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2<sup>x</sup>HD  
HISTORIC

**BOB JAMES**



**THE**

**LOST 1965**

**NEW YORK**



**STUDIO**

**SESSIONS**



Photo © Tom Capi.

## **YOUNG BOB JAMES: AT THE CROSSROADS**

BY ZEV FELDMAN

It's been wonderful working with Resonance founder George Klabin for almost twelve years now. Our latest project together is this Bob James album, an album that shows a side of Bob's musical development few people knew about.

George's generosity and talent have provided a great education for me, as well as the opportunity to work on a stream of important archival jazz discoveries, many of which George recorded himself in the multiple capacities of record producer, studio and label owner and recording engineer.

George was self-taught as an engineer, an endeavor he began pursuing seriously as a teenager. As an enterprising young man in New York in the '60s — an amazing time and place in jazz history — applying his intelligence, self-confidence and infectious enthusiasm, he was able to convince such greats as Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett, Charles Lloyd, Albert Ayler, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra and many others to let him record them. George's sparkling recordings demonstrated to these musical legends that despite his age, he was someone to be taken seriously and so the word spread among musicians.

Over time, George and the musicians involved naturally moved on to other things and George's tapes sat on the shelf. It wasn't until George and I joined forces in 2009 that we began to revisit the treasures he had created all those years ago. Since I started at Resonance, along with the other wonderful archival recordings I've been lucky enough to discover from around the world, our mission has been to pursue releasing all of our recordings legally and officially, with the guiding principle being that we would only release the very best recordings. This is one of those.

Fast forward to the Spring of 2019. George was recording Resonance's latest Eddie Daniels album, *Night Kisses*, with the multi-



Grammy-winning, legendary pianist, keyboardist and producer, Bob James. Luckily, George had just shared with me the news that he had gone farther back into his tape trove and discovered not one, but two sessions he recorded of Bob on January 20th and October 9<sup>th</sup> of 1965. These weren't live concerts, but rather studio-quality recordings with no audience, captured at Columbia University's Wollman Auditorium.

These recordings show why Bob James's musical journey is so interesting.

The different creative pathways he has traveled yield an

unusual musical journey that's nothing short of awe-inspiring. He has lived within so many different dimensions in music — from funk to R&B, from straight-ahead instrumental jazz, to being the music director for the great Sarah Vaughan — it's difficult to overstate his impact. And yes, he was also a dedicated adherent of the avant-garde. The recordings on *Once Upon a Time* expose another — I dare say for most — unexpected chapter in James's important legacy. These recordings shed light on James's mid-'60s stylistic explorations, which include his more experimental-leaning and straight-ahead periods.

For me, Bob James is one of the most stylistically diverse and important pianists in the history of modern music. To some folks he will be forever known as one of the founding fathers of smooth jazz, but I'm confident that one day there's going to be a book on the history of piano that will dedicate a hefty portion to the diverse and influential contributions — across multiple styles and genres — of the one and only Bob James.

— ZEV FELDMAN

North Potomac, MD - February 2020

## REFLECTING ON RECORDING BOB JAMES IN NEW YORK IN 1965

BY GEORGE KLABIN

The first time I heard Bob James was in 1963 as a senior in boarding school. At night I often tuned in to a Boston-area radio jazz program, where I heard Bob's *Bold Conceptions* album on Mercury, released that same year. I was really impressed with Bob's original style, technique and creativity.

The following year, as a freshman at Columbia University in New York, I was able to locate Bob, who was then living in Manhattan and working as pianist for Sarah Vaughan. I asked him to allow me to record a performance of his so that I could play the tape on my

radio show on WKCR-FM. The deal was I would give him a copy of the tape to use as he wished and he could record any music he liked.



## **IN TRANSITION: BOB JAMES IN 1965**

BY MARK STRYKER

*Wollman Auditorium, 1960s.*



This recording is going to surprise — perhaps shock — a great many people who think they already know the music of Bob James. After all, isn't James the de facto godfather of smooth jazz? The multiple Grammy Award-winning pianist, composer and arranger who found fame and fortune in the 1970s and '80s by crafting an audience-friendly fusion of light jazz, pop, sweetened funk and smooth R&B? The founder of the best-selling crossover band Fourplay? The composer of the hit theme to the sitcom *Taxi*, whose ear-worm melody played on recorder and electric piano was all over the airwaves in 1979-80?

Well, yes, that's Bob James, but it's by no means all there is to him. If James were a filmmaker, the well-made populist music that made him a star would suggest a summer blockbuster. His early recordings, however, are more like the forgotten films of a young director with an arty taste for the French New Wave and eager to challenge Hollywood convention.

This is the Bob James heard on *Once Upon a Time: The Lost 1965 New York Studio Sessions*. This arresting trio album is comprised

of two previously unreleased studio dates recorded by the teen-aged George Klabin, who, in recent years, became Resonance Records's founder and president. Here is James at 25 with one foot in the post-bop vanguard and one foot in the avant-garde. On "Airegin," for example, he sprints through Sonny Rollins's harmonic steeplechase at maniacal speed — swinging, taking risks, his lines splintering into fragments as brittle as cracked ice. Meanwhile, James's "Variations" opens with tranquil, solo piano floating like untethered Debussy. The enigmatic reverie is interrupted rudely by coarse, pre-recorded electronics and misterioso scrapes, buzzes, whistles and thwacks played by drummer Robert (Cleve) Pozar. The music then morphs into an abstract, Zen-like meditation on sound and silence including prepared-piano effects. Hello, John Cage.

Are these tracks really by the same pianist who wrote the *Taxi* theme? You bet they are. Yet even James, who turned 80 in 2019, admits that he didn't always recognize himself as the pianist when he first listened to these rediscovered tapes.

