whatever day it was.

So I talked to Ahmed and he was going down so we went down on the train to Philadelphia. When I walked in, Sun Ra was in a dark room editing the film *Space is the Place*. I was totally intimidated, you know? I knew about him and all of this mythic greatness and his music and then I'm in this dark room with him and I can't really see him and he says, "Just sit down, wait for me." So I'm sitting at the side of the room and he's talking to people about things having to do with the

film. Eventually, after that was over, he turned to me and says, "You're the French horn player?" and asks what experience I had. Basically at that point I had just finished my degree in classical music but I'd always been involved in jazz and I was doing some jazz work.

So he went to the piano and just played a couple notes and as he played a few notes guys started to come down the stairs, like [John] Gilmore, Marshall [Allen], one by one guys started to come down the stairs with stacks of music! That was their key, when Sun Ra sat down at the piano, that meant it was time to rehearse. So after the room filled with 10 or 12 guys he started working on a piece, just composing a piece right there, then he would pass a part out to each guy. This process took 40 minutes to an hour, for one piece - play some notes, write it, give that guy a part, then go to the next guy write some notes and give him a part. So he gave me my part and he said, "ok, let's all do the composition". He started it and then he asked me to solo on it and, you know, of course being around all these figures I was intimidated, but I played what I could do. He said, ok, put that piece aside and then started working on another piece. The whole rehearsal went like this for about ten hours. So at the end of rehearsal I said, "Well, Sun Ra, there was another French horn player in the group, can you just give me the parts that he had?" He said, "You don't play like the last guy, so I have to rearrange all my music to fit you in the band." Of course every guy in the band hated my guts because they had to sit through all these rehearsals and learn all new charts. So they weren't talking to me so much.

Then, after we finished a rehearsal he said, "Can you do a gig with us at the Bottom Line next... Monday?" I said, "ok", so I showed up at the gig and we did all of this music, we did the music we rehearsed and a lot more music too. So I didn't know the music and Sun Ra didn't call tunes. He would just hit two notes or a chord and the whole band knows what he's gonna do, so they all go to that piece. So he was doing it and I didn't know what it was so I was fishing through my music trying to find what tune was this. Somehow I got through the concert but the next day in the newspaper it said, "the Sun Ra concert was great but he had a new French horn player who spent the whole night looking for his music." [laughs] It was absolutely the case. A few days after that the band went to Europe for three months, so that was my introduction to playing with Sun Ra.

TNYCJR: I noticed your "Crosswalks" on your website. I really enjoyed those images.

VC: I was always fascinated with those signs. Once I started [touring] I would remember the last pedestrian sign and then see the next one, so I decided around 1984 to start doing a photographic study. A depiction of signs from every country I went to. I still do it. After spending a life of traveling and touring I like to have

something as a memento, even just these little pictures of a guy crossing the street on a sign.

TNYCJR: Being on the road in general, how is that for you? Sometimes people complain about it.

VC: I still enjoy it. I've been doing it since that '76 tour with Sun Ra, so it's been over 35 years now that I've been traveling - South America, Africa, Europe, Japan, all over the States, the Middle East - but every time I go out there are new things to learn, new cultures, I'm still enjoying it. I'll be going away Friday [Nov. 4th] to do a three-and-a-half week tour back in Europe again.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 35)

George Colligan Trio featuring
George Colligan - piano, trumpet, melodica
Linda Oh - bass Ted Poor - drums

Cornelia Street Café
December 21st - 8pm \$10
(212) 989-9319 - 29 Cornelia St

New CD "Living For The City"
(SteepleChase) will be available
Don't Miss this rare
NYC appearance!



georgecolligan.com

THE VILLAGE VANGUARD
www.villagevanguard.com

★ DECEMBER 1ST - DECEMBER 3RD ★
CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE & INSIDE STRAIGHT
STEVE WILSON - WARREN WOLF
PETER MARTIN - CARL ALLEN

★ DECEMBER 4TH ★
THE VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA
RARE SUNDAY NIGHT APPEARANCE!

★ DECEMBER 6TH - DECEMBER 11TH ★
**JENNY SCHEINMAN
BILL FRISSELL
BRIAN BLADE**

★ DECEMBER 13TH - DECEMBER 18TH ★
CEDAR WALTON TRIO
DAVID WILLIAMS - WILLIE JONES, III

★ DECEMBER 20TH - DECEMBER 25TH ★
CEDAR WALTON QUARTET
VINCENT HERRING - DAVID WILLIAMS - WILLIE JONES, III

★ DECEMBER 27TH - JANUARY 1ST ★
THE BAD PLUS
ETHAN IVERSON - REID ANDERSON - DAVID KING

MONDAY NIGHTS ARE RESERVED FOR
THE VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA
MONDAY THRU SUNDAY
9PM & 11PM
7TH AVE. SOUTH AT 11TH STREET 212-255-4037

STEINWAY & SONS

(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

TNYCJR: Right, with clarinetist Ab Baars.

