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## JANUARY 2024

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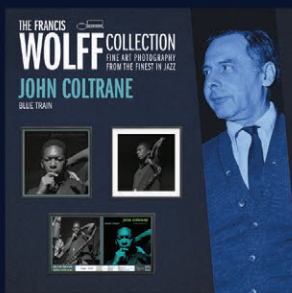
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# JANUARY 2024

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## ON THE COVER

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#### *Time to Be Adventurous*

BY SUZANNE LORGE

Samara Joy has appeared like a lightning bolt on the jazz scene with a Grammy Award for Best New Artist and Album of the Year honors in the DownBeat Readers Poll for her hit recording *Linger Awhile*. We check in with the rising star vocalist to discuss her year at the top.



"We can move the music forward by adding individual voices, like myself and other artists in this space, through adding repertoire," says Samara Joy.

Cover photo by Kwami Lee

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Herb Alpert



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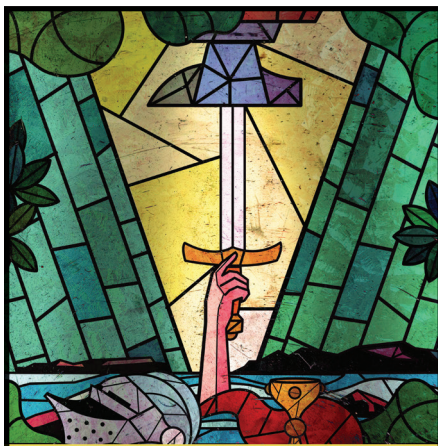


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## First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



James Brandon Lewis: thoughtful, powerful and bombastic.

# Loving the Next Generation

**WEDNESDAY, NOV. 22 — IT'S THE DAY** before Thanksgiving here in the U.S., and in the jazz world there's a lot for which to be thankful. As DownBeat kicks into its 90th year of continuously publishing about the world of jazz, this musical form is alive and well and kicking ass, to be honest. In the past year, our readers have been treated to the rise of a slew of new, talented artists, none of whom exploded on the scene more dramatically than our cover artist this month, Samara Joy.

What she has accomplished in the past year just doesn't happen in jazz — well, not since esperanza spalding's explosive rise in 2010. Joy, now 23, literally snuck in and stole the Grammy for Best New Artist last year — not just for jazz, but for all of music — setting off an unprecedented boom in her career and introducing jazz to a much larger audience.

What's fantastic about Joy at the moment is the sense that she's grasping it, and exploring all she can be. Her live shows in 2022 were nice, polite, wholesome. But seeing her develop over the past year has been nothing short of astounding. At recent shows at Umbria and Monterey and in Chicago, she has been on fire as a performer and as an artist — her vocal range incredible; her command of craft impeccable. Catch her story on page 22.

But she's not the only wave in the youth movement. The duo of DOMi & JD Beck were also nominated for that Best New Artist Grammy. They've been selling out large venues and capturing younger listeners with a fresh take on what instrumental music can be. (Their tour heads to Japan and Australia at

the beginning of 2024.) One fan of the group is pianist Emmet Cohen — another young star, whose infectious energy and love for tradition and social media have made the series *Live From Emmet's Place* a must-watch on YouTube — who gushes over the duo in this month's Blindfold Test (see page 90). Cohen is a true student of the history of this music who keeps abreast of what's happening today, too.

There are plenty of other new faces making their names these days, but one in particular tops this writer's list — and that's why we put him on our June cover. James Brandon Lewis is a force to be reckoned with: thoughtful, powerful and bombastic. At 40, Lewis has come into his own. In 2021, his *Jessup Wagon* was named the Album of the Year in DownBeat's International Critics Poll.

Lewis' last three albums have been killer. *MSM Molecular Systematic Music Live* (Intakt) demonstrated what an amazing performer he's become, something witnessed by anyone who caught him touring in 2023. *Eye Of I* (Anti-) catches the tenor saxophonist looking inward toward spirituality in a trio setting. And *For Mahalia With Love* (Tao Forms) reunites Lewis with his Red Lily Quintet for new takes on the music of gospel legend Mahalia Jackson.

Again, there are so many other voices out there to be heard, too. It's a great time for this music and the people who make it. The only challenge is that it's so difficult to cut through in a crowded cultural scene. We applaud those who have.

Got a favorite new artist? Shoot me a note at [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com).

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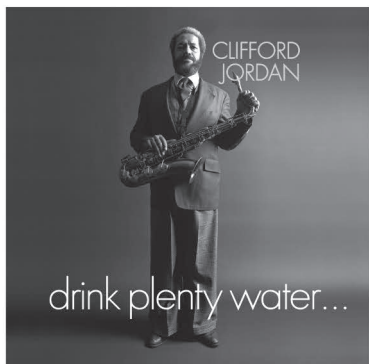
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## Chords & Discords

### Praise for Cuscuna

I wanted to send my heartfelt congratulations to Michael Cuscuna on being presented DownBeat's Lifetime Achievement for Recording Award. This could not have happened to a more deserving individual. I'm very happy for Mr. Cuscuna.

As a 19-year-old, in 1976, I was looking for another copy of the Art Ensemble of Chicago's album *Bap-Tizum* to replace my scratched copy. I couldn't find it at any record store in my area so I took a chance and wrote to Mr. Cuscuna, who was one of the album's producers, care of Atlantic Records.

Amazingly, Mr. Cuscuna not only received my inquiry, but replied with a very nice letter



Michael Cuscuna  
GATEKEEPER TO VALHALLA

By John McDonough Photos by Jimmy and Dana Katz

and a new copy! I wrote back to thank Mr. Cuscuna, and he, again, wrote a gracious letter back to me. I still have both of his letters, as well as that copy of *Bap-Tizum* that he sent me. The album still plays perfectly, and its back cover has since been signed by the A. E. of C.'s [Art Ensemble of Chicago's] alto saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell, who I saw perform in San Francisco. That album contains some good memories.

Congratulations, Mr. Cuscuna, and thank you again for the kindness and generosity you showed a teenager 47 years ago. It really left an impression on me.

BOB ZANDER  
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

### Praise for Cuscuna, Part 2

Enjoyed your salute (finally) to Michael Cuscuna, which was way overdue. To my mind, he was the logical choice to head up Blue Note. In the article, it is stated he got about 20 LPs issued domestically from his vault raid. I checked my collection and counted over 30. None were Nipponese. What gives?

LARRY HOLLIS  
VIA EMAIL

### We've Done It Again

In reference to the beautiful new recording (*Schoenberg On The Beach*, reviewed in the December issue) by Jeff Lederer, the DownBeat reviewer, Peter Margasak, wrote this about the brilliant vocalist Mary LaRose ... [she] "is a distraction at best, and more often an albatross ..."

Seriously?!? Is this what constitutes an actual review from a prestigious magazine like DB? This is so ridiculous and absurd it's damn near funny. But it's not. Please, DO YOUR HOMEWORK if you're given the privilege to review other people's art!! If I were to review his review (and I am), I'm giving it ZERO stars! I've said my piece, now it's back to the beach.

JEFF COFFIN  
SAXOPHONIST  
2.5 STAR RECIPIENT FROM DB MAGAZINE

**Editor's Note:** Thanks, Jeff, for your defense of Ms. LaRose. And, for the record, that bit about the 2.5 stars is Jeff's signoff, not the editorial staff's.

### From Auditions to Jazz Fame

I have been subscribing to DownBeat since 1976, and since then you have introduced

me to, and educated me on, numerous musicians and bands. I was also very pleased to see articles on my favorite musicians. I noticed this year that I typically read three articles or more of interest to me in each issue (with a few exceptions). This year your writers turned me on to six musicians that I was not familiar with. Thank you for a great year of DownBeat.

I recently found a large box of DownBeat back issues and discovered a feature that I never really paid attention to, "Auditions: DownBeat Spotlights Deserving Young Musicians." It looks like this feature ran from 1986 to 1991, and so far I have found 18 issues with 12 musicians who are well known today. One was a 15-year-old Chris Potter, and another, a 16-year-old Joey DeFrancesco.

I know that next year is DownBeat's 90th anniversary, and I think it would be very interesting to see a follow-up to this feature and interview the musicians who are known now. I saw several other DownBeat Anniversary issues that did that.

I look forward to your plans for the 90th anniversary issues.

MARC NEBOZENKO  
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

**Editor's Note:** "Auditions" was a feature started in the 1980s and, yes, a number of stars from today were first mentioned in that column back in the day. Of note, so were a variety of top jazz educators and business industry executives who showed up in the column as students. We are proud to say that the magazine has had a strong track record of highlighting talent early on, especially through the DownBeat Student Music Awards. We'll see if we can't do a recap of some during our 90th anniversary year.

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"I like to just click on songs that touched me and see if I could do them in a personal way — especially if it's a well-known song," Alpert said about selecting material for his new album.

## Herb Alpert Proves That Dreams Do Come True

In 2020, writer and director John Scheinfeld released the feature documentary *Herb Alpert Is ...*. "I liked it, but I was very reluctant in doing a documentary to begin with," the subject of the film admitted. "I just thought it was kind of a little bit self-serving. Ultimately, what I wanted to do was have a documentary for my grandkids and their grandkids.

"Overall, it was good. But I thought it was maybe a little too long," Alpert continued.

Given all he has accomplished in his 88 years, Alpert's life alternately might be perfect for a much longer Ken Burns miniseries. The trumpeter/multi-multi-hyphenate is on the phone from his home in Malibu to discuss *Wish Upon A Star*, which was released

in mid-September on his own Herb Alpert Presents label. Though he's officially promoting his 49th and latest album, the Los Angeles native was happy to revisit myriad points from his memorial and still-active career.

"I like to just click on songs that touched me and see if I could do them in a personal way — especially if it's a well-known song," he replied when asked about his new album's broad selection of material. Ranging from standards such as "Angel Eyes" and "On The Street Where You Live" to classic pop favorites like Paul Williams' "We've Only Just Begun" and the Disney-associated title track. "I try to do them in a way that hasn't quite been done before. That's always been an approach of mine."

"Mr. Herb is always searching for those

nuances that make the music move your body," wrote Jaz Sawyer, in an email. "There always has to be a spiritual connection inside the music, or else you won't find what you are truly seeking." The drummer, educator and bandleader played on the album track "(Marie's The Name) His Latest Flame" and has fond memories of that studio session.

"We tapped into a feel that called for a jazzy/second line/zydeco thang for that Elvis (Presley) number. It was a very Herb approach to exploring a feel of a song," Sawyer recounted. "I want you to get inside of it, he would express to me."

As the "A" in A&M Records — along with his late partner Jerry Moss — Alpert has deep connections to *Wish Upon A Stars* songs and





Alpert is arguably as well known as a philanthropist as he is for his music.

far beyond. “Waltz For Stan” revisits an Eddie Del Barrio original first recorded on Stan Getz’s *Apasionado* (A&M, 1990). “That touches my heart,” Alpert said, of his 21st century interpretation of the composition. “I wanted to do it in a way that I would think Stan would have appreciated.”

“Stan Getz was one of my best friends,” he added. When Getz was living in Northern California, Alpert cold-called him and asked him, “I was wondering whether there’s something you’d like to record or something you’d like to do that you haven’t been able to do during your amazing career,” and he didn’t really know what to say at the time. But that piqued his interest.”

Over a studio-enabled orchestra of synthesizers and horns, Getz was able to “play lyrical solos. The rest is history, and he turned out to be one of my best friends,” Alpert remembered. *Apasionado* was Getz’s sole release on A&M, the label Alpert and Moss co-founded 1962 and ran until 1993. *Midnight Sun*, Alpert’s final album on A&M, was released in 1992 and includes the inscription: “This album is dedicated to my forever friend Stan Getz.” Getz had passed away a year earlier.

Another highlight from *Wish Upon A Star* is a fusion Afro-Cuban arrangement of “Poinciana,” a signature piece of the late

Ahmad Jamal. When the fact that one of the pianist’s new posthumous releases (*Emerald City Nights: Live At The Penthouse 1965–1966*, Jazz Detective) features the Burt Bacharach & Hal David classic “Alfie,” Alpert naturally has a remarkable story:

“I happened to play that at Burt Bacharach’s memorial,” he said. “It was one of Burt’s favorite songs.” The Bacharach/David songbook has played a significant role for Alpert as both an artist and a producer. He’s the only performer to earn number one singles as both a vocalist (in 1968 with his version of the pair’s “This Guy’s In Love With You”) and an instrumentalist (“Rise” from 1979).

“Ahmad was one of my favorite artists, as well. And he was one of Miles’ favorites, too,” Alpert said. “And Miles was the guy who really understood the genre and took it to many different places.”

Alpert and Davis shared a love for Shirley Horn, another musician who mastered space and silence. “I’m crazy about her. My good friend Johnny Mandel did the charts for her,” he recalled, referencing Horn’s 1992 masterpiece *Here’s To Life* as well as her recommendable *You’re My Thrill* from 2001. “He did some really beautiful work with her.”

A frisky version of Jerry Reed’s “East Bound And Down” is *Wish Upon A Star*’s first

track. It opened the door for another Alpert milestone — playing at the Grand Ole Opry. “I just didn’t even think anyone knew me out there,” he said. His take on the *Smokey and the Bandit* soundtrack classic caught the ears of the powers-that-be in Nashville, and he was invited to perform.

“That was really a moment in my life that I wasn’t expecting,” he said. When asked if he had done much listening to country music in the past, he pointed out that A&M “discovered Waylon Jennings” and broke the outlaw country pioneer into the mainstream.

In addition to being a working musician and the former leader of the Tijuana Brass with nine Grammy awards and 14 platinum albums, Alpert is a Broadway producer who co-produced works like Tony Kushner’s *Angels In America* and *The Boy From Oz*. Herb Alpert’s Vibrato Grill jazz venue and restaurant in Los Angeles presents live music nightly, and its owner is also an active painter and sculptor, with his painting featured on the *Wish Upon A Star* album cover.

“I’ve been sculpting for 40, 45 years,” he said. “And I have a 14-foot trumpet player that’s going to the New Orleans Jazz Museum.” The idea wasn’t to represent himself or Louis Armstrong, he clarifies. “I was just trying to get the feeling what it feels like to play music.”

These days, Alpert is arguably as well known as a philanthropist as he is for his music. The Herb Alpert Foundation — established in 1985 by Alpert and his wife, Lani Hall — has supported 75 different organizations ranging from the Jazz Foundation of America and the Jazz Education Network to the Southern Poverty Law Center and Homeboy Industries, which provides “hope, training and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women.” There’s also Herb Alpert Schools of Music at UCLA and CalArts and the Herb Alpert Music Center at Los Angeles City College.

“I wanted to be able to pass that on, the idea that the arts are so crucially important to the soul of our country,” he said of some of his many charitable efforts. “And I wanted to be able to make sure that artists who are passionate about what they’re doing have the opportunity to travel the road less traveled.”

Life remains active and rewarding for Alpert and Hall, who celebrated their golden anniversary in December and continue to share bandstands together. “I’m grateful to have married an angel,” he reflected. A multiple Grammy winner herself, Hall was singing with A&M recording artist Sergio Mendes & Brasil ’66 when she met Alpert.

“It’s a really good feeling traveling and performing together,” he concluded. “The only thing that’s not so great is packing and unpacking.”

—Yoshi Kato



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The Black Men of Labor Club lead a second line parade, from the documentary *City of a Million Dreams*.

COURTESY CITY OF A MILLION DREAMS

# A Bounty of Documentaries

## LAST YEAR WAS A GOOD ONE FOR JAZZ

and jazz-adjacent documentaries. Most prominent among them are the well-distributed Prime Video docuseries *Wayne Shorter: Zero Gravity* and the October PBS American Masters episode *Max Roach: The Drum Also Waltzes*. But we've also included five additional 2023 films here that jazz fans of all stripes can appreciate.

### *Elis and Tom*

Shorter appears briefly in *Elis and Tom*, a multi-hued portrait of Brazilian superstars Antonio Carlos Jobim and Elis Regina. Analogous to Peter Jackson's *The Beatles: Get Back*, it's framed around previously unissued verité footage of the making of their revered 1973 album for which the film is titled.

Shorter's haunting account of a planned, but never executed, recording in 1981, a year before Regina died, joins testimonies from surviving participants and witnesses — guitarist Helio Delmiro, drummer Paolo Braga and pianist-arranger Cesar Camargo Mariano, director Roberto de Oliveira, impresario André Midani, producer Roberto Menescal and engineer Humberto Gatica, as well as João Marcelo Bôscoli (Regina's son with her first husband, Ronaldo Bôscoli) and Beth Jobim (Jobim's daughter, and the only woman who speaks) — that illuminate the album's historical context and musical nuances. They don't shy away from the psychological dynamics that inflected this "Apollo and Dionysius" meeting, per Midani,

who observes that *Elis and Tom* became "a watershed between what existed before and what came after it."

Venerated outside Brazil as the world's greatest songwriter, described by Ron Carter in one of his two vignettes as a "casual genius," Jobim circa 1973 was out of vogue in his homeland. Regina, nicknamed "Hurricane" and "Little Pepper," was on the cusp of international stardom, but ambivalent, her son says, about "leaving the comfort zone of home and starting from scratch." We view the process by which Apollonian Jobim — charismatic, minimalist, wary of ceding control — seduces, charms and bullies Dionysian, pop-oriented, intuitive Regina from tense mistrust to acceptance.

### *Sloane, A Jazz Singer*

Where *Elis and Tom* portrays two transcendent artists at a mid-career crossroads, *Sloane, A Jazz Singer* resembles Bertrand Tavernier's *Round Midnight* — without the bathos — in its focus on the final act of a single artist nearing the end of the road. It's a labor of love by director Michael Lippert, who shadows Carol Sloane (1937–2023) in her modest Massachusetts apartment in fall 2019 as she prepares for an engagement at the Birdland Theater.

Along the way, she talks about her formative years in Smithfield, Rhode Island, early touring with Les Elgart's swing orchestra, frequent subbing with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, and a breakthrough performance at the 1961 Newport

Jazz Festival. Sloane's nuanced phrasing, infallible time, immaculate pitch and spot-on intonation positioned her as a lineal descendent of early heroes like Ella Fitzgerald and Carmen McRae, who both befriended and praised her. Matter-of-factly, she traces her glorious 1960s. She moves to New York, tours as an opening act for Oscar Peterson, hangs out with and photographs the Beatles and Rolling Stones in 1964 and 1965 (they shared a manager) and frequently appears on *The Tonight Show*.

The ensuing half-century — during which she records more than 30 albums — is shakier. Work is scant. She finds a second home in North Carolina, has an alcohol-codependent marriage with the great pianist Jimmy Rowles, survives a scotch-and-sleeping pills suicide attempt, finds true love with a Boston clubowner, enjoys 25 years of stability and musical success, adjusts to widowhood and the infirmities of old age — and transcends mother time with four beautiful sets before four packed houses. During the week of filming, Sloane was unsure that she could make it happen. For viewers observing her exemplary character and dedication to craft, her triumphant performance seems inevitable.

### *The Blind Boys of Alabama, This May Be the Last Time*

A similarly elegiac-yet-affirmative trope of defying death via artistic practice infuses *The Blind Boys of Alabama, This May Be the Last Time*, a 22-minute account of the creation of





Vocalist Carol Sloane performs at one of her last gigs from the new documentary *Sloane, A Jazz Singer*.

the venerable gospel ensemble's recent album *Echoes Of The South*. Director Daniel Fox juxtaposes in-studio footage of the recording of "Send It On Down," "The Last Time," "Keep On Pushing" and "Heaven Help Us All" with interviews of the protagonists. We hear from "often imitated, never duplicated" falsetto tenor Paul Beasley and the redoubtable Benjamin Moore, who each joined BBOA after losing their vision and died not long after the recording was made.

Jimmy Carter, the 91-year-old group leader, who would retire after the session, discusses the group's history and future. Reverend Julian Love gives a post-session sermon. Guitarist Joey Williams, BBOA's youngest member, talks about the blessing of intersecting with the elders in the group.

Ricky McKinnie, a member since 1989, sums up: "Our spirit isn't about what you can't do; it's about what you can do; as long as we stay true to that, and everybody gives all that they have to give and we sing songs that touch the heart, this group will live on forever." This promotional EPK is a resounding testament to collective imperatives and soloistic individuality coexisting in equipoise.

### **Introduction to Syntactical Ghost Trance Music**

So is *Introduction to Syntactical Ghost Trance Music*, a 17-minute "educational video" by Anthony Braxton's TriCentric Foundation about Braxton's compositional methods as applied to the 12-singer ensemble that rendered 12 of his sui generis compositions for the 12-CD box *GTM* (Syntax) 2017. As in *Elis and Tom*, the narrative revolves around previously unreleased rehearsal and recording footage of the sessions that generated the album, and a separate inter-

view with Braxton in avuncular professor mode.

Edited by director, co-producer and singer Kyoko Kitamura for presentation at an August 2023 Braxton festschrift in Darmstadt, Germany, it's an invaluable resource for Braxton-ophiles. Particularly fascinating is an opportunity to individuate the singers, who render the score's complex rhythms and intervals with precision and a relaxed attitude, perhaps inspired by Braxton's amusing impromptu demonstration of how a long passage should be phrased.

Mostly freelancers from the New York area and New England, many of whom first convened at the recording of Braxton's opera *Trillium E*, they embody a phenomenon articulated by bassist Mark Dresser, a Braxton alumnus: "Braxton gives an amount of freedom unlike any composer I know. It's like he's created this ship, and once you get in, whatever direction the people want to take, it is there. It's almost shamanistic. That collective quality is unlike any music I've played. Whether the music was powerful or sensitive or textural or rhythmic, however you did it, as long as it was with total conviction, he loved it all."

### **City of a Million Dreams**

Braxton, an Army veteran, has explored parade music deeply over the years, and it isn't too much of a stretch, at least for this writer, to discern affinities between the polyphonic character of *GTM* (Syntax) and the sound of the New Orleans parade bands featured in the brilliant, multiply-layered *City of a Million Dreams*.

The project is the brainchild of journalist-historian Jason Berry, who traces the 200-plus year history of musical funerary rituals in the Crescent City with well-directed recreations of the African rhythms and ring dances in Congo Square, and historical photographs

and films of different parade bands that connect to the ensembles featured in Berry's own compelling footage of jazz funerals between 1997 and 2019.

Berry contextualizes the information with erudite testimony from clarinetist-scholar Dr. Michael White, an eminent historian-practitioner of traditional New Orleans music, renowned for playing "the widow's wail" in the dirge portion of hundreds of funeral parades, and Deborah Cotton, a columnist and blogger whose subject was these one-of-a-kind rituals. He also interviews participants like trumpeters Gregg Stafford (Young Tuxedo Brass Band) and the late Milton Batiste (Olympia Brass Band), as well as non-musician Fred Johnson, a one-time Mardi Gras Indian Spy Boy who runs the Black Men of Labor Club, one of the social aid and pleasure associations that contribute to the infrastructure that armatures the traditions across generations.

We see White, visiting his Katrina-ravaged home for the first time, sift through the ruins of his extensive archive. We're there as he begins to heal and rebuild, embody the resurrection spirit he refers to when remarking, "The jazz funeral helps us to transition from death to a new spiritual existence." We see Cotton — who endured 36 surgeries after being trapped in the crossfire of rival gangs at a 2013 parade, before dying of post-shooting complications in 2017 — tell an audience, "Could it be that the antidote to our struggle is to celebrate?"

Both perspectives are palpable in the footage of the funeral of Mardi Gras Indian Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr., whose son, the alto saxophonist Big Chief Donald Harrison Jr., horn in hand, is seen participating in the raucous ceremonial.

—Ted Panken





Billy Mohler's *Ultraviolet* was inspired by Sonny Rollins' *A Night At The Village Vanguard* and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*.

ROBBIE JEFFRIES

# Billy Mohler's Open Vision

**AS PART OF THE FINALE EVENING OF THIS** year's Angel City Jazz Festival, bassist-bandleader Billy Mohler took the stage of the REDCAT black box theater in downtown Los Angeles, asserting a deceptively calm-yet-powerful presence with only his double bass, a subtle looping part and neo-psychedelic visuals on the screen behind him. Mohler's natural anchoring role, laying down foundational riffs and putting forth compositional visions, found its fullest flower with the arrival of his "chordless" band — longtime allies Shane Endsley on trumpet and drummer Jonathan Pinson, with the exhilarating addition of tenor saxophonist Mark Turner.

The band's nimble, interactive and ever-flexible energy made a memorable impact. The set left the impression that this high-profile gig helped to cement Mohler's status as a pillar-in-the-making in jazz's relatively new West Coast school of cool — minus the laid-back connotation of the original "cool" qualifier.

After his Angel City set, Mohler greeted

well-wishers and LP autograph seekers. He said the music was approached in an intentionally open way, with a spontaneous and surprise-welcoming spirit true to the working process for his new album *Ultraviolet* (Contagious Music)

In an earlier interview, Mohler explained, "The concept for *Ultraviolet* was to write a group of songs that were more like loose sketches, that we could dial in once we got all in the studio. I thought there might need to be some discussion to all get on the same page, but as we were getting sounds, and messing around with the material it became clear that we should just hit 'record' and play, so that's what we did."

Turner, filling the seat occupied by Chris Speed on *Ultraviolet*, is an ideal player in these ranks. A Los Angeles native who went East long ago, Turner recently returned to his hometown and has been leading a similarly configured and widely acclaimed "chordless" quartet.

Mohler, a Long Beach native whose musical tastes and career have oscillated between jazz

and pop and includes a healthy resume of session work, has his own stylistic homecoming story to tell. After getting lost, and making steady income in the pop world — working in the studio with such artists as Macy Gray, Dolly Parton, AWOLNATION and others — he followed his heart back to a more serious jazz pursuit about five years ago, and now with three leader albums to his name.

Going "chordless" with his own project was a move inspired by such historic and paradigmatic recordings as Sonny Rollins' *A Night At The Village Vanguard* and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*, confessing that "both records made a huge impact on me as a bassist and composer."

Of special locational note, Coleman's groundbreaking quartet and early recordings took place in the City of the Angels.

"The rawness in Ornette's music is striking," Mohler notes. "*The Shape Of Jazz To Come* was recorded in Los Angeles by engineer Bones



Howe, and he talks about that session. The band walked in, set up in a circle and threw down, no lead sheets or music stands, and Bones said he doesn't even remember any songs being counted off, they just had some otherworld telepathy happening.

"That's something I'm always thinking about when I'm writing — how to write music, that gets straight to it, so we can have a conversation."

Musical conversation and communal action are important to Mohler's sense of artistic self. Looking back over his committed trajectory into music, he says, "I think our friends and family interpersonal relationships play the biggest role, in how and why we end up where we end up. One of my childhood best friends is [drummer] Nate Wood. Nate and I would play death metal, then an hour later set up and play a jazz trio set. We just loved music so much that we wanted to play everything that caught our ears. But during this time my family went through a difficult time, my parents lost everything, financially speaking.

"Luckily, we had some incredible friends that helped us out, but my high school years were rough because my family lived well below the poverty line. We didn't even have a home phone line. I had to walk to a pay phone if I wanted to call my friends. In hindsight, I'm grateful for the experience, but it was not easy. It had a profound impact on me creatively, as music was my escape. I found endless inspiration in just practicing and wanting to be a better bassist. I still feel that way, and I'm still as inspired to practice every day."

Conversation partners and the galvanizing spirit of a well-populated artistic environment have been vital to Mohler's evolution, and he has found himself in the vibrant midst of a renaissance for creative and chance-taking jazz in Los Angeles in recent years, a scene he is now entrenched and influential within. "It's incredible seeing the shift in real time," he comments. "(Saxophonists) Chris Speed and David Binney were the first two East Coast transplants, and they really helped kickstart the scene."

He points to influential and welcoming venues such as the once-thriving but now-defunct club The Blue Whale, ETA and Sam First as "incubators, so to speak, for creating spaces for the music to develop. Couple that with a mass influx of musicians from New York, and more students at the local colleges than I've ever seen, we've now got a cool, diverse scene."

Along his path, and without really trying, Mohler found himself pulled into the session/studio work force in Los Angeles, whether in brick-and-mortar or file-sharing digital facsimiles of studios. "Studio work was something that naturally evolved over time," he says. "Macy Gray was the first artist I worked with that really utilized her live band in the studio. We'd get off the road and head straight into the studio. She never stops, which is one of the many reasons she's so

amazing. From those early sessions with Macy, I eventually started getting more calls to play on albums.

