

## Lou Marini

### *Stars Aligned*

It took more than 20 years for saxophonist Lou Marini's new Blujazz CD, *Starmaker*, to see the light of day. Recorded in 1990 and named after a 1937 science fiction novel by Olaf Stapledon, the album features nine original tracks performed by some of Marini's best friends and associates. The album's release was sidetracked due to Marini's lack of success in finding a proper label for it, not to mention some personal-life distractions that prevented him from pursuing it further. More than two decades later, a bit of serendipity led to his renewed interest in the long-shelved but never-abandoned project, which was engineered by world-class producer Jay Messina.

"About a year-and-a-half ago, I saw Jay on a recording date, and he said, 'Where are you storing that, and have you transferred it to digital yet?'" Marini recalled while in Chicago this summer during a tour with James Taylor's band. "He said, 'Man, you've got to transfer that or you could lose it.' When I finally heard it digitally, it sounded so great. Jay said I was crazy not to put this out." Blujazz released the CD this summer, effectively transporting listeners, and Marini, simultaneously back in time and firmly into the present.

In his long career as a saxophonist and woodwind doubler, Marini, 67, is known for creating accessible music that's deeply rooted in his straight-ahead jazz background. He has been in high demand as a performer and clinician since graduating from North Texas State University, where he was in the One O'Clock Lab Band—though he claims he didn't even realize he had a career until he was in his 40s.

An ace soloist, expert arranger and valued member of numerous ensembles over the decades, he has worked with top artists across multiple genres—from Woody Herman, Lew Soloff and Frank Zappa to Blood, Sweat & Tears, the "Saturday Night Live" Band, the Blues Brothers Band and a long list of high-profile pop, rock and r&b artists. He's even served as musical director of the Brianza Blues Festival in Monza, Italy, and gigs frequently in a band led by actress and singer Linda Carter (of TV's "Wonder Woman" fame). Thanks to his professionalism, his laid-back personal style and his ability to flat-out wail in any musical situation, everybody loves "Blue Lou" (a nickname bestowed upon him by comedic actor and blues aficionado Dan Akroyd).

*Starmaker* features the trumpet playing of Alan Rubin, a.k.a. "Mr. Fabulous," a friend of Marini's who passed away last year. "I had asked Alan to be in the booth as sort of my co-



producer on the session," Marini said. "We were talking with Jay about something technical, and suddenly Alan says, 'Hey, check out what they're playing.' The guys had gotten into creating this beautiful soundscape. So that's the way the album starts off, and it ends in a similar way. That's one thing I like about this CD: There's so much free playing from everybody."

The CD contains funk, blues, jazz and ambient elements, with plenty of live-in-the-studio group interplay. It even features a couple of vocal performances from Marini. "I'm singing a lot better now," Marini said, noting that he's come a long way as a vocalist since recording *Starmaker*. "The reason is, my wife is Spanish, and I know a lot of musicians there. For the past three years I've been doing a lot of work with a Spanish blues quartet called Red House. When I go and visit my wife's family in Madrid, we've been working, and I'm singing five or six of my tunes with them. It's a different kind of singing than what's on the CD."

When it comes to playing his horns, Marini is all about articulating complete ideas and expressing them in a clear manner. "If I'm just playing the melody, I want to play the melody so that it feels like it's the first time you play it," said Marini, whose long gray hair stands in striking contrast to the never-gonna-grow-up twinkle in his eyes. "Even if you get into something that's very abstract, I want to have that abstract playing come from a clear feeling."

Marini, who grew up as the son of a band director in Navarre, Ohio, has always been good at maintaining a high level of energy onstage. "I've had a lot of fun, and I've spent my life with great musicians since the time I was a kid," he said. "I admire the guys who are still burning just the way they were when they were kids. In a lot of ways I burn harder now because I know that I'm on the tail end of that. Every time you play, you've got to remind yourself: Who knows how many more chances you're gonna get?"

—Ed Enright

metallic noise from Lonberg-Holm's cello and sounds so outrageous that it can only be the result of good-natured tomfoolery. Plus, it leads to the tune's second great bass clarinet solo.

