



JAY HOGGARD

UNDEREXPOSED VIBES

BY JEFF CEBULSKI

Even though he's been a presence on the jazz scene since the mid '70s, vibraphonist and Wesleyan University music professor Jay Hoggard has no illusions about his position within the public consciousness: "I am not one who has suffered from overexposure," he declares. About his forthcoming Jazzmobile Summerfest concert this month, for which he will be presenting his sextet at Marcus Garvey Park, he considers the performance as yet another introduction to his oeuvre. "I'm at the stage now that I have enough material that I can draw on from different projects," he says, "trying to bridge the gap between the art of the music and what is in the marketplace, and presenting it as one, organic whole." In fact, a blueprint for this approach is Hoggard's most recent album, *Retro Focus* (JHVM, 2023), a re-recording of tunes that cover the diverse aspects of his career.

What the soon-to-be 72-year-old Hoggard has attained is remarkable, given his educational and professional pedigree. Raised in Mount Vernon, NY—the son of an African Methodist Episcopal Zion bishop who helped arrange Duke Ellington's *Second Sacred Concert* in Harlem (at AME Zion Church, two months prior to the formal premier at Cathedral of St. John the Divine for which J. Clinton Hoggard, Jay Hoggard's father, was also one of its principal coordinators), and a mother and educator who introduced him to piano—at 15 Hoggard had a dream that he could play the vibraphone and then boldly embraced the instrument. "I had been on the New York scene as a kid," he says. "I used to stand outside the door at the Vanguard and go to all of the lofts in Lower Manhattan, in Brooklyn, the East Village. I took all that in... (and) felt that I was going to be playing with them eventually." He attended and graduated from Wesleyan University, where many influential musicians taught: "Sam Rivers, Ed Blackwell, Jimmy Garrison, Ken McIntyre, Bill Barron, Daoud Haroon and a trumpet player named Clifford Thornton were teaching here. So, I got to know people who were part of the guiding spirit, so to speak, of the '70s and '80s." Hoggard's auspicious early '70s recording debut was on the B-side of trumpeter, cornetist and multi-

instrumentalist Thornton's *Communications Network* (Third World), recorded at Wesleyan's 1972 Festival of African American Music, along with poet Jayne Cortez, saxophonist Nathan Davis, bassist Andy Gonzalez and percussionist Jerry Gonzalez, among others.

The vibraphonist soon found himself among the young lions to emerge in the mid '70s, when educated, fledgling jazz artists had to negotiate, both artistically and economically, the twists and turns of NYC's new music jazz period. It helped that fellow younger musicians and musical colleagues such as pianist Anthony Davis and drummer Pheeroan akLaff were along for the experience. Davis and Hoggard would become key members of an ensemble led by woodwinds virtuoso Chico Freeman (son of revered Chicago saxophonist Von Freeman and nephew to legendary Chicagoan guitarist George Freeman and drummer Buzz/Bruz Freeman), including on Chico's noted album *Kings of Mali* (India Navigation, 1977). The pianist and vibraphonist continued their musical partnership over the years, performing and recording prolifically together, particularly in the late '70s and early '80s—from flute player James Newton's eponymously titled album (Gramavision, 1982), to Hoggard's *Mystic Winds, Tropic Breezes* (India Navigation, 1982), Davis' *Song for the Old World* (India Navigation, 1978) and *Epistémè* (Gramavision, 1981), and as an efficient and explorative duo on *Under the Double Moon* (MPS, 1980). Says Freeman, "Jay's a very warm person, a really likable guy. We had some wonderful learning experiences on my first tour in Europe. What he brought was a level of accomplishment and musicianship...he played anything. Open arms and open mind, and open heart. I never argued about what direction we were going...if we had conflict, we just let the music decide!"

Versatility has unquestionably been a major characteristic of Hoggard's career. He explains that "when I did my first record in '78 (*Solo Vibraphone*, India Navigation), I kind of continued being in two (sub-genres) that appeared to be different because of marketing strategies but were in a cultural packaging of African-American musics [sic]. That said, during the day, when I was rehearsing for a record with (pianist) Dave Grusin for GRP (*Days Like These*), in the afternoon I was also rehearsing with Cecil Taylor. I never thought anything of it." akLaff, who has been a musical partner for as long as Hoggard has been performing, remembers, "We were 20 years old, playing together in New Haven, CT, in a band named Déjà Vu, which included reggae as part of the repertoire. We both came out of a tradition of music as a spiritual force; working with the 'hallelujah

force' to raise consciousness was part of what we were trained to do before entering commercial music." While akLaff and Hoggard performed gigs in the '70s, the drummer's recorded presence became more prominent in the '80s, when Hoggard's music began to more directly reflect his gospel roots and affinity for world music. "He's more versed of knowing African music and instruments, like the balafon from West Africa, that pre-date the vibes," says akLaff, "as well as the energy that brings a ritual feeling of raising the spirits in the room."