"It was a crazy experience," he said by phone from his home in Traverse City, Michigan. "George had to really jog my memory that I even did these things. It was like stepping into a time machine. It seemed like another lifetime; but I could also hear the somewhat embarrassing aspect that licks would show up and I'd say, 'Whoops, I'm still playing those licks today!'"

The record captures a hot young pianist on the make but also an artist in transition. James is searching for a musical identity to call his own. More broadly, the album opens a window on a period of rapid, often radical change and innovation in jazz and classical music.

In the early and mid-'60s, musical conventions of all sorts were under siege. Revolutions large and small erupted as regularly as the seasons

changed. Freedom was an inescapable rallying cry in jazz — a search for new forms and new modes of expression that reflected a dynamic art form progressing at light speed and an urgency mirroring the civil rights movement remaking American society.

The free jazz of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and Albert Ayler established new outer limits. Evolving juggernauts like the John Coltrane Quartet and Miles Davis Quintet remade jazz from inside the belly of the beast. The young progressives on Blue Note — Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams, Bobby Hutcherson, Joe Henderson, Sam Rivers, Andrew Hill — set a fast pace. Meanwhile, post-war classical composers were pushing toward greater abstraction via serialism, conceptualism and electro-acoustic experiments. Among the avatars were Stockhausen, Babbitt, Boulez, Carter, Cage and Feldman. On yet another front, composers like Gunther Schuller and John Lewis were exploring a synthesis of classical composition and jazz improvisation under the banner of Third Stream.

All this was in the air as James came of age. Throughout *Once Upon a Time*, he explores a plethora of aesthetic ideas and languages for improvisation — some of them "inside," some "outside," some severe, some surreal, some in the cracks between classical and jazz idioms. He's assimilating his influences, from pianist Bill Evans and multi-reedman Eric Dolphy, to classical sources as diverse as Debussy, Cage, and an emerging generation of brash young modernist composers including Robert Ashley, Roger Reynolds and Gordon Mumma. James had grown close to these provocateurs at the University of Michigan, where they had all been integral to the legendary ONCE Festivals of avant-garde music and multimedia experimentalism in Ann Arbor in the early '60s.

Like jazz musicians of any era, James was trying to divine his own relationship to the tradition. He was balancing his love for the jazz masters — especially Evans and his interactive trios — with his classical training and a desire to break the rules.

Channeling Ezra Pound's modernist credo, James wanted to make it new. At the start of 1965, he was also six months into a three-and-a-half-year tenure with singer Sarah Vaughan, a challenging gig that consecrated his straight-ahead jazz credentials and, not incidentally, provided a steady paycheck. It was an exciting time for James, but also confusing.

"Sometimes I felt like I needed musical psychotherapy," he said, laughing.

"Looking back, I can hear the internal battle that I was going through. I didn't want to be disciplined, but I didn't want chaos either. Ultimately, I think I wanted to have a love affair with the audience. When I listen to these recordings, I can better understand why I made the career decisions I made. These recordings represent a turning point, but it wasn't dramatic or sudden. I can hear the more conventional side of my playing style and my taste. I think I was beginning to become frustrated and maybe even unhappy pursuing the fringe of avant-garde jazz."

The tensions percolating inside of James date to childhood. He was born on Christmas Day in 1939 in Marshall, Mo., a town of just 8,500 people in the north-central portion of the state, 90 miles from Kansas City. James started piano lessons at four after his mother found him mimicking his older sister at the piano.

He was blessed with a good first teacher, a Catholic nun who pushed a disciplined routine of technical studies and scales. The training was rigorous and invaluable, yet also left James with the urge to rebel.

In jazz he found a more liberating creative outlet. An Afro-Cuban-themed Stan Kenton record in his parents' collection caught his ear, and then discovered Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan. He played his first dance gig around age 13 and soon set his sights on a music career. James majored in music composition at the University of Michigan, studying with Ross Lee Finney and Leslie Bassett. James was initially disappointed to find no formal jazz instruction at Michigan, so after a year he transferred to Berklee in Boston, only to find the approach there too narrow for his taste. He returned to Ann Arbor after just a semester, eventually earning a bachelor's degree in 1961 and a master's degree in 1962.

James bushwhacked his own path, studying classical music in school and modern jazz on his own. He attended jam sessions in Detroit to get a taste of the city's fertile scene, and he landed a steady nightly gig in Ann Arbor at the Falcon Bar with bassist Ron Brooks and

drummer Robert Pozar. The trio headed in adventurous directions as James found himself drawn to the bad-boy allure of the avant-garde. Composers like Ashley, Reynolds and Mumma started showing up,



*L-R: Larry Rockwell, Bob James and Omar Clay.  
Courtesy of Bob James.*

looking for players comfortable with concepts like aleatory (chance) music, improvising to pre-recorded tape and extended instrumental techniques. The trio was game for anything. James and Pozar both appear on performances included in the 5-CD box set *Music from the Once Festival 1961-1966* (New World).

For the 1964 ONCE Festival, James wrote "A Personal Statement," an unusually organic Third-Stream work for saxophone, voice, piano, bass and drums. He invited Eric Dolphy to Ann Arbor to perform it. A compelling, 15-minute recording of the piece, with Dolphy playing alto sax, bass clarinet and flute, appeared on the acclaimed 2019 Resonance release by Dolphy, *Musical Prophet*. There is photo in the New World box of Dolphy, James's trio and a chamber ensemble also performing Dolphy's "Strength and Unity" at the 1964 festival. Dolphy also joined the trio for a couple of nights at the Falcon Bar.

