

# down beat

For Contemporary Musicians

JULY, 1984

## ALIVE!

**CITY LIFE**—Alive! 543: *CITY LIFE*; *DIAMONDS ARE WHERE YOU FIND THEM*; *HAPPY ENDING*; *AFREAKA*; *SKINDO LE LE*; *ANOUMAN/LAZY AFTERNOON*; *WHAT IS LIFE, FOUR*.

**Personnel:** Janet Small, piano; Suzanne Vincenza, bass, cello; Mary Fettig, alto saxophone, flute; Barbara Borden, drums; Carolyn Brandy, Annette Aguilar (cut 5), percussion; Rhiannon, vocal.

★ ★ ★ ½

By keying so strongly to vocal centerpiece Rhiannon, Alive! gambles the success or failure of their recordings almost solely on two factors—song materials and vocal performance. As revealed by this LP, their second, when the group has interesting songs to work with, they deliver the goods. Rhiannon is a husky-voiced, more-than-capable singer who brings intelligence, taste, and control to her performances; the rhythm section work is solid and muscular, and here has the added benefit of guest performer Mary Fettig, on alto saxophone and flute, to enhance the group's sound with both color and excitement. Adding her was a splendid idea, yielding a much higher quotient of musical interest and textural variety than was the case with the group's debut LP.

To my ears the most successful performances are the sole instrumental, Cedar Walton's *Afreaka* (where Fettig's forceful, confident Cannonball Adderley-influenced alto really crackles), and Jon Hendricks' vocal setting of Miles Davis' perennial *Four* (which Rhiannon delivers in fine fashion, giving the hip, densely packed lyrics their due and indulging in a bit of effective improvising as well). Too, her insinuating treatment of the attractive John LaTouche/Jerome Moross ballad *Lazy Afternoon* is suitably languid, aided nicely by Fettig's warm, lyrical flute, and the easy-tempoed *Skindo Le Le* comes off pretty well, primarily as a result of its singing infectiousness, unpretentious lyrics, and the buoyant groove the group generates.

In comparison, the other pieces are somewhat less compelling, although *City Life* succeeds quite well in conjuring up the frantic pace of contemporary urban living with lyrics that are pretty much on the money. Still, one has but to contrast them with Hendricks' subtle, wickedly clever *Four* to have demonstrated their more modest levels of achievement. The balance of the program, like *City Life*, consists of group-generated songs, none of which is more than merely pleasant both lyrically and musically, but in fairness to the group, they do their utmost to infuse them with as much interest, coloristic variety, and excitement as they bring to the other selections. There's a high level of craft to these efforts but, as songwriters, the group has quite a way to go before their productions approach the level of professionalism evident in the LaTouche/Moross selection, for example. Good intentions are, after all, no meaningful substitute for good songs, and this is, I feel, Alive!'s only major deficiency.

—pete welding

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**Alive!**





# DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER®

Friday, September 9, 1983

## Live in the Village: Alive

By ERIC V. COPAGE

**T**HE KINGS, counts and dukes of jazz are well known. Less well known are the queens, countesses and duchesses who go back to the beginnings of the music. Alive, a quintet from the San Francisco area that will perform at Lush Life in Greenwich Village through Sunday, is one of a growing number of all-female jazz groups keeping that tradition vital.

Although women have been a musical force on a variety of instruments in jazz for many years—Irma Young on saxophone in the 1920s, Ernestine (Tiny) Davis and Estelle Slavin on trumpet in the 1930s and Bridget O'Flynn and Rose Gotteman on drums in the 1940s—one typically thinks of jazz women as singers or, more occasionally, pianists.

In spite of evidence to the contrary, it was often assumed that women did not have the breath for wind instruments, the hand strength for bass fiddle and the rhythmic drive for drums and other percussion.

If their second album, "Call It Jazz," is any indication, Alive proves those critics wrong, perhaps for the final time.

The album's first track, Gil Scott Heron's "Willing," is given a locomotive thrust by conga player and percussionist Carolyn Brandy and drummer Barbara Borden.

The excellent rhythmic support of pianist Janet Small and bassist Susanne Vincenza give the song a fluidity and buoyancy.

Vocalist Rhiannon is at her best on the second tune, the satirical "Call It Jazz," where her vocal textures and scat singing remind one of Betty Carter, and an earthy version of the raunchy Ida Cox number, "Wild Women Don't Get the Blues."

The band promises to play a mix of bop, ballads, standards, original compositions and contemporary works by other composers during their stay at Lush Life.

The professionalism and cohesiveness of the group come from four years of working together, classical music training (except for drummer Borden) and more than 20 years each on their instruments.

Yet, looking through their clips, one finds that critics are continually astounded that they can play at all.

