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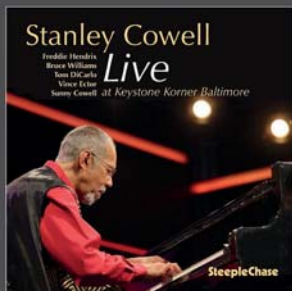
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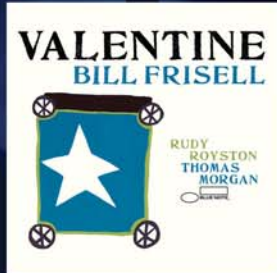
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NOVEMBER 2020

inside >

25 FOR THE FUTURE

20 **Veronica Swift** *Overnight Veteran*

BY SUZANNE LORGE

Singer-songwriter Veronica Swift has been touring since age 9. Now, at 26, she's a music biz veteran in pursuit of a variety of artistic disciplines. DownBeat catches up with the bandleader to discuss her career and her forthcoming album, *This Bitter Earth*. Our feature on Swift is followed by two dozen artist profiles that are part of our cover package, "25 For The Future."

26 **Shabaka Hutchings**

- Jazzmeia Horn*
- Christian Sands*
- Camila Meza*
- Nubya Garcia*
- Nduduzo Makhathini*
- Makaya McCraven*
- Lakecia Benjamin*
- Junius Paul*
- Morgan Guerin*
- Yazz Ahmed*
- James Francies*
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- Fabian Almazan*
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- Joel Ross*

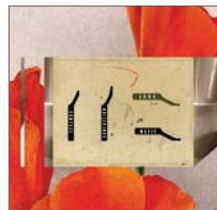


Vibraphonist Joel Ross, who's among the "25 For The Future," is set to release his sophomore leader date Oct. 23.

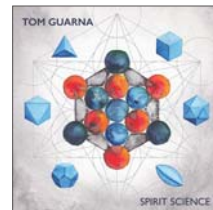
Cover photo of Veronica Swift shot by Bill Westmoreland.



44 Dafnis Prieto



45 Junk Magic



47 Tom Guarna



49 Steph Richards

DEPARTMENTS

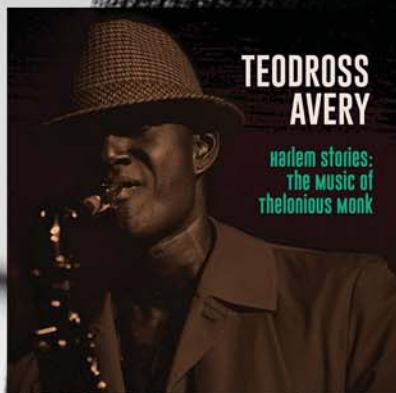
- 8 First Take
- 10 Chords & Discords
- 13 The Beat
- 41 Reviews
- 58 Jazz On Campus
- 62 Blindfold Test
Noah Preminger

RECORDING SCHOOL

- 52 Asynchronous Recording Platforms
BY KEITH BAUMANN
- 54 Home Studio Gear Basics
BY ED ENRIGHT
- 56 Toolshed



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Fabian Almazan, one of DownBeat's "25 For The Future," is profiled on page 32.

Revisiting a Futuristic Vision

A GREAT IDEA SOMETIMES BEARS repeating. Longtime readers will recall that the June 1999 issue of DownBeat had a cover package titled “25 For The Future,” focusing on young artists who seemed to have the potential to build significant careers in jazz. More than two decades later, we recognize the wisdom of the decision to shine a spotlight on musicians such as pianist Brad Mehldau, violinist Regina Carter, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Matt Wilson.

In our July 2016 issue, we had another cover package titled “25 For The Future.” As was the case in 1999, the goal was not so much to predict who would become a chart-topper, but to metaphorically declare, “Here are 25 musicians whose artistry has provided evidence that they have original voices—and just as significantly, they have something important to say.”

That 2016 batch included saxophonists Kamasi Washington and Melissa Aldana, pianists Gerald Clayton and Kris Davis, guitarist Julian Lage, vocalist Cyrille Aimée, trumpeter Marquis Hill and trumpeter/vocalist Bria Skonberg. Over the past four years, jazz fans have seen these musicians release excellent albums and become artists with the type of stature that allows them to tour the globe.

Well, they *were* able to tour the globe—before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

For young jazz artists whose careers are on the ascent, the opportunity to play at clubs, concert halls and festivals is essential. Live performance is the lifeblood of a jazz musician. Thousands of Facebook “likes” and video views

don’t make much of a difference to your career arc (or your bank account) unless fans are motivated to spend money to listen to your music and see you perform.

Prior to the pandemic, the DownBeat staff already had planned to present the third installment of “25 For The Future” as the cover package of this issue. When the coronavirus hit the United States in the spring, we considered, very briefly, the idea of pushing this article to 2021, a time when we hope that jazz musicians will be back on the road in full force. But we decided to forge ahead with this feature. Part of the reason is because we know how difficult it is for young musicians to maintain career momentum at a time when they cannot tour or conduct in-person workshops.

Avid jazz fans certainly will be able to connect the dots between the artists in our July 2016 issue and the ones in this issue. Stefon Harris, for example, has been a mentor to vibraphone phenom Joel Ross (see page 39). When he recorded his 2019 album *Love Tape*, Marquis Hill recruited bassist Junius Paul (page 30). Regina Carter is a guest on the forthcoming album by Camille Thurman (page 34). Those are just a few of the dozens of examples.

As you read our cover package, we hope that you’ll be inspired to check out some music by an artist you may not have heard of, or perhaps one whose name you recognize but whose music is not on any of your playlists.

And we fervently hope that one day soon we’ll have the chance to see these young players perform on a stage right in front of us, surrounded by other happy, healthy jazz fans. **DB**

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Watson's Blues Power

Congratulations to Bobby Watson on the success of his new album, *Keepin' It Real*, which hit the No. 1 spot on the JazzWeek radio airplay chart. Bobby and I were saxophone students at the University of Miami in the early 1970s—he an undergrad, myself a master's candidate. The article in *The Beat* section of your September issue really struck a chord with me (pardon the pun) because of what Bobby told journalist J.D. Considine about playing the blues. Somehow, with each passing decade, the blues in jazz has become the "redheaded stepchild," not really appreciated—or simply ignored.

As a full-time jazz performer for close to 40 years, I played the blues plenty. But it was only when I started working with Dr. Lonnie Smith that I started to truly *understand* the blues. In the article, Bobby described the blues as "something I think you have to



Bobby Watson

grow into," and he was talking about the difference between knowing the music and feeling it. I played with Doc on a regular basis throughout the 1990s and came to love playing the blues.

Long live the blues in jazz! And thank you to Bobby and Doc for always "Keepin' It Real."

ERIC ALLISON
SYLVAN LAKE, ALBERTA
CANADA

Applause for DownBeat

Your October cover story by Ayana Contreras is an example of fantastic journalism, covering the musical side of the current political and social environment.

The cover itself, depicting Jon Batiste, is a work of art. Well done!

JIM REYNO
HAMILTON, ONTARIO
CANADA

Precious Memories of Peacock

My first encounter with Gary Peacock occurred on a Boston street corner, where I was introduced to him by a good friend, Chris Hills, who is a great musician. Gary had given up music. ... He had sold his German factory plywood instrument, with a spruce top, to Chris.

Subsequently, Gary moved to Japan to study acupuncture. Upon my 1970 arrival in Tokyo, on tour with Sarah Vaughan, he visited me at our hotel. Entering my room, he asked how I was, and I told him that I was suffering from yet another, regularly occurring migraine. He told me to turn around; he began touching my upper shoulders and neck, and with a short manipulation, the headache disappeared.

In 1973, my girlfriend and I flew to San Francisco, pulled my car out of a storage garage, and drove to Portland, Oregon, to meet Chris—who had sold Gary's bass to me. Time went on, and I dropped out of playing for over 18 years.

The next visit from Gary occurred because he hooked up with Keith Jarrett and Jack DeJohnette, and asked if he could buy the Framus back from me. I declined. He asked

to come to my home to see it. I knew he wanted to talk me into it. He showed up, played it a bit, and my tongue hit the floor. He again asked me to sell it, whereupon I suggested he take it because I wasn't playing any bass in those days. He demurred because he didn't want to be in an active situation and receive a call from me wanting it back.

I'm so sad that he's gone. Gary was a fierce pioneer and pacesetter, and along with Scott LaFaro, led the way for so many others to follow.

GENE PERLA
GENE@PERLA.ORG

Salute to Segal

I was deeply saddened to hear that Joe Segal, founder of the Jazz Showcase, had died. When I received your October issue, I was very pleased to see the great article on Joe, who had presented jazz in Chicago since 1947 in numerous locations.

I first went to a Jazz Showcase show in 1977, when it was in the basement of a disco. There have been multiple locations since then. Joe stuck it out all those years, through thick and thin (and thinner). I once told Joe I thought I had read somewhere that the Jazz Showcase was a nonprofit club. He looked at me, laughed and said, "Not by choice."

Joe was mostly responsible for making jazz a passion of mine. I don't play an instrument, but thanks to Joe, I have great ears for great music.

MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

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Inside >

- 14 / Cindy Blackman Santana
- 15 / Detroit Jazz Festival
- 16 / John Hollenbeck
- 18 / Gary Peacock

Beat



Sharel Cassity, whose *Fearless* is being released through her Relsha Music imprint, believes positivity is a vital component of recovery.

Sharel Cassity Remains 'Fearless' Amid Recovery

As Sharel Cassity worked through compositions for her 2020 release, *Fearless*, one thought plagued her: “If I don’t get help, this will be my last album.”

In summer 2019, after a series of false negatives and inaccurate analyses, the Chicago-based saxophonist and composer was diagnosed with Lyme disease. Loved ones feared she’d slip into paralysis and lose her livelihood. But each morning, after throwing her legs out of bed and struggling to find her balance, Cassity repeated the same mantra: “There’s no proof there’s no cure.”

For months, Cassity endured severe neurological symptoms. Her body weakened. Her mind fogged and sputtered. But her spirit remained buoyant. “I was so determined to not let it affect my life,” she said. Andy’s Jazz Club, the Chicago venue where she played a weekly ses-

sion, had a stool set on the bandstand for her. She chose a softer reed for teaching and performances. When she flew across the world—from New York to Istanbul—IV ports clung to her arms.

“It was scary up until about January when the IVs came out,” she said, recalling the thought of an illness-induced career change. But amid despair and uncertainty, she meditated on recovery and worked on *Fearless*, a title she’d chosen long before she became ill.

Fearlessness and grit have sustained a distinctive career for the saxophonist that includes collaborations with Nicholas Payton and singer-songwriter Natalie Merchant. In 2015, Cassity made the decision to leave New York after 16 years and pursue a life in the Middle East. “I needed a change,” she said. At the time, fellow artists told Cassity she was ruining her life: “They’d say,

‘People wish they had what you have here.’”

The change proved revitalizing. She and her husband, pianist-composer Richard Johnson, landed gigs at Qatar Music Academy and Jazz at Lincoln Center Doha, respectively. They welcomed the birth of their son before relocating to Chicago, where Cassity fell hard for the scene.

After composing the majority of *Fearless*, Cassity heard two distinct voices in her mind that were needed on the project in addition to Johnson: bassist Alexander Claffy and drummer Mark Whitfield Jr., both strong pulse-setters and active conversationalists.

“We didn’t need a [studio] strategy, because we come from the same philosophy: When it’s time to play, you go all in,” said Cassity. “You don’t have to remind a marathon runner to run their best race. That’s what they’re born to do.”

Less literal but an equally intrinsic presence on *Fearless*—Cassity’s second release on her Relsha Music label—is the late Roy Hargrove. The day of his 2018 passing, she pulled out her horn. A latent melody became her “Ballad For Roy,” a tune on the new disc imbued with the lushness of the trumpeter’s work and a sense of humor.

Most viscerally on Cassity’s playing, Hargrove imprinted his sense of time. “It’s a heartbeat you can play with or reflect against,” she said. “Roy’s time was impeccable. He was my example.”

Spirituality and support from loved ones helped Cassity overcome the debilitating symptoms of Lyme. And as she moved toward complete recovery from one of the most frightening challenges in her life, she reflected on the nuance of fearlessness: “‘Fearless’ doesn’t mean not having fear. You’re gonna feel fear, but you’re gonna do something in spite of the fear. I hope this record encourages people to be positive and fight the good fight for humanity, to keep the music alive. The people who are the creators—who are full of love—need to keep fighting. They need to be fearless.”

—Stephanie Jones



Stanley Crouch

Critical Criticism: Stanley Crouch, a critic and writer who was as erudite as he was divisive, died Sept. 16 in New York at the age of 74. He was a public figure for jazz during a time when the music found itself amid declining influence in American culture, and came to advocate for a traditional aesthetic that belied his connection to the avant-garde in the 1970s. Along with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, Crouch helped conceptualize in 1987 what would become Jazz at Lincoln Center. Crouch, who became an NEA Jazz Master in 2019, was born in Los Angeles on Dec. 14, 1945 and held a variety of college teaching positions prior to moving to New York in 1975, where his writing career and influence in jazz blossomed.

New 'Black Radio': Keyboardist Robert Glasper is set to release *Black Radio 3* in 2021, eight years after the previous installment on Blue Note. Like the earlier *Black Radio* albums, the recording is set to feature a handful of high-profile collaborators, including H.E.R. and Meshell Ndegeocello, who appear on the album's first single, "Better Than I Imagined." robertglasper.com

Folkways Has The Blues: In September, Smithsonian Folkways announced the acquisition of Right on Rhythm, a Washington, D.C., imprint founded by Wayne Kahn in 1996 that focused on the area's blues scene. The label also issued music from Roy Carrier, a Louisiana Zydeco musician, before shutting down in 2012. folkways.si.edu

Final Bar: Saxophonist and DownBeat contributor Mark Colby died Aug. 31 from complications related to cancer. He was 71. Colby served as a jazz studies adjunct faculty member at Elmhurst University since 1997 and also taught at Chicago's DePaul University. ... Ira Sullivan, a saxophonist and trumpeter who recorded for the Muse and Delmark imprints, died Sept. 21 at the age of 89. Sullivan began performing in Chicago during the 1950s and shared stages with luminaries like Charlie Parker, and later worked in a combo with Red Rodney.

Blackman Santana Blends Musical, Spiritual Approaches

WHEN DRUMMER AND BANDEADER Cindy Blackman Santana makes music, it's in pursuit of something deeply spiritual.

Soulfulness has defined Blackman Santana's playing since her breakout in the mid-1980s, and it's the lifeblood of *Give The Drummer Some*, her joyful new jazz-fusion record featuring a cast of A-listers, including her husband of 10 years, Carlos Santana.

Growing up in Yellow Springs, Ohio, Blackman Santana attributes her early attraction to the drums to something divine. As a toddler, her mother would find Blackman Santana patting out rhythms on whatever household objects she were around. After begging for years, she was gifted a drum set at the age of 7.

"[My mother] thought I would outgrow it," Blackman Santana said recently. "But [I] never did. ... I think it is something that my soul has always wanted to do."

Owning her own kit opened up "a whole new world" for her, the drummer said, especially after she found Miles Davis and Ahmad Jamal records in her father's collection, offering up an inkling of what was possible on the instrument.

In her early twenties, after studying at Berklee School of Music, Blackman Santana moved to New York and started catching performances of such drum heroes as Tony Williams, Elvin Jones and Art Blakey. Remarkably, she became close enough with Blakey to call him "Papa" and babysit his kids. She also received a special gift from Jimmy Cobb—the cymbal he'd received from Williams years earlier when the younger drummer joined Davis' quintet.

While Blackman Santana clearly earned her straight-ahead jazz stripes—as her blistering, dynamic and polyrhythmic percussion feature on *Give The Drummer Some*'s "Mother Earth" so readily conveys—the new record truly is a fusion effort. Consisting mostly of the bandleader's originals, the album highlights Blackman Santana's adaptability, garnered from her years in Lenny Kravitz's band, as well as her experience supporting an array of artists from soul singer Joss Stone to avant-metal guitarist Buckethead.

While several tracks on the album, like the sassy "She's Got It Goin' On," were shaped to be radio-friendly, others, like "Miles Away," exist comfortably outside of the pop world.

Her ability to blend genres also highlights a spiritual approach to the music. Though Blackman Santana became a member of the Bahá'í faith in her teens and has studied Kabbalah, her current mode of spirituality is a nondenominational one, based in removing encumbrances, and finding truth and love through music.



The fusion of musical ideas on Cindy Blackman Santana's latest album "transcends any kind of veil that we put between us," the drummer said.

"I feel that music, in general, is the supreme communicator, which crosses all barriers that human beings have implemented upon ourselves around the world ... [M]usic touches people and it just transcends any kind of veil that we put between us," she said. "If you look at everything from a spiritual perspective, then you're not going to have the issues that we have, you know? We won't hate on each other, we won't hurt each other, we won't fight each other."

This philosophy not only imbues *Give The Drummer Some* with a sense of transcendence, but of celebration and communion with listeners and with other musicians featured on the album.

John McLaughlin, the jazz-fusion pioneer who first connected with Blackman Santana on stage at the 2011 Montreux Jazz Festival, describes playing music with the drummer as "taking a walk in the cosmos." They embark on a transcendent stroll when McLaughlin appears on "We Came To Play," a fierce riff-based rock tune anchored in an improvisational tête-à-tête between the guitarist and bandleader.

The joyful bond between Blackman Santana and her husband is conveyed on the celebratory "Fun Party Splash," the guitarist's high-energy soloing meeting Blackman Santana's raucous drumming and smoky voice, as she sings, "Have no fear/ Love is here."

Even on songs that might not seem overtly light, like "Social Justice" and "Change Is In Your Hands," Blackman Santana remains focused on love and connection. It's one of the aspects of the 17-track record that her husband most adores.

"The album has the frequency vibration and energy to heal people, because a lot of people need hope and courage; a lot of people need the opposite of doom and gloom," the guitarist said. "This album, to me, it's like a sweet pinch."

—Alexa Peters



The Detroit Jazz Festival broadcast crew films the Rodney Whitaker Sextet.

Inside The Detroit Jazz Festival's Bubble

THE DETROIT JAZZ FESTIVAL PULLED OFF A first—a live jazz fest with no audience—during the Labor Day weekend.

Rather than canceling the 41st edition of the festival, or holding a virtual event where artists perform from their homes, DJF decided the pandemic called for something completely different. Festival organizers turned the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center into a de facto television studio, complete with three full-sized sound stages and an anchor desk, and laid 2.8 miles of fiber optic cable to broadcast more than 40 hours of live music on TV, radio and social media, using 10 different platforms.

“I thought, ‘We’re not going to be a virtual festival,’” said Chris Collins, president and artistic director of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation. “We knew what people’s assumptions were about virtual performances at this point—Zoom stuff, the fabricated choir singing. They look like they’re all together, but they’re not. We weren’t going to do that. We want the sound to be great. We want the artist experience to be on a very high level, which I think we’ve achieved. When they arrive, there’s a feeling of specialness. It’s not, you know, something like a backyard barbecue. This is a performance.”

Speaking from his suite the morning after the festival’s first night of performances, Collins already had been in meetings and interviews since 6 a.m., and said the entire team was on a mission for the weekend.

“Our crews and our techs, and the entire foundation team—everyone’s pivoted several times this year,” he said. “But the final pivot? Talk about an example of professional skill in the city of Detroit.”

The crew turned Detroit’s RenCen into a jazz bubble for the weekend. Everyone who entered the building had to get a temperature check each day, sanitize their hands and wear a sticker that said they had been scanned. Every time anyone entered a sound stage, another temperature check, another splash of sanitizer. Masks, of

course, were mandatory. Some artists even wore them onstage.

The music itself was miraculous. Jazz players have a way of adapting, changing on the fly. So do camera and stage crews. The combination made for an extremely satisfying mix of music, TV and radio.

Outside of the crews, the only audience was a few writers and photographers invited to witness the event; applause between songs wasn’t allowed. Only after the cameras were turned off could people in attendance show their appreciation.

There were national acts: Trombonist Steve Turre, pianist Joey Alexander and singer Renee Marie all delivered strong sets. That said, most of the lineup featured the immense wealth of Detroit’s local scene.

The festival’s opening jazz suite, called “Justice,” featured four groups of area musicians, each delivering a powerful movement on the theme of peace and social justice. And the Marcus Belgrave Legacy Ensemble, presented by singer Joan Belgrave (the late trumpeter’s wife), offered up a big-hearted performance in honor of one of Detroit’s most-beloved jazz figures.

Keyboardist Robert Glasper—a Houston native—served as the closing act of the festival, and showed through his performance with drummer Justin Tyson, bassist Burniss Earl Travis II and DJ Jahi Sundance that he understands the times we’re living in and the importance of the music to the Motor City.

Pulling in pieces like Radiohead’s “Packt Like Sardines In A Crushed Tin Box” and his own “No One Like You,” and reciting the names of Black men and boys killed in the streets like Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, the bandleader delivered a set that was immediate and, somehow, hopeful.

Glasper’s most-poignant tribute of the evening might not have been his music, but his T-shirt, which read: “Imagine Black Culture Without Detroit.”

It can’t be done.

—Frank Alkyer

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Hollenbeck Takes Back Recordings, Forges Ahead

BY HIS OWN ADMISSION, JOHN Hollenbeck was a drum nerd at a young age, obsessed with the idea of becoming a big band drummer when he was a 12-year-old living in New York State's Southern Tier region. During the past 40 years, his career has blossomed well beyond those original intentions, to encompass work leading his large ensemble, the Claudia Quartet, various duo and small-group collaborations, composing and teaching.

Today, like numerous contemporary artists, he's added entrepreneurship to his skillset, launching a nonprofit called Flexatonic Arts to represent his various initiatives along with those developed by other artists in his circle.

For this latest project, Hollenbeck turned to Marty Khan, the co-founder of Outward Visions who has helped organize nonprofits for other jazz artists, including Oliver Lake's Passin' Thru, George Russell's Concept Inc. and Craig Harris' Nation of Imagination.

"It's a little bit of an experiment," said Hollenbeck on a Zoom call from Montreal, where he's a professor at McGill University's Schulich School of Music. "I realized that what I do is not based in consumerism, but in art. It's not necessarily about products; it's more about creativity, education and community."

Considering his early works—on labels like CRI, OmniTone and Cuneiform—Hollenbeck began thinking seriously about repatriating records he didn't control.

"When I put these records out, streaming platforms didn't even exist, and then all of a sudden I looked on a streaming platform and there was my record," he said. "I was like, 'Whoa, that's weird,' because, of course, we never even discussed it at the time. But I felt like, 'I want this. I want to get this to these people.'"

Now, via Flexatonic, listeners can purchase early albums like *No Images* (2001) and middle-period works like *Eternal Interlude* (2009), scored for a 19-piece orchestra and vocalist Theo Bleckmann.

Bleckmann, who met Hollenbeck at guitarist Ben Monder's Brooklyn apartment in the mid-'90s and has collaborated with him for almost 25 years, said it's the composer's restless curiosity about sonic possibilities that has inspired their long musical relationship.

"It has evolved from just trying stuff out to making those ideas much bolder and really owning them," the singer said. "We both always come together with new ideas, and I would never correct or stop him, unless something's completely out of my range or impossible to do for some physical reason. I've always been like, 'Let's make this work in some way. It's exciting.'"



When John Hollenbeck began releasing albums, the streaming economy didn't yet exist.

Their most recent collaboration is *Songs You Like A Lot*, which also features vocalist Kate McGarry, keyboardist Gary Versace and the Frankfurt Radio Big Band. The follow-up to 2013's *Songs You Like A Lot* and 2015's *Songs We Like A Lot*, the new project includes Hollenbeck's idiosyncratic arrangements of songs suggested by online votes. His approach to compositions as diverse as the hymn "Down To The River To Pray" and Joni Mitchell's "Blue" showcase his seemingly boundless imagination and signature willingness to explore unlikely sonic choices.

"I think John is really good at balancing the risky behavior and big-band writing with attending to everybody's need and desire to be heard in a large ensemble," Bleckmann said. "His approach is really incredible."

For Hollenbeck, like many others, a lot of interesting things were quashed by the outbreak of COVID-19. That meant scuttling a quartet performance of his composition "Epigraphs" in Australia, a residency in Finland and work with his longtime collaborator Meredith Monk.

When Hollenbeck spoke to DownBeat, he and his wife were just finishing a 14-day quarantine in Montreal after spending time in his hometown of Binghamton. The drummer was contemplating what the new school year would look like.