James's big break came as a result of his trio with Brooks and Pozar taking top honors at the 1962 Collegiate Jazz Festival at the University of Notre Dame. Quincy Jones, one of the judges, who was by then an executive at Mercury Records, was so impressed that he recorded James's debut LP, *Bold Conceptions*, in August 1962. The trio caused a stir at Notre Dame by mixing conventional tunes with avant-garde works, including Roger Reynolds's "Dervish," a piece with electronics, chance improvisation and a battalion of unusual percussion. The graphic score eschewed standard notation in favor of instructions for the musicians to dart about the stage to play different instruments.

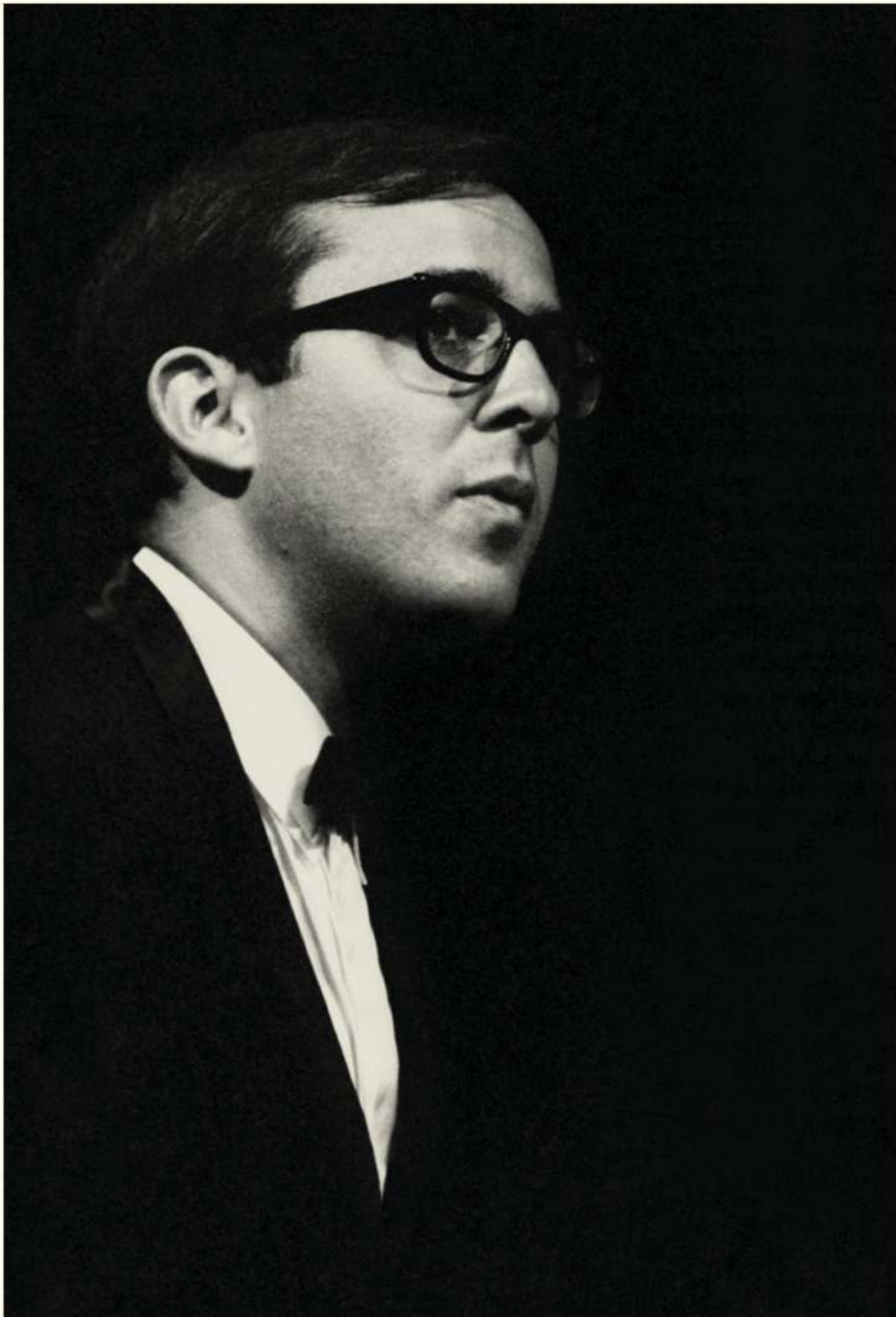
"We wanted to shock people," James said. "We intentionally tried to do the unexpected."

*Bold Conceptions* similarly mixes mainstream performances with experimental pieces. James's second LP, *Explosions*, recorded in May 1965 for the now-revered free jazz label ESP-Disk, goes all-in on the avant-garde. With Barre Phillips on bass and Pozar on drums, the improvisations are built largely around pre-recorded soundscapes by Ashley and Mumma.

— MARK STRYKER

Mark Stryker is the author of the new book, *Jazz From Detroit* (University of Michigan Press)





## **A PIVOTAL TIME—A CONVERSATION WITH BOB JAMES**

*Zev Feldman: What did you think when George Klabin told you about these sessions?*

Bob James: When he first told me, I had no memory of them. When he described the sessions, I had to really think hard to remember that I actually did it. Since I hadn't ever had a chance to listen to them, I hardly remembered they existed. It was a very, very dim memory, and it was amazing — when he finally sent me the audio files and I had a chance to listen to the music, my memory of it started to flood back to me.