"I look at being a studio musician and a composer as separate entities. When I'm doing a session, I'm there's to help facilitate what the artist or the producer wants. I go in as a blank canvas, and whatever they need I try to provide.

"As an artist, the writing and direction of the sound is on me. To a degree they intersect in my mind, in that, I always want to be in the moment

and allow the music to take shape organically. That can go for a bass part on a session, or a song I'm bringing to a recording session. The song tells you where to go, so as a session player or an artist I'm trying to stay in the moment."

On Mohler's horizon, he anticipates the dual life of a recording and performing jazz musician/bandleader, with studio work on the side.

"I enjoy splitting my time between doing sessions and being an artist," he says. "I like the balance of the two worlds."  
—Josef Woodard



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Seeking to create a vibe similar to New York's Village Vanguard, Paul Solomon, left, and David Robaire have made L.A.-based Sam First an artist-friendly club with its own record label.

# Musicians 1st at Sam First

**THE BACK ENTRANCE OPENS INTO A COZY,** darkened room, leather-cushioned benches snaking around the irregular, rounded perimeter walls. The furniture and decor are elegantly crafted, as if it were a featured dwelling in *Architectural Digest*. The bandstand is tucked next to the bar, where a grand piano snugles against a wall that is the same color as the golden-stained wood vertical paneling on the side of the bar and back corner of the stage, but closer scrutiny reveals the wood seamlessly morphs into unusual industrial hoses that line the rest of the walls and ceiling, like the inside of some futuristic spaceship.

Behold Sam First, this concept of a modern jazz club, an apt representation of the music that came of age in mid-20th century and continues to evolve into the 21st. Its creator, Paul Solomon, is a real estate developer who cultivated a love for jazz in college and enjoyed going to clubs in places he lived and visited in the U.S. and around the world. He decided to open his own club on a property he owned, literally steps from the entrance to Los Angeles International Airport. He named the place after his grandfather, Sam First, a tailor from Poland who emigrated with his family to L.A.

Mr. First probably did not foresee his grandson one day owning a jazz establishment, just as Solomon couldn't have predicted his little spot would become, inexplicably, one of the last remaining bonafide jazz clubs in the entire

greater Los Angeles area. Further beyond the realm of envisioning would be the expansion of this venture to not only house but capture, produce and release that music on his own fledgling label, Sam First Records.

"I never wanted to be in the bar business at all, but I started drinking more, I suppose," Solomon joked, over video from his office above his club. He thought about leasing the space, "But I didn't want the hassle of somebody running a bar on the ground floor and doing who knows what with what kind of crowd at night, so I decided to do it." Midway through construction, he realized he wanted to have music in the bar, so he directed his contractors to hire an acoustical engineer to help accommodate the sound of a live band.

Solomon needed to find musicians to play there. His neighbor had a son who was a jazz bassist, who had studied at the prestigious Thelonious Monk (now Herbie Hancock) Institute of Jazz at UCLA. Years earlier, they had gone to see him play. "Dave, I forget, do you remember who you were playing with?" Solomon asked the other face on the screen.

Dave Robaire replied, "I think I was there with Josh Nelson and Mark Ferber ... it's just funny to think about now, because you know those guys so well." Coincidentally, Nelson, one of the most highly regarded jazz pianists in Los Angeles, would perform at Sam First two days after this video chat, with bassist Luca

Allemano and Ferber, the former New York drummer who still plays there as much as he does in California. "Oh, my gosh, I didn't know that was the catalyst," said Nelson right after his show. Regarding the club itself, Nelson said, "I just get this welcoming energy [here]. There's some charm in that it's not a big club, it kind of reminds me of some of the older clubs that we used to have. I really love this room."

Solomon not only tapped Robaire to play at Sam First (which he still does on occasion), he hired him as its manager and now producer for the new label. "I definitely work for Paul," Robaire said, "but in a lot of ways I also consider myself an employee of the L.A. jazz scene. It's kind of this marriage of making sure all the pieces are in the right place. When you think about great recordings or great performances, it's because of all these elements that came together. We're trying to enable people to engage their creativity, to give you the most comfortable space so you can go do your thing."

"[It's] very welcoming, feels like you're playing in your living room," said pianist Kris Davis following her own brilliant performance there with bassist Eric Revis and drummer Johnathan Blake. Davis was just featured on the cover of the September issue of *DownBeat*, highlighting her band's live recording at the Village Vanguard. Acknowledging some similarities between the two clubs, she explained, "This goes back



to that intimacy ... being very close to the audience, and I feel the audience is really listening. They're both kind of dry rooms."

Aside from riffing about the quality of the libations at the Vanguard ("It's probably not the best Manhattan in Manhattan"), Solomon has only aspirational admiration for that most famous jazz club.

"It's the one place we mentioned [as a model], really. I mean, it's the lodestar," he said. After all, the dry, welcoming sound of the Village Vanguard has been immortalized in countless recordings from the hallowed history of jazz.

But the Vanguard doesn't have a label through which to disseminate the recordings that are made there. Solomon and Robaire believe Sam First has a unique sound and musician-friendly experience that results in striking music they have learned to capture in electronically pristine form for their live records. It's like bottling fine lightning to sell and savor later.

Josh Nelson was among the first of five artists to be approached by Robaire to record for the label. Keyboardists Jeff Babko and Rachel Eckroth also signed on, as did pianist Justin Kauflin, whose bonding with Clark Terry over their shared condition of blindness was elucidated in the 2014 documentary *Keep On Keepin' On*.

The final artist in this group of five is Joe LaBarbera, who first recorded at the Vanguard in 1974 with Chuck Mangione, and who later joined what would be Bill Evans' last trio, recording with the pianist during Evans' 1980 swan song run on *Turn Out the Stars: The Final Village Vanguard Recordings* (Warner Bros.). Did LaBarbera see any similarities between that iconic club and this newer one out West?

"That's a fantastic question, because there is an absolute direct link between both of those clubs, and between all of the great jazz clubs that that I've played in my life," LaBarbera asserted by phone from his Woodland Hills, California, home, "and that is that the owner of the club or the manager that ran the club loved the music, and so the music was primary in terms of what was being presented."

LaBarbera continued, "There's no interference between the audience and the music — you can't get any closer to the music than at Sam First, and the same at the Vanguard — people were right on top of you. I have to say that Paul Solomon's passion for the music is the same as was [Vanguard owner] Max Gordon's. He was devoted to presenting the best music around and giving deserving newcomers a shot at greater exposure."

Nelson echoed LaBarbera's sentiments. "His is the closest thing to a Vanguard," he offered. "This is definitely our Vanguard."

And they make a great Manhattan, too.

—Gary Fukushima



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# SAMARA JOY

## TIME TO BE ADVENTUROUS

BY SUZANNE LORGE PHOTO BY NIC COURY

Samara Joy posted a personal video on her social media this fall in which her grandfather, Elder Goldwire McLendon, is singing “It Is Well With My Soul,” surrounded by relatives gathered in a diner to celebrate his 93rd birthday. At the chorus, the family begins to harmonize in an impromptu gospel concert. The snippet, not even a minute-and-a-half long, received about 4 million views on TikTok. Joy had only joined the platform 10 months earlier.

“I don’t think I fully realized how rich my family musical legacy is,” Joy said. “I just thought it was normal, that we get together, and we sing. That’s what we do as a family. I’m just now realizing how special it is to have that kind of thing, spanning across generations.”

Joy, who grew up in the Bronx as Samara Joy McLendon, first received international attention with her 2019 win at the Sarah Vaughan Competition — one of the most competitive vocal jazz contests in the world. Within three years, she had released her trio-backed, crowdfunded debut, *Samara Joy*, on Whirlwind Recordings; charmed audiences on early morning and late-night TV; and begun touring globally. And last February, she became the second jazz musician

ever — after Esperanza Spalding — to take home the Best New Artist Grammy, for *Linger Awhile*, her second album and Verve debut. (The record also won Best Jazz Vocal Album against such revered singers as Cécile McLorin Salvant, The Manhattan Transfer and The Baylor Project.)

Even among those from similarly musical backgrounds, Joy is a rarity, not just for these early successes but for her confounding, inexplicable grasp of jazz idioms. Consider that before she’d won the Sarah Vaughan Competition, and before she’d received the Ella Fitzgerald Scholarship at SUNY-Purchase in New York, the school from which she graduated in 2021, she’d barely listened to the legendary singers whose names these awards bear. Most astonishing, she’d never really scatted.





Samara Joy performing at the 2023 Monterey Jazz Festival.



"When I first started to become interested in jazz, it was a sound that I wasn't used to hearing," she said. "I didn't listen to Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan growing up. College was really my first deep-dive into their styles. When thinking about music and a career, I knew I loved to sing. But I loved listening to gospel and R&B and soul and Motown, and I wasn't sure which route I should take."

Despite this uncertainty, Joy found the vocal jazz program at SUNY-Purchase a welcoming environment for her inquisitive mind. And when, as part of the program, she started listening to vocalists like Abbey Lincoln, Carmen McRae and Betty Carter, she realized that jazz singers have always been stylistic innovators.

"This encouraged me to develop my voice further, so that I could not only imitate — because I do like to imitate — but also explore my individuality, what singing jazz means to me, as someone with a diverse background of influences," she explained.

Joy's diverse influences — especially those that derive from the oral music traditions of the African diaspora — have likely provided the young singer with a ready template for understanding jazz improvisation. And modeling the licks, grooves and colors of a master soloist's performances is, arguably, the pedagogical pathway that all the jazz greats have followed. In this, Joy is no exception. For most, however, it takes longer than two years to rise from neophyte to exemplar.

"I didn't improvise much before school. If I knew solos, they were from [instrumental tunes]. I didn't even realize that it was Dizzy [Gillespie] on the Stevie Wonder song 'Do I Do,'" Joy said, by way of example. "So, when I was listening to instrumental music, I knew they were playing solos but didn't realize I was learning them. I guess I did scat at some point, but not in that way."

Joy recorded *Samara Joy*, her debut solo album, while she was still at SUNY, soon after her triumph at the Sassy Awards. The album's dozen tunes, all songbook standards, reflect her refined interests as a then-vocal student — the rich phrasing of McRae ("If You'd Stay The Way I Dream About You"), the sweet romanticism of Nat "King" Cole ("Stardust"), the vulnerable assertion of Billie Holiday ("But Beautiful"). She scats only enough to reveal her knowing way around a solo; for Joy, improvisation informs her approach to the melody and lyrics as much as anything else. This approach, coupled with a generous stage demeanor, renders her performances eminently accessible to a broad audience.

"The album released a couple of months

MICHAEL JACKSON



"You never stop being a student," says Samara Joy.  
"You never stop trying to top yourself and what you did before."

after I graduated," Joy recalled. "That was when everything started."

"Everything" being radio play, media interviews, a major label contract, more industry honors, invitations to perform at international festivals and in premier concert spaces and a massive following on social media. Before long, the singer was touring the world at a rate of about 300 gigs in a year.

In 2022, Joy signed a three-record deal with Verve. *Linger Awhile* was the first of these, produced and released within 14 months of her eponymous debut. For this effort, she again paired up with guitar-

ist Pasquale Grasso and drummer Kenny Washington, both former professors of hers at SUNY and mainstays of the rhythm section on her first record.

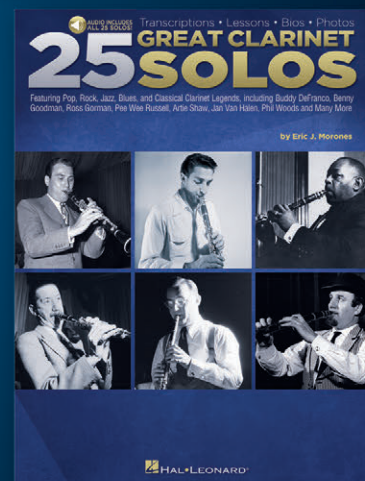
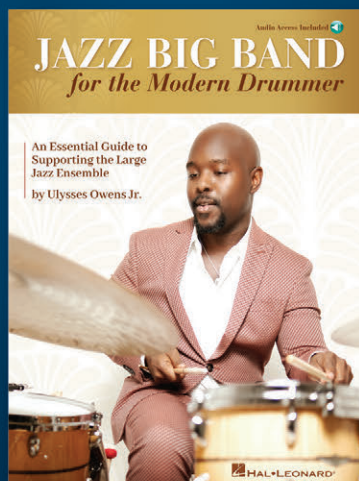
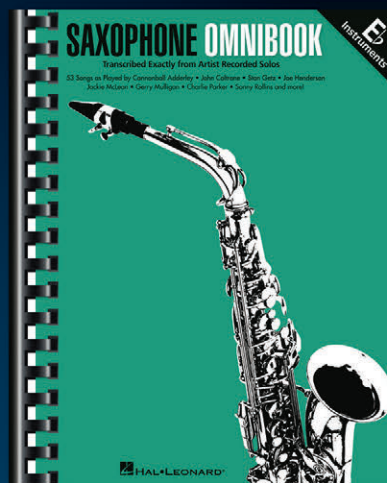
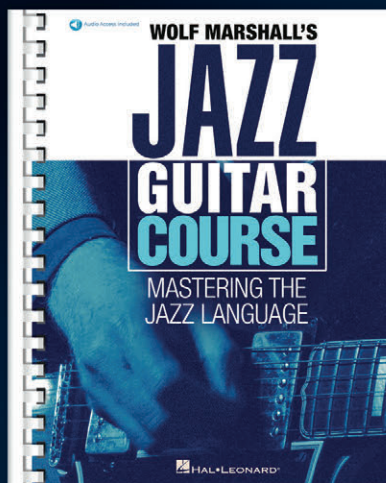
She also added piano and some horns, necessarily implementing more involved arrangements, with bassist David Wong taking over from Ari Roland. But where *Samara Joy* documents the singer's precocity as a jazz newcomer, *Linger Awhile* documents her arrival as a star.

First off, Joy's vocal delivery on the standard repertoire now bears the confidence of one who has been gigging relentlessly among





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Joy with manager/producer Matt Pierson and guitarist Pasquale Grasso at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel in 2022.

# 'That's what this time is for. It's to be adventurous.'

the jazz glitterati. On "Social Call," she displays not just a more assured exploration of melodic variation, but a broader dynamic range. On "I'm Confessin' That I Love You," she blends her usual deep contralto with a surprisingly facile upper register. And on the title cut she swings so expertly that it gives the lie to her rookie status.

Joy also steps out as a lyricist and adept interpreter of vocalese, the art of writing words to fit a recognized instrumental solo. Her self-penned vocalese track "Nostalgia (The Day I Knew)" uses trumpeter Fats Navarro's solo from his 1947 origi-

nal, "Nostalgia"; her innocent, romantic lyrics settle fittingly on the rangy melody line as she develops the charming narrative (a nod to her parents' longtime marriage). Further, she acknowledges Jon Hendricks, the undisputed vocalese master, by revisiting his seldom-heard lyrics on Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight," their darker story brightened by a ringing horn arrangement.

It's on *Linger Awhile*, perhaps, that we find a portent of Joy's creative development as a jazz singer. Citing an "organic" approach to album-making, she not only draws inspiration from traditional jazz role models, but

also from the present-day musicians in her immediate environment: former classmates and teachers, newly met celebrities and, of course, her family.

"I see myself incorporating more of my lyrics into my work and collaborating more with the arrangers and composers I've been working with live, but on recordings," she said. "I want to write and release 'new standards' — adding repertoire to the jazz idiom. We can move the music forward by adding individual voices, like myself and other artists in this space, through adding repertoire."

In this way, Joy would be following the path of fellow singers Cécile McLorin Salvant and Jazzmeia Horn, both of whom, like Joy, burst onto the jazz scene with early awards and rapid ascents in the public eye.

"Cécile and Jazzmeia are probably my main contemporary influences," Joy said. "I love their writing and the fact that they do original material, that they rework standards in their own way, and have their unique bands as well."

Like these contemporaries, too, Joy adopts a more hands-on role when it comes to project leading and self-promotion. These days, artistic autonomy demands a level of career involvement that early jazz singers could hardly have imagined.



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Deluxe digital reissue of the historic 2017 DeJohnette, Scofield, Medeski, and Grenadier HUDSON sessions with bonus tracks "Castles Made of Sand" (previously a Japan exclusive) and "Lay Lady Lay" (radio edit).

Jack DeJohnette, who sings on the Hendrix-penned track comments: "The song is pretty profound. The story it tells represents where we are at today: our well-made plans are just not guaranteed." DIGITAL

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DEC 1



FEB 2

## CHARNETT MOFFETT/JANA HERZEN **INNOCENCE OF TRUTH**

This joyful, spiritually inspired duo album of live and studio recorded synchronistic instrumental and vocal music was recorded in November 2021 and January 2022 by the late, great, bass innovator with his musical soul mate, and wife, Motéma's founder, Jana Herzen. Moffett appears here for the first time on acoustic bass guitar. CD/DIGITAL

*A worthy addition to Moffett's expansive legacy.* — JAZZWISE

*Probably the most joyful jazz gig of the past year.* — LA WEEKLY

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“My peers are releasing EPs on their own, doing all of the jobs that normally would be left up to a label,” Joy observed. “They’re taking full creative control over the projects, which I admire. And I love that they also find a way to incorporate their friends and peers into their projects. I love how community-based it is.”

To be clear, Joy doesn’t in the least underestimate the career benefits that major representation offers. And winning Best New Artist for her first major release “is a moment that I’ll never take for granted,” she said.

But “I wanted to maintain some level of independence [with the label]. So, in all the conversations that I have creatively, when it comes to album covers or songs or the musicians that I play with, they always ensure that I am a part of the conversation.”

In that conversation, Joy has a lot to say. To understand just how much, it helps to listen to some of her one-offs on Verve: single releases that reveal aspects of the singer’s talent that stand outside of her two LP releases. On her 2022 cover of Adele’s “Someone Like You,” for instance, Joy unleashes a powerful display of gospel virtuosity through the simple construct of the pop ballad.

She brings this same force — the belt, the sustained notes, the infectious riffing — to “Tight,” her remake of the Betty Carter tune released last September and nominated for a 2024 Grammy for Best Jazz Performance in November. Clearly, as a singer, Joy has more going on internally than swinging and scatting.

“What I’ve been working on is being comfortable accessing any part of my range, without any sort of break or hesitation,” Joy said. “You never stop being a student. You never stop trying to top yourself and what you did before.”

Already, however, Joy faces the conundrum that such creative expansion presents. Given audiences’ appreciation for her traditional jazz persona, how will they respond to her identity as a modern singer scanning new horizons?

“Because *Linger Awhile* was a success, people ask me, ‘Do you feel that you have a certain responsibility to keep the tradition, to save jazz?’” Joy said. “It’s a bit bizarre to me. I just entered this space, and it’s because of this one album. It’s a special time, and I’m not going to downgrade it.”

“But I feel that, above everything, I want to be honest with myself and about what I want to do musically. And if I have an idea but feel I can’t venture into it because of our responsibility to keep the music alive, then I’m only contributing even further to its death, because I’m not growing.”

“All of my contemporary and ‘tradition-



The cover of Joy's first holiday-themed album.

al’ heroes, they all grew. They all had different eras [in which] to explore their sound, and then it was something else. It never loses its foundation — it’s not without its roots, not without its history. It’s just that from that foundation, you have a platform to grow and have your own artistic voice. That’s the only responsibility I have: to pursue my artistic voice.”

In September, Joy released her second Verve album, the six-track EP *A Joyful Holiday*, a mixed sampling of seasonal tunes, some extending from her debut sessions with the label and others recalling her church upbringing. Verve had released two of these tracks as unrelated singles a year earlier: the retro confection “Warm In December,” featuring the *Linger Awhile* rhythm section, and a soulful, organ-backed version of “O, Holy Night,” with three generations of McLendons providing gospel interpolations. The common ground on these two pieces is Joy’s stylistically tempered vocals, the difference split between persuasion and power.

Similarly, the inclusion of two contrasting takes of “The Christmas Song” on the album only emphasize Joy’s creative flexibility.

The studio version, a smooth ballad with subdued comping, remains resolutely focused on Joy’s resonant instrument and sophisticated turns of melodic phrase. The live-recorded version, a duet between the vocalist and her father, gospel singer Antonio McLendon, highlights the harmonic rapport and emotional ease shared between the two family members. It’s easy to imagine that in Joy’s universe, these two tracks are complementary — rather than competing — musical statements.

Joy expects to release her third Verve album next fall, though the specifics are still being sorted. As with her previous records, she’s allowing the ideas to flow organically from the people and the projects in her purview.

“I’m not sure what the third album completely is going to be,” she admits. “I know that I want to incorporate live tracks from my octet project, in addition to some tracks recorded in the studio. I want to document what we’ve been working on live. But this octet project has been my main love.”

The octet represents Joy’s pursuit of yet another musical interest: jazz orchestration. Inspired by the work of historic bandleaders like Duke Ellington, Joy recently began to explore the possibility of broadening into larger ensemble structures via this newest collaboration: a piano-based rhythm section plus trumpet, trombone, and alto and tenor saxophones.

“I love orchestration,” she said. “Any sort of big band, small group, anything. So, I wanted to find some way to incorporate it into what I do.”

One of Joy’s initial forays into jazz orchestration appear on the deluxe edition of *Linger Awhile*, with its alternate studio versions of the album’s original track listings. Tucked away on Amazon Music, the only purveyor of this particular bonus track, is Joy’s horn-based rendition of “Lush Life,” as envisioned by the album’s tenor saxophonist/arranger Kendric McCallister. For this sleek, dramatic reframe of the romantic Strayhorn down-tempo, McCallister received a 2024 Grammy nomination for Best Arrangement.

Such an auspicious leap into jazz orchestration heralds good things for Joy’s work with her octet. Though the group lacks an official introduction (they’ve yet to decide on a name or even if they want one), Joy has been playing select gigs with the ensemble for some time, including high-profile performances at Jazz at Lincoln Center, Chicago Symphony Center and the Hollywood Bowl. From her posts on social media, one notes that in these larger venues, supported by the octet’s galvanizing intensity, Joy’s vocals skyrocket, seemingly without limit.

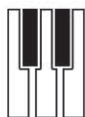
This said, when it comes to Joy’s career, it’s far easier to parse her immediate next steps than her boundless options. Already, she’s thinking beyond the octet to a bigger group and debating whether to add strings to the current recording project or the next one. Now, as she heads into her second Grammy season as a contender, her focus remains on the next Verve record, a lighter touring schedule and the evolving creative partnership with her octet.

She holds the latter open-handedly. Her sidemen don’t require much direction, she said, and she wants their creative minds to run free.

“There’s some adventurous arranging, for sure,” she said. “But that’s what this time is for. It’s to be adventurous.”

DB





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# JOHNATHAN BLAKE STORY TELLER

BY AMMAR KALIA | PHOTOS BY DAVID ELLIS

**For Johnathan Blake, every record is an act of remembrance. Over the past two decades, the Philadelphia-born and New York-based drummer and composer has imbued his work with the imprint of his mentors, channelling everything from the fierce rhythmic urge of Charles Mingus' music to Pharoah Sanders' spiritual freedom, the deep groove of Roy Hargrove to the swing of Ralph Peterson Jr.**

“**O**ur job as musicians is to be storytellers. We have to take the listener on a journey,” Blake says over a video call from his home. “When I’m writing, I’m putting my personality and everything about myself on paper. It’s a document of who I am and the people who have made me.”

Blake’s latest album, *Passage*, contains his most personal story so far by paying tribute to his late father, the jazz violinist John Blake Jr. Since 2018, Blake has been incorporating his father’s compositions into his records, paying homage to his work with the likes of Grover Washington Jr. and McCoy Tyner. Yet, following Blake’s 2021 debut for Blue Note, *Homeward Bound*, he decided it was time to delve further into the legacy his father left behind after his death in 2014.

“*Homeward Bound* began a process of using my music to celebrate those who are no longer with us,” Blake says. “That album was dedicated to the life and legacy of [saxophonist] Jimmy Greene’s and [flutist] Nelba Marquez’s daughter Ana Grace, who was tragically killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. *Passage* is a continuation of that ethos of dedication and celebration, this time focused on my dad.”











Rather than settle in an elegiac mood, Blake's musical tributes are infused with life and a surging sense of vitality. On *Homeward Bound*'s title track, for instance, Blake builds on bassist Dezron Douglas' skittering motif to produce a rapturous nine minutes of melodic ascendance, anchored in the trade-off between saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins and vibraphonist Joel Ross. "I don't want to make these records sombre," Blake says. "They are compositions embodying what people were like when they were alive, not just the feeling of when they are gone."

Growing up as the eldest of three siblings in late-'70s Philadelphia, Blake remembers his father as the center of the family and the local musical community. "He was a sweetheart. He treated everybody like they were family and everybody loved him because he was just this big teddy bear," Blake says with a smile. "His students became an extension of my siblings, since he was always so welcoming."

That openness extended to Blake Jr.'s music, as well as his teaching. At work, his gigs might veer from straightahead jazz to funk and even Top 40 pop, while at home he would take Blake and his sisters to watch the Philadelphia Orchestra as well as Michael Jackson. "My parents exposed us to so many different types of music because

it was a reflection of their own upbringings where they were surrounded by dance and music and poetry," he says. "My dad stressed to me at an early age that you need to be open to what's happening so that you can play in any setting."

Although Blake initially took up his father's instrument of the violin at age 3, he found himself banging on pots and pans and soon switched to the drums. As Blake developed his ear for everything from Motown to Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Bartók and Beethoven, his father stressed the necessity of composition alongside work as an instrumentalist. "He was one of the first people to encourage me to start exploring writing because he knew the importance of showcasing your own voice in this music," Blake says. "At a very young age he would show me different chords on the piano, and from there he gave me the blueprint to start creating my own work."

On *Passage*, the development of that blueprint is fully present. The title track is one of Blake Jr.'s, weaving together complex harmonies with an earworming melody, while Blake's Latin-inflected drumming drives forward a unifying sense of groove. On other numbers written by Blake, like the sprawling "Muna And Jona's Playtime" (named after Blake's two children) or the soulful and

airy "West Berkley St.," that same tension between density and lightness is ever-present, between thought and instinctual enjoyment. Like father, like son.

If Blake Jr. planted the seeds for his son's compositional dexterity, it was coming up in the '90s Philly music scene that truly cemented his skills. "Philadelphia was amazing back then, since there were so many different genres of music happening and it wasn't separate, we all knew each other," Blake says. "I would play house parties and standing next to me would be Questlove spinning while I was playing along with the record. It was all just music."

As a result of playing through that melting pot, Blake is still reluctant to refer to himself solely as a jazz drummer. "I see myself as playing the music first and foremost," he says. "I go into each situation not trying to play just one particular way and that's how I can work with Q-Tip and then turn around and do something with Maria Schneider's Orchestra."

Indeed, Blake's CV zigzags through some of the most exciting and varied artists of the past 50 years, covering the spectrum of jazz and genres beyond the realm of improvisation. He has played with everyone from Pharoah Sanders to Dr., Lonnie Smith, Oded Tzur, Ravi Coltrane and Bill Frisell. He has



recorded on Q-Tip's 2009 solo album *Kamaal The Abstract*, one created after the MC had left A Tribe Called Quest. On the day of this interview, Blake had just arrived back from a Japanese tour with Kenny Barron sporting a T-shirt with the album cover for A Tribe Called Quest's *Low End Theory*.

It seems that from each gig and mentor, Blake has taken away more than just merchandise. He speaks fondly of the late Roy Hargrove, who rang up 19-year-old Blake in his college dorm room at William Paterson University to ask him to join his band. "Roy was all about never sacrificing the groove no matter what you're playing," Blake says. "Even if you're playing straightahead, make it feel good because it's supposed to be dance music. He was such a soulful guy and he always played the perfect thing on any given solo that he would take."

Blake developed his rock-solid rhythmic foundations on Hargrove's gigs. During his time in the early 2000s with the Mingus Big Band — where he appeared on their Grammy-nominated albums *Tonight At Noon ...* (Dreyfus, 2007) and *I Am Three* (Sunnyside, 2005) — he learned the art of dealing with the ensemble. "I was 21 when I got that gig, and it was a big learning experience," he says. "I had to give the band energy and push 14 members to new heights. I was very green and some of those guys could be hard on you." So hard that Blake recalls a fight breaking out backstage before one gig, with the ruckus kicking up so much noise that one reviewer thought the group was listening to a recording of Mingus himself going off at his band as inspiration before the show. "There was a lot going on behind the scenes," he laughs. "I always tell people, if I can survive that band, I can survive anything."

