

LEROI MOORE: A BIOGRAPHY

by

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# LEROI MOORE: A BIOGRAPHY

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University of Nebraska, 2016

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Few artists thrive at the crossroads of musicality, originality, and popularity. Musicians and critics often laud the first two and neglect the latter. Any imbalance in ratios between them that tips toward popularity is balanced by diminishing the creative elements.

Saxophonist LeRoi Moore (1961-2008) of the Dave Matthews Band was one artist who balanced all three. While his musical output was prodigious very little is known about him. He was a reclusive figure onstage and in public, shunning interviews and at times literally the spotlight, despite being a founding member of one of the most commercially successful bands of the last two decades.

Musically Moore was firmly planted in the jazz tradition for which his instrument has become known. A gifted improviser and arranger, the quality of his musical contributions was consistently high and pure. Moore's music was creative, original, and popular in equal measure. A biography of his life and analysis of his works are essential to recognizing his place in the history of American music.

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PREVIEW

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## DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my family, without whom this would be impossible:

For Carter

For David

For Theodore

For Ashleigh

For Mamaw

PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of many who helped guide me in this process. To my family – Ashleigh, Carter, David, and Theodore – thank you for your continued inspiration and support. Without your love and caring this process would have been for naught.

To my grandmother, Betty Fryman, thank you for believing in me and supporting me on this journey. I could not have done this without you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Haar, my mentor of fourteen years. Your teaching and friendship has changed my life in too many ways to count. Thank you for everything.

A thanks to my extended family – my brother Alexander and his wife Helen, and my in-laws Paul and Robin Hartman. Dad – your perspicacity is and will always be appreciated. Alexa Lee – you started on this journey with me before I even knew I was on it.

A gracious thanks to the members of my committee – Dr. Anthony Bushard, Dr. Stan Kleppinger, and Dr. Hendrik Viljoen. A special thank you to committee member emeritus Dr. Eric Richards, whose patience and wisdom continues guiding me in my endeavors.

David Threlkeld – thank you for your teaching and friendship. You set an example I still try to live up to.

To my first saxophone teacher, Howard Burns – thank you for your patience.

To the many teachers who have guided me, too numerous to mention – thank you.

A special thank you to the friends and colleagues of LeRoi Moore in and around Charlottesville, Virginia and reaching out to New York, Colorado, and points all over the globe – thank you for sharing precious memories of your departed friend. I hope I have done his story justice.

PREVIEW



## A NOTE ON ANALYSIS

LeRoi Moore was one of the most recorded saxophonists in history. His playing with Dave Matthews Band appears on six studio albums, one unreleased studio album, eight official live releases, twenty-seven live releases in the band's "Live Trax" series, and twenty-three live releases in their "DMBLive" series. The band also had an open taping policy, allowing anyone to record their live shows under the condition of trading these amateur recordings freely instead of selling them. The amount of recorded material left behind is staggering, even when limited to the saxophonist's work with Dave Matthews Band.

Moore was an adventurous improviser. He was forever tinkering with motifs, themes, interpolations, and arrangements. Coupled with his bandmates similarly gifted knack for auditory adventure, the musical variation in these voluminous recordings is equally as staggering.

While not an exhaustive of his work the following is representative of his output. It illustrates, in musical notation, Moore's unique gifts as an improviser. His ability to pinpoint what was needed in musical space was astute. His playing was without artifice, and wholly contextual. The analysis should be observed in the context of the recordings from which they are drawn.

Because of the sheer magnitude of available recordings and song variations therein, a system of organization is necessary. Works are analyzed based on their definitive versions in the chronological order for which those versions appear. For example "Ants Marching" appears on the 1993 independent release *Remember Two*

*Things*, while the definitive version appears on the 1994 release *Under the Table and Dreaming*. As the most played song in the band's history "Ants Marching" is also replete with variations in form, texture, and arrangement. As the song evolves throughout the band's history certain variables become permanent while others fade away. Therefore "Ants Marching" will be analyzed according to its definitive version on *Under the Table and Dreaming*, with mention of its appearance on *Remember Two Things*, and historical analysis of its most important live iterations.

