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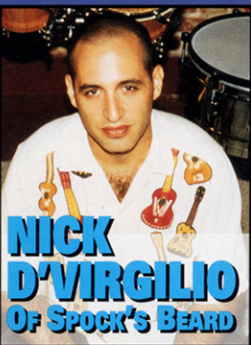
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04

Jazz/Rock Pioneers

by Rod Fogarty

In the waning days of the 1960s, before the dinosaurs of psychedelia were felled by the broadsword of corporate rock, there arose in America a new beast: a musical hybrid that would cause controversy and growth not experienced since swing gave way to bop.

Prior to the emergence of this phenomenon, jazz had been jazz and rock had been rock, and whenever the twain had met the result was usually some serious head-butting. But the late '60s saw musicians of all different stripes forming larger bands that featured horn sections. These groups blurred the borders that separated styles in order to create a new music, much of which still sounds fresh

and exciting today. And the drummers in these musical juggernauts would prove integral in bringing "pop" music to a higher level.

Bobby Colomby

Drummer and Blood, Sweat & Tears founding member Bobby Colomby was one of the first to pioneer this new and fertile frontier. Bobby was predominantly a jazz drummer with a wealth of technique and a sly wit when phrasing fills. But he was more than adept at rock and R&B styles. Packing tremendous creativity and humor, Bobby could always be relied upon to play the unexpected.

Blood, Sweat & Tears was a nine-piece

outfit out of New York City. Under one banner were Juilliard graduates, rock stars, and the cream of the Manhattan jazz scene—all of whom cooperated in a band of unequaled daring and virtuosity. Besides Colomby, other charter players included trumpeter Randy Brecker and former Blues Project members Steve Katz (on guitar) and Al Kooper (on keys and vocals).

BS&T's first album, *Child Is Father To The Man*, featured some undeniably good songs and loads of potential. But it was clearly the work of a band finding its way. However, if their first attempt seemed tentative, their second proved to be a work of collective genius. The



Chicago's Danny Seraphine

eponymously titled effort is generally regarded as the band's masterpiece.

The record opened with orchestral variations on Erik Satie's "3 Gymnopédies" that heralded a gelling of concept and musicality. To paraphrase Forrest Gump's mom, a BS&T arrangement was very much like a box of chocolates. What lay at the center always came as a surprise. Both "Smiling Phases" and "Spinning Wheel" conceal a core of molten jazz within a hard-rocking head.

Colomboy comps and plays shots in the tradition of the great big band drummers but in a way so personal that it could never be duplicated. In "Spinning Wheel" he plays one of the hippest and most identifiable one-bar breaks ever.

The impressionistic brush work of "Sometimes In Winter" dissolves into the down-home country honk of "And When I Die." Before long you're immersed in the sophisticated bluesiness of Billie Holliday's "God Bless The Child," featuring a "Manteca"-like call & response between Latin and swing.

Colomboy takes a brief but engaging solo on "Blues—Part II," rounding out an album that rivals *Sgt. Pepper* and *Pet Sounds* for sheer invention and historical importance. Though there was much great music to come, no other BS&T release would receive as much critical acclaim or commercial success.

Of the many fine recordings that followed, *Blood, Sweat & Tears 3* and *4* were particularly good. There were also more hits, such as "Hi-De-Ho," "Lucretia MacEvil," and "Go Down Gamblin'."

In a 1995 interview, Colomboy reflected, "I would like for the band to be looked at historically in a more favorable way. When I see *Rolling Stone* or other magazines come up with the '100 Best Albums In Pop Music' and we're not mentioned—when I know we had such a profound influence—it's disheartening."

Bobby need not feel disheartened, though. *Blood, Sweat & Tears'* landmark recordings top the list for all of us who had our ears and intuition tweaked by this groundbreaking ensemble. We revere

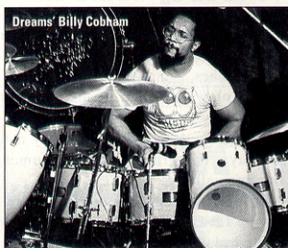
Bobby Colomboy as a singular drummer who inspired us with his playing and directed us toward fresh creative horizons.

