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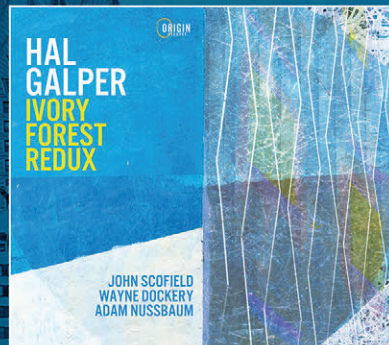
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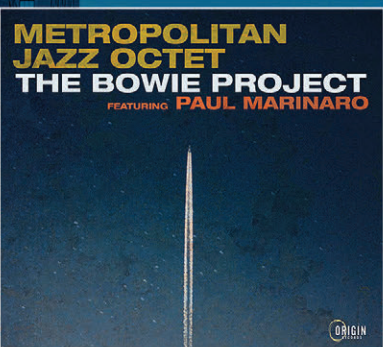
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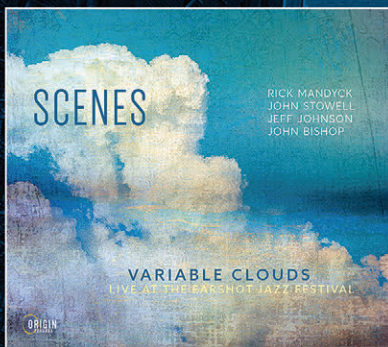
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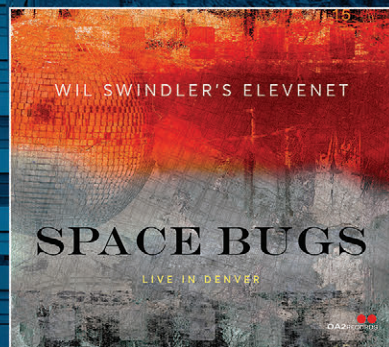
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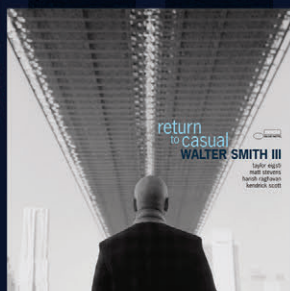
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BY TED PANKEN

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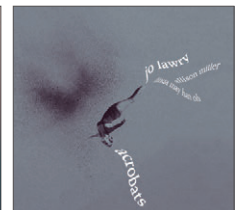
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"Sometimes you have to build a generator of who you are, even if you don't think that is who you are yet," says Sharel Cassity.

Honesty & Human Topics

WHEN WE SEE OUR FAVORITE ARTISTS performing, if all goes well, the lighting is perfect, the sound is perfect, the performance is spellbinding and the audience is rapt.

But what happens after the stage goes dark?

It can be easy forgotten that these larger-than-life figures are normal folks like you and me with many of the same joys, challenges and troubles that life can heap upon any of us.

For 89 years, the pages of this magazine have chronicled the lives of our greatest artists, often capturing tremendous moments of self-reflection and personal insight.

This issue continues that tradition.

Our cover story this month (beginning on page 20) finds pianist Brad Mehldau, truly one of our greatest living artists, at a moment of deep self-reflection. His new autobiography, *Formation: Building A Personal Canon, Part I*, is a fascinating read that dives into the early years of his life, including challenges with depression and drug use. As writer Ted Panken eloquently details in this *DownBeat* article, Mehldau was able to beat back an addiction to heroin, an evil master for many.

In the preface of his book, Mehldau states, "The late great bassist Charlie Haden, whom I also thank here as an important guide and support near the end of my *Bildung*, put it succinctly in a conversation I had with him once: 'Bird did not play great because of heroin. He played great in spite of heroin. And just imagine how much more he could have done if he had not been an addict.'"

Haden was no stranger to the topic. He, too, battled his demons with addiction.

It's fascinating, amazing and great that Mehldau so openly and honestly approaches the topic now. This writer can remember a time when the pianist was reticent about doing a *DownBeat* cover story early in his career, finally saying yes only after we agreed there would be no questions about drug use.

Hopefully, his reflections now will become required reading — yes, cautionary — for future generations of jazz and humanity.

He also eloquently speaks of mental health and dealing with depression. So does alto saxophonist Sharel Cassity in her interview beginning on page 32.

Cassity's path through jazz serves as roadmap of hard work and sheer dedication, a glimpse into what it takes to perform challenging music, and make it seem so simple.

But that road can be fraught with questions of purpose and doubt. That Cassity can speak openly and honestly about getting help for those challenges speaks volumes to her as a person, but moreso of the changing attitude and understanding of working through mental health issues.

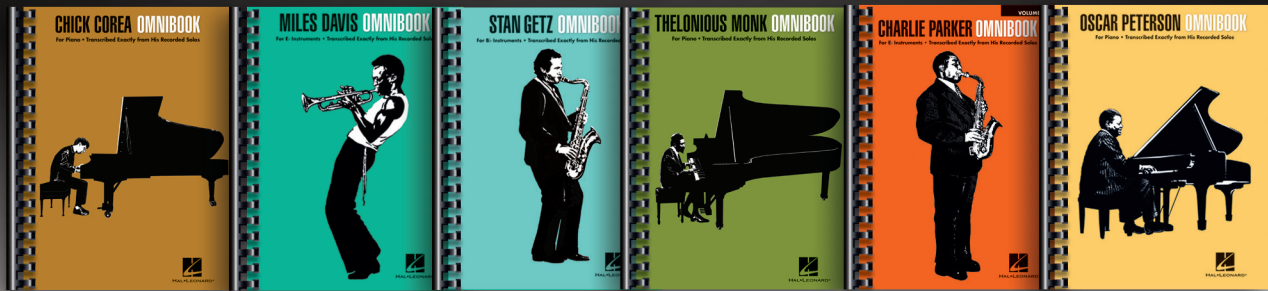
"We did about a year-and-a-half of cognitive therapy," Cassity notes about her early days at Juilliard. "Some meds, but I got off of those just because I don't like meds. But, yeah, at the time it was warranted. And we talked about building a generator. Sometimes you have to build a generator of who you are, even if you don't think that is who you are yet. You have to build that into you. If you don't have support, you have to build that support into you."

Amen, and here's to positive change.

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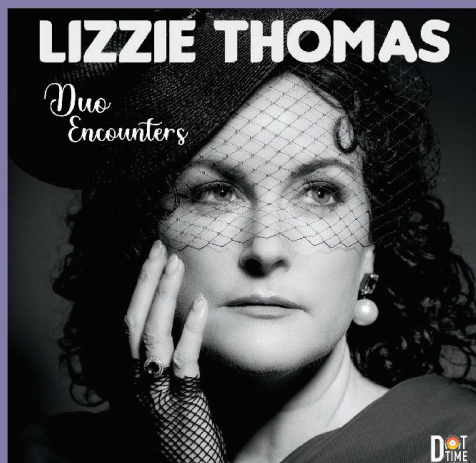


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Venue Guide Outrage!

Editor's Note: DownBeat has received dozens of letters defending local venues that were omitted from the February Jazz Venue Guide. Here's a taste:

Thank you, I guess, for confirming our paranoia that the West Coast is terra incognita for much of the jazz press. Somehow the Jazz Venue Guide relocated Santa Barbara to Northern California, while neglecting to include essential Bay Area venues such as San Francisco's Mr. Tipple's, Black Cat and Bird & Beckett Books & Records, Oakland's Piedmont Piano Company and Berkeley's California Jazz Conservatory. Equally baffling is the absence of the SFJAZZ Center. Come out and see us some time. We're friendly!

ANDREW GILBERT
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

The International Jazz Venue Guide, as featured in the February issue, well intentioned as it is, gives a totally inaccurate impression of jazz in Europe.

With the exception of Germany, the only clubs listed are those in the capital cities. Five venues are listed in London and yet, two of the



and the capital cities.

Then it truly would be an International Jazz Venue issue.

LANCE LIDDLE
BEBOP SPOKEN HERE

I thought it would be of interest to your readers to read about the success of Middle C Jazz in Charlotte, North Carolina. We have been open for over three years, and hosting some of the biggest names in jazz — Gerald Albright, Billy Cobham, Sy Smith, Marion Meadows, Stanley Jordan, Norman Brown, Keiko Matsui and many others. If you have a few minutes, please check us out at middlecjazz.com.

ALTEDDY JOHNSON
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Get it Right, by George

I do not do this ever, but I just read the February issue of DownBeat, and I saw the review of the great George Colligan's *King's Dream*.

You need to find writers that know what they are talking about. Let me quote: "Pianist George Colligan's fifth album as a leader ..." FIFTH????

I recorded George Colligan's first album ever Nov. 3, 1995 (*Activism*, SteepleChase). Following that, I have recorded 12 additional recordings with Colligan as a leader, including several solo piano recordings.

Too bad DownBeat allows a writer with such little knowledge review CD releases.

NILS WINTER
FOUNDER
STEEPLECHASE
VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: As always, Nils, you are correct. It was Colligan's fifth solo piano recording, not his fifth record. Sorry we dropped the ball, and the word "solo"! Thanks for the correction.

Avant Garde Discrimination?

I'm the owner of Akamu Agency, which works with several American jazz musicians (akamu.net), including jazz masters such as

Henry Threadgill, Roscoe Mitchell, Anthony Braxton and Nicole Mitchell.

I was checking DB magazine in the last 14 years, and I see some musicians are on the cover more than one time: five times — Joe Lovano; four times — esperanza spalding, Vijay Iyer, Cécile McLorin Salvant; three times — Diana Krall, Christian McBride, John Medeski, Jack DeJohnette, Terri Lyne Carrington, Pat Metheny; two times — Ravi Coltrane, Keith Jarrett, Miguel Zénon, Chick Corea, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Branford Marsalis, Wynton Marsalis, Jason Moran, Anat Cohen, George Benson and more.

Zero times. All of the artists below have won The Doris Duke Award, United States Artists Fellowships and more — Henry Threadgill, Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell and Nicole Mitchell.

Could it be that you'll do a cover for these artists in 2023? I'm a reader of DB since the early '80s (more than 40 years).

I feel it's a bit of discrimination against these artists over the last 15 years for their contributions to the jazz history.

Have a great 2023!

ALBERTO "LALO" LOFOCO
VIA EMAIL

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"That spontaneous feeling, like in a sanctified church, was always there, with the hardwood floors and the stomping," is how Marcus Baylor describes the music of The Baylor Project.

The Baylor Project's Storefront Church Jazz

Hundreds of chrysanthemums filled the dim-lit room at Apparatus, a midtown Manhattan design studio where The Baylor Project performed for three nights last May. In this etheric setting, the duo of Marcus and Jean Baylor played from their wide repertoire for a rapt audience large-

ly unfamiliar with their distinctive brand of gospel-inspired jazz. On a whim, they decided to record the event. The pursuant album, *The Evening: Live At Apparatus* (Be A Light/Motown), would earn them their fifth and sixth Grammy nominations.

"We'd been talking about doing a live

album for the year prior to releasing it," recalled lead singer Jean Baylor in a phone call between DownBeat and the husband-and-wife team. "We hadn't quite figured out the type of concert, but Marcus kept going with the feeling of a storefront church. We both grew up in church — our fathers are pastors. Some of our influences are different musically, though. I grew up in a Baptist church with mostly hymns, and Marcus grew up in a Pentecostal church where it was very high spirited, with longer services and shouting music. So, he thought about bringing the energy of that storefront space to a live concert."

"The spirit of a sanctified church," interjected Marcus, the Project's drummer.

"A storefront — it's different from a usual church," added Jean.

Anyone who's heard the Bayers live might sense that difference, even if they can't articulate it. It's the reason that the Bayers' audiences — including those more used to the still of a design studio — feel moved to clap or call or sing along to their high-amplitude sets of mostly original songs. You don't listen to the Bayers' music so much as respond to it.

Since stepping out as an official duo 10 years ago (they'd started playing together in 2000 and married in 2002), their profile in the jazz world has risen swiftly and garnered them some rare distinctions. Each of their four recordings to date has been nominated for at least one Grammy award, for a total of six. They're the first jazz act ever signed to a partnership with Motown Records. They've been nominated for two NAACP Image Awards and, as of this writing, have taken home one. Most impressively, they've achieved these honors through their own label, Be A Light, which debuted just six whirlwind years ago.

In some ways, it's misleading to describe The Baylor Project as a duo, given that the roster of collaborators on each date is as large and thrilling as their sound. Their 2017 debut, *The Journey*, included almost 20 prominent side musicians, among them harpist Brandee Younger, bassist Dezron Douglas and their regular saxophonist Keith Loftis. Their 2021 release, *Generations*, featured an orchestra of diverse musicians almost three dozen strong, with guest spots for singers Dianne Reeves and Jazzmeia Horn, saxophonist Kenny Garrett,



The Baylor Project's latest recording is titled *The Evening: Live At Apparatus*.

'Marcus grew up in a Pentecostal church where it was very high spirited. So, he thought about bringing the energy of that storefront space to a live concert.'

—Jean Baylor

drummer Jamison Ross and pianist Sullivan Fortner. Even on the live album, five side players joined the Baylors onstage, three of them horns to round out the rhythm section.

Of course, during the pandemic, such large-scale undertakings weren't possible. So, the couple used a simple quartet on the original "Sit On Down," a de facto PSA urging people to stay home during the first COVID-19 lockdown. The remotely recorded single, something of a social media phenomenon, was Grammy-nominated for Best Traditional R&B Vocal Performance for 2020.

Quick as their rise seems now, the pair spent decades earning their bona fides, mostly on separate, though intersecting, paths. Marcus, a New School jazz alum, held down the drum chair in the Yellowjackets from 2000 to 2010. And Jean, a graduate of Temple University's vocal jazz program, sold more than a million records as one half of the popular neo-soul vocal duo Zhané in the 1990s

before moving on to a solo career.

Given the breadth of their musical experience, the smoothly syncretic sound of The Baylor Project comes as a surprise. There's no bouncing from style to style just because they can, stretching to reach as many listeners as possible. Rather, the two pull from the improvisatory vocabularies of gospel, R&B and the blues to write intentional songs that appeal as much to the spirit as the ear.

This intention is freely apparent when Marcus plays an extemporaneous solo, alone onstage or before the mic. Two of these long-form solos have made it onto their records: "Voice Of The Drum (Interlude)" on *The Journey* and "Call Of The Drum" on *The Evening* — the latter tapped for Best Improvised Jazz Solo Performance this year. What stands out about these breakout solo compositions isn't virtuosity, though they do have that. It's how meditative they are, and how subtly they prepare the body for the deep

listening that follows in the set, whether live or recorded.

"For me, one part of [this type of soloing] is about standing on the shoulders of those that came before us, you know, like Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Art Blakey, Max Roach," Marcus said. "But then there's being able to tell a story, and that's really what it is ... My family taught me to play music where the inspiration is from my love and my relationship with God."

For the Baylors, this inspiration arises in real time and space — when they're onstage and interacting with an audience spontaneously, leaving room for serendipity to happen. Jean recalled an exchange with Buster Williams, earlier in her career, in which he explained how this experience is, in fact, a defining characteristic of jazz.

"He said jazz is about creating problems for yourself and then figuring out how to solve them — a little stressful," she quipped. Stressful, yes — but also generative.

"I feel like really understanding the roots of this music, where it comes from, born out of the African American community," Marcus continued. "That spontaneous feeling, like in a sanctified church, was always there, with the hardwood floors and the stomping. This is what happened at Apparatus — the spirit of that. When you listen to the old Cannonball Adderley albums or Ray Charles or Aretha Franklin, you can close your eyes and visualize what that feeling was back then. My personal goal is to try to capture those moments, and at the same time to push the music forward."

As the Baylors' duo career gathers momentum, pushing the music forward involves ever more audience contact. This year, so far, such contact includes the Blue Note Cruise in January; the Grammy and NAACP awards in February, plus a residency in Marcus' hometown of St. Louis; then more dates in the U.S. and internationally, including their first tour of Europe this spring.

"This is going to be a busy year," Marcus observed. "But the way that we create music and [come up with] our next endeavor is based on us traveling, really being around people. Jean and I are both producers, so we can always go into the studio and create. But our albums are really made offline."

They admit the demands of their expanding career can be exhausting, and perhaps some relaxation during their "offline" moments would be nice.

"That did not work out [this year]," Jean said with an easy laugh. "But, although we'd very much like to take some time, we're just trying to stay ready for whatever opportunities may come up. Because such is life as an artist."

—Suzanne Lorge



"I wanted Kurt to kill it and he did," saxophonist Jim Snidero says of the title track from his new album, *Far Far Away*.

Snidero Writes to Rosenwinkel's Sounds, Concepts & Range

ALTO SAXOPHONIST JIM SNIDERO'S latest date, *Far Far Away*, stands as a career milestone. He's reached the plateau of having recorded his 25th album as a leader, with his last 11 on Savant Records. While many musicians with such an oeuvre may be tempted to go on cruise control at this point, Snidero said he's not willing to idle while he's ensconced in such a consistently creative stretch. In fact, take a look at his last two albums: his spontaneous quartet gig on 2021's *Live At The Deer Head Inn* and 2020's bow to Korean culture, *Project-K*, featuring Dave Douglas.

And he's proud of the fact that he's got 10 million streams on the Acoustic Jazz platform for his alto saxophone tonal excursions. "The alto is a maverick," said Snidero, who started his recording career in 1984. "It's unforgiving to get it right. But when you master it, when you achieve control and freedom, the payoff is enormous. You can really soar like no other saxophone."

He ups the ante for alto adventure with his *Far Far Away*, an album that showcases a dynamic collaboration with guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel. Snidero meticulously composed with Rosenwinkel in mind and enlisted the killer rhythm section of Orrin Evans on piano, Peter Washington on bass and Joe Farnsworth on drums — the same rhythm section that graced *Live At The Deer Head Inn*. The new album features six originals as well as two covers, the Rodgers and Hammerstein balladic classic "It Might As Well Be Spring" and McCoy Tyner's sober "Search For Peace."

"I met Kurt in 2019," Snidero said in a phone conversation from his New York home. "We talked about doing something, but then COVID

threw a curveball. I wanted to make an album with Kurt because he has such an identity and has created his own pathway in his music. He's found an overarching musicality that's rare. As soon as we were able to make this project a reality, I started writing centered around his sound and concepts — something between an earthy and ethereal quality. And I arranged in a lot of crosscurrents between us."

In an email exchange from his Berlin home, Rosenwinkel wrote, "I definitely felt a synergy while learning and playing the music. I enjoy the challenge of having to adapt my approach to someone else's vision when they are writing great music. And to have the composer be actually hearing my voice while writing the material is a blessing and an honor."

To get the quintet acquainted with the music he composed and arranged, Snidero set up a rehearsal show in August at East Hampton's LTV Studios in Wainscott as a part of the Hamptons Jazz Festival in the South Fork of Long Island. The next day they recorded. It wasn't just a one-off guest shot, as Snidero will tour Europe in April with three or four shows in Germany featuring the guitarist.

The album opens with the sparkling title track, which highlights Rosenwinkel's signature fireball delivery and searing range. "I wanted Kurt to kill it and he did," Snidero said.

"With that song and that band, you can fly," Rosenwinkel affirmed.

Throughout the recording, Snidero's bright power is complemented and elevated by Rosenwinkel's dark-charcoal lines to create a colorful soundscape. When asked about this connection, the guitarist said, "I guess it was just

waiting to happen. Jim has a beautiful sound, so it's easy to gravitate to."

The new musical friendship swings on the almost playful "Nowhere To Hide," with Snidero taking the melodic lead and Rosenwinkel in support on a tune that the saxophonist wrote with unusual harmonic tensions. Snidero also paid homage to one of his musical heroes, the late guitarist Pat Martino, on "Pat."

"I fell in love with the power, the time, the sound of Pat Martino," Snidero said. "I wanted to write something that he'd play. I thought it was a perfect tune for Kurt, too, because they're both from Philadelphia. But Kurt said he never really knew him during the time the elder was recovering. In our take, everyone in the band gets to individually pay tribute."

A highlight of the Snidero-Rosenwinkel cooperative arrives on the soulfully reflective "It Might As Well Be Spring," which starts in an extended duo setting before the rhythm section quietly enters. The guitarist alludes to the melody in the open before he lets Snidero take the spotlight with his clear, melancholic voice. "I told Kurt to play as long and as short as he wanted," Snidero said. "I knew we would sound good together. This song feels so right on the alto. The range in that key is perfect. It gets to the sweet spot of the alto. It's a pretty tune, and I put in a little tension with some different changes. I've been wanting to record this song for years and years."

As to what's coming next for Snidero? "That's always the challenge to come up with something different," he said. "It's stressful to have to switch up the personnel and write new conceptual music."

Then he harkened back to his monumental *Strings* (Milestone) album from 2003, an album that featured his self-taught arrangements for 14 string players performing his music. The initial New York studio date for the Bob Belden-produced album was the infamous morning of the Sept. 11, 2001, Twin Towers attacks. The session was rescheduled for the next year, with the album coming out a year after that.

Since Snidero had retained the rights after 10 years, he put the project on the back burner until Savant indicated it wanted to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the original studio date with a remastered reissue for 2021. Snidero was back into a *Strings*-like big picture setting, making the calls for fixes, including dubbing in bass arcs to fatten a previously thin bottom.

Snidero remembers how complex and harrowing the original *Strings* project was, which has him thinking that his next album will in no way be so majestic.

"No telling, but I may just pare it all down," he muses, without sharing any specific details about his new compositions. "It's just an idea, but we'll see." Given his track record, we can expect Snidero to be contemplating something distinctively new.

—Dan Ouellette



"I could be a little bit indulgent and not worry," Justin Kauflin said about recording a live album.



Justin Kauflin's Live Adventure

SINCE APPEARING IN THE MOVING 2014 documentary *Keep On Keepin' On*, about his relationship with trumpet legend Clark Terry, pianist and composer Justin Kauflin has been lauded as a prodigy with a soulful approach.

But the prodigy label can paint such a lofty portrait of Kauflin, even as it aptly describes the Yamaha Artist's exceptional musical skill. Kauflin, deeply kind and humbled by the praise and caliber of musicians in his orbit, is — as he puts it — just a "simple guy."

"I feel like that comes through in the music," he said. "If it's a good melody, I'm pretty happy."

On *Live At Sam First*, Kauflin's new album and his first-ever live recording, it's this simplicity, expressed through his pure heart, relaxed delivery and tender melodic sense, that makes for magic.

Born with a rare degenerative condition called exudative retinopathy, Kauflin went completely blind by age 11. As he lost his sight, he dove into the world of music, eventually finding jazz. "It became a fast passion because it was something I didn't feel limited in," Kauflin said.

He then attended William Paterson University, where he studied with Mulgrew Miller and Clark Terry. His time at the university also brought about *Keep On Keepin' On*, a documentary about Kauflin's journey as Terry's protégé, which led to the pianist signing with Quincy Jones' management roster.

"[Terry and Mulgrew] were really wonderful, naturally humble people that just emanated love for the music but also for the people around them," Kauflin said. "[Clark] showed me the value of who a person is as a human being is reflected in their music."

A testament to his mentor's lesson, *Live At Sam First* teems with Kauflin's soulfulness and genuine goodness, and stands as one of his most relaxed and free recording dates. In the live format, Kauflin felt more able to let things breathe and coalesce organically.

"When you're in the studio you're always automatically thinking ... how I'm going to feel when I'm listening back to this later," Kauflin said. "[With this record] I didn't have to think about the time that it took to play the song. I could be a little bit indulgent and not worry."

For Kauflin, who has long dealt with severe stage fright, this easy embrace of the moment, and of imperfection, is a testament to the live setting, as well as to 36-year-old's growth since his portrayal in *Keep On Keepin' On*. In many ways, the pandemic was a forced pause that helped him recalibrate and get back to basics.

"The movie came out, which really helped exposure and allowed me ... to book gigs in Europe. That was exciting, but I just wasn't in the right place; I couldn't really enjoy it. And having the break allowed me to be like, no, that's definitely *not* how it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to enjoy this," Kauflin said. "[I'm] going to take the time to fall in love with the thing that I'm doing again."

In this way, *Live At Sam First* marks a new phase for Kauflin, as he tapped old friends, bassist David Robaire and drummer Mark Ferber. Recorded at the club Sam First Jazz in Los Angeles, the project came to fruition after Robaire, a producer for the Sam First Label, approached Kauflin to perform a streamed concert during the pandemic. From there, Kauflin was asked to do this live album, which they

recorded in 2021.

While the set features almost all previously recorded material (except "Candy," a sweet tribute to Kauflin's guide dog who passed away in 2021), Kauflin's originals like "Coming Home" and "Country Fried" sound refreshed, reframed and uplifted, partly due to his easy headspace and approach to the new work, and based on his heavy listening of symphonies during the pandemic.

With the flow of a symphony in mind, Kauflin brings the idea of four movements into the way he tracked and played the set at Sam First. This loose framework gives the album momentum as it climbs toward the climax, "No Matter," a bluesy ballad about "how life works out no matter what" from his 2015 debut *Dedication*.

"No Matter" is the third movement in a three-song series Kauflin wrote for *Dedication*, which chronicled the simultaneous discovery of jazz and his spirituality, the comedown from revelation and the remembrance of faith. This passionate connection to spirit comes out on other *Live At Sam First* tracks, including "Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing" and "Thank You Lord."

After the album is released, instead of touring, Kauflin is taking time to tend to his health. He'll also be composing for film and focusing on a new teaching job at his alma mater, Governor's School for the Performing Arts, which his mentor Terry would undoubtedly support.

"When I got in there, things really clicked, everything Clark had told me," Kauflin said. "I get to share what makes my life feel so enriched. Hopefully, it'll click for one of [my students] and they'll be able to turn to music the same way I did."

—Alexa Peters

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Fresh Sound at 40



Butch Miles

Charles J. "Butch" Miles, 1944–2023: Butch Miles, drummer best known for his work with the Count Basie Orchestra, passed away on Feb. 22 after a battle with cancer. He was 78. Miles was born in Ohio on July 4, 1944. He started on the snare drum at age 9 and began playing a full drum set at 14. He majored in music at West Virginia State University, graduating in 1966. Soon he landed a gig with the Iris Bell Trio. His first break was being hired as part of Mel Torme's combo in 1971. He joined the Basie band in 1975, later playing with Dave Brubeck, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Lena Horne, Joe Williams, Ella Fitzgerald and Woody Herman. He recorded more than 100 albums, three of them Grammy winners. In 2007, he became a faculty member at Texas State University.



Gretchen Carhartt Valade

Gretchen Carhartt Valade, 1925–2022: Gretchen Carhartt Valade, businesswoman and jazz philanthropist, passed away Dec. 30 at her home in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. She was 97. Known as the "Angel of Jazz," Valade will be remembered as a champion of the arts and culture around Detroit as well as a major force in the global jazz community. Valade founded Mack Avenue Records in 1999. In 2006, she endowed the Detroit Jazz Festival when it was in financial trouble to ensure it would be financially stable and remain free to attendees. She also donated to Wayne State University to fund the Gretchen C. Valade Jazz Center, a hall designed specifically for jazz performance. In 2008, she opened the Dirty Dog Jazz Café, a jazz and dinner club in Grosse Pointe.

FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT IS ENJOYING A pair of impressive anniversary celebrations. The original Fresh Sound label turns 40 later this year, while FSNT just reached its 30th birthday.

Both outlets were created by Jordi Pujol in Barcelona, who launched Fresh Sound in August 1983, initially concerned with reissuing his most treasured albums of the 1950s. Many of these had fallen out of catalog, existing only as deleted original vinyl. It was the sound of West Coast jazz that most captivated Pujol, and the urge was strong to make these old California vinyl classics available on compact disc. In 1984, Pujol made his first trip to Los Angeles, effectively in search of the Holy Grail. "When I first went to L.A., I was very young," he recalls. "It was my first trip. My English is still not good, but at that time it was even worse. It was difficult for me to be in contact with people, but I had good friends Dave Pell and Bob Keane that helped me a lot, introducing me to my idols Marty Paich, Bill Holman and Shorty Rogers."

Pujol recalls that around that time it was mostly the Japanese labels that were reissuing 1950s West Coast jazz classics (although Boplicity, a sub-label of Ace Records, was also busy exhuming LPs by Chet Baker, Shelly Manne, Curtis Counce, Buddy Collette and more in the mid-1980s in London). "To reissue those kind of records was my passion because many of them were not available since their first release."

