

But it was at Colin Curtis' club Berlin in Manchester and Gilles Peterson/Patrick Forge's Sunday afternoon session at Dingwalls in the mid- to late-1980s, that Carlos Garnett's records became bona fide anthems of the jazz dance scene. Through those heady club sessions and radio shows of Gilles Peterson and Patrick Forge, the Muse recordings of Carlos Garnett reached dancefloors across the world – from The Room in Tokyo to Delicious Doughnuts in Berlin.

Born in Panama in 1938, Carlos Garnett first heard jazz at the cinema via the swing bands of bandleaders like Louis Jordan and James Moody, whose performances would be screened as shorts before the main feature. These precursors to the music video were evocative stuff for the young Carlos, who searched deeper to discover the music of Sonny Rollins and Freddie Hubbard. It was at Junior High School where Carlos first picked up the saxophone and before he was out of his teens he was playing with US Servicemen stationed in Panama's Canal Zone.

Into his twenties, encouraged by the stories of the New York jazz scene from the servicemen he performed with, Garnett set out to find the source. Moving to Brooklyn in 1962 his first sessions were with R&B band of Leo Price, who went on to release the 1967 mod single "Stag-O-Lee". By that time Garnett was playing in various jazz bands and one night at a venue called the Blue Coronet he met the musician who would change his life. "Freddie (Hubbard) came there and heard me and he said, 'Man, you want to play with me?'," Garnett recalled to Russ Musto in a rare interview for *All About Jazz* in 2008. "I said, 'Sure!' He said, 'Well, we're going to Philly Monday,...that's when I realized that I was capable of playing with the giants. That's when I got seriously into the music. Prior to that I was playing by ear. I got into the music and I began studying. I told myself I should be ready when the opportunity presents itself."

That opportunity came in 1968 when Freddie Hubbard hired him for his Atlantic album, *A Soul Experiment*. Produced by the great Joel Dorn and featuring players like drummer Bernard Purdie and guitarist Eric Gale, the session at A&R Studios featured two Garnett compositions "No Time to Lose" and "Hang 'Em Up". These numbers were still in the R&B/soul jazz mode that had been Garnett's foundation but new things were on the horizon.

Building a reputation as a fiery player whose Panamanian roots gave him something different, other bandleaders began to take note. "Woody Shaw called me and connected me with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers," he told Russ Musto. As well as touring widely with the Jazz Messengers he also appeared on albums like *Jazz Messengers 70* with the composition "What The World Needs Now Is Peace And Love" recorded at Victor Studio 1, on February 19th 1970 and released on the Victor World Group label.

Sessions followed with Charles Mingus and

pianist Andrew Hill, appearing on his 1970 Blue Note LP *Lift Every Voice* and introducing him to the studio genius of Rudy Van Gelder. The year 1972 saw Garnett join Miles Davis on his most genre bending albums *On The Corner* and *Get Up With It*. When asked about this era by Russ Musto, he downplayed it replying, "Unfortunately, I didn't get to swing with Miles at all. It was all electronic." However, listen back to "Theme from Jack Johnson" Live at Philharmonic Hall in September 1972 and you can hear Garnett swinging with all his might.

But it was alongside Pharoah Sanders, appearing on monumental Impulse! albums like *Black Unity* and *Live at the East* that Garnett's fiery spiritual playing really let loose. Also on these sessions was an exploratory free-minded drummer by the name of Norman Connors. Born and raised in Philadelphia, Connors had moved to New York to study at Julliard, where he was soon immersed in the New Thing. His first recording was Archie Shepp's *The Magic of Ju Ju* (Impulse!, 1967) leading him to those legendary Pharoah sessions.

Connors was soon hatching a plan for his own group to explore the outer territories of jazz. It would find a home on a label that was itself going through a transformation. Rising through the ranks of Columbia Records, Joe Fields worked at Verve during the Creed Taylor era. "Creed was an extraordinary producer and a wonderful guy. He always used to pick my brain and ask 'What's happening out there?'. So I was there with my finger on the pulse and I really got to know the music business," Fields told me in 2015, two years before he passed away.