The best thing about the academic setting, he concluded, was the continuing challenge to learn. The 12-year-old drum nerd re-emerges: "I remember, I took [Kneebody drummer] Nate Wood out for Japanese food because I *needed* to know what were the best exercises he ever did. I wanted to figure out what are the things that could help a student the most. You end up thinking about yourself a lot and what you do and how you do it. You're constantly examining yourself, which I think it is good." —James Hale

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ELLIOTT PEACOCK

Gary Peacock (1935–2020)

Bassist Gary Peacock Dies at 85

BASSIST GARY PEACOCK, WHO PER-formed and recorded alongside trailblazing bandleaders Albert Ayler, Keith Jarrett and scores of others, in addition to leading his own trio, died Sept. 4 at age 85 following an unspecified illness.

Working from a broad musical palette, Peacock demonstrated full command of jazz standards, but his inquisitive nature pushed him toward engaging with the music's freer aspects as well.

"Gary was quite well-known and sought after because of his unique improvising concepts," said drummer Jack DeJohnette, a longtime collaborator. "His tone was incredible—rich, deep and even all over. His feel was amazing. He could really swing, and his free playing was like a rocket taking off, like a spring exploding."

Born in 1935 in Idaho, Peacock played a range of instruments before moving over to bass while stationed in Germany during a stint serving in the Army. By the early 1960s, he had made a name for himself as an imaginative and highly skilled jazz bassist, playing in trios with pianists Paul Bley and Bill Evans, as well as groups led by drummer Tony Williams, pianist Lowell Davidson and saxophonist Ayler. He even did a two-month stint with Miles Davis, subbing for Ron Carter.

Peacock was never defined by one particular idiom or style; instead, he sought to explore the freedoms revealed in any given musical context.

After establishing himself on the New York jazz scene, Peacock moved to Japan in the late 1960s, immersing himself in Eastern culture and studying Zen Buddhism. During that time, he recorded the albums *Eastward* (1970) and *Voices* (1971) for the Japanese CBS/Sony imprint.

The trio of Peacock, DeJohnette and pianist Jarrett was assembled for Peacock's 1977 album *Tales Of Another* (ECM). That grouping would later become Jarrett's Standards Trio, which toured annually for decades and released numerous recordings, beginning with the 1983 ECM albums *Standards Vol. 1* and *Standards Vol. 2*. On the occasion of the trio's 25th anniversary, Peacock reflected on the trio's longevity.

"We all surrender to the music and we're all 200 percent committed to the melodies in the American Songbook," he said in the November 2007 issue of *DownBeat*. "But if someone had told me at the time that we started that I'd be playing in the same band, even for 10 years, I would have thought they were a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic. But we have stayed together by immersing ourselves in these great songs, engaging in a spirited symbiosis and reaching a depth that's rare to achieve."

Other Peacock leader recordings on ECM included *December Poems* (with Jan Garbarek), *Voice From The Past: Paradigm* (with Garbarek, DeJohnette and Tomasz Stanko), *Shift In The Wind* (with Art Lande and Eliot Zigmund) and *Guamba* (with Garbarek, Palle Mikkelborg and Peter Erskine).

Peacock remained active in recent years, releasing *Now This* (2015) and *Tangents* (2017) on ECM with his own trio, which included drummer Joey Baron and pianist Marc Copland.

"Gary will be missed but remembered as one of the giants of the double bass," DeJohnette said. "He's a legend, and he will remain that." **DB**

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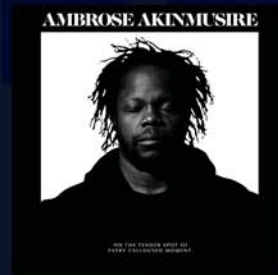
IMMANUEL WILKINS
OMEGA

After making a striking appearance on Joel Ross' *KingMaker*, alto saxophonist **IMMANUEL WILKINS** delivers an expansive opus about the Black experience in America on his own debut album *OMEGA*, which was produced by **JASON MORAN** and features a next-generation quartet with pianist **MICAH THOMAS**, bassist **DARYL JOHNS**, and drummer **KWEKU SUMBRY**.



GERALD CLAYTON
HAPPENING:
LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD

Pianist **GERALD CLAYTON** makes his Blue Note debut with *Happening: Live at the Village Vanguard*, a fitting name for what this dynamic quintet with alto saxophonist **LOGAN RICHARDSON**, tenor saxophonist **WALTER SMITH III**, bassist **JOE SANDERS**, and drummer **MARCUS GILMORE** captures on stage any given night. Recorded at the legendary NYC jazz club, a longtime sacred space for the music, the band conjures the spirits of the room on this set of Clayton originals and standards.



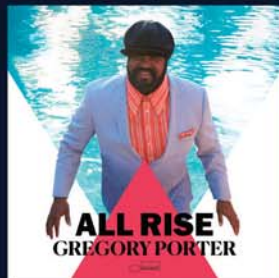
AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE
ON THE TENDER SPOT OF
EVERY CALLOUSED MOMENT

AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE follows his acclaimed, genre-busting best-of-2018 manifesto *Origami Harvest* with another visionary statement on his new album *on the tender spot of every calloused moment*, which finds the trumpeter examining blackness on an uncompromising set of modern jazz laced with a heavy feeling of the blues. The album presents 11 new compositions by Akinmusire and features his quartet with pianist **SAM HARRIS**, bassist **HARISH RAGHAVAN**, and drummer **JUSTIN BROWN** with guest vocals from **GENEVIEVE ARTADI** and **JESUS DIAZ**.



NORAH JONES
PICK ME UP OFF THE FLOOR

NORAH JONES' seventh solo studio album grew out of her acclaimed singles series, as the unreleased songs unexpectedly congealed into an album of tremendous depth and beauty. Featuring a range of collaborators from **BRIAN BLADE** to **JEFF TWEEDY**, *Pick Me Up Off The Floor* is connected by the sly groove of her piano trios, lyrics that confront loss and portend hope, and a mood that leans into darkness before ultimately finding the light.



GREGORY PORTER
ALL RISE

2-time GRAMMY Award winner **GREGORY PORTER** follows his loving tribute to Nat "King" Cole with a return to his deeply soulful original songwriting on *ALL RISE*. The album is a potent mix of jazz, soul, blues, gospel, and pop featuring longtime bandmates pianist **CHIP CRAWFORD**, bassist **JAHMAL NICHOLS**, drummer **EMANUEL HARROLD**, augmented by a horn section, string orchestra, and a dynamic production aesthetic courtesy of **TROY MILLER**.



VARIOUS ARTISTS
BLUE NOTE RE:IMAGINED

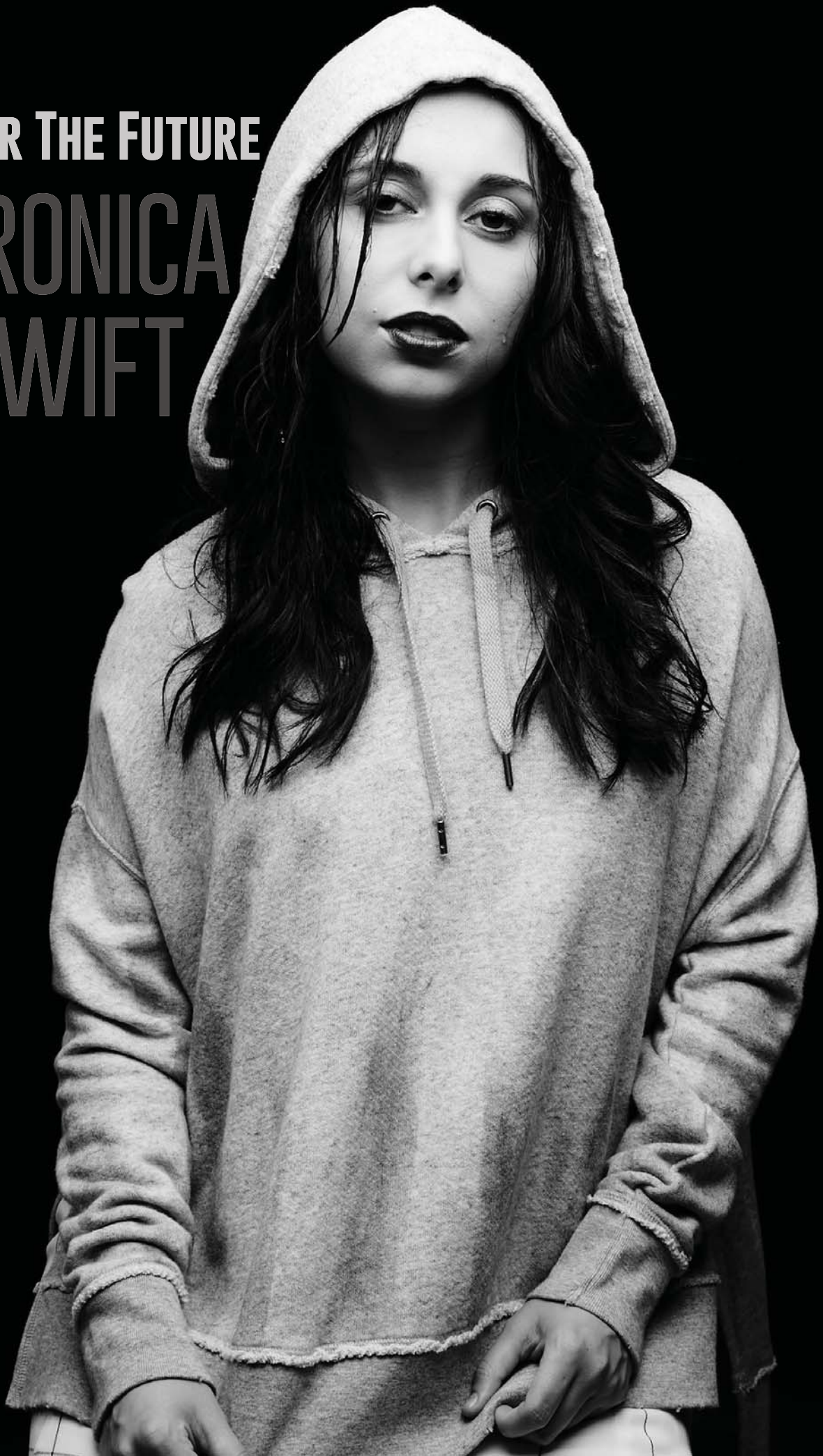
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25 FOR THE FUTURE

VERONICA
SWIFT



OVERNIGHT VETERAN

BY SUZANNE LORGE PHOTO BY BILL WESTMORELAND

Singer Veronica Swift returned home from a gig in Italy just in time to celebrate the birthday of her mother, acclaimed jazz singer and educator Stephanie Nakasian.

On Aug. 28 Swift, billed as one of “The Three Divas,” had played a sold-out, socially distanced concert in the Boboli Gardens at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, Italy, as part of the Uffizi Galleries’ New Generation Festival. Nakasian’s birthday party was held two evenings later at the family farm in Charlottesville, Virginia.

“I’m having an emotional crash after one of the most amazing weeks of my life,” Swift told DownBeat by phone the day of the celebration. The concert was just the kind of spectacle that Swift likes: an eclectic amal-

gam of opera, jazz, big band, tap dancing and musical theater.

If she was having a tough time coming down from a performance high, though, her phone demeanor belied it. During the interview, she spoke confidently about her upcoming album, *This Bitter Earth*, her second Mack Avenue release, and mused about the new challenges and opportunities that young singers are taking on today. From her poise in discussing these issues, it’s clear that global success rests easily on Swift’s shoulders.



Veronica Swift performs at the 2019 Detroit Jazz Festival.

Swift's star rose surprisingly fast. She first stepped into public awareness with her second-place finish (behind Jazzmeia Horn) in the 2015 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Vocals Competition. The following year, she would graduate from the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami. Relentless gigging followed—in the world's best jazz clubs, at prestigious jazz festivals, with celebrity-led ensembles. She signed with Mack Avenue and the label released her 2019 album, *Confessions*, which dazzled audiences and critics alike. All this by the age of 25.

But Swift disputes the notion that her career rise was precipitous. "I've been touring since I was 9 years old," she said. "So, it's not like this all happened overnight. People get that impression, but I've been putting in the hours, believe me."

Her claim is hardly an exaggeration. The only child of Nakasian and pianist Hod O'Brien (1936–2016), Swift spent much of her childhood bundled up in the back of the car while her parents toured. ("That's why I can sleep on planes so well," she joked.) Before the age of 12 she had headlined at Jazz at Lincoln Center, learned to play the trumpet and released two albums introducing children to different forms of jazz, including bebop. Not your typical pre-teen activities.

In November 2004, the child prodigy recorded her debut, *Veronica's House Of Jazz* (HodStef Music), fronting a band that included her father on piano and her mother on backing vocals. For that album, she assumed the professional moniker she still uses today. "My father was adopted, so even though O'Brien is my legal last name, his biological mother's last name was Swift," she explained. "Since I never knew his side of the family, [using that sur-

name] was my way of honoring that heritage."

The concept of honoring one's heritage—musical and otherwise—cropped up periodically as Swift discussed her career, almost as a disclaimer for the unconventional turns that her art sometimes takes. In truth, it's hard to miss the level of informed expertise that she brings to the least of her vocal lines, so firm is her grasp on a multiplicity of traditions. Whether she's singing in a European song form, with its clarion tones and preferred technique, or an American roots-based form, with its diasporic grooves and improvisational phrasings, Swift manages to strike unerringly at the musical center of whatever task is at hand. It's only after she has established her footing that she moves into uncharted territory.

"I like keeping the disciplines as their own thing," Swift said. "If I do an opera concert, I'll keep the music as it was originally intended. But then I would program around that song, with an aria, but in a jazz style. I want to understand the subtleties of a style, and I try to present it in the most authentic way I can—while remaining authentic to myself."

Like many singers of her generation, Swift holds that authentic creative expression doesn't necessarily fit squarely into any one category—the idea seems almost anathema to the creative impulse itself. "I can't just do one thing," she asserted. "I get branded as a 'Songbook singer,' when, in fact, only 25 percent of my repertoire is actually [from the Great American] Songbook."

She points to the repertoire for *This Bitter Earth* by way of illustration. The album's title track is a mournful, Max Richter-inspired version of a tune that Dinah Washington popularized in 1960. The program also includes a spate

of musical theater classics in modern jazz settings—"How Lovely To Be A Woman" (from *Bye Bye Birdie*), "You've Got To Be Carefully Taught" (from *South Pacific*) and "Getting To Know You" (from *The King and I*)—and a couple of satirical bebop novelties, Dave Frishberg's "The Sports Page" and Bob Dorough's "You're The Dangerous Type." By the closing track, a gripping, jazz-drenched version of The Dresden Dolls' 2006 rock ballad "Sing," any thoughts of Swift as a Songbook stylist have evaporated.

The album also contains one shocker that will give almost any listener pause: Swift's guitar-and-vocal duo reading of The Crystals' 1962 single "He Hit Me (And It Felt Like A Kiss)." Penned by Gerry Goffin and Carole King—and interpreted over the decades by rock bands such as The Motels, Hole and Grizzly Bear—this deeply problematic tune about domestic violence, rendered as gentle as a lullaby in Swift's voice, is all the more horrifying for its sonic sweetness.

With apologies to Goffin and King, who thought that writing such a tune was a good idea? Swift never asks this question in so many words, but her intent hangs in the air. Likewise, the album's other 12 tracks ring with similarly unspoken questions; in this indirect manner, the protean singer makes clear her views on the harsh societal ills that these tunes address: racism, school shootings, fake news and women's struggles in the workplace.

"It's crazy to me that the concept of this album is even timelier now than it was when I came up with the idea five years ago," Swift said. "The album is a commentary on the way things are. It's really hard to do this in a topical way that isn't offensive. But the album isn't preachy. [The commentary] comes through its cynicism and humor."

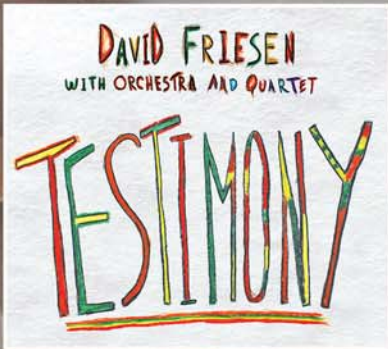
In these last statements, Swift alludes to the pressured public landscape that many young singers face today. Like all performers, they are now subject to an unprecedented level of scrutiny in their work. They feel a responsibility for the psychological impact that the words they sing might have on an audience. And they recognize that the musical world they inhabit is radically different from the one that birthed the careers of earlier jazz singers, like Nakasian.

"It's never easy [to be a singer], but there's a lot more freedom now than there was before," Swift said. "It used to be that if you were a white woman you catered to one kind of audience, and if you were a Black woman to another kind of audience. That's really not how it works today, which is beautiful. It means that someone can come up on mere artistry."

Swift identifies with other young vocalists who are forging new pathways in jazz "on mere artistry"—singers like Cécile McLorin Salvant, Cyrille Aimée and Jazzmeia Horn—and she acknowledges both their grounding in the jazz



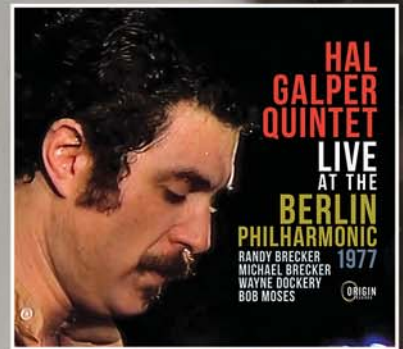
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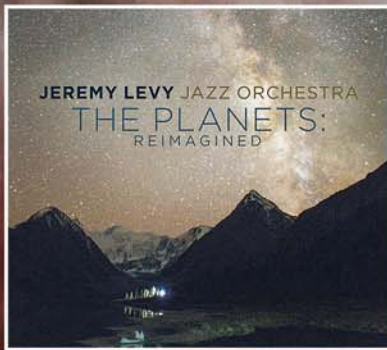
DAVID FRIESEN
Testimony
With Ukranian Orchestra & Quartet



JOACHIM MENCIL
Brooklyn Eye
Steve Cardenas / Scott Colley / Rudy Royston



HAL GALPER
Live at the Berlin Philharmonic '77
Randy Brecker / Michael Brecker
Wayne Dockery / Bob Moses



JEREMY LEVY JAZZ ORCHESTRA
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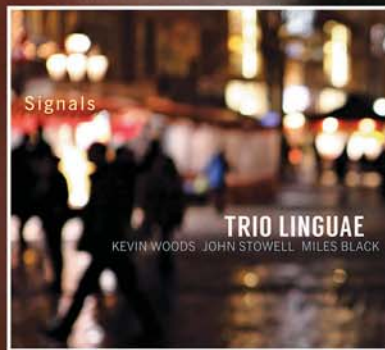
BENJAMIN BOONE
The Poets are Gathering
feat. Kenny Werner / Ari Hoenig / Ben Monder



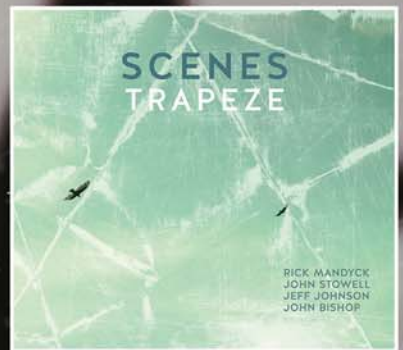
JIHEE HEO
Are You Ready?
Marty Kenney / Rodney Green



TED MOORE TRIO
The Natural Order of Things
Phil Markowitz / Kai Eckhardt



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Swift sings with her mother, Stephanie Nakasian, in 2018 at the Attucks Theatre in Norfolk, Virginia.

'I WANT TO UNDERSTAND THE SUBTLETIES OF A STYLE, AND I TRY TO PRESENT IT IN THE MOST AUTHENTIC WAY I CAN—WHILE REMAINING AUTHENTIC TO MYSELF.'

tradition and their collective need to depart from it.

"These women share a passion and respect for the traditional styles," she said. "But when we [sing], it doesn't sound derivative because we are very much from this era. We put our own influences in it."

Swift understands that the very thing that makes jazz what it is—the amalgamation of different cultural expressions—can render stylistic definitions meaningless after a time. And the more personally syncretic a young singer's artistic expression becomes, the harder it becomes to pigeonhole the work. This difficulty, challenging as it is, presents its own opportunities.

"I don't know what vocal jazz is anymore," Swift said. "The more I progress and follow the path of what I do, the more I lose sight of specific niche groups. I just see one community of people who appreciate art. Maybe that's because I'm touring so much; I don't have the chance to stay in any one scene for a while. I could try to speak to a specific group—I just wouldn't know how."

"I do see the value in branding," she continued. "At the beginning of one's career, you have to do it. You can't make a career otherwise. But by the time you've cultivated a fan

base, you've created your own genre. Think of Nina Simone, Freddie Mercury, Dianne Reeves—these people are their own genre. They paved the way for their own artistry, defined only by their name. You know exactly what their music is when you say their names. That's what I'm shooting for."

Even though the jazz scene is where Swift's name is most recognized today, that genre term wouldn't apply to many of the musical settings in which she operates. Take, as just one example, her foray into heavy metal as an undergrad student at Frost. She composed a rock opera, replete with religious symbolism, Goth stylings and disturbing imagery. Taken from Christian history, the musical drama's title, *Vera Icon*, is a clever bit of wordplay on Swift's first name.

"I write original material all the time, in different types of music," she emphasized. "In the beginning, though, I want to wait until people know me a little more before I release the original material. I have many albums as a leader, but when it comes to the albums in the public eye, there's only *Confessions* right now. I have so much more coming up, and I'm really excited about people getting to know me more and more as the years go by."

Swift observed that one strategy for introducing the many aspects of her creative per-

sona to her existing fan base would be to pair her different projects with her jazz releases in a way "that makes sense." With touring on pause because of the pandemic, she spotted one such opportunity while quarantined in Virginia alongside a group of filmmakers with whom she occasionally collaborates. Making the most of her downtime, she began working on a film for which she'd written the screenplay some years ago—a script with a thematic tie-in to the forthcoming album.

"The film is an intense and extreme representation of some of the things I touch on in [*The Bitter Earth*]," she said. "We have to be able to express our emotions about things like domestic abuse and not suppress them, so it's about that. It's a very dramatic film."

Since the start of the U.S. pandemic lockdowns in March, Swift has performed in some online shows, including the Worldwide Concert for Our Culture (Jazz at Lincoln Center's April 15 gala) and a Sept. 3 livestream with Nakasian, presented by Jazz Forum Arts. Despite the success of these and other broadcasts, Swift reserves judgment on virtual performing.

"I've had a few [online] gigs here and there, but I don't take to livestreaming," she said. "That's not how I want to present myself. I've tried it a couple of times, and a lot of people commented that it was so nice to get an intimate view into my life. That's good, but I don't want my performing to be a casual thing. I like a show—a concert, a production."

Swift remains optimistic about getting back to the stage again in 2021, especially given her concert experience in Italy, where live performance venues are opening up more quickly than in the States. Most encouragingly, about 80 percent of her canceled European gigs from 2020 have been rescheduled for next year.

In the meantime, her metal band plans to release a single by the end of the year; she's got the film to produce; and in March, she'll make her debut at The Appel Room (a space inside Jazz at Lincoln Center), sharing the stage with nonagenarian jazz vocalist Sheila Jordan in honor of Charlie Parker's centennial. And that same month, *The Bitter Earth* hits the street.

"The gigs will be coming back," Swift said, assuredly. "Because people need music. Your political system and your economy can fail you, but what's the one thing that people always turn to?"

From her words, it's clear that Swift feels strongly about the vital role that artists play in our society. So strongly, in fact, that when she heard that one of her most ardent followers was recuperating from COVID-19, she phoned the woman to bolster her spirits.

"I'm really connected to my fan base," Swift said. "So, I do that—I call my fans and talk to them. I think that's very important. We're just all humans trying to figure this out." **DB**

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25 FOR THE FUTURE

Welcome to our enthusiastic, optimistic look at the future. On the following pages, DownBeat proudly presents short profiles of two dozen musicians who, like Veronica Swift, have the potential to shape the direction of jazz in the decades to come.

SHABAKA HUTCHINGS

Shabaka Hutchings' M.O. is to spend much of each year on the road, circling the globe at the helm of three distinct ensembles: the dance-crazed quartet Sons of Kemet, the synth-driven trio The Comet Is Coming and the spiritual-jazz outfit Shabaka & The Ancestors. The British saxophonist has built a career by being seemingly everywhere at once, cultivating an international fan base inspired by the improvisation-fueled passion he and his various musical mates exude in concert and in the studio.

