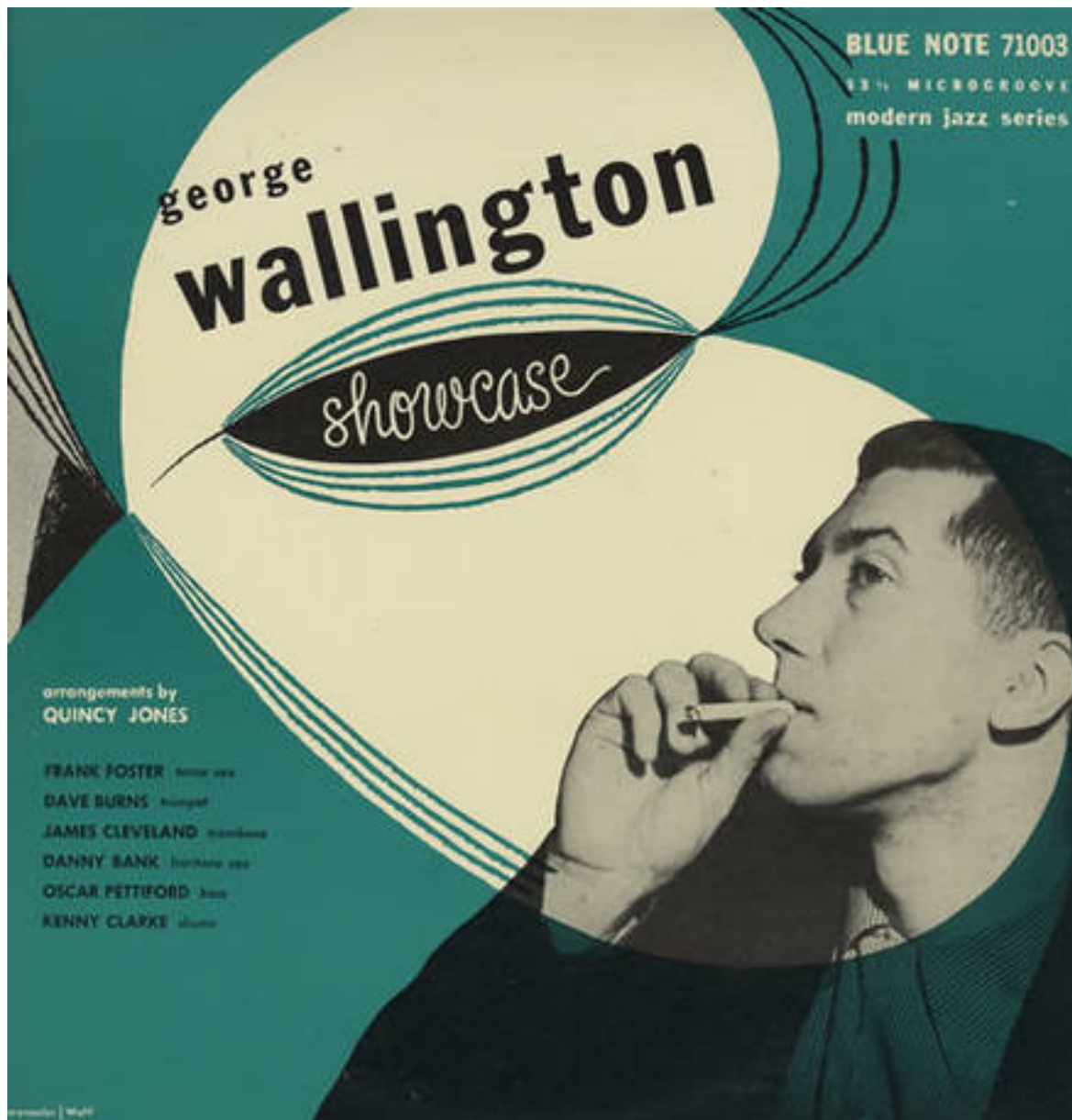




A Sicilian named George Wallington

Joey Skee (August 24, 2008)



Jazz pianist Giacinto Figlia aka George Wallington was at the founding of be-bop. Then he disappeared. Now Anthony Scotto's resurrects his life and music.



I'm a frequent listener to the loquacious and erudite jazz historian/raconteur [Phil Schaap](#) [2]'s "[Bird Flight](#) [3]," a radio program on [WKCR-FM/www.wkcr.org](#) [4] dedicated to the music of Charlie Parker. This month Schaap played a fascinating segment on the evolution of the Dizzy Gillespie composition "[Night in Tunisia](#) [5]." Running down the respective line ups for the different recordings, Schaap mentioned the name "George Wallington." The pronounced Anglo-Saxon name jumped out at me because I recognized it as the moniker of Sicilian-born pianist Giacinto Figlia (1923-1993).

I had the good fortune of having read about Figlia/Wallington in Anthony Scotto's unpublished article on the musician. Scotto sent me his edifying manuscript a few months back for comment and I enthusiastically recommended that he submit it to [VIA](#) [6], [Italian Americana](#) [7], or another publication.

Scotto writes that Figlia "occupies a vanguard position in the development" of bebop. The rather poor recording of "Night in Tunisia" I heard was performed by Gillespie's band, considered to be the first bebop band, at New York City's Onyx Club in January 1944. The live recording of this single song, the band's only known recording, was [discovered and first released in 1996](#) [8]. Figlia was nineteen-years-old.

Between 1940 to 1958, Figlia performed and recorded with such luminaries as Parker, Gillespie, Lester Young, Max Roach, Charles Mingus, Billie Holiday, and Sarah Vaughan, to name but a few. (According to one account, it was a quip by Stan Getz about Figlia's impeccable sartorial choice that led to the pianist adopting his nome d'arte "Lord Wallington.") The New York-raised artist was a prolific composer, having written over fifty songs, including the bop standards "Lemon Drop" and "Godchild."

In 1958, Figlia/Wallington retired from music to start an air conditioning business with his father and two brothers, only to return twenty-seven years later. Scotto writes that Figlia's "music still sounds vibrant, remarkably crisp and very listenable" after all these years. It was Scotto's research that helped me to better appreciate this little known artist.

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Links

[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/3966georgewallington1219553474.jpg>

[2] http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/05/19/080519fa_fact_remnick

[3] <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/wkcr/jazz/core.html>

[4] <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/wkcr>

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Night_in_Tunisia

[6] <http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/calandra/bordighera/books/voices/index.htm>

[7] http://www.italianamericana.com/poetry/_the_journal.html

[8] <http://www.mp3.com/albums/237532/reviews.html>

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