*ZF: What was going on in your musical career in 1965?*

BJ: Listening to these recordings gave me the opportunity to relive what was a very, very pivotal time for me. In the previous years, from around 1961, up until around '65, I was very involved with the fringe area of the avant-garde world. Not just in the jazz world, but the avant-garde scene in general. I was very curious about it. I had been studying composition at the University of Michigan in the music school. The composers at that time were strongly influenced by John Cage, and Stockhausen and a lot of those people who were exploring the far reaches of what even could be considered music. And I was one of them. And I was called upon to play on some of the music of other composers that required improvisation and required a kind

of bravery to bang on the inside of the piano and all that kind of stuff. That was the musical impulse I was feeling very strongly when I moved to New York. But also, in 1963 I had gotten married just a few months before we moved to the city. My wife was brave to let me pursue my career and my interest in music that didn't have the prospect of income attached to it, or the likelihood of very many performances that I'd actually get paid very much for. By the time these of these recordings in 1965, I had already lived in New York for almost two years, and I was beginning to think about getting a conventional job, so I could keep going with my career in music. At the time these sessions happened I had just landed a steady job as Sarah Vaughan's music director. Larry Rockwell played bass on some of the tracks; I had hired Larry to play bass with Sarah. Omar Clay, who's the drummer on these recordings, was a member of the trio I hired to play with Sarah. That sort of mainstream, very important job that I landed with this great jazz icon, Sarah Vaughan, really changed my life. Certainly, there was not going to be any avant-garde piano playing in Sarah Vaughan's trio. She wouldn't put up with it.

*ZF: What was your relationship like with her?*

BJ: Wonderful. It was like having a chance for a second college education. Because she was also a really good pianist, and she didn't particularly want to be her own pianist, but she was not at all unwilling to sit down and slide me off of a piano bench if I wasn't playing what she wanted to hear. I was learning a lot from her in that way, and I realized then that one of the skills that has stayed with me to this day is that I love being an accompanist and a support instrument with the piano. This is very different from the role of being a front man in a jazz trio, where you have all the responsibility for the melody, chords, tempos and the musical attitude. So that job with her was as a support musician. I stayed with her for four years and I got a tremendous amount of experience with her. That enabled me to settle into a reasonably competent career in New York. Using her as a

reference, I met lots of people, and started to get some fairly steady work in Manhattan. But the sessions on this album were from right at the beginning of that time and I wouldn't have had any way of knowing how long the job with her would last, whether I'd be happy with it or how it would turn out.

*ZF: How long were you with her, total?*

BJ: Four and a half years. It was toward the end of 1968 when I left her. But my interest in avant-garde music shifted over from being a fan of the avant-garde world. I guess it was the intensity of the job with Sarah and my responsibility of playing conventional jazz at that high level that occupied my mind, so my desire to be an avant-garde jazz performer shifted. I can see it now when I listen back to these recordings because it feels to me like I was still in that mode of trying to make up my mind. Some of the tunes, like "Serenata," or even the slightly more straight-ahead stuff were experiments. And the way I remember them, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my jazz life and where my career was heading.

*ZF: I want to talk about a festival that you participated in with Eric Dolphy, the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor. How did you get involved with that?*

BJ: It's a great memory and even though I didn't end up going in that direction, it has influenced everything I've done since then. That's because those people I met were so adventurous and so creative and had such great humor and passion in their music, it inspired me and I loved that time because of it. I have fond memories. When I originally got involved with that music, it was because those composers — and I'm thinking of Robert Ashley, Roger Reynolds, Gordon Mumma and George Cacioppo — were desperately looking for performers who were willing to play their music. A lot of it was pretty crazy stuff. And the conventional classical performers either didn't know what to do with it or weren't brave enough play it. But several of those guys came down to this jazz club in Ann Arbor called the Falcon, where

I was playing with my trio at that time, which consisted of Bob Pozar on drums and Ron Brooks on bass. They heard us playing a kind of conventional but adventurous jazz and ended up asking us if we would be willing to play some of their music at the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor. It was through them that I became curious about the festival and ended up composing some music for it myself, including this piece called "A Personal Statement" that I invited Eric Dolphy to play on. I wanted to confront that avant-garde world with the same passion I had for mainstream jazz and see how the two forms would interact or conflict; to see what variations might happen.

*ZF: How did Dolphy's involvement come about? Did you just contact him?*

BJ: Yes. Earlier, Gunther Schuller had composed a piece, which he invited me to play on, and Eric Dolphy was playing on it too. And as I began to look back through the long-ago memories, I believe that was how I met Eric Dolphy. I had already been a fan of his recordings, but through that live performance of Gunther Schuller's music, I met him. So it struck me that he would be great to invite, to come out from New York. And so, I got brave and asked him. At that time I had that gig at the Falcon Bar in Ann Arbor, so we arranged it for Eric to stay over and play for a few nights in the club in addition to performing my piece on the ONCE Festival. I think he also played one of his compositions. Maybe Dolphy's piece ended up on one of those ONCE Festival recordings, I'm not totally sure. Anyway, it was a very, very big deal for me to invite him and have that opportunity to play with such a great artist.

*ZF: Do you recall how the recording sessions with George came about?*

BJ: George was very young. He had done some research about me and thought that I would be a good candidate for him to try out this new recording equipment. It was a very young, new time for both of us getting our feet wet in the music business.

*ZF: The first session, recorded in early '65, is quite experimental*

*in nature. How did the band, which seems very committed, come together?*

BJ: I'd been playing with Bob Pozar on drums and Ron Brooks on bass in Ann Arbor before I moved to New York. When Bob Pozar moved to New York, we played together with different bass players. Larry Rockwell was someone I'd played with in New York and who I liked playing with. We played together with Sarah, as you know.

