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Steve Swell : The OFN Interview

 by Jay Collins
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Trombonist Steve Swell is a major talent who is finally gaining recognition for his no-nonsense playing and compositional approaches. A veteran of the New York scene since the early 1980s (after his early years in New Jersey), Swell has had the opportunity to play with an exceptional variety of musicians in diverse settings. Equally at home in large improvising ensembles, small groups or as a leader, he has developed an impressive résumé. For the name-droppers, the list includes stints/sessions with Joey Baron, Tim Berne, Lionel Hampton, Jaki Byard, Herb Robertson, Phillip Johnston, William Parker, Lou Grassi, Jemeel Moondoc, Chris Kelsey, and many, many others. I had the opportunity to speak with Swell after his return from a journey to Africa as a member of Roswell Rudd's Trombone Shout Project. While the group remains unrecorded, this three-trombone group also includes veteran drummer Barry Altschul. For someone known for such an aggressive, almost combative style, his personality could not be more different, as he is truly a warm and generous spirit.



You've just returned from a trip to Africa with Roswell Rudd and Barry Altschul. What was the purpose of this trip?

Roswell was invited to play at the 4th annual Festival au Desert, 2004, located near a small village called Essakane, two days from Timbuktu in Mali, Africa. We flew to Bamako, the capital and stayed about five days there, then drove on paved and unpaved roads halfway to Timbuktu and then drove the next day to Timbuktu. From there, we drove by Land Rover the next day through the sand, with no roads, paved or unpaved, to the festival site. The band was Roswell's Trombone Shout Band and this was our maiden voyage. The band has three trombones (Deborah Weisz was the 3rd), Barry Altschul on drums and Hank Schroy on bass. Roswell had been in Mali twice before, the last time, two years ago to record his Grammy nominated CD, *Mali Cool*, with musicians from Mali. Toumani Diabate, the master kora player, was the featured artist on the record. Hank was on that date too. We were scheduled to do one gig on the last day of the festival with the possibility of others, but as the traveling was somewhat difficult and the planes into Mali being not very regular, it was decided that we should get there early and not be stressed with trying to get the Festival. Plus, it was a chance to see a little more of Mali than if we had gone straight to the Festival.

Turning away from the musical purpose for a moment, tell me about the African cities you visited.

This was one of those once in a lifetime trips. In Bamako, we got to hear Toumani Diabate's band in a club that was open air like most of the clubs there. We also did some shopping which was an experience. Everything there is done on the haggling system. The prices start very high and then you bargain the merchant down to a reasonable price. This is the way business is done there and there is a social aspect to it as well. I enjoyed it after I got used to it. Barry was an expert at this and came away with some really great stuff. Besides exploring Bamako for five days, we got to spend a day and night in Timbuktu, which was a huge center of trade some 700 years ago. That city, or what is left of it, was beautiful in a way that can't be described, it being so, so old. We had a very informative guide to show us around.

What about the Festival itself and the performances?

The Festival itself was a three-day extravaganza of bands from all over Africa, but mostly from Mali. The Ganbe Brass Band from Benin was there who performed here in NYC at Joe's Pub last year; the legendary Ali Farka Toure was there as well as bands from Nigeria, Senegal, an American Indian band called Black Fire and about twenty other bands performing in the afternoon, early evening and later at night. Robert Plant had performed there last year. Our concert was a little disappointing because during the early evening performance, the generator went out while Ali Farka was playing (it seems a car had run over the wire backstage near where I happened to be at the time) and all the electricity at the whole site was out for about two hours which pushed everything back by the time the juice came back on. So in order to get all the bands in who hadn't played yet and to end the festival at a reasonable hour all the bands after the power outage got only 15 minutes to play. What we did play went very well. We played three of Roswell's tunes, "Bamako", "Sand In My Slide Boogie" and "We Come In Peace".

So, what are your overall impressions of the trip/experience?

I have two very distinct sides to my impressions of being in Africa. This was my first time there and I was only in Mali, so these are some of my reflections from the two weeks I spent there. It being so completely new to me, I have some very strong feelings about the experience. One cannot put aside the social aspects to life there while experiencing and enjoying the absolute beauty that is there as well. It's a bit paradoxical to be in such a beautiful place like our camp on the Sahara Desert eating your lunch and then giving your leftovers to a group of hungry kids who all grab for the plate then run after the lucky one who had the best grip on it. Then watching them sharing and hungrily scarfing down the scraps that were left there. I witnessed terrible poverty in the midst of beautiful landscapes. Also a richness of spirit and vitality.

