

# Mp3 Alan Jones Sextet - The Leroy Vinnegar Suite



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A musical tribute by Alan Jones to one of the world's sterling and most influential bassists, this original music reminds you of the classic jazz of the 50's and 60's while fetching you on a ride to where that music has gone. 10 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo, JAZZ: Bebop The Leroy Vinnegar Suite Songs

Details: Alan Jones Keeps the With child Walker's Spirit up Stepping Alan Jones got up from his drum set and walked barefooted to the breast of the stage. He pulled the microphone from its stand and flicked the cord until it was out of his way. The dark jazz club rumbled with laughter and food orders as jazz fans and supporters crammed around crowded tables and into corners of elbow-to-elbow standing room. His white, cotton button down shirt caught flickers from the candles on the tables. He pressed his lips together, sighed, and began speaking. He thanked the crowd; his manager and family, introduced his band, and briefly explained his nine-song suite dedicated to legendary jazz bassist Leroy Vinnegar. What Leroy taught me, has changed my music," he concluded, "I want to give something back for all he gave me; I couldn't have learned it anywhere else." Alan wanted to honor Leroy's influence by composing a jazz suite that represents and speaks of Leroy's personality and musical style. He wrote each song with a specific aspect of Leroy's character in mind. Just like great musicians take from the jazz canon, Alan used Leroy's inspiration as a catalyst for a similar creation. "I'm not just fetching songs Leroy wrote and playing them the way Leroy would play them and calling it a tribute record," he explained during one of his set breaks. "I'm fetching the spirit of what Leroy taught me, of ways that he expressed himself and acted, and of course his musical direction and ideas so that each of the compositions are completely related to an aspect of Leroy, but they are filtered through me, who he influenced." Alan went on. When Leroy played the bass, he understood that each note carried with it an ability to move a person. "He might play two thousand notes in a song and every single one of those notes had to move each person in the audience.

That's a lot of concentration. A lot of energy." And that's exactly what Alan Jones was trying to learn about when he met Leroy twelve years ago. "Music is a bunch of sound waves," Alan tried to explain to me exactly what it is about Leroy's music that was so enticing. "When you hear something, they actually move little cells in your body and have the ability to make you cry." Leroy's innate understanding and ability to play a quarter note in exactly the right place, to propel the music, first attracted Alan to Leroy. Leroy had mastered the motion and precision between one note and the next. He understood that when you hit a note, it goes into people, and that the next note you hit can either perpetuate that motion of entering the body or destroy that motion. This mastery of skill earned Leroy the title "The Master of the Walking Bass." "Walking the bass means fetching even steps forward with the notes," Alan continued. "You can vary the stride, but you can't change the tempo." He pretended to pluck an imaginary bass, bopping his head and saying "bao" with each pretend note. Then, to illustrate the concept of walking the bass, he began "walking" his index and middle finger on the table in front of us, keeping the same tempo. Then he pulled his hand back to his chest and pounded a few times next to his heart, all the while continuing the precisely spaced "bao's." "It's like trying to meditate for hours without getting distracted." Leroy was internationally recognized for his ability to "walk the bass." He played with jazz giants such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Billy Holliday, Art Tatum, Ben Webster, and Dexter Gordon, recording over 800 albums. Lucky for Alan, Leroy was also in Portland. At 69 years old, Leroy became the figurehead in the Portland jazz community, after a career that took him all over the world. During the late 80s and 90s, he drew old-time jazz gurus as well as younger fans and musicians like Alan to Portland nightclubs. Standing 6'5", and displaying a full head of white hair, he was both charismatic and intriguing. His influence was so prominent that in 1995 the Oregon Legislature named May 1 Leroy Vinnegar Day. When Leroy first came to Portland, Alan didn't think he was experienced enough to play with the With Child Walker, despite having performed in Paris, London, and all over the U.S. Leroy was playing with drummer Mel Brown at the time, but asked Alan to fill in when Brown couldn't. Although he was humble about playing with Leroy, Alan was eager to tap into his musical wisdom. Over the years, they developed a relationship, both as teacher and student and as companions. Several years later, Alan decided to compose the Leroy Vinnegar Suite. At the same time, Leroy was suffering from emphysema. He was spending 15 hours a day hooked up to an oxygen machine. Alan realized he didn't have a lot of time left. Leroy continued to play and record regularly while he was sick. He'd go to the hospital for his oxygen

