

Snarling two first-call drummers like Carl Allen and Lewis Nash for an interview requires a lot of luck and patience. You have to wait your turn for that rare window of opportunity not occupied by rehearsals, studio sessions or road gigs. Together, they have appeared on more than a hundred recordings and have performed with nearly every major artist in jazzdom. Moreover, each has a released album as a leader. In 1993 Nash debuted with *Rhythm Is My Business*, and Allen most recently recorded *Testimonial*. For a while it seemed our chances of hitting the Super Lattos were better than catching them in the same city at the same time.

After pursuing the drummers for nearly a year, it finally happened: We caught Allen after his return from

prohess, a tasteful restraint that permits him to accentuate an ensemble's subtle interplay; he is virtually peerless with brushes.

The relatively young musician—Allen, a native of Milwaukee, is 35, and Nash, who hails from Phoenix, is 38—have known and admired each other for several years, have a marvelous rapport and share an abiding admiration for Blakey, each noting his seminal role in their personal and artistic development. Both are rather reserved, careful about their remarks and as mindful of the clock governing the interview as timekeepers behind a battery of drums.

Since Allen resides in the wilds of Brooklyn and Nash lives in Rockland County, they decided that his Harlem home was as good a place as any to pour libations for the masters and let it all hang out.

thing. As an artist I am deeply grateful and appreciative of this recognition. I'm still a student of the music, so I'm always in awe when I get a call from a Benny Golson, Pharoah Sanders or whomsoever, realizing there are a number of musicians they can call. But it's also humbling to know that while you can be a first-call musician today, you may be a last-call tomorrow.

HB: A rather cyclical thing...
CA: Right. And you can never get to the point where you can rest on your laurels, thinking you've truly arrived. As soon as you get a mindset like that, someone will come to town and swing you right off the bandstand.

LC: I'd like to add one more thing about being a first-call musician. Even if you were on time to every gig and session, and wore what they wanted, and played what they asked, if there wasn't that cer-



cert I was fussing and complaining, and I told BU about how sad the drums were. He looked at me and said, "I don't know what you're talking about. It's not the instrument, it's the artist." In other words, he said there are no excuses.

HB: How do you prepare for a gig, and is it any different if the format is a trio, a quintet or a big band?

CA: It's not so much the size of the group but the direction of the music and who's the leader. Playing with Tommy

Flanagan is different from playing with Randy Weston, though both have trios. The primary thing is to put the music first and deal from that perspective. It's difficult to say, okay, it's a trio gig and I'm going to use this cymbal, or it's a big band and I'm going to use a 22-inch bass

drum. The size of the group does make a difference with me. If I get a big band call, I begin to think of the size of the bass drum or different kinds of cymbals for that ensemble. While for a trio call, a smaller bass drum is required.

The crash cymbals I might use with a big band I won't use in a trio format. But the principal thing is to swing, and that is necessary no matter what kind of group it is.

HB: I imagine, given your druthers, you both would rather be leaders than sidemen, right?

LC: In some instances. But there is still so much to get by playing with other musicians. I don't think being a sideman will ever end for me. It's not an either/or proposition for me.

CA: I enjoy all of it. Sometimes for selfish reasons I enjoy being a leader. But as Lewis said, I think I will always be a sideman because I learn from those performances with great leaders. The idea of going back and forth is very fulfilling.

It's humbling, too, because when you play with other people the demands are different, whereas when you're in your own situation, you make the rules. But leading my own band is not just about me. I believe in a more cooperative situation, and sometimes I feel like a sideman in my own band.

HB: Do you both come from musical families?

CA: Nearly everyone in my family, at one time or another, was involved in music, except my sister—she was great at telling. My mother is a gospel singer. And my brother, Eddie, plays trumpet. By the time I was 14 I became seriously interested in music, and two years later I was on the bandstand with Sonny Stitt. I had no business up on that bandstand. Stitt

wanted to play "Cherokee" real fast, but there was no way I could do that. He was very gracious and let me play it at my own speed.

HB: How did you end up on that gig?

CA: Well, first of all, Milwaukee—where I was raised—is not exactly the jazz capital of the world. Often horn players would come through and pick up rhythm sections. I got the gig by default: Nobody else was available. Later, in high school, I played in the various musical ensembles and by 1981 I was attending William Paterson College in New Jersey. It was in September or October of that year that I read an article in *Down Beat* where

Freddie Hubbard said he was looking for a young, energetic drummer. So when I heard a few weeks later that he was appearing at Fat Tuesday's in Manhattan, I went to see him with the article in my hand. I just wanted to meet him. There was no audition or anything, and he

promised that he would have Stanley Turrentine call me. Two years later, after I had returned to Milwaukee, Freddie came through, we talked again and I finally got my chance to play with him, and I stayed with him eight years.

HB: Lewis, when did you first get to New York City?

LC: The first time was in 1979. I saved up

some money and just came to see what the city was all about, and to study with the late Freddie Watts. He had come through my hometown in Phoenix with the Billy Taylor Trio and he agreed to give me lessons, if I ever made it to New York City. Freddie was an excellent teacher. In 1981 I joined Betty Carter and moved permanently to New York. Like Carl's situation in Milwaukee, there was

not a very large jazz community in Phoenix. But there was enough going on where I could grow and develop, and learn a lot of standards.

CA: [to Nash] I was playing with a singer in Milwaukee when I first heard you on Betty Carter's tune "Light."

HB: That tune calls for some special kind of timing, doesn't it?

LC: Yes. Betty's timing. [laughter]

HB: Given your busy schedules, what sustains you?

CA: I think it is my Christian faith. The music sustains me, and also my family, with whom I'm very close. Although there are times when I wonder if I'm being sustained, I like the idea of having a full plate. Very often you complain about not having enough free time, but I have more than a few days off, I start getting jittery.

