





**L-R: Andy Simpkins, Gene Harris, Bill Dowdy.**

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## the three sounds **groovin' hard**

In May of 2010, when Resonance Records first embarked upon the adventure of unearthing and presenting historical jazz recordings to the world, George Klabin and I began looking into various archives for tapes to release. One day, George came to me with a list of tapes he'd come across; tapes in the possession of Jim Wilke, who years earlier had been the host of a syndicated Seattle-based radio program called *Jazz After Hours*.

Over the course of Jim's storied career, he's been a staunch advocate for jazz and its greatest protagonists. Indeed, over the years, Jim has succeeded in presenting a veritable *Who's Who* of '50s and '60s jazz greats to the public.

From February 1962 through August 1968, Jim hosted the weekly radio program, *Jazz from the Penthouse*, on Seattle's KING-FM. As a well-known radio personality in the Northwest, Jim developed a working relationship with Seattle's legendary jazz club, the Penthouse, and consequently was able to air live performances by a wide array of artists while they performed at the club. These performances were broadcast direct to the public right as they happened. The shows not only went on the air live, Jim taped them, employing professional recording techniques and equipment. Over the years, Jim amassed an impressive collection of high-quality tapes; tapes that form a unique archive of the extraordinary music heard over the course of more than half a decade at the Penthouse by virtually all of the amazing music legends that played there.

Among the recordings in Jim's archive that first captured George Klabin's attention was this group of performances made during four separate engagements over the course of five years by three different editions of the Three Sounds featuring Gene Harris. Indeed, George has long admired Gene Harris and the Three Sounds;

he was responsible for Resonance's releasing the best-selling *Live in London* and *Another Night in London* albums, by Gene Harris, which were the first historical recordings Resonance ever released.

As a jazz pianist, Gene Harris epitomized all the musical qualities George loves: he had a prodigious technique, he was deeply sensitive to jazz traditions and the blues and he swung like crazy. The Three Sounds themselves were a comprehensively cohesive ensemble. Harris, bassist Andy Simpkins and drummer Bill Dowdy played together for years and responded to one another like a well-oiled machine. Sad to say, after the earliest of the recordings heard here were made in 1964, Harris and his childhood friend Dowdy had a falling-out and Dowdy left the group. But he was replaced on the later recordings on this album with two sensitive, empathetic drummers: Kalil Madi for the 1966 tracks and Carl Burnett for the performances from 1968.

All of us at Resonance are gratified to be able to present these recordings in conjunction with Jim and the family of Charlie Puzzo, Sr., who founded and owned the Penthouse. George and I had the pleasure of meeting with Charlie and his son, Charlie, Jr., in 2012, when they visited us at Resonance's studio. It's our intention to do them and the music proud.

This album bespeaks George Klabin's passion for jazz. He compiled it himself. I couldn't be happier to partner with him on it and see this music released officially, at long last. Resonance Records is a labor of love for George, an initiative of the Rising Jazz Stars Foundation, which he founded, whose purposes are to promote both emerging and under-recognized jazz talents and to preserve the great traditions of jazz and its foremost practitioners. And for me, this album is a reminder of how far we've come. It's great for me to be able to take a look back by presenting the fruits of one of our very first forays into our musical detective mission, this Three Sounds album, which represents the music that is so near and dear to George's heart.

For this package I'm happy that we've been able to call upon some great voices to discuss the importance of Gene Harris and these recordings; voices including George Klabin himself, Jim Wilke and the great music journalist Ted Panken, who in addition to his own perspective, presents appreciations of Gene Harris by pianists Monty Alexander and Benny Green.

So sit back and enjoy, *Groovin' Hard: Live at the Penthouse*.

### Zev Feldman

Los Angeles, September, 2016



## what gene harris and the three sounds mean to me

When I was 13 years old I fell in love with modern jazz. One of the very first jazz groups I discovered was the Three Sounds featuring pianist Gene Harris. I purchased many of their records and listened to them over and over, to the point where I could play them in my head. The Three Sounds were my introduction to bluesy, funky style jazz and I have cherished them and collected their recordings ever since.

