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NOVEMBER 2022

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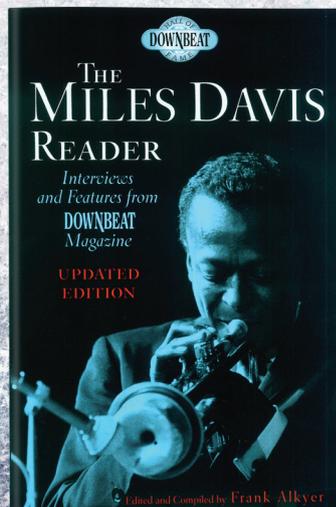
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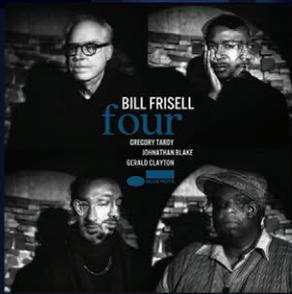


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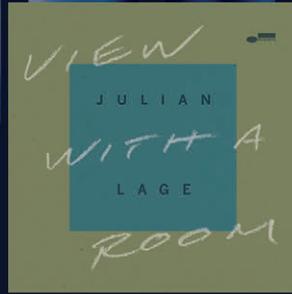
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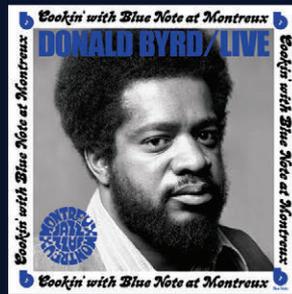
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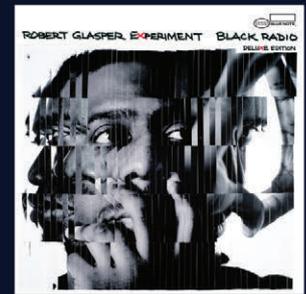
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Still Learning

BY JOE FARNSWORTH

To call Al Foster a student of the drums is an understatement. The 79-year-old master has studied the history of jazz drums in depth — much of it in-person. He speaks of legends like Arthur Taylor, Joe Chambers, Philly Joe Jones, Tony Williams, Billy Hart and other esteemed peers with the wisdom of a veteran artist who has luxuriated in the warmth of knowing these fellow drumming icons as personal friends.



"I like leaving a lot of space, which I learned from playing with Weather Report," Alex Acuña said about making his new album, *Gift*.

VON JACKSON

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Cover photo of Al Foster by Jimmy and Dena Katz

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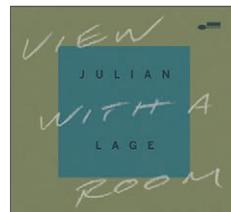
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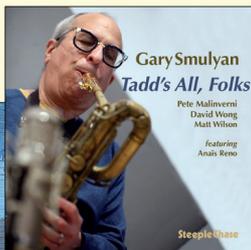
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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



Ramsey Lewis had a warm, open way with music as well as words.

Honoring the Community

IT'S BEEN A BEAUTIFUL, BUSY SUMMER OF festivals, fun and great music this year — a welcome reprieve from, well, you know what.

It's also been a season packed with transition. So, when the dust settled, it became clear that we have an issue full of honors.

For starters, it's the first time living drum legend Al Foster (see page 22) has appeared on the cover of *DownBeat*. Call it an overdue ovation, but his insightful conversation with Joe Farnsworth is a living jazz history lesson.

We also honor two fallen heroes of jazz. First, Ramsey Lewis passed shortly before the issue went to press. (See page 21.) Lewis brought a warm smile, a cool touch on the piano and a radio voice that soothed listeners around the Chicago area for decades. Back in 2009, he and saxophonist Kirk Whalum agreed to sit down for the very first Midwest Interview, a program created by *DownBeat* and the Midwest Band Clinic held every December in the Windy City.

It was a fascinating conversation about the nexus of pop music and jazz. Here's a snippet of that conversation concerning hip-hop:

Lewis: When we took the instruments away from the kids, they resorted to what was left. What was left? Rhythm, right? And the ability to make up prose or poetry.

Whalum: And sample Ramsey Lewis records! [Laughs]

Lewis: And sample! They sampled all of us. You have to admire them for turning to their own resources, what's available to them, and coming up with this music. I dare say there's some genius in there somewhere. If some of these kids had the opportunity to study the funda-

mentals of music, I don't know. Duke Ellington Jr., maybe? Gershwin Jr.? So, I'm still fighting the good fight in terms of getting instruments back in the schools, getting music back in the schools.

With this issue of *DownBeat*, we also honor the passing one of those "kids" who did receive the musical training that we want every child to have. We lost organist Joey DeFrancesco way too soon, at age 51. (See page 18.) He had his first *DownBeat* cover last November. Why did it take so long? Good question, and not one lost on DeFrancesco. At The NAMM Show in April, this writer got a chance to say hello to the virtuoso B-3 organist and thank him for being on the cover. He had two responses.

"It was like a Joey D advertising issue!" he said, and he was right. As a multi-instrumentalist who also played saxophone and trumpet, DeFrancesco had many endorsement deals, and all those companies jumped onboard.

His second response was, "It's about time!" He said it with a huge smile. And, again, he was right. I told him I hoped it was the first of many. Sadly, that wish will not come true.

Finally, we have The *DownBeat* Honors beginning on page 72. These are five people who readers should get to know. They have worked diligently in the fields of presenting, recording and teaching jazz. They're the part of the jazz community that serves as glue: connecting artists with audiences. They're the teachers who light a spark of beauty, truth and music for the next generation. We thank them all for their service to the music, and to this community we love so dearly.

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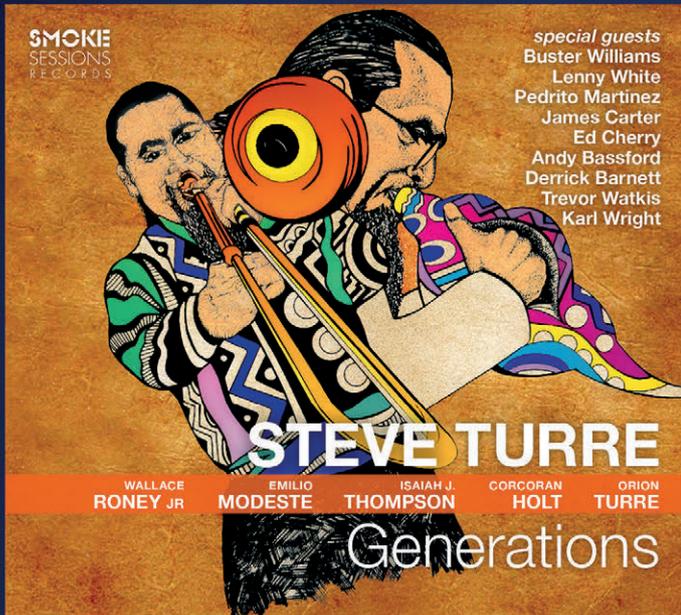
THE SOUND OF SMOKE



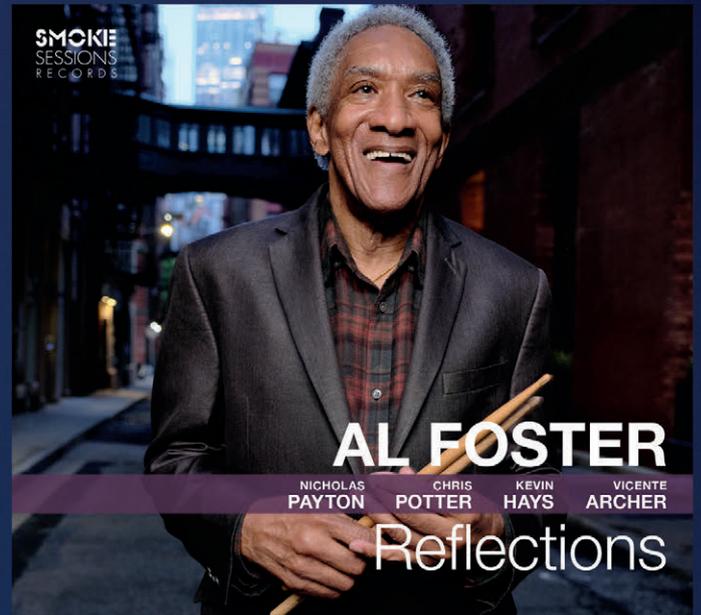
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Beyond-Loving

The Beyond Issue is just fantastic [October 2022]. So much for "Jazz Is Dead"! A point well made. A very comprehensive, well-written issue, covering many talented, creative, dedicated and unique artists/musicians. A great lead-in with the quote "Let's lose the term 'improvise'" from Wadada Leo Smith, which is probably a very good idea, aptly reflected in the articles and talent and expertise that comes forth in this edition. Thanks.

TOM TESKE
 VIA EMAIL

McLaughlin Hall of Fame Plea

In the recent Critics Poll under Hall Of Fame, John McLaughlin had 70 votes in the top half of the list and 30 votes in the bottom half of the list, making his total vote 100 to put him 2nd place under Geri Allen. Right?

M. WEIR
 VIA EMAIL

EDITOR'S NOTE: We goofed, but John's tally was correct. We had added the votes up, but failed to delete the second listing. I look forward to the day we get to honor Mr. McLaughlin as a full-fledged member of the Hall of Fame. We regret the error.

Jazz is Dead, Again?

Jazz is Dead? Yeah, right. That will happen when pink pigs fly past my window. Jazz, like any other organic form, changes and evolves. We jazz fans benefit every time there's a shift in jazz. It just makes the overall catalog broader and deeper. Jazz — the water's fine. Come on in.

LAURABETH MICHELS
 VIA EMAIL

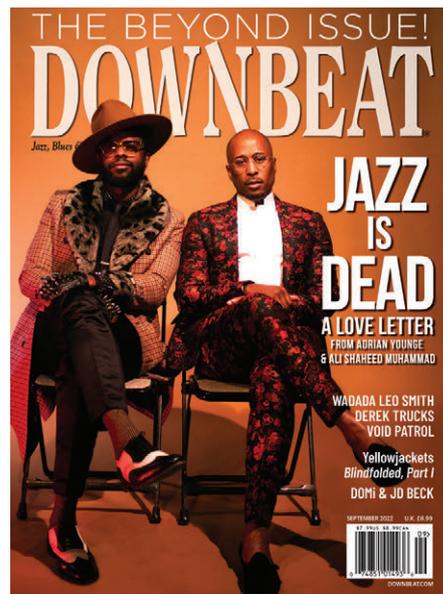
Ramsey Lewis, RIP

Ramsey Lewis is gone at 87. Loved his piano trio, and his *Legends of Jazz* radio show starting around 1998 (I have hours of those). I also have his *Legends of Jazz* TV series with his guest stars. Have him on Marian McParland's *Piano Jazz* radio show, too. He will be missed.

DAN CELLI
 VIA EMAIL

Joey DeFrancesco, RIP

I was shocked and deeply saddened when I heard about Joey DeFrancesco's premature death on Aug. 25. I have been following Joey's career since 1991, but only through recordings until 2010, when I first saw him performing live. I saw him 22 times since and at every show Joey seemed to be filled with a joie de vivre.



One of my favorite memories was seeing him perform with Jimmy Heath at Joe Segal's 90th birthday at the Jazz Showcase [in Chicago] in 2016. The club wasn't big enough to contain all the joy, warmth and love from all the musicians on the stage. I will miss Joey greatly but will remember all the shows and conversations I had with him. Thank you, Joey!

MARC NEBOZENKO
 EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Michael Bourne, RIP

I was sad to read that Michael Bourne had passed. In 1970, I was a musically curious 15-year-old who had just discovered DownBeat, *Bitches Brew*, Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart. In those early '70s issues, Bourne could be counted on to keep readers current on the Zappa/Beefheart fronts with interviews, record reviews and the occasional "Caught in the Act."

GREG MARSHALL
 VIA EMAIL

Corrections & Clarifications

DownBeat regrets all errors and attempts to correct the record whenever possible.

- In the August issue, vocalist Carol Sloane's name was misspelled in the four-star review of her latest album, *Live At Birdland*.
- In the September issue, Azymuth's Kiko Continentino was misidentified in a photo caption in our *Jazz Is Dead* cover article.
- In the October issue, the review of Jon Irabagon's *Rising Sun (Irabagast)* was written by Peter Margasak.

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The American Song series at NJPAC is presented, in part, through the generous support of the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, the David S. Steiner and Sylvia Steiner Charitable Trust, the Joan and Allen Bildner Family Fund, and the Smart Family Foundation/David S. Stone, Esq., Stone & Magnanini.

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JACIE LEE YOUNG



From left, Vieux Farka Touré and Khruangbin's Mark Speer, Laura Lee and DJ Johnson

Paying Tribute to Ali Farka Touré

Vieux Farka Touré is one of Mali's most inventive and adventurous artists. The guitarist is the son of the late Ali Farka Touré, the man who introduced most of the world to the music of his native country, employing a blend of traditional Malian music, American blues and sounds from Northern Mali and the Southern Sahara. His eponymous debut record made him an icon. Later in his career,

the elder Touré toured with his son Vieux accompanying him on percussion. As he grew older, the younger Touré decided to follow in his father's footsteps and picked up the guitar.

Enthusiasm for world music has increased exponentially in the past few decades, allowing the Vieux Touré to experiment. His albums have included reggae and dub reggae effects, rock, funk, Latin and

dance remixes.

His music slowly unwinds, layering up rhythms and overlapping melodies, driven by his impressive fingerpicking. He often includes a couple of his father's songs during live shows, but had never devoted an entire album to his father's legacy, until now. His latest effort, *Ali*, digs deep into his dad's music. He reinvents treasures, familiar and obscure, from his father's catalog, with the

help of Khruangbin, the psychedelic jazz fusion trio from Houston, Texas.

Eric Herman, Touré's manager, explained the genesis of the album. "The original germ of the idea came from a conversation between Vieux, Nick Gold [Ali Farka Touré's British manager and head of World Circuit Records] and me about doing an album of Ali's songs with a band from the U.S., Europe or the U.K., more of an indie or rock band, so they could totally reinvent these Ali songs and put them in a new context." They started brainstorming on who

Speer agreed, saying the band was surprised every time Touré started playing. "I'd never heard [the songs] before, which was kinda great. At first I thought, 'He didn't send over these songs?' But then I thought, 'Actually, maybe it's better we come to it completely fresh.'"

Lee agreed: "When we played them during the recording process, the three of us had never heard them. We didn't know what we were doing until we were playing them."

Touré and Speer both play guitar, but didn't get in each other's way, as they added

melody with a flurry of Congolese guitar lines. Johnson taps out an R&B rhythm on snares, with Speer adding Latin counter-rhythms on congas.

The trio also supplies call-and-response vocals. Near the end, Johnson speeds up the tempo to a brisk soukous beat. Then there's "Mahine Me," where the original was played as a desert blues. Khruangbin lays down a laid-back funk/rock beat, leaving Touré space to rock out before everything shifts into a slow coda, with Lee's bass at the front.

After the COVID delay, Khruangbin went back into the studio to do the final mix and found that the original recordings "have the magic and the energy and spirit of that initial take, when the three of us didn't know what songs we were playing until we were playing them," Lee said. "A lot of times, there's a freshness that's really beautiful in it. But it was something that we also wanted to refine. I specifically wanted to craft bass lines in a few of the songs, just to make sure it sounded more like me."

To complete the album package, Lee went looking for a cover image by an artist from Mali. She saw a work by Abdoulaye Konaté and reached out to Herman, who made the connection. "Laura sent me a picture of a piece that's called *L'Homme du Sahel (Man of the Sahel)*," Herman said. He called Touré who said, "Oh, that's no problem. He's my uncle. Konaté graciously gave permission to use the art. The original is in a gallery in Italy. Konaté had people at the gallery take some photos of it and the production staff worked with them to create the cover art."

Khruangbin is a byproduct of the friendship between the three musicians. They began playing as a unit after several years of hanging out, discussing their affection for a wide range of sounds including funk, dub reggae, surf-rock, ska, Middle Eastern soul, West African music — in particular the guitar stylings of Ali Farka Touré — and Southeast Asian funk. (The band's name is Thai for airplane.)

"The evolution of the sound, our sound, is a culmination of all the things that we listen to that inspire us," Johnson said. "We all listen to different things. We all come from different places. And Khruangbin happens within that Venn diagram where the three circles meet. That's basically what it is. And that's been the evolution of the sound, and it continues to evolve, because we keep listening to different music and being re-inspired by things. I feel like I got an extreme crash course in Malian music and Malian culture from the son of a legend, and a legend in his own right."

—j. poet

'I feel like I got an extreme crash course in Malian music and Malian culture from the son of a legend, and a legend in his own right.' —DJ Johnson

they'd reach out to. Khruangbin was at the top of the list and struck everyone as a perfect fit. During the sessions with the band, Touré would choose a song of his father's, play it, and experiment with the group. Then, they'd figure out the arrangements together.

They all connected in Houston, Khruangbin's home town, and tracked the album in June of 2019. But the pandemic hit and derailed everything.

As the quarantine eased, Khruangbin did a session to complete overdubs and another session to mix and prepare for the album's release.

Touré and the members of Khruangbin — bass player Laura Lee, drummer Donald "DJ" Johnson and guitarist, percussionist and keyboard player Mark Speer — took a wide-open approach to the music.

"Eric asked me to send [Khruangbin] the songs," Touré said, "but it's good to go there, sit down and start to play. This is the best way to do it, because when we start something, and nobody knows what it's going to be, we say, 'Yes, let's go.' We just play." He said things unfolded like a jam session, very spontaneous relaxed.

fills and ad-libs to the unfolding melodies. "My guitar has two pickups, electric and acoustic," Touré said. "Sometimes you hear the electric and sometimes you hear the acoustic."

"There was a point in this project where I said, 'I'm not gonna play guitar,'" Speer said. "Vieux's got this covered. This sounds great. If I add, it's just gonna take away. You know what? I'm gonna go and just play keyboards." In the end, Touré convinced him to stay and play guitar with him.

The arrangements on *Ali* cover an eclectic range of influences.

Ali Farka Touré's recording of "Lobo" is sparse, with guitar unspooling against a background of hand percussion. The new version opens with Touré stating the melody on his own, then the band jumps in with Johnson laying down a crisp funk beat on snare, accented by echoing dub effects and Lee's medium-tempo bass pulse.

Speer plays jazzy, midrange fills, while Touré ornaments the melody with sitar-like improvisations. The lyrics (translation included) describe the struggles of a woman bringing up a family in Mali.

"Tamalla" opens with Touré playing the



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"There's enough average piano trio records out there, and I didn't want to contribute to that kind of sonic pollution, you know?" Escreet said about waiting to record his own trio date.

John Escreet: The Trio Goes West

PIANIST JOHN ESCREET HAS ALWAYS HAD ideas. Born in England, he migrated to New York in his early 20s to study at the Manhattan School of Music, learning from Kenny Barron and Jason Moran. Over the course of a decade, beginning with 2008's *Consequences*, he made eight albums that covered a startlingly broad spectrum, from the three-part avant-garde suite that opened the debut to 2011's electronics-tinged, abstract *The Age We Live In* to a freely improvising quartet with saxophonist Evan Parker, bassist John Hébert and drummer Tyshawn Sorey. That group released a studio album, *Sound, Space And Structures*, and a live document, *The Unknown*. He was also working as a sideman with adventurous players like alto saxophonist David Binney, drummer Antonio Sánchez and trumpeter-composer Amir El-Saffar. He wasn't a household name, not even in jazz-loving households, but he was admired by those in the know.

In 2019, though, he decided it was time for a change. He got married, and less than a year later,

was packing up to move to Los Angeles. "I met my wife in New York and we both just kind of felt like we wanted a different lifestyle," he explains. "I'm a believer that sometimes you have to force a change to make things happen, even if you don't know entirely what the end result is gonna be."

He arrived in January 2020, full of optimism.

"I wasn't earning that much money in New York City. I was earning most of my money by going on the road and touring ... so in my mind I wasn't losing any work or any opportunities, I was only kind of enhancing and adding to it by moving to L.A. I thought that there were probably more opportunities to work locally, and also get into some other musical areas with the stuff that's happening out here, while maintaining all the stuff I was already doing.

"So my intention was to add and build my artistic output."

Of course, the world had other plans. Still, after lockdown eased, he was able to make (and strengthen) some connections, and now he's got a

new album, *Seismic Shift*. It features a brand-new rhythm section of bassist Eric Revis and drummer Damion Reid, and ... that's it. After close to 15 years of recording and touring, Escreet has made his first trio recording.

This is surprising, given that the trio is the fundamental formation for jazz piano, but as Escreet explains, "I never felt the pressure to make one because, I mean ... there's enough average piano trio albums out there, and I didn't want to contribute to that kind of sonic pollution, you know? I wanted to wait until I had something worthwhile to contribute." He reveals that it almost happened a decade ago; the group with Hébert and Sorey (which he describes as "a really happening trio ... that I really enjoyed") was a working group, and he'd planned to take them into the studio, but "when we did get a chance to record, we had been performing with Evan as a quartet, so that was an opportunity that was too good to miss, and that was what was happening at that moment in time. Therefore, I was like, 'Well, you know what? I'm just going to document what's happening rather than forcing something.'"

Seismic Shift offers nine tracks, several of which are in-studio improvisations and one of which is a re-recording of "The Water Is Getting Worse," from Escreet's 2011 album *Exception To The Rule*. The music is thrillingly varied, despite the absence of any of the touches he's added to previous albums — no horns, no switching from piano to Fender Rhodes to synth, no electronic manipulation of the sound. Instead, Escreet and his bandmates explore many versions of the piano trio language. "Perpetual Love" may remind some of Matthew Shipp, while "Digital Tulips" and the aptly titled "Quick Reset" (it runs just 1:42) bounce on thick Revis grooves, the former accented by high-pitched tom barrages from Reid that recall Tony Oxley. There's also an interpretation of Stanley Cowell's "Equipoise," drawing on the version heard on 1974's *Musa-Ancestral Streams*.

Escreet was introduced to Cowell by Nasheet Waits, with whom both men played at different times, and they formed a friendship.

"I would email Stanley because I wanted to study with him, but he wasn't really into giving lessons at that time," Escreet said. "But I did send him my recordings of what I was doing back then, which Nasheet was on, and to my delight, Stanley actually not only listened to them but wrote me back and was super-encouraging about them and very complimentary, which obviously meant the world to me.

"After that we had longer email exchanges where he would elaborate at length about all kinds of stuff. Musical concepts and how to sustain one's creativity in the music business, in the music industry, and recording contracts. He really was very generous with his time and his knowledge." —Philip Freeman

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"Joey DeFrancesco was hands-down the most creative and influential organist since Jimmy Smith," said Christian McBride.

In Memoriam: Joey DeFrancesco, 1971–2022

THE MUSIC WORLD MOURNED THE UNEXPECTED passing of Joey DeFrancesco, who died Aug. 25 from a massive heart attack, according to a statement released by Hammond Organ World. The noted organist and multi-instrumentalist was 51.

A generational talent, DeFrancesco was born in Springfield, Pennsylvania, on April 10, 1971, to "Papa" John, a railroad electrician and organist/vocalist, and Laurene DeFrancesco. He began playing organ when he was 4 years old and had memorized Jimmy Smith's "The Sermon" in six months when he was 5, according to a 1992 *DownBeat* profile.

After studying classical music from ages 10 to 14 at the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, he enrolled in the city's High School for the Creative and Performing Arts. His classmates there included drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, bassist Christian McBride and guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel. "I came into school one day at 8 a.m. to find Joey and Christian McBride burning through 'Giant Steps' at an impossibly fast tempo, rollicking and laughing the whole way," Rosenwinkel wrote on his Facebook page in memoriam.

In 1987, DeFrancesco placed fourth in the inaugural Thelonious Monk Piano Competition (Marcus Roberts won that year). He toured Europe as a member of Miles Davis' band at 17 and also recorded *All Of Me*, his first of five albums

for Columbia, with Houston Person guesting on two tracks. His final side for Columbia, 1993's *Live At The Five Spot*, featured Person again as well as fellow tenor men Illinois Jacquet, Grover Washington Jr. and Kirk Whalum. A year later he was playing trumpet, inspired in part by his time with Davis, and by his mid-20s he was drumming and singing, too.

Subsequent recordings on labels such as HighNote and Big Mo Records, Concord Jazz and Mack Avenue established him as the most notable organist of his generation. He also did high-profile recordings with Van Morrison, Bette Midler and Joe Pesci (a.k.a. Joe Doggs).

Highlights in his recorded career include *Goodfellas* (Concord, 1999), an Italian American cultural celebration with guitarist Frank Vignola and drummer Joe Ascione; *Incredible* (Concord, 2000), which was recorded live at Bimbo's 365 Club in San Francisco and features two medleys with his mentor Smith; and *For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver* (Mack Avenue, 2020), the Christian McBride Big Band album that reunited the "best friends," according to the bandleader, and other CAPA alumni.

"I've never had a problem saying that Joey DeFrancesco was hands-down the most creative and influential organist since Jimmy Smith," McBride wrote in an official statement. "In terms of taking the organ to the next level and making it popular again for a younger generation, no one

did it like Joey. He truly set a new bar and his legacy will live on as such."

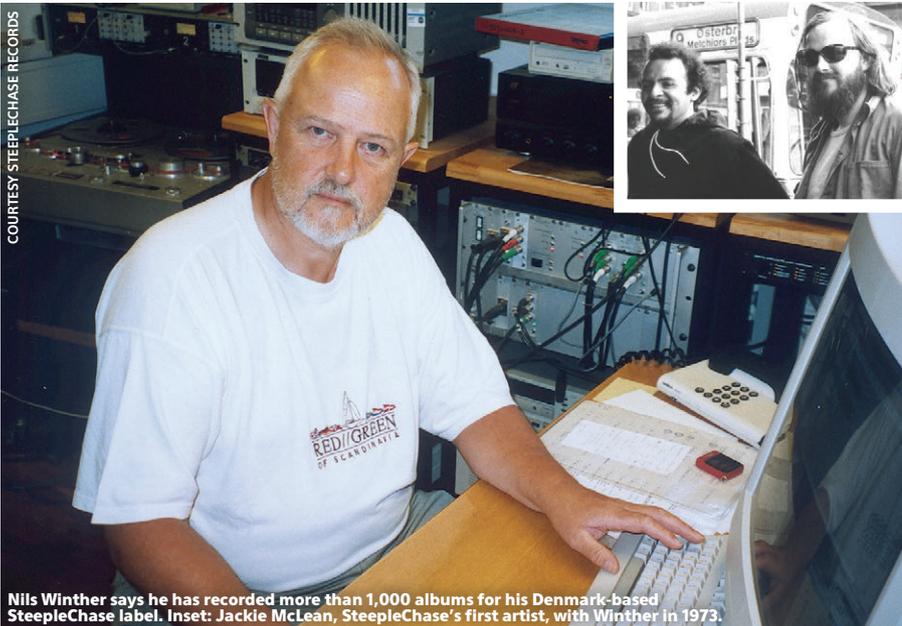
"The resurgence of the organ has a lot to do with myself," DeFrancesco said in a 1996 interview for the *San Jose Mercury News*. "I was 17 when my first record came out, and I was on a major label. And for a while there was really no new face. ... I feel very responsible for the resurgence."

Late in his career, DeFrancesco added saxophone to his arsenal. "You know, my grandfather was a saxophone player, and played with the Dorsey Brothers," he explained in a November 2021 *DownBeat* cover story by J.D. Considine. "Joseph, who I'm named after. So there was always some saxophone history in the family. My father kept his horns, and thank goodness he did, because those were there when I wanted to dabble with the instrument."

"I always used to say that God gave Joey enough talent for 10 musicians," remarked Pete Fallico, a Hammond B-3 evangelist. The Silicon Valley resident met DeFrancesco in San Francisco back in the early '90s and had collaborated with him on and off ever since. "Mind, body and soul, he's probably one of the most gifted musicians we'll ever see."

DeFrancesco is survived by his wife, Gloria; his daughter, Ashley; his son, Donny; his parents; and his siblings John and Cheryle.

—Yoshi Kato



Nils Winther says he has recorded more than 1,000 albums for his Denmark-based SteepleChase label. Inset: Jackie McLean, SteepleChase's first artist, with Winther in 1973.

SteepleChase's Jazz from Europe Turns 50

IN AUGUST OF 1972, NILS WINHTER WAS an enterprising young man with a taste for jazz and a talent for taping that he deployed liberally at the local club, Jazzhus Montmartre, in Copenhagen, Denmark. When Jackie McLean scheduled a multi-night engagement at the club, Winther naturally sought to record the saxophonist. Finding the atmosphere congenial, McLean — with a nudge from Kenny Drew, a childhood friend from New York who played piano in the club — agreed. Winther captured the entire run.

By today's standards, the equipment — heavy reel-to-reel tapes that Winther lugged up a staircase to a room where he had rigged a connection to the performance space below — was crude. The sound quality, however, was good — and the music, superb. Supported by Drew and two Danish musicians, bassist Bo Stief and drummer Alex Riel, McLean fashioned some exhilarating improvisations on tunes by composers as diverse as Charlie Chaplin to Charlie Parker. McLean was so happy with the result that a week after the gig, he came by the club, trudged up the staircase and told a surprised Winther that he thought the material should be released on record.

"I said, 'I don't know about that; I don't have any money,'" Winther recalled in a late-August Zoom conversation from his home in Virum, Denmark. "But then we talked. His friend and I, we made a contract. I got a grant to study at the university, which was enough money to make 500 LPs, and that's what I did." Already trading tapes with like-minded fans around the world, he applied his networking skills to seeking distribution, finding a global market that exceeded his

expectations. He borrowed money and pressed an additional 500 LPs. The album was *Live At Montmartre*. With it, SteepleChase Records was born.

