

STEVE GROSSMAN: FOUNDATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTS
THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE MAKING OF A JAZZ TENOR SAXOPHONE ICON

BY

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ABSTRACT

Steve Grossman is regarded as one of the most influential tenor saxophone players in Jazz. Relatively little is known about him and his music, however. This essay represents musicological research that synthesizes fragments of information in conjunction with personal interviews by the author. The purpose of this essay is to point to the environments and influences of Grossman that shaped him as a musician, and to advance knowledge about these people, places and times. Specifically investigated are the years immediately following the death of John Coltrane. Grossman took the influence of Coltrane and interpreted it in his own distinctive way. In 1969 at the age of 18, Grossman was hired by Miles Davis and played on several important albums including *Black Beauty*, *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*, and *Miles at Fillmore*. Elvin Jones hired Grossman subsequently, leading to the important album *Live at the Lighthouse*. Grossman also recorded the influential album *Some Shapes to Come* under his own name, and would go on to be a founding member of the band Stone Alliance. The lofts of Gene Perla and David Liebman were important to what can be referred to as a “school” of post-Coltrane tenor saxophonists. Grossman developed as a musician in several important environments, however there will be focus placed on those two.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES.....	5
CHAPTER 3: THE LOFT OF GENE PERLA.....	10
CHAPTER 4: THE LOFT OF DAVE LIEBMAN.....	13
CHAPTER 5: FREE LIFE COMMUNICATION	20
CHAPTER 6: MILES DAVIS.....	24
CHAPTER 7: ELVIN JONES <i>LIVE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE</i>	31
CHAPTER 8: <i>SOME SHAPES TO COME</i>	38
CHAPTER 9: STONE ALLIANCE.....	41
CHAPTER 10: FINAL THOUGHTS.....	43
SOURCES.....	47
APPENDIX A: DISCOGRAPHY STEVE GROSSMAN 1968-1977.....	49

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the period of Jazz History that can be described as “Post-Coltrane,” there was a new generation of outstanding tenor saxophone players who were associated with a particular “loft scene” in New York. Lofts were large, open living spaces that were typically former industrial spaces. They were favored by artists, photographers and dancers as well as musicians. Lofts were prime spaces for jazz musicians to play music all hours of the day and night. Specifically, the lofts of bassist Gene Perla and saxophonist Dave Liebman were places that Steve Grossman developed his skills playing jam sessions for hours at a time, day after day.¹ Those two lofts existed at a time when jazz was at a crossroads after the death of John Coltrane, and around the time that Miles Davis was adopting electronic instruments and using them to fuse the sounds of rock and funk with jazz. The lofts were places where those new sounds could be explored without limitation. Grossman, along with the other musicians there, was on the cutting edge of jazz at that time. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the cutting edge of jazz was a combination of the musical language of John Coltrane with the stylistic explorations of Miles Davis. This meant music that could be abstract and atonal, and included free improvisation in rock and funk contexts. The lofts of Gene Perla and Dave Liebman were extraordinarily fitting environments for the young tenor players to hone their skills and work out their own interpretations of the music of (especially later period) John Coltrane, and to do so in those rock and funk contexts. Among those in that new generation were Michael Brecker, Bob Berg, Bob Mintzer, Gary Campbell, Dave Liebman, and Steve Grossman. Liebman said of Grossman, “all of us

¹ For more information on Jazz Lofts, see Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (1968); Michael Heller, *Reconstructing We* (2012); Benjamin Looker, *BAG* (2004); and <http://www.jazzloftproject.org/?s=about>

acknowledged that he [Grossman] was the best of us.”² In this rarified company, how is it that Grossman is considered the greatest of all by his peers? This investigation is one of historical context and relevance. It will describe the people, events and environments in which Steve Grossman existed that eventually led to his being perhaps the most influential post-Coltrane tenor saxophonist of his generation. The investigation will cover the time frame of Grossman’s early life through his first important recordings with Miles Davis in 1969 to the end of his time with the band Stone Alliance in 1977. This essay is essentially musicological research—a description of a time and the people who had significant influence on the events that occurred, specifically in regard to the environments of Steve Grossman.

Grossman was an important musician in the transitional events in the history of Jazz after the death of John Coltrane. This project will show that Grossman was a vital participant in many of the environments in which these events occurred. More importantly, it will attempt to show how Grossman stood out in these contexts and what made him so influential. For the purposes of this paper, the term “environments” will mean “the aggregate of surrounding things, conditions, or influences.”³ Grossman grew up in a very favorable environment for becoming a jazz musician. He started playing saxophone at the very early age of eight years old. He was mentored by his older brother Hal, who was a jazz trumpet player.⁴ His mother loved jazz, and her brother, Grossman’s uncle, had played saxophone professionally.⁵

When Grossman was about fifteen years old, he met Dave Liebman, and the two became close friends. Together they were important players in the loft of Gene Perla starting around late 1967 or early 1968. Within about a year Liebman had his own loft. The influential record *Live at*

² David Liebman, telephone interview by Jonathan Beckett, January 19, 2013.

³ dictionary.reference.com

⁴ Al Levitt, “Steve Grossman,” *Jazz Magazine* (Fr.), 415, (1992): 26.

⁵ Steve Grossman, interviewed by Brian Pace, The Jazz Standard nightclub, New York, September 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRkF5ZeLvJo>

the Lighthouse by the Elvin Jones quartet included Grossman, Liebman, and Perla. Pianist Chick Corea and bassist Dave Holland lived in the same building that housed Liebman's loft at that time when both were members of Miles Davis' band. Grossman jammed with them, and would join them in Miles' band in 1969, spending about 10 months with Miles.

The bands of Miles Davis and John Coltrane were widely regarded as the most influential of the 1960s. Grossman had associations with both, having played in Miles' band, and in the band of Elvin Jones, who was Coltrane's drummer. It can be argued that Grossman carried the musical influence of both of these bands further, with his Coltrane-influenced saxophone playing within Miles Davis-influenced jazz-rock contexts. Other saxophonists may have been influenced by Coltrane and Miles Davis, but not from the same generation as Grossman or with the same level of connection to both bands. For example, Grossman is distinct from Liebman in this regard because he recorded more with Miles and at a more historically important time—when *Bitches Brew* was released. Grossman's association with Elvin Jones lasted over five years, whereas Liebman was with Jones for only about two years and on fewer recordings.

Grossman is distinctive in that generation because of the broad scope of his influences: from Coleman Hawkins through Charlie Parker and all stylistic incarnations of John Coltrane. Grossman has always been faithful to a hard-swinging style with a very strong, masculine sound. The harmonic and melodic approaches are distinctive, using elements both inside and outside of traditional tonality.

Recorded on September 9, 1972, *Live at the Lighthouse* featured a pianoless quartet of two saxophonists (Grossman and Liebman), acoustic bass and drums. A year later in September 1973 Grossman recorded *Some Shapes to Come*, which was also a quartet, but with electric piano/synthesizer, electric bass, and drums in addition to Grossman on saxophone. The contexts

of the two albums were very different and represented two important directions of Jazz at that time. The rhythm section on *Some Shapes to Come* consisted of Grossman, Jan Hammer, Gene Perla and Don Alias. They were all friends from Perla's loft who, minus keyboardist Jan Hammer, would form the influential band Stone Alliance. The band was something of a power trio, billing themselves as a funk band,⁶ but playing intense rock, latin and straight-ahead jazz. They recorded several albums between 1975 and 1977, when Grossman left the band.

⁶ Gene Perla, interview by Jonathan Beckett, Louisville Kentucky, January 5, 2012.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Steve Grossman was born in Brooklyn, New York on January 18, 1951. Grossman was a “privileged kid”⁷ from an upper middle-class Jewish family. There was jazz in the household in which he grew up—Grossman’s mother was a jazz fan. The young Steve Grossman picked up the alto saxophone at age eight, in the third grade. By his own account, Grossman originally wanted to play drums in school, but “they didn’t have any sticks left,”⁸ so at his mother’s suggestion, he took up the alto saxophone. His mother’s brother, Grossman’s uncle, had played saxophone professionally at resorts in the Catskills when he was young. His uncle loved jazz, and even more significantly, as Grossman stated, “my mother loved jazz.”⁹ (Research suggests that parental involvement and support in the early stages of learning leads to more musically successful students).¹⁰

Steve’s older brother Hal Grossman was a trumpet player who would go on to teach at the Berklee School for many years. Hal was a big influence on Steve. He was insistent that Steve learn the music of Charlie Parker. At that very early age, when Steve was in the third grade, he was learning Charlie Parker in a disciplined manner. Steve received a lot of attention and he was getting the best training for learning jazz. He was a normal kid who had what can be referred to as “natural talent”. He didn’t participate in sports like the other kids. He stayed in his basement transcribing Charlie Parker solos. Grossman’s first album was *Bird and Diz*, featuring Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. It was recorded on June 6, 1950 and originally released on the Verve

⁷ David Liebman, *What It Is, the Life of a Jazz Artist*, ed. Lewis Porter (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2012), 121.

⁸ Brian Pace.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Davidson, J., M. Moore and J. Sloboda, “The Role of Parental Influences in the Development of Musical Ability,” *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, n. 14, 399-412, (1996).

label in 1952. Grossman became a self-described “Bird freak.”¹¹ (Charlie Parker is often referred to by his nickname “Bird”). Grossman was also learning to play jazz by playing with *Music Minus One* records produced by Mal Waldron.

Grossman’s father was a salesman with RCA and moved the family frequently. The family moved to Pittsburgh when Steve was nine years old and stayed there until Steve was fourteen,¹² which would have been approximately the years 1960 to 1965. During that time in Pittsburgh, Steve and his brother Hal, five years his senior, formed a group in the model of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet called “The Uniques”. Hal played trumpet, and Steve played alto sax. The Uniques opened for Duke Ellington and his orchestra during that time, and Steve, as a young teenager was offered a chair in Duke’s band,¹³ which for unknown reasons he declined.

