59th Annual Critics Poll

The Critics’ Pick for Jazz Artist, Jazz Album and Piano

Jason Moran

Hall of Fame
Abbey Lincoln
Paul Chambers

Poll Winners
Paul Motian
Maria Schneider
Rudresh Mahanthappa
Craig Taborn
Ambrose Akinmusire

66 Album Picks

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59th Annual Critics Poll

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Jazz Artist/Jazz Album/
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Critically acclaimed as a leader
and sought after as a collaborator,
pianist Jason Moran is leading
the way for new innovations in jazz.

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First Take | BY FRANK ALKIER

Critics Endorse Amazing Artistry

It’s an exciting time to love creative music.

There’s no better indicator of that than the 59th Annual DownBeat Critics Poll. Gyrotational changes in the music industry have freed artists (both young and old) to follow their muses, take control and blaze trails fiercely—moreso now than at any other time I can remember in the last 20 years.

This year’s poll offers a snapshot of all of that drive and creativity. Jason Moran serves as our poster child for the trend. A triple-crown winner for Jazz Artist, Jazz Album and Pianist of the Year, he leads the charge, showing every one that the next jazz generation has officially arrived. With his hip-hop persona, love of jazz history and amazing chops, you can’t box him in. This spring, you might have caught him in a classical hall like Chicago’s Symphony Center working with master saxophonist Charles Lloyd’s quartet, or on tour with The Bandwagon at the Melbourne Jazz Festival, or serving up the Fats Waller Dance Party at the Harlem Stage Gatehouse in New York.

Only that kind of remarkable energy and a fantastic recording like the Critics Poll-winning Ten (Blue Note) could combine to surpass the biggest breakout artist of 2011, Esperanza Spalding, who placed second in the Jazz Artist of the Year voting and third in Jazz Album of the Year with Chamber Music Society (Heads Up). In February, when Spalding became the first jazz artist to win the Grammy for Best New Artist—a category that covers all genres of music—the jazz world burst with pride. It sent us to our e-mail, phones, Facebook and Twitter accounts to shout out, “Art 1, Justin Bieber 0.” It was satisfying to see Spalding (the cover subject of DownBeat’s September 2010 issue) get so much media attention. For all of us who know that jazz is a growing, ever-morphing art form, Spalding put to rest any ill-conceived notion that it is dead or dying. Her victory was further evidence that in this volatile digital era, jazz does and will continue to help shape popular culture.

Only the combined energy of both those young artists could top the mother of all birthday parties. Coming in third in the Jazz Artist of the Year voting was Sonny Rollins, who held his 80th birthday bash at New York’s Beacon Theater last September. This already legendary gig was the place to be for jazz fans and musicians alike. Sonny alone would have been plenty. But Sonny doesn’t play fair. Those of us who couldn’t make it to the Beacon lament missing a historic event that featured the Colossus and Ornette Coleman, Roy Haynes, Jim Hall, Roy Hargrove, Russell Malone, and on and on. In any other year, that would be the story of the year. By the way, four tracks from that concert will be appearing on Sonny’s Road Shows, Vol. 2 (Doxy/Emarcy) due out in September.

The beauty of the Critics Poll is that it’s a collection of artists and stories as diverse as the jazz world itself—like first-time winners 29-year-old trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire and 80-year-old drummer Paul Motian. The same is true of 66 album picks listed in the poll. Those, and every artist listed, provide a musical shopping guide that will keep us all busy until, well, the next poll comes around. Enjoy.
A bona fide guitar hero, perennial poll-winner and virtuoso of the highest order, Al Di Meola has also been recognized over the past 30 years as a prolific composer and respected artist with over 20 recordings as a leader. Following 2008’s triumphant 25-year reunion tour by Return To Forever, the trailblazing guitarist gets back to playing his own music on his new Telarc recording. A pioneer of blending world music and jazz, Di Meola’s current release delivers hauntingly beautiful music which extends and complements the evocative, compelling tone of his guitar. Features guest appearances by the Strike String Quartet and a wealth of Di Meola’s contemporaries, including legendary jazz bassist Charlie Haden, drummer Peter Erskine and Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba, among others.

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7/22 FRIEDRICHSHAFEN, GERMANY
7/24 ANTALYA, TURKEY
7/25 CESME, TURKEY
7/29 LA CORUNA, SPAIN
8/2 RHEINHAG, FRANCE
8/5 LONDONBURY, NH - TUPELO MUSIC HALL
8/6 NEWPORT RI - NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL
8/7 BETHLEHEM, PA - MUSKFEST CAFE
8/11 SERAVALLE, ITALY
8/11 ST. MONINZ, SWITZERLAND
8/12 REGGIO CALABRIA, ITALY
8/14 CESENA, ITALY
8/14 FIGIOLUNO, ITALY
8/15 MONTPELLIER, FRANCE
8/16 BREMEN, GERMANY
8/16 WEIZ, AUSTRIA
8/19 VILLACH, AUSTRIA
8/20 KRACZTL, GERMANY
8/21 PREROV, CZECH REPUBLIC
8/22 RENESSE, HOLLAND
8/23 BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
8/24 BREGENZ, GERMANY
8/25 RENGELO, HOLLAND
8/26 MUNICH, GERMANY
8/27 ISTANBUL, TURKEY
8/27 CLEM, FRANCE
8/27 CONFANS-SAINTE-NORINE, FRANCE
8/27 GISHABRUCK, GERMANY
Where’s Shorty?
I am very surprised that, year after year, many very good jazz musicians are added to the DownBeat Hall of Fame, but never the wonderful Shorty Rogers, who was a real giant. Rogers was a fantastic musician, spirit of the West Coast movement, composer, arranger and an original trumpet player with a very personal style, sympathetic ear and great instrumental technique. He’s been gone for 17 years, so maybe for the next Hall of Fame?

MAURICE CREUVEN
MAURICE.CREUVEN@GMAIL.COM

James Farm Didn’t Let Me Down
Take it with a grain of salt—that is my approach to reviews. But, John McDonough's three-star review of James Farm by Joshua Redman/Aaron Parks/Matt Penman/Eric Harland is more like a rock in my shoe ("Reviews," July). McDonough has a bias against plain brown wrappers and names he doesn’t understand. Maybe if the album cover had a black-and-white photo of a leaf in a pool of icy water—and the title of the CD was February and the label was from northern Europe, and the name of the group was “Vonnegut Revisited,” then he may have found the music more to his liking. I admit to my bias: I am a huge fan of Parks, Penman and Harland, especially Parks’ 2008 album Invisible Cinema. I have never purchased any disappointing music by Joshua Redman. I highly recommend this CD. My yardstick is repeated plays, and I have played James Farm many times, and I have yet to hear uninteresting music.

DON SEXTON
COLUMBIA CITY, IN.

Editor’s note: Keep an eye out for our feature story on James Farm in the September issue.

Hard-Bop Not Forgotten
I was surprised to discover a five-star review of trumpeter Brian Lynch’s latest release, Unsung Heroes (“Reviews,” July). Not that he didn’t deserve it, but it’s extremely rare these days to find a hard-bop CD receiving such accolades. I had the good fortune of seeing him perform with the Toshiko Akiyoshi–Lew Tabackin Big Band at the 1999 Monterey Jazz Festival. Lynch started off his featured solo with one of the most warm and beautiful flugelhorn like tones I’ve ever heard, but by the time he got near the end it sounded like Lee Morgan on steroids. The journey from point A to B was one of the most incredible rides I’ve ever been on. It’s comforting to know your magazine still considers mainstream jazz relevant.

GORDON WEBB
SAN JOSE, CALIF.

Long Live Gil Scott-Heron
Thank you for posting the Classic Interview with the late Gil Scott-Heron on downbeat.com. It was actually this 1975 interview that turned me on to him and his music (It was my first subscription to DownBeat). We got to see him perform in Birmingham, Ala., and I think it was around the time of the interview. Long live his music.

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Latin Uproar

Musicians protest Latin jazz category’s Grammy elimination

The Recording Academy’s reorganization of the Grammy Awards in April erased the Latin jazz category, along with several other prizes for such genres as Hawaiian, Native American, and zydeco/Cajun. In total, the number of categories has been slimmed from 109 to 78. The action also impacted R&B, gospel, classical, and jazz (there’s no longer a contemporary jazz slot, which like Latin jazz, has been folded into the general jazz category). But the elimination of the Latin jazz category in particular stirred a hornet’s nest of protest among Latin musicians.

Oakland, Calif.-based percussionist John Santos, a member of the Recording Academy and a five-time Grammy nominee, drafted an e-mail blast alerting the music community about the exclusion, writing that the act was a “travesty,” and followed that up with a later missive stating how “highly insulting [it was] to have out-of-touch individuals suddenly decide that Latin jazz is no longer a legitimate art form when the creativity and activity in the field are at an all-time high.”

Santos said that the Recording Academy’s action “shows a real lack of empathy for cultural creativity. It’s shameful how diversity is being diminished. It’s particularly insulting to the pioneers of the style.”

In New York, percussionist Bobby Sanabria (an Academy member who was nominated twice in the Latin jazz category) stated in an e-mail that the Grammy-producing organization doing this “behind the backs of we, the voting membership, is an infamia.”

Later, when asked why this was such an insult, Sanabria said, “It’s a symbolic racial insensitivity of this day and age. Look, we have a multi-cultural president, but the Recording Academy is turning its head away from cultural diversity in general and specifically the majestic history of Latin jazz that was created in this country.”

The Recording Academy heightened its recognition of that history in 1995, when Latin jazz was officially recognized as a genre that would be granted a Grammy. Pianist Eddie Palmieri had campaigned for the category and received early support from Santos. In 2001, the category name was changed to Best Latin Jazz Album.

The current controversy could serve to educate more people about genre, or at least raise awareness generally. Sanabria noted that there may be a “silver lining in this dark cloud” in that “the jazz community at large will unite behind this issue.” In keyboardist Rachel Z’s open letter to Recording Academy President/CEO Neil Portnow, she took issue with consolidating Latin jazz and contemporary jazz by saying that her New School students “who spend their life dreaming of a Grammy” now face “only one jazz category.”

According to the Recording Academy website, the plan is to have four jazz categories for next year’s Grammy Awards: Best Improvised Jazz Solo; Best Jazz Vocal Album; Best Jazz Instrumental Album; and Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album.

When Portnow announced the Grammy downsizing, he told Billboard that the consolidation was “a vision of an overview structure … that gives us some consistency.” Bill Freimuth, vice president of the awards, said that it’s not a matter of elimination, but consolidation. While saying that Latin jazz has been successful as a sub-genre and has been active in performances, “in terms of recordings, we’re not seeing a lot of submissions,” he said. “Latin jazz may be thriving, but it’s not reflected in the recordings.” Categories formerly had a submission requirement of 25 albums, however, that number is now 40. Freimuth says Latin jazz has been averaging 30 submissions over the last five years.

Freimuth explained that the changes were suggested by subcommittee recommendations, and then voted on by the national board of trustees. “Maybe we made a mistake,” Freimuth said. “Maybe if we receive 60, 70, 100 Latin jazz albums, we’ll reconsider the category. Everything is up for grabs.”
Eugene Edward “Snooky” Young, one of the great lead trumpeters in big band jazz, died May 11 in Newport Beach, Calif. He was 92 and the cause was complications of a lung disease. Young was named an NEA Jazz Master in 2009. He had played right up to his last gig in December.

Young was reared in his family’s band in Dayton, Ohio. Gerald Wilson was an 18-year-old trumpeter when he first heard him in 1939, with the Chick Carter band in Flint, Mich. “He was one of the featured artists,” Wilson recalls, “and he’d come down from the trumpet section in front of the band for his number and he ended the tune by hitting a double B-flat!”

Young joined the Jimmie Lunceford band in ’39, and stayed three years. He then moved on to the Count Basie Orchestra, until ’42 (and later rejoined from 1957–’62). Though he was a soloist out of the Louis Armstrong/Roy Eldridge continuum, his clean section playing put him into the lead trumpet role, which the modest Young never sought.

“He was always my favorite lead with the Basie band,” said section mate Clark Terry. “He could stylize the band with his lead playing—he knew just when to hit the short notes, the long notes, when to hold the notes and when to shake the notes.”

Young moved into the “Tonight Show” band in 1962, and became a charter member in the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Orchestra. His recordings included sessions with a range of musicians, including Steely Dan, Jimmy Smith and Quincy Jones. He remained with the “Tonight Show” band until 1992.

“He was about the most important member of the band, one of those very rare trumpet players who was a fine lead player but also a great soloist,” said drummer Ed Shaughnessy. “When he played lead, he had a very personal way of phrasing and a special capacity for details.”

Doc Severinsen added, “When Snooky passed, the music world lost the greatest first trumpet player of all time and one of the world’s greatest jazz stylists. The world lost a classy man, the epitome of a true gentleman, and I lost my best friend. There will never be another like him.”

― Kirk Silsbee
Bluesy Dupree Dominated Sessions By The Thousands

Guitarist Cornell Dupree’s style should have been widely recognized: He had his own way of playing blues-drenched lead and rhythm lines simultaneously. But he performed on so many recordings that his ubiquity may have contributed to his lack of due recognition. At the time of his death on May 8 at age 68 of emphysema, he had worked on more than 2,500 sessions with artists ranging from Aretha Franklin and Donny Hathaway to Archie Shepp and Miles Davis.

Dupree grew up in Fort Worth, Texas, and played blues and r&b in bars until saxophonist King Curtis—who also hailed from the state—brought him to New York to work alongside him in his own band and in a host of the city’s top recording sessions. He began accompanying Franklin in 1967 (that’s him on “Respect”) and played on her albums until the mid-’70s.

“His magic was always being there and being out of the way at the same time,” said drummer Bernard Purdie, who worked with Dupree since the late-’60s. “Having that rhythm going, that little bit of lead he would stick in when Aretha wasn’t singing. When she was breathing, humming, thinking something, he’d be there.”

During the ’70s, Dupree recorded albums under his own name, such as Teasin’ (Atlantic), and co-led the jazz-funk band Stuff. He continued to tour internationally, usually with other prominent jazz and soul instrumentalists who also had worked for Atlantic, including Les McCann.

“They worshipped him in Japan,” McCann said. “Whenever he came, the place was packed. They loved what he did. The biggest hit he had over there was ‘Something.’ When he played it, you could hear them crying in the audience.”

—Aaron Cohen
Norwegian Bassist Per Zanussi Brings Inward Focus To Conservatory Commissions, Expressive Collaborations

The Trondheim Conservatory of Music, located in Norway’s northern region, has been celebrated for its adventurousness: It’s hard to find a strong Norwegian jazz artist who didn’t study at the school. A loose band made up of alumni has been involved in projects in which commissioned artists create music with support from the school and the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra. In April, bassist Per Zanussi’s stunning music with the group was released on Morning Songs (MNJ).

Zanussi made a name for himself as a founding member of the electronic jazz combo Wibutee, beginning in the late 90s. After playing on the band’s best album, Playmachine (Jazzland), in 2004 he quit to concentrate on upright bass and his quintet, the Zanussi Five. The bassist wrote nifty post-bop vehicles for a three-sax frontline. His inventive, resourceful arrangements gave the outfit a larger sound than one would expect, and the process helped prepare him for Trondheim’s 2008 commission.

“If you write for four different voices in a quintet—based on three saxes that do different things—it’s fairly simple to expand it,” Zanussi said. “I’ve always been thinking a little bit like that, but I don’t know if I had a wish to do a bigger group.”

This project premiered at the Trondheim Jazz Festival in the summer of 2008. Zanussi originally conceived of the effort as an expansion of his quintet, but in the end it took on a life of its own, with richer voicings, extra counterpoint and increased textural density. The stormy opening piece, “The Afreet,” was created for this project and ended up getting stripped down for the 2010 Zanussi Five album Ghost Dance (Moserobie).

Since completing the project, he has collaborated with Stavanger Kitchen Orchestra and created elaborate arrangements for a performance by Nils Petter Molvaer and Jan Bang with the Bergen Big Band. But the most satisfying effort took place earlier this year when his quintet celebrated its 10th anniversary by adapting its songbook for a 13-member lineup of the group. A recording of a January performance in Oslo is slated for release on Moserobie later this year.

While Zanussi’s quintet remains his primary ensemble, he continues to play in the improv-heavy Tresspass Trio, led by Swedish reedist Martin Küchen, along with drummer Raymond Strid. The band is making its second album for Clean Feed this summer, and Zanussi intends to form another group with Wibutee saxophonist Hakon Kornstad. But he’s intent on keeping focused.

“I’m not comfortable having 20 bands that I have to book myself,” he explained. “You need time to write, to think.”

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Photo: David Bowes

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Saxophonist Ellery Eskelin Goes Back To Organ-ic Beginnings

Twenty albums and more than 20 years into his career, tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin is taking a detour. After concentrating on free improvisation in avant-garde settings, Eskelin has recorded an organ trio album featuring Great American Songbook standards. That album, *Trio New York* (Prime Source), is hardly conventional. Backed by organ player Gary Versace and drummer Gerald Cleaver, the tenor player doesn’t let the music or instrumentation preempt his penchant for free-jazz. While recording the album in February, Eskelin never identified the tunes in the group’s small repertoire; his sidemen merely reacted.

The album’s five tracks encompass 75 minutes and rely more on intuition than the bluesy grooves typical of organ combos. You have to listen hard to recognize “Off Minor” and “How Deep Is The Ocean?”

“That process is more akin to my approach to free improvisation,” Eskelin said. “The big difference with this record is that we were basically doing free improv with a lot of harmonic information.”

Versace added, “I just knew before I ever heard him play those tunes that he could bring a fresh approach to playing that music if he wanted to, because his playing is so informed; it’s so melodic.”

*Trio New York* marks a return to Eskelin’s roots. His mother, Bobbie Lee, was an organ player who performed professionally in the early 1960s. Eskelin grew up in Baltimore and sometimes accompanied Lee at house parties. His early influences included tenor players such as Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt and Mickey Fields, a Baltimore legend. After college, Eskelin toured with trombonist Buddy Morrow’s big band and then moved to New York in 1983, where his gigs included Brother Jack McDuff’s organ combo.

“At that time I really wanted to get into the jazz scene,” recalled Eskelin. But he soon grew tired of performing in conventional small groups. In 1987 Eskelin experienced an “artistic awakening” during an afternoon jam session. Jazz soon became taboo—even to listen to. “Long story short, I wound up getting with like-minded musicians who were doing (their) own music and realized that that was the way to go.”

Eskelin experienced another epiphany in 2008 when his mother asked him to store her Hammond B-3 organ at his apartment in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood. The presence of the instrument in Eskelin’s living room brought back memories; he began inviting organ players to his apartment for informal sessions.

He met Versace in early 2009 during a gig with John Hollenbeck, and the two began practicing that spring. The first edition of the trio debuted in May 2010 at Rosie O’Grady’s in New York. Eskelin also started playing a vintage 1927 Conn. “I’m continuing to work on my sound,” he said. “The organ trio project comes out of that.”

—Eric Fine
New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Strengthens Ties To Haitian Culture

“Haiti and New Orleans: twin sisters separated at birth,” tweeted Port-au-Prince-based bandleader Richard A. Morse, shortly before the 2011 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival kicked off on April 29. The Haitian programming series at this year’s Jazz Fest did more to justify his assertion than any similar showcase in recent history. Featuring some of Haiti’s biggest musical exports, the bill presented a taste of the rara, mizik rasin and other musical genres that thrive there. During the 10-day festival, a more overarching goal was achieved, as evidence of deep connections between the Crescent City and Haiti cropped up all over the festival grounds.

In the Economy Hall tent, clarinetist Dr. Michael White traded Caribbean concepts with the Haitian-born, New Orleans-based conductor Jean Montes as Emeline Michel’s satiny contralto unerringly tackled locally bred classics like “Eh La Bas” with the kind of aplomb that earned her the moniker “Queen of Haitian Song.” Tabou Combo shared the Congo Square stage with Delfeayo Marsalis. During the Neville Brothers’ annual closer, Cyril Neville led a breezy rendition of “Ayiti,” a socially conscious number about Haiti from the mid-’90s.

A closer look at the two cultures revealed even more deeply woven common threads.

Alto saxophonist—and Big Chief of the Congo Nation—Donald Harrison Jr. delivered one of the fest’s most inspired Mardi Gras Indian-led performances. He devoted half of his opening day set to soulful, jazz orchestra-friendly arrangements of originals and more standard fare, such as John Coltrane’s “Mr. P.C.” Harrison then swapped his white summer suit for his Big Chief best. Suddenly, the stage was aloft with chromatic plumes, as members of his Indian group appeared onstage to pitch in on percussion and backup vocal duties on a series of re-imagined classics from the Mardi Gras Indian musical cannon.

The focal points of Harrison’s bright red costume were beaded patches, each of which illustrated an image that referenced Indian culture. Across the fairgrounds, similar patches souped up the finery onstage at a multi-generational Golden Sioux set. Inside a tent dubbed the Haitian Pavilion, 54-year-old vodou flag artist Marie-Lissa Lafontant stitched miniscule, brightly colored beads onto a patch of fabric outlined with images of an altar, sacred objects and two worshippers. As it turns out, the spiritual and ancestral themes represented on Indian costumes—and the beadwork used to depict them—often parallel the process and imagery of Haitian flags.

The Haitian Pavilion also showcased vodou drumming, the rhythms of which create the basis for the mizik rasin of Boukman Eksperyans, the festival’s best-known Haitian representative. Led by the husband and wife team of Lolo and Manze Beaubrun, the band’s joyful, uptempo international beats were a magnet for dancers who’d warmed up at the pavilion’s drumming demonstrations. But the polish that comes with touring the world distanced Boukman from Morse’s RAM.

Most years, the second-line marching groups that perform while winding around the festival grounds are New Orleans-based brass, traditional or Indian outfits. This year’s parade lineup got a boost from the common-minded RAM and DJA-Rara, both of which drew rapturous crowds, eager to revel in the bands’ kinetic rhythm patterns.

—Jennifer Odell

Eric Reed Revisits Clifford Jordan’s 1974 Landmark Album Glass Bead Games

One of jazz’s more predictable occupational hazards may be the ease with which major figures can fall into obscurity. That’s what makes pianist Eric Reed’s sojourns into repertory so necessary. As Reed’s quartet got situated onstage at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola on May 19, the panoramic view of the New York skyline behind them could have been read as a signifier—an indication of just how much the scene has changed in the 18 years since the death of Clifford Jordan, whose music was the...
Hollywood Tribute To Billy Higgins Lauds Drummer's Hometown Contributions

The jazz world knew Billy Higgins as one of the most recorded jazz drummers of all time. In his hometown of Los Angeles, he also was revered and cherished for his work—shop and performance space, the World Stage. Higgins underwrote it with earnings from his studio recordings and tours, providing free training for developing players. His caché encouraged the greatest touring jazz musicians to play and donate their time to youngsters, making the World Stage the jewel of the Leimert Park renaissance of the past 30 years.

Broadcaster Maggie LePique produced a tribute to him on May 1 at Catalina's in Hollywood, inaugurating her "Hero Awards." The evening's musical director, pianist John Beasley, collated a varied roster of participants that hinted at the sweep of Higgins' career. Charles Lloyd, who first played with Higgins in 1957, improvised a plaintive alto saxophone solo rumination. Drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith joined in, setting a rhythm over which Kamau Daáood's ecstatic spoken-word piece about jazz drummers charged and danced. Doors drummer John Densmore added hand drums and recited Ethridge Knight's "The Bones of My Father."

Guitarist Kenny Burrell, head of the University of California Los Angeles jazz program where Higgins taught, expertly supported, then played an incisive brush solo. Burrell related how Higgins privately played guitar and admired Brazilian music, so they cobbled together a blues with a bauão beat.

Flugelhorn player Richard Grant Jr., trombonist Phil Ranelin, tenor saxophonist Charles Owens and bassist Trevor Ware acknowledged Higgins' tenure as Blue Note house drummer with "Speedball." Owens sounded particularly strong and exciting as a soloist and Smith relished his role as catalyst.

Excessive pedal effects marked New York drummer Will Calhoun's solo electronic drum piece. He fared better as an ensemble player to saxophonist Walter Beasley, bassist James Leary and Daáood on Ornette Coleman's "Una Muy Bonita." George Duke rendered a rare acoustic piano accounting of his impressive straightahead jazz chops. Stanley Clarke, on contrabass, likewise astonished with his pizzicato tour de force on a bright "Autumn Leaves."

Vocalist Dwight Trible defied the room's spotty acoustics and rendered a thrilling baritone rendition of Duke Ellington's "In The Beginning God." Percussionist Leon Mobley joined as Trible brought the whole house together on "Grandma's Hands."

—K. Leander Williams

The focus of the evening. When the Chicago-bred tenor saxophonist passed away in 1993 he left behind a big band that was a key Monday-night destination for discerning New Yorkers. Today, even the club that hosted it, Condon's, is gone.

To anchor its re-evaluation of Jordan's work, Reed's quartet reached back to his Glass Bead Games, a landmark album from 1974. Saxophonist Seamus Blake opened up the Jordan original "Powerful Paul Robeson" in much the same way the tune announced the original LP. Reed's accompaniment shimmered alongside Blake's post-Coltrane fluidity. Glass Bead Games was an acoustic anomaly amid the fusion that ruled the mid-'70s, but its subtleties didn't reveal themselves at Dizzy's until drummer Billy Drummond began doubling up the snare-to-cymbal ratio during Blake's third chorus. It's a strategy gleaned from the album's drummer, Billy Higgins.

The set took off with Drummond's prod- ding. The rhythmically charged cycle of notes from Jordan's dedication to another of jazz's unsung composers—"Cal Massey"—turned into a burst of chord clusters as Reed's solo vied with Drummond's forward motion. In contrast to the record, where it's a quickie groove exercise clocking in at 2:43, the solos by Reed and Drummond turned it into a workout so epic that two ballads serve as the breather. When the set closed out with Blake testifying on Jordan's "Highest Mountain," repertoire began to feel like church.

—Kirk Silsbee
The joint is jumpin’. A rowdy crowd is dancing, just like it did in the 1930s when Fats Waller cast his magical spell of invigorating music and playful entertainment for an exhilarated audience ready to celebrate.

But instead of a Depression-era speakeasy or a back-in-the-day neighborhood rent party, this whirling bash, starring pianist Jason Moran and vocalist/bassist Meshell Ndegeocello, combusts at New York’s Harlem Stage Gatehouse in the first set of a two-night collaboration commissioned by the performance center. With a supporting cast of sidemen and dancers totaling 15, it’s the Fats Waller Dance Party, an uptown extravaganza that not only pays homage to the piano dynamo, but also channels his spirit. The evening’s music is an intoxicating brew—made of hip-hop, funk, house, r&b and some Afrobeat grooves sampled from a mixtape—served up with New Orleans shadings, rock intensity, compact stride keyboard breaks and soul-jazz urbanity.

In an e-mail he sent out to drive traffic to the May 13 event (at $10 a ticket), Moran explained that he and Ndegeocello “are reworking about 15 Fats Waller songs into new ‘club’ versions… Fats’ ‘Joint Is Jumpin’ becomes our ‘House Is Housin’.’”

Nowhere audibly present is the pre-bop, pre-swing style that Waller delivered, as his best-known songs are being shredded and unrecognizably reshaped into jazz-infused, pop-driven rhythms. Anyone expecting straightahead versions of Waller classics like “Honeysuckle Rose,” “Your Feet’s Too Big” and “Jitterbug Waltz” might even be appalled by the deconstructions, but for the nearly 200 people in the cross-generational, racially diverse audience who push back chairs and pack the dance floor, these electrifying postmodern musical mashups trigger elemental merrymaking.