Forced to put touring on hold, Hutchings has been hunkered down at home in London, focusing on the production of a Sons of Kemet album recorded last year and slated for release in 2021. "I've been able to really concentrate on the overriding form and structure of the album,

which is always a concern of mine," he said. "But this time, I have been able to put a lot of extra energy into getting something that's really *crafted*."

When it comes to recording his ensembles, Hutchings likes to let tape roll, let the musicians move into deep grooves and capture hours of raw material that he and his producer later edit and assemble into forms that come across as completely organic. "The lockdown was a chance to go through the material and get the best bits from it," he said. "It's a progression from previous albums in that this was the first time I've been able to come back to the recordings and work in a concentrated, prolonged way on the overall vision of the music."



FERRICK GUDOU

In the process, Hutchings has learned how to use basic recording and production software on his iPad. He said he has begun work on making an album by himself, playing saxophone and various instruments he has collected during his world travels. "It might take me three years to do it," he said. "I've got no expectations of how it's going to sound. It will be just coming up with ideas, recording them into this device and then spending all my free time in manipulating it in as creative a way as I can." —Ed Enright



EMMANUEL AFOLABI

JAZZMEIA HORN

In pre-COVID times, Jazzmeia Horn recalled that her packed touring schedule meant "singing into my recorder while on the train, or on the airplane, or in the line to board the plane ... or in bathroom stalls."

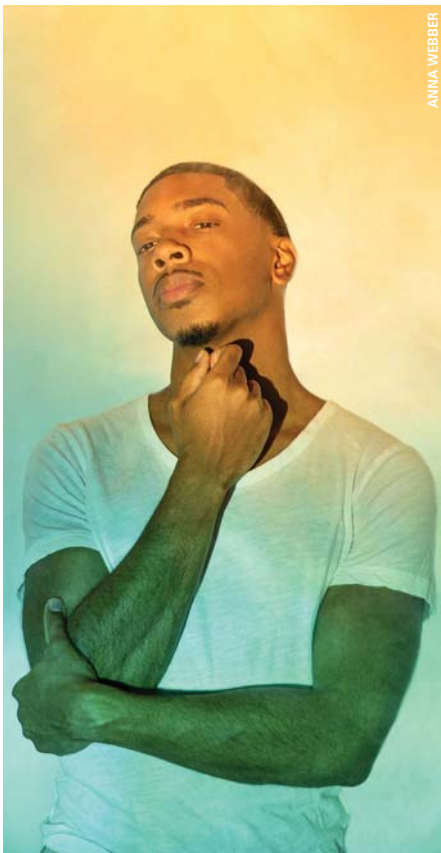
Since the pandemic began, the ambitious 29-year-old Dallas native with the stunning vocal technique has stayed busy. She used her forced hiatus at home in New York to spend more time with her two toddlers, work on a forthcoming big-band album with strings, finish a book she'd been writing for the past seven years and focus more on composing.

Horn's original songs were what set her 2019 album, *Love And Liberation*, apart from her debut, *A Social Call*, released two years earlier. Both Concord discs were critically acclaimed and nominated for Grammys. The first album, with its mix of sass, politics and straight-ahead scatting, announced her as an artist with a dis-

tinct vision. The second album deepened that vision by adding eight original songs that displayed a mature talent as a composer.

She writes about her artistry in her self-published book, *Strive from Within: The Jazzmeia Horn Approach*. "What separates me from other artists my age is my brand," she told DownBeat. "I think of myself as a business. I make my own clothes. I don't have a manager. I don't like to have people make decisions for me."

Horn is far from being a typical millennial. "I don't have a TV," she said. "If I'm in a bar, it's because I'm going to hear someone sing or play, or I'm going to play myself." Musically, she said she carries "a reverence for the tradition and for the elders who have walked this path before me—the shoulders I stand on ... My music will evolve, but I'll stick to the tradition of straight-ahead, classic jazz. There's nothing like it. And it makes me feel really good." —Allen Morrison



ANNA WEBBER

CHRISTIAN SANDS

When pianist Christian Sands titled his latest Mack Avenue album *Be Water*, he had no idea how appropriate its metaphor for adaptability would be. “There are different challenges with everything, and you just have to remind yourself to be ready, and to prepare yourself as much as possible,” he said. “I did not know that 2020 was going to put that to the test, but here we are.”

Like most jazz musicians, Sands has seen his bookings reduced to a trickle, but he has done some livestreamed performances.

“I went on the road with Christian McBride in my senior year of college,” Sands, 31, said via phone from Stamford, Connecticut. “So, this is the longest I’ve actually been home since then.” It hasn’t quite been time off, though, because Sands has been working. He’s been practicing, performing online and putting serious thought into the evolution of his artistry.

“Before, I was always on the road and always performing, which is great,” he said. “But you don’t really get a moment to improve the performance. I mean, you might say, ‘OK, tomorrow, let’s try doing this with the tune.’”

“But *how* do we present the tunes? How do

we really entertain people? Now that I’m home, I can take this time to work on different things.”

Like most artists nowadays, Sands can’t help but be influenced by the nightly news.

“As far as 2020, and having to be like water whether we like it or not, it’s put us through a lot of different things,” he said. “There are things that are making us more aware—I mean, George Floyd. Now is the time to be proactive. I’ve been more on the sidelines of things, and part of that was the notion of, ‘Can I do this? How do I do this? How do I go about this the right way?’”

Sands explained that he has benefited from time spent online. “All the Zoom meetings I’ve had to do have actually made me more comfortable speaking onstage,” he said. “I’m a very private person, but now that I’ve been doing shows in my living room, and having to be intimate with the fans, there’s this connection. Now I have a chance to really create performances.”

“My goal is to create experiences when you come to see me,” he added. “I mean, you already get one, but now it’s going to be more of an experience. Like Christian McBride says, ‘We want you to leave feeling full.’” —*J.D. Considine*

Camila Meza

Singer and guitarist Camila Meza was slightly anxious when, as a 19-year-old jazz novice, she took the stage for her debut at Thelonious, a top club in her native Santiago, Chile. But as she worked her way through a set of standards, she grew calmer. By the end of the night, she had found a home.

“I was [thinking], ‘OK, this is it,’” she said in August, her searching eyes framed by the screen in a Zoom transmission from a lush site in Montana, where she had been holed up for five months because of the pandemic.

Meza, 35, seemed at home in Big Sky country—a setting that recalled the hills around Santiago, where she frolicked gamely in a video shot in February 2019 for “Kallfu,” the striking opening track on her breakthrough album, *Ámbar* (Sony Masterworks).

She reflected on the distance she had traveled, artistically and geographically, since that Thelonious gig. In 2007, she released *Skylark*, followed by two more collections of others’ tunes, *Retrato* (2009) and *Prisma* (2013).

Traces (2016), her first full-scale presentation of her own music, won two Independent Music Awards. But even as she was preparing to release that album, she was thinking about

material for *Ámbar*, which, by involving a contemporary string quartet, transformed her sound.

“It is a record,” she explained, “that is ambitious in a way that, ‘Yes, I’m going to write my own songs and arrangements, but I’m also going to explore new orchestrations and new ways of expressing certain emotions and journeys within the music.’”

On “Kallfu,” she integrates primal vocals and nimble guitar work with a jazz trio and the string quartet, which, by turns, drives the rhythm in minimalist fashion and breaks the rhythm with aleatoric invention.

In Meza’s music, poignant explorations of sadness are offset by an occasional joyful noise. “Kallfu,” she said, was intended to do just that for *Ámbar* by introducing a “song that was in the brighter spectrum.”

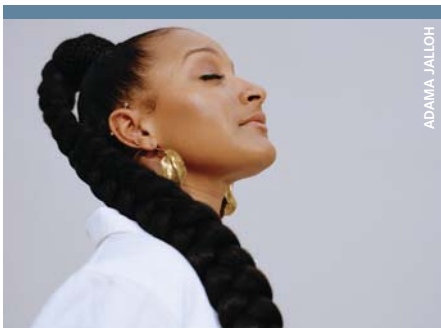
In “Portal,” an extended composition she hopes to record, she expresses both sides of her musical personality. Employing fresh instrumentation—a harp, electronics and additional singers join her voice, guitar and piano-bass-



CHRIS DRUKKER

drums trio—this highly textured work evokes both the near-apocalypse and ultimate salvation. Premiered in June 2019 as part of The Jazz Gallery’s commission series, its theme has special resonance these days.

“One of the very clear learnings of this time is to be able to let go of certain things, like attachments to whatever you think life should be,” she said. “We had a beautiful year last year and now, after a few months of not feeling creative—I was pushing myself through these emotional waves of feeling good and feeling bad—I’m starting to feel renewed energies to just speak for the moment.” —*Phillip Lutz*



ADAMA JALLOH

NUBYA GARCIA

Affectionately nicknamed “Empress” or “Queen” by British journalists and fans, saxophonist Nubya Garcia took quite a journey to arrive at the release of her debut full-length album, *Source* (Concord).

After picking up the saxophone at age 10, the London native enrolled in a jazz program at the Royal Academy of Music and later earned her degree at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Her participation in the educational program *Tomorrow’s Warriors* was a key influence on her creative development.

Since emerging with the septet *Nérija* in 2016, Garcia has injected fresh energy into the UK jazz scene. In addition to her EPs *Nubya’s 5ive* (Jazz re:refreshed) and *When We Are* (Nyasha), she contributed to the landmark UK jazz compilation *We Out Here* (Brownswood).

Garcia, who was born to Trinidadian and Guyanese parents, addresses big topics on *Source*. “It’s a collection of thoughts and feelings about identity, family history, connections, collectivism and grief,” she explained. “I had a lot of thoughts and feelings whilst writing the album ... life and identity questions, in terms of me wanting to know more than I already did about where my family’s from.”

Sonically, *Source* offers a compelling mixture of spiritual jazz, dub, reggae, Latin rhythms and Afro-diasporic sounds.

“I learned so much from [doing my last EP],” she said. “I weighed up my options between remaining independent or whether and I wanted to work with a label.”

Amid her busy schedule of touring, writing and DJing, Garcia came to a natural decision: “I realized that, whilst making an album, you don’t have to do everything. If you want to push yourself to the maximum, then you need a team to do all the other things, because they’re at the top of their field. Really, what I’ve chosen, is to put all of my time back into being a musician.”

—Tina Edwards

NDUDUZO MAKHATHINI

When he was 17, pianist Nduduzo Makhathini discovered jazz and realized that this was the door he had been seeking. Before that epiphany, music from his homeland, South Africa, had been his inspiration.

Then, when he began studying Western music formally in 2001, he picked up a book of Charlie Parker tunes. This led him to check out John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme* from a library.

“Hearing the first track, ‘Acknowledgement,’ where Elvin Jones comes in and plays the groove and then does variations on it, I realized this same feeling was also in my country’s music,” Makhathini said. “The traditional Zulu music of Islam is based on that same triplet that Elvin plays. The melody of ‘Resolution’ almost evokes the ancient style of Zulu singing called *amahubo*, which was popularized by Princess Magogo. So, the music I grew up singing in traditional ceremonies and rituals was already jazz in a certain way.”

Since then, Makhathini has made it his mission to bridge his musical DNA with what he calls “the American jazz narrative.”

His explorations are traceable through a handful of albums released since 2014, most on his own label, Gundu. Blue Note released his latest disc, *Modes Of Communication: Letters From The Underworlds*, on April 3. The musicians assembled for that album share Makhathini’s immersion in South African culture (except for the American-born alto saxophonist Logan Richardson). The recording sessions presented an opportunity for rich cross-cultural connections.

As head of the music department at South Africa’s University of Fort Hare, Makhathini bases his curriculum on the concept of music moving back and forth across cultural bridges. “I try to push for a new option that encompasses the ways in which people understand music locally. We call it the ‘decolonial project,’ where we look for creative ways to open a plurality in how people learn music. Yes, jazz is American, based on Western art music. But you also have to pay attention to your upbringing and the things you already know that can inform your way of finding your sound.”

—Bob Doerschuk



EZRA MAKGOPE

MAKAYA MCCRAVEN

If one were looking for an album to illustrate an aesthetic shared by several musicians who appear on DownBeat’s “25 For The Future” list, an ideal candidate would be drummer and producer Makaya McCraven’s 2018 gem, *Universal Beings* (International Anthem). Personnel for the sessions included reedists Shabaka Hutchings and Nubya Garcia, bassist Junius Paul, cellist Tomeka Reid and vibraphonist Joel Ross.

After recording live performances with various assemblages of musicians in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and London, McCraven remixed the material in mind-blowing ways—chopping, splicing and thoroughly recontextualizing the music.

On July 31, International Anthem released *Universal Beings E&F Sides*. The source music was recorded at the same sessions that yielded the 2018 album, but using studio wizardry, the Chicago-based McCraven created 14 new tracks of what he calls “organic beat music.” *E&F Sides* is used as the soundtrack for Mark Pallman’s new documentary about McCraven, also titled *Universal Beings*.

The Paris-born bandleader spoke to DownBeat in September via videoconference from his mother’s backyard in western Massachusetts, where he had traveled with his wife and two kids. McCraven said, “At my mom’s house, I have some instruments—a piano, a guitar and some old drums and stuff lying around. So I’m mobile. I’m always working on something. Right now, trying to finish up my next ‘proper’ record.”

During the lockdown, McCraven has done a couple of commissioned remix projects. But he’s not thrilled about the prospect of livestreamed gigs: “For me, if we were going to do a high-level stream, and we’re going to get all these musicians together and we’re gonna get this recording equipment for a performance—well, why don’t we just do a record date? If we’re going to put all this energy into it, then let’s write music and let’s make a record.”

He expressed an eagerness to make art that reflects the state of the world. “I’d like to keep on moving forward,” he said. “The world is a very different place than it was in 2018.”

—Bobby Reed



LESLIE KIRCHHOFF



ELIZABETH LEITZEL

Lakecia Benjamin

Lakecia Benjamin’s approach to jazz is influenced by the belief that Black music of all genres has a shared lineage.

The bandleader said she first picked up a saxophone at the age of 11, but “it wasn’t until I got to high school that I started getting into jazz.” She grew up in a primarily Dominican section of Manhattan, initially playing “a lot of merengue and salsa music,” but also was exposed to soul artists like James Brown and Sly Stone.

“So, by the time I got to college, I was kind of wide open to the sound of things. I wasn’t thinking, ‘This instrument sounds this way,’” she said. “I was thinking more like, ‘How does the music make me feel?’”

That perspective is reflected in the range of artists Benjamin’s collaborated with: A mentee of Gary Bartz, she’s toured with Gregory Porter and Alicia Keys, and has shared stages with hip-hop icons Pete Rock and Missy Elliott.

Benjamin’s boundless sensibility also is showcased on a handful of leader dates: While the 2012 release *Retox* was imbued with the energy of vintage funk and soul, her 2018 album, *Rise Up*, was inflected with a refreshing hip-hop sensibility.

Her 2020 album, *Pursuance: The Coltranes* (Ropeadope), is a rarity, a record simultaneously paying tribute to Alice and John Coltrane. Given her musical pedigree, though, it makes perfect sense for Benjamin’s first recorded homage to be conceptually inventive, yet rooted in heritage.

“I felt incomplete just honoring one person even though, of course, John Coltrane’s music is amazing,” said Benjamin, who helmed a 2018 tribute to the saxophonist at Jazz at Lincoln Center for the Monday Nights with WBOG series.

Since releasing *Pursuance*, Benjamin topped the category Rising Star–Alto Saxophone in the Downbeat Critics Poll and was named Up and Coming Musician of the Year at the Jazz Journalists Association Awards.

After the success of her latest album, which featured jazz heavyweights like Regina Carter, Ron Carter and Reggie Workman (who also served as co-producer), Benjamin said she wants to continue drawing from the well of music history, to honor “these legends while they’re here, using their guidance to keep moving forward, because I think that’s a big part of the tradition.” But she also reflected on those who no longer are here.

“The whole time I was recording [*Pursuance*], I was imagining that [Alice and John] were sitting in front of me, watching the session. [I asked myself,] would they be pleased with my behavior in the studio, every note I played, how I’m talking, how I’m arranging?” —Ayana Contreras



Terje Rypdal Conspiracy

Terje Rypdal electric guitar
Ståle Storløkken keyboards
Endre Hareide Hallre electric basses
Pål Thowsen drums, percussion



Dominik Wania Lonely Shadows

Dominik Wania piano



Anja Lechner François Couturier Lontano

Anja Lechner violoncello
François Couturier piano



Michel Benita Quartet Looking at Sounds

Michel Benita double bass, laptop
Matthieu Michel flugelhorn
Jozef Dumoulin Fender Rhodes, electronics
Philippe Garcia drums, electronics



Matthieu Bordenave La traversée

Matthieu Bordenave tenor sax
Patrice Moret double bass
Florian Weber piano



JUNIUS PAUL

Nearly six months into the pandemic, Chicago native Junius Paul packed up his stuff and moved out of his apartment, relocating to a house just outside the city.

"I've got a nice backyard," the bassist said by phone. "I've got a bonfire pit. I can host more people ... whenever that happens again."

Paul, 38, has been a fixture on the Chicago scene, carrying the torch with the trailblazing, avant-garde Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians while also pushing boundaries with drummer Makaya McCraven.

But due to the pandemic, Paul's touring came to an abrupt halt after he and McCraven returned from a series of gigs in Hawaii in late February.

This November, International Anthem released Paul's ambitious leader debut, *Ism*. The project took nearly four years to complete and features contributions from more than a dozen fellow travelers, including McCraven, cellist Tomeka Reid and trumpeter Marquis Hill. The hefty collection covers a lot of sonic ground. On "Baker's Dozen," spirited P-Funk keyboards orbit around a hard backbeat as saxophonist Rajiv Halim ties the whole affair together with erratic squawks. Elsewhere, the 20-minute "Spocky Chainsey Has Re-Emerged" evokes Miles Davis' tight denim vibe of the early 1970s.

As he waits for the world to return to some level of stability, Paul is enjoying his extra space—every square foot a buffer from the crowded metropolis nearby.

"I'll be grateful when things open up, but safety comes first. As much as we love to play and tour the world and just see people and feel audiences, health and safety are still our primary concern." And in the meantime, he can unpack boxes. "I've been playing a lot of keyboard, which has been good. It's important that I find ways to keep my spirits up, try to stay engaged. Music is everything to me." —Sean J. O'Connell

MORGAN GUERIN

Morgan Guerin conjures earthbound grooves and then releases them into the cosmos. At 22, the multi-instrumentalist, mixing engineer and first-call collaborator recently issued *The Saga III*, the final installment of an autobiographical album trilogy, having received critical acclaim for both *I* (2016) and *II* (2017). With each self-produced release, Guerin has refined nuances of his expression.

"I'm trying to create an environment of otherworldly sounds for the listener," said the Brooklyn-based artist. "I'm influenced by Wayne Shorter and Flying Lotus—people who embrace the sounds of space."

When he isn't traveling as the bassist in Terri Lyne Carrington's band Social Science, or as a synth-organ-bass-saxophone player and vocalist for Esperanza Spalding's touring quartet, Guerin hones his production skills from a small studio inside his Crown Heights apartment.

"I can definitely do all my engineering work here," he said. When crafting *The Saga III*, he played 19 instruments. With contributions from guitarist Matthew Stevens, drummer JK Kim and vocalist Safa, among other guests, the album comprises modal space-scaping, polyrhythmic-inspired sound design and ethereal lines that pair Guerin on EWI with vocalist Débo Ray.

The compositions' galactic feel belies Guerin's introspective personality. "I'm a pretty quiet person," he said. "I don't always know how to say what I wanna say with words. The album's cosmic world is me being in my own head."

Guerin, who considers *The Saga III* his mixing debut, said that one of the intentions behind the album was to establish his own unique voice as an engineer. "I want to find a mixing sound that's personal to me," he explained. Guerin now is challenging himself to expand the scope of his expression beyond his own music. "In 2020, it's so hard to do something that hasn't been done before," he said, "but there are still a lot of opportunities. I'm trying to be that low-key, go-to guy who can make your stuff sound super colorful." —Stephanie Jones



Yazz Ahmed

On the three studio albums flugelhorn player Yazz Ahmed's released, there's a very clear unfolding of singular ideas—an expansion of color and intent.

"I think I'm on the sort of outskirts, really," Ahmed said about where she fits into the London jazz scene, a loose cohort of players who have come to impact the global understanding of how identity interacts with genre. "Shabakah [Hutchings] and I, we went to music college together, so that's how I know him—I've known him for a very long time. But there are connections, even though my music, it's not sonically similar to the people who are grabbing the headlines."

What might cement her link to London's current crop of players is a willingness to engage popular forms of music. As with *La Saboteuse*, Ahmed's latest album is set to receive the remix treatment. "My friend, Charlie Jungle-Schaber, he sent me a list of a load of electronic artists that he thought I might like," Ahmed said, discussing *Polyhymnia Remixed*, due out Nov. 6. "I wouldn't have thought that I would have liked electronic or electronic experimental music, but I got into a lot of it. ... I chose the [producers], because I thought they would represent and respect my music. And also, they all have different backgrounds, so I thought it'd be interesting to hear my music through a different perspective."

On *Polyhymnia*, Ahmed wrote for an ensemble of more than 20 musicians, etching in choruses and chanted vocal sections, but also space for improvised spotlights. As her approach to composition has continued to develop, the ensemble she's worked with has grown, too, adding in instrumentation when she hears it in her mind. But the album's premise—each song detailing the story of a woman who pushed against societal expectations—entailed a different kind of exploration for the bandleader.

"*Polyhymnia*, it was kind of very outward looking, you know? I was finding inspiration from these women that I was reading about," said Ahmed, who lived in Bahrain until she was 9. "That really gave me the opportunity to learn about their stories and the music that they were brought up with. That really informs and inspires my writing, and you take that into your art." —Dave Cantor





JAMES FRANCIES

With *Flight*, his spirited debut album released by Blue Note in 2018, pianist James Francies avoided musical predictability with a compelling convergence of sounds and storytelling. The opening track, “Leaps,” begins with a classical piano feel tinted by gospel before erupting with keyboard/guitar unison lines. The program offers appealing eclecticism—straight-up lyrical beauties, r&b flavors and three divergent vocal tracks—which is precisely what the Houston native wanted his first album to do.

“I was coming from my own place by doing my own little thing,” the 25-year-old said from his home in New York’s Chelsea neighborhood.

Francies noted that he titled the Derrick Hodge-produced *Flight* for a reason. “Think of the Wright Brothers and how everyone called them crazy for thinking you could put a human in the air,” he said, laughing.

“It’s all about defying the odds. That is me. Some people think their first album should be straightahead, where you have to play ‘Giant Steps’ and a bunch of standards, you have to check off what you need to do, and then play a bunch of notes. But the big picture for me was

to show myself as an artist and to express how diverse I can be—acoustically and electrically.”

He has become a highly sought-after collaborator, working with vibraphonist Stefon Harris, singer José James and drummer Questlove, as well as touring with Pat Metheny’s band Side-Eye during the past two years.

Francies laughed as he explained how he first met the iconic guitarist. “I got up the courage to introduce myself to [Metheny] on an airport tarmac,” he recalled. “I told him I was a huge fan and that his music had inspired me. And Pat replied, ‘I know who you are. I’ve been watching your videos since you were in high school. Stop over my house and let’s play.’”

Francies proudly recognizes that he is part of the next generation of significant alumni from Houston’s High School for the Performing Arts and Visual Arts, following in the footsteps of keyboardists Robert Glasper and Jason Moran. “I have big shoes to fill,” he said. “Houston is the city that has a hybrid of musicians whose music can’t be categorized. They just play music from their personalities. Jazz needs more people who are being themselves and not being shaped into what came before.”

—Dan Ouellette

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KUBA WIĘCEK

Kuba Więcek's clicking the plunger of his pen with a kind of restlessness that's manifested in his studies and the trajectory of his career.

"Every one or two years, my mind changes so much," the saxophonist said recently from his home in Warsaw, Poland. "Before I went to study [at Conservatorium van Amsterdam], I was very much into doing my own music. I was not at all into playing just standards. I wanted to do my own music—very avant-garde. ... Teachers were forcing me to learn Lester Young and Sonny Stitt. I wasn't so much into this."