*ZF: You had a pretty close musical connection with Bob Pozar at that time. How would you describe him as a person and a musician?*

BJ: Wildly creative, unique, adventurous guy who was willing to try anything. And both of us were becoming acquainted with the avant-garde world at the same time. A lot of the craziest experimentation I did was directly with him. And what I loved about him was that he shared my same passion for also wanting to be legit, in the straight ahead, the bebop sense of covering the conventional jazz world. And we both loved this idea of going back and forth and surprising our audience. We had this job at the club in Ann Arbor, where the owner let us do whatever the heck we wanted to do as long as we brought people into the club. And we had our fans, who expected some wild stuff from us and we gave it to them. And a lot of experimentation, a lot of pushing the envelope and a lot of sudden shocking things that a normal jazz audience wouldn't be expecting to hear. We took that enthusiasm and that adventurous spirit to this jazz festival at Notre Dame, where Quincy Jones happened to be one of the judges. That ended up being the main reason we got his attention and why we prevailed at that festival. We were pushing the envelope and going outside of the normal conventional jazz world. I was full of that kind of confidence when I moved to New York and I had already had the experience of seeing how that combination of being able to hang with the straight-ahead jazz players, but also push the envelope was something I could pursue. That was my main fascination and Bob Pozar shared it with me, for sure.



*Omar Clay. Courtesy of Bob James.*

to sing. I relied heavily on both of them for their knowledge of tunes and very solid harmonic spirit. And in addition, Larry was a great groove player and fit very comfortably with Omar Clay.

*ZF: How about Omar Clay?*

BJ: He was a really close friend, even back in the Ann Arbor days. With Omar, I remember my earliest experience of how great it felt when the drummer was just swinging really, really hard. Omar had the most wonderful groove. That's what I think attracted Sarah Vaughan to him. I can even hear it on some of the recordings we made with Sarah; his feel and his amazing swing. His grooves were awesome. And he was also a really, really good friend. So I was happy to be able to give him that opportunity to have the job of working with Sarah.

*ZF: You want to talk for a moment about Larry Rockwell?*

BJ: He's very, very solid bass player, as was Herb Mickman, the other bass player I played with while I was with Sarah. They both had encyclopedic knowledge of standards and in particular, the repertoire that Sarah would have been likely

*ZF: I want to ask you also about the *Explosions* album, on ESP-Disk. This all happens around this kind of window. How did that recording session come about and can you also tell us about your dealings with Bernard Stollman?*

BJ: Sure. Again, I'm very grateful to George Klabin whose memory about that time was clearer than mine. He reminded me that he was the reason I actually met Bernard Stollman. George had become aware of my interest in avant-garde jazz. And what I remember is that what attracted me about the possibility of going to Bernard's label, ESP, was that he was developing this reputation of letting the artists do whatever they wanted to do. It was important to me that I had the opportunity to play very, very adventurous music that very few record producers would have been willing to let me do at that time. It did turn out that I was able to go in and make *Explosions* exactly the way I wanted to do it and bring in these people from the ONCE Festival. Robert Ashley, Gordon Mumma and Roger Reynolds all participated in it. In some ways it preceded this world of sampling and backing track looping music that exists so much in this era.

At that time, my concept with *Explosions* was to play our live trio improvisations in combination with electronic music tracks that had been prerecorded and pre-prepared by the composers for the ONCE festival. The piece, "Wolfman," for example, which Robert composed for that record, was an existing electronic recording that my trio just improvised over the top of. There are several of those kinds of pieces on that album and I did some electronic manipulation myself — in my style — that we did live improvisations over. So it was very cutting-edge music at that time. And even though a lot of fans of my recent music become quite confused when they picked that record up; they don't get what they expected. I hope that at least that it triggers their imagination in some way. To this day, I'm very proud of that music, and I have very, very happy memories of having the opportunity to do it.

*ZF: Do you have any thoughts on the repertoire on the sides of these two new recordings? There's such an emotional and tonal range of this material.*

*BJ: It's like going in to have some kind of psychotherapy to relive this stuff and to try to remember what was going on. It's a gift that these recordings still exist with the fabulous audio that George managed to hold onto and preserve is just amazing to me. I can literally psychoanalyze that shift, that pivotal time in my life, from the avant-garde adventures, to what I ultimately became what I would be. I sometimes call it romantic; a much more romantic approach to music, and with, I hope, some adventurous spirit as well. To listen to it again and to realize that that spirit was there when I was young enough and had the energy and the curiosity and I don't know, maybe the bravery to do it; I'm thrilled that that this music has had a life, and now has a new life.*

*ZF: What do you want the listeners to take with them, when they hear this music?*

*BJ: I've always tried to take my listeners on a journey and I liked being the driver. Being in control of the fact that I'm going to be taking them maybe to a place and they don't know exactly where they're headed. And it might be to some new place that has a surprise element or even sometimes has a shock element or a confusing element. But I have also always felt that I like bringing them back. I like being in control of the experience and feeling that I would like to have that listener feel that they enjoyed going on the journey. And I feel that with the avant-garde music, as well as the more conventional straight-ahead music too.*

*ZF: Do you have any final thoughts to share?*

*BJ: When I listen to these recordings, I feel there's a kind of naiveté; at that time, that there was so much for me to learn, my harmonic knowledge, my approach as to how I wanted to play jazz. I was just at the very earliest stages of learning all those subtleties and every time I would play with a great musician, I would learn something new.*

And here I am more than 50 years later, having played with so many different musicians, each of them teaching me something, and who inspired me or influenced my playing. At that time, I didn't have any of that. And I hadn't had the experience with Fourplay. And I hadn't had the experience with David Sanborn. I hadn't had the experience with Harvey Mason and so many other people who have influenced my life. So there was definitely a naive, just-beginning-to-be-formed approach to music. But I also had another element that I wish I still had, which is youth, and a kind of innocence. I don't have that anymore, and I could only listen back to it and remember what it felt like when I did have it. It's definitely represented on that recording, a kind of optimism; a kind of, "Who cares? I'm just going to do whatever the fuck I want to do." This type of attitude that I had in real life. The passage of time takes over, little by little, to the point where at this stage, I approach music in a very different way than I did then. It's just, I've been so lucky to have this documentation of that time in my life. I'm thrilled that this exists and very excited to have it come out. And now, I have come full circle and my focus totally has been the trio over the last couple of years.