"Sometimes it's frustrating, but I'm sure it's no different than women trying to do anything else that people think we can't do," Rhiannon philosophizes.

"We try not to get into that too much ourselves. We figure those kinds of comments are just some people's way of getting through to the music."

When Alive started as a trio seven years ago (Brandy, Rhiannon and Vincenza), they played coffee houses and auditoriums on the women's circuit.

But with the inclusion of Borden and Small, they began playing an increasing number of jazz clubs.

Their audience expanded from women mainly interested in hearing women play to men and women who primarily were interested in hearing jazz.

Alive hopes to travel out of the country to hear and be heard, to record more (their third album is due in a couple of months, and they are itching to do another), to work on individual projects and to continue their strenuous schedule of touring the country seven or eight months a year in their Winnebago.

"We're having fun up on stage, but I can't emphasize enough how serious we are about the music," Rhiannon says.

"And once people open their ears and minds to our music, I think they'll be able to hear that."

*Alive!*

# Music CONNECTION

Vol. IX, No. 2

Jan 17—Jan. 30

## Alive!

At My Place  
Santa Monica

□ **The Players:** Rhiannon, vocals; Stacy Rowles, trumpet & flugelhorn; Janet Small, keyboards; Suzanne Vincenza, bass; Barbara Borden, drums.

□ **Material:** Lots of dynamic originals by one or another of the quintet, the inclusion of a very old Duke Ellington piece, "Alabamy Home," added a marvelous bluesy touch. Rowles is impeccable on flugelhorn, giving "Alabamy..." a poignant flavor, even though it was taken at a fairly fast tempo. Rhiannon and Janet Small contributed several totally unauthentic songs, with lyrics and/or vocals with a "crazy" tinge. There were a couple of instrumentals, giving ample opportunity for everyone to demonstrate their jazz chops.

□ **Musicianship:** Alive! has been together for quite a few years now, although Rowles has only been added during the past year. They all know each other well, and are able to interact and pick up each others' vibes when most needed. Particularly impressive is drummer Barbara Borden, who swings with the heaviest of the heavies. Small's keyboard work tends to be a little lighter than the rest

of the group's members, but she displayed a delightful sense of adventure in her and Rhiannon's composition, "No Pricetag." Rhiannon's voice is—not to be pedantic, but how else can you describe it?—an instrument, and she delights in running the full gamut of her range, which is quite extensive. Her duets with Rowles' trumpet are particularly effective, as was demonstrated on an old Charlie Parker line, "Donna Lee."

□ **Performance:** From the rousing opener, right through to the "all hands on percussion" finale, Alive! commands total audience attention. The club was packed, and the enthusiasm was carried back and forth between musicians and listeners without any letup. Rhiannon's is an impressive presence onstage and although everybody else is superb, it is the vocalist's charisma that fully lights up the stage.

□ **Summary:** The alchemic mix of jazz, old standards, intelligent original songs and the wherewithal to pull it off make this group one of the most lively and delightful on the current music scene

—Frankie Nemko

# Alive!



# Washington Post

Tuesday, May 22, 1984

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## *Alive!*

Alive!, the all-female jazz quintet, has clearly come of age. Its opening set at Blues Alley last night was a satisfying blend of original materials and standards delivered with taste and swing.

Vocalist Rhiannon and trumpeter/flugelhorn player Stacy Rowles passed the lead back and forth on several tunes and generous solo space was given to bassist Susanne Vincenza and pianist Janet Small. Vincenza employed the upright on all but one number on which she switched to electric bass. Small supplemented her action at the Steinway with synthesized effects and opened one piece with kalimba. Drummer Barbara Borden supplied rustling commentary and driving beat.

Rhiannon's vocal dimensions included soft balladry and dynamic scatting that often lifted song to explosive heights. One piece had her combining stream-of-consciousness talking blues, Pearl Bailey sass and double-entendre.

Rowles often counterbalanced the vocal fire of Rhiannon with mellow flugelhorn or softly muted trumpet. She offered a beautifully relaxed "Night in Tunisia" and then got down on some gritty blues. A feature number for Small revealed individuality and technique to spare and Vincenza's bass was articulate in solo and steady in its supportive role. The set's finale, with Borden cannonading and the others taking up hand-held percussion, brought down the crowded house.

—W. Royal Stokes

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*Alive!*

# San Francisco Chronicle

The Largest Daily Circulation in Northern California

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1984

## Jazz Festival for the Sensual at the River

BY JESSE HAMLIN

Alive!, the SF-based all-women's band, has improved vastly in the past year. The band now swings and the addition of trumpeter-flugelhornist Stacey Rowles makes for a far richer sound. Lower-case vocalist Rhiannon still has a tendency to shout at you, but her Betty Carter-inspired gyrations have been honed down, and her improvised phrase swapping with Rowles developed into some exciting moments.