Decades later, when Gene joined the Ray Brown Trio and then struck out on his own to lead some great trios, I bought every record he made. In 2004 I met and befriended Gene's widow, Janie Harris, and when I told her I started a record label, she sent me a copy of a wonderful recording that Gene made in London at the Pizza Express in 1996 with some of the greatest English musicians including the fabulous Jim Mullen on guitar. With her permission, we released two CDs: *One Night in London*, Resonance HCD-2001 and later a second release from the same recording, entitled *Another Night in London*, HCD-2006.

Some time later I befriended Jim Wilke who had, among other things, worked as a sound engineer in Seattle. I soon found out that Jim had made numerous recordings in the 1960s at the great Seattle jazz club, the Penthouse. I was thrilled to learn that the Three Sounds had performed at the Penthouse numerous times in the '60s and that Jim had in his possession all of their recordings from the club, which he himself had recorded. For this release, I was able to select from these the very best material, including many songs that had never been previously released by the group, or which were only available on cut-out records or only released in a non-trio format. I have assembled these on this album and I am so happy they will add to the recorded legacy of this great artist and his first jazz group.

Here's hoping you will enjoy them as much as I have.

Sincerely, **George Klabin**

## the penthouse broadcasts

Despite its name, the Penthouse was a street-level jazz club that operated in Seattle from 1962 until mid-1968. The name may have stemmed in part from the popularity of the Playboy Clubs of that era, although there was no actual affiliation between the club and *Penthouse* magazine.

The front door of the Penthouse opened to the sidewalk. Near the door there was one small window through which a passerby could catch a view of the stage. The club was basically a long, narrow room typical of storefronts in Pioneer Square, the historic district of Seattle. The ceiling had been lowered, the floor was carpeted and there was exposed brick-and-wood paneling, which gave the room a cozy atmosphere. The bar spanned the back wall.

The small stage occupied a spot around halfway down the left side of the room and was only about a foot off the main floor. There was a small grand piano and a decent sound system with hi-fi speakers near the ceiling on the wall opposite the stage that spread the sound evenly around the room. The ceiling above the stage had mirrors instead of ceiling tiles. This arrangement provided an overhead view to patrons around the stage. One night a performer (who shall remain nameless) stared up at the mirrors for a moment after being introduced and remarked, "This kinda reminds me of some bedrooms I've been in."

The Penthouse came into existence in 1962, as Seattle was hosting the World's Fair, which had been dubbed, "Century 21." As a consequence of Century 21, Seattle audiences were able to benefit from exposure to myriad internationally renowned performers in all of the arts including jazz. Virtually everyone who was significant in the jazz world in that era played the Penthouse — Miles Davis, The MJQ, John Coltrane, Oscar Peterson, Carmen McRae, Stan Getz, Art Blakey, Dizzy Gillespie and on and on. Most groups would open on a Thursday and play a ten-day engagement through

two weekends. The Penthouse was closed on Sundays due to Washington State's blue laws of the era, which didn't allow sales of alcohol on Sundays.

Shortly after the Penthouse opened, radio station KING-FM installed a special broadcast-quality phone line between the club and the studio. This enabled us to originate live broadcasts from the club every Thursday night. We broadcast over 200 shows over the next six years. We got two shows from most groups — opening night and the following Thursday. I used a remote broadcast mixer with four mic inputs and four mics including two RCA 77DX ribbon mics, which are highly prized today. Most groups were comprised of three to five pieces, so with careful and judicious mic placement we could cover them well. I set up mics and mixer and did the show from a table beside the stage.

