

BILLY TIPTON MEMORIAL SAXOPHONE QUARTET

New World Records 80495

Box

The historical Billy Tipton was one of those journeymen jazz musicians who labor diligently, year in and year out, to maintain a particular music tradition, in this case the style of jazz identified with the swing era. While the Spokane, Washington, saxophonist and pianist was not necessarily a great innovator, there was, nonetheless, something special about Billy. What ensured that he'd amount to more than a mere footnote in just another local jazz history was the discovery, when he died of a bleeding ulcer in 1989, that Billy Tipton, canonical jazzman, was actually a woman. The masquerade had been so convincing that even his wife and (adopted) children swore they didn't know.

It isn't clear what motivated Tipton to live her life as a man. Perhaps she feared that a woman saxophonist would always be treated as a novelty rather than as a serious artist. Or perhaps she found the business of jazz so inimical to women that simply sidestepping the issue was a more appealing alternative. We'll never know.

What we do know is that it's no longer nearly unheard-of for a woman to pursue a career as a jazz instrumentalist in general, or a saxophone player in particular. Thankfully, the identities of the five (yes, five) members of the Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet 1-four women playing saxophones and one on trap drums, with widely varying musical backgrounds--need no disguising or suppressing.

Barbara Marino began her career touring around the country in a station wagon with a then little known singer/songwriter named Melissa Etheridge. She later toured for a year and a half playing alto sax and percussion with the Indigo Girls, at which time she shared the stage with Joan Baez, The Roches, and Mary Chapin Carpenter. In her hometown of Los Angeles she has performed with Vinx, Herbie Hancock, Blakey St. John, Phranc, and Ferron. "It Was a Wonderful Life", a documentary on homeless women in L.A., features a soundtrack of her collaboration with Melissa Etheridge and narration by Jodie Foster. Marino joined the Tiptons on baritone sax in 1991 to perform the dance piece "Saxhouse" with BTMSQ. She has been a full-fledged member ever since.

Jessica Lurie, alto and tenor sax, composes for BTMSQ as well as for dance, poetry, and mixed media events in venues across the country. She has played jazz with George Addams, West African beat music with Mii Shae, and something in between with Wayne Horvitz. She is also a member of and records with the Seattle punk-jazz trio Living Daylights.

Maya Johnson, soprano and tenor, abandoned classical flute studies to join the Bakra Steel Band, with whom she toured the country and recorded four CDs. She studied Bata dance and drumming in Nigeria, and performed in the 1990 Osun Festival there. She also participated in the 1994 Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. She regularly plays Brazilian music with Banda Voou and Samba Seattle.

Amy Denio ("rhymes with Ohio") plays alto sax with BTMSQ and is a founding member of the group. A multi-instrumentalist and composer, she has toured and recorded solo and with Tone Dogs, Curlew, and (EC) and Pale Nudes. A veteran home-taper, she has composed music for theater, film, and dance internationally; the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra premiered her *Green Fish Symphonette* in

1995.

Pam Barger, the Quartet's drummer, is a former member of Two Nice Girls, Girls in the Nose, and A&M's Pretty Mary Sunshine. She has recorded with Nona Hendryx, Michael Blaire (drummer for Tom Waits), Phranc, and MCA recording artist Craig Ross.

There's no long-established tradition of all-saxophone ensemble--the instrument is barely a century and a half old, after all, invented by Adolphe Sax to blend the fluidity of woodwinds with the stridency of brass. The jazz world has seen two basic approaches to the idea, both of them relatively recent. In the first, a battery of saxes plays the music of Duke or Bird note-for-note in front of a rhythm section. Their merits aside, these groups generally sound like the reed sections pried out of the nearest big band. A more elemental approach is found in the work of the World Saxophone Quartet and the avant-garde Rova Saxophone Quartet.

Lacking a long list of precedents, sax quartets have had to take their influences where they could find them. It's no insult to the World Saxophone Quartet, for example, to observe that their structured improvisations owe much to New Orleans brass bands and African drumming. In the case of the Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet, the chief inspiration is dance music. The greater part of the group's repertoire bears the stamp of various European and African folk dances, or their American derivatives and hybrids. In covers and original combinations alike, the BTMSQ beat generally hangs close to the surface, speaking through both reeds and percussion. The drummer is on the job full time, but at any moment any or all of the horns can metamorphose into rhythm instruments as well, beating out time not with sticks, but with something as elusive yet durable as breath.

Durable yet mutable, solid and liquid at once the combination is a persistent theme throughout this recording. The Tipton's horn lines may put you in mind of a street corner Salvation Army band one minute, a nasty funk outfit the next, and a wailing klezmer combo after that 1 or all three simultaneously. They may coalesce into the steam calliope of your wildest dreams, or the skirling bagpipe in the corner of a painting by Breughel. Don't be alarmed: your ears are not playing tricks on you. It's all there. Believe it.

—Michael Bloom

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Produced by BTMSQ

Engineered and mixed by John Nelson and Scott MacAllister.

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**BILLY TIPTON MEMORIAL SAXOPHONE QUARTET 80495-2
BOX**

1 **Tri-Monk** (Jessica Lurie) 3:44

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, alto; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Angelina Baldoz, trumpet; Pam Barger, drums

2 **Crna Machka (Black Cat)** (Jessica Lurie) 5:48

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

3 **Disgruntled Postal Worker** (Amy Denio) 3:19

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

4 **In Effect** (Jessica Lurie) 6:08

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, alto; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

5 **Boise** (Amy Denio) 3:28

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, alto; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

6 **Vorrei Dire Due Parole** (Jessica Lurie) 2:24

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, soprano; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

7 **Soleil** (Jessica Lurie) 4:19

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone, dumbek, djembe; Pam Barger, drums; BTMSQ, percussion

8 **All Manic** (Jimi Hendrix/Miles Davis, arr. BTMSQ) 4:35

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

9 **Cud** (BTMSQ) 3:25

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, soprano; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

10 **Likka Law** (Amy Denio) 3:07

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, soprano; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

11 **Le Goo Wop** (Geri Allen, arr. Lurie/Denio) 8:44

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, tenor; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

12 **Belle** (Traditional Cajun, arr. Lurie) 2:42

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, alto; Maya Johnson, tenor; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

13 **For My Beautiful Wife On Her Birthday** (BTMSQ) 2:37

Amy Denio, alto; Jessica Lurie, alto; Maya Johnson, soprano; Barbara Marino, baritone; Pam Barger, drums

Likka Law, **Disgruntled Postal Worker**, and **Boise** are published by Spoot Music, ASCAP.

Tri-Monk, **Crna Machka (Black Cat)**, **In Effect**, **Vorrei Dire Due Parole**, and **Soleil** are published by Zipal Music, BMI. Arrangement on **Belle** published by Zipal Music, BMI

Cud, and **For My Beautiful Wife On Her Birthday** are published by Spoot Music, ASCAP and Zipal Music, BMI.

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