60th Annual Critics Poll

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AUGUST 2012 inside

ON THE COVER

60th Annual Critics Poll

Cover photography of Vijay Iyer shot by Bill Douthart in New York City. Above images are this year's Critics Poll Hall of Fame inductees (from left): Paul Motian, Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt.

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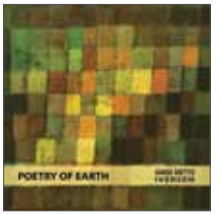

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A Date with History

Welcome to the 60th anniversary of the DownBeat Critics Poll. It's one of our most exciting polls in years—not just because of its historic nature, but also because of some incredible, record-breaking artistic recognition.

First, let's delve into a bit of history. The first Critics Poll came out in DownBeat's Aug. 26, 1953, edition. Twenty-four critics voted, but the term "critic" must used loosely. Certainly, many of the voters were bona fide music journalists: DownBeat editors like Jack Tracy and Charles Emge voted, as did DownBeat scribes Nat Hentoff, Leonard Feather, Ralph J. Gleason, George Hoefer and Don Freeman. So did other members of the jazz press, such as Ebony's Dan Burley, Metronome's George Simon and Barry Ulanov, and Record Changer's William Grauer Jr.

Critics Poll No. 1.

But the world of jazz criticism was still very small in the early '50s. There wasn't much *press* in the jazz press.

So, the rest of the critics for that first poll came from the pool of professional jazz fans of the day—disc jockeys, club owners and record executives. This now-historic group included George Avakian, the legendary Columbia Records producer; Richard Boch, the founder of Pacific Jazz Records; Al "Jazzbo" Collins, the famed DJ at WNEW in New York; Holmes "Daddie-o" Daylie from WAIT in Chicago; Dave Dexter Jr., a former DownBeat editor who made his name at Capitol Records; and Nesuhi Ertegun, the founder of Atlantic Records (but his affiliation for poll purposes was with Good Time Jazz and Contemporary Records). Other voters were Frank Holzfeind, owner of The Blue Note in Chicago; Morris Levy, the owner of Birdland in New York; Fred Reynolds, DJ at WGN in Chicago; Jimmy Lyons, DJ from WKGO in San Francisco (and future founder of the Monterey Jazz Festival); John Steiner, then owner of Paramount Records; producer Bob Thiele, then working as A&R director for the Coral and Brunswick labels; and the godfather of American jazz festivals, George Wein, who owned the famed club Storyville in Boston at the time.

The poll had 26 categories. Duke Ellington won the big band honors. Dave Brubeck took combo honors. Chet Baker, Paul Desmond, Billy Taylor, Gerry Mulligan, "Charlie" Mingus, Johnny Smith and Art Blakey were all "New Star" winners on their instruments. Not a bad year for new stars.

Fast-forward 60 years. For the 2012 poll, 186 critics from around the globe voted—by far, the largest voting turnout in the poll's history. The results show more than 1,000 artists or acts receiving votes in 61 categories.

Just like 1953, it's been a good year for new stars. Pianist Vijay Iyer leads the way, winning in a record five categories—Jazz Artist of the Year, Jazz Album (for his trio's *Accelerando*), Jazz Group, Pianist and Rising Star Composer.

Right behind him is another five-category winner, Robert Glasper. The Robert Glasper Experiment was voted the Beyond Group of the Year, and its release *Black Radio* was named the top Beyond Album; Glasper was voted the Rising Star Jazz Artist and Rising Star Pianist, while his trio was named the Rising Star Jazz Group.

This poll is an obsession, a labor of love by voters to mark what has happened during the past year in improvised music. It's complicated. It's comprehensive. It's expansive. And it's fascinating. Just like the musicians we cover. **DB**

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Chords & Discords

LeDonne's Dues

It took far longer than it should have, but I was pleased to finally see an article about Mike LeDonne in DownBeat (Players, June). Mike is a "dues payer" and a profound musician in so many ways. Because he has over two decades of recordings on the Criss Cross Jazz, HighNote and Savant labels, a far more retrospective essay would have been more informative. Mike is indeed "The Groover" on the Hammond B3, but he is a complete musician in so many other ways. Some will say he is *the* Cedar Walton piano disciple of his generation, and to an extent, that's true. But Mike has taken Cedar's influence and extended it much further in terms of both harmonic and rhythmic sophistication. He is a prolific composer whose works are recorded and performed by a bevy of New York A-listers.

BILL BENJAMIN
BILTMORE LAKE, N.C.

Editor's Note: Our critics agree with you: Mike LeDonne was voted Rising Star Organist in the Critics Poll.

Too High for Low

I rarely let reviews sway my music choices. However, after your 5-star review (and watching it on the jazz sales charts for the past month or so), I broke down and got Kat Edmonson's album *Way Down Low* (Reviews, June). I must say I was pleased but not overwhelmed. I'd give it 3½, maybe 4 stars, tops. The original songs do have appeal, but Edmonson's Blossom Dearie-inspired, precious vocal style comes off as too cute by half. Still, it's much better than another vocal album that got 5 stars in DownBeat, Lisa Sokolov's *Presence* (Reviews, June 2004), which I listened to once and promptly filed away. For my money, the best vocal jazz album so far this year is Gregory Porter's *Be Good.* Not only does it deserve 5 stars, but it may wind up in my Readers Poll voting as the Album of the Year.

FRANK FEDERICO
SAN FRANCISCO

Slanted Hall?

Your Hall of Fame continues year after year to omit or even avoid consideration of many jazz giants, including Sonny Stitt, Phil Woods, Joe Morello, Shelly Manne, Anita O'Day, Eddie Daniels, Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey and many others. Your current Hall membership is heavily biased toward avant-gardists, many of whom have never had a large fan base, or who have questionable instrumental skills. All of the above names not only have unimpeachable technical competence, but have enjoyed relatively large record sales and fan followings, all while winning the deepest respect of their


Mike LeDonne
MARK SHELDON

peers throughout the industry. Furthermore, they have popularized jazz worldwide, helping *all* jazz musicians. Contrast the above names with some already in your Hall: Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, Frank Zappa, Muhal Richard Abrams, Albert Ayler, Jimi Hendrix, Steve Lacy and Ornette Coleman. I feel that DownBeat's reputation has suffered in the eyes of the music community and general public alike. Critics must be more musically astute.

RICK SCHILLING
DEPT. OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

Editor's Note: We certainly do not discourage any critic from voting for any artist for the DownBeat Hall of Fame. You'll be happy to see that Sonny Stitt was elected into the Hall of Fame this year by our Veterans Committee.

Corrections

- In the June issue, the personnel listing for the review of *Vol. 1* by Michael Veal & Aqua Ife omitted the names of electric guitarists Alex Kennedy-Grant and Ben Tyree.
- In the Student Music Awards section of the June issue, the High School Winner in the Blues/Pop/Rock Group category should have been listed as the Cary-Grove Jazz Combo. The members are Steve Bernstein, Erin Claridy, Sarah Gebhard, Bobby Lane, Joey Martin, Bryce Sova and Spencer Weidner.
- Also, in the Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble category of the Student Music Awards, the name of one of the High School Outstanding Performances ensembles, Kaleidoscope, was misspelled.

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

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Inside

Regina Carter's Cultural Tapestry


Regina Carter
MICHAEL WEINTROB

While in residence at New York's Jazz Standard April 19–22, Regina Carter, winner in the 2012 Critics Poll violin category, performed selections from her 2010 CD *Reverse Thread* (E1 Entertainment) along with a few standards.

Reverse Thread reinterprets the traditional sounds of African folk music through contemporary jazz while staying true to the original harmonies. During Saturday night's late set, Carter's ensemble opened with the melancholic number "Kothbiro," by Kenyan musician Ayub Ogada. The synergy between Carter's lyrical touch and Yacouba Sissoko's steady rhythm on kora, a 21-string harp from West Africa, was lush and palpable.

Carter later tackled the Jimmy McHugh standard "I Can't Believe That You're In Love With Me," complemented by Will Holshouser on accordion. There was a gypsy-like quality to this song in that the musicians took an "anything goes" approach, notably Holshouser and Carter, who balanced strong phrasing with gaiety. Their call-and-response playfulness reappeared on "Zerapicky," another lively number from Madagascar. A noticeable Zydeco influence was heard in Holshouser's accordion and Carter's violin, which built up a wonderful crescendo near the end. Over the course of the set, Carter took an eclectic mixture of sounds, influences and instruments and transformed them into an audible tapestry.

DownBeat recently sat down with Carter to discuss the *Reverse Thread* album and to learn about how she continues to find sources of inspiration.

How did growing up in Detroit impact you and your music?

Detroit was a culturally rich city, and so many people migrated to the city because of Motown and the automotive industry. At a very young age, I was exposed to a lot of different cultures of music without ever having to leave the city—my brothers were playing Motown music and I was studying European classical music. My mom took me to hear the symphony and see the ballet. So I feel like I've internalized a lot of those sounds and [get a feeling of] joy from a lot of different styles of music. And I feel like that comes out in the music that I play and in the projects that I choose to do.

When did you first venture into jazz?

When I was in high school, one of my closest friends, a jazz vocalist named Carla Cook, brought in a record by Jean-Luc Ponty, Noel Pointer and Stéphane Grappelli. So my first introduction to jazz was by way of three violinists. I had no idea that there would be any other music for violin. And I was totally blown away by this other music. I wanted to do it. I would listen to these records of these three violinists and start to learn their solos and the tunes by ear and then put a band together. When I studied Suzuki, my teacher introduced us to improvisation, not jazz improvisation, but just being off the paper. Jean Rupert, our teacher, would make up a melody, and when she tapped you on the shoulder, you had to pick up where she left off and continue with the melody in the same style and have it make sense. I think I loved the fact that I could improvise and have my own voice. That's what attracted me to jazz.

Early in your career, you also worked with more mainstream pop acts like Billy Joel, Ms. Lauryn Hill, even the "Queen of Soul," Aretha Franklin. Has it always been easy for you to jump from different genres of music?

I have to really give credit to the Suzuki method for the ease with which I feel like I'm able to kind of move between languages, because that method stresses ear training. Like when people take a language immersion class, basically, that's what Suzuki is. It's not just learning the words or the notes, but in a specific genre, it's learning how those notes are pronounced. I think because of my ear I'm able to sometimes pick things up and not feel bashful about it. There's more to learning music, of course, than just hearing it and trying to imitate it. I always believe that if you really want to learn a culture of music, you need to under-

Riffs

A Musical Mind: Myra Melford received the 2012 Alpert Award in the Arts for Music, presented by the Herb Alpert Foundation and California Institute of the Arts. For the 18th annual edition of the award, the pianist and composer was honored with a $75,000 prize at a ceremony at the foundation's headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif.

Sharing is Caring: The Clayton Brothers have unveiled The Gathering, a recording project funded by fans through ArtistShare. The group, which consists of trumpeter Terell Stafford, pianist Gerald Clayton, drummer Obed Calvaire, trombonist Wycliffe Gordon and vibraphonist Stefon Harris, will showcase their entire creative process for fans to watch through the ArtistShare site.

Box Tops: Legacy Recordings has released three Complete Album Collections from Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk Quartet and Weather Report. Available July 30, the reissued multi-disc box sets focus on each artist's complete discography from Columbia and RCA or focus on a particular period.

Going Green: The Hermitage Artist Retreat and Philadelphia's Greenfield Foundation presented the 2012 Greenfield Prize to pianist Vijay Iyer during the Greenfield Prize Weekend in Sarasota, Fla. Iyer received a commission of $30,000 to create a new composition.

Guitar Great: Chicago-based guitarist Pete Cosey died on May 30 at age 68. Cosey was widely known for his work with Miles Davis during the early 1970s on such albums as *Agharta*, *Pangaea* and *Get Up With It*. A seasoned Chess Records session player, he appeared on classic recordings by Howlin' Wolf, Etta James and Muddy Waters.

stand its history and everything about it—not just the sound.

Let's talk about *Reverse Thread*.

When I first started working on that project, I had a completely different musical idea in mind. And that tends to be the case when I think back on most albums. I start off down one path and end up somewhere completely different. But it's OK because the music leads me where I need to be. So I walked into the World Music Institute to find some music for this other idea I had, and this woman just happened to ask me, "Have you ever heard this collection of music from the Ugandan Jews?" And I said, "No, I didn't even know that there were Jews in Uganda." She said it was absolutely breathtaking. "Whatever else you buy, you have to take this, too." And the recordings were breathtaking. I wanted to learn more. So I went back there and bought all kinds of music from all over the continent, not looking for a connection at all with the music, just buying things and listening. And I decided just to concentrate [solely] on music from the continent, which is huge, so I could barely scratch the surface. And I pretty much made the instrumentation choices before I started choosing the music. I had every instrument in place except for the kora—I originally had guitar. Although I love the guitar and have it on a couple of tunes on the record, there was another instrument I was looking for and I wasn't sure what. And John Blake, a jazz violinist and one of my mentors, his sister recommended Yacouba [Sissoko]. Yacouba, from the jump, was just so gracious and nice. He came in and it was a perfect fit.