“I don’t ever get to play party music,” says the 36-year-old Moran, who for
most of the set donned a surreal, larger-than-life, papier-maché mask of Waller—custom designed by Haitian artist Didier Civil—complete with fedora, cigarette hanging from his lip, happy-go-lucky smile and those trademark high-arching eyebrows. “I like fun, just like a lot of musicians like fun. But we’re rarely put into a situation where we can cut loose and get people dancing so they can have fun with us. I wanted to do something where I could watch how people interacted with the music, to be a part of it myself, dancing along as I played—just like the dance atmosphere at Smalls’s Paradise in Harlem where Fats played in the ’20s and ’30s.”

Discussing the shows a few days later in his apartment a couple of blocks away from Harlem Stage, Moran—this year’s trifecta winner in DownBeat’s Critics Poll, earning top jazz artist and pianist honors as well as his latest CD, Ten (Blue Note), scoring for best jazz album—is still charged up by the event and his newfound exploration of Waller’s music. He’s an adventure seeker, ears wide open to new artistic challenges both as a leader of his decade-plus Bandwagon trio—with bassist Tarus Mateen and drummer Nasheet Waits—and as a sideman in numerous, disparate bands, from the Charles Lloyd New Quartet and Dave Holland’s Overture Quartet to the burgeoning hip-hop and r&b-influenced group ERIMAJ, helmed by drummer Jamire Williams, a fellow Houston native.

For Moran, who was awarded a prestigious 2010 MacArthur Fellowship, the Waller re-scramble—creating the contemporary out of the traditional—plays into his wheelhouse of musicianship. Even though he’s one of the top guns in the thirtysomething jazz camp, Moran says, “I don’t want to be defined solely by what I do as a jazz musician at a club or a festival. That’s not all of me. It’s not even close. The hardest thing to hurdle for me is to avoid being stuck in a genre and a discipline. Once you find your identity in your craft, it’s hard to not let that identity keep you imprisoned. Tons of musicians who I love are imprisoned by their identity. That can be totally fine because they are so amazing in their technique, but for me, I’m a little too restless for that.”

He reflects on the Waller party, during which he alternated between a piano and a Fender Rhodes, saying that he set out to design a social event where he could more fully participate with the audience. “It was great to see how people interacted with the music,” he says. “I don’t want people to think I’m a certain way, that I play in a serious manner while people to think I’m a certain way, that I play in a serious manner while people are imprisoned by their identity. That can be totally fine because they are so amazing in their technique, but for me, I’m a little too restless for that.”

Moran’s don’t-fence-me-in philosophy has been on exhibit in his eight Blue Note albums, beginning with his auspicious 1999 debut, Soundtrack To Human Motion, teeming with compositional complexity and performance exuberance, and continuing with his 2000 sophomore outing, Facing Left, which signaled the startup of Bandwagon. He threw curvballs followed by changeups. “I don’t want any of my records to sound like one style throughout,” he told me early in his career. “That’s why I choose different grooves and songs, tunes that are sensitive and slow as well as pieces that are abstract and fast. The approach I want to take with my records is to give the listener a variety of grooves, concepts and composers.”

Two years later, in another conversation, Moran expounded further: “I want to express what’s meaningful. I’m not into gimmicks. I want to make truthful music that’s invigorating, maintains a cutting edge, takes on different shades.”

Moran’s recording oeuvre illustrates how he has continued to chart a singular path. He offered a solo album (2002’s Modernistic) and a concept disc (2003’s The Bandwagon: Live At The Village Vanguard), followed by Same Mother, from 2005, which featured the trio augmented by guest guitarist Marvin Sewell. Changing gears again, in 2006, Moran—by this time frequently sought out by commissioning performance organizations—released Artist In Residence, which was a provocative sampling of works for such organizations as the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis and Jazz at Lincoln Center.

Four years later, Moran returned with Ten, a 10-year Bandwagon anniversary project of tunes that range from the blues—“Blue Blocks” came from the show Live: Time, which was inspired by the quilters of Gee’s Bend, Ala.—to Jimi Hendrix (“Feedback Pt. 2”), a Monterey Jazz Festival commission wherein Moran sampled the guitarist’s scorching feedback from the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival and built a ballad based on it. Also included is “Pas De Deux—Lines Ballet,” a collaboration with choreographer Alonzo King’s Lines Ballet company, two different takes (slow and speedy) on classical composer Conlon Nancarrow’s “Study No. 6,” as well as tributes to his heroes: Thelonious Monk (a hip-hop-influenced montage version of “Crepuscule With Nellie”), Jaki Byard (“To Bob Vatel Of Paris”) and Andrew Hill (an anthemic piece Moran co-wrote with the pianist, “Play To Live”). In addition to his tune “Old Babies,” inspired by the 2007 birth of his identical twin sons, Moran covers “Nobody,” the ditty written by black vaudevillian comic Bert Williams that visual artist Glenn Ligon turned him on to. (Ligon had commissioned Moran to write a score of the tune for his video exhibit The Death Of Tom at New York’s Museum of Modern Art.)

Back in 2000 in the liner notes to Facing Left, Moran wrote, “We’re freely expressive and not rigid…. We don’t quite know where we’re going, but we’re facing left and headed in the right direction.” How does that resonate today? “It’s still the same,” he says. “I think I took enough wrong turns that I’m still looking to go in that right direction.”

Moran grew up in Houston, where his parents filled the house with jazz, pop, r&b and classical music from their eclectic record collection (Stevie Wonder, Maria Callas, Olivier Messiaen). He started playing piano at age 6 on an upright that he still has in his New York apartment as his go-to instrument even though it’s out of tune. “I like a good instrument," he says, “but I don’t think I’m ready for one.” He adds with a laugh, “Besides, I’m not a practiceaholic.”

In a 2002 interview, Moran told me that while he grew to resent taking classical lessons, he experienced a sudden piano conversion, thanks to his love of hip-hop. “Groups like De La Soul in the late ‘80s were using breakbeat samples by people like Horace Silver and Monk,” he
said. “So I’d go break hunting, looking on the back of a rap album to see who got the credit. Sometimes a song would be named, so I’d search for the original version. It became like a treasure hunt or like finding gold at the end of the rainbow. When I tracked down the original, I dissected it.”

As a result Moran began to learn jazz standards based on his newfound curiosity. Soon, he started digging through his father’s jazz albums to find as many different versions of a song as he could. “For example, I’d learn ‘All The Things You Are,’ then find a Jim Hall record with that song,” he explained. “Listening to and studying records was my jazz ed. I think it’s the best way rather than having a teacher tell you what’s best to listen to. I was using my intuition to discover what was genuine.”

Moran’s “discovery” of Monk came while attending Houston’s famed High School for the Performing and Visual Arts—the breeding ground for such future jazz stars as Eric Harland, Robert Glasper, Kendrick Scott and Jamire Williams, and where Moran has established a scholarship fund for aspiring musicians. “I never heard anything like him,” Moran said. “Monk did everything so different from the way a pianist is supposed to play, like the way he hit notes: Bling! And the way his left hand was like dignified ghetto: Booong, boom! He showed me what everybody wasn’t doing, how they weren’t composing rhythmically.”

After listening to every Monk record he could get his hands on—and copying his solos and comping styles—Moran moved on to McCoy Tyner, Phineas Newborn, Horace Silver, Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, Bud Powell and Andrew Hill. He recalled, “It was the best groundwork. I took it all in, threw it into a bag and now it’s starting to form into something.”

Moran considers his true jazz “beginning” to be when he moved to New York in 1993 to study with Byard at the Manhattan School of Music. “The first time I saw Jaki perform was shortly before school started,” he recalls. “He was playing at the club Trumpets in New Jersey, and he had this big band. During the show he was having fun and blowing whistles. I thought, Man, this guy is out. I loved his sense of humor. I have this image of him: He’s wearing a tie with planets on it, his hair is in complete disarray and he’s peering through his glasses at all this music on the piano. It’s perfect Jaki.”

Moran laughs, and then adds, “He was a very genuine cat. The first time I played with him in a lesson, he interrupted me and taught me something important. He said, ‘You play too goddamn loud. What do you think this is? A Chick Corea–Herbie Hancock record?’” Moran says that he often came in for his lesson and just asked Byard questions. “He gave me so much. He taught me about the old-school guys and always stressed that the new comes through the old.”

Meanwhile Moran started toying with finding his own voice, not wanting to come off sounding like other pianists he admired, such as Kenny Barron and Wynton Kelly. “I thought there was a different way for me,” he says, “so I took the Monk road. I met with a lot of resistance from teachers. One teacher even told me that I’d be lucky if I could get $20 gigs if I played that way. But Jaki supported me and totally wiped that guy clean.”

Moran’s big break came in 1997 when he was enlisted by saxophonist Greg Osby for a European tour. He came recommended by Osby drummer Harland, a Houston friend he’s known since they were 13. Osby had been trying out well-known guitarists and pianists, but as he tells it, “They were really good, but they fell short of interpreting my music. So Eric told me that his homie would fit my music like a glove.” Osby called Moran and asked him to come check out one of his shows. Afterwards they agreed to discuss the music by phone. “We talked for four or five hours,” says Osby. “Jason won me over by that conversation even though I had never seen or heard him play. But I was blown away by the scope of his interests, his knowledge and his reverence. We talked about composition, but Jason was also interested in discussing art, real estate, the stock market. He was ahead of the curve, and it turns out, he was the answer.”

They flew off to Europe as a quartet, along with Harland and bassist Calvin Jones, and the die was cast. (A YouTube clip of the quartet’s second show together in Berlin shows how in the pocket Moran was with his angular, melodic solo.) “Right off, we formed a kindred connection,” says Osby. “We were like brothers from another mother. He anticipated, then finished phrases, and he played with so much curve and unpredictability.”
Jazz Album of the Year

1. **Jason Moran, *Ten* (BLUE NOTE)** 66 votes

Celebrating a decade with The Bandwagon, Moran’s *Ten* was this year’s favorite among DownBeat critics. (See page 20.)

2. **Joe Lovano Us Five, *Bird Songs* (BLUE NOTE)** 47 votes

Lovano’s latest Blue Note release—the sophomore outing of his dynamic intergenerational ensemble Us Five—breaks the mold of Charlie Parker tribute records. *Bird Songs* is a thoroughly modern, thoughtful look at one of the most influential figures in jazz history by one of the most important voices in the music today. Us Five takes Bird out of the museum and places him in the context of a living, breathing continuum.


The bassist and blossoming vocalist creates a modern image of a chamber group with classical string trio arrangements complementing her own jazz/folk/pop compositions. Co-producer/co-arranger Gil Goldstein and vocalists Milton Nascimento and Gretchen Parlato contribute their genius and elegance to Spalding’s ever-deepening musical vision.

4. **Rudresh Mahanthappa & Bunky Green, *Apex* (PI)** 22 votes

Described by critic John Corbett as “a great intergenerational conference call,” *Apex* brings together rising star Indo-bopper Mahanthappa and living legend Green for an alto sax summit of sheer invention and discovery.


A collection of intimate duets recorded in 2007, *Jasmine* features collaborators Jarrett and Haden, who hadn’t worked together since the 1970s. The pristine, unprocessed sound of this recording makes it feel like you’re sitting right there in the same room with the pianist and bassist as they bring to life a program of romantic standards.


The beloved saxophonist’s last CD release before his death last December, *4B* showcases Moody at his best: approaching a conventional mix of jazz standards with easygoing, straight-ahead swing. The recording is also a great showcase for veteran pianist Kenny Barron, a supreme accompanist and soloist who first played with Moody 50 years ago in Dizzy Gillespie’s legendary quintet.

7. **Brad Mehldau, *Highway Rider* (NONESUCH)** 19 votes

This double-disc of original work features interactive performances by the Mehldau’s trio—with drummer Jeff Ballard and bassist Larry Grenadier—as well as drummer Matt Chamberlain, saxophonist Joshua Redman and a chamber orchestra. Mehldau also orchestrated and arranged the album’s 15 compositions for the ensemble.

8. **Mary Halvorson Quintet, *Saturn Sings* (FIREHOUSE 12)** 17 votes

When Halvorson adds trumpet and alto sax to her core trio with bassist John Hébert and drummer Ches Smith, the resulting interplay renders her quirky compositions punchier and more accessible. DownBeat’s Jim Macnie declared that *Saturn Sings* is “a wisely calibrated affair that finds the inventive guitarist reaching a new level of eloquence by balancing skronk with sweetness.”


Bassist Parker digs into the music of Curtis Mayfield for a freewheeling live big-band tribute on this two-CD set. Parker’s ensemble doesn’t merely give straight readings of “Move On Up” or “Freddie’s Dead”: They use the songs’ melodic DNA as launching pads for improvisational flights.

10. **Danilo Pérez, *Providencia* (MACK AVENUE)** 17 votes

The pianist’s command of Afro-Caribbean grooves merges with his mastery of jazz harmony on his latest CD, which DownBeat critic Ted Panken called “a tour de force, a kaleidoscopic suite woven from the core themes that mark Pérez’s oeuvre since his eponymous 1993 debut.”

11. **Anat Cohen, *Clarinetwerk: Live At The Village Vanguard* (ANZIC)** 15 votes

12. **Absolute Ensemble, *Absolute Zawinul* (SUNNYSIDE)** 13 votes

13. **Evan Christopher, *The Remembering Song* (ARBORES)** 13 votes


15. **Dave Holland_octet, *Pathways* (DARE2)** 12 votes

16. **Herbie Hancock, *The Imagine Project* (HANCOKC)** 11 votes


18. **Vijay Iyer, *Solo* (ACT)** 10 votes

19. **Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *Preservation* (PRESERVATION HALL)** 10 votes

20. **Chucho Valdés & The Afro-Cuban Messengers, *Chucho’s Steps* (4Q)** 10 votes

Later that year Moran, as a permanent member of the band, appeared on his first album, Osby’s *Further Ado*.

Back when Moran first joined Osby’s band, the saxophonist said that he was a “godsend,” a player the polar opposite of his piano peers who were “like mynah birds making perfect copies of what they hear.” Today, Osby says, “Jason is a musical chef. You get an amalgam of Monk, Bud Powell and Keith Jarrett, plus stride, and hip-hop fused with Third Stream. He’s still a work in progress, but he is a stellar example of a contemporary artist of the highest order.”

Because Osby was a Blue Note artist, the label took an immediate interest. “Greg was raving about Jason,” recalls Bruce Lundvall, then Blue Note president as well as talent scout and tastemaker. “I went to see the band at Sweet Basil one night. Jason was very strong, and I was impressed by how much originality there was in his playing. He was serious, but he also had an adventurous soul.” (Osby served as producer of Moran’s first three albums.)

Shortly before he left Osby’s employ in 2002, Moran played a duo show with him at Lincoln Center’s Kaplan Playhouse. They displayed the beauty of jazz telepathy, engaging in a jaunty game of word tag as if one were completing the other’s sentences. Clad in a dapper black shirt, dress slacks and a dark fedora, Moran scrambled, tumbled, rushed and skirted across the entire range of notes on the keyboard, then settled into graceful and thoughtful passages of quiet lyricism before launching into another round of roller coaster dynamics with his mentor.

But Moran was eager to pursue his own vision. “I was emerging as a bandleader with Bandwagon, so I wanted to see if I could exist on my own and not be seen as the pianist for Greg’s band,” Moran says. “So I stopped playing with him and focused on the trio.”

A decade later that has taken full form, with Moran and Bandwagon operating as a collective where all three members determine the improvisational direction and outcome. “When we first started playing together, I wasn’t sure what Tarus and Nasheet were doing,” says Moran. “I was unclear. But as a result, I thought this is going to be the best group for me because we can work together to figure out a language to play the music—and that’s what we’ve done. Most piano trios have the bass and drums follow what the pianist wants to do. But with us, Tarus is the major protagonist who pushes the music, and we work at intersecting with each other to have conversations. There’s a lot of discord within the music, but I don’t mind being drowned out by the bass or the drums. I like it that we’re working through ideas while we’re playing.”

Even though leaving Osby and zeroing in on Bandwagon was the right choice, Moran suddenly found that he no longer was getting calls to work on other artists’ gigs. “I was thinking that I hadn’t had that much experience as a sideman except with Greg and with Steve Coleman and Cassandra Wilson—but they were all M-Base artists,” he says. “So I started thinking maybe I’m not that good. Maybe people doubt that I can play a ballad straight or wonder how much jazz I really knew.”

First the drought, then the downpour. The calls started to flow—and continue to this day. “I always tell people that I have a fairy-tale career,” he says. “From the beginning, things began to come my way, and I was prepared to take advantage of them in every facet that I could. I did not
want to leave stuff on the clothesline. I wanted to yank it all down. And that's what I did. I tried to master each situation the best I could. You can hear an artist's music by sitting in an audience, but when you have the music sitting in front of you by someone like Ravi Coltrane or Dave Holland, that's totally different. The music sounds seamless until you see how intricate it is and what a challenge it is to play. But that's what I enjoy. I want my community to be as diverse as my own tastes in music.”

Moran has joined up with Ndegeocello and was integral in buoying Jenny Scheinman's superlative 2008 CD *Crossing The Field*. Then there was his once-in-a-lifetime, two-concert gig subbing for Danilo Pérez in Wayne Shorter’s quartet at the Umbria Jazz Melbourne Festival in May 2005, shortly before being announced the winner of four rising-star awards in DownBeat’s Critics Poll (jazz artist, acoustic group, composer and acoustic piano).

That first night on the bandstand in Melbourne, Moran was initially tentative, echoing John Patitucci’s bass lines, drummer Brian Blade’s grooves and the leader’s sax speak. But as the band hit its stride, Moran leaped into action and found his way through the improvisational turbulence as the group moved in fluid motion during such tunes as “Smiling Through,” “Joy Rider,” “Sanctuary” and an encore of “Highlife.” On night number two, right out of the gate, Moran set a hard rhythmic pace, allowing enough room for Shorter’s sax to jump in, but also syncing up with the rest of the rhythm section. There was funk and thunder, blues and groove, filled with acute listening and a build-up of frolicking interplay. Instead of following, Moran often led the charge.

Today, Moran still marvels at the experience. “It was totally thrilling,” he says. “Wayne is rare in a music with few rare artists. The way he talks about music, he uses a different language. When he called me on the phone, he said he’d send me all the charts for his tunes, and I received a thick folder. He told me, ‘We may just play two bars of a tune, and the rest is, Let’s go swimming.’ It was a test of fire that got me into choppy waters—only these two small instances on the other side of the world. I’ll never have that opportunity again, but that’s what’s so great about it.”

Two years later, another saxophone icon invited Moran to join his band: Charles Lloyd. That, too, came through Harland, who recommended the pianist to play in a relatively young rhythm section that also includes bassist Reuben Rogers. At the Voll-Damm Barcelona International Jazz Festival last fall, Moran and company cooked up rhythms that pushed and rejuvenated Lloyd in a spirited performance. (The rhythm team has played on Lloyd’s last two albums, 2008’s *Rabo De Nube* and 2010’s *Mirror*.)

“It’s generationally important for Reuben, Eric and me to play with a musician like Charles,” Moran says. “We all do gigs with older musicians, but rarely as a unified support band. Charles gives us the music, which we take and put a different lean on it that only people as young...
as us have access to. Charles doesn’t say, ‘What the fuck is this?’ or ‘We can’t play that.’ He rides what we play and likes how we address his classic songs like ‘Forest Flower’ and ‘Sombbrero Sam.’ He jumps into it.”

Moran cites an example: Lloyd’s 14 minute-plus “Booker’s Garden” from Rabo De Nube. “Eric, Reuben and I are clearly accessing Detroit hip-hop, circa 2004. That’s where we’re coming from. It’s not a Roy Ayers groove, but something straight from [producer] J Dilla, who was a mastermind in dealing with hip-hop rhythms and syncopation that people like Jamire and Glasper have taken and applied to jazz. So, Charles wouldn’t have a clue who J Dilla is, but if he heard one of his pieces, he’d say, ‘That’s like the shit y’all do.’ It’s not for him to check it out, but it’s for us to bring it to him.”

In a telephone conversation from his home in Santa Barbara, Calif., Lloyd recalls first meeting Moran in June 2006 when the saxophonist played his Sangam concert at Carnegie Hall. Harlin, who was in the band, invited Moran backstage after the show and introduced him to the leader. “I didn’t know who he was, but Jason told me, ‘Your music touched me all the way to my backbone,’ which is a Southern saying,” says Lloyd.

When pianist Geri Allen’s schedule conflicted with Lloyd’s European dates in April 2007, Moran came on board. Lloyd marvels at how well the rhythm section clicked: “It was synchronicity without the verbiage. They walk the waters with me every night.” As for Moran, he adds with a Zen-like sensibility, “Jason’s very special. He can function in the now. He grew up with intense devotion to music that is real. That permeates his quest.”

At Moran’s modest and child-proof apartment, adorned with an array of art by such visual artist friends as Kara Walker, Whitfield Lovell, Leslie Hewitt and others, certainly the elephant in the room is the MacArthur grant—half a million dollars doled out over five years. Even though no “project” is expected of the recipient, Moran felt like he had to make plans in the first few months after receiving word.

“The beautiful thing about the foundation is that they don’t tell you what to do—that all you need to do is continue doing your work so that your music gets better,” says Moran. “I get tons of interviews where people ask me what I’m going to do. I give them an idea, but realistically that will probably change in six months.”

Rather than talk about the future, Moran chooses to discuss what he’s already done: organizing the “713 →212: Houstonians in NYC” concerts that gathered 25 Houston natives to perform over the course of two nights in January at the 92nd Street Y/Tribeca performance space. It was a meeting of older musicians such as tenor saxophonist Billy Harper, trombonist Ku-umba Frank Lacy, drummer Michael Carvin and guitarist Melvin Sparks, along with players from younger generations, including pianists Glasper and Helen Sung, trumpeters Leron Thomas and Brandon Lee, and drummers Harland, Williams and Kendrick Scott.

“WBGO decided to record the event and interviewed a bunch of artists,” says Moran. “This took place [shortly] before Melvin Sparks passed away, so we have his last interview on tape. And I thought afterward, ‘You can’t plan this, but this is what you’re supposed to do.’”

Moran is a confident, gracious man on stage and in person, but despite all that he’s accomplished and all the accolades, he’s got a streak of self-doubt. As an example, Moran confesses, “When I played with Meshell at Le Poisson Rouge at the end of last summer, I found myself on stage thinking, Do I know anything about music? It was a reality check. What do I really know about groove, about harmony? The gig turned out fine, but for a few moments I was totally stumped as to what to do and play. Now, that gets scary. You think you’re successful and you’re good because you work, but this is not the truth. This is a falsehood.”

He laughs and continues: “Winning all these awards, you might think that I know how to play. Well, I know how to play some things, but there are plenty of deep and gaping holes that I still aim to fill in.”
Hall of Fame

ABBREY LINCOLN
No Longer Blue

By John Ephland

What made Abbey Lincoln Abbey Lincoln? If you read the press she received as her career began in the mid-1950s, you’d think you were reading about a flagging Hollywood wannabe, someone who was constantly pissed off. Pissed off because, with her good looks, she was supposed to be someone else, like a black Marilyn Monroe, or a well-behaved rising star, or at least someone who still needed to learn when to keep her mouth shut.

And if the world back then ended up having its way, we wouldn’t be here to talk about her now. If she hadn’t been, and didn’t stay who she was, deep down, our lives would have been poorer. DownBeat is proud to welcome Abbey Lincoln to the Hall of Fame.

Perhaps more than any artist in jazz, Lincoln’s story was, for the longest time, a story about identity, and not necessarily about her music. With her passing at age 80 last August, we now can begin the complete appreciation of her art and her life.

Indeed, the story of Lincoln’s life has always been a story about identity, but identity as expressed through a career that remained thoroughly unique, unlike any other musician in the history of jazz. Not an identity put upon her because she was a very attractive woman, someone who found herself in front of a camera more often than not when her singing was starting to bloom. It became an identity born through her own choosing, through a life created and again, on her terms.

To see the arc of Abbey Lincoln’s life is to see the ways an artist can change over time, evolving into the satisfying whole that a full life signifies. It is also to see how a world could and did respond, over and over again, more and more convinced that, with Abbey Lincoln, what you saw—and heard—was what you got.

And what we got was the best.

It was 1992 that saw the broadcast of the TV special “You Gotta Pay The Band,” its title borrowed from the album of the same name. At that time, Lincoln stated to Michael Bourne in DownBeat, “It’s a documentary of my life. I’m getting the chance to tell my story while I’m still alive.” And tell it she did, with references to the television appearances and early films she was in, starting with 1956’s “forgettable” The Girl Can’t Help It (where she wore a dress that had previously been one of Marilyn Monroe’s costumes), Nothing But A Man (from ’64), For Love Of Ivy (’68, where she received a Golden Globe nomination) and, later, Spike Lee’s disappointing (for her) Mo’ Better Blues (’90).

It was during her early years that Anna Marie Wooldridge, born in Chicago in 1930, and raised in Kalamazoo, Mich., started wrestling, in earnest, with identity questions, reflected in the series of name changes that were a part of a developing persona. Starting with her maiden name, she would later be known as Gaby Wooldridge and then Gaby Lee before being called Gabby Hayes. That was until she took the name Abbey Lincoln, which was a name mentor/manager Bob Russell had suggested right before her first film.

In a 1961 DownBeat article appropriately titled “Metamorphosis,” Lincoln was still exuding some of the “bitterness” that was attributed to her early on: “People used to tell me how pretty I was,” she said, “and I thought they were putting me on. It makes me extremely self-conscious and even more shy. I remember once a lady came up to me on the beach and asked if I would be interested in being in a beauty contest. I cursed her out. It never occurred to me that she was serious or that anyone could really think of me as being attractive.”

In 1972, on a trip to Africa with colleague and friend Miriam Makeba, Lincoln took another name, Aminata Moseka. As she told Bourne, “Aminata and Moseka are gods. It’s my African name, my offering to my African ancestors. I thank them for my life. All these names that were given to me are mine, and they’re all one person.” And, in case anyone was wondering how far back she was referring, Lincoln was sure to add, “Anna Maria was a French queen.”

Early on, there were the recordings that got her in the game, starting with Abbey Lincoln’s Affair (1956, Liberty Records), with big band arrangements by, among others, Benny Carter. Along the way, she would continue to meet other amazing people, including Max Roach, who “saved” her life, essentially rescuing her from that early “ingénue” phase that another early colleague, Sonny Rollins, later referred to when she was recording with him and Roach for her 1957 album That’s Him (Riverside). With Roach—who would become her lover and husband before they divorced years later, and with whom she actively recorded during the 1960s—Lincoln found her voice, both as a singer and interpreter, but perhaps just as importantly, as a composer. During the early ’60s, when she was collaborating with Roach on his We Insist! Freedom Now Suite (Candid), her burgeoning identity began to reflect a greater social awareness. It was also
a time when she started writing with a newfound force. First writing lyrics to the music of others (e.g., Mongo Santamaria’s “Afro Blue,” Thelonious Monk’s “Blue Monk,” Freddie Hubbard’s “Up Jumped Spring,” Charlie Haden’s “First Song”), Lincoln started writing songs of her own, including her first original composition, “Let Up” (from 1959’s wonderful *Abbey Is Blue*, Riverside).

Lincoln eventually penned other durable songs that became new standards, showcased during her last years when she had a string of strong albums for Verve. Her knockout recordings include *The World Is Falling Down* (’90), *You Gotta Pay The Band* (with Hank Jones, Stan Getz, Charlie Haden, ’91), *Devil’s Got Your Tongue* (’92), *When There Is Love* (with Hank Jones, ’93), *A Turtle’s Dream* (’95), *Who Used To Dance* (’97), *Who Used To Dance* (’97), *When There Is Love* (with Hank Jones, ’93), *A Turtle’s Dream* (’95), *Who Used To Dance* (’97), *Wholly Earth* (’99) and the expansive, orchestrated *It’s Me* (’03). Lincoln was at her best when singing her heart out on songs like “Bird Alone,” “I Got Thunder (And It Rings),” “Love, What You Doin’,” “Throw It Away,” “Down Here Below” and “The World Is Falling Down.” She was named a Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2003, that after enjoying a three-day celebration of her music at Lincoln Center titled “Abbey Lincoln: Over The Years—An Anthology Of Her Songs” the previous year.