From Verve, he moved to Prestige to work with Bob Weinstock for five years. "Bob was a guy who was really into the music and was really early onto the scene," he said. "You know he had Miles and all those people really early on. I saw how he ran his organisation and in the back of my mind I thought if he can do it so can I." With tentacles reaching across the industry, he was introduced to Neil Bogart of Buddah Records while working with R&B acts for Sue Records where he started to think more about his own label.

While he worked mainly with R&B acts, his great love was jazz and encouraged by Bogart and with the help of Prestige producer Don Schlitten, he set up the Cobblestone label as a subsidiary of Buddah. "I was there with Neil at Buddah for five years and we had become a real hit-making machine. But he was working with a lot of the Melanies and all that bubble-gum type of music. So I offered to set up a jazz label," he recalled. "I relied on Don to take care of the covers and some of the production, which left me to work on what I knew, which was the sales side and everything else."

While the label's early 70's focused on psychedelic rock and R&B, its first two LPs signaled a new direction with the soul jazz of *Comin' Home* by The Joe Thomas Group and the Brazilian improvisation

of Hermeto Pascoal's *Hermeto*.

But it was a series of releases from 1972 that signaled Field's intent to create a label to match the likes of Impulse!, the label that had been such an inspiration to him. The year 1972 was a pivotal one for Fields, as he created the foundation for his next venture with future Muse artists, such as Neil Creque (*Contrast* and *Creque*) and Harold Ousley (*The Kid*). They were followed quickly by *Dance of Magic* and *Dark of Light*, the two albums that solidified Connors' partnership with Carlos Garnett.

Connors' first album as a leader *Dance of Magic* saw him bring in major heavyweights for a session produced by Skip Drinkwater and Dennis Willen at New York's Bell Sound Studios. Trading solos with Carlos Garnett was Gary Bartz in a horn section that included Eddie Henderson on trumpet and Art Webb on flute. Augmenting the rhythm section of Cecil McBee on bass and Connors on drums were six percussionists, including Airto Moreira and Billy Hart. The pinnacle was the title track that took up the whole of side one.

With many of the same players, Connors' follow up *Dark of Light* continued the exploratory jazz funk/fusion of his debut, with the addition of singer Dee Dee Bridgewater whose voice would become a key component in the spiritual jazz that Carlos Garnett became known for.

While Cobblestone's relationship with Buddah was a good one, Fields set his sights on a new label that would give him complete creative freedom. "We had no money, but over the years I had worked with distributors and labels throughout the country. So I had built up a lot of trust," he said. "So when I had the idea for the label, I was able to approach distributors in Chicago, in LA and so forth and say 'Look, advance me the money and I guarantee you will get it back'. That's how I got Muse started."

With its serious cover art, sharp label design, and hip aesthetic that matched the depth of its output, Muse deserves its place in jazz history - somewhere between Blue Note, CTI and Strata East.

The label's early releases ranged from the hard bop of James Moody's *Never Again* to the vocalese of Mark Murphy's *Bridging A Gap*. The label also straddled the line between the commercial and the experimental. "I'm music orientated but also sales orientated," Fields explained. "You can't be all things to all people but you can make everything of quality in its own particular groove. So it was always important for me to find a balance and to cater to the many different tastes in jazz. Look, if you are an ECM label and you are making ECM music, you are catering strictly for those people. But if you are a Muse type label, you might do a Houston Person album that is in one direction and then a Carlos Garnett that is way off into another direction."

At this stage Garnett was at the peak of his exploratory powers, leading his own group

Universal Black Force, while exploring deeper free jazz with Mtume (appearing on his LP *Alkebu-lan - Land of the Blacks*) and in the powerful ensemble of Pharoah Sanders. Alongside his regular partner Norman Connors, the list of players assembled for his debut included heavyweights like Mtume, Buster Williams, and Billy Hart.

Produced by Garnett and Joe Fields, *Black Love* is best known for its storming jazz dance anthems "Mother of the Future" and "Banks of the Nile", featuring the soaring voice of Dee Dee Bridgewater. Garnett's compositional dexterity was also on display on the radical jazz funk of "Black Love" and the spiraling ballad "Ebonesque".

