

Joe Lovano

Sound Prints

By Nora McCarthy

Visit Joe Lovano online at www.JoeLovano.com

To live up to and beyond one's potential, to have something relevant to say, to advance the art form, to make your mark, to keep the music alive, to pass on the torch, to be remembered—that is what most jazz musicians aspire to and dream about when they embark on their personal musical journey. Walking in the footsteps of the masters—the heroes and giants that created this music is one thing—to be counted among them is quite another; tenor saxophonist, composer, arranger, Joe Lovano, whose stellar career cannot be disputed, is one such artist who in his own words, is living that “dream.”

Grammy Award winner and Blue Note recording artist since 1991, Joe Lovano has produced some twenty-five recordings as a leader and has gleaned many awards over his lifetime. One he is most proud of is the Gary Burton Chair for Jazz Performance in 2001 from Berkeley. He has been the winner of numerous awards for best tenor saxophonist many times throughout his career which began well over four decades ago. Joe moved to New York City in the mid 70's and quickly immersed himself in the vibrant jazz scene. A turning point for him came in 1980 when he was asked to play with the Mel Lewis Orchestra that back then was performing every Monday night at the Village Vanguard. Joe was in the band till 1991. That opportunity led to playing in other large ensembles with Carla Bley, Bob Brookmeyer, Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra and Gunther Schuller. Then he went on as a leader, co-leader and member of many outstanding groups that included luminaries: Tom Harrell, John Abercrombie, Paul Motian, Herbie Hancock, Elvin Jones, Dave Brubeck, McCoy Tyner, and the beat goes on and on. An almost exhausting list of collaborations and performances with major jazz artists, various ensembles, projects, and experiences ensued. Lovano's current projects are: *Us Five* featuring James Weidman, Esperanza Spalding, Otis Brown III and Francisco Mela; *Sound Prints: Joe Lovano/Dave Douglas Quintet*; *Joe Lovano Nonet*; *Trio Fascination* and, *Village Rhythms* featuring: Liberty Ellman, guitar, Matt Garrison, electric bass, Otis Brown, drums, Abdou Mboup, kora & percussion, and more.

Success, in most cases is something that *finds you*, not the other way around, because it can be as daunting and elusive to find as the holy grail. But anyone who has even remotely investigated the lifestyle, thought processes, steps and movements of highly successful people under-

stands that there are many key elements involved to being successful in the music business and living a successful life. You can't be ordinary and be successful in any business. It starts with having a passion, a desire and a strong belief system, work ethic, integrity, commitment, endurance and strength of character to avoid the pitfalls and navigate the tricky waters of the very seductive, selective, fickle, ever changing music industry that envelops the art form. Joe Lovano is someone who has the goods and who has mastered the fine art of living a balanced and successful life. He is talented, savvy, articulate, measured and focused.

In a brief forty minute candid interview with Joe this week, he spoke eloquently and mostly about the people in his life—his wife and frequent collaborator, singer/composer/improviser/lyricist Judy Silvano, his many friends and associations, his influences, the opportunities that were afforded him and the music he has served passionately with gratitude and humility throughout his career. He reflected on his father, Big “T” Tony Lovano, also a tenor player, who gave him the passion for the music and the early training setting the stage for the career he now enjoys. All the rest that followed has been like a finely orchestrated symphony composed by the greatest artists in the music business too countless to list. Always positive, always optimistic, always supportive of everyone he has known and worked with and everyone who has and is a part of his life story, Joe Lovano is a class act of the highest order. He is someone who gives back and one who remembers his roots and the people who helped him. This singular quality above all others is what real success is about in my opinion. The people he admired growing up, people he met along the way, the legends that he was and is privileged to play with and call friends, those masterfully successful people who influenced his playing and his spirit, those are the ones of whom he

those he has been surrounded by his entire life, I believe that is a given in his world. Traversing the upper echelons of the jazz world as he has for many decades, realizing fame and creative pinnacles, I asked him how his journey has changed who he is at his core, and without missing a beat he summed it up naturally by saying that along with development comes change that continues throughout life. That's the process but for all he has achieved and experienced he still is Joe Lovano from Cleveland, Ohio who maintains close contact with his hometown and the players there who are his friends for life.

