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SEPTEMBER 2014

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SEPTEMBER 2014

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Restless Urgency

BY JAMES HALE

A previously unreleased late-1966 concert recording of John Coltrane has given fans, critics and musicians an opportunity to reconsider where the saxophonist was headed in the last year of his life.



Arturo O'Farrill performs in New York City's Central Park on Nov. 9. (Photo: Adam McCullough)

Cover photo of John Coltrane by Joe Alper. Photo courtesy of Joe Alper Photo Collection LLC. Cover photo and the photo of John and Alice Coltrane on page 35 were taken by Alper at the 1966 Newport Jazz Festival.

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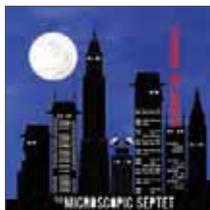
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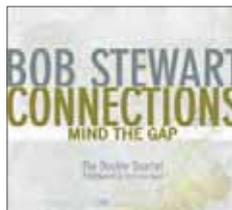
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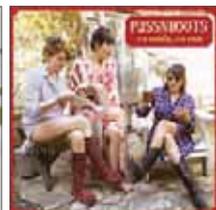
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John Coltrane (at microphone) and his band at the Village Theater in New York City, December 1966. Photo by Frank Kofsky. Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, University of California, Santa Cruz & The Frank Kofsky Archives.

Immortality Achieved

TRANE LIVES. John William Coltrane may have left this vale of tears on July 17, 1967, but he's still with us. Coltrane, like all great artists, has transcended death by virtue of his incredible oeuvre, including such classic albums as *Giant Steps*, *A Love Supreme* and *Interstellar Space*. Over the past 50 years, has any saxophonist prompted as much studious research, worshipful reverence and heated debate?

The research, reverence and debate will enter a new phase with the Sept. 23 release of *Offering: Live At Temple University* (Impulse/Resonance Records). The concert was recorded by Temple's WRTI-FM on Nov. 11, 1966.

Joining Coltrane onstage that night in Philadelphia were his wife, pianist Alice Coltrane; saxophonist Pharoah Sanders; drummer Rashied Ali; and bassist Sonny Johnson (substituting for Jimmy Garrison). While on tour in '66, Coltrane generously invited (or allowed) other musicians to sit in with the band, and *Offering* provides evidence of this, as two alto saxophonists and four percussionists join in. You can see additional evidence of this in Frank Kofsky's photo above. Looking at the image from right to left, you can spot some percussionists, Coltrane playing sax at the microphone, Ali at the drum kit, Sanders holding his sax, Garrison playing bass and another bassist onstage.

What do these kinds of loosely assembled concert ensembles—as well as the fiery, spiritual performance on *Offering*—tell us about Coltrane's mindset during the final months of his life? It's a question that DownBeat contributor James Hale deftly analyzes in our cover story.

Two other groundbreaking musicians who will be remembered decades after their passing are saxophonist-flutist Paul Horn (Riffs, page 14) who, like Coltrane, explored the spiritual and healing dimensions of music, and pianist Horace Silver, who composed numerous jazz standards, including "Song For My Father." In the tribute to Silver that begins on page 48, DownBeat Senior Contributor John McDonough uses the phrase "passport into the future" to describe the way that Silver will be remembered for decades because of the quality and popularity of his compositions.

Another icon whose recent death has shaken up the jazz world is the bassist-composer-educator Charlie Haden, who influenced so many of today's jazz players. Be sure to check out our tribute to Haden in the October issue. (Visit downbeat.com to read obituaries of all the aforementioned artists.)

Critics and fans often speak of musicians achieving immortality through their influential works, and the same is true of photographers and scholars. This issue's beautiful cover shot of Coltrane at the 1966 Newport Jazz Festival was taken by Joe Alper (1925–'68), and the image in this First Take column was taken by jazz scholar-photographer Frank Kofsky (1935–'97).

I first saw this photo in Kofsky's book *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* (Pathfinder), which contains Kofsky's famous interview with Coltrane as well as the transcription of an interview that the saxophonist gave while on tour in Japan in 1966, apparently for a radio station.

In our Coltrane feature, we're proud to present classic images from two of the living masters of jazz photography: Jan Persson (page 31) and Chuck Stewart (page 32). For those of us who love Trane, we're tremendously grateful that Alper, Kofsky, Persson and Stewart recognized the importance of what Coltrane was doing, and were on-site to chronicle it in such an elegant fashion. Bravo, gentlemen. **DB**



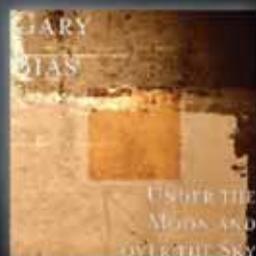
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You Call That a List?

In regard to your list ("The 80 Coolest Things in Jazz Today," July), where the heck is Pat Metheny? You contradict yourself by saying, "We want to look at the present and future," and then you put Ornette Coleman on your list. Also, where is Chick Corea when you have Keith Jarrett on the list? Of course you have to have Wynton Marsalis on your list—he has a shallow definition of what jazz is. You included Jakob Bro but not Kurt Rosenwinkel. I might have to stop buying your magazine at the bookstores because of your shortsightedness.

I do like the fact that you have John McLaughlin and Sonny Rollins on your list. Also

82 Coolest Things

The 80th Anniversary Issue is marvelous, but your list overlooked two of the coolest people around who help make jazz the great art form that it is: Bob Dorough and WKCR-FM radio host Sid Gribetz.

Keep up the amazing work for at least another 80 years!

RON ARFIN
JAZZGENIUS@GMAIL.COM

More Than 10 Living Masters

Thank you for your list of "The 80 Coolest Things in Jazz Today." It was great to be reminded of how vibrant the art form is today. Of course, any such list will have omissions open for debate, but I wish there had been room to acknowledge Jack DeJohnette as another one of "The Living Masters."

PHIL HURD
LEXINGTON, MASS.

Hersch on OutBeat

I am very pleased to be participating in an historic first: the OutBeat Jazz Festival to take place in Philadelphia from Sept. 18–21. The festival is the first in America to explore the intersection between the great universal American jazz art form and its many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) performers, composers, arrangers and promoters.

I am writing this because, in the midst of the creation of this important first festival of its kind, the tagline "America's First Queer Jazz Festival" was included in promotional materials and marketing campaigns for the festival. Though I have been "out" in the jazz community since the 1980s, I do not play "gay jazz"—if there were such a thing. And I certainly do not self-identify as "queer." I also would have



Wayne Shorter, but *Ornette Coleman*? Give me a break. He just plays all over the place and never lets the music breathe. By omitting Metheny, Corea and Rosenwinkel—who is the present *and* future—your list is not a list.

JAMES GINGRICH
JAMESGINGRICH@ICLOUD.COM

preferred that I had been consulted on this key marketing decision, as it came as a surprise to me. It may be that "LGBT" is not well-known as a descriptive term outside of progressive circles; "gay" is not inclusive enough, but "queer" is clear to all—whether in a positive or negative connotation. At any rate, I do hope that this festival will explore the impact of LGBT influence in many aspects of the jazz world and feature some inspired music.

FRED HERSCH
NEW YORK CITY

Corrections

- In the Critics Poll results (August), in the category Rising Star—Tenor Saxophone, the name of winner Wayne Escoffery was misspelled. In the category Rising Star—Percussion, the name Sammy Figueroa was misspelled.

- In the August issue, the interview with Joe Lovano misspelled the name Spring Quartet. Also, the text misstated information about the origins of his Village Rhythms Band. Lovano said: "This project goes way back to when I was in my late twenties and played a gig in Cleveland at a club called the Togo Suite with some of my old friends: Kenny Davis (trumpet), Wendell Logan (flugelhorn), Kip Reed (bass), David Thomas (piano) and Jamey Haddad (drums). There was this cat there from Lagos, Nigeria, who loved our band and later brought us to Lagos to play a festival at Tafabalewa Square. We spent time with Fela Kuti, and on Dec. 29, 1981, I turned 29 at Fela's Shrine. That trip has inspired me through the years."

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

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The

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Beats

All-Star Cast Celebrates Ornette Coleman at Free Brooklyn Concert

One of the most highly anticipated jazz events of the year in New York City was also the most rewarding. Not since Sonny Rollins' 80th birthday gala at the Beacon Theatre in 2010 had so many devoted jazz fans been so psyched to see a concert.

The free outdoor celebration of Ornette Coleman on June 12 at the Prospect Park Bandshell, part of the long-running Celebrate Brooklyn! concert series, came just a few months after the saxophonist's 84th birthday. It delivered so many surprises, crescendos and emotional moments that those in attendance—jazz fans or not—won't soon forget what they witnessed.

Organized by Coleman's son, drummer Denardo Coleman—who made his recording debut at the age of 10 on his father's 1967 album, *The Empty Foxhole*, and has been playing with him on and off ever since—the event attracted a diverse crowd. Concertgoers gathered at the park on the promise of seeing such advertised guests as Patti Smith, Flea, David Murray, Henry Threadgill, Bill Laswell, James Blood Ulmer, Laurie Anderson, Thurston Moore and maybe even the honoree himself (though Ornette was not listed among the scheduled performers).

The evening opened on an emotional high with an impromptu speech by Rollins. Looking every bit the jazz shaman figure, Rollins stood side-by-side with Denardo and said, "Thank you for being such a beautiful son, such a beautiful leader. We need leaders in this world today to spread love." Then, addressing the crowd, he added, "I knew him when he was 'this little.' He was a good kid then and he's a great man now."

Finally, Rollins shared a message that Ornette had given him decades ago: "It's all good. Don't worry about nuthin'. It's all good!"

And with that, Coleman shuffled on to the stage, looking frail but still hip, decked out in a bright red shirt and purple suit with white pinstripes. As the two titans met onstage, they embraced and Rollins bent over and kissed Coleman's hand. The night's honoree reciprocated, kissing Rollins' hand and wiping back tears. Coleman had performed with Rollins at the latter's 2010 birthday bash—a fact that added to the poignancy of this incredible reunion.

After Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams read the official proclamation declaring it Ornette Coleman Tribute Day in "the baddest borough on the planet," Coleman gave a concise speech.

"All I know to do is cry," he said. "It's so beautiful to see so many beautiful people who know what life is, who know how to get together and help each other."

Coleman continued with an uplifting message about living in the moment. "The only thing we have to do is to be alive," he said. "So do what you want to do so that we can all have something to enjoy." Coleman's own



seven-decade-long career of music making is a prime example of the sentiments he shared on this night.

The music commenced with Denardo's new band, Vibe, featuring past and present members of Ornette's band (upright bassist Tony Falanga, electric piccolo bassist Al MacDowell and former Prime Time guitarist Charles Ellerbee) along with powerhouse tenor saxophonist Antoine Roney.

With the addition of a third bassist, Flea from The Red Hot Chili Peppers, the group opened with a spirited "Blues Connotation" (from 1961's *This Is Our Music*). Threadgill joined them on alto sax and Murray on tenor sax for a kind of clunky, ska-inflected reading of "Broadway Blues," a song from Coleman's 1968 album, *New York Is Now!* Flea laid down the funk in characteristic fashion while Murray wailed in the altissimo range before launching into an incredible display of circular breathing in the low register. Ellerbee's dissonant chord clusters and steely guitar tones also lent an edgy quality to the harmolodic fray.

Coleman was then escorted onstage with his white sax in hand. As he took a seat, the band played his 1971 song "Law Years," from *Science Fiction*, with MacDowell carrying the melody and nimbly dropping in a quote from the Rodgers and Hammerstein show tune "If I Loved You." Murray soloed first in robust, bar-walking fashion before scaling the heights of his altissimo range. Threadgill followed with an alto solo full of challenging intervallic leaps and containing more surprises than a Coney Island roller coaster.

Riffs >



Next Jazz Masters: The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has announced the recipients of the 2015 Jazz Master fellowships: keyboardist Carla Bley, saxophonist George Coleman and saxophonist-flutist Charles Lloyd. In addition, club owner Joe Segal of Chicago's Jazz Showcase will receive the 2015 A.B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Award for Jazz Advocacy. The NEA will honor the 2015 Jazz Masters at an awards ceremony and concert at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York on April 20, 2015.

More info: arts.gov

Bird Lives in KC: The 2014 Kansas City Charlie Parker Celebration will run Aug. 14–31. Organizers have scheduled events honoring Parker (who would turn 94 on Aug. 29), including performances at eight area jazz clubs, a Charlie Parker Historical Tour and Musical Salute, educational programs, a 21-sax graveside salute for Parker's birthday, a panel session on the musical genius of Parker and a presentation of the Paul Messner Puppet Show "Ragtime to Bebop: The Kansas City Jazz Story." **More info:** kcjazzalive.org; americanjazzmuseum.org

Full Circle: The 2014 Angel City Jazz Festival presented by the Jazz Bakery will take place Sept. 19–22 and Sept. 25–28 at various Los Angeles venues, including LACMA, REDCAT, Blue Whale, The Aratani Theatre, Zipper Concert Hall at The Colburn School and Barnsdall Art Park—the site of the first Angel City Jazz Festival in 2008. This year's festival theme is "Full Circle," and performers will include Bobby Bradford, Vinny Golia, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton, among others. A closing-night Arthur Blythe Tribute & Benefit Concert is also planned.

More info: angelcityjazz.com

In Memory: Paul Horn, jazz alto saxophonist-flutist and New Age music innovator, died June 29 in Vancouver, Canada. He was 84. During his 50-year career, Horn recorded 50 albums, including *Jazz Suite On The Mass Texts*, which won a Grammy in 1966 for best original jazz composition. Horn was a proponent of transcendental meditation, and his meditative albums *Inside The Taj Mahal* (1968) and *Inside The Great Pyramid* (1977) helped earn him the nickname "the Father of New Age Music."

The anticipation of Coleman soloing on this tune built up throughout the piece, but he sat with his sax in his lap, looking out at the crowd and smiling benignly without ever putting the horn to his lips.

As the band finished "Law Years," Coleman finally picked up his alto and began a solo improvisation. Fans could hear the sound of his birthplace—Fort Worth, Texas—in his bluesy, keening tones. This eventually segued into the buoyant "The Sphinx" (from 1958's *Something Else!!!!*), featuring the front line of Threadgill, Murray, Roney and Coleman.

Clearly warmed up, Coleman soloed freely throughout this piece as Falanga held down the groove on upright and Ellerbee provided harmonic colors with his shifting chords. Suddenly, as this piece was beginning to peak, out from the wings stepped tap dancer extraordinaire Savion Glover, who took things up a notch with his energized and highly syncopated beats.

They next played Coleman's 1959 blues-drenched classic "Turnaround" (from *Tomorrow Is The Question!*), which again had the composer digging into his Texas roots on alto sax. Rendered as a road-house shuffle blues, it featured Glover providing more sonic fireworks. Murray dug into this earthy blues with a vengeance and Ellerbee added a nasty metal edge with his distorted guitar solo.

Tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano joined the crew for a fierce rendition of "Congeniality" (from Coleman's 1959 Atlantic debut, *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*) that also featured the mother-son team of pianist Geri Allen and trumpeter Wallace Roney Jr. Falanga's lyrical bowing on the melancholy theme to "Sleep Talking" (from 2005's *Sound Grammar*) set a tender tone for the young Roney, whose solo was probing and imbued with clarity.

Singer-songwriter Patti Smith featured her longtime colleague and bandmate Lenny Kaye on guitar and her daughter Jesse on piano. Smith walked onstage and kissed Coleman's hand. He remained seated beside her for two poetry pieces accompanied by music.

Tai chi master Ren performed some dramatic and powerful movements accompanied by a recording of singer-songwriter Lou Reed, who died last year at age 71 and was a lifelong fan of Coleman.

Next up was the explosive trio of electric bassist Bill Laswell, electric violinist Laurie Anderson and alto saxophonist John Zorn, performing along with Reed's so-called drone guitars (four of the late guitarist's axes leaned up against four of his personal amps to create a natural howling feedback loop). Laswell carried the haunting melody of "Lonely Woman" on his booming fretless bass underneath the trio's sonic onslaught while Zorn offered signature blasts of circular breathing on his alto and Anderson (Reed's widow) triggered harsh tones from her MIDI violin.

Branford Marsalis on soprano sax and pianist Bruce Hornsby followed with a beautiful, tightly orchestrated duet with chamber music underpinnings. Then two experimental electric guitar renegades, Thurston Moore and Nels Cline, locked their instruments on some provocative skronking.

Saxophonist Ravi Coltrane and harmolodic guitarist James Blood Ulmer joined Denardo's Vibe on a rendition of Coleman's evocative "Peace." Marsalis, Laswell and Hornsby then joined that assemblage, along with two shenai-playing members of the Master Musicians of Jajouka on the festive trance anthem "Theme From A Symphony," which morphed into a jam on "Song X" (the title track of Coleman's 1986 collaboration with guitarist Pat Metheny). Ulmer's singular, otherworldly wah-wah squalls cut through the din while Laswell kicked on his Mu-Tron pedal during this cacophonous throw-down.

Allen, trumpeter Roney, Murray and Lovano then joined the whole sprawling crew for a finale of "Lonely Woman." Coltrane dug down and delivered his most inspired solo of the set on soprano sax while Murray reached some inspired peaks of his own with his passionate blowing on a powerful crescendo, bringing this gala to a dramatic conclusion.

—Bill Milkowski



Sandoval Heats up Hollywood Bowl

Trumpeter-bandleader Arturo Sandoval (left) and trumpeter Wayne Bergeron trade scorching solos during a performance by Sandoval's 19-piece big band on June 14 at the Hollywood Bowl during the Playboy Jazz Festival. A full review is posted at downbeat.com.

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Rubén Blades: Tango Storyteller

During his service from 2004 to 2009 as the Minister of Tourism for his native Panama, singer-songwriter, actor and political activist Rubén Blades largely refrained from his many pursuits in the entertainment world. But before diving headlong back into his salsa career, Blades finished a project several years in the making: a collection of 11 of his original salsa compositions re-imagined as tangos. Carlos Franzetti, a Grammy-winning pianist from Argentina, arranged and produced *Tangos* (Sunnyside), which was recorded in Buenos Aires using the veteran tango musicians of the Leopoldo Federico Orchestra. Later sessions transpired in New York City, and in Prague with a symphonic orchestra.

"In Buenos Aires, the musicians were initially skeptical because they weren't familiar with me or the songs we brought with us," Blades said over brunch in Manhattan. "But there were times when I was singing and Leopoldo would play something, and it was as if he'd touched my soul." Several of Blades' better-known compositions from his early days with Willie Colón and the Fania All-Stars, including "Pablo Pueblo" and "Paula C.," receive dramatic new interpretations on *Tangos*. A compelling storyteller, Blades discovers new emotional coloration for his songs in the cross-stylistic collection.

When did you get the idea for putting your early salsa songs to tango?

In the early 1990s. I wanted to do things differently, and I was curious about tango. I knew the lyrics would be enhanced by the atmosphere of the tango. I always knew the songs would sound the way they were supposed to. My interest was always getting as much out of the lyrics as I could, and when you approach it from another national perspective, more as a reflection, then the lyric comes out. It's the story in the lyrics that matters.

Was it easier to sing tango?

No, it was hard as hell. The phrasing is different. It's action music. There's a reflection imbued in the tango itself. Because of the atmosphere in the tango, I knew the lyrics would become more poignant. The pacing—the deliberation—changes things, so the listeners are getting the lyrics differently. So is the singer. What you're expressing changes with the phrasing. So, the emotion changes. This was unsettling—one of the hardest things I ever did.

Do you think tango purists will turn up their noses at this album?

If you asked me two years ago—or a year ago, before the record was done—I would have said yes. Now, I'm not sure. I think they will find enough truth in the music so they won't dismiss it right away.

When do you remember first hearing tango?

On the radio when I was a kid in Panama. I didn't pay too much attention to it; I knew it was around. The inflections and accents were different from everything else I heard. There was something special about it. Tango had a sound that separated itself from everything else, and it was very popular in Panama—especially songs that were played on the radio and are familiar still to people today.

What was this recording experience like for you?

First, most of the credit goes to my friend Carlos Franzetti for his vision, arrangements and guidance. Singing tango is very different from what I sing in Afro-Cuban styles. Not because of the difficult phrasing, or the fact that the tempos keep changing. It was more in the manner of what the tango atmosphere does to you, the singer. I found myself overwhelmed emotionally. And these were all songs I knew by heart, which I wrote—I thought I knew them. I thought they were exhausted already emotionally.



VINCENT SOVEZ

You were away from music for five years. Did this sabbatical change your approach?

I think the time I spent away made me a better musician. I came out of the government thinking that you can actually change the world with what you do. I came out of there less selfish, more patient, with a better understanding of myself as a person, and a better understanding of other people. I used to get angry with people when I had asked them to do things and they couldn't. Now I realize it's not them, it's *you*. People sometimes don't know better or they don't grasp things as quickly as you'd like them to.

Is there any truth to rumors that you're planning to retire from performing?

In December 2016, I will quit salsa touring. My wife [Luba Mason] and I will be forming a band and playing something we call *mixture*—jazz, salsa, rock. We'll play whatever the fuck we want. You're not going to get a regular set of music. You're not going to come and hear what you want because you can do that back at the house. We'll play all kinds of music. I want to play a gig where I can sing "Man Of Constant Sorrow," and then do a Brazilian song, and then let the piano player lead an instrumental.

—Thomas Staudter

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Joachim Badenhorst Takes Full Control with KLEIN Label

Last year the Belgian reedist Joachim Badenhorst launched his own label, KLEIN, to take control of every facet of making records. The three albums he's released on KLEIN so far all feel homemade, especially the latest, *Forest/Mori*, his second solo album. The CD comes packaged in a lovely 24-page photocopied zine filled with sketches, writing and prints by more than a dozen friends. The cover art features the title scrawled in pencil by Badenhorst himself, along with a hand-taped swatch of elegant wrapping paper.

"It was an urge to release my own material that I am convinced of, and not having to compromise," Badenhorst, 32, said of KLEIN's origin. "I've been releasing a lot of CDs on different labels, and sometimes I wouldn't agree on the proposed artwork or aesthetic. All of the releases [on Klein] so far are handmade objects. I put a lot of time and energy into the releases, and I enjoy doing it."

Investing a plethora of time and energy into his work is nothing new for Badenhorst, a stylistically broad player with a huge network of international collaborators. Growing up in Antwerp, his transition from classical music training to improvisation came through a love of klezmer, especially the adventurous clarinetist David Krakauer. Badenhorst studied at the Royal Conservatory of the Hague in the Netherlands, and it was there that he began to form connections with players from around the globe.

He spent about three years in New York, until the end of 2011, where he not only developed relationships with American and European artists, but also learned to take more risks. "The city and the music scene changed me a lot," he said. "It taught me to 'go for it.' As Belgians, our culture is so polite, and the people tend to be so restrained and quiet, with so much modesty. Whereas in New York you have to scream so loud in order to be heard, and it was great to experience that for a few years."

The most striking quality of Badenhorst's oeuvre thus far is its sheer diversity. He works in a multitude of projects and styles. He's a member of the Han Bennink Trio—the first group the legendary Dutch drummer has ever led—and he works in the dynamic chamber trio Clarino, led by German trumpeter Thomas Heberer, as well as playing in Baloni, another drummer-less trio with violist



Frantz Loriot and bassist Pascal Niggenkemper. He has made several solo outings that juggle rigorous extended technique and languid lyrical playing, and he's a member of Carate Urio Orchestra, a pan-European ensemble that boldly melds art-pop with free improvisation; its debut album *Sparrow Mountain* from 2013 was the second release on KLEIN.

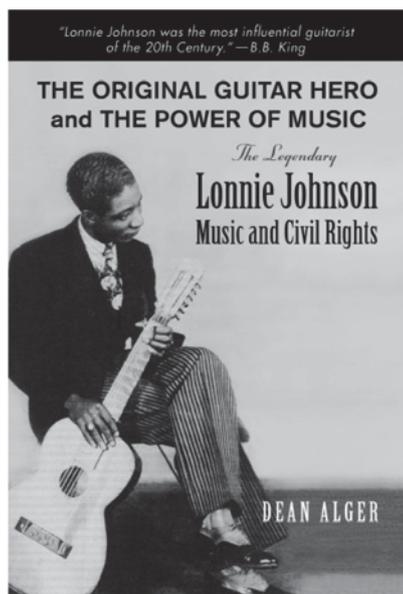
"I've always been interested in many different music styles," Badenhorst said. "Rather than repeating myself, I find it more intriguing to challenge myself in different settings, working with people who have different approaches and strong visions, like the case of my trio with John Butcher and Paul Lytton or touring with [stone percussion player] Toma Gouband and violinist C. Spencer Yeh."

Badenhorst is busier than ever, with a slew of recordings coming from both older projects (Baloni, Mogil—a group with Icelandic players—and his long-running trio Equilibrium) and new ensembles, including a partnership with the Portuguese trio Lama and a project with four clarinetists led by pianist Kris Davis.

These days, his curiosity is extending beyond musical collaborations. "In the last couple of years, I've started to collaborate more with artists, dancers and film, and the interaction of these different languages can be inspiring," he said. And while his next release on KLEIN is a duo project with the New York tuba player Dan Peck, he hopes to eventually release some Chinese traditional music. (Info about Badenhorst's albums is posted online at joachimbadenhorst.com/KLEIN_label.html.)

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After the Circus, Rehousing a Legacy at Moers Festival

Lines of musical, historical and geographical convergence suddenly achieved a strange moment of clarity on an unseasonably sweltering afternoon at the Moers Festival, which ran from June 6–9 in its namesake German city. The band Ideal Bread took the stage in the brand-new, indoor festival hall, which this year replaced the beloved “big top” circus tent.

Early on during the set, bandleader and baritone saxophonist Josh Sinton sent a sincere shout-out to the hosting festival, which he became aware of as a young record buyer discovering live recordings by avant-garde greats on the Moers Records label. He said he came to view Moers as a kind of mysterious and mythical idea as much as an actual place, a case of a European jazz entity embracing left-ish jazz from America and elsewhere.

The Moers Festival, founded in 1972 by bassist Peter Kowald and saxophonist Peter Brötzmann, and taken into its legendary early period by long-running director Burkhard Hennen, has come to represent jazz’s edge.

In the past several years, the festival’s legacy at Moers, located in the North-Rhine Westfalia region of Germany, has been rejuvenated by director Reiner Michalke, who put together the program for this 43rd annual fest, a year which will be marked by its new venue home.

After years spent in the transitory quarters of Europe’s largest circus tent, forces and funding were marshaled to create a new hall just in time for this

year’s fest. Built inside the shell of a vast tennis hall, the venue is a jewel, with crisp sound, warm ambience and democratic sightlines, and marked by jazz legends’ quotes on the support pillars.

Fittingly, the fest opened with a set by German bassist Sebastian Gramss’ BassMasse, featuring no less than 40 bassists, led in “conduction” style by Rodrigo López Klingenfuss and featuring Mark Dresser as one of the lead bassists. It was an awesome sonic encounter, yet also subtle, paying tribute to the late festival-founding bassist Kowald.

Bigger was often better at this year’s edition. On the next day, formidable and flexible Norwegian drummer Paal Nilssen-Love led the charge with his powerful collection of fine young Norwegian players called the “Large Unit,” one of the memorable highlights of the weekend. If the drummer restrained his own force-of-nature playing for the good of the whole ensemble, he cut loose more cathartically in a duet with charismatic guitarist-singer Arto Lindsay the next day.

Other compelling duo encounters this year included the madcap musicality of Dutch drummer Han Bennink (also present at the very first Moers festival) and young keyboardist Oscar Jan Hoogland, and the inspired matchup of jazz drummer Joey Baron and new-music percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky.

Each of the four festival evenings capped off with

a festive, party-themed closing act.

The Saturday night finale by the Sun Ra Arkesta, on tour to celebrate what would have been Sun Ra’s 100th birthday, was disappointingly earthbound. Apart from 90-year-old saxophonist Marshall Allen’s wily, wild playing and the last song’s “space is the place” mantra, the band failed to achieve its departed leader’s level of electricity and eccentricity.

By contrast, Letieres Leite & Orkestra Rumpilezz cooked up a riveting set distinguished by Afro-Brazilian features. The Brazilian group has earned a spot on the jazz fest circuit’s must-see list.

The best closing act came on the final day of the festival with Mostly Other People Do The Killing, in its early jazz-channeling Red Hot incarnation. The Moers Festival was an important early gateway for the American band to develop a devoted fan base in Europe. Its joyfully chaotic playing merged with jubilant, sassy melodies, highlighting lines of musical, historical and Euro-American jazz convergence in the post-circus tent hall.

—Josef Woodard

Ideal Bread onstage at the Moers Festival on June 8



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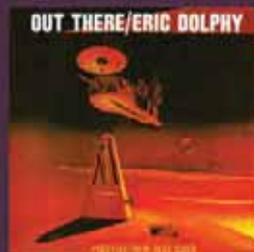
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TYLER BLANTON

The Gotham Grind

VINCENT SOYEZ

Many jazz instruments have undergone a style-shifting transformation since the 1960s and '70s, but the vibraphone remains somewhat frozen in time. Sure, a handful of players have advanced the mallet message presented by Gary Burton and Bobby Hutcherson. But the basic approach to vibes has yet to be sandblasted with the impact that, say, Jimi Hendrix or Tony Williams brought to their respective instruments.

While it would be an exaggeration to say vibraphonist Tyler Blanton's *Gotham* (Ottimo Music) is changing jazz vibraphone as we know it, there's no doubt that the 32-year-old is on to something. The album's six original compositions were written and recorded in New York City, and *Gotham* reflects the city's taxing effect on artists of all stripes.

"When I was writing *Gotham*, I was definitely feeling the weight and intensity of the city draining me," said Blanton, a Ventura, Calif., native. "I'd been in the scuffle for a few years, dealing with the day-to-day, the noise pollution, and becoming totally run-down. Sometimes all the shit I'm dealing with has to come out in the music. Some of *Gotham* is pretty aggressive. There's times when I am frustrated. I wasn't feeling a jolly swing tune."

Accompanied by drummer Nate Wood, saxophonist Donny McCaslin and bassist Matt Clohesy, Blanton plays linear, sometimes cerebral music with a groove on *Gotham*, recalling '70s French fusioners Gong ("Never Sleeps"), displaced free-funk ("Gotham") and noirish soundtracks set in some gloomy urban future ("Tunnels"). With much of the material through-composed and in-the-pocket, *Gotham* is far different from Blanton's 2010 debut, *Botanic*, which was more traditional.

"I grew up playing drums in a rock band and listening to metal, so those influences are always there," Blanton explained. "And working with Nate Wood—he's played edgy, hard-hitting music involving metric changes with Wayne Krantz and Kneebody. What Nate played over what I wrote really changed the direction; it's that aesthetic of understanding how Nate plays and his rhythms and musical vocabulary. He leaves a stamp on everything he plays."

Certain tracks on the new album seem custom-prepared for Wood: The music's cyclical ostinatos, locking patterns and abrupt accents allow the drummer to express all manner of time-stretching filigree and metric modulation. Wood gives *Gotham* the feeling of a roller coaster

barreling through a maze.

"Tyler's music is rhythmically complex," Wood said, "the kind of music only another drummer would subject his band to."

Blanton is currently developing material for his Tyler Blanton Electric Trio (with bassist Sam Minaie and drummer Ari Hoenig), where he plays the malletKAT, a MIDI percussion mallet controller. Blanton vows to use any source to achieve his goals.

"As a jazz vibes player, I love Milt Jackson and swing music, and I played it for years," he said. "But I started to feel confined by what the vibraphone does within jazz. A lot of *Gotham* isn't jazz at all. Some songs began with a drum-and-bass groove, or a [malletKAT] melody. I tried to not let the vibraphone pigeonhole the style of the music. And in New York you can literally go for anything and there will be people who can [relate to] your ideas and will want to work with you."

One such person is Wood. "New York musicians are so busy that they don't have time to think about what they want to do—they just have to do it," the drummer said. "In New York, you're encouraged to play what you want and take it as far as you can. You have to be in the moment."
—Ken Micallef



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MARIO PAVONE
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On his latest Playscape release, *Street Songs*, Mario Pavone revisits a sound from his youth.

"I always wanted to do something with accordion," said the 74-year-old bassist-composer. "And I realized it was because of this very diverse neighborhood that I grew up in—Waterbury, Connecticut—right after the war. Whether you were Italian or Portuguese or Polish, there was always an accordion playing on the front stoop, and as a kid I would hear this great folky sound ... *front stoop* music, I call it."

Pavone approached some tunes on *Street Songs*, such as "The Dom," in the same way he discovered music as a kid: from hearing parades passing by.

"You're a kid, you're walking along, you hear this music from afar, you approach it, it gets louder, you keep going, it recedes. Or you hear music from cars going by. You're still but the music is moving. This kind of thing is an interesting effect; there's a mystery there when music moves further away."

Trumpeter Dave Ballou, who arranged "Short Story" and "Alban Berg" on *Street Songs*, said Pavone has always kept things open during recording sessions and on the bandstand.

"Recording and playing gigs with Mario is always a great opportunity to dive deeper into the art," Ballou said. "Being an artist is who he is, and it's totally natural for him. But he wants you to bring that part of yourself to the mix, too. He doesn't tell you to play like 'this' or 'that.' The only time I've heard him even mention something about the way a musician was approaching a piece was when it was too far away from the vibe of the tune. He approaches things from a compositional instinct and celebrates the outcome when the whole band is coming from that perspective."

Pianist and longtime collaborator Peter Madsen, who also appears on *Street Songs*, added, "I've always been taken with Mario's huge sound on the bass, his propulsion, his swing. I've noticed that as Mario has gotten older, he's loosened up and can more easily and quickly go in various musical directions. And he does it with his special kind of energy, which keeps the music moving forward with such beauty and excitement."

Pavone worked early in his career with avant-garde icons Paul Bley, Bill Dixon and Anthony Braxton and was later the anchor of Thomas Chapin's trio of the late '80s and '90s before beginning his string of releases on guitarist Michael Musillami's Playscape label in 2000. In July, the bassist-composer celebrated his 50 years in music with a three-evening mini-festival at New York's Cornelia Street Cafe, where he showcased his Arc Quartet (Ballou, drummer Gerald Cleaver and tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin), Pulse Quartet (Cleaver, Eskelin and the leader's son, guitarist Michael Pavone) and an expanded nonet version of his *Street Songs* band. Meanwhile, he continues to feel energized and inspired by the input of all his sidemen. "These players today just get it," he said.

Pavone also gets a charge from teaching a new generation of jazz players at the Litchfield Jazz Camp summer series in Connecticut. "I've been there since the beginning [1997] ... and it's so great to see them all develop and grow on their instruments over the years."

—Bill Milkowski

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BRIA SKONBERG

Beyond 'Hot' Jazz



TOM CONCORDIA

It would be easy to pigeonhole trumpeter-singer Bria Skonberg as a trad-jazz player. A vital force on New York City's burgeoning "hot jazz" scene as a guest soloist with Vince Giordano & The Nighthawks and David Ostwald's Louis Armstrong Eternity Band, she is also co-producer of the annual New York Hot Jazz Festival, which was held this year at The Players Club. Skonberg has a genuine feel for the material and a real knack for singing classic tunes with the kind of class and pizzazz that recalls one of her vocal idols, Anita O'Day.

But a cursory listen to Skonberg's recent albums as a leader—2012's *So Is The Day* and 2014's *Into Your Own* (both on Random Act)—reveals this gifted and charismatic performer is into far more than just music from the '20s and '30s. Take, for instance, her clever mashup of the Tin Pan Alley chestnut "Three Little Words" and Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke" on *Into Your Own*.

"That is such a cool horn line and so fun to play," she said of the tune from Wonder's 1976 album *Songs In The Key Of Life*. "I've been wanting to work that into my own arrangement, and then the idea of the mashup came to me. I'm just trying to incorporate things that people will

relate to. In this case, they'll hear the familiar 'Sir Duke' and meanwhile the lyrics are from a song from the 1930s."

Throughout *Into Your Own*, Skonberg pushes the envelope well beyond her foundation in traditional jazz: There's her poignant reading of John Lennon's "Julia" and her raucous rendition of Jelly Roll Morton's earthy "Winin' Boy Blues," which she sings and plays through a heavily distorted mic. She channels her inner Elton John on the appealing pop song "All My Life" and summons a Phoebe Snow-meets-Norah Jones soulfulness on the affecting ballad "Break My Fall."

Skonberg's uplifting closer, "Go Tell It," is based on the spiritual "Go Tell It On the Mountain." "Peter, Paul & Mary put out a version of that song in the '60s and it ended up being an anthem for the civil rights movement," she said. "When I was doing this tune, it was right at the beginning of January when everybody was getting ready for the Olympics and there was that whole controversy of how you can't be gay in [Vladimir] Putin's Russia. And I just kind of connected the dots and thought, 'The LGBT movement is like the civil rights movement of my generation.' As an

artist, you're taking a snapshot of the culture at the time, and that's what I was doing with this tune."

Her lyrics on "Let's Go All In" carry the sardonic wit of a classic Cole Porter tune, and she keeps one foot in the early jazz camp with the Armstrong-inspired "Six More Weeks," set to a second-line groove.

"Hot jazz has been a home base for me since I started learning how to improvise," said the Chilliwack, B.C., native and current Brooklynite. "I did a lot of that in British Columbia, playing for dances and recreating that style. But I used my move to New York [in 2010] as an opportunity to redefine and explore what my signature sound is. I've definitely been trying to expand my concept of what can be done with it, and expand other people's perceptions in the process. And I like to see it as an organic progression.

"I've gotten a lot of press recently for doing the hot jazz stuff," she said, "but I think my real forte is bridging all these styles and interests together and bringing people on a bit of a journey. I have a lot of fun with it. I think people generally leave my concerts going, 'Wow, that was an experience!'"

—Bill Milkowski



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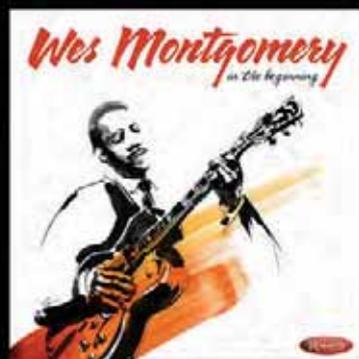
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NOAH BAERMAN
Making the Notes Count

A close-up photo on his website shows the braces that Noah Baerman wears throughout the day on his hands—chrome rings framing his middle knuckles. Though some might view the rings as stylish, for the keyboardist-composer (who also sings and adds slide guitar on his new CD, *Ripples*), these supportive devices allow him to play—and persevere—despite a debilitating condition caused by Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS), a genetic disorder that affects the body’s collagen production and development of connective tissue, resulting in loose and weakly controlled joints.

Baerman, 40, realized early on in his career that he would have to simply limit his playing in order to prolong his ability to perform.

“It’s a rarity to find musicians with EDS to begin with because of the inherent difficulties in being physically able to spend hours rehearsing, let alone performing,” he explained. “So, anything I did in music had to be sensitive to these circumstances. I could still play, but with little room for playing tunes just for their own sake. If there were only so many notes left in me, then I wanted to make them all count.”