LC: Me, too.

First-Call

PERCUSSIONISTS

By Herb Boyd

A Percussion Discussion with Lewis Nash & Carl Allen

Australia and before his weeklong engagement with guitarist Peter Leitch at Visiones in New York City; Nash was nabbed between studio sessions and a stint with guitarist Jim Hall at the Blue Note, and just hours before his departure to Japan.

While they share a number of common traits that make them indispensable as sidemen, the two drummers are in several ways markedly distinct. Allen is more physical and hard-swinging in the manner of Art Blakey, even so, he is aggressive without being intrusive. Nash relies on a considerable technical

HERB BOYD: You're both first-call musicians. What does this mean to you?
LEWIS NASH: It means we've put in a lot of time studying and experienced a lot of different musical situations; it means that your musicianship is at a certain level, that you are responsible and highly professional. Obviously, you don't become a first-call musician overnight. It's a cumulative process because the word has to get around from people attending your performances, hearing your recordings, and from the praise of other musicians. Much of it is exposure.

CARL ALLEN: I agree. It's an evolving

thing, they still might not call you. They have to enjoy working with you. You have to give them that certain something that makes them think of you as the next session comes up.

HB: So sometimes the call is based on more than your ability to read the charts?
CA: Playing music to me is a very intimate affair. It's like... well, you know what I mean. [laughter] When you perform you are sharing a very personal part of yourself. That's why there are musicians that I will not get on the bandstand with. I don't respect them because they don't respect me.

HB: Are there some calls you've yet to get from leaders you admire?
CA: How much time do you have? That list is long. I can't narrow it down to one. For years, though, when I was growing up I always wanted to be a Jazz Messenger. But there was just one problem: I couldn't get rid of the drummer. [laughter] Somebody had that gig for a minute.

HB: How much of an influence was Art Blakey on the two of you?
LC: He was my first real influence. I remember the first record I bought of his was *Live At Birdland* with Clifford

Brown and Lou Donaldson. From then on I was hooked. I knew when I bought his records that sound, that feeling, would be there.

CA: Another thing about Art, for me, was that so much of his philosophy with respect to the band had an impact on me. Not to say I agree with everything about him, but I was impressed with how much he was driven to nurture young talent. What was special about him was the way he enhanced your playing. When you got on the bandstand with him you rose above your level. And all the musicians who've spent time with

Art—Benny Golson, Freddie Hubbard and others—all say the same thing. Most rewarding were the lessons he taught you outside of the music. I remember once being in Europe—and you know how you never take your drums to Europe—but Art used to always take his drums. But there was this one gig when he didn't have his drums and we all had to play the same sad set. I was upset that the drums didn't have the specifications I wanted. But Bahzina [Blakey's Muslim name] played and was killing them. Billy Higgins played and was killing them. I played and it sounded sad. After the con-

EQUIPMENT	
Carl Allen plays a DWI (Drum Workshop) kit that includes a 14x18-inch bass drum, 8x10-inch and 8x13-inch mounted toms, 14x14-inch floor tom (sometimes 15x16-inch) and 5x14-inch snare (sometimes 6x13-inch). His cymbals are all Sabian HH models: 14-inch dark hi-hats, 18-inch medium crash, 20-inch mixed ride (with flares), 22-inch jazz ride (with four rivets) and 20-inch slip ride. He uses DW pedals, Cymbal sticks, Evans drumheads, Roc-Soc toms, Shure microphones and Protector cases.	
Lewis Nash uses a Sonor Designer series five-piece kit that includes a 14x18-inch bass drum, 8x10-inch tom, 8x13-inch tom, 14x14-inch floor tom and 6x14-inch snare. He plays three 20-inch Sabian hand-mixed ride cymbals and Sabian hand-mixed 14-inch hi-hats, Cymbal brushes and Remo drum heads.	
SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY	
Carl Allen TESTIMONIAL—Atlantic 82755 THE PURSUIT—Atlantic 89372 CARL ALLEN & MONTY BRUNER THE DARK SIDE OF DENVER—Evidence 22104 PROBABLY SQUARE—Timeless 456 CREASMENT—Ala/Timeless 327	with Benny Green BLUE NOTES—Sonnet/Harj 5669 (Japan only) TESTIFY—LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD—Blue Note 8911 THAT'S RIGHT!—Blue Note 84407
with Freddie Hubbard THE FREDDIE HUBBARD WOODY SHAW SESSIONS—Blue Note 32747 MUSIC—Meridian 61132 TOPSY—Ala/Compass 7161 LIVE PLUG—Blue Note 85339	with Donald Harrison FOR ART'S SAKE—Candid 79021
with Jackie Wilson THE JACKIE WILSON ATTACK—Verve 314 519 276 DYNAMITE—Blue Note 108 DYNAMITE—Blue Note 111	Lewis Nash RHYTHM IS MY BUSINESS—Evidence 22041 with various others TO BIRD WITH LOVE—Talon 8339 (Dory Gillespie) LET'S HAND OUT—Verve 314 514 454 (J.J. Johnson) THE MOORE I SEE YOU—Blue Note 8376 (Clara Peterson) BEYOND THE ALBUQUERQUE SESSIONS 360 (Timmy Flanagan) SOUL FUSION—New Tork (An Farmer) LITTLE MAN BIG BAND—Verve 314 513 966 (Lenny Hawk) IN THE DIRECTION—Crisa Cases 1038 (Benny Green) FL BE TALKING YOU—Cortez Jazz 4028 (Lew LaBel) I'M MOVING DON'T LET IT GO—Mus/Motators 85121 FLORIAN—Mus/Motators 85120 EVIDENCE—Lantern 1827