The School of Jazz grew out of the obvious necessity for a professional workshop for jazz musicians which would provide “sitting in” experience for the apprentices in the field and at the same time give them the first public exposure which leads to eventual jobs in jazz. The School is already able to evaluate its effectiveness, having gained financial support from the jazz business and art patrons, seen the introduction of Ornette Coleman, and provided the model against which colleges have patterned new jazz programs.

But to mention only The School Of Jazz is to forget the Quartet’s impact on The Monterey Festival (with John Lewis as artistic director), the formation of New York’s first jazz and classical music society, the in-residence group stature of the MJQ at the Berkshire Music Barn in Lenox, and their participation in countless educational programs created for experiment with and exposure of jazz.

These is a world of new criticism and a more prevalent tendency toward critical analysis. A world in which a new vocabulary has appeared with such expressions as “third stream.” A world of promotional materials with the result that one is likely to find one of their posters from a recent engagement for sale at Georg Jensen.

This album is an inevitable result of this kind of world. It appears after the Quartet has achieved its distinctive musical stature and at a time when each member of the group is in unquestioned command of his instrument and musical technique. It is the musical defense of Ralph Gleason’s comment that: “In a very real sense, the MJQ is a microcosm of the modern jazz scene. Within it are all the elements of importance affecting modern jazz—reaffirmation of the debt to the blues, intelligent use of classical devices and harmonies, a choice repertory of originals as well as the best show tunes and ballads. Beneath it all flows a pulsating rhythm, fine as a diamond drill, moving the whole inexorably, though delicately, on through time.” It is a statement of their world.

—JULE FOSTER
(from the original liner notes)
modern jazz quartet

the modern jazz quartet

volume one
european concert

N ow that the Modern Jazz Quartet is almost ten years old and has estab-
lished itself with audiences and listeners, whether jazz-directed or classically-
directed, whether in the United States, Europe or the Near East, it is almost too easy to heap
upon the quartet all the superlatives which one
can muster from one’s memory or dictionary and
and to hope that the sound of the most
unique’s, world’s greatest’s and supreme
artistry’s will somehow be indicative of the
work and, more practically, the achievement,
of John Lewis, Percy Heath, Milt Jackson and
Connie Kay. Their self-disciplined growth, from
a vague and shadowy 1951-1954 beginning

with a few experimental recording and prac-
tice sessions, the first public concerts, and the
formation of a musical philosophy, has elevat-
ed the Quartet to the enviable position of inter-
national respect. However, since the Quartet
has chosen to wait until now to release any
recording of a concert performance—when
they felt that, finally, it was time to preserve an
entire concert for immediate and eventual
judgment—it is perhaps also time to take
note of some of those events and directions
which have become the world of The Modern
Jazz Quartet.

The world of The Modern Jazz Quartet is a
world of ordered creative reaction which
sprang from the now sometimes forgotten,
quiet admonition of John Lewis early in the
Quartet’s concert life... “I think that the audi-
ence for jazz can be widened if we strengthen
our work with structure. If there is more of a
reason for what is going on, there’ll be more
over-all sense and therefore, more interest for
the listener... The improvised and written sec-
tions should not take on too much complexi-
ity— the total effect must be within the mind’s
ability to appreciate through the ear. Also, the
music will have to swing, but remember that
all music must do this, must have a mean-
ful rhythmic sense...”

Remembered in retrospect and in terms of
what the Quartet has become, this statement
is transformed into a kind of a pragmatic
creed in jazz and a statement of purpose
which has restricted the work of the Quartet
to a constant development and restudy of
their style within the limits of a specific direc-
tion, but at the same time provided the foun-
dation for their apparent musical freedom...
even though originally it was offered merely
as a description of what the Quartet was try-
ing to do. Whether considered within or with-
out the historical context, this intention has
become the nucleus of a reaction throughout
the critical, musical, and business aspects of
the total jazz field; a reaction which has even
served notice and had discernible effect
throughout contemporary music. This state-
ment and its musical translation has affected
not only the Quartet’s music, but the music
around them, the attitudes toward the nature
of a jazz performance, jazz recording,
atttempts to place jazz within the total per-
spective of contemporary music, the nature of
musical creation, jazz promotion, and the way
of life which the Quartet has chosen to lead.

Seldom has a musical group from any
musical age had the profound effect on the
performance practices of its age that the
Quartet has had on the performance practices
of jazz. Before there was a Modern Jazz
Quartet, there were jazz concerts. The Quartet
did not invent the idea, and yet, they have
been named “the first pure concert ensemble
in jazz.” There are both visual and musical rea-
sons for the qualification of The Modern Jazz
Quartet as the concert ensemble, even during
the lifetime of Duke Ellington.

