

David Ware



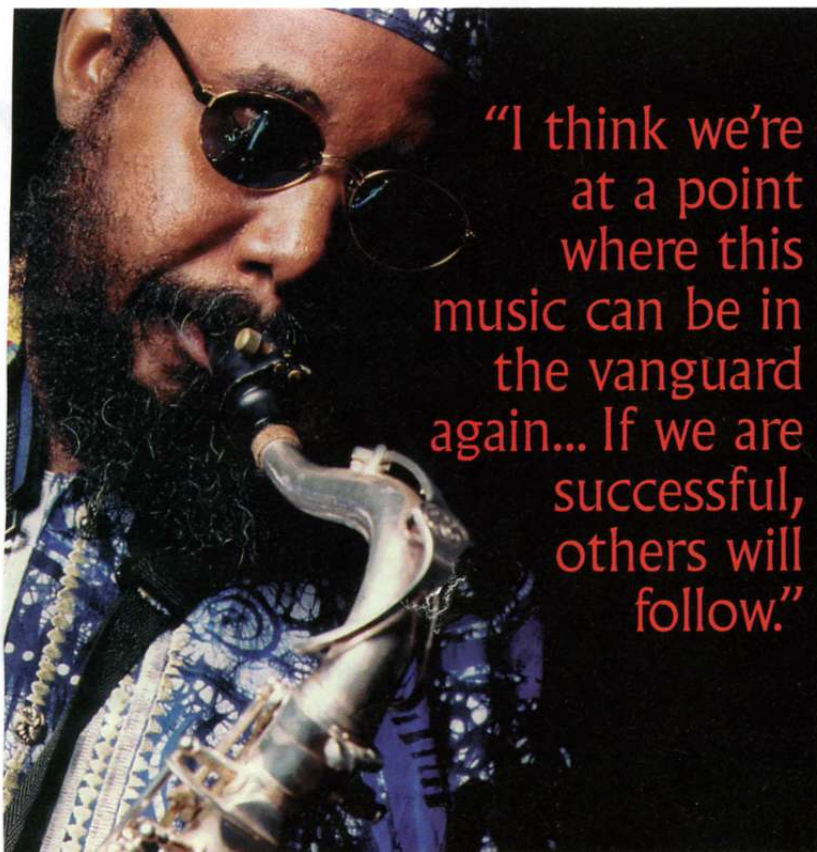
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DAVID S. WARE WASN'T SURPRISED FOR A MOMENT. Last year, he knew something was coming on; he just didn't know how it would manifest. Once, the feeling was so strong he shared it with his students. Then, just a week later, it happened. The tenor saxophonist became the first artist recruited by recently installed Columbia Creative Consultant Branford Marsalis. This bold number one pick couldn't defy the conventional wisdom more. The 49 year-old Ware epitomizes the uncompromising avant-garde jazz artist, committed to pursuing a music of deep, spiritual meaning through the most intensely direct means available, regardless of the obscurity and neglect it may entail.

BY BILL SHOEMAKER

SOUNDS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFFREY KLIMAN



"I think we're at a point where this music can be in the vanguard again... If we are successful, others will follow."

In this regard, Ware has his dues covered for years to come. After a promising first few years on the international scene in the mid to late '70s—playing with Cecil Taylor and Andrew Cyrille's Maono, leading a couple of dates for small European labels—Reagan's '80s handed him a seven-year drought with no recordings and few gigs. Yet, Ware stuck to his principles, and to his regimen of meditation, yoga, and practice, until the tide turned his way. Beginning in '87, Ware began a steady production of palpably passionate albums, initially for Silkheart and DIW ('91's *flight of i* was part of Columbia's short-lived licensing pact with the Japanese label).

During this period, Ware's quartet coalesced into an all-star unit that defines pre-millennial energy and intensity. One contributing factor is years of personnel stability—bassist William Parker has been on board since the dry years, pianist Matthew Shipp since '89; drummer Susie Ibara's two-year tenure follows lengthy stints by Marc Edwards and Whit Dickey. The other is their simple unmitigated faith in the music. That's why Ware's quartet became

a focal point for the avant-garde's emergent hard-core audience via albums like *Cryptology*, *Dao*, and *Wisdom of Uncertainty* (from '94, '95, and '96, respectively; the first two titles were issued on Homestead, the third on Aum Fidelity). And, that's why Ware is not particularly surprised at the turn of events.

"I know that the way this music is received goes through cycles, long cycles," Ware recently reflected. "I think we're at a point where this music can be in the vanguard again. It's very prestigious to be on Columbia, but what you do with it is another story. It's a chance for this music to rise to the top. If we are successful, others will follow."