Monday, October 8, 1984

## It's Time For Women At Jazz In the City

BY JESSE HAMLIN

Alive, the all-women quintet that has improved by leaps and bounds in the past year, performed the same set it offered at the Russian River festival and received the same enthusiastic response.

The set was composed of "inspirational" originals about getting up and being the best you can be, etc., a

lovely ballad called "Lazy Afternoon" that let us hear vocalist Rhiannon's voice at its prettiest (without the yelping), "Night in Tunisia," featuring trumpeter/flugelhornist Stacey Rowles, and an infectious Brazilian sizzler that closed the show.

**Alive!**





# San Francisco Examiner

Saturday, October 6, 1984

## Sounds of the city: a great, jazzy night

By Philip Elwood  
Examiner music critic

**T**HE CITY was jazzy last night — at the Victoria Theater three local groups featuring women performers presented a splendid Sounds of the City show.

Finally Tuck and Patti (Tuck Andrews and Patti Cathcart) seem to have caught the jazz public's fancy and in listening again to them at the Victoria Theater one wonders why it has taken so long.

Tuck's on guitar, Patti sings — that's it; but, of course, it ain't what you play, it's the way that you play it that makes the difference.

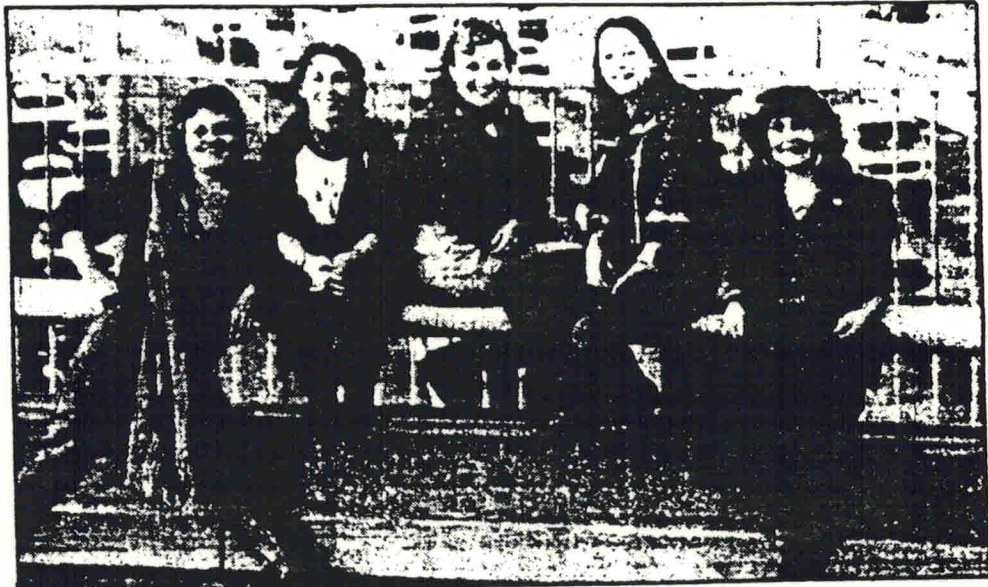
Originally more of a lounge or cabaret act, perhaps not of their own choosing, Tuck and Patti in the last year have been working jazz rooms and acquainting jazz audiences with their marvelous sounds.

Patti's rich ballad voice is equally at home in scat-singing which, I think, she overdoes, and she has a great talent capturing the mood of such tough modern jazz classics as Tadd Dameron's "Our Delight." Tuck's guitar is both the duo's rhythm section and a second lead-line for Patti's fascinating vocals.

Following the Andrews at the Victoria was pianist Jessica Williams and her accompanists — bassist John Wittala and drummer Bud Spangler. For the occasion, Williams chose a comfortably long set of Monk-oriented material (Thelonious Sphere Monk, that is), concluding with the definitely non-Monk "A Place For Us."

Williams is one of the few true keyboard jazz abstractionists around; that she favors Monk and Charles Mingus material is not surprising. She played beautifully last night, seemingly relaxed and certainly humorous. "Gettin' Sentimental Over You" and "These Foolish Things" (played as an extended medley) were followed by one of Monk's crazy-chord bop things.

Her set bubbled with excitement and was the steadiest of many I've heard from her. Spangler, an obvious Williams admirer (as am I, didn't compete with the pianist but contributed mightily to the enhancement of Monk's already eccentric rhythms. A bassist with Williams need only be technically skilled, rhythmically agile, in tune and inventive. Wittala was all four.



Alive! now features the horn of Stacey Rowles (second from right) as well as singer Rhiannon, left.

The women's quintet called Alive! was the headline group at the Victoria show, with singer Rhiannon and horn player Stacey Rowles in featured roles.

