

Each month we test a musician with a series of records which they're asked to comment on and "mark out of five" – with no prior knowledge of what it is they're hearing! This month: Mark Springer takes the test with Philip Watson.

CO-FOUNDER OF cult British pop-jazz group Rip, Rig & Panic, Mark Springer has always pledged musical allegiance to a very broad church. Classically trained and able to play Mozart by ear from an early age, Springer enjoyed a catholic musical upbringing which took in everything from Chopin to David Essex. Most obsessively of all, it also included jazz, and the legacy of Coltrane, Monk, Cecil Taylor and Eric Dolphy continues to play an important role in his music.

Since leaving RR&P in 1983, 31-year-old Springer has concentrated on a solo career which explores these multifarious influences. A solo LP, *Piano*, was released in 1985, and last year he recorded the much-applauded *Swans And Turtles* with viola player Sarah Sarhandi, a former member of RR&P. Springer has also written music for theatre, television and cinema. His music to a BBC2 play, *The Fall Out Guy*, can be heard this month, as can his second solo project, an album of 20 original compositions entitled *Menu* (Virgin Venture).

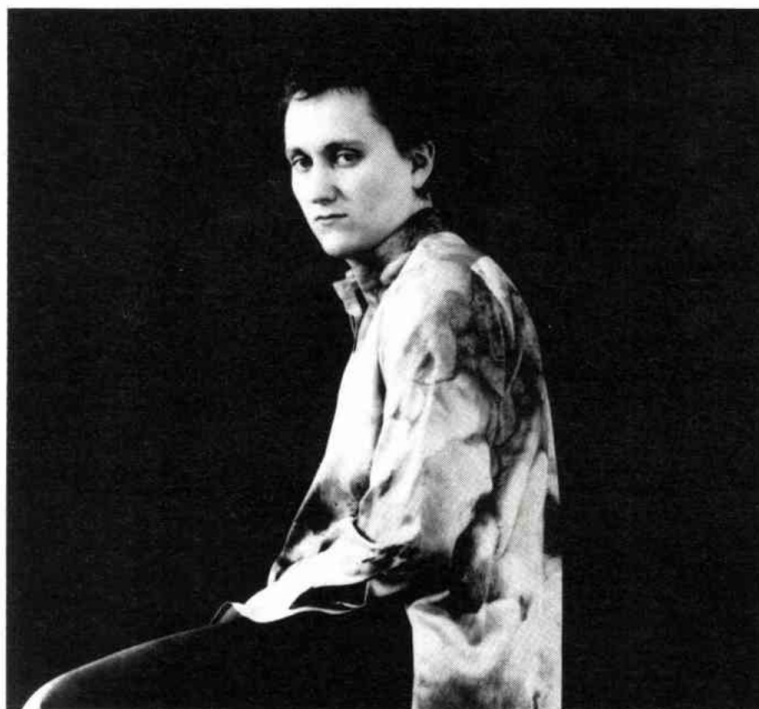
#### BILL EVANS

"My Man's Gone Now" from *Sunday At The Village Vanguard* (Riverside). Evans (p); Scott LaFaro (b); Paul Motion (d).

It's got that 60s Blue Note feel to it, but it's not McCoy Tyner or Herbie Hancock. Is it Bill Evans? I like his playing a lot; I like the sensitivity. It's not got some of the clichés that pianists can lapse into; it feels very fresh to the moment. He tried to be more and more open each time he played, and I can relate to the spirit of that. Sometimes you have to shed the things you know to come up with new material. It's very beautiful: three stars.

#### GLENN GOULD

"Prelude and Fugue in A minor" from *Bach Preludes, Fughettas & Fugues* (CBS). Gould (p).



Mark Springer

(*Straightaway*) That's a quote from a Bach prelude. It's a two-part invention. It's Glenn Gould – because there's no pedal and it's very clear. He makes the piano sound like a harpsichord. Using little pedal is not a great way to play, but it does allow him to get into the percussiveness of the piece. Gould is a brilliant interpreter of Bach. I'll give it two-and-a-half.

#### KEITH JARRETT

"Nagoya, Part IIb (Encore)" from *Sun Bear Concerts* (ECM). Jarrett (p).

It sounds like Gurdjieff or some kind of Eastern thing. Oh, it's Keith Jarrett – didn't he do an album based around the Gurdjieff's music (*Sacred Hymns*)? There was a time when I was really into Keith Jarrett, especially the early stuff, but I must say I have become less and less impressed with him. Pianistically, he's quite limited; he doesn't utilise the full range of sounds. And he's very restricted dynamically. I haven't heard this album, but I feel that I have – it could be from any one of

his records: two stars.

#### FATS DOMINO

"Everybody's Got Something To Hide Except Me And My Monkey" (Reprise single). Domino (p, v); (other personnel not listed).

It's a Beatles tune, and it's much better than how the Beatles did it, but I can't place the pianist.

*It's Fats Domino.*

Is it? I thought he was bluesier than this but, to be honest, I don't know much about him. I like it, it's got a lot of drive, but I'm not made on Beatles tunes, and I couldn't say he's a particularly memorable player. I'll give it two again.

#### MITSUKO UCHIDA

"Pour Les 'Cinq Doigts'" from *Douze Etudes Pour Piano* (Philips). Uchida (p).

