

## CARLA BLEY

Carla Bley was born in Oakland, California in 1936. Her father Emil Borg, a piano teacher and church organist, began giving her music lessons when she was three years old and she was soon playing at church functions. But her musical education ended at the age of eight. Her formal education stopped entirely when she dropped out of high school after completing the tenth grade.

During her adolescence Carla was drawn to jazz and moved to New York City to be closer to the musicians she admired. She resumed her musical education by working as a cigarette girl at the notorious Birdland jazz club, where she was able to hear the greatest jazz musicians of the day. She met pianist Paul Bley and eventually relocated to Los Angeles, where Paul and his quartet had a steady gig at the Hillcrest Club. She began to write music. When saxophonist Ornette Coleman came on the scene in the mid-fifties, Paul Bley immediately hired him and Carla was exposed nightly to 'free' playing, a powerful influence that was to affect her writing for many years.

In the early sixties Paul and Carla returned to New York. Soon George Russell, Jimmy Giuffre, Tony Williams and others began to play and record her compositions. During this period she also worked in the cloakrooms of Basin Street and the Jazz Gallery in order to hear as much music as possible. She was a member of The Jazz Composer's Guild and met composer Michael Mantler at the meetings. They formed a group called The Jazz Composer's Orchestra, and soon became personally involved; she left Paul Bley and moved in with Michael Mantler. In 1966 they had a daughter, Karen, who was to be Carla's only offspring.

At the end of the sixties Gary Burton recorded Carla's first extended work, A Genuine Tong Funeral. Shortly after, Charlie Haden asked her to arrange and write for The Liberation Music Orchestra. Her next major work, with words by Paul Haines, Escalator Over The Hill, was recorded on the Jazz Composer's Orchestra Association's label, JCOA. It received the French award Oscar du Disque de Jazz. Soon she and Michael Mantler founded The New Music Distribution Service, which distributed independent recordings.

In 1972 Carla received a Guggenheim Fellowship. She and Mantler started their own record company, WATT. Its first release was Carla's Tropic Appetites, another project with poet Paul Haines. In 1974 The Ensemble, a group of New York players, commissioned a piece for chamber orchestra. Titled  $\frac{3}{4}$ , it was conducted by Dennis Russell Davies and featured pianist Keith Jarrett. It was later performed by Speculum Musicae featuring Ursula Oppens, and recorded for the WATT label with Carla as the soloist. In 1975 she was in a band with Jack Bruce and Mick Taylor, and lived in London for six months. After the band prematurely broke up she returned home and decided to start her own band. Over the next six years the Carla Bley Band, which consisted of six horns and a rhythm section, toured Europe and Japan, and made five albums on the WATT label. The band also recorded a movie soundtrack for the Claude Miller film Mortelle Randonee and played Carla's arrangement of Nino Rota's music for 8  $\frac{1}{2}$  on Hal Willner's Fellini tribute album. During this period she also did recording projects for other labels with Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason, Stuff, and Charlie Haden.

Carla's next regular group was an enlarged rhythm section without horns, but she still made recordings with larger groups. Heavy Heart, then Night-Glo, the album she wrote for her bass player (and soon to be partner) Steve Swallow, were her next projects for the WATT label. The music on these two albums was not well received by the jazz establishment or her public but she managed to be voted Best Composer by Downbeat magazine before her fall from favor. She also received the Deutscher Schallplattenpreis. Two more arrangements for Hal Willner tribute albums, of Theolonius Monk's Misterioso featuring Johnny Griffin and Kurt Weill's Lost in the Stars featuring Phil Woods, were also recorded during this time. Misterioso was nominated for a Grammy for Best Jazz Instrumental, Big Band.

The Carla Bley Sextet, with Hiram Bullock, Larry Willis, Steve Swallow, Victor Lewis and Don Alias, toured in 1986 and recorded an album for WATT. An extension label called XtraWATT was started to record the music of friends and family. It produced an album by Steve Weisberg, released a live recording of a Sicilian Big Band playing orchestrations of Carla's music by Jeff Friedman and a series of albums by Carla's daughter, Karen Mantler. Soon it became the label for all of Steve Swallow's projects.

She received a commission from The Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society and wrote a piece featuring Fred Sherry, Paula Robison and Ani Kavafian called Coppertone. Soon after, she wrote Romantic Notions, a set of short piano pieces, for Ursula Oppens.

Playing duets with Steve Swallow, which started as recreation, soon turned professional and Steve and Carla toured and recorded as a duo regularly for five years. Their first album was called Duets. They were guests on the short-lived NBC TV Night Music series, produced by Hal Willner and hosted by David Sanborn. During that time she also worked with a 15-piece band and recorded the album Fleur Carnivore, then started writing for the standard Big Band instrumentation. Another album, Dreamkeeper, arranged for Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra, won the Downbeat Record of the Year award. She also was named Best Composer by Jazz Times magazine and Jazz Musician of the Year by Hi Fi Vision.

