

# ALPHONSE MOUZON

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Looking over the career of musician Alphonse Mouzon a steady, inspired output is revealed. From his beginnings drumming behind pianist McCoy Tyner and as an original member of fusion supergroup Weather Report, Mouzon has sustained an active musical career for decades. He has performed with Stevie Wonder, Carlos Santana, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck, as well as an incredible list of jazz greats including Gil Evans, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Donald Byrd, Jaco Pastorius and dozens more. He has been a widely sought after and a hugely influential drummer across multiple genres. "Miles was trying to get me to leave McCoy Tyner," Mouzon recounts, "He sat down beside my drums at the Village Vanguard and beat on my bass drum. McCoy said, 'Oh, man, I'm in trouble.'"

Outspoken about his influence has been the band Led Zeppelin. In his Rock and Roll Hall of Fame acceptance speech on behalf of the band, vocalist Robert Plant mentions Alphonse Mouzon. Music journalist Stephen Davis, author of two books about Led Zeppelin, talks about John Bonham thundering along to his Alphonse Mouzon records before, after and between gigs. Mouzon was one of the 30 drummers who recently performed at "The Bonzo Bash" at the Santa Ana Observatory in January. Video excerpts from that concert, as well as Robert Plant's speech, can be found online. Mouzon was also an inspiration to drum builder Canopus, which he now endorses. They are currently working on an Alphonse Mouzon signature snare drum.

On Oct. 13th, 1970 Wayne Shorter recorded *Creation*, with Mouzon, Tyner, bassist Miroslav Vitous and percussionist Barbara Burton, but it was never released. "We were actually the first version of Weather Report before Joe Zawinul replaced McCoy and Airto replaced Barbara," recalls Mouzon. "It was Wayne's vision." Shorter's vision had been hinted at on his

previous release, *Odyssey Of Iska*, also with Mouzon.

After Weather Report, Mouzon worked with Tyner for two years, producing memorable performances and five albums like 1972's *Sahara* and *Song For My Lady* and 1973's *Enlightenment* (all on Milestone). From 1972-74 he also released three progressively impactful albums under his own name for Blue Note: *The Essence of Mystery*, *Funky Snakefoot* and *Mind Transplant*. Next was the powerful fusion group Larry Coryell & The Eleventh House, with the titular guitarist, which lasted for just a few years before a brief run as the Coryell/Mouzon Band. German record label MPS has recently launched a reissue campaign, which includes two Mouzon classics from 1977 and 1979 respectively: *In Search Of A Dream*, a jazz-rock powerhouse, and *Baby Come Back*, a disco-funk party. Both titles have been remastered for digital download; the former is also available on CD.

Mouzon was just 19 years old when Mongo Santamaria recorded two of his compositions, thus launching the publishing company, Mouzon Music. Over the years he has licensed his music to television and film and he is hopeful that copyright reform will come to favor musicians. "It's about time the copyright office woke up! Composers, songwriters, publishers and labels [need] more control. Radio and TV will have to come clean and pay up! Music is not for free! I've been losing \$60,000-\$100,000 a year because of illegal file-sharing and downloads." In 1992 he started Tenacious Records, "because I don't give up, I'm resilient and tenacious like a pit bull, I've got to keep going."

In addition to a steady output of new recordings, Tenacious reissued a number of earlier records, which he could do because he always owned all of his music. "Own your stuff," Mouzon advises. "If you're the owner of a pizza place, own the recipe. Record companies will rip you off if you don't watch it. You could have 15 million plays and they might give you a thousand dollars." The reissues include titles from the '80s, which feature several of Mouzon's regular collaborators including Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard, Michael Brecker, Hubert Laws, Ronnie Laws, Lee Ritenour, Paul Jackson, Jr. and many more.

Tenacious kept a steady output through the '90s and into the 2000s.

"What's current," Mouzon reports, "is my straightahead record, my allstar record, called *Angel Face*, with Wallace Roney, Arturo Sandoval, Christian McBride, Ernie Watts, Bob Vincent, Kenny Barron and the late, great Cedar Walton. On a song called 'Never Say Never', I play lead trumpet and solo. I'm working on two albums, I just have to mix: *High Noon*, more bluesy funk, and *Smooth As Silk*, which is more smooth contemporary jazz. The late great guitarist Jeff Golub, along with guitarists Larry Coryell, Chuck Loeb, Julian Coryell and Jeff Richman are playing on [both records and they] feature me on lead trumpet, as well as on drums and keyboards."