Notations do not appear in concert pitch – they are pitched according to the saxophone in use at the time of performance. For many of the works the contribution from LeRoi Moore is improvisational only. For those works a written analysis, including timestamps for recordings, will be provided. Transcriptions for these entries are provided only in the context of bolstering the author's position on Moore's musicianship or to illustrate a historical significance. For example the alto saxophone solo "What Would You Say" from *Under the Table and Dreaming* is edited, while a longer version appears in the song's music video. The full performance is a rarely heard piece of his history that also shows his craftsmanship. A brief notation showing the difference in the two is provided.

## CHAPTER 1

LeRoi Holloway Moore was born on September 7, 1961, in Durham, North Carolina to Albert P. Moore and the former Roxie Holloway.<sup>1</sup> His parents graduated from the historically black North Carolina College, now North Carolina Central University. His mother was one of seven children to graduate with a degree from the school; LeRoi himself was “pre-registered” upon birth due to his parent’s status as alums.<sup>2</sup> His father, known to friends and family as A.P., was a public school teacher who had previously taught in Lynchburg, Virginia.

In 1963 the Moore family, which now included brothers Rodney and Jeffrey, relocated to Charlottesville, Virginia, for A.P.’s new job at Burley Middle School. The Moore family patriarch coached a variety of sports and taught driver’s education at Western Albemarle High School.<sup>3</sup> Virginia was then experiencing a population boom, especially in the “urban corridor” which included Northern Virginia and Richmond. This expansion pushed outward into places like Charlottesville.<sup>4</sup> From 1961 - the year of LeRoi Moore’s birth - to 1968 the city of Charlottesville saw population growth of 15% spurred largely by an increase in military installations and personnel.<sup>5</sup> The Moore family would not only be part of that growing population, but benefit directly from its causes, as

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan Delancey, *Dave Matthews Band*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: ECW Press, 2014), 31-33.

<sup>2</sup> “Like Father, Like Son,” *Carolina Times*, December 9th, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Comments on Mrs. Moore’s obituary article online described A.P. as both a basketball and baseball coach. Courtney Stuart, “Elegant Lady,” *The Hook*, April 22, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Pleasants, “Big Population Growth Seen in State’s Urban Corridor,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, June 11, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Fuller, “State’s Population Growing Faster Than U.s. Rate,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, November 24, 1968.

Roxie began a thirty-year career as a civilian for the United States Army in various roles.<sup>6</sup>

A.P. was a dominating figure with a big outward personality. Roxie, on the other hand, was quiet and reserved with a sharp sense of humor. The soft-spoken LeRoi would inherit his mother's wit and reticence, perhaps in contrast to his authority figure father.<sup>7</sup>

The Moore family's move to Virginia put them two doors down from Roland and Ann Beauford, whose son Carter was four years older than LeRoi.<sup>8</sup> Their parents were soon close friends, and the two would become regular playmates. "For the longest time I thought he was my brother because he was at my house all the time," said Beauford.<sup>9</sup> It was a musical neighborhood; in addition to violinist Boyd Tinsley (who lived down the street) Beauford's father was a jazz musician.<sup>10</sup> Moore's first musical memories are of a Magnus organ, most likely played by his mother. She would be his first musical influence. "My mother played the piano, but at that time we couldn't afford one.



Figure 1.1 - LeRoi Moore's first appearance in print - *The Carolina Times*, December 9th, 1961

<sup>6</sup> Stuart.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Five doors down lived future bandmate/violinist Boyd Tinsley, who they often chided for practicing violin on his front porch. *The Road to Big Whiskey Part 3*, directed by Sam Erickson (Fourty Four Pictures, 2009), accessed November 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JLajK0kVT8>.

<sup>9</sup> Dave Constantin, "In the Zone with Carter Beauford," *Drum!*, September 2009, 30-40.

<sup>10</sup> Delancey, 34.

