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LOUIS HAYES

SERENADING SILVER

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LOUIS HAYES

SERENADING SILVER

BY RUSS MUSTO



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"I'm ready," Louis Hayes says with characteristic positivity, anxious to discuss his newest recording, *Serenade for Horace*, a tribute to the late Horace Silver. "People had asked me about doing some things for Horace before and I didn't do them at that time because it just didn't feel right." A visit with an ailing Silver prompted Hayes' change of heart. "Horace gave me the wonderful feeling of coming to his home during the time when he was not well at all and we spoke about quite a few things," he recalls. "Louis, you're a part of my history," the pianist told his longtime drummer and that got him thinking. Hayes remembers, "Once Lou Donaldson and his wife were there; the three of us were there with Horace's first wife. She gave me the good feeling that she would like me to do this. She named the CD *Serenade for Horace*. Horace's son Gregory, he also sanctioned it."

Silver is crucial to Hayes' history. It was he who summoned the teenage drummer, making a name in his native Detroit playing with Yusef Lateef and Kenny Burrell, to come to New York City and join his newly formed quintet, which was to make its Blue Note recording debut in 1956 with *6 Pieces of Silver*. The band with Donald Byrd (trumpet), Hank Mobley (tenor saxophone) and Doug Watkins (bass) was essentially the Jazz Messengers, Hayes given the daunting task of taking over the drum chair occupied by Art Blakey. He humbly remembers his early days with Silver saying, "I was 19 when I got there. I could play pretty well, but I wasn't consistent like I needed to be. With Horace I had an opportunity to be in a band and grow. He gave me the opportunity just to be myself and grow because I was dealing with him and I was also recording and making music with some of the greatest artists that were on the scene here in New York at that time."

Hayes finished out the '50s making five more records for Blue Note with Silver in addition to recording with a host of other greats, including Lateef, Burrell, Jackie McLean, Clifford Jordan, Curtis Fuller, Sonny Clark, John Coltrane, Wes Montgomery and finally Cannonball Adderley, who lured him away to join his newly formed quintet. Hayes would spend the first half of the '60s with Adderley, before leaving to join the Oscar Peterson Trio. He remembers, "Appearing and playing and making music with Horace and Cannon, I basically approached it the same way. With Cannon I didn't change, I just had more experience. I had been on the scene for about three years, so I had grown. I had more experience by the time I was with Cannon, so I was able to handle things on a more consistent level. With Oscar, that was a different approach because it was a trio and naturally Oscar played on such a high level. Dealing with the trio I couldn't play the same way as when I was playing with the group. I had to really pay attention to Oscar Peterson and listen to him."

Hayes led his own groups when not on the road with Peterson. He had been performing and recording regularly with Freddie Hubbard and Joe Henderson, so in 1967 he recruited the pair to fill the frontline of his newly formed Jazz Communicators (with pianist

Kenny Barron and bassist Herbie Lewis filling out the rhythm section). Since leaving Peterson in the early '70s, Hayes worked regularly as a bandleader, most notably with his quintet with fellow Silver alumni trumpeter Woody Shaw and saxophonist Junior Cook. During the past decade Hayes has worked most frequently with his Cannonball Legacy Band, the repertoire culled from his years with Adderley. He says, "When I put the band together I got [alto saxophonist] Vincent Herring, because not only could Vincent play on a high level, but he also worked with Nat [Adderley] for at least nine or ten years. So that's why I got Vincent. And Vincent got [trumpeter] Jeremy [Pelt] and we took it from there." Herring lauds his friend, noting, "Louis Hayes is pure inspiration. Once on the bandstand you feel like you are playing with family. Louis has the ability to relate to everyone and make them feel like they're a part of a musical family. He has an understated spiritual nature that comes through in the way he speaks and plays."

