

ANDREW HADRO

PURSUING A UNIQUE PATH

Baritone saxophonist-composer Andrew Hadro has always bucked the status quo. “I just want to be different,” explained the longtime Brooklyn resident, “and that’s just part of my playing and my whole musical approach.” Rather than follow the path of bop-oriented bari blazers like Ronnie Cuber or Denis DiBlasio, Hadro prefers to play the baritone saxophone in a soft, beautiful, subtle way. And rather than waiting around to be signed to a label, he’d rather do it himself.

“It seems to me that everybody just puts out an album, they go through the motions, spend the money and they just sort of throw it out there into the sea of CDs and hope that something comes back,” said the fiercely independent musician, who has joined forces with pianist-composer Julian Shore to form the aptly named Tone Rogue Records. “I’m not interested in just blanket marketing, having anonymous people maybe check it out in passing. I’m more interested in finding the people who are interested in what I’m doing and connecting more seriously with those people. I’d rather have a few hundred people who really check it out and find it special, put it in their listening playlists and are familiar with it, will come see my gigs, email me and be in touch, as opposed to having 10,000 listeners that maybe heard my music in passing but don’t remember it.”

Fortunately for Hadro, a couple of past jobs—he worked as senior project manager at ArtistShare Records for four years and also was a web designer for fellow musicians—has given him a leg up on other musicians looking to forge their own independent path in the music industry. “What I’ve learned in the last few years really helped me to have the confidence and the knowledge to do all this stuff myself,” he said.

In Tone Rogue, Hadro and Shore have established a platform for fellow jazz musicians who don’t want to go the major-label route. “Maybe they just don’t want to deal with the business stuff on that level or they want to have more control of their music. So, we developed our label, we can generate catalog numbers and everybody can do their own thing. The artists are 100 percent in control of their albums, from album artwork to the music. And it’s actually expanded more than we ever expected.”

Along with Hadro’s two releases (2014’s *For Us, The Living* and 2018’s *For Us, The Living II: Marcescence*) and Shore’s two (2016’s *Which Way Now?* and 2012’s *Filaments*), Tone Rogue also has released recordings by pianist Carmen Staaf



Andrew Hadro is a co-founder of Tone Rogue Records.

JAMES KORN

(2017’s *Day Dream*), guitarist Ricardo Grilli (2017’s *1954*) and saxophonist Andrew Van Tassel (2016’s *It’s Where You Are*).

“These are all people we know and hang out with in Brooklyn, musicians of a similar mindset,” said Hadro, who holds down a day job at Vandoren, where he interacts with saxophonists and clarinetists in both the classical and jazz worlds. “Instead of just going through all the trouble of starting their own DIY label, they came to us and said, ‘Hey, Julian and Andrew, you have experience with this, can you help us out?’ There’s so much to do when you’re an independent artist. If you can get a little help from somebody who has something already done—who has a label or at least a name who has a website already—it just takes a few things off the to-do list.

“Most of the musicians in Brooklyn are all do-it-yourselfers,” Hadro continued, “so, we’re all figuring it out and sharing the knowledge

when we can. So, I wouldn’t mind passing on my knowledge of the business that I have definitely learned the hard way.”

Regarding his renegade approach to bari playing—evident throughout his highly produced *Marcescence*, which was three years in the making and incorporates overdubbed choirs of saxophones and flutes on several tracks—Hadro said: “I’m not necessarily against the blowtorch approach to baritone saxophone. I grew up with Ronnie Cuber. He’s one of my heroes; I’m in awe of his playing. But I’m never going to out-Ronnie Cuber Ronnie Cuber. It’s not that I think that baritone saxophone can’t be a blazing instrument and honk and play low and make loud noises; I just think it should be balanced. There should be an equal amount of delicate, highly arranged or maybe more subtle stuff. There should be more options, more variety.”