When I asked Joe about “firsts” and highlights of 2014 thus far he joyously responded, “Starting off the year with *The Spring Quartet*,” an ensemble he has with maestro Jack DeJohnette, Grammy® winner Esperanza Spalding, and Argentinean pianist Leo Genovese. Next was playing at a recent birthday celebration for 84-year-old Ornette Coleman. Sonny Rollins was there too—someone who Lovano has revered his entire life, and he said in his “jazz cat” style of speech that it was “beautiful” and “thrilling.” He also added recording with the avant-garde musician John Zorn's *Masada* group as something very special. Then he spoke sadly of the lowlights—the heartbreak of losing so many friends that he worked with and loved like Gerald Wilson, Idris Muhammad, Andras Mohay, Horace Silver, and Charlie Haden.

Lovano has had a long association with the Village Vanguard referring to the historic landmark as a beacon for jazz in the world and the main reason people visit New York. He lovingly spoke of the many fond memories he has of performing there and the fun he shared over the years with the late Max Gordon and the significant contributions the iconic jazz shrine has made throughout its 79 year run reciting all the jazz royalty that played there, and that the spirits of the great jazz musicians are in that room and can still be felt and if you listen closely, can still be heard.

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humbly speaks and credits, as he put it, “Life is about your associations.” There is of course the one element that fits all the pieces together without which none of it could have happened, and that is his talent and God given gift, that too is his blessing. Hard work notwithstanding, the labor of love and sacrifice that it takes to excel in this business is evident when you hear him play, he's all over the music. As he explains it his quest is about exploration, integrating cultures, discovering new modes of artistic expression and further defining the Jazz idiom, it's all about the love.

When asked about what he looks for in a band mate or sideman, what the essential ingredient is they must possess he said this, “That they have the ability to play the music within the music.” Given his artistry and the artistry of

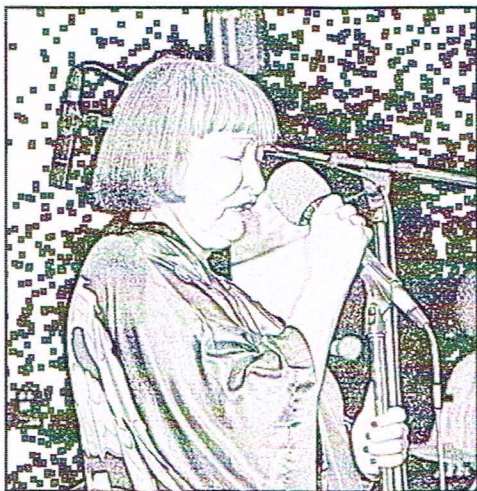
On October 21-26, the Joe Lovano/Dave Douglas Quintet: *Sound Prints* featuring Lawrence Fields (piano), Linda Oh (bass) and Joey Baron (drums) will be at the Village Vanguard as part of a tour of the United States and Europe that starts on the west coast in October. They will perform original music inspired by jazz legend tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter whom Joe has had an incredible association with over the years. As a recipient of a commission sponsored by The Monterey Jazz Festival in 2013, Wayne wrote two compositions, “*To Sail Beyond the Sunset*” and “*Destination Unknown*,” for the group to perform in his honor and they will be coming out on Blue Note this fall. Expect a dazzling and enthralling performance.



Sheila Jordan

A Lifetime Of Achievement

Jazz Vocalist, Educator 2012 NEA jazz Masters Award Recipient



By: Nora McCarthy

At age 14 Sheila Jordan left the coal mining town of Summerhill, Pennsylvania to live in Detroit, Michigan with her mother. There she discovered a burgeoning modern jazz scene and the music of Charlie Parker. Five or so years later she would follow his music to the jazz capital of the world, New York City.

With well over 50 CDs to her credit as a leader and guest artist, Sheila has performed with a diverse group of the best musicians in the business from George Russell, who discovered her, to Don Cherry, Steve Swallow, Don Pullen, Carla Bley, Charles Mingus, Dewey Redman, Leon Parker, Lee Konitz, Steven Kuhn, Roswell Rudd, George Gruntz, Jeanne Lee, Mark Murphy, Jay Clayton, Harvie S, and Cameron Brown, et al.

Although the road to success was a slow uphill climb having been born into poverty and alcoholism, dealing with abandonment at a young age, raising a daughter alone, taking day jobs to support herself and her child, battling bigotry, and challenging herself at every turn, Sheila survived it all by keeping her faith alive and the flame in her heart for singing. Her altruistic values, optimism, belief and love of jazz

music kept her steadfast in her quest to keep singing.

The song stylist whose former limited appeal has blossomed into receiving the highest honor in the country is humbled and grateful beyond words. Her lifetime of hard work and devotion to the music has been a selfless pursuit citing many artists who she believes are more worthy than herself.