Although Lincoln released a 1973 album of her own music, *People In Me*, the decades of the ’70s and ’80s seemed to be a prelude to the more active years that followed. Even so, such titles as *Abbey Sings Billie* (two volumes on enja, ’87), *Talking To The Sun* (enja, ’83) and *Painted Lady* (with Archie Shepp, ’80) provided great examples of that lovely, thoroughly intimate yet sometimes roughhewn, smoky voice that fell somewhere between her “spiritual relative” Billie Holiday’s soulful but always penetrating singing and Ella Fitzgerald’s magical, sometimes fanciful embrace of a song.

“When I first heard Billie, she went right to my soul,” Lincoln said in Bourne’s 1992 DownBeat feature. “She was honest. She didn’t garnish anything. She sang her heart. Billie inherited from Bessie [Smith], and I inherited from Billie. When I came to the stage, I was not alone. I didn’t have to chart a course. It was there. All these great women—Sarah Vaughan, Lena Horne, Rosemary Clooney—and Frank Sinatra, Nat Cole. There were many great singers, and they were great because they were original, but Billie was the only one who was social. She sang about things that others didn’t sing about. ‘God Bless The Child’ is the truth!”

By 1997, Lincoln was trumpeting the identity she had been developing for years when she told Jim Macnie for DownBeat, “I can get it off as an actress when I stand on stage and sing.” Combining her skills and experience in front of a camera, Lincoln found a way to glean the best from an otherwise troubling yet sometimes revealing and rewarding aspect of her career, imbuing her singing with that dramatic element that made such singers as Holiday so riveting. “Every good actor has a drawer where they keep things, and I went into my drawer and used what I found there,” she added. Lincoln, in that interview, was referring to a piece of acting she did for *Nothing But A Man* that drew on her musical experiences with Roach. Talking about her great movie directors, she said they “made me think I was a great actress. And I believe that I am, potentially. But you know what? I don’t need a movie.” Lincoln said it straight-out when she finished: “The interpretation of the lyric and the melody is what’s important … I think of what I do as storytelling.” This from the “storyteller” who was, apart from Shirley Horn, perhaps the greatest female singer of the postwar era.

Like Holiday, Lincoln sometimes seemed to be not so much a singer but another member of the band. This was especially true as she gathered musicians who could help extend the marvelous vision of her muse. Her 2000 recording *Over The Years* (Verve) featured the talents of saxophonist Joe Lovano and Jerry Gonzalez on trumpet for selected cuts, while her declarative *Abbey Sings Abbey* (an 2007 all-original
program except for her “Blue Monk” lyric, for Verve) found her using the novel voices of such musicians as cellist Dave Eggar, Gil Goldstein playing accordion and Larry Campbell on various guitars (including a National resonator, pedal steel and mandolin). Elsewhere, other players who joined in the Lincoln celebration included Steve Coleman, Frank Morgan, Pat Metheny, Christian McBride and J. J. Johnson.

As her career continued, Lincoln’s art seemed to become more organic, her music encompassing styles that were beyond categorization. To call her a jazz singer would be a misnomer, unless you meant “jazz” in the most mongrelized and expansive sense. For Lincoln, who drenched her music in deliciously languorous and more permeable forms that didn’t necessarily “swing,” the songs tended to hang out at the melancholy and longing side of the musical spectrum. Despite the sadness of a song like “A Heart Is Not A Toy”—where Lincoln’s lyric laments, “Have you ever known a lonely heart that’s broken? A lonely heart with no more dreams to share? A heart that doesn’t love anybody, that turned itself to stone, not to care”—Lincoln could also sound hopeful and wistful, as she did at the ending of “I’m Not Supposed To Know”: “Bending low sometimes to follow through, I’m not supposed to know you really love me! I’m not supposed to know it but I do.”

Questions of identity never seemed far away. Lincoln was still reflecting on the subject during those wonderful “comeback” years of the ’90s, somehow still not satisfied that she’d arrived. “When you get to be 65,” she said when she was 67, “it’s another world, another view. People should have something to say when they get to be my age. The idea is to offer some insight into how you perceive yourself: what you think we are, who you think you are.”

Once referring to her then-newfound success as an artist in 1992, Lincoln stated flat-out: “I thought I would probably die in obscurity. I didn’t mind. Lots of people have. I don’t mean nobody would know me, but sometimes you’re bigger in death than you are in life.” That may be true with some people. With Abbey Lincoln, it’s likely to remain a tossup.

“When I first heard Billie, she went right to my soul. She was honest. She didn’t garnish anything. She sang her heart. Billie inherited from Bessie [Smith], and I inherited from Billie. When I came to the stage, I was not alone. I didn’t have to chart a course. It was there. All these great women—Sarah Vaughan, Lena Horne, Rosemary Clooney—and Frank Sinatra, Nat Cole. There were many great singers, and they were great because they were original, but Billie was the only one who was social. She sang about things that others didn’t sing about. ‘God Bless The Child’ is the truth!”
For the Veterans Committee Hall of Fame often serves as an instrument of atonement for misplaced or overlooked past critical priorities, at least it carries the authority of historical perspective. Such is the case with bassist Paul Chambers, whose only DownBeat award during his lifetime was a Critics Poll New Star citation in 1956. Nor did he ever appear on a DownBeat cover. And when he died in January 1969, his stature was such that his DownBeat obituary was half the length of that accorded to New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis in the same issue.

Chambers is the fourth member of the original Miles Davis quintet/sextet to enter the Hall of Fame, after John Coltrane (1965), Cannonball Adderley (1975) and Bill Evans (1981). Davis was inducted in 1962. Sadly, it was a cursed group. Born in April 1935, Chambers was the youngest of its members but the one to whom death came first at age 33. Four others were gone before the age of 51. And none lived past 65, except for drummer Jimmy Cobb, who broke the curse and still tours successfully as leader of the “So What” tribute band.

Critics Martin Williams once wrote that “a handy explanation of ‘swing’ might be ‘any two successive notes played by Paul Chambers.’” There was a spring and resonance in his pulse that was felt more than it was observed, but which propelled many a rhythm section in the 1950s. If Coltrane gave the Davis quintet an “aura of experimentation,” as one Davis biographer suggested, Chambers gave it a corridor of stability that was both flexible and anchoring. He was also among the earliest to create a role for the bowed bass in modern jazz, although that proved a less fruitful track.

Born in Pittsburgh, Chambers came to New York from Detroit in 1954 and quickly became a frequent presence among the young lions of hard-bop. In the summer of 1955 Jackie McLean brought word to Davis, who was looking for an affordable bassist for his first working group since his nonet. Chambers became a charter member of the first Davis quintet when it opened at the Café Bohemia in July. He would have the singular distinction of being the only member to remain through its entire seven-year history. By the time the band dissolved at the end of 1962, pianist Red Garland had been succeeded by Evans (1958–59) and then Wynton Kelly (1959–62), and drummer Philly Joe Jones had been replaced in 1958 by Cobb. Coltrane left in 1960.

It was a ride that would carry Chambers across the full arc of what many now regard as the greatest working small band in jazz history. It also gave him a cornerstone place in many of the most honored recordings of all time. Thirty years ago critics presumed to compare the first Davis quintet/sextet to such groundbreaking chamber bands as the original Charlie Parker quintet, the classic Coltrane quartet, the Benny Goodman sextet with Charlie Christian, or the Louis Armstrong small groups of the ’20s (which were not actually working bands). Today one is more likely to find them compared to it.

Columbia saw important potential in Davis and treated him accordingly. As the Davis brand built, his players rose on its tide. Chambers, Coltrane and Garland mixed and matched in sessions of their own on labels like Prestige, Blue Note and others. In 1956 and 1957 alone Chambers participated in nearly 100 recordings, including such landmark dates as Thelonious Monk’s Brilliant Corners, the Sonny Rollins Quartet’s Tenor Madness and the first full-scale Davis–Gil Evans collaboration, Miles Ahead.

He also recorded his first albums under his own name. In November 1956, Ralph J. Gleason introduced him to DownBeat readers in a three-star review: “Chambers is the young bassist who has excited so much comment for his recent work with the Miles Davis group…. He almost succeeds in making the bass solo stand out enough to hold its own as a horn.” This was high praise in a time when the bass was still a fairly oblique presence for many listeners, taken for granted by all but other musicians. Three months later, his second record (Whims Of Chambers on Blue Note) came out. Nat Hentoff gave the album four stars and praised Chambers’ “intense skill.”

But the doors to history truly swung open to Chambers during a two-month window in the spring of 1959—March 2 to May 5—when he became a key voice in perhaps the two most influential recordings of the postwar era. The first was Kind Of Blue, in which Chambers sounded the six-tone keynote answered by Davis, Adderley and Coltrane on “So What.” The second was Coltrane’s debut Atlantic album, Giant Steps, in which the leader paid specific tribute to his bassist on “Mr. P.C.,” now a jazz standard. On April 2, a TV kinescope caught Chambers at the pinnacle performing “So What” with Davis.

With Kind Of Blue, the Davis sextet seemed to level out onto a plateau, albeit a high one. There would be no further breakthrough work. With bookings growing sketchy by the end of 1962, Chambers, Kelly and Cobb left en masse to work as the Wynton Kelly trio. Chambers’ recording work had fallen off to a handful of dates a year by then.

By the time of his early death, his promise seemed unredeemed. More than four decades later, history has rendered a different verdict. 08

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**Veterans Committee Hall of Fame**

**PAUL CHAMBERS**

**Corridor Of Stability**

By John McDonough

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**Veterans Committee Hall of Fame**

Paul Chambers 69.6%

**NOTE:** Artists must receive votes from 66% of the Veterans Committee to gain entry.

**Others who appeared on 50% or more of the ballots:**

- Scott LaFaro 60.9%
- Eubie Blake 56.5%
- Robert Johnson 56.5%
- Gene Ammons 52.2%
- Machito 52.2%
- Muddy Waters 52.2%

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AUGUST 2011 DOWNBEAT 33
DownBeat Hall Of Fame

Legends in jazz, blues and beyond can be elected into the DownBeat Hall of Fame by way of the annual Critics Poll (designated by “C”), Readers Poll (“R”) or Veterans Committee (“V”). It all started in 1952 with the Readers. The Critics got into the game in 1961—50 years ago—and the Veterans Committee began voting in 2008. With this month’s addition of Abbey Lincoln and Paul Chambers, there are currently 127 DownBeat Hall of Famers, listed here in alphabetical order.

A-B
Muhil Richard Abrams (C 2010)
Cannonball Adderley (R 1975)
Louis Armstrong (R 1952)
Albert Ayler (C 1983)
Chet Baker (C 1989)
Count Basie (R 1958)
Sidney Bechet (C 1968)
Bix Beiderbecke (C 1962)
Ed Blackwell (C 1993)
Art Blakey (R 1981)
Jimmy Blanton (V 2008)
Lester Bowie (C 2003)
Michael Brecker (R 2007)
Clifford Brown (C 1972)
Ray Brown (R 2003)
Dave Brubeck (C 1994)

C-D
Harry Carney (V 2008)
Benny Carter (C 1977)
Betty Carter (C 1998)
John Carter (C 1991)
Paul Chambers (V 2011)
Charlie Christian (C 1966)
Kenny Clarke (C 1968)
Nat “King” Cole (R 1997)
Ornette Coleman (R 1969)
John Coltrane (R 1965)
Chick Corea (C 2010)
Tad Dameron (V 2009)
Miles Davis (C 1962)
Paul Desmond (C 1977)
Baby Dodds (V 2010)
Johnny Dodds (C 1987)
Eric Dolphy (R 1964)

E-G
Billy Eckstine (V 2010)
Roy Eldridge (C 1971)
Duke Ellington (R 1956)
Bill Evans (C 1981)
Gil Evans (R 1966)
Maynard Ferguson (R 1992)
Ella Fitzgerald (R 1979)
Erroll Garner (V 2008)
Stan Getz (R 1986)

H-J
Lionel Hampton (R 1987)
Herbie Hancock (C 2009)
Coleman Hawkins (C 1961)
Roy Haynes (C 2004)
Julius Hemphill (C 1995)
Fletcher Henderson (C 1973)
Joe Henderson (R 2001)
Jimi Hendrix (R 1970)
Woody Herman (R 1976)
Andrew Hill (C 2007)
Earl Hines (C 1965)
Milt Hinton (C 2001)
Johnny Hodges (C 1970)
Billie Holiday (R 1961)
Freddie Hubbard (R 2009)
Milt Jackson (C 1999)
Keith Jarrett (C 2008)
Antonio Carlos Jobim (V 2008)
James P. Johnson (R 1992)
J.J. Johnson (C 1995)
Elvin Jones (C 1998)
Hank Jones (C 2009)
Jo Jones (V 2008)
Philly Joe Jones (V 2010)
Thad Jones (C 1987)

K-M
Stan Kenton (R 1954)
Rahsaan Roland Kirk (C 1978)
Gene Krupa (R 1972)
Steve Lacy (C 2009)
John Lewis (C 2002)
Abby Lincoln (C 2011)
Jimmie Lunceford (V 2008)
Jackie McLean (C 2006)
Glenn Miller (R 1953)
Charles Mingus (R 1971)
Thelonious Monk (C 1963)
Wes Montgomery (R 1968)
Lee Morgan (R 1991)
Jelly Roll Morton (C 1963)
Gerry Mulligan (R 1993)

N-P
Fats Navarro (C 1982)
Joe “King” Oliver (C 1976)
Charlie Parker (R 1955)
Jaco Pastorius (R 1988)
Art Pepper (R 1982)
Oscar Peterson (R 1984)
Oscar Pettiford (V 2009)
Bud Powell (R 1966)

Q-S
Sun Ra (C 1984)
Django Reinhardt (C 1971)
Buddy Rich (R 1974)
Max Roach (C 1980)
Red Rodney (R 1990)
Sonny Rollins (R 1973)
Pee Wee Russell (C 1969)
Artie Shaw (C 1996)
Woody Shaw (R 1989)
Wayne Shorter (C 2003)
Horace Silver (R 1996)
Zoot Sims (C 1985)
Frank Sinatra (R 1998)
Bessie Smith (C 1967)
Jimmy Smith (R 2006)
Billy Strayhorn (C 1967)

T-Z
Art Tatum (C 1964)
Cecil Taylor (C 1975)
Jack Teagarden (C 1969)
Clark Terry (C 2000)
Lennie Tristano (C 1979)
McCoy Tyner (R 2004)
Sarah Vaughan (R 1985)
Joe Venuti (R 1978)
Fats Waller (C 1968)
Chick Webb (V 2010)
Ben Webster (C 1974)
Mary Lou Williams (C 1990)
Tony Williams (C 1997)
Teddy Wilson (C 1987)
Lester Young (R 1959)
Frank Zappa (C 1994)
Joe Zawinul (C 2008)
THE CRITICS HAVE SPOKEN.
Congratulations to these Vic Firth Artists.
Winners of the 2011 Downbeat Critics Poll.

Scott Amendola, Cyro Baptista, Joey Baron, Gary Burton, Mino Cinelu, Jack DeJohnette, Peter Erskine, Pete Escovedo, Terry Gibbs, Stefon Harris, Susie Ibarra, Pedro Martinez, Francisco Mela, Allison Miller, Airto Moreira, Dafnis Prieto, Herlin Riley, Daniel Sadownik, Ed Saindon, Bobby Sanabria, EJ Strickland, Jeff "Tain" Watts, Michael ZeRang
Revolution In Blue

Duke Ellington’s 1930s Brunswick, Columbia And Master Recordings Broke New Musical, Social Ground

By Aaron Cohen

Duke Ellington had been a bandleader for close to eight years by February 1932, when his ensemble recorded “It Don’t Mean A Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing).” That song is from the initial session included on the 11-disc box set The Complete 1932–1940 Brunswick, Columbia And Master Recordings Of Duke Ellington And His Famous Orchestra (Mosaic), which placed first in the Historical Jazz Album category of the Critics Poll. He wasn’t quite 33 years old then, and “It Don’t Mean A Thing” was just one of his compositions that defined the era. Along with writing for, directing and serving as main pianist for this group, Ellington had reason to feel that he shouldered the weight of the world.

Historian Harvey G. Cohen’s Duke Ellington’s America, one of the standout jazz books of 2010, delves into Ellington’s social, political and cultural importance during the 1930s. As Cohen describes, the bandleader’s compositions and his orchestra gloriously refuted the notion that the music of black Americans was unworthy of serious study. The band’s 1933 tour of Europe wowed such esteemed classical critics as composer Constant Lambert. Stateside, when Ellington led his group through the South, their unified strength showed how to avoid the insult of segregation. The group’s widespread popularity helped, as even Bing Crosby showed up to voice the band’s “St. Louis Blues” in 1932.

The Complete 1932–1940 set illustrates how Ellington’s groundbreaking recordings developed alongside his public stature. Even early on, Ellington composed “Blue Harlem” (recorded in 1932), which celebrated the African American neighborhood and asserted his own brilliance through a blues that did not adhere to the time-honored 12 or 16 bars. A few years later, the Ellington orchestra created the suites that made European and, eventually, American critics recognize his accomplishments. At one session on Sept. 20, 1937, the band recorded “Diminuendo In Blue” and “Crescendo In Blue,” which refused the constraints of a 3-minute 78. Ellington also confounded critics with the four-part “Reminiscing In Tempo” in 1935, which still sounds striking for its reworking of theme-and-variation concepts. During this period, the orchestra also recorded definitive versions of “Sophisticated Lady” and “Solitude.”

At the same time, Ellington knew that all these songs would sound thrilling on record because of the musicians he had in mind while writing their parts. Longtime lead alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges sounded delicate and full-bodied throughout these recordings. Baritone saxophonist Harry Carney and clarinetist Barney Bigard lent brooding tonalities to the darkly alluring “Azure” in 1937.

Among the more than 100 Ellington compositions on the Complete 1932–1940 set are lesser-known works that show he was far ahead of his time. Recorded in 1938, “Pyramid” featured the bandleader on hand drum as he accompanied trombonist Juan Tizol and Carney. The percussion underpinning Eastern scales would have fit on a Sun Ra album.

Ellington’s impact is clear on other historical recordings that placed in this year’s poll. Miles Davis’ 1970 early fusion album Bitches Brew—its anniversary edition reissue came in second place in the poll—may seem far removed from classic swing, but guitarist John McLaughlin could trace the roots of his wah-wah pedal to the vocalized effects from Ellington trombonist Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton. Henry Threadgill also used his band as an instrument, often creating multifaceted compositions for particular players to deliver. It’s hard to say what Ellington would have made of the hubkaphone that Threadgill played on the 1978 album Montreux Suisse Air, now included in The Complete Novus & Columbia Recordings Of Henry Threadgill & Air box set, which placed third. But given time, Ellington could have featured it in a concerto.
Can a music program create professional, real-sounding arrangements and solos for your songs from only a chord progression?

"Are you sure it is legal to have this much fun?" "I'm looking for those perfect band mates and I just discovered they live in a box." "The soloist sounds amazingly like real people improvising!" "The program sounds so much better with RealTracks... A thousand times, Thank You!" "Band-in-a-Box is some of the most fun you can have with a computer." "I can load my MP3 in and see the chords play on the screen." "My buddy and I sat around last Sunday night just jammin' away..." "As an old BE-BOPPER circa late 40s, most of the cats I played with are dead and gone." "Band-in-a-Box has made me a much better player." "Can't say enough good about your products. You obviously understand our needs exactly." "BB makes it so easy to quickly build an arrangement for composing." "Thanks to BB I can still swing with the help of the fabulous cats living inside BB." "Band-in-a-Box was the solution to an old frustration: being a musician. Now I am a musician." "The ease and quickness in producing quality backing tracks is unparalleled." "RealTracks is by grill for accompaniment software." "This is so much fun." "I'm ""I will be telling my Mac friends to get it." "Band-in-a-Box is a truly sophisticated." "A giant leap forward." "Keep the RealTracks dimension of realism." "I was absolutely blown away at the program is extraordinary!" "Your product is AWESOME! Believable." "I can't believe how fast I can generate version." "They've outdone themselves this time, and I'll ""This new musical concept you have created is would be a whole new species." "Just when you take it to a new level." "Brilliant!" "I'm snashing." "I must say, the pedal steel is perhaps brilliant program." "The RealTracks are fantastic a great gift to jazz musicians, educators, and stunning." "Thanks for a superbly useful piece of detection is amazingly accurate!" "This is tunes fast with help of your Audio Chord Wizard." "Wow!" "I am blown away! The jazz/swing RealTracks stuff haves" "You won't regret it (and if you guarantee)." "I never thought I'd see the said before, but you guys are world on fire!" "I'm so stoked about stand it." "This is just killer." "Amazing, awesome sounding. Good work!" cease to amaze me. You got it." "Wow and RealDrums sound awesome." "I am frankly amazed at most of the this new BIAB 2009 for Mac. Kudos to song with Band-in-a-Box. I couldn't also in creating music in my studio. It is own. I am greatly impressed." "I use improved my musical talents by far and have helped make this program so your fantastic improvisational program." "the most powerful, cost effective, user "BIAB is my best learning tool." "J'ai la premiere version de Band-in-a-Box et j'aime beaucoup," "A truly great product!" "It's just incredible! I am a practicing jazz musician and was absolutely dazzled by your soloist feature." "Band-in-a-Box is an awesome tool for getting projects done NOW!" "The soloist feature is phenomenal!" "Excellent quality is a PG Music standard." "I use your program with my saxophone students. They love to play with a "real" band in the back!" "Who knew what Coltrane would sound like soloing over country music—LOVE IT!!" "Awesome software at a fantastic price!" "Band-in-a-Box, well, it's just a great program!"
Ambrose Akinmusire stands against the wall, behind his band, trumpet in hand, framed by Diego Rivera’s colossal mural of Ford Motor Co.’s River Rouge assembly plant. He holds his trumpet close, his eyes cast downward as he listens to his group, which cooks as tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III takes a rollicking solo. His expression is serious, but occasionally he hears something that forces a huge smile to his lips. The quintet tears through its second set at the Detroit Institute of Arts, and an audience of museum-goers whoops and hollers its approval.

Akinmusire spends a lot of time at the back of the stage, making himself scarce while his band members take the spotlight. “I think I’m doing it more now, as there’s more attention on me,” he says. “I get people telling me, ‘Ambrose, this CD is great,’ or, ‘Great show,’ but in my mind, it’s us doing this. I can’t make the music I’ve been making without this band. I think they should get the credit also, and moving to the back, where I’m not a focal point, is one way of trying to make that happen.”

As his name gets around more, Akinmusire is careful not to let greater notoriety change his approach. In person, the trumpeter is self-effacing. Asked about his band, he says, “They’re kicking my ass. I’m just so lucky to be around a band of creative musicians who are always pushing themselves and never are satisfied. And we actually like being around each other. I think you hear that in the music. It goes on stage with us.”

When he spoke to DownBeat, Akinmusire was in the middle of a transatlantic tour with a quintet that includes Smith on tenor, bassist Harish Raghavan, pianist Sam Harris and drummer Justin Brown, with whom he has played since he was 14 years old. On stage, the band is dynamic and unpredictable. Playing sets consisting almost entirely of Akinmusire’s originals, the musicians work the songs up sets consisting almost entirely of Akinmusire’s own. “Regret (No More)” is structured around peaks and valleys, passages where energy is gathered and expelled. When he composes, most of his sources of inspiration are from outside the realm of music.

“How I have to start with something that’s not so common; it’s usually a title,” he says. “More commonly these days, it’s a whole story I have to write before I can begin to write the first note. I think it works well in terms of form, and in terms of breaking out of your habits. For instance, for a song like ‘Tear Stained Suicide Manifesto,’ I wrote a whole five-page short story, and it had different peaks and valleys, and I worked those peaks and valleys into the music.”

This method means that the inspiration for songs can come from nearly anywhere, and at unexpected times. This is how “The Walls Of Lechuguilla” came about. “I used to practice in front of documentaries for the first couple hours of my practice routine,” Akinmusire explains. “Now I’m watching TV series. I just finished ‘The Wire.’ But it used to be documentaries. And I was watching a BBC ‘Planet Earth’ documentary, and they went down into this cave, to the Chandelier [Ballroom], and they turned on the lights, and it was just, man, I had to stop playing. I was just struck by that. I hit pause and just stared, and knew I should write a tune about it. I just kept going back and forth, looking at the different sparkles, and how the light hit things. I didn’t hear a melody, but I felt the shape of a melody, and I wrote from there. It came to me from the first note to the end.”

The resulting piece of music captures the anxious feeling one has when entering an unknown place. The song opens with...
Akinmusire’s isolated trumpet, with strangely squeezed tones and vocalizations that are gradually joined by drums and splashes of piano. The song is structured as if the band is passing from one cave chamber to the next, capturing the light as it glints off the formations in each one. Lechuguilla Cave, located in New Mexico, is known for its unusual geology, a fact that makes it an apt source of inspiration for Akinmusire’s quintet, with its unusual blend of forward harmonic concepts, scrambled post-bop and M-Base vocabulary, its leader’s unconventional trumpet tone and constantly shifting rhythm.

Akinmusire thinks about his band as he composes, and many of his rhythmic and harmonic ideas arose from developing alongside a core group of players for what amounts to most of his professional life. “When I think saxophone, I hear Walter, I hear Harish when I think bass, and when I think drums, I hear Justin. Sam Harris is new to the band, but I feel connected to him. Justin—we’ve played together for 14 years. It’s amazing, because we grew up together, and you’d think I’d know everything he’s going to do, but it’s always fresh. I feel that way about everybody in the band.”

He emphasizes again and again that his quintet music is a group effort, and that his collaborators deserve acknowledgement, both for shaping the sound of the music and for pushing him to be better. He is adamant that a compliment to him reflects on them as well. “In the long run,” he says, “yes, Ambrose is signed to Blue Note, and blah, blah, blah, but you know, I think about a guy like LeBron James. He’s part of a team. An individual can’t win a whole game.”

Even as the band finishes touring for the year, Akinmusire is looking ahead to new projects. “I’m starting to think about the next CD,” he says. “I have other projects that I’m working on, like a big band project. In the beginning of December, we’re gonna be playing our first show. I want to do a duo project with a piano player, too, but I don’t have anything nailed down yet. With all these projects, though, I’m staying focused. It’s not in my personality to ride the wave. I’m more in tune with what’s going on inside me and how I can express that.”

Regardless of what the future holds, Akinmusire seems determined to not be blinded or changed by a bigger spotlight. Accolades are nice, he says, but they’ll come as a result of doing good work, and they’re not the goal. “Attention or no attention, Ambrose is going to be doing exactly the same thing.”

### RISING STAR Jazz Artist

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<td>Jason Moran</td>
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<td>Rudresh Mahanthappa</td>
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<td>Vijay Iyer</td>
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<td>Avishai Cohen</td>
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### RISING STAR Trumpet

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MARIA SCHNEIDER
Classical Orientation

By Michael Gallant

Maria Schneider's journey to the stage of Carnegie Hall almost never happened. “When I was in college, the attitude I experienced from the classical world almost made me jump ship as a composer,” said Schneider, winner of the Big Band, Composer and Arranger categories of this year’s Critics Poll. “The belief at the time was that if your music wasn’t atonal and didn’t require a mathematical table to deconstruct it, it was passé and insipid. But I don’t hear atonality. My music is oriented towards beauty in the classical sense.”

