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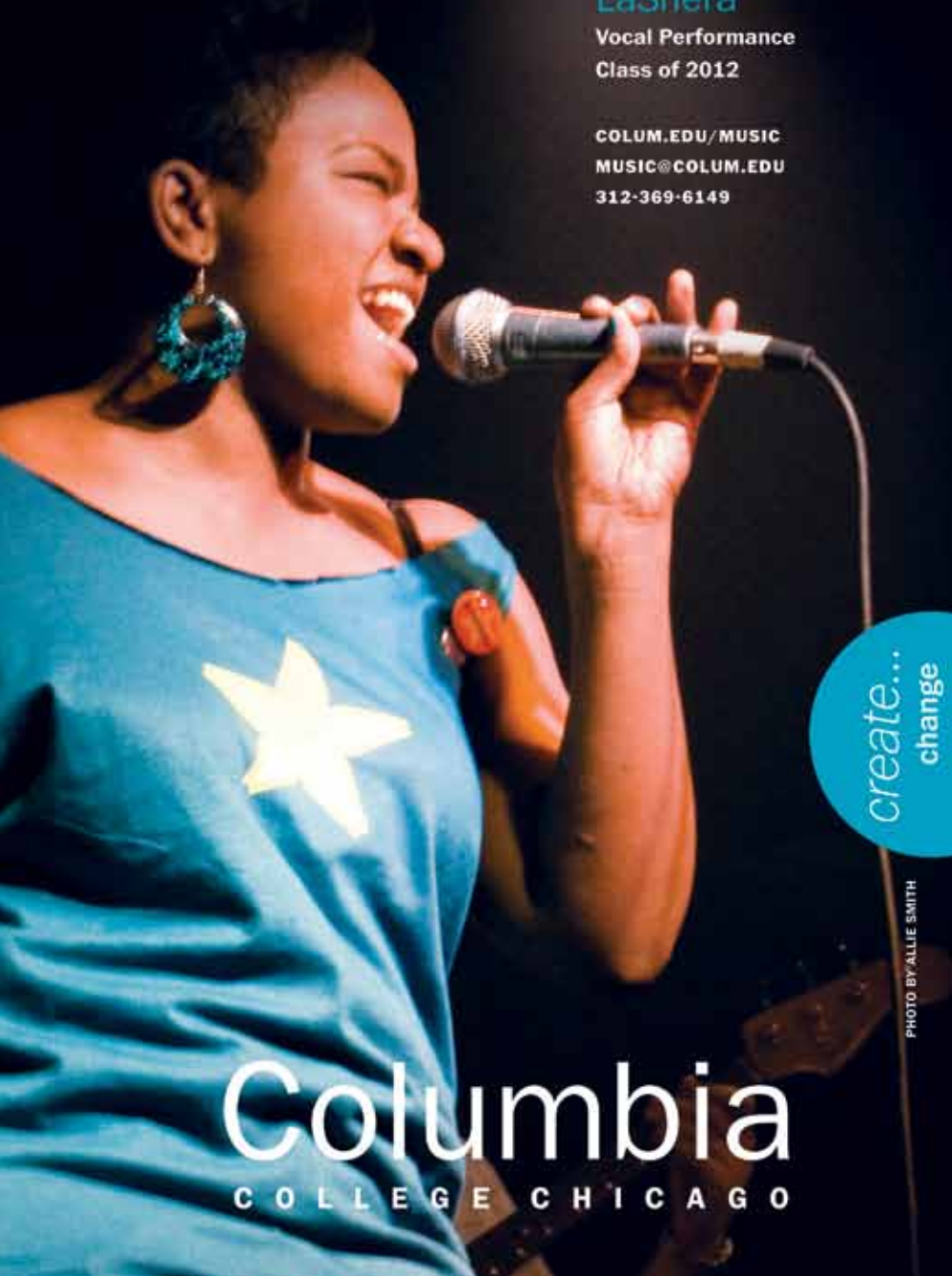
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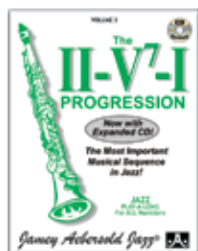


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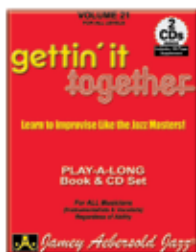


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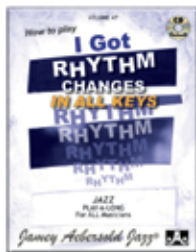


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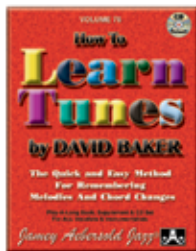


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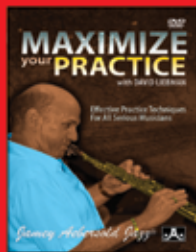
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SEPTEMBER 2011

Inside

ON THE COVER

22 **Stefon Harris, David Sánchez & Christian Scott** *The Cuban Voyage Of Ninety Miles*

BY KEN MICALLEF

Over seven sweat-drenched days, the trio of Harris, Sánchez and Scott performed and recorded with Havana's new breed of jazz musicians. Documented on the CD/DVD *Ninety Miles*, what resulted was a cultural exchange that illustrates the universal power of music to conquer any divide.



Christian Scott (left), Stefon Harris and David Sánchez

JIMMY AND DENA KATZ

Cover photography and above image shot by Jimmy and Dena Katz in New York City.

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Collaboration As A Way Of Life

Jazz is a collaborative art form. So what? Theater, dance and film-making—as well many other creative endeavors—are also collaborative in nature. Jazz musicians, however, share a special vocabulary and empathy that allow them to improvise, adapt to the unpredictable and create art in the moment. (Their closest artistic cousins might be improv sketch actors.) On the bandstand, jazz players listen and respond, agree and revise, quote and reply, and then listen some more.

In this issue, we shine a spotlight on two bands that illustrate the power of collaboration. Our cover subjects are vibraphonist Stefon Harris, saxophonist David Sánchez and trumpeter Christian Scott, three virtuosos who had never played together before they embarked on the *Ninety Miles* project. The trio ventured to Havana to collaborate with Cuban musicians, including the pianists Rember Duharte and Harold López-Nussa. The title of the *Ninety Miles* CD/DVD package released by Concord Picante refers to the approximate distance from Florida to Cuba. The assembled players came from diverse backgrounds, and they spoke different languages, but they found common ground as improvisers.

Also highlighted in this issue is James Farm, the exciting quartet whose self-titled release is out now on Nonesuch. With a lineup of saxophonist Joshua Redman, pianist Aaron Parks, bassist Matt Penman and drummer Eric Harland, this group is making major waves. What drew them together? The collaborative spirit. “We had never played together, but we were already a band,” Redman told DownBeat contributor Dan Ouellette. The albums titled *Ninety Miles* and *James Farm* provide evidence that the whole can be much, much greater than the sum of its parts.

Pianist Dick Hyman knows as much about collaboration as any musician you could hope to meet. We’re honored to include a feature on Hyman (whose legendary career stretches back to work with Benny Goodman) as part of this keyboard-themed issue. We’ve got pianist Orrin Evans taking the Blindfold Test, a transcription of a Joey DeFrancesco organ solo, a Master Class from pianist Joel Forrester and a Pro Session from pianist Champian Fulton.

In his superb book *Why Jazz?: A Concise Guide* (Oxford University Press), jazz critic Kevin Whitehead writes, “It’s exciting to hear musicians improvise, making a coherent statement in real time, as each player feeds and feeds on what the others are doing.” So true.

The skills of collaborating and improvising can unite people from various walks of life. It’s a lesson that non-musicians should apply to boardroom negotiations, labor disputes, legislative sessions and community council meetings. The key, of course, is to listen intently and, to quote a common expression, “to understand where somebody is comin’ from.” In the elusive quest for mutual understanding, jazz musicians can lead by example. Let’s all listen.

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Abbey Lincoln Remembered

I am a D-Day veteran of the Fourth Infantry Division. Before I went into the U.S. Army at the age of 18, I was a huge jazz fan, and Billie Holiday was my favorite vocalist. I had spent many years attempting to find a vocalist who stirred my emotional response the way Billie had. I eventually found Abbey Lincoln. I will not attempt to further embellish your article because it reflects almost completely my feelings about Abbey and her singing ("Hall of Fame," August).

I remember [having a conversation with] her at the legendary Lennie's On The Turnpike in Peabody, Mass.

My late brother-in-law, Richard Roud, was the program director of the first 25 New York Film Festivals. At one of the festivals that my wife and I attended, Catherine Deneuve (who was considered by most to be among the world's most beautiful women) was a guest. After the film, we all left for a club close to Lincoln Center, and we were sitting at a table near Deneuve. I can tell you this: When it came to beauty, Abbey Lincoln gave Catherine Deneuve great competition.

The last time I was with Abbey was at Scullers in Boston. She was sitting at a table next to me, talking to some patrons before she was due to go on. Again I was drawn into the conversation, and perhaps because I was a few years older than she, she spoke to me about political and social issues (topics about which we shared similar feelings).

It is extremely gratifying that Lincoln was voted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame so shortly after her death. Thanks to the critics, and thanks to John Ephland for his insightful and wonderful tribute.

IRVING SMOLENS
MELROSE, MASS.

His History Outdated

In July's Chords & Discords, Darryl Lynn of Richmond, Va., wrote, "In today's [educational] programs, there is little or no discussion on the origins of jazz and its relation to a segregated America." And he slams "the mostly white jazz programs of today." Does he mean programs taught mostly by whites, or studied more by whites, or maybe studies of "white jazz"?

For someone based in Richmond, where has he been? Certainly not in VCU Jazz's classrooms. My own class begins with weeks spent on West and Southern African mbira, drum, and vocal recordings to emphasize where so much of jazz rhythm and inflection comes from, and then moves to the spirituals and gospel songs of oppression, hope, and freedom to reveal the racial-history reasons why blues and the



DownBeat Hall of Fame artist Abbey Lincoln

beats existed before ragtime, Armstrong or swing. And it hits the links between the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the jazz of the time. To know the music, you have to know the culture, which means knowing the lives of the people of the time.

This individual has written DownBeat before with other sweeping general statements. It is unfortunate that DB offers credence to this stereotyping of education.

ANTONIO GARCIA, DIRECTOR, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY JAZZ STUDIES
RICHMOND, VA.

Editor's note: DownBeat does not condone stereotyping. Chords & Discords is a forum for our readers to express their views.

Down With The System

Like many of your readers, the first section of your magazine that I check every month is Reviews. Over the past few years, I've watched as the star system for CD reviews keeps increasing, and the criticism keeps decreasing. Because of this, I was quite surprised to read the reviews for the debut James Farm effort in your July issue. It's my favorite set of new jazz that I've heard in quite awhile. However, the reviews made it a sound as if the musicians were simply amusing themselves for the sake of amusing themselves. I found it strange that this was the CD that experienced real criticism, and not the [numerous] average recordings that receive 4-star reviews each month.

ROB KARP
LITTLE FALLS, N.J.

Correction

■ On page 53 of the August issue, Philip Booth should have been listed as one of the voting critics ("59th Annual Critics Poll").

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERROR.

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Beat ▶

Béla Fleck's Unfinished Business

Original Flecktones Lineup Reunites for 2011 Release

When the four original Flecktones stepped into Béla Fleck's Nashville, Tenn., home studio to test-drive songs for 2011's *Rocket Science* (eOne Music), Fleck said it was the most natural thing in the world. The reunion of the Flecktones marks the first time in almost 20 years that the quartet has released an album.

"Things are very different now than they used to be," said pianist/harmonica player Howard Levy, who departed from the group in 1992.

Levy had joined the remaining Flecktones for a three-week stint in 2009. It was what percussionist Roy "Futureman" Wooten called the group's "aha!" moment. "The opportunity came to talk about revisiting back to the beginning, going full-circle," he said.

With former Flecktone saxophonist Jeff Coffin enlisted with the Dave Matthews Band since 2008, the reconvention was a "right place, right time" situation that also stemmed from Fleck's desire to tackle some two-decades-old "unfinished business."

"I really wanted [the music] to fit my vision of what the group should be," Fleck said. "I don't think that was the key thing, but it was definitely an undercurrent. It stayed with me as something that I wished I'd handled better. There was just some kind of mismatch going on at the time."

After visiting Levy at his home in Evanston, Ill., in early 2010 to hash out song ideas, Fleck noted a "warmer, sunnier vibe."

"Everybody has grown," said bassist Victor Wooten. "Béla's been doing his Africa project with [Zakir] Hussain and Edgar [Meyer]. I've been playing a lot with my own band, as well as playing with Chick Corea and Mike Stern. And my brother, Futureman, has been writing a bunch of orchestral [material] and working on his new instrument, things like that. We've all been off in our own world. Coming back together, it's like we had a whole lot to offer, as well as just being excited to put something together. The ingredients are there. They've just matured a lot."

Rocket Science is an undefinable hybrid that Wooten calls a free-flowing "continuation of what could have been" and Fleck describes



From left: Victor Wooten, Béla Fleck, Howard Levy and Roy "Futureman" Wooten

as "simple, yet complex." It's garnered mass onstage appeal from Bonnaroo crowds of 80,000-plus, but reflects little of the Coffin era that many listeners are already familiar with.

According to Levy, the record's lack of road testing made it far more improvisational and impulsive—a "true collaboration" reflective of a more group-oriented writing style.

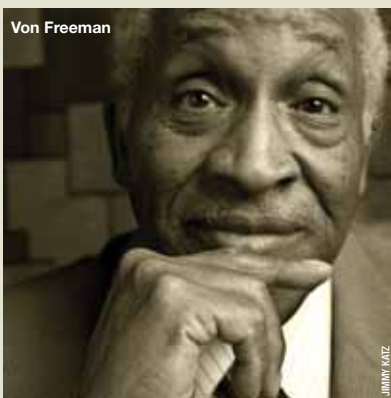
"There were some things that we had on the table that we always wanted to do," Fleck said. The album explores odd time meters, Indian scales, Bulgarian rhythms and African beats driven by the Max Roach and Elvin Jones-inspired acoustics of Futureman's SynthAxe Drumitar, a guitar-shaped, electronic percussion-sampling device.

"The dynamics, the cymbal sounds, they were all there," Futureman said. "The influences from all the drummers you know, the toms that we sampled, the snares, they were all inspired by a history of drumming."

The band will take the album on the road throughout October and November, where Wooten said the 20-year absence raises big questions. "Our personalities haven't been together for a long time," he said. "Are we going to be able to live together?"

—Hilary Brown

Von Freeman



Master Class: The NEA has announced the recipients of the 2012 NEA Jazz Masters Awards. Jack DeJohnette, Von Freeman, Charlie Haden, Sheila Jordan and Jimmy Owens will receive a one-time award of \$25,000 during a Jazz at Lincoln Center awards ceremony and concert at Frederick P. Rose Hall in New York. **Details:** arts.gov

Desirable Blanchard: Trumpeter Terence Blanchard signed on to compose the original music for the revival of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The show is set to premiere in spring of 2012.

Details: streetcaronbroadway.com

Funk Ed: Stanley Clarke and Ron Carter have been added to the star-studded faculty at Bootsy Collins' Funk University. Collins' online bass academy gives students access to a "virtual campus" where they can receive instrument instruction and industry insight.

Details: thefunkuniversity.com

King of the Blues: The Richmond, Ind.-based Starr-Gennett Foundation is hosting its "Battle of the Blues" competition on Saturday Sept. 10 at the Gennett Walk of Fame. The winning band will receive a \$500 cash prize, along with recording time at M Productions. **Details:** starrgennett.org

Starry-Eyed: Renatta DeBlase has released *With Stars In My Eyes*, a memoir detailing her relationships with legendary jazz musicians and her stride to bring their music to the forefront during racially turbulent times. Proceeds from the book will be donated to the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington.

Rising Son: On June 23, the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Miss., unveiled its Son House retrospective. The exhibit features the work of Blues Hall of Fame inductee and photographer Dick Waterman, and is also part of the museum's ongoing Robert Johnson centennial birthday celebration. **Details:** deltabluesmuseum.org

All For One Turns 50

Unsatisfied with the music business in 1961, saxophonist Harold Battiste formed All For One (AFO) Records with some of New Orleans' best session musicians. This year celebrates the milestone 50th anniversary of AFO, revered historically as the industry's first black collective record label.

"People forget what AFO brought to the culture in terms of modern jazz and dealing with youngsters playing music," Battiste said. "I'm concerned with [our] place in history. Cats like me are old school. I'm concerned with leaving a heritage of viable contributions to the music and the industry."

AFO recorded both jazz and r&b. The first session produced Barbara George's "I Know (You Don't Love Me No More)," featuring a cornet solo courtesy of AFO vice president Melvin Lastie. On the jazz side, AFO did sessions with the American Jazz Quintet with Alvin Batiste and Ed Blackwell, the Ellis Marsalis Quartet with James Black, and the AFO Executives with Tami Lynn. These were not only the first recordings of Blackwell, Marsalis and Black, but additionally the earliest recordings of nontraditional New Orleans jazz. They were also the only recordings of these groups made in the 1960s.

In search of greater exposure, AFO moved to Los Angeles in 1963, and due to union restrictions in finding gigs—and the end of a promising association with Sam Cooke after his 1964 death—the collective split up soon after. Battiste kept the label going with sporadic releases between productions. He and guitarist/pianist Mac Rebennack—better known as Dr. John—developed and produced the first Dr. John records' arrangements. He also assumed the role of music director for Sonny and Cher. In 1989, Battiste moved back to New Orleans



to teach at the University of New Orleans' jazz studies program. At the same time, he revived the label with records from Phillip Manuel, Germaine Bazzle, Victor Goines, and his Next Generation ensembles, which included Nicholas Payton, Brice Winston, John Ellis, Jesse McBride, Rex Gregory and Joe Dyson. This year, there have been several tribute concerts in honor of Battiste, as well as *The Sounds Of Harold's Horn*, an AFO release featuring Battiste's playing rather than production work.

"I would love to put out more music, but I can't see it, with the industry being the way it is, being affordable," Battiste said. "But I thank God that I'm still here to do something."
—David Kunian

ASCAP Bestows Legendary Prize

Jimmy Heath (left), George Duke and George Avakian celebrated Heath and Avakian receiving the ASCAP Living Legend Award at the ASCAP Gallery in New York on June 13. Other recipients included Oscar Peterson, Mel Powell and Nina Simone. The ASCAP Vanguard Award went to Omer Avital, who performed at the event.



Baikida Carroll *The Spoken Word*

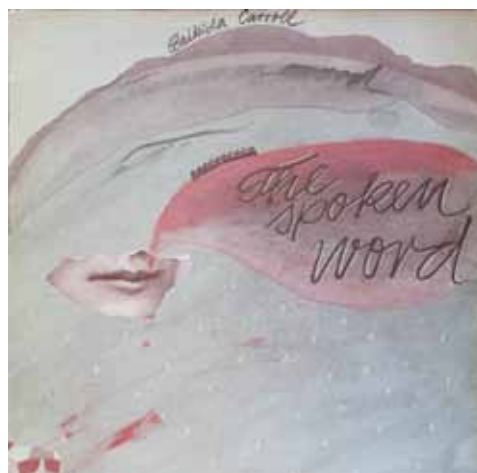
HATHUT, 1979

That's what happens when a record label waits so long to reissue a great LP—the music gets posted on YouTube. You can listen to all of St. Louis trumpet player Baikida Carroll's late '70s solo record, nicely transferred from the gate-fold double LP, on your laptop or PC. Nobody would argue that the fidelity is as good as the original (let's face it, MP3s just mash out the acoustics), but then again, thanks to one 13Samarkand, the beneficent soul who has taken the time to upload the vinyl, now anyone in reach of a computer can hear it. It definitely deserves a listen.

Carroll was part of the Black Artists Group (BAG), St. Louis' equivalent to Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. He joined BAG in '68 and quickly became a central figure alongside Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, Joseph Bowie, Charles "Bobo" Shaw and Luther Thomas. He played on Hemphill's monumentally important debut, *Dogon A.D.*, and, following the lead of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, left the United States for a year, along with several colleagues, to play in Europe in the early '70s. While there, in '73, he led the collective's first record, *Black Artists Group In Paris*, an incredibly rare slab of wax. I'd never heard

it until I got the reissue, which finally came out last year. It confirms what a forceful and unique voice Carroll had on his instrument.

That's amply demonstrated on *The Spoken Word*. Solo trumpet records are rare enough and were even more so 30 years ago. Carroll would have had Lester Bowie's broad, hilarious "Jazz Death" (from the 1968 Roscoe Mitchell LP *Congliptious*) to consider, a few Leo Smith outings, but for the most part solo wind was reserved for the reeds. *The Spoken Word* is less bodacious than Bowie, sparer, in places even quite aggressively experimental. On "The Spoken Word I," which starts with some quiet burbling mouth noises, Carroll uses a tube extension to create a bleating saxophone sound. On the other hand, Carroll approaches "Rites And Rituals" with the beautiful, radiant tone that most recalls Smith, using measured, phrase-by-phrase introspection and leaving odd spaces between his gorgeous lines. With crickets in the background laying a pulse bed, Carroll plays gentle, sweet and sour melodies, adding Harmon mute, then bathing his soft calls in reverb. It's a very special record,



extremely approachable, lovely and refreshing.

Hathut's early years included a great number of wonderful releases that have never been made officially available in digital form—numerous Joe McPhee LPs, a revelatory solo David S. Ware twofer and a Philip Wilson record with a youthful Olu Dara. It's certainly one of the most important archives of untapped vinyl, gaining in obscurity with each year, aching to be reissued. Until then, happy hunting!

DB

EMAIL THE VINYL FREAK:
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More than 60 years separate the first jazz recording in 1917 and the introduction of the CD in the early '80s. In this column, DB's Vinyl Freak unearths some of the musical gems made during this time that have yet to be reissued on CD.

Annual 'Great Night in Harlem' Benefit Rallies Surprise Lineup

No one knew who was going to pop up unannounced at the Apollo Theater to join the top-notch roll call of artists at the May 19 Jazz Foundation of America's (JFA) annual "A Great Night in Harlem" benefit concert. This year offered many surprises, as Donald Fagen lifted off into "Hesitation Blues," Ronnie Spector strutted the stage to a doo-wop-inspired "You Belong To Me" and NRBQ pianist Terry Adams leaped out of semi-retirement to a good-times, jazzy spin of "Hey, Good Lookin'."

Even the spirited house band, the Kansas City Band, provided a jolt for the entire show. The members weren't from the city but were reunited all-stars from Robert Altman's 1996 jazz-infused film of the same name. The lineup included James Carter, Geri Allen, Curtis Fowlkes, Don Byron, Nicholas Payton and Christian McBride, conducted—just as in the film—by Steven Bernstein. It also helped



Dr. John (left) and Nicholas Payton

that the Apollo event's musical supervisor was mover-and-shaker producer Hal Willner, whose resume includes the Altman movie.

In its early days, the event could ramble on for disorganized hours, but Willner made sure the music, awards and testimonies finished in exactly two. He also directed the assembled talent to bring out the best of their repertoire for

an organization whose sobering but joy-making call to mission is to provide in-need jazz and blues elders with healthcare and rent as well as create gigs in schools (jazzfoundation.org).

Highlights of the announced acts included a grizzled-blues duo medley by Dr. John and Payton, a moving soul-jazz take on "God Bless The Child" by Macy Gray and a performance by Lou Reed. Reed first electrified the audience with "Night Time" and ended the evening with "Perfect Day" (from his 1972 *Transformer* LP), concluding with an all-band singalong of the chorus lyrics, "You're going to reap just what you sow."

The show's execution was a mammoth undertaking, but it was pulled off successfully. In her introductory remarks that evening, JFK Executive Director Wendy Atlas Oxenhorn said simply and wisely, "Tonight is to remind us to be human beings, not human doings."
—Dan Ouellette

Women in Jazz Fest Celebrates Abbey Lincoln Songbook

The spirit of Abbey Lincoln rang loud and clear on the second evening of the 16th Annual Mary Lou Williams' Women in Jazz Festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington. The Terrace Theater performance was dedicated almost exclusively to Lincoln, who during her legendary half-century career transformed from kittenish actress and supper-club singer to uncompromising lyricist and social activist.

Terri Lyne Carrington directed a formidable sextet that included tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, guitarist Marvin Sewell and three of today's commanding jazz singers—Dee Dee Bridgewater, Dianne Reeves and Cassandra Wilson. Opening with a rousing rendition of "The River" and closing with an equally fierce "Freedom Day," the vocalists delivered three-part harmonies and bristling solo asides against Carrington's intricate, thunderous arrangements that showcased percussionist Luisito Quintero and bassist James Genus' rhythmic fire and friction.

There was nary a dull moment in the two-hour, intermission-free performance as the songstresses alternatively took center stage. Completely free of ego-driven vocal battles that occasionally occur during tributes, all three singers channeled Lincoln's flare, theatrical caprice and unalloyed conviction without subverting their own singular voices.

Reeves was in spectacular form on the for-



lorn ballad "Bird Alone," which paired her majestic alto with pianist Peter Martin. She allowed listeners to focus on her unerring sense of melody and Lincoln's purposeful lyrics. Reeves was the least prone to overdramatization but demonstrated that she can imbue her singing with just as much salt and showmanship as she can sanguinity, as she emphasized on a roadhouse blues version of "Tender As A Rose."

Drama is Bridgewater's strongest calling card, and she delivered plenty with the swirling, polyrhythmic "Wholly Earth" and spiteful "And It's Supposed To Love." Her most poignant performance was her séance-like rendition

of "Another World," derived from the memorable intergalactic six-note motif of Steven Spielberg's sci-fi flick *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. Bridgewater broke down in tears while singing, moved by the serene arrangement and Lincoln's incantatory lyrics.

Because of problematic sound engineering and the density of some of the arrangements, many of Wilson's solo turns came off hazy. Her humid alto and languid delivery were intermittently indecipherable on "I Got Thunder" and "Throw It Away," but Wilson demonstrated why she's one of her generation's top jazz singers with a blues-drenched "Mood Indigo" encore. —John Murph

Victoriaville Artfully Veers Left of Center

When it comes to avant garde jazz festivals on this side of the Atlantic, the cultural compass still points to Victoriaville, Quebec, site of the 27th edition of the Festival de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (FIMAV) May 19–21.

After the focus went a bit fuzzy in recent years, FIMAV returned in robust shape, adding surprise nonmainstream elements of left-field jazz, art rock and epic noise. The looming stars of the 19-show festival program were all festival alumni.

Formidable saxophonists Peter Brötzmann and Anthony Braxton are by now standard bearers of the free-jazz milieu. Their back-to-back Saturday night sets made for a fascinating comparison-and-contrast study.

Brötzmann appeared first with an impressive new trio that featured a longtime ally, drummer Paal Nilssen-Love, and electric bassist

Massimo Pupillo, whose surging, sludgy sonic foundation lent a rock-esque spin to the mix. The operative blend of ferocity and angular lyricism appeared the next afternoon during Brötzmann's solo concert. As a traditional jazz nod, he finished with a take on Coleman Hawkins' "I Surrender, Dear" and Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman."

In contrast, Braxton's multilayered late Saturday night musical adventure embraced "moments" of now, as well as then—his septet was equipped with iPods, loaded with snippets from Braxton's vast past discography. What we got was an hourlong block of music, mixed in a cathartic but intellectually encoded way.

Dutch extended vocalist Jaap Blonk worked a magic rooted in history and spontaneous heat, paralleling his solo program, "Dr. Voxoid's Next Move." A bedazzling vocal phenom who shapes his voice unexpectedly, Bronk



brought 1920s Dadaism to the present. With his latest FIMAV visit, Blonk reestablished himself as a virtuoso of “highly controlled absurdity.”

While Saturday night’s double-header affirmed the expressive power of free-jazz, Friday night’s fare reveled in the intensity of rock and the avant garde noise persuasion. A collection of discrete artists joined together for an artful “wall/landscape painting of sound” noise summit featuring Japan’s Merzbow, France’s Richard Pinhas and Michigan trio Wolf Eyes. During the post-midnight slot, deft turntablist eRikm met the staunchly real-time/real-object percussionist and former Einstürzende

Neubauten member FM Einheit, who rendered obscure objects, power tools and building materials into true, mind-bending musicality.