These feelings are echoed by the latest addition to Cannonball Legacy "family", Jazz Communicators bassist Dezron Douglas: "His time is so almost perfect that if you can't hang, you'll stick out within the first four bars and it's up to you to make yourself better. It's up to you to hang." He continues, "I just got back from a tour with Louis in February. Jeremy Pelt hooked up 18 days straight of one-nighters all over Europe; a quartet with Jeremy, Danny Grissett, Louis and me. And Lou—for somebody who's about to be 80 years old—he was schooling us. He was the first down for every lobby call, no matter what time it was. We were on a plane every day, trains going through different countries, dealing with immigration and every night Louis hit hard. He hit harder and harder every night."

Jazz Communicators vibraphonist Steve Nelson remembers upon joining Mulgrew Miller's Wingspan that the late pianist insisted that the first thing the band's drummers do was check out Hayes' ride cymbal playing. Nelson, like Douglas, is an important component in the 21st Century reincarnation of the Jazz Communicators. Hayes explains, "I always admired Steve's playing and with the Communicators this was the sound that I wanted. I didn't want the same sound with trumpet and saxophone all the time. So with Steve being there it gave the band a unique sound that we can approach the art form with and go in some directions and get some feelings that are different... With Abraham [Burton] and Steve it worked out. The feeling and the sound, it works out much better... I even like the way it looks. This is the direction I want to go in. And then with Horace, playing his music, the same thing. When I was with Horace naturally it was trumpet and saxophone and rhythm section. With Horace's music, with his music it works so wonderful, but I didn't want that same sound."

The band on *Serenade for Horace* features the Jazz Communicators, which includes pianist David Bryant, a longtime compatriot of Douglas and Burton, plus a pair of guests, trumpeter Josh Evans, who fills out the frontline on half of the date, and vocalist Gregory

Porter, who delivers a sterling performance singing the lyric to Silver's "Song For My Father". Douglas, who co-produced the album (with Hayes and Blue Note's Don Was) declares, "Some of the best playing, some of the best musical experiences that I've had to date, happened those two days in the studio with Louis, Abraham, Steve, David Bryant and Josh Evans. It was just a beautiful thing, man. Louis sounded like he was 25 years old. Seriously! I mean he's one of the only drummers that I know that can make something that he did already, make something that's been done already, make it new again. All of the music of Horace's that we recorded, it just sounds fresh...if you get a group of musicians together that all have a good feeling about each other you can expect nothing but grandeur."

Hayes is positively upbeat about being back on Blue Note. "I decided that I wanted to definitely do it on Blue Note," he proclaims. "Maxine Gordon [the date's executive producer and Dexter Gordon's widow] and myself, we talked about some other labels, but that wasn't going to work out. I wanted to go with Blue Note because when I recorded with Horace it was always on Blue Note. So I wanted to do it with Blue Note and I'm very glad that I did. The way it started off with Don Was was just a great feeling. It was very comfortable and the feeling of the CD and the compositions that we chose and the order that Don Was chose, the order that the music is in, it works just fine."

Hayes, who turns 80 this month, is equally effusive about the band from the record that he'll be bringing into Dizzy's Club to celebrate the album's release. He says, "I can't compare them to Joe Henderson or Freddie... It's different, but they have the same fire and they can play on a high level very well. I'm very, very comfortable playing, making this art form with these people. To be accepted by these young people and to make this history with these people from this era, it's a great wonderful privilege because a lot of guys that I came up with are not here anymore and they didn't have the opportunity to make this history with these younger musicians. So I've had the opportunity to do it with them, the older guys, and now I'm doing it with these wonderful musicians at this time in my life. I'm glad that my body is working and I'm healthy enough to do this. It's a great thing. It feels good." ❖

For more information, visit louishayes.net. Hayes is at Dizzy's Club May 29th-31st. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Horace Silver — *Finger Poppin'* (Blue Note, 1959)
- Cannonball Adderley — *Nippon Soul* (Riverside-OJC, 1963)
- Freddie Hubbard — *The Hub of Hubbard* (MPS, 1969)
- Louis Hayes — *Light and Lovely* (SteepleChase, 1989)
- Louis Hayes and the Cannonball Legacy Band — *Maximum Firepower* (Savant, 2006)
- Louis Hayes — *Serenade for Horace* (Blue Note, 2016)