

Leahey did contribute some compositions and arrangements to the group, but most material has been penned by Woods, followed by pianist Melillo who did the successful, and popular, reworkings of *Bye Bye Baby* and *Cheek To Cheek*.

Jules Styne's *Bye Bye Baby* or the Bob Hiliard-Sammy Fain *I'm Late* (which Woods arranged) from Walt Disney's *Alice In Wonderland* are not exactly standards within the jazz repertoire. But the musicians have made them into jazz vehicles, and it is such successes that help make Woods' group so exciting.

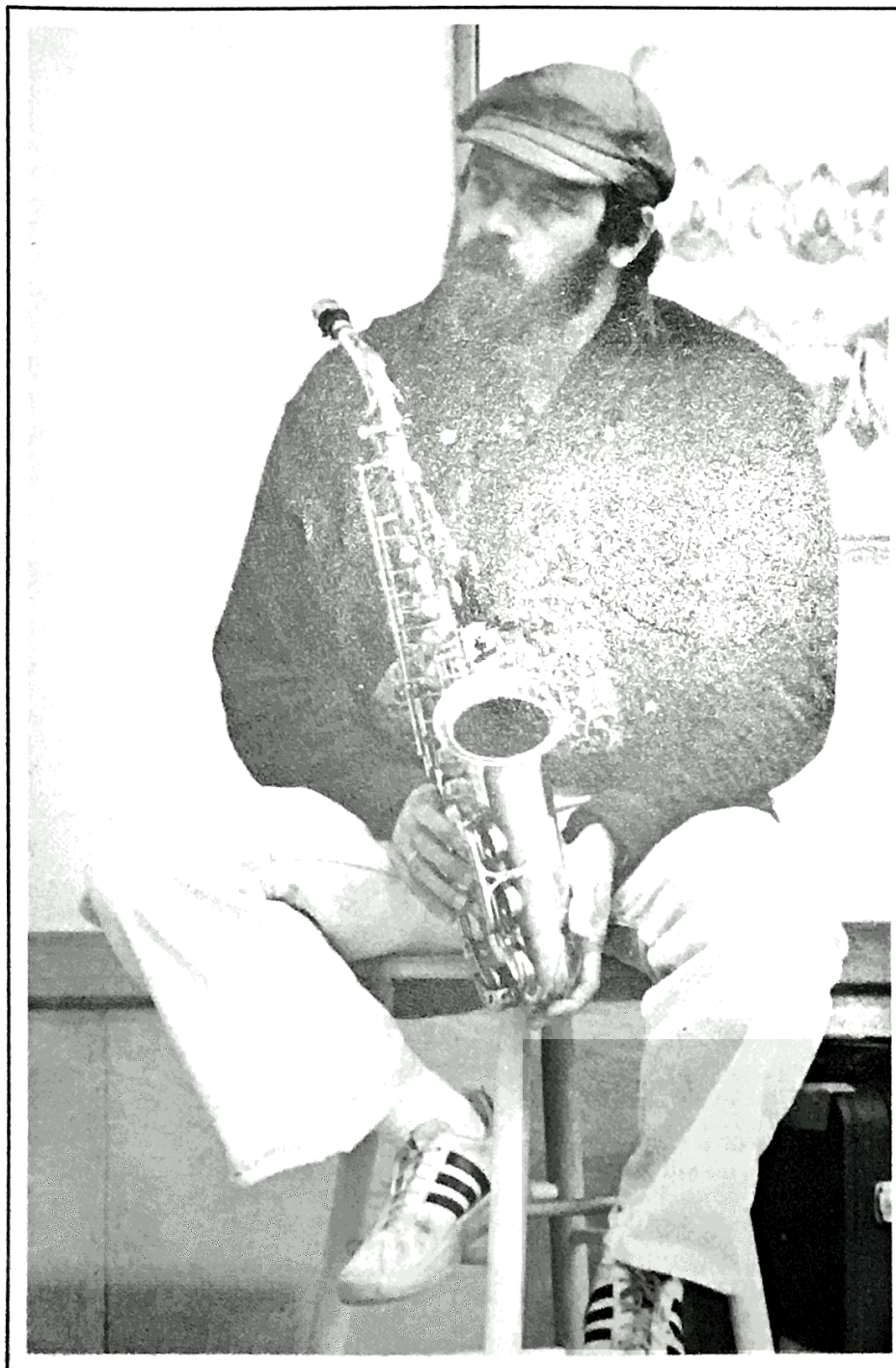
"We have an identity—a distinct sound," Woods explained. "In the five years we've been together we've definitely built up our own material."