Vocal projects certainly found their way into the FIMAV fabric elsewhere, as festival opener Koichi Makigami illustrated with his exotic, organically experimental Far East/Central Asian trio. During the closing program, “Comicooperando: A Tribute To The Music of Robert Wyatt,” vocalist Dagmar Krause, keyboardist-vocalist (and chip off the Carla Bley block) Karen Mantler and drummer Chris Cutler concocted a moodier take on art rock legend Wyatt’s venerable song-book. —Josef Woodard

Vision Fest Brings Brötzmann, New Combos Into Sight

The 16th annual Vision Festival was a *festschrift* for saxophonist Peter Brötzmann and some noteworthy new ensembles.

On night four of the event, Brötzmann—joined by cornetist Joe McPhee and bassists William Parker and Eric Revis—bellowed discrete segmented phrases to an oversold Abrons Theater. Parker and Revis alternated between pizzicato and arco, imparting different textures to each improvisation. McPhee later transitioned to tenor saxophone to help Brötzmann close the first colloquy. The second half began with Brötzmann’s long quasi-sub-tone as Parker and Revis conjured countermelody. McPhee commenced an Aylerian fanfare, and Brötzmann spun off a deeply soulful solo. McPhee played the blues on cornet, Brötzmann riposted on an elongated soprano with clarinet epigrams, and the conversation ended.

Brötzmann’s subsequent performance with Chicago-based vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz was less about blend than the duo’s exchange of ideas. He opened with long tones as Adasiewicz elicited a harpish, chime-like sound from the vibes, transitioned to long washes with standard mallets and later channeled church bells using formidable four-mallet stick combinations. Brötzmann poured on the vibrato before launching into a rubato melody reminiscent of the jazz standard “Body And Soul.” He’d conclude his appearance with a three-sax blow-out alongside fellow reedists Ken Vandermark and Mars Williams.

Peter Evans’ performance with electric bassist Tim Dahl and drummer Mike Pride showcased the trio’s amazing chops. Beginning with Evans’ opening fanfare over a grindcore-thrash vamp, the flow fragmented into polished three-way textural improv. Evans uncorked Bill



Dixon-like harmonics at tremendous velocity, manipulating sounds in real-time and deploying extended circular breathing.

Trumpets were abundant during the previous evening’s program, a coproduction with the Festival Of New Trumpet Music (FONT) organization. The evening opened with Amir ElSaffar’s “With/Between,” spotlighting quarter-tone Iraqi modes drawn from the trumpeter’s late 2009 fieldwork in Azerbaijan. Vocalist Jen Shyu was precise while phrasing complex rhythms—“What You’re Saying” featured multiple meters. François Moutin constructed cogent basslines while drummer Tomas Fujiwara nailed the long forms on “Apertures Of Light.” Liberty Ellman contributed projected blues sensibility on fretless, nylon-string electric guitar. On the concluding “Fuzuli”—named for an Azerbaijani poet—ElSaffar sang the text before Shyu’s concluding voice solo.

Trumpeter Tomasz Stańko’s new quartet with violinist Mark Feldman, pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and bassist Mark Helias interpreted a dynamic suite of seven tunes with the presence of a long-standing ensemble. Feldman was a perfect foil to Stańko while Courvoisier deployed low-end attack with a sense of spiky brilliance. —Ted Panken



one polish musical icon pays homage to another; mozdzer’s first solo outing for ACT sees the country’s most popular jazz musician offering his own reverential but original take on the music of the legendary pianist and film composer, krzysztof komeda, best known for his roman polanski soundtracks.

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Mike Jones *Magicians' Musician*

The Green Mill in Chicago is one of the world's greatest jazz clubs, but there aren't many world-class trios that *only* play the Mill. Outside of performing 250 nights a year with the Penn and Teller magic show in Las Vegas, that's the case with pianist Mike Jones. His new live album, *Chicago Trio 2010*, captures all the flavor of on- and off-stage banter at the club during an engagement there last year with bassist Larry Kohut and drummer Eric Montzka.

During a brisk, immaculate "Perdido," one of Jones' bandmates on the CD chuckles, "Stop that!" as the pianist dunks another cheeky quote from Fats Waller or Glenn Miller into the speeding narrative. An audience member comments, "You guys are good!" during a particularly flamboyant rendition of "But Not For Me," with idiomatic passages recalling Art Tatum or Teddy Wilson.

In reality, the trio only gets the opportunity to meet at the storied venue two nights a year because of Jones' dream gig in Vegas. "I get health insurance, a pension plan and a freshly tuned seven-foot grand every night after emerging from the Green Room," said Jones of his steady job at the Rio Hotel with Penn and Teller. But things weren't quite as cushy before Penn Jillette—who was tipped off that this amazing piano man was accompanying the diners at the Eiffel Tower restaurant in the Paris Hotel in Vegas—offered him a bigger gig.

After wearying of the commute from Boston (where he studied at Berklee College of Music) to do session work in New York, Jones had been enticed to Vegas a decade ago by the promise of a lucrative showroom engagement that didn't pan out. "One of the first marks of our friendship," recalled Jillette on the phone from Vegas, "was when he tattooed his head and hands, which basically lost him his restaurant gig and committed him to us."

Jillette had decided, at age 45, to learn standup bass, and he credits Jones with showing him the jazz ropes during their nightly pre-show duo gigs at the Rio. "I had told Mike it'd be just like Oscar Peterson playing with Ray Brown, if Ray Brown wasn't that good," quipped Jillette. Certainly Jones is steeped in the stylings of Peterson and "three-handed swing" master Dave McKenna, though he prefers to develop his bass lines organically rather than deploy what he identifies as the memorized patterns that worked so well for Peterson. He was transfixed when he first saw McKenna perform at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston in 1981. "He was playing everything a walking bass player would play, plus comping and soloing at the same time," recalled Jones, who thenceforth holed up in a Berklee practice room for six hours a day trying to figure out what McKenna was doing.

Another hero was Jamaican pianist Monty Alexander, who ultimately inducted Jones into the executive piano club when the two met as part of a junket on the QE2 cruise ship. "Monty pulled me aside and told me,



'You've got to stop this self-deprecating stuff. You're one of us, there's only a few of us around.'"

Playing six nights a week from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m. at the Bostonian Hotel for three years before going to Vegas honed Jones' chops. "I would sometimes play for two-and-a-half hours straight doing the kind of medleys McKenna would do, where a song like 'I Never Knew' leads into 'I Wish I Knew,' then 'I Wished On The Moon' leads to 'Moon Song' to 'No Moon At All.'"

Such punning/thematic segues were evident this spring at the Mill when Jones—joined by Montzka and pithy Chicago bassist Kelly Sill—reprise the Hoagy Carmichael medley he recorded on *Stretches Out* (Chiaroscuro, 2001), including "One Morning In May/The Nearness Of You/Lazy River." He also ripped through another favorite, "Black Orpheus," glancing Tad Dameron's "Hothouse" amidst percussive block chord architecture and greyhound chromatic chases in either hand.

The pianist's new recording is available for free download at his website (jonesjazz.com), so that he can maximize listenership. "[Green Mill owner] Dave Jemilo keeps saying, 'If you ever get famous, y'know, maybe you'll still come back here?' and I say, 'Absolutely!' I keep waiting. If I don't make it by the time I am 50, I think I may have to push it up to 75."

—Michael Jackson

Cindy Scott *Renewal in New Orleans*

When vocalist Cindy Scott quit her job as an executive at an international corporation in Houston and moved to New Orleans to pursue a master's degree in jazz studies, she made a pact with herself.

"I was going to be completely fearless and do anything I wanted to do," she says, seated before an electric piano in her home studio in the Mid-City neighborhood. "I have no regrets. Did I ever sing a wrong note? Yeah, but I was here to grow."

Scott quickly entrenched herself in the local music scene. She earned her degree and began teaching at the University of New Orleans as an adjunct professor. And just five years after leaving her corporate career behind, she released *Let The Devil Take Tomorrow* (Catahoula Records), which was named Best Contemporary Jazz Album of 2010 at the Best of the Beat Awards (presented by the New Orleans magazine *Offbeat*).

Looking back, the move required a lot more fearlessness than she had anticipated. Scott arrived to start her new life in January 2005, just seven months before Hurricane Katrina. Although she lost her belongings and much of her new city to flooding, the challenges of rebuilding her life alongside other resilient New Orleanians ultimately helped define her—and her work.



"We came back in January after the storm," says Scott, her voice warm and prone to wispy Southern lilt. "I wanted to finish school. I felt like New Orleans needed us. I don't know how I could ever have felt as connected to the city if I hadn't gone through that."

As she began performing around town, that bond became a driving force of her music, and her allegiance to the goal of expressing herself freely helped forge a new sound. She drew inspiration from the music around her, taking a note pad out to clubs and jotting down ideas that might become points of departure for her own music. Scott practiced scatting and uncovered jazz underpinnings in music that moved her, whatever the genre. She wrote and recorded songs about the emotions she felt after the storm, and the places she loved throughout the city.

All of these elements are evident in her recent work, as her voice moves seamlessly between influences, holding a masterfully controlled vibrato on one phrase before dipping into a bluesy purr on the next.

"There's so much freedom here," she says. "You can create music that's super straightahead and people like it. You can make music that's crazy, free, wacky stuff with loop pedals, and people like that, too. If you're tryin' to be creative and really open yourself up, it's OK here."

That kind of artistic risk-taking is at the heart of *Let The Devil Take Tomorrow*. Producer and guitarist Brian Seeger describes the disc as an attempt "to bring new sounds into a traditional jazz vernacular."

"Cindy brings a unique skill and artistic set to the community," Seeger explains. "I hear other great jazz singers, and I don't feel like I have any sense of them as a person. If you get so steeped in tradition, there's no room for your own personal expression. With Cindy, there's a lot of depth."

Despite her significant tenure as a professional musician, Scott feels she's on new ground with her career. As she puts it, "I'm coming out of my cocoon."
—Jennifer Odell

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Peter Zak | *Melodic Intention*

Although he is self-described as “not the type of person who wants to draw attention to myself,” Peter Zak belies that intention when he addresses his instrument. Consider *Down East*, the 46-year-old pianist’s fifth trio date for Steeplechase—you can’t help but be drawn in by his deep swing, mastery of tempos, horn-like phrasing, orchestrative savoir faire and ability to conjure melodic pathways through harmonic thickets. The repertoire includes three originals, as well as Duke Pearson’s “Is That So,” Thelonious Monk’s “Gallop’s Gallop,” Duke Ellington’s “I Didn’t Know About You,” Clifford Brown’s “Tiny Capers” and Ornette Coleman’s “Invisible.” Propelled by bassist Peter Washington and drummer Rodney Green, Zak faces the material head-on, personalizing with interesting chord choices and following his ears, rather than seeking new turf with radical reharmonizations and odd-metered time signatures as navigational aids.

“I want to be honest when I play, and not go on autopilot,” Zak said in late May, a few days after a trio engagement at the New York venue Smalls with bassist Paul Gill and drummer Justin Brown. “You can use your imagination within an idiom. People want jazz musicians to innovate, but you can’t just decide to do something new every three years. You’re always going to sound like yourself, anyway.”

An Ohio native who assiduously studied classical piano from ages 6 to 20, Zak “didn’t really know what jazz was” until his parents relocated to Oakland, Calif., when he was 16.

“I had records by Ellington, Tatum and Bill Evans, but I didn’t know what I was listening to,” he recalled. After his band director offered some progressions and listening suggestions, the process accelerated: “The first time I sat in with the jazz band, I was reading through a chart and had to solo. My ears weren’t very good, but somehow I did it.” By Zak’s senior year at University of California at Berkeley (where he majored in history), he was gigging locally in a band at the Jazz Workshop that included bassist Herbie Lewis. When in town on gigs, hard-bop-oriented contemporaries such as Winard Harper, Craig Handy and Cyrus Chestnut came by to sit in.

“I’d think, ‘This sounds different than what I’m hearing here.’” Zak explained. “I wanted to play that way.” He moved to New York in June 1989, met and gigged with guitarist Peter Bernstein and, as the ’90s progressed, formed further associations with hardcore main-streamers Ryan Kisor, Eric Alexander and Joe Farnsworth, burnishing his concept with frequent trips to piano rooms like Bradley’s and the Knickerbocker.

“At Bradley’s you could hear the way a pianist would think,” said Zak, who cites McCoy Tyner and Cedar Walton as influences and has the lexicons of Sonny Clark, Herbie Hancock and Wynton Kelly at his fingertips. “You’d hear Tommy Flanagan or Kenny Barron doing a tune—they were so in control, they’d hear what’s going to happen before it happens. Then there’s how you put a set together, how to keep playing without getting tired. I couldn’t play



COURTESY OF STEEPLCHASE RECORDS

trio 30 or 40 minutes [back] then without getting mentally exhausted.”

Zak’s Steeplechase debut was 2004’s *Peter Zak Trio*. “I could always play fast, but until a year before my first Steeplechase record, I was uncomfortable executing the melodies, guiding the form,” he said. “I got put into situations playing trio that forced me to think clearly about my ideas and adapt them to how I wanted to play. It meant stripping down a bit, integrating chords and single-note melodies, and really knowing the melody, which I’d kind of overlooked before.”

As for the future, Zak sees no reason to change. “It’s not a question of imitating,” he said. “It’s finding your own thing that will set you apart from the pack.” —Ted Panken

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Tim Daisy | *Juggling Finesse & Fury*

Chicago's intimate, homey venue the Hideout has a reputation for creative bookings like the free-jazz outfit Klang, which played a CD release gig there in May. The band's drummer, Tim Daisy, juggled finesse, fury and fun rhythmic interplay as though he'd filled up on ultra-high octane beforehand.

Not that Daisy had an easy assignment: The new Klang album *Other Doors* (Allos Documents) takes the music of Benny Goodman, along with Goodman-inspired originals, and launches it all on an improvisational flight that ricochets from familiar themes to ferocious flights, then back again. But Daisy, 34, has the stamina and smarts to pull it off live, whether hitting his staccato stops with exactitude, or chasing the torrential runs of clarinetist James Falzone as though running sweet circles around a twister. In Daisy's capable hands, the music of Goodman emerged as though telegraphed from a Gotham back alley during the ebb and flow of a stormy midsummer's eve.

Daisy provides the surest foundation imaginable for this formidable quartet. He's also a joy to watch; rendering the album's title track, Daisy whipped his brushes on the rims into such a froth of sound that you might think locusts had swarmed the stage.

Daisy's adventurous playing reflects a wide range of influences, running the gamut from avant-garde pioneer Milford Graves to post-bop paragon Elvin Jones. Daisy also counts himself a fan of European improvisers such as German drummer Paul Lovens.

Closer to home, he credits fellow Chicago musicians for toughening and tightening his sound, and helping him find his voice as a percussionist. "One beautiful thing about the scene here is that we all work in various groups together, so we get to know each other as players," said Daisy, who performs frequently

with acclaimed saxophonist Ken Vandermark. Daisy and Falzone trade places as bandleaders for the outfit Vox Arcana, which also includes Klang contributor Fred Lonberg-Holm on cello.

Daisy says the side project has deepened his approach to Klang's excursions: "It's very structured chamber music, so there's a different vocabulary. You bring that back into Klang, and it changes things in all sorts of ways. There's a fluidness and a synergy that creates an expanded sense of possibility."

Daisy has developed a great working relationship with Vandermark: "He's got one of the strongest work ethics I've ever seen," Daisy says. "He's constantly putting together bands, setting up rehearsals, making records. I've actually learned a lot just hanging out with him. On the road, he's taking me to art museums."

Daisy's two new releases are duo projects. He recorded *The Conversation* (Multikulti) with Vandermark, and *The Flower And The Bear* (Relay) with cellist Daniel Levin.

In his own way, Daisy has fashioned an approach to drums and rhythm that goes far beyond meter and tempo, into the realm where his playing splashes color like Jackson Pollock one minute and renders a sublime backdrop of cyan-tinged hues the next.

Beyond that, Daisy's also a guy who'll substitute knitting needles for sticks to generate an exotic percussive thread, or smack an ashtray if it helps him close a musical sentence with trashy punctuation.

Chicago music lovers who haven't seen Daisy play should check him out soon, with Klang or any of his other projects, because if he has his way, the future will turn this rhythm king into a road warrior. "I'd like to do more touring with my own groups," he says. "I love traveling and meeting people, playing in front of new crowds." —Lou Carlozo

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The Cuban Voyage of *Ninety Miles*

By Ken Micallef // Photos by Jimmy and Dena Katz

Springtime in Cuba feels like the dog days of the worst Louisiana summer. In Havana, decaying architecture drips with humidity. Flora rarely seen in the United States blossom with energy created by extreme sunshine. The locals survive through a combination of honor and ingenuity, perhaps awaiting Fidel Castro's demise or the frequently rumored, always expected U.S. invasion—though today that invasion is more likely to come in the form of dollars (or Chinese yuan) than boots on the ground. Into this world of political fog, musical tradition and searing heat came three jazz musicians and a novel concept.



From left: David Sánchez, Stefon Harris and Christian Scott

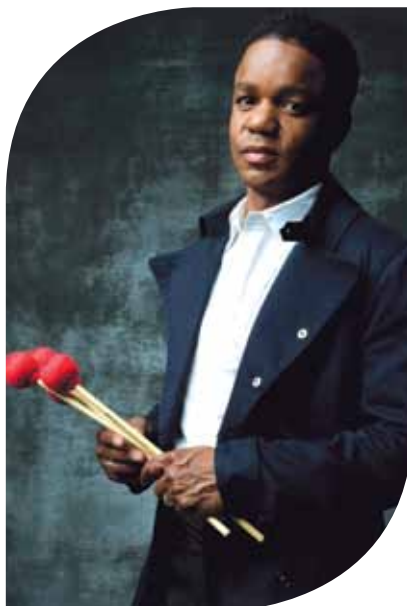
There is still a U.S. embargo of Cuba, but the Obama administration has loosened travel restrictions. Direct flights to Cuba are now allowed from 11 U.S. airports, with a premium awarded to religious and educational trips (Arturo O’Farrill and Wynton Marsalis also have made the journey to Cuba). In the wake of these changes, Concord Picante joined with the Montuno Producciones y Eventos S.L. label to produce the CD/DVD package *Ninety Miles*. What would actually transpire in Cuba was unknowable before the trio of vibraphonist Stefon Harris, saxophonist David Sánchez and trumpeter Christian Scott arrived there in May 2010. Over the course of seven sweat-drenched days, they would record with Havana’s new breed of fiery jazz musicians and perform (and be filmed) at one the city’s oldest venues, the Amadeo Roldán Theater.

“These three musicians come from three different parts of the U.S. and very different backgrounds,” said co-producer John Burk, chief creative officer of Concord Records. “Christian represents the New Orleans tradition, and you’ve got Stefon from New York, and then David from Puerto Rico. The whole point here was to mix it up and see what happens.”

What happened was a significant cross-cultural exchange that illustrates the universal power of music and its ability to conquer any divide, be it musical, economic or cultural. “We Are The World” commercialism and clichés aside, the *Ninety Miles* recording is nuanced, soulfully deep and brimming with inventive textures. Scheduled to record and perform with groups led by two brilliant young Cuban pianists—Rember Duharte and Harold López-Nussa—the trio of Harris/Sánchez/Scott finally arrived after a year of legal wrangling with the Office of Foreign Assets Control. They came to Cuba with music written and attitudes ready for anything. And as often happens when oppressed people are involved, the spirit was willing, and in abundance.

“I had an amazing experience,” Scott says, seated alongside Harris and Sánchez in a Universal Records conference room in New York. “We learned a lot of music fast, and we were rehearsing in this theater with no air conditioning. After the performance, people were really touched and captivated by what was going on. I felt like they were listening with more than just their ears. That’s one of the great things about Cuban culture—you can tell that music is a big part of their lives. They’re not talking about the Foo Fighters or what’s the new hot thing on iTunes. But they may listen to more music than the average American.”

“When you look at a situation where people are oppressed,” Harris adds, “and I don’t specifically mean Cuba—you have oppressed communities in the U.S. as well—but there tends to be more of an appreciation [of music] and even more so a need for artistic expression. People need to let out what’s inside of them. So their connection is considerably deeper than



someone who enjoys music as a pastime, a little hobby on the side. You can feel that connection in Cuba. It’s like we were having a spiritual exchange with the audience. I play music because music saved my life. I love this. It’s not something that’s just interesting to me.”

The DVD in the *Ninety Miles* package includes video footage from director Devin DeHaven’s documentary of the trip. Along with extensive footage of the three principals touring Havana in ’50s-era U.S. cars (à la Ry Cooder in *Buena Vista Social Club*), the DVD has excerpts of two performances from the Amadeo Roldán Theater concert. “City Sunrise,” a Sánchez composition, and “La Fiesta Va,” by López-Nussa, demonstrate the power and grace shared among these cross-cultural ambassadors.

The level of awareness and interplay between these U.S. and Cuban players is inspiring, and occasionally profound. Eye contact of the highest order is present, and the emotional communication is obvious. Each musician is hyper-aware, paying rapt attention to all that is happening around him.

Harris, Sánchez and Scott had never performed together, but when they joined with these stunning Cuban musicians—whose synthesis of contemporary and traditional jazz with their native music is often revelatory—the results were thrilling. The music rises and falls in waves, both melodic and rhythmic, the latter ingredient a constantly churning (and often odd-metered) theme in this burning, balmy music.

Repeated listens to the CD (tracked in Havana at EGREM Records’ Studio 18) reveal additional layers of musical depth, like a painting giving up her secrets. The only constant is a lack of constancy: rhythms flash and flow, propel and recede, often stylizations of rumba, cha-cha or montuno. Fireworks between the three principals are expected, while the subtlety, power and communicative skills of the Duharte and López-Nussa rhythm sections are completely engrossing. Acoustic bassist Yandy Martínez González, drummers Eduardo Barroetaña and Ruy Adrián López-Nussa, and percussionists Jean Roberto San Miguel and Edgar Martínez Ochoa perform like their lives depend on it, but with great transparency, airiness and spirit. Prior to making this journey, the U.S. trio wasn’t exactly sure *what* the Cuban collaborators would be like.

“I was thinking, ‘If they are going to be recording with us, they are going to have to be great,’ Scott, 28, claims. “I don’t want to waste my time. We are in the record business, and I would rather make a record with guys who can really play than make a record with guys who can’t. Call me elitist. But when we get there, there’s these two great composers, and they have their own bands. We played with two versions of their groups, and that is basically what the record is. I was taken aback at first, because I expected everything to be one thing, and



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when we got there, the two bands weren't what I expected, which made it great. My preconceptions were wrong. It was better than I thought it would be."

"It's a great concept," Sánchez adds. "But it was very challenging for the record label to execute. We're going to Cuba to work with these guys we've never played with, and with limited rehearsal, and we're going to have to make it work! That's exactly what happened. You can go in with expectations, but at the end of the day, it's a lot of pressure, a lot of concentration and a lot of energy to be spent. That being said, the drummers did have a lighter touch, because it's a different generation of drummers rising now in Cuba. Some of them are more influenced by jazz drummers like Billy Higgins, and some have not reached their maturity. But all these guys were really young, so Stefon, Christian and I had to focus and say, 'How are we going to lay the groundwork?' and 'How are we going to parcel this thing?' We used one rhythm section more than the other, which we did to make it more consistent."

The musicians had one day of rehearsal in the theater, and one day in the studio with each quartet, 10 hours per day. The concert was part of the yearly Cubadisco festival, an 8-day international musical event. The sessions in the studio recording were essentially a safety net. "If there had been a glitch with the concert record-

ing, the studio recording was originally seen as a backup," said Burk. "Our main purpose was to be there for the live performance, and then we decided to record the rehearsal. But that was a concise overview of the whole project so it became the focus."

With no cell phones, less than stellar accommodations, an antiquated recording studio and a scorching theater, simply making music became a challenge.

"Part of the synergy we have onstage is what we went through to get to the stage," Harris, 38, says. "When you're rehearsing and it's so hot—and we had some problems with the living situations where we were staying," he adds with a sigh. "But by the time you get to the stage—the stage is sacred. That's the one space where you can really let go. So you see that joy in the documentary. We forgot about anything that had been a barrier up until that point..."

"...Even when we're about to pass out," laughs Sánchez. "Seriously! The theater had a problem with the air conditioning, so the temperature during rehearsals could have been 100 degrees."

"I was dripping wet," Scott exclaims.

"But it was a beautiful theater," Sánchez notes. "And it's a testament to the people willing to relate to each other. Those people did not move from their seats. I was in disbelief. Are you kidding me? Those people could have been

anywhere else, but they stayed there."

Contrary to stereotypes, there was no Cuban machismo interfering with the musicians' willingness to work together. If anything, the Cuban musicians were intimidated by Harris, Sánchez and Scott. Residents of Havana may not have the latest CDs or downloads, but they still have underground tapes and word of mouth.

"We put them at ease quickly because we don't have those kind of egos," says Harris, who was provided with a smaller vibraphone in Cuba than the one he typically plays back home.

"Once they saw those beautiful smiles, everybody was laughing," Sánchez, 42, insists. "But I'll never forget the first minute. Rember was very worried. Harold and Rember had to learn a different system. For them it's a job, coming from their system. They have to rehearse a certain amount of hours—the process is different. We don't get together thinking like a 9-to-5 job. But they are paid by the state, which is pretty cool! At the same time, we deal differently with the unknown. We don't view learning the music as a schedule like the Cuban musicians do, in a regimented fashion. No, it was, 'Send me an email, send me a chart, and we'll see you there.' Their process is completely different. They rehearse constantly."

The *Ninety Miles* material came from all

Cuban Collaborators Discuss *Ninety Miles*

For the *Ninety Miles* project, Stefon Harris, David Sánchez and Christian Scott collaborated with the Cuban pianists Harold López-Nussa and Rember Duharte. The two Cuban musicians were interviewed via email, with the assistance of an interpreter.

How did you write material for this project?

Harold López-Nussa: One year before recording the project, I got a call from [Cuban record label] Colibri to tell me they were going to have an exchange with some American musicians who were coming to Cuba to perform with some Cuban musicians. I went to my home very enthused with the idea, and I composed a song for them. I called it ["La Fiesta Va"] because we know how difficult it is for Cuban musicians to interact with North American musicians. So for us, the idea was a celebration.

Rember Duharte: When I wrote the material for this project, I took in context the format for which I was going to write, of course. But overall I listened to a bit of Stefon's, David's and Christian's music to better know the style of each one, and based on that, I started to write the music. I am always looking for a different sound or color.

What struck you most about working with Stefon, David and Christian?

Duharte: The communication we had from the beginning—we were very connected since we started to play, and it took no time to have that happen. The three are very rhythmic, and it is difficult to find musicians with that characteristic and to be grounded. They provided a lot for the music I made, each one imprinted a style, and this enriched the composition enormously.

López-Nussa: It was an incredible experience! What

caught our attention the most was the distinct manner they viewed and made music. Us, with a totally distinct grouping, we viewed things a bit more closed, and they changed that way of thinking, making us view that the most important thing is leaving the mind open to new experiences and assimilate as best as possible.

What surprised you about the working relationship?

Duharte: That the music had no boundaries. No matter the language, the color nor where you come from, we all have a proper voice. And the mutual respect, and admiration, was one of the most beautiful things I picked up on this project.

López-Nussa: I always like the manner in which music can unite people, musicians of different latitudes, who don't speak the same language. The music does that for us, brings us closer, to understand one another, share, and feel like we've known each other forever.

What is the future for this kind of collaboration, given the current relationship between our two countries?

López-Nussa: The future I cannot predict, but my wish is for this to occur with more frequency and every time we can when we are close geographically.

Duharte: I think that it is the start of a new path that will bear much fruit, good things, and will help bring our countries together, definitively, with each country's culture surpassing any barrier. —Ken Micallef



participants. Duarte contributed the opening track, “Ñengueleru,” and “Congo.” Harold López-Nussa composed “E’cha” and “La Fiesta Va.” Sánchez, who also acted as the de facto interpreter, brought “City Sunrise” and a gorgeous ballad, “The Forgotten Ones.” Harris reengineered “Black Action Figure” (the title track from his 1999 album) for the Cuban context, and he composed the 9-minute gem “And This Too Shall Pass,” as well as the cathartic blues-meets-swing-meets-rumba tune “Brown Belle Blues.”