doses, but as soon as he was released, he'd head back to the bandstand. He recorded with Alan during his last days, with oxygen tank tubes running under his nose to keep him breathing. On August 3, 1999, Leroy passed away at age 71. Leroy contributed immensely to the art form and to the education of his fellow musicians. However, to Alan and the people close to him, he also offered a genuine closeness and passionate spirit that made him truly unique. Alan didn't write the Leroy Vinnegar Suite with the idea that he was tapping into a community element, but as he went along, people started hearing about the recording and becoming involved. Making it a community tribute to the legendary musician and friend, Alan began producing the album. Two and half years later, the album was completed and a CD release event took place at Jimi Meks jazz club November 2. Karen Natzel, manager of the Alan Jones Sextet and Alan's close friend, organized the event. She manned a table in the corner of Jimmy Meks handing out flyers and selling CDs. "The event built many bridges in the community," she explained, "generationally, Leroy has passed the baton to Alan, and musically Leroy's jazz built a bridge joining Alan's music." She went on to explain that it has also brought together people who are interested in jazz, but don't know how to get involved or feel intimidated by the scene. Although Alan plays a high-end sophisticated kind of music, he demystifies it, makes it accessible to people who don't think they will like it. "People are hungry for community," she affirmed, "and this CD isn't the end product." Karen's goal is to keep building bridges across the music scene by working with musicians like Alan who feel passionate and genuine about sharing the art. "Alan's such a genuine person; people are hungry for that," Karen explained. "He has this contagious, infectious spirit," she described him in a similar way that Alan describes Leroy. "People are drawn to Alan," she continued, "When people feel that genuineness, we intrinsically understand it." Karen, who has a background in marketing and image building, decided to work with Alan on a gut instinct. Although she had a full time job, she was drawn to Alan's dedication and pursuit of his dreams. Karen feels that seeing someone excited about his dream gives her courage to do what she wants. "This feeling of feeling alive because you are fetching risks. That's what life is all about. The pursuit." At the same time, Alan gets to learn from Karen about business. Being somebody who plays his drums barefooted and had never owned a business card, Alan didn't know how to connect his passion with business in order to promote the suite. While Karen praised Alan for his courage to follow his dreams, Alan shrugged it off as though he didn't know anything else. He admitted that he could probably find a higher paying job, but that for him, it's not an option. He is doing what he loves, and can't imagine

doing anything else. "Clarity in knowing what you want is key to following your dreams. I don't let things go very easily. I can't get tired of drumming. I can't get tired of writing music. Creativity requires focus and concentration." The clarity and focus of both Leroy and Alan shine on the CD. Alan superimposes clips of Leroy talking and laughing at the beginning of each song and on "The Walker Reprise (Bonus Walk)," number 9 on the CD, Leroy talks about trying to buy a Mercedes in 1954 while three horns play in the background. Leroy also plays on two tracks. Mel Brown told the Oregonian after Leroy's death that Leroy used to say, "I want to create something, and I need you guys to carry it on after I'm gone." And as though he is alive and responding to Alan's composition, at the end of the suite recording, Leroy's voice says, "All right, you guys did good. Keep it going." -Laura Michelle, independent writer

LINER NOTES, LEROY VINNEGAR SUITE //Listener, if you want a real tribute to Leroy Vinnegar, play for yourself again, his albums, "Leroy Walks" or "Leroy Walks Again". Or listen anew to any of his countless pairings with masters such as Art Pepper, Les McCann, Kenny Dorham, Billy Higgins, Stan Getz, Sonny Rollins or countless others. Listening to it all again is probably the best tribute you can find. Properly speaking, this is not a tribute album. Let me explain. //In the music store when I see, say, Benny Golson's tribute album to John Coltrane, I don't buy it. It is not that I don't like Benny Golson,, but if I want to hear Syeeda's Song Flute, I invariably want to hear Coltrane play it. Tribute albums are usually thought of and executed after a great musician is no longer with us. Although Leroy Vinnegar died on August 3rd, 1999; Alan Jones had long conceived of the Leroy Vinnegar Suite with Leroy's participation in mind. For Jones, The Suite was to be a very living work of art, exploring Vinnegar's influence on his own music, and on the musicianship of The Sextet. Ultimately, Leroy recorded for The Suite with Jones in the final weeks before his passing. //In considering this recording a tribute, there is a danger here of casting Jones as today's musician, reaching back across the great divide into Jazz History, and retrieving the lessons of the master. Our reliance on the notions of the Old Masters and Young Lions of jazz ignores that Jones and Vinnegar were contemporaries. They shared the bandstand. They exchanged living musical ideas that exist today. (Literally, "contemporary" means 'same time' which, better than anything, describes the relationship of the bass player and the drummer.) That the walking bass has been a staple to a certain way of playing jazz has never made it untouchable by new ways of listening, nor unsuited for the forms Jones trades in. Leroy knew this. What he played in 1955 made possible what Jones wrote in 1999; but The Suite makes also possible the use of the walking bass in ways not known of in the 50's and 60's. The light bulb was