Are there other sounds that you would like to explore on future projects?

My next project I'm working on is music from the South, which I'm doing my research on now. I'm particularly concentrating on Alabama, which is where my father's family is from. My grandfather was a coal miner there. You start looking at the history, and it still ties into *Reverse Thread* because of the slave trade, where a lot of slaves wound up in the South. And there's also a huge influx of Irish musicians who settled in the South, music from other parts of the world, and these other styles of music and sounds grew from that. Alabama has such a huge influence on a lot of music—rock 'n' roll, boogie-woogie, the doo-wop sound. So it's still the same "thread," but just coming back on this side of the water. This record was an original idea I had before the *Reverse Thread* album.

What else lies ahead for Regina Carter?

I'm like a kid in a candy store when it comes to music, but I'll be working and touring with pianist/singer Joe Jackson coming up this fall. I like being a sideman, and I don't get many opportunities to do that.

—Shannon J. Effinger

Caught

James Farm Delivers Ear Candy at Yoshi's Oakland

Jazz is complicated, and within its technical intricacies, it can often be devoid of traditionally "dulcet" tones. Apparently, James Farm never got that memo. Through Joshua Redman's sax, even the hardest bop line glides like the oboe in *Peter And The Wolf*. Similarly, bassist Matt Penman delivers the same honeyed tone with or without the bow, while drummer Eric Harland mitigates his endless creativity with an equally endless supply of tact. Only pianist Aaron Parks broke with the "sweet" theme at Yoshi's in Oakland this spring when he laid a synthesizer, a recent addition, on top of the piano. "I guess I could have practiced with it before the show," Parks later explained. "But why do that when you can practice onstage?"

Formed in 2009, James Farm is in the midst of a tour that will take them from California to Rotterdam, Tokyo and the Caribbean. The band's Oakland set was entirely original, featuring a few tunes so new that band members pulled out sheet music. "It's a process of meeting the tunes and getting to know them, especially onstage," Redman explained after the show. "That means getting to know what they need from us but also what we need from them."

James Farm never lost sight of the accessibility that has come to characterize the group. It might be smooth, but as Penman said, "Every night is a workshop." *—Zoe Young*


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Silence is Golden at Burgeoning Listening-Only Music Venues


Jon Lorentz
BOB MANLEY

Jon Lorentz wanted to bring jazz to his Laconia, N.H., community; somewhere people could hear great music. But when he began producing concerts in 2011 as "NH Jazz Presents," he found that music wasn't always customers' top priority.

"A great room becomes not-so-great when a couple tables decide they're not there for the music," Lorentz says. "Even if people are just hanging out at the bar and talking, it can drive away the folks that are coming there to listen."

Lorentz thus altered his approach. NH Jazz Presents—which produces shows at Studio 99 in Nashua and at a rehabilitated barn in Brandon, Vt., as well as Pitman's Freight Room in Laconia (though at press time the Laconia venue was set to move to Blackstone's Lounge)—has adopted a listening-room policy. No conversation, no cell phones, no cameras and no texting are permitted. "It's cutting down on distractions so that people can get lost in the music a little bit," he says.

The concept doesn't exist in a vacuum. New York and Chicago establishments have long had "no-talking" policies while the music played, but NH Jazz Presents is part of a growing trend of jazz listening rooms outside those meccas. Listening-room concert series have been presented in Richmond, Va., and Baton Rouge, La. There are venues in Annapolis, Md., and St. Augustine, Fla.; recently, a listening room launched in Cape Town, South Africa.

Jackson, Miss., is the home of The Yellow Scarf: a venue based in an old photography studio, owned by a partnership that includes vocalists Cassandra Wilson and Rhonda Richmond. They brought with them an audience already developed from Richmond's residence at a local coffee shop. "We started producing our own shows there, strictly for listening," she recalls. "And people would bring their own bottles, their own snacks, and they would just come in and listen to the music. So it grew out of that."

"That's the beauty of this," Wilson adds. "We just started drawing those people who wanted to come and strictly listen to the music."

Tony Falco, owner of The Falcon in Marlboro, N.Y. (about 90 minutes' drive from Manhattan), has cultivated a similarly attentive audience. "The people correct those around them, and I have a good listening audience," he says. "It's not a hundred percent, but nothing is. We have a bar with sliding doors to close it off, and if people want to talk we invite them to go in there." Patrons are equally receptive to the New York City artists and to the local musicians in the upstate Hudson Valley, Falco adds.

Lorentz also books a combination of regional and national artists. But he's had to take a harder line: It's not merely a listening room, it's listening only. "Just last night up in Vermont, I saw a woman try to take pictures with her iPad, holding it up in the air. Of course, I talked to her and told her what was going on." Lorentz has, on occasion, asked uncooperative customers to leave. Harsh enforcement, however, hasn't diminished his audience: "I'm gonna see a good portion of the community tonight in Laconia."

Artists, too, love the concept. Falco, who pays musicians from a donation box in the Falcon, finds they're usually happy with the results and thrilled to come back. Lorentz, who has hosted name players like Dave Liebman and Kenny Werner, notes that "they usually comment from the stage, 'Wow. You guys are a great crowd!' Because they know people are there for them and for the show."

With a record of both success and acclaim from artists and audiences alike, listening rooms are here to stay—and, perhaps, point the business side of jazz into a new direction for the future, where the music trumps all.

—Michael J. West


Danilo Pérez (left) and Wayne Shorter

FRAN KAUFMAN

Caught

Shorter Quartet Delves Deep into 'Comprovisation'

An hour before pianist Danilo Pérez went onstage with the Wayne Shorter Quartet on April 28 at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater, he was asked what the group would be playing. He laughed, "We never know, man." One might find it hard to imagine playing New York's foremost jazz venue and not having a clue about the set list. But for Shorter's sidemen—Pérez, bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade—it's all in a night's work.

The quartet specializes in music that seems impossible to play, unless you happen to be a member. Of course, they could rely on Shorter's formidable body of work, but apparently that's not enough of a challenge. Instead, they create new music every night, an in-the-moment mix of hair-raising group improv with occasional references to Shorter's book. They like to call it "comprovisation." Although the style is nominally post-bop, the music is as unique as the virtuosos who play it.

More importantly, it is the realization of Shorter's singular vision. Over the course of a six-decade career, his music often has been called cerebral; actually, it's metaphysical. His creations clearly come from a deeply spiritual place where nothing is more important than the moment.

Before the show, Patitucci revealed that Shorter, 78, was still recovering from gallbladder surgery only a week earlier. "But he came back yesterday and played hard all night," Patitucci said. "It's so selfless of him."

At the Rose Theater, the quartet opened with a 37-minute improvisation that began with a chromatic melody line played by Pérez in the piano's upper register, set against dissonant clusters, alternating ostinatos and cello-like bowing by Patitucci, along with Blade's urgent side-stick, cymbal and hi-hat work. Shorter, slightly stooped in a purple tunic, leaned on the Steinway, listening intently before entering with a few breathy notes on tenor. He was clearly pacing himself. As the improvisation built up a head of steam, gentle contemplation gave way to toots, whoops and grunts, then full-force legato runs; now he was all the way back and in command.

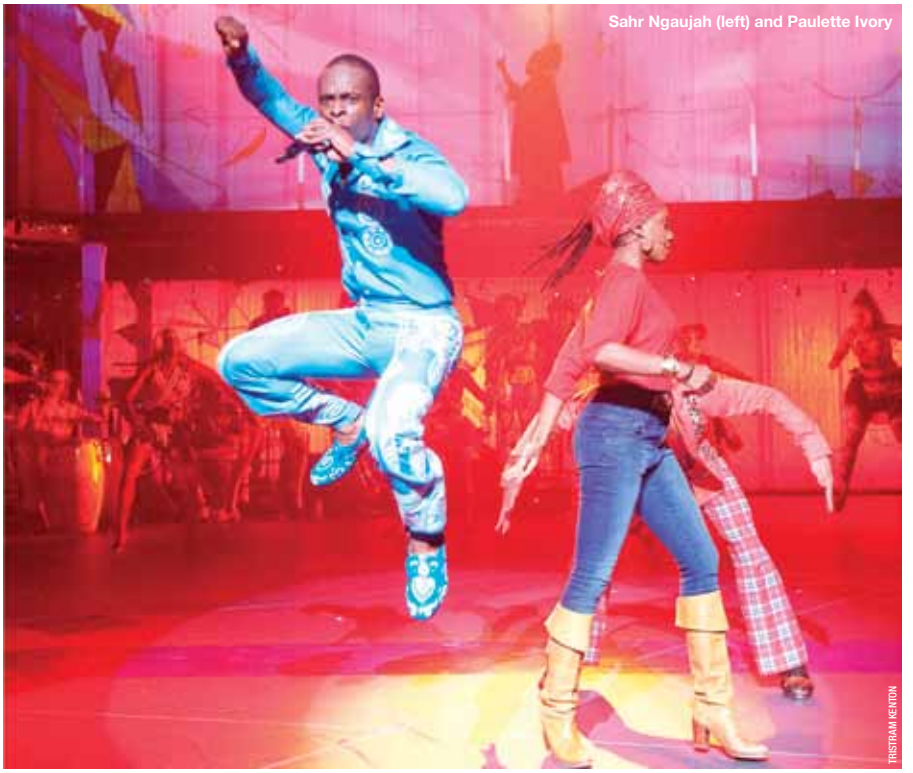
These players listen hard to each other. "Wayne always wants us to take big chances and be vulnerable enough to reach out your arms and take the other guys with you and go together," Patitucci explained. "He always leaves space for the other musicians. He has no shortage of technique, but he has no need to show off. His playing is deeply emotional—it's not just craft."

Nevertheless, there was marvelous craft on display: Pérez's dazzling classical technique, at times evoking French Impressionism; Patitucci's quick, daring leaps into the upper register; and Blade flinging himself around the kit like a mad marionette.

If it seemed as if there were five "songs" in the 100-minute concert, it was only that the audience, confronted with pauses in the action, interpreted them as endings and interrupted with applause. Along the way, the group alighted upon several Shorter classics, including "Joy Ryder," "She Moves Through The Fair" and "Plaza Real," as well as the more recent "Starry Night" and "Zero Gravity." The quartet encored with the standard "By Myself."

Pérez recalled an anecdote from long ago: Before an important concert, he asked the old master, "Are we going to rehearse?" Shorter answered, "You can't rehearse the unknown."

—Allen Morrison



Sahr Ngaujah (left) and Paulette Ivory

TRISTRAM KENTON

‘Fela!’ Triumphs in Music and Message

“I witnessed a miracle tonight,” wrote Roots drummer Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson after seeing “Fela!,” a theatrical production inspired by the life and music of legendary Nigerian musician, bandleader and political activist Fela Kuti. Since opening as an off-Broadway production in 2008, the show has gained momentum and celebrity interest from Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith, who all signed on as co-producers.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was born to a Protestant minister and an activist mother. Using Afrobeat music as a medium for raw critiques of the Nigerian military regime, Kuti fearlessly attacked injustice, oppression and corruption. Kuti left behind a formidable body of music—nearly 50 albums, including the recently released *Live In Detroit 1986*(Knitting Factory)—a 3-CD set containing the first new material from Fela since 1992. The Broadway production approaches his music and enduring legacy with a sense of reverence, and producer Stephen Hendel is determined to do Kuti’s work justice.

“I discovered a Fela CD by chance,” said Hendel, who began developing the production in 2000. “I was overwhelmed by his sound and by what he stood for.” The CD propelled Hendel to create a stage show that portrayed “the extraordinary life of a man who sacrificed himself, refusing to give up music as an expression of the people’s call for social justice.” Hendel enlisted award-winning choreographer Bill T. Jones to direct the play and, together with writer Jim Lewis, assembled a group of musicians, actors, dancers and technicians for workshops.

When “Fela!” opened on Broadway, its cast performed to an audience of half a million people over a 15-month run. The show won three Tony Awards in 2010 for its choreography, costume design and sound design. It was also received enthusiastically by such musicians as Stevie Wonder and Branford Marsalis.

Kuti’s music is played live by Antibalas, a leading force in contemporary Afrobeat. During a recent March 27–April 15 run at Chicago’s Oriental Theatre, Antibalas’ delivered a powerhouse performance of Fela’s classic anthems, including “Zombie” and “Expensive Shit,” as well as “Dance Of The Orishas,” a climactic moment of free-jazz. The dynamic and charismatic Sahr Ngaujah stars as Kuti, backed by a supporting cast of Melanie Marshall as Funmilayo, Kuti’s mother, and Paulette Ivory as Sandra Smith (now Izsadore)—a member of the Black Panther Party who influenced Kuti’s sociopolitical consciousness. The set design recreates and captures the magical atmosphere of Kuti’s legendary Lagos, Nigeria, club, The Shrine.