Thankfully, it's apparent that Blake is far easier on his own intergenerational band Pentad, with which he has recorded both *Homeward Bound* and *Passage*. "It was so important for me coming up to have mentors and people who would take me under their wing, which is why I wanted players like Immanuel and Joel in the group," he says. "I first met Immanuel when he was just a kid, and I was delivering a master class at the Lovell Hines Youth Ensemble in Philly. I knew even then that he would be great and once he and Joel formed their own bonds playing in bands in New York, I knew we had to all get together."

Rounding out the group is bassist Dezron Douglas and pianist David Virelles, with whom Blake has been collaborating for the better part of a decade since first playing together in Ravi Coltrane's group. "We're all part of a brotherhood, and we come together with the purpose of trying to create the most

honest and organic music possible," he says. "From *Homeward Bound* to this latest record, you can hear the growth in our sound and you can hear the bond that has gotten tighter. We're all producing a very open-ended dialogue."

It is ultimately all encapsulated in the title of his latest record. Denoting the transition from one state to another, the movement between and onwards, *Passage* is the perfect expression not only of Blake's capacity for appreciating those who have come and gone before him, but also a gesture toward

his ever-changing future. "My dad is always going to be a part of me and my music, especially since I still have so many manuscripts of his to explore," he says. "But there are also so many other people and aspects of my life to celebrate."

With the recent premiere of a new group (which performed a suite of Blake's social justice-inspired music at the Village Vanguard last fall) as well as plans for orchestral compositions and a new tour, Blake continues to gather fresh material for the deeply personal, highly inspiring stories he tells so well. **DB**

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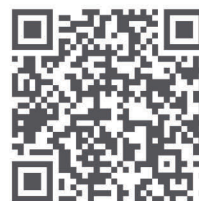
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**THE EVOLUTION OF**





# NICHOLAS PAYTON

BY BILL MILKOWSKI PHOTO BY DANA DISTORTION





"Some of the first things I checked out heavily when I got serious about playing music was Weather Report's *Heavy Weather*," Payton says of his early influences.

**There was a time, back in the mid-'90s, when trumpeter Nicholas Payton was being hyped as a Young Lion on the scene. His New Orleans birthplace lent credence to the notion that he might be the next link in the Crescent City's rich trumpet lineage, one that spanned Buddy Bolden to Joe "King" Oliver to Freddie Keppard to Louis Armstrong, then decades later to Wynton Marsalis and Terence Blanchard. The fact that this hard-bop prodigy also bore a striking physical resemblance to "Pops," as observers and scribes often noted, played right into that narrative.**

As Los Angeles Times jazz critic Don Heckman wrote in a May 1, 2000, review of a Payton concert: "It was appropriate that Payton was leading a seven-piece ensemble in a program billed as 'The Nicholas Payton Armstrong Centennial Celebration.' In addition to his extraordinary mastery of the Armstrong trumpet style, he actually bears considerable physical resemblance to the great jazz innovator." Though some, including the iconic 91-year-old trumpeter Doc Cheatham, maintained that Payton more favored King Oliver.

His appearance alongside Cheatham on a 1997 Verve album of jazz standards, recorded when Payton was 23, earned the rising star trumpeter a Best Solo Jazz Performance Grammy for "Stardust." And as the elder statesman said of his mentee at the time: "He's the greatest of the New Orleans-style players that I've ever heard. He's pure, he's not fooling around. He's gonna scare all the trumpet players. I haven't heard anybody like him since Louis Armstrong."

That praise, along with Payton's appearance on the 2001 Arkadia Jazz album *The New Young Lions Of Jazz*, further drove home the point. But Payton had other plans, as he would articulate in a 2012 blog post entitled, "Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore."

*Jazz died when cool stopped being hip.*

*Jazz was a limited idea to begin with.*

*Jazz is a label that was forced upon the musicians.*

*The musicians should've never accepted that idea.*

*Jazz ain't shit.*

*I play Postmodern New Orleans music.*

*Jazz is incestuous.*

*Let it go.*

Lazy listeners who bought the Young Lions hype may not have made it beyond 1995's *From This Moment On*, 1996's *Gumbo Nouveau*, 1997's *Doc Cheatham & Nicholas Payton* and

1998's *Payton's Place*. But if they had gone along for the ride on the neo-bop burner's ever-evolving trip through the next two decades, it might've explained how he got to *Drip*, his latest release for his Paytone Records.

There were plenty of hints along the way. As far back as 2001's *Dear Louis*, his heartfelt paean to Pops, there were signs of Payton expanding beyond the Young Lions tag. That album not only featured his first-ever use on record of the Fender Rhodes electric piano (which he played himself on a radically re-imagined and reharmonized rendition of "On The Sunny Side Of The Street," featuring Dianne Reeves on vocals), it also contained tweaked renditions of "Hello, Dolly," "Potato Head Blues," "Tiger Rag" and "Tight Like This" for 11-piece band.

With 2003's *Sonic Trance*, Payton opened the floodgates, offering listeners a taste of his neo-soul sensibility on the title track and "Seance (Romantic Reprise)" while delving into an edgier, electric Miles Davis aesthetic on trippy, wah-wah-inflected trumpet numbers like "Velvet Handcuffs," "Tantric," his Afrobeat homage "Fela 1" and the sly-named "Cannabis Leaf Rag."

But Payton continued pushing the envelope on 2011's *Bitches* and a string of ambitious concept albums that followed, again, on Paytone (2013's *Numbers*, 2014's *Letters* and 2015's *Textures*), revealing a rene-gade streak that placed him light-years beyond his Young Lions past. By 2020, when he released two quirky projects in the retro-soul *Maestro Rhythm King* (which had him playing all the instruments alongside a vintage drum machine; the kind formerly used by Sly Stone on 1971's *There's A Riot Going*



On) and the experimental electronica outing *Quarantined With Nick* (fueled by politically charged sampled rants of looped dialogue from outraged pandemic witnesses) — Payton left behind that portion of his earlier audience that wished he had remained firmly entrenched in the Armstrong jazz legacy.

Instead, he keeps defying expectations. While stretching into more expansive electronic directions on Paytone, the trumpeter maintains an acoustic jazz presence on the Smoke Sessions label, releasing *Relaxin' With Nick* in 2019, *Smoke Sessions* in 2021 (with bassist Ron Carter and tenor saxophonist George Coleman) and *The Couch Sessions* in 2022 (with bassist Buster Williams and drummer Lenny White, and featuring sampled testimony from the likes of Geri Allen, Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter).

DownBeat spoke with Payton just after the occasion of his 50th birthday on Sept. 26, which was also the official release date for his retro, '70s-sounding *Drip* (recorded in Atlanta with drummer Lil' John Roberts and his band The Senators along with guests Robert Glasper, Patrice Rushen and Michael Franks).

**Bill Milkowski:** Those who haven't been following your recent output may be surprised by the '70s vibe that permeates *Drip*, particularly on tunes like "Big George," "Black Is Beautiful" and

"Gold Dust Black Magic." But you've been alluding to that funk-soul-jazz direction since 1999's *Nick@Night*, which contained your rendition of Ramsey Lewis' "Sun Goddess," his hit single and title track from his gold-selling 1974 album.

**Payton:** True. So it's really nothing new. That was the era I grew up in. My first favorite song, which I used to ask my dad to put on repeat when I was like 3, was Grover Washington Jr.'s "Mister Magic." So the sound of the Fender Rhodes electric piano has been crucial in my music since *Sonic Trance* ... actually before that. I wanted to use electronic instruments on *Nick@Night* but back then the labels were not yet open-minded, and the Young Lions thing was heavy. Playing acoustic straightahead and "suiting up" and that whole thing was still very prevalent, so they were leery of me taking that sharp direction, which forced me to be creative. So on *Nick@Night* I employed the celeste as a substitute for the Fender Rhodes on one song ["Faith (For Faith Evans)"], and then I had a harpsichord as a substitute for the clavinet on another ["Beyond The Stars"]. But *Dear Louis* is the first time I had a Fender Rhodes on a record, which I played on "On The Sunny Side Of The Street."

**Milkowski:** Then on 2003's *Sonic Trance* you employed all kinds of electronics — wah-wah on the trumpet, synths and samplers and various other effects. And that's been part of your

modus operandi for a while now. You may have gotten pigeonholed into a Young Lions thing early on, or even pressured into that, but it seems you've broken away from that decades ago.

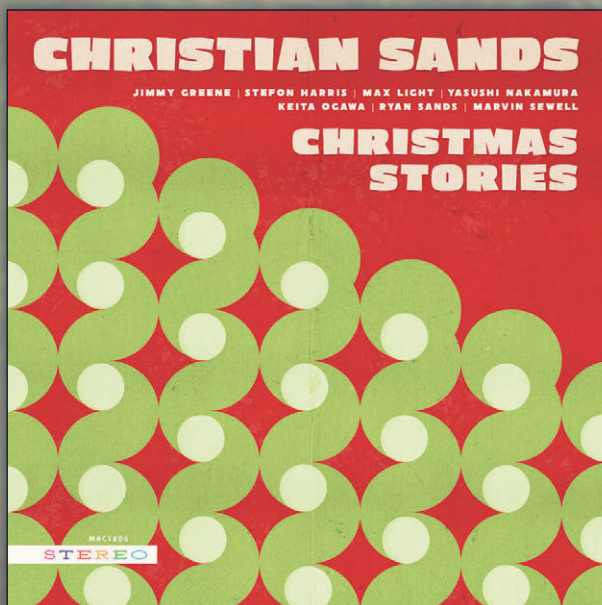
**Payton:** Yeah, indeed.

**Milkowski:** It sounds like you came about your interest in '70s music very organically.

**Payton:** Absolutely. Some of the first things I checked out heavily when I got serious about playing music was Weather Report's *Heavy Weather*. That's my favorite Weather Report album. "Birdland" was a really big hit at that time. Herbie Hancock and Headhunters' "Chameleon" was really big at that time. And I also got really into Freddie Hubbard's *Red Clay*. That was one of the first albums I really seriously started checking out and transcribing. So that aesthetic has always been prominent in my music, even when I was playing strictly acoustic. Even going back to *Gumbo Nouveau* [Verve, 1996], my arrangement of "When The Saints Go Marching" is like that. So that type of sound has always been central to the thing I do. Or even my very first album [*From This Moment On* [Verve, 1995], where I had vibraphones [Monte Croft] and guitar [Mark Whitfield]; it was very much going after a CTI/Milt Jackson *Sunflower* kind of thing. So, yeah, it's always been very prevalent. With this new album, though, what I think sets it apart is that I tapped a little bit into more of a



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*How Does Christmas Sound?*



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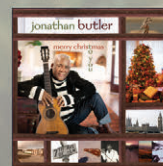
**Various Artists**  
*Christmas Goes Gospel*



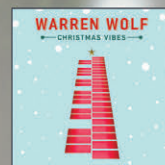
**Brian Bromberg**  
*Celebrate Me Home: The Holiday Sessions*



**Various Artists**  
*Christmas Goes Gospel, Volume 2*



**Jonathan Butler**  
*Merry Christmas to You*



**Warren Wolf**  
*Christmas Vibes*



**Various Artists**  
*It's Christmas on Mack Avenue*



**Rahsaan Patterson**  
*The Ultimate Gift*





"It was quite possibly the world's first COVID quarantine album," Payton boasts of *Quarantined With Nick*, recorded and released in March 2020.

kind of smooth, urban/AC type of format. I think it's the most in line with that type of studio-produced live type of sound that I've done. Whereas a lot of my other electronic albums have been more kind of free-form and a bit loose and experimental.

**Milkowski:** Like 2020's *Quarantined With Nick*.

**Payton:** Well, yeah, that's kind of way out there.

**Milkowski:** That was an adventurous and very politically charged experiment with Sasha Masakowski doing vocal loops and sampled loops and

other electronics and Cliff Hines playing modular synth. And some of the looped dialogue was addressing the state of the pandemic and angry reactions to the stay-at-home mandate. It was pretty dark and real.

**Payton:** Exactly. We did that recording right before it became a formal city-wide lockdown [ordered New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell in March 2020]. We set up in my home studio on March 13th and 14th and recorded it, then released it two weeks later, over the weekend of March 28–29. So it was quite possibly the world's first COVID quarantine album.

**Milkowski:** Some of the tunes from *Drip* conjure up memories of Roy Ayers' *Ubiquity*, Ronnie Foster and Herbie Hancock's more pop-inflected recordings from the late '70s like *Secrets*, *Sunlight* and *Feets, Don't Fail Me Now*.

**Payton:** And *Man-Child*. In fact, this new album was mixed in the studio where Herbie cut a lot of his earlier stuff — *Sextant*, *Head Hunters* and *Thrust*. The engineer I've been working with for the last two years [Otis McDonald] has studio C in what used to be Wally Heider Studios in San Francisco, but is now called Hyde Street Studio. That's where *Drip* was done.

**Milkowski:** On *Drip* you've re-imagined some tunes you had previously recorded for *Smoke Sessions*. The opening track, "Big George," was originally named for "George Coleman," who appears on your swinging version from 2021's *Smoke Sessions*. But on this new version from *Drip*, not only are you not playing any trumpet at all, the tune just hangs with that funk vibe. It never goes to a swing section. And instead of George Coleman's killing tenor sax solo, the solo on the new version comes from electric guitarist Derek Scott. That's really put a new suit of clothes on that tune.

**Payton:** Correct. I like the idea of revisiting compositions and bringing new light to something that I'd done years before. Wayne Shorter is a big inspiration for that, how he would revisit older material that maybe he did with an acoustic straightahead thing and then wrote a whole episodic type of thing for an electric ensemble. I think if the barebones of composition is there, if the melodic material is strong enough, you can do it any style. It doesn't have to be one particular thing, even if you conceived it in one particular type of sound when you originally wrote it. The deal I've had with *Smoke Sessions* is that I'll do the straightahead stuff for their label and not be competing with myself in terms of that. Then I save the more experimental or electronic stuff for Paytone Records. That's not to say playing straightahead can't be adventurous either, but just the aesthetic of playing more acoustic straightahead music, I do on their label since that's kind of in their wheelhouse.

**Milkowski:** That '70s vibe also comes across on "Black Is Beautiful," which has a Stevie Wonder influence to it.

**Payton:** Absolutely, very heavy. I definitely love Stevie as well. *Songs In The Key Of Life* was another one of the first things that I recall hearing on repeat as a kid, as a 3-year-old. But that song "Black Is Beautiful" was originally recorded for an album which I started working on at the top of the pandemic with Marcus Gilmore and Kwame S. Brathwaite, the son of the great photographer and activist Kwame Brathwaite, who was very crucial in the Black is Beautiful movement of the '60s. He took a lot of iconic photos during that time, including a couple for Blue Note album covers like Lou Donaldson's *Gravy Train* and *The Natural Soul* and Big John Patton's *Oh Baby!* So through Kwame S. Brathwaite, we had access to his father's archives. We'd pick a Kwame Brathwaite photo and then write a composition or piece of music that sounds like the photo. It started as an experiment with us bouncing tracks back and forth, sending files online since people were still quarantined. Then once stuff started opening up, we began inviting guests to appear on the recording. So far we've had Joel Ross on a tune and Brandee Younger is on "Black Is Beautiful," which is a piece in three sections. We also had a string section on some stuff, and the matriarch of the Brathwaite family appears via voice samples of her talking about the whole Black is



Beautiful movement — what it meant in the '60s and what it means now in terms of today's outlook on Blackness and its importance. So that project should be coming out sometime soon.

**Milkowski:** That idea of using voice samples was a significant aspect of your 2022 Smoke Sessions album *The Couch Sessions*, where we hear spoken word testimony from Geri Allen, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, Lenny White and others.

**Payton:** Yeah, it's something I started doing on my *Afro-Caribbean Mixtape* project, which is the first overtly political album that I've done that espouses a lot of the things I've written about but hadn't so much been a part of my music, until then. Initially, I had a DJ on that project to generate the voices. Now I use several apps on my phone to trigger samples, so I can do it myself in a live gig situation.

**Milkowski:** "The Backwards Step," which features Robert Glasper on Fender Rhodes, is another one that you had previously recorded. You originally did that tune on your 2013 album *#BAM: Live At Bohemian Caverns*.

**Payton:** No, that was actually the second time I recorded it. The first time was on my *Into The Blue* album, which came out [on Nonesuch] in 2008. And it's become probably my most played and performed tune of all the compositions I've written. That's one that has more or less become a standard on the scene.

**Milkowski:** That tune triggered memories of Angela Bofill, who was very popular in the '70s and got a lot of crossover radio play and attention from her 1978 album *Angie*.

**Payton:** Oh, love her! Yeah, that album was played often. That and her second album, called *Angel Of The Night*. My mom was a big fan of that album so I grew up hearing it. "I Try" is one of my favorite tunes ever. Those albums were always a part of the sound of my childhood.

**Milkowski:** You scored a nice coup on the new album with that vocal duet between Patrice Rushen and Michael Franks on "Visible Light."

**Payton:** Yeah, their first, actually. So I was proud to be able to put that together. Patrice is also playing Rhodes on that tune, and she's still at the top of her game. I've been loving Patrice since *Straight From The Heart* [Rushen's 1982 album on Elektra].

**Milkowski:** What's the story behind you collaborating with Lil' John Roberts and his band on *Drip*?

**Payton:** What happened was, I had a gig in Atlanta with his group and we did two nights at this club called The Velvet Note. This was a day or so before Hurricane Ida was due to hit New Orleans. And since I was already gone, it didn't make any sense to go back home, so I just stayed in Atlanta. And the gig had such a good vibe that I decided, "Why don't we just go in the studio?" I had some time to kill anyway, so we did two dates in the studio and that was the genesis of the project.

**Milkowski:** Meanwhile, you've appeared as a guest soloist on other people's records recently, including Joshua Redman's *where are we*, Al Foster's *Reflections* and Terri Lynne Carrington's *New Standards, Vol. 1*. You even played on Common's album *Fancy Free Future Love*. So it seems like you have a lot of avenues for expression these days.

**Payton:** Definitely. To me, that's always been the goal: to be free to do whatever it is I wanted to do musically or otherwise. It's kind of the point of what attracted me to music in the first place. My favorite artists didn't just do one type of thing. And the older I get, the more motivated I am. The closer I get to the finish line of being on this planet, I tend to be more motivated to try to do more stuff before I can't do it anymore. The impetus of me starting my own label, too, was not wanting to adhere to someone else's schedule of when I put an album out; that if I want to release five projects in a year, I can do that. **DB**

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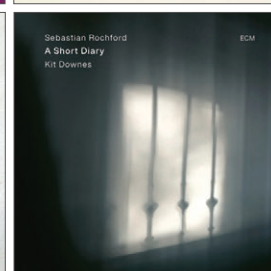
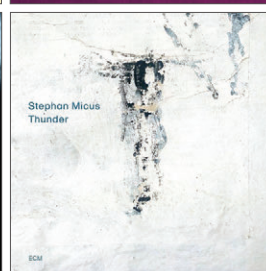
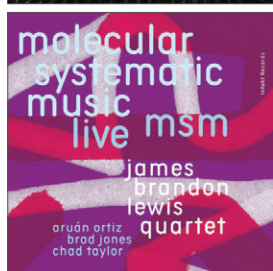
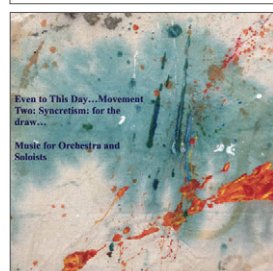
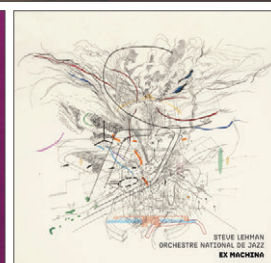
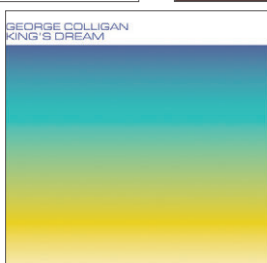
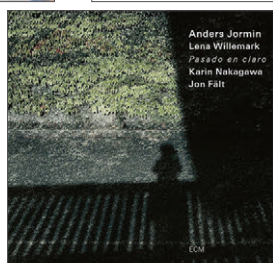
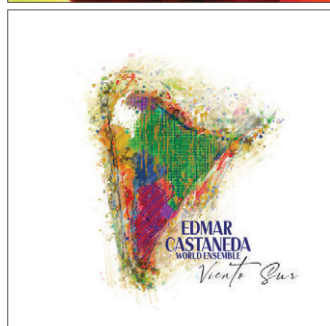
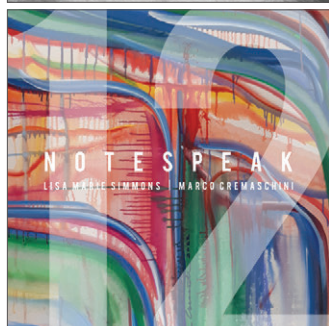
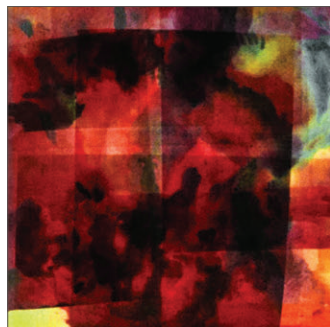


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# BEST ALBUMS OF 2023

## MASTERPIECES ★★★★★



**JAMES BRANDON LEWIS  
QUARTET**  
*MSM Molecular Systematic  
Music Live*  
Intakt ..... Jan.

**GEORGE COLLIGAN**  
*King's Dream*  
PJCE ..... Feb.

**BRIAN BLADE  
& THE FELLOWSHIP BAND**  
*Live From The Archives*  
Stoner Hill ..... Feb.

**LISA MARIE SIMMONS**  
*Notespeak 12*  
Ropeadope ..... April

**METTE HENRIETTE**  
*Drifting*  
ECM ..... April

**SEBASTIAN ROCHFORD  
& KIT DOWNES**  
*A Short Diary*  
ECM ..... April

**ANDERS JORMIN**  
*Pasado en Claro*  
ECM ..... April

**STEPHAN MICUS**  
*Thunder*  
ECM ..... April

**TONY KOFI  
& ALINA BZHEZHINSKA**  
*Alterra Vita*  
(For Pharoah Sanders)  
BBE ..... June

**EDMAR CASTAÑEDA  
WORLD ENSEMBLE**  
*Viento Sur*  
Independent Release ..... Aug.

**AJA MONET**  
*when the poems do what  
they do*  
drink sum wtr ..... Oct.

**VILHELM BROMANDER**  
*This Forever Unfolding*

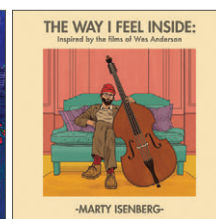
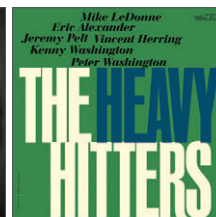
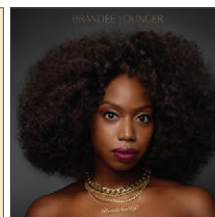
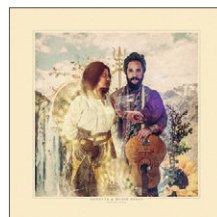
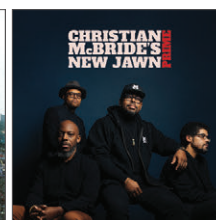
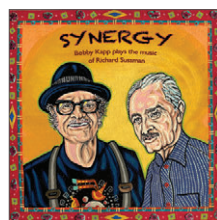
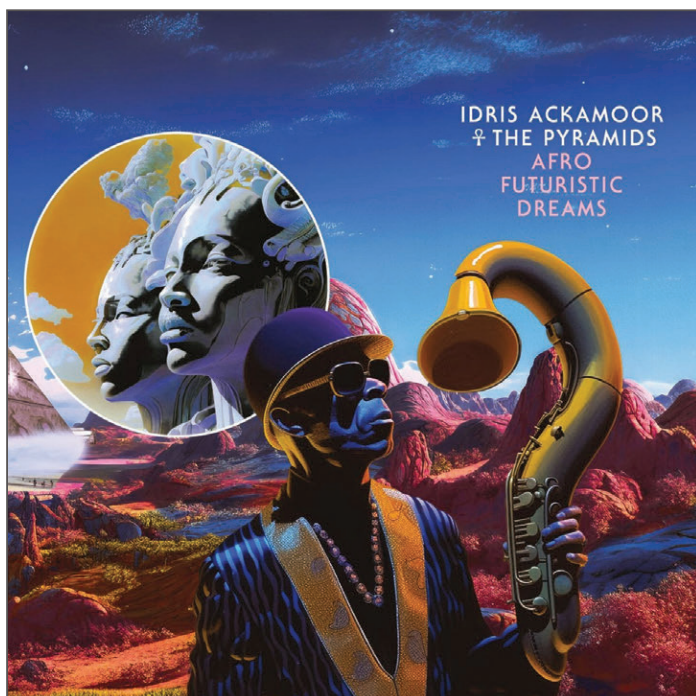
**Moment**  
Thanatosis Productions ..... Oct.

**STEVE LEHMAN**  
*Ex Machina*  
Pi ..... Nov.

**PLUMB**  
*Plumb*  
JMI/Outside in ..... Nov.

**VINNY GOLIA**  
*Even To This Day ...  
Music For Orchestra  
And Soloists,  
Movement Two: Syncretism:  
For The Draw ...*  
Ninewinds ..... Dec.