Woods emphasizes that material, and wants to forget about material he did before or outside of the quartet.

"Someone last night asked me to play a Mi-

chel Legrand tune," he said, in reference to his double Grammy winning album *Images*, which was done with Legrand. "But that was a different band, a different time, a different situation. I don't mean to insult anyone by not taking their request but we're not into playing requests, because if you started that people would be asking for *Quintessence* or *The Midnight Sun Will Never Set*. But if a request fits into a set we'll try to play it."

Still, Woods remains somewhat loose when deciding what to play, even though he tries to avoid pre-quartet tunes. He often will call out an old standard for the group to play and they will handle it without any rehearsal. With the youngest member of the group, bassist Gilmore, aged 35, all four know many older tunes, even obscure ones. The night before the interview, when one audience member requested a Legrand tune, Melillo had gone back nearly half a century to an early Marx



JOSEPH L. JOHNSON

Brothers film and played *When My Dreams Come True*.

"We react to the crowd," Woods admitted. "If there's only three people out there, it's nice to call on some old chestnuts or some obscure tunes."

That night at Rick's the crowd was small, and comprised mostly of unattentive—to the music at least—businessmen who wandered in for a drink. Woods was more puzzled than angered by this audience. Less than a year earlier, during a week-long snow storm in the middle of one of Chicago's worst winters on record, enthusiastic crowds had filled the room, and lined up waiting to get in for late sets, even on weekday nights.

"I'm older so I guess there should be a bit of inner peace in a way," he shrugged, "but I don't feel very different. I go to the gig. I take a shower. I get on the bandstand and we play music. I get a bite to eat. I watch television. I've been doing it for so long.

"I like to think I'm getting better but I'm not so sure. Maybe I'm dropping a step. Sometimes I feel I'm slowing up a bit. You're always questioning your playing. Some nights I don't believe how rotten I sound.

"I'm still looking for perfection. I want the perfect reed; I want the mikes right. I want the sound to sing.

"I think it might be easier when you're 27 and not 47. There's got to be some physiological shifting, but in general I feel pretty good about it."

Woods turned 47 last November 2 and as he sees 50 approaching he thinks it might be time to take things a bit easier.

"I'll be playing as long as I live but I want to moderate it some. I want," he added with the relaxed air of a satisfied and successful businessman, "to spend some time on the house, build a model airplane again which I haven't done in a long time.

"I don't want to stay out here forever. I do see a couple more years of active traveling. After that... who knows? Maybe I'll work six months and do something else for the other six months. By 50 I want to take a year off by myself. I think 50 is a good age to do that. After that I don't know. Teach somewhere, be an artist-in-residence.

"So that's my immediate plan and it's a silly one—as if there's something magical about the number 50. But it's a convenient time to reevaluate.

"I've been around jazz a long time, and I know you can't stay on the road forever. If you do, you usually end up dying alone and that's very sad.

"If it becomes a chore, if it becomes laborious to go to work, then it's time to call it quits. You're entitled to a slump but if it's that way all the time..."

Woods shrugged. Then, his spirit back up he exclaimed:

"Right now I just want to go out and play my best and play the music that I believe in.

"I want to play all the towns and all the rooms. I want to see what's going on out there. There's obviously an audience out there for what we're doing. I want to see it through. I think the work is important. There's a certain importance to playing this music, getting to young people who wouldn't be aware of some of this stuff."

See the Profile section, page 35, for a story of Woods' band: Mike Melillo, Steve Gilmore, and Bill Goodwin.