In addition to being visually and musically explosive, “Fela!” elucidates Kuti’s politics and run-ins with the law. It contextualizes his convictions in relation to U.S. civil rights activism and illuminates African religion and culture. It also demonstrates how African rhythms, calypso, James Brown, John Coltrane, Chano Pozo and Martin Luther King Jr. all informed both his music and political stance. The show is currently back on tour in the United States following a run in Europe and in Kuti’s beloved Lagos.

—Sharonne Cohen

PETE CHRISTLIEB

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RareNoiseRecords a Crossroads Of Style, Technology & Taste

Founded in 2008 by Italians guitarist/arranger/producer Eraldo Bernocchi and entrepreneur Giacomo Bruzzo, London-based RareNoiseRecords is the record label arm of RareNoise Ltd. Reflecting today's potential for creative musical insurgencies, RareNoise is all about finding new music, and supporting the people who play it. Names like Bill Laswell, Bernie Worrell and Bob Belden's Animation grace the label alongside other notables such as Nils Petter Molvær and the bands Brainkiller, Somma and The Mantra Above The Spotless Moon. Co-owner Bruzzo recently sat down for some label chit-chat.

How did RareNoise come into being?

It started with my fascination for artists featured from the late '90s on the UK label MO'Wax. In particular, DJ Shadow and DJ Krush led to the discovery of Japanese trumpet player Toshinori Kondo, via the mesmerizing Krush-Kondo recording KI-OKU. That led one step further, to the magnificently charged collaboration of Kondo with Bill Laswell and Eraldo Bernocchi.

From top: Animation's *Asiento*, David Fiuczynski's *Planet MicroJam*, Interstatic's *Interstatic*

What were your antecedents to all this activity?

I was born in Genoa, Italy. My background was in banking, risk management and then academia, in abstract mathematics. Functional Anned, in a sense, by the first three recordings I bought as a child: *Between Nothingness And Eternity* by the Mahavishnu Orchestra, *Graceland* by Paul Simon, and *Beethoven's Emperor Concerto* with Seiji Ozawa directing Rudolf Serkin on piano and the Cleveland Orchestra.

How would describe your catalog?

RareNoiseRecord's catalog consists today of 28 entries, the last six of which are in the process of being released. They try to span all the genres we are fascinated by. We seek that which is at the crossroads of style, technology and taste. A place where opposites meet and, for a fraction of a moment, are completely homogenous, from electronic dub and trip-hop to jazz/funk/drum'n'bass, Zappa-esque jazz/prog rock and ambient rock.

Please describe the RareNoise aesthetic.

What we try to do at RareNoise is create bridges between communities of listeners who may be connected to a specific genre, to tell them, "Look here … all these recordings may seem different on the surface, but they are all sharing the same imprint of curiosity, experimentation and aural delight. Be bold, dare to cross these borders with us." If there is anything that I hope we might be associated with in the future, it's an ability to break boundaries between genres, and show how musical thinking and processes are common to so many genres. A Bach cantata can elicit the same emotional transport as the Miles Davis Quintet. A further element of potential distinction is design, in particular our covers, as we work with quite wonderful artwork designers; primarily visual artists Petulia Mattioli, Hernan Hecht and Adriana Salomone. Music is the history of humankind's inner voice. We have a duty to foster, heed and help this voice circulate. What matters are not genres, but attitude. *—John Ephland*

Caught

The Many Faces of Anthony Wilson

Every Wednesday last April, guitarist Anthony Wilson presented four completely different sides to his musical persona at Los Angeles' Blue Whale. Each week Wilson brought on a distinct band and instrumentation that was an impressive display of skill and versatility. On top of that he curated the wines.

Wilson opened the residency with a bit of tradition offering straightahead swing with bassist John Clayton, drummer Jeff Hamilton and confident young pianist and vocalist Champian Fulton but flipped everything around the following week.


Anthony Wilson
BOB BARRY

For Wilson's second night, rock drumming legend Jim Keltner made a rare club appearance alongside organist Larry Goldings as the trio paid homage to the groove. Wilson, dressed casually in a sweatshirt, and Keltner, in sunglasses and denim, seemed like they could have been brothers despite their nearly thirty year age gap.

The band opened with a bouncy original that had the guitar and Goldings' swirling organ in close harmony. Throughout the evening, Keltner held it down but stayed out of the way, finding subtle grooves on his battered kit. A simmering cover of Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" had Keltner propelling the band with a set of brushes as Wilson dove into the tune with an impassioned solo. The band closed out the set with a bluesy simmer that had Keltner gripping a pair of maracas alongside his drumsticks.

After the performance, many of the drum fanatics in the audience (which was more than half the crowd) gathered around Keltner's bright drum kit. "It's 'sour apple green,'" he said. "Which is fine as long as it isn't 'chartreuse.'"

For the third week, Wilson presented his recently recorded guitar suite with a quartet featuring confident slingers Larry Koonse, John Storie and Jeffrey Stein, but he flooded the stage for his closing night with a youthful nonet.

Wilson managed to squeeze a full rhythm section and five horns into the Blue Whale's intimate space, but there was little room elsewhere because the sold-out crowd had filled every other corner in front of and behind the band.

Wilson opened his set by discussing the week's wines at length before launching into a pensive solo that was so quiet the music from the mall outside was competing. He raised the volume for the second song, covering Joe Zawinul's "Walk Tall." The funky riff-fest featured one of several great solos from trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos before Wilson closed the tune with a frenetic roar.

Wilson is a confident arranger of the nine voices at his disposal. Obviously his father, Gerald Wilson, taught him well. Over the course of an hour-and-a-half set, Wilson had the horns playing everything from a gentle flutter behind pianist Josh Nelson's delicate phrasing to a tight funky vamp over one of Alan Ferber's crowd-pleasing drum solos. They closed the residency the same way it started: swinging. Propelled by Ferber's splashing cymbals, baritone saxophonist Adam Schroeder bellowed on Duke Pearson's appropriately titled "Make It Good" to ecstatic applause from the audience. —*Sean J. O'Connell*

DOWNBEAT 60TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL CONGRATS TO ALL

WINNERS

JAZZ ALBUM
MARCUS GILMORE - Vijay Iyer Trio, Accelerando (ACT)

HISTORICAL JAZZ ALBUM
TONY WILLIAMS - Miles Davis Quintet, Live In Europe 1967: The Bootleg Series, Vol.1 (Columbia/Legacy)

JAZZ GROUP
MARCUS GILMORE - Vijay Iyer Trio

BEYOND ARTIST OR GROUP
MARK COLENBURG - Robert Glasper Experience

RISING START JAZZ GROUP
MARK COLENBURG - Robert Glasper Experience

RISING STAR DRUMS
MARCUS GILMORE

RISING STAR ARRANGER
JOHN HOLLENBECK

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Vijay Iyer

A BOUNTY OF EXPLORATION

By Ted Panken // Photography by Bill Douthart

The critics have spoken. Vijay Iyer dominates this year's DownBeat Critics Poll, with wins in five categories. The critics voted Iyer Jazz Artist of the Year, top Pianist and Rising Star Composer. The Vijay Iyer Trio earned best Jazz Group honors; the group's March release, *Accelerando* (ACT Music + Vision), won top Jazz Album.

The recognition signifies how wise Iyer was, when coming of age in the '90s, to decide that it was almost as essential to define his terms of engagement as it was to express himself in notes and tones. "I had to find a way to create a space for myself to do what I wanted," Iyer said in April. "A lot of that involved generating language that would surround the music itself, so that people could understand it."

Unopened boxes dotted the parlor floor of Iyer's recently acquired triplex in a Harlem brownstone. He was barely acclimated, back in New York just a few days after a monthlong road trip launched directly after moving in with his wife and 6-year-old daughter. In a few hours he'd join bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Marcus Gilmore for night three of a week at Birdland, to be followed by a series of one-nighters in Europe, where Iyer would stay for a few gigs with Fieldwork, the compositionally ambitious trio in which he collaborates with alto saxophonist Steve Lehman and drummer Tyshawn Sorey.

"As Muhal Richard Abrams would say, it was a response to necessity," Iyer elaborated, regarding his early self-advocacy. "My parents came to the U.S. in the wake of the 1965 Immigration Act; I'm from the first generation of Indian-Americans. People didn't know what to make of someone like me doing what I do, and their imaginations sometimes ran a bit wild. So it was about introducing myself to the universe, but also about finding my way: 'What is it that I am revealing?'"

Having effectively addressed this query, Iyer, 40, nowadays leans to a "deeds, not words" approach. But neither critical acclaim nor middle-age perspective prevented Iyer from stating his bemusement (or perhaps irritation) at a pervasive, ongoing "mad scientist of jazz" trope that he perceives in discussions of his albums and performances.

"The Immigration Act opened the door, in a very targeted way, to non-Westerners who were technically trained professionals," Iyer said in a calm, measured cadence. "It selected for a scientific-oriented community within these cultures. That's the template by which people like me are still understood. I've read literally thousands of reviews over 16 albums, and a certain cerebral or mathematical thing keeps getting pegged. I can play 'Black And Tan Fantasy,' and they'll still call it nerdy."

Nerdy or not, it is undeniable that Iyer is, as his late-'90s mentor Steve Coleman understated it, "an analytical, super-intelligent guy." Iyer dual-majored in math and physics as a Yale undergraduate, and then earned a master's degree and a Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley. (His dissertation, which quantitatively analyzed the neurobiology of musical cognition, was titled "Microstructures of Feel, Macrostructures of Sound: Embodied Cognition in West African and African-American Musics.") Such bona fides notwithstanding, Iyer is less concerned with the life of the mind in isolation than what he has called "the dialogue between the physical and the ideal."

In a 2009 article for the Guardian, Iyer noted his propensity to mesh math and music to reveal unexpected sounds and rhythms. As an example, he cited the trio's surging, anthemic treatment of Ronnie Foster's 1973 soul-jazz tune "Mystic Brew" on *Historicity* (ACT), its then-current release, constructed by transmuting successive asymmetric Fibonacci ("golden mean") ratios—specifically, 5:3, 8:5 and 13:5—into an angular 21-beat cycle that sounds, as he wrote, "simple and natural—like a buoyant, composite version of the original's 4/4." To deploy such elaborate rhythmic schemes, Iyer asserted, is no abstruse exercise. Rather, it connects directly to non-Western musical traditions grounded in social ritual—the classical Carnatic and folk music of South India ("intricately organized, melodically nuanced, and rhythmically dazzling, full of systematic permutations"); and the African rhythms that antecede "nearly every vernacular music we have in the West."

On the Grammy-nominated *Historicity*, Iyer was clearly the lead voice, uncorking a

From left: Pianist Vijay Iyer, drummer Marcus Gilmore and bassist Stephan Crump, New York City, April 12

series of solo declamations that explicitly reference and refract into his own argot such influences as Cecil Taylor, Thelonious Monk and Andrew Hill. On *Accelerando*, his strategies hew closer to an approach that Coleman described as "more compositional and contextual" than addressing "the actual content of the playing, which Bud Powell and that generation concentrated on."

"An emergent property of the ensemble is that groove has become paramount," Iyer said. "A certain wildness you hear in some of my earlier ensembles might be smoothed out; instead, a profound sense of pulse propels you through the whole experience. The positive response to *Historicity* allowed us to tour and opened some doors. In the course of performance, our priorities developed in a direction that has to do with music as action, which is literally the way rhythm works. When we listen to rhythm, a sort of sympathetic oscillator that's an internal version of the rhythm gets turned on in the brain. That's what dance is made of."

The trio has refined its own dance since 2004, when Gilmore joined Iyer's quartet with Crump and alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa, who played on four of Iyer's leader albums consisting primarily of original music that often explored issues of dual cultural heritage. (Iyer reciprocally played on three of Mahanthappa's contemporaneous quartet dates.) *Accelerando* shares a common thread with *Historicity* and the 2010 recital *Solo* (ACT)—all are age-of-Obama productions—in situating the trio within a palpably "American" landscape.

"It was like the room changed color," Iyer recalled feeling after Barack Obama's victory in the presidential election. "As artists of color, we didn't feel like we were in as embattled a position. It was like we could dream big all of a sudden—stretch and imagine and be ourselves, and not have to force things."

Titled for a piece that Iyer composed for choreographer Karole Armitage, *Accelerando* contains four other Iyer originals, and covers of American composers ranging from Rodney Temperton ("The Star Of A Story") and Flying Lotus ("Mmmhmm") to Henry Threadgill ("Little Pocket Size Demons"), Herbie Nichols ("Wildflower") and Duke Ellington ("The Village Of The Virgins"). Three years an independent entity, the trio aggregates information from multiple streams, sculpting Iyer's arrangements and compositions along equilateral triangle principles that make it unclear where melodic responsibilities lie at any given moment. This quality surfaces even more palpably in YouTube concert clips: Crump carves out supple vamps, thick ostinatos and the occasional walking bass line; Gilmore details with multidirectional pulse and rhythm timbre; at a moment's notice, the flow morphs into what Crump calls "zones of building from pure vibration and resonance, with everyone constantly micro-adjusting the pitch, dealing with textures and colors."

