

Title:

**Horace Silver: A New Definition of Greatness**

**By Greg Chako**

### Introduction:

Compared to the study of western European classical music like Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, the study of jazz, like the music itself, is relatively new. The spontaneous nature and prevalence of improvisation in jazz presents scholarly difficulties. The bulk of jazz music is not written down. Unless it is recorded, the rare beauty of a great improvisation is as fleeting as the moment. It's been said "...jazz has evolved at roughly twenty times the pace of European music," (DeVeaux. p. 545) but that is debatable. Even if true, it is unclear whether critics and historians have kept up the pace set by the trail-blazing musicians of this new music.

Scholars of classical music tend to focus on composer's written works. The study of jazz usually concentrates on a linear series of stellar performers (Gaines. 2005) who outline its historical evolution through their improvisations. Summarizing jazz history this way, as a string of exceptional soloists, is common. It may be unavoidable due to the multitude of individuals who make valuable contributions to the varied world of jazz. Since improvisation plays an integral role, it might seem logical to perceive jazz history through its most virtuosic players, much in the same way we recall virtuosos of classical music like Paganini and Rachmaninov. The drawback of this generalized approach is that a wide array of important artists tend to be overlooked. Horace Silver may well be one of those who deserve more attention. Inspecting Silver more closely, this paper questions the validity of how greatness and legendary status is judged, proposing that a subtle shift in our focus is advised if we wish to give ample credit to those artists who are most deserving of it.

Perhaps only by highlighting Silver's unique aspects can we endeavor to encourage his legacy to inspire future generations. Focusing on one *not* commonly considered to be a top-tier jazz legend, may increase interest in musicians like Silver, thereby contributing a broader, more thorough and accurate picture of the cast of characters who shape jazz culture.

It is difficult to prove that Silver has not gotten the attention deserved. But generally speaking, his music is not considered (by enough people in my opinion) the artistic equal of Monk's, Parker's, Davis's, or Coltrane's. Highly regarded jazz critic Martin Williams distinguishes Silver as an “. . . inspired, creative craftsman . . . ” (Williams. p. 185), but reserves higher compliments for Armstrong, Parker, Morton, Ellington and Monk, without whom “. . . jazz would languish . . . ” (p. 185). The chapter dealing with Silver in Williams' *The Jazz Tradition* is titled “The Meaning of Craftsmanship” (p. 178). That title, and Williams' views, seem to marginalize Silver as a mere craftsman while elevating Monk, Parker and others to the level of genius. This paper explores the possibility of Silver's marginalization through my biased lens, and attempts highlight with scholarly historical research and musical analysis, the characteristics that make Silver worthy of the highest possible acclaim in jazz.

#### The History:

Silver was born September 2, 1928 in the suburb of Norwalk, Connecticut. His family was mixed-race, including white, black, Portuguese and Native American Indian (Silver, H., Pastras, P. p. 88). Since his Cape Verdean father was Catholic, Silver did not experience as much of the African-American church tradition as one

might guess from listening to his music and reading what critics have said about it, who commonly refer to Silver's "gospel" feel (Shipton. p. 134). Before Silver reached age thirty, he was already a famous musician, acknowledged for almost single-handedly developing a new jazz style "... on the borderline between jazz and the popular black tradition ..." with singles that often appeared on Billboard's charts, and "... drew heavily on urban blues, gospel, and Latin American music. Without renouncing bebop's discoveries, their [Silver's songs] heavy beat and blues-influenced phrasing won popular appeal, re-establishing jazz as a staple on ghetto jukeboxes ..." (Rosenthal. p. 44).

Hearing Jimmy Lunceford's band at age 11 set Silver on the path to become a jazz musician. When 22 years old he was hired by Stan Getz, with whom he toured for almost two years, connecting with many well-known musicians that would help establish Silver's legitimacy once he decided to move to New York City in 1952. Getz recorded three of Silver's compositions, starting what became one of Silver's most notable legacies: a composer frequently "covered" by other well-known performers. Once in NYC, Silver freelanced with a wide variety of famous players including Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Lou Donaldson, Johnny Hodges, Kenny Dorham, Terry Gibbs, Oscar Pettiford, Sonny Rollins, Hot Lips Page, Big Nick Nicholas and many others. Silver's NYC experience included long-term jobs as (virtually) the house pianist at Birdland, and key dates leading his own group repeatedly at Minton's Playhouse.

At age 24, in 1952, he had his first (trio) recording as a leader, beginning a 28-year association with Blue Note Records, the longest such relationship ever. Silver

defined the Blue Note sound (Cook. p. 54). Many well-known musicians like James Spaulding were approached by Blue Note to record, provided they include at least one track in the Silver vein. Without copying that Silver style, they could not record with Blue Note then (Bridgewater, Spaulding). Silver's influence on that era of jazz was pervasive.

Silver played as a sideman on four Miles Davis records, including the all-star recording date for Prestige that produced *Walkin`* and *Blues and Boogie*, and the famous *Bags` Groove* session that included Sonny Rollins and Kenny Clarke. These were said “. . . to represent the state of jazz as it entered its second decade . . .” (Williams. p. 178). In 1954, the album *Horace Silver and The Jazz Messengers* is released, including the song *Doodlin`*. A second release with the same title came out the following year, with the song *The Preacher*, and these sessions, “. . . taken together, could be viewed as the birth and baptism of hard-bop . . .” (Seymour. p. 376). That same year, at only 26 years old, Horace wins the *Downbeat Critics` Poll* as new star of the year.

At this time in the mid-50`s, Silver was often associated with drummer Art Blakey. They were among the busiest musicians in NYC. Both artists functioned at different times as leader, before the idea to form a partnership that became one of the most famous bands in jazz history occurred to either one of them. Eventually they decided that since Blakey was a little older and more established in NYC, he would function as symbolic leader and public presenter of the group. The genesis of their musical concept, via Silver's writing and orchestrating (Blakey did not actually compose), *and* the group's name, was Silver's idea (Blakey. p. 11). Blakey said,

“ . . . it was Horace who decided we should organize a group. He said, 'We'll call it the Jazz Messengers.' So it was Horace who really put the name on it, and it stuck" (Nolan. p. 21). It's likely Silver's original model for a jazz group, the Lunceford band, played a part in the concept development of *The Jazz Messengers*. Silver liked Lunceford's tight arrangements, their choreography and slick presentation (Lees. p. 81). This admiration influenced Silver's band-leading and arranging style, starting with *The Jazz Messengers*: “ . . . so we wrote arrangements, got sharp - got some suits, started paying attention to the audience and put it together . . . ” (Blakey. p. 11).

