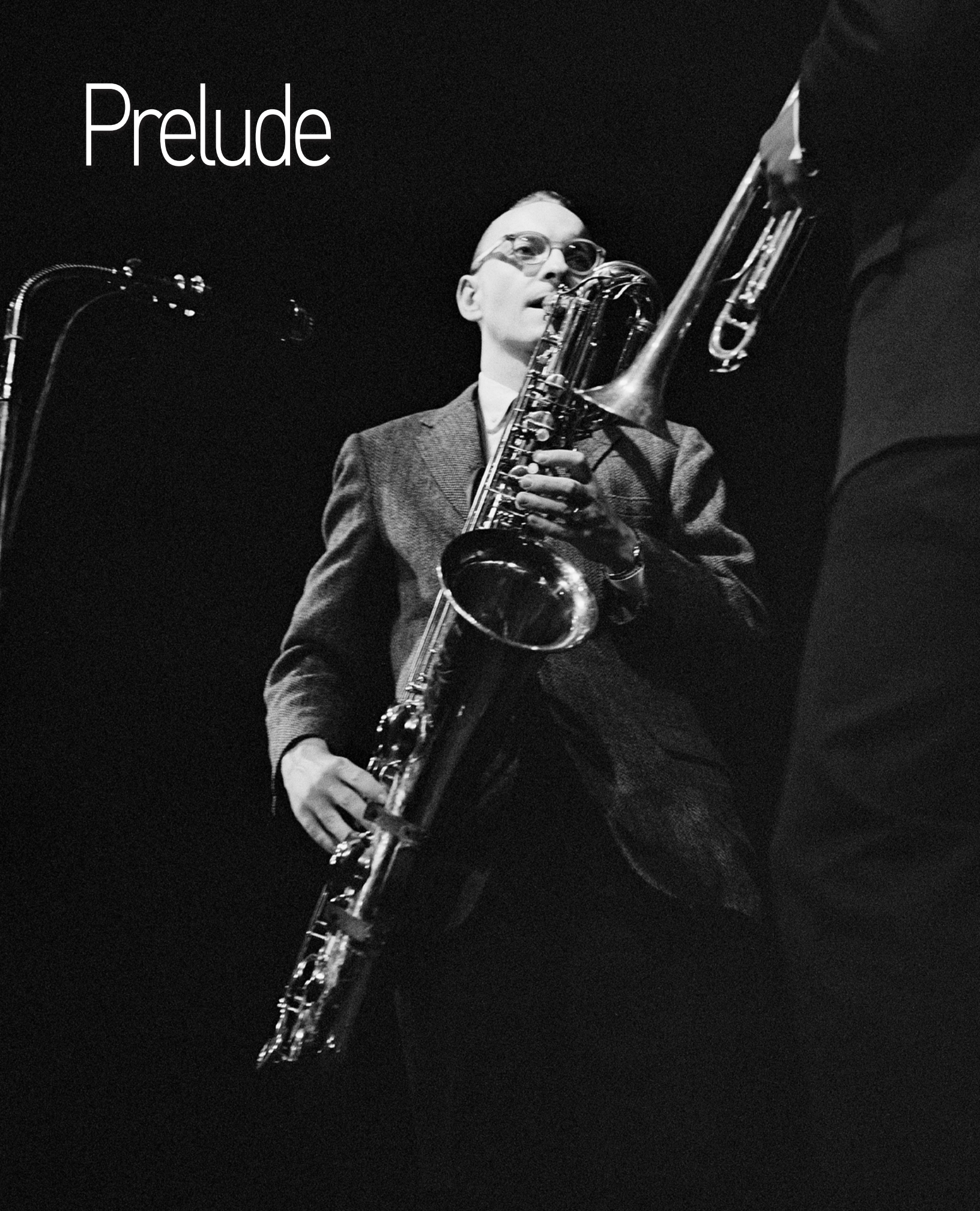


Prelude



Man On a Mission

Even musicians with sterling reputations can be overlooked. That's the case with Pepper Adams, the highly influential baritone saxophonist known for his sideman work with Charles Mingus and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. But not many people know that Adams was also a fine composer. It's an oversight that jazz historian Gary Carner is attempting to correct.