Baerman notes that the conversations evoked by his splint-like braces give him an opportunity to raise awareness about EDS. His music serves the same goal. The limit on his performing has caused him to gravitate toward composing what he calls “message music,” songs that have been inspired by or are meant to educate listeners about particular subjects. “I feel a need to tap into a more emotional potency in what I am doing versus what I would get out of playing random standards,” Baerman said.

In 2002, when he was recording his second album, *Patch Kit*, with bassist Ron Carter and drummer Ben Riley, Baerman settled into this overall concept—of using music toward a specific end—and turned the project into a fundraiser for the Ehlers-Danlos National Foundation.

Ripples, his ninth album, features music from two new groups: a relatively new collective called the Jazz Samaritan Alliance and a chamber octet built from his long-running trio. The arrangements on *Ripples* give his accompanists plenty of room to sparkle. The album was released this spring in conjunction with a not-for-profit organization Baerman has founded, Resonant Motion Inc., which aims to provide purposely created “healing art” while also pointing to humanitarian efforts that, in turn, reflexively stimulate the muse. “I want to explore the intersection where music and positive change converge and exist as reciprocal influences on each other,” he said

To achieve this synergetic art, Baerman began collecting some older songs and composing new ones that would memorialize the passing of a beloved aunt who was a passionate activist and generous philanthropist. One song, “The Healer,” deals with his physical disorder, and another, “Time Is Now,” celebrates the lofty national optimism of President Obama’s 2008 inauguration. Two songs—“Motherless” and “Lester”—were inspired by Baerman’s interest in foster care. (Baerman and his wife, the visual artist Kate Ten Eyck, have become foster and adoptive parents. They live in Middletown, Conn., and actively promote the concepts of fostering and adopting teenagers.)

For musical assistance on *Ripples*, Baerman turned to numerous friends and associates: saxophonists Jimmy Greene and Kris Allen, vibraphonist Chris Dingman (who attended Wesleyan University, where Baerman teaches), flutist Erica von Kleist and pianist Kenny Barron (Baerman’s mentor since his undergrad days at Rutgers University), plus his trio mates for the past dozen years—bassist Henry Lugo and drummer Vinnie Sperrazza.

“Noah is serious about making sure his voice comes through on the instruments he plays,” said Dingman. “You can hear it in the way he handles the melodies. And he can burn: On most gigs he always takes it several notches past where you would expect him to settle down. But it’s always serviceable to the music.”

—Thomas Staudter

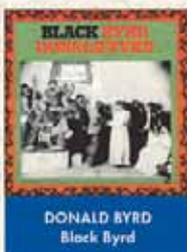


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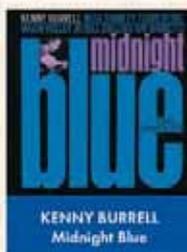
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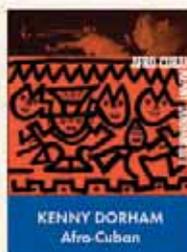
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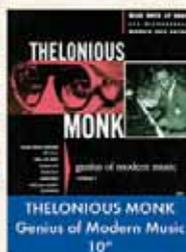
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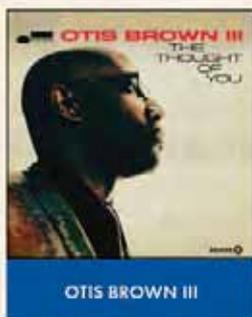
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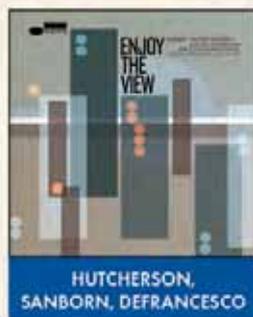
JASON MORAN
All Rise: A Joyful Elegy for Fats Waller

Pianist Jason Moran's latest album release, *All Rise: A Joyful Elegy for Fats Waller*, recasts the music of the legendary jazz entertainer Fats Waller as a modern dance party. Produced by Meshell Ndegeocello and Dan Was, the album features vocalists Ndegeocello, Lisa E. Harris, his longtime trio The Bandwagon featuring bassist Torus Mateen and drummer Nasheet Waits, and a funky horn-influenced ensemble anchored by drummer Charles Haynes that features trumpeter Leron Thomas and trombonist Josh Roseman, as well as guest saxophonist Steve Lehman.



OTIS BROWN III

Drummer Otis Brown III steps out with *The Thought of You*, a bold debut that harks back like a musical memoir through an vitalizing lens. Produced by Derrick Hodge, the core band enlists pianist Robert Glasper, trumpeter Keyon Harold, saxophonist John Ellis, and bassist Ben Williams with featured guests organist Shedrick Mitchell, guitarist Nir Felder, and singers Bilal, Gretchen Parlato, and Nikki Ross.



HUTCHERSON,
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NEA Jazz Master Bobby Hutcherson returns to Blue Note Records, where the virtuoso vibraphonist started his career in the early '60s. *Enjoy The View* was produced by Blue Note president Dan Was and recorded by an all-star collective of saxophonist David Sanborn and organist Joey DeFrancesco, featuring drummer Billy Hart.



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JOHN COLTRANE

RESTLESS URGENCY

A PREVIOUSLY UNRELEASED LATE-1966 CONCERT RECORDING OF JOHN COLTRANE HAS GIVEN FANS, CRITICS AND MUSICIANS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECONSIDER WHERE THE SAXOPHONIST WAS HEADED IN THE LAST YEAR OF HIS LIFE

BY JAMES HALE // PHOTO BY JAN PERSSON

When the titans depart too soon, the void they leave behind is enormous.

The gaping hole that remained in the wake of John Coltrane's death (from liver cancer at the age of 40 on July 17, 1967) was particularly large—not only because of his incredible talent, but because his artistic vision was evolving so quickly and his next steps were anything but obvious.

Fans who bought Coltrane's late-period LPs knew he was moving into uncharted territory. The studio albums *Ascension*, *Kulu Se Mama* and *Meditations*—all released in 1966—showed him adding musicians like bass clarinetist Donald Rafael Garrett and percussionist Juno Lewis to his core quartet, and expanding the harmonic possibilities of his saxophones to play compositions with titles that reflected a deepening concentration on the divine.

Listeners who witnessed his 1966 performances were aware that something much more radical was occurring. Gone from his circle of musicians were drummer Elvin Jones—his triplet-based, polyrhythmic swing replaced by Rashied Ali's looser thrash and propulsive roar—and pianist McCoy Tyner, superseded by Coltrane's partner Alice McLeod. Bassist Jimmy

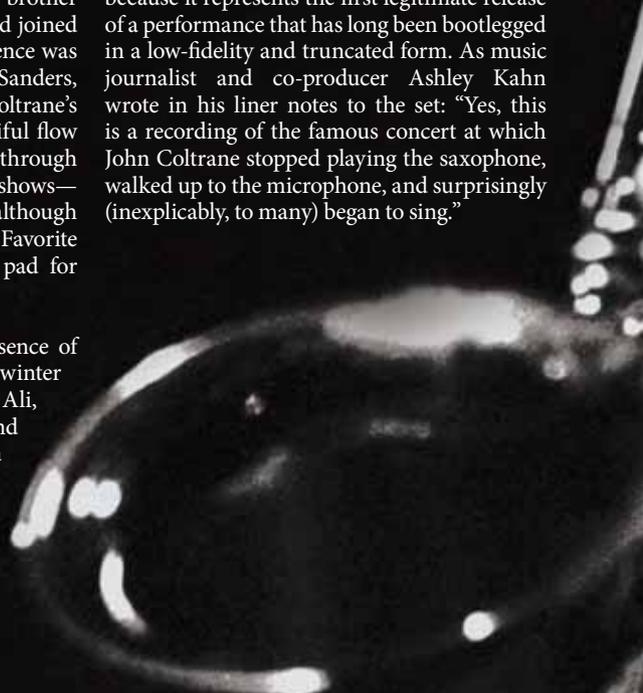
Garrison was out, too, beginning around the time that Coltrane returned from a tour of Japan and married McLeod in August 1966. Stepping in was Sonny Johnson, the brother of trumpeter Dewey Johnson, who had joined Coltrane on *Ascension*. A steady presence was young firebrand saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, who seemed capable of matching Coltrane's intensity, if not his stamina or bountiful flow of ideas. The music Coltrane played through the first 10 months of 1966—some 80 shows—was less rooted in recognizable forms, although compositions like “Naima” and “My Favorite Things” remained as the launching pad for far-ranging extrapolation.

Where was he going?

The question hangs, and the presence of two final studio sessions from late winter 1967—the set of muscular duets with Ali, released as *Interstellar Space* in 1974, and the songs that make up the 1995 album *Stellar Regions*—do not provide an unequivocal answer.

That is precisely why any new evidence is treasured, both as a further clue to where the journey was headed and a welcome addition

to Coltrane's catalog. Recorded on Nov. 11, 1966, *Offering: Live At Temple University* (Impulse/Resonance) is particularly welcomed because it represents the first legitimate release of a performance that has long been bootlegged in a low-fidelity and truncated form. As music journalist and co-producer Ashley Kahn wrote in his liner notes to the set: “Yes, this is a recording of the famous concert at which John Coltrane stopped playing the saxophone, walked up to the microphone, and surprisingly (inexplicably, to many) began to sing.”





Trane Tracks

John Coltrane's career—and the global appreciation of his artistry today—would have been very different without the contributions of recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder. Several of the albums Van Gelder recorded with Trane, especially those with the saxophonist-composer's "classic" quartet, stand among the greatest in the history of jazz. They also demonstrate the close connection between a soft-spoken, introverted artist and an audio work bent on perfectionism.

Beginning with the recordings he made for Prestige and Blue Note, Van Gelder first worked in the living room of his parents' home in Hackensack, N.J., fitting in sessions while maintaining his day job as an optometrist. A handful of jazz dates in 1953 encouraged the young recording engineer and assured the label bosses he worked for that the progenitors of hard-bop were in capable hands. The following year his workload increased significantly, as he handled the recording duties on more than 35 sessions for the likes of Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Milt Jackson and Horace Silver.

"During that time there were only three major record companies: RCA, Columbia and Decca," Van Gelder recalled during a recent interview. "[Prestige founder] Bob Weinstock, a music lover like myself, wanted to record albums that could compete sound-wise with the majors. I felt that now I had a mission: to allow small private labels to sound as good as the three big labels." (As part of Prestige Records' 65th anniversary celebration this year, Concord will release high-resolution digital reissues of 60 *Rudy Van Gelder Remasters* titles and hold a special event in the fall to salute the engineer on his 90th birthday.)

When Coltrane arrived as a member of Miles Davis' quintet in November 1955 for a recording session, many hard-blowing saxophonists had already been flocking to Hackensack to cut records in Van Gelder's living room, including Lou Donaldson, Phil Woods and Gene Ammons. "Rudy had a way of capturing horns the way they sounded," said Michael Cuscuna, the reissue producer of numerous Van Gelder-engineered recordings. "He was committed to getting as close to the impact of a 'live' performance as possible in his studio—and he did it."

Over the next two years, Coltrane would have many opportunities to appreciate Van Gelder's meticulous nature, hard work and technical expertise. In 1956 alone, Coltrane was featured on a number of Prestige recordings cut in Hackensack: Sonny Rollins' *Tenor Madness*, Tadd Dameron's *Mating Call* and the *Tenor Conclave* project with Hank Mobley, Al Cohn and Zoot Sims, plus the famed *Cookin'*, *Relaxin'*, *Workin'* and *Steamin'* titles with Davis. Coltrane signed with Prestige in April 1957 and within the next few months recorded his debut, *Coltrane, Blue Train* (a one-off for Blue Note) and *John Coltrane With The Red Garland Trio*—all with Van Gelder.

Away from Van Gelder's magic, Coltrane was still able to spin his own. The saxophonist's work with Davis took him to Columbia Records' fabled 30th Street



McCoy Tyner (left, at piano), Archie Shepp, John Coltrane and Bob Thiele, during the recording sessions for *A Love Supreme* on Dec. 10, 1964. (Photo: Chuck Stewart)

recording studios, nicknamed "The Church," in 1956, 1957 and 1959 for *Kind Of Blue*. A timely collaboration with Thelonious Monk in 1957 took him to Reeves Sound Studios in New York City for a memorable, breakthrough session. Coltrane's two-year contract with Atlantic Records moved him over to Atlantic Studios in Midtown Manhattan (with Tom Dowd engineering) and yielded *My Favorite Things*, with its hit title track. But when his contract ran out, the saxophonist immediately reunited with Van Gelder, who was then working for Creed Taylor, and later Bob Thiele, at Impulse Records.

By then, Van Gelder had built a new home and studio in Englewood Cliffs, N.J. He helped design a chapel-like space with a 39-foot-high ceiling made of cedar with arches of laminated Douglas fir, which created a natural reverb.

"When John's time at Atlantic ended, Bob Thiele asked him where he wanted to record, and he said, 'At Rudy's,'" Van Gelder remembered. "I believe that John liked the new studio, and it fit with where he was going with his music. A perfect match."

Moving to Impulse gave Coltrane the freedom to broaden his horizons. His first project with the label was a large ensemble recording, *Africa/Brass*. Van Gelder was truly tested when he recorded Coltrane for *Live At The Village Vanguard*, setting up his tape machine at the front of the stage and capturing the music on two microphones.

"It took balls to record Coltrane," said Cuscuna. "The quartet was a volatile group—it was heavy-metal jazz in a lot of ways, and most engineers were afraid of those situations. But Rudy was a genius in miking the music and riding the recording levels. He was able to achieve clarity and presence in those recordings, and put the music in your face in a great way."

Many of the albums Coltrane recorded with Van Gelder—including *Crescent*, *John Coltrane And Johnny Hartman* and the 1962 quartet LP *Coltrane*—stand as remarkable achievements, but *A Love Supreme*, recorded 50 years ago this December, became an iconic cultural touchstone. "Those sessions fit into the sound of the room in a natural way, and they were quite easy to record," said Van Gelder. "Also, Bob Thiele appreciated that. His skill was in knowing when to just let things happen, not to interfere."

In early 1967, Coltrane and his collaborators—pianist Alice Coltrane, reedist Pharoah Sanders, bassist Jimmy Garrison and drummer Rashied Ali—worked with Van Gelder on material that would be released posthumously. The final recording session that Coltrane had with Van Gelder was on March 7, 1967. By that time, both the engineer and the artist had come a long way from Hackensack. —Thomas Staudter

Coltrane had vocalized before, of course, most notably on the "Acknowledgement" movement of *A Love Supreme*, but also during his band's Sept. 30, 1965, performance, which was released as *Live In Seattle*. But what he did during "Leo" and "My Favorite Things" at Temple University appeared to be more spontaneous, and more of an extension of his instrumental work—intoning the same phrases he played and pounding on his chest to produce a percussive vibrato effect.

"What I hear is someone being ecstatic, and transcendent energy being realized," said David Mott, longtime head of the music department at York University in Toronto, whose work on baritone saxophone often expresses similar spiritual themes. Mott said he recognized Coltrane was an ecstatic while watching him perform over the course of a week (likely in early November 1964) at Boston's Jazz Workshop.

"There are three types of musicians: those who play from the ego, those who manage to put ego aside while they play, and a very few like Coltrane, who channel something outside themselves."

The extended vocalizing was just one aspect that made the Temple performance stand apart; another was the presence of a quartet of percussionists, including Ali's brother Umar, Robert Kenyatta, Algie DeWitt and Charles Brown.

"These were guys from the neighborhood who were interested in promoting African culture as part of community-building," said Kahn. "It was the same kind of thing you saw at the time in drum circles near the Bethesda Fountain in New York's Central Park or in San Francisco. It was an informal, spiritual thing, rather than following any specific style like clave or Indian percussion."

As early as 1960, Coltrane had spoken of a desire to explore the rhythmic possibilities in his music more deeply as a way to further his artistic development. In the article "Coltrane on Coltrane," published in *DownBeat's* Sept. 29, 1960, issue, he wrote: "I want to broaden my outlook in order to come out with a fuller means of expression. I want to be more flexible where rhythm is concerned. I feel I have to study rhythm some more. I haven't experimented too much with time; most of my experimenting has been in a harmonic form. I put time and rhythms to one side, in the past.

"But I've got to keep experimenting. I feel that I'm just beginning. I have part of what I'm looking for in my grasp but not all."

According to Kenyatta, whom Kahn interviewed, Coltrane appeared unannounced at the church where the drummers rehearsed and asked if he could sit in. At first, the saxophonist could not find a way to mesh his playing

with the rhythms, but within a week he had altered his phrasing to suit the ensemble.

If the presence of amateur drummers wasn't enough to signal that Coltrane was trying a new direction, what to make of two additional saxophonists—Steve Knoblauch and Arnold Joyner—who stepped onstage (the latter uninvited by Coltrane) to solo?

Journalist and jazz critic Francis Davis was a 20-year-old English major at Temple in 1966. He recalls that he was not completely surprised by the expanded lineup or unannounced guests. "There had been reports in DownBeat and elsewhere about people like Rufus Harley and Sonny Fortune joining him onstage, so it wasn't totally unexpected," he said. "Still, there were some people who reacted to this like it was open-mic night with a bunch of amateurs. I don't buy that, but it was certainly in the air."

A variety of factors had brought Coltrane to this atypical point in his performing career.

Originally, he had planned to be on tour in Europe in November 1966. Dates had been announced for Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, but the tour was cancelled. Instead, Coltrane spent several weeks in his hometown of Philadelphia. Those looking for clues that he recognized he was suffering from what would turn out to be a fatal disease are quick to point to this abrupt change in plans.

Rutgers University music professor Lewis Porter, author of the exhaustive book *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, dismisses the notion. "I think the reason he cancelled the tour and returned to Philadelphia is much more mundane," he said. "John and Alice had two children under 3 years of age, and Alice was several months pregnant with their third child. They had just returned from an extensive tour of Japan. I think they just viewed the European tour as something they didn't need."

Add to that the fact that it was not until the following spring that Coltrane submitted to medical tests, and it is clear that the sudden cancellation and the spiritual nature of the Temple performance had nothing to do with a heightened sense of mortality.

Kahn points to the fact that Coltrane also had burgeoning career plans on his mind as 1966 drew to a close. "He was tired of battling it out with the noise of the cash register and patrons being served in bars. He

wanted to present his music more like a service, and was thinking about opening his own performance space and producing concerts."

Given that, it is not surprising that Coltrane would have responded favorably to Temple's Student Union Board's offer to appear in the 1,800-seat Mitten Hall, and that he turned it into a communal presentation that was closer to a spiritual offering than a traditional jazz concert.

Davis, who has compared the atmosphere that night in Mitten Hall to a political convention, said: "It was a time when every Coltrane concert seemed charged with meaning. Just like when Bob Dylan went electric a year earlier, it seemed that more than the future of music was at stake. In addition, the so-called 'New Thing' had become increasingly black-identified, which scared some people off and drew others in. There was a definite political charge in the air."

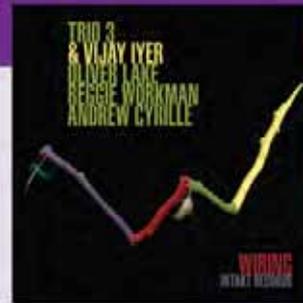
The tape of the concert made by WRTI, Temple's community radio station, misses the opening notes of the performance, but when it begins Coltrane is rhapsodizing over his wife's spectral piano. The song is "Naima," but he is taking it far beyond the familiar melody he composed for his first wife, and the rhythmic structure has all but vanished. Despite the song's transformation, saxophonist Jon Irabagon hears a "singular vision" that distinguishes Coltrane's approach.

"On 'Naima,' he plays the very used, traditional and standard line from the opening of 'Cry Me A River,' and he develops and manipulates it," Irabagon said. "One wouldn't think that Coltrane would mix that kind of 'older' vocabulary with the cells and transpositions that had taken over his melodies by 1966, but we find it here. Coltrane never saw a line between what he was doing and where he came from, and the traditional, more melodic approaches were a part of his playing all along."

What captures Porter's ear on this version of "Naima" is Coltrane's tone. "Right at the beginning, you are struck by his beautiful sound," he said. "You realize when you hear it how much it had changed; it's big, open and resonant."

Within minutes, Coltrane is at full throttle, and the effect, even to saxophonists who are as familiar with his body of work as Mott and Irabagon, is thrilling.

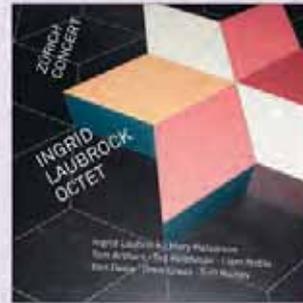
"It's kind of astonishing how hard he is pushing his horn, getting



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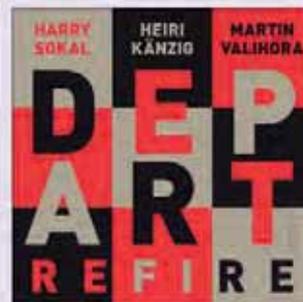
Mark Feldman: Violin
Sylvie Courvoisier: Piano
Scott Colley: Bass
Billy Mintz: Drums



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ANDREAS SCHAEERER LUCAS NIGGLI ARCANUM

Andreas Schaerer: Voice
Lucas Niggli: Drums



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Heiri Känzig: Bass
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it to rattle in the lower register,” Mott said. “The horn sounds like it’s about ready to explode; he’s putting tremendous pressure on it. What he’s doing is not supposed to be humanly possible.”

Irabagon marvels at how easily and quickly Coltrane shifts between the motivic cells that he had come to favor, and how he plays call-and-response phrases in separate octaves with extraordinary precision. “The saxophone technique needed to pull off these ideas is incredibly difficult, but because he has constantly grown and evolved his ideas so fully and meticulously, the ideas come through without a second thought to the technical difficulties behind them,” Irabagon said. “Coltrane always had great

technique, but in this concert he is not hindered by the technical side of the saxophone at all.”

The single microphone employed onstage at Mitten Hall keeps the focus clearly on Coltrane when he is playing, but despite how obscured the piano, bass, drums and percussion instruments are, it is evident that the saxophonist’s use of his accompanying instruments had changed, too. From her introduction to his band in early 1966, McLeod had changed the texture of her partner’s playing. While Tyner had underpinned Coltrane with his signature use of fourths and left-hand pedal points, and was frequently asked to lay out during solos, McLeod used sweeping gestures, and was encouraged by the saxophonist

to use the entire keyboard. Ali’s low rumble lacked the dynamic range of Jones’ playing, and the percussion ensemble added a dark tapestry to the rhythm section.

“One of the remarkable things about this performance is how far Coltrane has shifted to what music theorist Jonathan Kramer called ‘vertical time,’” Mott said. “With this texture of percussion behind him, Coltrane isn’t defining time at all. That frees him up even more than previously. The music is not goal oriented; it doesn’t have to go anywhere.”

Both in his book and in conversation, Porter makes the case that this type of background was Coltrane’s attempt to shift the way listeners perceived his playing.

“The new context of Coltrane’s last music changed the meaning of his dissonance,” Porter wrote in 1998. “By that, I mean that without that underpinning it starts to sound like the tonal centers are floating. A changing tonal center is unsettling to most people, and even though the lay person won’t discern the subtleties, the percussionists in the Temple performance give it a certain regularity.”

Some listeners might theorize that Coltrane was experimenting with ways to make his music more palatable.

“I think he was always moving with his music, trying different things,” said Kahn. “There were always times when he took a break and revisited earlier ideas. Everyone is going to hear what they hear in the Temple performance; I hear a restlessness, and I hear urgency.”

Many among the 700 people who paid \$2.50 to see Coltrane that evening in Philadelphia did not like what they heard and left the hall.

“I’ve seen walk-outs at only two other concerts that I recall,” said Davis, “but this was a real visceral reaction. People either loved what was going on or they wanted out.”

“I have to say, as much as I love Coltrane, it’s easy to have mixed feelings about this performance,” said Mott. “Most of the other musicians were not up to his level, and while Coltrane clearly sounds transcendent, the others are simply being cathartic.”

Still, Mott made the point that Coltrane’s openness about sharing his stage—to the point of allowing Joyner to jump in as though the concert was the loosest of jam sessions—reflected his state of mind. “He wasn’t discriminatory or judgmental. The whole world was his community, and his playing shows that he was in a true state of love.”

“All the rules had been thrown out by this point in Coltrane’s life,” said Kahn. “Listening to the complete tapes of the concert, you are struck by the informality of the whole thing. Not only was he open to young players joining in, but after the music is over the band doesn’t even leave the stage. On the broadcast, two WRTI announcers [Dave McLaughlin and Bob Rothstein] converse for 10 minutes, trying to decipher what they’d just experienced.”

For both WRTI and the student organizers, who lost \$1,000 on the event, the concert was little more than an anomaly, and were it not for Davis’ reminiscence in a February 1992 article

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in *The Village Voice* and an essay attributed to Rashied Ali in a book about the '60s published by Rolling Stone Press in 1977, the event might have been forgotten.

Kahn recalled that Ali essay, and was excited when persistent detective work by renowned Coltrane collector Yasuhiro Fujioka turned up the master tape at WRTI. Despite interest by Kahn, Porter and various people at Universal Music's Verve Music Group, which now owns the Impulse label, the project languished until George Klabin and Zev Feldman of Resonance Records got involved.

"We had heard about the idea to release this," said Feldman, "and Universal knew about us through the Bill Evans and Wes Montgomery archival projects we had produced. We all thought it was a perfect fit for us, right in line with the kind of historical restoration work we had been doing."

The joint venture between the French-owned multinational Universal and the non-profit Resonance is unique, as is the donating of some profit from sales to the restoration of Coltrane's final residence in Dix Hills, N.Y. (The museum project is described online at thecoltranehome.org.)

While Resonance handled the digital restoration of the 48-year-old tape—giving depth and clarity to the dodgy sound captured on the various bootlegs—Universal's participation gives the release the iconic orange-and-black spine associated with Impulse and more than 40 other Coltrane recordings.

"Any new Coltrane find is massively interesting and immensely educational," said Irabagon. "For those of us who have researched as much Coltrane as we can, every new solo gives us clues as to where he was at that particular point, and helps us to hypothesize where he might have gone."

"His explorations of pitch, phrasing and spontaneous freedom of expression sound like he was looking for something," said Mott. "I don't know what would've happened had he beaten the disease, but I do know that if the need to express the divine is there, it's going to come through."

Jazz scholar-photographer Frank Kofsky's book *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* includes the transcription of a radio interview that Coltrane gave during his 1966 tour of Japan. The interviewer asked Coltrane what his goal for the future was, and his reply reflected his philosophy that the quality of his music was intertwined with a quest for self-improvement: "I believe that men ought to grow themselves into the fullest, the best that they can be. ... [T]his is my belief—that I am supposed to grow to the best good that I can get to. As I'm going there, becoming this—if I ever become—this will just come out of the horn. So whatever that's going to be, that's what it will be. I'm not so much interested in trying to say what it's going to be—I don't know. I just know that good can only bring good ..."

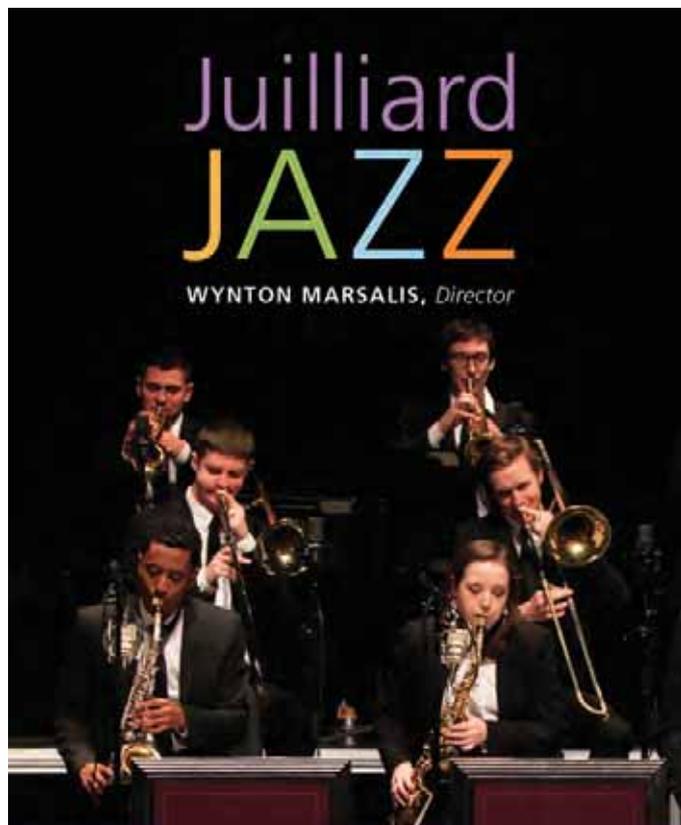
"Regardless of where he was headed, which we'll never know, I think hearing this [Temple] performance makes us reconsider what Coltrane was doing and what it meant to him," said Kahn. "The fact that it came so close to the end of his life just makes it more poignant and poetic."

Indeed, Coltrane would perform only an estimated seven more times in 1966, and one final time on April 23, 1967. There is no indication that he intended to continue with a large ensemble, although DeWitt and another percussionist—thought to be Juma Santos—performed at his final gig. Much of what he recorded in February 1967, which makes up *Stellar Regions*, points to a return to more structured compositions and is notable for the absence of Sanders or other additional musicians. This may have been evidence that he was pulling back from the concept of a large ensemble and open-ended, high-energy excursions into spiritual expression, or simply another stop on a quest for new ways to communicate with listeners.

As with so much about Coltrane, the truth is elusive, but Irabagon believes the journey itself is inspirational.

"The fact that Coltrane was on a never-ending search for new and uplifting ways to play, coupled with the drive to do whatever he heard in his head—despite pushback from the public and critics alike—is inspiring and life-changing. His work gives many current musicians confidence to try to find new avenues of expression."

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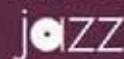
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Arturo O'FARRILL

The Same Root

By Ted Panken | Photography by Rebecca Meek

If it's Sunday evening, Arturo O'Farrill is probably at Birdland. Since 1997, with occasional interruptions, he has spent his Sunday nights directing big bands at the New York venue—14 years with the Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra of Chico O'Farrill, which bears his father's name, and three years with its legatee, his own Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra (ALJO). In early June, not long after the release of ALJO's album *The Offense Of The Drum* (Motéma), O'Farrill opened the show with "Vaca Frita," a swing-to-mambo original infused with Gil Evans-esque brass, then Chico O'Farrill's "Trumpet Fantasy," which juxtaposed rumba-driven call-and-response sections with subtle restatements from the *canción* section of Chico's *Afro-Cuban Suite*.

O'Farrill rose from the piano, stated titles and personnel, and introduced "On The Corner Of Malecón And Bourbon," which he composed. "I do everything backwards," he said. "When I teach jazz history classes, I start with Cecil Taylor, then we go to Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Mingus. We keep searching, and finally end with Scott Joplin. The beginnings of jazz and Latin come from the same root."

As on the version that appears on *The Offense Of The Drum*, O'Farrill's florid introduction evoked Rachmaninoff more than Taylor, but everything else was as stated. After the climactic two-trumpet passage, the applause was raucous. O'Farrill waited. "We've decided that Latin jazz is not defined by Cuban and Puerto Rican music," he declared, and then offered "Mercado en Domingo," a highlight of the new CD. Composed by Colombian pianist Pablo Mayor, it contained janky trumpet lines, tangoish sax unisons and Rafi Malkiel's fluid trombone solo, all goosed by a *porro* streetbeat, which would sound apropos in a New Orleans second line. Next was "Freilach a Nacht," a klezmer-ish minor blues propelled by a crackling merengue perhaps one degree removed from a polka. On the set-closer, a Ray

Santos mambo dedicated to Mario Bauzá, ALJO idiomatically channeled the soulful Afro-Cuban essence of its namesake.

Within this six-tune episode, O'Farrill, 54, encapsulated the overlapping streams that have defined his musical production since 2002, when Wynton Marsalis invited him to form the Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra of Lincoln Center.

His mandate was to assemble an exhaustive book of repertoire associated with his father, Machito, Bauzá, Tito Puente and other Afro-Caribbean heroes, and to perform it authentically, but with an attitude firmly implanted in the here-and-now. After JALC severed ties in 2005, he regrouped, substituting "Latin" for "Cuban" in the band's title. In 2007, supported by a non-profit called the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance, he launched an annual concert season at Symphony Space, which includes an annual *Musica Nueva* concert devoted to commissioned works—*The Offense Of The Drum* culls nine of them—reflecting Pan-American and Afro-diasporic perspectives.

A few days after the Birdland show, in a courtyard near the ALJA offices, O'Farrill discussed the roots and branches of his hemispheric sensibility. He recalled the in-studio response of Donald Harrison—on-site to perform the Mardi Gras Indian flagwaver "Iko, Iko," which closes the album—to a playback of "Mercado en Domingo." "Donald started laughing quietly," O'Farrill said. "He understood the idea I'm selling—that the same music he grew up with in the streets of New Orleans was happening in the streets of Bogotá or Lima or any major metropolis in South America where brass bands played African rhythms. We're playing each other's music, but from different entry points."

These connective portals reveal themselves in various guises in the otherwise disparate pieces that constitute *The Offense Of The Drum*. Colombian harp virtuoso Edmar Castaneda solos over a mélange of Colombian, Brazilian

and Afro-Cuban rhythms on his glistening "Cuarto de Colores." Spanish alto saxophonist-vocalist Antonio Lizana infuses flamenco soul into Erik Satie's "Gnossienne 3 (Tientos)," which he arranged. The hip-hop cadences of Nuyorican poet Christopher "Chilo" Cajigas' recitation-chant of "They Came," arranged by Jason Lindner, intersect with DJ Logic's turntable sound-painting.

The oppressive, martial sound of Japanese *taiko* drums, set ironically against a fugal form and a bolero cadence, opens the title track, which O'Farrill wrote in response to the gradual suppression of public drum circles in New York City. During the song's second half, liberation beats fuel the orchestra's rowdy splashes of color.

"Everything Arturo writes is really from the drums, although he writes around melody and conceptual things as well," ALJO drummer Vince Chericó said. "When we're learning something in rehearsals, he'll stop the horns and have the rhythm section—or maybe the conguero or me on drums—play the patterns over and over until it sinks in."

The album includes Vijay Iyer's 8-minute concerto "The Mad Hatter," which, Iyer says, "explores compatibilities between Carnatic rhythmic ideas I was thinking about and certain rhythms in clave."

"I see it as similar to Satie and Philip Glass in the way Vijay explores the idea of unfolding within a context of stasis," O'Farrill said. "It also intrigued me that he would have the audacity to fuck with clave."

Some ALJO band members found "The Mad Hatter" threatening, O'Farrill reported. One questioned the necessity of playing the first section in its ascribed 21/8 time signature, to which O'Farrill riposted, "Because we can't play 'Oye Como Va' forever." The next day the dissident called O'Farrill in the middle of a difficult commute. "The bridge is a mess, there's an overturned tractor-trailer, and I'm trying to

get to New York,” he said. O’Farrill answered, “Brother, life isn’t always 4/4—is it?”

“To me, that was a perfect object lesson,” he continued. “If you define your music by constructs that are already in place, you’re a fool. Now, I love 4/4. At my core, I’m a jazz pianist. I may have this big vision of what jazz could become, but my entry point into that conversation was bursting into tears when I first heard Herbie Hancock on ‘Seven Steps To Heaven.’ I wanted to play like Herbie more than anything in the world, because if you could float rhythmically over that bed of swing, like him, you were a complete human being with mastery over time and space.”

Already a “mid-level” practitioner of Mozart and Chopin when he experienced his Hancock epiphany, O’Farrill, then 12, was just beginning to experiment with jazz and improvisational music. By 14, when he joined the Local 802 musicians union, he was playing with New York vets like Artie Simmons. “I didn’t know much about harmony or stylistic nuance in jazz, but I had really good keyboard skills,” O’Farrill said.

Over the course of three decades, O’Farrill evolved from efflorescent performer to the impresario-maestro of his maturity. Born in Mexico City, where his Havana-born father and Mexican-descended mother moved after the Communist Party consolidated power in Cuba, and a New Yorker since age 5, he experienced “tremendous ambivalence” about his cultural roots. “I thought the music of Chico, Machito and Tito Puente was secondary to jazz in importance and intellectual ability,” he said.

“Growing up, the only Hispanics I knew were the school custodian and the basketball star. When I found out that Herbie had come from Bud Powell, I became a Bud Powell freak.” Even so, while immersing himself in bebop and free-jazz, O’Farrill began playing on his father’s jingle dates, beginning with a Bumble Bee tuna commercial.

“I knew what a *montuno* was, but I didn’t understand how to make it work in the clave,” he recalled of that session. “Sal Cuevas was playing bass, and told me that I had to study and get my shit together.” O’Farrill purchased Papo Lucca records, learned the mechanics, but resisted the subtleties. He dropped out of The High School of Music & Art, worked as a bicycle messenger and led a peer-grouper sextet called the Untouchables, which in 1978 took a gig upstate “at a hole-in-the-wall bar, playing for beers.” The proprietor notified Carla Bley, who lived down the road. She stopped by, liked what she heard, and soon thereafter hired O’Farrill to play a Carnegie Hall concert, initiating a four-year association.

“I’m much more Carla’s child—or Charles Mingus’ child—than Chico O’Farrill’s child,” O’Farrill said of his freewheeling aesthetics regarding musical narrative. “Composition was my father’s end-all and be-all. He held jazz on a pedestal. Carla taught me that the notes are secondary to what you want to communicate: It’s not the vehicle, but where the person who’s driving wants to go.”

As the ’80s progressed, O’Farrill freelanced, worked more frequently on his father’s projects, earned a degree in classical performance at Manhattan School of Music, and did extensive

fieldwork in Latin piano traditions with bassist-scholar Andy Gonzalez. “Andy told me that I needed to embrace where I come from, to understand how beautiful it is,” O’Farrill said. “Almost immediately I realized that Latin piano was as sophisticated—maybe even more so—and as difficult to cop as anything Herbie was doing.”

These investigations coincided with a burgeoning appreciation of the quality of Chico O’Farrill’s corpus. “In my twenties, a friend had me listen to *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite*,” O’Farrill recounted. “He asked, ‘Have you really heard this?’ I went, ‘Yeah... not really... no.’” He blames family dynamics. “Whatever legendary musician



he was, my father was also prone to the foibles and frailties of fatherhood,” he said.

Youthful resentments dissipated during the ’90s, as Chico, who died in 2001, experienced a late-career renaissance, spurred by the albums *Pure Emotion*, *Heart Of A Legend* and *Carambola*, which Arturo music-directed. “I learned how to arrange by looking at my father’s scores. I learned how to compose by listening to my father’s compositions. I learned about voicings and counterpoint. I also learned that my voice was very different than his. It wasn’t just about mimicking, saying, ‘This is a good way to do it.’ It was also about, ‘No, I reject this.’”