Harris has an enthusiastic admiration for Duarte: “I like ‘Ñengueleru.’ I got the sense immediately that Rember occupies his own sound space. He has a voice. If I heard one of his compositions today and didn’t know the composer, I think I would guess correctly that it’s Rember. That’s very difficult to come across in the world of the arts. I really appreciate that about his writing.”

“That’s one of my favorite tunes as well,” Sánchez concurs. “I can feel Africa in it as a common denominator. The African American experience, Caribbean Africa, it’s like nothing else. [He pauses to sing the melody.] But it’s something else! It’s the roots. That’s why ‘Ñengueleru’ is one of my favorite tracks. It’s just crazy how the bass line relates to the piano; it’s very clever.”

“Rember is a soulful musician,” Harris interjects. “He reminds me of Horace Silver. Just the concept and his placement.”

“It’s hard to find a ballad more beautiful than ‘The Forgotten Ones,’” Scott says, jumping in. “David wrote it for New Orleans, so for me it struck a chord. And you’d be hard-pressed to find some shit as killing as ‘Brown Belle Blues!’ It was hard to play at first. Even though you can argue that the three of us are rooted in the blues, there’s something about the way that melody speaks. It’s great. And when

Stefon would be singing it and we’d be going over it, I’d be like, ‘Damn, that is killing!’”

Harris reflects on other highlights: “There are great moments, like Christian’s solo on ‘E’cha,’ it’s so killing. The tone and feeling that he generates in his solo, right off the bat, you feel it. I love that moment. David’s solo on ‘And This Too Shall Pass’—that’s incredible. I like the way we played it—it was a real good merger of everyone’s influences. Everyone opened up, and there’s a lot of interaction going on.”

A focus on the here-and-now superseded any concerns regarding star status or ego tripping. But when it came to writing material, I wondered whether these musicians were influenced by past Cuban-American collaborations like Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo, *Buena Vista Social Club* or even the purely Cuban band Irakere.

“Absolutely not,” Harris states. “I didn’t live that experience. The only thing I can write is that which is a reflection of my experience. But I did consider that ‘Brown Belle Blues’ was going to be played by a Cuban rhythm section with percussion, and that I am coming from more of a soul background. I wanted to create a melody on top that embodied the blues, but leave enough space for them to do what they do. I did write in a way that brought the musicians together. But I am not thinking about anyone from the past.”

“But then again,” Sánchez adds, “being from New York City, you have all these experiences. You maybe didn’t play with Tito Puente or whoever, but it’s in our inner ear. The experience of New York City all alone, 14 years for me, it brings to you so many different things that they actually become part of your DNA. So it’s like eating food and you process it.”

For three musicians who had never played together, Harris, Sánchez and Scott are certainly a simpatico and dynamic front line. Perhaps

it was the foreign surroundings, or that they are simply great listeners, but there’s a sure connection between these three evident on both the CD and DVD. Though they were brought together by a record label, they rose above the basic construct of matching popular U.S. jazz musicians with two younger Cuban rhythm sections. And with a global tour ensuing, their bond is only deepening.

“We played the Atlanta Jazz Festival just the other day,” Harris says. “It was incredible to see how when the lights came on these brothers knew how to step it up. Not everyone knows how to do that. There’s a reason that David and Christian are who they are. They know how to deliver. And to be onstage with that type of chemistry, and that energy, it just makes you elevate your game in the same way.”

“These monsters helped me and showed me some different ways of approaching and navigating the music,” Scott recalls. “David knows so much about playing in clavé and really getting around this kind of music that hasn’t been my experience. And I’ve been listening to ‘Black Action Figure’ for years. You talk about some shit that a lot of guys today still can’t navigate. A majority of guys who would say they are great musicians can’t play that.”

Harris, Sánchez and Scott came, they conquered, they learned about Cuban music (and the value of rehearsal) and, most importantly, they opened a window into a world few of us have ever seen. A closed Cuba can’t last much longer, and traditions will surely undergo rapid change once the proverbial wall falls. So what did they take away from the experience?

“I was happy to be in Cuba before the change, which seems inevitable, before capitalism puts its big foot down there,” Harris replies. “As an American you read about it, but until you’re on the ground and feel the city and meet the people, you don’t really know what to think. There are lots of systems that can work. Our system is one system, and what they have there, in Havana, what I saw, I saw good and bad. Same here.”

“It’s really a testament to the individual, what they can take, their backbone,” observes Sánchez. “At the end of the day, the people are the ones who suffer the most to make that system work. You have education but these horrible conditions. But these people are so uplifted. How can they live in those conditions and be oppressed yet have such a brightness? It’s amazing. I’ve been there five times, and every time it has the same effect on me.”

“It’s not about the systems,” Sánchez continues. “It’s about our hunger to learn not only about music but about life. The main thing to learn is really to listen. If we listen, that is key. Listening is very special and not as easy as we think it is—the willingness to relate to something else and learn from someone else so you can grow. Then you’re not a capitalist or a socialist. Then you’re just a human being learning about life.”

DB



Bill Frisell at Fantasy Studios in Berkeley, Calif., on June 30

BILL FRISELL

Anything's Possible

By Eric Fine // Photo by Monica Frisell

Bill Frisell was reminiscing. He chuckled at the memory of growing up with at least one bomb shelter in his neighborhood and recalled how America's then-fledgling space program had become the focal point for an emerging medium—television. Frisell's nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s had a dark side, though. In his hometown of Denver, like many communities before the civil rights era, neighborhoods were frequently established on the basis of race and ethnicity. Because of music, Frisell leapfrogged such divisions.

"That was the first place where it seemed to me all that [racial] stuff melted away," the lanky guitarist remembered. "I sort of grew up with that feeling of, 'Oh, wow, if we're playing music, we're musicians and we're together.' And I feel really lucky that I had that."

Frisell's youthful mindset provided a blueprint of what his music would sound like a half-century later. The absence of boundaries is prominent in the unlikely hybrids he creates and the odd combinations of instruments he assembles for various bands. Over the last two decades he has tailored the conventions of American roots music to jazz (and vice versa). He has incorporated free improvisation and modern approaches to composition. He has combined a reverence for the past with a vision of the future.

"He plays one or two notes, and you know immediately it's Bill—even if he's playing a chord," guitarist John Abercrombie said. "He doesn't even have to be taking an open-ended solo. You can feel his presence."

Because of this reach and his busy itinerary, Frisell can turn up almost anywhere. On a bright day in early June, he sat on one of the benches surrounding the mosaic at New York's John Lennon memorial, Strawberry Fields, in Central Park. Guitar players nearby sang Lennon's songs. Groups of tourists posed for snapshots while standing on the mosaic's gray and white tiles, where the title of Lennon's celebrated peace ode, "Imagine," is printed in the center.

Frisell, 60, lives in Seattle. He had arrived in New York to perform during a month-long festival presented by the Blue Note, the high-profile Greenwich Village club. Just weeks from recording a forthcoming album of Lennon's music, Frisell said surprisingly little about the songwriter's work. Instead, he spoke of the era whose music the Beatles helped shape.

For a little more than an hour, Frisell maintained roughly the same position: his left leg crossed over his right, with an iPhone resting on his thigh above the knee. In spite of several appointments and a gig that night at the Blue Note with a group featuring Lee Konitz, Gary Peacock and Joey Baron, he appeared relaxed and focused. His attire was casual—canvas sneakers, brown trousers, a loose-fitting black T-shirt—and his demeanor was by turns voluble and self-conscious. His career seemed to follow the course of his life, he explained, but he added that many of his projects had occurred more by chance than design; this held true for the Lennon album.

Back in 2005 Frisell booked a few weeks in Europe with a trio that included violinist Jenny Scheinman and Greg Leisz, a multi-instrumentalist who doubled on lap steel and acoustic guitars. Shortly before the first night in Paris, a promoter asked Frisell if he would consider per-

forming Lennon's songs; the booking coincided with a museum tribute in Lennon's honor. "It was originally supposed to be just this one concert," Frisell said, "but we got there early, and we prepared all this music, and we did the concert, and it was great. So we ended up doing the whole tour playing only this John Lennon music."

The trio regrouped last year at Yoshi's in Oakland, Calif., with the rhythm section of bassist Tony Scherr and drummer Kenny Wollesen. By then, Frisell's repertoire of Lennon's music had grown to roughly 14 songs, notably "Revolution," "Woman," "Give Peace A Chance," "Nowhere Man" and "Across The Universe." In addition Frisell signed with the reformed Savoy Jazz imprint for the release of *Beautiful Dreamers* (2010), after more than 20 years with Nonesuch Records. Though Frisell's sophomore album for Savoy, *Sign Of Life*, came out in late April, he expected to complete the Lennon album for release this fall.

Frisell, who was named top guitarist in this year's DownBeat Critics Poll, sometimes devotes painstaking research to projects before he begins recording. Several years before releasing the album *Disfarmer* (2009), Frisell drove to a small town in Arkansas to study the portraits of a Depression-era photographer whose legacy inspired the music. For a multimedia work called *The Great Flood*—a collaboration with filmmaker Bill Morrison inspired by the Mississippi River flood in 1927—Frisell embarked on a two-week tour extending from New Orleans to Chicago. With a band in tow, he composed music for the project and performed warhorses like "Moon River," "St. Louis Blues" and "Old Man River" at clubs and even tap rooms.

"I felt strong about not just having this be some abstract thing, where I wrote the music and just showed it to the guys and we read the music," Frisell said. "But it turned out the river was actually flooding again—the worst it had been since 1927—right while we were doing this."

For the Lennon album—which Frisell recorded between June 28 and July 1 in Berkeley, Calif.—there was no need to experience specific landmarks firsthand, or to dig deep into various archives. "That music is so in all of us. With these other things, it's more like I was a tourist. I wanted to see it and feel it," he explained. "But the Lennon music, I can say it's been in me my whole life. You can't escape it. It's just so much a part of all the music that we play, and our generation."

Frisell's preoccupation with Lennon did more than merely jibe with the manner in which musicians of previous eras interpreted popular music; it also typified the guitarist's unique vision of jazz. "It just seemed like, OK, this is the place where anything is possible," he said. "It doesn't seem such



a stretch for someone of my generation, and the music that I grew up with, to be referring to this music the way Charlie Parker referred to Broadway show tunes. It's the same process."

Frisell discovered Wes Montgomery's records during high school; a guitar teacher later introduced Frisell to Jim Hall, with whom he studied briefly in 1971. Shortly thereafter, Frisell immersed himself in Hall's recordings. "I shaved my head to try to be exactly like Jim Hall," he recalled. "I had a guitar that was just exactly like his [a Gibson ES-175 archtop]. I was just totally trying to mimic everything that he played."

In doing so, he lost his way. So he began circling back. For Frisell, jazz was a detour—a genre he discovered only after becoming passionate about other music styles. He subsequently began using solid-body guitars. He eventually chose a Gibson SG, a model emblematic of rock and blues, in conjunction with several effects devices. And he focused on his early influences, particularly rock, r&b and folk music.

"I did hear the Beatles, and I went to hear Jimi Hendrix," he said. "I didn't feel like I was being really true to where I was coming from. I was pretending like it was 1956—and it was 1975. That's when I got a solid-body guitar. In a way, it was sort of reverting back again. It's so weird because, after all this time, I've gone through hundreds of guitars and I probably could have just kept my first guitar [a Fender Mustang] and my first amp [a Fender Deluxe]."

For the last decade, Frisell has performed mostly with Fender Telecaster guitars, or models based on the prototype. Since the mid-'90s his other instruments have included an assortment of Stratocasters, archtops and custom models. He typically tours with one guitar, and uses just a few effects for delay, distortion and loops.

Frisell earned a degree from Berklee College of Music in 1978. He then spent an eventful year in Belgium, where he met his future wife, Carole d'Inverno, before moving to New York. "I really started writing my own tunes and playing them with this band," he said. "That was where I got the confidence to keep doing that kind of stuff."

In New York Frisell received exposure with drummer Paul Motian and on numerous sessions for ECM Records. He also established a reputation on the Lower East Side's "downtown scene," where the musicians looked beyond the mainstream for inspiration. Free improvisation and the influence of music from overseas flourished; nothing was considered off-limits.

Frisell acknowledged that his penchant for folk music and other unusual repertoire had precedents. He singled out Gary Burton's *Tennessee Firebird*, a 1967 release recorded in Nashville that included the city's premiere musicians, notably guitarist Chet Atkins and pedal steel guitarist Buddy Emmons. The set featured tunes by Bob Wills and Hank Williams. Frisell also spoke of Sonny Rollins' album *Way Out West* (1957), which included the cowboy songs "I'm An Old Cowhand" and "Wagon Wheels."

"I've never met anyone with such a rever-

ence for country music like Bill [has]," said Carrie Rodriguez, a violinist and singer who performed with Frisell in March during a European tour. "When he played a Hank Williams tune, he had learned the way Hank sang the lyrics to a T. When he's playing the head, he can play it exactly how Hank sings it."

In addition to Frisell's adventurous spirit, John Abercrombie praised his knowledge of the jazz tradition, especially with regard to Great American Songbook standards. "That's what gives his playing this deep foundation," Abercrombie said. "You can feel that this is not just somebody doing [unusual repertoire] for effect. He's doing it because he really wants to do it, and he's informed by a jazz language underneath it all."

"Everything I always dreamed of is happening.... I just want to try and get in as much as I can."

As Frisell continued to branch out, the press began attaching his name to various trends and movements. Frisell bristled at the almost compulsive categorizing, the sound bite-worthy pigeonholes. "First I was like the ECM house guitar player, whatever that is," he recalled. "And then I was a 'downtown guy' because I played with John Zorn, and then I went to Nashville. So now I'm sort of stuck with this 'Americana' thing. I'm a little uncomfortable—it's kind of an easy way out. Sometimes I think, 'Are you really listening?' It's stuff that's been in my music [from the beginning]."

In 1989, Frisell not only decided to leave ECM, but also New York. He signed with Nonesuch, and formed a working relationship with Lee Townsend, a San Francisco Bay area producer. "He was covering every angle of the guitar in New York," said guitarist Nels Cline, a former roommate. "[But] he was running himself ragged."

Frisell originally went to Seattle to work with keyboard player Wayne Horvitz, who produced the guitarist's second album for Nonesuch, *Is That You?* (1990). "I had been in New York for 10 years. It was soon after my daughter [Monica] was born, and I was really getting pretty burnt on the whole thing," Frisell said. "I just wanted to be in a quieter place."

In addition to Frisell's oeuvre as a leader, he recorded the recent duo album *Lágrimas Mexicanas* with Brazilian guitarist Vinícius Cantuária and did some session work on Nashville guitarist Buddy Miller's *The Majestic Silver Strings*. He also plays on recent jazz releases by bassists Scott Colley and Kermit Driscoll, and on Bonnie Raitt's forthcoming album. Frisell also will appear next

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spring on the second release by a collective called Floratone that includes drummer Matt Chamberlain and producers Tucker Martine and Townsend, among others.

Lucinda Williams, the Grammy-winning singer and songwriter, looked back fondly on Frisell's contributions to her 2007 album *West* (Lost Highway Records). "He's able to move in different worlds," Williams said. "That's one of the things that sets him apart. He's got a very global outlook, that kind of blend or fusion of styles."

Frisell remains busy with an ever-widening slate of projects. Joey Baron attributed the guitarist's enthusiasm at this juncture to the control he has over his career.

"He can go out and do concerts all over the world, with any of his projects," said Baron, who spent roughly a decade as Frisell's drummer. "It's his own thing; that's a very wonderful, privileged position to be in. And I know that he knows that, and I know that he doesn't want to waste it."

Frisell sometimes has trouble keeping track of his many bands, whose lineups frequently overlap. The trio Beautiful Dreamers includes viola player Eyvind Kang and drummer Rudy Royston. The 858 Quartet, which performs on *Sign Of Life*, features a string section—cellist Hank Roberts, Scheinman, Kang—but trumpet player Ron Miles also has worked with the group. Disfarmer includes bassist Viktor Krauss, Scheinman and Leisz.

The Great Flood is set to premiere Sept. 10 during ELLNORA/The Guitar Festival at the Krannert Center in Urbana, Ill. The production will then be presented in select cities through next spring. (It will pair clips culled from documentary footage with Frisell's music for a group that includes Ron Miles, Tony Scherr and Kenny Wollesen.)

"I've been beyond overwhelmed," Frisell said. "Every single day for the past six months I've been doing something else. I mean, the past year I've had like a handful of days off, and every day I've got to learn some music." He added, "Each of these things I've mentioned I could have easily spent 10 years locked away in a monastery just thinking about. This Lennon thing, there's not enough time in my life to really do it right. And I get really terrified sometimes; I can never get totally comfortable. And then I show up and somehow we pull it off."

Later, during a telephone conversation, he said: "My life is really the music. And I cannot figure out one place I can be where it works. I guess New York would be the closest place, [but] not even that. There's people that I want to play with who are all over the world. And there's places that I want to play all over the world. I just have to play, and I haven't figured out any other way than just traveling all over the place."

"It's also like I feel blessed. Everything I always dreamed of is happening. So when I have the opportunity to do these things, it's the best thing in the world. I just want to try and get in as much as I can. Maybe I get tired, but there's still nothing that I'd rather be doing." **DB**



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Christian McBride, Artist in Residence with Juilliard Jazz Orchestra, photo: Hiroyuki Ito

JAMES FARM

Growing Fame

By Dan Ouellette // Photos By Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos

Thursday night at the Jazz Standard could well be time for a sweet taste of rural jazz—that is, if you’re judging by the name of the new-fledged band assembled to make its New York debut. Bluegrass-steeped, Americana-infused? Hot banjos and fine picking? Distinctively no. In what is certainly the most unusual name for a jazz group since The Bad Plus controversially barreled its way onto the scene more than a decade ago, the quartet James Farm takes the stage for its packed-house show with a stellar cast: saxophonist Joshua Redman (the elder at 42), pianist Aaron Parks (the younger at 27), bassist Matt Penman and drummer Eric Harland (both in their 30s)—none of whom display any notion of hayseed cultivation even though their eponymous CD’s gatefold opens up to a photo of a fallowed field ready to be planted, and its cover is what looks to be an upside-down farmhouse.

Word has already leaked that James Farm is no country outfit, but something newfangled that nonetheless promises an intriguing project that many might have assumed is Redman’s new quartet for his latest Nonesuch album—given that of the four, he’s the only musician signed to the label. But, again, expectations are quickly upended.

James Farm opens the set with “1981,” a combustible Penman composition that changes speeds through a spirited stretch of groove and sax lyricism and ends in bass-piano dreaminess. Next up is a new Redman composition, “If By Air,” which swings lightly, changes tempo and adheres to a tune-like sensibility. There are the requisite displays of instrumental virtuosity—such as Redman reflecting and lifting off and Harland crisply skittering on the cymbals and driving beats with a pleasant urgency—but the solos are compact with an ear to return to the melody, which is not merely a catchy head but a full-blown song.

About halfway through the set, a Redman fan squirms uncomfortably in his seat at a table near the bar, frowns and complains, “This is not Joshua.” He shakes his head and continues, “This is dumbed down like what you’d see at a festival or something.”

After Redman’s bluesy and shape-shifting “Star Crossed” and Harland’s edgy-grooved, tempo-accelerating “I-10”—both crammed with exhilarating telepathic instrumental exchanges among the members—the band settles into

Parks’ gem “Bijou,” which is played straight with a relaxed hush. The Redman fan says again, “This is not Joshua! It’s David Sanborn. He’s dumbing it down.”

The reply to the unhappy audience member expecting to see unabated Redman pyrotechnics: “You’re right. It’s not Joshua. It’s James Farm, which is not just Joshua.”

And that is the band’s story. James Farm is not Redman’s new quartet, but a collective of like-minded friends who are exploring something new—not plotting out a onetime all-star billing but letting their desire to collaborate dictate the music. When James Farm, founded in theory at the end of 2008, delivered its first onstage meeting the following year as a band, all four members had strong connective tissue from the recent past. Redman, Harland and Penman were in the SFJAZZ Collective from 2005 to 2007, and the rhythm team synced up on Parks’ *Invisible Cinema* (Blue Note) and Penman’s *Catch Of The Day* (Fresh Sound New Talent), both released in 2008.

The band made its official launch at 2009’s Montreal Jazz Festival, where Redman was asked to curate the three-show *By Invitation* series with his own bands, including a quintet featuring the saxophonist flanked by Joe Lovano, Sam Yahel, Reuben Rogers and Gregory Hutchinson, and then a double trio with Rogers, Hutchinson, Larry Grenadier and Brian Blade. Part three of the trilogy was the inauguration of the new collective.

“We had never played together, but we were already a band,” Redman says at the Nonesuch office in Manhattan, where all the band members are amiably assembled. “It wasn’t like we put the band together for the concert. We had already started talking about playing together late in 2008. We were committed to playing together, and it just so happened that I got the invitation and everyone was available—which is a hard thing for this band, given how busy we all are.”

There were three main forces at work to form James Farm: search, soul and song.

“Hands down, it had to happen,” says Harland. “You could just feel it. I had been playing with Matt and Aaron and loving it, and I’ve always wanted to play with just Josh. I loved the quartet he had with Brad Mehldau, Christian McBride and Brian Blade. It was a pioneering group, as if it were the next leading voice at the time they were together. They had a lot of information and great things to say.”

That’s what Harland was hoping to find with James Farm: “I wanted to stand up and be in a group that has something to say in this age where there are groups after groups coming out. I wanted to associate myself with a band that has a different meaning.”

At age 16, Parks met Redman when his mother took him to see the saxophonist play at the Clifford Brown Jazz Festival in Wilmington, Del. They crossed paths over the years, but it was the pianist’s Blue Note debut, *Invisible Cinema*, that really got the juices



Saxophonist Joshua Redman (left), pianist Aaron Parks, drummer Eric Harland (kneeling) and bassist Matt Penman

flowing. “I try to listen to lots of music, but it was Aaron’s album that made such a huge impact on me,” says Redman. “I listened to that all the time, and it’s just so damned good—the fluidity of the rhythm section and the layers of conversations that were happening, but all in the context of a groove. It felt so natural and soulful. There was a natural balance of in-the-moment group interplay and how that was integrated into the real sense of songs—good songs that may be complicated to play but sound effortless and simple and listenable. It reminded me of my favorite rock and soul records I grew up with.”

“Josh and I talked and realized we were really searching for something,” Parks explains. “I was just coming onto the scene with Eric and Matt, and we all felt like we were searching, too. From our overlapping histories, you could hear everyone had his own individual voice and complementary attitudes and brought their own personalities into play. It made sense to make a band—actually, a real band.”

Penman agrees: “I worked with Josh and Eric in the SFJAZZ Collective, then I met Aaron, which was revelatory to me. So I had two streams of music that I felt very comfortable with and inspired by.” This took true form when Penman, Parks and guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel accompanied Harland on his quartet tour of Japan, where they developed a complementary language of four strong composers who each brought their individualities into the playing. “That made me realize,” Penman says, “that I’d like to be in a band and make decisions as a band, where everyone can chime in, which makes the music stronger.”

Nonesuch released James Farm’s debut on April 26, with each band member’s name appearing on the CD cover and spine, and printed on the disc itself.

“One of the things that defined us from the beginning was that we conceived ourselves as a band,” says Redman. “That’s not usually the way that the world works in jazz, where someone typically puts a group together to be the so-and-so trio or the so-and-so quartet. This was an opportunity to organize a band in a different way. It’s not like it hasn’t been done before, but I had never played in a group quite like this.” As for the compelling and at times memorable narrative quality of the music, he adds that storytelling was central from the beginning. “We didn’t really articulate it, but that’s one of the things about us—dare I say, our strength, or focal point. We all like writing songs.”

Penman holds up his iPod. “That’s a big reason why we’re together,” he says. “We have such eclectic tastes. You can tell that by looking at what we have on our iPods. James Farm is a great vehicle to process those tastes.” Case in point, the bassist’s “1981,” a suite of sorts that was inspired by The Police’s 1981 album *Ghost In The Machine*, which contained the pop hits “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic” and “Spirits In The Material World.” “There



are three really good songs on that album,” Penman says, “and the rest are not so good. But I wanted to experiment with that Police-like groove, that then moves into a section that’s kind of poppy. And then there’s a part at the end where you change one note and you’re into another world—which I like because it’s surprising. After all the hardness of the tune with a very fixed bass line and a very fixed drum beat, I wanted to drift into a dreamy landscape with a liquid bass part and a floating kind of groove that wasn’t prescribed.”

Parks brought to the mix the dramatic, almost urgent “Chronos,” with its Middle Eastern flavor. “It’s a journey,” he says. “It’s a time-traveling song where we all play through little worm holes. And at the end, we merge into space where there’s zero gravity. It’s almost like an amusement park ride. I brought this tune to the band because it’s what this band is all about—it has a melody that you want to sing even though it’s weird and tricky, but the rhythm carries you along.”

Penman adds, “It’s like an oceanic seafaring vibe. There’s a bit of a pirate ship feel to it.”

Harland says, “It’s like a Greek ship.”

Penman replies, “Or a Viking ship. I liked the way we explained it when we played in Rotterdam: It’s all about threes within threes. It’s in nine, so there are all these circular things at work throughout the entire song.”

One of the most indelible tunes on *James Farm* is Redman’s spirited “Polliwog,” which is more fluid and playful than most of the saxophonist’s compositions. It’s one of three songs that Redman composed specifically with the collective in mind. “I had a sense of the groove first without really knowing what it was going to sound like,” he says, struggling a bit to explain the imagery and the metaphors at work. “I was thinking of a rustic element, I guess. It was like a bunch of people sitting around a campfire after having gone fishing.” He laughs and continues, “It was like we were all beating the rhythm on a log or a picnic table. It has a real elemental quality with a simple melodic motif that repeats. It’s a real physical song that’s something you could dance to—not that I ever did.”

Harland says, “I like how you describe it, Josh, like a tadpole shaking its tail. I always feel that.”

“Yeah, it’s like someone shaking their ass,” says Redman. “It’s dance even though it’s a little quirky, a little idiosyncratic.”

“At the end, there’s also that loss of innocence when you turn into a frog,” says Penman. “After the polliwog comes the frog and all the adult responsibilities.”

The foursome laughs when talking about the songs, repeatedly spiking the conversation with quips and observations.

Even though it’s the only composition Harland contributed to the album, the irregular-metered “I-10” is arguably the most noteworthy for its groove as well as its sonic variety, including alt-rock distortion toward the end, when the band sounds like its voice is blasting out of a tinny radio from the transistor age. The tune is about Interstate 10, which runs from California to Florida, with a major interchange in Houston, Harland’s hometown.

“This tune is all about texture,” the drummer says. “As a teenager, I used to take I-10 every day to high school, with my dad driving me in his truck. I was always practicing beats on his dashboard every morning while I was hearing the sounds of the freeway. It always intrigued me—the traffic sounds, the construction sites, different things going on. Every morning it became music to me and something that I looked forward to. But I could never figure out how to express that in music.”

It wasn’t until Harland began hanging around with such Indian musicians as tabla player Zakir Hussain that he unlocked the song. (Harland and Hussain played on saxophonist Charles Lloyd’s trio date *Sangam*, which was recorded at a 2004 concert and released by ECM in 2006.) Hussain introduced him to ragas, which led to Harland developing his own urban raga. “It’s like a rhythmic chant,” he says. “It’s like a chant based from one to eight, and you lose an eighth note on that journey from beat one to beat eight. The funny thing was that I didn’t even have to tell these guys what to do. We went into the studio and it happened. They kept wanting to do another take, but I kept saying, ‘No, we’ve got it.’ I knew deep down that the first take was the freeway and the sounds I heard as teenager.”

And the sonics? Totally the lo-fi radio in Harland’s dad’s truck, which was conjured up

when James Farm did the mix. “It’s the window in the truck,” says Harland. “When it’s down, it’s clear and the sound has a sense of clarity. When the window is up, it’s muted.”

