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DOWNBEAT

APRIL 2022

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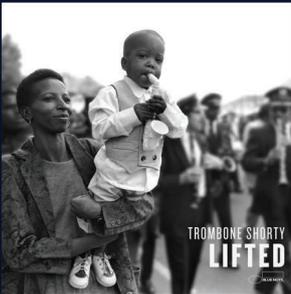
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APRIL 2022

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BY PHILLIP LUTZ

The tenor saxophonist's musical journey has been sprinkled with stardust and hard work. The latest example? Being signed to Blue Note and presenting her latest recording, *12 Stars*. Aldana sits down with contributor Phillip Lutz for an update.

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"It's just music — it's not culture, it's not gender, it's that moment," Melissa Aldana said of connecting with an audience.

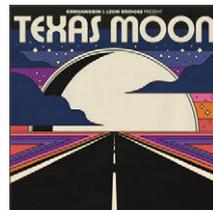
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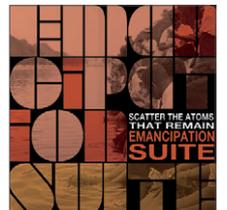
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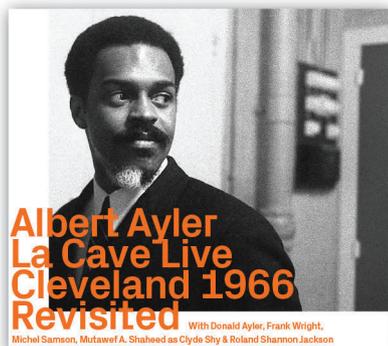
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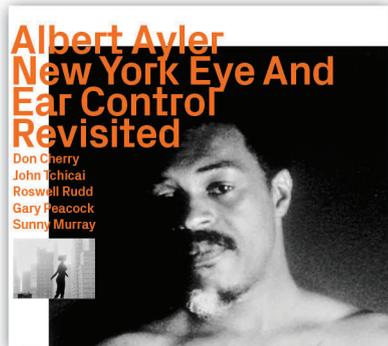
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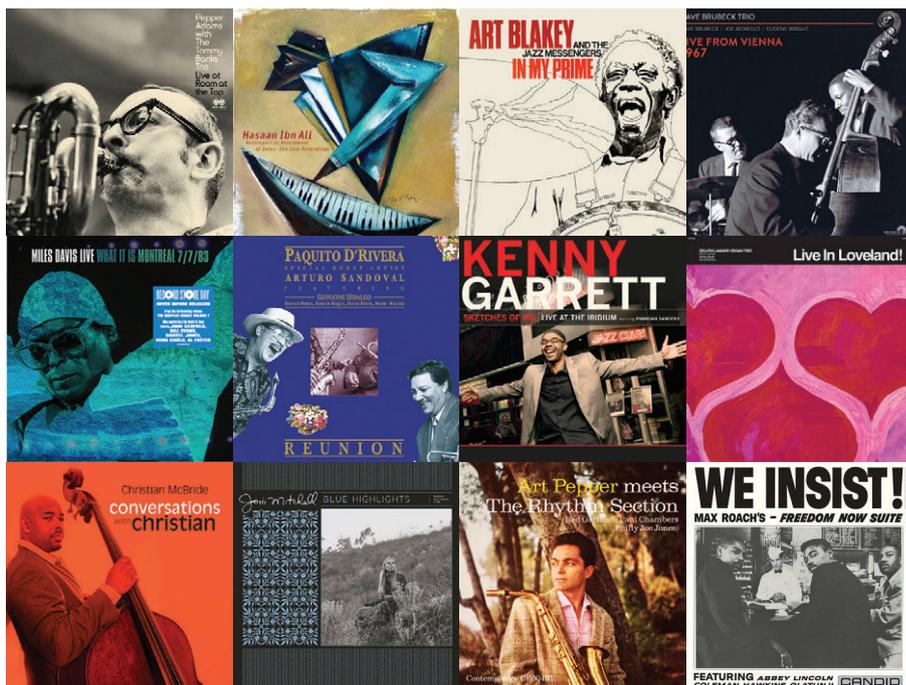
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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



More Record Store Day Gems

AT PRESS TIME, DOWNBEAT RECEIVED THE long-awaited release of Record Store Day drops for April 23. We had already been clued in on some (see We Love Vinyl! starting on page 37), but there are plenty more scheduled for release. Here are a few we're looking forward to spinning.

Pepper Adams with The Tommy Banks Trio, *Live At Room At The Top* (Reel to Real): Reel to Reel dishes out a previously unreleased concert from the baritone saxophonist, a 70-minute performance recorded in 1972. The liner notes feature interviews with bari stalwarts Frank Basile and Gary Smulyan.

Hasaan Ibn Ali, *Retrospect In Retirement Of Delay: The Solo Recordings* (Omnivore): Now on vinyl as a four-LP set, this retrospective of the late pianist's work received 5 stars in the February issue of DownBeat. "Add Hasaan Ibn Ali to the pantheon of great jazz pianists," said critic Carlo Wolff in praising the work.

Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers, *In My Prime* (Tidal Waves): Originally released by Timeless Records as two volumes, this package brings the complete *In My Prime* sessions under one roof. Recorded in New York on Dec. 29, 1977, it's a deluxe, 180-gram, two-LP edition.

Dave Brubeck Trio, *Live From Vienna 1967* (Brubeck Editions): Brubeck Editions continues to mine the archives with this live performance featuring the master with his classic bandmates Joe Morello on drums and Gene Wright on bass. Where's Paul Desmond? He missed the plane to Vienna.

Miles Davis, *What It Is: Montreal 7/83* (Legacy): This two-LP set features a late-Miles group at the Montreal Jazz Fest with John Scofield, guitar; Bill Evans, saxophone, flute and electric piano; Darryl Jones, bass; Al Foster, drums; and percussionist Mino Cinelu.

Paquito D'Rivera & Arturo Sandoval, *Reunion* (Messidor): This was the first time reedman Paquito D'Rivera and trumpeter Arturo Sandoval recorded together after both had defected from Cuba — D'Rivera in 1980, and Sandoval a decade later.

Kenny Garrett, *Sketches Of MD: Live At The Iridium* (Mack Avenue): The great alto saxophonist pays tribute to his ancestors — in song, to Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter, and in person to guest artist Pharoah Sanders. This one's numbered, colored vinyl for RSD.

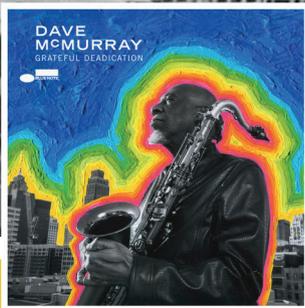
Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio, *Live In Loveland!* (Colemine): Remember when RSD was a major live event? It will be once again this April, and this album — recorded live on RSD 2018 at Plaid Room Records in Loveland, Ohio — serves as a reminder. It was a celebration of the band's release *Live At KEXP*.

And here are just a few more late-breaking RSD releases to add to your shopping list: **Christian McBride, *Conversations* (Mack Avenue); Joni Mitchell, *Blue Highlights* (Rhino/Warner); *Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section [Mono]* (Craft); and Max Roach's *Freedom Suite Now* (We Insist).** DB

More info: recordstoreday.com

Dave McMurray

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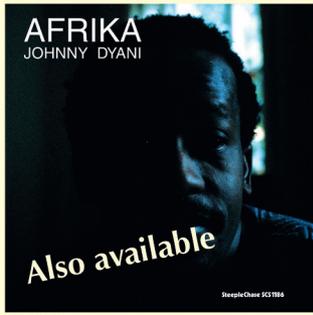
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Chords & Discords

Barry Harris, the Ultimate Jazz Advocate

I am a loyal admirer and student as well as a lifetime friend of pianist Barry Harris.

Adding to Ed Enright's "In Memoriam" tribute for Barry in DownBeat's February edition, I must say that Barry Harris was one of the greatest and most underrated jazz pianists since the 1950s as well as one of jazz's most inspiring educators and strongest advocates for jazz in its most essential expression. Barry has left this world with many adoring students like myself. And we are committed to continuing Barry Harris' message of jazz excellence and non-compromising playing of creative and swinging bebop music.

The world at large may never come to fully appreciate the enormous contributions Barry



In Memoriam: Barry Harris, 1929–2021

PIANIST BARRY HARRIS, AN R&B JAZZ titan in his young profile as a first-call pianist, has now faded from the scene. Harris was born in New York City in 1929 and began playing piano at a young age. He was a member of the bebop movement and played with legends like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk. Harris was a prolific composer and educator, and his influence on jazz piano is immeasurable. He passed away in 2021 at the age of 92.

Harris has made in his hundreds of brilliant recordings and live performances with the very finest of jazz's other creative giants like Coleman Hawkins, Sonny Stitt, Charles McPherson, Dexter Gordon, Lee Morgan, Cannonball Adderley, Eddie Jefferson, Sonny Red and Hank Mobley. But the spirit and the soul of jazz will continue to live on because of the many beautiful people like Barry Harris who came into the world, shared their love of music and have left us without the recognition that should be given to such amazing human beings.

Many, many thanks to Barry Harris for his lifetime of devotion to some of the greatest bebop ever played,

RAMA KUMAR
FAIRFAX, CALIFORNIA

In Memoriam: John Goodsall

I am disappointed DownBeat hasn't mentioned the passing of John Goodsall in Final Bar. When the guitarist died in November, it marked the end of the celebrated British fusion band Brand X, according to original keyboardist Robin Lumley and founding bassist Percy Jones.

Though seen by some as a side project for Genesis drummer/vocalist Phil Collins, over the course of the band's history it featured numerous drummers, including Kenwood Denard, Pierre Moerlen, Mike Clark and Kenny Grohowski, alongside various percussionists and keyboardists; the two constants were Jones and Goodsall.

Goodsall's breathtaking leads fueled many of the band's tunes, as on "And So To F" and "The Poke." I remember once reading an article on Pat Metheny that praised his "violin-like fluidity." I thought at the time the only other guitarist to whom I would attach such a description was John Goodsall.

I was fortunate to see the band perform three times, with 38 years separating the second and third shows. The guys were still on fire.

ROSS BOISSONEAU
VIA EMAIL

Not Enough Metheny Love

Is there any reason DownBeat didn't review *From This Place* and *Side Eye* by Pat Metheny?

CHAZ WEGGLER
VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: Yes. We did major features with Pat Metheny when both of those

albums came out. In an effort to spread the love and include as many artists as possible in each issue, we try to give artists either a review or a feature. That said, those albums would have been well reviewed.

UNT Memories

Your fine tribute to the University of North Texas jazz program took me back to 1960 when I was a staff member of the first national Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival. The (then) North Texas State One O'Clock Lab Band ventured to the wintery plains of Indiana and swept the top awards — with Stan Kenton as a judge and national press. Jazz education got a huge boost.

DAVID SOMMER
VIA EMAIL

Corrections & Clarifications

- DownBeat regrets these errors:
- In the February issue, Lauren Deutsch's great photos of the trio Artifacts were taken at Estrada Poznanska in Poland, not Chicago's Constellation.
 - In the February issue, Alan Baylock's name was misspelled. He is the award-winning director of the University of North Texas One O'Clock Lab Band.
 - In the March issue, Steven Feifke's new recording *Kinetic* came out on the label Outside In Music, not La Reserve.

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Alexander Flood & Alexis Cole

"Keith's thing was startling," pianist Craig Taborn says of *Facing You*.



COURTESY ECM RECORDS

Jarrett's Seminal *Facing You* Turns 50

A half century has passed since Keith Jarrett released his first solo piano album, *Facing You* (also his first recording for ECM), which altered the course of jazz. With the announcement last fall of Jarrett's retirement following strokes he suffered in 2018, the 50th anniversary of *Facing You* becomes cause for both celebration and a bit of sadness.

"For me, it changed everything," pianist Kenny Werner said of the seminal album. "He introduced a totally fresh way of playing over his changes. It sounded totally original."

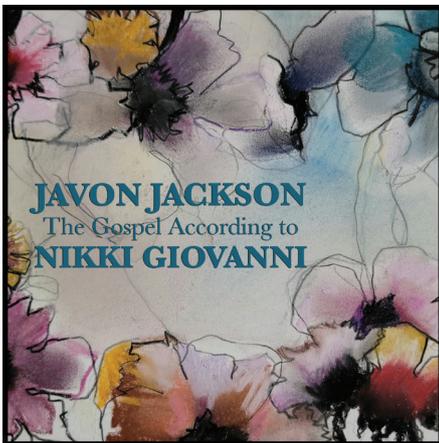
Just 26 years old when *Facing You* came out, Jarrett had come to the fore with Charles Lloyd on the wildly popular 1967 album *Forest Flower* and had gone on to form his own trio and quartet, in addition to working with Miles Davis on *Bitches Brew* and *Live/Evil* in 1970-'71. The pianist originally planned a solo album for Columbia, but the label dropped his contract, so when ECM's Manfred Eicher extended an invitation, Jarrett jumped.

"If I hadn't found him there would still be no solo albums, no *Facing You*, let alone a successful triple album," Jarrett told *Down*

Beat in October, 1974, referring to the subsequent 1975 set, *The Köln Concert*.

Though never as popular as *Köln*, which so far has sold more than 4 million copies, *Facing You* was the beginning — step one of a long journey that has led listeners and musicians to a vast, robust, new musical territory.

Recorded in Oslo, Norway, on Nov. 10, 1971, during a day off from touring with Davis, *Facing You* was released in March of the following year. It was a turbulent time. The Vietnam War (and the protests against it), Watergate, the Arab assassination of



"Giovanni curates a wealth of hymns and spirituals that the saxophonist addresses with grace and gravity. The poet's vocal on 'Night Song' is a goosebump event that drops a balm."

— Jim Macnie, *DownBeat*

"Jackson's gentle foray into the blurry space between jazz and the sacred elucidates: With this album he gives a musical face to the human suffering that forged these venerable melodies. As a one-off vocalist, Giovanni delivers heartache and solace in equal measure."

— Suzanne Lorge, *DownBeat*

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Israeli Olympians, disturbance in Ireland, racial strife in the U.S. and a younger generation in open rebellion against the old order — all of this dominated the headlines.

And yet it was also a time of tremendous optimism, change and possibility, as Apollo 17 beamed back photography of Earth, the Equal Rights Amendment was passed by Congress, and Eastern spirituality and Western psychology had a baby called the human potential movement, all of it ushering a shift from '60s communalism to the primacy of the personal that flowered in the '70s.

Indeed, Jarrett can be read as an icon of that era, though his profound and original project surely transcended the treacherously self-absorption of the New Age pianists who later claimed him as an inspiration. Sitting alone at a grand piano on a concert stage, Jarrett was facing the keyboard, as it were, but also facing you, the listener, with an open heart. It was as if Jarrett coolly observed clouds of musical thought pass by — snippets of jazz, classical, folk, country, blues, boogie woogie, pop, gospel — and somehow pulled them down to Earth for all to see.

And even more miraculous, it all made sense, which seemed to suggest that the universe was not random at all, but actually ordered already, if only you just listened hard enough. Yes, others had played solo piano before, Art Tatum and Cecil Taylor, for example. Chick Corea and Paul Bley would both release solo albums within months of *Facing You* (also thanks to Eicher). But no one had ever heard anything quite like Jarrett.

"Keith's thing was startling even amidst the Chick one, or Paul Bley's albums," reflected pianist Craig Taborn, whose recent solo effort, *Shadow Plays*, takes Jarrett's influence to a new level. "It was still like, 'What's this? What's this one?' That's what always hits me about *Facing You*. It sounds fresh that way. A lot of how pianists play today owes so much to that."

The fact that *Facing You* was released in an era dominated by electric jazz-rock fusion seeking to reclaim young listeners from rock (Quincy Jones' *Smackwater Jack* and Davis' *On The Corner* topped the 1972 jazz charts), it's all the more intriguing that such a contrary strategy would succeed. But Jarrett drew in non-jazzers with rumbling, soulful ostinatos and unabashedly gorgeous melodies in the mode of 19th century romantic piano music.

Perhaps even more impressive than his reconciliation of jazz and rock, Jarrett also made peace with the seriously regarded "free" music rising in opposition to



straightahead jazz by devising, as Werner points out, "a new way of playing on changes" that was both inside and outside. Instead of declaring a tune then improvising on its form, he improvised tunes, then invented forms on the fly by creating variations on a motif here, a chord progression there, or a wild excursion out of nowhere, then returning to whatever suited his fancy, whenever he felt like it, with long breathing spaces in between.

Critical reception was ecstatic. In a review for *Rolling Stone* that also addressed Jarrett's American quartet albums *Expectations* and *Birth*, the late Robert Palmer declared that *Facing You* "may well be the finest album of jazz piano solos since Art Tatum left us, and it is without a doubt the most creative and satisfying solo album of the past few years." The Canadian jazz magazine *Coda* called *Facing You* "a classic that stands as the ultimate achievement of the artist who has, after years of searching, found himself."

As both Taborn and Werner observe, *Facing You* still sounds remarkably fresh. With eight almost totally improvised tracks totaling just 46:14, it is more compact than many later albums, with fewer long vamps and more pre-composed material. Yet, like everything that followed, the album projects that sense of precarious, in-the-moment possibility that became Jarrett's trademark.

From the opening track, "In Front" — which starts as if we've caught the pianist in the middle of a thought, then rides an ambiguous, broken, two-handed rhythm to churchy, ecstatic joy — to the album's resolution, "Semblence," which returns to the same feel, but with speedy runs and a hard, glassy surface, *Facing You* feels like one long, coherent conversation with a muse whose mercurial moods shift easily from serene to rhapsodic, from troubled to spacey, from melancholy to sublime.

Its notes still ring around the world.

—Paul de Barros

THE SOUND OF SMOKE



Pianist Bill O'Connell was trained as a classical composer, but dedicated his life to jazz.

Bill O'Connell's Hope for Change

BEST KNOWN AS AN INSPIRED HYBRIDIZER of modernist jazz and Afrodiasporic idioms as an improviser and composer, Bill O'Connell moves in a funkier, Black American Music direction on *Change Is Gonna Come*, his first recorded encounter with master drummer Steve Jordan. For his 17th album (and eighth for Savant), the 68-year-old pianist convened Jordan, bassist Lincoln Goines, conguero Pedrito Martinez and saxophonist Craig Handy last May.

The O'Connell-Jordan relationship dates to 1980, when they played on a month-long tour with Sonny Rollins, the dedicatee of "Sun For Sonny," a rollicking calypso. They hit it off and stayed in touch, sharing the bandstand at a few benefit concerts — including a 2015 tribute to Rollins — sponsored by the Jazz Foundation of America, where Jordan served as musical director. At some point in 2020, after COVID-19 struck, O'Connell told his old friend: "We're all not getting any younger. We've waited 40 years. Let's do a record together."

O'Connell spoke via Zoom from his home in Montauk, Long Island, where he conceptualized the seven originals and three O'Connellized covers that constitute the proceedings. "Steve is a very wide guy," said O'Connell, who exploits Jordan's idiomatic breadth and interactive instincts for what Hank Jones once called the "perfect tempo."

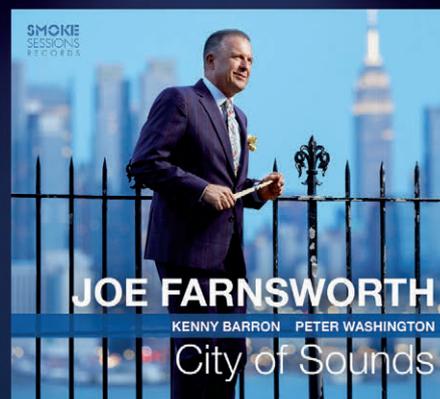
On the set-opening "Moment's Notice," Jordan lays down a thematically cohesive admixture of backbeats and swing, allowing O'Connell — his fluid chops and personal refraction of Hancock-Tyner-Evans-Corea vocabulary on full display — to enable the flow to breathe. Jordan personalizes the Elvin Jones 3-feel on "Enough Is Enough," a soul blues highlighted by Craig Handy's wailing tenor solo; funks out on a stop-time treatment of "My Foolish Heart"; and seamlessly switches with Martinez between Afro-Latin and swing on "Chaos," a turbulent 5/4 theme with Eddie Palmieri-esque connotations.

"Chaos" evokes O'Connell's long association with the Fort Apache Band, which he joined in 1990 as a sub for Larry Willis on the say-so of Steve Berrios, a close friend from their days playing with Mongo Santamaria between 1977 and 1979. As Santamaria had done in the early 1960s with Herbie Hancock, he also encouraged O'Connell to write, and he placed O'Connell's Hancockish "Little T" on the Grammy-winning *Amanecer*. "I came to the music from a humble place, with respect, not being a Latino," O'Connell said. "Steve respected that, but he also heard how I had eyes to stretch with Latin jazz."

O'Connell joined Santamaria a few years after arriving in Manhattan's East Village from Oberlin Conservatory, where he'd studied the modern European canon. "I was into being a classical composer," O'Connell said. "But jazz combined the sophistication I was looking for in music with the earth and the swing — I was determined to pursue it and develop myself as a jazz pianist." He studied with Richie Beirach; networked with up-and-comers like Jim McNeely, Michael Wolff and Dennis Irwin at his college roommate's Union Square loft; and embedded himself in New York's then-vibrant Latin scene, learning the art of montuno construction.

As the '80s progressed, O'Connell eschewed leader ambitions for the security of sideman gigs with, among others, Jon Lucien, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Astrud Gilberto, Gato Barbieri and Dave Valentin (an employer and colleague until his death in 2017). "I wanted a balanced life, between family and kids, and the New York sideman thing worked for me," said O'Connell, who raised four children with his wife of 33 years. "I led gigs occasionally, but not from necessity. I'm a writer. Ideas for new projects and new music are always in my head, and in order to do what I wanted, I had to jump out more on my own. From 2000 on, I've consistently put out what I'm thinking about."

—Ted Panken





"There's just a lot of stuff that I needed to get out," said Grdina.

Gordon Grdina: The Artist as Label Head

VANCOUVER-BORN GUITARIST GORDON

Grdina remembers the moment, at age 13, that he first heard the sound of the Middle Eastern oud, the centuries-old forerunner of the European lute.

"My guitar teacher played me a record (*Saltanah*, on Water Lily Acoustics)," he recalled. "I was playing a lot of blues at the time and a little bit of slide, and he thought I'd be interested in the Indian slide guitar player Vishna Mohan Bhatt. But when I heard Simon Shaheen playing the oud on that album, it blew my mind. I loved the sound of it, and I couldn't wrap my head around how it was being made. So I started listening to master oud players like Simon and Hamza El Din. Rabih Abou-Khalil was a big influence, too, in terms of doing a more hybrid thing with the instrument. But I wanted to be respectful of the tradition and learn as much as I could, and eventually come up with new ideas to create something that's more honest for my own expression."

Grdina has done precisely that. As an emissary of Iraqi and Arabic style oud playing, he has continued to put his stamp on the 11-stringed instrument since the release of his first recording as a leader, 2006's *Think Like Waves*, with the venerated rhythm tandem of bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Paul Motian. He made further inroads on 2008's *...If Accident Will* and followed with a trio of introspective solo classical guitar/oud projects with 2018's JUNO Award-winning *China Cloud*, 2020's *Prior Street* and 2021's *Pendulum*. His mission continues with two stirring releases on his new label Attaboygirl Records — *Night's Quietest Hour* and *Oddly Enough: The*

Music Of Tim Berne.

Since forming Attaboygirl last year with photographer and partner Genevieve Monro, Grdina has been on a roll. The label was launched in October 2021 with the simultaneous releases of the solo *Pendulum* and the debut of his Square Peg quartet with viola ace Mat Maneri, bassist Shahzad Ismaily and drummer Christian Lillinger on *Klotski*. *Night's Quietest Hour*, released in February, is a collection of traditional Iraqi and Arabic tunes performed with Grdina's folk music ensemble Haram. It features guest guitarist Marc Ribot's distortion-laced skronking over the tightly knit ensemble on intricate numbers such as the traditional Turkish tune "Longa Nahawand," the Sudanese song "Sala Min Shaaraha" and the Syrian tune "Dulab Bayati."

"Ribot's been a hero of mine for a long time," Grdina said. "He added a whole lot of energy and excitement as well as a punk-rock aesthetic to these pieces. Marc blended into the ensemble from the beginning and his presence pushed the group's delicacy, intensity and explosive nature to new heights. The record is five songs but in concert we did 12 different pieces from older repertoire, and he had such a great time [that] he played on everything with us."

The compelling solo project *Oddly Enough*, also released in February, finds Grdina exploring Berne's music on acoustic guitar, oud and a customized electric guitar fitted with MIDI pickups.

"Lost in Redding," for instance, has him triggering an acoustic bass sample along with tabla, piano, Fender Rhodes and various electron-

ic sounds, all in real time with no overdubs. As he said about tackling Berne's work, "The compositions are incredibly complex, personal and harmonically unique. The linear way he writes for bands like Blood Count, Science Friction and Snake Oil, I really connect with. And I wanted to get that quality in a different way on my own. I had already done a bunch of acoustic records so I wanted to try and do something electric. I wanted to use the amps in the big room and get a huge electric guitar sound there. That's why I did this album in a studio instead of doing it at my house."

While three songs on *Oddly Enough* — "Snippet," "I Don't Use Hair Products" and "Pliant Squids" — are strictly live solo guitar pieces, three others involve overdubs. For instance, "Trauma One" features guitar and oud navigating in unison through Berne's knotty lines. The title track has two electric guitars (one through an octave pedal) engaged in frantic counterpoint.

Upcoming on Attaboygirl is another project called *Gordon Grdina's The Twain*, featuring electric koto player Michio Yagi and drummer Tamaya Honda of the Japanese improv duo Dōjō, and singer Koichi Makigami, who doubles on theremin and cornet. Being released as a co-promotion between Attaboygirl and Black Dot, a vinyl record label from Vancouver Island, it's part of a flood of releases the prolific guitarist-oud master has put out during the pandemic.

"There's just a lot of stuff that I needed to get out," he said. "I want to be able to get things out quicker, where what I'm releasing is closer to what I'm actually working on." —Bill Milkowski

DAVID RESCE (PINK SUN PRODUCTIONS)



"Even if we're not intentionally doing it, we are constantly trying to reach out," said Alexander Flood.

Alexander Flood: From Australia with Drums

MILES DAVIS FAMOUSLY ADVISED: "DON'T play what is there, play what is not there." Alexander Flood incorporates that guidance on his invigorating sophomore album, *The Space Between* (Ropeadope Records/Stretch Music).

As a skillful drummer and percussionist, he creates grooves that accentuate his versatility and virtuosity in playing multiple cosmopolitan rhythms while allowing the music to breathe and take shape.

"To me, rhythm is not the notes; it's the space between the notes," the 25-year-old Flood explained. "If you just have a bunch of notes with no spaces or rests, you just have subdivision. But as soon as you break up the notes with space and rests, then you suddenly have rhythm. It's the space between the notes that ultimately creates rhythm and variation."

The Space Between has another connotation. It plays into the polyglot nature of the music on which Flood deftly switches between 21st century soul-jazz and hip-hop and modern jazz fusion, while also infusing rhythms, melodies and textures from West Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, Brazil and Asia.