Talking of the first of his five albums to Russ Musto Garnett said: "I was pulling all the different elements and rhythms of all the black cultures. And also, I had some vocals singing some positive messages. I was disturbed that there were so many hostile and negative vibrations going on in the black communities, so I was writing positive messages for my community."

The LP came in a beautiful sleeve by Ron Warwell, Muse's graphic designer, painter, and photographer who deserves his place alongside Pete Turner at CTI and Reid Miles at Blue Note. "Ronny was a total jazz nut and a really talented guy," said Fields. "He was very hip and very smart and did some really nice things for us. He used to do them all by hand and really was a wonderful artist. And most importantly he understood the music and made the art reflect the music."

During this time Garnett remained closely aligned with Norman Connors, appearing on his 1974 album for Buddah Records, *Slewfoot*, known for its alternative version of the Garnett composition "Mother of The Future", featuring the vocals of Jean Carn.

Female singers became an important feature in Carlos Garnett's music and in the incredibly fertile year of 1974 he called on Ayodele Jenkins (who had provided vocals to accompany Dee Bridgewater on *Black Love*) for his second album for Muse. Co-produced by Garnett and Joe Fields, *Journey To Enlightenment* featured a smaller ensemble than *Black Love*, but the sound was no less powerful. Opening with the serious spiritual jazz opus "Journey to Enlightenment", the album is best known for its storming modal dancer "Chana" that brings to the fore the percussive Latin influences that run through much of Garnett's work.

Garnett's output during the mid-1970s really was staggering and in 1979 he released another essential Muse album entitled *Let This Melody Ring On*. It opens with "The Good Shepherd" that shows a funkier, more edgy side to Garnett, his fiery and urgent horn flying over layers of strings, wah wah guitars and spacey keyboards. After a tribute to his homeland "Panama Roots" Garnett plays and sings an ode to the street on the conscious jazz of "Ghetto Jungle".

Introduced by a beautiful Afrocentric painting by Ron Warwell, Carlos Garnett's *Cosmos Nucleus*



(1976) mixed the driving jazz funk of “Saxy” with the glorious Afro-Latin Soul of “Wise Old Man”, featuring one of Garnett’s most beautiful vocal performances. But the album is best known for “Mystery of Ages”, a relentless jazz dance monster featuring the killer vocals of Cheryl P. Alexander. It has caused mayhem on dancefloors across the world since first being played by DJs like Colin Curtis and Paul Murphy in the early 1980s.

The final of his five classic mid-70s albums for Muse came in 1978 with *The New Love*, featuring a new line up of serious players, including drummer Alphonse Mouzon and trumpeter Terumasa Hino, known for their jazz funk and fusion records of that era. Crossing from the surging fusion of the jazz dancer “Uncle Ben & Aunt Jemima” and the Panamanian jazz funk of “Bolerock”, the album showed Garnett – as it says in Tom Bingham’s original liner notes – “as one of the true masters of musical fusion.”

As the 1980s dawned, Garnett reached a creative and personal nadir. “Quite a few other musicians that I schooled were making big money and causing me to be very depressed and I got deep into drugs,” he told Russ Musto. After what he termed “a spiritual awakening” and retreat from music, he returned with the help of bassist Brad Jones in the mid-90s with the Muse LP *Resurgence* and two albums for Joe Fields and his son Barney’s jazz label High Note: *Fuego En Mi Alma* and *Under Nubian Skies*.

In 2000, Garnett returned to Panama where he performed and taught music. “I had the intention of moving back, eventually to spread the gospel of jazz and to pass on my knowledge and experience on to these young kids because they are very hungry for this music,” he told Russ Musto. One of those he mentored was Irreversible Entanglements’ trumpeter Aquiles Navarro. He paid tribute to Garnett on the track “\$\$\$ /// billete” from the LP *Heritage of the Invisible II* with Tcheser Holmes for the International Anthem label. It includes extracts of an interview with his mentor.

Over recent years London’s Soul Brother Records have helped uphold the legacy of Carlos Garnett through the 2015 Anthology *Mystery of Ages* and a series of LP reissues. Label owner Laurence Prangell is one of those to provide tributes for a man whose compositions and playing will live on through DJs and dancers.





