



Hal Horowitz

Andy Milne (fourth from left) with his band, Dapp Theory.

Dapp test

Paul Weideman | The New Mexican

"If I could turn the lights out, you'd see that I'm an occupant of physical documents, trapped inside, moving through darkness, and I'm wondering how do we exist without being so see-through but still being so see-through, if I could just see you and just feel and touch, too black, too white, too in, too out, so many walls and how do we just manage to crawl and creep and exist, and I'm wondering how long can we persist, pushing through this feeling of blackout. If only I could turn the lights out and just see you see through this madness, sadness."

As soon as I do that — put a band together — it becomes its own entity; then you're writing for something that's evolving but also has its own signature.

— Andy Milne

As vocalist/poet John Moon breathlessly delivers these lines in Andy Milne's "Blackout," the piano, bass, soprano sax, and drums rise and fall in the background, dramatically accenting the song's intimations of mystery and anxiety. Such moments, conjured up by Milne and his band, Dapp Theory, promise a stimulating set in the intimate quarters of the Gig Performance Space when the quintet performs on Friday, April 4.

The bandleader, composer, and pianist earned his bachelor's degree in music at York University in Toronto, Ontario. Among his teachers was the great Canadian jazz pianist Oscar Peterson, who instilled in the young Milne the idea "that getting 'your sound' comes from within and not from the piano," Milne said in a 2003 interview with *Pasatiempo*.

Milne studied with saxophonist Steve Coleman at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta and then joined Coleman's band, the M-Base Collective, in 1991. For the next five years, Milne performed with the collective and also toured and recorded with fellow M-Base alums Cassandra Wilson, Geri Allen, Ravi Coltrane, and Greg Osby.

In 1998, Milne formed Dapp Theory, which, as he put it, would "tell passionate stories, promote peace, and inspire collective responsibility towards uplifting the human spiritual condition." The band enriches the thread of jazz with elements of funk and hip-hop and often includes a vocal element. On 2003's *Y'all Just Don't Know*, the guest vocalists were Bruce Cockburn and rapper Kokayi.

Dapp Theory's *Layers of Chance*, released on April 1, includes Moon's earnest spoken poetry on songs like "Blackout." The album features saxophonist Loren Stillman and drummer Sean Rickman, while the touring version of Dapp Theory has John Beaty on saxophones and Kenny Grohowski on drums. The quintet's bassist is Chris Tordini.

Pasatiempo interviewed Milne between sets in Chicago and Denver.

Pasatiempo: That poetry by John Moon definitely adds drama and meaning to your music.

Andy Milne: That's the general idea, to speak about the things you can't necessarily directly infiltrate into someone's psyche with the music alone.

I wanted John to be able to be many voices, the same way I can pull different synthesizer sounds out, depending on the song. So I'll say maybe I want to go for a mysterious thing or an energetic thing and slightly change the pitch or timbre of his voice or his delivery style to define and refine each song.

Pasa: The tune "Bodybag for Martin" starts off with the fantastic combination of Gord Grdina on oud and Loren Stillman on soprano. Then it shifts into something a little funkier.

Milne: I wrote that on Martin Luther King Day, and I was thinking about the war in Iraq and a lot of things in our present culture and wondering what Dr. King would say, which would probably be like, "Jesus, what are you people doing?"

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Pasa: I've read the members of your group say that Dapp Theory is all about the exchange of energies and ideas, but isn't it also similar to M-Base, in that there's a name and a concept, and perhaps that makes the musical goals more specific?

Milne: It's not so much because of the name but because of who I am and what I'm trying to do and in terms of results I've achieved in wanting to have a band. As soon as I do that — put a band together — it becomes its own entity; then you're writing for something that's evolving but also has its own signature.

The new album represents a shift in my writing. It was an opportunity to write more, in the sense of the length and the strengths of the elements, so I have more instruments, and the forms are longer.

Pasa: This music is very precise, but is improvisation still an important element in performance?

Milne: Yeah, that's what makes it something that is still considered jazz.

Pasa: This music is all composed by you. What's your writing process?

Milne: There's one song, "Bird Calls," and on that day I got up thinking, I gotta write music today. I gotta get going on this, and there was a bird singing outside my window, and there was something peculiar about it, and I thought, What if I just use some of that and change it?

This is like something I got from Steve Coleman. He'd be doing these master classes, and someone would be obsessing about 4/4 time, but he'd say, "Birds don't sing in 4/4. Just because so much music is written in 4/4, there's no reason it has to be the standard." So I think that stuck with me, and when I heard this bird, it was just an interesting sound, and it was one of those crisp mornings where it was really nice to hear a bird and the tonality of whatever that bird was doing.

Sometimes I'm just sitting down and singing something to myself and writing it down. I try to write as long as I can before I go to the piano or get into multiple parts, because as soon as I assign chords and harmonies to something, it takes its innocence away for what it could have been and where it could go.

Pasa: Are you going to play both acoustic piano and electronic keyboards in Santa Fe?

Milne: Oh, yeah. I've always done that.

Pasa: Any new projects afoot?

Milne: There were two that were already on the go last year. One is an album called *Scenarios* with [harmonica player] Grégoire Maret that has a lot of free improvisation; then there's a solo-piano recording. That one changed my relationship with the piano, because I don't have a keyboard on top, so I could explore the instrument in a different way.

Last year I started a new project that premiered at the London Jazz Festival in November with a tap dancer, a cellist, and vocalist. And the last thing I just did, which I haven't mixed yet but that will probably be out in November, is a duo piano recording with the French pianist Benoît Delbecq.

Pasa: How's jazz doing in 2008?

Milne: Uhhhh, I think there's a problem where we're saturated. There's a lot of great stuff out there, but maybe there's too much. There's just so many people doing it.

Pasa: Well, what did you think of Herbie Hancock winning that Grammy for Album of the Year?

Milne: It was great, but he's been around a long time and played so much music in so many veins, so it's not like he's an obscure jazz guy. And it's the music of Joni Mitchell! I think it's great for Herbie, but I don't know if it will do a lot for jazz. It will probably mean there will be a half-dozen people doing the music of Joni Mitchell next year. ◀

details

- ▼ Andy Milne & Dapp Theory
- ▼ 8 p.m. Friday, April 4
- ▼ Gig Performance Space, 1808 Second St., Suite H
- ▼ \$20 at the door, www.gigsantafe.com