Pujol got to know producers including Gene Norman, David Axelrod, Dick Bock, and Dootsie Williams, and made connections with Bethlehem Records. Pujol's father was also a jazz fan, so there was an abundance of Tommy Dorsey and Les Brown around the house as well as Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

Since that first jaunt, Pujol has tried to ensure that he returns to L.A. annually in search of the next wave of players. Even though Fresh Sound was primarily a reissue label, he recorded *The Dave Pell Octet Plays Again*, in a move that heralded the creation of New Talent in 1992. Pell was already a veteran saxophonist, but this new label outgrowth set out to produce original albums by emerging artists.

Fresh Sound New Talent elected to concentrate on rising stars, with many of its early acts now decidedly risen. The Bad Plus released its debut on FSNT, and Brad Mehldau recorded three discs before signing to Warner Bros. When Pujol also began stopping off in New York, he was hanging out in the early Smalls club, winking out players who were then bordering on the obscure.

"Sometimes you don't know why you start doing something in one way, or not. As soon as I started to meet musicians in L.A., I recorded them, all the [1950s] West Coast players who were still playing." Pujol also began recording in Barcelona as early as 1987, with multiple sessions



JOAN CARLES ABELANDA

Jordi Pujol has made it happen, little by little, for the past 40 years at Fresh Sound New Talent.

by pianist Tete Montoliu.

"I like things to happen little by little, coming naturally," Pujol said. "In the beginning there were very few records [on FSNT]. From '92 to '96, we made maybe 15 records. After '96 the label started to have a more regular production every year. Now we have almost 700 releases."

Pujol appreciates it when players interact with each other, a leader on one album becoming a side person on another, with differing line-up permutations. He's guided completely by his own taste, his instinct for fine performances. Pujol recently discovered a particular London scene that impressed him, culminating in a specially commissioned album to celebrate three decades of New Talent. Saxophonist Alex Merritt (actually living in Bristol) was entrusted with the mission to build the Fresh Sound Ensemble, which includes fellow saxophonist Alex Hitchcock, trumpeter Steve Fishwick and bassist Conor Chaplin in its 11-piece roster. The resultant album was *Common Threads*, released right at the end of 2022. Pujol had already brought out solo albums by many of the players involved, so he already knew where they stood musically.

The FSNT roster is highly diverse, with a surprising presence of some stylistically wide-ranging artists, including Ambrose Akinmusire, Kris Davis, Ari Hoenig, Gerald Cleaver, Bill McHenry, Logan Richardson and Kirk Knuffke. Some even more out-there favorites in the last decade include albums by Mara Rosenbloom, Jesse Stacken and Peter van Huffel's Boom Crane. More recent winners include discs by Spanish drummer Iago Fernández (*Luzada*) and South Korean bassist Jeong Lim Yang (*Zodiac Suite: Reassured*).

Whatever the sound, Pujol remains a dynamic crusader in modern music as well as a dedicated preserver of old, swingin' California beach party soundtracks.

—Martin Longley



At 65, Branker feels he is just coming into his own as a composer.

Anthony Branker Explores Sense of Place

WHILE THE TRAJECTORY OF A JAZZ MUSICIAN'S career often follows a somewhat logical arc, others take more complex and evolving paths. The latter has been the fate — mostly self-designed — of Dr. Anthony Branker, whose latest album is one of his most ambitious projects. *What Place Can Be For Us? A Suite In Ten Movements* is a sweeping opus with sociopolitical and poetic content woven into a musical tapestry — with his band Imagine — which manages to be at once cerebral, emotive and viscerally exciting.

The project, Branker's eighth album for Origin Records, is imbued with the wisdom earned and musical lessons learned in his life as a veteran educator (currently at Rutgers, after retiring from Princeton), as a respected conductor for music by Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard and Duke Ellington, and a composer/conceptualist. His powers in and commitment to that role grew dramatically after catastrophic health issues more-or-less ended his life as a trumpeter in 1999. The long, dedicated road has led Branker to this point, and he professes to be as creatively engaged and forward-thinking as ever.

At 65, he asserts, "I feel as though I am just beginning to come into my own as a composer, so I just want to keep writing, learning, growing and sharing."

As for the story, or matrix of stories, told in his new suite, Branker explains that "the actual commitment to write this suite came after a period of seeing some incredibly disturbing images on television of the horrific suffering the citizens of Syria were experiencing during the country's ongoing civil war. This was when many were seeking refuge in a number of countries. Interestingly, though, I had been thinking about a number of issues associated with the concept of 'place,' such as what does place mean or represent, and how it is a universal concept that

all of us can relate to on some level.

"With all of this swirling around in my mind, I was driven to develop this extended work, which would allow me to offer my own creative responses to a number of historical and social occurrences. I could begin to unpack such overarching issues as inclusion and belonging while also addressing what I have described as circumstances of exploitation and zones of refuge experienced by people of color and other global citizens."

As Branker says, working in the broader canvas and modular strategy of creating a suite, versus discrete "tunes," has been an awakening process for him as a composer. He recalls the influence of a BMI Jazz Composers Workshop in the early 1990s, with innovative big band leaders Jim McNeely and Manny Albam, and McNeely's narrative vision of writing "with characters and episodes unfolding and developing time as part of the flow of a piece. It has been an eye-opening experience to embrace this kind of organizational thinking because I can approach the writing process in a more open, organic and episodic way. I could now start to consider things more like a visual artist would or a filmmaker who is imagining flow in more cinematic terms."

Fittingly, the suite's journey opens with "Door Of No Return," a reference to a slave trade shipping "place" in Senegal, with vocalist Alison Crockett intoning text by Brazilian writer Beatrice Ezmer. Crockett returns on the turf of Harlem Renaissance poet laureate Langston Hughes' "I, Too."

Branker is quick to point out that the suite and its mutable definition of "place" relates to other oppressive geographic and ethnic conditions around the world. "Clearly," he comments, "we recognize that the voice Langston Hughes speaks through in his poem used in the movement 'I, Too, Sing America' is the voice of the African American community. However, if we

listen carefully, it will become clear that it can also be the voice of members of other disregarded groups within this country that clearly have the right to intone the words, 'I, Too, Am America.'"

In the instrumental component, driving yet sophisticated meshes of scored material slalom through themes, via a vibrant band including saxophonist Walter Smith III, trumpeter Remy le Beouf and guitarist Pete McCann. In some of the faster, more rhythmically intricate pieces in the suite, it's natural to detect qualities of the M-BASE movement, spearheaded by Steve Coleman, Greg Osby and others starting in 1980s Brooklyn. Although claiming no direct influence, Branker says, "I have probably been influenced by a lot of the same kinds of approaches and musical vibes that have inspired their way of knowing, experiencing, creating and communicating music. I am very moved by what I hear and the musical relationships that exist and evolve within these rhythmically complex and engaging compositions and improvisations. The work of M-BASE is crazy amazing."

Branker's musical lineage, as a first-generation American with parents from Trinidad and Barbados, includes Uncle Rupert, a music director and pianist with the Platters, and Uncle Roy, who wrote with Billy Strayhorn when both were with the Copasetics. Among the musical highlights in Branker's own career are a discography of a dozen-plus recordings and a role leading the Spirit of Life Ensemble, the regular Monday night band at Sweet Basil, the legendary Greenwich Village club of yore.

A critical juncture in Branker's musical focus occurred in 1999, when he had a stroke during a big band rehearsal at Princeton. Two brain aneurysms and the discovery of AVM (arteriovenous malformation, the affliction from which guitarist Pat Martino suffered) guided him into writing, conceptualizing and conducting.

In his philosophy as a composer of jazz (however loosely defined), Branker points out that "the 'self' is always in relation to 'other,' and understanding that relationship as it occurs in a one-on-one situation or group setting and what happens when that becomes a main factor whether in a jazz group or in a classroom."

As to his group Imagine, "This, for me as a composer, is infinitely more interesting and satisfying because the relationship between a composer and the performers can now be more collaborative and less heavy-handed from the perspective that a composer might have more of a tendency to want to dictate how a composition is 'supposed to be played.'"

Nearly a quarter century after his health crisis, Branker asserts, "I have grown quite a bit in my conceptual thinking, but I'm always trying to find new ways to continue this forward progress. There is so much that inspires me as a composer and I feel so incredibly energized and driven right now."

—Josef Woodard



STEINWAY

The *Formation* of BRAD MEHLDAU

By Ted Panken Photo by Steve Sussman

At the tail end of 2022, Brad Mehldau took advantage of a New York sojourn to play piano with old friends at Smalls Jazz Club, the now-iconic room he opened in April of 1994 with guitarist Peter Bernstein, bassist Omer Avital and drummer Andy Watson.

In late December, he performed as a sideman with Bernstein — a close friend since their days at the New School during the late 1980s — in a quartet with bassist Vicente Archer and drummer Joe Farnsworth. Ten days earlier, Mehldau joined Farnsworth and bassist Peter Washington for another sideman date at the club. All six sets, viewed by 20,000 YouTubers and counting, were intensely swinging affairs, focusing on slightly less traveled bebop, hard-bop and American Songbook gems rendered on their own terms of engagement.

Last year Mehldau, 52, also toured internationally with Joshua Redman, Christian McBride and Brian Blade — all up-and-comers when they recorded Redman's influential 1994 album *Moodswing* (Warner) — behind

the summer release of the Redman-led *Long Gone* and its 2020 predecessor, *Round Again* (both on Nonesuch).

And in March 2021, in Amsterdam, his primary residence over the last decade, he led a quartet with Dutch virtuosos Joris Roelofs on bass clarinet and Clemens van der Feen on bass and Catalan drummer Jorge Rossy. Rossy served as Mehldau's partner on five *Art of the Trio* albums — recordings that fueled the pianist's ascension to international prominence by age 30. The pared-to-essence flow propelled an interactive set postulating fresh, intriguing perspectives on repertoire Mehldau has frequently played with his second working trio (with Larry Grenadier and Jeff Ballard) since they formed in 2005.



"The more condensed tune-offering may be a part of aging — wanting to not waste time," Mehldau says of keeping songs short on his latest live recording, *Your Mother Should Know*.

"With Larry and Jorge and Jeff, there was a continuity and, of course, comfort — even as we grew together and, I like to think, moved the music forward in our own neck of the woods," Mehldau observed via email. "But my earlier roots are with [the aforementioned musicians], and when I go back to play them, I find something striking — it is familiar and wonderful, but it is not my comfort zone anymore. Joe plays drums very differently than Jeff. He spars with me more directly, sometimes in the older tradition of Art Blakey — 'dropping some bombs,' as they say. It's exciting but can throw me off, as Joe did when I played with him in the early 1990s. It keeps me on my toes, and realigns my perspective, which for almost half a lifetime is primarily being a leader. With Joe and Peter, I was not a leader. They were not on my turf any more than I was on theirs. We were having a spontaneous conversation. I was in my head a lot, which I accept. It's telling me something about myself. It's an opportunity for growth and further self-knowledge. It gets me out of a fixed story of who I am as a musician."

Mehldau's abiding determination to avoid "a fixed story" is palpable on his recent Nonesuch-Warner release, *Your Mother Should Know*, which dropped in February and contains 10 Beatles songs performed solo in September 2020 at the Paris Philharmonie. As when this

writer heard Mehldau play solo last March in Bergamo, the interpretations are mostly pithy, less discursive than the comprehensive 2015 release *10 Years Solo Live*, comprising 19 selections culled from European concerts between 2004 and 2014 (among them, a 16-minute rumination on "And I Love Her") or, for that matter, the 2018 release *After Bach*, also from a Paris Philharmonie concert where Mehldau refracted works from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* into springboards for recomposition and improvisation. (He's currently working on a similarly schemed project that pairs his compositions with the music of Gabriel Fauré.)

"I consider this, in a way, a companion to the solo record I did right before this in lockdown," Mehldau asserted, referencing *Suite: April 2020*, on which none of the 15 tracks exceed four minutes. "For whatever reason, with all the time on my hands to play, I made things short in a way I never had done previously. In truth, I've always wanted to do it. It's some kind of shift; whether it's temporary or long-term, I don't know yet. When I played solo in September at the Village Vanguard, set lists ran upwards of 14 tunes per set, versus the seven or so I've done for a long time in solo performances. The more condensed tune-offering may be a part of aging — wanting to not waste time."

Asked if a different consciousness is at play

interpreting the works of McCartney, Lennon and Harrison than compositions by Bach, Monk, Jimmy Heath or Cole Porter, Mehldau responded affirmatively, but noted "common elements that often are in the harmony, which, in a different but no less powerful way than more overt melody, gives a composer their calling card. Just about everyone will overlap with Bach, because he is a container for so much harmony. When you make those connections, you can actually free yourself from the genre a bit: If something in 'Blackbird' reminds me of Bach, why not let Bach's own keyboard writing inform the approach? If something in Paul [McCartney]'s writing, like 'Maxwell's Silver Hammer,' reminds me of Monk, it's an invitation to approach it more like a Monk tune, which is a bit what I did on this record."

"Mostly I adhered to the original, and much of what contributed to the final product was to slim it down to a piano arrangement. The exceptions were an extended rumination at the end of 'Maxwell's Silver Hammer,' a stretched-out series of amen cadences at the end of 'Golden Slumbers' and a radically slower tempo on 'Baby's In Black' as well as an extended ending, where I came up with a new harmonic progression that became an extended 'outro.' I've taken that approach with solo for a while now — going to another place after the tune is done,

like a very long tag. I sometimes wished I had a crack at these songs in the studio, because I didn't quite 'hit' any number of little details — things I wanted to honor in the original Beatles orchestration, but lapsed on. I'm sure some folks will hear a few melody snafus on a close listening. That's the nature of a live recording. I've been having fun playing a lot of these live, so I can redeem myself for those errors."

Mehldau takes full advantage of studio

lished memoir, *Formation: Building A Personal Canon, Part 1* (Equinox Press). It's an unflinching account of his turbulent first quarter-century, recounting and intersectionally contextualizing, in searing, transparent detail, the circumstances that framed the establishment of the musical relationships and tonal personality that he has elaborated and refined ever since.

In the process of "saying goodbye" to his story "as a path to healing," Mehldau applies

'Perhaps that's a key to what makes me tick — a very strong curiosity, which makes me a perpetual fanboy of whatever I'm discovering.'

resources on the March 2022 release *Jacob's Ladder* and 2018's *Finding Gabriel*. Both are phantasmagoric cross-genre epics, with eschatological intention, a broad sonic and beat palette, lots of keyboards (on three tracks on the former date he functions as a multitracked one-man band), many beautiful voices and an attitude privileging compositional and ensemble imperatives over improvisational impulses. On *Jacob's Ladder*, made during the latter stages of lockdown, Mehldau incorporates prog gestures, electronica, classical piano, lieder, spoken Biblical text and wordless vocals deployed as discrete instruments with distinctive timbral properties. On *Finding Gabriel*, gestated midway through the Trump presidency, he more explicitly references Old Testament prophecy and wisdom (Daniel and Hosea, the Psalms, and the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes), endeavoring to transmute Biblical study into, as he writes in the program notes, "a corollary and perhaps a guide to the present day — one long nightmare or a signpost leading to potential gnosis, depending on how you read it."

"*Jacob's Ladder* is my most personal, biggest record, but I can't sense the impact it might have on other people the way I have with other records," Mehldau said. "I could tell *Finding Gabriel* had hit people. But *Jacob's Ladder* might be too strange. I can say that it's a crisis record. To give a one-word description, it was a breakdown. It's all there — the descent, the way through and the way out. I made it as I was going through it."

Mehldau hadn't unpacked this recent episode sufficiently to discuss it, but termed the experience his most difficult journey since the formative years he addresses in his just-pub-

lished memoir, *Formation: Building A Personal Canon, Part 1* (Equinox Press). It's an unflinching account of his turbulent first quarter-century, recounting and intersectionally contextualizing, in searing, transparent detail, the circumstances that framed the establishment of the musical relationships and tonal personality that he has elaborated and refined ever since. In the process of "saying goodbye" to his story "as a path to healing," Mehldau applies a dictum of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Mehldau is a practitioner of his Plum Village tradition) that "literature and music 'inter-are.'" He models the text on the German bildungsromans of Goethe and Hesse — "a book that traces the life of a young person up to the point when they reach a provisional maturity, and ends there." He mashes up literary genres — transgressive fiction, confessional autobiography, critical theory, social history, music criticism — with the interdisciplinary fluidity that he applies to his admixed narratives in notes and tones. There are painstakingly detailed descriptions of childhood trauma, his early musical training, his drug dependency — escalating from cannabis as "a daily coping mechanism that got me through high school" to the heroin addiction that consumed him during the mid-1990s — and his "fluid sexuality." He maps with sociological rigor — and an ironic touch — the layers of his various school communities in West Hartford, Connecticut, and "the New York jazz scene as I experienced it with a group of peers from roughly 1988 to 1994," showing us tribal alignments; his position within them; the psychological and material circumstances influencing the protagonists he interacts with and his own motivations within those interactions.

Perhaps this encapsulation sounds pedantic and heavy-handed; Mehldau's prose is anything but. In tracing the twists and turns that shaped the canon that has helped shape the sound of 21st century jazz, he presents compelling tangents: nuanced riffs on how German philosophy and Marxian-Freudian literary theory infuse his aesthetics — for example, "the crushing sublime" in relation to the musics of

John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix and Lee Morgan. With vivid, microscopic detail, he portrays the respective scenes at New York rooms like Augie's, Bradley's, the Top of the Gate; the rituals attendant to drug use or a random hook-up; a harrowing episode of sexual abuse from a high school principal; his relations with the GenX jazz factions ("bebop Nazis," "goons" and "straddlers") he intersected with during apprentice years. He mentions piano classic solos without which "I wouldn't be who I am" — piano solos like McCoy Tyner's on "Chain Reaction" with Hank Mobley, Wynton Kelly's on "No Blues" with Wes Montgomery, Bobby Timmons' on "Spontaneous Combustion" with Cannonball Adderley. And he explains why they were so important.

Mehldau's preferred way to communicate for this article was through emailed responses to DownBeat's questions, which he composed while preparing for an end-of-January week at the Village Vanguard where he debuted a new quintet with Dayna Stephens, Josh Evans, McBride and Farnsworth. His words were equally eloquent as those in *Formation*.

"My favorite jazz musicians, like Miles, are storytellers first and foremost, and many of my records are informed by more overt narrative devices in literature," he said. "Joyce's *Ulysses* was a big model for *Elegiac Cycle* and *Places*, for example. Narrative implies a lot of things, but one big one is form. Form is first and foremost an expressive device — it gives the content meaning. There is a sense of journey, of departing and arriving, of time passing. Although I don't address it in the book, the other influence in this narrative/formal sense is cinema. One reason why this book languished on a hard drive for a good 15 years is because I could not find the form/story — I had a lot of the material, but it had no frame until about three years ago. What it is finally is only one-third or so of that writing.

"I wanted to tell a story and then drop that story once and for all," he explained. "That is a paradox, but I'm happy to say it's worked to a degree — I no longer feel burdened by this younger identity I write about. My actual trauma was more of a perfect storm: the depression I've grappled with my whole life, unquestioned answers about my origins in terms of my adoption, insecurity about homosexual feelings that was much more prevalent in that time, and then, the actual negative, abusive sexual experiences, which added another level of shame, and, I learned later, repressed anger. The anger was then reinforced by the depression that was always rearing its head, and they fed off of each other. Then you get stuck in this persona where the experiences have already happened but you keep reliving them. It's that story you need to drop. It's the story of a victim. Anyhow, when you add up the whole mix, it was too much for



"When I began getting some recognition as a musician, there were a lot of questions about drug use," Mehl dau says of writing about addiction for his new book. "I was defensive."

me, and I needed to medicate it somehow.

"For a long time, I was reluctant to talk about what happened to me in high school. I had friends who had worse childhood and adolescent experiences on the face of it — physical abuse, neglect, outright rape. I felt I should just shut up about what happened to me, or downplay it as a joke.

"When the #MeToo movement began, I was emboldened and inspired by other people coming forward with honesty and courage. I thought perhaps there was a way to show how healing could take place for people who had similar traumatic experiences as mine — particularly other men.

"One tacit theme I wanted to communicate is the spiritual principle of non-differentiation I've found in Buddhist teaching. Suffering is holy. That means to me that the trauma you experience is your own holy moment, because it contains the path towards salvation. The grace is there within you already. That holy kind of suffering is yours, and yours alone. It makes you

who you are. You can't split it off from the stuff you like about yourself, the stuff that works — and you don't need to. You can draw from it the rest of your life as a musician. The whole process is beautifully mysterious and sacred. Every part of you has unfathomable beauty, even the infinite sadness you may face. That's where I find my faith. For me as a musician that's meant traumatic experiences are just as rich — often richer — to draw from as a musician as positive, joyful ones.

"When I began getting some recognition as a musician, there were a lot of questions about drug use. I was defensive. I felt they played into clichés about drugs and musicians — jazz musicians in particular. There are reasons why some of my greatest musical heroes stuck a needle in their arm; it was their trauma, or an affliction that already lived inside them. That is both tragic and sacred. We shouldn't talk flippantly of it, and we should be careful speculating on it if we weren't the ones who lived it. To make some flimsy causal connection is an insult to

the music and to those musicians. Now in writing this book, I feel I can give my own past drug abuse a broader context, and explain why it happened, just as much to myself as to the reader. It is an act of self-forgiving. During those defensive years at the beginning of my career after getting clean, it wasn't just that I wanted to tell my own story and not have someone else trivialize it. I didn't yet know what that story was. It took half a lifetime to get the story right, tell it, and finally begin to let it go."

Mehl dau also discussed the interface between writing and playing music. "I was a big reader from an early age, but didn't write that much until my 20s. The first things were some of my liner notes for the earlier *Art of the Trio* records. I wasn't as good a writer as a musician; I'm still not, and probably never will be. But there was something there — a certain ability to synthesize ideas I was collecting from literature, maybe something similar to what I can do in music.

"It strikes me that I was trying to sound smart in some of that earlier writing, and I hope I've managed to steadily excise that quality. The genuine freedom from the ego I find in making music I do not find in writing with words. There is a flow and a zone you get into undoubtedly, but it is always mediated by a self-appraisal in real time — 'That came out well and had an economy of words ... this sounds too stuffy, too overwrought ...,' etc. The white heat of improvisation leaves no time for that inner discourse.

"In this regard there is still an unresolved question for me about writing versus music-making: Can you ever be truly vulnerable as a writer? Even when you are revealing your warts to the reader, aren't you still controlling what you put on the page? In an improvised musical medium, sometimes you fall on your ass in front of an audience, and in that moment, something opens up inadvertently with its own fragile grace. I tried to explain a redemptive vulnerability in the musical sphere that I value in some of the greats in the chapter 'Dragon Music.'"

Mehl dau's soliloquies touched on many things, one being his self-assessment of his accomplishment and his impact.

"I don't like to make assumptions about my influence on others," he prefaced. "I would like to think, though, that I have offered a model of assimilation. The gift I perceive in myself is an ease in bringing together musical streams that may seem disparate — German Romanticism, hard-bop, singer-songwriters, prog and the like. Henry James referred to 'the blessed faculty of wonder.' He meant that curiosity, in itself, is a kind of gift. We all have it, but perhaps that's a key to what makes me tick — a very strong curiosity, which makes me a perpetual fanboy of whatever I'm discovering."

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MENDOZA

Sunset Boulevard begins its 21-mile journey at Figueroa Street in downtown Los Angeles, curving northward as it skirts the edge of Dodger Stadium and Silverlake, extending west through Hollywood and Beverly Hills. Moving past UCLA in Westwood into Brentwood, the bustling city scenes spin away from a shady, looping road dotted with homes growing exponentially in size and value.

Finally, the vast ocean reveals itself, where the golden sun gleams off the water onto the town of Pacific Palisades, an idyllic place that might have been quaint before it became sumptuous.

Vince Mendoza told me he moved his family into this neighborhood more than 20 years ago, joking that waiting another 10 minutes might have put the price of the home we were sitting in out

of reach for good. It was built in 1947, elegant but increasingly dwarfed over time by the mini-mansions that have replaced many of the other structures in his neighborhood. “I’m just kind of getting to appreciate the history of the house and what it represented, and what this neighborhood used to be like,” he said. “You know, the Palisades were called ‘the Weimar of the West.’ There were a lot of European expatriates who came here to live.”



Vince Mendoza has collaborated with Metropole Orkest for the past 28 years and served as its principal conductor from 2005 to 2013.



Olympians features selected works Mendoza has composed and performed with the Amsterdam-based orchestra over the years.

Mendoza's path in music has traced a similar route as the boulevard that leads to his home — journeying west on a winding road to a destination bathed in warmth and success, created in part by those from old Europe. Though the seven-time Grammy winner lives a literal stone's throw from the Pacific, much of Mendoza's accomplishments have happened across the Atlantic, most notably in the Netherlands, home to the highly regarded Metropole Orkest, with which Mendoza has collaborated for the past 28 years and served as its principal conductor from 2005 to 2013. Under his watch, Metropole became what it is now: the premiere jazz orchestra in the world, a European luxury vehicle taken for a spin by some of jazz's brightest stars, including Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny, Robert Glasper and Snarky Puppy. Mendoza and the orchestra have reunited in a grand retrospective of their relationship together with *Olympians* (Modern), featuring selected works Mendoza wrote and performed with the group over the years.

Mendoza, 61, first arrived in Los Angeles in 1983 — journeying westward from his birthplace of Norwalk, Connecticut, via Columbus, Ohio, where he went to college at The Ohio State University — for graduate school at the University of Southern California. He had, at the time, dual aspirations of becoming a film composer and a studio trumpet player. “Those aspirations were dashed almost immediately upon arrival,” he said ruefully. He initially did some work for television, but found himself drawn to writing music for jazz musicians. “It’s

all kind of one big pot of [television and film] composers that are vying for the same projects, but they don’t mix, generally, with the concert composers and the jazz musicians,” Mendoza explained. “It was fortunate that I found the opportunity to develop my voice as a jazz composer . . . I think [that] would have definitely been compromised had I pursued the media music any further than I did.”

An exception would be the arranging and conducting Mendoza did for the singer and composer Björk, who turned to him for the 2001 film *Dancer in the Dark* and her album *Vespertine* (Elektra) from the same year. At the time, Mendoza was also working with another iconic pop singer, Joni Mitchell, on her landmark orchestral albums *Both Sides Now* (Reprise, 2000) and *Travelogue* (Nonesuch, 2002). Though these two artists traverse entirely different universes of sound and style, Mendoza was able to flesh out similar themes of mystique and wonder they both share.

Mitchell and Björk are two examples of Mendoza's uncanny ability to enhance a well-known voice, also doing so with the likes of Elvis Costello, Melody Gardot, Al Jarreau, Gregory Porter, Luciana Souza and even Sting. On *Olympians*, a new treatment of one of Mendoza's most beloved compositions, “Esperanto,” features another acclaimed vocalist, Dianne Reeves, who has collaborated with Mendoza since the early 2000s, most recently at a concert in her hometown of Denver, Colorado.

“Anytime I work with him, I enjoy it

because you know he really, really listens,” Reeves said by phone from Denver, where she still lives. “The way that he conducts . . . I feel that [I] and the orchestra are one. . . . He’ll be right there to support whatever the read of the song is for that day, and it’s exciting when you have somebody who conducts in that way.” Reeves sings lyrics to “Esperanto,” words written by Kurt Elling, who drew loosely from Pablo Neruda's *The Book of Questions* for his own litany of queries set to the tune's syncopated, odd-metered chorus.

“The lyrics really gave a new birth to that melody by framing it in a beautiful story,” Mendoza said. “Dianne’s rendition is really about a very wise person giving us comfort and a life lesson, and when Dianne delivers a lyric, you really sit up and listen.”

Reeves was mutually inspired by the song. “It mirrors a lot of Vince’s music to me,” she said. “There’s so much mystery in his own writing.”

Befitting Neruda's native tongue, “Esperanto” is the Spanish translation of “Esperança,” the Brazilian-Portuguese word for “hope” and the original title of Mendoza's tune, which he wrote in the 1990s. “During those years, I spent a fair amount of time as a tunesmith, coming up with compositions that would interest instrumentalists who were making recordings,” he said. Mendoza had originally intended “Esperança” for the Yellowjackets, but it was drummer Peter Erskine who took a liking to it for his trio with pianist John Taylor and bassist Palle Danielson on the 1996 ECM album *As It Is*. Erskine, in an aside during an

interview for DownBeat, alluded to his time in guitarist John Abercrombie's trio with bassist Marc Johnson as instructive for how to play with greater attention to the sonic choices one could make, something Erskine brought into his own ethereal piano trio. Mendoza played synths in a trio with the late Abercrombie and drummer Jon Christensen on 1990's *Animato* (ECM), and there is a through-line from all these aforementioned trios to Mendoza's aesthetic of mysterious beauty. "John's sense of lyricism and space for me was very influential as a composer and still is," he said of Abercrombie. "In orchestrations and how I feel about lyricism and leaving space for improvisers, and a lot of that comes from John's sensibility."

