

THE COOKERS



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A dream team of forward-leaning
hard-bop.

— Nate Chinen,
The New York Times

Player for player, there's
no better working band in jazz
than The Cookers.

— Andrew Gilbert,
Boston Globe

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Experience counts, especially in jazz. The more time musicians spend interpreting tunes and interacting with others, the more articulation an audience can expect. You can hear the fruits of such work in the expressive language The Cookers bring to the bandstand and to their three critically acclaimed recordings, *Warriors*, *Cast the First Stone* and *Believe*. This exciting new all-star septet summons up an aggressive mid '60s spirit

with a potent collection of expansive post-bop originals marked by all the requisite killer instincts and pyrotechnic playing expected of some of the heaviest hitters on the scene today.

Billy Harper, Cecil McBee, George Cables, Eddie Henderson, and Billy Hart all came up in the heady era of the mid '60s. It was a period that found the dimensions of hard bop morphing from their original designs, and each of these guys helped facilitate the process as members of some of the most important bands of the era. Hart and Henderson were members of Herbie Hancock's groundbreaking Mwandishi group; Cecil McBee anchored Charles Lloyd's great '60s quartet alongside Keith Jarrett and Jack DeJohnette; Billy Harper was part of Lee Morgan's last group, as well as being a member of Max Roach's Quartet and Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers; while George Cables held down the piano chair in numerous bands including groups led by Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson, Freddie Hubbard, Dexter Gordon and Art Pepper.

David Weiss and Craig Handy, from a more recent generation and the youngest members of the band,



are experts in this forthright lingo, having gained experience performing with Bobby Hutcherson, Freddie Hubbard, Charles Tolliver, Roy Haynes and Herbie Hancock.

Each member of the Cookers has spent time leading his own series of groups as well, and each has a keenly individual sound. But it's the unmistakable power of teamwork that makes this music so commanding and resonates with a kind of depth and beauty that speaks of the seasoned track record of its principals (combined, the group has over 250 years of experience in the jazz world and has been a part of over 1,000 recordings). You can feel the collective weight of that experience in their CDs and especially in their live performances. Since this version of the band was solidified in 2007 the group has performed at venues around the world, including headlining the New Orleans Jazz Fest, Playboy Jazz Festival, Vancouver Jazz Festival, Umbria Jazz Festival, Northsea Jazz Festival, Chicago Jazz Festival, The Jerusalem Jazz Festival, The Guinness Cork Jazz Festival, The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, The Burghausen Jazz Festival, Jazz Terrassa, The Healdsburg Jazz Festival, Jazz Viersen, Ronnie Scott's and Yoshi's.

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A hard-bop wrecking crew

— Nate Chinen, **The New York Times**

Talk about truth in advertising: The Cookers, an eye-popping septet, offers the promise of broiling intensity ... the blend of experience and youth, the rich orchestration possibilities offered by four horns, and especially the distinctive collection of personalities gives the band a unique complexion.

— Mark Stryker, **Detroit Free Press**

With *Believe*, The Cookers hooked me from the first horn blast on the first tune, "Believe, For It Is True." This masterpiece alone, composed and arranged by tenor genius Billy Harper, should be enough for jazz fans to buy the whole darn album.

(They) are some of the best composers, arrangers and musicians we have in jazz, and they're working together in one of the most exciting super-groups we've seen in a long, long time.

The arrangements, handled by Harper and Weiss, are outrageously wonderful. And the musicians just kill it on every tune.

This is a group of the world's best musicians who have nothing to prove to anyone, but they prove it all on *Believe*.

— Frank Alkyer, **Down Beat Magazine**

The Cookers are hard-wired into the golden era of jazz history, but they use tradition as a foundation for creative fury in the present moment.

— Thomas Conrad, **Jazz Times**

This hard-hitting septet wears its name like a mission statement. Rich with a mix of classic elegance and exploration, the group might reference the past by name, but it never sounds less than current.

— Chris Barton, **Los Angeles Times**

Believe it: The new Cookers CD is amazing.

It's one of those rare albums that come along a handful of times a year, that will blow you away the first time you give it a close listen.

This one has gravitas, rich melodic beauty and all sorts of deep playing and interplay. Interestingly, much as this band is all about power and fiery chops, it's the compositions here that absolutely slay.

— **Lucid Culture**

Believe is a cooker, indeed. Consisting of seven originals and a Wayne Shorter tune ("Free For All") and featuring rich, thick, smart arrangements by Weiss, *Believe* bristles with fiery conviction from start to finish.

— Paul de Barros, **Seattle Times**



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“Priestess” launches Harper like a slingshot: There is no tenor saxophonist in current jazz whose entrance can create such a jolt of adrenaline. (There was once one named Coltrane.)

— Thomas Conrad, **Jazz Times**

If you wondered what has happened to all the passion and intensity, once such essential ingredients of great swinging jazz and now virtually non-existent in so much of today’s outpourings, you’ll find it all in The Cookers.

— Tony Hall, **Jazzwise Magazine**

The Cookers reunites several musicians whose decades-long associations affirm the progressive spirit of early ‘70s straight-ahead jazz, one which is always needed now more than ever. Subsequently, the veterans’ consistently sterling work is presented within a context that is organic, the polar opposite of most all-star band schemes.

— Bill Shoemaker, **Point of Departure**

This lineup that has jelled magnificently, and their new CD, *Believe* (Motema Music), may even surpass last year’s *Cast the First Stone* in terms of drive and camaraderie.

But everyone here is giving it their all, and it shows. The fire burns as much now as it did then, and the music on *Believe* is both a tribute to the veterans in the group and a contemporary life force.

— **Denver Post**

On this second release, Blue Note values prevail: hard-driving rhythms; soulful solos; exuberant ensemble work; a feeling that jazz is a serious, meaningful calling but also fun.

The composer’s raw, impassioned lead and the ensemble’s intense, jabbing responses quickly indicate that this is a special session. A slower section expands the horn harmony, and there’s that old revered Blue Note sound hitting you in your head-to-heart circuitry.

— Owen Cordle, **Jazz Times**

This is the perfect album for anyone who says they don’t record jazz albums like they used to.

— Jack Garner, **Democrat and Chronicle**

You’re not likely to hear a better set of straight-ahead jazz at a local club this year.

— **Time Out New York**

Cast the First Stone cooks like crazy. Its seven tracks feature a lot of righteous bashing from veteran jazzmen who play with remarkable vigour and risk-taking. Drawing equally on the wall-of-sound horn section of an Art Blakey Messengers band and on the maximum drums/modal fury esthetic of the great John Coltrane Quartet, The Cookers raise the bar for intensity in this style of jazz. You could think of this disc as a sequel of sorts to the seminally powerful Blakey disc *Free For All*.

— Peter Hum, **Ottawa Citizen**



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Believe begins with one of Harper's preaching thunderbolt tunes, "Believe, For It Is True." He rips through his solo; his sound could shred burlap. Then Henderson goes sky-walking through "Free for All," the Art Blakey anthem. He's the hippest of trumpeters, and this is one very hip band.

— **San Jose Mercury News**

The Cookers deliver straight-ahead jazz with brains and brawn and *Believe* is beautifully rendered. The magnificent seven ride again!

— **ICON**

Believe, the latest effort from The Cookers, is their most enjoyable to date.

A working unit since 2007, the Cookers have a depth to their interplay that cannot be faked — the difference between 10-year old and 18-year old whiskey.

At 69, Harper is somehow playing better than ever: His tone is clear and bottomless, his ideas brandished with black-belt assurance and formidability.

— **eMusic**

This is the nitty-gritty stuff — technically adept, soulfully alive; calling up the spirits of jazz past and incarnating them in the Now through the medium of these exciting musicians.