She liked to play hymns.” Moore said.<sup>11</sup> Music was not his only passion; he was a natural athlete and played football in school. An injury in high school ended his athletic career, though by all accounts he was as talented on the field as he was on stage.<sup>12</sup>

In junior high Moore took up the alto saxophone. His taste in music at that time centered around popular rock and R&B groups. In a 1997 interview with *Windplayer* magazine he mentions Earth, Wind, and Fire specifically.<sup>13</sup> Moore was also drawn to the music of Led Zeppelin, developing a fondness for hard rock that would shape his own musicianship.<sup>14</sup> His junior high music teacher pointed him towards Charlie Parker, and soon the young saxophonist discovered Phil Woods, Bennie Maupin, and Herbie Hancock.<sup>15</sup> After discovering the tenor saxophone his influences widened to include Wayne Shorter and Archie Shepp.<sup>16</sup> Moore began playing professionally around this time, joining Charlottesville’s vibrant musical culture. A frequent gathering place for musicians was a shop owned by engineer and audio repairman Heinz Pors, whose son Norman was a jazz pianist. Alto saxophonist Michael Cogswell worked at the shop part-time and met LeRoi as a high school student looking to purchase reeds.<sup>17</sup> Though he made many friends networking in the Charlottesville music scene, his most frequent collaborator was neighborhood friend and drummer Carter Beauford.<sup>18</sup> The two friends

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<sup>11</sup> Christine Granados, “LeRoi Moore,” *Windplayer*, 1997, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Rosensky, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 23, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Granados, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Sokolowski, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 1, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Granados, 18.

<sup>16</sup> An undocumented conversation with technician Dave Saull includes mention of Stanley Turrentine and his sound concept. Frank Alkyer, “Jeff Coffin – The Art of Openness,” *Downbeat*, October 2012, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Cogswell, phone conversation with author, Lincoln, NE, January 11, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Granados, 18.

were very different – Carter the outgoing, smiling extrovert and LeRoi the reticent introvert.<sup>19</sup>

LeRoi Moore's dream was to attend the Berklee School of Music in Boston.<sup>20</sup> His parents balked at paying for a music school, so he opted to attend James Madison University in nearby Harrisonburg.<sup>21</sup> Majoring in music, Moore soon turned heads by being one of two freshmen to make the top jazz ensemble directed by Dr. George West. The other was pianist Clarence "Butch" Taylor. The two became friendly, with LeRoi expressing a joking concern they might be hazed for making the top ensemble.<sup>22</sup> At the time James Madison University was the top collegiate music program in Virginia. Chris Magee, then a trumpet student at James Madison, recalls that Moore impressed many with his "big sound...[H]e just played like he wasn't afraid of anything." Magee says.<sup>23</sup>

While Moore was making positive strides in the jazz area, his private saxophone instruction was not to his liking. Dr. George Wolfe was the professor of saxophone at James Madison University. Wolfe is a renowned classical saxophonist but his jazz teaching did not resonate with students. Resorting mainly to Jamey Aebersold recordings and Music Minus One play-alongs, his jazz students (including LeRoi Moore) did not reap the benefits of his pedagogy. In contrast to the flourishing jazz ensemble headed by Dr. West, many of the saxophone students became less than excited about studying with Wolfe.<sup>24</sup> Most of Moore's jazz education came from ensemble work, learning the more

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<sup>19</sup> John D'earth, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 17, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Moore mentioned this dream often in conversation, and subsequently surrounded himself musically with Berklee graduates including Norman Pors, Johnny Gilmore, Sal Soghoian, Rashawn Ross, and Jay Pun. Sokolowski.

<sup>21</sup> Norman Pors, phone conversation with author, Lincoln, NE, February 5, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Butch Taylor, interviewed by author, Scottsville, VA, June 1, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Magee recalls that Moore was in the second jazz band, not the first. Chris Magee, phone conversation with author, Frederick, MD, January 22, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Elswick, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 30, 2015.

difficult saxophone soli sections of composers like Toshiko Akiyoshi. He also demonstrated a talented ear and an ability to easily pick out what others were playing.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately it was not enough to sustain him and he dropped out after a semester.<sup>26</sup> “It’s a shame there wasn’t more there for him,” Magee says of James Madison.<sup>27</sup>

Dropping out of college had a lifelong effect on LeRoi Moore’s self-esteem. His humor and kindness was beloved by friends, but it belied an inner monologue of criticism about his life. Butch Taylor described him as “self-deprecating to a fault,”<sup>28</sup> while friend and trumpeter John D’earth goes so far as to call it self-loathing.<sup>29</sup> In rare instances it manifested outward in negativity towards others. It is during this time in his life that he begins using alcohol in excess; his talent for imbibing would be described as “prolific.”<sup>30</sup> He countered his low self-esteem by joking with friends. “All he had to do was start a joke and you’d be on the floor,” D’earth says.<sup>31</sup>