Blakey and Silver are sometimes credited as co-founders of the famous band. When Silver left the group, he allowed Blakey to keep the name. It was from then on known as *Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers*. It is the second name that is most familiar. It appears as if most people are not aware of Silver's primary role in organizing the first version of that band. Generally speaking, the press attributes far more focus to Blakey's role in that seminal group *and* the hard-bop movement, and less to Silver's role. In the 2009 textbook *Jazz*, authors DeVeaux and Giddins mention Blakey before Silver, calling him “ . . . the central figurehead of hard bop,” (Deveaux, Giddins. p. 325) and give readers the impression that Silver was merely one of Blakey's talented sidemen, when it might have been more accurate to describe it the other way around. Blakey does not educate people to the contrary, publicly calling Silver “ . . . one of the original Messengers . . . ” (Bridgewater. p. 22). James Lincoln Colliers' 1978 *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History*, paints a similar portrait of jazz history. It also mentions Blakey first, saying: “ . . . he put together the first of his Jazz Messengers . . . ” (Collier. p. 440). But Silver is called “ . . . a second important figure . . . ” (p. 441). The well informed believe it was not

necessarily Blakey, but the music composed by Silver, and later composed by others copying his style, that codified hard-bop as a musical trend, defining a significant period of jazz history.

Silver left the band reluctantly, because he felt he was playing with the best jazz musicians available. He is the first to admit that as a drummer, Blakey had no equal. But Blakey was an addict at that time, and Silver did not use drugs. While on tour in Philadelphia, driving with the Baroness Nica de Koenigswater's daughter in the car, the sight of a white woman in a car full of black men caught the attention of local police and the car was stopped. A police check revealed drugs that did not belong to Silver, but he was found guilty merely by association. He spent the night in jail and called his father to bail him out the next day. The experience scared Silver. He did not want to take any chances on such a thing happening again (Silver/Pastras, Bridgewater, Brecker). Music was too important for Silver to let anything potentially detract from his ability to pursue a successful career. That is why Silver left *The Jazz Messengers*.

When asked by interviewers about this, Silver often refuses to explain, presumably not to speak ill of his musical heroes who suffered from drug addiction. Musician insiders like Cecil Bridgewater and Randy Brecker know the story. Silver talked about it frankly in Gene Lees' book *Cats of Any Color* (Lees. p. 85), and then again most recently in his autobiography, but never with a hint of disrespect for Blakey or anyone else. It appears Silver's character will not permit speaking ill of another. After Silver began leading his own bands in 1956, he adopted more healthy habits like touring with a juicer, vegetarianism, and counseling band mates against the

use of drugs (Bridgewater, Brecker, Maupin), in stark contrast to the habits of his peers. Silver was way ahead of his time. Today the sober, drug-free musician is the norm, rather than exception to the rule as was the case in the 50`s and 60`s (Brecker).

From 1958 to 1964, “Silver led his longest lasting, most consistent and perhaps best known quintet with Junior Cook, Blue Mitchell, Gene Taylor and Louis Hayes” (Cuscuna. p. 18). In the late 50`s through the late 60`s, Silver was at the height of his popularity, as he further established the influential hard-bop style, sometimes referred to as soul-jazz or funky-jazz. A 1962 tour of Japan was one highlight of the period, resulting in the album *Tokyo Blues*, which writer Shadwick called “. . . one of Silver’s finest achievements.” In 1964, Horace recorded *Song for My Father*, one of Blue Note’s best selling albums of all time, with the title single replacing *Senor Blues* as Silver’s most popular hit record.

The late-60`s ushered the end of one peak in Silver’s career when his friend and recording patron Alfred Lion, sold Blue Note Records to United Artists Records, which was later sold to Capital Records. Silver remained signed on until 1981, saying, “Capital was giving less and less attention to their jazz artists and concentrating on their pop artists such as Kenny Rodgers and Dottie West. I didn’t think they were going to pick up my option when my contract expired, and I was right” (Silver/Pastras. p. 139). In 1970, “Silver married, disbanded the quintet and focused on writing lyrics and music for a series of albums, *The United States of Mind*” (Dobbins). These albums (released on Blue Note in 1970, `71 and `72) represent a turning point as Silver began to increasingly incorporate his philosophical and



spiritual ideas into the music. The new approach of Silver writing lyrics, actually singing, and larger group formats got mixed reviews from the press.

From 1975 to 1979, Silver recorded his last of five albums for Blue Note, *Silver`n Strings Play Music of the Spheres* ('78/79), *Silver`n Percussion* ('77), *Silver`n Voices* ('76), *Silver`n Wood* ('76) and *Silver`n Brass* ('75), thus completing his Blue Note contract and essentially ending an era. Insider Michael Cuscuna explains: "It had a slow slide into dormancy, from about '75 to '81 when everything came to a halt. Horace turned in his last album. He was the last artist under contract. In the summer of '81, it [Blue Note] was completely dead" (Woodward).

In 1980, Silver forms his own production company called Silveto Productions Inc., of which Silveto Records and Emerald Records were a part. Silveto was for his "... explicitly spiritually minded compositions and Emerald focused on his straightforward hard-bop performances" (Dobbins). Though Silver was still recording his familiar brand of hard-bop, some of those recordings would not be released until much later, such as *Paris Blues*, a live '62 date not put out till 2002 on Pablo Records. Silver realized a difference in immediate appeal between his hard-bop hits like *Song for My Father*, which was requested and played nightly throughout Silver's performing career, and his holistic-message music that began to demand more of his attention in the 70's and 80's. Silver knew the (recording) companies were reluctant to push these message-oriented albums with vocals that some considered too preachy (Shew), but he was determined to follow his inner guide while trying to continually satisfy live audiences with requests and older hits.

Silver was *always* concerned with satisfying his audience. When band members would experiment with harmonies, or solo “outside” the chord changes, Silver would rein them in if he thought they were not connecting with the audience, yet if they were, he might allow the experimentation. He might tell his band members to keep an eye on the audience while they were soloing, encouraging them to be sure they got emotional connections. He wanted to see toes tapping and bodies moving in appreciation for the overall band groove. Apparently, Silver’s shows were *always* packed with highly responsive audiences. When introducing new material, he would explain to the audience that songs like (his older hits) *Sister Sadie* and *The Preacher* were new once, and the band *will* play those requests, but first they would introduce *today’s* new music. Silver often talked to his audience, explaining what the band was playing or what the inspiration for the tune of the moment was (Maupin, Brecker, Bridgewater).

Regarding Silver’s 1980’s foray into self-help holistic music, interviewer Ben Sidran said, “Silver has once again tapped into a deep well of public longing, which, in the final analysis, is perhaps his greatest talent. He is truly a people’s jazz musician” (Sidran. p. 61). Silver explained it this way: “I’ve been thinking about music for healing and what I can do. We’re trying to uplift people’s thinking, tout here, through the lyrics, a few spiritual principles that everybody needs to get in tune with” (p. 65).

But as was already mentioned, not all people agreed with this ideal, and Silver was bound to alienate some of his fans. In the *Afterword* of Silver’s autobiography, editor Phil Pastras makes an astute observation that, just as “. . . many readers of

Dante's *Divine Comedy* reject the idea that a loving God could forever impose horrible tortures on those souls condemned to Hell in the *Inferno*, so would Silver's works be rejected by those purists who subscribe to the arts-for-arts sake aesthetic" (Silver/Pastras. p. 193). When discussing the issue of genre, Pastras reminds that Ellington faced the same sort of criticism " . . . as Silver has with his spiritual works: superficial or naive lyrics, preachy-ness, music not up to the usual standards," and Pastras denounces, particularly the last of these, as patently untrue in both Ellington and Silver's case (p. 193).