Hal Grossman and some of his friends who were also a few years older than Steve were jamming with Steve on Saturday afternoons. Steve was going to jam sessions in the Hill District in Pittsburgh, which was something of the African-American cultural center and center for contemporary jazz activity. It could be referred to as the “Harlem of Pittsburgh”. During his time in Pittsburgh and at a young age Grossman was jamming with accomplished jazz musicians who were older than he was. Those musicians included Eric Kloss, Tommy Turrentine and Bernard Chambers. Eric Kloss is a legendary blind saxophonist who made his first record for Prestige in 1965 at age sixteen. Trumpeter Tommy Turrentine was the older brother of saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, and recorded with Max Roach and Jackie McLean among others. Bernard Chambers was a well-known drummer at the time. Incidentally, he played stylistically between Roy Haynes

¹¹ Laurel Gross, “Steve Grossman,” *All About Jazz*, November 21, 2008, accessed March 16, 2013, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=30560>

¹² Levitt. 26.

¹³ Mark Gilbert, “Steve Grossman,” *Jazz Journal International* 49/1 (January 1996): 11.

and Elvin Jones,¹⁴ who were the prominent drummers with John Coltrane in the 1960s. Grossman may have met future roommate Frank Mitchell at that time as well. Mitchell was a saxophonist who played with Art Blakey's band in the mid-1960s. Blakey was from Pittsburgh. One might assume that Grossman playing and jamming with excellent jazz musicians from an early age would have been of benefit to him. Among the many influences of Grossman in addition to Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, he himself has specifically named Jackie McLean, Sonny Rollins, Coleman Hawkins, and Don Byas. Speaking of his early influences, Grossman said, "I started out listening to Bird [Charlie Parker] and Jackie McLean, just trying to play straight-ahead. Then I heard Coltrane and that took me for a trip. At first I didn't know what was happening, but eventually the sound just went through my body."¹⁵ Grossman had stated that he was trying to play like Charlie Parker early on, but found it too difficult, so he tried to play like Jackie McLean instead.¹⁶ Jackie McLean might seem an unusual influence, but when investigated more closely, it makes more sense. McLean was influenced primarily by tenor players early on: Lester Young, Sonny Stitt, Dexter Gordon, and of course Sonny Rollins. Rollins was a childhood neighbor of McLean in the Sugar Hill neighborhood of Harlem, and a strong influence on McLean. He was about a year older than McLean and "playing excellent when he was fourteen, fifteen years old."¹⁷ Rollins was also a major influence on Grossman.

Like Grossman, McLean played with raw intensity. One may not associate being tough with playing the alto, but toughness is what McLean brought to his alto sound. Much like Grossman, there was a distinctly masculine aspect to his sound. Gary Campbell stated,

¹⁴ Barry Altschul, Interview by Harris Eisenstadt (part 2), January 10, 2013, accessed March 16, 2013. <http://destination-out.com/?p=4236>

¹⁵ Gilbert, 11.

¹⁶ Levitt, 26.

¹⁷ Jackie McLean, interview by Fred Jung.

http://www.danmillerjazz.com/studentresources/chat_jackie_mclean.pdf

“Oh yeah. That’s an important part of that [Grossman’s sound]. It still is. You can’t get young alto players to say too much about Jackie McLean. But Jackie McLean’s thing was sort of the same [as Grossman]. He wasn’t Charlie Parker or Cannonball necessarily, but boy he had a great delivery, you know... He was tough alto if you want to call it something. He really stood his ground and played with great conviction, and I guess it was a macho thing I guess you could say.”¹⁸

McLean in his career is said to have bridged three distinct and important styles in the evolution of jazz: Bop, hard bop, and avant-garde. The sound of the avant-garde can be heard on McLean’s 1962 release *Let Freedom Ring*, in which his playing at times sounds like plaintive wails or cries of passion. McLean notably uses the altissimo range of the instrument, an important technique highlighted by Grossman and Dave Liebman in their post-Coltrane pursuits. Similarly, Grossman has bridged multiple styles including bebop, avant-garde and fusion.

Grossman was a prodigy and precocious even more so by the standards of that time--the early to mid-1960s. Dave Liebman aptly observed, “In those days there weren’t as many teenaged whiz kids walking around playing great as there are now.”¹⁹ Elsewhere, he said:

“There’s no question that by the time Steve was fifteen, when I met him, he was already burning up Coltrane, you know, and I didn’t even ever hear him play like Charlie Parker. Seems like he passed through that probably [chuckling] when he was like, ten, eleven years old. And he played drums, and he played trumpet, and he could play bass. He was, you know, kind of a prodigy. And at that time, that was not so common as it is now, prodigies. It’s a thrown-around word, but incredible talent at a young age is much more common these days worldwide as we see in some of the...as someone like myself sees a lot because of the education. In those days, if it existed we didn’t know about it. It was unusual to have a teenager to be that adept at playing like that.”²⁰

Alto saxophone was the instrument that Grossman played until he was fifteen or sixteen years old, when he switched to soprano saxophone. About a year later, by age seventeen, he was on tenor as his primary and preferred instrument.

¹⁸ Gary Campbell, interview by Jonathan Beckett, January 19, 2012.

¹⁹ Liebman, *What It Is*, 123

²⁰ Liebman, interview by Beckett.

Grossman moved back to New York with his family at some point around 1965 and they were living on Long Island. Around that time he met some musicians who were trying to emulate the music of John Coltrane. They included pianist Larry Schubert who, according to Liebman and Grossman, could sound like McCoy Tyner of Coltrane's classic quartet, and was on a level of Chick Corea in ability.²¹ Also included were drummer Jimmy Sutherland, who was well known and highly regarded at the time—"Elvined out" as Dave Liebman put it.²² Bassist Lanny Fields was also involved. He would become a player in the loft scene as well as Free Life Communication, a collective organization of musicians that will be discussed later.

Slugs' Saloon was an important jazz club through much of the 1960s and into the 1970s. It was one of the few places that regularly booked avant-garde as well as mainstream jazz. Sun Ra and his Arkestra had a regular Monday night gig, and other notable avant-garde artists such as Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, and Cecil Taylor often played there. Slugs' is probably most famous (or infamous) for being the location where Lee Morgan was gunned down onstage by his common law wife on February 12, 1972. In addition to Morgan, jazz greats such as Woody Shaw, Joe Henderson and Kenny Dorham were regulars that played and jammed at Slugs'. There were jam sessions there on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, where Grossman, as a teenager, would play with Lenny White, George Cables, and bassist Clint Houston. Some weekends Grossman would play with that rhythm section in Bedford-Stuyvesant or at Slugs' with the trombonist Artie Simmons, whose band was "The Jazz Samaritans."

²¹ Levitt, 26.

²² Liebman, interview by Beckett

CHAPTER 3

THE LOFT OF GENE PERLA

There were other lofts in which there was a lot of jamming activity, including the one that drummer Bob Moses had on Bleecker Street, but the lofts of Gene Perla and Dave Liebman had particular relevance. Those were the lofts where Grossman was heavily involved. Those two lofts created something of their own “scene” because of the many musicians who frequented them. Among many others, some of the noteworthy musicians in that loft scene were Grossman, Michael Brecker, Bob Berg, Bob Mintzer and Gary Campbell on saxophones; Randy Brecker and Terumasu Hino on trumpet; Chick Corea, Jan Hammer and Karl Schroeder on piano; Gene Perla, Dave Holland, Lanny Fields, Clint Houston and Calvin Hill on bass; Bob Moses, Al Foster, Lennie White and Jimmy Cobb on drums.

The first and probably most important loft to Grossman was the loft of bassist Gene Perla. It is likely that Grossman learned of Perla’s loft through Dave Liebman, with whom he had already been hanging out. That loft was downtown, on the lower east side on Jefferson Street near the Fulton Fish Market, a half block off the East river. It was an ideal place for jamming. As Perla said, “There was nothing around there. We could play all night.”²³ As with Liebman, Perla put his grand piano and a set of drums in his loft. Grossman was a regular at Perla’s jam session, along with Don Alias, Jan Hammer, Dave Liebman, Michael and Randy Brecker, and many others. Most of the time it was Perla, Alias and Grossman. They rarely played tunes from standard repertory or even blues, focusing instead on time and feeling. In Liebman’s loft, the music was almost entirely free improvisation without defined pulse or harmony, but in Perla’s loft it was not completely free. Perla said, “We played time...but no structure whatsoever. Just

²³ Perla, interview by Beckett.

go. I'd hear something and I'd go there with Grossman. I'd play some [stuff], he'd come with me... just on and on, hours and hours. ...We played day after day, sometimes twice a day.”²⁴

Perla was documenting many of the sessions using an Uher (brand) five-inch reel-to-reel tape recorder.²⁵ (He maintains an archive of these tapes). It was possible to run the tape at different speeds, as slow as 15/16 inches per second. The quality was not great, but discernible. The tape was like cassette in that it could be run on one side, then flipped over and recorded on the other side. Perla was recording one and a half hours per side, then flipping over the tape and filling both sides in a session. They were jamming for three hours at a time during the day, then coming back again at night and doing it again. What was most important in these sessions was working on the feel, or “feeling” as Perla puts it. They weren't concerned about the notes being played, or the “correctness” of it. The important thing was trying to get a good feeling going, “and I think that's what Elvin picked up on. Of course, if there's anyone with feeling, it's Jones.”²⁶ Though they were playing hours a day, day after day at times, they never played gigs together at that time, just jam sessions.

Jan Hammer was an important participant in the loft scene and a key player on early recordings of Grossman. Perla and Hammer were close friends. When Hammer came to New York, he lived with Perla in his mom's house in New Jersey. Later they moved into New York and stayed together in the loft. “That was really the.... between Hammer, Grossman, Alias and myself, that was the real center of a lot of the stuff we did on those recordings”²⁷

Before Perla had his loft on Jefferson Street on the Lower East Side, he had a four-month sublet on Bleecker Street. It was at the first loft that percussionist Don Alias would stay on

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Some of the tapes can be heard on Gene Perla, interview by Charles Blass, “Jazz Profiles,” WKCR 89.9 FM, New York, April 6, 2008.