VC: Yes. The way I met Ab was, I started working with this Dutch pianist, Guus Janssen, a very accomplished pianist and composer both in classical and experimental jazz. I started working with him in 1989 and Ab was a part of that band. So I've been going to Holland a lot for 22 years, doing all different kinds of projects - quartets, quintets, operas, octets, a 12-piece band - with this one composer. I'll be going to a couple places that I haven't gone to, Romania being one of them. It will be interesting to go there, might find a nice sign.

TNYCJR: I know that over the decades folks have talked about advantages and disadvantages of collaborating with European musicians. In some cases it makes it easier to secure work with a trans-Atlantic collaboration happening. Some European countries don't just want American bands taking work away from their musicians.

VC: Right. It's changed. When I first started going to Europe, we'd play on a festival and if there were 12 bands at least 10 or 11 of them would be American groups and one local or European group. Now it's pretty much flip-flopped; it's like one American band and 11 European groups. I think the Europeans have said, "We've learned this music, we can master it now, so if we're going to have a festival we might as well premiere our own people." It's a big expense to bring Americans over, so this way they cut back and the world changing the way that it is, everybody's cutting back on funds, so a lot of the times I go to Europe it is with a European band.

TNYCJR: When you come back you have a date coming up with Dave Douglas and Brass Ecstasy. Is the group in general a Lester Bowie tribute?

VC: He formed it with that in mind but the band has taken on a life of its own. Musically it's totally different from Lester, the only similarity is brass and drums. Lester's band was eight horns and drums and Dave's band is four horns and drums.

TNYCJR: You did a Lester Bowie tribute at Sistas' Place in Brooklyn recently. Who was involved with that?

VC: Well, Lester's wife went to [tubaist] Bob Stewart and asked him if he would put a group together for the celebration of Lester's 70th birthday. So Bob called in guys that were involved ... I think that was three trumpets, trombone, French horn, tuba and drums. We brought out the old book and tried to play some of the pieces we could play with a reduced group. For me it was exciting to go back to this music, open my old book that I hadn't seen in 12 years and to go through all those compositions. The people loved it, it was a very good show.

TNYCJR: This month you have gigs with poet Barry Wallenstein and with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (Dec. 29th-31st at Park Avenue Armory).

VC: Yes, I've been working with Barry for maybe 12 or 13 years. I'm reading his words with him and making music out of what he's saying. I like working with him and I like working with dancers, you're able to see what you're playing. For the Merce Cunningham project, that's going to be a big event. Christian Wolff is composing a piece. You know when Merce died he said, "I want the company to disband after I leave." They just put together concerts throughout the end of this year. New Year's Eve will mark the end of that company, the very last performance they will ever do,

so it's going to be a huge event.

TNYCJR: And your group Phat Chance is back in action, I guess it's mostly playing on Latin and Brazilian rhythms?

VC: Well, a lot of it is because I have a fascination for Latin and South American music and then a lot of it is free improvisation as well. So, what I'll do is play freely and then just touch upon rhythms, or even compositions that I've written that the band knows and then we will segue into that. I have certain key rhythms or things that I'll do to let them know where I'm going and we'll delve into that - like I got from Sun Ra, those two notes on the piano to lead them in. ❖

For more information, visit vincentchancey.com. Chancey is at Jazz Standard Dec. 11th with Dave Douglas, Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center Dec. 12th and Cornelia Street Café Dec. 18th with Barry Wallenstein. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Muhal Richard Abrams - *Blues Forever* (Black Saint, 1981)
- Herb Robertson Brass Ensemble - *Shades of Bud Powell* (JMT-Winter & Winter, 1988)
- Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy - *The Fire This Time* (In & Out, 1992)
- Vincent Chancey - *Next Mode* (DIW, 1996)
- Reggie Nicholson Brass Concept - *Surreal Feel* (Abstract Recordings, 2008)
- Dave Douglas United Front - *Brass Ecstasy at Newport* (Greenleaf Music, 2010)

(LABEL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

"All over the world people can hear our hearts' vibrations because of Ogun," exults Moholo-Moholo, who was featured on *Live at Willisau* and continues to record for the label today. "We are so rich musically because Ogun stepped in to record us when times were tough. It's still spreading the music to places where other recording companies did not."

As with most small labels, distribution remains a problem, with gaps as local companies go in and out of business. Right now, notes Miller: "Ogun is distributed through Harmonia Mundi in the UK, Orkestra in France, Distrijazz in Spain and Portugal, IRD in Italy, Music by Mail in Denmark, No Man's Land in Berlin and Wayside Music, Downtown Music Gallery, Dusty Groove and Squidco in the US." And she adds proudly, "at last I have a distributor in South Africa: Pretoria's Mabitsele Music & Events."