Celebrating the label's 50th anniversary, Winther said he had recorded more than 1,000 albums. Among them are some of the most distinctive in the jazz canon. A pair by saxophonist Archie Shepp, for example, finds the voluble and innovative contributor to the 1960s avant-garde having a go at spirituals (1977's *Goin' Home*) and blues tunes (1980's *Trouble In Mind*). Matched in duo with pianist Horace Parlan, Shepp works the songs to surprising effect, his free-form sensibility tempered by an obvious reverence for the material. The outcome is work that puts a premium on his considerable ability to wring the most out of a melody — something of a detour for the artist but one he clearly welcomed.

"I asked him if he would do that," Winther said of the project. "He was very happy to."

If the episode with Shepp was a first, it was not the only one for SteepleChase. Singer Sheila Jordan logged her first duo recording with a bass player, the Norwegian Arild Andersen (Sheila), and leader or co-leader debuts were recorded by pianist Hilton Ruiz (*Piano Man*), guitarist Doug Raney (*Introducing Doug Raney*), saxophonist René McLean (*Watch Out*), bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen (*Paul Bley/NHØP*) and saxophonist Rich Perry (*To Start Again*). All were released in the 1970s, save for the Perry record (1993).

Perry's album is particularly noteworthy in that it is also the first of many outings on SteepleChase with pianist Harold Danko, whom

he had met when they were members of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra in the 1970s. On the album, the two are joined by bassist Scott Colley and drummer Jeff Hirshfield, the same players who appear on Danko's debut for the label, *Next Age*, released the same year. The back-and-forth of leader-sideman roles is characteristic of Winther's mode of operation.

Danko, who wrote the title tune for *To Start Again*, had come to Winther's attention when he appeared on saxophonist Lee Konitz's 1979 album for SteepleChase, *Yes, Yes, Nonet*. At the session, which included among the nine-piece band stalwarts like bassist Buster Williams, trumpeter Tom Harrell and drummer Billy Hart, his interaction with Winther was minimal. But, Danko said, in the ensuing years, as he was making a mark with his quartet and was keen to record with it, he sent a demo to Winther, who reacted positively — with a characteristic caveat.

"I got a call out of the blue from Nils," Danko recalled. "He said he loved it, but could we do a Rich Perry quartet first." The collaboration between the artists has been one of the most fruitful in SteepleChase's history, yielding, in addition to *To Start Again* and *Next Age*, richly rewarding albums like *Stablemates*, *Tidal Breeze*, *New Autumn* and *The Feeling Of Jazz*. The partnership continues with Danko's next album, *Trillium*.

That album, to be recorded in October, will be the final installment in a trilogy inspired by Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Consisting of Danko's original compositions, the series has so far produced 2021's *Spring Garden*, which features Danko, Perry, Hirshfield and, on bass, Jay Anderson, and 2022's *Rite Notes*, a solo piano affair. On the upcoming disc, Danko will be joined by Perry and cornetist Kirk Knuffke.

Few jazz artists have mined Stravinsky — and been able to document their explorations — as deeply as Danko has in his series. And that, he allowed, was only possible because of the freedom the 78-year-old Winther offers.

"It's really unusual," Danko said, "and it's amazing he's still doing it."

Danko reckoned that he has recorded, as leader or co-leader, about 30 albums for SteepleChase. The label, Winther said, is still releasing two or three new recordings every month, 10 months a year, as well as one vinyl per month in the fall and spring from the back catalog. Little wonder, then, that as he sat in his home amid what he estimated to be 12 to 15 thousand LPs, Winther appeared totally engaged in the enterprise — modest but forthright about his achievement with SteepleChase and the loyalty shown it by artists like Danko.

"We're not a major company, but we can offer them a recording where they have an influence on the artistic outcome," he said. "I consider my role to be a tool for the musicians to get their music out."
—Phillip Lutz



Basquiat's *King Zulu*. (Credit: Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–'88), *King Zulu*, 1986. MACBA Collection, Barcelona, Government of Catalonia long-term loan (formerly Salvador Riera Collection). © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York)



Basquiat's *Dog Bite / Ax to Grind*. (Credit: Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–'88), *Dog Bite / Ax to Grind*, 1983. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York)

The Musical World of Basquiat

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT'S BOLD AND challenging images have gone from their origins in the streets of New York to worldwide acclaim. Musical ideas were vivid throughout his work as part of the vibrant contrasting colors, declarative words and enigmatic symbols that have become his identifiable style.

An upcoming exhibit, *Seeing Loud: Basquiat And Music*, emphasizes the artist's focus on experimental and improvisational sounds, including jazz and its creators.

The works will be on display at the Montreal Museum Of Fine Arts from Oct. 16 until Feb. 19. In April 2023, the paintings travel to Cité de la Musique in Paris. Both museums will also host concerts as part of their programs. Saxophonist James Brandon Lewis and an American-Malian guitar collaboration featuring Eric Bibb and Habib Koite are slated performers for the Paris exhibit.

Mary-Dailey Desmarais, chief curator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, intends to show viewers how Basquiat internalized and reworked his sonic influences.

"We want people to leave this exhibition understanding how musical Basquiat's mind was through the works," Desmarais said. "This goes far beyond just an image of Charlie Parker, or an image of a musical instrument. It's deeper than musical iconography. It's the structure of the painting he was making. There was this kind of cultural nexus in New York in the late 1970s/early 1980s where you saw this collaboration between artists and musicians and saw this fluidity that fed his practice in interesting ways."

Basquiat's life and artistic practice echoed several musicians he admired. Born in 1960 to

Haitian and Puerto Rican parents in Brooklyn, he rebelled against his middle-class upbringing but highlighted themes from the African diaspora in his paintings. The exhibits will show that one of his first pieces was a flier for saxophonist Arthur Doyle. He also combined what he saw in the late-'70s New York City streets with his studies of classical artists, creating a mashup that drew on graffiti as well as from such canonical painters as Pablo Picasso. Using whatever he could for canvasses, his works frequently presented jazz musicians as heroes. As Basquiat started to become a global celebrity, he died of a heroin overdose at age 27.

Throughout his short career, Basquiat worked across different media and drew on diverse musical references, according to Vincent Bessières, who is curating the Paris exhibit and has worked as a jazz journalist and producer (he created the Jazz & People label). That came through in how Basquiat painted as much as who he painted.

New York itself shaped the motifs that ran throughout Basquiat's work. Pianist Matthew Shipp moved to Manhattan's East Village in 1983 and encountered Basquiat in the neighborhood, especially in such clubs as Area. Shipp said that this was a time and place for absorbing everything from early hip-hop to European synth pop. Jazz was part of that mixture and Shipp believes that Basquiat identified with its creators' attitudes and spirits. So it was no accident that the hip-hop song that Basquiat produced for Rammellzee was titled "Beat Bop."

"Basquiat saw the bebop cats as Black artists who created a complete counter code of their own, an outside code," Shipp said. "They were vir-

tuous in a way that was undeniable and weren't genuflecting to European classical music values. That outlaw code that Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell had, I think he really related to that energy field."

Cultural critic and curator Carlo McCormick also lived nearby at the time and knew Basquiat, who he has extensively written about. He mentioned the artist's own noise band Gray and said that in the neighborhood, artists, musicians and poets would seek out information where "everyone was an autodidact." Meanwhile, Sun Ra and Tito Puente would play neighborhood block parties. Taking it all in, McCormick believes that Basquiat approached jazz with an attitude that was similar to many of his neighbors.

"Like everyone else at the time, Jean-Michel's tastes were a little more eclectic," McCormick said. "Jazz represented as an intellectual and spiritual center of African American identity and thinking. This was crucial to him as a mode of learning and digesting things."

With gentrification, Basquiat's old stomping grounds have become unaffordable to most upstart musicians and artists.

The cost of Manhattan property rising exponentially as the auction prices of his paintings continue accelerating is likely not coincidental. But community still offers a crucial role in his art's presentation. Desmarais added that Basquiat's multidisciplinary ideas and cultural background help make her city ideal for the exhibit's premiere.

"For Montreal, with its incredible musical communities, wonderful jazz festival and strong Haitian population," she said, "I hope that this exhibition will resonate." —Aaron Cohen



BOB RICHARDS

Ramsey Lewis broke out in 1965 with his crossover hit "The In Crowd."

In Memoriam: Ramsey Lewis, 1935–2022

JAZZ PIANIST, THREE-TIME GRAMMY WINNER and NEA Jazz Master Ramsey Lewis, who successfully crossed over from the jazz charts to the pop charts, most notably with his smash hit "The In Crowd," died at his home in Chicago on Sept. 12. He was 87.

Ramsey E. Lewis Jr. was born in Chicago on May 27, 1935. Growing up in the Cabrini Green housing project, he began taking piano lessons at age 4 and played piano at church, where his father was choir director. A jazz fan who played Duke Ellington and Art Tatum records at home and took his son to jazz concerts, Ramsey Lewis Sr. encouraged Ramsey to embrace that music.

When Lewis was a freshman at Wells High School, saxophonist and pianist Wallace Burton, a fellow church musician whose jazz ventures had enticed the young pianist, asked him to join his band, the Clefs, a septet of collegians that blended jazz and R&B. Lewis needed to familiarize himself with bebop and other jazz styles but learned on the run. After the outbreak of the Korean War, the military draft claimed several members of the Clefs, including Burton. The three members who didn't get drafted — Lewis, bassist Eldee Young and drummer Redd Holt — formed what would become known as the classic Ramsey Lewis Trio.

In 1956, they released their first album, *Ramsey Lewis And His Gentlemen Of*

Jazz, on the Chess label. Three years later, he was invited to perform with the trio at Birdland in New York. Their three-week gig led to performances at the Newport Jazz Festival and the Village Vanguard, and recordings with Max

Roach, Clark Terry and Sonny Stitt.

Lewis broke through in a big way in 1965 with the early crossover smash "The In Crowd." The elegantly funky, Grammy-winning song (written by Dobie Gray) was followed by two more chart-toppers, "Hang On Sloopy" and "Wade In The Water."

After Young and Holt left to form their own group, Lewis continued in the trio format with bassist Cleveland Eaton and future Earth, Wind & Fire eminence Maurice White on drums. He subsequently experimented on electronic keyboards in more expansive settings. A high point was his 1974 album *Sun Goddess*, produced by White and featuring members of Earth, Wind & Fire (with falsetto specialist Philip Bailey, whom he would tour with years later). The recording established Lewis as a fusion music icon with broad appeal.

Over the years, Lewis performed and recorded in a remarkable variety of musical settings. Throughout the '70s, he embraced R&B and Latin music genres without abandoning mainstream jazz.

Among his honors were five honorary doctorate degrees and an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Artist. "The In Crowd" single was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, and his personal memorabilia reside at the Smithsonian Institution. Lewis received a 2007 National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master Award.

His monthly *Saturday Salon* livestream series, produced during the pandemic by his wife, Jan, was critically acclaimed. His forthcoming album, *The Beatles Songbook: The Saturday Salon Series, Volume One*, will be released Nov. 11. Lewis also spent the last year of his life working on his memoir *Gentleman of Jazz* with his co-writer Aaron Cohen. The book will be released via Blackstone Publishing next year. **DB**

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Al Foster

STILL LEARNING

By Joe Farnsworth

Photo by Jimmy and Dena Katz

To call Al Foster a student of the drums is an understatement. The 79-year-old master has studied the history of jazz drums, much of it in-person, as he's speaking of legends like Arthur Taylor, Joe Chambers, Philly Joe Jones, Tony Williams, Billy Hart and so many more with the depth of an artist who has a keen ear and eye as well as the warmth of knowing these legends as friends as well as peers.

Even more impressive is his list of credits as a sideman with Kenny Barron, Miles Davis, Blue Mitchell, Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson and so many more.

It seemed fitting to ask another student of the instrument, veteran drummer Joe Farnsworth, to sit down with Foster to discuss his life, musical loves and just a slice of his long, illustrious career for Al Foster's first DownBeat cover article in honor of his latest release as a leader, *Reflections* on Smoke Sessions Records.

The following is just a portion of the free-wheeling, nearly two-hour interview. It has been

edited for space and clarity.

JOE FARNSWORTH: Believe it or not, in 1988 when I was in college, I was 18 years old, and there was a musician's union phone book. It had all the musicians in it — Horace Silver, Walter Bishop, Walter Davis, Sonny Rollins — but the two people I was able to call from that phone book were you and Arthur Taylor. And I was able to meet you back then. And you were so kind to me as a kid. So thank you for that, man. You invited me to help take your drums or be like a drum tech. You were just on the road with Herbie Hancock.





"You know, I am not as fast as I used to be," says Foster. "But it's more fresh ideas. I'm always coming up with new stuff when I practice."

AL FOSTER: Wow. OK, that was 1986.

FARNSWORTH: I was a freshman in college. So, of all the musicians I called, you were the one that were most kind and most supportive. So, thank you so much for that.

So, let's talk about how you feel now, man. How are you doing?

FOSTER: I'm getting old. You know, I am not as fast as I used to be. But it's more fresh ideas. I'm always coming up with new stuff when I practice. Because lately, I practice every day — drums, two sets in my living room. I just sit there for a few minutes, you know, almost like, "Whatcha gonna show me today?" I don't want to play the same stuff. It's just the way my mind works. I hate it if I keep playing what I know. Show me something I don't know. I want something different.

FARNSWORTH: You're saying that to yourself?

FOSTER: I'm saying that in my brain, before I even pick up the sticks. I just sit on the drums and look at them. I usually start at 12 o'clock, noon, and it's been working for some time.

I'm still learning it at this age. I'm 79.

FARNSWORTH: 79.

FOSTER: Yeah, I'll be 80 next January.

I'm just overwhelmed. My whole career, all the people I played with. You know, sometimes when you do this, you take it for grant-

ed like, "OK, I'm playing with Miles, and maybe that's why other people called me after Miles. I was always insecure. Because I always wanted my own style after Tony [Williams] and Joe [Chambers and Jack [De]Johnette]. I said to my maker, "What about me?" Like, can I be me?"

I just was brought up differently ... a little bit. And then all the people I played with were innovators.

I remember in the late '80s, telling Sonny Rollins, and Sonny probably thought I was turning mad. I said, "Sonny, before I'm 50, I'm going to have my own style." [Farnsworth turned 50 in 1993.] It was it was getting close to that. And I couldn't believe I said that to him. You know Sonny, he was like, "OK, OK, Al." He was probably sayin', "What's going on with Al's brain?" [laughs] When you idolize so many talented musicians, you want to be there, too. I know I wasn't there as far as being an original, and I'm still working on it.

FARNSWORTH: I was talking to [drummer] Billy Hart during the pandemic. And he mentioned you. That there was a drum battle with you, Billy Hart and Philly Joe Jones. And Papa Jo [Jones] was the emcee. And according to Billy, Max [Roach] was there and he gave a lecture on how to have your own sound. And as he was speaking, he was tapping on Billy's tomtom like, "Sit down and listen to me." And then Billy said you told him, "If I don't have my own sound in five years, I'm gonna quit." And Billy made a deal with you. And he said, "Al did get

his own sound" and [Billy] was still trying to get it.

FOSTER: I don't remember seeing Max or Poppa Joe. Wilbur Ware was there. I think I was so nervous, I didn't want to look out the stage. But Philly told me and Billy Hart something that that everyone should use, especially when you're starting out. He said if the time gets turned around, don't try to find it. He said, "Whoa, it's no time." And me and Billy looked at each other and said, "Wow, he's right."

FARNSWORTH: Do you remember how Philly played that day?

FOSTER: He played great. Yeah, Philly Jones is always Philly, regardless. He's so hip, man. And just the way he was chopping, you know? [vocalizes the sound of the drums] Absolutely, a really awesome drummer.

I used to see him at Gretsch Drum Nights, Charlie Persip, Mel Lewis. Mel Lewis saw me on a Monday night, you know, with all of my drugs. And he said, "That's gonna catch up with your as you get older." And he was right, you know? Yeah, he said it in a real nice way, too.

FARNSWORTH: I met him one time, I played at my brother's senior recital at North Texas State. And I said "hi" to him, and the only thing he said to me was, "You played way too effing loud. And then kept walking. [laughs]

Back to the present day. During the two years of COVID, were you practicing the whole time?

FOSTER: Yeah.

FARNSWORTH: And you sit there and say to the drums ...

FOSTER: No, this started maybe more this year. Me sitting there thinking. So, you know, I don't want to sit down and play what I've been playing for years. And like Lester Young, I don't go there. [laughs] I've been listening to some of his interviews. You need to.

FARNSWORTH: Did you ever see him?

FOSTER: I never seen him. I never met him, and I wish he would have lived long enough just for me to see him play. And Billie Holiday was another one I missed. I cried. I was 16, I think, when she died. I cried like a baby for weeks putting on her records. Too sensitive, actually.

FARNSWORTH: That's what makes you so great, because you're so dynamic.

FOSTER: You know, even happy things can make it happen, you know, like some of the cuts on

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CASIO

my new record make me cry.

FARNSWORTH: Let's talk about your new record. Who's on that?

FOSTER: Well, the bass [Vicente Archer], I met him at the studio. Chris Potter, he was in my

just came in so laid-back, not knowing what to expect. And I just played it like that. And I would tell you [if] I had either a wine or whiskey, I don't remember, you know. It's dinner time, and I had a long break, and then I forgot about the new Al Foster and went back to "Noisy Guy." [laughs] It's true, bro. Come on,

"Did you know Sonny Rollins said you were the last of the great drummers?" Twice I was asked that. Of course, no, because he never said that to me.'

band in '94 or '95. He was great. He sounded so wonderful. Nicholas Payton, I played with at Smoke just before the pandemic. Great. He sounded unbelievable. And Kevin Hayes used to play with me in the late '90s, early 2000s, genius type piano player. And the way he arranged my two songs — I have three songs on the album but he arranged two of them. I didn't know that he was gonna have how many notes for the two horns just playing the melody. Just blew my mind, man.

FARNSWORTH: This was some of the best playing you've done on record, isn't it?

FOSTER: I'm proud of it.

FARNSWORTH: How did you maintain your strength through this whole two years off of playing?

FOSTER: Well, I just practice. Yeah, it didn't bother me at all.

FARNSWORTH: Did not playing gigs at all bother you?

FOSTER: The last gig I had was here [at Smoke]. The end of February. And I had a lot of gigs after that, and all that stuff was canceled. But I get a nice check from Uncle Sam because I'm an old man. [laughs]

FARNSWORTH: Do you still have the same feeling like you used to have back in the '80s, or the '70s?

FOSTER: Oh, yeah. I really enjoy playing. But I

man. I have to be honest about me. Everything is not Mr. Wonderful. You know, it's not like Joe Chambers. To me, Joe is like a perfect drummer.

FARNSWORTH: Are you talking about his cymbal beat?

FOSTER: Less is more. Oh, I used to copy that cymbal beat to death. Miles even said — and made Joe Chambers feel good about this — Miles said [imitating Miles Davis' raspy voice], "I don't wanna hear none of that Joe Chambers shit." So, I told Joe, when we were having lunch together in Europe, and Joe smiled. He loved it. Because he used to hear me playing his beat in the '70s. He's a wonderful drummer. Great piano player. Good musician. Yeah, yeah, I like him a lot.

FARNSWORTH: Let's go back to early years when you were growing up. What was that like? Where did you grow up?

FOSTER: Harlem, 140th and Amsterdam, right across the street from City College.

FARNSWORTH: Brothers and sisters?

FOSTER: Yeah. I have an older brother. He played congas. One year older than me. Capricorn, too, Jan. 9, 1942. I'm '43, born on the 18th. So, my sister was born in '48. I was 5 when she was born. She was born in November. January, two months later, I turned 6 years old. And two younger brothers, one was born 1950, the same day, June 12, as my wife, Bonnie. He played tenor for a while. But they went to public school, my sister and two younger brothers. It was different. In the streets with the gangs. But I came

home from school, sat at my drum set, especially when I heard Max Roach. I was about 12, maybe 13.

FARNSWORTH: Were you already playing drums at this point?

FOSTER: Oh, yeah. My aunt said when I was 3, I was banging on pots and pans. And first, second grade, all through the school years.

FARNSWORTH: Pots and pans.

FOSTER: Banging like this. [demonstrates] I had pencils. "Aloysius," the nuns yelling, for real. I didn't know why they were so upset. So, I was banging on my mother's pots and pans. My great aunt, my mother's father's sister, brought me a practice pad when I was about 5 or 6.

And they tell me I played when they were on a boat ride, and I played with the Count Basie band when I was 7. I don't remember. My aunt was supposed to have a picture.

FARNSWORTH: You actually played with Count Basie?

FOSTER: I guess they let me play a little solo.

FARNSWORTH: Was that with Sonny Payne, maybe?

FOSTER: No. That would mean it was in the '40s when that happened. I was born in '43, so this was in the early '50s. The first time I saw Count Basie live was at the Apollo Theater with Sonny Payne. Unbelievable. And when I was at Minton's with Blue Mitchell, he came in and sat in on my Slingerland set. And he sounded good, but he was, you know, different with that kind of music. Art Blakey came in and sat in at Minton's every time he would go with somebody. And Jack DeJohnette sat in. He just came in off the bus from Chicago.

I just met him. I didn't know if he could play. But it was unbelievable, man. I mean, I never understood Jack's playing, but the swing is there.

FARNSWORTH: What was your first "name" gig that people came to see, like your arrival?

FOSTER: Well, I would say Blue Mitchell because we would go play Minton's there. And one time I was filling in and Donald Byrd and Kenny Dorham were both standing near the drums, you know, and when we finished a tune, one of them said, "You sound like A.T. [famed drummer Arthur Taylor]." Man, I felt so good about it, I looked the other way. I was probably "doh, doh, chu, dohn, dat, dat, dat, dat at, boom, boom, boom" [imitates a Taylor drum pattern]. A.T. had some slick little moves.

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Foster, second from right, helps cut the ribbon on the newly reopened Smoke Jazz Club. From left, trumpeter Nicholas Payton, bassist Vicente Archer, New York City Council member Shaun Abreu, club owners Paul State and Molly Johnson, Foster, council member Gale Brewer and saxophonist Chris Potter.

FARNSWORTH: So even at early age, you were playing great.

FOSTER: Well, I was kinda playing like A.T. and somewhat like Max.

FARNSWORTH: When was the first time you met Art Taylor?

FOSTER: That's another great story. I'm practicing in my apartment, and I look to my left, it's my mother's bedroom. I was in the living room. Big mirror is in front of me. I never met A.T. before, never even seen him play live.

I see this light-skinned guy. Heavy mustache. But my aunt, my mother's sister, was in front of him. I jumped up, and he said, "Play, sit down and play." And he's sitting on the couch just watching me. I was playing to something from Max Roach, from one of Max's records.

So, we became friends then, and my great aunt lived in the same building on the same floor as A.T. He was still living with his mother. He's in his 30s. When I went to see my aunt, [I'd go to] A.T.'s. His mother, she loved me. Even when A.T. wasn't there she was like, "Come in, come in." She was showing me pictures of when they were teenagers and Sonny [Rollins] and the band. Yeah, it was great, man.

A new [Art Blakey] record came out, and I went by that night. And [A.T.'s mom] let me in, and I went to T's room. And the new record was on, and he just yelled, "Bu." [Short for Blakey's Muslim name Abdullah Ibn Buhaina] I said, "Whoa." He was really in love with Bu. He was a good person.

FARNSWORTH: Who were the guys you were a fan of, who you wanted to play with?

FOSTER: The ones that I did play with.

FARNSWORTH: Miles.

FOSTER: No, no, it wasn't Miles. It was Sonny Rollins, early Sonny Rollins. I bought *Max Roach +4* — that did it!

So they didn't have the Max with Clifford Brown album [at the record store]. I see Max sitting down with these big guys behind him, you just see their backs. So, I bought it. Sonny Rollins did it to me, man. I fell in love with Sonny's playing. I bought a saxophone in 1970, a Mark VI Selmer. I had just worked at the Apollo with Hugh Masekela. So I bought me a tenor, and I'm trying to play that lyrical stuff like, you know, I'm talking about early Newk [Rollins' nickname], all the '50s and '60s recordings.

FARNSWORTH: And when did you meet Sonny?

FOSTER: You want to know that story? [laughs] Sonny Rollins called me on a Sunday in 1969, and asked me if I can play the Vanguard with him.

FARNSWORTH: Never met him before?

FOSTER: Never met him.

FARNSWORTH: Wow.

FOSTER: I said, "Sure." He asked me if I could come to the Vanguard in the daytime to go over the tunes. I get down there with my bass drum and snare drum. Sonny's back is to me, but he's near the where the phone is in the Vanguard. I'm lugging my bass drum and shit. He never turns around. When I got everything up, and he heard me hittin' the cymbal and the snare, he turned around [doing his best Sonny impersonation], "OK. How you doing, Al?" And he just went into this straightahead tune. And it was cool. He asked me, "Do you know how to play a calypso?" I said, "I think so, yeah," because I don't know what he'd like.

FARNSWORTH: I heard that you were the only guy

that he liked that knew how to play a calypso. How did that come about?

FOSTER: Maybe. I don't know. From Blue Mitchell, my first album. Even Louis Hayes asked me what was that guy doing on the cymbals? It was on the jukebox at Slugs. And Louis came over to the table. I was just hanging and, yes, I felt so good.

So, Sonny says OK after the calypso. Tells me what time to be at the gig Tuesday night. I don't know that Tony Williams is playing with Lifetime [also that night]. We knew each other. Always nice to me. But I was nervous. Albert Dailey was on piano, great piano player. My idol on bass, Wilbur Ware.

I think he's the one that told Sonny to hire me. I knew Wilbur, he lived in my neighborhood — always calling me, you know, to borrow a couple of dollars to get wine and, probably, other things, you know.

I was raising the kids by myself at that time. Do the first gig Tuesday night, and Wednesday night. Thursday, Sonny called, he broke my heart. He said, "Al, listen, man, I want to try something different tonight, OK, man?"

Then, Wilbur calls and tells me he got fired. I said, "Whoa." Anyway, Sonny told me come by Sunday and he'd pay me for the two nights. I said, OK. I couldn't believe the new bass player and drummer. [The drummer] was a policeman, I can't remember his name.

Anyway, he paid me, and I went back to the Vanguard to see somebody the following week. [Somebody] told me that Tony Williams said when I was playing, "Al's gonna get fired." Because he fired Tony, too. He fired Joe Chambers.

FARNSWORTH: But then you went back with him.

FOSTER: Nine years later, he just called me, and asked if I could go to Europe. No rehearsal or nothing, July 1978.

And, he was super nice to me. Giving me solos when I'm trying to take it out. Smiling. I was on the road with Joe [Henderson] in the '90s. And critics would yell to me — it's like at a festival, where everybody gets on the same bus from the hotel — "Did you know Sonny Rollins said you were the last of the great drummers?" Twice I was asked that. Of course, no, because he never said that to me. But I worked with him from that time on, all the way, even after I got in trouble. I played with him after his wife died, yeah.

FARNSWORTH: What's he like off the stage?

FOSTER: He is cool. He was almost like Miles to me. He called me all the time. Yeah, Newk is cool. One of his tunes is on the album, and I hear he lives on my street now — so, when it comes out, I'm just gonna go take it to him. **DB**



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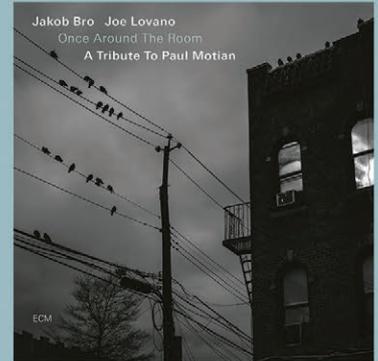
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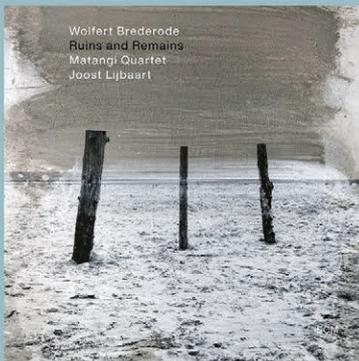
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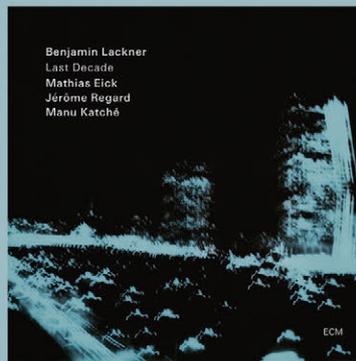
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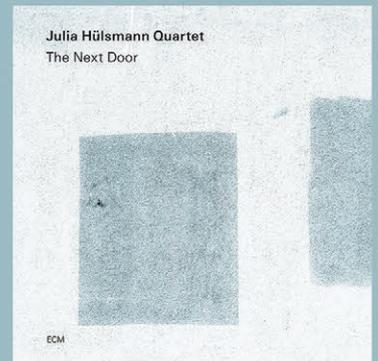
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Connie Han

THE JAZZ

WARRIOR-GODDESS

By Gary Fukushima

Photos by Robert Lynden

Of all of the interesting things Connie Han said during a recent interview, this was perhaps the most unexpected: "I will finally say publicly," she asserted, "that I am so fucking sick of people comparing me to Keith Emerson."

The fact that anyone had indeed drawn such a parallel between the 26-year-old jazz pianist and the keyboardist-bandleader of one of the greatest prog-rock bands of all time seemed noteworthy, if not flattering on the merits. But one thing became evident during a two-hour conversation over video from her hotel room in New York: Han hates being compared to others in general.

She had just flown in from a jazz festival in Vancouver to do a video shoot at the famed factory of her main endorser, Steinway & Sons. Sporting a shoulder-length rocker hairstyle that looked eerily similar to the cuts worn by all three of Emerson, Lake & Palmer during their heyday, Han exudes an aura less compatible with jazz and more with any other popular music genre, be it rock, funk, punk or hip-hop: a defiant, brash, f*#k-you attitude and image that has nothing to do with fitting into any societal norms of modesty and decorum. Quite contrarily, she intends to push audiences out of their comfort zones into areas that are more, shall we say, dangerous.