What about Bamako?

Being in Bamako you had the feeling like in any other city; bustling rush hours, streets jammed with people, shops selling all kinds of wares, but the actual physical appearance of those shops and people were just so different from any other place I've ever been to. Mostly, the shops were nothing more than rows of one-story aluminum shacks or makeshift lean-tos with wares and food displayed on tables or the ground. You got used to this and didn't feel like there was anything unusual about it, because people acted the same way as if they were doing business in the more upscale establishments you see in NY. There were so many side streets and shops like this in Bamako.

How did that differ from the desert and the Festival grounds?

In the desert it was a different story. The festival was a camp unto itself. There we all slept in tents which were really nothing more than

huge pieces of burlap held up by 2 sticks. The sights, sounds and air of the desert were distinctly different from Bamako. In Bamako you could not escape the smell of unrefined gasoline from the traffic and the wood burning fires used to cook. The desert had a hint of sweetness in the air somehow. And as I was told later, the temperature hit over 100 degrees in the afternoon but I never noticed it because there was no humidity and the air was so pure. My lungs were treated to some of the best air I've ever inhaled. The only other experience I had like that was when I was in Sweden, out in the countryside last year. Growing up in the NYC metro area, you notice things like that. At night it was much cooler and touching the sand had a coolness at night that was very refreshing to the touch. And the sand itself was much finer than any sand I've experienced at Jones Beach or Sandy Hook. I simply lied down many times in the sand during the night to listen to the bands, feeling the cool sand through my clothes. It was pure heaven. It took a couple of hours to get used to walking in the sand when I first arrived because you were never on flat ground really other than in small areas. I think after the three days of being there I got into some good shape just by walking a different way than you do in NYC. My physical motion was so different that it put me in another zone mentally and spiritually. Not a linear, asphalt-induced motion, running from one errand to the next, but a lateral motion, trudging up the sides of one dune after another, moving from one inspirational view of the landscape to another equally or more breathtaking one. Also, not being confronted with commercialism and people running to and from acts of commercialism but space, space, space. Even the merchants, and there were many of them on the desert, some pushy, were just being part of their world. A different way of doing business that just became another part of the experience. People moving to a different pace and breathing in more of a sense of themselves rather than people breathing in a sense of desperation if they don't fit into whatever it is they think they have to fit into, like here. Motion, ease, breathing, time. A timelessness you felt as if the day you are experiencing, standing in the middle of this beautiful place with the sky so vast and covering you like an umbrella with a comfort you cannot possibly feel in a city, that you know you are alive and in touch with something other than a frenzied, caffeinated whirl. Existence, a feeling of absolute, basic existence. Living.

Sounds like a profound experience. Care to expand?

I have done a lot of camping and I have never looked at the sky like that before. The sense of timelessness gives you the feeling that each day flows naturally into the next. I would just get up with the sun, took my time to actually get out of my sleeping bag, rambled over to the hut where they fed us and just walked around, talked with people and enjoyed the sensations of the sun, sand and air. And of course, camels. Camels everywhere. Very relaxing. Maybe after awhile you went back inside your tent if you felt like it, lying down and then getting up for more exploring. It was as if there was no need to worry about tours to organize (there were no emails or computers either) or music to write (I actually did write something while I was there) or bills to pay. I knew all that would be waiting for me when I got back.

So, now that you have returned to New York, how has the overall experience affected you, even in the short term?

I feel that since I've been back I have a little more clarity in my thinking and how I pace my days. I have more energy, not erratic, unfocused energy. I seem to have more time to work on my projects and think, I feel like I'm doing more with my time and that it is a pleasure doing all that I'm doing and doing more of it. It's as if some other space inside me has opened up. One of the purposes of meditating is to get to that space inside yourself and make it wider and I think this trip has gone a long way to enlarge some of that space. I think I brought back a feeling of ease that does not seem to want to go away. I think by being there I made a different kind of connection to myself that is expressing itself in a more naturalness of being. Roswell talked about how much his experiences there have been life-altering and how it wasn't going to be anything like what you might project it to be and I have to agree. I'm glad I pushed aside any preconceived notions I might have had and was able to just take it all in. A lifetime's worth of great memories and sensations. Ros[well] also mentioned when he has traveled through the desert before, he thinks he's looking at one thing and it turns out the closer he gets he realizes it's a shrub or bush. Desert hallucinations he calls them. I had the same feeling a few times myself. I thought I was seeing rabbits when we were driving in the sand but it turned out to be a very unusually shaped shrub. Another time I had my arm holding on to a handle behind Roswell while we were driving to brace myself during a very bumpy two hour drive and looked at my arm a couple of times and wondered who's arm it was. In some sense I guess this wonderful opportunity has managed to alter me and remind me to wonder a bit more about our world and all that exists in it and how I go on about my own path through it. That road is unpaved as well.