In the fall of 1990 she was a visiting professor at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA. During the semester she took off time to tour Europe and record The Very Big Carla Bley Band. The album received the Prix Jazz Moderne from the French Academy du Jazz.

She and Michael Mantler separated in early 1991. Soon after, Carla and Steve Swallow began living together. A second Duets album, Go Together, was recorded during the summer of 1992. A commission from the Glasgow Jazz Festival resulted in a piece for violin and Big Band, called Birds of Paradise. It featured Rumanian violinist Alex Balanescu.

The 'Very Big Band' toured Europe in the fall of 1993 and recorded another album, Big Band Theory, which included Birds of Paradise, at a studio in London. The album was nominated for a Grammy in the Best Jazz Big Band category. During the remainder of the year Carla performed only with Steve Swallow, but eventually saxophonist Andy Sheppard was added to the duo. The trio toured Europe and recorded a live album called Songs With Legs.

In 1994 Carla finished *Tigers In Training*, a piece commissioned by the Hamburg-based chamber group, L'Art Pour L'Art, and wrote a piece for the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band. In 1995 she and Steve played Duets in Brazil, and worked with local Big Bands, first in Sandvika, Norway, then at the Cornish Institute in Seattle. In November, Carla's Big Band premiered a commissioned piece, *Setting Calvin's Waltz*, at the Berlin Jazz Festival. This was followed by another European Duets tour. She got to hear all the music she had recently been writing for classical musicians at the 300<sup>th</sup> Jazz Workshop at the North German radio station in Hamburg. A new piece, *End of Vienna* was premiered there.

In early 1996 Carla, Steve and Andy Sheppard performed a piece in Grenoble, France that had been commissioned by the Grenoble Jazz Festival. Based on cutouts by Henri Matisse, it was called *Les Trois Lagons*. In July there was another Big Band tour, which culminated in three days of live recording at a famous church in Perugia, Italy during the Umbria Jazz Festival. The album was called *The Carla Bley Big Band Goes To Church*. Later in the summer, a Big Band made up entirely of musicians from New York played the new pieces at jazz festivals in Detroit and Chicago. She spent the rest of the year writing chamber music.

In 1997 Carla had a week's residency at the Barbican Center in London. This was followed by a British Arts Council tour of England. In June she went to Cologne, Germany for the first live production of *Escalator Over The Hill*, then played at the Montreal Jazz Festival with the trio. In August her Big Band played at a festival in Belgium, and Carla and Steve went to Helsinki, Finland to work with a local Big Band. This was followed by a tour and recording of *Fancy Chamber Music*, Carla's collected music written for non-improvising musicians.

Carla and Steve were invited to Denmark to take part in a program called Jazzvisits. They lived in Copenhagen for a month and worked with various groups of Danish musicians. *Escalator Over The Hill*, with a 24-piece band including Paul Haines, was presented at European Jazz Festivals in July. Carla and Steve recorded a Duets album, *Are We There Yet?*, during a tour in the fall of 1998. Carla spent the rest of the winter preparing music for her new group, called 4X4.

In April of 1999 4X4 made its premiere at a nightclub in Tokyo. In July the group, which consisted of four horns and four rhythm, toured Europe and recorded an album in Oslo. Later in the year, Carla and Steve played Trios with Andy Sheppard in Europe. She spent the winter writing and re-orchestrating chamber music. In March of 2000, Carla and Steve went to Tokyo to play a Fancy Chamber Music concert with members of the New Japan Philharmonic. It was the first performance of a new piece called *First Date*. They formally retired the Duets format after a concert in Sao Paulo the next month.

Thierry Paul Benizeau, who had previously made a film about *Escalator Over The Hill*, came to New York and filmed a portrait of Carla that included a Trios concert at a gallery in Woodstock. He continued filming the following month at a Fancy Chamber Music concert in Verona, Italy. 4X4 toured Europe again in the fall of 2000. During the next few years Carla and Steve worked with various Big Bands (in the USA, Luxembourg, Italy and Portugal) including her own (Europe) and toured with Trios (Europe and Korea). When Carla wasn't touring she was writing music for her next Big Band album.

In the fall of 2002 Carla recorded Looking For America at a studio in New York. It was nominated for a Grammy in the "best large jazz ensemble album" category. The following year she played the music from that album with musicians from New York at the Iridium in Manhattan, then took the band to Minnesota to play a concert in Minneapolis. Carla's Big Band drummer, Billy Drummond, was added to Trios and the new group was called The Lost Chords. Their first concert was in Austria in August of 2003. That fall they toured Europe, recorded some of the concerts, and released a live album called The Lost Chords.