'I THINK JAZZ
NEEDS MORE
PROVOCATIVE
PERSONALITY,
AND IT NEEDS
MORE SEX.'



"I'm a perfectionist in my music," Han said.

Perhaps no place would be more perilous than in the presence of an impetuous, lustful, power-hungry warrior-goddess. There exists such a creature in ancient Sumerian mythology, in the form of Inanna, goddess of love, sensuality, fertility — and war. Han explained in great detail how and why she came to identify with this deity, to the point of titling her fourth and latest album *Secrets Of Inanna* (Mack Avenue) a thematic collection of pieces tied to the titular character. In this case, Han is openly inviting

the comparison with her own persona.

"I find [Inanna] fascinating," Han said, "because she was not only a woman that represented all the virtues of what is glorious about being a woman and femininity and beauty, but she was also viciously ambitious. ... She had unbridled ambition for power, and she had very commonly associated masculine qualities about her — she was very brash, very courageous." Such qualities are certainly evident in Han's public life — she is not shy about pro-

moting her feminine assets online, via provocative photos and videos, yet in those same videos, she can be seen aggressively attacking the piano with a skill and ferocity unmatched by all but the most accomplished of pianists, in an unapologetic display of virtuosic showmanship. Think about the muscular musicality of Art Tatum in the body of an Instagram model.

Han has channeled Tatum directly in these videos, flawlessly performing a transcription of his vaunted rendition of "Tea For Two," and also indirectly in tribute to Tatum and fellow piano legend Hank Jones in her arrangement of Neal Hefti's "Girl Talk." Those brilliant runs glide effortlessly off her fingers, yet she has worked very hard to make it look so easy. "I've spent many hours checking out those Tatum transcriptions. Some people are like, 'He plays too much,' and I'm like, that's because he *wants* to play too much, and it sounds great, and I always loved that. Art Tatum is a huge influence just in his, sort of, flair."

Han works almost as hard producing those videos. She estimates it takes a solid five full days to produce a three-minute video, from conceiving and working up the seemingly impossible piano arrangements, to doing her own wardrobe, hair and makeup, to recording and filming the performance, all on her own without any assistance. "As I've already explained to you, I'm a perfectionist in my music. I'm simi-

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larly a perfectionist with my look because I consider my image to be an extension of my personality. I know that's not common, especially in jazz music and classical music, because they're both considered higher-order forms or whatever. I'm pretty wild with it, but that's because I like to express myself."

Expressing herself in the way that she does — with an overt emphasis on herself as a young, sexy female — has certainly had the desired effect, awarding greater exposure to her music on a larger scale. Yet, the elephant in the room is that such a strategy runs counter to a rising chorus of women jazz artists who have spoken out against the persistent misogyny they continue to endure by the overwhelmingly large number of male artists and audiences in this particular music. Drummer Sherrie Maricle, who founded the all-women DIVA Jazz Orchestra almost 30 years ago, told this writer in a 2020 Q&A for *DownBeat*, "No single woman artist that I've ever known in my life would have [looks] as a priority above learning the music and being reverent about everything surrounding it." Even more recently, vocalist Jen Shyu said in another interview for *DownBeat*, "What I've been exploring my whole life as an artist is trying to come up in a music world — and more specifically a jazz world — that has objectified me and exoticized me as an Asian female."

Han, whose images could be seen as perpet-

uating the exotic Asian female trope Shyu described as having been applied to her, has, obviously, a different philosophy. "Jazz used to be more provocative and more dangerous," she mused. "And as things have become more formalized and institutionalized, it's become very sterile and safe. I think jazz needs more provocative personality." She added bluntly, "And it needs more sex." She cited Miles Davis and Roy Hargrove as two examples of jazz artists who understood the connection between sexiness and swagger.

"I just think it's more about a statement of not playing it so safe anymore," she said, regarding her choice to highlight her looks, "and as long as you can play and stake your right to be there because of your abilities, you should have the full right to express yourself with as much edge and flamboyance and eccentricity as the greats used to do."

More on that last point in a bit. But to Maricle's thoughts, Han's detailed knowledge of the history of jazz piano, along with her own playing, helps make the case that her music is still the main priority, no matter how she chooses to look. She cites pianists Tatum, Hank Jones, Erroll Garner, McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea, Mulgrew Miller and Kenny Kirkland as her prime influences. She gushes about these artists in detail and depth; about her favorite recordings of theirs, their sense of time, their

articulation on the piano, their ability to sound modern while drawing on tradition. On Jones, she remarked, "He was able to imbue that modern attitude while still being able to play [stride] because he was a heavy Fats Waller guy, and he still had that beautiful left hand." On Garner: "I consider him like an anachronistic player — he's really extraordinary with his interpretation of like the triplet. He's playing in his style that is so Harlem stride — it's not the *boom-chick, boom-chick*, but he's playing that quarter note — and it's so interesting." Han spent perhaps 10 minutes or more talking about Kenny Kirkland's combination of clarity and presence, comparing and contrasting those things with what Chick Corea did on *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs* (Blue Note).

It was not lost on Han that all of her musical heroes are no longer alive. "I'm not a modernist," she replied, "but as a modern piano player just by the virtue of the fact that I'm alive today, I consider myself more like a traditionalist, and I say that in the context of the fact that you can't play modern unless you have a deep understanding of the roots." Asked if there were any current musicians she might draw inspiration from, she demurred, saying, "To be honest, I've always been interested in blazing my own path, and what's going on today as a whole doesn't really influence my playing."

Born in Los Angeles to Chinese parents

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Han started piano lessons at age 5, with her mother being her first teacher.

who were at one point both career musicians, Han started piano lessons at age 5, with her mother being her first teacher. She acknowledges her early classical training and the work ethic passed down from her parents through some cultural and/or genetic traits as crucial to her ability to play the way she does.

Han discovered jazz in high school, when she heard “Chance” by Kenny Kirkland from his self-titled album. “When they found out that I wanted to play jazz,” Han said of her clas-

sical-minded parents, “they took it really personally. But when I decided on it, it was not to go out of my way to rebel or anything against them. I was genuinely raptured by the spirit of this music from a very young age, and I pursued it, regardless.” Her parents are much more supportive now, in light of her recent success. Having an endorsement from Steinway doesn’t hurt, for sure.

“Everyone wants to make their parents proud, and god knows that story is even more

severe in Asian households,” she said. “But, yeah, I think it’s important to instill in young people to have a strong sense of self and to have good mentorship and self-esteem that doesn’t rely on the approval of others.”

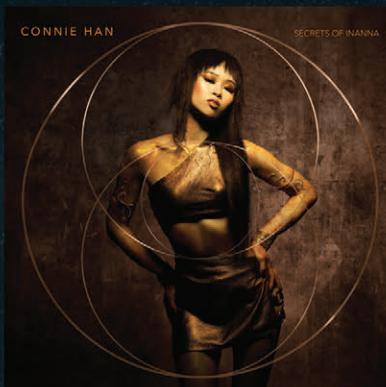
Han’s belief in herself ultimately led her away from going to college to study jazz. “I think the fact that when you’re a developing young person, surrounded by other peers who are checking out a certain music that’s really trendy, that can lead to a certain type of peer pressure to also listen to those same things because you wanna fit in with your friends, you wanna make the hang, and I think that can often lead to a lot of clones,” she said. She also was discouraged by what she saw as a coddling of the students, which only served to perpetuate the fragility of their egos.

“There is a certain level of walking on eggshells with students because of the protocol of civility at higher education,” she said. “Whereas I feel like in the real culture of jazz — at least the way it used to be — it was very crass if you fucked up, and I think having that culture, though it may potentially be toxic, bred in an environment of motivation to really take it more seriously because there were stakes for your reputation, there were stakes for paying your rent.

“I think that culture shifted. Now you go to

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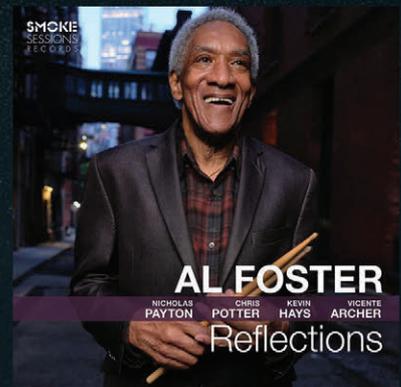
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school for jazz, and we're going through these institutions that are funded by philanthropists, and it's a very comfortable environment where it's easy to access information and everyone is listening to the same thing." For Han, jazz had gotten too safe in the schools, so she had to escape that safety to find growth through challenge.

"This actually goes back to mythology," she continued. "Because mythology talks about how suffering and experiencing hardship will awaken the deepest parts about yourself, and I think that hardship just isn't there these days, especially in a jazz institution." Han's mythical heroine, Innana, had to descend into the underworld and, according to Han, was actually killed down there before coming back to life to ascend to the heavens in her own resurrection story.

"She wants to face her inner darkness," Han said of Innana. "Because in order to be good, you'll have to acknowledge the darker moments to draw from. In order to create quality art," she continued, completing the thread of her logic, "[artists] draw from suffering, they draw from a place of darkness in order to create something and to be inspired. I know that I've created some of my best art through my darkest times. You come out as a more enlightened being with the perspective that allows you to take on life as a more exceptional version of yourself."

Drummer Bill Wysaske, a former high-school teacher of Han's, said, "There never seems to be anything that she's not going to accomplish. She was attuned to star quality. I'm willing to say every jazz musician is an artist for sure, but I'm not sure every jazz musician has that thing to be the star."

Wysaske, who recently relocated from Los Angeles to Boston to pursue music full-time, ended up producing and playing on all four of Han's albums, arranging and even composing many of the pieces. It was he who first introduced Han to the legend of Innana, suggesting the goddess to her as a kindred spirit who could be a central theme for their next project together.

"He is a true visionary," Han said of Wysaske. "He was able to sort of see how mythology parallels real life, and that it's a metaphor and poetry for the human condition. I think what was really unique about his contribution to the project was that he imbued it with this melodic life that made the world that we were trying to create more immersive."

Wysaske did this by orchestrating some of the music for French horn, alto flute and piccolo, and by enlisting saxophonist Rich Perry to act as kind of a melodic and empathetic foil for Han's percussive, aggressive instincts. Both Han and Wysaske point to "Vesica Piscis," a stunning rubato piece composed by Han and performed as duet with Perry, as the highlight

of the album, showcasing the full musical and pianistic range of Han's abilities.

The tracks that feature Perry also reveal another side to Han, that of an accompanist, something she does with great skill, yet something she is not known for, as she launched directly into her solo career without the usual first step of being hired for someone else's band. "Most of my heroes played as sidemen for legendary bands," she acknowledged, "so it's something that I'm interested in." She is open to playing that role "if the right person called."

There is, after all, plenty of time for that to

happen, as Han continues to nurture her young and flashy career in different ways. "In order to really have something to say on the instrument, you have to have experienced life to have a story to tell," she said. "And when you're young, you don't necessarily have these experiences. I mean, I'm young, but I have certain experiences I can imbue into my music. ... Who doesn't want to have a reason for why you play?"

It might take another descent or two back into the darkness and the danger, but Han will always be up for the challenge — and look good every step of the way. **DB**

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Alex Acuña Offers His **GIFT**

By Dan Ouellette Photo by Von Jackson

When Alex Acuña bought his home 37 years ago in the Lake Balboa neighborhood of Los Angeles County, the Peruvian-born maestro of drums and percussion made sure that he had a spacious, one-acre back yard for two reasons. First, he had a big family and wanted to allow for plenty of space for his children and grandchildren to play. And, second, there was the building in the back yard that he developed into “my homemade studio,” he says — the essential playground for his creative approach to igniting music with exclamations, hues, textures, passion and spirituality.

Wearing a fitted, black T-shirt advertising his workout hang, Inosanto Academy of Martial Arts in nearby Marina Del Ray, the 77-year-old Acuña gives a tour of the meticulous state-of-the-art space. He points to a piano that he only occasionally practices on and shows a vibraphone that was a gift from vibes master Emil Richards.

“He wanted me to bring him to Peru, and when he left he gave me this,” he says with a laugh. “Emil said he already had too many instruments.”

The jovial Acuña continues the tour to show off an array of drum sets as well as another area filled with multicultural percussion instruments from timbales to hand drums to wind chimes — ointments to paint his rainbows of colors and the polyrhythmic arsenal that leads to a range of expressions from outcries to grooves. This is where Acuña anoints his sound.

Acuña works with Josh Connolly, center, and team to get the sound right at Capitol Studios.



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Given that he has been so involved in creating sounds and dynamics throughout his years in groups like Weather Report, Koinonia and The Unknowns, as well as on hundreds of film soundtracks including *West Side Story* and *Spider-Man: No Way Home* in recent years, Acuña's drum life in his studio makes it feel like the organic gallery of a music museum.

There's a long-ago portrait of Acuña. In many ways, with his jet-dark hair, he doesn't seem to have aged. Prominent on the back wall are two acoustic panels decorated with Peruvian motifs.

This was the perfect setting to gather longtime friends and work on the exuberant *Gifts*, his latest album — and first in 17 years as a leader — for Le Coq Records. With several tunes given to him by friends, a couple originals and the brilliant refashioning of two standards he loves (Joe Zawinul's "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" and Herbie Hancock's "One Finger Snap"), it's a multifaceted song fest.

Acuña recorded the sessions at Capitol Studios. "To be honest, I didn't want to do any more albums," he says. "Those from the past are very good sonically, but I don't live by selling them. I don't tour. I've made a lot of recordings with other people, and I do movie sessions. But Le Coq asked me and I said yes. They wanted to bring in great players from New York, but I wanted to record this with my own band — guys I've played with for a long time. They're the only musicians who can play my work."

The core band on the recording consists of Venezuelan keyboardist Otmaro Ruiz, Puerto Rican-bred bassist John Peña and Peruvian guitarist Ramón Stagnaro, who passed away in February — a victim of COVID. "Ramón was my right-hand man," Acuña says. "I never made one of my own recordings without him. While he could sound like Van Halen, he could play all the right notes of Cuban, Brazilian, South American and South African music. He was in

the hospital for 44 days before they pulled the plug of the ventilator. I prayed for him, and I cried every day."

With songs given to him as long as 30 years ago by friends, *Gifts* is a repayment to their generosity.

Ricky Encarnacion offered him his Latin-tinged tune "Aletin Aletun" (Acuña's nickname, which translates to "your tool"), which cooks with the addition of trumpeter Michael Stever. The album opens in the jazz fusion zone with "In Town," offered many years ago by another frequent collaborator, Norwegian pianist Jan Gunnar Hoff.

L.A. violinist and friend Harry Scorzo gifted Acuña with "Postlude," and Frank Zottoli passed the reins of "Chuncho," inspired by the Amazon jungle people in Peru that Acuña had recorded decades ago with the band Koinonia.

The lyrical beauty of the collection, "Divinia," by Miguel Ernesto and Fajardo Figueroa, is played as a waltz with support from cellist Giovanna Clayton.

Acuña serves up a pair of originals that range in style from ambient melodic (the deep-emotion title track, "Regalo") to balladry on "Amandote" (translated: "Loving You").

"I love ballads," Acuña says. "I like leaving a lot of space, which I learned from playing with Weather Report."

Within the Peruvian atmosphere of Hancock's "One Finger Snap," arranged by Japanese-Peruvian bassist Osmar Okuma, Acuña has the rare the opportunity to stretch on drums and timbales toward the end with saxophones riffing in support. Another highlight is the funky, Brazilian-flavored "Melancia" with Peña's phat bass lines.

"Alex is like a big brother and mentor to me," Peña says. "He's one of my heroes. I played with him in his band The Unknowns, and we all became close-knit. Alex is so strong, and he has that essential spirit. We know each other so well in the lingo of South America, Latin jazz authen-

ticity. We understand each other's nuances."

Born in rural Peru, Acuña was the youngest of 11 siblings — six boys and five girls, two of whom died very early. "We were a very poor family, with no running water, no food and no house," he says. "The only beautiful and wonderful thing we had was music. My father was a great musician, taught lessons to my brothers and formed a band. My mother was very firm in not letting me become a musician. She was probably thinking I couldn't make it in a Bohemian life."

Even so, when he was 10, Acuña learned about music from one of his brothers and started to play drums professionally. At 15, he left home for Lima, where he worked as a studio musician. When he was 18, he caught the attention of the Mambo King, Pérez Prado, who was looking for a simpatico drummer for his orchestra who could read music. "It was 1964, and I was going to the United States for a 10-month tour around the country," he says. "He got me my permanent residency papers and gave me a good contract."

Acuña only had five years of education and taught himself how to read on his own. When he was 7, he says he was told by God that he would soon start reading. After he left home, he consumed books, including stories by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, and books by the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and Christian writer C.S. Lewis.

When Prado left to tour Mexico, Acuña decided he needed to learn more about playing Caribbean music. With money saved from the tour, he moved to Puerto Rico after a trip home to Peru and enrolled in a prestigious conservatory of music there. He stayed in Puerto Rico for nine years, at which time he married, and in 1968 became a father. "My life changed," he says. "I had come to the U.S., and wow! There was the freedom, the opportunities."

Next stop: Las Vegas, where he got a job as house drummer at the International Hilton. He backed Diana Ross and Elvis Presley, who introduced the young musician to the martial arts. Another main act? Olivia Newton John. In the audience? Jazz rhythm ace Don Alias. "We became friends and he told me that I need to play jazz," he says. "He told me all about Jaco Pastorius, who he knew before Weather Report."

Intrigued, Acuña left Las Vegas a year later and moved to New York to jam on the scene. "Don and others recommended me to Joe Zawinul, who was looking for a percussionist to replace Alyrio Lima in Weather Report. That was like the Beatles of jazz," he says. "Joe called me, and my life changed."

To honor that relationship, Acuña covers Zawinul's hit tune "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" on the new recording. "Joe gave me so much," he says. "We became friends. I remember in the later years, Joe even called and asked me to party

with him. So this funky take is to honor him.”

A drummer and percussionist on such monumental albums as 1976's *Black Market* and 1977's *Heavy Weather*, Acuña became close friends with Pastorius. They were roommates on the tours. “Jaco had just come onboard, and he was developing his new approach to the bass,” Acuña says. “It’s not well-known, but Jaco used to practice by playing cello books. He told me not to tell anyone about that, but I was there listening to him treating a piece of music in a new way.”

He also appreciated how he was treated. “Wayne and Joe gave us all the respect and consideration,” he says. “If they were flying first-class, all of us flew first-class, too. If they were booked into a five-star hotel, so were we. They shared.”

His drumming prowess caught the attention of aspiring artists. As a youngster living in Cuba, Dafnis Prieto says he had heard about this percussionist from Peru. But one day a friend gave him a video of his favorite band at the time, Weather Report, live in the '70s. “That just blew my mind,” he says. “Alex was amazing. He had a sense of creating over the knowledge of tradition. He’s a great percussionist and one of the most creative. He inspired me.”

The two have only met on occasion, but Acuña is paying attention to what Prieto is doing. “Dafnis is a monster,” he says. “I admire him as a musician. He respects the art. I went go a con-

cert at the Hollywood Bowl, and the band was playing one of his compositions. I’m impressed.”

Acuña decided to leave Weather Report in 1978, just before the album *Mr. Gone*. “I wanted to stop the touring and to be a father to my children, to stay with them and raise them. It was also because in getting prepared for the new album, I felt like I was repeating myself on the drums.”

Plus, a few years earlier, Acuña reacquainted himself with religion. He had neglected his relationship with God as he became more famous. He indulged in drugs. But Acuña says God spoke to him, “Alex, I know you need me now,” and he became a Christian. He attended church, met his second wife and started a new family.

He returned to the road in a different setting with the Christian jazz fusion band Koinonia that he co-founded in 1980. The band recorded several albums and became well known in Scandinavia and in Europe. “The money was great, but I left in 1987 so I could go back to being a loving father.”

Being back in L.A. opened doors for Acuña as a go-to support for many artists. He still recorded with Shorter and Zawinul after Weather Report folded. He was also featured on U2’s *Rattle And Hum*. He played on several Joni Mitchell albums and he was a fundamental presence with the Yellowjackets in the late '80s and early '90s. Band co-found-

er Russell Ferrante says, “First of all, Alex is the most remarkable human being I know. He taught me so much about African and Latin rhythms. He’s passionate and excited. He helped the Yellowjackets become a fantastic team. He worked closely with our drummer Will Kennedy on different rhythm patterns.”

Around the same time, Acuña was enlisted by contemporary jazz bassist Brian Bromberg, supplying percussive support on several albums. “Alex brings humanity to the rhythm,” Bromberg says. “Some percussionists sound like machines. They may play exactly what is required, but Alex brings the spirit of the music.”

Because Acuña has the ability to read scores (a rarity for drummers in the film business), he’s been wall-to-wall busy on all kinds of movie projects, including *Minions*, *Rise* and *Encanto*. The payday is lucrative, allowing him to stay close to home. “I came from Peru alone, and now I have an incredible tribe,” he says.

However, he may hit the road soon, given the release of *Gifts*. He quit touring in 1986 and retired 20 years ago from the musicians union. But the label wants to do some record release shows, there’s a proposal to play Scandinavia and a theater in Peru wants him. Don’t be surprised if the band headlines some European festivals.

“I’ve got more *Gift* music than this,” Acuña says. “We may record again before I really retire.”

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Claudia Acuña

El Arte del **DUO**

By Suzanne Lorge Photos by Tracey Yarard

Singer-songwriter Claudia Acuña had thought about doing a duets album for a long time. The emotional exposure of the pared-down structure intrigued her. The concept behind the musical content excited her. And the first steps toward booking the sessions made her nervous.

“The pandemic gave me a sense of how fragile things can be, so I took a chance and started to make phone calls to some of my idols,” she said by telephone from her Brooklyn home. “I wanted a [certain] vulnerability on these songs that mean so much to me — the standards of South America.”

In September, the Chilean native released *Duo*, her sixth solo album as a leader and her Ropeadope debut. Of the record’s nine tracks, seven feature distinguished guest instrumentalists. Acuña was surprised, she said, when they all agreed to do the project.

Perhaps she shouldn’t have been. After all, Acuña has been a leading Latina jazz vocalist here in the U.S. since the 1990s, a recording artist for several prestigious jazz labels since the 2000s and a Latin Grammy nominee for her last record, *Turning Pages* (Delfin), in 2019.

The list of prominent musicians with whom she’s shared world-reknown stages over the last 20-plus years is impressive — George Benson, Avishai Cohen, Tom Harrell, Antonio Hart, Joey Calderazzo, Arturo O’Farrill, Susie Ibarra, Jason Lindner and Guillermo Klein, to name a few.

But working in the studio one-to-one during a global health crisis — on very personally affecting material, no less — would be an undertaking of an entirely different order. Most of Acuña’s previous efforts were larger operations, with heavier rosters and more complex arrangements.

“I wanted to focus on the simplicity of the melodies, on reacting to what the other person is playing, on the connection that I have with these [musicians],” Acuña said.

One of her first calls was to pianist Kenny Barron, whom she had met at the West Village jazz club Sweet Basil in the 1990s.

At the time, she was new to the U.S., still familiarizing herself with the language and gaining a foothold as a singer on the New York scene.

“We both love food, and I’d be sitting at the end of the bar, talking about recipes in my broken English, in the presence of this icon,” Acuña recalled. “Through the years, we kept running into each other, and [once] we traveled together to Chile for a festival. So, I took a chance and asked him. It was a beautiful gift — he said yes. Now I call him El Rey.”

Acuña had “the king” in mind for “Medianoche,” a Spanish-language classic by Chilean songwriters Patricio Manns and Horacio Salinas. The wine-dark colors in Acuña’s voice and the shifting lights of Barron’s rubato over the keyboard bring favor to the somber ballad, which serves as the album opener.

Acuña also reached out to another con-

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"I wanted to focus on the simplicity of the melodies, on reacting to what the other person is playing," says Claudia Acuña in selecting the duo setting for her new recording.

nection from her early days in New York for "Eclipse de Luna," a gentle bolero by Cuban composer Margarita Lecuona popularized by Brazilian legend João Gilberto. Acuña's

version has bassist Christian McBride turning out crisp riffs while the singer extemporizes musingly, in a pleasing departure from the usual moody understanding of the tune.

The comfort between the two musicians is obvious, speaking, perhaps, to their long association.

"I met Christian soon after I arrived in this country, and he's my friend," she said. "[Even so], you can't just call Christian for a gig — he's one of the busiest musicians these days. But I picked up the phone to ask him, and before I could even finish, he said, 'Of course. What are the dates?'"

Besides the Lecuona song, Acuña wanted to include compositions by other prolific Latina musicians who have gone largely unheralded in the U.S.

She turned to guitarist Russell Malone to help her interpret "Verdad Amarga," by Consuelito Velázquez, the Mexican composer who wrote "Bésame Mucho."

As with this long-beloved standard, Malone's guitar accompaniment (inexplicably) only enhances the longing in "Verdad Amarga" — rendered on the album as a wistful conversation between two musicians who happen to be friends.

"I love that crazy, beautiful man. We have a very particular story," Acuña said when asked about Malone's participation in the recording. "We were on tour and got stuck together on 9/11 in Salt Lake City, [trying to]

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fly back to New York. Ever since then, it could be a whole year that we don't talk, but when 9/11 comes, one of us will call the other. It's because of that story that he's so dear to me. I had to have him on this record."

In choosing the album's repertoire, Acuña also felt drawn to Maria Grever's "Júrame," an early 20th century hit that bears the same lilting melodicism as the Mexican-born composer's later success, the Songbook favorite "What A Difference A Day Made."

Acuña thought that pianist Fred Hersch would bring the requisite pathos to the rueful tune, but she had never worked with him. Thus, she was flattered to discover that Hersch not only knew her music, but appreciated it.

"I picked this song because I felt that, with the way he plays, it would be a nice rendition," she said. "Fred commands when he plays, if I may say it. And he is so different from the other pianists on the record."

Colombian pianist Carolina Calvache — who invited Acuña to sing on last year's *Vida Profundo* (Sunnyside), a showcase for Calvache's skill as a vocal arranger — delivers a powerful rendering of Argentine songwriter Victor Heredia's "Razón de Vivir." After an impressionistic intro, she hurtles

toward the tune's catharsis before returning to an effervescent figure in the outro; this dramatic motion frees Acuña to explore the unbearable sorrow in Heredia's melody.

Acuña had also partnered with pianist Arturo O'Farrill on a Latin vocal album — 2008's *In These Shoes* (Zoho), impressive in its musical scope and breadth of talent.

As on this previous collaboration, O'Farrill's multifaceted approach to Latin jazz serves Acuña's arresting vocals on "Piensa en Mi," a popular ballad by Mexican composer Agustín Lara.

"It's an intense song," Acuña said. "And the way Arturo plays it, it's like an orchestra."

But for the Victor Jara song "Manifiesto," Acuña wanted a simpler dialogue with violinist Regina Carter, who engaged in call-and-response as the singer interpreted the Chilean songwriter's powerful lyrics. Intertwined, the two melodic lines present one of the most surprisingly moving performances on the record.

"Regina is my girl," Acuña said. "We have known each other from the Verve years. I knew that I wanted to do this song with her. She is such a unique, beautiful woman, and that comes through in the way that she plays her instrument."

Toward the end of the album, Acuña inserts the only songs with English-language lyrics, both of them solo vocal tracks. She sings the first, "Crystal Silence," a capella, almost as a private message to its composer, pianist Chick Corea, who died in February 2021.

"I was heartbroken when Chick Corea passed away," she said. "I had the privilege of meeting him before I got signed by Verve. He always had time, he remembered everything about you, and he always had something positive to say to support you. I'd dreamed of singing with him — but I never had the courage [to ask]. I decided that this would be my tribute to him, and instead of trying to replace him with an instrument, it would just be me."

Acuña closes with the album's only original, "Yo," a bold composition with ethereal, overdubbed vocal harmonies, eerie whispers and the bombo lehuero beating like a heart behind Acuña's assertive solo line — a statement of intent, it seems.

"With this album, I want to give a little glimpse of what's coming, in my compositions, my melodies," Acuña said. "I'm not afraid anymore. I'm just going to do my music the way I feel it."

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Miguel Zenón's **Pandemic** HISTORY LESSON

By Bill Milkowski Photos by Adrien Tillmann

While prepping for his latest recording, saxophonist-composer Miguel Zenón had plenty of time to research the history and development of music throughout the American continent, including his native Puerto Rico. His reading list during COVID lockdown in 2020 included such historical tomes as Sebastian Robiou Lamarche's *Tainos y Caribes*, Laurent Dubois' *Avengers of the New World*, Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Build an Empire* and Andy Robinson's *Gold, Oil and Avocados*.

The resulting music heard on *Música de Las Américas*, a byproduct of Zenón's pandemic history lesson, pays tribute to the diverse indigenous cultures found throughout the American continent

while also examining their encounters with European colonists. Along the way, he also challenges modern notions about who and what America is.

"The idea of putting together this project

sprung from me thinking about what it means to be American," Zenón said by phone in August during a break in his weeklong residency at the Village Vanguard. "And for the longest time, for most people, that

meant being from the United States. But thinking about it from a broader perspective, it's more about this idea of America as this massive piece of land that eventually found its way to connect with this other massive piece of land on the other side of the ocean. And I wanted to write music that symbolized the idea of what that meant and how that translated in my head. Am I Puerto Rican? Am I American? Am I Latin American? There's all these different lines that you could draw."

Joined by his longtime working quartet of Venezuelan pianist Luis Perdomo, Austrian bassist Hans Glawischnig and Puerto Rican drummer Henry Cole, Zenón also recruited the renowned Puerto Rican ensemble Los Pleneros de La Cresta along with master percussionists Paoli Mejías, Daniel Díaz and Victor Emmanuelli for this ambitious project, his 12th as a leader.