Carner produced *Joy Road: The Complete Works of Pepper Adams* (Motéma), a five-volume set that puts Adams' 43 compositions in a contemporary context. The complete set is available digitally. Two recordings — from vocalist Alexis Cole and a sampler from all five volumes — are available on CD.

Adams and Carner became friends in 1984, two years before the saxophonist died of lung cancer at age 55. At the time, Carner was collecting material for a planned biography of the musician. That's when he discovered Adams had written dozens of compositions, sending Carner on his 28-year quest to re-establish Adams' place in jazz history. "How many players were this dominant on their instrument, respected by an entire generation of players after them, and wrote such a large body of work?" Carner asks rhetorically. "There are great players who stand the test of time who don't get their due, and Pepper Adams is one."

The *Joy Road* series includes trio and quartet sessions led by pianist Jeremy Kahn, and a sextet helmed by baritone saxophonist Frank Basile. Carner notes that he wanted a variety of settings to showcase the versatility of Adams' compositions. All five volumes are full of fine, solid performances that showcase the tricky but subtle harmonic complexities Adams weaved into a straightahead format. Carner points to Adams' ballads as the best examples of his work. "They harken back to that moodiness of Billy Strayhorn," he says. "They inhabit that really extraordinary place. When you listen to a Pepper ballad, you feel transformed, sort of like a 'Chelsea Bridge' or a 'Day Dream.'"

Carner is scheduled to record Volume Six — a big-band outing featuring the University of Illinois Concert Jazz Band — in the spring. Presently he's still working on the Adams biography, continuing the mission he set for himself nearly three decades ago.

"For me," Carner says, "it's just become a crusade because it's the right thing to do."

—John Frederick Moore



Rio Sakairi

Sweet Relief

Rio Sakairi will never forget when her mother-in-law called — on March 11, 2011 — and told her to turn on the television. One of the worst earthquakes in history had devastated the coast of Japan, not far from where Sakairi grew up. "It's happening, but it's surreal," Sakairi recounted recently in a cozy coffee shop on Manhattan's Upper West Side. "I remember the Twitter feed on one of the news sites. Half of the tweets were people from all over the world sending love and encouragement, and the other half were people in Japan responding to them. I realized that sending thoughts and prayers does a lot to lift the spirit." Inspired, Sakairi channeled her grief into creating her own prayer to send.

Home: Gift of Music, released in September by Sunnyside Records, is a manifesto of hope, in eight songs, dedicated to the victims of the earthquake. All of the services required for production, from studio time to marketing, were donated, and all proceeds will go to Habitat for Humanity Japan to help rebuild homes. The album features an eclectic bunch of talented musicians, including Becca Stevens, Doug Wamble, Claudia Acuña, Gretchen Parlato, Alan Hampton and John Ellis. Each was recruited by Sakairi, whose work as the Director of Programming at the Jazz Gallery has earned her a place at the heart of the New York City jazz scene and a reputation for possessing impeccable artistic standards and creative vision. *Home* is a resounding affirmation of that reputation.

Excluding the only cover — an aptly chosen rendition of Abbey Lincoln's "Music is the Magic," sung by Acuña — all of the tracks were written specifically for the album in the span of about a week. "There was no rehearsal," explained Sakairi. "We had one day in the studio. Everyone did a song in one or two takes." The experience was new to Sakairi, who had never been inside a studio before. "Producing has always been something I wanted to do, so I just went for it."

Each of the songs is delivered with care and sincerity. Taken together, they convey a single message, which is plainly stated by 10 distinct voices — young and old, male and female — on a brief opening track, then again on the closing seconds of the final track. "*Gambare nippon*," the voices urge. "Hang in there." —Casey Donahue