Other hallmarks of Mendoza's sound: sudden modulations, asymmetrical phrases, unusual and unpredictable syncopations — he attributes directly to the music and mentorship of Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul. "With regard to Joe," he said, "his way of assembling a structure based on an improvisation and then scrambling it to tell a different type of a story, and the mystery and the sense of expectation that comes from that, has always been interesting to me." Mendoza was once quoted as saying Zawinul and Igor Stravinsky "have more in common that you think." When asked about that he said, "I think that they both had a very

modular sense of structure ... A lot of the times the first idea will inspire the second one, [and that] will inspire the third one, and Joe definitely worked that way. He was much more modular in his sense of structure than, you know, Brahms." (Also, Stravinsky and Zawinul were both Europeans who resettled in Los Angeles, the latter residing in Pacific Palisades near Mendoza's home.)

Mendoza first worked with Zawinul soon after his graduate work at USC, beginning a relationship that culminated in 2005, when Mendoza arranged and conducted another European jazz ensemble, the WDR Big Band of Cologne, Germany, behind Zawinul for a live concert album, *Brown Street* (Heads Up International). They had plans to bring Zawinul to Metropole Orkest, but he passed away before they got the chance. Metropole Orkest ended up recording Mendoza's arrangements for Zawinul in a live tribute concert album, 2010's *Fast City* (BHM).

Despite all his progressive innovation on keyboards, Zawinul's voicings on synthesizer hearkened back to an earlier time. Mendoza said a friend told him, "Joe was a big band, and I think that was true ... He wanted the sound of that, so in a way it was easily transformed for a big band, but then you have a dilemma to contend with because when you hear those struc-

tures replicated for a big band you're already transformed to 1938." He continued, "The challenge was to take those voicings and write it for a big band without automatically generating this historical reference to so many years ago that I think would have been abhorrent to Joe, with his sense of looking forward."

Looking forward is as critically important to Mendoza as it would be for any other jazz musician. He seeks to innovate as a composer, arranger and orchestrator. "It may be a little bit more of what Wayne [Shorter] was talking about with regard to his mission that there would be an improvisational approach to composition, that each idea would inspire the next idea," he said. The incorporation of a jazz-centric viewpoint into a classical orchestral arena is also what makes Metropole Orkest unique. "I think that's one of the reasons that Metropole, in particular, and I had a relationship ... They knew that I had experience and a point of view of classical music as well as the jazz nomenclature, so it was important for me to be able to translate all of that into practice," he said. "How do we really play these rhythms with a string instrument, and how is the string orchestra relating to a rhythm section in a meaningful way?"

Mendoza was discovering answers to these questions with the release of his seventh solo

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'There's so much mystery in his own writing.'

—Dianne Reeves on Vince Mendoza

album, 1997's *Epiphany* (Zebra Acoustic), the first of his own to fully utilize a string ensemble — in this case, the London Symphony Orchestra. Mendoza imported many of his musical friends and heroes to the U.K. for the session: Erskine, guitarists Abercrombie and

John Scofield, saxophonists Michael Brecker and Joe Lovano, bassist Johnson, along with pianist (and native Briton) John Taylor and trumpeter Kenny Wheeler. The groundbreaking album created the gold standard for what a symphonic jazz orchestra could sound like.

And yet by then, Mendoza had already begun collaborating with Metropole Orkest, honing his writing and conducting for such a vehicle. "The orchestra of was born out of the ashes of World War II in 1945," said Mendoza, recounting the history of Metropole. "They were working for different radio stations doing different types of projects, and they were looked at really as a light music orchestra for radio broadcasts." With each successive conductor, the orchestra adapted to the identity of its leader, becoming more of a studio film orchestra in the '80s under Rogier van Otterloo, and a pops orchestra in the '90s with Dick Bakker. By the time Mendoza had agreed in 2005 to become only the fourth principal conductor in its history, he had already established a decade-long rapport with the group as a guest conductor and arranger, ultimately and fully imbibing the orchestra with his jazz sensibilities.

And that attracted jazz musicians to the orchestra. Guitarist Peter Tiehuis had been in Metropole Orkest prior to Mendoza's first appearances. He had moved on, but as a fan of Mendoza's music, he decided to rejoin in 1995 on a trial basis for a year. "The first time, [Mendoza] came with Bob Mintzer, and I think the second project was with Mike Stern," Tiehuis recalled, speaking by phone from Amsterdam. "Those were my heroes, and I

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realized I could play with those people.” He has remained ever since. “One of the finest guitarists in the world — he’s incredible,” Mendoza gushed. Tiehuis’ guitar work is featured on the rock-driven anthem “Big Night.”

Tiehuis, pianist Hans Vroomans, alto saxophonists Marc Scholten and Paul van der Feen, tenor saxophonist Leo Janssen, trumpeter Rik Mol and drummer (as well as co-producer) Martijn Vink form the core of jazz artists in Metropole who are showcased alongside numerous all-stars brought in for *Olympians*. In addition to Reeves, vocalist Cécile McLoren-Salvant makes a memorable appearance on “House Of Reflections,” a haunting ballad written years ago by Mendoza, with lyrics added in 2014 by Norma Winstone, who co-led the group Azimuth with Kenny Wheeler and pianist (and then-husband) John Taylor. Winstone wrote those words to sing at Wheeler’s memorial. As both Winstone and Taylor have also since passed on, this orchestral debut could be a requiem to all three artists and friends of Mendoza.

Saxophonist Chris Potter unleashes a blistering solo on “Barcelona,” which, like “Esperanto,” was both performed by Metropole Orkest and can be heard on *Epiphany*, where the solo was played by Brecker. “It was a bit of, you know, large shoes to step into for that solo,” Mendoza conceded, “but the environment around that solo is totally different, and [Potter] really approached it from a very powerful place.”

Alto saxophonist David Binney has his own incandescent moment on the whirlwind piece “Lake Fire.” Mendoza had utilized Binney’s sound and talent years ago with Metropole, and they reacquainted after Binney relocated to Southern California in 2016 and started playing around town with a quartet of young musicians that included Mendoza’s son, Luca. (The junior Mendoza shared the stage with his father for the first time last fall, a concert at the Ford featuring Luciana Souza.)

Percussionist Alex Acuña and the late charango player Ramon Stagnaro are featured on the album’s opening track, “Quixote,” adding folkloric authenticity to the Spanish and South American rhythms Mendoza arranged for symphonic orchestra. It was originally commissioned by the Henry Mancini Institute, the former Los Angeles educational organization that sponsored workshops to help young orchestral and jazz musicians understand and appreciate each other’s music through direct collaboration. Mendoza, who now teaches jazz composition and arranging at his alma mater USC, had an outsized role to play there as well. “You know, I hear quite often from the musicians out there that they started and got interested in playing jazz and working with rhythm sections from that Mancini Institute,” he remarked. “And so now, I’d like to think that

that being in [a hybrid jazz-classical] ensemble like that would be a goal of a younger musician the way it is for younger musicians to step into the Metropole.” (In fact, a former attendee of the Mancini Institute, Jules Buckley, went on to succeed Mendoza in 2013 as the current principal director of Metropole Orkest.)

Knowing that younger musicians are now looking to organizations like Metropole as a career goal is just one of many positive outcomes Mendoza has realized during his tenure. “From the first moment I was on the podium with them,” he said, “I felt that we had a connection, and I really appreciated their enthusiasm

and friendly way of working together. We were developing unusual language, and when we had projects that were challenging in terms of stylistic variations — music in different countries or different eras of jazz or whatever — they were always very open to my suggestions of how we could get there. As a result, over the years we’ve been together, they’ve developed a wide palette of possibilities of styles and colors that are very comfortable to them, which makes them really the perfect orchestra to play my music.”

And they continue to do so with power and grace, like Olympic athletes running along a boulevard off into an ocean-framed sunset. **DB**

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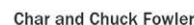
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SHAREL CASSITY FINDS COMFORT

BY FRANK ALKYER PHOTOS BY MICHAEL JACKSON

There's a zen-like drive to alto saxophonist Sharel Cassity that's undeniable — über calm on the exterior, but burning inside.

Whether leading her own groups, or working as an in-demand side woman for everyone from the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band to legends like Herbie Hancock, Wynton Marsalis, Jimmy Heath, Roy Hargrove and so many more, Cassity brings that fire, an open set of ears and a willingness to foster musical community.

Based in the Chicago area since 2017, she's carved out an artist's life, gigging around town with groups like Altoizm, an saxophone-driven summit led by Cassity and fellow alto saxophonists Rajim Halim and Greg Ward, touring the globe or teaching the next generation at DePaul University and Columbia College Chicago.

She sat down for a live interview with DownBeat in December at the Midwest Clinic, a gathering of some 20,000 music educators and students in Chicago. The free-flowing conversation with Frank Alkyer, DownBeat's editor and publisher, offers just a glimpse into Cassity's world as artist, educator and mother. This transcript has been edited to its essence for reasons of style and space.

Frank Alkyer: Let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

Sharel Cassity: I was born in Iowa City [Iowa]. But six months later, we moved, and throughout my childhood I ended up moving 13 different times.

My parents divorced when I was 3. And my father was the musician. He had played in New Orleans for 10 years, six nights a week before they moved to Iowa. It was three months before I was born. They moved to Iowa so that he could get his doctorate at Slippery Rock [University].

Alkyer: He's a pianist, keyboardist and he played some organ, I think.

Cassity: Yeah, absolutely. And I grew up hearing that. I grew up seeing him play in organ trios. There are pictures of me as a baby on his organ while he was practicing. I grew up hearing the music. I loved it. I didn't quite know what it was. But I also was exposed to a lot of classical music, which I think the goal was to push me that way.

Alkyer: Your dad was pushing you in that direction.

Cassity: Everybody. It's more fitting, I guess. So I started piano at 6. When I would visit him in the summers, he gave me a practice schedule that was literally four hours to six hours a day. And I would practice piano. So everyone thought that I was a prodigy. I was winning all these classical piano competitions. But, really, I just practiced.

Alkyer: You were playing at a high level as a young kid, a high level as a pianist — winning competitions and things. How did you find the saxophone?

Cassity: I wanted to play an instrument. I don't know what gave me that idea. I was a kid. I don't know. I just want to play an instrument. I told my mom, "Hey, I want to play the flute." And she said, "You? Play the flute? You're too cool for that. You're gonna look like a pickle playing the flute, jammin' out."

Alkyer: No offense to the flutists in the audience!

Cassity: No offense! I play the flute now. But my mom was the catalyst. She said, "Keep thinking." She didn't say saxophone, but she said, "Keep thinking." And I went to see my dad, and I saw a saxophone player. And I was like, "I want that. I want one of those."

Alkyer: You turned down a classical [saxophone] scholarship to the University of North Texas. You looked at ...

Cassity: The University of Central Oklahoma. And at the time, I still had some responsibilities with my brother — helping my brother come home from school, and I was studying there, you know, practicing and playing at UCO, which was great. Brian Gorrell leads the program now. They have a nice jazz lab. It's a great program.

But I needed something more, I needed to get in a bigger pond. So I decided to go visit my aunt in Boston, and I enrolled at Berklee. But shortly after, George Garzone actually helped me audition for NEC. He heard me and he said, "You should audition." And I did. But the first day of school, they brought me into the office and — preface this with I hadn't seen my dad in 12 years; I hadn't seen him since I was 12, actually. And they called me into the office and said, "You can't have the scholarship. Your biological dad makes too much money. And you're you're not allowed to have this scholarship." So I dropped out of school, and I spent a year working at a bagel shop.

Alkyer: For all you young people out there that are working odd jobs, we've all done it.

Cassity: And then my best friend from Oklahoma, who was a drummer, David Bowen, moved to New York, and he said, "Sharel, you've got to come out here." So I made the trip. We went to see Branford [Marsalis] live. When I got off the bus, he took me down into Smalls. I met everybody. It was amazing. It was everything I had always wanted. I was like a kid in Candyland, meeting all of my heroes. So I stayed in New York for 16 years.

Actually, let's back up a bit. I wasn't in school. So I played at the jam sessions at Smalls. And Mitch [Borden] gave me \$20 a day, if I cleaned up and locked up afterward. I practiced in Smalls. I was always moving from different places for different reasons. Finally, I decided to audition at the New School because a lot of my contemporaries were there that I would see come through the clubs.

And I went through New School, finished my bachelor's, and then I got the full scholarship to Juilliard. And that's when things started to take off. All the way through New School, I was a bartender.

Alkyer: Where did you bartend?

Cassity: Baltimore Lanes.

Alkyer: Good job?

Cassity: Great job!

Alkyer: We always hear about the competitiveness at Juilliard. Did you feel it?

Cassity: Yes, a little bit from the other students,



I knew Dizzy's music inside and out," Cassity said about playing in the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band. "That's what I grew up chasing."

but more because what I saw at Juilliard were students who were doted over. Their parents came to all the concerts. They were supported. I, at that time, when I moved to New York, my family was like, "Well, that's it. She's gone." And I didn't have any support.

So when I saw that, I sort of went through a breakdown, and I got some help and learned how to deal with it, which was probably the most valuable thing I received at Juilliard.

Alkyer: Wow. How did you get help? What did you do?

Cassity: I went to a psychologist, and I guess I said the right thing because they sent me to their top psychologist, who looked like Splinter [from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles] [chuckles], he had a white beard. And, you know, we did about a year-and-a-half of cognitive therapy. Some meds, but I got off of those just because I don't like meds. But, yeah, at the time it was warranted. And we talked about building a generator. Sometimes you have to build a generator of who you are, even if you don't think that is who you are yet. You have to build that into you. If you don't have support, you have to build that support into you.

Alkyer: You were able to get through Juilliard, get your master's degree. Tell us what happens

right after that.

Cassity: Right after that, Michael Dease, the trombonist, invited me to a New Year's Eve party — and this is something I will never forget. He said, "By the way, bring your horn." I showed up and it was every jazz legend you can imagine that was alive. James Moody, Benny Green (the trombonist), Roy Hargrove, Cyrus Chestnut, Jimmy Heath. Slide Hampton was there. I mean, it was a meeting of jazz royalty. And the only young people there were a young Emmet Cohen, a young Evan Sherman, myself and Michael Dease.

I didn't know what to do with myself. Roy had seen me at jam sessions at Cleo's, at Smalls. I was always sitting in. I was always playing.

So we're at this party, and I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, you know, Roy, I never know what to say to them." So I'm there and he just comes over, and he said, "You got your horn?" I was like, "Yes." He said, "Good. Get it out." At the time Antonio Hart, another one of my idols — I grew up listening to Antonio — and he was burnin' over the uptempo bebop tune "Bebop." He was just burnin'. And Roy, I thought he was gonna play next, but he looked at me said, "You're next."

I was like, "No!" What are you gonna say? So you gotta go. I went, and I played, and I guess they listened and from then on, I played in the

Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band. Which was a huge moment in time where I got to tour with Jimmy Heath, Roy Hargrove, Gary Smulyan, Antonio Hart, James Moody ...

It was incredible. I was pinching myself every day. To be there and to be a sponge and soak up not only the music, but the culture and what they taught, which was coming from Dizzy. It's being a human being, having compassion, always treating people with kindness. You know, wherever you go, making life fun.

Alkyer: You, as a side woman, have played with literally everybody. In fact, it's probably a shorter list of who you *haven't* played with. Who were some of the mentors had a profound effect on you?

Cassidy: My my top mentor is John Lee. He's the bassist for the Dizzy band. He runs the Dizzy band, and all of the Dizzy groups. But he played with McCoy Tyner and Sonny Rollins in the '80s, the '90s. And he's the one who brought me into the fold. He's the one who's always kept me on the path. You know, knowing what's right and always doing the right thing. John is amazing. I call him my East Coast dad. He also did the album *Relentless* with me.

Alkyer: What have you learned from him?

Cassidy: Oh, my goodness. He he was one of the first people to talk to me about tuning everything out and just listening to music and playing and focusing. He also taught me not to be a stone face. I was so serious. This was a serious thing. You know, I was way more serious then. I'm glad it changed. [chuckles]

He was just like, "OK, Stone Face. First of all, you have to smile a little bit."

Alkyer: Other mentors?

Cassidy: James Moody gave me the nickname "Sectionette." My first week playing in the Dizzy band, we were at sound check on the stage of the Blue Note and I'm sitting by Mr. Heath, and Mr. Heath didn't warm up to me right away. He just didn't.

And I'm sitting by Antonio Hart and Gary Smulyan in the section, and Moody leans over from the second tenor chair and he says [to Heath], "Ha, ha, that's 'Sectionette.'" And Jimmy went, "Aargh. OK." And that was my acceptance into the band. Because when they walk into a room, they've been playing with big bands their entire lives, for so long that they call each other "Section." It's a term of endearment. So when Mr. Heath would walk into the Blue Note and see Moody, he'd say, "Hey, Section." And Moody would yell back, "Section." And they'd give each other a hug. So me being "Sectionette," that was my first nickname.

Alkyer: Were you the only woman in that band?

Cassidy: Yes. But, really, Renee Rosnes was a

predecessor in the band. She she was the first woman in the band. She was gone by the time I got there.

Alkyer: OK. Let's talk about that.

Cassidy: Again, It's interesting, because I was focused on the fact that I deserve to be here because I'm a musician. I worked to be here. I know this music. I knew Dizzy's music inside and out. That's what I grew up chasing. But then to be the only woman — when I see the audience, that's when I start thinking about it. Because everyone perceives you differently. And then everyone has to comment. Oh, it's great seeing a woman in the band. It took me a while to get used to that. And then, how you dress is treated differently. How you act is treated differently. For me? I try not to focus on them. I tried to play my part as great as I could because I knew it was an honor to be there.

Alkyer: You were in New York. You were doing the thing. You're playing in everybody's bands. You've got your own leader career going. And you moved to Chicago?

Cassidy: Well, another can of worms. I was in New York. And the last three or four years I was there, I wanted to teach. It was important to me to start teaching.

I had a master's from Juilliard in performance. And I was applying at all of these teaching jobs on the East Coast, and I couldn't get one. I couldn't land one job. I was always in the top three, and they would pick someone that was internal or someone that was a little more famous or someone within that degree. And I started thinking about the future and thinking about what it's going to look like when I'm 60. Am I gonna be doing the same thing, running around playing gigs and tours? I wasn't sure about that. And I knew that for things to change, I couldn't go about it the same way. So, I just kind of prayed about it and thought about it. And then I get a call to go play in Doha, Qatar, at a major club for a month. And while I was there, I had this life-changing experience that the music needs to follow me. I followed the music my entire life. So if it's meant to follow me, great. And if not, fine, I'll do something else. But I was at a point where I was just ready to release.

And when I was out in the Middle East, I met a woman who ran the Qatar Music Academy. And I said, "I'm looking for a teaching position." You know, I was just chatting, talking to her. And she said, "Oh, really? Well, I run the music school and we're looking for a woodwind instructor." Since I could teach clarinet, flute and saxophone, I taught at the school for a year. And while I was out there, I met my husband, Richard Johnson [a keyboard player who was running the jazz club].

So we met there, and we ended up having

these long talks. I knew immediately that this would work. This is it. I just realized this is the person for me. And so it was kind of chaotic because we had this break because Qatar gets very hot in the summer, everything closes. So in the summer, I went back to New York. I'm playing the Blue Note, and I'm flying to Chicago [where his parents were living]. And we're looking at houses and I'm meeting his family and then flying back to New York, and then I'm doing a tour in Mexico.

We got married. We bought the house. We set it up. Then, we went back to Qatar to work another year. And that's when I found out I was pregnant. We had the baby in Qatar. While I was there, I was practicing. I was writing. I missed the community of New York. But I did not miss the struggle. You know, and I was getting a chance to figure out who I am.

Alkyer: How has Chicago been for you?

Cassidy: I love it. I love in New York, too. And, I thought I would live there forever. But since I've been in Chicago, the music scene has really gotten into my being. If you don't play some blues, and if you don't groove, you're not going to be received very well. You have to come with some blues. You have to come with some language, some soul.

And there are so many incredible musicians on the scene, and educators, too: Bobby Broom, Jeff Bradfield, Dana Hall, Reggie Thomas. Ramsey Lewis was alive when I moved here.

The rhythm sections are 10 people deep of people who can really play. They're killing, and they could go to New York any day.

I always tell people everything that I wanted to accomplish in New York I'm able to accomplish here. I wanted to teach. I'm teaching at three colleges. I wanted to still perform. Now, I'm traveling more than ever to perform and performing in the clubs here.

I wanted to have a family; I can comfortably have family here. And I wanted to start a jazz program. And I started a non-profit called Jazz Up. And, we have that in the summertime in the area where I live.

So, I was able to accomplish these things within a short time of being here.

Alkyer: One thing about family life: How do you balance wife, mom, teacher, travel, all these things?

Cassidy: It's a lot, I'm not going to lie. But it's worth it. If you care about something, you will find the time. Especially as women, we work so hard to get where we're at. Having a child was so powerful. It's changed [how I think of] humanity, because I've never experienced that much love, and that much joy. And I wouldn't trade it for the world. At the same time, I have another passion. So [my son] is going to grow up seeing that, and I think that's good.

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WE LOVE VINYL!

Record Store Day Hits April 22, so we deliver a glimpse at some of the vinyl dropping in and around that blessed holiday of wax. Here are just a few new releases and reissues the DownBeat staff is looking forward to (or is already) digging into right now!

By Frank Alkyer

ALBERT
TYLER
EUROPE
1966



SHIRLEY SCOTT
Queen Talks
live at the
Left Bank
GEORGE COLEMAN - BOBBY DURHAM - EDNIE ANDREWS



WALTER BISHOP Jr.
LIVE IN BALTIMORE HAROLD VICK LOU MCINTOSH DICK BERK



ECM



WE LOVE VINYL!



ANDREW HILL

Dance With Death (Blue Note)

Blue Note Records continues its Tone Poet Audiophile Vinyl Reissue Series with 22 releases already out or scheduled to come out throughout 2023. The beauty of the series is bringing back and bringing attention to a variety of unsung classics like Andrew Hill's *Dance With Death*, released March 3. Recorded for Pacific Jazz in 1961, the session features Charles Tolliver on trumpet, Joe Farrell on saxophones, Victor Sproles on bass and Billy Higgins on drums. All Tone Poet releases are cut directly from the original analog masters. A few others to look forward to this year include Freddie Hubbard's *Blue Spirits* (out in May), McCoy Tyner's *Time For Tyner* (June release) and Lee Morgan's *Infinity* (August release).

(bluenote.com)



CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE

The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait of Four Icons (Mack Avenue)

Available for the first time on vinyl, Christian McBride's *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait of Four Icons* elegantly focuses on four key figures of the Civil Rights Movement: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks and Muhammad Ali. McBride composed his five-part suite for an 18-piece big band, complete with chorus and narrators, offering a powerful musical glimpse into the lasting impact of the times and bravery of the people who demanded change. Added to the original piece is a fifth movement, "Apotheosis," acknowledging Barack Obama's election as the first African American President of the United States.

(boutique.mackavenue.com)



DIZZY GILLESPIE

Portrait Of Jenny (BBE)

In 1970, Perception Records released two albums by the great Dizzy Gillespie: first, *The Real Thing*, a funk/fusion all-star affair; then, *Portrait Of Jenny*, a gem of an album featuring four long-form, Gillespie-penned tunes recorded at Rudy Van Gelder's studio in New Jersey. The latter was a return to Gillespie's love for Afro-Cuban rhythms, with Mike Longo on piano, Andrew and Jerry Gonzalez on bass and congas, respectively, and Carlos Valdes on percussion. Gillespie not only composed the music here; he arranged and produced the entire recording with his cousin Boo Frazier. *The Real Thing* has also been reissued. Both feature 180-gram heavy vinyl as part of BBE's Perception/Today Records series. (bbemusic.com)



DOROTHY ASHBY AND FRANK WESS

In A Minor Groove (Real Gone)

In the pantheon of jazz greats, those playing harp never seem to get their due. Such is the case with the swinging harpist Dorothy Ashby, who battled sexism and instrument discrimination in the '50s and '60s while making amazing music. On this 1958 New Jazz release, the quartet — with Frank Wess joining on saxophone and flute as well as Herman Wright on bass and Roy Haynes on drums — glides through a terrific set of eight tunes that includes "Yesterdays" and "Alone Together." Real Gone went back to the original mono audio sources of *In A Minor Groove*, reproduced the first-pressing album artwork and restored Ira Gitler's original liner notes.

(realgonemusic.com)

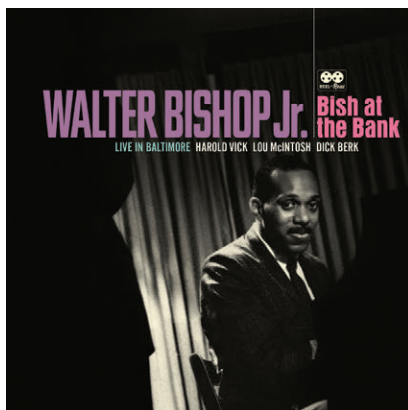


MEDESKI MARTIN + WOOD

It's A Jungle In Here (Real Gone)

Here's another Real Gone release dropping on Record Store Day 2023. In honor of the 30th anniversary of Medeski, Martin + Wood's second album, *It's A Jungle In Here*, the recording is being released for the first time on vinyl. The trio performs some stellar originals and breathes new fire into the music of John Coltrane, King Sunny Ade, Bob Marley and Thelonious Monk. It's a Clearwater Blue pressing limited to 2,500 copies. In addition to the trio, Steven Bernstein plays trumpet and flugelhorn; Josh Roseman, trombone; Dave Binney, alto saxophone; Mark Ribot, guitar; and, Jay Rodriguez, tenor and alto.

(realgonemusic.com)



WALTER BISHOP JR

Bish At The Bank, Live In Baltimore (Reel to Reel)

Bop pianist Walter Bishop Jr. gets a well-deserved, overdue ovation with the release of *Bish At The Bank*. Recorded during performances for Baltimore's Left Bank Jazz Society in 1966 and 1967, the sets have been beautifully packaged and reproduced by archivist Zev Feldman and musician-impresario Cory Weeds, complete with great photography and in-depth liner notes from journalist Ted Panken. "The energy levels and good-time attitude are characteristic of the Left Bank cabaret parties that transpired every Sunday of the month since mid-August 1964," wrote Panken.

(walterbishopjunior.bandcamp.com)



MACK AVENUE LOVES VINYL



THE BIRTH OF BOP The Savoy 10-Inch LP Collection (Craft)

While being released in a variety of formats, this magnum opus of bop is truly one for vinyl lovers. A total of five LPs holding 30 bebop gems from one of the greatest jazz labels of the era, *Birth* gives new voice to the music of Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, Stan Getz, Milt Jackson, Fats Navarro and many more.

The box spans the second half of the 1940s, when bebop reigned supreme as well as a dividing line between the old guard and the new lions of jazz. The sound was raucous, rebellious, blistering and complex. The technical ability needed to perform it was astounding.

Many of the artists performing the new music had grown up playing in big bands. Bop was a direct challenge to the music of the day, pushing toward adventure while eschewing the sweet sounds and dance-friendly swing tempos associated with the big band era.

Into this scene, Savoy Records was established in 1942, soon diving headlong into the new music with the keen eyes and ears of A&R man, producer and promoter Teddy Reig. A music fan and tireless hustler, Reig was a fixture in New York's jazz clubs, befriending many a rising star. He formed a partnership with the label and began to bring many of the foundational artists of bop to Savoy, often serving as the producer.

In the 10-inch vinyl format, the music in this collection breezes along, with only three cuts to a side. Volume 1, Side A, for example, features Charlie Parker's "Romance Without Finance," Dexter Gordon's "Dexter's Minor Mad" and J.J. Johnson's "Jay Bird. All of that in under nine minutes.

The Birth Of Bop certainly isn't a complete history of the era or the music, but it is a great introduction to those halcyon days viewed through the lens of one record company's output.

