

FRANK MORGAN GEORGE CABLES MONTREAL MEMORIES



FRANK MORGAN alto saxophone

GEORGE CABLES piano

- 1. NOW'S THE TIME** (CHARLIE PARKER) ATLANTIC MUSIC CORP. BMI **6:30**
- 2. ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE** (J. KERN / O. HAMMERSTEIN II) UNIVERSAL-POLYGRAM INTERNATIONAL ASCAP **7:02**
- 3. A NIGHT IN TUNISIA** (J. GILLESPIE / F. PAPARELLI) UNIVERSAL-MCA MUSIC PUBLISHING ASCAP **7:46**
- 4. 'ROUND MIDNIGHT** (T. MONK / B. HANIGHEN / C. WILLIAMS) THELONIOUS MUSIC / WARNER BROS. INC. BMI / ASCAP **5:31**
- 5. CONFIRMATION** (CHARLIE PARKER) ATLANTIC MUSIC CORP. BMI **4:59**
- 6. BLUES FOR ROSALINDA** (FRANK MORGAN) SABIRAH MUSIC BMI **8:27**
- 7. HELEN'S SONG** (GEORGE CABLES) CABLE CAR MUSIC BMI **8:24**
- 8. LULLABY** (GEORGE CABLES) CABLE CAR MUSIC BMI **5:03**
- 9. MEDLEY: NEFERTITI** (WAYNE SHORTER) MIYAKO MUSIC BMI / **BILLIE'S BOUNCE** (CHARLIE PARKER) ATLANTIC MUSIC CORP. BMI **7:26**

PRODUCED BY ROSALINDA KOLB / EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: BARNEY FIELDS / AUDIO RESTORATION: JON ROSENBERG
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CANADA IN 1989 / PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL WILDERMAN / GRAPHIC DESIGN: CHRISTOPHER DRUKKER

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Frank Morgan and George Cables offer exuberance, solace and profound introspection in this supersonic flight from the Théâtre Port-Royal, July 1, 1989, at the Montreal Jazz Festival.

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the depth of The Great Depression, Frank had the enviable fortune, at the age of seven, to hear and be advised musically by Charlie Parker. In 1940, Frank's father, The Ink Spots' guitarist Stanley Morgan, took his son to hear "Bird" in the Jay McShann band at the Paradise Theatre in Detroit.

"Charlie Parker stood up to take his solo on 'Hootie Blues' and changed my whole life," Frank remembered. "It was like 'That's it! That's where I'm at. That's what I want. That's what I want to play.'"

Backstage at the Paradise, the 20-year-old Bird counseled the eager youngster that a clarinet was the wisest approach to an alto goal. Frank was taken clarinet-shopping by a couple of teen-aged alto saxophonists then playing with Stanley in Howard McGhee's band. Both eventually switched to tenor. Their names were Wardell Gray and Teddy Edwards.

At 13, Frank and his father moved to Los Angeles. Frank enrolled at fabled Jefferson High School on L.A.'s Eastside—fabled because, from the mid-1930s, aspiring musicians there had the opportunity to study with music director Samuel Browne, the first black high school teacher ever hired by the Los Angeles Unified School District. His students were earning respect and fame in the jazz world. Within a year, little Frank Morgan was sharing weekend jam sessions at clubs with Browne's students and alumni—among them, Hampton Hawes, Chico Hamilton, Horace Tapscott, The Farmer twins—Arthur and Addison, Dexter Gordon, Sonny Criss, Ernie Royal, Ernie Andrews, Cecil "Big Jay" McNeely, Gray and Edwards—as well as with touring pros such as Harry "Sweets" Edison.

Listeners began insisting, "Frank Morgan sounds just like Bird." Frank graciously acknowledged the praise but consistently maintained that that was not his intention, affirming "I just want to be the best Frank Morgan that I can be." He did so, however, with the same model Selmer alto saxophone, crafted in France, that Parker played. And he reverently reminded followers that "Bird blessed my horn."

The frequently published claim—with highly imaginative variations—that Stanley Morgan took 14-year-old Frank to "audition" for Johnny Hodges' lead alto chair in the Duke Ellington Orchestra, and that Duke offered Frank the job because Hodges was known to be leaving soon to form his own band but that Stanley nixed the offer—is false. Frank didn't have to "audition" for anyone. And at that point, Ellington had no clue that Hodges would be leaving more than a year later in March 1951.