It could be considered poetic justice, then, that Schneider’s performance at Carnegie Hall on May 13 showcased an original piece of tonal, genre-bending beauty. Entitled *Carlos Drummond de Andrade Stories*, Schneider’s long-form composition set to music darkly clever poems, penned by the piece’s Brazilian namesake and translated into English. Schneider drew from diverse influences—Brazilian choro and flamenco, as well as the work of her one-time mentor Gil Evans—to create a piece that, in her words, was “classical in nature, but still sounds like me.”

Anyone familiar with Schneider pieces such as “Cerulean Skies” and “Bulería, Soleá y Rumba” would immediately recognize her compositional voice here. *Stories* breathed with warm clouds of harmonically morphing sound, moving from transcendent, quiet exchanges of violin and piano into full-voiced grandeur. At points, reflecting the darkness of the piece’s source material, *Stories* even took on a sense of Charles Addams-esque ballroom macabre.

Schneider wrote the piece in 2008 for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and their creative partner Dawn Upshaw, a MacArthur grant-winning soprano and fan of the Maria Schneider Orchestra. In fact, Upshaw remarked from the Carnegie Hall stage that she takes her daughter to see the band perform every Thanksgiving at New York’s Jazz Standard.

When Upshaw first approached Schneider about a classical commission, the composer wasn’t immediately sure how to respond. “I’d never written for voice, or classical orchestra before,” Schneider said. “So nothing about this was what I was used to, but it turned out to be so much fun,” she explained, reflecting on the learning experience. “A classical orchestra works very differently from a jazz band. There are drastically different sorts of phrasing and rhythms at play—and the conducting is completely different. Conducting my band is a very immediate experience, but conducting a classical ensemble is a little like speaking on the phone and having things come back to you with a delay.”

The opening seconds of *Stories* did feel rhythmically jagged, with Schneider and the orchestra seeming to search for commonality within the heavily syncopated introduction. By the time Upshaw began singing, though, differences had been resolved,
resulting in soft and subtle magic. The 25-minute, through-composed piece encompassed four poems; one spoke of nostalgia for a safer time, while another was bluntly titled “Don’t Kill Yourself.” Upshaw performed flawlessly, displaying a virtuosic range of tonal colors matched phrase-for-phrase in movement and intensity by those of the orchestra. After the piece drew to a close with the wry tale of a love hexagon run amok, the audience called Schneider and Upshaw back for no less than three curtain calls.

Schneider has built her name composing for big band, yet long before she attended the Eastman School of Music for jazz or studied under Gil Evans, she received a grounding in both classical and popular music. “I grew up with a teacher who instructed me in stride piano and classical music, so I didn’t see boundaries between music,” she recalled. “Even though I was turned off by the judgments of the classical world in college, I did love my theory courses, studying the music of people like Elliott Carter, and even trying to write music using chain-link theory. But it also felt like trying to write poetry in a language that wasn’t my own.”

Given recently diminishing audiences for classical music, though, Schneider feels that the time is right for her to create music for the concert hall. “I think a lot of people are longing for something more accessible in terms of harmony and tonality, something that doesn’t alienate audiences. That’s why I was asked to write this music. I stepped in with a lot of trepidation, but I’m glad I did.”

Though Stories hasn’t been recorded yet, Schneider plans to feature it on an upcoming album. The piece will be paired with another commissioned work for Upshaw—this time in partnership with the Australian Chamber Orchestra—this time in partnership with the Australian Chamber Orchestra—which will be premiered at the 2011 Ojai Music Festival and will include improvisational elements by three members of Schneider’s band. The album will be her seventh; she released her debut, Evanescence, in 1994. She has won two Grammy awards: Best Instrumental Composition for “Cerulean Skies” (on 2007’s Sky Blue) and Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album for 2004’s Concert In The Garden.

With her most recent album dating back to 2007, Schneider found news of her Critics Poll victories to be surprising and heartwarming. “I’m just glad the music sticks in our audience’s heads,” she said. “I hope it means that people are still playing records. I hate the idea of spewing a lot of plastic in the planet and having it just lay there,” she continued, laughing. “So hopefully it creates beauty, and people enjoy it beyond the first listen.”
CRAIG TABORN
Illuminating Ideas

By Bob Doerschuk

For most keyboard players, a significant milestone looms over their career path. Regardless of what they play and how they play it, eventually they’re going to confront the challenge of cutting a solo piano album.

It took Craig Taborn a while to reach that point. For more than 15 years, he’s been establishing himself as an adventurous ensemble player. Whether leading his own groups or working with those of James Carter, Mat Maneri, Tim Berne, Evan Parker and other edgy innovators, he’s developed into a versatile team player. When called upon to play piano—or, on Roscoe Mitchell and the Note Factory’s Far Side (ECM), one of two pianos, along with Vijay Iyer—he’s interacted brilliantly with the other musicians, batting sometimes highly abstract ideas back and forth, developing and complementing them while adding something new with each volley. (By playing his solo on “Inside The Box” on Michael Formanek’s CD The Rub And Spare Change entirely in minor seconds, Taborn adds a delightful prickly sting to his expression.)

And when playing synthesizers, he adapts easily to their format and function. Much of the electricity that channels throughout David Torn’s Prezens is powered by Taborn’s sometimes startling textural manipulations, in effect painting a kinetic backdrop that showcases the interactions of the band as a whole and its members individually.

The Minnesota-born keyboardist also has released a couple of albums as a leader, though both Junk Magic and Light Made Lighter were electronically oriented group projects. That’s a strong track record, to which we can add a number of live solo piano gigs that Taborn has done as far back as 10 years ago, mainly around New York City—which does raise the question of why it took him until 2011, with the release of Avenging Angel (ECM), to make his solo album.

Moments such as these helped Taborn cultivate a complex and idiosyncratic approach to improvising, a practice he’d enjoyed even as a young piano student who would slip a cassette of one of standards, but in his case he might take a detour around it. “It would be easy to do a standards record, but to get it to be something really special, that takes some work,” he advised, laughing. “So, I wouldn’t hold my breath.”
RISING STAR

Piano
Craig Taborn 72
Vijay Iyer 57
Gerald Clayton 48
Robert Glasper 45
Eric Reed 40
Hiromi 34
Jon Batiste 27
Bruce Barth 23
Aaron Parks 23
Taylor Eigsti 22
Stefano Bollani 20
Dan Nimmer 20

Electronic Keyboard
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Uri Caine 80
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### 59th Annual Critics Poll

#### Alto Saxophone

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At a certain juncture in the ’90s, Rudresh Mahanthappa, then living in Chicago, had reached a crossroads in his nascent career. “I saw that I wasn’t going to be one of those people who got signed in their twenties,” Mahanthappa said via Skype from his hotel in Tilburg, Netherlands, two days after his 40th birthday. “The question was whether to try to play the business game or stick to your guns artistically and take the proverbial high road. I opted for the latter. I tried not to worry too much about the ramifications of that choice on business and income and popularity. Maybe it means not playing the main stage at Montreux when you’re 28—but maybe that’s not so important.”

In light of this narrative, it’s not surprising that, to Mahanthappa, who was named a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow in 2007, his designation as Alto Saxophonist of the Year in this year’s Critics Poll denotes a certain validation. “I’m continually surprised,” he said of the award, as well as an invitation from the North Sea Jazz Festival to function as one of this summer’s two “Carte Blanche” artists. Under the latter honorific, he would perform with three of the nine working bands that he either leads or co-leads (Samdhi, with guitarist David Gilmore, bassist Rich Brown and drummer Damion Reid; the Indo-Pak Coalition, with guitarist Rez Abbasi and drummer Dan Weiss; and Apex, a two-alto quintet with Bunky Green), as well as conduct a clinic and sit for a public DownBeat Blindfold Test.

“It’s rewarding to see that it was worthwhile to explore what I wanted to explore, and investigate multiple sides of what I feel jazz is to me,” he said. “A lot of musicians in my generation have followed their mentors—Coltrane, Bird, whomever—in trying to create something unique that they thought was important. It’s my experience that audiences come first and the industry later. I always felt that my music resonates not just with jazz fans but a broader public. Everyone has access to a great variety of music, and things that seemed incredibly eclectic 15 years ago—that don’t fit into a preconceived template of what jazz is supposed to be—get much more play. I think that’s going to continue.”

Over the previous year, Mahanthappa had performed with the aforementioned units, in addition to the Dakshina Ensemble (in which a Mahanthappa-led jazz quartet merges with Indian classical alto saxophonist Kadri Gopalnath’s trio with violin and mridangam in hybrid refractions of Carnatic music); Raw Materials (his long-standing duo with pianist Vijay Iyer); Dual Identity (a two-alto quintet with Steve Lehman); the collaborative trio MSG (Ronan Guilfoyle, guitar; Chander Sardjoe, drums); and a duo with guitarist Nguyen Lê. He will tour Europe in November with Mauger, another collaborative trio with bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Gerry Hemingway, and will sustain sideman relationships both with Danilo Pérez and with Jack DeJohnette’s new band, which includes guitarist Dave Fiuczynski, keyboardist George Colligan and bassist Jerome Harris.

“I’m used to being a leader, so it’s been refreshing and challenging to shape what I do into someone’s else overall artistic statement night after night,” Mahanthappa said, referring to a 2011 European tour with DeJohnette. “Jack and Danilo give me a lot of latitude—they react to me as much as I react to them musically. I’m thrilled that they called me because they want me, not because they’re going down a list of alto players.”

Looking forward to 2012, Mahanthappa intends to “streamline what I’m offering as a bandleader.” He’ll focus primarily on Samdhi, the Indo-Pak Coalition and Gamak, a revised, plugged-in quartet that retains bandmates Weiss and bassist François Moutin, and adds Fiuczynski. Each ensemble allows the leader to exploit the guitar’s ability to complement his increasingly sophisticated mapping onto the saxophone of the tuning schemes of such double-reed instruments as the North Indian shehnai and the South Indian nadaswaram.

“The idea was specifically to work with Fuze, not just [any] guitarist,” Mahanthappa says of Gamak. “He’s a prolific student of non-Western tuning systems, be they Chinese or Indian or Middle Eastern. Also, we have a nice sonic blend; we can play a melody together, and bring it to life in a way I can’t do with the fixed-pitch nature of a piano. I feel the same way with David Gilmore in Samdhi. It’s about the rhythms as well as the tunings, and trying to re-contextualize these qualities within a Western jazz setting.”
## Drums

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I remember one time being audited by the IRS,” Paul Motian recalled. “It was driving me crazy. All day long, that’s all I thought about. I felt like jumping out the window. But that night when I went to play, that was all gone. I played the music and had a great time, had fun. If I’m really sad and in a bad mood, I’m not going to bring that to the music. The music is the savior. I just love it, man.”

For more than 50 years, Motian has provided some of the most personal, colorful and swinging drum work in jazz, from his wonder years with Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett to his trio recordings with Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell to his inexhaustible output as a leader. But as much as Motian lives in the moment as a musician, as a tale-teller his sentimentality is showing. Motian’s gig diary, which he has kept since 1957, stirs fascinating memories.

“With Bill Evans and with Scott LaFaro,” Motian recalls, “something new seemed to be happening. In those days nobody played like that in a trio. Back then a trio was a piano player with bass and drum accompaniment. But with Bill and Scott, all of a sudden it became one voice out of three people. I didn’t plan anything. I listened and took from what I heard and it just came out how it came out. I’m lucky that it’s something of value.”

Motian remains extremely active, with a batch of recent recordings that includes The Windmills Of Your Mind (with Bill Frisell, guitar; Thomas Morgan, bass; Petra Haden, vocals) on Winter & Winter, Chick Corea’s Further Explorations Of Bill Evans with Eddie Gomez and guests Greg Osby and John Scofield, and Live At Birdland, an ECM release credited to Lee Konitz/Brad Mehldau/Charlie Haden/Paul Motian.

“That night at Birdland we played standards that were all disguised,” Motian said. “You don’t know if it’s ‘Lullaby Of Birdland’ or ‘Oleo.’ No one said anything to anybody; people just started playing.”

Whatever the job, Motian never leaves New York. The mountain must come to him, and typically at his favorite club, the Village Vanguard. “I don’t know why I love playing the Vanguard so much,” Motian mused. “They give me the gig! The first time I played in there was Christmas 1957 with Lee Konitz. I do like the sound at the Vanguard—it’s the best. When we played there with Bill Evans there were always two acts: folk bands, comedians, singers, always a double bill. We played opposite Lenny Bruce in 1962, and opposite Stiller and Meara, who have been forgotten. I played at Slug’s with Keith Jarrett the day after Lee Morgan got shot. I played the Half Note with Lennie Tristano three months at a time. You started around 10 [p.m.] and played until 4 in the morning. But even with that I don’t remember feeling tired at the end of the night.”

As a drummer, Motian is more comfortable discussing the giants of yesteryear than his own contributions. He’s perhaps too humble for self-appraisal.

“Kenny Clarke was about my favorite,” Motian says. “The drummers that I loved from Kenny Clarke to Philly Joe Jones to Max Roach to Art Blakey, the sound they got out of the drums and the feeling—just tops. Some drummers just play music on the drum set. Kenny Clarke could play four bars and it sounded like a symphony. Sid Catlett is another one. He’d play a few bars on a snare drum and it was like an opera, so much going on.”

Gentle prodding, followed by the occasional blank stare, prompts a brief self-evaluation. “I can hear what I play without playing it,” Motian accedes. “Space, space. Paul Bley said he loved playing with me because I didn’t pound shit on top of the ride cymbal. A big part of it is listening, man. I can lay out for four bars and I still hear the time. That’s what I mean about playing but not playing. You’re playing something but you’re really not actually playing it.”

Motian’s approach keeps his 80-year-old frame young. Ever curious, he’s constantly learning new music, always developing new projects (an MJQ tribute is scheduled at the Vanguard), always wondering, “What if?”

“Always wondered how the big band drummers could hear everything,” Motian says. “Those big bands were spread out. There were no monitors, no microphones. They must have known what they were doing, man, ‘cause the music sounds great.”

This year’s DownBeat Critics Poll marks the first time Motian has won the honor for top drummer. “I’m a little embarrassed about winning the poll with all these great players around,” he says. “Gee, whiz. But I’m really thrilled to win. It’s quite an honor.”
## 59th Annual DownBeat Critics Poll

### COMPLETE RESULTS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Jazz Group</th>
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<td>Charles Lloyd Quartet</td>
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<td>Dave Holland Quintet</td>
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<td>Keith Jarrett/Gary Peacock/Jack DeJohnette</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branford Marsalis Quartet</td>
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**RISING STAR Jazz Group**

| Vijay Iyer Trio      | 68                      |
| Miguel Zenón         | 47                      |
| Claudia Quintet      | 40                      |
| Mary Halvorson Trio  | 40                      |

| Mostly Other People Do The Killing | 40                      |
| Robert Glasper Trio             | 35                      |
| Marcus Strickland Trio          | 32                      |
| Gerald Clayton Trio             | 31                      |
| Fly                              | 28                      |
| Rudresh Mahanthappa Indo-Pak Coalition | 28                      |
| Nicole Mitchell Black Earth Ensemble | 25                      |
| Kneebody                        | 24                      |
| Mike Reed’s Loose Assembly      | 24                      |

**Mr. Ho’s Orchestrotica**

| Howard Wiley and the Angola Project | 17                      |

**Trumpet**

| Dave Douglas | 88 |
| Wynton Marsalis | 69  |
| Brian Lynch   | 51  |
| Terence Blanchard | 44  |
| Terell Stafford | 44  |
| Wadada Leo Smith | 42  |
| Nicholas Payton | 40  |
| Tom Harrell   | 36  |
| Roy Hargrove  | 36  |
| Ingrid Jensen | 32  |
| Tomasz Stanko | 32  |
| Jeremy Pelt   | 23  |
| Steven Bernstein | 20  |
| Christian Scott | 19  |
| Ralph Alessi  | 16  |

**RISING STAR Trombone**

| Luis Bonilla | 86 |
| Alan Ferber   | 80  |
| Josh Roseman  | 63  |
| Vincent Gardner | 62 |
| Marshall Gilkes | 40  |
| Gary Valente  | 38  |
| Jeff Albert   | 32  |
| Julian Priester | 30 |
| Trombone Shorty | 23 |
| Joey Sellers  | 16  |
| Andy Martin   | 13  |

**Soprano Saxophone**

| Dave Liebman | 111 |
| Jane Ira Bloom | 92 |
| Wayne Shorter | 92  |
| Branford Marsalis | 71 |
| Steve Wilson  | 42  |
| Joe Lovano    | 32  |
| Evan Parker   | 29  |
| Chris Potter  | 23  |
| James Carter  | 21  |
| Sam Newsome  | 21  |
| Anat Cohen    | 20  |
| Joshua Redman | 19  |
| Kenny Garrett | 18  |
| Roscoe Mitchell | 18 |
| Jane Bunnett  | 14  |

**RISING STAR Alto Saxophone**

| Jon Irabagon | 68        |
| David Binney | 67        |
| Tia Fuller   | 62        |
| Grace Kelly  | 61        |
| Antonio Hart | 55        |
| Ted Nash     | 47        |
| Jaleel Shaw  | 41        |
| Matana Roberts | 36    |
| Sherman Irby | 31        |
| Darius Jones | 24        |
| Francisco Cafiso | 23 |
| Sharel Cassity | 21    |

| John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble | 113 |
| Darcy James Argue’s Secret Society | 80  |
| Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra | 50  |
| Steven Bernstein’s Millennial Territory Orchestra | 49 |
| Orin Evans’ Captain Black Big Band | 45  |
| Jason Lindner Big Band | 44  |
| Gordon Goodwin’s Big Phat Band | 36  |
| Satoko Fujii Orchestra | 30  |
| Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra | 28  |
| Chicago Jazz Philharmonic | 18  |

| Trombone Shorty | 20 |

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**RISING STAR Alto Saxophone**

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| David Binney | 67        |
| Tia Fuller   | 62        |
| Grace Kelly  | 61        |
| Antonio Hart | 55        |
| Ted Nash     | 47        |
| Jaleel Shaw  | 41        |
| Matana Roberts | 36    |
| Sherman Irby | 31        |
| Darius Jones | 24        |
| Francisco Cafiso | 23 |
| Sharel Cassity | 21    |
Tenor Saxophone

Sonny Rollins 111
Joe Lovano 109
Chris Potter 48
Charles Lloyd 45
David S. Ware 36
Joshua Redman 35
Wayne Shorter 31
 Branford Marsalis 27
Von Freeman 22
Eric Alexander 20
Fred Anderson 20
Mark Turner 19
James Moody 18
James Carter 17
Kidd Jordan 12

RISING STAR

JD Allen 63
Mark Turner 60
Eric Alexander 49
Tony Malaby 43
Marcus Strickland 42
Anat Cohen 40
Jon Irabagon 33
Donny McCaslin 31
Bill McHenry 30
Walter Smith III 30
Tim Warfield 29
Grant Stewart 28

Baritone Saxophone

Gary Smulyan 131
James Carter 71
Ronnie Cuber 60
Hamiet Bluiett 46

John Surman 36
Ken Vandermark 34
Mats Gustafsson 33
Joe Temperley 33
Dave Rempis 29
Scott Robinson 27
Claire Daly 20
Howard Johnson 20
Charlie Kohlhase 20
Charles Evans 18
Tim Berne 17

RISING STAR

Claire Daly 74
Greg Tardy 53
Roger Rosenberg 47
Alex Harding 41
Gebrhard Ullmann 38
Ted Hogarth 27
Andy Stein 27
Adam Schroeder 25
Brian Landrus 24
Lauren Sevian 22
Jason Marshall 21
François Corneloup 19

Clarinet

Anat Cohen 132
Don Byron 79
Ken Peplowski 63
Evan Christopher 50
Eddie Daniels 46
Paquito D’Rivera 46
Buddy DeFranco 36
Louis Sclavis 32
Victor Goines 29
Marty Ehrlich 25
Michael Moore 23
Ben Goldberg 22

RISING STAR

Nicole Mitchell 69
Henry Threadgill 61
Jane Bunnett 59
James Moody 59
Lew Tabackin 58
Charles Lloyd 57
Frank Weiss 51
James Newton 38
Sam Rivers 32
Jamie Baum 24
Ted Nash 20
Dave Valentin 20
Hubert Laws 19
Ali Ryerson 19
Dave Liebman 15

Flute

RISING STAR

Nicole Mitchell 98
Jamie Baum 54
Holly Hofmann 53
Ali Ryerson 52
Tia Fuller 45
Mark Weinstein 35
James Newton 35
Kent Jordan 30
Wolfgang Puschning 26
Michel Gentile 21
Anne Drummond 20
Sam Most 16

Violin

Regina Carter 167
Billy Bang 110
Jenny Scheinman 109
Mark Feldman 52
Mark O’Connor 45
Jean-Luc Ponty 30
John Blake 21
Jason Kao Hwang 19
Christian Howes 16
Carla Kihlstedt 14
Mat Maneri 14
Svend Asmussen 13

RISING STAR

Christian Howes 56
Jason Kao Hwang 52
Carla Kihlstedt 45
Aaron Weinstein 42
Didier Lockwood 41
Jeff Gauthier 39
Svend Asmussen 34
Susie Hansen 29
Zach Brock 27
Mads Tollings 20
Flurin Niculescu 17
Mary Oliver 17

Guitar

Bill Frisell 84
John Scofield 62
Russell Malone 53
Pat Metheny 53
Kurt Rosenwinkel 49
Jim Hall 41
Marc Ribot 37
Nels Cline 36
John McLaughlin 30

Cyro Baptista

Gretchen Parlato
Howard Alden  28
John Abercrombie  20
Charlie Hunter  19
Jeff Parker  19
Peter Bernstein  17
Anthony Wilson  17

RISING STAR
Guitar
Mary Halvorson  94
Julian Lage  86
Joe Cohn  51
Peter Bernstein  47
Ben Monder  47
Adam Rogers  46
Jeff Parker  41
Liberty Ellman  34
Roni Ben-Hur  21
Will Bernard  18
Jonathan Freilich  14

Electric Bass
Christian McBride  91
Marcus Miller  70
Steve Swallow  70
Stanley Clarke  64
John Patitucci  48
Jamaaladeen Tacuma  37
Ben Allison  33
Victor Wooten  30
Esperanza Spalding  29
James Genus  25
Bob Cranshaw  24
Stomu Takeishi  22
Matt Garrison  18
Jimmy Haslip  17
Avery Sharpe  11

RISING STAR
Bass
John Hébert  59
Drew Gress  39
Reuben Rogers  39
Avishai Cohen  37
Larry Grenadier  36
Linda Oh  29
James Genus  27
Greg Cohen  26
Ben Williams  26
Scott Colley  24
François Motin  24
Robert Hurst  23

RISING STAR
Drums
Nasheet Waits  69
Dafnis Prieto  65
Antonio Sanchez  55
Willie Jones III  40
Allison Miller  39
Gerald Cleaver  33
Gerry Hemingway  33
Francisco Mela  29
E.J. Strickland  26
Dan Weiss  26
Paal Nilssøn-Love  25
Scott Amendola  21

RISING STAR
Electric Bass
Esperanza Spalding  81
Avishai Cohen  33
Matthew Garrison  32
Ben Allison  29
Derrick Hodge  28
Drew Gress  27
Stomu Takeishi  27
James Genus  22
Skúli Sverrisson  21
Hadrien Feraud  20
Nate McBride  20
Tal Wilkenfeld  15

RISING STAR
Vibes
Jason Adasıwicz  84
Jason Marsalis  77
Warren Wolf  68
Matt Moran  46
Bryan Carroll  42
Khan Jamal  34
Chris Dingman  31
Peter Appleby  25
Joe Chambers  24
Mark Sherman  22
Teddy Charles  19

Gunter Hampel  18
Ed Saind  18

Percussion
Cyro Baptista  69
Pancho Sanchez  61
Hamid Drake  53
Arito Moreira  50
Zakir Hussain  48
Bobby Sanabria  37
Kahlil El'Zabar  35
John Santos  27
Mino Cinelu  26
Giovanni Hildago  26
Han Bennink  23
Adam Rudolph  22
Naná Vasconcelos  22
Trilok Gurtu  21
Pete Escovedo  20

Susie Ibarra  109
Dan Weiss  68
Giovanni Hidalgo  56
Naná Vasconcelos  40
Michael Zerang  37
Sunny Jain  35
Badal Roy  34
Daniel Sadownick  33
Satoshi Takeishi  28
Arto Tunçboyacıyan  28
Guilherme Franco  25
Pedro Martinez  15

RISING STAR
Miscellaneous Instrument
Erik Friedlander  75
Gary Versace  65
Edmar Castaneda  56
Tom Varner  40
Anouar Brahem  38
Daniel Smith  37
Rabih Abou-Khalil  33
Fred Lonberg-Holm  31
Scott Robinson  30
Matt Perrine  28
Peggy Lee  25
Rudi Mahall  22

Male Vocalist
Kurt Elling  143
Andy Bey  49
The Critics have spoken. Now, here’s your chance to vote!

Just go to DownBeat.com
Make your vote count in naming the year's best in jazz, blues and beyond!

VOTE!
### 59th Annual Critics Poll

**Mose Allison** 47  
**Theo Bleckmann** 39  
**Bobby McFerrin** 38  
**Tony Bennett** 32  
**Freddy Cole** 31  
**Kevin Mahogany** 30  
**Giacoimo Gates** 27  
**Bob DorOUGH** 27  
**Ernie Andrews** 22  
**John Pizzarelli** 20  
**Mark Murphy** 19  
**Jimmy Scott** 19  
**Jon Hendricks** 18

**Female Vocalist**

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<td>Dianne Reeves</td>
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<td>Dee Dee Bridgewater</td>
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<td>Abbey Lincoln</td>
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<td>Roberta Gambarini</td>
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<td>Luciana Souza</td>
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<td>Lee Townsend</td>
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<td>Buddy Guy, Living Proof (SILVERTONE)</td>
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<td>Otis Taylor, Clovis People, Vol. 3 (TELARC)</td>
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<td>Lucky Peterson, You Can Always Turn Around (GREYUS)</td>
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<td>The Holmes Brothers, Feed My Soul (ALLIGATOR)</td>
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<td>Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble, Couldn’t Stand The Weather: Legacy Edition (EPIC/LEGACY)</td>
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<td>Eden Brent, Ain’t Got No Troubles (YELLOW DOG)</td>
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<td>Gary Lucas &amp; Dean Bowman, Chase The Devil (KNITTING FACTORY)</td>
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<td>Hot Tuna, Live At New Orleans House Berkeley, CA 09/69 (COLLECTORS’ CHOICE)</td>
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<td>Ron Gaines And His Orchestra, Tuxedo Blues (BLACK GOLD)</td>
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<td>Carolina Chocolate Drops</td>
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<td>Medeski Martin &amp; Wood</td>
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<td>Dr. John</td>
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The Critics

Following are the 80 critics who voted in DownBeat’s 59th Annual International Critics Poll. The critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices (no more than five points per choice) in each of two categories: Established Talent and Rising Stars.