—Bill Milkowski

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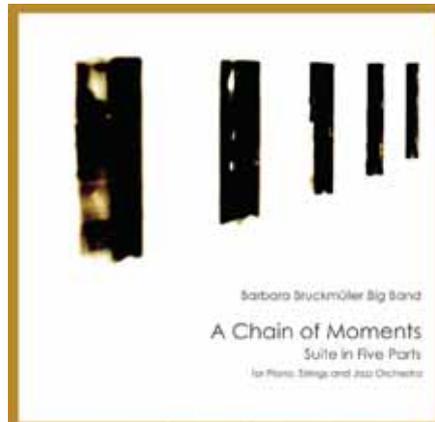
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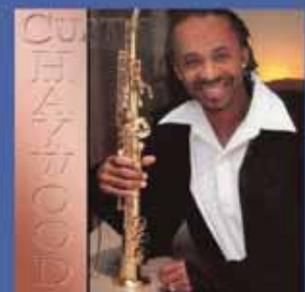
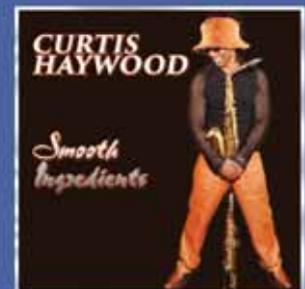
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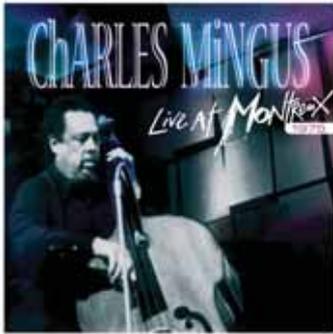
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The lineup features Charles Mingus on bass with Don Pullen on piano, Dannie Richmond on drums, George Adams on tenor sax, and Jack Walrath on trumpet. Gerry Mulligan on baritone sax and Benny Bailey on trumpet join for "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat".



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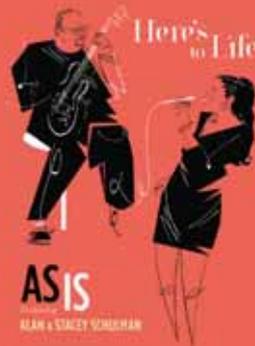
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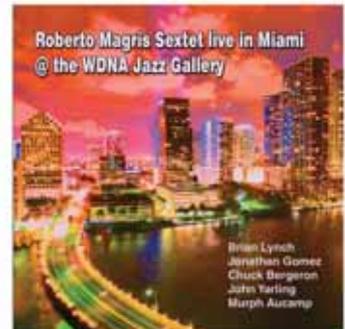
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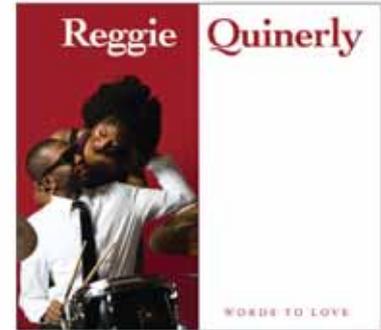


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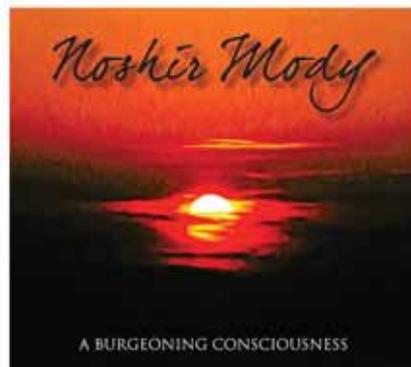
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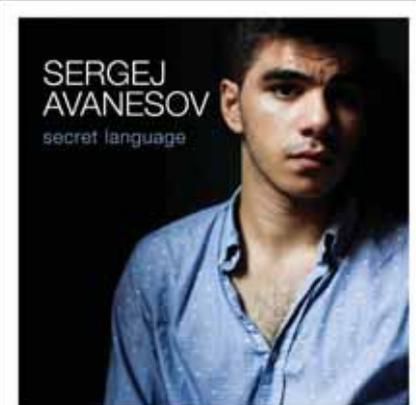


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JUAN ANDRÉS OSPINA



STELLA K

Juan Andrés Ospina relied on an extensive Kickstarter campaign to finance his new album, *Tramontana*.

FULL-TIME ENTREPRENEUR

“I do many things,” said Juan Andrés Ospina, over the phone from his apartment in New York. “I’m a piano player, but I’ve been producing a little bit. I do composing and arranging, and I have a comedy duo with my brother in Colombia. So, I’m not full-time at any specific thing.”

About a decade ago, when he was at Berklee College of Music, Ospina started writing for big band. By his final semester, the pianist had enough material to put on a concert of his music. And for a while, that was that. He made a solo album, *BBB: Barcelona, Bogotá, Boston* (Armored) in 2009, produced and arranged several albums, including singer Luísa Sobral’s platinum debut, *The Cherry On My Cake* (Mercury) and singer Marta Gómez’s Latin Grammy-winning *Este Instante* (Aluna Music), and—with his brother Nicolás—performed in the music/comedy duo Inténtalo Carito, whose YouTube channel has garnered more than 22 million views.

Still, he kept coming back to the big band material. He had the music, but he didn’t have a band. Nor did he have a label willing to bankroll a big band album. “The big band thing is kind of crazy, in economic terms,” he said. “It’s so expensive to do it, and so complicated to put everything together.”

Through his experience as a producer, Ospina knew what was involved in making a recording, so he started planning what would eventually become his new album, *Tramontana*.