This smokes! Yes, this is music for the hard core and music that bites into the core of the sweet apple of jazz. Solid!

— Rick Erben, **91.5 KIOS FM**

This isn't a band reliving its heyday; it's living it.

— Chris Smith, **Winnipeg Free Press**

On *Warriors*, this mighty seven wields instruments like sonic weapons as they stir up a fiery jazz that harmonizes, improvises, takes chances and creates turbulent energy. These older cats still know how to wail and purr, creating cutting-edge, melodic, compelling jazz.

— Eric Feber, **The Virginian Pilot**

This is a must for the many lovers of pure hard bop. What are the prime ingredients? Intensity, passion and great beauty.

— Ken Franckling, **Jazz Notes**

Harper breaks out on one of his extraordinary solo flights, his sound is huge and bold, swooping like a powerful eagle over the musical landscape.

It's great to see these experienced musicians getting a chance to play with each other and create vital and interesting music.

— Tim Niland, **Music and More**



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The Cookers, a dream group made up of jazz royalty, each a leader in their own right, has continued to prove that egos can be set aside when the joy of making strikingly original music is accomplished.

— **Audiophile Audition**

There's a sense of twilight on most tracks, which stylistically are firmly based in the intense and adventurous modal post-bop of the mid-'60s, a style which has aged so well that I'd even say it hasn't aged at all.

— **Culture Catch**

These guys aren't merely masters of their instruments; they're also composers and arrangers. Everything is beautifully arranged and swings wonderfully. ... This is pure jazz, as played by master artists. I loved it.

— Ric Bang, **Jazz Scan**

Talk about a blast out of the starting gate: Billy Harper's tenor saxophone just about jolts you out of your seat from note one of his *Cast the First Stone*.

"Peacemaker" owns a beautifully off-centered melody, one that enchants but is uncommon in its workings. It is a piece of art.

They own a full sound throughout — and this is in no small part because of the level of expertise we are dealing with here. They swing hard, and they improvise to the hilt, yet "Cast the First Stone" really sounds quite beautiful.

In the last 35 years, I've had my jazz ears bent quite a bit. What I love about this music is that a top-to-bottom, top-shelf ensemble such as The Cookers allows that to happen yet again.

— Jon Poses, **The Columbia Daily Tribune**

Pretty accurate to call this a jazz supergroup. All the members of this ensemble have been a vital part of the jazz landscape for decades, and based on their collaborative album *Believe*, that ain't gonna change anytime in the near future.

Their third album as the Cookers ensemble, and it has all the pure jazz buoyancy, swing, and musicianship that symbolize so much of what is great about Jazz.

— **Bird is the Worm**

A cohesive and focused effort that lives up to its all-star billing, *Cast the First Stone* transcends the clichés that hinder many similar sessions.

These legends play a vivacious strain of muscular acoustic jazz that establishes a historical through-line to the innovations of past masters, keeping the faith with passion and grace.

— Troy Collins, **All About Jazz**

The entire album delights, really. It's old-school jazz without in any way being old. And reminds us that jazz, at it's best, is both energetic and substantial.

— Matt Marshall, **Jazz Inside**



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The Times-Picayune

The Cookers blazed in a brainy, heartfelt show at New Orleans Jazz Fest

By Chris Waddington

On a blustery evening at New Orleans Jazz Fest, The Cookers raised temperatures to thermonuclear levels in the WWOZ Jazz Tent. In fact, the brainy, heartfelt American music conjured by this all-star septet tempts me to reach for the “Best of Fest” ribbon with two days left to go at the Fair Grounds.

If you’re not a jazz fan, (or a #BAM fan), this blazing band was also the biggest sleeper of the weekend.

Jazz acolytes knew better. Every artist on stage had already led notable bands, recorded widely, and performed with the grandmasters of improvising music.

Talk to most drummers on the Fair Grounds, for example, and they will have a story about Billy Hart: his impeccable time, his dramatic sense and the astounding range of colors he pulls from the kit. Hart added a few new stories at Jazz Fest, whether setting the incantatory mood of the opener with tom-tom rolls and cymbal crashes, or feeding the pulse in a modern waltz.

Mention George Cables to a pianist, and they’ll tell you something about his telepathic



abilities to support a soloist. On Friday he also embraced the history of his instrument in solos that mixed crashing octaves, trills, gospel chords and keyboard spanning arpeggios: a pan-stylistic feast that was, in the end, pure Cables.

Bassist Cecil McBee once tread the sun with free jazz icon Pharaoh Sanders, and he played musical chess with that master of harmony, Wayne Shorter. One understood why on Friday, as he provided the same services -- and an oceanic pulse -- for a powerful front line of two trumpets and two reeds. McBee also contributed some of the concert’s most compelling tunes,

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including a devastating contemporary blues.

The front line winds were just as distinguished as the rhythm section.

Tenor sax dynamo Billy Harper used to go head-to-head with Lee Morgan. He reprised some of the melodically memorable tunes he wrote for the late-great trumpet brave, including the medium tempo jazz waltz, “Croquet Ballet.” Harper’s horn dodged through the musical maze like a halfback, muscling the band with a burly, broad-shouldered sound and effective use of expressive distortions.

Eddie Henderson once played trumpet in Herbie Hancock’s pioneering electric bands, and he brought the same burnished brass sound to Jazz Fest. This trumpeter can take a wiggly interval and a minor theme and transform it into a cubist poem, complete with bullfight flourishes, speedy runs and dramatic pauses.

The quality didn’t fall off with the youngsters in the band. Craig Handy conjured slippery lines on alto saxophone, reaching deep into the baritone range with expressive honks and articulating cascades of notes in the stratosphere.

Trumpeter David Weiss is a mean improviser, as full-throated as Henderson, but a little tarter in his harmonic choices. That piquant harmonic sense also pervades his smart arrangements for The Cookers. He helped to make a seven-piece band sound like an orchestra. Even in thickly scored sections, he allowed individual voice to shine. (I guess that’s why Weiss used to write charts for Abbey Lincoln and Freddie Hubbard).

Put all those elements together and you have much more than an all-star jam. You have a remarkable band at the height of its collective powers.

Los Angeles Times

Bill Cosby makes more Playboy Jazz Festival memories

By Chris Barton

But it was the veteran jazz group Cookers that offered one of the weekend’s highlights with a hard-hitting set that seemed to catch Cosby’s ear. “This is the Playboy jazz festival,” Cosby yelled from his usual position at stage right, emphasizing the music that inspired the weekend-long party in the first place.

After the band (composed of players who

backed legends such as Lee Morgan, Andrew Hill and Art Blakey) swirled around a powerful solo from trumpeter David Weiss, Cosby walked onstage and said a few quiet words with Weiss and saxophonist Billy Harper. As the musicians laughed and the song continued to build around them, Cosby walked off the bandstand and back to his post, never looking back.

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Detroit Free Press
www.freep.com



The Cookers' front line, from left: tenor saxophonist Billy Harper, trumpeter David Weiss, trumpeter Eddie Henderson and alto saxophonist Craig Handy. Bassist Cecil McBee is behind them.

Experience and Youth Make A Noteworthy Combo in the Cookers

By MARK STRYKER

Talk about truth in advertising: The Cookers, an eye-popping septet led by the accomplished trumpeter, composer and arranger David Weiss, offers the promise of broiling intensity when it appears this weekend at the Jazz Café at Music Hall.

The Cookers pairs Weiss, 45, and alto saxophonist Craig Handy with five stalwarts from an older generation still at the top of their games: tenor saxophonist Billy Harper, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, pianist George Cables, bass-

ist Cecil McBee and drummer Billy Hart. The band, whose name descends from a pair of celebrated mid-'60s Blue Note LPs by trumpeters Freddie Hubbard and Lee Morgan, lives at the mainstream intersection of hard bop and post-bop. The music is swinging, in touch with the blues and girded by sturdy structures and sophisticated harmony but also willing to explore looser forms and freer rhythmic and harmonic conceptions.