Lonberg-Holm switches to tenor guitar on several tracks, lending something of a progressive-rock lilt to the music, which Anton Hatwich (bass) and Frank Rosaly (drums) drive along, especially in "Later News." He uses looping effects to shape "Simpler Days," a 10-minute ballad that follows the equally pensive "Lazy Day." Some of the wildest moments on *Gather* come from one of the two works penned by other band members. Jackson's "Roses" is full of brief sketches, pregnant pauses and a section where all six musicians blow trumpets or cornets. Even though Lonberg-Holm didn't write it, the work bears his compositional influence, which features a great sense of adventure.

The cellist reveals yet another facet of his style with *Seval*, which includes performers from Sweden's new music/improvising scene. For the group's sophomore album, Lonberg-Holm penned all eight selections, including clever lyrics. The chamber-like lineup includes cello, guitar, trumpet, bass and the soprano vocals of Sofia Jernberg. Arrangements are often spare and delicate with instruments echoing Jernberg's crisp enunciations perhaps a little too closely. "Revolution Song" breaks free, though, when the vocalist imitates saxophone shrieks and blends in with her comrades' swelling sound.

MIKE SHANLEY

## HAROLD MABERN

MR. LUCKY: A TRIBUTE TO SAMMY DAVIS JR.  
(HighNote)



Brisk, buoyant and gimmick-free, this straight-ahead quartet date is as unpretentiously satisfying as that first swig of cold beer after a hard day's work. In the liner notes to *Mr. Lucky*, pianist Harold Mabern proclaims Sammy Davis Jr. to be "the greatest performer ever," and this beaming tribute brims with the innocent insouciance of that Rat Pack era of the 1950s and '60s, when Davis palled around Vegas with Sinatra and Dean Martin and Mabern, now 76, was just entering adulthood.

The lead soloists here, Mabern and tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, are both master craftsmen of underrated artistry, their stylistic conservatism camouflaging their creative refinement of the

blues and hard-bop idioms. Joined by their likeminded and frequent cohorts in the rhythm section—drummer Joe Farnsworth and bassist John Webber—on a project dear to Mabern's heart, they set their intuitions on high alert and allow their expertise and shared musical experience to hone their ensemble interplay. As a result, precious few records swing so efficiently and reliably as *Mr. Lucky*.

Most of the material here is not automatically associated with Davis, who was more of an all-around entertainer than a musician. But on the relatively iconic "I've Gotta Be Me," both Mabern and Farnsworth burst from the gate with joyous energy, while Alexander gradually builds the sort of gusto implied by the song's credo over the course of three solos. Mabern is also ecstatic—his right hand trilling, flecks of New Orleans stride spangled on his Memphis funk-soul-blues-bop amalgam—on "As Long as She Needs Me" and the finger-snapping title track. Sans Alexander, he lets the ballad breathe on "What Kind of Fool Am I?," a somber interlude that reminds us how segregation and accusations of being a racial sellout besmirched some of the luster of Davis' celebrity. But as the album title implies, Mabern prefers to honor his hero with music that puts the wind in your hair and tempts you to engage in a little soft-shoe celebration. **BRITT ROBSON**

## LOU MARINI

STARMAKER (Blujazz)



Lou Marini's discography as a leader is relatively puny—*Starmaker* is only his fourth proper solo release in a career that stretches back some four-plus decades, and it was recorded in 1990, unreleased until now and actually predates his other albums. Not that the saxophonist has kicked back through the years; he's kept busy serving as a sideman for a long list of headliners running the gamut from Blood, Sweat & Tears to Frank Zappa, Levon Helm, James Taylor, the Saturday Night Live Band and, most famously, the Blues Brothers.

At the time he made *Starmaker*, Marini could easily have capitalized on his rock and pop associations. But he had a specific concept in mind—the album is inspired by Olaf Stapledon's sci-fi novel of the same title—so Marini handpicked a cast of ace player's players, among them pianist Gil Goldstein, bassist Bob Cranshaw, drummers Danny Gottlieb and Chris Parker

and a bevy of guitarists, keyboardists and horn men, to flesh out his concept.

