

# MARSHALL'S ART

## Trumpeter John Marshall talks to Mark Gardner

Having learnt his craft, with help from Ornette Coleman and Lonnie Hillyer along the way, trumpeter John Thomas Marshall (born May 22, 1952) went on to work with a succession of big bands led by Buddy Rich, Mel Lewis, Lionel Hampton, Al Porcino, Gerry Mulligan and Dizzy Gillespie. He played in every trumpet chair from fourth to lead, also garnering invaluable small group experience in a group he co-led with pianist Tardo Hammer. A great admirer of Fats Navarro, Kenny Dorham and Dizzy Gillespie, John moved to Europe 17 years ago to become a member of the brass section and featured soloist with the West Deutscher Rundfunk Big Band, based in Cologne. One of the brightest of the contemporary hard bop trumpet voices, he leads his own quintets in Europe and, for a month a year, in New York. He is represented on CD by a series of excellent sessions released on the Organic Music, Blue Jack and Mons labels. A British tour by the cooking quintet he co-leads with Dutch saxophonist Ferdinand Povel is way overdue!

I was born in Wantagh, New York, and raised in Long Island, New York. From the age of eight, my family lived in Lloyd Harbor, Huntington. It was a one hour trip by train or car to New York City, where both of my parents had been born. My father was a saxophone player as well as a music teacher and band director in an elementary school in Merrick, Long Island. His job was to get youngsters started playing instruments at the age of eight or nine. After three years they would move on to junior high school, as we call it in the States. He gave my younger sister and me piano lessons, and would always bring home various band instruments for us to try out. When I was eight years old I took immediately to the trumpet. My high school had an excellent music department. We learnt music, theory and diction, sang in the choir and played in the concert band. My father arranged for me to study privately with Ned Mahoney, an outstanding cornetist and teacher. His mentor had been Ernest Williams, who in turn had studied with the great Herbert Clark, whose books of exercises and etudes are still widely used today. All these men came through the Goldman Band, which was quite an institution for many years, playing the characteristic American concert band repertoire. Ned worked with me on all the basics, getting a nice sound, playing clean and pretty, and trying to make real music out of every phrase. He also pushed me to play longer and longer passages of a piece in one breath, the classic way to develop breath control. I was very lucky to have this good training at such a young age.

Back at the high school our band director was Clem DeRosa, a drummer who

pioneered bringing big band music into the schools. I had the opportunity to play lead trumpet on the classic big band material, like the things Sammy Nestico and Neal Hefti wrote for Basie. At home I remember hearing the Sinatra-Nelson Riddle records as well as various big band things, like Basie and Maynard Ferguson. Although I was a good student and loved to read, from the age of 16 I took less and less interest in my academic studies in favour of music. On my little radio in the evening, when the reception improved, I could listen to WRVR, a jazz station from New York. This was around 1968 or 1969. I would fall asleep at night hearing the latest Blue Note sides by Lee Morgan and others, although it was only later that I

would be able to get my hands on the actual records.

At around this time I began to make weekend excursions into the city with friends to hear concerts at The Fillmore East Auditorium in the Lower East Side. My schoolmates were mostly interested in the biggest rock acts, but I quickly became enamoured with Miles Davis, who had just brought out *Bitch's Brew*, his first thoroughly electric record. I probably saw almost every appearance by Miles in New York City until 1975, after which he didn't perform in public again until 1981. I also began to visit some of the real jazz clubs in New York. I remember seeing Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk, Sun Ra, Roland Kirk, Dizzy, and the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Big Band. I regret to this day not having been aware of Kenny Dorham, who was still around at that time, playing great.

After two very brief and half-hearted attempts at further formal education – hardly worth relating here – I landed in New York City. I drove a taxi at night a few times a week and played r&b and salsa gigs. I made the acquaintance of Ornette Coleman, who was very kind and encouraging to me. He invited me to his loft in Soho to play through some of the things he was composing at the time. He actually hired my little group to play as the opening act at a concert in the street-level performance space at 131 Prince Street, called the Artist House. In later years he would call me to play in some of his projects. One interesting experience



Quintet co-leaders, John Marshall and Ferdinand Povel, in Holland, 2005.