The blend of experience and youth, the rich orchestration possibilities offered by four

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horns and especially the distinctive collection of personalities gives the band a unique complexion. The veterans are insider favorites known for their fierce energy and individual character. Hart in particular is among the most majestic drummers in contemporary jazz, and the band is stocked with imaginative composers.

“I wanted to put a band together of all these veterans I admired and wanted to work with and feature their music in the best possible light,” says Weiss. “No one of my generation or younger plays with the intensity and passion and freshness of these guys, so I would be foolish not to want to get a piece of that.”

Best known for the gleaming authority and professionalism he brings to all his endeavors, as well as his entrepreneurial spirit, Weiss has carved out his own niche on the New York scene. He’s always got something intriguing up his sleeve — from the Cookers to ensembles of his peers like the New Jazz Composers Octet, to thoughtful tribute projects dedicated to Lee Morgan and Wayne Shorter, to his Point of Departure Quintet that explores landmark but overlooked music from the ‘60s, including gems by the late Detroit pianist Kenn Cox and the Contemporary Jazz Quintet.

Weiss has contributed arrangements and transcriptions to some 80 recordings, including those by Freddie Hubbard, Phil Woods and Abbey Lincoln. He also developed a particularly significant working relationship with Hub-

bard, helping the innovative trumpeter find a comfortable creative outlet for his music as he struggled with embouchure trouble in the last years of his life.

Mostly, Weiss’ varied career illustrates one man’s answer to the central dilemma facing contemporary jazz musicians (actually, all artists in our post-modern age): How does one

develop a healthy relationship with the past? It’s an especially tricky riddle for well-schooled musicians assimilating their love for the pantheon and the talisman-like pull of classic recordings while still searching for their own voice. Weiss’ approach has been to develop something of a split personality, on the one hand leading bands of his peers to fulfill his passions as a composer, trumpeter and bandleader and on the other pursuing repertory projects and bands with personnel best-suited to the specific material and conception.

When it comes to the Cookers, whose personnel Weiss solidified about three

years ago, the point was to engage his elders on their terrain.

“I don’t think I would have any interest in playing this music with my peers or anyone younger,” he says. “It just doesn’t make any sense to me. That would really be looking back as opposed to playing this sort of music with the guys who are part of it. They don’t look back. They play this music fresh and with passion and intensity every day, and I feel I am part of something that is moving the music forward — or striving to all the time.”

Best known
for the gleaming
professionalism he brings
to all his endeavors,
as well as his
entrepreneurial spirit,
Weiss has carved out
his own niche
on the New York
scene.

The Seattle Times

The Cookers at Jazz Alley — the real thing

By Paul de Barros

The '50s and '60s were the golden age of jazz, then everything went to hell.

That's the orthodoxy, right? Sure, but you know what? It's wrong.

For anybody who was listening — and the problem was, not many were — the '70s ranks at the very least as a silver decade, a time when a new bop mainstream coalesced from the old. It was the period when piano players regularly began to navigate two keys at the same time, offering floating modal harmonies and altered scales all about color; when drummers implied two, sometimes three meters simultaneously, swinging easily in time signatures beyond 4/4; and when slinky melodies stopped and started and twisted and turned, often with intertwining horns and layered rhythms churning beneath.

If that sounds like something you like, get yourself down to Jazz Alley Tuesday or Wednesday for the Seattle debut of The Cookers. Started five years ago by New York trumpeter David Weiss as a Freddie Hubbard tribute band (the name comes from Hubbard's famous album), this all-star group plays with the coherence and abandon of a seasoned ensemble. It consists of George Cables (piano), Cecil McBee (bass), Billy Hart (drums), Billy Harper (tenor saxophone), Eddie Henderson (trumpet) and Weiss himself. (Alto saxophonist Craig Handy had to miss this gig because of a conflict.)

"Like it or not, that era produced the best musicians we've seen," explained Weiss in a phone interview from the San Francisco airport, after the band sold out two nights at Yoshi's in Oakland. "But they got short shrift, that generation. When it was their time to be stars, the labels were gone."

There's a label for them now — Motema — and the band's new album, aptly titled "Believe," is a cooker, indeed. Consisting of seven originals and a Wayne Shorter tune ("Free For All") and featuring rich, thick, smart arrangements by Weiss, "Believe" bristles with fiery conviction from start to finish. The two compositions by Cables — the lightly Latinish "Ebony Moonbeams" and an easy waltz, "But He Knows" — are special attractions. But the band also takes the Shorter tune to the precipice and back, with the locomotive Harper referencing late Coltrane, Handy kissing his solo goodbye with a wiggling gliss and Cables skittering over the keys like a mosquito with a mission.

"Tight Squeeze" gives Miles Davis and Shorter veteran McBee welcome space to shine, as Hart serves up a narrative on drums and cymbals that plays like a little story. Hart's celebratory closer, "Naaj," is that rare jazz tune you walk away from whistling.

For fans who grouse that Jazz Alley doesn't book enough "real jazz" these days, here's your chance.

Show up or shut up.

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The Boston Globe

THE REAL DEAL:

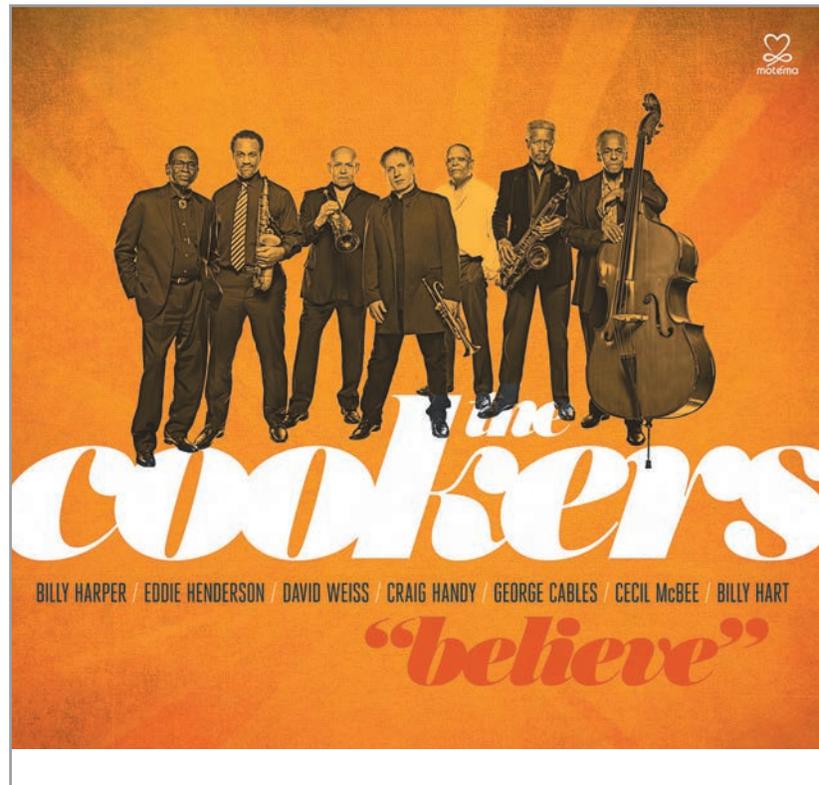
The Cookers make for one serious jazz combo

By Andrew Gilbert

Player for player, there's no better working band in jazz than the Cookers. Showcasing a cast of masters who came of age in the 1960s, the group started as a high-concept project and eventually developed its own identity, built upon decades of intertwining ties and a repertoire of brilliant original compositions.

