

JVC Jazz Festival Newport

SATURDAY, AUG. 9 | CHRISTIAN SCOTT

Passion for progression

BY MATT KEEFER

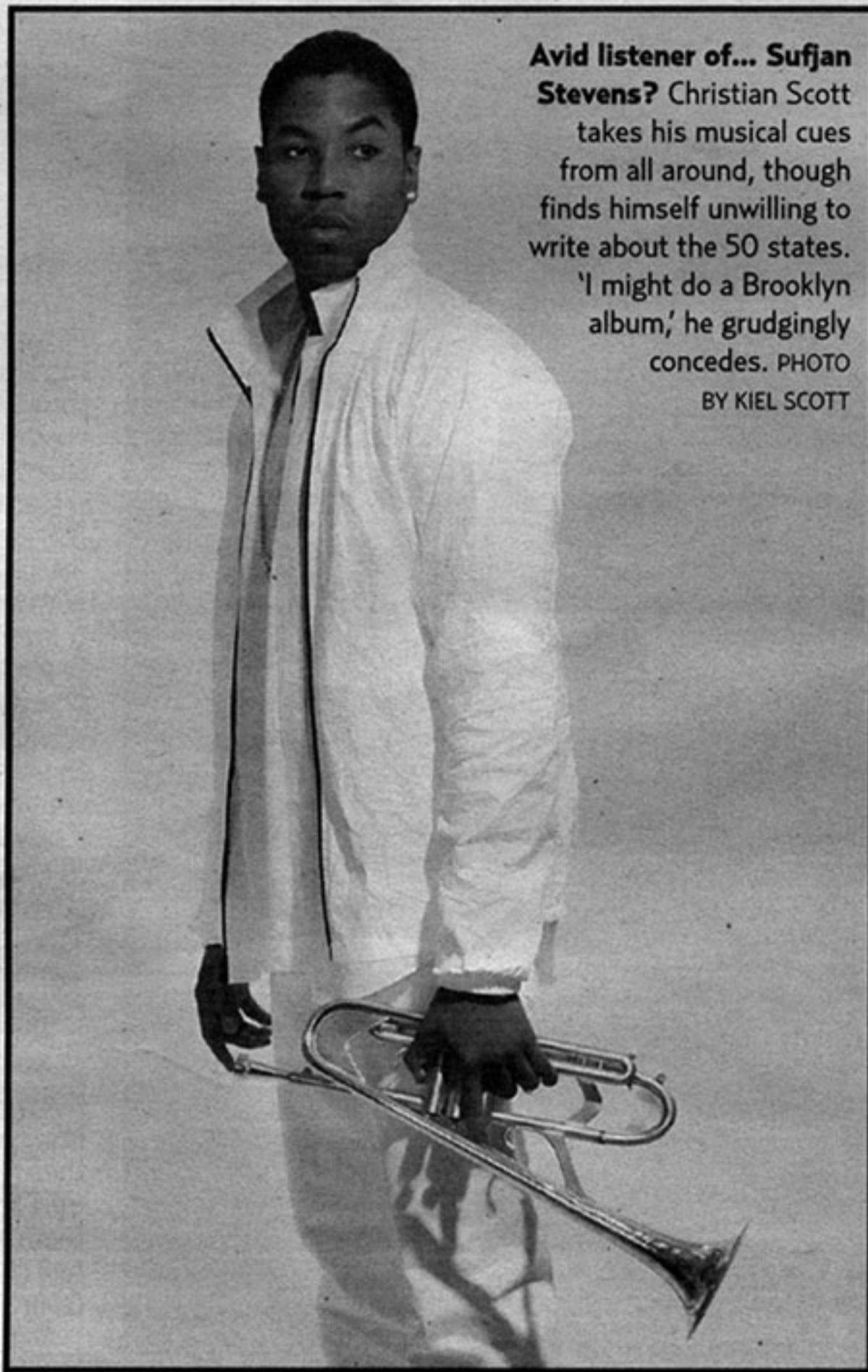
Twenty-five is a good age. You're young, you're fit, the world's ahead of you; you got a 2006 Grammy nomination for the Best Contemporary Jazz Album. You play a self-named, upturned trumpet (22 degrees, not Gillespie's 45). Your uncle is respected alto saxophonist Donald Harrison.

So everybody can't be like Christian Scott. The young trumpeter returns to the JVC Jazz Festival Newport stage for the third consecutive year on Saturday, Aug. 9. It blends new and old, hip-hop and classic jazz influences, and sets up a more electronic and eclectic feel to jazz. Did I mention his uncle is Donald Harrison?

It can be awkward.

"More often than not, they don't know he's my uncle," Scott says in a phone interview. "We might be in the same place at the same time, and I might say 'Uncle Donald,' and I'd literally have McCoy Tyner be like, 'Who's Uncle Donald?' I was like, 'Donald. Donald, Donald! Like, right on the bandstand!' He looks at Donald and he's like, 'That's your nephew?'"

Scott's first performance came around 13, when Harrison brought him on stage at the New Orleans Jazz Festival to perform "Christopher Jr." Since then, the young trumpeter has developed a strong group of musical contacts, including trombonist Steve Turre, pianist Eddie Palmieri, vibraphonist Gary Burton, and bassist Christian McBride. McBride shows him a proprietary sense of the name. "He wouldn't call me by my name because he said the minute that



Avid listener of... Sufjan Stevens? Christian Scott takes his musical cues from all around, though finds himself unwilling to write about the 50 states.

'I might do a Brooklyn album,' he grudgingly concedes. PHOTO BY KIEL SCOTT

he calls me Christian, then he'd no longer be the most popular Christian playing jazz."

Scott has generated his own musical voice apart from Harrison's, though his 2007 album "Anthem," often draws comparisons with Terence Blanchard's "A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)." Blan-

chard, a former band mate of Harrison's, released his album the same month last year, and both albums bring attention to 2005's Hurricane Katrina.

Scott quickly draws a dividing line between the two. "The album ('Anthem') is more or less about my stands and my take on some of the socio-politi-

cal-economic dilemmas that I see in the United States and abroad. It's not really a Katrina album." He further distinguishes himself from the jazz neo-classicists of the '80s, and emphasizes the need for an individual musician to develop his or her own voice.

"The thing about it is, you can have that, be a poet or writer, you can read Baldwin, but you don't want to write (like) Baldwin, be a Baldwinist. James Baldwin wouldn't want you doing that," he says.

He feels a respect for Tyner and the past generations who have created their own unique voices. "Even though they're older, they're progressive; the way they hear is progressive, the way they think is progressive. I end up over-analyzing it if I just put it on, and sometimes I end up getting frustrated; it's hard to listen to music as a musician."

His current musical enjoyment finds itself far from his expected element, in such bands as Elizabeth & the Catapult, My Brightest Diamond and Sufjan Stevens. As for his playing, "I'm still finding my voice. I'm still a student of this music and will never not be that."

But Scott describes what he hopes to achieve in his sound. "It's more a concept based on what it sounds like when you've washed away all these things, these preconceived notions that people have about what music is supposed to sound like, and what music sounds like — and just play from your experience."

An artistic experience, which, for a 25-year-old, shows impressive depth.