A change came when Więcek moved to Copenhagen and began attending Rhythmic Music Conservatory where an onslaught of performance possibilities presented themselves, cementing his admiration for the jazz tradition. He's gone on to develop a language and style on his instrument that encompasses the past and present. Compositions for *Another Raindrop* (2017) and *Multitasking* (2019) generally were restricted to shortform pop songcraft, giving his work a nervy edge. He favors staccato runs, injecting his band with a rhythmic nuance not unlike Shabakah Hutchings' various groups. It's

just drawn from different points of reference, Więcek saying that before hearing Kendrick Lamar's 2015 *To Pimp A Butterfly*, he mostly was interested in jazz and classical music. But from jazz, he took away a lesson that's pushed him to look beyond the trio he's led for about four years.

"I really think the most important thing about being a jazz musician is this kind of openness for everything that happens—if you play a wrong note, you make something good out of it," he said. "This is the most important thing for me in jazz—not even the language or harmony."

With time provided by the pandemic-pause in touring, coupled with his willingness to experiment, Więcek's delved into electronic music. Early next year, the composer said he's set to release an album with a Polish emcee, where he serves as producer. They'll be some saxophone, but programmed beats, too.

"Making this electronic music and composing music in a very different way has changed my approach to composing acoustic music so much," he said. "I used to study in Berlin with [drummer] John [Hollenbeck], and his way of composing, you have those cells, like minimalism. ... And when it comes to electronic music, it's



MARCIN GIBA

even more like this. I just have small fragments, but I can do even more with it. So, [now I have] opportunities that I didn't think of before. I really think that doing electronic music is a very natural step for me. And it's something when I came back to jazz, it helped me so much. And it will help even more as I get better at it."

—Dave Cantor

Fabian Almazan

Pianist Fabian Almazan has a distinct recollection of an incident that took place years ago at the Village Vanguard, a moment that made him feel that his art could connect with listeners in a profound way: "Out of the corner of my eye, I could see this young boy, smiling, gleaming. You could tell he was really enjoying the music, and that for me was very powerful."

Almazan, 36, isn't far removed from his own childhood memories. He fled Cuba at age 9, feeling sad and alone but comforted and inspired by his love for music. "I don't know what that boy's life was [like]," he mused, "but I'm assuming we have similar souls."

Almazan has spent more than a dozen years in Terence Blanchard's band, and his esteemed status as a collaborator has been bolstered by work with Paquito D'Rivera, Dave Douglas and Linda May Han Oh (whom he wed in 2018).

As a leader, Almazan has intertwined his formative love for classical repertoire and jazz with the musical influences of his homeland, resulting in two significant recordings with his band Rhizome. The second of those albums, *Alcanza*, was released on the artist's own label, Biophilia, which he founded to express a commitment to

environmentalism.

The philosophy behind the label is to showcase artists who, according to Almazan, "care about the environment and stand in solidarity with the people who are fighting to protect this Earth."

Among the artists on the Biophilia roster are Oh, saxophonist/vocalist María Grand, trumpeter Adam O'Farrill and vocalist Sara Serpa. The label actively collaborates with authors and conservationists, helping to raise awareness of initiatives to fight pollution and climate change.

Almazan's latest album, *This Land Abounds With Life*, is a trio effort recorded with Oh and drummer Henry Cole. It was inspired by a recent visit to Cuba, his first return trip there since his family's departure. He was in tears well before takeoff. "Cuba was all I knew," he said. "I wrote poetry when I was 7 years old about how much I loved Cuba. I didn't understand why we were leaving. I thought Cuba was the most wonderful



CLARA PEREIRA/JAZZTRAIL

place on Earth."

Almazan's advice for future artists? "Fail," he said, surprisingly. "I think it's important to not ignore that little voice that's inside of you that's telling you what you really like and what you have passion for. If that voice is in there, even if it's really faint ... it's better to fail than to not even try. Failure doesn't mean failure. The lack of even trying—that's failure."

That moment at the Vanguard remains a keystone. "Have a child's approach," he said. "Try to be as pure about it as you can. Just listen to that voice and go after it."

—Gary Fukushima

Theo Croker

Trumpeter Theo Croker is tired of being boxed in as a jazz musician. He expressed that sentiment while also acknowledging the importance of embracing the genre's deep, multifaceted tradition. "I don't like having everything I release compete with Frank Sinatra or Miles Davis on the sales charts. That's not doing anybody any good. It's a dead market," Croker explained.

Croker, the grandson of legendary trumpeter Doc Cheatham (1905–'97) and a former mentee of singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, exemplifies the jazz modernist who embraces multiple genres and cutting-edge technology. His 2019 album, *Star People Nation* (Sony Music Masterworks), deftly intertwined hip-hop, Afrobeat and future soul with late 20th-century jazz. But Croker doesn't consider it to be an album that represents the next "New Thing."

"We aren't doing anything new; we are just being present," Croker said before referencing Don Cherry's albums from the '70s, which incorporated music from across the world. "All of this ties into the larger conversation about race and our history as a country: how innovation—especially when it comes from people of color and other minorities—is just taken from us and not really respected."

His thinking, like his music, quickly moves from idea to idea. Croker leaps unexpectedly from notions of race and art to commerce, topics that have surged to the forefront of public debate since the police-involved killing of George Floyd on May 25.

"Who's getting paid every time a Dave Brubeck song is played?" Croker asked. "I understand that there is a jazz business that includes a giant catalog of acquired music and connected through a time period when a lot of Black jazz artists were taken advantage of. I think it's dangerous to look back and think our music should be always be in the past. We need to understand where we came from in any art field or any genre. If you're going to build the ship that's going to Mars, you have to understand the ship that went to the moon."
—John Murph



JIMMY MACBRIDE

Considering the environment in which he was raised, it's not terribly surprising that Jimmy Macbride was creating rhythms as early as age 3. His mother, a visual artist, and his father, who was a composer, noticed the precocious child's interests. "When I was very young, I started playing on some pots and pans at home," Macbride said via videoconference. "My parents recognized, 'Hey, I think Jimmy has some interest in percussion. So, maybe we can find a teacher for him.'"

They did find an instructor for the toddler, setting him on a path that would lead to a degree from The Juilliard School, where he studied with Carl Allen, Kenny Washington and other jazz titans. Nowadays, Macbride is an in-demand collaborator.

"When someone calls me for who I am as an artist, that is certainly the greatest compliment," Macbride said. "When I look at the musicians that I admire and I aspire to be like, that's the common thread: They can seemingly be in any kind of situation or any musical kind of group, and still, you always know that it's them. They always sound like themselves."

Macbride's versatility is illustrated by his discography of more than 40 titles, including recent recordings by trombonist Nick Finzer, guitarists Nir Felder and Alex Goodman, pianists Eldar Djangirov and Manuel Valera, and saxophonists Roxy Coss and Troy Roberts.

Although he has not recorded a leader date yet, Macbride played a couple of 2019 shows at Smalls in New York, focusing on his own compositions. For the Dec. 4 show, he assembled a quartet with tenor saxophonist Ron Blake, pianist Shai Maestro and bassist Joshua Crumbly.

"It was great to see how everyone's different personalities contributed to something that was mine—that I had conceived of," Macbride said. "It was very exciting and rewarding."

Many bandleaders who have hired Macbride could say the same thing. —Bobby Reed



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CAMILLE THURMAN

With ambition to spare and serious cred supported by a weighty professional resume, Camille Thurman has made a considerable contribution to the legacy of jazz while paying tribute to its heroes. The 33-year-old New York native—a scatting jazz vocalist with equally strong chops on tenor and soprano saxophone and various woodwinds—has four leader albums to her name, the most recent being 2018’s *Waiting For The Sunrise* (Chesky), on which she delivers inventive takes on jazz standards in the company of trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, guitarist Jack Wilkins, bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Steve Williams. Thurman also has been the recipient of distinctive honors, taking second place in the 2013 Sarah Vaughan International Vocals Competition and winning the ASCAP Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composers Award two times.

For the past two years, Thurman has toured internationally as a member of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, temporarily taking the place of tenor saxophonist Walter Blanding, who’s expected to reclaim his chair in the near future. She has spent considerable time on the road and in New York clubs with her own band, the Camille Thurman Quartet, and has been frequently featured with a trio led by her partner, Darrell Green, in collaborative performances at such high-profile venues as the Kennedy Center and Alice Tully Hall.

Mentored and encouraged early in her career by bassist/vocalist Mimi Jones, saxophonist Antoine Roney and reed player Tia

Fuller, Thurman has proven her eagerness to give back to the jazz community by conducting workshops and master classes, teaching at jazz camps, presenting lectures on jazz and gender issues, and inspiring young artists toward musical excellence in whatever ways she can. Recently, she has been leading a virtual mentorship series called The Haven Hang for female artists.

“This is what I’ve been wanting to do for so many years: find other young women musicians who are figuring out the beginning of their journey and connect them with legendary artists that are already doing it,” she said.

Thurman has remained active in recent months, putting on occasional livestream concerts from the New York home she shares with drummer Green and serving as a faculty member for virtual jazz camps and workshops, including the Summer Jazz Academy at Jazz at Lincoln Center. She has been composing a commissioned piece for the Quarantine Music Project that she expects to release in recorded form sometime next year. And she plans sometime in 2021 to release an album of Horace Silver compositions she recorded about four years ago with Green’s trio (which includes pianist David Bryant and bassist Rashaan Carter) plus special guests Regina Carter and the late



COURTESY OF ARTIST

Wallace Roney.

“When we recorded, we didn’t know that these pieces would be so relevant right now,” she said, noting the inclusion of Silver compositions like “Love Vibrations,” “Nobody Knows,” “Lonely Woman” and “Won’t You Open Up Your Senses,” and pointing out that Silver wrote lyrics to many of his compositions.

“I fell in love with the album that Horace made during the early ’70s, *That Healin’ Feelin’* [which appears in its entirety on the 2004 Silver compilation *The United States Of Mind*]. I was moved by how the compositions are so relevant for today, even though this music was written over 40 years ago.”

In discussing the Silver compositions she rearranged for the album, Thurman said, “They reveal a Horace who is really conscious about his community and how he plays a role as a member of society. I was checking out a song of his about environmental consciousness, and being conscious of the food that you eat. This was in the ’70s. Fast-forward 40 years, and now we’re all getting into being health conscious and realizing our actions and their effects on the environment.

“I have a background in environmental science, so I understand the balance between what we do and how it affects our environment. And for him to be thinking about that and putting it to music is mind-blowing.”

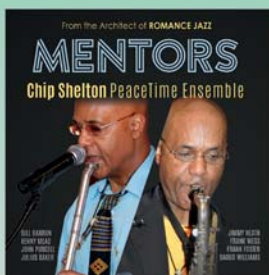
Watch for upcoming online performances by Thurman and her collaborators during this year’s True Blue Jazz Festival in mid-October and during the Virtual Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival in late February. —Ed Enright

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Alfredo Rodríguez

On March 11, when the U.S. State Department advised Americans to “reconsider” international travel in response to the emergent COVID-19 crisis, Alfredo Rodríguez was in Istanbul for a concert, midway through an extensive tour with bassist Richard Bona and percussionist Pedrito Martinez. The trio canceled its remaining engagements and the musicians headed for their respective homes. For Havana-born Rodríguez, this entailed flying to Madrid to join his girlfriend and their infant daughter, Aria. In July, the family relocated to Miami.

Rodríguez—who moved from Cuba to the States in 2009 and landed a contract with Quincy Jones’ management company—has adjusted psychologically. “I feel we should try to adapt to situations and take advantage of the opportunities they offer,” he said. “I was scheduled to be on the road and missing a lot of Aria’s growth. So, despite the economics and not playing for people, being able to be with her is a blessing.”

In addition to teaching online for multiple universities, composing music for films and his various duos, Rodríguez also is focusing on two prospective recording projects. One involves the

videos he’s recently posted on social media with his working trio, which plays on the 2018 release, *The Little Dream* (Mack Avenue). “We’re transforming covers, music that people know, into *timba*, the popular music of Cuba,” he said.

He developed intimacy with the Cuban canon during formative years. The son of an eminent singer who hosted a popular TV variety show, Rodríguez was a child prodigy who also focused on the Euroclassical canon.

During his teens, he heard Keith Jarrett’s *The Köln Concert*, spurring an ongoing passion for deploying abundant technique toward *tabula rasa* expression. Early on, he also developed studio discipline, playing piano and serving as music director for his father’s TV show, collaborating with numerous world-class Cuban stars.

Rodríguez is adamant that his admixture of high precision and intuition will continue to infuse his music. “I’ve looked to be global for a long time,” he explained. “I like music that is involved with all regions. Even though I can’t travel, technology gives me the tools to go online and listen to music from everywhere. You can observe culture, and incorporate so many good things into your life.”

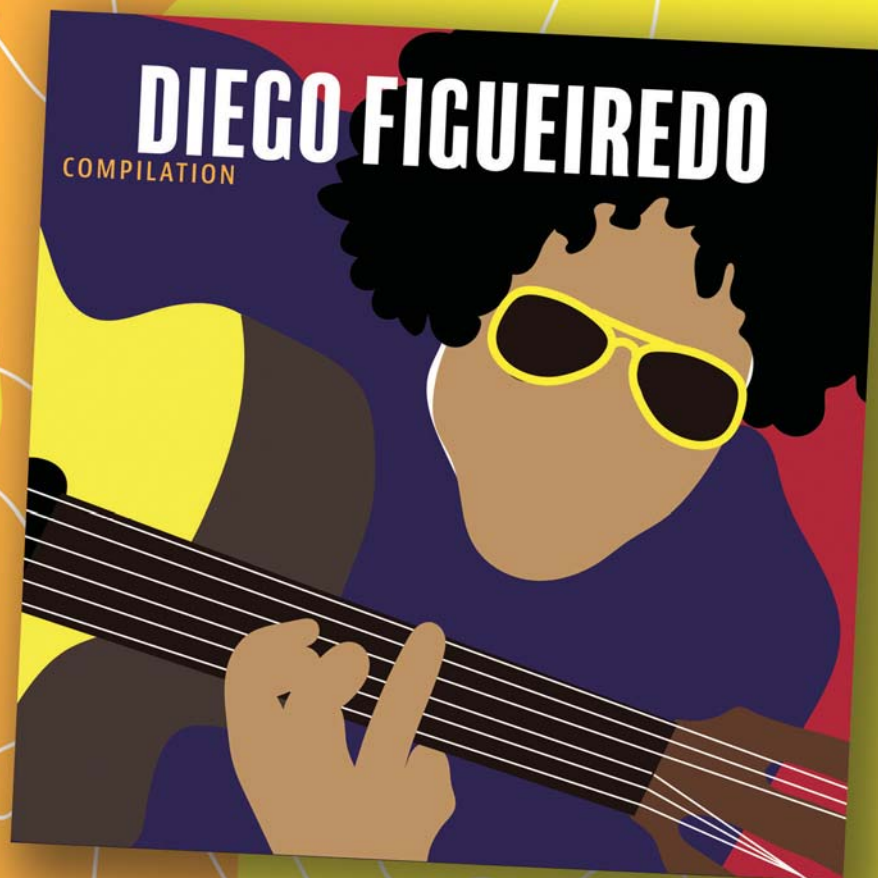
—Ted Panken



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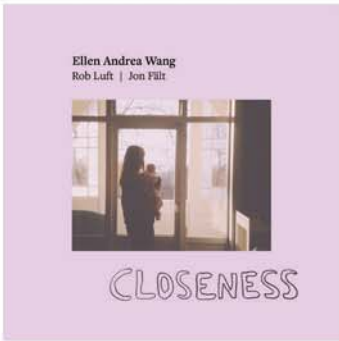


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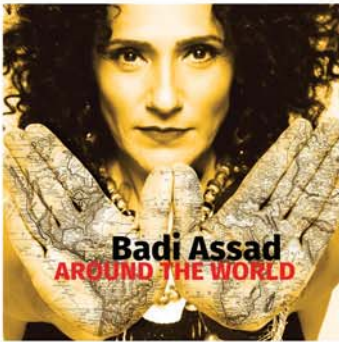
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HEDVIG MOLLESTAD



“Especially in the beginning, when we were kind of searching for ourselves—we were just playing music and we didn’t think too much about, ‘What are we going to make,’” guitarist Hedvig Mollestad said about her eponymous trio as she lounged in the grass outside of her Oslo apartment. “We just kind of made music and played it, and it’s kind of evolved naturally with what we were doing live.”

On stage, the group fills in the cracks between peak ’70s metal, prog and rock-oriented jazz, shifting from Sabbath-esque riffing to Mollestad’s fluid leads, propped up by Ivar Loe Bjørnstad’s truculent drumming and Ellen Brekken’s pressurized bass work.

An aspect of all the guitarist’s varied live settings has been a range of festival-related commissions, one from Vossjazz resulting in the 2020 album *Ekhidna* (Rune Grammofon). That record, though, expands on the bandleader’s trio—compositionally and in terms of the ensemble members she enlists—even as Mollestad sees similarities between this latest dispatch and previous efforts.

A few cuts on *Ekhidna*, like “Antilone,” mirror the sort of aggression her working combo has trucked in during the past 10 years. But the second half of the new disc dips into a more contemplative mode and features a lithe solo spot for the bandleader—sparsely supported by electric keys and aptly titled “Slightly Lighter.” It’s a different kind of feature than what Mollestad’s performed in more rock-ist settings, the tune seeming to narrate a folktale, not an action movie.

“I wish I was playing a lot more abroad, because I would like to play with people that are not Norwegian,” she said, pausing to acknowledge the pandemic’s travel limitations, the convivial community of players she’s embedded herself with at home and aspirations for the future. “Playing with Susana [Santos Silva, the Portuguese trumpet] player on *Ekhidna*, bringing her into that band with all the other guys—we were all having the same references. ... She came with so many other kinds of inputs and thoughts, and ways of looking at things—just because she was from another place and came from another background.”

—Dave Cantor

Adam O’Farrill



The 26-year-old trumpet-playing son of pianist Arturo O’Farrill and grandson of composer/arranger Chico O’Farrill, feels fortunate to have contributed to a slew of recordings by his peers on today’s jazz scene. A solid section player and a head-turning improviser, Adam O’Farrill made his professional recording debut on tenor saxophonist Chad Lefkowitz-Brown’s 2013 breakout album, *Imagery Manifesto*. He took third place at the 2014 Thelonious Monk Institute Jazz Trumpet Competition and began touring and recording in Rudresh Mahanthappa’s quintet that same year.

More recently, O’Farrill was called upon by guitarist Mary Halvorson to play on her brand-new Code Girl release, *Artlessly Falling*. He appears on a new big band recording by saxophonists Anna Webber and Angela Morris titled *Both Are True* (Greenleaf Music)—a project he describes as “one of the greatest things I’ve ever been a part of.” O’Farrill’s horn provides one of the frontline voices on pianist Glenn Zaleski’s new quintet album, *The Question* (Sunnyside). And in coming months, he’ll be featured on releases by saxophonist Aaron Burnett and drummer Tarun Balani.

And that’s just scratching the surface. O’Farrill has played on dozens of important albums in the last several years, including *Cuba: The Conversation Continues* with his father’s New York-based Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra. But his work as a bandleader and composer has been most meaningful to the young trumpeter/flugelhornist, who heads the wide-ranging quartet Stranger Days (with his brother Zack on drums) and an electro-acoustic nonet called Bird Blown Out of Latitude.

“With Stranger Days, I feel like we’re making more progress as a band than ever before, so that’s always going to be a priority,” O’Farrill said, noting that the group has a new album on the horizon. “But looking ahead, I do have other things in mind. There are different mediums I want to get into. I aspire to be a storyteller, and I include other forms aside from music in that. Right now in my life, I don’t see music as the be-all and end-all.”

—Ed Enright

TOMEKA REID

Celloist Tomeka Reid remembers when she started telling people about her quartet. Not everyone was encouraging about its atypical lineup. She was taken aback at the time, but laughs about it now.

Like its self-titled predecessor, the lively compositions on the second album from her group, 2019's *Old New* (Cuneiform), allow guitarist Mary Halvorson, bassist Jason Roebke and drummer Tomas Fujiwara to explore dissonance and feedback while also swinging relentlessly.

"We're just an even better team than before," Reid said. "I was able to write with them more in mind for this record. While the first time I had all the tunes written, this time I was thinking about many different sounds for them."

Until the pandemic hit, Reid had a full slate for 2020, including recording plans, which have been tabled for now. But she's had to move her space of Mills College classes online.

"A lot of times in programs, you study people who you can't really access," Reid said. "It was exciting for me to be an access point for students. I taught a composition seminar, and when they have questions about the score, we

could call the composers up."

Along with her commitment to teaching and long-term collaborations, Reid sought new ventures just before the pandemic. This spring, she released a duo album with British pianist Alexander Hawkins, *Shards And Constellations* (Intakt). Their conversation builds on a compatible sense of tension that flows into quiet lyricism on their interpretation of Muhal Richard Abrams' "Peace On You."

"I'm always looking for situations to challenge myself and just playing duo in that way is very exposed," Reid said. "Being so exposed, what would my role be? How are we going to interact? How are we going to make a whole album interesting—is it going to be freely improvised, different sounds, or do anything harmonically based? That's always the challenge."

Reid's explorations, especially during the past few years, have involved complementary string instruments. She traveled to Ethiopia in 2018 and 2019 where she learned about the *masenqo*, a single-stringed lute that typically reflects different rhythms based on region. Reid also doubled on banjo for Nicole Mitchell's *Mandorla Awakening II: Emerging Worlds*.



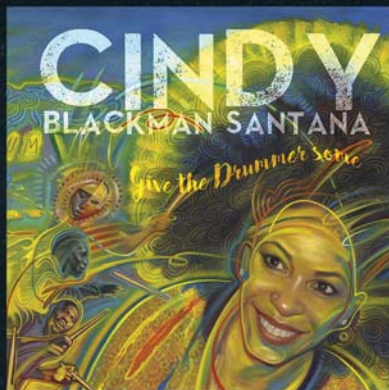
COURTESY OF ARTIST

Still, Reid remains an outspoken cello advocate. Winner of the Miscellaneous Instrument category in the DownBeat Critics Poll for 2019 and 2020, she contends that the cello deserves its own category.

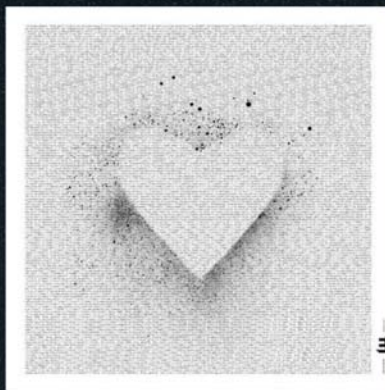
"Every band needs a cello player," Reid said. "It gives a different nuance to low-end than just the bass—it increases the richness of the environment to have that other strong voice that can go into the mid-range, the high-range, go low. It can cover so much ground, and people are discovering it more. There are also more musicians interested in improvising. They may not have all the language together, but if you don't mind investing the time, you can really have something different." —Aaron Cohen



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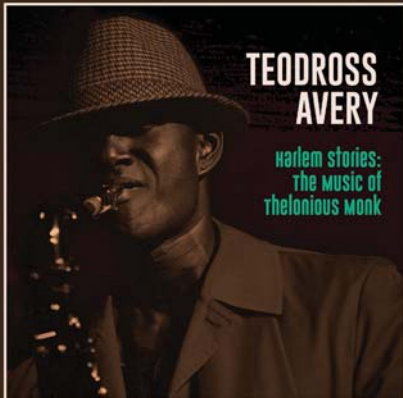
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LUKE STEWART

The very act of identifying Luke Stewart's latest project is exhausting. Rarely is there just one.

The prolific bassist began building an international reputation in 2014, when he became a member of tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis' working trio. By that time, however, he was well established as both an artist and a presenter in Washington, D.C., where he arrived at age 19. Gifted and determined, Stewart began to shape the city's artistic landscape. A cofounder of the jazz advocacy organization CapitalBop, he helped to create a thriving independent scene for jazz and experimental music in a metropolis that didn't have the institutional infrastructure of New York, Chicago or New Orleans.

Though all his recording projects—including the recent leader date *Exposure Quintet* (Astral Spirits)—involve free improvisation, they are remarkably diverse. But Stewart doesn't recalibrate his approach each time out. For him, the new setting provides the direction.

"I want to be totally present for each band," he said. "Each band is different, and my role in each is different. So, of course I'm going to think about them all differently. If there's an overriding theme, it might be just following the music."