Don Albert: DB, Jazz Journal International, Financial Mail
Frank Alkyer: DB
Mark R. Bacon: JazzRIO
Chris Barton: Los Angeles Times
Peter Bastian: Jazzthetik, Jazzpodium
Fred Bouchard: DB, All About Jazz
Michael Bourne: DB, WBGO-FM
Herb Boyd: DB, Jazziz, Bass Player, Billboard, St. Petersburg Times, Las Vegas City Life
Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum
Stuart Broomer: Toronto Life, Musicworks, Point of Departure, Signal To Noise
Nate Chinen: New York Times, JazzTimes, The Gig
Aaron Cohen: DB
Thomas Conrad: Stereophile, JazzTimes
J.D. Considine: Toronto Globe & Mail
Owen Cordle: The News & Observer, JazzTimes
Paul de Barros: DB, Seattle Times
Alain Drouot: DB, WNNJ-FM, Cadence
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Ed Enright: DB
John Ephland: DB, Relix, Kalamazoo Gazette
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Dave Helland: BMI.com, Grammy.com
Lee Hildebrand: San Francisco Chronicle, Oakland West
Geoffrey Himes: DB, Washington Post, JazzTimes, Baltimore City Paper
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C. Andrew Hovan: DB, All About Jazz, Jazz Review
Tom Hull: Village Voice
Michael Jackson: DB, Jazzwise
Robin James: DB, Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder
Willard Jenkins: DB, JazzTimes, Jazzwise, Independent Ear Blog, Openskyjazz.com
George Kanzler: JazzTimes, Hot House, All About Jazz
Bob Karlovits: DB
Yoshi Kato: DB, San Jose Mercury News
Kiyoshi Koyoma: NHK-FM, Jazz Tonight
David Kunian: DB, Offbeat, Gambit Weekly
John Litweiler: Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago Sun-Times
Jim Macnie: DB, Village Voice
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Bill Meyer: DB, Chicago Reader, Signal To Noise, The Wire
Ken Micallef: DB, Remix, Modern Drummer
Virgil Mihaiu: DB, Steaua/Jazz Contex, Jazz.Pt, Jazz.Ru, Musica Progresiva
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Norman Provizer: DB, KUVO-FM
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Guy Reynard: Critic
Chris Robinson: DB, Earshot Jazz
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Antonio Rubio: DB, Correo De Manha, Jazz.Pt
Gene Santoro: New York Daily News, Weider History Group, Chamber Music
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Thomas Stauder: DB
W. Royal Stokes: Jazzhouse.org, JazzNotes
Andrew Sussman: Critic
Otakar Svoboda: Tutti, Czech Jazz Society
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Ron Sweetman: Scena Musicale
Joe Tangari: DB, Pitchfork
 Eliot Tiegel: Critic
Josef Woodard: DB, Los Angeles Times, JazzTimes, Santa Barbara Independent, Opera Now
Scott Yanow: JazzTimes, Jazziz, L.A. Jazz Scene
Jack Tracy Set DownBeat Critics’ Table

By John McDonough

Jack Tracy, who joined DownBeat in 1949 and led the magazine as editor from 1953 to 1958, died Dec. 21, 2010, in Nooksack, Wash. He was 84. It would be hard to imagine this issue’s Critics Poll without his impact: Tracy guided DownBeat out of the last phrases of its fabled but fading antiquity into a modern era of serious criticism and journalism and then went on to become one of the most important jazz producers of the 1960s, mentoring such talents as Ahmad Jamal, Benny Golson and Rahsaan Roland Kirk.

“I started writing for DownBeat just after Jack left,” said Dan Morgenstern, Director of the Institute for Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, “and knew him primarily as the record producer he became. But there’s no question that his tenure at DownBeat covered one of the magazine’s most transformative decades.”

In a 1995 interview, Tracy reminisced about his arrival at the magazine. “I had just graduated from the University of Minnesota School of Journalism when I joined the DownBeat Chicago staff,” he recalled. It was April 1949, and his salary was $75 a week. “I was 22 and that was one of the highest salaries of anyone in my class.” Born in 1926, Tracy had served as a medic in the Navy during the end of World War II before coming to Chicago. His first DownBeat byline appeared Oct. 7, 1949.

When Tracy arrived at DownBeat, its founder and publisher, Glenn Burrs, still ran the magazine. But its fortunes were floundering as unpaid printing bills piled up. Thirteen months after joining DownBeat, Tracy found himself with a new employer when the John Maher Printing Company took control. In January 1951, with editorial management still in flux, Tracy and two staffers took over the record reviews. Each scored a given record on a scale from one to 10. The combined average of the three became the rating. This method proved unwieldy, though, and in May 1952 it was abandoned for the present five-star rating system, with each review assigned to a single writer. It was Tracy who decided in January 1957 that full personnel listings should accompany all record reviews—an editorial approach that continues to this day.

In October 1952 Norman Weiser came over from Billboard to become president and publisher. He appointed Tracy editor in early 1953. Tracy recruited or nurtured dozens of important writers, including Ralph J. Gleason, Dom Cerulli, John Tynan, John S. Wilson, Martin Williams and Nat Hentoff. “Jack Tracy was DownBeat,” said Hentoff. “His spirit, his knowledge and his continual determination to be accurate and insightful was the magazine.”

As circulation slumped with the decline of the big bands, Tracy responded with a flurry of innovations. He began devoting issues to recording sessions, and brought to Mercury for the famous teaming with Max Roach, Rich Versus Roach. In 1960 he moved to the Chess-Checker-Argo group, where he concentrated on the Argo jazz line. Among the artists he produced were Jamal, Golson, Ramsey Lewis, Art Farmer and James Moody. He also recorded Kirk’s first important work for Argo, then brought him to Mercury when it merged with Dutch Phillips in 1961. He continued with the company and helped form another jazz subsidiary, Limelight Records, in 1965. In 1963 Tracy co-authored (with Leonard Feather) an anecdotal memoir, Laughter From The Hip.

Perhaps the most important page that DownBeat turned during the Tracy era was its initiative into jazz education. When Tracy was unable to attend a festival of high school bands in 1956, he passed the invitation to the magazine’s publisher, Chuck Suber, who returned convinced that schools represented a growth frontier in which DownBeat could play a major role. From that point forward Tracy and Suber became leaders in the growing student band movement. The magazine helped rally advertisers to sponsor festivals and musicians to become clinicians. On Oct. 3, 1957, DownBeat published its first annual school band issue.

That turned out to be Tracy’s last major act at DownBeat. In March 1958, he left to join Mercury Records, where his many DownBeat contacts proved invaluable. One was Buddy Rich, whom he had met in 1950 and brought to Mercury for the famous teaming with Max Roach, Rich Versus Roach. In 1960 he moved to the Chess-Checker-Argo group, where he concentrated on the Argo jazz line. Among the artists he produced were Jamal, Golson, Ramsey Lewis, Art Farmer and James Moody. He also recorded Kirk’s first important work for Argo, then brought him to Mercury when it merged with Dutch Phillips in 1961. He continued with the company and helped form another jazz subsidiary, Limelight Records, in 1965. In 1963 Tracy co-authored (with Leonard Feather) an anecdotal memoir, Laughter From The Hip.

As contributors for DownBeat, we will always be grateful that Tracy made the magazine what it is today.
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When you have a fat sound and deep chops like Sean Jones, all you need is a cache of material that best serves both attributes. It seems like the trumpeter has been on the hunt for such tunes from the start. Previous records have found him placing inventive solos in the service of overly smooth ensemble work that sometimes tilted towards pop tail-wagging. In a few cases they sounded like fusion played on acoustic instruments; sumptuous on one hand, creamy on the other.

No Need For Words turns that around. It’s the first album to not only find the horn player throwing punch after punch after punch, but the first to see his colleagues offering him genuine challenges. The resulting tussles are creative in spirit. Jones, former lead trumpeter in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, is a hard-bop fan with a yen for the Jazz Messengers—several moments in his canon reflect Art Blakey’s macho sophistication.

Indeed, Blakey casts a shadow on these new tunes—and that’s a good thing. It brings focus to the action, and spotlights the serious side of Jones’ improvisation skills.

Take the wham/bam attack of the title tune. Because he corralled a terrifically vigorous rhythm section (bassist Luques Curtis, drummer Obed Calvaire and pianist Orrin Evans), the music’s glide has a muscular thrust. His solo darts around playfully and floats rather than storms—the vehemence is delivered by his teammates, whose accents arrive with some dangerous jabs.

A similar tension bubbles up in the ballads. “Momma” fends off schmaltz on the strength of musicianship alone, and “Forgiveness (Release)” conjures gospel with the nobility of an Abdullah Ibrahim tune. The chemistry is complex, the interplay tight and gorgeous.

Alto saxophonist Brian Hogans is an apt foil. Like Jones, he speaks in pithy phrases that also manage to underscore expression.

The emotional narrative behind the disc has to do with the many ways that romance raises its head. Thanks to this team’s deep communication, love does turn out to be a many-splendored thing.

—Jim Macnie

No Need For Words: Look And See; Olive Juice; Momma; Touch And Go; No Need For Words; Obsession; Love’s Fury; Forgiveness (Release). (56:21)

Personnel: Sean Jones, trumpet; Brian Hogans, alto saxophone, strings (7); Luques Curtis, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums; Orrin Evans, piano, keyboards (7); Corey Henry, organ (5); Khalil K for the Bell, percussion (2, 7, 8); Matt Stevens, guitar (7).
Guitarist Julian Lage is an exceptional talent whose consummate technique and unfeathered imagination allow him to strike out in distinctive directions at will. His flow will remind many of Pat Metheny, but Lage’s genre-besotted will to freedom is reminiscent—in spirit, if not in kind—of Brazilian guitarist Baden Powell. On this album, Lage applies his background as an acoustic flat-picker—husky sound, bold attack, lickety-split lines—to jazz improv, chamber music textures (with cello and tenor saxophone) and carefully layered set pieces of double and triple guitar overdubs. The overall result does not add up to the integrated concept album the liner notes suggest was the goal—the invocation of an imaginary American small town called Gladwell—but rather a pleasant miscellany that is sometimes sparkling, other times a trifle bland. The recording quality is downright odd, with the single-line instruments often sounding like they were coming out of a bottle in another room, and the overall effect rather synthetic.

The music is only mildly engaging until the fourth track, “However,” when the zesty repetition of a four-note figure explodes into a happy hoe-down recalling the Jimmy Giuffre folk-jazz of “Pickin’ Em Up and Layin’ Em Down.” Lage’s elegant finger-picking on the Elizabeth Cotton classic “Freight Train” keeps the mood going, with traces of slack key languor. “Listening Walk” showcases guitar starbursts over percolating percussion and a contrasting slow line.

But the rest of the material, though often cinematically evocative, is a bit literal: case in point, the imitation of overlapping church bells via guitar overdubs on “Cathedral.” A striking take on “Autumn Leaves” lets listeners luxuriate in Lage’s fleet fingers and Johnny Smith warmth, but where this tune fits into the big picture is hard to say. And melodica and cello together is a sound I hope not to hear again soon.

But Lage is young. Because there is so much music in this guy, we have much to look forward to.

—Paul de Barros

★ ★ ★

Challe Konitz/Brad Mehldau
Live At Birdland
★ ★ ★ 1/2

In any competition between youth and age, one is best advised to choose the latter. Experience generally trumps enthusiasm, patience im petuousness. But on Live At Birdland we have the rare exception. Three elders and one (relative) youth, and the crazy insight of the young one carries the day.

Of course, this isn’t a competition, it’s a collaboration, and the joint maneuvers of the super-quartet need to gel. The older guys sound great, if ultra-laid-back, wending their way dreamily through six standards, all clocking in up over 10 minutes. Lee Konitz sets the mood with his trademark floating melodicism; though he’s lost a step on his former self, he makes every note count, meandering meaningfully, sometimes pulling the train unexpectedly on a different track, but never getting lost.

Paul Motian and Charlie Haden make a curiously un-demonstrative rhythm team, the drummer leaving little holes in the flow, Haden his inimitable self, leaden, mysterious, full of fascinating decisions and directions. With Konitz and Brad Mehldau, it could be a mess of personalities, but it works because everyone listens and interacts and builds together. But there are moments when I wish Haden had picked up the pace, rather than gravitating towards a loping, slowly morphing time feel.

What cuts the molten-ness is Mehldau, who is quixotically brilliant across the board. He’s an instigator, pushing Konitz to find new lines; is quixotically brilliant across the board. He’s an instigator, pushing Konitz to find new lines; a font of endless variation, taking “Lullaby Of Birdland” through a prismatic set of transformations. The pianist spells romance in all its forms, and it works because everyone listens and interacts and builds together. But there are moments when I wish Haden had picked up the pace, rather than gravitating towards a loping, slowly morphing time feel.

Julian Lage Group
Gladwell
EMARCY 0015502

★ ★ ★

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Lee Konitz/Brad Mehldau/Chalie Haden/Paul Motian
Live At Birdland
ECM 0015667

★ ★ ★ 1/2

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Sean Jones, *No Need For Words*

Not an album “based simply on musical talent,” we are told; instead, an essay on “the meaning of love.” Has musical talent become such a commodity that it requires such a pompous justification? Jones is a virtuoso player and crack leader. His music has a crisp, clear-headed energy (if you skip “Love’s Fury”) and needs no emotional GPS.

I dig Jones’ dry, delightfully unadorned sound. His writing is less consistently persuasive, even if the band attacks it with a healthy appetite. (Particularly unconvincing stab at the furious on “Love’s Fury”) Pleasant enough mainstream tunes, tinged with contemporary soul, in need of something more personal. —John McDonough

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Tight and bright from start to finish, with some nice gospel feels (“Momma,” “Forgiveness”), this forthright, declarative album showcases Jones’ magnificent tone in all registers, excellent flow and brilliant turns of phrase. But the other soloists don’t seem to be in his league. —Paul de Barros

Julian Lage, *Gladwell*

A pastoral peace to this mostly acoustic ensemble, even when the music stirs. Poignant images from *The Sterile Cuckoo* and the landscapes of Hamilton College flashed before me. “Freight Train” has a lonesome folkish quality that Lage nurtures beautifully, if briefly. “Telegram” feels like a fast train song carrying Lage into the guitar pantheon.

In sentimental segments, like “Cocoon,” Lage’s imaginary landscape stretches into the characterless bland, though his acoustic guitar playing has fetishistic sparkle and he takes a standpoint on American music that’s inclusive, expansive and not imitative. —John Corbett

I’m not hearing much of the narrative that drives this concept album, but I am taken with the way the young guitarist bars his obvious virtuosity from marring the music’s natural ebullience. And his choice of instrumentation, especially the cello, bolsters the date’s individuality. My favorite cut might be the solo “Freight Train.” —Jim Macnie

Branford Marsalis/Joey Calderazzo, *Songs Of Mirth And Melancholy*

This is a showcase for two things: Calderazzo, generally, and Marsalis’ soprano. The pianist sounds wonderful, whether playing Brahms or his own Thelonious Monk-ish “One Way.” Soprano saxophone is such an abused instrument, it needs players like Marsalis to show that it’s not a total loss. —John McDonough

Their vivaciousness is fetching. But melancholy is their real forte. “The Bard Lachrymose” and even the Brahms drily create moods that are completely palpable. Calderazzo is in sharp form throughout. —Jim Macnie

Lee Konitz/Brad Mehldau/Charlie Haden/Paul Motian, *Live At Birdland*

One of the most memorable of May–December jazz summits. Konitz’s cool radiates a warm off-center temperament. Mehldau is a man of many means, none more welcome that the wispy single-note lines that coil quietly around Konitz. Haden solos with a rich, syrupy undertow.

Improvisation as a matter of judicious positioning. If you blow that alto lick here, I’ll make a cymbal wash there. If you punctuate the chorus with a thump, I’ll trill something in the upper register. It’s got snoozy moments, but it’s entertaining to hear them negotiate their peculiarities. —John McDonough

These guys hook up softly and magically. Mehldau’s inner voicings and bell-ringing of the changes are a delight. Konitz plays with more verve than usual; Haden and Motian sculpt lovely contours. —Paul de Barros
**Ari Hoenig**

**Lines Of Oppression**

NAVE RECORDS 621111

★★★½

Drummer Ari Hoenig’s *Lines Of Oppression*, which features pianist Tigran Hamasyan, guitarist Gilad Hekselman and bassists Orlando le Fleming and Chris Tordini, is a hip and dynamic album that effectively mixes rock and pop elements with more mainstream jazz approaches. Hoenig’s compositions, especially the title track and “Arrows And Loops,” rely on numerous written-out sections, which the group digs into fully committed. This emphasis on repeated and contrasting sections is similar to Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey, although the groups sound nothing alike. Hekselman’s slightly bluesy electric guitar tone provides a nice contrast to the impressionistic “Love’s Feathered Nails,” especially when juxtaposed against Hamasyan’s shimmering and bell-like chords. Hoenig is a clean impressionistic “Love’s Feathered Nails,” especially when juxtaposed against Hamasyan’s shimmering and bell-like chords. Hoenig plays the melody on the toms with mallets, which is a creative approach to a classic, especially when he shifts the tune slightly out of time. After the head, the group settles into a relaxed shuffle over which Hekselman takes a measured solo that is followed by Hamasyan’s understated yet funky statement.

The album’s only weak spot is the wordless group vocals at the end of “Wedding Song,” which are a bit contrived. —Chris Robinson

**Matt Nelson Trio**

**Nostalgiamaniac**

CHICAGO SESSIONS 14

★★★

Matt Nelson, a young Chicago pianist, dabbles in a range of projects—rock, hip-hop, actor Gary Sinise’s band—but he isn’t giving jazz short shrift. For *Nostalgiamaniac*, Nelson leads a piano trio, a hardly uncommon route, although a quartet would have provided a safety net. The addition of a horn or guitar not only would broaden the scope of the arrangements, but also create flexibility for the soloists.

But the opener, “Infatuation,” dispels such concerns. The first of Nelson’s eight tunes, it includes a vamp, a polished melody over a brisk tempo and then a strong solo. “The Epitome” follows a similar course, except it’s faster and more boppish. Drummer Matt Nischan’s “Compliments,” another up-tempo tune, is also quite strong. On the ballads, Nelson fares reasonably well, although “Quiet Love (and Sunshine)” and “The Art of Suppression” sound better than the unaccompanied “Longing For...” which seems a little precious.

My favorite track may be “Lady Luna,” composed by Matthew Santos, a singer-songwriter with whom Nelson has collaborated. It’s probably the album’s least jazzy tune, but it’s pensive, lyrical, even stately. Nelson’s reading demonstrates restraint, an impressive grasp of dynamics, and a nice cresendo at the end. Bassist Graham Czach’s well-constructed solo also deserves props.

*Nostalgiamaniac* makes me want to check out the musicians’ other projects, jazz or otherwise. As it turns out, the album’s title is misleading—Nelson is looking forward, not backward. With chops, taste and an evolving repertoire, you can hardly blame him.

—Eric Fine

**Lisa Hilton**

**Underground**

RUBY SLIPPERS PRODUCTIONS 1014

★★½

Pianist Lisa Hilton returns with another program of originals that frustrate almost as much as they reward. The sense that what she’s offering are compositional fragments, rather than compositions, hamper this production.

She shows more stylistic influences than on her previous release *Sunny Day Theory* (2009), yet still fails to exhibit a sense of beginning, middle and end to these recordings. Her sources include Erik Satie careening on “B Minor Waltz,” a quote from the second movement to Beethoven’s Pathétique Sonata as the basis for “Boston+Blues,” and Lonnie Liston Smith’s early ’70s modal macramé in the rolling, aquatic clusters of “Someday, Somehow, Soon.” But these pieces don’t grow in interesting ways, or resolve with much discernible finality. The hasty, slip-out-the-back endings of “Someday” and “Just A Little Past Midnight” are almost dishonest in their slipshod fadeouts.

JD Allen’s tenor saxophone doesn’t have much to do on the pieces to which he contributes. Another pianist would provide a framework for him to work out on, and interact with him. Hilton keeps him on a short leash, allowing him to reinforce her lines or shade what she’s doing. He gets off some brief rippling runs on “Come And Go,” perhaps the most successful (and least structured) piece here. The commanding bassist Larry Grenadier provides similar shoring up of Hilton’s strongest asset: her rhythmic bass chords. Nasheet Waits thankfully provides dancing stick cymbal subdivisions and textural variety.

It’s a pity, because Hilton clearly has a musical voice and some technique at her disposal.

—Kirk Silsbee

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chicagosessions.com

lisahiltonmusic.com
Two piano players, two sets of ideas of how to play solo, one design that both artists use to craft their performances. Listening to Gonzalo Rubalcaba’s *FE ... Faith* next to Jean-Michel Pilc’s *Essential*, one might be inclined to pay closer attention, if only for the slight differences in attitude, execution and overall expertise. There are real differences, if only superficially: Pilc’s is a live CD, and temperament-wise, Pilc tends to be a bit more lively, Rubalcaba more introspective, meditative.

Pilc and Rubalcaba come at the jazz tradition from their respective posts originating beyond America’s shores. But it would be difficult finding supposed Latin flavors coming from one, and more European classical devices from the other. And, in fact, both players are so good that technique is noticed only in hindsight, and isn’t a distraction. Instead, *FE ... Faith* (released on Rubalcaba’s own label) and *Essential* (which comes as an enhanced CD that features live video) play like current readings on the state of the art in solo jazz piano, circa 2011, their performances creatively lifting references to some of the instrument’s previous masters along the way.

Each pianist is a mature artist with a distinctive voice, and yet, it is fascinating to listen to each player’s take on the Miles Davis/Bill Evans composition “Blue In Green.” There are parallels and there are divergences. Elsewhere, each artist similarly takes certain material and reworks it (as with “Blue In Green”) Pilc with his “Etudes” (six of them), Gonzalo with his “Derivado” (three), “Improvisation (Based On Coltrane)” (two) and Dizzy Gillespie’s “Con Alma” (three).

Pilc’s “Blue In Green” remains an abstraction of the original, recognizable more fully toward the end, the mood less in keeping with the way Davis and Evans played it on Davis’ *Kind Of Blue* and more about what Pilc feels, whereas Rubalcaba stays in the zone of the original more even as he takes his liberties. Pilc’s version of “Caravan” maintains the usual speed, but keeps the rear wheels elevated for much of the song’s intro as he takes his time spinning the song on one chord. Rubalcaba’s “Improvisation 1” and “Improvisation 2” are quirky, playful runs around the basic framework of John Coltrane’s “Giant Steps,” his different versions of “Con Alma” loving recreations of what remains essentially a beautiful melody, regardless of tempo. —John Ephland

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**Gonzalo Rubalcaba**

*FE ... Faith*

PASSION 005

★★★★

**Jean-Michel Pilc**

*Essential*

MOTÉMA 61

★★★★

FE ... Faith:

- Derivado 1
- Maferefun Iya Lodde Me
- Improvisation 2 (Based On Coltrane)
- Derivado 2
- Con Alma 1
- Preludio Corto #5
- Blue In Green 1
- Oro
- Joan
- Yolanda Anas

Essential:

- J & G
- Con Alma 1
- Preludio Corto #5
- Blue In Green 1
- Morning Song
- Etude - Tableau No. 1
- Etude - Tableau No. 2
- Etude - Tableau No. 3
- Etude - Tableau No. 4
- Etude - Tableau No. 5
- Etude - Tableau No. 6
- I Remember You
- Scarborough Fair
- Sam
- Blue In Green
- Mack The Knife

Personnel:

- Gonzalo Rubalcaba, piano.
- Jean-Michel Pilc, piano.

Ordering info: passion.com, motema.com

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**WARNEN WOLF**

On his eponymous debut, Warren Wolf will make it as apparent to jazz fans as it already is to the jazz cognoscenti that the young vibraphonist is the next major voice on his instrument. Joined by Christian McBride, Peter Martin, Greg Hutchinson, Tim Green and guest Jeremy Pelt, Wolf offers a marvelous playlist that admirably represents his singular blend of chops, muscular attack, harmonic acumen and a tireless groove.

mackavenue.com • warrenwolfmusic.com

Ordering info: mackavenue.com
Hiromi
Voice
TELARC 32819
★★★ 1/2

Nobody would ever mistake piano virtuoso Hiromi for Paul Bley or Keith Jarrett in a Blindfold Test. Delicate, probing, lyrical explorations wandering through metric frontiers is not her province. She likes it firm and she likes rigid, metronomic time. She has prodigious classical training, revealed by her masterful technique. But what is technique if it doesn’t serve or illuminate something greater than itself? These near-galvanizing performances are such that a little goes a long way on the ears.

Virtuosos don’t always work well in ensemble formats and this is Hiromi’s show all the way. Bassist Anthony Jackson and drummer Simon Phillips are just supporting players. She doesn’t feed off their input so much as pull them into her vortex. Her touch is so relentless that when gimmicky keyboard figures intrude something greater than itself? These originalities wander through her vortex. Her touch is so relentless that when gimmicky keyboard figures intrude her vortex.

Her decompresses the album with a lazy, blue-sky version of Beethoven’s “Pathétique.” Nobody would mistake her for Bill Evans, nor should they.

—Kirk Silsbree

Jeff “Tain” Watts
Family
DARK KEY 003
★★★

Laura Kahle
Circular
DARK KEY 004
★★★ 1/2

Newlyweds Jeff “Tain” Watts and Laura Kahle produce two very different recordings that confirm their individuality. Following the theatrical WATTS album, the drummer’s Family maintains a sense of tranquility, even when unleashing his trademark rhythmic barrage. Watts has always been both a steamer and a storm-bringer; his ability to elaborate profoundly in any tempo while scouring a pulse is one of his undeniable gifts. Watts’ longtime compadres James Genus and David Kikoski are joined here by saxophonist Steve Wilson, whose arier style complements the album’s simmering sensibilities. Watts burns throughout, driving Latin figures in “Of August Moon,” copping J.R. Robinson’s famous “Rock With You” intro in the languorous “Little Michael,” and replicating Elvin Jones’ rolling thunder in “Jonestin” (for Elvin). Overall, Family sounds like a breather.

Kahle picks up her husband’s steam and mainlines it in Circular. A former arranger for Wynton and Branford Marsalis and the Danish Radio Big Band, Kahle’s material leans towards the avant-garde; as in the seemingly simple opener, “Chance Encounter.” Though Watts is onboard (performing with even greater gusto than on Family), Kahle is the obvious leader, her pungent tone (produced by the unique pocket trumpet), gracefully angular lines and reserved demeanor making everyone think outside the box. Kahle’s performance is beautiful and slightly eerie throughout, as she controls her often ethereal compositions through subtle dynamics. The title track, recalling something from Wayne Shorter’s Odyssey Of Iska, has all the power of a requiem performed at high noon.

—Ken Micallef

Reed Trio
Last Train To The First Station
KILOGRAM 020
★★★ 1/2

The aptly named Reed Trio emerged in fall 2008 as a breakout group from the latest large ensemble project of Ken Vandermark, the transatlantic Resonance Ensemble. Considering the project’s roots in Poland, this improvising combo further connects Chicago and Krakow through Vandermark’s partnership with the veteran Mikolaj Trzaska and up-and-comer Waclaw Zimpel, who joined Resonance midstream as a replacement for Ukrainian reedist Yuri Yaremchuk. The instrumental format clearly brings to mind another improvising reed trio featuring Vandermark—the powerhouse Sonore with Peter Brötzmann and Mats Gustafsson, but it only takes a set of ears to hear the differences.

Reed Trio embraces a cooler, less frenetic sound that makes greater use of silence and space. While the pieces are all improvised, there’s a nominally greater exploration of harmony than in Sonore. The set, recorded live in Gdansk after a technically cursed studio session two years prior was lost, features a solo piece by each member—and Vandermark’s tenor showcase “The Distance That Becomes You” contains enough ferocity to counter the trio’s relative calm elsewhere—along with a couple of duos. Considering that the trio hadn’t convened in nearly two years before the spring tour that produced this album, it’s stunning how preternaturally connected they sound together, shading, anticipating and completing phrases as if they were charted out in advance. Each piece deploys interesting combinations of reeds, from clarinet and bass clarinet on “In Between Chairs” to two baritones surrounding the lean clarinet of Zimpel on “Anthology Moves.”