**TYSHAWN SOREY TRIO + 1**  
*The Off-Off Broadway Guide To Synergism*  
Pi..... Jan.

**FRANCO AMBROSETTI**  
*Nora*  
Enja..... Jan.

**SONIDO SOLAR**  
*Eddie Palmieri Presents Sonido Solar*  
Truth Revolution ..... Jan.

**SONG YI JEON/VINICIUS GOMES**  
*Home*  
Greenleaf.....Feb.

**KRIS ALLEN**  
*June*  
Truth Revolution .....Feb.

**KENNY BARRON**  
*The Source*  
Artwork ..... March

**MIKE LEDONNE/ERIC ALEXANDER**  
*The Heavy Hitters*  
Cellar Music ..... March

**BEN WOLFE**  
*Unjust*  
Resident Arts.....April

**GAIA WILMER LARGE ENSEMBLE**  
*Folia: The Music Of Egberto Gismonti*  
Sunnyside.....April

**JO LAWRY**  
*Acrobats*  
Whirlwind .....April

**CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE'S NEW JAWN**  
*Prime*  
Mack Avenue ..... May

**LIBBY YORK**  
*DreamLand*  
OA2/Origin ..... May

**MUNIR HOSSN/GANAVYA**  
*sister, idea*  
Ropeadope..... May

**BRANDEE YOUNGER**  
*Brand New Life*  
Impulse! ..... June

**NICK FINZER**  
*Dreams Visions Illusions*  
Outside in..... June

**JOHN PIZZARELLI**  
*Stage & Screen*  
Palmetto ..... June

**JOE FARNSWORTH**  
*In What Direction Are You Headed?*  
Smoke Sessions..... July

**SEX MOB**  
*The Hard Way*  
Corbett vs. Dempsey ..... July

**FENTON ROBINSON**  
*Somebody Loan Me A Dime*  
Alligator..... July

**ISAIAH J. THOMPSON**  
*The Power Of The Spirit*  
Blue Engine ..... July

**BETTYE LAVETTE**  
*LaVette!*  
Jay-Vee ..... Aug.

**DAN WILSON**  
*Things Eternal*  
Brother Mister ..... Aug.

**VICENTE ARCHER**  
*Short Stories*  
Cellar Live ..... Aug.

**DAVE MCMURRAY**  
*Grateful Dedication 2*  
Blue Note ..... Aug.

**FELIPE SALLES INTERCONNECTIONS ENSEMBLE**  
*Home Is Here*  
Tapestry ..... Aug.

**CHIMYTINA**  
*Milky Way*  
La Reserve ..... Aug.

**ANTHONY HERVEY**  
*Words From My Horn*  
Outside in..... Sept.

**ERIC ALEXANDER**  
*A New Beginning: Alto Saxophone With Strings*  
HighNote ..... Sept.

**KATE GENTILE/INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLE**  
*bio me ii*  
Obliquity ..... Sept.

**DAVID VIRELLES**  
*Carta*  
Intakt..... Sept.

**NORA STANLEY & BENNY BOCK**  
*Distance Of The Moon*  
Colorfield..... Sept.

**MATTHEW HALSALL**  
*An Ever Changing View*  
Gondwana..... Oct.

**MARTY ISENBERG**  
*The Way I Feel Inside: Inspired By The Films Of Wes Anderson*  
Truth Revolution ..... Oct.

**BLUE CRANES**  
*My Only Secret*  
Jealous Butcher/Beacon Sound ..... Oct.

**MAKIKO HIRABAYASHI TRIO**  
*Meteora*  
Enja/Yellowbird ..... Nov.

**IDRIS ACKAMOOR & THE PYRAMIDS**  
*Afro Futuristic Dreams*  
Strut ..... Nov.

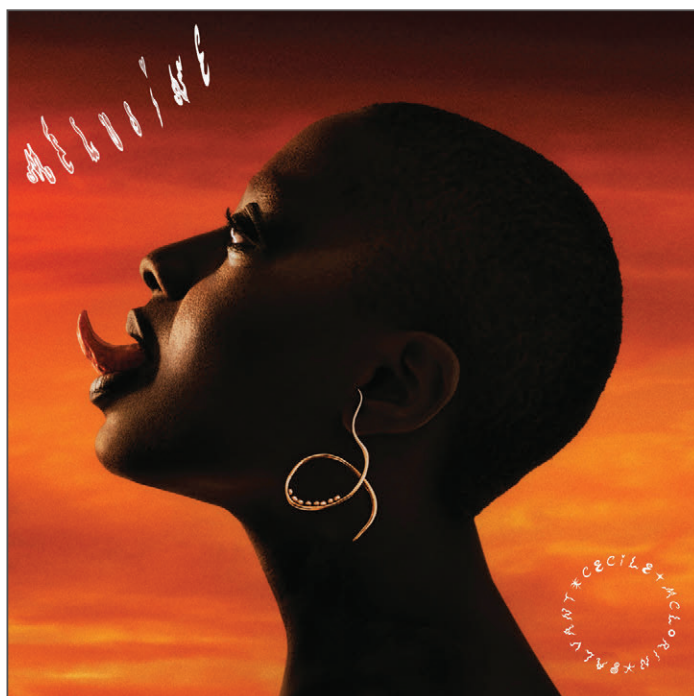
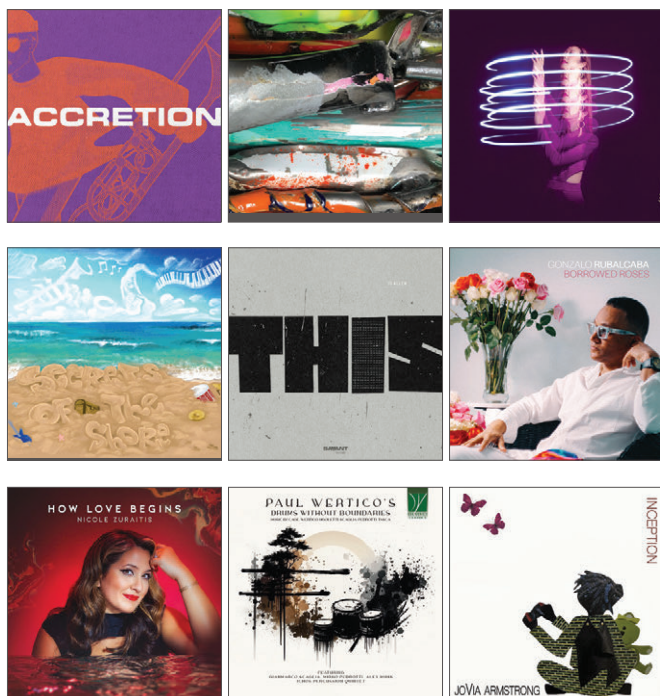
**BOBBY KAPP & RICHARD SUSSMAN**  
*Synergy: Bobby Kapp Plays The Music Of Richard Sussman*  
Tweed Boulevard..... Nov.

**KEVIN HAYS/BEN STREET/BILLY HART**  
*Bridges*  
Smoke Sessions ..... Dec.

**ALINE HOMZY**  
*Eclipse*  
Elastic ..... Dec.

**DARIUS JONES**  
*fLuXkit Vancouver (its-suite but sacred)*  
We Jazz/Northern Spy .... Dec.





**ANAT COHEN**  
*Quartetinho*

Anzic ..... Jan.

**BILL FRISELL**  
*Four*

Blue Note ..... Jan.

**GONZALO RUBALCABA/  
TRIO D'ÉTÉ**  
*Turning Point*

5Passion ..... Jan.

**RAY ANDERSON**  
*Marching On*

Doublemoon ..... Jan.

**DARRYL HARPER**  
*Chamber Made*

Stricker Street ..... Jan.

**OLLI HIRVONEN**  
*Kielo*

Ropeadope ..... Jan.

**THE HEADHUNTERS**  
*Speakers In*

*The House*  
Ropeadope ..... Jan.

**ARTURO O'FARRILL/  
CONGO PATRIA SON  
JAROCHO COLLECTIVE**  
*Fandango At The Wall*

*In New York*  
Tiger Turn ..... Jan.

**LAUFEY**

*The Reykjavik Sessions*  
AWAL ..... Jan.

**MICHAEL BLAKE**  
*Combobulate*

Newvelle ..... Jan.

**DAN WEISS TRIO**  
*Dedication*

Cygnus ..... Jan.

**DEZRON DOUGLAS**  
*Atalaya*

International Anthem ..... Feb.

**LASZLO GARDONY**  
*Close Connection*

Sunnyside ..... Feb.

**STARKLINNEMANN TRIO**  
*Transcending Liszt,*

*Vol. 1*  
UCM ..... Feb.

**MONTY ALEXANDER**  
*The Montreux Years*

BMG ..... Feb.

**JEFF PARKER**  
*Mondays At The Enfield*

*Tennis Academy*  
Eremite ..... Feb.

**MTHUNZI MVUBU**  
*The 1st Gospel*

Ropeadope ..... Feb.

**BLUE LINES TRIO**  
*Chance And Change*

Casco ..... Feb.

**OÚAT**  
*The Strange Adventures Of*

*Jesper Klint*  
Umlaut ..... Feb.

**KONRAD AGNAS/  
PER "TEXAS"  
JOHANSSON**  
*All Slow Dream Gone*

Moserobie ..... Feb.

**PHILIP ZOUBEK**  
*Labrynthus*

Why Play Jazz ..... Feb.

**SUN-MI HONG**  
*Third Page: Resonance*

Edition ..... March

**ART ENSEMBLE  
OF CHICAGO**  
*The Sixth Decade:*

*From Paris To Paris*  
RogueArt ..... March

**HOUSTON PERSON**  
*Reminiscing At Rudy's*

HighNote ..... March

**3D JAZZ TRIO**  
*9 To 5*

Diva Jazz ..... March

**MATS GUSTAFSSON  
& NU ENSEMBLE**  
*Hidros 8-Heal*

Trost ..... March

**PETRA VAN NUIS & ANDY  
BROWN**

*Lonely Girls:*  
*I Remember Julie*  
String Dampier ..... March

**JOE FIEDLER**  
*Solo/The Howland Sessions*

Multiphonics ..... March

**NADJE NOORDHUIS**  
*Full Circle*

Newvelle ..... March

**WIL SWINDLER'S ELEVENET**  
*Space Bugs - Live In Denver*

Origin Arts ..... March

**CHRIS POTTER**  
*Got The Keys*

*To The Kingdom:*  
*Live At The Village Vanguard*  
Edition ..... April

**BILLY VALENTINE &  
THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH**  
*Billy Valentine &*

*The Universal Truth*  
Flying Dutchman ..... April

**JEAN-MICHEL PILC**  
*Symphony*

Justin Time ..... April

**CHRIS DINGMAN**  
*Journeys Vol. 2*

Independent Release ..... April

**GREG WARD'S  
ROGUE PARADE**  
*Dion's Quest*

Sugah Hoof ..... April

**RACHEL & VILRAY**  
*I Love A Love Song!*

Nonesuch ..... April

**DAVE STRYKER TRIO**  
*Prime*

Strikezone ..... April

**ELIO VILAFRANCA**  
*Standing By*

*The Crossroads*  
Artistshare ..... April

**GEORGE**  
*Letters To George*

*Out of Your Head* ..... April

**MICHAEL FEINBERG**  
*Blues Variant*

Criss Cross ..... April





**OKONSKI**  
*Magnolia*  
 Colemine ..... April

**BUSTER WILLIAMS SOME-  
 THING MORE SEXTET**  
*Unalome*  
 Smoke Sessions ..... April

**FRANSISCO MELA FEATURING  
 COOPER-MORE AND WILLIAM  
 PARKER**  
*Music Frees Our Souls Vol. 2*  
 577 ..... April

**ED PARTYKA JAZZ ORCHESTRA**  
*Hold Your Fire*  
 Neuklang ..... April

**JULIAN LAGE**  
*The Layers*  
 Blue Note ..... May

**BILL WARFIELD  
 AND THE HELL'S KITCHEN  
 FUNK ORCHESTRA**  
*Time Capsule*  
 Planet Arts ..... May

**DIEGO RIVERA**  
*Love & Peace*  
 Posi-Tone ..... May

**LEAP DAY TRIO**  
*Live At The Café Bohemia*  
 Giant Step Arts ..... May

**MARGHERITA FAVA**  
*Tatatu*  
 Independent Release ..... May

**FRANK GRATKOWSKI/  
 SIMON NABATOV**  
*Tender Mercies*  
 Clean Feed ..... May

**LUÍS VICENTE 4TET**  
*House In The Valley*  
 Clean Feed ..... May

**PETER CASE**  
*Doctor Moan*  
 Sunset Boulevard ..... May

**MATT ANDERSEN**  
*The Big Bottle Of Joy*  
 Sonic ..... May

**JIMI "PRIMETIME" SMITH &  
 BOB CORRITORE**  
*The World In A Jug*  
 Vizztone/SWMAF ..... May

**THE CASH BOX KINGS**  
*Oscar's Motel*  
 Alligator ..... May

**MIKE RICHMOND**  
*Turn Out The Stars*  
 Steeplechase ..... May

**SANAH KADOURA**  
*Duality*  
 Independent Release ..... May

**EAST AXIS**  
*No Subject*  
 Mack Avenue/Brother  
 Mister ..... May

**MATT GREENWOOD**  
*Atlas*  
 Independent Release ..... May

**OSCAR JEROME**  
*The Spoon*  
 Independent Release ..... May

**JAKE BALDWIN**  
*Misc. Items*  
 Shifting Paradigm ..... May

**GRETCHEN PARLATO/  
 LIONEL LOUEKE**  
*Lean In*  
 Edition ..... June

**ARTEMIS**  
*In Real Time*  
 Blue Note ..... June

**RALPH ALESSI QUARTET**  
*It's Always Now*  
 ECM ..... June

**BILLY CHILDS**  
*The Winds Of Change*  
 Mack Avenue ..... June

**CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT**  
*Melusine*  
 Nonesuch ..... June

**AVISHAI COHEN/  
 ABRAHAM RODRIGUEZ JR.**  
*Iroko*  
 Naïve ..... June

**TINEKE POSTMA**  
*Aria*  
 Edition ..... June

**SAMUEL BLASER**  
*Routes*  
 Enja ..... June

**THEO CROKER**  
*By The Way*  
 Sony Masterworks ..... June

**HAILEY BRINNEL**  
*Beautiful Tomorrow*  
 Outside in ..... June

**BOBBY WEST**  
*Big Trippin'*  
 Soulville Sound ..... June

**BRÖTZMANN/LEIGH/  
 LONBERG-HOLM TRIO**  
*Naked Nudes*  
 Trost ..... June

**STEVE SWELL'S FIRE INTO  
 MUSIC**  
*For Jemeel*  
 RogueArt ..... June

**ALI FARKA TOURÉ**  
*Voyageur*  
 World Circuit ..... June

**PETROS KLAMPANIS**  
*Tora Collective*  
 Enja/Yellowbird ..... June

**BLOOM/HELIAS/PREVITE**  
*2.3.23*  
 Radio Legs/Rank  
 Hipocri\$y ..... June

**DAN ROSENBOOM**  
*Polarity*  
 Orenda ..... June

**CHRISTINE JENSEN**  
*Day Moon*  
 Justin Time ..... July

**BELA FLECK/ZAKIR HUSSAIN/  
 EDGAR MEYER**  
*As We Speak*  
 Thirty Tigers ..... July

**HENRY THREADGILL  
 ENSEMBLE**  
*The Other One*  
 Pi ..... July

**STEVE SMITH AND VITAL  
 INFORMATION**  
*Time Flies*  
 Wounded Bird ..... July



**LINDA MAY HAN OH**  
*The Glass Hours*  
Biophilia ..... July

**RUDY ROYSTON'S  
FLATBED BUGGY**  
*Day*  
Greenleaf ..... July

**PIERRE CHAMBERS**  
*Shining Moments*  
Dash Hoffman ..... July

**TRACY NELSON**  
*Life Don't Miss Nobody*  
BMG ..... July

**JOE LOVANO TRIO TAPESTRY**  
*Our Daily Bread*  
ECM ..... July

**ADAM LARSON**  
*With Love, From New York*  
Outside in ..... July

**JEREMY PELT**  
*The Art Of Intimacy, Vol. 2: His Muse*  
HighNote ..... July

**SHAWN MAXWELL**  
*Story At Eleven*  
Independent Release ..... July

**MARTIN WIND**  
*Gravity*  
Laika ..... July

**ORRIN EVANS**  
*The Red Door*  
Smoke Sessions ..... Aug.

**ROXANA AMED/FRANK  
CARLBERG**  
*Los Trabajos y Las Noches*  
Sony Music Latin ..... Aug.

**WARREN WOLF**  
*Chano Pozo: Origins*  
Independent Release ..... Aug.

**MARK DRESSER**  
*Tines Of Change*  
Pyroclastic ..... Aug.

**KVL**  
*Volume 2*  
Astral Spirits/Spacetone ....Aug.

**JOËLLE LÉANDRE/CRAIG  
TABORN/MAT MANERI**  
*hEARoes*  
RogueArt ..... Aug.

**REGINALD CHAPMAN**  
*Accretion*  
Fresh Selects ..... Aug.

**CARLO MUSCAT/TONY TIXIER**  
*Hymns*  
Independent Release ..... Aug.

**KASSA OVERALL**  
*Animals*  
Warp ..... Aug.

**CLAUDE DIALLO SITUATION**  
*11:11*  
Dot Time ..... Aug.

**EMILIE-CLAIRE BARLOW**  
*Spark Bird*  
Empress ..... Aug.

**MIRA CHOQUETTE**  
*In Reel Time*  
Independent Release ..... Aug.

**JONI MITCHELL**  
*At Newport*  
Rhino..... Sept.

**JOVIA ARMSTRONG**  
*Inception*  
Black Earth ..... Sept.

**NICOLE ZURAITIS**  
*How Love Begins*  
Outside in ..... Sept.

**NOAH HAIDU**  
*Standards*  
Sunnyside ..... Sept.

**DUANE BETTS**  
*Wild & Precious Life*  
Royal Potato Family ..... Sept.

**WILLIAM LEE ELLIS**  
*Ghost Hymns*  
Yellow Dog ..... Sept.

**BRANDON SEABROOK'S  
EPIC PROPORTIONS**  
*brutalovechamp*  
Pyroclastic ..... Sept.

**FREDDIE BRYANT**  
*Upper West Side Story  
– A Song Cycle*  
Tiger Turn ..... Sept.

**LOUIS HAYES**  
*Exactly Right!*  
Savant ..... Sept.

**KAISA'S MACHINE**  
*Taking Shape*  
Greenleaf ..... Sept.

**LONNIE LISTON SMITH**  
*JID017*  
Jazz Is Dead ..... Sept.

**TONY ALLEN**  
*JID018*  
Jazz Is Dead ..... Sept.

**BUSSELLI/WALLARAB  
ORCHESTRA**  
*The Gennett Suite*  
Patois ..... Sept.

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Late Night Basie*  
Primary Wave ..... Oct.

**SOFIA GOODMAN  
GROUP**  
*Secrets Of The Shore*  
Joyous ..... Oct.

**SAM EASTMOND**  
*The Bagatelles Vol. 16*  
Tzadik ..... Oct.

**EVAN PARKER/  
MATT WRIGHT**  
*Etching The Ether*  
Intakt ..... Oct.

**JOHN BUTCHER/  
PAT THOMAS/STEVE NOBLE**  
*Fathom*  
577 ..... Oct.

**GARD NILSSEN'S  
SUPERSONIC ORCHESTRA**  
*Family*  
We Jazz ..... Oct.

**SANDRA BOOKER  
& THE NEW TRIO**  
*The Reunion Concert*  
Booker Group ..... Oct.

**HAROLD LÓPEZ-NUSSA**  
*Timba a la Americana*  
Blue Note ..... Oct.

**CLAUDIA VILLELA**  
*Cartas ao Vento*  
Taina ..... Oct.

**RYAN KEBERLE'S COLLECTIV  
DO BRASIL**  
*Considering*  
Alternate Side ..... Oct.

**GUILLERMO KLEIN QUINTETO**  
*Telmo's Tune*  
Sunnyside ..... Oct.

**HILARIO DURAN**  
*Cry Me A River*  
Alma ..... Oct.

**CHIEF ADJUAH**  
*Bark Out Thunder Roar Out  
Lightning*  
Ropeadope ..... Nov.

**EDDIE HENDERSON**  
*Witness To History*  
Smoke Sessions ..... Nov.

**DON BRADEN**  
*Earth Wind And Wonder  
Volume 2*  
Independent Release ..... Nov.

**ALLISON MILLER**  
*Rivers In Our Veins*  
Royal Potato Family ..... Nov.

**SAM MARTINELLI  
WITH KEN PEPOWSKI**  
*Jazz Meets The Great  
Brazilian Songbook*  
Independent Release ..... Nov.

**WOLFGANG MUTHSPIEL**  
*Dance Of The Elders*  
ECM ..... Nov.

**PAUL WERTICO**  
*Drums Without Boundaries*  
Da Vinci Classics ..... Nov.

**MITCH WOODS**  
*Friends Along The Way*  
Club 88 ..... Nov.

**COCO MONTOYA**  
*Writing On The Wall*  
Alligator ..... Nov.

**DAVE KELLER**  
*It's Time To Shine*  
Tastee Tone ..... Nov.

**SÄJE**  
*säje*  
Independent Release ..... Nov.

**DOUYÉ**  
*The Golden Sekéré*  
Rhombus ..... Nov.

**MICHAEL ECHANIZ**  
*Seven Shades Of Violet  
(Rebiralost)*  
Ridgeway ..... Nov.

**BRANDON SANDERS**  
*Compton's Finest*  
Savant ..... Nov.

**TERELL STAFFORD**  
*Between Two Worlds*  
Le Coq ..... Nov.

**JOHN SCOFIELD**  
*Uncle John's Band*  
ECM ..... Dec.

**MIHO HAZAMA'S M\_UNIT**  
*Beyond Orbits*  
Edition ..... Dec.

**GONZALO RUBALCABA**  
*Borrowed Roses*  
Top Stop ..... Dec.

**JD ALLEN**  
*This*  
Savant ..... Dec.

**LA FAYETTE GILCHRIST**  
*Undaunted*  
Morphius ..... Dec.

**RHIANNON GIDDENS**  
*You're The One*  
Nonesuch ..... Dec.

**ARUÁN ORTIZ**  
*Pastor's Paradox*  
Clean Feed ..... Dec.

**JENNIFER WHARTON  
BONEGASM**  
*Grit & Grace*  
Sunnyside ..... Dec.

**MIKE REED**  
*The Separatist Party*  
We Jazz/Astral Spirits .... Dec.

**TOMAS FUJIWARA**  
*Pith*  
Out of Your Head ..... Dec.

**JEFF BABKO/  
MARK GUILIANA/  
TIM LEFEBVRE**  
*Clam City*  
Sam First ..... Dec.

**ANGELICA SANCHEZ**  
*Nighttime Creatures*  
Pyroclastic ..... Dec.

**AARON LEHRIAN**  
*A Joyous Opus*  
Independent Release ..... Dec.

**BUTCHER BROWN**  
*Solar Music*  
Concord Jazz ..... Dec.

**SIMON MOULLIER  
TRIO**  
*Inception*  
Fresh Sound ..... Dec.

**DONALD VEGA**  
*As I Travel*  
Imagery/Tiger Turn ..... Dec.



## HISTORICAL ★★★★★

### JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

*The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Los Angeles Forum, April 26, 1969*

Sony Legacy ..... Feb.

### MICHEL PETRUCCIANI

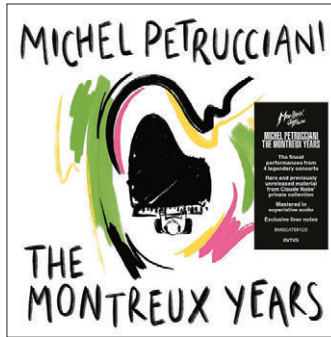
*The Montreux Years*

BMG/Montreux ..... July

### JOHN COLTRANE/ ERIC DOLPHY

*Evenings At The Village Gate: John Coltrane With Eric Dolphy*

Impulse! ..... Oct.



## HISTORICAL ★★★★★ ½

### DEXTER GORDON

*Bouncin' With Dex*

Steeplechase ..... Nov.

### EDDIE LOCKJAW DAVIS

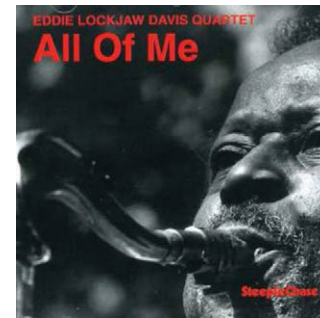
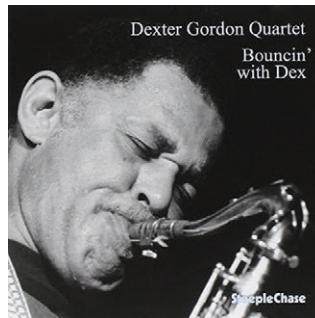
*All Of Me*

Steeplechase ..... Nov.

### WES MONTGOMERY- WYNTON KELLY TRIO

*Maximum Swing: The Unissued 1965 Half Note Recordings*

Resonance ..... Dec.



## HISTORICAL ★★★★★

### DONALD BYRD

*Live-Black Byrd*

Blue Note ..... Feb.

### VINCE GUARALDI

*Jazz Impressions Of Black Orpheus*

Craft ..... March

### VARIOUS ARTISTS

*Classic Jazz At The Philharmonic Jam Sessions (1950-1957)*

Mosaic ..... June

### CHARLES MINGUS

*Changes: The Complete 1970s Atlantic Recordings*

Rhino ..... Aug.

### DOROTHY ASHBY

*Dorothy Ashby With Strings Attached*

New Land ..... Sept.

### NINA SIMONE

*You've Got To Learn*

Verve ..... Oct.

### TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

*TLC & Friends*

Candid ..... Oct.

### JIMMY HEATH

*You've Changed*

Steeplechase ..... Nov.

### COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

*Count Basie & His Orchestra In Concert*

Steeplechase ..... Nov.

### JIMMY GIUFFRÉ TRIO/ GENE KRUPA QUARTET

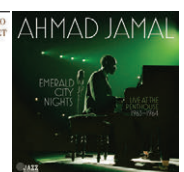
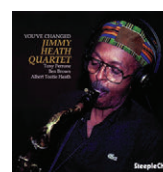
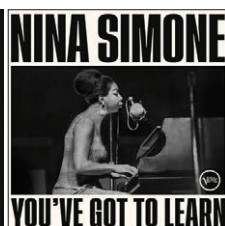
*Jimmy Giuffrè Trio/ Gene Krupa Quartet In Concert*

Steeplechase ..... Nov.

### AHMAD JAMAL

*Emerald City Nights: Live At The Penthouse 1966-1968*

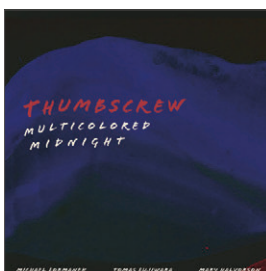
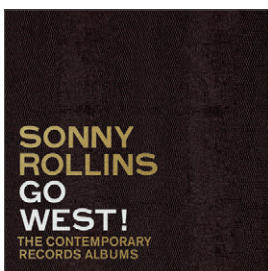
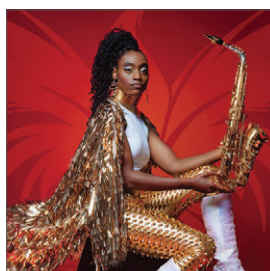
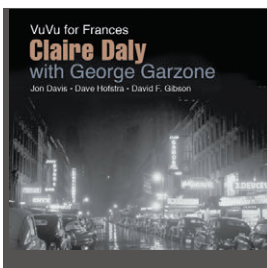
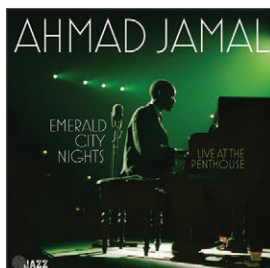
Jazz Detective/Elemental ..... Dec.





# EDITORS' PICKS

**Editor's Note:** Many times, we publish an article about a new recording, but not a review. Here are a few 2023 choices, featured in print or online, that the DownBeat staff thinks will stand the test of time and invite repeated listening.



**FRED HERSCH & ESPERANZA SPALDING**  
*Alive at the Village Vanguard*  
Palmetto ... Jan., Cover

**THUMBSCREW**  
*Multicolored Night*  
Cuneiform ... Jan., Feature

**JAKOB BRO/JOE LOVANO**  
*Once Around The Room, A Tribute To Paul Motian*  
ECM ... Jan., Feature

**DOUG WAMBLE**  
*Blues In The Present Tense*  
Halcyonic ... Jan., Feature

**LAKECIA BENJAMIN**  
*Phoenix*  
Whirlwind ... Feb., Cover

**AHMAD JAMAL**  
*Emerald City Nights: Live At The Penthouse (1963-1964) / (1965-1966)*  
Jazz Detective ... Feb., Feature

**JOE CHAMBERS**  
*Dance Kobina*  
Blue Note ... March, Feature

**DELFEAYO MARSALIS**  
*Uptown On Mardi Gras Day*  
Troubadour Jass ... March, Cover

**JOSE JAMES**  
*On & On*  
Rainbow Blonde ... March, Feature

**BRAD MEHLDAU**  
*Your Mother Should Know*  
Nonesuch ... April, Cover

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Birth Of Bop: The Savoy 10-inch LP Collection*  
Craft ... April, We Love Vinyl

**SONNY ROLLINS**  
*Go West!*  
Craft ... April, We Love Vinyl

**ERIC REED**  
*Black, Brown & Blue*  
Smoke Sessions ... May, Feature

**KENDRICK SCOTT**  
*Corridors*  
Blue Note ... May, Feature

**GARRETT SARACHO**  
*En Medio*  
Verve ... May, Editors' Pick

**JAMES BRANDON LEWIS**  
*Eye Of I*  
Anti- ... June, Cover

**RICKIE LEE JONES**  
*Pieces Of Treasure*  
BMG Modern ... June, Feature

**KENNY BARRON**  
*The Source*  
ArtWork ... June, Editors' Pick

**WALTER SMITH III**  
*Return To Casual*  
Blue Note ... June, Feature

**TAJ MAHAL**  
*Savoy*  
Stony Plain ... June, Feature

**ARTURO O'FARRILL**  
*Legacies*  
Blue Note ... Sept., Editors' Pick

**SHAKTI**  
*This Moment*  
Abstract Logix ... July, Cover

**ARTURO O'FARRILL**  
*Legacies*  
Blue Note ... July., Feature

**GOGO PENGUIN**  
*Everything Is Going To Be OK*  
XXIM ... July, Feature

**CLAIRE DALY WITH GEORGE GARZONE**  
*VuVu For Frances*  
Indie Release ... Sept., Editors' Pick/Nov., Feature

**JOSHUA REDMAN**  
*Where Are We*  
Blue Note ... Sept., Editors' Pick/Oct., Cover

**DARCY JAMES ARGUE'S SECRET SOCIETY**  
*Dynamic Maximum Tension*  
Nonesuch ... Sept.

**KRIS DAVIS**  
*Diatom Ribbons Live At The Village Vanguard*  
Pyroclast ... Sept., Editors' Pick/Sept., Cover

**TYSHAWN SOREY**  
*Continuing*  
Pi ... Sept., Feature

**MARC RIBOT'S CERAMIC DOG**  
*Connection*  
Knockwurst ... Sept., Feature

**WARREN WOLF**  
*Chano Pozo: Origins*  
Indie Release ... Sept., Feature

**LUCIANA SOUZA**  
*Cometa*  
Sunyside ... Nov., Cover

**VINCENT HSU & THE JAZZ SUPREME ORCHESTRA**  
*Music For The River Jazz Suite: The Spirit Of Love River & Mississippi*  
Truth Revolution ... Nov., Editors' Pick

**IRREVERSIBLE ENTANGLEMENTS**  
*Protect Your Light*  
Impulse! ... Nov., Editors' Pick

**MAREIKE WIENING**  
*Reveal*  
Greenleaf Music ... Nov., Editors' Pick

**PHAROAH SANDERS**  
*Pharoah*  
Luaka Bop ... Dec., Cover/Historical

**JOE BONAMASSA**  
*Blues Deluxe, Vol. 2*  
J&R Adventures ... Dec., Feature

**CAROLINE DAVIS' ALULA**  
*Captivity*  
Indie Release ... Dec., Feature



# JAZZ EDUCATION NETWORK

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MIKE TOMARO BIG BAND • THE NAVY COMMODORES • AFRO-PERUVIAN JAZZ ORCH  
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CARMEN BRADFORD W/ THE UNC COMPASS JAZZ ORCH • SFJAZZ ALL-STARS BIG BAND





Matana Roberts



ANNA NIEDERMEIER

## Matana Roberts *COIN COIN Chapter Five: in the garden*

CONSTELLATION

★★★★

So many female histories are forgotten — if they were ever noted to begin with. On *COIN COIN Chapter Five: in the garden*, composer and multi-instrumentalist Matana Roberts not only asserts this truth but seeks to remedy at least one such omission. Through a compelling constellation of free improvisation, spoken word, avant-rock and new music, Roberts relays the lived experience of an unnamed woman in their family line; despite the story's tragic ending, the protagonist emerges as a sacrificial hero for our times.