Known for mixing a modernist jazz sensibility with folkloric elements, as he did on 2005's *Jibaro*, 2009's *Esta Plena* and 2017's Grammy-nominated *Tipico*, Zenón has been forging a collective identity with his core group since coming together 17 years ago. "It's kind of amazing," he said of the group's longevity. "We're comfortable together and they're comfortable being around the music, so I consider myself lucky because I found something that works for me and apparently works for them, too."

Zenón and his like-minded crew expertly wed backstory and music on *Música de Las Americas*. The driving opener, "Taínos y Caribes," captures the clashing of cultures between two predominant groups in the Caribbean prior to European colonization in its interlocking rhythms. "They were very different societies in nature," Zenón explained. "The Taínos, from the Greater Antilles islands of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba and Jamaica, were an agricultural-based, very peaceful society, while the Caribes, in the Lesser Antilles islands of Trinidad and Tobago off the coast of Venezuela, were warriors and conquerors. This difference in character has always attracted me. I've known about Taínos and Caribes for a long time, but I got deeper into it by reading and finding more about the societies and how they lived at the time. So this tune was trying to portray that type of dynamic of these two societies — coexisting but always rubbing against each other."

"Taínos y Caribes," like many of Zenón's pieces over his career, also deftly obscures the "one" in a manner that recalls the rhythmic experiments of alto saxophonist-composer Steve Coleman with his Five Elements. "Steve is one of my biggest inspi-

rations," Zenón said. "As a musician, as a saxophonist, I drew heavily on a lot of his ideas. I know him personally, and I've talked to him many, many times about his process. He's been incredibly influential, not only to me, but also to a lot of folks' imaginations. He's probably one of the most influential musicians of the last 20, 30 years."

"Opresión And Revolución," about the post-colonial uprising in Haiti, is dense and dissonant while drawing on Haitian Voodoo music for a mesmerizing undercurrent, courtesy of master percussionist Paoli Mejías. "I was going for something that was more atonal, more tense," Zenón said. "I was thinking about the Haitian revolution and what that symbolized for all the Americas, historically, musically, culturally. But I was also thinking about what causes those revolutions, which in most cases is oppression and inequality."

"Navagando (Las Estrellas Nos Guían)," underscored by churning polyrhythms and featuring vocal call-and-response by Los Pleneros De La Cresta, tells the story of how indigenous groups in the early Americas were able to travel great distances in handmade wooden vessels by observing the constellations at night.

"That song came together from looking into how this civilization, around the 1500s, traveled from place to place," explained Zenón. "And it was amazing for me to think that they were traveling these ridiculously long distances in these very rudimentary vessels, basically just using the stars as road maps. And that opens up this whole conversation about what it means to be scientifically advanced, so-called civilized societies. So in writing that song, I looked specifically at some of the star formations that they were dealing with and what they symbolized, and I went through this long process of trying to use some of those star formations to connect to a specific group of notes, a specific group of chords, then build an intro and a melody using that."

"Imperios" addresses the achievements in astronomy, mathematics, agriculture, architecture and urban planning made by advanced and powerful empires like the Aztecas, Mayas and Incas that ruled vast parts of pre-colonized America.

"Venas Abiertas," inspired by the 1971 book by Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina (The Open Veins of Latin America)*, examines the dark relationship between Latin American countries and the corporations that have been exploiting their resources for generations. It's also a rare instance where Zenón actually wrote lyrics, not intended to be sung but rather to inspire

ROXANA AMED UNÁNIME

NEW ALBUM

'For this Argentine-born, Miami-based vocalist, jazz is a loose and syncretic system, suitable for mingling traditions from across the Americas. The luxurious darkness of her alto might recall contemporaries like Cassandra Wilson (...), but Amed is distinguished by her scholarly tack.'

Giovanni Russonello - The New York Times

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Matt Collar - All Music

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Zenón (left) and his longtime working quartet of Hans Glawischnig, Luis Perdomo and Henry Cole.

his own instrumental phrasing.

“Sometimes I will write lyrics that probably won’t ever be heard but they help me to write melodies that are more on the lyrical side,” he explained. “And in this case, the melody that I wrote that I play on the saxo-

phone is coming out of this process.”

Another intriguing number on *Música de Las Americas* had Zenón once again going to the history books for source material. “Bámbula” utilizes an ancient rhythmic cell (a 3-3-2 pattern) that found its way,

via Africa, into the Americas, first in Haiti before spreading to Puerto Rican bomba, Cuban tumba and Central American garifuna. It later spread to New Orleans, first in the drumming of enslaved Africans at Congo Square and later appearing in classical composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk’s 1848 Louisiana Creole-flavored composition “Bamboula, Op. 2.”

That same rhythmic quality is evident throughout the New Orleans brass band tradition and Jelly Roll Morton’s syncopated “Spanish tinge” music as well as Professor Longhair’s vivacious “rumba boogie” style emulated by the likes of Allen Toussaint, Dr. John and Henry Butler.

“This idea of a Bámbula cell, or what people think of as a ‘habanera’ rhythm, that connects all these different places and cultures and musics and then can be traced back that far is, for me, one of the greatest things in music you can find,” Zenón said. “So, I was really enamored with the idea of this ancient cell having all these ramifications.”

While Zenón is shining a light on ancient cells and timeless wisdom on *Música de Las Americas*, he is quick to point out, “For me, it’s not really about discovery. It just feels good to be able to organize this information and verbalize it musically.”

DB

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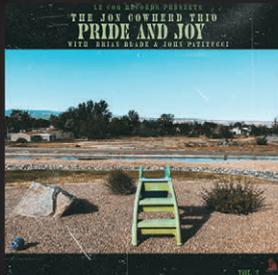
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Roxana Amed mixes multiple LATIN MUSIC TRADITIONS

By Cree McCree Photo by Claudio Napolitano

How do Latin and jazz combine to produce Latin jazz? To help her decipher the code, the virtuosic Argentinean vocalist-composer-producer Roxana Amed — who earned two Latin Grammy nominations for *Oncology*, her 2021 U.S. recording debut — called in her troops.

Unánime, her stunning new Sony Latin release, celebrates the work of contemporary and historic Latin composers with an entire firmament of Latin stars.

Among them: legendary Cuban pianist Jesús “Chucho” Valdés; Spanish flamenco guitar maestro Niño Josele; Venezuelan vocalist-songwriter-trumpeter Linda Briceño, the

first-ever woman to win a Latin Grammy for Producer of the Year; and fellow Argentine Pedro Aznar, a fretless bass phenom and longtime Pat Metheny collaborator, who

fused jazz with Argentine folk and rock.

At the center of the crossroads is Amed herself. She conceived, composed and sang on *Unánime*; assembled its far-flung cast; and was the project's hands-on producer. She is, in short, an artist who knows how to "Make Things Happen," like it said on the T-shirt she wore when being interviewed via Zoom.

"Latin jazz isn't just samba or bossa nova," Amed explained, speaking from her home in Miami, where she's lived since 2013. "People from different Latin countries

songs that I didn't want to sell." So she contacted Latin jazz trailblazer Aznar, and they instantly clicked. "Pedro loved my work, and we became collaborators and friends," she said. Eighteen years after Aznar produced her 2004 debut, *Limbo*, "I invited him to represent the voice of Argentine music on the new album." Amed also came full circle with other longtime collaborators to create *Unánime*, which means "one soul."

During a lively conversation between two kindred spirits who share a passion for tux-

edo cats and Jorge Luis Borges, Amed discussed the genesis of *Unánime* from her studio, where she'd just finished teaching a voice lesson for an appreciative feline audience. "My cat loves to be here while I'm singing," she said, and lifted her tux, Rooney, up to the screen. "He knows it's a sacred space. People are singing, people are breathing."

Is that how you felt singing "Nueva Luna, Mundo Arjo," the Argentine piece?

Yes. Arjo comes from argento, silver, which is the name of our country, and the composer says it means "our world." And it's true. I love American jazz more than any music in the world. But when I sing my music from Argentina, my body is aligned with my voice and with my soul.

"Adios a Cuba," the closer, sounds almost like a benediction.

That's my work as the producer. Find a guest who can show his soul. Chucho Valdés was very moved by the lyrics: footsteps that disappear on an island that looks really dark from a distance, because it doesn't have much electricity.

You also did "Los Tres Golpes" with Chucho, which sounded like so much fun.

It was! I was facing Chucho, with Martin [Bejerano] improvising on the other piano like crazy. Just before I got to the studio, the tuner called to say, "You may have to cancel because I can't match the two pianos." And I said, "What? [laughs] I'm sure Chucho will love the piano." And he did.

My first husband, a flamenco guitarist, taught me about duende, and I could feel the power of duende throughout *Unánime*.

Duende is when the spirit speaks through you. I really trusted that as a producer, but I can get a little distracted at the studio, doing things like sandwiches.

And it's like, "Now I have to sing?" The voice is a very delicate instrument, and I never go into the studio like a diva. So when I finally sit in front of the microphone, I don't know what's going to happen.

I think that works in your favor, because it lets the duende speak. My first introduction to Argentina was the great writer Jorge Luis Borges. What's your perspective on Borges?

He's definitely the father of Argentinian literature, not only as a writer but as a cosmopolitan intellectual. When I started writing this album, I was thinking about [his short story] *The Circular Ruins*, and the main character in that story talks about *noche unánime*.

So, I decided to call the album *Unánime*, which means one soul. Now every time I say the name, I remember Borges. **DB**

'People from different Latin countries express their music in different ways with the freedom that jazz gives you.'

express their music in different ways with the freedom that jazz gives you. I wanted to have Cuban jazz, of course, but not doing salsa." So Amed asked Chucho Valdés to interpret a work by the late 18th century Cuban composer Ignacio Cervantes. "My personal perspective comes from South America," she noted. "But everyone on the album had a chance to add other colors from their own tradition."

Amed's own tradition dates back to her childhood outside Buenos Aires. She started playing guitar and singing Argentinian songs with her father at the age of 4, when her mother also steered her to classical piano lessons "because I always had extra energy."

As a Catholic school girl, Amed sang in multiple ensembles and took classical voice lessons. "It was a huge thing, I had to go downtown," she recalled. "But it wasn't my language." Later, she hit a similar wall at the conservatory. "I was really frustrated because I didn't want to be an opera singer or a classical pianist. And I had nowhere to go to learn." So Amed learned on the job, doing gigs as a vocalist with different rock and pop bands. But it was only when she started singing jazz — "a style that came to me almost by accident" — that she found her true calling.

"Someone gave me a tape of Dee Dee Bridgewater singing 'Round Midnight' with the National Jazz Orchestra of Paris," Amed recalled. "And everything was there. The classical training made sense. The openness of the range. The layers in the arrangement. It was perfect."

After "listening to every recording I could get," Amed started writing songs for other artists, which quickly evolved into "writing

edo cats and Jorge Luis Borges, Amed discussed the genesis of *Unánime* from her studio, where she'd just finished teaching a voice lesson for an appreciative feline audience. "My cat loves to be here while I'm singing," she said, and lifted her tux, Rooney, up to the screen. "He knows it's a sacred space. People are singing, people are breathing."

I can hear the influence of your classical training in the album. And you chose to work with composers, it wasn't just music off the streets.

I'm a very passionate person, but I like to use my mind. I'm still trying to find a more accurate version of my soul in the music I make. I'm getting closer but I have to go deeper.

The pictures you paint with your voice are already deeply soulful. "Flamenco Sketches" takes us to an after-hours session in Andalusia on the wings of Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain*. And your flamenco-scattering is one of the Latin jazziest moments on the album.

I like what we did with that piece. It's not easy to sing flamenco, and finding people to play and do the clapping was a challenge. But the great Niño Josele agreed to play guitar, which he recorded in Madrid, and Kendall Moore, who wrote the arrangement, had just won a Latin Grammy when we recorded that.

"A Veces No Siempre," the Peruvian piece, talks about how you always want to return to the music of your country, which seems like a primary theme.

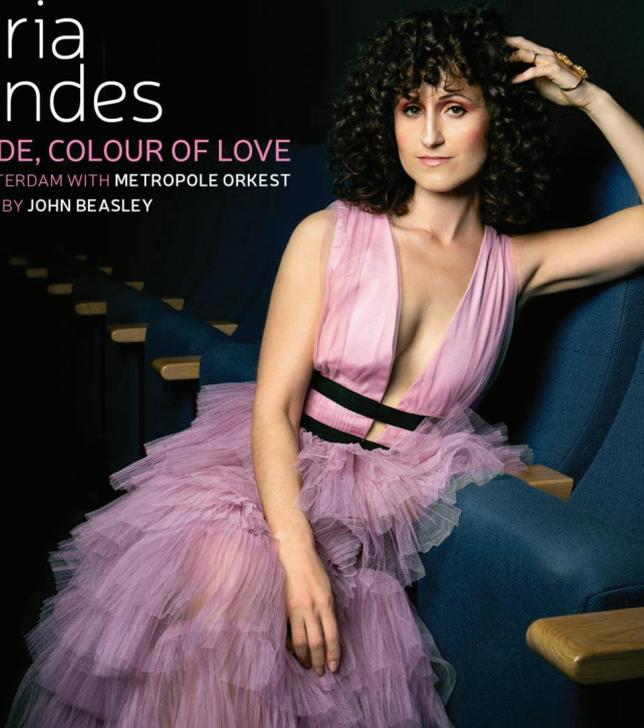
Absolutely. [Bassist] Edward Perez went



maria mendes

SAUDADE, COLOUR OF LOVE

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LATIN JAZZ

CALIENTE!

By Daniel Margolis

DownBeat presents a flurry of releases from Latin jazz artists to check out now ...

Dafnis Prieto featuring Luciana Souza *Cantar* (Dafnison)

Dafnis Prieto is a Grammy Award-winning, Cuban-born drummer, composer, bandleader, educator and 2011 MacArthur Genius Fellow who, at 48 years old, is just getting started. His discography as a leader goes eight titles deep, and as a sideman he's been playing for two decades with names as far ranging as Eddie Palmieri and John Zorn. Here, he features Brazilian singer Luciana Souza, also a Grammy-award winner.

The album, *Cantar*, out Sept. 16, also showcases Peter Apfelbaum on soprano saxophone and keyboards, Martin Bejerano on piano and Matt Brewer on electric bass in a mix of the traditions of the genre and its current influences.

dafnisonmusic.com

Gustavo Cortiñas

Kind Regards-Saludos Afectuosos (Desafío Candente)

Chicago bandleader and composer Gustavo Cortiñas has a talent for conceiving and executing projects that are ambitious in scope. His 2021 release *Desafío Candente* was a sprawling meditation on Latin American life and struggles. Now, Cortiñas builds upon that foundation with his fourth release as a leader, *Kind Regards-Saludos Afectuosos*, which came out Sept. 2 on his own label, Desafío Candente Records. The subject matter on *Kind Regards* focus-

es on the immigrant experience in the U.S. — its cover depicts an image of two children on each side of the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

"*Kind Regards* gives life, through music, to words that attempt to build bridges and understanding in times of borders and ignorance; words that focus on our feet and the dust on which they walk, instead of the stars under which they dream," the bandleader explained. And words are indeed the fundamental focus of this music, as the album is a collection of songs in which the bandleader served as composer and lyricist, representing a significant departure and evolution from his previous work.

desafiocandenterecords.bandcamp.com

Lauren Henderson

La Bruja (Brontosaurus)

Versatile vocalist Lauren Henderson expands her sound on *La Bruja*. Merging mystical themes with familiar melodies, *La Bruja* is an embrace of African American music highlighting the Afro-Latinx experience and the resilience of women through a spell-binding, 11-track collection of deftly composed originals and carefully curated Latin jazz standards.

Out in July via Henderson's label Brontosaurus Records, *La Bruja* takes its name from the Spanish word for witch. On her ninth release as a leader, Henderson sets out to reclaim an obsolete term

that historically has had a negative connotation. As the U.S. is in conflict regarding women's rights, Henderson's venture is a reprisal against the governing of women's bodies, while remaining a display of Henderson's signature nuance and silken vocal palette.

brontosaurusrecords.com

Manel Fortià Trio

Despertar (Microscopi)

Barcelona-born bassist Manel Fortià bridges his Mediterranean and Spanish roots with the sounds of modern New York jazz on his trio album *Despertar*, out in July.

Composed and produced by Fortià, *Despertar* presents a musical self-portrait based on a selection of originals, all inspired by his experiences while living in New York between 2016 and 2020. The composer creates mellow and personal music that touches on influences as varied as Charlie Haden, Keith Jarrett, Maurice Ravel and Paco de Lucía, among others.

Fortià's trio features two European jazz personalities of the new generation. Spanish pianist Marco Mezquida understands Fortià's music deeply and performs with elegance and dynamism. The two previously worked together on their 2015 duo album *My Old Flame*. Rounding out the trio is French drummer Raphaël Pannier, with whom Fortià recorded the

PLÍNIO FERNANDES SAUDADE

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XIOMARA TORRES



Kind Regards
Saludos Afectuosos.

Gustavo
Costinas



Cantar

DAFNIS PRIETO

featuring

LUCIANA SOUZA

Manel Fortià

D E S P E R T A R

Marco
Mezquida



Raphaël
Pannier

2018 album *Bulería Brooklyniana*, mixing Brooklyn jazz underground with flamenco.

microscopi.cat

Maria Mendes

Saudade, Color Of Love (Challenge)

Hailing from Portugal and based for the last decade-and-a-half in the Netherlands, Grammy and Latin Grammy Award-nominated vocalist and composer Maria Mendes is no stranger to living between two worlds. With her critically acclaimed 2019 album *Close To Me*, Mendes spotlighted her ability to bring disparate influences together with her vibrant fusion of symphonic jazz and Portuguese Fado, the folk music of her homeland.

Now, Mendes brings her singular vision to the concert stage in collaboration with master keyboardist-arranger John Beasley and Metropole Orkest on her new live album, *Saudade, Colour Of Love*. Out Oct. 7 via Challenge Records, the album expands the emotional intensity of its predecessor's hybrid sound with the

backing of a full orchestra. The lush symphonic sound sparks when it meets the interplay of Mendes' brilliant quartet and the singer's fervent vocals.

challengerecords.com

Plínio Fernandes

Saudade (Decca Gold)

Born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil, Plínio Fernandes' musical talent has brought him all over the world, including to the Royal Academy of Music in London, where he received his master's degree and has lived for the last seven years. With *Saudade*, a collection of works for solo guitar, Fernandes makes his recording debut for Decca Gold, weaving his musical loves and telling his captivating international story in sound.

"I chose songs that I grew up listening to," Fernandes explained, "and in many cases I fell in love with the guitar through them." One can hear that love throughout *Saudade*.

The album also features special guests Sheku Kanneh-Mason (cello) on Villa-Lobos' "Bachianas

Brasileiras No. 5: I. Aria (Cantilena)," Braimah Kanneh-Mason (violin) on "Menino" and vocalist Maria Rita on a rendition of "O Mundo É Um Moinho."

deccarecordsus.com

Xiomara Torres

La Voz Del Mar (Patois)

La Voz del Mar is a scintillating work by vocalist Xiomara Torres and vibraphonist Dan Neville on Wayne Wallace's Patois Records. The recording showcases Torres along with Bay Area native Neville's arrangements, and celebrates the rhythms and songs of generations of Afro-Colombians living and making music on Colombia's Pacific Coast.

Guest artists include John Benitez, Edmar Castañeda, John Santos, Wayne Wallace and Destiny Muhammad. Neville, who has long studied with master musicians in Cuba and Colombia, spearheads the outing, part of an ongoing effort to share a cultural heritage from this little-known region.

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patoisrecords.net

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Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★



Drummer Mark Guiliana's latest release reveals a compositional style focused more on rhythmic structure and timbre than melody and harmony.

Mark Guiliana *the sound of listening*

EDITION

★★★★½

It sometimes seems there are two Mark Guilianas. One is a traditional jazz drummer whose taut, propulsive quartet with saxophonist Jason Rigby, pianist Shai Maestro and bassist Chris Morrissey delivered tuneful, groove-centered acoustic jazz on his first two Edition albums. Then there's Guiliana the electronic musician, whose work ranges from the muscular grooves of 2013's *Beat Music* EP to the ambient textures and electronic percussion of this year's *Music For Doing*.

With the sound of listening, Guiliana not only brings both sides together but underscores

the common thread in his bifurcated career: a compositional style focused less on melody and harmony than on rhythmic structure and timbre. And even though he modestly outfits the album with lower-case titles, the sound of listening is a major step forward.

It starts big with the aptly titled "a path to bliss," contrasting chordal haze — overdubbed flute, clarinets and mellotron — against thrumming, circular rhythms, all the while hooking us in through melancholy climb of the melody. With "the courage to be free," the electro-acoustic blend is pushed further, as a burbling sequencer pattern is overlaid with reeds, arco bass, synths and vintage keyboards in a densely layered, two-minute symphony.

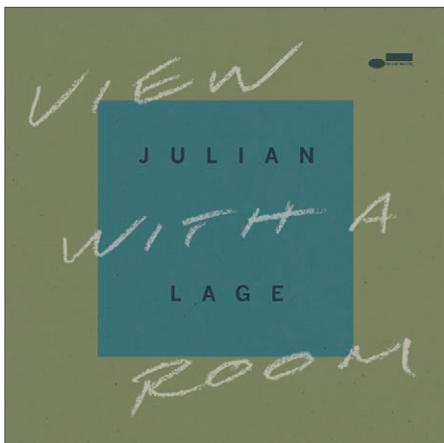
There are also all-acoustic moments, such as "our essential nature," where Guiliana's lightly

percolating drums need no help in keeping the rhythms poly, or the lilting "practicing silence," a duet between Morrissey and Maestro that ticks along like an outsized music box. Ultimately, it's not a matter of plugged or unplugged, so much as the uncanny interplay between these four, as if a single organism were bringing this multifaceted sound to life. —J.D. *Considine*

the sound of listening: a path to bliss; the most important question; a way of looking; our essential nature; the courage to be free; everything changed after you left; the sound of listening; under the influence; practicing silence; continuation. (44:33)

Personnel: Mark Guiliana, drums, synthesizers (3, 5, 7), drum programming (7), percussion (10); Chris Morrissey, bass; Shai Maestro, piano, mellotron (1, 5, 7), ampicelste (1, 5, 7), Fender Rhodes piano (2); Jason Rigby, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet (1, 3, 5, 7), clarinet (1, 5), flute (5).

Ordering info: editionrecords.com



Julian Lage *View With A Room*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★★

Swing presents itself in numerous ways. Sometimes it chatters, sometimes it floats, sometimes it chugs. Sometimes it just glides with the delight of a bird eyeballing the world below and thinking, “Nah, I’ll hang up here for a while.” As often as not, this is the vibe I get from from Julian Lage’s trio music. Ease, agility and confidence unite to define his improv approach. Regardless of tempo, regardless of terrain, the guitarist crafts interplay gambits by

blithely moving from idea to idea while creating rich opportunities for his fellow travelers.

By inviting Bill Frisell to join him on the bulk of this new album, Lage doubles down on that gliding feel. Frisell’s aerated sound enhances the exchanges between the two string players, which are numerous, intricate and charming. Along the way they create an ode to consonance; *View With A Room* delivers its most captivating moments in spots where accord is prioritized and tension is well-groomed, like the ominous romance of “Echo.” With bassist Jorge Roeder and drummer Dave King tweaking the drama, Frisell underpins Lage’s lines with his own glistening support. When agitation does blossom, it too enjoys the pleasures of refinement. “Let Every Room Sing” is built on an eight-note riff that generates its own mirror image before becoming a dust devil of activity. Thanks to the rhythm section’s aplomb and the front line’s eloquence, the hubbub comes off like two pals trying to make the same animated point in personalized ways. Banking on rapport, the somewhat pacific *View With A Room* is all about the fruits of camaraderie.

—Jim Macnie

View With A Room: Tributary; Word For Word; Auditorium; Heart Is A Drum; Echo; Chavez; Temple Steps; Castle Park; Let Every Room Sing; Fairbanks.

Personnel: Julian Lage, Bill Frisell, guitar; Jorge Roeder, bass; Dave King, drums.

Ordering info: bluenote.com

Shorter/Carrington/ Genovese/Spalding *Live At The Detroit Jazz Festival*

CANDID

★★★★★

This splendid all-star capture from the 2017 Detroit Jazz Festival unfolds like a technical-dream. Snippets and snatches of songs turn in space, interlock, then spin away, the power of association moving the music from one idea to the next, an oblique, diffuse approach familiar from Wayne Shorter’s own quartets. As he suggests during the album’s conversational coda, the music’s real subject is the process of discovery itself.

The 89-year-old saxophonist wrote three of the album’s five tunes; the other two are by Milton Nascimento and, appropriately, Geri Allen, who was originally slated to play but, sadly, died before the festival. The opening track, “Someplace Called Where” begins as a soft mist into which characters emerge, intermingle, then peak with a dramatic climax. Bassist Esperanza Spalding sings the romantic lyric in startlingly pure tones and with great expressivity, uncannily matching Shorter’s timbre and attack.

“Endangered Species,” also by Shorter, is a



masterful free improvisation running nearly 22 minutes, with Spalding cutting and pasting the lyric and her longtime pianist Leo Genovese weaving and skittering in and out of Shorter’s alternately staccato and chuffing lines. Indeed, the “dual solo” seems to be the modus operandi throughout.

—Paul de Barros

Live At The Detroit Jazz Festival: Someplace Called Where; Endangered Species; Encontros E Despedidas; Drummer’s Song; Midnight In Carlotta’s Hair; The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of (A Conversation). (62:00)

Personnel: Wayne Shorter, tenor and soprano saxophone; Esperanza Spalding, bass, vocals; Leo Genovese, piano, keyboards; Terri Lyne Carrington, drums.

Ordering info: candidrecords.com



Redman/Mehldau/ McBride/Blade *Long Gone*

NONESUCH

★★★★★

Leader Joshua Redman excels at configuring star-filled constellations. Among the shiniest was his 1994 quartet with pianist Brad Mehldau, bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade — though at the time they initially recorded, only Redman was firmly fixed in the public eye. By the time Redman reconvened the group to record 2020’s *Round Again* for Nonesuch, however, this had changed: All four players had emerged as formidable leaders in their own right. With *Long Gone*, his fourth Nonesuch release, Redman again taps into the extraordinary synergism this ensemble first manifested almost three decades ago.

The group’s sensitivity to shared musical space is unmistakable on cuts like “Long Gone,” the happy title track, as Redman solos peripatetically against Mehldau’s flawless comping, or on “Disco Ears,” as Blade and McBride lock into a relentless synchronization.

There’s plenty of individuation on this record, too. Listen to Mehldau’s extended soloing on “Kite Song,” where his two hands are so fleet that at times they sound like four. And “Ship To Shore,” where McBride peppers Blade’s unhurried groove with skittering runs during his one solo on the album. And the closing track, a live recording of a group mainstay from the 1990s, “Rejoice,” a gospel-blues tune that relies on the unchecked energy of each player to reach its fevered ascendancy. On “Statuesque,” the album’s only ballad, Redman steps away to dabble in romanticism: He frames the free explorations at the center of the piece with two subdued saxophone solos, hymn-like in their reverence. You can hear how closely his bandmates are listening.

—Suzanne Lorge

Long Gone: Long Gone; Disco Ears; Statuesque; Kite Song; Ship To Shore; Rejoice. (47:13)

Personnel: Joshua Redman, soprano and tenor saxophone; Brad Mehldau, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Brian Blade, drums.

Ordering info: nonesuch.com

The Hot Box

	Critics	J.D. Considine	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros	Suzanne Lorge
Mark Guiliana <i>the sound of listening</i>		★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★½
Julian Lage <i>View With A Room</i>		★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
Shorter, Carrington et al. <i>Live At The Detroit Jazz Festival</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Redman, Mehlau et al. <i>Long Gone</i>		★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Mark Guiliana, *the sound of listening*

Intricacy has rewards, but some of the action has an algebraic feel. The rich arrangements teem with character, though, so the program delivers vista after vista. —*Jim Macnie*

This album feels a bit split. On one side is the sensibility we've come to know from Guiliana: meditations on trance beats, acoustic space, deep listening. On the other, a more traditional jazz feel, with cool tenor and piano solos. Both work, but don't find much common ground. —*Paul de Barros*

What sets Guiliana apart is the sheer rhythmic insistence of his musical language: His ability to translate metaphysics into metered sound and sonic structures impresses for its fluency. This album resounds with insight, without a word being spoken. —*Suzanne Lorge*

Julian Lage, *View With A Room*

Lage and Bill Frisell are so perfectly paired that there are times when each seems an extension of the other — a real plus when they burrow into Americana melancholy, but a bit of a blur elsewhere. Thank god for drummer Dave King, who knows when and how to prod them out of prettiness. —*J.D. Considine*

A landmark pairing of Lage and Bill Frisell, who communicate a sense of whimsy as well as the sheer, Chet Atkins-like joy of just plucking six strings on this crisp program of originals. —*Paul de Barros*

Lage's halcyon playing stimulates the mind as it tempers the spirit. Out of the rich loam of the guitarist's imagination arise well-contoured phrases lit up in rare colors; but it's the unexpected shadows that give these compositions their depth. —*Suzanne Lorge*

Shorter/Carrington/Genovese/Spalding, *Live At The Detroit Jazz Festival*

Shorter may be top of the bill, but Spalding is the real star here. Whether through her vocals or her bass playing, she lends narrative focus to tunes that could otherwise turn digressive, while her lock with Carrington is so tight as to seem almost genetic. —*J.D. Considine*

Wayne has a way of making the most informal moves seem epic. Cool, but not always necessary. The more offhand he sounds, the more engaging this music becomes. —*Jim Macnie*

On this recording, we bear witness to the real-time confabulation of these four great artists, with all of its invention, weighty silences and improvisatory zeal. There are generations of cultural history packed into these brief minutes. —*Suzanne Lorge*

Redman/Mehlau/McBride/Blade, *Long Gone*

B-plus work from A students. —*J.D. Considine*

The music's exquisite character is based on a deep agility, yet a buttoned-down aura wafts through the program. That vanishes on the live track. —*Jim Macnie*

One nice part about growing from young lion to wise old cat is you no longer have anything to prove. Redman always sounded a little anxious before; here he just sublimely lays it out. That said, the band might have reached the intensity of the celebratory "Rejoice" a little earlier. —*Paul de Barros*

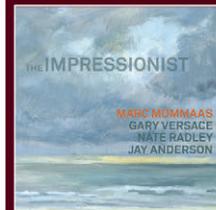


ROBERTA PIKET HARVIE S BILLY MINTZ YOU'VE BEEN WARNED

SSC 1675
released 8/12/2022

ROBERTA PIKET piano HARVIE S bass
BILLY MINTZ drums

The efforts put forth by ensembles comprised of friends always seem to have a special spark. When such a group comes together under ideal circumstances, the results can be spellbinding.