Originally Alive!'s ensemble included only Rhiannon's singing as a lead instrument and her backup included a percussionist with a table full of noise-makers. The sound changed when the percussionist was dropped but Rhiannon's voice still dominated each performance.

When, fairly recently, Rowles came up from Los Angeles to the Bay Area with her trumpet, flugelhorn and mutes, Alive! finally had a second lead instrument and the group really came, well, alive.

Pianist Janet Small, although seem-

ingly distracted last night, has a good jazz touch and writes very well. Bassist Suzanne Vicenza, always steady, is looser these days and drummer Barbara Borden (now the only percussionist) although pretty noisy-intense in solos, has her corner under control.

Rhiannon's vocal style and much of her material are not especially appealing to me (they're not supposed to be, I guess) but she has a marvelously strong, musical, and flexible vocal instrument. It is most attractive when matched with Rowles' horns. I really enjoyed their matching of musical wit in duet — swapping twos and fours, etc.

Besides lots of original stuff, Alive! did a bright "Night In Tunisia," and a tricky version of Bird's "Donna Lee."

*Alive!*

# Los Angeles Times

Thursday, November 22, 1984

## JAZZ REVIEW

### BAND IS ALIVE! AND WELL

By LEONARD FEATHER

**B**efore returning to its home base in San Francisco, the quintet known as Alive! played the final date of a long tour, drawing a capacity crowd Tuesday to At My Place in Santa Monica.

The central figure is Rhiannon, a versatile and commanding singer who, when this was a hornless group, tended to monopolize the proceedings. The addition during the last year of Stacy Rowles on trumpet and fluegelhorn has modified and improved the vocalist's role. On several numbers Rowles traded passages with her or, as in the be-bop standard "Donna Lee," played harmony along with Rhiannon's scatting.

The singer's artillery ranged from a charming ballad, "Claudia," to the half-spoken, satirical, wittily worded "No Picetag," and a surprise version of Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan," newly fitted with lyrics.

One of the few all-instrumental works, Duke Ellington's "Alabama Home," found Rowles at her most fluent, followed by a bass-and-drums dialogue between Susanne Vincenza and Barbara Borden. All three are skilled musicians. Vincenza played upright bass on every tune but one, in which she doubled effectively on Fender.

Janet Small, a good pianist/synthesist and better composer, contributed two works in a set liberally sprinkled with songs created by members of the group.

In a rousing finale that brought the crowd to its feet, Borden let loose with an infectious solo while her four colleagues picked up cowbells or other percussion pieces to contribute to the excitement.

Woman for woman, Alive! is one of the most enterprising and entertaining small bands on today's jazz scene.

**Alive!**





# Jazz Festival

By **DAVE HELMS**  
and **MIKE MARSHALL**  
Press Register Reporters

There was enough musical talent at the Greater Gulf State Fairgrounds Saturday to fill several stages — with Ray Charles at the top of the list — and that has Mobile Jazz Festival organizers already thinking about next year.

"We're already talking about a two-day festival next year, or maybe more than one stage," said festival President J.C. McAleer.

There was no doubt that it was Charles who saved the day, drawing better than 6,500 people to the fairgrounds to hear such favorites as "Hit the Road, Jack," "I Can't Stop Loving You" and "Georgia On My Mind." The attendance figure was more than double that of last year.

While Charles showed the polished performance of a jazz veteran, younger acts at the festival also carried some weight. The female quintet **ALIVE!** sparked the audience with their West Coast sound.

Rhiannon provided smoky vocals and, on one memorable number, Janet Small on piano stood to get more leverage for slamming the ivories. The group received a standing ovation.

**Alive!**





FESTIVAL  
INTERNATIONAL  
DE  
JAZZ  
DE MONTREAL



Photo Les Archives

Cinq «California Girls» ajoutent une note féminine au jazz.

## Place aux GIRLS!

Alivel, cinq «California Girls» ont décidé il y a maintenant près de dix ans de faire du jazz, parallèlement à celui des hommes.

Manon Guilbert

Aux USA, au Canada, on les a vues dans des Festivals consacrés à la musique faite par des femmes.

(Suite à la  
page 27)

(Suite de la  
page 26)

«Les femmes dans le monde du jazz sont souvent des interprètes, solistes ou musiciennes. En général aussi, elles sont accompagnées par des hommes. Si des groupes de femmes, par exemple The Bangles, se retrouvent dans le monde du rock, ils sont très rares dans le jazz.»

Les trois fondatrices du quintet se sont rencontrées dans des ateliers de musique à San Francisco.

Ensemble, elles se sont rapidement rendues compte qu'elles préféreraient se mesurer aux appréciations féminines qu'à celles des hommes très sou-

vent peu encourageantes.