(craftrecordings.com)



Christian McBride's New Jawn

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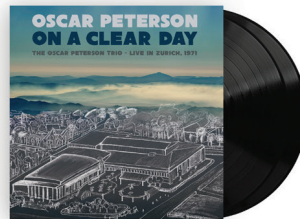
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Christian McBride

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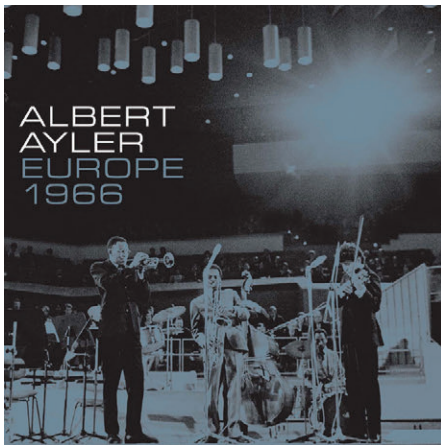
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ALBERT AYLER

Europe 1966 (Org)

This four-LP set features four dates from saxophonist Albert Ayler's 1966 tour to Europe. The box captures live performances in Berlin, Lörach, Stockholm and Paris over a two-week span featuring Donald Ayler on trumpet, Michel Samson on violin, William Folwell on bass and Beaver Harris on drums. The music has been remastered for vinyl by Dave Gardner at Infrasonic Mastering and includes a 12- by 24-inch foldout insert with liner notes by John Litweiler and tour photography. The albums were pressed on audiophile-grade black vinyl at Pallas Group in Germany.

(orgmusic.com)



MILES DAVIS

Turnaround: Rare Miles From The Complete On The Corner Sessions (Legacy/Columbia)

Back in 2007, Legacy/Columbia pulled out the stops and released the complete recording sessions from that historic 1972 recording date famously titled *On The Corner*. On *Turnaround*, the label picks four great cuts from the sessions, which features Michael Henderson on bass, Al Foster on drums, Mtume on percussion and appearances by the likes of Dave Liebman, Herbie Hancock and Bennie Maupin. This is an RSD exclusive pressed on 12-inch sky blue vinyl.

(legacyrecordings.com)



SHIRLEY SCOTT

Queen Talk: Live At The Left Bank (Reel to Reel)

This two-LP set is an RSD launch featuring the Queen of the Hammond B-3 live at the Famous Ballroom in Baltimore on Aug. 20, 1972. This is another one culled from the archives of the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore. The date features George Coleman on saxophone and Bobby Durham on drums with guest vocals by Ernie Andrews. The liner notes feature interviews with Monty Alexander, former Scott sideman saxophonist Tim Warfield and the late organ hero Joey DeFrancesco.

(shirleyscott.bandcamp.com)

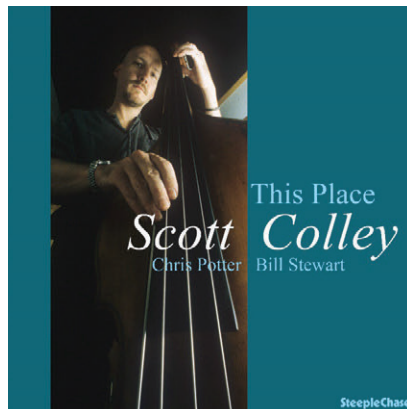


CHET BAKER

Chet (Craft)

Craft Recordings digs into the Riverside Records catalog to reissue the silk-voiced vocalist and trumpeter's third album for the label, originally released in 1959. But on *Chet*, we find an entirely instrumental offering from Baker, who offers his beautiful take on nine classic tunes including "How High The Moon," "September Song," "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To" and "You And The Night And The Music." It's the first mono version of the recording to be released since 1959 featuring AAA remastering with lacquers cut directly from the original master tapes.

(craftrecordings.com)



SCOTT COLLEY

This Place (SteepleChase)

Originally released on CD in 1997, *This Place* catches the renowned bassist as an up-and-comer of 30 years old. While he was introduced to SteepleChase in 1994 as a member of the Harold Danko Quartet, this was Colley's SteepleChase debut as a leader. He masterfully delivers a seven-song set that includes John Coltrane's "Mr. Day," and Sonny Rollins' "Airegin," "The Peacocks" by Jimmy Rowles and Stan Getz, "The Blessing" by Ornette Coleman as well as three originals. This Audiophile Edition is pressed on 180-gram vinyl.

(steeplechase.dk)



VARIOUS ARTISTS

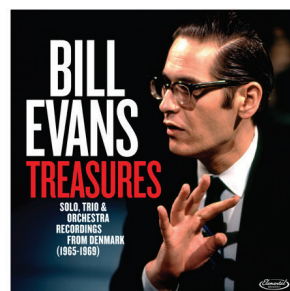
Jazz Dispensary: Hotel Jolie Dame (Craft)

The latest in the Jazz Dispensary series, *Hotel Jolie Dame* takes us back to 1978 on the French Riviera. The vibe is fantastical. The music includes Dizzy Gillespie, Dorothy Ashby, Cal Tjader, The Blackbyrds and more. Alongside these jazz icons are tunes by the bossa nova/sunshine pop group Triste Janero, the South Uruguayan/American fusion group Opa, Flora Purim and the Euro pop of Jean Jacques-Perrey. This one's as much about a place and a mood as the music. The package features a single LP in what has been termed psych-sunset orange marble.

(craftrecordings.com)

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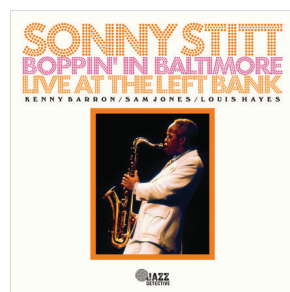


BILL EVANS - TREASURES: Solo, Trio & Orchestra recordings from Denmark. A truly holy grail released for the very first time! This limited-edition 180-gram 3-LP set includes trio performances from 1965 featuring legendary Danish jazz bassist **Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen**; the only solo piano version of "My Funny Valentine" by Evans known to exist and a 1966 orchestral suite performed

by the Evans trio with the Danish Radio Big Band conducted by trumpeter/arranger **Palle Mikkelborg**.



CHET BAKER - BLUE ROOM: The 1979 VARA Studio Sessions in Holland features two 1979 recordings of the trumpet/vocal icon captured in glorious stereo at the legendary VARA studio 2 in Hilversum, the Netherlands for the KRO radio program *Nine O'Clock Jazz*. The booklet features interviews with **Randy Brecker**, **Enrico Rava**, and **Enrico Pieranunzi**.

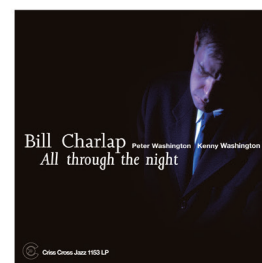


SONNY STITT - BOPPIN' IN BALTIMORE Recorded live at the Famous Ballroom in Baltimore, on **November 11, 1973**. Featuring Stitt on alto sax plus pianist **Kenny Barron**, bassist **Sam Jones** and drummer **Louis Hayes**. The LP insert and CD booklet include rare photos, insightful liner notes and interviews with **Barron**, **Hayes** and saxophone icon **Charles McPherson**.

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3 SMOKIN' OFFERINGS FROM VERVE

Verve/UMe's Acoustic Sounds Series continues to deliver with a trio of great new albums and plenty more to come.

In February, the label reissued the Oscar Peterson Trio's *Night Train*, a romp through the American Songbook from the title track to "I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good." It also presents Peterson's "Hymn To Freedom," which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Add Ray Brown on bass and Ed Thigpen on drums and you've got pure magic.

In March, the label was scheduled to drop the grooving Alice Coltrane album *Journey In Satchidananda*, featuring saxophonist Pharoah Sanders. First released in 1971, the music sounds as fresh as today.

And, in April, the label unleashes Wes Montgomery and the Wynton Kelly Trio's 1965 live recording *Smokin' At The Half Note*, a blistering affair released, in part, to celebrate the centennial of Montgomery's birth on March 6. All releases in the series have been mastered in stereo from the original analog tapes and pressed on 180-gram vinyl.

(shop.vervarecords.com)



ECM'S VINYL BOUNTY

ECM continues to issue new albums on vinyl, with the latest batch of LPs set for release in March.

Pianist Bobo Stenson's trio with bassist Anders Jormin and percussionist Jon Fält captivates on *Sphere*, a deep breath of open spontaneity where nuance and understated interplay offer a sophisticated improvisational experience.

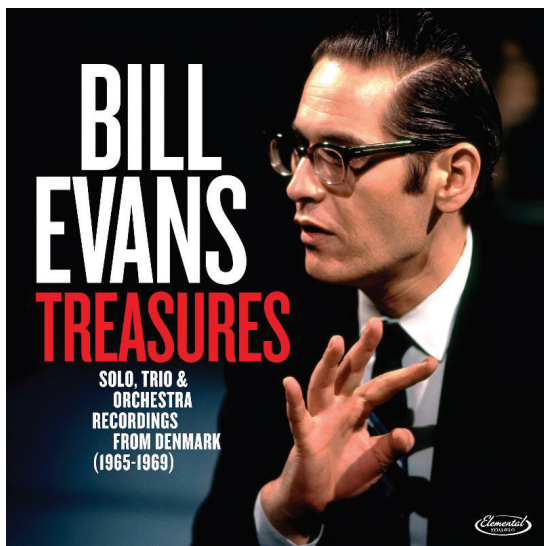
Ralph Towner's *At First Light* presents the guitarist delivering a stunning solo performance marked by tone, taste and joy. "My solo recordings have always included my own compositions, in which there are trace elements of the many composers and musicians that have attracted me," Towner writes in the liner notes. Those influences include everyone from George Gershwin and John Coltrane to Bill Evans and Jon Dowland.

Ralph Alessi's *It's Always Now* presents the trumpeter in a new quartet setting. Moving to Switzerland in 2020 gave him an opportunity to play with a new set of musicians, including pianist Florian Weber, drummer Gerry Hemingway and bassist Bänz Lester on this recording.

(ecmrecords.com)



WE LOVE **VINYL!**



BILL EVANS

Treasures: Solo, Trio & Orchestra Recordings From Denmark (1965-1969) (Elemental)

In the growing pantheon of unearthed Bill Evans recordings, *Treasures: Solo, Trio & Orchestra Recordings From Denmark (1965-1969)* comes in as a true amalgamation of what the great pianist and composer embraced. As a limited-edition, three-LP, 180-gram vinyl exclusive for RSD, the album will also be released as a two-CD set. Compiling music that originally aired on Danish radio in the 1960s, the package is the work of Zev Feldman, the Jazz Detective, and his team, complete with extensive liner notes that include interviews with trio members Eddie Gomez and Marty Morell as well as Danish musicians Alex Riel and Palle Mikkelborg

(elemental-music.com)

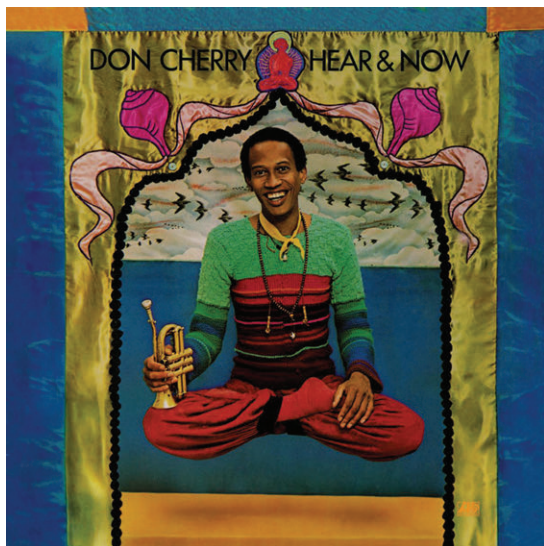


D.B. SHRIER

Emerges (Omnivore)

This is the story and music of a lost artist. Saxophonist D.B. Shrier released his only studio recording in 1967, *D.B. Shrier Emerges* (Alfa Records). It would have been lost in the ether, a novelty known by few, if not for Alan Sukoienig, the man responsible for developing *Retrospect In Retirement Of Delay: The Solo Recordings* by Hasan Ibn Ali. Sukoienig had met Shrier while attending the University of Pennsylvania. In searching for the Ali original tapes, Sukoienig reconnected with Shrier and came across the saxophonist's nearly forgotten recorded material. Now reissued in its original format for vinyl, the set has been expanded from five to 10 tunes for digital and CD release. The music is sweet; its re-emergence even sweeter.

(omnivorerecordings.com)



DON CHERRY

Hear & Now (Real Gone)

Here we have the first U.S. vinyl reissue of Don Cherry's killer 1977 album, *Here & Now*, his only release recorded for the Atlantic label. One part world music, one part jazz, another part otherworldly, Cherry seemed set on breaking down barriers between jazz, rock and world music at the time. Indian drones, African drums, searing guitars, thumping funk bass — it's all here — an artist in deep search for a sound and a broader audience. The cast of sidemen on the recording is simply mind-blowing, from saxophonist Michael Brecker and bassist Marcus Miller to drummer Tony Williams, guitarist Steve Jordan, Colin Walcott on sitar and Stan Samole on guitar.

(realgonemusic.com)

OTHER RSD DROPS!

At press time, plenty of other RSD drops were being announced:

Roy Ayers, *Stoned Soul Picnic* (Nature Sounds)

Chet Baker, *Blue Room: The 1979 Vara Studio Sessions In Holland* (Anagram)

Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, *Live At Jazz Workshop 1970* (Gearbox)

Butcher Brown & Bruce Hornsby, *Secret House* (Concord Jazz)

Terry Callier, *Hidden Conversations* (Mr. Bongo)

Larry Coryell, *Introducing The Eleventh House* (Culture Factory USA)

James Cotton & Friends, *The Chicago Sessions* (Reel)

Willie Dixon, *Catalyst* (LMLR)

Eric Dolphy, *Musical Prophet: The Expanded 1963 New York Studio Sessions* (Resonance)

Howlin' Wolf, *Live And Cookin' At Alice's Revisited* (Anagram)

Jazz Artist Guild, *Newport Rebels* (Candid)

Norah Jones, *Little Broken Hearts* (Blue Note)

B.B. King, *Blues Is King* (Anagram)

Charlie Parker, *Afro Cuban Bop: The Long Lost Bird Live Recordings* (Liberation Hall/Rockbeat)

Max Roach/Archie Shepp, *Force - Sweet Mao - Suid Afrika 76* (LMLR)

Archie Shepp, *Live At Massy* (LMLR)

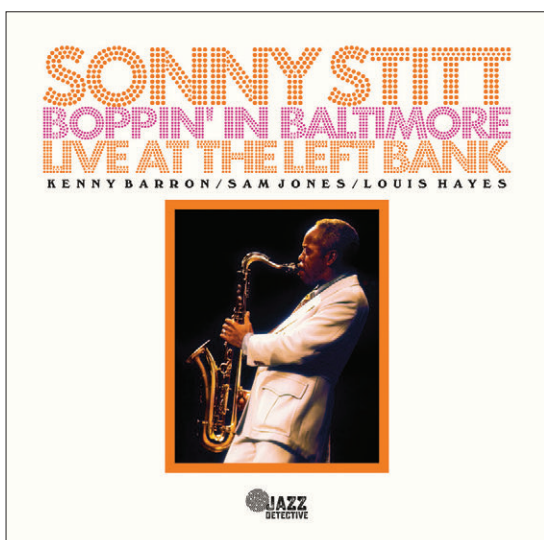
Sonny Stitt, *The Bubba's Sessions* (Who's Who In Jazz)

Sun Ra, *Haverford College Jan. 25, 1980* (Modern Harmonic)

Koko Taylor, *I Got What It Takes* (Alligator)

Muddy Waters, *The Muddy Waters Woodstock Album* (Anagram)

Muddy Waters, *Hollywood Blues Summit 1971* (Liberation Hall)



SONNY STITT

Boppin' In Baltimore, Live At The Left Bank (Jazz Detective)

This is the third in a series of recordings from the Archives of the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore that will be dropped on RSD. The 1973 date at Baltimore's Famous Ballroom found Stitt and his saxophone in fine form backed by a rhythm section of jazz royalty: Kenny Barron on piano, Sam Jones on bass and Louis Hayes on drums. The package features rare photos as well as an overview by jazz critic Bob Blumenthal and interviews with Barron, Hayes and saxophonist Charles McPherson. How good was Sonny Stitt? "Sonny Stitt scared people," McPherson said. "Roy Haynes said that he seemed to be the only guy that Charlie Parker would be nervous around."

(thejazzdetective.com)

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SONNY GOES WEST

One of the most-anticipated reissue releases of the year is *Go West!*, a three-LP opus exploring saxophone colossus Sonny Rollins' historic output on Contemporary Records.

Set for a June 23 LP release date, the box has everything a vinyl freak could wish for: pressed on 180-gram vinyl, newly mastered from the original analog tapes by Grammy-winning engineer Bernie Grundman, pressed at RTI and 20 tracks of classic Rollins. The set presents *Way Out West*, Rollins' 1957 masterpiece, and *Sonny Rollins And The Contemporary Leaders* from 1958, plus six alternate takes selected from both albums. Beyond that, the expanded booklet offers new liner notes from Grammy-winning music historian Ashley Kahn, including a new interview conducted by Kahn in 2021 specifically for the release.

In 1957, Rollins was 26 and ready to explore the world beyond New York, where he grew up. He took a headlong dive into the West Coast, where the cool jazz movement was heating up.

"The idea of freedom comes up often in chronicles of Rollins during this period," Kahn writes in the liner notes. "It's noted in the music he was creating — particularly in his decision to perform and record with piano-less rhythm accompaniment, allowing for a harmonic freedom, but also in his extended improvisations that developed into lengthy stories of their own. Rollins was developing his sound and approach on a daily basis."

Rollins connected with Lester Koenig, the founder of Contemporary. Koenig was a former screenwriter and producer on the West Coast who was making a name with his nascent label.

As for the music, *Way Out West* connects Rollins in his first trio setting with bassist Ray Brown and drummer Shelly Manne. The results included the terrific title tune and the classic "Come Gone," along with Duke Ellington's "Solitude" and a wonderful jazz take on Johnny Mercer's "I'm An Old Cowhand."

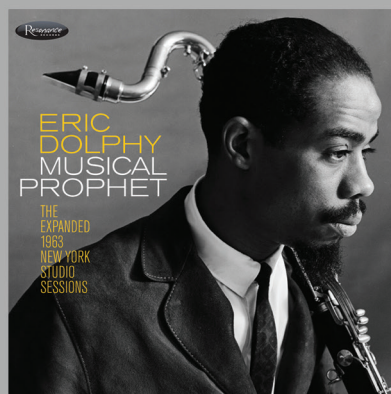
A year later, Rollins continued his West Coast adventure, this time in a quintet setting with Leroy Vinnegar on bass, Barney Wessel on guitar, Hampton Hawes on piano and Manne again on drums. It's an East-West affair of eight standards including "Alone Together" and "How High The Moon."

For Rollins, going West was "like new beginnings to me," he said. **DB**
(craftrecordings.com)

ERIC DOLPHY

MUSICAL PROPHET:

THE EXPANDED 1963 NEW YORK STUDIO SESSIONS



2ND
PRESSING!
MASTERED BY
KEVIN GRAY
180G

Musical Prophet: The Expanded New York Studio Sessions (1962-1963) from jazz luminary Eric Dolphy gets a second pressing for RSD with new album cover photos by Chuck Stewart and mastered for vinyl by engineer Kevin Gray at Cohearent Audio. Limited-edition 3-LP set contains the full *Conversations* and *Iron Man* albums, plus nearly 85 minutes of bonus material from the studio sessions in NYC. The set features jazz greats Clifford Jordan, Sonny Simmons, Woody Shaw, Richard Davis and Bobby Hutcherson. The 20-page insert includes rare and previously unpublished photos, memorabilia, essays and interviews.

♦♦ LOW STOCK VINYL ALERT ♦♦

NAT KING COLE

HITTIN' THE RAMP:

THE EARLY YEARS (1936-1943)

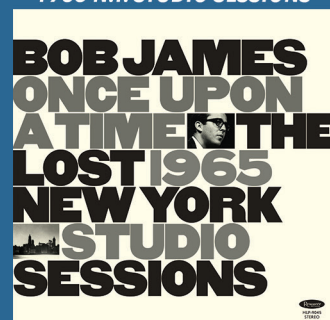


THAD JONES/MEL LEWIS
ORCHESTRA
ALL MY YESTERDAYS



BOB JAMES

ONCE UPON A TIME: THE LOST
1965 N.Y. STUDIO SESSIONS



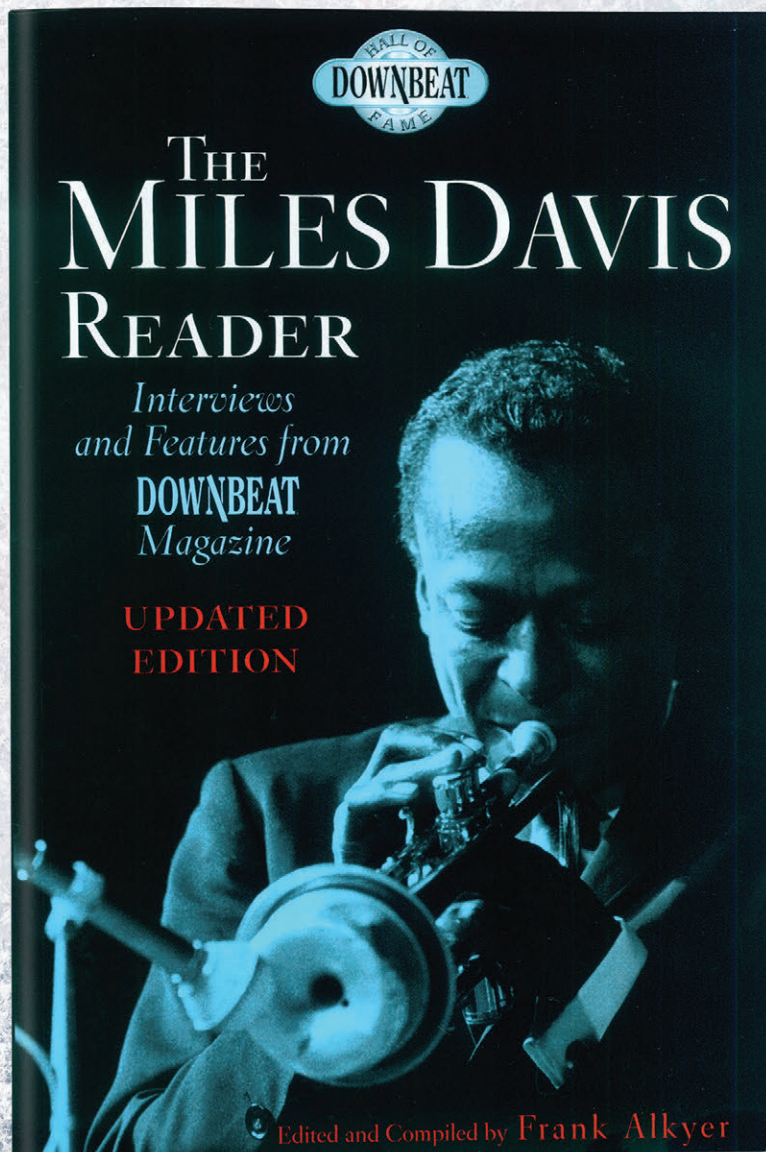
ROY HARGROVE &
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Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

DANIEL GAREL



Potter's live performances unleash a sense of focused ferocity.

Chris Potter *Got The Keys To The Kingdom: Live At The Village Vanguard*

EDITION

★★★★

Listening to a live Chris Potter album is like watching someone capture lightning in a

bottle. He's been one of the most consistent deliverers of vivacious, imaginative modern jazz since bursting onto the jazz scene more than 30 years ago. And while his studio albums often teem with jostling energy, his live performances unleash an even further heightened sense of focused ferocity.

This album marks the third *Live At The Village Vanguard* date in his estimable discography. The first one, *Lift*, came out in

2004 and featured him leading a scintillating quartet that included bassist Scott Colley, drummer Bill Stewart and keyboardist Kevin Hays. Potter released *Follow The Red Line*, his second live date from the Vanguard three years later; that one showcased his acclaimed 21st century modern fusion combo, *Underground*. Since then, the Vanguard has hosted annual residencies for Potter to exhibit his acrobatic improvisations, marked by searing tone, blazing speed and incredible control.

On this date, captured last year, Colley, who appeared on Potter's first *Village Vanguard* live LP, and pianist Craig Taborn, who played on the saxophonist's second one, join forces with supreme drummer Marcus Gilmore. After Potter commences the album with a spirited a capella tenor saxophone solo, the rest of the band concocts a swampy reading of Mississippi Fred McDowell's blues adaptation of "You Gotta Move." As Gilmore and Colley push the song forward with an infectious medium-tempo swing-funk groove and Taborn injects gospel-like chords, Potter animates the timeless melody with his Merlot-flavored tone and conversational phrasing that slowly progresses into a heated testimonial.

The album concludes in similar thematic fashion with a mesmerizing retooling of Washington Phillips' blues-gospel anthem "I've Got The Keys To The Kingdom." Here the ensemble offers an elliptical approach as Gilmore's lacerating rhythms, Colley's buoying bass lines and Taborn's accompaniment conjure an atmosphere of suspense as the leader coruscates the melody with impish ingenuity.

In between, Potter plays an intriguing program that includes a dazzling rendition of the Amazonian folk tune "Nozani Na" and a flinty makeover of Charlie Parker's bebop classic "Klactoveedsedstene." The most moving moment, however, is Potter's superb cover of Billy Strayhorn's ballad "Blood Count." And even here, when the combustible drive is noticeably lower, Potter imbues the melody with undeniable luminosity.

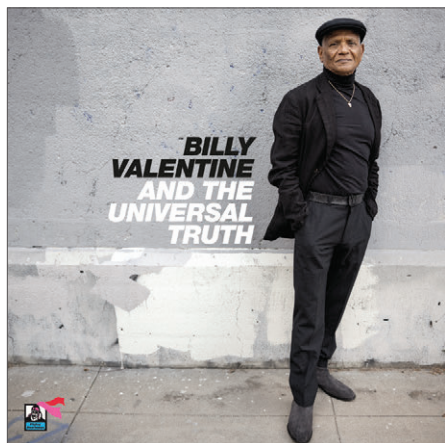
—John Murphy

Got The Keys To The Kingdom—Live At The Village Vanguard

Vanguard: You Gotta Move; Nozani Na; Blood Count; Klactoveedsedstene; Olha Maria; I've Got The Keys To The Kingdom. (60:19)

Personnel: Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Marcus Gilmore, drums; Craig Taborn, piano; Scott Colley, bass.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com



Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth
Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth
 FLYING DUTCHMAN

★★★★

Bob Thiele's Flying Dutchman imprint returns after four decades dormant with the perfect continuation to its legacy of social-consciousness releases from the likes of Gil-Scott Heron, Angela Davis and John Coltrane. On its latest release, vocalist Billy Valentine, of The Valentine Brothers fame, explores a selection of soulful protest tunes penned by Stevie Wonder,

Prince, Curtis Mayfield and more.

What gives the eight tracks on *Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth* their distinctive identity is not particularly the apt song selection, rather his choice of younger players who fresh material.

On Eddie Kendricks' "My People ... Hold On," for instance, Valentine's falsetto ad-libs expertly interweave with vibraphonist Joel Ross' flowing solo lines to create an undulating sense of urgency that bolsters the song's message of defiance, while trumpeter Theo Croker lends a languorous funk to "Sign Of The Times" with his ascending, breathy phrases. Guitarist Jeff Parker, meanwhile, finds gorgeous, reverb-laden space in a soft solo on "The Creator Has A Master Plan" as bassist Linda May Han Oh maintains a driving, plucked rhythm beneath.

He may be entering his fifth decade in the industry, but Valentine's voice as an artist and bandleader is stronger than ever.

—Ammar Kalia

Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth: We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue; Home Is Where The Hatred Is; My People ... Hold On; You Haven't Done Nothing; The Creator Has A Master Plan; Sign Of The Times; Wade In The Water; The World Is A Ghetto. (43:58)

Personnel: Billy Valentine, vocals; Abe Rounds, drums; Pino Palladino, bass; Jeff Parker, guitar; Larry Goldings, piano; Immanuel Wilkins, tenor saxophone (1); James Gadsen, drums (2, 7); David Pittch, bass (4); Linda May Han Oh, bass (1, 5); Joel Ross, vibraphone (3); Theo Croker, trumpet (6).

