



JACK WARTCOOMAN

## BRIAN LYNCH: Expansive Presentation

Seated in the living room of his New York Chinatown loft, where monologist Spaulding Gray and beat icon William Burroughs were once tenants, trumpeter Brian Lynch dissects the spheres of influence of current activity.

More a colleague than a sideman with Eddie Palmieri and Phil Woods for more than a decade, and an alumnus of Horace Silver and the last edition of Art Blakey's *Jazz Messengers*, Lynch is a respected insider within the hardcore Latin and bebop communities. He established firm leader credentials on a series of albums between 1986 and 2000 for Criss Cross, Sharp Nine, Cellar Live and Ken Music. These showcased his skills as a compelling storyteller with a fiery style built on encyclopedic knowledge of post-bop trumpet syntax, and as a strong jazz composer with a penchant for constructing tunes defined by insinuating hooks and slick turnarounds, tweaking harmony but never abandoning groove and melodic essence. But the albums did not, as Lynch said, "completely reflect my activity as a musician."

But now, Lynch is finally documenting a more expansive presentation of his sound. "You have to marinate for a long time," Lynch, 48, said. "You play with everybody and do all kinds of things, and the payoff comes in your 40s and 50s when you can come up with something original. Jazz had to develop a bit, and awareness of the hand drum and comprehension of the clave is now a requirement in learning the language of the music. I don't know if we've developed a real classic form that would take its place as a true statement of the hybrid."

An example of this hybrid appears on trombonist Conrad Herwig's *The Latin Side Of Miles Davis* (Half Note) and on *Que Viva Coltrane* (Criss Cross), a Herwig-Lynch collaboration, on which Lynch reharmozes tunes like "Freddie Freeloader," "Miles Mode," "Wise One" and "Straight Street." He rephrases the melodic line to follow idiomatic guaguanco, songo, bolero and timba pathways over which the co-leaders, saxophonists Mario Rivera and Paquito D'Rivera, and pianist Edsel

Gomez solo with grace and elegance.

Joined by tenor saxophonist Ralph Bowen and a first-class rhythm section, Lynch addresses his own compositions in a similar manner on a forthcoming Criss Cross date, *Jazz Con Clave*. And in the spring, EWE will release Lynch's six-part composition for nonet entitled the "Spheres Of Influence Suite." On the eve of the recording in late November, Lynch performed it at the Jazz Gallery before two packed houses.

After the long, intense first set, replete with orchestrative detail, striking melodies, virtuosic improvising and mind-blowing rhythmic dialogue, the sidemen had nothing but compliments for the leader. "This music is amazing," said Tim Ries, who tripled on baritone and soprano saxophones and flute, sharing the front line with Lynch, Herwig, Miguel Zenón and Craig Handy.

"It has the freedom and deep harmonic sense of jazz, but with the roots of Afro-Cuban groove," Ries continued. "Playing it is like being an acrobatic high-wire walker. There's a net underneath you, and you have all the freedom in the world to explore. Over the last 15 years, he's evolved into one of the great composers and trumpet players. The music just flows out of his axe."

"This music is hard, with a lot of technical complexity—rhythmic variations and ensemble nuances," said Zenón, who began to work with Lynch soon after moving to New York. "Once you learn how to play it, though, it makes a lot of sense. Any time you hear Brian's music, you can tell it's his. It's fresh."

Not long after his 1981 move to New York, Lynch began to crack the codes of the "Spanish tinge" in the bands of salsero Angel Canales and cantante Hector Lavoe. "I had my style of soloing, which was pretty progressive," Lynch said. "Someone said, 'Bebop is cool, but you've got to play some drums.' Sometimes you're just at the right moment for that to hit you the right way—and that hit me the right way. Later, Eddie Palmieri made me aware of the classic Cuban music of Arsenio



Rodriguez and Chappottín, and early son groups like Sexteto Nacional. It reminded me of the time when I was finding all the Blue Notes, and all the pieces in the puzzle began to fall into place. It's important to know your genealogy, so you can take your place within it.

"I still like to use structures that involve playing a lot on chord changes," Lynch continued. "I'm not coming up with any big concept here. Luis Perdomo's music and Miguel's music has it—it's the way a lot of people want to play. The drummers I work with are used to using the cycle of the montuno to make their statement, but they have the sensibility to listen to me and play with the melodic line as well as the rhythmic component. They're jazz musicians. They want to learn as much as they can about the different facets of jazz.

"I'm getting into deeper levels of knowing how the rhythm works, and using my imaginative capacities to draw my own conclusions about it. They're learning how to contribute in terms of authentic 'Jazz Norteamericano.' Not to boast, but I'm an exemplar of that. I live in the music of Art Blakey and Horace Silver, and the tradition of the trumpet players who came out of those bands. Fats Navarro, Woody Shaw and Freddie Hubbard are where I live. That's the house that I was born in."

Still, Lynch calls many places home. His schedule involves juggling gigs with Woods and Palmieri, as well as with nuevo cancionista Juan-Carlos Formell, Buena Vista Social Club alumnus Barbarito Torres and the Latin alternative group Yerba Buena. He arranges for Japanese pop star Mika Nakashima and producer Shinji Ozawa, and teaches master classes at various institutions. Periodically, he presents a realized fusion of his varied influences in Manhattan rooms like the Jazz Gallery, Sweet Rhythm and the Zinc Bar. "It's earn as you learn, and I have first-hand experience of how all these musics work for me," said Lynch, who is preparing to record a Spheres of Influence—Eddie Palmieri collaboration for ArtistShare this spring. "I can say the same things within a traditional Cuban trumpet style as I can playing a modern jazz tune in a modern jazz style. The principles are similar, but the expression is different."

Still, he emphasizes, "the mainstream thing about swinging and saying something on the changes" remains a first principle. "That's my lifetime study, to say something of my own in that idiom, and then carry the banner of my heroes into other contexts," he said. "I like to see how my sensibility can mesh with different things. I love it all—playing on a montuno with a loud band or playing a delicate ballad with Bill Charlap. It's like turning an object around and seeing different facets of it—and the object is the music."

—Ted Panken