The rhythm section alone is a formidable force with pianist George Cables, bassist Cecil McBee, and drummer Billy Hart, players who define the progressive post-bop continuum. While never a working trio, they recorded a gorgeous album under Cables's name in 1991, "Night and Day" (DIW).

Trumpeter Eddie Henderson and tenor saxophonist Billy Harper hail from roughly the same generation, and the Cookers embody the serious-as-death commitment that it took to thrive on the New York scene some four decades ago, when Henderson and Hart made his-



tory in Herbie Hancock's band Mwandishi and Harper and Cables toured with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers.

"We came up together and shared a lot of personal, musical, and conceptual experiences," says Cables, 66, whose exquisite lyricism led altoist Art Pepper to dub him Mr. Beautiful. "We've had musical and

personal relationships for many years and have a lot of shared memories."

For Harper, who grew up in Jim Crow Texas, the bond uniting the Cookers was forged equally off the bandstand, in the crucible of the civil rights movement. Possessing a huge, iron-hard sound and spiritually charged sensibility inspired by

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John Coltrane, he generates fearsome momentum in solos that can arc from the pews to the barricades.

“We went through the fire coming up in America,” says Harper, 68. “We had similar experiences dealing with those times. It makes you a lot tougher, and that’s what makes the group as driving as it is. We had to have a driving force in life even before we became musicians.”

A septet, the Cookers include two musicians who came up in the 1980s, saxophonist Craig Handy, best known as a long-time member of the Mingus Big Band, and trumpeter-arranger David Weiss. An inveterate organizer of bands, Weiss first assembled the ensemble about 10 years ago for a concert commemorating “The Night of the Cookers,” two classic 1965 Blue Note albums documenting a fiery jousting session between trumpeters Freddie Hubbard and Lee Morgan.

He rounded up most of the surviving players from the album, and the bandstand chemistry was potent enough to lead to several festival appearances. But after a few years, Weiss decided to recruit a new cast of players from Hubbard’s generation who could transform the Cookers from a tribute project into an independent ensemble.

“I got tired of the Lee Morgan-Freddie Hubbard angle,” says Weiss, whose latest album, “Point of Departure,” features some of the most compelling younger players on the scene. “I wanted to bring in new music.”

The first player he hired was Harper, with whom he was playing in Charles Tolliver’s big band. After recruiting the rest of the cast, Weiss introduced the new lineup at the 2007 Healdsburg Jazz Festival in California.

On the band’s 2010 debut “Warriors” (1-2-3-4 GO!), the group explores an impressive array

of material, including a sumptuous McBee ballad “Close to You Alone,” an entrancing Cables waltz “Spookarella,” and Harper’s numinous scorchers “Capra Black,” the title track of his classic 1973 Strata East debut featuring Cables.

“We have a balance between what we know will be incredibly intense from Billy Harper and prettier music from the other guys,” Weiss says. “It’s always about finding the right balance of both: the go-for-the-jugular and the dazzling pretty stuff.”

Harper is the band’s secret weapon, the player whose notoriety in the United States is farthest afield from his rarified accomplishments. After paying dues with such heavyweights as Elvin Jones, Gil Evans, and Morgan, he established himself as a leading

force in jazz’s 1970s black consciousness movement. Harper’s spiritual bent was so captivating that his 1975 album “Black Saint” became the first release on Black Saint, lending the celebrated Italian label its name.

“Outside of Sonny Rollins having a good night, there’s nobody playing more saxophone than Billy Harper,” Weiss says. “He comes out of the church. He’s got avant-garde touches, but everything he plays is so deeply rooted.”

Like his peers, Harper is a singular player at the peak of his powers. At 76, McBee is the only Cooker senior enough to attain the late-career glow that sometimes marks a player’s passage out of jazz’s dreaded middle-age doldrums. That is not to say that Cables, Hart, and Henderson are not working regularly, just that the red carpet they have earned is not often offered.

“Pound for pound you just can’t get any better than these cats,” Weiss says. “We’ve been doing it for four years, so it’s a real band, not just a concept. And these guys know what being in a band is about.”

The rhythm section
alone is a formidable
force.

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THE BOSTON
PHOENIX

The Cookers' Book

A “supergroup” maintains the standard

By JON GARELICK

When does a one-off gimmick turn into a “real” band? On the face of it, the Cookers, who come to Scullers next Thursday, June 16, could easily have become a gimmick that outlived its usefulness — a handful of wily veterans egged on by a couple of younger cats as a way to trade on the collective power of their names and score some gigs. But they’ve turned into more than that — an imposing band with an impressive book of original tunes, playing hard.

The Cookers is a cross-generational mix with a bias towards heroic progenitors. Billy Harper, Eddie Henderson, George Cables, Cecil McBee, and Billy Hart are all on the far side of official retirement age. Trumpeter David Weiss, the band’s musical director, is easily 20 years younger than anyone else in the group aside from his North Texas State contemporary, saxophonist Craig Handy. Now working off their second release, *Cast the*



First Stone (Plus Loin), they’re here for keeps. (They play the Scullers gig with one substitution — formidable young trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, in for Henderson.)

The band takes its name — and its origins — from *The Night of the Cookers*, a classic Blue Note disc of the hard-bop era, recorded live at Brooklyn’s Club La Marchal in 1965. The two LPs from that session featured just four side-long im-

provisations. Its two trumpet players, Freddie Hubbard and Lee Morgan, were still in their 20s and at the height of their powers. With alto saxophonist James Spaulding, pianist Harold Mabern Jr., bassist Larry Ridley, drummer Pete La Roca, and conga-player Big Black, it burns from start to finish. But it’s in the fierce sparring of the two brass players (it was essentially Hubbard’s band plus Morgan) that the album sus-

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tains its reputation.

Weiss — who worked closely with Hubbard in the last decade of the trumpeter’s life — put a version of the Cookers together at the request of another Brooklyn club owner in the early ‘00s. The anniversary of the original Night of the Cookers was coming up, which also happened to coincide closely with Hubbard’s birthday. Weiss was able to reconvene Ridley, Spaulding, and La Roca, with the addition of Ronnie Matthews — another hard-bop keyboard stalwart — filling in for Mabern.

“It sounded amazing,” recalls Weiss on the phone from his home in New York, “and it was a lot of fun. I was like, ‘How do I get to do this again?’ “ There were a few more club dates around New York and a festival gig here and there. “But like anything, at some point it became, ‘What can I really make this into?’ It’s fun to play Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard’s music, but that’s not how you get to whatever Holy Grail we’re looking for.”

Personnel evolved, with various former associates of Hubbard and Morgan coming and going, as well as the trumpeter Charles Tolliver. Eventually, the band settled into its current line-up. Aside from Harper having played in Morgan’s last band, and Cables being a regular with Hubbard, there were previous playing connections among everyone. The repertoire would comprise pieces by Harper, Cables, and McBee. “I went through their old records and found the tunes I liked,” says Weiss, “and they brought in their own tunes, and eventually we had a pretty good book.”

That book includes Harper’s driving, Coltrane-tinged hard-bop anthem “Capra Black,” the shapely, semi-comic start-stop of Cables’s medium-groove “Spookarella,” and McBee’s

classic blues line “Ladybug,” as well as (from the new album) his meditative “Peacemaker.”

Weiss says that Harper’s Capra Black album was a touchstone for him in college. “I listened to it to death.” And, originally, he leaned heavily on Harper for the Cookers’ sound. “Billy Harper is unbelievable — one of the most intense, impassioned tenor saxophone players ever. I don’t think anyone’s playing like that now — maybe Sonny Rollins on a good night. But that impassioned, go-for-the-jugular, loud, full, intense. . . ,” He pauses. His problem as a bandleader was, “How do we balance this?