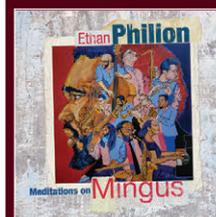


MARC MOMMAAS THE IMPRESSIONIST

SSC 1669
released 8/19/2022

MARC MOMMAAS tenor saxophone
GARY VERSACE piano NATE RADLEY guitar
JAY ANDERSON bass

*It was with Gabriel Fauré's esthetic in mind that Mommaas began to write music for his new recording, *The Impressionist*.*

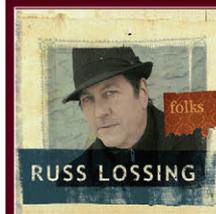


ETHAN PHILION MEDITATIONS ON MINGUS

SSC 1666
released 8/26/2022

ETHAN PHILION bass
RUSS JOHNSON tp VICTOR GARCIA tp RAJIV
HALIM as GEOFF BRADFIELD ts, fl, voc, MAX
BESSESEN tp, as, fl NORMAN PALM tb BRENDAN
WHALEN tb ALEXIS LOMBRE p DANA HALL dr

*Now, in Mingus' centennial year of 2022, Philion is proud to present *Meditations on Mingus*, a powerfully swinging and inventive set of Mingus masterworks as arranged by Philion himself and performed by a stellar 10-piece ensemble.*



RUSS LOSSING FOLKS

SSC 1658
Released 8/5/2022

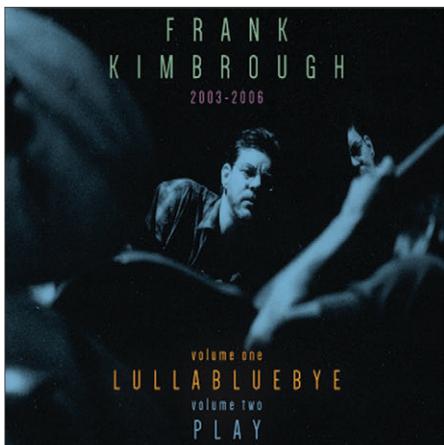
RUSS LOSSING piano
JOHN HEBERT bass MICHAEL SARIN bass

Lossing uses the idea of folk melodies without quoting any directly, generating an instinct in creating this music and establishing an esthetic.



sunnysiderecords.com





Frank Kimbrough 2003–2006

PALMETTO
★★★★★

The reissue of pianist-composer Frank Kimbrough's trio albums originally released as *Lullabluebye* and *Play* offers further evidence that he was an artist of the first order. Masterful though not immodestly showy; easily flexible and adaptive but with an indelible personal approach. Natural, flowing and always honest; Kimbrough was a truly free improviser in the best sense, knowing and stretching the tradition, unafraid of trying

Marshall Gilkes *Cyclic Journey*

ALTERNATE SIDE
★★★★★

Mendelssohn said that the trombone was “too sacred for frequent use.” I say, “Phooey, Felix!” In recent times the instrument has been marginalized, dismantled live on stage in the name of improv, and, more forgivably, turned into a novelty instrument. We’ve forgotten that from Giovanni Gabrieli to Tommy Dorsey on the trombone — with the old sackbut still hiding in its shadow — came closer to the beauty of the human voice than any other horn. So bring it back and bring it on.

Of contemporary trombone players, Gilkes probably has the closest kinship with both Gabrieli (not a trombonist, but he seemed to find its natural song) and Dorsey.

This is one of those records that makes one wish the old habit of not applauding in a church were to be revived. The instinct is to listen to what is, for once, a genuine musical journey, full of wise and joyful observation, sit silently for a moment or two in appreciation and then get up and leave. Whether it is a jazz record or not is a question for those who have time to split hairs, but the combination of Parks, Oh and Blake makes it feel very much like one, with *The*

something new, always feeling.

Before dying of a heart attack at age 64 in 2020, he was central to the New York jazz scene: a member of Maria Schneider’s orchestra, co-founder of the Jazz Composers Collective, principal in its Herbie Nichols Project, leader of some dozen albums including a five-volume Monk project, teacher at New York University and Juilliard, and creative collaborator with vocalist/poet Maryanne de Prophetis, his partner. A child of the South, his mother taught piano, and he picked out church hymns. Classically trained but enamored of Bill Evans, and later Paul Bley, Keith Jarrett, Cecil Taylor and Andrew Hill, for years he worked in obscurity in a Greenwich Village bar. His distinctively lyrical curiosity and unusual range, from sensitive introspection to rollicking teamwork, resulted in the depth and beauty of these two trio sessions, as elsewhere across his oeuvre.

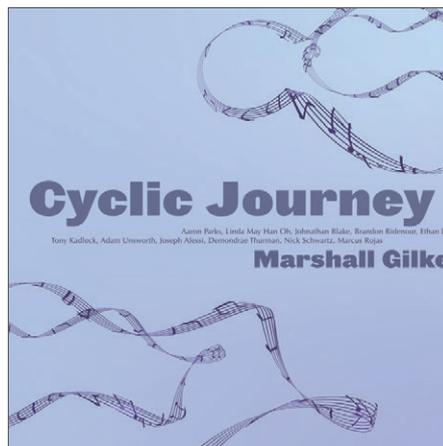
Recorded three years apart with two sets of exemplary partners, both albums are based in devotion to deep interaction. Restoring two of his loveliest hours, Palmetto serves us all.

—Howard Mandel

2003–2006: *Lullabluebye*; Centering; Kid Stuff; Ode; Whirl; Ghost Dance; You Only Live Twice; Fu Bu; Ben’s Tune; Eventualities; Beginning; The Spins; Lucent; Waiting in Santander; Conception Vessel; Jimmy G; Play; Regeneration; Little Big Man; Beginning 2. (1:47:57)

Personnel: Frank Kimbrough, piano; Ben Allison, bass (1–10); Matt Wilson, drums (1–10); Masa Kamaguchi, bass (11–20); Paul Motian, drums (11–20).

Ordering info: palmetto-records.com



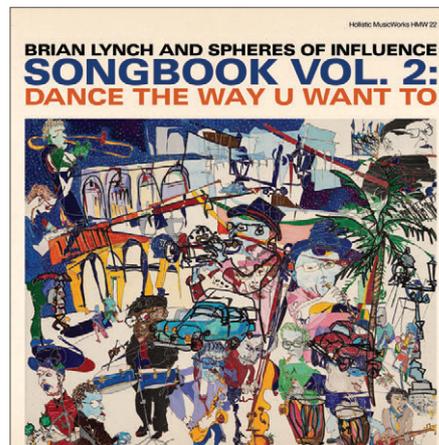
Birth Of The Cool and *Kind Of Blue* not so far back in the family tree. The buoyant bonus “Sin Filtro” is probably a touch de trop, to mix the tongues a little, on such a perfect record, but it’s a useful and exciting reminder of where Gilkes comes from.

—Brian Morton

Cyclic Journey: Part I—First Light; Part II—Up And Down; Part III—The Calm; Part IV—Go Get It!; Part V—Respite; Part VI—Beat The Clock; Part VII—Genre Battles; Part VIII—Musings; Part IX—Cyclic Journey; Sin Filtro (bonus track). (54:00)

Personnel: Brandon Ridenour, piccolo trumpet, trumpet, flugelhorn; Ethan Bensdorf, Tony Kadleck, trumpet, flugelhorn; Marshall Gilkes, Joseph Alessi, trombone; Nick Schwartz, bass trombone; Adam Unsworth, French horn; Domondrae Thurman, euphonium; Marcus Roja, tuba; Aaron Parks, piano; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Johnathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: alternatesiderecords.weebly.com



Brian Lynch and Spheres of Influence *Songbook, Vol. 2—Dance The Way U Want To*

HOLLISTIC MUSICWORKS
★★★★★

He’d worked with everyone from Art Blakey to Prince (the latter perhaps explaining the hip orthography of the title) and along the way shown a wise and detailed knowledge of the earlier trumpet masters, and not just the obvious ones: Lee Morgan, Booker Little and Charles Tolliver were also part of his make-up. The first surfacing of *Spheres Of Influence*, on the Sharp Nine album of that name, was in 1997 when Lynch, having more than mastered the show-up-and-play small combo ethos of Gerry Teekens’ Criss Cross label, experimented with a larger band, with sly reggae beats and bolder writing.

Now, releasing on his own dedicated label, Lynch explores Latin jazz more thoroughly than before, but first of all by asking us to note a continuity with that earlier record. One of its outstanding tracks was the swinger “Palmieri’s Mood.” This one kicks off with “E.P.’s Plan B,” a terrific line that the Miami iteration of the band delivers with breezy authority. There is another tribute to a fellow trumpeter “Tom Harrell,” which sits prominently among the themes he’s revisiting from his songbook. The only other new tune is “The Disco Godfather,” a tribute to Rudy Ray Moore.

There’s no sense here of bop simply being Latinized. Each tune seems worked out from the core outwards.

—Brian Morton

Songbook, Vol. 2—Dance The Way U Want To: E.P.’s Plan B; Change Of Plan; Across The Bridge; Dance The Way U Want To; The Disco Godfather; Tom Harrell; Silent Conversation; Que Sería La Vida; Awe Shocks; Tom Harrell alternate take; E.P.’s Plan B radio version; Change Of Plan radio version; Across The Bridge radio version; Dance The Way U Want To radio version; Tom Harrell radio version; Que Sería La Vida radio version; Awe Shocks radio version. (127:00)

Personnel: Brian Lynch, trumpet; Tom Kelley, alto saxophone; Christ Thompson-Taylor, Aldo Salvent, tenor saxophone; Kemuel Roig, Alex Brown, piano; Rodner Padilla, electric bass; Hilario Bell, drums; Murphy Aucamp, percussion.

Ordering info: hollisticmusicworks.com



Makaya McCraven's pan-stylistic concept album

Makaya McCraven *In These Times*

NONESUCH/XL RECORDINGS

★★★★★

Makaya McCraven has been respected as a drummer, but that conspicuous musical gift is just one part of an expanding universe of expression for the artist, who stretches out ambitiously on his latest album, *In These Times*. More than a jazz album, his project is a pan-stylistic concept album and impressive next chapter created in multiple studios, live tracking and time frames, with a broad sonic palette including strings, harp and such prominent young soloist talents as alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins, guitarist Jeff Parker, trumpeter Marquis Hill and vibraphonist Joel Ross.

But this music expands beyond the conventional jazz approach of score/bed as framework for individual improvisational workouts. He is after a broader canvas of ideas and musical spaces, as forecast on the opening title track, replete with lustrous string textures and the album's sole spoken word testimonial.

Tidy melodic designs are also of little interest here. McCraven's writing, as heard on "The Fours," can draw on looping and cross-hatching motifs and hypnotic structures evoking

West African music, minimalism and Afro-futurist jazz of the past and present. Harpist Brandee Younger steps forward on "Lullaby," a cooling agent of a piece, limned in strings and subtle horn parts. Hill's plaintive trumpet presides over "The Calling," while De'Sean Jones' flute soars over the rumbling thicket of drum textures on the beguiling "Seventh String." One of the live elements, "The Title," closes out the set on a soft-funky postlude note.

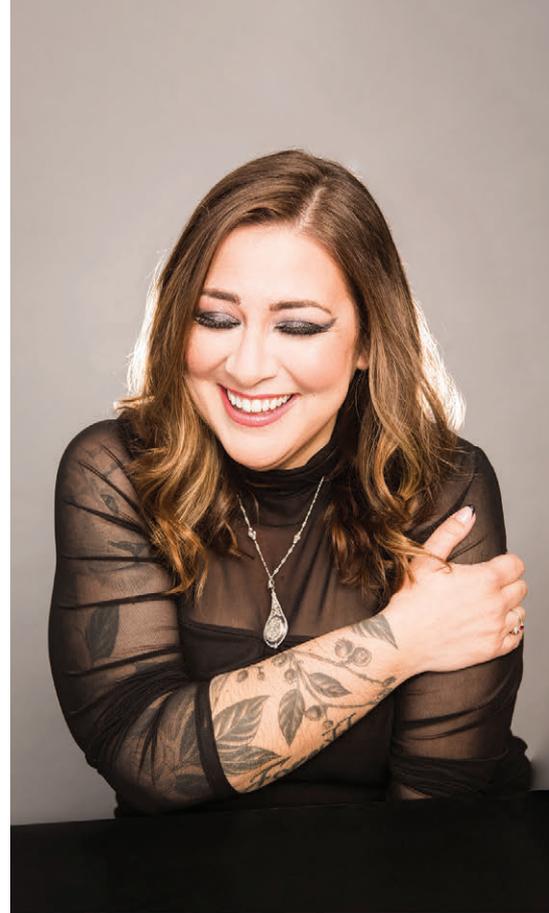
At times in the course of tracks and atmospheric passages, the spirit seems thin, in want of more content. Seen as an integrated whole, though, *In These Times* establishes a holistic poetic sensibility tethered to McCraven's genre-defying and rule-bending creative logic. It's music ripe for a fragmented time in search of connections between the fragments.

—Josef Woodard

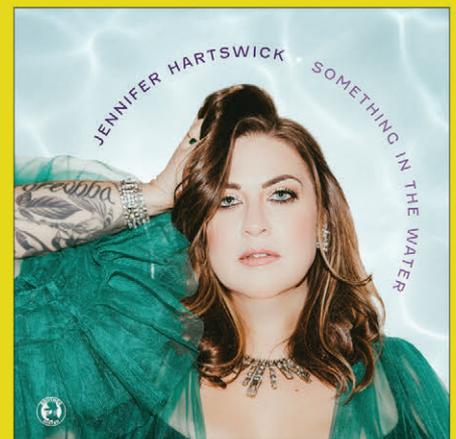
In These Times: In These Times; The Fours; High Fives; Dream Another; Lullaby; This Place That Place; The Calling; Seventh String; So Ubuji; The Knew Untitled; The Title. (41:23)

Personnel: Makaya McCraven, drums, sampler, percussion, tambourine, baby sitar, synths, kalimba, handclaps, vibraphone, Wuritzer, organ; Junius Paul, double bass, percussion, electric bass guitar, small instruments; Jeff Parker, guitar; Brandee Younger, harp; Lia Kohl, cello; Macie Stewart, Zara Zaharieva, violin; Marta Sofia Honer, viola; Greg Ward, alto saxophone; Irvin Pierce, tenor saxophone; Marquis Hill, trumpet, flugelhorn; Greg Spero, Rob Clearfield, piano; Joel Ross, vibraphone, marimba; Matt Gold, guitar, percussion, baby sitar; De'Sean Jones, flute.

Ordering info: intlanthem.bandcamp.com



JENNIFER HARTSWICK *Something in the Water*



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Billy Drummond & Freedom of Ideas

Valse Sinistre
CELLAR MUSIC GROUP

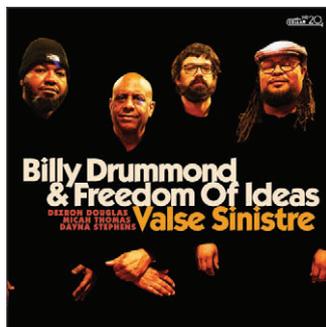
★★★★

There is much to savor in Billy Drummond's latest release as leader, his first since the acclaimed *Dubai* in 1996. Here, the celebrated drummer offers a romp through his career as an educator, as collaborator with many of the greats of the last several decades, and an icon and mainstay on the important jazz stages of New York. Each composition is in many ways a tribute to those moments: his work with Carla Bley ("Valse Sinistre") and Frank Kimbrough ("Clara's Room"), his paeans to Jackie McLean ("Little Melona") and Tony Williams ("Lawra"), and his own original composition "Changes For Trane & Monk." Bolstered by a supporting cast representing a younger generation, the album has a sophisticated-but-loose, jam-session type vibe that provides an opportunity to reflect upon Drummond's sonic journeys. Featuring well-crafted interventions from pianist Micah Thomas on piano, bassist Dezron Douglas and saxophonist Dayna Stephens rounding out the band, one can feel the intention behind every arrangement. Thomas' "Never Ends" reflects the feeling of knowing when one has embarked upon musical territory that feels incomplete, but, importantly, not incoherent. —Joshua Myers

Valse Sinistre: Little Melona; Never Ends; Valse Sinistre; Laura; Frankenstein; Changes For Trane & Monk; Clara's Room; Reconfirmed; Lawra. (44:26)

Personnel: Billy Drummond, drums; Micah Thomas, piano; Dezron Douglas, bass; Dayna Stephens, saxophones.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com



Alina Bzhezhinska and HipHarpCollective

Reflections

BBE MUSIC

★★★★½

Part homage, part reimagination, Alina Bzhezhinska and HipHarpCollective's *Reflections* is all heart. In arrangements that feature the music of Mongo Santamaria, Duke Ellington and jazz harp foremothers Dorothy Ashby and Alice Coltrane, Bzhezhinska brings a unique flavor that wrests groove and a percussion-driven motif out of these and other familiar tunes. Along with HipHarpCollective members Adam Tiexiera and Joel Prime, guest appearances from Jay Phelps and Tony Kofi are layered effectively throughout the recording. Bzhezhinska and Kofi's take on John Coltrane's "Alabama" is the perfect encapsulation for the message embedded in this album.

On the title track, Bzhezhinska performs alongside another guest, Julie Walkington on bass, who provides a welcome platform for this heartfelt piece. Then there is "Pairs Sur Le Toit," a tune that is performed with and without the vocals of Sanity and Tom TheyThem, rappers who bring the tune, and the album, to its transcendent hip-hop/jazz apex.

—Joshua Myers

Reflections: Soul Vibrations; For Carrol; Fire; Reflections; Afro Blue; Alabama; African Flower; Paris Sur Le Toit (Instrumental); Sans End; Action Line; Pairs Sur Le Toit; Mediation. (62:34)

Personnel: Alina Bzhezhinska, harp; Adam Teixiera, drums; Joel Prime, percussion; Tony Kofi, saxophones; Jay Phelps, trumpet; Vimala Rowe, vocals (5); SANITY, vocals (11); Tom TheyThem, vocals (11); Julie Walkington, bass; Ying Xue, violin, viola.

Ordering info: bbemusic.com



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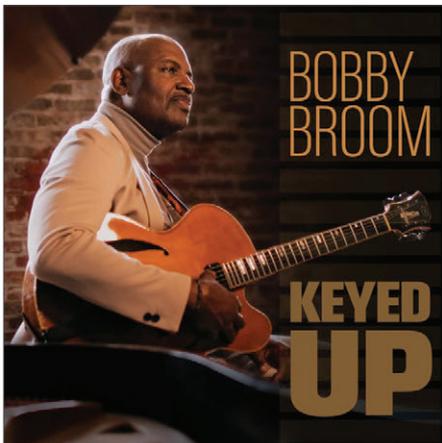
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Bobby Broom *Keyed Up*

STEELE

★★★★★

It was perhaps logical for guitarist Bobby Broom to feature a pianist on *Keyed Up*, his tribute album to several of his favorites on the instrument, and wise to extend that invitation to Justin Dillard.

From Errol Garner's "Misty," which is rendered at a deliberate pace as if summoning the lyrics to the fever pitch of Horace Silver's "Quicksilver," Broom and his regular trio of bassist Dennis Carroll and drummer Kobie

Watkins provide a comfortable format for the young pianist to present his wares, and Dillard shines throughout, illuminating the songs with dazzling displays of high notes.

Broom has given Dillard a challenging list of greats to approximate, but this isn't done without his own tuneful accompaniment, with an assortment of lush chords that often burst into a shower of sparkling notes.

There are moments when Dillard matches Broom's speed and dexterity, which is delivered with reverence to Bud Powell on "Hallucinations (Budo)." They are a bouncy pair on Chick Corea's "Humpty Dumpty," and share clusters of intervallic leaps.

There are two takes of McCoy Tyner's "Blues on the Corner," and Carroll and Watkins are the authors here as they infuse the familiar blues with intricate patterns of rhythm inspired by Broom and Dillard.

In many respects the tracks here are an extension of Broom's tribute to Monk, and however he chooses to continue this mission, he would be smart to bring Dillard along for the ride.

—Herb Boyd

Keyed Up: Hallucinations (aka Budo); Second Thoughts; Humpty Dumpty; Soulful Bill; Quicksilver; Misty; Driftin'; Blues On The Corner (Take 2); Scoochie; Blues On The Corner (Take 1). (49:74)

Personnel: Bobby Broom, guitar; Justin Dillard, piano; Hammond SK-X; Dennis Carroll, bass; Kobie Watkins, drums.

Ordering info: bobbybroom.bandcamp.com

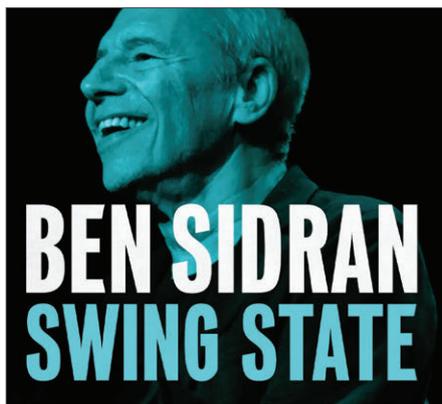
Ben Sidran *Swing State*

NARDIS

★★★★½

Ben Sidran does many things well. He's a wit, rocker, singer, songwriter, satirist, scholar, record producer, film composer, broadcaster and of course has performed in the singing pianist format exemplified by his hero Mose Allison. It's surprising that after 40 albums, *Swing State* is Sidran's first all-instrumental effort, if predictable in featuring his longtime accompanists. Forty-five-year-old son Leo is on drums and Billy Peterson is on bass.

The repertoire is familiar, enhanced by Sidran's mentioning in liner notes that these songs from the '30s and '40s were among the first he attempted as a kid. In each case they get a fresh spin through tempo or rhythmic variations, without straying far from happy conventions, like the brushes soft-shoe under "Ain't Misbehavin'." Addressing the well-worn lines of such sentimental favorites as "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (solo) with genuine care rather than tongue-in-cheek distance and an unfailing sense of melodic narrative, Sidran personalizes his interpretations subtly, with few pyrotechnics. He has fine chops but his efforts don't go into reconceptualizing the relations of music and energy; rather towards creating cleanly



swung, readily grasped pleasures. At that the trio excels.

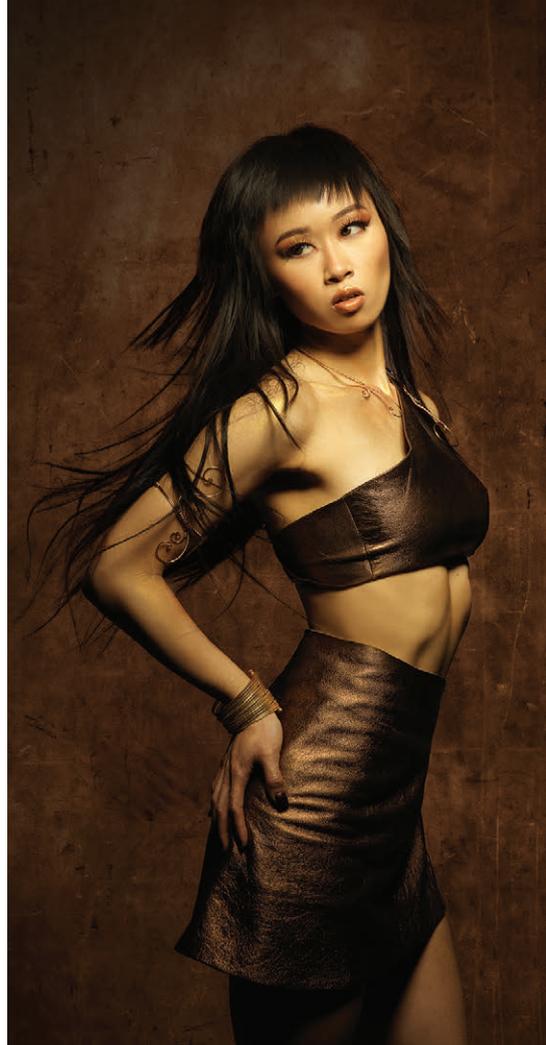
"Laura" gets an imaginative transformation, from haunting ballad into bossa nova dripping saudade in the chosen take, dreamier and arguably more Hollywoodish in the alternate. "Stompin' At The Savoy," at a medium tempo, spotlights a clever bit of counterpoint that has rhythmic implications. The whole project goes down easily.

—Howard Mandel

Swing State: Lullaby Of The Leaves; Swing State; Laura; Ain't Misbehavin'; Stompin' At The Savoy; Somewhere Over The Rainbow; Tuxedo Junction; Laura, Alternate Take. (38:52)

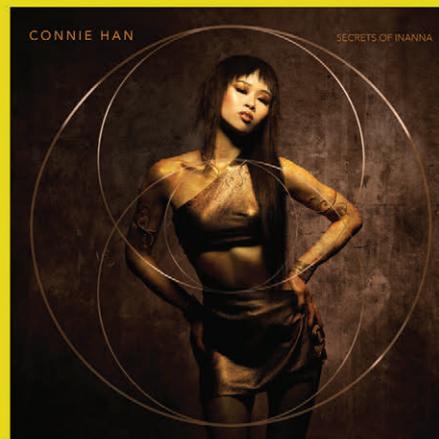
Personnel: Ben Sidran, piano; Billy Peterson, bass; Leo Sidran, drums.

Ordering info: bensidran.bandcamp.com



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Bridging Jazz Generations

Jazz moved some distance in the 25-year span covered by the following four albums. In 1958 there was a remarkable harmony in the jazz world. In the minor arguments over East Coast vs. West Coast, bebop vs. hard-bop, etc., it was easy to overlook what the music still had in common. Jazz was easily defined because nearly all musicians still phrased with an iridescent and aerodynamic swing at faster tempos, lyricism on ballads. And it was still performed within the standard formats of a 12-bar blues or 32-bar AABA song. Accordingly, generational differences were easily bridged as Coleman Hawkins and John Coltrane could converse easily at the Village Vanguard.

The unity of the 1958 jazz world is very nicely caught on Craft Recording's vinyl reissue of **Four! Hampton Hawes!!!! With Barney Kessel, Shelly Manne, and Red Mitchell (Craft; ★★★★★)**. Originally issued on Contemporary Records, this is the third in a series of LP restorations marking the label's 70th anniversary. The music conforms to the consensus of the period, which balances five jazz and songbook standards with a couple of originals.

Ordering info: craftrecordings.com

By 1978, when Mal Waldron recorded **Searching In Grenoble: The 1978 Solo Piano Concert (Tompkins Square; 64:23/38:58 ★★)**, the rules had changed. Waldron and Hawes were contemporaries but followed very different muses. Rock threw up new choices beyond bop that suited Waldron well. This newly issued concert gives us a much darker more atmospheric ambience where motion is oblique and where the "covers" are mostly Waldron's own, made to his own structural specs. This itself becomes a kind of trap. Too many of the dozen pieces begin with a melancholy, minor-key

chord proclamation, as if he's been listening to too much Rachmaninoff. Its persistence becomes a self-imposed cliché, casting a glum shadow over a program that needs a bit of pacing.

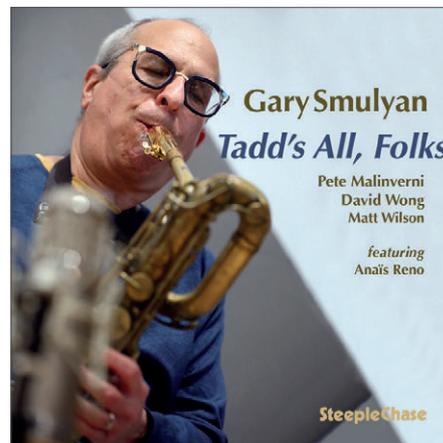
Ordering info: tompkinssquare.com

The '70s and '80s belonged to Miles Davis and his proteges. They were smart, talented, ambitious and, unlike most jazz musicians, acutely sensitive to the zeitgeist and its possibilities. Few were willing to explore more opportunities than drummer Tony Williams. **Play Or Die (M.I.G. Music; 39:47 ★★½)** is a 1980 trio album made in Germany, issued in a limited run of 500 LPs, and "lost" until now. The music is deep into the fusion lingo of the day, free form and full of dystopian bass boomers and repeated hooks and ostinatos. But Williams makes most of it an ensemble effort — it's really his showcase — and gives the so-so material a consistent undertow of coercing tension, with one artfully long solo on "Beach Ball Tango."

Ordering info: mig-music.de/en/mig-music

Jack McDuff was among a handful of Hammond organists around 1960 to create a funky quartet format with a strong appeal to Black audiences who had supported jump and rhythm & blues bands after the war. The organ was uniquely equipped to fuse blues and church sensibilities into a form soon dubbed "soul jazz." In **Jack McDuff: Live At Parnells (Soul Bank Music; 121:03 ★★½)** the accent is on jazz with a preponderance of standards from Golson and Ellington to Bacharach. McDuff skillfully murrurs seductive bluesy tremolos broken by shimmering organ shrieks. Also, he had not forgotten how to swing. Though not an all-star group, Dan Wilensky enlivens things with some hard-driving, buzzsaw tenor work. **DB**

Ordering info: soulbankmusic.bandcamp.com



Gary Smulyan Tadd's All, Folks

STEEPLECHASE

★★★★★

Inveterate swinger and perennial poll-winner Gary Smulyan is as comfortable with bebop (check 2018's *Alternate Contrafacts*) as he is with romantic ballads (1997's *With Strings* and 2013's *Bella Napoli*). Here he offers his bari as a potent solo rejoinder in a program of tunes with words composed by bebop icon Tadd Dameron. All the lyrics are delivered by the remarkably poised young singer Anaïs Reno, a student at New York's Purchase College, where both Smulyan and pianist Pete Malinverni teach.