Pastras offers another plausible reason why Silver's post-70's recordings were neglected. Historically, a large segment of the jazz media is reluctant to accept change of any kind. Examples of this are Davis's foray into electronics in the 1970's, Ellington's ambitions to write extended works for Carnegie Hall concerts in the 1940's, and the post-World War II innovations of bebop. Silver made all these sorts of changes too. He introduced electronics after establishing a loyal fan base for his acoustic playing, larger ensemble works with orchestra and choir after arguably "defining" the instrumental jazz quintet, and added to his earlier Powell-based bebop style of piano playing the elements that came to characterize funky soul-jazz. Each change was met with complaints and devaluation from some fans and critics.

Much like the first-tiered Davis, Silver remained true to his vision of where he and the music should be going. A product of the 1960's anti-establishment generation, Silver chose to go his own way rather than change his music to meet anybody else's demands. "Suddenly, an artist who had been one of the most successful in the jazz field, both artistically and commercially, had to fight to make his next album with the

recording company that had always given him carte blanche in the past”  
(Silver/Pastras. p. 191, Bridgewater).

From 1983 to 1988, Silver records five albums on his own label (with his own money), called: *Guides to Growing Up* ('81), for kids essentially, with Bill Cosby; *Spiritualizing the Senses* ('83); *There's No Need to Struggle* ('83); *Continuity of Spirit* ('85) in which Horace was commissioned by ASCAP to write a three-part musical work in Ellington's honor, saying: “I wrote it for string orchestra, rhythm section, a mini-chorus of singers and some flute players. That really turned me on, you know?” (Rozzi); and *Music to Ease Your Disease* ('88).

Silver also continued touring internationally during this time, mentoring musicians like Tom Harrell, Bob Berg, Bob Maize, Carl Burnett, Ralph Moore, Brian Lynch, Michael Mossman, Ralph Bowen, Yoron Israel, Mike Richmond, Billy Cobham, Todd Coolman and many others. One popular notion of jazz mentorship is that Blakey and Gillespie are the most notable, but Silver was a considerable influence as a mentor to many. *All* the musicians interviewed referred to Silver as a mentor, some even suggesting that their time with Silver was the deciding factor insuring their success in the industry.<sup>1</sup>

In live concerts Silver continued to connect well with audiences, but the records made in between the early 1970's and 1992, especially those made on his Silveto label, did not get proper distribution, are not released on CD, and can be

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<sup>1</sup> I attended Silver's memorial service in NYC on July 7, 2014 and heard people such as Louis Hayes, Lou Donaldson, and Bennie Maupin, give a public thank you to Silver, because in their minds, their successful careers in jazz were largely due to Silver's influence in their lives.

particularly difficult to find. The only exception is the three-CD set, *United States of Mind*, which was re-released in 2004 by the modern Blue Note label owned by EMI. That reissue in its entirety has somewhat vindicated Silver's belief in the quality of his spiritual works which didn't receive commercial success when originally released in the early '70's. A variety of stars like Chet Baker, Marlena Shaw, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Charles Earland have recorded their own covers from this monumental album, and poignantly in 2001, as Michael Cuscuna informs us, ". . . when the tragedy of September 11 struck, KCRW in Los Angeles began playing Norah Jones' version of *Peace*, and other stations followed suit. During an especially difficult time, it had an enormously soothing and healing effect on those who heard it. Horace's intent for his music had finally connected on a large scale when it was needed most" (Silver/Pastras. *Afterword*).

In 1992, Horace gave up trying to get his label off the ground. He approached his old friend George Butler (formerly with Capital), to sign and record with corporate giant Columbia. There he produced *Pencil Packin' Papa* and *Hard Bop Grandpop*, successful releases with positive reviews that somewhat commercially revive Silver's ailing recording career. Columbia had far more cash and a much broader distribution network than the old Blue Note ever had. A lot had changed in the recording industry since the 1960's when Silver and Blue Note were on top of the jazz world.

Artist-friendly pioneers like Alfred Lion, who started Blue Note in the late 1930's, had been replaced by corporate attorneys and accountants who cared more about bottom line profits than for jazz art (Bridgewater, Herring). "Lion, whose roots

were in a European cultural value system, already had a conviction that jazz was an art music” (Cook. p. 13). In one of Blue Note’s 1939 promotional flyers, Lions’ philosophy and purpose was summed up as follows: “Blue Note records are designed simply to serve the uncompromising expression of hot jazz and swing. Any particular style of playing which represents an authentic way of musical feeling is genuine expression, and Blue Note records is concerned with identifying its impulse, not its sensational and commercial adornments” (Cook. p. 12). Bobby Hutcherson put it like this: “Alfred and Frank were more like jazz musicians than record executives” (Rosenthal. p. 120). By the 1990’s those Alfred Lion Blue Note days were only fond memories of a bygone era.

It seems obvious that the success of Silver’s mid-90’s CDs, when compared to earlier works made without major label backing, were primarily a result of Columbia’s wealth and network, rather than due to any superiority of musical quality in the later works. Conversely, the lack of financial backing for the Silver releases and even the final Blue Note albums like the *Silver* ‘n... series, was likely a significant reason for the dearth of favorable press and public awareness for those releases. Indeed, a fan of Silver for years, I knew nothing of those recordings until I began carefully researching sources. It is common knowledge that, especially in the post-Blue Note recording industry, the amount of money spent on advertising in trade journals like *Downbeat* and *JazzTimes*, is directly related to the amount of positive press and critical acclaim an artist may receive (Herring). Silver’s recordings of the 70’s and 80’s, despite their high musical quality, simply did not have enough marketing money behind them to become well known.

In 1993 at age 65, Silver suffers a serious illness he says almost killed him. He was just about to appear for the Playboy Jazz Festival at the Hollywood Bowl in California, but had to cancel that and an eleven-week tour with his *Silver/Brass* ensemble. Silver was inducted to the Downbeat Hall Of Fame (Reader's Poll) in 1996: "Silver might come as a surprise to some, but a quick look back on past Reader's Polls shows that the hard-bop grandpop has been a contestant all along" (Stewart). Recuperated from his illness but weakened, Silver is active through 1998, leading his *Silver/Brass* band with 6 brass players, after releasing the two aforementioned Columbia CDs. In 1997 on Impulse, *A Prescription for the Blues* is put out, with the Brecker Brothers, Louis Hayes, and Ron Carter. It was reviewed well. Silver's last recording *Jazz Has a Sense of Humor*, was released to positive reviews in 1998 on GRP Records.

In 2005, Horace Silver receives a Grammy's Presidential Merit Award, saying at the ceremony upon acceptance: "I've tried to do my best to bring you the music that God has given me. Thankfully, you've accepted it and hopefully it will continue to live on, bless, and uplift people" (Silver website). Today, Silver is 84 years old. Though reliable details are difficult to confirm, it is generally accepted that he is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He has varying degrees of lucidity and mobility, and is in a special-care facility under the careful supervision of his family, primarily his son Gregory (Bridgewater, Brecker, Richmond, Harrell, Maupin). By all appearances, his music-making days are over for good.