"I felt the trio had reached a state where it's as much about *how* we play as what we play, and the how-ness could be transplanted to another context—still the trio but doing something else," Iyer explained. "But also, I've written a lot of music, and when ACT approached me, I wasn't ready to write a bunch more for the trio." In fact, Iyer asserted, he had two other recordings in the can. However, ACT's top-selling group, e.s.t., had recently dissolved after the death of its leader, pianist Esbjörn Svensson, and label head Siegfried Loch wanted to establish Iyer's trio in the marketplace before releasing other projects. Feeling he had already "reached a certain level in the United States," Iyer agreed, hoping to exploit ACT's strong European presence as a source of "infrastructure for supporting tours or taking out ads or relationships with the media."

"In retrospect, I can see that to establish a composer-pianist in a certain sphere, it makes business sense to somehow put that person in front," Iyer said. "Then you can do things that vary from that more classic format. The trio sensibility already was up and running. I wanted to see if we could shine it on something else, including a few of my older tunes, for at least half the program."

> "I discovered multiple extra dimensions of subtlety on the instrument that I hadn't been able to access before."

By settling on the trio as his most visible vehicle of self-expression, Iyer effectively put on hiatus his artistic partnership with Mahanthappa, who is himself an ACT recording artist. "It became a logistical reality," Iyer explained. "We both had things going on, and weren't able to play together that much. But also, we experienced what we called the 'you guys' phenomenon: People would say, 'When are you guys playing next?' or get us mixed up. At some level, we need to be able to establish independent trajectories."

In Crump's view, the trio "instantly became a more organic beast." He added, "Even though the music was always forward-reaching and everyone was searching, the quartet's functionality was essentially conservative—a horn and piano front line, melodies-solos, with a rhythm section. There's potential magic in a trio, and each element has to expand. So the trio enabled more avenues of expression and development, and more engagement in the ensemble's exploration and overall experience. We're able to shape-shift so much more.

"In the early days of the quartet, Vijay and Rudresh were working things out. They were mutually very supportive, and helped each other grow, both musically and career-wise. But in a way, it always got to the same place, a blasting, dense zone. Vijay had to get through that to get to the other side; now he's a much broader and more mature musician."

Coleman, who introduced Iyer and Mahanthappa in 1996, stated, "Outside of their shared concern with heritage, I didn't hear a big connection in their tendencies and tastes."

Mahanthappa concurred. "Our compositional approaches are very different," he said. "As a saxophonist, I'm writing for what I can do on an instrument that can play only one note at a time. A lot of Vijay's writing is based on the rhythmic interplay he can produce between both hands, and how that fits onto the drums."

"We're both idiosyncratic musicians, with our own fixations, which turned out to be compatible," Iyer said. "Rudresh went to music school—I didn't. Maybe my orientation was more composerly, on the level of ensemble and sound and larger structure; his was more playerly, about projecting real intensity. We were trying to deal simultaneously with Carnatic and Hindustani elements and with Monk—I was the Monk guy—and Coltrane—he was the Coltrane guy. Coltrane had dealt with Indian music, so that point of reference was already in the vocabulary of so-called 'post-bop' language. When Marcus joined my band, without shedding the rhythmic language we'd been developing, the different elements seemed to become clearer. I became more reserved with the amount of detail I was trying to infuse into the pieces. I guess it's called maturing.

"The quartet records Rudresh and I did together—and the early Fieldwork albums—articulate the idea of pushing ourselves to the brink of what we can hear, or understand, or execute. Rudresh and I did all this work that got a lot of critical acclaim and attention. On the other hand, it received a response from the musical community that didn't feel exactly like hostility, but more like bewilderment and willful shunning. To me, the subject was to assert this new reality that speaks through us as a new kind of American. How American are we? How American are we allowed to be? How American are we seen as? You could say it was about articulating and negotiating identities, and all those kinds of '90s multiculturalism words. But it was really about insinuating ourselves into the country. I'm also drawing on a heritage that includes M-BASE and the AACM, Ellington and Ahmad Jamal, pop music and electronica. It's like trying to imagine a new world music, kind of following Wadada Leo Smith's directive from the '70s, a sort of world-making with a modernist aspect—to develop something singular and at variance with other things in the world."

Over the course of their collaboration, Iyer—a self-taught pianist who initially felt "dwarfed" by Mahanthappa's titanic chops and

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"solid melodic improvisational concept"—developed his instrumental facility. In recent years, Crump suggested, "the element of being a virtuosic pianist has taken form in Vijay, which in combination with his development as a composer is just beastly."

"I still wouldn't say that I have highly refined technique," Iyer demurred. He cited a remark by the dancer Rosangela Silvestre, whom he met during his immersive apprenticeship with Coleman. "She said technique is a process, about knowing your limits and being able to work within them, but also seeing how you can gently push on or reach beyond those limits. It's about being able to express yourself with what you have. For me, composition became about challenging myself to write things I could barely play, and then having to rise to meet the challenge.

"From playing so many concerts during the last few years, especially a bunch of solo concerts on amazing pianos, I discovered multiple extra dimensions of subtlety on the instrument that I hadn't been able to access before. Now I find myself addicted to dealing more with things like testing how quiet you can be and still be heard and have an impact. Often in the trio concerts, I'll play a solo standard in the middle of a set. It's about things that I can make the piano do, sonic experiences—sonorities and timbres I've been finding, the continuum between timbre and harmony, the relative weight of different notes, and relative attack and articulation. It's been this newfound bounty of exploration, like playing in a garden."

On May 8–9, Iyer participated in two tribute concerts to Cecil Taylor at New York's Harlem Stage Gatehouse. He, Amina Claudine Myers and Craig Taborn played solo and duo homages to the maestro; Amiri Baraka read several choice verses, accompanied by Iyer, who began performing with the poet soon after his 1999 move to New York. The day after the first concert, which Taylor had attended, Iyer spoke of Taylor's impact on his aesthetics.

"You sense this all-encompassing approach to creativity, the perspective of music as everything one does," said Iyer, a Taylor acolyte since the early '90s, when he was gradually transitioning from physics to music as his life's work. In a 2008 article, he described a raucous 1995 Bay Area performance of Taylor's creative orchestra music in which he played violin, his first instrument. During a summational solo, Taylor deployed a chord with which Iyer had been experimenting obsessively since hearing Taylor play it on the ballad "Pemmican," from his 1981 live solo album *Garden* (Hat Hut). "It had an uncommon stillness, as if it predates us and will outlast us," Iyer wrote for Wire. "For all its animated surface qualities and notorious tumult, Taylor's music somehow possesses a motionless, timeless interior; this chord was proof."

This experience, Iyer continued, focused him on the question of "What is hearing or what is sound?" He increasingly honed in on a notion that improvising is the equivalent of being "empowered to take action as yourself." He wrote: "If music is the sound of bodies in action, then we're hearing not just sound, but bodies making those sounds…It's about those sounds somehow emerging from human activity. The beauty has a story behind it—how did it get there?"

During the last two decades, Iyer has explored this issue within multiple, sometimes overlapping communities. In the Bay Area, he played and composed experimental music with Taylorphiles Glenn Spearman and Lisle Ellis, and with Asian Improv collective members Miya Masaoka, Francis Wong and Jon Jang—all influenced by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians—as well as AACM icon George Lewis, who served as a member of Iyer's dissertation committee. (During the '00s, Iyer would gig consequently with AACM ava-


Vijay Iyer Trio, the Critics Poll Jazz Group of the Year

tars Roscoe Mitchell and Ishmael Wadada Leo Smith.) Iyer and trans-genre-oriented peers like Liberty Ellman, Elliot Humberto Kavee and Aaron Stewart established an AACM-inspired infrastructure, setting up bands to present original music that drew upon elements from electronica and hip-hop, including sampling.

Iyer also regularly attended concerts of Carnatic music targeted to the Silicon Valley's sizable Indian-American population, and took group classes with Ghanaian drummer C.K. Ladzekpo that taught him to "execute rhythms in a way that would motivate people." On jobs with world-class drum elders Donald Bailey and E.W. Wainwright—and with his own working trio—Iyer garnered functional experience in the jazz tradition. All these associations prepared him for life with Coleman, who brought Iyer on fieldwork trips to Cuba, Brazil and India, and provided a platform upon which he

could consolidate ideas.

Now, within the trio, Iyer seems to be coalescing these parallel, long-haul investigations into a unitary voice. "Vijay's relationship to what I call 'composite reality' has definitely progressed," Sorey said, using Anthony Braxtonesque nomenclature. "We're at a time and place where the idea of cosmopolitanism is such an important tenet in our music. Vijay doesn't want to classify himself. When I play with Fieldwork or sub with the trio, it no longer feels like there's any parameter."

Iyer has been spreading his wings in the broader playing field as well. He spent the latter third of May at Canada's Banff Centre, co-hosting the 2012 International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music with trumpeter Dave Douglas, from whom he will assume the position of director in 2013. Furthermore, in April, Iyer received an unrestricted $225,000 grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and a $30,000 commission from the Greenfield Foundation for a new work to be performed in 2014. With such honoraria in the pipeline, not to mention another large commission for a collaboration with filmmaker Prashant Bhargava marking the 100th anniversary of *The Rite Of Spring*, and an array of talented private students (among them pianist Christian Sands), it would seem that either the jazz "mainstream" has caught up to Iyer, or that Iyer has caught up to it.

Given Iyer's earlier frustrations at "finding a home in the jazz landscape," he regards the proposition as complex. "It's more that I've reached a position of acceptance among people who present concerts in this area of music," he countered. "That allows me to play in front of large audiences, and step by step, I have opportunities to connect that weren't there before.

"To me, the notion of a jazz mainstream is a peculiar take on a music that was always oppositional and kind of defiant. It's not fiction, because it exists in a market. But the real mainstream is perhaps more tolerant of aesthetic radicalism. I'll hear a hip-hop beat that's made from drops of water in a cup, and some cheap Casio bass drum and tom sounds that are almost comical—aesthetically shocking. Then I'll look on YouTube and it has 20 million hits—not just a few people underground. I also have to say that, touring with Steve Coleman or Roscoe or Wadada, I've seen rooms filled with 3,000 people completely connect to some very intense stuff that we can do in those contexts."

For now, Iyer was still processing the heady turn of events. "I've been in constant motion, and the Doris Duke award dropped on me in the middle of it," he said. "Two days ago, I woke up, had an appointment in Midtown, and then just walked around New York, and tried to breathe and exercise my shoulders and observe and just be in the world for a change, not running like a crazy person. I'll continue to do a significant amount of work and gigging. But I'm hoping to transform my day-to-day, so I'm not so anxious all the time." **DB**

60TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
JAZZ ALBUM OF THE YEAR

1 Vijay Iyer Trio, *Accelerando* (ACT) 115 votes

Ambitious and culling from various sources, *Accelerando* was this year's favorite among DownBeat critics. (See page 24.)

2 Sonny Rollins, *Road Shows, Vol. 2* (DOXY/EMARCY) 69

In these live recordings taken from a September 2010 80th birthday concert at New York's Beacon Theatre, and two shows in Japan the following month, the tenor saxophone hero trades brilliant ideas with some very special guests, including the enigmatic Ornette Coleman.

3 Keith Jarrett, *Rio* (ECM) 68

Recorded in Rio de Janeiro in April 2011, this CD's 15 succinct, improvised cuts document an extraordinary solo piano experience. DownBeat's Paul de Barros describes the proceedings as "astonishingly beautiful."

4 Gregory Porter, *Be Good* (MOTÉMA) 56

The singer not only escapes the sophomore jinx, but he gives further indication of being a major jazz talent on the rise. Porter knows how to balance his material with personal references and universal truths, according to reviewer John Murph.

5 Miguel Zenón, *Alma Adentro: The Puerto Rican Songbook* (MARSALIS MUSIC) 54

After journeys into exploring Puerto Rican traditional music (*jibaro* and *plena*), the alto saxophonist presents a collection of standard songs from the island in a straightahead jazz style.

6 Brad Mehldau, *Live In Marciac* (NONESUCH) 52

Recorded in August 2006, this live two-disc set displays Mehldau's limitless imagination and technical virtuosity during a recital that combined his own pieces with other works. As reviewer Bob Doerschuk points out, Mehldau always honors the composition.

7 Matt Wilson's Arts & Crafts, *An Attitude For Gratitude* (PALMETTO) 40

Wilson's buoyant, positive spirit carries over into every cranny of this CD, and his economical approach to the drum kit allows plenty of breathing room for the other instruments in this empathic ensemble.

