

# Heat and Light Come Together

**I**t's a pleasant Friday afternoon in Strathcona: cherries are budding on trees that just a month ago bore cascades of pink and white blooms, and neighbours are congregating on sun-dappled porches to review the week. It's just as peaceful inside Graham Ord's Edwardian town-

## OFF BEAT ALEXANDER VARTY

house—until, that is, I ask Ord and his long-time playing partner, Bruce Freedman, to discuss each other's saxophone style.

"Well, Bruce really sucks," says Ord.

"And this asshole can't play either," Freedman replies.

Then we all crack up: rather than bitter enemies, the two musicians act more like brothers. It wasn't quite love at first sight, however; these guys don't swing that way. But from the moment they met, Freedman and Ord recognized each other as kindred spirits. By chance, the two Vancouverites first hooked up at San Francisco's fabled Keystone Korner jazz club, circa 1975, where future Miles Davis sideman Bob Berg was playing with pianist Cedar Walton. It wasn't long before Ord had insinuated himself into Freedman's pioneering Afro-Latin-jazz-funk band Rio Bumba. They've shared stages ever since. No wonder the two feel free to tease each other.

Once we stop laughing, things settle down, but only slightly. Freedman speaks about admiring

Ord's "absolutely phenomenal ear".

"He's got this amazing ability to hear things, and he doesn't think about it; he can just hear things and transfer them to his horn," Freedman contends, more seriously. "I hear—I have a *great* ear—but my ability to transfer what I hear to my fingers and to the right note is totally out to lunch, whereas Graham is highly developed in that sense. That's really a distinct thing that he's got that I don't have, and I've always found that amazing."

"Okay, my turn," Ord says, jumping in. "The thing I've always, always liked about Bruce's solos is that they are like well-crafted novels. They start here, and they go there, and they develop, and they come up and peak, and they come back down and introduce something new, and then they keep going. And they always end up climaxing somewhere."

Despite their similarities, the two have distinctly different styles. Ord talks about being a "responsive" player: he's always listening to what's going on around him and taking inspiration from that. He has a great, intuitive understanding of collective improvisation, and some of his best bands, like his Garbo's Hat trio with bassist Paul Blaney and singer Kate Hammett-Vaughan, have taken a loose, conversational approach to their music. Freedman, in contrast, is more of a classic jazz soloist. When he's got an idea to express, he appreciates the kind of rhythm section that can hang back and give him room.

Perhaps the best way to distinguish the two is to use an elemental analogy: Freedman is heat; Ord is light. The first thing you notice about the latter's sound is its beauty. I've often used the term *luminous* to

characterize Ord's approach. Freedman is more likely to be loud and raucous, and even when he's playing pretty there's an obvious depth of feeling in his work.

Although the two have never formally led a band together, they often collaborate as part of the NOW Orchestra, with whom they'll play at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre on June 27, as part of the Vancouver International Jazz Festival. But before that they'll share a more intimate stage at the Iron-Works studio (235 Alexander Street) next Thursday (June 12), in an evening that promises to be special.

"We're not going to have Graham's band play first and then the next set feature my band; what we're going to do is alternate after every couple of tunes," Freedman says.

"We both thought of that," Ord interjects.

"And we'll all play together, one tune per set, as well. So I think it'll be kind of interesting."

"I think it'll be great."

It may well be. Each of the two friends has assembled an intriguing array of collaborators: Ord's trio contains Blaney and drummer Paul Townsend, while Freedman's quartet is anchored by bassist Clyde Reed, driven by the splashy Stan Taylor on drums, and gets melodic oomph from the presence of trombonist Rod Murray. Both leaders take considerable pride in their ensembles: Freedman points out that his band rehearses weekly, a rarity in the local jazz scene, while Ord touts Blaney's emergence as a composer.

"Still, I think the bottom line for both of us," says Freedman, as Ord nods in agreement, "is that we want people to get life out of the music." ■