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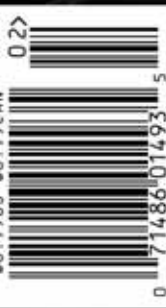
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BY SUZANNE LORGE

The Grammy-winning drummer/producer/bandleader, who recently founded the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice at Berklee College of Music, speaks out about the importance of creating jazz without patriarchy.



JIMMY & DENA KATZ

Terri Lyne Carrington

Cover photo of Terri Lyne Carrington (and portrait above) shot by Jimmy & Dena Katz at Power Station at BerkleeNYC on Nov. 5 in New York City. Info on the facility is posted at powerstation.nyc.

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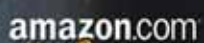
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## Surviving the Jazz Life

### THE FOLKS WHO WORK AT

DownBeat come from all walks of life, but we all have one thing in common—a drive, a passion for music, especially jazz.

Take, for example, Ritche Deraney. Ritche has worked for DownBeat for two decades, currently as vice president of sales. Industry insiders know him as a pro's pro when it comes to promoting this magazine and the music we cover. In his distinctly New York accent, Ritche will tell you—straight up—why DownBeat is the best damn magazine in the world. And don't be surprised if he sells you an ad, too. He's awfully good at his job.



Ritche Deraney

When he's not selling, Ritche plays guitar. He studied at the elbow of his longtime mentor, the late Billy Bauer, one of the great jazz guitar teachers in New York history, and has been a gigging musician his entire adult life. Out of respect for our elders, we won't go into how long that's been. Let's just say he's got amps older than you that he bought brand new.

Ritche recently released *From The Belly Of The Cave*. It's a sweet, five-song EP (all originals) recorded at Jay Dittamo's The Cave Studio in Waldwick, New Jersey. The music is thoughtful, joyful and truthful, just like the guys laying it down. Ritche does his thing on guitar with Dittamo on drums, Bobby Nelson on keyboards and Tim Santo on bass.

The inspiration behind the project is as compelling as the music. Ritche dedicated the record to his friend Kevin J. O'Brien, who passed away in 2016 while battling heroin addiction. And, he is donating 30 percent of the proceeds from this record to Alumni In Recovery (AIR), a volunteer program that supports people in recovery, encouraging them to share their stories with others.

It's a topic that is dear to Ritche's heart. After more than 30 years of clean and sober living, he continues to call himself "recovering." To remain clean, he has led a mightily disciplined life: practicing guitar and taekwondo each morning, attending AA or NA meetings nearly every day and teaching both guitar and taekwondo in the evening. Over the years, Ritche has sponsored and mentored scores of recovering addicts, and frequently shares his personal story with groups or individuals facing the disease.

A dedicated husband to his wife, Maipi, and father to his two grown sons, Chris and Devin, Ritche mentioned another motivation for creating *From The Belly Of The Cave*.

"I want to leave something for my kids," he said. "I wanted to make something for them to remember me by."

"A legacy, Ritche?" I asked.

"Yeah, a legacy."

For any of us who have had the honor of listening to Ritche's story, how he climbed out from the belly of his own cave, that legacy involves more than just his music. It's an ongoing example of sheer willpower and finding the deeper meaning of life.

You can support this cause and enjoy some great music, too, by going to CD Baby, Apple Music or Spotify and searching for Ritche Deraney. **DB**

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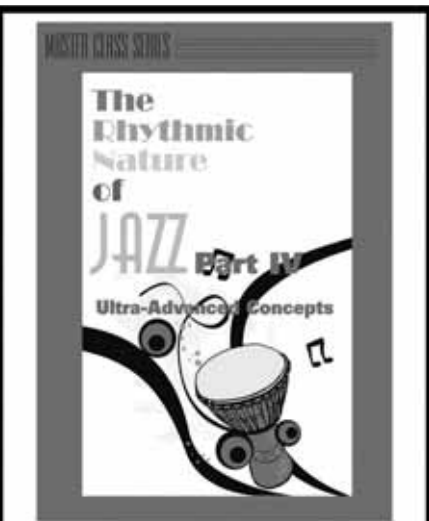
### Rock Star, Indeed

In the January issue, I really enjoyed the article on Donny McCaslin ("Just Be Brave"), detailing his interesting new direction. I went to Seattle in September for my nephew's wedding and took a side trip to Portland, and I was at the Star Theater gig referenced in the article.

As well as taking his music in an art-rock direction, I was struck by how much Donny seemed to resemble David Bowie on stage—both long-legged, red-haired guys, and some of Donny's stances as he played reminded me of Bowie at the mic.

Clearly, the *Blackstar* experience had a major effect on him, in a positive and forward-thinking way, which journalist Robert Ham did a good job of delineating.

MARK GRISSOM  
NEW ORLEANS



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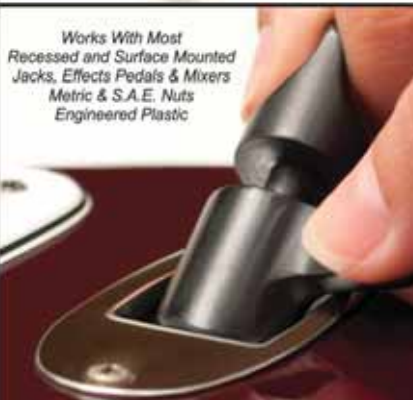
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### Stetson Ref?

I found Geoffrey Himes' article on Derek Brown in the December issue ("Brown's One-Man-Band Approach") to be very informative. It caused me to add Brown to my list of artists who excite me beyond the routine performers who are in trios, quartets and big bands.

Brown credits Sonny Rollins and others as influential in his unusual approach to performing solo on the saxophone.

I was surprised that neither he nor Himes mentioned Michigan native Colin Stetson, whose solo saxophone performances are astounding. Stetson is known mostly by indie rock audiences, but his work with Hamid Drake, Bill Laswell and Evan Parker could have prompted a reference from Himes—even if Brown never considered Stetson an influence.

JAMES DORSEY  
BERWYN HEIGHTS, MARYLAND

### Welcome Return

Thank you for the good news on pianist Joey Calderazzo in your January issue ("Calderazzo Bounces Back"). I am still knocked out by his eponymous Columbia record from 2000. I'm very glad to know that he survived surgery,

and that he will again be gracing us with his tremendous style.

RICHARD FREEMAN  
KENSINGTON, CALIFORNIA

### Bitter Adieu

I have subscribed to *DownBeat* for nearly 30 years, but I had doubts about renewing because your publication has become so annoying due to your increasing fixation on leftist outrage and identity politics—instead of jazz.

The November 2018 issue, however, eliminated any remaining doubts I had about allowing my subscription to expire: I read Geoff Bradfield's essay on Randy Weston, in which Bradfield fretted that, because he is white, his jazz work might be viewed as "an act of cultural appropriation."

Jazz is the one cultural arena where I consistently see people working or listening side-by-side, regardless of race. But I guess the social warriors are going to ruin that, too. Farewell, *DownBeat*.

JOHN LIEBERMAN  
CINCINNATI

### Killer Cuts

I have a suggestion for a category in the *DownBeat* polls: Jazz Song of the Year.

So often there are albums that may not be entirely great, but they contain a single killer track. It would be nice to see recognition for individual tracks.

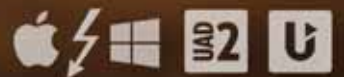
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# Beat

## Tom Oren Wins 2018 Monk Competition

The winner of this year's Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz competition, Tom Oren, hails from Tel Aviv, Israel—a fact that illustrates the international scope of the prestigious contest.

The Monk Competition, which returned after a two-year hiatus, was devoted to the piano for the first time since the 2011 edition. After dazzling the judges at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 3, Oren took home the first prize of a \$25,000 scholarship and a guaranteed recording contract with Concord Music.

Accompanied by drummer Carl Allen and bassist Rodney Whitaker, Oren exhibited a jaunty, capricious wit on his effervescent rendition of Cole Porter's "Just One Of Those Things." Spurred by a brisk tempo, Oren offered melodically cogent, single-note runs that gave way to daredevil passages and feisty interactions during Whitaker's bass solo. Oren also displayed remarkable delicacy and emotional conviction while still conveying a sense of improvisational adventure on a solo reading of "Just As Though You Were Here" (a ballad recorded by Tommy Dorsey & His Orchestra with Frank Sinatra in 1942).

Jason Moran, one of the judges, applauded Oren's willingness to take risks. "When he first started his intro on his first tune, you could hear that he was actually going to try something new but wasn't sure if it was going to work out. But his ideas seemed to keep working out," Moran said. "You could hear him on the edge. He just kept taking these unexpected turns."

The other judges were pianists Renee Rosnes, Joanne Brackeen, Danilo Pérez, Monty Alexander, Cyrus Chestnut and Monk Institute Chairman Herbie Hancock.

Isaiah Thompson, of West Orange, New



Maxime Sanchez (left), Isaiah Thompson and Monk Competition winner Tom Oren pose with Herbie Hancock at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on Dec. 3

PAUL MORIGI/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE MONK INSTITUTE OF JAZZ

Jersey, won the \$15,000 second-place scholarship prize. He performed two superb originals, "A Prayer/Good Intentions" and "The Other Originals." The first one initially sounded like a modern jazz interpretation of a gospel tune from the African American church tradition, before it evolved into a ragtime-like excursion. The rhythmic engine of the latter song bounced between funky backbeats and driving hard-bop swing, as Thompson embroidered the framework with impressive improvisations.

Maxime Sanchez, of Toulouse, France, won the \$10,000 third-place scholarship. His performance was the most unusual of the three. He opened with a solo makeover of Ornette Coleman's "Mothers Of The Veil," on which he approached the melody in an apprehensive fashion before developing a fissured improvisation, marked by quaking tremolos, jolting harmonic dissonance, clipped melodic busts and surpris-

ing turnaround phrases.

This year's competition marked the end of a three-decade long chapter for the Monk Institute. Last month, it announced that beginning in 2019, it will be renamed the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz. The name change involved a request from representatives of the Monk Estate regarding the continued use of Thelonious Monk's name.

When asked if the change will affect any of the institute's educational and advocacy efforts or the competition, longtime president Tom Carter said: "We are keeping all the programs that we currently have. But there will be some expansion with us moving in directions that will very much be addressing the present and future. Herbie has always been—as Thelonious Monk [was] in his time—a groundbreaking force in the music. So, I think you will see Herbie's vision building on top of what we've done in the past."

—John Murph



Catherine Russell

SANDRINE LEE

**About Time:** Vocalist Catherine Russell is set to issue her first recording for Dot Time Records. *Alone Together* is slated for release March 1. The veteran vocalist has worked with musicians as diverse as David Bowie, Dr. John and Madonna, and has issued six previous leader dates. “Catherine is an exquisite vocalist,” said Dot Time CEO Johanan “Jo” Bickhardt in a press release. “No matter what genre she approaches, her prowess and methodology are superb.”

[dottimerecords.com](http://dottimerecords.com)

**Live and Direct:** After three seasons of producing finely crafted box sets for boutique jazz albums, Newvelle Records is set to offer a series of ticketed in-studio events. Planned for New York’s Eastside Sound, visitors will take part in a master class with Grammy-winning producer Marc Urselli and label head Elan Mehler’s trio. A hand-cut lacquer of the session, as well as food and drinks, are a part of the package. Three dates are available: Jan. 20, Feb. 3 and March 24. Admission is \$2,000.

[newvelle-records.com](http://newvelle-records.com)

**At the Beach:** Snarky Puppy’s GroundUP Music Festival returns for its third installment Feb. 8–10 in Miami Beach. Each night will feature the band alongside different performers. And one evening will include Snarky Puppy premiering music from an album set for release in March. Lalah Hathaway, David Crosby, Innov Gnawa and others are also set to perform.

[festival.groundupmusic.net](http://festival.groundupmusic.net)

**Final Bar:** Blues guitarist Jody Williams succumbed to cancer Dec. 1 in Munster, Indiana, at the age of 83. The Alabama-born blues player made a name for himself in Chicago performing with a cast of musicians tied to Chess Records. He partnered with fellow guitarist Hubert Sumlin on early recordings in Howlin’ Wolf’s career, while cutting a few sides under his own name and contributing to work by Bo Diddley, Otis Rush and others. Williams was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2013 and into the Chicago Blues Hall of Fame in 2015.

Nicole Mitchell performs with the Art Ensemble of Chicago at JazzFest Berlin, which ran Nov. 1–4 in Berlin, Germany.



CAMILLE BLAKE

## JazzFest Berlin’s Audacious Program Challenges Attendees

**A FESTIVAL IS SUPPOSED TO BE TOO MUCH** of a good thing. An overabundance of garlic in Gilroy, California, mud-slinging in Boryeong, South Korea, or jazz at locales the world over.

The 55th edition of JazzFest Berlin, which ran Nov. 1–4, involved 100 artists from 15 countries. Yet, it was something more—a demanding program designed to take listeners outside their comfort zones.

The festival’s first female artistic director, 41-year-old Nadin Deventer, spoke about her aesthetic during a pre-festival interview with managing director Thomas Oberender: “Sometimes, the music might sound complicated, but people should stay there and listen to these kinds of conversations and also accept that sometimes you can’t understand everything.”

That translated into endless varieties of free-jazz—none of which allowed listeners to receive music as passive vessels—at main festival venue Haus der Berliner Festspiele. But for all the program’s burn-it-to-the-ground audacity, Deventer carefully curated themes that festivalgoers could elect to follow. These included a Chicago focus: Trumpeter Jaimie Branch, percussionists Makaya McCraven and Hamid Drake, and many AACM-affiliated artists played over three nights. As the festival’s artist-in-residence, guitarist Mary Halvorson gave four concerts with four distinct groups, drawing her own broad, glowing arc. The richest vein was Afrofuturism, with Nicole Mitchell’s Black Earth Ensemble performing its gorgeous, wide-open Octavia Butler-inspired *Mandorla Awakening II*.

With concerts held simultaneously, there was an imperative to make choices count. After Jason Moran’s stunning audiovisual meditation on proto-jazz pioneer James Reese Europe, it made sense to catch Polish piano-and-drums duo Ragtime, which treated the style with bouncy abstraction.

More fruitful was Deventer’s driving belief

that taking jazz beyond concert halls and clubs into unfamiliar spaces is the future of programming: “I thought, if people aren’t coming to us, then we’ll go to them. Then we need to get out of our venues and send a signal that we’re here and we want to be part of this society with our art.”

And so the festival’s “Melancholic Sunday” involved nontraditional venues for morning concerts. A distinctly younger crowd milled around a neighborhood near the Haus der Berliner Festspiele hearing musicians like Jon Irabagon and Ingrid Laubrock in a private apartment, art gallery and hairdresser’s. But Sunday’s apotheosis of altered experience was Silence Meal, involving no speaking whatsoever. With excitement and fear, 40 diners sat down at a long table for a two-hour upscale lunch with Nina Backman, a Finnish multidisciplinary artist. Silence made diners into performance artists, necessitating other means of interaction. Without the hedges of speech, a strange garden of human emotion sprang forth: Clouds of embarrassment and anxiety passed over diner’s faces and boredom bloomed into hilarity. We distracted ourselves with nonverbal toasts, clinking wine glasses just for the joy of the ringing resonance—useful sound, since the silent meal was recorded as “new music.”

Later, I ran into Deventer and offered my impressions of the Silence Meal, which she’d not been able to attend. “So much can happen when we’re awkward and destabilized,” she enthused.

But solo Bill Frisell is neither of those things, and programming him as Sunday’s closing festival act was Deventer’s final stroke of genius. His rich improvisation comes in a tone that embodies Joni Mitchell’s “comfort in melancholy,” and he eased listeners back down to earth with tunes like Thelonious Monk’s “Epistrophy.” It was a JazzFest Berlin lullaby, an invitation to lean back and begin to recover from the demands and rewards of improvising a festival experience for ourselves.

—Michelle Mercer



# Shorter Among Kennedy Center Honorees

OVER THE COURSE OF HIS CAREER, PROLIFIC SAXOPHONIST AND composer Wayne Shorter has amassed numerous accolades, including an NEA Jazz Masters fellowship, induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame and the Recording Academy's Special Merit Award for lifetime achievement. Now, he is a member of the 2018 class of Kennedy Center Honorees—and according to his admirers in the jazz world, it's about time.

"It's long overdue," said vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater, walking the red carpet prior to the Dec. 2 Honors gala at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. "Wayne is a musical genius."

Bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding echoed the sentiment: "I think we all recognize him every day, but it's really beautiful to amplify his magic on this scale."

Spalding was among the musicians who paid tribute to Shorter from the stage of the Kennedy Center's Opera House, where the 85-year-old saxophonist was feted alongside his fellow honorees: country music star Reba McEntire, classical composer Philip Glass, singer-actress Cher and the creative team behind the musical *Hamilton* (writer-actor Lin-Manuel Miranda, director Thomas Kail, choreographer Andy Blakenbuehler and music director Alex Lacamoire).

The onstage segment paying tribute to Shorter began with an ensemble that included pianists Herbie Hancock and Danilo Pérez, saxophonists Joe Lovano and Tineke Postma, bassists John Patitucci and Alphonso Johnson, drummers Brian Blade and Terri Lyne Carrington, and percussionist Alex Acuña. The band, led by Carrington as musical director for this portion of the program, performed a medley of Shorter compositions, including "Footprints," "Elegant People," "Joy Ryder," "Over Shadow Hill Way" and Spalding's vocal arrangement of "Endangered Species."

Opera singer Renée Fleming followed with a bravura performance of Shorter's orchestral piece "Aurora" (with lyrics taken from Maya Angelou's poem "On the Pulse of Morning").

Pianist Jason Moran (the Kennedy Center's artistic director for jazz) and guitarist Bernie Williams also paid tribute to Shorter in short speeches from the stage. "Wayne Shorter is an icon," Moran said. "Many of his hundreds of compositions have become standards. I can safely say that right now, at a jam session somewhere in the galaxy, a band is playing one of his pieces."

More praise for Shorter, whose *Emanon* recently received a Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Instrumental Album, came in video form, first through footage taken the previous evening at the State Department Trustees dinner, hosted by Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan. At the dinner, honorees received their official medallions. "If jazz music traces and describes our voyage on Earth, then Wayne has written a colorful and fertile encyclopedia," said Hancock, Shorter's friend and collaborator of more than 50 years. "His interests lie way outside of the mainstream, and the word 'safe' isn't in his vocabulary."

In a separate video made specifically for the gala, tributes to Shorter were delivered by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, guitarist Carlos Santana and keyboardist Donald Fagen (who collaborated with the saxophonist on the Steely Dan album *Aja*). "Wayne Shorter stays relevant," Marsalis said. "In an era when computers and other things that are nonhuman are being elevated, [the fact] that a master can reconnect you with the magic and the marvel of a human being, with the poignancy and directness that Wayne Shorter does it, it touches everybody."

"You can hear all of creation coming out of his horn," Santana said.

Shorter, who used a wheelchair at the event, remained characteristically humble. Before the gala, he paused on the red carpet to reflect on what the Kennedy Center Honor meant to him: "It means that everything that the people who came before me have done, was not done in vain."

During the tribute segment at the gala, Shorter could be seen wiping tears from his eyes.

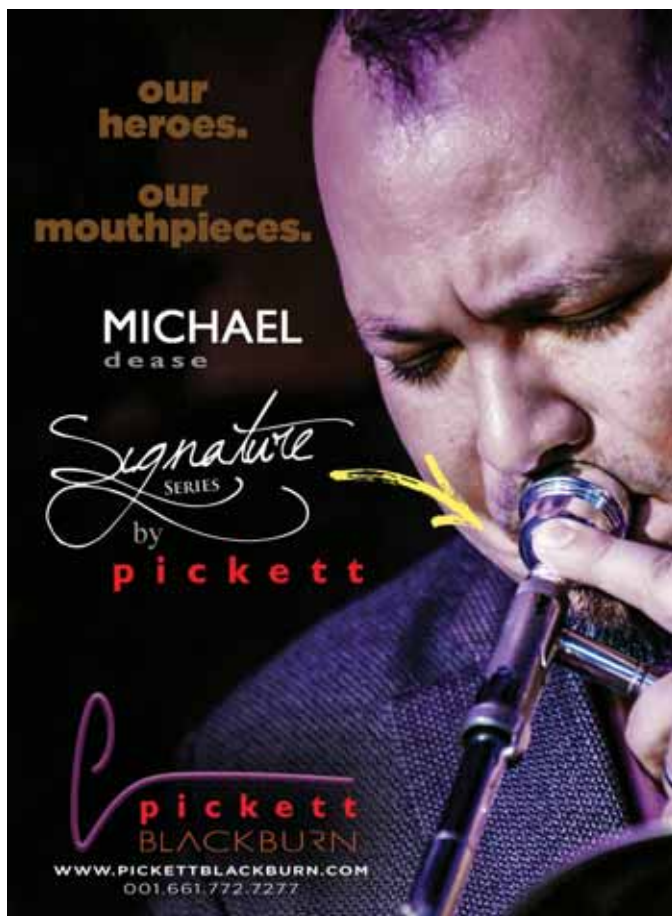


John Patitucci (left), Tineke Postma, Herbie Hancock, Joe Lovano and Danilo Pérez pay tribute to Wayne Shorter on Dec. 2.

Following the gala in the Opera House, a select group of attendees was invited to a large banquet. Tucked among the hundreds of dinner guests in the Kennedy Center's Grand Foyer was a jazz septet featuring musicians from Washington, D.C. As diners enjoyed appetizers, the band played "Footprints," with trumpeter Graham Breedlove and bassist Zack Pride offering impressive solos. It was yet another reminder of the scope of Shorter's artistry.

The Kennedy Center Honors event was filmed for TV broadcast on CBS as a two-hour special, scheduled to air on Dec. 26 at 8 p.m. ET.

—Michael J. West



# Karen Sharp: On the Low End

**MICHELLE OBAMA PROBABLY WASN'T** speaking to alto and soprano saxophonists as she declared, "When they go low, we go high." And certainly Karen Sharp didn't take it as a musical directive. But the fact is that the British tenor and baritone saxophonist does prefer the lower depths, musically speaking. This, among other stylistic elements, is evident on her latest album, *The Sun, The Moon And You*, slated for release in the U.K. this spring on Trio Records.

Sharp loves melody, whether composed or improvised, as reflected in her relaxed and natural phrasing. Rather than zoom upward, her solos often wind downward, despite Obama's advice. "I just love the lower sounds," Sharp admitted. "In an ensemble, I love playing the bottom end."

It took her a while to reach this epiphany. Growing up near the North Sea coast in Suffolk, Sharp initially studied classical music. By the time she entered the Royal Northern College of Music, though, premonitions of her segue into jazz could be discerned, particularly as a composition teacher encouraged Sharp to analyze the repertoire harmonically, as if sketching a lead sheet.

More significantly, Sharp began playing saxophone at 16, when another teacher lent her an alto. "And he made me a compilation tape," she recalled. "It had Al Cohn and Zoot Sims' 'You'd

Be So Nice To Come Home To,' some Lester Young and a lot of other stuff. I'd play along to it in my bedroom until I had a moment when I somehow got how the harmony worked. I thought, 'Wow, that's amazing.' It was my first taste of what it was like to improvise."

Having made that connection, Sharp began realizing she felt drawn more toward instruments below the alto range. Dexter Gordon's tone became a guideline of sorts as she switched to tenor. She also absorbed the sound and feel of Joe Henderson, Sonny Rollins and Stan Getz in his lower range. Later, having graduated and launched her professional career, she went lower still, when Humphrey Lyttleton hired her to replace Kathy Stobart in his band. Since Stobart's baritone was a hallmark of his arrangements, Sharp added one to her arsenal.

Much of her post-Lyttleton work involved collaboration with pianist Nikki Iles, whom she first heard in Manchester on a job with bassist David Green. Both of them join her on *The Sun, The Moon And You*, with drummer Steve Brown rounding out the lineup.

"Dave is in his mid-70s going on 20," Sharp said, smiling. "He and Steve go back a long way together, too. And Nikki is amazing, really good fun. Where she comes from musically really suits



MONIKA S. JAKUBOWSKI

**Karen Sharp's latest album was recorded in a single day.**

me down to the ground."

It took just one day for them to record the new album, with no more than two takes on any track. From the rubato intro to the drums-and-tenor first half-verse on "Get Out Of Town" to a loving interpretation of Ron Carter's "Little Waltz" and on to "Iris," an Iles original that she and Sharp previously recorded, arrangements basically were inspired during the session.

Sharp's calendar includes upcoming gigs with various groups throughout Europe; for now, shows in the U.S. exist only on her wish list. But with luck, that might change. On her priorities list, for this one, she goes high. —Bob Doerschuk



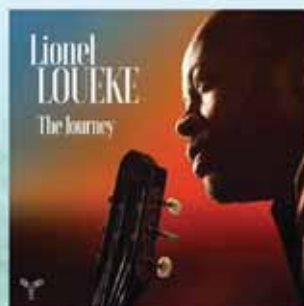
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Gary Burton, seen here in a vintage publicity photo, has a new Mack Avenue anthology titled *Take Another Look: A Career Retrospective*.

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES



## Box Set Spans Burton's Boundless Career

**GARY BURTON'S NEW RELEASE ENCAPSULATES** a remarkable, unprecedented career. In his first interview in about two years, Burton recently discussed his five-LP, 35-track compilation, *Take Another Look: A Career Retrospective* (Mack Avenue).

"I'm humbled to see the range of experience that's here and what that added up to," he said over the phone from his home in Florida. "To know that your music can be listened to for decades is special."

The most influential four-mallet vibraphonist of modern jazz—who spent 33 years at Berklee College of Music in the roles of professor, dean and executive vice president—"stepped back" in 2017 from his six-decade career because of health issues. "I first recorded in 1960 when I was 17," he noted, "so I had a fulfilling career."

Burton even bequeathed the bars of the vibraphone that he'd owned since high school to a Berklee grad, Vid Jarnik. "The bars are the only things that really count," Burton said. "I'd gotten new frames and resonators over the years, but it's the bars that make the instrument. Funny thing is, I don't miss the vibraphone." He no longer owns one, instead playing the piano, which was his first instrument as a young prodigy. (He also won a national marimba contest when he was 9.)

*Take Another Look* includes tunes that

Burton and compilation co-producer Nick Phillips felt best represented his identity. "It had been a long time since I heard the older records from 30 years ago, so I had to do a lot of listening," said Burton, who was approached three years ago to consider the project by Denny Stilwell, president of Mack Avenue. The imprint released the vibraphonist's final studio date in 2013.

The anthology includes tracks from Burton's tenure with RCA, Atlantic, ECM, GRP, Concord Jazz and Mack Avenue. It also features a dazzling array of collaborators, such as Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Astor Piazzolla, Stéphane Grappelli and Carla Bley, as well as guitarists Pat Metheny, John Scofield and Julian Lage.

Country icon Chet Atkins helped get Burton signed to RCA Victor, which issued his leader debut, *New Vibe Man In Town*, in 1961. Burton's 11 albums for the label frequently explored a blend of jazz and country music, resulting in Americana recordings like *Tennessee Firebird*.

Burton then moved to the Atlantic label. There he ranged from rocking out the Gil Evans tune "Las Vegas Tango" on *Good Vibes* (1970) to taking a wild live ride at the Montreux Jazz Festival with bandoneon legend Piazzolla on "Nuevo Tango." "We didn't think we had connected," Burton said of the Montreux show.

"We went on after midnight, after Miles Davis went long, and we were exhausted from touring. I felt it was not my best night, but I took the tapes home and it was great." The concert was released in 1987 as *The New Tango* and became one of Burton's biggest hits.

The vibraphonist said the wide variety of his artistic pursuits was based on creative intuition. "With the country and jazz, then the rock and jazz, I never set out to try a trend," he said. "I just wanted to play different music. I was always different. I liked playing with four mallets, because I wanted to be able to play harmony and chords. I had always been musically restless, which is why I also wanted to try out playing tango."

During his ECM years, label owner Manfred Eicher decided to record Corea and Burton as a duo, which the pair didn't think would work. "It [was] too esoteric," Burton said. "But we were finally convinced and we recorded *Crystal Silence* [1973]. Then we were to go on the road. I thought, 'Here we are in a 4,000-seat concert hall at the University of Michigan, and we're going to look like two mice on stage playing introspective chamber music.' Pat [Metheny], who was in my band at the time, was so excited that he volunteered to carry my vibes, so he could go. Well, it sold out. And eventually the album sold the most of any of my albums."

After a string of ECM dates featuring Metheny, Burton signed on to GRP for eight albums over the course of eight years, playing music from the Benny Goodman songbook to his biggest adventure at the time: the 1991 album *Cool Nights*. "This was my attempt to see if I could sell smooth jazz, which was so predictable and repetitive, with music that wasn't brain-dead," he said. "The DownBeat reviewer said that it was the best elevator music ever heard, and the album sold the least of anything in my catalog."

For his final quartet with Lage, bassist Scott Colley and drummer Antonio Sánchez, Burton recorded two Mack Avenue albums: *Common Ground* and *Guided Tour*. He said it was one of the best bands he'd played with.

Lage considers his learning experience with Burton a touchstone: "Gary has always been so generous," he said. "He was exemplary in all ways. Gary understood all the angles of the music, from Americana to avant-garde. I had been a fan of his music as a youngster from the *Duster* album [1967] to all the work he had done with Metheny. I continue to be deeply moved by how honest and sincere and soulful he had been with all styles of music. Everything ends up sounding like authentic Gary Burton."

Burton's got an important gig coming up, though: playing borrowed vibes for his grandson in Los Angeles at a school show-and-tell session: "I'll have to get in shape to let my grandchildren see what I used to do," he said.

—Dan Ouellette



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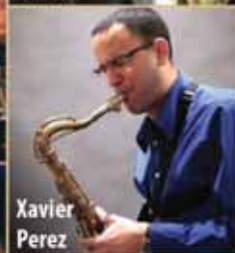
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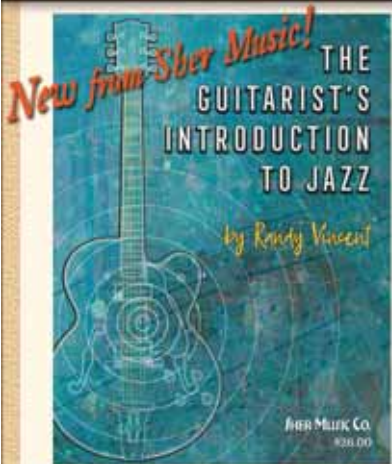
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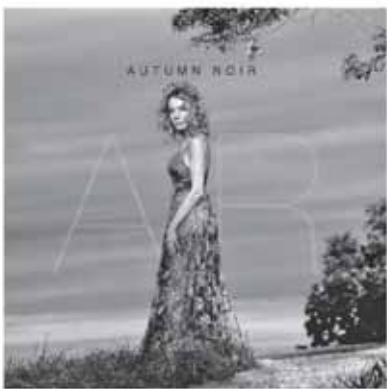




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## Obligations of a Big Ego

When Chris Schlarb opened Big Ego studios in his hometown of Long Beach, California, in March 2016, he didn't also intend to start releasing records. But as a succession of gifted—and relatively unheralded—artists passed through, the 41-year-old producer, musician and engineer felt a growing sense of obligation toward them.

"We were doing all these records that I knew were great," Schlarb said. "And I was afraid they would end up going out into this digital wasteland."

So, at the beginning of 2018, Schlarb launched Big Ego Records as a vinyl subscription series. For \$85 a year (plus tax and shipping), patrons get four limited-run records annually, shipped two at a time. The label, like its owner—best-known for his experimental groups *Psychic Temple* and *I Heart Lung*—is genre agnostic, though each pair of albums is intended to be complementary. After debuting Big Ego with a pair of folk and bluegrass outings, Schlarb, who produces each Big Ego release in-house, turned his attention toward two releases that fall loosely under the heading of jazz, though both experiment with the form in intriguingly different ways.

*Forest Standards, Vol. 1* is the debut leader date from Wichita, Kansas, guitarist David Lord, whom Schlarb discovered 10 years ago when he shared a bill with Lord's post-rock group *Solagget*. "I heard this sweetness in his playing," Schlarb said. "A very thoughtful, melodic, Midwestern jazz quality I always associate with early Pat Metheny." Though Lord has a style all his own, the Metheny comparison is apt; even when he's exploring the dissonant spaces between his tricky progressions, there's a lightness to his tone that makes the compositions feel less experimental than they are.

To accompany the 36-year-old guitarist, Schlarb brought in bassist Devin Hoff, best-known for his work with Nels Cline and art-rockers *Xiu Xiu*, and veteran drummer Chad Taylor (*Chicago Underground Duo*, *Marc Ribot*). The trio never had played together before—a hallmark of Schlarb's work at Big Ego, where he prides himself on putting together musicians from disparate backgrounds who he thinks will have interesting chemistry together. The results speak for themselves: *Forest Standards, Vol. 1* is a fascinating record, full of slippery arrangements that allow all three players to showcase their endlessly creative approaches to their instruments.

Taylor resurfaces on the other album in Big Ego's late-2018 pairing: *Quartet & Double Quartet*, from Long Beach bassist An-



Chris Schlarb

DEVIN O'BRIEN

thony Shadduck. On the album's first half, Shadduck leads guitarist Jeff Parker, pianist Cathlene Pineda and drummer Dylan Ryan through four variations on modal compositions, including Ornette Coleman's "Law Years," which the quartet sets beautifully adrift in floating free time, and a Schlarb tune, "The Starry King Hears Laughter," which Pineda illuminates with a Brad Mehldau-like sense of harmony and restraint.

The double quartet, by contrast, pays homage to Coleman's classic takes on the titular configuration, even as it careens into new terrain. To match Taylor's shifty, polyrhythmic drumming, Schlarb and Shadduck brought in longtime Lou Reed sideman and Paul Motian acolyte Danny Frankel, who could keep up with Taylor, even as he gave the arrangements a rock drummer's sense of forward momentum. "I love that combination," Schlarb said. "They're such wildly different personalities." The double quartet also features Shadduck and David Tranchina on bass, Alex Sadnik and Phillip Greenleaf on reeds and, crucially, trumpeter Kris Tiner and multi-instrumental brass player Danny Levin. The latter pair's wild interplay gives the material a loose, carnivalesque quality that saves it from becoming an overly intellectual exercise in free-jazz revisionism.

Future Big Ego releases are set to include not just jazz, but more folk, Americana, post-rock and even experimental pop music. The common thread will be Schlarb's clean, uncluttered production style and his never-ending quest to push musicians outside their comfort zones. "There should be an element of fear," he said. "Being afraid before a session is such a healthy and exciting feeling. It puts you on edge. It makes you want to do things you haven't done before."

DB



Laurin Talese (left), Toscha Comeaux, Oleg Akkuratov, Gabrielle Cavassa and Olivia Chindamo perform at the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition on Nov. 18 in Newark, New Jersey.



# Laurin Talese Wins Sarah Vaughan Vocal Competition

**Laurin Talese has spent countless** hours as a vocal teacher emphasizing the importance of breath control to students. On Nov. 18, she made the point emphatically as she captured first place in the 7th Annual Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition.

The classically trained, Philadelphia-based singer synthesized strong vocal technique with musical passion to emerge on top in the competition finals at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark. Talese received a \$5,000 cash prize and was guaranteed a performance slot at the 2019 Newport Jazz Festival.

On all three of her numbers at the finals, Talese was about as complete a performer and singer as you could ask for, thanks to a combination of natural talent and the commitment she has made to developing her vocal chops.

"It comes from years of being in love with the music and taking my time and taking the songs that I love and trying to do them better," she said.

Second place went to Oleg Akkuratov, a pianist and vocalist who teaches at the Rostov State Conservatory in Russia. Only the second man to perform in the finals of the competition (following a rule change last year that allowed in male singers), Akkuratov received a \$1,500 cash prize.

Toscha Comeaux, a native of Hartford, Connecticut, finished third and took home \$500.

The other finalists were New Orleans-based Gabrielle Cavassa and Olivia Chindamo, an Australian who now calls New York home.

The singing competition—the final event of the TD James Moody Jazz Festival at NJPAC—was open to solo vocalists who were not signed to a major label. More than 600 men and women globally applied to the competition. Through three rounds of public voting, the field was narrowed to five candidates. The 173 eligible entrants represented 41 different countries.

The judges for the finals were vibraphonist

Stefon Harris, NJPAC's artistic advisor of jazz education; trumpeter Jon Faddis; vocalist-composer Nnenna Freelon; Mary Ann Topper, president of artist management company Jazz Tree Inc.; and Sheila E. Anderson, an on-air host with Newark public radio station WBGO.

Providing musical accompaniment for the singers was a trio led by pianist and musical director Sergio Salvatore, with Gregory Jones on bass and Buddy Williams on drums.

Talese filled her performances with a variety of subtle flourishes. On "The Very Thought Of You," she brought an operatic splendor to the standard, her voice filled with a beautiful smoothness. When she shifted into medium-tempo mode on "Something Happens To Me," she loosened up the rhythm while honoring the song's emotional integrity. During her performance of "Save Your Love For Me," the fruits of the hours Talese spent laying the groundwork for acrobatic vocal feats clearly were evident.

"This year's class of singers are unique in their styles, but in their voices you can hear the history and respect for [the artists who] came before," said NJPAC CEO John Schreiber.

Comeaux—a singer whose hallmark is her power—kicked things off with "You Turned The Tables On Me" and a scat-sung medium-tempo blues based on Vaughan's own "Sassy's Blues."

She was followed by Cavassa, who put a spare style and horn-like sound to good use on "Stardust" and "I've Never Been In Love Before."

Then came Akkuratov—a blind musician who accompanied himself on piano—joined by Jones and Williams. Akkuratov performed a Latin-flavored version of "Nature Boy," blending scatting, crooning and note-bending as he sang. He then downshifted into an intimate take of "Skylark."

Talese is set to appear at New York's Birdland Theater on Feb. 5.

—Michael Barris



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Joel Ross (left), Harish Raghavan, Matthew Stevens, Walter Smith III and Marcus Gilmore have a new album on Whirlwind Recordings.

## On Common Ground

**IN COMMON, A NEWLY FORMED QUINTET,** had a day-and-a-half to record its debut album. So, the co-leaders—tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III and guitarist Matthew Stevens—knew they couldn't ask their bandmates to learn new material with odd meters, multiple sections or through-composed themes. On the other hand, they didn't want to settle for just recording standards or merely blowing on short vamps.

This challenge threw the leaders back on some old-fashioned virtues: clear structures, rhythmic tension and strong melodies. The album's seven original compositions all feature fluid, singable themes, juxtaposed with quirky

rhythmic figures. Only two tracks are uptempo, and all 10 tracks clock in at less than six minutes. The resulting album, *In Common*—credited to Smith, Stevens, Joel Ross, Harish Raghavan and Marcus Gilmore—proves that minimalist moves can yield a powerfully emotional experience.

"That was the challenge: to write something that was clear and accessible without dumbing things down," Stevens, 36, said. "So, everything became very concise. It sounded like another era in a way, before long-playing records. We didn't want to have three long improvisations on every track; to drone on like that would be to lose sight of the purpose of the record. For me, parame-

ters like that can be liberating, because they let you know what you're trying to do. They can bring out a different side of people's playing. Each improvisation on this record feels like a continuation of what came before, not like this guy doing his thing and the next guy doing his thing."

