

Maynard Ferguson's music is uniquely his own jazz



NEW YORK, N.Y. — "The first thing is to keep loving music! Then keep your head wide open, and listen to everything — and play everything — in a creative way. . . . The two severest critics I know are on the two sides of my own head. But don't worry; they know how to applaud too! . . ."

Maynard Ferguson started listening to those "critics," and studying music, at four years of age. At nine he was a conservatory student in his native Canada. At 15 he formed a big band with sidemen averaging twice his age. At 20 he played the United States with Jimmy Dorsey, Charlie Barnet, and Stan Kenton — whose band made him a star.

Hitting the top is a good trick, but staying there is a better one. Ferguson's latest Columbia album — "Primal Scream" — sold more copies in five weeks than any of his previous hits sold in a year. Why does a huge young audience dig Maynard so much?

Mixture of rhythms
 "We're into today's music a lot," muses the musician. "Kids identify with the rhythms we get into. Yet our approach is a mixture. My daughter is my manager, and she once said, 'It isn't jazz, it isn't rock, it isn't pop — it's just Maynard Ferguson, the band, and what they're doing today.'"

"That sounds pompous, but it's the seed of what we're all about. Still, you could turn that negative into a positive and say, 'It is jazz, it is rock, and it is what pop represents: Popularity!'"

One key is listening for new ideas wherever you can find them. "If you hear something new that happens to be electronic, don't say, 'What do we need that for?' Say instead, 'I wonder if there's a way we could use that so it would turn me on.'" This attitude helps explain an electric mix like "Primal Scream," which moves from disco to Latin, from Chick Corea's "Cheshire Cat Walk" to a

jazzed-up "Pagliacci." It's all Maynard, and Maynard loves it all.

Questions 'pure' art
 Despite his current broad popularity, Ferguson is aware of critics who snipe at eclectic styles, calling them "impure" and commercially motivated. "Some people like purists," responds the trumpeter, "but who is pure? Louis Armstrong started doing something different when he left King Oliver's band, so was he 'impure' forever after that? The only real purist is some African drummer somewhere."

"These people want to see me walking around with a beatup old cornet under my arm in a paper bag," Ferguson smiles, "looking to borrow five bucks from someone like in all those old movies. But most people are away from that image of jazz musicians now . . ."

A continuing challenge for any big-band leader is finding fresh talent for his ensemble. Ferguson has his own method of keeping his ears open for reports and recommendations, and asking prospective musicians to send tapes of themselves playing "in a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere."

He has "never been a fan of the audition, which often leads to a case of nerves. I could give you a very famous list called Maynard's Mistakes of talents I missed when I did auditions. So the in-person audition has been depleted from my repertoire. I've struck out too many times with it."

Dislikes competition
 One reason for this approach is Ferguson's dislike of unnecessary competitiveness. "Often a sensitive, creative musician enters into music without wanting

to keep score," he says. "I dislike that competition in an art form. Especially when you're trying to educate children. It's destructive to tell one 13-year-old that he came in last while another is the best."

This implies no disrespect for music educators in general, however, whom Ferguson calls "those great friends of ours, along with the school systems and the 20,000 stage bands that are in America today. The upgrading of music education in the schools has been the greatest improvement in the last 15 years." He grins as he thinks of "all those kids getting into a wider form of music . . ."

For Ferguson, some of those emerging youngsters might be future sidemen. He admits to getting attached to members of his band, and mourning when they leave for other pursuits. "It reminds you of running a ball club. You always think you'll never get another Mickey Mantle, but before that you thought you'd never get another DiMaggio; and the truth is you don't get another one, you get something different that you hadn't even thought of."

Doesn't need dummies
 The main problem, he says, is not finding talent, but selecting from the profusion of good players who are available. He recalls the "wild" jazzman Charlie Barnet saying he didn't care about a man's fine nonmusical qualities, proffering "a dummy who can play." Says Ferguson, "I don't need dummies. There are so many wonderful people coming along today . . ."

Though Ferguson's career has prospered, the road has not always been smooth. "When I was nine I just loved music," he recalls. "And the rate of plea-

sure I get from playing and performing has been going steadily up."

"But in the late '50s I got disenchanted with the cookie-camp Maynard Ferguson I was playing. Audiences weren't so adventurous then — they just wanted to hear 'Maria' instead of what I wanted to play." So Maynard took off for India and England, after disbanding his band.

But he never forgot the thrill of leading that band and blowing his own horn — "I approach the instrument very physically" — before an American audience. "Not many people still believe the old stuff about playing only for yourself," he insists. So he returned to the U.S. and found listeners "widening their interests."

Designs instruments
 He gave them the diversity they wanted, and soon found himself back in the swing — and with a growing reputation as a designer of instruments, such as the M.F. Horn Trumpet, M.F. Superbore, and M.F. Firebird that he plays on "Primal Scream."

Today Ferguson enjoys the challenge of longer cuts on albums — "It's more artistic" — while remembering to avoid the pitfalls of "the endless solo." He

remembers a remark once made to him by Charlie Parker: "If you can't say it in eight bars, you can't say it at all." Comments Maynard, "I'm not sure I can say it in eight bars, but it's a great quote."