Danny Seraphine

Late summer, 1968. The National Democratic Party Convention in Chicago, Illinois. America's youth takes to the streets of the Windy City in a charged outpouring of social frustration and political distrust. Bristling with that same kinetic energy came the next great band of the new movement.

With extended jams and slightly rough edges, Chicago was everyman's horn band. At the helm of that great, roaring battleship was a drummer of uncommon ability and spirit. Danny Seraphine burst upon the scene with rhythmic concepts that were a siren's song to rock drummers tired of simply "chopping wood."

A drummer from the age of nine, Seraphine was one of the best-schooled players in rock at the time. He had put in the hours with some of the greatest names in teaching. Men such as Bob Tilles, for-



The Pioneer Spirit

10 Jazz/Rock Landmarks

| Artist | Title | Drummer |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Blood, Sweat & Tears | Child Is Father To The Man | Bobby Colomboy |
| Blood, Sweat & Tears | Blood, Sweat & Tears | Bobby Colomboy |
| Blood, Sweat & Tears | Blood, Sweat & Tears 3 | Bobby Colomboy |
| Blood, Sweat & Tears | Blood, Sweat & Tears 4 | Bobby Colomboy |
| Chicago Transit Authority | Chicago Transit Authority | Danny Seraphine |
| Chicago | Chicago II | Danny Seraphine |
| Chicago | Chicago VII | Danny Seraphine |
| Chase | Chase | Jay Burrid |
| Chase | Ennea/Pure Music | Jay Burrid, Gary Smith, Tom Gordon |
| Dreams | Dreams | Billy Cobham |



mer Woody Herman ace Chuck Flores, and drumming icon Jo Jones filled and refilled his cup of knowledge.

Chicago was a prime example of that rarest of birds: a truly fine group of musicians who found mass public appeal and critical acceptance. It is no exaggeration to say that Chicago was for many years one of the most popular bands in America. Though they still record and tour today (with the talented Tris Imboden on drums), it's their late-'60s through '70s output that remains required listening for all serious students of music.

"Bobby Colomby was really great. He was the first drummer I heard that made some kind of transition from jazz to rock and put the two together."

—Buddy Rich, 1980

Chicago Transit Authority (as they were first known, until the bus company of the same name threatened to sue) released their debut album in 1969. It was a time when young people were accustomed to hearing various styles of music combined and contrasted on their local FM radio stations. Offering everything from acid-rock funkifying to overtly jazz-inspired improvisation, Chicago's collection did not disappoint. Tucked away here and there, like treasures to be unearthed, are a few perfect little radio-friendly songs.

Chicago's broad appeal embraced the young and the young at heart. Older listeners, raised on the big band sounds of the 1940s, found a comfortable middle ground in musically turbulent times. As a result, the band got a great deal of AM radio play. Top-10 hits when originally released, these recordings have gone on to become classics. Much of this success is due to Danny Seraphine's gift for creating an original and perfect drum part for each song.

Listen to "25 Or 6 To 4." Seraphine

lays down one of rock drumming's catchiest grooves. As arresting as it is straightforward, it propels the other musicians to frenetic heights. (The song also has an infectious bass guitar line that your blue-haired granny probably knows how to play.)

"Make Me Smile" is where the big band and the rock group collide head on. Sporting horn voicings and a rhythmic force that would soon be in evidence in the writing for the Woody Herman and Buddy Rich orchestras of the day, this one cooks. Seraphine's energetic fills are equal measures of fire and precision.

"Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?" swings with an odd meter intro and settles into a 4/4 shuffle that sits right in the pocket. Danny had that shuffle down.

An outstanding example of Danny's versatility as a player can be found on the first three cuts of 1974's *Chicago VII*. (Seraphine composed or co-composed all three.) The musical voyage begins with "Prelude To Aire," an Afro-Cuban nancingo built slowly yet deliberately in layers of congas and toms. Walt Parazaider's flute enters insistently for some tribal exchanges that put one in mind of Art Blakey's late-'50s collaborations with Herbie Mann.