«Avec les hommes, vous avez toujours à prouver. Ils vous font sentir coupables.»

Entre elles, elles ont trouvé un modus vivendi.

Elles explorent une ligne moderne, le bee-bop, la samba et toutes les tendances latines. Chez elles, l'amour du jazz est le lieu commun.

Même si elles viennent de milieu différent du classique jusqu'au théâtre les cinq filles de Alivel! tentent d'offrir une nouvelle vision du jazz «au féminin».

Au Spectrum, vendredi soir, elles ont fait la preuve que le jazz s'accorde aussi à ce genre.

Alivel!

le JOURNAL de MONTREAL  
Sunday, June 29, 1986  
International Jazz Festival of Montreal

MAKE ROOM FOR THE GIRLS!  
(Manon Guilbert)

Five "California Girls" decided ten years ago to make out of jazz an art form parallel to that of men. In the US and Canada, they have appeared at festivals dedicated to music made for women.

"The women in the world of jazz are often interpreters, soloists, or musicians. In general, also, they are accompanied by men. Although groups of women, for example, 'The Bangles' can be found in the world of rock, they are still very rare in jazz."

The three founders of the quintet met in a San Francisco music studio.

Together, they quickly became aware that they would prefer to measure themselves according to the judgments of women, rather than those of men, which are not very encouraging.

"With men you always have to prove yourself. They make you feel guilty."

Together as a group they have found a modus vivendi.

They explore a modern line, bebop, the Samba, and all the Latin influences. In their music, the love of jazz is the common bond.

Even though they come from different backgrounds, ranging from classical music to the theater, the five girls of ALIVE! tend to offer a new vision of jazz "au féminin."

At the Spectrum Friday night, they gave proof that jazz gets along well with this genre.

--translation: Spaid/Dacey/Small

**Alive!**





LE DEVOIR  
Saturday, June 28, 1986

JOBIM CHARMS AND ALIVE! ASTONISHES  
(Paul Cauchon)

....A little earlier at the Spectrum, festival-goers were able to listen to ALIVE!, the all-woman quintet, which was a discovery.

ALIVE! was born in 1976 at the get-together of three women in a San Francisco jazz studio. Two other members joined the group in 1979, and in 1981 a new agent launched them on the jazz circuit.

The group seems to have played much in women's festivals, and their music is hybrid, sometimes jazz, sometimes standards, pop, Latin or more free-form.

What is a women's quintet like? First of all, five good musicians, who are as much at home with the music of McCoy Tyner and Dizzy Gillespie as with their own compositions, which are often interspersed with jazzed-up talking texts, which tell true stories about grocery lists, about the need for money, about a woman who takes pills.

All that served up by Rhiannon, a singer with an uncommon voice and presence. The transitions and the solos sometimes lacked polish, but the overall effect is good and above all very joyous, full of humor, a kind of happy affirmation of playing together.

--translation: Spaid/Dacey/Small

**Alive!**



## Jobim charme et *Alive!* étonne

PAUL CAUCHON

Et un peu plus tôt au Spectrum les festivaliers ont pu entendre *Alive!*, un quintette entièrement féminin qui fut une découverte.

*Alive!* est né en 1976 de la rencontre de trois femmes dans un atelier de jazz à San Francisco. Deux autres membres se joignaient au groupe en 1979, et en 1981 une nouvelle gérante les lançait dans un circuit jazz.

Le groupe semble avoir joué beaucoup dans les festivals de femmes et leur musique est hybride, à la fois jazz, proche des variétés, latine ou plus *free*.

À quoi ressemble un quintette de femmes? D'abord à cinq bonnes musiciennes qui jouent autant McCoy Tyner et Dizzie Gillespie que leurs propres compositions, mais avec des textes parlés/jazzés qui racontent de vraies histoires, des textes sur des listes d'épicerie, par exemple, sur le besoin d'argent, sur une femme qui prend des pilules.

Tout cela servi par Rhiannon, une chanteuse d'une voix et d'une présence peu commune. Les enchaînements ou les solos manquent quelquefois de fini, mais de façon générale c'est bien et surtout très joyeux, plein d'humour, une sorte d'affirmation heureuse de pouvoir jouer ensemble.

*Alive!*



LA PRESSE  
Montreal, Sunday, June 29 1986  
The 7th Montreal Jazz Festival

ALIVE: ANOTHER WAY OF PLAYING  
(Alain Brunet)

How can we not applaud the emergence of women in a world where, in spite of women's accomplishments, male instrumentalists still carry the ball, as elsewhere in society? How can one articulate a masculine criticism of a vanguard of women's excellence in jazz? A most difficult and delicate task for a man.