### The Music:

When Max Roach joined a band the great Lester Young was in, trying to play just like Papa Jo Jones whom he had replaced, “Prez” admonished Roach in his characteristic jazz jargon, “you can’t join the throng until you write your own song” (Bridgewater). What Prez meant by that comment was similar to what Roach meant when he would later say about altoist Phil Woods, “there are innovators and there are imitators,” (Bridgewater) suggesting that Parker was an innovator and Woods was copying him. The gist of these comments implies what I have come to believe, and what every famous jazz person I have ever met has said when asked what the ultimate goal of being a jazz musician is: *To develop one’s own unique sound, by first learning the traditions established, and then building upon them and fully realizing your own creative potential.* To put it another way, “you are standing on the shoulders of giants, so don’t shit on them” (Bridgewater). Bridgewater’s meaning is that we, who rightly follow in the footsteps of those who came before us, have tremendous responsibility to respect and uphold traditions. According to Bridgewater and the other musicians interviewed, Silver is a true innovator, and *not* just an imitator. Silver had apparently fully absorbed all that came before him and created something truly unique to supplement pre-existing jazz traditions. Proof of such innovation is probably only ascertained experientially, by first heeding Bridgewater’s advice, and then using one’s own ears to judge music on its own merit within its historical context. This is hard, if not impossible, for a non-musician (a writer, critic, or academic) to do.

There are problems portraying jazz history as a linear string of stellar soloists. As mentioned in the introduction, important second-tier players like Silver can be



overlooked or overshadowed. Additionally, the process of how first-tier improvisers develop their innovations, and the fact that similar discoveries can be occurring simultaneously by different individuals in different parts of the world, can be glossed over. The way a new style develops is rooted in an inexplicable blend of wide-ranging variables. It might appear as if Parker's genius was a singular phenomenon when in fact, Sonny Stitt was developing an almost identical musical language far removed from Parker's influence (much to Stitt's consternation!).

At one time, Parker knew hardly any songs all the way through, and was infamously once thrown off the stage for his bad playing and ignorance of the tradition. The point is, Parker was not a "giant" over night. He did not achieve his genius without first absorbing musical and cultural data from many other people and experiences. History books rarely mention the influential locals who taught legendary players like Bird, just as the influence of Tyner on Coltrane, or of Silver on Blakey is often hidden to some students and the vast majority of the lay public. Every great innovator stands on the shoulders of those who came before them. Nobody creates something completely unique without borrowing from a wide range of pre-existing data. Interpersonal interaction is too complex to suggest that people create something entirely new of their own as if in a vacuum.

The criterion of judging greatness in jazz needs to be addressed. If we accept that the overriding criteria for being a legendary jazz musician is determined by the extent to which they develop their own distinctive voice built upon a foundation of traditional knowledge, then Silver deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as Monk, Tyner, Tristano, Blakey, Roach, Parker, Young, Basie, Ellington, etc. Perhaps

Joe Zawinal's foreword to Silver's autobiography expresses the sentiment best: "Throughout the history of music, there have been thousands of master players, artists, and composers. Yet each generation has produced relatively few individuals with something so distinctive, personal, and recognizable that when you hear the music not only do you know whose music it is but it also seems that you know that *person*. These are the ones who will always be remembered. In this very privileged group belongs the *hero* of this book: Horace Silver" (Silver/Pastras. p. xi. Italics in original).

Pianist and educator Dick Katz said Silver was "Creating his own jazz universe, with an instantly identifiable way of expressing himself" (Katz. p. 368). He had his own unique sound and way of expressing himself both on and off the bandstand (Maupin, Brecker, Bridgewater, Shew, Coolman, Richmond). After being present to hear Silver play all night in Chicago in the late-50's, Sonny Rollins gave a hand-written note to him saying: "Dear Horace, You are the living in-flesh representative of all that modern progressive musicians should be. Continue to play and to live the life that your talents are worthy of" (Silver/Pastras. p. 83).

What is perhaps most fascinating with Silver is the speed, determination, and single-mindedness with which he evolved. As only a teenager in high school, Silver said: "One of these days, I'm going to make records. And when people put the needle down on the record and play about a quarter of an inch, they will say, 'That's Horace Silver-I recognize his style'" (Silver/Pastras. p. 20). By the time he was in his mid-20's, Silver had boxed and locked all his records in the closet, because by then he already recognized in himself a sound he thought nobody else had. He wanted more

than anything else to develop that individual sound, “voice,” or style, without any corrupting or distracting influences. By the mid-50’s, barely 27 years old, he seemed to have accomplished a totally original sound.

Many of his contemporaries at the time seemed to think so too. When, in 1956, Leonard Feather took a poll among leading musicians, asking them to identify who was the most notable rising piano star, they chose Silver. The results, published in *The Encyclopedia Yearbook of Jazz*, proved Silver’s 1st-tier stature was unanimous among a disparate list of “. . . souls as Herb Geller, John Graas, Bill Holman, J. J. Johnson, Quincy Jones, Stan Levey, Oscar Pettiford, Andre Previn, Billy Taylor, Charlie Ventura, and Frank Wess,” all of whom cast their vote for Silver (Feather. Liner notes to *Silver Blue*). Feather went on to inform that Silver had already achieved an original style that was being copied “. . . from coast to coast . . .” (Feather).

Silver’s piano style is slightly controversial. He has been plagued by various physical problems throughout his life. Spinal scoliosis caused him to give up tenor sax in favor of piano (Bridgewater, Silver/Pastras). Bouts with rheumatism, arthritis, and wrist sprains affected his piano playing to varying degrees at different times (Gardner). Yet, even his most outspoken detractor, Martin Williams, described Silver as taking “. . . ingenious advantage of the very things that otherwise seem flaws in his playing” (Williams. p. 185). The most common criticism of Silver’s piano playing is that it lacks technique. Silver and many other pianists agree that, as Ahmad Jamal said in a recent *Downbeat* interview: “Everybody’s not Art Tatum” (Katz. p. 30). When confronted about technique, Silver said he has all he needs to adequately express his

ideas, implying that there is no need for a level of technique beyond that (Lyons, Silver/Pastras).

When former Silver band mate Bennie Maupin was asked about those who criticize Silver's technique, he said:

Well, those things - people talking about his piano playing - they did the same with Thelonious Monk! They talked about Monk's playing not being pianistically acceptable. People are entitled to their opinions, I just think that the fact that these two guys, Horace and Monk, were there at the same time historically, and they both have a distinct identity and a voice of their own, and they're both two of the most incredible composers. So the opinions of people, of criticizing a person's ability to play an instrument, are superficial and don't even merit discussion. It really doesn't, because look at the contribution that they made, both of them . . . Ok, what did the critics contribute? (Maupin. p. 2)

This sentiment expressed above by Bennie Maupin was echoed by all the musicians interviewed, with Brecker saying, "he's burning, had great time, great feeling and could play . . . [he could] keep up with the best of them" (Brecker. p. 4).

It seems that for every person who finds something to criticize in Silver's piano technique, there are more people who view it as superlative. Perhaps author, scholar, and professor Thomas Owens best sums up the controversy when he says: "As with Monk, his technique may seem primitive, but it is not. He can play fast, intricate runs when he wishes. Like Sonny Rollins, Silver has found a way to make his instrument sound loud without actually playing loudly, for his touch is surprisingly gentle and controlled. In a real sense, he is a virtuoso, albeit of a completely different type than Oscar Peterson. Because of his unique virtuosity, no one can play the blues such as Filthy McNasty and Senor Blues with the down-home sound more convincingly or effectively. No one" (Owens. p. 156).