"We didn't talk about it much," Smith, 38, said. "But neither of us wrote much fast music. That's fine with me; I'm sick of fast music. When I was younger, I remember all my favorite artists—Kenny Garrett, Michael Brecker, Joshua Redman—got to a point in their careers where they all did some slower music. At the time I didn't understand it; I thought, 'Why wouldn't they do that fast, hard stuff?' ... When speed and long solos aren't the point, what comes out is a different kind of beauty."

If the format is traditional, the vocabulary is modern. Smith and Stevens long had wanted to do a project together, and when Stevens wound up with a prepaid day at the Clubhouse studio in Rhinebeck, New York, last winter, the two men decided to take advantage of it.

In *Common* isn't intended to be a touring band, though the quintet is hoping to play a few dates to mark the album's release. But Smith and Stevens are looking to record multiple albums under the moniker, each time with different collaborators. If so, the band could become akin to Steely Dan in the mid-'70s—an unchanging duo joined by a rotating cast. —Geoffrey Himes

## Hedvig Mollestad Eschews Stylistic Purity

**NORWEGIAN GUITARIST HEDVIG** Mollestad learned music through a jazz lens. Her father, Lars Martin Thomassen, was a professional flugelhornist who worked with reedist Jan Garbarek in the mid-'70s, and she studied under the highly respected guitarist Jon Ebersson, but points out that she's never experienced or played music with any sort of stylistic purity. As with most musicians her age, Mollestad, 36, grew up listening to all sorts of stuff, and her muscular trio reflects that sort of multiplicity. *Smells Funny* (Rune Grammofon), the bracing sixth album from her trio with bassist Ellen Brekken and drummer Ivar Loe Bjørnstad, toggles among meaty riffs redolent of Black Sabbath, overdriven improvisations and impossibly heavy grooves.

"We don't think in terms of 'jazz or rock' when we work," said Mollestad. "There is one big bag of fantastic music that we have listened to, and I think our music is a dip into that bag, containing anything from Jim Hall to Stravinsky, grunge, Brit-pop, prog-psychedelia, bebop and avant-garde whatnot." The trio came together in 2009 while its members were students at the Norwegian Academy of Music. And after a short time playing jazz standards almost bereft of joy, the group found its calling when the musi-

cians cranked up the volume and began injecting doses of hard rock. The trio's 2011 debut, *Shoot!*, emerged from a small community of Scandinavian musicians applying the improvisational rigor and harmonic complexity of jazz to ferocious prog-rock and post-metal—groups like Elephant9 and Scorch Trio. But none have operated with the same sense of purpose as Mollestad's trio, which is driven by a desire to bring unrelenting intensity to its live performances.

"When we've made our last two records, our goal wasn't to make the best record ever," she said. "It was to be a version of ourselves where we are right now." That version just happened to make the trio's strongest record yet with *Smells Funny*, a pointed reference to Frank Zappa's ubiquitous quote about the health of jazz. The trio is too busy crafting massive, exploratory jams as a tightly wound ensemble to spend time wondering about where the music belongs. "We play dirty jazz clubs in cellars around Poland, Royal Festival Hall at London Jazz Festival, supporting John McLaughlin, with a sitting audience on balconies, and the next day a head-banging crowd in a small club in Paris."

When the band formed, Hedvig wrote nearly all of the material, but over the years the whole



Guitarist Hedvig Mollestad (center) said her band doesn't think in terms of "jazz or rock."

trio became involved in developing compositions: "I think our interplay is almost like a fourth member in the band," explained Brekken. "We have also been playing so many concerts, and hung out so much together in cars, airports and so on that we really know each other inside and out."

Although each member brought in pieces for the new record, in the end it's all credited to the trio. "It is a goal that everybody contributes riffs, songs or melodies," said Mollestad. "The music gets better that way." Indeed, *Smells Funny* is the group's most unified effort, simultaneously riding hypnotic, hard-hitting grooves where Brekken's authoritative lines provide an indestructible backbone for the guitarist's journeys between outer space and deep earth. —Peter Margasak



# Bowers Explores Shirley's Work for 'Green Book' Film

**THE LATE PIANIST DON SHIRLEY (1927–2013)** straddled the worlds of jazz and classical throughout his prolific career. Born in Jamaica, Shirley was a piano prodigy, debuting with the Boston Pops Orchestra at the age of 18. Through the 1950s and '60s, he released dozens of albums on Cadence Records from meditations on ancient Greek myths to straightforward interpretations of the Broadway hit parade. He had a measured sound, fond of chamber-esque instrumentation and poise, more introspective than raucous.

The new film *Green Book* is an embellished look at Shirley's two-month tour of the American South in the early 1960s. Directed by Peter Farrelly and starring Mahershala Ali as Shirley, the film is a sweetly turbulent road trip, full of holiday warmth and period pop songs. Viggo Mortensen co-stars as Shirley's brash foil, Tony Lip, an oafish Italian-American bouncer whose anger has limited his options for regular employment. Young jazz pianist Kris Bowers wrote the score and more.

The title of the film comes from a guide book published and used by African Americans in the 20th century to help navigate the hostility of a divided America with a listing of black-owned and non-discriminatory businesses throughout the country. Long before the internet, it was the most respected and widely used source for bypassing the antagonism of segregation, like a AAA guide that also takes into account virulent racism.

For those looking for a history of the green book and its relevance to American history, this is a good introduction, but far from a deep dive into a necessity for many travelers. The movie is primarily focused on the relationship between Ali and Mortensen, an inverted *Driving Miss Daisy* with a better sense of swing.

"The first time I heard about him was when I got the script," Bowers said of Shirley by telephone. "He reminded me a lot of other musicians from that era dealing with similar things—John Lewis, Nina Simone. He was another person trying to figure out how to showcase his classical training and his music."

While Shirley was a prolific and successful artist in his time, his legacy has faded since the release of his last album in 1972, *The Don Shirley Point Of View*. His delicate precision and cross-genre style fell between the cracks of music history, neither heralded by jazz circles nor the classical world. When he died at the age of 86, much of his catalog was out of print.

Ali plays Shirley as a man often too refined for his surroundings. Mortensen is his compan-

Mahershala Ali (right) portrays pianist Don Shirley in the film *Green Book*.



PATTI PERRET/UNIVERSAL PICTURES, PARTICIPANT, AND DREAMWORKS

ion, out of his comfort zone in virtually any environment that isn't close to a pot of bubbling red sauce. Ali first appears on screen as a robed mystic living above Carnegie Hall. Mortensen opens the film busting heads on behalf of the Copacabana nightclub's management. Both characters move toward an agreeable center the further south they travel, bonding before a backdrop of roadside attractions and concert venues that range from living rooms to concert halls.

Bowers has been making waves writing for film and television during the past five years. In 2011, he won the Thelonious Monk Piano Competition and in 2017 a Daytime Emmy award for his music on the new children's classic *A Snowy Day*. He also has scored documentaries about Norman Lear and Kobe Bryant, but *Green Book*, which recently was nominated for five Golden Globe Awards, is his biggest scoring endeavor yet.

"I've been wanting to do this since I was 8. It's always been a part of my life plan," he said.

Bowers, who took orchestration classes while studying at Juilliard, was given a lot of room to

explore—more than he expected. "[The filmmakers] let me write something that fits. A lot of times you have to match temp music or appease a director, be someone they couldn't afford to hire," he said.

Ali's piano performance is wonderfully convincing. He parries from glowing Steinways to juke-joint uprights with a natural flow that looks as though he had been playing piano for years. He had not: Bowers was Ali's piano teacher.

"He's a really quick learner," the pianist said about Ali. "I figured we'd start with a major scale. He played the C major scale for three hours. He was so intensely focused, I had to interrupt him physically to get him to stop."

There were a few scenes for which Ali's skills were not up to snuff, though. Bowers' hands were offered an acting opportunity, serving as Ali's stand-in. "Having to learn all that music was pretty scary," Bowers said. "I went back to practicing eight or nine hours a day. It was nerve-racking to get those things done in one, two, maybe three takes. They're not going to spend an entire day to get one song right."  
—Sean J. O'Connell



Terri Lyne Carrington at Power Station at BerkleeNYC on Nov. 5 in New York City



TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

# 'TRANSFORM THE CULTURE'

BY SUZANNE LORGE | PHOTOS BY JIMMY & DENA KATZ

What would jazz without patriarchy sound like? It's a provocative question—and one that drummer Terri Lyne Carrington seeks to answer.

To this end, she founded the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice at Berklee College of Music, inaugurated at an open house at the Boston campus on Oct. 30. Through the institute, Carrington, who serves as artistic director, and her board of prominent thought-leaders will help to guide select groups of music students across the rocky terrain that lies at the intersection of jazz, gender and our modern culture. No small undertaking.

To start, one must understand that “the work of achieving gender justice is not ‘women’s work,’” said Dr. Farah Jasmine Griffin, author and professor of English, comparative literature and African American studies at Columbia University. In her keynote address at the open house, she stated the case clearly: “Gender justice implies a politic where boys and girls, men and women, cis- and transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary persons—everyone is valued equally and shares in the equitable distribution of power, knowledge and resources.”



"There are plenty of guys who would vote for a woman president before hiring a woman in their band," Carrington said.



Despite the clarity of Griffin's explanation, the phrase "gender justice" might not conjure up ready images for many people. So, in a post-launch interview, Carrington spoke to some common misconceptions about gender justice and how the institute will enact it: No, the institute won't be about all-female ensembles and segregating musicians into washroom categories. But it will be about musicians all along the gender spectrum—female, male, non-conforming and non-binary—working together to create music that rises above social constructs based on seeming biological differences. In large part, this work will be corrective, Carrington said, and a challenge to the basic underpinnings of patriarchy, the system by which women and non-normative individuals are disenfranchised.

"I loved how Farah commented [in the keynote] that we could have said 'jazz without sexism' instead of 'jazz without patriarchy,' except that sexism is really just a by-product of patriarchy," Carrington said.

Patriarchy, a hot-button word in and of itself, is not a topic that often comes up in jazz circles. The omission has puzzled Carrington, given that jazz musicians were at the forefront of political activism during the civil rights era in the States.

"Why is [jazz] so ass-backwards when it comes to gender?" she asked. "Racial justice mattered to many of the people who created this music because it was affecting them directly.

And gender justice may not be as important to the men at the helm of this genre. But all of these [justice issues] are interconnected. I don't see how you can be concerned about racial justice and have no concern about gender justice."

How men in positions of authority treat women—a core issue at the heart of many discussions about patriarchy—came to dominate the national dialogue in late 2017 with the rise of the #MeToo movement, when millions of women globally took to social media to speak out against sexual harassment and abuse at all levels of society. In joining this conversation, several female jazz musicians began to talk publicly about the harassment they had experienced at some of the country's leading jazz schools—Berklee among them. (See sidebar on page 28.)

While the timing of the institute's launch seems propitious in light of the #MeToo movement, Carrington had begun laying the groundwork in 2015. But the galvanizing event that spurred her to action was a meeting of the Women in Jazz Collective in 2017, during which female Berklee students spoke about the same kinds of harassment and denigration that, in the wake of #MeToo, would result in the firings of numerous high-profile men in the fields of politics, media and entertainment.

"What led me to the work [on the institute] were the stories that I heard," Carrington, 53, said about the meeting. "It made me think that I've got

to try to do something. Because I would get angry listening to these young women talk about [their experiences]. ... I thought, I can't rest just because I have a nice career. And it's more than asking, 'What can I do about it?' It may start there. But the problem is so huge."

Carrington, who has a double album set for release in the spring under the banner Terri Lyne Carrington and Social Science, could be accused of modesty when assessing her career. She's won multiple Grammys as a drummer and producer, including one for Best Jazz Instrumental Album—the first woman ever to win in the category—for *Money Jungle: Provocative In Blue* (Concord). She has toured and recorded with legions of jazz luminaries.

Carrington received an honorary doctorate from Berklee in 2003 and currently holds the Zildjian Chair in Performance there. She serves as artistic director for various jazz organizations and continues to record, tour and educate. In truth, it's hard to think of any jazz drummer of her generation who's accomplished as much.

By her own admission, though, Carrington's experiences as a female musician have been different from those of the young women who study at Berklee today. Her father was a drummer and saxophonist; she started playing saxophone at age 5 before switching to drums. Later, she took private lessons. At 11, she attended Berklee on scholarship. As a preteen, she was



working professionally and had her union card; she'd jammed with trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and pianist Oscar Peterson, and received mentorship from saxophonist Wayne Shorter, drummer Jack DeJohnette and producer Quincy Jones. Because of her precocity and the benefits of tutoring during her formative years, Carrington was able early on to claim a professional spot in the male-dominated jazz scene, a spot most female musicians are denied at any age.

"It's not that I liked being seen [as one of the guys], it's more that I felt accepted being seen that way," she said. "I didn't feel that I wasn't accepted by that community. I saw it as the way—the primary, maybe *only* way—to have a career. To make sure that you play as well as the next guy.

"For me, that meant that I had to embody everything that I'd heard in jazz, which also meant that [I was] embodying the male aesthetic in some way. ... That's not just about playing louder and faster and busier. It's about a sense of ownership in the music. Meaning, this is *my* music as much as it's the next person's music. It's as much my music as it was for the great jazz innovators. ... I feel that way as strongly as any other person who's ever played [jazz]. I have ownership in it, and I have a stand in it, authentically."

Despite Carrington's legitimate claim to mastery and the backing of several jazz titans, she found that some male musicians would default to stereotypes in their dealings with her (even, surprisingly, when she was on stage as Herbie Hancock's drummer). Some assumed she was a singer or pianist, or perhaps the girlfriend of one of the musicians. Others would challenge her expertise, either unaware of or dismissive of her bona fides, which usually surpassed their own. Carrington was quick to note that these sorts of knee-jerk biases aren't as bad as what some female jazz players have endured. Still, cumulatively, over time, she said, these interactions were exhausting and exacted a personal toll.

"[Bassist] Esperanza [Spalding] articulated it beautifully at a roundtable discussion at Winter Jazzfest [in 2018]. How [as women players] we have this guard up, and how [playing together with the late Geri Allen, the pianist in their trio] was the first time that we didn't have any guard up at all. Fending off a little comment, a slight unwanted advance—they're just small things, but guys don't have to deal with them. Or just having to prove yourself [again and again] or feeling like you're being judged. Working through all those things while on the stage trying to be creative is a lot. It's energy that pulls you away from creativity. People will say that it's just in your own head, but that's not true."

By the time Carrington met Spalding, she'd worked with only a few female musicians of her own caliber—among them Allen (1957–2017), the first regularly gigging female instrumentalist she'd ever met, and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, whom Carrington befriended after graduating

from Berklee as an undergraduate and moving to New York in 1983. At the time, early in her career, Carrington was solidly entrenched with "the greatest jazz musicians around," all male, and so she eschewed opportunities to play in all-women projects and festivals. "I didn't want to be pigeonholed," she explained.

But the first time Carrington played with Spalding, she had an epiphany that precipitated a shift in her own consciousness regarding female musicians. "The bass and drum connection is so strong, so important ... and I felt [a synergy] from the moment I played with Esperanza," she explained. "She's the first female player that I had this kind of synergy with. There was a joy in it, because it was a piece of the puzzle that had been missing for me.

"I had a gig coming up in Israel and I asked Geri Allen to play, and Esperanza, and Tineke Postma, who is a Dutch saxophone player. When I booked these musicians for this gig, I didn't realize that they were all women. I didn't do it on purpose; it just happened that way. That was for me a signal that things had shifted. Not just for me personally, but also in the music. There were more and more women playing that I just really wanted to play with."

Following this impulse, Carrington decided to use these musicians as the unit for an album that she wanted to produce. "But it wasn't a political thing—it wasn't a statement of any sort, other than celebrating the talent of all of these women I had been playing with," she maintained.

That 2011 record, *The Mosaic Project* (Concord), would go on to earn Carrington her first Grammy and to garner ample media attention. To her chagrin, much of the album's coverage focused on the fact that the performers all were women—before assaying any commentary on their performances. "I think it's a good record, no matter who was playing on it," she stressed.

It was only through discussions with author and educator Angela Y. Davis that Carrington came to see *The Mosaic Project* as a kind of activism in its own right. "A long view of history reveals that musicians and other artists play crucial roles in encouraging social change," Davis wrote in an email from Brazil, where she was attending the Brazilian National Congress of Black Women Against Racism, Violence and For Life. "And jazz has always been linked to quests for justice, sometimes in terms of content, but almost always in terms of form. Jazz always reminds us that we have the potential to imagine something very new."

This vision of "something very new," according to Carrington and her advisors—Davis among them—is what drives the institute, from its name to its mission. "I love the slogan of the institute—'Jazz Without Patriarchy,'" Davis added. "Pushing jazz to imagine what it can potentially become when patriarchal obstacles are removed allows us to think not only about the



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## BERKLEE STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

Sam Spear, an undergrad saxophone student at Berklee, walked into the jury room to play for a panel of faculty adjudicators. “You should have done your hair today,” remarked one of the male professors. Rudeness aside, this statement could have violated Spear’s civil rights.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, comments that deride women for not conforming to stereotypical notions of how they should look qualify as gender discrimination under Title IX, the 1972 federal civil rights law that prohibits gender discrimination at educational institutions that receive federal funding.

Spear, who in Spring 2017 went on to co-found the Women in Jazz Collective, a Berklee student club that promotes female students’ participation in jazz events, recalls other derogatory or dismissive comments that she and members of the club have experienced. At the school, she said, people have assumed that she got an affirmative-action pass in admissions or that she’s attending on a scholarship for women. They’ve also underestimated her abilities, expecting her to play quietly, have bad technique or be afraid of improvising. “What do you say to that when you’ve devoted your whole life to learning how to do something?” she asked.

Not all offensive speech is discriminatory, but uncorrected patterns of hostile speech within an institution can create an environment that fosters discrimination and abuse. Berklee was forced to examine its own practices regarding these issues when in November 2017 it became the subject of a Boston Globe exposé on alleged sexual misconduct at the school. The article prompted hundreds of students to march in protest against the school’s handling of the allegations.

Words can hurt, but they also can heal. College President Roger Brown responded at an open forum on the campus, apologizing to all who had been harassed or abused at Berklee. “I am so sorry,” he said to the 1,250 students gathered.

Today, Berklee students have access to expansive resources on the school’s equity and Title IX website. Through its policy statement, Berklee commits to fostering a “safe, supportive, and diverse climate” for its young musicians.

—Suzanne Lorge

benefit to women, but to the entire field. ... [A]chieving gender justice will allow the music itself to become something new. For those who might assume that this quest is to assimilate women into a musical field that remains the same, we need to emphasize that this is about transformation—not assimilation.”

Undertaking cultural transformation at an institutional level can be a daunting task. Case in point: Carrington and the institute’s managing director, ethnomusicologist Aja Burrell Wood, observed just how deeply gender bias colors common perceptions of jazz musicians in the responses they received to a display at the Berklee library. Wood asked students to post the names of their favorite female jazz musicians, and almost all of the posted names were those of well-known singers like Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Stacey Kent. Only a few students posted names of female instrumentalists.

“I was bothered by that,” Carrington admitted. “But Aja said that this gives us a good idea [of what we’re facing]. This proves our point. So, let’s ask this question again in a couple of years and see if we have some improvement in looking for female musicians outside of the singer category.”

What the library display demonstrates is that even at one of the most prestigious jazz schools in the country, expected gender roles dictate, even if only implicitly, that men play instruments and women sing, with some exceptions allowed for women who play piano, violin or flute. Gendered instruments is “another thing that we need to move away from,” Carrington asserted. “There are a lot of women who were great singers who also played [instruments], and who knows how they would have developed as players if the culture had been different.”

For the coming generation, the institute will provide that different culture, where all musicians will have the space and structure to develop artistically in whatever direction suits them, even if—perhaps especially if—that direction is against expectations. Bucking cultural expectations in favor of authentic artistic expression is how the institute will challenge what Carrington called the “defined norm”—the standard-bearer against which all others are judged. “The defined norm, as I know it, is white, Christian, male, straight, able-bodied and with resources. That tends to be what we’re struggling against,” Carrington contended, going on to label as “totally ridiculous” the notion that good ideas, musical or otherwise, only can manifest through one gender or race.

In Carrington’s vision, challenging the defined norm at the institute won’t be about limiting any one group, but rather about opening up all areas of jazz to those previously deemed outsiders—not only because it’s the fair thing to do, but to prepare for a rapidly changing world. In a March 2017 Time magazine poll, 20 percent of millennials reported that they do not consider themselves cisgender (aligned with the gender assigned at birth) or straight. Additionally, U.S. Census statistics indicate a gradual decrease in the white population relative to populations of color, such that the white population could be in the minority by 2045—just about the time that current first-year Berklee students will be hitting their mid-career stride.

The rise in visibility of women and people of color in other professions—law, medicine, politics—suggests that the defined norm is shifting, but “a lot more quickly than in the jazz field,” Carrington observed, noting that compared to most other professional schools, music schools are behind the curve when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

In 2016, the most recent year information was available from the National Center for Education Statistics, 56 percent of undergraduate students in the U.S. were women. According to the 2017–18 Berklee Factbook, of the college’s 6,282 undergrads, 38 percent were female. Only “Male” and “Female” were listed as responses in each data set.

Through initiatives like the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, Berklee is trying to address the relative shortcomings of music institutions head-on, Carrington said. And she has firm ideas about how music organizations—both academic and professional—might follow suit.

First, assumptions about female musicians being inferior to male musicians or unable to play what traditionally have been perceived as male instruments have to stop. Female players should not have to be exceptional to be given the same opportunities granted to male players. To bring this about, music educators need to take a long, hard look at the messages they send to young female musicians, Carrington said.

“A large responsibility is with the band directors. A lot of them are problematic,” she opined, noting that bias among band directors shows up at the high school level, and even more critically, in middle schools, when children first are learning to play. “I’ve heard some pretty bad stories about band directors saying things like, ‘I’ve never met a good female jazz musician’ or ‘I’ve never played with a good one.’”



Even among those who “say the right things” about gender equity in music, the follow-through still can be lacking.

“I’ve said to some of these people, ‘When was the last time you mentored a woman? This is what I’m asking you to do: See some potential in a young woman and mentor her—whether in your opinion she’s as good as the guy next to her or not.’ Because you can’t just care about gender equity in other fields and not [in jazz]. And I do think that people care about gender equity. I also think that there are plenty of guys who would vote for a woman president before hiring a woman in their band.”

Finally, Carrington said, female jazz musicians are just as deserving of radio airplay, coverage in the press and grant money as male jazz musicians—and should receive it. The disparity both troubles and confounds her. “When you can drive for two hours and not hear one female musician on the radio, how do you not see something wrong with that?” she asked. “Music is an expression of life, and you can’t have life without women. If [life is] what we’re expressing, then women’s voices have to be part of that expression.”

Much of the institute’s corrective work will be to fill the holes in the jazz narrative where women’s voices should have been. The plan, according to institute managing director Wood, is to dig into jazz history to unearth information on the lives of female jazz musicians and build out the organization’s archive with both physical and online resources on these overlooked historical figures. In addition to documenting the lives of historical women in jazz, the archive also will chronicle the ongoing careers of living female jazz artists. Lastly, the library will catalog music by female jazz composers, a small, but sorely neglected, group of artists. “Almost every song that Geri Allen wrote should be a standard. She wrote amazing music,” Carrington said. “That’s just one example, and there are others.”

If all goes according to plan, within a few years the library at the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice could be the most definitive archival resource on women in jazz in the world. “I don’t think that anything like this exists for women in jazz,” Carrington professed.

Within this environment, Carrington envisions a new classroom dynamic for all students, regardless of their gender or sexual identity (two different things, she emphasized). All students will take Wood’s class on “Jazz, Gender, and Society,” which will present the cornerstone teachings of the program. None of the ensembles will be male-dominated. Students from all disciplines—engineering, therapy, performance and more—will be welcome. And the institute’s classrooms will be spaces for musical experimentation “where you can learn how to play the music without having your guard up,” she avowed.

Carrington also hopes to create an educa-

tional program for young musicians to help redress systemic gender bias in middle schools and high schools. “We could make the curriculum ... feel more inclusive,” she said. “Maybe something along the lines of beginner’s books [as part of] an outreach that can be both local and, eventually, national.”

In the end, the institute will grant students the space to develop their musical identities, free from pressure to meet gender-based societal expectations—and through this process, perhaps, to develop ownership of the music in their own right.

“[The institute] is about freedom, searching for freedom within the constructs of society,” Carrington said. “Freedom is a big part of why I play—I’m the freest when I’m being creative and expressive. If I feel this way, I imagine that a lot of other people feel this way, too.”

That said, Carrington knows that gender equity is neither a passing trend nor an easy win. She grasps the magnitude of the challenge before her: “This is a journey for the rest of my life.”

So, the question remains: What would jazz without patriarchy sound like? Carrington looks to the future for the answer. **DB**

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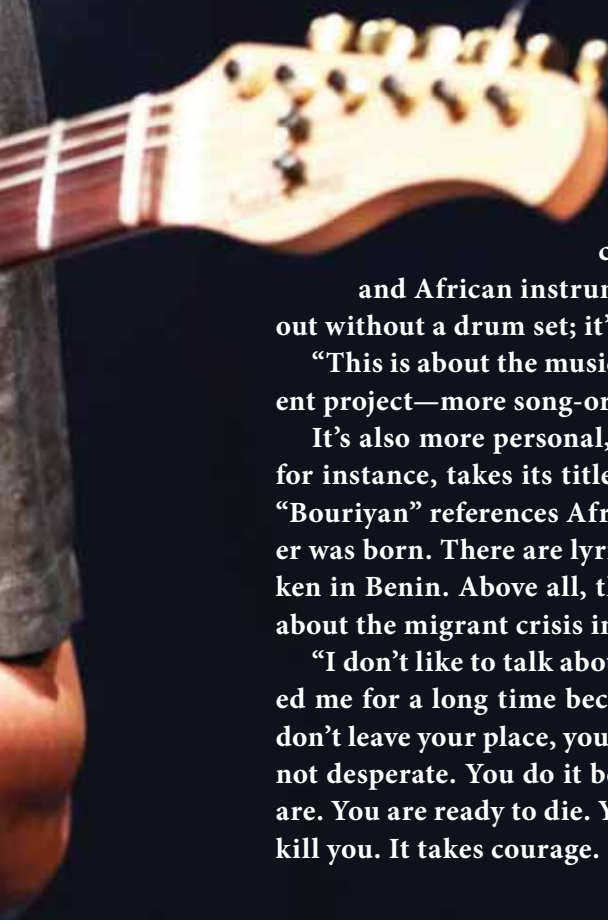




# JOURNEY OF EMPATHY

By J.D. Considine | Photo by Mark Sheldon

For guitarist **Lionel Loueke**, the title of his new album—*The Journey* (Aparté Music)—isn't merely a metaphor. It reflects both his odyssey from childhood in Benin to his current life as a globe-trotting jazz star while also mirroring his musical development.



“My CDs are all different, and I like them that way,” Loueke said in his soft, French-accented voice. “This one in particular is really different, because it’s a resumé of all I’ve done in the past, and a continuation of what I’m doing now. It’s the first time I’m combining classical musicians and classical musical instruments with jazz

and African instruments, all on the same project. It’s the first time I’m putting a CD out without a drum set; it’s all percussion. So, yes, we definitely have a different character.

“This is about the music; I wasn’t focusing on ‘jazz’ or ‘classical’ or ‘African.’ It’s a different project—more song-oriented, more words, more singing.”

It’s also more personal, as Loueke touches on his family life and background. “Molika,” for instance, takes its title from the names of his children (Moesha, Lisa and Mika), while “Bouriyan” references Afro-Brazilian culture in Ouidah, the city in Benin where his mother was born. There are lyrics in French, but more in Fon, Mina and Yoruba, languages spoken in Benin. Above all, the album reflects Loueke’s life as an immigrant, and his feelings about the migrant crisis in Europe at the moment.

“I don’t like to talk about politics,” he said, “but this issue is something that has interested me for a long time because there’s some ignorance when it comes to immigration. You don’t leave your place, you don’t get on a boat or a ship to cross the Mediterranean if you are not desperate. You do it because you know that there is nothing else left for you where you are. You are ready to die. You prefer to die on the sea, basically, rather than wait for them to kill you. It takes courage. It’s not something where you just wake up one day and go.”



Loueke incorporates styles and sounds from other instruments into his guitar playing.

As befits someone whose music is often a model of economy, Loueke's lyrics are almost aphoristic, evoking great feeling with few words. "Bawo," which is Yoruba for "how," asks, "How have we come to this? Modern-day slavery/ And climate disruption push/ Humanity to the roads of exile." Yet the music, rich with complex polyrhythms, carries not anger but the bewildered resignation of a man shaking his head at the state of things.

"Those are things that are happening, and the responsibility—I'm not blaming just the politicians. I'm blaming everybody, including myself, you know?" he said. "And this project is working to change our ways. The whole CD, while you listen to it, nothing is aggressive. The CD I did before, called *Gaïa*, is more rock-oriented. But here, a song like 'Vi Gnin'—about a child who lost his mother in a war—is presented in a gentle way." And gentleness is important, Loueke said, because it encourages deep listening: "We can change the world by talking to one another, by trying to understand the other person. And that's what I try to present.

"On the song 'Reflections On Vi Gnin,' which was completely improvised, there's just sound. I'm not using any actual words. They're sounds, because when you listen to music, if you don't have the lyrics or you don't understand the words, you have different images coming through your mind. This is what it's about here. If you hear 'Vi Gnin,' maybe you'll say, 'It's beautiful.' But you can't say, 'Vi Gnin' is a happy song. And for me, that's the power of music. It's not always about the lyrics; it's about the atmosphere

you set up."

Loueke, who currently lives in Luxembourg, credits much of his journey to his search for musical knowledge and experience. "I moved to the United States to study jazz," he said. "The reason I moved to Paris was the same thing—to study jazz, and to study classical. I turn to Europeans so I can learn new things, so I can blend better, to put two different spices together for the flavor."

After four albums for Blue Note, Loueke switched to the classically oriented French label Aparté for *The Journey*. He once again worked with Robert Sadin, who produced his 2006 album, *Virgin Forest*.

"Bob Sadin had the great idea of proposing to me to go into the studio for three days and just record by myself," Loueke said. "Usually, I go into the studio with a band. So, that's how we started this project. I played by myself, and then we started developing. And I was like, 'Man, I'm feeling this. Maybe I can add another guitar or some percussion.' Or we just redo it with different musicians, based on what I recorded in those three days."

"I've known Lionel for a long time," Sadin said. "He has a great sense of community. If he's with other musicians, he tries to find a common ground, and that's great in a lot of situations. But for his album, I felt that it was important not to find common ground, but just reach into himself.

"So, he played alone, and he defied every convention. He was precisely on time or early for everything. An 11 a.m. session? Wham, he's ready to go. And unlike almost anything I've done, we never needed a second take for any-

thing being not quite right. We might want one to take a different approach, but his playing was just—'flawless' is not a word I like to use, but there was never a take that wasn't great."

Loueke plays acoustic guitar for most of the album, which is not only a change from his usual recorded sound, but also represents a change from how most listeners would expect an acoustic guitar to sound. On the album opener, "Bouriyan," Loueke plays percussively, pinging harmonics, muting the bass strings with his hand, even slapping the strings like a bass player.

"That slapping on the guitar [is something] I've been developing for the last few years," he said. "I'd never done a sound like that on an acoustic guitar. Usually, I do it on electric with my effects. So, I tried it on acoustic, which for me sounds more naked, and more real.

"That type of playing brings me back, to back in the day when I was a bass player. Before I played guitar, I was a bass player. I've always loved bass, and so many of my songs are based on a bass line." He laughs. "I think of myself as a guitar player/frustrated percussion and bass player. Because bass is really involved in what I do."

On *The Journey*, however, all the bass playing is provided by Pino Palladino, whose credits include work with Herbie Hancock, Jeff Beck, José James and D'Angelo. "In one note, you know it's Pino," Loueke said. "A really warm sound. And on top of being one of the greatest [musicians], he's just a great guy. When I asked him, he was in London. He took the train, came to Paris, recorded with us, and went back."

Palladino's playing on "Bouriyan" is spare and supportive, undergirding the guitar line where needed, and laying out when not. But some of the track's tastiest moments come when, instead of playing the obvious root, he plays something more melodic, slyly flipping the harmony. "What I love about Pino is how he always finds what's missing, or what he can bring to lift the music," Loueke said. "I try to think that way, and that's my approach to music. If I feel that I cannot bring anything, I won't do it."

"Pino was completely relaxed," Sadin said. "He was not trying to think, 'Where is Lionel going next?' In a way, that enabled him to bring more of himself, because he was not trying to adjust, but bring his thing to bear on the music."

Fitting into Loueke's groove is no small thing, Sadin added, because the guitarist's timing is so highly developed and specific. "His phrasing is so extraordinary that it's hard for people to adjust to his playing," he said. "It's so subtle that it really goes beyond what most people can follow, because he's combined so much traditional African music, so much jazz, and [other genres of] music."

Loueke ascribes some of that rhythmic facility to his preference for playing fingerstyle. "I don't play with a pick," he explained. "My approach is closer to the classical guitar tech-



nique, so on my right hand I deal with four fingers. That gives me more freedom to combine different lines and play polyrhythms. I want to get something close to the [sound of a] piano, but not exactly, because I want to have the freedom of doing whatever I'm hearing—if I can."

Loueke appreciates Sadin's ear for additional color, as well as his ability to bring classical instrumental technique to the arrangements—something the guitarist describes as "Bob Sadin's magic touch."

One example is the oboe-like introduction to "Gbêdtemin," which is based on a phrase from Debussy's *Gigues*. Sadin had come up with that on one of his keyboards, and played it for Loueke. "Some of the songs—'Gbêdtemin,' 'Vi Gnin,' 'Hope'—those three have some classical movement, harmonically speaking," the guitarist said. "So, when he proposed that to me, I was like, 'Yes, please. Can we use that?'"

Sadin also brought in classical clarinetist Patrick Messina and cellist Vincent Ségala to flesh out the chamber-style orchestration of "Hope." But not all the string playing came from the clas-

played that he almost didn't bother asking Feldman to have a go at the version of "Kába" Loueke previously had laid down. "I thought, 'You know, I don't even think I need him on the basic track.' And Lionel says, 'Well, let's let Mark do it once, anyway.' I'm not going to say no," Sadin recalled. "So, he's playing the version which had Lionel already playing parts underneath, but now he knew Lionel's moves so well that in one take there was nothing to say. Done."

"Kába" is the Fon word for "sky," and the lyrics Loueke sings describe being energized and uplifted by gazing at the vastness of the sky. There's an apt spaciousness to the music, which slowly builds in intensity as the different voices join in. In addition to Feldman's violin and Loueke's voice, there's Palladino's lean, melodic bass line, which locks nicely with the gently thrumming percussion of Christi Joza Orisha and Cyro Baptista. Dramane Dembélé adds breathy interjections on a Malian peul flute, and Sadin's soundscapes add textures via synthesized oboe and string voices.

But the most striking aspect, instrumentally,

performers of the style. Loueke also includes notation—not just the overall score, but individual guitar parts with tablature. To make it easier for users to play along, the interface allows for looping, changing the playback speed, changing the pitch and isolating audio tracks. Overall, the app provides a practical, accessible education in African music.

"I just composed music for each of those countries, using the strongest rhythm," Loueke said. "By doing that, I learned so much about different instruments—the kora, the guimbri. All that work, it comes out when I play today, because it's somewhere there with me."

So, how did he get his guitar to sound so much like a kora? "I play a lot with the harmonics on the instrument," he said. "Also, I have a mute technique which is, I think, a typical African approach. Where I grew up, many people mute their strings when they play."

On some songs, he put paper on the strings to get a sort of resonant muting. "It's a simple way to have a sound close to a kalimba, a vibrating sound," he said. "When it comes to the [guitar] sound, I've been working a lot on what I'm hearing and what I'm trying to make on the guitar."

"Dark Lightning" contains the most jaw-dropping bit of electric playing on the album. The track was recorded with only Loueke's voice and guitar, but it features a sonic wave that resembles an entire orchestra of electric guitars. All the layered growls and whines were not the result of overdubbing, but of Loueke's mastery of digital delay and, particularly, the Kemper Profiler digital guitar amp.

"That was one take," Sadin said of the guitar track. "There weren't overdubs on that. Lionel has a very evolved relationship with his digital processor, so this is coming all at once. All those colors, all those guitar pads, that's all from this one device."

Since finishing the album, Loueke has played some shows in support of his own work, but his versatility makes him an in-demand collaborator. In 2017, he toured as a member of The Chick Corea & Steve Gadd Band. He recently did a European tour with Dave Holland's Aziza, and in January he'll perform with Jeff Ballard in Germany. In October, Loueke played with Herbie Hancock's band in Kuwait, and he'll go back on the road with the keyboardist this year.

"I'm lucky, because I've got lots of offers to do different things," Loueke said. "My approach to music is open, so I'm not locking myself to one style. I can go [perform] with Angélique Kidjo, play something, record something, and then Kenny Barron or Kenny Werner. I like to jump from one project to another, because I learn more doing that. The most important thing for me is to bring something to help the music. And to be myself."

"Wherever good music is taking me, I'm going." **DB**

# 'WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD BY TRYING TO UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER.'

sical realm. Violinist Mark Feldman had played with Loueke for a few concerts in Savannah, Georgia. And when Sadin was trying to come up with the right voices to flesh out the song "Kába," Feldman came to mind.

"But I needed to get Mark—who's so wonderful—really into Lionel's world," Sadin said. Rather than merely have the violinist add an overdub, he decided to have Feldman and Loueke sit down and play together awhile in the studio. It was an idea Loueke heartily endorsed.

"We don't have many violin players who can improvise," Loueke said. "Most of the time, when you hear a violin in jazz, it's Stéphane Grappelli or someone like that. But Mark is a different cat. That song he played on, 'Kába,' it was just the two of us in the studio, and we played the same song for—I don't know, an hour or 45 minutes. We told the engineer, 'Let it roll,' and we just played. That, for me, is where the real magic happens, because the whole thing bypasses cognition. You're just following some great tone. It's magical."

Sadin was so pleased with what the two had

about the track is the bright, brittle guitar lines Loueke sprinkles throughout, adding a sound that's closer to the West African kora than to any standard guitar sound. "That's something I've been working on for years," Loueke said. "I'm from Benin, where we don't have any history of the kora as an instrument. But I grew up listening to a lot of kora players, and I always wanted to play the kora. But it's like the violin: It's not the type of instrument you start to play when you're old. You start when you're young, and then you grow up with it."

"I've been working a lot on zooming in on different African instruments—doing transcribing, checking the tuning—to see how I can bring that back to the guitar. I made an application called GuitAfrica, which involves different African instruments on the guitar."

GuitAfrica is an iOS app that features pieces (written and played by Loueke) that typify a quintessential musical style from 22 different countries. Each style is identified, with a page offering notes on the music's style and origins, typical instruments and a short list of significant





# 'YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE MEANING'

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

PHOTO BY TODD ROSENBERG

Sipping tea in the Harlem hangout Common Good, **Marquis Hill** wore a serene smile. The expression was hardly one unfamiliar to the trumpeter's friends and colleagues, who know him as the personification of the easygoing guy—on and off the bandstand.

