

**Mind the Gap**  
**Bob Stewart Connections (Sunnyside)**  
 by Andrey Henkin

To be a “Player of Instruments Rare in Jazz” is in some ways liberating. Take, for example, the tuba. There haven’t been a huge number of tuba players in jazz, fewer who play the instrument exclusively, fewer still who lead their own bands. So, unlike, say, tenor saxophonists, there is no compelling tradition of remaking Ray Draper albums ad nauseam.

Bob Stewart, veteran of the bands of Carla Bley, Gil Evans, Arthur Blythe, Lester Bowie and numerous pop one-offs, has not recorded as a leader very frequently but each outing is unique, whether it be brass-heavy largish ensembles, an aggressive duo with trombonist Ray Anderson or his latest and definitely most ambitious album. Stewart here leads what is called The Double Quartet—comprised of the First Line Band (violinist Curtis Stewart, guitarist Jerome Harris and drummer Matt Wilson, plus trumpeter Randall Haywood and trombonist Nick Finzer on two tracks) and the PUBLIQuartet (violinists Curtis Stewart and Jannina Norpoth, violist Nick Revel and cellist Amanda Goekin)—on a commissioned suite by Jessie Montgomery called *In Color*, broken up by pieces by Arthur Blythe, Henry Thomas, Astor Piazzolla,

Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus and Stewart and Harris themselves, mostly arranged by the leader.

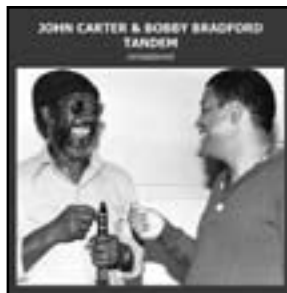
Stewart is like the maypole around which the other musicians dance. On the jazzier pieces, the tuba fills the primal role taken over by the upright bass in modern jazz but is rounder, more fluid, like some virtuosic heartbeat. Tracks with the string quartet (the *In Color* material) find Stewart in a more classical role, flitting about like a bassoon might in some Baroque fantasia, the music lovely and delicate. And even though Stewart only composed one tune, his leadership is evident in the album’s programmatic nature, interspersing the formal pieces with, for example, Foster’s gypsy-ish “Simone”, Thomas’ deep-fried “Fishin’ Blues” (with charming Harris vocal) or the edgy Blythe pieces. Special mention should be given to Curtis Stewart’s playing in all these disparate scenarios.

In an interesting twist, the tuba-plus-string quartet pieces were recorded separately in the studio from the Front Line Band tunes, which were documented both in the studio and from a 2010 Cornelia Street Café concert. But the album never sounds sewn together, always floating along on the joyful undercurrent of its leader.

For more information, visit [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com). This project is at Dizzy’s Club Sep. 29th. See Calendar.



**Flight for Four**  
**John Carter & Bobby Bradford Quartet**  
 (Flying Dutchman-International Phonograph)  
*Tandem*  
**John Carter & Bobby Bradford (Emanem)**  
 by Marc Medwin



There is absolutely no reason that the contributions of saxophonist/clarinetist John Carter, who would have been celebrating his 85th birthday this month, have been so often overshadowed and neglected. There is his magnum opus, the *American Roots and Folklore* series of five albums, inexplicably out of print and crucially important in presenting a history of jazz’ evolution, but also so much more. In listening to these two studio and live reissues, it is abundantly clear exactly what made his work so unique and so moving. We are also privileged to hear him with one of his most sympathetic collaborators, trumpeter Bobby Bradford.

In the heady and experimental days of 1969, when *Flight for Four* was recorded for Bob Thiele’s Flying Dutchman label, Carter was playing alto and tenor saxophone and clarinet, all heard to great effect as he tears it up on the quartet’s debut. This is a date that thrives on loose precision and while Ornette Coleman’s late ‘50s Atlantic work is certainly a model, the tension between freedom and rigor has been elevated to the next level. Take the blindingly fast passages in “Second Set” and Carter’s scorching alto solo as one facet of what this group could do. But beyond that, listen to the tightness that bassist Tom Williamson and drummer Buzz Freeman achieve on a regular basis, nailing down phrases that complement what Carter and Bradford are laying down without ever restricting it. Contrast all of that with the achingly beautiful bass and trumpet duet on “Woman” or Carter’s buttery-smooth clarinet tone on the same track and the full range of this quartet’s accomplishments comes into focus. If ever a well-rehearsed group existed, this is it and the intensity pouring from every tune on offer is astonishing. Add to that the International Phonograph Inc. treatment, with the best and most open sound possible and a beautiful

package and you have a model of what every reissue should entail.

Sonic upgrades have also been applied to *Tandem*, concert recordings initially issued by Emanem in the late ‘90s. Recorded in 1982 and 1979 respectively, we hear the duo of Carter and Bradford in free fantasy, using compositions as springboards for spectacular flights of improvisational fancy. “Woman” is reprised twice and while the second is a Bradford solo, the first finds Carter accompanying on clarinet—his sole instrument by that time—in long streams of arpeggiated notes, spinning supporting lines as Bradford circles and recircles the tune. Each player is also given ample solo time; on “Angles”, Carter’s approach conjures shades of Eric Dolphy’s solo version of “God Bless the Child”, but as the language of free improvisation had evolved over some 20 years, Carter’s vocabulary is more diverse. He covers the entire range of his instrument, incorporating tasteful rasps and cries in tandem with Dolphy-esque leaps and long scalar passages. Some of the burning intensity of earlier days is present, but, as with Bradford, it has been sublimated, or turned inward. The two often play as one instrument, finishing each other’s thoughts and anticipating the next phrase, something only a long-nurtured relationship makes possible.

As Carter and Bradford swing through freebop and beyond, it becomes clear that they are summing up creative music’s history in every gesture as the musical forms evolve. They are complete musicians and it is only tragic that such a fruitful collaboration was cut short (Carter died in 1991). We can enjoy these reissues for the musical friendship they document.

For more information, visit [internationalphonographinc.com](http://internationalphonographinc.com) and [emanemdisc.com](http://emanemdisc.com)