“I sensed that Arturo felt very much in Chico’s shadow and fervently desired to establish his own identity,” said *Offense* producer Todd Barkan, who managed Chico and produced his ’90s albums. “But I never saw him be anything less than totally deferential and acquiescent to Chico’s wishes.”

“Chico’s health was failing, so I was thrust into taking over the functions he’d done so well—standing in front of the guys, conducting them and emceeing,” O’Farrill said. “I had to stop being a pianist. I had to pursue responsibilities I wasn’t really sure I was prepared for.”

After Marsalis played “Trumpet Fantasy” with the Chico O’Farrill Orchestra at Alice Tully Hall in 1996, Arturo approached him for advice. “It interested me that he assembled this orchestra that was building a canon of American jazz, and I asked him—or maybe his assistant—for thoughts on how we could develop a relationship with an institution that might help us create a similar repertory orchestra,” O’Farrill recalled. “A few years later, Wynton said, out of the blue, ‘I really like your idea, and I want to give you a home at Jazz at Lincoln Center.’”

O’Farrill has bittersweet feelings about the association, which JALC severed a year after entering its high-maintenance quarters at Columbus Circle. But he now sees the break as a blessing in disguise, by which ALJO was afforded the opportunity, as Barkan puts it, “to venture into the world on its own and be its own person.”

“That Wynton would open up his platform to us was extraordinarily moving to me,” O’Farrill said. “I learned a lot of lessons from him. He never told us what to do or how to do it. At the end, I asked him point-blank if we had done something wrong. He answered that we represented the House of Swing with great respectability, but that JALC was under great financial duress and would no longer be able to house us.”

Both institutions share a commitment to educational initiatives as well as an insistence that its members have technical expertise in matters of performing, composing and arranging. Each takes a non-preservationist approach to performing “classic” repertoire, operating on the principle that to bring forth new work is just as important as the obligation to preserve past glories.

“My model since the Lincoln Center days is to look for musicians who are multi-layered, multi-cultural, flexible stylistically and artistically,” O’Farrill said. “I like to put a younger musician next to a veteran and hope each will influence the other’s thinking.”

In his embrace of the music of the Americas, O’Farrill draws not only on extensive travels through South and Central America, and bandstand interaction with musicians from those cultures, but frequent visits to Cuba since 2002.

“I learned that the sounds and sights of Cuba indelibly shaped my father’s aesthetic and cultural roots, his sense of harmonic counterpoint and Afro-folkloric counterpoint,” O’Farrill explained. “The more time I spend in Cuba, the more I realize it’s the land I come from, and also that Cuba is part of Latin America in very concrete ways.”

O’Farrill cited his next recording, a project called “The Conversation Continued,” for which ALJA has commissioned composers in the United States and in Cuba to imagine what might have happened had the U.S. not imposed an embargo. The program will comprise next season’s *Musica Nueva* concert at Symphony Space.

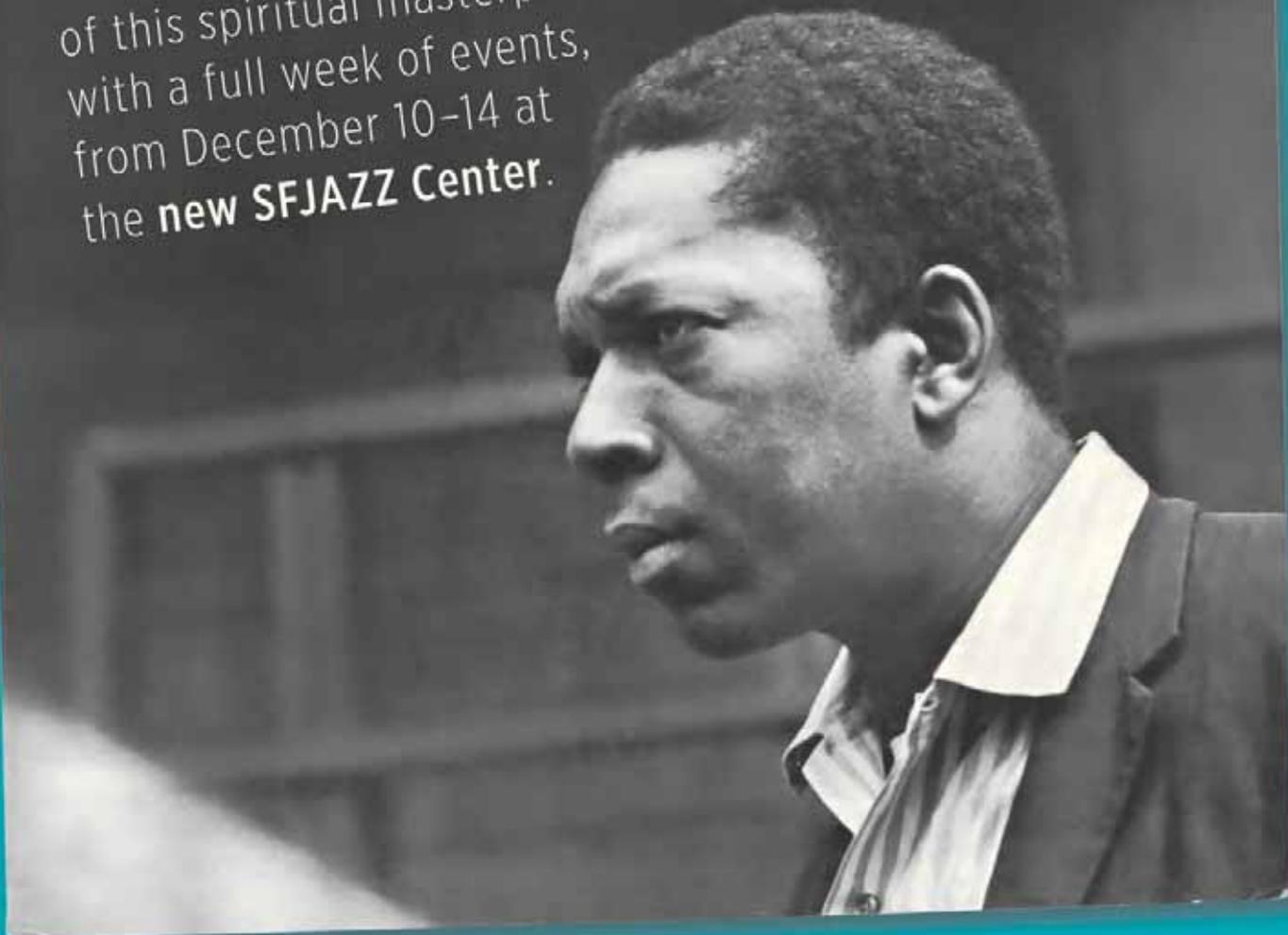
Of Mexican descent on his mother’s side, O’Farrill said he can’t “identify more as a Cuban than as a Mexican.” He adds, “I feel not so much Mexican or Cuban, but I feel Pueblo. I relate to the pace of South American-Latin American life. I like the noise of children in the streets, and bright colors and sounds, and food smells, and people practicing on terraces. When I first returned to Cuba, I remember walking down the street and thinking, ‘This feels like home.’ I’ve had that feeling in Mexico. I’ve also had that feeling in Lima, and in Cali, and in Santiago.”

More than anything, though, O’Farrill’s need to create on the edge, in an experimental, cross-disciplinary context, emanates from his New York origins. “Everything I do—being a bicycle messenger as a teenager, running a non-profit now, my musical projects—I take great chances,” he said. “What makes it exciting is that it could crash and burn.”

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UNIFYING ELEMENTS

By Yoshi Kato | Photos by Jay Blakesberg



As Joshua Redman spoke with DownBeat about *Trios Live*, his 14th album as a leader, the value of working with a tight-knit group of trustworthy musicians kept coming up. “I try as much as possible to have a regular working band,” the 45-year-old saxophonist said. “Because when you’re playing with musicians that you’re familiar with, both musically and personally, you develop rapport and empathy. That really frees us as musicians and allows the music to soar and become something more than the sum of its parts.”

The tracks on *Trios Live*, released June 17 on Nonesuch, were culled from an October 2009 engagement at the Jazz Standard in Manhattan and shows performed in February 2013 at Blues Alley in Washington, D.C. Matt Penman was the bassist for the former dates and Reuben Rogers on the latter, with Gregory Hutchinson drumming on both.

“I love playing in that format,” Redman said of the saxophone trio. “There was a period of time where that was really the main thing I did.”

His unofficial trilogy of trio albums started in 2007 with *Back East* (Nonesuch). It featured three different rhythm sections—Rogers and Harland; bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Ali Jackson; and bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade—as well as guest contributions from saxophonists Joe Lovano, Chris Cheek and Dewey Redman, Joshua’s late father.

Compass (Nonesuch), which came out in 2009, upped the traditional sax trio ante. With Grenadier, Rogers, Hutchinson and Blade returning, Redman recorded with all four possible trio permutations plus quartet tracks with two basses, and even “double trios” with all five musicians.

“I feel like even though I did two records, there was an aspect of our sound and conception ... that really hadn’t been heard on record,” Redman said, alternating between occasional sips of espresso and chilled water at the cafe Babette in Berkeley, Calif. “I realized it could only be captured live.”





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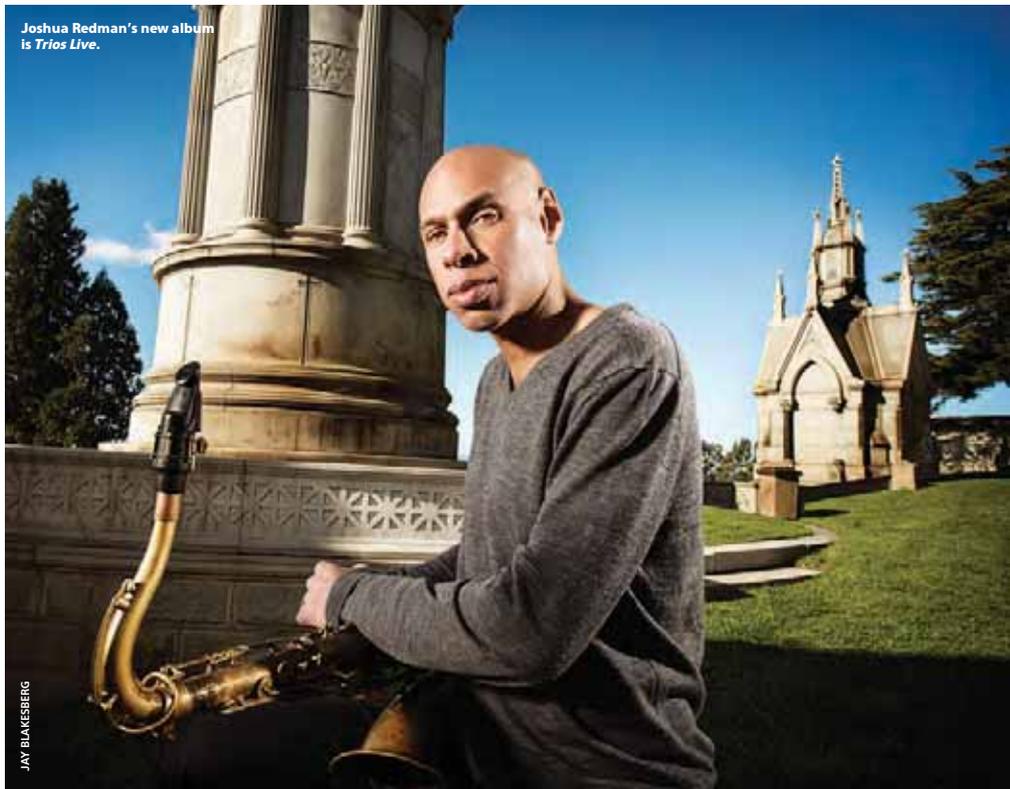
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Joshua Redman's new album
is *Trios Live*.



The *Trios Live* dates were initially recorded for Redman's personal archives, he explained. Live sound engineer Paul Booth, who had his recording equipment with him, asked Redman if he wanted the shows captured for posterity.

After listening to the recordings last year, Redman made a discovery: Although he wasn't necessarily satisfied with his own playing—"probably the vast majority of it," he says, with a laugh—he was reminded there was something special about the amplified atmosphere of a live date.

"I realized there was a certain spirit, a certain kind of intensity, exuberance and, most of all, freedom and freewheeling quality that we had live that really hadn't been captured in the studio," he said. "There's a raw, unfiltered energy there."

With his self-critical ear, Redman went through the material for nearly every night of several of his trios' extended club engagements—"a very painful process," he admitted. Eventually he narrowed the hours and hours of material down to the 58 minutes that appear on the album.

The program starts and concludes with a pair of standards: "Mack The Knife" and "Never Let Me Go," to open, with Thelonious Monk's "Trinkle Tinkle" and Led Zeppelin's "The Ocean" closing it out. *Trios Live* also offers four Redman originals that showcase a fluid, driven and joyful group interaction. It builds off Redman's previous domestic live album, 1995's *Spirit Of The Moment* (Warner Bros.), which was taken from Village Vanguard gigs that March with his then-current quartet of Blade, bassist Christopher Thomas and pianist Peter Martin.

"Hutch is absolutely on fire on these tracks," Redman wrote later in a text message. "One thing I'm most proud about is the way the album captures Greg's amazing feel and freedom and power

and groove. And at the risk of sounding self-congratulatory, I think it's one of the better documentations of his playing on record."

Along with pianist Aaron Goldberg, Rogers and Hutchinson are members of Redman's current quartet, which reconvened in the spring of 2013. Redman and Penman are members of the James Farm band along with pianist Aaron Parks and drummer Eric Harland. And Penman and Harland, in turn, played with Redman in the SFJAZZ Collective from 2005 through 2007.

Redman and Hutchinson's history dates back to 1991. Goldberg and Rogers first met a year later, and the four were a unit from 1998 through 2001 before Redman switched his focus, first to his keyboard-based Elastic Band and then his acoustic trios.

"We still have this deep connection, and in many ways we've matured," Goldberg said. "During that break, I think we got some perspective."

Redman has one of the better-known biographies in modern jazz. He famously went from being an academic powerhouse (1986 Berkeley High School valedictorian; a summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa graduate from Harvard in 1991) who played saxophone as an extracurricular activity—albeit to much acclaim—to become the winner of the 1991 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition. A Warner Bros. recording contract with steady gig bookings and plenty of press coverage followed.

Going from undergraduate studies to quick stardom didn't allow Redman the opportunity for a long-term apprenticeship in a veteran leader's band.

"He went straight to making records and touring," said McBride, who first played

with Redman less than a year after his Monk Competition win. "We can all safely say that it's worked out for him."

"Communication is prime in jazz, and that's important for Joshua," Goldberg said. "There are musicians he enjoys listening to but doesn't necessarily have a natural connection to. Over the years, we've created a conversational environment in which we all feel comfortable and inspired."

The DNA to *Trios Live* can be found in Redman's eponymous debut album, released by Warner Bros. in 1993. It boasts multiple rhythm sections, a mix of originals and standards and even a trio track ("Trinkle Tinkle" provides some illuminating A/B comparisons between his playing then and now). Hutchinson and McBride were two of the seven other musicians who participated.

There's also a "new standard," James Brown's "I Got You (I Feel Good)." Redman has since gained a reputation for interpreting songs that were born roughly within his lifetime.

Among the most recent is New York noise-rockers Blonde Redhead's "Doll Is Mine" from 2004. He reinterpreted it on his emotive 2012 ballads-with-orchestra album *Walking Shadows* (Nonesuch)—produced by longtime friend and colleague Brad Mehldau—and routinely plays it live with his quartet.

"People make a lot about that—I'm not trying to make any statement about pop music and its relationship to jazz," Redman clarified. "I'm just looking for music that I think feels right with a particular band. Especially with trio. At its best, it can be one of the most exciting, liberating formats. But because you lack the harmonic instrument, it's also very easy for things to start sounding the same. So I do look for a variety of music."

Citing his own eclectic listening preferences, Redman believes that it's natural for that variety to be expressed in his own musical choices. As his artistry has grown, he has strived for a group sound to serve as the unifying element amid a diversity of material.

In early June, Redman's quartet (with Joe Sanders substituting for Rogers) was part of a double bill with Charlie Musselwhite, who headlined the Healdsburg Jazz Festival in Northern California. He and the blues harmonica legend sounded like longtime road warriors, performing Nat Adderley's "Work Song" together with Sanders, Goldberg and Hutchinson.

That open-eared eclecticism also proved useful in late April and May, when Redman participated in "Atomic Bomb: The Music of William Onyeabor," a five-date mini-tour spearheaded by former Talking Heads frontman David Byrne.

"I wasn't really super-familiar with William Onyeabor's music," he said. "I read some article in the New York Times about it and thought, 'Yeah, I'm going to check out this album'—a compilation of the Nigerian funk musician's work from the '70s and '80s that was released on Byrne's Luaka Bop label.

A call later came from Luaka Bop inquiring if he'd like to be an additional, high-profile member of the horn section for a specially assembled tribute band.

"I had no experience playing any sort of Afrobeat or Afropop, so I thought, 'Hey, this is

a chance to play a totally different kind of music with completely different musicians.'"

Relishing the chance to play with Byrne—"I came of age when Talking Heads were huge," he said—Redman also shared the stage with vocalist/keyboardist Alexis Taylor from Hot Chip, vocalist Kele Okereke from Bloc Party and drummer Pat Mahoney, formerly of LCD Soundsystem.

Eyeing summer dates for his quartet and fall engagements with his trio plus additional dates in August and September with The Bad Plus (with whom he occasionally teams up), Redman is also looking forward to releasing the sophomore James Farm album. "We just finished it," he said, tapping

on the smart phone in his pocket. "In fact, I think I just got the master.

"I never say this about my own records, but this is a special one," he added. "I think it's a real step forward for the band. We really found ourselves, and there are some really good tunes on there."

When he's not touring or in the studio, Redman is at home in Berkeley with his wife and their two young children. But he always relishes an opportunity to make music with his comrades: "One of the greatest things about being a bandleader is having the opportunity to surround myself with musicians that I feel closest to." **DB**

Stefano Bollani

Joy in Spite of Everything

Stefano Bollani piano

Mark Turner tenor saxophone

Bill Frisell guitar

Jesper Bodilsen double-bass

Morten Lund drums





Rebirth Brass Band, standing, from left: Glen Andrews, Vincent Broussard, Phillip Frazier, Derrick Shezbie, Chadrick Honore and Stafford Agee. On the front row are Gregory Veals and Keith Frazier. (Derrick Tabb is not pictured.)

REBIRTH BRASS BAND

KEEP IT GOIN' LIKE A HEARTBEAT

By Jennifer Odell | Photo by Ian Frank

As a cluster of horn players launches an ostinato attack into the muggy air, the pressed tin ceiling above them intensifies the brightness of their tones. A snare drum rattles off a sparse series of strokes. A four-beat tuba riff plunders off the stage, transforming the jostling crowd into waves of moving hips. The bass drum kicks in like a funk-timed clock, leaving just enough room for the snare to dance within and around the wails of the now swinging horns.

It's 1 a.m. on a rain-soaked weeknight in June in New Orleans, but the energy of the Rebirth Brass Band on a Tuesday at the Maple Leaf has rarely been diminished by elements like weather or time. (The band has been a weekly staple at the venue for 23 years.)

"Ain't nothin' but a Rebirth groove," the musicians chant with the audience, playing a track from their new Basin Street album. A rhythm section breakdown follows before trumpets and trombones swing out, multiple parts moving gracefully and simultaneously without interruption. That big, powerful back line is the hallmark of Rebirth's sound. It creates a space that allows for collective improvisation amid crisp horn arrangements, yielding synchronized, unexpected twists and turns, like the sound of a party that keeps on rolling.

In a city where music traditions are held sacred, the Rebirth Brass Band, anchored by leader Philip "Tuba Phil" Frazier alongside his brother, Keith "Bass Drum Shorty" Frazier, occupies a unique place in New Orleans culture. Over the course of three decades, the group's r&b and funk motifs have redefined the standard for brass band music without losing sight of the music's

heritage. Rebirth's profound influence on brass band musicians endures during second line parades and jazz funerals, and in classrooms and rehearsal spaces citywide. And the band's Grammy award for 2011's *Rebirth Of New Orleans* (Basin Street), along with its heavy, year-round touring schedule, underscore its ongoing relevance on a broader scale.

But as anyone who's seen co-founder and captain Philip Frazier come off the stage at a Maple Leaf set break can attest, these are not the kinds of guys who sit around counting their accolades. A gregarious people-magnet prone to jokes and fist bumps, Philip makes no concessions that Rebirth's music—and its latest album, in particular—is about celebration. As such, the band's success depends largely on how the members interact with each other.

"Most bands can't be friends as long as we have," Philip said during an interview a few days before the Maple Leaf gig. He was seated backstage at the Howlin' Wolf, located in New Orleans' Warehouse District, on the day of the band's annual anniversary show. They were celebrating a 31-year run that night—although 26-year-old trumpeter Chadrick Honore, the

youngest band member, hyped the crowd by plugging Rebirth's "32 years" before being amiably corrected.

It was an understandable mistake. Rebirth's repertoire and style is ingrained in the brass band scene and has been for so long that in some ways, its impact on younger generations has surpassed the level of influence that bands like the Dirty Dozen had on Rebirth when it first started.

Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, who contributed a trombone solo to the reggae-steeped "On My Way" on *Move Your Body*, cited the band among his early influences. "We used to meet up to go to the grocery to get the cardboard boxes so we could imitate Rebirth, and that'd be our drums," he recalled.

Nowadays, at Trombone Shorty's music academy, his students are doing the same thing he once did, albeit with better instruments. "Besides Troy, their heroes are Rebirth, first and foremost," said Bill Taylor, executive director of the Trombone Shorty Foundation. "When they hang out together and jam, it's almost always to a Rebirth tune." He added that in the 2014-'15 school year, Rebirth's music will become "specifically a part our curriculum."



Rebirth Brass Band's Derrick Tabb (left), Derrick Shezbie, Phillip Frazier and Chadrick Honore perform at the House of Blues in New Orleans on Dec. 23, 2013.

ERIKA GOLDBRING

Rebirth's new album—which features snare drummer Derrick Tabb, trumpeter Derrick “Kabuki” Shezbie, trombonists Stafford Agee and Gregory Veals, and saxophonist Vincent Broussard in addition to the Fraziers and Honore—bears some characteristics of the previous 15 albums, including the push to try new things. *Move Your Body* showcases a renewed focus on original material, a new production team (Tabb and Honore along with engineer Tracey Freeman, who also mixed the album) and what Broussard calls “a more open sound.”

The album kicks off like most Rebirth shows at the Maple Leaf do, with the traditional “Lord, Lord, Lord, You’ve Sure Been Good To Me.” Augmented here by an exuberant, growl-peppered lead vocal by Glen David Andrews, the track reflects the band’s roots in standard repertoire.

Move Your Body goes on to cover a swath of mostly original new music written by varied combinations of band members, each of whom has at least one composition credit. The vibe is decidedly dance-centric, with lyrical themes about motion set up to match the music’s propulsive rhythms and rolling grooves. Powering all of that is the peerless strength of the Fraziers, who, along with Tabb, drive the music forward.

“The drummers and tuba try to push the band,” Philip said, explaining a Rebirth-specific concept that’s become well known among brass band players in New Orleans. “If you feel a gap, you gotta fill in the gap. You gotta push it to keep it goin’ like a heartbeat.”

Such momentum is certainly useful in settings like the jazz funeral that Rebirth played the day of the Howlin’ Wolf show. It also translates to material that could work as easily in a parade setting as onstage. While Rebirth’s stage shows have far outnumbered parade performances for decades, the unstoppable groove that makes it instantly recognizable on a crowded Lady Buckjumpers second line also contributes to the singularity of its sound in a club or on record. “It’s music for *anywhere*,” Philip said.

Rebirth’s story began in 1983 when Philip, then the band captain at Joseph S. Clark High School in the Treme neighborhood, needed a small band to play a special event. He called on a handful of players, including his younger brother, Keith, and trumpeter Kermit Ruffins for the gig. Then under 21, the musicians weren’t allowed to

stay at the party after they’d performed because liquor was being served, so they packed up their instruments and headed to the French Quarter to play for tips.

At that time, it had been six years since Benny Jones, Roger Lewis and other alumni of Danny Barker’s Fairview Baptist Church band had formed the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, incorporating the sounds of bop and r&b into the traditional New Orleans brass band idiom. Along with the Olympia Brass Band, the Dozen was credited with sparking a resurgence in the brass band tradition—built on the somber, dignified tempos and dress used in jazz funerals, as opposed to the party atmosphere of second lines.

“When we did that first album, *Feet Can’t Fail Me Now*, [the members of Rebirth] liked the sound and beat of the uptempo [music] on the street,” said Dirty Dozen founder Jones, who was the band’s original bass drummer before founding the traditional-oriented Treme Brass Band, where he plays snare.

As for the fast tempos and modern elements the Dozen introduced to the brass band circuit, Jones said, “People told us that wouldn’t last too long.” So he felt proud when Rebirth followed the Dozen’s uptempo cue—followed by scores of younger bands.

In his new book, *Roll With It* (Duke University Press), Tulane University ethnomusicologist Matt Sakakeeny notes that among Keith Frazier’s lasting innovations was the use of one- and two-measure drumbeats, patterns the author connects to Rebirth’s driving sound—and to similar patterns used among today’s new crop of brass bands.

“There are so many drummers from the Olympia Brass Band and Chosen Few, the Pinstripe Band,” Keith said, discussing his early musical development. “We were trying to play what they were playing, and it helped us evolve into something else.”

In 1984, the “Rebirth Jazz Band” landed a deal to make its first record, a live album staged at what was then called the Grease Lounge, a Treme club located around the corner from the house where the Fraziers grew up.

As producer Jerry Brock recalls in the 2005 documentary *Never A Dull Moment: 20 Years of the Rebirth Brass Band*, the resulting album, *Here To Stay*, was recorded with little more than

a couple of overhead mics before an audience of about 12 people. It featured a mix of originals like the fast-paced tuba-centric title track, New Orleans classics like Smokey Johnson’s “It Ain’t My Fault” and a pair of tunes—“Blue Monk” and “Chameleon”—that wouldn’t have been out of place on a Dirty Dozen record.

But while the Dozen adopted instrumentation appropriate for the stage rather than the street and began to experiment with rock fusion, Rebirth maintained its street-ready lineup and looked to old-school r&b, funk and hip-hop for inspiration. The players who cycled through the band or performed with them frequently influenced that development in ways that have become inextricable from the 2014 version of Rebirth. In some cases those ties were connected to extreme loss. The Fraziers’ brother, tuba player Kerwin James, died in 2007 after suffering a stroke at age 35. Tabb and his half-brother, Glen David Andrews, were subsequently arrested while parading in his honor in the Treme during the period of harsh law enforcement following Hurricane Katrina.

Other memories were happier. “All those guys were characters,” Keith recalled. Throughout the band’s history, a fragment of music or a joke served up by trombonists like John Gilbert or Reggie Stewart has often resulted in new material.

In fact, many of the band’s most popular tunes were born amid an atmosphere that longtime Rebirth trombonist Agee described as “clowning around, being spontaneous.” Whether that speaks to the young age at which the band started or a deeper connection between artistic expression and community, the effect certainly has contributed to the group’s lasting appeal.

“We’d be marchin’ up the street playin’ and some guy would want to dance real close to the horns,” Ruffins recalled, thinking back to the now-classic “Do Whatcha Wanna.” “And we’d be like, ‘Come on, man, don’t dance so close to the damn horn—you’re gonna hurt my lip or something. And he’s all, ‘I do what I wanna do.’ So me and Philip start singin’, ‘Do whatcha wanna,’ teasin’ the guy. We were always joking and playing, and something good always came out of it.”

1989’s *Feel Like Funkin’ It Up* marked the first time Rebirth experimented with Mardi Gras Indian chants and traditional songs, a theme that they—and many brass bands after them—would build on in subsequent years, influenced in part by trombonist Agee’s membership in the Black Feather Mardi Gras Indians.

Take It To the Street, released in 1992, marked another milestone in the band’s discography, featuring an innovative use of polyrhythms and creative arrangements of a wider spectrum of genres. A decade later they would take a more daring step, introducing rap on *Hot Venom* in 2001.

Like many ideas Rebirth musicians have explored, their use of hip-hop on that CD included a range of approaches, from Soulja Slim’s rapping to the multi-part, barbershop quartet-minded take on Curtis Mayfield’s “Let’s Do It Again,” which features a vocal chorus made famous by Slick Rick. In that case, beat-matching songs from different genres and eras innovated a

lighthearted—and seriously swinging—new tune.

The way Tabb sees it, the Fraziers played a large part in such developments. When he joined the band in the mid-'90s, Philip Frazier would teach him a few key tunes, then “change the whole set” the next week, Tabb recalled. “That helped me in a lot of ways. He didn’t confine me. He just threw me out there and said, ‘Swim.’”

The Fraziers’ combination of chops and encouragement fostered an environment in which Tabb grew artistically. The result was that the city’s most in-demand snare drummer worked now for them, which heightened the band’s continued relevance on the scene.

Unlike previous Rebirth snare drummers, Keith said, “Derrick had played snare drum his entire life, right up through high school, so he was more technical. That made me want to understand more.”

Having come from a background of playing euphonium in church and other horns in college, Keith explained, “I wanted to learn more about the rhythm and the beat.”

By 2011, the give-and-take tide of the Rebirth back row had turned again.

In their early days as a team, Philip Frazier consistently told Tabb to embrace his own style.

“It was something that really changed the way I looked at a lot of things in my life,” said Tabb, who in addition to performing with Rebirth now runs Roots of Music, an after-school music and tutoring program he founded.

Tabb began expressing interest in the production side of Rebirth’s recording career, and got his feet wet pitching in on the Freeman-produced *Rebirth Of New Orleans*. With *Move Your Body*, he said, “I was ready and the whole band was supportive.”

His vision, he said, was to create an album on which each band member felt he’d contributed to the overall vibe of one song, a goal he accomplished in the studio by adding touches like lyrics, a medley or extra horn tracks. What he did not alter was the live-sounding nature of the album—an element audible on early Rebirth albums at a time when such a sound was harder to achieve.

Tabb put *Take It To The Street* on heavy replay while he was producing *Move Your Body*. “The grooves and musicianship on that album are impeccable,” he said. “And the diversity of that has always been a guide for me as far as brass band albums, period.”

From Tabb’s perspective, the band’s ability to continue innovating without losing the spark that’s driven them this far comes down to the Fraziers’ commitment and personalities.

Being laid-back and open to new ways of thinking on the bandstand is one thing, but when Philip suffered a serious stroke two years after his brother had died from one, he demonstrated a more telling kind of tolerance.

Philip now jokes that he told his tuba, “I’m comin’ back for ya,” and sure enough, he did, because, as he likes to point out, the horn expresses both pain and joy: “It’s all right there in the heart.”

“When it gets bad,” he said, collecting his horn as the band prepared to hit the stage, “the music makes it better.”

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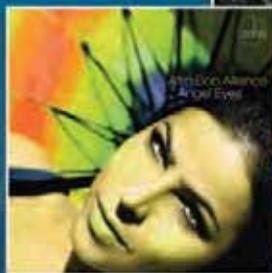
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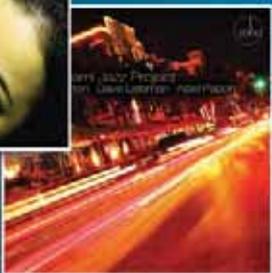
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HORACE SILVER

By John McDonough | Photo by Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos

‘The Whole PACKAGE’

Back in the mid-1950s, when words like “funky” and “hard-bop” were still freshly minted coins of modern jazz grammar, cautious critics used them in quotes, not yet certain whether they or the music they represented deserved the formal recognition of a real name. More than any other single player, pianist-composer Horace Silver, who died June 18 at age 85 in new Rochelle, N.Y., made it safe to remove those quotes.

Every musician has his Horace Silver story. Ramsey Lewis, 79, is one of the few major pianists still working whose career goes back to those days when the young lions of the moment included, in addition to himself, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Dave Brubeck and Silver. A few days after Silver’s death, Lewis offered this remembrance during a performance at Ravinia Park near Chicago.

“The first time I went to New York it was to play Birdland, which in those days was the jazz corner of the world. And they had—get *this*—three performances: the Art Blakey group, the Buddy Rich big band and our trio. Horace Silver was playing with the Blakey quintet. . . . I already knew [his songs] and I knew that I liked Horace Silver. But when I got to see him in person, I just fell in love with his piano playing. Horace was a pianist who did not have the Oscar Peterson-type technique, but he could swing you to death. He’ll be sorely missed. Whether he played in a rhythm section or whether he played solo, his playing vibrated.”

The “vibrations” that hit Lewis were immediate in their impact. Silver was that kind of player, and Lewis was there at the beginning. So was pianist Dick Hyman, who went back even further.

“Though I hardly saw him after we were both grown up, I remember jamming with him way back in the 1940s one night in Connecticut,” the 87-year-old Hyman said. “He was a terrific tenor [saxophone] player, though the world would know him as a great pianist.”

Decades later, Silver’s playing and compositions continued to make an impact on young musicians. “I discovered [him] on record as an early teen,” said bassist Christian McBride, 42. “It was ‘Song For My Father,’ and it was one of the first jazz songs I ever heard. I was maybe 11.”

The song, now considered essential hard-bop listening, was the title track a 1964 Blue Note album. “That was my first jazz album when Blue Note started reissuing its classic sessions,” McBride continued. “My mother took me on a record shopping spree, and that was one of the ones I got.”

Pianist Jason Moran, 39, had a similar experience. “The first solo I fully transcribed was Horace’s solo on ‘Song For My Father,’” he said. “Of course, my dad loved that.”

But such purely sensory wallops, even when recorded, are fleeting. They become fixed and familiar as context evolves, which is why the recordings of even the most imperious performers tend to eventually slip from the collective memory and into honored but historic obscurity.

Over time that may happen to Silver, the pianist. But not the writer. As one of the major *composers* of jazz’s modern era, he has a passport into the future that few working musicians can claim. This is because a performance tends to be interred with its time. But a song is a work of literature. It’s immortal. Decade after decade it can be rediscovered and reinterpreted. Performers are only its *pro tem* custodians. It’s why most of you who are reading this article probably know that George Gershwin wrote “I Got Rhythm”—but know nothing of Ethel Merman, the singer who first made it famous in 1931. For 60 years, successive generations have been revising and re-voicing the songs that Silver began coining in his first Blue Note sessions in 1953–’54: “Opus De Funk,” “Doodlin’,” “Horace-Scope” and more.

In 2014, a night doesn’t go by when some player *somewhere* in the world doesn’t lean into a microphone and say, “Now, ladies and gentlemen, we’d like to play a great jazz standard by Horace Silver called . . .”

Number one on the Silver hit parade is “The Preacher,” a tune whose easy melodic logic could have made it an advertising jingle. “The Preacher” first appeared on a 10-inch Blue Note LP in 1955, *The Horace Silver Quintet*. The head of Blue Note, Alfred Lion, didn’t want to release it; too old-fashioned, he thought, for the progressive Blue Note brand. Since then, more than 220 recorded versions have appeared, by everybody from Louis Armstrong and Bing Crosby to Gerry Mulligan and Woody Herman.

Silver continued to produce a catalog of diverse pieces that would take root, motivating hundreds of artists to interpret them: “Nica’s Dream” has been recorded 191 times; “Song For My Father,” 188; “Sister Sadie,” 130; “Doodlin’,” 103; “Opus De Funk,” 67. The numbers grow every year.

Silver’s songbook would become a portfolio of annuities, bringing him financial security in life and a perpetually evolving legacy in death as new generations discover his work. “I’m very fortunate that I was able to get off the road,” Silver wrote in his 2006 autobiography, *Let’s Get to the Nitty Gritty*. “I don’t have to worry about my income because God has been kind to me. Jazz musicians are still recording my tunes . . . so I have a steady income from royalties. If I didn’t have that, I’d be forced to go out on that road to pay my . . . expenses.”

For Horace Silver, the road began in 1950 when he was one of the many young pianists hatched from the pervasive DNA of Bud Powell. His trio became the rhythm section for Stan Getz, and Silver made his first records as a sideman for Roost Records. Jazz was discovering its cooler side, and Getz recorded Silver’s first two compositions, “Potter’s Luck” and “Penny.”

After settling in New York and working briefly with both Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, Silver fell in with alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson, whose group included bassist Gene Ramey and, at different times, Art Taylor and Art Blakey on drums. It got its first break when Lion recorded Donaldson for his Blue Note label in June 1952. A second date was scheduled for October. Then at the last minute, Donaldson withdrew. But Lion was confident in what remained. The Donaldson Quartet simply became the Horace Silver Trio, and Silver’s relationship with Blue Note was cemented for the next 28 years.

“Horace-Scope” and “Quicksilver” were

among the Silver originals on those sessions. His tunes began to hint at a subtle but distinct series of possibilities within the bop rulebook. The music's initial jolt of revolt was losing steam by the early '50s, and musicians were looking for fresh energy. For most, this meant new levels of challenge and complexity inside an already complex form. Silver seemed to suggest a simpler way.

Reflecting on Silver's music as both pianist and composer, McBride said that the icon worked from the basics. "Horace is one of the players people discover when they're in their early stages of learning about jazz," he observed. "He's the perfect bridge for anyone coming to jazz from r&b, gospel

or any sort of dance music. He's the ideal entry level into jazz because his music is so infectious."

Moran agrees. "There was something so approachable about how Horace's music was," he said. "He'd make the most powerfully grooving statements with his hands, and I always loved the rumbling gesture his left hand could create at the bottom of the piano while comping his own solo."

"Clearly," Hyman said, "it's hard to separate Horace's playing from his composing."

Infectious, catchy—it's music that people can hold in their heads. And that was what made Silver such a distinct voice in the early '50s, when jazz was playing increasingly to the hip and suggesting,

not too subtly, that the squares could get lost. Silver dared to want to be liked. While hanging on to the essential spirit of bop, he found substance in the most basic elements of blues and gospel—music whose fundamental *raison d'être* had always been *connecting* with an audience.

"In jazz—particularly over the last 35 years or so—infectiousness and swing have become almost a detriment to be looked down upon," McBride said. "We're now in a period where 'advancing' is what everyone's looking for in jazz. Unfortunately, most of the time, catchy melodies and toe-tapping rhythms have sadly been lost in that equation."

The idea of jazz as something earthy and low-down was hardly new in 1953, merely out of fashion. But in developing his musical persona, Silver seemed to reconcile the opposing temperaments of jazz orthodoxy and modernity to give a newer, more direct character to bop. Who would have thought this would be possible just a few years earlier when boppers and old-fashioned swingers were each trying to excommunicate the other?