*Bob James was interviewed by Zev Feldman on January 28, 2020.*

## **DRIVING THE PEOPLE CRAZY**

EXCERPTS FROM HANK SHTEAMER'S INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT "CLEVE" POZAR ABOUT BOB JAMES (2011)

*Of the unique people that spoke their own language on that instrument, I don't think I'll ever have any better experience that I had with him. He was a big influence on me at that time, and it remains that way, on my thinking of playing jazz but from a unique and adventurous vantage point. All of that grew out of the Falcon Bar, Ann Arbor and the times that we played together.*

— Bob James on drummer Cleve Pozar, 2011

Robert Pozar, later known as Cleve, met Bob James in Ann Arbor in the early '60s when both were studying music at the University of Michigan. They worked with contemporary classical composers as part of the ONCE Festival and formed a jazz trio with bassist Ron Brooks that took first prize at 1962's Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival. The group went on to record two albums together: *Bold Conceptions*, a forward-thinking set of standards and James originals produced by Quincy Jones, and *Explosions*, which blended free improvisation with electronic tape pieces by James's and Pozar's Ann Arbor collaborators, Robert Ashley and Gordon Mumma. In 1964, after both James and Pozar became based in New York, they returned to Ann Arbor to appear at the ONCE Festival with Eric Dolphy, a performance documented on Resonance's 2019 Dolphy album, *Musical Prophet*.

Pozar and James eventually went their separate ways, but each always thought highly of the other. Pozar hoped to reunite with James for a project combining jazz and the percussionist's later obsession, Cuban Batá drumming. Sadly, Pozar passed away in 2019, but he reminisced about his history with James during a 2011 interview, excerpted below.

— HANK SHTEAMER

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So in [the office of University of Michigan percussion teacher James Salmon], the graduate students would bring in scores that they needed to have played, and if you were a percussionist, you could look through them. If you liked one, you'd tell Mr. Salmon and he would tell the student composer to contact you. So late that semester [of my first year], I played a show that Bob James wrote. He was about one year older.

Bob James, when he was a freshman in college, could wipe anybody out. He was badass. He didn't even have to go to college; they could have just said, "Here, give me your money, we'll write you a degree."

So I played the show with him and I started playing with his duo in this place called the Falcon Bar; we were like a little cocktail trio. Can you believe *Bold Conceptions* started out being a cocktail trio? [Laughs]

Bob James talked [composer Roger Reynolds] into letting me [perform one of his pieces, "Wedge"]. This guy in graduate school and I took four parts and played them with two guys and pulled it off. When we did that, that was when my career with the ONCE Festival started. The ONCE Festivals were noted for being *the place, the*



L-R: Bob James, Ron Brooks and Bob Pozar.  
Courtesy of Bob James.

avant-garde classical percussion festivals. (The reason why they're called the ONCE Festivals is most of the people who write that kind of music only get the piece played once.) Man, I was playing it all. I played with John Cage, Morton Feldman, all those cats.

In the meantime, the stuff at the Falcon Bar is starting to escalate and Bob James and I are working with [Gordon] Mumma and [Robert] Ashley and we drove the bar owner nuts. I started playing with my knitting needles on my cymbals. I took four-mallet marimba technique, and I took number-10 aluminum knitting needles and decided to play them on my cymbals. You can control the overtones on the cymbals, and when I was working with the ONCE cats, I did things like bowing the cymbals and stuff like that, so I really had command over those techniques. All that stuff is on *Bold Conceptions*. So I started doing that, and it started fascinating people, and the classical composers from graduate school used to come and hang out with us because they'd talk about stuff during intermissions with us. So college people started coming, and they became fascinated with all the interesting little ditties we were doing.

Then the local jazzers would come and they were all jealous of us having the gig, so James used to wait until all of them got there and then we'd play "Giant Steps" and "Moment's Notice" as fast as possible, just to drive them crazy. And James was noted for driving people crazy.

In the meantime, we're getting more and more involved with the avant-garde shit. So we started introducing it with the cocktail tunes. All of the sudden we'd start playing free, right? So all of the sudden, my temple blocks appear onstage and three triangles appear onstage. [Laughs] So now we've become an Ann Arbor curiosity. In one semester, we went from working in this bar to, we started at 9 o'clock at night and at 10 to 9, you could not get a seat. That place was packed every night and we just took it out.

Then we went to the Intercollegiate Jazz Festival. The University of Michigan music department absolutely was against jazz. We went to our teachers and said, "We want to go play the Intercollegiate Jazz Festival, and so could you give us our homework up front so we could turn it in," after we were going to have to miss classes. And our teachers said, "No, and if you go I'll give you an F." So we go there [in 1962]; we won every prize that you could possibly win. We get back, and the school says, "Well, that's wonderful that you guys won. Give us our trophy so we can put it in the trophy room." And we looked at them and said, "You guys gave us F's for the day, you guys gave us all this shit, you're always giving us all this shit; you don't get the trophy." It went above the bar, at the Falcon Bar. [Laughs]

Then James left [for New York]. I moved to New York later. The ONCE Festival people called us and said, "We'd like you guys to come back from New York to play a concert . . ." So we also did a week at the Falcon Bar again, because they wanted Eric Dolphy and they couldn't afford to pay us all just for the ONCE Festival. So that's where I did a week with Eric Dolphy. They hired the Bob James Trio and Eric Dolphy as a unit.

[Back in New York,] Bob called me to do [*Explosions*], and we rehearsed with [bassist] Barre Phillips a little bit — Bob was trying to put that trio together and it just wasn't successful. I think we had one rehearsal and then we went and did the album.