Turning to the music, will the Trombone Shout group be recording in the future?

Well, according to Roswell, since it's his project, and I quote: "We're a movie score in search of a movie." So he's putting the word out about the band but nothing is concrete at the moment.

What is on your agenda for the year music-wise? Are there any projects in the works?

There's always something on the stove, in the oven, in the mail... you get the idea. I've learned you really have to look from six months to a year and a half ahead in terms of putting tours and projects together, which means getting and keeping certain groups of people interested and together. I did one concert and CD with my Unified Theory Of Sound in 2001 and we have our second gig on the Interpretations Series at Merkin Hall scheduled for May of 2005. I hope to do something before then with that band. I'm playing a week with Cecil Taylor at Iridium with his large ensemble in March for his 75th birthday. I've got a trio with Jay Rosen and Francois Grillot that has been working a bit around town, doing a gig at CBGB's, also in March. A duo with Kevin Norton, also in March at COMA. I've got a tour in the Midwest and Canada I'm putting together with Gebhard Ullman, Hamid Drake and Darius Savage for June, as well as a tour starting in the Midwest, then south then more west through Texas, New Mexico, California, Washington and western Canada with Jemeel Moondoc, William Parker and Hamid in the band. That will be in the middle of September to about the middle of October. Gebhard then has a band with me, Tony Malaby and Drew Gress doing a tour in Europe from late October to middle of November. I think I will extend with some gigs of my own with some people over there that I like playing with. I've been working with Chad Taylor who is planning a tour this year off his Delmark record that has Jemeel, Tom Abbs and myself. I just did a tour with Patrick Brennan in February as well as doing a band of Rob Mazurek's who is from Chicago Underground called The Black Goat Ensemble. I'm doing some gigs and recording with Joe Morris and Rob Brown. Sabir Mateen's Shapes Textures and Sound Ensemble is doing a tour in the beginning of June. And for the first time I'm curating a weekend of music in a gallery, the weekend of March 13 at Fusion Art Gallery, 57 Stanton St. in the afternoon, Saturday and Sunday (March 13 and 14 from 3-6pm). There will be three bands each day starting at 3pm going till 6pm with poets and free food and drinks, nothing fancy. I've got Sabir Mateen doing a set and at this writing, I'm working on the rest of the weekend. I like the idea of an afternoon of music.

What about projects influenced by your African trip?

The only project directly influenced by this trip is something Barry Altschul has started with myself and couple of young players. The music that I'm writing for that is influenced by my experience in Africa and I hope we do some gigs in the near future.

It certainly sounds like you've got a lot on your plate. Now, turning to the releases under your own name, it seems that you've impressed the folks at Cadence, judging from the several releases on their labels. First, how did that come about and do you have any general comments about the relationship?

There are actually nine CIMPs with me as a leader or co-leader and two Cadences. I've also got two duos on Drimala and co-lead groups on Clean Feed, Rossbin and Eyesore. CIMP, though, has been kind of home base for me since 1996 and the first recording company I recorded for as a leader. I think I was just coming off of Joey Baron's band in 1995 and didn't have much going on and started playing a duo with Chris Kelsey who knew Bob Rusch and was sending him tapes of our rehearsals which he liked very much. We went up to Redwood and recorded Observations, my first CD as a co-leader. Bob said I could do whatever I wanted as a follow-up. Since I was in contact with Roswell Rudd, I wanted to do something with him because he has been a special person in my life and he wasn't very active at that time either and Bob loved it. Bob has been around a long time and I value his opinion and have really benefited from his support in terms of the music and the business. For whatever reason how these things happen, we've grown into being pretty good friends. I know there's a lot of

people who have very strong feelings about what Bob is doing; too much of this, too little of that. But all I've got to say to those people is that Bob is just about the only one documenting as much of what people are playing right now without an agenda or ax to grind. He's been such a big supporter of mine, and friend, that I can't say anything negative about him. If people really looked objectively at what he is doing, they will see how diverse his catalog is. Recording the way he does is really a lesson in how to always be in performance mode when recording, just as if it was a concert. Being in the moment. Recording in a studio can fix mistakes, and I'm not against studio recording, but even when I'm in a studio, I will still play the music without stopping and starting, or pasting and cutting. Bob is also very interested in me as a person and wants to see people on his label do well and doesn't demand exclusivity and encourages me to try to get my stuff out on other labels.