**B**ut the smile was more serene than usual: He just had come off a satisfying series of North American concerts at which his quintet, the Blacktet, captivated audiences with a cache of new tunes, and was headed for Europe, where he would extend the run in 10 countries through November.

The new music, like his previous efforts, is calibrated with cool precision and delivered with calculated understatement, his trumpet playing filled with the mellifluous tones, cascading lines and outpourings of lyrical invention that have been stirring souls throughout the jazz world.

The music also stirs the pot, layered as it is with anxious hip-hop grooves and unsettling spoken-word narratives that reflect the conditions Hill saw growing up—and, to a degree, still sees today—on the South Side of Chicago.



Hill benefited from time spent at the Velvet Lounge, a jazz room on the South Side of Chicago run by saxophonist Fred Anderson (1929–2010).

“You’ve got to have a message,” Hill, 31, declared. “You’ve got to have meaning.”

Meaning, in fact, marks all of Hill’s oeuvre—not least his new album, *Modern Flows Vol. 2* (Black Unlimited Music Group). It combines musical prowess and cultural provocation in a synthesis of art and activism rare among musicians of any generation, according to bassist and bandleader Marcus Miller, with whom Hill has played for three years.

“He plays flawlessly, but is really committed,” said Miller, who was introduced to Hill at the 2014 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Trumpet Competition, which Hill won. “These days, people want to know you’re about something, and you can tell what he’s about.”

What he is about clearly is expressed in the pieces with some lyric content—nearly half of the new album’s 15 tracks—from the opener, “Modern Flows II Intro,” on which Brandon Alexander Williams invokes a series of references to black culture, to the closer, “Legend Outro III,” on which rapper Keith “King Legend” Winford does the same, with an overlay of appeal to the instinct for self-reliance.

The first line of Winford’s outro reads: “I still pray to god but I also pray to myself for all the things he didn’t fix I had to fix em myself.”

“That line really spoke to me,” Hill said, recalling the work his mother, a single parent, put into raising him. “To me, it sums up a lot. There’s nothing really holding us back but ourselves.”

In enlisting Winford, Hill was returning to a friend he met when the two were undergraduates at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, where Hill earned a bachelor’s degree in music education in 2009. They began collaborating on Hill’s earlier albums, *The Poet* and *Modern Flows Vol. 1*, for which Winford also wrote outros.

“I love the way he thinks, his flow, his cadence,” Hill said. “I gave him the music, told

him the concept of the record in general, told him this was going to be the closing track, and to sum up his perception of the project and this music. That’s what he ran with.”

Given creative control over the words, Winford waited a couple of weeks before writing. “I wanted to see what I could do to bring my spin,” he said. “I had a lot of stuff on my mind.” Having gathered his thoughts, he wrote the rapid-fire text and brought it to the studio, where, after four or five false starts, he and Hill produced a two-and-a-half-minute take. “It happened organically. We knew what we were trying to accomplish.”

Part of what Hill said he wanted to accomplish with the album was to avoid male-centrism. “I was sitting at home one night writing music at the keyboard, thinking how we’re taking history from a man’s perspective and wondering what it would look like from a woman’s perspective. I thought, ‘It would be great to hear a woman’s voice in this day and age.’”

To that end, he recruited Chicago poet M’Reld Green, who contributed two segments united loosely by the theme of cultural marginalization. “Prayer For The People” deals with subjects like gentrification (“The history is being erased and being replaced/ With Starbucks”), while “Herstory” addresses attempts to render African American women invisible (“Her story went away with the cameras/ No more reporters to report her”).

“Marquis wanted it to be more than just slam poetry,” Green said. “He wanted it to be more narration, like a story.”

Although Hill composed the music before any lyrics were written, he viewed the instrumentalists in a sense as supporting players. “I used the ensemble to lay the platform for the spoken-word to get across,” he explained.

Not that the instrumental parts were conceived uniformly or as mere accompaniment. On

“Prayer,” the words lay on a percussive bed crisply animated by Junius Paul’s electric bass, Joel Ross’ marimba and Jonathan Pinson’s drums in concert with Hill’s open trumpet and Josh Johnson’s alto saxophone. On “Herstory,” in contrast, the mood is decidedly subdued, colored by Hill’s muted horn.

The new album represents a move toward a more electro-acoustic sensibility; it is the first on which Hill composed exclusively on the computer and employed only electric bass. But that move might not have been inevitable. Miller, whose band routinely interprets material by soul groups from the 1960s, said he thought at first that the trumpeter, for all his gifts, might only be comfortable in a kind of post-bop acoustic universe. He won the Monk competition playing “If I Were A Bell” and “Polka Dots And Moonbeams.”

“I wondered if he could hit the funk,” Miller said. But he soon found out that Hill was raised by a mother who filled the house with music by the very artists Miller was fond of covering, like The Temptations, and he fit in perfectly with Miller’s band. As for Hill’s own music, Miller added, “He’s getting more and more progressive. The latest thing has a lot of contemporary flavor. That’s what you want to go for: one foot in the history and one foot in the future.”

Hill’s history with jazz began as a precocious fifth-grade trumpeter at Chicago’s Kenwood Academy, where a band director, saxophonist Diane Ellis, gave him a copy of Lee Morgan’s 1958 Blue Note album *Candy*. He recalled being especially taken by the elegant ballad “Since I Fell For You”: “I had never heard anything like that, and I wanted to sound like that.”

The music inspired him to practice, which he assiduously did and still does. But for the young Hill, the music also served another purpose. “I thought of it as a beautiful distraction,” he said. “There were a lot of things happening on the South Side of Chicago in the ’90s. It kept me from getting into trouble on the streets.”

Properly distracted, he gravitated as a teenager toward the South Side’s hippest haunts, the Velvet Lounge and the New Apartment Lounge. There, some of Chicago’s now-departed jazz titans—trumpeter Malachi Thompson (1949–2006) and tenor saxophonists Von Freeman (1923–2012) and Fred Anderson (1929–2010)—accepted him into their community. When Hill went to college, he would drive the 70 miles back to Chicago to keep his hand in the scene, playing for a time in the Velvet Lounge’s house band on Sundays.

His contact with Chicago’s jazz veterans proved liberating and, ultimately, critical to the development of his sound. “Technically—and this goes back to my mentors, like Von and Fred and Malachi—I would play free,” he said. “I was not thinking about rhythm, key, pitch; not necessarily trying to mimic this or that kind of sound—just clearing my mind and playing shapes, melo-



dies, textures.”

He felt confident enough to begin releasing albums while he was still a student, including two he worked on while enrolled at Chicago’s DePaul University, where he earned a master’s in jazz pedagogy in 2012.

*New Gospel* (2011) was recorded at a time when Hill still was absorbing the language and developing his facility for expressing it. “Sometimes I listen to *New Gospel* and I cringe,” he said with a laugh. “But it’s a beautiful thing to listen to the growth. I can listen to specific points and say, ‘I was going for that.’ That helped me get to this point.”

*Sounds Of The City* (2012) “was my approach to capturing the sounds of Chicago, trying to find my sound through all the music I was exposed to.” But Hill’s evolution took a leap with 2013’s *The Poet*, which has a spoken-word intro by Kevin Sparks, as well as Winford’s outro. “Something clicked,” he said. “I was starting to tap into more of the sounds you hear today, to incorporate more of the groove aspect of the music. I knew I wanted to keep going in that direction, in terms of my personal sound and compositional sound.”

Those aims were advanced in 2014 with the release of *Modern Flows Vol. 1*, which, in addition to Winford’s contributions, includes those of spoken-word artist Tumelo Khoza and singer Meagan McNeal. “That’s when I wanted to purposely play on that genre line between jazz and hip-hop,” Hill explained. “I said, ‘OK, I was born in ’87, I love hip-hop. I’m a jazz baby as well; I was exposed to this music at a very young age. To me, it’s the same music—it’s coming from the same tree—and they’re extensions of one another.”

The same year as that album’s release, Hill’s profile got a boost with his Monk competition win. The awareness of his music—and his awareness of others’—was heightened by a 2014 move to New York. Living in Harlem, he enjoys a broader view of the musical landscape. “Being here has affected my approach to writing music,” he said. “Using Logic [music production software] helped me dive deeper into blurring the genre line. That’s how hip-hop artists work. Nowadays, there are many more musicians who write that way than I realized.”

He has extended his network to include such like-minded musicians as Pinson. The drummer, who also moved to the Big Apple in 2014, said he and Hill found a kinship after discovering they shared a passion for integrating a social message into their music. That, in turn, led to Pinson’s gigging with Hill at events like the 2017 Atlanta Jazz Festival and, eventually, recording together.

“Marquis and I are on the same wavelength,” he said. “I’ve always wanted to do music that touches people in a certain way, and this album delivers a strong message people can relate to—a message people need to hear at this time. It was where I was spiritually.”

The search for spiritual connection is a force

driving Hill in many directions. Prominent among them is the development of a series of short albums called *Meditation Tapes*, or, in Hill’s description, “beat tapes.” In them, his trumpet joins forces with Paul’s bass, Brett Williams’ keyboard and Makaya McCraven’s drums to build soundtracks around spoken words.

Winford and Mic WeSt contributed to a 2018 tape, the second in the series. The first, in 2017, drew on breakfast conversations Hill recorded with his Harlem roommate, Marvin “Bugalu” Smith, a onetime drummer of Archie Shepp’s who regularly holds forth on spirituality.

After recording the commentary, Hill—with Smith’s approval—incorporated the words into an otherworldly sonic environment shaped by hip-hop. Using that kind of beat, he said, made the product more accessible.

“I did think strategically about that,” Hill said. “It didn’t necessarily reflect what he was saying at any moment, though I wanted the music to support his ideas and concepts—that we were kind of a melting pot.”

The melting-pot concept has not always applied in Hill’s life, a fact he documents on “White Shadows,” from *Modern Flows Vol. 1*. The tune grew out of an incident of apparent racial profiling he experienced while on a tour in the South.

“It was blatant that this person was following me around the store, to the point that it felt like a

shadow,” he said. “I had never felt like that in my life. After dinner, we got back on the tour bus and I wanted to put that feeling into music. I turned that negative situation into a tune.”

The agitation Hill felt is palpable in the skittery rhythms he employs, yet the piece maintains its lyrical bearings. For all the social concerns at the heart of Hill’s art, his music does not dwell in the darkness. That, he said, is due in no small measure to the influence of his grandmother, a constant touchpoint.

She was the inspiration for “The Watcher,” a reference to her role as an elder who, in the absence of police, kept an eye out in the neighborhood for developing problems. The tune, from *Modern Flows Vol. 2*, has its moments of alarm, heralded by ominous horn figures repeated over a rumble of bass and drums. Still, it displays a sense of equanimity throughout.

Another tune from Hill’s most recent work inspired by his grandmother, “It’s All Beautiful,” casts a soft glow as vibraphonist Ross’ harmonies illuminate the horns’ simple melody. By Hill’s account, the piece, rendered without embellishment, echoes his grandmother’s spirit—and, by extension, his own.

“She had a way of coping with the hardships of life by reminding us we have a choice,” he said. “In these crazy times, we can live in Hell. But I’d rather put my energy into something that’s beautiful.”

DB



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# 'Be the Change'

By Samantha Willis | Photos By Steven Sussman

When singer **Alicia Olatuja** steps on stage, she is sure-footed, and a smile almost always rests on her lips.

She reaches for the microphone like a too-long-gone friend, and her fingers grip it lightly as she centers herself. There is a moment of stillness, and then Olatuja opens her mouth. Her alto voice—rich as coffee, fluid as mercury—reveals a woman completely at ease with her artist-fee, fluid as mercury, madly in love. She's also a newlywed, in early November, seated at a table inside the empty conference room of an upscale hotel in Richmond, Virginia. "His name is Juan Pablo Pastor," and he's just as beautiful as his name, according to Olatuja. Pastor is an Argentina-born fusion percussionist; Olatuja said he fundamentally understands her, both as a musician and a woman. "[Our relationship] works out, because I think if you weren't a musician, you'd probably get tired of all the noise—me walking around singing all the time; him, practicing all his tunes," Olatuja said with a chuckle.

Olatuja was in Richmond as part of a vocal trio powering "Songs of Freedom," a project under the musical direction of drummer Ulysses Owens Jr., her friend of more than a decade. Olatuja, alongside jazz singers René Marie and Theo Bleckmann, delivered customized versions of 1960s American classics, songs originally performed by vocalists who used their voices to convey protest messages through their music: Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln and Joni Mitchell.







Like so many singers before her, Olatuja's talent was shaped in the sanctuary.

For Owens, who displays brilliance not only as a Grammy Award-winning drummer but now also a band-leading music director, Olatuja was a natural fit for the project.

"She was the perfect combo of a fresh-sounding voice and a true vocal technician," he said by phone from Milan, where he was touring. The Alicia Olatuja he knows isn't just the latest singing sensation; she is a master artisan whose craft is musicianship. "I love people who don't just have their own voice, but who understand their instrument and how to play it well, and who use it to say something meaningful. That is Alicia."

Those skills are demonstrated on Olatuja's new album, *Intuition: Songs From the Minds of Women* (Resilience Music), out Feb. 22. The album is the latest peak in a lifelong journey through music.

But Olatuja learned her first musical lessons in the schoolhouse and church. Born in Washington State, she moved with her family to Oregon as a toddler and then to St. Louis when she was 5. She discovered her voice in kindergarten.

"I loved Whitney Houston, and I would sing 'Saving All My Love For You' to my crush. He was terrified," she said dryly.

Like so many singers before her, Olatuja's talent was shaped in the sanctuary; she was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

"Church music, sacred music, is not about you. ... In a sense, it's music that the singer uses to point the listener to the divine. So, you're actually using yourself as a prism; it passes through you, but points in a different direction."

A number of legendary black musicians—including A Tribe Called Quest lyricist Phife Dawg, 1950s jazz chanteuse Joyce Bryant, r&b heavyweight Brian McKnight and Prince—also were born into the SDA faith. The 18.5 million

members of the church, represented in countries around the world, live by strict ethical edicts. In addition to abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and "unclean" meats like pork, Adventists view themselves as stewards of God's creations.

Olatuja's grandmother, Lucille Mitchell, was head elder of their church, the first woman to inhabit the role in their congregation. Olatuja grew up hearing that she had inherited Mitchell's "proactive, ambitious" spirit. Her mother, Valencia, also was a force in Olatuja's young life, and a singer in her own right, though she didn't pursue a career in music. The women around her modeled for Olatuja a distinctive kind of feminine strength, cloaked in grace and tough love. And they believed in her gift, so she believed in it, too. The spiritual fervor and musical dynamism that flavored Olatuja's early experiences were emotionally powerful, but could have been costly.

"I noticed a lot of my friends in church, they were getting calluses on their vocal chords, nodes were forming. ... They were singing from this place of raw emotion, which is a beautiful place. But if it causes you to hurt yourself, so you can't sing, then it's counterproductive. I didn't want that to be my story."

Instead, she went "from singing in church to singing classically and trying to understand my instrument." After a brief stint double-majoring in veterinary medicine, Olatuja focused her college studies on music, and went on to earn a master's degree in classical voice/opera from the Manhattan School of Music.

An international audience learned Olatuja's name when she sang a solo during "Battle Hymn Of The Republic" at President Barack Obama's second-term inauguration on Jan. 21, 2013. Olatuja, whose high-flying vocalizations scaled

the summit of her register, was surrounded by the ethereal, harmonic power of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, complete with blaring brass and swelling strings. It was a stirring performance, but Olatuja holds only a few stark memories of the historic moment in her mind.

"I remember just seeing a sea of people," Olatuja said. "I remember feeling very warm while I was singing—and it was freezing out there. Sometimes you remember the feeling more than the visual, you know?" From her vantage point on the stage, she couldn't see the famous faces in the audience, just the tops of their heads. "I wasn't nervous; I felt prepared and so supported by the people in the choir. ... I felt like, we're all here in this moment to experience something that will never happen again."

Olatuja's new 13-track album, *Intuition*, is a collection of songs old and new, all written by female composers, herself included. The importance of women's experiences, and how those experiences shape American society, framed Olatuja's approach to crafting the record.

"It was amazing to see the parallel of struggles and victories that women have had to endure and continue to push through, over and over again," she said. "Some tunes are from the 1970s, some of them are from 2017; just seeing how there's this throughline of strength and perseverance—strength but not hardness—is amazing."

Producer Kamau Kenyatta, a longtime collaborator of vocalist Gregory Porter, became enthralled by Olatuja's voice after hearing her rendition of "Human Nature" on her first album. When Porter wanted to harmonize on his 2016 studio album, *Take Me To The Alley* (Blue Note), Kenyatta said, "I've got the person," and that person was Olatuja. Featuring Porter's smooth sound and the vocal gifts of Olatuja, Lalah Hathaway and Kem, the album earned a Grammy in 2017 for Best Jazz Vocal Album. Kenyatta remained intrigued by Olatuja's talent, and, in Spring 2017, sought a way to further their relationship.

"Alicia deserves a wider audience," Kenyatta said. "And I think a wider audience deserves Alicia, too. At the same time, I was thinking a lot about women composers, and how important women are to music in general." He brought an idea—an album spotlighting the musical labors of female composers, arrangers and artists—to Olatuja, who talked it over with Owens. The project aligned closely with Olatuja's own vision for her work, and added her voice to the surge of women engaging in what seems to be a historical inflection point: "You can speak through dance, you can speak through paintings; I choose to speak, and be part of this movement of being heard, through music," she said.

*Intuition* both reflects and contributes to the public discourse prompted by the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, as well as the record number of women running for political office.

"Usually when people ... are talking about 'a



woman's intuition,' they mean this gut instinct that surpasses the intellect. And, yes, a woman's intuition is undeniable. But we also are intellectual beings who function from an emotional place, but also from an incredibly intellectual place," the vocalist said. "You hear that in these songs, you hear it in the lyrics, you see it represented in the different women artists."

Sade's 1992 soul single, "No Ordinary Love," is given a wholly new life through Olatuja's voice and keyboardist Jon Cowherd's arrangement. And when Olatuja croons, "I keep trying, I keep crying for you," the emotional yearning is nearly palpable; in her voice can be heard a woman equally enraptured and tormented by her lover.

Billy Childs' arrangement and flowing piano melody layer with Olatuja's warm vocals, evoking the lighter side of love on another of the album's offerings, a reimagining of Brenda Russell's "So Good, So Right." Owens provides percussion throughout, in addition to his role as co-producer, and a host of dynamic musicians—including guitarist David Rosenthal, bassist Ben Williams and tenor saxophonist Dayna Stephens—create a deeply felt musical experience. But the point is the message: discovering what well-known artists' lesser-known tunes communicated to listeners then, and what they have to say now.

"We all know Joni Mitchell and so many of us know a lot of her tunes," Olatuja said. "But the tune I did of hers on this album is 'Cherokee Louise,' which I noticed a lot of people didn't know." The song's lyrics serve as a narration, a dark story told by a friend of the track's namesake character, as Mitchell's lyrics depict the violence and trauma of the girl's sexual abuse in graphic detail: "She runs home to her foster dad/ He opens up a zipper/ And he yanks her to her knees ..."

Olatuja initially found such stark phrasing and imagery uncomfortable; eventually, that sense of unease pushed her to record the song.

"If we can't put a voice to the things that are shameful or uncomfortable, then we will never get into a place where we can overcome these things and actually fight against them effectively—if we choose to be silent because we're uncomfortable," she said.

Commenting on how they handled the heavy content, Kenyatta said, "Alicia understands bigger issues. We have some [songs] dealing with racial issues, then a song dealing with abuse. So, it's not just fluff; it's matters of the heart and mind, matters that should be important to all of us."

Months after wrapping the album, Olatuja signed with Resilience Music Alliance, a label founded in 2017 by activist Steve Ruchefsky and vocalist Rondi Charleston. The company describes itself online as "a label that transcends genre and focuses on empowering artists exploring our collective elemental condition of resilience while conceptualizing projects that resonate with the human spirit." Any artistic risk posed by

partnering with such a recently formed entity is mitigated by the label's clear values, which are similar to her own, Olatuja said.

As her artistry evolves, Olatuja's identity—as a woman, as an African American, as a musician—will continue to inform her music, she said. Musicians and vocalists of color who seek to expand their musical spheres beyond the expected—namely, soul, r&b and gospel—might not see themselves represented in genres where they feel a natural kinship.

"Growing up, I did not see a lot of little black girls singing opera music. But I felt like, because

of my experiences, and the range of music that had already been downloaded in me at home, I brought something different to opera. That was my approach. Be the change you want to see."

When she isn't touring, Olatuja is a voice instructor, giving private lessons to aspiring singers. She said she tells her students, who represent the next generation of diverse artists, to use their unique backgrounds as "the sofrito to whatever it is you're singing. That's your seasoning, that's what makes what you're doing yours. Music is not made for a particular race; music is made for the human spirit and the human soul." **DB**

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# NYC: STILL THE CAPITAL

**During the past century, three cities—New Orleans, Chicago and New York—played leading roles in the development of jazz. In the 21st century, however, New York reigns as the world’s undisputed jazz capital, an essential place for jazz musicians to make their bones. As singer and Chicago native Kurt Elling recently told *DownBeat*, “If you’re a jazz musician, you don’t want to live your whole life and not live in New York.”**

Since at least the 1920s, New York has been the center of the business of jazz, housing more jazz record companies, recording studios, clubs, music schools and, inevitably, attracting more jazz musicians than any other city in the world.

Musicians still flock there to meet the best jazz players and—if they have enough talent, luck and grit—to play with them. To test their mettle. To raise their profile and maybe gain national attention in the country’s media capital. In short, for the opportunities that only New York affords.

Many of the quintessential moments in jazz history were New York moments: Sonny Rollins practicing on the Williamsburg Bridge; the 1958 gathering of current and future jazz icons for Art Kane’s photograph dubbed “A Great Day in Harlem”; The Harlem Stride piano cutting contests of the 1920s; Duke Ellington at the

Cotton Club; the legendary Carnegie Hall concerts of Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington; Bird, Dizzy and Miles on 52nd Street in the 1940s and 1950s; the legendary live recordings of Thelonious Monk at the Five Spot.

The 52nd Street jazz scene is just a memory now, but today’s New York still boasts the legendary Village Vanguard and a dozen other clubs in Greenwich Village, including The Blue Note, Smalls, Mezzrow and 55 Bar; Birdland, Iridium and Jazz Standard in Midtown; Jazz at Lincoln Center’s three plush venues; Smoke and Minton’s uptown; The Jazz Gallery and The Stone, both incubators for forward-leaning artists; as well as venues in Brooklyn.

The dozens of record companies include the three giants: Sony, Warner and Universal (which includes Blue Note, Impulse and other labels); independents like Pi Recordings, HighNote/Savant and Motéma; and labels associated with jazz clubs, including SmallsLIVE and Smoke Sessions. Making the scene, particularly at the clubs that offer late-night jams, are students from all over the world who have come to study jazz at Juilliard, The New School, Manhattan School of Music and nearby William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey, among others.

Bassist Matt Garrison, who in addition to his trio work with Jack DeJohnette and Ravi

Coltrane runs the ShapeShifter Lab in Brooklyn, said that living in the metropolis created openings for him that he just wouldn’t have had elsewhere. “When I was younger, I would play anytime, anyplace, whoever called. Each of those things, in almost every case, led to something else; that led to something else; that led to the thing on the big stage that paid lots of money. And they tend to emanate from these little stinky joints in New York.”

Clarinetist Anat Cohen echoes that sentiment: “For me, it was either go home to Israel or move here.” Cohen came to New York nearly 20 years ago after studying at Boston’s Berklee College of Music. Recalling her early days, she said, “It was having the horn on my back, walking from gig to gig, to jam, to sit in. It exists elsewhere, too, of course, but it’s more concentrated here. There were times I’d play Brazilian pop, Louis Armstrong music, big band music and play New Orleans music in the afternoons in the street, too—everything in one day. I don’t think I’d be able to do that elsewhere.”

Even though he and most of his staff are based in Los Angeles, Don Was, president of the storied Blue Note label since 2012, said, “I can’t think of any artist we’ve signed since I’ve been here that didn’t come through New York. The best current example is [pianist]



James Francies, who comes out of the same high school in Houston as [pianist Robert] Glasper and [drummers] Chris Dave and Eric Harland. Houston is a great music town, but James had to come to New York ... to attend The New School and make the connections that led to him playing with The Roots, Chris Potter, touring with José James. ... I don't think I would have found him if he hadn't been in New York."

In the 1990s, another New School alum, pianist Spike Wilner, played regularly at the Village basement hangout Smalls, eventually becoming a partner in the club. "It's just a bar, honestly ... but for the last 25 years it has become a hub for generations of jazz musicians," Wilner said. "It wasn't created for the topflight acts or for comfortable seating. Just a place where people could hang out as late as they liked for almost no money. And it created a culture of young jazz musicians who began to make it their home."

Wilner agreed that young jazz players need to come to New York to learn the tradition of masters of bebop and hard-bop like Art Blakey. "If you want to become a great Chinese chef," he asked rhetorically, "do you need to spend some time in China? You can't really assimilate the full culture of jazz anywhere else. To me, it should be called New York Jazz."

For Barney Fields, who runs the HighNote and Savant labels, the concentration of musicians and studios makes it hard for him to imagine operating his labels anywhere else. The labels' rosters include Cyrus Chestnut, Houston Person, Peter Bernstein, Mike LeDonne and Eric Alexander, among others. "The talent pool here is enormous," he said. "If you need a bass player, there are five different guys just on the West Side. ... The studio engineers here have recorded enough jazz that they know what they're doing, not like a studio that's recording rock one day and jazz the next."

Another indie label strongly associated with New York is Pi Recordings, founded in 2001 by Seth Rosner and Yulun Wang. "We were documenting guys like Vijay Iyer, Craig Taborn and Steve Lehman before the international jazz audience really knew about them," Rosner said.

Wang added: "I don't think we could be the label we are without being here. We feel the need to be on the ground, going out and listening to lots of musicians and getting to know them as people. You just can't do that by email or by listening to a digital file." Over time, Wang said, the musicians have "shared their honest thoughts about who we should be paying more attention to. ... Frankly, I don't think that's possible if we were, say, in Dubuque."

New York can be intimidating—even for the most talented young musicians. But Cohen believes they should come anyway: "I always tell them to spend some time in New York—it's really important. And when you get here, you'll have to get in line. For every gig, there's a line and a hierarchy. But if you're good, the line just goes faster."

—Allen Morrison

Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah performs at the 2018 DC Jazz Festival.



FRITZ PHOTOGRAPHIC

## D.C. OFFERS HOMEGROWN JAZZ

**Washington, D.C., was the birthplace for icons Duke Ellington, Charlie Rouse and Shirley Horn, and because the nation's capital is so steeped in history—of both the political and jazz variety—it remains an alluring destination for tourists. The city's music, however, has no plans to retire to the exhibit cases at the Smithsonian.**

"There's so many things about D.C. that are unique," says Amy K. Bormet, a pianist and native Washingtonian who recently moved back after five years in Los Angeles. "I didn't realize how magical it was until I left it."

D.C.'s jazz ecosystem naturally has elite, international components to it. At the top of that list is the programming at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the country's national cultural center, which pianist Jason Moran has overseen since 2012. The Kennedy Center's prestige has drawn esteemed performers for decades. Under Moran, its jazz offerings have expanded steadily, ranging from concerts by Anthony Braxton to collaborations between Moran and a group of skateboarders who built a half-pipe in the center's outdoor plaza.

Washington also boasts the DC Jazz Festival each June; the event has grown since its 2005 inception to become one America's largest jazz festivals. In 2018, the DCJF attracted 82,000 attendees to its 165 events, with performances by Leslie Odom Jr., R+R=NOW, Maceo Parker and D.C. native Ben Williams.

But the city's greatest strength springs from local energy: the homegrown jazz artists, venues, advocates and fans that constantly replenish the local scene. Two vibrant examples are the neighborhood venue Alice's Jazz & Cultural Society, which hosts weeknight performances, and the Petworth Jazz Project, a summertime concert series at a local recreation center. Bars offering weekly gigs include Elijah Easton's Tuesday nights at U Street's Service Bar and Friday's late-night jams at Maddy's in Dupont Circle. Numerous players have organized ambitious events, like Bormet's influential Washington Women in Jazz Festival.

"This is the best community in the entire world," Bormet said. "I love L.A., but it's so spread out—people there work on separate things. Here, they collaborate and co-sponsor events, and take time to support other people's ventures. All that stuff means a lot to me. I wanted to be back here, so I could build things in this community, for this community."

—Michael J. West



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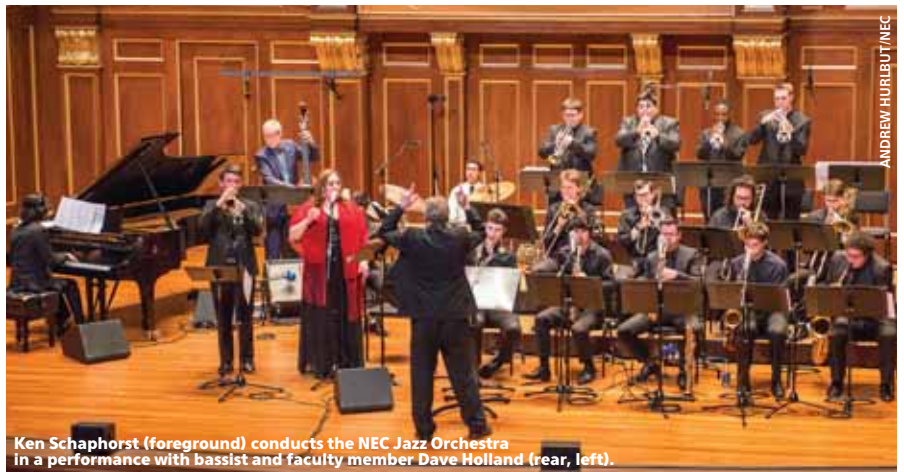
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Ken Schaphorst (foreground) conducts the NEC Jazz Orchestra in a performance with bassist and faculty member Dave Holland (rear, left).

ANDREW HURLBUT/NEC

# SCHOOLS RULE IN BOSTON

**Boston's reputation as a jazz city rests on its importance as an education hub. It's a college town, after all. There are jazz clubs like Scullers and the Regattabar, which book internationally touring acts, as well as smaller venues like the Lilypad, Outpost 186 and the venerable Wally's.**

But it's the thousands of aspiring musicians who fuel area performances—as listeners and players. And in large part, the schools serve as concert venues for the general public.

In addition to music-specific institutions like Berklee College of Music, New England Conservatory and the Longy School, student musicians also can study in music departments at any number of area colleges, including Boston University, Brandeis and Harvard (where pianist Vijay Iyer is a professor).

But the heavyweights of jazz education in Boston are Berklee and NEC. Both institutions set the template for jazz education in America: inviting world-class musicians to demonstrate the ins and outs of performance.

Berklee's current history began in 1954, with an ever-evolving faculty that has included legendary teacher/performers like trumpeter Herb Pomeroy (1930–2007), drummer Alan Dawson (1929–'96) and reedist John LaPorta (1920–2004), through to vibraphonist Gary Burton's long association with the school, including roles as professor, dean and executive vice president.

These days, the school has 6,500 students and a teaching staff of hundreds that includes Tia Fuller, Terence Blanchard and Danilo Pérez. Among its broad-reaching programs are the Berklee Global Jazz Institute and the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, directed by Terri Lyne Carrington (see cover story).

NEC, founded in 1867, turned its ears to jazz

in 1967, when Gunther Schuller (1925–2015) became president. In short order, Schuller hired composer George Russell (1923–2009) and pianist Ran Blake, who still teaches at the school.

Today, musicians at NEC study in both the jazz studies and contemporary improvisation departments, the latter a descendent of the Third Stream Department, which Schuller asked Blake to create as a laboratory for Schuller's ideas about the blending of classical and jazz idioms.

On any night, fans can catch free faculty-student recitals at either school. The Berklee Beantown Jazz Festival is a free multi-stage block party every September, featuring faculty, alumni and students. NEC's many free concerts in its storied Jordan Hall last fall included trumpeter Dave Douglas performing his 1998 album *Charms Of The Night Sky* with a student-faculty ensemble. The Berklee Performance Center is a major venue for touring acts, and the intimate Café 939 offers a showcase for touring acts.

Many musicians interact in some way with both institutions: The multi-instrumentalist and composer Mehmet Ali Sanlikol, 44, now a professor at NEC, earned a bachelor's degree at Berklee and then moved on to NEC to earn a master's and doctorate.

A native of Istanbul, Sanlikol came to the States dreaming of jazz and with no interest in traditional Turkish music. By the time he got to NEC, he recalled, "I was a 23-year-old jazz cat! I'm hip and hot and playing with [trumpeter] Tiger Okoshi." But the ethnomusicology courses offered by NEC led him back to his roots, and his own diverse oeuvre now mixes jazz and Turkish influences. "The institution has a way of encouraging students to go beyond their majors or concentrations," the Grammy-nominated Sanlikol said, "and that changed my life as a composer and jazz performer." —Jon Garelick



# Deep Pride in New Orleans

Jazz is more than a genre in New Orleans. It's a fundamental part of the city's ethos, woven into the fabric of its 300-year history and reflected back into daily life in ways that extend beyond the stages of celebrated clubs like Snug Harbor, the Prime Example and Fritzel's, or events like the Jazz & Heritage Festival, the French Quarter Festival and Satchmo Summerfest.

The city's collective reverence for local music reverberates 24/7 on the airwaves of WWOZ. During Sunday afternoon second-lines, when brass-band music spurs folks into fervent displays of self-expression, they're participating in a community-based form of collective improvisation. Often, those moments are staged against the backdrop of historic jazz sites like Congo Square, or newer focal points for jazz history, like the New Orleans Jazz Museum, which houses pieces ranging from Louis Armstrong's first cornet to a contemporary soprano saxophone donated by Aurora Nealand, an important voice in the city's thriving creative and improvised music scene.

Like jazz itself, New Orleans is engaged in a



New Orleans' French Quarter Festival will take place April 11–14.

ZACK SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

struggle to move forward while sustaining cultural traditions embedded in its past. Amid changing demographics, local organizations have picked up the mantle, providing essential services to protect musicians, students and audiences. Arts magnet NOCCA is nationally recognized for offering a serious jazz education to youngsters. And programs like the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation's Heritage School of Music and the Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong Jazz Camp remain committed to teaching the next generation.

"Our programs help empower musicians to

pass along New Orleans' jazz and other cultural traditions to students," said trombonist and Preservation Hall Director of Programs Ashley Shabankareh. "As a result, we're seeing younger musicians engaged in the art form and playing alongside their elders."

From the musicians themselves to the vinyl freaks at Euclid Records or the Louisiana Music Factory to the city's habit of putting life on hold to serve the music, New Orleans is a place where jazz both is fueled and protected by a sense of community.

—Jennifer Odell



The GroundUP Music Festival will take place in Miami Beach on Feb. 8–10.

## MIAMI'S JAZZ PULSE

Much of Miami's jazz emanates from WDNA, which offers riches in jazz programming and public events live-streamed from the station's jazz gallery music venue. The station has a strong rapport with the University of Miami's Frost School of Music, an institution that boasts many notable jazz instructors, including Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Brian Lynch and 2018 Grammy nominee John Daversa, as well as student combos and jazz orchestras. In the face of challenges for funding the arts, WDNA's "doing a service for the incredible amount of great jazz musicians in the area, and our part for the world of jazz," according Maggie Pelleyá, the station's general manager.

WDNA's programming reflects tropical Latin rhythms, with broadcasts led by DJs Frank Consola and Fania-connected Andy Harlow, featuring lots of straightahead jazz

throughout the day.

French cafe Le Chat Noir is a great spot for small jazz groups, and outdoor concerts frequently are programmed among the dramatic murals at Wynwood. The club Ball and Chain books jazz combos as well. But a large Brazilian contingent in the area gets bragging rights for Rio jazz great Antonio Adolfo, who appears in local concerts periodically.

Tours of national and international acts move through town largely during the winter season. And for the third year, Snarky Puppy has booked intriguing international acts for its GroundUp Music Festival, which will be held in Miami Beach on Feb. 8–10. The lineup's set to include David Crosby, Lalah Hathaway, Tank & The Bangas and three nights of performances by Snarky Puppy.

—John Radanovich

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Esperanza Spalding performs at the 2018 Detroit Jazz Festival.



## DETROIT

Detroit's reputation as a great jazz city is due, in large part, to the annual Detroit Jazz Festival. Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2019, this free, outdoor event is held every Labor Day weekend.

It features unique programming, celebrated international stars and a bevy of Michigan-based jazz musicians, with upwards of 100 performances dispatched from five stages. In addition, there are a variety of educational activities to enhance the visitor experience, all of it taking place downtown at the picturesque Hart Plaza. The artist-in-residence for the 2018 fest was Chick Corea, who performed with members of his ensembles, as well as an orchestra. Festival artists also have included Esperanza Spalding, The Bad Plus and Motor City native Regina Carter.

For the other 51 weeks of the year, fans can check out music at venues such as the Jazz Cafe at Music Hall, Baker's Keyboard Lounge, Cliff Bell's and the Dirty Dog Jazz Cafe.

Bert's Marketplace includes not only a Jazz Room, but a Motown Room and the Warehouse Theater, which regularly stages award shows. This 24,000-foot entertainment complex is a favorite watering hole for saxophonist and Detroit native James Carter, who referred to the club's owner, 75-year-old Bert Dearing, as "a historic and soulful fixture on the Detroit music map." Carter added, "Every time I'm in town, I make a point to go there. I like to revisit the well to see how folks are doin' in town, to find out what's happening, musically. ... Bert's has a down-home feeling."

In addition to the city's night life, listeners can tune into Detroit public radio station WRCJ, which offers original and satellite programming.

Meanwhile, the next generation of jazz stars is studying in Wayne State University's jazz department. Visiting clinicians at the Detroit college have included Joe Lovano, Jon Faddis, Kenny Werner and Branford Marsalis. Benefiting students, as well as faculty, the school collaborates with the Detroit Jazz Festival and Mack Avenue Records. The label, which was founded in Detroit, has released critically acclaimed albums by Kenny Garrett, Christian McBride, Alfredo Rodriguez and Cécile McLorin Salvant, among others.

—John Ephland

Lewis Achenbach (foreground) offers a painting demonstration while saxophonist Greg Ward and several other musicians perform at Chicago venue Constellation in 2017.



# SAGES FUEL CHICAGO SCENE

**Saxophonist Chris Greene did not intend to become a mentor when he began playing professionally in Chicago 25 years ago. But he enjoys the role nowadays and is aware of the heritage that afforded him this stature.**

"When you're in your 20s, 30s, you maybe don't think about being part of a lineage," he said. "But when I first became a tenor player, I would go to Von Freeman's sets and hear about his story. It kind of dawns on you, being a tenor player, especially a black tenor player in Chicago, you are part of the tradition whether you want to admit it or not. I'm in no way comparing myself to what Von did, but it is like what he did—encouraging people, if not offering guidance, an example of how to succeed and weather the storm as a professional musician."