The simultaneous presence of at least two elements is necessary to define greatness by the above definition. One is to create a unique musical style or sound, and the other is to know and respect the traditions. With regard to the second, Silver was also quite special. “He had listened to a lot of blues from the 30’s and 40’s, a surprising departure for a young man of the time,” (Cook. p. 54) and as Silver relates: “On one of the gigs I played with Hawk, I quoted an old Fletcher Henderson song in my solo. Hawk was quite surprised that a young man in his early 20’s would know that song. What he didn’t know was that I was an avid listener of all the older jazz recordings and had a pile of old tunes stored in my head” (Silver/Pastras. p. 47).

Silver is self-taught, learning to play things off records, starting with boogie-woogie piano and eventually, solos by Teddy Wilson, Bud Powell and others. He played tenor while in high school and was known as the “Prez of Norwalk” (Silver/Pastras) for playing, verbatim, Lester Young solos transcribed from the record. Silver’s fondness for interpolation could only be born of an uncanny knowledge of traditional tunes: “He and Dexter Gordon may be the champion theme quoters in jazz” (Owens. p. 154). Silver often expressed his respect for traditions. He took the learning of them very seriously, but he also remained open-minded enough to embrace a variety of cultural influences and musical elements in his work.

It is not much of a stretch, of either the facts or the imagination, to consider Silver one of the first fusion musicians. His 1956 single hit, *Senor Blues*, had a galvanizing effect as a new genre blending Latin-American rhythms that were not from Cuba, with a sinuous melody and a finely-judged construction in 6/8 time.

Though rhythms from Cuba and Africa were introduced to North America approximately 10 years earlier, nobody had synthesized them the way Silver did, or borrowed from the more elusive sounds of Latin America and Cape Verde the way he did (Shadwick. p. 38). David Rosenthal quotes an Alan Lomax transcription of a Jelly Roll Morton comment: “. . . if you can’t manage to put tinges of Spanish in your tunes, you will never be able to get the right seasoning for jazz,” (Rosenthal. p. 39) adding that such tinges can be found frequently in Silver’s work, as exemplified by *Nica’s Dream* and *Ecaroh*. Interviewees confirmed what critics have also said: Silver is always appreciative of what other musicians are doing. He has an open-minded approach and is always listening. He is often influenced by new places and experiences, incorporating them into his music.

However, as Bob Blumenthal points out in the 2008 liner notes addition to the re-release of *The Tokyo Blues*:

Silver did not study Brazilian sources when he wrote *Swinging the Samba* or Middle Eastern modes when he penned *The Bagdad Blues*. Analysis of source materials did not lead him in future years to *Calcutta Cutie*, *Mexican Hip Dance*, *African Ascension*, or *The Great Mexican Indian Uprising*. And he most definitely did not immerse himself in the music of Japan when he wrote the four originals that appear on this disc. The Silver approach was more old school, born of an era when dues were paid by playing for the people not just in a musician’s own community but in other local neighborhoods as well, when even aspiring jazz players gained passing acquaintance with rumbas, sambas, polkas, calypsos, and other ethnic styles. As an African-American with Cape Verdean roots, Silver may have had a head start on many of his peers, but it was his open ears and uncommon gift for melody, structure, and small-group orchestration that allowed him to incorporate foreign elements with such success.

Silver “. . . prides himself on remaining open to all kinds of music and accessible to many kinds of people. Like Duke, he has been inspired by his travels

and by his heredity.” (Ullman. p. 79). Here are some examples of ethnic flavor in Silvers’ music: bolero: *Moon Rays*; bossa-nova: *Gregory is Here*; mambo: *Nutville*; samba: *Time and Effort*; rock: *Psychedelic Sally*; oriental: *Dragon Lady*; Brazilian: *Swinging the Samba*; gospel: *The Preacher*; folk blues: *Doodlin`*; and r&b: *The Backbeat*. Despite an intrinsic belief in steeping oneself in the tradition, Silver’s willingness to embrace electric keyboard and bass on his 1970 *United States of Mind* release seems indicative of an open mind flexible and receptive to changing trends. Though even here too, Silver felt the need to make a unique *choice* of keyboard, saying that since everyone else used the Fender Rhodes, he would use an RMI, because nothing else sounded like it and nobody else was using it (Silver/Pastras, Bridgewater).

Another aspect of Silver’s uniqueness, notably in contrast to that of other acknowledged legends like Bird and Blakey, is his clean living represented by a drug-free, vegetarian, spiritually focused, self-healing lifestyle. At age 30, he changed his diet and said, “The most difficult thing in life is the most important thing, perfecting one’s self, ones character” (Ullman. p. 87). Silver could fire band members who got high with heroin, just as Dizzy Gillespie could in his big band. Neither bandleader tolerated substance-abuse, especially if it was a noticeably negative distraction to the music they played nightly (Bridgewater). Silver seems extraordinarily brave for having the clarity and independence of mind to express such ideals at a time when the behavioral norm was the opposite. It takes a strong character to avoid, as Silver did, giving in to cravings or desire when playing nightly to loving fans who regularly brought unhealthy food, drugs and alcohol to offer the musicians, as tokens of

appreciation. This kind of situation happened often touring with Silver's highly popular band (Maupin, Bridgewater).

If we were to judge levels of personal or karmic development through the evaluation of one's lifestyle and behavior, then when compared to addicts like Charlie Parker or Chet Baker, whose lives were cut dramatically short from substance-abuse, it is easy to claim that Silver was the stronger, more "advanced" spirit. Bennie Maupin said about Silver, "He had something to say that was beyond any kind of reharmonization you know. Horace was very advanced. People missed it, a lot of people missed it." (Maupin. p. 10) This supports the notion Silver was unique in every way, musical and otherwise. Interviewees confirmed this. Brecker said, "he was unique in every way," and Shew said, "he was a very unique man," and all the others that I interviewed reinforced the same idea in their own words.

The aspect distinguishing Silver described above may have contributed to some media marginalization. Writer and jazz critic Dan Morgenstern responded about whether Silver got the amount of press coverage he deserved for his contributions to jazz. Morgenstern replied: "No, probably he did not. He was too clean! He didn't do drugs like Blakey and most others did at the time, he wasn't infamous with the women or dressing wild the way Miles was. He was just a really nice guy who cared about one thing: his music. There was nothing for us to write about" (Morgenstern paraphrased). The gist of that comment, and of the notion that Silver's clean living resulted in less press attention was confirmed as, "likely," in interviews with Richmond, Bridgewater, Brecker, and others. When Morgenstern was pressed further, as to where he thought Silver's position among jazz greats was, he admitted: though a



“nice man who gave 150% at each performance,” Silver would not rate on Davis’s or Armstrong’s level in the history books. Musicians commenting on the same question were more generous, since they, generally speaking, allotted Silver 1st-tier status as an innovator. Bassist, Mike Richmond, made a particularly shrewd and telling observation when he commented that, “. . . all one has to do to realize what the media considers worthy is to turn on the nightly news!” (Richmond)

Morgenstern’s 2009 comments are reflected by Barbara Gardner’s first sentence of a 1963 article for *Downbeat* called *Inside the Horace Silver Quintet*. She begins, referring to Silver, “Nice guys just don’t make it in this business.” (Gardner. p. 20) Though the remainder of the article explores the idea that Silver is an exception to that rule: “. . . to deny the best efforts of Horace Silver is, in essence, to deny the expression of musical truth,” (p.22) we are reminded that Gardner’s article was written in 1963. In 2010, looking back to evaluate Silver’s whole career, I propose Gardner’s starting sentence may have proved more accurate historically than she could have imagined then.