Like, five straight tunes of Billy Harper and someone’s head might explode. And I can’t afford a lawsuit!” The solution was to bring in pieces by other band members. McBee is “the most open composer,” Weiss says. “He has his foot in all camps at all times,” and his credits include important contributions as a composer to the records of Charles Lloyd and

Keith Jarrett. And Weiss describes Cables as not only a leavening agent as a composer but “one of the most beautiful pianists out there.”

I mention how hard Hart and McBee have been playing lately, in bands like the Cookers and Saxophone Summit (another “supergroup” that’s also a real band — fronted by Joe Lovano, Davie Liebman, and Ravi Coltrane). Hart, like McBee, teaches at New England Conservatory and he’s always showing up in the bands of young Boston players. “He’s got an eternal curiosity,” says Weiss. “He wants to try everything. And he’s of two opinions: on the one hand he’ll complain about working too much, but then a younger band of mine will be playing a \$50 gig and he’ll ask me why I didn’t call him for it.”

... an imposing
band with an
impressive book
of original tunes,
playing hard.

THE COOKERS

FINANCIAL TIMES

The Cookers, Ronnie Scott's London

By Mike Hobart

The Cookers are an all-star band of seasoned New York modernists who name themselves after a Blue Note-recorded mid-60s jam session, when modernism, modality and free jazz met on equal terms.

Then the music was experimental, optimistic and tinged with rage, but at this gig, the four horns developed the long themes and complex structures with a knowing, technical edge. Cross-rhythms jittered, tensions rarely resolved and the idiosyncratic sat next to the common stock. And as each soloist navigated the treacherous waters, with a handful of themes spread over two long sets, this intense and thought-provoking gig increasingly seemed to capture the temper of the times.

As on the recording there are two contrasting trumpeters – at this gig Dave Weiss, poised and technical; Eddie Henderson, urbane and lustrous-toned – a fiery saxophonist – Billy Harper on tenor sax – and a pulsating piano-led rhythm section. The Cookers add an extra horn, alto-saxophonist Craig Handy, and draw on a repertoire of tightly arranged in-style originals that sit well beside the occasional cover.

The first set opened with the four horns swelling over an ominous pedal, morphed to a storytelling theme and threw in a few lines of bop. With a quick burst of improv to round things off, Billy Harper's "Capra Black" neatly

displayed the band's stylistic palette in one fell swoop, underpinning each segment with firm rhythms and harmonies to bite into. In less experienced hands, structures like this become hurdles to climb, but here they were landscapes to explore, with each musician taking a different path.

Cecil McBee's "The Peacemaker" followed, the rhythm section spacious around the bassist's off-kilter thrums. As before, the theme evolved through mood and motif, and pensive and purposeful solos were urged on by riffs and ominous sustains. Later, angular lines decelerated to a smoky blues, three beats were built into a concerto and a sweet a cappella riff slowly lost notes on the

nod – it ended as a single short stab. The finale covered Freddy Hubbard's up-tempo "Free for All", an abrasive climax of exploding modes, jagged runs and a melodic thrash from drummer Billy Hart.

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Hard bop heroes the Cookers return for brace of UK dates

By Stephen Graham

Sometimes the word ‘supergroup’ is just unavoidable. No matter which way round you want to call it, ‘band’ or “all-star” line-up, just won’t do. The Cookers, who return to London for two dates next week, is definitely and unashamedly a supergroup. And, into the bargain, it’s an aggregation that digs deep into the heartland of hard bop without coming off second best. It pays tribute but there’s no cynicism involved and the band members contribute tunes that stand up well on their own merits as well as returning to some of their own compositions from differing times in their own careers as leaders.

The Cookers take their name from a Freddie Hubbard double LP set *The Night of the Cookers: Live at Club La Marchal*, which the late great trumpeter recorded in Brooklyn with fellow horn man the jazz clubbers-favourite Lee Morgan, James Spaulding (who guested on Gregory Porter’s *Water* more recently), Harold Mabern Jr, Larry Ridley, Pete LaRoca and Big Black back in 1965 for Blue Note records. Trumpeter and bandleader David Weiss, who was a friend and playing colleague of Hubbard’s in the latter years of his life, put The Cookers together partly in name at least to pay homage to Hubbard and the music he stood for, but also as a showcase for some fine players who have the right chemistry as well as the supreme musicianship to play in a band together. As Tony Hall has written in *Jazzwise*: “If you wondered what has happened to all the passion and intensity, once such essential ingredients of great swinging jazz and now virtu-

ally non-existent in so much of today’s outpourings, you’ll find it all in The Cookers.”

With Weiss there’s ‘conscious’ tenor saxophone hero Billy Harper, trumpeter Eddie Henderson of Mwandishi fame, tenor saxophonist Craig Handy, like Henderson known for his work with Herbie Hancock and who has played with David Weiss in their own band, classy pianist George Cables who played keyboards on the Hubbard album *Liquid Love* in the 1970s, legendary Charles Lloyd Quartet bassist Cecil McBee, and the great drummer Billy Hart, like Henderson a stalwart of Herbie’s Mwandishi band in the 70s.

The great thing about hard bop as opposed to certain period styles, and the UK’s Empirical prove this as an example that springs immediately to mind, is that the style is adaptable enough to not sound terribly dated when young players come to it with their own ideas. Compare it to say early jazz styles from the 1930s and 40s like stride, boogie-woogie or swing, even orthodox bebop, and you’ll get the idea. And when the veterans play it: you’re into another dimension. Hard bop always sounded modern and when its main building blocks are put into a blender with the passage of time and new twists as the active ingredients it always comes up trumps. Players like the members of The Cookers were never ones to stick to the orthodox in any case, and that’s partly why their London shows are so exciting a prospect. If you’re going along, keep an ear out to see if they play ‘The Core’ from their ear-catching album *Warriors*, and Harper’s ‘Capra Black’ the spiritual title-track from his famous thought provoking black consciousness album.

THE COOKERS

COLUMBIA DAILY
TRIBUNE

The Cookers live up to their name, namesakes on new CD

By Jon Poses

Talk about a blast out of the starting gate: Billy Harper's tenor saxophone just about jolts you out of your seat from note one of his "Cast the First Stone," the title track from The Cookers' latest disc (Plus Loin), an album that follows the group's well-received "Warriors" (Jazz Legacy Productions). The group is an ebullient ensemble composed of supreme veterans, each who is a leader in his own right, virtually has total command of his instrument and, in varying degrees, is at the pinnacle of his technical prowess.

The Cookers take their name from one of Blue Note Records' classic recordings, a 1965 live release, "Night of the Cookers," that came out under the late trumpeter Freddie Hubbard's name but housed an all-star ensemble, including Lee Morgan, a legendary trumpet counterpart, alto saxophonist/flutist James Spaulding and a tremendous rhythm section composed of pianist Harold Mabern, bassist Larry Ridley and drummer Pete LaRoca. The session consists of only four tunes, each running more than 20 minutes in length. Can you say "radio-friendly"? Who cares when you're laying it out like that?

The present-day group matches its predecessor's power and complex intensity. Joining producer/trumpeter David Weiss and saxophonist Harper on the front line are trumpeter Eddie

Henderson and Craig Handy, one of the most versatile and gifted reed players who now serves as musical director of the Mingus Big Band, plays as a member of trombonist Conrad Herwig's Latin Side All-Star Band and works with vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater. Handy is heard here on alto saxophone on five of the session's seven pieces. Meanwhile, the rhythm section boasts an A-plus contingent of George Cables on piano, Cecil

McBee on bass and Billy Hart on drums. Just for good measure, veteran Azar Lawrence offers a second tenor saxophone on three cuts and soprano saxophone on another operating as a "special guest."