The album kicks off with "All For The Pocket," a hip-hop manifesto that sounds as if it could have been recorded in Philly, especially thanks to Nelson Dialect's soulful rhymes and the creamy keyboard flourishes wafting atop of Flood's sinewy backbeats and crackling snare. After Ben Kepron delivers a snazzy electric piano solo followed by Tyler Venter's howling electric guitar, the rhythm soon evolves into a pulsating go-go groove that would make any Washington, D.C.-based band proud.

Growing up in Adelaide, Australia, Flood didn't hear go-go music there. But once he got a taste of it, after visiting friends in D.C. three years ago, he was hooked. "When they played some of

the music, I thought, 'Wow! This is some of the funkier music I've ever heard in my life,'" he recalled.

Flood, however, wasn't content on mimicking go-go music's distinctive buoyant patterns on his own; he invited Brion "BeeJay" Scott, a master go-go conguero from D.C. — as well as Kepron and his brother Nick, both of whom are also from D.C. — to authenticate the vibe. "I was so fortunate to have their help in piece it together properly and not just faking go-go music," Flood said.

Other highlights include the samba powered "LDN"; the enchanting "Starseed," which features Vivian Sessoms singing lyrics in English and Nigeria's Igbo dialect; and the anthemic "Pathways," which features Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah's plangent trumpet passages. Ever since connecting with Adjuah several years ago, first at a jazz festival in Australia then more directly after checking out his shows on a Blue Note at the Sea Cruise, the trumpeter has become a championing mentor for Flood.

"[Adjuah] has been a huge mentor for my musical development both as an artist from the creative side as well someone on the music business side," Flood enthused. "He helped me understand signing to record labels, getting publishing rights and licensing music. From where I'm from, there's no easy way of learning all the business side of the music industry. He's the most generous person in so many ways — with his time, enthusiasm, wisdom and resources."

When asked what attracts him to Flood's musicality, Adjuah said, "his openness."

"We tend to draw lines about which culture is eligible for whatever kind of music, or who can actually play whatever culture," he said. "Flood is really open-hearted and willing to recognize and reference all of the different cultural perspectives that had light in them." —John Murph

Final Bar >

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE



Khan Jamal, 1946–2022: The vibes legend who founded the Sounds of Liberation band in 1970 died Jan. 10 at age 75. Jamal was raised in Philadelphia, where he played with the Cosmic Forces before joining The Sun Ra Arkestra and then the Untouchable Factor led by Sunny Murray. He consistently ranked among the world's best vibes players in DownBeat's annual Critics and Readers polls.

Jimmy Johnson, 1928–2022: Blues master Jimmy Johnson passed away at his home on Jan. 31 after suffering a stroke. He



was 93. Born James Earl Thompson in Holly Springs, Mississippi, Jimmy grew up in a musical family that included the late soul-singer Syl Johnson (see below) and bassist Mack (or Mack) Thompson. He began on the piano, switching to guitar. In 1950, he moved to Chicago, taking on a welding job. There he met his neighbor and mentor Magic Sam, of whom he once declared: "I saw Magic Sam and thought, 'I can do that.'"

Syl Johnson, 1936–2022: The younger brother of Jimmy Johnson and well-known soul singer passed away on Feb. 6. He was 85. A favorite of today's record collectors and hip-hop producers because of ear candy like "Different Strokes" and "Is It Because I'm Black," as well as his version of Al Green's "Take Me To The River," Johnson released dozens of albums across a half-century-long career.

Andy Kaufman, 1945–2021: The New York-born booking agent, club programmer, record producer and artist



manager passed away Dec. 14. He was 76. Kaufman was best known for the years he spent booking the Blue Note clubs in New York and Japan from 1989 to '95, and Birdland in New York from 1995 to 2005. He also managed the late vocalist Kevin Mahogany.

Blue Note: Uncompromising Expression

by Richard Havers

An official history of Blue Note Records in all of its breathtaking glory, this 400-page book features 600 illustrations that might just force buyers to reinforce their coffee tables. It's a stroll down memory lane with some of the most iconic album covers and images in jazz history as well as a number of terrific surprises. One catch: You'll have to wait until the release date in June to get your hands on it. Trust us, it will be worth the wait. (Thames & Hudson)

Ordering info: thamesandhudson.com

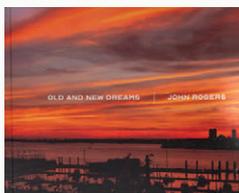


Old and New Dreams

by John Rogers

John Rogers, one of New York's grittiest, and best, jazz photographers, delivers his first book of images from decades on the beat. Rogers has the eye of an artist and an ear for music that plays toward adventure. Here, he captures more than 40 musicians at their best, including Billy Hart, Ornette Coleman, Andrew Cyrille, Jason Moran and Chris Potter. His work is in the moment, and right on time. (Independent Release)

Ordering info: johnrogersnyc.com

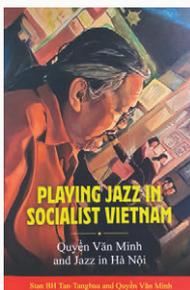


Playing Jazz in Socialist Vietnam

by Stan BH Tan-Tangbau and Quyên Van Minh

In a fascinating display of the endurance of jazz in every corner of the world, scholar Tan-Tangbau and saxophonist Van Minh diligently piece together the history, disappearance and resurrection of jazz in Vietnam through Minh's personal journey as a musician pursuing freedom through his music. (University of Mississippi Press)

Ordering info: upress.state.ms.us



JEREMY KIM

"There was no way I was just going to say goodbye to those arrangements," Cole said of the music she performed with the West Point Band Jazz Knights.

Alexis Cole Keeps Saluting Jazz

VOCALIST ALEXIS COLE HAS A CONFIDENT

understanding of how to interpret music in a manner that enralls an audience. It was evident last fall during a performance with her long-standing trio at the Jazz Forum in Tarrytown, New York, that featured music from her 12th album, *Sky Blossom: Songs From My Tour Of Duty*, released late last year. Although she performed mostly at the piano, singing centerstage, she launched into a long, scat-filled "All Blues," which received a rousing ovation and left her bassist David Finck and drummer Kenny Hassler shaking their heads in amazement.

The "tour of duty" Cole references harkens back to 2009, after the then-33-year-old decided to audition for the West Point Band's Jazz Knights. She got the job, enlisted in the U.S. Army to seal the deal and completed basic training. Later, Staff Sergeant Cole rehearsed in the morning each day at West Point, then hit her desk job on the Hudson Valley campus until evening, when she would head back to her arts housing flat in Peekskill and run into New York City for gigs.

When Cole's first tour of duty was finished, she re-enlisted for another three years in 2012 — around the same time she headed into a studio to start working on the solo album *A Kiss In The Dark*. After her discharge, Cole dove back into jazz full-time, but her years singing at West Point left her with the idea of someday putting together an album of big band arrangements, like those that Scott Arcangel of the Jazz Knights had written specially for her.

While at the Jazz Education Network Conference in January 2018, a fortuitous meeting with trumpeter Jeff Jarvis, who leads the California State University at Long Beach Concert Jazz Orchestra, jumpstarted the big band project. Cole and Jarvis started recording tracks, and though the pandemic stalled studio work for several months, the album was completed in early 2021.

"Working with the Jazz Knights was a special experience for me," Cole said. "Scott's writing is so gorgeous. I loved being part of that overall texture. There was no way I was just going to say goodbye to those arrangements."

Along with a busy performing schedule, Cole has intertwined work as an educator with a sweep of entrepreneurship. Currently, she leads the jazz vocal programs at the Conservatory of Music at SUNY Purchase College, William Paterson University and Western Connecticut State University. She launched *JazzVoice.com*, an online educational community with more than 1,200 members and teaching help from the likes of Sheila Jordan, Catherine Russell, Tierney Sutton, Cyrille Aimée and Kate McGarry, in 2020. The following year she co-founded the annual Virginia Beach Vocal Jazz Summit.

Pete Malinverni, veteran pianist-composer and chair of the Jazz Studies program at Purchase College, noted that he resurrected the school's Jazz Voice concentration in tribute to his late wife, the jazz singer Jody Sandhaus, and now it is the "crown jewel" of the jazz program because of Cole, whom he calls "a monumental force."

"Alexis takes care of her students' voices as well as their hearts, while making sure they can write great, professional-looking charts to bring onto the bandstand," Malinverni says. "In short, she has been perfect for us."

Cole finished her 10-song set at the Jazz Forum with her bravura arrangement of Cole Porter's "Night And Day," flashing piano skills that matched her winning vocals. The tune will be found on her next recording, she says, a trio date planned for release at the end of this year.

"I like being in charge with the trio," she says. "I get to play around with these arrangements and be part of the band throughout. Having an opportunity to be in the middle of those rhythmic interactions makes my singing that much more fun."

—Tom Staudter



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Melissa Aldana

A SPRINKLE OF STARDUST

BY PHILLIP LUTZ
PHOTO BY EDUARDO PAVEZ GOYE

Melissa Aldana's musical journey has been sprinkled with stardust, from 1990s TV appearances as a saxophone prodigy in her native Chile to a 2019 Grammy nomination for a solo on "Elsewhere," off her last album, *Visions* (Motéma). In between, just as she was finding her footing in New York, Aldana won the Monk competition – the first female instrumentalist to do so – in 2013.

Now, at age 33, she is celebrating the release of *12 Stars*, her debut album on Blue Note. Eight tracks that mine the depths of her interpretive gift, the album, out March 4, yields a bounty of new material wrapped in a fresh sonic package that she will bring to a six-night release party at the Village Vanguard, her first booking as a leader at the storied club. As COVID permits, months of touring will follow.

But as she sat in the dressing room at Jazz at Lincoln Center on an early winter's night, all that stardust momentarily seemed irrelevant; indeed, a few stray particles fell to Earth. While she waited to take the stage at Dizzy's

Club as the sole woman in bassist Carlos Henriquez's acclaimed nonet, she revealed a profound melancholy of long standing.

"I always have this feeling of emptiness after I play a concert," she said. "This has been for years. Sometimes I can easily cry, and there's nothing wrong."

Her bearing did little to predict the sudden revelation. Eminently well prepared and solicitous of a visiting writer, she exuded the warm confidence of one not given to tears. Onstage, she was in full command, delivering a solo of such exquisite cogency on Henriquez's "Moses On The Cross" that Henriquez, caught between sets, was rapturous.





Aldana with quintet members Pablo Menares (bass), Sullivan Fortner (keyboards), Kush Abadey (drums) and Lage Lund (guitar/producer).

“You just don’t find people like that in this world,” he exclaimed.

Plaudits like that hardly account for the tears. In fact, praise for Aldana has become such a routine ego-boost before, during and long after the show that the standard-issue, post-performance letdown seems at best a superficial explanation. Those who know her well point to something deeper at work.

“It’s an existential emptiness,” said singer Cécile McLorin Salvant, a confidant and longtime admirer of Aldana’s who created the surreal cover art for both *Visions* and *12 Stars* and performed with her in the impactful all-woman group Artemis.

By Aldana’s own account, playing and being are for her so intertwined that the loss of one can complicate the other. “When I’m playing,” she said, “it’s such a beautiful experience to be in the moment. It’s something that’s so hard to just be. And after the concert, I’m just so sad to go back to my crazy head.”

Ironically, escaping her “crazy head” and entering others’ mental spaces has proved key to her extraordinary musicianship. The vehicle has been transcription. Starting as a child who dissected Charlie Parker solos under the tutelage of her father, saxophonist Marcos Aldana, she has turned transcription into a magnificent

‘There’s something about being vulnerable that’s a beautiful way to connect with people and know you’re not alone in your problems.’

obsession that can involve years of work delving into a single artist’s solos. The payoff: grasping intentions, internalizing concepts and gaining self-knowledge that can be used to find one’s voice.

“My process as a musician has always been imitating to understand, ‘Who am I?’” she said.

She has applied the process most consistently to the improvisations of Sonny Rollins — who she became enamored with to the point that she switched from alto to tenor — after hearing 1995’s *Sonny Rollins +3* at age 12. Opening a laptop in the Lincoln Center dress-

ing room, she called up a 2017 video of her soloing on “Without A Song,” a tune Rollins revisited many times. In the solo, her lines and counter lines evoke without imitating Rollins’ question-and-answer approach to thematic development, his liberal application of humor and his illiberal intolerance of substandard performance.

Rollins’ body English, in subdued form, is suggested as well.

“I’m trying to think like he’s thinking,” Aldana explained.

Adopting Rollins’ thinking has meant

going beyond the application of purely musical concepts; she has also acquired his legendary predilection for extreme practice. In the dressing room, she had spent hours practicing while her new apartment in Brooklyn was being renovated. That apartment has a soundproof booth in which she can play at full volume to her heart's content — no small consideration for a musician who, in the past decade, has moved at the rate of nearly once a year.

"She is the hardest-practicing musician I've ever met," Salvant said. "She logs the most amount of hours of anybody I know. On tour, we purposefully try to avoid being even remotely close to her in the hotel because you know that if there's going to be a lobby call, she's waking up early in the morning and going to be doing long tones for hours before we even leave."

Few would argue with the results. Don Was, president of the Blue Note label, said he signed her on the strength of a live recording she sent, his knowledge of her last album and her work with Artemis, whose most recent album, *Artemis*, was also on Blue Note. He had met her on Zoom but not in person.

"I think her mastery of the instrument is just remarkable," he said. "She's the real deal, transcending thinking about notes and tech-

nique to speaking through her instrument."

12 Stars, he said, had been made largely on her own. Along the way, she sent him some demos and the finished work. "When I heard it, I knew what she was doing because I was familiar with her earlier work, and I had a sense of where she was headed with these compositions and where it was going to end up."

As it happened, the album ended up in a different place than it would have had she not recruited Norwegian guitarist Lage Lund as producer and instrumentalist. In part, that reflects a radical suggestion on Lund's part. "He's the one who told me, 'Stop transcribing, maybe, before the album,'" she said. And that is what she did, though not without withdrawal pangs.

It's an open question whether freeing herself from the immediate influence of whom-ever she was transcribing brought her closer to what she wanted to say. Echoes of Rollins, Mark Turner and Don Byas — three favored transcription subjects — are not imperceptible. And the unmistakable qualities of her sound — transience and a capacious expressivity among them — are in evidence throughout the album.

Likewise in evidence, according to bassist Pablo Menares, a longtime musical partner

and friend from Chile who appears on *12 Stars* and *Visions*, is Lund's influence on a broader level: "This album is different from all the other albums. The core of the music, her own compositions, is so strong. And the collaboration with Lage brought something new to it. He brought his own aesthetic in his approach, sound-wise and rhythm-wise."

Lund first noticed Aldana as the standout at a jam session in the club Smalls more than a decade ago. His admiration increased after gigging with her in the United States and Europe. Though he originally had doubts about producing her album, he found himself drawn into the project as he offered, via electronic communications, increasingly detailed suggestions about the work as it progressed.

"At some point," he said, "it seemed, 'If I'm doing that and also very involved in writing stuff, I guess I'm producing it.'"

Among the challenges, he said, was finding ways to differentiate the tunes. In making changes, he tried to work with restraint. But a few of his changes were substantial, notably the one on "Intuition" in which he accelerated the melody in relation to the harmony to distinguish it from what had been a similarly patterned "The Bluest Eye."

On "Emilia," a highly personal piece

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Melissa Aldana, bassist Pablo Menares and drummer Kush Abadey perform in Central Park. "I remember feeling free," Aldana said.

inspired by visions of the daughter Aldana never had — or, she said, is yet to have — he and engineer James Farber concocted a particularly lush and layered cocktail mixing Lund’s guitar, Sullivan Fortner’s Rhodes piano and Menares’ bass. Amid the potent environment, Aldana’s disarming melody, at once haunting and haunted, survives intact. She first sang it into a voice recorder, she said, after hearing it in a dream.

“It’s the first and the last time that happened,” she said.

Near the end of the track, the melody fades and a child’s voice emerges. It is that of Lund’s older daughter, Leona, who was 7 at the time, singing a melody written by his other daughter, Indigo. Lund recorded the voice on his iPhone, added harmony and ran it through an audio processor, he said, “to make it seem like something you’d hear in a dream, almost in the distance.” The result functions as a coda whose qualities are distinct from the main work, even as they complement it. A pleased Aldana cited it as a testament to her trust in Lund.

“Lage is one of my closest friends,” she said. “I can talk to him for five hours. He knows exactly what’s happening, he knows the story.

So he knows to just go for it. He knew that was coming from a dream.”

Lund’s post-production effects are a distinguishing feature of the project. To achieve them, he said, he eschewed digitization in favor of “gizmos” like an analog lo-fi delay pedal. A guitar with an object manually placed in the strings produces a keyboard-like effect intended to add mystery without straying too far into outer space.

“It’s a lot of experimentation, and it’s not something I planned out,” Lund said.

Most of the basic tracks were recorded like a traditional jazz session, with Fortner on acoustic piano, save for two tunes, and the agile Kush Abadey on drums rounding out the quintet. Laid down over two days in May 2021 at the Samurai Hotel studio in Astoria, New York, all but two of the tracks were dispatched in one or two takes. One exception is the 39-second “Intro To Emilia,” a dreamy Menares improvisation that sets up the title piece. It was chosen from several improvisations he recorded.

The other exception is “Los Ojos De Chile” (“The Eyes Of Chile”), which, Lund said, was still being developed as the group went into the studio: “When we did the first take, I don’t

know if we all knew exactly what the form was. Everyone had so many notes on their charts.”

Aldana recalled an in-studio atmosphere of creative ferment, which ultimately fed the tune’s evocation of street-level chaos inspired by a social rebellion engulfing Santiago, her hometown. Taken literally, the tune’s title refers to eyes the police shot out during the demonstrations.

To prime herself for the experience, Aldana fell into default mode, awakening at 5 a.m. for four or five hours of early practice. “We were trying to figure out how to play it,” she said. “I was like, ‘I’m ready, let’s just do it.’” And the group dove in, producing multiple, diverse takes. “Every one sounded great.”

The version that made the cut has sharp-edged melodic contours, rough-hewn interplay among the rhythm section and, above it all, Aldana at her most animated — a whirlwind of anguished runs punctuated by plaintive cries at the top of her horn and, at one point, an ecstatic bellow at the bottom. It seems a rare moment of release.

If “Los Ojos” was the most difficult chart to unravel, the title track was probably the easiest. Originally called “Goodbye Song,” Aldana

said, it started life as a demo that came together in two fully formed parts on her upright piano. She wrote the first part in March 2020, marking the beginning of the pandemic and the breakup of her marriage, and finished the second part near the end of 2020. Thoughts of a Blue Note contract were far from her mind.

"I just started writing music because I was going through a deep personal process," she said.

Barely three minutes long — less than half the length of most of the tracks — the tune, Aldana said, was always intended to be the album's closer. On it, the hours she spent meditating on, and extrapolating from, the likes of Byas' "Stardust" are clear. Operating in the instrument's middle and upper ranges, she weaves tightly wound tonal twists with subtly shifting harmonies to tell the story of the pain and, perhaps, redemption of the year in which the piece was written. It constitutes a fitting final statement.

"It was the beginning and end of a personal cycle," she said. "It was like an awakening, realizing things about myself. There's something about being vulnerable that's a beautiful way to connect with people and know you're not alone in your problems."

Acquiring that knowledge has not always been easy, especially during the lockdown of 2020. Throughout the period, she, Menares and Abadey formed a bubble, meeting at her apartment for regular sessions that involved food, talk and — yes — a few tears along with heavy workshoping of the pieces that became *12 Stars*.

The camaraderie, she said, was more than helpful. But it may have been the events at which the trio was able to ply its trade for a live audience that got her through the period. And none, in retrospect, was more liberating than a modest gig in Central Park, where, on a wind-swept day in October of the lockdown year, the trio performed as part of Giant Step Arts' Walk With The Wind series.

"I remember feeling free," she said.

Playing with abandon for two hours under a bronze likeness of another storyteller, William Shakespeare, she clearly touched the assembled onlookers. Though Aldana was at the time developing the new pieces, she chose not to air them. Rather, she powered through a set mostly of standards, building her narratives within their classic structures and saving her more elastic self for "Elsewhere." Feeding off the crowd, she stretched the form as she stretched her body — to near the breaking point, as though physically reaching for notes that, even for a master of the altissimo, were unattainable.

"For me, seeing the people there is seeing the connection, the beautiful thing where we're all in one moment," she said. "It's just

music — it's not culture, it's not gender, it's that moment."

That moment, of course, was gone with the wind. With the artistic highs — and they are high, indeed — come the inevitable lows. And warding off the lows seems destined to be an ongoing affair.

Last summer, she showed up at Bar Bayeux in Brooklyn, where saxophonist and educator George Garzone, whom she described as her "main mentor, really like a father to me," was playing with his group.

Garzone, under whom she was a star student at Berklee College of Music (from which she graduated in 2010), recalled the night: "She was hanging out. I was talking with her about how she's setting up her life. She was learning how to be alone."

Aldana, too, recalled the night — and added a note of existential hope. It had not been easy, she said, but in the months since then, she had become more settled.

"I'm learning how to be," she said. "That's part of the musical journey." **DB**



The album cover features a photograph of Sharon Azrieli smiling, with a scenic view of a town and mountains in the background. The text on the cover includes "SHARON AZRIELI" at the top, "SECRET PLACES" in large letters, and "A Tribute to MICHEL LEGRAND" below it. A white banner at the bottom of the cover reads "Available March 4, 2022 in stores and all major streaming services".

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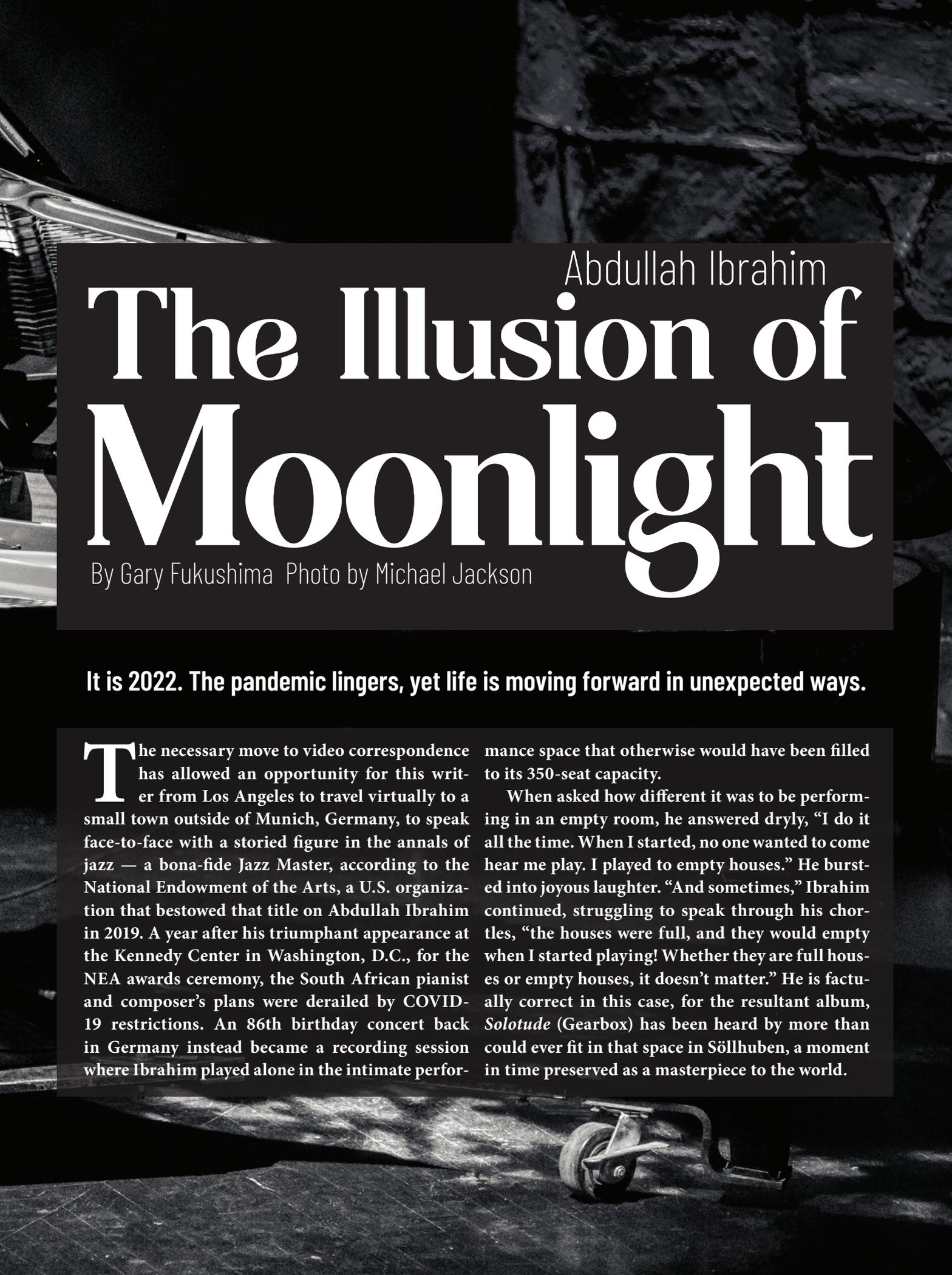
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Abdullah Ibrahim

The Illusion of Moonlight

By Gary Fukushima Photo by Michael Jackson

It is 2022. The pandemic lingers, yet life is moving forward in unexpected ways.

The necessary move to video correspondence has allowed an opportunity for this writer from Los Angeles to travel virtually to a small town outside of Munich, Germany, to speak face-to-face with a storied figure in the annals of jazz — a bona-fide Jazz Master, according to the National Endowment of the Arts, a U.S. organization that bestowed that title on Abdullah Ibrahim in 2019. A year after his triumphant appearance at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., for the NEA awards ceremony, the South African pianist and composer's plans were derailed by COVID-19 restrictions. An 86th birthday concert back in Germany instead became a recording session where Ibrahim played alone in the intimate perfor-

mance space that otherwise would have been filled to its 350-seat capacity.

When asked how different it was to be performing in an empty room, he answered dryly, "I do it all the time. When I started, no one wanted to come hear me play. I played to empty houses." He bursted into joyous laughter. "And sometimes," Ibrahim continued, struggling to speak through his chortles, "the houses were full, and they would empty when I started playing! Whether they are full houses or empty houses, it doesn't matter." He is factually correct in this case, for the resultant album, *Solitude (Gearbox)* has been heard by more than could ever fit in that space in Söllhuben, a moment in time preserved as a masterpiece to the world.



Abdullah Ibrahim's 2019 solo piano album *Dream Time (Enja)* was recorded in the same hall he returned to a year later for *Solitude*.

Yet, Ibrahim's viewpoint that crowd size doesn't matter is rooted in more than fact. "Let me put it this way," he explained. "We invest in loss. It's a strange concept. If you invest in loss, that takes care of the ego, because you don't expect anything in return. Once I strike [a] note, there's nothing I can do about it. I make my intention as clear and as truthful as possible. This is the idea of investing in loss. Since you don't expect anything in return, when you strike the note, you do so with the utmost sincerity. The idea is that we have to be cognizant and careful about what you say and do."

Clear intentions are evident on *Solitude*. Gone from his playing are the physically demanding displays of bombast and endurance from his heroic solo piano ruminations in the 1970s (perhaps a model for another solo-piano marathoner making a splash at that time, one Keith Jarrett). Now, Ibrahim's intention seems to be to induce an unhurried stream of melody and harmony, weaving tunes from the corners of his long life and career together into a singular tapestry of sustained thought. One piece will melt into another and back in a gentle hypnotic dance, conjuring a null-field of timeless-

ness that extends to infinity in all directions, something unknowable yet familiar ... and profoundly peaceful.

