

Lauer Architecture Progressive Design

1553 Meadowside Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146 314.994.3926

Playback STL
Herbie hancock Interview

DATE: Friday, March 10, 2006
Project#: LA-0600-a

Interview with Herbie Hancock

I recently had the rare privilege to talk with jazz legend Herbie Hancock. He is releasing a new DVD in April called *Possibilities*. It follows him through the creative journey of writing and recording the music for a collaborative project with many of today's top recording artists. You get to witness first hand the formation of ideas from the start with many talented songwriters and performers like Sting, Paul Simon, John Mayer, and Santana to name a few. The DVD captures the very human and open interactions as they communicate ideas and talk about lessons of life. As he talks about his approach to music and people, they mix in some great old footage of Hancock with Miles Davis and during his years with his legendary funk group, the Headhunters. Herbie Hancock is a worldly and wise man and was kind enough to share some of his unique insight with me – which I now share with you:

DL: Derek Lauer
HH: Herbie Hancock

DL: What goals do you have for this DVD release?

HH: Well, first of all, I hope that a large population will hear about it, because it is something that could appeal to people of different ages.

DL: What message do you most want it to convey?

HH: I'm hoping that people will start to realize two things,. One, if you start from the standpoint of serving humanity, in some way. In other words giving something, sharing something. You know, when you're sending something to the world that they don't have already. Something fresh, something unexpected, something they hadn't considered, something that has new clothing on it, or a twist on it of some sort. Basically something that is outside the box of their expectations. Then, you have a chance of waking up something inside the viewers that pertains to inspiration, which every human being possesses. That's the first thing and the second thing is, in how many ways can I use, whatever it is that I'm using, in this case it's music, to get the most bang for the buck. In other words, for the time that's spent doing, for the amount of money that's spent doing it, how can you make it a win, win, win.

DL: Music is a powerful force - how do you see it having an affect on our current social and political environment?

HH: For the most part, people never think that they make a difference. What eye opener came each time is that if you look at things in the standard way, you won't see anything but what you've seen before in the past.. But there are more ways to look at things than one. As a matter of fact there are an infinite number

Lauer Architecture Progressive Design

1553 Meadowside Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146 314.994.3926

Playback STL
Herbie hancock Interview

DATE: Friday, March 10, 2006
Project#: LA-0600-a

of ways to look at things. In that way you see more possibilities. When you see more possibilities, you stimulate your own creative juices, your own ability to come up with the solutions, with new solutions. In this way you can make a difference.

DL: Do you see yourself as having a role as an ambassador of good will in race relations?

HH: I am hoping to represent the things that I believe in., and live by those things, and hope that the best that a human being has to offer. I hope that in some way I am able to encourage that from myself and from others.

DL: By working with a diverse range of co-writers do you hope to spread awareness of Jazz and improvisation to try and reach a larger and younger crowd?

HH: When I looked at the project to weigh the pros and cons of it, that's one of the pros of it. But as I said, there's a lot of pros to it. That wasn't the reason for doing the record. The reason for doing the record was to show artists who are normally pigeonholed into whatever the public recognized them for, you know, whatever they became popular for. The tendency is for people to want them to do that again and again. I wanted to show that if you give artists another kind of environment that they have a hand in creating, so that even though it may be slightly outside of their comfort zone, if they have a hand in creating it, there is a part of them already in the setup. And make in such a way that things are more geared towards being in the moment. They will rise to the occasion and they will love that, and will put a thousand percent into doing a project like that.

DL: So that they feel a sense of ownership in the process

HH: The result is something other than what they have done before, something new, a context that people never hear these artists in.

DL: Through this process do you see yourself more as gaining influence or spreading influence with others?

HH: Both – that's why I said it's a win, win. I mean I learn and they learn too. I went to that project wanting to learn.

DL: What have you learned?

HH: I learned that there are a lot more dimensions to people, than even them, themselves, realize.

DL: Did you find it difficult to work with any one during the course of the DVD?

Lauer Architecture Progressive Design

1553 Meadowside Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146 314.994.3926

Playback STL

Herbie hancock Interview

DATE: Friday, March 10, 2006

Project#: LA-0600-a

HH: I didn't have a problem communicating with anyone that I could tell. When we talked about the philosophy of the record, they all loved it. They loved the fact that the first thing I said to everybody is, I don't want to do a record, I stopped doing records that are copies of records I've done before. I like to do new things that I haven't done before. I don't want to do a record like they've done before either. I want it to be different from anything they've done before or anything I've done before.

DL: Is there a difference in the level of discipline required of younger musicians today?

HH: As far as level is concerned, with many jazz artists a majority of jazz musicians are schooled in music and they may have a certain kind of technical artistry that is beyond what pop artists have. But technical artistry is not what makes music. You only need to play one note to make music. But you have to play with your heart. You have to play with conviction. You have to play something that you want to play. You know you can play a million notes and be technically correct, but that's not music, as far as I concerned. Very often Miles Davis would play few notes, few complicated things, but the things that he chose, were so heartfelt that the soloists that played after him, playing thousands of notes, paled by comparison, on some of his records.