I should tell you that I wasn't totally blown away by the performance of the five women who make up ALIVE, the San Francisco - based jazz quintet that for ten years has been making quite a reputation for itself with their strong technique and originality. To be sure, the musicians of ALIVE are among the pioneers of women's improvisation. In their bold use of tonal colors, their varied compositional approaches, and their feminine interpretations, they prove to be innovators of international dimension. If for nothing but that, the show was worth the trip.

It is rare enough to see women drummers, bassists, and trumpeters, since the instruments they play are usually reserved for the opposite sex. But here is an entire program aimed at allowing creative women to refashion jazz in line with their own energy and their own sensitivities. One shouldn't evaluate this music with the same criteria one applies to men's music, because we are dealing here with a whole different way of making music.

Vocalist Rhiannon is definitely the catalyst here. Extremely talented, this singer displays a powerful voice full of nuances and great musicality. As well in the lower register as in the higher, more ethereal reaches, this woman has no problem communicating her art to her audience. This rapport is most clearly evident in those explosions of blues, latin rhythms, and anthological rereadings of several jazz periods and American pop tunes.

One gets the feeling that ALIVE is really in control of its language, although not always the supporting technique. Nonetheless, the improvisations of the pianist, Janet Small, seemed relatively interesting to me. Many masses of chords, a percussive approach, but with a few ambiguous moments in the fingering. The horn player, Stacy Rowles, on trumpet and flugelhorn, daughter of the celebrated pianist, Jimmy Rowles, demonstrated a great deal of sweetness and restraint, but nothing very spectacular. A very good technician, nevertheless.

Who could ask for anything better than those choice anecdotes sung by Rhiannon, which humorously decry the typical day-to-day difficulties in the life of a woman. Equally memorable was the very beautiful interpretation of My Song, a superb piece by Keith Jarrett. A Night in Tunisia (Gillespie) was not bad either. Altogether, a hot show, very much appreciated by the audience, but more conventional than one would have expected.

--translation:Spaid/Dacey/Small

LE 7<sup>e</sup> FESTIVAL DE JAZZ DE MONTREAL

Les cinq filles de Alive, dans l'ordre : Rhiannon, Janet Small, Barbara Borden, Stacy Rowles et Susanne Vincenza.

## Alive: une autre façon de jouer

ALAIN BRUNET  
collaboration spéciale

■ Comment ne pas applaudir à l'émergence des femmes dans un monde où les hommes instrumentistes mènent le bal, malgré les acquis féministes, comme d'ailleurs dans le reste de la réalité? Comment articuler une critique masculine d'une figure de proue de l'excellence féminine en jazz? Indissociable et délicat.

Je dois vous dire que je n'ai pas été renversé par la prestation de ce quintette féminin que constitue *Alive*, groupe basé dans la baie de San Francisco, qui depuis 10 ans, s'est fait une réputation de très forte teneur technique et d'originalité. Certes, les femmes de *Alive* sont parmi les pionnières de l'improvisation féminine. Elles sont des défricheuses de couleurs, d'approches compositionnelles et d'interprétations féminines d'envergure internationale.

Rien que pour cela, le show en valait le déplacement.

Il est d'autant plus rare de voir des femmes drummeuses, contrebassistes, ou trompettistes, instruments relégués d'ordinaire au sexe opposé. Mais c'est tout un programme pour les femmes créatrices que de s'approprier le jazz selon leur propre dynamisme, leur propre sensibilité. On ne doit donc pas évaluer cette musique avec les mêmes critères que la musique d'hommes, car il s'agit d'une *autre* façon de jouer avec les sons.

C'est définitivement (Lionel) la soliste Rhiannon qui mène le bal. Extrêmement talentueuse, cette chanteuse témoigne d'une voix puissante, nuancée, d'une très grande musicalité. Tant dans les graves fréquences que dans les effets plus aériens, la dame n'a aucun problème à communiquer son art à son public. Visiblement, ce dernier embarque au maximum dans cette pétaarde de blues, de textures latines, de relectures anthologi-

ques de plusieurs époques jazzistiques... et de variété américaine.

On sent effectivement qu'*Alive* maîtrise son langage, mais pas nécessairement les prouesses techniques qui l'appuie. De fait, les improvisations de la pianiste Janet Small m'ont paru relativement intéressantes; beaucoup de montées d'accords, approche percussive, mais quelques côtés évasifs dans le doigté. La ventiste Stacy Rowles (trompette et flugelhorn, et fille du célèbre pianiste Jimmy Rowles) a démontré beaucoup de douceur et de sobriété mais à peu près rien d'étonnant. Une très bonne technicienne, toutefois.