The first step, since he didn’t already have a big band at his disposal, was to recruit players.

“It wasn’t really that difficult. Here in New York, there are so many musicians, and many of them are thirsty for music that they enjoy,” he said. “I guess that’s the main reason we all ended up moving here, because we want to be part of projects that we like.”

Once Ospina had the musicians lined up for *Tramontana*, he was able to draw up a budget. That’s when things got serious. “I talked to a couple of friends who are not musicians but are very good at business, trying to get some kind of advice,” he said. “I asked if they thought it was a good idea to try to find a sponsor, but that was very complicated. So, I ended up doing a Kickstarter.”

Ospina wasn’t simply going to ask for money and felt it would be better to have a creative Kickstarter campaign—“or a more entertaining one,” he said, “so that I would maybe attract some people who were not so much into the jazz world.”

This is where his YouTube experience came in handy. “I have a camera that is OK—not a full professional camera, but OK,” he said. “And I know how to edit, and really like to do that. That was the most important tool that I had for the Kickstarter videos.”

That first video, which shows Ospina running around New York with a microphone, recording each player separately, offered a sense of the sound

and size of the project, and also was a nice piece of comedy. But it revealed Ospina’s other secret weapon: Cuban jazz legend Paquito D’Rivera.

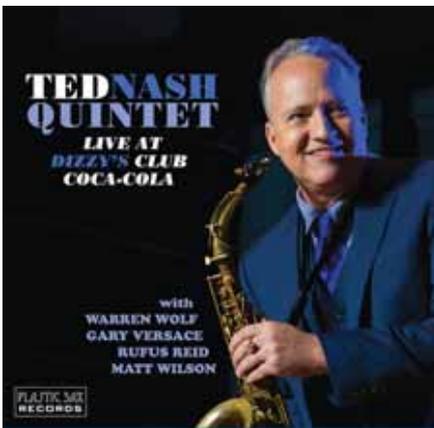
“He saw one of the videos that I did with my brother back in 2012, and was curious. So, he did some research, found out that we were musicians and bought my album. And then after a couple of days, he called me,” Ospina recalled. “He found my phone through Oscar Stagnaro, his bass player, who I met at Berklee, and he was very enthusiastic about the record. He said he wanted to play [“*Todavía No*”], which I arranged later for the big band.”

Ospina’s Kickstarter campaign wasn’t just a single video effort; there were several additional clips, and he even wrote a song, “\$20,000 Samba,” to celebrate reaching \$20,000 in pledges.

“Of course, it was tough,” he said. “I had to work a lot. But it was fun to do.” And it made Ospina a believer in Kickstarter. “For a lot of people, that’s the only way,” he said. “I applied for grants and I tried to find sponsors. Maybe there’s something else that I didn’t think about, but I really couldn’t figure out a way to fund an album of this size with a different tool.

“Technology has brought a lot of pain for creators,” he added, “because nowadays it’s hard to sell music. But at the same time, there are these new tools that were unimaginable a couple years ago. And now, you can fund an album, \$35,000, through people directly. That’s amazing!”

—J.D. Considine



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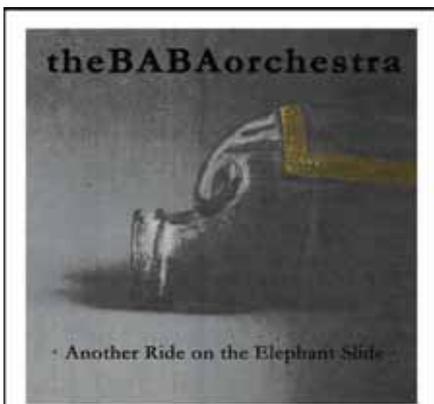


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The group's take on Joe Zawinul's 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy' bursts with energy, featuring trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt** at his most inspired on a soaring solo."
 — Dan McClenaghan, *All About Jazz*

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MOTÉMA MUSIC



Donny McCaslin's second album for Motéma will be released later this year.

FOSTERING INTENSE CREATIVITY

High hopes always accompany the launch of a record label. But many labels falter due to the challenges of today's economy and the changing nature of consumers' buying habits. A select few labels, such as Motéma Music, manage to thrive. Founded in San Francisco and now based in Harlem, Motéma is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year.

Helmed by owner Jana Herzen, Motéma has not only figured out how to weather the storm—it was a steep learning curve, she admitted, one that former Narada executive David Neidhardt helped her negotiate—but has also nurtured the careers of rising-star artists. Singer-songwriter Gregory Porter helped raise the label's profile when his two Motéma albums, *Water* and *Be Good*, each earned Grammy nominations. "After that, artists start-

ed coming to us," Herzen said. Motéma is also home to thrice Grammy-nominated pianist Joey Alexander, whose eagerly anticipated new album is titled *Eclipse*.