—Peter Margusak
Sir Roland Hanna
Colors From A Giant’s Kit
IPO RECORDINGS 1020
★★★★

The main impression created in these previously unreleased solo piano performances is one of monumental dimension. Tim Martyn’s engineering fully captures Sir Roland Hanna’s pianism, and that alone merits applause. The instrument sounds gorgeous primarily, of course, because of this artist’s unique command of and personality at the keys, but to have the details and the sweep of his artistry captured this vividly is a great gift both to him and to us.

There are several original compositions by Hanna amid these 14 selections. Three of them open the album, individually and collectively conveying a regal presence. On the title cut, “Natalie Rosanne” and “A Story, Often Told But Seldom Heard,” he makes an almost cinematic impact through octave processions, subtle rubato and the clarity, eloquence and emotional substance of his writing. These performances are not in the least about exhibitionism, but they do proclaim Hanna’s presence as a fanfare heralding the arrival of royalty.

This impression sustains throughout each subsequent track. There is in fact no shortage of jaw-dropping moments: An electrifying, slashing two-handed lick ignites his take on Coltrane’s “Moment’s Notice,” leading to a short but overwhelming exhibition that blazes by so quickly that one almost doubts that it actually happened. But Hanna makes the point through his music that technique goes way beyond the superficialities of being nimble and quick. He generally maintains a medium tempo and never strays far from the written theme, instead walking this line with a quality of nobility that speaks clearly for itself.

At all tempos, a powerful momentum animates Hanna’s work, even though he rarely indulges in walking or stride bass. More often, he generates power through hand independence, amazing dynamic range and gestures but never tasteless pedaling. The flavor of stride piano inhabits “Robbin’s Nest” and “In A Mellow Tone,” not from any actual stride pattern but through Hanna’s Fats Waller–influenced voicings within a freer rhythmic framework. Prefaced by an extemporized two-and-a-half-minute fantasia, “My Romance” becomes a monument to romanticism: Listen to his transition from the first to second verse, surging briefly into a higher key over a V pedal tone before settling, feather-like, back into place. And on “Lush Life” Hanna’s stately pace establishes a foundation that soars through stately articulation of the theme, which he illuminates in his solo, like fireworks over Manhattan.

This is thrilling stuff, make no mistake. Hard though it seems to hold the late Sir Roland Hanna in higher regard than he already is, these performances can only enhance his legacy.

—Bob Doerschuk

Colors From A Giant’s Kit: Colors From A Giant’s Kit; Natalie Rosanne; A Story, Often Told But Seldom Heard; My Romance; Blues; ‘Cello; Moment’s Notice; Lush Life; 20th Century Rag; Naima; Chelsea Bridge; In A Mellow Tone; Cherokee (66:29)

Personnel: Sir Roland Hanna, piano.

Ordering info: iporecordings.com
Arrive
There Was...
CLEAN FEED 217
★★★★

Cylinder
Cylinder
CLEAN FEED 219
★★★½

Cylinder and Arrive are a couple of quartets that share the same reed player, Aram Shelton. But they sound and operate in fundamentally different ways, and it’s fair to say that neither group could sound like the other if they tried. This isn’t just a matter of instrumentation, although instrumentation does matter. The way each combo operates reflects the levels of development that the musicians shared when originally formed.

Shelton formed Arrive not long after he came to Chicago in 1999, fresh from finishing college. The group’s members came of age together, forging a collective as well as individual identity founded upon the challenges and opportunities available to the city’s improvisers in the immediate post-Ken Vandermark era. On There Was..., the band’s third album, Arrive plays with the sort of empathy that can only develop between musicians who continue to play together many times over a span of years.

No matter how tricky the lines Shelton writes for his fellows, they not only execute them with aplomb, they make them swing. On “Cradle,” for instance, even Tim Daisy’s drums adhere to the strict unison figure at the tune’s foundation; moments later, the combo shuffles like they’re dancing together in their softest shoes, gliding with insolence and grace. It’s tempting to compare any record that pairs alto sax, which is the only horn Shelton plays here, and vibes with Eric Dolphy’s Out To Lunch. But where that record was as jittery as a New York street crossing, this one has a robust flow even in its most delicate and abstract moments. The group dynamic at work on There Was..., gives familiarity a good name.

Everyone in Cylinder had established a strong identity before they came together in the San Francisco Bay area, where Shelton has resided for the past five years. Shelton plays clarinets as well as saxophone now, and his composing for the quartet exploits its fluency of classical, free improv and jazz vernaculars. Drummer/percussionist Kjell Nordeson

Roseanna Vitro
The Music of Randy Newman
MOTÉMA 63
★★★★½

When one considers songwriters whose canons might be interpreted by jazz singers, Randy Newman is quite the dark horse. His appeal is not in intriguing chord changes, harmonic possibilities or a rich melodic approach, but in a distinctive lyrical content. By turns witty, melancholy, ironic, satirical or sardonic—Newman is a wry observer of American life. The simplicity with which he tells stories—stating little and implicating more—marks him as a practicing master of musical Americana.

Singer Roseanna Vitro has her way with ten Newman originals, from his Warner Brothers period to the present. (He had a lengthy track record as an eclectic songsmith before he recorded in 1970.) She’s a passionate, expressive singer whose emotional streak never overrides her musicality. Nor do her musical flights interfere with the story of a song. “Sail Away”—a slaver’s advertisement—is sung with heartfelt sincerity, making it all the more laden with historic and social implication. She’s very effective on ballads and laments; her poignancy on “Everytime It Rains” and the haunting “In Germany Before The War” are near heartbreaking.

Vitro’s also a swinger and she expertly romps on a ripping “Last Night,” bossa treatments of “If I Didn’t Have You” and “Baltimore,” and the blues-tinged “Mama Told Me Not To Come.” Her soulful alto connects beautifully with Newman’s great feel for Southern music forms. Pianist Mark Soskin,他的 contributions often override her musicality. Nor do her musical flights interfere with the story of a song. “Sail Away”—a slaver’s advertisement—is sung with heartfelt sincerity, making it all the more laden with historic and social implication. She’s very effective on ballads and laments; her poignancy on “Everytime It Rains” and the haunting “In Germany Before The War” are near heartbreaking.

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Big Band Insurgency

Like jazz itself, the big band format keeps defying predictions of its imminent demise. While it’s encouraging that Gen X bandleaders like Darcy James Argue and Christine Jensen are breathing new life into jazz orchestras, the most exciting development is the diversity of material and instrumentation that the rising crop represents.

Alto saxophonist Daniel Jamieson grew up inspired by fellow Canadian Rob McConnell and with the formation of his Danjam Orchestra in 2008 he picked up the mantle of McConnell’s Boss Brass and Tentet. Unlike those a decade or so older than him, Jamieson’s writing on Sudden Appearance (OA2 22083; 64:59 ★★★) reflects a more traditional approach to harmony and rhythm. His 17-member band is brass and reed heavy, but he leaves their clout on three of his eight pieces with the airy vocalese of Jihye Kim, and his own tuneful solo take on Charlie Chaplin’s “Smile.” While the ensemble work is nicely voiced and powerful, some of the solos lack energy, and the recording could use a more concise focal point to set it apart.

Ordering info: danjam.ca

At the heart of composer John Hollenbeck’s best music are his fascination with arcane percussive instruments and his love of fluid counter rhythms. The composer’s conceit for Shut Up And Dance (Bee Jazz 042; 44:15/40:26 ★★★) was to write groove-oriented pieces for each of the 10 members of Daniel Yvinec’s Orchestre National de Jazz. This results in a prismatic approach to rhythm: How many different ways can you re-imagine beat and time? Another result—perhaps unintended—is a paean to other free-thinking composers who have experimented with rhythm: from Steve Reich to George Russell (Yvinec’s ensemble is reminiscent of some of Russell’s later electric bands) to Frank Zappa. Not everything works equally well across the two discs, but variety abounds throughout.

Ordering info: beejazz.com

Ferocious in its intensity, Tito Puente Masterworks Live!! (Jazzheads 1184; 71:38 ★★★½) showcases some of the best young musicians who were studying at the Manhattan School of Music in 2008. Under the direction of Bobby Sanabria, who contributes percussion on six of the 13 pieces, the band has more fire than most college ensembles. Sanabria exerts the 16 members of his band mightily, and Tito Puente’s compositions themselves lend themselves to stops-out wailing. The five-piece reed section is particularly tight, and trumpeter Paul Stodolka is a standout with his solos.

Ordering info: jazzheads.com

Dedicated to the simple pleasures of rural life in his native Argentina, bassist Pedro Giraudo’s Córdoba (Zoho 201106; 59:54 ★★★★) doubles as an effective platform for a number of just-under-the-radar young players like trumpeter Tatum Greenblatt and trombonist Ryan Keberle. For a 12-piece ensemble Giraudo’s orchestra is lithe and light on its feet, thanks largely to the clearly defined stickwork of Jeff Davis, the leader’s highly active bass and his movement-filled arrangements. Giraudo says he composes on guitar, and the airy feeling that infuses his melodies bears that out. The idea of “country” music played by a big band seems implausible, but Giraudo and these exceptional players make it work.

Ordering info: zohomusic.com
We3
Amazing
KIND OF BLUE 10045
★★★1/2

There's something slightly different hearing Steve Swallow’s electric bass as it fills the air of this oftentimes quiet and gentle album of trio jazz. It's conventional jazz but with an attitude of nothing to prove, nowhere to go necessarily, something three friends (who’ve made music together for over three decades) might play just because they like to play, and play with each other. Except for Cole Porter’s “Get Out Of Town,” it’s all original material, everyone getting into the act, and everyone getting some room to blow. And blow, especially, is what Dave Liebman does here, Amazing being a great showcase for his versatility on not only his acclaimed soprano and tenor saxes but his playing on the C and wooden Indian flutes. Swallow’s gentle, wooly electric bass seeps into everything here, while Adam Nussbaum’s drumming is impeccably recorded and played, his approaches delicate and popping, not to mention highly syncopated, with skins and cymbals alike glistening.

The jazz feel kicks in with Swallow’s waltz “Remember,” followed by his ballad title track; Liebman sticks to soprano on both, his swinging followed by another example of his ease with Swallow’s pretty melody. Another Swallow original, the perky swinger “In F,” features Nussbaum’s great technique with brushes. “In F,” based on the chords to Porter’s “I Love You,” is one of those free-floaters that swings with no anchor, Liebman’s beefy tenor swimming in and around Swallow’s high-flying bass lines. “Free Ballad #1” sounds free in a more subtle sense—what melody line there is sounds a bit structured amidst the open form. It’s slightly eerie.

Nussbaum’s “My Maia” (the longest cut here) is a basic medium-tempo swing waltz (alternating between 6 and 5) that lets We3 just hang out. Liebman’s fire is on display, alongside some more soloing from Nussbaum, this time showcasing his stickwork. It’s on a tune like “My Maia” that you can get a sense for how these three musicians feel about playing with each other: the simple melody and basic progression keep things pretty open for different musical personalities to inhabit. No surprises, but also no pretentious virtuosity to distract from your basic jazz conversation. “Get Out Of Town”—featuring Liebman on flute, some chatty bass from Swallow and a sultry, slow tempo—is played true to form.

The rest of the album follows a similar trajectory. Their “chordless trio” approach, while not groundbreaking, is one that’s always welcome. Especially from between friends.

—John Ephland

Amazing: Remember; Amazing; In F; Free Ballad #1; My Maia; Get Out Of Town; Blend Over Backwards; Swallowish; Free Beguine; #1; Sure Would Baby; Latin Like. (63.31)
Personnel: Dave Liebman, soprano and tenor saxophones, C flute, wooden Indian flute; Steve Swallow, electric bass; Adam Nussbaum, drums.
Ordering info: kindofbluerecords.com

Café Central de Madrid

Café Central de Madrid was recently named one of DownBeat’s 150 Great Jazz Venues. It’s one of just 24 European venues on the list and the only one in Spain.

We’ve had some unforgettable moments with great jazz musicians:

George Adams and Don Pullen, Tete Montoliu, Randy Weston, Barry Harris, Houston Person, Etta Jones, Ben Sidran, Lew Tabackin, Chano Dominguez and Javier Colina.

The Café Central is located in the Plaza del Ángel 10 de Madrid. In the heart of the city, on Huertas street, next to the Plaza de Santa Ana and Puerta del Sol.
Dave Douglas
*United Front: Brass Ecstasy At Newport*
GREENLEAF MUSIC 1018
★★★★½

When trumpeter Dave Douglas brought his brass choir to the 2010 Newport Jazz Festival, WBGO was there to broadcast every note. Now packaged in CD form, this date presents live material from Douglas’ brass-plus-drums quintet disc, Brass Ecstasy, alongside a couple of fresh compositions.

Each piece is anchored by an infectious, danceable groove that is a solid platform for Douglas’ stratospheric explorations. Tuba player Marcus Rojas superbly fulfills his bass duties throughout the set—especially on the trumpeter’s rubato introduction to “Rava,” where Rojas grounds the tune with an arco-like pedal tone even as Nasheet Watts rolls in with booming tom-toms. One of the new charts, “Spirit Moves,” is a reggae-tinged jam that begins with a languid stepwise phrase that ascends and descends a bit behind the beat. Rojas takes center stage on the other new composition, “United Front,” playing a lyrical melody (for a tuba, that is) against staccato background figures.

While getting four fickle horns in tune is a challenge even without the August weather playing tricks on the instruments, *United Front* is a thrilling summation of what exactly Douglas has been up to for the past few years.

—Jon Ross

*United Front: Brass Ecstasy At Newport: Spirit Moves; Rava; Fats; I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry; United Front: Bows; (44:55)*
*Personnel:* Dave Douglas, trumpet; Vincent Chancey, French horn; Luis Bonilla, trombone; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Nasheet Watts, drums.
*Ordering info:* greenleafmusic.com

Rufus Reid & Out Front
*Hues Of A Different Blue*
MOTÉMA 58
★★★

*Hues Of A Different Blue* is the second disc for Motéma by Rufus Reid and his trio Out Front. This lengthy set focuses on contemporary, straightahead hard-bop. Reid, who has a huge sound and impeccable time, is locked in with the highly flexible Fonseca throughout. Pianist Steve Allee is particularly effective on “Come Rain Or Come Shine” and “Manhattan Style,” on which he juxtaposes block chords with sequenced runs. Eubie Blake’s “Memories Of You,” a duo performance by Reid and Allee, is a perfect showcase for Reid’s deep woody sound and melodic inventiveness.

Saxophonists JD Allen and Bobby Watson, trumpeter Freddie Hendrix and guitarist Toninho Horta join Reid’s trio for several tracks. The results are somewhat mixed. The ensemble parts on Reid’s “When She Smiles Upon Your Face” are a bit rough around the edges and have intonation issues, although Allen throws down, and the short simultaneous solo section is quite compelling. “Francisca” is a duo between Horta and Reid, who shows off his musicality backing a singer. It’s a nice performance, but doesn’t fit in with the rest of the album. “These Foolish Things” is a duet between Reid and Watson, whose bittersweet lines recall Cannonball Adderley and Lee Konitz.

—Chris Robinson

*Hues Of A Different Blue: It’s The Nights I Like; Candango; When She Smiles Upon Your Face; Francisca; Come Rain Or Shine; These Foolish Things; Lower Burellian Bicycle Loop; The Eloquent One; Manhattan Style; Memories Of You, Mother And Child, Summer’s Shadow, I Can’t Explain; Hues Of A Different Blue, (73:59)*
*Personnel:* Rufus Reid, bass; Bill Cunliffe, piano; Steve Allee, piano (1-3, 5, 7-14); Duduka da Fonseca, drums (all except 4, 6, 10); Bobby Watson, alto saxophone (3, 6, 14); Freddie Hendrix, trumpet (3, 6, 14); JD Allen, tenor saxophone (3, 7, 14); Toninho Horta, guitar (3, 4, 11).

Ordering info: motema.com
Helado Negro
Canta Lechuza
ASTHMATIC KITTY 083
★★★★

This is Roberto Carlos Lange’s second album as Helado Negro (Black Ice Cream), but he’s been around for much longer, recording under the names Epstein, Boom & Birds and ROM on his own and in partnership with Prefuse 73’s Guillermo Scott Herron as Savath & Savalas. He’s also worked with artist David Ellis on a series of kinetic sculptures. The son of Ecuadorian immigrants, Lange was born and raised in Florida, and the mixture of hot weather and booming bass he grew up with has greatly informed his music.

Canta Lechuza is something different for Lange, however. The title means “Owl Song,” and the album was written and recorded during a month of seclusion in the woods of Connecticut. Where his first Helado Negro album was funky and collaborative, this one finds him almost entirely alone with his thoughts and synthesizers. This direction was hinted at on an eight-song mini-album last year, but the hermetic creative process seems to have pulled the singer and sound sculptor completely within himself. Lange sings in Spanish, and the sounds he builds up around his sturdy, plainspoken voice seem designed as an incubator for his thoughts. The humidity has been wrung from the music, and what’s left behind is airy and spacious. Lange creates his own sounds, often by recording improvisations on instruments and then manipulating them digitally. The beats are looped, but the noises they're assembled from give them a ramshackle, human quality rather than the crisp snap of a drum machine.

Canta Lechuza is music of the mind. Its unique sonic character and light touch make it highly re-playable, though once you get past the playful use of the stereo field and the oddball Raymond Scott bubbliness that surfaces in places, you may be left searching for depth.

—Joe Tangari

Canta Lechuza: Globitos; Regresas; 2° Dia; Lechugulla; Cenar En La Marisopa; El Oeste; Obra Uno; Ojeda De Arelma; Con Suerte; Calculas; Alcanzar (59:31)
Personnel: Roberto Carlos Lange, synthesizers, electronics, computers, vocals; Jason Ajemian, bass (3); Jason Trammell, percussion (4); Ahmed Gallab, percussion (4); Isaac Leshaf, harmonic vocal (-).
Ordering info: asthmatickitty.com

Marcin Wasilewski Trio
Faithful
ECM 2208
★★

At what point does an innovation of years past become a safe harbor for artists to seek refuge? With reference to a one-time revolutionary reconsideration in record production, we are well past that point now, judging from the Marcin Wasilewski Trio’s Faithful.

The playing throughout these tracks is elegant, reflective and autumnal. The musicians listen to each other and respond with the understanding that space and silence remain the dominant principles in their extemporizations. At times, the drums especially seem almost completely absent, with Michal Miskiewicz barely tapping the ride cymbal bell or doing muted mallet rolls on the tom. They work like three painters collaborating on a canvas that depicts a misty afternoon in some beautiful but barren, gray-skied place.

All of this is well executed, but the same could be said for several decades’ worth of similar projects piloted by Manfred Eicher. The first of these deviated strikingly from how producers and players traditionally worked on solo or small-group sessions. Their impact was profound and enduring, affecting how musicians would improvise alone or together, how space would become an integral element in texture, how tempos would breathe.

But these early ECM recordings also established a template to which subsequent artists could conform. Such is the case here. A mist blankets each track, which serves the drumming particularly well: On the uptempo “Mosaïc,” Miskiewicz alternates between supporting Wasilewski’s piano with clarity and taste to disappearing during much of bassist Slawomir Kurkiewicz’s solo, without any interruption in the group’s flow.

The interactions of bass and drums are critical throughout Faithful. On “Night Train To You,” written in 10/8, Miskiewicz stays very much in the background through most of it, entering four bars from the top with featherlight triplets on the bell of his ride. Even when Wasilewski begins blowing with just a long single line and no left hand, the drumming holds back. But it does lock in with Kurkiewicz in a way that constantly varies the groove while making not so much heard as felt.

—Bob Doerschuk

Faithful: An Den Kleinen Radioapparat; Night Train To You; Faithful; Moisea; Ballad Of The Sad Young Men; Or Guateno; Song For Swine; Woke Up In The Desert; Big Foot; Lugano Lake (69:42)
Personnel: Marcin Wasilewski, piano; Slawomir Kurkiewicz, bass; Michal Miskiewicz, drums.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Joe McPhee
Sound On Sound, Solo 1968–1973
C VS D 0 005
★★★★½

Redoubtable multi-instrumentalist Joe McPhee made his first recording with cornetist/trombonist Clifford Thornton in 1967. When a company he worked for went on strike, he had free time to tackle the tenor. The first disc here evidences his inaugural recorded efforts on tenor in late 1968/early 1969, thus preceding Anthony Braxton’s For Alto solo saxophone LP. McPhee made these home tapings using an early “sound on sound” multi-track recorder. He would later posit the ethos of Po Music: “ideas as provocation rather than as an accurate description of what things are: a positive, possible, poetic hypothesis.” Listeners should use that to guide them through the rough patches of “Tenor Saxophone Solo Number One,” during which McPhee drifts through references to “Lover Man” and Coltrane’s “Africà” as if on a free-ranging practice session. “…Solo Number Two” starts with possible fragments from Stravinsky as grist to the mill. Eventually he settles on a Pharoah Sanders/Gato Barbieri-style growl that splits into the kind of high multipheronic shriek. More compelling is the gentle overdubbed recorder piece completing the disc.

Disc two begins with a Wurlitzer hum beneath intense tenor screeches bursting out of that growl effect. The 16 tracks here, culled from 1970/’73, reveal McPhee’s profound curiosity about sound per se, beyond prolific horn blowing. After several tracks drench his soprano in reverb via Echoplex (a tape delay machine), “Space Organ One” has the Phantom of the Opera sinking slowly down to Davy Jones’ Locker, where he encounters fluorescent early life forms before a vast nuclear submarine passes overhead.

—Michael Jackson

Sound On Sound: Disc One: Sound On Sound; Tenor Saxophone Solo Number One; Tenor Saxophone Solo Number Two; Recorder Solo Number One; (21:45); Disc Two: Cosmic Love: Kalimba; Percussion Number One; Two; Soprano/Echoplex Number Two; Soprano/Echoplex Number Two; Soprano/Echoplex Number Three; Cosmic Love Number Two; Cosmic Love Number One; Space Organ One; Space Organ Two; Space Organ Three; Mi Feedback One; Mi Feedback Two; Nagoya Harp (in session) (27:14)
Personnel: Joe McPhee, saxophones.
Ordering info: corbettsведенploye.com

DownBeat August 2011
Voices Lifted

Kaye Bohler: Like A Flower (KB Records 2009; 43:15 ★★★★) Bohler is a belter who stands firmly in the blues tradition and yet can turn on a dime into soul sophistication. Here she crosses musical barriers with a sure sense of pace and fluidity in 10 solid songs that she wrote about relationships. Attentive to the meaning of the words she sings, dramatic but not histrionic, this Bay Area dynamo enjoys the benefit of first-class horn and rhythm sections. Lead guitarists Danny Caron and Sammy Verela are two veterans who focus their responsive energy better than guest big shots Tommy Castro and Robben Ford.

Ordering info: kayebohler.com

Dana Fuchs: Love To Beg (Ruf 1167; 50:54 ★★★) Fuchs, known for contributing to the Across The Universe film and soundtrack, sings up a storm on her second studio album. Her feeling for the blues-rock idiom appears genuine and her songs on various types of love show intelligence. Lapses into Janis Joplin vocal mannerisms aren’t so much willed as subconscious residue left over from portraying Joplin in an off-Broadway production. No easy feat, Fuchs succeeds in personalizing Otis Redding’s “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long.” The band, however, glories in exaggerated rock-arena gestures.

Ordering info: rufrecords.de

Graná Louise: Gettin’ Kinda Rough! (Delmark 812; 56:11 ★★½) Thirteen years in Chicago, Louise holds little back with her take-no-guff-from-my-man attitude on a largely covers-based album split between studio and live tracks. The singer is a good entertainer, regaling club listeners with material identified with Etta James, Koko Taylor and Denise LaSalle. But Louise doesn’t share her foremothers’ persuasiveness. Her own songs, “Big Dick, M’sipi” and “Bang Bang,” are vulgar fun.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Sweet Claudette: That Man’s Got To Go (Blue Skunk 0016: 60:57 ★★★) As “Detroit’s Matriarch of the Blues,” vocalist Claudette does credit to her title despite lacking the strength and crisp execution of her younger years. There is diligence in her treatment of the lyrics to “Don’t Talk That Yak To Me” and eight more originals that are streaked with jazz, funk or soul. Conserving energy, Claudette rightly puts lots of trust in the talent of soloists like Motown r&b stalwart Marty Montgomery on saxophone and Howard Glazer on guitar.

Ordering info: blueskunkmusic.com

Marcia Ball: Roadside Attractions (Alligator 4942; 43:37 ★★★½) After more than a dozen feature recordings, Ball might be found driving her Gulf Coast blues-and-boogie on cruise control. Fat chance. Passion remains in her singing, and the fascination she has for Crescent City rhythms is as strong and true as ever. Also in Ball’s favor: semi-autobiographical songwriting of high quality, Gary Nicholson’s complementary production and her four-star working band with guitarist Mike Schermer, who shines brightest on the straight blues “Mule-Headed Man.” If the tall gal were any less involved with the music, the Nashville pros supporting her on half the program would draw attention to their bloodless, note-perfect conventionality.

Ordering info: alligator.com

Davina & The Vagabonds: Black Cloud (self-release; 44:19 ★★★½) This Minnesota band dares to be different, using trumpet, trombone, string bass, drums, vocals and piano to carve out their own bluesy niche. Davina sings like a naiⅰ grown up on r&b, gospel and Brecht-Well, sometimes tenuous with her skill sets but unafraid to lampoon tradition on her own fey songs. She zips to near-impossible heights in a divine declaration of romance titled “Pocket.” The brass players often have traditional New Orleans jazz on their minds.

Ordering info: davinaandthevagabonds.com
Art Hirahara
**Noble Path**
POSI-TONE 8074
★★★½

Some piano players just feel good. Count Basie was a master of subtle humor. Cedar Walton added a unique melodic twist to inventive progressions (and it feels good). Roger Kellaway, Red Garland, Vince Guaraldi and such contemporary players as Geoffrey Keezer exemplify an effervescent, forward motion approach that, in contrast to sounding “soulful” or cerebral, simply releases musical endorphins.

Add San Francisco native Art Hirahara to that short list. Moving to New York City in 2003, Hirahara has animated performances by Stacey Kent, Dave Douglas, Vincent Herrings, Jenny Scheinman and Fred Ho, among others. Hirahara’s debut, *Edge Of This Earth* released in 2000. So why is Hirahara such a relative secret? His playing is sparkling, thoughtful but never melancholic ballads and chunky uptempo swingers that exude improvisation and inspiration. Duke Ellington’s “Isfahan” is playful and luminous, a showcase for Hirahara’s improvisations that span moody lower-register dissonances to childlike twinkles.

Hirahara seems to draw from a bottomless wellspring of ideas, often layering chords to build tension or rolling the entire length of the keyboard in melodic freedom. His playing is consistently compelling, and always swinging.

—Ken Micallef

**Noble Path:** I’m OK; All Or Nothing At All; Stood Down; Ebh And Flow; Noble Path; Gun Alma; Peace Unknown; Change Your Look; Isfahan; Nocturne: Vest; Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye. (63:10)

**Personnel:** Art Hirahara, piano; Yoshi Waki, bass; Dan Aran, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com

Peter Evans Quintet
**Ghosts**
MORE IS MORE 111
★★★★

In the quartet Mostly Other People Do The Killing, trumpeter Peter Evans breathlessly demonstrates a cool mastery of numerous mainstream jazz styles while serving up a maverick’s challenge to the music’s orthodoxy. On *Ghosts*, the stunning new album by his current quintet, he engages bop history in a different way, merging a respect for tradition with explicitly forward-looking modes of improvisation and compositional hybrids. Rather than writing new tunes based on the changes of old standards, Evans reinvents the Mel Tormé classic “Christmas Song” by leaving the harmony intact, but cramming in tons of extra notes into the spaces in the original melody, while the title piece tweaks the Victor Young standard “I Don’t Stand A Ghost Of A Chance With You” with a shadowy glimmer of the original piece.

