

Jazz Festival

fusion

...uch a *dreadful* past.

"There was even a time in the rock world, especially in the '70s, when you weren't allowed to even *talk* about jazz—it was sort of like AIDS in some circles. It's really the antithesis of everything rock stands for. Now, pop music has become just another marketing exercise—people like Sting and Peter Gabriel are an aberration—and the improvisational nature of jazz subverts all that completely. I know I haven't got the interest in playing that game, and I'm just glad that these circumstances have turned around and I can come out of the jazz closet."

The first, post-closet Earthworks album is a self-titled profile of four very distinctive musicians, working towards a futuristic, improvisational world music (not unlike Barbara Thompson's *Paraphernalia* and their eclectic Brit-mix). Hutton's muscular acoustic bass provides the roots for the proceedings, Ballamy plays a wild array of reeds over the top, and Bruford and Bates send out waves of electronic sound. In person, young Django (he must come from a musical family!) eschews his keyboards in favour of trumpet and, unusually for jazz, the tenor horn.

"I loved playing with Adrian Belew, for example, but there are such basic limitations in rock—the most overwhelming being the lack of harmonic knowledge," says Bruford. "Somebody like Adrian can't really manoeuvre out of an arrangement he's put himself into, where a good jazz player can work his way out of anything. I guess Django Bates is our Adrian now: he's a very attractive player on-stage, fusing our ideals in a physical way. I don't want people to think we're bringing some repellent, theoretical jazz that will be no fun."

Judging from the buoyant melodies, Afro-Arabic undertones and predominance of Bruford's "whirled instruments", there's no danger of that. But *Earthworks* is really only a new beginning for this veteran percussionist. With a brand-new drumkit that contains only vestiges of the traditional acoustic setup (he triggers an amazing variety of on-stage effects through the wonders of MIDI), this articulate Englishman has faced the challenges of the computer age head-on.

"Electronics promise so much, but there are still so many problems about automation and human-ness. I remember when King Crimson got its first drum machine, around 1973, I loved it 'cause I could play all this fancy stuff on top of the groove. So we had this hypnotic beat going at a big concert and I was playing this percussion rack with my back to the audience for about 15 minutes, and when I turned around, they were all asleep!

"The trick will be to control this technology to come up with new things that are still *music*. I'm sure that, within a handful of years, all musicians—whatever their instruments—will be capable of generating totally unique, unheard-on-this-planet sounds. Who knows if that will be good or bad; I just want to be around to see it!" ■

Gary Burton: the low-key vibe-master

By Ken Eisner

Picture this: it's 1967's Summer of Love and you've just drifted into San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium in time to catch a new foursome from out of town. Peering through the lysergic haze and happily writhing free-dancers, the drummer and bass player look like bush-bearded mountain men, the long-haired leader has a Teddy Roosevelt moustache and swings his beads and buckskin fringes when introducing the round-faced guitarist, who immediately launches into a frenzy of feedback and distortion. The Collectors? The Move? The Peanut Butter Conspiracy? No, just another gig for jazzman Gary Burton.

"Those were the most exciting times for all kinds of music," mused the 45-year-old master vibraphonist in a call from his Massachusetts home. "I don't think things have ever been as open, before or since."


Burton, who brings his latest quintet to the Vancouver East Cultural Centre for an intimate evening on Saturday (July 2), doesn't spend a lot of time looking back, though. His career has barely cooled down from the time when the Indiana-born musician first stepped into a Nashville recording studio with his then-exotic instrument. Starting with country and MOR dates, he recorded and toured with superstar saxist Stan Getz before launching his own groundbreaking albums, many of which featured the above-mentioned fusion avatar, Larry Coryell.

"The rockers really came around to check out Larry," he remembers. "There was much more cross-pollination then, and they dug his speed and dexterity." Of course, few could have missed Burton's own incredible four-mallet technique, and vibesounds began appearing in the music of more adventurous bands, like the Sons of Champlin and the Grateful Dead. "A lot of the older rockers were jazzers who had switched around, and [impresario] Bill Graham loved throwing all these different acts together."

In the '70s, Burton was disappointed to see these innovative musical forms diverge again, but he had his hands full between constant touring and teaching at Boston's Berklee School of Music. Over the years, he has increased his reputation through thoughtful pairings with profound artists like Keith Jarrett, Stephane Grappelli, Ralph Towner, and especially Chick Corea. Their relatively frequent duet recordings (1981's Grammy-winning *In Concert, Zurich* two-record set is still a highlight) seem to bring out something special in each man's prodigious playing, and the vibist admits that Corea is probably his favourite foil.

"There's so much I admire about Chick, but I'm always amazed by his tremendous scope. Lesser players could build entire careers out of just one aspect of his music, but he manages to balance fusion things with acoustic music, symphonic works, and other projects. He's kept his interests alive in electronics and all sorts of pop music, where I guess I've lost

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