Bob James, he was into writing his Broadway showtunes. By that time, he was a star. So, we separated. Every once in a while, we'd make contact. I have so much trouble with [mixing] the Batá and jazz the way I want to do it. I keep on telling everybody, you know some day I'm gonna get pissed off and I'm gonna call Bob, and I'm gonna say, "Hey, I wanna do a duet." And I guarantee you, Bob and I will pick three hours and put together an entire CD with the Batá, and we'll smoke the shit.

## GOING FOR IT

MAKOTO OZONE ON BOB JAMES

*Zev Feldman: When did you first hear Bob James's music?*

Makoto Ozone: The first time was when I was in high school and I played his music. That was "Touchdown." There was a big band arrangement of "Touchdown" and my mentor in Osaka — his name is Tadao Kitano — had a big band. He was my teacher and he invited me to play with his big band a few times. He brought me this chart and it was "Touchdown." That was my first encounter with Bob's music and then a couple of years later, a friend of mine who worked at the American Embassy in Tokyo invited me to his house and he played me Bob's record of *Touchdown*. Then I said, "Oh, OK. This sounds great."

*ZF: The recordings we have from 1965 feature Bob in trio settings with the first four tracks from the January 20th session being more experimental and the later four tracks from the October 9th session being more bebop-oriented. Were you aware of Bob's more adventurous side from the 1960s?*

MO: I was not and actually I'm very happy that you sent me the music. Of course, I knew about his hits, but I became a fan of his music much more deeply after I met him through Gary Burton. This was probably the late '80s. Gary had recorded an album with Bob and I totally fell in love with the way he plays. As I say, I knew who Bob James was, but his music totally caught my attention then. I always appreciated the simplicity of his playing in the melodies he writes; what he does is so simple, but it's so strong. I'm a believer in melody, too. So I fell in love with his melodies and his playing, but I always knew that there had to be something deeper in the background of his music. It's not just simple. He writes clear melodies and simple harmonies, but it was always a great twist with a great taste. That's hard to do. I always knew that this guy, Bob must have done an incredible amount of research and studying and copying and sure enough, a few years later I discovered this record that he made with all the classical material. I said, "Okay. This explains a lot about his

playing." Yet, I knew there was something about his jazz playing and, but I had a feeling that he did something like this, but I never knew. Then when you sent me this music and I listened to it right away and I thought, "Okay, here it is. That's my answer right there."

*ZF: When Bob talked to me about this record, he reflected on how he sounded at this early stage of his musical career. One of the things he said that he valued now that he's 80 years old was the youthful, carefree attitude. Do you hear that attitude on these recordings?*

MO: I don't know if that's the way I'd look at it, but he's definitely going for it. I was very touched and impressed by the energy; he's trying to create something new to himself. Sometimes I think people try to create things on surface that people will recognize, "Oh, this is something new." I think the most important thing for a musician is to create something that's new to you, yourself. It doesn't matter what other people think and the energy that he was striving for. The energy; he's trying to create something new. It was so great along with his colleagues. I don't know who the bass player was and the drummer, but they're trying out so much stuff. It gave me a great laugh at the end of the blues, the drummer wanted to end one way, Bob wanted to end another way. I was like, "Man, this is great." I was really happy to hear that. I mean, some people might say, "Okay, they didn't end together." To me, that's the shallowest part of the music; it's just surface. How you shape up. I think the essence of what the jazz music is all about, for me, was there.

*ZF: What have you learned from Bob James over the years from listening to him?*

MO: Well, I played with him. I respond to his energy for doing new things and his harmonic and melodic sense. I played duets with him a couple of times at the Tokyo Jazz. We've been talking about doing something together for two pianos. I think his energy for creating new things is still there. Also, I love his harmony. I hear his harmonic approach, which is so unique and yet it doesn't really give you a shock unlike some people who construct a harmonic structure so differently

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from others that you will have this initial shock. Like, "Wow this is different." Yet, Bob's thing is different and it's his own, but it's so subtle. I totally believe in subtlety. I don't really believe in going crazy over the changes or voicings to make people think, "Oh, this is really something else or something new or something different." Bob's music, is so musical and simple and yet has the great twist, very intelligent, very clever twist. And he still has that. Even when he plays solo, when we played together one song. His approach to solo was so unique. You couldn't predict where he was going to go. That was very exciting. And I think I saw some of that; how he does it is very much him.

ZF: Do you have any final thoughts to share?

MO: I teach this material, you know. I'm teaching at the Kunitachi College of Music right now. I'm the head of the Jazz Department, here in Tokyo. The kids these days, because they have so much material to listen to, through YouTube and through the internet in general, they've got a lot of information, but especially in Japan, they don't seem to appreciate this kind of music making. I don't know if the same thing is happening in the States. I shared this with some people who are teaching now. We all see that the kids are too focused on not making a mistake and that prevents them from really going for it like Bob does here. One of these days, I would love to take something typical like say, a movie soundtrack, where the objective is clean execution — playing all the notes correctly — and play it for

the students and then play this record to be able to point out to the students, okay, this is where it's coming from; this is what "going for it" means. It's hard for people to understand, but when you want to play simple material, it's like you can't just learn this kind of music and make something like this. You would have help to have a much heavier background. You must have this incredible amount of vocabulary, and

experience, in order to develop such a strong melodic sense, which, on the surface, seems very simple, and yet, can grab people's heart. To do that through melody and harmonic structures, is a deep and complex matter. So I totally admire this recording of Bob's. And I'm so happy that I heard it. And now there's one thing I want to mention. It's not really just about the music, but about his personality. I got to know him personally very well these past few years and he's an incredible human being. He's so loving and he's so caring. That's another really important essence of being a musician. His personality comes out on his music and it's at that center. It's the warmth and the care. He really cares. And on top of all this incredible intelligence that he has, he's a very intelligent person and yet

he doesn't really come on to you like, "Okay, I know everything." He's the warmest guy on earth. I think that's what grabs people's heart, too. It's not just his musical knowledge. I wanted to add that, because he's a beautiful human being to me.