8 Corea, Clarke & White, *Forever* (CONCORD) 39

Keyboardist Chick Corea, bassist Stanley Clarke and drummer Lenny White—the core of '70s electric-jazz supergroup Return To Forever—deliver crystal-clear, hard-swinging jamming on this two-disc set.

9 Terri Lyne Carrington, *The Mosaic Project* (CONCORD) 38

Shedding light on several of today's top female jazz artists—including Geri Allen, Ingrid Jensen and Patrice Rushen—this drummer-led disc boasts artistic consistency and durable compositions.

10 Tim Berne, *Snakeoil* (ECM) 33

There are no compromises on this bassless outing, which features "long, involved, compositionally complex tracks, with hardcore improvised extrapolation and points of miraculous convergence," according to DownBeat Hot Box reviewer John Corbett.

11	Trombone Shorty, *For True* (VERVE FORECAST)	33
12	JD Allen Trio, *Victory!* (SUNNYSIDE)	30
13	Rudresh Mahanthappa, *Samdhi* (ACT)	30
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15	Bill Frisell, *All We Are Saying …* (SAVOY JAZZ)	27
16	Charlie Haden/Hank Jones, *Come Sunday* (DECCA/EMARCY)	27
17	Matthew Shipp, *The Art Of The Improviser* (THIRSTY EAR)	27
18	Charles Lloyd/Maria Farantouri, *Athens Concert* (ECM)	26
19	Brian Lynch, *Unsung Heroes: A Tribute To Some Underappreciated Trumpet Masters* (HOLISTIC)	25
20	Branford Marsalis & Joey Calderazzo, *Songs Of Mirth And Melancholy* (MARSALIS)	25
21	Jenny Scheinman, *Mischief & Mayhem* (JENNY SCHEINMAN)	25
22	Chick Corea/Eddie Gomez/Paul Motian, *Further Explorations* (CONCORD)	24
23	Gary Smulyan, *Smul's Paradise* (CAPRI)	24
24	3 Cohens, *Family* (ANZIC)	23
25	Christian McBride, *Conversations With Christian* (MACK AVENUE)	23
26	Tierney Sutton Band, *American Road* (BFM JAZZ)	23
27	Gilad Hekselman, *Hearts Wide Open* (CHANT DU MONDE)	22
28	Amir ElSaffar Two Rivers Ensemble, *Inana* (PI)	21
29	Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra, *MTO Plays Sly* (THE ROYAL POTATO FAMILY)	21
30	Craig Taborn, *Avenging Angel* (ECM)	20

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Paul Motian
COMPLETE VISION

By Geoffrey Himes // Photo by Joe Alper

Eight months after his death, Paul Motian takes his rightful place in the DownBeat Hall of Fame alongside other drumming legends

Bill Frisell gets annoyed when people describe Paul Motian's drumming as "free" or "abstract." He gets really annoyed when they say Motian didn't keep time. "That's so absurd," says Frisell, who played with Motian for three decades.

"Paul's beat was so strong," Frisell says. "I've played with lots of drummers, and I've been really lucky to know what it's like to play with a good beat. He had that, as heavy as any on the planet. Maybe you have to listen a little harder, but it's there. We would gather around that beat, that energy of the song, and there would always be a phrase everyone would feel together. You're not picking it apart any more than you would pick out each drop of water while you were surfing."

Motian revolutionized jazz drumming so thoroughly that people are still groping for words to describe what he did. His was a revolution of addition rather than substitution. Yes, it's true that he sounded markedly different from such predecessors as Elvin Jones, Max Roach and Sid Catlett, but he didn't erase their influence and replace it with something else. He added his own inventions on top of theirs; if you listen closely to his playing, the history of jazz drumming is reflected in there.

"Playing with him, I felt like I was getting the whole last century of music," Frisell says. "I felt as if everything he had experienced, he was giving to me. Because he had played with Oscar Pettiford, Coleman Hawkins, Monk and Bill Evans, you could hear all the connections he had made with those people and the connections those people had made."

Born Stephen Paul Motian to Armenian-American parents in Philadelphia on March 25, 1931, he was raised in Providence, R.I., on big-band swing and Turkish music. After a four-year stint in the U.S. Navy, he moved to New York, ready to play with anyone, anywhere, anytime. When he wasn't playing gigs with Monk, Lee Konitz or Lennie Tristano, he was at Evans' apartment, rehearsing with the then-obscure pianist, whom he'd met at an audition. Motian joined the nascent Bill Evans Trio, which released its debut, *New Jazz Conceptions*, in 1956. The real breakthrough came when Evans, after leaving Miles Davis in 1959, reconstituted the trio with Scott LaFaro on bass.

"I was listening to an old Tony Scott record I'm on from just before that period with Bill," Motian told DownBeat in 1993, "… and I'm playing straightahead 4/4, man, not breaking up the time hardly at all. And then, playing with Bill, when Scott started gigging with us … because they weren't doing strict time anymore, I just took what I heard these two guys doing, and all of a sudden the time started to spread out more, and it became freer."

Freer perhaps, but never untethered. Motian and LaFaro avoided the obvious rhythm parts, but the rhythmic pulse was always there, sometimes implied, sometimes camouflaged by secondary accents, but never abandoned. Nor was either man ever disconnected from what his two bandmates were playing; there was no need to duplicate what was already being said, but there was always a need to respond to it with countering lines or variations.

"What I'm doing in music," Motian told DownBeat in 2010, "I hate to use the term 'free,' but that's what I mean. What I'm doing has to fit with what the other musicians are doing or what I'm hearing. If it doesn't fit and if it's not integrated, it's bullshit. … I could play totally free, but if it doesn't fit with what else is happening, that's bullshit."

The Evans trio reached a peak during a June 25, 1961, date at the Village Vanguard that yielded two classic albums: *Sunday At The Village Vanguard* and *Waltz For Debby*. Here was the epitome of the democratic trio—each man developing an original, rhythmic, melodic part that fit with the others like puzzle pieces. LaFaro died in an auto accident 11 days later, and in 1964 Motian left the trio. In 1966 he joined the Charles Lloyd Quartet, which boasted a young pianist named Keith Jarrett. When Jarrett decided to form his own trio in 1967, he invited Motian and Charlie Haden to join him.

"The first jazz concert I ever went to was the Charles Lloyd Quartet in 1968 in Denver with Paul, Keith and Ron McClure," Frisell says. "When I see films of Paul in the '60s, he already had this thing that was clear and complete; he already had his own way of hearing the music."

"Paul was such an important part of the Keith Jarrett Quartet," adds saxophonist Joe Lovano. "I heard them in 1972, and it was so beautiful that I just wanted to play with them. Within 10 years I was playing with Paul, Charlie and Dewey [Redman]. Playing with Paul was a journey that I was on before I ever met him."

Motian bought Jarrett's old piano and began to compose on it. He wrote all six of the tunes on his 1972 ECM debut, *Conception Vessel*, and five of the seven compositions on Jarrett's 1977 album *Byablue*. Today Motian's compositions are so highly regarded they appear on CDs where he's not the drummer, such as pianist Fred Hersch's 2010 disc *Whirl* (Palmetto), Tarbaby's 2010 release *The End Of Fear* (Posi-Tone) and saxophonist Ravi Coltrane's latest, *Spirit Fiction* (Blue Note).

The majority of Motian's recordings as a leader have been released by ECM (from *Conception Vessel* to 2010's *Lost In A Dream*) and JMT/Winter & Winter (from 1988's *On Broadway, Vol. 1* to 2011's

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Motian performing in 1963

The Windmills Of Your Mind). Most of these albums have been built around one of three basic units: Paul Motian's Electric Be-Bop Band (aka EBBB or the Paul Motian Band), Trio 2000 + One or Paul Motian-Bill Frisell-Joe Lovano. The latter emerged from Motian's early '80s quintet as a bass-less trio in 1984 and did live dates together at least once a year through 2010.

"That trio with Paul and Bill was one of the most settled, creative experiences in my whole life," Lovano says. "Sometimes it had been a year since we played together, but it always felt like the next night."

Motian was active almost up to his death on Nov. 22, 2011, at age 80. His distinctive work can be heard on two recent, posthumous releases: the Chick Corea-Eddie Gomez-Paul Motian album *Further Explorations* (Concord) and the Masabumi Kikuchi Trio's *Sunrise* (ECM). It can be difficult for a drummer to assert himself on a jazz recording, but Motian never had that problem. On these records, as on the many that preceded them, there's no mistaking his unorthodox tuning, his unfailing melodicism and his unpredictable phrasing—implying some rhythms, improvising others, but always keeping the pulse and the dialogue going. **DB**

Gene Ammons
ULTIMATE REDEMPTION

By Ed Enright

The DownBeat Hall of Fame welcomes Gene Ammons, the tenor saxophone giant affectionately known as "Jug" and "The Boss"

Jazz audiences in the post-World War II era adored saxophonist Gene Ammons (1925–1974) for his big, robust tenor sound and emotionally direct playing. Highly influenced by Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins, Ammons had chops to spare. But it was his instantly identifiable tone and the simplicity of his expressiveness that won the hearts of listeners who bought his records, flocked to his performances and hung on his every note.

The son of boogie-woogie piano pioneer Albert Ammons, Gene Ammons was a giant of old-school style who cut his teeth under the legendary Captain Walter Dyett at DuSable High School on Chicago's South Side. His professional career began in 1943, when he joined the band of trumpeter King Kolax at age 18. Soon afterward, Ammons found himself amid heavy company in the sax section of Billy Eckstine's famous orchestra, which helped propel him to national fame. By the late 1940s, he was leading his own groups—his first hit recording was a 1947 original titled "Red Top"—and performing in Woody Herman's Second Herd, where he replaced Stan Getz. Ammons had a commanding stage presence that earned him the nickname "The Boss"; many of his fellow musicians called him "Jug," an affectionate moniker reportedly given to him by Eckstine in reference to his large hat size.

Ammons will forever be associated with tenor battles, a theme that started with the lively exchanges between him and Eckstine bandmate Dexter Gordon (on "Blowin' The Blues Away") and later teamed him with frequent sparring partner Sonny Stitt for history-making concerts and recordings (including the minor hit "Blues Up And Down") starting in 1950–'52 and recurring regularly over the course of their careers. In the article "Jug Ain't Changed" in the Aug. 17, 1961, issue of DownBeat, critic Marc Crawford compared one meeting of Ammons and Stitt at a Chicago club to a military dogfight: "Like a pair of jet fighters they swooshed into high flight, taking off from opposite ends of the runway, soaring out to battle distance, and then banking to make a combative pass…."

A strong jazz improviser who excelled in the bebop idiom and—along with the likes of Johnny Griffin, Von Freeman and Clifford Jordan—helped establish the so-called "Chicago school" of tenor playing, Ammons was also known for making frequent forays into more popular styles like blues, r&b and soul-jazz. He went into the studio whenever he had the opportunity, releasing dozens of sides and LPs on the Prestige, Verve and Chess labels, among others. Ammons' prolific recording career included several jukebox hits, among them "Canadian Sunset," "My Foolish Heart" and "My Romance." He was a master balladeer known for his strong, sensitive, lyrical style.

Tragically, Ammons' career was significantly set back by multiple narcotics charges and subsequent jail time, beginning in 1958. One stint at the Illinois State Prison at Joliet saw him spend seven years behind bars; after he was released in 1969, Ammons told DownBeat: "There have been a lot of changes in this world since I went in," noting that he played his horn almost every day during his long confinement. "It's like day and night. These changes have struck music, too. Dudes are trying new directions and I dig it. But the avant-garde wouldn't fit my bag. I might try a free lick here and there, but I'll stick mostly to the Gene Ammons I know." He emphasized, "There's only one thing I can say for sure. Put me down as saying I'm here to stay."

Ammons' never lost his chops while he was incarcerated. After his release, it only took a few weeks for him to get into the studio for sessions that produced *The Boss Is Back!* and *Brother Jug!*, both released on Prestige in 1970.

Though initially stifled by legalities concerning the terms of his parole, Ammons' return to society resulted in a full schedule of gigs and sessions that reunited him with old friends and introduced him to a new generation of musicians. He dabbled with the Varitone (an amplifying and octave-dividing breed of electric saxophone from Selmer that Eddie Harris helped popularize), but he stayed true to his roots, and his signature style remained largely intact. Ammons continued to tour and record—including albums that set him in the contexts of big bands and strings—until mid-1974, when he was diagnosed with bone cancer. His comeback abruptly cut short, Ammons died in Chicago's Michael Reese Hospital on Aug. 6, at age 49. His last album, recorded earlier that year, was aptly titled *Goodbye* (Prestige).

Along the way, Ammons earned the respect of countless musicians with whom he shared the stage and studio. They not only appreciated the music that seemed to pour straight from his heart, but they felt strong personal connections to the man behind the horn.

"I found playing with Gene every time a joy," said guitarist Kenny Burrell, who collaborated with Ammons on several 1950s Prestige sessions. "It was a very wonderful experience to make music with him, because every time he played his horn, it was meaningful and serious and heartfelt. I enjoyed making music with people like that. He was a beautiful man, very respectful of other people.