These Thursday night shows were broadcast live. People at home or in their cars heard the performances at the exact moment the audience in the club heard them. We often had people come into the club and tell us they just heard us on the radio and came down for the second set! As the shows went out over the air, they were also simultaneously being recorded in the studio on an Ampex 350 stereo tube tape recorder, which was the state-of-the-art tape machine of that era. The resulting tapes were mostly for my reference; they were never rebroadcast or circulated. I'm delighted, given the quality of both the performances and the recordings, that now through this series of Resonance Records releases, these recorded documents, which capture the artistry and spirit of some of the greatest jazz musicians working during the '60s, musicians who are now heralded as key figures in the history of jazz, are now available to present-day audiences half a century after they happened. I'm proud to have been a part of it.

### **Jim Wilke**

Jim worked at KING-FM from 1961 to 1977, and was creator and host of *Jazz After Hours* on Public Radio International from 1984-2014. He runs an audio production company, Hatchcover Productions [www.hatchcover.co](http://www.hatchcover.co).



Photo courtesy of the Puzzo Family Archive

## live at the penthouse 1964-68

by TED PANKEN

*"I call myself a blues piano player with chops."* — Gene Harris

First the facts: *The Three Sounds Featuring Gene Harris/Groovin' Hard: Live at the Penthouse 1964-1968* comprises ten selections culled from location broadcasts by three different editions of the Three Sounds at four separate engagements in 1964, 1966 and 1968 at a Seattle club known as a music-over-commerce venue. It's the fifth live recording of the more than two-dozen albums — issued both contemporaneously and after the fact — that the trio made between 1958 and 1970. It includes several never-before-released numbers, including "Bluesette" and "The Shadow of Your Smile," both performed at a level that stands up to anything in the trio's catalog. Other keepers like "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," "A.M. Blues" and "Caesar and Cleopatra," all part of the Three Sounds' go-to book when they were touring to back the Mercury or Limelight LPs (none issued digitally) that contained them, will be known only to the most hardcore completists.

To be specific, on February 20, 1964, when the Three Sounds broadcast the "Caesar and Cleopatra Theme," they were touring behind the Mercury LP *Some Like It Modern*, recorded in July 1963. On that February evening they also played "Blue Genes," a groovin', churchy shuffle that titled a date for Verve recorded during the first days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was their sixth of seven recording sessions during 1962, following five done for Blue Note at Rudy Van Gelder's studio, where they recorded a total of 14 times between their maiden voyage for that label on September 16, 1958, and June 28, 1962, generating nine LPs and 20 or so jukebox singles. During that 45-month span, no other act on Blue Note's distinguished roster sold as many units.

By 1964, the Three Sounds — as the then Cleveland-based trio of pianist Gene Harris, bassist Andy Simpkins and drummer Bill Dowdy dubbed themselves in 1956

after parting company with R&B-oriented tenor saxophonist Lonnie "The Sound" Walker — had long since patented their instantly identifiable brand of special sauce. "They had a certain chemistry that created a happy feeling," says pianist Monty Alexander, who knows a thing or two himself about generating that dynamic. "Gene came out of the church and he loved the blues. But he loved Erroll Garner and Oscar Peterson and mixed all of that up together. His touch on the piano was crystal clear, immediately bringing up the feeling of blues as well as that cross between church and blues. He was greasy! He brought up soulful emotions. I'm sure he'd played in R&B bands in his younger days. He was a big, barrel-chested guy and his genial personality came through in the playing. Gene spent a lot of time interacting with the bass player and Andy was made to order for him. You could hear that Andy loved Ray Brown and he referred to Ray style-wise even though his sound was not as round and big.

"They played in a lot of clubs I played in — places like the Front Room and the Key Club in Newark or the It Club in Los Angeles, where the crowd was 99 percent African-American. Those folks enjoyed their swinging feeling; how they got right to the meat on the bone in a way that wasn't just sophisticated lines. It was a great name, the Three Sounds, because collectively they created a sound."