The gentle-giant approach comports with Ibrahim's current relationship to the piano. "The physical idea of sitting every day and practicing 20 hours — I used to do that. Now, it's not necessary. As with everything else," he clarified, "you continually try to get rid of all the unnecessary things, and you're just left with the bare tools that you use to express. It takes a minute ... or two ... a couple of years," he quipped, laughing. "There's a deep joy and an ongoing revelation. I'm using my own breath."

Already dealing in lofty principles, Ibrahim began to escalate into outer space. "It's an illusion that there is moonlight," he said. "What we perceive to be changes in the moon, the phases of the moon, it's also an illusion. In this massive universe, we are small little specks. It is designed that we can only function in the sphere of illusion, because the reality is so massive that we would not be able to bear it because it is so immense and awesome. The moonlight and the illusion help us some to find a glimpse of that vast reality. Every now and then, we are

able to experience it, and that is what happens when you play music, and this genre of music we call improvisation, and we call jazz."

Any perceived familiarity for those who have followed Ibrahim's output as of late might stem from his prior release, 2019's *Dream Time* (Enja), a solo piano album recorded in celebration of his 85th birthday, in the same hall that he returned to a year later for *Solitude*. The two albums are eerily similar in tone, tenor, and tunes — it would be difficult to tell them apart in a Blindfold Test.

When asked about the reasons behind releasing essentially an encore studio performance of a prior concert, Ibrahim answered coyly, "Well, that's what we do best." An awkward silence, followed by a clumsy attempt to ask the same question was met with more words but less clarity.

"Here we are again with this concept of illusion. The illusion that we also have with time. What is past is past, and what is future ... in our understanding, there is no past and there's no future, there is only now. Which is also the principle of the curve-age of time and space. In Africa, this is what our wise, old mentors and elders taught us. Let me put it this way: When I go to school, the first person to teach me is the teacher. The teacher says to me, '1 plus 1 is 2.' Now, in the [African] tradition, our first teacher is the master, and the master says, 'This is 2.' So then under his guidance, you have to figure out how to get to '2.' That is your life experience. So, '1 plus 1 is 2,' that is information. The master says, 'This is 2,' and you spend your whole lifetime, under his guidance, to get to '2.' That is knowledge."

Ibrahim might be shading his response with a little moonlight of his own. I try — against his philosophical intentions — to once again to address the initial question. The corners of his mouth turn down in disapproval, looking very much like a small green Jedi master trying to explain to his padawan how it was not impossible to Force-pull his X-Wing out of the swamp. "We are dealing with the same thing, this time, this time," he chastises me in quasi-Yoda-syntax. "There's no past and no future, so why would I want to go back there and recapture something that was past?" Which was exactly the question this interviewer was getting at. "I'm dealing with now ... I have no concept of what I did before! That's irrelevant. I can't change anything. I can't change the past, I can't change the future, I can only deal with what is now."

Days after this exchange, insights emerged that I struggled to comprehend in the moment. If one can somehow release past and future from the present, can there be little memory of a concert a year prior? Given a life dedicated to a consistency of intention and faithfulness to oneself, wouldn't the combination of those

things result in a near-identical musical portrayal? If you are truly most like yourself (as Ibrahim's own muse Thelonious Monk once remarked was the hallmark of genius), your artistic actions and decisions would be uncannily consistent, wouldn't they? (Monk himself performed and rerecorded his same works repeatedly throughout his life.) If time is indeed an illusion, the live version of a studio recording could occur either before or after the fact, right?

Furthermore, the moonlight of all these ethereal higher-plane thoughts is certainly preferable to the muddy trenches of the business of music. Given that, we should be content to simply accept "2," rather than dwell on whatever number-crunching it took to achieve that outcome.

Ibrahim is no stranger to Germany, or all of Europe for that matter. In 1962, with the apartheid South African government persecuting his band the Jazz Epistles (which included trumpeter Hugh Masekela), Ibrahim fled in exile with his soon-to-be wife, Sathima Bea Benjamin (who passed away in 2013), settling in Zurich, Switzerland. "I met everybody in Zurich," he recalled, citing luminaries like Count Basie, Art Blakey and, of course, Duke Ellington, who shepherded Ibrahim (then still known as Dollar Brand) and his trio to France to record their breakthrough album *Duke Ellington Presents The Dollar Brand Trio* (Reprise, 1963). He recalled meeting John Coltrane in Zurich, which was big for him, having been profoundly moved by his music. Ibrahim read aloud a poem about *Giant Steps*, Coltrane's signature album, released in February 1960:

"In New York that day, a premonition that something astounding was about to happen.

"In the late afternoon, word started trickling in from the recording session.

"A seismic realignment and reaffirmation of our shared individual and collective tonal centers."

Were those words from Coltrane himself? "No, me. I wouldn't ascribe something so banal to Coltrane."

Ibrahim recorded with Coltrane's drummer, Elvin Jones, on Jones' own album *Midnight Walk* (Atlantic, 1966), contributing one of his compositions, the waltz "Tintiyana." It's fascinating to hear Jones, his brother and trumpeter Thad Jones, and saxophonist Hank Mobley navigate the fiendishly tricky melody and form. It might be the most hard-bop playing by Ibrahim on record. At that time, he usually reflected an older school of pianists — Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, Ellington, Monk, Herbie Nichols.

"They edited my solos," Ibrahim said. "I'm not supposed to sound like that. I'm South African, I don't have the mental capacity [*laughing hysterically*] to be able to play something like that." Thinking about Elvin Jones led Ibrahim to recall playing with two other drummers, Ed Blackwell and Billy Higgins. He and Benjamin had moved to New York at that point, and Ibrahim soon found himself in more radical company: Don Cherry, Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor, Pharoah Sanders and Ornette Coleman, who all embraced his ferocious improvisatory spirit and his compositions inspired by South African traditional music.

"It was a joy and an honor to play with Billy Higgins and Ed Blackwell," he remembered fondly. Cherry and Blackwell appear with Ibrahim on *The Journey* (Chiaroscuro, 1977), while Higgins was the drummer on *Mindiff* (Enja, 1988), recorded for the film *Chocolat*. The title track is the first tune Ibrahim plays on *Solitude*.

When asked about the recent passing of South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ibrahim recalled, "My grandmother was a founding member of the AME [African Methodist Episcopal] Church in Cape Town." That was his first experience regarding the church, with which Tutu's African Anglican Church was, and is, also

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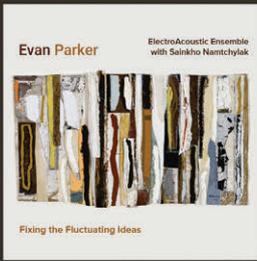
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Ibrahim induces an unhurried stream of melody and harmony, weaving tunes from the corners of his long career together into a singular tapestry of sustained thought.

'That's what the striving is about: to play one note with absolute sincerity, devoid from ego.'

affiliated. "But we also had our tradition," he said. "My great-grandfather knew everything about the herbs, and the plants and the animals. My grandfather spoke all the Southern African languages fluently. Here we [were] in a system that says, 'Everything is now going to be apart. You're going to live there, and we will live here.' And then our mentors made us understand that this is totally idiotic, because how can you sow anything out of the universe, where would you put it? And then our mentors told us, 'They are not our teachers.' And then they told us what is actually occurring, and how we can transcend. As young people, we were very angry. We wanted to make change. I wrote songs about that time, about what young people felt, what they needed to do, and people were angry."

Circling back to the original topic, he continued, "You talk about Desmond Tutu, but there are hundreds of spiritual mentors there that guided us. And they say to us, 'Don't tell anybody about us, we want to remain anonymous.' And that is the tradition of the mentor," he concluded. "The mentor remains anonymous. That's why I am not anonymous," he chuckled. "Some time, I'll disappear from all your books."

If Ibrahim's intention is to move toward anonymity, he is doing a terrible job of it. In addition to his high-profile induction as an

NEA Jazz Master, he will have at the time of this writing recorded a solo performance at his home in Germany on his Fazioli grand piano, to be broadcast on NPR's *Tiny Desk* video series. Upon hearing that this was one of the most-watched live music streaming platforms in the world, the octogenarian artist reacted with mild surprise, with maybe an imperceptible glimmer of delight.

"We accept the accolades, but we understand that it doesn't stop there," he said. "Every time that it occurs it means that it's the beginning of the continuation of that striving."

What is he striving for? "It takes a long time to play one note," he mused. "That's what the striving is about: to play one note with absolute sincerity, devoid from ego. It's a challenge, because there's always the whisperer, that tells you, 'Wow, that was great.' People say that you must annihilate the whisperer, but we say, 'No, whisperer, stick around. Because you will keep us on our toes.' The whisperer always tells you how great you are. The quest is always to get past that so we can try to be sincere."

At one point, he looked to his left and asked the woman sitting quietly beside him during the entire interview, "Does this make any sense?"

"Yes," she answers. "But I know you very well."

Not too many years ago, Marina Umari, from Germany, was finishing her last year of medical studies in Cape Town. "Somebody there knew I loved piano music, so they told me I had to go and listen to Abdullah Ibrahim before I go back home," she said, with a slight smile. "And I listened."

"She was warned that coming to my concert would have some consequences," Ibrahim said, looking at her fondly. "Lovely consequences." So, after returning to his homeland as a prodigal native son whom Nelson Mandela proclaimed as their very own Mozart, Ibrahim has once again left South Africa for Europe, this time on his own terms with a new companion, the two of them settling in this quiet village in Upper Bavaria. "We have shared dreams and wishes," he said.

In fact, Umari is a driver of those dreams and wishes, and revealed to be part of the solution of how we "got to 2." "It was Dr. Umari that really created this," said Ibrahim about his recent solo piano excursions. "She's the one who suggested [that I] play at the Hirzinger, and to get the piano — she's the one. And of course, the owner of the venue is quite a remarkable person." The owner he speaks of is from a family that has, for the past 500 years, run the Hirzinger Hotel in Söllhuben. It's about a 20-minute drive from where Ibrahim and Umari live, and it is on that property where an old wooden barn has been repurposed into a large reception hall, a sometime performance space for Ibrahim's concerts. "It's a very beautiful place," said Umari. "It's not easy to get because almost everybody wants to get married there."

"But we are blessed that we rely on people around me who are compassionate and [know] what we are hoping to achieve," Ibrahim affirmed. Long steeped in Japanese philosophy and martial arts, he is a proponent of Ikigai, finding one's life's purpose. "Ikigai is the principle," he explained, "that says, 'When you wake up this morning, what is it that you would like to do? Not what someone else would like, what is it that you would like? Sometimes we go through the paces of living daily, and we never seem to reach that goal. With me, I'm blessed with having that possibility. I think we've all been designed to play our roles and interact with each other.'"

So, after an unparalleled and historic musical journey, has Ibrahim discerned what his role has been on this Earth? "I have no idea," he admitted, laughing heartily, as he had many times that day. "How is it that at 90 years of age, a master will say, 'I wish God would give me another 200 years so I can perfect this thing?'" It's not a question of trying to achieve something within a space of time.

It's a good thing, then, that time — like moonlight — is an illusion.

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‘When you really get deep into the history of the music and erase the genre boundaries, you realize it truly is all coming from the same place.’

Marquis Hill

PUSHING FORWARD

By Aaron Cohen Photos by Chollette

Trumpeter Marquis Hill speaks in quietly determined tones. Through a Zoom conversation from his college office in Boston, he enthusiastically detailed his musical concepts, teaching philosophy, personal history and a host of other topics without raising his voice.

Not that he lacks enthusiasm. Hill's conversational personality reflects his performance style where his subtle strength eschews unnecessary leaps and descents. These qualities shape his recently released live album, *New Gospel Revisited* (Edition Records). His sense of contemplation also may be a big part of what has kept him even-keeled throughout seven momentous years.

The world noticed when Hill, at 27, won the Thelonious Monk International Trumpet Competition in 2014. His hometown of Chicago knew about his inventiveness and technique long before that moment. After that, Hill was thrust onto the global stage. He relocated to New York and has since recorded a diverse range of projects, served as a valued sideman, partici-

pated or led different international tours and still makes regular creative immersions back to the Midwest. All the while, he also teaches at Berklee College of Music. While the pandemic has caused innumerable worldwide pauses and hardships, the slowdown has made Hill more introspective but no less energized.

"Time kind of pushed us all in the space of reflecting on what's important," Hill said a few minutes after teaching an advanced improvisation class. "Especially in 2020 when things shut down, I had nothing but time and space. Gigs and festivals are starting to come back, but the world is still in the process of reflecting on what's really important."

For Hill, that sense of self-reflection became intensive just before the pandemic hit, which *New Gospel Revisited* docu-



New Gospel Revisited highlights Hill's distinctive tone on ballads, which has become more pronounced with time.

ments. That was when he returned to Chicago, in December 2019, for a two-night stand at Constellation. His set list consisted of songs that he recorded for his debut album, *New Gospel*, eight years earlier. Along with reinterpreting those pieces, Hill led a dynamic sextet that included old friends and new colleagues. The energy of playing and recording in this musician-owned venue also sounded palpable and reminded Hill of a time when he could try out ideas at such encouraging spaces as the city's Velvet Lounge.

"A part of me subconsciously always realized I was going to revisit this set of music," Hill said. "This is one of my favorite sets of music, and it's special to me because it was my very first time sitting down at the piano and saying, 'I've never written music before, I'm going to write a set of music for a project.' My connection with that music from 10 years ago has not changed. It still has that special place in my heart, but I wanted to record it at a higher quality, put this dream team of a band together and really stretch and expand this music."

That team has given the music an overall more spacious feeling while also highlighting different instrumental textures from the first time around. A sense of tension that runs through the performance does not contradict its feeling of warmth. The group brings together two other former Chicagoans — vibraphonist Joel Ross and bassist Harish Raghavan — along with tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III, pianist James Francies and drummer Kendrick Scott. While Hill and Ross have worked with each other for years, the trumpeter had a firm sense of the specific qualities that every musician brought to the ensemble and these particular compositions. He also gave them space to build on those qualities as each musician took the lead on different tracks.

"On the original *New Gospel*, the compositions are fairly simple even though they have shape and movement," Hill said. "To expand and grow on this music, I needed musicians who can take a simple melody, see past that melody and play things that aren't necessarily on the page. Kendrick was one of the first

drummers who came to mind. You listen to Kendrick and you hear how younger drummers are coming out of Kendrick. He writes his own music so when he's playing, it sounds very compositional.

"Typically, on a bandstand, the bass player plays in the pocket and holds everything together. But I'm a fan of a bass player who pushes the band in different directions, who has the courage to do that, and Harish is one of those players. With Joel, I've always been a fan of that sound, the dreaminess and openness. James is just another one of those voices who has his own shape, own direction, you can hear that he's coming from a history of the music but also pushing things in his direction. Walter has that dark, warm, fluffy sound that I'm a huge fan of, and we blend well together. He's pushing the music forward with his composition and language, but you hear the connection to Sonny Rollins and the connection to this music."

New Gospel Revisited also highlights Hill's distinctive tone on ballads, which has become more pronounced with time. His new inflections on this album derive, in part, from his intuitive dialogue with Smith and how he responds to the saxophonist's qualities he described. But the muted lyricism in Hill's solos remain rooted in what he learned from a host of musician teachers while growing up on Chicago's South Side. That education includes his record collecting.

"I've always had the concept of when I play I want to sound like I'm singing," Hill said. "Back in high school, I had mentors who were telling me, 'Sing through your instrument.' So I've always had that concept. When I'm playing a ballad, today and back then, I've had that concept of trying to sing, but the older I've got, the more records I've checked out, just life, my concept has just deepened. One of the first trumpet sounds I fell in love with was Lee Morgan on the record *Candy*, track two, 'Since I Fell For You,' a beautiful ballad. One of the very first jazz songs I heard and that stuck with me: the round, fluffy, airy vocalist type quality on that record and that's just the record I naturally hear myself and hear the trumpet."

While Hill did experience life in the church and its music while growing up, the album's title track does not directly and exclusively refer to that institution's sound. Rather, it connects to his time in graduate school while working on his master's degree in jazz pedagogy at DePaul University, when he started studying the roots to how his cultural interests connected. That research took him to the legacy of New Orleans, primarily Congo Square.

"That groove was just a New Orleans accent on the four, I wanted to compose a tune paying attention to that groove," Hill said. "That groove set the pace to push the music forward."

Groove in all of its contemporary aspects

runs throughout other albums that Hill released during the past few years, particularly *Soul Sign* from 2020 and *Love Tape* from 2019 (both on Black Unlimited Music Group). These connect to his youth spent absorbing R&B and hip-hop with his friends while Hill was also sitting in at Chicago's jazz clubs. Nowadays, he absorbs similar energies from his current Harlem neighborhood. Along with blending ideas from different idioms, Hill also released vocal and instrumental versions of both albums.

"It came natural to write music that incorporates all these different genres: jazz, hip-hop, soul," Hill said. "When you really get deep into the history of the music and erase the genre boundaries, you realize it truly is all coming from the same place. So being born in the '80s, falling in love with jazz early but still hanging with friends listening to hip-hop and R&B, it is easy for me to just create. The older I get and more I studied, the more it confirmed it's truly coming from the same place. Music will have all of those influences, so I naturally hear the music, and compose the music, that way."

Hill linked his studies with an inward perspective for *Soul Sign*. Both versions of the album are his musical interpretation of the zodiac with input from spoken word artists and astrologers. Some inspiration came from Mary Lou Williams' *Zodiac Suite*, as well as from *Soul Zodiac*, an album that Cannonball Adderley produced and presented that showcased his brother Nat Adderley. But Hill's albums also emerged from looking at his own life as the pandemic started shutting everything down.

"I've always been into the zodiac and the truth that's within it, but during this pandemic, we all had to time and space to do that," Hill said. "So I dove really deep into it, and there's so much truth in it. I started to see how much of it is represented in my life. It's undeniable, the truth. I was just inspired by what I was learning. I also went back to one of my first tapes, *Mediation Tape* [from 2017], where there's one that's instrumental and one with voices. With *Soul Sign*, the messages that astrologers are spinning are so deep with so much detail but the beats are so interesting, I had to release an instrumental to absorb the music without the text. So there are two versions, and the challenge of that was I wanted each sign to sound like the energy of the zodiac. I wanted to give listeners the chance to check out both."

Throughout these recordings, Hill added that he also looks for the same qualities of individualism whether he's working with spoken word artists or musicians. As he teaches advanced improvisation classes, these are the sorts of lessons that he imparts.

"How can I help you pull out what you have to offer — your voice?" Hill said he asks his students. "A lot of lessons and exercises are to help students find their thing. And also just the seri-

ousness. With a lot of my mentors, it was just sitting and watching how serious they are about their craft. This music is a high art and you have to bring your very best to represent this music."

Alongside performing, recording and teaching, Hill continues actively working as a sideman, including on former Chicagoan saxophonist Caroline Davis' *Portals, Volume 1: Mourning* (Sunnyside). His tours as part of bassist Marcus Miller's band put him in a direct line with a colleague of Miles Davis, an experience he found invaluable. Hill also contributed to pianist Greg Spero's new *The Chicago Experiment* (Ropeadope). The trumpeter's versatility and sense of space fits in with the album's constantly shifting idiomatic turns and his exploratory lead on "For Too" quietly echoes those free-jazz mentors at the Velvet Lounge. Spero said this all makes him the ideal team player.

"Marquis' focus on color and harmony is so flexible," Spero said. "Marquis stands out

because his melodic sense is almost beyond harmony. He can take melody and pull harmony to his will, which is what he exemplified on that track and improvisation in that context."

In the coming year, Hill intends to continue with such collaborations along with creating new music of his own. Possibly, his future work will connect with *The Philosophy & Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, a book he was re-reading at the time of this conversation. He also imparted his own philosophy on how to endure the current tribulations we are facing.

"Just keep pushing forward, keep staying optimistic and focus in on the positive things in life: our loved ones, our families, the things that we have going on in our life that bring us joy," Hill said. "Focus on that, take care of our health and just keep pushing forward. It's a crazy, scary time but we all have control of our own lives, our own destiny, so take care of your spirit, take care of your mind and push forward. That's what we have to do." **DB**

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MACK AVENUE ♥ VINYL



Oscar Peterson

A Time for Love

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Cameron Graves

Seven

Vinyl



Christian McBride & Inside Straight

Live at the Village Vanguard

2-LP 180-gram Vinyl



Joey DeFrancesco

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Emmet Cohen

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Kenny Garrett

Sounds from the Ancestors

2-LP 180-gram vinyl



Tower of Power

50 Years of Funk & Soul:

Live at the Fox Theater –

Oakland, CA – June 2018

3-LP Vinyl

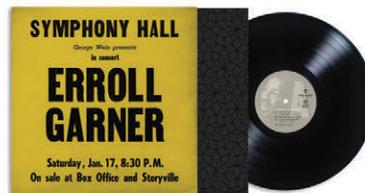


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MINGUS

THE LOST ALBUM FROM RONNIE SCOTT'S

WE LOVE VINYL!

With Record Store Day landing on April 23, it's time for another installment of We Love Vinyl! Here are just a few selections the DownBeat crew looks forward to digging into – be they RSD Drops, or other great, new sounds on wax.

By Frank Alkyer

ORNETTE
COLEMAN

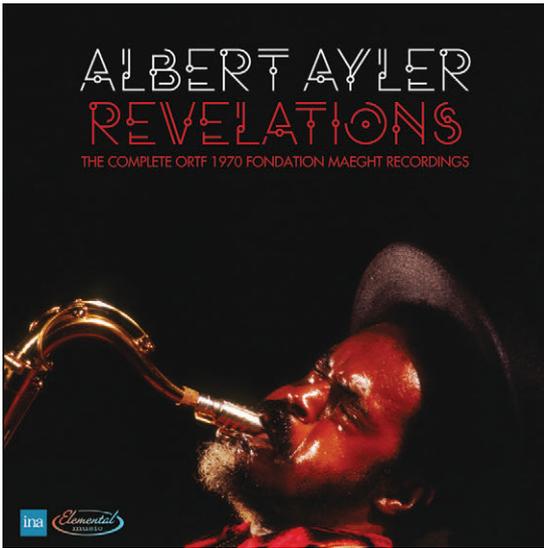


IRMA
THOMAS
FULL TIME
WOMAN
The Last Cotillion Album

ALBERT AYLER
REVELATIONS
THE COMPLETE ORTF 1970 FONDATION MAEGHT RECORDINGS



REIMAGINED BY JAZZANOVA



ALBERT AYLER

Revelations: The Complete ORTF 1970 Fondation Maeght Recordings (Ina/Elemental)

This four-album set is the work of jazz super-sleuth Zev Feldman, who, while doing research at the French Institut National de L'Audiovisuel (Ina), stumbled upon the complete concert recordings of Albert Ayler made at the Fondation Maeght in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France, in 1970.

Some of the music had been released as *Nuits de la Fondation Maeght Volume 1 and Volume 2* (Shandar) as well as on *Live On The Riviera* (ESP-Disc), but the new find was a complete set of recordings from two concerts that came from "a different source, capturing both concerts in stereo in their entirety using professional recording equipment," according to Feldman. The liner notes, where he details the find, are a treasure on their own, full of great photography and insights about Ayler from his daughter Desiree Ayler-Fellows, Feldman, Ayler scholar and saxophonist Jeff Lederer (who also receives producer credits) and

bassist Steve Tintweiss, who played on the dates.

The music has been slighted by some over the years as not as strong as the work done with earlier groups, but here the band of Ayler on tenor, soprano and vocals; Mary Parks on soprano and vocals; Call Cobbs on piano; Steve Tintweiss on bass; and, Allen Blairman on drums sounds superior compared to earlier releases, giving a rich sense of Ayler's free-spirited, late-career live performances.

Sadly, Ayler passed away four months later at the age of 44. He was found in New York City's East River, his death called as a suicide over rumors that he was murdered. These recordings are an important addition to the Ayler canon, not just for the sense of wonder he commanded, but also for letting listeners hear the two concerts exactly as the audiences heard them then from one of our greatest improvisers. (recordstoreday.com)



CHARLES MINGUS

Mingus: The Lost Album From Ronnie Scott's (Resonance)

Here's a great way to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Charles Mingus' birth. Resonance will be launching this previously unreleased live recording one day after the great bassist and composer's centennial birthday. It will be an exclusive three-LP RSD drop (and offered as a three-CD set and digital recording a week later).

The setting is London, 1972, at the world famous Ronnie Scott's jazz club. Mingus brought in an all-star sextet featuring Jon Faddis on trumpet, Charles McPherson on alto saxophone, Bobby Jones on tenor sax and clarinet, John Foster on piano (with some cool vocals on "Noddin' Ya Head Blues," too) and Roy Brooks on drums ... and musical saw.

The Ronnie Scott's residency came at the end of a European tour that took them through France, Italy and the Netherlands before hitting London in August. On the last night at the club, Columbia Records sent

a mobile truck out to record the gig with plans to release it as an album. But a year later, Columbia dropped its entire jazz roster except Miles Davis. Mingus' wife, Sue, held onto the tapes all these years.

This is another Zev Feldman project, this time working with trumpeter David Weiss. The package they have crafted is lovely. British jazz journalist Brian Priestly delivers some terrific liner notes, along with a 1972 interview he conducted with Mingus and McPherson. McPherson offers his reflections on a 12-year tenure with Mingus.

Famed author Fran Lebowitz delivered her own memories of working with Mingus. In addition, there are interviews with Mary Scott, Ronnie Scott's widow, Christian McBride, Eddie Gomez and quotes from Mingus himself throughout, and he was one of the most quotable artists in jazz history. (recordstoreday.com)



OSCAR PETERSON

A Time For Love: The Oscar Peterson Quartet -- Live In Helsinki, 1987 (Two Lions/Mack Avenue)

This album was one of the editorial staff's picks for the DownBeat Gift Guide in the December issue, but now it's available as a three-LP set on 180-gram, translucent vinyl.

While the title of this album is *A Time For Love*, a more apt heading might be *A Time To Burn* because that's exactly what the quartet does throughout this 12-tune blast of joy. The recording captures Peterson, guitarist Joe Pass, bassist Dave Young and drummer Martin Drew on the last show of the group's 1987 fall tour. "There was no set list. Just get out there and play," Young wrote in the liner notes. "Just by Oscar playing an intro, we'd know."

Those notes also include an eloquent tribute to Peterson by pianist Benny Green, as well as some loving words from Oscar's widow, Kelly Peterson. Packaging aside, the music is the star here. The pianist is at the height of his musical prowess. The same can be said

for guitarist Pass with the two blistering runs through "Sushi."

"Love" is in the title of this album, and there are certainly some wonderful ballads here such as the aptly named "Love Ballade," as well as the title cut. The intro to the latter offers a nice glimpse of Peterson's classy onstage persona as he introduces the band before drifting elegantly into his keyboard.

