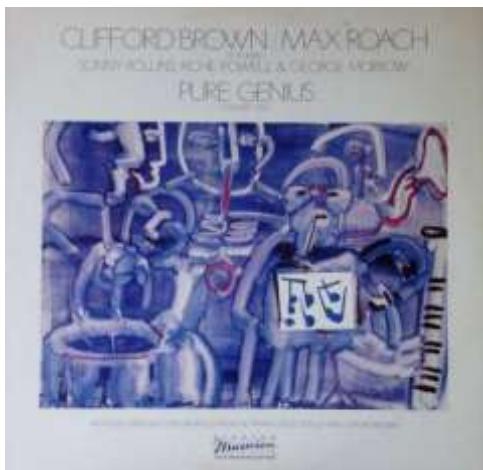


## ON CLIFFORD BROWN & MAX ROACH

by John Clare

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[John Clare reviews the album "Pure Genius", released on Elektra Musician (E1-60026) in 1982. This review appeared in the September/October 1982 edition of Jazz Magazine.]



Clifford Brown is an odd one out of the American line of talent dying young. He was not addicted to drugs or booze, nor seemed self-destructive in any way. From all accounts he was Clean Living Clive. His playing was getting better and better, stronger and stronger, until it seemed that he would burst with the joy of what he could do on the trumpet — and then at 25 years of age he was killed in a car accident.



*The scene of the 1956 car accident in which Clifford Brown died at the age of 25...*



*Clifford Brown: an almost frightening exuberance, intensity, optimism and sheer virtuosity ... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

This album of previously unissued tapes from the collection of Brown's wife LaRue, recorded in 1956, the year of Brown's death, shows an almost frightening exuberance, intensity, optimism and sheer virtuosity. Perhaps, we are tempted to think, no-one has the right to be that positive!



*Brown (left) pictured with drummer Max Roach: the latter was part of every solo in a way no drummer except Roy Haynes had approached... PHOTO CREDIT HERMAN LEONARD*

It was not just Brown's playing, however. The whole band was fired by something, the full force of which can only be heard in concert and club performances, such as this. That something is easy enough to break into components: Max Roach's phenomenal drumming under two young soloists — Brown and Sonny Rollins (tenor sax) — who were reaching their full powers; underpinned by an excellent bassist (George Morrow) and pianist (Richie Powell).

Roach was part of the underpinning too, of course, but in live performances particularly, he was part of every solo in a way no drummer except Roy Haynes had approached. This is hard bop at its fiercest. Roach's sustained holocaust of polyrhythms edges the band into areas later explored by John Coltrane and Elvin Jones. So formidable is Roach's drum surf that Rollins — so surefooted rhythmically as a rule seems to quail before it momentarily on *52nd Street*. He and Brown ride it confidently on the maniacally fast *Dahoud* (compare the speed with the 1954 recorded version) and the blazing *I'll Remember April*.



*Brown (left) with Sonny Rollins: the latter seems to quail momentarily before Roach's formidable drumming on 52nd Street... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

Some of the appeal of Brown's playing stems from sheer technical competence — his flawless articulation, his full-bore shots at high speed at difficult intervals which he hits smack in the middle, the fact that he is absolutely in tune so that you feel you could grasp his sustained notes as though they were perfectly cast bars of brass — which is always at the service of a wonderfully musical intelligence. His ballad playing had a refined poignancy which, strangely or perhaps not so strangely, always reminds me of Mozart. There are good but not lengthy examples of it here.

The sound on this album is rather harsh. Roach's tape recorder did not pick up many of the mellower over tones. However, all the individual lines are very clear. You can hear everything they are doing, but you may still not believe it.