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

"He had such an individual, unique voice that, like many great artists, you could certainly tell it was him after a few notes," Burrell continued. "He was expressing his spirit and his soul when he played his horn. That, to me, is the essence of what one strives to do: Whatever instrument you play, or if it's your voice, to be able to express what you feel and what you hear. He certainly did that."

Ammons, along with Stitt, mentored bassist Buster Williams by taking him on the road for his first tour in 1960. "Gene Ammons had a sound that was unsurpassed—a sound that was totally his own," Williams said. "Sonny Stitt was a great technician, and he would be on the bandstand playing his solo on alto or tenor and just dazzling everybody, playing all this beautiful stuff. Gene Ammons would be standing off to the side. And when Sonny would finish, Jug, as we called him, would step up to the mic and play one note. And everybody would go crazy. He was the Ben Webster of the band: He could say so much with so little effort. He knew how to pick the pretty notes out of all the notes available to you. And he had the sound. He captured your heart. And it was totally uncontrived. When he played his horn, you heard his soul, and you felt it." **DB**

Sonny Stitt
ORIGINAL VOICE

By Aaron Cohen // Photo by Joe Alper

Saxophonist Sonny Stitt, who was a fierce competitor, joins his peers and idols in the DownBeat Hall of Fame

Sonny Stitt never had it easy. At the start of his solo career, he had to defend himself from unfair comparisons to a personal hero. Because his discography is so extensive—and contains several albums that sound like quickie productions—the numerous gems in his oeuvre often have been overlooked.

But Stitt always had a compelling, original voice on both alto and tenor. The saxophonist never allowed anybody's apathy get in the way of his work ethic, either: He toured constantly up until his death in 1982 at the age of 58. Thirty years later, he finally has been inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

The accolade is a far cry from how this magazine presented Stitt in its May 14, 1959, issue. David Bittan's feature ran with the headline "Don't Call Me Bird!" Its subhead was "The Problems Of Sonny Stitt." And that article was intended to be flattering. In the interview with Bittan, Stitt responds to claims that his alto playing too closely resembled that of Charlie Parker. Meanwhile, he had, according to Bittan, "turned partly away from alto, an instrument he loves, and learned tenor. Today he still doesn't know which horn he prefers." The article concludes with Stitt exclaiming, "'I'm no new Bird, man! And Cannonball Adderley isn't, either. Nobody's Bird! *Bird died*!"

It's a bleak image that did Stitt a disservice, especially because it contradicted how positively he truly felt. Earlier in the piece, Stitt simply said, "Bird was one of my favorite musicians." Stitt's glowing sentiment was sincere, according to pianist Junior Mance, who worked with him beginning in the late 1940s.

"Sonny worshipped Charlie Parker—I know that for a fact," Mance recently said. "All the time, he would speak up whenever anybody would say anything bad about him. Sure, he played a lot of Charlie's riffs, but he had his own thing going, too. He was one of the best, even back then."

Points of comparison between the two saxophonists include not just their fleet solos, but also shared Midwestern big-band roots. Although Stitt was born in Boston, he grew up in Saginaw, Mich. He joined the Tiny Bradshaw band in the early '40s. Stitt met and jammed with Parker when the group hit Kansas City in 1943. A few years later, Stitt joined Billy Eckstine's and then Dizzy Gillespie's big band.

On a recording that Stitt made with Gillespie, "Salt Peanuts," their velocity frightened a young Art Pepper, who recounted that experience in his memoir, *Straight Life*: "Not only were they fast, technically, but it all had meaning, and they swung! They were playing notes in the chords that I'd never heard before. It was more intricate, more blues, more swinging, more everything."

By the early 1950s, Stitt was distancing his approach from the bop innovator. He spent considerable time working in popular pairings with another strong tenor saxophonist, Gene Ammons (who joins him in this year's class of Hall of Fame inductees). As pianist Cedar Walton remembered, "Gene talked slow, Sonny talked fast. They played that way, too."

Stitt also possessed a warm tone and stunning pitch—sometimes echoing Lester Young—without relying on vibrato, particularly when his quartet emphasized ballads on 1956's *New York Jazz* (Verve). In his combination with saxophonist Paul Gonsalves on 1963's *Salt And Pepper* (Impulse), he let his glowing blues choruses unfurl gradually. From the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, Stitt led a quartet for 10 sought-after albums on the Roost label that are currently available in a Mosaic Records box set.

A few years later, Stitt recorded some appealing LPs with organ groups (like *Made For Each Other* and *It's Magic*, both on Delmark). But he also advocated for the short-lived electronically amplified saxophone in a DownBeat cover story (Oct. 6, 1966) by Barbara Gardner—one of the surprisingly few features about him in this magazine.

Stitt spent these years releasing a string of albums that sounded half-hearted, and performing a long road of one-nighters with pick-up bands. Jazz critic Harvey Pekar—who was usually a Stitt champion—used an early panel in his autobiographical *American Splendor* comic book just to rant about how Stitt's records sounded too formulaic to review.

Stitt turned all of this around on two stellar albums in the early 1970s for the Muse label—*Tune-Up* and *Constellation* (combined on the 1997 *Endgame Brilliance* CD from 32 Jazz). Here, Stitt stuck to a straight-up conventional alto and tenor on these thoughtful collections of mostly standards, although *Tune-Up* also included his exceptional composition "Blues For Prez And Bird." These performances affirmed that his later, heavier, approach just required the right material along with an accomplished rhythm section. *Constellation* tied for a DownBeat Critics Poll win for Album Of The Year in 1973 (along with McCoy Tyner's *Sahara*).

Pianist Barry Harris, who played on both of those Stitt records,

Stitt playing at the 1964 Newport Jazz Festival

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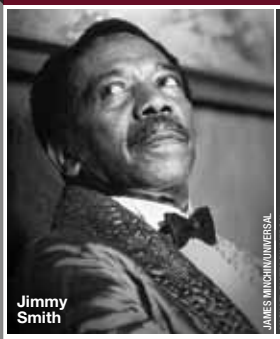
explained that there was another important change to the saxophonist's approach during these later years.

"Sonny was always a competitor," Harris recalled. "If another tenor player got funny with him, or played a blues in D-flat, Sonny would lay it on him. But then the way he was playing became different. He was more subdued, not the competitive Sonny, just Sonny who played."

This was the sound that Stitt usually carried in concerts toward the end of his life, some of which have been documented, like a strong 1976 gig at San Francisco's Keystone Korner that didn't see the light of day until 2005, when it was released as *Work Done* on HighNote. Walton said that back then, and always, "Sonny wasn't capable of having a weak sound."

That consideration from his colleagues was all he needed. **DB**

DOWNBEAT HALL OF FAME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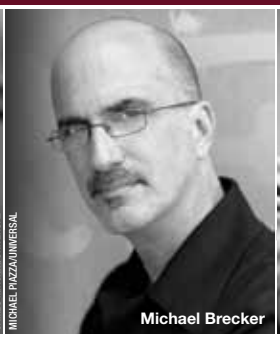
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Legends in Jazz, Blues and Beyond can be elected to the DownBeat Hall of Fame by way of the annual Critics Poll (designated by "C"), Readers Poll ("R") or Veterans Committee ("V"). It all started in 1952 with the Readers. The Critics got into the game in 1961 and the Veterans Committee began voting in 2008. With this month's additions of Gene Ammons, Paul Motian and Sonny Stitt, there are currently 131 DownBeat Hall of Famers, listed here in alphabetical order.

A–B

Muhal Richard Abrams **(C 2010)**
Cannonball Adderley **(R 1975)**
Gene Ammons **(V 2012)**
Louis Armstrong **(R 1952)**
Albert Ayler **(C 1983)**
Chet Baker **(C 1989)**
Count Basie **(R 1958)**
Sidney Bechet **(C 1968)**
Bix Beiderbecke **(C 1962)**
Ed Blackwell **(C 1993)**
Art Blakey **(R 1981)**
Jimmy Blanton **(V 2008)**
Lester Bowie **(C 2000)**
Michael Brecker **(R 2007)**
Clifford Brown **(C 1972)**
Ray Brown **(R 2003)**
Dave Brubeck **(R 1994)**

C–D

Harry Carney **(V 2008)**
Benny Carter **(C 1977)**
Betty Carter **(C 1999)**
John Carter **(C 1991)**
Paul Chambers **(V 2011)**
Charlie Christian **(C 1966)**
Kenny Clarke **(C 1988)**
Nat "King" Cole **(R 1997)**
Ornette Coleman **(R 1969)**
John Coltrane **(R 1965)**
Chick Corea **(R 2010)**
Tadd Dameron **(V 2009)**
Miles Davis **(R 1962)**
Paul Desmond **(R 1977)**
Baby Dodds **(V 2010)**
Johnny Dodds **(C 1987)**
Eric Dolphy **(R 1964)**

E–G

Billy Eckstine **(V 2010)**
Roy Eldridge **(C 1971)**
Duke Ellington **(R 1956)**
Bill Evans **(C 1981)**
Gil Evans **(C 1986)**
Maynard Ferguson **(R 1992)**
Ella Fitzgerald **(R 1979)**
Erroll Garner **(V 2008)**
Stan Getz **(R 1986)**
Dizzy Gillespie **(R 1960)**
Benny Goodman **(R 1957)**
Dexter Gordon **(R 1980)**
Stéphane Grappelli **(R 1983)**

H–J

Lionel Hampton **(R 1987)**
Herbie Hancock **(R 2005)**
Coleman Hawkins **(C 1961)**
Roy Haynes **(C 2004)**
Julius Hemphill **(C 1995)**
Fletcher Henderson **(C 1973)**
Joe Henderson **(R 2001)**
Jimi Hendrix **(R 1970)**
Woody Herman **(R 1976)**
Andrew Hill **(C 2007)**
Earl Hines **(C 1965)**
Milt Hinton **(C 2001)**
Johnny Hodges **(C 1970)**
Billie Holiday **(R 1961)**
Freddie Hubbard **(R 2009)**
Milt Jackson **(R 1999)**
Ahmad Jamal **(R 2011)**
Keith Jarrett **(R 2008)**
Antonio Carlos Jobim **(R 2002)**
James P. Johnson **(C 1992)**
J.J. Johnson **(R 1995)**
Elvin Jones **(C 1998)**
Hank Jones **(C 2009)**
Jo Jones **(V 2008)**
Philly Joe Jones **(V 2010)**
Thad Jones **(C 1987)**

K–M

Stan Kenton **(R 1954)**
Rahsaan Roland Kirk **(C 1978)**
Gene Krupa **(R 1972)**
Steve Lacy **(C 2005)**
John Lewis **(C 2002)**
Abbey Lincoln **(C 2011)**
Jimmie Lunceford **(V 2008)**
Jackie McLean **(C 2006)**
Glenn Miller **(R 1953)**
Charles Mingus **(R 1971)**
Thelonious Monk **(R 1963)**
Wes Montgomery **(R 1968)**
Lee Morgan **(R 1991)**
Jelly Roll Morton **(C 1963)**
Paul Motian **(C 2012)**
Gerry Mulligan **(R 1993)**

N–P

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

Q–S

Sun Ra **(C 1984)**
Django Reinhardt **(C 1971)**
Buddy Rich **(R 1974)**
Max Roach **(C 1980)**
Red Rodney **(R 1990)**
Sonny Rollins **(R 1973)**
Pee Wee Russell **(C 1969)**
Artie Shaw **(C 1996)**
Woody Shaw **(R 1989)**
Wayne Shorter **(C 2003)**
Horace Silver **(R 1996)**
Zoot Sims **(C 1985)**
Frank Sinatra **(R 1998)**
Bessie Smith **(C 1967)**
Jimmy Smith **(R 2006)**
Sonny Stitt **(V 2012)**
Billy Strayhorn **(R 1967)**

T–Z

Art Tatum **(C 1964)**
Cecil Taylor **(C 1975)**
Jack Teagarden **(C 1969)**
Clark Terry **(R 2000)**
Lennie Tristano **(C 1979)**
McCoy Tyner **(R 2004)**
Sarah Vaughan **(R 1985)**
Joe Venuti **(R 1978)**
Fats Waller **(C 1968)**
Chick Webb **(V 2010)**
Ben Webster **(C 1974)**
Mary Lou Williams **(C 1990)**
Tony Williams **(C 1997)**
Teddy Wilson **(C 1987)**
Lester Young **(R 1959)**
Frank Zappa **(C 1994)**
Joe Zawinul **(C 2008)**

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60TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
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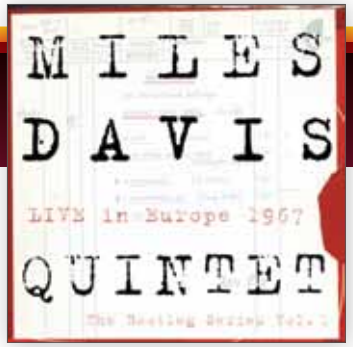
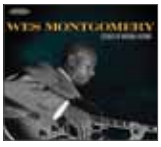


1 Miles Davis Quintet, *Live In Europe 1967: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 1*
(COLUMBIA/LEGACY) **465 votes**

The trumpeter and his second great quintet were in their prime while touring with George Wein's Newport Jazz Festival.