"Aire" moves like the current of a stream, and Seraphine establishes a rhythm that's as smooth as polished stone. The first time that I heard it—as a younger, less experienced drummer—I thought it was in straight time. That belief came to dust as I tried to play along and kept coming up short. Yup. It's definitely in seven. (What can I tell you? I wasn't a real big kid.)

Riding in on a Coltrane-esque introduction, "Devil's Sweet" rains sheets of dissonance that clear to reveal a tune as dark and moody as a city block after midnight. Listeners are treated to an under-documented aspect of Danny Seraphine's mastery of the drums: Perhaps as a tip of the hat, soul-wise, to Papa Jo, Danny plays the brushes. In tremendously artistic fashion, he shows all of the passion and control one associates with the greats of jazz. Always playing with his ears wide open, his way with dynamics is enviable. Hearing this trilogy always leaves me wondering what he must be playing now.

The Drummers Of Chase

Bill Chase spent most of the 1960s as first trumpet in one of Woody Herman's finest Herds. But in 1970 Bill had an idea: He wanted to present the bold impact of a big-band trumpet section supported by a more contemporary rhythmic structure. The group he formed took his name, and their brassy sounds cut straight to the marrow. In a career tragically cut short, Chase (the band) turned out three LPs that have recently resurfaced in compact disk form. Aside from the odd carry-over track, each album rocked to a different drummer.

The group's debut effort, simply titled *Chase*, spawned the hit single "Get It On" and featured the drumming of Jay Burrid. Burrid's playing brimmed with power, finesse, and great ideas. Though the drummer had strong roots in rock, he had also worked with jazz giants Bill Evans, Benny Golson, and Clark Terry.

Admired for their extended and intricately arranged pieces, Chase here offers "Invitation To A River." Transported to a bullring in old Madrid via a Spanish-tinged trumpet fanfare, the listener surfs the ebb and flow of Burrid's timpani-like tom rolls. As the rhythm melts into a medium swing, his ride pattern simmers, pushes, and prods, inspiring everyone to play over their heads. You can practically hear the gears turning as Burrid gives deep thought to every note he plays. His grace on the instrument was unparalleled.

Though Burrid appears on two cuts, follow-up LP *Ennea* belongs to Gary Smith. Smith had chops 'til next Tuesday and an

in-your-face, funk-rooted approach.

After bowling the listener over with a supercharged rendition of Stephen Foster's "Swanee River," Chase burns through song after song before arriving at the album's centerpiece. "Ennea Suite" presents six musical biographs, each dedicated to a figure from Greek mythology. The level of intensity rarely lets up, and Gary Smith's playing must be heard to be believed. From the up-tempo jazz waltz of "Zeus" to the rapid-fire funk of "Hades," Smith is awe-inspiring. He double-clutches the band through twists and turns as hair-raising as any Ozark mountain pass. Adventurous and strong...as fluid as a tap left running...rolls as smooth as distant thunder—Gary Smith had the goods.

If *Pure Music* seems incomplete, that's because it is. Production on the album had begun in late spring of 1974. Before recording was to resume, Chase went out to play what was to be a brief tour. Fully half of the band was killed when their small chartered plane crashed into a farmer's field. Among the dead was Bill Chase.

Released posthumously (it's now available on a two-fer CD with *Ennea*), *Pure Music* gave strong evidence that Chase had been eschewing pop songs in favor of more fusion-oriented instrumentals.

Drummer Tom Gordon, though totally conversant with the vocabulary of modern music in the 1970s, shows that he was very much his own man behind the set. At once technical and economical, Gordon was an exceptionally musical drummer. In the space of six tracks he flawlessly executes linear funk and progressive rock patterns, as well as playing cool and spacious odd time.