In the fall of 1981 Norman Pors was set to return to Boston and continue at Berklee. He put out word that he was looking for a roommate. Moore took the opportunity to, at the very least, close the geographical distance between himself and Berklee and moved in with Pors that fall. He was not an ideal roommate; Pors would come home from class to parties already in progress. Moore would often invite strangers to come socialize in the already cramped space, usually to join him in a drink.<sup>32</sup> While in

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<sup>25</sup> Moore’s penchant for self-education through active listening would continue his entire life. Taylor, transcript.

<sup>26</sup> Granados, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfe was denied tenure at James Madison University and eventually moved to Ball State University. LeRoi Moore missed studying with renowned jazz tenor saxophonist Gunnar Mossblad by only a few years. Magee, transcript.

<sup>28</sup> “He never thought he was a good player.” Taylor, transcript.

<sup>29</sup> D’earth, transcript.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Pors, transcript.

Boston he obtained work at a local bank in their vault; quite literally in their vault – they sealed him in at night. There was only enough oxygen for him to last through the night, which he spent practicing or listening to records. Moore would say that he loved the reverberation in the vault, and the sound of his saxophone echoing off the walls.<sup>33</sup> He and Pors would attend local jam sessions. When the two were not listening to records or playing music together, Moore would grill Pors about what he was learning at Berklee.<sup>34</sup> Their cohabitation lasted until January of 1982, at which point Moore went back home to Charlottesville.

While the city had always attracted creative minds (saxophonist “Big Nick” Nicholas was a resident, and could be found at local music stores<sup>35</sup>), the Charlottesville LeRoi Moore returned to in 1982 was experiencing an artistic boom. A revitalization of the Downtown Mall area had attracted small businesses of all types. In 1981 Steve Tharp opened a bar and music venue at the old Miller’s Drugstore. “I had always fantasized about creating a jazz club kind of scene,” Tharp says. “You know, everyone wants to be Humphrey Bogart in the corner with a dinner jacket. I had a thought that might work here.”<sup>36</sup> Having an established venue like Miller’s was one more reason for trumpeter John D’earth to move to Charlottesville in 1981 with most of his New York-based band Cosmology. A frequent performer at summer festivals in the city, Cosmology (which at one point included guitarist John Abercrombie) made their residency permanent with D’earth, vocalist Dawn Thompson, and drummer Robert Jospé establishing roots in the

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<sup>33</sup> Sokolowski and Taylor, transcript.

<sup>34</sup> Pors, transcript.

<sup>35</sup> The John Coltrane composition “Big Nick” is his homage to Nicholas. Cogswell, transcript.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence A. Gretson, “Hipster 1.0,” *C-ville Weekly*, August 26, 2015, accessed January 9, 2016, <http://www.c-ville.com/hipster-1-0-generation-created-downtown-mall-scene/>.



area.<sup>37</sup> The burgeoning jazz scene lived alongside styles of every flavor – new-wave bluegrass (Hogwaller Ramblers), rock and roll (Skip Castro Band), world music (Baaba Seth), indie rock (Stephen Malkmus of Pavement), and several musicians who defied classification (Tim Reynolds and Greg). A curious mix of fraternity parties, country club soirees, and alternative coffeehouses meant gigs were there for the taking.

The vibe of the Charlottesville music scene is one of support and positivity, like many college towns with vibrant musical scenes. Half-bohemian, half-ivory tower, the University of Virginia sits at the epicenter of an eclectic mix of art and scholarship in which bands intermingled regularly. Guitarist Sal Soghoian believes that Thomas Jefferson felt those same vibes, thus establishing the university and his home in Charlottesville.<sup>38</sup> It was not uncommon for musicians to go to other clubs and sit in with bands on set break from their own gigs.<sup>39</sup> An amalgamation of styles soon became prevalent, with many musicians playing in several bands of varying genres. So it would not be unusual for LeRoi Moore to invite a violinist like Boyd Tinsley to play with the jazz groups with whom he performed.<sup>40</sup> Author Nevin Martell describes the music scene as “incestuous.”<sup>41</sup> It was this evolving musical culture that Moore returned to after his sojourn in Boston.