What about the Particle Data Group release and will there be more from that collective?

Unfortunately, as much as I enjoyed recording and listening to that recording, the business is very difficult in terms of keeping a band together and Bruce and Gregg are very busy. But if anyone has a gig for us, please call or write. We'd be happy to do one. I am continuing to pursue that kind of playing whether on individual projects of that kind or with Blue Collar or other bands.

Tell me about the Unified Theory of Sound. You stated that you are playing another gig in 2005, how did that group evolve?

That is a group that I've always dreamed of doing but never could figure out how to get all those guys in one room. I got a Roulette gig and there seemed to be enough money in the budget to do that band so I did and it turned out great. Bob [Rusch] liked it very much, as do I, and he released it. We are doing a gig on Tom Buckner's Interpretations series in the Spring of 2005. In addition to Jemeel Moondoc, Matt LaVelle, Cooper-Moore and Kevin Norton, William Parker will replace Wilber Morris. We will also have Leena Conquest and Tom Buckner with us. I am trying to get other gigs for that band before then. The Interpretations gig in 2005 will have a theme/concept behind it.

What about your work with the Poets of Now/NY Brasswood Trio (with Tom Abbs and Geoff Mann)? What is the concept and will we hear anything from that group in the future?

That band is a terrific band and really could have done more than the two records and two tours we did. Again, economics being what they are, I don't think that band will do anything in the near future. I really wanted a band of people who doubled and this was a good way to get more sounds out of three individuals. Sometimes you have to shoot higher than where things are at and I think we landed in a pretty unique space. We got there a number of times, but I think now there is a lot of information we all got doing that project and we need time to distill it for a while, and, maybe, in the future, it will happen again.

What about your last CIMP date with a sextet [*Suite for Players, Listeners and Other Dreamers*]?

That band was originally to be a reunion with Lou Grassi and myself but Lou has been so busy lately that he couldn't do the project. I'm very happy that he is doing so well, and getting so much attention. He's spent a lot of time out here and deserves all the good things that are happening to him. I ended up having my good friend Kevin Norton play the drum chair and I really wanted to do something where the whole CD could be listened to as a suite, even though I always try to put CDs together that are listenable as a concert anyway. But here, there was more of a deliberate attempt at putting a cohesive thread through the whole piece. Roy Campbell, Will Connell, Charles Burnham and Francois Grillot are the other members of the band. I hope I can get some work with them. Will has been a friend for almost 20 years and is a real underrated player out here who should be more recognized as one of the true individual voices playing this music.

Finally, will you be recording for either Cadence label anytime in the near future?

I'm doing a co-led project with Gebhard Ullman that will include Hamid Drake and Darius Savage on bass in June, with a tour going through the Midwest, Canada and upstate NY. Then I've got two projects as a sideman for CIMP this year as well. One with Patrick Brennan that will be done by the time this interview is out and one with Chris Kelsey in April. I've also got a studio project with Sabir Mateen, Matt Heyner and Klaus Kugel that I am shopping at this time.

I know that we've been speaking about the present and the future, but what started it all? In other words, how did you find the trombone and who influenced you initially? I assume that players like Roswell Rudd must have caught your ears?

