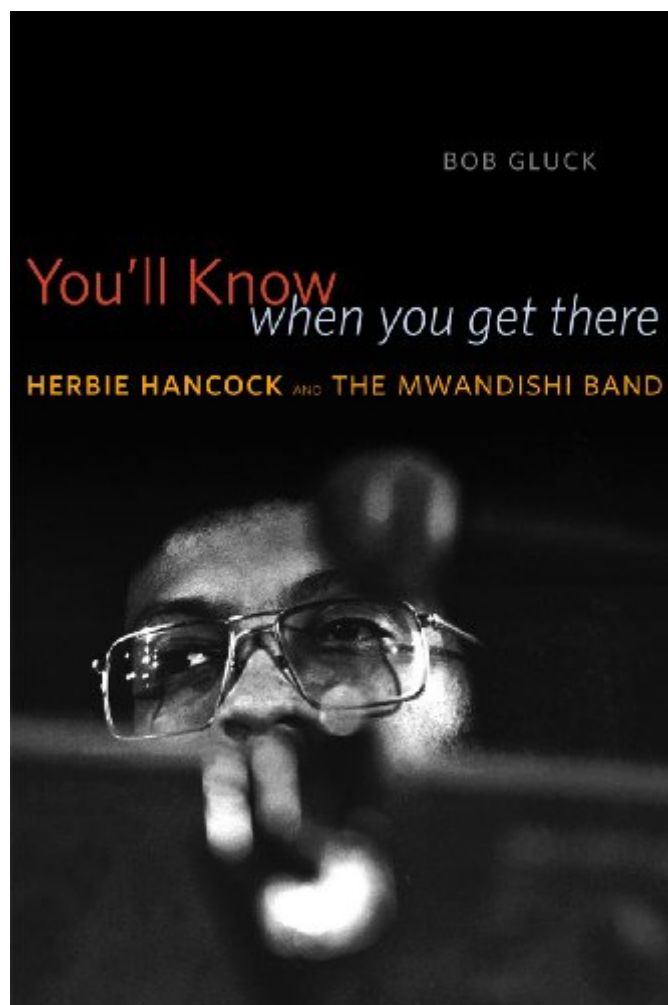


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You'll Know When You Get There: Herbie Hancock And The Mwandishi Band



Synopsis

As the 1960s ended, Herbie Hancock embarked on a grand creative experiment. Having just been dismissed from the celebrated Miles Davis Quintet, he set out on the road, playing with his first touring group as a leader until he eventually formed what would become a revolutionary band. Taking the Swahili name Mwandishi, the group would go on to play some of the most innovative music of the 1970s, fusing an assortment of musical genres, American and African cultures, and acoustic and electronic sounds into groundbreaking experiments that helped shape the American popular music that followed. In *Youâ€™ll Know When You Get There*, Bob Gluck offers the first comprehensive study of this influential group, mapping the musical, technological, political, and cultural changes that they not only lived in but also effected. Beginning with Hancockâ€™s formative years as a sideman in bebop and hard bop ensembles, his work with Miles Davis, and the early recordings under his own name, Gluck uncovers the many ingredients that would come to form the Mwandishi sound. He offers an extensive series of interviews with Hancock and other band members, the producer and engineer who worked with them, and a catalog of well-known musicians who were profoundly influenced by the group. Paying close attention to the Mwandishi bandâ€™s repertoire, he analyzes a wide array of recordingsâ€”many little knownâ€”and examines the groupâ€™s instrumentation, their pioneering use of electronics, and their transformation of the studio into a compositional tool. From protofunk rhythms to synthesizers to the reclamation of African identities, Gluck tells the story of a highly peculiar and thrillingly unpredictable band that became a hallmark of American genius.

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Customer Reviews

If you're a fan of the great jazz pianist/composer Herbie Hancock and especially, the fabulous cosmic/jazz group the Mwandishi Band that he led back in the early 70's, then this marvelous book by jazz historian, pianist, and music professor Bob Gluck is for you. I have waited for years for an in-depth, comprehensive study of Herbie's Mwandishi band (of which I'm a rabid fan), and his book PERFECTLY does this. Gluck does a masterful job in covering the early roots of the band, how it evolved over time, the musicians involved, their philosophy and goals, the daring chances they took with the music, how they created it, and so much more. The Mwandishi band made three studio albums, "Mwandishi" (1971), "Crossings" (1972), and their final swan song, "Sextant" (1973), all of them highly electronic, revolutionary, cosmic, improvisational excursions into uncharted territory. "Mwandishi" was Herbie's Swahili name for the "Composer". The other members of the band, which was a sextet, adopted Swahili names, as well. This was done "for the unifying effect in that when everyone adopted those names it had the effect on each individual joining. They became a unit. It was like we became a family, you know?" Trombonist Julian Priester became Pepo Mtoto which meant "Spirit Child", bassist Buster Williams was "Mchezaji" meaning the "Player of the Art". Drummer Billy Hart was "Jabali" which meant "Energy", trumpeter Dr. Eddie Henderson became "Mgan-ga", the "Doctor of Good Health", and reedman Bennie Maupin was "Mwile At Akya", the "Body of Good Health", as he was the vegetarian in the group. In mid 1972, synthesizer wizard Dr.

If you have any doubt that Hancock's Mwandishi period gets little attention, go to Hancock's own website and read the musical biography contained there. It goes from Herbie playing with Miles straight to Headhunters--no mention at all of Mwandishi. This is a real shame because it's one of the most creative and important periods of his musical career. So I'm happy that someone actually produced a book giving Mwandishi the attention it deserves. The book does a good job with its bio on Hancock, how he got to where he did, describing the musical and cultural setting in which he developed. The late '60s was a time of unbridled musical creativity and adventure. It's all the more remarkable to look back at it with some historical distance and see just how vital a period it was.

The book gives good basic explanations of the theoretical aspects of the music played by Mwandishi: the move away from harmony, incorporation of concepts from the European avant-garde, the unlikely (but successful) fusion of it all with funk. There's also a good discussion of the band's concept of intuitive playing and the spiritual dimension they felt it brought about. I've been listening to "Crossings" and "Sextant" since they first came out but the book gave me some insights that let me hear them anew, and I'm all the more impressed with what an achievement this music was. There are a couple of shortcomings in the book: one is that there's a bit too much blow-by-blow description of performances that aren't available to the general public, and it's not particularly interesting to read detailed descriptions of music that you haven't heard or will never hear.

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