Sam Pluta’s live processing is the group’s ace in the hole, whether that means he’s rapidly refracting, dicing and/or reconfiguring the improvised acoustic lines of his cohorts, creating a multiplying effect on the leader’s bold trumpet playing, or dropping in some nostalgically repurposed string samples, as he does with the title track. But in his compositions and arrangements, Evans is often doing something similar to Pluta, whether that means scrambling the opening motif of his “Chorales” when it comes around in the second section of the piece, or directing his excellent rhythm section (drummer Jim Black, bassist Tom Blancarte, pianist Carlos Homs) to accelerate and decelerate the form of “…One To Ninety-Two” to accommodate shifting, asymmetrically long harmonic movement. As heady as Evans gets with his ideas, the music still hits on a visceral, ferociously swinging level, arriving a futuristic hard-bop shattered by abstract electronics, free-jazz daring and nonchalant technical virtuosity.

—Peter Margasak

**Ghosts:** …One To Ninety-Two; 323; Ghost; The Big Crunch; Chorales: Articulation; Stardust. (57:38)

**Personnel:** Peter Evans, trumpets; Carlos Homs, piano; Tom Blancarte, bass; Jim Black, drums; Sam Pluta, live processing.

Ordering info: moreismorerecords.com

Benny Green
**Source**
JAZZ LEGACY PRODUCTIONS 1001014
★★★★

In the liner notes to *Source*, his first trio album more than 10 years, Benny Green writes that he wanted to make “a real and honest jazz record.” If that means Green, who is joined by the incomparable bass/drums tandem of Peter Washington and Kenny Washington, intended to record a hard swinging and exceptionally well executed album that gives its listeners a clinic in hard bop, then he succeeded. Aply titled, *Source* contains inspired performances of numerous bop masterpieces, such as Bud Powell’s “Tempus Fugit,” Horace Silver’s “Opus De Funk” and Duke Pearson’s “Chan.” Green also provides sensitive readings of Dizzy Gillespie’s ballad “I Waited For You” and Mel Tormé’s “Born To Be Blue.” Green and company consistently churn out creative and fresh takes of these well-trod nuggets, making *Source* anything but a generic reperitory album.

Green, who has never lacked for chops, takes a slightly different approach on *Source* than I’ve heard from him in the past. His strong touch remains, but he now relies more on single-note melodic lines than heavy and dense block chords and voicings. Green’s versatility is on display throughout, whether bringing a bluesy funk to Kenny Drew’s “Cool Green,” mixing up phrase lengths and turning the beat around on “Blue Minor,” or teasing out nimble and fleeting octave runs on the tidy “Tempus Fugit.” He also exhibits a pensive melancholy on the ballads, letting chords and single notes breathe, ringing luminously. Peter Washington, who contributes numerous excellent solos throughout, and Kenny Washington, whose brushwork on “Way Cross Town” is especially tasty, work together as one; it’s doubtful that any bassist and drummer swing and drive a group better. This is a fantastic trio and an excellent record.

—Chris Robinson

**Source:** Blue Minor; Way Cross Town; I Waited For You; Little T; Cool Green; Tempus Fugit; Park Avenue Peter; Chant; Born To Be Blue; Opus De Funk. (55:52)

**Personnel:** Benny Green, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

Ordering info: jazzlegacyproductions.com
On his latest tribute project, Chris Byars delves into lesser-known works of tenor and soprano saxophonist Lucky Thompson. Much of the album is based on octet arrangements from a 1961 concert in Hamburg, but Byars also includes a Lucky Thompson-esque original (“Minik Koosh,” possibly an inspiration from his recent State Department tour of material by frequent Thompson collaborator Gigi Gryce). Arthur Johnston’s “One More Chance” and Mark Lopeman’s “Tiptop” round out the add-ons.

Thompson’s music is an ideal showcase for Byars, both as a performer and as a student of music history. On “Two Steps Out,” punchy solos and upper register trills—complemented by Ari Roland’s addictive bass lines—accentuate Byars’ fluid phrasing and tonal purity, while the swinging romp “Could I Meet You Later?” highlights the deft precision with which he’s able to recapture the spirit of an era without compromising the spirit of his own voice.

Equally impressive is the amount of detailed work that went into transcribing each part from the six tunes on the 1961 concert, not to mention Byars’ ear for small but meaningful updates like the piano and blues chorus he added to a 1960s-era arrangement of “Fanfare.” And though the short opening track, “Theme,” wasn’t changed, the combination of Byars’ soft, graceful phrasing and the 21st century production values infuse an old Thompson favorite with new vitality.

—Jennifer Odell

**Personnel:**

Chris Byars, tenor, soprano saxophone; Scott Wendholt, trumpet; John Mosca, trombone; Zaid Nasser, alto saxophone; Mark Lopeman, baritone saxophone; Sacha Perry, piano; Ari Roland, bass; Stefan Schatz, drums.

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2008 inductee

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Curtis Macdonald
Community Immunity
GREENLEAF MUSIC 1019
★★★½

At the heart of most of the material on New School faculty and alumnus Curtis Macdonald’s Greenleaf debut is a fascination with harmony—but not necessarily the musical kind.

In the course of 10 original compositions, each rife with opportunities for deep musical theorizing, the New York-based saxophonist toys with notions about patterns, interconnectedness and the relationship of individual parts within a whole. Instruments trade duties, compositions consider the burden of repetition and time is shared with such precision that the sum of so many interlocking missions begins to resemble a minutely organized ant colony in motion.

The title track opens with a piano solo in which David Virelles’ cautious left hand seems to be conversing with his more exploratory right hand. At times, the pair convenes on a chord before wandering off in their own directions. When the band comes in, led by Macdonald’s saxophone, a gradual seamless-ness settles over what at first felt like disparate ideas. The piano continues to hold down the lower register of the tune until it ends with an inquisitive horn note.

As if answering its own question, more reeds step in to take over on “Childhood Sympathy” where the piano left off. Breathy and insistent, Macdonald’s alto part buoy the track, creating the kind of soft tension normally assigned to a drummer’s brushstrokes. The pattern is at once oddball and obsessively catchy, childlike in its persistence, yet regular enough to sound machine-driven (perhaps an inspiration drawn from Macdonald’s background in sound design).

“The Living Well” is similarly appealing for its use of a recurring theme, in this case, a breakneck-paced sax solo that bookends the tune. And the title, of course, is a double entendre—one of many titles underscoring the deeply interwoven constructs at play in this dynamic effort that succeeds in opening more doors with each listen.

—Jennifer Odell

Farmers By Nature
Out Of This World’s Distortions
AUM FIDELITY 67
★★½

In the 1940s, Lennie Tristano’s saxophone players, Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh, studied with him before graduating to sidemen. The tracks reflect Tristano’s hallmarks: long hours of consistent work on a specific repertoire. Today, realizing the former is all but impossible, even for established bands. Perhaps as a consequence, free-jazz can sound unconnected and sometimes volatile, particularly for projects in which there are no charts or even the barest of arrangements.

Farmers By Nature’s second release, Out Of This World’s Distortions, typifies such an encounter. The trio matches bassist William Parker, an influential figure on New York’s avant-garde scene, with the emerging talents of pianist Craig Taborn and drummer Gerald Cleaver, who plays a key role. Amid Parker’s busy bowing and Taborn’s intricate lines and herky-jerky chord placement, Cleaver swings. The sense of that trickles down.

At 18 minutes, The Thelonious Monk-inspired “Tait’s Traced Traits” is the longest. The musicians—especially Taborn—become so frenzied and percussive it’s easy to lose interest. And then they discover a pocket, and mine it. Cleaver excels here, urgent without pounding the life from the drumheads. The tune bleeds into the title song; Cleaver stops playing, Parker begins unaccompanied; the composition features a pensive mood and much slower tempo.

The trio builds “Sir Snacktray Speaks” on a riff, and then revels in the near chaos of “Cutting’s Gait.” Cleaver’s strong pulse unifies the latter track. For all of the album’s likable moments, I had to watch the CD player’s indicator to distinguish the end of one track from the beginning of the next. This group is better than that. —Eric Fine

Marc Copland
Crossstalk
PIROUET 3054
★★

Despite its title, Crossstalk is more like talking to oneself. Everything on Marc Copland’s latest effort presents itself in a mid-range indistinct haze. No matter the tempo, it’s like the engine has been started and is idling in neutral.

This is obviously an imposing lineup. Greg Osby’s alto flourently elaborates on the changes and Copland demonstrates his sophisticated grasp of harmonized extemporization. Yet there’s something unengaged in their interactions. Part of this stems from the compositions, which have a pro forma quality: head, solos, recap and out. At the top of “Talkin’ Blues,” Copland plays a lustrless pattern over which Osby and bassist Doug Weiss sketch a simple up-and-down lick in unison. A sharp snare crack from Victor Lewis on the restatement of the theme momentarily wakes things up, but otherwise there’s not much going on here. The opening and closing verses on the rest of the original material are neither memorable nor effective at driving the blowing sections.

The better moments involve interactions between the four players as they’re winging it together. Lewis in particular keeps tossing out ideas, from constantly evolving rhythm fragments, also on “Talkin’ Blues,” to empathetic cymbal rolls and textural shadings on the free-tempo “Diary Of The Same Dream.” He also goes back to the bop canon on his composition “Hey, It’s Me You’re Talkin’ To,” with off-beat kicks and accents punctuating the momentum he establishes through crisp ride work.

Lewis also keeps his dynamics in a very narrow range, reflecting the group’s collective restraint. Copland speaks often, in solos and backup, through voicings that hover mainly over the center of the keyboard. His themes are usually harmonized figures; even when playing Osby’s “Three Four Civility,” the piano’s chord movement defines the thrust of the performance more than the saxophone theme.

—Bob Doerschuk

Out Of This World’s Distortions: For Fred Anderson; Tait’s Traced Traits; Out Of This World’s Distortions Grow Aspen’s And Other Beautiful Things; Sir Snacktray Speaks; Cutting’s Gait; Murd, Mapped. (69:54)

Personnel: William Parker, bass; Craig Taborn, piano; Gerald Cleaver, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: aumfidelity.com

Crosstalk: Talkin’ Blues; Diary Of The Same Dream; Uzz-i-thee; Tenderly; Crossstalk; Slow Hand; Hey, It’s Me You’re Talkin’ To; Three Four Civility; Minnow. (53:59)

Personnel: Marc Copland, piano; Greg Osby, alto saxophone; Doug Weiss, bass; Victor Lewis, drums.

Ordering info: pirouet.com
Beyond

Tom Zé’s
Enduring,
Uncompromising
Idiosyncrasy

One of the founding fathers of Brazil’s mid-to-late-60s countercultural Tropicália music, Tom Zé once said, “I’m seen as a heroic resistance-type man who’s like the child defiantly playing drums in front of an army.” While a musical rebel similar to recognized Tropicália stars Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, Zé (now in his 70s) went largely unrecognized in the United States (and even in his own country). His pop musical defiance made the jagged edges even more pronounced (even using appliances and tools such as floor sanders and blenders) and his protest lyrics about class inequalities and social exclusion were poetically and surreally rendered, thus avoiding an authoritarian governmental crackdown on his musical vision (unlike the more outspoken Gil and Veloso, who were imprisoned and then exiled during the ‘60s and ‘70s). During this time and in the years that followed, Zé fell from the mainstream, or any counterculture movement. However, it was the chance encounter of former Talking Head frontman David Byrne “discovering” his music stashed away in an obscure record-store bin in Brazil that brought Zé to spotlight status around the world in the late ‘90s.

Zé was signed to Byrne’s Luaka Bop label, which gave him a new cult audience that included the members of the Chicago-based rock band Tortoise. They accompanied him on tour frequently, beginning in 1999 with his first United States tour, dubbed Zé2K. Today, Luaka Bop has released the limited-edition, hand-numbered box set of three 180-gram vinyl LPs Studies Of Tom Zé: Explaining Things So I Can Confuse (Luaka Bop B003yAu0Ey ★★★★½) which comprise the first-time collection of Zé’s three “estudandos” on samba, pagode and bossa styles of Brazilian music that spanned his career from 1975 to 2010. The music as a whole is sublime, comic, captivating and subversive. The LP box set is augmented by a 45 rpm two-sided vinyl single of Zé’s jazz-infused collaboration with Tortoise, recorded live in 2001 at London’s Barbican performance venue, and a CD of a Zé-Byrne-Arto Lindsay conversation that was recorded in 1993.

Issued in 1975, Zé’s “study” of samba on Massive Hits (Estudando O Samba) features the singer/arranger paying homage to the music while also breaking all kinds of its time-honored rules. His tune “Tô” is sung in a lighthearted, wild-eyed style, while the quirky “Tôc” has clips of horns and strange background voices as well as breaks for typewriter and chainsaw. But then there’s Zé’s soft, lyrical voice and strummed acoustic guitar on “A Felicidade,” which oddly includes only one short chord of horns toward the beginning and a percussive close.

Released in 2005, Estudando O Pagode plays with the notion of the contemporary, commercially successful and lowbrow style of samba, pagode, by placing the music in the context of an unfinished opera about sexual politics. There are slashes of rock, clipped and spoken-word vocals, duets of Zé and one of his background singers, and melodic arias. “Elaeu” is a pop beauty, with ooh-woop background vocals, while “Duas Opiniões” is coolly delivered with samba undertones and “Prazer Carnal” sounds like a meld of Bach and Jobim. The proceedings get wonderfully manic on “Ave Dor Maria” with nightmarish, crazed vocals, swells of strings and a sprightly beat.

The spirited finale of the trilogy, Estudando O Bossa, originally released last year, bows to bossa nova while also twisting and turning the style. Zé goes dreamy on “Barquinho Herói” and bouncy on “João Nos Tribunais.” Other highlights of the album include the quirky “Roquenrol Bim-Bom” with its Beatlesque “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” background vocals and the melodic gem “Outra Insensatz, Poe!” which, fittingly, mixes Zé’s gravelly vocals with smooth vocal support from Byrne—making it the only song of the collection that has English lyrics.

Ordering info: luakabop.com

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Bootsy Collins
Tha Funk Capital Of The World
MASCOT LABEL GROUP 310 ★★★½

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Standards
SCUFFLIN RECORDS 1613 ★★½

Considering the numerous guest spots on Tha Funk Capital Of The World that range from the intriguing (Ron Carter, Béla Fleck and Sheila E.) to the WTF?! (Dr. Cornel West, Samuel L. Jackson and Jimi Hendrix), it’s commendable that Bootsy Collins reins in the off-kilter energy, goofy inside jokes and stylistic variations into an album that actually holds together.

In the past, the legendary bassist and singer sounded as if he were desperately chasing trends from his post-70s heyday. In some cases, his signature elastic and ebullient bass playing got lost in the mix. Not so much on cases, his signature elastic and ebullient bass together.

Of The World and Jimi Hendrix), it’s commendable Béla Fleck and Sheila E.) to the WTF?! range from the intriguing (Ron Carter, on Considering the numerous guest spots on Tha Funk Capital Of The World, his most alive-playing got lost in the mix. Not so much on cases, his signature elastic and ebullient bass together.

The stylistic realm eventually spins outward with varying degrees of success. Washington, D.C., gets a strong pound on “The Real Deal,” via go-go rhythms provided by Sheila E. Collins goes real south on the Afro-Puerto Rican romp “Siento Bombo” and gives jazz a loving pound with “The Jazz Greats,” which features George Duke and Carter. The thematic glue that keeps all of this intact is Collins’ edifying declarations of the influential power of funk, an argument established from the start on “Spreading Hope Like Dope,” a gothic keyboard-driven intro that resembles the “Prelude” from Parliament’s Clones Of Dr. Funkenstein.

The musical lessons are earnest and humorous, but at times get in the way of just enjoying the exhilarating funk. Collins takes off the professorial robe and gives up the funk more unadulterated with the molten groover “Yummy, I Got The Munchies.”

Fellow P-Funk alum keyboardist and living musical institution Bernie Worrell focuses on the jazz canno. An improvisational intuion along with a fancy for counterpoint has always seeped into Worrell’s best playing for Parliament-Funkadelic. Clinton once said something to the effect that he could play 100 keyboard parts in one song and none of them got in the way. That said, Worrell’s playing is decidedly less fantastical and memorable than yesteryear on Standards. It begins with a solo piano rendition of Billy Stayhorn’s “Take The ’A’ Train” that’s so stately it hardly sounds like a jazz composition. Things begin loosening up on his take on Paul Desmond’s “Take Five” where Worrell opts for a loopy, electronically enhanced take on the classic that’s mildly interesting, but it never invites repeated listening.

From there, the aesthetic bounces back and forth, between the funny and formal. The music is serviceable, whether it’s the breezy bossa nova rendering of Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “Aguas De Beber” or the Afro-Cuban-meets-disco makeover of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s chestnut “All The Things You Are.” The playing is solid and the stylistic re-contextualizations certainly pique the curiosity, but hardly anything remarkable rises above that.

—John Murph

The Funk Capital Of The World: Spreading Hope Like Dope (Intro); Hip Hop; Funk U; Mirrors Tell Lies; JB Still The Man; Free-dumb; Where I Oves-Becomes-A-Threat; After These Messages; Kool Whip; The Real Deal; Don’t Take My Funk; If Looks Could Kill Bootsy Collins, The J. Mifs Under Construction; Béla Fleck, The Jazz Greats (A Tribute to Jazz); Garry Shider Tributes; Stars Have No Names; Chocolate Caramel Angel; Yummy, I Got The Munchies. (79:24)

Personnel: Bootsy Collins, space bass, guitar, keyboards, drums, drum programming and vocals; Buckethead, guitar; Ron Carter, bass; Dennis Chambers, drums; Candice Cheatham, vocals; George Clinton, vocals; Catfish Collins, guitar, vocals; Oui Vey Collins, drums; Melvin Gibbs, bass; JT Lewis, drums; Darryl Dixon, saxophone. Personnel: Bernie Worrell, keyboards; Smokey Hormel, guitar; Randy Miller, vocals; Alphonso Horne, trumpet; Frank “Kash” Waddy, drums; Mike Wade, flugelhorn and trumpet; Paul Patterson, strings; George Duke, keyboards; Sheila E., drums and percussion; Marc Ford, trombone; Bela Fleck, barjo; Benny Ford, vocals; Adam Hall, vocals; Brian Hoag, saxophone; Ronni “Pocket” Jenkins, guitar; Joel “Razor Sharp” Johnson, keyboards, Steve Jordan, drums; Hal Mela, saxophone; Musik Stouflill, vocals; Farrell Newton, horn section; Andrew Cleon, horn section; Pastor Cooper, vocals; Paul Patterson, string; Michael Phillips, horns; Chad Ruiz, vocals; Mohammed Seck, African drums; Garry Shider, guitar; Linda Shider, vocals; Shawn Steele, guitar; Fallow Sy, African drums; Randy Villar, trumpet; Frank “Kash” Waddy, drums; Mike Wade, flugelhorn and trumpet; Fred Wesley, trombone; Tony Wirtz, drums; Gary Winters, flugelhorn and trumpet; MelSymphony, vocals; Victor Wooten, space bass; Bernie Worrell, keyboards.

Ordering info: mascottlabelgroup.com

Standards: Take The ’A’ Train; Take Five; Aguas De Beber; All The Things You Are; You’re My Thrill; Watermelon Man; Killer Joe; Moon River. (50:00)

Personnel: Bernie Worrell, keyboards; Slykey Hornet, guitar; Melvin Gibbs, bass; JT Lewis, drums; Darrel Hoeven, saxophone, flute. Personnel: Stan Killian, tenor saxophone; Benito Gonzalez, piano; Corcoran Holl, Bryan Copeland, bass; Darrel Green, McClelland Hunter, drums; Ron Hargrove, Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; David Binney, alto saxophone.

Ordering info: bernieworrell.com

Stan Killian
Unified
SUNNYSIDE 1282 ★★★

Stan Killian has the air of a great thinker, and on Unified, his intellectual nature is reflected in both his compositions and carefully shaped solos.

On the opening track, “Twin Dark Mirrors,” Killian’s reedy tenor improvisation beings slowly, almost hesistantly. The solo evolves into a few sixteenth-note runs, but Killian never really breaks into the torrential note downpour that lies just under his fingers.

There are the occasional bursts of speed through thickets of notes, but Killian is mostly a contemplative improviser. His musical personality is a foil to his guest artist: David Binney, Roy Hargrove and Jeremy Pelt, who unleash fireworks. But even through all the exciting playing, Killian commands attention. Compositionally (all but one of the tunes are his), Killian thinks about the direction of the tunes, laying out multiple melodic ideas. His best numbers are up tempo compositions, and he seems to have more fun with melodies full of interval leaps. Pianist Benito Gonzalez shows off his own compositional skills on “Elvin’s Sight.” His horn writing is economical, and he teases out a simple melody that floats above a busy piano accompaniment. Unified is not a flashy record; it shows a saxophonist forming his own identity—thoughtful and contemplative, but just combative enough to keep you listening. —Jon Ross

Unified: Twin Dark Mirrors; Elvin’s Sight; Unified; Center; Isocsoles; Window Of Time; Eternal Return. (53:15)

Personnel: Stan Killian, tenor saxophone; Benito Gonzalez, piano; Corcoran Holl, Bryan Copeland, bass; Darrell Green, McClelland Hunter, drums; Roy Hargrove, Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; David Binney, alto saxophone.

Ordering info: sunnysideres.com
Frank Sinatra
Loomed Larger Than Life On Small Screen

Larger than life, the Chairman of the Board could not be contained. And yet, here we have it: a seven-DVD box set of shows that put him in his own front-row seat and back in our living rooms. The more than 14 hours in *Frank Sinatra: Concert Collection* (Shout! Factory 826663-12220; ★★★★) encompasses those decades of the 1950s through the 1980s.

Viewing these DVDs, one might notice that looking back, Sinatra didn't score on television the way Dean Martin did. It may have had something to do with his attitude. But it was also because he remained an outsized personality, and there was something about his demeanor that carried a subtle threat especially when he was singing ballads, or “saloon songs,” as he put it. After all, that was his characterization of himself, namely, as a “saloon singer” (read: possible menace to mainstream society).

The set begins with his first television special, “A Man And His Music” (1965), on the occasion of his 50th birthday. This is one of the strongest programs here. With collaborator/arrangers Nelson Riddle and Gordon Jenkins on hand, Sinatra seems more relaxed and grounded, and his singing reflects a more casual attitude, less show-bizzy as he banters with the studio audience and tells jokes. Along with singing definitive versions of songs he would repeat over and over—favorite swingers like “My Kind Of Town,” “I Get A Kick Out Of You,” “The Lady Is A Tramp”—there’s the pattern of delivering creative medleys of “saloon songs,” where he’s essentially acting out the music instead of standing there facing you. “Young At Heart,” “The Girl Next Door” and “Last Night When We Were Young” are interwoven with age-appropriate slivers from “It Was A Very Good Year.” This is where Sinatra seems to transcend the limits of TV.

A constant theme was his having “a respect for the lyric.” “A Man And His Music” emphasizes this, along with the introduction of his transition from suits, blazers and sweaters to a tuxedo. Referring to such, Frank announces, “I always say, ‘If you’re gonna look dead, dress dead.’” Speaking of which, dead might be a word used to describe the rollout of some guests who appear on the included shows, like his daughter Nancy Sinatra, singing “These Boots Were Made For Walking”; the embarrassing appearances of Tony Bennett (too much hair, and no voice), Robert Merrill (trying to swing) and country singer Loretta Lynn (singing Nelson Riddle’s arrangement of “All Or Nothing At All” with Sinatra). Despite the geezer vibe and garish sets that these 1970s appearances display, other spots include a stunning “I Love You” from Leslie Uggams, a fun exchange with The Fifth Dimension and a medley of spirituals in duet with Diahann Carroll. Perhaps the most entertaining exchange comes with the disc that includes colleague and friend Gene Kelly, the two of them singing and dancing together.

Other great guests that find Sinatra relaxed and in his element include Ella Fitzgerald and Antonio Carlos Jobim, seen on “A Man And His Music + Ella + Jobim” (1967). Clearly vigorous and with the requisite swagger, Sinatra opens with a crazy video montage followed by a focus on rhythm with “Day In And Day Out” and “Get Me To The Church On Time.” In his only filmed meeting with Jobim, their renditions of “Quiet Nights,” “Change Partners” and “Girl From Ipanema” are exquisite. On a separate disc, a 1981 TV segment pairing him with Count Basie and his orchestra finds Sinatra aging gracefully, and with mixed results. The earliest material features two specials, the hokey, bizarre “Happy Holidays With Bing And Frank” (1957), and a series of performances, “Vintage Sinatra” (1957–58), with 2003 commentary by children Nancy, Tina and Frank Sinatra Jr.

“The Main Event” (1974), with Don Costa and Woody Herman’s Thundering Herd, was a Madison Square Garden smash. With Howard Cosell introducing Sinatra as he sang from the boxing ring surrounded by celebrities and regular fans, this performance is personal and professional. The 20,000 people in attendance are part of the show, with smiles everywhere and women dancing in the aisles.
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Satchmo’s Second Act

The typical biography finds its story in the uncertainty of struggle, discovery and triumph. Ricky Riccardi’s *What A Wonderful World: The Magic Of Louis Armstrong’s Later Years* (Pantheon) flips this model upside down. Riccardi meets his subject at the top—the pioneering done, the legend triumphant, enough fame and fortune banked for a life of security. Riccardi takes it from there. Pretty boring, right? Don’t bet on it.

Armstrong’s career divides with remarkable neatness into two 24-year halves: innovation and consolidation from 1923–’47; then global celebrity and the All-Stars from 1947–’71, the second act that Armstrong’s earlier biographers treated as a coda. Here Riccardi finds a terrific story that begins when Armstrong scraps the big band and returns to his small group roots. But as he reinvented himself by moving backwards, the rest of the jazz world charging forward, leaving him honored, beloved but without active influence—unlike such comparable second acts as those of Count Basie and Miles Davis.

Old masterpieces were joined by new ones, none sustained with more majesty than *Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy for Columbia*. They set a high standard as bellwethers of virtuosity. But as revisions of material he had been working with for decades, they broke no new ground. As time went on his playing was constantly examined for signs of weakness, some fissure that might signal the incursion of age or ennui. All aging performers face such scrutiny. In many ways, this is a chronicle of creeping decline, the slow ratcheting down of the physical engine behind a great talent.

Riccardi first pinpoints a 1962 Paris concert when Armstrong had trouble with his “Indiana” solo. “His sound was still huge,” he writes, “but the first small signs of a decline were evident.” Then again in the spring of 1965, “a farewell to Armstrong at the peak of his powers.” Major dental work in 1966 seemed to seal the process. One could choose among many such moments. I was convinced I heard it in 1960 when I reviewed *Louis Armstrong Plays King Oliver* for my high school newspaper. But there came a point when fans could no longer avert their ears, as Armstrong’s determination to continue ultimately led him into denial. But despite some late innings of “getting the hell out of this grind,” it was not in him to walk away from audiences whose love only seem to grow stronger as he grew weaker; and to not repay it with any last spasm of energy he could squeeze into his trumpet. He stayed too long. Riccardi’s Armstrong ends on a note of triumph and will laced with acute poignancy—but as Armstrong wished.

Digging into a period neglected by others, Riccardi explores familiar controversies in groundbreaking detail. The role of Joe Glaser, for instance: thief or protector? Both, Riccardi suggests, but worth the price. The Uncle Tom question, was he or wasn’t he? He felt the disrespect of segregation deeply, Riccardi demonstrates, and struck back both overtly and covertly. His description of Armstrong singing “Black And Blue” in East Berlin in 1965 is dramatic. Yet, he still performed to segregated audiences and saw no impropriety singing about “darkies” as late as 1951. A man of his generation, he could not escape nor be blamed for the forces that shaped him. And finally, the endlessly repeated solos and set lists—counterfeit jazz or quality control? Both, perhaps. But Riccardi reminds us that Armstrong’s active repertoire surpassed 200 tunes, vastly greater than that of Thelonious Monk or John Coltrane.