Ordering info: acidjazz.bandcamp.com

Sara Caswell
The Way To You
 ANZIC

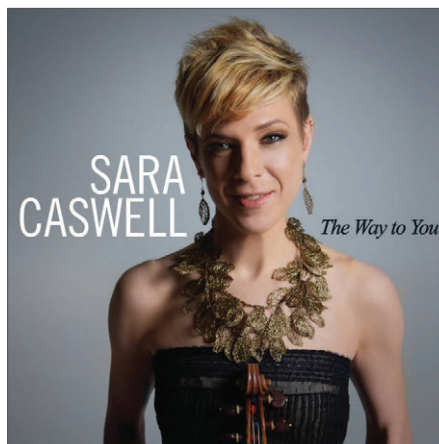
★★★★½

There are jazz musicians who play violin, and violinists who play jazz. Sara Caswell belongs to the second group. Her virtuosity has made her welcome in many contexts, even though it may have diminished her profile within the more select circle of jazz Stradivarians.

The Way To You is her first CD as leader in nearly 20 years, putting her in the nexus of a mannerly jazz unit, perhaps for the first time since four Arbors CDs in the early 2000s. The repertoire is less American songbook with five originals and four semi-standards showcasing her versatility and more particularly the violin's ways of pleading subtle contours.

Michel Legrand's "I'm On My Way To You" gets the royal romantic treatment. Though never excessive, she climbs to the top of the staff, then slides down with a sculpted elegance. "Stillness," by bassist Ike Sturm, is a simple ballad on the surface, with its repeated three-note descending figure. But it develops a subtle emotional undertow that sways into a lulling throb. Two of Caswell's tunes are similarly soulful, leaving one slightly overdosed on poignancy.

The music jumps suddenly to life with "7 Anéis," which has the appeal of a catchy folk



dance, powered with a punchy bass drum tattoo from Jared Schonig. Lewis dials the pep to a standstill before Caswell revives and steers it back to the opening theme. Next, Kenny Barron's "Voyage" is the jazz peak of the set, with Caswell proving she can swing as well as swoon. Note the smart dialog between guitar and vibes. Caswell's own delightful quirky-trot, "Last Call," has the cartoonish charm a bumpy but eccentric romp.

—John McDonough

My Way To You: South Shore; Stillness; 7 Anéis; On My Way To You; Voyage; Warren's Way; Last Call; Spinning; O Que Tinha de Ser. (51:04)

Personnel: Caswell, violin; Chris Dingman (1, 5, 8), vibraphone; Jesse Lewis, guitar; Ike Sturm, bass; Jared Schonig, drums.

Ordering info: anzicrecords.com



Jean-Michel Pilc
Symphony
 JUSTIN TIME

★★★★

Jean-Michel Pilc is a name that's always welcomed on a jazz festival marquee. Spirited and original, he brings a fresh — distinctively European — voice to piano improvisation. Since taking a teaching position at McGill University's Schulich School of Music in Montreal, he's become more prominent in North America, and this solo album of related and occasionally seamlessly flowing music is a strong calling card for the French native.

While *Symphony* is an apt title, the name of the album's second piece, "Discovery," seems even more suited, since the pianist loves to explore ideas — expanding or contracting the subject matter. While Keith Jarrett might seem like a role model, Pilc leans more heavily on his European roots.

That background is displayed throughout "Discovery" and "The Encounter." The former is a journey, with Pilc wearing his heart on his sleeve moving through lovely pastoral-sounding playing, contemplative passages and far darker places. Pilc is particularly adept at independent movement in his playing, and his adventurous, two-handed work is superb here.

The mood turns bluesier on "Way To Go," which provides a restorative tonic following the dark bombast of "Just Get Up." Like the sound of "Reveille" at a military memorial, that bluesy refrain signals a turn toward more contemplative and fulsome playing on "Understanding."

Following the playful, two-handed chase of "Waltz For Xose," Pilc's considerable technique is on stark display as "I'll Be Back" rumbles and roars to a conclusion.

Symphony has the flow of a live performance, but the sonics are much better than any concert hall could deliver.

—James Hale

Symphony: Leaving; Discovery; The Encounter; First Dance; Just Get Up; Way To Go; Understanding; Waltz For Xose; Not Falling This Time; I'll Be Back. (50:06)

Personnel: Jean-Michel Pilc, piano.

Ordering info: justin-time.com

The Hot Box

	Critics	John Murph	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough	James Hale
Chris Potter <i>Got The Keys To The Kingdom</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Billy Valentine <i>Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth</i>		Recused	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★
Sara Caswell <i>The Way To You</i>		★★★½	★★★½	★★★½	★★★½
Jean-Michel Pilc <i>Symphony</i>		★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Chris Potter, *Got The Keys To The Kingdom—Live At The Village Vanguard*

Potter's latest live record journeys through the unexpected, exploring the joyous melodies of spirituals such as the title track, as well as lesser-known bop on Charlie Parker's "Klactoveed-sedstene." Potter's phrases are typically self-assured and tight, while pianist Craig Taborn and drummer Marcus Gilmore go to battle on rhythmic intricacies, producing an insightful and unusual set.

—Ammar Kalia

You won't hear a sleepy moment anywhere from this crack quartet in eager form. Potter appreciates structure even as he seems to duck it. The simplest folk forms here inspire the longest, most dynamic marathons, while "Klacto..." is a mere sprint at seven minutes.

—John McDonough

The prime of an exuberant, powerful band. Potter is a whirlwind, and Marcus Gilmore stirs up a fury. As usual, the tiny room brings out the best in everyone.

—James Hale

Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth, *Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth*

(John Murph has been recused from reviewing this album due to conflict of interest.)

The message of this 50-year folio of "message" soul songs of rage and faith is less musical than political; neither the message nor the politics have changed. Valentine gives their relevance authority. Shifting personnel hold a steady tone.

—John McDonough

A well-crafted, thoughtfully programmed set of soul covers that lets Valentine's dramatic, evocative voice soar.

—James Hale

Sara Caswell, *The Way To You*

After a nearly 20 year hiatus from releasing music as a leader, this delightful return in the spotlight is more than worth the wait.

—John Murph

A spirited outing from violinist Caswell, featuring her longtime quartet, who all play with a self-assuredness that speaks of their decade spent collaborating. Highlights come on the up-tempo rhythmic trading of "7 Aneis" and the gentle bowing of "Stillness," although the album as a whole fails to break much new ground with its compositions.

—Ammar Kalia

Heartfelt and expressive, Caswell's tone is lovely, and her seasoned quartet brings enormous variety to the table. I kept returning for the warmth.

—James Hale

Jean-Michel Pilc, *Symphony*

A gorgeous set of blossoming compositional spontaneity.

—John Murph

Pianist Pilc's solo record is gently paced and plaintive, working through darker melodic palettes on tracks like "The Encounter" and the frenetic "Not Falling This Time," as well as finding brightness on "Discovery." Ultimately, his touch is a little too soft to leave a lasting mark, trading instead in washes of texture and ambience.

—Ammar Kalia

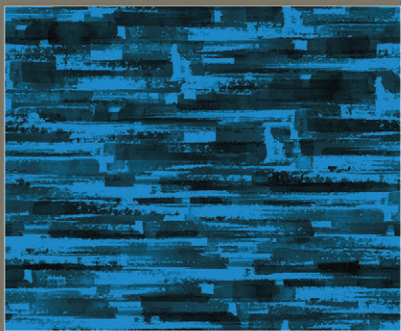
Pilc's orderly stream of consciousness juxtaposes a spacious, often lovely simplicity against grandiose ostentation, sprinkled with classical tropes. Whirlpools of virtuosity camouflage a lack of thematic clarity. Several intriguing interludes of potential are abandoned prematurely. Yet, interestingly discursive.

—John McDonough

THE SOUND OF SMOKE



BEN WOLFE UNJUST



Ben Wolfe

Unjust

RESIDENT ARTS

★★★★½

The third in a trilogy of albums that bassist-composer Wolfe recorded in 2021 during three two-day blocks in the studio with multiple ensembles, *Unjust* is a brilliant work of melodic ensemble writing and superb playing by a stellar intergenerational crew. Things kick off in high-flying fashion with “The Heckler,” an uptempo number that has trumpeter Nicholas Payton and alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins taking turns wailing against a frenet-

ic pulse laid down by drummer Aaron Kimmel and the leader. Vibraphonist Joel Ross’ minimalist comping creates an ethereal presence in contrast to the runaway burn here. The loping and moody “Hats Off To Rebay” has Ross and Wilkins uniting on a tight, angular head, à la Eric Dolphy’s “Out To Lunch,” before launching into individual riveting solos.

“Lullaby In D” is a gorgeous, affecting ballad that showcases rising star tenor saxophonist Nicole Glover, who brings a luxurious, breathy quality that belies her young age; more Ben Webster than Michael Brecker. The tasty medium-tempo swinger “Bob French” finds the ensemble in a relaxed groove paced by Wolfe’s solidly walking bass lines and inspired soloing from Glover and Payton, who engage in blistering exchanges at the tag. “The Corridor,” showcasing Ross’ vibes, and a rare solo turn from the bassist-leader. The angular “Mask Man” and Monkish title track, put Payton and Glover on the front line before freewheeling solos, are more proof of this modernist ensemble’s unity and urge to swing.

—Bill Milkowski

Unjust: The Heckler; Hats Off To Rebay; Lullaby In D; Bob French; The Corridor; Mask Man; Eventually; Unjust; Sparkling Red; Side-ways; Hats Off To Rebay (Interlude); Reprise (Credits). (58:26)

Personnel: Ben Wolfe, bass; Aaron Kimmel, drums; Nicholas Payton, trumpet (1, 4, 6, 8, 10); Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone (1, 2, 9–11); Nicole Glover, tenor saxophone (3, 4, 6, 8); Joel Ross, vibraphone (1, 2, 5, 7, 9–12); Orrin Evans, piano (3, 4); Addison Frei, piano (1, 7, 9, 12).

Ordering info: benwolfe.com

Gaia Wilmer Large Ensemble

Folia: The Music Of Egberto Gismonti

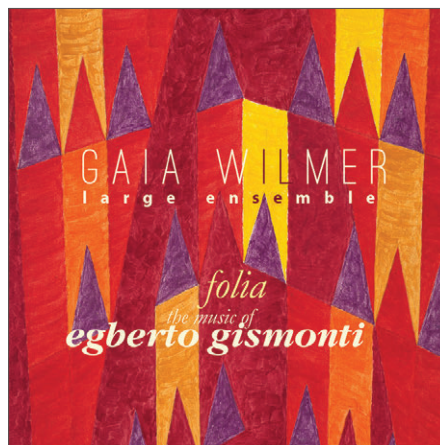
SUNNYSIDE

★★★★½

As Brazilian musical legends go, Egberto Gismonti ranks so highly and has created such a personal voice, blending jazz, classical and folkloric elements that the prospect of paying tribute to his work should be daunting. Yet young bandleader/arranger Gaia Wilmer has worked a small miracle, partly thanks to the deep influence, direct blessing and actual input of the man himself. On this strikingly fine album, the Gismonti himself lends authenticity on piano, amidst a 90-minute series of inventive-but-ever-respectful charts on his tunes.

Wilmer, a native of Florianópolis, Brasil, began developing her fresh, fascinating takes on Gismonti with concerts timed for his 70th birthday in 2018. She approaches her task with visceral energy and sophistication, incisively capturing the delicate, symbiotic qualities of Gismonti’s buoyant spirit and virtuosity.

On well-known classics, Wilmer offers expressive concepts as with the deconstructed melodic fragments of “Lôro” and deft dynamic interplay on “7 Anéis,” including a generous



piano solo and a restless free improv section.

Featured soloists include former Gismonti collaborator, cellist Jacques Morelenbaum and the bedazzling harmonica player Gabriel Grossi. But the primary spotlights go to Wilmer’s riveting orchestration, her ensemble’s taut esprit de corps and the timeless allure of Gismonti’s musical garden.

—Josef Woodard

Folia—The Music Of Egberto Gismonti: Folia; Em Família; 7 Anéis; Bianca; Infância; Lôro; Karate; Maracatu; Cego Aderaldo; Baião Malandro. (1:25:15)

Personnel: Maiara Moraes, Aline Gonçalves, flutes, piccolo; Fernando Trocado, Rui Alvim, Gustavo D’Amico, Joana Quieroz, Henrique Band, saxophones; Bruno Soares, Diego Garbin, Gilson Snatos, Pedro Paulo Junior, trumpets; Rafael Rocha, Everson Moraes, trombones; Luciano Camara, guitar; Rafael Martin, piano, accordion; Mayo Pamplona, bass; Lourenço Vascencellos, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Chris Dingman

Journeys Vol. 2

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★

Since his 2011 debut *Waking Dreams*, Chris Dingman has ushered those who gather to hear him into quiet listening spaces with dimensions always difficult to demarcate. The chamberish feel of that debut has given way an introspective and oneiric mode that isn’t sacred or religious in any overt or explicit sense, but invites a kind of deep listening that mirrors the trajectory of prayer, encompassing anxiety, guilt, simple wonder and profound affirmation.

If this is a lot to lay on an album of solo vibraphone music, it’s important to get rid of any fixed sense of what an album of solo vibes music might sound like. Anyone who has heard 2022’s *Journeys Vol. 1* will, of course, be prepared. Critics lost for a comparison often fall back on “bell-like.” Dingman has evolved a tinnabulatory method in which attacks and delays blend together and interact in quite remarkable and unanticipated ways. It’s not unrhythmic, though pulse has tended to replace strict rhythm, and pulse always rightly points to a vital humanity in the music.

Made against the background of years of lockdown and personal stresses, this is another unmistakably personal statement; but, detached from any psychological agenda, its musical values speak of the continuity of the creative person. Though “Enter,” the most important track here, is lifted from a much longer improvisation, it doesn’t sound like an edit or excerpt, but a privileged glimpse of an ongoing process. The closing “Return” works further variations, via sampling and processing. That, too, reinforces a feeling that this music is all of a piece, that the artist has allowed us a privileged glimpse into his life and mind, but also offered us music that sits strongly on its own terms, and makes its own journey.

—Brian Morton

Journeys Vol. 2: Ride; Dream, Ever Dream; Transit; Enter; Return. (48:30)

Personnel: Chris Dingman, vibraphone, effects.

Ordering info: chrisdingman.com



**Greg Ward's
Rogue Parade**
Dion's Quest
SUGAH HOOF RECORDS
★★★★

Chicago-bred alto saxophonist, bandleader Greg Ward shows an unusual fluency with sax-guitar relations, as we're reminded by the wondrous new album, sharing the front line of this quintet with guitarists Dave Miller and Matt Gold. Following up on 2019's acclaimed Rogue

Parade album *Stomping Off From Greenwood*, *Dion's Quest* expands on the promise of a project in which rock elements, groove imperatives and jazz sophistication get along seamlessly. Old school notions are swapped out for a fresh plate of ideas and textures, driven by the supple rhythm section of drummer Quin Kirchner and (mostly) electric bassist Matt Ulery.

Ward's band, and writing, stand to cross the divide between neophyte jazz listeners and diehards. We're on refreshed stylistic turf with the infectious allure of the opening "Crimson

Clay" — one of the most organic deployments of 5/4 in recent memory. West African guitar inter-chatter sneaks naturally into "Bravo Constantine," and a certain Bill Frisell-like touch shows up on the short but impactful "Porthole Dreams," a reflection on insular life during the pandemic hunkerdown.

Both guitarists bring palettes of colorizing effects, adding warble, tremolo, roadhouse reverb and fine-to-coarse-tuned degrees of warm distortion, sometimes with hints of Frisell-ish phrasing and slightly off-center note choices. Hyper-effected guitar abstraction adds spacey tints to the chugging "Blues Of The Earth" and the anthemic "Beware Of The Oh EEEs," shifting slyly from a rabble-raising 6/8 groove to fast post-bop/post-fusion lines to end on an ecstatic note. Things turn from rock-tinged roguishness to yearning lyricism plaintive on the finale, the poignantly moving, free-pulsed "Ocean Of Faith."

Ward weaves in and out of unison heads with guitarist allies, and issues tart, purposeful and soulful solo turns. Excessive showboating not allowed on this winning ship.

—Josef Woodard

Dion's Quest: Crimson Clay; Dashing Towards First Light; Noir Nouveaux; Blues Of The Earth; Bravo Constantine; Porthole Dreams; Beware Of The Oh EEE's; Ocean Of Faith. (52:06)

Personnel: Greg Ward, alto saxophone; Dave Miller, Matt Gold, guitars; Matt Ulery, bass; Quin Kirchner, drums.

Ordering info: sugahhoof.com

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JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER



BLUE ENGINE RECORDS

Voices with Visions

When listening to a jazz standard, listeners of a certain age may be thinking, "They don't write 'em like that anymore." Guitarist Vilray Blair Bolles does. On ***I Love A Love Song!* (Nonesuch; 42:15 ★★★★★)**, the latest album he's cut with singer Rachael Price, as **Rachael & Vilray**, there are 11 tunes that echo the feel of standards, without dipping into a single musical or lyrical cliché. The numbers are evenly divided between big band arrangements and intimate small combo settings, but everything swings with smooth, waggish tempos. Price and Bolles have easygoing vocal styles well-suited to playfully loquacious tunes that explore love's various aspects.

Ordering info: nonesuch.com

Like Peggy Lee, **Ann Hampton Callaway** is a songwriter and a vocalist with a subtle approach. On ***Fever: A Peggy Lee Celebration!* (Palmetto; 50:23 ★★★)**, she revisits Lee's iconic catalogue, paying tribute to hits like "Black Coffee," "I Love Being Here With You," played with a subtle Latin feel, and the title track. The album also introduces two compositions by Lee that have never been recorded: "Clair De Lune," a poem by Lee that Callaway composed music for and "The Other Part Of Me," a song written by Lee and Paul Horner for Lee's short-lived autobiographical Broadway musical, *Peg*. "Clair De Lune" is a moving song about unrequited love, but "The Other Part Of Me" is the album's standout track. It's a fervent love song, delivered powerfully by Callaway's tender vocal, minimal piano accompaniment and sustained notes on bowed bass.

Ordering info: palmetto-records.com

Kari Kirkland steps in with ***if (when you go)* (Independent Release; 41:05 ★★★★★)**, a collection of contemporary covers she recorded at Capital Studios in Hollywood. The arrangements look to the past, with the jazz players she enlisted treating the songs as if they were standards from the '50s. Her vocals are impressive throughout, with a less-is-more approach that downplays the often-bombastic scores created for the originals. She performs Sting's "Fragile" with the same bossa nova lilt he used, with the song's quiet intensity getting a lift by incorporating a few verses of the Dionne Warwick hit "What The World Needs Now." Her low-key vocals on Illenium's "Good Things Fall Apart" give the song more emotional weight than the original's over-the-top version. Her soft delivery makes the tale of lost love resonate even more deeply.

Ordering info: karikirkland.bandcamp.com

Poetry and jazz have been influencing each other for a long time. **Lisa Marie Simmons**, a poet, singer and composer, draws on that rich history for ***Notespeak 12* (Ropeadope; 60:06 ★★★★★)**, her continuing



Lisa Marie Simmons' voice flows freely between singing and speaking/reciting on *Notespeak 12*.

COURTESY LISA MARIE SIMMONS

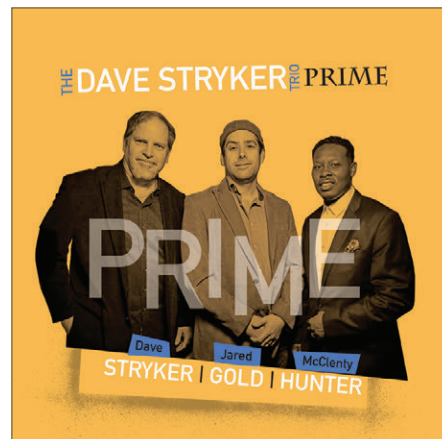
collaboration with Italian composer and keyboard player **Marco Cremaschini**. As with her previous efforts with the Notespeak ensemble, Simmons flows freely between singing and speaking/reciting, blurring the lines between poetry and music. This time around, Simmons and Cremaschini expand their musical palette. "The 12th Thing," a tribute to Tony Allen, longtime drummer with Fela Kuti, has Notespeak drummer Federico Negri laying down an Afrobeat groove. Simmons describes the connection between Allen, music and the cosmos, with kaleidoscopic images. She takes on racial injustice with "The Last Supper," a slow simmering track that uses the last meal of men wrongly convicted of murder. Cremaschini's spare piano and Manuel Caliumi's restrained saxophone keep the attention on Simmons' questions about the morality of the death penalty.

Ordering info: ropeadope.com

Composer and pianist **Christina Galisatus** has been playing music since she was a child. On ***Without Night* (Slow & Steady; 53:49 ★★★)**, her self-produced debut, she presents her own musical vision, drawing from the worlds of jazz, pop and folk music. With singer Erin Bentlage along, she shows off her gift for catchy melodies. Ten of the 12 tracks here are wordless, and let Bentlage show off her improvisational chops as she scats around the hooks Galisatus lays down. When she does sing, she brings the words to vibrant life. "I Want To Know Her," a song about mother/daughter relationships, lets Bentlage express a range of conflicting emotions with changes in tone and volume, holding notes to increase their dramatic effects. On the moody "Candlelight," her sparkling delivery makes a lyric that borders on cliché ("There can't be light/ Without night") sound like a heartfelt prayer.

Ordering info: christinagalissatus.bandcamp.com

DB



Dave Stryker Trio *Prime*

STRIKEZONE

★★★★★

As a recording artist, guitarist Dave Stryker's climb happened over the course of a 20-album affiliation with Steeplechase lasting from 1990 to 2012. Since then, he has confirmed his reputation with eight recommendable Strikezone releases: a deluxe saxophone salute to his former employee Stanley Turrentine (*Messin' With Mr. T.*), four "Eight Track" albums of jazzed-up 1960s/'70s pop music and others involving a string quartet (*As We Are*), the WDR Big Band (*Blue Soul*) and saxophonist Walter Smith III (*Baker's Circle*).

Stryker's new one, featuring his long-operating organ combo, is a capstone to all his years of headliner studio work. Foursquare and sure-fingered, he sizes up the potency of the melodies to eight arresting original compositions and one standard, "I Should Care." He emanates sensitivity of a special sort in "Hope" and "As Were Were."

Stryker's creative engine, in all gears, promotes a free-flow of inspiration. Maybe nothing shows his vivacity more than the way his elemental instinct for bluesy greasiness underlays homages to his mid-1980s boss Jack McDuff: the shuffle "Dude's Lounge" (part smoke-filled joint, part high-end club) and the exciting "Captain Jack." Organist Jared Gold, who solos as often as the guitarist and is of a different type than groove-oriented B-3 specialists, and communicative drummer McClenty Hunter are large assets to the one-take-per-song-and-no-overdubbing proceedings. Both show confidence in their own musical intelligence and skills.

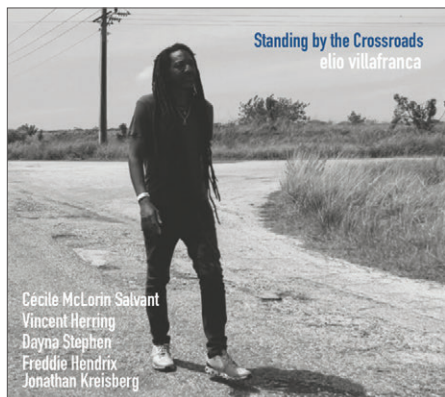
Arguably, *Prime* exceeds the high standard set by previous Stryker guitar-organ-drum albums made with colleagues like Gold, Joey DeFrancisco, Adam Nussbaum and Tony Reedus.

—Frank-John Hadley

Prime: Prime; Lockdown; Captain Jack; Hope; As We Were; Mac; I Should Care; Deep; Dude's Lounge. (57:55)

Personnel: Dave Stryker, guitar; Jared Gold, organ; McClenty Hunter, drums.

Ordering info: strikezonerecords.com



Elio Villafranca *Standing By The Crossroads* ARTISTSHARE

★★★★★

Cuban-born, U.S.-based pianist Elio Villafranca's 10th album is a deep dive into his past as reflected by his current life. A two-disc set featuring a dozen original compositions and complex arrangements for a septet amended by percussionists, singers including Cécile McLorin Salvant and, briefly, acoustic guitar, *Standing By The Crossroads* is ambitious.

Villafranca's music incorporates, with different emphasis, four musical influences he draws on: folkloric sounds from the Congolese traditions he absorbed growing up, classical

conservatory training, Afro-Cuban jazz and the greater jazz mainstream.

From these, he spins sophisticated works grounded in age-old rhythms. His virtuosic keyboard winds through the album, guiding without seeming to dominate its mid-song rhythmic shifts.

The title track is an interestingly complicated jazz waltz (at least in part), and the ballad "I Belong To You" featuring Salvant is romantically Ellingtonian. The compositions have anecdotal, historical or philosophical subtexts, but nothing other than the bee-buzz opening of "Panal de Abejas" is literal. Villafranca depicts his position at a crossroads of cultures knowing that it has required aesthetic choices, which he attempts to resolve by enfolding everything he's encountered in his group's sound. It's a noble effort, sincere and successful in creating something beautiful.

—Howard Mandel

Standing By The Crossroads: Habana Blues Chronicle; Standing By The Crossroads; Panal de Abejas; Yo Soy Lori Oba; I Belong To You; San Isidro Part 1; San Isidro Part 11; Song For Freedom; Keep The Eye On The Bull; No Man's Land; Solitaria; Picture Window. (78:08)

Personnel: Elio Villafranca, piano, compositions, ekón, guataca, coros, handclaps; Vincent Herring, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet; Freddie Hendrix, trumpet, flugelhorn; Dayna Stephens, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Jonathan Kreisberg, electric guitar; Domo Branch, drums; Edward Perez, acoustic bass; Jonathan Troncoso, batá drums, coros, hand claps; Mauricio Herrera, batá drums, congas, bonkó enchimiyá, coros, moyuba, hand claps; Jason Olaine, coros, hand claps; Cécile McLorin Salvant, vocals (5); Mar Vilaseca, vocals (2); Guillermo Guillén, Spanish guitar (9).

Ordering info: artistsshare.com

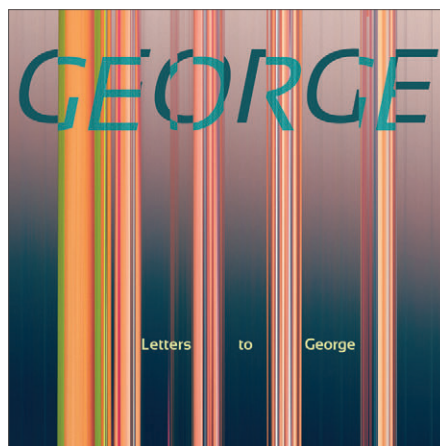
GEORGE *Letters To George* OUT OF YOUR HEAD

★★★★★

Out of the ever-expanding and category-blurring universe of drummer/composer/conceptualist John Hollenbeck comes a new entity, GEORGE, as enigmatic, punchy and compact as its name. Building on carefully selected components, Hollenbeck hand-picked saxophonist/flutist Anna Webber (a fellow Brooklynite and nimble idiom-crossover), saxophonist/vocalist Aurora Nealand and organic electronix/vox conjurer Chiquita Magic.

Their debut, *Letters To George*, is a body of work at once chill, atmospheric and intellectually challenging. The band's mission statement is seemingly laid out in the opening tracks: the seductive rhythmic maze of "Earthworker" followed by "Clinton" (nodding to funkmaster George Clinton), with its effective mix of angular drums/tenor saxophone discussions and a synth-fueled, hypnotic neo-soul-jazz wash.

"Can You Imagine This?" was a pandemic-timed, remotely recorded road test for this project, with parts flown into the evolving whole and the questioning lyric improvised by Nealand. Sonny Bono's "Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)," is basted in gothic moodiness, and British folk singer Cyril Tawney's



"Grey Funnel Line" is set into a busy-yet-coloristic landscape of drones and lines. Extra-musical references range from Georgia O'Keefe's palette in the languidly lyrical "O'Keefe" to post-George Floyd rage in the purposefully disjunct "Floyd."

Magic happens in the margins and the middle, between analog and digital textures, genre detours and a collective will which is dogmatically subject to change. In short, it's just GEORGE music.

—Josef Woodard

Letters To George: Earthworker; Clinton; Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down); Washington Carver; O'Keefe; Can You Imagine This?; Saunders; Floyd; Grey Funnel Line; Iceman. (49:18)

Personnel: John Hollenbeck, drums, piano; Anna Webber, tenor saxophone/flute; Aurora Nealand, voice, alto and soprano saxophone, keyboards; Chiquita Magic, keyboards, voice, piano.

