



# Footprints: The Life and Music of Wayne Shorter

By Michelle Mercer

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## Footprints: The Life and Music of Wayne Shorter By Michelle Mercer

The first biography about the man *The New York Times* recently called "jazz's all-around genius, matchless in his field as a composer, utterly original as an improviser."

Saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter is one of the great architects of jazz, and a man whose influence will be felt by musicians and music fans for generations to come. In this first biography of Shorter, Michelle Mercer traces the amazing trajectory of his fifty-year career. As fellow jazz great Herbie Hancock puts it: "Wayne Shorter has evolved as a human being to a point where he can synthesize all the history of jazz into a very special, very alive musical expression. Nobody else can do that now."

In many ways, Wayne Shorter's story is the story of modern American music. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1933, he learned bebop as an adolescent in cutting contests with Sonny Stitt and Sonny Rollins. In the 1950s, he graduated to some "hard-drinking, hard bop years" with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. The saxophonist was the catalyst in the famous 1960s quintet of Miles Davis, then followed the trumpeter on his avant-garde electric excursions. In the 1970s, he and Joe Zawinul pioneered fusion in Weather Report. Into the 1980s and 1990s Wayne's solos graced pop recordings like Steely Dan's "Aja" and Joni Mitchell's "Hejira." And today, at age seventy, he is leading the Wayne Shorter Quartet, a group that critics have compared to Coltrane's classic quartet and to Davis's own groundbreaking quintet.

A rich portrait of a great American artist, *Footprints*. makes a vital contribution to the literature of jazz.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Legendary jazz saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter gets an appreciative appraisal in this excellent biography by music journalist Mercer, who follows this "determinedly eccentric" genius from his early days with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers in the late 1950s, through his stunning work with the Miles Davis Quintet in the 1960s, to his popular jazz-rock fusion band Weather Report in the 1970s and his ongoing recording and performing. She carefully details his early influences, including his mother's tireless indulgence of his creative whims and his fascination with the 1948 film *The Red Shoes*, whose central conflict—living for oneself versus living for one's art—would define his career. Mercer expertly investigates Shorter's relationships with the two pianists who most influenced his music, fellow Davis Quintet member Herbie Hancock and Weather Report co-leader Joe Zawinul, as well as the impact of his Buddhist faith on his music. Mercer also shines in her consideration of some Shorter's less critically acclaimed efforts, including his genre-defying work with Joni Mitchell and Brazilian pop singer and composer Milton Nascimento. Interviews with Shorter, Carlos Santana, Amiri Baraka and dozens of others lend depth and tone to this clear-eyed account. B&w photos not seen by PW.

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Review

*Footprints* is a fascinating, often intimate account of his creative journey. -- *San Francisco Chronicle*

Intelligent and revealing. -- *Financial Times*

May be the closest we will come to an autobiography of one of the greatest composers and improvisers in jazz. -- *The New York Times*

Mercer untangles Shorter's web of metaphysics, historic films and music making, and reties them all together for an engrossing narrative. -- *Downbeat*

Mercer untangles Shorter's web of metaphysics, historic films and music making, and reties them all together for an engrossing narrative. -- *Billboard*

Mercer's book is pleasurable and empathetic, essential for anyone who wants to get closer to this inscrutable genius. -- *The New Republic*

[A]n elegant, questing biography into the mindset of the great jazz sax man.... -- *Kirkus Reviews*

[I]t's impossible to imagine a book that would give any better understanding of this enigmatic man. -- *Los Angeles Times*

[a] well-told, thoroughly researched, and ultimately inspiring story of a jazz giant. -- *Jazziz*

a compelling and fascinating story, told with grace and candor. -- *Sunday Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

About the Author

Michelle Mercer is a music writer and a regular music commentator for National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. Her articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *Down Beat*, and *Jazziz*.

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