Malinverni takes a seasoned approach on Dameron's dreamy opener, "Whatever Possessed Me," the buoyant jazz-waltz "This Night Of Stars," the bossa-flavored "Weekend" and the jaunty swinger "Lovely One In The Window." Bassist David Wong supports and reliably swinging drummer Matt Wilson offers crackling fills on "This Night Of Stars" while engaging in lively call-and-response with Smulyan on the vivacious "You're A Joy." Wilson also joins Reno on a stirring drums-voice into to "Take A Chance On Spring," which morphs into an uptempo romp, complete with Smulyan's sly quote from Dameron's "Good Bait."

Reno, all of 18, had barely heard of Dameron before this session. But she delivers with rare maturity throughout and delivers with uncanny depth on the melancholy torch song "I'm Never Happy Anymore." And she swings with the ferocity and sass of an Anita O'Day on the uptempo closer, "Never Been In Love." While Smulyan solos brilliantly throughout, Reno is the real treat here. —Bill Milkowski

Tadd's All, Folks: Whatever Possessed Me; This Night Of Stars; Weekend; Lovely One In The Window; You're A Joy; Take A Chance On Spring; My Dream/Do You Remember; Sweet Life; I'm Never Happy Anymore; Never Been In Love. (67:13)

Personnel: Gary Smulyan, baritone saxophone; Pete Malinverni, piano; David Wong, bass; Matt Wilson, drums; Anaïs Reno, vocals.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Michael Wollny Trio

Ghosts

ACT

★★★★

German jazz pianist Michael Wollny, who has worked with Albert Mangelsdorff and such Americans as Peter Erskine, Pat Metheny, Donny McCaslin and Vince Mendoza, has been a regular on the ACT label since 2005. For this recent effort, he regarded his eclectic repertoire as a gathering of the musical ghosts (or memories) that have long haunted him.

Engaging in close interplay with drummer Eric Schaefer, with whom he has worked for nearly 20 years, and bassist Tim Lefebvre,

Wollny performs melodies that range from the standards “I Loves You Porgy” and “In A Sentimental Mood” to the Irish folk song “She Moved Through The Fair,” Franz Schubert’s “Erikonig,” film music, contemporary pop/rock tunes and two originals.

Despite the wide range of music (and the rather thunderous treatment of the Schubert piece), there is not that much mood variation on *Ghosts*. Most of the performances are melancholy, laidback, cinematic and (relating to the title) a bit spooky. “Willow’s Song” (a love song from the soundtrack of a European movie) has Wollny really drawing out the melody. “Hand Of God” sounds like it could have been used for a chase scene. “Ghosts” (not the Albert Ayler tune which would have been too happy for this project) is a fairly brief dirge. While this version of “In A Sentimental Mood” is largely unrecognizable, Wollny treats the theme of “She Moved Through The Fair” with affection and gets rather dramatic on the closing “Beat The Drum Slowly.” The emphasis throughout is on the ensemble and creating dark moods while keeping most of the music somewhat melodic.

—Scott Yanow

Ghosts: I Loves You Porgy; Willow’s Song; Hauntology; Hand Of God; Ghosts; Monsters Never Breathe; Erikonig; In A Sentimental Mood; She Moved Through The Fair; Beat The Drum Slowly. (37:32)

Personnel: Michael Wollny, bass; Tim Lefebvre, bass; Eric Schaefer, drums.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Jeff Coffin

Between Dreaming And Joy

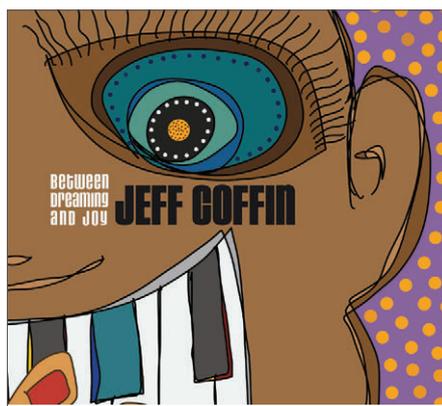
EAR UP

★★★★

Jeff Coffin is best known as a sideman/bandmate, in such high-profile pop and fusion contexts as Dave Matthews and Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, but has built up a 20-something album discography under his own name. For his latest, the culmination of intensive pandemic-time prep work and with a piled-high, cast-of-many in the culling of parts from remote studios, Coffin jumps into an ambitious free fall of a project, to varied ends.

Listening to the album in sequence may be misleading. Early, the album consists of innocuous and polished funk jazz variations, with simplistic riffs passing for melodies and an off-putting proximity to the banalities of smooth jazz. At times, Coffin’s flute work has the effect — intentionally or otherwise — of a tribute to Herbie Mann, an unapologetic pop-jazz-fusioner of another era, especially on “Bird & Magic.”

Many of the album’s charms and saving graces arrive in the details and detours, as with the 13-beat groove of “In The Belly Of The Whale,” and tasty solos from the likes of Robben Ford and Coffin on a myriad of reeds,



flutes and more (including Coke bottle). The cinematic title cut may be the set’s highlight, with its enigmatically woozy sensuality, chromatically tumbling B section and a fluid, potent solo from young slide guitar wizard Marcus King. Rhythmic strategies can grab the ear even when other aspects fall short. “Spinning Plates” has a pan-global, hypnotically layered rhythmic maze effect, and a slithering slink-funky quality energizes “Behind The 8 Ball.”

—Josef Woodard

Between Dreaming And Joy: Vinnie The Crow; Ruthie; Tip The Band; In The Belly Of The Whale; Between Dreaming And Joy; Spinning Plates; Behind The 8 Ball; Busting Out All Over; When Birds Sing; Bird & Magic. (45:51)

Personnel: Jeff Coffin; numerous other contributing musicians.

Ordering info: earuprecords.com

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Steve Tibbetts Hellbound Train An Anthology

Steve Tibbetts Hellbound Train— An Anthology

ECM

★★★★★

Retrospectives usually span the entirety of an artist's career, but Steve Tibbetts optimizes for cohesion rather than breadth in *Hellbound Train—An Anthology*, a two-volume collection celebrating his 40-year-long career at ECM. That might explain why three of Tibbetts' nine ECM recordings feature heavily in this anthology, while one of them, *Yr*, doesn't appear at all. The illustrious guitarist hand-picked each piece to weave together a continuous narrative that perfectly distillates his distinct, genre-bending work.

The first volume showcases Tibbetts' signature string-bending techniques and global influences in spiritual soundscapes like "Full Moon Dogs" and ambient rock ballads like

"Lochana." Tibbetts' longtime collaborator, percussionist Marc Anderson, brings a sort of rigor and focus to these songs with his high-octane congas, gongs and steel drums. His methodical and deliberate approach to rhythm is a fitting foil to Tibbetts' imaginative playing and frenetic lines.

Tibbetts dives deeper into the rock genre in the latter half of this volume, with electric distortions juxtaposing Anderson's unrelenting beats on "Roam And Spy" and Claudia Schmidt's haunting vocals on "Nyemma."

The rock motif carries over into the second volume, which focuses largely on Tibbetts' more stripped-down acoustic work. He explores delicate melodies on "Start" and "Life Of Someone," and introspective lines and deliberate pacing on "The Big Wind" and "Night Again."

Hellbound Train is a collection that moves seamlessly from atmospheric world music to industrial rock to experimental acoustic jazz and everything in between. Each song flows seamlessly into the next while also referencing a consistent set of textures and themes throughout. The hypertextual nature of this anthology perfectly encapsulates Tibbetts' signature sound and methodical artistry.

—Ivana Ng

Hellbound Train—An Anthology: (Vol. 1) Full Moon Dogs; Chandoha; Lochana; Black Temple; Burning Temple; Glass Everywhere; Roam and Spy; Hellbound Train; Nyemma; Your Cat; Vision. (Vol. 2) Chandogra; Climbing; Black Mountain Side; Start; 100 Moons; Mile 234; Wish; Ishvarana; Bloodwork; Life Of Someone; Life Of Emily; The Big Wind; Aerial View; Night Again; My Last Chance; End Again; Threnody. (54:11/73:05)

Personnel: Steve Tibbetts, guitar, kalimba, percussion; Marc Anderson, congas, percussion, gongs; Jim Anton, bass (Vol 1: 1–4, 6, 9); Eric Anderson, bass (Vol 1: 1, 8, 9); Bob Hughes, bass (Vol 1: 10, 11; Vol 2: 15); Mike Olson, synthesizer (Vol 1: 7); Marcus Wise, tabla (Vol 1: 8, 10; Vol 2: 3); Claudia Schmidt, voice (Vol 1: 1, 9); Rhea Valentine, voice (Vol 1: 1); Michelle Kinney, cello, drones (Vol 2: 9, 10, 11, 16); Tim Weinhold, vase, bongos (Vol 2: 15).

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Sélébéyone / Xaybu: The Unseen

Steve Lehman & Sélébéyone

Xaybu: The Unseen

PI

★★★★★

To wrap one's arms around *Xaybu: The Unseen* is to open oneself up to a multicultural, boundaryless experience. MCs HPrizm and Gaston Badimic, saxophonists Steve Lehman and Maciek Lasserre, and drum set operator Damion Reid create demanding jazz. These sound designers also serve up a style that has been called avant-rap, as Bandimic vocalizes in the African language Wolof and HPrizm talk-speaks in English. There are traces of hip-hop, even talking blues, all set in a determinedly futuristic context. Their charged, risk-taking improvisations speak to this global collective's ability to navigate all kinds of high wires.

"Sélébéyone" means "intersection" in Wolof. "Xaybu," also Wolof, references the unknowable and unseeable in Sufi mysticism. All but Lehman and Reid are Sufi Muslims.

The militant music these visionaries produce pushes boundaries in 15 units (you can't call them songs) of various shapes, sizes and textures. There is a sense of totality, if not unity, as the opening and closing works share a title, if little else. This high-definition album rewards patience, and while not the most accessible — don't look for melody (exception: "Dual HP") or any kind of regularity — that very irregularity makes it magnetic. But it's not an easy draw.

Take the segue from "Poesie I" to "Poesie II." The one ends on fat chords courtesy of Reid's mastery of effect, only to be succeeded by Bandimic's vocals and Reid's stuttering drums. Weird how smoothly these chunks work together. Weird how much musical variety these explorers, expertly produced by Lehman and Lasserre, cover. With this exceptional album, Sélébéyone is clearing a fresh pathway.

—Carlo Wolff

Xaybu—The Unseen: Time Is The First Track; Djibril; Lamina; Gas Akap; Liminal; Gagaku; Poesie I; Poesie II; Go In; Navigation; Dual Ndoxol; Dual HP; Zeraora; Souba; Time Is The First Track. (48:38)

Personnel: Gaston Bandimic, vocals (Wolof); HPrizm, vocals (English); Maciek Lasserre, soprano saxophone; Steve Lehman, alto saxophone; Damion Reid, drum set.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com



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Steve Turre Generations

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★★

Jazz has always thrived on intergenerational exchanges. Ensembles in which musicians of different eras swap on-the-job insight and whippersnapper enthusiasm have proved to be some of the best incubators of enduring music.

Trombonist and composer Steve Turre is a product of such ensembles. After playing with such iconic renegades such as multi-reedist Rashaan Roland Kirk, pianist and singer Ray Charles and drummer Chico Hamilton, he's gained the wisdom of playing with elders. That experience enables him to project substantially into the present and future.

On the gratifying *Generations*, Turre marshals an esteemed cast of musicians of various ages for a program that sounds like joyous jazz-filled cookout party. The album's title may come off as generic and self-explanatory; the music however is anything but. Hard-bop, particularly the frontline horns fashioned by Art Blakey and Horace Silver, bolsters the album, which transverses multiple idioms, ranging from hypnotic modal excursions to sweltering Afro-Latin bop.

While there's no disputing the incredible talent on *Generations*, which includes superb performances from young guns such as trumpeter Wallace Roney Jr., tenor saxophonist Emilio Modeste and pianist Isaiah J. Thompson, as well as from virile veterans such as drummer Lenny White, bassist Buster Williams and guitarist Ed Cherry, the brightest stars are on the album are Turre's compositions.

Turre has forged such an illustrious career as trombonist and conch shells improviser, capable of mastering numerous idioms that his gifts as a composer get overlooked. Except for the tantalizing Afro-Cuban makeover of Jerome Kern's "Some Gets In Your Eyes," he wrote all of these songs.

Generations evokes the heyday when Blue Note, Prestige and Cadet Records were issuing jukebox 45-rpm singles of hard-bop and soul-jazz classics. The album kicks off with the fetching "Planting The Ceed," on which Turre and his crew tip their hat to pianist Cedar Walton, who was an unsung wizard in crafting melodic jazz earworms.

Other highlights include "Flower Power," which prances to an inflatable groove à la Ahmad Jamal; "Don D." a gripping hard-bop-meets reggae joint; and "Dinner With Duke," a sumptuous ballad on which Turre's velvet-crush tone and seductive melodicism channel Lawrence Brown.

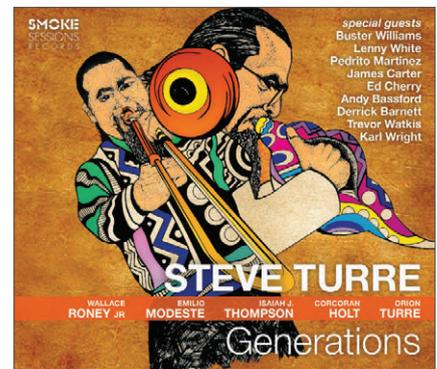
There's not a false note on *Generations* as

Turre delivers a superb manifesto on the poignancy of intergenerational brilliance devoid of hyperbole or homiletics. —John Murph

Generations: Planting The Ceed; Dinner With Duke; Blue Smoke; Smoke Gets In Your Eyes; Don D.; Pharaoh's Dance; Flower Power; Good People; Sweet Dreams; Resistance. (70:23)

Personnel: Steve Turre, trombone, shells (7); Wallace Roney Jr., trumpet (1–3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10), flugelhorn (8); Emilio Modeste, tenor and soprano saxophone (1–3, 5, 6–8, 10); James Carter, tenor saxophone (9); Ed Cherry, guitar (3); Isaiah J. Thompson, piano; Corcoran Holt (1, 2, 5–7, 10), Buster Williams (3, 4, 8, 9), bass; Pedrito Martinez, percussion (4, 6, 8); Andy Bassford, guitar (5); Trevor Watkis, Rhodes piano (5); Derek Barnett, electric bass (5); Orion Turre (1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10), Lenny White (3, 7, 8), Karl Wright (5), drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



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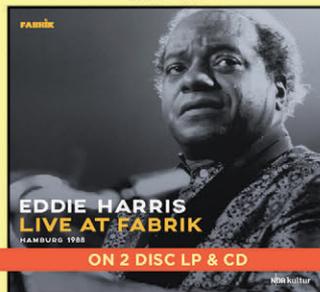


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Opportunities Between Genres

Musical boundaries are porous at best. Each of the following records treats the blurry spaces between genres as zones of opportunities, drawing good ideas from all over to make sounds that defy confinement.

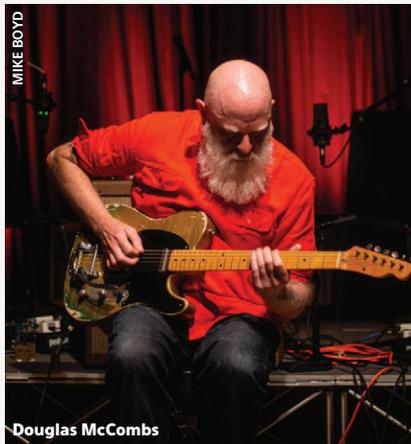
The trouble with pinning **Oren Ambarchi** down starts with saying what he plays. On stage, the Australian-born, Berlin-based multi-instrumentalist is most likely to wield an electric guitar fed through a table full of signal-modifying effects, which generate sonorities one might expect from a Hammond organ or an electric piano. Or he might just play a drum kit. Ambarchi might put his tools to work improvising freely, or playing heavy rock. But in the studio, he'll play anything, and then recruit friends like synthesist Jim O'Rourke, pianist Chris Abrahams and pedal steel player BJ Cole to put their unique sonic fingerprints on the music. ***Shebang* (Drag City; 35:01 ★★★★★)** is an album-length exploration of groove, melody and atmosphere. Polyrhythmic drumming looms large in the mix, providing a gently percolating flow from which bright string passages and woody textures surface and submerge

Ordering info: dragcity.com

Guitarist Michael Vallera and drummer Steven Hess are **Cleared**. The Chicago-based musicians, who both also play electronics, also perform in post-punk, improvisational and experimental ensembles. For much of its decade-long existence, the duo's instrumentals have fashioned a highly individualized synthesis of these elements, but they take a deep dive into pure, immersive sound on ***Of Endless Light* (Touch; 72:12 ★★★★★)**. This shift represents an embrace of recent circumstances. Due to current supply chain issues, Hess and Vallera knew going in that vinyl would not be an option. So, they decided to embrace the CD format's less restrictive playing time; the album's tracks range in length from 10 to almost 19 minutes, and there's nary a rock gesture among them. Instead, each piece comprises layers of long, electronic tones, looped beats and processed metal percussion.

Ordering info: clearedreleases.bandcamp.com

The title ***VMAK-KOMBZ«DOUGLAS«6N-DR7»* (Thrill Jockey; 33:51 ★★★★★)** may look like the product of a password generator, but the name of **Douglas Andrew McCombs'** first solo album was actually lifted from a visa stuffed into his passport. This is fitting, since the album is the latest step in a three-and-a-half-decade career; McCombs is an inveterate sideman, collaborator and leader who has played rock and post-rock with Tortoise, Brokeback and Eleventh Dream Day. Additionally, this music imparts the experience of a slowly unfolding road trip.



Ordering info: thrilljockey.com

Guitarist **Bill Orcutt** first gained renown during the 1990s as a member of Harry Pussy, during the explosive attack of which concealed the exacting rigor of their harmolodic-meet-punk miniatures. In more recent times, Orcutt has pursued two musical tangents. He is a fearless improvising guitarist, equally riveting playing freely or un sentimentally distilling the cultural implications and spiritual essences of classic tunes like "Moon River" and "Lonely Woman." He also composes software-facilitated minimalist music that uses systematically adjusted repetition to extract nuggets of psychedelic disorientation from found materials and his own playing. These methods converge on ***Music For Four Guitars* (Palilalia, 30:01 ★★★★★½)**, the title of which exposes both method and inspiration. Each of its 14 brief pieces consists of four interlocking, repetitive tracks of electric guitar, which mutate in a manner similar to early American minimalism. This is what would happen if Steve Reich wrote music for Captain Beefheart.

Ordering info: palilalia.com

Composer and multi-instrumentalist **Steven R. Smith** is a master at creating virtual ensembles with distinct identities. He usually works alone, recording in the same Los Angeles home studio where he builds some of his instruments. But for ***Sun Spar* (Worstward, 34:14 ★★★★★½)**, the latest effort by his Ulaan Passerine project, he solicited remote contributions from seven other American and European musicians. Brass, woodwinds and keyboards fill out Smith's swinging, hand-played grooves and gritty guitar melodies. Each of the record's nine tracks could soundtrack a scene from a movie, but Smith's music is so evocative that a listener could easily imagine a better flick of their own while playing the LP spins. **DB**

Ordering info: worstward.com



Various Artists *Blue Note Re:imagined II*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★½

The tracks presented here were clearly selected through the lens of younger ears, centering the genre-tightrope-walking music that fresher jazz heads connect to. So, perhaps not surprisingly, *Blue Note Re:imagined II* serves up a heaping helping of tunes either penned or otherwise popularized by the oft-sampled though never-duplicated trumpeter Donald Byrd: "Miss Kane" from 1973's *Street Lady* (fairly faithfully reimagined by Swindle), "Where Are We Going" from 1972's *Black Byrd* (reimagined by Venna & Marco) and the post-bop masterpiece "Cristo Redentor" from 1964's *A New Perspective* (reimagined by Franc Moody). That's not to say that this compilation is stuck in a polyester-clad time warp; two tracks pertinently reference material by Norah Jones.

Most of these re-imaginings approach the material with a light touch, displaying a clear respect for the intrinsic magic of the source material, while showcasing the creativity of these performers as they play in the sandbox of one of jazz's most storied catalogs. Gene McDaniel's "Feel Like Makin' Love" was popularized by Roberta Flack, but in 1974 on Blue Note, Marlena Shaw did her slinky, sassy thing, injecting it with an almost serpentine magnetism. For the new rendition, vocalist Kay Young clearly took note of Shaw's telling of a tale as old as time. "You Make Me Feel So Good," penned by the Mizell Brothers and recorded by Bobbi Humphrey in 1975, is reimagined by Conor Albert. It's an inspired choice that captures the haunting lilt of the original. —Ayana Contreras

Blue Note Re-imagined II: It; You Make Me Feel So Good; Don't Know Why; Miss Kane; Through The Noise (Chant No.2); Morning Side Of Love; Green With Envy; Lost; Epistrophe; Harvest Moon; Feel Like Making Love; Where Are We Going; Infant Eyes; Fort Worth; Sunrise; Cristo Redentor. (69:43)

Personnel: Yazz Ahmed (1); Conor Albert (2); Parthenope (3); Swindle (4); Nubiyah Twist (5); Ego Ella May (6); Oscar Jerome (7); Daniel Casimir feat. Rita Moran (8); Theon Cross (9); Maya Delilah (10); Kay Young (11); Venna & Marco (12); Reuben James (13); Binker Golding (14); Cherise (15); Franc Moody (15); various artists.

Ordering info: bluenote.com

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Sarah Bernstein Veer Quartet

NEW FOCUS

★★★★½

The days of complete separation between written classical music and improvised jazz are long gone, at least as far as violinist Sarah Bernstein and some of her contemporaries are concerned. Having explored a variety of music using many different types of instrumentation on her 10 previous albums as a leader and in collaborations with the likes of Anthony Braxton, Tomeka Reid, Adam Rudolph and Vinny Golia, in recent years Bernstein has been writing her originals for a traditional string quartet. However the only thing traditional about her Veer Quartet is the instrumentation.

Joined by like-minded and technically skilled string players (violinist Sana Nagano, Leonor Falcon on viola and cellist Nick Jozwiak) who have no difficulty playing the most complex arrangements while also being adventurous improvisers, Bernstein performs six of her diverse compositions. "Frames No. 1," which often utilizes a walking cello, swings

in its own way with riffs and dissonance interacting before a surprisingly peaceful ending. "News Cycle Progression" pairs together a through-composed ballad and improvised sections while making it difficult to tell which is which.

"Clay Myth" is accurately described as "softly unsettling." The episodic performance, the most colorful and lengthiest piece of the program, has Jozwiak's cello carrying the melody or playing patterns much of the time while the other strings improvise all around it.

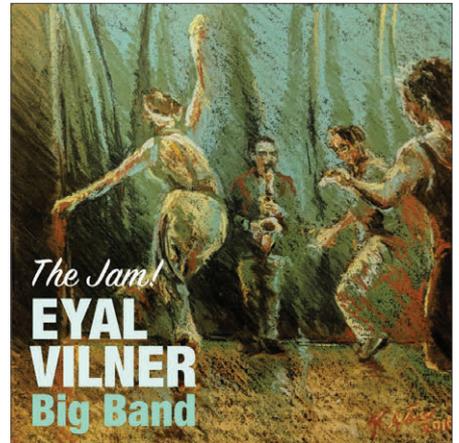
"World Warrior" features some free improvising by the ensemble. "Nightmorning" fits its title with a dreamlike melody and unaccompanied solos by each of the musicians. Closing the thought-provoking set is the intriguing "Hidden," which has a melody by the violin purposely buried by the dense ensemble, a concept that one could imagine the Veer Quartet exploring more in depth in the future.

—Scott Yanow

Veer Quartet: Frames No. 1; News Cycle Progression; Clay Myth; World Warrior; Nightmorning; Hidden. (42:41)

Personnel: Sarah Bernstein, Sana Nagano, violin; Leonor Falcon, viola; Nick Jozwiak, cello.

Ordering info: newfocusrecordings.com



Eyal Vilner Big Band The Jam

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★½

Eyal Vilner is a composer, arranger and reed player hailing from Tel Aviv, who's been in New York City for some 15 years. His medium? Big band music for dancers.

The Jam, his latest recording, swings sweet and hard with toe-tapping rhythms, tight horn work and excellent soloing throughout. Take, for instance, the band's take on Duke Ellington's "Lucky So-and-So." It's and updated stroll down memory lane with Imani Rouselle's vocals ringing true. The tune also features sweet solos by trumpeter Brandon Lee and trombonist Ron Wilkins.

Vilner mixes in old classics with crafty originals. "Chabichou" is a nice, swinging Vilner piece named after his favorite goat cheese. "Another Time" has the appropriate swagger featuring stride-induced piano by Jon Thomas. And the title track comes packed with a fleet, swinging groove.

But my favorite is the tongue-in-cheek "Will You Be My Quarantine?" (Say "tine" like "vine.") After some two years of pandemic talk and feelings of isolation, this is the first tune these ears have heard that injects some humor into the situation. It's a kitschy, fun take featuring Rouselle's great vocals.

Brianna Thomas joins in for a swinging take on "Hard Hearted Hannah." Vocalist Brandon Bain delivers a great take on Al Hibbler's hit "After The Lights Go Down Low."

Is this groundbreaking music? No. But is it fun? Absolutely!

—Frank Alkyer

The Jam: Just A Lucky So-and-So; Chabichou; Another Time; The Jam; Will You Be My Quarantine?; Monday Stroll; Chad's Delight; Hard Hearted Hannah; T'aint What You Do; Call Me Tomorrow; I Come Next Week; After The Lights Go Down Low; Tap Tap Tap; Belleville; Jumpin' At The Woodside. (46:54)

Personnel: Eyal Vilner, alto saxophone, clarinet, flute; Imani Rouselle (1, 5), Brianna Thomas (8, 9), Brandon Bain (11), vocals; Caleb Teicher, tap shoes (12); John Lake, Brandon Lee, Bryan Davis, Michael Sailors, James Zollar, trumpets; Ron Wilkins, Robert Edwards, Mariel Bildsten, trombones; Bill Todd, Jordan Pettay, Julieta Eugenio, Evan Arntzen, Michael Hashim, Josh Lee, Eden Baret, woodwinds; Jon Thomas, Jordan Piper (8, 9, 11), piano; Ian Hutchison, bass; Eran Fink, drums.

Ordering info: eyalvilner.com

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Welcomed to the Zeitgeist

One could say this is a collection of debut albums, but this isn't necessarily the case. Simeon Davis has been a performer and publicist for years with *Of Narratives And Nocturnes* being his second album with his large ensemble. Jennifer Hartswick has numerous credits to her name on top of three previous albums, though her latest is her first on Mack Avenue Records. Drummer Gard Nilsson has been around the block a bit as well, and played on his trio mate Petter Eldh's *Projekt Drums Vol. 1* on Edition just last year, but *Elastic Wave* is his first on ECM. Emanuel Casablanca has toured for years before putting out his first album. Even Steve Knight out of Chicago had been through South Carolina, New York, Oklahoma and Olathe, Kansas, before putting out *Persistence*.

Simeon Davis Group's *Of Narratives And Nocturnes* (Outside In Music; 81:46 ★★) on the is an album of eight adventurous tunes that go to great lengths, at times splitting the difference between ambitious and overblown. These songs are a lot; however, they're written in such a way that they couldn't be anything else. Davis is writing for a talented 12-piece band who definitely rise to the occasion for which he is calling, but said occasion at times calls for the overeagerness of a golden retriever's birthday party. Opener "The Diver" or large sections of the subsequent "Seven Come Wednesday" have the kind of saccharine sweet pep that can rot teeth.

Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com

Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter **Emanuel Casablanca's** indie debut *Blood On My Hands* (59:20 ★★★) is an adequate blues album. Casablanca's guitars — his own and those of guests like Eric Gales, Paul Howells, Felix Slims, Paul Gilbert and others — are muscular and grungy, somehow perfectly aligned while entirely opposed to the glossy and clean production. It's an album of sanded-down grit. His singing of "Nashville" has the feel of a child wearing his grandfather's hat he's yet to grow into. Other tunes like "Thicker Than Blood" or "Fantasies" venture outside blues into straight-up rock territory, which feels less like a dissolution of genre and more like a muddying of it. Casablanca has a sound that can probably pull some attention in bars in Brooklyn or the general festival circuit, like SXSW gigs.

Ordering info: emanuelcasablanca.com

Gard Nilssen Acoustic Unity's *Elastic Wave* (ECM; 44:17 ★★★½) is a well-made album through and through. The sound is roomy. Gard Nilssen's drums are as much at the fore as they are as part of the trio. Petter Eldh's bass strongly resounds. André Roligheten's assorted reeds are punchy and expressive. *Elastic Wave* is exactly what one comes to expect from a debut ECM release. Nilssen, Roligheten and Eldh are a very good trio with inventive ideas and a good vibe playing songs with clear lines that never wear out their welcome. Its rambunctious moments like "Spending Time With Ludvig" are balanced out in solemnity, like on "Lokket til Jon, og skejferfet til Paul."