Musicians' willingness to fulfill the role of personable sage remains a key reason why the Chicago jazz scene has flourished for more than a century. At the same time, Windy City legacies have combined with experimental inclinations. In the 1960s that meant adding in new harmonies and compositions to established blues and bop. Today, hip-hop-inspired production by artists like drummer Makaya McCraven augment instrumental improvisation.

A local infrastructure provides spaces to bring these musicians' ideas to audiences throughout the Chicago area. These include a number of independent record companies, including International Anthem and artist-run efforts like Greene's Single Malt Recordings. A range of venues also host diverse jazz performers throughout the city, including musician-owned spaces (drummer Mike Reed's Constellation and Hungry Brain), established institutions (Jazz Showcase and Green Mill)

and spots for jam sessions where mentors can connect with young adherents (Norman's Bistro). Perhaps the city's relative affordability—compared to the urban East and West Coasts—has helped them remain sustainable.

Such vibrancy extends to areas just outside the city, as numerous performance spaces thrive in the suburbs. Evanston venue SPACE celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2018. And a new venue/gastropub, Hey Nonny, recently opened in Arlington Heights. Along with bluegrass, blues and folk music, Hey Nonny regularly hosts local jazz artists, such as vocalist Typhanie Monique, drummer Dana Hall and saxophonist Shawn Maxwell. Its owner, Chip Brooks, has seen a positive reaction to the venue.

"There just hasn't been a place [in the northwest suburbs] for people who love jazz to go, so it's not a preset destination," he said. "We have to find the people who love jazz, introduce ourselves and get to know them."

Ultimately, artists continue to create their own experiences, while drawing on a supportive community of collaborators and listeners. One such upcoming musician is clarinetist/keyboardist Angel Bat Dawid. Her take on Afrofuturism follows the path of such Chicago forerunners as Kelan Phil Cohran (1927–2017), and she already has composed a Bible-inspired opera (*Song Of Solomon*) and recorded her debut album for intended release in 2019.

"There's a self-supporting, strong community here," Bat Dawid said. "Money-wise, not really. You have to be doing this for something else besides paper; it's not about that. This is deeper than an industry—it's cosmic, divine and spiritual. Chicago has this thing I've heard nowhere else."

—Aaron Cohen





Josh Nelson (left) Larry Koonse and Brian Walsh, seen here at the Angel City Jazz Festival, also have played at Los Angeles venue Bluewhale.

## L.A. RENAISSANCE CONTINUES

Even before native son Kamasi Washington achieved international renown, a jazz renaissance was well underway in Los Angeles.

Today, the city is home not only to Washington and his group, the West Coast Get Down, but to a growing number of transplants from the New York and Chicago jazz scenes, as well as recent grads of jazz programs at UCLA, USC and CalArts, who have found an active community of players unafraid of intermingling with the city's thriving music scene.

If L.A. jazz has a hub, it's Bluewhale, a listening lounge opened by vocalist Joon Lee in 2009 in the city's Little Tokyo neighborhood. Lee competes with more established venues the Baked Potato and Catalina's for national talent, but also programs an adventurous mix of

boundary-pushing L.A. artists. Other small, but expertly curated venues include the LAX-adjacent Sam First, Highland Park cocktail bar ETA and Zebulon.

"It has turned out to be surprisingly fantastic," said Australian bassist Anna Butterss—who plays in guitarist Jeff Parker's quartet at ETA on Monday nights—of her adopted hometown.

L.A. also has a thriving festival scene that includes The Playboy Jazz Fest, the Angel City Jazz Festival and the Central Avenue Jazz Festival. And just down the road in Long Beach, KKJZ remains one of the country's best jazz FM stations. Combine all that with a deep pool of studio and session musicians, and one could argue that Los Angeles' jazz scene is the world's most underrated. —Andy Hermann



The SFJAZZ Collective, with Edward Simon on piano, performs at SFJAZZ Center in San Francisco.

## BAY AREA EXUDES ENERGY

Boasting venues like Black Cat, Red Poppy Art House, and Bird & Beckett Books and Records, San Francisco is a great jazz city with a colorful past and a vibrant contemporary scene.

The 35-year-old SFJAZZ organization is a focal point, its SFJAZZ Center the first freestanding building in the U.S. devoted to jazz. "It's kind of the monolith of jazz in San Francisco," said vocalist Kitty Margolis, a Bay Area native.

SFJAZZ concerts, classes and talks were programmed mostly in-house for 46 weeks in 2018. The center is also home to the 15-year-old SFJAZZ Collective octet, the High School All-Stars and the Monday Night community band.

"We're very lucky to have a place like this in the city, and I'm so fortunate to be here now, because I can go hear a lot of great music that

goes through there," said SFJAZZ pianist and Sunnyside recording artist Edward Simon.

Other establishments regularly host performances by local musicians. Across the Bay in Oakland, the famed club Yoshi's is a tour stop for many jazz stars, while The San Francisco Symphony, Yerba Buena Gardens Festival and SF Performances all include jazz in their seasonal schedules. Nearby performing arts organizations, including Cal Performances (at UC-Berkeley) and Stanford Live (at Stanford University), do the same.

Broadcasting from the campus of the College of San Mateo, public radio station KCSM can be heard throughout the area and has excellent jazz, blues and Afro-Cuban shows around the clock. —Yoshi Kato



## SEATTLE

The passion of Seattle's jazz scene was demonstrated dramatically in 2016, when the community ponied up \$7 million to buy its own radio station, KNKX. Then known as KPLU and associated with Pacific Lutheran University, in Tacoma, Washington, the frequency was about to be absorbed by a fellow NPR station in Seattle.

"It was a testament to the community," said Joey Cohn, president and general manager of the new, community-owned jazz-and-news NPR affiliate with offices in Seattle and Tacoma. "We kept hearing that people had an emotional connection to the people on the air, who felt like family or friends."

Cohn added that lately he has been struck by how many young musicians pass through the station's live broadcast studio. Part of that trend includes the area's prodigious student jazz scene. Is there another city in America that sells out a 3,000-seat theater every year to showcase five high school jazz bands? That's what happens at the Starbucks-sponsored "Hot Java, Cool Jazz" concert at the Paramount Theatre.

Additionally, Cornish College of the Arts and the University of Washington have strong programs and present rounds of concerts.

One reason kids from Seattle's Garfield High School and Roosevelt High School have aced the Essentially Ellington competition in New York seven times between them just might be that their parents take them to see the A-list jazz musicians who regularly come through Dimitriou's Jazz Alley.

"I spent many years lobbying the governor and the liquor board to allow us to [admit minors]," said John Dimitriou, who opened Jazz Alley in 1980. "I see parents and grandparents and great-grandparents here, introducing their kids to the music."

Jazz fans also fill up the clubs Tula's, Egan's, the Triple Door and pianist Wayne Horvitz's cozy spot, the Royal Room. Jazz fans also can buy local, from Seattle's Origin Records, still going strong after 21 years, and a sponsor of springtime's Ballard Jazz Festival.

With jazz on the airwaves (also on KBCS, from Bellevue College), in the classroom, record bins, clubs and theaters—especially in October, when the now 30-year-old Earshot Jazz Festival floods the city with new sounds—Seattle jazz fans enjoy a robust jazz scene, indeed. —Paul de Barros

# MONTREAL

Montreal is a city that embraces the large show—or "le grand spectacle," as it's called in French. It was a love affair that began in 1967, Canada's centennial year, when the city hosted Expo 67, a world's fair that attracted as many as 570,000 visitors a day to two islands in the middle of the St. Lawrence River.

Three years later, on that site, the Festival International de Jazz de Montreal debuted to 12,000 fans. Now, it's not unheard of for FIJM to draw 100,000 people to a free outdoor show. At any time during the festival's run, when 500 concerts are staged at 20 venues, downtown Montreal hums with life. A vast 760,000-square-foot site is closed to vehicles, and businesses inside the perimeter contend with crowds milling outside their doors.

"The key to making this all work is bringing everyone around the planning table," said Mikaël Frascadore, senior production director for L'Équipe Spectra, the company that operates FIJM and numerous other cultural events in Montreal. "It's all about communications—with city officials and our 'neighbors,' who include both business owners and residents."

He said FIJM's nightly schedule makes concessions to those who live in condominiums near the festival's site, shutting down concerts at 10:30 p.m., while indoor shows might run until midnight. The approach to open communication has helped



everyone find something in FIJM's mammoth sprawl that works for them.

"The city wants to increase tourism," Frascadore said. "Montreal citizens love the exposure to the diverse music we program. Together, we have a common mindset."

Local musicians, too, recognize its value: "This festival has given me so much love in terms of providing a space for me to develop as a jazz artist," said saxophonist Christine Jensen, who first performed at FIJM in 1999 and also has attended outdoor concerts with her 8-year-old daughter in tow.

"Forty years ago," Frascadore said, "the organizers made up a lot of this as they went. Now, the technical quality is so high, with fiber-optic cabling at every site. We have great people working on this to make it the best it can be."

—James Hale

# Portland

The closing of Jimmy Mak's—a fixture of Portland music for two decades—put a pall of worry over jazz fans in late 2016. True, the Biamp PDX Jazz Festival still was going strong, and a lot of young players were injecting fresh energy into the scene, but it felt like the jazz community was without a central hub.

Fortunately, things only have improved since then. The Jack London Revue opened in mid-2017, providing a new home for regulars like drummer Mel Brown and booking an array of touring acts. Jazz club/restaurant The 1905 stepped in to provide a home for local combos and regular jam sessions, as well as all-ages showcases for ensembles from area schools. Smaller spaces, such as Turn! Turn! Turn! and No Fun, have taken up the baton for the city's growing coterie of avant-garde players, with weekly gigs rife with adventurous sounds and styles.

Surrounding all of this local activity are organizations aiming to give Portland musicians the national and international platform they deserve. Chief among them is PDX Jazz, the nonprofit organization behind the festival, which takes over various venues around the city every February, and draws in top-tier talent like Mary Halvorson and John Scofield for one-off shows throughout the year.



The city also boasts the Portland Jazz Composers Ensemble, a 12-piece chamber orchestra that only performs original works by its members or commissioned material. That philosophy extends to its affiliate label, PJCE Records, which to date has released more than 30 albums by local artists, including multi-instrumentalist George Colligan.

Ryan Meagher, director of PJCE Records, commented on the label's focus: "It is originally composed Portland jazz with a high level of artistry. We have a pretty wide swath of aesthetics to offer. There are definitely swinging straightahead sounds, and there's really far-out sounds." While he's only talking about the work that the label has put out, his comment serves as an apt summation of this thriving city's entire jazz scene.

—Robert Ham



Nubya Garcia

MICHAEL JACKSON



# London

London has a long history as a jazz-savvy city. In 1959, British saxophonists Ronnie Scott and Pete King opened Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club. The venue still flourishes in Soho, presenting local mainstream-to-modern talent, as well as internationally touring stars.

Fans of experimental music flock to The Vortex, whose director is Babel label honcho Oliver Weindling. Drummer Avreeayl Ra collaborated with saxophonist Evan Parker there recently.

Nearby, Cafe Oto presents progressive music in a casual setting. The ICP Orchestra, Ben LaMar Gay and Matana Roberts have performed there, and in April, pianist Alexander Hawkins will play a two-day residency with flutist Nicole Mitchell and cellist Tomeka Reid.

In Camden, the Jazz Cafe offers a hip space for r&b, soul and increasingly strong jazz book-

ings. Saxophonist Jean Toussaint, who moved to London in 1987, led his sextet there in December. The Bill Frisell Trio plays there Feb. 23.

Each November, the EFG London Jazz Festival presents an array of talent in venues throughout the city, including the essential 606 Club, PizzaExpress and the 100 Club.

Fabrice Bourgelle's 2018 documentary *We Out Here: A LDN Story* and its accompanying Brownswood soundtrack shine a spotlight on exciting young British artists informed not only by hard-bop but also hip-hop, drum 'n' bass and African rhythms. The film features saxophonists Shabaka Hutchings and Nubya Garcia, drummer Moses Boyd and others. Garcia commented in the film on her colleagues' aesthetic: "There's a constant pushing and desire to say something new, but also fully appreciate and take in what has been said before." —Michael Jackson

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# HAVANA

Music nearly is inescapable in Havana. Cuba's capital city pulsates with not just styles long associated with Afro-Cuban jazz—such as *changüí*, *son*, *danzón* and *rumba*—but also with new hybrids incorporating elements from hip-hop, soul, pop, electronica and reggae.

"There is a strong jazz movement in Cuba that is constantly growing and evolving," said Cuban-born jazz singer Zule Guerra, who performed last year in Washington, D.C., at the Kennedy Center's Artes De Cuba: From the Island to The World festival. "A new generation of young jazz musicians with increasingly fresh and innovative languages is breaking through, showing the wide range of inherited rhythmic traditions and its enriching experimentation with contemporary music from around the world."

The annual Havana International Jazz Festival—with iconic pianist Chucho Valdés as its artistic director—is certainly a draw for jazz fans. The 41-year-old festival showcases a wealth of the island's finest jazz musicians, as well as other international stars, such as Dee Dee Bridgewater, Joe Lovano and Arturo O'Farrill.

A visit to some of Havana's venues, including La Zorra y el Cuervo, Jazz Café and the piano bar

Orlando "Maraca" Valle at the 2017 International Jazz Day Global Concert in Havana



STEVE MUNDINGER/  
THELONIOUS MONK INSTITUTE OF JAZZ

Delirio Habanero, will reveal less well-known musical treasures.

One must-see spot is the Fábrica de Arte Cubano, a former cooking-oil plant turned multimedia arts venue. Situated in Havana's Vedado neighborhood, the place draws a huge crowd of mostly young locals as they take in a diverse selection of bands and DJ sets. One could just as likely hear Cuban musicians channel Robert Glasper's modern jazz innovations as they would delight in the Afro-Cuban sounds associated with the Buena Vista Social Club.

An outing to the historic EGREM recording studios is rewarding for any music buff interested in Cuba's history. The label EGREM, which was founded in 1964, has a catalog of more than 30,000 tracks, and the studio buildings have an adjacent record store and performance space for intimate concerts. —John Murphy



## TERMANSENS RIBE, DENMARK

Renowned Danish pianist Martin Schack has opened the jazz club **Termansens** in Ribe, the oldest city in Denmark. Located in a historic building that dates back to the 1500s, **Termansens** has hosted top Danish and international artists, including:

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The artist's view onstage at Porgy & Bess in Vienna, Austria.

COURTESY PORGY & BESS

## VIENNA

Vienna always will be celebrated as a classical music landmark. It was the seedbed of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. Yet the musically fertile soil also extends into the jazz realm—as evidenced by one of Europe's finest jazz clubs, Porgy & Bess.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2018, Porgy & Bess boasts auspicious beginnings through the efforts of the madcap musician Mathias Rüegg. His big band project, the Vienna Art Orchestra, earned a reputation as one of the most adventurous large ensembles in the world, incorporating humor, intricate charts and references to music beyond jazz.

The venue's original location was in what had been known in the 19th century as the Fledermaus Bar (a nod to the famous operetta by Johann Strauss II). The current 400-seat location has been the club's home since 2000 and formerly played host to a 19th-century theater.

"Of course, Vienna is associated with Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler and Schoenberg," said Christoph Huber, who has run Porgy & Bess since 2000. "But we also had a saxophone titan named Hans Koller [1921–2003]. Don't forget that in the 1950s, the German jazz scene was called 'jazz im Kollerland.' There was a jazz club [in Vienna] called Fatty's Saloon, programmed by the great clarinet player Fatty George."

Besides Porgy & Bess—known for embracing more experimental and avant-garde sounds—jazz fans in Vienna frequent the Blue Tomato and Vienna's oldest continuously running jazz club, Jazzland. That venue's founder and director, Axel Melhardt explained, "Back in 1972, there were only a few places to play jazz. So, Jazzland was founded, with concerts by Albert Nicholas and Ben Webster."

Vienna also boasts a hearty annual summer jazz festival, Jazzfest Wien, founded in 1991. It is part of the prestigious International Jazz Festival Organization, just as Porgy & Bess is connected with the European Jazz Network, which helps facilitate cooperative bookings with venues in other cities.

Jazzfest Wien generally books smaller shows into both Jazzland and Porgy & Bess during its run, along with booking high-profile shows in the grand Vienna State Opera.

"We have cooperated with the Jazzfest Wien for many years," said Porgy's Huber. "They usually program a week at the club in the beginning of July. The festival is an important event in the Viennese jazz life, but ... I definitively prefer the club," he added with a laugh.

—Josef Woodard

# Amsterdam

Amsterdam's jazz history is extensive. It even boasts a *Guinness Book of World Records* entry for the Ramblers as the world's longest-running dance band. The group formed in 1926 and gained legitimacy in 1934 when Coleman Hawkins, then starting out on a five-year sojourn through Europe, worked with the band. But the city truly made its mark in the '60s with the rise of the musicians who later would form the Instant Composers Pool—pianist Misha Mengelberg, drummer Han Bennink and saxophonist Willem Breuker—a collective that internalized the full breadth of jazz history while deploying feverish creativity.

In the decades since then, the city has established a reputation built upon a collision of tradition and rebellion, with a stellar cast of players steeped in that ICP ethos. Although it relocated to posh new digs in 2005, the Bimhuis has been the city's hot-house of experimentation since it opened in 1973.

The current century has seen the Amsterdam scene grow increasingly international while embracing a stronger emphasis on free improvisation. Guitarist/bassist Jasper Stadhouders said, "It's wonderful to see how ICP's history seeps through to the younger generation. Most musicians here



Jasper Stadhouders (left), Mark Sanders, Wilbert de Jooide and John Dikeman perform at De Ruimte during the 2018 Doek Festival in Amsterdam.

MAARTEN VAN DER KAMP

have a strong musical identity without neglecting or ignoring the musical past—where improvised music came from—while at the same time feeling confident about their own way of viewing improvised music."

The sprawling North Sea Jazz Festival occurs each summer in Rotterdam, an hour drive away, but Amsterdam possesses such a rich assortment of venues that there's never a shortage of performances by locals and touring musicians.

Although modest in size, the annual Doek Festival in June provides an intriguing look at the scene's overall health, presenting veteran musicians alongside key new figures like expat Slovenian pianist Kaja Drakslar and keyboardist Oscar Jan Hoogland. —Peter Margasak

## COPENHAGEN

Copenhagen, Denmark, boasts one of Europe's oldest jazz clubs, even if it has changed location three times and was closed for 15 years (from 1995–2010). Jazzhus Montmartre first opened in 1959, booking many visiting or resident American artists, such as Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster, Stan Getz, Thad Jones and George Lewis. Now, it has a modern interior and returned to a location that previously housed the venue between 1961 and 1976.

At one point, a similarly named venue, Jazzhouse, was Copenhagen's main club for more wayward sounds, but this year, it merged with the venue Global to create Alice—a new place dedicated to jazz, electronica and folk music.

The city also boasts two jazz festivals: The massive summer incarnation of the Copenhagen Jazz Festival occupies nearly every possible venue in the city; its smaller winter incarnation still is fairly extensive. And the concept is all-encompassing, as the events welcome the biggest acts in large concert halls, as well as working with hardcore improvisers in alternative spaces. Many of its gigs are free, and the entire range of jazz styles is embraced.

One of Copenhagen's best (yet slightly overlooked) players is the guitarist Pierre Dørge, who has led his New Jungle Orchestra since 1980. The band remains active, mostly around the city, but DownBeat caught up with him during a run of gigs and asked him about the special qualities of the scene in Copenhagen: "There are many musicians



Singer Dee Dee Bridgewater (right) is one of the luminaries who has performed at the Copenhagen Jazz Festival in Denmark.

CHRISTOPHER JUEL POULSEN

experimenting and creating spontaneous music stories, mixing and combining fragments not only from jazz history, but from the whole world, mixed with electronics and samples," he said. "Surprise is the key word."

Prominent players making a global impact include saxophonist Laura Toxværd, percussionist Marilyn Mazur, trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg, guitarist Jakob Bro and drummer Kresten Osgood. Toxværd is involved with the ILK improvising collective and record label, whose main haunt is much appreciated by Dørge.

"One of my favorite venues is in the old slaughterhouse named 5E," he said. "It was initiated by Kresten Osgood: a small, raw room with a wooden stove, where I heard my musical guru [and collaborator], John Tchicai, freestyling for the last time before he passed away." Indeed, that magisterial saxophonist was another Copenhagen-born treasure. —Martin Longley



Sunset-Sunside has presented jazz in Paris since 1983.



## PARIS

Fans of Martin Ritt's 1961 film *Paris Blues*, with Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's magnificent score, might be stuck with the lingering image of crowds of existentialist fans crazy for jazz musicians. Things have changed significantly since then, but a line from the standard "Azure-Te" poses a question that remains relevant today: "How can I be blue in Paris?"

After all, Le Caveau de la Huchette is still here. Near Notre-Dame, the venue remains a stomping ground dedicated to late-night dancing in an ancient cave still echoing with the grooves of Lionel Hampton. Additionally, a variety of restaurants and cafés in Paris moonlight as jazz venues. The Cercle Suédois presents spirited jazz once a week. Chez Papa is a Saint Germain-des-Prés restaurant that presents jazz every day.

"Jazz in Paris is a multicultural crossroads involving all forms of jazz," said Stéphane Portet, owner of Sunset-Sunside, located on the Rue des Lombards, which claims four clubs strung along 100 yards. "This eclectic situation will give rise to the jazz of tomorrow."

Thanks to the presence of clubs like Le Baiser Salé and Le Duc des Lombards, many exciting players are drawn to this musical hub. U.S. artists routinely stop at Sunset-Sunside, which has booked guitarist Peter Bernstein's quartet to perform Jan. 4-5.

Located further from the city center, New Morning is a larger venue that presents a variety of genres (rock, hip-hop, gospel) and big-name jazz stars, like guitarist Lionel Loueke, who is scheduled for a Feb. 21 show.

—Jean Szlamowicz

## Berlin

Even considering the event's sterling reputation, the 2018 edition of JazzFest Berlin made more of an international impact than usual, with the debut of its adventurous new artistic director, Nadin Deventer. "Taking on this task is a big privilege, but also a bit intimidating," she said. "I'm relieved that my open, participatory, cooperative and challenging idea of a festival has been so well received."

Not far from the center of the festival is the city's famed club A-Trane, where international stars frequently appear. Clubs such as Schlot and B-Flat present mainstream jazz, but there are more out-there alternatives as well, including Sowieso and Donau 115.

There are many imports in this markedly international city, including Osaka, Japan-born pianist Aki Takase, Finnish guitarist Kalle Kalima and, from Britain, pianist Julie Sassoon and trumpeter Tom Arthurs. Among the younger adventurous players based in Berlin are Silke Eberhard (saxophones), Magda Mayas (piano) and Christian Lillinger (drums/percussion).

Other festivals in Berlin include XJAZZ, which looks outward to electronic and new music. In the past six years, the upstart A L'ARME! festival has featured much music of the avant-garde and free-improv variety.

Berlin is a fine home for collectives, with Splitter Orchester and KIM Collective being of particular note, working in the territory between composition and improvisation.

—Martin Longley



Mary Halvorson performs at the 2018 edition of JazzFest Berlin.



Henry Threadgill (left), John Lindberg, Marcus Gilmore and bandleader Wadada Leo Smith perform at the 2015 Jazz em Agosto festival in Lisbon, Portugal.

## LISBON

Lisbon's Hot Clube de Portugal, now more than 70 years old, is one of the world's mythic jazz rooms. It's an important stopping point for celebrated touring musicians, a vital space for Portuguese jazz artists and an anchoring center for jazz appreciation and education.

A school, Escola de Jazz Luís Villas-Boas, long has been part of the Hot Clube operation. "The Portuguese jazz scene is in fact surprisingly exciting," said Inês Cunha, the club's president since 2009. "There are now a few jazz schools, and a new generation of extraordinary musicians. But Portugal is a country in the 'tail' of Europe. It is harder for Portuguese musicians to play abroad. That is maybe why there are not that many Portuguese musicians known either

in Europe or in the States."

But the city's a well-established hot spot for experimental jazz and free-improv, especially in August, thanks to Jazz em Agosto, a 35-year-old festival that has been run by Rui Neves—also a jazz broadcaster, critic and producer—for much of its history.

Regarding Lisbon's jazz resources, Neves pointed to the improvisation-oriented Creative Sources label, run by violist Ernesto Rodriguez. In Portugal, Neves said, "Jazz is learned at the university, and private schools are everywhere—but this is not making more creative musicians, only formatted musicians playing by the rules. However, there is in Lisbon a bunch of improvisers we can discover at the Creative Sources label who are getting some recognition."

Additionally, the label Clean Feed, founded in Lisbon in 2001, is a prodigious supplier of recordings of improvisational and other non-mainstream jazz albums. —Josef Woodard

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Fasching is one of Stockholm's most famous jazz venues.

## STOCKHOLM

Setting the pace for the Swedish jazz scene is the Stockholm Jazz Festival, which was founded in 1980. The festival runs 10 days every October, each year entertaining about 21,000 enthusiastic fans at clubs, concert halls and theaters. Organized by the jazz club Fasching, the festival's programming historically has ranged from straightahead to free and avant-garde to blues, with a special emphasis in recent years on world music. Wayne Shorter, Abdullah Ibrahim, Lina Nyberg, Fatoumata Diawara, Tia Fuller, Isabella Lundgren, Archie Shepp, Bobo Stenson, Monica Zetterlund and B.B. King reflect the festival's remarkable range.

Many of the festival venues maintain the jazz vibe all year. High on the list alongside Fasching are the intimate lounge Glenn Miller Cafe, the cozy Plugged Records (fans can head downstairs to their cavernous club), S:TA Clara Bierhaus, Mornington Hotel and the majestic Konserthuset Stockholm. Serving as Fasching's artist in residence for 2018, stalwart Stockholm native Magnus Lindgren speaks for many when he says, "Fasching has soul, always serving the best live jazz music with a lot of love. I love playing this club."

As artist in residence, the saxophonist collaborated with talents across the musical spectrum, including vocalist/pianist Ida Sand, bassists Ruben Farias and Kinga Glyk, and the Elaria Orchestra, a big band made up of younger musicians, half of whom are women. Lindgren's last date at Fasching, in December, found him sharing the stage with eclectic folk singer Lena Willemark.

The Swedish national radio station P2, while limited, does provide a steady diet of jazz. Every Tuesday evening P2 broadcasts jazz concerts, featuring mainly Swedish contemporary jazz, with more jazz programmed each Saturday.

Musicians revere the legendary Atlantis studio, formerly a movie house. Much jazz has been recorded there over the years, including work by Arne Domnérus, Quincy Jones and the Esbjörn Svensson Trio, not to mention Sweden's most famous global export: pop band ABBA.

Commenting on what makes Stockholm special, Lindgren noted that the city is home to both established jazz icons, as well as the leaders of tomorrow: "The Royal College of Music, with a new facility built in 2016, educates up-and-coming jazz stars every year."

—John Ephland

Mopo performs at the 2018 We Jazz festival in Helsinki.



## HELSINKI

For jazz lovers, any visit to Helsinki should include a stop at Digelius, one of the world's best and most inviting jazz record stores, launched in 1971. Clubs where jazz can be found include Storyville, Koko, Dubrovnik Lounge & Lobby (owned by Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki) and new state-of-the-art club G Livelab, which programs jazz and other genres.

A list of elite Finnish musicians in the past and present has to include the late drummer Edward Vesala, and also his wife, pianist-composer Iro Haarla (who continues to make luminous music), as well as veteran saxophonist Juhani Aaltonen, guitarist Raoul Björkenheim and saxophonist Eero Koivistoinen.

Festival-wise, Helsinki has had a strangely checkered history, despite its being a thriving spot on the jazz world's GPS. Meanwhile, Finland's 37-year-old Tampere Jazz Happening is a highly regarded destination on the jazz place map. Other longstanding festivals take place in the neighboring cities of Espoo and Porvoo. The island-based Viapori Jazz festival is a limb

of the massive Helsinki Festival, with respected saxophonist Jukka Perko as artistic director.

Six years ago, along came the innovative We Jazz, an annual fest that presents each event over its eight-day spread in a different venue—many of which are not "venues" in any strict sense. We Jazz, which is also a record label with 10 releases so far, is led by Artistic Director Matti Nives and a group of young culture-keepers.

"The aim of We Jazz is both to introduce new ideas to the very concept of a 'jazz festival,' and to be the leading jazz event in Helsinki," Nives explained. "The heart of We Jazz is presenting what we consider the best jazz music, be it local acts or international ones, in settings which help the music fully achieve its potential.

"Making experiences possible is more important to us than having the current headliner topping the bill, as at other festivals. Each edition of the festival also includes more experimental concepts, such as a concert in complete darkness, an immersive 3D gig, and 24 gigs in 24 hours by [the trio] Mopo." —Josef Woodard

Saxophonist Jan Garbarek performs at the Oslo Jazz Festival in Norway.



## Oslo

There is a joke going around the jazz world: In every city of reasonable size in Norway, you will find an airport and a government jazz office. Comic hyperbole aside, Norway's jazz life, emboldened by government arts support and an eager public ear, has become legendary.

Oslo's jazz club scene runs the gamut, from the mostly Norwegian focus of Kampenjazz to mainstream sounds at the Herr Nilsen club, jazz and world music at Cosmopolite, trad-jazz at New Orleans Workshop, and avant-gar-

de and improvisational music at venues that are part of the Blow Out! festival.

In August, the Oslo Jazzfestival caps off Norway's spring-summer jazz fest circuit. The city also hosts the adventurous All Ears fest.

Oslo has been ground zero for many Norwegian artists who came to public awareness in the United States thanks to ECM Records, going back to '70s recordings by icons like saxophonist Jan Garbarek, guitarist Terje Rypdal and others. In the past decade-plus, ECM has put out albums by trumpeters Nils Petter Molvær, Arve Henriksen and Mathias Eick, pianist Tord Gustavsen and keyboardist Christian Wallumrød.

A major development in the jazz system has been the partially government-subsidized venue known as Nasjonal Jazzscene, which has been run by music veteran Jan Ole Otnæs since it opened in 2008.

"We have a rich, vibrant scene for jazz in Oslo," Otnæs said. "You can hear great music every night. The jazz communities in the city are mostly cooperating in a constructive way in order not to compete, but to support each other in the best possible way." —Josef Woodard



# Tokyo

Greater Tokyo is the world's largest urban area, with 35 million people spread across the vast Kanto Plain. Japan's capital city offers more than 100 jazz gigs nightly, spread out over a range of venues, from internationally famous clubs to small neighborhood bars in the suburban outskirts.

It would take several months to visit them all, but the short-term visitor looking for some great live music has numerous choices in the central part of town.

Tourists often pop into two of the most well-known clubs, both with significant history: Alfie in Roppongi and Body & Soul in Aoyama. Alfie was opened by the late drummer Motohiko Hino, a beloved figure in Japanese jazz circles and brother of world-famous trumpeter Terumasa. The venue features the brightest names in Japanese jazz on a nightly basis, and has late-night bar hours for post-gig drinks (something not all clubs in Tokyo provide).

Body & Soul is owned by Kyoko Seki, the grand dame of the Japanese jazz world for more than 50 years. It features a mix of local and visiting artists, often with vocalist-led groups, and is one of the few jazz clubs in town with good



Grand Marshall Oswald Jones and the Treme Brass Band march in a jazz parade during the 2017 Tokyo Jazz Weekend.

food.

Naru in Ochanomizu is another spot to catch local musicians nightly, with the last set kicking off at 10:30 p.m., making it a good place for a nightcap session.

The one must-see venue for any jazz fan in Tokyo is Shinjuku Pit Inn, Japan's version of the Village Vanguard. The Pit Inn has the history, the ambience and the high-quality music, and it is almost universally regarded as Japan's most important jazz club. One of its unique offerings is afternoon sets for a post-lunch crowd that hungers for live jazz. Regular shows by musicians like George Otsuka, Naruyoshi Kikuchi and Shinpei Ruike make the Pit Inn essential to the local scene.

Tokyo residents seeking a funkier vibe are drawn to The Room in the Shibuya area. For more than 25 years it has been a key spot for jazz, Latin and funk. Plus, DJs from around the globe drop by. "The scene here continues to evolve as skilled local musicians link up with club culture from around the world," said manager Tsuyoshi Sato, who has been with The Room from the start. "It's always a thrill to have unpredictable live sessions, DJ events and jams night to night."

In Japan, jazz gigs tend to start a bit earlier and mainly finish up by 11 p.m. There are, however, several places where musicians gather for informal, all-night jam sessions, such as the Manhattan Bar in the Asagaya neighborhood or Elektrik Jinja in Roppongi. —James Catchpole

## CAPE TOWN

With its combination of beauty and location, Cape Town has attracted many different people to its picturesque shores over the decades. In the 1940s, saxophonist and singer Christopher Mra Ngcukana was a pioneer, performing with groups that entertained soldiers passing through Cape Town during World War II.

By the '50s Cape Town already was growing cosmopolitan and international because of the port. As a youngster, pianist and Cape Town native "Dollar" Brand (who later changed his name to Abdullah Ibrahim) is said to have earned his nickname because of a penchant for buying jazz LPs from visiting U.S. sailors at the port.

In 1965, vibraphonist-pianist-violinist Merton Barrow and his wife, Cynthia, founded the Jazz Workshop. This school has remained a cornerstone for nurturing Cape Town jazz musicians, and it now has 11 instructors on staff.

University of Cape Town's jazz department was founded in 1989 by Mike Campbell after he had graduated with a jazz degree from the University of North Texas. UCT has spawned a host of accomplished players, who, with dedication and good fortune, have risen to fame.

The political isolation of country during apartheid resulted in a hunger to see international



Trombone Shorty is among the hundreds of international stars who have performed at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in South Africa.

musicians perform in a festival setting that would bring a diverse array of people together, according to Rashid Lombard, who helped found the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, which began in 2000. The annual fest provides a major boost to the economy and contributes to jazz education, training and professional development.

"Every year people depend on us for their livelihood," said Billy Domingo, festival director. "We have a moral obligation to maintain this event, if not expand it."

There are numerous inner-city and suburban venues nowadays presenting African music and jazz. The music initiative Jazz in the Native Yards—organized by Koko Nkalashe and Luvuyo Kakaza—brings jazz to the backyards, cultural centers and informal spaces in the townships where people gather. These events offer a full African jazz experience for attendees, combining music and food with a strong sense of community and freedom. —Struan Douglas





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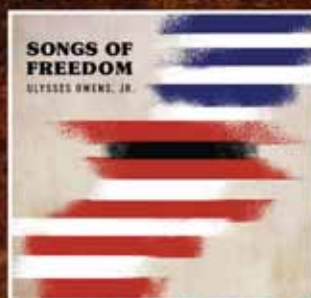


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# REVIEWS >



## Ingrid Laubrock *Contemporary Chaos Practices* (Two Works For Orchestra With Soloists)

INTAKT 314

★★★

Four years ago, Wayne Shorter issued a sphinx-like definition of jazz as, “I dare you.” It came off as a call-to-action for musicians to muster the courage to embark on any artistic journey their imagination fancied. While there was no mandate that the exploration had to involve the avant-garde, it seemed implied, considering that at the time, the iconic saxophonist was investigating both the outer limits and internal networks of some of his cherished compositions and new works. Ingrid Laubrock’s wily *Contemporary Chaos Practices* embodies

Shorter’s maxim in full, unapologetic effect.

Like Shorter, the German-born, New York-based Laubrock often is heard on tenor and soprano saxophone in self-created, envelope-pushing realms of music. But on this new album, she articulates her artistic voice not as a commanding instrumentalist, but as a composer with a wanton spirit. Her imagination manifests in unconventional orchestral wonder where diaphanous through-composed elements rub against intuitive improvisations, simultaneously led by two conductors: Taylor Ho Bynum and Eric Wubbels. Her conductors engage in Walter Thompson’s “soundpainting” system, which is like Butch Morris’ “conductions” in that it involves a sophisticated language of hand signals and gestures to shape the large-scale improvisations.

The three-track, four-part *Contemporary*

*Chaos Practices*, written for the 2017 Moers Festival, occupies much of the disc. It blasts off like a cannonball, followed by streams of flaring horns. Very soon, Mary Halvorson offers a guitar solo marked by twisting lines that take on the logic of curling barbed wire and eventually disintegrate. The orchestra then unleashes a series of fidgety notes—swarming around like hornets—that give way to sustained chords zooming across a sonic landscape in such an evocative manner that it conveys a sense of suspenseful adventure.

Trumpeter Nate Wooley and pianist Kris Davis are the other two guest soloists here. Both superbly nestle inside Laubrock’s restive composition, which places high premiums on textual ingenuity, spatial awareness and wide dynamics. With its judicious use of dissonance and dramatic jolts, a sense of peril permeates throughout without ever letting up. And when Laubrock leans into an unaccompanied soprano saxophone solo, listeners can better glean why she’s regarded as one of the most audacious reed players of her generation. She imbues her swirling passages with equal amounts of subversive humor and steely determination.

Laubrock composed “Vogelfrei,” the disc’s concluding piece, for the second Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute Reading. Presented in 2013 by the American Composers Orchestra at Columbia University, it boasts a hermetic universe that sounds as if an entire new solar system is coming to life.

None of the music here is for the faint at heart, though. Like Shorter’s maxim, Laubrock’s intrepid orchestral works dare listeners to forgo any conventional comfort zones. —John Murph

**Contemporary Chaos Practices (Two Works For Orchestra With Soloists):** Contemporary Chaos Practices (Part 1 & Part 2); Contemporary Chaos Practices (Part 3); Contemporary Chaos Practices (Part 4); Vogelfrei. (41:46)

**Personnel:** Ingrid Laubrock, soprano, tenor saxophone; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Kris Davis, piano; Nate Wooley, trumpet; Greg Chudzik, Pat Swoboda, bass; Nanci Belmont, Dana Jessen, bassoon; Talia Dicker, Maria Hodge, Katinka Kleijn, cello; Joshua Rubin, Katie Schoepflin, clarinet, bass clarinet; Bohdan Hlilash, clarinet, contrabass clarinet, bass clarinet; Josh Sinton, amplified contrabass clarinet (4); Michel Gentile, flute, piccolo; Zach Sheets, flute, piccolo, bass flute; Elizabeth Fleming, John Gattis, French horn; Christa Robinson, oboe; Katie Scheele, oboe and English horn; Tim Feeney, Clara Warnaar, percussion; Jacob Garchik, Mike Lormand, trombone; Gareth Flowers, trumpet, piccolo trumpet; Dan Peck, tuba; Dominic DeStefano, Hannah Levinson, Miranda Sielaff, viola; Sam Bardfield, Maya Bennardo, Jean Cook, Erica Dicker, Mark Feldman (4), Sarah Goldfeather, Megan Gould, Elena Moon Park, Mazz Swift, violin; Roland Burks, Tomas Cruz, Chris DiMeglio, Walker J. Jackson, Amirtha Kidambi, Kyoko Kitamura, Emilie Lesbros, Kamala Sankaram, vocals; Eric Wubbels, Taylor Ho Bynum, conductor.

**Ordering info:** [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch)



## Jeff Ballard *Fairgrounds*

EDITION 1121

★★★★½

There's only a slight difference between a hodge-podge and a potpourri, and if I recall correctly it has to do with confusion and order, or in the case of this new Jeff Ballard disc, variety and design.