Meanwhile, Silver's partnership with Blakey was coalescing on Blue Note, first in early 1954 with two *Night At Birdland* volumes with Clifford Brown and Lou Donaldson; then later that year on *The Horace Silver Quintet* with Kenny Dorham and Hank Mobley; and finally in 1955 when the same group emerged as *The Jazz Messengers At The Café Bohemia*. Mobley gave a sweaty edge to Silver's gospel sprinklings. Its elemental power was distinct enough that critics began rewarding it with a tentative identity of its own, "hard-bop," at first in quotes. A fresh adjective arrived with it: "funky." New to most, it was an embarrassment to some older African Americans who knew it for its impolite racist connotations of body odor. Quincy Jones reportedly disliked it. But Silver's new soulfulness soon helped make it respectable. By the end of 1954, Woody Herman was playing "Opus De Funk," and Time magazine officially defined it as "authentic, swinging."

Silver was profiled by DownBeat for the first time in the magazine's Oct. 31, 1956, issue. Critic Nat Hentoff pronounced him "a key influence on a large segment of modern jazz pianists." By 1957, he had left the Messengers and was emerging as a group leader. When he recorded that April with Rollins, it would be his final session as a sideman. From that point forward, he would produce one or two albums a year through the '60s and '70s, including *Song For My Father* with Joe Henderson in 1964. He left Blue Note in 1980, put out four albums on his own Silveto label in the '80s and then recorded for Columbia, Impulse! and Verve in the '90s. His last issued album, *Jazz Has A Sense Of Humor* (Verve), was recorded in 1998.

Hyman summed up Silver's legacy: "His tunes will always be played, but it should be remembered how creative a pianist he was."

According to McBride, "He was the whole package."

In December 1996, Silver entered the DownBeat Hall of Fame. From his home in Malibu, Calif., he spoke like a man satisfied with his life. "It's gone pretty much the way I wanted it to," he said. "I've gotten to work with many of my idols: Coleman Hawkins, Pres, Miles, Art Blakey. I'm a happy man."

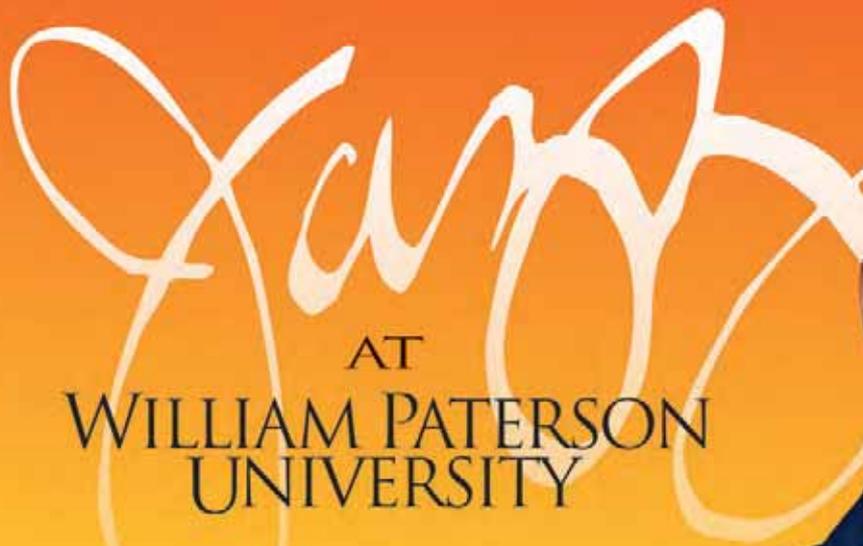
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BOBBY AVEY

DRINKING FROM THE SOURCE

By Phillip Lutz

On the night of Jan. 10, 2012, Bobby Avey found himself in rural Haiti, an incongruously placid figure among a clutch of ecstatic locals caught up in a vodou ceremony for accessing the “gateway” between the world of the living and the parallel world inhabited by the spirits of the dead.

Avey, a probing pianist from Mount Pocono, Pa., was there to conduct ambitious fieldwork. Having secured a highly sought-after grant at home, Avey, then 27 years old, hoped to complete a phase in the project of a young lifetime—a look at Haitian history through the prism of its drum culture, filtered through his own aesthetic.

“My idea,” he said, while nibbling orange slices in his Brooklyn apartment in June, “was to drink from the source, approach it with as much attention to detail as I could and then draw from it as inspiration.”

His effort paid off. After spending more than four hours at the ceremony, he had absorbed enough to inspire a striking suite titled *Authority Melts From Me*. Documented in a 2014 Whirlwind CD that earned a 4½-star review in *DownBeat*, the suite has been played in such venues as Symphony Space in Manhattan and will be performed by the same personnel—Avey’s working trio plus alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón and guitarist Ben Monder—in Europe starting in December.

The project’s spark was lit in June 2009, when Avey, visiting an American friend in the Dominican Republic, witnessed the difficulties of Haitian migrant laborers. Avey—who was on a personal quest two years after graduating from the Purchase Conservatory in



Purchase, N.Y.—began studying Haiti's colonial legacy and the role played by ceremonial drumming in a late-18th century slave uprising.

"That eventually gave me the idea to make a musical project based around Haiti's revolution," he said.

Even before he became interested in Haiti, Avey had applied to Chamber Music America for a grant under its division of New Jazz Works: Commissioning and Ensemble Development. Submitted at the urging of bassist Thomas Kneeland, the application included work samples and basic information about Avey's trio with Kneeland and drummer Jordan Perlson. It was rejected.

A second application included a pitch for the Haiti project, noting Avey's intention to celebrate the slave rebellion and referring, in broad terms, to a piece that would have multiple movements and instrumentation providing melodic enhancement and compositional layering. It, too, was turned down. But a third application in 2011 was accepted.

"I'm fortunate that whoever was judging that year understood that composition on this type of scale is a process that will come together as you're doing it," Avey said.

The award, for \$21,000, came with some strings attached, among them a requirement that Avey take part in conferences to improve his business acumen. At the same time, it provided money he could use for travel. He contacted his friend in the Dominican Republic, who connected him with another American who knew a Haitian who could offer Avey entrée to a vodou ceremony. The pianist was on his way.

On the day of the ceremony, Avey, who had been staying in a commune in Port-au-Prince, joined his American friend and their Haitian contact in a four-hour bus ride past slums, tent camps and garbage-filled canals. For the last leg of the trip, they transferred to motorcycles, finally reaching a verdant spot in Soukri, near the town of Gonaïves. It was 7:30 p.m. and the sun had set, but a vodou ceremony had been under way for seven hours.

Avey turned on his audio recorder as he and his companions joined the assembled crowd: younger women bedecked in red dresses, an older woman holding a lit candle and an older man, in his role as priest, singing and shaking a maraca-like instrument. The crowd sang back, and three percussionists—two playing hand drums and one wielding a cowbell-like metal plate with a stick—kicked into high gear.

Fueled by the rhythm—and rum—the members of the crowd gyrated well into the night, some to the point of collapse. Near midnight, Avey and company slipped away.

Eleven months later—six of which, off and on, he spent writing—Avey and his four associates were gathered in the Sear Sound studio on West 48th Street in New York. The rhythm section, which provided the structural framework for Avey's suite, had already been through a dozen rehearsals. Zenón and Monder had been rehearsing on their own; all the musicians were given digital play-along files that Avey had created for practice.

"A lot of the music he's written is some of the most complex and challenging I've ever played," Zenón said in a phone interview, "but in a very good way. It's very well put together."

Among the suite's three movements, the second, "Louverture," named after a leader of the slave rebellion, had grown directly out of the field-work transcriptions. The first and third movements—"Kalfou" ("crossroads," in Creole) and "Cost"—drew on tracks from the album *Voodoo Drums*, featuring the Haitian Drummers of the Société Absolutement Guinin.

Most of the Haitians' drumming was clear enough on Avey's field recordings to be transcribed in standard notation. The rest became digitized representations of sound waves on which Avey estimated the positions of beats and drummers' hits. In Perlson's hands, those representations became a rough map with which he worked to create the drum interlude between the second and third movements.

"I said, 'Put on your headphones and see what you can do,'" Avey explained.

No formula was set for how the transcribed drum lines were to be used by the quintet. Because the vodou drumming tended to be repetitive, even trancelike, the lines would sometimes be absorbed within the larger soundscape in the interest of maintaining balance or creating tension and release. Sometimes they would be superseded by Zenón's sax sweeping over the rhythmic churn. At other times, the drum lines would simply disappear, as in Avey's solo interlude inserted after the intense first movement.

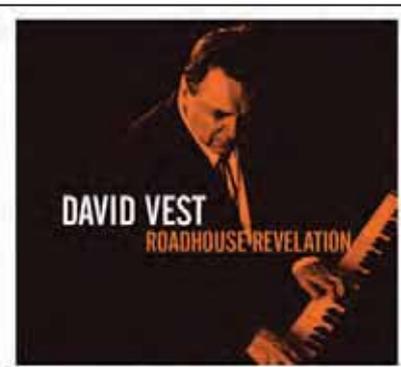
"I needed to chill out, take a breath," he said.

Throughout the album, recorded in November 2012, Avey's piano creates a canvas of contrasting colors where delicate strands of notes skate lightly over and around dense clusters that skirt the borders of functional harmony. In live performance—with saxophonist Dave Liebman's quintet Expansions at Smalls in June 2013 and with bassist Michael Bates' quartet at the Cornelia Street Café in June of this year—the colors have become noticeably more vivid.

Avey said there are other social causes—besides Haitian oppression—on which he'd like his music to shine a light. Wrapped in a complex yet swinging rhythmic approach, his artistic signature is becoming more clearly drawn and widely recognized. The Chamber Music of America grant was not an isolated award.

Avey won the 2011 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Composers Competition for his piece "Late November." The composition appeared on *A New Face* (JayDell), which featured Liebman, a mentor for the past dozen years and a recording partner—starting with the duo's 2006 release *Vienna Dialogues* (Zoho) and continuing with the planned September release of the new Expansions album *Samsara* (Whaling City Sound). In Avey, who's not yet 30, Liebman hears a voice to be nurtured.

"It is to be commended and to be worked out over the next 50 years," Liebman said. **DB**



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ONAJE ALLAN GUMBS

GRACE AND SENSITIVITY

By Eric Harabadian

‘Onaje’ is a Nigerian name that means “the sensitive one.” Adopted by Onaje Allan Gumbs in the early ’70s, its definition could not be more poignant today as the veteran keyboardist reveals a pensive and translucent playing approach on his latest album, *Bloodlife: Solo Piano Improvisations Based On The Melodies Of Ronald Shannon Jackson*. Grace and sensitivity, in great reserve, were needed to bring the project to fruition.

Gumbs and Jackson (1940–2013) had a friendship that dated back to the late ’70s, and the pianist played on the drummer-composer-bandleader’s 1985 Decoding Society album *Decode Yourself*. When Jackson was working on a concept album consisting of solo drums and spoken-word pieces, called *Pulse*, he put forth an idea that ultimately led to the creation of *Bloodlife*.

“There was this tune called ‘Lullaby For Mothers,’ and Ron asked me if I could do something with this song,” explained Gumbs, 65. “Mind you, he only had melodies because he wrote music on flute. He sat behind me as I played what I heard. When I turned back around to him, he was crying. He then asked if I could do it as a solo piano piece on his album.”

Jackson’s producer at the time, David Breskin, took the idea a step further and asked Gumbs to record an entire album of the drummer’s melodies. With a book of Jackson’s notes in hand, the pianist set upon choosing the appropriate material and recorded the album with engineer Ron St. Germain. “Mr. Breskin mixed nine pieces I had done,” Gumbs said. “[But] all of a sudden, I’m not sure what happened: He shut everything down and went back to San Francisco with the tapes.”

Roughly two decades passed before Gumbs got to hear what he had recorded in the mid-’80s. “I had to hear the music,” he said. “Ron was not attempting to get the rights to the music, so I was going to.”

Digging into his own pocket, Gumbs bought the rights to the music and hired mastering engineer James P. Nichols to clean up the original tapes. Listening back to the tapes, Gumbs began to conceptualize a project involving more than just the original tunes that Breskin had mixed. Nine tunes ended up being 14, including three composed by Gumbs.

Roughly two weeks before Jackson died last October, he reconnected with Gumbs and was finally able to listen to the finished tunes in their entirety. “I feel this is one of my best solo piano presentations, and I feel honored he chose me to do it,” Gumbs said. “He felt I could interpret his music, and I’m trying to keep his image alive. I did one other solo piano album for SteepleChase in 1976 when I was with Nat Adderley. Even though that album got great reviews, I feel *Bloodlife* is more centered and superseded what I did before.”

Gumbs released *Bloodlife* on his own imprint, Ejano Music, and is distributing it digitally through CD Baby. “I didn’t have a lot of money to make hard copies of it,” he explains. “But I wanted people to hear it and get the music out there.”

The lyrical and texturally lush playing on *Bloodlife* is evidence of Gumbs’ immense skills as a pianist. He is not only a brilliant interpreter of other artists’ work, but an avid educator as well. His association with the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York and his work with the Litchfield Jazz Camp in New Milford, Conn., allow him to expand his vision and shape young minds. “It’s important to talk to students about why we do this,” Gumbs said. “Yes, we try and pay bills, but there is a *reason* we do

music. Our mission is to heal. Once we have the mechanics down, what does it mean for us and the listener? That’s what I’ve tried to do with the groups I work with and produce.”

Currently he has two active ensembles that incorporate his love of singers, poets and dancers: New Vintage and Onaje Allan Gumbs Trio Plus. “Neither group is compartmentalized,” Gumbs said. “Sometimes it might be more hip-hop, straightahead, African or r&b. The only destination for the music is the heart and how it feels.”



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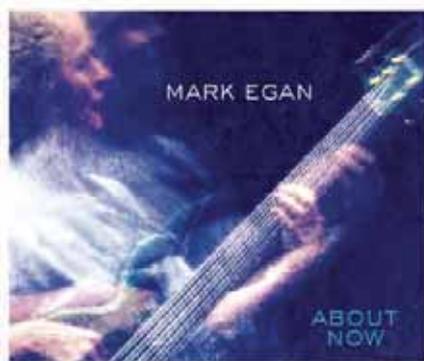
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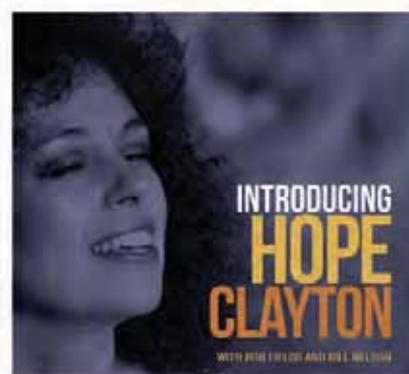
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A DREAM UNDETERRED

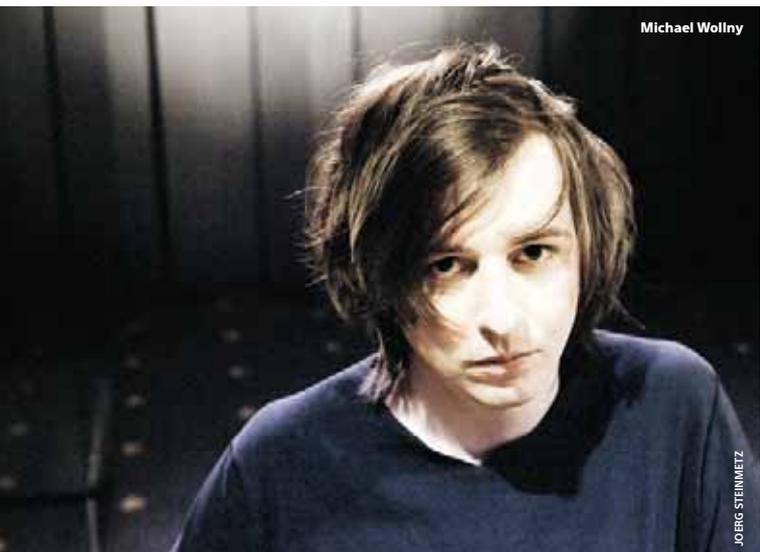
By Sean J. O'Connell

Siegfried "Siggi" Loch has been a part of the recording industry for nearly 55 years—starting as sales representative for EMI in 1960 and later serving as an executive for Liberty Records and Warner Bros. But for the last 22 years, Loch has run his own label, ACT Music, one of the most important jazz imprints based in Europe.

"I would be really reluctant to advise anybody to start a record label," Loch said by phone from ACT Music's office in Munich, Germany. "I was very fortunate to live through the golden age of the record industry. The way the business developed and all the love and the success that I was able to experience will never happen again."

The 73-year-old knows better than most that nothing can deter a dream. Loch fell in love with jazz after hearing Sidney Bechet in 1955. Five years later, he had his foot in the door of the industry peddling the EMI catalogue. Two years after that, he was producing sessions for rockers, jazz musicians and blues artists. "I had the idea of running my own label after I had my first experience as a producer in the 1960s," he said. "I made records with Jean-Luc Ponty, Sonny Boy Williamson, Memphis Slim, John Lee Hooker."

With several production credits under his belt, Loch was ready to go off on his own when he received an offer in 1967 to help run Liberty/United Artists Records. After four years at Liberty, he was again ready to start his label when a business offer pushed his dream aside once more. Loch began working for Warner, eventually rising to the position of president of WEA Europe from 1983 to 1987. He left the company to start an independent publish-



ing and production company. Finally, in 1992 he released the first album on his own label.

That inaugural ACT Music release received tremendous acclaim. *Jazzpaña* was a collaboration between Vince Mendoza and Arif Mardin that featured the WDR Big Band, Michael Brecker, Al Di Meola and other global musicians. It was nominated for two Grammy awards and set the path for a diverse catalogue of more than 350 records.

Swedish trombonist Nils Landgren appears on nearly 10 percent of the label's output, with 22 albums under his own name plus guest appearances and production credits scattered over 20 years of collaborating with Loch.

"Siggi knows what he wants, and he has the business skills to *get* what he wants," Landgren said. "Many labels stop when they have a finished project, but ACT spends so much time and effort to make all the projects visible."

Swede Esbjörn Svensson, who recorded with a trio under the name E.S.T., was one of those musicians who benefited from Loch's well-oiled machine. The two met through Landgren, and Loch was immediately taken with the young pianist's use of disparate genres to create a moody palette entirely his own. "I would only work with his music if he would sign with me directly," Loch recalled. "As a result, he became one of the most important European jazz artists." (The E.S.T. trio appeared on the cover of the May 2006 issue of *DownBeat*.)

Loch's reputation for promoting the music of Sweden was enough to earn him a knighthood in 2010. However, it was a bittersweet honor because the immensely talented Svensson had died in a scuba diving accident only two years prior. He was 44.

Loch initially considered shutting down the label entirely. But as he worked through his grief, he found the determination to honor Svensson's legacy by extending the reach of ACT Music. The label's roster expanded to include pianist Vijay Iyer, drummer Manu Katché and pianist Michael Wolny.

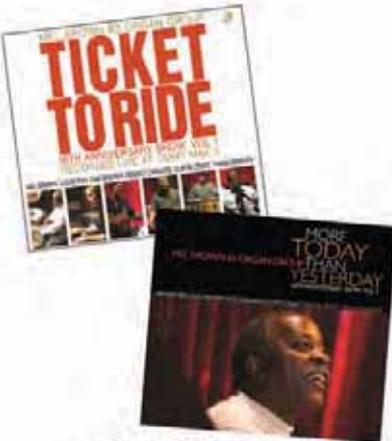
"ACT was E.S.T.'s label, and there is no musician I know who hadn't been somehow struck by that band," Wolny said.

Over the decades, Loch has enjoyed a strong rapport with his artists, including Wolny, whose latest trio album is *Weltentraum*. "Over the last decade on the scene, I can honestly say that Siggi remains the most trustworthy and honest friend I can imagine," the pianist said.

To further solidify the label's sterling reputation, ACT has been awarded "Jazz Label of the Year" at the German ECHO awards four years in a row and continues to promote new artists as well as label mainstays such as guitarist Nguyễn Lê and jazz vocalist Youn Sun Nah.

Despite ACT's dramatic expansion, Loch maintains the sense of togetherness that catapulted the label 22 years ago. "There is a closeness to the company," Landgren said fondly. "The artists have the feeling that we belong to the ACT family. We can speak directly to the boss. It feels like a family business. It makes it rewarding to put in a lot of work because something good always comes out the other side."

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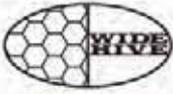
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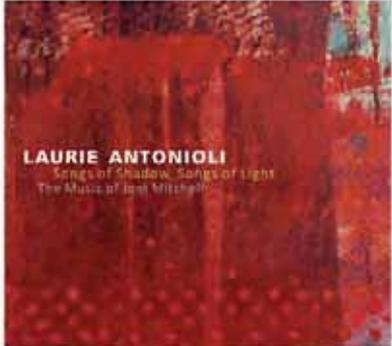
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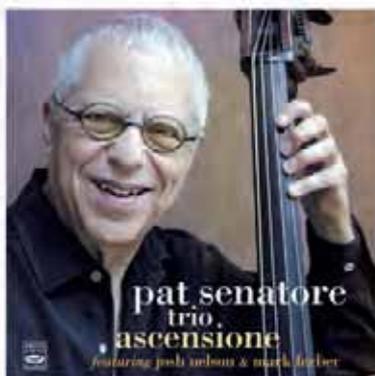


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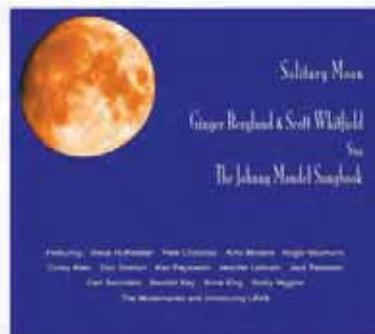


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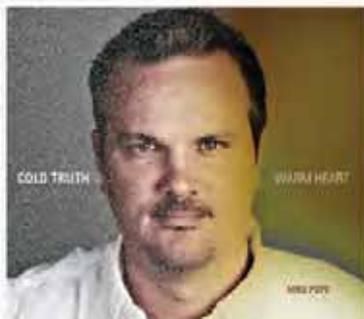
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Reid Anderson (left), Dave King and Ethan Iverson of The Bad Plus



The Bad Plus *Inevitable Western*

OKEH/SONY 88843024062

★★★

This collection of mostly minor-key, off-kilter originals occasionally rises to the orchestral, interactive grandeur that has made The Bad Plus one of the most original and popular trios in jazz. But more often than not, the tracks sound like moody piano recitals with bass and drum accompaniment, even as they start and stop, zig and zag, and churn and clang through asymmetrical meters, rhythmic hitches and obsessive vamps.

The title suggests that this is, perhaps, the aim—to create a sort of soundtrack for an imaginary spaghetti western. But the music doesn't really get interesting until the unsettling fifth track, bassist Reid Anderson's "Do It Again," with its dissonant piano solo and a pulsing vamp that feels slightly subversive in the way it seduces you into feeling a groove, then undercuts it. That track is followed by the even more attractive, kaleidoscopic "Epistolary Echoes," by drummer Dave King, whose dynamism gives the cut a more active jazz feel than the rest of the album.

A satisfying instance of piano-centrism can be found in Anderson's solemn and oddly scary (given the title) "You Will Lose All Fear," in which Ethan Iverson's skittering notes and calm melody recall the droll loneliness of the late Esbjörn Svensson before surging into dissonance.

Iverson's hesitation and restraint on the lovely title ballad, which he wrote, recall the lyricism and restrained yearning of Thelonious Monk's romantic moments.

But too many tracks don't take flight: the slippery dirge "I Hear You," churning rockers "Gold Prisms Incorporated" and "Self Serve," the rippling and chimey impressionist piece "Adopted Highway" and the darkly tense driver "Mr. Now."

While this may not be one of the trio's best albums, its signature mix of jazz, rock and modern classical music is immediately recognizable, and everything here is played with impeccable clarity of intention.

—Paul de Barros

Inevitable Western: I Hear You; Gold Prisms Incorporated; Self Serve; You Will Lose All Fear; Do It Again; Epistolary Echoes; Adopted Highway; Mr. Now; Inevitable Western. (50:46)

Personnel: Ethan Iverson, piano; Reid Anderson, bass; Dave King, drums.

Ordering info: okeh-records.com



Dave Douglas & Uri Caine *Present Joys*

GREENLEAF 1037

★★★★★

Thirty years ago, when genre borders were being obliterated by willful expansionists like John Zorn and tribute-themed albums were catching on, we'd joke around and pull absurd possibilities out of the air. "Oh yeah, heard about the new album, David Murray does Bad Brains? What about that Bill Frisell Sacred Harp record?" Well, at this late date, jazz is practically overflowing with repertory options. Given his signature blend of varied interests and keen imagination, we should have guessed that Dave Douglas would be on point to tackle the unexpected. *Present Joys*, a sumptuous romp with pianist Uri Caine, is a foray into shape-note singing and the powerful Sacred Harp vocal book. With Douglas, you don't rule anything out.

Shape-note singing is an a cappella ensemble

Saxophone Summit *Visitation*

ARTISTSHARE 0125

★★★★★

The two prior Saxophone Summit releases, with the late Michael Brecker instead of Ravi Coltrane, give little indication of what's in store on *Visitation*. A wide-open vista, it's a marvelous contradiction to the group's clichéd name—no locked horns jam-sessioning here, this is a notably democratic outing, with compositions and equal input from all six members, not just the hornmen.

Let's shine a light on the rhythm section, then. It's wonderful, for instance, to hear bassist Cecil McBee spread out like this, recalling his terrific '80s records, so close to this one in spirit. Billy Hart's been on a tear with his ECM outings, and the drummer's "Balkis" creates an open, unpulsed field, patient and unfolding, with the cymbals adding color to impressionistic reed work, composed lines emerging from the mist. Pianist Phil Markowitz is especially impressive. He can handle the softer material but is adept at the thornier spots, too, acting as a springboard in rhythmically open waters, as on his boiling track "Point."

Joe Lovano contributes the title track, best on the disc, with a Steve Lacy-like, loping arrangement; Dave Liebman's soprano solo is brilliant, organic, tendrils exploring the peaty earth. Coltrane's presence is important to the

approach with oft-repeated melody patterns created to facilitate community choirs. Its roots go back to New England religious gatherings of the early 1800s, and the vocal web is unusually captivating. In a few ways it sounds like uproarious prayer. Here, Douglas and Caine reduce the action to two voices, but the essence of the Sacred Harp dynamic is unmistakable. Even when they're throwing blues slants into the title hymn, there's a churchy feel to the music.

Because they've worked together intermittently for decades, the pair's rapport is obvious. The volume adjustments, the balance of melody and improv, the gas-brakes, gas-brakes changeups on some tracks—each of the nuanced transitions these performances offer are beveled with the concord of friendship.

Caine's nods to the church are built on seductive subtleties; his moves on "Old Putt" add up to a mildly abstract solo meditation. Douglas wrings strong emotions on each of the traditional nuggets. Maybe he hears his job as distilling all those voices into a single line. If so, he's on the right track—as he spills through the melodies, his earnest horn lines teem with sentiment, and his inspired originals carry a similar candor. If the Protestant hymns of 2012's *Be Still* wore their heart on their sleeve, *Present Joys* seals the deal. From "Supplication" to "Confidence," this may well be the most poignant we've ever heard him.

—Jim Macnie

Present Joys: Soar Away; Ham Fist; Bethel; Present Joys; Supplication; Seven Seas; Confidence; End To End; Old Putt; Zero Hour. (42:37)

Personnel: Dave Douglas, trumpet; Uri Caine, piano.

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com

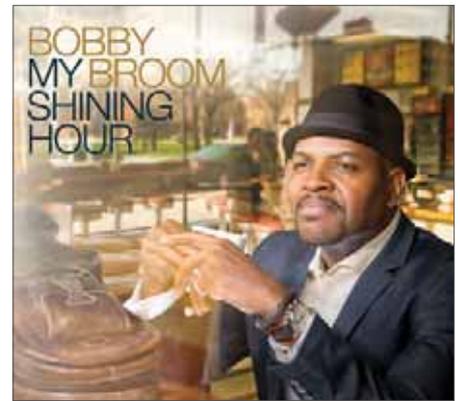


overall chemistry, combining soprano with Lovano's alto clarinet (take that, saxophones!) on "The Message," a gently free-flowing track and the only one with a slight Trane vibe. Ringleader Liebman gives the saxes three minutes of unaccompanied room for breathy, sonorous interplay on his "Partition," tenors and soprano tumbling together like pillowcases in the dryer; it ends with choreographed horns, a saxophone quartet minus one. —John Corbett

Personnel: Joe Lovano, tenor, G soprano saxophones, alto clarinet; Ravi Coltrane, tenor, soprano saxophones; Dave Liebman, soprano, tenor saxophones; Phil Markowitz, piano; Cecil McBee, bass; Billy Hart, drums. (57:07)

Visitation: Visitation; Balkis; The Message; Partition; Point; Consequence.

Ordering info: artistshare.com



Bobby Broom *My Shining Hour*

ORIGIN RECORDS

★★★★½

In this low-maintenance, upper-end CD, guitarist Bobby Broom strolls softly and intimately through the familiar riches of the Great American Songbook. When you've been playing with Sonny Rollins on and off for 34 years, songs like these become second nature. Rollins would fling them around in spreading orbits of peril to test their mettle. On his own, Broom is far less extravagant and intrusive. He holds them closer, probing carefully with a respectful and uncrowded ease.

This is not an especially ambitious album, but a very welcoming one. There are no dramatic flights of virtuosity, conspicuous emotion or wanton tempos. The fastest pieces never break a relaxed trot. Broom approaches the ballads as a pianist might, framing his lead choruses mostly in warm, caressing chords, then making his own paths almost exclusively in clean, single-note lines that never lose sight of the melody. Is there a more formidable challenge for a musician today than to find surprises hidden within such well-traveled standards?

Broom succeeds subtly, rarely straightahead, and often with the help of bassist Dennis Carroll and drummer Makaya McCraven, who apply a quiet undertone of unexpected rhythmic counterpoint. After the beautiful and rarely heard verse to "Oh, Lady Be Good," for instance, the trio finds a medium, finger-snapping tempo for a chorus, then decouples from the pulse and floats into more spacious drum-guitar dialog. "Sweet Georgia Brown" becomes interesting less for its juicy changes and what Broom does with them than for the quietly edgy and acentric rhythms McCraven stirs in below the surface.

"Tennessee Waltz" is the shortest of the pieces, the most straightforward and perhaps the most lovely. With its country roots, it still seems like a party crasher in a jazz context. But its simple melodic lucidity makes it rich material for variation, as musicians from Rollins to Art Hodes have shown. Broom does it proud here, ending this collection on a note of repose. —John McDonough

My Shining Hour: Sweet And Lovely; My Ideal; Just One Of Those Things; My Shining Hour; Sweet Georgia Brown; The Heather On The Hill; Jitterbug Waltz; Oh, Lady Be Good; The Tennessee Waltz. (57:24)

Personnel: Bobby Broom, guitar; Dennis Carroll, bass; Makaya McCraven, drums.

Ordering info: originarts.com

The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
The Bad Plus <i>Inevitable Western</i>	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★
Dave Douglas & Uri Caine <i>Present Joys</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Saxophone Summit <i>Visitation</i>	★½	★★★★	★★★★½	★★½
Bobby Broom <i>My Shining Hour</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★½	★★½

Critics' Comments

The Bad Plus, *Inevitable Western*

Crowded with nervy polarities of temperament and density. Massive, imperial-sounding chords drop like lordly commandments, then melt into desolate restraint. Irony is suspected. Excess is often demonstrable in much fast flash and noodling. "Adopted Highway" is soaked in a stark menace. On balance, this album commands respect for its form and sizzle.

—John McDonough

I dig 'em most when they're doing their own thing; the covers grow wearisome, whether Nirvana or Stravinsky, but BP's a clever, capable bunch, and they're in good form here, incorporating bits of rock effluvia and classical grandiosa into their reindeer games. Along the way, Iverson can be riveting.

—John Corbett

It picks up where *Made Possible* left off—sober tunes (especially Reid Anderson's) played with a charismatic frenzy. Don't let the title have you looking for a pastoral prairie vibe—their stuff may be cinematic these days, but it's still a bit crazed.

—Jim Macnie

Dave Douglas & Uri Caine, *Present Joys*

Pure pleasure in these wide-open, heart-on-sleeve psalm tunes from (or related to) *The Sacred Harp*. Douglas has never sounded more pure and rich in the middle register, and his vivid interactions with a swinging, bluesy Caine put this album solidly in the "Weatherbird" tradition of Armstrong and Hines.

—Paul de Barros

In a reduced setting, keeping the tracks concise, Douglas continues some of the exploration of American traditional music he began on 2012's *Be Still*. Caine is a perfect foil, adept at adapting, a brilliant support and sparring partner on both the shape-note songs and the Douglas originals. I love the richness of DD's trumpet sound: nothing strident, super generous, matte and warm.

—John Corbett

While "shape notes" may send you to Wikipedia, there is nothing especially difficult about this two-legged stool. Douglas has an emotionally subdued primness and decorum befitting the music's early American formality. But there is also a playfulness within the Haydn-esque rectitude that softens the sobriety with considerable surprise.

—John McDonough

Saxophone Summit, *Visitation*

A testament to interplay. The three horn players weave in and out of each other's air space with a sublime artistry. There's plenty of confidence in the air, and it helps tether some of these luminous abstractions.

—Jim Macnie

Dave Liebman, Joe Lovano, Ravi Coltrane—love these guys—and what a treat to hear bassist Cecil McBee, especially on his tune "Consequence," but most of this album feels over-composed and underplayed.

—Paul de Barros

There have been many sax summits. This is *not* one of them. The promise is "new conceptual realms." But it could have been made 50 years ago. When the avant-garde opened the gates, the irony was it left no place to grow. This CD reminds us how little has changed.

—John McDonough

Bobby Broom, *My Shining Hour*

A festival of oldies but goodies, maybe an odd programmatic choice, but with this caliber trio that's no hindrance. Broom is the full monty: ultra-refined timing and tone, continuous flow of ideas, a touch of grease, a treat for the connoisseur. This threesome, with long-term bassist Carroll and swinging McCraven, is one of the guitarist's finest.

—John Corbett

I dig the agility of his solos and was wooed by the minimalism of the approach. But the rhythm section was a bit too benign—it would be nice to hear more overt interplay from this outfit.

—Jim Macnie

Broom's halting, interruptive style and stainless steel twang are jubilant on "Jitterbug Waltz" but elsewhere feel forced and stylized.

—Paul de Barros

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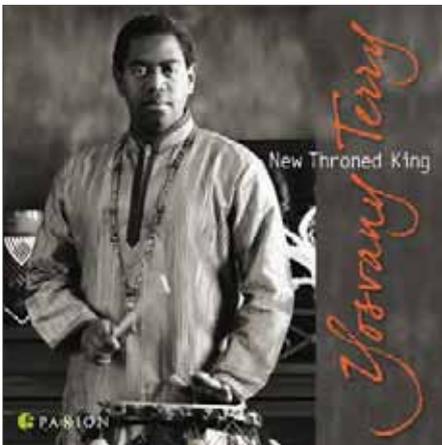
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Yosvany Terry New Throned King

5 PASSION
★★★★½

This ambitious new disc from Yosvany Terry's Afro-Cuban Roots: Ye-Dé-Gbé ensemble casts a cultural net that reaches back to the ancient West African kingdom of Dahomey (present-day Benin), across the Atlantic to Cuba's Matanzas province and south to Haiti before coalescing as Terry's brainchild in New York. Rooted in the religious chants and intricate drum patterns of the relatively obscure Cuban Arará tradition, *New Throned King* pays homage to a pantheon of spirits and ancestors.

The Microscopic Septet Manhattan Moonrise

CUNEIFORM RUNE 370
★★★★★

Ever since its cutting-edge debut, 1983's *Take The Z Train*, there has been an air of mystery and mirth surrounding The Microscopic Septet. While this band of musical merry pranksters has been dedicated to swinging, it's always done so in slightly tongue-in-cheek fashion. Thirty-one years later, following on the heels of 2008's *Lobster Leaps In* and 2010's *Friday The Thirteenth: The Micros Play Monk*, nothing has changed. The ensemble, cofounded by saxophonist Phillip Johnston and pianist Joel Forrester, is still quirky after all these years.

There's a touch of retro to this kind of tight ensemble writing, which harkens back to such groups as Raymond Scott's Quintette and the John Kirby Sextet (aka the Onyx Club Boys). But a post-Art Ensemble aesthetic is also expressed here on the densely chaotic-sounding "Blue" and also in the wildly dissonant solos that occasionally crop up by Johnston on soprano sax and bari ace Dave Sewelson. Forrester carries a distinct Monk influence in some of his off-kilter writing and playing, which is particularly evident on "A Snapshot Of The Soul." Johnston also mines that Monk flavor on his "You Got That Right," which features some boisterous bari work by Sewelson. There's a whole lot of quirk here, but it's always on the joyous side, a quality perhaps

In the process of interpreting elements of the group's music tradition, Terry also opens the door for some of New York's brightest Latin jazz stars to explore their own fluencies within an Afro-Cuban tradition that's rarely been heard outside of the Matanzas province.

While the disc could serve as a document of musicological research, it sounds nothing like an academic exercise. The power and raw beauty of unexpected bell patterns, the harmonic choruses of call-and-response chants, and the supple textures of piano and horn motifs take center stage here. On the rousing opener, "Reuniendo La Nación," Terry, Jason Moran and Haitian sound designer Val Jeanty play off the pitches and timbres of the drums, connecting a historic song about patriotism with modern melodic impulses. Windswept crests of percussion and ghost-like vocal whispers set the tone on "Healing Power" as a plaintive horn weaves its way into the soundscape as if to clear a path for the crystalline voices that follow. Terry closes things out with "Ilere," a forward-looking piece in which the band uses Arará as a point of departure to riff on a contemporary impression of the tradition; the resulting groove is liable to summon as many present-day dancers as ancient spirits. —Jennifer Odell

New Throned King: Reuniendo La Nación; New Throned King; Walking Over Wave; Laroko; Ojun Degara; Mase Nadodo; Thunderous Passage; Healing Power; Dance Transformation; Ilere.

Personnel: Yosvany Terry "Sobo Jain," saxophones, chekere, weve (5), coro; Osmany Paredes, piano; Yuniór Terry "Afra Jun," bass, coro; Pedrito Martínez "Eshu Ni," lead vocals, apití; Sandy Pérez "Oya Ladde," yonofó, akoto (1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10); Román Díaz "Asia Ana Bi," weve, coro; Dominick Kanza, guitar (2, 3, 9, 10); Justin Brown, drums; Jason Moran, piano (1); Val Jeanty, sound design, DJ (1, 8); Gema Corredera, coro (4–6, 8); Ishmael Reed, poetry (6).

Ordering info: 5passion.com



best represented by the title track, which stands as Forrester's streamlined answer to Glenn Miller's "Chattanooga Choo Choo."