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.com



GAIA WILMER LARGE ENSEMBLE *FOLIA* THE MUSIC OF EGBERTO GISMONTI

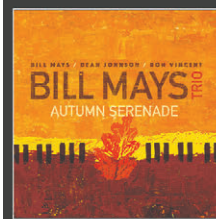
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with special contributions from

EGBERTO GISMONTI piano GABRIEL ROSSI harmonica
JAQUES MORELENBAUM cello

The magical music of Brazilian composer/guitarist/pianist Egberto Gismonti has enchanted generations of listeners. His celebrated blend of folkloric, jazz, and popular music has stationed Gismonti in the pantheon of Brazilian music. Composer/arranger Gaia Wilmer fell under Gismonti's spell as a youngster and now honors him with her new large ensemble recording, *Folia*.

A handful of the pieces were selected from her favorite Gismonti recording, *Em Família* (1981). She approached each piece individually, trying to find intriguing ways to translate them appropriately for nineteen instruments. Even Gismonti pointed out that with her changes and reharmonizations the music had truly become her own re-compositions.



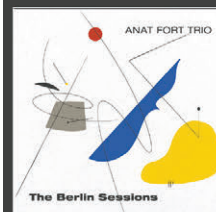
BILL MAYS *AUTUMN SERENADE*

SSC 1695
in stores NOW

BILL MAYS piano DEAN JOHNSON bass
RON VINCENT drums

Fall is a special time of year. The carefree vibrations of summer slow to a meditative pace allowing healing and regrouping to begin. For pianist Bill Mays, fall gives him a feeling of spiritual rebirth along with time for introspection and reflection. Mays has dedicated his heart felt new recording, *Autumn Serenade*, to the season.

Thoughts of autumn usually imagine changing leaves, color temperatures, and a meditative hush. The music that Bill Mays and his trio have compiled for *Autumn Serenade* proves to be a perfect soundtrack for this contemplative season.



ANAT FORT TRIO *THE BERLIN SESSIONS*

SSC 1687
in stores NOW

ANAT FORT piano
GARY WANG bass ROLAND SCHNEIDER drums

The world's pause caused by the Covid-19 pandemic created rifts in regular patterns and collaborations. Pianist Anat Fort found herself effectively separated from her regular trio of bassist Gary Wang and Robert Schneider for the first time in the trio's 20 years of existence. When an opportunity arose to bring the trio together to perform in Germany, Fort seized on the chance to regroup and record an album that goes against the group's typical formula on *The Berlin Sessions*.

The trio touche in *The Berlin Sessions* on some elements in the music that they hadn't normally touched to stunningly, unique effect.



sunnysiderecords.com



Michael Feinberg *Blues Variant*

CRISS CROSS

★★★★

A bassist-led record doesn't necessarily mean a whole raft of bass solos. Feinberg prefers to play for the band, but he plays such a lot that solos might almost seem beside the point. Jimmy Garrison is his model. Feinberg made an impact with his 2020 SteepleChase record *From Where We All Came*, which featured former teacher Dave Liebman as a guest and the technically accomplished Noah Preminger on a densely detailed quintet date.

The key to a successful group is a balance of resources. Nasheet Waits can play in any meter known to man, and Leo Genovese is a superbly

two-handed player whose roles on the title track and the superb "Saqqara" confirm his quality.

The album and opening track title refers obliquely to the COVID pandemic, which must have been agony for a player as active and ambitious as Feinberg. The blues are part of his make-up, even when not strictly present and every track here has a flavor of the form. "Healing Power Of GRITS" (this title refers to "girls raised in the South," like his wife) finds Feinberg in a soulful mood. He then messes creatively with the meter on Herbie Hancock's "Eye Of The Hurricane," the first of three numbers with the ultimate guest star. Having Lieb in for that middle sequence makes it sound more like a genuine walk-on. When he's gone, after Genovese's challenging "Gather Power," Feinberg offers further family homage with an improvisation for his late mother-in-law, a sign that underneath the steely and sometimes unyielding control, there's a lot of upwelling emotion in his work as well.

A wholly satisfying album, which brings together fine writing, individuality, adaptability to a new voice and, crucial to it all, a tremendous group feel. That's model modern jazz.

—Brian Morton

Blues Variant: Blues Variant; Saqqara; High Or Booze; The Healing Power Of GRITS; Eye Of The Hurricane; The Water Spirit Brought Us; The Water Spirit Will Bring Us Home; Gather Power; Improvisation (for Leslie); Cycle Song; Year Of The Ox. (49:53)

Personnel: Noah Preminger, tenor saxophone, flute; Dave Liebman (5–7), saxophone, flute; Leo Genovese, piano; Michael Feinberg, bass, electric bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

Ordering info: crisscrossjazz.com

Okonski *Magnolia*

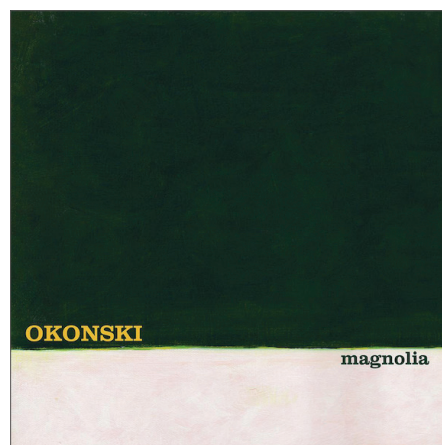
COLEMINA

★★★★

This trio record's mood calls for deep contemplation. Over a rather short run of just 29 minutes, Steve Okonski's compositions offer a measured approach that create connections to our emotional centers. They are cues for getting in touch with the things we hold close and dear.

All seven tracks are variations on this theme. There is none of the traditional jazz motifs of improvisation that we have come to know. Yet these themes aren't what one might expect from veterans of the Durand Jones and the Indications rhythm and blues group.

Featuring Michael Isvara "Ish" Montgomery on bass and co-founder of the Indications Aaron Frazer on drums, those familiar with their work might find that this project feels different. Okonski's compositions replace the hard-driving rhythmic gestures associated with soul and funk with meditation, allowing the reflective tones of the piano to take over our senses. The absence of vocals force us ever more into a deeper relationship with a



sense of an emotional register that requires no lyrical translation.

Recorded on a Tascam 388 in the Colemine Records headquarters in Loveland, Ohio, the engineering prowess of this album is a perfect foundation and vehicle for what Okonski has on offer.

—Joshua Myers

Magnolia: Runner Up; Field Museum; Old Friend; Dark Moon; Song For My Sister's Son; Walking To A Home; Sunday. (29:23)

Personnel: Steve Okonski, piano; Michael Isvara "Ish" Montgomery, bass; Aaron Frazer, drums.

Ordering info: coleminerecords.com



Buster Williams *Something More Sextet* *Unalome*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★

Half of the eight tracks on Buster Williams' *Unalome* are his compositions, and each, to some degree, chronicles the master bassist's musical odyssey. "Stairways," Williams' opening salvo, is reminiscent of his formidable steps in the '70s as well as his transcendence, emblematic of the Buddhist definition of the album's title. But it's also an occasion for pianist George Colligan to glow, and his swift arpeggios are radiant harbingers. That acceleration is less apparent on "Estate," where Jean Baylor's horn-like voice blends almost imperceptibly with Bruce Williams' wonderfully articulated licks on saxophone. Baylor extends her unique vocalizations on "In The Middle Of A Rainbow" and gives "Here's To Life" an interpretation that radically departs from other treatments.

Warmth and paternal tenderness exudes on "Tayamisha," the leader's tribute to his daughter, and his fans are sure to recall an earlier version with Sphere that in the hands of the Something More Sextet has lost none of its magic, particularly in Colligan's blocked chords, and Williams' deep resonance and rich tonality. Intricate patterns of rhythm emerge on "42nd Street," and the mallets of Stefon Harris and drummer Lenny White merge and emit a variety of percussive sounds.

There is a quality of equanimity, a sense of sharing in this ensemble, and perhaps emanates in part from the leader's intuitive balance, Williams' way of assembling and finding a center of expression for disparate musical tendencies. His special Buddhist vision, his wisdom of silence and serenity is pervasive on these Smoke Sessions.

—Herb Boyd

Unalome: Stairways; Estate; Tayamisha; In the Middle Of A Rainbow; The Wisdom Of Silence; 42nd Street; I've Got The World On A String; Here's To Life. (51:22)

Personnel: Buster Williams, bass; Bruce Williams, saxophones; Jean Baylor, vocals; Stefon Harris, vibraphone; George Colligan, piano; Lenny White, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



Francisco Mela featuring Cooper-Moore and William Parker *Music Frees Our Souls Vol. 2*

577

★★★★★

Since moving from Cuba to the U.S. in 2000, Francisco Mela has established himself in several spheres. He has drummed for Joe Lovano, McCoy Tyner and esperanza spalding; led ensembles that span the jazz spectrum; and joined the faculty of Berklee College of Music. Most recently, he made a connection with New York's ecstatic jazz community, which has been documented by 577 Records.

Even though he has turned toward the avant-garde, Mela has not left his past. *Music Frees Our Souls Vol. 2* is the second in a proposed three-part tribute to McCoy Tyner. This session and its predecessor were recorded on the same day in November 2020. Bassist William Parker appears on both, in the company of pianists Matthew Shipp on the first volume, and Cooper-Moore on this record.

John Coltrane found in Tyner not only a versatile foil, but a spiritual fellow traveler, and the title of this series attests to an influence that is not simply musical. This album's two collectively improvised pieces project transcendence and generosity, which speak to Tyner's values.

Mela's name may come first on the cover, but he plays a facilitator's role, framing his partners with radiant cymbal play and propelling them with quiet insistence. Parker complements this approach with light, sprinting figures. The combination of space and velocity gives Cooper-Moore room, and he takes full advantage, honoring Tyner by playing lines zig, zag and tumble, supplying the yang that balances the rhythm section's yin in order to create music that feels whole and uplifting.

—Bill Meyer

Music Frees Our Souls Vol. 2: Musical Literacy; Mental Scenario. (41:33)

Personnel: Francisco Mela, drums; Cooper-Moore, piano; William Parker, bass.

Ordering info: 577records.com

Ed Partyka Jazz Orchestra *Hold Your Fire*

NEUKLANG

★★★★★

Arranger-leader Ed Partyka and singer-composer Julia Oschewsky collaborated on two earlier albums (*Hits* and *Kopfino*) with Oschewsky guesting on two songs on Partyka's *In The Tradition*. The music that they create together is a bit unusual because the German-born Oschewsky, who considers Joni Mitchell and Bonnie Raitt to be her main influences, is a subtle singer with a light tone whose roots are clearly in rock and folk music. In contrast, Partyka, originally from Chicago, moved to Germany in 1990 and heads the UMO Helsinki Jazz Orchestra and the Zurich Jazz Orchestra. His arrangements, which make extensive use of brass instruments and lower-pitched reeds (often in unusual combinations), at times hint at both Gil Evans and Bob Brookmeyer.

Hold Your Fire consists of three originals by Oschewsky, a rock number from Leslie Feist and the traditional gospel piece "I Told Jesus." The opening "Hold Your Fire" has the singer accompanied by the brass-heavy ensemble, gives trombonist Simon Harrer an opportunity to stretch out and is episodic and unpredictable. Feist's "I'm Not Running Away" is some-



what cinematic and could have been used for the soundtrack of a 1960s detective show; trumpeter Tobias Weidinger is impressive. Benny Brown's fluent trumpet solo on "Isabelle" contrasts with a philosophical pop vocal and the dissonant ensembles.


—Scott Yanow

Hold Your Fire: Hold Your Fire; I'm Not Running Away; Isabelle; I Told Jesus; Dead Man. (38:05)

Personnel: Ed Partyka, arranger; Julia Oschewsky, vocals; Felix Meyer, Benny Brown, Tobias Weidinger, Christian Mehler, Suzan Veneman, trumpet, flugelhorn; Simon Harrer, Lukas Wyss, trombone; Robert Hedemann, bass trombone; Jan Schreiner, tuba, bass trombone; Linus Bernoulli, French horn; Oliver Leicht, alto and soprano saxophone, clarinet; Florian Trubsch, Malte Duurschnabel, alto and soprano saxophone, clarinet, alto clarinet; Malte Schiller, tenor, and soprano saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet; Nils Fischer, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Florian Leuschner, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet; Hendrik Soll, piano; Reza Askari, bass; Reinhold Schmolzer, drums.

Ordering info: bauerstudios.de

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Northern Atmospheres

Artists that Manfred Eicher nurtures and presents on his boutique imprint ECM come from all over, with heavy representation from Northern Europe. Albums released by the minimalist, elegant label January were all European: **Drifting** (★★★★★) is the issue of tenor saxophonist **Mette Henriette**, a Norwegian; drummer **Sebastian Rochford** and pianist **Kit Downes** are the Brits behind **A Short Diary** (★★★★★); **Pasado en Claro** (★★★★★) is by Swedes **Anders Jormin** (bass), **Lena Willemark** (violin, viola and vocals) and drummer **Jon Fält**, along with Tokyo native **Karin Nakagawa**; and **Thunder** (★★★★★) is Swede sonics savant **Stephan Micus'** 25th solo album for ECM.

Conventional drums surface on only two of these intellectually fearless and fascinating recordings. The emphasis on atmosphere and pulse is common to all, rather than the rhythm so often prominent in the African-American jazz tradition.

Each album is unique in different ways. All rate five stars for their varying atmospheres and moods, from Henriette's mid-register, yearning stylings to the obstreperous dramatics of Micus' odes to the gods of thunder. The Jormin album is sinewy and elastic, a culture-straddler in tunes like "The Woman Of The Long Ice" and the haunting "Glowworm," which lead the listener to magical mental spaces. The Rochford-Downes is the most accessible and, perhaps, familiar-sounding.

The most layered piece on *Drifting*, an album Henriette says is "on its way somewhere," is "Oversoar." Building on Johan Lindvall's tight piano intervals, Henriette's saxophone breathing the unexpected and the imminent, this gives way to Judith Hamann's cello, high and insistent against the commanding piano and saxophone undertone. Contemporary chamber music of power and persuasion, this joins its musicians in a quest for serenity.

Downes' circumspect drums and Rochford's tentative piano set the tone for *Diary* with "This Tune Your Ears Will Never Hear," a moving song Rochford wrote in memory of his father, who died in 2019. The album is an extended elegy and a healing, and it is lean.

Diary's subtlety is its strength. The drumming is often ghostly, the piano stately but ringing. On the deliberate "Night Of Quiet," a Rochford-Eicher co-production, the piano gains such resonance it feels as if a phantom cello has entered the room.

Too unexpected for background music, the thoughtful, precise sounds of this respectful and warm duo demand attention; the overtones are as compelling as Rochford's minimalist keyboard strikes. Downes' judicious cymbal and suggestion of brush add



Mette Henriette: contemporary chamber music of power and persuasion

just the right touches.

Songs featuring the work of Mexican writer Octavio Paz and Petrarch, an Italian sonneteer of the early Renaissance, inform *Pasado en Claro*, a seamless merging of music and poetry that enhances both expressions. Nakagawa's zither-like, 25-string koto launches the album with the vibrant and exotic "Mist Of The River," ushering in Willemark, a vocalist of astonishing elasticity and strength.

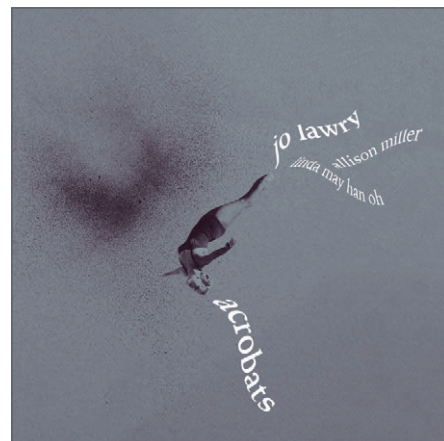
Related sonic surprises await on "Kingdom Of Coldness." There, bass growl and koto clang underpin Willemark's plaintive vocals as the tune stacks textures like a person adding layers of clothing to prepare for a winter walk. This quartet's music is stark and invigorating, a startle around every corner. It conjures oxymoronic descriptors, like kabuki flamenco out of the North.

Recorded from 2020 to 2022, *Thunder* reflects Micus' fascination with Tibetan monasteries and the liturgical Buddhist music their monks play. The "star" of this aggressive, exciting album is the dung chen, a ritual trumpet more than 13 feet long. It makes quite a noise. So do the South African storm drum, the Japanese bamboo flute known as the shakuhachi, the ki un ki (a handmade wooden flute one plays by inhaling) and kyeezee, triangular bronze chimes used in the temples of Burma.

Micus played those instruments and more to record his nine homages to thunder gods, spiritual figures one finds across belief systems. Each *Thunder* segment has its own character, and each tells a different story. This narrative music clears paths fresh to most Western ears.

The longest track is "A Song For Armazi," the thunder god of Georgia, the former Soviet republic. It starts with a plucked sarangi rumble, sounding like a giant bass bouncing around a cathedral ceiling. The melody develops across an expanded scale. What a way to cap a voyage to the heart of mythology. **DB**

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Jo Lawry *Acrobats*

WHIRLWIND

★★★★½

While Sheila Jordan has pioneered and championed voice-bass duets, a trio consisting of voice, bass and drums is much less common. A jazz vocalist in that setting can play it safe by simply singing conventionally while ignoring the fact that there are no chordal instruments. But Jo Lawry took another approach here.

Although the Australian singer has worked with Sting (for more than a decade), Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel, it is obvious from the first moments that she is a fearless improviser whose true love is jazz. While she uses lyrics in spots, it is her wordless flights that most impress. One could imagine Sonny Rollins playing many of these phrases and ideas.

Lawry has a pretty voice, a flexible style and a wide range. While some of the songs on *Acrobats* are standards, she continually comes up with fresh interpretations, such as taking "You're The Top" uptempo as a duet with drummer Allison Miller and "Deed I Do" as a loose and adventurous jazz waltz. Her phrasing on "Taking A Chance On Love" is quite attractive even as she bends and reshapes the swing standard's melody. A measure of her musical courage is choosing to sing the nearly unsingable Lennie Tristano melody "317 East 32nd Street."

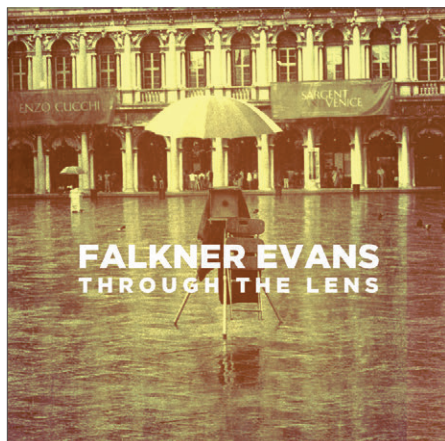
Bassist Linda May Han Oh is rarely an accompanist on this set, for her playing is devoid of anything obvious, she consistently pushes and challenges the singer, including on their playful duet rendition of "Takes Two To Tango." Drummer Miller is subtle but, like the bassist, never just keeps time, and she makes each note count. With Lawry never taking it easy, the results are quite stimulating.

—Scott Yanow

Acrobats: Travelling Light; Acrobats; Taking A Chance On Love; You're The Top; Deed I Do; You're The Voice; Takes Two To Tango; 317 East 32nd Street; Medley: My Time Of Day, I've Never Been In Love Before; If I Were A Bell. (42:29)

Personnel: Jo Lawry, vocals; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Allison Miller, drums.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



Falkner Evans *Through The Lens*

CONSOLIDATED ARTISTS PRODUCTIONS

★★★★½

Falkner Evans' 2001 debut, *Level Playing Field*, a trio recording with bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Matt Wilson, introduced a promising young talent with a penchant for swinging, a warm, lyrical touch on the piano and a wide tonal palette (he covered everything from k.d. lang to Duke Ellington to Leonard Bernstein in between several distinctive originals). His potent 2011 quintet outing *The Point Of The Moon*, featuring Wilson, Greg Tardy,

Ron Horton, Belden Bullock and Gary Versace, was a similarly ebullient and eminently swinging session marked by fresh originals like the tango-flavored title track and the quirky, irrepressibly swinging "Cheer Up." When his wife, Linda, died under tragic circumstances nearly three years ago, his music understandably took a more melancholy turn on two subsequent solo piano outings.

A companion piece to 2021's *Invisible Worlds*, his solo debut featuring a set of new compositions dedicated to Linda, *Through The Lens* (his fourth for CAP, founded by the late pianist Mike Longo) is a purely improvised solo piano recital exploring memory, grief and healing. The sustain pedal is depressed throughout this moving collection as the pianist lets the notes ring out and hover in the air like unanswered questions on unhurried meditations like "Soul Witness" and the tender "Closeness ... Desire." On "Blues For Lucia" and "Living Forever," he takes a dip into a darkly dissonant pool, while the tranquil title track is both bitter-sweet and uplifting.

Evans' heart was wide open on this starkly introspective and deeply emotional solo outing.

—Bill Milkowski

Through The Lens: Soul Witness; Closeness ... Desire; Blues For Lucia; Living Forever; Through The Lens. (43:49)
Personnel: Falkner Evans, piano.

Ordering info: falknerevans.com

Bill Laurance/ Michael League *Where You Wish You Were*

ACT

★★★★½

The Snarky Puppy founder and his longtime musical companion have stripped things down for their latest release, finding new heights of pleasantness with this duo album. The pair explore directions and inspirations, finding interplay with League's oud and Mediterranean influences that are instrumental in breaking free of constrictions. Where in other contexts and larger ensembles, their need for precision could be arguably one that leaves the music lacking soul, here that precision doesn't need to coordinate with so many other elements. Laurance and League have only themselves and the results are indeed interesting.

"Round House" is a jaunty tune that delights for five minutes. Laurance's left hand stays a constant rhythmic presence while his right and League's guitar find all sorts of corners to explore through such simplicity. The following tune, "Sant Esteve," feels like its inverse with League taking lead on the oud holding down the simple rhythm and finding what he and Laurance can do with it. "Tricks" lives up to its title with League on 12-string guitar giv-



ing a percussive edge at the start, providing an entirely different energy than the rest of the album.

Ultimately, the pair charm. It's understandable why they've known each other well for more than 20 years, what they bring out of each other and why — in their simplest form — they excel at hitting all their desired marks. They know more than a just little bit about what's around them.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Where You Wish You Were: La Marinada; Meeting Of The Mind; Round House; Sant Esteve; Kin; Tricks; Anthem For A Tiny Nation; Ngoni Baby; Bricks; Where You Wish You Were; Duo. (41:38)
Personnel: Bill Laurance, piano, voice; Michael League, oud, fretless acoustic guitar, bass, fretless baritone electric guitar, ngoni, voice.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

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Paul de Barros, Downbeat Magazine

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Rachel Therrien
Mi Hogar
 OUTSIDE IN
 ★★½

There's a vastness to the international flair heard on *Mi Hogar* by Rachel Therrien's Latin Jazz Project. Equipped with her own experiences living, performing and studying in New York and Cuba, Therrien brings in more than 20 other players who have been a part of her journeys to record in locations the world over.

"Capricho Arabe" opens the album with a savory slow burn. It's not until more than halfway through that the piece expands its instru-

mental layers — bass, piano, trumpet, drum kit, congas — and a faster tempo. The arrangement takes its time stepping into a full-bodied stride. The wait is long but the journey to turn the corner is gorgeous. "The Wizard," by contrast, one of Therrien's three originals, immediately embraces the playfulness and mystique of its title figure, as Therrien delivers a bold flutter-tongued note that gently overlaps with a foreboding, sustained bass note and the subtle undercurrent of percussive rattling. Its imaginative writing leaning into storytelling, giving the music an extra dimension of personality.

Therrien blends her passions more directly on Dizzy Gillespie's "Con Alma," with bustling, overlapping rhythmic patterns as percussive tones dance beneath Therrien's trumpet and Manuel Valera's agile flights along the piano.

Mi Hogar is as firsthand a presentation of multicultural music as one could hope for and throughout the seven tracks, Therrien applies her instincts as a composer and arranger with exceptional judgement. —Kira Grunenberg

Mi Hogar: Capricho Arabe; Moment's Notice; The Wizard; Mojo; Con Alma; Odessa; Porcelanosa. (44:59)

Personnel: Rachel Therrien, trumpet, flugelhorn; Michel Medrano Brindis, drums; Miquel de Armas (1), Julian Gutierrez (2), Gabriel Chakarji (3, 4), Manuel Valera (5), Danae Olano (6), Willy Soto Barreto (7), piano; Alex Bellegarde (1, 2); John Benitez (3–5), Roberto Riveron (6), Luis Izquierdo (7), bass; Roman Filiu (3, 4), Nestor Rodriguez (7), saxophones; Lazaro Martinez (1, 2, 7), Arturo Zagarra (1, 2, 7), Melissa Lavergne (1, 7), Keisel Jimenez (3–5), Carlos Maldonado (3–5), Victor Pablo (5); Magdelys Savigne (6), percussion.

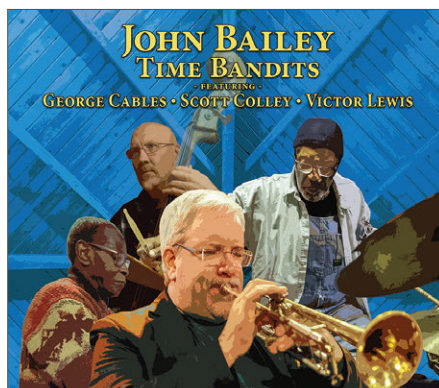
Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com

John Bailey Quartet
Time Bandits
 FREEDOM ROAD
 ★★

Brassman John Bailey and his compatible band lean into the straight-ahead post-bop model codified in the 1960s and '70s at Rudy Van Gelder's studios on *Time Bandits*, his third album as a leader. With confidence edging on swagger, the trumpeter-flugelhornist brings a gleaming tone and tart delivery reminiscent of Freddie Hubbard, Lee Morgan and Donald Byrd to the riff-based blues title track, boogaloo-inflected "Groove Samba" finale and three other originals, plus a Jerome Kern standard, the Beatles' "She's Leaving Home," pianist George Cables' thoughtful "Lullaby," Garry Dial's tender "How Do You Know?" and drummer Victor Lewis' popping "Oh Man ...!"

Despite inclusion of lesser-known pieces, the music sounds familiar, which may be considered a feature or flaw. Cables and Lewis are longtime masters of the form, deserving far greater appreciation, and with Colley — whose solid tone is always welcome — provide Bailey with perfect backup. The pianist's support, in particular, adds colors and dimension to the combo; for one small pleasure, listen to Cables comp in the pocket on "Various Nefarious."

One track, "Rose," is disappointing. It ven-



tures into free-time land, just as players sometimes did on Blue Note albums 60 years back, but without as much urgency. Lewis takes an exciting break, but Bailey follows by asserting the unpersuasive melody line. Everything's better when group sticks to firmly jazzy swing, and Bailey focuses on the brawny, measure-leaping phrases he delivers like a pitcher with a repertoire of swerves, curves, sinkers and changeups, including warm feelings on the ballads.

—Howard Mandel

Time Bandits: Time Bandits; Various Nefarious; Long Ago And Far Away; Ode To Thaddeus; Oh Man, Please Get Me Out Of Here!; She's Leaving Home; Rose; How Do You Know?; Lullaby; Groove Samba. (53:01)

Personnel: John Bailey, trumpet; George Cables, piano; Scott Colley, bass; Victor Lewis, drums.

Ordering info: johnbailey.com



Derrick Gardner & The Jazz Prophets
Pan Africa
 IMPACT JAZZ
 ★★½

Midway through "Highlife Suite," the fifth track on this album by The Jazz Prophets, trumpeter/leader Derrick Gardner makes a fleeting allusion to "Strangers In Paradise." That may well be how the band felt on the 2021 tour through Ghana that inspired the album, which bristles with joyful discovery.

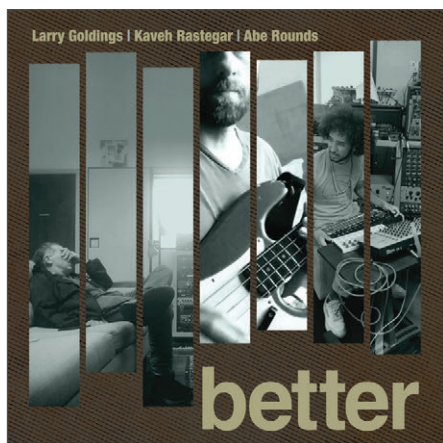
True to the spirit of Kenny Dorham's band of the same name, The Jazz Prophets play no-nonsense hard-bop, in this case leavened by the sparkling African percussion of Washington, D.C.-based drummer Kweku Sumbry. Gardner plays clean, smart lines with unerring virtuosity in the Dorham tradition. High points include a driving rendition of Jackie McLean's "Appointment In Ghana"; "10,000 Ships," a fascinating original by tough-toned saxophonist Robert Dixon, which moves from atmospheric suspense to a surprisingly triumphant ending; and Gardner's down-home "Blues For The Diaspora."