There is so much to love here. The sound of Peterson patting his foot along to the beat of "How High The Moon" gives this music an authenticity. "Waltz For Debbie" swings dreamlike; "When You Wish Upon A Star" gives goosebumps as Pass quietly picks the intro, then plays the tune solo. The "Duke Ellington Medley" is a joy, and the closer, Peterson's own "Blues Etude," serves as a full-out sprint, complete with Peterson's solo stride break. This is jazz as good as it gets. (store.oscarnpeterson.com)

RECORD STORE DAY™
APRIL 23, 2022



BURT GODBLATT, CTS IMAGES



Ornette Coleman GENESIS OF GENIUS: THE CONTEMPORARY ALBUMS

Craft Recordings kicked off a 70th anniversary celebration for the Contemporary Records imprint back in December, issuing a set of pristine, digital-only compilations of music from the likes of Art Pepper, André Previn, Barney Kessel, Hampton Hawes, Shelly Manne and saxophonists Ben Webster, Sonny Rollins, Benny Golson, Harold Land and Teddy Edwards. Now, the label has turned its attention to the two Ornette Coleman recordings on Contemporary: *Something Else!!!!: The Music Of Ornette Coleman*, and *Tomorrow Is The Question!: The New Music Of Ornette Coleman* from 1958 and 1959, respectively.

They have been packaged as a two-LP box set on 180-gram vinyl, newly mastered by Bernie Grundman. Both records feature the amazing tandem of Coleman on alto saxophone and Don Cherry on trumpet. *Something Else!!!!* has Walter Norris on piano, Don Payne on bass and Billy Higgins on drums. *Tomorrow Is The Question!* has Percy Heath and Red Mitchell on bass, with Shelly Manne on drums. They document an artist going from a jazz outsider to becoming the toast of New York.

"These two recordings are the accessible gateway to Ornette Coleman's music," said Nick Phillips, the producer of *Genesis Of Genius*. "He's expanding on the bebop vocabulary and at this point he's using traditional forms for most compositions, 12-bar blues and AABA song form, but doing something totally different. With Ornette and Don Cherry's trumpet in the front line, the way they play and phrase and shift rhythms together, it sounds very loose but very tight."

The gateway to Coleman's fame was opened by Lester Koenig (1917–'77), the founder of Contemporary, who welcomed the alto saxophonist and his unorthodox approach when many in Los Angeles ran. Koenig was an intellectual who loved the arts. He was blacklisted from the film industry when he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, an offshoot of McCarthyism of the day.

He originally created Contemporary as an outlet for contemporary classical works, but opened his ears, and the label, to jazz, earning a reputation for having faith in artistic creativity. Coleman was the beneficiary of that faith. It launched him from relative obscurity to jazz stardom.

This history and more is detailed beautifully in the expanded 32-page booklet adeptly handled by Grammy-winning jazz historian Ashley Kahn, peppered with some terrific archival photography.

craftrecordings.com



Previously unissued live recording of jazz legend **Charles Mingus** at Ronnie Scott's in London, August 1972 with **Charles McPherson**, **Bobby Jones**, **Jon Faddis**, **John Foster** and **Roy Brooks**. Limited-edition 180-gram 3-LP set is mastered by **Bernie Grundman** and pressed by **RTI** (also available as a deluxe 3-CD set). Includes an extensive booklet with rare photos; an essay by British jazz author **Brian Priestley**, who interviewed Mingus & McPherson during the engagement and excerpts are included; plus interviews with McPherson, Mingus' friend and author **Fran Lebowitz**, and bass icons **Eddie Gomez** and **Christian McBride**.

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BILL EVANS THE LEGENDARY BUENOS AIRES CONCERTS

MORNING GLORY:
THE 1973 CONCERT AT THE TEATRO
GRAN REX, BUENOS AIRES

INNER SPIRIT:
THE 1979 CONCERT AT THE TEATRO
GENERAL SAN MARTÍN, BUENOS AIRES



First official releases of jazz icon **Bill Evans'** uplifting concerts in Buenos Aires, Argentina with **Eddie Gomez** & **Marty Morell** on June 24, 1973 and **Marc Johnson** & **Joe LaBarbera**, September 27, 1979. Remastered from the original tape reels in cooperation with the Bill Evans Estate, these limited-edition 2-LP sets (and deluxe 2-CD sets) include extensive booklets with rare photos from the actual concert by **Tito Villalba**; essays by the American author/journalist **Marc Myers** and Argentine author/journalist **Claudio Parisi**; interviews with Gomez, Morell and pianist **Richie Beirach** (*Morning Glory*); plus interviews with Johnson, LaBarbera & pianist **Enrico Pieranunzi** (*Inner Spirit*). Mastered by **Bernie Grundman** and pressed by **RTI**.

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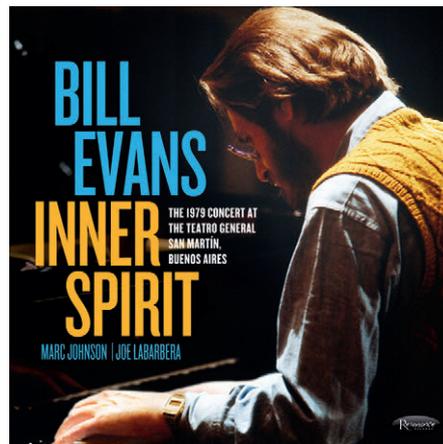
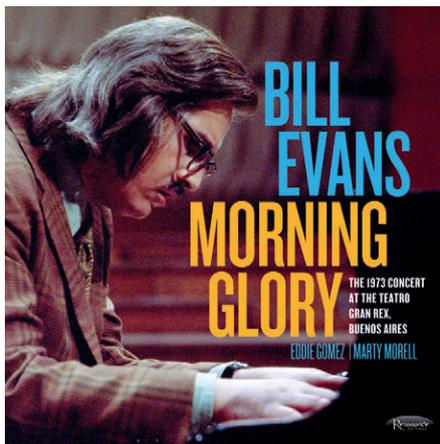
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BILL EVANS

Morning Glory & Inner Spirit (Resonance)

Resonance Records continues to expand a deep, rich vein of rare or never-been-released Bill Evans recordings, this time with two live dates in Argentina from the 1970s. On *Morning Glory*, Evans is joined by bassist Eddie Gomez and Marty Morell for a 1973 date at Teatro Gran Rex. On *Inner Spirit*, the always-classy pianist is joined by Marc Johnson and drummer Joe

LaBarbera at Teatro General San Martin in 1979. Both will be released as two-LP packages that include interviews with the musicians who played on the dates. The vinyl editions are exclusive RSD drops. The music will be released a week later on CD and as digital downloads.

resonancerecords.org

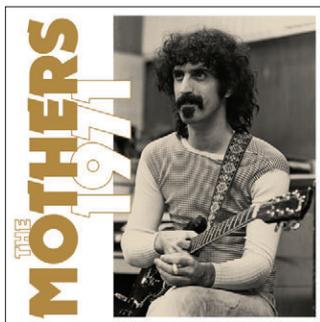


IRMA THOMAS

Full Time Woman: The Last Cotillion Album (Real Gone)

After a string of successes in the mid-1960s, Irma Thomas, the Soul Queen of New Orleans, signed to Atlantic Records and produced music for its Cotillion imprint. Only one of the songs she recorded made it to the airwaves during that time period ("Full Time Woman" with a B-side of "She's Taken My Part"). A few others showed up on a 2014 collection. But now, the folks at Real Gone Records bring all of that lost material into one package of 15 tracks, printed on light-blue vinyl and filling a hole in the Irma Thomas discography. They have that New Orleans soul and grit of the era and, oh, that voice!

realgonemusic.com



FRANK ZAPPA

The Mothers 1971 (Zappa/UME)

The beautiful thing about Zappa is doing Zappa to the absolute extreme. And that's exactly what we have here with this motherlode of material from Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention live in 1971. This 100-tune, 10-hour set brings together so much from that time, including the entire run that closed the Fillmore East in New York, as well as the group's outrageous final gig at the Rainbow Theatre in London. On vinyl, this collection will be packaged as two three-LP sets. The first is an expanded 50th anniversary edition of *Fillmore East-1971*. The second is the *Rainbow Theatre* concert.

zappa.com



CHET BAKER TRIO

Live In Paris: The Radio France Recordings 1983-1984 (INA/Elemental)

Here's a beautiful RSD drop of live Baker recorded by Radio France — in stereo — at La Esplanade de La Défense in 1983 and Le Petit Opportun in 1984. The shows came during a period when the hard-living Baker was, perhaps, living not as hard, according to authoritative liner notes by Ashley Kahn. The simple combination of Baker's gift playing with piano and bass gives the music that essence of wistfulness that the trumpeter and singer famously conjured. This hand-numbered, three-LP set on 180-gram vinyl was mastered by Kevin Gray at Coherent Audio.

recordstoreday.com

BBE'S GOT A HOLD ON ME

BBE Music has been delivering a trove of vinyl geared for the ears of jazz lovers and beyond in recent years. Founded in 1996 by Peter Adarkwah, the label (its full name is Barely Breaking Even Music) is into everything from disco to rock to hip-hop and improvised music, but here's a taste of the jazz and jazz-adjacent material coming out now.

Kenny Cox, Clap Clap! The Joyful Noise (Strata)

A previously unreleased record from Strata Records founder Kenny Cox, BBE has teamed with DJ Amir Abdullah's 180 Proof Records to bring out this and other music to reintroduce Strata to the world. DJ Amir got deep into Strata while researching an exhibit based on lost youth culture in Detroit for an online museum. *Clap Clap!* has an infectious groove with Caribbean flair mixing with electric guitar.

Jazzanova, Strata Records — The Sound Of Detroit Reimagined By Jazzanova

Here's another example of DJ Amir Abdullah's dream. On *The Sound Of Detroit*, he brought in the production collective Jazzanova from Berlin to rework songs from the Strata universe. It's a cool breeze of music, delivering just the right essence of pop and groove. It's music of great hope that grew from the tumult of Detroit in rapid decline during the late 1960s. In the midst of this, Kenny Cox founded Strata as a community organization that ran food drives and jazz programs, then developed it into so much more. Jazzanova puts this music back on the map with a two-LP set.

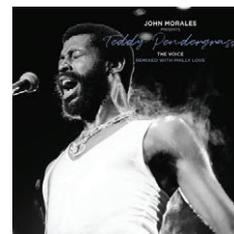
Various Artists, If Music Presents You Need This: Klinkhamer Records

Here's a truly cool 7-inch disc, the latest in the If Music Presents You Need This series. Here they invite Michel Veenstra, owner of the Dutch record shop Klinkhamer Records, to compile a few of his favorite tunes. Like a champion crate-digger, he brings back some surprise, wonderful sounds. Especially tasty is Gianni Basso's "Epitaph."

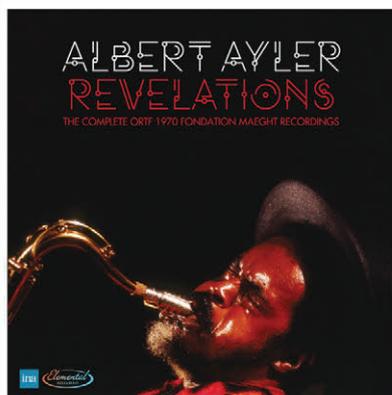
John Morales Presents Teddy Pendergrass, The Voice — Remixed With Philly Love

Producer/engineer John Morales tangles with the Voice on this three-LP set that reminds once more of the enduring beauty and power that was Teddy Pendergrass with a dozen extended tracks like "The More I Get, The More I Want," "Don't Leave Me This Way" and "If You Don't Know Me By Now" that will have you dancing hard and bouncing off the walls or doing your very best torch-song karaoke.

(bbemusic.com)



ELEMENTAL MUSIC ANNOUNCES TWO EXCLUSIVE VINYL SETS FOR RECORD STORE DAY APRIL 23RD

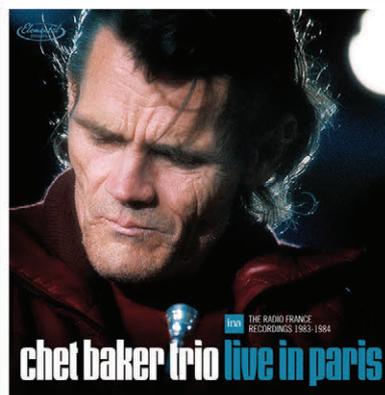


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Remastered by **Kevin Gray** at Coherent Audio. Transferred directly from the original ORTF stereo tape reels. This set is released in partnership with the **Albert Ayler Estate & INA France**. 24-page booklet containing previously unpublished photos from the actual concerts, essays by **Ben Young, Zev Feldman, Jeffrey Lederer** and **Pascal Rozat**, and words by **Sonny Rollins, Archie Shepp, David Murray, Carlos Santana, Joe Lovano, Carla Bley, John Zorn, Bill Laswell, Reggie Workman, James Brandon Lewis, Patty Waters, Carla Bley, Annette Peacock, Marc Ribot, Thurston Moore** and **Zoh Amba**.



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Recordings 1983-1984.*

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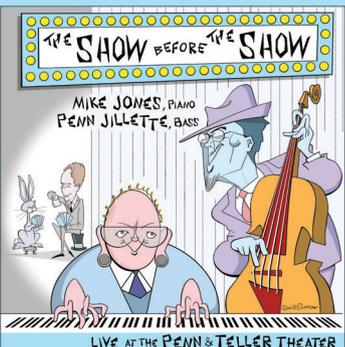
Sheila Jordan
Comes Love: Lost Session 1960



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BOB JAMES

Feel Like Making LIVE! (Evolution)

The composer/keyboardist brings his artistry to a trio setting with bassist Michael Palazzolo and drummer Billy Kilson, delivering an eclectic mix of music from his own catalog, plus some surprising covers like Elton John's "Rocket Man." For vinyl lovers, he's delivering a limited run of signed, 180-gram, orange-colored double LPs.

(evosound.com)



CHRIS DINGMAN

Journeys Vol. 1 (Independent Release)

These beautifully atmospheric solo vibraphone pieces bring an air of calm while maintaining incredible artistic integrity. It's an extension of Dingman's 2020 release *Peace*, where he collected hours of solo improvisation he played while his father was in hospice. When his father passed, Dingman took time away, but has made his way back with a deep sense of self.

(chrisingman.bandcamp.com)



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Black Lives: From Generation To Generation (Jammin'colors)

This huge project hopes to help tackle continuing inequality and help musicians hurt by the pandemic. Stefano Calembert, the producer, manager and owner of Jammin'colors, a Brussels-based music agency, put the idea together, and commissioned some 20 tracks by artists like Immanuel Wilkins, Jeremy Pelt, E.J. Strickland, Reggie Washington and numerous others.

(jammincolors.com)



RON JACKSON

Standards And My Songs (Independent Release)

Ron Jackson is a master of the seven-string jazz guitar, learning it at the suggestion of the great Bucky Pizzarelli. He has a loose, easy way that puts a smile in your heart. He's here in a trio setting with drummer Willie Jones III and bassist Ben Wolfe with guest spots from Brian Ho on the Hammond B-3. "Brandy (You're A Fine Girl)" is a swinging pick hit from the set.

(ronjacksonmusic.com)



NATALIE COLE

Unforgettable With Love (Craft)

It couldn't have been easy for Natalie Cole to join the family business. Her father, the great Nat "King" Cole, had one of the most "unforgettable" voices ever. Through the marvels of technology, she delivered the title track as a duet with her late father. Seven Grammys and 30 years later, it can be heard on 180-gram vinyl as a two-LP set.

(craftrecordings.com)



JEREMIAH CHIU & MARTA SOFIA HONER

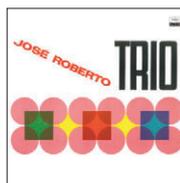
Recordings From The Åland Islands (International Anthem)

Jeremiah Chiu and Marta Sofia Honer combine Chiu's analog synthesizers with Honer's viola – and it's stunning. The two traveled to the Åland Islands in the Baltic Sea to help a friend. Once they got there, the landscapes and seascapes inspired music that was as unusual as the topography. The recordings have a down-home, hand-made sensibility. Nothing is rushed. It's remarkably peaceful art.

(intlanthem.com)

JOSÉ ROBERTO BERTAMI

Os Tatus & José Roberto Trio (Far Out)



The late Brazilian keyboardist and bandleader José Roberto Bertami, best known for his work with the trio Azymuth, played with a host of jazz greats like Sarah Vaughan, George Duke and Eddie Palmieri. But here we find his 19-year-old self cutting his first record, *Os Tatus*, in 1965, then following it up as an audacious 20-year-old with *José Roberto Trio*. Both records are now back out on the Far Out label, bringing back some delightful jazz with that serious Latin tinge. And, let's just say he was mature beyond his musical years.

(faroutrecordings.com)



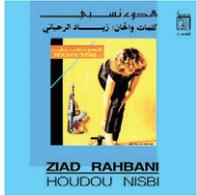
DAVE REMPI & AVREEAYL RA

Benu (Aerophonic)

Chicago saxophonist Dave Rempis has been putting out a prodigious amount of music on his Aerophonic label during the pandemic, the latest being *Benu*, the first recorded document of Rempis with longtime collaborator Avreeayl Ra on drums and percussion. The two are in full free-jazz flight here, tackling sound

in fascinating ways. Ra, a legend of the Chicago free-jazz scene who has toured with Sun Ra and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, is a swirling encyclopedia of rhythm. Rempis blows furious, fierce and fine.

(aerophonicrocords.com)



ZIAD RAHBANI

Houdou Nisbi (We Want Sounds)

Recorded in Lebanon in 1985, this cult hit has never been on vinyl before. A major star of Arabic music, Rahbani cross-pollinates Middle Eastern sounds with jazz, pop and film soundtrack overtones. *Houdou Nisbi* translates to "relatively calm" and was a term used by Lebanese news anchors to describe the ceasefires

during the civil war of 1975-90. While the music sizzles, even the cover has political overtones with a woman slipping on her shoe while a machine gun rests against the wall. The album has been remastered for vinyl from the original tapes by David Hachour at Coloursound Studio in Paris. (wewantsounds.com)



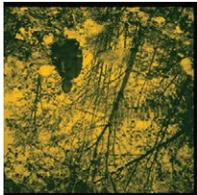
JIM O'ROURKE & MATS GUSTAFSSON

Xylophonen Virtuosen (Trost)

Put the free-wheeling saxophonist Mats Gustafsson and former Sonic Youth guitarist Jim O'Rourke into a studio and hit record. It's a pretty magical blend of bending time and space with folky-avant jazz overtones. Some of the tracks were released on CD in 2020 on Incus Records, but have been newly remastered

by O'Rourke for a two-LP set along with a number of previously unreleased tracks. Their foray into duet improvisation opens up amazing twists and turns. For those who like music on the edge, this is a great listening experience.

(trost.at)



BRODIE WEST QUINTET

Meadow Of Dreams (Ansible Editions/Astral Spirits)

Alto saxophonist Brodie West is a bandleader steeped in the creative music scene of Toronto, Canada. He studied at Amsterdam Music Conservatory with Misha Mengelberg, rubbed shoulders with the likes of percussionist Han Bennink and was a member of the Ex, an experimental punk band from Amsterdam.

On *Meadow Of Dreams*, West has created a groove-driven, percussive web, one where complexity is derived from simplicity with plenty of twists. It's an enchanting, avant-garde mix to dig into.

(ansibleeditions.com)



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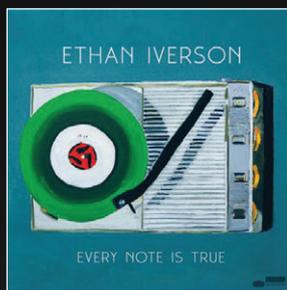
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KEITH MAJOR

Ethan Iverson's latest album highlights the pianist's mature ear and the expert comping skills of drummer Jack DeJohnette and bassist Larry Grenadier.

Ethan Iverson *Every Note Is True*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★★

Pianist Ethan Iverson has long been a master of melody. Since co-founding The Bad Plus in 2000, Iverson has developed a deceptively simplistic style: a deep-swinging, medium-tempo cascade through jaunty keys, plucking his notes with measured intent and always producing a delightfully unexpected result.

It is apt that his Blue Note debut comes with the title *Every Note Is True*, since there has long been the feeling behind Iverson's searching work that unless he believes in the melodies he is playing — in the veracity of their selection — they simply won't make it under his fingers. The resulting 10 tracks are a testament to this

intuitive selection process, serving to highlight both Iverson's mature ear and the expert comping skills of Jack DeJohnette on drums and Larry Grenadier on bass.

Opener "The More It Changes" serves as an homage to the isolation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic, featuring a virtual choir of 44 friends voice-noting lyrics on the importance of music in fostering a sense of community. From there on, this optimistic tone is carried by Iverson's piano, enacting the very sense of togetherness the track expresses.

Highlights come on the driving groove of "She Won't Forget Me," showcasing DeJohnette's capacity to stretch the bounds of a rock rhythm with his expressive cymbal work, meanwhile "For Ellen Raskin" is classic Iverson territory, interweaving lyrical harmonies with Grenadier's tripping bass. Indeed, DeJohnette

and Grenadier are stellar throughout and come to the fore on the sludgy, Fats Waller-esque swing of "Goodness Knows," as well as on the intricate rhythms of "Merely Improbable."

The trio presents the seamless feel of having spent years playing together and perhaps could have put this surprising confidence to use in expanding their tight compositions to reach a risk-taking free flight. Yet, that tightness in itself is no mean feat and ultimately packs immense depth into an outstanding debut.

—Ammar Kalia

Every Note Is True: The More It Changes; The Eternal Verities; She Won't Forget Me; For Ellen Raskin; Blue; Goodness Knows; Had I But Known; Merely Improbable; Praise Will Travel; At The Bells Of Motley. (42:56)

Personnel: Ethan Iverson, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Kenny G *New Standards*

CONCORD

★★★

In his wholesome blandness, Kenny G (for Gorelick) has built a uniquely successful career around an inviting façade without a noticeable interior. Yet, for millions his Potemkin jazz village has stirred a loyal fervor that is oddly inverse to its placid emotional neutrality and indecision. One tries to comprehend how such an alternate jazz reality could capture such devout devotion. But one person's reality in music can be unknowable to another. It's called

Nicholas Payton *Smoke Sessions (Remixed)*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★

It was big news in the early '90s when Peter Gabriel made some of his raw tracks available for remixing, and again, in 2006, when David Byrne and Brian Eno enabled fans to download elements of their album *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* to use for their own purposes.

Today, it's commonplace for musicians to welcome reimagining of previously issued work, but Nicholas Payton has introduced some additional layers of meta with an EP-length remix of tracks from his recent *Smoke Sessions* album. Although the tracks on *Smoke Sessions* already pulsed with contemporary-sounding rhythms, courtesy of bassist Ron Carter and drummer Karriem Riggins.

But Payton had more in mind; he'd already planned to assign tracks to Riggins and Tomoki Sanders to put the largely acoustic music through their digital blenders.

That postmodern bent already had a head start, considering that "Levin's Lope," one of the four songs Payton plucked from *Smoke Sessions*, had already re-purposed a Carter-inspired bass line from an earlier Payton session. To that, producer Riggins adds an ear-candy Payton horn riff from "Hangin' In

taste, and to each their own.

This CD, *New Standards*, is modeled on popular ballads of the '50s and '60s, but takes nothing specific from them, save a title here and there. We hear no familiar melodies, just a restful sensibility of the sound of the period filtered through Gorelick's 11 compositions. His "Milestones" suggests its inspiration nicely, though at a slower tempo and without the extended bridge of the original. Accompanied by piano, guitar and a feathery bed of discreet strings, his themes are simple and minimal, often little more than pivots between two notes with connecting grace strokes. Nothing to distract or disrupt from one's daydreams.

And therein lies the point. There is really nothing to dislike or deride about *New Standards*. Its arpeggiated wanderings neither offend, upset, excite nor challenge. They're a sedative in the honorable, if not honored, tradition of Jackie Gleason and Mantovani. But the press release persists in calling Gorelick a "jazz icon," a claim that stokes needless controversy. And Gorelick, who claims no jazz stature, takes the heat in the crossfire. —John McDonough

New Standards: Emeline; Only You; Paris By Night; Rendezvous; Legacy; Anthem; Blue Skies; Milestones; Two Of A Kind; Moonlight; Waltz In Blue. (51:68)

Personnel: Kenny G, soprano saxophone; other musicians unidentified.

Ordering info: concordrecords.com



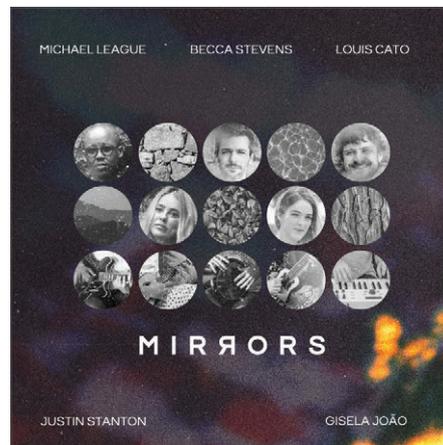
And Jivin'" to get things underway.

There's a distinct lack of ego — or is it perceived ego? — in the way Payton signs off on remixes like Riggins' take on "Gold Dust Black Magic" and Sanders' treatment of "Hangin' In And Jivin'," which both transform Payton's lyrically flowing compositions in blunter, less chops-oriented performances. —James Hale

Smoke Sessions (Remixed): Levin's Lope (Karriem Riggins Remix); Big George (Karriem Riggins Remix); Gold Dust Black Magic (Karriem Riggins Remix); Hangin' In And Jivin' (Tomoki Sanders Remix). (21:26)

Personnel: Nicholas Payton, trumpet, keyboards; George Coleman, tenor saxophone (2); Isiah Sharkey, guitar (3); Ron Carter, bass; Karriem Riggins, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



Mirrors *Mirrors*

GROUNDUP

★★★

Like a lot of art created during 2020 that relied on collaboration, the story of determination and realization behind *Mirrors* fascinates more than the results. Let's call it a pandemic-era art dilemma.

In August 2020, when the world was still grappling with the coronavirus without vaccines, Justin Stanton, Gisela João, Michael League, Louis Cato and Becca Stevens convened in the Alentejo region of western Portugal and engaged in a musical workshop. They stipulated that each member would co-write a song with another. The fact that this cosmopolitan quintet with members hailing from the U.S., Spain and Portugal managed to gather in one place amid strict travel restrictions is impressive unto itself. And each musician is admirable in their ability to underscore the earnest with erudition.

The thing is, nothing quite catches fire. The album starts out promisingly, with the percolating vocal melody of "Can't Stop Moving," but the arrangement quickly morphs into a dreamy soundscape, highlighted by languid guitars and keyboards. The lyrics behind Stevens' emotive vocals gets swallowed up, leading the listener to lean in to decipher the words without any revelatory reward.

From there, the album proceeds with conquered, shoe-gazing art pop, fueled by themes of longing for deeper connections.

The music is pretty but middling. For all its heartfelt intentions, *Mirrors* is the musical equivalent of Ikea furniture: sleekly designed, functional and anonymously appealing.

—John Murph

Mirrors: Can't Stop Moving; The Call; Say It; Sleep; Una Rosa; Over The Line; Weary; I Don't Blame The Wind; Tempestade; Life Is Fine. (39:23)

Personnel: Becca Stevens, vocals, charango, electric guitar, hammerstone, acoustic guitar; Justin Stanton, trumpet, piano, keyboards, synth bass, drum programming; Gisela João, vocals; Louis Cato, vocals, acoustic guitars, electric guitar, drums, drum programming, percussion; Michael League, electric bass, percussion, synth bass, background vocals; Nathan Schram, viola, violin (4, 5, 8, 10).