2 Wes Montgomery, *Echoes Of Indiana Avenue*
(RESONANCE) **172**



Newly discovered live recordings made in Indianapolis sometime in 1957 or '58 shed light on the early work of one of jazz's greatest guitarists during a pivotal point in his career.

3 Modern Jazz Quartet, *The Complete Atlantic Studio Recordings Of The Modern Jazz Quartet, 1956–1964* (MOSAIC) 121

Exceptionally prolific during its tenure with Atlantic, the ever-cool MJQ gains further distinction with this seven-CD box set.

4 Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble, *Old/Quartet Sessions* (NESSA) 78

The material collected on this two-CD set features Mitchell with Lester Bowie, Malachi Favors and Phillip Wilson. Cut in four days in 1967, the music was unprecedented at the time and can still blow minds today.

5 Dave Brubeck Quartet, *Their Last Time Out*
(COLUMBIA/LEGACY) **76**

Brubeck's quartet of 17 years with Paul Desmond, Eugene Wright and Joe Morello played their last concert together in Pittsburgh on Dec. 26, 1967, as documented on this previously unreleased CD.

6 Aretha Franklin, *Take A Look: Aretha Franklin Complete On Columbia*
(COLUMBIA/LEGACY) **76**

This 11-CD box set (with DVD) presents the Queen of Soul while she was still earning her credentials on the Columbia label, starting in 1960 at age 18.

7 Howlin' Wolf, *Smokestack Lightning: The Complete Chess Masters, 1951–1960*
(HIP-O SELECT/GEFFEN) **75**

Perhaps the most unique and powerful performer in the history of the blues, Howlin' Wolf created a remarkable catalog of music for Chess Records.

8 Ray Charles, *Singular Genius: The Complete ABC Singles* (CONCORD) 56

This five-disc box set contains numerous treasures Brother Ray recorded after signing with ABC-Paramount in late 1959, including several tracks never issued on CD before. Clearly, he was keeping a step ahead of the era's musical changes.

9 Ray Charles, *Live In France 1961* (EAGLE ROCK) 41

Charles' July 1961 sets at the French Antibes Jazz Festival—his first time performing outside of North America—were explosive. They were also expertly filmed, as presented here on DVD. Charles and his band dove deeply into pop, jazz, r&b and gospel terrain.

10 Roscoe Mitchell, *Before There Was Sound* (NESSA) 37

Recorded in 1965 by Mitchell's working band with Malachi Favors, Alvin Fielder and Fred Berry, this historic release reveals a musician carving out his own space and hints at much bolder things to come.

11 Sir Roland Hanna, *Colors From A Giant's Kit* (IPO) 36
12 Magic Sam Blues Band, *West Side Soul* (DELMARK) 29
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Robert Glasper
LET IT BLUR

By John Ephland // Photo by Jimmy and Dena Katz at Brooklyn Recording

You could hear it coming. Halfway through his 2009 release, *Double Booked* (Blue Note), Robert Glasper started to show his other hand. Tracks 1–6 were by his acoustic trio, while tracks 7–12 were billed to his electric Experiment band.

And then along comes this year's *Black Radio* (Blue Note), a full-length album by The Robert Glasper Experiment. The keyboardist has been working with rappers and singers in the realms of hip-hop and r&b since at least 2001, when he collaborated with *Black Radio* contributor Bilal, followed by work with the late J Dilla, Q-Tip, Common and another *Black Radio* contributor, Lupe Fiasco.

Glasper scored wins in five categories in this year's DownBeat Critics Poll. *Black Radio* was voted the Beyond Album of the Year, and the Robert Glasper Experiment was named the top Beyond Group. Glasper was named the Rising Star Jazz Artist and the Rising Star Pianist, while his trio was voted the Rising Star Jazz Group.

Glasper offers a relaxed smile when the subject of his poll wins comes up. Sitting in a hotel lobby, The Experiment still has a sound-check before two shows later that night at the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival in Kalamazoo, Mich. "I thought it was gonna be a really cool record that people would like, kind of underground," Glasper says before rattling off the statistics. "It debuted at number 15 on the [Billboard] 200. It debuted at number four on the hip-hop/r&b charts, after Rihanna, Tyga ... and Drake [*laughs*]. It debuted number four in digital sales, after Adele and Kid Cudi. It's really crazy. But that's a great thing—that you can do your music and be honest and still make it on those kinds of charts. Normally, to be after Rihanna on a chart you have to be some kind of cookie-cutter thing."

The distinctiveness of *Black Radio* comes in part from the fact that it's mostly singer-driven with some rap, while the instrumental solos are on the side. Glasper assembled a team of urban radio artists to work alongside his regular collaborators.

"My favorite jazz musicians didn't just play jazz," Glasper says. "Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, the list goes on and on. I like other music. It helps jazz music out to blur the lines. All of my influences are in there. Some things are jazz, some things are hip-hop, some things are r&b, because I was blessed with a talent to play those different kinds of music. Now, I don't think the critics are saying I'm not a jazz musician; I think I've proven that with my other records, and if you see me live. My whole band studied the music, hard-core. We're all on serious jazz records and take that music very seriously. And we're all proficient on our instruments—which is the difference between any other band that's ever done hip-hop music and jazz in the past."

At the Gilmore, musical sophistication gracefully moved in and out of some serious hip-hop vibes. Joining Glasper on keys were regulars Casey Benjamin on alto saxophone and vocoder, bassist Derrick Hodge and in place of Chris Dave on drums (then on tour with D'Angelo) was Mark Colenburg.

"Some people say, 'Oh, it's been done before. What's the big hype about *Black Radio*?' The big hype about it," Glasper notes, "is there's never been a band that does all that music effortlessly and honestly and without being pretentious. And it's organic. When you hear us play hip-hop, it's hip-hop. All the hip-hop heads will say, 'Them are the roots.' And any jazz band, when we sit down and play *A Love Supreme*, we're not gonna be like, 'Here's the hip-hop guys.' No, we're playing everything organically."

Black Radio is breaking musical ground, and it's getting played on the radio—and not just at midnight but also during the day.

"During the *day*," Glasper says emphatically, regarding the airplay. "For a 17-year-old kid to hear that music, who listens to hip-hop, for [one of my songs] to come on now, it's like, 'Hey, what's that?' What *Black Radio* has done—it helps the music. Herbie would not be as popular in pop culture if it wasn't for 'Rockit.' Kids who come up now know who Herbie is. They may not have checked out all his music, but they know who Herbie is. And that says something. That says, 'Hey, man, he's not afraid of being of now.' Even at his age, he's not afraid of being of now. That was what was going on then [during the '80s], with break-dancing. So, he said, 'I'll do this. This is cool. Yes, I can play a blues, too.'"

"It was great to collaborate with Robert," says Paris, a member of the trio KING, which contributed vocals and keyboards to the serene, exquisitely funky "Move Love." "His creative spirit and energy were a real treat to experience in the creative process."

So what comes next? Given that *Black Radio* is populated with artists Glasper has collaborated with before, it only seems natural that he'd want some new names on board to continue the momentum the CD has generated. "I wanna work with Cee Lo and André 3000," Glasper says. "I wanna work with Little Dragon, José González, Anita Baker, D'Angelo. If I do another record like this, it may be a mix of people I've never played with before, or people that I have played with before but who never appeared on my own records.

"But at the same time," the quixotic artist quickly adds, "I also wanna do a live-at-the-Vanguard trio date." **DB**


Exhibit

Dr. John
SHIFTING GEARS

By Jennifer Odell // Photo by Adam McCullough

On the main stage at the 2012 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival in late April, Dr. John looked downright rejuvenated. Busting out the occasional pigeon-toed strut dance move, Mac Rebennack alternately played electric and acoustic piano and even a little guitar as he growled his way through tunes spanning a six-decade-long career. Shortly before the end of his set, he stood up from his bench, splayed his knees and bent his large body down into a near-split, trusty African walking staff in one hand, the other aimed up at the sky. It might as well have been a victory pose—and rightly so.

Earlier that month, Rebennack had released *Locked Down* (Nonesuch), a collaboration with guitarist and producer Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys. It has been widely praised by critics as one of the most shining accomplishments of the 71-year-old's career. Debuting at No. 1 on the Billboard Blues Albums chart, the CD mixes the most compelling elements of his sticky, hoodoo-soaked blues concepts with a new approach to lyric writing. Dr. John also eschews his acoustic piano for a Farfisa organ, which gives his playing a distinctly new sound even as the instrument itself heightens the spooky soulfulness for which he is famous. Subject-wise, the songs delve more deeply into his psyche than ever, uncovering regrets, fears and visceral responses to the hard truths of life.

This spring, Dr. John's impact was evident far outside of the sales charts, too. From late March through mid-April, the *Locked Down* material inspired one of three programs in a nine-day Brooklyn Academy of Music residency titled "Dr. John: Insides Out." A second bill celebrated New Orleans funk and featured guests like Irma Thomas, Donald Harrison and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. The third program was a Pops tribute pegged to Rebennack's forthcoming, George Avakian-produced album *Dr. John Meets Louis Armstrong* (due out on Proper Records this year).

Rebennack's Jazz Fest performance came just days after he'd launched the first Healing Ceremony for the Gulf, a weeklong event featuring music and non-denominational prayer aimed at healing "the waters, the land, the critters and the people" of the region. Produced in conjunction with Turtle Women Rising, a Gulf Coast-based Native American organization, it culminated on the anniversary of the 2010 BP oil spill. Dr. John, traveling by pedicab, led a massive second line from Armstrong Park to the Mississippi River, where he held a memorial for the workers killed on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig.

Rebennack's recognition as the Blues Artist of the Year in the DownBeat Critics Poll comes at a time when his musical output and community influence actually rival that of his 1970s heyday. Back then, the mystically funky, psychedelic r&b-meets-swamp-rock mash-up he introduced on LPs like 1968's *Gris-Gris* and 1973's *In The Right Place* broke new musical ground. With the arrival of *Locked Down*, and Auerbach's help, however, Dr. John has secured a new reign—one that exists outside the shadows of his Night Tripper persona.

"When Dan first got in touch with me, he came to the pad and we was going to write some songs," Rebennack recalls, referring to the New Orleans visit during which Auerbach proposed producing a new Dr. John record. "We tried, and everything was going along well—not that we used any of it."

Though the first music they played didn't quite stick, there was clearly a spark. Or, as he describes it in the unique Dr. John vernacular: "We had some good chemicals there."

Among them was a personal connection that allowed Rebennack to feel at ease trying a new approach to his creative process. He credits Auerbach with encouraging him to search a different side of himself for inspiration.

"We talked a lot," says Rebennack. "One of the things from the minute we was communicating, it was like he opened up, and that's important to me." Auerbach proposed his vision for the album: Rebennack would record with a group of artists Auerbach selected, outside of New Orleans, and the goal would be "shifting some gears," as Rebennack puts it, from how he usually records.

That summer, Rebennack and Auerbach joined forces onstage at the annual Superjam set at the Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival in Tennessee. With them was an array of musicians, including drummer Max Weissenfeldt (of the German band Poets of Rhythm), whose retro-funky, Afro-pop beats ended up on the final album, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, who were guests on the performance but not the recording. (Earlier that weekend, Dr. John and the Meters had performed his entire 1974 album *Desitively Bonnaroo*, from which the festival got its name.)

Prior to the Bonnaroo show, Auerbach invited the musicians coming together for the Superjam to rehearse at his Nashville studio.

"We went through all the songs and took a break, and when we came back, Dr. John

Dr. John at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, April 5

showed up," recalls Preservation Hall tuba player Ben Jaffe. "Mac's been knowing the guys in my band since they were kids—I mean, he knew [drummer] Joe Lastie's *grandparents*. But none of the guys in Dan's band knew Mac. It was interesting to witness how those guys perceived Mac [versus] the legend of Dr. John. It's always fascinating to see how people experience things for the first time that you've known your whole life."

Noting that Auerbach's band members idolized Rebennack based on his early records, Jaffe suggests that "as an artist, something different happens to you when you're breaking that ice for the first time."

"I haven't really seen Mac stretch way outside of his familiarity zone in his career," Jaffe continues. "But he had this young person—with young energy and a different take on what he does and who he is—push him to create something that someone who knew him for 40 years couldn't have done."

For Rebennack, it was spiritual kismet. "Everything was different than the way I usually do stuff," he explains. "Usually I'm trying to just get a groove with the band, that kind of thing. And I'm singing songs as I'm going to get down with it, just so they got an idea. This was way different because we just started up cutting tracks, and everybody was contributing to everything.