Before recording the album, the quartet hit the road for gigs in Canada, throughout Europe and in clubs in Philadelphia and Seattle. “It was played and to some degree tested,” says Penman, but the actual recording was much more instinctual, as the foursome aimed to capture the potency of their concerts. In the studio and on the stage, these players’ personal chemistry has resulted in infectious music.

Redman scoffs at the suggestion that the formation of James Farm could mark a milestone moment in the contemporary jazz landscape. He says, “I get uncomfortable when people talk like this: bringing jazz to a new generation or carrying jazz into the future or making it more modern, or getting outside of jazz by bringing in outside influences. There’s nothing wrong with that, but personally, I can’t be an effective musician if I’m thinking about that. I’m just thinking about the agenda for the band, the significance of the band, our relevance. I’m not thinking about marketing. Simply put, this is a band I want to be a part of with the musicians I want to play with. They inspire me. There’s something fresh and unique in playing with this band, and that’s it and that’s enough. If other things happen as a byproduct, fine, but it’s not our motivation or our agenda.”

So, how strong is the James Farm commitment, especially given the side projects and session work each member is actively involved with? “Everyone has a real commitment,” Redman states. “We’re building it into our schedules.” While he concurs that James Farm may never be a band that tours together the majority of the year, it will stick together as unit, instead of being merely a one-shot deal.

Even given all the artistic vigor of James Farm, the question begs to be asked: Where in the world did the name come from? The word *James* came from the first letter of each band member’s first name: Joshua, Aaron, Matt and Eric, with the letter *S* tacked on the end. But what about *Farm*? Is that really a farmhouse on the album cover? Actually, it’s Parks’ iPhone shot of a house in upstate New York belonging to singer Rebecca Martin and bassist Larry Grenadier. The mysterious image—which also contains autumn leaves both floating and submerged—is a reflection in a pond, so the farmhouse appears to be inverted.

Don’t read too much symbolism into that, they all agree. Still, Redman says, “When we all saw the photo, we thought, ‘That looks the way that our music sounds.’ It’s evocative.”

“When I first saw the photo, [the bits of leaves] looked like stars in the sky, and I saw the hue of the clouds,” says Harland. “I wasn’t paying much attention to the upside-down quality. It just seemed like a simple house in the floating solar system. It’s like us. We’re such grounded individuals, but we’re dreaming at

the same time. We have large minds, big hearts, big fantasies, but we remain pretty simple.”

As the interview winds down, the musicians grow restless and evasive regarding the band name and any farming metaphors.

Penman says, “Really, it’s just a word we liked that we stuck on the end of another word that we liked. It sounds good.”

Harland goes further: “To me it’s the earth, the field. There’s growth. It’s natural.”

Parks jokes, “It’s just that the *F* is the sixth letter of the alphabet. But it does sound friendly.”

Redman impatiently ends the discussion.

“If you ask what the band name means, you’re going to get a different answer from each of us,” he says, as if annoyed by the question. “*Farm* is part of our name. It’s the name we chose for the band because we liked it, even if we don’t all agree with what *farm* means.”

And maybe that’s what makes this group so unusually empowered. It’s not the Redman Quartet, the Parks Quartet, the Harland Quartet or the Penman Quartet. It’s a farm where the soil is enriched and nourishing. The seeds have been tenderly covered with earth. Only time will tell what future fruit it will bear. **DB**

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Dick Hyman SUBJECTIVE & PERSONAL

By Aaron Cohen // Photo by Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos

It takes a certain amount of confidence, or nerve, to attach possessive punctuation to a hundred years of an instrument's evolution. But sometimes that apostrophe mark belongs there because the musician in front of it has not just lived through, but played a part in, those 10 decades of changes. That would be the case with the five-CD/one-DVD survey *Dick Hyman's Century Of Jazz Piano* (Arbors).

The collection (originally released on CD-ROM in 1997) is Hyman's admittedly subjective and personal survey of jazz piano history. That "personal" encompasses a lot. Throughout the musical and video lessons, Hyman demonstrates ragtime's syncopation and boogie-woogie's loping octaves, describes how he believes Thelonious Monk's compositions should work as improvisational vehicles and addresses Cecil Taylor's rapid percussive attack. All of which provides only a few glimpses into Hyman's own multifaceted career and why, at 84, he continues to inspire generations of proteges.

"I've never had a greater teacher than him, and he continues to teach me," said pianist Bill Charlap. "Most importantly, his beautiful touch, and very unique and individual harmonic perspective. Dick's in his eighties, practices every day and sounds great. His lust for music never diminishes. He never sits back on his laurels; he's always discovering and doing something new."

That desire is why Hyman continues to perform and write so energetically. It's also why his earlier works are still sought. He plays around his Florida home for the most part, but occasionally returns to the New York club scene, where he took part in jazz's biggest changes of the 1940s during his off hours as a busy session musician. His wide interests are also why he has distinctive followings that don't even know of the other camp's existence: Hyman's lively and impeccable presentation of early stride and proto-swing styles has made him an honored guest at such historic-minded events as the Bix Beiderbecke Festival in Davenport, Iowa. This summer, he presented new classical chamber music scores that reshaped one of his earlier compositions. At the same time, DJs and electronic music mavens have been scouring Ebay

and other crate-diggers' outlets for his innovative, sometimes intentionally funny, synthesizer recordings of the 1960s. Cinephiles are also familiar with his name, which appeared on dozens of movie scores during the '80s and '90s.

Even with this still-active career, Hyman isn't given to introspection or expounding too much on any wider, deeper meaning of his music. As the *Century* project shows, he's more given to direct explanations of how the music works. But, when prodded, Hyman will give a simple reason for his continued determination.

"I have to keep explaining to my retired friends down here, you don't stop doing this," Hyman said a few months before the Beiderbecke festival in August. "You keep doing it until you can't do it anymore."

Or, as Hyman shows, just keep building on what began in the late-'40s. Coming from a musical family, he was a humanities major at Columbia University and after a stint in the Navy took some classes outside of college with his uncle, Anton Rovinsky, a classical recitalist. "He began to show me the subtleties of expression and composition in the Beethoven sonatas—that stayed with me," Hyman said. "Matters of touch. Things a good teacher would show you, not just running through and memorizing pieces, but how they work and how to make them sound well."

But it was 12 lessons he won after entering a radio contest that made as much of an impact. Teddy Wilson was the first-prize teacher. (With uncanny memory, Hyman added that if he had come in second place, then he would have studied with Mary Lou Williams.)

"Teddy was a lovely man, very generous, and he gave me my complete philosophy," Hyman recalled. "I said, 'I really play OK sometimes, and other times I feel I'm not making it at all,





Dick Hyman in The Allen Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center

what can I do about it?" And he said, "That's why you practice. So that even if you are at a low point at what you think you ought to be doing, it's still acceptable." I take that as the greatest pragmatic advice anybody ever gave me."

Around that time, Hyman was playing in New York clubs, including opening week at Birdland in December 1949. But an early career high occurred when he became a sideman for Wilson's former employer, Benny Goodman, the following year. "It was an immense acceptance into the biggest of the big time," Hyman recalled. "I still feel that way about Benny Goodman." He also worked with Max Kaminsky's Dixieland group, but even with this re-emergence of earlier forms of jazz, Hyman knew that a revolution was polarizing the music, and he didn't see the changes as a threat.

"I had played with Charlie Parker a couple times before, at Birdland when Bud Powell was late," Hyman said. "He came to Cafe Society, where I was playing with Tony Scott, late hours when nobody was there and he would jam with us. Long before I met Parker, we got the message that bebop was it. I never expected it would go back to an older kind of stuff, that I would become well known for: Scott Joplin, James P. Johnson. I thought bebop was here forever."

Hyman wound up accompanying Parker on one of his most historic gigs: the saxophonist's only known television appearance, on the program "Stage Entrance" on Feb. 24, 1952, when the pianist backed him and Dizzy Gillespie on "Hot House." For Hyman, this performance exemplified how his worlds collided. Along with bridging the splintering jazz scenes in New York clubs, he had become a constant presence in television sessions, recording dates for singers like Tony Bennett, com-

mercial jingles and the occasional film score.

"The miscellaneousness was really what we session players liked," Hyman said. "We would go from date to date on a totally freelance phone-call basis. So if you were hot and it was a busy week for some reason, you could do as many as a dozen dates of recording sessions that were three hours long, and it was expected that you would do four tunes. Things weren't as agonized as they were later to get a track right. And the recordings got exceedingly busy because, as we old men say, hi-fi came in. Not only were all sorts of innovative ideas in arranging encouraged, but all of the old catalogs from many companies had to be redone. I learned a great deal from accompanying singers, not just in jazz, but in general. How to learn the songs, transpose them immediately, how to change the style."

But Hyman began looking at different kinds of technologies in the '50s, recording a hit version of Kurt Weill's "Moritat—A Theme From 'The Threepenny Opera'" on what he calls "a funny grand piano kind of instrument with special hammers that gave it a sound like a harpsichord." After becoming adept at using Lowrey's new glide pedal for organ, he worked on early synthesizers alongside engineer Walter Sear.

"Since I knew nothing about his equipment, it was natural to proceed with a strategy where Walter would select a sound, or I would describe a sound, and he would say, 'How about this?'" Hyman said. "It's only a monophonic instrument, so we got credit for a great deal of complexity which wasn't ever there."

Still, Hyman found a way to add complex layers, sometimes tongue-in-cheek, to such compositions as "The Minotaur," which was on his 1969 album *Moog: The Electric Eclectics Of Dick Hyman* (Command). This summer, he arranged that piece for violin, piano and chamber

"If you were hot and it was a busy week, you could do a dozen recording sessions that were three hours long, and it was expected that you would do four tunes."

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orchestra at the Soundwave Music Festival in Gleneden Beach, Ore., but back in the '60s, it was far from acoustic.

"Cocktail lounge people at that time had a drum machine that would play various kinds of rhythms in any tempo you want, and I switched on the buttons for bossa nova and waltz and somehow it didn't burst into flames," Hyman said. "So we used the 3/4 bossa nova as a basis for that. We did 'The Minotaur' with that, and I added a drone in the manner of Indian music. Ravi Shankar was becoming prominent then. The main melody took advantage of the scoops and sweeps from low to high at different tempos depending on what keys were struck. Whenever I see the show 'Law & Order,' the theme has a striking upward swoop toward the end, and I suspect he must have heard my record."

In a stylistic about-face, Hyman was on the ground floor when jazz took a serious turn toward re-examining its origins and presenting those beginnings in concert during the 1970s. George Wein recruited him for the New York Jazz Repertory Company, which included bringing the music of Louis Armstrong to the Soviet Union in 1975. Back home, Hyman became a mentor to a coterie of younger players who were immersed in jazz history yet could shift into contemporary techniques at will. Along with Charlap, clarinetist/saxophonist Ken Peplowski and trumpeter Randy Sandke have remained part of this group.

"When you're around Dick, you find yourself doing these amazingly impossible things," Peplowski said. "We just did duos at Kitano's [in New York] and did old Jelly Roll Morton tunes, but one can turn to the other and say, 'Let's do a free improvisation,' and bam, you're off. And in the middle of the song, he might stop everything, change keys, change mood or change tempo."

During the 1980s and '90s, Hyman balanced his work as a jazz organizer with an increasingly busy schedule working on film scores. He ran the Jazz In July program at the 92nd St. Y from 1985 until he handed the reins over to Charlap 20 years later. Meanwhile, Hyman worked on the music for a dozen Woody Allen movies, as well as *Moonstruck*.

"The rewarding thing for me was it was done live," Hyman said. "If it was a movie with a chorus, you had a chorus of 16 singers in the studio. Or a big symphonic orchestra. It wasn't the slightly phony technological processes that have become familiar since. Sometimes there were scenes where I would be conducting an orchestra to a projection on the screen. You had to get to a certain point and pause for maybe a half second before you went on to the next point. And those things were marked on the screen. All this was fun."

Since Hyman has put aside organizing the Jazz In July series and doubts he'll work in film again, he's refocused on his own music, though he's also collaborating with his daughter, Judy Hyman, on Appalachian waltzes for piano and fiddle. He's been transcribing and selling his scores and plans to publish a notated version of *Century Of Jazz Piano*. He's also released a series of moving collaborations on Arbors this past decade, including a great duo project with Sandke in 2005, *Now & Again*. Throughout the disc, Hyman constantly challenges the trumpeter with tricky turns on standards like "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To" while also showing radiant warmth on his Beiderbecke tribute "Thinking About Bix."

"You just have to have all your wits about you when you're playing with him because he's liable to go off in any direction," Sandke said. "A couple times he'd change keys on me, and I'd try to follow along as best I could. He's not an accompanist in the standard sense. He's a take-charge kind of guy, but in his quiet, reserved way. And one of the most cool people under pressure I've ever seen."

Hyman continues to draw younger musicians into his orbit. Clarinetist Anat Cohen played with him at a 2009 Fats Waller tribute in Chicago, and also at New York's Birdland in June.

"We were playing the music of Louis Armstrong last night, and I found myself smiling so much at the way he will just surprise you," Cohen said. "He'll go where you expect him to go with a line, but then give a different punch line. He can go in, out, take a trip and put you back inside a song. And then he paid me one of the best compliments when he said, 'You were reading my mind the whole gig.'" DB

vijay iyer

selected compositions

1999-2008



I'm honored by this chance to compile some of my small group compositions from 1998 through 2008. The bulk of the pieces collected here were originally written for my quartet with altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa, bassist Stephan Crump, and drummers Marcus Gilmore, Tyshawn Sorey, and Derrek Phillips, and documented on the albums *Panoptic Modes* (2001), *Blood Sutra* (2003), *Reimagining* (2005), and *Tragicomic* (2008). We were experimenting with rhythmic techniques, harmony, orchestration, soloing structures, and macro-form, but I always tried to make the music sound and feel good, too. The repertoire often posed challenges for us, but the process of finding solutions proved rewarding. Likewise, it is my hope that other musicians, be they students or experienced players, can find in this volume some useful tools with which to keep building.

– Vijay Iyer, New York City, 2011

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—Dan Morgenstern (from liner notes)

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Trombonist David White Gets Down To Business

Surprising shifts arise throughout trombonist David White's self-released *Flashpoint*. He guides his 17-member orchestra through a program of compositions that seamlessly move from extended blues strut ("I'll See You In Court") one moment to soft-focus serenity ("First Lullaby") the next. While White's formal education and on-the-job training sharpened the organizational concepts to craft these dynamic moves, he took it upon himself to learn the skills of building an audience.

"Marketing has been a piece missing from any conservatory education," White said. "There's not much focus on the business aspect. The record labels used to deal with that, but in the 21st century you have to do it yourself. But it's worth the effort to get the chance to hear your own music and play with a bunch of great guys."

New York-based White enrolled in the city's free business classes for budding entrepreneurs and applied those lessons to his path as an independent musician. He also read such books as Seth Godin's *Permission Marketing* and mapped out how to use its principles about six months before launching a Kickstarter campaign to fund the production of *Flashpoint* and maintain his website (davidwhitejazz.com).

"I went through my address book and wrote each person individually and asked them, 'May I have your permission to send you a once-a-month newsletter?'" White said. "I found that was more effective than a constant email blast or an event invitation on Facebook every 10 minutes."

White's goals for audience building are straightforward.

"If you're self-produced, to be economically viable, you need 1,000 people who will spend \$50 on your products per year," White said. "So my approach is to build that 1,000-supporter database one person at a time. It's arduous, but

it will pay off in the end."

Even with the inherent financial difficulties of big band leadership, White has a classic sound that fits as naturally as his business model. While he was growing up in Buffalo, N.Y., about 15 years ago, there were a number of large ensembles in the area and he also played in the city's historic Colored Musicians Club. Bandleader Macy Favor taught him section playing and even let the teenage trombonist solo in his ensemble. White began thinking about how to combine jazz and symphonic textures while he studied under such musician-teachers as Jim Pugh at Purchase College Conservatory of Music.

"Generally, I'm looking for a more colorful effect," White said. "I want to use the full possibilities of the orchestra. I like to get away from the idea that the saxes always have to play as a section, brass has to play as a section. What I wanted to do on those two was mix choirs of instruments. The reason for having an ensemble of that size is to have that giant box of crayons where there are so many possibilities."

After White received his master's degree from Purchase, he taught briefly at a public school in the Bronx. Deplorable conditions at the school crushed his idealism and an altercation with an unruly student tore up his knee. But he was able to turn all of that into a fun song, "I Have A Bad Feeling About This." He cites Duke Ellington's example for standing tall in the face of any hindrance (he arranges Ellington's "David Danced Before The Lord With All His Might" on *Flashpoint*).

"I look at the dignity he always had: the self-confidence, elegance," White said. "There had to be tremendous pressure on him in the 1930s, but it never showed on his face. He was such a supremely confident person, he just presented his music—it was authentically his and he just said, 'I am a jazz composer.'" —Aaron Cohen



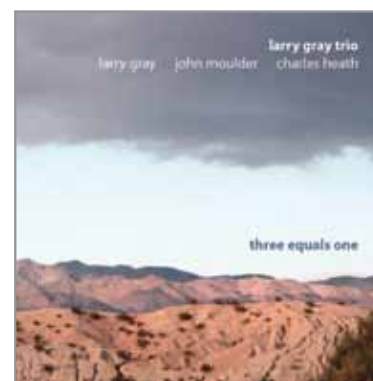
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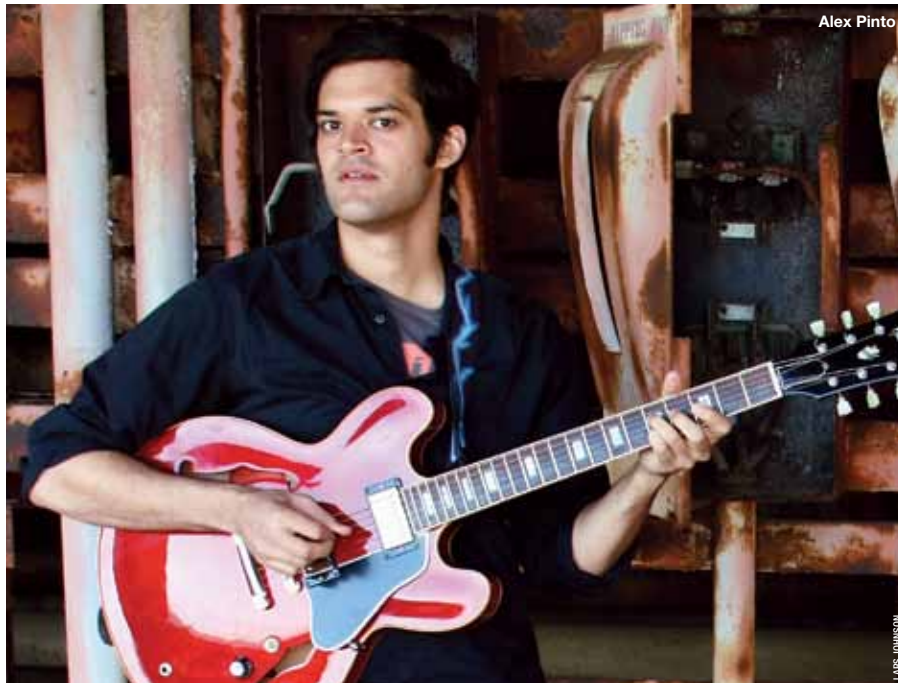
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Alex Pinto Shares Some Worldly Wisdom

Before guitarist Alex Pinto infused jazz with Indian classical music, he traveled the world. Pinto not only accompanied his father, originally from southwestern India, during his frequent trips to Mangalore, but also during extended assignments overseas.

He attended school in Warsaw, Poland, and Moscow, where he remembers studying guitar. His teacher and classmates barely spoke English. But he learned how to adapt quickly to strange surroundings and overcome language barriers. “[At] international schools,” Pinto recalled, “everybody’s from a different country. You have to make friends fast, you have to think fast, and then you grab onto things from different parts of the region.”

Pinto returned to his birthplace of Silver Springs, Md. He began focusing on Indian classical music during his last year at McGill University in Montreal. He studied the *sarod*—a lute instrument prominent in north India’s Hindustani music tradition—while earning a master’s degree at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, Calif. While attending grad school, he finished third in the Gibson Jazz Guitar Competition at the 2008 Montreux Jazz Festival.

Pinto moved to the San Francisco Bay area in 2009, maintaining a folk music band, jazz trio, blues band, and two groups that fuse Indian music and jazz. “If there’s an ethnic boundary or if there’s a cultural boundary,” Pinto said, “none of it really matters if the music is strong and pure.” Guitarist Rez Abbasi met Pinto in 2006 while teaching at the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music in Alberta, Canada. In 2009 Pinto sent Abbasi a recording of his CalArts recital. “That’s when I

thought, ‘Wow, is this the same guy?’” Abbasi said. “Because now he had these Indian [flavored] melodic phrases in his soloing, and some of the compositions were really wonderful, and his technique became much more solid.”

Pinto’s debut album, *Inner State* (Pursuance), draws inspiration from a group of established musicians in New York whose careers similarly blend jazz and Indian music: pianist Vijay Iyer, drummer and tabla player Dan Weiss, and Abbasi. He shares the front line with tenor player Jon Armstrong and drummer Jaz Sawyer. On “Chai Kinda Day,” Pinto tunes one of his guitars to simulate a sarod. “Chai Kinda Day” and “Two Pictures of Love” feature tambura-like drones via a prerecorded guitar effect or bassist Dave Tranchina’s bowing.

Pinto has also immersed himself in Wayne Shorter’s now-classic albums *Night Dreamer* and *Juju*, from 1964 on Blue Note. “You can sing his melodies, every single one of them,” Pinto said. “Whenever I [use] distortion, it sounds like him. [In the low register] he gets that overdrive, almost.”

Inner State is more traditional than its billing. If Pinto had to attach more weight to his jazz or Indian influences, he would probably choose the former. “People want to know what the music sounds like in five words or less,” he said. “It’s like modern jazz—seasoned with certain Hindustani elements. That’s usually what I tell people.

“I’m not out there to make a dedicated Hindustani music album, or a fusion album. It’s just something that I’m trying to relay in my music. It’s a part of my background, [and] it’s a part of my musical study. I get a lot of inspiration from it.”
 —*Eric Fine*



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**Gerald Wilson
Orchestra**

Legacy
MACK AVENUE 1056
★★★

The main purpose on this recording is to showcase Gerald Wilson's "Yes Chicago Is..." a terse programmatic suite commissioned in 2008 for the Chicago Jazz Festival. Its seven pieces taken together run only 14 minutes, some so brief as to be virtually orphans. Hearing "47th St. Blues" is like walking in on the last two choruses of a blues that's been cooking for several minutes. And "Blowin' In The Windy City" is nipped in the bud after one minute before any flavor or feeling begins to set in or be summed up.

In fairness, the individual parts are not intended to be free-standing

singular portraits. All are hatched from the same thematic nugget, providing a running continuity that makes each part a variation and extension on the other. Accordingly, Wilson manages to redecorate the same thought with all the options of tempo and timbre you'd expect from a skilled arranger. "Riffin' At The Regal" molds the material into a simple, satisfying bit of big band swing. "Cubs, Bears..." survives long enough to give satisfactory solo space to baritonist Gary Smulyan and what sounds like Dennis Wilson on plunger trombone. But overall, while a pleasant and agreeable work from a veteran pro, "Yes Chicago Is..." lacks the compelling charisma or sense of originality likely to get it played a second time.

If brevity was the soul of "Chicago," Wilson is expansive

on the balance of the program, which gives him a chance to further experiment in the art of variation. When Wilson was coming up with the Jimmie Lunceford band around 1940, bandleaders often raided the classics for pop material. Wilson returns to that tradition here, though his choices are little more than checkpoints for flights of departure. "Variation On A Theme by Igor Stravinsky" opens with a thundering vamp, almost an ostinato, that seems to derive from the fourth movement of *The Firebird Suite*. But it quickly discards all pomp and rumble, transforming itself into a jaunty solo vehicle for tenor saxophone and trumpet.

"Variations On Clair De Lune" drips with an alluring film noir expressionism supplied by pianist Renee Rosnes, whose sticky fin-

gers cling engagingly to her slurred and bluesy notes while Wilson's saxes and brass quietly stalk her like shadows in a dark alley. Antonio Hart brings the music into the daylight with a glaring vigor.

Perhaps the most sustained single piece of orchestration is "Virgo," a nearly 10-minute work in which Wilson is discreetly at hand beside or beneath virtually every soloist. Overall, the disc is good but unexceptional big band music.

—John McDonough

Legacy: Variation On A Theme by Igor Stravinsky; Virgo; Variations On Clair De Lune; Variation On A Theme By Giacomo Puccini; September Sky; A Jazz Mecca; A Night At The El Grotto; Riffin' At The Regal; Cub, Bears, Bulls, And White Sox; 47th St. Blues; Blowin' In The Windy City; A Great Place to Be. (49:59)

Personnel: Frank Greene, Sean Jones, Tony Lujan, Freddie Hendrix, Jeremy Peit, Mike Rodriguez, trumpets/flugelhorn; Dennis Wilson, Luis Bonilla, Alan Ferber, Douglas Purviance, trombones; Antonio Hart, Dick Oatts, Kamasi Washington, Ron Blake, Jay Bradford; Gary Smulyan, saxophones; Renee Rosnes, piano; Anthony Wilson, guitar; Peter Washington, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

James Carter *Caribbean Rhapsody*

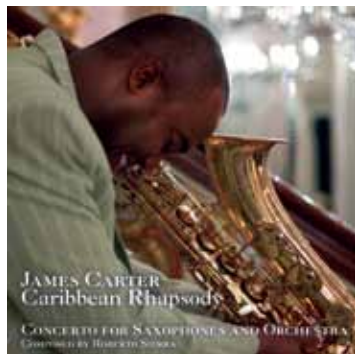
EMARCY 15472

★★½

The virtuoso with bad taste is a familiar if frustrating type in all music, and the extraordinary but puzzling saxophonist James Carter too often fits the bill in jazz.

Teaming up with Puerto Rican classical composer Roberto Sierra for this ambitious but disappointing project appears to have exaggerated that tendency, the result being a hybrid that promises—and occasionally fulfills—expectations of an imaginative jazz-classical composition but more often descends into clichéd, even downright ridiculous music. Part of the problem may stem from the formal contradiction of presenting two discrete compositions—a concerto for saxophones and orchestra and a chamber piece for sax and strings—punctuated by Carter cadenzas on tenor and soprano riffing on themes from each piece.

Despite these issues, the experience of this music can be engaging. Sierra creates rhythmically engaging and harmonically colorful settings for Carter's swaggering improvisations—to wit, the refreshingly free environment of



“Rítmico,” the concerto’s first movement. “Tender;” the waltz time ballad second movement, is gorgeous, and Carter’s switch from soprano to tenor is supported nicely by a shift to oblique rhythms. But Sierra doesn’t seem to know where to go from there.

The final movement, “Playful,” has similar formal problems, with Carter

moving from an appealingly choppy and chewy tenor passage to something that sounds like the jazz-classical stuff Friedrich Gulda used to write in the ‘60s, with a jump blues coming to the rescue to resolve all contradictions. George Gershwin had moved the jazz-classical bar this high by 1924.

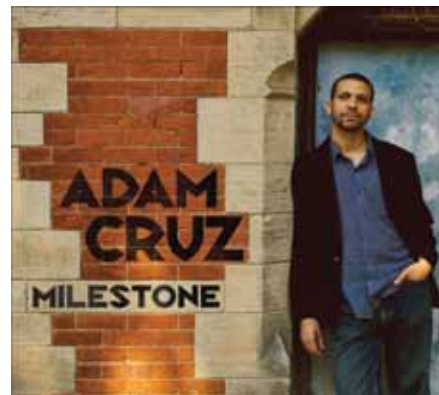
I liked the chamber piece, “Caribbean Rhapsody,” especially its vigorous, rollicking 6/8 feel and lively exchanges between the saxophonist and strings. But Sierra seems to just kiss it off at the end, as if segueing into a soprano sax cadenza would finish his thought. It doesn’t.