Ordering info: groundupmusic.net

The Hot Box

Critics	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough	James Hale	John Murph
Ethan Iverson <i>Every Note Is True</i>	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★½
Kenny G <i>New Standards</i>	★★	★★★	★★½	★½
Nicholas Payton <i>Smoke Sessions (Remixed)</i>	★★★★	★½	★★★	★★★
Mirrors <i>Mirrors</i>	★★★	★★	★★	★★

Critics' Comments

Ethan Iverson, *Every Note Is True*

Iverson finds his style in his material, which gives this CD a sundry quality. But on "Goodness," "Improbable" and "Bells" he drops into a loose groove that mixes a tasty cocktail of Ellington and Monk while opening welcome space for his pedigreed trio partners. —John McDonough

Given COVID lemons, Iverson makes a dream trio. DeJohnette and Grenadier contribute exceptional imagination and technique to the pianist's plan to bring some compositional sketches to the studio and improvise, lockdown-style. —James Hale

Intermittently adventurous and coolly accessible. —John Murph

Kenny G, *New Standards*

It's always worthwhile spending time engaging with why something might be massively popular and yet critically reviled. Such is Kenny G's wheelhouse. On this latest effort, his tone is predictably so smooth as to be saccharine and the arrangements perfectly calibrated to soundtrack a romantic dinner scene in a Hallmark movie. It is well-crafted yet dull; so unobtrusive to make us question why we should pay any attention to it at all. —Ammar Kalia

As pleasant and safe as tap water, these "new standards" sound like they were concocted from tried-and-true musical recipes. If you crave carbonation or flavor (to say nothing of intoxication), listen elsewhere. —James Hale

Perfect easy-listening music for people who pretend they're into jazz. —John Murph

Nicholas Payton, *Smoke Sessions (Remixed)*

King of the beat tape-flip Karriem Riggins helms this remix EP, refiguring Payton's engaging acoustic trio record into a hip-hop frame. The un-quantized swing is dark and heavy, permeating the rattling shaker of "Levin's Lope" and reverb-laden snares of "Gold Dust Black Magic." Meanwhile, producer Tomoki Sanders' turn on "Hangin' In And Jivin'" is a master class in drum machine programming. —Ammar Kalia

Beware the bent genre, the current contagion in the world of marketing cliches. Alas, I prefer my genres streamlined, straight and untainted, something Payton offered last fall to solid praise. Which makes this 20-minute encore a brief, redundant and twisted afterthought with its light hip-hop remix. —John McDonough

Jazz remixes that don't snuff out the actual jazz interactivity, deftly done. —John Murph

Mirrors, *Mirrors*

Michael League channels the openly collaborative ethos of Snarky Puppy to partial effect with this quintet record. The individual players shine: Stevens' silken voice, João's emotive tone, Cato's groove. But the whole never quite unifies into a convincing identity for the group, leaving *Mirrors* a somewhat confusing, stylistically uncertain prospect. —Ammar Kalia

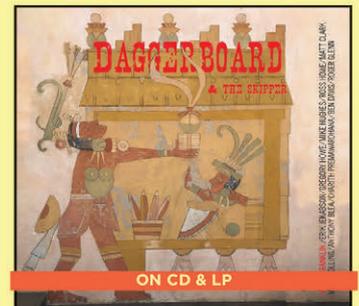
Five part-time songwriters from the Snarky Puppy extended family pair off to pen and perform 10 original titles. But the modest melodic craft and sagging lyrical savvy cannot meet or sustain the emotional gravitas they pour into the performances. —John McDonough

Mediocre, overblown pop music posing as pretentious lounge music. —James Hale



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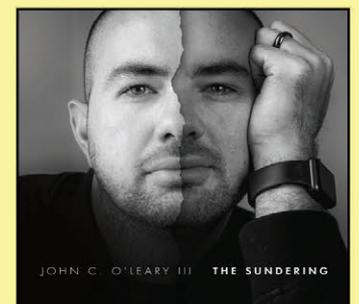
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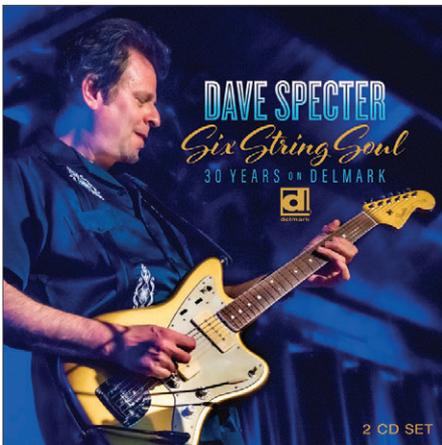
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Dave Specter *Six String Soul*

DELMARK

★★★★

Music writers like to play up Dave Specter's perceived precocity, i.e. "He looks too young to have a 30-year retrospective." However, quick back-of-the-napkin math reveals Specter was nearly 30 when his version of the Louis Jordan classic "Buzz Me" (taken from his 1991 debut album) was released.

Perhaps the sleight of hand here resides in Specter's ability to hold his own in configurations consisting of a wide-ranging assortment

of much more seasoned vets, a fact showcased on *Six String Soul* to great effect. Backed by an intergenerational cadre of players and featuring performances from legends — from Otis Clay to Jack McDuff and from Lurrie Bell to Jefferson Airplane's Jorma Kaukonen — this expansive collection also showcases Specter's chameleonic ability to fit into blues and jazz modes with equal mastery.

Six String Soul, though lengthy, never sags, which could be attributed to Specter's predilection for recording in a never-ending variety of contexts. Earlier releases, such as the aforementioned scene-setting opener, are more rooted in the blues, while later releases, such as "Unleavened Soul" (featuring the tremendous McDuff in his element), reflect his interest in soulful, Kenny Burrell-tinged jazz. Specter's most recent releases, such as the timely "Ballad Of George Floyd," have stylistically swung back further toward the direction of his blues roots. Other highlights include "Specter's Walk" and "Fortune Tellin' Man." —*Ayana Contreras*

Six String Soul: Buzz Me; Wind Chill; Railroad Station; Specter's Walk; Fortune Tellin' Man; Ridin' High; Sweet Serenity; West Side Stroll; Seventy-four; Can't Stay Here No More; Get Back Home; Unleavened Soul; St. Louis Blues; You're Gonna Be Sorry; Blues On My Mind; Texas Top; Riverside Ride; Feel So Bad; In Too Deep; Got To Find A Way; This Time I'm Gone For Good; Chicago Style; The Stinger; Blues From The Inside Out; March Through The Darkness; Sanctifunkious; The Blues Ain't Nothin'; Ballad Of George Floyd. (1:44)

Personnel: Dave Specter, guitar, vocals; numerous others.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio *Cold As Weiss*

COLEMINE RECORDS

★★★★

Cold As Weiss sounds familiar and new at the same time, hitting all the conventions of the organ-guitar-drums trio. There's no reinventing the wheel here, because the music ain't broke, and Lamarr ain't tryin' to fix it. This is soul music down to its bones.

Guitarist Jimmy James' soloing on "Big TT's Blues" gets at the core of the feeling, makes an excellent impression and doesn't wear out its welcome. Daniel Weiss, the latest addition to the group (born 1988, not to be confused with the other Dan Weiss, the drummer born in 1977), keeps a perfect pocket and knows just when to add the right amount of flair. He's a tactician, getting the job done. However, it's Lamarr up front on organ who keeps this as crowd pleasing as possible.

It's difficult to describe the perfect, lilting quality of this music — not flashy and outlandish, but certainly not so pleasant as to be forgettable. It's a simple, stripped-down sound that sticks to the ribs because it does exactly what's necessary to soothe the soul.

It shows in the directness of the approach,



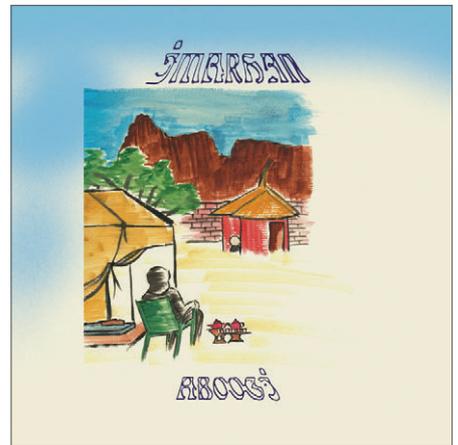
like in the Leon Ware and Arthur Ross tune "I Wanna Be Where You Are" — this is hearkening the Motown sound, the "feel good music" Lamarr says the group specializes in. They aren't doing anything splashy to the song; they don't have to. They have good enough sense to play a good song well with the elements they have. This is the prevailing idea to the rest of *Cold As Weiss'* compositions and arrangements.

—*Anthony Dean-Harris*

Cold As Weiss: Pull Your Pants Up; Don't Worry 'Bout What I Do; I Wanna Be Where You Are; Big TT's Blues; Get Da Steppin'; Uncertainty; Keep On Keepin' On; Slip 'N' Slide; This Is Who I Is. (39:57)

Personnel: Delvon Lamarr, organ; Jimmy James, guitar; Daniel Weiss, drums.

Ordering info: delvonlamarrorgantrio.bandcamp.com



Imarhan *Aboogi*

CITY SLANG

★★★★

This Tuareg quintet has been gaining recognition on the world music scene since their self-titled debut in 2016. With the exception of one track, the band made this album in a studio they built in their home city of Tamanrasset, in Southern Algeria. While they draw on the style of Tuareg rock pioneered by Tinariwen in the early '90s, they put their own spin on it. They are known as a rock quartet, but the music here has a low-key, hypnotic pulse, balanced between bright acoustic and subtle electric guitars, accented by stirring vocal harmonies and restrained percussive touches.

As before, the album features collaborations with fellow artists, lifting the band's appealing melodies and rhythmic interplay to a new level. Acoustic guitars, sparse percussion and the vocals of lead singer Iyad Moussa Ben Abderrahmane (aka Sadam) quietly introduce "Achinkad (The Gazelle)," before the band jumps in with crackling electric guitars and enthusiastic whoops.

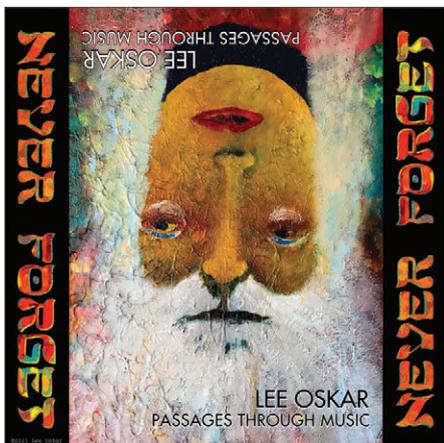
Sudanese singer Sulafa Elyas shares lead vocals with Sadam on "Taghadart (Betrayal)," a song she co-wrote. It's an intense acoustic number describing the desolation created by infidelity. Welsh guitarist Gruff Rhys sings lead on "Adar Newlan (The Blazing Rocks)." It's a funky low-key rocker, with a flamenco flavored rhythm created by clapping hands. The tempo slowly accelerates to bring the album to a satisfying close.

—*j. poet*

Aboogi: Achinkad; Derhan; Temet; Tindjatan; Asof; Assosam; Taghadart; Laouni; Imsalam N'Assouf; Tamiditun; Adar Newlan. (43:52)

Personnel: Iyad Moussa Ben Abderrahmane a.k.a. Sadam, lead vocals, lead guitar, claps; Abdelkader Ourzig, guitars, background vocals, claps; Tahar Khaldi, bass, background vocals, claps; Hicham Bouhassse, percussion, guitars, background vocals; Haiballah Akhamouk, percussion, additional guitars, background vocals; Lala Chekhi, Tata Balhadja Fatma, vocals; Mohamed Ag Itlale a.k.a. Japonais, lead vocals (10); Gruff Rhys, lead vocals (11), guitar and vocals (9); Sulafa Elyas, lead vocal (7), Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni, lead vocal (4), Marco Ngoni, guembri (8); Bilal Lahmissi, Amar Chaoui, percussion; Maxime Kosinetz, synthesizer; Bilal Alhoma, vocals (2); Ahmad Bika, vocals (2).

Ordering info: cityslang.com/artists/imarhan



Lee Oskar
Never Forget: Passages Through Music
 INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★

Harmonica ace Lee Oskar supplied some of the joyful spirit to the platinum-selling rock-funk-Latin-soul band War on their '70s hits like "Slippin' Into Darkness," "The Cisco Kid" and "Low Rider." Though he recorded a string of solo albums through the late '70s and early '80s produced by Sly & The Family Stone drummer Greg Errico, we haven't heard much from him since. Until now.

The son of a Holocaust survivor, Copenhagen-born Oskar comes to terms with his family's experiences on this profoundly moving musical memoir. Composed, produced and illustrated by the 74-year-old harmonica virtuoso, *Never Forget* represents a pinnacle in his career.

On the uplifting opener "Far Away Dreams," Oskar recreates the twin sax/harmonica lines from his War days with partner Charlie Miller. His keening harmonica wails over the melancholy minor key theme on "Miracle Children," then he takes a slow, deliberate approach on "Song From Mom," a delicate piece dedicated to the perseverance, courage and quiet dignity of his mother, who escaped a death camp. The piece morphs into a rousing dance tempo near the end, suggesting optimism in the face of atrocities.

"Last Moments (Saying Goodbye)" is a brief, poignant statement, while "Liberty (An American Waltz)" is buoyant and affirming. A sumptuous version of "My Road," title track of his 1981 album, closes the collection on an elegant note. Oskar's triumph is a reminder of the healing power of music.

—Bill Milkowski

Never Forget: Passages Through Music: Far Away Dreams; Miracle Children; Song From Mom; Last Moments (Saying Goodbye); Never Forget; Liberty (An American Waltz); World For Peace; Son For Sri; My Road. (39:39)

Personnel: Lee Oskar and many more.

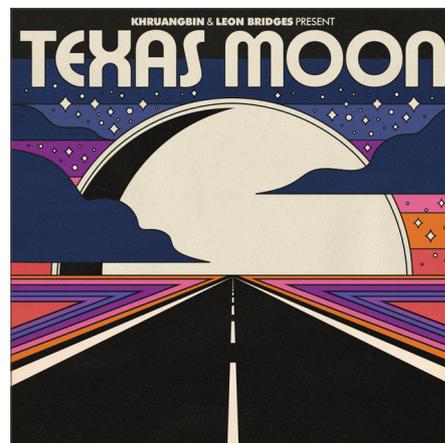
Ordering info: leoskarmusic.com

**Khruangbin/
 Leon Bridges**
Texas Moon
 DEAD OCEANS
 ★★★★★½

Texas Moon is the spiritual flipside to Khruangbin and Leon Bridges' 2020 release *Texas Sun*, and like that other brief yet adventurous romp, *Texas Moon* weaves together seemingly disparate musical traditions into one well-wrought psychedelic tapestry.

This collection opens with "Doris," a track meant to give a salt-of-the-earth woman her roses at the twilight of her life. Doused in liberal reverb and wah-wah guitar the way a New Orleans debutante of yesterday might have doused Evening In Paris on her collarbone, the sound captured here, replete with a waterlogged chorus repeating the subject's name like a chant, sticks with you long after the track is over.

The same could be said for all of the tracks: From the groovy, Afrobeat-flavored dancer "B-Side" to the Prince-inspired slow jam "Chocolate Hills," and the country-by-way-of-soul "Mariella," each track furthers the overall sonic plot that the collective has explored since *Texas Sun*. Laura Lee's luscious bass, Donald



Johnson Jr.'s laid-back drums and Mark Speer's hallucinogenic guitar, augmented to great effect by Will Van Horn's windswept pedal steel, all perfectly support fellow Texan Leon Bridges, a vocalist who continues to delight with his intimate tone and phrasing.

—Ayana Contreras

Texas Moon: Doris; B-Side; Chocolate Hills; Father Father; Mariella. (22:39)

Personnel: Leon Bridges, vocals; Khruangbin, background vocals; Mark Speer, electric guitar, percussion, Hammond organ, synthesizer (3); Laura Lee, bass; Donald Johnson Jr., drums, SK-20 Symphonic Ensemble (1); Will Van Horn, pedal steel guitar (1, 3–5); Charlie Perez, conga, bongo (2).

Ordering info: deadoceans.com



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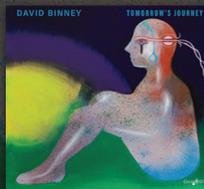
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Marta Sanchez SAAM (Spanish American Art Museum)

WHIRLWIND

★★★★

A fine pianist who is a particularly inventive arranger-composer, Marta Sanchez has led a quintet since 2015, one that has recorded four

albums so far. A constant has been Roman Filiu who played alto on the other quintet recordings but for this project switches to tenor. Altoist Alex LoRe is a major asset, often sounding quite relaxed and laid-back even while improvising over the most dissonant backgrounds.

The opener, “The Unconquered Vulnerable Areas,” has a soothing theme before it builds in suspense and tension. LoRe shows that he can hit high notes with ease while Filiu has a stormy and stirring tradeoff with Sanchez.

“Dear Worthiness” is a thoughtful and dark piece about self-doubt that includes a fluent alto solo and some pretty expressive playing by the leader.

“SAAM” is filled with dissonance and the assertive drums of Allan Mednard, while the harmonized horns on the ballad “The Eternal Stillness” are memorable, as is arguably the best piano playing of the set.

“Marivi” was written as a message to Sanchez’s mother, whom she was not able to visit in Spain during her last days because of COVID-19 travel restrictions. The emotional

piece features singer Camila Meza and trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire as guests.

Of Sanchez’s other originals, “If You Could Create It” is relatively playful yet purposeful, Filiu and bassist Rashaan Carter star on a somber “The Hard Balance,” “December 11th” has a tango feel and a sparkling piano solo, and the closer “When Dreaming Is The Only” is highlighted by the interplay of the saxophonists.

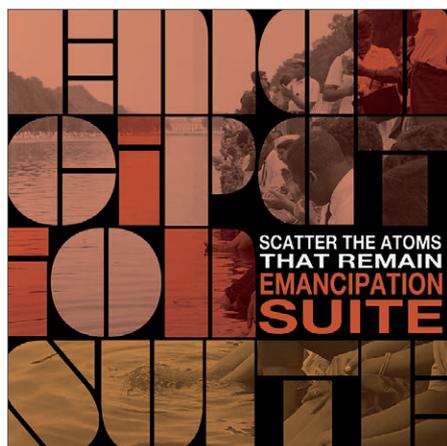
It is a bit surprising that Sanchez’s music has not been featured with a big band, for her complex yet often surprisingly accessible compositions would benefit from all of the potential tone colors.

For now, SAAM serves as an excellent introduction to her writing. —Scott Yanow

SAAM (Spanish American Art Museum): The Unconquered Vulnerable Areas; Dear Worthiness; SAAM (Spanish American Art Museum); The Eternal Stillness; Marivi; If You Could Create It; The Hard Balance; December 11th; When Dreaming Is The Only. (57:26)

Personnel: Marta Sanchez, piano; Alex LoRe, alto saxophone; Roman Filiu, tenor saxophone; Rashaan Carter, bass; Allan Mednard, drums; Camila Meza (5), vocals, guitar; Ambrose Akinmusire (5), trumpet; Charlotte Greve (5), synthesizer.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



Scatter the Atoms That Remain Emancipation Suite

MOBILITY MUSIC

★★★★

Drummer Franklin Kiermyer is enamored of John Coltrane’s late-period music, and with three fellow devotees mines that vein of soberly engaged, energy-imbued improvisation in *Emancipation Suite*, his 12th release since 1992. Subtitled “Equality–Compassion–Liberation” — like Trane’s *Meditations* tracks “Compassion,” “Love,” “Consequences” and “Serenity” — this quartet’s suite aims for the powerful sweep of works from 1965 to ’66, when the iconic saxophonist led McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones into open-ended forms of increasing density, and subjected his classic quartet’s makeup to personnel flux.

The rhythm triumvirate of the band has been stable since 2017, Emilio Modeste tak-

ing the saxophone chair just in time for this pre-pandemic, live-in-the-studio recording, which boasts no “predetermination” and only one edit of the continuous, nearly 26-minute performance to create two sides for a limited-edition LP. He blows sturdily, as one standing literally or figuratively in front of Kiermyer’s kit must, although to compare his sound to Coltrane’s majestic virtuosity, profound drive and ethereal transcendence can’t help but put him at a disadvantage. Modeste plays well, squeezing simple motifs for all their urgent squeals and cries, and shouldn’t be faulted for not yet attaining the profundity of his model’s penetrating intonation and all-encompassing resolution.

Whitfield’s pianistic approach derives from Tyner’s, with thick chords and fast lines establishing fields of clustered, throbbing pitch. It must be a challenge for Gardner to provide the center around which everything swirls, but he does so handily. Over, under and through his colleagues’ efforts, drummer Kiermyer thunders and clatters, generating multiple simultaneous pools of percussive activity that bubble and burst like lava pits. His parts heard without the others’ would be symphonic. Here they dominate, his skins perhaps a touch tighter than Elvin’s, his cymbals slightly brighter, his demands of heroic response just as dramatic. Scatter the Atoms That Remain calls for universal freedoms such as it enacts.

—Howard Mandel

Emancipation Suite: Equality; Compassion/Liberation. (25:53)

Personnel: Franklin Kiermyer, drums; Davis Whitfield, piano; Emilio Modeste, tenor saxophone; Otto Gardner, bass.

Ordering info: kiermyer.bandcamp.com



The BBB featuring Bernie Dresel The Pugilist

DIG IT

★★★★½

On *The Pugilist*, Bernie Dresel and his big band, The BBB, offer an hour of rousing big band tunes, primed for a nighttime groove or a morning pick-me-up. Blow after blow, round after round, the boxing metaphor delivers. A mixture of traditional big band sounds and new arrangements of both jazz standards and classics from the American songbook, the third effort from The BBB does not disappoint. —Joshua Myers

The Pugilist: The Pugilist; Running And Jumping; Lulu’s Back In Town; Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough; You’d Be So Nice To Come To; World Premiere; Positive For The Blues; 100R 200N; Rico’s Rowdy Rhumba; I Got Rhythm; La Vie En Rose; All Blues; What Could Possibly Go Wrong?; Zomby Woof. (63:20)

Personnel: Bernie Dresel, drums; Djordje Stjepovic, upright slap bass; Andrew Synowiec, guitars, electric bass (14); Anthony Bonsera, trumpet, keyboards, vocals (14); Dave Richards, Jamie Hovorka, Jeff Bunnell, trumpet; Carl Saunders, trumpet, vocals (7); Alan Kaplan, Ryan Dragon, James McMillen, trombone; Juliane Gralle, bass trombone; Brian Scanlon, alto and soprano saxophone; Kirsten Edkins, alto saxophone; Rob Lockart, Tom Luer, tenor saxophone; Brian Williams, baritone saxophone.

Ordering info: berniedresel.com



Little North Familiar Places

APRIL

★★★★

Little North, a Nordic group with stellar output, is at its core a piano-bass-drums trio, but they have tricks up their sleeves. They're charming without having to be bombastic, contemporaneous without being derivative.

Album opener "Running Down The Park" immediately evinces a sound like Aaron Parks, but that's exactly what they're going for, in the same way "Spotting Salamanders" will definitely make you think of Tigran Hamasyan. It's

proof these young players have good taste, chameleonic talent and voices of their own, but it also tugs at the heartstrings to see the canon of the genre play out by literally hearing influences of the time. Even Benjamin Jacobsen's humming on "Huntress" while his brother Lasse is grooving along feels just like the hardest grinds Ivo Neame made alongside Anton Eger in Phronesis.

Benjamin Jacobsen's hypnotizing piano entrances lay the ground for Kasper Tranberg's not-so-subliminal messages to still make their resounding impact on "Calystegia." "Einar" is a simple but deceptively gritty ballad thanks to Lasse Jacobsen's brushes on the kit. Martin Brunbjerg Rasmussen's bass on closer "Ind i det Azurblå" is his chance to shine, providing the soul in their answer to the song and group's question of what exactly is Nordic in their music.

Familiar Places is Little North's fourth album in six years, further defining and investigating a sound all their own based on twisting everything around them.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Familiar Places: Running Down The Park; It's Beginning To Rain Again; Calystegia; Push; Spotting Salamanders; Einar; Tide; Huntress; Ind i det Azurblå. (45:25)

Personnel: Benjamin Jacobsen, piano; Lasse Jacobsen, drums; Martin Brunbjerg Rasmussen, bass; Kasper Tranberg, trumpet (3); Victor Spasov, guitar (1, 4, 9).

Ordering info: littlenorth.bandcamp.com

Taru Alexander Echoes Of The Masters

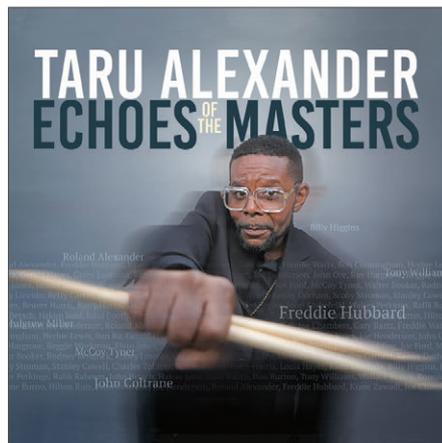
SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Drummer Taru Alexander celebrates the music of his father, the late saxophonist Roland Alexander, with a splendid quartet that makes late-'60s post-bop sound fresh and true. Saxophonist Antoine Roney and pianist James Hurt are at the top of their game, while bassist Rashaan Carter clicks with the leader, whose kick drum and engaging accents drive the mostly uptempo tracks and bind everyone's efforts.

Hurt's touch — even on his expertly articulated right-hand single-note runs — is innately percussive. His connection with Alexander is most clearly demonstrated on "Kojo Time," a song the father wrote for his son, born while he was on tour in Europe. Roney's tenor sound is bracingly muscular; his improvisations twist and turn themes as if he's wrestling with them but always in control. Carter's bottom line bounces and throbs. Alexander's patterns across his kit exhibit creative variety, as well as fast hands and feet.

Of the material: The senior Alexander's "Change Up" has a climbing motif, and "Kojo" a satisfying turnaround. "I Mean You," credited to Thelonious Monk and Coleman Hawkins,



is the occasion of a bright reading with singer Hanka G.; the smile in her voice makes up for some mis-intonation.

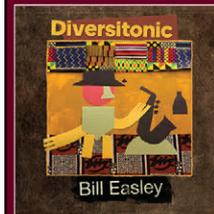
This album is fun listening, the ensemble united in its embrace and celebration of jazz that's timeless — capable of generating new ideas and exciting performances, regardless of being nearly 60 years of age.

—Howard Mandel

Echoes Of The Masters: Change Up; I Mean You; Deception; Kojo Time; Peresina; Pinocchio. (35:41)

Personnel: Taru Alexander, drums; Antoine Roney, tenor saxophone; James Hurt, piano; Rashaan Carter, bass; Hanka G, vocals (2).

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

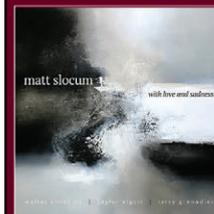


BILL EASLEY DIVERSITONIC

SSC 1651
available 3/11/2022

BILL EASLEY saxes **KYLE KOEHLER** hammond **B3**
MARK WELLS pianos (ac & el) **JOHN HANKS** drums

A sixty-year career as a successful professional musician requires flexibility and perseverance. Woodwind master Bill Easley has been able to achieve this feat by being a fantastic musician and putting himself into promising musical situations. He believes the key to his success has been his attraction to diversity in both music and life. On his new recording, *Diversitonic*, Easley aims to make a personal statement utilizing musical influences that have impacted his life and career.

