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
bassist, 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 rigidness 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 `Chapulines' 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 explicated 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:


*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)
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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).

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—Mario Pavone

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NEW WORLD RECORDS
16 Penn Plaza #835
NEW YORK, NY 10001-1820
TEL 212.290-1680  FAX 212.290-1685
Website: www.newworldrecords.org
email: info@newworldrecords.org

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