Well, originally, I started out on clarinet when I was nine years old. My father played alto and clarinet and started giving me lessons on it. I struggled with it for about a year then gave it up. At that time my elementary school in NJ would give us free lessons on an instrument of our choice. Trombone was not one of them but it was the only instrument left, so, the teacher there, Albert Schmidt convinced me to play it. He was a very charismatic teacher; he looked a lot like Jimmy Durante, the bow tie, the nose, the whole thing. I took to it right away and got proficient enough at it that Al Schmidt was very impressed and I got some positive attention, which I was in need of as I was a very shy, quiet kid. Also, he gave me these free tickets to a local symphony concert and I felt like I had won the lottery or something. This inspired me to really practice and get better at it. He also had a game that he did with his class. He would play the theme from *Batman*, the TV show and at the break, he would go around the room and each one of us would improvise a bit on the break. We didn't know what we were doing, he just had us play, and I think that was a very important approach at the age of 10. Improvising and not really doing all this thinking about it. I think that helped me to take a relaxed approach to improvising, without getting nervous or hung up about it when I started to take it more seriously. By the time I got to high school I was doing pretty well with it, winning all state band, orchestra and stage band competitions and had some more great teachers along the way. Morty Geist was someone who turned our little group of "jazzers" onto Monk, Bird, Thad Jones-Mel Lewis and about five of us would get together during lunch and listen to records in the back of the old auditorium. But ultimately I really didn't fall in love with the instrument until I heard Roswell at age 15 during a radio show that came out of NYC called *Just Jazz* with Ed Beach. It was broadcast on what was WRVR at that time. He would feature one artist and play his or her discography in chronological order with bits of info in between so you got a sense of the times and places the music was happening. From there, I really got into all the trombone players after that, especially JJ and Jimmy Cleveland and Jimmy Knepper who I studied with when I was 19. I was also lucky to study with Curtis Fuller at Jazz Mobile and spent a couple of years studying with Roswell at Jazz Interactions around this time as well. And when Roswell couldn't be there, Grachan Moncur III substituted for him. Also, when I was in high school and won the first chair in the all state stage band, Bill Watrous was the guest artist for our concert and I was really blown away with his technique and range. When I started college at Jersey City State the following year he was a guest artist with the band there as well, and I got to spend a little bit of time with him. At this time I also studied with Ed Hermann from the NY Philharmonic. I was also very fortunate to get a chance to play with Makanda Ken McIntyre for several years, starting in the mid-1980s, who I eventually took a number of lessons from. So basically you could say I had a slew of very terrific players as teachers.

Who influences you now, whether it be trombone players or other musicians?

Well, I really like to know who all the trombone players are out there and listen to them all to know what's going on. I think that it's important in general to know what's going on in the music and especially those playing your instrument. I'm very into George Lewis right now and Paul Rutherford, Giancarlo Schiaffini and a trombone player named John Lewis who played with Ken McIntyre in the early '60s. I also like what Tom Walsh is doing up in Canada and Walter Wierbos in Holland. Of course Roswell is still an influence and friend and anytime I can speak with him or spend time with him is invaluable to me. I'm also very into Jimmy Lyons right now. I love his harmonic choices and his writing. Other non-trombonists I like very much are Evan Parker, [Anthony] Braxton and Cecil Taylor. I'm interested in a wide range of styles and love finding players to play with who understand that. I also get a great deal of inspirations from the people I like to play with such as Jemeel Moondoc, William Parker, Rob Brown, Sabir Mateen, Joe Morris, Matt LaVelle, Cooper-Moore, Chad Taylor, Rob Mazurek, Matt Lux, Barry Altschul, Debra Weisz, Ras Moshe, Matt Heyner, Paul Flaherty, Chris Corsano, Daniel Carter, Roy Campbell, Jackson Krall, Nate

Wooley, Tatsyua Nakatani and Kevin Norton to name only a few. To be totally honest, I love to play. Anytime I play, I get something back from the other musicians which is really invaluable not only in terms of the music, but the spiritual connections that are made and bonds that occur when people get together to do what it is we do. I love communication on this plane, not to mention the stories and folklore that are part of this music.

Based on what you've said before and looking at your discography, it seems like you have come into contact with a diverse set of musicians like Chris Kelsey, Joey Baron, Jemeel Moondoc, etc. What this tells me is that there is a "networking aspect" to playing out there in the trenches. Is this accurate, that like any other job, in order to be successful, one has to "network"?

I think that is pretty accurate but with a slight, maybe not so subtle difference. It isn't just about a "glad handing", "back slapping", "let's do lunch" kind of thing. To do the music justice and yourself justice, you should be into the project you are asked to be a part of and give yourself to it as much as possible. I don't really look at the things I've recorded or tours I've been on as just another gig, but opportunities to express some side of me that feels right. For example, I don't feel right about going and doing someone's Duke Ellington cover band or Ornette cover band, even though I've been involved in projects like that. I'd rather be playing someone's original concepts or putting my own project together. There is an element of diplomacy involved even when you're asked to do something that you might be free to do but just don't want to be involved with that person's music or that person, even, at that time. And you also have to allow for change, change in your feelings, change in the other person, allowing for growth all around. I did a lot of what they used to call jobbing around NYC; theater, big bands, salsa gigs, some studio work and all those areas have different cliques and protocols that go along with that so I may have learned some very good survival lessons from those days. However, for about the last 15 years I've focused on creative music and have built what I hope is a reputation as a good improviser, good reader and a reliable sideman/leader. Most of that I learned from my jobbing years. I think it has served me well in building something for myself. It's great to be a fantastic improviser and writer but if you can't get to the gig because you're too irresponsible or can't read your own music and don't know how in general to deal with people then you have really defeated yourself before you have begun. To answer the question, yes, networking is involved in being successful as it is in most walks of life. However, I think having your heart, head and music right should be the first step in becoming successful and knowing that those elements of your being are always growing and to allow for that growth and base your decisions on what you want to do with all the information you've acquired up to the present moment. Plus get out there and play!