Makoto Ozone was interviewed by Zev Feldman on February 5, 2020.

BOB JAMES #1

1. SOLAR 5:15 ✓

2. INDIAN SUMMER 5:10 ✓ *SINGLE & DOUBLE (ON THIS PIECE)*

3. SIMPLE BLUES IN F. 4:40 (GTC) (REMOVED)

4. " " " " 11 2 9:00

5. AIREGIN 5:00 4:43

REC OCT. 9, 1965 AT WOLLMAN AUDITORIUM COL. U.

BOB JAMES PIANO  
OMAR CLAY, DRUMS  
BILL WOOD BASS

| TIME     | RECORDING ONE DIRECTION |            |            | RECORDING BOTH DIRECTIONS |         |            |
|----------|-------------------------|------------|------------|---------------------------|---------|------------|
|          | 1/4 IN                  | 1/4 OUT    | 1/4 IN     | 1/4 IN                    | 1/4 OUT | 1/4 IN     |
| 1200 Ft. | 2 hrs.                  | 3 hr.      | 50 min.    | 4 hrs.                    | 2 hrs.  | 1 hr.      |
| 1800 Ft. | 3 hrs.                  | 1 1/2 hrs. | 45 min.    | 6 hrs.                    | 3 hrs.  | 1 1/2 hrs. |
| 2400 Ft. | 4 hrs.                  | 2 hrs.     | 1 hr.      | 8 hrs.                    | 4 hrs.  | 2 hrs.     |
| 3600 Ft. | 6 hrs.                  | 3 hrs.     | 1 1/2 hrs. | 12 hrs.                   | 6 hrs.  | 3 hrs.     |

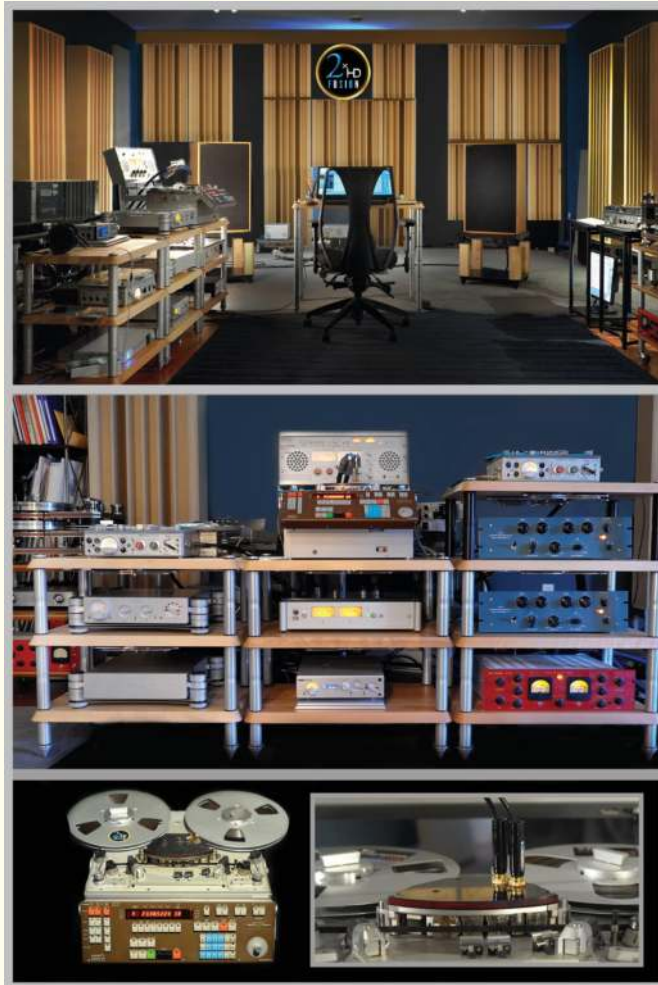
\*Double these times for 4-track monophonic recording.

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The 2xHD Fusion Mastering System: In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original 1/4" 15 ips NagraMaster curve, NAB or CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired with OCC silver cable from the playback head direct to a Nick Doshi tube head preamplifier. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.

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**2xHD.com**  
**Pure Emotion**



October 9, 1965

1 **LONG FORGOTTEN BLUES** 9:02

Unknown composer

2 **INDIAN SUMMER** 5:11

Al Dubin, Victor Herbert

3 **SOLAR** 5:20

Miles Davis

4 **AIREGIN** 4:42

Sonny Rollins

Bob James – piano  
Larry Rockwell – bass  
Robert Pozar – drums

January 20, 1965

5 **SERENATA** 7:09

Leroy Anderson, Mitchell Parish

6 **VARIATIONS** 4:21

Bob James

Bob James – piano  
Bill Wood – bass  
Omar Clay – drums

Recorded at Wollman Auditorium  
in New York City in 1967  
2XHD MASTERING: RENÉ LAFLAMME  
2XHD EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: ANDRÉ PERRY

Produced for release by  
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Sound restoration by George Klabin  
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Mastering by George Klabin  
and Fran Gala

Front artist photo by Tom Copi

Front and back cover city photo courtesy  
CSU Archives/Everett Collection

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Album Package Editor: John Koenig

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Legal Counsel: John Koenig

Photo research: Zev Feldman and  
Zak Shelby-Szysko

Project assistance: Cynthia Garcia

Special thanks to Mark Stryker,  
Hank Shteamer, Sonny Abelardo,  
Makoto Ozone, Tom Copi, Michael Kurtz  
and Carrie Colliton at Record Store Day

Dedicated to the memories of Robert Pozar,  
Larry Rockwell, and Omar Clay