

## MARIO PAVONE Song for (Septet)

New World Records 80452

Among seldom-noted influences affecting broad developments in jazz of the 1990s is the continued growth to full maturity of musicians who survived the creative fires of the Sixties, Seventies and early Eighties. The so-called avant garde of those years was a crucible, producing a dubiously commercial but undeniably spirited movement against which the present-day neo-traditional wash is surely a reaction.

The major record companies, the mainstream media, and nationally known critics have often overlooked geographically dispersed centers of jazz activity in favor of better-publicized doings in New York City and Los Angeles. The image-mongers have also ignored even veteran jazz players who sometimes choose to work at some remove from the well-established jazz institutions -- the Village Voice, Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, and conservatories such as Boston's Berklee School of Music. Yet these players go about the business of trying to make new music, confident that their efforts are valid, and pleased with the opportunities they find. Mario Pavone, a primarily self-taught bassist and composer, is more active and accomplished now than ever before in his 30 year career.

"I came into music the opposite way than is happening now, which is through the schools," explains Pavone over the phone from his home in Connecticut, an hour and a half via parkway from New York City (he considers himself a suburban commuter). "Other than a very few lessons with the great classical bassist Bertram Turetzky--who was considered something of a radical, by the way--I'm completely untrained.

"I'd never played an instrument until I was twenty-four years old, though I sang rhythm and blues around the mostly black high school I attended in the mid Fifties. I'm fifty-three now, and play a hundred-year-old dark cherry wood Juzak, a U.S. bass, one of the first they made.

"I developed a passion for listening to jazz in college. Something happened to me when I first heard Coltrane. It was like he was saying, 'There is music in everyone, and there is music in the devoted pursuit of that music.' Then I was visiting an older friend, the guitarist Joe Diorio--who's from Waterbury--when he was in Chicago, and he heard me whistling a Wes Montgomery solo and said, 'You should be playing.' When I got home from Chicago I rented a bass and started plucking away.

"I graduated from the University of Connecticut in '64 as an industrial engineer; I was educated in quality controls and time studies. But I started playing bass that summer and was soon touring Europe with pianist Paul Bley and drummer Barry Altschul."

Even the staunchest defenders of Sixties culture concede it was an era of excess. In jazz, a cathartic and often competitive expressionism was much in vogue.

"In New York in the Sixties people were playing in lofts, there was Albert Ayler and Archie Shepp, there would be sessions with a many horn players wailing, and I was immersed in it all," Pavone recalls. "There was a certain amount of anger, agitation, almost violence in the 'free,' or 'outside,' music; which reflected the general political climate at that time. Anyway, the New York school had a thing about

playing hard and long--so when the influence of the Chicago AACM [Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians] arrived, with its emphasis on compositional methods and ensemble sound, lighter but still avant garde, it seemed heaven-sent.

"I always practiced. For one thing, when I started there were no amplifiers. There would be two bassists, two drummers, five or six horns at a session, and you could hardly hear yourself--you *had* to play strongly.

"I take a different approach to the bass now--and I could use three lifetimes to catch up on my instrument--but my lines have never been like the guitar-styled bass of today. My influences are Albert Stinson, Malachi Favors, Henry Grimes, Charlie Haden, Fred Hopkins. And Mingus, of course, bass-wise but also for his interest in colors, openness and sudden shifts."

All of those players have taken pride in supporting roles over their spotlight moments as soloists, and so it is with Pavone, who indulges himself no lengthy features on *Song For (Septet)*, his second CD for New World Records after self-producing *Sharpeville* (in '89), *Shodo* ('81), and *Digit* ('79) on his own Alacra label. He's performed solo concerts, often under the auspices of the Creative Musicians Improvisers Forum (CMIF), a New Haven-based artists' collective set up loosely on the AACM model. But he's most conspicuous as the anchoring bassist of the Thomas Chapin Trio, and an accomplished bandleader and composer--roles he first assumed during the early Seventies.