invented in 1879. That we still use it today, to light our modern buildings, doesn't make it outdated. It makes it indispensable. //One of the defining musical choices on this album is the inclusion of Leroy's voice. Short pieces of "found" sound of Leroy speaking precede each track, and close out the album. I call this a musical choice because it is very much so in two ways. First, Leroy's voice, its resonance, cadence and lilt has a musical quality to it, recalled by everyone who has spoken with him. We hear in it often barely articulated words, imbued with a kind of ease and reassurance - and though it is trite, it is also true - reminding us of the same qualities in his playing. Secondly, Jones's use of these pieces involves very definite choices about their relation to the tunes. They augment the character, and become part of the songs, in the way the title of a painting always changes the way we see it. Let me say only that the closing voice clip will tug hauntingly at your core. //Alan Jones found in Vinnegar a teacher, someone who taught him things impossible to learn elsewhere. For the Suite, he set out to identify aspects found in Leroy's playing and subject them to a process of evolution. The evolution takes place within his compositions, and by the powerful shaping forces of the sextet's playing. The Leroy Vinnegar Suite is therefore not a tribute, not music written so much for Leroy, as much as from him. //Dr. Loose gives a nod to the bass feel developed by Leroy in the late 60's and early 70's, playing with Les McCann. One of the best examples is recorded on McCann's Swiss Movement, with Benny Bailey and Eddie Harris. Listen to the groove on Cold Duck Time, then pull it back a little. Jones wrote it as a vehicle for the jazz, R&B, soul feel of that music. The aim was to lay a groove for Leroy and the rhythm section, and stick with it throughout the tune. Pay attention to the introductory section, with its between-the-eyes hit. What follows is loose, swaying time behind deep, funky call and response. Gross demonstrates his improvisational genius, weaving vivid phrases, off notes, and rhythmic challenges into a striking solo. //Alan doesn't like the name he gave to Dedication. Having heard this tune played by the Sextet dozens of times, I understand why. There is nothing wrong with the word. Any title would fail to capture the elevated beauty of the song's melody, and the beguiling arrangement. This is one of those songs which, once placed, you cannot get it out of your head. But unlike most others, you don't want it to go. Whether it is Rand's beautifully warm and tender statement of the theme on the soprano sax, or its bold re-statement by the horn section, something mesmeric in the piece resists being named. Alan wrote it for Leroy, who in the last years of his life knew he was dying. While this fact brought the faintest mantle of sadness to his life, Leroy's letting go was anything but a giving up. (He recorded the songs here only 4 months before he

died.) In the car, on the long way to a gig, the conversation would return to those figures in his world that he needed to revisit - perhaps evoking and releasing them at the same time. Jones wanted the song to reflect this fond sadness, a certain poignancy and well, he succeeds. //Short Order is one of two tracks on which Leroy recorded, here in a trio arrangement. The form is a simple rhythm changes, in a be-bop vein. This platform, common ground for all, allowed Leroy to play in familiar territory, and serve as an anchor for Porter's adventurous and brilliant soloing. As Jones says, "You can push, pull...take things wherever they want to go when Leroy's there to hold everything down." This delightful tension is immediately recognized from the opening bars of the track, and never dissipates. //Jones'n and The Walker also have a story behind them. Jones'n, written by Randy Porter, began as a tune for a commercial. Leroy was hired by a sub sandwich company to do voice-over, while the band played Randy's tune in the background. Their product was a "Classic Club", and for the commercial, Leroy was to rap about a classic "jazz" club. Thanks to this lighthearted and humorous session, Jones got the idea to use Leroy's speaking voice in his suite, and latched onto a seven-note riff in Randy's tune, which became his inspiration for The Walker. Jones later asked Porter if he would like to include his tune in The Suite. Porter not only reshaped his own song for the Sextet, but cleverly adapted it in the style of Jones's composing. //For The Walker, Jones took this seven-note phrase, combined it with abrupt and angular melodic detours, and built a hard driving standard blues as a showcase for beauty, breadth, and solidity of Leroy's quarter note. Mazzi develops a solo in waves of dazzling constructions, which unfold and lift, still keeping a foot planted solidly in the blues. //The Lesson is the answer to a question Alan once asked of Leroy. Jones recalls the gig, at Atwater's in Portland. Jones was thinking about Leroy's mastery of the movement of one quarter note to the next - a relationship Leroy spent his whole life investigating. "I asked him whether, in a ballad, he thought about that movement from note to note, in the same way as in a medium tempo tune." Leroy's answer was..."of course". But the true answer was given throughout the gig, as Leroy periodically glanced at Jones over the bass, smiling as he played the answer, tune after tune. This ballad's enduring melody reflects the feeling of a lesson learned, a lesson that could only be taught through the music. //Vinnegar's bass playing has always been about four - four quarter notes, four strings, in fourth's tuning. The title "Run Mr. 5" refers to a bassist who uses a five string bass, or tunes it in fifths instead of fourths. Red Mitchell, Vinnegar's long-time friend and fellow bassist developed this latter style of bassplaying. In Jones's title, as in Vinnegar's spoken intro, the two make playful reference to that elusive and fast walking

