

# BILL WARFIELD

## *Biography*

**Bill Warfield** figured his trumpet-playing days were over when, at age 18, he lost his front teeth in an auto accident. Even though he had them replaced by a permanent plate, he was unable to recapture the strength and tone that had marked his early playing and instead began taking gigs as a pianist. Some months later, however, he had an epiphany while driving a girlfriend on a date when “Spinning Wheel” by Blood, Sweat & Tears came on the radio. It was the first time he’d heard the hit song.

“I remember pulling over to the side of the road when I heard the trumpet solo by **Lew Soloff**,” he recalls. “It just completely knocked me out. I’d never heard anything like it. I decided at that point that I wanted to play the trumpet again.”

Now a noted jazz trumpeter, composer, arranger, bandleader, and educator, Warfield would eventually get to know, study with, and make records with Soloff, who died in 2014 at age 71. Warfield’s latest album, *For Lew* on Planet Arts Records, is a tribute to his late friend compiled from material recorded by his orchestra between 1990 and 2014. Ten of the selections first appeared on four albums by the **Bill Warfield Big Band**—1990’s *New York City Jazz*, 1994’s *The City Never Sleeps*, 2005’s *A Faceless Place*, and 2014’s *Trumpet Story*—while two others were previously unreleased.

Five of the tunes were composed by the leader, and his dynamic, multi-hued arrangements are heard on all but one of the numbers. They were drawn from four different recording sessions, each of which was made up of different players, yet each was a truly all-star affair. Soloff himself was the soloist on one song and played lead trumpet on that and two others. In addition to Warfield, who displays his mastery of the trumpet with solos on three tracks, other world-class soloists among the disc’s collective personnel are trumpeters **Randy Brecker** and **John Eckert**; trombonist **Matt Havan**; saxophonists **Dan Block**, **Andy Fusco**, **Bob Hanlon**, **Rick Perry**, **Chris Potter**, and **Walt Weiskopf**; pianists **Ted Rosenthal** and **Joel Weiskopf**; guitarists **Vic Juris** and **Dave Stryker**; bassist **Mike Richmond**; and drummers **Tim Horner** and **Bob Weller**.

“Lew was such a warm, supportive human being,” Warfield says of Soloff. “When he died, it took me a week to get over it. I patterned my playing after him. I wanted to do the gigs he did. I wanted to sound like him. I wanted to be like him. I wanted to be him. I patterned my whole career after that guy. He was a little nerdy guy who would put a horn in front of his mouth and become Superman.

“He was the guy who got me to take my writing seriously. On the second record I used him on, I used a few other people’s charts. Then he pulled me to the side and said, ‘Look, your writing is really special. You shouldn’t include anybody else’s stuff on your records.’”

Soloff was one the most versatile trumpet players in the history of jazz, among the few who was both a commanding soloist and a powerhouse lead trumpeter. This double duty is evident in his stunning solo and section work on the excitement-filled “**Salsa En Mi Alma**.” Written and arranged by bassist Jeff Fuller, it’s the only tune on *For Lew* that the bandleader didn’t arrange.

“That’s a masterful solo,” he says of Soloff’s improvisation on the tune. “He was very good at that Afro-Cuban trumpet style. He’d played with Machito, Tito Puente, Eddie Palmieri, and a lot of Latin bands.”

*For Lew* opens with a swinging Warfield arrangement of the Burton Lane/Yip Harburg classic “**Old Devil Moon**” from *Finian’s Rainbow*. He and guitarist Dave Stryker play the melody on this previously unissued track, followed by solos from alto saxophonist Andy Fusco and pianist Joel Weiskopf. Lee Morgan’s Latin-tinted “**Totem Pole**” features Warfield and alto saxophonist Dan Block.

Drummer Bob Weller and tenor saxophonist Rich Perry solo on the swinging “**Street Corner Supermarket**,” a Warfield original with a title inspired by a corner one block from his Manhattan apartment where heroin was sold openly. “I used to run into Chet Baker all the time up there,” he recalls.

Warfield’s arrangement of “**In Your Old Sweet Way**,” inspired by Kenny Dorham’s 1960 recording of the Dave Brubeck tune, sports the distinctively voiced harmonies of three flutes, clarinet, and bass clarinet that reflect the influence of Thad Jones. Pianist Ted Rosenthal and trombonist Matt Havan solo.