"That was a fertile period when everyone was at Yale or at Wesleyan University: Leo Smith, Jane Bloom, Mark Helias, Bobby Naughton, Ray Anderson, Anthony Davis, Gerry Hemingway, Pheroan ak Laff, Brandon Ross, Anthony Braxton. That was my second coterie," Pavone says. "I'd already spent serious time with Bley and with trumpeter Bill Dixon, who ran a Saturday morning rehearsal session in New York called Orchestra of the Streets." Pavone reconnected with the individualistic Dixon in the late Seventies, and recorded with him several times in the Eighties.

As for regionalism in the age of global communication, Pavone says, "CMIF began as a regional group, but luckily produced world-class players. In the early Eighties we co-sponsored big-band concerts with the Hartford Jazz Society; someone like Muhal Richard Abrams or Carla Bley would conduct." Financial constraints currently prevent such concerts, but Pavone occasionally mounts elaborate presentations of his music at Wesleyan and elsewhere.

"I've worked up to Swing," he continues. "I've always searched for propulsion, pulsation rather than time. I'm not interested in maintaining a steady 4/4 through a whole piece; what interests me is to juxtapose, to walk after emerging from something else, then to roar out of there. But during the past fourteen years, I've been learning a lot more about playing over changes and harmonic things than I knew earlier. I share the bass chair at the 880 Club with Nat Reeves, who plays with Jackie McLean; on Thursday All-Star Nights someone good, and usually straight ahead, comes from out of town.

"I think my compositions have a special sound because of my outside leanings, but my bottoms have always been rooted in the tradition and groove-oriented. My tops are angular. I pay attention to rhythmic detail so it's not 4/4 all the time. I like to switch it up."

Throughout *Song For (Septet)* Pavone demonstrates commanding swing, as well as a willingness to let

irregular melodic ideas unfold (a la Ornette Coleman) even if they disrupt conventional form; he enjoys pitting two or more motifs against each other for rhythmic tension and complexity. As a composer, he conceives his music in terms of instrumental colors--"I knew these tunes, which I wrote at home during two months off from touring with Chapin, would be predominantly clarinets and flutes, bass clarinets and vibraphone. And from the first, I meant to feature the solos of Madsen and Ware, who get more space than the horns, you'll notice."

Pavone (like most jazz composers, though Ellington is typically credited with starting the practice) always thinks of specific players for the parts he charts. "I'm most interested in writing music for musicians whose sounds attract me," he explains, "in getting commitments from them to work with me exclusively for a couple of weeks in rehearsing, and then going out to play a half dozen gigs through the Northeast. I like to get everyone in the same spiritual place. It's hard for me to believe great music can be made without that human connection."

As a result, his septet displays a unanimity of purpose that bespeaks its members' close association and mutual sensibility. Pavone has known high energy alto saxist and flutist Chapin for fifteen years, multi-reedist Marty Ehrlich, who's earned his bluesy, heartfelt style, for twelve. Pavone calls trombonist Peter McEachern, whose tone sometimes resembles that of a French horn, "an old friend"; and he worked with drummer Steve Johns--a man with power to spare, who plays the *music*, not just the beat--in Chapin's trio as well as on his previous New World CD *Toulon Days*. He met incisive pianist Peter Madsen through Johns, and heard provocative, lyrical vibist Bill Ware while on tour with the Jazz Passengers (Ware's a founding member) in Europe.

"Marty and Tom, especially, have been tremendously helpful collaborators," Pavone says, "providing voicings when I haven't filled out all three leads, co-writing tunes, and just being attuned to what I want." They too value the spontaneity, originality and appetite for adventure that characterized "outside" jazz in the Sixties and Seventies. Yet Ehrlich and Chapin have virtuosic skills and overall professionalism equal to any jazz challenge they might face today.

"I think Peter Madsen is a particularly powerful and flexible pianist," Pavone continues, "he's worked with Stan Getz and John Abercrombie, and gigged on his own in New York. Steve Johns has worked with George Russell's orchestra and is currently (1994) with the Billy Taylor Trio. When the written parts stop so it's up to each player to play at his or her own pace--interpret, so rigidity breaks down and the soloist stretches out the feeling of the line--Steve really helps. When you've played twenty-one gigs in twenty-two days as he and I have, you get a chance to get your stuff together.