Ballard's ensemble has been together for several years, and *Fairgrounds* collects a fetching and far-flung program recorded in various locales during a spring 2015 tour that stretched from Dublin to Rome. Rather than focus on a uniform sound, Ballard's quintet spreads the cards on the

table and yields to the adventures of plurality. From eerie drones to brutish skronk and dreamy lyricism, the music is as skittish as it is inclusive.

That last descriptor is key. An array of inspirations fuel jazz right now, and several of the era's compelling improvisers find ways to apply them without having them fully define the music at hand. That's what happens here, as guitarist Lionel Loueke and pianists/keyboardists Kevin Hays and Pete Rende unite with the drummer and his electronics accomplice, Reid Anderson. Using acoustic and electric instruments to underwrite a wealth of textural blends, the program never sits still or repeats itself. The itchy reflection of "I Saw A Movie" is divorced from the raucous overload of "Twelv8," which adds tenor saxophonist Mark Turner to spray the sky with upper-register exclamations. "Marche Exotique" touts pulse, while "YEAH PETE!" milks mood. The music is both physical and ethereal, and at times it feels as if the entirety of Weather Report's canon is on shuffle. Rather than clashing, these utterly distinct gambits find several ways to coexist—and occasionally thrive. —*Jim Macnie*

**Fairgrounds:** Grounds Entrance; YEAH PETE!; The Man's Gone; I Saw A Movie; Hit The Dirt; Twelv8; Marche Exotique; Grungy Brew; Miro; Soft Rock; Cherokee Rose. (52:33)

**Personnel:** Jeff Ballard, drums, percussion; Lionel Loueke, guitar, vocals; Kevin Hays, piano, keyboards, vocals; Reid Anderson, electronics; Pete Rende, piano, Fender Rhodes; Chris Cheek (5, 11), Mark Turner (6, 8), tenor saxophone.

**Ordering info:** [editionrecords.com](http://editionrecords.com)

## Twin Talk *Weaver*

PEOPLE 0020

★★★★

To appreciate the experimental nature of *Weaver*, the third album from Chicago's Twin Talk, compare the short track "Miniature I" with its counterpart, "Miniature II." You'll hear the same disarming melody in two starkly contrasting arrangements. The first—the electric version—uses a drum track behind the vocals in unison with the saxophone, both reverb-laden, repeating the hook. The second—the acoustic version—uses hollowly ringing gankogui bells behind an upright bass and unadorned saxophone, also repeating the hook.

The trio—reedist Dustin Laurenzi, bassist/vocalist Katie Ernst and drummer Andrew Green—holed up in a recording studio in 2017 to explore the boundaries between improvised and composed music. The product is a 10-track album of nuanced phrases and subtle excitement. Laurenzi, a commanding improviser, wrote most of the pieces for the program. His ideas run the gamut from the unhurried, aptly named "Folks," where Green leans into a slow, heavy backbeat, to the free and frenzied "Paxton," which shifts abruptly into an ambling ballad midway through. Laurenzi's use of repeated phrases, doubled mel-



ody lines and contained solos drives these pieces in a satisfyingly linear direction. Ernst's wordless, straight-tone vocals, which hover around the tonal center of the tunes she sings, figure prominently on the album and contribute to the dramatic tension of the compositions. Ernst penned three of the tracks—the standout being "Human Woman" for its breathless, insistent vocalese and propulsive bass line. Powerful. —*Suzanne Lorge*

**Weaver:** Weaver; Five; Human Woman; Miniature I; Folks; Blessing; The Sky Never Ends; Paxton; Solace; Miniature II. (49:04)

**Personnel:** Dustin Laurenzi, tenor saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet; Katie Ernst, bass, vocals; Andrew Green, drums, percussion, gankogui bells.

**Ordering info:** [37d03d.com](http://37d03d.com)



## Florian Weber *Lucent Waters*

ECM 2593

★★★★

From the first crystalline chord of the opener, "Brilliant Waters," German pianist Florian Weber's quartet draws listeners into a shimmering, introspective, often slow-motion world that bristles with frisson. Part of the tension emanates from Weber's pan-tonal melodies—unpredictable, yet oddly restful—but also from the quartet's mercurial polyphony, reflecting the influence of his mentor, Paul Bley. The result is an exponential increase of the subtle interplay Weber showcased on *Alba*, a 2016 ECM album of duets with trumpeter Markus Stockhausen.

*Lucent Waters* sometimes also calls to mind the parched landscapes of the Scandinavian piano school. Is "From Cousteau's Point Of View" a winking reference to E.S.T.'s "From Gagarin's Point Of View"? It's the third track in a series of water-themed tunes that move from twinkling surface to roiling falls to the exhilarating sense of floating weightless—underwater, not in space. The final track, "Schimmelreiter," too, proceeds with a glacial, E.S.T.-like simplicity, the crucial difference being that motion and emotion triumph over irony and stasis.

Water references give way to a sweetly yearning homage to Lee Konitz, another mentor with whom Weber's earlier trio recorded twice: "Honestlee" offers bassist Linda May Han Oh an opportunity to weave in her warm-toned magic, as does the pretty "Butterfly Effect," on which she and Weber breathe organically. Trumpeter Ralph Alessi develops an expressive solo on that one, and also is featured on "Cousteau" and the dark, freewheeling "Fragile Cocoon." Drummer Nasheet Waits breaks out on "Time Horizon," with Oh throbbing beneath.

A lovely album, all around. —*Paul de Barros*

**Lucent Waters:** Brilliant Waters; Melody Of A Waterfall; From Cousteau's Point Of View; Honestlee; Butterfly Effect; Time Horizon; Fragile Cocoon; Schimmelreiter. (42:20)

**Personnel:** Florian Weber, piano; Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

**Ordering info:** [ecmrecords.com](http://ecmrecords.com)



# The Hot Box

Critics	Paul de Barros	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie	John Murph
<b>Ingrid Laubrock</b> <i>Contemporary Chaos Practices</i>	★★★	★★★	★★★★½	★★★
<b>Jeff Ballard</b> <i>Fairgrounds</i>	★★	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½
<b>Twin Talk</b> <i>Weaver</i>	★★★	★★★	★★★★½	★★★
<b>Florian Weber</b> <i>Lucent Waters</i>	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Ingrid Laubrock, *Contemporary Chaos Practices*

A deft mix of large-group free improv and scripted organization, this aptly named album lands somewhere between the exhilarating see-saws of Butch Morris' conductions and the cacophonous outpourings of the London Jazz Composers Orchestra. It's a welcome departure for this excellent saxophonist. —Paul de Barros

Laubrock juxtaposes several clashing components of modern composition—electronic effects, atonal improvisation, errant vocalizations and a finely calibrated orchestra—with consummate skill. But through this jumble of spontaneous sounds, fun as it is, something intriguingly subversive is astir. Phenomenal soloists. —Suzanne Lorge

The saxophonist's orchestral experiment thrives on the variety of its core elements: texture and momentum. Soloists mark the title piece, but each performance shines. —Jim Macnie

### Jeff Ballard, *Fairgrounds*

In his continuing exploration as a leader, Ballard adds atmospheric electronics, blues singing, grungy guitar and African dance beats to a freewheeling mix that ultimately feels a bit random, though the artful "Miro" might be a direction worth pursuing. —Paul de Barros

Ballard changes feels handily, tapping into everything from folksy blues to space-age electronica and in-your-face dissonance—never staying in one place for long. The ruckus is exhilarating, though, requiring more than one listen to take it all in. —Suzanne Lorge

This is the kind of supple, modern jazz-fusion that lures you in with each repeated listen, revealing superb collective empathy along with some haunting melodies. —John Murph

### Twin Talk, *Weaver*

The simpatico Chicago indie-jazz trio beefs up with studio overdubs. The most compelling material still comes from Ernest, whose bass is Charlie Haden-warm and whose singing—on "Human Woman" (sans lyrics) and "Solace" (with)—has a Native American feel. Fun stuff, but a bit much of the same doleful mood. —Paul de Barros

Wasn't previously familiar with this outfit, but, boy, they grabbed me good. Agile coordination, fetching themes, intriguing program. —Jim Macnie

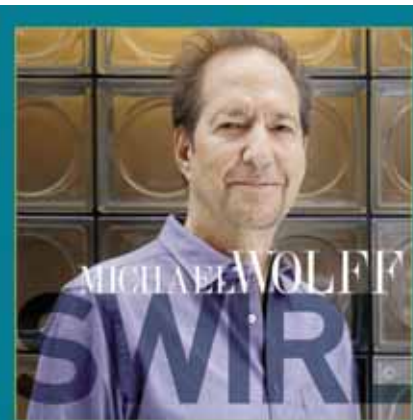
Exuding the Chicago jazz scene's knack for rugged, modern explorations, this trio carries forth the Windy City's legacy proudly with a program of imaginative originals that play to the strengths of each member and their flinty collective accord. —John Murph

### Florian Weber, *Lucent Waters*

Ambient and abstract, Weber's compositions straddle jazz and the avant-garde seamlessly. The emphasis here is on economy and beauty; it's hard to resist the melting colors of the compositions, the delicate touch of the players and the seductive calm of the tempi. —Suzanne Lorge

Its delicacy has attractions, but it was hard to foreground the intra-band communication. An allegiance to mood swamped its concern for interplay. —Jim Macnie

The delicate, yet kinetic, execution of Weber's exquisite, often pensive compositions at times conveys the rejuvenating splendor of savoring crisp spring water. —John Murph



## MICHAEL WOLFF SWIRL

SSC 1531 - IN STORES JANUARY 25

MICHAEL WOLFF piano BEN ALLISON bass  
ALLAN MEDNARD drums

A crucial reason why *Swirl* sounds so buoyant and brilliant is the rapport shared among the trio-mates—comfortable and flowing yet full of musical risk-taking, and always interactive. "I like to play with people I love; that's really important to me," Wolff says. "That vibe needs to be up there on the bandstand." Wolff adds, "Having a group to me is like casting a movie: If you have the right people, you don't have to say much. You just kind of do the work."



## JOHN RAYMOND REAL FEELS LIVE vol. 2

SSC 1535 - IN STORES JANUARY 18

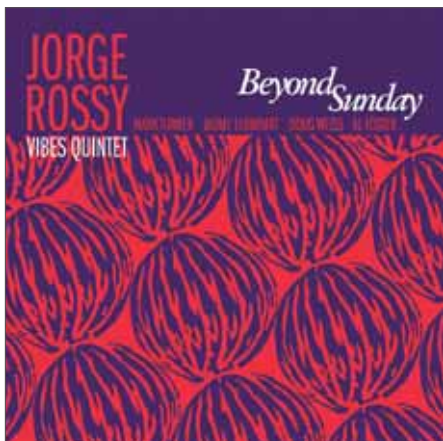
JOHN RAYMOND flugelhorn GILAD HEKSELMAN guitar  
COLIN STRANAHAN drums

For their 2018 album *Joy Ride* Real Feels hit the road for an extended tour over four months that allowed their material, along with the ensemble, to grow and refine itself. Their final concert on this tour, at the Blue Whale in Los Angeles, was preserved, and is now released as *Real Feels Live Vol. 2*.



www.sunsiderecords.com





**Jorge Rossy  
Vibes Quintet**  
*Beyond Sunday*  
JAZZ&PEOPLE 818006  
★★★★

Veteran drummer-turned-pianist-turned-vibist Jorge Rossy's *Beyond Sunday* is a slick and highly competent jazz album. And it'd be hard to find fault with contributions from players like drummer Al Foster and saxophonist Mark Turner when their attention turns to dynamic uptempo pieces, like the Rossy-composed "Joe's Dream." Turner's bright sound and imaginative phrasing slide through and around the bouncing original.

**George Lewis/  
Roscoe Mitchell**  
*Voyage And Homecoming*  
ROGUE ART 0086  
★★★★

This meeting between two pillars of AACM is an uneven affair, which can be explained by the diffuse nature of each of the three pieces here.

"Quanta" mainly pits Roscoe Mitchell's soprano saxophone against the sounds produced by George Lewis through a laptop. The saxophonist's reedy squeaks are alternately tentative and plaintive, while Lewis delivers fairly conventional fare. As the latter's output grows increasingly foreboding, the two begin to sound at odds. As if sensing the mismatch, Mitchell becomes more animated, encouraging his long-time collaborator to join in the maelstrom.

Much more fascinating is "Voyager," when an interactive computer program created by Lewis activates an acoustic piano. After a piano solo rooted in classical vernacular, Lewis engages the instrument with thoughtful and well-paced trombone phrases. Mitchell takes his own turn, this time on the alto, relishing the opportunity to challenge and probe the program. The piece concludes with a trio segment that adds a new ingredient, humor, handled in successful fashion by the interactive computer-pianist. What impress-

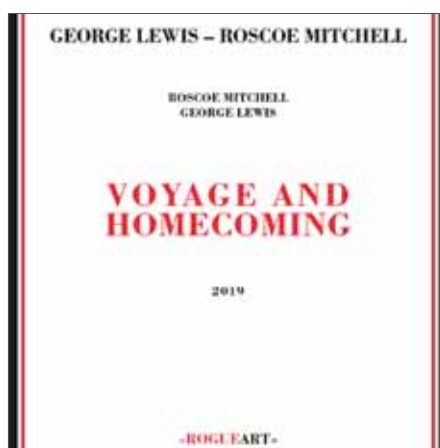
Across *Beyond Sunday*, Foster administers an absolute clinic in swing. His drumming drives soloists, scaffolds ideas and holds court. "Sleepin' In," a Rossy original that sounds airlifted from 1950-something, opens with the drummer's brushwork accompanying guitarist Jaume Llobart's gentle soloing. Without spotlight-hogging, Foster sifts through rhythmic ideas and complex patterns so easily and quickly that his virtuosity easily could just go unnoticed.

The strength of Turner and Foster's voices lend *Beyond Sunday* a batch of much-needed dynamism, as do Rossy's memorable compositions that clearly intend to evoke past masters. It's harder to pin down Rossy as a soloist, though, as he generally offers short, clipped lyrical phrases yielding few memorable moments.

A couple of slower numbers lack cohesion and focus, too: "Dusk" includes Rossy's most melodically captivating solo, but wanders aimlessly, and "Cold" emphasizes atmospheric over melody, leaving performers clutching at straws.

When feeding off the steam generated by Foster or Turner, *Beyond Sunday* feels like something vital. Lacking those ingredients, it feels disposable. —Andrew Jones

**Beyond Sunday:** Beyond Sunday; Sativa; Kierra; Dusk; Joe's Dream; Sleepin' In; Cold; Trust?; Douglas; Introspection. (60:21)  
**Personnel:** Jorge Rossy, vibraphone; Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Jaume Llobart, guitar; Doug Weiss, bass; Al Foster, drums.  
**Ordering info:** [jazzandpeople.com](http://jazzandpeople.com)



es most is that, without a prior knowledge of the process at play, it would be impossible for a listener to consider that the piano might not be played by a human. Computers, though, are set aside for the closer, "Homecoming." Lewis' initial zesty ruminations end with a sustained growl that invites Mitchell (on soprano) to enter a dialog. Their exchanges, subtle at first, slowly gain in spirit—always engrossing. —Alain Drouot

**Voyage And Homecoming:** Quanta; Voyager; Homecoming. (57:56)  
**Personnel:** George Lewis, trombone, laptop; Roscoe Mitchell, soprano, soprano, alto saxophone; Voyager, interactive computer pianist.  
**Ordering info:** [rogueart.com](http://rogueart.com)



**Van Morrison**  
*The Prophet Speaks*  
CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL 7707186  
★★★★½

On 2018's *You're Driving Me Crazy*, Van Morrison connected with organist Joey DeFrancesco to celebrate the Great American Songbook. For *The Prophet Speaks*, Morrison and his crew continue to step back and cast historic blues and r&b alongside new compositions. Along the way, the bandleader retains the same spirit he had back in 1972, when he sang the praises of Jackie Wilson.

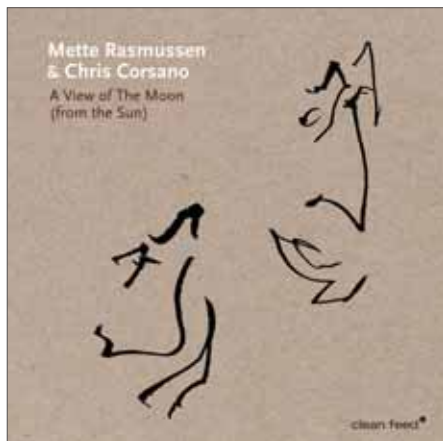
This album is more than just an upbeat nostalgia trip, though. The team digs deeply into repertoire, while Morrison's own songwriting remains sharp. More than most rock veterans who still are global stars, Morrison knows how best to use his voice's sublime reach. He's at his best when creating low-key conversations on the original "Got To Go Where The Love Is." On another Morrison original, "Ain't Gonna Moan No More," his subdued approach and staccato phrases provide a strong retort to DeFrancesco's organ groove. And when Morrison summons blues shouts, they're in all the right places.

While the bandleader continues to be an effective improviser—with nods to scatting—DeFrancesco shows off an equally strong blues feel on Sam Cooke's "Laughin' And Clownin'." Guitarist Dan Wilson's dynamics also match the leader's, particularly on Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson's "Gonna Send You Back To Where I Got You From." Wilson also adds a lyrical texture to the spiritualistic title track, which closes out the album. After swinging hard throughout *The Prophet Speaks*, Morrison knows that a gospel-inspired moan can say it all. —Aaron Cohen

**The Prophet Speaks:** Gonna Send You Back To Where I Got You From; Dimples; Got To Go Where The Love Is; Laughin' And Clownin'; 5 A.M. Greenwich Mean Time; Got To Get You Off My Mind; Teardrops; I Love The Life I Live; Worried Blues/Rollin' And Tumblin'; Ain't Gonna Moan No More; Love Is A Five Letter Word; Love Is Hard Work; Spirit Will Provide; The Prophet Speaks. (68:49)  
**Personnel:** Van Morrison, vocals, alto saxophone, harmonica (14); Joey DeFrancesco, organ, keyboard, trumpet (14); Troy Roberts, acoustic bass, drum, soprano saxophone; Dan Wilson, guitar; Michael Ode, drums; Shana Morrison, vocals (6, 13); Jim Stern, tambourine (6).

**Ordering info:** [carolineinternational.com](http://carolineinternational.com)





**Mette Rasmussen/  
Chris Corsano**  
*A View Of The Moon (From  
The Sun)*

CLEAN FEED 493  
★★★★

Mette Rasmussen, a Danish alto saxophonist who lives in Norway, is a versatile player who's equally at home occupying a chair with the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra or making a guest appearance with anti-capitalist symphonic rock ensemble Godspeed You! Black Emperor. She has a particular rapport

with American improvisers who prize intensity over genre purity, such as guitarist Tashi Dorji, and drummers Tyler Damon and Chris Corsano.

*A View Of The Moon (From The Sun)*, her third recording with Corsano, was captured live at the Ljubljana Jazz Festival on July 4, 2015, and provides a splendid opportunity to hear both performers unfurl their respective freak flags.

Corsano's spent as much time playing with psychedelic noise-makers like guitarist Bill Nace and shahi baaja player Mick Flower as he has touring with free-jazz veterans such as saxophonists Akira Sakata and Paul Flaherty. Sonic Youth co-founder Thurston Moore's also been a frequent collaborator. But Corsano's an accomplished one-man band, too. In that setting, he often uses reeds, as well as drums, to whip up a sonic fervor that frequently sounds like it's all on the verge of collapse, but never quite falls apart. He brings these same sonic resources to his work with Rasmussen.

The reedist opens *A View Of The Moon (From The Sun)* with keening cries, shifting between her horn's lowest register and its highest-pitched tendrils of sound on "Many People Were Scandalized—Some Still Are." At first, Corsano buoys her lines with a pum-

meling onslaught, but soon reins things in with a quiet wash of cymbals. The saxophonist matches his maneuvers, and when he eases back, Rasmussen slips into an abstracted blues that mixes up pages from the playbooks of Johnny Hodges and Mats Gustafsson. This builds to a pugilistic summit, and then they're off exploring another zone.

On "Let's Have A Raincheck On The Franchise," Rasmussen's muted horn ripples like a flag in a stiff, hot breeze as Corsano encircles her lines with a stream of snare strikes and bell tones that propel the music without ever settling into a steady meter. A bit later in the set, the percussionist limns the saxophonist's forlorn lines with ghostly metal sonorities, and then picks up a slide clarinet and layers long tones against her stuttering, avian cries.

The duo applies its astounding variety of sounds to highly expressive ends, balancing moments of giddy wildness with solemn interludes. Come for the thrill, stay for the spirit.  
—Bill Meyer

**A View Of The Moon (From The Sun):** Many People Were Scandalized—Some Still Are; Folding In On Itself; Let's Have A Raincheck On The Franchise; Today's White Blood Cell; Well Now, There, Then; You're Breaking Up, The House Is Going Through A Tunnel; A Detail; Another Detail. (57:05)  
**Personnel:** Mette Rasmussen, alto saxophone; Chris Corsano, drums, slide clarinets.

Ordering info: [cleanfeed-records.com](http://cleanfeed-records.com)

**Kirk Knuffke**  
*Witness*

STEEPLECHASE 31859  
★★★

Cornetist Kirk Knuffke is a jazz musician through and through, bringing rigorous engagement and serious erudition to everything he does. But within that context, he's revealed a feverish imagination and a restless curiosity, qualities that allow him to toggle effortlessly between tradition and the avant-garde. Still, on *Witness* he's delivered the most audacious project of his prolific career, partnering with classical baritone Steven Herring to make surprising connections among opera, spirituals and free-jazz. The singer's operatic background is made clear from his first utterance on the title track, where Herring and Knuffke's chamber-like band interact with astonishing grace and sensitivity.

The singer might remind listeners of balladeer Johnny Hartman with his dramatic reading of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life," with articulation that doesn't scrimp on bringing every syllable to life, including phrases of biting desolation: "While I rot with the rest." The operatic arias of Puccini, Rossini and Verdi are a bit tougher to digest, as the singer collides formal delivery against a more intuitive response by the instrumentalists. Unsurprisingly, among the highlights are original settings of poetry by Knuffke, where everything fits perfectly.  
—Peter Margasak



**Witness:** Witness; Lush Life; Ride On, King Jesus; The Satellites Are Spinning; Iago's Credo; Subway; Aria Mustafa; Charade; Storm; The Voice; Questo Amor; A City Called Heaven. (66:23)

**Personnel:** Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Steven Herring, vocals; Ben Goldberg, contralto clarinet; Ross Lossing, piano.

Ordering info: [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk)

**Birgitta Flick  
Quartet**  
*Color Studies*

DOUBLE MOON/CHALLENGE 71353  
★★★★½

If the color studies referenced by saxophonist Birgitta Flick on her third quartet album were to be conceptualized, they would make up a mottled, impressionist canvas. The brushstrokes—or instrumental detail—fade into one another with infinite intricacy and subtly emotive touches. Yet, no overarching theme emerges.

While 2013's *Yinying* was a pensive, melody-driven work reminiscent of Sweden's Esbjorn Svensson, and 2016's *Dalarna* a wintry mood piece, *Color Studies* takes on a warmer aspect. "Grey" clatters through a descending line, softly played by Flick, while pianist Andreas Schmidt counters with forceful chords beneath drummer Max Andrzejewski's polyrhythmic touches. Feeding into the "studies" designation of the title, many compositions are doubled, returned to and re-evaluated: two versions of Bach's "Sarabande" and "Gespenster." Ultimately, these returns lead to *Color Studies* feeling fragmentary. There are seeds of song-length ideas in "Kor" and "Ludus," so perhaps with fewer colors in her palette, Flick would allow compositions like "Yellow Room" to shine, rather than be overwhelmed.  
—Ammar Kalia



**Color Studies:** Grey; Yellow Room; H; Für Paul; Art Pop; Color Studies #1; Sarabande #1; Gespenster #1; Kor; Gespenster #2; Sarabande #2; Happy Song; Molphy; Major And Minor; Ludus; Line; Für Connie; Color Studies #2. (58:33)

**Personnel:** Birgitta Flick, tenor saxophone; Max Andrzejewski, drums; James Banner, bass; Andreas Schmidt, piano.

Ordering info: [challengerecords.com](http://challengerecords.com)



## A Personalized Perspective

Three trios and a quartet—led by a drummer, a guitarist, a keyboardist and a bassist, respectively—demonstrate an ability to cast a wide net and still remain within the jazz tradition. From originals to classic rock standards, soul, blues and a touch of Brazil, these players rely on their deep love and knowledge of modes and material, and a commitment to laying it down.

Known for his work on the Hammond B-3 organ, **Raphael Wressnig** lets loose on **Chicken Burrito (Pepper Cake 2110; 32:06 ★★★)**. Featuring longtime collaborator Alex Schultz on guitar and celebrated soul and jazz sideman James Gadson on drums, the trio moves with virtuosic ease while the groove never stops, from the album opener, “Chunky Thighs,” through the funk feel of the title track and into the laid-back “Tiny Dog Blues.”

Ordering info: [raphaelwressnig.com](http://raphaelwressnig.com)

**The Humanity Quartet** is bassist Sean Smith, drummer Leon Parker, their longtime acquaintance, tenor saxophonist Joel Frahm, and guitarist Peter Bernstein (whose association with Smith and Parker dates back to 1987). Formed in 2016 as a response to a world gone mad, its first recording, **Humanity (Cellar Live 060118; 64:11 ★★★)**, swings with elegance and proficiency while working toward the group’s goal: bringing humankind together through music. Consisting entirely of original, modern material, cuts like “Jobimiola” and “Samba For Evandrea” (with vocals by Marya Lawrence) go for a warm Brazilian vibe.

Ordering info: [cellarlive.com](http://cellarlive.com)

**The Denny Seiwell Trio** also favors Brazilian styles on its second recording, **Boomerang (Quarto Valley; 55:08 ★★★)**. With one previous release (*Reckless Abandon*) to its credit, drummer Seiwell leads

guitarist John Chiodini (Natalie Cole, Tony Bennet) and organist Joe Bagg (Madeleine Peyroux, Larry Coryell) through two pieces by Brazilian musician César Camargo Mariano, plus a samba, “Cascades Of The 7 Waterfalls” by Alex Malheiros, as well as the Chiodini-penned “Cheetahs And Gazelles,” with its own Brazilian changes. Seiwell was a founding member of Paul McCartney’s Wings and there’s a dramatic version of “Live & Let Die” included here, plus a guest appearance by rocker Edgar Winter, who hits the saxophone throughout the unfortunately titled “Baby Mama.” The familiar “Cold Duck Time,” by Eddie Harris, and the Jule Styne/Sammy Cahn standard “I Fall In Love Too Easily” also find their way into the group’s wide-ranging palette.

Ordering info: [quartovalleyrecords.com](http://quartovalleyrecords.com)

**Bobby Broom**—who made a name for himself as a sideman with Sonny Rollins and Dr. John—ushers his troupe, the Organi-Sation, through **Soul Fingers (Clean Sweep 0118; 58:38 ★★★)**, a collection of rock classics that inspired the guitarist when he was a youth during the 1960s and ‘70s. Following trio albums and quartet releases, as well as recordings with Deep Blue Organ Trio, *Soul Fingers* was produced by Steve Jordan. With Ben Paterson on organ and Kobie Watkins on drums, the trio gelled opening dates for Steely Dan. (They do an arrangement of “Do It Again”). There are also pop entries, like Bobbie Gentry’s “Ode To Billie Joe,” The Beatles’ “Come Together” and “While My Guitar Gently Weeps,” and even easy rockers by Seals and Crofts, and Bread. Each gets Broom’s treatment, the guitarist voicing every note of the distinct melodies, then cleverly winding up the set with the sweetly flavored “Guitar Man.”

Ordering info: [bobbybroom.com](http://bobbybroom.com)



## Draksler/Eldh/Lillinger *Punkt.Vrt.Plastik*

INTAKT 318

★★★★★

The lineup of any ensemble has an alchemical quality to it. The right combination of personalities and styles can yield nothing less than gold. But throw in one bad element and it quickly can turn leaden.

That was the risk drummer Christian Lillinger and bassist Petter Eldh took when they started working with pianist Kaja Draksler in a new trio. The pair already were familiar with one another, having provided the backbone for the marvelous free-jazz quartet Amok Amor. Draksler was the X-factor they brought into their creative partnership, a new source of heat that could bend their playing into new shapes. The resulting work is as invitingly, thrillingly jumbled and postmodern as their album’s title. The connection that Lillinger and Eldh have built up over the past decade is still clear and strong, but Draksler flows and spills around it like a steady stream of water, slickening up a craggy rock.

The best tracks here have the feel of a classic jazz album subjected to William S. Burroughs’ cut-up method or the whims of a particularly keyed-up remixer. “Punkt Torso” could be a ballad, but the otherwise fluid melodies and gentle splash of the drums sputter and break in this trio’s hands. It’s like watching a colorful, glitchy livestream. And it only makes those moments of clarity and accessibility—the slowly unfurling intro of “Body Decline,” Draksler’s pensive solo that begins “Life Is Transient” or when it sounds like Lillinger and Eldh are going to slip into a tight funk groove—carry you through the album’s more challenging moments. They’re like those moments at the first peak of a roller coaster ride, before you’re sent tumbling into a adrenalized thrill ride.

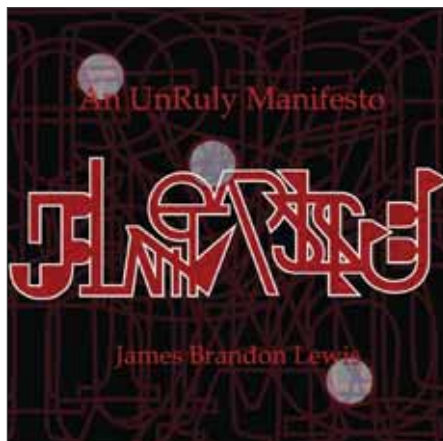
—Robert Ham

**Punkt.Vrt.Plastik.**: Nuremberg Amok; Evicted; Punkt Torso; Azan; Veins; Body Decline; Plastik; Momentan; Life Is Transient. (41:55)

**Personnel:** Kaja Draksler, piano; Petter Eldh, bass; Christian Lillinger, drums.

Ordering info: [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch)





## James Brandon Lewis *An Unruly Manifesto*

RELATIVE PITCH 1078

★★★★★

Tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis' manifesto, printed on the album's inside sleeve, presents unruliness as a movement of authenticity and originality pushing against convention and sameness; of knowledge, depth and regard for an "inner harmony of being" over superficiality and pretense. His quintet makes good on this vision with music that's by turns intriguing, intense, rambunctious, stately and

thorny—yet overall welcoming. United in direction, the band sprawls. For neatness, go elsewhere.

Lewis doesn't abjure structure: His five lengthy pieces here are interspersed with brief interludes. "Year 59 Insurgent Imagination" opens the recording with a spacey guitar pattern, horns entering with sad elegance. And later, three installments of "Pillars," evidently excerpts of a single outing, recur like dictums, echoes and memories. The plan works, lending contrasts while building power.

But this isn't a concept album—it's a work of immediacy and engagement. Without even offhand reference to spirituality, Lewis leads his ensemble down paths of ferocious polyphony that Albert Ayler and John Coltrane took for transcendence. He's more secular. Peace, for Lewis, seems to be a matter of grappling with issues in the here and now, a grounded aesthetic stance like that of Archie Shepp or Sonny Rollins.

Having released six albums as a leader—including a 2018 collection of duets with drummer Chad Taylor—since his 2010 debut, Lewis is admired for his unselfconsciously brawny sound and expressiveness. Although shrugging off conventions and ideologies, he embraces the legacy of Ornette Coleman, having studied with Charlie Haden, and marks the influence on "Sir

Real Denard" and "Haden Is Beauty." Mindful of these elders, Lewis flies far, high and gutsy, launching from bold themes, strong grooves, minor modes and rich backgrounds. He encourages all involved to blow, shaping episodes from within, culminating in the "Ascension"-like "Escape Nostalgic Prisons."

Trumpeter Jaimie Branch, on Lewis' first album featuring another horn player, stays close to him, adding swaggering gestures, bleats, blurts and Don Cherry-esque clarion calls. The rhythm section, a power unto itself, is back from Lewis' *No Filter*. Bassist Luke Stewart, while establishing himself, ably evokes Lewis' past collaborator, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, as well as Haden. Drummer Warren Trae Crudup III's slap-happy fills drive the ensemble, his busyness a productive goad. Guitarist Anthony Pirog comes up with fascinating backgrounds, wild effects and sweet leads (for instance, at the end of "Notes").

Lest we forget jazz was forged by breaking norms, *An Unruly Manifesto* celebrates the aspirations, complications and results of freedom.

—Howard Mandel

**An Unruly Manifesto:** Year 59 Insurgent Imagination; An Unruly Manifesto; Pillar I: A Joyful Acceptance; Sir Real Denard; The Eleventh Hour; Pillar 2: What Is Harmony; Escape Nostalgic Prisons; Haden Is Beauty; Pillar 3: New Lived, Authority Died. (46:06)

**Personnel:** James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Jaimie Branch, trumpet; Luke Stewart, bass; Warren Trae Crudup III, drums; Anthony Pirog, guitar.

**Ordering info:** [relativepitchrecords.com](http://relativepitchrecords.com)

## Laia Genc & Roger Hanschel *Change Follows Vision*

JAZZHAUS 259

★★★★½

The intimate and nurturing *Change Follows Vision* presents five tunes each by pianist Laia Genc and alto saxophonist Roger Hanschel, her reflective approach complementing Hanschel's more biting style.

The tunes span Genc's romantic "Nazmiye," Hanschel's rigorous and plaintive title track, his swirling, aspiring "Begebenheiten I" and Genc's "Zwischenträume," during which the musicians conjure people taking steps between rain drops. At times, the two seem like competitors bent on racing each other to the finish. On Hanschel's "Personal Dharma," which starts slowly but accelerates, his tone lights the path toward a sparkling—and too-rare—Genc solo. A matter of stops and starts, a kind of duel, the tune is exciting, the two mocking each other as they vie for the same patch of footing. But the album's outlier is Hanschel's "Interlude," a staggering display featuring the saxophonist's mastery of staccato, circular breathing and what might be called power surges. Backed by a subtly percussive Genc, Hanschel stalks and wrestles himself here, bringing a strikingly muscular approach to a melody at the brink of bursting. Chamber jazz of a high order, this recording effortlessly blends discipline and drama.

—Carlo Wolff

**Change Follows Vision:** Charlie's Reverberations; Nazmiye; Interlude; Change Follows Vision; Lifeaholic; Begebenheiten I; Zwischenträume; Personal Dharma; Strandgut; Play. (70:17)

**Personnel:** Laia Genc, piano; Roger Hanschel, alto saxophone.

**Ordering info:** [jazzhausmusik.de](http://jazzhausmusik.de)



## Karin Hammar *Fab 4 Circles*

PROPHONE 175

★★★★

Swedish trombonist and bandleader Karin Hammar boasts an extensive résumé. She spent several years playing alongside her sister, trombonist Mimi Hammar, in The Sliding Hammars, a band that paid tribute to J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding. She

also was part of trumpeter Hildegunn Öiseth's world-music group, spent time in several big bands and recorded and toured with various pop singers. Although she started playing classical music, the improvisational freedom Hammar discovered in jazz led her to pursue a unique path, and her wide-ranging interests are evident on *Circles*. There's a hint of bossa nova in the rhythm of the title track, as she opens by stating the melody with melancholy phrasing. Drummer Fredrik Rundqvist supports her exchanges with guitarist Andreas Hourdakis with sparkling work on his ride cymbal and hi-hat. "Bossa For Ella" showcases bassist Niklas Fernqvist, who supplies a laid-back Brazilian pulse to complement Hammar's tranquil ornamentations. And when the band covers Nina Simone's "Four Women," a challenging rumination on sex and race in America, it maintains the tune's subtle Latin feel, emphasizing the song's celebratory aspect with quiet improvisations that lead to an expansive conclusion.

—j. poet

**Circles:** Circles; Mammakech; Bossa For Ella; Choose Your Issues/Hildegunn; Praia De Buzios; New O; Four Women; Habbit Rabbit; Uphill. (52:52)

**Personnel:** Karin Hammar, trombone; Niklas Fernqvist, bass; Fredrik Rundqvist, drums; Andreas Hourdakis, guitar.

**Ordering info:** [naxos.com](http://naxos.com)



# The Upside of Melancholy

**Kevin Burt, *Heartland & Soul* (Little Village Foundation 1025; 52:02 ★★★★★)** Burt has the abundant ability and creativity as a vocalist, an acoustic guitarist, a harmonica player and as a composer to justify the many accolades heaped on him at the 2018 International Blues Challenge. Evoking Bill Withers and Richie Havens, yet his own man, this fifty-ish lowan gets right to the spirit-core of the music on his first high-profile release with an assurance that's a key element of his modern style. He expresses extreme unease on the stark "I Don't Want To See You No More" and brings believable emotionalism to "Makin' Me Feel" and other tunes about romantic love. To good advantage, Burt teams with a self-effacing rhythm section that includes legendary bassist Jerry Jemmott, as well as producers Kid Andersen and Jim Pugh.

**Ordering info:** [littlevillagefoundation.org](http://littlevillagefoundation.org)

**Henry Townsend, *Mule* (Omnivore 319; 73:50 ★★★★★)** This late-1970s session—its strong 13-track program now expanded with eight formerly unissued tracks of equal merit—has St. Louis blues fixture Henry "Mule" Townsend (1909–2006) drawing on the wisdom of experience as he convincingly sings and plays piano and a little bit of guitar. Fifty years since making his first solo 78s, showing the influence of colleagues Roosevelt Sykes and Walter Davis, he invokes an aura of transcendence. No matter how melancholic the lyrics, his music never gives in to sorrow. Part-timers Yank Rachell, on mandolin and second guitar, and Townsend's wife, Vernell, a capable singer, share his heartbeat.

**Ordering info:** [omnivorerecords.com](http://omnivorerecords.com)

**Earl & The Agitators, *Shaken & Stirred* (Foghat 0018; 79:32 ★★★½)** The blues-rock alliance of guitarist-singer Scott Holt (formerly employed by Buddy Guy), guitarist Bryan Bassett and drummer Roger Earl (the latter two from the ageless Foghat) drills through mostly good original material and a few well-chosen covers like "Hi-Heel Sneakers" and "Linda Lu" using dauntless spirit. Unlike many of their kind, the Agitators seldom indulge in useless pyrotechnics. Also in their favor is the music's undercurrent of honest feeling, which really breaks to the surface on the affecting ballad "Love Isn't Kind." Five bonus tracks display the band's mettle in a club setting.

**Ordering info:** [earlandtheagitators.com](http://earlandtheagitators.com)

**James Montgomery, *Duck Fever* (Angel Air 521; 36:07 ★★★½)** A singer and harmonica player schooled by Junior Wells and James Cotton, James Montgomery earned a place in the annals of Boston blues as leader of a 1970s bar band that gave J. Geils a run for his money. After flopping at



Fiona Boyes

DEBRAH NOVAK

Capricorn Records, he journeyed to New York and made this mostly uneventful solo pop-blues set with studio hacks. What's interesting decades later are Montgomery's sporadic bursts of harmonica and an intriguing makeover of the old blues-and-boogie "Crazy About My Baby."