During the winter Carla wrote and arranged music for Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra. She toured Europe with that group the following summer and recorded the album Not In Our Name in Rome. Later that year they played a night at the Village Vanguard in New York. In November The Lost Chords had another European tour. Carla's next project was a piece for Big Band commissioned by the Monterey Jazz Festival.

During 2005 The Lost Chords worked in America. Their schedule included appearances at the Newport Jazz Festival and a week at Iridium in New York City followed by a two-week tour of the West Coast. Appearing Nightly At The Black Orchid, the piece Carla had written for the Monterey Jazz Festival, was premiered at that festival in September. When the Lost Chords tour was over Carla played a week at the Blue Note in New York with the Liberation Music Orchestra, then went on a fall tour with that band in Europe.

Michael Kaufmann, director of programming at the Philharmonie in Essen, Germany, invited Carla to be artist in residence for a year. The first program she brought to Essen was Fancy Chamber Music, performed with Steve Swallow and musicians from the area. She spent the early months of 2006 writing music for an upcoming big band tour scheduled for the summer, then returned to Essen twice in April, first to prepare and perform a concert with a student big band, and later to re-create Escalator Over The Hill with a mostly new cast.

In the summer of 2006 the Carla Bley Big Band toured Europe for three weeks and recorded a live album at the New Morning in Paris. In August Carla and Steve went to Sardinia and worked with Orchestra Jazz Della Sardegna, then flew to Hamburg and presented a similar program with the NDR Big Band. Another tour with the Liberation Music Orchestra took place in November. In December Carla completed her residency at the Essen Philharmonie with a program written especially for the event, called Carla's Christmas Carols.

During the winter of 2007 she worked on music for her new quintet, The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu. The Banana Quintet was written during this period. The group's tour, in the spring of the year, concluded with a recording (Watt/34) at Studio La Buissonne in the south of France. She asked ECM if it would be possible to release Watt/34 (The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu) before Watt/33 (the big band album, Appearing Nightly, which was due to be released in a few months) and ECM agreed.

Carla and Steve went to Toronto to rehearse and perform Carla's music with a Canadian big band at the Art Of Jazz Festival. Later in the summer Carla made a few appearances with the Liberation Music Orchestra at jazz festivals in the Northeast.

Carla and Steve returned to La Buissonne to mix the quintet album in August, and then continued on to the south of Italy and played with the quintet at a festival in Rocella Ionica. In September they rehearsed and performed Carla's big band music with a young Dutch big band at a jazz festival in Rotterdam.

In the fall the quintet with Paolo toured Europe. ECM managed to have the new album released at the same time as the tour. This was an unusual and, for Carla, unprecedented advantage that allowed the album to get extensive promotional coverage resulting in great reviews and strong sales. The big band album was re-scheduled for release the following summer.

Michael Kaufmann asked Carla if she could envision a program involving any other of the artists who had been in residency at the Essen Philharmonie, to be performed in November of 2008. She decided to work on a revision of an earlier piece called 3/4, and to feature fellow resident Uri Caine as the piano soloist. During the rest of the year she prepared music for that program, which would also include other music she had written, and worked on new material for an upcoming trio tour with Andy Sheppard and Steve Swallow. During the holiday season she couldn't resist arranging another Christmas carol for brass quintet.

In April, 2008 the trio of Carla, Steve and Andy Sheppard had a mini American tour consisting of a week at Birdland in New York City, a night at a jazz club in Boston and four days rehearsing and performing with the student band at the University of Vermont in Burlington. Short but sweet. In early summer Carla toured Europe with The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu.

In August The Lost Chords found another trumpet player, Michael Rodriguez, and took him with them to the southern tip of Israel for an appearance at The Red Sea Festival. It was hot as an oven but they had a great time, when they weren't rehearsing or performing, exploring the area. The following month Carla played with The Liberation Music Orchestra – first at Duke University in North Carolina then in Minneapolis. The Lost Chords Find Michael Rodriguez soon had another exciting trip; they went to Brazil for concerts in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Vittoria. In November Carla and Steve went to Essen and performed 3/4, featuring Uri Caine. At that concert Carla also played trios with Andy Sheppard and Steve Swallow, and made a rare appearance as a solo pianist, playing her collection of short pieces called Romantic Notions.