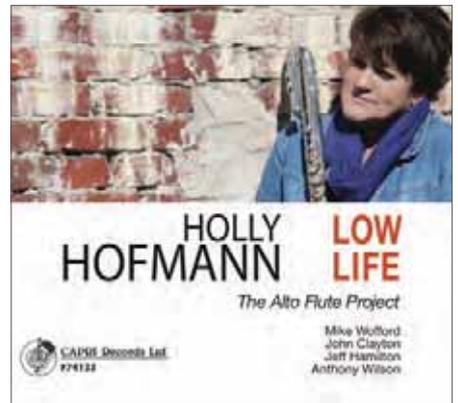
The album closes on a solemn note with Forrester's odd march-tango number "Occupy Your Life," which recalls Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra. An eclectic bunch of kindred spirits still doing it against all odds.

—Bill Milkowski

Manhattan Moonrise: When You Get In Over Your Head; No Time; Manhattan Moonrise; Obeying The Chemicals; A Snapshot Of The Soul; Star Turn; Hang It On A Line; Let's Coolerate One; Suspended Animation; Blue; You Got That Right; Occupy Your Life. (61:15)

Personnel: Phillip Johnston, soprano sax; Don Davis, alto sax; Mike Hashim, tenor sax; Dave Sewelson, baritone sax; Joel Forrester, piano; Dave Hofstra, bass; Richard Dworkin, drums.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com



Holly Hofmann Low Life: The Alto Flute Project

CAPRI 74133
★★★★★

San Diego-based flutist Holly Hofmann isn't riffing on Johnny Mandel with her album title—"Low Life" refers to her instrument of choice here, the alto flute. Pitched a fourth lower than the standard C model, it has a far more circumscribed range. You'll get no soaring upper-register somersaults or airy maypole frolics from the alto flute. Hofmann takes full advantage of minor scales to explore the soulful, sometimes-romantic, sometimes-melancholy aural possibilities—as a jazz player and not a classical convert.

She's in the fast company of an all-star quartet led by the splendid pianist Mike Wofford and anchored by Jeff Hamilton's incisive drumming. It's not hard to hear Hofmann's left-jab, right-cross phrasing on a blues bopper like "Cedar Would" and mentally transfer it to a savvy trumpeter.

Though the album operates at a lower audible dynamic, the crash cymbal hiss on guitarist Anthony Wilson's swinging "Jack Of Hearts" is no less stinging. Wofford's chords and lines are so choice and so well placed—yet so modest—that it might be easy to overlook his contribution to this album. But the kick he gives to "Cedar" reveals the big picture.

Pat Metheny's poignant "Farmer's Trust" ballad limns the emotional potential for the alto flute. Hofmann's tone has body with an edge of discreet vibrato, though her considerable technique is wisely disguised in favor of lyrical simplicity. On John Clayton's moody "Touch The Fog," she deftly channels blues feeling over spare minor piano chords, and the bassist responds with a marvelously executed plucked solo.

Hofmann set a musical challenge. Her triumph is in being able to conjure a sonic world and never leave the listener wanting for something else. —Kirk Silsbee

Low Life: The Alto Flute Project: Jack Of Hearts; Touch The Fog; Grow (For Dick Oatts); Lumière De La Vie; Cedar Would; The Very Thought Of You; Make Me Rainbows; Soul-Leo; Farmer's Trust. (47:05)

Personnel: Holly Hofmann, alto flute; Anthony Wilson, guitar; Mike Wofford, piano; John Clayton, bass; Jeff Hamilton, drums.

Ordering info: caprirecords.com

Keys to the Highway

Michael Bellar and the As-Is Ensemble's *Oh No Oh Wow* (Left 3 Lanes Music; 59:33 ★★½) brings Bellar's chameleon nature as a composer and multifaceted musician to the fore. On the title track, the pianist shifts between acoustic and electric keyboard, varying the sonority but never straying from within the tight, compact groove laid down by bassist Rob Jost and percussionist Brook Martinez. In fact, the accompaniment shifts within the song as well, staying propulsive and on top of the beat, but creating an added depth to a sound that would be perfectly at home on the festival circuit. That Bellar and his three-person backing ensemble's sound slithers beyond easy classification fits their aesthetic. It's a bit classic rock—especially on the wah-wah-fueled "Gadson"—with a lot of funk thrown in. There's jazz, of course, and soul and blues, too. On "Biscuit Baby," Bellar's solo organ introduction is tinged with gospel sounds before becoming a slow blues shuffle—his playing is even more subdued on "Go Long Gaudi"—aided by the most restrained accompaniment heard on the disc.

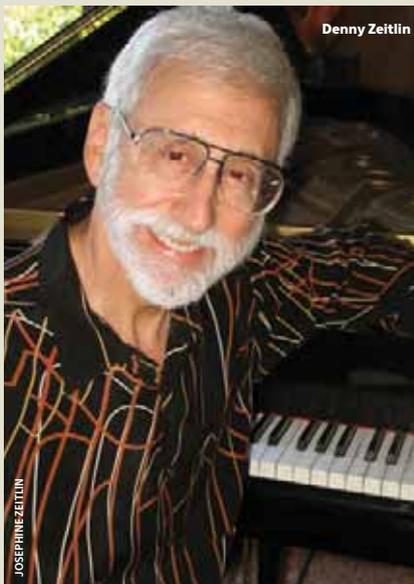
Ordering info: michaelbellar.com

If Bellar's cover tunes are easily recognizable, to a point, Denny Zeitlin sets out to remake standards into something entirely his own with *Stairway To The Stars* (Sunnyside 1380; 66:42 ★★★★★). Eschewing melody lines, Zeitlin applies his angular piano approach, interspersed with the occasional lush chord, to mostly slowed-down versions of other people's music. Recorded at the Jazz Bakery in 2001, the live setting likely allowed the musicians to branch out a bit and get more creative with the material. The exception here is a blistering "Oleo," which has a disorienting, out-of-time effect for the "A" section, then sequesters into fiery swing, anchored by the excellent rhythm section of bassist Buster Williams and drummer Matt Wilson. The tune, though, is really the only straightforward piece on this exceptionally performed, but at times a bit cerebral, album.

Ordering info: dennyzeitlin.com

Where Zeitlin is sparse and uses space, Manuel Valera, in his enchanting solo album *Self Portrait* (Mavo 1106; 60:36 ★★½), is bubbly and lush, with rubato lines spanning the whole keyboard. Each note seems deliberate and carefully planned, even in his three impromptu pieces that form the backbone of this album. The programmatic improvisations, composed for George Gershwin, Erik Satie and Nicholas Slonimsky, paint short but satisfying portraits. Gershwin's begins with an ornamented melody atop interlocking arpeggios in the left hand, but quickly moves to a more impressionistic aesthetic. For Slonimsky, Valera chooses a plodding, slow-moving accompaniment. Pushing delicately constructed pieces aside, Valera ends the CD with a down-home blues and a herky-jerky improvisational bebop sketch.

Ordering info: manuelvalera.com



Denny Zeitlin

Pianist John Stetch takes on the perceived precision of classical music in the musical dressing-down *Off With The Cuffs* (Addo AJR020; 62:40 ★★★★★). Stetch creates a disc full of solo classical repertoire presented through an improvisational filter. He uses the notes that were originally written, adding some of his own, while stretching out or compressing rhythms. The results are enjoyable while remaining musically satisfying. His take on the three movements of Mozart's Sonata No. 13 in B-Flat Major, K. 333 moves from a quasi-ragtime first movement to the standout third movement, which is taken over by unadulterated bluegrass sensibilities. Stetch has the musical gravitas to pull off what some could see as mere musical jokes; in his hands, though, these tunes have become more contemporary songs, to be taken no less seriously than the originals. On Stetch's version of Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23, he uses the space inherent in the original work to add a few ideas of his own, breathing a bit of swagger into the sober piece.

Ordering info: addorecords.com

On the revolving-quartet album *Venture Bound* (Enja 9603; 63:48 ★★★★★), Alon Nechushtan has an immediacy to his playing and demonstrates a need to push notes out of the piano. At times, those notes come out in big clusters of improvisation and long, 16th-note ascending lines; other times, though, they come out slower, with a heavier attack, but with no less urgency. The opening track, "L'Avventura," fits in the first category. Equally as impressive, though, is Nechushtan's more introspective, quiet side, shown on "F.A.Q." and "Snowflow." He's at his best, though, during rollicking, uptempo swing tunes like "L'Avventura" and "Pome(grenades)." To get his message across, the pianist assembled a wide range of top-notch sidemen for *Venture Bound* including tenor saxophonists Donny McCaslin and John Ellis.

DB

Ordering info: enjarecords.com

GREG REITAN
POST NO BILLS
SSC 1395 / In Stores August 19

GREG REITAN piano
JACK DARO bass
DEAN KOBA drums

After years of experimentation and exploration, it can be beneficial and, occasionally, revelatory to look backwards to known paths and accomplishments. The reexamination of an older composition can lead to new discoveries and goals for an ensemble that has been performing together for years. It has proven to be well worth revisiting the Greg Reitan Trio. The ensemble's new *Post No Bills* has provided a perfect example of their strength as a group and as masterful interpreters of the jazz canon.

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Available on iTunes

Azar Lawrence *The Seeker*

SUNNYSIDE 1392

★★★★½

When Azar Lawrence was new to the scene in 1971, Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner and Miles Davis each brought him into their bands because they heard echoes of John Coltrane in his playing. He cut three records as a leader and played as a sideman with dozens of other acts before retreating behind the scenes at Capitol Records. He's come roaring back as a leader over the last several years, though, and on *The Seeker*, that Coltrane spirit is still alive and well. That's not to say Lawrence sounds like his biggest inspiration. He has his own strong voice, nimble and fleet even in the most tangled passages, but this outing, recorded live at New York's Jazz Standard, swims in the same post-bop stream Trane helped chart in the early 1960s. Lawrence's band is right there with him, and they blast out of the gate with "Gandhi." Lawrence plays a sharp, Indian-inflected theme and everything clicks; pianist Benito Gonzalez is on fire for every second of the song's 10 minutes. Inevitably, there's a come-down from this thrilling opener, but they find ways to reach similar highs several more times. On "Rain Ballad," the band plays loose and out of time behind Lawrence's commanding solo, while the title track finds the leader switching from tenor to soprano and playing with incredible weightlessness. The audience is occasionally audible and duly appreciative. It's enough to inspire jealousy that they were on hand for a show where everything worked so well.

—Joe Tangari

The Seeker: Gandhi; Lost Tribes Of Lemuria; The Seeker; One More Time; Rain Ballad; Spirit Night; Venus Rising. (63:10)

Personnel: Azar Lawrence, tenor, soprano saxophones; Nicholas Payton, trumpet; Benito Gonzalez, piano; Essiet Okon Essiet, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Jason Palmer *Places*

STEEPLECHASE 31780

★★★★

Musicians are no strangers to the road. Each traveler takes away something different after a stay in a new city, whether it's a year or a night. Trumpeter Jason Palmer came away with a set's worth of material inspired by the various places he put his luggage down. But he isn't trying to emulate the music of each location. There is no oompah to "Berlin" or yodeling on "Bern." These are internalized trips hashed out in the hours and days between gigs. Tenor saxophonist Mark Turner and alto saxophonist Godwin Louis fill out the front line of Palmer's sextet here, and their tight attack is vital to the soul of this recording. They are put to good use on nearly every melody, forming a dense, swooping blend. Palmer is quick with a confident assault, and Turner is powerful throughout. On "Rising Sign (For Paris)," the horn men weave in and out of each other's message, deftly dancing between a bubbling riff and darting solo lines initially without help from the rhythm section. Once the band is fleshed out, the horns engage in some rapid-fire lines before stepping aside for drummer Kendrick Scott to demonstrate his high-energy approach. Guitarist Mike Moreno and bassist Edward Perez are tasked with keeping a spacious, harmonic foundation in place, and they do so admirably. Moreno is most engaging when he keeps the shifting gears of "Berlin" steady before getting an opportunity to add a little grease to the band's arsenal.

Places: Urban Renewal (For High Point); Falling In (For Guimaraes); Berlin; Bern; Rising Sign (For Paris); Silver (For Xalapa); American Deceptionism Part I (For DC); Spirit Song (For Rozzy); American Deceptionism Part II. (72:26)

Personnel: Jason Palmer, trumpet; Godwin Louis, alto saxophone; Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Mike Moreno, guitar; Edward Perez, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Jimmy Cobb *The Original Mob*

SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS 1407

★★★★½

Louis Hayes *Return Of The Jazz Communicators*

SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS 1406

★★★★

The Smoke jazz club in Harlem has started its own record label, with two recent releases led by veteran drummers. The CDs come with extensive scene-setting liner-note interviews with the leaders and lovely Jimmy Katz photographs, making for the sort of holistic experience that's in danger of going out of style in the digital era.

Jimmy Cobb played drums on Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue*, as well as in the Davis rhythm section that went on its own as the Wynton Kelly Trio, which also recorded, famously, with Wes Montgomery. For *The Original Mob*, Cobb reconvened players who assembled around him for gigs in the New York City area when the drummer was teaching at The New School in the early '90s—young musicians particularly inspired by those records he made with Kelly and Montgomery.

Guitarist Peter Bernstein, pianist Brad Mehldau, bassist John Webber and Cobb make for a better combination than ever in this session from February 2014, just a few weeks after the leader turned 85. They recorded at Smoke but under studio conditions, without an audience—and the results are ravishing.

The opener, "Old Devil Moon," is a thrill, with Bernstein leading the way; there's a quicksilver glow to his tone, like neon reflecting off wet city streets. The recording has depth and impact, with George Coleman's "Amsterdam After Dark" also showing off the sheer beauty of the band's sound, from Webber's bass on up. Bernstein lays out on a Brazilian-style recasting of Mehldau's hit "Unrequited," with pianist and drummer inter-



acting with such second nature that it seems as if this ever-elastic song should sound no other way. Other highlights include Cobb's hard-grooving "Composition 101" and Bernstein's gritty, involved "Minor Blues." The band's uptempo flow almost redeems the hoary "Stranger In Paradise."

Louis Hayes—who played in a golden era with the likes of Horace Silver, Cannonball Adderley and Oscar Peterson—revived the band name The Jazz Communicators from an outfit that he assembled for New York gigs in the late '60s with Freddie Hubbard, among others. For *The Return Of The Jazz Communicators*—recorded live last November—the drummer swings alongside seasoned vibraphonist Steve Nelson and up-and-comers Abraham Burton (tenor sax), David Bryant (piano) and Dezron Douglas (bass). As a tribute to Mulgrew Miller, the album kicks off with the late pianist's catchy "Soul-Leo." There's also a nod, with "Simple Pleasures," to the departed Cedar Walton, another former Hayes confrere.

Hayes, now 77, was on the 1958 session at Rudy Van Gelder's studio when John Coltrane recorded "Lush Life" for Prestige. Billy Strayhorn's classic also figures here, including an extended introduction by Nelson. His silvery tones are the group's dominant hue, the bell-like resonance like a halo above the bandstand. In the room on the night, this quintet's Smoke sets were surely a delight, but there are moments on record when this feels like one of those you-had-to-be-there live albums.

—Bradley Bamberger

The Original Mob: Old Devil Moon; Amsterdam After Dark; Sunday In New York; Stranger In Paradise; Unrequited; Composition 101; Remembering U; Nobody Else But Me; Minor Blues; Lickety Split. (63:42)

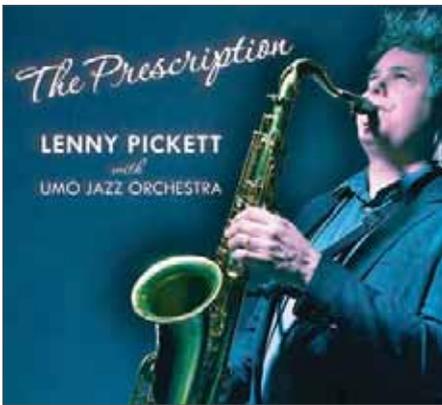
Personnel: Jimmy Cobb, drums; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Brad Mehldau, piano; John Webber, bass.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

The Return Of The Jazz Communicators: Soul-Leo; Shape Shifting; Lush Life (Intro); Lush Life; Groovin' for Nat; It's To You; Without A Song; Simple Pleasures; Vagabond Ron; Portrait Of Jennie; Lou's Idea; Village Greene. (75:31)

Personnel: Louis Hayes, drums; Abraham Burton, tenor saxophone; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; David Bryant, piano; Dezron Douglas, bass.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



**Lenny Pickett
with UMO Jazz Orchestra
The Prescription**

RANDOM ACT RECORDS 1014
★★★★½

Tenor saxophonist and E-flat clarinetist Lenny Pickett has hunkered behind the scenes for much of his 40-plus years as instrumental ironman. Crucial to the 1970s Tower Of Power horn section, the *Saturday Night Live* house band and sessions with David Bowie and Talking Heads, this release, his second as a leader, is welcome for saxo-maniacs smitten with Pickett's ozone-piercing altissimo playing, which renders such sonic orbiters as James Carter and David Murray comparatively earthbound.

These 10 adventurous arrangements are book-ended with high-note volleys on "Busted Again" and the closer, TOP's "What Is Hip?" approaching frequencies only audible by dogs and bats. Rather than grandstanding, however, as Finnish altoist Jouni Järvelä, an instigator of this project, puts it, Pickett's upper-register forays are "jubilant and ... volcanic," in the manner of his obvious influence, Motown's Junior Walker.

It was Järvelä—via NYU faculty Rich Shemaria, director of the Helsinki jazz orchestra UMO in the '90s—who urged Pickett to pursue this varied and spectacularly vivid setting for eight of his themes. "UMO" begins like Jan Gabarek meeting Alfred Hitchcock before kicking into a sidewinder 9/8 groove. The soul ballad "XVII" abruptly cuts to silence for 17 seconds in what Pickett describes as a "John Cage moment."

At times, as on the dedication to his wife, "Kathy," you could be forgiven for calling the music "smooth jazz." But Pickett unapologetically states the inspiration of Philly soulsters The Spinners, and somehow this crack Finnish 19-piece seems to know where he is coming from. —Michael Jackson

The Prescription: Busted Again; Alex Foster; XV; The Prescription; Kathy; The Big Wiggle; A Sad State Of Affairs; UMO; XVII; What Is Hip? (58:01)

Personnel: Lenny Pickett, tenor sax, E-flat clarinet; Jouni Järvelä, alto sax; Mikko Mäkinen, alto sax, clarinet, flute; Teemu Salminen, tenor sax, piccolo flute; Manuel Dunkel, tenor sax; Pertti "Pepa" Päivinen, baritone sax; Teemu Mattsson, Timo Paasonen, Mikko Pettinen, Erno Tiitonen, trumpets; Heikki Tuhkanen, Mikko Mustonen, Pekka Laukkanen, trombones; Mikael Långbacka, bass trombone; Kirro Lintinen, keyboards; Teemu Viirikainen, guitar; Ville Huolman, bass; Markus Ketola, drums; Abdissa "Mamba" Assefa, percussion; Arttu Takalo, orchestral bells, xylophone.

Ordering info: randomactrecords.com

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They Got All the Moves

David Vest, *Roadhouse Revelation* (Cordova Bay 1182; 38:56 ★★★★★) David Vest's impressive blues and boogie-woogie piano language, its syntax drawn from late greats Floyd Dixon and Meade "Lux" Lewis, isn't the only thing this native Alabaman has going for him on the fourth feature album in a long career that includes work with Big Joe Turner and the Paul deLay Blues Band. His modest, well-regulated singing voice, all the better for occasional stabs into its highest range, shows a weathered self-awareness on 10 solid original songs laden with plain-spoken ruminations about his life experiences. "Crooked Politician," a wry deLay number ideal for a New Orleans street parade, tells it like it is. Supported by blues guitarist Teddy Leonard and two more satisfyingly unassuming musicians from Ontario, Vest should do everyone a favor and tour outside his home region of Western Canada.

Ordering info: cordovabay.com

Bob Corritore, *Taboo: Blues Harmonica Instrumentals* (Delta Groove 163; 44:30 ★★★★★) Bob Corritore, based in Phoenix but ever on the move, dares to be different by recording a rare all-instrumental blues harmonica album. Although lacking the considerable creative intelligence of a Charlie Musslewhite or the supernova energy of a Sugar Blue, he succeeds in keeping listeners engaged with his poised playing in a mix of moods and rhythmic variation. Chicago blues may be his truest love ("Ruckus Rhythm"), but he has a soft spot for tiki-lounge ("Taboo") and tropical-breeze exotica ("Faboloco"). Guitarist Junior Watson, so marvelous at intertwining jazz and blues, makes his presence known on 10 of a dozen tracks. Ex-Roomful of Blues baritone saxophonist Doug James, Texas guitarist Jimmie Vaughan and B-3 paterfamilias Papa John DeFrancesco make adequate cameo appearances.

Ordering info: deltagrooveproductions.com

Little Mike And The Tornadoes, *All The Right Moves* (Elrob 14232; 57:34 ★★) Back in the 1980s, the Queens-based Tornadoes were best known for supporting Pinetop Perkins, Jimmy Rogers and other elder statesmen. Long dormant, they've regrouped and let it rip in the studio. Tony O. Melio is a good guitarist and Little Mike Markowitz works out his harmonicas pretty well, at least when they're not trafficking in clichés. Unfortunately, Markowitz has always been a weak vocalist, and the band material here runs as generic and undistinguished as titles like "(I Got) Drunk Last Night" and "So Many Problems."

Ordering info: littlemikeandthetornadoes.com

Davina And The Vagabonds, *Sunshine* (Roustabout; 41:29 ★★★★★) Davina Sowers is a one-of-a-kind performer whose singing, just this side of campy affectation, has a sassiness bearing some comparison to that of heart-thumping



Davina Sowers

CHRISTIE WILLIAMS/GRINKIE GIRL PHOTOGRAPHY

blues queens Ma Rainey and Ida Cox. With the Vagabonds (two brass players, a drummer, a string bassist-tubaist) blurring territorial lines between jazz and blues, she's on top of her game drawing authentic feeling out of the words to eight songs she wrote and time-tested Fats Waller and Eddie Miller tunes. Sowers also has a gift for approaching the piano keys with an unusual sensibility. Alone with her Rhodes, the Minnesotan gets to the unvarnished simplicity of Patty Griffin's in-the-moment love song "Heavenly Day."

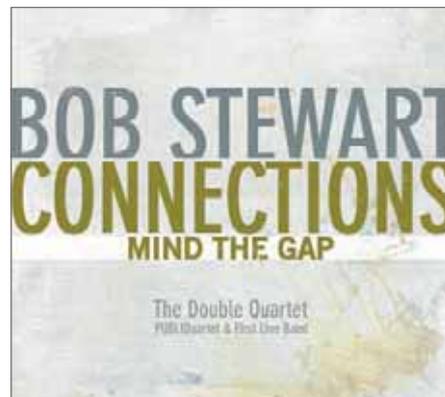
Ordering info: davinaandthevagabonds.com

Rod Piazza & The Mighty Flyers, *Emergency Situation* (Blind Pig 5160; 46:57 ★★) Once again it's clear that when it comes to singing, this bandleader does not have a gift for natural phrasing and expressive spontaneity. His vocals drag down covers of historic songs like Johnny Ace's "The Clock" and Big Walter Price's "Gambling Woman." Such a shame as there's far more artistic and emotional value in the gale wind of his harmonica playing. Ever-faithful Miss Honey on piano and the other Flyers give it their all without improving the dire circumstance.

Ordering info: blindpigrecords.com

Lonesome Shack, *More Primitive* (Alive 0159; 42:05 ★★★★★) Singer and guitarist Ben Todd developed his blues aesthetic while living in a shack in the New Mexican desert. To judge by *More Primitive*, he must have surrounded himself there with the music of John Lee Hooker, Mississippi hill country blues enchanters and maybe even young Captain Beefheart. Now calling Seattle home, recording with a bassist and drummer, Todd revels in a raw Paleolithic blues that is thick in spectral atmosphere. But Todd can be inconsistent; a few tracks lack the emotional weight and lyrical coherency needed to hold our interest in the edgy, apocalyptic lifestyle he sings about. **DB**

Ordering info: alivenenergy.com



Bob Stewart *Connections: Mind The Gap*

SUNNYSIDE 1394

★★★★½

Bob Stewart is credited only with arrangements on most of this complex, beautifully realized album. But, drawing from various collaborations spanning the 69-year-old tubist's career as well as sections for tuba and string quartet, it works as an original, unified suite, and a kind of musical autobiography. More than half the tracks here represent Stewart's associations with the likes of Frank Foster, Arthur Blythe, Astor Piazzolla, Taj Majal and Charles Mingus. The unifying element in these retrospective pieces is Stewart's longtime First Line Band quartet (expanding to a sextet for a couple of numbers with trumpet and trombone). With Stewart and drummer Matt Wilson covering the bottom end, the grooves, as you can imagine, are just about perfect.

Especially effective is Blythe's "Odessa," with its slow minor-mode theme and insinuating vamp, accented by Wilson's offbeat tambourine jangle-and-thump. The First Line Band performances alternate with sections of "In Color," a five-movement composition for the tubist and the PubliQuartet, commissioned by Stewart from former quartet violinist Jessie Montgomery. Technically, you might say "In Color" is "classical," and its sections work as cinematic interludes between the First Line performances. But taken as a whole, "In Color" is an integral piece, from the dissonant, suspended harmonies of "Red" to the driving, complex rhythms of "Aqua."

It's also impressive how easily its sections segue in and out of the jazz and blues pieces. It helps that the tubist and his son, violinist Curtis Stewart, provide linking sonorities for the ear to follow from one movement to the next, and it doesn't hurt, either, that Stewart's virtuoso brass work—whether laying down throbbing bass lines or taking off in multiphonic solo flights—is still a wonder. —Jon Garelick

Connections: Mind The Gap: In Color: Red; Simone; In Color: Aqua; Bush Baby; Fishin' Blues; In Color: The Poet; Odessa; Libertango; In Color: Purple; Monk's Mood; Nothing To Say; In Color: Makina; Hand By Hand; Jump Monk; Red 2. (63:34)

Personnel: Bob Stewart, tuba; Curtis Stewart, violin; Jerome Harris, guitar, vocal; Randall Haywood, trumpet; Nick Finzer, trombone; Matt Wilson, drums; Jannina Norpoth, violin; Nick Revel, viola; Amanda Goekin, cello.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

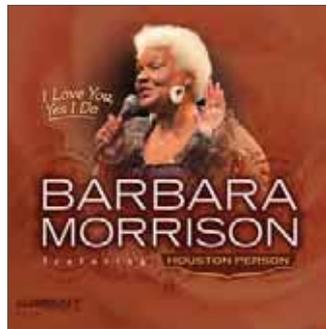
Barbara Morrison *I Love You, Yes I Do*

SAVANT 2136

★★★★

For quite some time, Barbara Morrison has been the favorite blues-directed jazz singer in Los Angeles. An Angeleno since 1970, she's got a long history with saxophonists like Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Teddy Edwards and Herman Riley. Working locally and releasing self-produced albums, she has rarely connected with the national jazz audience. This program of well-chosen and far-reaching standards, chestnuts and forgotten gems has Morrison's working trio of pianist Stuart Elster, bassist Richard Simon and drummer Lee Spath augmented by tenor giant Houston Person. The addition proves a very fine musical fit. She has a middle-range alto voice, and Morrison's versatile singing encompasses jazz, blues, soul and pop. With the addition of Person, there will be inevitable comparisons to his longtime musical partner, the late Etta Jones. The two singers share an upper-register lilt that Morrison can lyrically spin on a floating treatment of the Isley Brothers' "For The Love Of You" (sharing a fleeting tonal similarity to Dionne Warwick). Morrison can also unfurl a deliciously nasty blues growl on "Blow Top Blues" and Joe Cocker's "Black Eyed Blues." It's that dual ability—to sing authentic blues and improvise melodically on jazz and mainstream pop fare—that makes her special. Bull Moose Jackson's ballad, the title track, is in loving hands, with Person's airy Lestorian obbligatos wrapped around Morrison's smitten vocals. With this solid release, Morrison may finally break out of the SoCal confines.

—Kirk Silsbee



I Love You, Yes I Do: Save Your Love For Me; Canadian Sunset; I Had A Talk With My Man Last Night; Trust In Me; I Didn't Know What Time It Was; Who Can I Turn To; If It's The Last Thing I Do; Black Eyed Blues; I Love You, Yes I Do; And I Love Him; For The Love Of You; Blow Top Blues. (54:25)

Personnel: Barbara Morrison, vocals; Houston Person, tenor saxophone; Stuart Elster, piano; Richard Simon, bass; Lee Spath, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

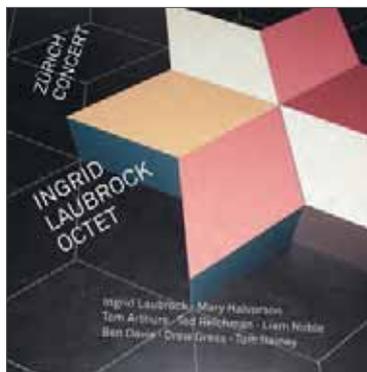
Ingrid Laubrock Octet *Zürich Concert*

INTAKT 221

★★★★

In 2011, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock presented a work that was commissioned by the SWR NewJazz Meeting in Baden-Baden, Germany. This was followed by a short tour that ended in Zürich, Switzerland, with a performance that was selected for this release. For this occasion, she assembled a group of fine improvisers, even though she decided to focus her energy on the overall ensemble sound rather than to create opportunities for individual prowess. This is a brave decision knowing some of the fans of the featured artists might be a bit disappointed not to hear them stretch out. They will still be able to savor guitarist Mary Halvorson's pointillist introduction to "Chant," pianist Liam Noble's angular yet strangely melodic excursion on "Nightbus," or the leader's own thoughtful features. The lineup's wild card is Ted Reichman, whose haunting accordion leaves the strongest mark. His halo hovers over the soundscapes imagined by Laubrock, and his contributions greatly benefit the ensemble passages, which are by turns eerie, enigmatic or threatening. Laubrock's pieces blur the line between composition and improvisation and make little use of rhythms that can still pervade surreptitiously—Tom Rainey mainly provides colors as he splits his time between the drums and the xylophone. The instrumentalists' lines are juxtaposed or interlocked and, as a result, can sound a tad too premeditated. When more spontaneous conversations take place, the music becomes increasingly rewarding.

—Alain Drouot



Zürich Concert: Glasses; Novemberdoodle; Blue Line & Sinkers; Chant; Matrix; Nightbus; Der Zauberberg. (73:33)

Personnel: Ingrid Laubrock, soprano, tenor saxophone; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Tom Arthurs, trumpet; Ted Reichman, accordion; Liam Noble, piano; Ben Davis, cello; Drew Gress, bass; Tom Rainey, drums, xylophone.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

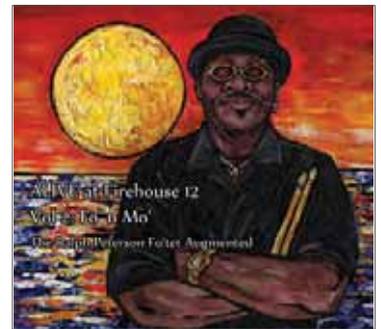
The Ralph Peterson Fo'tet Augmented *Alive At Firehouse 12— Vol. 2: Fo' N Mo'*

NYC PRODUCTIONS MUSIC

★★★★½

A pugilist of legendary attack and grace, drummer Ralph Peterson stamps everything he plays with his life-affirming personality, his power and individualism, and his riotous swing style borne of such greats as Art Blakey (with whom Peterson doubled-drummed as a Jazz Messenger), Elvin Jones and Billy Higgins. Peterson's criminally out-of-print '80s-era Blue Note albums—*Triangular*, *V*, *Volition*, *Presents The Fo'tet* and *Art*—established the template that all later Fo'tets followed, and with good reason. Peterson unleashes a scalding swing beat, his devilish snare jabs, rattling full-set rolls and heaving cymbal pulse requiring a unique arena to fully express its majesty. The live album's opening track, "Humpty Dumpty," is Peterson at full-bore, dotting every "i" as the Fo'tet jumps onboard. Steve Wilson's probing soprano saxophone solo winds Peterson up further; incredible vibraphonist Joseph Doubleday contrasts their fever with beauty, spiraling around the group with ethereal sounds that are dreamy, nightmarish and entirely hard-bop. Clarinetist Felix Peikli's solo is equally inspiring. Peterson's "The Lady In Black" follows, its implied half-time pulse like a warm ocean breeze. The album is further divided between covers and two more Peterson originals. An odd-metered clave and percussion bed underpins Bud Powell's "Celia"; Monk's "Skippy" offers a final meal for the brilliant Fo'tet to dissect and discuss.

—Ken Micallef



Alive At Firehouse 12—Vol. 2: Fo' N Mo': Humpty Dumpty; The Lady In Black; The Tears I Cannot Hide; Celia; Chelsea Bridge; Overjoyed; Surrender; Skippy. (73:45)

Personnel: Ralph Peterson, drums; Joseph Doubleday, vibraphone; Felix Peikli, clarinet, bass clarinet; Steve Wilson, soprano saxophone; Eguie Castrillo, percussion.

Ordering info: ralphpetersonmusic.com

Jean-Louis Matinier/ Marco Ambrosini *Inventio*

ECM 2348

★★★★

The combination of accordion and nyckelharpa is an unusual one to begin with. But on this duo recording by French accordionist Jean-Louis Matinier and Italian nyckelharpa player Marco Ambrosini, it not only makes perfect sense, but it does so in a surprising variety of contexts. The pair flows effortlessly from Baroque classical music to folk tunes to spare improvisation to cinematic sweep, all of it stark and lovely. Two pristine voices exploring a range of dynamics in an intimate setting—this is the kind of project that benefits immeasurably from producer Manfred Eicher's exacting ear. The nyckelharpa is a Swedish string instrument somewhere between a fiddle and a hurdy gurdy, and in Ambrosini's gifted hands it transcends its folk origins to become an elegant and incredibly emotive instrument. Matinier and Ambrosini have worked together since 2008, and their voices have uncannily similar qualities, so much so that one seems to melt into the other repeatedly over the course of this captivating CD. Ambrosini beautifully emulates a cello on Bach's Presto From Sonata In G-Minor (BWV 1001) and a violin on Austrian composer Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's Praeludium From Rosary Sonata No. 1. The narrative arc of Ambrosini's "Basse Dance" leads from dark-hued minimalism to a lively folk dance and then into quiet melancholy. The range of inspiration on this disc results in a gorgeous array of moods poignantly expressed.

—Shaun Brady



Inventio: Wiosna; Tasteggiata; Basse Dance; Szybko; Presto From Sonata In G-Minor (BWV 1001); Inventio 4 (BWV 775); Taiga; Qui Est Homo; Praeludium From Rosary Sonata No. 1; Oksu; Hommage; Kochanie Moje; Balinese; Tasteggiata 2; Sicilienne. (46:31)

Personnel: Jean-Louis Matinier, accordion; Marco Ambrosini, nyckelharpa.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Soul Echoes Then & Now

Various Artists, *Wheedle's Groove: Seattle Funk, Modern Soul & Boogie, Volume II 1972-1987* (Light In The Attic 108; 72:54 ★★★)

An explanation for those not raised in the Northwest: "Wheedle" is a scruffy brown creature that was a former Seattle Supersonics mascot. He looked like Elmo after a bender. That beloved, ugly icon is nostalgic; it's a local pride thing. And that also reflects the heart and joy of this compilation series featuring deep regional bin-digging from an era when deejays with local accents still spun regional 45s.

This second volume highlights the local soul, funk and r&b bands that sparked Seattle's vibrant dance clubs from the early '70s through the late '80s. Featuring everything from outright gems to amusing missteps, its inherent quirkiness makes for an enjoyable spin. There are plenty of good vocalists, kicking rhythm sections and an impressive wealth of supra-funky bassists. Disco was infiltrating and Seattle artists included its elements, yet with a raw, funky sound not as heavily drenched with the *oon-sss-oon-sss* beat of New York and L.A. productions.

The opener by Epicentre, "Get Off The Phone," is a winning, hooky pleasure that assuredly put many a platform shoe on the dance floor. Vocalist Bernadette Bascom seduces with husky ease. Should've been a hit. On the wobblier side, several tracks, such as "Love In Your Life" by Priceless, fall prey to production clutter (another funky bass player, though). Similarly, the double-tracking on Don Brown's "Don't Lose Your Love" makes him sound stuck in an air duct. The track's Philly-influenced strings likely launched many a make-out, although the backbeat is layered with a sound resembling a stepped-on rubber duck. "You Turn Me On" by Push is an ecstatic gem with a simple, killer hook (hello, Pharrell Williams).

Drum machines reared their nasty heads in the era's latter period, flattening some tracks. But the nervous programming on "Trouble In Mind" is weirdly effective behind Malik Din's fine voice, creating an electro-funk vibe suggesting a Curtis Mayfield and Talking Heads mash-up. Unfortunately, no production values could help "Holding On" by Unfinished Business, a band whose business was perhaps better left unstated. Still is fun, though. The urgent vocals of "Love One Another" by Frederick Robinson III hit pay dirt with a world-class groove while the epic, slightly psychedelic "Don't Give Up" by Robbie Hill's Family Affair is a standout highlighting Will Hill's dyn-o-mite falsetto. *Wheedle's Groove* is great fun. Our own hometowns should be so lucky as to have similar time capsules—heart talent, warts and all.

Ordering info: lightintheattic.net

Various Artists, *Eccentric Soul: The Way Out Label* (Numero Group 053; 54:03/59:39



★★★½) This double disc is another regional soul-r&b treasure trove, compiling the entire output of the Way Out label of Cleveland that released 35 titles between 1962 and 1972. At its polished best—such as The Occasion's "There's No You"—the tracks aspire to Motown, utilizing strings or brass with pumping bari sax. But most sides reflect a grittier Stax influence. Betty & Angel's "Honey Coated Loving" has a deep, nasty groove that rap samplers would covet. There are wonderful finds such as The Soul Notes' "How Long Will It Last," a tension-builder with true hit potential, as well as misfires like the ragged filler jam "Harmonics On The Warpath" by The Harmonics. Endearing oddities are here also, including the awkward jazz waltz "Red Robin" by Volcanic Eruption. All in all, it's packed with honest, rough-around-the-edges soul.

Ordering info: numerogroup.com

Liam Bailey, *Definitely Now* (Flying Buddha/Sony Masterworks 888430665521; 54:02

★★★★) Vocalist Liam Bailey is being promoted as a soul-rock artist with constant references to Otis Redding and Sam Cooke. But Bailey doesn't sound like those vocalists; instead, he sounds expressly like himself. At its core, this fresh and vital statement is really a rock record with influences spanning r&b, garage-rock, psychedelia, and '60s and '70s pop. Bailey has a strong, free voice with expressive soulful phrasing that's grippingly immediate. On the opening rocker, "On My Mind," the band surges behind the passionate vocalist with a live, open wash. You can visualize the ringing guitar chords being flailed with windmill strokes. A self-professed vinyl junkie, Bailey foremost absorbed the value of breathing, interactive performing. It's not retro; it's Definitely Now. **DB**

Ordering info: sonymasterworks.com



Alan Chan Jazz Orchestra *Shrimp Tale*

CROWN HEIGHTS AUDIO NETWORK 1407

★★★

Like a lot of his peers who lead contemporary big bands, 36-year-old Los Angeles-based composer Alan Chan takes his inspiration in equal measure from traditional orchestral language and extra-musical sources. But, while Maria Schneider has come to be associated with pastoral settings and Darcy James Argue's writing reflects his social conscience, Chan is harder to pin down. He has yet to settle on a characteristic sound, and that combines with a broad set of interests to make for a sprawling, somewhat disjointed listening experience.