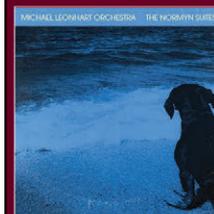


MATT SLOCUM WITH LOVE AND SADNESS

SSC 1648
available 3/18/2022

MATT SLOCUM drums **WALTER SMITH III** tenor sax
TAYLOR EIGSTI piano **LARRY GRENADIER** bass

With Love and Sadness features Grammy-nominated pianist Taylor Eigsti, an important voice in the world of creative music and a musician whose "range of expression is not limited by illusory stylistic boundaries," says Slocum; first-call bassist Larry Grenadier, who also appears on Slocum's previous album, *Sanctuary* (Grenadier is a modern-day giant known for his 25-year association with the Brad Mehldau Trio, as well as consequential engagements with Pat Metheny, Paul Motian, Charles Lloyd, Joshua Redman, and Mark Turner); and saxophonist Walter Smith III, a modern master who is equally at home in a variety of musical settings — from performing with the Roy Haynes Quartet to co-leading an ensemble with Matthew Stevens and Joel Ross.



MICHAEL LEONHART ORCHESTRA THE NORMYN SUITES

SSC 1655
available 3/25/2022

featured artists include

NELS CLINE guitar **ELVIS COSTELLO** vocals
BILL FRISELL guitar **LARRY GOLDINGS** Hammond **B3**
DONNY MCCASLIN tenor sax **CHRIS POTTER** bass cl
JOSHUA REDMAN tenor sax **JSWISS** rap

The Normyn Suites is both a requiem and celebration, inspired by the life and death of the bandleader's 15-year-old dog, a female mini dachshund named Normyn. The third album by the Michael Leonhart Orchestra features a pair of suites — the first of which is an exploration of the stages of grieving, while the second is a reflection on love and loss.

In addition to the two suites, the album features three songs co-written with Elvis Costello during the quarantine. There are two versions of "Shut Him Down" bookending the suites — one with Joshua Redman, playing his late father Dewey's newly restored tenor saxophone for the first time on record, the other with Chris Potter on bass clarinet. Costello performs spoken word on "Radio is Everything", featuring legendary guitarists Bill Frisell & Nels Cline who also co-wrote the songs with Leonhart and Costello. The final collaboration is the driving "Newspaper Parade".



Sunnyside

sunnysiderecords.com



3 Black Editions Reissues

Black Editions Group comprises the imprints Thin Wrist, VDSQ and Black Editions, which collectively specialize in making beautifully packaged, limited-pressing vinyl runs of contemporary improvisation, solo guitar music and reissues of Japanese outsider sounds that were originally released during the CD age. Recently, Black Editions has reissued two titles by the late Japanese guitarist Masayuki Takayanagi, and a previously unissued, archival recording by Peter Brötzmann, William Parker and the recently deceased Milford Graves, as well as launching Black Edition Archive, a new partnership between BEG and Eremita Records.

Masayuki Takayanagi (1932–'91) is a founding figure of Japanese free improvisation. In 1969, he broke dramatically from jazz practice, embracing feedback and other sounds that can only be obtained at high volume while discarding heads, tunes and fixed grooves. His music developed into conceptual approaches, such as “Gradually Projection” and “Mass Projection,” which prescribed degrees of density and aggression.

The triple LP *Station '70: Call In Question/Live Independence* (122:19, ★★★★★), by the Masayuki Takayanagi New Direction Unit, is an early example of his radicalized approach. Recorded over three days in early 1970 and first released by P.S.F. Records on a pair of CDs in the mid-1990s, it introduces a sound that had very few precedents. The interactions between Takayanagi, bassist Motoharu Yoshizawa, drummer Sabu Toyozumi and (on one track) tenor saxophonist Mototero Takagi, are an ongoing process of simultaneous construction and demolition, in which whatever the musicians devised when denied the comforts of familiar form constitutes a new form.

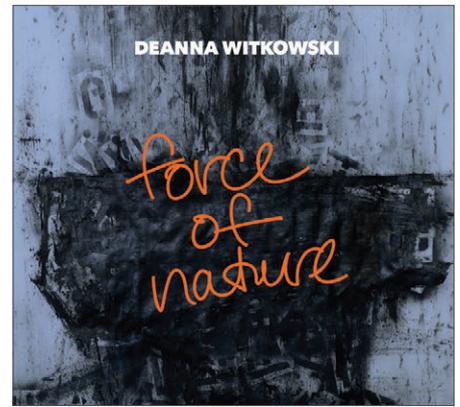
On the opening “Extraction,” guitar and drums drive like battering rams, scattering tendrils of feedback and cymbal flourishes like debris, while the bass produces earthquake-like vibrations. Of special note is the album’s sixth side, the previously unreleased “Mass Projection, February 1970,” in which wordless vocals and a slashing attack amplify the music’s expression of an anguish that is denied catharsis.

Eclipse (45:59, ★★★½), which was recorded five years later and originally released in an edition of 100, is even more uncompromising. It represents the acme of Takayanagi’s use of calibrated aggression to unite his ensemble’s independent musical attacks. On “First Session 1 & 2 (Gradually Projection),” his guitar and Hiroshi Yamazaki’s drums seethe unquietly, like carnivorous underbrush dwellers waiting to strip the flesh from cellist Nobuyoshi Ino and bass clarinetist Kenji Mori if they ever let their levitational efforts flag.

Peter Brötzmann and William Parker are by no means strangers. They’ve recorded 15 albums and performed together since innumerable times 1993, mostly in Brötzmann’s Chicago Tentet and the Albert Ayler-themed small group Die Like A Dog. What sets *Historic Music Past Tense Future* (68:05, ★★★★★) apart is the participation of drummer Milford Graves (1941–2021). While Graves has been an acknowledged game-changer since the 1960s, when he worked with Ayler and the New York Art Quartet, he has never played by anyone’s rules, least of all the music business’. He was too busy pursuing an autodidactic, integrative study of martial and natural healing arts, cardiological research and private musical performance to worry about making too many records. But in 2002, he joined Brötzmann and Parker for one long set at the punk club CBGBs. It was recorded by Michael Ehlers of Eremita Records, and it is being released for the first time as a double LP that inaugurates a partnership between him and Black Editions.

Graves’ inimitable technique, which rejects steady time-keeping in favor of a white-water maelstrom of sound that contains hints of Afro-Caribbean polyrhythms, set this album apart from anything else in his partners’ shared discography. Parker’s bass joins symbiotically with the drummer’s vortex, deepening and intensifying it, while Brötzmann’s alto and tenor saxophones issue raw, primal cries. On the fourth side, they switch to a Malian doussn’gouni and clarinet, creating a diaphanous but propulsive backdrop to Graves’ shamanic incantations. Black Editions has the circle of existence covered. **DB**

Ordering info: blackeditionsgroup.com



Deanna Witkowski *Force Of Nature*

MCG JAZZ

★★★★½

This musical homage to Mary Lou Williams, Deanna Witkowski’s mentor and Pittsburgh soulmate, complements Witkowski’s biography, *Mary Lou Williams: Music for the Soul*. But *Force Of Nature* is a bold statement of its own, even though most of its 12 tracks, including three from the album *Zodiac Suite*, are interpretations of Williams originals.

The album opens with “Gjon Mili Jam Session,” Williams’ debonair homage to a 1940s jazz photographer, featuring Clay Jenkins’ playful trumpet and a Witkowski piano solo that turns ever more percussive. “Cancer,” spliced with “Act Of Contrition” from Williams’ religious work *Mary Lou’s Mass*, is the most contemplative of the three Zodiac updates. Jenkins’ voice-like trumpet adds to the affectionate dreaminess Witkowski brings to this beautiful tune. The protracted ending affirms Witkowski’s comfort with the large gesture. She follows with the energetic “Lonely Moments,” a showcase for Jenkins and a testament to Witkowski’s command of the melodic line. Her trades with drummer Scott Latzky are invigorating; the whole group is in on this high-wire act.

The atmospheric center of the album is “What’s The Story, Morning Glory?/Ghost Of Love.” Latzky’s brushwork and Daniel Foose’s careful bass lines keep this mini-medley at a slow burn, but Witkowski eventually stretches out, draping the melody over her bandmates. Latzky’s snare helps propel “Force Of Nature,” Witkowski’s brisk original. In each track, Witkowski finds a still center; here, she gives way to Foose’s urgent bass and Latzky’s rim shots, gathering strength to return for a triumphant close. —Carlo Wolff

Force Of Nature: Gjon Mili Jam Session; Aries; Taurus; Cancer/Act Of Contrition; Lonely Moments; What’s Your Story, Morning Glory?/Ghost Of Love; Force Of Nature; Intermission; Dirge Blues; Carcinoma; Stompin’ At The Savoy; My Blue Heaven. (68:06)

Personnel: Deanna Witkowski, piano; Clay Jenkins, trumpet; Dwayne Dolphin, Daniel Foose, bass; Roger Humphries, Scott Latzky, drums.

Ordering info: mcgjazz.org



Tinsley Ellis
Devil May Care

ALLIGATOR
★★★★½

The Duke Robillard Band
They Called It Rhythm & Blues

STONY PLAIN
★★★★½

After decades in the trenches, Tinsley Ellis and Duke Robillard have secured enduring reputations. The usually overblown tag legend has a strong scent of legitimacy when applied to these two guitarists.

Ellis' *Devil May Care* is the best of the dozen albums he has made for Alligator since starting a solo blues-rock career in 1988. His singing voice is a casually potent vehicle of expression that age has given a new texture and a mature timbre. When he writes melodies, Ellis demonstrates an inquiring spirit and an ear for the catchy. His lyrics, even those on conventional romantic quandaries, are thoughtful rather than boilerplate. The 10 songs here, each a winner, were picked for the album from 200 he composed while at home in Atlanta for 18 months because of the pandemic. Being off the road so long allowed him to *own* his music as never before.

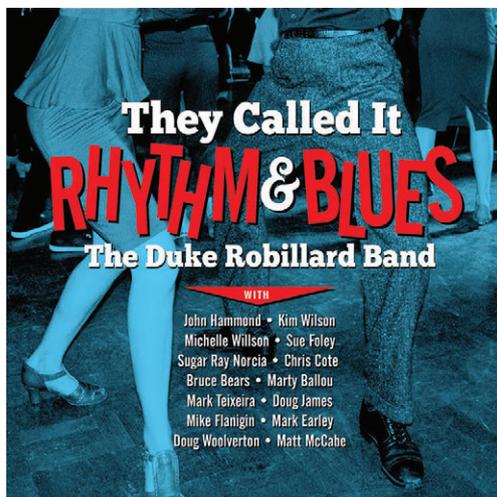
Years ago, Ellis blazed like a firestorm, but today he's a model of self-regulated heat who strikes the notes on his guitar with hard confidence and musical intelligence. He taps into a vein of inspi-

ration soloing on the Hendrix-like "Step Up" and the ballad "Don't Bury Our Love" (a cousin of Al Kooper's "I Love You More Than You'll Ever Know"). Ellis' guitar seemingly helps him summon the power to confront inner hurt and find a place of solace in the Muscle Shoals-soul of "Just Like Rain." Striking technical ability goes hand in hand with emotional tenacity throughout the album. Several songs carry the spirit of the Allman Brothers Band. Bonus: Pianist and organist Kevin McKendree, who produced the album with Ellis, enriches the music with his consummate workmanship.

Robillard's guitar work is excellent all through *They Called It Rhythm & Blues*, his salute to 1950s jump-blues and the other strains of R&B that drove his band Roomful of Blues in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Rhode Islander may be a nostalgist, but he cuts through the sentimental mists of time with a creative clarity that reinvigorates lost artifacts by Roy Milton, Joe Liggins, ZuZu Bollin, Mickey & Sylvia and others. His trait of elegant precision alternates with one of celebratory bravado. Robillard has found his passion in giving living history lessons, none better than his instrumental "Swingin' For Four Bills" in honor of guitar men Bill Jennings and Billy Butler and organ players Wild Bill Davis and Bill Doggett.

Vocals yield varied results. Though underwhelming in the past, Robillard steps up as a quirkily likable singer on three songs. Chris Cote, a member

of Robillard's ace band, acquits himself commendably on several others. Kudos also to Sugar Ray Norcia, whose expressive engine runs in highest gear when singing and playing harmonica on Tampa Red's "Rambler Blues" and Jimmy Nelson's "She's My Baby." Texan guests Kim Wilson and Sue Foley are in satisfactory vocal form. However, Bostonian Michelle Willson sounds hoarse trying to



put across two numbers. More appropriate for another Robillard album, veteran bluesman John Hammond gouges the air with his craggy voice doing Howlin' Wolf's "No Place To Go" and the country blues "Homeless Blues."

—Frank-John Hadley

Devil May Care: One Less Reason; Right Down The Drain; Just Like Rain; Beat The Devil; Don't Bury Our Love; Juju; Step Up; One Last Ride; 28 Days; Slow Train To Hell. (48:23)

Personnel: Tinsley Ellis, guitar, vocals; Kevin McKendree, organ, piano; Steve Mackey, bass; Lynn Williams, drums, percussion; Jim Hoke, saxophone (3, 4, 7); Andrew Carney, trumpet (3, 4, 7).

Ordering info: alligator.com

They Called It Rhythm & Blues: Here I'm Is; No Good Lover; Fools Are Getting Scarcer; Tell Me Why; Rambler Blues; The Way You Do; Champagne Mind; Homeless Blues; Outta Here; In The Wee Wee Hours; Someday After Awhile; She's My Baby; Trouble In Mind; No Place To Go; The Things I Forgot To Do; I Can't Understand It; Eat Where You Slept Last Night. Swingin' For Four Bills. (68:02)

Personnel: Duke Robillard, guitar, vocals (2, 9, 17); Chris Cote, vocals (1, 3, 6, 10, 11, 16); Bruce Bears, piano, organ; Marty Ballou, acoustic and electric bass; Mark Teixeira, drums; Sugar Ray Norcia, vocals, harmonica (5, 12); John Hammond, vocal, guitar (8, 14); Kim Wilson, vocals, harmonica (4, 15); Michelle Willson, vocals (7, 13); Sue Foley, vocals, guitar (2, 18); Mike Flanigin, organ (2, 18); Matt McCabe, piano (4); Doug James, baritone and tenor saxophones; Mark Earley, tenor and alto saxophones; Doug Woolverton, trumpet; Anita Suhani, background vocals (9).

Ordering info: stonyplainrecords.com

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Alexander Hawkins Mirror Canon Break A Vase

INTAKT
★★★★½

An intriguing connectivity exists between Alexander Hawkins Mirror Canon (the moniker for the particular lineup with which the pianist plays on his new album), “Break A Vase” (the album’s title track) and Hawkins’ reputation as a jazz improviser. These elements channel a delicate duality of clarity and explosive unpredictability, which thrives throughout the album’s 10 tracks.

Joel Lyssarides Stay Now

ACT
★★★★½

Joel Lyssarides is a young Swedish pianist who is rapidly gaining renown, not just in Europe, where he was building a live performance career before the COVID-19 pandemic began, but on streaming music services, where his compositions are perfect for playlists with titles like “Peaceful Piano,” “Chilled Jazz” and “Jazz For Study.” His playing is technically flawless, reflecting his classical training at both the Södra Latin College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music in his home country, and his simple, melodic compositions fit well into the subgenre of Nordic piano jazz. You could play them alongside the work of the Esbjorn Svensson Trio, Iro Haarla or any number of other artists.

Lyssarides seems like a romantic at heart, if the early track titles on *Stay Now* (“As Night Let Down Its Curtain,” “Sommarsnow,” “Cloudberry Hill”) are any indication. But there’s also a spiritual aspect, as evidenced by titles like “Gowns Of Dark,” “Procession” and “St. Joseph.” This isn’t really reflected in the music, though. There’s a gradual rise in energy level over the course of the first two or three tracks, but they all blend together into what feels

“The Perfect Sound Would Like To Be Unique” opens the album with immediate, humorous self-awareness. Striking silences alternates between single, often low-register notes drowned in pedal reverb. This first track, which does seem to be searching for the “perfect sound,” establishes a contemplative space that suits the individual piece and the album’s overall themes. From there, the flutterings of notes from Shabaka Hutchings’ flute, the metallic flashes of bowed cymbal and the clacking percussion on “Sun Rugged Billions” seem to perpetuate this sonic search with and impulsive freneticism.

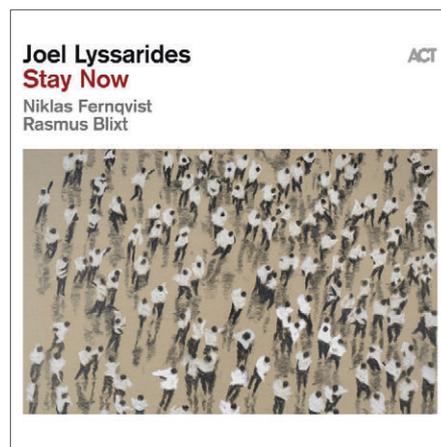
The title track returns to a reserved, piano-only introduction, similar to the opener. Subtle tone phasing applied to the decay of some notes gives the piece a distinctly modern quality, as do the dissonant chords, and a secondary, cyclical piano motif. It’s as though the titular vase endures under the unavoidable shards (in this case chords) left after its breakage.

—Kira Grunenber

Break A Vase: The Perfect Sound Would Like To Be Unique; Stamped Down, Or Shovelled; Sun Rugged Billions; Generous Souls; Faint Making Stones; Break A Vase; Chaplin In Slow Motion; Domingada Open Air; Stride Rhyme Gospel; Even The Birds Stop To Listen. (49:29)

Personnel: Alexander Hawkins, piano, sampler; Neil Charles, acoustic bass guitar, upright bass; Stephen Davis, drums; Shabaka Hutchings, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute; Otto Fischer, electric guitar; Richard Olátundé Baker, adamo (talking drum), percussion.

Ordering info: intakt.com



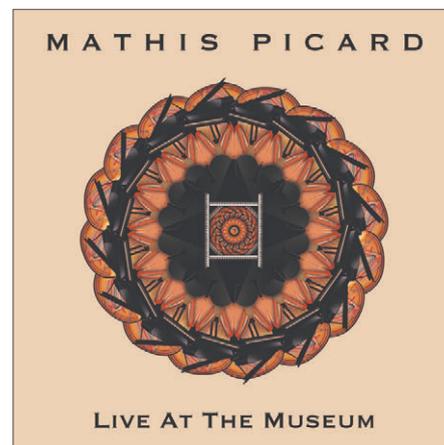
like a single performance. This is an album that sets a mood and sustains it. Lyssarides’ playing always focuses on the same qualities: rippling, repetitive patterns that land somewhere between Bill Evans and Philip Glass, supported with unobtrusive patience by bassist Niklas Fernqvist and drummer Rasmus Blixt. It’s nice while it’s on, but quickly forgotten when it’s over.

—Philip Freeman

Stay Now: As Night Let Down Its Curtain; Sommarsnow; Cloudberry Hill; Is There A Way; Gowns Of Dark; Procession; Chimera; Stay Now; Echoes; Down And Out; St. Joseph; The Last Verse. (42:32)

Personnel: Joel Lyssarides, piano; Niklas Fernqvist, bass; Rasmus Blixt, drums.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Mathis Picard Live At The Museum

OUTSIDE IN MUSIC
★★★★

Mathias Picard’s solo piano recital is certainly one of the most intriguing releases that I have heard in recent times. As he shows on the opening selection on his debut recording as a leader, “The Creation Of The World” (an obscure John Lewis song), he often has the feel and touch of a vintage pianist but his playing is mostly quite modern and never predictable.

There are times, particularly during a rather original interpretation of Willie “The Lion” Smith’s stride piece “Cuttin’ Out,” that he uses an innovation devised by Jason Moran. Picard plays that piece almost conventionally in spots before seeming to hit a brick wall, sounding as if he were stuck in a tape loop, only able to play over a repeated two- or four-bar section. Finally, when the tension has built up to a high level, he breaks through to the rest of the chorus.

Picard has brilliant classical technique and a vivid imagination, as he displays during this January 2019 concert at the National Jazz Museum of Harlem. In addition to the Lewis song and two by The Lion (including an inconclusive “Woodland Fantasy” with Savannah Harris added on drums), he embraces John Williams’ emotional “Leia’s Theme” in a mostly out-of-tempo rendition and reinvents pieces by Ravel and Bix Beiderbecke (a rather abstract “In A Mist”). He also quotes parts of “Rhapsody In Blue” on a few occasions.

Of his five originals, the ballads tend to work best, while “Firelude” does not lead anywhere. Some of the selections segue into each other or do not have definitive endings but perhaps that was his intent, to sound as if the music were merely flowing through him.

—Scott Yanow

Live At The Museum: The Creation Of The World; Cuttin’ Out; Earthalude; Snake Song; Leia’s Theme; Like, Blue; Firelude; Le Gibet; In A Mist; Clouds; Woodland Fantasy.

(49:11)

Personnel: Mathias Picard, piano; Savannah Harris, drums (11).

Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com



The OGJB Quartet

Ode To O

TUM

★★★★

Andrew Cyrille/William Parker/Enrico Rava

2 Blues For Cecil

TUM

★★★★½

Ode To O and *2 Blues For Cecil*, the latest releases from Finland-based TUM Records, showcase the power of collective improvisation and the radical voices that propel modern improvised music forward.

The powerhouse group behind *Ode To O* is



the OGJB Quartet, which features saxophonist Oliver Lake, Graham Haynes on cornet and electronics, bassist Joe Fonda and drummer Barry Altschul. Each of these musicians is, in their own right, a pioneer in modern improvised music, and the totality of their experiences is apparent in this beautifully complex yet effortless set of songs.

They pay tribute to their musical predecessors, dialoguing with the free-jazz pioneer Ornette Coleman on “Ode To O,” Hungarian composer Bela Bartók on “The Me Without Bela” and violinist Billy Bang on “Da Bang.” They then turn outward and forward in the second half, experimenting with tone rows and digital effects on “The Other Side” and elongated notes and whimsical percussion on “Caring.”

2 Blues For Cecil is inspired by another jazz

great, the late pianist and bandleader Cecil Taylor. This record represents the first time that drummer Andrew Cyrille, bassist William Parker and flugelhornist Enrico Rava have played together as a trio, but they are connected by their individual experiences spent performing and recording with Taylor since the 1960s and 1970s. This throughline manifests in liberatory improvisation and uninhibited expression between the three established musicians.

“Improvisation No. 1” and “Ballerina” are marked by frenetic horns and muscular basslines, supported by dynamic yet understated drums. “Improvisation No. 2” takes a turn toward more philosophical, with Parker’s bass and Rava’s flugelhorn in a subtle crescendo of textural lines and somber tones.

What makes *Ode To O* and *2 Blues For Cecil* particularly powerful is that all of the musicians on these two records have had decades-long careers in free-jazz, and it is this very collective creativity that expands our understanding of the genre. —Ivana Ng

Ode To O: Ode To O; Justice; The Me Without Bella; Da Bang; The Other Side; Caring; OGJB #3; Bass Bottom; OGJB #4; Apaxionado. (57:46)

Personnel: Oliver Lake, alto and soprano saxophones; Graham Haynes, cornet, electronics; Joe Fonda, bass; Barry Altschul, drums, percussion.

2 Blues For Cecil: Improvisation No. 1; Ballerina; Blues For Cecil No. 1; Improvisation No. 2; Top, Bottom And What’s In The Middle; Blues For Cecil No. 2; Enrava Melody; Overboard; Machu Picchu; My Funny Valentine. (67:17)

Personnel: Enrico Rava, flugelhorn; William Parker, bass; Andrew Cyrille, drums.

Ordering info: tumrecords.com

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Lenny Tristano playing solo in Toronto, 1963.

Show Tristano Some Love

A deep-rooted, Anglo-Saxon suspicion of ideology has so thoroughly pervaded the wider culture that we routinely withhold affection from anything identified as a school or a movement, or, with deeper shudders, an -ism. There are exceptions, of course, like the recent rage for Afro-futurism. No single or greater figure has been more thoroughly sidelined, as a result, than the music's greatest — and some would say first — teacher. We admire Lennie Tristano, and we routinely acknowledge his importance, but somehow we have not been taught to love him. The Tristano school, with obvious exceptions, is treated like some remote Jesuitical sect, admired for its rigor, but rarely embraced. Lee Konitz, perhaps the most obvious of those exceptions, said that he could recognize a pupil of Lennie's by the way they walked down a Harlem street. Many took this for criticism.

It's all about to change, God willing. A new six-CD Mosaic box titled **Lennie Tristano – Personal Recordings** (★★★★) offers the most comprehensive reassessment of a major artist since the Albert Ayler *Holy Ghost* monolith landed. Not only is the set a revelation in showing Tristano's importance as a bridge between Ellingtonian swing (the solo "Suite Thursday" from 1970 has been on repeat all day) and free jazz (the early "Digression Expanse" and "Live Free" from 20 years earlier may be the first recorded instances of jazz without clear harmonic armature and bar lines), it also reveals him as a puckishly playful improviser, someone very far removed from the cool, doctrinaire martinet of imagination. Of course, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary in the existing discography, but most observers have refused to acknowledge the signs of personality. Here, and especially on the solo recordings made at Rudy Van Gelder's and at his own East 32nd Street studio, a new conclusion is unavoidable.

Sometimes, one just needs to listen to

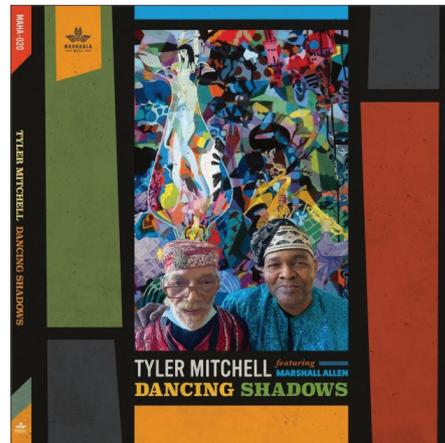
those who knew a figure best. Anyone who ever bumped into Olivier Messiaen, for instance, knows that he wasn't the shy, difficult mystic of legend. Those close to him reported a tough, earthy man with a blunt sense of humor.

In answer to the charge that Tristano's playing was always a juggernaut of eighth notes, unstoppable and unvarying, saxophonist Lenny Popkin is on hand to argue that every note has its own character and that they're far more varied in rhythm than is usually conceded. No argument with that.

Unlike Mosaic's usual practice, the material isn't organized with strict chronology, but with reference to playing situations. Disc 1 is live trio material with Billy Bauer and Arnold Fishkin, recorded in 1946 and '47. Disc 2 is solo material. Disc 3 is sextets with Konitz and Warne Marsh, live recordings that must now be considered landmark documents in the evolution of free jazz. Then, somewhat unexpectedly, the approach shifts to mainstream jazz on disc 4, concluding with further duos and trios, and then that pioneering free jazz date with Konitz, Marsh and Bauer on the final two discs.