The music is often appropriately cinematic and ambitious. The opening title track is a slow builder, tentative synth and percussion noodling giving way to the first of many brash Marini solos. When the saxophonist retreats midway to give the floor to Goldstein and keyboardist Robbie Kondor, the piece becomes wide-screen, announcing that nothing here will remain static for long. "Civilization Blues" runs on solid funk and Marini's more-soulful-than-expected, Mose Allison-like lead vocal. And on the epic "In My Dreams," guitarist Jeff Mironov, Cranshaw, Gottlieb and Marini lock into a sturdy groove that disintegrates deliberately as it fades, leaving shards in its wake. What all of this has to do with its 1937 source material is never quite spelled out, but the tribute stands on its own admirably enough. **JEFF TAMARKIN**

## BILL McHENRY

LA PEUR DU VIDE (Sunnyside)



*La Peur Du Vide* sits uneasily between straight-ahead and free jazz, occasionally tipping to one side or the other. It's familiar ground for tenor saxophonist Bill McHenry—even more so for his quartet (pianist Orrin Evans, bassist Eric Revis and drummer Andrew Cyrille). By and large they handle this terrain superbly, solidifying the album's aesthetic with their personalities and a deep sense of tradition.

Sometimes that tradition is overt. "In Sight" is a straight cooker with a bop-pish head and deadly swing. Elsewhere, the band stretches out but keeps a foot in blues harmony. Though much of "Recognition" comprises freeform, softly stated interplay between McHenry, Revis and Cyrille, McHenry maintains edgy tonality that solidifies into dark spiritual chords when Evans rejoins him to conclude the piece.

Four of the six tunes pay homage to McHenry's favorite musicians, further unifying the program. "Today" was inspired by Stevie Wonder, whose style reverberates throughout McHenry's two-octave melody and in the soul that Evans and Revis place behind that melody. "Siglo XX," ostensibly a joint tribute to Woody Shaw and Paul Robeson, instead evokes Andrew Hill in its oblong structure and Evans' lustrous, dissonant voicings; McHenry even suggests frequent Hill col-





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## Lou Marini: *Starmaker* (2012)

By [HRAYR ATTARIAN](#), Published: October 13, 2012

Lou Marini's *Starmaker* is a reflection of the veteran reedman's professional life, with eight originals ranging from jazz, to blues and other related genres. Known by the moniker "Blue Lou," Marini has starred in the classic "The Blues Brothers" and has played with such diverse ensembles as [Woody Herman's](#) orchestra, Blood, Sweat and Tears, guitarist/composer [Frank Zappa](#), trumpeter [Lew Soloff](#) and singer/songwriter [James Taylor](#).



Raw emotionality and effervescent zest permeate all of the tunes as Marini alternates blowing all three of his saxophones with soulful vocals. Clocking at over eleven minutes, the R& B of "In My Dreams" contrasts Marini's gritty alto, full of satisfying vibrato, with his smooth voice. Jeff Mironov's blistering guitar enhances the urbane mood. True to his nickname, Marini blows a wailing solo on the gutbucket "Civilization Blues," against the backdrop of a full horn section and heavy percussion.

The funky "Mr. Slinky" sheds the spotlight on Marini's spontaneous creativity. His intricate and meandering soprano takes an exhilarating round-trip ride to the main theme. [Gil Goldstein's](#) complex piano arpeggios enhance the tune's jazz roots, while Robbie Kondor's subtle synthesizer gently hints at more electronic styles.

Fusion sensibilities also abound on the title track. Sparse sax notes and carefully placed percussive beats set a futuristic ambience, as Marini's evocative tenor lets loose a lilting melody that echoes against the mellifluous harmonies of the rhythm section. On "Jerusalem," on the other hand, Marini's piercing and agile tone glides over keyboardist Leon Pendarvis' vaguely bluesy vamps, spicing up the piece with Middle Eastern motives.

The remainder of the album includes the Afro-Cuban "A Slash 'a Mango," featuring George Wadenius' deep-rocking guitar and Francisco Centeno's angular bass, a gospel-esque "Mom and Dad," and a shorter reprise of "Starmaker."