²⁶ Perla, interview by Beckett.

²⁷ Ibid.

weekends and jam, somewhat establishing that scene. Alias, who is known as a percussionist, was a regular in the sessions at Perla's lofts, using the opportunity, as Perla stated, to "try to get his drums chops together, and [he] did!"²⁸ Perla and Alias had been friends since their days in Boston in the early-mid 1960s. They played together in "Los Muchachos," the only authentic Latin dance band in New England at that time. Perla would later say that learning the clavé and Latin dance music was of significant importance in his musical development. Use of clavé and syncopated feels were important in the music that developed in the lofts. The rock and funk grooves relied on those syncopated feels. "... Alias came from Latin music. I learned Latin music playing with him and we love rock 'n' roll, and when he and I would play together, I mean, from half-measure even, or measure...the feeling could change from, 'oh, it's a rock feel for this,' for half a measure, or it's a jazz feel, and now it's a Latin feel. It was amazing how it would just shift from the feelings between us. We had something special going."²⁹ The foundation in dance music of Perla and Alias reinforced the contexts of steady time that were crucial to Grossman's development. Eventually Alias would be a founding member of the important band "Stone Alliance," a trio with Perla and Grossman. In that band, Alias played some congas and percussion, but primarily drum set.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Perla, interview by Beckett.

CHAPTER 4

THE LOFT OF DAVE LIEBMAN

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the relationship between Grossman and Dave Liebman. They were key players in the particular “loft scene” of Perla and Liebman. They played together in Elvin Jones’ band, and separately in Miles Davis’ band. They carried forward the legacy of John Coltrane, which would seem unlikely considering the vast body and influence of Coltrane’s work.

Coltrane is conventionally regarded as one of the most innovative and influential jazz musicians in history. He was certainly the most influential tenor saxophonist in jazz. He seemingly covered all of jazz saxophone, taking the music beyond what anyone imagined. It would be difficult to assimilate the music and saxophone playing of John Coltrane because he was exploring so many aspects of not just the music, but of saxophone playing. This eventually distinguished many saxophone players, but few at that time. Coltrane used the overtone series, angular playing, multi-phonics, and altissimo playing—all within harmonic context and swinging rhythm, especially in Coltrane’s middle period, 1961 to 1965. The harmonic structures that Coltrane was using generally were stark and open, utilizing few chords and changes of harmony within a tune. The ability to play long solos in that context without repetition would require a vast amount of so-called vocabulary, which is the identifiable components that construct the unique language developed by an individual player. To take that on and convincingly play music influenced by Coltrane would have been a formidable task, and that is just what Grossman and Liebman did.

Grossman and Liebman were on that same path, and they eventually came together. Grossman was friends with bassist Lanny Fields and drummer Danny D'Imperio. Those two were in the army band stationed at Fort Jay on Staten Island along with Liebman's good friend, pianist Mike Garson. There was a lot of jamming at the base, and it was Garson who made Liebman aware of Grossman:

“Mike told me, ‘you’ve got to hear this kid who’s really young’. I don’t remember exactly how young, maybe sixteen, which would make it 1967 when I first met him. I went to a jam session at the army base in Staten Island and sure enough he was killing, playing Trane [Coltrane] modal tunes and everything, definitely in there big time. This cat was way beyond me. He was a great musician.” “By the time I met Steve at this jam session he had been through Bird [Charlie Parker] and had Trane down! We’re talking the middle period *Impressions* on tenor and the *Afro Blue/Promise* stage on soprano. As well, he played bass, trumpet, and piano and seemed like he knew a million tunes. He was a phenomenon! He had worked on it. That was for sure”³⁰

The first few encounters between Liebman and Grossman were rocky. Grossman was, relatively speaking, very young. He was egotistical and arrogant.³¹ However, Liebman saw Grossman as the ideal musical partner in a Coltrane/Dolphie or Coltrane/Pharoah Saunders playing situation. He knew that he had to make peace, and called a meeting at Grossman's house on Long Island. Liebman knew that they were better together than not, and that they had to “get their act together.”³² Grossman went along with that, and they became best friends, “like brothers.... Steve was my tightest friend...we had a really great rapport.”³³

For Liebman, the loft was the way to reach his musical goals: “I knew that for me to be good, I had to play and play more. There was no shortcut. It was hands on, hours at the wheel,

³⁰ Liebman, *What It Is*, 120.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

and the only way to do that was to have a loft.”³⁴ Grossman developed in the lofts in that same way. Of the musicians in their circle, drummer Bob Moses was the first to have a loft. Liebman was close friends with Moses, and was inspired to acquire a loft for himself. After an intense six-month period of practice during which Liebman assimilated the musical language of late-period Coltrane, he resolved to find a loft. In January 1969, Liebman moved in to 138 West 19th Street. Not long after that, Grossman was going to the loft every day, and staying over on weekends, being there all the time. He adopted the lifestyle and habits of Liebman (and others in that scene), including a macrobiotic diet (which Grossman maintained even after Liebman had given it up). They were great friends at that time. That relationship would peak in their time together on Elvin Jones’ band in 1971-1973.

Liebman’s loft had been a former tie-dye factory, which was perfectly representative of the lifestyle of the musicians who would hang-out there. Liebman stated, “of course we were quite hippied out.”³⁵ The building was a three floor walk-up, and Liebman lived in the top floor. By Liebman’s description, it “was a very small loft, 1200 square feet.”³⁶ It had an eight foot high ceiling, which was lower than many lofts. The lofts at that time were very basic. Often there were no comforts or conveniences other than a toilet. In Liebman’s case, he had to obtain a refrigerator for the loft. As commercial spaces, the lofts were illegal to live in, and this was stated explicitly at the top of the lease. Of course, this did not deter the would-be residents, landlord, or even the fire department.³⁷

As a musician, Liebman needed to have instruments, especially piano and drums so that he could host the seemingly endless jam sessions that would go on there. Getting a baby grand

³⁴ Liebman, *What It Is*, 98.

³⁵ Liebman, interview by Beckett.

³⁶ Liebman, *What It Is*, 100.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

piano into the 3rd floor loft was next to impossible, but somehow got done. Movers had to hoist it in from the roof through a window. “That piano never moved again. It’s probably still there,” Liebman said.³⁸ Liebman had an open door policy, which was exceptionally important. “I told anyone who wanted to play to come over to my place any time, day or night.”³⁹ This allowed an environment of musical exploration and development by groups and individuals that would have a profound impact on jazz. The Miles Davis bands from 1969 to 1974 were touched, if not shaped by the sounds and musicians in Liebman’s loft. Elvin Jones’ iconic “Lighthouse” band of 1972 was a direct result of the lofts of Liebman and Gene Perla. Liebman called the 19th Street loft “truly the beginning of my creative life.”⁴⁰

Not long after Liebman started living there, Dave Holland moved in and occupied the vacant second floor. Holland was Miles Davis’ bass player at that time. The exact circumstances are not clear, but Holland, who is from England, was apparently living in a hotel with his wife and baby daughter. Liebman told him of the vacancy and he moved in. Not long after that, Chick Corea, who was a keyboardist for Miles at the time also moved in and occupied the first floor. By that time, Corea was very well known and regarded as one of the, if not the top jazz pianists in New York. He had already recorded with Sonny Stitt, Blue Mitchell, Herbie Mann, as well as with Miles, and had recorded under his own name for Atlantic records and Blue Note. Holland was very much into free jazz, and was influential in Miles’ band steering the music in that direction. The three jammed together and separately, and with “anyone who wanted to come play,” especially Steve Grossman, who was best friends with Liebman at that time and coming over all the time and living with Liebman on the weekends. Liebman, Holland, and Corea were in the loft building on 19th Street playing constantly, day and night. There might be jam sessions

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 103.

happening in all three lofts simultaneously. Any combination of musicians and instruments might occur, and there was a lot of changing of instruments—Liebman, Grossman, Michael Brecker and others played multiple instruments well, especially drums. All of them were excellent drummers as well as saxophone players.

There was a close connection to the Miles Davis band in Liebman’s loft situation. Davis himself had come to Dave Holland’s loft one time for dinner. Liebman had met Davis backstage before through Lennie White, with whom Liebman and Grossman were jamming at George Cables’ house in St. Albans Queens. White was on *Bitches Brew* and played some gigs with Miles during that time in 1969.

The time in the lofts as Gary Campbell said, “was a wonderful time. There was so much music happening—playing.”⁴¹ However this was a time in the history of jazz when the master/apprentice dynamic was fading. Within the new generation of tenor players, there was not as much work as there might have been in previous years. It is true that Michael and Randy Brecker played with Horace Silver, and Bob Berg would be working with Cedar Walton, but after the top tier of musicians, the work dried up quickly. Even Grossman was not working that much. “But still, the creativity part of it, especially in the loft situation was really intense and every day.”⁴²

One should keep in mind that at that time there was a horizon with unknown musical expression to be explored. The musical landscape was changing rapidly. Young musicians look to what is happening “now” for inspiration, and what was happening at that time was free jazz, and the fusion of jazz and rock. Miles had recorded *Bitches Brew* in August of 1969. There were also experiments with rock by flutist Jeremy Steig (the album *Energy* with Gene Perla) and the

⁴¹ Campbell, interview by Beckett

⁴² Ibid.

band “Dreams,” which featured the Brecker brothers and Billy Cobham. Popular rock bands at that time such as Blood, Sweat and Tears (Randy Brecker was an original member of that band and was on their first album), the band Chicago, and Ten Wheel Drive (with Dave Liebman on saxophone) were incorporating elements of jazz into their music including the use of horns, harmonic structures and tunes, and more complex improvised solos. There was a reflexive aspect to fusion. Rock was borrowing from jazz, and jazz was borrowing from rock. So, the music of the lofts could at times reflect at least the feeling of the jazz-rock fusion that was a new thing then.

