

Tenor tribute to the late, great Miles Dewey Davis III

Joe Henderson

So Near, So Far

Polygram

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With the release of *So Near, So Far* (Musings For Miles), Joe Henderson becomes the player to beat in '90s jazz. Henderson is now rivaled only by fellow tenor David Murray as the toughest jazz musician of the decade so far.

So Near, So Far is a tribute to the late, great Miles Dewey Davis III, with whom Henderson played briefly in 1968 and calls "one of the greatest musicians that's been on the planet in our lifetime."

John Coltrane recommended Henderson to Miles as his replacement in 1960, but Joe was immediately drafted by Uncle Sam and sent to Europe.

"On this album we're definitely paying homage to Miles, but it's not just a repeat or recreation of what Miles had done," Henderson says about the session. "I don't think it would have been fair to do that."

The other players on the record, bassist Dave Holland, drummer Al Foster and guitarist John Scofield, played with Miles' electric-era groups and have more than distinguished themselves since. The rapport and empathy between the bandmembers is one of many good things about *So Near, So Far*. The album is airier, more open and subtle than earlier Henderson records.

The album explores songs associated with or written by Miles, but does not dwell on the obvious. There is no "Round Midnight," "My Funny Valentine," "Summertime" or "All Blues." There is no guest trumpeter. Many of the cuts—like "Pfrancing (No Blues)," "Teo," "Joshua" and the title track—are from Miles' early '60s acoustic quintets.

The album underlines the best elements of Henderson's style—what Gary Giddins of the Village Voice describes as "ricocheting shards of melody... a shy doggedness where intonation and harmony are chameleons."

I have to admit that I rarely like jazz guitar, or much of Miles' electric stuff, for that matter, but Scofield's contributions are undeniable. Often he plays an

album

SCOTT TIMBERG

understated counterpoint to Henderson's melodies, or states the chords and backs off the way pianist Bill Evans did on Miles landmark *Kind of Blue* record. In fact, Scofield's playing on "Flamenco Sketches," one of *So Near, So Far*'s best tracks, is every bit as sensitive and crucial as Evans' was on the original.

Born in Lima, Ohio in 1937, Henderson spent several decades in the shadows of Coltrane and Sonny Rollins, known to most as one of a number of solid, dependable Blue Note sidemen who'd put out some good records of their own.

He had announced himself in places, with powerful solos on Horace Silver's *Song For My Father*, Lee Morgan's *The Sidewinder* and his own *Mode For Joe*. By the mid-'60s he'd started to draw a bit from free jazz, modal music and Ornette Coleman's innovations.

Henderson's playing has mellowed a bit since his Blue Note days, but he has become an absolute master of the tenor sax who controls all the emotions of which it is capable.

So Near, So Far makes it clear that Joe leans increasingly to the lyrical, introspective style developed by Lester Young and adapted by Stan Getz and others. Henderson has emerged as a fiery, imaginative, exciting player who can hold his own, quite simply, with anybody else. When he wants it, his tone acquires the stirring, keening quality of Coltrane and his phrasing the invention of Rollins. Like the great tenors saxophonists like Lester and Sonny, Henderson is a startling innovator—a raconteur who can tell his story six different ways.

Henderson's last two records, *Lush Life: The Music of Bill Strayhorn* (Verve) and *The Standard Joe* (Red) were two of the most compelling albums of '92. *Lush Life*, a tribute to composer

Strayhorn, Duke Ellington's greatest collaborator, was highlighted by trumpet support from Wynton Marsalis, Christian McBride's bass, and stark, dramatic retakes of "Take the A Train" and "Rain Check."

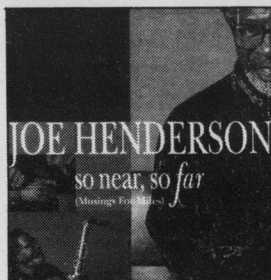
This record, which ranged from ballad duets to hot up-tempo numbers, spent seven weeks at the top of Billboard's jazz charts and was to a large part responsible for Henderson's winning the triple crown in both Down Beat's readers and critics polls—sweeping Jazz Album of the Year, Jazz Musician of the Year, and Tenor Saxophonist of the Year. (The last artist to win in three categories was Duke Ellington in 1969.) Henderson also scored a much-deserved best soloist Grammy this February.

Less strictly arranged than *Lush Life*, *The Standard Joe* offered Henderson more freedom and allowed him to explore the spare, open drum-bass-tenor combo brought to its highest power with Sonny Rollins' Village Vanguard dates.