*In the garden* is the fifth of 12 chapters in

Roberts' ambitious *COIN COIN* recording project. Operatic in scope, this particular installment comprises 16 tracks, each a glimpse into the messy interpersonal dynamics of gender, race, societal oppression, bodily autonomy, family disruption and how we love, despite all. Roberts' writing — both their music and words — reflects the emotional complexity of these issues. The opening track, "we said," for instance, uses bits of sound — clanking chimes, mumbled syllables, bird-like flutes — to engender trepidation, but Roberts doesn't leave us there. Subsequent shifts in mood lead to explicit statements, such as "how prophetic" and "a(way) is not an option" and "for they do not know," where spoken word sections externalize the protagonist's inner monologue in the face of denied personhood.

These monologues are a tough listen, even

though offset by pieces like "the promise," a lullaby-like group sing, and "shake my bones," with its noisy, rumbling catharsis. However, by "... ain't i ... your mystery is our history," the concluding track, the jumble of sounds and voices is almost a comfort: In ongoing struggle lies hope for change. One absorbs this message mostly intuitively, though, and Roberts leaves lots of space for listener reaction.

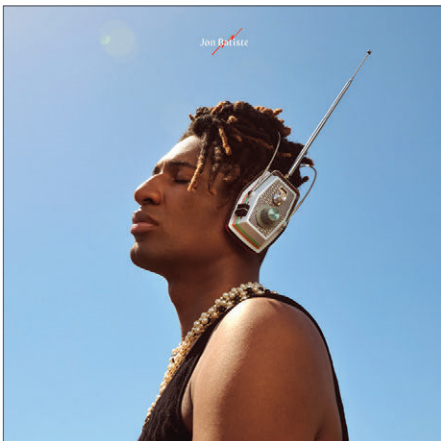
—Suzanne Lorge

**COIN COIN Chapter Five: in the garden:** we said; different rings; unbeknownst; predestined confessions; how prophetic; a caged dance; i have long been fascinated; enthralled not by her curious blend; no way chastened; but i never heard a sound so long; the promise; shake my bones; a(way) is not an option; for they do not know; others each; ... ain't i ... your mystery is our history. (58:01)

**Personnel:** Matana Roberts, horns, harmonicas, percussion, vocals; Mike Pride, drums, percussion vocals; Matt Lavelle, alto clarinet, pocket trumpet, tin whistle, vocals; Stuart Bogie, bass clarinet, clarinet, tin whistle, vocals; Cory Smythe, piano, vocals, tin whistle; Mazz Swift, violin, vocal, tin whistle; Darius Jones, alto saxophone, tin whistle, vocal; Ryan Sawyer, drums, percussion, vocal; Gitanjali Jain, text collage; Kyp Malone, synths.

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





## Jon Batiste *World Music Radio*

VERVE

★★★★

Jon Batiste always felt bigger than New Orleans, so his global impact is something we all should've been betting on. His role as a multihyphenate artiste better suits him with each new project because he's truly intrigued by the way we all connect. So *World Music Radio's* mix 'n' match aesthetic — a pointedly inclusive pan-genre trip — can claim ample victories, especially when the tempo is upbeat and bounce carries the day.

Each piece of this 21-track pastiche has some

kind of earworm element, and while a tad hokey, its cosmic-disc-jockey conceit keeps things moving nicely. From the Michael Jackson phrasing of "Calling Your Name" to the pedal-steel twang of "Master Power," the hooks just keep on coming.

Or at least for the bulk of the program, they do. Because of some melodramatic ballads, things don't conclude as swimmingly as they begin. The outro maneuvers start with "Runnin' Away," marking a shift from pop-groove to pop-schmaltz. Synopsizing the planet's music is a heroic undertaking but seems best accomplished in a rhythm-forward manner.

—Jim Macnie

**World Music Radio:** Hello, Billy Bob; Raindance; Be Who You Are; Worship, My Heart; Drink Water; Calling Your Name; Clair De Lune; Butterfly; 17th Ward; Uneasy; Call Now (504-305-8269); Chassol; Boom For Real; Movement 18 (Heroes); Master Power; Running Away; Goodbye, Billy Bob; White Space; Wherever You Are; Life Lesson. (65:02)

**Personnel:** Jon Batiste, vocals, piano, keyboards, harmonium, melodica, clarinet, programming, sound effects; Shannon Powell, drums (1); Mathieu Edouard, drums (13); Josh Adams, drums (16); Rahm Silverglade, keyboards (1); Jon Bellion, bass, guitar, keyboards, background vocals, programming, vocals (6); Pete Nappi, background vocals, guitar, bass, programming; TenRoc, background vocals, bass, guitar, keyboards, programming; Braxton Cook, flute, trumpet (5); Kenny G, saxophone (8); Rita Payés, trombone, vocals (5); Native Soul, vocals (2); Brennan Gautier, Luca Stewart, Camilo, JLD, New Jeans, vocals (3); Fireboy DML, vocals (6); David Gauthier, voice (10); Lij Wayne, guitar, vocals (11); Michael Batiste, background vocals (12); Chassol, bass, piano, Rhodes, synth bass, vocals (13); Kassa Overall, drum programming (14); Connor Gallaher, Nick Waterhouse, Pedrum Siadatian, guitars (16); Brian Lang, bass (16); Matthew Correia, percussion (16); Nikki Grier, background vocals (17); Daniel Seeff, bass (17); Wesley Singerman, guitar, programming (17); Rogét Chahayed, keyboards, programming (17); DJ Khalil, programming (17); Leigh-Anne, vocals (17); Mehram Rastegari, strings (20); Pastor Drew, vocals (20); Zach Dawes, bass (21); Gabe Noel, cello (21); Greg Koller, string arrangement (21); Gabe Witche, violin (21); Lana Del Rey, vocals (21).

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

## Hiromi's *Sonicwonderland*

CONCORD JAZZ

★★★★½

The immensely popular pianist Hiromi features a horn player — the dazzling trumpeter Adam O'Farrill — for the first time in her new quartet, *Sonicwonderland*, and the effect is salubrious. On *Sonicwonderland*, they deliver a propulsive, stylistically diverse album that ranges from free improv to two-beat trad. The project has a mercurial, flowing feel that suggests strong, in-the-moment rapport. That said, the material is inconsistent and the more ambitious tracks don't always cohere.

The fetching opener, "Wanted," sounds like a surefire radio hit, its simplicity leavened by a lovely weave of piano, trumpet and Hadrien Feraud's bass. The lyrically grace-noted "Utopia" yearns for a better world. The long, two-part "Polaris" feels a tad sentimental in the opening, slow section; the heart-melting bass solo in the uptempo part is a highlight of the album. Also intriguing: the froggy, jaw-harp-like harangue Hiromi unleashes from her synth on the title track, not to mention O'Farrill's athletic solo and drummer Gene Coye's crisp eight-bar trades.

"Trial And Error" is cute, even a little cheesy, with its music box synth and unconvincing free improv. But at least it reaches for gravity. The popping bass, singsong trumpet line and boinging



synth of "Go Go" do not. In the unexpected column file "Reminiscence," a tender ballad sung in a hoarse but affecting voice by British singer-songwriter Oli Rockberger, Hiromi's Berklee classmate, and "Bonus Stage," a two-beat trad outing played with surprising conviction.

Hiromi's music has always felt propelled more by 19th-century romantic pianistics and pop music. This album suggests a welcome shift toward jazz.

—Paul de Barros

**Sonicwonderland:** Wanted; Sonicwonderland; Polaris; Go Go; Up; Reminiscence; Trial And Error; Utopia; Bonus Stage. (69:00)

**Personnel:** Hiromi, piano, keyboards; Hadrien Feraud, bass; Gene Coye, drums; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; Oli Rockberger, vocal (6).

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



## Ethan Iverson *Technically Acceptable*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★

Ethan Iverson is a man of many talents, but until now his albums have focused on one facet at a time. Not that he's hamstrung by such limits — his work with wry modernists The Bad Plus alone was enough to earn him major standing — but the breadth of his ability, in the jazz world and beyond, has yet to be adequately represented on a single project.

*Technically Acceptable* begins to remedy that. There are seven pithy performances by Iverson's current band with bassist Thomas Morgan and drummer Kush Abadey, plus two with the trio he employs when accompanying the Mark Morris Dance Group. But there's also the debut of Iverson's piano sonata, as well as the first theremin performance on a Blue Note album.

If that sounds like overreach, it's not. His piano sonata, a standard, three-movement work, draws on jazz and blues in a manner similar to Darius Milhaud's American-influenced piano pieces, although Iverson is more adept at adapting and recontextualizing his source material. Even better, there are echoes of the work in the album's jazz numbers; compare the first movement's opening bass figure to the left-hand comping in "Victory Is Assured." This isn't dilettantism, but the expression of a talent that can't be confined.

That said, there is still room to quibble. It's hard to tell whether the theremin version of "Round Midnight," with its hyper-dramatic piano accompaniment, is satire or mere kitsch, and it's hard not to wish there was more of Morgan and Abadey. In all, though, this is a welcome glimpse into Iverson's wide-ranging genius.

—J.D. Considine

**Technically Acceptable:** Conundrum; Victory Is Assured (Alla Breve); Technically Acceptable; Who Are You, Really?; The Chicago Style; It's Fine To Decline; The Way Things Are; Killing Me Softly With His Song; Round Midnight; The Feeling Is Mutual; Piano Sonata: Allegro Moderato; Piano Sonata: Andante; Piano Sonata: Rondo. (49:07)

**Personnel:** Ethan Iverson, piano; Rob Schwimmer, theremin (9); Thomas Morgan, bass (1-7); Simon Wilson, bass (8,10); Kush Abadey, drums (1-7); Vinnie Sperrazza, drums (8,10).

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



# The Hot Box >

Critics	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros	J.D.Considine
<b>Matana Roberts</b> <i>COIN COIN Chapter Five ...</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
<b>Jon Batiste</b> <i>World Music Radio</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★
<b>Hiromi's Sonicwonder</b> <i>Sonicwonderland</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★
<b>Ethan Iverson</b> <i>Technically Acceptable</i>	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

## Critics' Comments

### Matana Roberts, *COIN COIN Chapter Five: in the garden*

The *COIN COIN* series brims with eloquence, but between the ensemble work, the leader's acting skills and the right-now politics that drive this recounting of women's reproductive rights in the early part of the 20th century, Roberts' poetic impact has reached a new level. —Jim Macnie

Many artists blend music and history narratives, but Matana Roberts gets it just right. A great storyteller, never mind the medium. Gripping stuff. —Paul de Barros

Roberts is an eloquent alto saxophonist, a soloist whose carefully shaped phrases evoke the power of speech. But it's actual speech, a riveting tale of undervalued life, that makes this installment of *COIN COIN* a must-hear in post-Dobbs America. —J.D. Considine

### Jon Batiste, *World Music Radio*

The concept of unity through multiplicity underpins much of Batiste's work. The difficulty lies in absorbing it all. Perhaps that's his point: It's time to expand the expectation that anyone can live within a bucket, especially the artists, dreamers and other alien beings. —Suzanne Lorge

Great concept, but this music hardly qualifies as a world tour, notwithstanding a smattering of French and reggaeton. Few of the guest features stand up to Batiste's own tracks, which makes this Quincy Jones-like "producer's roundup" even more frustrating. —Paul de Barros

There's nothing wrong with jazz musicians attempting pop music. It's when they fail that's the problem. —J.D. Considine

### Hiromi's Sonicwonder, *Sonicwonderland*

Hiromi trades in dialectics: precision versus abandon, strength versus vulnerability, individual versus collective. This said, her unremitting sense of whimsy smooths any friction between opposing musical values. Standout one-off vocals by Oli Rockberger. —Suzanne Lorge

There's often something unnatural about Hiromi's presentations: Her fast tempos are crazy fast, the synth textures are on the cheesy side. This new one is a step in the right direction. The funk is exciting; the swing is inviting. The tunes? Meh. Not meh: Adam O'Farrill. —Jim Macnie

Adding Adam O'Farrill to this latest fusion project was inspired, and it would be amazing if Hiromi produced more music in the synth-bop vein of the title track. Could have done without the raspy, greeting-card sentiment of the vocal number, though. —J.D. Considine

### Ethan Iverson, *Technically Acceptable*

Iverson's eclecticism allows him to adopt different musical personas, and each piece here is a tale unto itself. His attention to form enhances this storytelling. —Suzanne Lorge

Ease dominates the way the pianist's new trio addresses these pithy tunes; their chemistry is infectious. It evaporates Iverson's occasional formal vibe and bolsters the casual way his clever phrases attain their gravitas. Ditto for the glee he brings to the sonata. —Jim Macnie

A formal tour de force, this album plays like the musical equivalent of poststructuralist "poetics" — art about art — though "Killing Me Softly" is a straight shot of gorgeous. But "'Round Midnight" on theremin? Why? —Paul de Barros

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## Chien Chien Lu *Built In System* (Live From New York)

GIANT STEP ARTS

★★★★

*Built In System (Live From New York)* opens with “Boulanger’s Variation,” a clever, upbeat take on Lili Boulanger’s early 20th-century classical work “Thème et Variations.” The resulting rework feels remarkably fresh, even contemporary, without losing the DNA of the original work. The same can be said about Chien Chien Lu’s approach to Schumann’s “Träumerei,” another 20th-century classical piece.

## John Chin Trio *Sun Of Music: Live From The Lockdown*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★

A compelling backstory doesn’t guarantee a compelling performance. Not so with this on-location August 2020 album from Smalls, before an empty house, by pianist John Chin, bassist Sean Conly and drummer Jaimeo Brown, frequent bandmates for two decades who hadn’t intersected during the five months since the onset of COVID-19, whose victims included Chin, who contracted a severe case and then, upon recovering, become a father.

The trio is interactive from start to finish, executing grooves spanning funky to burnout across a suite-like program of harmonically sophisticated covers that they’ve played frequently in a deconstructive manner over the years. Chin applies formidable chops and abiding creativity to the improvisations, imparting slightly different angles to familiar stories, sometimes stretching the forms to the edge, but never allowing cleverness or facility to dissuade him from milking a good melody with a well-turned vamp or constructing a stirring blues. Conly and Brown emerge from the well-recorded flow with resourceful, thematically apropos solos, sustain-

ing interest throughout the rather long tunes. You could call the end result Chin’s master class in how to refract a canon ranging from the Miles Davis pianists (Keith Jarrett, Wynton Kelly, Herbie Hancock) and hands-on mentor Kenny Barron to influential 21st-century stylists Brad Mehldau, Robert Glasper and Jean-Michel Pilc (plus Mose Allison, the subject of Chin’s previous release, *Anything Mose!*) into a satisfying personal argot.

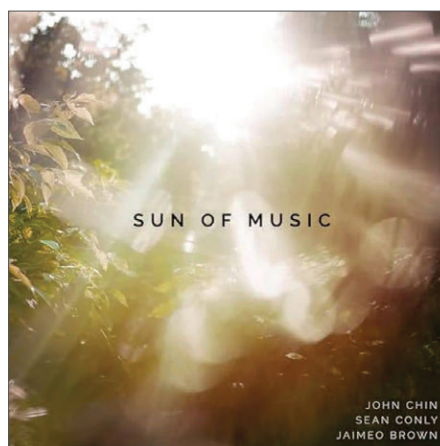
Lu came to jazz from a primarily classical/traditional Chinese musical perspective a decade or so ago. But in 2020, after the release of her debut album *The Path*, Lu told DownBeat, “I have a clear direction for the next [album]. I want to add more traditional elements that really relate it to me when I was growing up. My elements, my roots.” She’s done just that.

Lu’s phrasing is a singular delight: at times richly melodic, at others she seems primarily concerned with expressing complex rhythm changes, and the interplay between trumpeter Jeremy Pelt and Lu’s rock-solid vibe technique are clearly informed by her background as a classical percussionist. This is especially evidenced on tracks like “Chun Yi” and “Special Things.”

**Built In System (Live From New York):** Boulanger’s Variation, Hsiu Chin, Träumerei, Chun Yi, Special Things, Percussion Song (The Wheel of Fate), Just Listen, Full Moonlight. (47:48)

**Personnel:** Chien Chien Lu, vibraphone; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Richie Goods, Bass; Allan Mednard, drums.

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



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**Sun Of Music—Live From The Lockdown:** Bermuda Triangle Eyes; Speak No Evil; Fall; Intermezzo; Imagination; Countdown; Montara. (54:32)

**Personnel:** John Chin, piano; Sean Conly, bass; Jaimeo Brown, drums.

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



## Keyon Harrold *Foreverland*

CONCORD JAZZ

★★★

Trumpeter Keyon Harrold’s latest album isn’t trying to raise your heart rate. This isn’t to say it’s not exciting or innovative. It’s pushing boundaries and using a good range of collaborators for an album full of ideas. It’s a jazz album, much as it has R&B, hip-hop and funk throughout; such are the times and this has always been Harrold’s pocket. However, if Robert Glasper (featured here on the opener, title track and closer) has spent the last decade reminding us of Black radio, Harrold’s latest does what it can for the Quiet Storm.

It definitely rumbles like thunder. “The Intellectual” is one of those weighty ballads that sticks to your ribs like it’s Miles Davis’ “Vonetta.” Shedrick Mitchell’s feature here is an album highlight: one of those early moments where the curtains are drawn and one realizes this album could be anything. Chris Dave plays drums on two-thirds of the album and his signature is all over it; in simple *boom-bap* or syncopated deconstructions, he’s everywhere, killing in every direction.

“Gotta Go (Outer Space)” is another of those sudden turns, this time with Marcus Gilmore on drums and BIGYUKI on keys, taking the session in a different, trippier direction, vastly different from everything else on the album but befitting all the while under Harrold’s ever-present chill vibe. There are many places to go in Keyon Harrold’s *Foreverland* (even if the 45-minute run time somehow feels short), but it’s definitely not a race to get there if you’re literally going to be there forever.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**Foreverland:** Find Your Peace; Beautiful Day; The Intellectual; Foreverland; Well Walk Now; Don’t Lie; Paranoid; Gotta Go (Outer Space); Pictures; Peace Beyond. (45:17)

**Personnel:** Keyon Harrold, trumpet (1–6, 8–9), vocals (1, 4, 7, 9–10), flugelhorn (2); Robert Glasper, Rhodes (1, 4, 10), Moog (4), beatbox (10); Jahari Stampley, piano (1, 5–6), organ (1), Rhodes (3, 5–6); Justus West, guitar (1, 5); Burniss Travis, bass (1, 3–8); Chris Dave, drums (1–6, 9), additional programming (3–4), percussion (2); Jaki Sundance, turntables (1, 10); Common, vocals (1, 10); Jean Baylor, vocals (1, 10); PJ Morton, vocals (2), keyboards (2); Shedrick Mitchell, piano (3); Randy Runyon, guitar (3–4); Laura Mvula, vocals (4); Nir Felder, guitar (5–6); Malaya, vocals (6); BIGYUKI, keys (7–8); Marcus Gilmore, drums (7–8); Greg Phillinganes, piano (9); Brandon Owens, bass (9).

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





## Jeff Cosgrove/Jeff Lederer/Mark Lysher *Welcome Home*

GRIZZLEY MUSIC

★★★★½

## Jeff Cosgrove/Noah Preminger/Kim Cass *Confusing Motion For Progress*

GRIZZLEY MUSIC

★★★★★½

Jeff Cosgrove is a Maryland-based drummer who's drawn the attention of some high-pow-



ered players, including Matthew Shipp, Scott Robinson, Frank Kimbrough and others. Now he's got two new albums out, with two different trios.

*Welcome Home* was recorded at the Town Run Brewing Company in Shepherdstown, WV with Jeff Lederer on sax and clarinet and Mark Lysher on bass. Cosgrove has history with both men. Lederer's tenor playing is melodic and bluesy, well suited to a gig in front of people possibly drawn in more by beer than jazz. At one point during "Dewey's Tune," a train goes by outside, and Lederer echoes its whistle with long cries. There are perhaps more

bass and drum solos than one might wish for on an album to be listened to at home, but all the music seems well received, so Cosgrove and company were clearly reading the room in the moment.

*Confusing Motion For Progress* was recorded live at the Rust Library in Leesburg, VA with Noah Preminger on saxophone (an off-and-on collaborator) and Kim Cass on bass. This is a quieter, more introspective set. The focus is on the compositions, and they're more complex than the simple, immediate blues grooves of *Welcome Home*. Solos seem to bubble to the surface of the music, and even when someone takes an unaccompanied solo, you can sense the others offering psychic support. Cosgrove's playing is free, but in a light, dancing way. Preminger has a big sound rooted in Sonny Rollins' 1960s work, and Cass's bass playing is both dexterous and beautifully recorded. Both are worth hearing, but *Confusing Motion For Progress* is the keeper.

—Phil Freeman

**Welcome Home:** Stanley's Package; No Booze Blues; Deep River; Dewey's Tune; Farmer Alfalfa; Softly In A Mornings Sunrise; Krystal's Cavern; Going Home; Pee Wee's Blues (73:39)

**Confusing Motion For Progress:** AT; Off-Handed Invitation; Jumbles; Fingers; Everyday Language; AC; Ghost; Slips (51:58)

**Personnel:** *Welcome Home* – Jeff Lederer, saxophone, clarinet; Mark Lysher, bass; Jeff Cosgrove, drums. *Confusing Motion For Progress:* Noah Preminger, saxophone; Kim Cass, bass; Jeff Cosgrove, drums.

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

## Dan Tepfer & Miguel Zenón *Internal Melodies*

MAIN DOOR

★★★★★

Recorded in June 2018, one wonders if this sparkling series of duets fell off the radar of pianist Dan Tepfer and saxophonist Miguel Zenón during the pandemic; it's so compelling you'd think they'd have rushed to get it into fans' ears. Its scope is sweeping, including a dramatic pas de deux on Zenón's "La Izquierda Latina Americana," a romp through György Ligeti's "Fanfares" and a gorgeous interpretation of Lennie Tristano's timeless "317 E 32nd St." Best of all is the intricate, time-warping interplay on "Frontline," which dates back to the saxophonist's time in the SFJAZZ Collective more than a decade ago and features some exceptional horn playing.

He and Tepfer are such expansive, expressive musicians that they cover far more ground than you might expect. While Zenón brings the heat, Tepfer follows a more tender-hearted path. Even his multilayered "A Thing And Its Opposite" is spiked with drama, balanced with impassioned release, none more moving than Zenón's exceptional solo. Bookending this rich compositional tapestry are two improvisations: a brief étude with fluttering horn and minimal piano, and "Freedrum," a delightful exploration of rhythm, long horn tones and resonant, muted piano strings.

—James Hale


**Internal Melodies:** Soundsheets; A Thing And Its Opposite; La Izquierda Latina Americana; Fanfares; Internal Melodies; Centro de Gravedad; I Know; La Libertad; Frontline; Solstice; 317 E 32nd St.; Freedrum. (56:12)


**Personnel:** Dan Tepfer, piano; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone.

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



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## Blues / BY FRANK-JOHN HADLEY

### Lookin' the World Over

**Dom Martin: *Buried In The Hail* (Forty Below; ★★★★★ 40:02)** British blues fans and award shows are all in, agreeing that ex-Belfast pub performer Dom Martin as the guitarist on the current London scene. His third and best album isn't so guitar-centric, though. Martin's sincere feeling and sharp musical intelligence in using electric guitar in empathic blues-rock are on display, praise be, but he's just as involved with his singing (sometimes in tortured-soul emulation of Scottish blues-folk iconoclast John Martyn) and his ace songwriting. Favoring sardonic and dark lyrics, the 33-year-old salves old emotional wounds with brave resolve.

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

**Mathias Lattin: *Up Next* (VizzTone; ★★★½ 34:12)** The big winner at the 2023 International Blues Challenge was a 20-year-old bluesman on the Houston scene, a former jazz studies student in high school. Mathias Lattin now takes the next step on his career path with his first album. His guitar playing isn't too far from having an authoritative presence, spurred as it by his ever-growing confidence, and he's a smooth singer working through the influence of various r&b artists in the past. Lattin, too, is making strides as a composer of tunes that spring from life experience. Along with his working band, the young man invites the specter of Stevie Ray Vaughan to "Party," cranks out ominous blues-rock on "Second Degree" and makes pop-blues "I Tried So Hard" upliftingly special.

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

**David Bennett Cohen: *Seems Like A Good Time For The Blues* (self-release; ★★★½ 41:51)** David Bennett Cohen doesn't impart the wisdom of the late great Mose Allison yet he has a lot to say as one of the very few piano-playing blues sages active today. Wryly in tune with his surroundings, he weighs in on cooking, aging, neighborliness, modern malaise, matrimony, walking the streets of New York. Once you get used to it, his imprecise singing takes on a certain charm. The real pleasure of Cohen's music is his activity on the 88s, especially when he transports listeners to Fess Longhair's New Orleans. And it's to his advantage that Greenwich Village comrade Arthur Neilson supplies fine, decisive guitar solos. Worth noting: Cohen, Neilson and the rhythm section develop an elevated level of collective empathy reviving "Flyin' High," a trippy tale Cohen originally played with 1960s political-psychodelic rock band Country Joe & the Fish.

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

**Various Artists: *Parchman Prison Prayer* (Glitterbeat; ★★★½ 37:26)** Well-regarded producer Ian Brennan travels the world recording albums that document mu-



Dom Martin's sharp intelligence

sic performers of what he calls "under-represented and persecuted populations." Notorious prison-without-walls Parchman Farm in Mississippi — once temporary home to Bukka White, Son House and R. L. Burnside — received a visit by Brennan and his rudimentary electronic gear in early 2023. (Ninety years earlier folklorists John and Alan Lomax first began taping Parchman inmates.) He set up at a Sunday morning chapel service and coaxed nine very good or fairly decent feature singers and the Prison Choir to stirringly pledge their faith via standard gospel repertoire and originals. (A few guitarists and pianists had minor roles.) Hope, joy, shame, remorse and sad acceptance of their lot are part of their emotional makeup. Holy eeriness haunts "Solve My Need" as prisoner M. Palmer's deep bass vocal tones are engulfed by a torrent of reverberation.