According to Liebman, the music being played in his loft was “almost all free jazz. I don’t know if we ever played a tune or a set of chord changes.”⁴³ There was an attitude that playing a “tune” was beneath them. In Perla’s loft, tunes were played rarely if ever. There was always a context of time where Grossman was concerned, but as a rule there were not harmonic structures or tunes. The music in Liebman’s loft was “free, a la Trane’s *Ascension* recording, meaning a lot of guys playing all the time together—chaotic, loud, intense, like Dixieland gone crazy.”⁴⁴ “When I played with Steve Grossman it was like he was Trane and I was Pharoah Saunders. We sort of had this understood relationship, with (Bob) Moses playing like [drummer] Rashied Ali.”⁴⁵

Prior to his death in July 1967, Coltrane had been following a trajectory of change and deconstruction. The music was leading toward completely free improvisation. There was free improvisation in jazz before Coltrane took it up, as will be discussed below regarding Bill Dixon and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, for example. To some degree, Coltrane pursuing it would have given it much stronger credibility and influence. Coltrane was

⁴³ Liebman, *What It Is*, 110.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

already very popular and influential in the jazz world. He played bebop with Miles Davis in the 1950s as well as creating the tonal innovations “sheets of sound” and the substitute harmonies used in the tunes *Giant Steps*, *Countdown*, and *Satellite*. There were also tonal innovations in modal jazz as well, and associated saxophone techniques using the overtone series of the tenor saxophone. All of these things chronologically led to Coltrane exploring free improvisation on the record *Ascension* and albums beyond that. Those who were followers of Coltrane, true believers so to speak, would have followed Coltrane down this path. Dave Liebman was certainly in that group. Picking up where Coltrane left off would logically lead to starting with free improvisation. Liebman, through the music in his loft and the with collective Free Life Communication, carried the mantle of free jazz forward as far as it would go at that point in time, and Grossman was certainly a part of that.

CHAPTER 5

FREE LIFE COMMUNICATION

Free Life Communication was an important organization that grew out of Dave Liebman's loft. Steve Grossman was a member and active participant in that organization. The seeds for Free Life Communication were planted sometime in 1969 during the time when the 19th Street loft of Dave Liebman was thriving. Free Life Communication was a collective organization that was formed for the purpose of providing a means for the loft musicians to play in public.

The AACM is the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Along with the Jazz Composers Guild, the AACM was a model for Free Life Communication. The AACM was formed in 1965 in Chicago in the midst of great social unrest in the African-American community. The previous year had been the October Revolution in Jazz, a four-day event organized by trumpeter and composer Bill Dixon. Dixon was trying to elicit awareness for free improvisation. There were performances and discussions at that festival, and Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor, among others, were in attendance. Considered to be the first free-jazz festival, it was a model of similar festivals to follow. Not long after the October Revolution, Dixon established the Jazz Composers Guild. That collective organization had among its goals creating bargaining power for musicians with club owners, and building visibility and awareness in the media for free-jazz. The Guild broke up within a year after an unsuccessful call for a general musicians strike against jazz clubs.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ben Ratliff, "Bill Dixon, leading edge of avant-garde jazz, dies at 84," June 19, 2010, accessed March 16, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/arts/music/20dixon.html?_r=0

Bob Moses was the one in the loft scene that had awareness of the AACM. The model of the AACM pointed to a momentum toward grass roots organizations that represented free improvisation and the musicians who were playing it. One should be mindful that the musicians in the loft scene were middle class white guys just playing music for each other, not particularly aware of what was going on in the outside “real world”. For the African-Americans who participated in it, the free jazz movement had significant socio-political relevance. For the members of Free Life Communication, it was a time to play and practice music and to enjoy the accompanying lifestyle. Those were two very different purposes and approaches to similar goals, and there was something of a disconnect as a result.

Moses knew some members of the AACM including saxophonist Anthony Braxton and violinist Leroy Jenkins, who were invited to a meeting called by Dave Liebman in his loft. The goal was to gain insight that would help him with organizing such a collective using the example of the AACM. When Jenkins arrived, he surveyed the room and saw nothing but young middle class white people. This elicited an angry reaction to the effect that they didn’t have a cause like African Americans and therefore had no reason to organize. He then left with no further input. Braxton arrived later, and had the opposite reaction. He was supportive, encouraging the fledgling group. Subsequently that evening, the group decided to organize and put on their own concerts. They arrived at the name “Free Life Communication.”⁴⁷

Free Life Communication was an organization that started in 1970. Liebman procured the services of an attorney and incorporated as a non-profit organization. There were meetings with Robert’s Rules of Order (a time-honored book of rules for Parliamentary Procedure), and dues paid by members. The organization was awarded a grant through the New York State

⁴⁷ Liebman, *What It Is*, 114

Council of the Arts in the amount of \$5,000. Within the next year they put on concerts at churches such as Judson Church and St. Peters, known as the “Jazz Church.”⁴⁸

A big break for Free Life came about a year into its existence. Through a contact of pianist Richie Beirach, Liebman’s close friend and one of the leaders of Free Life, the collective was offered residence as the musical group in the Space for Innovative Development. Wealthy philanthropist Samuel Rubin and his Foundation renovated a church on West 36th street that housed the project. Also involved were a dance company and a theater group. Free Life had an entire floor of the building with plenty of space and the use of a grand piano. The group played three hundred concerts that year, which was the peak of its existence. Eventually the group became too big, and with Liebman joining Elvin then Miles, leadership was passed on. Over the following few years Free Life Communication faded out.

That time in the lofts can be described in jazz history as “Post-Trane” or “Post-Coltrane”, especially with regard to saxophone playing and how that legacy was interpreted. Coltrane had died relatively recently, in July 1967. His music was inspiring saxophone players and being emulated by them.

Gary Campbell stated,

“Trane was gone, and things were bending a little more over toward the Miles direction...and those tunes, and Wayne Shorter...in terms of cutting edge, innovative ensembles. And I think this is the key at that time. One big thing that at that time, those two bands, probably the best...among the best two bands in the whole history of jazz... Because it was such a personal thing... each of those groups, the Trane Quartet and the Miles Quintet with Wayne Shorter, Herbie and Tony Williams. I mean, this was coming out of those individual cats, and you can't replace that. When Trane died, that went away, you know, that particular energy, and those guys and that whole "statement". It was gone then. And the cats at that time in New York, we were trying to experience that and grab a hold of the tail of it kind of, you know. And get that feeling, because it was still alive...in the

⁴⁸ David Liebman, “Notes on Free Life Communication,” November, 1976, accessed March 16, 2013, http://www.daveliebman.com/Feature_Articles/freelife.htm

atmosphere and in society in everything it reflected....But once society changes and the times change, and the cats are...like when Trane passed away, that's it!"⁴⁹

The Coltrane energy and "statement" were literally gone when he died. The tenor players in New York in the lofts at that time such as Grossman, Liebman, Michael Brecker, Bob Berg, and Gary Campbell were trying to experience the spirit of that energy and grab the tail of it. Not only was the Coltrane "statement" ending, but so was the statement of the Miles Davis great quintet of the 1960s with Tony Williams, Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter. These two bands were the innovative vanguard of jazz and the most influential to those musicians and bands after them.

Gene Perla said, "For me, the greatest inspiration was three groups that showed me how jazz can go in different directions with such meaningful force. And those three groups were Miles' group with Ron Carter... and Coltrane breaking away with his quartet, and Ornette's group with Charlie Haden and Don Cherry. Those three groups at that time were just stupendous in how they influenced so many of us. And so we took the elements of those things and put them together to create our own stuff."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cambell, interview by Beckett.

⁵⁰ Gene Perla, interview by Charles Blass, "Jazz Profiles," WKCR 89.9 FM, New York, April 6, 2008.

CHAPTER 6

MILES DAVIS

During 1969, Grossman was hired by Miles Davis to join his band. Miles came down to gig at a club called Danny's Hideaway on West 45th Street.⁵¹ It should be mentioned that there is an alternative possibility for the location of this gig. In an interview with Liebman, he states that the gig happened at a "famous rock club" called "The Scene".⁵² The gig featured a double rhythm section of George Cables on piano, Lanny Fields and Dave Holland on basses, Lenny White and Bob Moses on drums, and Liebman and Grossman on saxophones. The double quartet may be of significance because it is the same configuration as the landmark album recorded on December 21, 1960 by Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz*. Dave Holland was already with Miles, and Miles may have come to the gig because of Lennie White, who had recorded on *Bitches Brew*, but was not in Miles' live band. It is speculated that White told Miles about Grossman,⁵³ having played with him at jam sessions at George Cables' house and in The Jazz Samaritans. That matinee gig occurred on a Sunday afternoon sometime between October 9 when Miles' Ferrari was shot up, and November 19, 1969, the date Grossman first recorded with Miles. On a break, Miles took band members outside to show them his bullet-riddled red Ferrari. At that time, and on that gig, Liebman and Grossman were playing the musical language of late period John Coltrane. Grossman was subsequently asked to join Miles.

Miles had returned to the recording studio in August of 1969, six months after recording tracks that had produced the album *In a Silent Way*. During that time Tony Williams left the

⁵¹ Liebman, *What It Is*, 121.

