

NORMAN

The following interview was conducted by Another Room Magazine with Norman Salant, Saturday, May 1, 1982 after his appearance at "The Stone" in San Francisco. Amid the mix of opera and disco at Tosca's, the interviewer spoke with Mr. Salant on a variety of subjects that were mutually interesting. The Norman Salant band presently consists of: Mr. Salant playing saxophones; Morey Goldstein, who plays saxophone and clarinet; Steve Ashman, playing fretless bass; Jeff Nathanson, playing guitar and synthesizer; Jeff Kaplan who plays guitar and Bruce Slesinger who plays drums. Alive Records produces the Salant band's records; their address is, 533 Sutter, Suite 1107, SF, CA 94102; in New York, 3977 Sedgwick Avenue, Bronx, NY 10463. The recent album is called, "Saxophone Demonstrations." Readers interested in innovative saxophone ensemble approaches with experimental overtones will want to see Norman Salant, hear them or both!

AR: First off, I'd like you to give me some information on the band.

NS: All right. Our band is six-piece. Got Morey Goldstein as the other saxophone player. He's been like my right hand. Jeff Nathanson plays guitar and he also plays the synthesizer. I've known him for a few years. Over the past year or two, we've made half-hearted attempts to get a group together but they never got off the ground. My relationship with Steve is kind of the same.

AR: He's the bass player?

NS: Steve Ashman. He's so graceful. He's another guy who's getting his shit together. He has a neat style. He's not locked into playing like anybody or sound like anyone. You know, he does things that I can't think of. Any musician does something I can't think of, I really think they're great. I consider this guy that way. If I can figure it out, well, big deal.

AR: Why is Bruce (Slesinger) working with you?

NS: That's a good question. I suppose that he is intrigued by it. I suppose that's why everyone is doing it. I don't think that I'm particularly easy to work with. I can be real demanding and real rigid, but the idea of a project like this is intriguing, and it's been successful, and you can't argue with success.

AR: You're obviously not looking for

structures - some were singing and some were instrumental - and then we jammed. The whole idea was like the Great God Jam and everybody played whatever they felt like or tried to create textures and I guess that carried over a lot into this band. But we couldn't get any gigs. Anything experimental in those days was impossible.

AR: Right.

NS: After the band broke up, I figured I'd go for the bucks. I joined up with a disco band and thought that would be my ticket to a lot of money. But playing the disco music - you know, there were times when it was great, the beat was really in place - but the scene, the clubs, the people, the clothes, the music we had to play during those covers...I started to lose interest in the music. I couldn't write, I couldn't listen to music, just everything. I quit and came out here. I didn't touch my horn for several months, and then very slowly got into it.

AR: What are your influences? I mean, you're not classically trained.

NS: No.

AR: But you're a structuralist.

NS: Yeah.

AR: And you make the standard saxophone references like Charlie Parker.

NS: I'm aware of it, certainly.

There's a history, you know, on the horn. There are people who

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NS: After the band broke up, I figured I'd go for the bucks. I joined up with a disco band and thought that would be my ticket to a lot of money. But playing the disco music - you know, there were times when it was great, the beat was really in place - but the scene, the clubs, the people, the clothes, the music we had to play during those covers...I started to lose interest in the music. I couldn't write, I couldn't listen to music, just everything. I quit and came out here. I didn't touch my horn for several months, and then very slowly got into it.

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photo: Judy Burgio

SALANT

it on real mild, it sounds like a phaser. I can have it on a little more, it sounds like a doubler. I can have it on a little more, I can warble it. I can get different kinds of noise and different rocket ship kinds of sounds.

AR: So it's not just a straight multiplier.

NS: No, it's not like that at all. It's taking the electronic and incorporating it into the idiosyncracies of the saxophone. You know that makes it unique. It's not a guitar. A guitar can't do

AR: How about James Chance?

NS: Nah.

AR: That's just cocktail music?

NS: It's not cocktail music, no. I have certain prejudices having worked real hard to play a good sound. I'm prejudiced against musicians who don't do that. James Chance as a saxophone player, I don't think much of him. As an entertainer, as a performer, as an innovator.