One of the first musical ventures he participated in was a weekly jazz workshop at a restaurant and club called C & O. Norman Pors, newly returned to Virginia having

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<sup>37</sup> Giles Morris, “First Trumpet:: John D’earth is ready to release a new album, but the music is only part of the story,” C-ville Weekly, June 11, 2013, accessed January 9, 2016, <http://www.c-ville.com/john-dearth-trumpet-player/>.

<sup>38</sup> Sal Soghoian, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 22, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Cogswell, transcript.

<sup>40</sup> The Road to Big Whiskey Part 2, directed by Sam Erickson (Fourty Four Pictures, 2009), accessed November 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JLajK0kVT8>.

<sup>41</sup> Nevin Martell, *Dave Matthews Band: Music for the People*, rev. ed. (New York: Gallery Books, 2004), 7.

PIEDMONT, Charlottesville, Virginia, Saturday, September 4, 1982 5

## Area Jazz Workshop Starts Sunday at C&O

"Experience authentic jazz" — That's what is written on flyers which are posted around town, and that is what the jazz workshop will try to create, an authentic jazz sound.

Beginning on Sunday from 7 to 12 p.m., a jazz workshop will be held at the C&O on Water Street, each week. The public is invited to come in the listen, or even participate in playing jazz music.

The organizer of this event is Norman Pors. Pors is a jazz pianist and a graduate of the famous Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he majored in jazz performance, jazz arranging and composition.

The jazz workshop was formed with some specific goals in mind. It is intended for players and students to have a chance to perform jazz pieces in a live situation, where before the chances to do so were few and far between. Also, it will offer an opportunity to arrangers and composers to present their material so they may hear their music performed.

Pors emphasizes that the

"It is my definite aim to make the workshop an educational experience as well as making it a listening event."

— Norman Pors

workshop is not a "run-of-the-mill jam session."

"It is my definite aim to make the workshop an educational experience as well as making it a listening event." He added, "I would really like to give people this chance to play and listen to some real jazz, because jazz in it's authentic form is very exiting and seems to have a magic of its own."

The musicians of the house band include Mike Cogswell, alto sax; Lerio Moore, tenor sax; Rob Otis, guitar; Carter Beauford, drums and Pete Spaar, bass.

Figure 1.2 – Piedmont Magazine article on the C & O Jazz Workshop – courtesy of Michael Cogswell

## A Night at the C & O Jazz Improv

by Peter Buchanan

It's 6:30 on Sunday, September 19, and the members of the C&O Restaurant's Jazz Improv house band are tuning up. Norman Pors, the pianist, turns around to the rest of the band. "Let's try to keep the solos short tonight guys," he says. "If they get too long, then people get bored. But, as always, if it feels good go ahead."

Pors' words describe the essence of jazz: spontaneity within the widest musical boundaries. Since its inception in late August, Jazz Improv Night at the C&O Downstairs Bar has provided an atmosphere in which aspiring amateur jazz musicians can mix it-up with established pros. Anyone with an instrument and a penchant for be-bop or swing can sign up to jam with the boys in the C&O band.

Pors begins a few deft scales on his piano. Carter Beauford hits his drums intently, one by one. Leroy Moore runs his fingers rapidly along the neck of his tenor saxophone while, Joe Briggs plucks his bass, his head crunched low over the frets. Their mood is decidedly casual. As of tonight the band doesn't even have a name.

As they warm-up, the band members toss around ideas for a name. "Jazz Inception" is too fusion. "The Sentinels" is too new



wave. They settle on "Conception." But when they take the floor, Moore announces, "We're the house band here at the C&O." "Conception" has been scrapped.

Michael Cogswell, the organizer of the weekly event, is a fourth-year music major at the University. He normally plays alto sax with the group but has to hit the books later, so he'll only sit in on a couple of tunes tonight. Says Cogswell, "the first week, it was full. We had advertised, put up posters, and we went on WTRU. It's a matter of promotion really. The second week the room was overflowing, but the third week it was only half full. The band members are uneasy. They wonder how many people will show tonight."