While it is questionable how big a role the press plays in the formation of a jazz legend, it does make *some* impact on a player’s notoriety. Tragic figures like Parker and Baker, and those who become hero-like by overcoming their addictions, such as Blakey, Davis and Coltrane, appear to get more press than artists who avoid addictive-behavior altogether. By his clean living, Silver could have been slightly overshadowed by these types of tragic or hero-like figures. More contentious and extravagant personalities than Silver, such as Davis’s, Mingus’s, Blakey’s or Parker’s, may gain attention from jazz scholars, not necessarily only because they are more

worthy as influential and innovative players, but also because “scholars can become as star-struck as average fans, latching on to the most flamboyant and controversial artists” (Gaines. p. 2). In describing how different Silver seems when compared to his peers, Leonard Feather said, “Horace in many respects represents a departure from the popular concept. Many leading style setters are eccentric; Horace lives a life normal and temperate enough to upset all the preconceptions about artistic temperament” (Feather. Liner notes to *Silver Blue*).

Silver’s fame as founder and proponent of the hard-bop style is admirable, valid, and problematic all at once. The problem is due to the trend of critics limiting Silver’s artistic output to one particular style or influence. Martin Williams is one important critic who devalued Silver’s music by concluding that his style developed more from the earlier 30’s and 40’s music than of bebop. Williams (correctly) traced the essence of some Silver work to older Basie recordings. Bebop was considered art music, whereas the entertainment-oriented older music was not. In effect, Williams marginalizes Silver to the extent that he relates Silver’s music more to the period pre-dating bebop.

The large majority of critics, and Silver himself, feel that bebop is his primary stylistic influence. The bebop influence on Silver’s earliest recordings, such as *Quicksilver* and *Safari*, are obvious. Silver said he loved and imitated the swing era. After all, Lester Young was one of his all-time favorites. Silver also proudly proclaimed fondness for early blues and boogie-woogie. His first musical influences included musicians like Jay McShann and Muddy Waters, and of the old blues musicians Silver said, “I dig the feeling. They weren’t technicians but they had a

whole lot of feeling. It was diamonds in the rough, unpolished diamonds” (Ullman p. 83). As important as more dated musical styles were on Silver’s development, it appears to be bebop, and notably the style of Bud Powell, that provided the musical roots for Silver’s sound. It seems that when he added more dated musical elements to bebop, his style evolved into the highly popular, funky, folksy, bluesy one he is famous for, and that is when his first, most vocal critical detractors seemed to materialize.

Silver’s love of the older styles and how that was expressed in some of Silver’s music may help to contribute to a small degree of critical controversy. Silver’s self-professed “. . . old time gutbucket barroom feeling with just a taste of the back-beat” (Rosenthal. p. 38) garnered public appeal, but also the devaluation of critics and fans in Martin Williams’ camp. “Popularity” and “jazz” are words not often mentioned in the same breath, but they can be with Silver’s work. When trumpeter Tom Harrell was asked about Silver’s possible lack of acclaim, he compared Silver to Tchaikovsky (Harrell. p. 2), suggesting that artists like them, who garner unusually wide appeal with their music, are devalued by a prevailing assumption that their popularity proves their music is not synonymous with high art, and this happens particularly in America where, he said, jazz has lost its “. . . street appeal . . .” (p. 2). Experienced jazz stalwarts like Cecil Bridgewater, who has witnessed the pulse of the times in numerous school hallways and ensemble rooms educating college youth in the jazz tradition, are quick to agree with Harrell’s notion.

The hard-bop and funky jazz Silver is most famous for has “. . . generally enjoyed less prestige with modernist-oriented jazz critics, including Gunther Schuller

and Amiri Baraka. Baraka lamented hard bops' deviation from the track of high art undertaken by bebop" (Monson. p. 196). Describing Silver's style in *Hard Bop*, author Rosenthal says it was "... less likely to attract the highbrows like Schuller" (Rosenthal. p. 36).

Horace Silver's overall business acumen is well known among musicians, especially with regard to controlling his own publishing rights (Bridgewater). His songs and lyrics have been covered by a wide range of artists including James Brown, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Norah Jones, Marlena Shaw, Chet Baker, Lonnie Liston Smith and many others. As a result, Silver enjoyed a comparatively high degree of financial success, which he acknowledged modestly by saying, "I don't have to worry about my income because I have a steady income from royalties," (Silver/Pastras. p. 156). Some close to the Silver family say he is "... worth millions ..." (Richmond, Bridgewater) with assets including a NYC apartment building commonly referred to as the Silver Building (Richmond).

Besides being a possible source of jealousy, Silver's commercial or monetary success contributes to his preclusion from jazz's most elite because "... whether conceived as art music or folk music, jazz is consistently seen as something separate from the popular music industry ... and, ... the stigmatization of commercialism as a disruptive or corrupting influence has a long history" (DeVeaux. p. 529). It is relatively easy to place Silver into the popular/commercial category. He was one of Blue Note's all-time best sellers (Rosenthal. p. 68). One of Silver's earliest pieces, *Opus de Funk*, a Silver title based on the earlier Stan Getz song called, *Opus de Bop*,

popularizes a “word [funk] for Silver’s brand of soulful jazz: funky . . . to signify basic back-to-roots musical values” (DeVeaux/Giddins. p.327).

Silver has said about his style, “I loved bebop for taking jazz further along. But as hip and great as it was, there was a period when musicians kinda’ . . . not totally, but somewhat . . . eliminated the blues, you know? They got so sophisticated that it seemed like they were afraid to play the blues, like it was demeaning to be funky. And I tried to bring that. I didn’t do it consciously at first. But it started to happen” (Seymour). Silver’s fusion of elements “suggests a distant past when American folk melodies, church music, and blues seemed to share the same terrain,” (DeVeaux/Giddins. p.327) and the musical results definitely propel Silver into the commercially profitable pop realm of the business. His music “attracted lyricists and vocalists, were covered by pop or soul artists, and were played by bands that ranged from Dixieland to rock” (DeVeaux/Giddins. p.327). Referring to Blue Note founder Alfred Lion, author Richard Cook says that along with Jimmy Smith, Silver “paid most of his bills, making Blue Note a commercial entity” (Cook. p. 101). At the same time Silver’s popularity was at its height in the 1960’s, his style was seemingly being dismissed by some jazz critics like Schuller and Baraka, because of his music’s “. . . accessibility, its easy and self-serving simplicity, its eagerness to please, [which] seemed to betray the movement of jazz as an art music” (DeVeaux. p. 548).