That's not to say that Stewart has no set aesthetic principles. In fact, *Exposure Quintet* embodies a primary one. All five of its tracks are his compositions, in the sense that he organized them—but he did so by picking out themes, motifs and other frameworks from recordings of the band's improvisations. The goal is to dissolve the barriers between composer and improviser, especially those that assign greater value to one than the other.

If there's a hint of the revolutionary in Stewart's talk of abolishing hierarchies, that's no coincidence, considering his views on sociopolitical issues in 2020: "During this time, everything's up for review—even the fundamental basis of how we perceive music, and some of the oppressive influences that have been imposed on those perceptions."
—Michael J. West



Yussef Dayes

"If you're not working with people that are pushing you," said drummer Yussef Dayes, "then it's missing something."

A serial collaborator, the London native has followed a distinctive path, weaving his sound through underground jazz and left-field popular music. He first gained recognition during the mid-2010s as a member of the socially conscious quartet United Vibrations. Dayes' progressive duo with keyboardist Kamaal Williams—named Yussef Kamaal—sculpted the milestone album *Black Focus* for Gilles Peterson's Brownswood label in 2016, helping to define the sound of London's contemporary jazz scene. And in 2019, he released *Duality* (Good Grief), a sultry and electronic-driven two track EP. Most recently, Dayes teamed with guitarist/vocalist Tom Misch for the album *What Kinda Music* (Blue Note)—a fluid ride through jazz, electronica and hip-hop that includes a guest spot by rapper Freddie Gibbs.

"Genres and stuff ... I don't really put things into boxes like that," Dayes said. "For me, I'm inspired by Black music; that's where I come from. It's about letting people decipher for themselves what they want it to be."

Dayes' skills as a live performer have elevated his status as a performer to watch. At his mostly improvised shows, motifs from his best-known works are combined with fresh ideas, as the drummer revels in call-and-response; the seeming ease with which he devises complex but danceable rhythms is stunning. Regardless of tempi or genre, he can flirt with time, hold back beats and elasticize the air. Dayes seems determined to reach drumming nirvana and bring the audience with him.

With his swagger and unpredictable stage persona, the drummer exudes rock-star appeal. What he does next is anyone's guess—but this we can bank on: "I'm gonna be dropping something with my trio—[bassist] Rocco Palladino and [keyboardist] Charlie Stacey. The [songs will] all interrelate in some ways—but they're all very different. It's my time, now."
—Tina Edwards



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JOEL ROSS

Four years after moving to New York to study music, Joel Ross—already a veteran sideman—released his leader debut, *KingMaker* (Blue Note). The 2019 disc earned rave reviews, heralding the arrival of a vibraphonist who was also a conceptualist.

So how is the 25-year-old Chicago native capitalizing on the buzz? By releasing a follow-up album and, well, going back to school. Even as *Who Are You?* (Blue Note) comes out on Oct. 23, Ross will be returning to The New School to finish his bachelor's degree.

"I don't like to do the obvious thing," he said.

His decision as a youth to join the relatively small fraternity of vibraphonists came, he said, after his brother proved to be the better drummer. But it satisfied a creative urge to combine the characteristics of his favorite instruments—the drums and piano.

"The vibraphone is the best outlet to play a percussive instrument and express myself harmonically and theoretically," he said.

As a bandleader, his guiding lights often have been trumpeters, including Miles Davis, Marquis Hill and Ambrose Akinmusire. Their willingness to grant their bandmates autonomy has proved a model.

"I don't give my band much direction," Ross explained. "Just bring the music. Be completely honest. Search for something higher."

According to alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins, a member of Ross' quintet, Good Vibes, the leader seems determined to explore new sonic territory with his instrument: "He may have changed the vibes' role within the comping realm. He's developed a language where he's able to play in between other people's solos, with some landmarks, without normal comping chords—a motif way of comping."

Ross, in fact, plays down traditional notions of accompanist and soloist, speaking instead of a joint effort to "craft a sort of long-form song."

In January, Ross is scheduled to arrange a piece or two for the Danish Radio Big Band. His experience with ensembles of that size is limited, he said, motivating his return to school, where he will study arranging. He plans to use this new knowledge to avoid the obvious.

"I want to look into big band and orchestra writing, so that I can understand how it works," he said, "so that I can break away from it." —Phillip Lutz



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"If there was ever an inspiration to me at this time in history," says Daly, "it is the unstoppable, fearless courage of Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Let us all summon his energy to move forward and find our new reality. Dream on."

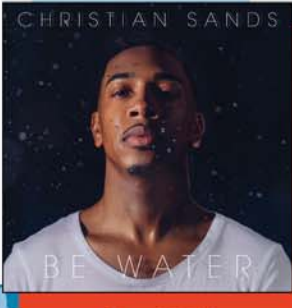
"The subterranean baritone saxophone is a bear of a horn; to coax gruff beauty from its guts takes a musical poet like Claire Daly."
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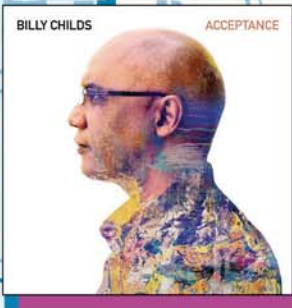
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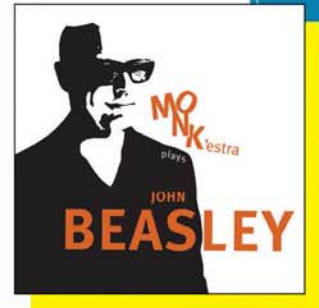
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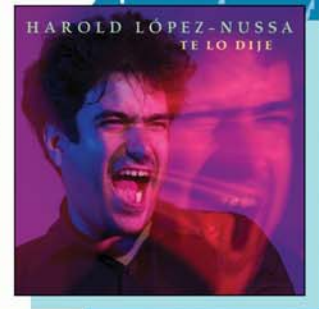
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46 / Jazz

REVIEWS >



Ben Wendel's *High Heart* is brooding music for our times.

Ben Wendel *High Heart*

EDITION 1162

★★★★★

While it's sometimes unseemly to make comparisons between artists or their works, it's impossible to encounter saxophonist Ben Wendel's *High Heart* and not immediately flash back 45 years to Wayne Shorter's *Native Dancer*, an album that paired the saxophonist with Milton Nascimento's feathery voice over an exceptionally sensitive rhythm section led by Herbie

Hancock and Airto Moreira.

The comparison is apt, considering vocalist Michael Mayo—a former student of Shorter, Hancock and another Brazilian vocalist, Luciana Souza—factors into *High Heart*'s sonic identity. Here, though, the focus isn't on Brazilian music, but on the Shorter/Nascimento-inspired soundscapes and their ethereal, timeless quality. Rather than joyful release—the overarching mood of *Native Dancer*—Wendel most often strikes a tone of uncertainty, if not outright anxiety. Call it brooding music for our times.

Mayo's voice—augmented by electronics at

times—is the ideal instrument for this. Airy and flexible, it plays multiple roles: doubling Wendel's tenor against the surging groove of "Burning Bright," floating high and dreamy above a simple, five-chord progression on the appropriately named "Less" and creating a gauzy haze on the closing "Traveler." The highlight of his contributions comes in a tumbling, wide-ranging solo on "Kindly," which gives way to a particularly brawny tenor statement.

There is textural tension between these kinds of weightless, wordless vocals and the saxophone. On *Native Dancer*, Shorter leaned primarily on his soprano to move closer in range to Nascimento's crooning; here, Wendel widens the gap by relying on his tenor, and pushes his horn hard on the title composition to add another layer of sonic fabric. His sax also frequently serves as counterpoint to the almost-ambient rhythm beds he writes. On "Darling"—a piece dedicated to electronic producer Alfred "Daedelus" Darlington—the sax rising out of the chiming piano notes and vocal wash seems operatic in its dramatic flourish, and sets the performance apart from what otherwise would sound like something one might hear while getting a massage. "Traveler" omits the tenor embellishment, ending the album on an unapologetically lush yet stark note, pairing Mayo with single drum strokes and a descending five-note motif.

Wendel—the Vancouver-born cofounder of Kneebody—also emphasizes dramatic contrast in his deliberate track sequencing, radically shifting moods between the minimalist "Less" and "Drawn Away," which moves closer to fusion with Nate Wood's hyper-present drums and competing streams of melody and rhythm. Within compositions, too, he sets opposing elements together, breaking up the staccato beats of "Fearsome" with another soaring tenor obbligato.

On balance, the minimalism holds sway, but the intertwining of piano and Fender Rhodes, Joe Sanders' understated bass and Wood's savvy drumming consistently generates interest.

—James Hale

High Heart: High Heart; Burning Bright; Kindly; Less; Drawn Away; Fearsome; Darling; Traveler. (46:56)

Personnel: Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone, bassoon, EFX, piano, organ; Shai Maestro, Gerald Clayton, piano, electric piano; Joe Sanders, bass; Nate Wood, drums; Michael Mayo, vocals, EFX.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com



Mary Halvorson's Code Girl

Artlessly Falling

FIREHOUSE 12 04-01-034

★★★★½

There's an inherent musicality in the rhythm of language, and nowhere does this find a more comprehensive expression than in poetry. Voltaire said, "Poetry is the music of the soul," and Mary Halvorson tests the maxim on *Artlessly Falling*, composing eight tracks around as many poems. It's an ambitious concept, with the guitarist taking on demanding forms, like the 19-line pastoral poets' favorite, the villanelle.

Ron Miles Rainbow Sign

BLUE NOTE B003239502

★★★★½

I Am A Man, Ron Miles' previous album, upped the cornetist's game by expanding his trio with guitarist Bill Frisell and drummer Brian Blade into a quintet by adding pianist Jason Moran and bassist Thomas Morgan. But that seems almost a baby step compared to *Rainbow Sign*, which ups the ante through the writing's richness—by far Miles' most impressive work as a bandleader.

Much of the album was composed in summer 2018, when his father passed, bringing an emotional resonance to the music. There's also a lot of storytelling, and that emphasis is what most informs the playing here. In his trio albums with Frisell and Blade, Miles underscored the equality of the playing, so that none of the three had their role defined by the instrument they played. *Rainbow Sign* doesn't merely expand that concept to quintet size, it expands it to encompass richly detailed and deeply integrated composition, creating a sense of communality that evokes the free interplay of collective improvisation and the structural focus of ensemble writing.

Perhaps the most epic example is "Like Those Who Dream," an almost 16-minute journey shot through with stunning solos and perfect-

ly choreographed group interactions, all solidly grounded in the blues. But there's also the subtlety and wit of "Custodian Of The New," which is built around stuttering, time-bending phrases the players take turns completing; and the dreamy lyricism of "The Rumor," in which a guitar line that could have fallen out of a Ron Howard movie is supported by intricate, melodic time-keeping. Rest assured, there's plenty of gold at the end of this rainbow.

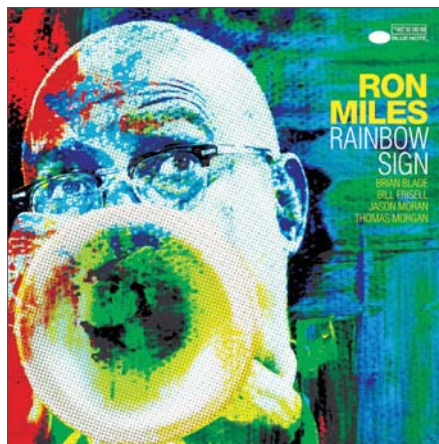
Ultimately, *Artlessly Falling* is an acquired taste, a record where Halvorson paints intricate, sweeping soundscapes with challenging harmonies, deftly accompanied by Michael Formanek's resonant bass and drummer Tomas Fujiwara's textural rhythms. Yet, it's in the use of poetry where depth and difficulty lie. Here listeners are confronted with a mercurial mix of words, forms and music—combinations that gel as often as they resist each other.

—Ammar Kalia

Artlessly Falling: The Lemon Trees; Last-Minute Smears; Walls And Roses; Muzzling Unwashed; Bigger Flames; Mexican War Streets (Pittsburgh); A Nearing; Artlessly Falling. (64:18)

Personnel: Mary Halvorson, guitar; Amirtha Kidambi, Robert Wyatt (1, 3, 5), vocals; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; Maria Grand, tenor saxophone, vocals; Michael Formanek, bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums.

Ordering info: firehouse12.com



ly choreographed group interactions, all solidly grounded in the blues. But there's also the subtlety and wit of "Custodian Of The New," which is built around stuttering, time-bending phrases the players take turns completing; and the dreamy lyricism of "The Rumor," in which a guitar line that could have fallen out of a Ron Howard movie is supported by intricate, melodic time-keeping. Rest assured, there's plenty of gold at the end of this rainbow.

—J.D. Considine

Rainbow Sign: Like Those Who Dream; Queen Of The South; Average; Rainbow Sign; The Rumor; Custodian Of The New; This Old Man; Binder; A Kind Word. (69:53)

Personnel: Ron Miles, cornet; Brian Blade, drums; Bill Frisell, guitar; Jason Moran, piano; Thomas Morgan, bass.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Miki Yamanaka Human Dust Suite

OUTSIDE IN MUSIC 2024

★★★★½

Miki Yamanaka comes to us only with one previous leader date and membership in saxophonist Roxy Coss' ensemble. But her calling card becomes the opening track of this new album. It shows what she can do, which is a lot. "Pre School" is a cunning bebop contrafact on a contrafact that once might have cradled the wit of Bud Powell or Sonny Stitt. Structured in the AABA format of jazz tradition, it welcomes listeners with an implicit familiarity of form and ingenuity of spirit, displaying Yamanaka's crisp attack and swinging drive. It's the best track on the set. Another high point is Randy Weston's "Berkshire Blues," which she burrows into with a shrewd and elegant funkiness.

Her principal companion is altoist Anthony Orji, who slides in obliquely like a dry and thirsty desert breeze. His disposition is initially shy and out of tempo, but slips comfortably into the flow with a soft and feathery austerity in the Paul Desmond-Lee Konitz vein. His cool emotional restraint never rustles a hint of vibrato. "Human Dust Suite" is a sequence of five unrelated pieces, ranging from playful to a lovely, Billy Strayhorn-like solemnity. It's said to be inspired by a photo of cremation remains, inviting needlessly vague expectations. It's an intrusive pretense that endows an otherwise interesting quartet with a distracting self-importance not sustained in the music. If the intent is irony, its subtlety is beyond these ears.

Fortunately there are no literal translations in music. So, don't let that divert you from taking in the warm winds Yamanaka and Orji have stirred here. A smart, cohesive and listenable success.

—John McDonough

Human Dust Suite: Pre School; March; First Day Of Spring; Human Dust Suite I (Brain); Human Dust Suite II (Hatsu); Human Dust Suite III (Tummy); Human Dust Suite IV (Feet Go Bad First); Human Dust Suite V (Party's Over); O 2017; After The Night; Berkshire Blues. (55:47)

Personnel: Miki Yamanaka, piano, vibraphone; Anthony Orji, alto saxophone; Orlando Le Fleming, bass; Jochen Rueckert, drums.

Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com

The Hot Box

Critics	J.D. Considine	James Hale	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough
Ben Wendel <i>High Heart</i>	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★½
Mary Halvorson's Code Girl <i>Artlessly Falling</i>	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★½
Ron Miles <i>Rainbow Sign</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Miki Yamanaka <i>Human Dust Suite</i>	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★½

Critics' Comments

Ben Wendel, *High Heart*

Digital tech is what you make of it, and in Wendel's case that's heartfelt and deeply human music. What's particularly inspiring is that it expands the group's sonic vistas without getting in the way of the players' natural sound. —J.D. Considine

A fantastically intricate and emotionally acute album from the saxophonist. Incorporating everything from modernist chromaticism to beautifully fluid harmonies pairing saxophone lines and wordless vocalizations, the record is a restless push toward an uncertain future. —Ammar Kalia

Wendel's blend of saxophone and voice might seem less of a letdown if it weren't heralded by such lofty aspirations. Lots of long, pensive notes give the music an academic, Walden Pond-like quality. His lectures are surely more stimulating than the music here. —John McDonough

Mary Halvorson's *Code Girl*, *Artlessly Falling*

Maybe it's the weathered grace of Wyatt's vocals or the astringent lyricism of O'Farrill's trumpet, but the writing here conveys the quirky charm of Carla Bley's collaborations with Paul Haines. Except Bley's keyboards were never as otherworldly as Halvorson's guitar. —J.D. Considine

I applaud Halvorson's reach and compositional ambition, but the tonal vision that sounds so fresh on her guitar grates when filtered through Wyatt's creaky voice. —James Hale

The *Code Girl* has camouflaged her notable skills in such formal literary opaqueness they become largely unbreakable. O'Farrill's trumpet conveys a note of clarity in the deeper ranges, but is stranded in a tedious emotional vacuum. —John McDonough

Ron Miles, *Rainbow Sign*

Elegant and austere, Miles' compositions bear a wistfulness that gains steely resolution in the hands of Frisell and Blade. —James Hale

A deeply touching album written as Miles' father passed away, it explores the range of his horn from guttural, atonal confusion to piercingly pure melody, as if putting music to the swirling contradictions of grief. —Ammar Kalia

A quiet, low-energy album of rather languorous, largely unobtrusive music, considering the marquee talent. Even-tempered mutual support makes it pleasant enough. But one wishes it would spring to life a little more and pitch a few surprises our way. —John McDonough

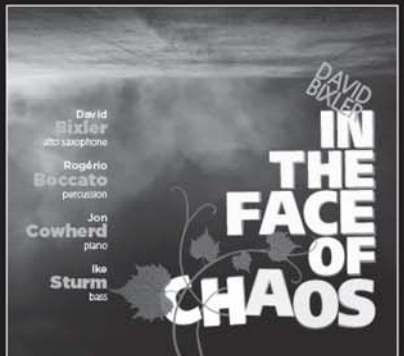
Miki Yamanaka, *Human Dust Suite*

Yamanaka is a unique voice on piano with great harmonic instincts, and her rapport with the rhythm section is truly inspiring. But between his weirdly wispy tone and tendency to play behind the beat, saxophonist Orji undoes much of the album's pleasure. —J.D. Considine

Reminiscent of the albums that poured forth from the Young Lions, Yamanaka's sophomore recording churns forward pleasantly without challenging the status quo or presenting much new to ponder. —James Hale

A typical yet artful construction from pianist Yamanaka, taking the body and its finite physicality as her inspiration for a suite of compositions that veer from cubist intricacies to soulful harmony. Her doubling on vibraphone is an inspired move, locking in with Orji's alto. —Ammar Kalia

NEW RELEASE!



"The spotlight performer was alto saxophonist David Bixler, who pushed the music with his exuberant extended solos."

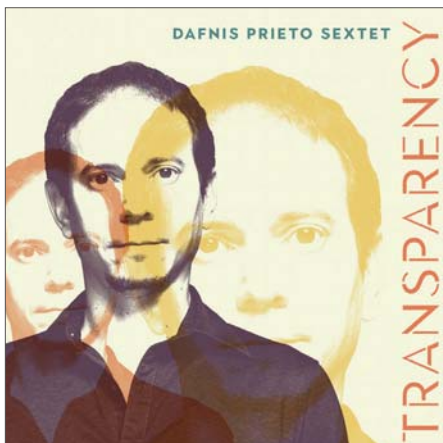
—Dan Ouellette, *DownBeat*

"*In The Face Of Chaos* marks a re-emergence, if not a complete artistic rebirth, for David Bixler. It serves as a true inspiration, drawing beauty from pain, and peace from personal struggle."

★★★★ —Dan Bilawsky, *All About Jazz*



www.davidbixler.com



Dafnis Prieto Sextet *Transparency*

DAFNISON

★★★★

Since arriving in the States from Cuba in 1999, Dafnis Prieto has displayed a scintillating prowess behind the drum kit and a musicianship informed by a multiverse of influences, from Latin rhythms to European classical harmony, from straightahead jazz to experimental forms of improvisation. Yet, a clear identity has emerged, recognized at the highest levels and earning Prieto a Grammy for Best Latin Jazz Album in 2018 for his big band record, *Back To The Sunset*.

Joe Farnsworth *Time To Swing*

SMOKE SESSIONS 2006

★★★

Joe Farnsworth's drumming is the epitome of solid, swinging time-keeping, played with a light touch while maintaining a powerful groove. He's got chops to spare, but seems uninterested in offering bravura flourishes; his big solo here, the six-minute "One For Jimmy Cobb," is more concerned with musical narrative than technical flash. Moreover, his command of mainstream style is so complete that it hardly matters whether the tune is a churchy stomp like "Down By The Riverside" or a classic ballad like "The Star-Crossed Lovers," because the music always has the feel-good pulse listeners expect from straightahead jazz.

For his latest album as a leader, Farnsworth has put together something of an all-star quartet. Where much of his discography found him playing with the late Harold Mabern, this session puts Kenny Barron at the piano bench, whose authoritative touch brings a suitably quirky feel to the phrasing of "Monk's Dream" and provides plenty of drive to his own "Lemuria." Wynton Marsalis, who's used Farnsworth on several of his own albums, turns up on four tracks, his burnished tone and

The drummer forges ahead by returning to the six-piece ensemble he's occasionally favored. Much of Prieto's innovative arranging remains—overlapping horn textures, undergirded by undulating piano figures and any number of clave variations in the rhythm section. And his writing continues to evolve, with a more through-composed approach—perhaps honed by recently writing for a larger ensemble. "Feed The Lions" is a clever puzzle of motivic fragments, unlocked by liberating solos from altoist Román Filiú, trumpeter Alex Norris and pianist Alex Brown. "Cry With Me" is a cyclic, chorale-like piece, but its peaceful harmonic descent is chaotically disrupted through slashing volleys by and between tenor saxophonist Peter Apfelbaum and Prieto (who inexplicably sounds like an entire percussion section). The eight originals and one standard (a wonderfully unhurried version of Dizzy's "Con Alma") convey emphatic narratives and unrestrained expressiveness, fulfilling Prieto's wish for this project to be "transparent." In these confusing times, it's a welcome respite to hear music that's so passionately honest. —*Gary Fukushima*

Transparency: Amanecer Contigo; No Es Fácil; Uncertradition; Con Alma; Cry With Me; On The Way; Feed The Lions; Nothing Or Everything; Lazy Blues. (62:22)

Personnel: Dafnis Prieto, drums; Román Filiú, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Alex Norris, trumpet; Peter Apfelbaum, tenor saxophone, melodic percussion; Alex Brown, piano; Johannes Weidenmueller, bass, electric bass.

Ordering info: dafnisonmusic.com

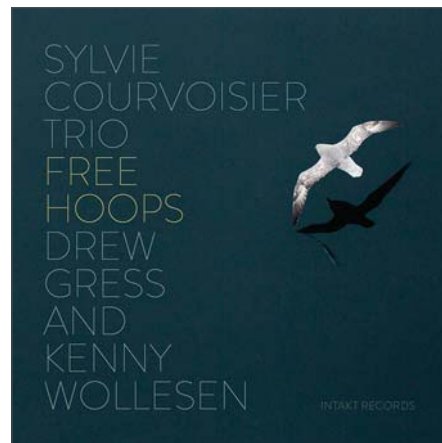


vocalized half-valve work bringing soul and wit to "Darn That Dream," while his muted horn burns white-hot on "Hesitation," driven by Farnsworth's classic, bop-schooled cymbal work. As for Peter Washington, his triplet-spiked bass lines and rich, dark tone perfectly complement Farnsworth's playing, matching it in both understated virtuosity and irresistible groove. —*J.D. Considine*

Time To Swing: The Good Shepherd; Hesitation; Darn That Dream; Down By The Riverside; One For Jimmy Cobb; Lemuria; Prelude To A Kiss; Monk's Dream; The Star-Crossed Lovers; Time Was. (61:44)

Personnel: Joe Farnsworth, drums; Kenny Barron, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Wynton Marsalis (1-4), trumpet.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



Sylvie Courvoisier Trio *Free Hoops*

INTAKT 351

★★★★

On the third album by this superb trio, pianist Sylvie Courvoisier balances her compositional rigor and improvisational élan with astonishing results. Each of her nine compositions embraces a specific idea, all tied to a particular dedicatee, and her process fans out from there, taking flight thanks to the connections she's developed with bassist Drew Gress and drummer Kenny Wollesen. The title composition, for example, was written for longtime partner—in life and music—violinist Mark Feldman, and she says its steeplechase theme was inspired by "the weird figure she plays." Indeed, the composition hurtles breathlessly, with rapid-fire jabs and up-and-down phrases meticulously sculpted by the whole band, before it opens up to a plush, rolling pattern with echoes of Ahmad Jamal.