Mouzon and Coryell continue to build on their musical partnership of over 40 years. The Eleventh House was reborn in 1998 and toured the world. On Apr. 5th, 2013 they performed a reunion concert for Coryell's 70th birthday with the original members of the band. Meanwhile, "I'm planning on going back on the road," says Mouzon. "I have a super group with Wallace Roney called Miles Smiles [with] people that associated with Miles. We tour all over, sell out the concerts and it's big." If that's not enough to keep him busy, Mouzon is a part-time actor. He appeared in 1996 alongside Tom Hanks in *That Thing You Do!* and the last film he did was *The Dukes* with Chazz Palminteri and Robert Davi; he licensed a couple of tunes and played the part of a doo-wop singer. ❖

For more information, visit [tenaciousrecords.com](http://tenaciousrecords.com)

## Recommended Listening:

- Weather Report – *Eponymous* (Columbia, 1971)
- McCoy Tyner – *Sahara* (Milestone, 1972)
- Larry Coryell & The Eleventh House – *At Montreux* (Vanguard, 1974)
- Alphonse Mouzon – *Mind Transplant* (Blue Note, 1974)
- Albert Mangelsdorff/Jaco Pastorius/Alphonse Mouzon – *Trilogue – Live!* (MPS, 1976)
- Alphonse Mouzon – *In Search Of A Dream* (MPS-Edel, 1977)

## LEST WE FORGET

# BETTY CARTER

BY DONALD ELFMAN

Betty Carter was a one-of-a-kind artist. She remains the embodiment of modern fullest jazz singing, her art comprising composition, daring improvisation, a unique sense of time and harmony and a desire to find and teach young talented vocalists and instrumentalists.

Born Lillie Mae Jones in Flint, Michigan on May 16th, 1929, Carter studied piano at the Detroit Conservatory of Music. As a teenager she played with artists—notably Charlie Parker—when they worked Detroit. Carter won an amateur contest and, in 1948, joined the Lionel Hampton band, performing as Lorraine Carter. Hampton coined the nickname "Carter Be-Bop" and, though she didn't care for it, changed her stage name to Betty Carter and moved to New York after traveling there with the Hampton band.

In New York, Carter played shows at The Apollo and worked with such luminaries as Dizzy Gillespie and Max Roach. She became known as an artist who didn't take to any notion of mainstream style. She made her first recording in 1955 with pianist Ray Bryant (*Meet Betty Carter and Ray Bryant*); this and several other recordings received little attention. But she was gaining some notoriety as an independent

artist and woman, thanks, in part, to the influence of Gladys Hampton, Lionel's wife. Still, Carter needed a break and it came from Ray Charles, through Miles Davis. Acting upon Miles' recommendation, Ray signed her to do a recording of duets with him. *Ray Charles and Betty Carter* became a giant hit, popular with audiences and the press. It even had a smash single, "Baby It's Cold Outside".

But Carter was raising a family and so chose not to capitalize on the success of the recording. She did record several albums in 1963 and 1964, but essentially did no other recording from 1961-68. In 1969, she decided she wanted back into the business. She did a few albums for Roulette and then started her own label, Bet-Car. The Bet-Car albums are considered by many to be among the finest jazz vocal albums. *The Betty Carter Album*, *Betty Carter* (reissued later as *At The Village Vanguard*), *I Didn't Know What Time It Was* and, the apex of these recordings, *The Audience with Betty Carter*, are brilliant, fiercely independent statements made by an artist who was increasingly sure of her own stunning talents and also enthusiastic about nurturing talented young musicians who could beautifully negotiate the challenges of this music. Among these were pianists Stephen Scott, Mulgrew Miller, John Hicks and Cyrus Chestnut; saxophonists Mark Shim, Craig Handy and Don Braden; and drummers Kenny Washington and Winard Harper.

After *Whatever Happened to Love* (1982) and the

*Carmen McRae Betty Carter Duets*, recorded live in San Francisco (1987), Carter signed an agreement with Verve Records, which not only released new recordings but also reissued the majority of her older material. From the late '80s through the '90s, Carter thrived. She received a Grammy award, performed at the White House and was a major feature of Verve's 50th anniversary celebration in 1994 at Carnegie Hall. And there's Betty Carter's *Jazz Ahead*, a special educational residency at The Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, which identifies talented players and gives them a special chance to learn and perform (launching careers for pianists Jacky Terrasson and Jason Moran). Carter died Sep. 26th, 1998. ❖

A Betty Carter tribute is at *The Appel Room* Mar. 6th-7th. See *Calendar*.

## Recommended Listening:

- Betty Carter – *Out There With Betty Carter (What A Little Moonlight Can Do)* (Peacock-Impulse, 1958)
- Ray Charles/Betty Carter – *Ray Charles and Betty Carter* (ABC Paramount, 1961)
- Betty Carter – *Betty Carter (At The Village Vanguard)* (Bet-Car/Verve, 1970)
- Betty Carter – *The Audience with Betty Carter* (Bet-Car/Verve, 1979)
- Betty Carter – *Look What I Got* (Bet-Car/Verve, 1988)
- Betty Carter – *Feed The Fire* (Verve, 1993)