Primarily because of Harris's singular concept, that sound remains constant in 1966 with Kalil Madi and in 1968 with Carl Burnett, who assumed the drum-set chair after Harris and Dowdy — friends since they met as kindergarteners in their home town of Benton Harbor, Michigan — parted ways after fighting over a misunderstanding about money during a 1966 road trip. As Alexander indicates, Harris's tonal personality was an amalgam. A 1933 baby, he demonstrated piano skills around the time he began to speak, when he emulated boogie-woogie records by Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson. Later, he absorbed his mother's recordings of Jay McShann, Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson and Count Basie. Evidently Wilson's elegant legato touch and melodic focus and Basie's concision and feel for tempo became imprinted in Harris's

musical DNA and mitochondrial elements from Nat Cole, Oscar Peterson, Ahmad Jamal and Horace Silver filtered in as the '40s progressed into the '50s.

That Harris also learned the art of people-pleasing in early life is evident from his recollection to one observer that, when he was five or six, his father would bring him to play in local saloons (*père* Harris received free drinks as payment). He conveyed a similar anecdote to pianist Benny Green — who studied Harris granularly after replacing him in Ray Brown's trio in 1990, when Harris began his final efflorescent decade helming the Gene Harris quartet and a big band that took Atomic-Era Basie as its template.

“Gene told me how confident he was as a young person,” Green says. “He would drive to bars and say, ‘You need to have me playing here.’ The owner would say, ‘We don’t have music here,’ and Gene would say, ‘Well, you need to hear me.’ Then he would wheel in his spinet piano, play for them, and create a gig. That spirit makes me imagine Erroll Garner, who swung so hard that all you need is him and a piano in a room with people and you’ve got a party.”

Harris's touch was exceptional. A witness to a performance by Brown's trio with Harris and Jeff Hamilton recalls Brown joking after a particularly boudoir-oriented number that the piano had slipped Harris its room key. Perhaps that's what Green's early-'80s employer Betty Carter was thinking, too, when she told her young pianist, “the way Gene Harris touched the piano in the Three Sounds was just perfect.” Green also recalls Brown's remark that Harris “broke a lot of strings when they were out on the road,” and that, on one occasion, Harris crumbled his Walkman cassette player in the process of pressing the Play button.

Green also focuses on Harris's finely calibrated time feel, as distinctive laying in the cut of a gospel shuffle as slowing down time to a syncopated crawl. “Some Three Sounds numbers were so slow that you'd almost have to wait between each beat,” he

says, referring to “Li'l Darlin'” and “Things Ain't What They Used to Be” on the 1960 Blue Note album *Moods*. “It's almost humorous how slow they make them — sexy, ridiculously slow. It's a beautiful thing to hear a band so well integrated that the leader can have their own concept of laying back on the time and the band members can make that work. No one got hold of those tempos like Gene. I feel he kind of took them to the grave.”

Another quality that Harris garnered from his role models was an ethos of professionalism, of performance consistency, which, for him, did not serve as what the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson described as the “hobgoblin of little minds,” but rather, as a default basis of operations that allowed him to project his feelings in as transparent a manner as possible to his audience on a nightly basis. Green himself observed this about 25 years ago during his first sustained road-time with Harris on a *One Hundred Golden Fingers* tour in Japan.

“We were doing one-night concerts, and we'd only get to play for maybe 12 minutes each night; barely get a chance to touch the piano or warm up during the day,” Green recalls. “My God, every night Gene Harris would play a different piece with the trio, and to say that he rocked the house is an understatement. It was a sermon. Whether he was playing a ballad or a groover, his spirit never, ever let up. I don't know how the man did it. His performance ethic was like nothing else I've ever seen.

“It's essential for a master to know their own limitations and his strengths and I don't think we have any recorded examples of Gene attempting to do something that he could not do well. The music he chose to play, the tempos, the keys and just the feeling that he instilled in his performances, was a home run every time. He went deep-deep-deep into what he could do well, which was a whole lot. He's known, rightfully, as a blues master, but his ballad playing would give you goosebumps, cause you to tear up. He understood on a very profound level that music is an emotional transference. It's some kind of spiritual channeling. I think at all times, with the Three Sounds and in

later years, he had no inner conflict, intellectually speaking, that led him to subdue elements of the Black Baptist Church experience, where he came from, in favor of more esoteric jazz elements. There's an art to creating that balance with taste. He knew what he was, what he had to offer, and that's what he gave us. So at the end of the day, when we think of Gene, we're not talking about how fast he could play or how much of an innovator he was, but we all have to say, 'Hallelujah, what a spirit. His music makes me feel like nothing else.' That's no small feat."