Nearly all of the pieces here deftly pack in such shape-shifting detail, whether the stuttering "Lulu Dance," where Gress masterfully pulls away from the cycling theme with seemingly spontaneous but fully scored asides, and the feline groove (the piece was composed for her cats) comes to a halt for a moment of quixotic give-and-take stabs and slurs. Naturally, "Just Twisted," composed for John Zorn—who pushed her to form a trio in the first place—goes through numerous, often breathless episodes, including a hard-driving section that sounds a bit like a Henry Mancini detective theme. "Birdies Of Paradise," written for her ornithologist bassist, is built on imaginary birdsong, Courvoisier mimicking a woodpecker with some of her inside-the-piano clanking. Despite the references, there's nothing pastiche-like about *Free Hoops*, which positions the group as one of the most exciting piano trios at work today. —*Peter Margasak*

Free Hoops: Free Hoops; Lulu Dance; Just Twisted; Requiem D'Un Songe; As We Are; Birdies Of Paradise; Galore; Nicotine Sarcoline; Highway 1. (53:48)

Personnel: Sylvie Courvoisier, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Kenny Wollesen, drums; Wollesonics.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

Junk Magic Compass Confusion

PYROCLASTIC 12

★★★

Forgoing orthodox concepts about jazz and EDM is crucial to one's enjoyment of *Compass Confusion*, the latest installment of Junk Magic's fascinating if insolent music. Led by ace sonic explorer Craig Taborn, the combo engages in spontaneous sound sculpting that places premiums on textural ingenuity, spatial awareness and vigorous interactive dialogue. Oftentimes, instruments such as Chris Speed's saxophone or Taborn's piano don't sound like they would if deployed in conventional jazz settings; nor does the music bump along steadily—a hallmark of electronica.

The commotion opens with "Laser Beaming Hearts," as a shimmering dissonant chord slowly rises, then gives way to a disquieting melodic motif that sounds like some futuristic emergency alarm. David King's thumping drums, Taborn's edgy keyboard riff and Erik Fratzke's economical bass shape the song that eventually evolves into an agitated electro groove. "The Science Of Why Devils Smell Like Sulfur" is one of the album's most elaborate designs, beginning with a thundering motif that dissipates into spacious free-form improvisation, growing more menacing and plunging into cacophony. Even for fans of jazz and EDM, *Compass Confusion* takes patience and courage to behold its hermetic suspense. —John Murph

Compass Confusion: Laser Beaming Hearts; Dream And Guess; Compass Confusion/Little Love Gods; The Science Of Why Devils Smell Like Sulfur; The Night Land; Sargasso; Sunsets Forever. (50:39)
Personnel: Craig Taborn, piano, keyboards; Chris Speed, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Mat Maneri, viola; Erik Fratzke, bass; David King, drums.

Ordering info: pyroclasticrecords.com



Edward Simon 25 Years

RIDGEWAY ARTS 016

★★★½

During Edward Simon's lengthy career, his profile as a go-to sideman rose with gigs for heavy-hitters like Terence Blanchard. His own 13-disc catalog as a leader has received less attention, but *25 Years* works to correct the lapse. For the pianist's elegant two-disc retrospective, he gathered 17 carefully constructed pieces (five are covers) that speak to the fascinations of Simon's upbringing—the beats of Venezuela, where he was born, the rigors of classical training and the jazz idioms of the States. The first disc, featuring mostly small ensembles, introduces several of Simon's concepts, including his fleet, angular soloing against thrashing congas on "Fiestas." It's on the second disc, through large ensemble works, that Simon unveils the breadth of his vision. A suite tenders a mellifluous symphonic theme on "Uninvited Thoughts" and a ferocious harp solo recommends "Barinas," a lesson in how to pack 25 years of excellence into nine minutes. —Suzanne Lorge

25 Years: Disc One: Ericka; Alma Llanera (Pt. 2); Govinda; Fiestas; Simplicity; Pathless Path; Pere; Impossible Question. Disc Two: What If?; Aguatando; Caballo Viejo; Barinas; Uninvited Thoughts; Navigator; Gracias A La Vida; Venezuela Unida; Triumphs. (60:20/69:13)

Personnel: Ed Simon, keyboards; David Binney, Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; David Sanchez, Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Shane Endsley, Sean Jones, trumpet; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; Mark Dover, clarinet; John Ellis, bass clarinet; Valery Coleman, Marco Granados, flute; Robin Eubanks, Alan Ferber, Jesse Newman, trombone; Adam Rogers, guitar; Monica Ellis, bassoon; Jeff Scott, French horn; Toyin Spellman-Diaz, oboe; Edmar Castaneda, harp; Jorge Glem, cuatro; Genevieve Artadi, Gretchen Parlato, Lucia Pulido, Luciana Souza, vocals; Avishai Cohen, Scott Colley, Larry Grenadier, Roberto Koch, Joel Martin, Matt Penman, John Patitucci, Ben Street, bass; Rogerio Boccato, Luis Quintero, Pernell Saturnino, Leonardo Granados, percussion; Adam Cruz, drums, percussion; Brian Blade, Obed Calvaire, Eric Harland, drums.

Ordering info: ridgewayrecords.net



Matt Moran Trio Return Trip

DISKONIFE 006

★★★½

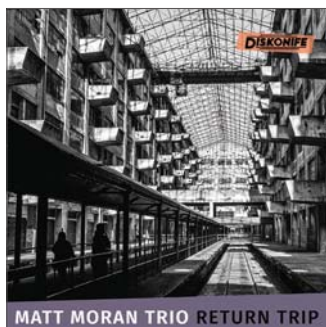
Vibes and organ, both endowed with ultra-rich timbres, are an unusual pairing, almost a sonic indulgence, which Matt Moran and Gary Versace, respectively, refine on their second album with drummer Tom Rainey. *Return Trip* is a bit more diffuse, its songs less immediately defined than on 2018's *Play Ball*. But the two albums are of a piece—quirky, mood-shifting, surprising, honestly engaged.

Although very open, the music here is not completely free—except perhaps for "Sometimes That's OK," which gradually heats to a controlled boil. Yet the structural bits of the ensemble's forays are sketchy; Moran's meandering line in "Ripples," his repeating pattern for Rainey to strike against as an intro to "Spring." The nicely developed melody of the latter is an exception, and "Effish" has deceptively conventional elements, too. More important than the repertoire are the ways Moran's hard metal strokes glint and his lyrical gestures gleam against Versace's spongy chords and bass pedal ostinatos, while Rainey connects with them both. The sound is enveloping, but not loud; angularity and dissonance are embraced, but not flaunted. These musicians trust the processes and results of discovery; they take unexpected turns and happily expand on subtle grooves. *Return Trip* is dark, but that's more about mystery than gloom. —Howard Mandel

Return Trip: Ripples; Spring; Chord Conversation; Lush; Sometimes That's OK; Effish; Peace And Integration. (35:47)

Personnel: Matt Moran, vibraphone; Gary Versace, Hammond B-3 organ; Tom Rainey, drums.

Ordering info: diskonife.com



Diego Urcola Quartet Featuring Paquito D'Rivera El Duelo

PAQUITO/SUNNYSIDE 4560

★★★

Diego Urcola has spent nearly three decades in the studio and on stage as a member of the Paquito D'Rivera Quintet, which makes this turning of the tables feel long overdue. But it's apparent throughout *El Duelo* that he made every creative decision for the album to better support and highlight his mentor and friend.

That's especially true in the choice of rhythm section. Urcola opted to include piano here—a move that left a lot of space for D'Rivera to fill and play around in, lending an impish air to his solos on the original "Buenos Aires" and the group's take of Monk's "Bye-Ya." Urcola also took care to showcase his and D'Rivera's proficiency in jazz from both American continents. They delight equally in the cool pull of Gerry Mulligan's "I Know, Don't Know How" as in the hip-swinging title track, written by Argentinian composer Guillermo Klein. At the same time, there's a noticeable stiffness throughout. As loose as the horn players get in their solos, they approach the melodies with caution, as if fearful of flying too far off the rails. Crisp and clean as *El Duelo* is, even a touch of grit would go a long way. —Robert Ham

El Duelo: El Duelo; Tango Azul; Una Muy Bonita; La Yumba/Caravan; Pekin; The Natural; Buenos Aires; Foxy Trot; I Know, Don't Know How; Libertango; Sacajawea (Theme); Leyenda; Con Alma; Stablenmates; Bye-Ya. (76:34)

Personnel: Diego Urcola, trumpet, flugelhorn; Paquito D'Rivera, alto saxophone, clarinet; Hamish Smith, bass; Eric Doob, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com





GAYA FELDHEIM-SCHORR



BRIAN COHEN



TJ HUFF

Nick Dunston

Michael Formanek

Anna Webber

Scuffed-Up but Exhilarating

Given the travails of releasing jazz recordings in the 21st century, it's easy to imagine the name "Out Of Your Head" deriving from the reactions of friends and family when bassist Adam Hopkins, drummer Scott Clark, and artists TJ Huff and Nick Prevas started the imprint in fall 2018.

In this case, *Out Of Your Head* originally was assigned to an improvised music collective that Hopkins cofounded in Baltimore during 2009. He brought it with him, first to the group's Brooklyn chapter and finally to the label. Explains the bassist, who currently resides in Richmond, Virginia: "I thought it would be cool to curate the label in a similar way to how the collective operated, with a focus on the releases creating a little community of musicians."

Recently, the label debuted three live recordings on a new, digital-only imprint, OOH Untamed. "I would say that COVID sped up the process, but I had an idea for a digital-only side of the label since we started in October 2018," Hopkins said. "For each OOH release, we struggle with the decision as to what kind of physical [product] we should put out."

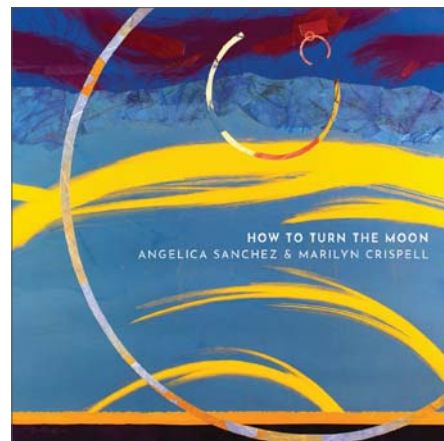
The choice to go totally digital allows the label to turn releases around quickly, and take chances on strong but sonically scuffed-up performances like bassist **Nick Dunston's *Atlantic Extraction: Live At Threes (Out Of Your Head U001; 48:13 ★★★★★)***. Drawn from a Feb. 26 concert at a Brooklyn brew pub, the set was captured on a cell phone. While it lacks the clarity and dynamic range of Dunston's debut studio recording, which OOH released in 2019, it ably presents the musician's command of his mercurial compositions. The unconventionally configured quintet (strings, woodwinds, guitar, drums) nimbly shifts among stately chamber melodies, combative free passages and exhilarating steeplechases. The program is divided into two tracks (plus one bite-sized preview

edit), which invites appreciation of the group's management of these dynamic shifts. This recording is a bittersweet discovery, since the band is surely not going to play again anytime soon: Dunston recently moved to Berlin, saying he wanted to begin a new chapter in his life and career.

Rectangles (U002; 38:20 ★★★★★), by saxophonist **Anna Webber**, also was recorded with pocket-sized device. A Zoom recorder proved entirely adequate to document "Rectangles 3." Webber originally wrote the tune for the Simple Trio, her old band with John Hollenbeck and Matt Mitchell. While the trio recorded three iterations of the piece, each less than two minutes long, they never played it live. So, in 2019, Webber assembled a quartet with pianist Marc Hannaford, drummer Mark Ferber and Hopkins on bass to play only "Rectangles 3." After a dizzying, free introduction, the musicians give the piece's asymmetrical groove a marathon workout. They repeat it, speed it up, slow it down and break it into component phrases, which in turn launch intricate solos and intense, collective improvisations. Once more, the chance to experience the totality of the music's development overrides any caveats about the audio's slightly in-the-red sizzle.

The Michael Formanek Quartet recorded ***Pre-Apocalyptic (U003; 66:10 ★★½)*** in 2014. The group, which included alto saxophonist Tim Berne, pianist Craig Taborn, drummer Gerald Cleaver and Formanek on bass, already had made two albums for ECM and toured widely before recording this music in parts unknown, and many of its tunes will be familiar to fans of those records. The audio—muffled and lacking in high end—impedes appreciation more than on other releases. But the performances themselves will be essential listening for fans of the band. Berne sounds far more energized than he does in ECM studio settings, and the quartet's nuanced performances of Formanek's byzantine pieces attest to their road-tested rapport. **DB**

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com



Angelica Sanchez & Marilyn Crispell *How To Turn The Moon*

PYROCLASTIC 10

★★★★

On their first recording together, pianists Angelica Sanchez and Marilyn Crispell bring together deep wells of experience at the jazz and creative music vanguard. *How To Turn The Moon* features this intergenerational duo exploring the edges of their respective imaginations through in-the-moment collaboration, the occasionally intense flourishes and dense clusters of sound belying a playful intimacy.

Sanchez's compositional sketches outline the framework for some of the pieces; others are entirely improvised by the pair. Both approaches lead to similarly exciting moments and a wide range of moods and timbres—from the dramatic, percussive contrasts of "Space Junk" to the hypnotically lyrical melodic fragments in "Ceiba Portal."

The delicate, slower moments that linger between phrases—amid the spacious chords of "Windfall Light," for example—are a testament to the expressive and dynamic range that both pianists display throughout. The two balance well together, darting between the rush of new ideas and responding to the each other's call. On "Rain In Web," the explosive energy that Crispell long has been known for erupts, eliciting scintillating flourishes from both players. Elsewhere, as on the closing track "Fires In Space," energy emerges from the dance of improvisation over repeated figures penned by Sanchez.

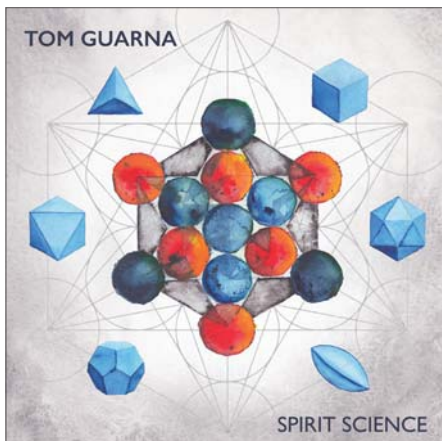
Throughout, the pair impress with their commitment to the exploration of a vast range of sonic territories. Although it's often hard to tell who's leading and who's following, together the duo invite listeners to a dance where they investigate each moment's possibility.

—Alex W. Rodríguez

How To Turn The Moon: Lobe Of The Fly; Ancient Dream; Calyces Of Held; Space Junk; Ceiba Portal; Windfall Light; Twisted Roots; Sullivan's Universe; Rain In Web; Fires In Space. (49:18)

Personnel: Angelica Sanchez, Marilyn Crispell, piano.

Ordering info: pyroclasticrecords.com



Tom Guarna *Spirit Science*

DESTINY 0030

★★★★

On the surface, few musical topics are less enticing than sacred geometry, which even Steve Coleman might reject as abstruse. Yet *Spirit Science*, the eighth album by guitarist Tom Guarna, is enticing—and accessible to boot. The mystical/mathematic concept (explained in the liners) contributes inspiration and a shroud of mystery to his quintet's doings.

But some expressions of the enigma are more overt than others. At times, it's no more than an

obscure title, like the opening “The Trion Re.” (Unsurprisingly, its irregular melody and angsty solos by tenor saxophonist Ben Wendel, Guarna and pianist Aaron Parks shed no light on what the title means.) We can guess from the name of “The Genesis Pattern” that creation is at play; why its swing and improvisational energies are so urgent is less clear. Ditto “Metatron’s Cube,” virtually a rocker between Guarna’s distorted shards, bassist Joe Martin and drummer Justin Faulkner’s commanding pulse, and a plunging, adrenalized Wendel solo.

What that means in terms of the titular cube—a shape comprising all other shapes in sacred geometry—is anyone’s guess. Mystery is a more palpable force on the title track, whose serenity and gentle Martin solo suggest a motive for studying arcana. It’s even more true on the mood piece “Platonic Solids”; Parks’ eerie Rhodes and Guarna’s guitar-synth move over a groove of grim determination from Martin and Faulkner in a way that both forebodes and beckons. Several listens might offer a better understanding of geometric spirituality; the intrigue of the music, though, only will increase. —*Michael J. West*

Spirit Science: The Trion Re; Platonic Solids; The Genesis Pattern; Spirit Science; Two Circles; A Reflection In A Reflection (For Kofi Burbridge); Metatron’s Cube; Source; Lullaby For Lena. (61:64)

Personnel: Tom Guarna, guitar, acoustic guitar, Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone, bassoon; Aaron Parks, keyboards; Joe Martin, bass; Justin Faulkner, drums.

Ordering info: destinyrecordsmusic.com

Michael Wollny *Mondenkind*

ACT 9765

★★★★½

Turning in a solo piano album, as opposed to working with his well-established trio, doesn’t take away from Michael Wollny’s ability to conceptualize, compose and convey a breadth of larger-than-life musical ideas.

The track list alone, with titles like “The Rain Never Stops On Venus” and “Un Animal Imaginé Par Méliès,” fosters fascination. The latter tune lends itself especially well to listeners’ imaginations; the titular figure, Georges Méliès, directed the iconic 1902 film *A Trip To The Moon*. Wollny leans into his concept, beginning the track with strikes and hard plucks of the piano strings. While somewhat jarring, the aural oddities seem an appropriate embodiment of Méliès’ creativity. The disjointed nature of the piece’s melodic and rhythmic flow, as well as booming low notes at the track’s end, are at least unconventional in jazz writing, if not radical. The ideas do, however, fit well when considered through a contemporary classical lens. The same could be said about the frenzied and dynamic “Spacecake.”

“Lunar Landscape” doesn’t have nearly the length for the same wealth of segmented changes. Yet, the piece manages to depict the moon’s



surface in a lively and unexpected fashion. The melodic movement of the piece resides in Wollny’s left hand, not the right, providing a contrast befitting of the moon’s unknowable but picturesque qualities.

Taken collectively, *Mondenkind* is graceful, compositionally daring and a fantastic display of Wollny’s cross-genre musicianship.

—*Kira Grunenberg*

Mondenkind: Lunar Landscape; Father Lucifer; Things Behind Walls; Sonatine Nr. 7/2. Satz; Velvet Gloves & Spit; Tale; Mondenkind; Enter Three Witches; Schliesse Mir Die Augen Beide; The Rain Never Stops On Venus; Un Animal Imaginé Par Méliès; Cyranó; Sagée; Spacecake; Mercury. (46:41)

Personnel: Michael Wollny, piano.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

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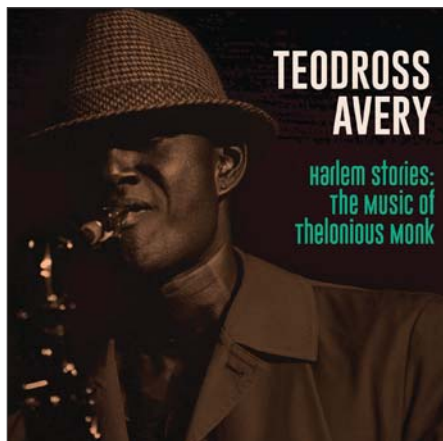
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Teodross Avery *Harlem Stories: The Music Of Thelonious Monk*

WJ3 1024

★★★★½

Saxophonist Teodross Avery is an urbane, erudite player who can slide comfortably between worlds. He's recorded with vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater in a traditional acoustic context, but also on albums by Talib Kweli, Amy Winehouse and Lauryn Hill. This album is a follow-up of sorts to 2019's *After The Rain: A Night For Coltrane*. But that was preceded by 2017's *Post Modern Trap Music*. In other words, he's no mere traditionalist.

The Claire Daly Band *Rah! Rah!*

RIDE SYMBOL 34

★★★★

Claire Daly was only 18 when she sat spellbound for several days watching multi-horn master Rahsaan Roland Kirk during a jazz workshop residency in Boston, a life-changing experience that set her on her own artistic path. After studying tenor and alto saxophone at Berklee, she picked up a baritone nearly as big as she was, which (along with flute) became her primary instrument. Though Kirk was baked into her playing, it wasn't until 2008 that Daly paid tribute to her mentor with *Rah! Rah!*, a limited-edition self-released title. Twelve years later, that record gets its due with a reissue that sounds as fresh as the day it was recorded.

From the opener "Blue Lady," Daly's own spin on Kirk's "Lady's Blues," she and her long-time band hit every station of the Rahsaan cross. Her witty flute takes flight on Kirk's "Serenade To A Cuckoo" and plays tag with Dave Hofstra's bass on "Funk Underneath." There are also some fun surprises. Midway through the iconic "Volunteered Slavery," Daly bursts into Sly & The Family Stone's "Everyday People," an out-of-left-field kind of maneuver at which Kirk himself excelled. Less successful is Daly's decision to jet-

Still, his exploration of the work of one of jazz's greatest is both admiring and admirable.

For the most part, *Harlem Stories: The Music Of Thelonious Monk* is a straightforward treatment of the pianist's compositions that places the emphasis where it belongs: on indelible melodies and ferocious swing. Avery's relationship with drummer Willie Jones III goes back to the '90s, and they're perfectly aligned throughout the five tracks they perform together. "Rhythm-A-Ning" is taken at a sprint, and "Ruby, My Dear" has a steady r&b groove, but other tunes showcase the locked-down pulse of Frankie Dunlop or Ben Riley's work with Monk's 1960s quartet. "Monk's Dream," in particular, is about as good as a latter-day interpretation of the pianist's work gets, with everyone fully engaged and challenging each other. Marvin "Bugalu" Smith, heard on the disc's second half, is looser, heavier and a much more active drummer; he launches the music skyward. As a consequence, Avery's own playing on "In Walked Bud" gets wild. And the group's take on "Ugly Beauty" simply is explosive.

—Philip Freeman

Harlem Stories: The Music Of Thelonious Monk: Teo; Monk's Dream; Ruby, My Dear; Evidence; Rhythm-A-Ning; In Walked Bud; Ugly Beauty; Pannonica; Trinkle, Tinkle; Boo Boo's Birthday. (63:25)

Personnel: Teodross Avery, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Anthony Wonsey (1–5), D.D. Jackson (6–10), piano; Corcoran Holt, bass; Willie Jones III (1–5), Marvin "Bugalu" Smith (6–10), drums; Allakoi "Mic Holden" Peete (3), cajón.

Ordering info: wj3records.com

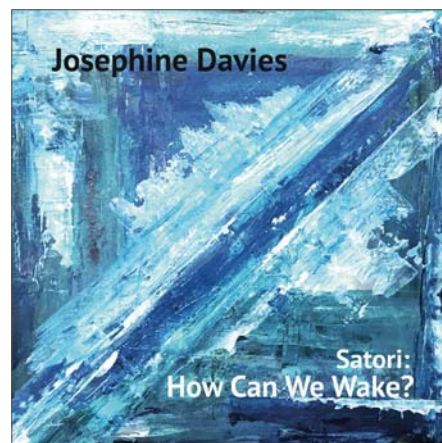


tison Kirk's rich instrumental version of "Alfie" in favor of a take with her rather thin vocals; she wisely keeps "I'll Be Seeing You" as an all-instrumental closer. But she shines brightly on "Momentus Brighticus," Daly's homage to "Bright Moments," in which her flute soars above Eli Yamin's manic piano runs before gliding back to earth. It's a real passing-the-torch moment, and Daly and her band deliver. —Cree McCree

Rah! Rah!: Blue Lady; Serenade To A Cuckoo; Volunteered Slavery/Everyday People; Simone; Funk Underneath; Theme For The Eulipions; Alfie; Momentus Brighticus; Blues For Alice; I'll Be Seeing You. (52:52)

Personnel: Claire Daly, baritone saxophone, flute, vocals (3, 7); Eli Yamin, piano; Dave Hofstra, bass; Peter Grant, drums.

Ordering info: ridesymbol.com



Josephine Davies' Satori *How Can We Wake?*

WHIRLWIND 4764

★★★★

On *How Can We Wake?*, British saxophonist/composer Josephine Davies and her trio explore improvisation through the lens of philosophy. The result is an introspective display of the bandleader's musical prowess and the ensemble's unquestionable simpatico on a record of timely urgency.