The band begins with "Sum-

meruntime," from George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," and then launches into a piece written by pianist Pors. Moore's sax begins with an upbeat melody. The others join in and they begin trading chords, playing together for four bars, then improvising solos for four. As the set continues they reveal the breadth of their repertoire, playing pieces by Sonny Rollins, Oleo Henry, Keith Jarrett and Miles Davis.

The C&O does give the house band one big privilege. They are allowed to set up on the dance floor, which means their music flows straight to the back of the room. From the stage, sound bounces off a brick wall first, before it reaches its audience, making it less pure. The group's sound is crisp and clean.

In addition to good acoustics, the C&O's Downstairs Bar provides a great atmosphere for jazz. The darkness and high ceiling give it the aura of a cave. The room is long, and brick-walled. Black, wooden rafters traverse the length of the ceiling. It looks old, and this gives it an intimacy that makes one feel



Michael Cogswell, and Leroy Moore jam at the C&O Sunday night Jazz Improv; photo by Ellen McBride

close to the music.

By the start of the second set, the bar is over half full, and the first "sitting-in" guest is up. He is Steve McNerney, 30, an alto sax player. Cogswell leans over and says, "He's only been playing eight months. I love his sound."

McNerney's first piece is an original composition, a lilting, slow-paced song called "Blues for a Monday Afternoon." Next comes a leisurely version of Charlie Parker's "A Night in Tunisia." McNerney can play all the notes and has a rich tone, but he has not yet learned to play fast.

"I always wanted to play the sax," McNerney says. "and I was in the mood to fulfill my dreams. Right now, I'm not even good enough to play ballads at weddings. And I want to be good, really good."

McNerney's teacher is Cogswell, who is the next "sitting-in" guest. The band plays "Equinox" by John Coltrane, and Cogswell and Moore trade solos.

Carter Beauford takes off on a two minute drum jam, complete with rim shots and rolls on the rototoms, flat drums with a "punchy" report. The band is playing together better at this point, apparently inspired by the increasing size of their audience, gathered at the bar and cafe tables.

After "Equinox," Moore moves to the side, to hear Cogswell's rendition of "I'm in the Mood for Love."

Later, the band gets a request to play "Summertime" again. It sounds faster, tighter, just plain better than before. They trade chords. The crowd claps. It's not hard to reach the audience once it gets here.

Figure 1.3 – LeRoy Moore's first print appearance as a musician – courtesy of Michael Cogswell



graduated from Berklee, had established the workshop. It included Moore, alto saxophonist Michael Cogswell, and Carter Beauford among others. The workshop was designed for beginners and professionals alike to have a place to play straight ahead jazz and work on their musicianship. Though they had met years earlier, the C & O workshop would be the first time Moore and Cogswell would play together. Cogswell said of Moore "...he had big ears, and he listened to everything."

The other performance opportunity that year was in the newly formed John D'earth Quintet. Firmly rooted in Charlottesville by 1982, D'earth began a Thursday night residency at Miller's that continues to the present. His quintet lists LeRoi Moore as a founding member. D'earth was drawn to Moore's unique voice on the saxophone; he called Moore his favorite saxophonist to perform with. "He played the idea of jazz," D'earth said.<sup>42</sup> He goes on to tout the saxophonist's musicianship:

LeRoi Moore is unique. He needs more credit than he gets. He's basically a self-directed musician who's incredible talented. When there's pressure to show off your chops, he always tries to get to the center of the music I have such respect for his playing.<sup>43</sup>

That year Moore cofounded, along with D'earth and Cogswell, the Charlottesville Swing Orchestra. The group played dance band numbers, arranged by D'earth, for country club parties. They had a regular gig every other Sunday at The Boar's Head Inn, a local resort. Moore was a frequent patron of the bar there, which caused him to get into some trouble.<sup>44</sup> While the saxophonist was renowned for his sense of humor on rare occasions he would drink and be rude to customers at the Inn; the manager demanded D'earth fire Moore or risk never being hired again. D'earth would do as instructed, find someone to

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<sup>42</sup> D'earth, transcript.

<sup>43</sup> Delancey, 41.