At his best, Chan conjures cinematic imagery and triggers emotional release, nowhere better than on the sweeping, multipart opener, which was inspired by the 2011 Japanese tsunami. Buoyant reed and brass movement is counterweighted by a brief, melancholy piano coda that gives way to dark colors, which then yield again to optimism. "A Spirit's Dream," designed to capture the deft brushstrokes of Chinese painting, is equally evocative, led by Michael Stever's lyrical flugelhorn and Paul Young's light touch on trombone.

"Moving To A New Capital" addresses a political theme, but the dramatic rush of horns, intended to symbolize the massive influx of rural peasants into the industrial maw of modern Beijing, is heavy handed, while the other movements distract from the central theme. At the opposite end of the spectrum lies "Rancho Calaveras," a depiction of Californian rusticity that is meant to be a novelty, but is rendered a 1950s-era farce by the use of banjo and horns-as-animals.

The real novelties are a pair of relative miniatures that are built around prose by Elaine Cohen and use the oddly cadenced voice of Lauren Marks, an actress in recovery from aphasia. Here, Chan displays a gentle-yet-dramatic touch that might prove to be his most effective signature. —James Hale

Shrimp Tale: Tsu Zu Ku; Shrimp Tale; A Spirit's Dream; Moving To A New Capital; Monte Alban; Solita; René's Barcarolle; Rancho Calaveras. (59:43)

Personnel: Alan Chan, composer; Wayne Bergeron (2), Rob Schaefer, Rick Baptist, Tony Bonsera, Michael Stever, trumpets; Andy Martin (1, 4, 6-8), Charlie Morillas, Dave Ryan (2, 3, 5), Paul Young, Steve Hughes, trombones; Kevin Garren, Alex Budman, Tom Luer, Jeff Driskill (2, 3, 5), Vince Trombetta (1, 4, 6-8), Ken Fisher, saxophones; Andy Langham, piano; Andrew Synowiec, guitar, banjo; David Hughes, bass; Jamey Tate, drums; Lauren Marks, spoken word (4, 5); Darla Driskill, Zane Driskill, vocals (8).

Ordering info: alanchanjazzorchestra.com

**Elio Villafranca
and The Jass Syncopators
Caribbean Tinge**

MOTÉMA 147

★★★★

**The Spiros Exaras/
Elio Villafranca Project
Old Waters New River**

HARBINGER 3001

★★★★

Pianist Elio Villafranca was born and raised in Cuba and has lived in the United States since 1995. His goal in the music he performs with his Jass Syncopators is to fuse jazz with Afro-Caribbean music. Now, with a name like the Jass Syncopators, one might expect the repertoire, or at least the style of his group, to be 1920s jazz, but that is inaccurate. Villafranca wants to recapture the spirit and excitement of early New Orleans jazz, but his music is actually a mixture of hard-bop with rhythms that originated from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Haiti.

In his extensive liner notes, Villafranca points out the actual rhythms that he utilizes on his originals, including the yuba, sica, belén, salve and tresillo. Fortunately, it is not necessary to be a musicologist in order to enjoy this spirited music. These live performances at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola are from two different engagements that took place a year apart. There are many stirring solos from trumpeters Sean Jones (who continues to grow in power and range) and Terell Stafford, tenor saxophonist Greg Tardy and, on a few numbers, altoist Vincent Herring.

The opening "Sunday Stomp At Congo Square" is a fast jazz waltz with a complex melody and prominent drums and percussion throughout. The wistful and thoughtful ballad "Last Train To Paris" is followed by the up-tempo "Caribbean Tinge," which has Herring and Tardy hinting at Jackie McLean and Joe Henderson. The lengthy "Flower By The Dry River" utilizes a quiet Puerto Rican rhythm and features one of Villafranca's



strongest solos of the project as well as a stretch where the three horns improvise together. "Cofradías" is a medium-tempo swinger with attractive chord changes that inspire particularly inventive solos from Tardy, Stafford and Herring. One might argue that the "Caribbean tinge" on this set is overshadowed by the hard swinging, but one cannot dispute that this music is consistently exciting.

While Villafranca contributes many stimulating piano solos to *Caribbean Tinge*, *Old Waters New River* puts him in a much different format. The Cuban pianist teams up with Greek acoustic guitarist Spiros Exaras to show that their very different geographical origins pose no communication problems at all. While the opening "Habanera 'Tu'" is Villafranca's interpretation of a traditional Cuban habanera, and "My Sweet Canary" is Exaras' modernization of a popular Greek melody from the 1950s, the other music on *Old Waters New River* would not be readily identified as Cuban or Greek but simply as creative jazz. With the exception of Bebo Valdés' typically charming "Rareza Del Siglo," the other selections are all originals and in most cases they could be considered a gentle form of acoustic fusion that would not be out of place in Chick Corea's repertoire.

To the credit of Villafranca and Exaras, neither of these virtuosos is shy to embrace a melody when it deserves it. Their sophisticated playing demonstrates for the umpteenth time that jazz is very much a universal music.

—Scott Yanow

Caribbean Tinge: Sunday Stomp At Congo Square; Last Train To Paris; Caribbean Tinge; Flower By The Dry River; Cofradías; Mambo Vivo; Two To Tango; The Source In Between. (67:00)

Personnel: Elio Villafranca, piano; Sean Jones, Terell Stafford, trumpet; Greg Tardy, tenor; Vincent Herring, alto; Gregg August, Carlos Henriquez, bass; Willie Jones III, Lewis Nash, drums; Anthony Carrillo, Jonathon Troncoso, percussion; Juango Gutierrez, Nelson "Mateo" Gonzalez Camilo Molina-Gaetan, percussion (1).

Ordering info: motema.com

Old Waters New River: Habanera "Tu"; Old Waters New River; Cogelo Suave; Deer's Leap; Gitanos; My Sweet Canary; Keeping The Promise; Shalom; Rareza Del Siglo; Do You Hear Me? (58:47)

Personnel: Spiros Exaras, classical guitar, vocals; Elio Villafranca, piano, vocals.

Ordering info: harbingerrecords.com

**Clovis Nicolas
Nine Stories**

SUNNYSIDE 1378

★★★★

The Juilliard-trained bassist and Ron Carter protégé, an in-demand player on the French jazz scene before moving to New York in 2002, presents a smart, swinging program for his debut as a leader. A formidable walker with a big, resonant tone, Nicolas also distinguishes himself as a first-rate composer on this persuasive outing. His sextet—which includes some accomplished rising star players in trumpeter Riley Mulherkar, guitarist Alex Wintz and saxophonist Luca Stoll—comes out of the gate charging hard on Nicolas' "Pisces," an uptempo swinger that carries all the strict stop-time, tightly executed hits of Victor Feldman's "Seven Steps To Heaven." Mulherkar acquits himself nicely in his solo on this revved-up offering while Wintz plays over the changes to the mellow "None Shall Wander" with tasty aplomb. Stoll is featured on soprano playing serpentine lines in unison with Wintz on the buoyant "Juggling" before breaking loose for a freewheeling solo full of humor and verve. One of Nicolas' most affecting numbers here is the thoughtful "Mothers And Fathers," which has Mulherkar and pianist Tadataka Unno edging into sublime "Stardust" territory on their respective solos. Clovis' impressive first as a leader—brimming with fresh energy and outstanding arrangements—definitely marks him as a talent deserving of wider recognition. —Bill Milkowski



Nine Stories: Pisces; None Shall Wander; Juggling; Mothers And Fathers; Thon's Tea; The Bridge; Tom's Number; You And The Night And The Music; Sweet Lorraine. (53:24)

Personnel: Clovis Nicolas, bass; Riley Mulherkar, trumpet; Luca Stoll, tenor, soprano saxophone; Alex Wintz, guitar; Tadataka Unno, piano; Jimmy Macbride, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

**Tomas Cotik/Tao Lin
Astor Piazzolla:
Tango Nuevo**

NAXOS 8573166

★★★★

Sometimes the distinction between jazz and classical is a matter of who's playing it. In this case, the music of the unclassifiable Argentine composer and bandoneon player Astor Piazzolla has been arranged for violinist Tomas Cotik and pianist Tao Lin (some by Cotik himself), both distinguished classical musicians. (Violinist Glenn Basham joins them for two numbers.) So there's no jazz phrasing here and no improvisation. What you do get is an exceptional point of view on Piazzolla's broad range of work. Piazzolla (who died in 1992) was nominally a tango composer, but his vocabulary included everything from the Romantics to French Impressionism, jazz and beyond. His genius was to incorporate all these sound worlds into his personal tango nuevo. Cotik and Lin view the scope of Piazzolla's work through the lens of the violin-piano sonata, as rigorous and detailed as Piazzolla is likely to get, but also with free expression. The romance, longing and violence are all here. So the "Café 1930" section of Piazzolla's four-movement "Histoire Du Tango" begins with a florid piano introduction straight out of the Romantic era, before violin enters with the tango rhythm and a beautiful, slow melody. In its way, this disc is a more pure rendering of Piazzolla's classical side than performances by the Kronos Quartet and other ensembles. Which isn't to say Cotik and Lin don't deliver the requisite claps, foot-stomps and whistles when called for. Piazzolla can be played differently than this, but probably not better. —Jon Garelick



Tango Nuevo: La Muerte Del Ángel; Histoire Du Tango: I. Borden 1900; II. Café 1930; III. Night-club 1960; IV. Concert D'Aujourd'hui; Melodia En La Menor (Canto De Octubre); Tango En La Menor (Tanguano); Milonga Sin Palabras; Fuga Y Misterio; Ave María (Tanti Anni Prima); Y, Soy María; Oblivion; Aire De La Zamba Niña; Le Grand Tango; Libertango. (59:24)

Personnel: Tomas Cotik, violin; Tao Lin, piano; Glenn Basham, violin (11, 12).

Ordering info: naxos.com

Door to the Cosmos

The great Sun Ra (1914–'93) touched down on planet Earth 100 years ago. In decades past, this milestone would have meant labels assembling tasty box sets filled with classic material, session outtakes, hopefully a remastering job, rare photos and some insightful liner notes.

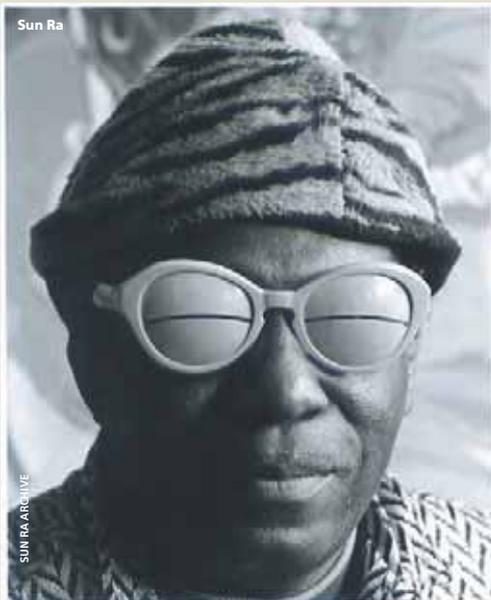
But the Sun Ra Music Archives' central outlet for partaking in this celebration—namely, a place for you to buy the music—is not Impulse (which released classic material in the '70s), not Evidence (which reissued material on CD for the first time in the '90s), not even Sun Ra's own El Saturn label. Instead, it's iTunes, which, at launch, gave Sunny a plum spot in its jazz section carousel alongside campaigns for Miles Davis, Blue Note's 75th birthday and some other high-profile new releases. Grouping the albums and books together in one place, this platform also notably presents 21 new reissues—release dates range from 1956 to 1974—with 24-bit transfers from original analog master tapes of classics, rarities, new mixes and unreleased material. This is a first batch with a promise of more to come.

It's a well-deserved spotlight on one of the most eccentric personalities in the jazz universe—the composer (real name Herman Sunny Blount) who famously claimed to hail from Saturn instead of Birmingham, Ala.—but the colorful personae and music were only part of this solar equation.

The iTunes campaign also organizes one of the most complicated catalogs in jazz—due to size, the bandleader's blasé approach to accurate documentation of personnel and dates, not to mention uneven sound quality of the recordings issued. This is further mitigated by the fact that he recorded, released and reissued (possibly with a different title, album art or a substituted song) hundreds of albums spread across a dozen labels, sometimes in pressings as few as 50–75 copies to sell at live shows.

Even experts have a hard time keeping it straight, although the liner notes on the reissues are brief but informative and iTunes included a short set of its own on each album's page. Perhaps to the chagrin of the collectors out there, this new arrangement simplifies matters greatly and there's the plus of the improved sound. Here's a sampling of three albums included in the first batch.

Recorded in 1956 but released in 1957, **Super-Sonic Jazz (49:00 ★★★★★½)** is generally regarded as Sun Ra's first LP (and first for his El Saturn label), although material was culled from different sessions and some of it was first released on singles. At this time, the Arkestra was still known for playing relatively conventional swing ("Blues At Midnight"), bebop ("Kingdom Of Not") and early r&b ("El Is A Sound Of Joy") for



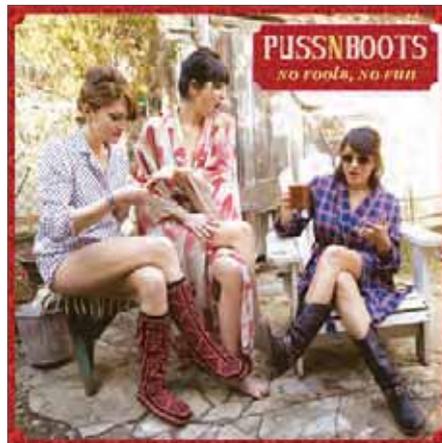
folks around Chicago to dance to. But the exotic sounds of "Portrait Of The Living Sky" and "India" reveal the direction the bandleader was taking his band, which during this era included the great trombonist Julian Priester, legendary Chicago drummer Robert Barry as well as charter members like tenor saxophonist John Gilmore and saxophonist Laurdine "Pat" Patrick, among others.

While his corporeal body was based in New York for much of the '60s, he really started traveling the spaceways with a series of albums that alternated by avant-garde, swing, exotica, bop and maybe (depending on whom you ask) performance art.

Generally regarded as the pinnacle of the Sun Ra catalog, **Atlantis (49:58 ★★★★★)** has been previously issued by El Saturn, Impulse and Evidence, but has never sounded better. Recorded in 1967–'69, this album's first side is a mix of Ra's "Solar Sound Instrument" (the recently released Hohner Clavinet keyboard) and the band playing a variety of drums. The 20-minute title track takes up the album's second half with cataclysmic music of what Sun Ra envisioned as the flooding and destruction of Atlantis.

Released in 1972, **Universe In Blue (63:22 ★★★★★)** is a classic Sun Ra rarity. The LP saw small-run releases by El Saturn with two different album covers and then slipped into obscurity, never released digitally until now. The album likely came from a Monday-night residency at Slug's Saloon in New York, though this can't be confirmed. As the cover text indicates, the original cassette recordings were done in "Galacto Fidelity," with a microphone placed on each side of the stage. The setup works pretty well until the terrible-sounding final track, whose only redeeming quality is the strength of the playing. Highlights include a version of "Calling Planet Earth" with June Tyson at the center of the storm. **DB**

Ordering info: itunes.com/sunramusic



Puss N Boots No Fools, No Fun

BLUE NOTE 2080402

★★★★½

There are an abundance of affinities among Norah Jones, Sasha Dobson and Catherine Popper, the singer and multi-instrumentalists who make up Puss N Boots. Eclectic by nature, they've all moved among jazz, country and rock on their own, and each of them has had varying levels of contact with Willie Nelson. On the trio's first recording, they offer novel versions of songs from the likes of Johnny Cash, Wilco and Tom Paxton, along with a few solid originals. They usually come across like they're having a low-key and inclusive good time. But surprising bits of tension creep in, too, and their thoughtful arrangements suggest that *No Fools, No Fun* is not just supposed to be a diversion from their main gigs.

Dobson and Jones have a similar approach on their vocals. Drawls and hesitancy are emphasized as they stretch out such songs such as Dobson's "Sex Degrees Of Separation," highlighting the tune's humor as much as its eroticism. (This group doesn't take itself too seriously: One of its earlier names was Shitstorm.) Puss N Boots' vocal strengths are not just in the three-part harmonies, but also in how they assemble alternating lines in Rodney Crowell's "Bull Rider." The group also kicks up the tempo at the right moments, such as on Jones' rocker "Don't Know What It Means," one of the few tracks here that includes drums.

Puss N Boots doesn't shy away from the dark stuff, such as on Neil Young's murder ballad, "Down By The River." Jones has an affinity for such noir themes, like her "Miriam" on her 2012 album, *Little Broken Hearts*. But she also reworks Young's signature fragmented electric guitar attack. Popper's "Pines" is also endearing, if unsettling, with minor-key fiddle staccato notes complementing the odd vocal lines. Even though Jones, Dobson and Popper have their own successful careers to run, *No Fools, No Fun* shouldn't be the only recording these three release as a team.

—Aaron Cohen

No Fools, No Fun: Leaving London; Bull Rider; Twilight; Sex Degrees Of Separation; Don't Know What It Means; Down By The River; Tarnished Angel; Jesus, Etc.; Always; GTO; Pines; You'll Forget Me. (42:22)

Personnel: Sasha Dobson, vocals, acoustic guitar, bass, drums; Norah Jones, vocals, electric guitar, fiddle; Catherine Popper, vocals, bass, acoustic guitar.

Ordering info: bluenote.com

Håkon Stene
Lush Laments For
Lazy Mammal

HUBRO 2544
 ★★★★★



On this stunning collection, Norwegian percussionist Håkon Stene takes on British minimalism, focusing primarily on the work of Oxford composer Laurence Crane and rounding out the recording with likeminded pieces, including “Hi Tremolo,” a key piece from the influential Gavin Bryars. While that 1980 Bryars piece moves through chord changes, each shift signaling a release of tension created by undulating patterns played on vibraphone and piano to generate the titular effect—until a shimmering cimbalom magnifies the action toward its conclusion with a jarring yet triumphant increase in volume—most of the works by Crane opt for less peripatetic action. On “Bobby J,” a series of gorgeous guitar chords hover and decay as if they were played on a tuned percussion instrument, ringing and overlapping in beautifully meditative fashion. A similar quality emerges in “Riis” as mesmerizing, cloud-like billows of marimba blend with electric keyboard tones and sustained guitar notes (using an EBow); the sounds float, shifting gently, but without pushing toward any inexorable conclusion. The Crane pieces are complemented by Stene’s brief “Sit,” which clears the air for the exquisite dissonance of pianist Christian Wallumrød’s “Low Genth’s,” where sourly harmonized piano clusters are soothed by serene vibraphone and the shadowy presence of cello.

—Peter Margasak

Lush Laments For Lazy Mammal: Prelude For HS; Hi Tremolo; Bobby J; See Our Lake I; Riis; Holt; Sit; Low Genth's; Blue Blue Blue. (53:02)

Personnel: Håkon Stene, vibraphone, quartertone vibraphone, bowed marimba, electric guitar, acoustic guitar with EBow, keyboards, piano; Heloisa Amaral, piano (2); Hans Kristian Kjos Sorensen, cimbalom (2); Tanja Orning, cello (1, 4, 6, 8); Christian Wallumrød, piano (1, 8).

Ordering info: hubromusic.com

The Daniel Rosenboom Quintet
Fire Keeper

ORENDA 0001
 ★★★★★



There are few jazz records that seem suitable for a pyrotechnics show, but trumpeter-composer-producer Daniel Rosenboom has accomplished such a feat with the debut of his new album on his new label, Orenda. The work is a wholly modern and frequently intimidating assault brimming with ferocity and enough guitar showboating to keep the lighters in the air. The first minute of the album is a little misleading. “Leaving Moscow” opens with Rosenboom’s muted trumpet offering a languid modal dance, but an unbridled boil soon follows and never lets up. Guitarist Alexander Noyce rips into a headbanger’s frenzy not long into the tune and returns throughout the album to the altar of shred. Saxophonist Gavin Templeton supplies a boisterous solo alongside Rosenboom’s muted frenzy on the brushed-steel soul of “With Fire Eyes,” while drummer Dan Schnelle, a young and swinging fixture in Los Angeles, seems equipped with steel sticks and a set of bottomless toms. The quintet has a grinding meticulousness that is admirable but could benefit from the occasional release. Spontaneity is replaced by an exacting approach to every drum roll and trumpet splat, and the band is extremely tight in their execution of Rosenboom’s ideas. This is not background music. It’s a panoramic assault, soaked in aggression and fuzz, flinging jagged machismo in every direction. The listener has two options: Put down what they’re doing and soak it up, or run screaming for the hills. —Sean J. O’Connell

Fire Keeper: Leaving Moscow; Seven On Seventh; With Fire Eyes; Tadodaho; Hush Money; The Fifteenth Hour; Holiday Motel; Inspiration; Tendrils. (52:58)

Personnel: Daniel Rosenboom, trumpet, piccolo trumpet; Gavin Templeton, saxophones, flute, bass clarinet; Alexander Noyce, electric guitar, electronics; Kai Kurosawa, Bear Trax, ziggy, electronics; Dan Schnelle, drums.

Ordering info: orendarecords.com

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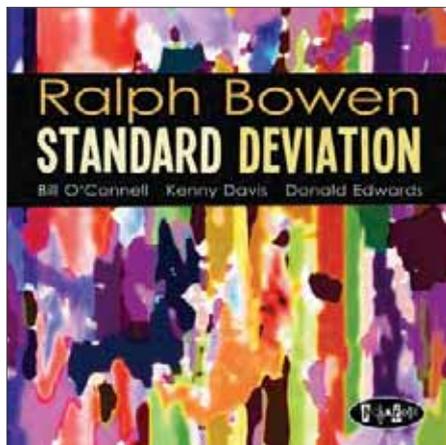
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Ralph Bowen *Standard Deviation*

POSI-TONE 8124

★★★★½

Often played as a lament, “By Myself,” in the hands of tenor saxophonist Ralph Bowen, becomes an explosive surprise, his fluency on the horn mesmerizing. Bowen is on some kind of warp-path here. Akin to Coltrane’s remake of standards like “Out Of This World,” “I Want To Talk About You” and “My Favorite Things,” Bowen’s penchant for fiery and aggressive playing finds him taking his dancing partners for a dizzying swirl across familiar terrain. Fresh today, stale by longevity’s standards, pianist Bill O’Connell, bassist Kenny Davis and drummer Donald Edwards egg Bowen

Florencia Gonzalez *Between Loves*

ZOHO 201404

★★★★½

The music on Florencia Gonzalez’s second CD was written during the Uruguayan composer’s first few years in the States, but there’s no evidence of an unsure transitional period on these seven striking tracks. *Between Loves* may find Gonzalez balancing her roots in Montevideo with explorations in modern jazz, but this isn’t the document of an artist torn between two passions; it’s a harmonious and impassioned melding of both that reveals rich promise.

Gonzalez’s 2012 self-released debut, *Woman Dreaming Of Escape*, showed off her big band charts, which marry Latin rhythms with vivid harmonic colors out of the Gil Evans school. *Between Loves* pares the lineup back to a three-horn front line and rhythm section, but her arrangements are no less lush. On the opening track, a rendition of Uruguayan composer Hugo Fattoruso’s “Hurry” that is the disc’s only non-original, the interweaving horn lines seem to blossom from the source melody.

Two other pieces from *Woman Dreaming Of Escape* are reprised in pared-down arrangements as well, with no loss of vitality. The title track from that album is an “abstract tango” taking advantage of the friction between the stabbing horns and Luis Perdomo’s ominously skulking piano, while “Chacarera For Greg” features a dance of contrasting rhythms.

“Hurry” provides Gonzalez the opportunity to

on to create that recognizable combination of flair and adaptability, a tantalizing admixture of tempo, mood and feeling.

“By Myself” ends this program, but it hardly contrasts itself from what precedes it. “Isn’t It Romantic” kicks things off in similar fashion, with bold statements from Bowen and O’Connell, the driving rhythm section treating this romantic ballad like a softball readied to be hit out of the park. Jerome Kern’s “Yesterdays” gets a quirky, refreshing remake both as a waltz and as a Latin tune, Bowen’s playing fluid, hitting all the spots consistent with the song’s unique contours with nary a nod toward contemplation, Edwards adding some heated drum licks toward the end. More like a hot and sweaty night on the dance floor.

Halfway through the set, “You Don’t Know What Love Is” provides something of a respite, giving us a sample of this band taking a meandering stroll in a manner akin to the classic Coltrane quartet. Still, even at a slow tempo, Bowen’s proficiency on tenor is on full display. Perhaps the least deviated, this treatment ends up being an album highlight. Quoting Frank Zappa’s comment on deviation and progress, Bowen has all the ingredients for a kind of deviation that works on a certain level, yet it remains a confluent series of renditions that are familiar, very listenable and well within the mainstream of jazz. —John Ephland

Standard Deviation: Isn’t It Romantic; No Moon At All; Yesterdays; You Don’t Know What Love Is; You Stepped Out Of A Dream; Spring Is Here; Dream Dancing; By Myself. (52:17)

Personnel: Ralph Bowen, tenor saxophone; Bill O’Connell, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Donald Edwards, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com

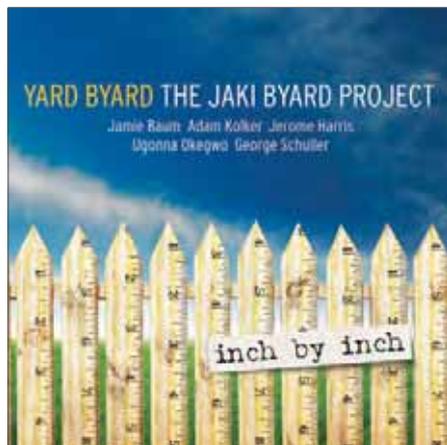


show off her supple and restrained tenor playing, but she repeatedly cedes the solo spotlight to Jonathan Powell’s tart trumpet and Shannon Barnett’s singing trombone, at its most crooning on “Zamba For Jose Gervasio.” Drawing on the rhythms of tango and candombe, she anchors her arrangements in her Argentinean rhythm section, built around Fernando Huergo’s fluid bass and drummer Franco Pinna’s subtle versatility, which freely elaborates and embellishes the traditional roots. —Shaun Brady

Between Loves: Hurry; Woman Dreaming Of Escape; Zamba For Jose Gervasio; Weird Pericon; The One Who Never Was; Chacarera For Greg; Between Loves. (40:53)

Personnel: Florencia Gonzalez, tenor saxophone; Jonathan Powell, trumpet, flugelhorn; Shannon Barnett, trombone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Fernando Huergo, bass; Franco Pinna, drums.

Ordering info: zohomusic.com



Yard Byard: The Jaki Byard Project *Inch By Inch*

GM RECORDINGS 3051

★★★★

Pianist Jaki Byard, who died in 1999 at age 76, was a freewheeling spirit who seemed to have the entire history of jazz at his fingers. He reeled off everything from ebullient stride to quiet dissonance whenever the mood struck him, but he always made these full-throttle transitions fit in with his ensembles’ directives. Byard also served as an anchor to such innovative bandleaders as Eric Dolphy and Charles Mingus. But the quirky beauty of his playing often overshadowed his imaginative compositions.

Yard Byard: The Jaki Byard Project should enhance this legendary musician’s stature. Flutist Jamie Baum and drummer George Schuller formed the group with guitarist Jerome Harris, multi-reedist Adam Kolker and bassist Ugonna Okegwo about four years ago to devise new arrangements of Byard’s written works. Along with some of his relatively more familiar pieces, they also present a number of his lesser-known compositions that deserve wider discovery.

This quintet does not include Byard’s main instrument, a sensible omission that provides even more reasons to marvel at how his notated ideas work in such a different context than his own. The combined reeds of Baum and Kolker also sound like they’re paying tribute to Byard’s incredible ’60s front-line horns, especially Dolphy, Booker Ervin and Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Their harmonic flights are especially lively on the title track (recorded here for the first time), which gives off the appearance of collective improvisation. Kolker, on bass clarinet, uses astute pauses to highlight the warmth in Byard’s ballad “Toni.”

Since the treasure trove that Byard left behind still needs to be fully explored, *Inch By Inch* should just become the first volume of an enduring series.

—Aaron Cohen

Inch By Inch: Flight Of The Fly; Toni; Twelve; Aluminum Baby; Fadism; Gaeta; Inch By Inch; Yard Byard; St. Mark’s Place Among The Sewers; Strolling Along; Garr; Ode To Charlie Parker; Dolphy. (60:32)

Personnel: Jamie Baum, flute, alto flute (2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12); Adam Kolker, tenor saxophone, clarinet (1, 9), bass clarinet (2, 4, 6); Jerome Harris, guitar; Ugonna Okegwo, bass; George Schuller, drums.

Ordering info: gmrecordings.com

Ellen Rowe Quintet *Courage Music*

PKO 064

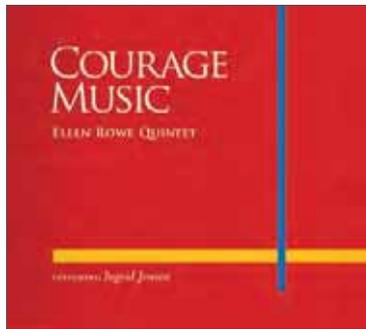
★★★★½

While some might see a small group as a format for highly charged interactive exchanges, pianist-composer Ellen Rowe's vision makes it intimate, relaxed and expansive. Intimate because the band works predominantly at low dynamic levels, relaxed in the floating time employed, and expansive in her relaxed approach to structure. The question is: Just how much slow, low-dynamic music can one take in a sitting? From a programmatic standpoint, the album suffers from a sameness of texture and temperature; a little more fire in the ensembles and soloists would have been nice. That said, she has given us many musical joys to discover. Rowe's writing features the musicians—notably trumpeter-flugelhornist Ingrid Jensen—and the compositions, rather than her piano playing. Rowe does a lot of chording, except for interludes like the playful treble frolic on "Circle Of Life." Jensen's understated trumpet and flugelhorn—sometimes with Andrew Bishop's reeds—are emblematic of Rowe's unrelenting pastels. She also leads Rowe's reharmonization of "All Of You," which yields some of the most satisfying collective improvisation on the set. There are some exceedingly fine passages here: Bishop's snaky clarinet on the tango-like "If Time Stood Still," pretty brass and reed voicings (led by trombonist Paul Ferguson) on the ballad "Gentle Spirit," the biting alto solo on "... And Miles To Go (Part 2)" by Alekos Syropoulos, and Jensen's stick-and-move trumpet on the bluesy "Summit Dog." —Kirk Silsbee

Courage Music: Circle Of Life; Leaves; If Time Stood Still; Golindrinás De Los Horcones; Summit Dog; All Of You; ... And Miles To Go (Part 1); ... And Miles To Go (Part 2). (73:18)

Personnel: Ellen Rowe, piano; Ingrid Jensen, trumpet, flugelhorn; Paul Ferguson, trombone; Andrew Bishop, clarinet, tenor saxophone; Kurt Krahnke, bass, Pete Siers, drums; University of Michigan Chamber Jazz Ensemble (8).

Ordering info: ellenrowe.com



Stephane Spira *In Between*

JAZZMAX 80402

★★★★★

French-born, New York-based saxophonist Stephane Spira uses his urban quartet to express music as darkly romantic and emotionally rich as a Paris scene at midnight. Accompanied by trombonist Glenn Ferris, bassist Steve Wood and drummer Johnathan Blake, Spira's fourth album inches between New Orleans second line and funeral dirges, between seamless straightahead and surprising versions of Duke Ellington's "Reflections In D" and Vinicius de Moraes' "Samba En Preludio." The unusual front line of saxophone and trombone finds plenty of fresh ground to seed, their crisscrossing tonality detailed and warm, eerie and evocative. At times *In Between* is surprisingly un-jazz: the buoyant "Dawn In Manhattan" sounds like some late-night Moroccan jam session; "Reflections In D" recalls that page in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* where he awakes, and seeing a purple sunset over dusty rail yards, can't remember who or where he is. Wood's ominous arco bass and Blake's spooky percussion expand the song's air of ennui before it zips off into happy-jazz directions. By contrast, the melody of "In Flight" jerks like Arabic-derived bebop; "N.Y. Time" swings like the old 52nd Street. Trained as an engineer, Spira is self-taught, but he's musically mature and his music is soulful. Though he resides in New York, *In Between* sounds nothing like the city's current school born of aggressive rhythms and serpentine melodies. Having dedicated himself exclusively to jazz since a final day job in the Arabian desert in the mid-'00s, Spira's evolution is one to watch. —Ken Micallef

In Between: Cosmaner; Dawn In Manhattan; Gentlemen; In Transit; Reflections In D; Flight; A Special Place; N.Y. Time; Samba Em Preludio; Classic; In Between; Grounds 4 Dismissal. (67:22)

Personnel: Stephane Spira, tenor, soprano saxophones; Glenn Ferris, trombone; Steve Wood, bass; Johnathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: spirajazz.com



Russ Johnson *Meeting Point*

RELAY RECORDINGS 008

★★★★½

Russ Johnson certainly did not lack for playing opportunities during his two decades in New York. He has led his own projects, co-led ensembles with Swiss saxophonist Co Streiff, and worked as a sideman for the likes of Lee Konitz, Tony Malaby and Laurie Anderson. Since moving back to the Midwest nearly three years ago to teach at University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Johnson has not only plugged into Chicago's thriving scene, but has made his first recording under his own name in a decade. It's well worth the wait. Johnson's confederates on *Meeting Point* have played together in numerous projects helmed by Dave Rempis and Ken Vandermark, so they have a readymade chemistry. But one of the album's ample pleasures is the way they engage with Johnson's personal compositional approach, which emphasizes bold and catchy melodies, without abandoning their commitment to playing in more abstract zones. Hatwich and Daisy can lean right in, using jaunty, swinging cadences that put just enough muscle behind the leader for him to glide with apparent effortlessness. But on the lengthy "Confluence" suite, it's the momentary absences in their stop-start accompaniment that reveal the steely sturdiness of the leader's sinuous lines. Stein not only matches Johnson's textural shadings empathetically; he uses his agility in his horn's lowest register to put a coal-dark smolder of ambiguous activity under Johnson's bright, fluttering phrases. The exquisite balance between contrasting elements makes this an album to savor. —Bill Meyer

Meeting Point: Lithosphere; Confluence—Introduction; Confluence—Part I; Confluence—Part II; Conversation; Clothesline; Conversation; Chaos Theory; Conversation; Half Full. (58:52)

Personnel: Russ Johnson, trumpet; Jason Stein, bass clarinet; Anton Hatwich, bass; Tim Daisy, drums.

Ordering info: relayrecordings.wordpress.com



People *3xaWoman: The Misplaced Files*

TELEGRAPH HARP

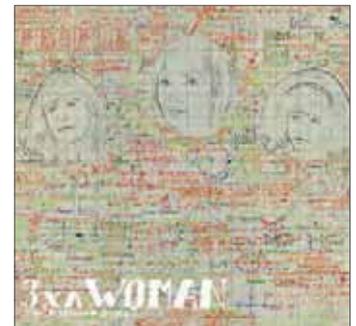
★★★★★

Two thirds of People—Mary Halvorson on guitar, Kyle Forester on bass, Kevin Shea on drums, and all three on vocals—are firm members of the jazz world. Halvorson, of course, leads several of her own groups while simultaneously working in the bands of Anthony Braxton, Taylor Ho Bynum and others. And Shea sits behind the kit for Mostly Other People Do the Killing. But People has just about nothing to do with jazz. Instead, the trio offers up a sort of gonzo take on rock, playing it rough and weird and funny and surprising. The results are refreshing, to say the least. The highlight of the band's latest album, *3xaWoman: The Misplaced Files*, is "The Lyrics Are Simultaneously About How The Song Starts And What The Lyrics Are About." "This song starts off a capella," Halvorson sings unaccompanied to begin the track. "Both of us are singing now," goes another line when Halvorson is joined by one of the male vocalists. Shortly afterward, still a capella, the singers wonder, "Will it be distorted guitar?" Then Halvorson comes in with some crunchy chords and sings, "Yes, it will be distorted guitar like this." The track could be taken as a joke, but it's also genius. That's the best stuff: Art that is equal parts laughs and seriousness. —Brad Farberman

3xaWoman: The Misplaced Files: Prolegomenon; These Words Make Up The Lyrics Of The Song; What's So Woman About That Woman; A Song With Melody And Harmony And Words And Rhythm; Supersensible Hydrofracked Dystopia!!!; Zwischenspiel; Reinterpreting Confusing Lyrics To Popular Songs; Interoperable Intertrigo; Piles For Miles; Psychic Recapitulation; The Virtuous Relapse; The Cavernan Connection; The Lyrics Are Simultaneously About How The Song Starts And What The Lyrics Are About; The Disambiguated Clone. (35:48)

Personnel: Mary Halvorson, guitar, voice, composition; Kyle Forester, bass, voice, acoustic guitar; Kevin Shea, drums, voice, lyrics; Peter Evans, trumpet, horn arrangements (1, 2, 4, 6); Sam Kulik, trombone, bass trombone (1, 2, 4, 6); Dan Peck, tuba (1, 2, 4, 6); Jesse Moynihan, lyrics (9).

Ordering info: telegraphharp.com

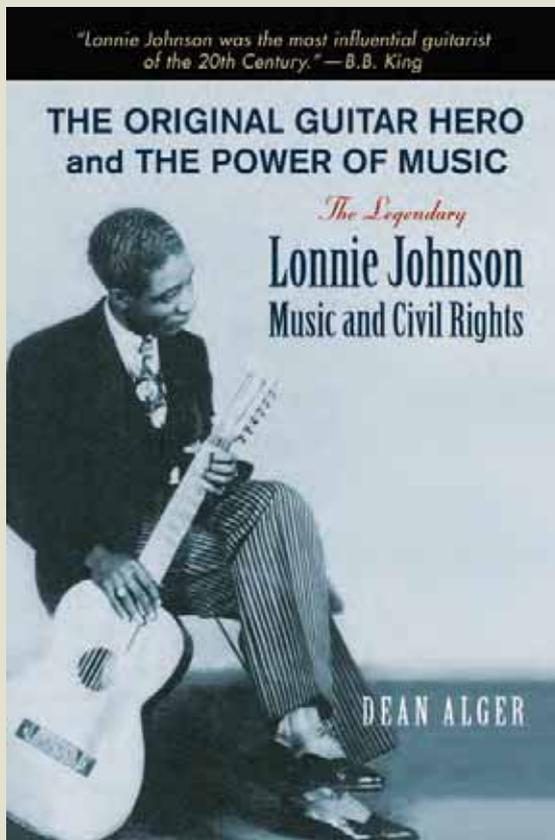


Original Guitar Hero

Lonnie Johnson, one of the most important guitarists of the 1920s, was a significant force in music for 45 years. Probably the most fluent of the blues guitarists who matured in the '20s, he appeared on more significant jazz sessions than any other bluesman of the era and was the only musician to record with both Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Johnson, who was also a skilled and relaxed singer, spent much of his life singing and playing the blues, sometimes unaccompanied and at other times at the head of small groups. While his life had its ups and downs including two periods (the mid-1930s and mid-1950s) spent outside of music, he was musically active until a year before his death in 1970 at the age of 71.