—Paul de Barros

Caribbean Rhapsody: Concerto For Saxophones And Orchestra: Rítmico; Tender; Playful – Fast (With Swing); Tenor Interlude; Caribbean Rhapsody; Soprano Interlude. (45:02)

Personnel: Carter, tenor soprano saxophone; Sinfonia Varsovia Orchestra, Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor (1–3); Regina Carter, violin (5); the Akua Dixon String Quartet (5): Akua Dixon, cello; Patrisa Tomasini, Chala Yancy, violin; Ron Lawrence, viola; Kenny Davis, bass.

Ordering info: emarcy.com



Adam Cruz *Milestone*

SUNNYSIDE 1278

★★★★

Think of a drummer with crossed sticks, like the kindling at the base of a fire. Tended correctly, with the right architecture to give air to the flame, the conflagration builds, maybe into a bonfire, maybe into a backyard barbecue. Adam Cruz is the classic drummer bandleader, in the tradition of Philly Joe Jones and Elvin Jones, who knows how to stoke the fire from the proverbial engine room, but he’s gone the extra mile on *Milestone* in crafting quite a solid compositional woodpile of original music.

The working method is established on the first track, “Secret Life,” which commences with Cruz’s crisp, crackling snare, Edward Simon’s thoughtful chords, Chris Potter stating the melody on tenor, Miguel Zenón joining contrapuntally on alto and bassist Ben Street finally kicking in to bring things up a notch. Potter, who is quite Pharoah Sanders-esque here, is the catalyst, building intensity atop the drummer’s consistent, burly energy.

Ebbing and flowing comes in various packages—some, like “Magic Ladder,” feature nifty compositional conceits and particularly sensitive improvisational interplay between drummer, pianist and bassist. More stately and introspective, “Resonance” again finds Potter and Zenón meshing perfectly, this time with guitarist Steve Cardenas; Simon shows in a short solo how romance and intellect can join forces. Rimshots on the cool theme to “The Gadfly” subtly tip hat to Latin music, as do the pivoting basslines, but the eruptive, expressive arc belies all, even the ballad “Crepuscular,” which opens up and uncorks dramatically in the middle.

Cruz has proven himself as a drummer and loyal bandmember in Danilo Pérez’s trio. On *Milestone* he steps out and steps up, making a personal statement and setting the stage for some very satisfying ensemble action.

—John Corbett

Pat Metheny *What’s It All About*

NONESUCH 527912

★★★★½

Here’s a picture: Pat Metheny as a kid at home in Missouri, bed covers pulled up over his head, transistor radio offering an escape from the night’s silence. But instead of some New Orleans or Memphis station providing r&b epiphanies, our boy is tripping to the hits of the day: Gerry and Pacemakers, Simon & Garfunkel, maybe The Ventures. Almost a half-century on, such tunes are still in the guitarist’s head, and his first disc to be fully void of original compositions is his first disc to fully embrace the power of nostalgia.

Coming after the robotronics of *Orchestrion*, it seems appropriate. A few of us were looking for something with a bit more flesh and blood from Metheny, and this dreamy solo recital, a follow-up to the plaintive baritone guitar program of 2003’s *One Silent Night*, finds a way to bring an improviser’s touch to the table while making hay with sentimental tendencies. From Dionne Warwick’s hit “Alfie” to Carly Simon’s “That’s The Way I Always Heard It Should Be,” these ‘60s and ‘70s nuggets are not only in his head,



they’re also in his heart.

That means a bit of preciousness bubbles up. As the tunes trickle forth, it feels like *What’s It All About* could have been released on the Windham Hill label. Please take that comment as a minor tweak, not a full indictment.

Longtime fans know that Metheny’s a romantic. Go back to *New Chautauqua* (his first

solo statement) and check “Daybreak.” It glows with the kind of dewey-eyed beauty that fuels the new disc’s meditation on The Carpenters’ “Rainy Days And Mondays.” Both glisten, and each provides a wistful perspective that elicits a sigh or two.

One thing the disc does succeed at is mood. Metheny recorded it alone at night, and perhaps no tune makes that clearer than Paul Simon’s “The Sound Of Silence.” Using a 42-string guitar, he brings a hushed radiance to Paul Simon’s introspective melody. Even the bolero-tinged “Pipeline”—the peppiest piece on the record—has a private feel that only solitude and shadows can provide.

—Jim Macnie

What’s It All About: The Sound of Silence; Cherish; Alfie; Pipeline; Garota De Ipanema; Rainy Days And Mondays; That’s The Way I Always Heard It Should Be; Slow Hot Wind; Betcha By Golly, Wow; And I Love Her. (55:53)

Personnel: Pat Metheny, baritone guitar; 42-string guitar (1), 6-string guitar (4), nylon-string guitar (10).

Ordering info: nonesuch.com

Milestone: Secret Life; Emjé; Crepuscular; The Gadfly; Resonance; Outer Reaches; Magic Ladder; Bird Of Paradise. (75:52)

Personnel: Adam Cruz, drums; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone (1, 2, 5, 8); Steve Wilson, soprano saxophone (3, 4, 6, 7); Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Edward Simon, piano and Fender Rhodes; Steve Cardenas, guitar; Ben Street, bass.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

The Hot Box

CD ▾ Critics ▶ John McDonough John Corbett Jim Macnie Paul de Barros

Gerald Wilson Orchestra <i>Legacy</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★½
James Carter <i>Caribbean Rhapsody</i>	★★★★½	★★★	★★½	★★½
Pat Metheny <i>What's It All About</i>	★★★	★★	★★★½	★★★★
Adam Cruz <i>Milestone</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★

Critics' Comments

Gerald Wilson Orchestra, *Legacy*

Let's hear it for the nonagenarian, kicking butt and taking names! Stunning band, rich tunes, spectacular soloists—Renee Rosnes rocking hard, son Anthony always a joy—in a Windy City tone poem. Thoroughly satisfying. —John Corbett

Working the blues into the lion's share of his pieces, the 92-year-old composer speaks an orchestral language that is slowly (and sadly) fading from view. That adds some weight to this album, which brims with graceful solos and ultra-tight ensemble passages. —Jim Macnie

I adore Gerald Wilson, but his recent gambit of reworking a four- or five-note theme into a suite of genre treatments—"Monterey Moods" was the previous one—doesn't add up to much. "Yes Chicago Is..." consists of pieces so short it feels like a sketch rather than a completed composition. By contrast, Anthony Wilson's "Virgo," a soft swing time piece with expansive chords in Dad's mode, really shows off the talent in this amazing band. —Paul de Barros

James Carter, *Caribbean Rhapsody*

Carter, who seems ready for all comers, scores a winner in two works that both tame and invigorate his mischievous virtuosity. "Concerto" is jittery, rigorously staccato, urbane, and ends on the blues. "Rhapsody" slumbers amiably until the two Carters meet in a dazzling shootout in which Regina trumps James' slap-tongue flamboyance with elegant ingenuity. More. —John McDonough

Passages of depth and interest pop up here and there, enlivened by Carter's crazy energy. Sometimes he rides clichés a bit hard, but he's a hellfire who doesn't wait for the composition to come to him. Some of Sierra's score lapses into such a Hollywood daydream that one expects the credits. —John Corbett

Hmmm, my mind kept wandering during long chunks of the orchestral passages, which is 90 percent of the program. It wasn't the soloist's fault—Carter is as agile and assured as ever throughout. I'm thinking it was the pieces themselves, which have an enviable lilt, but act a bit too antsy. —Jim Macnie

Pat Metheny, *What's It All About*

Jazz may have begun as the "devil's music," but it's the angels who rule here from note one. Nicely anchored in the worldliness of late standards, the tranquility is meditative and angelic, but also (save for "Pipeline") relentlessly peaceful in its new-age passivity. Metheny wants us to chill out, and this is a tempting sedative. —John McDonough

Beautiful recording, pristine guitar sound, impeccable musicianship, novel tunings. But this is such a dull program that all the good elements melt away. Of all the things Metheny could do with his prodigious talent: "Cherish"? "Rainy Days And Mondays"? It could work if there were a tongue in cheek somewhere, but alas, it's totally sincere. —John Corbett

Just when Pat Metheny's pursuit of special projects had started to feel tedious, along comes this lovely solo outing on baritone guitar, in which he immerses himself in a faraway-feeling meditation on romantic love. Metheny's pristine touch and spectacular harmonic mind refreshingly recharge songs like "Cherish" and "Alfie"; his silence-peppered distillation of "Girl From Ipanema" is a masterpiece. —Paul de Barros

Adam Cruz, *Milestone*

Mainstream avant contemporary fare, played within smart structural frameworks that make use of both ensemble and solo resources. Horns tend to fling themselves about with more passion than the material would warrant. But strong piano work from Edward Simon, who builds the bridges that connect the tempo and dynamic shifts. A solid debut CD for Cruz. —John McDonough

When all is said and done, the drummer's debut is a showcase for some of the era's best saxophonists. Cruz's tunes are vehicles for excursive forays by Chris Potter, Miguel Zenón and Steve Wilson, who twirl and swirl around each other in various combinations. —Jim Macnie

This band has startling firepower. Potter colors outside the lines with tremendous ferocity, and Cruz drives the race car with crackercjack energy. But after a few cuts, the music begins to feel like all tension and no release. It's possible this band needs to play together more before it relaxes into a groove. —Paul de Barros

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Ralph Peterson's Unity Project *Outer Reaches*

ONYX MUSIC LABEL

★★★★

On *Outer Reaches*, drummer Ralph Peterson pays tribute to Larry Young's 1965 Blue Note album *Unity*, a watershed moment for the Hammond organ in jazz. *Unity* looked toward the wide-open harmonic landscape created by John Coltrane, Miles Davis and McCoy Tyner; it liberated the organ from the omnipresent blues repertoire.

Outer Reaches begins as a repertoire project. Peterson mimics *Unity*'s instrumentation—tenor, trumpet, organ, drums—and performs four of the compositions. The album showcases some promising, if largely unheralded, young musicians. Organ player Pat Bianchi's bop sensibilities remain mostly in the pocket. The charts feature some nice arrangements, the solos are well played and the group is pushed along by Peterson, who's in excellent form.

But the last four tracks of *Outer Reaches* embrace the mystique of the original, if not Young's singular approach. Things loosen up on Young's "Ritha" during a duet occurring in the middle of the track between Peterson and Bianchi. The group pushes the boundaries on



Woody Shaw's "Zoltan"—which features guitarist David Fiuczynski's first of two cameos—and "We Three Kings." Fiuczynski then jump-starts John McLaughlin's "Spectrum," imbuing the track with primal energy.

At around 79 minutes, the CD includes nearly enough material for two releases. Perhaps content should have been more of a consideration: one straight-ahead album, the other more eclectic. All in all, *Outer Reaches* should be judged on its own merits.

—Eric Fine

Outer Reaches: The Moontrane; Monk's Dream; Outer Reaches; Katrina Ballerina; Beyond All Limits; On My Side; An Inside Job; Beyond My Wildest Dream; Ritha; Zoltan; We Three Kings; Spectrum. (78:47)

Personnel: Ralph Peterson, drums, trumpet; Pat Bianchi, organ; Jovan Alexandre, tenor saxophone; Josh Evans, trumpet; David Fiuczynski, guitar (10, 12).

Ordering info: ralphpetersonmusic.com

Starlicker *Double Demon*

DELMARK 2011

★★★★

Double Demon is an excellent example of less producing more. Cornetist Rob Mazurek's quintet, with its two-bass lineup and its strategic applications of studio retouching to live performances, came up with a solid effort, *Sound Is*. But even before he had assembled the five-piece he had this smaller assemblage in mind, and after completing *Sound Is* he began figuring out what to do with it.

The answer was to stop telling us what sound is and simply be sound. Sound as a force, sound as a presence, sound as a mass of interacting waves that fill all available space. This music is designed to set free the overtones that result when you strike or blow metal instruments—horn, vibes, cymbals—as hard as you can. Mazurek could not have chosen better men for the job. Jason Adasiewicz is a drummer as well as a vibraphonist, and he delights in bringing down his mallets with such vigor that he can feel unforgetting metal bars give beneath his blows. John Herndon's early musical experiences were with rock bands, and while he can swing when the music requires him to do so, he has no qualms



about whipping up an unrelenting barrage. The trio's attack is bracingly physical, and yet it is never overwhelming. The tunes Mazurek has written for this project are as sturdy and memorable as any he's ever recorded. They're also refreshingly simple; by stripping out all the inessentials, Mazurek and his confederates have made music that speaks directly.

—Bill Meyer

Double Demon: Double Demon; Vodou Cinque; Orange Blossom; Andromeda; Triple Hex; Skull Cave. (38:17)

Personnel: Rob Mazurek, cornet; Jason Adasiewicz, vibraphone; John Herndon, drums.

Ordering info: delmark.com



The Headhunters *Platinum*

OWL STUDIOS 139

★★★

In the early '70s, The Headhunters was the first word in jazz-funk of the artistic-while-accessible kind. The band that Herbie Hancock built managed to cross seamlessly between a respected jazz vibe to uncommonly populist stature. The Headhunters has continued, off and on, post-Hancock, and comes on most strongly with this new, valiant effort at an era- and genre-bridging album. However seductive and true the current band, strengthened by the formidable, slinky-cool and anchoring presence of drummer Mike Clark, The Headhunters sans Hancock can feel vaguely incomplete.

The musical map here heeds the group's heritage, with such clearly '70s-geared tracks as the "Chameleon" tribute "Salamander," "Congo Place" and the Latin-fired "Head Hunting." Also of key importance to the project's aim is a linkage to later and current reverberations of the jazz-funk-hip-hop vocabulary, including the rap-fitted opener "Mission Statement" and "D-Funk (Funk with Us)," a generation-hopping cameo turn with Snoop Dog, George Clinton, Killah Priest and Cynthia Lane.

In this Headhunters, original percussionist Bill Summers is in the ranks, while charter saxophonist/bass clarinetist Bennie Maupin only plays a fleeting guest role. Much of the musical power comes from keyboardist Patrice Rushen, saxophonist Donald Harrison and bassist Richie Goods.

Short interlude tracks along the way, framed by opening and closing chants "nam-myohorenge-kyo" from the Nichiren Buddhist practice maintained by Hancock and other jazz musicians, add hipness on impact but lose their charm after the first spin.

—Josef Woodard

Platinum: Platinum Intro; Mission Statement; Reality Of It; Salamander; I Predict A Good Year; D-Funk; I Feel Really Good About; Tracle; Rehearse Everybody; Paging Mr. Wesley; M Trane; Apple Tree; Palm Nut; Years Of Touring; Congo Place; On The Road; Head Hunting; Skizness; Soul Glow; Platinum Outro. (70:44)

Personnel: Mike Clark, drums; Bill Summers, percussion; Patrice Rushen, Gary Mielke, Kyle Roussel, keyboards; Donald Harrison, saxophones, key bass; Bennie Maupin, saxophones; Richie Goods, bass; Derrick Gardner, trumpet; Jerry Stucker, guitar; Rob Dixon, saxophones; Snoop Dog, George Clinton, Killah Priest, Cynthia Lane, Jaecyn Bayne and Private Pile, vocals.

Ordering info: owlstudios.com

Terri Lyne Carrington
The Mosaic Project

CONCORD 33016

★★★★½

If there were a search for a new artistic director for the Kennedy Center's Mary Lou Williams' Women in Jazz Festival, Terri Lyne Carrington would rank high on the list. *The Mosaic Project* embodies all of the festival's lofty goals of shedding light on female jazz artists and many ways exceeds the festival's sometimes stodgy stylistic limitations.

The Mosaic Project brims with a multi-generational cast of musicians that includes pianists Patrice Rushen, Helen Sung and Geri Allen, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen and percussionist Sheila E., along with vocalists Gretchen Parlato, Carmen Lundy, Dianne Reeves, Nona Hendryx and Cassandra Wilson. One of the many winning qualities about *The Mosaic Project* is that despite its multifaceted characteristics, which sublimely mingle the acoustic with the electric and various idioms and genres, the disc boasts a consistency and durable compositions for the musicians to truly delve inside rather than skate lightly above.



Carrington radiates as a sensitive drummer; she helps propel rhythmic intensity on material such as Bernice Johnson Reagon's "Echo" along with Sheila E.'s equally propulsive Afro-Latin percussion beats underneath Reeves' majestic voice as she sings about the injustices suffered by women and wrongfully imprisoned men.

On her original "Insomniac," Carrington gets to showcase her gift for modern post-bop as she steers the rubato swing alongside Esperanza Spalding's shadowy bass, providing a festive

springboard for Jensen's clarion trumpet asides and Tineke Postma's tart and serpentine improvisations on alto saxophone. Still, Carrington doesn't overshadow her accomplished band mates in efforts to prove that she's the leader. She knows how to support and caress the music, perhaps best illustrated on the songs showcasing the vocalists, such as the shining make-overs of Al Green's "Simply Beautiful" featuring Wilson and Irving Berlin's "I Got Lost In His Arms," and the Beatles' "Michelle" featuring Parlato. On the haunting original "Show Me A Sign," Lundy turns in one of her finest performances in recent years.

Another reason why *The Mosaic Project* excels is that Carrington and her cohorts have delivered an album that doesn't shy away from gender politics, but the music and themes aren't so hermetic and preachy that it sucks all the joy out of it.
 —John Murph

The Mosaic Project: Transformation; I Got Lost In His Arms; Michelle; Magic And Music; Echo; Simply Beautiful; Unconditional Love; Wistful; Crayola; Soul Talk; Mosaic Triad; Insomniac; Show Me A Sign; Sisters On The Rise (A Transformation). (71:56)
Personnel: Terri Lyne Carrington, drums, percussion, voice (2, 4, 5, 11, 13, 14); Geri Allen, piano, keyboards (1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13); Dee Dee Bridgewater, vocals (10); Anat Cohen, clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone; Angela Davis, commentary (5); Sheila E., percussion (1, 5, 6, 10); Nona Hendryx, vocals (1, 14); Ingrid Jensen, trumpet, flugelhorn; Mimi Jones, bass (4); Carmen Lundy, vocals (13); Chia-Yin Carol Ma, violin; Hailey Niswanger, flute; Gretchen Parlato, vocals (2, 3); Timeke Postma, alto saxophone; Dianne Reeves, vocals (5); Shea Rose, vocals (14); Patrice Rushen, piano, keyboards (1, 2, 5, 10, 11); Esperanza Spalding, bass, vocals (7, 9); Helen Sung, piano, keyboards (2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12); Linda Taylor, guitars; Cassandra Wilson, vocals (6).
Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

SACHAL VASANDANI
HI-FLY

Truly a high-water mark in the young vocalist's career. Highlighted by a guest turn from the master Jon Hendricks, Sachal exceeds the expectations that led to critics from the *New York Times*, *JazzTimes* and *DownBeat* hailing him as the "next great jazz singer."

mackavenue.com
svjazz.com

gerald wilson orchestra
legacy

Gerald Wilson, jazz's reigning composer/orchestrator, pays homage to his adopted hometown Chicago on his newest recording *Legacy*. Wilson's son, guitarist/composer Anthony Wilson, and grandson Eric Otis are also represented by a composition/orchestration apiece, thus extending Gerald's musical legacy.

amazon.com iTunes

Freewheeling and Sensitive Keys

By definition, caprices are meant to be lively, and Uri Caine's dozen compositions for string quartet and piano on ***Twelve Caprices (Winter & Winter 910 171; 61:56 ★★★★★)*** more than meet that standard. The first five are a whirlwind of slashing parts for the Arditto String Quartet, filled with drama and tumbling, sprightly piano accompaniment. It's not until the midpoint that Caine shifts moods and calms the pace with a gorgeous, slow piece that makes superb use of the quartet's harmonic depth. "Caprice 8" also stands apart for its sharp shifts in tempo and the tender dance movement at its center. Like Keith Jarrett, Caine has both the technical scope and fearless commitment to pursue both jazz and classical music without seeming like he's just visiting in either camp.

Ordering info: winterandwinter.com

Often overlooked among the other creative pianists of his generation, Bill Carrothers has a beautiful touch and a wide stylistic range. On ***A Night At The Village Vanguard (Pirouet 3056; 69:18/70:06 ★★½)*** he's in a predominantly wistful mood, mining some of the Richie Powell and Clifford Brown tunes featured on his album *Joy Spring* as well as standards and some of his own sturdy originals. Backed by his regular trio mates, bassist Nicolas Thys and drummer Dré Pallemarts, he never sounds less than a musician who thinks on his feet and channels emotions freely. Whether digging deep on Duke Jordan's bluesy "Jordu" or swinging lightly through "Let's Get Lost," the band sounds like it's connecting with its audience.

Ordering info: pirouet.com

As collaborations go, ***Knives From Heaven (Thirsty Ear 57198; 43:37 ★★)***—the second meeting of Matthew Shipp and Antipop Consortium—is somewhat one-sided, with Antipop's Beans and Priest dominating the first two-thirds of this short work. Among the splintered, cut-up beats and freewheeling rhymes, it's difficult to determine what Shipp and bassist William Parker are contributing, though that may be part of the sonic intent here. Much more effective is the closing third, where Shipp's piano slips into the forefront, particularly on "Twopiece," full of stuttering rhythms and metallic momentum, and "Reeds," with its throbbing underpinning and pile-driving, repeated drum pattern.

Ordering info: thirstyear.com

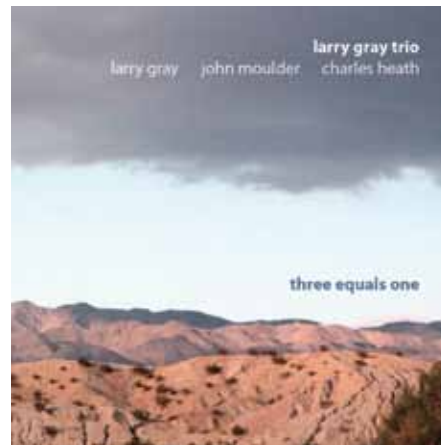


Few pianists in their seventh decade wear their influences as openly as Jessica Williams, an artist whose concerts often feature highlights of her predecessors' songbooks. On ***Freedom Trane (Origin 82589; 57:20 ★★)*** it's John Coltrane's turn—not an obvious choice for Williams, whose work usually follows a more mainstream course. Rest assured, she's not delving into post-1965 Coltrane territory here, but McCoy Tyner's churning, propulsive block chords are much on display in interpretations of compositions like "Lonnie's Lament" and her own "The Seeker." How you react may well be a reflection of your attitude toward high-concept tribute albums. There's no question that Williams' versions add nothing to the originals, but it's clear that her heart is in the work.

Ordering info: origin-records.com

With his vivid imagination and great command of time, Denny Zeitlin is one pianist who sounds constrained in anything but a solo setting, even though he's played with several great rhythm sections. That makes ***Labyrinth: Live Solo Piano (Sunnyside 1283; 72:06 ★★)***, recorded in two sessions at home concerts, just about a perfect setting for the San Francisco Bay Area veteran. His opening take on Wayne Shorter's "Footprints" moves easily from free time to a lightly swinging middle section and takes full advantage of the intimate venue (Ernie Shelton's House Concerts). Variety rules, and there's no greater contrast than that between the lightning arpeggios on his three-minute run through John Coltrane's "Lazy Bird" and the twists, silences and hanging notes of his own 11-minute title composition. By turns impressionistic and tightly focused, this is a beautifully paced and sensitively played recital.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Larry Gray Trio *Three Equals One*

CHICAGO SESSIONS 0015

★★★½

With Chicago-based bassist Larry Gray, what you see is what you get. Whether he's playing with any number of jazz greats or performing with *Three Equals One* (his followup to 2008's *1, 2, 3* with the same group), the surprises come in subtle, consistent ways. In an all-Gray program, this is standard, right-down-the-middle guitar-trio jazz.

In fact, Gray is a case study in how to play bass, lead from the rear and still get your voice out there. It just so happens that, with guitarist John Moulder and drummer Charles Heath, Gray has formed a simple yet elegant trio that takes you through 10 tunes that can include simple bop phrases in a delicate swinging style—e.g., "Be-Bop Blues (For Barry Harris)"—some nighttime suspended animation with the gently off-kilter ballad "Karolyn" or a little swing with an edge, as on the slinky, fusion-y "Triceratops." The team supports the overall view, which is group interplay, and these guys play up to the album title's meaning.

Moulder's approach recalls early Pat Metheny without aping that style. It's patient and melodic, combining single notes and chords in a way that suggests comfort at various tempos and moods: His lines follow Gray's writing as if he were the composer. Heath plays busy, plays soft, swings and can rock, but none of it draws attention to itself. Listen to his straightahead style as he shadows Gray's gliding bass lines on "Blank Slate," the three swinging this tune with ease, Moulder's lines (like Heath's beats) busy without being overbearing. And Gray offers another one of his tasteful, melodically interesting solos here, with Heath then joining in trading fours with some more controlled ferocity.

—John Ephland

Three Equals One: King Vita-Man; Waltz For Lena; Beyond; Be-Bop Blues (For Barry Harris); Karolyn; Blank Slate; Hail To The Chief (For Wilbur Campbell); Triceratops; Soffi's Lullaby; Mysterious. (70:44)

Personnel: Larry Gray, bass; John Moulder, electric and acoustic guitars; Charles Heath, drums.

Ordering info: chicagosessions.com

Nicole Mitchell
Awakening

DELMARK 599
★★★★½

While Nicole Mitchell, the rightfully ascending flutist has ventured into various contexts, this quartet session makes for a fine place to check in on what makes her so special. On nine tracks, mostly penned by Mitchell and moving rhythmic vigor, tender asides and abstract passages, the flutist demonstrates her musicality. She also embodies a generosity of spirit and pan-historic/jazz tradition tendencies with her connections to the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

She works beautifully and empathetically with the flexible and mostly clean-toned guitarist Jeff Parker, who supplies fluid chordal support and linear dialoging. The rhythm section of bassist Harrison Bankhead and drummer Avreeayl Ra ebbs and flows, with assured grace and energy. What begins in an easily swinging pulse with “Curly Top” veers left into textural, free improvisational terrain, within a structured setting, on “Journey On A Thread” and into modal on “More Than I Can Say.” Her angular dirge/balladic skills are conveyed on “Snowflake,” and the extended “Momentum” teeters between tighten-up post-funk and tough-loving jazz waltzing before fanning out into an open zone. Parker’s solo turns are tasteful and adventurous. The title cut has a deceptive flow and sway to it, but with restless harmonic wanderings and syncopated rhythmic twists.

—Josef Woodard

Awakening: Curly Top; Journey On A Thread; Center Of The Earth; Snowflakes; Momentum; More Than I Can Say; There; F.O.C.; Awakening. (64:38).

Personnel: Nicole Mitchell, flute; Jeff Parker, guitar; Harrison Bankhead, bass; Avreeayl Ra, drums.

Ordering info: delmark.com



My Silence
It Only Happens At Night

482 MUSIC 1078
★★★★

Chicago trio My Silence got its start in the casual way so many ensembles come into existence, without the slightest bit of calculation. Drummer and nominal group leader Mike Reed put the trio together because he wanted to work with bass clarinetist Jason Stein and intuitive low-rent electronics experimenter Nick Butcher in a single context (he’d already played with both in other settings). It only took one meeting to convince Reed to book studio time. After recording material at the core of *It Only Happens At Night*, it took another five months before My Silence tried to play the music live.

The end result transforms the initial, purely improvised sessions with an extra session of instrumental overdubs and another with the New York folk-pop singer Sharon Van Etten, whose austere, elegant voice serves up mostly wordless melodic reveries later edited to fit the instrumental selections. The result is the transformation of free improvisation into delicate meditations that veer naturally from tender, folk-like melodies to controlled chaos. Van Etten’s voice is one thread in the gauzy lattice of sound, with Stein’s astringent bass clarinet lines puncturing the enchanting mix of disparate samples, noise, bone-dry guitar and uke patterns. Reed’s drumming functions like a motor, providing a pulse and sometimes adding serious turbulence.