As I listened to the disc, with all of its engaging, remarkable solos that are at times outdone by the wonderful arrangements and ensemble playing, I was reminded of another cooperative group where

McBee had shouldered the bass piece — The Leaders, who, like this outfit, had the capability of pounding notes inside and out, playing the blues, stopping and turning on a dime and serving as a powerhouse. In fact, the second tune here is a nearly 11-minute reading of McBee's "Peacemaker." When it came on, I realized I knew the tune. It struck me he had recorded the selection on two previous Leaders' discs — one as a sextet and one as a trio. "Peacemaker" owns a beautifully off-centered melody, one that enchants but is uncommon in its workings. It is a

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to a small orchestra

THE COOKERS

piece of art.

Coltrane-esque in much of their approach, the members of The Cookers have managed to put together a kind of “crash-and-burn” approach, selections that have a density and a kind of tone-poem quality at myriad passages. Yet there also are truly scintillating solos set throughout “Cast the First Stone.” Equally important is the fact all the harmonic playing and interplay between the individuals gives one the sense The Cookers are much more than a septet; rather, the group is tantamount to a small orchestra.

They own a full sound throughout — and

this is in no small part because of the level of expertise we are dealing with here. They swing hard, and they improvise to the hilt, yet “Cast the First Stone” really sounds quite beautiful. I think they saved the best for the last cut, “The Chief,” that, by the way, was written by Mabern circa 1970 when he was a member of original Cooker Morgan’s quintet. Not surprisingly, it showcases Cables, who lays out a spectacular piano solo. In the last 35 years, I’ve had my jazz ears bent quite a bit. What I love about this music is that a top-to-bottom, top-shelf ensemble such as The Cookers allows that to happen yet again.

OTTAWA  CITIZEN

Now that’s what I call cooking

By Peter Hum

When the veteran all-star septet The Cookers released its disc *Warriors* last year, I complained that there wasn’t enough cooking. Despite the abilities and proclivities of some of the band’s storied members — gale-force tenor man Billy Harper, the gloriously thrasher of drummer, Billy Hart, *Warriors* was just a little too tepid — almost mystifyingly so.

Good news: *Cast the First Stone* — which is on the laissez-faire French label Plus Loin as opposed the Jazz Legacy label that put out *Warriors* — cooks like crazy. Its seven tracks feature a lot of righteous bashing from veteran jazzmen in their late 60s and early 70s who play with remarkable vigour and risk-taking. Drawing equally on the wall-of-sound horn section of an Art Blakey messengers band and on the maximum drums/modal fury esthetic of the great John Coltrane Quartet, The Cookers raise the bar for intensity in this style of jazz. You could think of this disc as a sequel of sorts to the seminal powerful Blakey disc, *Free For All*.

Of the disc’s seven tracks, three are from the distinctive pen of Harper. His title track and his minor blues *The Seventh Day* are dark, dramatic and built to spur furious, committed solos. He and trumpeter David Weiss in particular deliver on the promise of these tunes even as the rhythm section expands and contracts mightily behind them. Harper also wrote the waltzing *Croquet Ballet*, which is slightly prettier — especially thanks to Weiss’ arrangement — but still hard-hitting.

The band’s pianist George Cables contributed two tunes — the 3/4 tune *Look to the Light* and his well-known *Think on Me*. They are not quite as volcanic as Harper’s songs but they are still sturdy vehicles for forthright expression. Cecil McBee’s *Peacemaker* is in relative terms a more sedate straight-eighths tune, affording space for Eddie Henderson’s muted horn, Craig Handy’s alto saxophone and the composer’s own pliant bass.. The closing tune, *The Chief* by pianist Harold Mabern, is breakneck fast, with bracing solos by Harper, and Cables. Does it cook? It boils over.

THE COOKERS

San Francisco Chronicle

At Healdsburg Jazz Festival, the tradition is untraditional

By David Rubien

Sometimes conversations about jazz start to sound like the debate between evolutionists and creationists.

In the evolution corner, advocates point out that, duh, jazz has evolved at breathtaking speed from the ragtime and stride of the early 20th century to the post- post-what-ever that exists today, and argue that without constantly transforming into the next new thing, jazz ceases to exist in a meaningful way.

In the creationism corner, advocates, using Ellington or Monk as stand-ins for the Lord, sayeth, “In the beginning there was the blues, and there was swing, and, verily, it was good.” Anything that deviates from those two fundamentals is the work of pagans and heathens, not real jazz, easily dismissed.

This is an argument that the creationists won a long time ago. The top creationist, Wynton Marsalis, rules the roost, and the evolutionists have had to make accommodations.

The Cookers’ horn players consist of (clockwise from top left) Billy Harper, Eddie Henderson, David Weiss and Craig Handy.

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THE COOKERS

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The institutional focus of jazz since 1980 has been relentlessly on tradition, on exalting and studying -- the evolutionists would say, "copying" -- the masters. This year, during SF-Jazz's Spring Season, the subject was Thelonious Monk. In the recent past across the country we've seen cottage industries spring up around John Coltrane and Louis Armstrong.

That's all fine, as far as it goes. But if jazz is going to look backward, why not take a less predictable route? Why not consider some of the dozens of artists who may not be considered "the

giants," but who are brilliant players nonetheless, and who were engines of important movements in the music? And significantly enough, many of them are still alive and performing.

Witness the current version of the Cookers, who play Friday night at the Healdsburg Jazz Festival, which is in its ninth year -- no mean feat. The festival's marquee gig on Saturday is a duet of guitarist Jim Hall and bassist Dave Holland -- two giants of jazz by anyone's standard. But the Cookers' show, as well as Sunday's closer, pianist George Cables' Project, are more emblematic of this idiosyncratic festival and are a window into the jazz tradition that's, well, less traditional.

The Epoch Times

Brilliant Line-Up at the SummerStage Charlie Parker Jazz Festival

By Annie Wu

On a late summer afternoon in the city, temperatures outside were probably enough to melt asphalt, but that did not stop local jazz lovers from leaving the comfort of their air-conditioned homes and congregating at Tompkins Square Park in East Village for the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, an annual two-day musical festivity in celebration of the bebop legend Charlie "Yardbird" Parker.

Next, The Cookers performed, with each artist showing incredible prowess in their playing. Billy Harper was on tenor saxophone, Eddie Henderson and David



Hard bop ensemble The Cookers wows audiences with their incredible musical prowess. (Annie Wu/The Epoch Times)

Weiss on trumpet, Craig Handy on alto saxophone, George Cables on piano, Cecil McBee on bass, and Billy Hart on drums.

THE COOKERS

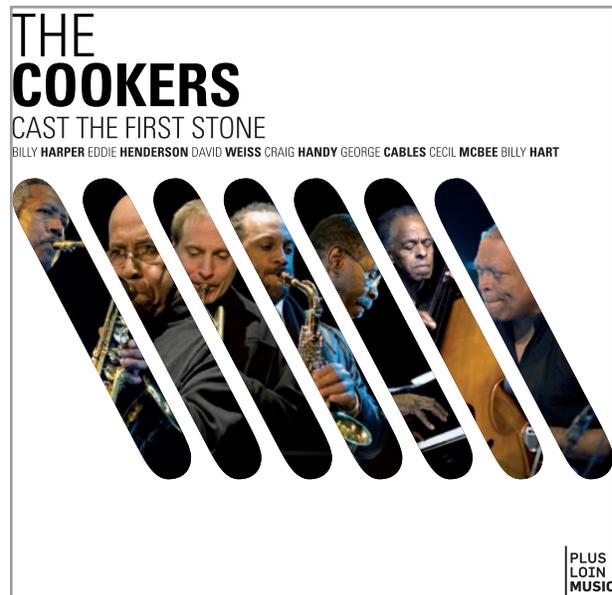
Los Angeles Times

Culture Watch: The Cookers' 'Cast the First Stone' CD

By Chris Barton

.... Primarily composed of jazz warhorses who backed '60s giants such as Lee Morgan, Herbie Hancock and Charles Lloyd, this hard-hitting septet wears its name like a mission statement. Inspired by the Blue Note live album series "Night of the Cookers," this taut, seven-song set carries the freely developing yet sympathetic interplay of a late-night jam session, offering plenty of room for each soloist to stretch.