This is what actually happened: The Duke Ellington Orchestra played a concert at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, February 20, 1950. Frank was 16. Stanley—Frank's horn case in hand—took his son backstage to meet Ellington and asked if he would like to hear Frank play. Stanley basically was showing off his progeny but also wanted The Maestro's appraisal of Frank's talent. Frank, with no hesitation and seemingly great confidence, played brilliantly for several minutes for Ellington. Duke was enthusiastic in his praise and did offer Frank a job in the band. Hodges never was mentioned. To insiders present in Duke's dressing room, however, the prospect of the dour Johnny Hodges' reaction to possibly being positioned beside this amazingly talented teenager, was hilarious. Ellington loved creating chaos. Seeing that Duke was extending a serious offer, Stanley immediately refused, saying that Frank wasn't going anywhere until he graduated from Jefferson High School.

George Cables was born in Brooklyn, New York, November 14, 1944. He, too, had parental encouragement for his choice of instrument. His mother, an elementary teacher, played piano for school assemblies and often substituted for the family's church's organist. His father fully supported George's lessons, which commenced, to George's delight, when he was in nursery school. Accepted at the famed New York High School of Performing Arts, George credits his immersion there in all of the aural and visual arts with his development as a composer, soloist, accompanist and collaborator. He became familiar with symphonies, added a second instrument, the viola, and, best of all, was able to take classes at Juilliard where he met and observed such performing guest artists as the Brazilian pianist Claudio Arrau, and, visiting from the Curtis Institute, Rudolf Serkin. Simultaneously, George studied privately with Warren Wilson, whom he remembers as "a disciplinarian, which was both good and bad, but he got me into Mannes [the Mannes School of Music]."

How did this lead to the keyboards of jazz?

"A high school friend turned me onto Art Blakey's 'Drum Suite' and Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five,' then Monk's Town Hall Concert. *He was really different!* Finally, at the legal age of 18, I could see Thelonious Monk in person at the Five Spot—for four or five months! And Mingus with Mal Waldron. About that time, Billy Cobham, Clint Houston and I put together a neighborhood band in our basement called The Jazz Samaritans. Once Woody Shaw hired us, we stayed busy. Ironically, my first major jazz gig was with Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers.

What sparked George and Frank's collaboration?

"I was in L.A. in 1980," George says today. "Someone I can't remember called and asked, 'Y'know Frank Morgan?' I didn't. 'Y'know, he's a good alto player. He's been at this Artists' Collective, and he wants to know if you want to play duet.' Sounded good so I went out to Santa Monica, and it got to be a semi-regular thing. We had a great time."

That collaboration at Jack Duganne's Workshop on Main Street was the source of Frank and George's international touring and recording. Best-selling Los Angeles crime fiction writer Michael Connelly was so moved by their music at a Hollywood jazz club that he continues to transfer the impact into the enthusiasm of his literary (and television) Doppelgänger Hieronymus (Harry) Bosch. The invented police detective consistently craves inspiration and peace from the music of Frank Morgan and George Cables. At the author's request, George joined Connelly on his book tour for *Lost Light*. And it was Connelly, traveling with their CDs, who played one for filmmaker NC Heiken in France, that sparked the masterful, 2014 award-winning documentary "Sound of Redemption—The Frank Morgan Story." Connelly was an executive producer. Heiken directed. Cables plays. Frank plays and reminisces archivally. He died December 14, 2007.

The music on this HighNote CD captures the essences of the artists. Frank called the tunes—most from his bebop idols Parker, Monk, Gillespie and Miles Davis. He also loved ballads, particularly ones he could hear in his head being sung by Frank Sinatra—thus Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are." George responds:

"Frank was in love with the melody...milking the melody...slowing the tempo...the guy dealing with lyricism," he relates. "I was the guy dealing with energy. My role has been being the glue. It's really personal and fun to support the soloist. Still, we interact. It's a conversation. We sort of dance with each other."

For three numbers, however, they change partners.

"Blues For Rosalinda" is a tribute to the fine artist Rosalinda Kolb, whose love and deep understanding of Frank, her longtime companion and former husband, is poignantly revealed in her 2014 e-book biography *Leave 'Em Hungry*. Compellingly written and generously illustrated with her stunning paintings and photography, a deluxe print edition is being prepared for 2019 or 2020 publication. Of the musical salute, she observes, "Probably named for all the blues he gave me." His intro and first eight bars reference Bird's "Parker's Mood."

"Helen's Song," George's intimate, loving gift to his muse and soul mate Helen Wray, whom he lost in 2010, has become one of his best-known compositions. The couple was in San Francisco when he wrote the wistful melody, "looking out the window through the eucalyptus trees on a Sunday afternoon."

"Lullaby," too, is dedicated to Helen. "Frank liked to open and close our sets with 'Lullaby'...kind of put listeners in a mood," George reminisced.

Mike Connelly frequently explains "George Cables's 'Lullaby' helped me understand jazz." Harry Bosch feels the same way.

PATRICIA WILLARD

Friend of Frank Morgan for nearly 60 years Recipient, Jazz Journalists Association Lifetime Achievement Award, 2018