<sup>44</sup> "He was a heavy drinker." Cogswell, transcript.

fill in, and slowly rehabilitate Moore back into management's good graces. This cycle would usually repeat itself after a few weeks.<sup>45</sup> His kindness and sense of humor made it easy for friends to stick up for him when he misbehaved; John never completely removed him from the band's lineup.

In the spring of 1984 Moore and Beauford drove west over Interstate 64 to Staunton, Virginia, where Beauford was subbing on a gig.<sup>46</sup> The drummer was playing for the first time with this group of musicians and Moore was tagging along. There he met pianist Michael Sokolowski.<sup>47</sup> Reserved and dressed in a double-breasted suit, Moore



Figure 1.4 – LeRoi Moore with the Charlottesville Swing Orchestra – L to R Moore, Michael Cogswell, John D'earth – photo by Heinz Pors, courtesy of Michael Cogswell

made an impression on Sokolowski from the start, as did Beauford. “Both of these guys were on a very high level,” he recalls, “much higher than we were.” Moore was

welcoming of the group,

welcoming them to the scene

without condescension. “We immediately hit it off,” says Sokolowski.<sup>48</sup> At a time when the jazz community was beginning to splinter, Moore was interested in music of any

<sup>45</sup> D'earth, transcript.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Sokolowski, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 1, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Sokolowski recalls that “Owner of a Lonely Heart” by Yes was popular on the radio at the time. The song spent 23 weeks on the Billboard chart after being released in October of 1983, indicating that Sokolowski's recollection of meeting Moore in the spring of 1984 is correct. “Yes - Chart History,” Billboard, accessed August 29, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/431615/yes/chart>.

<sup>48</sup> Sokolowski, transcript.

genre done well.<sup>49</sup> A personal and musical friendship began between the two. Sokolowski eventually moved to Charlottesville where he and Moore would perform duo gigs as well as in the pianist's fusion group, at first called Soko.<sup>50</sup> Of the latter Moore was more of a rotating member, often dropping in on gigs and albums. Sokolowski was also struck by the lack of artifice in the saxophonist's playing, later writing that "he didn't play an inauthentic note."<sup>51</sup>

Sometime the next year LeRoi Moore and Carter Beauford dropped in on a local jam session at a club names Sophie's where they met bassist Houston Ross. "My band, The Projects, was more or less the house band," Ross says. Though not formally trained, Ross made such an impression on the two that they "brought him downtown" to the jazz scene happening around Miller's.<sup>52</sup> The bassist would be part of several projects with Moore, including Sokolowski's group. The two would eventually join forces with Carter Beauford to start a group that was completely free – rather than work up songs they would improvise their entire set. Moore called the group The Basics, and when Beauford left Virginia to do work in Los Angeles another local drummer from the old neighborhood, Johnny Gilmore, stepped in.<sup>53</sup> This trio of Moore, Ross, and Gilmore soon became the band to see.<sup>54</sup> "He could play anything," Ross says. Both Ross and Sokolowski note his high intelligence and sense of humor, though Ross says Moore was a

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<sup>49</sup> By 1984 Wynton Marsalis held firmly to the title of "Young Lion" and his success greatly upset the jazz establishment. Already blossoming into a polarizing entity, his criticisms of fusing jazz and rock together would be at odds with LeRoi Moore's musical values. See "A Life in Music: Wynton Marsalis" by Nicholas Wroe, published in *The Guardian* in July 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Sokolowski, transcript.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Sokolowski, "Leroi Moore R.i.p. (Reprinted from Myspace Blog)," Sokoband, August 19, 2008, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://sokobandmusic.blogspot.com/2009/12/leroi-moore-rip-reprinted-from-myspace.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Houston Ross, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 25, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Sokolowski, transcript.