1. **Girl Talk** - Recorded on August 23, 1968, not long before the Penthouse closed. This interpretation is a touch brisker than the 1970 version with Burnett and bassist Henry Franklin that appears on *Live at the It Club, Volume 2* (Blue Note) or Frank Wess's Basie-esque arrangement for the Philip Morris Superband from *Big Band Soul* in 1990.
2. A bossa-funk feel permeates this arrangement of **The Night Has a Thousand Eyes**, for which Harris channels his inner Ahmad Jamal and Erroll Garner. Some attendees at this 1966 Penthouse broadcast may have known the Three Sounds' recording on *Three Moods*, a with-strings album for Limelight recorded in February 1965.
3. This February 1964 version of **Blue Genes**, a flat-out boogie-woogie shuffle, is a notch more up-tempo than the recorded version on *Blue Genes* (Verve) from 1962. Note Dowdy's use of a tambourine on the ride cymbal, a characteristic Harris touch.
4. This is the first commercially released document on which Harris addresses Johnny Mandel's **The Shadow of Your Smile**, to which he imparts a tango-ish feel that morphs into four on-the-floor swing, propelled ebulliently by Burnett.

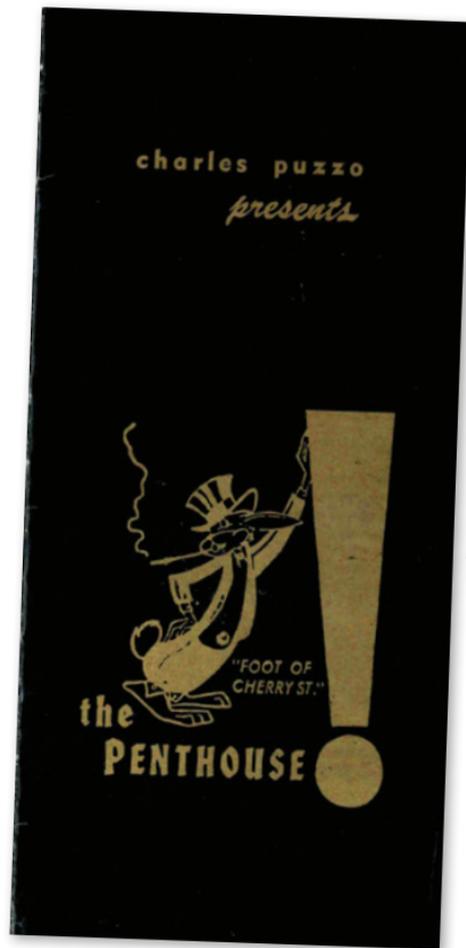
Harris's playing on this 1968 track has the qualities that impelled Monty Alexander to mention to Ray Brown that he should consider playing with Harris.

5. **Rat Down Front** is another Harris boogie-woogie number that rocks the house with a deep church feel. It's possible that Harris recorded it as "Way Down Front" on the 1963 Mercury LP *Some Like It Modern* or as "Rat Up Front" on a never-issued 1965 session.
6. A favorite among jazz folk with a certain romantic sensibility, **Yours Is My Heart Alone** debuted in Franz Lehár's 1929 operetta *The Land of Smiles*. The Three Sounds did it on the 1966 Blue Note LP *Vibrations*. In 1968, perhaps having eaten his Wheaties earlier that day, Harris proceeds at a much crisper pace than the medium-to-tippin' time feel on *Vibrations*, uncorking a free-associative improvisation that culminates in a quote of Ellington's "What Am I Here For" to launch Simpkins's brief but telling bass solo.
7. On **A.M. Blues**, which the Three Sounds recorded in 1966 on *Live at the London House* (Limelight), Simpkins blends motifs from Ray Brown's "Gravy Waltz" and Paul Chambers's bassline on "All Blues." After the theme, Harris ratchets the tempo a notch, uncorks a declamatory solo, then decrescendos gradually in the treble register.
8. This beautiful October 1964 performance is the only document of the Three Sounds taking on Toots Thielemans's immortal *chanson*, **Bluesette**, composed in 1962. Harris does it justice, creating melody and swinging over the medium 3/4 feel for 6 minutes in his inimitable manner.
9. Dizzy Gillespie, Wynton Kelly, Paul Gonsalves and Paul Horn all recorded Alex North's **Theme from Caesar and Cleopatra**, which introduced the then-contemporaneous mega-hit Elizabeth Taylor-Richard Burton film. So