On s'en tiendra aux succulentes anecdotes chantées par Rhiannon, qui décrit avec grand humour les contraintes d'un typique quotidien de femme. Rappelons également la très belle interprétation de *My Song*, superbe pièce de Keith Jarrett. *A Night in Tunisia* (de Gillespie) n'était pas mal non plus. En somme, un spectacle chaud, fort apprécié par l'auditoire. Mais plus conventionnel qu'on aurait pu l'imaginer.

*Alive!*



# ALIVE!

R E C O R D S

THE INDUSTRY'S NEWSPAPER

# R&R

RADIO & RECORDS

## JAZZ... NATIONAL AIRPLAY/30.

April 6, 1984

- 1 TANIA MARIA/Love Explosion (Concord Picante)
- 2 EARL KLUUGH/Wen!u Thuring (Capitol)
- 3 DAVID BAMBORN/Backstreet (WB)
- 4 MICHE COLO/Alto Alive's Theme (Palo Alto)
- 5 ALIVE/City Life (Alive)
- 6 WEATHER REPORT/Domino Theory (Columbia)
- 7 SADAO WATANABE/Up The Night (Musicon/Elektra)
- 8 PIECES OF A DREAM/Imagine The (Elektra)
- 9 JEFF LORBER/In The Heat Of The Night (Arista)
- 10 COURT BASS & HIS ORCHESTRA/88 Base Street (Pablo)
- 11 BLUE SKY/Blue Sky (C.T.)
- 12 KENNY G/Force (Arista)
- 13 MILT JACKSON QUARTET/Soul Route (Pablo)
- 14 FREDDE HUBBARD/Sweet Return (Atlantic)
- 15 MANHATTAN TRANSFER/Sodes & Soul (Atlantic)
- 16 PHIL UPCHURCH/Name Of The Game (Jarn)
- 17 OSCAR PETERSON QUARTET/A Tribute To My Friends (Pablo)
- 18 JIMMY FONGER/Down Here On The Ground (Milestone/Fantasy)
- 19 LARRY SMITH/Keep On Comin' (Milestone/Elektra)
- 20 MONTY ALEXANDER/CLAYTON/HAMILTON/Reunion in Europe (Concord)
- 21 ANDY NARELL/Light In Your Eyes (Big Pocket)
- 22 CARROLL/MAT ADDERLEY QUINTE/What Is The Thing... (Palo Alto)
- 23 ALEX de GRASSI/Southern Exposure (Windham Hill)
- 24 MATT CATROUS BIG BAND/My Mommy & Me (Sea Breeze)
- 25 ART FORALL/Young & Old (Audiograph)
- 26 LARRY VUCKOVICH with JOE WENDORF/Cast Your Fate (Palo Alto)
- 27 RODNEY FRANKLIN/Marathon (Columbia)
- 28 DAVE VALENTI/Futs Juice (GRP)
- 29 MICHAEL FRANKS/Passionfruit (WB)
- 30 L. SUBRAMANIAM/Indian Express (Milestone/Fantasy)

Current lists of jazz reporters are available. Please call Barbara Baines for further information.

### ALIVE! has performed at:

BLUES ALLEY in D.C.  
 BOTTOM LINE in N.Y.C.  
 EDMONTON JAZZ FESTIVAL  
 KEYSTONE CORNER in San Francisco  
 DANTES in L.A.  
 ROCKEFELLERS in Houston  
 CARAVAN OF DREAMS in Fort Worth  
 PEABODY'S in Cleveland  
 SAN ANTONIO JAZZ FESTIVAL  
 RUSSIAN RIVER JAZZ FESTIVAL  
 KANSAS CITY WOMEN'S JAZZ FESTIVAL  
 LANDMARK SHERATON JAZZ BAR  
 in Vancouver  
 Montreal Jazz Festival, 1986  
 Mobile Jazz Festival, 1986  
 Three Rivers Arts Festival,  
 Pittsburgh, 1986

"The jazz group ALIVE! . . . could scarcely have chosen a more descriptive name. The vitality that it projects is vivid and is expressed in a variety of ways — in the range and adventurousness of its repertory, in the polished and exuberant energy of its ensemble playing and in the probing thoughtfulness of its solos."

John S. Wilson, *The New York Times*

"ALIVE! is a superb example of five individuals fitting together like a Rubik's cube."

Frankie Nemko-Graham, *Downbeat*\*\*\*\*

"With zest and authority, five women musicians have formed a combo called ALIVE! . . . Their vibrant music — alternately spiraling and contemplative — defies rigid categorization."

Nat Hentoff, *Cosmopolitan*

"ALIVE!, the San Francisco based all-acoustic quintet that caused such an uproar at the 1980 Top New Talent Concert, brought the evening to an unwelcome close with a high-test set of colorful, energetic jazz (try to imagine a cross between the Verdi Requiem and an earthquake) that had the crowd shouting for more."