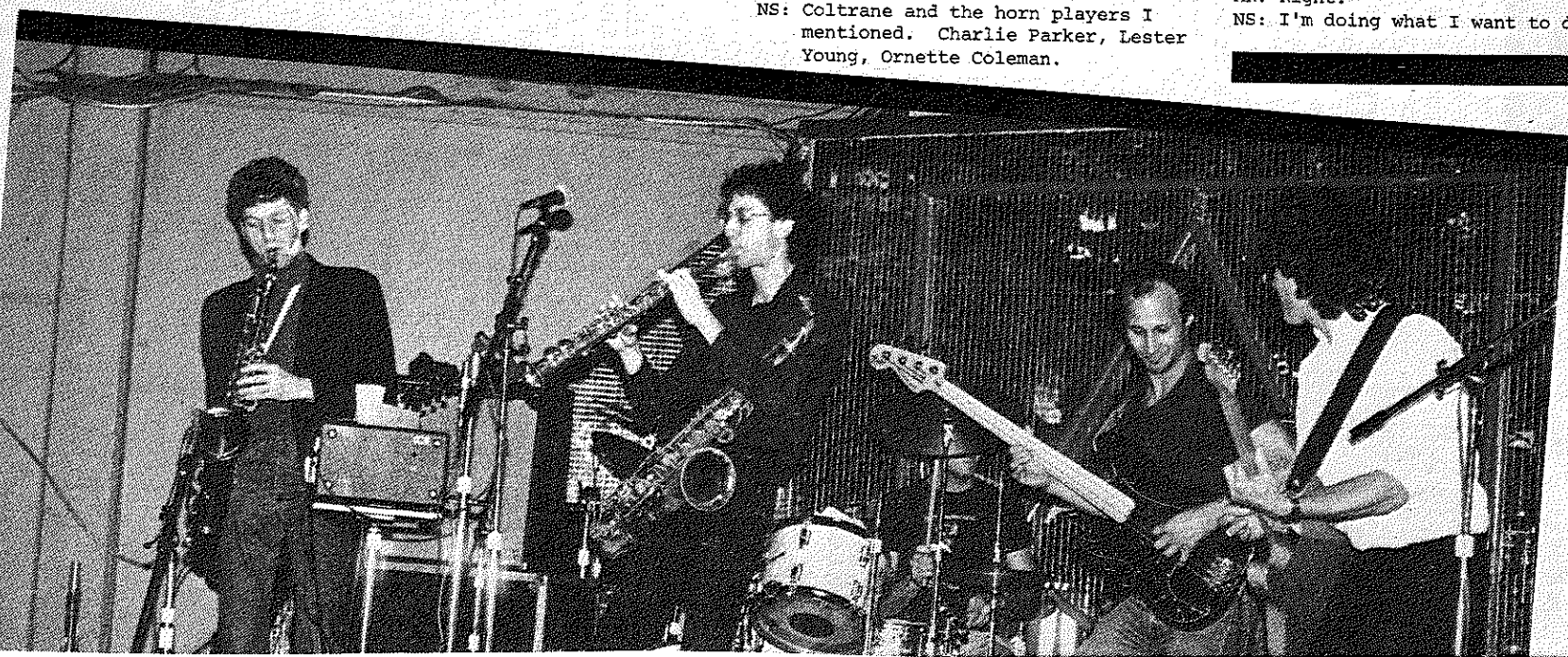
AR: How about the Lounge Lizards?

NS: (Laughter) I don't know what to say. They strike me as watered-



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Photo: Alan Grosso



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Top 40.
NS: We do club dates but we treat them like concerts.
AR: There's a certain awkwardness to the club format for you.
NS: Right, but that's all we can do at this point. We're trying to break out of that. As soon as we can get out of the clubs, we will. We have a lot of music that we don't play in the clubs 'cause it's real slow, it's real moody. We got a number of songs like that but we don't want to risk doing them.
AR: Let's move on to the second guitarist.
NS: Jeffrey Kaplan. Now there's a beautiful player. The guy's a natural. He's getting better by leaps and bounds. He's one of those people who's got a certain area in his psyche...he just relaxes, like in meditation, and then he just plays incredibly. He's able to find that area.
AR: Where did you come from?
NS: I'm from the Bronx, New York.
AR: How did you end up out here?
NS: When I was in college, I joined up with a group. That was during free form rock - in 1973, experimental free form rock was like an ideology that we had. Nobody was allowed to tell anybody what to play and nobody was allowed to take a solo. We set up songs and

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are so great, so great, one after the other: Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Ornett Coleman, John Coltrane. Then there's the avant gardists and there's Anthony Braxton. I mean, you can't fuck with these guys. They're great and for all time and all history. They invented a style and a sound that never happened before and they did it great.
AR: And they didn't compromise.
NS: They didn't compromise anything and they pulled it off and they convinced everyone else that it was great, too, and everyone follows them. So when you pick up the horn and you start to play, what are you going to play? You're going to play Coltrane? You're going to play Charlie Parker? I tried to find something else. I found it by accident.
AR: It's almost a choral arrangement. I wondered if you used some kind of electronic chorus. What's your technology?
NS: A little bit of delay, a little slow delay and it adds space to your sound, which makes it more beautiful. I'm into exploring. The phaser I have has been customized and it has an extended range of capability and I can get on it eight of nine distinctive sounds, totally distinctive. I can have

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the things that a horn does. A horn, a saxophone, has a sound and style that has its own idiosyncrasies. Putting that in a fresh context, putting a fresh technology with it, hopefully, this is what I - my goal is. People who are into bebop might think I'm just trashing the instrument, and that I'm not really playing because I play slow. I'm not into demonstrating technique. Anyone can do that now, anyone who practices. All musicians have great chops and I get bored just listening to that.
AR: Have you listened to big band music? Any Ellington in what you do?
NS: Big band music is something that I haven't listened closely to but I'm aware of it in Forties movies and dancing to big bands.
AR: Well, there's a thickness to big band music that seems similar to what you do. There's that big sound.
NS: I hear that in the music and that's partly having to do with a lot of saxophones, but this group - having a lot of instrumentation and the way that's used - it all kind of works together that way, too. It's kind of like a big band. I don't know if it's an influence as much as an effect.
AR: Who do you admire?
NS: Coltrane and the horn players I mentioned. Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Ornette Coleman.

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down pop music. Why listen to the Lounge Lizards when you can put on a Charlie Parker or Thelonius Monk record. You know, when Joe Jackson did that Jumpin' Jive big band, I'd put on the radio and it'd be all new wave and then suddenly there'd be this big band music, but it was Joe Jackson and that's not right. And people have to know, if you're going to expose them to big band music, that Joe Jackson is swing. Go one step further and play...
AR: Play the good stuff.
NS: Play the real stuff. He's good, he's real good, but you gotta give the credit where the credit is due and if you're going to turn pop audiences on to that kind of music, let them know Joe Jackson didn't invent it. Let them know that he's just taking someone else's spot. At least give them a chance to hear it.
AR: Where do you hope to be a year from now? Do you want to continue with the ensemble?
NS: Yeah, I'll go with anything as long as it works. The band got together on a lark. The band was supposed to be together for a month and then go our separate ways, but the audience response has been real positive and real strong, you know. Can't argue with success.
AR: Right.
NS: I'm doing what I want to do.