Understandably, many singers today, young and old, from all around the world, identify with Sheila Jordan. Her strong appeal is that she is real; she embodies what it means to be a jazz singer. And, rightfully so, many singers want to emulate the style she forged—especially the freedom. If you are a student of jazz voice, you must pass through the school of Sheila Jordan; it's as simple as that. Her life, her accomplishments and her wisdom are inspiring to all singers and especially to those who understand what it means to love jazz music.

The originator of the voice and bass duo, Sheila was ahead of her time in a way that was quite attractive to some of the most creative jazz musicians who recognized her unique gift. She traversed the harmonic highways between bebop, post bop, straight-ahead jazz and beyond creating a unique scatting and improvisational style that she credits to her musical hero, friend and mentor, the great jazz icon and founding father of bebop, Charlie Parker.

An innovator and song stylist whose blessed life put her rightfully in the company of the greats in jazz, Sheila Jordan remains a simple and honest woman with a quick sense of humor, self effacing personality, and an unlimited capacity to touch everyone who hears her reflective of a life lived in truth and humility. She understands truth thus she sings the truth. Her voice has a sound and tone deftly childlike and fragile at times yet fiercely capable of bopping through complex harmonic structures, singing obtuse melodies and adapting lyrics to horn solos with an easy expertise. Charlie Parker called her, "the kid with the million-dollar ears." Within the protective custody of the music that she champions and the skills she has honed over a lifetime, she has found her comfort, strength, security and purpose.

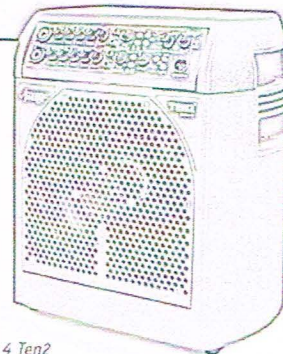
We at Jazz Inside Magazine would like to thank Sheila Jordan for her contribution to jazz music; for raising the bar of jazz vocals, for giving back that which she was given, for being a teacher, leader and inspiration to aspiring young singers everywhere and for achieving the country's highest honor in jazz, the National Endowment For the Arts Jazz Master's Award. We salute you.

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"Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip."

- Will Rogers

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Lewis Porter

Interview by Nora McCarthy

(This is a continuation of the interview that was published in the February issue of Jazz Inside Magazine.)

LP: Like most cats I have been self-managed all these years but recently I've started to work with Susan Brink who does an excellent job and can be reached on Facebook. Recently, I was asked to join a new collective called, The Conjure Collective and that collective includes Howard Johnson, who I love, and Frank Lacy, J.D. Parran, Ray Blue, Kevin Ray—about ten people, and we are going to be working with a booking agent as well.

JJ: Tell me more about the Master's Program you founded.

LP: I've always loved teaching. I especially love it in recent years because since from about 1998 all I do is teach graduate students now in a program that I founded in 1997. It is the only jazz history degree in the world, it's called, "A Master's in Jazz History and Research." So all I've done in recent years is teach graduate seminars which I love because graduate students are people who have made a decision that jazz is what they're all about. Not only that but it's a really interesting mix of students, most of whom are young people who just finished their Bachelor's Degree. Not people whose names you're going to know but I also get accomplished musicians who are going back to school to study with me and get their Master's and those include currently: Vincent Gardner, Wynton Marsalis' trombone player, a lovely guy who happens to be in my mind, one of the best trombone players anywhere. He's very open in terms of how he plays and what kind of things he likes to play; Rhoda Scott, the legendary organist who is in her early 70's; singer Melba Joyce, also in her early 70's; and, Chad Taylor the drummer, who is on the new Enja Record with Liebman. So it's a really interesting mix of people everything from people who maybe are not destined to become name players to people who already are name players. Because it's a Jazz History program, you don't want only people who are high powered players in it, you also want people who are heading more toward a Jazz History/Education type of career. I find that when we have discussions that it's a marvelous mix, that it's not all one kind of a thing—everybody's mutually respectful, and it's just a great program and I love it.

JJ: Do you have an association with Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center? I remember hearing you speak there a few years ago.