did Harris, on the 1963 date *Some Like It Modern* (Mercury). Dowdy's tomtoms are prominent throughout, as the Three Sounds sustain a stomping, inexorably building environment.

10. This June 1966 performance is the first-ever commercial recording containing **The Boogaloo**, whose title is self-descriptive.

Ted Panken is an American writer and jazz journalist. He contributes to *DownBeat*, *Jazziz* and *JazzTimes*, among other publications. From 1985 to 2008 he broadcast jazz and creative music on WKCR. He has written more than 500 liner notes, and has contributed consequently to the *New York Daily News* and the now-defunct jazz.com e-zine. Panken is a member of the nominating committee for the Jazz Journalists Association's Critics' Choice Awards.



Courtesy of the Puzzo Family Archive

**GENE HARRIS** *piano*  
**ANDY SIMPKINS** *bass*  
**BILL DOWDY** *drums*\*  
**KALIL MADI** *drums*†  
**CARL BURNETT** *drums*‡

*Recorded at the Penthouse in Seattle, WA 1964-1968*

## track listing

- 1. GIRL TALK** (6:23) ‡  
N. Hefti/Sony ATV Harmony (ASCAP)  
Recorded 8/23/68 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Carl Burnett, drums
- 2. THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES** (5:49) †  
J. Brainin, B. Bernier/Sony ATV Harmony (ASCAP)  
Recorded 6/23/66 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Kalil Madi, drums
- 3. BLUE GENES** (3:10) \*  
E. Haire/Taggie Music Co. (BMI)  
Recorded 2/20/64 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Bill Dowdy, drums
- 4. THE SHADOW OF YOUR SMILE** (6:55) ‡  
J. Mandel, P.F. Webster/EMI Miller Catalog, Inc./Marissa Music (ASCAP)  
Recorded 8/23/68 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Carl Burnett, drums

- 5. RAT DOWN FRONT** (2:25) \*  
E. Haire/Taggie Music Co. (BMI)  
Recorded 2/20/64 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Bill Dowdy, drums
- 6. YOURS IS MY HEART ALONE** (7:50) ‡  
F. Lehár, L. Herzer, F. Löhner-Beda/European American Music Distributors, LLC (ASCAP)  
Recorded 8/23/68 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Carl Burnett, drums
- 7. A.M. BLUES** (4:09) †  
R. Brown, S. Lefco/Ray Brown Music (BMI)  
Recorded 6/30/66 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Kalil Madi, drums
- 8. BLUESETTE** (6:48) \*  
N. Gimbel, J. Thielemans/New Thunder Music Co./Songs of Universal, Inc. (BMI)  
Recorded 10/22/64 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Bill Dowdy, drums
- 9. CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA** (film theme) (4:57) \*  
A. North/Ole Grand Films (ASCAP)  
Recorded 2/20/64 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Bill Dowdy, drums
- 10. THE BOOGALOO** (2:44) †  
E. Haire/Taggie Music Co. (BMI)  
Recorded 6/23/66 with Andy Simpkins, bass & Kalil Madi, drums

L-R: Andy Simpkins, Gene Harris, Bill Dowdy  
Francis Wolff, ©Mosaic Images LLC