Visually, The Modern Jazz Quartet has elimi-
nated distraction from the jazz concert stage.
It was with full intent that the four members of
the group have sought to lose the individual
personality within the unit by following close
rules of stage arrangement and dress.
Aesthetically as dull-looking on the stage as a
string quartet (the British critics have called
one of their performances, “jazz in sober
suits”), the Quartet’s stage attitude forces the
audience into a state of listening. The unity of
the group disqualifies individual showmanship
and superficial characterization by any of the
players which might intrude on the real busi-
ness at hand, the musical program. What is
gained is the aesthetic opportunity for full dis-
play of musical individuality and technical vir-
tuosity of the individual members.

This visual concept was necessary because
of the Quartet’s most severe performance
practice and challenge, concert improvisation.
Improvisation is, of course, forever regarded
as the essence of jazz and the most important
of its musical characteristics, but it cannot be
taken automatically for granted that all jazz
groups improvise. Realistically speaking, the
majority of the groups do not achieve any real sense of improvisation at all, with the exception of an occasional solo; and too often the jazz concert consists merely of canned arrangements of tunes which have become popular, and whatever improvisation existed, existed only during the first playing of the composition, however many months or years before this was done.

—JULE FOSTER
(from the original liner notes)

the modern jazz quartet
volume two

European concert

It has remained for The Modern Jazz Quartet to devise a practicable method for creative and formal improvisation by four musicians simultaneously, and their achievement in this technique is equal to the greatest achievement of western musical history, including the transcendent creativity of the soloists of the baroque and early eighteenth century periods of musical development. Max Harrison, the British critic, has noted the improvisational achievement of the quartet: “it seems that Lewis, with his additions and modifications to the language of modern jazz, has, for the small group at least succeeded in utilizing more elaborate forms while preserving the soloist’s freedom. The innovations have been proved valid, and form and content, improvisation and composition have in his hands entered into a closer, more complex relationship than ever before in modern jazz... To hear the Quartet play pieces like Django twice in one day with largely different solos on each occasion was to realize that the group is very far from stagnation. The MJQ presented more improvisation per concert than any other group that has visited us (England) and this increased one’s admiration for their innovations in other directions all the more.”

The proof of the meaning of jazz improvisation that this album provides the listener is one of its special significances. Many of the compositions played here have been released before... some of them (Django, Vendome) even twice before. The time taken for a short session of comparative listening will give ample evidence of the Quartet’s intent to “constantly develop a musical idea as long as it is within the repertoire of the
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ed the playing of 88 concerts within a period of four months, most of them solo concerts. The group made a whistlestop tour through every available hall in Western Germany on the slimmest of concert budgets. But this was essentially a matter of bringing their music to a new audience on the terms of that audience and served as the Quartet’s declaration of concert purpose.

At that time began the many first-appearances—by jazz which are a part of the MJQ history... The Belgian Decade of American Contemporary Music, the concert at the Mozarteum, in Salzburg, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Donaueschingen Festival in Germany, among them. The Quartet pioneered a concert trail which this year will be extended to Japan and the Far East, and through which many jazz groups of the new genre will most likely follow.

The Quartet's interest in the institutions of jazz is characterized by their participation in and founding of The School of Jazz in Lenox, Massachusetts. With John Lewis as the musical director, and Heath, Jackson, and Kay as the nucleus of a faculty which has included Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Oscar Peterson, Gunther Schuller, and J. J. Johnson, the School has completed four successful August sessions with an alumni presently numbering over
the modern jazz quartet

european concert

european concert volumes one & two
the modern jazz quartet
european concert

volume one
1. django 5:32
   (John Lewis)
2. bluesology 4:39
   (Milt Jackson)
3. i should care 5:33
   (Sammy Cahn, Axel Stordahl, Paul Weston)
4. la ronde 3:07
   (John Lewis)
5. i remember clifford 5:15
   (Benny Golson)
6. festival sketch 4:41
   (John Lewis)
7. vendome 2:45
   (John Lewis)
8. odds against tomorrow 6:57
   (John Lewis)

originally released in 1962 as Atlantic 1385

volume two
9. pyramid (blues for junior) 8:45
   (Ray Brown)
10. it don’t mean a thing
    (if it ain’t got that swing) 5:36
    (Duke Ellington, Irving Mills)
11. skating in central park 6:05
    (John Lewis, Judy Spence)
12. the cylinder 6:20
    (Milt Jackson)
13. ‘round midnight 3:46
    (Bernie Hanighen, Cootie Williams, Thelonious Monk)
14. bags’ groove 5:14
    (Milt Jackson)
15. i’ll remember april 4:53
    (Gene De Paul, Don Raye, Pat Johnson)

originally released in 1962 as Atlantic 1386

total time: 79:42

the modern jazz quartet is composed of john lewis, piano; milt jackson,
vibraharp; percy heath, bass; connie kay, drums. recorded in scandinavia in april, 1960.
recording engineer; gusta whoholm. cover photos: lee friedlander. supervision: nesuhi ertegun

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