⁵² Liebman interview by Beckett. [Danny's Hideaway was more likely because it may have been researched by Lewis Porter]

⁵³ Liebman, *What It Is*, 121.

band and was replaced by Jack DeJohnette. “With DeJohnette, the Quintet began to stretch out more on each tune, playing with increased intensity.”⁵⁴ The August 19-21 sessions produced what would become *Bitches Brew*. Despite being packaged as a double album with long tracks, *Bitches Brew* gained traction and airplay on underground rock radio stations (excerpts were usually played). The result was Miles’ first “and most unlikely” gold record.⁵⁵

The November 19, 1969 recording sessions were Grossman’s first significant recording of his career. The band was essentially the same as the *Bitches Brew* band, and it was several months before the release of *Bitches Brew*. The tracks that resulted from the November 1969 sessions, as well as November 28 sessions on which Grossman recorded, were released on *Live/Evil* in 1971 and *Big Fun* in 1974. However, Grossman was in Miles’ working band when *Bitches Brew* was released in April 1970, and toured with Miles for several months thereafter. So to some degree Grossman would have received some of the attention *Bitches Brew* was getting. Even if only by association, Grossman was, to live audiences, part of the *Bitches Brew* phenomenon. That made Grossman relevant, beyond simply being a member of Miles’ band.

Why would Miles have selected Steve Grossman to play with him at such a crucial time? The replacement for Wayne Shorter, whose influence had defined Miles’ “Second Great Quintet” especially through his compositions, would have been under intense scrutiny. It can be argued that Grossman, in how he was perceived by critics and fans, was a victim of being too different than Shorter. Grossman was heavily influenced by later Coltrane, and was pursuing that sound. Miles had always loved Coltrane, and it would have been plausible for him to hire a saxophone player who idealized Coltrane. The type of raw intensity with which Grossman played was appropriate to Miles’ musical pursuits at that time.

⁵⁴ Michael Cuscuna, Liner Notes, *The Complete Bitches Brew Sessions*. Columbia C4K 65570, 1998.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

At the same time of Coltrane's death, Miles Davis' band was changing personnel and direction. By the end of August 1968, Dave Holland and Chick Corea had replaced Ron Carter and Herbie Hancock respectively in Miles' live band. Corea, and especially Holland embraced free jazz, and Miles' band was moving in that direction under their influence. 1968 also was the beginning of Miles' electronic explorations with the release of *In a Silent Way*. By the time Grossman was in Miles' band, there was something of a confluence of electronic and free jazz.

Liebman remembers seeing Miles' band when Grossman was playing with him. Grossman was always standing at the back of the stage, behind Jack DeJohnette. Often, Miles would end his solo abruptly and Grossman would saunter up to the front of the stage, weaving his way through the cords and cables taking some time doing it. To Liebman, this appeared to bother Miles, but it was not something that he likely would have communicated explicitly to Grossman. "Miles isn't the kind of guy to communicate like that. Everything was innuendo."⁵⁶ Speaking of that version of Miles Davis' band, Liebman stated,

"...you've got to remember that that band with Chick [Corea] and Dave [Holland] had not been so well recorded, but there are live recordings of it. In some ways, it could have been the best band Miles ever had. It was so free, so exciting. And very loud. And a lot of the free jazz influence...found its way with Chick and Dave particularly. First with Wayne, by the way, and then when Steve came in [to the band].... Somehow when Miles would play, they would be playing the backbeat type, you know, fusion *Bitches Brew/In a Silent Way* kind of sound. And Miles would play his solo... [He] still had open trumpet at that time. Then Steve (or Wayne) would come on and those guys would go completely crazy and [laughing] they covered him up! Especially Steve, it was like he wouldn't even be there. They would get so loud. It was electric piano, Jack was playing at the top of his game, and I just remember often not being able to hear Steve too much. I don't know if he had a pick-up [mic] or not, I don't remember. But of course you do have the recordings, *Jack Johnson*...you have *Black Beauty* and so forth. And you can hear how Steve played and he was definitely doing something. I mean, he was onto something that was not Wayne; not Trane. It was him, and a certain way of playing. He was snaking around the intervals and so forth. It was happening. It

⁵⁶ Liebman, interview by Beckett.

just wasn't dominant and you couldn't hear it. It didn't seem they paid attention to him. I always thought they were kind of ignoring him."⁵⁷

It did seem that Grossman was not necessarily being treated with the same regard as other band members. Perhaps it was because he was relatively very young. It was possible that it was because he was replacing one of the all-time jazz greats in Wayne Shorter. Grossman was somewhat of an outsider musically because of his own preferences. He was at heart a tenor player, but Miles wanted him to play soprano exclusively. The band leaned toward free playing under the influence of Dave Holland and Chick Corea. They had to "keep a lid on it" when Miles was playing, but when he stopped, they did their free thing with no regard for the soloist. Perhaps the music at that moment was flashing back to Liebman's loft, where there were no soloists, just a Dixie-like cacophony. Of course, Grossman could not compete with the blaring electronic instruments and was marginalized as a result. Grossman stated, "Dave Holland was always trying to push Chick to play more 'out', but they wouldn't do it behind Miles. Instead, they experimented behind Wayne's solos, and continued to do so behind me when I was in the band."⁵⁸

In a 1996 interview, Grossman stated,

"Well, I liked what the group was doing with (Jack) DeJohnette, and I liked a lot of what Wayne was playing, and Miles of course. But for the first time in my life I felt at a loss for what to play sometimes. It was a strange feeling. It was maybe too much interference. So I mostly played with the drums, with DeJohnette. They would lay out—Dave (Holland) and Chick (Corea)—and I would just play tenor with the drums. That's where I felt most comfortable."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Paul Tingen, *Miles Beyond: The electric explorations of Miles Davis, 1967-1991* (New York: Billboard Books, 2001), 117.

⁵⁹ Gilbert, 11.

In a more recent interview, Grossman put it more strongly, "the only time I had a good time was when I was playing duet with DeJohnette, tenor and drums."⁶⁰ In fact, Miles only wanted soprano, "He wanted me to play soprano all the time. He said, 'you don't have to bring your tenor.' I could see he was very into the sound of soprano and trumpet melodies. But I kept bringing my tenor, kept playing it, and he would splice my tenor solos out of the records. But he liked the tenor and drums."⁶¹ "I always wanted to be a tenor player", Grossman commented. "So I kept the tenor on a lot of tunes, and I think a lot of my solos were cut out for that reason. Miles was really into the soprano, and I kind of disobeyed his order."⁶²

Speaking of being hired and in Miles' band, Grossman said, "Miles was just a great person and very encouraging. He really tried to make me feel at ease, but he was one of my favorite musicians since I was eight years old, so it was difficult. Also, to suddenly go into this environment where everyone had a lot more experience, I would say I was inhibited."⁶³

Grossman played several studio dates with Miles before he joined the touring band, and he described the rehearsal and studio experiences:

"We played a lot during rehearsals, but when we got to recording, Miles changed everything. He might keep one line from a rehearsed piece of music, or maybe nothing at all. Ninety percent of the tunes we rehearsed were never used in the studio. It seemed like everyone just felt each other out and got used to being with each other playing with each other. Rehearsal was just hanging out together and creating something like an intimate 'family atmosphere', a support thing."⁶⁴

Grossman also spoke of the June 3-4 sessions with Hermeto Pascoal, "There were many different short takes...I remember that there was just a melody written out and we phrased it and I just tried to follow Miles the way he was phrasing it. He liked a little delayed kind of phrasing. There

⁶⁰ Brian Pace.

⁶¹ Gilbert, 11, 13.

⁶² Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 117.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 78.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 105.

wasn't any beat, it was all out of time, so it was a matter of playing just a shade behind him with the soprano. I think Wayne developed that approach with him...just to follow him, milliseconds behind. It was a nice effect.”⁶⁵

The period that Grossman was in Miles' band was a period of transition, musically as well as with personnel. Grossman had recorded with Miles in November 1969 and early 1970, but did not join his live band until April 1970. The live band from the time Grossman first recorded with Miles in November 1969 until his departure in August 1970 consisted of Jack DeJohnette on drums, Dave Holland on bass, Chick Corea on piano and Airtio Moreira on percussion. Keith Jarrett was added as the second keyboard (organ) player in May 1970. The studio band was in flux, consisting of his “Stock Company Players.”⁶⁶ So on the album *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* which was recorded on April 7, 1970, Grossman was the only musician who could be considered one of the live band members as well.⁶⁷ Besides Miles, the other players were Billy Cobham, John McLaughlin, Herbie Hancock keyboard and notably Michael Henderson on bass. Henderson would go on to replace Dave Holland, and represented a significant change in musical direction of the Miles Davis band. Whereas Holland was pulling the band toward free improvisation, Henderson could be seen as almost the opposite, providing repeating ostinato grooves. Miles was being influenced by the music of James Brown, Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix, and the electric bass style of Michael Henderson helped allow Miles to pursue those rock and funk styles. The difference between recording studio and live versions of the Miles band has caused some uncertainty as to the sequence of events. After the Fillmore East gig March 6 and 7, 1970, Wayne Shorter left the band for good, and was replaced by Grossman. The

⁶⁵ Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 110.

⁶⁶ Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, p. 75. The “Stock Company Players” referred to by Tingen were a rotation of musicians that Miles used in the recording studio, especially during the numerous recording sessions around 1969-1970. These musicians were frequently not in Miles' live band.

⁶⁷ Borderline—the gig the night of April 7 was Wayne Shorter's last with Miles.

March 7 performances were in circulation as a bootleg for a long time and released in 2001 as *It's About That Time: Live at the Fillmore East March 7, 1970*. This was the last performance for Wayne Shorter with Miles' band, live or studio. It should not be confused with *Miles at Fillmore* recorded June 17-20 also at the Fillmore East but with Steve Grossman on saxophone.

Grossman left Miles' Band sometime before August 18, 1970, when saxophonist Gary Bartz first appeared with the band. According to Grossman, "Miles fired me...in my opinion he did not like my contribution to the music. In the end, I hope that was it because there was also a kind of psychological warfare between us."⁶⁸ At some point later, Grossman was approached by Miles again. By that time, Grossman was with Elvin Jones, and he turned Miles down.

In existing literature there is relatively very little mention specifically of Grossman with Miles, and what does exist consists primarily of negative reviews or assessments. The playing of Grossman on *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*, *Black Beauty*, and *Miles at Fillmore* is excellent. It seems that initial perceptions have been somewhat blindly followed and propagated so that the continuing narrative of substandard performances and the overall negative contribution of Grossman have been dominant. These perceptions are typically value judgments, with no real justification.