—Peter Margasak

It Only Happens At Night: I Didn’t Dream Last Night; Little Boy; Self Portrait; Slow Cycle; The Secret Dreams Of Mothers To Be; You; Whatever Happened To Doo Wop; The Passing Moment. (45:15)

Personnel: Nick Butcher, electronics, turntable, guitar, keyboards; Jason Stein, bass clarinet; Mike Reed, drums, bass, baritone ukulele; Sharon Van Etten, voice.

Ordering info: 482music.com



Solomon Burke & De Dijk
Hold On Tight

VERVE FORECAST 15256
★★★

Solomon Burke was a good sport when in 2007 he agreed to record a single and then an album with De Dijk, a Dutch blues-rock band that asked him to sing at one of its gigs. Three years later, the King of Soul was returning to the Netherlands for sold-out shows with these same musicians when he took ill and was pronounced dead at the Amsterdam airport. It’d be nice to report that *Hold On Tight* is Burke’s terrific swan song in the studio. Instead, it’s a low point, not far above his horrid MGM and Chess records in the 1970s.

Burke’s cavernous voice, hardly diminished by arthritis, raises the hair on the back of your neck for the sheer mass of his exhilaration. But he needs good songs. The De Dijk tunes dealt him here are a sorry assortment, with only the title song palatable, and even that runs longer than it has any right to at five minutes-plus, laden with needless guitar solos and a fake soul groove. He’s further hamstrung by Dutch lyrics translated into English. Burke tries hard to give coherence and conviction to often awkward word juxtapositions; however, it’s a lost cause. The De Dijk musicians are competent at their contrivances of American soul, blues and even New Orleans parade music. Things improve briefly with the one new tune, “Text Me,” composed by Burke and album coproducer JB Meijers; Burke painfully makes it known that he’s cut off from his loved one.

—Frank-John Hadley



Hold On Tight: Hold On Tight; My Rose Saved From The Street; What A Woman; No One; More Beauty; I Gotta Be With You; Seventh Heaven; Good For Nothing; Text Me; Don’t Despair; The Bend; Perfect Song. (54:42)

Personnel: Solomon Burke, lead vocals; Huub van der Lubbe, backup vocals; Hans van der Lubbe, bass; Nico Azzbach, JB Meijers, guitar; Antonie Broek, drums; Pim Kops, keyboards, accordion, guitar; Peter van Soesl, trumpet; Roland Brunt, saxophone; Jools Holland, piano (3).

Ordering info: vervemusicgroup.com

Ithamara Koorax
& Peter Schärli Trio - O Grande Amor
★★★★½ **DownBeat**

"This pairing of Koorax and Schärli is a rare instance of a voice working as another instrument... As a result, this a quiet, unassuming gem of a recording. Koorax authoritatively conjures compact majesty on "Setembro" and she floats the title ballad with lighter-than-air musical pillow talk. This woman has manifold ability." — Kirk Silsbee

"That's the real thing! ★★★★★" — Gino Ferlin — Jazz 'n' More
"A superb jazz-like exploration of Brazilian music." — Douglas Payne — Sound Insights
"Koorax's soft voice is an instrument of tonal precision, innate swing and a variety of emotional inflection. Koorax and Schärli share the use of quietness to achieve expressive power." — Doug Ramsey — RiffNotes

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www.ithamarakoorax.blogspot.com ithamara@koorax.com



Dana Gillespie

JOHN HUBER

Droning And Waking The Dead

Dana Gillespie: *I Rest My Case* (Ace 1279; 64:14 ★★★½) Dana Gillespie is one of the best blues singers in Great Britain. On her seventh album for Ace, she provocatively braids together lovesickness, sensuality and a strong sense of selfhood in grown-up, carefully paced tunes of considerable merit that she wrote herself. A master of rhythmic subtleties with purity of intent, Gillespie leads her quietly exuberant band (despite occasional bouts of blandness) to the emotional center of “Guilty As Hell” and a dozen more.

Ordering info: acerecords.com

***Coyote Poets Of The Universe: Pandora’s Box* (Square Shaped 0105; 60:18 ★★★½)** These nine musicians, offering all original tunes on their fifth album, might be graduates of Ken Kesey’s Acid Tests of the mid-’60s who have been transported across time to the present. Along the way, they picked up influences ranging from globalists Paul Horn and Oregon to adventurous rock bands It’s a Beautiful Day and Joy of Cooking to Ken Nordine’s word-jazz. Keeping listeners off guard, the Denver-based Coyote Poets loosely fit the contemporary jam-band mold even as “Blood & Bones” and “Quittin’ Time” rumble with a blues heft unattainable to many conventional blues bands.

Ordering info: coyotepoetsoftheuniverse.com

Various Artists: *North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic, Volume II* (Devil Down; 69:24 ★★★½) Guitarist Kenny Brown’s event salutes Junior Kimbrough and R. L. Burnside, the past giants of droning, galvanic single-chord blues. Highlights of the 2010 Southern picnic are Reverend John Wilkins playing “You Got To Move,” which hits concert-goers hard, like an intravenous injection of pure M.S.G., and Alvin Youngblood Hart & Muscle Theory taking no prisoners in a boogie rage called “Big Mama’s Door.”

Ordering info: devildownrecords.com

Henry Gray: *Lucky Man* (Blind Pig 8013; 35:47 ★★★) Originally released in 1990, this reissue finds the respected Chicago bluesman—he was employed by Howlin’ Wolf—thumping the piano keys on his own boogies and on venerable perennials of Chicago or New Orleans origins. Henry Gray’s singing wavers some but it never lacks for authenticity.

Ordering info: blindpigrecords.com

Amde Ardoin: *Mama, I’ll Be Long Gone* (Tompkins Square 2554; 52:47/52:07 ★★★½) Andre Ardoin’s pained, high-register singing to a lost sweetheart and his assured performances on accordion are the glowing hearts of 34 tracks that this paterfamilias of southern Louisiana music performed between 1929 and 1934—his entire recorded output, now painstakingly remastered by archivist Christopher King. The tortured yelling by Ardoin in “La Valse Ah Abe” can wake the dead. Many of these Afro-Creole blues and dance tunes, it should be noted, are further elevated in their stark, timeless magnificence by the fiddling of Dennis McGhee. Unfortunately, the accompanying booklet lacks English translations of the French lyrics.

Ordering info: tompkinssquare.com

Grayson Capps: *The Lost Cause Minstrels* (The Royal Potato Family 1107; 44:38 ★★★½) Grayson Capps’ fifth record marks his arrival as a premier exponent of Southern roots music—those white guys tirelessly entertaining in blues joints and country honky-tonks. This Alabamian has the deep, pliable voice, the songwriting smarts and the air of confidence needed to put over his hard-hitting blues-rock (“John The Dagger”), his updating of a number from early-20th century songster Rabbit Brown (“Jane’s Alley Blues”) and his own version of swinging, jazz-heated Gulf Coast fun (“Coconut Moonshine”).

Ordering info: graysoncapps.com



Madeleine Peyroux *Standing On The Rooftop*

DECCA 5636

★★★

It has taken Madeleine Peyroux at least 15 years and six albums to fully develop her musical personality, to branch out into the mature artist on *Standing On The Rooftop*. Unlike the intimate jazz-combo readings of standards on her first albums, Peyroux embraces a more popular, bluesy music on the new disc. Supported by an excellent rhythm section that can deftly navigate between genres—pianist Allen Toussaint and bassist Meshell Ndegeocello form the core of the group—Peyroux has developed a new compositional and vocal approach.

Her original tunes include the shimmering, stripped-down New Orleans funk of “The Kind You Can’t Afford,” which was co-written with Bill Wyman, and the plodding, ephemeral “Standing On The Rooftop.” On these songs, Peyroux’s voice is front and center, adapting to the textural changes and mood swings within each tune.

Cover songs outside the realm of jazz standards can be a bit prickly for musicians. There’s always a thin line between faithful send-up and misguided interpretation. Peyroux toes this line expertly with “Martha, My Dear,” which slows down the bouncy Beatles tune into a lament accompanied by sparse banjo and languid acoustic guitar. Peyroux takes Bob Dylan’s “I Threw It All Away” in the opposite direction, speeding it up slightly and adding a slow blues-rock groove.

The most striking feature of *Standing On The Rooftop* is not the covers nor Peyroux’s original compositions, but the transformation of her vocal approach. She still has a residual bit of her Billie Holiday affectation, but Peyroux’s vocals are now weathered and have much more depth.

—Jon Ross

Standing On The Rooftop: Martha My Dear; The Kind You Can’t Afford; The Things I’ve Seen Today; Fickle Dove; Lay Your Sleeping Head; My Love; Standing On The Rooftop; I Threw It All Away; Love In Vain; Don’t Pick a Fight With A Poet; Meet Me in Rio; Ophelia; The Way of All Things. (47:09)

Personnel: Madeleine Peyroux, vocals; Allen Toussaint, piano; Meshell Ndegeocello, bass; Marc Ribot, Chris Bruce, guitar; Charley Drayton, drums.
Ordering info: decca.com

**Bo-Keys
Got To Get
Back!**

ELECTRAPHONIC 106
★★★½

**Steve
Cropper
Dedicated**

429 RECORDS 17832
★★★½



Redding's turf. He shows enough of his own gruffly passionate personality to escape charges of mimicry. Bell, a participating witness to the birth of Stax, gives an exquisite treatment of "Weak Spot." No less impressive are Bomar and the instrumentalists, including legends Howard Grimes on drums and Ben Cauley on trumpet. They too bring honest, shimmering feeling to the tracks with the singers and to six on their own.

Steve Cropper still has the magic.

As part of the current soul renaissance, the Memphis-based Bo-Keys—the core group consists of young soul zealot Scott Bomar on bass and veterans Skip Pitts on guitar and Willie Hall on drums—strived for musical transcendence on their largely instrumental album *The Royal Sessions* in 2004. They fell short. Their new *Got To Get Back!* finds them in a special zone where the word "soulful" truly applies.

Bomar was smart to enlist bona fide soul singers Otis Clay, Percy Wiggins, William Bell and Charlie Musslewhite. All four of these elders probe the deepest recesses of the heart for answers to questions on romance posed in top-grade songs mostly written by Bomar and other Bo-Keys. Clay, who made successful records in Memphis in the early '70s, grabs the two-part "Got To Get Back (To My Baby)" by its neck from the very first bar and hurls it onto Otis

Dedicated is his tribute to his heroes the "5" Royales—the long-lasting Southern r&b vocal group that played an important role in the early stories of soul and rock 'n' roll for their harmony singing and the amazing single-string guitar of Lowman Pauling (also a fine songwriter). Listeners are advised to give their undivided attention to Cropper's lead and rhythm playing on updates of the Royales' hits "Dedicated To The One I Love," "Think" and lesser-known, underrated, "Say It." Savor Cropper's tone, his million-dollar licks, inerrant rhythmic sense and intimate understanding of when and where to leave space. He's soulful and then some, not least on "Help Me Somebody," where he exudes an easy authority and a delicate restraint. Three cheers for the contributions of David Hood, Spooner Oldham, Steve Ferrone and Steve Jordan.

On the debit side, Cropper and co-producer Jon Tiven called on a number of singers to help them out. Steve Winwood, Lucinda Williams, John Popper, Bettye LaVette and the others have good intentions but they only succeed in pointing out how wonderful and definitive the lead singing of tenors Johnny and Eugene Tanner was on the originals. B.B. King and Shemekia Copeland sound terrific singing "Baby, Don't Do It," yet their friendliness pales next to the raw romantic pain the "5" Royales brought to their 1953 r&b chart hit.

—Frank-John Hadley

Got To Get Back!: Hi Roller; Got To Get Back (To My Baby); Just Chillin'; Catch This Teardrop; Jack And Ginger; Sundown On Beale; Weak Spot; 90 Days Same As Cash; I'm Going Home; Cauley Flower; Work That Sucker; Got To Get Back (To My Baby), Part Two. (40:05)

Personnel: Scott Bomar, bass, percussion; Charles "Skip" Pitts, guitar, vocal (11); Howard Grimes, Willie Hall, drums and percussion; Archie "Hubble" Turner, Al Gamble, keyboards; Marc Franklin, Ben Cauley, trumpet; Derrick Williams, tenor saxophone; Kirk Smothers, tenor and baritone saxophone; Jim Spake, baritone saxophone; Otis Clay (2, 12), Percy Wiggins (4); William Bell (7), Charlie Musslewhite (9), vocals.

Ordering info: thebokeys.com

Dedicated: 30 Second Lover; Don't Be Ashamed; Baby, Don't Do It; Dedicated To The One I Love; My Sugar Sugar; Right Around The Corner; Help Me Somebody; I Do; Messin' Up; Say It; The Slummer The Slum; Someone Made You For Me; Think; Come On And Save Me; When I Get Like This. (46:17)

Personnel: Steve Cropper, guitar; Buddy Miller, guitar (11); David Hood, bass guitar; Spooner Oldham, acoustic and electric pianos, organ; Steve Ferrone, drums, percussion; Steve Jordan, drums; Neal Sugarman, Jon Tiven, tenor saxophones; Steve Winwood (1), Bettye LaVette (2, 10); Willie Jones (2); B. B. King (3), Shemekia Copeland (3); Lucinda Williams (4, 15), Dan Penn (4, 12); John Popper (5), Delbert McClinton (6), Brian May (8), Sharon Jones (9, 14), Buddy Miller (11), Dylan LeBlanc (14), lead vocals; Angel Cropper, Harry Stinson, Beth Hooker, Dylan LaBlanc, Leroy Parnell, Keb Mo, Billy Block, Jon Tiven, Brian May, Dan Penn, background vocals.

Ordering info: 429records.com



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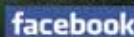
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Americana's Deep Roots

The tight-knit Americana music community bonded together for several noteworthy projects issued during the first half of this year.

"I'm like James Brown, only white and taller, and all I wanna do is stomp and holler," sings Hayes Carl to kick off *KMAG YOYO (& Other American Stories)* (Lost Highway 15136-02; 42:00 ★★★★★½), a contender for this year's best roots-rock release. Carl's a talented craftsman of well-built, familiar melodies, but his true gift is for conveying smart-aleck barroom wisdom. ("Everybody's talking 'bout the shape I'm in/They say, 'Boy, you ain't a poet, just a drunk with a pen.") Still, he can write a heartbreaker with the best of them. On "Bye Bye Baby," he remembers the one who got away "out there somewhere, between the highway and the moon." He could just as well be singing about the soul of every troubadour, an overcrowded group among which he stands out.

Ordering info: losthighwayrecords.com

For *The Majestic Silver Strings* (New West NW6188; 56:46 ★★), producer and songwriter Buddy Miller joins forces with guitarists Marc Ribot, Bill Frisell and Greg Leisz along with a handful of roots-rock elite. The result is a pleasant but underwhelming collection where, ironically, the original songs often trump the high-profile covers. Casual listeners may want to download "Meds" and "God's Wing'ed Horse"—a collaboration between Frisell and singer Julie Miller, Buddy's wife—instead of springing for the whole package.

Ordering info: newwestrecords.com

Leisz also lends his talents to *Blessed* (Lost Highway 15240-02; 59:05 ★★★★★½), the latest release from country-rock goddess Lucinda Williams. Over the past decade, Williams' songwriting has taken a turn toward the minimalist, and *Blessed* pushes that to new levels. There's no "Essence," "Over Time" or "Real Love" here. Instead, she delivers an inspired but unpolished song cycle on the back of her most formidable band to date.

Ordering info: losthighwayrecords.com

On *I Love: Tom T. Hall's Songs Of Fox Hollow* (Red Beet Records RBRCD 0014; 29:46 ★★★★★½), a group of Americana notables, including Buddy Miller, cover Hall's 1974 children's album, *Songs Of Fox Hollow (For Children Of All Ages)*. Several tracks are stunners, particularly the vocals by Patty Griffin on "I Love" and Elizabeth Cook on "I Wish I Had A Million Friends." Hall himself even lends his voice to the closer, "I Made A Friend Of A



Hayes Carl

COURTESY UNIVERSAL MUSIC

Flower Today," a new song that fits right into this surprisingly moving tribute.

Ordering info: redbeetrecords.com

On its sophomore release, *Helplessness Blues* (Sub Pop SPCD 888; 49:53 ★★★★★½), Fleet Foxes seek identity, enlightenment and relief from the quarter-life crisis. The album's a reverb symphony of late-'60s, early '70s folk-rock, awash in multipart harmonies and random instruments. Supposedly, there's even a Tibetan singing bowl in the mix. Bandleader Robin Pecknold displays welcome growth as a songsmith, writing more personally and, at the same time, more universally than on the Foxes' self-titled debut. *Helplessness Blues* is a shot of sunshine—a marked improvement from the band's first album—and well-deserving of its considerable hype.

Ordering info: subpop.com

Steve Earle's *I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive* (New West NWA3052; 37:43 ★★★★★½) makes an argument that the songwriter's strongest suit may be for the slow-burning heart-tuggers. Such down-tempo numbers as "Every Part Of Me," "This City" and "God Is God" rank among the most memorable moments in Earle's quarter-decade-long catalog.

Ordering info: newwestrecords.com

Instead of relying on others' songs, country-rock interpreter Emmylou Harris wrote or co-wrote all but two tracks on *Hard Bargain* (Nonesuch 525966-2; 56:06 ★★). It's among her more directly emotive statements and often pays tribute to the departed. Sometimes, this works to great effect, as on the driving "New Orleans" and "Darling Kate" for the late Kate McGarrigle; other times, not so much ("My Name Is Emmett Till"). But like many Harris albums, *Hard Bargain* is an aesthetic feast, making its uneven moments all the more listenable.

Ordering info: nonesuch.com

DB



Anne Mette Iversen Quartet *Milo Songs*

BROOKLYN JAZZ UNDERGROUND 025

★★★★½

New parents inevitably dote over their children, seeing genius in every utterance and invention that springs from their young minds. Bassist Anne Mette Iversen takes that tendency to the extreme on *Milo Songs*, creating an entire CD's worth of new pieces out of a single melody devised by her then-2-year-old son.

Fortunately, the resulting album isn't the equivalent of a refrigerator door cluttered with crayon "masterpieces." Iversen plays hide and seek with the original tune throughout, at times bringing it to the forefront, at others burying it deep within a song's construction. She manages to generate a diverse suite of music from such a simple source, maintaining a youthful sensibility even inside her most cerebral compositions.

Iversen is joined on this outing by her second family, her long-running quartet with saxophonist John Ellis, pianist Danny Grissett and drummer Otis Brown III. Ellis, no stranger to the more whimsical side of jazz—he cavorts with puppets on the cover of his most recent album, *Puppet Mischief*—engages in a playful back-and-forth with Grissett to open "The Storm," a musical game of catch leading into an insistently whirling melody.

The disc opens and closes with two of Iversen's most lyrical pieces, her ever-present classical influences enlivened by a wistful glance back at childhood. "The Terrace" spotlights Ellis' willowy tenor, while "Cortot's Wheel" finds the leader insinuating herself into the tight corners of Grissett's stabbing solo. Iversen's playing is constantly subtle and suggestive, dropping hints that seem to linger in the air while Brown supplies a more muscular swing. She takes her finest solo on "Child's Worlds," a contemplative piece that recognizes the melancholy side of youth. It's another example of how the music can be childlike without ever feeling childish. —Shaun Brady

Milo Songs: The Terrace; The Storm; Drum Dreams; Trains & Chocolate; Milo's Brother; Child's Worlds; Cortot's Wheel. (47:33)
Personnel: Anne Mette Iversen, bass; John Ellis, tenor saxophone and clarinet; Otis Brown III, drums; Danny Grissett, piano.
Ordering info: bjurecords.com



David Binney
Graylen Epicenter

MYTHOLOGY 0008
★★★★½

You might have to listen to alto player David Binney's ninth release, *Graylen Epicenter*, more than once to fully digest it. It spotlights a midsize ensemble that often blends Gretchen Parlato's vocals with a horn section. The compositions include interludes, multiple sections and some surprising twists and turns.

"All Of Time" initially features drummers Brian Blade and Dan Weiss, the two bashing away beneath horn riffs for roughly a chorus. Things quiet down at the beginning of pianist Craig Taborn's solo, but pick up shortly before Binney's dramatic entrance more than halfway into the 10-minute track. Binney even sings toward the end.

The title track also is fairly long (12:36). Guitarist Wayne Krantz's bluesy solo complements the distinctive melody before it segues into the more abstract territory of scatter-shot horns, rubato rhythm section and various (spooky) sounds. Parlato's vocals herald yet another transition that introduces Binney's solo, a strong effort that begins quietly, builds momentum and happily stops short of a predictable climax.

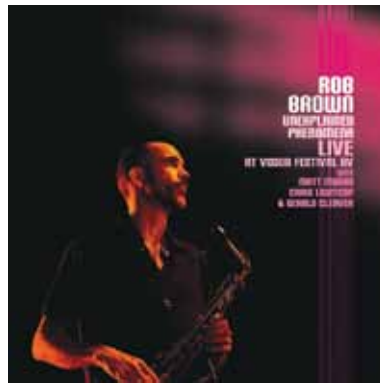
"From This Far" is shorter, purposely busy and densely textured; the abrupt ending works. On "Terrorists And Movie Stars," Binney and tenor player Chris Potter feed off the rhythm section; when it becomes frenzied, their dialogue follows suit. "Home" spotlights Parlato at the outset, but a supercharged Binney upstages her. While the album's vision isn't always realized, it typifies the new mainstream: The soloists possess the flexibility to play inside and out; the arrangements are structured and eclectic and the time is played fairly straight.

—Eric Fine

Graylen Epicenter: All Of Time; Graylen Epicenter; Equality At Low Levels; Everglow; From This Far; Terrorists And Movie Stars; Same Stare, Different Thought; Home; Any Years Costume; Waking To Waves. (73:50)
Personnel: Binney, alto, soprano saxophones, vocals; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Wayne Krantz, guitars; Craig Taborn, piano; Ervin Opvik, bass; Brian Blade, drums (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10); Dan Weiss, drums (1, 5, 6, 9, 10); Kenny Wollesen, percussion, vibes; Roberto Boccato, percussion; Gretchen Parlato, vocals; Nina Geiger, vocals (10).
Ordering info: davidbinney.com

Rob Brown Trio
Unknown Skies
ROGUE ART 0033
★★★★

Rob Brown
Unexplained Phenomena
Live At Vision Festival XV
MARGE 48
★★★★



Rob Brown is one of the most singular voices on the alto saxophone. His skillful interval jumps and his biting tone are not designed to cajole the listeners, but to help them move out of their comfort zone and to expand their horizons. Two new live recordings offer additional insight on his musical persona and ideas.

Unknown Skies was recorded at the 2010 Sons d'Hiver Festival with pianist Craig Taborn and drummer Nasheet Waits. Without a bass, the three musicians operate on a more leveled field, rely less on melodies, and have plenty of room to stretch and develop notions to the fullest. Doing so, they alternate moments of fury and others where time is suspended. A few surprises are also included. Taborn is magnificent throughout: He can skillfully manipulate the sound of his instrument, as on the title track, where he slowly metamorphoses into a demented saloon piano player over an uncanny drum backdrop. His boundless imagination also translates into unusual comping patterns that occasionally threaten to collapse. Waits is such a chameleon that he perfectly blends in, making his first encounter with Brown a success. His

loose and ever-shifting poly-rhythms provide a challenging and inspiring backdrop to the two soloists. The leader demonstrates the rewards of patience as he slowly builds his solos to reach astonishing climaxes.

Unexplained Phenomena is a different animal altogether—a quartet date recorded about five months later at the Vision Festival in New York. Brown shows

that he also can conform to conventions, which is reflected in the structure of the pieces and the instrumentation. Ironically, the saxophonist's playing is sonically more extreme: proof that even though Brown's tone has been getting more polished over the years, its ferocity and tartness always come back to the fore when he is at his most incandescent. He also breaks the routine by choosing a different strategy to introduce each piece. Additional colors not previously found in the saxophonist's musical universe are provided by vibraphonist Matt Moran, although his improvisations are much more restrained and less varied than Taborn's. Drummer Gerald Cleaver and bassist Chris Lightcap weave an intricate rhythmic background while keeping the proceedings solidly anchored.

—Alain Drouot

Unknown Skies: A Fine Line; Unknown Skies; Bounce Back; The Upsnot; Temerity. (61:58)
Personnel: Rob Brown, alto saxophone; Craig Taborn, piano; Nasheet Waits, drums.
Ordering info: rogueart.com

Unexplained Phenomena: Kite; Wonder/Wander Off; Tic Toc; Lurking/Looking; Bell Tone. (55:16)
Personnel: Rob Brown, alto saxophone; Matt Moran, vibraphone; Chris Lightcap, bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums.
Ordering info: futuramarge.free.fr

Magos Herrera *México Azul*

SUNNYSIDE 1292

★★★★½

On her sixth disc and second for Sunnyside, singer Magos Herrera teams up once again with Tim Ries, who produced her enchanting previous disc, *Distancia*, for another dreamy collection of wisely picked Latin compositions. This time though, the binding theme is songs, plucked from her Mexican roots, dating back to Mexican cinema from the 1930s and 1940s. But as she's shown before, Herrera isn't content on just parrotting the past; she offers refreshing makeovers that sound modern rather than *Buena Vista Social Club*-inspired reenactments.

Blessed with an enticing, husky voice, Herrera could have easily gotten away with just skating over the surface. But she brings a smartness to the album, illuminating certain African influences in Mexican music that many others tend to ignore. It certainly comes out on the rumbling take on Augustin Lara's "Lamento Jarcho" and the pneumatic rendering of Álvaro Carillo's "Seguire Mi Viaje"—both composers, coincidentally, of Afro-Mexican heritage. Other highlights include her divine take on Osvaldo Farres' "Tres Palabras" and Pedro Flores' classic, "Obsesión." Throughout the disc, Herrera and her band mates keep the



arrangements pliable enough to play to her jazz instincts yet tight enough to allow the melodies to soar intact.

Similar to other modern Latin jazz singers like Claudia Acuña and Luciana Souza, Herrera artfully delves into her own heritage, inviting Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish speaking listeners alike to venture and discover these musical gems from this long-ago era.

—John Murph

México Azul: Luz De Luna; Noche Criolla; Azul; Angelitos Negros; Seguire Mi Viaje; Voz Antigua (Homeland); Lamento Jarcho; Que Sea Para Mi; Tres Palabras; Obsesión; Dos Gardenias. (48:13)

Personnel: Magos Herrera, vocals; Rogerio Boccato, percussion and background vocals; Tim Hagans, trumpet; Alex Kautz, drums and background vocals; John Patitucci, bass, double bass, background vocals; Luis Perdomo, piano; Adam Rogers, electric and acoustic guitars.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Sachal Vasandani *Hi-Fly*

MACK AVENUE 1060

★★★★½

If Sachal Vasandani has a trademark, it's his vocal tone. Clean and clear, it glides with an accessible assurance. On his third album, he continues to showcase his instrument through a mixture of standards, originals, contemporary songs and lesser-mined gems.

Although shuffle and random are a modern day a way of life for some, *Hi-Fly* is best appreciated in its sequential entirety. It plays like a thoughtfully prepared live set, albeit one in which peers and even a vocal(ese) legend sit in on half the songs. A spritely version of "The Very Thought Of You" opens the album, showcasing the restraint and practiced nimbleness of Vasandani's working trio of 10-plus year bandmates Jeb Patton and David Wong and new member Kendrick Scott. The album's sole recent number, Amy Winehouse's "Love Is A Losing Game," is up next, with an open acoustic arrangement that's less frantic than the original. "I See Your Face Before Me," "That's All I Want From You" and a drumless "All The Way" go far to highlight Vasandani's other trademark, his romanticism. It's Jon Hendricks' familiar voice that's up first on "One Mint Julip," and one can



hear the smile in Vasandani's as he responds. (Interestingly, he only seats on it and the title track, the other Hendricks duet.) The trio of originals in the middle of the album reflects a songwriter who's stretching, while the two Gershwin numbers serve as an unexpectedly tight pairing.