DL: In addition to Wayne Shorter, who else to you have respect for as a jazz artist at your level of playing and improvising?

HH: He's the top as far as I'm concerned.

DL: He came through with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra last fall – just amazing.

HH: Oh Yeah, yeah. I think that he is doing the most cutting edge music that exists today.

DL: Are you involved with music education? You recently played at Berklee College of Music in Boston as a part of their anniversary – was that a rewarding experience?

HH: What I liked was that a lot of genres were represented and major artists agreed to participate in that event. There was represented a lot of cultures. There was Latin music, African music and straight ahead jazz, and rock and pop.

DL: Are you better received in the states or overseas?

HH: I find that there is a lot more attention paid to jazz outside of the United States than inside the United States.

DL: Do you have any upcoming television appearances?

Lauer Architecture Progressive Design

1553 Meadowside Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146 314.994.3926

Playback STL

Herbie hancock Interview

DATE: Friday, March 10, 2006

Project#: LA-0600-a

HH: Well, Miles Davis is being honored for the Rock 'N' Roll Hall of Fame, and that's being televised. I put a little band together for the four minute musical segment we're going to have for that. There are other people that are being honored too. That's the next televised appearance that I will have.

DL: How do you enjoy spend your time?

HH: Sometimes I read. I like technology. I'm very often in my office on my computer. I usually don't have time to relax; I'm usually working on one thing or another, but necessarily music.

DL: What new projects do you envision on the horizon?

HH: We have some ideas that I think can be very, very interesting. I don't want to talk about them now, because they're not etched in stone. But I'm very excited about putting some new music together in a way that hasn't been done before.

DL: That's what we want to hear – That there's more Herbie coming!

HH: I'm not limiting myself to audio, I'm thinking both audio and video at the same time, so let's say multimedia. I'm also thinking a convergence of cultural direction. Converging dance, music, art, books – that kind of thing I'm keeping open like that. So that what may come out may be the result of not just musical ideas, but could be the result of books and music.

DL: Well that is one of the things I always found to be fascinating about Wagner's work. His operas involved the singing, the lighting, even back then, the music, the words, the scenery, the building, the whole experience was the piece of art.

HH: As a matter of fact you hit the word on the head – experience. This will be an experience for the audience, rather than it just being a record that they hear, we're looking at creating environments and using various other directions in culture, as part of the team – integration. I mean Wagner did his operas, but this will be, in a way, compared to opera, but it won't be opera! It will be totally different.

DL; I think those lasting things that get passed down through time, through generations, are things that are really an experience, not just a piece of music.

HH: Right. You know what I like doing? I like putting different kinds of things together. Things hat are normally not put together, things that people don't normally hear together at the same time.

DL: Well I think that your new DVD, Possibilities, really does that. There is a wide range of music on that.

Lauer Architecture Progressive Design

1553 Meadowside Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146 314.994.3926

Playback STL

Herbie hancock Interview

DATE: Friday, March 10, 2006

Project#: LA-0600-a

HH: There is, there is. I like when things don't stay the same, when they can morph into something completely different. So you get taken on a journey. I've done it in a way, with the *Possibilities* record. That's one example of how to do that. This new stuff is a totally way, an approach to doing that.

DL: Well it sounds like people will dig it. Because I think that is what everybody is looking for – new experiences, plus one that they can relate to. I think that your new DVD has something for everybody.

HH: yeah, that's what I like to do. I wanted to say one other thing about the new DVD. I wasn't just looking to do a video, just to sell videos. It wasn't just a record that was about records. We talked during the process of making the DVD about social issues, about the environment, about political issues, about family, about aging, about medical problems, about fun, about sports, about.... We talked about Life. I wanted the music to grow out of life relationships, even though the relationships were new and short. But I wanted the music to grow out of the lives of the person and not just putting a bunch of notes together because they sound good, not composition in a standard sense. I think that's the reason the record sounds the way the sounds, and I hope the message comes across in the DVD, and That's because those people who I collaborated with on the record were called upon to be human beings. To interact together and record it live so you get a sense of the musicians interacting and responding to each other. That human element and that is what makes a difference and what gives it the life and the vitality. In today's world, the creative process doesn't always work that way. It's much more cut and dry and people do things with layers, and yes you can make music like that. But you'll never get it to come out with that kind of heart.

DL: Getting back to some of the social issues that you were talking about, there were some very poignant moments in the DVD, with some of the thing that you and Santana were saying, that there were several key insights that you have had about living your life, and I think that is knowledge that a lot of people could benefit from having.

HH: Exactly. We had those discussions because, to me, that's part of making the music. It's not just sitting in the studio looking at music paper or just responding to music. That's kind of a shallow or surface way of looking at the power of music. But when you include a perspective that is further back and more all encompassing, then those additional elements become part of the creative process and therefore part of the music.

DL I think it is something tangible that you can actually feel.

HH: Right, exactly.

By Derek Lauer

END OF INTERVIEW