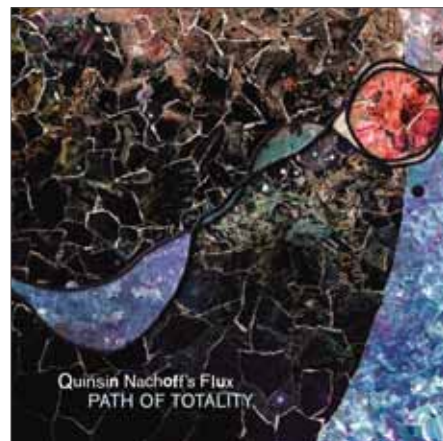
**Ordering info:** [angelair.co.uk](http://angelair.co.uk)

**Fiona Boyes, *Voodoo In The Shadows* (Reference/Blue Empress 729; 45:30 ★★★½)** Riding a successful career since the 1990s, Australian Fiona Boyes sustains the vitality of her love of the music found in America's Deep South on her 11th feature album. Primarily in a trio format this time, she's far more convincing as a singer and guitarist hip-deep in straight blues than she is as a performer of Louisiana music on a couple tracks. Boyes' blues composing has a revealing immediacy, as with "Tell Your Story Walking" and "I Ain't Fooling," both scrupulous in conveying the understated ebullience of her guitar.

**Ordering info:** [referencerecordings.com](http://referencerecordings.com)

**Daniel Seymour & Mark Robinson, *Chug It Down And Go* (Blind Chihuahua 004; 40:06 ★★★½)** This album, featuring two of the leading roots musicians in Nashville, no exaggeration, gives listeners the sense that they're hearing them play at some private gig. Friendly and witty, multi-instrumentalists Daniel Seymour and Mark Robinson take many of their influences—begin with the Memphis Jug Band, Lightnin' Hopkins, Jimmie Rodgers, Bob Wills—and brew the lot into old-sounding, but vibrant, acoustic music that lingers in the mind. The standout of their original songs is Robinson's soaked-in-blues "Take Me On Down The Road." A minor longfire: One-joke "Barefoot Girl" runs too long at four-plus minutes. **DB**

**Ordering info:** [markrobinsonguitar.com](http://markrobinsonguitar.com)



## Quinsin Nachoff's Flux Path Of Totality

WHIRLWIND 4733

★★★★½

Back in the days of the Third Stream, work mostly seemed concerned with finding space for improvisation within the limits of the classical form, an approach that often made the music feel needlessly stuffy. Quinsin Nachoff, by contrast, uses structures borrowed from the classical realm to make his music more open and expressive.

It helps that the saxophonist's compositional signposts are found not in the 19th century classical tradition, but in the strategies of 20th century aleatoric and electronic music. "Toy Piano Meditation" evokes John Cage's *Suite For Toy Piano* both in its title and the way it repeats and transforms a five-note phrase. But Nachoff's crew also nods to Lou Harrison's orchestral version of Cage's piece, particularly in the gamelan-inflected percussion of Mark Duggan. "Bounce," meanwhile, uses structures derived from a mathematical description of a bouncing ball (physicist Stephen Morris did the calculations).

These are substantial compositions—both "Bounce" and "Toy Piano Meditation" last more than 19 minutes—but there's no sense of sprawl. Credit some of that to the hyper-kinetic drumming of Kenny Wollesen and Nate Wood, whose play (and interplay, on the two tracks where both are present) never is less than invigorating. It's also worth noting that by not using a bass player, Nachoff keeps the tonal centers loosely defined, enabling more improvisational latitude. In all, *Path Of Totality* is a stunning, deep dive of an album, the sort of music in which one could spend hours submersed. —J.D. Cosidine

**Path Of Totality:** Path Of Totality; Bounce; Toy Piano Meditation; March Macabre; Splatter; Orbital Resonances. (80:46)

**Personnel:** Quinsin Nachoff, tenor, soprano saxophone; David Binney, alto and C-melody saxophone; Matt Mitchell, piano, keyboards, Ely pump harmonium; Kenny Wollesen, drums, percussion (1, 3, 4, 6); Nate Wood, drums (1, 2, 5, 6); Jason Barnsley, Kimball Theatre Organ (2); Mark Duggan, percussion; Carl Maraghi, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet (4); Dave Urness, Matt Holman, trumpet (3); Ryan Keberle, trombone (4); Alan Ferber, trombone, bass trombone (4); Orlando Hernández, tap dance (4); David Travers-Smith, synthesizer.

**Ordering info:** [whirlwindrecordings.com](http://whirlwindrecordings.com)





## Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox The Essentials II

CONCORD CRE00832

★★★★★

Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox continues the vocal fun with a compilation of 18 additional era-melding mash-ups.

Known for their feel-good weekly viral videos, Bradlee and his extensive cast of star vocalists from reality TV shows *American Idol*, *The Voice* and *America's Got Talent* are lent

assistance by a few well-known international and American celebrities for *The Essentials II*. Talented pianist, producer and arranger Bradlee fuses modern pop, hip-hop, rock and metal chart-toppers with vintage genres, including 1920s toe-tapping jazz, 1930s torch songs, carefree classics from the 1950s, doo-wop and Motown. With his gift for arranging and presenting popular contemporary music, jazz is given a more accessible veneer, one that might entice mainstream audiences. So, hats off to Bradlee for revisiting the blissful sounds of vintage American music in celebratory fashion.

The powerhouse soulful swinging of *The Voice*'s Maiya Sykes on Notorious B.I.G.'s "Juicy" is an uplifting and stellar jazz standout. "What Is Love" spotlights *American Idol*'s charismatic Casey Abrams, kicking up a vibe drawn from the 1950s and '60s with a heartfelt delivery. High-energy upbeat performances from Holland's Jennie Lena and Sweden's Gunhild Carling heighten the retro-party mood.

Melinda Doolittle's take on "Toxic" is enticing as vampy '30s torch jazz. And soaring vocal highs from Haley Reinhart peak melodiously on Bradlee's exquisitely arranged opener, Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun."

Postmodern Jukebox's viral mash-up cover of "All About That Bass" features Bradlee's catchy jazz arranging and a 1920s flashback in perfect form with a polished sassy collective.

Winding down with his star-studded lineup, Bradlee closes with an on-the-rise talent, 15-year-old Caroline Baran, driving Metallica's "Nothing Else Matters," perhaps fostering the next generation of star performers.

—Kerlie McDowall

**The Essentials II:** Black Hole Sun; Heroes; Closer; What Is Love; Perfect; Timber; Crazy Train; Dream On; Juicy; Love Yourself; All About That Bass; Thriller; Chandelier; Crazy; The Final Countdown; Toxic; MMMBop; Nothing Else Matters. (76:49)

**Personnel:** Scott Bradlee, piano; Haley Reinhart (1, 11), Nicole Atkins (2), Vince Cannady (3), Kenton Chen (3, 17), Adanna Duru (4), Mario Jose (3, 5, 17), India Carney (5), Robyn Adele Anderson (6), Gerard Giddens (6), Scout Ford (6), Bernard Taylor (6), Jennie Lena (7), Morgan James (8, 11), Maiya Sykes (4, 9), Sara Niemitz (10), Ariana Savalas (11), Wayne Brady (12), Puddles Pity Party (13), Hannah Gill (14), Melinda Doolittle (16), Luke Edgerton (17), Matt Bloyd (17), Caroline Baran (18), vocals; Artyom Manukyan (1, 8), Hilary Smith (5), Reenat Pinchas (13), cello; Desiree Hazlee (1, 5, 8), Molly Fletcher (13), violin; Lauren Baba, viola (1, 5, 8); Jonathan Richards (1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16), Adam Kubota (2, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18), Ian Solomon (3) bass; Casey Abrams, bass, vocals; Martin Diller (1, 3, 9, 12, 14, 16), Chip Thomas (2, 6, 10, 11), Dave Tedeschi (4), Aaron McLendon (5, 7, 15, 18), Andy Senesi (8, 17), Allan Mednard (13) drums; Conrad Bauer (3, 4, 17), Luca Pino (5, 7), guitar; Austin Creed, tambourine, trombone; Tim Kubart, Tambourine Guy (7), tambourine; Lemar Guillary, trombone, sousaphone; Gunhild Carling, trombone, vocals; Lasim Richards (7), James Hall (11), trombone; Jacob Scesney, saxophone, clarinet; Dave Koz (5), David Luther (6), Danny Janklow (16), saxophone; Jesse Molloy, baritone saxophone (7); Ben Golder-Novick (11), Mario Maggio (12), Chloe Fearanzo (14), clarinet; Mike Cottone (10, 16), Cameron Johnson (12), trumpet; Bob Hamilton, banjo (10); Sarah Reich, Anissa Lee, tap dance (12); Jesse Elder, Rhodes (14).

**Ordering info:** [concordrecords.com](http://concordrecords.com)

## Kristen Strom Moving Day: The Music Of John Shifflett

OA2 22161

★★★★½

Countless words have been plied in the pursuit of articulating the entangled connection between music and community. On reedist Kristen Strom's album devoted to late Bay Area bassist John Shifflett, the connection appears in full force. Shifflett's quartet members for 25 years (Strom, drummer Jason Lewis and guitarist Scott Sorkin), as well as a host of other collaborators, gather to give life to the tunes composed by their late friend. The result is a touching sonic imprint of Shifflett's local musical and communal life. Throughout, the bassist's generosity and humor come through amid open harmonies and searching melodies, the tunes animated by caring arrangements of tight horn parts and musicians' bright playing. On various tracks, Strom doubles on a number of instruments to produce her own woodwind section. But when she stays on saxophone, as on the meditative "The Vikings," the group's longterm intimacy comes through. "Franklin's Men/Northwest Passage," the only track here not composed by Shifflett, features bassist Ken Okada on the starting and closing melody, and provides a gentle, parting homage to Shifflett's lifelong instrument. —Tamar Sella



**Moving Day:** The Music Of John Shifflett: Moving Day; Mt. Hamilton; Her Garden; The Vikings; Quantum Theory; Down To The Sea In Ships; Iowa; Franklin's Men/Northwest Passage. (53:37)

**Personnel:** Kristen Strom, soprano, alto, tenor saxophone, flute, clarinet; Scott Sorkin, guitar; Ken Okada, bass; Jason Lewis, drums, percussion; Dahveed Berhoozi, piano (3–6); Aaron Lington, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet (2, 7); Jeff Lewis, trumpet, flugelhorn, cornet; John Gove, trombone (2, 5, 7, 8); John R. Burr, piano (2, 8); Dan Robbins, bass (2).

**Ordering info:** [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)

## Gabriel Zucker Weighting

ESP-DISK 2568

★★★★½

*Weighting*, pianist Gabriel Zucker's debut album, is inspired by Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*, a 2013 novel set in the '70s that shifts between the New York art world and the convulsive, revolutionary Italian political environment of the era.

The album's eight tracks are combined into three suites, each surging and receding, slamming and roaring before descending into a keening wail from the horns or a solo piano passage. The influence of Kushner's novel seems to manifest primarily in track titles, but there are times when the music recalls the '70s loft-jazz scene. At others, the music's thoroughly modern. On "The Stream Of New York/And Art, Of Course," Zucker's piano playing—atop a tricky, shifting groove courtesy of drummer Tyshawn Sorey—fits comfortably alongside the work of 21st-century groups like Dawn Of Midi or GoGo Penguin. Meanwhile, on "Missing Our Appointments With Each Other," the subtle treatment of the horns (and the players' deployment of extended techniques) makes for a mesmerizing, ritualistic atmosphere. This is an album that refuses to distinguish between old and new, structure and freedom. —Philip Freeman



**Weighting:** Would It Come Back To You; The Uselessness Of Truth/Not To Be Anything More; The Stream Of New York/And Art, Of Course; Missing Our Appointments With Each Other; What's Left (When We Are Always Honest)/The Future Was A Place; A Movie, A Lover; Dissimulation/Not Knowing It At The Time; The Stones In My Pockets. (62:04)

**Personnel:** Gabriel Zucker, piano; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; Eric Trudel, saxophone; Tyshawn Sorey, drums.

**Ordering info:** [espdisk.com](http://espdisk.com)

# Getting Ahead of the Beat

**New York Ska-Jazz Ensemble**, founded in 1994 by saxophonist “Rock Steady Freddie” Reiter, still hews close to ska’s foundational connection to jazz. And its 14th album, **Break Thru (Brixton 046; 40:30 ★★★★★)**, is made for dancing. Fans who recall NYSJE’s take on Bob Marley’s ska classic “Love And Affection” will relish the polished update included here. Reiter takes the lead vocal, while guest toaster Treas Don Dada is peppered throughout the tune. Another classic, “Perfidia,” features Kevin Batchelor on vocals; his trumpet and flugelhorn across the album are at times fluid and at others staccato. The legendary Larry McDonald, who performed with Count Ossie in the Wareika Hills of Kingston, guests on congas. It’s pure energy.

Ordering info: [brixtonrecords.com](http://brixtonrecords.com)

It’s the classic r&b-styled vocals straight out of rock-steady Kingston, modeled on The Techniques and Melodians, that give **The Steady 45s** depth way beyond members’ collective years. Perhaps no song better exemplifies this than “Meaning Of Love,” off the troupe’s **Don’t Be Late (Happy People; 32:30 ★★★★★½)**, with falsetto vocals stunning enough to make listeners swoon. But it’s the skill of the instrumentalists—guitars that sometimes slide, sometimes evolve into a percussive element; tight and sharp horns; and drums featuring occasional cymbal riffs borrowed from Latin genres—that are most remarkable. Joe Quinones’ vocals on “Freedom” are simultaneously Aretha Franklin and Billie Holiday with a little Robert Plant mixed in. “Interstate 8” is a smooth ride to a surprise ending, and “Crucial Ska” clips along with authentic percussion. This third album is the group’s strongest yet, and considering its past work, that says something.

Ordering info: [thesteady45s.com](http://thesteady45s.com)

Though **The Prizefighters** hail from Minneapolis, the troupe’s rock-steady melts ice, as does **Firewalk (Prizefighter Sound System; 33:53 ★★★★★½)**. The instrumentals are strongest, including album highlight “Kashmir,” which features plenty of trumpet whinnying and a catchy melody that seems like it must be a standard, but was written by lead guitarist Aaron Porter. “Bebop Rock-steady” offers smoothly plucked guitar à la Jamaican master Lynn Taitt, but fronted by a slippery horn section and juxtaposed with crisp, twinkling piano. Classic jazz themes and varied arrangements follow, giving each instrumentalist a chance to strut his stuff. Typically, though, the horns stay in close formation. Both techniques are evi-



New York Ska Jazz Ensemble

COURTESY NYSJE

dent on “The Accolade,” as the harmonies resolve from dissonance to consonance.

Ordering info: [theprizefighters.net](http://theprizefighters.net)

For about six decades, **Lee “Scratch” Perry** has been creating—and destroying—expectations. From his Black Ark Studio in Kingston in the 1970s, Perry was the originator of dub. Though that studio long ago burned to the ground, Perry continues on with **The Black Album (Upset-ter; 73:50 ★★★★★½)**. Opener “Mr. Brown In Town” starts with a baby’s cry, reminiscent of his 1968 classic “People Funny Boy,” and evocative of the dawn of creation. For those accustomed to Perry’s bass- and reverb-heavy style of music, this latest album strives for something more vintage and analog. Fans of that former style won’t be disappointed, though, as there frequently are two versions of each song—one leaner and one dubbed-out version. “Dead Meat” and “Dead Meat Dub” feel like peering into a single mirror, then falling head-first into a hall of mirrors.

Ordering info: [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

Listening to **Black Uhuru’s** most recent release, **As The World Turns (Self Release; 51:52 ★★)**, one might forget that this ensemble once included the talent of Sly & Robbie, Junior Reid and Michael Rose; or that in 1985, the group garnered a Grammy award in the Best Reggae Album category. Featuring a lone original member, this offering is overproduced with unnecessary echo and reverb that might work for tourists at a poolside cabana, but not here. “Jamaica Herbsman” is a sacrilegious version of Marley’s “African Herbsman” with cringe-worthy auto-tune, as is the cover of Marley’s “Stand Alone.” And Junior Murvin’s “Police And Thieves” inexplicably is renamed “Police And Thief.” Original songs with unremarkable lyrics are no better: “My mind is like a computer, everything locks in.” Sticking with 1970s-era recordings of the band is recommended. **DB**

Ordering Info: [blackuhuruofficial.com](http://blackuhuruofficial.com)



## Hanna Paulsberg Concept + Magnus Broo *Daughter Of The Sun*

ODIN 9565

★★★★½

Saxophonist Hanna Paulsberg has recorded a powerful statement, dedicating *Daughter Of The Sun* to Pharaoh Hatshepsut, of ancient Egypt, and to all strong women who have fought for gender parity.

Surprisingly, though, “Little Big Saxophone” doesn’t belong to Paulsberg, though she wrote all of the tunes apart from “Serianna.” Trumpeter Magnus Broo’s lilting horn commands most of the sonic space here with Paulsberg tacking on edgy passages at its conclusion. “Hemulen Tar Ferie” clearly is a nod to Paulsberg’s Nordic roots, and she presents an impressionistic narrative, her horn conjuring a world of fairies and folklore alongside wonderful counterpoint from pianist Oscar Grönberg. There’s a methodical, meditative quality here that first appears on the title track and then on “Scent Of Soil,” when Broo works his way through a beautifully orchestrated arrangement.

The group’s singular inventions combine artfully on “Bouncing With Flower Buds,” as drummer Hans Hulbækmo leads the way, his cymbal work in perfect coordination with Broo’s sizzling slashes and Paulsberg’s references to James Carter’s burps, bleeps, bops and bursts.

According to Egyptologists, Hatshepsut was one of the most successful rulers of ancient Egypt, many women having emulated her regality and resourcefulness since. Now, Paulsberg has put a musical cap on that glorious legacy. But the rich tonality of her horn, so much in common with a number of renowned predecessors, is a tribute that reaches far beyond Hatshepsut.

—Herb Boyd

**Daughter Of The Sun:** Scent Of Soil; Little Big Saxophone; Hemulen Tar Ferie; Serianna; Daughter Of The Sun; Bouncing With Flower Buds. (41:06)

**Personnel:** Hanna Paulsberg, tenor saxophone; Magnus Broo, trumpet; Trygve Fiske, bass; Hans Hulbækmo, drums; Oscar Grönberg, piano.

Ordering info: [odinrecords.com](http://odinrecords.com)



## Stina Hellberg Agback/Jonas Isaksson Quartet

### Quiet Now

DO MUSIC 072

★★★★

Tranquility defines *Quiet Now*, a date co-led by harpist Stina Hellberg Agback and guitarist Jonas Isaksson.

Interpreting Wayne Shorter's "Witch Hunt," the first of two tunes from the saxophonist's canon, sets an anticipatory tone. Agback's playing fills the space between beats like crystal chimes, while Isaksson delivers the long-lined theme with a reservation in sharp contrast to Shorter's recording. Agback and Isaksson playing in counterpoint on "Infant Eyes" twines the harp and guitar, making them almost indistinguishable. And if there is icing on the cake, the quartet's rendition of "My Favorite Things" satiates the desire for Agback's harp to become the focal point. She delivers the theme melodically and harmonically, demonstrating the sheer beauty and power of her instrument.

"Alice I Jönköping," the lone original here, is lilting and romantic with an ample harp introduction before bassist Pär-Ola Landin enters and is joined by drummer Daniel Olsson, nodding toward both Alice Coltrane and the Swedish city Jönköping.

—Michele L. Simms-Burton

**Quiet Now:** Witch Hunt; Quiet Now; My Favorite Things; Alice I Jönköping; Infant Eyes; Gospel Train; Naima. (46:18)

**Personnel:** Stina Hellberg Agback, harp; Jonas Isaksson, guitar; Pär-Ola Landin, bass; Daniel Olsson, drums.

Ordering info: [domusicrecords.com](http://domusicrecords.com)



## Aaron Goldberg

### At The Edge Of The World

SUNNYSIDE 1521

★★★★½

Pianist Aaron Goldberg's *At The Edge Of The World* is a global-in-scope outing that features a pair of compositions from the songbook of vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson.

Goldberg not only ventures out into the world here, he dares to reprise "Poinciana," a tune inextricably linked to Ahmad Jamal. But the pianist and his trio demonstrate an uncommon verve for the tune, issuing fresh harmonic and rhythmic intensity. "Black Orpheus (Manha De Carnaval)" features an understated samba beat, but with percussionist Leon Parker's wordless sounds—a mixture of Al Jarreau and Bobby McFerrin—a festive mood of Bahia is evoked. The two-fisted, swinging Goldberg dazzles on "Luaty" and "Isn't This My Sound Around Me," then sonorously eases into Hutcherson's "When You Are Near." But if the group's cohesion has a special moment, it's on McCoy Tyner's "Effendi." Its groove and each player's ability to take cues from one another is emblematic of a sturdy hard-bop lineage. The album's global feel is brought full circle on "En La Orilla Del Mundo" and "Tokyo Dream," Goldberg using repeated riffs to structure his solos. It's enough to make listeners look forward to another journey with such an engaging pianist.

—Herb Boyd

**At The Edge Of The World:** Poinciana; Luaty; Isn't This My Sound Around Me; When You Are Near; Effendi; En La Orilla Del Mundo; Black Orpheus (Manha De Carnaval); Tokyo Dream. (46:04)

**Personnel:** Aaron Goldberg, piano; Matt Penman, bass; Leon Parker, drums, percussion, vocals.

Ordering info: [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com)



## Champion Fulton

### The Stylings Of Champion

CHAMPION 002

★★★★½

Growing up with multi-instrumentalist and educator Stephen Fulton as her father, Champion Fulton developed an individualistic style, even if her vocals sometimes can hint at Dinah Washington and her piano playing is reminiscent of Erroll Garner.

*The Stylings of Champion*, a twofer set, can be thought of as a CD and an EP, since the second disc features just about 29 minutes of music. Here, Fulton is joined by her regular trio, plus her father on flugelhorn for seven of the 14 selections. The bandleader showcases a bluesy singing style, with relaxed phrasing and a swinging delivery, while her piano work remains very much in the tradition of 1950s jazz. And she's not shy to stretch out, whether playing "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To" at a blazing tempo, giving "I Only Have Eyes For You" an odd rhythm before taking a conversational vocal or rendering "Body And Soul" as a vocal-bass duet. Fulton also performs a few instrumentals, including an uptempo "All The Things You Are," Oscar Peterson's "Blues Etude" and Cedar Walton's "Martha's Prize" during this well-rounded and enjoyable set.

—Scott Yanow

**The Stylings Of Champion:** Disc One: Day By Day; Lollipops And Roses; I Only Have Eyes For You; Blues Etude; I Didn't Know What Time It Was; Rodeo; Darn That Dream; Too Marvelous For Words; Body And Soul. Disc Two: Isn't It A Lovely Day; You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To; Martha's Prize; Lonesome And Sorry; All The Things You Are. (54:33/28:36)

**Personnel:** Champion Fulton, piano, vocals; Hide Tanaka, bass; Fukushi Tainaka, drums; Stephen Fulton, flugelhorn.

Ordering info: [champion.net](http://champion.net)



# Freedom and Tradition

What's old is new again. The LP *Change A Pace* (Steeplechase 1135; 36:55 ★★★), a trio date led by pianist **Duke Jordan**, originally was issued in 1980, one year after it was recorded, and was followed by an expanded CD version in 1990. Now that vinyl has found its audience again, the record has been released once more in that format with its original running order. Steeplechase has not forgotten the value of a nice clean pressing, and the cover is so faithful to the original that there's not even a UPC code. Jordan's run as Charlie Parker's preferred pianist already was distant history by the time of the recording, and he'd settled into a routine of recording original tunes that swing without ever breaking a sweat. That disinclination to flaunt prowess makes this an easy record to enjoy without engaging deeply. However, a close listen to "Double Scotch" reveals the subtle accents and smooth propulsion of bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen and drummer Billy Hart.

Ordering info: [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk)

Pianist **Fred Hersch** likely enjoyed 1997. Having then recently recorded a series of well-received investigations of the Strayhorn, Monk and Rodgers & Hammerstein songbooks, he was invited to a week-long stand at the Village Vanguard with his regular trio, which included bassist Drew Gress and drummer Tom Rainey. They recorded one night for posterity, and Hersch finally has taken eight tracks off the shelf to release *'97 @ The Village Vanguard* (Palmetto 2193; 58:20 ★★★½). The pianist sustains both ardor and invention on the lengthy dissections of "Easy To Love" and "My Funny Valentine" that open the record. And the way he glides over Rainey's brushwork on "Evanessence" evokes the titular homonym, as well as it honors its dedicatee, Bill Evans. The album lags a bit during a couple of overly fussy originals in its second half, but finishes strong with a bravura rendition of "You Don't Know What Love Is."

Ordering info: [fredhersch.com](http://fredhersch.com)

Chicago's Corbett Vs. Dempsey label is co-operated by DownBeat contributor and gallerist John Corbett, which angles at affordability by making free-jazz rarities available on CD. So, if you don't have the funds necessary to buy an original pressing of *Instant Composers Pool's Groupcomposing* (Corbett Vs. Dempsey 056; 42:29 ★★★), the label's got your back. The multinational lineup (trombonist Paul Rutherford, guitarist Derek Bailey, saxophonists Evan Parker and Peter Brötzmann, pianist Misha Mengelberg, drummer Han Bennink and his brother Peter on alto sax-



ophone and bagpipes) for this 1970 performance has considerable overlap with the groups that Brötzmann assembled for *Machine Gun* and *Nipples*. But the music's organization and dynamics are quite different. Elsewhere, the German used sturdy, composed riffs to launch ferocious solos, but *Groupcomposing* seems much more episodic and varied. It's like a symposium with sub-groups proposing varied takes on collective improvising. Brötzmann leads a woolly charge; Englishman Rutherford pushes for more space and less volume, the better for uncovering previously unknown ways of voicing his horn. And while one Dutchman opts for sardonic commentary and another percussive disruption, they each seem to be challenging the proceedings.

**Bäbi** (Corbett Vs. Dempsey 052; 30:28/56:45 ★★★½) originally was released on drummer **Milford Graves'** own Institute for Percussive Studies label in 1977, and that edition is at least as scarce as the ICP disc. While the label's name augurs an academic demeanor, the exhilarating music that Graves and reeds players Arthur Doyle and Hugh Glover deliver is wild enough to shock, even four decades on. The overblown horns burn like rocket fuel, and the primal force of the drums barrage is exceeded only by the madness of Graves' prelinguistic, pan-ethnic vocalizing. But when he stops it all to give a numerical breakdown of his polyrhythms, it becomes apparent that there's rigorous science directing this missile's launch. A bonus CD by the same trio recorded seven years earlier reveals how exacting the trio's management of tonal nuance and energy could be in order to come up with a nonpareil work like *Bäbi*. **DB**

Ordering Info: [corbettvsdempsey.com](http://corbettvsdempsey.com)



## Johannes Wallmann *Day And Night*

SHIFTING PARADIGM 139

★★★★½

Johannes Wallmann's eighth album as a leader, *Day And Night*, connects the German-born, Canadian-raised pianist and composer with a highly accomplished set of New York colleagues: trumpeter Brian Lynch, saxophonist Dayna Stephens, bassist Matt Pavolka and drummer Colin Stranahan.

Wallmann's confident, muscular and elegant playing leads a set of tunes evenly divided between standards and original compositions. The opening track, "Press Briefing," described as an impression of a White House press conference, builds in tense interplay between Stephens and Wallmann with Lynch adding bright and fierce trumpet that helps conclude the tune with a dynamic flourish. The pace then mellows a bit, gliding along on Thelonious Monk's "Think Of One," the last third of the performance showcasing Stranahan's nuanced, crisp beats. The set continues with an interpretation of the Cole Porter classic "Night And Day," its title inverted to name the disc. Another Wallmann original, "No Blues For No One," follows, highlighting the horns' smooth-as-silk grooves in a thoroughly satisfying tune. A slightly edgy take on the standard "All Or Nothing At All" includes Middle Eastern nuances, and fades down, leading into "Toddlin'," which brims with clipped, bouncy notes inspired by Wallman's youngest daughter's first steps. The album closes with a fully fleshed-out quartet version of "What Now?" that highlights the essential phrasing of Pavolka's bass.

*Day And Night*, a nuanced set of tunes balanced in perfect dynamics, is meant to be sipped and savored from beginning to end.

—Catalina Maria Johnson

**Day And Night:** Press Briefing; Think Of One; Nocturne: Night And Day; No Blues For No One; What Now?; All Or Nothing At All; Toddlin'; Solitude; Bright Mississippi; What Now? (62:08)

**Personnel:** Johannes Wallmann, piano; Brian Lynch, trumpet, flugelhorn; Dayna Stephens, tenor, baritone saxophone; Matt Pavolka, bass; Colin Stranahan, drums.

Ordering info: [shiftingparadigmrecords.com](http://shiftingparadigmrecords.com)



## Joe Locke *Subtle Disguise*

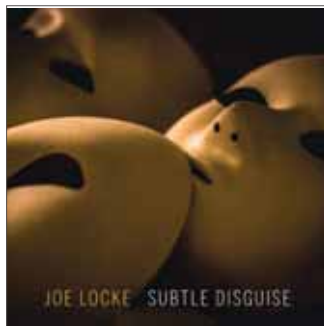
ORIGIN 82766

★★★

On his latest release, veteran vibraphonist Joe Locke opts mostly for his own compositions, with the exception of Bob Dylan's "Who Killed Davey Moore?" and Blind Willie Johnson's "Motherless Children," both of which feature ace singer-songwriter and guitarist Raul Midón in fine form.

*Subtle Disguise* is, for the most part, a satisfying collection of tightly arranged post-bop numbers, with elements of rock, funk and swing. Stylistically, it's similar to Locke's previous two records, *Lay Down My Heart (Blues & Ballads, Vol. 1)* and *Love Is A Pendulum*. Here, Locke's accompanied by a core group of bassist Lorin Cohen, drummer Samvel Sarkisyan and keyboardist Jim Ridl, whose crisp tone at the piano is an excellent complement to the bandleader's echoey malleting. Throughout, Locke, 59, takes ample solos, many fast and complex. But he's best heard on the album's two ballads, "Safe And Sound (At the Edge Of The Milky Way)" and "Make Me Feel Like It's Raining," a tribute to vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson. At these slower tempi, the full dimension of Locke's chords have the room to blossom.

—Matthew Kassell



## Alexander Claffy *Standards: What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?*

SMK JAZZ 002

★★★

Standards records can be a dicey proposition. Some hem slavishly close to source material; others modernize in a fashion that's more tacky than imaginative. New York bassist Alexander Claffy and his band don't stray far from either on *Standards: What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?*, working in a warm, classic style. Much of the music here sounds like it could have been recorded in 1961, with guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel's deployment of electronic effects creating a rubbery, delay-laden sound, affording the album a shock of modernity. On a take of McCoy Tyner's "Blues On The Corner," Rosenwinkel recalls Adrian Belew more than the Burrell-ish sounds one might expect in context. While not a particularly fiery record, there are occasional blasts of heat. On "You Must Believe In Spring," tenor saxophonist Joel Frahm ventures into sheets-of-sound territory, steering the band into choppy waters. Even at its weakest moments, *Standards* remains pleasant. And while there's not much risk-taking, Claffy still stretches the boundaries of his chosen framework, doing justice to the material at hand.

—Dustin Kratochiv



**Subtle Disguise:** Red Cloud; Who Killed Davey Moore?; Subtle Disguise; Make Me Feel Like It's Raining; Rogues Of America; Motherless Children; Safe And Sound (At The Edge Of The Milky Way); Blondie Roundabout; A Little More Each Day. (68:39)

**Personnel:** Joe Locke, vibes, piano (9); Jim Ridl, piano, Fender Rhodes, synths; Lorin Cohen, bass; Samvel Sarkisyan, drums; Raul Midón, vocals (2, 6), guitar (2); Adam Rogers, guitar; David Binney, alto saxophone (1, 5, 8, 9); Ailina Englibaryan, vocals (9).

Ordering info: [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)

**Standards: What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?:** Blues On The Corner; You Must Believe In Spring; Michelle; Just One Of Those Things; So In Love; Is That So?; Devil's Island; What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?; Deep Song. (62:01)

**Personnel:** Alexander Claffy, bass; Kurt Rosenwinkel, guitar; David Kikoski, piano; Adam Arruda, drums (1, 3, 5); Mark Whitfield Jr., drums (2, 8); Aaron Kimmel, drums (4, 6, 7); Joel Frahm, tenor saxophone (2, 6, 7); Benny Benack III, trumpet (6, 7); Veronica Swift, vocals (9).

Ordering info: [smokesessionsrecords.com](http://smokesessionsrecords.com)

## Cæcilie Norby *Sisters In Jazz*

ACT 9738

★★½

Danish vocalist Cæcilie Norby sings with a clean, crisp tone and just enough swing to almost saunter. But an air of sameness and non-ambition causes *Sisters In Jazz* to feel a bit rigid. The material here is no surprise: three originals thrown in amid a selection of iconic numbers by some of Norby's favorite singers. The bluesy slyness of Bonnie Raitt, the rapid-fire scat and sway of Betty Carter and the commanding majesty of Nina Simone all are colors that go into the grand design of the album. At best, Norby's interpretations of "Do I Move You?" and "Big Yellow Taxi" reflect a lightly swung, post-Ella Fitzgerald vocal jazz. At worst, it sounds like she's simply reciting the hits in a Las Vegas cabaret, and the inclusion of tabla-style percussion on Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" feels problematic and appropriative. But there are fair interpretations of Abbey Lincoln's "Love Has Gone Away" and Mitchell's "Man From Mars," where Norby is able to meld effectively with the plush, ambient scene set by her band. The mood conjured by contributing musicians—pianist Rita Marcotulli's ethereal touch and drummer Dorota Piotrowska's textural moves—hint at potential ultimately unrealized.

—Jackson Sinnenberg



**Sisters In Jazz:** Easy Money; Willow Weep For Me; Droppin' Things; Man From Mars; Naked In The Dark; First Conversation; Puzzled; Love Has Gone Away; Big Yellow Taxi; All At Once; Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow; Do I Move You? (55:49)

**Personnel:** Cæcilie Norby, vocals, percussion; Rita Marcotulli, piano; Nicole Johännngen, saxophone; Hildegunn Øiseth, trumpet; Lisa Wuif, bass; Dorota Piotrowska, drums; Marilyn Mazur, percussion (4, 6, 7, 9).

Ordering info: [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)

## Merje Kägu Ensemble *When Silence Falls*

LOSEN 207

★★★

As the title of Merje Kägu's debut as a leader and composer, *When Silence Falls*, suggests, the Sweden-based guitarist deals in subtlety. On the seven compositions here, even when the pulse is true and the melodic line active, the mood is one of introspection.

In Kägu's explorations, she pulls together ideas from different traditions, but in a restrained manner. On one tune, she'll finesse a winding guitar solo against a straight rhythm section ("Time To Grow"). On another, she uses strings in a classical setting without a rhythm section ("Linda"). Intriguingly, the focus of Kägu's compositions often are gossamer-like duet sections—violin and cello, oboe and flute, voice and violin—either in steady unison or fleeting harmony. Just about every tune has one, and in these dialogs lie much of the compositions' simple, sophisticated drama.

Kägu formed the album's seven-person cross-over group two years ago in Gothenburg, Sweden, drawing players from several different countries and the divergent spheres of classical, jazz and improvised music. The group cohesion is strong, however, and all the players demonstrate equal facility in written and improvised music—a rare thing.

—Suzanne Lorge



**When Silence Falls:** To Find Yourself Is To Lose Yourself; Time To Grow; Esperando Um Capricornio; Diana; Linda; Journey Of Awakening; When Silence Falls. (62:25)

**Personnel:** Merje Kägu, guitar; Anders Jorin, bass; Jesse Ojajarvi, drums; Asa B. Johansson, violin, vocals; Leonor Palazzo, cello; Marina Cyrino, flute; Blanca Sans Ballart, oboe, English horn.

Ordering info: [losenrecords.no](http://losenrecords.no)

# Dexter Gordon's Full Arc

There's a fascinating meta quality to *Sophisticated Giant: The Life and Legacy of Dexter Gordon* (University of California Press), Maxine Gordon's engrossing biography of the bebop tenor saxophonist.

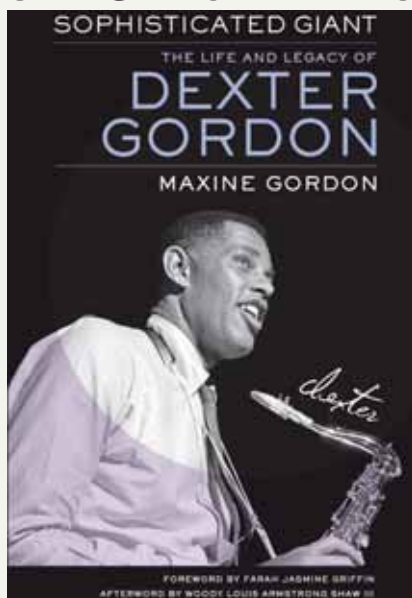
Dexter aspired to write a stylized autobiography (titled *The Adventures of Society Red*) after being nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Actor in a Leading Role category in 1987 for his work in Bertrand Tavernier's *Round Midnight*. At the time, he was relishing a late-career renaissance, spurred on by his 1976 return to the United States after living in Copenhagen for 14 years. On a legal pad, Dexter would jot down various recollections and share them with Maxine, his third wife and former road manager, when the couple lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico, beginning in 1983.

But he died in 1990 of kidney failure before completing his memoir. Before he passed, though, Dexter encouraged his wife to finish both college and his book. With *Sophisticated Giant*, she does the latter superbly, while incorporating direct snippets of Dexter's eloquent literary voice. Another important voice to emerge intermittently is Dexter's friend, Leonard "Skip" Malone, who helped distinguish between fact and fiction regarding the saxophonist's life. The dynamics among Dexter's recollections and self-editing with Maxine's desire to reveal the full arc of his life invigorates the book.

Before writing *Sophisticated Giant*, Maxine obtained her undergraduate degree at the City University of New York in sociology with a concentration in African American and Puerto Rican studies. She then earned a master's degree in African studies from New York University and completed a Columbia University summer fellowship program in oral history, race and ethnicity. She's currently a doctoral candidate in history at NYU. That rigorous formal education buttresses the biography.

From extensive research into not just Dexter's life but into the wider historical context of the swing and bebop eras, and the socio-political climate that helped shape him, she provides a portrait of a jazz artist, oftentimes with a quixotic streak that allowed him to see light beyond innumerable adverse situations.

Defiant optimism went only so far, though. According to Maxine, Dexter planned to omit all information about his life in the 1950s, because it was, in part, spent in California prisons following arrests for drug possession, as well as several probation violations. Dexter also argued that his prison time and battles with heroin addiction



helped destroy his relationship with his first wife, Josephin, and two daughters, Robin and Deirdre.

Maxine explained to Dexter that he couldn't leave out an entire decade of his life, but the saxophonist balked and said that if she insisted on having that information in the book, she would have to write it herself. With scant assistance from Dexter, Maxine pieced together that challenging decade by researching prison records and conducting extensive interviews with saxophonist Hadley Caliman, one of Dexter's close friends who also had spent time in prison. Indeed, the chapter titled "Trapped" makes for a poignant read regarding Dexter's lost years and provides more insight into why his subsequent 1960s run with Blue Note Records was so pivotal.