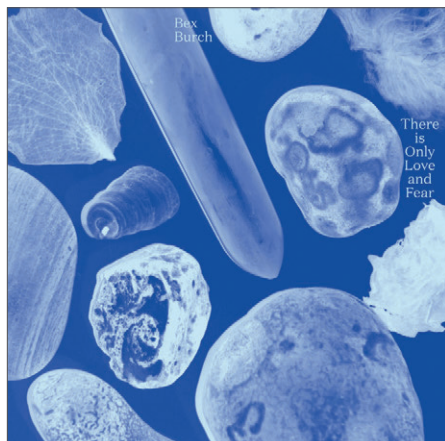
**Ordering info:** [glitterbeat.com](http://glitterbeat.com).

**Candice Ivory: *When The Levee Breaks—The Music of Memphis Minnie* (Little Village; ★★★ 45:59)** An early link between urban and country blues, singer-guitarist-songwriter Memphis Minnie has great stature in the blues story. Candice Ivory, a St. Louis-based jazz-and-more singer with Memphis roots, knows it and celebrates Minnie with an album that has her treating a dozen songs recorded by her foremother in the early 1930s. Ivory's appealing, heartfelt voice goes at the lyrics with determination to assimilate Minnie's dramatic sense. Still, *Levee Breaks* is a bit of a letdown. As producer, arranger and guitarist, Charlie Hunter does not achieve blues feel; his modern blues worldview is skewed by awkward involvements of African percussion, steel guitar, Rasta rhythms, etc. Better had Ivory partnered with a Minnie enthusiast like Bonnie Raitt, Maria Muldaur or Alvin Youngblood Hart.

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

DB





## Bex Burch *There Is Only Love And Fear*

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★★★

Bex Burch's debut solo record cements her place as a distinctive, visionary voice in avant-garde music. It's a vibrant showcase of her playful, expansive yet minimalist sound.

Recorded over 32 sessions with members of International Anthem's talented roster, including woodwind player Rob Frye, cornetist Ben LaMar Gay and bassist Anna Butterss, *There Is Only Love And Fear* is beautifully rendered and wonderfully complex. Burch moves effortless-

ly between meditative motifs and bursts of chaos. On "Dawn blessings," her handmade xylophone is measured and pensive, mirroring Frye's flute and Macie Stewart's violin melody. On "Don't Go Back To Sleep," her introspective percussion engages in call-and-response with Dan Bitney's synthesizer. The rain, thunder and sirens on "You Thought You Were Free" signal an impending storm, generating a frenetic, bebop-infused improvisation session between Gay, tubaist Oren Marshall and clarinetist Rob Frye. Drummer Mikel Patrick Avery's high-octane beat buoys Burch's lilting melody and bassist Anton Hatwich's somber rhythm on the triumphant closer "When Love Begins."

Birdsong recorded in Berlin, sirens in Chicago and other "found" sounds are layered in to anchor Burch and her collaborators' freewheeling improvisations, giving every track an element of terror that indicates this record is a Bex Burch original.

—Ivana Ng

**There Is Only Love And Fear:** Dawn blessings; If I was you, I'd be doing exactly the same; Don't go back to sleep; Fruit smoothie with peanut butter; Pardieu; Start before you're ready; You thought you were free?; "Joy is not meant to be a crumb"; On falling; Follow me, I make you happy; This is the sound of one voice; When love begins. (38:42)

**Personnel:** Bex Burch, xylophone, pitch pipes, voice, tongue drum, water drum, percussion, bells, piano, sanza, shakers; Mikel Patrick Avery, drums, prepared piano (10); Rob Frye, flute, clarinet (6), percussion (8), bass clarinet (10); Anton Hatwich, Anna Butterss, bass; Macie Stewart, violin, prepared piano; Dan Bitney, drums, synthesizer (3), bells (6), percussion (6); Ben LaMar Gay, cornet, bells (6); Diego Gaeta, prepared piano (4), piano (9), keyboard (11); Ben Lumsdaine, drums (4), percussion (9), metallophone (9); Oren Marshall, tuba (6).

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

## Reggie Quinerly *The Thousandth Scholar*

REDEFINITION MUSIC

★★★★½

Drummer-composer Reggie Quinerly is self-effacing to a fault throughout his fifth album, *The Thousandth Scholar*. The arrangements of his original tunes by his friend, pianist and coproducer Manuel Valera emphasize tight-knit quartet interaction, but the audio mix sets Quinerly's traps low, making it hard to distinguish his playing from that of percussionist Samuel Torres.

As the repertoire dives deeply into Afro-Cuban roots, Torres' congas (and perhaps others; they're not specified in credits) often seem to dominate the eight tracks' polyrhythmic underpinnings. The leader has spotlit measures in "Sam From Brooklyn," but otherwise his snare and tom work is most clearly heard in punchy combinations breaking from the steady beat; his hi-hat claps and cymbals splash in the background, and his bass drum is not in my hearing range. The upside is that he and Torres sync up/contrast richly, as demonstrated by the opening of "Folk Song" and exchanges at the climax of "Skain's Blues."

There's a lot going on rhythmically, given the strong bass spine and Valera's sundrenched pianism, warm and sparkling, carrying the tunes. They are all of a piece, despite Valera having com-



posed "Invernal," which starts with a rubato fantasy, and "Ray's Tune" being closest to classic, bluesy Latin jazz, featuring a piano montuno episode. The vibe is romantic, the melodic themes approached as rumbas, spun out in Valera's dramatic solos (disclosure: I wrote liner notes for his 2004 debut album, *Forma Nueva*). Quinerly claims he's a student of music, but proves here to be masterful, and is encouraged to be less modest.

—Howard Mandel

**The Thousandth Scholar:** She That Steps in Bull's Blood; Felipe Jacinto; Folk Song; Invernal; Ray's Tune; Childrens Song; Sam From Brooklyn; Skain's Blues. (47:56)

**Personnel:** Reggie Quinerly, drums; Manuel Valera, piano; Matt Brewer, bass; Samuel Torres, percussion.

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

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## Susan Alcorn / Septeto del Sur *Canto*

RELATIVE PITCH

★★★★½

*Canto*, the new album from pedal steel player Susan Alcorn and folk ensemble Septeto del Sur, is driven by emotion and expression in a rather dramatic and direct way: not just with individual interpretation or personal narrative but through each piece's inherent compositional form. Notes are left rough around the edges; full band performance is cacophonous, imparts disarray, instability and intermittent discomfort; and phrasing can

be challenging to follow. However, these observations do not reflect a poor listening experience.

Though wild improvisation swells up throughout *Canto* (not even halfway through opener "Suite Para Todos" and many times during behemoth movement "Presente: Sueño de Luna Azul," for example), and the sheer amount of musical contrast can lead to a feeling of wading through the tracks, *Canto*'s resonance with the spirit of the nueva canción movement shifts thoughts of any chaotic performance from unfettered to purposeful. The very nature of social justice as a complex and unpredictable but focused concept — one that Chilean musicians have channeled into their works since the movement's inception in the mid-20th century — gives the aforementioned qualities of Alcorn's writing a broader, dynamic and laudable sense of direction that's felt emotionally more than heard explicitly. The beauty heard in Victor Jara's "El Derecho Vivir en Paz," sung with steady and somber reverence by Amanda Irarrazabal, is as perfect an "ending" to a project highlighting an ongoing ideology as one can ask for. —Kira Grunenber

**Canto:** Suite Para Todos; Canto I. ¿Donde Están?; Canto II. Presente: Sueño de Luna Azul; Canto III. Lukax; Mercedes Sosa; El Derecho de Vivir en Paz. (43:38)

**Personnel:** Susan Alcorn, pedal steel guitar; Luis "ToTo" Alvarez, guitar; Claudio "Pajaro" Araya, drums, cuatro; Francisco "Pancho" Araya, charango, quena; Rodrigo Bobadilla, flute, quena, zampona, guitar, vocals; Amanda Irarrazabal, bass, Vocals; Danka Villanueva, violin, vocals.

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

## Dave Stryker Trio with Bob Mintzer *Groove Street*

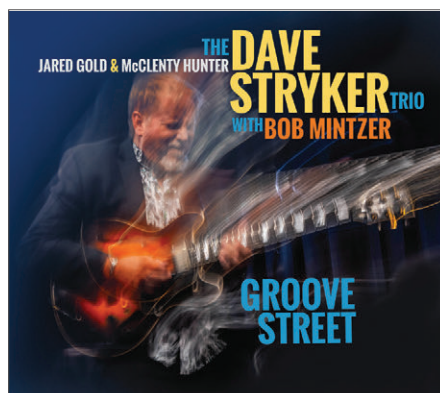
STRIKEZONE

★★★★½

With driving, rhythmic counterplay and an understated steadfastness, *Groove Street*, the newest record from Dave Stryker Trio featuring Bob Mintzer, is aptly named. Recorded prior to a string of July dates at Birdland that would feature Stryker's trio with Mintzer, *Groove Street* is the result of a spontaneous idea between old friends. Looking to capture some magic, Stryker and Mintzer hit the studio and lay down some fresh tunes they'd never played together before, just one week before their Birdland stint.

Featuring Stryker on guitar, Mintzer on tenor, Jared Gold on organ and McClenty Hunter on drums, *Groove Street* is a pot set to simmer, allowing for some delectable improvisations from Mintzer and interplay between organ, guitar and tenor saxophone. The conversation is particularly engaging on Mintzer's uptempo original "Overlap" and their straightforward rendition of the 1945 standard "The More I See You."

For some, a trip down *Groove Street* may be too smooth and predictable. But there are a few unexpected left turns: "Cold Duck," with



a driving pattern in the bass and a funky melody shared by guitar and sax, is reminiscent of some earworm Brecker Brothers hit, while the slower "Infant Eyes" has a smooth neo-soul edge. The album's eponymous track is perhaps its greatest triumph, blending the familiarity of a shuffle beat with a forward-looking angular melody, twisting progression and stand-out solo from Stryker. Snugly and safely in the passenger seat, the listener is transported.

—Alexa Peters

**Groove Street:** Groove Street; Overlap; Summit; Infant Eyes; Soulstice; Cold Duck; Code Blue; The More I See You; Straight Ahead. (53:57)

**Personnel:** Dave Stryker, guitar; Bob Mintzer, tenor saxophone; Jared Gold, organ; McClenty Hunter, drums.

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



## Ethan Phillion *Gnosis*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

*Gnosis* is the follow-up to Ethan Phillion's 2022 debut *Meditations On Mingus*. The band has downsized from a 10-piece group to a lean, compact quartet with the Chicago-based leader on bass, Greg Ward on alto saxophone, Russ Johnson on trumpet and Dana Hall on drums.

Once again, however, Phillion derives inspiration from the bassist-composer who titled his previous album by crafting a version of "What Love," Charles Mingus' contrafact based on Cole Porter's "What Is This Thing Called Love." It is less expressionist than the 1960 original recording; without Dolphy, the opening theme is less smeary, but there's still plenty of room for deep listening and open-ended solos. Johnson, for one, manages to carve out space for sonic exploration with interesting intervals. There are also passages with just bass and drums intertwined that call to mind Mingus with Dannie Richmond; quotes fly by and there's a touch of flamenco flourishes on the bassist's four strings. The alto leans in, spinning off variations, and the drum kit is an engaged participant throughout the tune.

There are also beautiful arco solos on the title track and "Comment Section," the latter of which finds the band really letting its free chops fly in between areas of wide-open space and composed passages. (Ditto "The Boot.") "Nostalgia" features delicate pinch harmonics. The title track refers to esoteric knowledge of spiritual truth. I don't know if the ancient Gnostics played instruments, but if they did it might sound like this. If I saw these modern ones in a club, though, I'd stay for the second set. —Larry Appelbaum

**Gnosis:** The Boot; What Love; Sheep Shank; Nostalgia; Comment Section; Gnosis. (53:22)

**Personnel:** Ethan Phillion, bass; Greg Ward, alto saxophone; Russ Johnson, trumpet; Dana Hall, drums.

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





## Sam Newsome & Jean-Michel Pilc *Cosmic Unconsciousness Unplugged* SOMENEWMUSIC ★★★★½

In 2017, soprano-saxophonist Sam Newsome and pianist Jean-Michel Pilc recorded *Magic Circle*, an album of duets. Since that time they have both grown as improvisers and in developing the sounds they are able to create. While Pilc sometimes “prepares” his piano, Newsome has modified his soprano with tube extensions and noise-makers that greatly increase his tonal variety.

*Cosmic Unconsciousness Unplugged* is a set of free improvisations, all first takes. Even the four standards the duo explores are quite unpredictable, with nothing being worked out beforehand and the tunes being taken to surprising destinations while keeping the melodies close at hand.

Newsome’s sound is usually recognizable as being made on a soprano but there are a few pieces where that is less obvious. On “How Deep Is The Ocean” he plays an electronic-sounding low tone for Pilc to improvise over, sounding quite otherworldly and, again, almost electronic during parts of “Cosmic Unconsciousness Unplugged” and “Lost In Translation.” During “The Two Faces Of Samuel Augustus” he improvises furiously, and simultaneously, on two sopranos, interacting with Pilc’s percussive rumbling.

Some of the other pieces are a little more conventional while still being adventurous, including the thoughtful two-part ballad “Bittersweet Euphoria” and the wistful if occasionally intense “Skyward Lullaby.” Newsome and Pilc act very much as equals during this atmospheric outing, creating haunting ensembles that generally emphasize melancholy moods. —Scott Yanow

**Cosmic Unconsciousness Unplugged:** Sounds From My Morning Window; The Enigma’s Melody; All The Things You Are; The Two Faces Of Samuel Augustus; How Deep Is The Ocean; Cosmic Unconsciousness Unplugged; Bittersweet Euphoria Part 1; Bittersweet Euphoria Part 2; The Storm Before The Quiet; Take The ‘A’ Train; Dancing Like No One’s Watching (But Everyone Is); Serenading Seismic Waves; Skyward Lullaby; Lost In Translation; Solitude. (67:44)

**Personnel:** Sam Newsome, soprano; Jean-Michel Pilc, piano.

**Ordering info:** [samnewsome2.bandcamp.com](http://samnewsome2.bandcamp.com)

## Myra Melford’s Fire And Water Quintet *Hear The Light Singing* ROGUE ART ★★★★

The second album by Myra Melford’s Fire And Water Quintet affords an opportunity to ponder the extent to which an ensemble’s circumstances determine what it does. In this case, pianist-composer Melford has set about making a working band out of an all-star ensemble. Given that everyone who played on the quintet’s first album (2022’s *For the Love of Fire and Water*) is an established bandleader, it’s remarkable that there is only one substitution on the second; drummer Lesley Mok proves to be an able replacement for Susie Ibarra. Still: what does one do with such a band, musically speaking, and how do they make such an ensemble work night after night?

Melford’s solution has been to compose material that explicitly advances the first album’s approach. While that recording is an album-length suite, *Hear The Light Singing* is a sequence of compositions that are intended to make sense either on their own, or shuffled into the original *For The Love Of Fire And Water* suite.

Each piece is designed to showcase a particular instrumentalist, which makes a lot of sense when one has a collection of highly individualistic soloists on hand. And from Melford’s solitary preview of what is to come at the beginning of “Insertion One” to saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock’s exposition of bale-



ful, elongated tones in “Insertion Five,” the set gives each player a chance to remind listeners why they follow them, or at least why they should. But equally satisfying is the way the rest of the combo realizes Melford’s intricate, constantly changing frameworks. Each Insertion contains both opportunities for free exchanges between breakout duos and ensemble passages that both require and reward close engagement.

Melford’s writing is highly practical, enabling her to reimagine the existing book of material rather than throw it out. But it also presents this band of bandleaders at their best and sets up the anticipatory question: what next? —Bill Meyer

**For The Love Of Fire And Water:** Insertion One; Insertion Two; Insertion Three A + B; Insertion Four; Insertion Five. (51:46)

**Personnel:** Myra Melford, piano and melodica; Lesley Mok, drums; Ingrid Laubrock, soprano and tenor saxophones; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Tomeka Reid, cello.

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

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# The Timeless Power of 3

Trios come in one number but in many colorations, variations and degrees of tradition, as this handful of recent releases remind us. Whatever the specific parts involved, trios make for a timeless and renewable notion, especially in jazz.

**Ray Gallon's *Grand Company* (Cellar Music; ★★★½ 53:12)** demonstrates that, when it comes to piano trios, cream always rises above the din. Gallon is commanding, poised and witty, and for his debut trio album he has enlisted stellar company: bassist Ron Carter and drummer Lewis Nash. The threesome take on the antic "Acting Up," the ballad "Zombette" and select standards: the framing of the Ellingtonian opener "Drop Me Off In Harlem" and the semi-self-referential closer "Old Folks," with "Nardis" and "If I Had You" in between. It all comes together with luminous energy and three-way telepathy.

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

A special chemistry and balance graces the fascinating new trio album led by alto saxophonist **Loren Stillman**, joined by bassist Drew Gress and drummer Mark Ferber. With his partners' sentient ensemble help, Stillman, who comports himself with an admirable restraint and measured fire on ***Time And Again* (Sunnyside; ★★★★★ 47:31)**, issues an evolving master's touch with echoes of acknowledged heroes Warne Marsh and Lee Konitz. On this fetching set of Stillman originals, "Backyard" opens the proceedings with a deft, driving energy, easing into the open-aired approach of the title track and the angular-headed "Lift Off." The album's endgame, "The Mask," eloquently caps the album off with one of the session's freer etudes.

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

On **Oz Noy's *Triple Play* (Abstract Logix; ★★★ 72:32)**, his 10th album and first live recording, the guitarist dishes up a bold blast of neo-fusion energy in lean, mean trio form, with dynamic detailing and grab-you-by-the-sternum guitar gymnastics up front. Noy is a hyper-nimble electric guitarist, sometimes to a hubristic fault, but delivers mightily on visceral impact and sophisticated harmonic qualities. Coloring his tone with various effects, Noy deftly mixes genres, from straight-up fusion exercises to blues rock — with echoes of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jimi Hendrix in the mix — and, along with serviceable originals, intriguingly reshaped arrangements of Monk's "Bemsha Swing" and Charlie Parker's "Billie's Bounce" as a ballad, for contrarian's sake. He also enjoys the company of powerful foils in fusion veteran drummer Dennis Chambers and tasteful ex-Yellowjacket bassist Jimmy Haslip. Fusion is not dead: it's



just morphing.

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

Neo-fusion of different flavors, textures and intensities can be found on **Trio Grande's *Urban Myth* (Whirlwind; ★★★½ 48:46)** comprising ace guitarist Gilad Hekselman, Will Vinson on saxophone and keyboard, and drummer Nate Wood's sideline bass work. This trio's contextual agenda shifts. What opens with the in-your-face blast force of "Urban Myth" eases into the agreeably smooth "Ministry Of Love." The turf continues shifting from the supple kinetics of the Roy Hargrove-penned "Strasbourg—St. Denis," the balladic gleam of "Olive Tree" and fractured beauty of "Chorale." There is the occasional jarring musical swerve, into such fluffier stuff as "Dancing Girls," suitable for white wine parties (apart from the slyly subversive edgy twists), but art is redeemed by the peaceful gospel-ish exhale of the final "A Gift." Throughout, the album is blessed with fine and empathetic playing from all aboard.

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

Of the trio albums surveyed here, the most innovative and mold-breaking has to be **J.C. Sanford's *New Past* (Shifting Paradigm; ★★★★★ 40:32)**, your not-so-basic trombone/piano/bass outing. Trombonist-composer Sanford deploys a refreshing understatement and artfully dodges the temptation of overkill or showboating without artistic intent, and his trio allies pianist Mike Cain and bassist Anthony Cox follow suit. The end result: Intrigue grows in the respected spaces and inventive twists of the music. We know something fresh is afoot from the introductory track "Sparrows Are Badasses," letting an aviary "field recording" lead us into the loose-limbed "Avocado," the Ornette-boppish, onomatopoeic "followfellowfloat," Wayne Shorter's "Toy Tune" and the graceful sigh of the final "Some Moments Are Eternal." And some moments are coated with a musical wink, as Sanford can also demonstrate. **DB**

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



## Mark Turner Quartet *Live At The Village Vanguard*

GIANT STEP ARTS

★★★★★

It's fitting that Mark Turner performed his composition "Nigeria 2" during his June 2022 appearance at the historic New York club. The tune is a contrafact of "Airegin" by Sonny Rollins, who in 1958 released the first live jazz album from the Village Vanguard, making these two tenor saxophone colossi the current bookends to the history recorded within that triangular basement.

Turner, who moved way out West to his hometown of Los Angeles in 2020, brings back with him drummer Jonathan Pinson, who along with bassist Joe Martin constitutes the flexible but firm foundation of Turner's quartet, which took the Vanguard's stage in support of their 2022 release *Return From The Stars*. The contrapuntal two-horn chorale writing and brilliantly improvised extrapolations conjure Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh, but the blurring of harmonic orthodoxy with the sounds of mystery make manifest the ghosts of the Ornette Coleman Quartet. Highlights include "Wasteland," a haunting three-voice evocation of "Moon Dreams" from Miles Davis' *Birth Of the Cool*, and "It's Not Alright With Me," which, despite its contrarian title, follows roughly the same harmonic form as the Cole Porter standard, unrecognizable in every other way save for hints of the original motif embedded in a hemiola bass ostinato.

This two-hour-plus summation traverses the range and depth of a working band united in vision and purpose, worthy of chasing Coleman, Coltrane and Shorter on the short list of storied saxophone-led quartets — with Turner's alongside the very best to have been archived at the Village Vanguard.

—Gary Fukushima

**Live At The Village Vanguard:** *Return From The Stars*; Terminus; Bridgetown; Brother Sister; Nigeria 2; Lincoln Heights; 1946; Unacceptable; It's Not Alright With Me; Wasteland; Lennie Groove. (2:11:23)

**Personnel:** Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Jason Palmer, trumpet; Joe Martin, bass; Jonathan Pinson, drums.

Ordering info: [giantsteparts.org](http://giantsteparts.org)





## Sean Mason *The Southern Suite* BLUE ENGINE ★★★★

To say that Sean Mason and his crew are old-school is not a putdown, but a hint at their way of interrogating the ensembles and styles of the past. None of these is rendered more sensitively than the hard-bop and beyond on “Closure.”

Their thematic narrative is extended on “One United,” the album’s longest track, and it’s an opportunity for a full exposition of Chris Lewis’ way of telling his engrossing tale on tenor saxophone. During several passages, Mason seems to be saying, “Let me tell you something,” but he passes the story on to trumpeter Tony Glausi and the rhythm section to finish.

Unlike the almost laughing quality of his sound on “Final Voyage,” Glausi completes Lewis’ solo with a sonic medley that Mason handles intuitively with a dramatic coda and single-note dexterity of a Count Basie. “Kid” belongs almost entirely to Mason and the Basie-like reference is suddenly now something more akin to Art Tatum or any one of the stride pianists of yesteryear.

The quintet is capable of delivering impressionistic eras of Black music, including an occasional burlesque beat on “Lavendar,” and Louis Jordan and Tympani Five on “SilkyM.” Amid the group’s wailing tonality, there are intimations of “flat foot floogie” from Lewis’ horn.

“Lullaby” is just that, and while the melody is repeated it builds with each iteration, at last giving way to cinematic imagery that sets the stage for the thoughtful exchanges from the drummer Domo Branch and bassist Felix Moseholm as they move everything toward, uh, closure.

—Herb Boyd

**The Southern Suite:** Final Voyage; Kid; Lavendar; SilkyM; One United; Lullaby; Closure; Sean’s Theme. (40:44)

**Personnel:** Sean Mason, piano; Chris Lewis, tenor saxophone; Tony Glausi, trumpet; Felix Moseholm, bass; Domo Branch, drums.

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

## Thandi Ntuli with Carlos Niño *Rainbow Revisited* INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM ★★★

With a collaborative, authentic and eclectic approach to music making, South African pianist, composer and singer Thandi Ntuli offers an original angle on contemporary jazz. This is apparent on Ntuli’s *Rainbow Revisited*, a stylistically kaleidoscopic new exploration out on International Anthem Recording Co. and produced by the Los Angeles-based percussionist Carlos Niño.

*Rainbow Revisited* came about during Ntuli’s first visit to Los Angeles in 2019 to perform at The Ford Theatre at a show presented by The Nonsemble. While there, Niño invited her to do a session with him and engineer Andy Kravitz at Studio 4 West. During that playful, exploratory session, *Rainbow Revisited* coalesced organically.

In listening, that pureness shines through. *Rainbow Revisited* fosters and highlights Ntuli’s distinct voice and cultural perspective. The new record exhibits certain American jazz hallmarks — improvisation, call and response, complex harmonies — as well as the sort of lush, polyphonic textures, pentatonic scales, acapella vocals and percussion key in sub-Saharan musical styles.

There are also hints of something more. Tracks like “Nomayoyo (Ingoma ka Mkhulu),” which builds on a hymnal-like theme, lean

into Western classical harmonic ideas.

Meanwhile, on songs like “Rainbow Revisited,” with its pop melody and heavy, driving bass line, and “Voice And Tongo Experiment,” which features vocals, drum and a frenetic flute, you can hear the influence of Afro-rock and even contemporary American pop.

Ntuli’s warm vocals and maximalist piano and Niño’s deferent production and percussion function as the connective tissue running throughout *Rainbow Revisited*, combining all these facets into an refreshing, contemplative mélange.

—Alexa Peters

**Rainbow Revisited:** Sunrise (In California); Rainbow Revisited; Breath And Synth Experiment; Nomayoyo (Ingoma ka Mkhulu); Piano; Sunset (In California); Voice and Tongo Experiment; The One (First Part); The One (Second Part); Lihlanzekile. (48:35)

**Personnel:** Thandi Ntuli, piano, synthesizer, tongo, voice; Carlos Niño, cymbals, percussion, plants.

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



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## Nitai HersHKovits *Call On The Old Wise*

ECM

★★★½

Nitai HersHKovits was born and raised in Israel, started on the piano when he was 15 and extensively studied both jazz and classical music. He worked with Avishai Cohen's trio for five years, then moved to New York where he began a long-time association with Oded Tzur's quartet. In recent times, he has moved back to Israel. His solo piano showcase *Call On The Old Wise* is his debut as a leader for ECM.

HersHKovits performs 18 compositions (16 are originals), all of which are quite concise: 11 clock in at under three minutes and only one exceeds four. The tonal, generally melodic music is mostly freely improvised, setting moods and sometimes containing memorable if briefly explored themes. Some of the pieces strongly display HersHKovits' classical background where he sounds a bit like an improvising concert pianist.

Among the highlights are the energetic "The Old Wise" (one of three songs dedicated to his former piano teacher Suzan Cohen), the introspective "Enough To Say I Will," a quietly dramatic "Of Trust And Remorse," his beautiful interpretation of Molly Drake's "Dream Your Dreams," the pretty "A Rooftop Minuet" and the mysterious-sounding "Late Blossom." While each of these miniatures stands on its own, they also form an unpredictable suite with one piece leading to the next. Though I wish that Nitai HersHKovits had stretched out more and developed some of the stronger grooves (a few of the performances are just brief sketches), *Call On The Old Wise* succeeds at holding on to one's interest throughout.

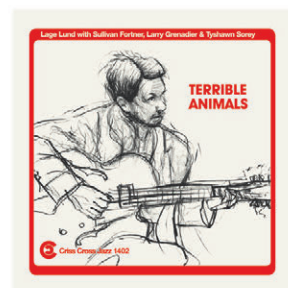
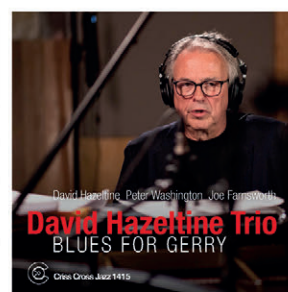
—Scott Yanow

**Call On The Old Wise:** The Old Wise; Enough To Say I Will; Mode Antigona; Of Trust And Remorse; Intermezzo No. 3; Majestic Steps Glow Far; Dream Your Dreams; Placid In Africansque; Mode Brillante; Single Petal Of A Rose; A Rooftop Minuet; Late Blossom; Intermezzo No. 4; In Satin; This You Mean To Me; Of Mentorship; For Suzan; River Wash Me. (50:13)

**Personnel:** Nitai HersHKovits, piano.

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

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— OFF THE CHARTS —

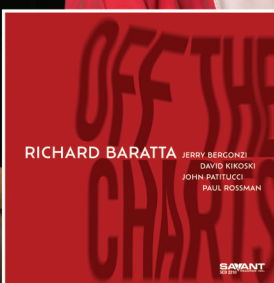
Leaving the music scene 35 years ago to go into the film industry, drummer Richard Baratta produced a number of high-profile movies including *Joker*, *The Irishman*, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and others. Recently returning to jazz, his latest recording fully displays his immense talent as both an instrumentalist and a leader.