It will be argued that, like much of the material on *Holy Ghost*, some of the recordings are plain horrible to the brink of listenability. But as with the Ayler set again, the lo-fi sources somehow confirm the historical importance of the document, the way black-and-white footage of World War II always seemed more authentic than the colored stuff. There's nothing monochrome about Tristano's musical world, and even through the wow and hiss, there's always something wonderful to be found. A great and pioneering teacher, yes. A man who sometimes consigned the bass player's role to industrial predictability, yes, too. But as this extraordinary set show, there is so much more. **DB**

Ordering info: mosaicrecords.com



Tyler Mitchell feat. Marshall Allen *Dancing Shadows*

MAHAKALA

★★★★½

Bassist Tyler Mitchell and saxophonist Marshall Allen worked together in the Sun Ra Arkestra in the mid-1980s, helping lay extraterrestrial sounds over traditional genres. Mitchell explored other avenues in the intervening decades, while Allen — a bolt of energy at age 97 — still leads the Arkestra. Their collaboration revisits Arkestra classics such as "Interstellar Low Ways," the title track and "A Call For All Demons," newly arranged by Allen. It also honors its own members with fresh material: Alto saxophonist Nicoletta Manzini, a protégé of Allen's, is namechecked in the creamy Mitchell ballads "Nico" and "Nico Revisited."

Mitchell's bowed bass launches Sun Ra's "Enlightenment," a Mingus-styled blues in which tenor saxophonist Chris Hemmingway gets a chance to unspool beefy lines over Mitchell and drummer Wayne Smith. When Allen weighs in with his trademark squawks and blats, the link between the traditional and the otherworldly becomes obvious.

This album is also a feast for saxophone fans, blending Manzini's and Allen's altos with Hemmingway's tenor on the pell-mell title track, and lashing Mitchell, Smith and percussionist Elson Nascimento to Allen's explosive bleats on the free, abstract "Marshall The Deputy."

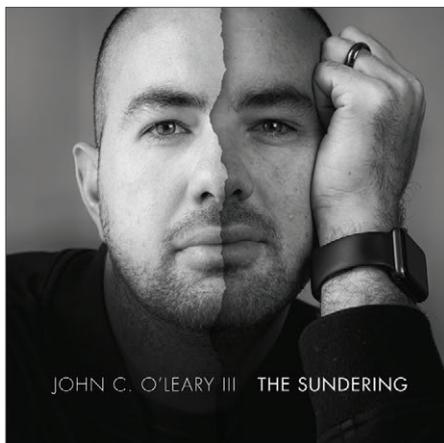
The one cover is "Skippy," an amusing, angular Thelonious Monk tune that grounds an album that at times threatens to slip its moorings. Other relaxants are the sultry "Angels & Demons At Play," featuring subtle Allen EVI.

—Carlo Wolff

Dancing Shadows: Interstellar Low Ways; Spaced Out; Angels & Demons At Play; Skippy; Nico; Dancing Shadows; Carefree; Marshall The Deputy; Nico Revisited; Space Travelers; Enlightenment; A Call For All Demons. (47:06)

Personnel: Marshall Allen, alto saxophone, EVI; Chris Hemmingway, tenor saxophone; Nicoletta Manzini, alto saxophone; Tyler Mitchell, bass; Elson Nascimento, percussion; Wayne Smith, drums.

Ordering info: mahakalamusic.com



John C. O'Leary III *The Sundering*

ARBORS
★★★★½

The liner notes (“unpacking instructions,” as one critic has put it) by pianist John C. O’Leary III are essential to understanding *The Sundering*. Its arc of majesty, drama, mystery and inquiry weaves a compelling story, but a confusing one unless one reads O’Leary’s remarkable recounting of his own cultural background and search for a unified self against that background. That story gives *The Sundering* its true beauty.

Without this, for example, the uncertainty

Scott Burns/John Wojciechowski/ Geof Bradfield *Tenor Time*

AFAR
★★★★½

On this warm, bold mainstream project out of Chicago, it is indeed “tenor time,” times three. On this project, created and produced by keyboardist Richard D. Johnson and recorded in a single day in his studio, tasteful saxophonists Scott Burns, John Wojciechowski and Geof Bradfield summon up a winning and rare temporal simpatico of sound: the sound of three strong tenors, individually and in accord.

They work in harmony and counterpoint, and occasionally in taut unison as on the head of “Altar Blues” and the uptempo, bop-ish “Force Majeure.” That tune is a ripe showcase for the saxophonists’ expressive mettle, along with Johnson. Compositional contributions are evenly supplied by the saxophonists and Johnson. Bradfield’s entries are standouts, from the opening clarion-call swing of “Valkyrie” to the Mingus-ish ballad “Some Other Sunday.”

In the album’s diversified mix of feels and musical palettes, the waltz factor represents nicely in the form of Burns’ traditionalist jazz waltz “Monday Waltz,” contrasting the brisk-

— the feeling of loss — in his version of “All The Things You Are” (a duet with Snarky Puppy’s Shaun Martin) makes no sense. Given the context, it is deeply moving instead. Ditto the non-festive “Christmas 1992,” whose dimension comes from O’Leary’s wordless vocal and Martin’s subtle synths, and the fraught resolution of the closing “The Coupling.”

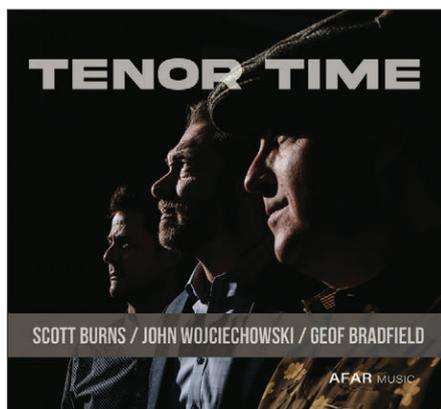
Which is not to say that the music has no potency on its own. The context gives shading to “Contextual Binding Theory” and “Ghosts In The Desert” parts 1 and 2, but the dark spiraling of the former and the eerie sparseness of the latter can also speak for themselves. “Samba Jelly” — written specially for the album by its other guest pianist, Dick Hyman — works as more of a plug-in than a segment of the arc. The other pieces mentioned above all have their own charms as well. Still, it’s a bit like appreciating puzzle pieces as standalone objects: reasonable, but beside the point. Absorbing the whole story elevates *The Sundering* from a fine collection of piano tunes to a profound work of art.

—Michael J. West

The Sundering: Aurora; Contextual Binding Theory; Intro To The Sundering; The Sundering; All The Things You Are; Christmas, 1992; Focus; Ghosts In The Desert 1; Samba Jelly; Xenographic Barrier; Truly’s Theme; Ghosts In The Desert 2; C Jam Blues; The Coupling. (73:56)

Personnel: John C. O’Leary III, piano, voice (6); Shaun Martin, piano (4, 7, 13); Prophet REV2 (6); Dick Hyman, piano (9).

Ordering info: arborsrecords.com



er, lighter minor-mode waltz “Jazz Folk Song” penned by Wojciechowski. The tune features a solo by Johnson, who supplies the final two tunes of the outing. His “Curioso” is a mostly march-fueled setting and framework for interactive tenor solos, and respects are paid to the recently belated Chick Corea on Johnson’s “Corea,” which weaves in and out of swing grooves.

In all, *Tenor Time* showcases Chicago talent deserving wider recognition. —Josef Woodard

Tenor Time: Valkyrie; Monday Waltz; Force Majeure; Some Other Sunday; Altar Blues; Jazz Folk Song; Curioso; Corea. (56:03)

Personnel: Scott Burns, John Wojciechowski, Geof Bradfield, tenor saxophone; Richard D. Johnson, piano, Fender Rhodes; Clark Sommers, bass; Greg Artry, drums.

Ordering info: afarmusic.com



Kurt Rosenwinkel *Kurt Rosenwinkel Plays Piano*

HEARTCORE
★★★★½

One need not be an established fan of Kurt Rosenwinkel to appreciate the technical and melodic instinct with which he writes. That said, while catalog familiarity isn’t a prerequisite, much of what shapes Rosenwinkel’s story as an artist is what can shape the way this album is received. The album showcases the piano as a melodic storyteller and Rosenwinkel as a composer. On both fronts, the album delivers a rich, surprising and qualitatively diverse listening experience.

Despite its conceptually general title, “Music” establishes a clear musical throughline with a syncopated motif that recurs throughout the piece. Yet, between these familiar moments, the piece floats along in a carefree manner. Rhythms change fluidly and subsequently, the melody’s flow seems to shift like someone continually changing their gait as they walk. This isn’t a sign of compositional dysfunction. Rather, it should be seen as a window into the musically diverse relationships — flush with classical and jazz — both of Rosenwinkel’s parents had with the piano.

“Whispers Of Love” offers glimpses of delicate and warm melodies, tucked between reverb-laden, rapid melodic rumbblings. The latter seems to oppose delicate whispering but perhaps it’s the inverse: The piece’s busiest sections reflect quick bursts of love. Rosenwinkel’s most direct homage to his father, “For Dad,” displays Rosenwinkel’s appreciation not only for who his father was as an individual and a parent, but also for how Rosenwinkel views music: as a medium that provides healing and that can help humanity convey empathy without uttering a word.

—Kira Grunenberg

Kurt Rosenwinkel Plays Piano: Love Signs; Music; Lost Song; Whispers Of Love; The Cross; For Dad; Cycle Five; Hommage à Mitch; Reassurance; Heavenly Bodies. (48:26)

Personnel: Kurt Rosenwinkel, piano.

Ordering info: heartcore.com



Five-Note Morphing: A Path to Improv Success

Improvisation by key centers, by blues scale or via the ability to play any note convincingly over any chord are always options. Here I explore a fourth avenue: being literal with each chord change, responding with chromatic decisions that conform to the symbol of the moment.

If you're a more experienced improviser, questions may arise in your head: "Can I *really* play on the chord changes? Or do my lines stop every time I play a color tone?" If you're less experienced: "Am I ready to go beyond scale-steps 1, 3, 5 and 7 and *hear* 9, 11 and 13? Or do I run from them?"

Jazz education for less-experienced improvisation levels tends to focus on requiring mastery of full scales. Yet students learning entire scales tend to gravitate to the root of every new chord as they improvise, not exploring the rest of the scale as much. And many of the lyrical melody lines of standard-tune composers — and even the improvisational solo lines of the jazz masters — aren't built of eight or nine pitches: many have only four or five notes.

So if great, lyrical lines can be constructed from just a few notes, why not focus for a while on mastering *half*-scales that originate from a single pitch name throughout the piece, adjusting chromatically as needed to address the shifting harmonies? I call this "five-note morphing" and have found it to be the single

best indicator as to whether a student — or I — can successfully make the changes while improvising over a given tune.

This approach is as effective (or more so) for vocal improvisers and for developed classical musicians, yet it is very different from learning scales from each chord-root. And it's just as relevant for advanced improvisers on very challenging chord changes: You'll be forced to address the chords and related scale steps in ways you might otherwise avoid. I call it "the great lie-detector," because if you've been faking your way through the chord changes, you'll hit a full-stop quickly in this exercise.

Variables

Recognition of a given chord's third and seventh is critical. But decisions as to whether to proceed through a natural ninth or a flat-tened one, or a natural fifth or a raised one, are up to you. What does the flavor of the melody of the tune at that point suggest? Do you wish to reinforce or defy that? An initial approach can often be to shift as little as possible from the preceding or following chord's key-center, as that will minimize mental interruption to the improviser and thus potentially maximize your lyricism as the chords move by (as in my book *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers*).

Where you start your five-note pattern is also up to you. Regardless, you'll end up covering *all* the letter-names of the scale, as *part one* of the exercise is to perform a five-note scale up and down; *part two* is to start on the fifth note of that exercise and begin a new five-note pattern from there, thus covering a total of a ninth.

You can then explore starting the exercise from any scale-step of your choice; and you'll never lose one of the most important elements of the drill. Whereas in improv practice it's easy to avoid certain tones, in five-note morphing you have to address *every* letter-name. By doing so, you'll get your ear attuned to 11ths, 13ths and altered fifths and ninths that you likely would otherwise have avoided for as long as possible — and which would have caused you to doubt your solo line even when hitting a very "tasty," *correct* note.

If you're new to swing, first perform these in an even-eighth bossa nova style. But eventually you have to perform them in swing; do so at as slow a tempo as you need to be accurate. You'll find repeats here to vamp the drill, plus the occasional passing tone to facilitate a repeat. If you're an instrumentalist, *singing* these exercises will benefit you greatly, placing the sounds in your mind's ear before you reach them on your instrument.

My final advice: Though I am providing you written examples for pedagogical purposes, I strongly encourage you to teach this approach strictly *by ear*, at least for blues and simpler chord progressions. You and your students will then develop aural recognition of the darker and lighter tonal colors associated with shifting chords — invaluable!

A Minor Blues

I have great results starting with A minor blues: See why in Example 1a. Comping aside, this path of Example 1a is so easy for middle school soloists that often I'll teach measures 1 and 9, then simply tell them to watch for my thumbs-down signal in bar 9 and thumbs-up in bar 10 as they either play the exercise or solo within the five notes.

Example 1b is a bit more challenging in bars 10 and 12 — but doable with just a bit of practice. You can still teach it by ear, then remind students in real-time by calling out or using flash cards. Remember, the final V chord is optional.

F Basic Blues

Comping aside, for a basic F blues the first eight bars of Example 2a are identical; so I can even use a thumbs-up in measures 9 and 12,

plus a thumbs-down in measures 11 and 1, to cue the E natural or E \flat . I can point out later our use of C minor and major scales. And now we have lydian-mixolydian in a different measure.

Example 2b is of similar difficulty. And I can point out later our use of F major and F minor scales — perhaps even E half-diminished (still F major), if that won't confuse the participant.

B \flat , 'Rhythm' Changes

Comping aside, you can solo over the A sections of "Rhythm" changes entirely with the B \flat major (ionian) or B \flat dominant (mixolydian) scale, as well as the blues scale. So let's focus on the bridge, which changes to three other keys before returning in its last two bars to the home key of B \flat . Example 3a shows minimal pitch-shifts are needed.

Again, you can hold two, one or no fingers up to signal the number of accidentals needed at a given point. Sometimes I use flash cards that simultaneously show the number of accidentals needed in the keys of most band instrumentation: C, B \flat , E \flat and F concert.

Example 3b requires a shift every two bars, from G, C, F to B \flat , also possible with flash cards.

Standard Tune: 'Satin Doll'

Let's look at a standard tune, which can be more complex. Example 4a addresses the four key centers that appear in the initial A section of "Satin Doll": C, D, G and G \flat (or, in part, D \flat). This illustrates how important it is across the two iterations of the exercise to negotiate each pitch, which you might otherwise easily avoid if only improvising during practice).

Both Examples 4a and 4b require a small leap from the end of bar 6 to the beginning of bar 7 — but to either the fifth or first scale-degree of the key, so they're quite doable with a little practice.

After the drills, invite the students to solo using just *half-scales* with the *same* letter names.

Variations on Morphing

The preceding examples carry the same five notes throughout a measure. But you can adapt five-note morphing to a harmonic rhythm of half notes (shifting to the new scale in the second half of the bar) or of quarter notes (changing the scale every beat). It's as relevant for practicing John Coltrane or Wayne Shorter tunes as it is for blues and standards. As long as you proceed up five notes and down five notes (if in 4/4), you'll be forced to address the chords and related scales in ways you might otherwise avoid. Once achieved, you'll be confident that you can play any pitch-name over any chord.

You can download C Treble, C Bass, B \flat , E \flat and F versions of these musical examples, plus mp3 rhythm section play-along accompaniment, within the online version of this article archived at garciamusic.com/educator/articles/articles.html. **DB**

Trombonist, vocalist, composer and educator Antonio García (ajgarcia@vcu.edu) is director of jazz studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. On his website (garciamusic.com), he examines some related works: his articles "Thematic Dissonance: No Wrong Notes!" and "Clear Chord Symbols," and his book *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers* (Kjos Music).

Example 1a: A Minor Blues (starting on E)

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Example 1b: A Minor Blues (starting on A)

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Example 2a: F Basic Blues (starting on C)

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Example 2b: F Basic Blues (starting on F)

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Example 3a: B \flat , "Rhythm" Changes Bridge (starting on A)

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Example 3b: B \flat , "Rhythm" Changes Bridge (starting on E)

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Example 4a: "Satin Doll" A Section (starting on C)

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Example 4b: "Satin Doll" A Section (starting on G)

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As a composer, Brandee Younger uses rhythmic density to create dramatic increases and decreases in energy, a technique she puts to use in this improvisation.

Brandee Younger's Harp Solo on 'Reclamation'

Harp is not an instrument typically associated with jazz. In fact, if you were to name all the jazz harpists you could think of, I suspect you'd have trouble coming up with three. Brandee Younger certainly deserves to be among those.

"Reclamation," the first track from her 2021 album *Somewhere Different* (Impulse!), has her improvising over diatonic chords in G minor descending in thirds until arriving at the ii chord, which is then followed by the V7 to get back to the tonic. Although harp is generally written in grand staff (like piano music), to make this transcription easier to read, we've only used grand staff where necessary.

As a composer, Younger uses rhythmic density to create dramatic increases and

decreases in energy, a technique she also puts to good use in this improvisation. Her solo starts off very melodic, mainly consisting of eighth notes and longer rhythms, and two-bar phrases. Often she leaves the space of about a whole note between phrases (bars 2, 5, 7, 18, 26, 29). But at bar 33 she bursts into much denser rhythms, with no space, sweeping across three octaves, and she remains at this energy level for almost three measures. Then the energy is brought back down, but not all the way down to eighths. That might be too drastic.

Instead, she goes down to 16ths, and for the culmination brings it back again, but still not quite to eighths. She plays syncopated 16ths, with a lot of dotted eighths, bringing the intensity down, density-wise, but creating a poly-

rhythmic feel. I think this is exceedingly clever, and effective. The energy is brought down from 16ths, and yet remains at the 16th-note feel.

Younger's phrase lengths are also a source of variation. She begins her solo with two-bar phrases (although the first and third phrases, starting on bar 1 and the pickup to bar 6, are single-measure lines held over into the subsequent measure). Then, at bar 10, she plays a phrase that could be heard as lasting five bars, followed by a four-bar phrase and then one that is a single measure.

This variation continues into the already referenced bar 33, where even though there are many more notes than in the previous phrases, it still only takes up about four bars.

The harp has an enormous range — if I understand correctly, it's basically a piano standing up — and the way Younger expands and contracts her use of that range is intriguing. Starting out covering an octave (bar 1), then expanding to two octaves (bars 3–4), going back to about an octave (bars 6–7) and then a fifth (bars 8–9), and two full octaves again (bars 10–14), Younger is using range to create interest.

Also, notice how when she plays an octave or more, it's typically in ascending lines. We don't hear that kind of gesture in the descent until bar 35, close to the end of the solo (and again in 37–38, though less dramatically). It's like she's been leading our ears up and up, and then in closing brings them back down. At the very end she glisses up and down two octaves, which seems like an obvious conclusion after what we've been through.

Notice also how Younger starts out playing single-note lines, like a horn player, and then introduces us to a lower voice — first with octaves in measure 6, but then with subtle answering lines and chords beginning in bar 12. She's basically comping for herself like a pianist, but notice that the comping is almost always placed in the spaces of the melody (either during a silence or a held note). Bar 31 is where this lower voice really starts to take on a life of its own, playing a countermelody before both hands are taken over by the massive arpeggios.

This brief counterpoint sets up our ears for the final two bars, where the two voices interlock but play independent lines. In signature Younger fashion, this creates an uptick in the drama while simultaneously bringing down the energy to signal the improvisation's imminent ending.

DB

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He recently released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass, titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.

♩=74 Gm7
2:05

5 Ebmaj7 Cm7

10 Am7(b5)

14 D7(b9) Gm7

19 Ebmaj7

23 Cm7

28 Am7(b5) D7(b9)

33 Gm7

34

35 Ebmaj7

37 Cm7

39 Am7(b5) D7(b9)

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SAM WISEMAN

Artist and educator Jeff Coffin has developed a new app that teaches improvisation via the arpeggio notes, or “bones,” of a chord.

Playing the Changes

Connecting The Dots Practice App Takes the Mystery Out of Jazz Improvisation

I'm of the belief that anybody can learn to improvise, because I think that everybody is creative. In my work as a jazz educator at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, many of my students are non-music majors who come in with no concept of improvisation and how it relates to chord tones.

That's why I've created an improvisation practice app called Connecting The Dots. It's a clear and easy approach to improvisation, voice leading and understanding the variety of relationships that exist between chords. The information transfers to any song that has chord changes, providing you know what the chord

changes of that song are. The app is like a book and a play-along rolled into one, where the user can follow along on the score, which highlights the notes as the audio track plays. It's the greatest teaching tool I've ever used, period.

CTD is based on a very simplistic process that's appropriate for young players, for classical musicians that have never improvised before, for music teachers who don't know how to teach improvisation, for players who have always wished they could improvise but never got to it — people like my brother-in-law who plays trumpet, who never figured out improvisation but loves playing. Part of this app is for him,

part of this is for my students and part of it is for educators so they can do call and response with their students and get them practicing in all 12 keys. Players are encouraged to make sure they work on the keys less familiar to them. In time, and with focused practice, all of the keys will feel equally familiar and fun for them to play.

When we learn a spoken language, we ideally learn the sounds of the letters that make up words and sentences through imitating and emulating. When we learn music, we ideally learn the sounds of the notes that make up melodies and phrases through imitating and emulating. You can see how similar these processes are, but it doesn't always happen this way. Many times, we try to learn a language from a book. That method can only take you so far, and you'll usually get the accent wrong. By breaking down the CTD concepts into easily digestible exercises, app developer Ben Winkelman and I have made the language of improvisation easier to learn and put into practice than ever before.

I want to teach people how to drive down the middle of the road, on a flat surface, with no traffic, no hills. Then, later, we can introduce some curves and hills and some other cars, too.

The Skeleton Is Key

CTD uses call-and-response exercises that utilize the “bones” of the chords — the arpeggio notes — to help you understand how the vertical chords and horizontal melodies relate in music.

I consider the arpeggios to be the spine, the backbone, the skeletal system of these chords. I give my students the analogy of, “What would you look like if you didn't have a skeletal system? You'd be a big blob on the floor, with no definition and no structure.” Well, your solo is going to be the same way if you don't understand the chord skeletons. Once you have the skeleton, you put in the connective tissue, you can put in a vascular system and organs and some skin and dress it up in a really nice suit, put on a cool lid and some nice shoes, some sunglasses, and you're sounding good, you know? But if you have no skeleton to build on, it's a moot point.

The Apple-based CTD platform will help you better understand form, how to play chord changes, arpeggios, rhythmic pattern recognition, sight reading, imitation, emulation, creativity and improvisation through a series of interactive exercises. Tempos and keys are adjustable within the app, which also integrates seamlessly with the popular tune practice app iReal Pro. The CTD exercises are presented in three sections: Section 1 deals with only one

chord, Section 2 deals with two chords and Section 3 deals exclusively with the blues.

The easy-to-follow exercises include arpeggio studies on root position, 1st, 2nd and 3rd inversions; basic voice leading; rhythmic arpeggios starting on the root, third, fifth and seventh of each chord; tunes at the end of each section pulled from the previous material covered; and solos from me showing how to use the material presented in a way that exemplifies “playing the changes.”

I think of CDT exercises as bite-sized morsels of musical vocabulary that you can easily apply in your practice. You are encouraged to use these examples to stimulate your understanding, creativity and imagination. On the audio I have provided, you will hear me play a phrase, and then you repeat it. You can actually play it or sing it — both are good practice. Personally, I recommend starting off by singing first so you can internalize the phrasing and feel it in your body. Try to emulate what you hear in the way of articulation, phrasing, tone and dynamics when you sing and play.

I have written the exercises in rhythmic patterns to demonstrate how you can play the arpeggios differently. There is no limit to the variety of rhythms you can make up, and your imagination is a great wellspring of creativity.

Points of Resolution

When improvising, simply knowing where your resolution point is within a chord is hugely important. Let’s say that you’re doing a 2–5–1 in the key of C, and if you don’t know what the arpeggio of that C chord is, and you play a C# over it — it ain’t gonna work. But if you play a D, that’ll work. Is that a great resolution for your line? Maybe, maybe not. But if you play an E, for example, or a G, or a C, those notes will work because those resolution points work within the chord. Understanding those resolution points is really important, as is understanding which ones work better than others if you’re in the middle of a phrase, or if you’re ending your solo. That’s another thing I talk about with my students: how to come out of a phrase and understanding the arpeggios.

The importance of voice leading cannot be overstated, either, and the CTD user will find the app’s voice leading grids to be extremely useful as visual aids. At the beginning part of the CTD exercises, you’re just connecting these very simple lines all the way through, in whole notes. Then we put rhythm to it. And that’s when it starts to really open up, showing different rhythmic possibilities. Over the root, third, fifth and the seventh, we go through six different exercises.

Then we go to two notes, and then it’s a different rhythm, six exercises, until we’re using all four of the notes. At this point we’re starting to actually phrase and we’re starting to show how these two chords can connect to one

another, using just the notes of the arpeggio, using just four notes per bar.

Eventually, I’ll say to a student, “OK, now put a half step under each of those notes.” Now we’re using chromaticism. Suddenly, we have eight notes per bar that we can mess around with. And I think that voice leading also informs people’s resolution points, another very important part of the improvisation puzzle. How do you resolve the phrase you’re coming out of? How do you put punctuation on it? Thirds and fifths are really great for that — if you’re leaning on a third or fifth or even a seventh, it tends to leave the phrase open. Whereas if you land on the root, it tends to close the phrase. More advanced players can end a phrase on a sharp 11, or a flat 13, or a nine, or any number of possibilities if they know where they’re going with it. I love the Raheem Roland Kirk quote where he said there are no wrong notes, just incorrect resolutions.

The Improv Part

You can begin improvising using just one note from a chord by varying the rhythmic placement within the bar or by repeating it in some kind of fun and creative way. That’s what these exercises are showing you how to do. Practice this as you move through the exercises. Build off the written stuff and use your imagination to create some other cool ideas when you practice by yourself.

Eventually you will understand how to use all four notes of the arpeggio while you play and you’ll have a much greater understanding of chords and how they relate vertically as they are moving horizontally through the tune. This means you will understand basic voice leading. It’s like a game as you learn to connect the dots and find out what sounds good to you.