That world-conscious spirituality, bolstered by his continued musical ministry, and over 30 years teaching at Wesleyan, has empowered much of Hoggard's recorded output in the 21st century. "I play in church every Sunday that I can," he says. "There was a time when the saints would be like, 'oh, this is bringing too much jazz into the church.' But at this point they are, like, 'bring it.' I teach a course called: Sacred and Secular African and African-American Musics. The assertion is that, in the pre-1500 (European colonization) era, there were tens of thousands of years of the development of African culture, of which music is one aspect. One great thing about Wesleyan is that it has stuck strongly with its concept of a broad vision of what is human, what should be studied in an institution of higher learning, and what is, specifically in music, humanly organized sound, which is the underlying philosophy of the discipline of ethnomusicology."

For those attending this month's (or, for that matter, any) Jay Hoggard concert, not only is a musical class part of the experience, but also a reintroduction to the vibraphonist's works. His good will and erudition continue to raise the level of his art—and, hopefully, the number of listeners who may discover his veteran talent and versatile abilities.

For more info visit jayhoggard.com. Hoggard is at Marcus Garvey Park Aug. 7 (part of Jazzmobile Summerfest). See *Calendar*.

Recommended Listening:

- Jay Hoggard — *Solo Vibraphone* (India Navigation, 1978)
- Jay Hoggard — *Mystic Winds, Tropic Breezes* (India Navigation, 1982)
- Jay Hoggard — *A Night In Greenwich Village* (Muse, 1996)
- Jay Hoggard/James Weidman — *Songs Of Spiritual Love* (JHVM, 2004)
- Jay Hoggard — *Harlem Hieroglyphs* (JHVM, 2016)
- Jay Hoggard — *Retro Focus* (JHVM, 2023)

LEST WE FORGET



IOLA BRUBECK

WOMAN OF MANY PARTS

BY MARILYN LESTER

The truly inspiring Iola Brubeck (1923-2014) could never be called a "power behind the throne," not that it would have mattered to her. She was indeed a partner to husband Dave Brubeck, fully equal alongside him, pivotal in personal and professional roles. Iola was a driving force as a lyricist, creative business manager and administrator, tour manager, confidante and advisor. She was also the mother to six children: musicians Darius, Chris, Dan and Matt; the theater- and dance-leaning Catherine (who passed in 2022); and Michael who, due to health issues stemming from childhood,

lived a quiet life, passing away in 2009. Married to Dave for 70 years, Iola outlived him by two, joining him in death in March 2014. The children's devotion to Iola, to both parents, is palpable. The four who remain are vibrant, living legacies whose commitment to furthering their Brubeck heritage speaks volumes.

Iola Marie Whitlock was born 103 years ago this month on August 14, 1923, in the northern California town of Redding. Dave was born on a horse ranch in Concord, CA, a man "with a steel backbone, high ideals and a tough work ethic," according to Chris Brubeck. "My father once said it was like being raised in two different homes at the same time, a hardworking cowboy culture ranch-house and a...house in the scorching hot, burnt-brown grazing fields of Northern California." Iola was a highly-accomplished student, winning several statewide awards for public speaking, debate and essay writing and graduated as the valedictorian of her high school class. She matriculated at the College of the Pacific in Stockton, CA, a student of drama and radio production, where she met the budding

pianist and her soon-to-be lifemate. The attraction was immediate, but it was wartime, and upon graduating in 1942, Dave joined the Army, the pair marrying that year when Dave was home on leave.

Iola continued her studies, winning a radio drama contest and working as a freelance radio actress. Upon Dave's discharge, both pursued graduate education at Mills College, where she studied philosophy and creative writing. Early days were marked with struggle as children began arriving in 1947 and Dave was working in the San Francisco Bay Area to build a career. Matt Brubeck reflects, "I doubt Dave would have had such great success without Iola's unwavering support, business sense and artistic collaboration. It's hard to sum up the extent of Iola's impact on his career..." Dan Brubeck adds, "Iola really believed in him. And Dave could get very insecure and down in those dark early years."

Then in the early '50s, inspiration struck in the

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 33)