“button pusher.”<sup>55</sup> Of Moore’s playing the bassist says the world did not see him at the height of his artistry; his time with The Basics and later Charlottesville jazz groups represented his most creative output.<sup>56</sup>

A prevailing myth concerning LeRoi Moore’s early career is his involvement with the fusion band Secrets. Though Secrets contained many of his co-conspirators – Beauford, Butch Taylor, and guitarist Tim Reynolds among them – Moore was never a member.<sup>57</sup> In fact the band already had a saxophonist – Steve Wilson from Richmond. Wilson and Moore were acquaintances, having played together in the early part of the decade in Harrisonburg. Wilson describes him as shy, humble, and without bravado. Wilson also fell victim to Moore’s legendary sense of humor, saying any time they spoke “he had me in stitches.” The two spoke often of saxophones, equipment, and influential players.<sup>58</sup> Though Moore was close with Wilson and many other members of Secrets, he was never a member. He was invited to sit in and brought his tenor to a gig, but upon hearing Wilson play slid his horn under the table with his foot to avoid being called up.<sup>59</sup>

While his calendar was filled with gigs Moore was increasingly unhappy as the 1980’s reached its midway point.<sup>60</sup> He was working a blue-collar job in the laundry room at the University of Virginia hospital, as well as other odd jobs.<sup>61</sup> Health issues were also

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<sup>55</sup> During Houston Ross’s interview, Michael Sokolowski was present and offered further insight. Ross, transcript.

<sup>56</sup> In another example of the “incestuous” nature of the Charlottesville music scene, Ross would go on to play with Tim Reynolds as a member of TR3. Ross, transcript.

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, transcript.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson describes Moore as having a “wide perspective” on the saxophone, discussing Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Charlie Parker among others. Steve Wilson, phone conversation with author, Harrisonburg, VA, June 14, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, transcript.

<sup>60</sup> Of his playing Michael Cogswell said “he was getting better.” Cogswell, transcript.

<sup>61</sup> Cogswell, D’earth, transcript, and Martell.

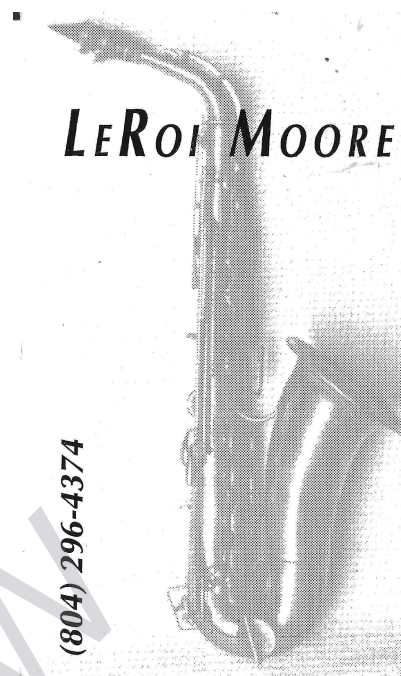
a concern – Moore was diabetic and required a cornea transplant at one point.<sup>62</sup> In 1986 Albert, the Moore family patriarch, passed away leaving him the male head of the family.<sup>63</sup> The quiet, good-natured saxophonist turned increasingly to substance abuse to ease his burdens.<sup>64</sup> He could be contentious at gigs, often playing outside the chord changes if displeased. The more displeased he was, the more outside he tended to play.<sup>65</sup>

“Roi was a moody performer,” said guitarist Jamal

Millner.<sup>66</sup> On some gigs with The Basics, Moore would start a song only to leave the stage and take up residence

at the bar. With his bandmates beckoning he would continually brush them off until the end of the song. After ending the song the cycle would repeat, though these musical tantrums were rare.<sup>67</sup> An existential crisis seemed to be plaguing Moore, though that is speculation. Still he seemed to be in limbo – working manual labor by day and playing by night. “If you don’t watch out you could be doing that for thirty years,” Cogswell says.<sup>68</sup>

The one constant was his improvement on the saxophone and as a musician. He was a voracious listener. Many nights, if not playing, Moore could be found at local radio



*Figure 1.5 – LeRoi Moore’s business card c. 1990 – courtesy of Jamal Millner*

<sup>62</sup> Elswick, transcript.

<sup>63</sup> The responsibility he felt toward his family weighed heavily on Moore all his life. Dave Saull, phone conversation with author, Lincoln, NE, February 4, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Of the well-known cliché Ross says he and Moore were more into the “drugs and rock and roll” aspect. Ross and D’earth, transcript.

<sup>65</sup> D’earth.

<sup>66</sup> Jamal Millner, interviewed by author, Charlottesville, VA, June 22, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Ross, transcript.

<sup>68</sup> Cogswell, transcript.