Carla and Steve went directly to Bari, Italy, and rehearsed with the Partyka Brass Quintet in preparation for a whirlwind Christmas Carol tour of five countries in five days; they played in Italy, Greece, Germany, Poland and France, then went to the south of France and recorded the album: Carla's Christmas Carols. This marked the end of a record-breaking series of formats in a short time period – from quintet to chamber orchestra to trio to solo to duets with brass quintet. Carla was glad to get back to her desk and spent the winter writing a new piece for trumpet and big band.

In June of 2009 Carla went to London to rehearse and perform with Charlie Haden and the Liberation Music Orchestra for the Meltdown Festival. While she was gone she received the Jazz Journalist's award for Best album of 2008 – Appearing Nightly. Her daughter, Karen, (pretending to be Carla) attended the ceremony and accepted the award. During July The Carla Bley Big Band toured Europe, and Carla got to hear Gates, the new piece she had been working on for the past 8 months.

Steve Swallow wrote an album's worth of music for a quartet that included Carla playing organ. During September his new quartet rehearsed and had its first performances in Italy, Spain and Germany. In October Carla and Steve went to the north of Sweden for 10 days to rehearse and perform Carla's music with the Norrbotten Big Band. To conclude the year's appearances, The Lost Chords reunited for a northern European tour. Carla was presented the German Jazz Trophy for 2009 at a concert in Stuttgart.

Her next, self-inflicted, project was writing a series of 'lead sheets' - music that wasn't arranged for anyone specifically and, in fact, had no instrumental limitations. When she got to the sixth lead sheet she realized that most of them were closely related and destined to become a suite. And at least a couple of them cried out to be pieces for big band. So much for lead sheets.

In April of 2010 Carla and Steve went to Portugal to play a concert of Carla's music with Orchestra de Jazz de Matosinhos. It was followed by Swallow Quartet appearance at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, then a European tour with the quintet, The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu.

The summer was spent writing big band arrangements. In September Carla and Steve went to Sweden to do a series of rehearsals, then a week-long tour with The Bohuslan Big Band. Carla vowed to find a way to work with this band again.

In November and December there were back-to-back European tours, first with the trio - Carla, Steve and Andy Sheppard, then with Steve and the Partyka Brass Quintet playing the Christmas Carols.

The music written for the Bohuslan Big Band became the first music in what was to become a larger project. She continued working on related pieces, and was considering using voices again for the first time in 30 years. She was able to hear some of the instrumental portion of the new project when she and Steve went to Boston in April of 2011 to work with the student big band at the New England Conservatory.

In May Carla joined the Anglo-American version of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra for a concert at the Barbican in London. Charlie asked her to write some new arrangements for the group, and in August the new pieces were played with the original American members of the LMO at jazz festivals in Antwerp and Oslo. There was talk about recording a new album next year.

Steve enlarged his quartet, adding a drummer. The Swallow Quintet toured Europe in October and November 2011, then recorded an album at Studio La Buissonne, in the south of France.

## CARLA BLEY DISCOGRAPHY

### As a leader:

Watt/35	Carla's Christmas Carols
Watt/33	Appearing Nightly
Watt/34	The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu
Watt/32	The Lost Chords
Watt/31	Looking For America
Watt/30	4 x 4
Watt/29	Are We There Yet?
Watt/28	Fancy Chamber Music
Watt/27	Goes to Church
Watt/26	Songs With Legs
Watt/25	Big Band Theory
Watt/24	Go Together
Watt/23	The Very Big Carla Bley Band
Watt/21	Fleur Carnivore
Watt/20	Duets
Watt/17	Sextet
Watt/16	Night-Glo
Watt/14	Heavy Heart
Watt/12-1/2	I Hate To Sing
Watt/12	Live!
Phonogram	Mortelle Randonnee
Watt/11	Social Studies
Watt/09	Musique Mecanique
Watt/08	European Tour 1977
Watt/06	Dinner Music
Watt/01	Tropic Appetites
JCOA	Escalator Over The Hill

### Selected others:

Verve France	Charlie Haden, Not In Our Name
Virgin Classics	Karen Mantler's Pet Project
XtraWatt/02	Steve Swallow, Carla
Blue Note	Charlie Haden, Dreamkeeper
A&M	Various Artists, Lost In The Stars, The Music of Kurt Weill
A&M	Various Artists, That's The Way I Feel Now, A Tribute To Thelonius Monk
Celluloid	Golden Palominos, Drunk With Passion
Hannibal	Various Artists, Amarcord Nino Rota
CBS	Nick Mason, Fictitious Sports
ECM	Charlie Haden, Ballad of The Fallen
Watt/03	Michael Mantler, 13 & 3/4
JCOA	Michael Mantler, The Jazz Composer's Orchestra
Impulse	Charlie Haden, Liberation Music Orchestra
Fontana	Michael Mantler, Jazz Realities
RCA	Gary Burton, A Genuine Tong Funeral