—Yoshi Kato

Hi-Fly: The Very Thought Of You; Love Is A Losing Game; I See Your Face Before Me; One Mint Julip; That's All I Want From You; Babes Blues; Flood; Summer No School; Here Comes The Honey Man; There's A Boat That's Leaving Soon For New York; Hi-Fly; All The Way. (46:57)

Personnel: Sachal Vasandani, vocals; Jeb Patton, piano; Rhodes, Wuritzer; Kendrick Scott, drums; David Wong, bass; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet (2, 6, 7); John Ellis, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 6); Jon Hendricks, vocals (4, 11).

Ordering info: mackavenue.com



David S. Ware/William Parker/ Cooper-Moore/Muhammad Ali *Planetary Unknown*

AUM FIDELITY AUM 068

★★★★

I caught this group's set at New York's Vision Fest, where they were plugged as an "improvisational supergroup showcasing harmonic and melodic dexterity." Let's not quantify it with catchall justifications; this is spirit music, music for the spheres, with no compromise. David S. Ware's tenor tone is a unique hard plastic from top to bottom, and the sound of his stritch (a straight alto favored by Roland Kirk) on "Ancestry Supramental" goes straight to the heart of the matter (much like in Kirk's hands, albeit with increased fever and agitation). Recently, Ware has developed a mastery of the soprano: check the clarity of his altissimo visitations on "Divination," which begins, after pianist Cooper-Moore's initial "Autumn In New York" pun, with a lemon sour prelude to a kiss.

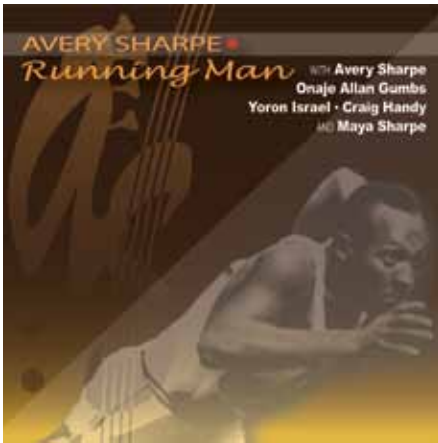
"Duality Is One" is a fabulous parabolic duo with drummer Muhammad Ali, with Ware betraying Albert Ayler-ish intervals and note-end scoops while Ali (who worked with Ayler in the late '60s, as did brother Rashied) maintains a loose polyrhythmic energy well spread across the speakers, thanks to engineer Michael Marciano at Brooklyn's Systems Two studio. The fulcrum here is Cooper-Moore, whose knit with Ware stretches back to Boston days. Though Moore keeps cascades a-ripple with elbows and knuckles, he exhibits tactical patience on "Divination Unfathomable," and the embers of "Passage Wudang" suggest he has listened to Bill Evans.

If you are cognizant that we perilously ride atop a beachball through the abyss and that, as the Sun Ra-like cover art suggests, the ball is fit to burst, take your stereo speakers out to the deck at dusk, play loud, count the galaxies and to hell with the neighbors. —Michael Jackson

Planetary Unknown: Passage Wudang; Shift; Duality Is One; Divination; Crystal Palace; Divination Unfathomable; Ancestry Supramental (7:108)

Personnel: David S. Ware, saxophones; Cooper-Moore, piano; William Parker, bass; Muhammad Ali, drums.

Ordering info: aumfidelity.com



Avery Sharpe
Running Man

JKNM RECORDS 898910

★★★

The cover of bassist Avery Sharpe's latest, *Running Man*, features a 1936 picture of Jesse Owens. The image of Owens coming out of the blocks, head down, arms pumping, serves as a metaphor for the album's characteristics: strong, determined and containing a focused intensity, all of which abound on the title track, which opens the record. Pianist Onaje Allan Gumbs opens up the solos with a short statement that slowly builds, and is followed by Craig Handy on soprano. The restatement of "Running Man's" head is followed by one of the album's most compelling moments: a spirited exchange between Sharpe on electric and Handy on which they go toe to toe before miming each other's slowly rising trills.

One of *Running Man's* most consistently strong aspects is Sharpe's bass solos, which are loaded with fresh ideas. He has incredible facility on acoustic and electric bass, and when soloing he resides mostly in the upper register, where he repeats short motives and expands upon them, all while mixing up phrase lengths and using double stops. Sharpe is also effective when moving into more of a frontline mode when he doubles the melody on "Silent War," "Celestial Stride" and "Rwandan Escape." Handy is a strong presence on the album on soprano and tenor, and he weaves effortless bebop lines through the changes, such as on the double-time section of "Jump!" His tenor sound is big, bold and has a slight edge. I particularly like his clear soprano tone and relaxed phrasing, as well as his melodic solo on the relaxed r&b number "Breathe Again," which features Maya Sharpe on vocals. But Handy has some slight intonation issues on the notoriously difficult horn, but not severe enough to make his soprano hard to listen to. —Chris Robinson

Running Man: Running Man (For Jesse Owens); Jump!; Breathe Again; Cher's Smile; Celestial Stride; Her All; Rwandan Escape; Ancestry Delight; Lex's Song; Silent War; Cher's Smile (Reprise). (59:44)
Personnel: Avery Sharpe, electric and acoustic bass; Craig Handy, soprano saxophone (1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11), tenor saxophone, (2, 6, 7); Onaje Allan Gumbs, piano; Yoron Israel, drums; Maya Sharpe, vocals (3, 10).
Ordering info: jknmrecords.com

Historical | BY JOHN MCDONOUGH

Serene Getz On The Verge Of Global Influence

The focus of *Stan Getz Quintets: The Clef & Norgran Studio Albums (Hip-O Select 14657; 68:57/74:18/79:16 ★★★)* is narrow, concentrating on the saxophonist's earliest singles and albums for Norman Granz, recorded between December 1952 and January 1955. It elegantly fills a gap in Getz's youthful discography.

A dozen years later the world would know him. But in 1952 Getz languished in an orbit that barely reached beyond the subscription rolls of this magazine. Within that elite bunch, though, he was already a major figure. For three years running he had topped the tenor saxophone category in the DownBeat Readers Poll, sometimes by a two-to-one margin. By the end of '52 he was ready to step up, from the cottage-industry world of Roost and Prestige to the more savvy and prolific Granz operation.

Granz had the soul of an independent but the business instincts of a robber baron. In 1952 his Norgran and Clef labels operated under the cover and protection of Mercury. Sixty years later they're all family in the Universal Music Group, whose distinctive Hip-O Select series adds Getz to its catalog of reissues. Unlike most "complete" editions, which proceed chronologically by session, this one is sequenced to re-create Getz's first five 10-inch LP records, plus a half-dozen singles and a few unissued orphaned cuts. The order is not strictly chronological, since Granz sometimes held back a few tunes for later LPs.

The first 12 titles move with such efficiency they almost seem to underestimate themselves. Getz's composure and containment at fast tempos crackle with a taunt rigor, but one so poised there's no suggestion of struggle or resistance. Also, the drums are so deep in the background that they are sensed more than noticed. "Lover Come Back To Me" and "The Way You Look Tonight" are chiseled with such a fleet, understated precision, it's easy to forget how hot and raucous the same notes might have been in the hands of Ben Webster or Johnny Griffin.

But the inherent serenity of Getz's sound tended to tame passions and bank fires, a quality that made his ballads into essays of implicit seduction rather than explicit lust. Evergreens like "Body And Soul" and "These Foolish Things" have a sheer and wispy purr that must have seemed equally at home in a smoky jazz cellar or a suburban cocktail party. His cool romanticism helped put bourgeois America at ease with modernity in the '50s, jazz's last



Stan Getz

heyday decade, and made Getz an influential voice for 20 years. These recordings remind us of how completely that influence has vanished today, buried under four decades of John Coltrane partisans.

In 1953 Getz partnered with valve trombonist Bob Brookmeyer, a combination that continued on and off into 1954. The two were temperamentally and sonically attuned. Their tenor-trombone front line produced an especially soft and pillowy texture that carries through much of the remaining music here. Getz remains the key soloist, though Brookmeyer holds his sides of the conversations smartly as the length of the performances expands to fit the enhanced possibilities of the LP.

The set's one significant gaffe is that while all of the Getz-Brookmeyer studio titles are included, "Flamingo" is not. This was apparently due to a mix-up in the final mastering that erroneously inserted the live version of the tune from the famous Shrine concert of November 8, 1954. That slip-up is corrected via a download on Hip O-Select's website. That anomaly aside, it's good to have a few previously unissued takes, particularly the ordered fury of "It Don't Mean A Thing." But is it necessary to include an abridged take of "We'll Be Together Again" that fades out at 4:00 (and released as a single) alongside the exact same take played out in full? On balance, though, this set restores an important partnership between two major players who still sound compelling.

Note: The contents of this collection, with the exception of the December 1953 quintets, have been issued on four LPs by Mosaic Records, *Stan Getz: The 1952-'54 Norgran Studio Sessions*. Both versions offer program notes by Ashley Kahn.

Ordering info: hip-oselect.com; mosaicrecords.com

BassDrumBone *The Other Parade*

CLEAN FEED 223

★★★★

On and off this trio has been together for more than three decades, and if this recording is any indication their best years might still lie ahead. No sign of fatigue is showing. On this new recording, bass player Mark Helias, drummer Gerry Hemingway and trombonist Ray Anderson sound surprisingly fresh and as excited as if this were a much anticipated first encounter.

Their take on various styles is not gimmicky but stems from a deep appreciation for the trailblazing artists that have preceded them. Their sincere respect for the tradition is epitomized by Anderson quoting “It Don’t Mean A Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)” in “Soft Shoe Mingle.” Whether they break into a blues or embrace New Orleans beats, their approach is also supported by the unique rapport they have cultivated over the years and their own innovations—here, their radical ideas are often



wrapped in ear candy. The seamless and nimble shifts speak volumes about the telepathic abilities of the trio.

Their wonderful interaction is supplemented by impressive skills and craft. Anderson delivers articulated solos with astonishing nuance over Helias’ full and resonating bass and Hemingway’s elaborated rhythms—the drummer even dares to provide such a backdrop on the pastoral “Unforgiven.” And the slow-cooking “The Masque” is a tribute to Anderson’s seemingly endless range.

But highlights are difficult to single out in such a consistent and enthralling collection. The mournful yet hopeful title track is nevertheless a wise choice to close a recording that also benefits from great engineering, which provides the opportunity to admire in fine detail the exceptional art of these three musicians.

—Alain Drouot

The Other Parade: Show Tuck; The Blue Light Down The Line; King Louisian; Rhythm Generation; Soft Shoe Mingle; Unforgiven; The Masque; Lips And Grits; The Other Parade. (59:07)

Personnel: Ray Anderson, trombone; Mark Helias, bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums.

Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com

Ketil Bjørnstad/ Svante Henryson *Night Song*

ECM 15236

★★★★½

Night Song plays like a suite of classical music. It is mannered, with little in the way of overt juxtaposition or sudden turns. That’s not to say it isn’t evocative or expressive. It is.

The disc is pianist Ketil Bjørnstad’s first duo recording with a cellist since his ’90s work with David Darling. *Night Song* is like chamber music, more moody, music to listen to when grieving or maybe feeling some doubt if not wonder. Maybe that’s why I struggle with it, trying to get over what feels like a sameness that gleams onto each individually beautiful piece. The delicacy and acute attention to execution that pervades everything here starts with the opening title track followed by “Visitor” with nary a sense of transition; a seamless web of notes flows into what follows.

There is a wealth of artistry, composure and assurance displayed by both Bjørnstad and cellist Henryson, who, despite a full classical pedigree, is well-versed in various musical styles. This isn’t the first time Henryson and Bjørnstad have worked together; their *Seafarer’s Song* was released in 2003. It may make for a more complex picture to know that Bjørnstad, who has been equally as musically collaborative as Henryson, is also a celebrated author.



for art’s sake.” “Reticence” comes up a third of the way through this program of 13 tracks, and while it still feels like an extension of the opening “Night Song,” the gentle breezes of Bjørnstad’s delicate chords and soft single lines lightly bouncing off Henryson’s equally exquisite sustains carry a hint of menace.

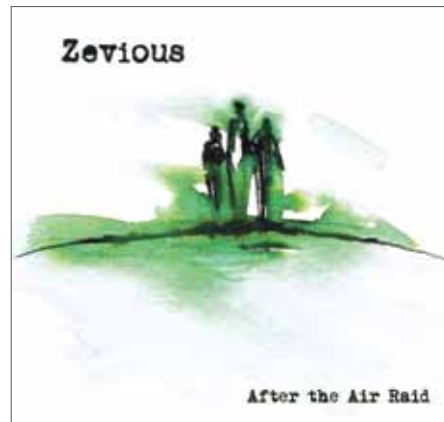
Not that *Night Song* is all doom and gloom. Providing some form of emotional balance, there are wispy hints of playfulness within the floatation device “Schubert Said,” a bit of cello plucking puckish-ness occasioning the strolling “Serene,” not to mention the slightly sunshiny “Adoro” (where Bjørnstad veers off on his own momentarily, again with mysterious, patient chords and single notes) and “Melting Ice,” with its memorable four-note phrase perhaps the brightest and most hopeful sign that tomorrow is another day.

—John Ephland

Night Song: Night Song (Evening Version); Visitor; Fall; Edge; Reticence; Schubert Said; Adoro; Share; Melting Ice; Serene; The Other; Own; Sheen; Chain; Tar; Night Song (Morning Version). (77:06)

Personnel: Ketil Bjørnstad, piano; Svante Henryson, cello.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Zevious *After The Air Raid*

CUNEIFORM 287

★★★★½

Zevious is a guitar power trio. Mostly scabrous in nature, *After The Air Raid*’s most interesting and enjoyable music comes when Zevious lets the air out of its tires. That contrast helps make the more intense music sing. The atmospheric title track, “That Ticket Exploded” and even “The Noose” offer relative calm, hints of swing and more nuance next to more ominous, driving, menacing fare like “Mostly Skulls” and “The Children And The Rats,” a tune in which the band combines both elements.

Based out of New York, Zevious is jazz, it’s rock, it’s the downtown punk-jazz-harmonic vibe. With cousins Mike Eber and Jeff Eber on guitar and drums and bassist Johnny DeBlase, these guys put their music degrees to work, influenced by the likes of Ronald Shannon Jackson, Fred Frith and James Blood Ulmer. The five-year-old Zevious is for anyone who loves aggressive rock-oriented improv with grooves and some semblance of a song.

Hard to believe that its first album, *Zevious* (2007), was an all-acoustic affair, more straight-ahead and jazzy, while *After The Air Raid* is not something you’d necessarily want to play for your grandmother. “Where’s The Captain?” starts things off, letting us know that being intense doesn’t mean you can’t have arrangements and that following a script doesn’t mean you can’t let your hair down. The song is tethered by a structure that keeps everyone close, the medium-tempo oddly metered funk giving way to Eber’s caustic Telecaster with barely more than a minute left to improvise. DeBlase’s bass playing can be heard like a second guitar, busy and intricate at times, a good contrast to Eber, as on slowly grinding rocker “Coma Cluster” and the mesmerizing groove laid out with “Inciting.”

—John Ephland

After The Air Raid: Where’s The Captain?; Coma Cluster; Mostly Skulls; That Ticket Exploded; The Noose; Inciting; Gradual Decay; The Ditch; After The Air Raid; The Children And The Rats; Glass Tables. (53:50)

Personnel: Mike Eber, guitars; Johnny DeBlase, electric and acoustic basses; Jeff Eber, drums.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

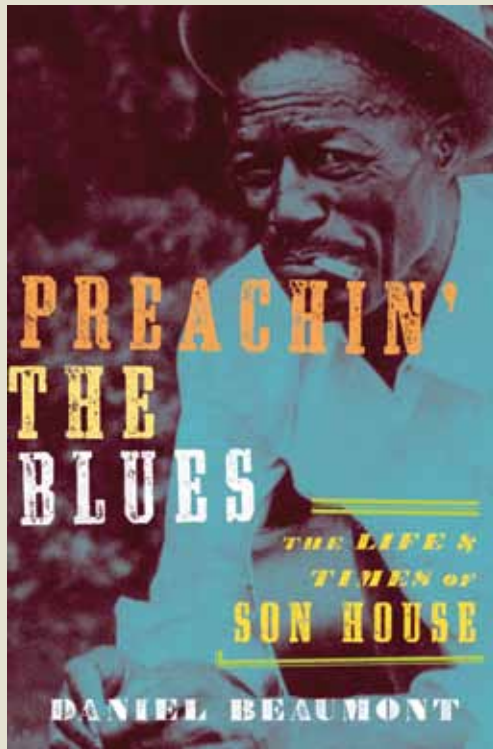
How Son House Preached, Rambled and Lived

Eddie “Son” House Jr. was one of the sterling bluesmen of the 20th century—the chief architect of Delta bottleneck guitar technique and a powerful singer, with a dark, rich voice. His songs harbor profound lyrics on the plight of Deep South blacks during the Depression era. The eloquence of his recorded blues, rags and levee-camp moans rings like a timeless clarion call of self-dignity. But House could hardly be more obscure today, overshadowed by his students Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf. Things are looking up, though. Not long ago, Ted Gioia rightly affirmed House as a “Mississippi master who revolutionized American music” in his excellent book *Delta Blues*, and now there’s

a Son House biography by University of Rochester professor Daniel Beaumont, *Preachin’ The Blues* (Oxford University Press).

Beaumont starts the book off in the early 1960s with white, middle-class blues aficionados traveling the back roads of the Delta and elsewhere looking for House and other bluesmen known to them from old 78s. The romance of the quest, however, is undercut by Beaumont’s assertion that these searchers were motivated by the wish to promote these elders on the burgeoning folk-blues scene. Finally locating him in western New York, Dick Waterman and two cohorts “were faced with a man who may have been an enigma even to himself.” Some 200 pages later, House remains as much an enigma to the reader as he was at the start of the book. And the author can’t square the nagging contradiction of House the minister and House the “ramblin’” blues musician. To be fair, perhaps no one can, though it’d be interesting if a journalist or an academician with knowledge of the blues and the story of the black Baptist church and culture gave it a try. A good beginning already exists: Biblical college scholar Stephen J. Nichols devotes several pages to House in his recent book *Getting The Blues* (Brazos Press).

Still, Beaumont has done commendable research, teasing out facts about House from many sources, even sorting through conflicting information given by the man himself. After taking stock of House’s semi-popular “rediscovery,” Beaumont recounts his life story as best he’s able. The mystery man began preaching



in his mid-teens, reportedly hating blues music. But upon hearing Willie Brown use a small medicine bottle to “zing” (House’s word) the strings, he suddenly took up playing blues guitar in his mid-twenties—while still preaching. He soon fit the nasty caricature of the down ‘n’ dirty bluesman: drunkenness, adultery, violence. House, in fact, killed a man and served time on the dreaded Parchman Prison Farm. He went on to record for Paramount in 1930 and—his stark artistry at its peak—the Library of Congress in 1941–’42. Beaumont, a good writer, is especially interesting when telling of House’s friendship with a fellow giant of Delta blues, Charley Patton.

There’s scant information on House between World War II and his re-emergence in 1964: He worked for the railroad in Rochester, and he fatally stabbed a labor camp worker on Long Island. This time he wasn’t sentenced to jail, but Beaumont is of the opinion that House “did not escape prosecuting himself” and “sought refuge in oblivion.” After his ‘60s folk-blues celebrity, House, supposedly an alcoholic, spent his last years in Detroit, dying there in 1988. Instead of padding the last chapter with digressive information on Rochester music gadfly Armand Schaubroek, Beaumont could have sought out Bonnie Raitt, Taj Mahal, Geoff Muldaur and other friends of House to share their thoughts on the Mississippian and his inner conflict between moral goodness and corruption—what House termed “stradlin’ the fence.”

DB

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The Transcendent Aesthetics Of The Block Chord Language

Before I was a jazz musician, I was a jazz fan. I have been listening to this music my entire life and have always been fascinated by the piano trio format. One of my favorite pianists is Red Garland, and from his music I have learned to love and appreciate block chords. Much has been said about the technique of block chords, including various voicings particular to certain players. But here I will discuss several of my favorite innovators in the block chord language, their unique contribution, and the impact block chords have on the audience.

The use of block chords (defined as both hands striking the keyboard simultaneously) by jazz pianists spans the history of the music and transcends all styles of jazz. It is used by traditional early pianists as well as players in the avant garde as a way of engaging the audience with strong rhythm and melody. One of the first pianists in jazz to use block chords impressively was Milt Buckner. On Dinah Washington's 1943 recording of "Evil Gal Blues," Buckner plays in a locked-hand style with both hands moving together over the keyboard to accommodate the melody note (the top voice of his right hand). The solo is melodic and similar to an ensemble passage in a big band chart. Buckner plays rhythmic phrases and leaves space for the rhythm section to complement him as he sets up the tune for Washington. Another of my favorite Buckner solos comes from saxophonist Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis' 1970s recording of "Leapin' On Lenox." The intense rhythm of his block chord solo makes this example particularly swinging. Buckner's locked-hand style has been emulated by many, including Nat Cole, George Shearing, Barry Harris and Oscar Peterson.

Erroll Garner took a different approach to block chords. Garner maintained a steady rhythm in his left hand (four beats to a bar) while playing a block chord, or sometimes a single-note line, in his right hand. I find this style to be challenging because of the rhythmic and creative inde-

pendence required in both hands. On his recording of "Robbin's Nest" from the album *Encores In Hi Fi* (Columbia), Garner uses block chords to play the melody, then switches to a single-note technique for his solo, switching back to block chords for a shout chorus section, before heading back to the melody. In this performance we see the similarity of block chords to a big band; they allow the pianist to simulate an entire ensemble for the listener, engaging them through the use of rhythmic melody as opposed to intellectual linear ideas. It should be noted that the block chords are also louder than a single-note line.

Another of my favorite block chord artists, Bobby Timmons, is a master of exciting and climactic solos. This is apparent in his solo on "Blues March" from Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers' album *1958: Paris Olympia Concert* (Universal). Timmons starts the solo with a single-note line and quickly moves into his block chords—a style in which the right hand creates the melody and the left hand moves with the rhythm of the right hand, but does not change voicing except to accommodate the chord changes. In this solo it is interesting when Timmons changes his block chords at the beginning of his sixth chorus into an Erroll Garner style. This serves to delay the climax of his solo and further bait the audience.

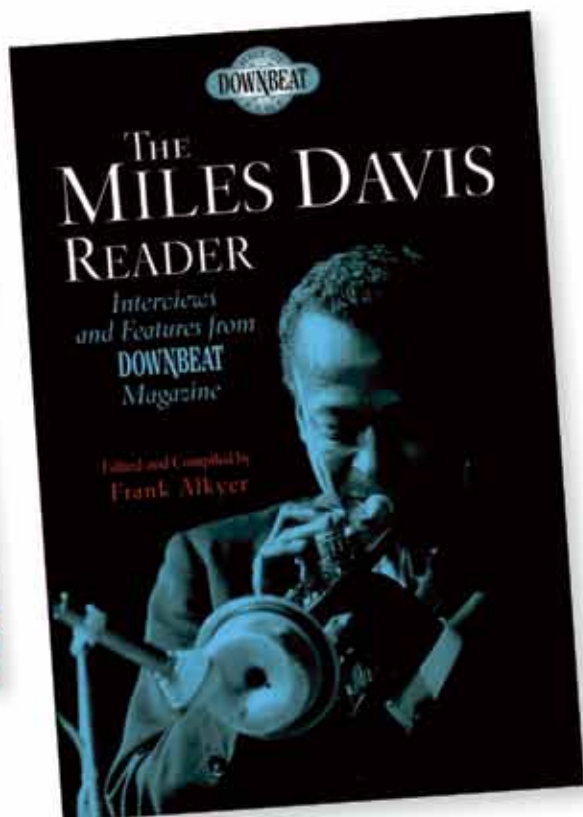
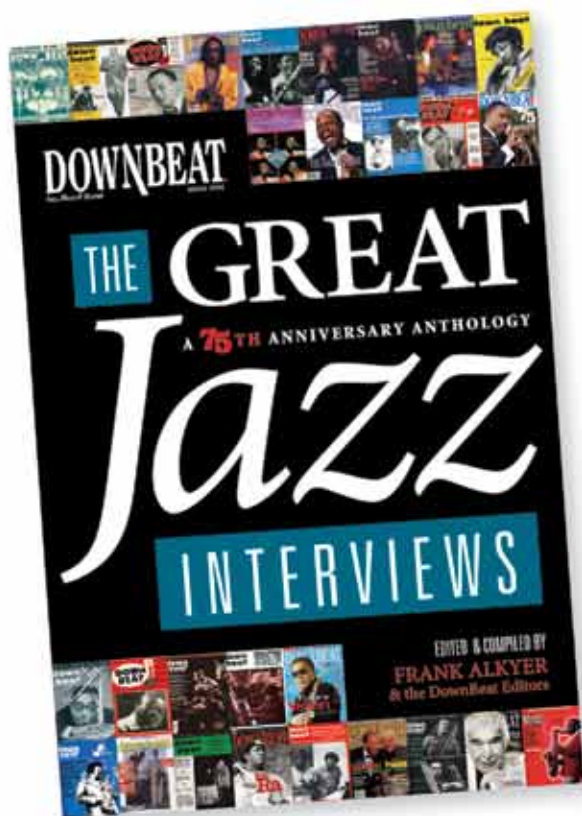
Because block chords highlight melody and rhythm in favor of intellectual ideas, I find they connect with the audience on an emotional level and make them pat their foot or want to dance. This subtle and swinging aspect of block chords was perfected by Red Garland. Garland's style was very similar to Timmons' in that the right hand states the melody while the left hand rhythmically follows but does not move melodically. Garland's use is less aggressive, and with an emphasis more on melody than rhythm. Often Garland used block chords in his soloing, but maintained a single-note approach to the melody. This makes his block chords even more cli-

mactic. Note his solo on "C-Jam Blues" from his 1957 album *Groovy* (Prestige). We can hear the similarity to a big band shout chorus. After the bass solo, Garland plays a send-off figure with the block chords, to effectively trade with himself (the rhythmic send-off is followed by a single-note solo), creating texture within the piano trio format. Garland also used block chords for intros, as at the beginning of "You're My Everything" on Miles Davis' 1957 album *Relaxin'* (Original Jazz Classics), where we can hear Davis actually request a block chord intro from Garland; and on Davis' famous studio recording of "Bye Bye Blackbird," where we can hear one of Garland's most effective block chord intros.

Oscar Peterson has used all these approaches to block chords to great effect. Listen to his solo on "Blues Etude" (from the 1966 Limelight album *Blues Etude*), where we can clearly hear the block chords as a shout chorus, complete with drum fills, in the chorus before the head out. Peterson often favored block chords for melodies as well, such as on "I've Never Been In Love Before" (from the 1961 Verve album *The Trio Live From Chicago*), or his many recordings of "Satin Doll." Emulating the Peterson example are the block chord styles of Phineas Newborn, Gene Harris, Johnny O'Neal, Benny Green and Monty Alexander.

Playing block chords is not only a commitment to melodic invention and rhythmic assuredness, but a demonstration of a pianist's technique and creative ability. I am always challenged by the possibilities block chords offer, and am constantly searching for ways to use them to involve and excite the listener. **DB**

CHAMPION FULTON IS A NEW YORK-BASED JAZZ PIANIST, VOCALIST AND EDUCATOR. SHE PERFORMS WORLDWIDE AND HAS THREE RECORDINGS TO HER CREDIT SINCE HER MOVE FROM OKLAHOMA TO NEW YORK IN 2003. FULTON'S TRIO IS KNOWN FOR PERFORMING A REPERTOIRE OF JAZZ STANDARDS AND BLUES. HER PIANO PLAYING IS INFORMED BY HER EARLY INFLUENCES, WHICH INCLUDE RED GARLAND, HAMPTON HAWES AND ERROLL GARNER.



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Embracing Change In Real Time

I believe that every living human has a personal sense of time, a signature as unique as any of the more usual means of individual identification. What singles out musicians and dancers is our developed ability to express this sense.

If you're reading this, you're likely a musician; I am, too. As musicians, our lives are important to the species as a whole. Don't let anyone tell you that you're marginal; don't allow public indifference to prey on you; don't let commerce trivialize your calling. I repeat: Our lives are important. Don't let your daily struggles erode this certainty.