Given Riccardi’s mandate, it would have been nice to probe a bit deeper into Armstrong’s TV work. He left some sui generis moments, especially on “The Ed Sullivan Show.” His work in advertising campaigns is only brushed upon. Perhaps a more detailed account of Armstrong’s remarkable posthumous renaissance would be in order.

Then again, that could be yet another book.

Ordering info: pantheonbooks.com
Kiss Your Licks Goodbye

When we improvise, most of us are guilty of relying on certain comfortable note combinations or “licks.” I’ve always been drawn to musicians who avoid this trap, and I try to emulate their models when I practice and perform. But we face several potential roadblocks in our pursuit of uninhibited improvisation. You’re lucky if your musical imagination hasn’t been somewhat compromised by increasingly homogenous radio and television programming. At the same time, the spectacular volume and diversity of music on the Internet can convince you that everything has already been done. Raise your hand if you do not own the Charlie Parker Omnibook or a few Jamey Aebersold publications. Maybe you’re simply content with attempting to play like Dexter Gordon—there are worse fates. But it’s almost our duty as modern musicians to explore other options, at least when we practice.

So how do we go about busting out of a musical rut? First, it’s important to remember that bebop, for example, is a system, a rhythmic and harmonic approach to playing over set chord changes. It’s such a powerful, seductive and logical form that many musicians never bother to try anything else. But it’s only one concept. If John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy had stopped searching, we’d be the poorer for it. Each of these extraordinary musicians developed their own system that simultaneously synthesized and transcended the music of their time. The fact that these systems coexisted (along with those of Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, et al.) reminds us that there is no end to what you can do with 12 notes, even before you add rhythmic and tonal variations, not to mention quarter-tones and overtones. Simply put, our mentors reach for sounds we mortals don’t hear, or maybe are just afraid to try.

Don’t stop with the 1950s and ’60s, though. Many of our contemporaries come to mind, but one of my favorite fearless musicians is Jan Garbarek, a model of lick-free improvising. You might assume that he’s never played a standard in his life, but I had the pleasure of hearing just that. And he sounded like … Jan Garbarek! He incorporates the music of many cultures, including hauntingly beautiful folk songs from his native Norway. This is an excellent way to expand your own musical vocabulary. Immerse yourself in the music of India, Cuba, Africa, Brazil—anything that shakes your tree. Another obvious but often overlooked source of ideas is the avant-garde, a.k.a. free-jazz or creative music. Even if their style is not your cup of tea, learn a solo by Roscoe Mitchell or Roswell Rudd—it’s good for you.

You should also practice music that’s written for other instruments. Try Bach’s cello suites or Bartók’s Mikrokosmos. Embrace the inevitable mistakes along the way: They may turn into etudes of their own.

Better yet, ignore genres, names and places, and get down to the business of reprogramming your technique.

My second method book, Advanced Sax (Mel Bay, 2000), is a blueprint for eliminating “note prejudice”—choosing notes based on convenience or familiarity. I used 16th- and eighth-note patterns exclusively, because I think that it’s most effective to focus on one discipline at a time; you can apply articulation, dynamics and rhythm later. To illustrate my approach, I chose three notes—B♭, D♭ and G—and sent them through several permutations. In Example 1, there are six variations, ascending and descending. Continue each pattern up and down chromatically using the entire range of your horn, including altissimo notes if you wish. The turnarounds at the top and bottom of the horn should be seamless, and you should finish where you started.

Next, apply the same variations, but instead of ascending and descending, skip a whole step, then a minor third, and so on (see Example 2).
Use a new note combination every day, and you will strengthen your transposing skills, dexterity and confidence. The possibilities are endless: After you exhaust every three-note combination you can think of, add a fourth note, and so on. Some of it might even sound good, but that’s not the point. We’re just trying to get around the instrument.

I designed the “Random Exercises” section of my book to help players eliminate their preconceived notions of linear improvisation. Many of these exercises contain a general theme, so “Almost Random Exercises” might be a more appropriate title. By employing wide skips and sudden changes of direction, you can add an element of unpredictability to your playing. Eric Dolphy was a master of this technique. Although these exercises contain musical phrases, they are best used as a technical foundation to complement your own harmonic and rhythmic ideas. See Examples 3 and 4, excerpted from Advanced Sax.

Example 4 shows a continually morphing scale-like pattern. Try set articulations, such as alternating two staccato notes with one legato.

The next goal is to apply these advanced concepts to set song forms—standards, for instance. Joe Henderson, Michael Brecker and Joe Lovano tackled this challenge in particularly elegant ways; at least we know that it can be done. There’s not enough space here to analyze their individual approaches, but you can accomplish much by following their simple mantras: Explore. Learn. Reach. And, of course, listen.

Your identity as a musician is inextricably linked with your identity as a human being. You are what you play, and you play what you are. Hopefully your technical prowess will be enhanced by your pursuit of beauty in all of its manifestations.

SAXOPHONIST DAN WILENSKY HAS TOURED AND RECORDED WITH RAY CHARLES, JACK McDUFF, SLICKAPHONICS, STEVE WINWOOD, JOAN BAEZ, MARK MURPHY, R. KELLY, MANHATTAN TRANSFER AND DAVID BOWIE. HE HAS PLAYED ON NUMEROUS JINGLES, FILM SOUNDTRACKS AND TELEVISION THEMES, AND HE CAN BE HEARD ON MORE THAN 250 RECORDINGS. WILENSKY’S CDs AND PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT DANWILENSKY.COM.

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Early in 2000, the Dave Holland Quintet released the album *Prime Directive* (ECM). Trombonist Robin Eubanks contributed one composition to the CD: “A Seeking Spirit.” Despite the unusual time signature (5/4) and key (Eb minor), Eubanks delivers quite a compelling solo.

His solo starts and ends with modal sections in Eb dorian; there are also four measures of this at what could be considered the end of the first “A” section (bars 17–20). Though it’s no surprise that Eubanks sticks to Eb dorian in these sections, he rarely deviates from it, even when the chords change. Many of these harmonies exist within Eb dorian (e.g., Gbmaj7, Fm7, Bbm7, Absus), but we also find Eubanks playing Eb dorian sounds against chords that don’t—for instance, at the end of measure 40, where Eb dorian is superimposed on top of an E7. Though it could be argued that the high Bb, Ab, and Gb could be heard as flat fifth, third and ninth of the E7, adding the Eb and playing the notes in such a scalar manner makes it hard to hear it as anything other than an Eb minor scale. A similar thing, though not as extreme, happens in measures 16 and 44. One could assume that this would be extremely dissonant, but what it does is keep the listener’s ear tuned to the key of the song, even while the harmonies move away. This makes the convergence, when the harmony resolves back to Eb minor, that much sweeter.

There are other places where Eubanks opts to move away from Eb dorian to go with the changing chords instead of against them. The first time happens in measure 10, where the descending G# diminished triad gives us the seventh, fifth and third of the E7 chord. It’s also cool that the first two notes of this arpeggio are a minor third that creates a sequence of minor thirds moving down chromatically. Eubanks plays Eb and C (seventh and fifth) on the Fm7 at the beginning of the measure. Both of these notes are in Eb dorian. Then comes the diminished arpeggio, which starts out with D and B, a half-step down from the notes he played before. Eubanks drops another half-step to Db and Bb, which brings us back into Eb dorian.

His solo opened with a similar sequencing idea. We have a three-note descending pattern beginning on F with the second note doubled. Eubanks then plays the same idea down in scale steps (changing the last third into a step), starting on Eb, then Db, and finally on C. He even starts his next phrase on Bb, implying that he will continue with this idea, but instead goes in a different direction.

It’s no surprise that Eubanks closes out his
solo with an analogous idea. Starting at the end of measure 44 we hear ascending scale steps, starting with C to D♭, and in the next measure sequencing down in steps: B♭ to C and A♭ to B♭. Here the licks are even rhythmically the same: eighth rest/eighth note/quarter note.

With all the E♭ dorian we’ve been hearing, it’s curious that for his very last line Eubanks decided to play a D natural. In the context of the last three notes (F, D and B♭), it outlines a B♭ triad, which would be the V chord to E♭ minor. But Eubanks elected to leave the tension unresolved and let the next soloist pick it up from there.

Bob Durling is a guitarist and bassist in the New York area. He can be reached at jimidurso.com.
Nord Stage 2
Fine-Detail Upgrades

Over the last few years, Nord has quietly taken over the professional market for stage pianos and general gigging workstations with the Electro and Stage series keyboards. The Stage series is designed as an all-in-one workhorse for the working player, and it has always included three basic sections: an organ emulator, a piano section and a synth. In the Stage 2, all of these areas get significant upgrades, and there are some new features added here that address the few weaknesses that the Stage series had. Nord demonstrates with this upgrade that it has been listening very carefully to what users have been saying.

The Stage 2 looks pretty similar to the Stage and Stage EX—for this review, I had the 88-key version and was able to compare it directly to my own Stage 88 Classic. The telltale red paint and wood endcaps are here, if a little slimmer, and although the control panel is painted slightly differently, and there are some new controls, the layout is basically the same. From left to right, the control sections are Organ, Piano, Global, Synth, External and Effects. The back panel has seen some changes as well, with a new dedicated Rotor Speed pedal input, and a few of the other jacks moved around. A welcome sight is the new housing for the power button, which is much more sturdy and secure. Seems like a small thing, but if that breaks off in the case, you’ll be sorry on the gig. This is indicative of some of the fine-detail upgrades present throughout the Stage 2.

The Organ section now is based on the Nord C2 organ. The C2 is one of the premium organ simulators on the market, and the new Leslie simulation is also excellent. The Nord pushbutton drawbars are here as well, and while it’s a bit of an acquired taste, they do the job (unless you are used to playing a real drawbar organ, you probably will not be hampered in the least). In addition to the expected B3, you’ll find very nice Vox and Farfisa emulations here, too. The organs can be routed through the Leslie, or through the amp simulators, which we’ll look at later. This is a really solid upgrade to an already solid feature.

The Piano section received a similar upgrade, this time in memory and sound quality. There is now enough memory to accommodate a much wider variety of piano sounds, both acoustic and electromechanical. The new grands are really nice, but the new uprights are spectacular. I also enjoyed the additions to the electric piano sections and seeing a dedicated subset of harpischords. The Clavinet seems the same, and remains the most versatile clav simulation on the market. The library has been expanded here, so there is room to add more and carry several of the pianos from the growing Nord Piano library. Add to all this greater control over string resonance, and you have a serious contender in the digital piano arena.

The most impressive upgrade is to the Synth section, which has been significantly revamped on the Nord Stage 2. There are new additions, like an arpeggiator and a dedicated LFO control, both of which can sync to the Nord’s master clock for effect syncing. The envelopes have been upgraded, too—there are now dedicated ADR controls in the Mod, Filter and Amp sections, and while it’s not the ADSR envelope many of us wish for, it’s much better than the previous two-knob configuration. But the big news here is the samples. Finally, the Nord Stage can load the Nord Sample Library, as well as user-created samples. This is a real game-changer, and makes the Stage a top option for all working players. You can now have vibes, or real strings, which were always glaring omissions. With the included sample editor, you can tweak your own sounds for loading in, too.

The effects section includes all of the slot effects from previous models, which can be applied to any of the three sound generators. The amp simulator section has been upgraded to reflect three new amp models: a Roland Jazz Chorus, a Fender Twin and a Wurlitzer 200A internal speaker, all of which can be overdriven. The EQ section now includes a sweepable mid, a welcome addition. Reverbs are still applied globally, but they all sound good.

The External section is an elegant, simple set of MIDI controls. Here you can control octave transposition and assign Pitch Stick and Sustain in the same way you do for the internal Nord sounds. There is also a large knob that can send MIDI CC messages and hot buttons to quickly send volume- or program-change info. These parameters can also be set to send on Nord program change, so you can effectively control an external device through the Nord panel with a little preparation.

With the release of the Stage 2, Nord once again demonstrates its willingness to listen to users and respond with the most wanted and asked-for features. The one complaint most often heard about Nord is the cost. They are on the high end of the spectrum, but the quality of Nord keyboards makes them well worth the price. The Stage 2 update is significant enough for current Stage owners to think about an upgrade, and it should be at the top of the must-try list for anyone in the market for a Stage Piano and workstation. The controls on the front are easy to understand, and are surprisingly deep. Add to that the free sound libraries, the sound management software, and the ruggedness and playability of the Stage, and you’ve got a keyboard that everyone wants to play.

—Chris Neville
Band-in-a-Box 2011
Leaver, Meaner, Cleaner

Band-in-a-Box has been around for more than 20 years, and PG Music has faithfully maintained its ongoing commitment to provide a steady stream of releases that feature the latest technologies and bring the program’s functionality to new heights. The company’s latest offering, Band-in-a-Box 2011, provides an impressive set of enhancements including a high-quality time stretching engine and user interface improvements plus more than 100 new RealTracks for jazz, country and rock included in the EverythingPak.

The basic concept of the program remains pretty much the same. Type in a set of chord changes, choose a playback style and you are off and running. However, for those who seek to create more complex and realistic arrangements, the program offers a slew of advanced options that provide access to its many subtleties and nuances.

Software creator Dr. Peter Gannon brought Band-in-a-Box to a new level with the introduction of RealTracks, which replaced MIDI tracks with actual recordings of top studio musicians. This has been one of the product’s most significant enhancements, and the 2011 release showcases some major upgrades in the RealTracks technology. The biggest issue with RealTracks is that the audio source files require a lot of disk space. PG Music provides users with compressed files but also makes the higher-quality uncompressed tracks available in its Audiophile Edition.

A solution was found in the Elastique Pro V2 time stretching and pitch transposition engine from zplane. Up until the 2010.5 release, the software included several versions of each RealTrack recorded in different keys. Now only one version of each track is required and the transposition is handled by the software. In addition, the time stretching allows the RealTracks to be played back at a wider variety of tempos without significant loss in audio. The Audiophile tracks did produce a cleaner sound than the compressed audio, but the difference is surprisingly subtle. “Band-in-a-Box 2011 now has 600 RealTracks available, including 200 Jazz RealTracks,” Gannon said. “This includes over 600 hours of high-quality recordings of top jazz, pop and country studio musicians comping and soloing. And it all fits in 45 GB, so it can be run on typical Windows or Mac PCs.”

A new mixer floating window provides quicker access to track volume, pan settings, reverb level and instrument selection. Also worth mentioning is the ability to change song styles or RealTracks at any bar of a song. PG Music has also developed new client apps for iPhone and Android devices that work with Band-in-a-Box 2011 for Windows.

Whether you are a long-time user or just getting to the program, Band-in-a-Box 2011 is well worth the upgrade. —Keith Baumann

Ordering info: pgmusic.com

Blue Yeti Pro USB
Bigfoot Performance

The Blue Yeti Pro USB microphone is the finest professional-grade USB microphone I have seen or heard. From the dawn of computer-based recording, musicians have weathered a storm of low-quality plug-and-play microphones. When the original Blue Yeti USB was introduced a few years ago, it marked a significant improvement in the dynamic performance of mics in this category. The Yeti Pro USB upgrades the original Blue Yeti USB by adding a stereo XLR output and top-level 24-bit recording as well as other versatility-enhancing features suitable for studio recording, field recording, close-up isolation miking and non-musical applications such as podcasting or interviewing.

Like its mythical namesake, the Yeti Pro USB dominates the landscape and delivers bigfoot performance. Standing 1 foot high mounted on its base stand, the mic weighs just over 3 pounds. A steely, stout, black metal casement rises to a chrome-screened caged protector of three 14mm condenser capsules. The Yeti Pro is configured to allow four mic patterns: stereo, cardioid, omnidirectional and bidirectional, all accessible via a toggle of the pattern switch on the mic’s body casement.

I was able to use the Yeti Pro USB right out of the box on both Mac and PC desktop setups without needing to load any drivers or software. Without a single hitch, I was hooked up and ready to work with multiple DAW platforms—a pleasure for the musician who wants to spend his time capturing music instead of clicking a mouse. Traditional connections to hardware mixing consoles and patch bays are accomplished with an analog XLR output located on the bottom of the mic. The smart 1/8-inch headphone jack and accompanying volume knob allow for zero-latency live audio monitoring directly from the mic, a subtle feature that puts the Blue Yeti Pro USB in a class of its own.

What makes the Yeti Pro USB a real champ is the dynamic range of the microphone, which delivers 192 kHz at 24 bits of pristine audio quality. I enjoyed putting this mic through its paces in both studio and outdoor recording atmospheres. In cardioid pattern for vocals, I was able to achieve the desired flat response. Using both cardioid and omni patterns to record acoustic guitars and an amplified electric guitar, the Yeti Pro USB performed smoothly with bright presence and true 24-bit luxury. Placed near the bridge level of a double bass, the mic absorbed and captured all of the proper lows and thump mimmiscously. Switching again to a stereo pattern to record my daughter’s school band concert, I was regaled with a fine stereo spectrum of the full ensemble.

Retailing at $249, the Yeti Pro USB is more than reasonably priced for the outstanding look, construction and performance of this beast.

—John LaMantia

Ordering info: bluemic.com
JAPANESE FUSION
Remo’s new Katsugi Okedaiko was inspired by Japanese percussionist Hiroyuki Hayashida, along with recent developments in taiko drum playing styles. The Katsugi Okedaiko is manufactured with Remo’s lightweight Acousticon drum shells and Skyn-deep Natural drumheads with a calfskin graphic. The instrument is easily slung over the shoulder and comes with two bachi sticks.
More info: remo.com

MEMORY ENHANCEMENT
Electro-Harmonix has introduced the most powerful version of the Deluxe Memory Man analog delay. The pedal provides sweet organic delay and modulation, and its tap tempo feature offers five rhythmic subdivisions.
More info: ehx.com

LÅG BAGS
Låg Guitars has released a line of soft-padded gig bags, semi-rigid gig bags and hardshell Croccocases, offering custom-fit protection for all body styles in the Tramontane acoustic guitar line. The hardshell Croccocases feature a dark brown mock-crocodile finish with gold accent closures and a plush interior.
More info: lagguitars.com
STEREO MASTER
Audio-Technica’s new AT2022 X/Y is a dual-element condenser microphone designed for stereo recording. It features two unidirectional condenser capsules in an X/Y configuration pivot, creating 90-degree narrow or 120-degree wide stereo operation. The capsules also fold flat for storage and transport. A switch allows for a choice of flat response or a low-frequency roll-off to control ambient noise.
More info: audio-technica.com

VERSATILE PERKS
Zoom has unveiled the R8, which combines four production tools in a small, versatile device. In addition to eight-track playback and two-track simultaneous recording using SD memory cards, the R8 is a digital multitrack recorder, an audio interface, a control surface and a pad sampler.
More info: zoom.co.jp

SOUNDPROOF PANELING
Auralex’s new SonoLite fabric-wrapped Studiofoam Pro panels are suitable for the home-based recordist. The panels are available in black or beige and feature squared edges that provide an overall noise coefficient rating of 0.75.
More info: auralex.com

Sometimes Dreams can be dark...
Tucson Musicians Invigorate Arizona Jazz Education

If you ask Tucson-based bassist and educator Scott Black, jazz pedagogy in the city has hit dire straits.

About half of Tucson’s elementary schools no longer offer instrumental classes due to extreme budget cuts. Still, of those remaining music programs, 70 percent train students in jazz, according to Black, who firmly believes that exposing kids to music at an early age is the key to future success.

To spread jazz to the city’s youth, Black joined tenor saxophonist Brice Winston (who plays in the Terence Blanchard Quintet) and Doug Tidabeck, the former lead trombonist in the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, in 2009. The musicians created the Tucson Jazz Institute at the Tucson Community Music School from the ashes of two defunct community schools, Arizona Jazz Academy, which was run by Black and Tidabeck, and Winston’s JazzWerks.

Students as young as age 10 can enroll in the program, which includes placement in both a small group and a big band that meet for a total of four hours each weekend during the school year. Courses in music technology and other electives can be added. The school also holds a six-week summer session.

Funding for the institute is completely tuition-based. (In 2010, students paid $1,100 for a full year.) A parents’ group raises some money for scholarships, but the school ultimately relies on tuition money to provide the classes.

Two years ago, the musicians were teaching 240 kids; with the crushing blow of the economic recession, enrollment dropped by 90 in 2010. This led to fewer classes and a little more hand-wringing, but Winston has hope that things will turn around this fall.

“I’m expecting a huge jump in participation,” Winston said. “I’m not sure if we’ll hit the same mark we did our first year, but it’s possible we could see that. The better the economy is here, the better chance we’ll have good numbers.”

Winston, a Tucson native, lived in New Orleans for 16 years before Hurricane Katrina forced him to relocate to his hometown.

To keep the school open, Black, Winston and Tidabeck continuously visit middle school and high school band classes to recruit students. Winston feels that signing up band students has multiple benefits. Not only do the kids learn jazz on the weekends, but their band directors get to teach students (during the week) who have more command over their instruments.

Instructors at the school give budding musicians a chance to get out into the community. Students can perform around town at jam sessions led by Tidabeck, Winston and Black every Sunday and Tuesday, and a number of gigs and competitions are scheduled throughout the school year. In 2010 the school’s top big band placed first in the community ensemble division of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band contest.

“There’s a lot of demand for the kids to be out there,” Black said about the students’ community involvement. “People love seeing them.”

The school currently is fighting against institutional music apathy and the lingering effects of the recession, but Winston can see past all the current challenges. He’s trying to turn the Tucson Jazz Institute into a school on par with the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts or the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Houston.

“I really want to be a player on the national scene—in terms of raising young jazz musicians who are at a level to compete with other organizations that turn out musicians who are playing at a high level,” Black explained.

But it’s not just about developing the next generation of top-flight jazz musicians. Many of the kids will simply go on to be casual jazz lovers, and for Winston, that’s fine, too.

“Even having the numbers we have, if they don’t become musicians, at least they’ll become fans of the music. They’re getting exposed to jazz in ways that most young kids don’t,” Winston said. “Hopefully, they’ll be fans for life.”

—Jon Ross
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George Wein

“The idea is huge and right now, and you’d better taste it all,” said George Wein, after sitting for his first Blindfold Test. “But I don’t have time to listen to CDs.” Instead, the 85-year-old jazz impresario, himself a more-than-competent pianist, was going out two or three nights a week to New York’s clubs and workshop spaces to hear and recruit talent for the 2011 edition of the Newport Jazz Festival.

Dave Brubeck Quartet

“Oh The Sunny Side Of The Street” (from Park Avenue South, Telarc, 2003) (Brubeck, piano; Bobby Militello, alto saxophone; Michael Moore, bass; Randy Jones, drums)

That’s music from the ’50s. It could be Benny Green. It could be David Sanborn, or maybe James Moody—I don’t know. It’s contemporary in that jazz is contemporary. The pianist had some feeling for Erroll Garner, which you don’t often hear. It could be Bobby Militello and Brubeck. Dave still plays with a bit of that ’40s and ’50s guts, and that’s what I heard. These guys play great. Brubeck belongs in the Valhalla of jazz greats. He brought jazz to a major public, which helped everybody who played jazz. He’s unique, which is what jazz musicians are supposed to be. As this shows, Dave came right out of the roots.

Brad Mehldau

“Into The City” (from Highway Rider, Nonesuch, 2010) (Mehldau, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass; Jeff Ballard, Matt Chamberlain, drums)

The drummer was influenced by Roy Haynes. It could be Brad Mehldau and Jeff Ballard; Jeff has that light touch—he’s a wonderful drummer. Brad is laying back to present his drummer and bass player, Larry Grenadier; he’s very unselfish that way. I find that Brad has many voices. His interest in classical music is profound, but I once heard him play with Peter Bernstein, his friend, and the ideas flowed in the pure jazz tradition. I heard a solo piano concert where he played in a minimalist, Steve Reich way. You really never know what it is with Brad—except that he happens to be a genius.

Herbie Hancock

“Sweet Bird” (from River: The Joni Letters, Verve, 2007) (Hancock, piano; Wayne Shorter, tenor saxophone; Lionel Loueke, guitar; Dave Holland, bass; Vinnie Colaiuta, drums)

Jason Moran. No? It’s a perfect ballad tempo. People play ballads too slowly, but this had a beat. Very beautiful. I like the pianist’s harmonies. I like the structure, and the bass accompanied beautifully. Everyone’s a master musician. But it sounds like so many different people that I can’t call out names. [afterwards] I haven’t heard Wayne Shorter play inside in a long time. He’s been into different things the past few years. I’m not a fan of it, but he’s into his own thing and I respect that. People worship Wayne, and rightfully so. He wants to create every time he plays. Along with Sonny Rollins, he’s perhaps the number one or two important tenor saxophonist alive.

Sonny Rollins

“Sonny, Please” (from Sonny, Please, Doxy, 2006) (Rollins, tenor saxophone; Cliff- ton Anderson, trombone; Bobby Broom, guitar; Bob Cranshaw, bass; Steve Jordan, drums; Kinimati Dinzulu, percussion)

Rudresh Mahanthappa? No! At times it sounded like him, particularly the scales and the structure of the improvisation. It’s contemporary music, what’s happening with a lot of the younger players. It was recorded very well, and although it took a long time to say what he was saying, the improvisation held up—it was still going someplace after we turned it off. Fantastic playing. [afterwards] The sound confused me—at times I thought it was an alto, at other times it sounded like a tenor. I love Sonny. One reason you don’t recognize him is because he’s influenced so many people. That is the curse of being an original—people are always copying you.

Wynton Marsalis Quintet & Richard Galliano

“Sailboat In The Moonlight” (from Street/Jazz in Marciac, 2010) (Marsalis, trumpet; Galliano, accordion; Walter Blanding, soprano saxophone; Dan Nimmer, piano; Carlos Henriquez, bass; Al Jackson, drums)

That’s Wynton. I can’t remember the name of his pianist, but he has some Erroll Garner in his playing, which I like. It’s a lot of fun, and it swings. We badly need that expression of music. Wynton has devoted himself to knowledge of the jazz trumpet. When I first heard him, I was so impressed that he could play bebop, play Diz and Miles, and he has also played Louis Armstrong from the Hot Five days, and improvise in that style and understand it. I never thought I’d see a young black musician play his way. To me, jazz is a totality. There’s a new movement of young musicians who understand the entirety of the music, like Anat Cohen, a young woman from Israel who can play whatever she’s asked to and play it well, whether it’s Bechet or Coltrane. Wynton started that a long time ago.

Rudresh Mahanthappa & Bunky Green

“Who?” (from Apex, Pi, 2010) (Mahanthappa, alto saxophone; Green, alto saxophone; Jason Moran, piano; Francois Moutin, bass; Damion Reid, drums)

It’s Rudresh and Jason and Bunky Green. I’m glad you played that, as Bunky’s a great player, and Rudresh will be an important figure in the future. I heard his arrangement of “Salt Peanuts” with Danilo Pérez’s band, which was fantastic.

Roy Haynes

“Moose The Mooche” (from Birds Of A Feather: A Tribute To Charlie Parker, Dreyfus, 2002) (Haynes, drums; Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone; Roy Hargrove, trumpet; David Kikoski, piano; Dave Holland, bass)

It’s a bebop standard. The musicians are fantastic. The interplay between the sax and the trumpet is like one fine. But I don’t know who that was. Roy Haynes comes to mind, but the solo doesn’t show the taste Roy has in his playing. The trumpet player was marvelous, the star of the record; it sounded like Nicholas Payton on a good day.

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.

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.
Yamaha congratulates Steve Turre and Rudresh Mahanthappa on being recognized as Instrumentalists of the Year in the 59th Annual Downbeat Critics Poll. Bravo!
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