For the opening of “**Scootzie**,” Warfield borrowed the theme from a song he heard at the annual Junkanoo parade in the Bahamas, which he picked up during a long-term gig with a show band at the Cable Beach Casino in Nassau in 1983 and ’84. Tenor saxophonist Bob Hanlon is the soloist on the song, its title taken from the Bahamian slang term for free-base cocaine.

The swinging “**Tentigo**” was written by Warfield while he was studying with Bob Brookmeyer and is based on the mathematical relationship of the intervals between three notes that was pioneered by Anton Webern. The solos are by trumpeter John Eckert, bassist Mike Richmond, and drummer Tim Horner.

Warfield’s arrangement of John Coltrane’s “**Some Other Blues**,” which he originally wrote for the U.S. Air Force’s Airmen of Note, features solos by the leader and tenor saxophonist Walt Weiskopf and was inspired by the late Baltimore tenor saxophonist Mickey Fields, with whom Warfield had jammed early in his career.

The leader initially scored Charles Mingus’s haunting “**Goodbye Pork Pie Hat**” as an arranging assignment at the Manhattan School of Music. Rick Perry’s solo, Warfield says, “is one of the greatest tenor solos on any of my records.” It was recorded in one take.

Warfield originally wrote “**A Little Circus Music**” in 1978 as “a tongue-in cheek take on disco” for a funk band in Baltimore and later revamped it for his New York big band. Tenor saxophonist Chris Potter, Warfield’s onetime classmate at the Manhattan School, is the sole soloist.

Warfield’s vibrant orchestration of Wayne Shorter’s “**The Three Marias**,” which has no solos, is followed by his original “**When Janie Takes the Stand**.” Guitarist Vic Juris and trumpeter Randy Brecker take the solos. Brecker and Warfield had been friends and colleagues for 20 years before they finally recorded an original project together—“**Trumpet Story**,” in 2014.

**Bill Warfield** was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 2, 1952. He took up trumpet in the fourth grade because, he says, “it looked cool. Because it only had three buttons, I thought it would be easier to play.”

By the time he was 14, Warfield played Saturday mornings with the orchestra and brass ensemble at the Peabody Conservatory Preparatory School and Saturday afternoons with the Maryland Young Symphony, as well as with a teenage soul band called Nina and the Marcells.

After recovering from his accident, he studied for four years at Towson State with **Hank Levy**, an arranger noted for his charts for Don Ellis and Stan Kenton. His other activities during the 1970s including touring with a show band called the Admirals and leading the 15-piece government-funded Port City Jazz Band in Baltimore.

Warfield counts Hank Levy, Fred Lipsius, Dick Halligan, Mike Abene (who would produce his first two big band albums), Michel Colombier, Charles Mingus, Thad Jones, Gil Evans, and Bob Brookmeyer, along with Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Webern, Prokofiev, and other classical composers, as influences on his arranging style.

He moved to New York City in 1980 and began subbing in the **Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra**, playing and arranging for the **Bill Kirchner Nonet**, and copying music for Lester Bowie, Joseph Jarman, and others, as well as earning a master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music. There was even a European tour with **Ornette Coleman**, for which he'd been recommended by Lew Soloff. But during a world tour with Paul Anka in 1982, he blew his chops out. Back in New York, he sought out the help of legendary lead trumpeter **Jimmy Maxwell**, who taught him the correct way to hit high notes.

Warfield has been imparting his vast knowledge to college students since 1987. Following stints at the Dalton School in New York, Brooklyn College, Towson State University in Maryland, and the University of North Florida, he joined the faculty at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1996. He continues to teach and direct the jazz program there three days per week.

His other four days are usually spent in back in Manhattan, where he currently directs four bands: the **New York Jazz Repertory Ensemble**, the **New York Jazz Octet** (which includes tenor saxophonist Don Braden and pianist Kenny Werner), the **Hell's Kitchen Funk Orchestra**, and the **Bill Warfield Big Band**. The big band is one of the most remarkable original and dynamic jazz orchestras extant, proof of which can be found in the dozen brilliant performances that comprise *For Lew*. •

## **The Bill Warfield Big Band: *For Lew***

(Planet Arts Records)

**Street Date:** March 9, 2018

**Web Site:** [www.billwarfield.net](http://www.billwarfield.net)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/HellsKitchenFunkOrchestra](http://www.facebook.com/HellsKitchenFunkOrchestra)

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/GeorgePorgie6](http://www.twitter.com/GeorgePorgie6)

**YouTube:** <http://bit.ly/2yhZO8u>

Media Contact:

Terri Hinte

510-234-8781

[hudba@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hudba@sbcglobal.net)