Gardner's "Vincent, The Afro Mestizo" and "The Sixth Village" offer welcome solo space for Gardner's trombonist brother, Vincent. "NKRUMAH 'da RULA" highlights how bassist Obasi Akoto (formerly Steve Kirby) anchors the band. "Highlife Suite," by Ghanaian pianist Victor Dey, steps warm and lively, though, oddly, it's not a suite and its highlife flavor is submerged. The closer, "Assin Manso ... The Last Bath," a reference to a ritual of the slave trade, feels like an appropriate place to end. But its repeated resolutions of portentous buildups into short segments gets frustrating. Maybe that's Gardner's point, one of many in a satisfying, well-conceived album. —Paul de Barros

Pan Africa: Djembe Kan; Appointment In Ghana; 10,000 Ships; The Sixth Village; Highlife Suite; Blues For The Diaspora; Vicente, The Afro Mestizo; NKRUMAH 'da RULA; Assin Manso ... The Last Bath. (64:00)

Personnel: Derrick Gardner, trumpet; Robert Dixon, alto and tenor saxophone; Vince Gardner, trombone; George Caldwell, piano; Obasi Akoto, bass; Kweku Sumbry, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: impactmusicinc.com



Larry Goldings/Kaveh Rastegar/Abe Rounds *Better*

ROPEADOPE

★★★

Keyboard maestro Larry Goldings teams up with Kneebody bassist Kaveh Rastegar and versatile pop drummer/composer Abe Rounds for a smart, studio-centric outing. Swaggering, in the pocket, leaving air between the notes and whacking backbeats, sometimes the music is finger-popping fun. At others, it comes across as “inside baseball” for analog keyboard geeks.

On the fun side of the ledger, count the

blissfully groovy title track, with its deft interweaving of wah-wahs and organ gurgles; a reprise of same, with an entirely different palette of timbres and textures, including creamy organ and an acoustic piano that seems to suddenly tumble through the ceiling; a darker, thrilling nod to Les McCann, “But Wait, There’s Les”; and “Stockwell,” a twangy, Duane Eddy kind of thang that recalls the pulpy taste of Eugene Chadbourne or John Zorn.

In the near-miss column put “Temple Bar,” which stands out for the way it eventually (though not fast enough) transports you to an imaginary world, and the peppy “Yeah Yeah Yeah,” which teases with reedy, harmonica-like sounds over a reggae-ish feel but goes nowhere.

Who needs a calliope-kitschy roller-rinker like “I Want To Be Happy”; the grace-noted breeze of background jazz called “Bob James”; or the faux exotica of the wheezy dream called “Mary Lou”?

Somebody, I guess. But this project feels like it slipped being precious, a hunch perhaps verified by a line at the end of title track: “I don’t know.” Me, neither. —Paul de Barros

Better: Better; Bob James; But Wait, There’s Les; I Want To Be Happy; Mary Lou; Reprise; Stockwell; Temple Bar; Yeah Yeah Yeah. (42:44)

Personnel: Larry Goldings, piano, organ, synthesizers, Pocket Piano; Kaveh Rastegar, bass, guitar (8); Abe Rounds, drums, percussion, drum machine, guitar (3, 9), synthesizer (5); Bob Magnuson, woodwinds (6), John Sneider, arranger (6).

Ordering info: ropeadope.com

Anat Fort Trio *The Berlin Sessions*

SUNNYSIDE

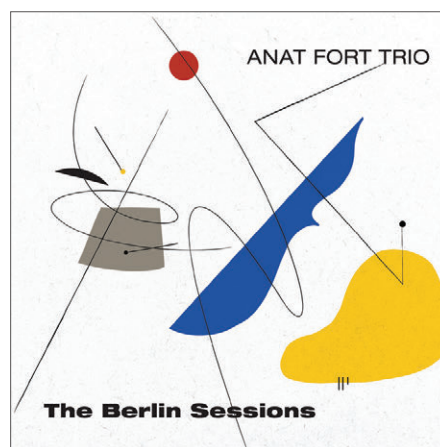
★★★

Pianist Anat Fort formed her trio with bassist Gary Wang and drummer Roland Schneider in 1999, but COVID sent them home — to Tel Aviv, New York and Berlin, respectively. As the pandemic eased, they reconvened for a performance in Munich, Germany, quickly seizing the opportunity to record for the first time since May 2018, when they cut *Colour*.

Instead of entering Berlin’s legendary Hansa Studio with a rehearsed book of material, they opted for a spontaneous approach: tackling some pop tunes, revisiting some older repertoire, recording a suite they had played several times at New York’s Rubin Museum.

They kept the tape running and emerged with this double album, which adroitly captures the renewed spark, especially in the four fully improvised pieces that open the album, balancing driving swing impulses, thrillingly jagged post-Thelonious Monk piano phrases, waves of abstraction and a collective snap.

The rest of the music covers a broad spectrum, particularly in transforming sketches of “The Jain Suite” into a lustrous, enigmatic sprawl with grains of harmonic antiquity



and yearning melody. On the downside are a schmaltzy reading of Billy Joel’s “Just The Way You Are” and an unfunky take on Level 42’s “The Sun Goes Down (Living It Up),” but the rest of the album affirms that Fort and company have picked right up where they left off.

—Peter Margasak

The Berlin Sessions: First Dance; Into It; Out of It; Are We Still Dancing; The Jain Suite: Two and a Half Continents; The Jain Suite: Enlightenment in Four Dimensions; The Jain Suite: Flying Student; The Jain Suite: Mahavira’s Pregnancy And Death; The Jain Suite: More Than One Way To See Things; The Jain Suite: The World As A Human Being; Breeze; Fire Drill Blues; Just The Way You Are; All the Things You Are; Wish Cloud; Open (for Take Toriyama); The Sun Goes Down (Living It Up); Oseh Shalom; Back To The Future. (82:46)

Personnel: Anat Fort, piano; Gary Wang, bass; Roland Schneider, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

SteepleChase

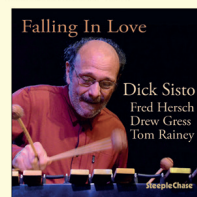
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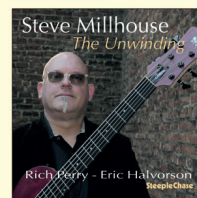
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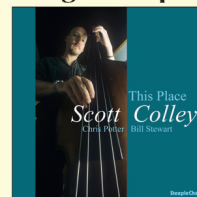
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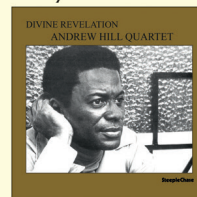
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Something Blue

Personal Preference

POSI-TONE

★★★½

This album brings together some familiar and new members of Posi-Tone Records' roster for a sextet project. Labeling the group Something Blue might invite one to think about the many moods contained in that color and what it signifies. But this writer believes that the blues can be pleasurable. So it was not surprising that as

producer Marc Free explains in the album's notes, the result of this project is "maximum enjoyment."

The band presented here is composed of "familiar collaborators" alto and soprano saxophonist Markus Howell, bassist Boris Kozlov and drummer Donald Edwards, each of whom offer an original composition. But the "new faces" handle the bulk of the compositional duties. They include pianist Misha Tsiganov, tenor saxophonist Willie Morris, and trombonist Altin Sencalar.

There is straightahead risk-taking, and that is what places this work over the edge and offers an invitation for listening to the way blues can ripple and excite as well as expand upon the tradition.

How one relates to this sound might ultimately reveal their personal preference. But what makes this recording work is its wholeness rather than its individuality. What is personal is made in what is collective. —Joshua Myers

Personal Preference: The Path; Flyover Country; Blended; Seeley Street Song; Yasya; Grit; Pa' Lan' Ga; Niecee; Here To Stay; Waltz For Olena; You May Have Already Won. (54:54)

Personnel: Markus Howell, alto and soprano saxophones; Willie Morris, tenor saxophone; Altin Sencalar, trombone; Misha Tsiganov, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Donald Edwards, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com

Wolfgang Haffner

Silent World

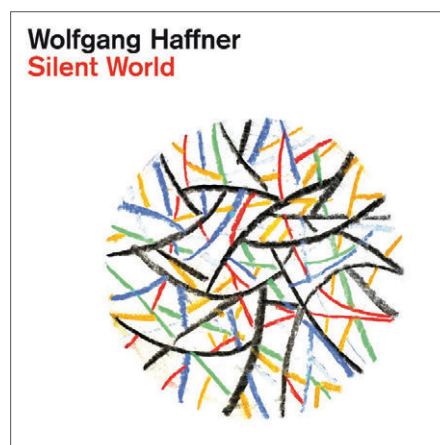
ACT

★

The extremely prolific German drummer Wolfgang Haffner was discovered by trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff, but his subsequent progress has taken him into the calmer zones of mellow pop and mainline jazz. Even so, he's also worked with Nils Petter Molvær, Bugge Wesseltoft and Nightmares On Wax.

This latest release surely finds Haffner in his most bland state, aiming for cross-pollination with fusion and house, but ending up with what could be termed new age smooth jazz. The most successful aspect is Haffner's own precise drumming, and its relationship with the bass lines, but everything draped over these is seemingly targeted on a low-volume existence in a hotel lounge — or finding placement as music in advertisements for the most inoffensive products possible.

Haffner does imply a slight tension with his snare work, but there's always a chirping melodic superficiality colonizing each tune. Synth atmospheres hang in soft warm breezes, and the bridge of "Here And Now" is actually a cabaret piano interlude. Wordless vocals waft throughout, woven with weebly synth lines. Poor sonic taste dominates, but hope arises with "La Casa," an attempt at a darker house number, good for night-driving, with its keyboard hookline. Then, a few tracks later, "Life



Magic" has burnished trumpet whorls, lightweight Jon Hassell-style, that also develops into a persistent mild house pulse. Otherwise, there's no passion, energy or friction allowed, but also, neither is any poignancy, sensitivity or melancholy permitted. Fusion fans will find this too lukewarm, while tough-jazz followers will soon be leaving the room.

—Martin Longley

Silent World: Here And Now; Silent World; La Casa; The Peace Inside; Faro; Yoyo; Life Magic; Rise And Fall; Hope; Belief; Forever And Ever. (51:49)

Personnel: Wolfgang Haffner, drums; Thomas Stieger, bass; Simon Oslender, piano, keyboards; Sebastian Studnitzky, trumpet; Bill Evans, soprano saxophone (1); Alma Naidu, vocals (1–3, 8); Bruno Müller, guitar (1, 10); Mitchell Forman, synthesizer (2); Till Brönner, flügelhorn (4); Rhani Krija, percussion (4, 5); Nicolas Fiszman, bass (5, 10); Dominic Miller, guitar (5); Norbert Nagel, Marc Wyand, tenor saxophone, clarinet, flute (5, 10); Nils Landgren, trombone (10); Eythor Gunnarsson, keyboards (10).

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Joe Locke

Makram

CIRCLE 9

★★★½

Two words that sum up Joe Locke's music are precision and versatility. The vibraphonist's technical confidence enables him to negotiate intricate forms at speed, and depending on the night, one can hear him apply that technique to diverse jazz variants, orchestral music or songs by India.Arie, Freddie Hubbard or Blind Willie Johnson.

If one picked a third word, however, it would be slick, a quality that does *Makram* no favors. The album's nine tracks include hard-bop and fusion originals by Locke and the members of his band as well as pair of instantly recognizable chestnuts by Cole Porter and Billy Strayhorn. While there's some diversity in the material, it's all performed with an impersonal briskness that showcases the musicians' chops, but conveys little personality or emotional resonance. The intricate unisons of "Shifting Moon," for example, do little more than assert their own trickiness. "Tushkin" veers between mechanical impersonality and the too-smooth stylings of guest reedist Tim Garland. And the way the ensemble rushes through "Love For Sale," one gets the impression that the musicians really just want to hit all the green lights.

The album's glossy production lays a way sheen over elements that could introduce some character. The title track honors bassist Makram Aboul Hosn, from Beirut, Lebanon. An oud doubles Locke's statement of the tune's theme, but it sits so low in the mix that it's easy to miss it.

There's no denying the studio craft that Locke and company bring to this endeavor, but that's really its chief virtue. —Bill Meyer

Makram: Love For Sale; Raise Heaven (For Roy); Makram; Elegy For Us All; Tushkin; Shifting Moon; Song For Vic Juris; Interwoven Hues; Lush Life. (62:18)

Personnel: Joe Locke, vibes, additional keyboards; Jim Ridl, piano, keyboards; Lorin Cohen, acoustic and electric bass; Samvel Sarkisyan, drums; Doug Beavers, trombone (2, 4); Eric C. Davis, French horn (2, 4); Jennifer Wharton, bass trombone, tuba (2, 4); Samir Nasr Eddine, oud; Bahaa Daou, riq; Tim Garland, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet, flute (5).

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"Anytime I get a chance, I love going to see my friends and hearing what they're doing," Simon Moullier said of other vibes players.

SIMON MOULLIER: VIBES TO THE WORLD

Examples of thespians who want to be rock stars or pro athletes who want to act can be found throughout pop culture history. In Simon Moullier, one finds the rare vibraphone virtuoso who originally wanted to play a horn.

A native of Nantes in Western France, the 28-year-old's musical journey includes several instruments, at least two musical genres, two continents and both North American coasts. His most recent stop includes a self-released third album, *Is/la*, which features pianist Lex Korten, dou-

ble bassist Alexander Claffy and drummer Jongkuk Kim.

"I started on drums when I was 6 or 7," Moullier said, in a phone conversation from his home in Brooklyn. "I was building some drums at home with kitchen pots and pans, and I was always very attached to the drum-

set. It was my first instrument and the foundation to what I'm doing now."

Classical percussion would be Moullier's formal area of study, though he continued to play drums on the side. "It was very important in developing discipline in practice and learning how to focus," he said. "But on the side, yeah, I was playing drums in a few bands here and there. James Brown, Michael Jackson and Earth Wind & Fire were among his non-classical favorites. "We had a few ensembles that I participated in once in a while. It was a lot of fun."

Life changed at 17, and his mother's love of the blues as well as his interest in jazz came to the forefront. "I started rotating more toward notes. I really wanted to play saxophone or a horn instrument. But since I already spent 10 years on percussion, I stuck with it."

Moullier took a transatlantic jump that same year, attending a five-week summer camp at the Berklee College of Music. He signed up as a drummer, but fate, in the form of sheer numbers, would send him in another direction.

"I was much better at jazz drums, and I didn't know any melodies, I didn't know any forms," he shared. When he arrived, there were "an overwhelming" number of students in the drum audition room. "Seeing the vibes audition room, there were like three people. So I thought, 'Man, maybe I should switch to that.' I didn't have anything prepared, of course, and I didn't even have mallets.

"So the guy kind of looked at me funny, but he saw something that I clearly wasn't seeing," he said. "And this five-week camp really changed my life. It showed me that vibes is actually what I wanted to pursue instead of drums. Playing notes and playing melodies was really freeing, and it was such a magic feeling.

"I did have some chops already — a little bit on marimba, xylophone and vibraphone," Moullier added. "And all the classical studies gave me some background with how to hold the mallets, whether you're using two or four."

After high school, Moullier attended Berklee as an undergraduate and found a mentor in trumpeter, flugelhornist and professor Darren Barrett. He'd go on to earn a master's degree from the Hancock Institute of Jazz (formerly the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz) in Los Angeles and has maintained friendships and musical relationships with classmates from both institutions.

Bassist Luca Alemanno, who plays on Moullier's first two albums — *Spirit Song* from 2020 and *Countdown* from 2021 — was in his Hancock Institute class. And he and Kim, who played on all three albums, attended Berklee together.

Vibraphone is, of course, one of the lesser-pursued instruments in jazz. Moul-

lier has used that uniqueness to both play with a variety of bandleaders — including pianist Miki Yamanaka, bassist Harish Raghavan and drummers Terri Lyne Carrington and Jason Tiemann — and bond with fellow vibraphonists.

"At least with those in New York, we definitely all know each other," he said, of the current wave of vibraphonists that includes Joel Ross, Sasha Berliner, Chien Chien Lu, Juan Diego Villalobos and other rising stars. "We support each other. Anytime I get a chance, I love going to see my friends and hearing what they're doing. I get inspiration from it."

As for *Isla*, Moullier opted for total independence and simplicity. "I've never done a self-release, so I wanted experience it," he said. *Spirit Song* was released by the New York-based Outside In Music, while *Countdown* saw the light of day via Fresh Sound New Talent Records out of Barcelona.

"The front cover is a photo I took [of the island of Ouessant, off of Moullier's coastal hometown]," he said. "So it definitely has a very homemade vibe, which is what I was going for. I just wanted to keep it simple. Same for the music. I didn't want too many tracks, so it's only eight."

Six of the eight tracks are originals and showcase Moullier's prowess as a composer. The title track alternately glides and swings effortlessly, while "This Dream" advances hypnotically with intertwining vibraphone and piano lines. Fred Coots' "You Go To My Head," one of two standards, is interpreted with equal parts sophistication and playfulness.

Moullier also kept things even simpler, sonically, by making *Countdown* a trio outing. "You have a lot of responsibility, because the bass and drums already have their full sound," he explained. "There's so much space that I really cherish. Sometimes it's also about not playing, and I feel like trios are a really good setup to learn about that."

Lest one think that Moullier is only concerned with horn players as role models, he reassures that he's done his musical homework.

"I'm really still just trying to copy Coltrane or Charlie Parker," he admitted. "That being said, it doesn't mean I don't listen to other vibraphonists. I think it's very important to follow the lineage and understand all of those recordings."

"There are so many beautiful things that I'm still discovering every month," he concluded. "I still get inspiration from the elders. I definitely love Bobby Hutcherson. I love his compositions. I love what Milt Jackson contributed to the language of the vibraphone, and I love Lionel Hampton for all the rhythmic aspects that he brought to the instrument."

—Yoshi Kato

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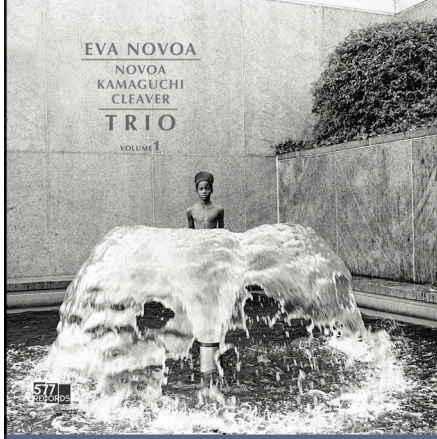
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SIMONA PREMAZZI: CONTROL & EMPOWERMENT

Simona Premazzi speaks of her art with a calm self-assurance tempered by enthusiasm and curiosity.

She knows what she wants and how to achieve it, from her sharp, precise touch at the keyboard to her personal style to putting out her own records. But she's still learning and constantly striving to take her music — playing, composing, conceptualization — one step further.

"I don't like to play easy stuff," Premazzi says with a laugh. "I really need a challenge whenever I'm performing, something that keeps the fire under my butt somehow. I like when there's a challenge in the music."

On her latest album, *Wave In Gravity*, that challenge comes from stepping into the spotlight alone for the first time. It's her first solo album in a career that's spanned nearly two decades of leading her own groups and guesting with players like alto saxophonist Greg Osby and trumpeter Jeremy Pelt. Her debut, 2007's *Looking For An Exit*, featured bassist Joe Sanders and drummer Ari Hoenig, while 2017's *Outspoken* had Joe Martin on bass and Nasheet Waits on drums, with saxophonist Dayna Stephens, vocalist Sara Serpa and Pelt (who also produced the album) guesting. She was a member of the trumpeter's band for two years, playing on his 2015 album *Tales, Musings And Other Reveries*.

Recording solo has been an entirely different experience for Premazzi, though. She made *Wave In Gravity* in Studio A at New York's Sear Sound in December 2021, with engineer Chris Allen. "Of course, the pandemic had an influence, because I recorded it at the end of 2021," she says. "And I've been performing solo for a long time, so it's something that I enjoy doing. I have a repertoire of solo pieces that I had prepared ... so I was like, you know what, I haven't done a solo album, I know it's a challenging thing to do, but why not? Let's do it." She describes the process as "very intimate. You're by yourself with the music and it's a different experience from recording with other people."

The album's tracks cover a wide range of music — from standards like Cole Porter's "In The Still Of The Night," Rodgers and Hart's "My Heart Stood Still" and Frank Loesser's "On A Slow Boat To China" to pieces by piano masters Thelonious Monk ("Monk's Mood") and Andrew Hill ("Smoke Stack"). *Wave In Gravity* also includes five compositions by Premazzi.

"G Minor Thing/Wachet Auf" is an improvised counterpoint tune in 5/8, which metamorphoses in its final moments, becoming an interpretation of Bach's Cantata No. 140,

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme. Hearing the instantly recognizable melody, normally sung by a choir, performed on piano and in 5/8, is a somewhat head-spinning experience, at once beautiful and surprising.

"I'll Take A Spaceship And Try And Go And Find You" started life as a rhythmic and hand-independence exercise. ("G Minor Thing" was also an exercise at first.) Premazzi says, "All musicians tend to work on our weakest thing, you know? Not only on what we are good at doing. So, of course, when I write a new tune, I also try to include some aspect that I would love to work on."

"Between Spheres" and "Wave In Gravity" are both freely improvised, and while their titles may remind some readers of Matthew Shipp's work, Premazzi's style is more romantic. In fact, the way she leaps from one end of the keyboard to the other on the title piece and the taut, jabbing way she strikes the keys, are at times reminiscent of the work of Cecil Taylor.

Taylor, whose own solo recitals were often stunning events, has been something of a touchstone for Premazzi in recent years. She performed a solo tribute to him at the Buffalo CMC Jazz Festival in 2018 — the recording is available on her Bandcamp page — and as part of her preparation for that and for the *Wave In Gravity* session, she listened deeply to his 1974 solo album *Silent Tongues*. But it may be more an example of common roots than direct influence. She explains that like Taylor, who famously attended New England Conservatory, "I have a grounding in classical studies, so my technique kind of comes from there, but of course [that] was just the beginning, so I keep working on it."

Andrew Hill is even more of a crucial figure for her. She has put together a program of his music that she performs live with a trio or a quartet, but this is her first solo recording of one of his compositions. Her version of "Smoke Stack" offers repetitive, almost obsessive exploration of the melody, like she's turning an intricately constructed machine over and over in her hands to see how it works.

In addition to playing solo, Premazzi is a one-woman operation offstage, releasing all but one of her albums herself. (Her 2013 release *Lucid Dreamer* was on Greg Osby's Inner Circle label.) "The big problem is dealing with my procrastination, 'OK, let's work on this, let's work on the cover, let's call here and there,'" she says. "I have to really organize my actions and decide when to be effective with contacting people and putting steps together."

"I like the idea of being the owner of my music and my masters and having total control over it, so that's something that empowers me," she continues. "I like the fact that I decide whatever I want, the order of tunes, by myself. I like being in control of my art, but I would like to have someone who does publicity for me."

—Phil Freeman



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MoonJune's Leonardo Pavkovic in Toledo, Spain, the new home for his free-form, globe-trotting record label.

THE MARCO POLO OF MOONJUNE RECORDS

Ever since being galvanized by rock and prog-rock as a youngster, entrepreneur Leonardo Pavkovic has had a lifelong, unquenchable thirst for music.

The motto of his MoonJune Records reflects his uncommonly open-minded attitude and eclectic tastes. As it states on the MoonJune letterhead: "Progressive music exploring and expanding boundaries of jazz, rock, avant, ethno, the unknown, and anything in between and beyond."

That's Leonardo in a nutshell. A native of Jajce in the former Yugoslavia (now Bosnia and Herzegovina), Pavkovic came of age in Southern Italy, where he came under the spell of T-Rex, Vanilla Fudge, Deep Purple and Pink Floyd, then Frank Zappa, Magma, Van Der Graaf Generator, Gentle Giant, King Crimson, Soft Machine and the Mahavishnu Orchestra and ultimately such ECM artists as Keith Jarrett, Ralph Towner and Terje Rypdal.

Pavkovic continued developing his eclectic tastes after moving to New York in August 1990. His first job in the Big Apple was working for renowned Brazilian graphic artist and photographer Fernando Natalici in his Studio T design firm, whose clientele included the Knitting Factory, the Village Vanguard, Blue Note Records, Dreyfus Records, Intuition Re-

cords and other music industry stalwarts. Pavkovic taught himself computer graphics and soon was doing Village Voice ads and posters for all of Studio T's clients, which put him in the company of great musicians, concert promoters and record label executives.

His inaugural MoonJune release was 2001's *Bar Torque*, a duet by former Soft Machine saxophonist Elton Dean and British guitarist Mark Hewins. To date, Pavkovic has released more than 125 albums on his unconventional label and he continues to trek around the world in search of music that inspires him, which has also earned him the nickname Marco Polo.

MoonJune's growing roster of international artists includes Uruguayan guitarist Beledo, Israeli-born/London-based drummer Asaf Sirkis, Indonesian keyboardist Dwiki Dharmawan, Indonesian guitarists Tohpati and Dewa Budjana, Italian prog-rock legends DFA, the Jakarta-based band simakDialog, Serbian-born/Barcelona-based guitarist Dusan Jevtovic, Slovenian saxophonist-flutist Vasko Atanasovski, Italian keyboardist Beppe

Crovella, Italian vocalist-beatbox artist Boris Salvodelli, Italian fusion band Siivovitz, Canadian prog-rockers Mahogany Frog, Chinese blues-rockers Zhang Ling (aka Big John), the Belgian group Mass Machine Trio, the Brazilian trio Dialeto and Bosnian-born/Barcelona-based drummer Xavi Reija.

That's a whole bunch of artists whose prodigious output and instrumental virtuosity would otherwise be unknown to Stateside prog-rock, fusion and avant garde music fans, were it not for Pavkovic.

Other MoonJune artists like Soft Machine, Stick Men, drummer Gary Husband and the fusion band Pakt may be more well known to Western ears. Regardless of their level of visibility in the States or the U.K., Pavkovic has been a fierce and tireless advocate for all of the artists on his roster.

"I have very eclectic tastes," Pavkovic said. "Of course, I have my preferences. But I always say to people, 'Look, I love Chinese food, but I don't eat Chinese food every day. I eat different foods.' That's why we need different music. And also as a person of extremely mixed background — Montenegrin, Croatian, Italian and Lebanese — and a guy who grew up in Yugoslavia and Italy and is married to a Chinese woman who is actually Brazilian, you cannot easily fit me in any category of human being. I'm just by myself. And that's what I like in the music, and that's actually how my label is represented. I don't like to be jazz label, progressive label, fusion label, I just want to be a label of music that I like."

In 2022, after 32 years of living in New York, Pavkovic moved his entire operation — record label, booking and management company — to historic Toledo, Spain.

His latest batch of releases from MoonJune's new headquarters includes Markus Reuter's new project Anchor & Burden (*Kosmonautic Pilgrimage*), Stephan Thelen's *Fractal Guitar 3* and *Bleed* by a trio of Reuter and Pakt members Motzer and Grohowski.

In June 2022, Pavkovic inaugurated the International MoonJune Music Festival, which was held in his birthplace of Jajce in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is now working out details for the second International MoonJune Music Festival, to be held this coming June in his new home base of Toledo. "I would like the MoonJune Festival to be held every year in different parts of the world, always in beautiful places," he said. "Dwiki Dharmawan has offered to help me organize the festival for next year in Bali. Yes, it's a dream, it's a fantasy. But in my life I've had so many dreams and fantasies come true, so why not?"

Meanwhile, Pavkovic is already laying plans for the rest of 2023. "I have some new MoonJune recordings coming out, I have a big tour with Soft Machine in October, and I'm always looking for other adventures."

Spoken like a true Marco Polo.

—Bill Milkowski

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Stéphane Wrembel's quest has been to find the simplest structures that will allow harmonies and melodies to deploy within the greatest empty space possible.

Uncovering Simplicity in Music

Music is simple. The universe is made of dualities. So is the human experience. So is music.

Dualities seem to be the fabric of the cosmos, and of everything we are able to experience in life. The universe is made of a subtle and natural balance of order and chaos. In the human realm, this equilibrium can be manifested as the ongoing tension between the mythological forces of Prometheus and the gods, the artificial creations and the works of nature. This battle seems to be inherent to the human condition, and at the core of the achievements of mankind. The

promethean mind brings about a set of great confusions between what is natural, organic and what's fake, and tends to mix up and invert the meaning of dualities which usually results in a state of mental haziness. The two most common duality inversions are: simple/complicated and easy/difficult.