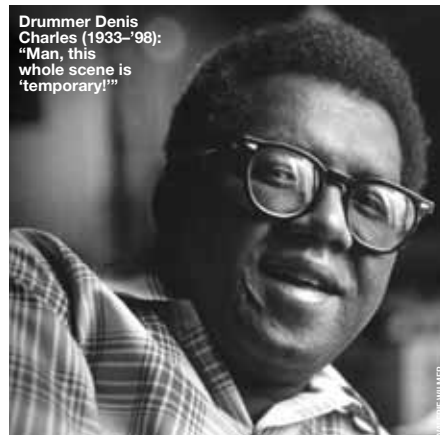
This is important, because without individual expression of time, time would become terminally confused with its measurement: the clock would rule the planet. It already does for those who don't dance or play. For the unlistening ear, music is at best a trip: a moment outside of time, blessed recreation. For us, music is our lives: We live time—a wild gift, a serious responsibility. Time is our language.

Your personal sense of time exists both prior to your experience in life and accompanies you every step of the way—it has everything to do with your choices, your destiny. When your chops are together on your instrument and your voice is truly your own, your temporal distinction can help any listener whose personality is submerged in patterns of authority, whose sense of herself depends on what others tell her. What people think they want is recreation, entertainment; but what they really both need and desire is to be themselves. We can help with that.

It might take years for you to find your voice. That can't bother you. The searching is the finding. Everybody starts out imitating someone else. The point is never to give in to the allure that surrounds imitating yourself. Forget it—that's how you sounded yesterday. That's another reason to take yourself seriously as a musician: You operate in a medium that embodies change. People need encouragement to change. We certainly can help them with that, too.

But there are additional depths to be sounded. Living as a musician is a gift; our souls know a freedom not granted to others; and the most important thing we can offer, in return, has to do with memory.

There is more to memory than information-retrieval. The hardest thing to remember is the fact that your life is limited. I believe that all definition arises out of an awareness that our lives will end. Death defines us, and we learn from that. But we also pass much of the waking day hiding from this awareness. Novelist Anthony Powell once had a character title his autobiography *Camel Ride to the Tomb*, something he once



Drummer Denis Charles (1933–98): "Man, this whole scene is 'temporary!'"

saw as a kid on a sign outside an Egyptian airport. I played with drummer Denis Charles for 25 years; I once warned him about the temporary nature of a weekly gig we had; he answered with an open-arm gesture meant to include all creation and said, "Man, this whole scene is 'temporary!'"

A musician focuses her memory on the present. Her memory allows her to make a moment of that present. That moment can be shared by all who hear what she plays. Life is every bit as temporary, but we are no longer on the "camel ride." The musical moment involves a tacit acceptance of death; it does not hide from death by killing time. Music needs time to breathe.

My guide here has always been Austrian musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl, who described hearing the succeeding tones in a melody as a matter of "freedom in prospect, necessity in retrospect." This involves memory as a dynamic process. Again, that's functionally obvious to a musician; he needn't think about it. And it's always been important.

But never more so than today, when we are inundated with information, most of it visual. At the same time, there is a consensus that our species must soon go through a change in order to survive; and our most honest critics say it is the inability to deal with death that holds us back. All the more important, then, for those gifted with music to live "melodic" lives; that is: open to the moment, if only momentarily.

Any musician knows that there's more to existence than the visual world, more to memory than data. The eye may justly be considered the window to the soul, but the ear is the portal.

We are heralds, we musicians. We can help humankind make the next big change. And just by being ourselves. **DB**

JOEL FORRESTER IS A BEBOP AND STRIDE PIANIST WHO LIVES IN NEW YORK. HE HAS WRITTEN 1,600 TUNES, INCLUDING THE THEME TO NPR'S "FRESH AIR." HIS LATEST RELEASE IS *DOWN THE ROAD ON THE RIDE* SYMBOL LABEL. WITH PHILLIP JOHNSTON, HE CO-LEADS THE MICROSCOPIC SEPTET.

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Joey DeFrancesco's Groovin' Organ Solo On 'Down The Hatch'

Jazz organists are amazing. Whereas most of us are content when we play a great solo or provide a groovin' bass line, it's in the organist's job description to do both simultaneously. On his 2006 release *Organic Vibes* (Concord), Joey DeFrancesco demonstrates an abundance of this skill. Presented here are both hands for the first three solo choruses of DeFrancesco's blues "Down The Hatch."

To start with the left hand, organists may be amused to note that the first six measures of each chorus are identical. Maybe these lines were prepared so that they could be played almost habitually, allowing DeFrancesco to concentrate more fully on his right hand. Or maybe he just wanted to start his solo with a consistency in its underpinning.

Regardless, his bass support is even, steady quarter notes. You'll also notice that there is somewhat of a formula to them: Each measure starts with a chord tone, usually the root, then with few exceptions another chord tone, and then two notes that lead to the first note of the next measure. In this way the lines not only help define the chords but create an impetus toward the next measure. In the turnarounds, where there are two chords per measure (bars 11–12 and 35–36), DeFrancesco plays chord tones exclusively, making the harmony abundantly clear.

Some curious oddities in his bass line occur at measures 7, 19 and 31, where the IV chord resolves back to the I. In all three choruses DeFrancesco plays the fifth on the down-beat (the only instances where a chord change is not initiated on the root). In measure 19, playing the B \flat on beat two makes it still sound like an inverted I chord, but in the other measures (7 and 31) his line appears to be more like an F chord than a B \flat . He seems to be implying a V resolving to I in the place in a blues where we usually have just the I. It's especially intriguing since in measures 9–10, 21–22 and 33–34 DeFrancesco is playing a V–IV (like an urban blues) where normally there would be a ii–V (in a typical jazz blues). Having the IV move up to V and resolve to I makes the V–IV that comes a bar later sound like we're coming back down the path we ascended.

As to the right hand, first notice how even these three introductory choruses are constructed in a way that builds: simple eighth-note licks with lots of space in the first chorus; less space and some trills in the second, with the introduction of a triplet at the beginning of the final phrase; and in the third chorus much less space, lots of triplets (and even 16th notes) and expanding the range upward. And



DeFrancesco accomplishes this while his right hand remains solid.

There is another curious discrepancy between his hands. Sometimes the chords outlined in the right hand aren't those that are in the left hand. The first instance occurs at the beginning of measure 4, where he plays a G diminished triad (which could be heard as the top of an E \flat 7 chord) on top, but in the bottom we hear F and A, implying an F chord. One could argue that the first half of the measure makes up an F9+, but with the intervals separated the way they are, it sounds more like an E \flat 7 lick over an F chord.

DeFrancesco uses this polychordal concept multiple times. We next hear it at the end of bar 9, where there is an A7 chord over an E (its fifth), but the lower part resolves to an E \flat , and the upper part resolves to an A natural, making the A7 sound linger over the E \flat 7. Again in measure 14 there is an E \flat 7 chord, but it's played over the G# and A in the bass, which aren't part of the E \flat 7 and only serve to resolve to the B \flat 7 in the next measure. It's as if his hands are thinking in two different ways—the bottom moving chromatically to the next chord, but the top harmonically resolving from IV to I—but both converge on the B \flat 7.

Similarly, measure 22 ends with chromatic motion in the bass line leading to B \flat , but in the lead there is an Am7 arpeggio resolving to the same chord. In bars 25 and 26 he takes this idea a little further. Though the harmony is basic-

ly B \flat , as his left hand starts climbing chromatically from E \flat to E, DeFrancesco inserts a descending E \flat triad, and then an F#m7 arpeggio, but at this point there is an F and G in his left hand.

He goes beyond this at the end of the third chorus, and plays a B \flat minor pentatonic lick on the B \flat chord in measure 34, and then in the next

two measures over the turnaround he plays F# minor pentatonic in the right hand while his left is defining a I-VI-ii-V in B \flat , chords which have very little to do with F# minor. It's as if he has a brain for each hand. **DB**

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Kawai CA93 Digital Piano *Concert Tone, Artist's Touch*

As far as authenticity goes, the Kawai CA93 digital piano has two distinct advantages working in its favor. First would be the company's 80 years of experience building fine acoustic upright pianos and grands. The other is an actual wooden soundboard that disperses the instrument's tone and makes it ring out just like a real piano being played on stage or in your living room.

While digital instruments typically utilize cone speakers that generate a highly directional sound, acoustic instruments like pianos, guitars and violins harness the properties of wood to produce a tone that resonates evenly in all directions. In the CA93's 135-watt Soundboard Speaker System, sound energy from six speakers is channeled by an electronic transducer onto a wooden soundboard, which in turn vibrates to create ambient soundwaves. The resulting non-directional sound is a detailed acoustic portrait—about as close as you can get to an actual piano, with deep, resonant bass frequencies and clean, crisp trebles. Ultra Progressive Harmonic Imaging sound technology ensures smooth tonal transitions across the keyboard and throughout its dynamic range. All 88 keys of a high-end Kawai EX grand were sampled multiple times to achieve a super accurate and subtly nuanced piano sound on the CA93.

For realistic touch, the CA93 uses the new RM3 grand action with let-off feature, which re-creates the subtle “notch” sensation felt when playing gently on the keys of a grand piano. This action uses real wooden keys with incredibly real-feeling Ivory Touch key surfaces along with a mechanical design that closely resembles the motion of Kawai's grand piano actions.



Counterweights are placed at the front of the bass keys to provide the natural balance of an acoustic piano action.

In addition to about two dozen beautiful acoustic and electric piano sounds, the CA93 has a broad selection of studio-quality instrumental sounds including 16 organs (jazz, drawbar, pipe, etc.) a handful of harpsichords and mallets, orchestral strings, vocals/pads and guitars/basses—80 sounds in all. Any two sounds can be played on the keyboard simultaneously, and there is a split mode where two different instrument sounds can be played on opposite sides of the keyboard. The keyboard's 192-note polyphony is simply astounding.

USB-to-device and USB-to-host capabilities provide a world of opportunity, including recording and playing digital audio, storing songs and playing song files, and connectivity to computers. Users can save, play and load

songs recorded in the CA93's internal song format as well as play standard MIDI, WAV and MP3 files. Other useful jacks include two headphone jacks, MIDI connections and audio input/output jacks for connecting to sound equipment and recording systems.

There are several educational features on the CA93 that make it appealing to beginners and novice players, and it even plays a decent selection of classic piano pieces and standard religious hymns all on its own. But this a fine, expressive instrument with a beautiful conservatory design and exceptional concert sound, fit for a true artist's touch. And remember, this is no portable keyboard: You'll want to dedicate a space for it in your theater, home, church or studio.

—Ed Enright

Ordering info: kawaius.com

Yamaha CP5 Stage Piano *Powered To Perform*

Yamaha has a history of making revolutionary stage pianos that have changed the way professional keyboardists play, including the launch of the CP70 and CP80 in the 1970s and the DX7 in the 1980s. With its completely redesigned lineup of CP Series professional stage



pianos—the CP1, CP5 and CP50—Yamaha has again redefined the expectations of what the ultimate stage piano should be. All three

models are full-size, 88-note keyboards offering 128-note polyphony and full USB-to-host/USB-to-device connectivity.

All three models also use Spectral Component Modeling tone generation technology to their advantage, recreating the sounds of Yamaha acoustic and vintage electronic pianos with pinpoint precision. This highly advanced system replicates the instrument's physical components for unbelievably realistic tone that factors in the hardness of the hammers, resonance of the soundboard and the striking position of the hammers. It also relies on granular parametric data that translates every aspect of the player's touch into an expression of tone.

"Our new Spectral Component Modeling process in the CP lineup reproduces the sound and expressiveness of acoustic and vintage electronic pianos better than any technology has ever done," said Athan Billias, director of marketing for Yamaha's Pro Audio and Combo Division. "For professional players on stage, the new CP series sets a new standard."

I auditioned the CP5 stage piano, which I performed on during an outdoor solo-piano gig and then again in the practice room at home. The CP5 represents the middle of the line, offering serious tone-modeling power at a reasonable price for the professional market. Hefty in build but not prohibitively heavy, it includes 12 acoustic and vintage electric piano sounds and 305 additional sounds and effects. I enjoyed the super-smooth response and balanced action

of the CP5's NW-Stage weighted keys, which feel an awful lot like the real thing. I also appreciated having the ability to EQ my signal output directly from the front CP5's front panel.

I was able to process my vocals through the CP5—you can plug a mic directly into the keyboard and access all of the onboard effects, as well as control your vocal levels without needing a separate mixer. The keyboard features plenty of high-quality Yamaha reverbs along with many of the effects algorithms from the company's Motif XS line of workstations.

From the output section on the back of the CP5, you can connect to your amp or mixer in stereo via balanced XLR-type cables—very cool. Not only is this a more secure way to connect than quarter-inch or RCA jacks, but the signal is notably cleaner and more stable in gig conditions. Regular L-R quarter-inch output jacks are another option, if you prefer using standard instrument cables.

A customization function on the CP5 lets you build and edit your own acoustic and electric pianos, so if you're interested in a little sonic experimentation, or even serious synthesis, you're not limited to just the presets here. A convenient USB drive makes it a breeze to load and save data using a flash memory device. Recording and playback options for MIDI and audio are available, as well as 100 built-in

rhythm patterns. (MSRP: \$3,299.)

The flagship keyboard of the series, the CP1, recreates 17 Yamaha acoustic and vintage electronic pianos, including the CFIIS, S6B, the CP80, Rd1, Rd II, Wr and the DX7. Like the CP5, it features NW-Stage weighted wooden keys and offers rhythm patterns, record/playback function and the ability to customize sounds. (MSRP: \$5,999.)

The CP50 includes six acoustic and electric piano sounds, plus 215 additional sounds and effects. Its keyboard consists of Yamaha's Graded Hammer Action keys, a favorite of professional players for many years now. (MSRP: \$2,199.)

The new CP models are all loaded with Virtual Circuit Modeling effects that replicate the pedals, amplifiers, compressors, EQ and other equipment that played an essential role in creating and defining the sounds of the vintage keyboards represented in this series. They are great at splitting and layering sounds, and their built-in rhythms are totally suitable for live applications, so you can easily get a full ensemble sound as a solo performer. One especially cool performance feature is the CP line's Master Keyboard function, which lets you set up four virtual zones and assign them to four different tone generators, including other MIDI instruments. —*Ed Enright*

Ordering info: yamaha.com

HardWire HT-6 Polyphonic Tuner

One Strum and You're Done

There are a multitude of choices when it comes to chromatic pedal tuners for guitar and bass. Although varying in design and features, they all operate in basically the same way: by plucking an individual string to display its degree of sharpness or flatness. Taking a leap forward in tuner technology, HardWire has introduced the HT-6 Polyphonic Tuner, which can actually display the pitch of all your strings simultaneously with one quick strum, making tuning faster and easier.



DigiTech's HardWire division currently offers a full line of professional-level effects pedals, and the HT-6 is the company's second offering in the tuner arena following the HT-2. Its ability to sense multiple strings comes

from technology developed by recently acquired 3dB Research, a company specializing in music and voice processing.

As with all HardWire pedals, the HT-6 is built to be road-worthy, encased in a rugged metal housing. The LED display is somewhat unique due to the tuner's polyphonic capabilities and features a separate line of indicators for each string, with six in total. When plugged in, the unit displays the current reference pitch for A, which can be fine-tuned

between 436–445kHz or even lowered as much as five half steps. The HT-6 currently supports five different tuning modes: standard guitar, drop D guitar, plus 4-, 5- and 6-string basses.

If the tuner is off, your guitar signal remains

pure as the HT-6 implements true analog bypass. When switched on, the output signal gets muted. Also, the HT-6 has a DC output voltage jack for powering other pedals in your chain, up to 1 amp total when using the recommended PS0913DC power adapter.

When tuning one string at a time, the HT-6 functions in a standard manner, displaying the note name and showing pitch as a series of LED lights with the center indicating a correct note. Using the polyphonic capability, a strum across your instrument will light up all six lines at once, immediately showing which strings are sharp, flat or in tune. The large display panel and color-coded LEDs make the unit easy to read from a distance and in low-light situations. The HT-6 is surprisingly quick and accurate in sensing all the notes of a guitar or bass. Another great feature is the fret offset, which automatically compensates for lowered and raised tunings, or when using a capo. —*Keith Baumann*

Ordering info: hardwirepedals.com

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Cymbal Masters has released Virtually Erskine–Peter Erskine Drum Sample Library, which features two of Peter Erskine’s personal drum kits formatted for BFD2 and BFD Eco. The company also launched Virtually Erskine–Peter Erskine MIDI Groove Library, which has more than 400 MIDI files formatted for BFD2, BFD Eco and MIDI. It can be used with any GM-compatible drum software or hardware. **More info:** bosporuscymbals.com



COMPACT KEYS

Korg has launched the microPIANO, a compact, convenient and portable piano for players of all levels. Featuring 61 keys, the microPIANO borrows design elements from a grand piano, including an adjustable lid. The instrument gets its sound from Korg’s flagship digital pianos and offers 61 authentic sounds. It is available in black, white or red.

More info: korg.com

HEAVYWEIGHT PROTECTION

Reunion Blues has unveiled a heavyweight violin case built on a foundation of shock-absorbing Flexoskeleton walls lined with reinforced impact panels. The inside of the case features a multilayer foam suspension system that cradles the violin. An adjustable locking strap helps prevent movement when the case is bumped or dropped.

More info: reunionblues.com





SOUND ARMY

Casio's WK-7500 keyboard puts an army of sounds at players' fingertips. The 76-key instrument comes loaded with 800 tones that range from vintage pianos to a Chinese erhu. The WK-7500 also has 250 preset rhythms, including rock, Latin, jazz and classical. Plus, it has a 17-track sequencer that can save song files to an SDHC card or as an audio recording. Casio's free Data Manager 6.0 software can convert those songs into a WAV file for burning onto a CD. **More info: casio.com**

PORTABLE INTERFACE

Apogee Electronics has released Duet 2. The portable audio interface features a top-panel, full-color high-resolution OLED display; balanced outputs, independent speaker and headphone outputs; and configurable touch pads. Duet 2 can record from sampling rates of 44.1–192kHz.

More info: apogeedigital.com



STOMPING DINOSAUR

T-Rex Engineering has introduced an array of new guitar effects pedals. New models include the Gull Triple Voice Wah (with light and heavy wah options plus "yoy-yoy" effect), the Hobo Drive (a two-stage preamp), the SpinDoctor-2 (an overdrive preamp) and four new affordable Tonebug stomp boxes: Tonebug Booster, Tonebug Fuzz, Tonebug SenseWah and Tonebug Totenschläger. **More info: t-rex-effects.com**

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Niles North Celebrates 20 Years of Vocal Jazz

More than 90 languages are spoken across the school district that houses Niles North High School. But over the past 20 years, one common language has resonated above all others—and that language is vocal jazz.

Since 1991, the Skokie, Ill., high school's vocal jazz program has grown from one small group to three ensembles with a growing international reputation. But to current members and former students, the program is still a family. In May, "family members" packed the school auditorium for a three-hour, 20th anniversary celebration.

The event showcased all three groups, concluding with an onstage performance of Kirby Shaw's arrangement of "Bridge Over Troubled Water" by 130 current members and alumni.

That version of "Bridge" is the most recent milestone of Director Daniel Gregerman's efforts to build one of the nation's top high school vocal jazz programs. Gregerman started developing interest in teaching vocal jazz while getting his master's degree at Western Michigan University. When he began teaching choir at Niles North in 1991, the entire choral program had just 32 students, prompting him to revamp it.

"I realized that the school choral program was in dire need of being rebuilt," Gregerman said. "As I started designing the program, I knew there was going to be a need for students to sing in a setting that allowed jazz, pop, rock, etc."

He began expanding choir repertoire during regular class time and also launched an extra-curricular vocal jazz program. "My feelings were confirmed that vocal jazz was a vital part of a comprehensive choral program," he said. "So I started on that immediately when I began at Niles North."

The school's first vocal jazz group, Take One, began with a dozen singers and Gregerman

accompanying on piano. The group's popularity skyrocketed to the point that Gregerman found himself turning students away.

To solve the problem, he formed Sound Check in 1996 and—due to a continued surplus of interested vocalists—added Harmonic Motion in 2007.

"I've always believed in giving students as many opportunities as possible," he said.

While Gregerman continues to direct Take One, he's recruited alumni to direct the other two ensembles—currently, Logan Farris and Clara Wong direct Sound Check and Harmonic Motion.

Gregerman treats the ensembles like professional singing groups with serious rehearsal time and tour schedules. Take One and Sound Check have been invited to perform at Western Michigan's Gold Company Invitational Vocal Jazz Festival, and all three groups tour to the Millikin University Vocal Jazz Festival.

Internationally, Take One has toured Denmark, Germany, Mexico, Sweden, and Switzerland. In Switzerland, the group was the only high school vocal jazz ensemble chosen to perform at the 33rd annual Montreux Jazz Festival. The group has also been honored by DownBeat, receiving four Student Music Awards in the past decade.

"The skills and confidence I gained through doing vocal jazz strongly influenced my choice to pursue a career in the performing arts," said Julie Burt Nichols, a former member of Take One in the 1990s. The Chicago-based musical theater actor directly relates her career skills to the ones she developed in Take One.

As the program celebrates its 20th anniversary, Gregerman still said the program "does not seem to be slowing down."

"We still need to turn people away at auditions each year," he said. —Stephanie Drucker

World Music: Students from Berklee College of Music along with Newton North and Needham High Schools participated in a Kenyan cultural exchange program from June 24 to July 15. In partnership with local organization Global Youth Groove (GYG), participants spent two weeks in Kakamega, western Kenya, where they taught music lessons, gave additional workshops and learned about traditional Kenyan music. They also donated a full ensemble setup and eight MacBook Pros to a local community center.

Indie Prophecy: In other Berklee news, student-run label Jazz Revelation Records (JRR) recently released *Oracle*, its eighth album. The CD showcases original compositions by top Berklee players from such countries as Cuba, Israel, Italy, Mozambique, Norway and the United States. The album also features Habana Entrance, led by Dayramir Gonzalez, the first resident of Cuba to be awarded a full Berklee scholarship.

Details: berklee.edu

Revue Album: KPLU 88.5 has released *KPLU School of Jazz-Volume 7*, a compilation CD of Western Washington state's best high school bands. The project stemmed from the radio station's partnership with local high schools and middle schools for its jazz mentorship program. The album also includes such guest artists as David Marriott, Chad McCullough and Jay Thomas. All proceeds benefit Western Washington state's school music programs.

Details: kplu.org

Class Act: On Sept. 11, New York-based vocalist Fay Victor hosted a Jazzschool master class that explores creative jazz vocalization techniques. During the daylong workshop, Victor used her own repertoire to demonstrate how sheet music is interpreted. In addition to directing exercises in lyric writing and collaboration, she also allowed students to develop their own material.

Details: jazzschool.edu



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Orrin Evans

“I go head-first for a lot of things,” pianist Orrin Evans once said. “Wherever the music takes me, I’m going there.” That Evans continues to embody this philosophy in his musical production is apparent on the recent Posi-Tone releases *Freedom*, a trio date; *Captain Black Big Band*, with his long-standing large ensemble; and *The End Of Fear*, by the collective quartet TarBaby. This was Evans’ first Blindfold Test.

Marc Cary

“Round Midnight” (from *Focus Trio: Live 2009*, Motéma, 2009) Cary, piano; David Ewell, bass; Sameer Gupta, drums.

I’m probably wrong, but I’m thinking Vijay Iyer—he did a record where he took some commonly known tunes and did interesting things with them. I’m enjoying the approach, playing over the pedal tone for the whole vibe, but I’d like to hear it finally release into the actual tune and hear the harmonic structure of the original. I’d probably do something like this if it was live. It’s live? OK, then it might not be Vijay. Now I’m confused. You got me. I’m enjoying the bass player and drummer—it sounds like an Indian drummer. 3 stars.

Eric Reed

“26-2” (from *Here*, MaxJazz, 2006) Reed, piano; Rodney Whitaker, bass; Willie Jones III, drums.

I’m not sure who the drummer is, but I’m loving him. I love the total approach to the song. I love the piano player’s ideas, his approach to form, playing the tradition of the piece, the chord changes, the harmonic structure, and then being able to stretch and take it into this other area, but it’s still swinging. I haven’t heard this person, whoever it is. The drummer isn’t Bill Stewart, but has a vibe like him. 4 stars. Eric? I thought of him because of the tradition, but I haven’t heard him play like that in a long time.

Alexander von Schlippenbach

“Off Your Coat Hassan” (from *Twelve Tone Tales, Vol. 2*, Intakt, 2005) von Schlippenbach, piano.

The piano sounds great. It sounded like it was recorded either in an open room, or live—a great sound. Well, at least I know it’s male—I can hear the voice. Is it Uri Caine? I wouldn’t have said that until he did those little clusters. Dave Burrell? No? I hate using the term “out.” But sometimes more free or out players can sound as if they don’t have any musical knowledge. I can hear the history of the music and instrument in this person’s playing. I can hear some piano like a mug! No idea who it is. 5 stars.

Matthew Shipp

“Autumn Leaves” (from *4D*, Thirsty Ear, 2010) Shipp, piano.

I’m enjoying listening to this piano player on “Autumn Leaves”—playing at it, touching at it. I can’t figure out who it is. [song ends] I’m not sure what I feel about that. The player sounded as if they could swing, but kept fooling me by doing some squirrely type shit. Have you ever seen that squirrel run down the telephone wire and always look like it’s about to fall? I have a way of playing like that, but this player was doing it, and I couldn’t tell if they were trying to be funny. I wasn’t really convinced by it. 3 stars.

Aaron Goldberg

“Shed” (from *Home*, Sunnyside, 2010) Goldberg, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Eric Harland, drums.

It’s a great arrangement, very well executed. Even though it’s just a vamp right now for all intents and purposes, pianistically what he or she is



doing with the time signature is really bad stuff—technically a great player. I’m thinking either Manuel Valera or Luis Perdomo. No? Then I’m totally lost. That’s [Clarence] Penn on drums. It’s not? Jeff Ballard? No? That drum solo reminds me of Penn. I like the rhythm section. I love the tune and the arrangement. It’s not Danilo [Pérez], is it? I said that because of the dual piano and bass lines. 5 stars. [afterwards] Aaron was the first thing that came to mind. What threw me off was the Latin tinge of the song.

Geri Allen

“Dancing Mystic Poets At Twilight” (from *Flying Toward The Sound*, Motéma, 2010) Allen, piano.

I love the opening. Whoever this is, is swinging. Wherever this was recorded, the piano sounds amazing. It sounded like a totally improvised composition, which was great. I loved the balls—the integrity and intensity—that the piano player played with. This person definitely had a tremendous touch and control of the instrument, wasn’t scared to play it. 5 stars. [afterwards] Agghh. I should have known that! I was thinking younger. Also, I was hearing these Monk things, and the two people who really deal with that approach, to me, are Rodney Kendrick and Geri. Geri plays with some balls. I’m not calling her masculine in any way—balls are gender-neutral when it comes to that.

The Kevin Hays Trio

“Cheryl” (from *You’ve Got A Friend*, Jazzeyes, 2006) Hays, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

This is killing, right from the beginning. I love the drummer—he sounds like someone coming out of Jack DeJohnette. [blowing section] The only thing that’s bothering me about this is that they decaffeinated the harmonic structure. It’s a blues. Come on, get stank with it! When the bass first comes in, it’s too “Bright Size Life”-ish. I love “Bright Size Life.” But I don’t want to hear that on “Cheryl.” Give me my black coffee—caffeine! Ah, that’s Bill Stewart. See, there’s an example of someone a little bit older who’s created a sound. [toward final passage] I like this more than what they originally went to harmonically. 4 stars. **DB**

THE “BLINDFOLD TEST” IS A LISTENING TEST THAT CHALLENGES THE FEATURED ARTIST TO DISCUSS AND IDENTIFY THE MUSIC AND MUSICIANS WHO PERFORMED ON SELECTED RECORDINGS. THE ARTIST IS THEN ASKED TO RATE EACH TUNE USING A 5-STAR SYSTEM. NO INFORMATION IS GIVEN TO THE ARTIST PRIOR TO THE TEST.

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