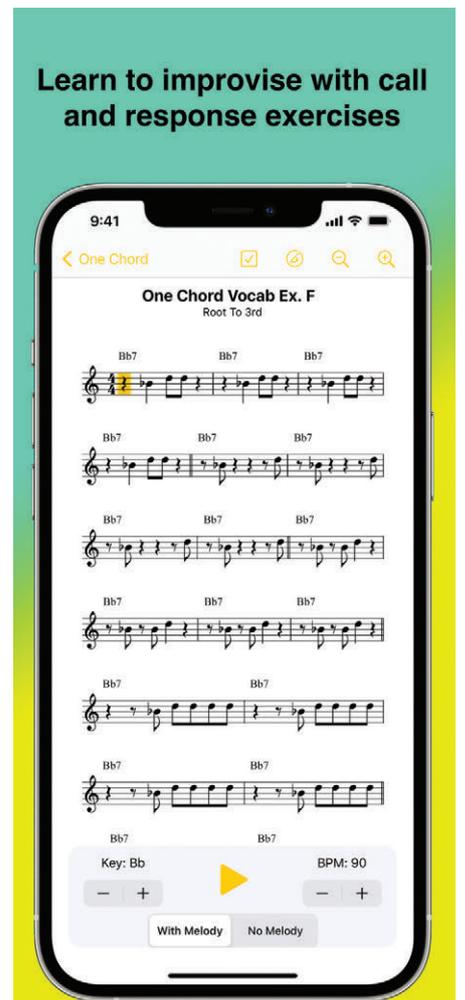
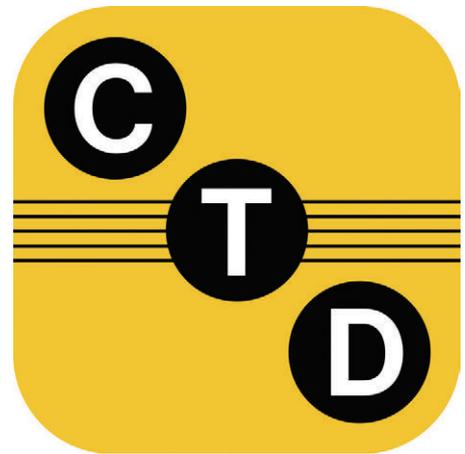
Winkelman, a New York-based pianist who was mentored in app-building by iReal Pro developer Massimo Biolcati, seconded the notion that voice leading is a crucial aspect of learning to navigate chord changes. “It’s not easy to teach voice leading principles to beginning and intermediate jazz students,” he observed. “But I think this app nails it in a very hands-on, easy-to-understand way.”

When I think about harmony, I don’t think of chords and scales. I think of harmony as the relationship between sounds. So, when I’m working with my students, I say, “I want you to know what the root sounds like over a chord. I want you to understand what the third, the fifth, the seventh, the sharp 11 sound like over this chord. What’s the relationship of the sharp 11 to the dominant chord or to the major chord? What’s relationship with the flat 13?” Rather than just regurgitating a bunch of scales, I encourage my students to learn how these things connect. What is the relationship of these sounds together? And how can we create melodies starting with a single note? If you

teach them to really listen to the relationships of what they’re playing, it changes everything. That’s connecting the dots.

You don’t need to know all this harmonic information before you start to improvise. You can begin by listening to the masters and getting some basic ideas about what notes to use. CTD will give you a deeper understanding of this harmonic material and help you to learn how to “play the changes.” **DB**

For more information on Jeff Coffin and Connecting The Dots, visit jeffcoffin.com/app.





"My brain is a strange place," Ben Allison joked, in discussing what sparks his creative musicianship.

BEN ALLISON: HAPPY MOMENTS OUTSIDE

Whenever bassist Ben Allison records, he always leaves some time at the end of the session for an unstructured improvisation with the band. He records these offhand moments and usually files the track without much ado.

But the improvisation that concluded the session for his 2021 record, *Moments Inside* — released via his label, Sonic Camera Records, last November — was different. Deeply nuanced, the free piece tapped

into the players' elation at playing again post-lockdown. They extemporized without interruption for almost half an hour.

In February, Allison launched this sweeping track as *Moments Outside*, a comple-

mentary afterword to the discrete reflections of *Moments Inside*.

Though wholly unplanned, *Moments Outside* stands as a remarkably finished piece. "It's a complete statement, where you can hear the musicians finding their way through this completely spontaneous composition," Allison said in a remote video chat from his Manhattan home. "It feels like a suite of tunes that have a trajectory and that fit together cohesively, beginning to end."

To understand this newest album, Allison's fifth as an independent label owner, it helps to listen closely to *Moments Inside*. Recorded in June 2021, these eight tracks emerged, Allison said, from the pressure cooker of life under lockdown the year before, when the world was shuttered so jarringly. Against expectation, Allison's pandemic visions were of light and air, sea and sky — symbols of the very freedom he yearned for during that first troubling year of the pandemic.

Allison opens *Moments Inside* with "Safe Passage," establishing his composer's gift for melodic storytelling and the group's easeful, string-centric sound (with guitarists Chico Pinheiro and Steve Cardenas). From this tune's clean surfaces, he segues into "The Chase," with its variegated percussive textures and brisk pulse (from drummer Allan Mednard). It's clear, by the end of these two exuberant tunes, that Allison has no intention of deconstructing our communal suffering of the last two years.

Rather, he holds it differently. Take "Milton," for example, a tribute to Brazil's Milton Nascimento, one of Allison's favorite composers. Atop a bustling rhythm section, solo guitar articulates the brightness of the changes, dipping only occasionally — and masterfully — into their harmonic shadow.

"[Brazilian music] is as deep and complex as any musical tradition ever," Allison offered. "Even when [Brazilian musicians] are writings sad songs about horrible things like poverty, there's still a sense of beauty to the music. I find that so inspiring and awesome."

He brings this same insight to "The Great Sandero," a darker, moodier piece despite the smooth lyricism that he uses to recall not just Nascimento, but jazz fusion composers like Weather Report's Joe Zawinul.

"It's in the way that the harmonies move above pedal points," Allison said. "I wanted to write a tune that had one simple melodic idea that was repeated through different permutations."

The title is completely made up, he continued. "But it's mysterious, like an imaginary magician who is creating mystical, wondrous things before our ears."

Allison's also conjures the fantastic on "Voyage Of The Nautilus," a modern jazz



Allison with drummer Allan Mednard (left) and guitarists Chico Pinheiro and Steve Cardenas.

reference to Jules Verne's adventure *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Written in 5, the composition rolls like waves crashing — an effect that's especially strong on the bridge, as the melody surges and swells. As Allison explains, this musical motion represents the submarine's plunge toward the depths and the astonishing sea creatures that live there.

"My brain is a strange place," Allison joked, in discussing what sparks his creative musicianship. Here he's referring specifically to "A Child Sings In Stone," arguably the most rending piece on the album. The prompt for this composition's mournful lines — and Allison's eloquent bass solo on the track — derives from an e.e. cummings poem that suggests children's voices rising from the grave. Allison was reading this poem around the time that he heard about the shooting of Daunte Wright in April 2021.

"The idea of losing a child — I think there's nothing worse. It's just so disturbing," he said. "Hearing [Wright's] parents talk about their loss, it hit me very hard, and I sat down and wrote this tune in three minutes."

Allison was also hit hard by the death of his close friend and longtime collaborator, pianist Frank Kimbrough, at the end of 2020. Not only had Kimbrough played on six of Allison's 10 releases for Palmetto Records, but the two were founding members of the Jazz Composers Collective, a forward-thinking non-profit that sponsored scores of jazz jams, concerts and commissions from 1992 through the mid-aughts.

In Kimbrough's memory, Allison added the harmonically dense "House Party Starting" to the album, the only cover on the roster. In Allison's hands, this surprisingly

complex composition by the oft-overlooked pianist/composer Herbie Nichols unfurls fluidly.

"I think this is the first tune that Frank ever brought to me," Allison said. "I went back and listened to it, and I heard some clusters of harmonies that are not the way that [Nichols] originally recorded it. And the intro is mine. But how it came together was inspired by my love of Herbie Nichols — and by Frank."

Allison originally wrote the only other pre-pandemic contribution to the album, "Breakfast With Eric," as a theme for a friend's indie radio show. Allison based the jazz blues tune on the odd-meter, whole-tone bass line in Eric Dolphy's "Hat And Beard" from *Out To Lunch!*, and in live performance it served as an open vehicle for Pinheiro and Cardenas to trade with abandon. Today this track serves as a reminder of the days when such in-person abandon was the norm, rather than a socially regulated event.

But Allison is resolute in his optimism. He's looking forward to releasing *Moments Inside* on vinyl this spring. He plans to drop *Healing Power*, a tribute to composer Carla Bley, on Sunnyside in July. And his work as an advocate for musical artists — ongoing since his days with the Jazz Composers Collective — continues at the New School, where he both teaches and co-chairs the faculty senate.

"Some day we'll be able to look back and say, 'Those moments were finite,'" Allison observed. "We reemerged from those moments of total lockdown to find that our culture and our art are still here. It's a great feeling."

—Suzanne Lorge

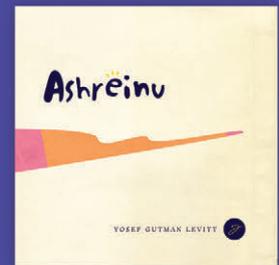
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Taking a break during a Le Coq recording session at Studio A Las Vegas are, front row, from left: Bill Cunliffe, Terell Stafford, Chris Potter, John Patitucci. Second row, from left: Bob Sheppard, Jon Cowherd, Andy James, Michael Dease, Alex Acuña, Marcus Gilmore and Piero Pata. Back row, Josh Connolly and Jake Langley.

LE COQ: A STARTUP LABEL WITH ALL-STAR AMBITION

It was June of 2021, and the pandemic was giving people a bit of a break in certain areas of the country that allowed a collection of jazz all-stars to assemble and jam.

John Patitucci, Alex Acuña, Chris Potter, Terell Stafford, Marcus Gilmore, Jon Cowherd, Bob Sheppard, Michael Dease, Jake Langley — all convened in one place, playing with the joy that comes with an overdue hang after having live gigs torn away during the previous year.

This wasn't New York or Chicago or New Orleans, where it might have been easier to pull this assemblage together. The session was in Las Vegas, and the person organizing the party was Piero James Pata, the founder of Le Coq Records, an upstart label with all-star ambition.

The Las Vegas Italian American Club, a down-home venue with old-school Vegas charm, served as home for this showcase, one that featured another upstart, Andy James, a smokey-voiced chanteuse who charmed an audience of fans, friends and family as she fronted what can only be called a dream band.

For Pata and James, jazz and Le Coq are an interesting second act in their arts careers. Pata grew up playing piano and studying dance, eventually becoming a member of The Australian Ballet, touring with a number of international companies and becoming a flamenco dancer. James was a world-class flamenco dancer who also had a yen for singing. It was flamenco that brought them together professionally and personally. Now, it's jazz that fuels Le Coq Records.

Pata said he started the label after they wound down their dance careers "because Andy wanted to sing again. She sang when she was young, and then all through Spain dancing flamenco with everyone. Whenever a jazz artist would come, we'd go into the city and she'd sing with them."

They immigrated to America to pursue that dream and formed the label to help cut through the challenges of releasing music.

"We had to start again," Pata said. "So to start again, I figured we might as well form a label, and then help other jazz people, who weren't really getting a lot of work. Not just with them working on her albums, but also making their own musical albums."

The result has been a string of high-profile recordings. In 2021 alone, Le Coq released *Le Coq Records Presents: The Jazz All-Stars*; Andy James, *Tu Amor*; Rick Margitza, *Sacred Hearts*; John Patitucci, Bill Cunliffe and Vinnie Colaiuta, *Trio*; and *An Evening With Andy James And John Patitucci*.

More is on the way for 2022, which has already seen the release of *The Jazz All Stars, Vol. 2*, with records by Stafford, Acuña and Cowherd on the horizon as well as another Andy James recording with an all-star big band.

Pata joked that the challenge with the big band album is, "How many numbers can you put in it? Because we've got a lot."

Josh Connolly, vice president of artists and repertoire, noted that “a lot” is about 22 at the time of the interview. Connolly, a Grammy-nominated engineer who has worked in pop, hip-hop, jazz and more, met Pata some five years ago, while mixing an early album for the label. “We’ve done two decades of work in five years,” he said of the pace at which Le Coq is producing music.

“We recorded some albums, and we never put them out,” Pata said. “We didn’t think they were quite the quality we wanted, or we didn’t like the arrangements.”

The question remains, how does a new label draw the level of talent Le Coq has been able to record? For Pata, the answer is simple. “One by one, more players come in,” he said. “So, we start with a group of players, Joe LaBarbera was in it, and Bill Cunliffe started doing everything. Then, it was mainly players that Bill knew, really.”

Top-tier players have been attracted to Pata’s dedication to quality, according to Connolly. “From day one, he has always been, ‘How can we make this better?’ and ‘How can we make this of quality?’” he said.

At the time Connolly met Pata, he had just finished his fifth Santana album and had been nominated for Grammys two years in a row. “So, from an audio standpoint, it was definitely bringing the best quality they had to offer in Vegas. Piero demands that quality throughout everything.”

Through community building, the Le Coq team met artists like Colaiuta, John Beasley and Nate Smith as well as the artists on that June gig in Las Vegas.

Pata offers them freedom to do their own projects the way they see fit. One day, the label might record James with an all-star cast. The next day, they’ll record a date for Acuña or Patitucci or Cowherd.

“That’s been really exciting on my end,” Connolly said. “I get to push record on some of the most incredible people to do this. It’s really a no-brainer when it comes to us working together and trying to create as much content as we can.”

Pata said the philosophy of the label is a direct response to the fact that he and James are artists themselves. “I knew what I wanted,” he said. “So, I know what they want, and I try to give it to them if possible.”

While scheduling can be challenging, Le Coq not only manages recording dates, but also live performances. The label has pulled together a handful of all-star gigs during lulls in the pandemic. Three more have been planned for this spring in Cincinnati, Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Pata said he hopes to work with more jazz legends. He lamented missing a chance to record Chick Corea as a guest artist before the pianist’s passing in 2021.

As for others, “I’d love to get Herbie in the room,” Pata chuckled. “He could play anything he wanted.”

And that’s how a little label dreams big.
—Frank Alkyer

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CLAIRE DICKSON'S VALLEY OF SOUND

Claire Dickson stepped onto a gently bobbing deck and lost track of her perspective. Shadows and perimeters dissolved into expanse. But singing into darkness, she felt closer to her voice than she ever had: “There are no acoustics in the Arctic. So your voice sounds really, really close to you. Frighteningly close. Like it’s a secret that you’re singing.”

In 2019, the Brooklyn-based singer, songwriter and emerging producer out of Boston became one of 29 multidisciplinary artists aboard the *Antigua*, a mobile residency that ferries its passenger-fellows across the Arctic Circle. The experience informed more than Dickson’s output. It emboldened her process. Alone in her bunk, she composed lyrics, worked out progressions on a MIDI keyboard and improvised melodies that would become the bedrock elements for *Starland*, her debut

release as a leader and producer.

The album is the gesture. Hearing the music of *Starland* in its entirety provides listeners a feeling of being warmed from the inside out. Using what she considers a specific sound palette, Dickson casts molten ribbons across cool, clean soundscapes and creates an ebb and flow of textural depth. Seven songs, seemingly connected as movements of a suite, present striking — at times, wordless — lyricism and melody-driven sound

chambers within shapeshifting ambience. As a composer and producer, she allows herself to explore that duality without restraint.

“It’s something that feels very natural to me,” said Dickson, who admitted to fighting prescribed classifications at times. “You have to choose: Is your music melodic or is it ambient?’ [laughs] Or, ‘Try and make your sound fit into this box more,’ which, of course, is never the way to go about creating honest music.”

What’s honest for Dickson is an exploration of context. Her songs aren’t formless. Rather than write the music into sections, she hears the composition unfold in mood changes and atmospheric resonances — a tendency buoyed by the vastness and infinitesimal axis turn of her Arctic surroundings.

“Where someone might hear a chorus,” said Dickson, “I hear a valley of sound. Where someone might move instinctually toward some traditional song forms, I’m more comfortable creating in kind of a through-composed sequence that’s much more abstract.”

Starland engages layers of texture. Dickson had in mind certain effects from the start — the icy buzzing of a toy piano plugin, the glacial echo of a delay. “It is contained, in a way,” she said. But as she composed, her sound palette expanded and her risk-taking intensified. Use of a contact mic on her throat, attached to a delay pedal, became integral to *Starland*’s sound. Present on nearly every track, that particular vocal effect submerges into the instrumental orchestration. “I love using the contact mic because it’s almost closer to the vocal chords than singing,” Dickson said. “It’s accessing the vocalizations from a different direction. And it was fun to deal with depth — with the delay pedal, as well — with that tool.”

Guitarist Grey McMurray appears on “Arctic,” the album’s first movement. His is the only instrumental contribution other than Dickson’s. She sought his refined, fluid expression to activate the sound palette, trusting his expertise and intuition. “He really understood the timing and how randomly specific it is,” Dickson said. “He described it to me as the scribble tattoos people get. They may look like nothing, but they’re actually very intentional.”

Apart from McMurray’s guitar and certain post-production elements mixed and mastered by Lee Meadvin, Dickson composed, recorded and produced *Starland* entirely on her own, an outcome that felt meaningful to her — and critical to the success of her vision for the release. “I could only make what I heard by putting the pieces together and producing it on my own,” she said. “Production and engineering is one area in the music that’s particularly male dominated, so it felt very important to me to overcome that lack of representation and realize my music the way I imagined it.” —Stephanie Jones

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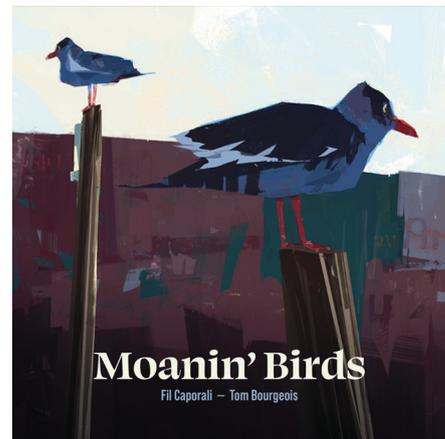
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Ingrid Jensen has helped to steer Manhattan School of Music's jazz studies program through unprecedented times by nurturing students' ability to see opportunity in the unpredictable.

Ingrid Jensen: Growing with Students at MSM

IN SPRING OF 2020, AT THE HEIGHT OF A global pandemic, Ingrid Jensen became interim director of jazz studies at Manhattan School of Music. In a way, assuming the role has been a natural next step for the trumpeter, who began teaching in her early 20s as the youngest professor in the history of the Bruckner Conservatory in Linz, Austria, and holding many teaching positions throughout her nearly three decades on the scene.

But, Jensen also acknowledges that running the program — all while supporting her staff and students, monitoring her daughter's at-home school and attempting to get a few minutes in every day to make music — has been “crazy.”

Still, Jensen has steered the jazz studies program through these unprecedented times by leaning on her own and her team's expertise as improvisers and by continuing to nurture each student's ability to see opportunity in the unpredictable. After all, that's an outlook Jensen learned from some of her legendary jazz teachers, like Clark Terry and Art Farmer.

“[My mentors were] always studying and looking for the new thing and checking out the past but moving forward with all of the inspiration to keep that flow of creativity and never getting stifled,” she said.

MSM was one of the only music institutions that offered in-person options for students during the pandemic. Using face masks, instrument bell covers and ample social distancing, students were able to convene for juries, performances and ensembles. There were also

tracks of students who chose to attend completely online, and others who chose a hybrid approach. This made the programming of courses and performances more complex.

All the while, Jensen, with little administration experience, spent long hours behind a computer screen learning Microsoft applications, Zoom and other tools she'd rarely used in order to help students continue to grow.

“I didn't even know what an Excel document was,” she said. “The students were the instruction manual, [as was] the faculty. Between both groups, I was able to get a sense of what needed to happen, but at the same time we were improvising, all of us.”

Jensen and her staff whipped up some incredible resources to send to students over the internet. They began to develop creative techniques for teaching students through Zoom, and they continued to help support and nurture students' personal growth and mental health — which Jensen notes is already an essential part of her holistic approach to teaching free musical expression.

“[There's a] magnifying glass on mental health and self-worth and confidence that comes along with being able to freely make music. That magnifying glass is like burning a hole into all of us,” Jensen said. “I think that's really a good thing because you have to be able to communicate somehow to a student that what they're doing matters, and they matter.”

Jensen, too, had to find ways to take care of herself so she could show up for her students — and her 10-year-old daughter, whom she cared

for solely for several months during the pandemic while her husband was taking care of a family rental house. Luckily, one of Jensen's side passions is brain study, and over the last few years she'd learned a lot about herself through therapy, discussion and research, all of which helped bolster her resilience for the long haul.

“I think the thing that study taught me the most is that I can listen more and be more attuned to what's around me without all of the extra that used to come along with the processing of day-to-day things, especially baring my soul through my instrument to the audience,” she said. “I think that's freedom — to know that you can know yourself and survive whatever [comes] and even help others along the way.”

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, MSM has also been proactive in terms of Black Lives Matter and has encouraged teaching more material from the African American diaspora — not just in the jazz program, which makes its history in that diaspora, but also into the classical and contemporary music departments. Jensen, who is currently on tour with the star-studded all-woman jazz group Artemis, said those discussions often dovetail with discussions of gender equity in music, too.

“I came into this job knowing nothing of what it means to be a leader on this level, and the one thing I'm the most thankful for — and the most excited by — is this level of accountability,” Jensen said. “It's like a backbone of the change. You can't just go, ‘Oh, yeah, let's honor this person.’ No. Let's make this part of the curriculum so everyone is aware of [artists like] Geri Allen, for example.”

After all, Jensen added, the ability to adapt and authentically include is key to serving today's burgeoning jazz musicians and their futures. Thinking back on when she came up, Jensen balked, “Jazz musicians these days are not only required to play well, they need to understand how to promote themselves on social media, stand out in a saturated market and find ways to make music that genuinely interact with the rapidly evolving zeitgeist.

“These students are so fast with [social media] that it's second nature to them, so now it's really our jobs as the elders to make sure that what they're emulating has substance and has depth and is not just a flash-in-the-pan thing,” Jensen continued. “There has to be continuity of message in everything they do. And that's really where school can play a fantastic role, to keep them accountable for their growth as much as it keeps their educators accountable for growing with them.” —Alexa Peters

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Steve Slagle

Veteran alto saxophonist Steve Slagle has been around several blocks and musical situations since the move from his native Los Angeles to New York in the late 1970s. Beyond early work with Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra, the Carla Bley Band and ongoing links to the Mingus Big Band, Slagle has created a sizable discography as a leader, and a musical partnership with guitarist Dave Stryker, among others. During pandemic times alone, he has cut and released two albums: *Nascentia* and the new *Ballads: Into The Heart Of It* (both on Panorama). This was Slagle's first Blindfold Test, conducted via Zoom from his Manhattan residence.

Miguel Zenón

"Colobó" (*Sonero: The Music Of Ismael Rivera*, Miel, 2019) Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Henry Cole, drums.

In 30 seconds, I know it's Miguel Zenón and his quartet. When his drummer, Henry Cole, first came to the United States, he was in my ensemble at Manhattan School [of Music] where I was teaching. So I met him fresh to New York before he had even played with Miguel, but they've been playing together quite a while. Even though the style he's playing with Miguel is Miguel's music, Henry's also a very open-minded drummer to a lot of new rhythms and new things. I know the pianist Luis Perdomo quite well, and he is a great musician, and I believe it's Hans on bass. And that's probably a song of his. I give it 5 stars.

Immanuel Wilkins

"Warriors" (*Omega*, Blue Note, 2021) Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Micah Thomas, piano; Daryl Johns, bass; Kweku Sumbry, drums.

It's a modern, young recording. If I had to guess the alto player, I'd say possibly Jaleel Shaw. That's the ballpark of guys that are using a lot of chromatic lines in their improvisations. It's obviously a new record and all the guys sound good on it. [afterwards] OK, I know of him. And that would've probably been my second guess. Without seeming critical, the new players rely on using chromaticism a whole lot. And to me it can get overbearing sometimes. But he is a very good player.

John Scofield

"Past Present" (*Past Present*, Impulse!, 2017) John Scofield, guitar; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone; Larry Grenadier, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

Of course, that's John Scofield, with Joe Lovano, Bill Stewart and their newest bass player. It's funny. I heard that song played live, pre-pandemic. John, Joe and I go back a long way. I mentioned to John that that was like an old-school kind of bass part to a new-school composition. I mentioned Walter Page, the bass player. And he said, "Yeah, that's exactly what I was going for." He's repeating the one note over and over, with an old-school swing bass feel over a modern composition. I love the music, and John has a very distinctive sound on guitar. I give it 5 stars.

Charles Mingus

"Self-Portrait In Three Colors" (*Ah Um*, Columbia, 1959) Booker Ervin, Shafi Hadi, tenor saxophone; Willie Dennis, trombone; Horace Parlan, piano; Charles Mingus, bass; Dannie Richmond, drums.

Of course, that's "Self-Portrait In Three Colors," the original recording by Mingus. I first started playing that with the Mingus band around 1990, because it was one of the first charts in the book. It sounds easy, but it's a hard song to play, harmonically and even melodically, because there's so many beautifully held notes. I later arranged it for the Stryker/Slagle Band, for five horns on a record called *Routes* (Strikezone). One of the great things about Mingus' music is that some of it was in kind



"I would give it 100 stars," alto saxophonist Steve Slagle said of Ornette Coleman's 1971 recording of "Law Years."

of a rough form that allows for you to reform it or rearrange it yourself, as opposed to a musician who makes like the perfect quintessential recording of a song and then you never want to touch it again. The reason it's "Self-Portrait In Three Colors" is because it's basically three counterpoint lines coming in one after the other. [On this version] they didn't improvise on it, but in itself it's a great composition, and it's also really good to improvise on. It's got great changes. I'd give it 100 stars for composition.

Kenny Garrett

"For Art's Sake" (*Sounds From The Ancestors*, Mack Avenue, 2021) Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone, electric piano; Johnny Mercier, Fender Rhodes; Corcoran Holt, bass; Ronald Bruner Jr., drums; Rudy Bird, percussion.

That's Kenny Garrett, his new record. One reason I took notice of it was the drummer on that. Of course, he's using two drummers, but I'm speaking of the regular trap-set drummer. I don't know him, but he really plays great on that. He makes it really happen with the triplets and all the ways messing up with the rhythm. It's great. I like the composition. The drums prevail on that and push the music, too. I'm more apt to be rhythmic-oriented than otherwise. I tend to — and I guess Kenny tends to — feel the strongest inspiration from rhythm. 5 stars.

Ornette Coleman

"Law Years" (*Science Fiction*, Columbia, 1971) Ornette Coleman, alto saxophone; Bobby Bradford, trumpet; Dewey Redman, tenor saxophone, musette; Charlie Haden, bass; Ed Blackwell, drums.

I already know it's Charlie Haden with Ornette Coleman and the song is "Law Years." I played with Charlie and this is one song that I used to talk to him about. It's from *Science Fiction*, which I bought when it first came out, in the LP era. Charlie is being somewhat featured, but it's a great composition of Coleman's, with Dewey Redman on tenor saxophone and Eddie Blackwell on drums. Luckily, I got to play with Charlie and Dewey in Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra. Dewey's solo is a great example of his style. To me, he's the best example of somebody influenced by Ornette, but who doesn't sound like Ornette and isn't imitating Ornette. He has that perspective of playing freely, but also playing changes while you're playing freely with the bass player. Many of my students over the years didn't know of this record. They knew of the Atlantic records, the ones with Don Cherry, but they somehow thought that was enough. I think, along with the earlier Ornette records, if you're missing this one, you're missing part of the puzzle of Ornette's music. And I would give it 100 stars. **DB**

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

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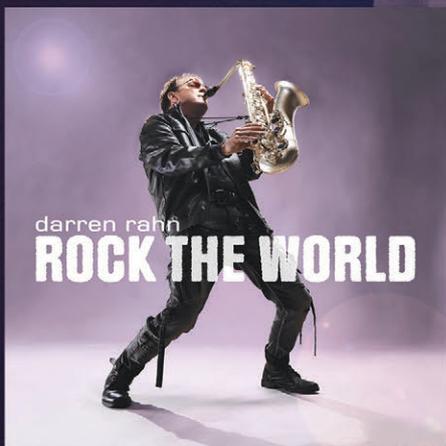


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