Billy Cobham

It's a sad fact that world-class artists can sometimes vanish from the world stage. But a man still highly visible on that stage is Billy Cobham. Though he has led his own band for some years now, in 1970 Cobham belonged to a collective known as Dreams. At various times featuring Randy and Michael Brecker, the late Don Grolnick, and ElMer John Abercrombie, Dreams was a scary bunch.

It was common practice for the players in Dreams to improvise around the arrangements. This kind of risk-taking was right up Cobham's alley. Constantly playing in the moment, he was steering the bus all the way.

The band lasted only long enough to release two fine albums. On *Dreams*, ideas spill out in cornucopic fashion. Cobham is never less than inspired,

whether tying the other musicians into a tight groove or stretching out a bit, as he does on "Dream Suite." There's that incredible single-stroke roll, ubiquitous and splendid. And on "New York" Billy displays his effortless technique on an extended drum solo. This recording presents Billy Cobham in a setting unlike any other. It's well worth some digging at a used record shop.

The next Dreams album, *Imagine My Surprise*, was produced by former Booker T. & The MG's guitarist Steve Cropper. Though it's not as adventurous as the first record, Cobham finds numerous opportunities to catch fire. A case in point is the completely spontaneous tag ending of the title tune. Buoyed by Billy's cooking samba, Dreams chases their swan song to a close.

With Billy Cobham, the link to the new era would seem complete. The master drummer eventually left Dreams to join The Mahavishnu Orchestra, the mother of all fusion bands. And so the next phase began.

To those unfamiliar with early jazz/rock, happy listening. The rest of us will pull out our practice pads and extend a silent nod of thanks to the bands of that not-so-quiet revolution, and the drummers who made them go.



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plethora of information, tips, and exercises. Besides that, the "latest guys" usually shed some insight on "making it" in today's music biz. So don't judge *MD* just by its cover; read each and every page. There's a lot in there, month after month.

George Fleischer
Jacksonville, FL

BUILDING YOUR OWN DRUMSET

Although the chances that I'll ever build my own drumkit are less than those of a meteor striking Earth, I think Paul Bielewicz's series on building one's own drumset is your best technical piece since "MD's Guide to Drumset Tuning" in the November 1999 issue.

Mr. Bielewicz has thrown a fascinating light onto what makes a drumset and how it works. In fact, the series is a hands-on introduction to all the parts and pieces of the drumkit, while clearly showing their purpose and how they interact

together (and with the drummer, too). Congratulations.

Javier Diaz
Santiago, Chile

ZOOMATIC STRAINER REPAIR

In Harry Cangany's November 2002 *It's Questionable* answer to the problem a reader was experiencing with a slipping Zoomatic strainer arm, Harry said that Loctite could not be used, since the threads need to move. Having been a mechanic for twenty-five years (as well as a drummer), I'm happy to tell you about a Loctite product that will do what the reader needs it to do. That product is a retainer that is blue in color and only keeps the threads from backing off from vibrations (as opposed to securing them permanently). The reader should be able to find this version in small quantities in any auto parts store.

Steve Scherrep
Roanoke, VA

THANKS FROM GARY

My thanks to Rod Fogarty and *Modern Drummer* for the kind words in the April 2002 "Jazz/Rock Pioneers" story regarding my drumming with Chase. I'm sorry to be so long in responding; the article only came to my attention recently.

I was inspired by the technique and musicality of Billy Cobham and Bobby Colomby, and I'm flattered to be included in that story with them, as well as with Chicago's great Danny Seraphine, and the other fine drummers who played with Chase: Jay Burrid and Tom Gordon.

Thanks also for recognizing Bill Chase's contribution to music. He was a consummate performer who is still an inspiration to many, especially those of us who had an opportunity to play with him.

Finally, I'd like to mention that Chase had another drummer, Walter Clark. As I understand, Walter was a favorite of Bill's, but as far as I know he never recorded with the band. Tragically, Walter was killed in the plane crash that also took the lives of Bill Chase and two other bandmembers, along with the pilot and co-pilot.

Gary Smith
via Internet