To a substantial degree, that success will be predicated on how Ware's first Columbia disc, *Go See The World*, is received (speaking of being received, "Go see the world" was the first thing Ware's mother said to him upon his birth: while on family matters, let's deal with the "S," about which Ware is adamant—it stands for Spencer, his grandfather). Some critics will certainly have problems with it, and not just the

neo-cons; however, as this is music that knocks you off your status quo, the fence-straddlers may well end up singing soprano on this one. No matter what media buzz ensues, the bottom line may actually work in Ware's favor, as the fiercely loyal audience developed by labels like Homestead and Aum Fidelity, and cutting-edge events like New York's Vision Festival (Ware's quartet is featured on Aum Fidelity's new *Vision Volume One: Vision Festival 1997 Compiled*), will undoubtedly rally around *Go See The World*.

The album is long on Ware's time-tested strengths as player and a composer. Though he still occasionally practices his soprano, stritch, and flute, a few years of performing exclusively on tenor shows when he sweeps through the registers, morphing rapid-fire, finely edged lines with molten streams of altissimo screams, mid-register growls, and low end blasts. On pieces like "Mikuro's Blues"—Ware's case in point of how his music has evolved since his last recording, which "should show people the depth of what we do"—he has perfected the compositional equivalent of the no-look pass, as a bristling staccato theme surprisingly gives way to a slow-burn, Coltraneish vamp. His re-composition of "The Way We Were" goes way beyond a Rollinesque overhaul of a trite standard (Ware benefited from early studies with the Saxophone Colossus, though the only obvious influence is Ware's huge sound); imagine a Robert Thompson portrait of Marvin Hamlisch, and you start to get a sense of this often harrowing multi-section work.

Though Ware's compositions are rooted in his powerful tenor sound (the title of the new disc's closer, "Rapturelodic," is aptly descriptive of his approach), he doesn't simply transcribe improvisations; the pieces take the express, directly from conception to paper. "It's the most spontaneous way for me to write," Ware said. "It becomes more of a construction process later when I try to put things together to make a piece." With the modesty typical of true bandleaders, Ware points to the input of his quartet for the music's strength, and even credits their years in the wilderness. "I think that isolation allowed for a thoroughness in the development of detail, of organization," Ware suggested. This allowed Ware's quartet to refine a music whose immense energy

listening pleasures

Ornette Coleman *Ornette on Tenor* (Atlantic)

Sonny Rollins *Our Man in Jazz* (RCA)

Archie Shepp *The Way Ahead* (Impulse!), particularly "Frankenstein"

Cecil Taylor *Unit Structures* (Blue Note)

doesn't dissipate its structure, and whose structure doesn't tether its energy. "That's happening because of who we are," Ware emphasized. "We have this natural tendency to constantly modify our music. These pieces will be very different when we perform them a few months from now."

While Ware recognizes the potential material impact of success with Columbia—that he cites more work, with concerts being booked more in advance than presently, is telling of a man who has had years where he could count the number of gigs on his hands—his ultimate goal for this affiliation is to promote the music itself. "I want to be in more situations where I can talk about this so-called avant garde music, because it is very, very misunderstood," Ware stated. "A lot of people don't know how to listen to it, they don't understand the elements of it, because it takes some culturing of the ear to hear it."

Ware sees two distinct paths for culturing the ear, which are often unnecessarily stereotyped as contradictory. "This music is an open field for intellectuality, and there's nothing wrong with that," he asserted. "An analytical process is part of appreciating what it is. There's also a very deep philosophical side to this music. What you hear in the music is a philosophical projection. For me, it's not just about locking yourself in a room with your horn. It's meditation, it's what you eat, it's how you relate to people and to the world, it's what you believe in, it's what you experience beyond belief."

Though Ware has a strong desire to educate, the classroom is not his destination (Ware endured three semesters at a high-profile music school that went out of its way to diss his inspirations—Taylor, Shepp,

Ornette, Ayler, and late-period Coltrane; the experience was so negative that, more than 25 years later, Ware refuses to even name it).

Rather, Ware wants to develop events that combine performances and workshops. "I did three solo concerts last year with a question and answer period at the end, and I took the audience through it, step by step, and broke it down for them through demonstration and discussion, which was very positive. We need more of that.

Musicians can only evolve so far by themselves. We need an educated audience to really move ahead." ■

GEARBOX

DAVID S. WARE:

David's tenor saxophone is a silver-coated Buffet Crampon Model S-1, which he uses with a 10 Star Otto Link hard rubber mouthpiece and medium Bari reeds.