Recorded live in London during early 2020, the spiritual heft of *How We Can Wake?* was of special design by Davies, who set up her bandmates for the sessions with loose rhythmic and melodic guidelines, and two key pieces of inspiration: the meaning inherent in the trio's name, "Satori" (a Buddhist idea which indicates a moment of inner spaciousness away from noisy thought), and the teachings of Patanjali, a revered ancient Indian sage.

From the outset, a patient embodiment of mood is palpable. "Ananda: Bliss" finds Davies floating a bittersweet melody over a soft expanse created by James Maddren's feathery percussion and Dave Whitford's creative beat-keeping. Later, "Mudita: Joy" is defined by effervescent staccato in Davies' saxophone and Maddren's playful, intentional responses.

Darker moods also are portrayed with this emotional nuance: "Klesha: Affliction" is shaped by an angular melody from Davies, while Whitford and Maddren speed toward madness. Mirroring human emotional experience, the album's vibe changes without pause or notice, as with the transition between the drum-centric "Sutra 1" and the anxious "Duhkha: Pervasive Dissatisfaction."

Throughout, the album asks, how can you wake to yourself? It's a fearful question in 2020, but here Davies provides a mindful and enrapturing answer.

—Alexa Peters

How Can We Wake?: Ananda: Bliss; Sutra 1; Duhkha: Pervasive Dissatisfaction; Sutra 2; Nirodha: The Possibility Of Liberation; Mudita: Joy; Daya: Compassion; Sutra 3; Klesha: Affliction; Ananda: Bliss (Reprise). (46:23)

Personnel: Josephine Davies, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Dave Whitford, bass; James Maddren, drums.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com

Steph Richards *SUPERSENSE*

NORTHERN SPY 130

★★★★

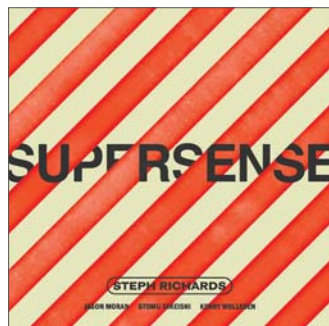
On her third impressive album in as many years, innately adventurous trumpeter Steph Richards continues forging a distinctive path through jazz and experimental music. *SUPERSENSE* finds her on trumpet and flugelhorn (and “resonating drums/water”), abetted by an ensemble that exercises restraint, freely draws on extended techniques and embraces the bandleader’s aesthetic.

Sagacity is built into Richards’ work, and senses work overtime on *SUPERSENSE*, courtesy of scent-maker Sean Raspet, who created specific fragrances—both inspired by and responding to the music. (Scratch-and-sniff cards are included with the physical album.) Nine tracks, each with a different character, build the album’s expressive landscape, almost with an abstruse song cycle-like identity. Richards’ slow ascent up a (mostly) major scale ends the otherwise restless energy of the title track, and a simple melodic motif capping off the dreamy “Glass”—hinted at earlier by Jason Moran’s chordal feints—captures the ear and teases a sense of the music’s structure. In keeping with her visceral approach to free play, Richards and company have created an engaging multi-sensory tableau, one that poses the question, Who’s afraid of the avant-garde? —Josef Woodard

SUPERSENSE: Underbelly; SUPERSENSE; Canopy; Glass; Metal Mouth; Bunker; Matter Is Water; Sleeping In The Sky; The Gentlest Insect; Heat Of Light; Finding Our Touch; Jungle Warfare; Lipreading. (39:28)

Personnel: Steph Richards, trumpet, flugelhorn, percussion; Jason Moran, piano; Stomu Takeishi, bass; Kenny Wolleson, drums, Wollesonics; Andrew Munsey (7), Wallesonics.

Ordering info: northernspyrecs.com



Miguel Alvarado *Idile*

EAR UP 0433

★★★

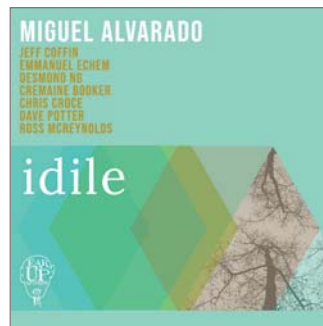
During our pandemic year, it’s the one-man band who will have the best parties. From his Nashville studio, Miguel Alvarado plays more than a dozen instruments on *Idile*, presenting a meticulous series of mostly original tunes that bounce among a few too many musical ideas.

“Taino” opens the album, blasting off with clattering drums and shouts—even some crickets. It’s the sound of humans en masse. The drums lock in with complex polymeters and an even more challenging unison horn line—saxophones, a muted trumpet, an EWI. Most of the surprisingly loose tracks have an organic live band at their core, but the liveliest of the bunch seem amplified by multiple, layered contributions from Alvarado. “10101101,” though, feels sliced from another project. The ethereal vibe, heightened by oscillating keyboards, spirals into the atmosphere, distant from the overall tone of the album. Other times, things get a little too sappy: “Lagrimas Negras” features fine flute work from Alvarado, but seems cloying with the addition of strings. “Ping Pong,” the closer, could trick a few lovers onto the dancefloor, but they’d break their hips on Alvarado’s jagged horn lines. —Sean J. O’Connell

Idile: Taino; Rainy Birthdays; Lagrimas Negras; Blindspots; Idile; 21 Days; El Principe; 10101101; Song For Jennifer; Ping Pong. (49:19)

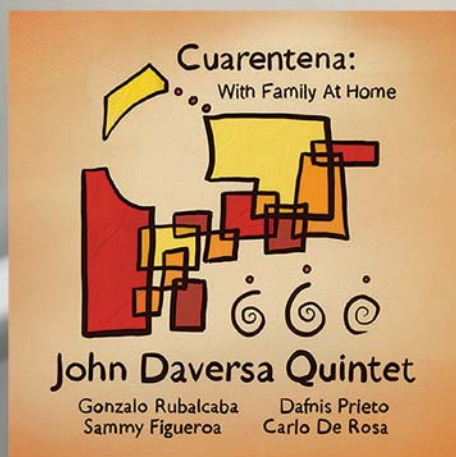
Personnel: Miguel Alvarado, saxophone, EWI, flute, keyboards, percussion, vocals; Jeff Coffin, piccolo; Desmond Ng, trombone; Emmanuel Echem, trumpet; Cremaine Booker, violin, cello; Chris Croce, bass, electric bass; Dave Potter, Ross McReynolds, drums.

Ordering info: earuprecords.com



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**Geof Bradfield/
Ben Goldberg/
Dana Hall Trio**
General Semantics

DELMARK 5035

★★★★★

Saxophonist Geof Bradfield, clarinetist Ben Goldberg and drummer Dana Hall keep things compact here. But the group's energy, sharp writing and quick thinking across 11 relatively short tracks on *General Semantics* offer a plethora of ideas.

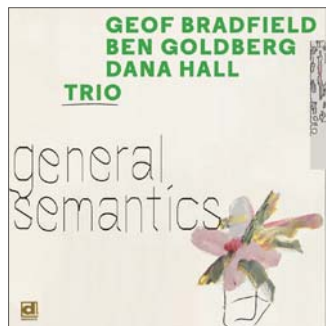
Their dialogue immediately enlivens Goldberg's "Last Important Heartbreak Of The Year." The three gently goad each other—Hall picking up steam as Goldberg's clarinet responds to Bradfield's tenor cues. Then it turns into the kind of collective improvisation that suggests what could have resulted if Jimmy Giuffre spent more time in New Orleans. The trio emphasizes the exuberance in presenting an instrumental arsenal that deviates from standard small jazz ensembles, not least of which is the absence of a chordal anchor. Goldberg's contra-alto clarinet implies the bass on a take of Duke Ellington's "Half The Fun." At the same time, Hall conveys as many different melodic colors as five woodwinds. While they direct each other through a few wide-ranging interpretations—including Cecil Taylor's landmark "Air"—no single player dominates.

—Aaron Cohen

General Semantics: Air; Tioga Street Zenith; Last Important Heartbreak Of The Year; Lamentation; Hit Flip Switch; General Semantics; Half The Fun; 3-4-5; 8 De Augusto; Never Met A Stranger; Under And Over. (50:14)

Personnel: Geof Bradfield, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Ben Goldberg, B-flat clarinet, contra-alto clarinet; Dana Hall, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: delmark.com



**Wind/Catherine/
van Rooyen**
White Noise

LAIKA

★★★★★

A title like *White Noise* might seem to come from the industrial end of things, but bassist Martin Wind intends it to refer to the gentler sounds of wind or water that can help soothe the clatter and contention of everyday life. The title piece was written specifically to be played with guitarist Philip Catherine and flugelhorn player Ack van Rooyen, and it's perfectly suited for them.

Wind interweaves his own compositions with standards, leaving respectful room for 90-year-old van Rooyen's elegiac but not mournful "Autumn Bugle." It's a pity, perhaps, that there isn't room for something by Catherine, a mere stripling at 77. But the fact is, this is very much the bassist's record. That's obvious from the almost Bach-like arco that opens Kenny Wheeler's "Canter." Wind is a master with the bow, but it's his plucked lines—gracious and singing—that define his sound. He resembles no one more than another European master, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, who was an early influence. "The Dream" was written for a duo with Pat Metheny, but Catherine's lightly amplified, ringing tone is perfect for it, too. The title still might mislead, but, taken as intended, it offers pure balm.

—Brian Morton

White Noise: Canter; Everything I Love; White Noise; But Beautiful; The Dream; Autumn Bugle; A Genius And A Saint; I Fall In Love Too Easily. (44:14)

Personnel: Martin Wind, bass; Philip Catherine, guitar; Ack van Rooyen, flugelhorn.

Ordering info: laika-records.com



**Derrick Gardner &
The Big dig! Band**
Still I Rise

IMPACT 002

★★★★½

Tribute might be the operative word on *Still I Rise*, the album's title a salute to author Maya Angelou, while several of the tracks conjure the sounds of Count Basie's band.

On "Soulful Brother Gelispie," drummer Curtis Nowosad pays tribute to another time-keeper, educator Randy Gelispie. Then there's an homage to trumpeter Derrick Gardner's father with "Blues À La Burgess" where the Basie beat erupts with splendid profusion from the bandleader. Another unforgettable nod to Basie comes on "8 Ball, Side Pocket" with pianist Zen Zdravec reprising a recognizable intro from the big band. One final tribute is "Melody For Trayvon"—written for Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American slain by a Florida neighborhood watch coordinator in 2012. It's a lament that captures the tragic incident, Gardner's horn burnishing its mood. The Basie influence here is unavoidable—though it by no means detracts from the essential sound and swing of the 18-piece Big dig! Band. And given the group's collective ascendance and promising skills, its next album could be called *We Have Risen*.

—Herb Boyd

Still I Rise: Push Come Da Shove; Still I Rise; Soulful Brother Gelispie; Melody For Trayvon; Blues À La Burgess; 8 Ball, Side Pocket; Heavens To Murgatroyd! (71:09)

Personnel: Derrick Gardner, Bijon Watson, Jeff Johnson, Curtis Taylor, Andrew Littleford, trumpet; Mark Gross, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Greg Gatien, alto saxophone; Rob Dixon, Tristan Martinuson, tenor saxophone; Ken Gold, baritone saxophone; Vincent Gardner, Joel Green, Anthony Bryson, Bill Green, trombone; Zen Zdravec, piano; Luke Sellick, bass; Kasey Kurtz, guitar; Curtis Nowosad, drums.

Ordering info: derrickgardnermusic.com



John Minnock
Herring Cove

DOT TIME 9093

★★★½

Singer John Minnock's third album chronicles different facets of the gay community, a subject still rarely discussed in jazz. Erick Holmberg's lyrics in these songs emphasize the challenges that Minnock, his family and friends still face. But courageous storytelling isn't the only strength of *Herring Cove*. Minnock's phrasing seamlessly veers from romantic to lighthearted and acerbic alongside an accomplished crew that includes saxophonist/producer Dave Liebman.

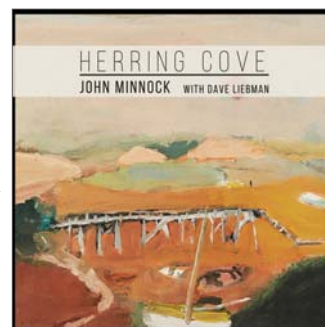
Minnock, a veteran of New York's jazz and cabaret scenes, consistently uses his dramatic inflections to serve the songs' contrasting tones. This comes across on his tongue-in-cheek kiss-off, "Tell Him I'm Fine," highlighting his sharp timing alongside pianist Enrique Haneine. On his dialogue with singer Deborah Lippmann, "Now There's You," their dissimilar timbres blend as they recount the Reagan era and the emergence of the AIDS epidemic. A sense of loss also pervades the moving title track, which refers to a popular LGBTQ+ beach in Provincetown, Massachusetts. While it would be a stretch to say that Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time" will appear at future jazz jams, Minnock's understated performance shows how this LGBTQ+ star's hit belongs in these spaces.

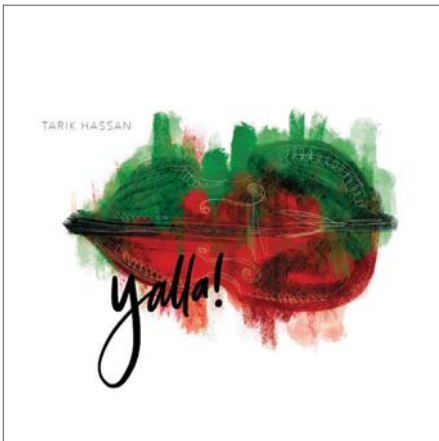
—Aaron Cohen

Herring Cove: Tell Him I'm Fine; If I Could Turn Back Time; On Green Dolphin Street; Unconditional; It Goes Like It Goes; A Melody; Now There's You; Herring Cove; After All These Years; Kansas City; Stardust. (55:17)

Personnel: John Minnock, vocals; Dave Liebman, saxophone, flute; Enrique Haneine, piano; Carlos Mena, bass; Pablo Eluchans, drums; Deborah Lippmann (7), vocals.

Ordering info: dottimerecords.com





Tarik Hassan
Yalla!

SELF RELEASE
★★★

Tarik Hassan's second album, *Yalla!*, takes its title from the Arabic word for hurry. It informs some of the album's most compelling moments, but also the record's urgency to display the leader's versatility while undermining the recording's cohesion.

The first sound on the record is Hassan's warm, supple bass. He sets a brisk tempo on the title track, keeping the ensemble moving as violinist Kimberly Zielnicki waxes dramatic in a

Roma-tinged solo. Pianist Ben Irom's accompaniment sets up a Latin feel, which the bassist lucidly elaborates on during his own solo. Such eclecticism reflects Hassan's biography: He was born and raised in Florida by Irish and Palestinian parents, and worked in New Orleans for about 10 years before settling in Austin during 2013. The next tune, "Arab Spring," is named for the wave of protests and uprisings that swept the Arab world in the early 2010s and proves that Hassan can use pacing and mood to suggest a narrative thread. First a low-register piano figure, pizzicato violin and the leader's bowed theme express a sense of foreboding. Then pianist Irom surges forward at a breakneck pace over Noah Mosgofian's hand percussion, evoking that moment when dissatisfaction gives way to action.

After a solid opening, though, *Yalla!* seems to lose focus. There's a tango, an uptempo New Orleans party groove and a multi-segmented Celtic suite, each competently executed but arbitrarily sequenced. The album comes off feeling more like a resume that ticks off the different things that Hassan can do than a group of inter-related compositions. —Bill Meyer

Yalla!: Yalla; Arab Spring; Tango Avec Frenchie; Twice At Once; Dance Of The Grackles; Falls Water; Dublin; Peacemaker; The Colors No One Wanted. (59:43)

Personnel: Tarik Hassan, bass; Ben Irom, piano; Noah Mosgofian, percussion; Fabio Augustinis, Michael Longoria (4–6), drums, percussion; Kimberly Zielnicki, violin; Brian Pardo, guitar (4–6).

Ordering info: tarikhassan.bandcamp.com.

Jason Kao Hwang
Human Rites Trio

TRUE SOUND 03
★★★★

The veteran New York violinist/violist Jason Kao Hwang, who's worked with Anthony Braxton, William Parker and the late Butch Morris, among others, creates work under his own name that resists categorization: Sometimes it's jazz, sometimes chamber music and sometimes entirely uncategorizable. He's even written an opera.

String players often have a more collaborative, cooperative sense of group interplay than their brass- or reed-playing peers, and Hwang is no exception: *Human Rites Trio* features a rhythm section—bassist Ken Filiano and drummer Andrew Drury—the bandleader has been working with for more than a decade.

The opening two-part suite, "Words Asleep Spoken Awake," grants much more space to the rhythm tandem, at least early on, than to the putative leader. Following an almost martial opening fanfare, the bass is a thick, forcefully bowed boom, the drums a recurring but persistent rattle, as Hwang adds sharp, pinched-off tones. Eventually, he takes the spotlight, but not for long, and Drury gets a drum solo before the movement ends. The second half of the suite is a free-jazz blowout worthy of The Revolutionary Ensemble, Hwang zipping and diving all over





the violin as the bassist and drummer thunder behind him. Toward the end, there's a genuinely unidentifiable sound; it could be Drury bowing cymbals or it could be Hwang blasting his violin through a pedal. Regardless, it's astonishingly loud and powerful. On other tracks, like "Conscious Concave Concrete" and "Battle For The Indelible Truth," the trio dials down the abstraction somewhat and dives deep into the blues, bringing to mind Julius Hemphill's work with Abdul Wadud. Which is to say that this is heavy, profound music. —Philip Freeman

Human Rites Trio: Words Asleep Spoken Awake: Part I; Words Asleep Spoken Awake: Part II; Conscious Concave Concrete; 2 AM; Battle For The Indelible Truth; Defiance. (52:57)

Personnel: Jason Kao Hwang, violin, viola; Ken Filiano, bass; Andrew Drury, drums.


Ordering info: jasonkaohwang.com.

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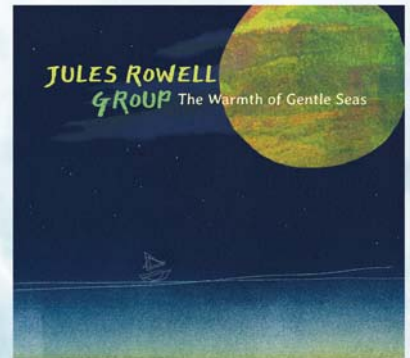
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—David Sanborn
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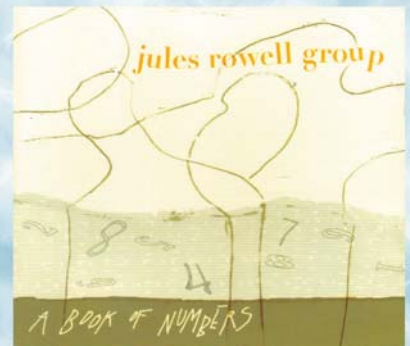


Photograph by Melanie Futorian

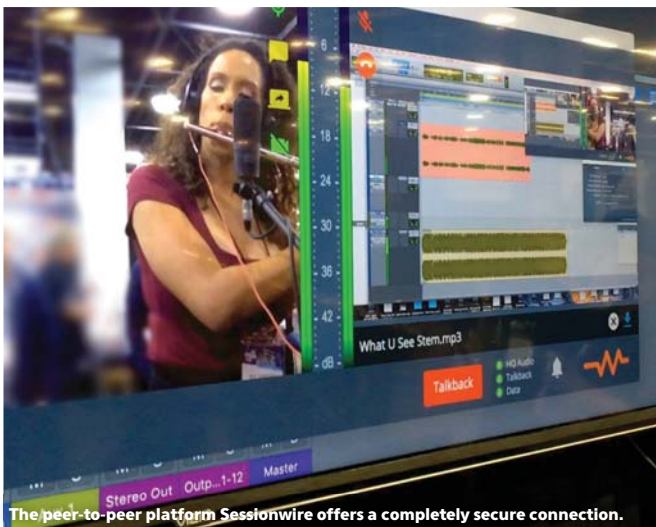
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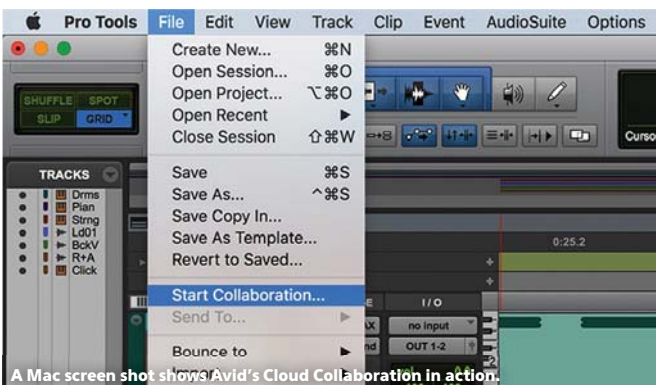
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The peer-to-peer platform Sessionwire offers a completely secure connection.



A Mac screen shot shows Avid's Cloud Collaboration in action.



Soundtrap's easy-to-use interface makes it ideal for home-recording beginners.

Long-Distance Workarounds

Remote Collaborative Recording Solutions

Great recordings require a high level of cooperation from everyone involved. From initial concept through final release, a successful project will inevitably draw on both creative talent and technical expertise. Those of us who have recorded with ensembles large and small know that organizing a studio session and working out all the logistics can be a time-consuming and costly task—especially if travel is involved.

The need for a better solution and the rise of the internet have served as the sparks that ignited the development of a new breed of high-quality collaborative tools that allow musicians to work together, remotely. Online recording via asynchronous multi-tracking—long regarded as a convenient, cost-saving option for bands and long-distance musical partners—is rapidly becoming a necessity in today's pandemic-afflicted world.

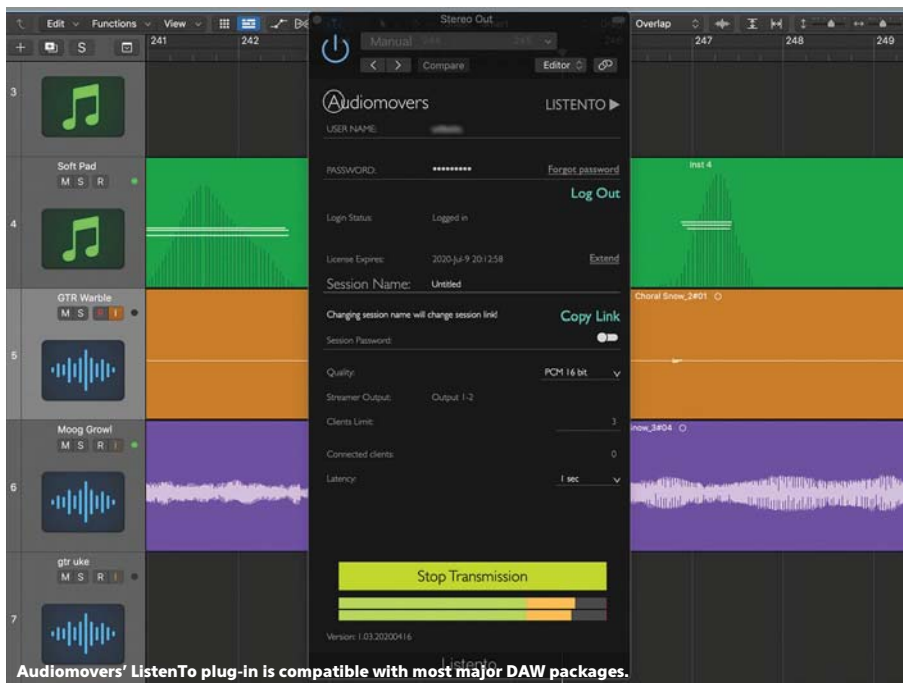
Remote collaboration first began to take hold with the advent of digital recording. Audio files would be shuttled back and forth between studios via removable media, as standard phone lines did not have the bandwidth to handle large data transfers. High-speed ISDN lines eventually provided studios with a workable collaborative option, but the cost was extremely high, putting such methods out of reach to all but the big production houses.

With the availability of the internet, files could be transferred by anyone via file-sharing apps like Dropbox, but the workflow remained rather cumbersome. Developers sensed the need for better tools that would streamline the remote collaboration process, and innovative solutions are being unveiled seemingly every day, pushing the boundaries of how we make, produce, record and distribute our music.

Even in today's high-tech digital world,

there are still many technical challenges that developers face in creating online audio tools for musicians. First and foremost is connection speed, something that can vary greatly between users and a wildcard factor for software engineers. Most internet users today utilize a wireless Wi-Fi connection, which can also be problematic for sustained high-speed data transfer; a wired ethernet connection is a much more reliable option.