Jennifer Hartswick

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

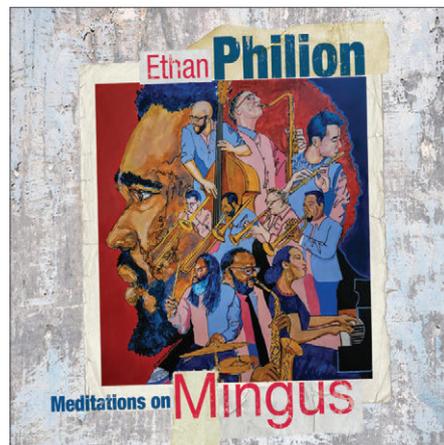
Jennifer Hartswick's *Something In The Water* (Mack Avenue; 35:40 ★★★½) is smooth, there's no denying it. She's singing vocals and playing the trumpet with bassist and label head Christian McBride backing her on a collection of nine songs that walk a well-trod path through pleasant enough scenery. This is Hartswick's fourth album as a leader and first on McBride's label, a label that has steadily made a sound for itself in a kind of Black radio kind of pocket where SitW fits. The tour of New Orleans on "By The River" or the lean into the funk of "For You" are fun listens that prove Hartswick's capabilities and versatility.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

Steve Knight's self-released trio album *Persistence* (53:48 ★★★★★), which finds the Chicago-based guitarist alongside bassist Justin Peterson and drummer Jeff Stitely, is a lively, direct, solid straightahead release. This is precisely what one would want in a guitar trio album: easy enough to follow but never uninteresting. This is a contemporary sound that isn't a turnoff to the unsuspecting. It's just plain clean, rootsy guitar playing. **DB**

Ordering info: steveknight.net

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Ethan Phillion *Meditations On Mingus*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★★

The legacy and jazz historical prominence of Charles Mingus, in his centennial year, remains alive and well, in terms of his looming influence and the continuing saga of the mother-ship Mingus Dynasty Band. There remains room at the table for artists of integrity seeking to pay respects to the master. Enter Chicago-based bassist Ethan Phillion's new *Meditations On Mingus*, a labor of conspicuous love and respect for a musical titan whose music remains timeless and relevant. As heard again, in fresh forms, Mingus' music still sounds at once modernist and deeply-rooted in historical soil — partly archetypal turf of his own devising.

Phillion the bassist demonstrates his chops and taste on "Haitian Fight Song," but his primary role and objective on the project are to supply the sophisticated but faithful arrangements and curatorial vision for the tentet gathered for the occasion. Other gifted players are granted soloist spotlights, sometimes pairing up and off, as when trombonists Norman Palm and Brendan Whalen dialogue on "Meditation For A Pair Of Wire Cutters," or the purposeful collective chatter on "Pithecanthropus Erectus."

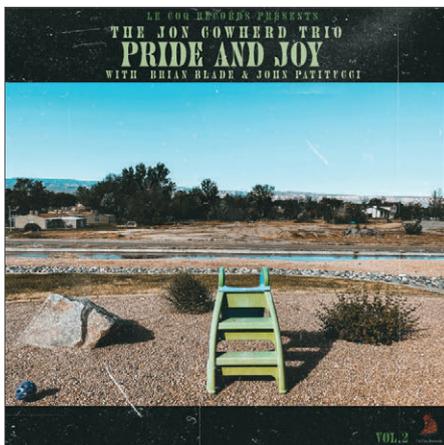
Phillion wisely maintains a balanced overview in this Mingus sampler, which, even clocking in at just over an hour, broadly suggests the composer's fruitful diversity. Phillion touches on the interwoven personalities of Mingus's curious classic "Self-Portrait In 3 Colors," and closes out with "Better Git It In Your Soul."

—Josef Woodard

Meditations On Mingus: Once Upon A Time There Was A Holding Corporation Called Old America; Haitian Fight Song; Self Portrait In 3 Colors; Pithecanthropus Erectus; Prayer For Passive Resistance; Meditation For A Pair Of Wirecutters; Remember Rockefeller At Attica; Better Git It In Your Soul. (73:16)

Personnel: Ethan Phillion, bass; Russ Johnson, trumpet; Victor Garcia, trumpet; Rajiv Halim, alto saxophone; Geof Bradfield, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet, flute; Max Bessenes, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, flute; Norman Palm, trombone; Brendan Whalen, trombone; Alexis Lombre, piano; Dana Hall, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Jon Cowherd Trio *Pride And Joy*

LE COO

★★★★★

A seasoned player known for his long tenure in the Brian Blade Fellowship, Jon Cowherd finds the sweet spot on his third album as a leader. Backed once again by drummer Blade and bassist John Patitucci, who both appeared on 2017's *Mercy*, the pianist-composer-arranger also prominently features saxophonist Chris Potter on three tracks. "Grand Mesa" has Potter's authoritative tenor soaring over Blade's rolling pulse as he effortlessly explores

the full range of his horn in Breckerian fashion. Patitucci's deep bass tones hold the fort on this conversational medium-tempo swinger while the leader's spirited comping and cascading arpeggios reflect the vast open spaces suggested by the title. Potter switches to mellow soprano sax on the gently introspective "Little Scorpio" then returns to tenor on the surging title track.

"The Colorado Experiment" is a superbly swinging piano trio showcase in the conversational vein of Chick Corea's 1968 landmark *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*. Blade nearly steals the show here with his sheer dynamism on the kit. More tranquil is "Honest Man," Cowherd's homage to his first jazz piano teacher, the late Ellis Marsalis. Patitucci's expressive upright solo elevates this moving elegy.

Cowherd underscores his languid ballad "Plainfield" with some understated organ while Blade sets the delicate tone with his sensitive brushwork. The trio pays tribute to two pianistic heroes on Patitucci's irrepressibly swinging "Chickmonk," featuring killer solos by each member. The album ends on a calming note with "Quilt City Blues." —*Bill Milkowski*

Pride And Joy: Grand Mesa; Little Scorpio; The Colorado Experiment; Honest Man; Pride and Joy; Plainfield; Chickmonk; Quilt City Blues. (46:23)

Personnel: Jon Cowherd, acoustic piano; Hammond B-3 organ (6); John Patitucci, acoustic bass and electric bass (2); Brian Blade, drums; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone (1, 5) and soprano saxophone (2); Alex Acuña, percussion (1, 2, 5).

Ordering info: lecoqrecords.com

Elan Mehler *There Is A Dance*

NEWVELLE

★★★

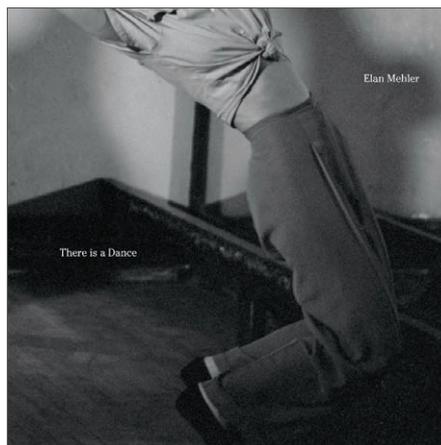
The formula of the piano-bass-drums trio, while sometimes overlooked in favor of more musicians, more notes, more flash, is one of the most essential group formats in jazz. The rhythm section takes over the show, giving it more space to clear its thoughts and stretch out.

Elan Mehler's *There Is A Dance*, recorded and produced in November 2021, is a good-to-great example of that. His 11th album overall, the project features Tony Scherr on bass and Francisco Mela on drums.

Mehler's structured approach to spontaneity works well. The title track glides in slowly, building in melody, the three musicians never coming anywhere close to crowding each other out. "We Spin" feels similar, but Mehler, Scherr and Mela do begin to circle each other a bit.

There are moments here, such as "Ruby D," when you wish the three would pick up the pace. "When You Were Blind" does so perfectly. Mehler selects all his notes with graceful precision as his sympathetic band follows.

"The Shakes" is the first place where Mehler lets his nimble fingers loose while his backing follows along at a quick, shifting tempo —



they should do this more. Scherr even takes a solo. Closer "Then You" sees Mehler backed so unobtrusively he's practically alone at the piano, clearly with someone special in mind.

The most compelling thing about these 10 tracks is they get in and out fast — some under three minutes, others just a bit over five. This is an album for a mood — a sad, rainy day, say.

—*Daniel Margolis*

There Is A Dance: There Is A Dance; We Spin; Ruby D; When You Were Blind; We Breathe; We Hope; The Shakes; Murray Park; East Side Blues; Then You. (41:00)

Personnel: Elan Mehler, piano; Tony Scherr, bass; Francisco Mela, drums.

Ordering info: newvelle-records.com



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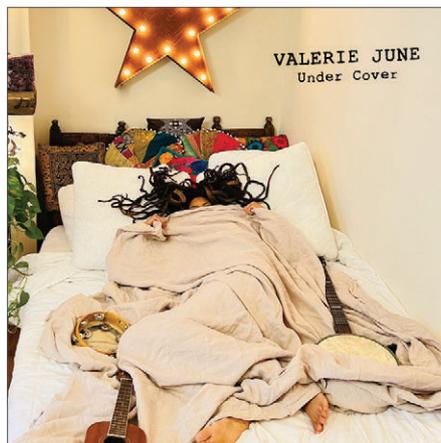
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Valerie June *Under Cover*

FANTASY

★★★★½

Who doesn't love a good cover? Some soft refuge to crawl up under on an autumn evening, or in this case, something to stretch out and riff on?

Valerie June inspires ravenous fandom, much of which is a product of her songwriting ability (and off-kilter-yet-emotive voice), but *Under Cover* is a lean collection of material wholly composed by other songsmiths, from Nick Cave to Dylan, John Lennon to Joe South.

Tobias Hoffmann Jazz Orchestra *Conspiracy*

MONS

★★★½

Modern big band music exists largely in its own microcosm. Depending on geography, it might be connected primarily to university music programs or state-sponsored radio orchestras, but apart from clear exceptions like the ensembles led by Darcy James Argue or Maria Schneider, most big bands exist in their own bubble. I'm not sure where Germany's Tobias Hoffmann Jazz Orchestra fits into the puzzle, but the musicianship on the group's first album *Conspiracy* is excellent and the leader/composer reveals a clear mastery of the form, drafting disparate arrangements of harmonic complexity, fleet counterpoint and technical rigor. Within the big band world this debut is auspicious.

On the other hand, there's something about this music that feels like it was created in a laboratory, even if there are moments of genuine expression peeking out, such as the sleek alto saxophone solo Andy Schofield spreads across the changing landscape of "December Song," like all of the pieces, a Hoffman composition. When the leader cites his experience playing "high-energy big band charts from the rich his-

"Don't It Make You Want To Go Home" successfully captures the beating heart of brass-heavy 1960s Southern-fried arrangements without feeling overly sentimental and reductive: it even nods to a funky 1972 rendition of the beloved tune by Swamp Dogg. The key here is that she went straight to a prime source for soulful backbone: the horns were recorded at Royal Studios in Memphis and engineered by Boo Mitchell (son of mythic songwriter/producer Willie Mitchell) ... and the crew let that groove breathe. Hallelujah!

"Look At Miss Ohio" was a perfect song choice here, as well. Valerie and the band capture the windswept forlorn vibe of the original.

This skintight album successfully captures the intimate tableau that its title inspires, but her vocal stylings (particularly on "Pink Moon"), though artful, the effect is like that of the tried-and-true Vaseline smear on a camera lens: romantic impressionist renderings that obscure what are truly luscious lyrics.

—Ayana Contreras

Under Cover: Pink Moon; Fade Into You; Look At Miss Ohio; Godspeed; Imagine; Don't It Make You Want To Go Home; Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You; Into My Arms. (28:23)

Personnel: Valerie June, vocals; Dan lead, electric guitar (1, 5, 6) pedal steel (1–3, 5, 7), acoustic guitar (1–3, 5, 6); Jason DiMatteo, electric bass (1, 5, 7), bass (2, 3); Greg Wiczorek, drums, (1–3, 5–7) percussion (1–3, 6, 7); Dave Sherman, piano (1, 5), keys (3, 8), organ (6); Treya Lam, keyboards, backing vocals (4); Hope Clayburn, saxophone, flute (6); Victor Sawyer, trombone (6); Paul McKinney (6); Pete Remm, keyboards (7).

Ordering info: fantasyrecordings.com



tory of big band music," as his inspiration for "Trailblazers," you might expect the piece to evoke Ellington and Basie more than Goodwin and Parton. It's the sound of passionate craftsmanship serving pure detachment.

—Peter Margasak

Conspiracy: Conspiracy; Elegy; December Song; Awakening; Relentless; Trailblazers; Renegade; Impostor Syndrome; Who Knows Intro; Who Knows. (72:53)

Personnel: Patrick Dunst, Andy Schofield, Robert Unterköfer, Martin Harms, Jonas Brinckmann, reeds; Dominic Pessi, Bernhard Nolf, Felix Meyer, Simon Plötzeneder, Jakob Helling, trumpets & flugelhorns; Kasperi Sarikoski, Robert Bachner, Daniel Holzleitner, Johannes Oppel, trombones; Vikka Wahl, guitar; Philipp Nykrin, piano, synthesizer; Ivar Roban Krizic, double bass, electric bass; Reinhold Schmölder, drums & electronics.

Ordering info: monsrecords.de

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A TRUE JAZZ ANGEL

By Frank Alkyer Photo by John Osler

When you ask Gretchen Valade what's near and dear to her heart, she might just shoot back, "Coffee!" and laugh, as she did during a 2017 interview with DownBeat. She's telling the truth, of course, but there's something else that is much more

Valade, the nonagenarian heiress to Carhartt, the famed workwear and outdoor apparel company, may be the most important jazz angel in the past 30 years, beginning with the founding of Mack Avenue Records to saving the Detroit Jazz Festival to opening the

Dirty Dog Jazz Club just north of Detroit to endowing the Gretchen Valade Jazz Center at Wayne State University located in the city that she loves.

For all of these reasons, Valade is the 2022 recipient of the DownBeat Lifetime

Achievement Award for recording (and in her case, so much more), but her journey began, almost accidentally, with a song.

Valade grew up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, the tony suburb just north of Detroit. Her journey to jazz began as a result of her sisters, who were a decade or more older. They played the music of Armstrong and Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald et al., music that a 6-year-old Gretchen soaked up and adopted as her own.

"And Billie Holiday," Valade is quick to add. "She's one of the first I ever heard." While Ella was smooth and sophisticated, Holiday sang with a grittiness that rang true for a woman who gets a kick out of calling herself a "broad" from time to time.

Valade learned to play the piano, but stopped once she heard "the real piano players who make this music." But her love affair with the art form endured. As a young woman, she went to school in New York City to continue her jazz education in places like the Village Vanguard and Eddie Condon's.

"I went to, um, they call it a finishing school, and it almost finished me," she said in the short documentary *When I Need To Smile*. The scene cuts to a rapid-fire of the 400 Restaurant hawking Jimmy Dorsey, The Stork Club, El Morocco and Eddie Condon's. "It was all right. It was in New York City. I just wasn't interested in school. Some people just aren't."

What she was interested in was hearing music. "Sydney Bechet was very good for my education. Eddie Condon. Wild Bill Davidson, Pee Wee Russell."

Later in life, she started to write songs, then looked to record them. The first, a song called "When I Need To Smile."

She met Stix Hooper, the legendary leader of the Crusaders. He suggested doing a demo and seeing where it went.

"Nobody had been interested in my songs before Stix Hooper, and he said, 'Well, we'll do a demo.' And I said, 'Oh, well, if you insist,'" Valade noted in the documentary.

Recording a few tunes turned into starting a record label. And Mack Avenue Records, named after a thoroughfare that runs from Detroit through the city's northern suburbs, was born. The label's first release was *When I Need To Smile*, by pianist Eugene Mazlov. It was released in 1999, the title cut being one of Valade's. With that, Mack Avenue opened for business. As luck, or lack of it, would have it, the label launched at a time when many jazz labels were closing up shop, victims of the early transition to digital streaming services.

"That my signal! Something's gone wrong," she laughs, noting that she has a history of entering when things look, well, bleak. But in some ways, the timing was good for a new label. A host of artists began knocking on Mack Avenue's door. The company put a pro-

fessional team in place to make things happen. And Mack Avenue turned quickly from a startup to one of the most influential labels in jazz, releasing albums by George Shearing, Gerald Wilson, Cécile McLorin Salvant, Kenny Garrett, Stanley Jordan, Christian McBride and so many more.

For Valade, it became a crusade to help the

the music up close and personal, it's a listening room for about 75 guests at a time, where musicians come first. Valade insisted that musicians were paid well, fed well and treated well.

"I like the musicians to be happy," she has said. "Then, the audience will be happy."

To that point, The Dirty Dog features something that few other local clubs can offer, a first-

guy said, 'That's it.' I'm thinking, 'They change their clothes in there, in the kitchen, with the fried eggs?'"

The only eggs Valade wants to see are maybe next to a nice steak for the musicians before a set. In years past, she could usually be found in her seat at the bar for the first set, cheering on jazz musicians young and old, locally grown or internationally famous.

"I think there is a certain part of all of us who meet Gretchen, who secretly think that, 'Wow, I'd really like to be *that* when I grow up,'" said Denny Stillwell, president of Mack Avenue Records, in *When I Need To Smile*.

With this DownBeat Honor, it's only fitting that a musician gets the last word.

"At the Dirty Dog, it's all about the music," said saxophonist and Detroit legend David McMurray in 2017. "Detroit jazz champion and club proprietor Gretchen Valade makes sure of it. Because she respects the music and the artists, the audience does, too. They come to listen. As a jazz musician, it's always better to play where people love and appreciate the music."

"The atmosphere is so intimate — I feel like I'm in Gretchen's living room. She presents the music she loves with all who share her passion for jazz, whether they're new to the music or long-time fans."

In honor of the artists, the label professionals and the fans, we salute Gretchen Valade. **DB**

'I like the musicians to be happy. Then, the audience will be happy.'

musicians and music she so admired. That crusade turned local in 2005 when Valade heard that the Detroit Jazz Festival was about to shut down. She rescued the 2005 festival with a \$500,000 donation and another \$100,000 in in-kind donations from Mack Avenue Records. Later that year, she pledged to endow the festival with a \$10 million donation to ensure it continued — free to the public, an important point for her. In all, she has donated some \$15 million to the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation, ensuring its health going forward.

Valade also looks to the next generation of jazz in Detroit with her philanthropy. Over the years, she has gifted \$9.5 million to Wayne State University, the money being used to build the Gretchen Valade Jazz Center as well as the Gretchen Valade Endowed Chair to serve as artistic director for the center and the Gretchen Valade Endowed Scholarship in Jazz Studies, offering a graduate assistantship for the center.

"We call her the Angel of Jazz," said Chris Collins, the saxophonist who directs the jazz studies program at WSU, and serves as president of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation as well as being the fest's artistic director. "She's created tremendous synergy. It's a great reflection of the jazz heritage here, and the university is becoming the new gravity center of the city's arts community."

That local spirit and love of jazz has also extended very locally to Grosse Pointe, where Valade lives. When a building she owned became vacant, there was a question of what to do. Rent it out again? No. Valade decided to strip it down and create a jazz club, and the Dirty Dog Jazz Café was born in 2008. Built to reflect those small New York clubs, with plenty of jazz photographs and paintings on the walls, where the sound is sweet and the audience hears

class "green room" for musicians to relax in when not performing."

"That's something I really wanted," Valade said. "I think it came to me when we went to the Village Vanguard in New York. I said, 'Where's your green room?' And he pointed to the kitchen. And I said, 'No, no, no. Don't kid around. Where's your green room?' And a

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Randall Kline SFJAZZ'S GUIDING VOICE

By Yoshi Kato Photo Courtesy SFJAZZ

“Scalability” is a popular buzzword among businesses and organizations these days, and DownBeat Lifetime Achievement Award recipient Randall Kline chuckles when that idea of sustained and efficient growth is brought up while discussing the early days of SFJAZZ, which is now an internationally admired jazz entity.

Another “s” word actually came to mind when recalling the events of June 1983. “There was no issue of scaling. It really was survival,” Kline admitted. “It wasn’t successful fiscally in the first year, so we had to regroup and try to think about how to reset.”

At the start of a two-hour interview on the Friday afternoon before Labor Day weekend,

SFJAZZ’s founder and executive artistic director was frank about the organization’s early missteps even as he marveled at its accomplishments and was quick to mete out praise to its many internal and external champions.

Enjoying the elevated sightlines of his third floor office in San Francisco’s Hayes Valley performing arts district, he has the benefit of hind-

sight when revisiting the non-profit’s rough start. Headquartered in its 36,000-square-foot, \$64 million SFJAZZ Center, the jazz presentation, education and media group had a \$19 million pre-pandemic budget and continues to boast both an all-star house band and a pair of DownBeat Student Music Award-winning groups.

SFJAZZ’s 2022–’23 season, which launched

on Sept. 8, features more than 300 concerts over 37 weeks and celebrates the 10th year of the SFJAZZ Center, the nation's first free-standing building devoted to jazz.

Most shows will be held in its 700-seat Miner Auditorium or at its 107-seat Joe Henderson Labs. A handful will be presented at venues around San Francisco or Oakland, including nearby Herbst Theatre — home to SFJAZZ's infamous inaugural event.

It's a far cry from humble beginnings that started as the Jazz in the City Festival. Kline and concert lighting and sound professional Clinton Gilbert had an idea to showcase San Francisco's talent through a two-day event.

With a budget of \$20,000 gathered from the Hotel Tax Fund/Grant for the Arts program, they gathered a diverse group of locally based musicians — too diverse, it turned out.

The lineup included jazz vocalists, a stride pianist, a bebop combo, an Afro-Cuban group and an avant-garde ensemble on the bill. "We had this wide-open view of what jazz was, and that was really a founding principle," Kline said.

"Our thinking in the first year, presenting variety on the same stage in one night, was not of interest to people for an indoor festival," he said. "For an outdoor festival, no problem. You go out, and you get a drink, you come back, you wait it out. For us, you want to see bebop and beyond but had to sit through a '40s vocal act that may not be your thing. We drew less than half attendance for both of the nights."

That meant a shift in thinking was needed. The Jazz in the City Festival was moved to October and re-launched in partnership with the Asian-American Jazz Festival.

It was funded by another grant from Grant for the Arts and a loan from the Arts Loan Fund of Northern California to cover outstanding vendor debts. The fest was spread out over five days and included a duo with pianist George Cables and vibraphonist/marimbist Bobby Hutcherson, Rova Saxophone Quartet, the guitar/vocal husband-wife duo Tuck & Patti and the Berkeley High School Jazz Ensemble with a then 15-year-old tenor saxophonist named Joshua Redman.

Jazz in the City kept its local focus until it started incorporating out-of-town artists through its Jazz Masters Series, including a Stride Piano Summit in 1988 with Dick Hyman, Ralph Sutton and Ruby Braff and in a Jazz Tap Summit a year later with legends like the Nicholas Brothers and teenage phenom Savion Glover.

In 1990, the organization acknowledged its expanded focus representing local, national and international musicians and changed its name to the San Francisco Jazz Festival.

After presenting concerts in schools towards the end of the decade, SFJAZZ brought the outreach mission inward with its High

School All-Stars Big Band and Combo in 2001. The SFJAZZ Collective was founded in 2004, with an octet — but more recently a nonet and then a septet — of top-shelf players arranging and performing the works of masters as well as composing pieces for the group. (The list of Collective tenor saxophonists alone includes co-founder Joshua Redman, Joe Lovano, Mark Turner, David Sánchez and Chris Potter.)

SFJAZZ has kept its eclectic core by presenting gospel (Rev. Walter Hawkins and the Love Center Orchestra, Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir), Brazilian music (João Gilberto, Caetano Veloso), salsa (Celia Cruz, Marc Anthony), Americana (Merle Haggard, Roseanna Cash) and contemporary classical (works by Philip Glass, John Luther Adams) concerts.

"We came up with this phrase early on: Jazz is at the center of what we do," Kline explained. "And the music that jazz has influenced, and the music that has an influence on jazz, is also part of our character."

Conceived in 2001 as the Center for Jazz, the SFJAZZ Center opened on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2013. A Resident Artistic Director program in which a handful of artists are chosen for two-year terms to present themselves each season in unique musical settings also started when the center opened.

Having a structure that serves as a primary venue, an administrative command center and a streetside box office has allowed SFJAZZ to produce concerts year-round, morphing from fall, spring and summertime offerings to a September-through-May performing arts season plus two summertime festivals. And the week COVID-19 lockdown began in San Francisco, back in March 2020, SFJAZZ started its weekly live-streaming service, first for pre-recorded and then for real-time concerts.

A bass-playing transplant from a coastal Massachusetts, Kline's early music industry work in San Francisco was as a jack-of-all-trades at Boarding House, the famed San Francisco music and comedy spot where Bob Marley and the Wailers, Steve Martin and Neil Young gigged. He moved from outdoor gate-keeping and dishwashing to maître d' and indoor security.

"I was just super-lucky, stumbling into these things that could have been nice experiences that you have when you're younger but turned out to be meaningful for me — even the washing of dishes," he reflected. After 40 years of steering the organization, he plans to step down in October of 2023 — but not before being recognized with this DownBeat Honor and, certainly, many more to come. **DB**



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STANFORD JAZZ WORKSHOP'S GUIDING LIGHT

By Yoshi Kato

When Jim Nadel presented the final concert of the 2022 Stanford Jazz Festival in late July, the newest entrant into the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame beamed with a well-earned sense of pride.

It was a night of mutual gratitude and admiration for the Stanford Jazz Workshop's founder and artistic director as an all-star group he'd assembled with saxophonists Joshua Redman and Yosvany Terry, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, pianist Taylor Eigsti, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Eric Harland took the stage of Stanford University's historic Frost Amphitheatre. All members of that SJW 50th Anniversary Band had been campers at the legendary summer program save for Harland, but he has been a faculty member, and were on the

first half of an impressive double bill that included vocalist Dianne Reeves' quintet accompanied by an orchestra with music arranged and conducted by Vince Mendoza.

The festival, which ran from mid-June to the end of July and included 30 other concerts, runs parallel to the Summer Jazz Workshop and nearly always features musicians who are also teaching there. Students can attend these shows for free, so there's a youthful energy emanating from the audience.

"One of the joys of having my job is you get

to imagine an idea, and I'm often in a position to make it happen," Nadel said during an interview in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Whether it's a one-time performance or conceiving a jazz education institution, Nadel's career has been fueled by invention.

Nadel was a recent Stanford graduate when he launched SJW in the summer of 1972. The workshop's growth from a modest local gathering to an international presence puts it in the impressive league of other one-time startups like Yahoo! and Google, which also have roots in the famed Stanford campus.

"That first year, we had a jam session in the Coffee House on Monday night," he recalled. "And I invited anyone who wanted to come to a separate meeting on Tuesday night in the student union that was just going to be about talking about what to play the next week and approaches to the changes and what chords to maybe use on the bridge. And we'd play some vinyl and discuss what we were hearing. It was an open exchange."

With a degree in Western music, Nadel felt he could help his fellow workshop comrades approach the jazz they all loved through a wider historical and theoretical lens.

"For the first 10 years, it was locally based," he shared. "And then in 1982 we made the big change, because I tracked down Stan Getz. He came to Stanford for a week as our first artist-in-residence, and I took the plunge and bought our first ad ever in DownBeat."

"That got us some musicians from London, and people came from all over the United States," he continued.

Subsequent Workshop educators/festival performers included Dizzy Gillespie, James Moody, Horace Silver, Ray Brown, Marc Johnson, Victor Lewis and many more.

"They should put up a statue of Jim Nadel on the Stanford campus," wrote Ted Gioia in a 2015 email interview. "He has trained two generations of jazz players and has had a lasting positive impact on thousands of performers."

On the summertime front, SJW now averages about 800 students a year. And the jam session concept on which SJW was founded remains both a formal and informal nightly practice for all.

"I like to think that everybody gets inspired and gets closer to the music when they come," Nadel said. "We're not in the business of producing the next generation of professional jazz musicians, though so many do come through. But I think there's a place for music in everybody's life. And you can get deeper into it by spending some time in a program like Stanford Jazz Workshop, and your life will be a little different in a positive way."

For these reasons and more, Jim Nadel has been inducted into the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame. **DB**

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SFJAZZ salutes its Founder, Randall Kline on receiving DownBeat Magazine's Lifetime Achievement Award for Presenting.

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The 2023 SFJAZZ Gala celebrates SFJAZZ Founder, Executive Artistic Director Randall Kline, who, after 40 years of championing jazz in the Bay Area, will be stepping down from SFJAZZ in November 2023. Join us for this all-star evening of performances as we thank Randall for all he's accomplished for Bay Area arts and culture.





Miles Osland

DOCUMENTING JAZZ EDUCATION

By Terry Perkins Photo by Neal Grindstaff

Miles Osland, DownBeat's 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award for Jazz Education honoree at the collegiate level, had a simple answer when asked about one of the key factors in building his distinguished career.

"This school year marks the beginning of my 36th year teaching jazz," Osland said. "And it also marks my 34th year here at the University of Kentucky, Lexington. And that longevity is one of the keys to success."

Make no mistake, it's what Osland has done during that time — first as a professor of saxophone and then as director of the University of Kentucky's Jazz Studies program.

He applied for a position at the University of Kentucky in 1987, after he graduated from the Eastman School of Music with his master's degree in jazz and contemporary media.

"I met Vince DiMartino, a great trumpet player who was teaching at the University of Kentucky, when he came to Eastman in the summers to work with the Arranger's Orchestra program," Osland explained. "Vince had a great jazz band at UK, and he attracted world-class trumpet students. He was working hard to expand the jazz program, and when a teaching position at UK opened up, I decided to apply. I was interviewed and was one of the finalists for the job, but funding for the position was cut.

"I began scrambling around trying to find a teaching gig. I filled in for Dave Demsey [the current coordinator of jazz studies at William Paterson University] at the University of Maine Augusta for the 1987-88 school year while he

came back to Eastman for his doctorate, then went out to Western Wyoming Community College the next year. I was the only music faculty member there, so I had the jazz band and also conducted a 60-piece community orchestra. Then the UK job got funded again, and I was hired. When I came to Kentucky, I knew the potential of what this program could be. But when I first started, there was no combo program, and no arranging or improv classes."