Grossman and Liebman later and famously played together with Elvin Jones, and eventually Liebman was hired by Miles. So there was something of a game of "musical chairs" going on. Interestingly, Liebman was present (double quartet gig) when Miles hired Grossman, and Grossman was present (in Elvin Jones' band) when Miles hired Liebman.

Grossman went on to play with organist Lonnie Smith and guitarist George Benson for several months before he was hired by Elvin Jones. He stayed with Jones nearly six years, past the time when Liebman and Perla had left.

⁶⁸ Levitt, 26.

CHAPTER 7

ELVIN JONES *LIVE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE*

Elvin Jones *Live at the Lighthouse* is an album of primary importance to the career of Steve Grossman. It is the album that made Grossman known as a great tenor saxophone player to the jazz world. The album is very influential in the history of jazz to players of all instruments, but especially to saxophonists. Gene Perla stated, "...Any stature that I've gained in the...scene comes from probably, mostly this record...because it was a record for saxophone players, and so many saxophone players were influenced by this recording."⁶⁹ In the introduction to Petter Wettre's book of the transcribed saxophone solos of Grossman and Liebman, Chris Potter observed,

"Elvin Jones' classic *Live at the Lighthouse* recordings have provided a generation of jazz musicians (myself definitely included) with tremendous inspiration and material for study. Liebman and Grossman raised the bar for what could be accomplished on the saxophone after assimilating the musical language of John Coltrane, and Elvin Jones was at the absolute peak of his powers. The joy these four musicians must have shared playing together still jumps out of the speakers at you, and it remains a shining example of jazz at its most vital."⁷⁰

The personnel of Elvin's band had fluctuated from the time of the recording of *Merry Go Round* on December 16, 1971 when all four members of the *Lighthouse* band were on board. At times the band might include Jan Hammer on piano and Don Alias on congas, although there are no official recordings of the band with those two musicians. One of the important and distinctive things about *Live at the Lighthouse* is that it is a piano-less quartet. That configuration allows for the maximum expression and exploration for a solo instrument player. There is no harmonic

⁶⁹ Perla, Gene. (2008) *Jazz Profile* radio program, interview with Charles Blass WKCR New York, April 6.

⁷⁰ Petter Wettre, ed., *The Lighthouse Omnibook: David Liebman & Steve Grossman*, (The System: 2005). <http://www.lighthouseomnibook.com>.

implication or interference from a chord-playing instrument, allowing in this case the saxophones of Grossman and Liebman to soar over the efficient and very solid rhythmic foundation provided by Perla and Jones.

The importance of *Live at the Lighthouse* indicates that there is musicological relevance in relating how the band was assembled. Besides Elvin Jones, the three other members of the *Lighthouse* quartet were saxophonists Steve Grossman and Dave Liebman, and bassist Gene Perla. All three had some interaction with Elvin previous to being hired. In 1968 Grossman had sat in with Elvin at Pookie's Pub, a club across the street from the Half Note. Elvin had that gig for some time after he left Coltrane. There was some notice of Grossman on that gig⁷¹ and Elvin may have remembered him. Dave Liebman played opposite of Elvin in 1968 at a town hall concert. In 1969 he was playing an unsuccessful gig with Pete LaRoca and talking of getting a better paying job. Elvin showed up one night and when LaRoca mentioned it, Elvin got in Liebman's face and threatened him to stay with Pete.⁷² The story of how Gene Perla wound up with Elvin Jones is the first and most important narrative of the members of that band. Perla was the one who would facilitate the hiring of Grossman and Liebman by Jones, thus making possible the *Live at the Lighthouse* band.

When Perla was at Berklee in the early 1960s, he was learning about the music scene and his goal became to go to New York and play with two people: Miles Davis and Elvin Jones. He would eventually realize that goal, but more significantly with Elvin Jones. While in Boston, Perla was making trips to New York because he knew he would end up there eventually. His first encounter with Elvin was on one of these trips, likely in 1965, when he sat in on piano with Elvin at the Five Spot club. Jones was in Coltrane's band at the time, but he was recording under

⁷¹ Whitney Balliett, "A walk in the park." *The New Yorker*, May 18, 1968, 45.

⁷² Liebman, *What It Is*, 140.

his own name by then, so it is reasonable to assume that he was playing gigs under his own name as well. The second meeting was more auspicious. Perla tells of the chance occurrence in July of 1968 that led to him getting the gig with Elvin:

“I had sat in with Elvin on piano, but then I became a bass player and I happened to be visiting Boston. This is really a story of being in the right place at the right time. Elvin was working at a club called ‘The Jazz Workshop’ for the week, and Jimmy Garrison jumped on a plane, went to New York to cop [heroin]. He didn’t make it back in time for a WGBH half-hour TV show. And so the people at the television station called Berklee. I was standing in the lobby when the call comes in and the girl openly says to some of us just standing around, ‘Elvin Jones is at WGBH. He needs a bass player now!’ Oh, man! All I had was my electric bass with me. I got in the car, I put my foot on the floor... I was gonna race a cop to get there! I get there, run in...we’re going to hit in five minutes. Joe Farrell is showing me the tunes. Good luck, I’m really paying attention, right? ...Trying to set up this Ampeg amp that sounds like [crap]. I play the first note, Elvin gives me this dirty look [in gravelly voice] ‘make the thing sound good!’ So I adjusted the controls to where I liked it, and off we went.

[It was trio with Elvin, Joe Farrell on soprano and Gene on electric bass] Talk about flying by the seat of my pants, not knowing the music or anything. What was interesting about this was that I was playing electric bass. I had heard afterward, several people told me when Elvin went back to New York he mentioned that he had played with an electric bass player that made the electric sound ‘upright-ish’. It was some months that went by, but when the chair opened up, he called me. That’s when I joined for a long period of time.”⁷³

Gene Perla joined Elvin Jones in the middle of January, 1971, and stayed in the band for two and a half years. He would work and record with him occasionally after that. One of the first things that Perla did with Elvin was a recording on February 12, 1971. The recording that would become the album *Genesis* was released on Blue Note records. It was a piano-less chord-free band, with Frank Foster, Joe Farrell, David Liebman on saxophones and reeds, as well as Perla and Elvin Jones.

Perla was almost tempted away from the Elvin Jones band. In 1971, John McLaughlin was starting his own group, which would become the Mahavishnu Orchestra. He offered the gig

⁷³ Perla, interview by Blass.

to Perla, but was turned down. If Perla had accepted, *Live at the Lighthouse* might not have ever happened. Perla did secure an audition for Jan Hammer, which resulted in Hammer getting the Mahavishnu Orchestra gig and launching his career and notoriety.

“Mr. Jones was my ticket,” Perla quipped. Indeed, having the Elvin Jones gig put Perla into a new and elevated level of respect among jazz peers and fans. “Once I got that gig with Elvin, people from all walks of life started to treat me very differently...greeting me friendly, wanting to have conversations with me.... Of course now I’m playing with Elvin so I must be important! I’m still the same guy, but that’s the way it goes.” The opportunity of playing with Elvin allowed Perla to ask friends Steve Grossman and Dave Liebman to join him with Elvin during his time there, which eventually led to the famous “*Lighthouse* band”. Speaking of Perla, Liebman related that “I remember he said to me, ‘I’m going to get you and Steve Grossman in the band. Watch me!’”⁷⁴

Dave Liebman was to become the next member of the “Lighthouse band” to join Elvin. Before Liebman, Elvin’s band had different combinations of saxophone players including Joe Farrell, and at different times Frank Foster, Clifford Jordan or George Coleman, piano-less trio or quartet. The piano-less configuration, though very important, was not new or unique to *Lighthouse* band.

The events leading to Liebman getting hired transpired somewhat rapidly after Perla was in the band. Liebman stated, “one evening in February 1971 at 11:30 p.m., I get a frantic call from Gene Perla. ‘Elvin wants to hear you now. Come to Slugs.’ Come right now.”⁷⁵ When Liebman got there, the band was a piano-less trio consisting of Elvin, Perla and Joe Farrell. While Farrell stayed at the bar, Liebman played several tunes, one after the other. After Liebman

⁷⁴ Liebman, Dave, *What It Is*, 140.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

was finished, Elvin asked him to come to Rudy Van Gelder's studio the following week, and to "bring a tune."⁷⁶ Music from the session on February 12, 1971 would become the album *Genesis*. Liebman contributed his tune "Slumber", which Grossman had recorded with Chick Corea on his 1970 album *The Sun*.⁷⁷

The February 1971 call was for the recording session only. Liebman did not join Elvin's band as a full time member until September that year. One September night at four a.m., the phone rang. It was Keiko Jones, Elvin's wife. "Elvin wants you to come to Chicago, first flight out of LaGuardia. There's a ticket waiting for you, seven a.m. flight."⁷⁸ Liebman got there, and played the gig at noon at a school. Still not knowing what was going to happen, he was summoned to Elvin's hotel room, where Elvin told him, "I'd like you to join the band as of right now."⁷⁹

Liebman's experience and inclination at that time leaned heavily toward modal playing, and Elvin's band was moving in that direction. There was a distinct difference in the styles of Liebman and Elvin's other tenor players (Joe Farrell, Frank Foster, George Coleman and Clifford Jordan) who favored bebop *ii-V* structures and perhaps somewhat inappropriately inserted them into modal tunes. Liebman stated, "*Impressions* is where I started. For them, it was *Confirmation* where they started, or something like that."⁸⁰ As Liebman wisely put it, "You are a product of your time and what is in the so-called 'air' when you are at your [formative] stage, somewhere in the teens to twenties age-wise. That's what will always feel most natural to you."⁸¹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁷⁷ Chick Corea. *The Sun*. Express/Toshiba (Jap) ETP-9016, (Recorded September 14), 1970. LP record.