Add to the mix the user's particular hardware, software and operating system, and you can begin to see the many hurdles that this technology must overcome. As much as everyone would like to be able to multi-track with other musicians remotely in real-time, the reality is that each step of the digital recording process adds latency, and working online can introduce a significant amount. To overcome these and other limitations, there are several



common workflow scenarios that developers have begun implementing in their collaboration toolkits. We took a look at a few choice solutions—practical workarounds that musicians can use to create great-sounding online recordings with players and producers in remote places.

Cloud-Based Solutions

Cloud-based solutions utilize a central internet location to store data and/or applications that multiple users can access. Cloud computing is a rapidly rising technology, but for audio applications, connection speed is still a concern, with each developer taking its own approach to minimize the problem. Avid's Cloud Collaboration, which has been around since 2014, is designed to work with Pro Tools, one of the industry's most popular digital audio workstation packages. The process begins by creating a "project" in Pro Tools. Projects are saved in the cloud, while "sessions" are local to the user. Special collaboration tools are provided, and you can invite other collaborators to your project with users communicating via a chat window.

Although the project is shared via the cloud, all audio processing is performed and cached locally and uploaded afterward, where it can be downloaded by another user into their local DAW. This solves the latency issue, since all recording data ends up on each user's local drive. One of the great benefits to this solution is that it works with Avid's free version of Pro Tools (Pro Tools First).

Soundtrap takes things to the next level by offering an entirely cloud-based DAW that runs in a browser. The software's easy-to-navi-

gate interface makes it ideal for users just learning the basics of a digital recording package. In this scenario, nothing is local, which allows it to be platform- and device-independent.

Now owned by Spotify, Soundtrap has been widely adopted by educators as a remote teaching tool for audio production and music education. According to Per Emanuelsson, director of Soundtrap at Spotify, "Our goal is to offer a simple-to-use yet powerful product that allows our customers to get to the creative part much faster." Created with collaboration in mind, Soundtrap has attracted quite a large customer base by offering a basic service for free along with several levels of paid subscriptions. To enhance collaboration, there are also video and audio chat capabilities built right in. Although users can listen in real-time and record individual tracks into Soundtrap, live multi-tracking is not yet 100 percent practical.

Peer-To-Peer Solutions

Sessionwire, which hit the scene in 2018, is a true "peer-to-peer solution" that runs on Mac; a Windows version is in the works. The package consists of the Sessionwire Studio app and drivers that you load onto your computer. Sessionwire utilizes the Mac's core audio, so it's compatible with any audio app that supports that. You can also collaborate with other users running different DAW packages.

To get up and running, you select the Sessionwire drivers for input and output in your software and the Studio app runs in a separate window on top of your DAW window—providing the ability to connect to remote users and also maintain audio and video

chatting. Audio can be streamed in real time between users for listening purposes, but to work collaboratively on a project, the files need to be transferred directly between computers via simple drag-and-drop. Once the files are residing locally, latency is no longer an issue, and connection speed and reliability, although a factor in transfer speed, will not impact the actual recording and editing process.

Another benefit of the peer-to-peer workflow is that with no server involved, the connection between users is totally secure. Robin Leboe, Sessionwire's founder, informs us that Sessionwire is truly an all-in-one software independent solution that provides not only useful tools but also a community of likeminded users through its website. "Sessionwire is a part of this new paradigm of remote recording, and we want to create the illusion of being on the other side of the studio glass," Leboe said.

Audio Streaming Solutions

Audiomovers ListenTo audio plug-in is capable of streaming live audio between remote users. It claims to be the only solution that actually streams high-quality uncompressed audio. Available in VST, AU and AAX formats, ListenTo is compatible with most major DAW packages on both Windows and Mac.

The plug-in is placed in your channel's signal path, and there are two separate components: send and receive. You can select your stream quality from several compressed formats or full-resolution PCM lossless if your connection speed can handle it. Audio can be streamed directly between DAWs or to a web browser for remote listening.

As a streaming solution there are latency issues, and Audiomovers allows you to adjust your latency up to 2 full seconds. Also keep in mind that if you are playing along with an incoming audio stream, since there is latency introduced into what you are hearing, your file will be offset from the original track when it is streamed back to the other user, so it will need to be time-synced or "lined up." Since it's a plug-in, Audiomovers contains no video or audio communication functions, so a third-party application such as Zoom or FaceTime might be needed. According to Igor Maxymenko, co-founder of Audiomovers, "Our solution is completely nonintrusive to the user's setup, and it works exactly like an audio cable."

Remote, asynchronous audio collaboration is on the rise and here to stay. With a decent internet connection, we now have the means to work with artists from around the world. There are still technical challenges to overcome, but if you're based in North America and want to feature an amazing bass player from Sweden or a brilliant saxophonist from Australia on your next recording project, a solution is easily within reach. **DB**

Carlos Henriquez with the MXL Revelation II



United Audio Arrow with Mac laptop



Avid Pro Tools recording platform



Blue Yeti microphones

Warm Audio WA-251



Apogee Symphony desktop version

Home Studio Gear Options & Solutions

Now is an ideal time for musicians to get on board with home recording. With gigs few and far between due to the pandemic, musicians who haven't yet taken the plunge would be well advised to start getting a handle on how to produce and document your own music, on your own terms. It's a great use of what otherwise would be downtime, and it will help you take charge of your career during this challenging new era. If a collaborator asks you to overdub some solos or background parts on their recording project via remote recording, you'll be better prepared to answer the call and give it your all. Or if you decide you want to teach students online or take an online lesson yourself, you'll already be set up for success.

Of course, there is some basic gear you'll need to get your home studio up and running.

Fortunately, there are many available options that are affordable and easy to use, even for the technology-challenged. Here are some of the bare essentials that we recommend to make recordings from the comfort and safety of your own home.

Digital Audio Workstations

Let's assume that the core of your home studio will be a digital audio workstation that runs on your computer. DAWs are powerful, versatile platforms that give you the ability to create basic, high-quality recordings and edit them to your heart's content. Commonly used DAWs include Apple's Logic Pro, Ableton Live, Steinberg Cubase and GarageBand. But the most ubiquitous of all is Avid's Pro Tools, considered by many to be the music industry's

most open and efficient recording platform.

Companies that offer DAW programs tend to make them available in multiple versions, from more affordable introductory versions to super-powerful professional versions. If you're new to home recording, you'll probably do best by starting with a beginner-type DAW and working your way up to more sophisticated versions as you gain more experience. Companies frequently update their DAW programs to improve workflow and add powerful features, and they make it easy and affordable for users to upgrade whenever a new version is released.

Interfaces

In order to connect your instrument with your DAW, you'll need an audio interface.

These are pieces of hardware that convert the signal from a microphone, an electric instrument such as keyboard or guitar, or an outside audio source into digital information that your computer can understand. They serve as an essential link in the recording chain that makes it possible to record and manipulate the sound of virtually any instrument or voice.

Some audio interfaces currently found in musicians' home studios include Universal Audio's Arrow and Apollo Twin, the Apogee Symphony I/O Mk II and the Focusrite Scarlett 18i8. Make sure you go with an interface that has the proper connections (e.g., USB, Thunderbolt) to be compatible with your computer's input ports.

It's also an excellent idea to purchase some fresh computer cables, XLR mic cables and quarter-inch instrument cables and designate them exclusively for use in your home studio; the last thing you'd want is to have an old cable fail right in the middle of a productive recording session.

Microphones

A good microphone is key to making great-sounding recordings, and these days, musicians have their pick of mics suited for recording vocals, horns, drums, guitar amps and the like. More and more companies are marketing highly affordable microphones with built-in USB connectivity, which makes it especially easy to record voice and acoustic instruments with a computer.

Some of the more versatile mics used by today's home recording enthusiasts include the Yeti from Blue Microphones, the WA-251 from Warm Audio, Austrian Audio's OC818 and MXL's Revelation series. There are dozens of other microphones on the market today that are suitable for home studio use, so it's worth taking the time to research some of the different models out there—you'll likely be thrilled with the results you can get from even the most inexpensive models. And, once you hear how nice your horn or your voice sounds through your mic of choice, you'll be inspired to dig deeper into the world of home recording and explore all the creative possibilities it presents.

Standard recording mics like the Neumann U47 and Shure SM57 and SM58 work nicely in a home studio context as well, provided you're using an interface that accommodates a regular XLR mic cable.

Monitors

If you're relatively new to home recording, consider monitoring your projects via headphones. Any decent pair of stereo headphones will do; avoid using earbuds, which can get uncomfortable quickly and often have insufficient dynamic range for proper monitoring.

Headphones bring the sound of your recordings into focus while blocking out outside noise, and they offer the added benefit of allowing for "silent" mixing sessions that won't disturb your spouse, roommate or neighbors. There are numerous headphone brands out there, and I recommend checking out models made by Bose, Sennheiser, Audio-Technica, Beyerdynamic and M-Audio as a starting point. As you become more accustomed to home recording, eventually you'll want to invest in a pair of studio monitor speakers, which will provide you with a better overall "reference" of your recorded work.

The more time you spend working with DAWs, digital audio interfaces, microphones and monitors, the more second-nature it will all become. As you get more acquainted with basic home recording gear, you'll gain practical knowledge that will ultimately help advance your career as a musician.

Ask your peers about their home studio setups, and seek gear recommendations from musicians you trust. And, most important of all, don't let yourself get discouraged during the learning process—once everything starts to click, you'll find new creative inspiration in a simple home studio setup. **DB**

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Samson G-Track Pro Professional USB Mic with Audio Interface

Professional-quality USB microphones are all the rage these days, as home recording continues to rise in popularity and digital audio workstations become more powerful and easier to manage. One such USB mic, Samson's G-Track Pro, is an extremely useful tool that allows musicians to focus more on the recording aspect and less on the process itself.

G-Track Pro doubles as a digital audio interface, with an instrument input and basic mixing functions for recording two independent audio channels at one time. It has the capacity to record audio at 24-bit/96kHz, delivering detailed, high-resolution results. With plug-and-play connectivity and a straightforward design, G-Track Pro will appeal to musicians and podcasters alike. It requires no driver installation and can connect directly to virtually any Mac or PC device via a single USB cable.

The mic's dual 1-inch large-diaphragm condenser capsule does a fine job of capturing the detail and nuance of your voice or instrument. It offers three selectable pickup patterns—cardioid, omnidirectional and bi-directional—making it flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of sound sources. The front panel of the G-Track Pro has a mic gain control, so you can adjust the signal level on the fly.

G-Track Pro's quarter-inch instrument input can be used for recording guitar, bass, keyboard and other line-level devices. A Mono/2-Track switch allows you to record mic and instrument on the same track for streaming content or on separate tracks for post-production editing.

G-Track Pro puts independent mic and instrument volume controls right at your fingertips. Its 1/8-inch stereo output and headphone amplifier provide zero-latency playback when direct monitoring is activated. It also features a mute button that silences the input signals when needed.

I used the G-Track Pro to record myself singing while accompanying myself on digital piano. It took about one minute to connect my keyboard to the mic, link the mic's USB output to my Mac and set myself in playing position like I would for a live gig. Even using a basic recording platform like GarageBand, my voice and keys sounded fantastic and well blended after I made a few

simple level adjustments. I could have just as easily recorded a two-person project, with myself on keyboard and a horn player or singer on the mic.

G-Track Pro's heavy-duty, die-cast zinc desktop base features permanent-grip hinges that hold the mic securely in place. Weighing just over 3½ pounds, it's a solid, commanding piece of gear that will make a great addition to any home studio.

—Ed Enright

samsontech.com



Zoom LiveTrak L-8 Compact, High-Functioning Digital Mixer/Recorder

When it comes to packing a ton of features into small packages, no one does it better than Zoom. With 30 years of producing compact gear under its belt, Zoom continues to impress with products that offer a remarkable amount of functionality, considering their physical size. Zoom has recently introduced the LiveTrak L-8, a portable digital mixer that delivers live audio mixing, multi-track recording, podcasting and even audio interface capabilities—all packed tightly into a 3.4-pound unit.

The L-8 is actually the fourth and smallest offering in the LiveTrak line and is the first to run on batteries or USB power. Priced at \$399, it is a multi-function mixer, and according to Samuel Greene, product specialist at Zoom North America, "The L-8's primary function is first as a digital mixer, second as a digital recorder and third as an audio interface."

Lifting the L-8 from the box, I was amazed at how light and compact this unit is. The mixer has six combo XLR/quarter-inch inputs for mics and line-level instruments plus two additional multi-function inputs that can accept line level, USB or an external device, such as a smartphone. For outputs, the L-8 offers a mas-



ter out, which would be for your front-of-house, and main mix monitoring, plus three additional monitor outs. The various monitor mixes can be saved and recalled at the push of a button, and each output can be set to the master mix as well. Zoom utilizes a mode selector that features four basic modes: mixer, effects, scene memory and recorder. The layout is very intuitive and LED lights make viewing of the settings a snap. There is a basic three-band EQ and eight onboard effects. A sound pad section delivers the ability to instantly access six audio files for playback.

The preamps and effects sound good, and the multiple monitor outs along with the ability to store scenes make this a very functional piece of gear. For multitrack recording, the L-8 utilizes its internal SD card reader, to record up to eight individual mono channels, plus a stereo mix of a performance. Mono tracks are pre-fader, so they are ready for transfer into your DAW. In addition, the L-8 can be set up as an audio interface to your computer. There is obviously a lot of clever engineering involved in squeezing such a large amount of functionality into this small a space, making the L-8 powerful and versatile enough for use at home or on the go.

—Keith Baumann

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Art Baden of Berklee College of Music was a co-winner in the Jazz Instrumental Soloist category (Undergraduate College Division) in the 2020 DownBeat Student Music Awards. (Photo: ©Yossi Zwecker)



Michael Dessen (left), Steph Richards, Nicole Mitchell and Mark Dresser perform in San Diego at a 2018 telematic concert. Images of musicians collaborating with them in real time from New York City and Seoul, South Korea, are projected on video screens.

UC Instructors Build Bridges Via Telematics

DURING THE PANDEMIC, EDUCATORS have wrestled with a pragmatic and philosophical question: How can music students effectively play together when they cannot *be* together? During the past few months, as DownBeat has spoken with collegiate educators in formal interviews and in casual conversations, the names of two trailblazers have popped up repeatedly—and for good reason.

Trombonist Michael Dessen, who is on the faculty at the University of California at Irvine, and bassist Mark Dresser, a faculty member at the University of California at San Diego, have spent many years studying the intersection of music performance and internet technology.

They have performed many concerts that involve musicians who are in different locations, playing together through a network. In some cases, all the musicians are located in the same state. But they also have staged ambitious productions in which the participating musicians are located on different continents.

Dessen and Dresser frequently collaborate as educators. For example, they use videoconferencing so that students in a San Diego classroom can learn simultaneously with students in an Irvine classroom.

DownBeat spoke to Dessen and Dresser via videoconference to learn more about their craft. The educators began by explaining some of the basic terms related to their discipline.

“The phrase ‘networked music performance’ refers to the idea of playing with people in multiple locations, through a network,” Dessen said. “But usually Mark and I are talking about music that we make specifically for that environment. When we talk about a ‘telematic concert,’ we mean a concert that

we conceive of and we put on *knowing* that it’s going to be over a network, and we make it with that in mind.”

Although many educators are excited about high-tech tools like JackTrip software that can make it possible for students within a certain geographic distance to play uptempo tunes tightly in real time, Dessen and Dresser focus on projects that run much deeper than that. Their performances often revolve around ideas about overcoming cultural barriers—and how they could be related to overcoming geographical barriers in order to make music.

“I think it’s apropos to think of the network as an instrument that requires practice, just like learning to play [any] instrument,” Dresser said. “Just because you have a Selmer saxophone doesn’t mean you can get a [good] sound on it. You have to have skills. You need to practice. There’s a learning curve [for creating telematic music]. You know, it isn’t ‘plug and play.’ But compared to how labor intensive this used to be, this [discipline] is so much more accessible than it ever has been.”

Part of Dessen and Dresser’s advanced artistry involves accounting for sonic latency—the delay between when a sound is made and when someone hears it through a network.

“The speed of light is kind of insurmountable. So, the greater the distance, the greater the latency,” Dresser said. “So, if we’re playing between San Diego and Irvine, the latency is basically insignificant. But if we’re collaborating with [musicians in] Seoul or Zurich, it might be a quarter of a second or more. So it’s interesting. You can think of it as an acoustic property. And we have worked on tactics or strategies to create the illusion of synchrony. This is like

the way that people composed [music to be performed in] churches centuries ago. So, you take the acoustic property and think, ‘Well, what can I do with this?’”

Dessen and Dresser actively teach students on their respective campuses how to use technology to create telematic music. Often, this gives the young musicians a valuable skill set.

“It’s much more important to teach students how to *learn* technology than how to use it,” Dessen explained. “How do you find the right keywords to [search] online to solve your problem? A lot of people write into forums for tech advice and they don’t even know how to ask the question in a way that they’re going to be helped properly. So, students have to learn those kinds of skills.”

“And if you learn that, it doesn’t matter if you’re even in music. You might go do something else for a living, but you’ll know how to fix your home Wi-Fi or help do the PowerPoint presentation at your company. It’s all about transferable skills.”

For these forward-thinking educators, being a musician is about so much more than simply playing notes.

“The thing that keeps surprising me about telematics is not the technical level: It’s the human dimension of how people collaborate and work together,” Dresser said. “We’re doing projects with people playing in completely different cultural traditions, but who share improvisation. You would think that there would be more dissonance of concept than not. But in fact, if someone has musicianship and improvises, we can transcend so much. The ability to communicate and share—and the will to collaborate—can transcend so much.”

—Bobby Reed

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arkivjazz.com		jazzednet.org		ropeadope.com	
Blue Note Records	5, 19	JodyJazz	64	Sher Music	47
bluenote.com		jodyjazz.com		shermusic.com	
Cannonball Music	7	John Daversa	49	SteepleChase Productions	4
cannonballmusic.com		johndaversa.com		steeplechase.dk	
Casio	2	The Juilliard School	25	Tim Shea Presents	47
casiomusicgear.com		juilliard.edu/jazz		timsheapresents.com	
Chip Shelton Jazz	34	Jules Rowell	51	Vandoren	3, 33
chipshelton.com		julesrowell.com		dansr.com	
Claire Daly	39	Légère	9	Verve Label Group	31
clairedaly.com		legere.com		vervelabelgroup.com	
David Bixler	43	Mack Avenue Records	40	WFLIII	59
davidbixler.com		mackavenue.com		wfliiidrums.com	
DownBeat	38, 55, 57	Origin Records	23	WJ3 Records	38
downbeat.com		origin-records.com		wj3records.com	
ECM Records	11, 29	Outline Records	16	Yamaha	15
ecmrecords.com		janeirabloom.com		usayamaha.com	
FocusYear Basel	8	P. Mauriat	17	Zoom	63
focusyearbasel.com		pmauriat.com		zoom-na.com	

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BEYOND THE NOTES

Streaming LIVE from the Galt House Hotel, Louisville, KY

Noah Preminger

Even before saxophonist Noah Preminger topped the Rising Star—Tenor Saxophone category in the 2017 DownBeat Critics Poll, he'd issued a handful of leader dates, including a protest album, *Meditations On Freedom*, which was released the same day President Donald Trump took office. On Oct. 15, SteepleChase is set to issue his quartet album *Contemptment*. This is Preminger's first Blindfold Test.

Walter Smith III

"The Peacocks" (*Twio*, Whirlwind 2018) Smith, tenor saxophone; Harish Ragavhan, bass; Eric Harland, drums.

That's Walter Smith, "The Peacocks," correct? I'm not super familiar with his playing. He strikes me as somebody who's really confident in what he has to say. I feel like he's very confident in what he knows and what his abilities are. He doesn't try to fill up space. He's a melodic player. He has a very monotone sound to me; it's very even. He doesn't have a particularly big sound—sort of like a Joe Henderson kind of thing. I really like that drummer, but I can't put a name to who that is. Nice track: concise, short-and-sweet, good energy. I would give that 3½ stars.

Artemis

"Frida" (*Artemis*, Blue Note, 2020) Melissa Aldana, tenor saxophone; Anat Cohen, bass clarinet, clarinet; Ingrid Jensen, trumpet; Renee Rosnes, piano; Noriko Ueda, bass; Alison Miller, drums.

That track sounds so 2010s to me. Frank Kimbrough told me that if a tune has that many hits, it's just not worth playing it. The tenor player has clearly got some chops and a nice even tone, but he never felt really comfortable on the tune, never really dug into the time at all.

[after] No kidding? I've only heard her a couple times. The first time she was coming straight out of Brecker, which is what is on this track. The next two times I heard her she was coming straight out of Mark Turner's playing. That ensemble, that tune, doesn't help, either. It sounds like somebody wrote a tune for their college recital, and they all got together that day to run it down, and then they tried to play it that night. I'm going to give that 1½ stars.

Chris Potter

"You And The Night And The Music" (*Concentric Circles*, Concord, 1994) Potter, alto saxophone; Kenny Werner, piano; Scott Colley, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

Everything about that track sounds familiar. The bass player is very Charlie Haden-esque. The alto player has a lot of freedom in his fingers, which is something I love to hear. His fingers don't necessarily hold him back, which is a sign of a real improviser. I could sing the solo to you. Beautiful playing, and they play beautifully together.

I'm just cycling through alto players right now. It's a tenor player playing alto? I knew it wasn't an alto player, because I can hear it in his sound. Oh, man, I'm going to hate myself for asking you who it is, but who is it? [after] No, is it really? What record is that on? OK. It doesn't sound like Chris Potter. I give it 3½ stars.

Immanuel Wilkins

"Ferguson—An American Tradition" (*Omega*, Blue Note, 2020) Wilkins, alto saxophone; Micah Thomas, piano; Daryl Johns, bass; Kweku Sumbry, drums.

Whoever the alto player is, I really like him. He expresses himself in different ways with the horn that aren't so common. It sounds like he's really looking for some other shit, and is really expressive. It adds a lot to the music. I know there's that new guy, who's getting a lot of work on alto ... Wilkins? Clearly Immanuel Wilkins has a bright future. He can play his



ass off. I look forward to hearing his next record. I would give that 4 stars. They sound great together.

James Brandon Lewis

"Haden Is Beauty" (*An UnRuly Manifesto*, 2019) Lewis, tenor saxophone; Jaimie Branch, trumpet; Luke Stewart, bass; Anthony Pirog, guitar; Warren Trae Crudup III, drums.

That was great, man. 5 stars. I have no idea who that was. It obviously brings to mind Ornette [Coleman], "What Reason Could I Give," that first track off of *Science Fiction*. Beautiful front-line ensemble playing, and the consistent rumble from the rhythm section. It's understated and kind of a folk melody. It serves a purpose, this tune. I think it misses nothing. I enjoyed every minute of it. Somebody like that, I should see their name everywhere.

Act

"Subway Song" (*Act II*, 2015) Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone; Harish Raghavan, bass; Nate Wood, drums.

Killing. Give them all the stars, and I got a message to the gatekeepers—you know, the cats that run the scene: *That* shit works! Music like that is music that should be performed, in public, in front of an audience. That's who you hustle for. Nice balance, nice tone, has a lot to say. He's got that whiskey tongue but he makes it work for him. I don't know what the rest of this cat's music sounds like, but I want to hear it, 'cause it's terrific. I could listen to that all day. Great sound on the recording. Now, you have to tell me: Who was that?

[after] Get out of here—wow. Well, all I'll say is I wish Ben would make more music like that. I can't believe that's Ben Wendel. I'm going to write him a message after hearing that.

Garzone/Erskine/Pasqua/Oles

"The Honeymoon" (*3 Nights In L.A.*, Fuzzy Music 2019) George Garzone, tenor saxophone; Peter Erskine, drums; Alan Pasqua, piano; Darek Oles, bass.

I feel like I've heard that a billion times. It's super swinging. The tenor player's got free fingers, which I love. And he's doing shit articulation-wise that creates tension and release. He's doing shit time-wise—behind the beat, on the beat, on top of the beat, in the beat—that creates tension and release. Harmonically, he's all over the horn. Yeah, I love that style of playing. Is that Jerry Bergonzi? Garzone? OK, yeah. I studied with George my freshman year in college when I was 18. We had 6 a.m. lessons. I would stay up until my lesson at 6, and then I would go to sleep after it and miss all my classes. I'm so happy that was Garzone. I've got to transcribe that solo.

DB

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.

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