"For 37 years Hazel Miller has tirelessly worked to make possible the documentation of this passionate music," notes Julie Tippetts. "So today it's here for everyone to hear."

Continuing to issue new CDs means that even with its long history Ogun remains much more than a reissue label, insists Miller. Plus, like the recent *Spiritual Knowledge and Grace* capturing a nightclub gig of Moholo-Moholo, Pukwana and Johnny Dyani with American saxophonist Frank Wright, some future scheduled CDs consist of material recorded in the past, but never released. There's another disc from the Blue Notes' sojourn in Holland, without Wright, but with McGregor for instance, plus a multi-disc McGregor project, the size or scope of which has yet to be decided. Among the new issues will be Moholo-Moholo's concert at the 2010 London Jazz Festival in duo with Keith Tippett and leading a group.

"Whilst there are still fans out there we shall continue to release archive music and new recordings," says Miller with conviction. ❖

For more information, email ogunrecords@googlemail.com



Thu, Dec 1	SHANE ENDSLEY AND THE MUSIC BAND 8:30PM Uri Caine, Harish Raghavan, Justin Brown
Fri, Dec 2	BILL MCHENRY QUARTET 9PM & 10:30PM Orin Evans, RJ Miller
Sat, Dec 3	FABIAN ALMAZAN TRIO 9PM & 10:30PM Linda Oh, Henry Cole
Sun, Dec 4	BOBBY AVEY QUARTET FEATURING MIGUEL ZENON 8:30PM Thomson Kneeland, Marcus Gilmore
Mon, Dec 5	AMRAM & CO 8:30PM David Amram, Kevin Twigg, John de Witt, Adam Amram
Tue, Dec 6	BLUE TUESDAYS: SARA SERPA 8:30PM André Matos, Kris Davis, Ben Street, Tommy Crane, Julie Hardy, host
Wed, Dec 7	DAN BLAKE QUARTET CD RELEASE: THE AQUARIAN SUITE 8:30PM Jason Palmer, Jorge Roeder, Richie Barshay
Thu, Dec 8	HARRIS EISENSTADT AND CANADA DAY 8:30PM Nate Wooley, Matt Bauder, Chris Dingman, Garth Stevenson
Fri, Dec 9	GERALD CLEAVER 9PM & 10:30PM Darius Jones, Brandon Seabrook, Cooper-Moore, Pascal Niggenkemper
Sat, Dec 10	
Sun, Dec 11	GLOBAL LIVING ROOM: ORAN ETKIN TRIO 8:30PM Ben Allison, Francisco Mela, Jean Rohe, host
Tue, Dec 13	LOGAN RICHARDSON QUARTET 8:30PM Sam Harris, Ben Street, Nasheet Waits
Wed, Dec 14	"THE FAMILY TREE" PRESENTS... MATT PARKER + FRIENDS 8:30PM Frank Locrasto, Chris Higgins, Reggie Quinerly, Alan Hampton, host
Thu, Dec 15	KERMIT DRISCOLL QUARTET FEATURING BILL FRISELL 8:30PM Kris Davis, John Hollenbeck
Fri, Dec 16	JOHN HOLLENBECK'S CLAUDIA QUINTET 9PM & 10:30PM Drew Gress, Matt Moran, Red Wierenga, Chris Speed
Sat, Dec 17	
Sun, Dec 18	ERI YAMAMOTO TRIO "THANK YOU, 2011" 8:30PM David Ambrosio, Ikuo Takeuchi
Mon, Dec 19	MORRISON MOTEL 8:30PM
Tue, Dec 20	MARY HALVORSON'S REVERSE BLUE 8:30PM Chris Speed, Eivind Opsvik, Tomas Fujiwara
Wed, Dec 21	GEORGE COLLIGAN TRIO CD RELEASE: LIVING FOR THE CITY 8:30PM Linda Oh, Ted Poor
Thu, Dec 22	MATT WILSON'S CHRISTMAS TREE-O 8:30 PM Jeff Lederer, Paul Sikivie
Fri, Dec 23	DUANE EUBANKS QUINTET 9PM & 10:30PM Abraham Burton, Orin Evans, Derzon Douglas, Eric McPherson
Tue, Dec 27	CALEB CURTIS AND THE WHEELHOUSE BAND 8:30PM Duane Eubanks, Mike Pinto, Dylan Shamat, Rodney Green
Wed, Dec 28	NEW BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVES: SEBASTIAN CRUZ AND THE CHEAP LANDSCAPE TRIO 8:30PM Moto Fukushima, Joe Saylor, Billy Newman, host
Fri, Dec 30	TOM RAINEY TRIO 9PM & 10:30PM Mary Halvorson, Ingrid Laubrock

For our full schedule check out our website
www.corneliastreetcafe.com

CORNELIA STREET CAFE
29 Cornelia Street
New York, NY 10014
(212) 989-9319