Williams’ astute observations about Silver’s style seem to easily relate to, or overlap with, thoughts proposed by DeVeaux, Schuller, Baraka, Collier and others, all of which can be viewed to marginalize Silver’s worth as an artist. I asked all eight interviewees about the ideas referenced above that related to Silver’s commercial

success, and whether or not Silver's music is synonymous with high musical art. *All* of them expressed the same feeling in almost identical words which I paraphrase here: "Anyone who devalues Silver's work as anything *less* than high art don't know what they're talking about!" My opinion is that his genius should not be limited to any one style or label, nor be evaluated in relation to commercial success or failure. When asked about his funky-soul style, Silver sometimes told interviewers he didn't think of his music as being any *one* style. He felt he quite naturally merged cultural, musical, and environmental influences, creating an uplifting musical representation of how he feels about the world. Tempting as it appears to be to focus on one Silver song style, "for every down-home funky tune there is one or more that in no way fits the funky stereotype" (Owens. p. 221).

In particular, "Silver wrote some of jazz's most poignant ballads: tunes like *Shirl, Lonely Woman, Peace, Sweet Stuff, and Cherry Blossom*. Silver ventured into time signatures like the 6/8 he used on one of his first major hits, *Senor Blues*, and bar lengths like the 16-6-16 bar structure of *Swinging the Samba* that broke with jazz's traditional Tin Pan Alley-derived 32 bar AABA formula" (Rosenthal. p. 45). Talking of Silver's 1958 *Further Explorations of the Horace Silver Quintet*, Rosenthal called Silver's writing ". . . genuine jazz compositions" with unusual construction such as, ". . . Melancholy Mood with its 7-7-7 bar pattern, and most include secondary themes, varied rhythmic devices typically consisting of a Latin beat played off against straight-ahead 4/4 sections, and percussive riffs" (p. 46). "He is one of the two or three principal composers in bebop" (Owens. p. 154). One could argue he is one of the three principal composers in the entire history of jazz, along with Monk and Ellington. It is difficult to prove, but Silver could be the most prolific jazz composer

ever, and it is unique (again) in that there is *zero* controversy surrounding the authorship of Silvers' tunes, something that cannot be said of Davis and Ellington.

There is a fair amount of diversity in Silver's songwriting. He wrote many songs completely different in structure to *Sister Sadie* or *The Preacher*, the hits most often identified with his funky, hard-bop style. "His harmonic vocabulary in *Melancholy Mood*, *Barbara*, and others is far removed from the folk traditions, as is the 7/4 meter of *Perseverance and Endurance*" (Owens. p. 221). Silver often employs chromatic melodies with dissonant harmonies like *Nica's Dream*, *Ecaroh*, & *Barbara*; unexpected rhythm, form or tempo changes, for instance, suddenly going into a fast tempo on *Where You At* from *Horace-Scope*; utilizing odd meters or phrase structures like *Jungle Juice* from the 1968 *Serenade to a Soul Sister*, which is moving between a main stanza in 5/4 and a bridge in 6/4; *The Mohican and the Great Spirit* has a bar of 4/4 followed by a bar of 5/4; *The Outlaw* has phrases of 7, 6, 7, 6, 10, and 18 (an "a-b-a-b-c-d" form); *Nineteen Bars* has phrases of 7, 8, and 4; *Activation* is AABA, but with phrases of 9, 9, 14, and 9; *Pretty Eyes* is 3/4 in Eb minor, constructed in 16 and 18 bar passages, with an interlude where the melody goes to Ab major and Gmajor. These are all quite unique song form structures.

Horace says about *Metamorphosis* from *The Styling's of Silver*: "... this song has two 15 bar phrases with a 16-measure channel, and that last 15 measures again. Even though it's not even, it sounds even. As long as it feels natural it's all right. I don't try to contrive something just to make it different" (Silver. Liner notes). Of *You Happened My Way* from *Finger Poppin`* Silver says, "... the construction is a little unusual. The main phrase is 12 bars long, but the second time it's played, the last bar overlaps into the first bar of the channel, so in effect the chorus is 12, 12, 7, and 12.

It's written in the key of B, but the 2nd eight ends on a C chord, so the channel starts in C. I don't stop to think about measures until after I'm finished writing. As long as they feel even and comfortable, that's all that counts" (Feather. Liner notes).

Regardless of their complexity, Silver's songs tend to have a "hook" that seemingly never fails to connect emotionally with listeners, which was, no doubt, one of Silver's overriding intentions.

Characteristic trademarks of the Silver style included the use of bass ostinatos, often in unison with his left hand (*Song for My Father, Senior Blues*); unifying accompaniment textures, such as the alternating the Latin and swing sections in the bridge of *Nica's Dream*, and the interlude between solos; fast tremolos and false fingerings reminiscent of Monk and more dated, traditional piano styles; dry, pedal-free ballads (also Monk-like); bitonality effects and emphasizing the upper structure ninths, elevenths, and thirteenth; 2-beat and backbeat rhythms, bluesy phrases, minor pentatonic and blues scales; a left hand "rump" (*Bridgewater*) or "... low tone clusters as rhythmic punctuation . . ." (Owens).

Two more highly recognizable traits of Silver's piano playing are (1) his use of short melodic phrases and sequences in the right hand while soloing, and (2) the percussive, driving comping feel of his left hand. Most can easily hear the first when listening. Eddie Meadows' analysis is: "Silver seems to prefer conjunct melodic movement while Powell and Monk seemed to prefer disjunctive melodic lines. By using conjunct melodies that are permeated with a strong blues-gospel feeling, Silver achieved a musical groove that has proven to be successful since the mid-50's. The success and intensity of this musical groove has been enhanced by Silver's knowledge



that conjunct melodies are easier to remember and in most cases, are more likely to become a hit with the masses than are the disjunctive-type melodies that characterized the bop era” (Meadows. p. 124). Paraphrasing Meadows in layman's terms, “. . . you can sing his solos . . .” (Bridgewater).

“Silver is also known to transpose a sequential pattern to a different key while keeping the same rhythmic pattern, to reinforce both uniformity and familiarity in a composition. It develops an inner momentum and drive which enables it to both veer in the direction of uniformity and also to veer away from the envisaged point of completion . . . Silver’s use of the sequence is regular and uniform, and the result is that the listeners feel they know what the next stimulus will be, however, they remain in doubt as to where the process will be broken” (Meadows. p. 125). Silver uses sequences not only in his solos, but in his melodies too, such as in *Song for My Father*, *Filthy McNasty*, *The Great American Indian Uprising*, and many others.

In his autobiography, Silver says he puts just as much energy in perfecting his comping as one might in perfecting one’s soloing. He cherished and valued the role of accompaniment greatly, and said of his comping: “All the cats dug the way I comped behind them. I always tried to get up under them, to provide a great rhythmic and harmonic background that would inspire them to play their best and, above all, swing” (Silver/Pastras p. 51). In contrast to Monk’s comping that was unpopular with musicians, everybody seemed to love Silver’s: “he always played percussively . . . dance rhythms seem to underpin everything he plays” (Cook. p. 55); Miles Davis said of Silver’s comping: “He put a fire up under my playing” (Cook); Art Farmer said of Silver’s comping: “Horace is very compelling, driving and forceful. It would make a

traffic jam if you lay back” (Gaines. p. 45); “. . . extraordinarily propulsive . . .” (Rosenthal. p. 29); “. . . brilliant hard driving piano . . .” (Gitler).