Saxophonist Billy Harper sets the tone with the album-opening title track, which features a tough bit of soloing between an insistent melody, and fellow jazz veteran Azar Lawrence lends



a graceful soprano saxophone to "Looking for the Light," one of several moments in which the group turns down the heat but maintains a steady boil. Rich with a mix of classic elegance and exploration, the group might reference the past by name, but it never sounds less than current.



Four More Recommended New Releases

By Patrick Jarenwattananon

David Weiss is a trumpeter with an clear affection for the later generations of hard bop. He maintains a band called Point of Departure (after the Andrew Hill album, ostensibly) inspired by the spirit of the late '60s; there and otherwise, his compositions and arrangement start from that hard-driving feel and harmonic richness. And he's the organizing force behind this band

of underrecognized veterans, many of whom have been on the scene since the '60s and '70s.

As The Cookers, Billy Harper, Eddie Henderson, George Cables, Cecil McBee, and Billy Hart — joined by Weiss and saxophonist Craig Handy — have this one disc out now, and another already in the can. These are their original tunes, and they all burn, conveying intensity with a loose, ragged feel.

Editor's Picks

By Frank Alkyer

With *Believe*, The Cookers hooked me from the first horn blast on the first tune, "Believe, For It Is True." This masterpiece alone, composed and arranged by tenor genius Billy Harper, should be enough for jazz fans to buy the whole darn album. It is everything, in a snapshot, that makes The Cookers a must-see band on the festival circuit this summer. The musicians in The Cookers are ringers who take no prisoners. Harper, Cecil McBee on bass, George Cables on piano, David Weiss and Eddie Henderson on trumpet, Craig Handy on alto and Billy Hart on drums are some of the best composers, arrangers and musicians we have in jazz, and they're working together in one of the most exciting super-groups we've seen in a

long, long time. *Believe* is the third, and my personal favorite, Cookers record. Founded and organized by Weiss, the group has settled into a tight comfort zone that comes from working together over the long haul. The arrangements, handled by Harper and Weiss, are outrageously wonderful. And the musicians just kill it on every tune. "Free For All," a Wayne Shorter composition, offers a perfect example of what makes The Cookers so special. Weiss' arrangement provides a driving, up-tempo romp. The horn-section work is precise and impeccably power-packed. Then comes a series of mind-bending solos by Harper, Henderson, Handy, Cables and Hart. This is a group of the world's best musicians who have nothing to prove to anyone, but they prove it all on *Believe*.

Point of Departure

an online music journal

Moment's Notice: Reviews of Recent Recordings

by Bill Shoemaker

The Cookers, Warriors

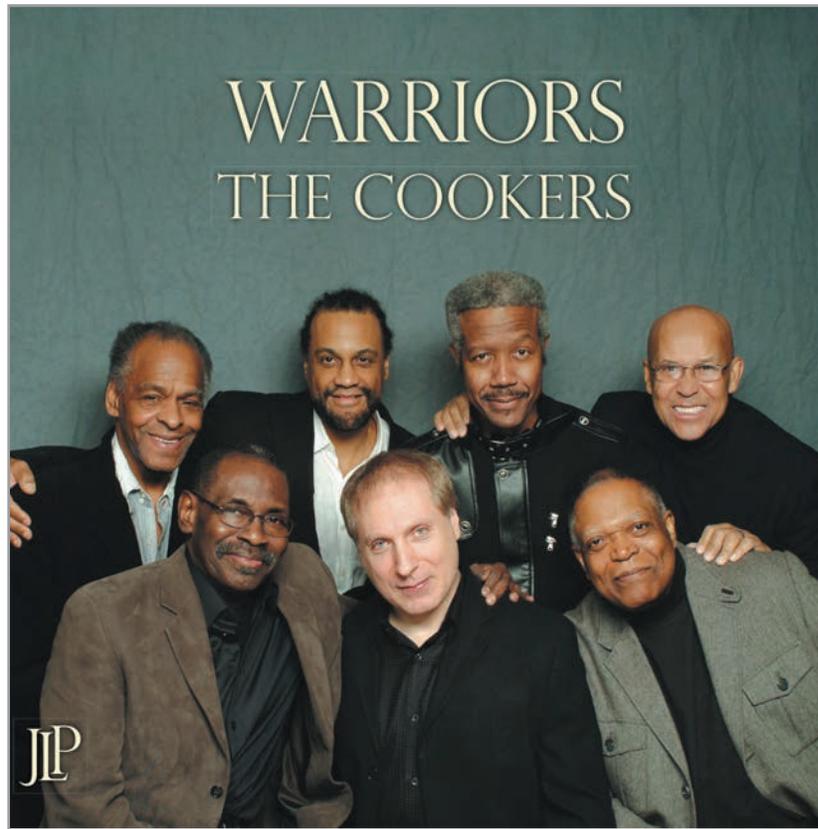
Instigated by trumpeter David Weiss, one of the more determined flame-keepers of recent years, The Cookers reunites several musicians whose decades-long associations affirm the progressive spirit of early '70s straight-ahead jazz, one which is always needed now more

than ever. There are very few musicians that embody this notion as persuasively as tenor saxophonist Billy Harper, and it's telling that most of the septet worked with him at critical junctures: Pianist George Cables played on Harper's classic '73 *Strata East* album, Cap-

THE COOKERS

ra Black. Billy Hart was the drummer of another stellar ensemble that debuted on Strata East – Great Friends, the collective rounded out by Stanley Cowell, Sonny Fortune and Reggie Workman. Trumpeter Eddie Henderson, who first played with Harper in the Jazz Messengers’ front line, joined Harper on his under-heralded Somalia (Evidence), the palpable ’93 plea to end famine and violence in the failed East African state. Hart and Henderson blazed one of the more significant trails in fusion with Herbie Hancock’s Mwandishi sextet; the drummer also performed on bassist Cecil McBee’s ’74 debut as a leader – Mutima, also on Strata-East.

However, the sum of the music far exceeds the total of discographical connections between the five veterans; to this end, the presence of Weiss and Craig Handy, heard on both alto saxophone and flute, cannot be overstated. They beef up the ensembles to fully realize the distinguishing details of Cables, Harper and McBee’s compositions (it’s disappointing that none of Hart’s are included); the vigor and fluency of their solos compare well with the veterans’. Respectively, Weiss and Handy have the unenviable task of



following a classic exclamatory Harper solo on “Priestess,” one of his signature anthems; another is “Capra Black,” on which Weiss again follows Harper in the solo order. Both the trumpeter and the altoist understand the key to Harper’s pieces is the specificity of his phraseology, which draws upon everything from gospel to traditional Japanese music, as much as their thunderous locomotion.

Weiss also deftly arranges Cables and McBee’s compositions; Handy’s flute capers

nimbly on the pianist’s lissome “Spookarella” while his alto projects vulnerable warmth on the bassist’s ballad, “Close to You Alone.” Subsequently, the veterans’ consistently sterling work is presented within a context that is organic, the polar opposite of most all-star band schemes.

Had they not already settled on “The Cookers,” a perfectly tailored name for the septet would have been the title of the fiery Freddie Hubbard tune they nail to lead off the album – “The Core.”