"Off the Charts" is outstanding! Love the choice of tunes and the band is smoking. Best record I've heard all year."

— Arnie Baum, Jazz Critic, Indie Music

"This album inspired me. It entertained me and introduced me to some well-written songs I had not heard before. The masterful musicians and Richard Baratta himself made each selection a work of art."

— Dee Dee McNeil, *Musical Memoirs*



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Roy Hargrove, already a jazz giant at 23.



COURTESY JALC

## Late Horn Masters Play On

It's hard to believe five years have passed since the death of **Roy Hargrove**, who had helped make straight-ahead acoustic jazz palatable for a younger generation who started to explore the music. ***The Love Suite: In Mahogany* (Blue Engine; ★★★★★ 29:04)**, captured at Alice Tully Hall in 1993 when Hargrove was a ripe 23 years old and newly a household name, is filled with swinging goodness.

The album is divided into five movements: the first is a subtle, sophisticated groove titled "Young Daydreams" with crisp soloing from pianist Marc Cary. Hargrove takes things a step higher with "Obviously Destined," whose joyous cockiness only Hargrove had the nerve and chops to pull off. Bassist Rodney Whitaker supports him lick for lick.

"Into The Outcome" is the suite's magnum opus. At 19 minutes long, it gives off a New Orleans vibe with Hargrove blowing like mad and saxophonist Ron Blake summoning equal fervor at a key moment of the piece. Hargrove then breaks into a craftsman's precise scatting that would make Louis Armstrong jealous. Drummer Gregory Hutchinson gets a piece of the action as well.

The *Love Suite* shows Hargrove, Cary, Whitaker and Hutchinson at the start of their development and is a fine introduction to Hargrove's progression as a trailblazing artist.

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

In August 1981, only 10 months before his passing, alto saxophonist **Art Pepper** performed a spellbinding three-night set at Maiden Voyage, a Japanese-owned jazz club in Los Angeles. Joined by pianist George Cables, bassist David Williams and drummer Carl Burnett, Pepper played seven sets over three nights and tore the house down every night. Pepper knew his days were numbered. According to the liner notes, "He woke up everyday surprised to be alive, and every tune he played, he felt might be his final word, his deathbed declaration."

Thankfully the heavens were shining down and saw fit for the entire gig to be taped by

Pepper's widow Laurie and musician/producer Ed Michel. The seven-disc ***Complete Maiden Voyage Recordings* (Omnivore; ★★★★★ 502:00)** features 42 performances, 23 of which are previously unissued. The set also includes a 44-page booklet featuring photos, Pepper's original handwritten notes and commentary, ephemera and a new essay from Laurie Pepper telling his story.

If this recording could be summed up in just a few words, then "audio autobiography" would come to mind. Pepper bares his heart and soul to the audience via personal stories, anecdotes and flashbacks of his life in between songs. (He had released his profound autobiography *Straight Life* just a few years earlier, in 1979). Much of his passion and humanity is present in his versatile soloing and the smooth, melodic phrasing he was known for as part of the West Coast jazz scene.

The recording comprises a mix of Pepper originals ("Road Waltz," "Samba Mom Mom," "Valse Triste") and standards ("Donna Lee," "Begin The Beguine," "Yours Is My Heart Alone"). Pepper's brilliant, pure tone comes across gently in the ballad "Everything Happens To Me," backed by Cables on piano. The saxophone-and-piano duets steal the show as the two gel beautifully on every track, especially "Thank You Blues," where the two collide into thin air with their blues-tinged executions. Pepper can even be heard in the background praising Cables while the pianist is creating pure magic in every note. They pull off a chilling rendition of the classic tune "But Beautiful." There are also plenty of upbeat tracks that dazzle the crowd ("Straight Life," "Without A Song," "Allen's Alley"), all of which Pepper and his rhythm section nailed in every take.

For any true Art Pepper fan, this compilation is a complete diamond cut in the rough. There is little left to the imagination as every inch of his gut goes into these songs; as Pepper put it in the included notes, "His whole life went into this."

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

DB



## Arthur Kell Speculation Quartet Live At Lunático

ORIGIN

★★★★★

Arthur Kell seems to have played with everyone without (yet) making a wider splash. He's probably too generous an artist for stardom, and in this terrific group, he leaves much of the spotlight to the two guitarists and drummer. But when you listen to the nicely dotted rhythm of "The Djado," or the resonant intro and sustained lead line to "Lullaby/Omni," it becomes obvious that he's always the foundation stone of the music.

This is modern jazz that seems to have been touched, consciously or not, as much by the post-rock of groups like Tortoise as by anything derived from bop.

"Dark Green No 15" is an exception to that. You can imagine that softly rocking line on a '60s Blue Note date, but with horns rather than guitars returning the call to the bass. "Polymorphous" might be one of those things that Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff recorded but, uh, forgot to put out because it didn't seem likely to deliver another "Sidewinder."

Shepik and Radley don't need to be held apart in the mix. It's the interweaving of lines — sometimes with the same spiralling effect you used to get from the Bhundu Boys — that makes their chemistry function.

Mednard is disciplined but loose, which takes discipline. Kell plays neither inside nor outside. Like his old friend and associate, Tom Chapin, he keeps ears and mind open for new sounds and experiences.

It's music that seems to take pleasure in itself; not at all the same as performers admiring their own work. The crowd at Lunático are a bit noisy, but I'd have been, too.

—Brian Morton

**Live At Lunático:** Speculation; The Djado; Lullaby/Omni; Pisciotta Blue; Dry Delta; Dark Green No 15; Regatta; Polymorphous; Speculation. (70:22)

**Personnel:** Brad Shepik, Nate Radley, guitars; Arthur Kell, bass; Allan Mednard, drums.

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





## Harold Danko *Trillium*

STEEPLECHASE

★★★★★

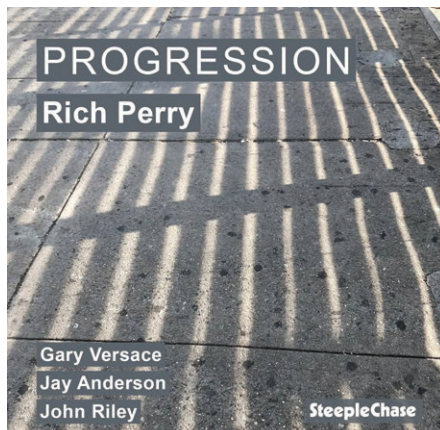
## Rich Perry *Progression*

STEEPLECHASE

★★

Pianist Harold Danko and tenor saxophonist Rich Perry both have three-decade associations with the Danish SteepleChase label. Leading a quartet on his own *Progression*, Perry also plays on Danko's *Trillium* with cornetist Kirk Knuffke.

Could we call *Trillium* third stream, as it lifts



elements from Stravinsky's *Rite Of Spring*? Perhaps, but this shimmeringly spacious music also possesses free improvisation, as well as a flowing exchange of roles and phrases, always with a refined direction in mind.

Danko's fingers are briefly under the lid as the horns enter for "Spring Winds," entwined harmoniously. Knuffke radiates brightness, while Perry is invitingly velvety. They phrase together, staggering time as they unwind. The leader doesn't crowd out the notes but provides skeletal forms that we might imagine being realized by a big band in an alternative realm.

There are three miniatures, but most of the compositions run between six and 11 minutes.

There are various duo permutations, but most of the pieces feature all three members taking part in involved interactions. Each player is continually responsive in the midst of high-wire situations.

Perry's inviting tenor glow resides at the core of his own quartet session, but *Progression* is more straightforward in approach. The combo of Gary Versace, Jay Anderson and John Riley is secure in its slickness, with rivulet piano, enunciated bass and light brushes interacting with sensitivity.

Three of the longer works stand out by possessing greater weight, as "Blind Faith," "Gotta Blues One" and "Unison" fare best. The first has a creative theme, allowing Versace to fly, the second swings breezily and the third is a lively workout, but the whole spread seems quite unremarkable when set beside Perry's eloquence on *Trillium*.

This is a classy selection of tunes, but it's clinging onto familiar ways that eventually become tedious as the album tops the hour. There is little drama, tension or even swing here, factors that seem necessary given the nature and presumed intentions of this quartet's compositions.

—Martin Longley

**Trillium:** Spring Winds; Envisage; Address Unknown; No Escape; Blossom Tango; Earth Dance; Second Act; Rising Aspirations; Nevele; Vernal Eternal. (64:48)

**Personnel:** Harold Danko, piano; Rich Perry, tenor saxophone; Kirk Knuffke, cornet.

**Progression:** Progression; Blind Faith; Mud; Rebirth; Pause; Gotta Blues One; Living; No Lines; Unison; Now; The Road Ahead. (67:00)

**Personnel:** Perry, tenor saxophone; Gary Versace, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; John Riley, drums.

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



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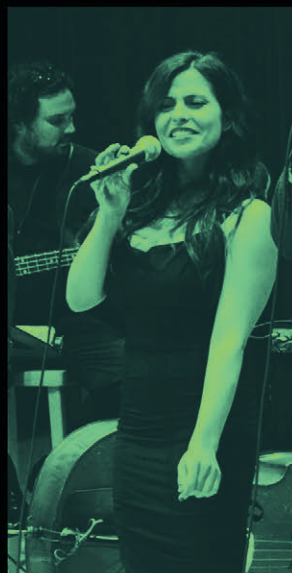
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Colleen Clark directs at U. of South Carolina





Jazz Girls Day, a program spearheaded by Colleen Clark, assistant professor of jazz studies at the University of South Carolina (far right), has held five events over the past two years and is expanding the program to several other states.

# SOUTH CAROLINA'S GRASS-ROOTS JAZZ DEVELOPMENT

BY TERRY PERKINS | PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

**When Bert Ligon retired as director of jazz studies at the University of South Carolina in Columbia after 30 years, he'd built a strong foundation for the program. When Ligon started teaching there in 1991, no jazz degrees were offered. By the time he retired in 2021, undergraduate and masters degrees in jazz studies were in place, as well as a doctoral minor degree.**


Ligon posted this message on the School of Music's Facebook page when he retired: "It's time for me to pass the torch to the new full-time facul-

ty: Matt White, Colleen Clark, and Lauren Meccia. I look forward to seeing the program grow and develop."

Thanks to the energy and initiative of

White, Clark and Meccia — and the support of the university's School of Music — the jazz studies department has moved into a dedicated building renovated to





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fit its needs, started a free gender equity program, Jazz Girls Day, within South Carolina as well as other states and worked to support middle school and high school jazz programs throughout the state.

In a recent Zoom interview, faculty members White, Clark and Meccia talked about their new facility and innovative programs underway at the university.

“Our new building is across the street from the School of Music and used to be the Green Methodist Church,” said White. “Dean Tayloe Harding at the School of Music obtained funding to buy the build-

ing to create more space for jazz studies. Now it’s totally renovated, with offices in the Sunday school building. And the sanctuary is where our ensembles are able to rehearse. It still has stained glass windows, so we call it the jazz church.”

“We have three big bands as well as our jazz combos, and with so many ensembles it was hard to secure rehearsal space,” he added. “Now we have the sanctuary plus other available spaces in the new building where we’ll be able to present concerts and engage with the community.”

Both White and Clark started teaching

at U of SC in the fall of 2021. White holds degrees from the University of North Florida and the University of Miami. Clark earned her doctorate in jazz performance at the University of North Texas in 2019, the first woman — and first drummer — to do so. Meccia earned her undergraduate and masters degrees at U of SC, and was also named to the faculty in 2021.

When Clark started, she also began laying the groundwork for the Jazz Girls Day program. She said the concept for the program actually had its beginning during her time at North Texas.

“As we all know, jazz is a male-dominated art form, but it’s changing, which



**‘OUR MISSION IS TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF JAZZ EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN OUR STATE, AND OUTREACH IS A BIG PART OF THAT.’**

**—Matt White**

is exciting,” Clark said. “When I was at North Texas, there were about 300 jazz studies students, but only four female instrumentalists. We started a Women in Jazz Day, and I started thinking, ‘How can I make something like this impactful for communities around universities that offer jazz studies?’ When I was offered this job, it became the first big thing I wanted to do. As the flagship university in South Carolina, we should be setting the standard for the new normal — making jazz more inclusive for women.”

With the support of her colleagues and the School of Music, Clark got the Jazz Girls Day program off the ground, and the free one-day event now takes place three times a year in South Carolina. It is also expanding across the country.

“We’ve had five Jazz Days in the state of South Carolina within two years, and we do it by region,” explained Clark. “We have

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U of SC's Left Bank Big Band rehearses in a newly renovated space dedicated to the jazz studies department, which was formerly a church.

the upstate area that's more mountainous, and that program is held in Greenville. Here in the midlands, we hold the program in Columbia. In the low country, we partner with the Charleston Jazz organization and Charleston Jazz Academy to host it during the Charleston Jazz Festival."

The free program is open to all middle

school and high school girls and music educators. Although pre-registration is encouraged, walk-ins are accepted.

"We never know who's going to walk in the door," Clark said. "So we always encourage same-day, walk-ins. If girls are coming and have friends — bring 'em. We welcome parents as well and always try to

be over prepared and flexible."

Jazz Girls Day begins with Clark and the other instructors — including faculty members White, Meccia and others such as Ligon, who stays involved as a professor emeritus and is a strong supporter of Jazz Girls Day — introducing themselves by playing as a group and teaching about their instruments.

"Then we do instrumental breakout sessions as well as one for vocalists," Clark said. "We welcome anyone who plays an instrument, whether it's a French horn, a violin or a tuba. We then come together to sing and play the Girls' Day theme song written by Lauren, and follow with a session where the faculty improvises, and any girl who raises their hand can ask a question. We break for a free lunch, come back and learn a tune by ear as well as by reading. And Matt leads breakout sessions with music educators, helping them with teaching questions.

"The program concludes with a performance by the girls, and they're encouraged to improvise and take solos. They then get a T-shirt and a personalized certificate. We want them to go back to their school and say, I did this really cool thing. We're try-



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ing to inspire them musically by participating in this program.”

In addition to South Carolina, Jazz Girls Day events have been held in Ohio, Missouri and Connecticut — with upcoming sessions scheduled for Arizona and Oklahoma in 2024.

“The long vision is to present Jazz Girls Day in every state by 2030,” Clark said. “We want to inspire the organizations we work with in other states to gain funding to

concerts. Our mission is to raise the level of jazz education and engagement in our state, and outreach is a big part of that.”

Alson, the department recently partnered with the Marian McPartland Jazz Archive in Columbia, where the pianist’s Piano Jazz shows were produced.

“All the shows are completely digitized, and there are over 5,000 documents — show notes, sheet music and photographs,” said White. “We’ve partnered with them

and digitizing all the documents to create mega data for a public archive. We also have equal use of all the materials and have graduate assistantship opportunities paired with the archive.”

“When we came in, there were two grad students and six undergraduates,” said White. “Now we have about 25 undergrads and seven grad students in our own building. You can really feel the energy.”

DB

## ‘WE SHOULD BE SETTING THE STANDARD FOR THE NEW NORMAL — MAKING JAZZ MORE INCLUSIVE FOR WOMEN.’ —Colleen Clark

continue presenting Jazz Girls Day events themselves. For example, after we presented Jazz Girls Day in Columbus, Ohio, in partnership with a local arts organization, we heard back from them later that they were able to get funding to present it on their own.”

In addition to that program, the jazz studies department revived the annual University of South Carolina Jazz Festival. “The festival stopped in the 1990s, and we brought it back last spring semester, said Meccia. “We’ve got the second festival coming up March 8th and 9th with guest artist Mimi Jones, who will perform with our jazz faculty on Friday night and our Left Bank Big Band Saturday. We also have adjudication and clinics with high school bands. It’s just a really fun event and builds our relationships with jazz band directors.”

“We’re also trying to address the state of jazz education in South Carolina,” added White. “Only about 10 percent of South Carolina high schools have jazz bands. Some teachers don’t have the experience to feel comfortable teaching jazz, so I do open forum sessions with band directors to help them get started and offer resources. And we take our big bands out to schools for

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# CREATING FLEXIBLE MUSICIANS AT WVU

BY YOSHI KATO | PHOTOS COURTESY OF WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

**The idea of a big fish in a small pond is a cliché. But how about being a big fish in a comfortably sized pond that's connected to an impressively large lake?**

That's the idyllic situation for West Virginia University (WVU) Music Performance: Jazz and Commercial Music undergraduate and Jazz Pedagogy graduate students. "WVU is a very livable place," said Jarred Sims, WVU director of jazz studies. "The grounds are large — so much so that you have to take a tram, like an overhead train, to get from one campus to another. But the School of Music has about 400 majors and is really a school-within-a-school."

An academic institution's setting is secondary to the education it provides, of course. WVU's approach is forward-looking, Sims said during a phone interview. "My soundbite I give everybody is I'm not trying to prepare stu-

dents for a gig that happened in 1959," he said. "And the other thing is that jazz is not necessarily an endpoint, but it's actually a process and a methodology."

A jam session that WVU runs in nearby downtown Morgantown serves as a secondary classroom. "We have that weekly session that's at a bar, and I think it's really important on a lot of levels," he said. "I try to get the students off campus as much as possible. I'm taking them to the Mid Atlantic Jazz Festival, which is held in D.C. I want them to perform for people who aren't other musicians or their parents."

"The other night I was in Pittsburgh, which is about an hour away, and this guy came up to me and he said, 'Are you still doing those jam



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Jarred Sims directs the honor band during rehearsal.



sessions on Thursday nights? So our jam sessions cast a fairly wide net of older people who are enthusiastic about the music and some high school students, too.”

With the West Virginia Wine & Jazz

Festival in the fall and the WVU Jazz Festival in the spring, students have further performance opportunities. “The Wine and Jazz Festival is an opportunity for students to share the stage with professional artists from the region and

sometimes New York City and for them to play in front of large audiences,” he said. “And in the spring, there’s a guest artist who performs, coaches students in their performances and gives a master class.

“When there’s not a jam session, the classroom can get disconnected from everything off campus,” he added. “Sometimes we get our priorities messed up where the students only do what the teacher says to do. There’s a high amount of motivation to learn this music when there’s an outlet for it.”

The “Commercial” aspect of the undergraduate major is for students to graduate with a liberal arts-style, cross-disciplinary flexibility. “There are a lot of musicians with an extreme passion about jazz that might use the tools that they have in other genres,” Sims pointed out.

“Musicians in every generation have that breadth, like Jeff Coffin [who currently plays with the Dave Matthews Band as well touring and recording on his own],” he said. “He’s best known as a rock saxophonist, but he’s also a really good jazz player. A deeper cut would be somebody like Warren Smith. He’s known as being an avant-garde percussionist in New York. But he also has experience recording with Aretha Franklin.”

The school’s own alumni already reflect

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Photo: Brandon Parigio, UMKC



this approach: A multi-woodwinds player, Sims earned his bachelor's degree from WVU and has performed with the likes of Soulive, The Temptations and Brit-popper Noel Gallagher as well as with Bob Brookmeyer, Anat Cohen and the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra. Allison Miller, his WVU classmate and one-time bandmate, has been behind the drum kit for singer/songwriters Brandi Carlile,

teaching," Sims said.

As someone who's both homegrown and a bit of a prodigal son, one who earned graduate degrees at two universities in Boston, Sims tries to share his experience with his students. Drummer and faculty member Brian Wolfe, another of Sims' WVU classmates, had similar experiences in New York with tours and sessions with Maynard Ferguson, Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings, David Byrne and others.

"One of the things that Brian and I talked about is what we wish we'd gotten as students here, although we both think very highly of the teachers we had," Sims conveyed. "We won-

dered, 'What experiences did we have out there that, in retrospect, we wish someone would have told us?'"

What they don't need to convey is the allure of the campus, which is quickly apparent to those who visit.

"You get the best of both worlds — the big football team with the 70,000-person stadium and also a very comfortable scene within the School of Music.

"We have a reputation for being a bit of a party school, but the music school has been isolated from that whole area," Sims concluded. "And our students are very busy."

DB

## 'WHAT WE BRING TO THE TABLE AS JAZZ PLAYERS IS JUST TO PROVIDE DEPTH.'

—Jarred Sims

Natalie Merchant and Toshi Reagon as well as being in jazz acts like Artemis and a variety of her own adventurous groups. "What we bring to the table as jazz players is just to provide depth," Sims noted. "And that's the commercial side of 'Jazz and Commercial Music.'"

Part of a 21st century jazz education involves learning to have an entrepreneurial self-sufficiency, and Sims and his colleagues promote that, too. "We're also encouraging students to do live sound and to have experience recording and editing," he said. "We have a really thriving music industry program, so I'm sending more students to do a minor in that on top of a jazz major." There's also instruction in copyright law and the logistics of live sound recording.

While undergraduates are currently from West Virginia as well as Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey, graduate students hail from as far away as Brazil and Malaysia. They'll earn a master's of music in jazz pedagogy — an acknowledgment that many jazz teaching positions require graduate degrees.

"I oversee them visiting the high school here so they can basically learn how to teach and how to have objectives, how to measure objectives — all the things having to do with



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EMILY BOLDEN



Doug Richards founded the jazz studies program at Virginia Commonwealth University.

# Using Polyphony & Timbre to Score Jobim for Big Band

The content of this article is intended for the intermediate to advanced jazz arranger/composer in order to illustrate various elements of craft that are some-

what unique to my most recent recording, *Through A Sonic Prism*, which explores the melodies of Antonio Carlos Jobim.

The vast majority of big band literature

from pre-Fletcher Henderson through the music of Thad Jones is scored in unison or homophonically, sometimes with a counterline. When homophonic, each of the horn sections (saxophones/woodwinds, trumpets, trombones) plays alone, or with another section, or full tutti. In essence, this involves taking the lead line and placing the harmony in the under parts in close position with the lead. This is a fundamental technique that has been used from the mid-1920s through today, and has yielded an incredible amount of extraordinary music.

There are, of course, various techniques (e.g., drop voicings, spread voicings) in homophonic scoring that are commonplace. A great primer for these fundamental techniques is Rayburn Wright's excellent book *Inside the Score*. I also strongly recommend checking out the major writers for large jazz ensemble throughout jazz history, with an emphasis on Duke Ellington, Gil Evans and Eddie Sauter. (Sauter's writing on Ray McKinley's *Borderline*, recorded in 1946-'47, is a great place to start.)

Polyphony is one of the fundamentals of jazz (just think of the character of the rhythm section). From its birth at the turn of the 20th century in New Orleans, jazz was largely improvised by a relatively small ensemble with each instrument having a musical function/character. Polyphony from this period is also fundamental to the written compositions of Jelly Roll Morton.

A different approach to counterpoint would be to expand it beyond a simple counterline function and use it as it would be found in a chamber music setting. An example of this can be heard in "Sabia," one of the tunes on *Through A Sonic Prism*. Though the main line of this features a vocalist (the voice part is to be interpreted freely), it could just as well be assigned to a solo instrument. Example 1 on page 78 shows bars 9-18 (all examples are in concert key).

## Counterpoint & Melody

Another example of counterpoint on *Through A Sonic Prism* is from "Retreat em Branco e Preto" (also known as "Zingaro"). The melody — a very chromatic ditty — is treated in quasi-call-and-response two-bar phrases: The first instrument's tone sustains while the second instrument's tone is stated and also is sustained until the first instrument plays the next tone, etc.

This is scored for a pair of trumpets (in hat mutes), which is followed by a pair of flugelhorns (also in hats). The hat mutes cre-



ate a more mellow sonority. Throughout all of this, the guitar plays the melody as is. After the first eight bars, the same basic idea continues up a third by a pair of soprano saxophones followed by a pair of clarinets. As you can see, the melody is stated by assigning every other tone to the two instruments.

This sets up a dissonant harmonic tension that goes with the chromatic character of the melody. Under the trumpet/flugel lines is a chromatically descending (every two bars) baritone saxophone line. Under the soprano/clarinet line is a chromatically descending solo trombone line. See Example 2 on page 79.

After the theme has been stated, flugelhornist Taylor Barnett plays a one-chorus solo accompanied by the trombone section. As you can see/hear, the trombones play a variant (elongation) of the theme using pyramids (yes, things get harmonically “hairy”). See Example 3.

After the first two choruses of bossa nova, a double-time-feel samba commences featuring flugelhornist John D’earth. The backgrounds are entrusted to the reeds (two clarinets, two sopranos, bari) playing brief, fragmented, angular and very dissonant figures. This is somewhat homophonic, but with each of the underparts having a very independent character. Again, the backgrounds are variants of the melody. See Example 4.

(Thelonious Monk once stopped his band mid-rehearsal and asked an upstart trumpet soloist, “Why don’t you use the melody?” The upstart arrogantly quipped, “You want me to play the melody?” Monk retorted patiently, “Why don’t you use the melody?” — ’nuff said.)

### Basic Outline of “Samba de Uma Nota So”

Two-bar introduction: pickup is unison/octave additively pyramiding to a 12-tone chord.

Exposition = 40 Bar Theme (each section is 8 bars = “A1,” “A2,” “B,” “A1,” “A2”). For the “A” sections of the melody I use a variant of the hocket technique: a 13th and 14th century polyphonic device where a melody is passed one note at a time between different voices, and after each has played a melodic tone, the process starts again.

Instead of using a single tone for the melody, I use a three-part harmonic structure. Here are the harmonized tones for the five trios for each successive tone:

- Piano (r.h.) + Guitar (two pitches);
- Tpt. 2 (cup) + Alto 2 + Tbn. 2 (cup);
- Tpt. 3 (straight) + Tenor 1 + Tbn. 3 (straight);
- Tpt. 1 (harmon) + Alto 1 + Tbn. 1 (harmon);
- Tpt. 4 (bucket) + Tenor 2 + Tbn. 4 (bucket);
- Bari + Pf (l.h.) + Dbl. Bass = Bass Line.

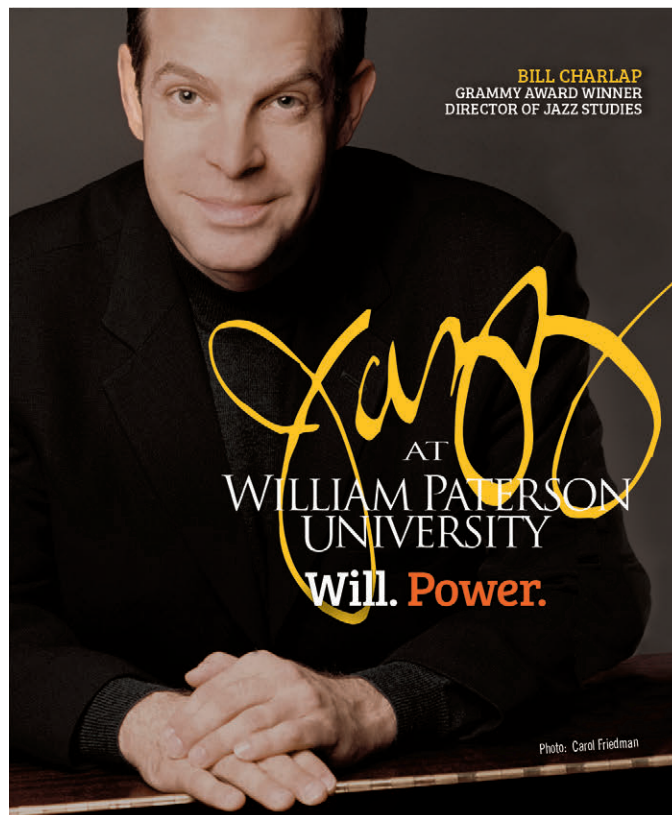
The “B” section is a five-part canon (each line starting one beat apart) for the trios at the unison/8va.

Things return to the hocket-like technique for the final “A1” and “A2” sections.

Two choruses of improvised solos follow, each player receiving four bars of solo space. Immediately before each upcoming solo is a brief (two to four quick tones) homophonic tutti announcement (usually with 8va leaps).

This is followed by a tutti (homophonic) variant of the theme (shout chorus). The “B” section of this chorus features a stop-time trade of two bars each for saxophones (florid) followed by brass (percussive with 8va leaps). The penultimate “A” section returns with the basic groove and a call-and-response brass-versus-saxes growing ever more rhythmically fractured.