Despite his significance, until the release of Dean Alger's *The Original Guitar Hero and the Power of Music: The Legendary Lonnie Johnson, Music, and Civil Rights* (University Of North Texas Press), there had been no full-length biographies written on Johnson. Fortunately, Alger was the right person for the job, as he put a tremendous amount of research into this book during the 10 years that he worked on it. He not only thoroughly discusses Johnson's recordings and travels, but he dug up as much information on Johnson's private life as will probably be found. The guitarist was a private person and some questions inevitably remain unanswered, such as when and how often he was married. However, from this book, one comes away with a good idea as to Johnson's personality, lifestyle and the distinguished and classy way that he always presented himself.

There are times in his zest to restore Johnson to prominence that Alger overplays his hand a little. B.B. King is quoted as calling Lonnie Johnson the most influential guitarist of the 20th century and Alger does his best to prove this throughout the book. Many jazz fans and critics have maintained that Charlie Christian was the most influential jazz guitarist post-1940 (at least until the fusion years) and that Eddie Lang was the top guitarist on records in the 1920s. Lang's chord voicings were futuristic, and he was more versatile than Johnson. Alger does his best to prove his case with dozens of examples of guitarists and singers who not only listened to Johnson's recordings but also occasionally showed his influence. The list includes Christian, King, Robert Johnson, Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Buddy Guy and even Elvis Presley, who emulated his singing on his



version of Lonnie's hit "Tomorrow Night." While some of these and other connections are stronger than others—is Eric Clapton influenced by Lonnie Johnson because he listened to B.B. King?—it does cause one to think about how Johnson's influence and career have often been overlooked.

While the first chapter of the book could be skipped over (its points are mostly reiterated later in the text) and some of the musical examples are a bit detailed, the book is quite readable and tells its story very well. To his credit, Alger covers Johnson's entire life, rather than just his work in the 1920s, showing that he was a working musician for decades and one whose music was gradually updated without losing its essence. Johnson was sometimes criticized for singing sentimental ballads that he loved, but he was always a bluesman and never compromised his music.

Included at the end of the narrative is a guide to Johnson's recordings (although a complete discography would have been welcome), a list of releases from some other relevant musicians and an extensive bibliography. In addition, available directly from the author is *The Ultimate Best Of Lonnie Johnson*, a CD of 23 top-notch selections (all discussed in the book) that are taken from the guitarist's career, along with Elvis' version of "Tomorrow Night."

Ordering info: untpress.unt.edu

DB



Satoko Fujii Orchestra New York *Shiki*

LIBRA 215-036

★★½

Gato Libre *DuDu*

LIBRA 104-035

★★★

The prolific Japanese pianist and composer Satoko Fujii has excellent taste when it comes to American collaborators. On the latest recording of her long-running New York Orchestra, Fujii only sits at the piano on the last of three tracks, serving instead as conductor for the top-notch players.

The bulk of the album is devoted to the title composition, a nearly 40-minute epic that translates to "four seasons." Fujii expands the idea to human life, with its episodic, scene-changing phases. Naturally the piece winds and wends through many different sections—way more than just four—ominously droning long tones, magisterial brass fanfares, lush, triumphant reed patterns—with no more important function than providing improvisational grist for the extended cast. Unfortunately, despite the band's best efforts, the composition arrives as strict pastiche, with dozens of fragments grafted together without any clear narrative logic.

Fujii's husband, trumpeter Natsuki Tamura, appears on *Shiki*, and she returns the favor on *DuDu*, from his Gato Libre quartet, a chamber ensemble that is in stark contrast to her own volcanic efforts. She switches to accordion in this context, giving the music a strong European flair—whether evoking a café on the Left Bank of Paris or a funeral service somewhere in the former Yugoslavia—but ultimately the tone is set by the alert contrapuntal improvising of Tamura and trombonist Yasuko Kaneko. —Peter Margasak

Shiki: Shiki; Gen Himmel; Bi Ga Do Da. (53:10)

Personnel: Oscar Noriega, Briggan Krauss, alto saxophone; Ellery Eskelin, Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone; Andy Laster, baritone saxophone; Natsuki Tamura, trumpet; Herb Robertson, Steven Bernstein, Dave Ballou, trumpet; Curtis Hasselbring, Joey Sellers, Joe Fielder, trombone; Satoko Fujii, piano; Stomu Takeishi, bass; Aaron Alexander, drums.

DuDu: DuDu; Gato; Nanook; Rainy Day; Scramble; Mouse; Cirencester; B&B. (54:56)

Personnel: Natsuki Tamura, trumpet; Yasuko Kaneko, trombone; Kazuhiko Tsumura, guitar; Satoko Fujii, accordion.

Ordering info: librarecords.com

Western Jazz Quartet *Free Fall*

BLUJAZZ 3412

★★★★★

They could have ended *Free Fall* in a blaze of unrepentant jazz glory. Instead, the very melodic, sometimes overtly stated “Sand, Salt Grass And Sage,” composed by bassist Tom Knific, gently steals away. That’s one of the nice surprises on this new disc by the Western Jazz Quartet, out of Western Michigan University. With new personnel, the group places academic acuity on the back burner, instead opting for an impressionistic if still formal delivery across eight more originals, all penned by younger members Andrew Rathbun (saxophone) or Jeremy Siskind (piano). *Free Fall* is built around a theme, the titles all taking inspiration from an historical event in 2012: daredevil Felix Baumgartner’s record-breaking 128,100-foot skydive. And while there’s a boatload of group interaction and well-placed soloing, *Free Fall*’s theme-based journey is, in the end, a composer’s album. On Siskind’s “Lighter Than Air,” Knific, Siskind and drummer Keith Hall quietly, gradually lay the groundwork for Rathbun’s mild, haunting yet beefy tenor. Not that it’s all a variation on serenity. The sunny “Everything Is Hostile” is a fluid rocker with a driving pulse featuring alternating bars of six and seven and a snappy piano solo. Hall’s tasteful stick work ends the balladic but slightly rowdy “Awe And Remoteness,” and opens the next song, “Claustrophobia,” a tune that runs the gamut from churning duets to outright uptempo swing.

—John Ephland

Free Fall: Lighter Than Air; Everything Is Hostile; Awe And Remoteness; Claustrophobia; Privileged To Stand Where No One Stood Before; Velocity Unknown; Spin So Violent; Tropopause; Sand, Salt Grass And Sage. (50:15)

Personnel: Andrew Rathbun, soprano, tenor saxophones; Jeremy Siskind, piano; Tom Knific, bass; Keith Hall, drums.

Ordering info: blujazz.com

Roddy Ellias Trio *Monday’s Dream*

KWIMU MUSIC

★★★★★

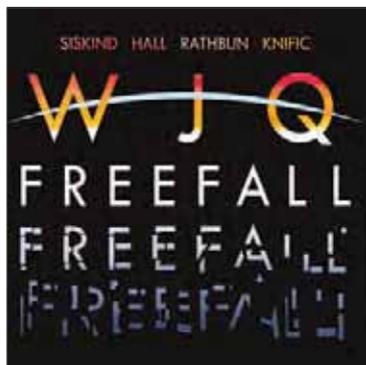
Every album comes with a big idea. *Monday’s Dream*, the new album from Canadian guitarist Roddy Ellias, is about mood. Also featuring Adrian Vedady on acoustic bass and Thom Gossage on drums, the disc is a subdued thing, intense but not tense. One might assume that the guitarist is European, as this music seems suited for some warm, intimate, dimly lit café somewhere. There’s plenty going on, and lots of focused interplay between the musicians, but the album never grows wild; control seems to be a primary concern here. Also of note is the band’s approach. There is not a “changes” vibe happening. For some ensembles, it’s a soloing-on-this-chord, then soloing-on-that-chord type of affair, but *Dream* is something a little looser and jammier. The music revolves around specific ideas and the different ways you can dance around them. The album is fairly loose; the time is never rigid or metronomic. But the music is always tonal. Ellias and company are able to play it straight without succumbing to banality. And that’s exciting. Particularly interesting is “The Lopsided Robot,” which, like all of the tracks on the album, was composed by the leader. Right out of the box, the tune has a funky attitude. As its title implies, “Big Bass Song” is a showcase for Vedady’s large, round sound. And the solo guitar tune “Somewhere Under The Rainbow” is a work of pensive, folkly beauty.

—Brad Farberman

Monday’s Dream: Little One; Shuffle Boogie; Too Far; The Lopsided Robot; Chorale; Calm; Big Bass Song; Somewhere Under The Rainbow; Evening Sky Dance; Monday’s Dream. (48:05)

Personnel: Roddy Ellias, guitar; Adrian Vedady, bass; Thom Gossage, drums.

Ordering info: roddeyellias.com



Kathleen Grace *No Place To Fall*

MONSOON RECORDS 204

★★★★½

Historically, the overlap between jazz and country has most often met at the neck of a guitar, whether it’s the lap steel of Western swing or Willie Nelson’s battered arpeggiating through “Stardust.” But the intersection between the two genres goes at least as far back as Louis Armstrong and Jimmie Rodgers strolling through “Blue Yodel No. 9” in 1930. Kathleen Grace learned an appreciation for music among the tumbleweeds of Tucson, Ariz., and something of that ethereal desert town coats each tune on this album with a layer of dust. Echoes of Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris’ Tucson-indebted *Western Wall* reverberate on this recording, especially with the same ease and smattering of cover songs, but the pace of this album never strays too far from a destination-less walk. A cover of the Meat Puppet’s “Plateau” has a hard time climbing out of the shadow of Nirvana’s definitive *MTV Unplugged* rendition, while Grace’s original “I’m On Fire” is a sighing away of patient guitars (a cover of the Springsteen song by the same name could’ve led to some interesting terrain). Ellington’s “Mood Indigo” benefits from the appearance of pedal steel guitarist Greg Leisz, whose languid curls dance around Grace’s sly reading. On “The Briar And The Rose,” Grace offers a gorgeous three-part harmony with help from guest vocalists Jamie Drake and Leslie Stevens. The trio blends seamlessly, evoking visions of matching bolo ties that elevate the original material to somewhere unexpected. Hopefully on the next record, Grace can do a little more exploring in that corner of her world.

—Sean J. O’Connell

No Place To Fall: No Place To Fall; Emma; I’m On Fire; Fine Young Woman; Plateau; Mood Indigo; The Colour Of Spring; The Briar And The Rose; Blame It On My Youth; Goodnight. (44:15)

Personnel: Kathleen Grace, vocals; Erik Kertes, electric and upright bass; David Steele, guitar; David Raven, drums; Will Gramling, piano, organ; Tim Young, electric guitar; Greg Leisz, pedal steel guitar (1, 6, 10); Jamie Drake (4, 8), Leslie Stevens (8), Patrick Park (10), vocals; Anthony Wilson (9), electric guitar.

Ordering info: kathleengrace.com



Jonathan Rowden Group *Becoming*

ORENDA RECORDS 0007

★★★★

Los Angeles-based saxophonist and bandleader Jonathan Rowden is making some notable noise as a worthy player and conceptualist way out west, to quote Sonny Rollins. His group’s aptly named debut, *Becoming*, is a mix of unabashed emotionality, compositional breadth and occasional flights of free-ish fancy, adding up to an intriguing introductory mission statement from a West Coaster with something fresh to say and play. *Becoming* is more than the sum of a series of unconnected parts, but rather plays out like a suite-minded structural grand plan. After the short, unfolding title track, the furtive 5/8 riff-fueled “Snowing In Paradise” kicks up the energy level, and returns in an uptempo rush of a closing reprise to the album. “Autonation” takes an easy-on-the-ears path through waves of dynamics and melodic pleasantries as well as fiery interchanges between the saxophonist and drummer James Yoshizawa. But for all its muscular moments and solid ensemble interplay, sentiment often rears its head and softens the flow. There are echoes of the melodic and romantic airs of the Pat Metheny Group—an influence that includes song titles such as the three-part “Long Road Home” suite and pianist Ryan Pryor’s Lyle Mays-ish touch. *Becoming* goes down too easily at times, challenges the ear at other times. More generally, it serves to perk up ears to Rowden’s obvious gifts.

—Josef Woodard

Becoming: Becoming; Snowing In Paradise; Entrance; The Long Road Home I; The Long Road Home II; The Long Road Home III; 27-1; Autonation; Snowing In Paradise—Reprise. (34:58)

Personnel: Jonathan Rowden, saxophone, electronics, percussion; Ryan Pryor, piano, Rhodes, percussion; James Yoshizawa, drums, bodhran, pandeiro, percussion; Chris Hon, bass.

Ordering info: orendarecords.com



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DOWNBEAT'S GUIDE TO LEARNING JAZZ

THE WORLD OF ULTRA HIGH-END *PIANOS*

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Hiromi plays the Yamaha
CFX grand piano

PLAYING THE HIGH END

A look inside
the world of
premium pianos—
and their growing
popularity in the jazz
world and beyond

BY MICHAEL GALLANT



I vividly remember the first time I laid fingers on a Fazioli piano. It was years ago, in Herbie Hancock's living room, shortly after I interviewed the legend for a high-profile magazine article. Herbie graciously invited me to give the Italian-made instrument a spin—so I did.

To date, I have never driven a Ferrari, but after playing that piano, I believe I have an inkling of what it must feel like. As I improvised, the distance between my brain, heart, gut and fingers seemed nonexistent. I felt as though the instrument could anticipate my touch, sparkle and growl as I asked it to, without demanding any physical heroics or unnecessary machinations from me. I remember thinking, "Wow, this is something different. This is a *piano*."

I've been lucky to sit at a number of similarly exquisite instruments over the last few years—among them, Kawai's sonorous Shigeru Kawai SK-EX, Ravenscroft's vivid new Model 275 and Yamaha's rich and dynamic CFX, not to mention beautiful, classic instruments like the Bösendorfer Imperial and Steinway & Sons Model D, both of which have more than a century of history, and scores of enthusiastic devotees, behind them.

Just as a Maserati may handle high-speed turns with a different touch and attitude than a Lamborghini, so does each piano possess a distinct vibe, tone and personality; at such levels of craftsmanship and musicality, "which piano is best?" can feel like a superfluous question. These days, when dealing with a pantheon of ultra high-end instruments, it seems much more a matter of taste.

"For a long time in piano making, there was a certain uniformity, but especially in the U.S., people are paying more attention to the qualities that individual pianos have, particularly in terms of sound and tonal color," says Simon Oss, premium piano market development manager for Yamaha Corp. of America, who works closely with both Yamaha and Bösendorfer instruments. "If I can make a comparison to paintings, one person might really like Chagall while another likes Picasso, though they're totally different."

McCoy Tyner, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, George Duke and Oscar Peterson are just a few of the revered jazz artists who have painted masterpieces with Bösendorfer pianos; for their own part, Steinway and Sons boasts an artist roster that includes the likes of Duke Ellington, Tommy Flanagan, Nina Simone, Jason Moran and George Gershwin. And though Fazioli is a relatively younger company, founded in 1981 and manufacturing a modest batch of 130 instruments per year, it also claims an impressive roster of loyal users within the jazz world. In addition to playing the instruments at home, Hancock "strictly requests only Fazioli pianos as a non-negotiable condition for his tour dates and recordings," says Paolo Fazioli, the company's founder. "Another legend of jazz who recently fell in love with our pianos is Abdullah Ibrahim—just while I am answering these questions, Mr. Ibrahim is recording, at the Fazioli Concert Hall, his 80th birthday celebration album. There are many others who are happy to play Fazioli

pianos," he continues, "from Stefano Bollani to Michel Camilo and Brad Mehldau."

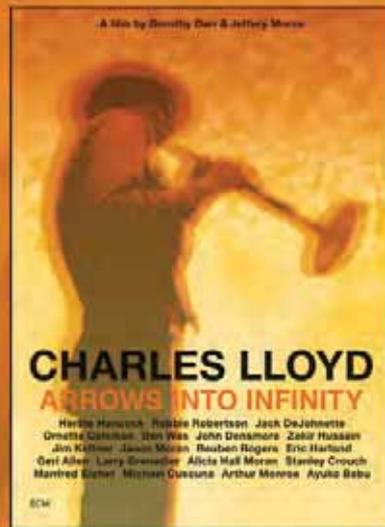
Why do artists gravitate toward one instrument over another? According to Brian Chung, senior vice president of the Shigeru Kawai Piano Co., expressive sound is, of course, fundamental. "The intention for all Shigeru pianos is to provide a warm, rich, full, enveloping piano tone," he says. "Shigeru pianos certainly project beautifully with power into the recital hall. However, it has never been our desire to create a loud, bright instrument." Artists like Yuko Maruyama have echoed the sentiment, finding a home within the Shigeru's sonorities; she has described the piano as "a chorus of voices

with each one singing its finest performance. When I improvise, I know my sound is always there, perfect in every range, every color and for each expression that I feel."

Another key component when it comes to instrument choice can be flexibility—and the confidence that such flexibility inspires in a performer. "[Artists] know that they will be able to produce exactly the right sound they want," says Bonnie Barrett, director of Yamaha Artist Services in New York, describing a common reaction she sees after pianists interact with the CFX. "They know they will have a beautifully prepared instrument, with a consistency of evenness and touch, responsive to every musical

CHARLES LLOYD ARROWS INTO INFINITY

A film by Dorothy Darr
and Jeffery Morse



Arrows Into Infinity chronicles the arc of an improviser's still-unfolding life, moving through time with memories, archive footage and music, lots of music.

With Herbie Hancock, Robbie Robertson, Jack DeJohnette, Ornette Coleman, Don Was, John Densmore, Zakir Hussain, Jim Keltner, Jason Moran, Reuben Rogers, Eric Harland, Geri Allen, Larry Grenadier, Alicia Hall Moran, Stanley Crouch, Manfred Eicher, Michael Cuscuna, Arthur Monroe, Ayuko Babu.

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Yamaha CFX

Y A M A H A

instinct and nuance.” Gerald Clayton has praised just those qualities of the piano, citing the CFX’s ability to travel from warmth to cutting brightness; similarly, watching Hiromi dance with the instrument live makes it clear how lithely a high-end piano can react with a true musical athlete piloting from the keyboard.

Attraction towards a particular piano can have much to do with the individuality of each instrument, as well as qualities inherent in an overall brand and model. “One key thing that artists love about our instruments is that they’re handcrafted, and each piano has a personality,” says Anthony Gilroy, director of marketing and communications for Steinway & Sons Americas. “But within that individuality, there’s the consistency that is Steinway. Even though each piano has a different personality and soul, they are all instruments within the same echelon of greatness.”

Investing in a top-of-the-line piano often brings with it the benefit not just of the instrument itself, but of the manufacturer’s pride, reputation and support. “In Japan, there are very few products known by the first and last name of the creator—you will see ‘family’ names like Honda and Toyota, but you don’t see first names,” says Chung. “Only individually crafted items, such as ceremonial samurai swords, carry the first and last name of the person who made it.

“This is because, in Japan, the presence of the first and last name places an incredible burden of personal responsibility—a sense of duty—on the builder,” he says. “Mr. Shigeru Kawai fully understood this responsibility and commitment when he put his first and last name on this line of pianos.” To make sure the honor of the name is upheld, Chung continues, the manufacturer sends a Master Piano Artist from Japan to the home or studio of every purchaser of a Shigeru piano, within the first year of ownership, to carry out a concert-level regulation, tuning and voicing. “This level of personal commitment has never been seen before in the world of the piano,” he adds.

Whether an artist, studio or institution invests in a Shigeru, Steinway or other piano, great instruments often come with great price tags—six-figure retail prices within the United States are the norm for premium concert grands, and some

can range up to half-a-million dollars or higher—yet manufacturers describe witnessing growing global interest in, and sales of, these highest-end models. That’s a notable trend, especially given the tribulations of the global economy over the last half-decade. And while much of the growing market for high-end pianos can be attributed to current economic recovery, other factors have contributed as well.

To Fazioli, current interest in high-end pianos is a matter of fact—though it’s an attitude his company believes transcends the musical instrument field. “People can collect information much more easily nowadays, and this helps them in clarifying what they should look for,” he says. “They are able to compare different brands and features with an increased awareness about the technical characteristics. Therefore, it is our responsibility, as piano makers, to offer potential clients the right answers.”

When it comes to the economics of obtaining a great instrument, Gilroy boils it down: Although costs are high, you get what you pay for. “If you get a piano off of Craigslist for \$200, chances are there’s a reason it’s that price,” he says. “People pay what they do for a Steinway because of the quality of the instrument and the music it produces, but also the longevity of the piano. We often say that a Steinway piano is actually the least expensive to own. It’s marketing, but it’s also the truth.”

How so? The instrument will last for many decades, Gilroy says, and, if treated well, won’t lose its value. The price of producing a new Steinway rises roughly 4 percent a year, and prices of used Steinways track with new ones. “If you get a mass-produced piano, you’re probably getting lesser woods and plastics used instead of woods,” he notes. “You have to deal with planned obsolescence.”

That’s a topic that Michael Spreeman has a lot to say about. His three-person company, the 10-year-old, family-owned, Arizona-based Ravenscroft Pianos, embraces the exact opposite approach, investing more than 1,000 production hours into each instrument the company sells and shipping roughly two hand-crafted pianos per year. With more than three decades of experience working as a concert and service technician, as well as piano rebuilder and instructor, Spreeman

has a simple goal when focusing his knowledge on his own instruments: “to build the absolute, positively best that we can possibly build,” he says. It’s an objective that comes not just from a desire, and ability, to offer something outstanding to his customers, but also from careful observations of the international marketplace.

Spreeman recalls growing up in Detroit in the 1970s and witnessing the impact that foreign auto manufacturers made on American companies in terms of overall quality and longevity.

“The bottom end kind of dropped out of the market,” he says. “There’s been an almost 100-percent turnaround in the auto industry and it’s now hard to tell, quality-wise, the difference between the least expensive Detroit car and a Volvo or Nissan. The quality line globally has come up. Now, the same thing has happened with pianos.”

That’s due to a similar pattern of well-built imports impacting the American market, Spreeman says, causing the lowest common denominator of mass-produced instruments to largely evolve into solid, middle-quality pianos, whether grand or upright. “People who are buying acoustic pianos are more serious,” he says. “Overall demand for quality, as a result, is going up.”

And demand is indeed increasing, not just among dedicated players looking for the best possible instrument, or high-net-worth individuals looking for an elegant and unique piece of furniture. Clubs and concert halls, conservatories and recording studios continue to seek out the best instruments they can afford. According to Ed Bezursik, piano marketing manager for Yamaha Corp. of America, this is a good thing for everybody, even those who may look at the price tags of premium pianos in disbelief.

“Historically, we always hear about the starving artist, and often, during their lifetimes, Beethoven and other composers didn’t have access to the finest musical equipment,” he says. “Heck, we see that today, with great artists not having access to the best digital equipment, and having to make do.

“The bottom line is that the artistic community overall, and certainly an artist him



Fazioli F308



Bösendorfer
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Steinway &
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Shigeru Kawai
SK-EX



Yelena Eckemoff A Touch of Radiance

Yelena Eckemoff piano
Mark Turner tenor saxophone
Joe Locke vibraphone
George Mraz double bass
Billy Hart drums



or herself, wants to be heard on the best possible equipment,” he continues. “And when artists have the opportunity to record or are engaged by a venue, it’s up to all of us to make sure that they sound as good as possible, whether it’s in a studio, at a club or in a concert hall. It’s certainly much more feasible for an organization with a multi-million-dollar budget to house a fine piano like a CFX, because they have to recognize that most artists will not have one. It’s kind of like one of us owning a Ferrari.”

Some artists do, however, manage to put the proverbial sports car in the garage, though not without a great deal of financial discipline and gumption. As Oss points out, while prices are high, many Bösendorfer customers are not, as he puts it, “super rich, like one might think. They’re simply people who love to have this instrument and save a very long time to afford it, so it’s an important investment and part of their life,” he says. “While a car may cost \$20,000–\$40,000, you need another new car after a certain amount of years, so that adds up to a lot of money over the years.

“A premium piano—you buy it once, and you keep it for a lifetime.”

DB

“Very rarely I am surprised like I am with Yelena. You’d think somebody on this level you would have heard about before. In a very euphoric way it was a very satisfying project for me.” - Billy Hart

“She has her own thing - it is not a copy of another person’s music like you run into almost all the time.” - George Mraz



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New Sounds for the Piano Trio

THE JAZZ TRIO OF PIANO, BASS AND DRUMS IS A CLASSIC FORMAT

with a storied tradition. The list of piano greats who made their mark on the music through the trio vehicle is a long one that includes Teddy Wilson, Bud Powell, Oscar Peterson, Ahmad Jamal, Bill Evans, Paul Bley, Keith Jarrett, Brad Mehldau and countless others. In fact, it's hard to think of a pianist who hasn't worked with a trio at some point. Even Duke Ellington, known primarily for his big band, recorded some incredible trio albums, including two of my favorites: *Money Jungle* and *Piano Reflections*. With such a rich history, it can be daunting to think about adding something new to the idiom. Often, musicians will seek a new sound through unorthodox instrumentation, e.g., "My new project is for saxophone, viola, vibraphone and three elephants." But how do you approach writing or arranging for the same old instruments that have been used together for nearly a century?

Although I started listening to trio records early on—I was obsessed with albums like *The Unique Thelonious Monk* and *This Here Is Bobby Timmons*—it wasn't until after college that I turned my focus toward the trio configuration. I had written mainly for horn-based combos, delegating melodies and harmony parts to the trumpet or saxophone, having the piano play chords and the occasional ostinato, and having the bass and drums play their traditional supportive roles. At one trio session, I decided to adapt a tune I had originally written for a quintet. I played the two horn voices in my right hand and the rhythmic-pattern figure that was the piano part in my left. In another section of the piece, I experimented with the roles of the right and left hands, sometimes having the left take the spotlight while the right played accompaniment. At the time, I had been intensely studying classical repertoire, which opened me up to the vast possibilities of hand independence and freed me from the left-hand chord/right-hand melody model. When we added the bass and drums to the mix, the result was enlivening: It felt new to me, and I was left with a desire to experiment more.

Since the formation of our trio with bassist Chris van Voorst van Beest and drummer Max Goldman in 2008, I have tried to carry this spirit of experimentation through every facet of the group, be it the composition process, improvisation, rehearsal or live performance. When I sit down to compose, I try not to force things out, preferring to stumble upon ideas that excite me: a short melodic theme, a quirky rhythm, a rich-sounding chord or progression, etc. Often this means I sit at the piano staring at blank paper and doubting my whole existence, before deciding to get a snack instead. But with patience and persistence, I usually arrive at some kernel that then serves as the basis for the entire composition. In most of our tunes, there are two or three themes that form the basis for multiple sections, owing much to the motivic writing you see in classical music.

On "Sterling," the first tune on our 2014 album *Wide Eyed* (Hot Cup Records), the first idea I came up with was a simple six-note bass melody in A \flat minor (see Example 1a) with the first three notes descending A \flat -G \flat -E \flat , and then repeating A \flat -G \flat but now going up to B. Then, I thought it would be neat to mimic that line in the left hand of the piano but with different notes highlighting an A \flat min6 chord: F-E \flat -B, F-E \flat -A \flat (Example 1b). From there, I rearranged the first three notes of the new piano figure to come up with the beginning of the right-hand melody: E \flat -F-B-A \flat , which comes back slightly altered at the end of the first measure as E \flat -F-A \flat -B (Example 1c). Finally, I added chords to the left hand to play before each counterline played with the bass. This six-note theme comes back in other sections of the piece but is somewhat disguised through new harmony and rhythm. In the following section (Example 1d), the left hand plays the bass melody but now in E minor with an added note (B, the fifth of the chord) and as a faster eight-note grouping: E-D-B-E-D-G-B-G. The right hand of the piano plays a repeated E minor chord against this line.

To form a section within a section, the piano and bass answer this new line with the original piano counterline but now outlining an Emin6 chord: C#-B-G-C#-B-E (Example 1e). Here, the right hand of the piano referenc-



Danny Fox Trio: bassist Chris van Voorst van Beest (left), pianist Danny Fox, drummer Max Goldman

EXAMPLE 1a ("Sterling")

EXAMPLE 1b ("Sterling")

EXAMPLE 1c ("Sterling")

EXAMPLE 1d ("Sterling")

EXAMPLE 1e ("Sterling")

es the original chords played at the very opening of the piece. The amount of material you can spin out of small ideas is endless: Move the notes around, change the key, vary the rhythm, swap these themes between instruments or registers, etc. While the sections might sound drastically different, they will be linked together through the exploration of a common theme, thereby giving the piece coherence. This kind of composing can help you break free of the limitations of a head-solo-head framework.

In composing for bass and drums, I try to view the instruments equally instead of relegating them to supporting roles with the piano leading the way. With only two pitched instruments, one of which resides in the lower reg-

EXAMPLE 2 ("Tumble Quiet")
EXAMPLE 3 ("Funhouse Memory")
EXAMPLE 4a ("All Tolloed")
EXAMPLE 4b ("All Tolloed")

ister, it can seem like a limited palette with which to work. But having this limitation can challenge you to be creative in assigning roles to the instruments. For one, I like to write specific melodies for the bass, whether short interjections or longer passages. Allowing room for the bass to be featured breaks things up both for the trio and for the listener. A good example of this is pianist Ahmad Jamal's classic recording of "But Not For Me," where bassist Israel Crosby inserts catchy little lines as a response to Jamal's statement of the melody.

On our tune "Tumble Quiet" (Example 2), the piano and bass play equal roles in stating the melody, like in a chamber group. At first, they exchange phrases, then they play different lines simultaneously. Another idea is to have the piano and bass play the same melody at different times so it sounds like a canon. On "Funhouse Memory" (Example 3), the piano states a quirky little phrase, then the bass plays the same line but with a staggered entrance, and the left hand of the piano plays the line at yet another starting point. This idea allows us to spin a mini-section of the piece out of relatively little material.

Similarly, on "All Tolloed," our bassist came up with the idea to first accompany the piano melody in a traditional way by playing the roots of the chords (Example 4a); on the repeat he briefly mimics the piano melody but

one measure later, before returning to his original line (Example 4b). Also, while the bass mainly plays pizzicato in a jazz context, you can expand the sound of the group by having the bass bow certain parts. It could be a featured melody or it might be laying down long, held notes as accompaniment.

The drums can also bring many different colors and textures into the mix through creative use of the kit. Our drummer plays the drums almost like a symphony percussionist, employing a wide range of sounds to shade the various sections of a composition: a timpani-like tom-tom-based part for an earthier groove; an exclusively cymbal-based part for a spacey, atmospheric section; or a mix of sticks, brushes and mallets depending on what the piece calls for. Even though the drums don't play pitches, they can function in a melodic role accenting lines played by the piano and bass, and sometimes asserting a separate rhythmic idea. Also, within a piece you can vary the approach such that in one section the drums play a specific beat while in the next they improvise freely as the piano and bass play in time. In "All Tolloed," the piece starts with a specific upbeat-based drum groove in 3/4. For the following section, I wanted the drum part to accent the third beat of every other measure: Max came up with the idea to build a drum roll on beat 1 up to a loud thump on beat 3 with the bass drum and closed hi-hat. In a later section, the drums briefly play around hits before improvising over a trance-like piano figure.

It can be challenging to incorporate improvisation into longer compositional forms, as there is often not a clear solo section. The goal is to find ways to improvise that work with the spirit of the piece. One song might call for improvising over chord changes, while another might suggest free improvisation or soloing over a vamp. You can experiment with where and how you inject improvisation into the piece. The solo might be a release after lots of dense written material, or it could be building up tension until the introduction of new written material. It could come at the very beginning of the tune or all the way at the end. It could be four measures long or an open-ended free improvisation. If the piano and bass both take solos, having each instrument play over a different section creates a nice contrast and prevents repetition.

Another good way to generate new ideas for the piano trio is simply to listen to as much different music as you can. Listening to The Meters gave me an appreciation for how a few simple interlocking parts played with energy and intensity can create a groove greater than the sum of its parts. Checking out composers like Scriabin, Messiaen and Debussy opened my ears to rich harmonic possibilities, and watching a string quartet performance taught me about the blending between instruments through dynamics, sound production and phrasing. Let your own varied influences seep naturally into your writing and playing. I relish the moments when I stumble on a chord or rhythm and realize afterwards where it came from: perhaps from working on Professor Longhair riffs, a Monk tune, a Beethoven Sonata or my obsession with the theme song from the '80s movie *Fletch*.

Finally, the real key to finding a new trio sound is to put in the time developing your band. When composing, write specifically for the members of your group, keeping their particular strengths and proclivities in mind (by the same token, write material that challenges them out of their comfort zone). Schedule regular rehearsals and start workshoping the music with the input of your bandmates. In our group, I will bring in material and the group will sculpt it together with ideas for arrangement, improvisation and dynamics. Harnessing the creativity and experience of each member results in a truly collaborative band sound. It is important to be open to criticism and not let ego stand in the way of the music: Often, my bandmates or I will voice dissatisfaction with a certain section of a tune and we will work together to come up with a solution. This tinkering process has yielded some of my favorite musical moments.

Once you have working versions of tunes, try them out on gigs. See what works and re-examine what doesn't. It might take some time before a tune fully takes shape. Memorize your songs, as it allows closer connection within the group as well as with the audience. Also, don't underestimate the value of spending time together as a band: Share meals, introduce each other to new music, make fun of each other, etc. All of this will emerge in the music and result in a closer unit that has a uniquely personal sound and is comfortable taking musical risks.

DB

Danny Fox is a New York City-based pianist and composer. The Danny Fox Trio recently released *Wide Eyed* (Hot Cup Records), the follow-up to its debut CD, *The One Constant* (Songlines). Fox is also a co-founder of the band Tubby, which plays old New Orleans r&b hits. Visit him online at dannyfoxmusic.com or email him at dannyfox@gmail.com.



Bradley Sowash

FRANK HUNTER

10 Reasons Why Scales Matter

I ONCE ASKED A NEW ADULT STUDENT IF SHE UNDERSTOOD WHY I assigned scales. Her reply surprised me: “No, not really, but they must be important because every teacher I’ve ever had has insisted that I practice them.” I suspect she’s not alone in missing the connection between playing scales and becoming a better musician. Here, I present 10 reasons why scales are useful in developing musicianship—which I hope will motivate your practice.

Benefits of Scale Practice

1) Foundational: Scales are the building blocks of chords and melodies. Chords and melodies combine to make songs and tunes. Songs and tunes provide the structure for improvisation. Improvisation enables you to express yourself musically. Hooray!

2) Efficient: Playing scales is a super-effective way to practice. What else combines warming up, technical development, theory review, muscle memory and ear training all in one exercise? Like athletic conditioning, you can think of scales as push-ups for your fingers (and your brain).

3) Practical: Knowing the notes, fingering and “feel” of the scale associated with a progression increases the likelihood of finding and playing the notes you hear in your head on your instrument when improvising.

4) Technical: The stepwise motion of scales prepares you to play adjacent

notes (seconds), the most common interval found in tunes. (By the way, thirds are the next most common interval, which is why arpeggios are valuable, but that’s another story.)

Squared Scales

Here is a way to make scale practice more relevant to actual music. Like the four sides of a square, music is often organized into units of four. Given the predominantly square musical architecture in music, the usual method of practicing seven-note scales with five fingers yields odd (pun intended) results. Running up and down a major scale is simply unmusical—either that, or we are practicing daily in a very unusual time signature (something like 15/8).

Add to this the tendency to zoom up and down scales with little regard for the beat, and playing scales becomes more of a monkey trick than a useful musical skill.

A better way to practice scales is to repeat and lengthen the top notes to make them come out evenly and give them a more natural-feeling beat. Here’s how to play “squared scales” (see Example 1):

- Set a metronome or drum track to 100 bpm or higher.
- Play half notes over one octave (two clicks per note).
- Play quarter notes over two octaves (one click per note).

- Play quarter-note triplets over three octaves (three notes for every two clicks).
- Play eighth notes over four octaves or two octaves twice (two notes per click).

- Play eighth-note triplets over three octaves (three notes per click).
- Play 16th notes over four octaves (four notes per click).

Practicing scales this way adds two more reasons to the list:

5) Rhythm: Playing scales with various note values over a steady beat increases your understanding of how rhythmic subdivisions interrelate, which, in turn, adds more rhythmic variety to your improvisations.

6) Phrasing: Squared scales help you develop an intuitive feel for square phrase lengths, which, in turn, helps you keep your place in the music.

Variations

Here are additional ways and reasons to get more out of practicing scales:

7) Swing harder: Play eighth-note scales with a swing beat to deepen your swing feel. (Pianists, play 10ths: Left hand starts on the tonic, right hand starts on the third scale degree.)

8) Feel the backbeat: Synchronize your playing to the metronome clicks on beats 2 and 4 rather than the more obvious 1 and 3 to improve your groove.

9) Learn patterns: Play “turn back” scales as shown in Examples 2a and 2b in three- and four-note patterns in both directions, thereby adding new licks to your bag of tricks. (Pianists, stick to standard scale fingerings when you play patterns as much as possible and avoid placing thumbs and pinkies on black keys.)

10) Turn on a dime: Since scale passages in actual music can start on any note, practice changing direction on each scale degree by playing “continuous scales” as shown in Example 3. (Pianists, left hand plays diatonic seventh chords.)

Pop/Jazz Scales

Among the many scales improvisers use in pop and jazz styles, pentatonics and blues scales are particularly popular.

While learning about pentatonic scales, a light bulb went off for a student of mine when she said, “Oh, these five pitches are like safe notes.” It’s a great description because improvising on the pentatonic scale in the same key as a chord progression makes it next to impossible to play a bad note. For this reason, one of my favorite tips, especially for beginning improvisers, is, “When in doubt, pent out.”

Note that the major and minor pentatonic scales in a given key share the same notes. The only difference is where you start and end. (See Examples 4a and 4b.)

Most improvising musicians discover the gritty appeal of blue notes early on. But did you know there are at least two blues scales? The “bright” blues scale (aka major blues or flat-third pentatonic) has a cheerful character with just a touch of the blues. (See Examples 5a and 5b.) The better-known “dark” blues scale has more of a minor, down-home feel. (See Examples 6a and 6b.) Like pentatonic scales, all of the notes in either of these scales sound great anywhere in a blues progression. With jazzy blue notes built right in and no possibility of wrong notes, it’s easy to see why blues scales are “fearless favorites” for improvising.

Scales are Key

Every good jazz educator will tell you to practice scales in all keys. That’s because the ability to transpose and play in any key is powerfully useful for navigating chord changes. However, you don’t have to master all of the keys at once. To quickly benefit from daily scale practice, initially focus on the most comfortable keys for your instrument. For pianists, this means learning the major, minor, pentatonic and blues scales in C, F and G major first. Which keys you tackle after that depends on your performing situation. If you often play with horn players, such as in a school jazz band, learn the flat keys next. If jamming with guitar players and other strings is more your thing, go for the sharp keys next.