"The players have their own ideas about the parts I write that help things lie more comfortably for them, and we make adjustments before we record. But I like my brass muted, so that's what Peter McEachern plays. He's even muted on his solo in '3 M Blues.'"

The three Ms are the Pavones: Mario, his wife, Mary (president of a manufacturing concern), and his 32-year-old son Michael, a guitarist who graduated from Berklee after starting at age three to play with his dad. "The idea of that piece was to play an irregular blues," says Pavone. "After what I hope is an interesting head, we'd vamp over B flat, and when the soloist felt he'd stretched enough, he'd gesture and the ensemble would play two choruses of an altered line while he finished the solo.

"'George On Avenue A' was inspired by a local musician friend of mine, whose slight awkwardness when we made a trip to New York gave me the loping line that the bass and bass clarinet play, with another line above. Madsen is really sparse and powerful soloing on it. Chapin wrote the shout chorus at the end of the vibes solo before the out-head.

"'Dance Off' is one of my favorites; it's a slowly developing piece, with the trombone and bass playing the bass line. Horn accents come in as the line repeats in 9/4 or 5/4, and the vibes solo over everything. Eventually the vibes are joined by flute and clarinet, and the melody emerges as the piece comes to an end. We back ourselves out opposite to the way we came in.

"'Song for M' is dedicated to my wife, a love song. For 'Chaplines' I set the alto battle as an intro, then we play the line, but instead of more horns next, which might be expected, I wanted to hear piano. And Madsen makes one of his strongest statements.

"You see, I'm thinking as a listener when I prepare this music, and I order as much as possible even before we go into the studio. It's about surprising the listener with changing textures and varieties of ensemble sounds. I use color charts, and sequence the tracks like a suite, thinking of the whole process from composition to improvisation and back.

"I bow on 'Ciro,' which is somewhat unrelated to the other pieces. It comes from Leo Smith's influence on me, juxtaposing fragments of written material with improvisations, then more written material, and more improv, and so on. Each player takes the lead with his solo, and those solos are very open. It's dedicated to my friend Nick Makros, a saxophonist who was mysteriously murdered in '93; I found his body in his apartment. It's a loose ballad. Tom got a Dolphy feeling in his flute solo, and Marty did, too, on bass clarinet.

"'The Door' is from Chapin's thick book of compositions, with normal form and changes; it's always been a favorite of mine, and I asked if we could do it--it hasn't been recorded before. 'B Count' has an obscure reference to Basie's driving orchestral feel. It gets more open and extended as it goes on, but it set out to be a normal piece."

Pavone explicates the structures of *Song For (Septet)* with easily apparent satisfaction. "My limitations have worked for me," he suggests, not to deny the value of greater knowledge, but to uphold the primacy of intuition and the imaginative ear.

"I'm trying to make albums of interest and lasting value," he says. "I love performing, but I love recording and the crafting of every detail even more. I think that kind of care brings people closer to understanding the music, especially mine, coming as it does from the avant garde. I'm trying to make my music accessible, but not abandon what jazz players do in the real world.

"I'm trying to compose for straight, strong playing," concludes Mario Pavone, "but I'm not making music about a period or a scene that's over and done with, so we know what it was and wasn't. My music is about right now."

—Howard Mandel

Howard Mandel *writes about jazz and related musics for many publications and for radio productions. He's currently*

*working on a book entitled Future Jazz, for Oxford University Press.*

**Mario Pavone** is a graduate of the University of Connecticut, where he studied with Bertram Turetzky. He has anchored the trios of Paul Bley, Bill Dixon, and Thomas Chapin. In addition to leading his own ensemble, Pavone has played and recorded with Anthony Braxton, Marty Ehrlich, Dewey Redman, and Leo Smith. He has performed throughout the world at many major jazz festivals including the JVC, Newport, North Sea, Vancouver, Toulon, Wolf Trap, and Nippon Express (Japan) Festivals.