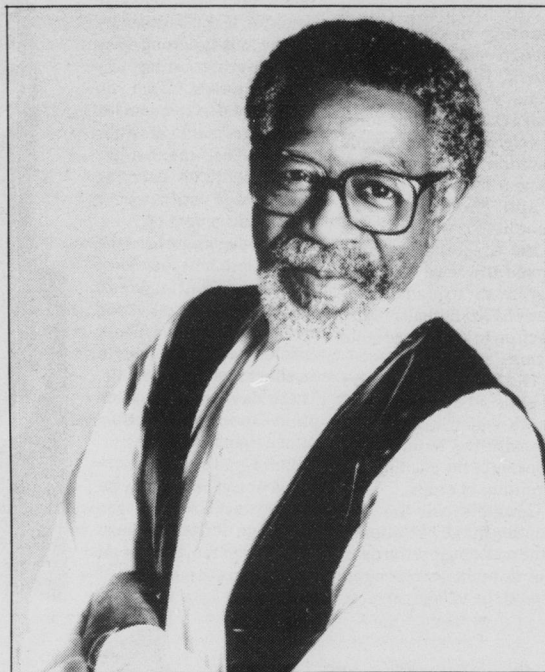
In part because Red is a far smaller label than Verve, this record has been a little lost in the shuffle between *Lush Life* and the new one. The *Standard Joe*, which features Foster on drums and Rufus Reid on bass, may be the best of the three records; it's certainly the most adventurous. Some musicians, specifically, prefer this one to the more laid-back *Lush Life*.

Henderson's style is marked by a keen use of space, a strong command of rhythm and time, and the furious spirals of notes that burst from his tenor.

Biting, fast, sharp, staccato, in the best of his playing, Henderson plays the way Rollins did at the Vanguard, the way Coltrane played on *Giant Steps*—like a man who knows he can do anything he wants with the horn. It's Henderson's absolute confidence, matched with phrasings alternately flamboyant and introspective, that makes much of his playing so outstanding. As Giddins writes, "He raises you up by drawing you in."



So Near, So Far



Joe Henderson

Henderson is not a radical or an innovator to the same degree as David Murray or Ornette Coleman or their disciples; Henderson's style is part of a

renewed interest in late-'50s hard bop. Let's be glad Henderson is still there, getting his message across. Somewhere, Miles is smiling.

Jazz loses its first black sex symbol



Jazz great Billy Eckstine, who played with Dizzy, Miles and Bird, last month died at the age of 78

In sadder news, jazz lost singer Billy Eckstine, who died at age 78 in early March. "Mr. B," as he was known, was often called the first black sex symbol, and led a big band in the '40s that sowed that seeds of bebop.

Eckstine had the best eye for talent in the business, and led big bands in the '40s that included Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, Art Blakey, Miles Davis, Sonny Stitt, Fats Navarro and Sarah Vaughan. Eckstine, whose dark, romantic, luxuriant baritone influenced singers like Johnny Hartman, was known as both a debonair sophisticate and a tough guy.

"He was a tough motherfucker who didn't take no shit off no one, woman

or man," Miles wrote in his autobiography.

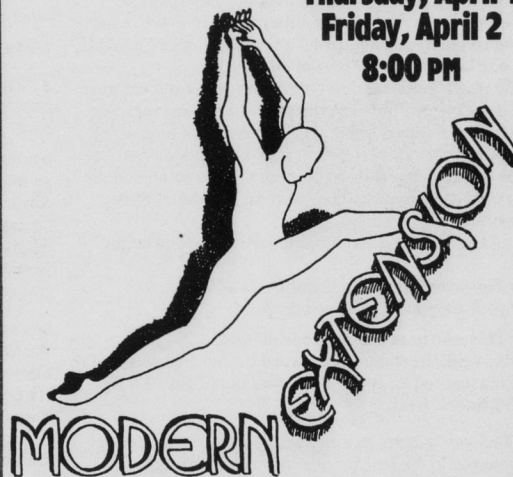
And though some of his shows used to outdraw Sinatra, Eckstine never reached the same fame. "If he'd been white," Quincy Jones said, "the sky would have been the limit."

B's band was also never properly recorded, due to union bans and record companies treating him like a pop star instead of a jazz artist.

The most recent Eckstine release is *Roulette*'s reissue of his first live album, *No Cover, No Minimum*, a 1960 date heavy on ballad standards like "In the Still of the Night," and "Prisoner of Love," as well as two strong Ellington medleys including Strayhorn's "Lush Life."

Spring Concert

In Memorial Hall
Thursday, April 1
Friday, April 2
8:00 PM



Tickets \$5
in Pit or at the Door