That's great. Is it Debussy? *L'Isle Joyeuse*? Is it a woman playing? I could sense it in the way she's playing, the type of touch. Because I've

worked with Sarah (Sarhandi) for so long, maybe I can sense a woman musician. It sounds like Martha Argerich.

*It's Mitsuko Uchida.*

Oh, I would have said her, but I've never heard her play Debussy. I think she's fantastic. She has the two ingredients that a pianist should possess – she's very sensitive and she knows how to create a beautiful sound. The thing about pianos is that you almost have to create your own obsessive world of sound in spite of and not because of the instrument, and she does that. That's excited me more than anything else, but, still, I'm hard to please: four stars.

#### MICHAEL NYMAN

"Miserere Paraphrase" from *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* soundtrack (Virgin Venture). Nyman (p); Alexander Balanescu (vn).

This is quite wacky – it sounds like German Expressionist music or Kurt Weill. Oh, it's Michael Nyman – it's from one of the

Greenaway movies. I quite like it actually. I don't think it's inspired, but I like his rawness compared to the smoothness of Philip Glass. I think Nyman and Greenaway are great collaborators – the music very much works with the pictures – but as music in itself, it lacks something, and all great music has to stand on its own. Ultimately, this is not really going anywhere, so I'd say three stars.

#### STAN TRACEY

"Air On A Shoestring" from *Tandem* (Ogun). Mike Osborne (as); Tracey (p).

The alto player sounds like Ornette. It's great – I love the piano playing. Is the sax player Braxton?

*Think British.*

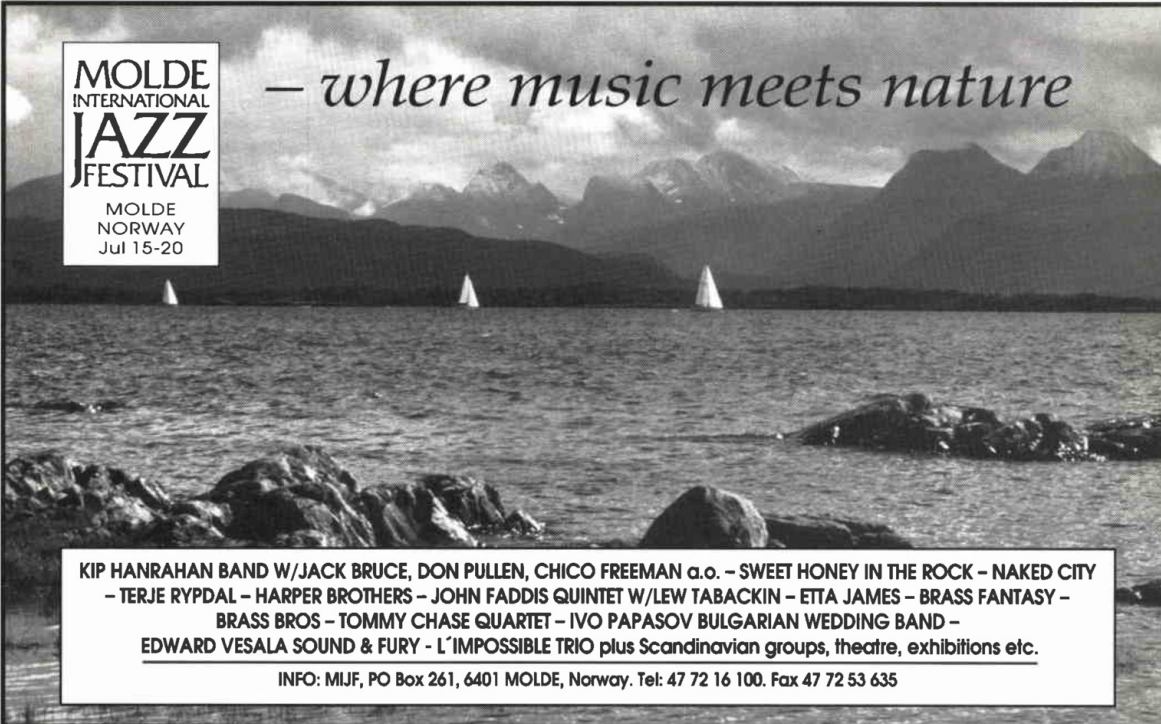
Well, the only guy who plays the piano like this is Howard Riley or Keith Tippett, but it doesn't actually sound like either of them. Ah, it's Stan Tracey, but I liked it before he got into this part (more melodic and rhythmic). I like it when he goes off

more. I wasn't mad on Stan Tracey until now, but I like the feel of this, I like the freedom and movement; three stars.

#### CECIL TAYLOR

"Excursions On A Wobbly Rail" from *Looking Ahead!* (Contemporary). Taylor (p); Earl Griffith (vib); Buell Neidlinger (b); Dennis Charles (d).

It's a 60s album. No? Well, late 50s then. It must be very early Cecil Taylor, from *In Transition* or *Looking Ahead!*. It's got that Caribbean drummer on it, and Buell Neidlinger on bass. I love this, I really love it. I like it a lot more than the later stuff. Cecil goes all the way with himself, in which case I have to go all the way with him. I have a great respect for him, but I still feel that his music limits itself. Cecil has got into a certain energy, and he's tapping into an energy that is limitless, but I sometimes think he should sit back and create in a different way. But this is up there with Mitsuko (Uchida): four stars. \*



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