The last aspect of style to be mentioned is by no means the least important. Silver elevated the art of orchestration, particularly of quintet writing, to a level unsurpassed to date. Perhaps a singular achievement, to the extent that anything can be so, because neither Ellington, nor Monk, nor Blakey, nor Parker or Coltrane did it at Silver’s level of perfection. Who matched Silver’s skill orchestrating for a quintet? Using his piano like a big band, everything about his playing seems compositional and lyrical in nature. “Silver makes two horns and his piano sound exactly like the alternating brass and reed sections of a big band executing call-and-response riffs . . . and, Silver uses his piano excellently as a substitute sax or brass section, propelling his soloists along with background riff figures” (Williams. p. 184). Silver says about his arrangements including interludes, tag endings and shout choruses: “I was looking to be unique and do something different, not over-arrange but be more original, color it up a bit and make the whole presentation more uplifting and desirable for people to listen to” (Sidran. p. 63). “His music is beautiful. He learned how to voice very well. He learned how to utilize two horns to the fullest extent. That's one thing I learned from him. Instead of hearing a whole lot of horns he'd take two horns and get just as much out of two as you can get out of three in most cases. He would utilize everything. He just turned out to be a hell of an arranger. The more he did it, the better he got” (Blakey. p. 17).

### The Influence:

This paper proposes that greatness in jazz is best judged by evaluating to what degree an artist builds upon the tradition and adds his own unique sound or style to it. Another legitimate question in evaluating “greatness” is to ask, to what extent has that artist influenced others? Silver’s influence was not as singular as someone like Parker because Horace influenced more than just music-playing styles. He was an influential composer and orchestrator, bandleader, businessman, and for some, an excellent model of healthy, spiritual behavior. Parker has influenced many players, including Silver, but has not contributed much on how to succeed in the music business, lead a band, or even a life for that matter. Silver made significant impacts on people besides how to play an instrument or compose a song.

Harrell said he learned the importance of making music that “feels good” from Silver. Bridgewater said Silver taught him how to put the music together professionally in terms of the mechanics, preparation, and live performance of it, and also how to maintain energy and health while on the road. Maupin said Silver taught him things about harmony, chord voicings, and about communicating with the audience. Brecker said he modeled his own small groups after Silver’s in many ways, including the use of his two-horn harmony techniques. Brecker also said that in his own long history with music, he never met a leader who rehearsed as much as Silver. This influenced Brecker to rehearse his later groups a lot. Silver was this author’s chief inspiration for composing and leading small jazz groups. Tools Silver used compositionally can be found in much of my writing, though like Silver, I did not reflect on such things until after a song was finished being composed.

When Herbie Hancock was first approached for a record deal, he apparently lied and said yes when asked if he had his own publishing company. At the time he did not, but right after that meeting he formed one because he knew (after Silver's example) that he needed to self-publish in order to collect 100% of publishing royalties (Bridgewater). As Bridgewater suggested, without Silver, we may not have known about a Hancock, or songs like *Watermelon Man*. Without Silver's model, many musicians, like Hancock, might have inadvertently sacrificed 50% of their potential royalties.

Perhaps, the two most famous piano players that publicly acknowledge their debt to Silver are Chick Corea and Joe Zawinul. Each wrote forewords for Silver books. Zawinul said he copied Silver's style for a long time, calling Silver "one of the original masters of the 20th century's greatest art form" (Zawinul). Corea's praise is equally lofty. Corea said he "copied Silver's entire repertoire from the albums with Blue Mitchell" (Lyons. p. 260). Corea also said Silver was one of " . . . the very first musicians that truly inspired him to go ahead with music as a lifelong love and pursuit" (Corea. p. 4).

Silver's influence is obvious on these two jazz giants, but some of the pianists Silver inspired may be surprising to some readers. For instance, avant-garde pioneer Cecil Taylor says, " . . . listening to Horace that night I dug that he was the real thing, the Negro idea because he was playing with all the physicality of it, with the fifth of it, and the movement in the attack" (Collier. p. 456). In the chapter about Taylor from Collier's *The Making of Jazz*, Collier explains that Cecil had been listening to Brubeck and Tristano while thinking of using European influences in his playing.

Hearing Silver really turned Taylor's head around: "... in the end, it was another type of piano player, Horace Silver, that affected him most deeply" (Collier. p. 456).

The influence of Silver's style on other important musicians is by no means limited to jazz artists. Silver's early work in the 1950's seemed to singularly spur a wide-ranging list of notable artists and tunes. It is difficult to imagine the following list without acknowledging that each of these artists were standing on the shoulders, so to speak, of the truly great tradition embodied by Silver: "Silver's pioneering work helped kick off a new wave of jazz that pulled others along in its wake. Cannonball Adderly (Sack o' Woe), Joe Zawinal (Mercy, Mercy), Bobby Timmons (Moanin`), Lee Morgan (The Sidewinder), Herbie Hancock (Watermelon Man), Freddie Hubbard (One Mint Julep), Ramsey Lewis (The In Crowd), Eddie Harris (Listen Here), Les McCann (Compared to What). The ramifications of this were far-reaching indeed, affecting generations of players in both rock and jazz, pianists as diverse as Herbie Hancock, Geri Allen, Gene Harris, Chick Corea, Joe Sample, Benny Green, Dr. John, Gregg Allman and A.J. Croce" (Woodward). Maybe one could add to that list Cecil Taylor and hence, indirectly, the avant-garde.

#### The Conclusion:

In reviewing the distinguishing characteristics of Silver's playing and writing, his history, influences and background, there is no argument whatsoever, even from his most outspoken critics, that he is highly respected as a brilliant craftsman, and a gifted composer who has often bridged the gaps (whether real or imaginary) between jazz and other musical forms, and clouded the defining lines and labels that separate

high-art music from entertainment, funk-soul jazz from bebop, and genre from purist aesthetics. An overwhelming majority of the critics, and apparently all of the most respected musicians that I know of, believe Silver's music *and* piano playing is purely distinctive and instantly recognizable. All agree that Silver was an important founding father of a new genre in jazz, one that continues to have an obvious and positive impact on the music and musicians of today, over 50 years since the birth of hard-bop.

What is important now is this:

Will we continue to relegate artists like Silver to a somewhat arbitrary second tier of importance when compared to the Monk's, Parker's and Ellington's of the first tier? I propose we permanently devalue the linear, hierarchal structure used to define jazz history that is currently taught by academics and formulated by critics and historians. In its place, we should adopt a new criterion for determining greatness - one that reflects the ideals of those musicians who actually create and extend the art form in the first place. What these jazz "insiders" seem to believe, that is paramount for the success of anybody striving to be an exceptional jazz musician, is that one should endeavor to: build upon the existing rock of historical, musical and cultural tradition, standing on the shoulders of giants, as it were, and not shitting on them, but instead, adding a singular stamp of creative genius to it while pursuing the pinnacle of one's self-development. *This, Silver has done, and as well as anyone else in history.*

Greg Chako, edited 7-9-14

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