Ride Like the Wind, Freddie Hubbard on Elektra/Musician Records.
The Spirit Within, Red Rodney and Ira Sullivan on Elektra Records.

This month marks the debut of an important new jazz record label on Elektra, named simply, "Musician." The first group of releases on the label include albums by, Freddie Hubbard and the Red Rodney-Ira Sullivan group. Also released are works from Lec, Bittern, Eric Tette, and a previously unavailable album by Charlie Parker.

At the beginning of the last decade, jazz critics predicted Freddie Hubbard to be the "jazz talent for the seventies" because he had come onto the scene in the sixties as one of the more original and stylistic trumpet players yet seen. He had previously studied with legendary cornetist John Coltrane. In the sixties, Hubbard had recorded a number of excellent mainstream jazz albums, which gave him his reputation. Columbus records recognized his talent and signed him on the mid-sixties. Columbus, like other large record companies, had taken on a reputation for discovering jazz talents by forcing them to record what they think will sell, rather than what the performers want, or even what the jazz listeners would consider good. Although some of his fusion work is excellent, much of Hubbard's work at Columbus is obvious (and interior) attempt to sell jazz to the masses by passing it off as pop. Hubbard is now recording for several jazz labels, and some of his albums, such as Back to Bland (on Reel Time records), have been excellent back-to-back works, while others have been commercial.

Like the Wind, Hubbard's new album, is unfortunately one of his most commercial albums, and also one of his poorest. In addition to the title song, new a Christopher Cross hit, and another pop tune, "This Is It," by Kenny Loggins, the album also includes "Birdland" (the most overplayed jazz tune of the decade), Hubbard's ballad "Brigitte," and several compositions by Allen Ferguson, who also wrote all the arrangements. The instrumentation, referred to by Hubbard as a "Big Band," is actually a rhythm section with strings and a few horns. The compositions lack depth, and the arrangements for this band are all second-rate, except for "Brigitte," which is the only redeeming part of the album.

Hubbard's playing is still and very relaxed. "We didn't take the improvising too far away from the melody," he says. It is fast, it's very little improvisation with album, making one wonder whether it qualifies as jazz. What is most disappointing about the album is that one keeps Hubbard could do much better, but he is just trying to make a fast buck.

On the other end of the spectrum, the new Red Rodney-Ira Sullivan album is one of the most refreshing jazz releases in a while, and it brings back to the scene some of the most talented musicians. Red Rodney is best known as the alto-trumpeter who replaced Miles Davis on Charlie Parker's 1949 quintet. After joining Parker, his life was a series of up and downs, combining drug problems with jail.