Terry Teachout, *The Kansas City Star*

"Not only is ALIVE! getting booked into major jazz festivals and into such important jazz clubs as Blues Alley in Washington, D.C., it is getting invited back."

Derk Richardson, *San Francisco Chronicle*

# The New York Times

Sunday, September 11, 1983

## *Jazz: Alive! Ensemble at Lush Life*

The jazz group called Alive!, which is at Lush Life, at Bleecker and Thompson Streets in Greenwich Village through today, could scarcely have chosen a more descriptive name. The vitality that it projects is vivid and is expressed in a variety of ways — in the range and adventurousness of its repertory, in the polished and exuberant energy of its ensemble playing and in the probing thoughtfulness of most of its solos.

The fact that all five musicians are women is, initially, a point of interest,

but that is quickly forgotten as the group establishes its distinctive musical personality. The central figure in most of the pieces is Rhiannon, a singer whose pliable and authoritative voice moves from the warm, throaty quality that sets the mood for "Lazy Afternoon" to virtuoso scat-singing that is mixed with lyrics written by Amy Duncan for Charlie Parker's "Donna Lee" and a broad and lusty growl on "Wild Women Don't Sing the Blues."

Rhiannon is an almost constant

presence in the quintet's performances. But she steps back from time to time to allow Janet Small to develop piano solos that billow with a surging power that is supported by a strong, tightly knit rhythm section — Carolyn Brandy playing congas, whistles, thumb piano and other colorful percussion instruments, Suzanne Vincenza on bass, and Barbara Borden, drums. The group is very much together, and its spirit, enthusiasm and flair are captivating.

John S. Wilson

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**Alive!**





the village

# VOICE

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## Call Them Serious

By Kate Walter

On "Call It Jazz," the title track of Alive!'s second album, lead singer Rhiannon asks: "Is it blues, is it gospel, salsa or soul? Is it avant-garde, classical, standards, or swing? Is it straight-ahead bebop or ballads we sing?" The answer is all this and more, and the quintet's set on June 12 at Lincoln Center, part of the Universal Jazz Coalition's 6th annual New York Women's Jazz Festival, confirmed Alive!'s claims to eclecticism. The audience at Damrosch Park—a mixed bag of senior citizens, Latinos returning from the Puerto Rican Day parade, and jazz lovers—had no problems expressing their approval of this all-woman ensemble. Not like the critic in *Jazz Journal* who admitted himself astonished by this "extraordinary group of girls."

Admittedly, a tight women's jazz group is a rarity even on the women's music circuit, where segregated rock bands abound, forming and reforming with the winds of each festival. Sustained by the San Francisco women's community during their formative years, the original three members—Rhiannon, Carolyn Brandy (congas and percussion), and Susanne Vincenza (cello and bass)—began jamming in 1976. Pianist Janet Small and drummer Barbara Borden joined in 1979, when Alive! cut their first album. Rhiannon's feminist insights, which should be sufficient to sate the politicians, were showcased during a frenetic scatting spree that recreated the hectic schedule of a working mother rushing to fix the coffee/ship out the kids/get dressed/dash onto the freeway/bolt to the office/and make nice for the boss man. With her penchant for rewriting standards, Rhiannon took Neal Hefti's chattering "Girl Talk," and twisted it into a feminist message with "profound girl talk."



HELAYNE SEIDMAN

### Small, Vincenza, and Rhiannon of Alive!: outsiders' adaptability

Rhiannon's bebop vocal style recalled Betty Carter right down to the hand gestures, although her hearty delivery lacks Carter's expressive range. She was the focus of the performance, but she laid out often enough to let the others come forward as an instrumental quartet, with enough solo space to highlight each musician. Pianist Small was wild and commanding; drummer Borden maintained a jaunty pace throughout; congalera Brandy held back until the last number, when she led an explosive percussive closing.

Beyond the fact that Alive! are women who play jazz and play it well, what distinguishes them is their varied repertoire, mostly original material, and nontraditional themes. Take "Too Bad," written by Vincenza and Rhiannon, where Rhiannon and Small get down with some no-bullshit blues piano and crooning that would have another woman cryin' how her man done left her. Instead, this woman's cryin' how we done ruined mother earth. Ecological blues? Why not? And why not toss together Gil Scott-Heron, Dizzy Gillespie, June Millington, and '20s blues writer Ida Cox, whose independent anthem, "Wild Women Don't Get the Blues," has been reworked to include lines about drinking all the Perrier you can find.

Their diverse American roots—Philly, L. A., Detroit, Seattle, New Mexico, South Dakota—may account for Alive!'s adaptability, or perhaps their outsider status in a traditionally male field stimulated their willingness to experiment. Whatever, the potpourri works well. Alive! brings strong musicianship to their core of followers, while at the same time converting other audiences to hear beyond their biases.

**Alive!**