Releasing definitive classics like *Go!*, *Dexter Calling* and *One Flight Up* with the imprint during the '60s marked an artistic resurgence. Also, during the period, he found a refuge in Denmark, where he could more easily lead a healthy life.

In addition to cinematically rendering Dexter's formative years on Los Angeles' Central Avenue jazz scene, his tenures with Lionel Hampton, Louis Armstrong and Billy Eckstine, as well as his life in Europe, Maxine's detailed account of the long strategic planning of his historic 1976 homecoming concert at the Village Vanguard is illuminating. Add to that Maxine's meticulous account of filming *Round Midnight*, and *Sophisticated Giant* becomes a thoroughly enjoyable and essential read. **DB**

Ordering info: [ucpress.edu](http://ucpress.edu)



## John Fedchock Quartet *Reminiscence*

SUMMIT 735

★★★★½

There's good reason why virtuosic trombonist, composer and arranger John Fedchock—a Woody Herman Orchestra alum and three-decade-strong New York City jazz stalwart—titled a previous album with his nimble quartet *Fluidity*: His music is steeped in free-flowing ideas and sounds like sheer, effortless joy.

Now, Fedchock and company have followed up *Fluidity* with what's being billed as its sequel, and it's a peppy joyride worthy of its predecessor. Dubbed *Reminiscence*, and made up of a hodgepodge of standards and originals captured live during a three-night run at Virginia Beach jazz hub Havana Nights, the recording displays both an intimate rapport and raucous feel.

Over seven compositions, Fedchock's inviting blend of scintillating tone, ear-wormy hooks and bouncy bop romps are met with wild applause that pull the listener inside the club. From the program's spirited, jazzed-up get-go on the Fedchock original "The Third Degree," the quartet (save "Brazilian Fantasy," another Fedchock number) are ostensibly deep in a telepathic zone, their built-in chemistry palpable from decades of playing together. Running the gamut from red-hot chugging blues (Fedchock's "Loose Change"), heartstring-tugging balladry (a Latin-tinged take on trombonist J.J. Johnson's "Lament"), to spunky bop (a cover of the 1950s standard "The End Of A Love Affair" by Edward Redding), *Reminiscence*, which also includes standards by Harry Warren and Tadd Dameron, is as breezy and laid-back as the Virginia beach the set was recorded near. It's a conversational back-and-forth that swings with abandon, spritzed with improvisational touches.

—Brad Cohan

**Reminiscence:** The Third Degree; Loose Change; Lament; The End Of A Love Affair; You're My Everything; If You Could See Me Now; Brazilian Fantasy. (47:36)

**Personnel:** John Fedchock, trombone; John Toomey, piano; Jimmy Masters, bass; Dave Ratajczak, Billy Williams (7), drums.

Ordering info: [summitrecords.com](http://summitrecords.com)





**Daniel Rotem**  
*Serenading The Future*

SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

Israel-born saxophonist Daniel Rotem's sophomore album is the latest document of a vibrant jazz resurgence in Los Angeles, the bandleader's adopted home since 2014. Rotem offers a heartfelt, searching quality on this exciting double-disc endeavor, evident in his compositions, melodic interpretation and spacious improvisational approach.

Guest soloist Jeff Parker's guitar sets the tone for the ethereal framework and plaintive tenor saxophone melody on the opening track, "Different But The Same." But Rotem's group is especially adept at pushing the edges of timbre and groove. "Who Is It?" dances through playful permutations of melody and meter; the bandleader's solo featuring his saxophone amplified by the electronic octave-synthesizer effect. It's followed by "Between Lives," a searching ballad in which Rotem's altissimo lends the melody a haunting vulnerability. On "Good News," Rotem's octave-pedal combines with the wordless singing of guest vocalist Erin Bentlage and Atwood-Ferguson's ambient electric violin soundscapes to great effect, creating a remarkably coherent, chilled-out atmosphere.

The album closes with the title track, bringing Bentlage back to sing in unison with Rotem's airy, unadorned tenor saxophone. The quiet, contemplative melody harkens back to the spacious opening track, with the more conventional harmony and through-composed elements bringing a sense of resolution and peace: Rotem's inspired romp through the changes builds into a climactic, joyful conclusion.

—Alex W. Rodriguez

**Serenading The Future:** Disc One: Different But The Same; Who Is It?; Between Lives; Push Through; Look Again. Disc Two: A Cold Ode; Good News; Country Of Mind—Intro; Country Of Mind; Conversation On Letting Go; Serenading The Future. (40:55/42:48)

**Personnel:** Daniel Rotem, tenor, soprano saxophone; Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, violin; Miro Sprague, piano; Alex Boneham, bass; Roberto Giaquinto, drums; Jeff Parker, guitar; Erin Bentlage, vocals.

**Ordering info:** [danielrotem.com](http://danielrotem.com)

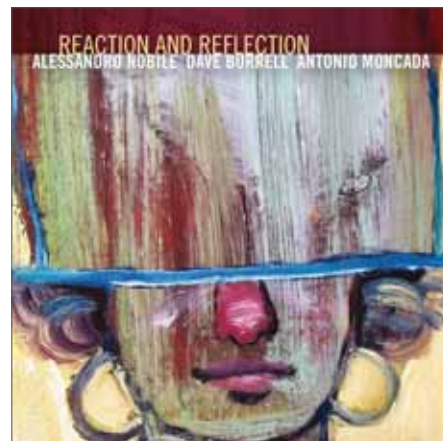
**Nobile/Burrell/Moncada**  
*Reaction And Reflection*

RUDI J1039

★★★★

Reaction and reflection are critical attributes in all facets of jazz, but perhaps paramount in free improvisation. And over seven tracks, American pianist Dave Burrell and Italian bassist Alessandro Nobile and drummer Antonio Moncada display a highly attuned ensemble instinct featuring Burrell's personal touch.

Broken into episodes of "Reaction" and "Reflection," the pianist demonstrates free ferocity, as well as a delicate, sometimes Monk-ish bounce. While tonality is a loose and wandering thing here, Moncada slips from atmospheric playing to semblances of feel, as on the anti-swing of "Reflection Two." In the liner notes, Burrell explains how the beauty of Sicily's landscape prodded the combustible music, making *Reaction And Reflection* a vessel for what was



captured in Italy at the Vittoria Colonna Theater.

—Josef Woodard

**Reaction And Reflection:** Reaction One; Reaction Two; Reflection Two; Reaction Three; Reflection Three; For Carlo. (49:08)

**Personnel:** Alessandro Nobile, bass; Dave Burrell, piano; Antonio Moncada, drums.

**Ordering info:** [rudirecords.com](http://rudirecords.com)

**Eugenia Choe**  
*Verdant Dream*

STEEPLECHASE 33137

★★★★½

Pianist Eugenia Choe seems to approach everything with careful consideration. She and her trio didn't hit the studio to record their debut until they had two years of gigs under their collective belts. And it took them nearly that long to return to the studio for their follow-up, *Verdant Dream*.

Every note Choe plays, whether laying down stem chords or flitting off into a solo, feels precise and pointed. And bassist Danny Weller and drummer Alex Wyatt take cues from that. The downside is a stiffness the trio has a difficult time overcoming. Even the stuttering sections of "Sunday Fatigue" and the pleasant attempt at a freer sound on "Odd Birds" feel like they were mapped out by a computer. The meticulousness of Choe's work is best represented on her ballads, like the crisply autumnal "Milomonal." Beyond



that and a few other selections, Choe would do well to tap into her fearless side.

—Robert Ham

**Verdant Dream:** Verdant Dream; Sunday Fatigue; Odd Birds; Ever Green; Midnight Mingle; Blue In Green; What; Milomonal; Knock Knock; Wind Catcher. (50:08)

**Personnel:** Eugenia Choe, piano; Danny Weller, bass; Alex Wyatt, drums.

**Ordering info:** [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk)

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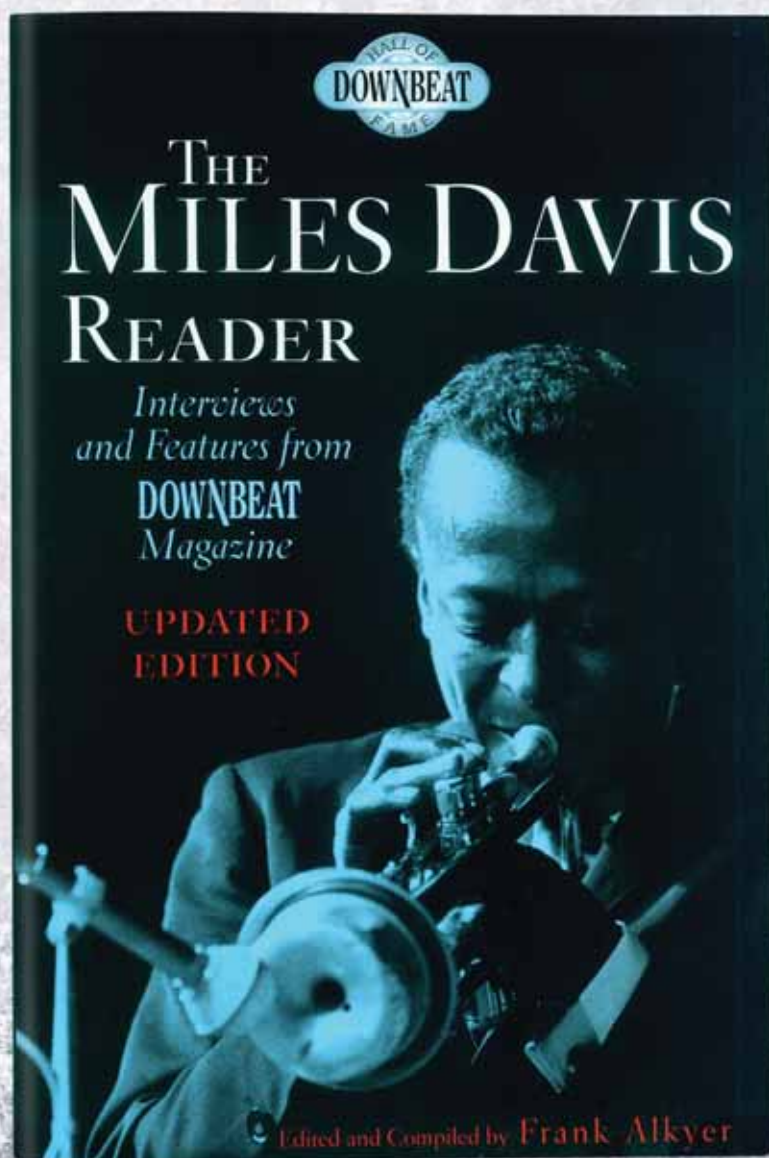
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# RECORDING SCHOOL

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Rob Mitzner: "You can often record a great sound from just a couple of audio channels if you position your mics correctly and your drums are in tune."



THOMAS WESTER

BY MICHAEL GALLANT

# JAZZ & THE HOME STUDIO

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO RECORDING, RIGHT WHERE YOU LIVE

**Jazz players often transmute their identities to become different things as situations and career paths dictate—bandleader or backing player, composer or arranger, publicist or booking agent, on-stage talent or in-classroom teacher.**

Yet more and more, musicians are adding two fresh titles to this already robust list of roles: producer and engineer. This tech-embracing trend is notable, growing and style-agnostic among jazz players; regardless of whether you aim to channel Charlie Parker through your horn, conjure keyboard colors that would make Monk blush or follow John Zorn into the unknown, jazz devotees of all styles increasingly are taking the recording process into their own hands, tracking their tunes right where they eat, sleep and live.

If you're new to it, the prospect of recording music within your own four walls might seem intimidating, but rest assured that you needn't be a massive star with a many-zeroed budget, or even a deeply technical gear-head, to make it happen. With a reasonably small investment of money,

time and research, nearly any jazz musician will be able to piece together the nuts-and-bolts of a small but mighty home studio, one that can push his or her music forward in both standard and unexpected ways. In fact, home studios can help jazz musicians review and critique their own practice sessions, lay down and share works-in-progress, teach and promote over the internet, create parts or entire songs for commercial releases, and more.

Read on for introductions to the most essential types of gear you'll need to make your own recordings at home—and case studies from musicians whose home studios play an integral part in their careers.

## BRICK BY BRICK

The heart of any home studio is the device that actually sets the music in digital stone, and that tool can take a variety of forms. For quite a few years, standalone digital multitrack recorders—a.k.a. dedicated devices that let you record, overdub, edit, mix and export a finished stereo track, all within the same cool-looking box—were widely popular among home-recording musicians, and many still swear by them. Multitrack recorders like Tascam's compact DP-008EX and expansive DP-32SD, as well as Zoom's R8, R16 and R24, all offer consolidated recording solutions with price tags in the low to mid hundreds.

That said, with every passing year, laptop and desktop computers are becoming more and more ubiquitous as the nerve centers for musicians' home studios. Running on studio computers are highly versatile and powerful digital audio workstations (DAWs) that often give users the capability to create basic, high-quality recordings.

Some of the most popular DAWs among recording musicians are Apple Logic Pro X, Ableton Live, Avid Pro Tools and Steinberg Cubase. These programs often come available both in their full professional grandeur and in more basic, introductory, student or demo versions; if you're new to the world of DAWs, it's a good idea to download these "lite" iter-





Mike Jones: "I use the home studio setup for recording music for Penn & Teller, solo projects and any other piano or small-group jazz stuff."



ations for cheap or free and see what resonates with you creatively before investing in a full version. Other low- and no-cost options include Apple's GarageBand, which comes standard on any new Mac computer and offers impressive capabilities with a reasonably gentle learning curve, and Audacity, a free, open-source recording program that has gained widespread popularity with pros and hobbyists alike.

Mobile devices are getting in the game as well; companies like IK Multimedia, Sonoma Wire Works, Meteor and quite a few others offer multitrack recording software for iPads. While the portability and multi-touch interface offered by the tablet are certainly attractive, you'll generally get less power and flexibility in tablet-based recording suites than with laptop- or desktop-based ones, so make sure that any iPad recording program does what you will need it to do before investing.

If you're recording to a computer, the next key element of your home studio is the audio interface, the piece of hardware that takes raw sound from your instruments and microphones, digitizes it and feeds it into your computer, so your DAW can capture it. The market offers a wide variety of interfaces, and the vast majority of them will perform strongly in a home studio setting. Key to getting the right audio interface is knowing the right questions to ask—do you need an interface that will link

with your computer via USB, Thunderbolt or some other type of connection? Will you be OK with an interface that only can record audio from two microphones at a time, or do you need to be able to simultaneously record 16 microphones instead? Do you need top-of-the-line hardware that will convert your analog soundwaves into ones and zeros with audiophile-level perfection for a surround-sound release, or is basic, solid-quality sound all you need for your webcast or demo? Online reviews and tutorials of audio interfaces offer a wealth of knowledge, so don't hesitate to do the research and take home an interface that both meets your needs technically and resonates creatively.

If your instrument is an electric keyboard or guitar, you might be able to plug directly into your audio interface, hit "record" and call it a day—but if you're a singer, horn player or acoustic instrumentalist of any type, you'll need microphones as well. In a home studio context, remember that a microphone is more than a device that passively captures the riffs and harmonies that you play; rather, matching the right mic with the right recording situation can have a significant impact on the color and texture of your final sound, as well as the overall quality of the recording.

Certain microphones are widely used in specific recording contexts—Shure SM57s are go-to tools for snare drums and guitar amps, for exam-

ple, and Neumann U47 microphones are classic choices for warm and expressive vocals—but in the end, the key is ending up with a microphone that helps you create, record and share the sound and music that you want.

A home studio won't do much unless you can hear what you're working on, so decent headphones and/or studio-quality speakers are a must. A huge range of choices exist and the majority of options will do a fine job in a basic home studio setting. In my own home recording work, I rely most often on a pair of Sennheiser HD 650 headphones. I have colleagues who also use headphones from companies like Audio Technica, M-Audio and Sony, and speakers from manufacturers like Genelec, Yamaha and Adam. Regardless of the manufacturer, make sure to end up with headphones or speakers that are made for studio use and give you an honest representation of the sound that you've recorded, as opposed to consumer speakers or headphones that might artificially boost certain bass frequencies, for example, or otherwise unnaturally warp how your recorded sound is reproduced.

Depending on where in your home you'll be working and the projects you're crafting, you might want to sonically treat your space to make



Chad Lefkowitz-Brown: "For YouTube educational videos, I use a Blue Yeti USB microphone for both sax and voice."

Jonathan Fasulo

sure that you're recording and hearing what you should be recording and hearing. That could mean strategically applying sound-absorbing material to prevent unwanted street noise from leaking into your microphones; it also could mean placing one type of specially constructed panel to absorb troublesome frequencies and another type to diffuse other frequencies. Companies like Primacoustic and Auralex offer panels, pads and kits to help you tweak the acoustics of any room, though it's important to note that you can often achieve positive results with household objects like pillows, sheets and towels (check out [ehomerecordingstudio.com/acoustic-treatment-101](http://ehomerecordingstudio.com/acoustic-treatment-101) for a solid intro).

Also worth noting is that technology has evolved to make treating your room easier, without major installations of foam and cloth. Many Genelec studio monitors, for example, come with a Smart Active Monitoring capability, which means that the speakers automatically adjust to the acoustics of whatever room they're placed in. Similarly, a newer company called Sonarworks creates a software program that insures that you hear the same frequency response when you listen to your recordings-in-progress, regardless of what room you're in—or what speakers or headphones you're listening through.

If you're simply working on demos and tracking your practice sessions to monitor your tone or timing, chances are that room treatment will be low on your priority list. But if you're planning on tracking something for commercial release, or even streaming over YouTube or Twitch, you might want to do some research on how to optimize the acoustics of your room.

Stocking up on ancillary tools and accessories will set you up for success. Both XLR microphone cables and standard quarter-inch instrument cables have an uncanny ability to fuzz out at unfortunate times, so having spares handy is always a good idea. And investing a little time and money in twist-ties (or velcro cable ties) and a basic organizing system can keep your cables untangled and in good working condition.

Finally, I highly recommend following Schofield's Second Law of Computing, which states that data doesn't truly exist unless you have at least three distinct copies of it. Back up your recordings and session files, to the cloud and/or external hard drives, early and often. I've had good experiences using Apple's Time Machine automatic backup function with high-capacity external hard drives by Western Digital and Glyph, but any reasonably high-quality hard drive should do the job.

### THEME AND VARIATIONS

Just as 10 different saxophone players will give you 10 different solos over the same progression, jazz musicians' home studios manifest in unique and customized ways. Here are a few real-world examples.

When he isn't touring as a soloist or with artists like Arturo O'Farrill, saxophonist Chad Lefkowitz-Brown often works in his home studio, which is powered by a 2015 MacBook Pro laptop, loaded with 16GB of RAM and running Apple Logic Pro software.

If a client asks him to overdub a saxophone solo or other horn part for a song, Lefkowitz-Brown listens to the track through Bose QC 35

headphones and plays into a Coles 4038 microphone, which feeds his sound into a Focusrite Scarlett series audio interface—a simple, affordable and high-quality line of devices used by many recording musicians.

The majority of Lefkowitz-Brown's home studio time, though, is spent creating instructional videos, which he then broadcasts over the internet. "For YouTube educational videos, I use a Blue Yeti USB microphone for both sax and voice," he says. "It's a stock podcast mic that sounds good in both contexts and is super easy to use."

Early on in Lefkowitz-Brown's instructional video-making career, he invested in a Savage Seamless Backdrop, which gave him a clean, white background in front of which to speak and play, and an Interfit F5 Three-Head Fluorescent Lighting Kit to help make sure his visuals are clear and crisp. His camera is a standard Logitech C920 Pro HD webcam.

Even when he's recording for studio releases, acoustic room treatments haven't proven to be a necessity. "I hold my sax maybe 10 inches from the microphone when I'm recording, and I've always gotten a satisfactory sound, without any ambient noise leaking in," he says.

Lefkowitz-Brown is far from the only artist to achieve recording success with a less-is-more vibe. For New York session musician Rob Mitzner (and longtime drummer in my own Michael Gallant Trio), a simple tracking setup very often is the way to go.

"I've found that you can often record a great sound from just a couple of audio channels, if you position your mics correctly and your drums are in tune," he says. In practice, for





**Alexandre Prol: "It's very important to have a good processor, but even more important is having as much memory as possible."**

Mitzner, that means running four microphones into a Focusrite Scarlett 1818 audio interface. When recording himself playing drums, especially for jazz settings, Mitzner places an AKG D112 microphone on the bass drum, a Shure SM57 on his snare and two Neumann condenser microphones either above the kit or further back in the room, in order to capture a sense of space and ambience.

Especially for jazz recordings, Mitzner has been pleasantly surprised by how good a sound he can get from such a reasonably minimal setup. "Home recording technology has come a long way since I got my first Mbox [Pro Tools audio interface] eight or nine years ago," he says. "The pre-amps in particular are way better nowadays."

Alexandre Prol has been recording expressive Brazilian-tinged guitar from a variety of home studios "forever," he says with a laugh. He describes how working from a home studio helps him practice, compose, produce and collaborate from his current home in the United States with fellow musicians in Brazil.

Prol records with Logic Pro X on a powerful MacBook Pro. When you're recording to a computer, he advises, "It's very important to have a good processor, but even more important is having as much memory as possible." When tracking acoustic guitar, he uses an AKG C414 microphone running through an Apogee Duet audio interface and records all of his electric guitars through a Kemper Profiler pre-amp and effects processor. He listens on a pair of Beyer Dynamic DT 770 Pro headphones and KRK Rokit 6 speakers and backs up his work to Lacie and Seagate drives. "It's good to label your drives, because if you do a lot of home recording, you can end up with way too many," he says. "If you don't label them, you'll definitely get lost at some point."

As a longtime home studio user, Prol continues to learn as much as he can not just about recording great sounds, but mixing and mastering as well. "Going that deep is not for everybody and there's a lot to learn," he says, "but there's so much that you can do on your own these days. It's all about experimenting a lot, doing your research on this particular mixing tool or watching a mastering tutorial online. It's as simple as Googling, 'How do you mix nylon-string guitar?,' watching a bunch of videos and seeing how you can apply those lessons to your own recordings."

For Las Vegas jazz musician Mike Jones, recording knowledge was part of the mix long before he created his first home studio. The pianist, who currently serves as music director for magicians Penn & Teller, spent years crafting jingles in New York's Soundtrack Recording Studios early in his career, so when he moved into his current home, he knew exactly what to do.

"I have a Kawai GS100 9-foot concert grand and, when I bought this home, I knew that it had the perfect room," he says. "There were slate floors, a 10-foot ceiling and a great natural sound to it. There's also a room right next to it that I can use as the control room."

Getting the perfect recorded sound out of Jones' Kawai required experimentation with microphone placement. Jones uses Neumann TLM 103 and AKG C414XLS mics, positioning two mics spread apart, directly over the piano's string dampers, and an additional mic underneath the piano, directly off of the soundboard. "When I mix those three tracks together, it gives such a fat, present sound," Jones says. "It doesn't wind up being bass-heavy and there's an immediacy to it."

For anyone recording a piano, at home or otherwise, Jones highly recommends a simple

but often overlooked step: Get your piano tuned multiple times a year, and make sure it's completely in tune before you hit the proverbial red button. If not, "Any unisons that aren't absolutely locked in will stand out like a sore thumb when you're recording," he says. "When you're listening or playing live, your ear doesn't register the imperfections the same way, but once you put it down in a recording, you hear the vibrations so easily. It's gotta be right."

Jones' attention to tech and tuning have paid off. "I use the home studio setup for recording music for Penn and Teller, solo projects and any other piano or small-group jazz stuff," he continues. "I've done some music for a few short films, including *Gamblers Ballad: The Legend of Johnny Thompson*, currently on Showtime. I also use it for social media videos and I'm starting up a jazz interview podcast."

Whether you're a pianist or guitarist, drummer or horn player, having a comfortable and effective home studio setup can be a tremendous boon, both when it comes to career progress and overall creativity.

For many musicians who would prefer to simply focus on their instruments, though, it can be easy to get overwhelmed by hardware and software, cables and compressors. Don't let any such resistance stop you from giving home recording a try. Remember that gear exists to serve your music and not the other way around, so don't hesitate to choose the tools that both meet your technical needs and inspire you to make great music.

Finally, know that, just like soloing or sight-reading, recording is a skill, and a highly musical one at that. Practice, learn and reflect as you would when first picking up an instrument and you might be blown away by how virtuosic a jazz recording engineer you end up becoming.

**DB**







BY ANTONIO SÁNCHEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM MCCULLOUGH

# TIME & SPACE

There's absolutely no way I would have been able to create my 2017 solo album, *Bad Hombre* (CAM Jazz), without my home studio in the Jackson Heights neighborhood of Queens, New York.

Whenever you're in the studio, even if it's just you and an engineer, you already have an audience: Somebody is listening. It's a completely different experience to record in your own space, on your own, without anybody checking you out, and without feeling the need to play for somebody else.

The home studio has changed that in a very interesting way, as it allows you the time, the space and the privacy you need to focus on what's happening in the moment.



As a drummer, it's very common that you come to the recording studio, set up your stuff, the engineer mikes everything, you lay down your tracks and you leave. You usually have one or two days, if you're lucky. But working in my home studio, I can mess around with miking and drum placement, and I can repeat a passage as many times as I please. I can experiment as much as I want to and try things that I would never be relaxed enough to try in a normal studio situation.

For example, on *Bad Hombre*, I started placing little splash cymbals all over my drums, on top of the drumheads, just to see what that sounded like. Then I changed them all around, taping them, putting a T-shirt on top, whatever craziness I could think of—those kinds of things that are absolutely impossible to do when you have to make a record. I have unlimited amounts of time—it's not like the clock is running and I'm paying for it. I don't even have an engineer; I can trigger everything from behind the drums. That has allowed me to develop other more creative ways of thinking about drums, the studio and music in general.

My new album with my band Migration, *Lines In The Sand* (CAM Jazz), was recorded in the beginning of June, and I just had the first copies given to me a couple days ago. It was a really quick turnaround. I do a lot of prep work for my albums in my studio. I do very thorough demos using the MIDI sequencer app

Logic, and I export everything to Pro Tools. Then I create a tempo map. On *Lines In The Sand*, there are a couple of really complex, long compositions that go through many different moods and tempos. One thing I learned from working with Pat Metheny in the studio is to record everything to a click track and create a very well-structured tempo map. Then, I can have the track change tempo in certain spots—for example, if there's a piano solo and it starts getting exciting, you're going to want to rush, organically. So, I speed up the click track—very minimally and unobtrusively. When you're playing along live to it, it doesn't feel like it's holding you back whenever a little bit more energy comes in. And then I do the opposite sometimes, where the tempo slows down on purpose, just to make it more organic.

Once I have everything mapped out, then I know exactly how long the record is going to be. That's a big advantage, because I know in advance that the piano solo is going to be three choruses, for example, or the saxophone solo is going to be four choruses. I know how long my drum solo is going to be. It can take out a little bit of the organic factor, but in terms of production, post-production and editing, it all goes so fast and efficiently when you do it like that. It's super consistent: On every track, every take is the same tempo, and it lands exactly in the same place. That way, I can listen to the bass from take 1 with the drums from take 4 if I

want to, and it will fit together perfectly.

Once I have converted the demo into the Pro Tools format, I record my drums. This is where I begin to notice things like whether a section is too long or too short—things that I don't really grasp when I'm writing. When I'm playing the tracks live on the drums, that gives me a completely new perspective on the compositions. It helps me create drum parts, helps me understand the composition and helps me realize the performance energy that is required at any given moment.

When we go into the studio to record the actual album, I've already played the track a bunch of times. Then I add sounds to the demo to see what it would be like if I did post-production. A lot of the stuff I do on the demo ends up being on the record, anyway. For example, on *Lines In The Sand*, one of the tracks had a very lush string section going on. When we went in the studio to record, we didn't have a string section with us, but because we were playing with the exact track and could hear the sequenced strings from the demo, we would play right along with them. Then, later, I brought in the string players. They recorded on top of what we already had done, and it worked out perfectly.

Another thing that has been great about having a home studio is all the post-production that I can do. On *Lines In The Sand*, in addition to tracking live strings afterward, my wife, Thana Alexa, recorded a bunch of voices, and



I added double drums on some things, as well as some cymbal rolls. Anything of that nature can be done afterward without having to worry about it.

Everything I've learned about recording in my own studio has been through trial-and-error, because I never took lessons. Somebody gave me a couple sit-downs with Pro Tools just to teach me how to edit. And everything else has been, "OK, what happens if I click on this thing? Whoa, that's amazing!" or, "Wow, that sucks—I'm never going to do that again!"

It all started a few years back when I was asked to do the music for a Spanish-language documentary called *Política, Manual de Instrucciones*, and they wanted a lot of drums. I had no idea how to do this, and it was at the same time I was buying my house. I thought, "OK: Buy the house, finish the basement, buy all my gear and then I'm going to do this movie." The learning curve was super steep.

I was incredibly stressed out because I knew I had to turn in the movie soundtrack in two months and I didn't have a studio yet. Once I acquired and installed all the necessary recording equipment, I had to learn how to use it quickly in order to meet the deadline. Now, I'm much more familiar and comfortable with my home studio gear. I do the music for the TV series *Get Shorty*, and I record everything at home and send it to Los Angeles whenever they need it.

Some of my own recordings involve sonic layerings that get nice and thick. Once I have the MIDI information input, I can take any existing track and put the exact same thing onto another track with a completely different sound. Sometimes I'll layer a bass. For example, on *Bad Hombre*, there would be the main bass going on, and then at some point another bass would come in, and maybe another. Sometimes I would have five different types of basses going on at the same time just to create a little bit more density, a little bit more depth, and a different vibe. *Bad Hombre* didn't consist of compositions in the traditional sense; it was more like a collection of different "vibes." To be able to sustain something that doesn't have a melody for 8 minutes, you need a lot of stuff going on. Sometimes, I would have over 80 or 100 tracks.

Having a home studio has allowed me to try things I never would have dreamed of doing just a few years ago. One of those things is singing. I have a really good Mojave mic in my studio that I bought for my wife to record her vocals. It's an imitation of a Telefunken, and it sounds gorgeous. There were places on *Lines In The Sand* where I would think, "OK, maybe a little bit of voice here would be cool." I have a horrible singing voice, but working at home, I can do it as many times as I want until I get it just right, and then tweak it with reverb and delays, so it doesn't sound so bad. If people were

around me, listening in, I would never do that. I'm too shy. So, that's another creative aspect of my musical personality that never had come out before. And that's how *Bad Hombre* was made, just messing around and seeing what I could do with absolutely no constraints but my imagination.

Looking to the future, I would like to add some gear to my studio setup. I really want to get an old Prophet-5 synthesizer by Sequential Circuits. I would like to get a minimoog, too, and some different-sounding drums. I have an amazing set of Yamaha Phoenix drums, and they record beautifully, but I would like a really old kit just to get a different vibe. I would love to have a real piano, but I just don't have the space.

I'm looking forward to having the opportunity to sit down and experiment again when I start work on the second volume of *Bad Hombre*, to be released in 2020. I want it to be the same kind of thing, but I want to get different plug-ins, different keyboards—and I know that will trigger my creativity in a completely different way.

DB

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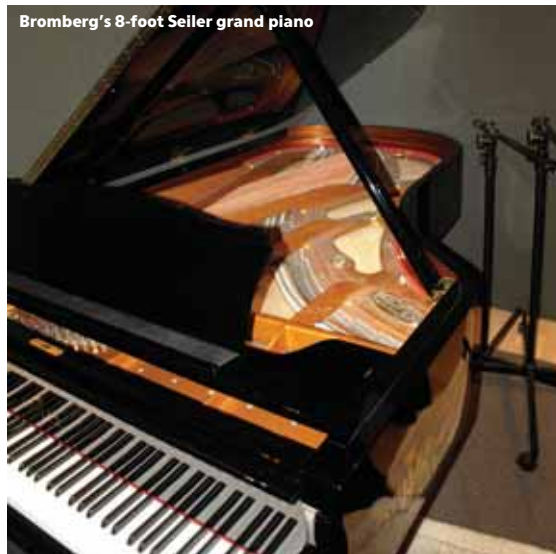


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One of the isolation rooms in Bromberg's home studio

**BY BRIAN BROMBERG**

# HEARING THE BIG PICTURE

**I made a decision early on that I wanted my home studio to be as self-contained as possible. Because of the amount of record production I do, for myself as well as for other people, and the fact that in addition to being a bass player I also play drums, I figured that the more isolation rooms I had, the more capability I had—and the more I could actually use my space, versus having to go to other places.**

Because, let's face it: When you're making jazz records, the budgets are not big. So, you have to make the most with the least. It's just the nature of the business.

When I bought my house in North Hollywood in 2001, there was already a studio there. That's why I went and looked at it in the first place. They had converted the

garage and done some degree of soundproofing, and there was one little vocal booth. It was not kept up, but the space already was built and the room had already been soundproofed to some degree.

I have rebuilt the studio a few different times since then. The first incarnation, I had a choice of how many isolation rooms I wanted versus the size of the control room. When you're dealing with a 20-by-20-foot or 18-by-18-foot garage, you only have X-amount of real estate to work with. I made the choice of having a medium-size to smaller control room plus two isolation rooms—one that I could put a drum set in and one where I could record my bass. I didn't have a piano at the time, so essentially I could cut all the drums, bass, horns and vocals in my own space, and then I would go to another studio to cut piano.

The way the studio is built, they had a guest unit attached to it with an office and a bathroom. But it was built horribly, and eventually a massive rain storm collapsed the ceiling of the guest room to the point where I was looking at the sky. And I thought, if I have to rebuild this, then I'm going to make it bigger. At that point I had four full-time isolation rooms, the control room, a microphone closet, a bathroom and a big storage unit. I ended up getting a concert grand piano, and before I knew it I had a full-blown professional recording studio. Every album I've produced and/or recorded in the past 15 years was done in my studio, including orchestra, strings, horn sections, choirs. Whatever is on my records, let alone all the other records that I've produced, it was done there. In most home studios, you can't do that.

I wanted to make something that was flexible, and that



allowed me to rent it out a lot. Musicians on low budgets could come in there and cut piano, bass, drums, one or two horns or vocals, and record it live without having to go to a \$1,000- or \$2,000-a-day studio. I did a lot of research and worked with studio designers and structural engineers to ensure that it was built very well. Sonically, it's great. It's very tuned, and even though it was a small home studio, the quality of work I've done in there is remarkable. The isolation in my studio has no bleed whatsoever. I built most of the doors myself, with multiple layers, lots of air chambers and lots of glass. I caulked every piece of drywall and every seam myself in order to keep airspace out, because airspace is your enemy when it comes to soundproofing. I went above and beyond to make it as good as I possibly could, and the end result is a really great-sounding small space.

Early on I had a choice: Am I going to do tracking here, or just mixing? I produce records, so I want to be able to do as much as I possibly can in my space, and if there's something I can't do, then I'll go rent a bigger space. But if I can do it at home, I'd prefer that because I can spend more time on my records.

It's been a fascinating journey. I've learned so much about acoustics and reflection and what to do, as well as what *not* to do. And it made me much better as a producer. After working in such a controlled environment for 15 years, I know what my room sounds like, and I can tell what's in balance and what's out of balance, what's completely out of whack and what isn't.

Just like in anything in life, the biggest challenge of building a home studio is money, unless you're blessed with being rich. A lot of people cut corners, because they don't have the budget. I've learned that it's best to do it right the first time, so you don't have to rebuild it or spend the rest of your career trying to fix in mixing and mastering the mistakes you made because you built the wrong room or didn't tune it properly. Take the time to do it right, even if it costs more money. If you do it right the first time, you're going to get much better results than if you try to cut corners and have all those mistakes you made come out in every recording you do.

People sometimes make huge mistakes in the construction of their studios, resulting in too many standing waves or too much low frequency building up. And if they try to compensate for it in the mix and in mastering, and they go out into the real world and listen to it, it will sound completely out of whack. Take the time to do it right the first time, and you'll never have to fix it after that.

One of the first people I consulted about building a home studio was Eddy Schreyer, one of the greatest mastering engineers ever, whom I met at Capitol and who later owned his own

place called Oasis Mastering. Eddy's ears were unbelievable and his rooms were impeccably tuned. The way I learned how to mix and master was by bringing stuff to him to listen to in a controlled environment and getting my ass kicked. When you go into a room that's extremely well tuned, every mistake you make sticks out like a sore thumb. I heard all the inconsistencies and problems in my room by taking it to his room. And it was blatantly obvious when I took it into a tuned and controlled space that I was way off. He'd come over with his computer and we'd shoot the room, and he helped me dial it in. Eddy really helped make a difference in what I needed to fix in the room. Any time I'd finish a mix, I'd take it over to Oasis and listen to it in their room and go, "All right, check this out. Are we close, are we not close?" And they'd tell me where I was messed up.

Over a period of years of doing that, two things happened. It helped me dial in my space, so I could make the correct modifications to get certain resonant frequencies out of my room, because it was screwing up my mixes. And it taught me how to identify problems, in a very non-judgmental way.

One of the greatest pleasures for me was when I heard my new album, *Thicker Than Water* (Mack Avenue), on iPhone speakers. Even from 10 feet away, I could hear absolutely every instrument, even the bass. When my mixes jumped out of an iPhone like that and sounded balanced and right, I realized that I was getting it right after all these years. I finally learned how to do my job and listen and hear the big picture.

When I originally was figuring out how much money to invest in the building versus how much to spend on recording equipment, I decided to put my money into my environment. One of the blessings of living in the Los Angeles area is that within 10 miles of my studio are several of the best studio equipment rental places in the world. So, instead of spending \$15,000 on a high-end microphone, I can rent it for \$100. Instead of spending \$15,000 on some Neve pre-amps or \$100,000 on a Neve console, I can go rent whatever I need. I can get it delivered, I can hook it up, I can use it, it can leave and I'm not putting all of that investment on something that's sitting in the studio collecting dust until the next time I use it.

I like to record things live, because that's what jazz is about, and I can get a record cut in a very short time. In a couple days, I've got everything on tape. But the way I produce, I spend a lot of time on the computer after the fact. I want it to sound great, and I'm going to make it right because I have the ability to do it. And the end result is what's most important. So, why spend a large amount of money on equipment that's gonna sit there when I'm only going to use it for two days? For me, it's minimalistic gear.

My pre-amps are nothing fancy, the mics I have work fine, and if I need something better, I rent it down the street and it's here in 15 minutes.

I have several different monitors in my studio. I used Tannoy PBM-6.5 monitors for a long time, and still use them for some things because they're very accurate, and they're great for vocals. But I fell in love with K&H near-field monitors that go down an octave lower than the Tannoy's do. They're very clear, very natural, they're not ultra-hyped. I don't want to be adjusting my mix to compensate for the monitors; I want the monitors to be as neutral as possible. The minute something colors the sound, it's affecting what you're putting on tape. If my monitors are too freaky and too high-endy and too hyped, if you put that mix into a regular rig it's going to sound horrible.

For mains, I have old Tannoy CoAx-15s that are punchy and fat and don't really color the sound. I don't want to hear the speaker; I want to hear the music. And I got those because of Eddy Schreyer and Oasis Mastering. He's a Tannoy guy, and his room sounded so incredible, I wanted that.