And as a follow up, how does that work? Do you call the other guys up, do they call you?

It goes both ways. I guess when you're first in town, you go out to all the places where music is being played and meet people, eventually you find a core group of people you like playing with or talking to and try to put projects, gigs, etc. together with them. They ask you to do something, you ask them. It isn't about "give me a gig", there's a social aspect that gets you asked to do something because you're seen as the right person, and that goes to who you've developed into as a human. I think that's very key, as well as ability and talent. It's not so much that way on the traditional "jobbing" scene. There, there is probably more drinking, glad handing, superficialness, but on the creative music thing there is an imperative to be real and to think about politics, art, people, social issues. This is important in becoming a fuller person which feeds into being a deeper artist. I think I'm only now really taking some of the people I've known for so long and really consciously making more long term projects with them, something I wasn't really able to do before. That is the curse or blessing of NY, depending on how you look at it. There are all these great players out here and you want to play with them but then you don't spend enough time developing something with just a smaller group of people. I'm finally learning that now and it's become somewhat of a mantra for me.

Of course, my questions also make one wonder, how does a musician as busy as you survive? Looking at your answers to the above, you seem to be extremely busy, however, is it possible to "make it" in the jazz world and is it fair to say that you have "made it"? Or, on the other hand, do you still have to do "odd jobs" to pay rent?

The money aspect seems to go in cycles. When I was touring with Joey Baron and Tim Berne in the early '90s that was a great time. No day job, only money from music. When I was jobbing in the mid-'70s to early '80s it was the same way. A lot of steady, decent work. I did have about 10 years of working as a proofreader, driving a taxi, waiting tables, washing dishes but that phase seems to have ended over the last two or three years. In addition to all the touring and recordings, I've got a decent job as an artist mentor to handicapped kids in the NYC public school system which has been very gratifying on a personal level as well as helping to pay the rent. I'm ever hopeful about gigs and recordings plus I enjoy playing too much to really worry about the money. I mean I have to pay the rent, I know that, but I don't let that keep me from playing or writing. I think my day job thing is really over now, I enjoy the teaching I do and will pursue more of that as I need it to get by but all the performing work has been very good of late and I don't see it letting up anytime soon. As far as other people I know, there is a real mix of those doing well and some who play really great doing the day job thing but there is absolutely no judgment as to, well that person isn't good enough to be working as a musician full time, so that's why they're working days. I've never heard that on the creative scene, it's just a given that that could be the situation for any of us at any given time. You learn to live with that. NY can be very tough but as a musician or artist I think it's great because there are so many terrific improvising musicians here and most of them are very accessible and are willing to talk about all the things that go on with our creative lives. In other words, a sense of community. That's important. As far as saying "I've 'made' it"? Well all I can say is that I'm happy playing music, I enjoy most of the people I come in contact with and I'm paying the rent. On the basis of that, I guess you can say I've "made it".

Finally, and while I realize that this is always one of those "cliché" questions, but if someone wanted to learn more about you as a player and artist, are there a couple of releases that you would consider representative or better yet, a good starting point?

I would say, as a sideman, check out William Parker's Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra, *Raincoat in the River* (Eremita), the 2 Jemeel Moondoc Jus' Grew Orchestra recordings [*Spirit House* (Eremita) and *Live At The Vision Festival* (Ayler)], a new one on Thirsty Ear, a little different, some funk by El-P called *High Water*. As a leader, my own *Poets of the Now* [with pianist Ursel Schlicht] and *Still In Movement*, both on CIMP. In addition, *This Now!* [with Swell's Unified Theory of Sound] on Cadence, as well as *Invisible Cities*, a duo w/Perry Robinson on Drimala. Also, look out for a new CD called *Slammin' the Infinite* w/Sabir Mateen, no label yet, but two offers are being discussed.

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