One veteran on the roster is Arturo O'Farrill, who has won three Grammys, including this year's Best Instrumental Composition honor for "Three Revolutions" from his 2017 collaboration with Chucho Valdés, *Familia: Tribute To Bebo & Chico*. "Arturo saw that we were doing well and decided to record his large-ensemble Latin jazz projects with us," Herzen said.

Other artists, including vocalist René Marie and pianist Monty Alexander, were impressed by the Motéma aesthetic, which is jazz-based with a groove underpinning, and it showcases artists who compose their own material. "I call it cin-

ematic jazz," Herzen said. "It's jazz that tells a story. There's a dramatic arc from the beginning to the end. With rare exceptions, you won't find people on our label who are doing jazz standards. And even though jazz is a music that takes a lot of chops to play, you won't be hearing artists display their chops from one band member's solo to the next."

Herzen has earned a reputation for encouraging artistic exploration. "Jana wants artists with vision," said saxophonist Donny McCaslin, who is working on his second album for Motéma. "She's not afraid for her artists to break through boundaries. She wants to shake things up." McCaslin's forthcoming album, with its alt-rock and electronica edge, will mark a distinct departure from his previous work. "It's a hybrid style but with no swing," he explained, regarding his new sound. "From being on the road, I felt a change in my music, and it's nothing that I could have imagined playing five to 10 years ago. Jana and her staff have been very supportive."

Motéma operates out of a Harlem brownstone a half-block away from where Art Kane took his iconic 1958 photo known as *A Great Day in Harlem*. The Apollo Theater isn't far away.

Originally Herzen envisioned the label—Motéma means "heart" in the Bantu language of Lingala and Herzen's name means "heart" in German—as a home for high-quality music of any genre. In fact, her impetus for launching the label was to release her African-infused, singer-songwriter album *Soup's On Fire*. But once in New York, she began to establish connections with the city's jazz scene.

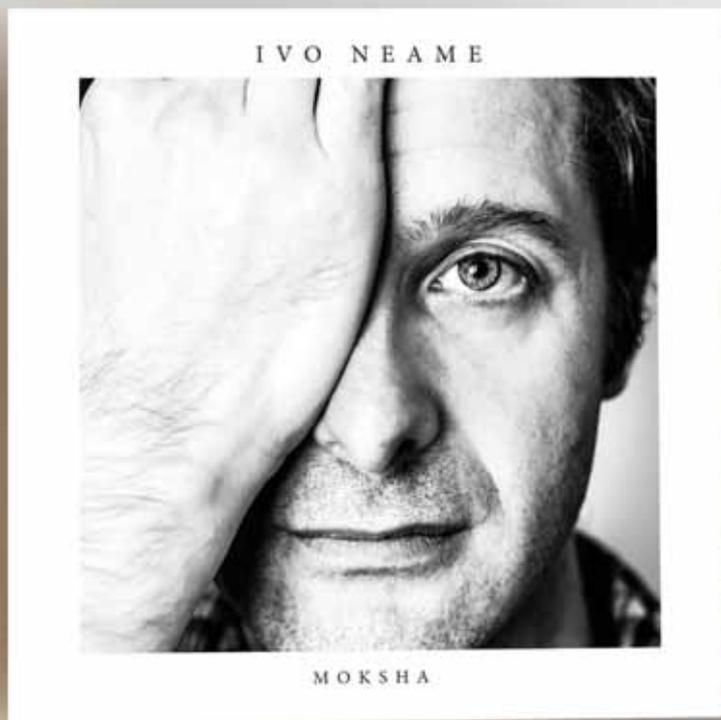
The pivotal moment for Motéma came in 2010 when pianist Geri Allen (1957–2017) sought out Herzen. A veteran of Blue Note and Verve, Allen was seeking the freedom to stretch. "It was amazing when Geri asked to join Motéma," Herzen said. "She made some artistically outstanding albums for us, a total of five. She didn't get the recognition that she should have, but since her passing, you see the rise of women in jazz. There's a shift in the tides, and Geri has been important in that."

Jazz is central to Motéma's vision, as evidenced by upcoming releases from saxophonist David Murray and vibraphonist Stefon Harris. But two of the label's current projects are less jazz-oriented, yet full of the vitality that Herzen champions: electrifying soul singer Deva Mahal (daughter of blues icon Taj Mahal) and the multi-genre international project *Playing for Change*—with its cast of more than 210 musicians, including Buddy Guy, Dr. John and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band—which Herzen described as "the ultimate project of inclusiveness of all cultures."

—Dan Ouellette

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