⁷⁸ Liebman, *What It Is*, 142.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 143-4.

⁸¹ Ibid., 144.

Indeed, when Liebman joined Elvin's band, it was the signal of a significant change in direction, generationally and musically.

The next few months after Liebman joined Elvin was a transitional period. The band played as trio with Liebman sometimes, but also with another tenor player including one of Joe Farrell, Frank Foster, Clifford Jordan or George Coleman. Sometimes Jan Hammer would play, having been suggested by Gene Perla. Elvin's brother Hank Jones would play some gigs, and Don Alias played congas on several gigs as well. Joe Farrell was still in the band, but on his way out.⁸²

It is not clear the exact circumstances of Grossman joining the band, but he was in the band by late 1971. December 16, 1971, Elvin Jones went into the studio with nine other musicians to record *Merry-Go-Round* for Blue Note. Included was Steve Grossman on his first recording date with Elvin along with Dave Liebman, and Gene Perla. All the players in the "Lighthouse band" were now together, but the origins of that band would be solidified very soon after, around Christmas-time when the piano-less quartet played a two-week gig in Ottawa, Canada. The gig was memorable because of the weather—there was two feet of snow, but important because the band was rehearsing new material almost daily. The band continued to play and work up the new tunes on gigs all the way up to September 9, 1972, when *Live at the Lighthouse* was recorded.

When Grossman joined Elvin, the vibe really came together. Perla, Liebman and Grossman were tight friends and compadrés from their times together especially in the lofts, but before that as well. That was a primary reason why *Live at the Lighthouse* is such a famous and influential recording. There was the music, which is very influential to saxophonists, of course. However, as Liebman states, it was much more than that.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 143.

“Elvin was happy as a pig in shit. He had a bunch of guys who idolized him and wanted to really play. He said years later that this was one of his best, if not the best, band he had, and one of the great records is *The Lighthouse*. He was really with us, not just the leader with sidemen, and I think that’s what comes across on *The Lighthouse*. It’s that there was a vibe in that band, which was special.”⁸³

Liebman went on to say,

“It was great when we ended up with Elvin, because here we were, three guys that enjoyed each other, had musical time together being in a band with the greatest drummer in the world, following in Coltrane’s shadow, so to say. So it was quite something, actually. It was really a confluence of events.”⁸⁴

Musically, *Live at the Lighthouse* was very influential because it showcased the top two post-Coltrane tenor saxophone players, who were playing the language of Coltrane with Coltrane’s drummer, but in a much different environment.

Live at the Lighthouse is where Grossman became an icon. He was known because of having played with Miles Davis, but that was not a satisfactory musical experience for him, and did not show him in a particularly positive light. *Lighthouse* is where Grossman truly came into his own as a jazz tenor saxophone player, and where everyone could witness what he was capable of.

Grossman would go on to play with Elvin Jones for about five years. *The Main Force* on the Vanguard label was Grossman’s last record with Elvin, made sometime in 1976.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., 144.

⁸⁴ Liebman, interview by Beckett.

⁸⁵ Elvin Jones, *The Main Force*, Vanguard VSD79372, 1976.

CHAPTER 8

SOME SHAPES TO COME

After Elvin Jones' *Live at the Lighthouse*, the next important event for Grossman was the recording *Some Shapes to Come*, on Gene Perla's fledgling record label PM Records. Perla formed his record company, PM Records, on the spur of the moment to help Dave Liebman get his album *Open Sky*⁸⁶ released. That recording included Liebman, Frank Tusa on bass and Bob Moses on drums. The tracks were already recorded for Liebman's album, so the second album released on PM Records was the first one recorded and produced by Perla.

That second record of the PM label was the first record under Steve Grossman's name, entitled *Some Shapes to Come*. The title is a reference to Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. *Some Shapes to Come* was recorded September 4, 5, and 6, 1973 and released soon after, a year after the very influential *Live at the Lighthouse* record. The album includes Gene Perla on bass, Don Alias on drums and percussion (there were over-dubs), and Jan Hammer on Fender Rhodes and Moog synthesizer.

Unfortunately perhaps, the album was recorded at too high an electronic input level resulting in a much less than perfect finished product. Perla was involved with playing, and the problem had gone unnoticed. Despite the deficiency, Perla released the record because he felt that the music deserved to be heard. "It's really a testament to the music that even with that...I have to characterize it as horrible sound, the music somehow transcended it."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ David Liebman, *Open Sky*, PM Records, PMR-001, 1972.

⁸⁷ Perla, interview by Beckett.

Perla related that “there were three tunes on that album: ‘The Sixth Sense,’ ‘Alodian Mode,’ and ‘Extemporaneous Combustion,’ there was nothing. We just made that stuff right up on the spot.”⁸⁸

“What we did a lot of is just make up stuff, especially in the loft, not play tunes. Mostly it was to just really get the feeling of the rhythm—to go, to get it smooth, to make it swing out...to work on that aspect. So the harmonic and melodic content was not so much of import as far as following changes, et cetera. It was really working, especially with Grossman, we were really working on the time, all the time with him.”⁸⁹

“The Sixth Sense” from *Some Shapes to Come*, states Perla, “was completely improvised. We just started playing and that’s what happened. It’s pretty interesting stuff, I think, that happens. It just comes together in the creative evolution of the song.”⁹⁰

The freely improvised tunes probably would not have come off if it weren’t for the talents of Jan Hammer. Perla stated,

“This goes back to Alias called me a couple of times... and the first time he called me he said, ‘hey man, there’s this piano player in Boston, man you gotta check this guy out!’ It was Jan Hammer. I wind up in Boston not long afterwards and do a session with him, [a drummer, and] John Abercrombie also...and Hammer. And, we’re playing time, but we’re making up stuff. There’s no song, right? And I’m playing along and all of a sudden I’d say, ‘oh, let me go here to this tonal point,’ right? And Hammer hits it, ‘boom!’ right at the same moment. And we’re playing for a while and we go to another [point], and he hits it at the same moment! And we were screaming at that session! I’ll never forget that...because it was so...I don’t know...who the hell knows how to describe it? And that’s what that album was. Those three tunes on there, we just made ‘em up...and Hammer and I were always harmonically...we’d get to a point, we’d feel like we were going to make a change and we’d go to the same place!”⁹¹

Perla went on to say,

“Grossman was right there with us. I mean, really...from my perspective, what do I know? I don’t know what they were thinking... but from my perspective, Jan

⁸⁸ Perla, interview by Beckett.

⁸⁹ Perla, Interview by Blass.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Perla, interview by Beckett.

and I were creating this...panorama. Call it that. We were creating this panorama and Grossman was sitting on top of it.”⁹²

There is a perception that “free jazz” is chaos and cacophony. Perhaps some of it is, but the three tunes that were freely fabricated on *Some Shapes to Come* sound prepared, largely because of the insistence on playing in the context of time. The extraordinarily high level of musicianship is demonstrated by the ability to seemingly instantaneously agree on harmonic contexts as well.

The instrumentation and overall sound of *Some Shapes to Come* is distinctive. The use of the Fender Rhodes electric piano, Moog Synthesizer and Electric bass are representative of the transitional phase between the jazz-rock of Miles and the softer edged fusion that was to come with Weather Report and Return to Forever. “Pressure Point” is the only tune on the album that can be considered straight-ahead, only because of the walking acoustic bass, but even that tune is carried off with post-Coltrane intensity. Despite what Perla characterized as “a horrible sound,” the over-modulation of the recording can be seen as actually enhancing the overall perception of an intense, gritty, real jazz-rock recording. Grossman plays with that great intensity throughout the album, and with a maturity that belied his twenty two years.

Some Shapes to Come was influential not exclusively to saxophone players. Perla relates a story of an exchange between bassists Matthew Garrison (son of Jimmy Garrison, Coltrane’s bassist) and Christian McBride in the not too distant past, “Christian McBride asks Matthew Garrison, ‘do you know The Bible?’, and Matthew Garrison says, ‘yeah, the Grossman record.’”⁹³

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Perla, interview by Blass.

CHAPTER 9

STONE ALLIANCE

The makings of Stone Alliance had probably been brewing unconsciously for some time, but came together on a whim. “Don and I and Steve had a meeting at Don’s mother’s house. And we’re sitting in her kitchen, talking about ourselves...and we decided that we were going to form a band.” Perla took care of the business side of it, Grossman was the saxophone player/ front man, and Don Alias was the leader.⁹⁴

It would seem that Stone Alliance was together much longer than the two years from 1975 to 1977, and in a sense they were. They had been great friends since the early days of Gene Perla’s loft, probably by 1968 if not sooner. Perla and Alias were best friends since 1964. There were times when all three played together in Elvin Jones' band in 1972, and the band that played together on *Some Shapes to Come* could be described as “Stone Alliance plus Jan Hammer”.

An interesting sideline is that all three played with Miles Davis on separate occasions. Don Alias was on *Bitches Brew*, Gene Perla played on the tune “Ali” on the May 19, 1970 recording session (Grossman did not play on that tune), and of course Grossman was with Miles from November 1969 to August 1970.

As Perla had stated earlier, most of what was happening on the hours and hours of recordings in his loft were him playing with Alias and Grossman, so the precedent was firmly in place for a ready-made and tight band. The ability and inclination to favor intense styles, and to change them rapidly—on the fly—helped make possible the remarkable fullness of sound coming from three monolithic instruments. Perla did use effects at times, such as volume pedal, phase shifter and octaver, but the drums and saxophone were essentially acoustic instruments in

⁹⁴ Perla, interview by Beckett.

that setting. Grossman remained true to his artistic ideals of pure jazz even within intense rock context, always finding a way to make it swing.

