

JAZZ REUNION

PEE WEE RUSSELL
COLEMAN HAWKINS

Bob Brookmeyer

Jo Jones • Emmett Berry

Milt Hinton • Nat Pierce



PEE WEE RUSSELL
clarinet

COLEMAN
HAWKINS tenor
saxophone

BOB BROOKMEYER
trombone

JO JONES
drums

EMMETT BERRY
trumpet

MILT HINTON
bass

NAT PIERCE
piano

The reunion was over, and the musicians were packing up. Pee Wee Russell was listening to a playback and arguing with himself as to how many different ways he might have formed each phrase; but despite his chronic self-criticism, he surprised himself by nodding approval in several places. Coleman Hawkins, who had enjoyed the long afternoon, was finishing his cognac with satisfaction.

Nat Pierce, who had arranged all the numbers, wandered over and said to Hawkins: "Did you notice how that tune of Pee Wee's **28th AND 8th**, sounded like something Monk might have written?"

"I can understand how it could," said the patriarch.

"And some of Pee Wee's choruses," added Bob Brookmeyer, "are really way out."

"I know, I know," said Hawkins. "For thirty years, I've been listening to him play those funny notes. He used to think they were wrong, but they weren't. He's always been way out, but they didn't have a name for it then."

For Pee Wee, jazz has always been an intensely personal, empirical way of talking. It's supposed to be personal for everyone in the field; but relatively few do develop their own implacable singularity, and still fewer keep growing and changing within their uniqueness. As British critic, Charles Fox, wrote recently: "It is, I suppose, Pee Wee's ability to communicate the sheer zest of musical creation that makes him sound so youthful, despite the 54 years on his birth certificate. Many of his contemporaries have either lost their enthusiasm or else allowed their playing to become sentimental, an evocation of the past."

"The more you try," Pee Wee once said, "the luckier you are." In addition to Pee Wee's insatiable curiosity about what can be done with music, there are also in his playing what Whitney Balliett has termed grace and artlessness. "These appear," he writes in his book, *The Sound of Surprise*, "when a musician like Russell miraculously and unselfconsciously translates such blues-like emotions as melancholy, yearning, and restlessness into a certain bent phrase or huskiness of tone with such surpassing timing and clarity that the listener suddenly becomes a transfixed extension of the musician."

Yet for too many of his playing years, Pee Wee was misinterpreted—largely as a result of the context in which he usually played and recorded—as a Dixieland or Nicksieland musician. In the past few years, he has been moving out of that constricting area on recordings, but I still felt he had yet to be recorded

in a fully sympathetic and mutually stimulating, but relaxing, environment.

In planning this date, the first man we both thought of was Nat Pierce, who has been a friend of Pee Wee for a long time, understands and respects his music, and is an arranger who abhors the non-essential in his scoring. The next was Coleman Hawkins, with whom Pee Wee had not recorded since the 1929 Mound City Blue Blowers session that produced the extraordinary *One Hour and Hello Lola*. Bob Brookmeyer was a natural addition because his playing reflects his love and comprehension of the whole of the jazz tradition. Furthermore, Brookmeyer's own burry wit and uninhibited lyricism are akin to those qualities in Pee Wee. The long underappreciated Emmett Berry has the capacity to always sound fresh and thoroughly involved emotionally. His tone is deeply burnished and his taste is faultless. In addition to Nat Pierce on the piano, the rest of the rhythm section fell into logical place—the flowing Jo Jones, a listening drummer, and the strong, big-toned Milt Hinton who also has never stopped learning more about the expressive capacities of his instrument.

The Russell-Hawkins reunion began aptly with *IF I COULD BE WITH YOU ONE HOUR TONIGHT*. The approach is gently pensive until Coleman Hawkins' bursting, now-is-the-time solo. Berry's muted contribution is an essay in judicious exactness of note selection. Pee Wee is characteristically lyrical, subtle, and remarkable in the twisting logic of his constructions.

Jo Jones opens *TIN TIN DEO* by hand, not with sticks. Pee Wee states the theme wistfully. Hawkins shouts again with an ardor that again calls into question the formula that jazz is a music only of young men. Berry is intense and yet remarkably without strain (note Jo Jones' commentary behind him). Pee Wee here reminds me of another Whitney Balliett observation: "At the end of a number, one realizes that, one way and another, Russell has managed to wrap it in a swirling, rococo cocoon that preserves its heat and glorifies its design." Brookmeyer, whose playing is closer to speech than that of any other modern trombonist, adds his own warm personalization of the tune. Nat Pierce, as is his custom, plays with spare understatement.

MARIOOCH is dedicated to the redoubtable, resplendently honest Mary Russell, Pee Wee's wife. (In the Italian sector of Greenwich Village, where the Russells now live, "Mary" becomes "Mariooch.") Pee Wee's performance is one of his most intimate and controlled on record and is also one of the best engineered because rarely has the wryly poignant Russell presence been so completely captured.

I'd long felt that Duke Ellington's *ALL TOO SOON* would be an apposite basing point for Pee Wee's particular qualities which include a glowing if occasionally prickly romanticism. The song, as is evident here, also releases the quite different musical personalities of the others involved; and the track is an absorbing illustration of how jazz unity can be made from strongly variegated individualities.

28th AND 8th is the address of a new apartment building in

progress where the Russells intend to move. Pee Wee's melody is airily angular and again, the solos are richly personal. (There are no hesitant, who's-hip-this-week acolytes among these hornmen.)

The final *WHAT AM I HERE FOR*, another Ellington perennial, is a distillation of the overall nature of this album. All these men are fully developed, total jazzmen whose styles cut across curves of fashion. They demonstrate Picasso's point: "To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present, it must not be considered at all." In addition to the remarkable directness of emotion and the relaxation of the playing in this album, I'm especially pleased that Candid could act as the catalyst for its coming to life, because I'm convinced the music here will "live always in the present."

NAT HENTOFF

SIDE A

1. *IF I COULD BE WITH YOU (ONE HOUR TONIGHT)*
Johnson-Creamer, Remick Music Corp.—ASCAP 8:50
2. *TIN TIN DEO* Pozo-Fuller, Consolidated Music Publishers Inc.
ASCAP 8:50
3. *MARIOOCH*
Russell-Pierce-Hinton, Bregman, Vocco And Conn Inc.
ASCAP 7:15

SIDE B

1. *ALL TOO SOON*
Ellington-Sigman, Robbins Music Corp.—ASCAP 7:26
2. *28th AND 8th*
Russell-Pierce, Bregman, Vocco And Conn Inc.—ASCAP 7:24
3. *WHAT AM I HERE FOR* Ellington,
Robbins Music Corp.—ASCAP 7:46

ON *MARIOOCH*, *PEE WEE RUSSELL AND RHYTHM SECTION ONLY*.

Recorded at Nola Penthouse Sound Studios, New York
February 23, 1961

Engineer: Bob D'Orleans • Supervision: NAT HENTOFF

Audio Notes:

This album was recorded monophonically and stereophonically directly to two-track and full-track master tapes on Ampex 300's using the following microphones: Neumann U-47; EV 667; RCA44BX.

The master lacquers were cut directly from the original master tapes on a Neumann lathe using a Westrex 2B cutter for mono and a Westrex 3C cutter for stereo. The frequency response of both systems is flat plus or minus 'A DB from 30 cycles to 15,000 cycles.

This recording is patterned to the RIAA curve and will give true frequency response if playback equipment is set for RIAA playback characteristic.