## **SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

As a leader:

*Sharpeville*. Mario Pavone. Alacra 1012.

*Shodo*. Mario Pavone. Alacra 1004.

*Toulon Days*. Mario Pavone. New World Records/CounterCurrents 80420-2.

As a sideman:

*Duets*. Anthony Braxton. Music and Arts CD-786.

*Anima*. Thomas Chapin. Knitting Factory Works 121.

*Insomnia*. Thomas Chapin. Knitting Factory Works 132.

*November 81*. Bill Dixon. Soul Note 1037/38.

*Son of Sisyphus*. Bill Dixon. Soul Note 121138.

Executive producer: Arthur Moorhead

Producer: Marty Ehrlich

Engineer: James Farber

Assistant engineer: Rich Lamb

Digital editor: Bob Ward (Current Sounds)

Recorded at Skyline Studios, New York City on February 28 and March 1, 1993.

Cover design: Stephen Byram

**This recording was made possible with a grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Additional funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.**

FOR NEW WORLD RECORDS:

Herman E. Krawitz, President; Paul Marotta, Managing Director; Paul M. Tai, Director of Artists and Repertory; Lisa Kahlden, Director of Information Technology; Virginia Hayward, Administrative Associate; Mojisola Oké, Bookkeeper; Ben Schmich, Production Associate.

RECORDED ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN MUSIC, INC., BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

David Hamilton, Treasurer; Milton Babbitt; Emanuel Gerard; Adolph Green; Rita Hauser; Herman E. Krawitz; Arthur Moorhead; Elizabeth Ostrow; Don Roberts; Patrick Smith; Frank Stanton.

Francis Goelet (1926-1998), Chairman

© 1994 © 1994 Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in USA.

MARIO PAVONE 80452-2  
*SONG FOR (SEPTET)*

- 1 *George on Avenue A* (Pavone/Chapin) 7:48
- 2 *3 M Blues* (Pavone) 7:02
- 3 *Dance Off* (Pavone/Ehrlich) 6:24
- 4 *Chapulines* (Pavone) 4:35
- 5 *Song for M* (Pavone) 6:38
- 6 *Ciro (For Nick)* (Pavone) 5:40
- 7 *The Door* (Chapin) 5:30
- 8 *B Count* (Pavone) 6:22

Mario Pavone - bass  
Marty Ehrlich - alto saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet  
Thomas Chapin - alto saxophone, flute  
Peter McEachern - trombone  
Bill Ware - vibraphone  
Peter Madsen - piano  
Steve Johns - drums

*George on Avenue A* and *Song for M* arranged by Thomas Chapin. *Dance Off*, *Chapulines*, and *Ciro* arranged by Marty Ehrlich. *3 M Blues* arrange by Peter McEachern.

All compositions by Mario Pavone (Pavo Publishing/BMI) except *The Door* by Thomas Chapin (Peace Park Publishing/BMI), *George on Avenue A* by Mario Pavone (Pavo Publishing/BMI) and Thomas Chapin (Peace Park Publishing/BMI), and *Dance Off* by Mario Pavone (Pavo Publishing/BMI) and Marty Ehrlich (Dark Sounds Music/BMI).

I would like to thank all the musicians associated with this project - Steve, Bill, Peter Madsen; and especially acknowledge Marty, Thomas, and Peter McEachern for their invaluable assistance and generous spirit in bringing the music to its final form. Once again, I would like to thank James Farber for his great skill in committing this music to tape.

—*Mario Pavone*

**NO PART OF THIS RECORDING MAY BE COPIED OR REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF R.A.A.M., INC.**

**NEW WORLD RECORDS**  
16 Penn Plaza #835  
NEW YORK, NY 10001-1820  
TEL 212.290-1680 FAX 212.290-1685  
Website: [www.newworldrecords.org](http://www.newworldrecords.org)  
email: [info@newworldrecords.org](mailto:info@newworldrecords.org)

**LINER NOTES © Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc.**