Although short on improvisational vigor and lacking thematic unity in the traditional sense of the word, this rollicking disc is an engaging journey through a versatile musician's career. The

enjoyment of its exuberant spirit grows with each spin.

Track Listing: Starmaker; Mr. Slinky; Civilization Blues; In My Dreams; Slash 'A Mango; Jerusalem; Mom And Dad; Starmaker (reprise).

Personnel: Lou Marini: saxophones, vocals; Danny Gottlieb: drums; Chris Parker: drums; Manolo Bandrena: percussion; Sammy Figueroa: percussion; Bob Cranshaw: bass; Tom Barney: bass; Francisco Centeno: bass; Jeff Mironov: guitar; George Wadenius: guitar; Gil Golstein: piano; Robbie Kondor: synthesizer; Leon Pendarvis: synthesizer; Alan Rubin: trumpet; Birch Johnson: trombone; Lawrence Feldman: alto sax; Tommy McDonnell: background vocals; Birch Johnson: background vocals.

Record Label: [Blujazz Productions](#) | Style: [Straight-ahead/Mainstream](#)

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## Jazz For A Saturday Night #50: Lou Marini



Lou Marini Jr. was born May 13, 1945. According to his biography appearing on [Wikipedia](#), he attended Fairless High School in Navarre, Ohio, where his father (Lou Sr.) was the band director. After he graduated from high school, Lou Jr. attended the University of North Texas where he performed in the One O'Clock Lab Band.

After college, Lou Jr. became a professional musician, most notably with the rock group Blood, Sweat And Tears, the Saturday Night Live house band, and The Blues Brothers Band. He appeared in both Blues Brothers movies, playing the character "Blue Lou".

Besides the aforementioned groups, Marini has appeared with Eric Clapton, Joe Beck, the Woody Herman Orchestra, Doc Severinson, Frank Zappa, Dr. John, Steely Dan, Maureen McGovern, and toured four times with James Taylor's Band Of Legends.

Besides being a multi-instrumentalist, Marini is a skilled arranger, composer, educator and producer. His discography consists of a large number of projects spanning a number of musical genres including jazz, rock, blues and classical.

The Lou Marini album I want to discuss this time around is his latest, the just-released jazz CD "Starmaker".

Normally at this point I list the other musicians involved, the sidemen if you will. The problem is, Marini is assisted on this one by no fewer than 17 fellow musicians. Listing that many people and their roles would take almost as long as actually talking about the music, so I'm going to experiment this time with listing the personnel for each track as we go along. I haven't ever done that before, and I may never do it again. So we'll see what happens. 📄 📱 🗣️

"Starmaker" brings us eight songs, all Marini originals. The title track is up first, and I have to say that, to the best of my memory, this is the first song I have heard, jazz or otherwise, that was inspired by a science fiction novel. The author of that book, [Olaf Stapledon](#), is not widely known these days because he died in 1950. However, Stapledon's 1937 novel, "Star Maker", is still considered a classic of the genre.

"Starmaker" the song is a very beautiful piece of music. It starts *very quietly* with a bit of music that Marini had the engineers record while the rhythm section was basically killing time and unaware they were being recorded.

This opening section is very soft and airy, and when Marini comes in with his tenor you might expect it to bring things back to earth but it doesn't.

A couple of minutes into "Starmaker" the opening seems to, in Marini's words, vaporize, and we are left with a nicely melodic piece of music that is a delight to listen to. That is a good thing, because this is a long song, running a bit over ten minutes.

"Starmaker" features Marini (possibly changing from tenor sax to alto and then back to tenor, if my ears aren't playing tricks on me), drummer Danny Gottlieb, pianist Gil Goldstein, percussionist Manolo Bandrena, Robbie Kondor on the synthesizer, and Bob Crenshaw on bass.

The next track is called "Mr. Slinky". Marini describes this as "6/4 funk and very difficult" to play. It is basically almost eight minutes of variations on the opening three phrases. This is a fairly bold move, and even though the concept may sound boring, the execution is anything but, especially when pianist Gil Goldstein gets his turn in the limelight. I will say "Mr. Slinky" does have a unique sound, quite unlike any song I have heard before. However, neither bold nor different mean it's bad.