The final “A” section of the last chorus continues the call-and-response pattern in a much calmer rhythmic fashion, having a gradual diminuendo until the final *pp* chord (another 12-tone structure, as on the introduction, except instead of gradually building to that structure, this time the structure is hit first then gradual-



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Richards (center) with the cast of *Through A Sonic Prism*.

ly all tones are eliminated except for the tonic B $\flat$  played by Tpt. 1). Added to the sustained B $\flat$ , the piece (and the recording) ends with the rhythm section playing a sustained tritone (B $\flat$  and E natural) — a tip of the hat to Duke and Monk).

These types of techniques came about quite intuitively as I created the music for *Through A Sonic Prism*, and they suited the character of what I was striving for. Embrace them in your own arranging and orchestrating and see if they work just as creatively and effectively for you.

DB

Doug Richards is the founder of the jazz studies program at Virginia Commonwealth University. An eminent jazz educator for more than 40 years, his former students include Nate Smith, Steve Wilson, James Genus, Clarence Penn, Reggie Pace, members of Butcher Brown and a host of other eminent players and bandleaders. An acclaimed orchestrator and arranger, Richards leads his stellar large ensemble in a set brimming with invention on his latest recording, *Through A Sonic Prism*, an album of Antonio Carlos Jobim arrangements featuring vocalist Laura Ann Singh and a top-shelf group of players from the Richmond, Virginia, area. Richards' horn accompaniments are wildly imaginative, tightly executed, with a rich and unusual blend of brass and reed sonorities. In addition to his career at VCU, Richards is founder and musical director of the Great American Music Ensemble, one of the leading professional repertory jazz orchestras in the U.S. GAME has performed at the Smithsonian Institution Jazz Festival, the Kennedy Center, the International Duke Ellington Society Annual Convention and the National Academy of Sciences Annual Meeting Concert, and has been featured on NPR and PBS. Richards has also transcribed numerous jazz performances for Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Publications and lectured at the Smithsonian regarding the music of Duke Ellington. For three years, he joined Wynton Marsalis, Max Roach, Ray Brown, Victor Lewis and Martin Williams on the jazz faculty of Gunther Schuller's Festival at Sandpoint, Idaho. There he met guitarist/composer Anthony Wilson and subsequently produced Wilson's first two albums, one of which was nominated for a Grammy. Visit Richards online at [doug-richards-music.com](http://doug-richards-music.com).

### Example 1

Antonio Carlos Jobim = composer  
Doug Richards = arranger

$\text{♩} = 60$

9 Clar Cm Cm/B Gm/B $\flat$  A $\flat$ maj7 A $\flat$ maj7 Fm G7(b9) G7(b9)

Voice *mp*

Flute

SopSx *mp*

(Flute) 13 Cm Cm/B $\flat$  A $\flat$ 7 A $\flat$ 7 Cm7 Cm7/B $\flat$

Bs Clar

Bari

17 Flugel E $\flat$ 7 E $\flat$ 7 Fm7/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ 7(b9)

Tbn



## Example 2

Medium Bossa  $\text{♩} = 120$   
 Antonio Carlos Jobim = composer  
 Doug Richards = arranger

Trumpets 1&2 (Hat Mutes)  
 Flügels 1&2 (Hat Mutes)  
 Bari

*mp*

5

Collective Improvisation  
 Angular / Chromatic

## Example 3

Medium Bossa  $\text{♩} = 120$   
 Antonio Carlos Jobim = composer  
 Doug Richards = arranger

1st 8 Bars - 2nd Chorus  
 Trombone Background

Trombones 1  
 2

Trombones 3  
 4

4

## Example 4

Double Time Samba Feel  $\text{♩} = 120$   
 Antonio Carlos Jobim = composer  
 Doug Richards = arranger

First 8 Bars 3rd Chorus  
 WW Background

Clarinets 1  
 2

Sopranos 1  
 2

Bari

*mf*

4

*"Being able to work with the top jazz educators in the nation at the CJC informed my ability to transcend the art form to create the new genres and bodies of work that are being forged by the new generation of jazz artists. These are socially poignant times and being given the tools to shape that politically impactful music that resides in me has provided me the skills I needed to be able to convey my vision."*

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Jean Fineberg has spent concentrated and productive time as composer-in-residence at art centers around the United States.

# Artist Residencies for Musicians & Composers

**W**hat musician or composer wouldn't want to be awarded the time and space to work solely on their music, devoid of the hassles of daily life?

The late 1880s saw the emergence of artist colonies as refuges for writers to congregate and immerse themselves in nature, derive inspiration from their peers and do their best work. These days, they have morphed into artist residencies, including visual artists and, more recently, musicians and composers.

I have been fortunate to have spent my most concentrated and productive time as composer-in-residence at art centers around the United States. I have also served as a music composition juror for residencies, viewing and scoring applications, which has given me some insight into the adjudication process.

I have developed many new friends whom I never would have met otherwise, including painters, sculptors, writers and poets. One of my favorite pastimes in residence is group dinners, where I am struck by the similarity of methods and processes across disciplines.

## What Does a Residency Provide?

Some residencies charge fees, but I have

attended only fully funded ones in the United States. You are usually expected to cover your own transportation, except to and from the airport. You are also free to drive.

They generally provide a private room and bathroom, and, minimally, a studio with access to a keyboard. Some serve in-house meals nightly or weekly; some provide a stipend and some do neither. If meals are not provided, there are shared or individual kitchens and transportation to stores.

## What is Expected?

They don't monitor what you're doing, or have any expectations about your work, even if it's different from your proposal. Most require some contribution to the community, which can be in the form of a one-time talk or an audio or video presentation of your playing — prior or working compositions. These are informal, and the small to medium audiences are very appreciative, often asking questions about your work. Some have even bought my CDs.

You can be as solitary or social as you want, but you are expected to partake in any provided meals. Centers usually appreciate a donation of some work for their collection, which primari-

ly applies to writers and visual artists, but if you have a CD, or a framed part of a score, you can offer that.

## How Long?

Sessions vary from about two to six weeks, although one of mine was 10 weeks. Most sessions have five to 10 residents at one time.

On your application, you will designate your preferred length of residence. As in all areas of the application, the more flexible you are, the greater the chance of being accepted. For me, the ideal length is four to five weeks. Anything shorter is not productive, and anything longer is not practical.

Some have fixed-length sessions, and everyone comes and leaves at the same time. I enjoy that structure, as it fosters group cohesion. I also enjoy staggered schedules, wherein artists arrive for different periods of time, enabling you to engage with more people and experience more ongoing work.

## The Other Residents

Artists come from all over the U.S. and abroad. I am usually the only composer/musician, as most sites have only one music studio. The others are writers/poets and visual/multidisciplinary artists, who have their own large work spaces. Some residencies accept emerging artists, although most are mid-career and established, many with an MFA. Their ages range from late 20s to over 60. Some centers conduct new-arrival get-togethers, and residents often plan informal trips to restaurants, etc.

## Residency Resources

Here are two sites that can help narrow your search to those that admit musicians and/or composers:

- [transartists.org/en](http://transartists.org/en)
- [artistcommunities.org/directory](http://artistcommunities.org/directory) residencies

Go to the residency's website and look for current open applications and deadlines. Some use their own application forms, but most use the common applications on the sites *Submittable* or *Slide Room*. Create your free account and plug in your information, which will be kept future applications. Your *Submittable* account also has a searchable database for opportunities with their deadlines.

The application fee is usually between \$20 and \$40.

## The Application

Give yourself plenty of time to assemble your materials before the deadline, because if



you miss it, you will not be considered. Read all instructions carefully and follow them exactly. Make sure that your work samples do not include any personal information.

When it comes to your artist statement, it might sound like a cliché, but be yourself. Don't try to impress them with anything except what you really do. Make your statement easily understandable and specific. Inject some of your personality in your real voice, so they get a sense of you as an artist. If you enjoy or derive inspiration from others' writing or visual art, you might mention that.

Regarding your Project Plan, be specific about what you want to accomplish. Here are a couple of examples:

- I will compose several new pieces for publication and use by high school, college, community and professional jazz ensembles (list instrumentation, and explain your involvement in music education).
- In the continuing development of my voice on my instrument (name the instrument), I plan to infuse the 1940s jazz improvisational language of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie with elements of 1980s New York fusion, to raise my craft to a more personal and emotional level.

Your work samples are by far the most important part of your application. Submit as many work samples as allowed. The higher the quality of the recording, the more it will impress the judges. I recommend including diverse samples, as one judge may relate to one piece, and a different judge, to another. If you have a great video which showcases your work without revealing your name or band name, I recommend including it.

If you are applying as a composer, and have an impressive and clear score, I also recommend including a PDF of the score. That said, uploading all audio clips is fine.

Some residencies ask for references. Ask teachers, colleagues, agencies, promoters and anyone who has hired you. Make it easy for them by just asking for a few sentences. Not only should they discuss your craft, but they might consider mentioning that you are not a jerk who will disrupt the harmony among the cohorts.

Make sure your CV or resume is current and update it frequently. Some ask for only one or two pages, so I find it convenient to save multiple versions, differing in length or order of the sections.

Let the institution know what your goals are for any given residency and say what you hope to achieve. This can duplicate much of your artist statement or project/work plan, but be specific about your work goals for your time there. What do you expect to learn or take home from your residency? You can also address how the natural setting, availability of

museums or libraries, glowing recommendations from former residents, etc., make this the perfect residency for you.

## What to Avoid

- Sounding like you just want a vacation by going on about places you want to visit in the area, or friends or relatives you'd like to see during your residency. Remember, you are there to do work that you are unable to do as well at home.
- Long-winded, amorphous, meaningless descriptions, such as "this piece represents the natural world and all it contains," or "my work attempts to decipher the multi-universe and explore the human and non-human conditions which affect communities and their continuity."
- Unreasonable requests, such as an extremely large studio, specific recording or sound equipment, a king bed, a kiss goodnight. However, vegetarian or other specific meal requests and physical accommodations are appropriate and respected.

## Adjudication Process

Jurors generally receive blind applications, with only work samples and descriptions, artist statements and possibly work plans.

Most applications are reviewed by at least two judges in the field. The residency must take into account your availability, so the more flexible you are, the better your chances. In cold climate locations, January and February are the least requested months. Academics and teachers often request summer months.

I have judged many applications from musicians working in classical music, theater or other types of choral settings. Many com-

posers also submit new music, including the use of technology and unconventional sounds and instruments. I haven't seen many jazz applications, so one would hope that if the residency seeks diversity of styles, a jazz-related application might attract particular notice.

## The Rejection Game

Rejection is the name of the game for writers seeking publishers, musicians seeking record labels, artists seeking gallery placement and anyone seeking a job. If you really want a residency, don't be discouraged. Keep writing/playing, and apply to as many residencies as you can for the same or different time periods. Yes, it's a lot of work, but it gets easier every time, as you have all your former materials to tweak for each new application. Jurors are usually rotated year to year, so you can submit the same work samples repeatedly.

All residencies have waiting lists. Artists drop out all the time, and you may be called to fill in, so even after a rejection, there's always hope. Good luck in receiving a fabulous residency. I hope you will love the experience as much as I have. **DB**

---

San Francisco Bay Area tenor saxophonist, flutist and composer Jean Fineberg is broadly experienced in all facets of the music business, from recording/touring with major artists to leading or co-leading her own bands to being a dedicated educator with a special interest in creating opportunities for girls and women in jazz. Her most recent recording is the 2022 release *Jean Fineberg & JAZZphoria* (Pivotal Records), featuring Fineberg's regular octet with special guests. She has attended and recommended the following music composition residencies: Ucross Foundation, Clearmont, Wyoming; Anderson Center for the Arts, Red Wing, Minnesota; Studios of Key West, Key West, Florida; Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Nebraska City, Nebraska (twice); Escape to Create, Seaside, Florida; Helene Wurlitzer Foundation, Taos, New Mexico; Rogers Art Loft, Las Vegas, Nevada; Surel's Place, Boise, Idaho (postponed); Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts, Saratoga, Wyoming (now defunct). Visit her online at [jeanfineberg.com](http://jeanfineberg.com).



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Hank Roberts covers an extensive range of the cello on his improvised solo.

## Hank Roberts' Cello Solo on His Piece 'Open Gate'

One thing I often point out in this column is the soloist's use of their instrument's range. Cellist Hank Roberts, on his composition "Open Gate" from 2011's *Everything Is Alive* (Winter and Winter) certainly makes this an important issue, enough so that I struggled with which clef to write this transcription in (eventually realizing I couldn't get around using both treble and bass). We go from a low B in the bass clef (bar 47) up to a high B $\flat$  in treble clef (bar 28). That's about three octaves.

But it's not just that Roberts uses an extensive range, but that he uses this range throughout. He doesn't start low and work his way up to the high notes, or the opposite. He keeps traversing the majority of his instrument's scope — enough so that this transcriptionist also had trouble deciding when to switch from one clef to another. (By the way: I opted not to use tenor clef, which, although many cellists can read it, most other instrumentalists don't, so I decided to try to make this transcription more accessible for non-cellists).

Roberts' very first phrase ascends over an octave, and his second phrase descends almost two, from the high C $\sharp$  in measure 7 to the low D in the next bar. From that low D he then climbs up a full two-and-a-half octaves, up to a high A $\flat$ . And he does this in a single bar.

Some instrumentalists could be concerned that all this up-and-down might make a listener seasick, but Roberts seems to have an understanding that there are no good or bad sounds, only sounds to be used as tools to achieve an effect.

Another example of this point is Roberts' use of a technique where he moves the bow closer to the bridge, which brings out higher harmonics in the tone, though this usually comes off as a squeaky sound. I've written these with diamond-shaped note heads. I'm not a cellist, so I don't know if there's a conventional means of writing this technique, but I expect there isn't.

Why do I believe that? Well, simply because I am a bassist, and I've had many lessons where when that sound emerged we worked on eradicating it. This sound is not considered valuable in a classical setting (or in a jazz setting, either). In fact, it's to be avoided. But Roberts isn't using this sound accidentally or haphazardly, but systematically. It's a part of his vocabulary, and he's not ashamed to speak in this manner.

Another aspect of this improvisation that is somewhat non-traditional (if such a term can be applied to music like this) is the lack of a strong sense of what the subdivision is. Roberts keeps alternating between duple and

triple subdivisions (we even get some quintuplets in measures 46–47), but they all seem to fit. And just like his use of range and tone, Roberts keeps shifting back and forth. He's adept with both, and uses them to further his statement. He also approaches this aspect in the same manner as he uses range: There isn't a steady build-up and/or step-down, as we've seen in some other transcriptions. Instead, Roberts is continually shifting from larger to smaller subdivisions. Neither approach is good or bad; it's more a matter of what moves the statement towards what the soloist is conveying. In this case, Roberts is using these facets to keep our ears off-balance. In another context, he may choose to do quite the opposite.

Another oddity (or at this point, maybe it's just another thing to be expected) is Roberts' phrasing. He's soloing over a four-bar phrase, and yet he doesn't play many four-bar phrases. His first ascending phrase leads up to the fifth bar, but then it's five bars for the next, resolving onto the second chord (measure 10). His next phrase could be considered four bars, but that means he is once again leading to the second bar rather than the primary one, then what appears to be another five-bar phrase, so now we're resolving to the third measure (bar 19).

Some of the next clear phrase endings happen in measures 27, 34, 39, 43, 50 and 58. These are all on the Fm and A $\flat$  chords, the second and third bars of the four-bar phrase, the spots when one wouldn't conventionally create an arrival point. But Roberts doesn't appear to be creating a conventional statement. The entire mood of this improvisation might be considered murky uncertainty, and all of the above adds to that. (Plus, the chord progression compounds it. I guess the argument could be made that we're in the key of E, but those chords don't seem to fit together in a way that makes harmonic sense.)

I suspect (and Mr. Roberts is welcome to write in and tell me if I'm incorrect) that he's not analytically juggling these elements, but instead he's so comfortable with them that he can just play and let these facets be a natural part of his improvisation, using the sounds that make his point. The approach he takes is determined by what he hears for that composition in that moment, and the elements we're hearing here may not appear in other performances. You're welcome to listen to more of his work and see if you agree with me. **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](http://jimidurso.bandcamp.com).



♩=88 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9)

2:34 Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

6 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

9 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

13 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

17 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

20 G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup>

23 A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup>

27 A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup>

31 A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup>

35 A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9)

38 Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

41 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9)

46 Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

49 E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9)

54 Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9) Fm<sup>9</sup>

59 A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup> E7(♯9)

62 Fm<sup>9</sup> A<sup>♭</sup> G<sup>♭</sup>

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# NS Design NXTa Active Electric Upright

*Precision-Made, Authentic-Feeling Double Bass from Ned Steinberger*

**Y**ou've got to appreciate an industry-leading maker of fine instruments that constantly strives to improve their products. NS Design is just that. The NXTa Electric Upright Bass is an excellent example, with fantastic craftsmanship, finishes, features, playability and sound. Let's face it: When considering a new instrument, it all comes down to playability and sound, doesn't it? Granted, the gorgeous flame maple top of the instrument I play-tested sure was pretty to look at. I've been playing an NS Design WAV Omni Bass (featuring a 34-inch scale like a bass guitar) professionally for about 10 years, and I was very interested to compare the two.

Out of the box, first note plucked, I was amazed by the amount of resonance and sound that could be produced by a solid-body instrument. NS Design founder and master designer Ned Steinberger put it simply: "Everything starts with the string." Available in four- and five-string versions, NS Design Upright Bases have a traditional 42-inch scale akin to a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -size upright bass. According to Steinberger, having enough tension on the strings is the key to creating the right kind of overtone structure, resulting in great tone.

Amplifying this tone is where NS Design has really stepped it up with their proprietary piezo Polar Pickup System. The simple volume and tone rotary knobs bely the versatility of the electronics. This ingenious pickup system has two unique polarities controlled by a toggle switch. The pizzicato mode picks up the vibrations of the string vertically (up and down), which results in a smoother attack and longer delay (not recommended for arco). The arco/percussive setting picks up the vibrations laterally (side to side) and produces a strong attack and quicker delay. This is optimized for arco, but also produces punchier and more percussive sound when played pizzicato.

The NXTa Upright Bass also features a relatively recent development: dual active/passive output modes controlled by a push-pull control on the tone knob. An accompanying AC-to-quarter-inch charger needs just 60 seconds to fuel the capacitor-powered active circuit for 16 hours of play (no more batteries!). Steinberger credits this modern advancement to the innovators at Mi-Si Electronics Design Inc., a company known for acoustic guitar pickups. In active mode, the bass can be plugged directly into any low- or high-impedance device, no direct box necessary. In layman's terms: The active mode seriously kicks butt with its powerful, full tone. No need for a preamp, either (as opposed to my passive-only 2013 WAV Omni Bass, which needs one unless being plugged into a

very powerful bass head). I A/B'd my Omni Bass to the NXTa Upright to compare them in passive mode. Both sound very good, even if on the quieter side, but the NXTa's passive setting seemed to have fuller tone and better response. Steinberger mentioned that proprietary improvements to the Polar Pickup System are ongoing.

Time to talk playability. The string spacing, tension and perfectly sculpted Richlite fingerboard make for a familiar, comfortable and "upright bass appropriate" playing experience. Richlite is a natural fiber composite with physical and sonic characteristics similar to ebony. Thanks to an adjustable bridge and maple neck with truss rod, the bass is adaptable to the bassist's preferences. Dot markers on the fingerboard are extremely helpful for navigation, but if you'd like more help, there is a Bass Neck Heel (Thumbstop) accessory available. Sometimes with EUBs (electric upright basses), you get the feeling like you can't really "dig in." Not the case with the NXTa Upright. During one particularly hard-swinging, seriously grooving show I played this bass on, I had no choice but to dig in. Comments from my bandmates were extremely positive regarding sound and feel.

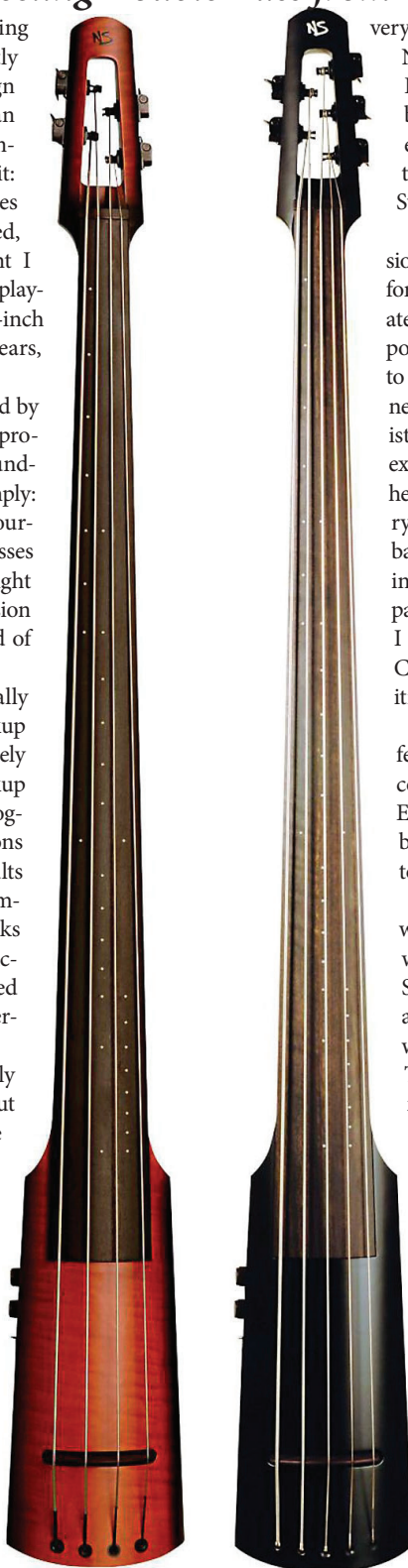
If a player would prefer an even more traditional feel, NS also makes a version called the CR-T, which comes set up with higher action, D'Addario NS Electric Traditional Flat Wound Strings and a small brass reference button located at the back of the neck to indicate the typical D-Neck position.

One final note: The test instrument did not come with the typically included tripod stand, but instead with the optional Bass Endpin Stand and Frame Strap System. The Bass Endpin Stand is very clever and allows the bassist a more traditional angle along with the ability to move around a bit while playing. The Frame Strap System gives the bassist the most mobility, but it took me quite a while to adjust to a comfortable setting. The playing angle of that system is also closer to that of a bass guitar. For most stage and gigging applications, I imagine that the normally included tripod stand would be the best option.

NS Design continues to impress and evolve. Constructed in the Czech Republic, the NXTa Upright Electric Bass (at a street price of \$2,109) is a great option for bassists looking for the portability of an EUB without sacrificing playability and tone. For bassists wanting even more tonal flexibility, the Euro and CR models include EMG pickups and 18-volt active circuitry.

—Jon Paul

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







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Mikayla Smith of King's Academy High School in West Palm Beach, Florida is an outstanding performance winner in the Vocal Jazz Soloist category (High School division) in the 2023 DownBeat Student Music Awards.



## Emmet Cohen

Emmet Cohen's first DownBeat Blindfold Test transpired on the only day in September that didn't involve traveling or a gig for the 33-year-old pianist. Since the onset of the pandemic in spring 2020, Cohen — winner of the 2019 American Pianists Awards — has exponentially expanded his global footprint through 122 livestreamed episodes of *Live From Emmet's Place*, his catchy music show on YouTube. Add to his resume two leader albums for Mack Avenue and five self-released Masters Legacy Series albums, most recently with Houston Person, and you'll get a picture of this pianist's boundless energy. Cohen took the test from the compact fifth-floor Harlem walkup where he tapes *Emmet's Place*.

### Micah Thomas

"Ugetsu" (*Piano Solo*, 345 Records, 2022) Thomas, piano; Cedar Walton, composer. Five stars. Micah Thomas reimagining Cedar Walton's "Fantasy in D" with style and flair, retaining the majesty of the original composition. In my generation, Sullivan Fortner was a game changer in dealing with jazz piano, especially solo piano. Micah came along after Sullivan, internalized his concept, has taken it one step further, and has his own thing, which future generations will have to go through to advance solo jazz piano. It's taking all the styles, from stride to freer stuff, 20th century classical harmonies, strong rhythmic concepts. He's able to orchestrate on the piano with a range of textures, especially in the left hand, where he plays cluster chords using all five notes. He can make music out of someone's original composition that you just put in front of his face, and I've heard him totally hearken back to Tatum on an amazing version of "Don't Blame Me." He draws beauty from the instrument. 5 stars.

### Taylor Eigsti

"Sparky" (*Tree Falls*, GSI, 2022) Eigsti, piano, keyboards, composer; Ben Wendel, saxophone; DJ Ginyard, electric bass; Eric Harland, drums; Charles Altura, guitar. Modern classical music, maybe like Steve Reich, where the melodic piano line repeats and thematically develops ever so slightly to lead your ear on the cyclical but pleasing journey that develops into new sections without ever feeling the need to return to what you've heard before. Beautiful piano playing, amplified with creative post-production, effectively using sound effects and different ways of pulling emotion out of the textural and ambient sounds. Taylor Eigsti. I could tell when he started soloing intensely, really improvising. I've admired him since high school for his touch and command. 5 stars.

### Eric Reed

"Infant Eyes" (*Black, Brown And Blue*, Smoke Sessions, 2023) Reed, piano; Luca Allemano, bass; Reggie Quinerly, drums; Wayne Shorter, composer. "Infant Eyes." Eric Reed. He's one of the most versatile and accomplished pianists of his generation. Along with Herlin Riley, who I've played with a lot, he actually invented a comping style for the various soloists in Wynton Marsalis's group in a myriad of styles, ranging from early jazz to more modern "burnout." "Infant Eyes" has I think nine bars; musicians know it's a hard song to solo over. I love that he simplified that complex Wayne Shorter tune essentially by creating a vamp on the end. It's an original and effective idea. 5 stars.

### Benny Green

"Rouge" (*Solo*, Sunnyside, 2023) Green, piano; Barry Harris, composer. Initially, the orchestration had me thinking the pianist was Barry Harris, but when the improvisation began, I knew it was Benny Green by his unique time feel. Benny is one of my favorite pianists. He



Emmet Cohen, right, with one of his heroes, Houston Person.

inspired me to want to swing when I heard him at a young age, and we later became friends. He always honors the bebop greats, having known them and absorbed everything he could. For the style, he's one of the greatest ever. 5 stars.

### Domi & JD Beck

"Sniff" (*Not Tight*, Blue Note, 2022) DoMi, keyboard, composer; JD Beck, drums. DoMi and JD Beck. Their rhythmic approach and the drum set sound are distinctive, very crisp and clear. It's easy to dial into what they're doing and flow with it. The music is complex, coming from the Herbie vein keyboard-wise. DoMi has complete mastery over the keyboard. It's amazing how she can play bass and improvise like that at the same time. She's always right in the pocket. I think they're great for the music because they're young and sexy and make people love jazz and improvisational music. They sell out large venues even with no vocals. 5 stars.

### Mathis Picard

"The Space Between Breath" (*The Space Between Breath*, La Reserve, 2023) Picard, piano; Joshua Crumbly, bass; Jonathan Pinson, drums. The piano player is totally grooving, with Robert Glasper and Herbie Hancock influences, using varied textures, eliciting sounds that are difficult to get. Very free and relaxed playing, with a wonderful touch. Beautiful electric bass playing and amazing drummer. Super tasteful. 5 stars. [afterwards] This fooled me, because I usually hear Mathis in a more straightahead context. Mathis is one of the few people of my generation who also loves stride piano — Willie "The Lion" Smith and Fats Waller stuff. He's inspired me since he moved to New York.

### Julius Rodriguez

"Elegy (For Cam)" (*Let Sound Tell All*, Verve, 2022) Rodriguez, piano; Philip Norris, bass; Brian Richburg Jr., drums; Hailey Knox, vocals. Beautiful track, which I heard in two parts — an introduction that went into a church vamp, where I found myself tapping my foot. This person has a lot of control and mastery of the style, but the playing seems a bit reserved; the track is more about the composition and the flow and the dance than the improvisation. But a few hints in the left hand show that the pianist is very comfortable with church harmony and movement. I liked the production, the vocals in the ending, how it rolled it out slowly. 5 stars. [afterwards] Julius has a genius musical mind.

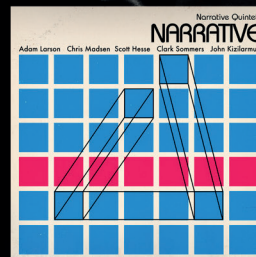
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The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given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



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