"Mr. 5", here embodied in the deep, relentless swinging of Dan Schulte's five-string bass. //The crown gem of The Suite is The Walker Reprise. Three stories are being told. One is how Leroy once wanted to buy a Mercedes. As a young jazz musician, the car dealership wouldn't take him seriously. Soon after, with a signed contract in his hand, (as the new bassist for the Ozzie and Harriet Show), he triumphantly returned to claim his vehicle. The other two stories are told musically. As Leroy speaks, a bass line is played behind him on the unified horns of Gross, Mazzio, and Rand. The line was created by Jones from various blues bass lines Leroy played or might have played, as well as from two bassists influenced by him: Ron Carter and Dave Holland. The bass line played by the horns is Jones's suggestion that the influence Vinnegar had extended, not only to other bassists, but to musicians of all instruments. //A native of Indiana, the forward motion of Vinnegar's bass line is celebrated in The Indy Express. The shape of the chord changes and the arrangement are borrowed from Sammy Nestico's tune "The Heat's On" "The drive and force of that song has blown me away since I was 14" says Jones. "I wanted to use it as a framework to illustrate that same driving quality in Leroy's playing". Jones often tells his music students to imagine a freight train, two hundred cars long, at full momentum, encountering the unfortunate animal on the tracks. This vehicle is so unstoppable, it doesn't even register when it hits something. Time in jazz - kept well - is like that. Leroy's time is like that. Jump on and ride, or keep out of the way. You choose. //In the end, The Leroy Vinnegar Suite is neither imitation nor mere flattery... And, if it is not a tribute, nor nostalgia, nor documentary, in what relation does it stand to Mr. Vinnegar and his art? He is not sideman, though of course he is that too. He is not headmaster, but of course, he instructs. The answer, I think, is that Leroy Vinnegar here is muse to Alan Jones. He is a muse, not in the distorted contemporary sense of the word - the composer's idol hovering over his shoulder. Rather he occupies that role, tall and broad, in the fullest, original sense of the term, from which "music" is derived. -Jim Strupp, Portland, Oregon

**LEROY VINNEGAR BIOGRAPHY** The "walking" bass is a hallmark of modern jazz, and Leroy Vinnegar was its undisputed master. He was known widely in this role among the sterling of jazz musicians, and he recorded with all of them. Perhaps less well-recognized in the general public, still Vinnegar cultivated a dedicated group of listeners, who understood his unparalleled contribution to the art of jazz bass. Leroy was born in 1928 in Indianapolis. A completely self-taught musician, he became the house bassist at Chicago's Beehive in 1952. In 1954, he moved to Los Angeles, where he quickly became the bassist of choice for local musicians Stan Getz, Chet Baker, and Shelly Manne. Over the course of his over 800

recordings, he played with Art Tatum, Billie Holliday, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster, Art Pepper, Gerry Mulligan, Chick Corea, Cedar Walton, Benny Carter, Wes Montgomery, Harold Land, Teddy Edwards, and Les McCann, among countless other giants. His 1956 performance with Shelly Manne and Andre Previn on My Fair Lady made that album the year's best seller. His album credits include: SWISS MOVEMENT, Les Mc Cann, Eddie Harris; Atlantic ELMO HOPE; Pacific Jazz BENNY CARTER JAZZ GIANT; Contemporary BLUESMITH, Jimmy Smit; Verve BENNY CARTER JAZZ GIANT; Contemporary HAROLD IN THE LAND OF JAZZ, Harold Land; Contemporary INTA SOMETHING, Kenny Dorham, Jackie McLean; Pacific Jazz As well as leader on his recordings: LEROY WALKS, Leroy Vinnegar Sextet; Contemporary LEROY WALKS AGAIN, Leroy Vinnegar Sextet; Contemporary Vinnegar settled in Portland, Oregon in 1986, and soon became a magnet for a revitalization of the local scene. His quiet command presided over a vibrant and distinct set of musicians who looked to him, in awe of his prodigious skills. He paired with local jazz drummer Mel Brown (former drummer to Diana Ross) for years across a variety of venues and musical settings. Vinnegar also served as teacher and mentor to Portland's younger jazz musicians. Alan Jones, raised in Portland, established himself in New York in the 1980's, and then settled in Paris and Vienna. Returning to Portland in 1993, Jones drew essential lessons from playing with Vinnegar, most importantly the singular movement of one quarter note to the next in jazz time feel. Leroy Vinnegar remained an active presence in Portland's music until his death in 1998, of heart and lung disease. He recorded Jones's Leroy Vinnegar Suite four months before he died.

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