

**DVD Review**  
**Robert J. Robbins**  
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by  
**BBI**

**Electric Heart: Don Ellis, The Man, The Times, The Music**

A Documentary Film by **John Vizzusi**

(Sleepy Night Records SNRDVD002; available from [www.sleepynightrecords.com](http://www.sleepynightrecords.com))

“Jazz had to invent a new term when it came to [bandleader/composer/trumpeter/drummer] Don Ellis (1934-1978),” the late Maynard Ferguson (in whose band the young Ellis served) is quoted as saying in John Vizzusi’s stunning documentary film **Electric Heart**, which has just made its debut on DVD. The film, in which I am most happy to have been a very willing participant, received enthusiastic expositions at the 2008 Monterey and North Sea Jazz Festivals; the same year’s International Jazz Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria (birthplace of longtime Ellis associate Milcho Leviev, who appears frequently throughout in performance and interviews); and by the Los Angeles Jazz Institute in 2007.

In addition to **Electric Heart**, which contains interviews with such Ellis alumni as keyboardist/arranger Leviev, reed men Fred Selden (alto, soprano, flute) and Sam Falzone (clarinet, tenor, flute), trumpeter and BBI member Dr. Paul Bogosian, guitarist Jay Graydon, and drummer Ralph Humphrey (along with Ferguson and composer Gunther Schuller, who conducted the New York Philharmonic in his *Journey Into Jazz* with Ellis as soloist on the CBS-TV *Young People’s Concerts* series in 1964, with excerpts reproduced here), plus considerable performance footage from the late Sixties through the mid-Seventies, the DVD incorporates additional interviews, a rehearsal and concert by the Don Ellis Reunion Band directed by Leviev, an excerpt from a 1968 NET (predecessor of PBS) Ellis band telecast from San Francisco’s Institute of Contemporary Art featuring Ellis’ “Turkish Bath”, and a tribute to Ellis and his parents “Sugar” and Rev. Dr. E. Ezra “Doc” Ellis. The Reunion Band portion of the DVD is almost worth the price alone, capturing the ensemble at the landmark Whisky-A-Go-Go (a venue where the original band performed some four decades earlier) on LA’s Sunset Strip in December, 2005. Leviev guides the band through swinging renditions of Ellis’ 7/8 “Pussy Wiggle Stomp” and 5/4 “Indian Lady”, with alumni Selden, Falzone, Gary Herbig (reeds), Jock Ellis (trombone, no relation), Jack Coan (co-lead trumpet and Ellis’ high school classmate from Minneapolis), Graydon, and Humphrey. Ellis’ own trumpet solos are very ably handled by John Daversa (who was not even born when these charts were first recorded), son of ex-Stan Kenton jazz trumpeter Jay Daversa. Ellis’ music was so far ahead of its time with its embraces of electronics, ethnic overtones, and unorthodox rhythms, and Vizzusi’s **Electric Heart** should go a long way in reinstating his musical contributions to their proper place in American and world culture.