Music is simple, but difficult — just as running 100 meters in 10 seconds is extremely simple in concept, but extremely difficult to achieve.

My quest has been to find the simplest structures that will allow harmonies and melodies to deploy within the greatest empty

space possible. Complicating music by packing this space with an enormous amount of information seems to be not only a dramatic mistake, but also a trend of the times. I consider the whole obsession about scales, modes, superimpositions of arpeggios and all the complicated concepts and pseudo complicated verbiage associated with it to be not only completely futile and useless, but also extremely confusing and damaging for the aspiring musician. After all, music is simply a part of the human experience. We are all musicians.

Music, like every human activity (espe-

Example 1: G minor Blues Progression

N.B. D7 CAN BE CONSIDERED DMAJ AT FIRST

GRAPHICS BY KEITH BAUMANN



Example 2: Frames of Each Chord

G-				C-				D			
3	6	10	6	3	8	11	8	2	5	10	5
3	8	11	8	4	8	13	8	3	7	10	7
3	7	12	7	5	8	12	8	2	7	11	7
5	8	12	8	5	10	13	10	4	7	12	7

Example 3: Zones of the Tune

ZONE 1

G-	C-	D	G-	G-	C-	D	G-	G-	C-	D	G-
3	3	2	3	6	8	5	6	10	11	10	11
3	4	3	3	8	8	7	8	11	13	10	13
3	5	2	3	7	8	7	7	12	12	11	12
5	5	4	5	8	10	7	8	12	13	12	13

cially in the arts), possesses logic, order and natural rules that can be explained, analyzed and taught. The other part is a great mystery; it's intelligent, instinctive and cannot be explained, but rather felt and expressed from the deepest part of the subconscious: the soul. So now we are facing a new duality, perhaps the deepest: Logic/Intelligence. Logic in the "Logos," the information itself, and Intelligence is "Intel Ligere," what ties information, its inner movements, connections and infinite shades of possibilities. Logic clarifies, Intelligence creates. Logic is a tool, Intelligence is Life.

There are three areas in music that one can approach logically and integrate into their muscle memory: technique (the contact between the body and the instrument), harmony (the horizontal and vertical layout of notes in space) and rhythm (the logical organization of time).

Melody and groove are the great mysteries that will be unique to every single human. In my mission to uncover simplicity, I turned toward classical harmony and counterpoint, and identified the simple frames starting with the root, third and fifth of the chords. This will be the fabric from which every melody will be born. Unfortunately (fortunately?), there is no formula to create melodies. If melodies could be rationally fabricated it would be a denial of the diversity of humanity, and humans would be all the same and

nothing but useless, empty shelves. Thanks to our uniqueness, one will have to listen and use their ears and instincts to create. Once one hears the basic structures of the chords, it will be a life-changing experience, a simple and instinctive one.

In the examples shown above in guitar tablature, I proceed in three steps to integrate the frames of a tune. First, I learn the chord progression (see Example 1, a G minor blues). Second, I identify the frames of each chord (Example 2). And third, I group them into zones (Example 3).

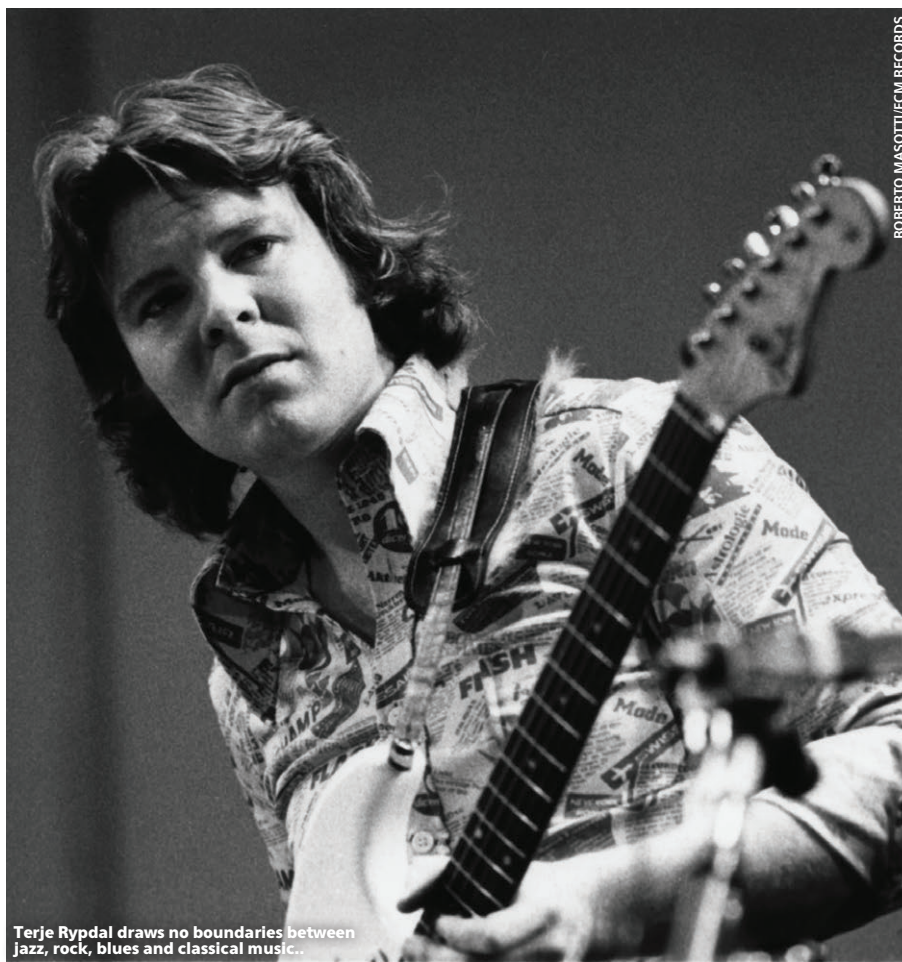
Then only do I begin to play with them, arpeggiate them and improvise with neighboring tones over them. Once the material is mastered, one needs to listen. Listening is very active; it is tied to concentration. Also, there is no magic trick: One cannot buy or bend time. It is not "I listen, therefore I hear"; it is "The more I listen, the better I hear."

I would like to end with the following inspirational quote from the British scholar Norman Davies: "You cannot build a tree." **DB**

Born in Paris and raised in Fontainebleau, France, Stéphane Wrembel has been releasing recordings since 2002 and has made his mark as a composer and an original voice in the world of guitar. He has headlined Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, The Town Hall and The Lyon Opera House. He has shared stages with everyone from Sam Bush and Stochelo Rosenberg to Esperanza Spalding and Al Di Meola. Wrembel has played at the Montreal Jazz Festival, Rochester International Jazz Festival, Django Reinhardt Festival in France, Ellnora-The Guitar Festival, Caramoor Jazz Festival presented by Jazz at Lincoln Center and many others. He has toured Canada, France, Israel, the U.K., India

and Nigeria. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Django A Gogo Festival, an annual event Wrembel created where he and others influenced by the iconic guitarist Django Reinhardt celebrate the Sinti guitar style. The fest takes place May 6 at New York's Town Hall. Wrembel is one of the preeminent guitarists in the Django Reinhardt style. His music incorporates jazz, blues, classical, swing, flamenco and rock. In 2017, he released *The Django Experiment I* and *The Django Experiment II* to coincide with the Django A Gogo 2017 at Carnegie Hall. These were followed by 2018's *The Django Experiment III*, 2019's *The Django Experiment IV* and 2020's *The Django Experiment V*, which features Daisy Castro on violin. In 2019, Wrembel released the album *Django L'Impressionniste*, putting the spotlight on 17 little-known solo pieces Reinhardt recorded between 1937 and 1950. In January 2021, Wrembel released *The Django Experiment VI* as he put the finishing touches on his book of transcriptions from *Django L'Impressionniste*, which was published in April 2021. His much-anticipated new album *Django New Orleans* is due out May 5.





Terje Rypdal draws no boundaries between jazz, rock, blues and classical music...

Terje Rypdal's Electric Guitar Solo on 'Ornen'

Norwegian guitar iconoclast Terje Rypdal has been around since the late '60s, and yet is still criminally underappreciated. Having been an influence on such luminaries as Bill Frisell and Andy Summers (to name just two), one would think he'd be a household name. His relative obscurity might be due to (or in spite of) his all encompassing approach to music. Rypdal seems to draw no boundaries between jazz, rock, blues, classical, or anything else he's familiar with. His world of music seems to be a melting pot of genres and influences.

Take his composition and solo on "Ornen," from his 1985 album *Chaser* (ECM): It's a slow gospel 6/8, with changes that straddle gospel, jazz and rock. Many of the chords are simple triads, but then we also have a jazzy Am7(b5) in there, as well as the Cm-A \flat 7 change, which

can be heard in the standard "Angel Eyes" and other tunes. In fact, the final 15 measures could be heard as being in the key of C minor, so modulating to the minor iv, which isn't a typical modulation in any genre, but easily done since he uses what I hear as a rock 'n' roll bVII chord (F) in the G major section, which makes for a pivot modulation by making those chords IV and V in C minor. Using rock sounds to produce a classical style modulation? Brilliant.

Rypdal's playing on this track demonstrates the same disregard to genre, while at the same time showing a deep familiarity with various traditions. First, on the rock 'n' roll side of things, notice how often Rypdal plays pentatonic licks. We initially hear them in bars 10–11 and 12–13. But here's where his jazz sensibilities start to come through:

It's (basically) the same lick, but moved up a fourth to match the chord change. Playing blues, but in a jazz way.

We also hear some blues in bars 25 (though he adds the major third here, making it fit the chord better) and 27–29, all in G, which is not only the key of the song but the current harmony. Bars 38–39 demonstrate the same blues-with-major-third sound, as do 49–50, but the next time we hear the blues scale sound is measures 53–55, and here Rypdal chooses to play it in C minor, which is even more fitting than before, as here the underlying harmony is Cm, except that he starts playing it on the F and G7 — as noted before, the IV and V chords of C minor.

Emphasizing the flat fifth (G \flat) hints at the A \flat 7 that's coming up, which is a very classical composition move. However, when the A \flat 7 comes up at the end (bars 63–66) Rypdal doesn't play the G \flat at all. (Rypdal does take care not to play the G natural on the A \flat 7, and instead emphasizes the F, which as the sixth isn't totally outside. It's a nice juxtaposition to his use of chord tones, discussed later.)

Incidentally, C minor pentatonic overlaps G minor pentatonic; the only notes that they don't share are the D in the G minor, which is replaced by the E \flat in the C minor. But the manner in which Rypdal plays those notes creates a strong sense of the tonality. The licks in 9–13 are borderline cliché, and bending them to the flat seventh and concluding on the fifth makes it clear what key they are in. (These licks could also be heard as ending on the minor third of the relative minor, but the underlying chords give the ear additional information.)

The line in bar 53 bounces up and down from the high C, which steers the ear toward hearing it as a chord tone, so we're no longer in G. Emphasizing certain notes causes us to hear them as likely chord tones, which can be used to make keys and harmonies more evident.

Rypdal does far more than blues licks. For one thing, there's the hip "My Funny Valentine"-style arpeggios that move from Cm(maj7) to Cm7 to Cm6 (though the A natural is more of an anticipation of the F chord) in measures 51–52. He apparently dug this so much, he brought it back in bars 59–60 when those chord changes come back, though he alters the rhythm. This is also something we often hear in classical music, taking a theme and varying it (and of course arpeggios are a staple in many forms of music). Displacing the rhythm also makes that anticipatory A natural happen half a beat into the F measure, giving the resolution a different feel.

There are plenty of times when Rypdal uses chord tones as a jazz musician does. A wonderful example can be heard in measures 31–34. It's a wonderful melody, and yet consists almost entirely chord tones.

This sequence of G–Gaug–G6–G7 is just a G chord with the fifth moving up in semitones, a chord progression we hear in many other styles of music. But Rypdal doesn't just play this line, which still could have been cool. He starts out on the third (B) and then jumps to the $\flat 6/\#5$. Then the third and second are put in, the second being a non-chord tone that one would think Rypdal would use to connect to the root. Instead, he drops down to the sixth (and right on the G6), which he uses to continue on to the flat seventh. So he does follow the chromatic line in the harmo-

nies, but doesn't start on the fifth, and uses the third and even the second to break it up. Very jazz-leaning.

Another poignant example comes in the final line, where Rypdal anticipates the tonic to bar 63, jumps up to the fifth and then drops down a step just in time for the $A\flat 7$ chord in bar 64, against which the preceding G would have been dissonant. We hear Rypdal play the C again (which is a part of all the chords in this line, including the Cm7 in bar 65), then go up to $E\flat$ (the minor third) and resolve his solo on a final, definitive C (the major third of the $A\flat 7$ that ends the form). **DB**

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

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Casio PX-S7000 Digital Piano

Flagship Model Privia Marks a Bold New Direction for the PX-S Line

Casio has made a major breakthrough in dialing in the essential touch-to-sound connection with its new Privia PX-S7000 digital piano — the company’s best-sounding and most realistic-feeling Privia model, which sports a brilliant style to support its superior tone qualities and overall playability.

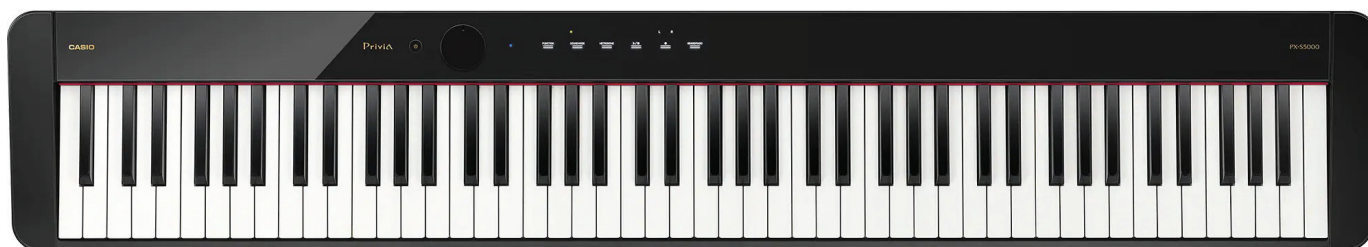
The PX-S7000 is the flagship in Casio’s new PX-S family of Privia models that includes the PX-S6000 and PX-S5000. It features a Smart Hybrid Hammer Action keyboard and simulated ebony and ivory keytops, which connects the player’s fingers to the sound of three concert grand pianos. A new, improved Acoustic and Intelligent Resonator derived from Casio’s acclaimed Celviano Grand Hybrid piano — a larger, highly sophisticated console type instrument developed in collaboration with Berlin-based C. Bechstein and originally released in 2015 (upgraded in 2019) — reproduces the resonances of a high-end acoustic piano’s strings, soundboard, damper and various other physical components.

“A lot of the nuance, the attention to detail, all the elements that make that touch-to-sound connection so special, were dialed in very nicely on the Celviano Grand Hybrid line — and the PX-S7000 is the direct evolution of that,” said Mike Martin, Casio’s GM of marketing. “Under the hood, all of the adjustable parameters — in terms of the nuance and detail, things like the amount of key knock or string/damp-

er/aliquot resonance — all of those little elements that really suspend the illusion of realism are present. So the PX-S7000 is identical to the Grand Hybrid in that regard.”

That illusion of realism, a goal toward which all digital piano makers strive, would not exist without the PX-S7000’s new keyboard action and feel. The instrument’s keys have a substantial amount of spruce content, which has implications beyond the cosmetic,” Martin said. “That adds density and rigidity to the key, so when that key hits bottom, it just feels right. And all the other elements that were put into place to keep it quiet and smooth, and the subtly textured key surfaces, complete the experience. It is really an elegant touch, and anybody who’s played our other Privias might find it hard to believe that it could be this much different. That’s one of the challenges: People really need to put their hands on it to believe it. And for an instrument of this compact size to have an action that is so dynamic and smooth is really outstanding.”

Sitting down to play the PX-S7000, it immediately transcends the instrument’s modest size. The Smart Hybrid Hammer Action keys come alive under the fingers, delivering the dynamic and natural response someone might expect from a well-regulated concert grand. Keys with spruce sides and subtly textured surfaces deliver a familiar and confidence-inspiring piano look and feel, and ensure a natural performance by replicating the hammer behavior of each of the 88 individual piano



PX-S5000



PX-S6000

keys. New counterweight and damping mechanisms also add to the experience in rewarding ways.

Playing a PX-S7000 is like having access to three of the world's finest grand pianos, dubbed Berlin (home of C. Bechstein), Hamburg (home of German Steinway) and New York (home of American Steinway). Each piano has its own personality, and the Multi-Dimensional Morphing AiR Sound Source brings them to life with damper, string and aliquot resonance plus subtle mechanical sounds. The PX-S7000 comes with a wide range of 400 built-in tones and DSP effects, including 50 electric piano emulations featuring brilliant tine, reed and other classic instruments and synth sounds. You may even find yourself inspired to plug a microphone into the audio port on the rear, add some vocal effects and sing along; or, use the vocoder setting to go full-out Joe Zawinul and funkify your verbal delivery.

Casio has taken a new approach with the design of these Privias. "We were stepping away from the traditional look of a console piano and creating something that is striking and instantly recognizable as something unique," Martin said. "It's different than anything anyone else has created."

Celviano will remain Casio's traditional piano line, while Privia is differentiated by creating something modern in design, and that includes the user interface.

The top panel of the PX-S7000 is elegant and simple. A touch ring that offers easy scrolling and directional input complements the easy-to-read backlit display, illuminated touch sensor controls and color-changing pitch bend wheel. Four multi-function, context-sensitive buttons let players access their favorite sounds and settings. When not played, the PX-S7000 can be protected using the included matching fabric cover.

"It's all driven by this super elegant touch control panel, and that touch wheel," Martin said. "It brings that elegant aspect to another level. But what I really love is that the menu underneath the screen can be customized, so you can choose what those four 'F' buttons 1-4 will do. They can be your favorite sounds or your favorite functions, depending on what you need access to ... transpose, you name it."

The PX-S7000 comes with a super-solid beech wood stand featuring a modern design that blends with any décor. It includes three generously sized pedals, fixed in place exactly as you'd expect them on a traditional piano. This full setup doesn't budge and inch or wobble in the least, giving the player a strong sense of being grounded, balanced and stable, which further boosts the realism factor. The main body of the PX-S7000 can be detached from the stand and played anywhere, thanks to its optional AA battery power. An optional SP-34

three-pedal unit can be connected for portable piano authenticity, and the optional SC-900 carrying bag lets you bring your PX-S7000 wherever the music takes you.

The PX-S7000's 32-watt, four-way Spatial Sound System delivers room-filling sound from behind a sleek fabric cover. The built-in speakers are tuned to resonate within the PX-S7000's wood and resin body. Using the Piano Position function, players can configure the Spatial Sound System to sound its best when placed against a wall, in the center of a room, on a table or anywhere else in a home or studio.

With plenty of style to match its breathtaking sound and touch, the PX-S7000 is a stunning musical centerpiece for someone's home. Its sophisticated and minimalist style reimagines how piano can be incorporated into everyday life. Unlike most instruments, the PX-S7000 is beautiful from every angle, giving players the freedom to place it anywhere in their home.

Eight types of hall simulation place the PX-S7000 in a variety of virtual concert spaces, and surround mode places the performer in the center of the music. Two headphone jacks allow quiet play at any time.

The PX-S7000 easily connects to amplifiers, mixers and P.A. systems via 1/4-inch outputs. The included WU-BT10 Bluetooth Audio and MIDI adapter allows for connection to MIDI software and allows users to stream music through the built-in speakers. Two headphone jacks offer quiet play at any time. The Casio Music Space app, which connects to the unit wirelessly, lets players to take further advantage of the instrument's abilities to display PDF scores and more.

The PX-S6000 inherits many of the performance features found on the PX-S7000, including the Smart Hybrid Hammer Action, Acoustic and Intelligent Resonator, four-way Spatial Sound System, touch ring, backlit display and key cover. It does not include the stand. Catering more to the performing musician, the PX-S6000 has 50 fewer presets, but players can get under the hood quite a bit more and customize sounds — far beyond the capabilities of the PX-S7000. They can adjust the speaker model, for instance, or the tremolo on the Rhodes.

The PX-S5000 brings Casio's Smart Hybrid Hammer Action Keyboard to the most portable and accessible version. Featuring 23 tones, including a detailed Hamburg concert grand and four electric piano tones, and a smaller, lighter chassis, the PX-S5000 is suitable as a stage or home piano or as a MIDI controller for a DAW or home studio setup.

The subtleties speak on these instruments. Skeptical? Don't be, at least not until you've laid hands on one and experienced full Casio PX-S immersion.

—Ed Enright

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1. Shades of Red

Tama has added a limited-edition finish to its Starclassic Performer series. The new color, Crimson Red Waterfall, is a blend of multiple shades of red. This kit includes all of the features of the Starclassic Performer series, including 6mm, four-ply birch plus two-inner-ply maple tom shells. The series also boasts a 7mm, five-ply birch plus two-inner-ply maple bass drum shell, die-cast hoops and the Star-Cast Mounting System.

More info: tama.com

2. Bold Projection, Focused Tone

The Paul Reed Smith SE A20E Angelus Cutaway body shape delivers comfort and playability and is well-suited for picking and fingerstyle playing. The all-mahogany body gives the PRS SE A20E an organic, warm voice. The parlor-sized acoustic with solid-spruce top features figured maple back and sides. This body size offers bold projection with more focused tone, and the maple back and sides provide warmth and tonal transparency.

More info: prsguitars.com

3. Lower Brass Studies

Hal Leonard has published *Vincent Cichowicz: Fundamental Studies for the Developing Trombone Player*. The new collection by Vincent's son Michael Cichowicz, Mark Dulin, Tim Higgins and Toby Oft features studies that represent the core principles of Cichowicz's brass teaching adapted for trombone and euphonium players. Each study has been professionally recorded by Higgins and Oft. The book includes access to demonstration audio tracks online for download or streaming.

More info: halleonard.com

4. Virtual Tape Echo

Black Rooster Audio's TD-201 Plug-in is a virtual take on vintage tape echo — effectively bringing the sound of an analog classic into the 21st century as an in-the-box tape delay that offers a variety of customization options.

More info: blackroosteraudio.com

5. Easy-Adjust Mic Stand Set

Gator Frameworks has released a microphone stand set with a zippered carrying bag that hauls all the stands together in one trip for easy setup, takedown and transport. Each lightweight mic stand features a single-section boom arm for getting microphones set at an ideal distance from the audio source. An ergonomic-grip twist clutch at the center controls the height of each stand, permitting quick and easy adjustments.

More info: gatorframeworks.com

6. Medium Diaphragm

CAD Audio has expanded its Equitek product line with the introduction of the CAD E40 medium diaphragm condenser microphone. The nickel-plated capsule performs well on vocals, acoustic instruments, percussion and voiceover work. The CAD E40 includes a 100Hz hi-pass filter, 10dB pad and low-profile shockmount.

More info: cadaudio.com



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Patricia Brennan

Having established herself as a master practitioner of extended techniques and electronic effects on vibraphone and marimba in the solo space on the 2021 release *Maquishti* (Valley of Search), Patricia Brennan extrapolates her singular vision on *More Touch* (Pyroclastic) with a quartet of virtuosos: Marcus Gilmore on drums, Mauricio Herrera on batá and congas and Kim Cass on bass. This was Brennan's first Blindfold Test.

Karl Berger

"Cutting Through" (*Crystal Fire*, Enja, 1991) Berger, vibraphone; Dave Holland, bass; Ed Blackwell, drums.

Impressive player. It feels like somebody younger. But at the same time, it doesn't. Players like Bobby Hutcherson and Milt Jackson, especially when playing faster, the pedal is almost absent — and there's very little pedal here. Nowadays we use a bit more pedal, more motor. The language is interesting, with unique characteristics. It sounds like two mallets. I could hear traditional aspects, but also unusual things, on the outer edge, like dampening the strokes at the end of the solo. I loved the drum solo: very thematic and clear development, more traditional ideas than the vibraphonist's. The opening bass-vibes unison was super-clear and in-tune. That virtuosic aspect and the recording quality of the bass made me think of a more recent recording. 5 stars.

Bobby Hutcherson

"Besame Mucho" (*Ambos Mundos*, Landmark, 1989) Hutcherson, marimba; James Spaulding, flute; Smith Dobson, piano; Bruce Forman, guitar; Jeff Chambers, bass; Eddie Marshall, drums; Francisco Aguabella, congas; Orestes Vilató, timbales, congas; Roger Glenn, percussion, flute.

I love "Besame Mucho"! I haven't heard this. The marimba's reverb was recorded in a newer way, so it's someone more recent than Bobby Hutcherson, who's one of the first people I heard play marimba on a late-1960s jazz recording. I can't get over how beautiful the interpretation is. It was cool how the theme returned under the guitar solo as a background instead of just comping — and in the lower register. Often vibes players play marimba the same as vibraphone, but this person respected how the instrument should be played differently. 5 stars.

Walt Dickerson/Sun Ra

"Utopia" (*Visions*, Steeplechase, 1978) Dickerson, vibraphone; Sun Ra, piano.

That would be amazing if it was released today. Or tomorrow. I love the little fast playing, with no pedal. It's not about trying to play a line, but using the resonance, a gesture-texture-energy — those stops moving all over the place. Then the texture of the other instrument, which I think was piano. ... Bass and piano? Only piano? Wow. The recording sounds like the 1970s. When the vibraphonist played a full tone and you heard that vibrato ... that's the '70s vibraphone tone. You can do only so many things acoustically; for me, electronics offer another world to expand that language. 5 stars. [afterwards] I spaced out on Walt Dickerson. I love his creativity.

Warren Wolf

"Cell Phone" (*Convergence*, Mack Avenue, 2016) Wolf, marimba, vibraphone; Brad Mehldau, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Jeff Watts, drums.

Awesome track. Really energetic. The whole solo was on marimba — but were marimba and vibes doubled at the beginning? The harmonic language, that last upper-extension chord, showed that the player is younger than Stefon, playing marimba really well. The drummer was incred-



"I got chills," said Patricia Brennan while listening to the music of Chris Dingman.

ible, and the pianist was great. The whole ensemble kept up the energy throughout, interacting during the solo, always encouraging him to go further. Virtuosic. Is it Warren Wolf? 5 stars.

Yuhan Su

"Feet Music" (*City Animals*, Sunnyside, 2018) Yuhan Su, vibraphone; Alex LoRe, soprano saxophone; Matt Holman, trumpet; Petros Klampanis, bass; Nathan Ellman-Bell, drums.

Steve Nelson? It sounded like him: the four mallets; the old-and-new in the playing, sometimes without the motor, sometimes a more modern approach to the language. I liked the melody's angular aspect, creating tension-and-release within ambiguity rather than just a hummable melody — even though it's hummable, anyway. Always new textures, something going on. I loved the bassist's little slides. I loved the vibes-drums duo that began the vibes solo; the drummer sustained the drive, very mature, never overpowering, but virtuosic. 5 stars.

John Zorn

"Atarah" (*The Testament Of Solomon*, Tzadik, 2014) Kenny Wollesen, vibraphone; Carol Emmanuel, harp; Bill Frisell, guitar; Zorn, composer.

I haven't heard this. Is it just guitar and vibraphone? Harp, too? It was interesting how the guitar and harp player were interweaving like a giant instrument, expanding each other's sonic palette. It blends well with the vibraphone. That distortion at the end was awesome. 5 stars.

Chris Dingman

"Refracted Light" (*Journeys Vol.1*, Independent Release, 2022) Dingman, vibraphone.

Chris Dingman's latest solo stuff. I got chills. He released this record at a tough time in his life, and I could feel that. Here, Chris strikes the bar in a way that creates the round, gentle sound, and he uses different extended techniques, like bowing — exploring the instrument in every single way. For me, solo vibraphone should incorporate that mindset, as a guitar player or pianist would do. Chris used the overdub technique, and rendered every layer with particular care. There was a repetitive, almost bell tone — a specific stroke, a specific mallet makes it sound pointy, not mellow and round like the other layers that established a bed of sound. It's a painterly creativity: finding how many sound-producing colors you can extract from the source that's before you and include them in your sonic palette. 5 stars.

DB

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

A man with short, dark hair and a light beard is looking directly at the camera. He is holding a large, custom-modified saxophone that has a wide, flared bell and a long, slender body. The saxophone is made of a light-colored metal, possibly brass or gold-plated. The background is dark and out of focus.

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