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MUSIC REVIEW

JAZZ'S GREAT PEDAGOGUE

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ERIC DOLPHY (1928-1964) is a jazz great who rarely led a band. The multi-instrumentalist, who was a virtuoso on alto saxophone, flute and bass clarinet, is renowned for his work in ensembles led by John Coltrane and Charles Mingus; in addition, he played on Ornette Coleman's groundbreaking 1961 release "Free Jazz" (Atlantic). His best-known work as a leader occurred in a variety of 1961 studio and live recordings with trumpeter Booker Little, and his 1964 album "Out to Lunch!" (Blue Note) is one of the cornerstone recordings of the genre. He introduced the bass clarinet into jazz, and his flute and alto saxophone playing expanded the lexicon of his instruments. The impact of his compositions can be heard throughout jazz today as bands offer unusual combinations of sonorities and harmonies.

"Musical Prophet: The Expanded 1963 New York Studio Sessions" (Resonance), which was released as a three-LP set in November to coincide with Record Store Day, is now being released digitally and as a three-CD set. It presents remastered versions of Dolphy's stellar "Iron Man" and "Conversations" albums, as

well as 70 minutes of music that has never been released. This set includes the first officially released new studio music from Dolphy in more



Eric Dolphy in Paris in 1961

than 30 years and is a vital document of a master musician at a creative peak.

Of the major figures of the early '60s jazz avant-garde—the others are Coleman, Coltrane and Cecil Taylor—Dolphy, in his music, made the strongest argument that the "New Thing," as it was often called, wasn't a repudiation of the past but a continuation of it. This is especially evident in the material from the "Iron Man" sessions.

Dolphy recruited an exceptional cast of young musicians whose later work would be revered, including bassist

Richard Davis, vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, saxophonists Clifford Jordan and Sonny Simmons and trumpeter Woody Shaw. The title

track of "Iron Man" opens with a burst of speed and intensity, as if the listener walked in on a band in full flight. Dolphy plays alto saxophone solos almost immediately and with swinging ferocity, offering a modernist take on Paul Gonsalves's famous 1956 solo on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" on "Ellington at Newport" (Columbia).

A more explicit connection to Ellington is made on the warm, reflective rendition of the Duke's "Come Sunday," which is done as a duet with Mr. Davis and with Dolphy on bass clarinet. Another tie to the past arrives with Dolphy's wistful and complex "Ode to Charlie Parker," also a duet with Mr. Davis—this time with the leader on flute.

There are two more superb ensemble tracks off of "Conversations," and the adroit weave of sonic textures prefigures the brilliance of "Out to Lunch!," but the highlights are the intimate

settings. "Love Me," which was written by Ned Washington and Victor Young, is a solo saxophone piece for Dolphy, a rare setting at the time but one that grew commonplace by decade's end. Then there are three duets with Mr. Davis: "Alone Together" and two renditions of "Muses for Richard," both previously unissued, which showcase the bassist's rich woody tone and Dolphy's exceptional range. The pieces feel like an exciting and insightful musical dialogue.

The third disc, all of previously unreleased music, features an alternate take of "Alone Together" and two of "Love Me." All three demonstrate the range of Dolphy's melodic ingenuity. It often seems as if he might go in any musical direction when soloing, creating a frisson that animates the tune and excites the listener.

Recently discovered vintage material has become a vital wing of jazz recordings, but this set by Dolphy is uniquely valuable. He emerged relatively late and died young, yet his influence is profound. The music on this release makes one hope that there is more Dolphy in vault somewhere.

Mr. Johnson writes about jazz for the Journal.