So Ferguson continues to tour — from Europe to Japan — and to bear out the most important factor of all. "The secret to my whole thing is that music is a thing of joy. As soon as the joy comes out of it, change your music!"

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JAZZ TRUMPETER MAYNARD FERGUSON ADVISES, 'KEEP LOVING MUSIC' . . . he listens to himself, new sounds, ideas, musicians

Movie Schedule

BRISTOL ART THEATER (Bristol)
 "Dixie" "French Heat" Mon. thru Fri. 1. Even. cont. from Sat. Sat. Sun. cont. from 1.

COLONIAL THEATERS (Bucks County Mall) TWIN I "The Seven-Per-Cent Solution" Mon. thru Thurs. 7:30, 9:35, 11:35, 7:50, 9:50, 11:50, 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, 9:30, 11:30. TWIN II "The Shaggy D.A." Mon. thru Thurs. 7:15, 9:10, Fri. 8:35, 9:35, Sat. Sun. 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30, 12:30.

BOYLESTOWN BARN CINEMAS (Boylestown) CINEMA I "King Kong" Wed. Thurs. 7:15, 9:15, 9:30, Fri. 5:30, 7:30, 9:30, Sat. 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30, 12:30. Sun. 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30, 12:30. CINEMA II "The Pink Panther Strikes Again" Mon. thru Thurs. 7:15, 9:10, Fri. 8:15, 9:20, 10:15, 10:35, 11:15, Sat. 2:15, 4:15, 6:15, 8:15, 10:15, 12:15. Sun. 2:15, 4:15, 6:15, 8:15, 10:15, 12:15.

BOYLESTOWN COUNTY THEATER (Boylestown) "Rod Stewart And Faces" Mon. thru Thurs. 7:30, 9:30, Sat. 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30.

ERIC FAIRLESS HILLS (Fairless Hills)
 TWIN I "Across the Great Divide" Mon. thru Thurs. 7, 9, Fri. 5, 9, Sat. 1, 3, 7, Sun. 2, 10, 4, 10, 6, 10, 10, 10, 10. TWIN II "The Pink Panther Strikes Again" Mon. thru Thurs. 1:30, 9:40, Fri. 5:45, 9:10, Sat. 1:15, 3:15, 5:45, 9:10, Sun. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 10:20, 10:30.

ERIC FEASTERTOWN (Feasterville)
 "Carrie" Mon. thru Thurs. 7:30, 9:30, Fri. 8, 10, 10:30, Sat. 1, 4, 6, 10, 10:30, Sun. 10:30.

ERIC TWIN PENN JERSEY (Fairless Hills)
 TWIN I "Silver Streak" Mon. thru Thurs. 7:30, 9:40, Fri. Sat. 1:50, 8:15, 10:20, Sun. 1:45, 7:55, 9:05, 9:20, 10:25. Mats. Wed., Fri., 7 TWIN II "Network" Mon. thru Thurs. 7:25, 9:45, Fri. Sat. 1:55, 8:15, 10:15, Sun. 1:30, 3:45, 6:10, 10:20. Mats. Wed., Fri.

FOX THEATRE (Levittown) "A Star is Born" Mon. thru Fri. 7:00, 9:30, Sat. 1, 3, 5, 7:45, 9:45, Sun. 2:10, 4:30, 7:05, 9:30, Mats. Wed., Fri.

LINCOLN PLAZA THEATERS (Langhorne Plaza, Route 1, Langhorne) TWIN I "Network" Tues. 7:15, 9:30. Mats. Sat. Sun. 1, 3, Wed., Fri. 1 TWIN II "The Enforcer" Sun. thru Thurs. 1:25, 9:45, Fri., Sat. 7, 9:40, 10:15. Mats. Sat. Sun. 1, 3, Wed., Fri. 1.

NEWTOWN THEATRE (Newtown) "Seven Beauties" Mon. thru Thurs. & Fri., Sat. 7:30, 9:40, Sun. 7, 9:15.

PENNSBURG THEATRE (Pennsburg Shopping Center) "Lollipop Palace" 1, 7, 9, 9:30.

PERMIELE TWIN THEATERS (Neshaminy Mall) TWIN I and II "King Kong" Mon. thru Thurs. 1:30, 7:15, 9:45, Fri. 1:30, 6:30, 7:30, 9, 10, Sat. 1, 2, 3:30, 4:30, 5:45, 7, 8:10, 9:30, 10:25. Sun. 1:30, 3:30, 4, 5:45, 7, 8:10, 9:30, 10:25.

TOWNE TWIN THEATERS (Levittown) TWIN I "The Shaggy D.A." Mon. thru Fri. 7:10, 9, Sat. Sun. 12:30, 2:10, 3:30, 7:10, 9, Mats. Wed., Fri. 1 TWIN II "Marathon Man" 1, 5, 9, Mats. Sat., Sun. 1, 3, Wed., Fri. 1.

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