When I'm recording acoustic bass, I like to experiment, and I do different things for different reasons. If I go to Capitol and work with Al Schmitt and play on a Michael Bubl  track or something like that, the signal path on my bass probably costs as much as a car. But it has a really specific sound. My bass has a very unique sound to it. It's just the nature of my 300-year-old Italian bass, and it does what it does, and I do what I do, and that's it, that's what I sound like. If I use the old tube mics and the old pre-amps, it has a very identifiable, fat, warm, comfort-food sound that only old beautiful analog equipment has. And it makes almost every bass sound the same. Mine is different because of the way my bass is. So, when I listen to recordings I've played on at Capitol, I'm hearing the signal path, but I can still hear that it's me.

On a lot of the records I've done for myself, I've used DPA microphones on my bass. They don't have the woof in the bottom that the old Neumanns do, but there's a clarity and a focus to them that the old tube stuff doesn't have. It's much more in your face. So, I've started mixing an AKG D112 (a classic kick drum mic) on my bass to give it that woof and that bottom, and match that with the clarity of the DPA. It's a great combination, because it does have some of that fat, warm, fuzzy analog sound, but it has the focus of a more modern microphone.

I went through a period where I did a lot of recording using Neumann digital microphones, and they are true digital microphones. There's no analog signal path, which means you put the mic up, it goes into a converter, you plug it directly into the back of the computer and you record at 24-bit/96kHz with no EQ, no

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I have a very unusual German piano, a hand-made 8-foot Seiler, one of the finest pianos in the world. It has lots of personality. Tom McCauley, the engineer I work with all the time, and I put up a few different microphones and listened to the piano, and with the digital mics, I could tell it sounds like *my* piano, which has a different sound from any other piano I've ever heard. Sometimes, I've used those digital mics on recordings, just because of the nature of the sound.

I can't tell you how many records I've done with artists from all over the world where I never leave my house. People send me files, and I record and I send them back, constantly. Randy Brecker is on a many, many records of mine, and we've been friends more than 40 years. But he's never been to my studio. He does trumpet parts in New York and sends them to me. Bela Fleck recorded banjo on one of my tracks remotely and sent it to me. Home recording has become the standard for so many artists, but if I can hear your room, then there's a problem. If you send me a saxophone part and I hear the room, I can't use your part. I want to hear your sax; I don't want to hear the reflections coming off the wall. That's where a lot of people don't think like producers. I think like a producer, I think like a mixer, or like a mastering guy, because I do so much of it in my space that I've really learned what to hear and what *not* to do.

My advice to people with home studios: Make sure you make your space is as neutral and as flat and as real as possible, because I easily can add something to your sound, but it's almost impossible to take something out of your sound. For musicians who record direct, it doesn't matter. But if you put a mic on something, that space is everything, and that's where musicians really need to pay attention to their environment.

If you're going to build a home space—which I highly recommend because it's awesome to be able to work in your environment—it's important to do it right and make sure that what you're documenting, you're documenting as clean, as dry, as ugly and as naked as possible. That will allow you to work with the best possible sound afterward.

All I ever wanted to do was be a really good jazz bass player. I didn't care about anything else when I was younger. I didn't think I'd be making records, let alone playing on them. All of this happened organically, and I'm really glad it did, because I've learned so much. I'm thankful there are people who took the time and recognized that I had the talent and the skill—I just didn't have the experience. And they helped me learn what *not* to do.

I remember 30 years ago or more watching one of those TV news magazine shows like *60 Minutes* or *20/20*, and they were interviewing a sculptor who would take bark from big trees that had fallen down, and he would carve sculptures in them. He carved an old man's face in the trunk of a tree, and I remember that it was so lifelike and accurate and incredible. They were asking him how he got it to look so real, and he responded, "Well, the face is always there. I just got rid of the excess wood, so you could see the face."

They filmed him in fast-motion doing the whole thing, using a knife and his hands, and you see a blur and all this wood flying around. The tree gradually is changes shape, and within like 30 seconds of him doing this, all of a sudden there is this guy staring at you from the wood. This face just shows up in the wood—and it blew my mind, because it was like a completely backwards way of looking at it. I've never forgotten that, and it taught me: Stop making mistakes, and what you're left with is correct. Get rid of the extra wood. That changed how I mix and master records, and how I produce. Get rid of the crap and what you're left with is beautiful. Is that not the truth? You can't get any more real than that.

DB

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BY BEN ALLISON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM MCCULLOUGH

# MIXING & EDITING AT HOME

**Through my long association with the independent label Palmetto, I had the good fortune of working with many great engineers.**

During every recording I made with Palmetto, I got to sit in the control room and be involved in the editing and mixing process—at first, just helping to make aesthetic decisions, but eventually helping to do everything short of pressing the buttons. Working alongside Palmetto founder and engineer Matt Balitsaris, I would watch him and try to understand how to put a mix together and how he avoided problems through each step of the process: putting all of your recorded tracks together in a stereo field, making sure the sounds are not conflicting, creating a sense of space around the instruments, and layering up the sonics so you've got nice lows, mids and highs. I learned so much from him.

When I stepped out on my own and created my label, Sonic Camera Records, I decided to try to mix my own recordings. I already had mixed a couple of “practice albums”—including one for the Italian label Abeat Records that I did with saxophonist Michael Blake and drummer Rudy Royston—but my first really big one that was publicly available was my 2013 album *The Stars Look Very Different Today*. I love the sound of that record, but it took me a long time to complete the mix, because I was learning as I was doing it, and I wanted to do a great job. One of the best things about having a home studio is that, as an artist, you really can apply your aesthetic to a mix, take your time and experiment freely throughout the process.

I'm a relative beginner compared to some of my engineer colleagues. But, being a musician and having musician's ears in some way gives me an advantage. I know what it feels like to play this music, and what I hear is what a musician hears, which might be slightly different than what a mixing engineer hears. I can make musical decisions as an instrumentalist that an engineer who is not a professional player might not think to make.

When I go into the studio, I record in high resolution, usually 24-bit/88.2kHz, on the Pro Tools platform. Then I bring home the entire session on a hard drive. I'll take those session files and open them up and create new session files that I use to create my mixes.



Ben Allison in his home studio in New York's Greenwich Village

My system is simple. The mixing part all happens on the computer. Coming out of the computer, I have the audio signal attached to an Apogee Duet 2 digital audio converter. That translates the digital audio into an analog signal, which then goes to my home stereo system for my monitoring. I have a beautiful vintage McIntosh MX110 pre-amp that's tube-based (which does introduce a tiny bit of distortion into the signal path, but it's a pleasant distortion). I have a solid state McIntosh MC 2105 amplifier, and I use a set of DeVore Fidelity Gibbon 3XL home stereo speakers as near-field monitors. This isn't like a normal recording studio where the signal would be absolutely flat; I'm sure there's some sonic signature to the sound. On the other hand, this is how people hear music—through stereos. I also listen to my mixes through Apple EarPods and other low-quality speakers and headphones to see what they're going to sound like on an iPod or smartphone.

I do like to use headphones, especially when I'm editing. I use the Sennheiser HD650s, a classic open-backed head-

phone. You also can mix with them, but I mostly use them for editing. With headphones, there's something about the immediacy of the sound that makes it easy to hear things clearly.

My mixing/editing toolkit includes several software plug-ins by Universal Audio, a venerable brand that created a lot of the vintage audio gear I grew up using. Now, the company offers software versions where they emulate the old hardware. I also use UA's Quad Core Satellite, a special processing unit that's outboarded, so my computer (a 2013 iMac) doesn't have to do all the audio processing that's needed. I also use EQ, compressor and limiter plugins by Fabfilter. I don't have any hardware in the signal path beyond the computer, the Duet 2 and the stereo system.

Audio software has advanced to the point where the level of control is at an all-time high. Software offers several advantages over hardware, including ease of use, flexibility, automation and, most significantly, cost. There's no way as a jazz bassist I ever could afford all of the hardware versions of the plug-ins that I





own. Also, where a studio might have, say, one or two Teletronix LA 2A compressors, I can put 20 or 30 instances of the plug-in version into my chain, which creates a lot of flexibility.

After *The Stars Look Very Different Today*, my next album was *Layers Of The City*, recorded with my group Think Free—Jeremy Pelt on trumpet, Frank Kimbrough on piano, Steve Cardenas on guitar and Allan Mednard on drums. It was a sonically complicated album in the sense that it had a lot of layers, and the way I mixed the piano was very lush. I try to build up sound in a way that's bigger than the sum of its parts. I learned about this by reaching out to friends of mine who are professional engineers and asking their opinion and sending them mixes and having them give me feedback.

My most recent album is *Quiet Revolution*, which was recorded three years ago and released two years ago. It's a trio record that was unusual for me in that it doesn't feature my tunes and my group; instead, it features a cooperative trio with myself, Steve Cardenas and saxophonist/clarinetist Ted Nash, playing the music of Jim Hall and Jimmy Giuffrè. It originally was released on vinyl by Newvelle Records, but the rights reverted to me this fall,

and I took the opportunity to remix and remaster it. This gave me a chance to go back and build it up from scratch and create the mix the way I wanted.

All of my albums for Palmetto, of which there are 10, reverted to me a few months ago as well. So, now all of those are in queue to be released on Sonic Camera Records. I might remix some of them, and I certainly will remaster all of them. Some of them go back to the analog tape days, so I have to go through those and digitize them. It will be a multi-year process, and I'm excited about it. And having engineering skills will be extremely helpful.

I'm always thinking about the next album, but I also want to get these old records back into the pipeline. The challenge for me these days is balancing these competing interests. I have about half an album's worth of new tunes that my group has been working out on the road, and I have a concept that's starting to coalesce.

When it comes time to record a new project, I always go into a nice studio, because recording is an art form unto itself, separate and different from mixing. When I record an album, I'm thinking as a bass player/composer/bandleader. I don't want to be dealing with the

recording side; I just want to make the music and have somebody who's a high-level professional get those sounds that I want. Recording live performances is a science and an art form. I need someone who has the right ears, the right skills, the right gear and the right space.

Most of the time, I record everything live, as I'm trying to recreate on record what we do in performance as a group. There have been some exceptions, though. For *Layers Of The City*, we did several takes of fully improvised music, and I especially loved the way one of them came out. Jeremy recorded his trumpet tracks using his own foot pedals, which he would click on and off, live as we recorded, to give his trumpet interesting effects. What happened was so cool and unusual that I was determined to use it. I ended up using some digital editing techniques to blend some passages together.

One of the things that's very cool about multitrack editing is that you have a visual representation of the amplitude, a squiggly line, for each audio track. So, you see all of the tracks leading from left to right, stacked on top of each other. With multitrack editing it's possible to cut from one performance to another performance at different times for each instrument, which means you can extend the performance of one of the instruments into the performance of the other instruments. This helps make edit points seamless and musical.

Mixing engineers have been combining different takes for years. For instance, Teo Macero did it on a lot of electric-era Miles Davis stuff. But with the technology of the day, they were limited in what they could do, and it was a time-consuming and imperfect process. Editing now is like creating a dovetail joint in carpentry, where you've got two pieces of wood and you're connecting them with perfectly interlocking forms, with one piece of wood blending into the other in a seamless way. This becomes part of the artistic expression in my opinion. On one track from my last record, "Get Me Offa This Thing," I did exactly that. Where the track ends was originally the beginning of the track, and where the track starts is where we originally ended. I reversed the two sections, but tried to do it in a way that felt organic and musical. I see this as part of the compositional process, part of the artistic statement.

It's extremely empowering as an artist to have the skills to make your recordings sound the way you want them to sound. I see mixing as an extension of the whole, something that's just as important as picking the right chord change, tweaking a melody or getting the best performance down. It's a vital part of the music-making process.

DB

Ben Allison is a bassist, composer, producer, bandleader and educator who lives in New York's Greenwich Village. Visit him online at [benallison.com](http://benallison.com).



## Rez Abbasi's Guitar Solo on 'Uncommon Sense'

In jazz, the “F word” is “fusion.” Though often derided or dismissed outright, there are many examples of great music being made in this subgenre. Guitarist Rez Abbasi’s 2016 album *Behind The Vibration* (Cuneiform) is an unabashed display of fusion at its best, and his solo on “Uncommon Sense,” with its John McLaughlin-esque rapid-fire delivery and Allan Holdsworth-style legato phrasing, is a virtuosic display of a guitar’s role in this style.

The solo section, like the rest of the song, happens over a bass vamp (represented on the top line of this transcription) that doesn’t real-

ly define a mode or key. This is both a challenge and an opportunity, as Abbasi has to navigate this non-tonal, odd-metered environment, but also has the freedom of not being confined to a particular key.

Abbasi makes his intention to exploit this clear from the onset: He starts out with some very simple two-note licks, sounding something like E minor pentatonic. But he ends these opening phrases with E $\flat$  and C, which aren’t E minor-sounding at all. Then, after a pause, we’re confronted with B minor pentatonic, and from the end of bar 11 through the beginning of 14 there’s a repeated F# blues lick,

moving further away from E minor.

So much of his improvisation has this non-tonal quality. Some examples of further “outisms”: Measure 20 is an F# half-whole diminished scale with an added F natural, and measure 21 starts out sort of in C minor, but then ends on E and G#, reversing the opening idea.

And this is some of the tamest chromaticism we hear. Check out the ascending line in bar 23: If he played this over a D $\flat$ 7, it would come off as mixolydian with a bit of bebop scale at the beginning. But it certainly doesn’t sound “in” over this bass line (which doesn’t even have a D $\flat$  in it). And Abbasi doesn’t try to resolve it to make it sound “inside,” at least not in an obvious way. He ends the lick on a perfect fourth (E $\flat$  to A $\flat$ ), and then moves this interval up a minor third (F# to B), which morphs into a minor-third interval (by raising the low note to G#), and then tops it off with a D and E. These last few notes bring us back to the E minor pentatonic alluded to earlier.

Measures 39–41 showcase a more advanced method of this intervallic development. Abbasi starts off with a descending lick that goes half step/whole step/half step/fourth, and then repeats almost the same lick a minor third up (minus the second half step). Then again up a major third, and then up a whole step, but this time it’s whole/half/half before the fourth. The final notes of these licks ascend through a Gm7 (starting on the third), while the beginning notes go up an E half diminished (also starting on the third), which are almost the same chord. The notes in between don’t spell out these chords, which makes the licks sound very chromatic, yet with a touch of sonority.

A large part of what makes this solo so energetic is the dialog between Abbasi and drummer Kenny Grohowski. Notice how as Abbasi builds the energy, so does Grohowski. It also helps when they anticipate each other’s intentions, like the stops at the ends of bars 11 and 19. Or how some of the more frenetic guitar licks line up with frenzied drum fills, as in measures 21–23, for example, or bars 39–47, where, along with the keyboards, they get so manic that they drop a beat in a couple of bars. It’s testament to their listening skills and connection with each other that they all still land on the downbeat together, disguising the time-shift. With all this interaction, Abbasi’s solo comes off not so much as a solo but a duet with the drums.

DB

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at [jimidurso.com](http://jimidurso.com).



$\text{♩} = 188$

bass vamp

3 5-13

7

11 *tr*

14

17

21

23

25

28

31

32

34 *tr*

37

39 *tr*

42 *tr*

45 *tr*


47 *tr* *A*(*tr*)

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## Zoom H3-VR Handy Recorder

### 360 Degrees of Separation

Inspired by the rapidly increasing amount of virtual reality content being produced today, and drawing upon advances in Ambisonic microphone technology, Zoom's new H3-VR Handy Recorder offers a complete solution for capturing, encoding, decoding, playing and streaming spatial audio in a single device.

Housed in a compact, cone-shaped casing, the H3-VR utilizes a four-capsule Ambisonic mic to capture a full 360-degree sphere of audio. Zoom makes the process incredibly easy, and a recording can be completed with just a few simple steps. Position the unit, select your recording format and mode, adjust levels and hit "record."

The H3-VR runs on two AA batteries, and also can be powered via its USB port. It records onto a microSD memory card. To get started, you need to set the mic position: The H3-VR allows you to place the unit upright, upside-down or on its side (to the left or right). This is critical so that the recorder can correctly interpret exactly where the sound is coming from. There is an auto option that uses a built-in six-axis sensor to automatically detect the H3-VR's orientation. Once positioned, you set the recording format, and the device can handle up to 96kHz/24-bit resolution.

Selecting the recording mode is next, and the H3-VR can record in raw Ambisonics A for later conversion or Ambisonics B for use in spatial audio applications. In addition to the four-channel modes, the H3-VR records in standard stereo, as well as binaural mode—a two-channel format that simulates the 3-D image that your ears naturally pick up. Recordings can be monitored through headphones or sent to a line out, and the H3-VR allows you to monitor in either standard stereo or binaural formats. It also provides a low frequency filter, a limiter and compression options for tracking.

I began by recording a guitar in binaural mode. I could actually feel the instrument moving through the room as I changed positions while playing. This alone was worth the \$349 price tag for me, and I immediately realized what a great tool this is for bands to record themselves either at a rehearsal or live venue. The H3-VR offers the opportunity to finally experience

exactly what the audience hears.

Next up, I switched into one of the Ambisonics formats, and that's where I began to see the true power of this technology. On playback of an Ambisonic file, you can manipulate your location in the room and experience the sound from almost any angle.

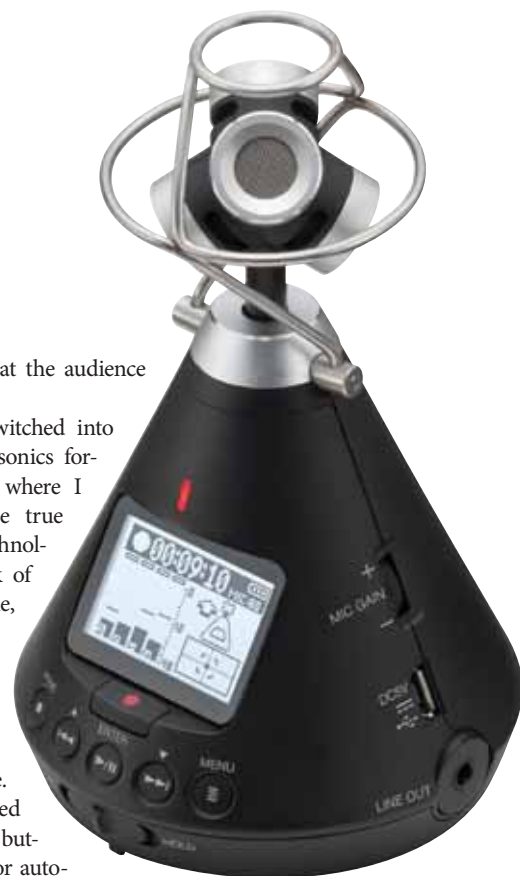
This can be adjusted manually via the buttons on the unit or automatically by simply holding

the H3-VR in your hand and rotating it to move around the room. According to Samuel Greene, Zoom product specialist, the H3-VR is the very first device to offer this functionality. With the optional BTA-1 Bluetooth adapter, the recorder can be controlled wirelessly via Zoom's iOS H3 Control app. The H3-VR also has USB functionality, which allows you to transfer files from the SD card to your computer and enables it to function as an audio interface.

This is an amazing product. For those creating virtual reality video, the H3-VR offers the ability to match their immersive visuals with equally immersive sounds. For musicians, it's a game changer in terms of creating a deeper, more intimate listening experience.

—Keith Baumann

[zoom-na.com](http://zoom-na.com)



## Universal Audio Arrow

### Thunderbolt 3-Powered Desktop Interface

Universal Audio's Arrow desktop audio interface is designed to be a truly portable recording solution. The unit features two inputs, four outputs and a design layout that will look instantly familiar to anyone who has used UA's two-input Apollo interfaces.

The Arrow features a single processing chip that's capable of running all of the company's UAD plug-ins. For those not already familiar with Universal Audio, the company makes an amazing number of hardware and software plug-ins that emulate legendary analog audio gear.

Clearly, with a single chip, this device is not meant for heavy mixing, but I have found a single chip does serve its purpose for anyone who will be tracking or processing one or two tracks at a time—perhaps an instrumentalist tracking in a home studio for remote sessions, or a voice artist.

With its Unison mic pre-amp technology and built-in UAD-2 SOLO Core processor, the Arrow includes a Realtime Analog Classics UAD plug-in bundle that allows you to emulate and record through some of the music world's most sought-after tube- and transformer-based audio tools—

including the 610 Tube Preamp, LA-2A and 1176 compressors, and a genuine Marshall Plexi amp plug-in—at near-zero latency, regardless of your audio software buffer setting. (All other plug-ins are sold separately.)

So far, these details almost perfectly describe the Apollo Twin Solo line, but there is one big exception. Arrow is using Thunderbolt 3 for connectivity. What is Thunderbolt 3, and why should you care? In the latest round of connectivity wars, Thunderbolt 3 has emerged as the new technology that could possibly save us from the myriad of cords and adapters that everyone has to deal with on a daily basis.

A few of the many benefits of Thunderbolt 3 are its blazing speed (it can provide transfer speeds of up to 40Gbps) and the ability to connect to a large number of peripherals, as well as supplying power. That is what makes Arrow the unique item it is, as it does not have a power supply. All power is supplied through the Thunderbolt 3 connection.

So, if you have a fully charged laptop, it's now possible to have a remote recording session with world-class pre-amps and plug-ins and only two



cords: the Thunderbolt 3 cord and whatever cable gets you into the interface from your mic or instrument. That is a very enviable portable setup.

The Thunderbolt 3 uses the USB-C connector type, but is different from USB-C, so you will have to check the specs on your machine to be sure it's compatible. Even though the port looks the same, the Arrow interface will not work with USB-C.

Beyond Arrow, the Thunderbolt 3 specification has more benefits, including being widely accepted on Windows and Mac. And, since it uses a PCIe bus, you can add external graphics cards to any computer that has a Thunderbolt 3 port. So, it's possible to convert your laptop into a high-powered gaming machine.

One feature I am happy to see return is the ability to daisy-chain multiple Firewire devices with Thunderbolt 3. Once the world moved to USB, that capability temporarily went away.

If you spend some or all of your time producing on a laptop, and a portable system with excellent recording capabilities is important to you, Universal Audio appears to be on the cutting edge with Arrow and its Thunderbolt 3 technology. —Matt Kern

[uaudio.com](http://uaudio.com)



## Royer R-10 Ribbon Microphone

*Detailed Clarity, Durable Build, Affordable Price*

Since 1998, Royer Labs has been making excellent and unique ribbon microphones, known not only for their transparent sound, but also their robust build quality and ability to withstand high SPL sources. I am a huge fan of Royer's R series mics, and regularly use the R-121 and R-122 in my own studio, so when I was offered a pair of the new R-10 mics to review, I jumped at the chance.

The R-10 is Royer's most affordable mic by a long shot, at less than \$500, or a little more than \$1,000 for a matched pair (consecutively numbered). This is for a mic that is hand-assembled in America, although the body is machined in China. Can a mic at this price point compete with the other ribbons on the market? Absolutely.

The matched pair comes in a foam-lined road case that includes the two mics, two screw-on mounts, stand adapters and cloth bags for each mic (a single R-10 also comes in a smaller case). The R-10 is smaller than the R-121, but fatter. The build quality is excellent, and the precision machining of the body feels sturdy and durable. This is a must for a mic that Royer is positioning not only for studio use, but for live applications. Unlike the typical Royer slotted grille, the R-10 has a large opening with no blockages to the triple-layer windscreen. This screen design protects the ribbon from bursts of air—which is extremely important for any high-SPL source, like a guitar amp. The R-10 also features internal shock-mounting of the ribbon, which is why the enclosed mounts are small swivels—great for fitting them into tight spaces.

These are mono figure-8 pattern mics, and are manufactured using Royer's patented offset-ribbon transducer and a 2.5-micron ribbon element. This design also means that the frequency responses on the front and back of the mic are slightly different—the back is brighter—which gives these mics a lot of flexibility. I thought that the figure-8 pattern might pose a problem in a live setting, so I called and spoke to Royer VP of Sales and Marketing John Jennings about it. He explained that for miking up guitar amps (one of the exemplary uses for these mics), the gain is set so low that there is no issue with sounds from the back of the mic, and indeed the pattern offers superior rejection of sounds coming from the sides, eliminating bleed even in extremely loud settings. The Foo Fighters took the prototypes out on tour for all their guitar amps, and now use them on all

their amps—that's a pretty demanding test.

I put the R-10 through its paces on a variety of sound sources, and found the results to be extremely pleasing. First, I tried it out on a loud guitar amp, with the mic placed about 3 inches off the cone, and cranked it up. Both with clean and distorted tones, the R-10 delivered the clarity and detail I have come to expect from Royer. It's a little darker than the R-121, but I was able to open up the sound with a touch of EQ, which it takes very well.

I also was able to test it out on a number of brass instruments, and it really shines in that context. The mic was not bothered in any way by the SPL being generated by either of these sources. I also tried it on a vocal, and the results were very natural sounding, almost to a fault—depending on your singer, you might prefer some of the "hyped" frequency curves that other mics deliver. I am also confident that the R-10 pair would perform beautifully on my grand piano or as overheads on a drum kit, knowing how well the R-121 performs in these situations. This is a pro ribbon mic, and would work in any situation that calls for one.

The R-10 delivers on every front as well as, or better than, mics costing more than twice as much. If you have held off on adding a ribbon to your home studio arsenal because of price, or have wanted to try using one live, but were afraid to risk it, this is the mic you have been waiting for. And if you do a lot of stereo material, or just want more options, a matched pair is a great investment for your mic locker.

—Chris Neville

[royerlabs.com](http://royerlabs.com)



### 1. Passive Pairs

Avantone Pro's CLA-10 studio reference monitors are full-range, two-way passive pairs for fixed or remote locations. Weighing just under 14 pounds each and featuring a frequency response of 60–20,000Hz, CLA-10 monitors feature a 10.4-liter sealed cabinet constructed from non-layered, high-rigidity, medium-density fiberboard.

More info: [avantonepro.com](http://avantonepro.com)



1

### 2. Schmitt's Sounds

Producer and engineer Al Schmitt shares his process of selecting a microphone and explains how to get the best sounds out of recordings in Hal Leonard's *Al Schmitt on Vocal and Instrumental Recording Techniques*. Schmitt demonstrates his signature methods for recording a multitude of instruments, including drums, bass, piano, guitars, organs, horns and voice.

More info: [halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com)



2

### 3. Smartphone Mixer

Roland's Go:Mixer Pro smartphone audio mixer lets users connect and mix up to nine audio sources at once, including pro-quality powered microphones, guitars, basses and line-level gear. Dedicated controls provide easy volume adjustment, and the resulting ultra-clean, stereo digital audio output is sent straight to the user's smartphone.

More info: [roland.com](http://roland.com)



3

### 4. Loud & Clear

PreSonus' HD9 headphones feature a closed-back acoustic design that provides superior listening isolation and reduces bleed. The HD9's 45mm dynamic neodymium drivers and high power handling (900mW per channel into 40 ohms) deliver loud, clean audio, minimizing listening fatigue. Its tailored frequency response extends from 10Hz to 26kHz (+/- 3dB), with accurate bass response, enabling precise mixes. The HD9 features an adjustable headband, cups that rotate 180 degrees on two axes and comfortable, durable ear pads.

More info: [presonus.com](http://presonus.com)



4

### 5. Small Diaphragm Modeler

The Verge small-diaphragm condenser microphone from Antelope Audio excels on a wide array of instruments, thanks to its high SPL handling and transparent response. When combined with the included native mic emulation plug-ins, the Verge takes on the character of some of the finest small-diaphragm mics.

More info: [antelopeaudio.com](http://antelopeaudio.com)



5

### 6. Tabletop Headphone Amp

Sterling Audio's SHA4 four-channel tabletop headphone amplifier accepts two discrete stereo sources via balanced (TRS) or unbalanced (TS) 1/4-inch line-level inputs. Front-panel master level controls are provided for each source. The four channels are equipped with 1/4-inch and 3.5mm mini-connector TRS stereo outputs. Each channel can be individually switched between the two source mixes.

More info: [sterlingaudio.net](http://sterlingaudio.net)

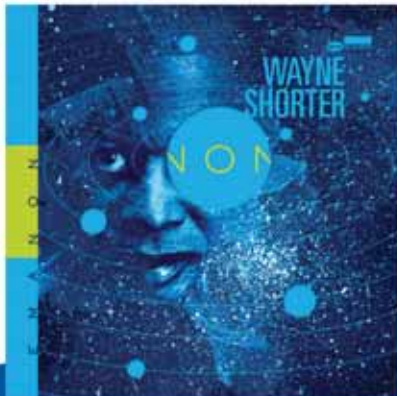


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## Military Band Alums Dominate George Mason Jazz Faculty

**IN AN ERA WHEN MANY UNIVERSITIES** are competing to add high-profile jazz instrumentalists to their faculties, George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, stands apart. Not only does its school of music, which confers jazz-related degrees at the bachelor, master and doctoral levels, have a vocalist—Darden Purcell—at the head of its jazz studies program, its jazz faculty is dominated by musicians who have been members of military bands.

“Our location just outside Washington, D.C., gives us great access to our premier military groups,” said Purcell, herself a former member of the Airmen of Note and High Flight, two of the bands associated with the U.S. Air Force. “That gives us the opportunity to hire some incredible musicians who have been teaching and performing for many years.”

“Most musicians who go through the military bands are well rounded and trained,” said Matt Niess, who teaches trombone, the instrument he’s played in the U.S. Army Blues Jazz Ensemble since 1988. “We had to win those jobs, so we needed to be diverse players who had learned all the rudiments.”

Despite the large number of ex- and present military band members on faculty, GMU’s jazz program focuses primarily on small groups, although there are two big bands on campus as well. In addition to the award-winning Mason Jazz Vocal Ensemble, the school of music features Soundcheque, a group whose repertoire includes Broadway and doo-wop songs.

“One thing I didn’t want to do here is to treat vocal studies as a separate thing,” Purcell said. “We aim to foster the overall musician, and whatever your instrument, we focus on getting you

playing music at the highest possible level.”

“Students study everything from marches to Coltrane,” Niess said. “One of our jazz faculty members is Victor Provost, who plays steel pans, and it doesn’t get much more diverse than jazz tunes played by a steel pan ensemble.”

On campus, Niess said there also are opportunities for jazz students to interact with peers who are pursuing other studies within the school of music and the larger College of Visual and Performing Arts. Overall, there are about 1,400 arts majors at GMU, including 250 students in the jazz studies undergraduate program, 70 people studying for a master’s of music in jazz studies and 30 doctoral students.

“Mason has a big-school feel,” Niess said, “but the jazz program really has a small conservatory vibe. ... As a student, you get to know all of your professors really well.”

Although the jazz program is only 20 years old, Purcell said it has grown very quickly. One element that exemplifies the growth of jazz at GMU is the 10-year-old National Jazz Workshop, which Niess directs on campus each June. Designed for students grade 8 and up, the workshop offers an intensive, fully comprehensive curriculum that includes improvisation, big-band and small-group performance pedagogy, composition, jazz history, arranging, music recording and production, as well as instrumental master classes.

During its decade of existence, the National Jazz Workshop has developed its own textbook, which students are encouraged to use once they leave the program. Niess said the return rate is exceptionally high, and currently all the counselors are former campers.

—James Hale

**Berklee Guitar Chair:** Berklee has named Kim Perlak as chair of its Guitar Department. Perlak’s versatile approach to the guitar embraces new American composition, along with education and public service. Her performances of classical works, original pieces, and collaborations with jazz and traditional players have been featured on NPR and on five recordings. Perlak joined Berklee in 2013 as assistant chair of guitar. She becomes the first woman to chair the department, and only the fourth person to hold the position since the college added guitar as a principal instrument in 1962.

[berklee.edu](http://berklee.edu)

**NSA Artistic Advisor:** Nevada School of the Arts, a non-profit music school serving Las Vegas and Southern Nevada, has hired Justin DiCioccio as artistic advisor to the organization’s School of JAZZ@NSA program. DiCioccio will work directly with NSA leadership to expand the program’s scope and enhance curriculum. School of JAZZ@NSA is a 14-week after-school program that focuses on jazz performance, improvisation, composition and arranging. DiCioccio, a three-time recipient of the Presidential Scholars Teacher Recognition Award, has an extensive education background that includes leadership roles with Manhattan School of Music, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, LaGuardia High School of the Arts and the New York City All City High School Jazz Program.

[nsamusic.org](http://nsamusic.org)

**Big Band Leadership:** Dan Thomas has been named executive director of the Kansas City Jazz Orchestra. A well-known educator, performer and composer, he served as a faculty member and administrator leading the jazz studies program at University of Missouri–Kansas City’s Conservatory of Music for the past 18 years. Thomas first studied at UMKC under the tutelage of saxophonist Bobby Watson and later became Watson’s partner in growing the program. Now in its 15th season, KCJO offers youth programming and community outreach to develop the next generation of big band jazz supporters.

[kcjo.org](http://kcjo.org)





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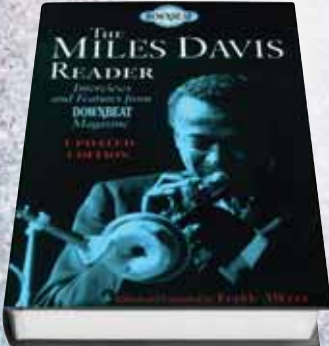
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## Michael Dease

The winner of the Rising Star-Trombone category in the 2016 DownBeat Critics Poll, Michael Dease, steadily has increased his profile as a bandleader. His latest album, *Bonafide* (Posi-Tone), is a demonstration of the 35-year-old trombonist's enviable chops as an instrumentalist and arranger. This is his first Blindfold Test.

### Joelle Léandre/George Lewis

"V" (*Transatlantic Visions*, RogueArt, 2009) Lewis, trombone.

It sounds like a swamp creature. I like the growth in the improvisation, how the guttural sounds connect up into the higher pitches. Now the creature is getting larger and moving. It's vocal in a unique way. I love hearing the raw plunger noise on the bell. This is incredible, expressive playing. I love the rhythms that he or she is interjecting. The only other person I've heard emote like this in extended techniques is Wycliffe Gordon. 5 stars. In its own category. It's such a beautiful composition. You compose when you improvise.

### Slide Hampton

"Quiet Nights" (*Slide Plays Jobim*, Alleycat, 2002) Hampton, trombone, arranger; Claudio Roditi, flugelhorn; Andres Boiarsky, tenor saxophone; Helio Alves, piano; Guilherme Monteiro, guitar; John Lee, bass; Duduka Da Fonseca, drums; Maucha Adnet, vocals.

Slide Hampton, *Slide Plays Jobim*. Some of the devices and melodies and structures Slide used in this arrangement will teach you to play melodically in jazz. I've made exercises of a lot of lines in this track—amazing counterpoint, different rhythms, traversing up and down the instrument. Slide is out of the J.J. Johnson school, which has plenty of nuance and feeling and inflection, but is adapted to the bebop style. He adapted a lot of shapes and harmonies that John Coltrane dealt with and put them on the trombone. A lot of people think that if you play bop, you don't have a lot of the goodies that the earlier swing and New Orleans trombonists have—but you do. 5 stars.

### Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra

"Jason And Jaseon" (*Vitoria Suite*, EmArcy, 2010) Vincent Gardner, Chris Crenshaw, Elliot Mason, trombones; Victor Goines, clarinet; Wynton Marsalis, composer; others.

The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Such an expressive trombone section, like a voice right in the middle of the band. That's Vincent Gardner. He has a relaxed, swinging, glorious weight in his sound, with a unique inflection in that he incorporates a lot of bends and scoops, but—as you see here—also plays with the clarity of any technical virtuoso. Sounds like Victor Goines on clarinet—his trademark glissandos.

Next is Chris Crenshaw, with whom I played in Georgia's 10th District All-District Jazz Band. He makes the trombone talk. We get that from our teacher, Wycliffe Gordon.

Next is Elliot Mason. He's got a slick eighth-note feel and accents. He does fantastic things on the trombone, but his approach to this solo is very mature—it's about the music, not about me. Those cats are always singing when they play, which is important in Wynton's concept for the trombones. 5 stars.

### BassDrumBone

"Lips And Grits" (*The Other Parade*, Clean Feed, 2011) Ray Anderson, trombone; Mark Helias, bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums.

This sounds like Ray Anderson. I saw Ray in his quintet with Wycliffe in 2001 when I moved to New York, and remember thinking, "Wow, it sounds so loose and in-the-moment and free, and I get the feeling he's playing exactly everything he wants to play." Hearing Ray live got me to



take my bebop blinders off, and started to get me to appreciate and try to hear different types of music—different types of jazz, especially. I've checked this record out. This is the group Ray's played with for 30 years. They're very simpatico. At times they go with each other, then they stand apart to give the ensemble more breadth. Sometimes, I dream at night that I could play like this. What Ray does is incredibly difficult to execute. He turns on a dime so quickly. One second he'll be in the basement register; next one, he'll be in the altissimo; then he'll be trilling; then he'll be growling. Most people can only do one of those at a time. Ray can do *all* of them, at any time, all together if he wishes. 5 stars.

### Steve Turre

"Settegast Strut" (*The Bones Of Art*, HighNote, 2013) Steve Turre, Frank Lacy, trombones; Xavier Davis, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Willie Jones III, drums.

I love when musicians are proud of the Africa in their swing. Steve Turre showed me that connection, and broke it down from the 6 to the 3 to the 2. [*first solo*] That's trademark Frank Lacy: Gliss up, where you take a low note and chromatically drag it through the overtone series. Aside from his powerful trombone playing, Frank always puts 100 percent of who he is in how he plays. He plays the blues in a special way. He just quoted "Lift Every Voice And Sing"—not the lyric, but the second half. [*track continues*] That's Steve Turre. You hear some of the rhythmic and harmonic language that Steve invented for the trombone—open intervals, the air push, pentatonic ideas he picked up from Woody Shaw, the brilliant, piercing attack. This reminds me of a tune Frank wrote called "Requiem." 5 stars.

### Robin Eubanks Mass Line Big Band

"Yes We Can—Victory Dance" (*More Than Meets The Ear*, ArtistShare, 2015) Antonio Hart, Alex Cummings, Marcus Strickland, Bobby Lavelle, Lauren Sevian, saxophones and woodwinds; Lew Soloff, Alex Sipiagin, Duane Eubanks, Aaron Janik, trumpets; Robin Eubanks, Jason Jackson, James Burton, Jennifer Wharton, trombones; Glenn Zaleski, piano; Boris Kozlov, electric bass; Nate Smith, drums; David Silliman, percussion.

Robin Eubanks. I'm a huge fan. When he goes into those fast lines, it's got this wordsmithing rhythm that rap artists have today. I think of Steve Davis as a wordsmith, too, but more like a poet, with magically chosen phrasing—everything feels so perfect. Robin has more abandon and fire and flair. But they're both discursing on the highest level. Is Sean Jones on trumpet? Alex Sipiagin? That type of accuracy and attitude can only be a handful of cats. The piece has all this rhythmic counterpoint and layers—really cool, like a big party. I have this record, but haven't checked out this track. 5 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.



A photograph of Adam Larson playing a saxophone. He is wearing a dark shirt with white polka dots and has his eyes closed in concentration. The background is dark and out of focus.

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