Grossman was on six different Stone Alliance records. In June 1975, the trio went into the studio and recorded tracks for the eponymous *Stone Alliance* album, released on PM Records. Within a relatively brief two year period, that inaugural incarnation of Stone Alliance (there would be others after Grossman left) recorded material for three other albums with trio only: *Live in Buenos Aires*, *Live in Bremen*, and *Live in Amsterdam*. Stone Alliance also recorded with the Brazilian trumpeter on *Marcio Montarroyos featuring Stone Alliance*. There was also *Stone Alliance Con Amigos*, that featured a pianist and percussionists from South America.

The end came after Grossman undermined the band on two notable occasions. First, Grossman had met a young woman in Argentina, and insisted on marrying her. There were roadblocks with paperwork, customs, etc. Grossman insisted on staying until he married her, and as a result the band had to cancel subsequent bookings in Central America.

Then, on the tail end of a European tour in the fall of 1977, the band was booked for two weeks at the famous Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London. Gene Perla related the story,

“We did a tour of Europe, and the last thing we had to do was two weeks, they gave us, two weeks at Ronnie Scotts, because we had played there before. Damn Grossman! The first week was opposite Stan Getz. The second week was opposite Joe Henderson. And Grossman, at that point, he'd have burned those guys out, man! Not to take anything away from them. They're both fabulous, both of them. But Grossman was so on fire, man... He didn't make the gig. I had to cancel the gig. And, I guess I got to the end of my rope. Did I make a mistake? ... who the hell knows?”⁹⁵

Thus Grossman's association with Stone Alliance ended.

⁹⁵ Perla, interview by Beckett.

CHAPTER 10

FINAL THOUGHTS

Most people who know the music of Steve Grossman think of him as “the Trane guy”.

But according to Liebman,

“He was more than that. When you hear *Jack Johnson*, when you hear stuff he played in the loft, and, of course, *The Lighthouse*, you know he was into something unique that could’ve continued developing—I mean the lines and choice of notes. But he was not that kind of guy. He was just very talented and very good by the time I got to know him. I don’t think he sat down and did any sort of deep figuring out of the stuff. He somehow had a way of playing lines that was different than Wayne and Trane, and with a lot of passion, for sure. In my opinion, it could’ve definitely been a bigger thing if he had taken more responsibility. I’m no expert, but it seems that his lifestyle waylaid him off a path that might’ve really been innovative—who knows? The plate was full when he walked in during those years with Elvin and Miles, with the great reputation he had.”⁹⁶

Campbell said of Grossman, “Steve’s depth of tenor saxophone in the jazz idiom is something to behold. At that time, anyway, for such a young cat, he had a lot of wisdom about the tenor.... Steve always had a kind of a thing in his tone that had a maturity to it...some deep [stuff] happening in his sound and his time feel...”⁹⁷

Grossman was very influential for several reasons when compared to his peers. The lineage is an important factor. The pedigree of Charlie Parker first, then Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, is conventionally regarded by aspiring jazz saxophonists to be the direction to take in order to reach the highest levels of playing and expression. These three were the most innovative and explored the limits of the saxophone and the music farther than anyone else. Having a solid foundation in bebop was paramount to Grossman’s influence. Having been grounded in the tonal

⁹⁶ Liebman, *What It Is*, 123.

⁹⁷ Campbell, interview by Beckett.

aspects of jazz in the context of fast tempos can be considered the starting point for virtuoso innovation, which it can be argued Grossman achieved to a point. The elements that Grossman synthesized to be considered innovative are bebop, modal contexts, avant-garde, and rock-jazz fusion. Coltrane innovated in the first three, but Grossman covered those as well as rock-jazz fusion. Grossman did not invent the context of rock-jazz, but he was the one who carried forward the legacy of John Coltrane in that context with *Some Shapes to Come*, and then with his work in Stone Alliance.

Grossman grew up musically influenced by Charlie Parker. He then evolved stylistically through late Coltrane. By the late 1960s, Grossman's musical maturity (very early by anyone else's standards) coincided with the hard rock and funk that would influence Miles Davis. To play music stylistically with what was happening at that time, Grossman would be playing in an environment of intense expression modeled musically from Coltrane, but modeled stylistically (metaphorically speaking) after Jimi Hendrix through the filter of Miles Davis. This stylistic expression is particularly noticeable on *Some Shapes to Come* and subsequent Stone Alliance recordings, which contained many tracks that are essentially jazz in a rock style.

The raw intense expression combined with elements of rock can be seen as a logical extension of Coltrane. Grossman is so influential because he also brought the highest level of technique and knowledge of the saxophone. He applied those elements to the music itself using the context of the history and tradition of jazz as it was applied to saxophone. There was no skipping of steps from Dixieland to Avant-garde with nothing in between, for example.

Grossman studied and covered the styles of Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, and the musically stylistic incarnations of Coltrane from bebop to avant-garde in more or less sequential order. However, the known recordings and available common knowledge of

Grossman would not reveal this without some digging. To even the fans of Grossman, it is not obvious that he was a “Bird freak”⁹⁸ before he discovered Coltrane, because his most famous recordings do not reference that. One of the distinct things about Grossman that puts him above the others is that, like Coltrane, he covered seemingly all of jazz saxophone and pursued it in what many would consider the proper way, playing at the highest levels in conventionally tonal style first before pursuing a more abstract style. To some, there may be disdain for playing repertory instead of pursuing innovation, but in Grossman’s case it proves that, when considering the level of playing, he is a virtuoso.

Grossman was important because he adopted the musical innovations of Coltrane and combined them with the stylistic innovations of Miles. Grossman used intense rock as a vehicle for jazz with Stone Alliance, which was distinctive. Coltrane’s innovations involved a revolution in how to play the tenor saxophone. Coltrane explored new techniques such as false fingering, using the overtone series to achieve different harmonics, and effects that don’t necessarily express notes in harmonic contexts. Coltrane was exploiting the physical characteristics and acoustics of the tenor saxophone to create new sounds and effects, and Grossman followed that example. Campbell stated that “it’s really hard...to build on that and to take it further. You can get onto it and learn from going there as much as one can, which is what Dave [Liebman] and Steve [Grossman] were doing in that band [Elvin Jones quartet].”⁹⁹

There were historical and personal elements of when Grossman was influential which can be seen as even more remarkable. He was very young by any objective standard when he achieved such a great deal. It’s mind-boggling to realize that he was just twenty-six when he left Stone Alliance in 1977. He had already recorded on several albums with Miles Davis and Elvin

⁹⁸ Gross, L.

⁹⁹ Campbell, interview by Beckett.

Jones. He was twenty one when *Live at the Lighthouse* was recorded in 1972. He was only twenty two when *Some Shapes to Come* was recorded.

Talent can be called the ability to process and internalize complex information and then express it outwardly. Grossman did that at a very early age and in an individual way, which might encourage some to consider him a genius.

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APPENDIX A

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1968

Weldon Irvine. *Weldon and the Kats* (1968). Love'n'Haight LHLP007

1969

Miles Davis. *Big Fun*. (1974). Columbia 4-45090.
(sessions recorded on **November 19 and November 28, 1969** were included on *Big Fun*,
released April 19, 1974)

1970

Miles Davis. *Directions*. (1981) Columbia KC236474
"Willie Nelson" recorded **Feb. 27, 1970**

Terumasa Hino. *Journey to Air*. (1970) Canyon (Jap) CAT1001.
March, 1970.

Miles Davis.
March 3, 1970. "Big John". Included on *Big Fun*.
March 20, 1970. Unreleased session.

Terumasa Hino. *Alone Together*. (1970) Takt (Jap) XMS 10027
April 6 & 7, 1970.

Miles Davis. *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*. (1971) Columbia CK47036
April 7, 1970. [released Feb. 24, 1971]

Miles Davis. *Black Beauty: Miles Davis At Fillmore West*. (1997) Columbia C2K65138
April 10, 1970. [Released Japan 1973, USA 1997]

Miles Davis. *Get Up With It*. (1974). Columbia KG33236
May 19, 1970

Miles Davis. *Live/Evil*. (1971). Columbia C30954
June 3 & 4, 1970

Miles Davis. *Miles Davis at Fillmore*. (1970) Columbia G30038
June 17-20, 1970.

Chick Corea. *The Sun*. (1970) Express/Toshiba (Jap) ETP-9016
September 14, 1970

1971

Elvin Jones. *Merry Go Round*. (1972) Blue Note BST 84414
December 15, 1971

1972

Elvin Jones. *Mr. Jones*. (1973) Blue Note BN-LA110-F
July 12 & 13, 1972

Elvin Jones. *Live at the Lighthouse*. (1972) Blue Note BN-LA015-G2
September 9, 1972

Elvin Jones Quartet. *Jazz Jamboree '72*. (1972) Muza (Poland) XL0929
October 20, 1972

1973

Teruo Nakamura. *Unicorn*. (1973) Three Blind Mice (Japan) TBM-18
May 18 & June 8, 1973 (recorded in NY)

Elvin Jones. *The Prime Element*. (1976) Blue Note BN-LA506-H2
July 24 & 25, 1973

Steve Grossman. *Some Shapes to Come*. (1973) P.M. Records PMR002
September 4, 5 & 6, 1973

1974

Dizzy Reece. (1974?) Honey Dew HD6619

Steve Grossman Quintet. *Jazz Confronto 23*. (1975) Horo (Italy) 101-23
June 6, 1974 (Lord)
[April 6, 1975 according to hororecords.blogspot.com—recorded at Titania Studios,
Rome, Italy]

Elvin Jones. *Mr. Thunder*. (1975) EastWest (Sweden) EWR 7501
September 29, 1974 (recorded in Kumla, Sweden)

1975

Fred Thomkins. *Somesville*. (1975) Festival 9002.

Elvin Jones. *New Agenda*. (1975) Vanguard VSD79362

1976

Steve Grossman. *Terra Firma*. (1976) P.M. Records PMR012

June 1975 & June 1976

[“This way out” recorded June 1975, other titles June 1976]

Stone Alliance. *Stone Alliance*. (1976) P.M. Records PMR013

June 1975 & June 1976

Elvin Jones. *The Main Force*. (1976) Vanguard VSD79372

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