LP: What happened is from September, 2006 to May 2009, they asked me if I would put together and lead a series of panel discussions for Jazz at

Lincoln Center. I said, of course, as long as I can have freedom in choosing what I want to do. I wanted to get people talking about some of the tougher issues like race and I wanted to get people who are interested in free jazz even though it isn't a big part of the programming there. They were cool with that so those years that I was doing that series, *Jazz Talk*, I had a bunch of people that told me that they had never spoken at Lincoln Center before. They included: Jane Ira Bloom, Amiri Baraka, Rashied Ali, Daniel Carter, Don Byron, just a whole bunch of people who had never been there before and we talked about things like: jazz and race, race and how it comes into play in jazz education, we talked about why are there not more women in jazz—although I feel that in the past few years there has been improvement there but it is still a good question. I'm the kind of person who respects everyone's opinion. I've never been a person who expects anyone to agree with me in order to be my friend...to a point, if you hate Black people or Jewish people and you love guns then you probably are not going to be my friend. But I don't really get worked up when people disagree. You have to know how to moderate. Most moderators do nothing; they just sit there and maybe throw out one question and sit back to see what happens. I feel that if you want a panel to be interesting you have to be an active moderator. That doesn't mean that you should interrupt people or talk much, or talk about yourself, but it means that you have to stay on it. The moderator should be on the edge of his/her seat thinking how can I keep this moving and how can I keep everyone involved, and if there is someone who hasn't spoken, how can I get that person to start talking.

JJ: What do you want our readers to take with them from this interview, or to know about you that we haven't discussed here?

LP: I'm a person who has pursued many different avenues and has a lot of interests, but the thing is that's just who I am, it is not something that I made a decision to be and the fact it is not something that I even had a choice about. Everybody's different and you don't necessarily choose to be the way you are.

JJ: What do you think about the business though? What do the kids who are leaving the music universities have to look forward to? What are their odds for success?

LP: I'm sure it is rough these days and I know it is but I will say one thing. I don't think it makes sense to go around talking about how all the players were great in the old days and "these kids today," blah, blah, blah. I don't agree with that. There's hundreds of great players out there today and Jimmy Heath is one of the few older cats I know, and I love. Jimmy by the way, who will say to you that the average level of players today as a result of jazz education is much higher than it was in his generation—and he will say that and won't say they were better in the old days. The thing is we know the few best players from the old days. I have a thing I do for my students where I play them recordings of average

bebop bands from the forties and the cats are not making the changes and it sounds horrible—the students start laughing. I say to them, 'Now you know what the average player sounded like, do you think everybody played like Charlie Parker? Wake up.' So this idea that everybody used to be magnificent and today they're not, that's ridiculous. There was only one, Bird, Coleman Hawkins and Prez but as far as I'm concerned, Joshua Redman is one of the best saxophonists ever and if you can't hear that, too bad. Chris Potter is great too! C'mon, wake up. There are lots of great musicians and there's lots of passion. This idea that they're not passionate like they used to be is pessimistic and insulting in my judgment. The thing about music is this. Occasionally I have a student who comes up to me, an undergraduate at Rutgers, and they will say to me, "I'm trying to decide if I should go into music or something else." My answer is always the same. If you're trying to decide between music and something else, go into something else. If the only passion that you must do is music, then you have no choice. And, if you have no choice, somehow or other, you're going to make it work.

JJ: I agree with that. Lastly, what do you see in the future for Lewis Porter?

JP: I'm going to continue doing a lot of work as a side person. I find working as a side person very satisfying. I don't think it's such a terrible thing because it exposes me to a lot of different playing situations. It is a bit hair-raising sometimes because you have to learn a lot of new music with short notice but in general there are a lot of things that I like about it. I'm hoping that I continue to get things as a single outside of the New York area and in Europe. I've been all over Europe, most often to Italy. I've also been to Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Finland, Spain - on the same festival with Roy Hargrove and others. I'm going to continue to tour as a single, continue to do mostly performing but of course my regular teaching at Rutgers and guest teaching here and there especially when I give a guest concert out of town very often they want a workshop or clinic. As far as big composition projects, I expect I'll continue to do them on an occasional basis, it's a lot of work, so I don't think I'm going to be turning out more than one a year. Of course, I'm going to continue to write music for some of the bands I'm in. This is basically it, just making music. I do occasionally get invitations to teach at other schools. In the early '90s I taught one day a week at the New School for two years. I taught one day a week at the Manhattan School of Music for two years. I taught one day a week at NYU for one semester and this semester, I accepted an invitation, so I'm going to teach every Monday at William Paterson University in addition to teaching at Rutgers.

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"First rate people surround themselves with first rate people, and second rate people surround themselves with third rate people."

- Leo Rosten, Author, 1908-1997