Osland began teaching a class in jazz arranging and focused on establishing a jazz combo program, hiring additional faculty and creating more ensemble opportunities for students.

"It's been an ongoing effort, and now we have good combos going on every year," Osland said. "We have at least two, and up to four, combos each semester — depending on the number of bass players and piano players available. In addition to our Jazz Ensemble, we now have the Lab Band happening each semester, and we've also started a third band — our Repertory Orchestra.

"One of the real keys to make all this happen was gaining another jazz faculty position. We hired Raleigh Dailey as our jazz piano professor, and he supervises the combos, conducts the Lab Band and teaches jazz improvisation."

Osland was also able to add more instructors to teach drums and bass, and has also

established an innovative saxophone combo program: Mega-Sax.

"I saw there were lots of sax quartets out there, but not much in terms of saxophone quintets," he said. "So I established the Mega-Sax program here when I started. When I was at Eastman, Ramon Richter, the saxophone professor there, directed a group called Saxology, that was inspired by the band Supersax, so that was my starting point. Now we have Mega-Sax groups that play as quintets and quartets — with and without rhythm sections."

Mega-Sax recorded its first album, *We Don't Need No Stinkin' Rhythm Section*, in 1995 on the Sea Breeze label, and various Mega-Sax ensembles at UK over the years have continued to record and win awards.

For Osland, recording his students as well as himself and other faculty members, has been a strong focus over the past three-plus decades.

"I'm a documenter, he explained. "I'm very research oriented, which you have to be in a university setting. Universities value research and reward it. So we have to convince academicians that as a music school, we showcase our research through live performances — and also documentation through live and studio recordings. The recordings serve as documentation of the research we've done as faculty members at the University.

"Recording is also a great learning experience for our students. And the recordings also become a great recruiting tool for potential students. We've also been very lucky to have the same recording engineer, David Henderson, for almost all of those 42 recordings."

In addition, Osland has written articles for *Saxophone Journal*, published transcription books and commissioned compositions and arrangements from saxophonists Bob Mintzer and Derek Brown.

Osland also wanted to thank some who have had a major influence on his career.

"I've already mentioned Vince DiMartino, and I have to give a shoutout to Raleigh Dailey — we've worked together for more than 20 years at UK, and he's written pieces for many of my projects. And my wife, Lisa, teaches saxophone here as well as serving as director of the saxophone ensembles.

"When I went to Cal State Northridge for my undergraduate degree, I started as a classical clarinet major," he added. "They had a great jazz band directed by Joel Leach, and by the time I graduated I had a jazz degree. And Ramon Richter's great saxophone books really attracted me to go to Eastman and study with him. Incidentally, I met my wife, Lisa, at Eastman, and that came about because Ray offered us both teaching assistantships at the same time. And Ray ended up being the best man at our wedding."

It's a family affair for this Lifetime Achievement honoree.

DB

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Ollie Liddell

THE REWARD OF TEACHING

By Terry Perkins Photo by Ceylon Bond

Given his family background, it might have seemed predictable that Dr. Ollie Liddell, director of bands at Memphis Central High School in Tennessee, is being honored with the 2022 DownBeat Lifetime Achievement Award for Jazz Education at the high school level. After all, his father, Lewis Liddell, had a distinguished four-and-a-half-decade career as a high school and college music educator that included almost 20 years as a professor of music and the director of bands at Jackson State University.

“I come from a musical family — especially my dad,” Liddell recalled during a telephone interview from his home in Memphis. “I wanted to play tuba growing up, but it was too big for me. My dad came home one day and dropped a trombone by my bed and said, ‘That’s what you’re playing.’ And trombone was cool. I played throughout high school in marching band and jazz band. And when I went to Jackson State, I continued playing with the Sonic Boom marching band and jazz band, too.”

But Liddell admits that jazz wasn’t what he preferred listening to in high school. It wasn’t until he began to play with the Jackson State Jazz Band that he really began to focus on it.

“At the time, jazz was old-folks stuff to me,” he said. “Although we had a jazz band in high school, I wasn’t really serious about it. I could read and play jazz when I got to Jackson, and I did get into the top jazz band. But the older cats in the band said to me, ‘Dude, you can’t swing!’

Thankfully, someone gave me a J.J. Johnson tape — *The Eminent Jay Jay Johnson Volume 1*. That was it. I lost my mind listening to that tape — I was in love!”

Liddell played in the jazz and marching bands at Jackson State for four years. He had earned both academic and music scholarships at the university and graduated with a major in chemistry and a minor in music. After graduation, he quickly realized he would rather play music professionally than become a chemist.

“I decided I didn’t want to work in a lab and ended up working on the chitlin’ circuit instead — playing music with anybody who would pay me,” Liddell said. “But things changed when a band director I knew at a high school in Memphis asked me to write arrangements for his marching band, and then come and work with the band. When I did that, I realized teaching is my calling — this is what I should be doing. I got a certificate and began teaching

middle school. It’s what I love to do.”

Liddell earned his master’s degree in music and his Ph.D. in music education from the University of Mississippi as he continued to teach in Memphis.

“I taught for four years at East High School in Memphis, then took the job as director of bands at Memphis Central High School, and I’ve been here ever since,” he said.

Under Liddell’s leadership, the Memphis Central High music program has expanded to include a concert band, a symphonic band, a wind ensemble, a percussion ensemble and several jazz combos. “We’ve even been able to have a saxophone choir some years,” Liddell said. “This school year we’re starting an after-school jazz band. I told the kids, come one, come all — French horns, oboes, I don’t care. Just play jazz.”

Memphis Central High School’s music program has won a number of awards in recent years. The Jazz Band won first place at the Savannah Swing Central Jazz National High School Competition in 2019, and was named a finalist in the 2020 and 2021 Essentially Ellington Competitions. The Memphis Central Marching Band was named Grand National Champions in the 2017 and 2018 High-Stepping National Show Band Competition.

“Some band directors specialize and focus on their jazz band or their marching band,” Liddell said. “But I believe that’s cheating your students. You really need to push every aspect of every band and combo you teach and strive for excellence. It can be really difficult and a lot of work, but everything has to be stressed. That’s my philosophy.”

Over the course of his teaching career, Liddell has learned that he can’t meet every teaching challenge on his own. He pushes for grants that help bring in other music educators and professional musicians to provide clinics and create additional educational opportunities for his students.

“Sometimes we band directors think we can do it all,” he explained. “But I try to get help from my musician friends to come and work with the students, and I reach out to organizations like the Memphis Jazz Workshop as well. I’m also a firm believer in YouTube university. Whatever I can do to get to get kids better on their instrument, I’ll do.”

For Liddell, it all comes down to seeing his students succeed.

“You know, I always thought it would be the coolest thing to walk into a professional gig and see one of my students playing. And that happened recently when I saw Michael Price, one of my students at Central who went on to study at the University of Tennessee. He was playing saxophone in Gregory Tardy’s band. That’s the reward.”

It’s a reward that has earned Liddell this DownBeat honor.

DB



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COURTESY OF ULYSSES OWENS JR.

Ulysses Owens Jr., drummer, band leader and producer

Producing from a Drummer's Perspective

One thing that makes a great producer is having some great ears. “Kid, you have a great set of ears on you, and you might end up producing as many records as I have one day.” That’s what my mentor Greg Knowles told me while producing my debut album, *It’s Time For U*, in 2007. Three years later in 2010, I was considering venturing into producing. At the same time, my friend Matthew Rybicki, a wonderful bassist, kept asking me questions about his upcoming debut recording, so I told him if he keeps asking me questions, he should just hire me to produce his record. “You haven’t done this before, right?” he asked. “Nope,” I said, “but how about this: I’ll produce the record for free, and if I mess up, you don’t owe me anything.”

After that conversation, in August 2010, I was walking around Avatar Studios (now

Berkeley Power Station Studios), checking microphones and waiting for the musicians to set up. My journey as a producer started on that day.

Matthew’s album, *Driven*, received great reviews from *DownBeat* and other publications. Then, Juilliard grad Mike Cottone heard Matthew’s record a few years later, and he wanted to work with me as well.

At that point, I definitely started charging to produce. However, I started learning more of what it takes to be a producer, particularly in the jazz genre of making mostly acoustic records.

A few months after Matthew’s session, I started UOJ Productions, which specializes in helping independent jazz artists with their debut and/or sophomore albums. I have now been producing albums for artists for close

to 15 years, and I have been fortunate to have released more than 60 full-length records via UOJ Productions while simultaneously working with larger labels, globally.

However, there are some advantages that I received being a drummer that allowed me to understand production, and the first one is that I can objectively listen to everything that is happening in the music. As a drummer, it’s also our job to tune in to what everyone is playing, and more importantly what everyone needs from us. Being insightful and artistically empathetic assures the artist’s vision is achieved. The drummer has the ability to single-handedly see the larger picture because our instrument’s role requires it of us — in a way that playing a brass, woodwind, vocal or rhythm section instrument doesn’t allow for consistently.

Get recording experience as a sideman.

One of my favorite label owners, drummers and producers in jazz is the great Willie Jones III. I can reflect back on countless records that Willie has been part of with Roy Hargrove, Cedar Walton, Herbie Hancock and so many others, and it makes complete sense that he has a great understanding of how to run a record label and make successful albums. The level of wisdom and experience that he has gained sim-

ply as a drummer qualifies him to be a great musician, and those skills transfer over to his J3 Records and the successful albums he has produced and released under that label.

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Working with so many great artists and finding myself in the studio a lot have allowed me to also understand how truly great sessions ran, and how some of the unsuccessful sessions were run. It's impossible to gain that experience if you aren't recording often and learning the tools of the trade. I often tell people don't rush into that process of becoming a producer if you haven't had enough experience.

As a drummer, some techniques translate well into production:

Laying down the groove. As a drummer, the most important thing for us is establishing the groove of a tune, and when you take that skill into production, it will allow for each record you produce to have a strong groove. Drummers will pick strong rhythm sections, and make sure they hire a rhythm section that fully supports the artist and makes the record feel good — which is a foundational element to any album.

Learning everyone's part. As a drummer, especially with my experience playing big band, it forces you to learn everyone's part and memorize it, ensuring that what you play is informed by what is happening in the music already. When producing, this is key, and some of my favorite producers (like Vince Mendoza, Robert Sadin, Al Pryor, Tommy LiPuma, Kamau Kenyatta, Steve Jordan and many others) have that ability. They can listen to a track with a microscopic ear, and then

zoom out and hear everything in its totality. **Assessing the gear you will need.** Drummers are gear-heads, and we obsess over each cymbal, snare drum, drumhead, etc. That same obsession is really key when diving into the studio as a producer.

When I first started producing records, I understood how to make music, but I leaned heavily on my engineer for the technical side of making records. However, the more I understood

about microphones, pre-amps, plug-ins and the gear side of the studio — what's necessary for each instrument to get the maximum sound in any studio — the easier it became to get a consistent sound as a producer on each record.

Being a multi-tasker. Drummers have to multi-task on the drum kit, and that skill translates as a producer. I am very careful now not to play and produce on the same record because I really like to focus my energy fully on whatever role I am playing in that given day. However, knowing how to multi-task and keep everything going at the same time is a key element in being able to successfully produce.

Putting the music first. As a drummer, when you are being selfish, or musically egotistical, people call you out on the bandstand for it. In that sense, our role requires humility. As a producer, you are constantly in service to the music, and nothing else matters. Being accustomed to that way of thinking is key.

Understanding arranging and orchestration. As a drummer, arranging and orchestration are key elements that allow you to know what to play on the kit to accent the necessary elements within a chart. That translates beautifully as a producer when it comes to knowing what to tell each band member at any given moment that will help the track or album be the best it can be.

There are several keys to becoming an impactful producer:

A great producer understands how to have a conversation with an artist about their musical vision and become fully committed to making it a reality.

Listen to music from the perspective of the player, composition and arrangement, and the goals and direction that are organically happening with each player. Knowing whom to call is one of the greatest skills needed to successfully produce a record or track for an artist. Clients will want to be informed about the best location for a recording studio, the best musicians and/or arrangers to work with, and how to handle post-production. Producers should always have a big Rolodex (whether digital or hard copy) to make their dreams a reality.

Be a project planner and strategist. A great producer knows how to become a project planner and strategist that completes the assignment of making an album or single in a timely fashion.

Be a people person. Understand how to navigate multiple personalities at once, particularly when an artist is in the middle of a recording session.

Have a vast understanding of music. Knowing how to speak to other musicians about music is key. I don't think it's necessary for every producer to be a great musician, but they should have a thorough theoretical understanding of music.

Have experience understanding the album-making process. When I produced Matthew's album, I had very little official experience as a producer. However, I had been fortunate to record quite a few albums with other artists, and learned from their producers about how they made decisions on their records. So, I had a lot to pull from with regard to experience.

Always seek to be honest with yourself and the artist. Understand if their vision artistically fits what you as a producer are able to assist them with. Have honest conversations with the artist, and make sure they are aware of the work that you have done.

The relationship with producer and artist is like a marriage: There has to be complete trust, and if/when that hasn't been established, an artist will question everything that you suggest for them. So take time and build a strong relationship with an artist before venturing into the album-making process. **DB**

Ulysses Owens Jr. is a drummer, producer, educator, author and creative entrepreneur and has toured and recorded with Christian McBride, Wynton Marsalis, Kurt Elling, Gregory Porter, Joey Alexander and many others. He has released several albums as a leader, and his most recent big band release *Soul Conversations* (Outside In Music) led to his big band being voted the Best Rising Star Large Ensemble in this year's DownBeat Critics Poll. He is a 2022 Armstrong Now Artist in Residence, and has penned a drum book, *Jazz Brushes For the Modern Drummer* (Hal Leonard). His book *The Musicians Career Guide: Turning Your Talent into Sustained Success* was released in 2020. Owens is currently working on his second book for Hal Leonard. He is artistic director at his family-owned arts non-profit Don't Miss A Beat. Owens serves as a faculty member at Juilliard within the jazz department and assists with the Alan D. Marks Entrepreneurship Center helping artists and students design purposeful music careers in the 21st century.



Joe Farnsworth, among the elite working drummers today

Joe Farnsworth's Drum Solo on 'Monk's Dream'

When you assemble the likes of trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, bassist Peter Washington and piano legend and NEA Jazz Master Kenny Barron, you are a guaranteed a hard swinging session. When you add master drummer Joe Farnsworth to the mix, the scale tips even further. Aptly named, *Time To Swing* (Smoke Session Records, 2020) is Farnsworth's fourth album as a leader and one that delights in a thoughtful mix of classic jazz compositions and original material paired against an all-star group. Known for his flawless technique, precise time feel, and highly technical style, Farnsworth delivers exceptional trading

opposite Kenny Barron and a full chorus of his own on the album's final track, Thelonious Monk's "Monk's Dream."

Like legends Tony Williams and Terri Lyne Carrington, Joe Farnsworth developed his remarkable hands and fine-tuned ears under the tutelage of legendary teacher and expert drummer Alan Dawson. With that foundation, Farnsworth has built his reputation over the years as a revered drummer in the groups of jazz royalty including McCoy Tyner, Pharoah Sanders, Harold Mabern and countless others. With more than 100 recordings to his credit, Farnsworth's infectious feel and chops have earned him a place among the

elite drummers working today.

Starting in the first trade, and represented throughout the solo, Farnsworth sticks closely to the rhythmic melody of the composition, often quoting the main motif of the song with an upbeat eighth note leading into a grouping of three triplets. This is first heard quoted on the "and" of 3 of the first measure, as well as in the third, fifth and six measures of the first trade. Along these same lines, and a remarkable feature of Farnsworth's drumming, is his precise control in the use of accents to shape a rhythmic phrase. Although not a fixed rule, the upbeats in the bebop language often receive more weight than the downbeats, rep-

representing a strong feel of forward momentum, a feature Farnsworth makes skillful use of throughout his phrasing. A notable example of this is in the first “A” section of the full chorus solo as Farnsworth explores successive eighth notes in the second, third and fourth measures. What adds to this effect is the fact that Farnsworth is feathering his bass drum throughout this solo, only occasionally breaking the pattern.

This creates a solid foundation underneath the syncopation that accentuates the effect of the upbeats throughout the solo. A wonderfully executed example of this is in the second trade when Farnsworth replies to Barron’s previous fast solo lines with a minimalistic statement of bass drum and upbeat snare and tom accents.

Dynamically speaking, Farnsworth remains consistent at a moderate volume throughout the trading and solo. Reminiscent of the great Max Roach, Farnsworth chooses very carefully his use of cymbals, focusing instead on the drums themselves rather than presenting any heavy crashes. In fact, outside of the occasional 2-and-4 of the hi-hat, Farnsworth abandons the ride cymbal completely within the first trade, only to re-introduce ride crashes and a hi-hat splash in the third and fourth measure of the “B” section of the full chorus. With that said, and an exception to the rule in this solo, Farnsworth works in a slick dynamic shift in the fifth and sixth bar of the “A” section of the full chorus. Marching down in the successive rhythm of two 16ths and an eighth note in the fifth bar, Farnsworth decrescendos to a whisper only to pop out with a heavy-handed *sforzando* on the second beat of the sixth bar.

The influence of Alan Dawson on Farnsworth’s drumming is apparent in his display of control over the rudimental language. With the ability to shift between various subdivisions with ease while effortlessly manipulating the amount of swing produced in his feel, Farnsworth’s control is outstanding. A good example of this is in the trading with Barron in the second chorus. Trade three alone moves between 16th notes, five-stroke rolls, sextuplets, eighth notes and triplets, all in the span of four bars of time. Technically speaking, this is no impossible feat, but what sets Farnsworth apart from so many others is that these transitions are seamless, with a perfect evenness of hands, time and controlled phrasing. This is the mark of true craftsman and a fine-tuned musician in control of their musical environment, and that is the common thread that ties all of the musicians featured on *Time To Swing* together. **DB**

Jeffrey Lien is a Berklee graduate, drummer, teacher and writer in the Nashville area.

The musical notation is presented in a vertical layout, starting with 'Trade 1 (Trading starts at 4:29)'. Each trade consists of two staves of music. Trade 1 is marked *mf* and features eighth notes with triplets. Trade 2 is marked *f* and shows a more sparse pattern with accents. Trade 3 is marked *mf* and includes sextuplets. Trade 4 is marked *mf* and includes a 'straight' section. Trade 5 is marked *mf* and features eighth notes with triplets. Trade 6 is marked *mf* and includes eighth notes with triplets. Section A is marked *mf* and *sfz*, and Section B is marked *mf*. The notation includes various rhythmic symbols such as beams, accents, and dynamic markings.

1. Kickin' it, Condenser-Style

DPA Microphones' 4055 Kick Drum Microphone is a durable mic solution that is not pre-tailored to any specific sound, allowing engineers to shape the sound exactly as desired. With an intentional use for kick drum-specific applications, the 4055 picks up the true, clear sound of the instrument. The mic also offers a linear frequency response, both on- and off-axis, which results in a very tight, natural, well-defined sound. The low end is punchier and dials in the right setting for the beater, while removing some of the midrange is easier than ever before. The shape of the DPA 4055 sets it apart from other kick drum mics. Its asymmetric design makes it easy to position inside or outside the kick drum.

More info: dpamicrophones.com



1

2. Exercises, Drills & Routines

Hal Leonard's *The Total Drummer* is a book/video package created to help drummers achieve their musicianship goals. Authored by professional drummer, producer and educator Dimitri Fantini, *The Total Drummer* guides players through exercises, drills and routines that are guaranteed to improve playing. Lessons include rudiments, advanced hand and feet techniques, coordinating independence, stacking meters, maximizing vocabulary, working in the studio and more than an hour of video performances and instruction. The book includes a special solo performance by the author, fully transcribed and demonstrating all the techniques explained in the book.

More info: halleonard.com



2



3

3. Strong Presence

Yamaha's DTX8 series and DTX10 series high-end electronic drum sets offer a blend of functionality and playability with expanded polyphony and reduced latency. The DTX8 series (including the DTX8K-M and DTX8K-X models) is ideal for drummers searching for high-quality sounds and functionality in an electronic kit. The DTX10 series (including the DTX10K-M and DTX10K-X models) is made for drummers who demand flagship performance and durability. Both series offer the option of mesh pads or Yamaha Drum's proprietary Textured Cellular Silicone (TCS) pads. The DTX8 series is powered by the DTX-PRO module, which uses the same tone generator as the DTX-PROX used in the DTX10 series.

More info: usa.yamaha.com

4. Synergy Upgrades

Building on Toca's Synergy line of congas, Synergy Deluxe adds upgrades in a thrifty package. Enhancements include Remo Tucked Fiberskyn heads, low-contact hoops, an elegant satin fade finish, chrome hardware and adjustable chrome basket stands. Like Toca's standard Synergy congas, Synergy Deluxe drums are sold as a set of 10- and 11-inch instruments. With Synergy Deluxe, percussionists have the option to add a matching 12-inch tumba. Synergy Deluxe models are available in Coffee Fade, Purple Fade, Wine Fade and Natural.

More info: tocapercussion.com



4



5



5. Flat Ride Renewal

Paiste has reintroduced models from the Formula 602, 2002 and Traditionals series and added a new model to its Masters series. The medium lightweight 20- and 22-inch Masters Dark Flat Ride models complement the Paiste Masters series with a dark and complex variation on the typical Flat Ride characteristic. The medium lightweight 20- and 22-inch Signature Traditionals Light Flat Ride models have dark and complex qualities, yet the ping offers silvery highs and clarity, making them well suited for quieter settings. The lightweight 18-, 20- and 22-inch Formula 602 Thin Flat Ride models feature the pure, clear sound typical of Formula 602 cymbals. The 18- and 20-inch 2002 Flat Ride models mirror the brilliance and warmth of the 2002 series and are ideal for situations that call for subtlety and definition paired with a radiant presence.

More info: paiste.com

6. Cymbal-ic Solutions

No Nuts Percussion has developed an adjustable sizzler solution that takes advantage of the company's open-ended sleeve. The SizzleNut is a length-adjustable riveted-cymbal substitute that slips snugly over the No Nuts Cymbal Sleeve, putting the sizzler sound into action within seconds. No Nuts Cymbal Sleeve cymbal mounts, originally launched in black, are now available in seven colors — black, red, silver, white, blue, yellow and green — to enhance the look of your drum kit. No Nuts CymRings compression-fit cymbal positioners, which fit loosely over the No Nuts Cymbal Sleeve or any standard plastic cymbal mounting sleeves, are now available in translucent white, black, red, silver, white, blue, yellow and green. The No Nuts CymVeil provides a cool and unique way to reduce cymbal volume: Drummers can completely cover the cymbal and strike through it or fold the CymVeil in half and strike the cymbal directly.

More info: nonutspercussion.com

7. Kits Handmade in Italy

Tamburo's Pro series of Italian handmade drum kits consists of three unique shell varieties: the flagship Opera, the vintage-vibed Unika and the acrylic Volume. Opera series kits are made from 6mm birch staves with an outer ply of high pressure laminate for durability, and beech inner reinforcement rings. The Unika series offers a different take on traditional vintage style drums, with a shell core composed of a thin, three-ply poplar base sandwiched between Tamburo's high-pressure laminate. Tamburo's Volume series shells are thin and seamless, allowing for more resonance than typically found with acrylic shells.

More info: tamburodrums.com

8. Gettin' in Tune

Since Welch Tuning Systems drums launched in 2018, players and drum builders have been inquiring about the WTS single-point tuning system hardware. Now, the company is offering a WTS hardware-only buying option for drum builders. A series of pulleys and cables tune both heads with the turn of a single handle, forgoing the need for tension rods or drum keys. With up to 90% fewer holes and hardware on each drum shell, builders only need to drill four holes for the tuning knob; every other piece of hardware is free-floating from the shell.

More info: wtsdrums.com



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Jim McNeely & Ryan Truesdell, Part I

During this year's International Society of Jazz Arrangers and Composers symposium in Austin, Texas, celebrated jazz orchestrators Jim McNeely and Ryan Truesdell administered the DownBeat Blindfold Test to each other, onstage in front of a live audience. In advance of the event, each artist chose four tracks for his counterpart to identify over the course of the test, for a total of eight musical selections — the first half of which are presented here. (Look for Part II in DownBeat's December issue.) The spirited exchange, effectively DownBeat's first Double Blindfold Test, kicked off with a McNeely pick, followed by a Truesdell pick, alternating back-and-forth for the duration. Everyone at ISJAC — a friendly, hard-working and diverse community that is seeking to expand its membership — knows each other on a first-name basis.

Duke Ellington

"Artistry In Rhythm" (*Will Big Bands Ever Come Back?*, Reprise, 1962) Billy Strayhorn, arranger; Stan Kenton, composer.

Ryan: It's Duke, but this is my worst nightmare, I don't know why I agreed to this. I'm horrible with titles. But it's Duke, right? It's Jimmy Hamilton on clarinet and Ray Nance on violin, Cootie Williams on trumpet. What's the title?

Jim: "Artistry In Rhythm," Billy Strayhorn's arrangement.

Ryan: Of course. The thing I love about this is the groove, it's so unique and different and beautiful and mysterious, and how that all evolves out of nothing, something Billy did so well.

Jim: This is one of the things on my must-play list when I teach my arranging class. When you compare it to the original Kenton, which is full of bombast, I show this as an example of taking the same material and doing a complete 180-degree turn in terms of atmosphere, vibe, the whole thing. And also writing for the musicians. You had Ray Nance in the band at the time — violin and trumpet, that's a double you don't normally encounter. And it's a beautiful use of the ensemble's solo voices: Harry Carney's playing bass clarinet, and Sam Woodyard is playing this groove that predates hip-hop by about at least 20 years.

Ryan: That orchestra has such a unique sound, there's no other orchestra like it. That sound of the clarinet and drums is so remarkable.

Jim: Part of what impressed me was, it isn't a baritone sax part, it's a *Harry Carney* part. He's half the sound of the band.

Ryan: 5 stars.

Buddy DeFranco

"A Bird In Igor's Yard" (*Buddy DeFranco & His Orchestra*, Hep Records, rec'd 1949) George Russell, composer/arranger.

Jim: I'm either gonna be 100% right or completely off base. Is that Buddy DeFranco, "A Bird In Igor's Yard"? I almost put this on my list. That was with Boyd Raeburn's band, and I think this is one of the first tune that George had recorded, was of his early ones. Buddy DeFranco at that time, I heard the clarinet but immediately the language, it wasn't Benny Goodman or Artie Shaw, it was bebop, that's why I figured it has to be Buddy. I remember hearing this a long time ago and being knocked out. It was back in the era where people were trying to mix Stravinsky with jazz. Who would do that today [audience laughs]. Stravinsky's language is so powerful it lends itself to the rhythmic aspects of jazz, and George Russell put it together. It's a great chart.



Ryan Truesdell (left) and Jim McNeely give each other the Blindfold Test onstage at ISJAC 2022 in Austin, Texas.

Ryan: George's writing is so advanced, with the complexities of the rhythms and everything that was going on in all the different sections, I always forget that it's 1949.

Jim: That was great — 89 stars.

Vanguard Jazz Orchestra

"A Simple Wish" (*Can I Persuade You*, Planet Arts, 2001) Julie Cavadini, composer/arranger.

Ryan: I still get goosebumps in all the same places. It's Julie Cavadini. That was "A Simple Wish" recorded by the Vanguard Orchestra, but she wrote it back in the '80s. I understand she studied with Bill Finegan, and was able to write for the band through Bob [Brookmeyer].

Jim: Bob brought her in. I think it was 1988 when she brought this, maybe before then. Bob had arranged a rehearsal for her to come in, and she wrote this for Tom Harrell, and this is Scott Wendholt on this recording. And I'll never forget, when it reaches that big climax at the end, I still get goosebumps when I hear that, and I've played that chart many, many times. You know it's coming, and it's just, wait for it, here it comes. She was a remarkable musician, and she wrote several things for Mel's band, and she passed away from cancer and not many people know about her.

Ryan: As many stars as you allow. I love that piece, it's absolutely remarkable, and I think it's a shame there isn't more.

Bob Brookmeyer

"Mellow Drama" (*Portrait Of The Artist*, Atlantic, rec'd 1959) Brookmeyer, composer/arranger.

Jim: I think of certain parameters like the piano and clarinets and I want to say Claude Thornhill, but I don't think it is. It's deep, it's really dark and the tuba, there's some harmony that they land on that's really [makes a "density" gesture].

Ryan: It's Bob. It's called "Mellow Drama."

Jim: That it is. [all laugh] So that's Bob playing piano. That's a great record. I've concentrated so much on [Brookmeyer's] *Blues Suite*, I guess I forgot about some of the other things.

Ryan: I wanted to give you a Bob one, but the minute his trombone comes in he's immediately recognizable, and I thought, this is such a unique piece. I also love the instrumentation: trumpet, french horn, slide trombone and tuba, and two reeds, and Bob on piano.

Jim: I never heard Claude Thornhill play like that. Usually he was just kind of Teddy Wilson on steroids playing over the band. So I just took a wild guess.

Ryan: That was a good guess. There's so much Thornhill in that.

Jim: Infinity-minus-one 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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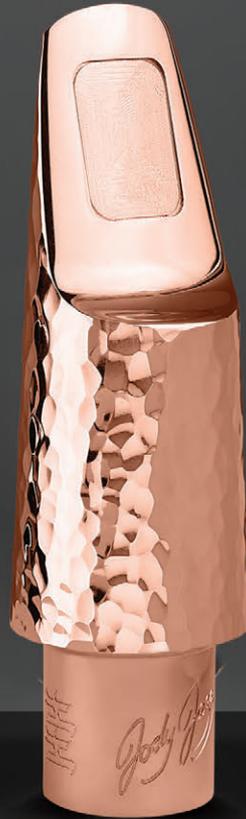
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