Besides Marini, "Mr. Slinky" features Goldstein on piano, Bob Crenshaw on bass, Jeff Mironov on guitar, Manolo Bandrena on percussion, and Danny Gottlieb on drums.

Track three is in the style of great, old-fashioned blues. The title, conveniently enough, is "Civilization Blues". Besides blowing his sax, we get a big dose of Marini's vocal skills on this one, featuring words written by the ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu.

Thus on one album we have possibly the first-ever jazz song based on a classic science fiction novel *and* possibly the first-ever blues song based on the writings of a long-dead Chinese philosopher. Those details alone don't make this album a cut above the rest; it's the quality of the resulting music that really nails it!

"Civilization Blues" begins with a slow, bluesy head and then evolves into first a folksy vocal for Marini and then a harmonious instrumental for everyone. The song bounces from vocal to instrumental a couple of times before fading away.

Besides Marini on vocal and sax, we have Goldstein on piano, Mironov on guitar, Kondor on the synthesizer, Bandrena on percussion, and Gottlieb on drums.

"In My Dreams" is a modern love song, and has a big vocal component. It opens with Marini singing, "I go driving in my car..." The most prosaic thing of all that modern man can do is drive his car. But who has sung about one? I mean, besides the Beach Boys crooning "[She's real fine, my 409](#)"?

Marini's vocal style fits the subject, sounding exactly like a man who has, to use the vernacular, "Been there, done that" when it comes to having loved and lost.

(I hasten to add that I know very little about Marini's actual personal life, other than what I have read as I researched this article. The conclusions I'm stating here are pure conjecture on my part and could be all hot air.)

Marini's voice has the smoothness of a man who has loved, lost, and, eventually, moved on with his life. The pain is behind him, but clearly not forgotten.

Skipping ahead, we find a wonderfully gentle ballad called "Mom And Dad". This was written for Marini's parents, and as you listen, you can feel the gentle fondness with which he holds their memory.

In between the vocal segments the guys take what could have been a maudlin' memorial and turn it into a nice piece of music with great rhythm and an undeniable sense of nostalgia that has more in common with a celebration of lives lived fully than it does with a lament for those lost forever.

The album ends with a reprise of "Starmaker", albeit a much shorter version than the opening cut. This one trades the ethereal, other-worldly opening of the original for a somewhat similar ending.

Which is not to say that there is no sense of flight here, because that, ultimately, is what the song is about, a flight to the stars in search of the star maker.

I've been lucky enough to be on vacation from my day job this last week. By a happy stroke of good timing, "Starmaker" and another CD both showed up in my mailbox on Monday. Both have been in my 6-disc CD player all week, being, if you will, the background music for my life these last six days.

Which is why I can state unequivocally that I am certain you will find Lou Marini's "Starmaker" to be an exceptional addition to your personal playlist, for a Saturday or any other night!

You can read more about Lou Marini, "Starmaker", and his other music at his [web site](#).

You can also "Like" him on [Facebook](#). I just did.

Ordinarily I try to embed a few videos from the reviewed album, but because I'm running late with this today I will instead give you the link to [Lou Marini's YouTube channel](#).

I think you find a lot there to enjoy.

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Posted 15th September by [Al Evans](#)

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thursday, december 6, 2012

## Lou Marini, *Starmaker*



I never paid much attention to Lou Marini in the past, even though he's been pretty ubiquitous. Listening to his new solo album *Starmaker* (BluJazz 3394), I hear something that gets my attention. It's a straight-ahead, somewhat commercial, somewhat electric date, with some very competent

sidemen and arrangements that are just fine. The tunes are interesting from a compositional standpoint.

But what is the main thing going for this is Lou Marini's playing. He's something else. He has a soulful rasp when he wants it and his lines are not at all typical, having bop-Trane and after in there in unusual ways. He sings a little but that's some band vocal stuff.

It's an album that shows you that Lou Marini is a *player* with a capital "p". Gil Goldstein, by the way, plays some hip things on piano too.

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