



a 12-concert tour of Japan with The Standards Trio. After that, he was back on the classical circuit playing recitals of Beethoven, Scarlatti and Bach, followed by his New York debut playing this material (which received a laudatory review from *The New York Times*). The immediate juxtaposition of the two musical disciplines had a profound effect on Jarrett. What he was doing was unparalleled in the music world – working at the highest level of his profession in both jazz and classical music.

Leaving aside the fact that he has never really received the kind of recognition – then or now, and especially in his own country – the magnitude of this achievement deserves, something had to give. “I got as close to a nervous breakdown as I’d ever like to get,” he reflects. “I marched into my little studio and started doing *Spirits* as a reaction against the classical nervous ‘Edit from bar 267, we want to start there’, and all that stuff. I would say things like, ‘but I am supposed to be in an emotional state at that moment in that piece, I can’t just jump into that emotional state because you don’t have it there perfectly’. And then not long afterwards I read a quote from a Beethoven player, it was the early days of recording, making 78s I guess, and he was *the guy, the Beethoven player*, and he was quoted as saying when someone said ‘don’t you think we should do this over?’ and he said, ‘if we did it again it would be better, but it wouldn’t be as good!’ [laughs] I love it. I relate to that – I don’t know

that there is anyone whose playing I love who plays ‘perfectly’. I know there are players – I can think of names but I don’t want to desecrate their work – and they do it perfectly, but I don’t get anything from it.”

When the album *Spirits* was done, he felt better able to come to terms with his feelings about classical music: “I appreciate everything about it and I was trained in it, and I have more classical recordings and LPs than I have jazz, and I listen to more classical music than most jazz players, but no, the world itself I find a little bit unfortunate. I’m involved in the world of creation from the ground up, because I can do – luckily – both things. I know what I am hearing, I know if I am successful at playing what I hear: the art of interpretation exists, but it’s not my thing, it was my thing, during that period of time in the 1980s. But then I just got overwhelmingly, let’s see, I was in the classical world in that period and walking out that door and breathing the air and thinking, ‘wait, I was so involved in this, editing at bar 167 was so not a good idea, can I possibly remind myself why I am in music at all?’ And I threw myself – came back down and had my pseudo nervous breakdown – and threw myself into the most spontaneously crazy thing I had done up to that moment [the album *Spirits*], and I had trio concerts that would make me smile while I was playing and I thought shit! That’s what it is! You can’t do that in a concerto or classical thing, you just can’t do that!”

As Jarrett’s career trajectory subsequently revealed, his enormous creativity found its true voice in jazz – he once said his humming during a jazz performance was a response to the sounds he heard in his head, while in classical those sounds are pre-ordered by the music manuscript so he remains silent – which has been all the richer for his commitment to the music (with just a few detours into classical over the years).

So at 70, how does he view the future? “Well the first thing I’d like to see is what kind of response this music [*Creation*] has, as it’s so radically different, as radical as the very first solo concert I played as it doesn’t follow any of my own rules in the past, and then I’ll figure it out from there. I don’t ever have a deep seated future planned out for adventures, but I don’t have a trio now so all I know is that I’m not going to look for other guys who I would need 30 years to get as good as we got, that’s the biggest problem of all. How much rapport and understanding we had, it’s unmatched anywhere I think. I can pick up albums I forgot about and listen to them and go, ‘Oh my God! Yeah, that’s right!’ So anyway, at the point we had all the information [for *Creation*] together we sent it to ECM and included in it was this quote, ‘Only age reveals our drive, our compulsion to say something, youth has nothing to declare’. It’s a very, very interesting quote.” ■