THE COOKERS

JazzTimes

The Cookers *Believe*

By Thomas Conrad

Few all-star groups are also working bands. The personnel of the Cookers has been stable for half a decade. They play 30 to 40 gigs a year and have now made three albums. They are Billy Harper (tenor saxophone), Craig Handy (alto saxophone), Eddie Henderson (trumpet), George Cables (piano), Cecil McBee (bass) and Billy Hart (drums). David Weiss, who conceived, organized and administers this project, also plays trumpet and handles most of the arrangements.

These are major players who have not quite become household names. Perhaps that is why, for all their solo firepower, there is a selflessness in their dedication to the ensemble cause. Most of the tunes are composed by Harper, Cables or McBee and were first recorded 20 to 40 years ago. The first two albums contained their strongest songs, but the pieces on *Believe* are interesting because they are more open and the

execution is edgier. Harper's "Believe, For It Is True" is portentous. The start-and-stop tension is released when its composer blasts in for a raw, caterwauling solo. McBee's asymmetrical "Tight Squeeze" provokes jagged responses from Harper, Weiss and Hart. Even a cooler, more lyrical piece like Cables' "But He Knows" inspires a hot, fierce reaction from Handy.

The Cookers are hard-wired into a golden era of jazz history, but they use tradition as a foundation for creative fury in the present moment. Wayne Shorter's "Free for All" is the only tune not written by a member of the band. For 12 minutes, the solos are passionate mountain-top calls to the multitudes. After Harper's guttural, commanding summons and Handy's singing cries, Hart breaks time loose and scatters it around as only Hart can. All the while, "Free for All" is tied together by the recurrent explosive riffs of Weiss' arrangement.

JazzTimes

THE COOKERS • Warriors (JLP)

By Thomas Conrad

David Weiss' most important contributions to jazz have been the projects he conceives and coordinates. His latest undertaking is the Cookers, whose members have 250 years of collective experience and more than 1,000 recording credits. Weiss plays trumpet and Craig Handy plays alto saxophone and flute. Then there are

five major but somewhat overlooked heavy hitters, best known from the 1960s and '70s, who can still play their butts off: Billy Harper (tenor saxophone), Eddie Henderson (trumpet), George Cables (piano), Cecil McBee (bass) and Billy Hart (drums).

The Cookers is not a typical all-star group but a tight working band. They have been together since June 2007 and play 20 to 30 gigs a year. Warriors is their first recording. On the

THE COOKERS

opening track, Freddie Hubbard's "The Core," the solos are fierce and keep coming. But even with all the solo firepower here, Warriors is not a blowing session. The other seven tracks, all originals by band members, include a ballad and two graceful, light-footed waltzes. Weiss' arrangements, with their horn backgrounds and recurring themes, treat the septet like a little big band.

McBee's "Close to You Alone," like all the best ballads, balances emotional exposure with dignified reserve. It is a feature for Handy, whose tone on alto saxophone is luminous but too human to be entirely pure. He searches passionately through the song and the other horns come in quietly behind him to reinforce the crescendos.

Billy Harper's "Capra Black" and "Priestess" are both dramatic anthems, with tumultuous solos from the composer. On "Capra Black" he announces himself with a guttural roar. Likewise, "Priestess" launches Harper like a slingshot: There is no tenor saxophonist in current jazz whose entrance can create such a jolt of adrenaline. (There was once one named Coltrane.)

THE COOKERS • Cast the First Stone

(Plus Loin)

By Owen Cordle

This band takes its name from The Night of the Cookers, the 1965 Blue Note live set recorded by trumpeters Freddie Hubbard and Lee

Morgan. On this second release, Blue Note values prevail: hard-driving rhythms; soulful solos; exuberant ensemble work; a feeling that jazz is a serious, meaningful calling but also fun. The cast includes '60s- and '70s-era veterans Billy Harper (tenor saxophone),

The title cut, by Harper, opens the album. The composer's raw, impassioned lead and the ensemble's intense, jabbing responses quickly indicate that this is a special session. A slower section expands the horn harmony, and there's that old revered Blue Note sound hitting you in your head-to-heart circuitry. Two other Harper compositions, "The Seventh Day" and "Croquet Ballet," appear later in the program. Harper's spirituality as a player and writer is galvanizing.

Other cuts include McBee's "Peacemaker," Cables' "Looking for the Light" and "Think on Me," and Harold Mabern's "The Chief." There's not a lackluster solo on the album, and McBee and Hart ably hold the group together while also accentuating and inspiring the soloists. Cables' fluid runs and springy beat counterbalance the heavier steps of his rhythm mates. In the solo department, Weiss is more Hubbard (as heard on "The Seventh Day") and Henderson more Miles Davis ("Peacemaker"). Handy and Lawrence cook as well. Simply put, this album speaks the real gospel of jazz.

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THE COOKERS

Lucid Culture

The Cookers Heat Up, Oldschool Style

Soul radiates from the grooves here – or from whatever a mp3 is made of. The Cookers' new album *Warriors* also has camaraderie, and chemistry, and purism. These jazz veterans – Billy Harper on tenor, Craig Handy on flute and alto, Eddie Henderson and David Weiss on trumpet and flugelhorn, George Cables on piano, Cecil McBee on bass and Billy Hart on drums – mine a rich, oldschool 60s vein, alternately slinky, contemplative, joyous and adrenalized, often nocturnal but sometimes not. The band take their name from the legendary Freddie Hubbard album *Night of the Cookers* – imagine the *Jazz Passengers* without Blakey overdoing it, and you'd be somewhere in the vicinity of what this sounds like. The ensemble passages blaze, or offer lush ambience – it's hard to believe sometimes that this is only a septet and not a big band.

Melody is everywhere, in the central themes and in the solos, and it isn't just solos around the horn, either: it's all about the songs. And they are songs in the purest sense of the word.

The opening track *The Core* builds with simple gravitas and eventually catches fire, lit by a tersely majestic Cables motif, aggressive hard-charging solos from Henderson and Harper, Weiss bringing the band back. *Spookarella* is less spooky than cinematic, its ensemble intro reaching a blithe crescendo, Handy's carefree flute solo juxtaposed with Cables' subtly shifting, almost hypnotic block chords. The pianist is the star of this cut (and in an unostentatious, methodical way, perhaps the star of the entire album), in this case

with a deftly polyrhythmic solo. The understatedly sexy boudoir ballad *Close To You Alone* lets Handy state his case expansively on alto while the ambience grows almost imperceptibly behind him – he's got something up his sleeve and he makes it worth your while. Priestess works variations on a hook that sounds suspiciously like the one from *SOS* by Abba, a showcase for a gruffly lightning solo from Harper, Weiss playing the voice of reason and Handy upping the ante once again with some sizzling doublestops before what's left of the hook returns at half the speed, worn out from everything that just happened.

Live at the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival last month, the jazz waltz *Sweet Rita Suite 2* took on an ominous glimmer; here, the darkness is limited to Cables furtively shadowing Handy's cheery flute. But *Capra Black* is every bit as potent as

the version they played there, rich with ambience behind the solos, Weiss again playing wiser buddy to Harper's fearless exuberance, Henderson feeling the electricity in summer night air, Cables the man half-behind the curtain, guiding the entire thing with judiciously sparse intensity. They close on a high note with the methodically swinging, vividly noirish *Ladybugg*, Cables and McBee stepping out of the shadows and then back in, followed by the powerhouse, aptly titled *U Phoria*, ablaze with trumpets, a stinging minor blues solo by Cables and matter-of-factly unstoppable incisiveness from Hart on the cymbals. Count this as one of our top ten jazz favorites for 2010. It's out now on *Jazz Legacy*.

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is only a septet
and not a big band.