Start thinking of scales as living things that can be applied to your playing, and you’ll soon discover your own reasons why every teacher you’ve ever had insisted that you make them a part of every practice session. **DB**

Bradley Sowash is a composer, creative pianist, multi-instrumentalist, recording artist and educator specializing in improvisation. He is the author of the best-selling jazz piano method *That’s Jazz* published by Kjos Music. Visit him online at bradleysowash.com.

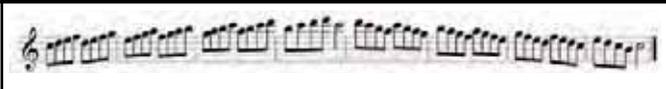
EXAMPLE 1



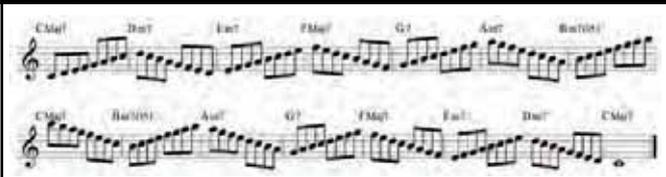
EXAMPLE 2a



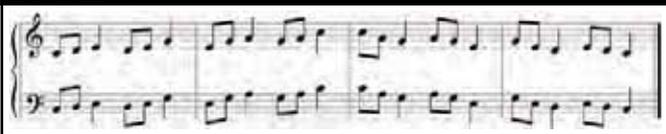
EXAMPLE 2b



EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4a



EXAMPLE 4b



EXAMPLE 5a



EXAMPLE 5b



EXAMPLE 6a



EXAMPLE 6b





Russ Nolan

Note-Centric Ear Training With Pentatonics

THE ABILITY TO START A LINE OR PHRASE ON ANY NOTE OF THE chord is one of the marks of a mature improviser. To help get you there, one helpful ear-training exercise can be practiced with the assistance of a chord instrumentalist like a keyboardist or pianist.

To start, play and hold the note C (concert pitch). After the note sounds, have the keyboard player randomly play a chord within the modes of the C major scale: Cmaj7, Dm7, E phrygian, F lydian, G7, Am7b6 or Bm7b5. Once the chord sounds, develop the line from C using Jerry Bergonzi's eight formulas found in his popular book *Inside Improvisation Series Volume 2—Pentatonics*. See Examples 1, 2.

By not knowing the mode of the major scale beforehand, you will train your ear to recognize the relationship between your starting note and the chord's quality and root. In the same way, you can also play the same line through all seven modes. Saxophonist/educator Bobby Stern's highly recommended e-book *Slick Licks That Stick* thoroughly demonstrates this "note-centric" concept.

Once you play through the major scale modes, move onto the melodic minor modes: CmMaj7, D phrygian natural 6, Ebmaj7#5, F7#11, G7b13, Am7b5 natural 9, B+7#9. See Example 3.

Although there are no "modes" of the diminished scale, using C as a launching point the accompanist could play through C/Eb/F#/A7#9 or dom7b9 (half-/whole-step diminished scale) or C/Eb/F#/Adim7 (whole-/half-step diminished scale). See Examples 4, 5. Exercises can also be developed for harmonic minor, whole tone and other scales. See Example 6.

If this isn't enough to practice, you can also use C as a non-chordal tone to launch a line. This is a favorite technique of Chicago saxophonist-educator Rich Corpolongo. As before, play and hold a C and then have the accompanist play a chord that does not have a C in it, such as Bmaj7, Bb7#9, AbmMaj7 or similar. As Bird once said, you are always a half-step away from a "right" note, and your ear will help you resolve the line into the chord by playing a half-step in either direction. See Examples 7, 8.

This exercise has expanded my vocabulary and has helped me break out of my improvisational ruts. It has also prepared me for the times I sit in with a band, an unfamiliar tune is called and I am simply told, "You'll hear it." If you haven't been in a situation like that yet—find one. **DB**

Russ Nolan is a New York-based saxophonist and educator. His current Latin and modern jazz recording, *Relentless* (Rhinoceuruss Music), features pianist and Latin jazz Grammy nominee Manuel Valera.

EXAMPLE 1

EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 3

EXAMPLE 4

EXAMPLE 5

EXAMPLE 6

EXAMPLE 7

EXAMPLE 8

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BY MARK SHERMAN



Kenny Barron

Kenny Barron's Motivating Piano Solo on 'New Picture'

WHEN SAXOPHONIST TIM HEGARTY, MY FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE OF MANY YEARS, asked me to produce his new CD *Tribute* (Miles High Records), I thought of my own dream as a young musician growing up. That dream was to be placed in a setting with a rhythm section of true masters—a pianist, bassist and drummer who could really capture the true tradition of the music.

Considering the masters honored on this recording project—Jimmy Heath, George Coleman, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane and Charlie Parker among them—I just knew that pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Rufus Reid and drummer Carl Allen would truly be perfect for the session. For me, it was a personal triumph and privilege to work the music with these incredible musicians. Settings like this give everyone the voice they have strived to develop for years and years inside the commitment of the music itself.

On the way home from the recording studio that night after finishing all the reference mixes, I began to listen to playbacks in my car. It affirmed in my mind my decision to go with this rhythm section. Barron's poignant, masterful playing on *Tribute* reflects the deep tradition in the music I grew up with and the expressive, poetic language we all strive for. He demonstrates true mastery of bebop and post-bop elements.

The first track I listened to was the Heath composition "New Picture," a beautiful tune that you rarely hear these days. It also happens to be a great vehicle for improvisation. I recalled how at age 17 I had transcribed Barron's piano solo on a cut titled "Swamp Demon." When I got home, I felt so motivated that I stayed up an extra two or three hours that night and started to draft this transcription of Barron's solo on "New Picture."

There is a lot to learn from this solo. Barron's improvisation is deeply rooted in the straightahead tradition and creates a beautiful collage of blue notes, diminished lines, altered harmonies and other classic bebop devices. His personal statement on this tune is spelled so beautifully.

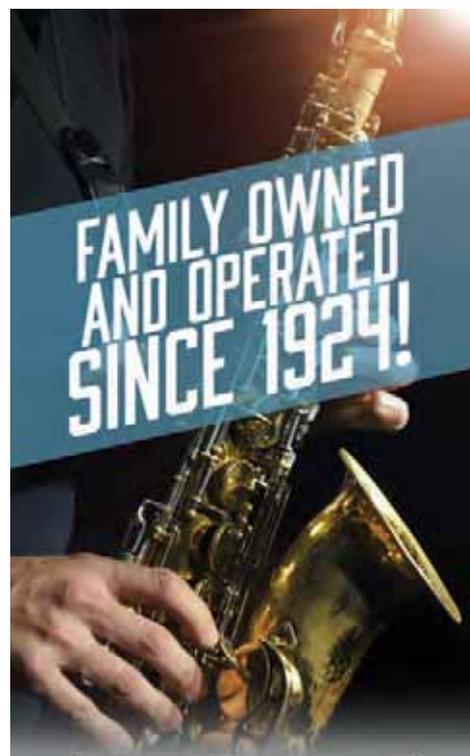
I suppose the best thing would be for me to simply say: Thank you, Kenny, for your ultra-hip concept and view of our music. It is truly enabling and motivating!

DB

Vibraphonist, composer and producer Mark Sherman brings a deeply rooted post-bop approach to his music. He has performed or recorded with a wide range of musicians including Peggy Lee, Tony Bennett, Mel Tormé, Lena Horne, Ruth Brown, Joe Beck, Rodney Jones, Ruth Brown, Ann Hampton Callaway, Liza Minnelli, Larry Coryell and many others. Sherman has been featured on 14 CDs as a leader and more than 150 as a sideman, and has been on faculty at The Juilliard School since 2010. He has toured internationally and was selected as a Jazz Ambassador for the U.S. State Department and Jazz at Lincoln Center. Visit Sherman online at markshermanmusic.com.



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Sheet music for a piece in 3/4 time, featuring a key signature of one flat (Bb). The music is written on a single staff with a treble clef. Chord symbols are placed above the staff at various intervals. The piece consists of 74 measures, with measure numbers 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 36, 43, 50, 57, 64, 71, and 74 marked at the beginning of their respective lines.

Chord symbols include: Bbmaj7, G7, Gb7, F7, Dm7, Cm7, F7, Dm7b5, G7b9, Cm7, F7, Em7b5, Aaug7b11, Dmaj7, B7, Em7, A7, Fm7, Bb7, Fbmaj7b11, D7b9, Gmaj7, Abmaj7, Dmaj7, Fmaj7, Fbmaj7, Bbmaj7, Emaj7, Emaj7, Dmaj7, F7, Bbmaj7, Eb6/Bb, Bbmaj7, Eb6/Bb, Bbmaj7, G7, Cm7, F7, Dm7b5, G7, G7, Cm7, F7, Dm7b5, G7, Cm7, F7, Em7b5, Aaug7b11, Dmaj7, Bbmaj7, Em7, A7, Fm7, Bb7, Emaj7b11, D7b9, Gmaj7, A7, Dmaj7, Fmaj7, Fbmaj7, Bbmaj7, Emaj7, Emaj7, Abmaj7, Dmaj7, F7, Bbmaj7, Eb6/Bb, Bbmaj7, Eb6/Bb, Bbmaj7, Eb6/Bb.



Vintage Vibe Electric Pianos

Abundance of Feel, Soul & Depth

In the world of vintage keyboard instruments, there are two camps. On one side you have folks buying and restoring them to keep their legacy alive. On the other you have people dismantling them for parts. Vintage Vibe is a company with an alternative: a line of electric mechanical pianos.

I paid a visit to the Vintage Vibe workshop in Rockaway, N.J., to experience what the company's electric pianos are all about. Being an acoustic pianist who owns a Fender Rhodes and a Wurlitzer 200A, I have a thing for *real* instruments. No digital samples here.

Owner Chris Carroll and his team are known for their expertise in restoring vintage electric pianos. But recently, they set out to build a new instrument that's more manageable for a gigging musician.

The classic early '70s Fender Rhodes inspires the action and tone. Vintage Vibe decided to utilize tines, which is the hallmark of the Rhodes sound. Starting with the harp of a Rhodes—without the heavy metal frame and recontoured to utilize about half the wood—the company created a new, lighter design and found additional ways to shed weight without sacrificing sound or feel. For instance, the keys are made of linden wood, which is light but strong. The action rail has been completely redesigned, too, with 2.5-inch holes drilled across it to reduce mass without compromising strength.

The result is a gorgeous instrument at *half* the weight, with a body shape that looks very much like a Wurlitzer. The Vintage Vibe Deluxe 73 comes in at 60 pounds—compare that to the original Fender Rhodes 73-note stage piano, which weighed about 125 pounds. The company's flagship 64-key model weighs 53 pounds, making it ultra-portable. Vintage Vibe even makes a 44-key version at 35 pounds. With their bright sparkle color, these instruments would take center stage in any performance situation.

But how do they feel and sound? I was overwhelmed by the touch—amazingly responsive. I've become slightly weary of having to draw the sound out from my own Rhodes—especially during soft passages—but the Vintage Vibe allowed me to use a wide variety of dynamics. The tone is clean, direct and extremely defined, but due to the overtones it has a real bark when you lay into it. I was impressed by the natural range of timbre and colors it can produce. I felt very expressive playing it and enjoyed the aftertouch and clarity when running faster series of notes. Having all the great onboard features right at my fingertips was useful as well as inspiring.

The Vintage Vibe electric piano is available with passive controls, with

tone and volume knobs alongside a mono 1/4-inch jack. It comes with cutouts for upgrading to active controls, which I highly recommend. Active controls deliver stereo-panning tremolo featuring depth, speed and a half-time setting; bass boost and treble control are offered as well. The connections, found on the bottom of the 64- and 73-key versions, sport an effects loop for plugging in your favorite stomp box. There is a headphone jack, as well as left-right outputs that make it possible to run effects in true stereo. On the 44-key version, the connections are on the back, so you can easily place it on top of another keyboard instrument.

The base prices for the Vintage Vibe electric pianos are \$3,505 (44-key), \$4,770 (64-key) and \$5,670 (73-key), respectively. The 64- and 73-key versions are also available in a "classic" model that uses slightly different materials such as imported pickups and an ABS plastic lid, which offsets the cost by about \$1,000 but makes no detectable difference in the feel and sound.

Optional features such as a choice of 73 different colored fiberglass lids, 40 different sparkle finishes, pedal/rod and active electronics cost an additional \$100–\$500. You can even order a "suitcase" speaker that the piano sits on. Vintage Vibe's Stereo Console amp, at \$2,800, has two 10-inch speakers that angle up toward the player and two 12-inch speakers that face the audience.

These electric pianos are not cheap. But compare their prices to the expense of a restored Rhodes and consider that you're getting a high-quality, road-ready instrument that is sonically equal at half the weight.

With a growing roster of endorsers such as Robert Glasper, Vintage Vibe is gaining notoriety as a customer service-oriented specialty company that sets up and voices each instrument to sound and feel great. Anyone wanting the experience of playing a real instrument with an abundance of feel, soul and depth should give one of their electric pianos a try. —Oscar Perez

Ordering info: vintagevibe.com

Yamaha CP4 Stage Piano

Professional Action, Inspirational Tones

Yamaha has long been one of the main players in the increasingly crowded stage piano market, and the latest offering in the line does not disappoint. The 88-key CP4 Stage Piano represents a major step in the evolution of Yamaha's long history with these instruments, and the company clearly has been paying attention to what your average stage piano customer needs and wants.

The CP4 is a solidly built instrument, and even though it weighs less than 40 pounds, it has a great playing heft to it. The keyboard of the CP4 is Yamaha's new Natural Wood Graded Hammer action, and it feels fantastic. The white keys are real wood, and have a synthetic ivory finish, albeit a slick



top, not textured. The action is heavy, but not overbearingly so, and the depth of the keys was spot-on under my fingers. Overall, it creates an uncannily piano-like playing experience.

The front panel is uncluttered and simple to navigate, with quick access to all the performance controls. Setting up splits and layers on the fly is a

breeze, and Yamaha included both pitch and mod wheels in the upper right corner—a welcome addition that many other stage pianos lack. There are also well-placed controls to access effects, playback, metronome and recording (more on that in a moment), as well as a nicely detailed five-band EQ. A compressor with seven presets can be quickly activated and tweaked to make sure your sound is getting through the mix.

The back panel offers both balanced XLR and unbalanced 1/4-inch outputs—a major convenience for pro players. It also includes a 1/8-inch input for sending audio through the CP4's outs, which is great for playing backing tracks or even break music. You will also find two foot-pedal jacks and a pair of expression-pedal jacks, along with MIDI in and out, making it a very competent controller for outside sound sources as well. Also on the back panel is a USB-B jack for connecting to your computer as a MIDI controller, and a USB-A jack for recording audio directly to an external drive. Among my pet peeves are so-called professional instruments that use an AC-to-DC “wall wart” power supply, and Yamaha is on the same page—an internal power supply on the CP4 eliminates that problem.

But the thing that really matters most is the sound. Any piano player will be immediately immersed in the piano sounds of the CP4. Yamaha included a few different piano options, each with 15 variations. The main piano (the one that comes up when you boot up) is the sound of the company's flagship CFX grand, and it is so gorgeous that it was difficult for me to stop playing and move on to the other piano sounds. The second piano is much darker, modeled on Yamaha's CFIIS, and the third is the S6, a piano that falls somewhere in between the other two. All are a joy to play and inspirational in their tone.

The CP4's Electric Piano section is also extremely playable, with Rhodes, Wurli, CP80 and DX pianos all represented. The Rhodes sounds are modeled on Yamaha's RDII and RDIII electrics, so there is a slight difference in the tone, but they are nice and warm, and they have a satisfying growl when you dig in. There are also a wide variety of clavinet, melodic percussion and synth tones—great for layering and easy to accomplish with just a couple of button presses. With individual sliders for part volume control, your splits and layers will always be balanced the way you like them. The synths in particular are well represented for a stage piano, and if you want to get in-depth to tweak them, the capability is there, though not so much in a performance context. The organ tones are useable in a pinch, but not really on a par with the dedicated “clone wheels” on the market now. This is not surprising for a stage piano, and playing organ on the CP4's piano action would be challenging, anyway. There are enough variations to be useful for quick organ parts, but not much else. This is a small complaint when

considering the incredible detail of the pianos, electric pianos and clavs. Indeed, the CP4 is not meant to be the next Motif.

The CP4 is a professional ax all the way, and would be at home in almost any context. Piano players in particular will fall in love with the feel and sound response, but any keyboard player would do well to use this as their main 88-key board. The nearest competitors that sound this good are quite a bit more expensive. There is no after-

touch, but again, this is a stage piano, and that feature will probably not be missed by most. Yamaha has a hit with this one, and it is priced right for all the functionality and playability it offers.

—Chris Neville

Ordering info: usa.yamaha.com

Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand

High-End Virtual Piano Experience

A collaboration between Garritan/MakeMusic and Abbey Road Studios has resulted in a great-sounding virtual instrument that combines one of the world's most painstakingly constructed pianos with the renowned London studio's acoustic environment, microphone collection and engineering team.

Those familiar with the popular Ivory piano sample library will find a similar modeling paradigm in the Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand. It uses a similar interface and most of the same parameters: sympathetic resonance, sustain resonance, lid height, pedal noise, velocity curves, EQ, convolution reverbs and many more. The breakthrough feature of this collection is the variety of microphone positions on both close and ambient mics. This gives a huge amount of naturally modeled control over timbral aspects of the instrument.

The piano itself is the centerpiece of this sample collection. The 9-foot CFX is Yamaha's flagship concert grand, comparable in quality to the Steinway D, Fazoli F308 or Bösendorfer Imperial. Retailing at just under \$300, my first concern was if this virtual version of the CFX would be versatile enough to be used in a variety of styles, or if it was merely a well-crafted one-trick pony. Fortunately, there are a number of presets that will put you in the ballpark for almost any style you're looking for by changing up EQ and velocity curves as well as reverb, mic positions and the numerous other parameters at your disposal. From a bright Elton John-ish sound to an even and articulate tone more suitable to jazz, to a rich and nuanced instrument well suited to Chopin, the variety and versatility of sounds that Garritan was able to derive from sampling this instrument in Abbey Road's legendary Studio One is simply amazing. But this instrument really excels where most others fail: hearing it solo, unaccompanied by other instruments. With the dynamic subtleties and shades of overtones, as well as the recreation of extraneous noises and ambient environment, one can hardly expect to hear a more realistic recreation of a fine acoustic piano.

How an instrument feels and responds to the player in performance is just as important as how it sounds. Latency—or the delay between when a key is pressed and when the note sounds—is often a problem with soft-synths, but the Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand is surprisingly responsive. Even at some of the higher buffer settings, there was no perceptible delay. The velocity curve and dynamics are also highly adjustable, so the player has almost limitless ability to match their expected response from the instrument with their controller of choice.

Potential users should be aware that the Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand can be very demanding on your computer's system. It will work with either Windows or Mac and can be used either as a plug-in or a standalone player. But the full install requires a minimum of 125GB of space to store the samples (almost three times as much as the largest Ivory instrument). Once installed on my stock MacBook Pro, it took more than 5 minutes to load each of the “full” presets. This could be a consideration for some if they are planning on using it in live performance. Fortunately, for less robust systems it offers the ability to run the instrument in “compact” mode, which uses only one-fifth of the sample resources while retaining all the features of “full” mode. “Compact” mode still sounds wonderful, though not as detailed, and is able to run on a relatively weak system at a low buffer size without any noticeable dropouts or system spikes.

The Garritan Abbey Road Studios CFX Concert Grand is a highly playable virtual instrument that would make a great addition to anyone's sample library.

—Vijay Tellis-Nayak

Ordering info: garritan.com

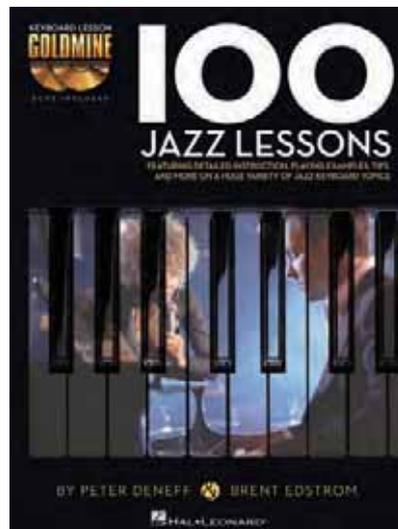




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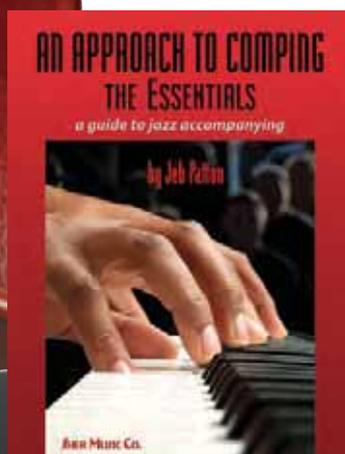
Hammond has released the A-162 organ, which was inspired by the company's A-100 model. The A-162 features a powerful 150-watt on-board sound system with five heavy-duty speakers, one of which is a 15-inch woofer for rich pedal/bass tones. Its small footprint makes it suitable for small churches, chapels, schools, homes and studios.

More info: hammondorganco.com



Key Tutorials

Hal Leonard's *100 Jazz Lessons* is a book/CD package that offers 100 self-contained keyboard tutorials with detailed instruction, playing examples, tips and photos. Authors Peter Deneff and Brent Edstrom cover such topics as scales, modes, progressions, Latin jazz styles, improvisation ideas and harmonic voicings. More info: hal Leonard.com



Comping Essentials

Written by New York pianist Jeb Patton, *An Approach to Comping: The Essentials* is a comprehensive book/CD from Sher Music Co. that teaches how to accompany jazz soloists with supportive, propulsive comping. The book starts with basic comping patterns and works its way up to transcriptions of master pianists like Tadd Dameron, Barry Harris and Bud Powell.

More info: shermusic.com

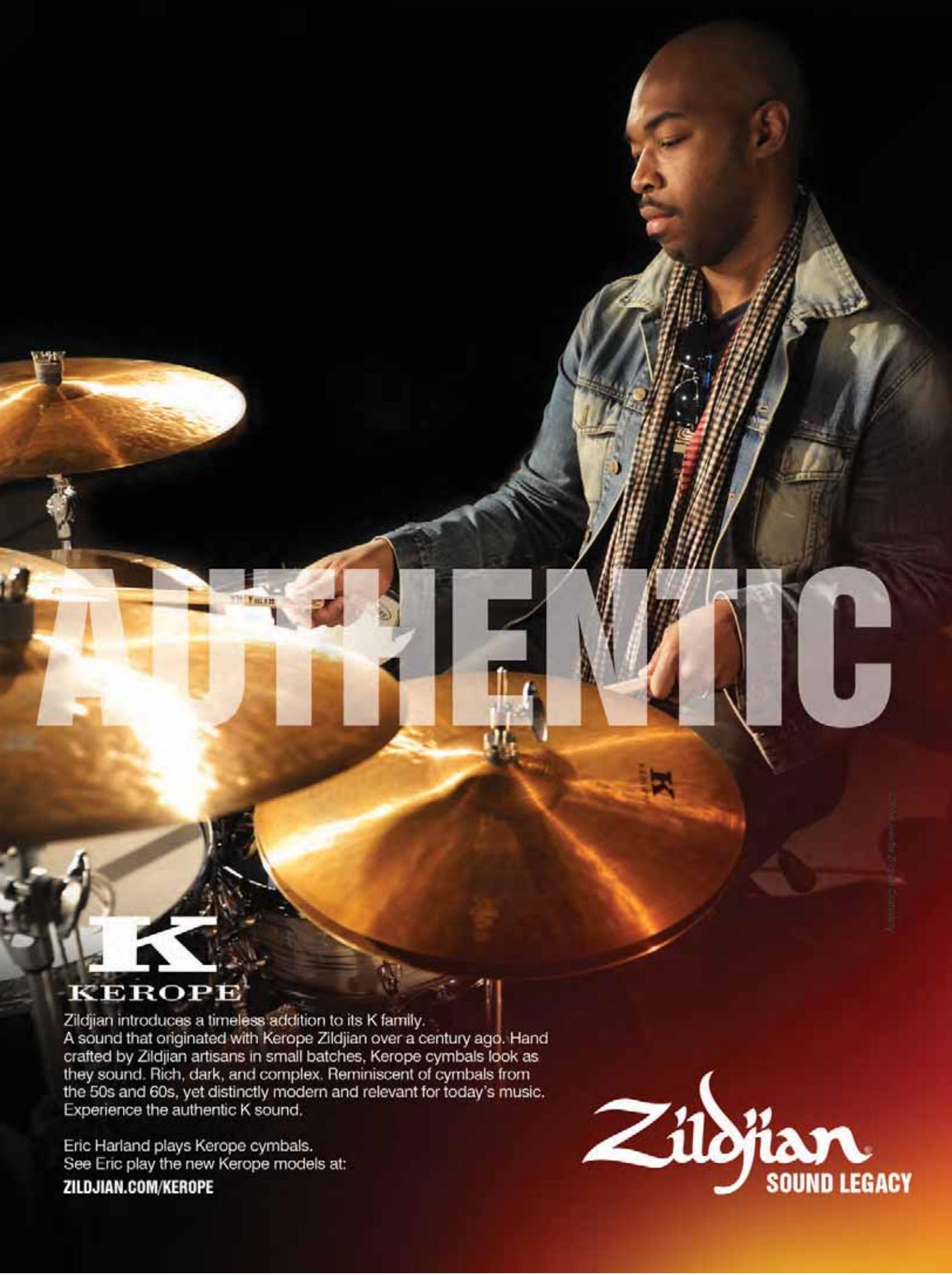


Making Arrangements

The Pa300 is the newest keyboard in Korg's Pa series of professional arrangers. The portable, 61-key Pa300 features an up-to-date collection of high-quality sounds and styles, many of which have been distilled from the Pa600 and Pa900. An custom-designed onboard amplification system consists of two 13-watt amplifiers that drive two loudspeakers in a bass-reflex box. More info: korg.com

Stage Piano Action

Roland's new RD-800 stage piano features an enhanced collection of world-class pianos, the latest weighted-action keyboard technology, a streamlined interface and a Tone Color function. Its LCD front panel makes it simple to execute essential tasks, such as selecting and layering tones, setting split points and adjusting effects. More info: rolandconnect.com



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IU Builds for the Future

FACULTY MEMBERS LIKE TO REFER TO THE JAZZ PROGRAM AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY AS “the house that David built.”

“David” is David Baker, the 82-year-old Indianapolis native who graduated from IU’s Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington and then returned to lead the jazz program, which has such famous alumni as Michael and Randy Brecker, Peter Erskine, Jeff Hamilton, Jamey Aebersold and Chris Botti.

Baker remains an active faculty member, but the appointment of fellow IU alumnus Tom Walsh as chair of the program is just one of a number of relatively recent changes, which include hiring guitarist Dave Stryker and trombonist Wayne Wallace, and a new program that allows students to major in jazz vocals.

The new focus on singing reflects the hiring of three other new faculty members: Steve Zegree, yet another IU alumnus, who had an impressive career leading vocal ensembles at Western Michigan University; Ly Wilder, who has a wide range of experience as a performer, vocal arranger and clinician; and arranger-vocalist-saxophonist Darmon Meader of the acclaimed vocal quartet New York Voices.

Visionary leadership is key to the school’s current direction. “It starts with [Jacobs School of Music Dean] Gwyn Richards and a conscious movement to stay relevant,” Zegree said. “We want to teach to a student’s future and not a professor’s past. IU already has a world-class reputation for opera education, and we’re hoping to do the same with jazz.”

“We’re interested in presenting students with the whole range of jazz expression,” Walsh said. “Our challenge is to give them a wide range of skills, and by bringing in Darmon, we put them in contact with someone who not only is an amazing musician, but also someone who can provide them with an understanding of how to develop and sustain a career.”

Meader is quick to acknowledge that jazz vocalists have not always been given as much credence or attention as instrumentalists in their early development. “Eighteen-year-old instrumentalists have tended to be more advanced musically because of the imbalance of information that is available to them,” he said. “Our goal is to overcome that discrepancy.”

He noted that some students will have a bigger learning curve than others as they learn to “wrap their sound around a lyric,” but added that the new option to major in voice is recognition that vocalists nowadays are expected to have solid instrumental skills.

The program accepts three new students each year; this reflects the school’s philosophy in maintaining a good student-teacher ratio.

“We’re not a cookie-cutter school,” Zegree said. “We give students a lot of personal attention, and that includes one-on-one time with David Baker. Just to be in the same room with him is an inspiration, and there is no substitute for hearing him talk about his time with Freddie Hubbard or touring Europe with Quincy Jones. It’s the same inspiration that IU’s classical students get from seeing [Beaux Arts Trio pianist] Menahem Pressler still at work at the age of 90.”

Although pioneers like Baker and Pressler are still active at IU, today’s music industry is far removed from the world where they made their reputations.

“We have to do our best to embrace change and prepare our students to face the new realities,” Walsh said. One way the school is doing that is through its Project Jumpstart, a collaboration with IU’s Johnson Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation that aims to provide music students with the skills needed to design their professional careers.

But as important as learning business skills is, Zegree stressed that it’s equally essential not to lose touch with the basics of a life in music. In his view, nothing can replace experiences like three IU ensembles had in April when they traveled to New York City to perform at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

“There’s nothing like getting them on the bus,” he said. “That’s life in the real world.” —James Hale



Next-Gen Jazzers: The Monterey Jazz Festival has announced the members of its 2014 Next Generation Jazz Orchestra (NGJO), an all-star big band of 21 high school jazz musicians from across the country. After performing concerts in California and Japan this summer, NGJO will appear at the 57th Monterey Jazz Festival on Sept. 21 with artist-in-residence Eric Harland and will close out the festival as the backing band for Michael Feinstein’s Sinatra Band Project. Five members of the orchestra are returning from previous years: baritone saxophonist Henry Solomon, trombonist Coleman Hughes, trumpeter Andrew Stephens, drummer Cameron MacIntosh and bassist Daryl Johns. The festival runs Sept. 19–21. montereyjazzfestival.org

Institute To Honor Pres ... Clinton: The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz will present President Bill Clinton with its Maria Fisher Founder’s Award Nov. 9 during an All-Star Gala Concert at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. A lifelong devotee of jazz, President Clinton has been a supporter of the institute for more than two decades. The concert—which will bring together Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Terri Lyne Carrington, Ron Carter, Vinnie Colaiuta, Jimmy Heath, Marcus Miller and Dianne Reeves—follows the finals of the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition, where three young players will vie for more than \$100,000 in scholarships and prizes, a guaranteed record contract ... and perhaps a chance to jam with President Clinton.

monkinstitute.org

XRIJF/Eastman Scholarships: Pianist-composer Max Berlin and trumpeter Emanuel Burks have been named the recipients of this year’s Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival/Eastman School of Music Scholarship. They will attend Eastman this fall as freshmen in the Department of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media. esm.rochester.edu

Frost Online: Starting this fall, people seeking graduate-level music education can turn to Frost Online. The new initiative enables the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami to offer two of its music business-related master’s degree programs online, with a third in music therapy to follow early next year. miami.edu



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Mike LeDonne

These days, Mike LeDonne is best known for playing Hammond B-3 in his Groover Quartet, as he does on *I Love Music* (Savant), the latest of his 16 leader dates. But LeDonne, a first-caller since he arrived in New York in 1979, built his considerable reputation playing piano, both as a sideman—with Milt Jackson, Benny Golson, Benny Goodman and others—and as an active combo and trio leader, most recently documented on 2013's *Speak* (Cellar Music).

Jimmy Cobb

"Unrequited" (*The Original Mob*, Smoke Sessions, 2014) Cobb, drums; Brad Mehldau, piano; John Webber, bass.

I think it's Brad Mehldau. Fred Hersch used to do contrapuntal stuff like that. I like the Spanish groove. What Brad does with the block chords is very cool; he's got great two-hand independence. What he's doing took a lot of figuring out. He's not going over-the-top to be new and different, yet I've never heard anything exactly like it. Good bass player. Do I know him? It's hard for me to tell rhythm sections on Latin tunes. I could listen to that some more. 5 stars.

Geoffrey Keezer

"Come Talk To Me" (*Heart Of The Piano*, Motéma, 2013) Keezer, piano.

In college, I saw some Keith Jarrett solo concerts that very much had this vibe. There's some McCoy blended in there, too. Geoff Keezer? He's a helluva pianist. Nice touch. I admire it, he's doing it well, it's pretty, but this folkie-contemporary pop is not my favorite kind of jazz music—4 stars.

Arturo O'Farrill & The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra

"The Mad Hatter" (*The Offense Of The Drum*, Motéma, 2014) O'Farrill, music director; Vijay Iyer, piano, solo; Seneca Black, trumpet, solo; Jim Seeley, John Bailey, Jonathan Powell, trumpets; Tokunori Kajiwara, Rafi Malkiel, Frank Cohen, Earl McIntyre, trombones; Ivan Renta, Peter Brainin, Bobby Porcelli, David DeJesus, Jason Marshall, saxophones; Gregg August, bass; Vince Cherico, drums; Roland Guerrero, congas; Joe Gonzalez, bongos.

[*first piano solo*] Robert Glasper? No? It wouldn't be Jason Moran ...? Orrin Evans? I know he's got a big band. [*clave section*] A Latin guy. I like it. It's in 7. This person really worked on this. The pianist is mixing Chick and Herbie. A lot of awesome writing, but a bit less would be more effective, to my taste. The crazy syncopated rhythms on top of crazy syncopated rhythms starts to get on my nerves; I want to hear something more melodic, not just rhythms coming at me. On the other hand, the pianist is throwing in melodies with both hands. Nice touch, and he has it together harmonically. 3½ stars.

Ralph Peterson's Unity Project

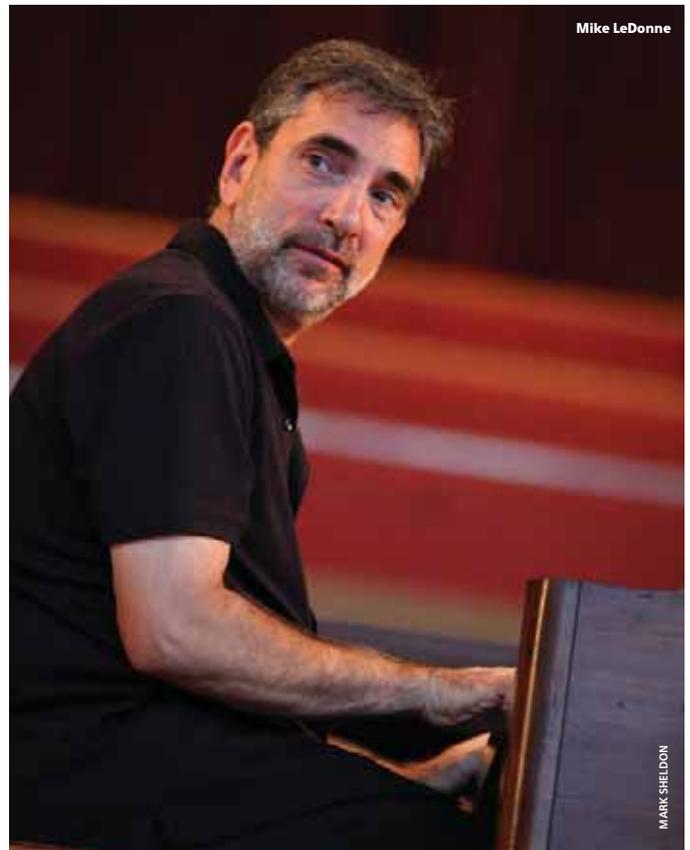
"Ritha" (*Outer Reaches*, Onyx Music, 2011) Peterson, drums; Pat Bianchi, Hammond B-3 organ.

That's Larry Young's tune with a one-word title, which I can't remember. The organist is doing similar intervallic things as Larry Young did, so it's hard to hear his personality. He's playing his ass off, playing beautiful bebop lines, keeping the time. A drum-and-organ thing with no guitar is difficult. Pat Bianchi? The drummer knows the history, playing one step in the past, one step in the future. Holding it back with the brushes, with a nice groove, but just busy enough to make it work. 4 stars.

Aaron Diehl

"The Cylinder" (*The Bespoke Man's Narrative*, Mack Avenue, 2013) Diehl, piano; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; David Wong, bass; Rodney Green, drums.

MJQ. No? Well, it's an MJQ tune. I've heard it a million times. That's Bags. No? They're completely copping the MJQ thing. I think it's Aaron Diehl. Warren Wolf? He sounds great. He's one of the few who's *really* listened to Bags. It's such a fine line between the real thing and hokey. This is close, but no cigar. It was a marvel that MJQ didn't sound hokier, but that's because



Percy Heath and Connie Kay kept it real. [These are] very talented young guys who need more seasoning. The drummer is swinging, but he needs to loosen up that cymbal a tad. Aaron sounds good, but he's imitating John Lewis. Very well done, though, and it will be good for them in the long run. 3 stars.

David Hazeltine Trio

"Horace-Scope" (*Señor Blues*, Venus, 2001) Hazeltine, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Louis Hayes, drums.

Sounds like Hazeltine. I know the tune. Is it by Carl Perkins? Sonny Clark? Peter Washington on bass. Is the drummer Killer Ray [Appleton]? Sounds like an older guy. Louis Hayes. Is it by Buddy Montgomery? Elmo Hope? Rhythm section's poppin'; Dave's playing beautiful stuff. He's got such a nice touch. [*bass solo*] Helluva bass sound. Oh, Horace Silver. "Horace-Scope." Great tune that Horace recorded quintet, so doing it trio brings out another side. Swinging. 5 stars. Dave is one my favorites. He's fiercely independent, and does what he believes in, which I admire.

Gary Versace

"Pinwheel" (*Outside In*, Criss Cross Jazz, 2008) Versace, Hammond B-3 organ; Donny McCaslin, tenor saxophone; Adam Rogers, guitar; Clarence Penn, drums.

Sounds like Brian Charette—disjunct, outside the norm for organ. 7/4. That's all the craze. But it's a nice groove in 7; good job by the drummer. The organist has lots of chops, and sounds loose and comfortable over the vamp, which isn't easy. Makes me think of Larry Goldings; Jared Gold also does stuff like that. Is Seamus Blake on tenor? I hate to say it, but so many guys sound the same to me today—those straight-eighth triplets—so it's hard to tell. It's not Chris Potter; the sound isn't big enough. I haven't listened enough to these guys to tell the subtle differences. I know the organist is trying for something different, but I was distracted by that weird sound—a lot of the higher partials with one low, and the Leslie on. That's a good effect, but I want to hear it for a color, not an entire solo. It's interesting, clever, high musicianship; it tickles my brain, but it doesn't get to my heart. 3 stars. **DB**

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.



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