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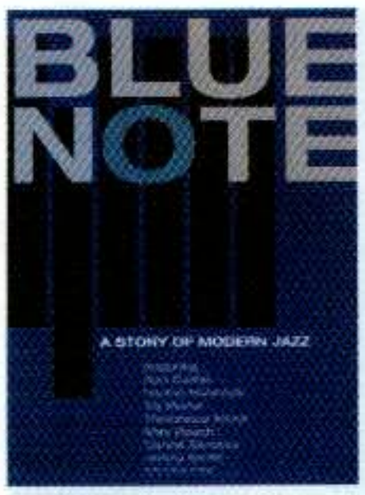


BLUE NOTE

A Story of Modern Jazz DVD

(EuroArts/Naxos)

Most people know that Blue Note is one of the greatest and most enduring jazz labels ever, bringing together such giants as Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock, Thelonious Sphere Monk, Max Roach and Jimmy Smith. Few know, however, that it was started by Alfred Lion and Frank Wolff, two Jewish immigrants who blended old-world sensibilities (Lion was famous for saying of the music on his label: "It must *schwing*") with new-world sensibilities and business smarts. Together, the duo put out some of the most dynamic audio (and visual) entertainment the music world has ever known.

On this new tribute documentary, friends, famous and otherwise, recall the great strides these two men made in the industry and in life, escaping persecution in Germany to bring the freedom of jazz to millions around the world. With rare concert performances and other archival footage, as well as live interviews, the story of these men, their label, and their unique, *schwing*-ing sound is brought back to life for a new generation of jazz fans, music fans and fans of stories about ordinary men who do great things. Party on, Alfred! Party on, Frank!

—Matt Robinson

VAN MORRISON

Under Review: 1964-1974 DVD

(MVD Visual)

There are some great moments on this DVD, which analyzes the amazing breadth of music Van Morrison made during the first decade of his long career. Near the beginning, there is short-haired, 20-year-old Van in a suit and tie, on stage with Them. He grips the microphone close to his mouth, eyes closed, shouting out "Gloria" like a baby-faced Irish satyr. His conservative look doesn't interfere at all with the message. His performance makes it clear exactly how she makes him feel alright, and there is something deliciously voyeuristic about watching him tell it.

Near the end of the video, during the 1973 "Too Late to Stop Now" tour, Van's hair is long and unruly and in true '70s' style, he sports a flowered shirt, white pants and a sky blue satin ascot. During "I Just Want to Make Love to You," he smokes, drops to his knees, high kicks, jumps and throws the mic stand around as he works the crowd and riles up the spectacular New Caledonia Soul Orchestra. In between, there are performance clips of some of his many influences including Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Louis Armstrong, Lonnie Donegan and Jack Kerouac. All these live turns make this survey worth watching.

Unfortunately the interviews with the enigmatic genius are all audio, with only footage of a tape recorder running. Such a disappointment. The knowledgeable writers and critics who do appear on camera do a good job of deconstructing the records and the Van Morrison mystique, but it would have been so much more fun to watch Van work his curmudgeonly verbal magic on camera. But for diehard Van fans, there is interesting commentary and just enough wow to keep it moving.

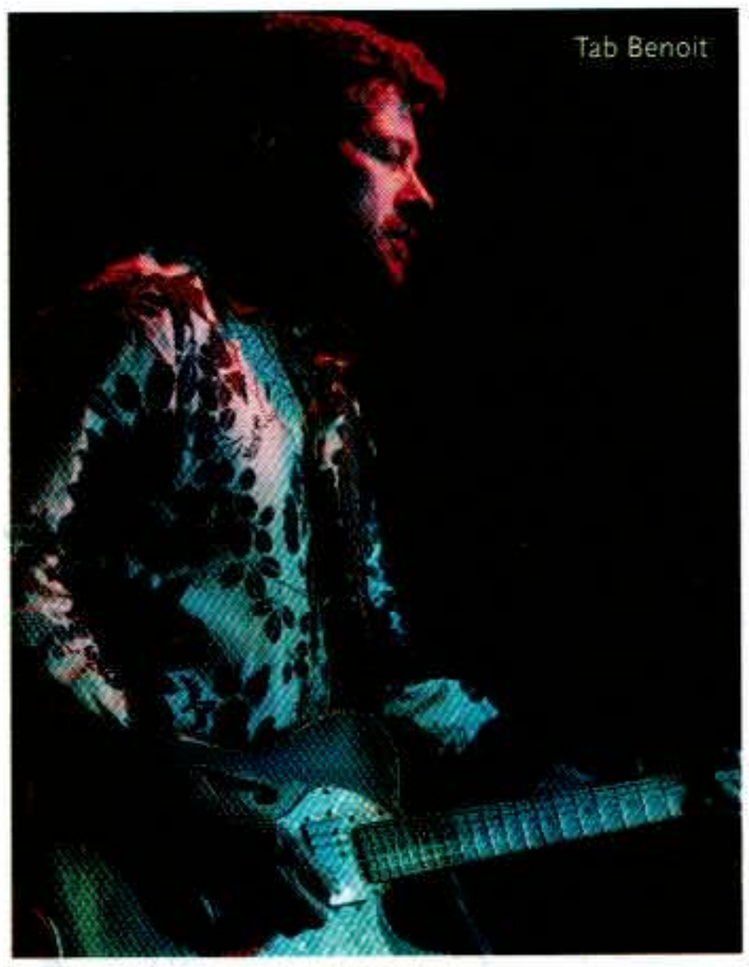
—Kay Cordtz

TAB BENOIT

Sullivan Hall, New York, NY

Tab Benoit is, without question, a blues guitar god. Backed by Leon Medica (bass) and David Peters (drums) of Louisiana's LeRoux, Benoit opened his recent Sullivan Hall show with the party standard "Last Night I Got Loaded" and followed it with "One Foot in the Bayou," making his guitar scream in the best way possible—the very definition of searing blues.

The already rowdy crowd got even noisier when, per their request, he launched into "Night Train." Between their excitement and Benoit's frenetic guitar style, energy ran almost impossibly high, but when Benoit introduced "New Orleans Ladies," a beautiful song and the first true slow song of the night, even these loud,



loyal fans showed they could quiet down. It didn't last long, of course, as Benoit's thundering melodies and ear-splitting solos made a swift, delightful return. After a string broke during "Nice and Warm," Benoit compared his guitar playing to banging on drums—something he actually did later on in the evening, as the crowd screamed for encores.

As surely as Tab Benoit knows how to open a show, he knows how to close one. Towards the end, he addressed the crowd's New Yorkers, asking them to spread the word so he could come back and play again, and then took a moment to comment on the sad state of his hometown: "Exercise democracy. Talk to those people when they win those elections," he said, and added, "I'm very passionate about the United States, and I'm very passionate about Louisiana." The song that followed his brief speech was supposed to be the last, but there was no satisfying that crowd, and the band happily returned once more.

—Abigail Wright

NORMA GRANZ, DIRECTOR

Duke Ellington At the Côte D'Azur with Ella Fitzgerald & Joan Miro

Duke: The Last Jam Session 2 DVDs

(Eagle Rock Entertainment)

Jazz aficionados and novices alike will be entertained by this

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