"Then he started doing some of these old-school things. He actually had one of these Farfisa organs. I hated them things back in the day. All of a sudden, I walk in the studio and he's got one that's really hip. I didn't know that [hip ones] existed. I just thought, 'Wow.' It wasn't like playing an organ or any kind of electric piano."

Encouraged to compose without reference to New Orleans motifs and paradigms, Dr. John delved into autobiographical lyrics about conflicted parenthood ("My Children, My Angels"), systemic malfunctions that breed social chaos ("Ice Age," "Revolution") and his time in prison on a drug charge ("Locked Down").

In the end, Rebennack dedicated the album to his children and grandchildren. "They had a song on there that I wrote for them," he says. "And I figured, in the light of trying to do things to make up for stuff, I would do that. A lot of [bad] things was never their fault, and I'm trying to be there for them now."

Malcolm John Rebennack Jr. was born in New Orleans and grew up in the city's Third Ward, where he played music professionally from a young age. He also got mixed up in drugs and crime, leading to a jail term and a shooting injury that forced him to give up the guitar for piano.

After a few years working as a session musician in Los Angeles, he returned to his New Orleans roots and adopted the name "Dr. John, the Night Tripper" in advance of his classic sophomore album, *Gris-Gris*. But much of the musical success that followed was clouded on a personal level by a drug addiction, which lasted through most of the 1980s.

If *Locked Down* is any indication, the bad memories must remain intense. The title track opens with wild bird calls, a stray dog's bark, a sinister drum roll punctuated by a chain-gang chant and a bass line that reverberates thickly as each string is stretched to its limit. While Rebennack sings about doing hard time in tones that sound resigned to an unwanted fate, an extended guitar solo in the middle of the song pushes past the melody.

On "Revolution," he bemoans, *"Blind eyes of justice/ Deaf ears of power/ Dumb moves of money/ Left us in a desperate hour."* Issues regarding political and economic failures to protect the people and natural landscape of Louisiana remain a central focus for Rebennack, who explored those themes on his Grammy-winning 2008 release, *City That Care Forgot* (429 Records). He says that he hits walls when speaking to politicians about the complaints registered in his music, because their replies ring with "untruths."

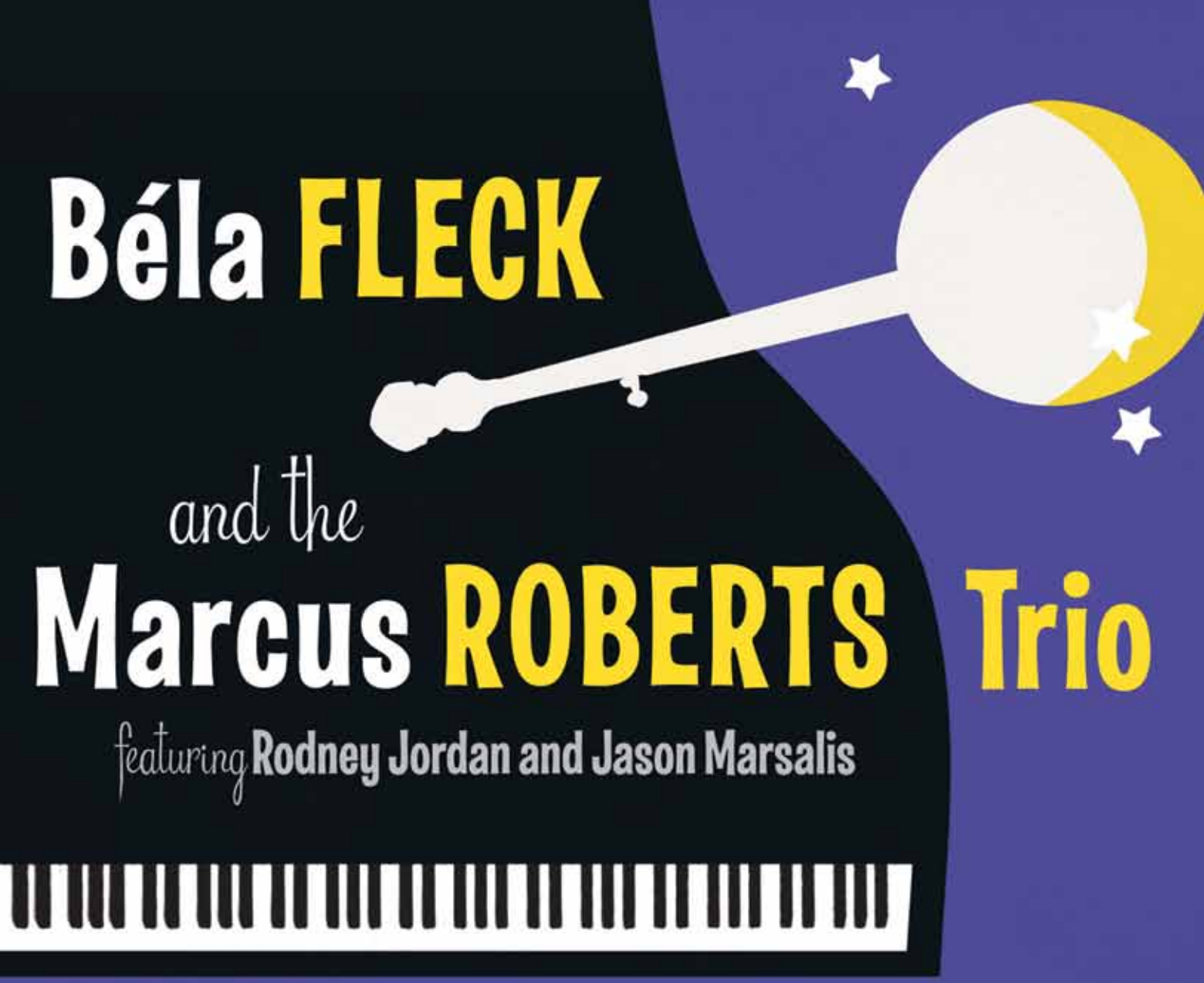
"If we aren't about the truths, what are we about?" he asks.

April's Healing Ceremony was an attempt to make a different kind of progress. Rebennack angrily notes that BP's oil is "still springing this stuff into the Gulf."

"We knew that was going to continue, but our goal was basically to show people that if we honor each other and the planet, we can actually help do something big," he says.

"I like to do things that open people's minds, open people's ears to something different."

Now, perhaps more than ever before, Dr. John is doing just that. **DB**



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Wycliffe Gordon

TROMBONE IS JUST THE BEGINNING

By Kevin Whitehead // Photo by Bassmint Photography

Wycliffe Gordon has played so much trombone for over two decades—starting in Wynton Marsalis' septet and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra—that it's a wonder he's only now topped the DownBeat Critics Poll.

His gospel-soaked 2011 album *The Word* (BluesBack) shows off the vocalized brass conception you can trace back to his church upbringing—his urge to shout on the horn and let its nobility ring out. Gordon's stately approach to the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy" recalls Duke Ellington's sanctified trombonist Lawrence Brown; "Sang My Song" shows how to scat-sing and syncopate in a sacred context.

That scatting is Gordon's own. We celebrate his virtuoso trombone technique, but these days he attracts more and more attention as a singer. It all stems from a lifelong love of Louis Armstrong, the subject of his other 2011 album, *Hello Pops!* (BluesBack).

"Louis Armstrong is the greatest example of how the instrument is connected to the voice," Gordon says. "His singing is the same as his playing. I think his singing influenced his playing." As the trombonist sings on the *Hello Pops!* title track: *"If I could do it for 10 quadrillion/ Wouldn't amount to what you did for me."* The influence runs deep. Gordon's music has a heavy New Orleans feel belying his Georgia origins.

Armstrong loved to sing from childhood, but Gordon bloomed later.

"Singing wasn't something I always did," he says. "My mom did make me sing in the church choir before the musicians would let me play. But it was not my favorite thing. If I could do something over, I would change that. Singing and playing are equally valid now. I used to play more; now I sing more."

Gordon points out the voice's handy portability: nothing to carry around or unpack. You can sing at your desk, in the car, out walking. (It's not just for the shower.) Last year, he put out *Sing It First*, an exercise book compiled and edited by Alan Raph. Gordon says, "No matter the style, if you can sing it first, you can play it." It'll help you hear intervals and articulate, Gordon writes, and ultimately to sing better, too. He makes his own case there.

Hello Pops! isn't merely a love letter to Armstrong; Gordon throws in a bouquet and a box of chocolates. One tune with a strong second-line New Orleans street beat is called "Pops For President" (with constitutional issues set aside). Singing, he'll growl a little but doesn't fall into gravelly Satchmo impersonation. Gordon lets his own warm vocal quality shine. But the impact of Armstrong's phrasing and pronunciation is hard to miss—on "I Cover The Waterfront," check out his arpeggiated "*Oh how I yearn*"—or rather, "*yoin*."

The program honors the old master while allowing for modern studio sweetening. Gordon overdubbed horn parts here and there, playing trombone, sousaphone and Pops-inspired trumpet—the last with a trombonist-friendly Wycliffe Gordon Chasons Hybrid mouthpiece. Sometimes he harmonized his vocal lines, as on the hooky descending refrain to "Hello Pops," recalling King Oliver's "Chimes Blues."

Gordon laid down brass lines on three horns for the sashaying "Meatball 1, 2, 3." "I wanted to create three different characters, or characteristics—not make them all sound like the same voice," he says. Gordon also made some post-production edits on "Basin Street Blues," where he stripped out some of the vocal harmonies by Nancy Harms and brass players Emily Asher and Bria Skonberg, replacing them with his own Mills Brothers-influenced moaning.

Post-dubbing aside, Anat Cohen—who mostly plays clarinet on the album—says the recordings were straightforward: "When we were in the studio, we recorded together, hearing each other play in real time," she says. "If he did any fixes, it was after that."

Cohen and Gordon had bonded on some of the Louis Armstrong Centennial Band's weekly Birdland gigs in New York. She gushes about him the way other collaborators do: "I cannot describe how happy Wycliffe's playing makes me. He's a generous soul who always gives an opportunity to the younger cats. He supports and helps develop the next generation of jazz."

Gordon was born in Waynesboro, Ga., in 1967. He grew up in the Peach State and later attended Florida A&M in Tallahassee. "In my younger years, I listened to gospel and classical music, thanks to my parents," he says. "But I was listening to New Orleans music before I ever met any New Orleans musicians." His family inherited an aunt's five-LP jazz anthology, and young Wycliffe was instantly drawn to Pops' Hot Fives and

Sevens masterpieces from the '20s. He briefly took piano lessons, starting at age 11, but kept up his playing with his church youth choir. When his older brother brought a trombone home from school, Gordon knew what he really wanted to play. He caught on quick, encouraged by teachers like Harkness Butler. (*Sing It First* is dedicated to Butler.)

Trumpeter Marcus Printup, who's worked extensively with Gordon in numerous settings, first laid eyes on him in Savannah, Ga., in 1985, at an all-state high-school musicians' competition. "I didn't know anything about jazz at the time," Printup says. "I'm hanging out on a break, and suddenly 30 or 40 kids come running by, in a frenzy. 'There's a guy named Wycliffe Gordon here, and he's playing jazz!' He was kind of skinny back then, with a great big Afro, just bebopping! And I'm thinking, 'How'd he learn to play that great?'"

The next time Printup saw him was six years later, when he went to a concert by Wynton Marsalis' septet. There was Gordon on stage, with a slightly larger build and shorter hair. Before long, they were playing together in the Lincoln Center band.

"Wycliffe's got that New Orleans thing; he has definitely studied that music," Printup says. "But he also has a certain thing Georgia musicians have, that comes from the black Baptist church, and how we sing there." (Printup pauses to illustrate, singing a swayback version of "Amazing Grace.")

"It's a certain vibe that takes me home," Printup explains. "I hear it in everything he plays, and it's what I aim for, too. His trumpet playing? He's so scary, so good."

For Gordon, a horn is merely one vehicle for making music. Playing and singing,

improvising and composing are all part of the same package: "Composing gives you a chance to bring out a different side of your playing. I love to perform, write and teach."

He had caught Marsalis' ear when the trumpeter visited Florida A&M, but that was due more to Gordon's musical initiative than his trombone technique. "He came to a big band rehearsal," says Wycliffe, "where everyone who wanted to could play. Wynton suggested we make a blues out of section riffs, Basie style. I'd grown up in church, and listened to New Orleans music. So I came up with a riff, taught it to the trombone section, and we were playing it by the second chorus. Later Wynton asked, 'Who came up with that riff? I want to talk to you afterwards.'"

Marsalis' own Ellingtonian pastiches helped stretch Gordon's expressive range on trombone—he's mastered the pixie-mute-plus-plunger sound of Duke's wah-wah specialists—and he had no trouble relating to Marsalis' New Orleans callbacks, or the churchiness of 1993's *In This House, On This Morning* (Columbia).

Gordon eventually moved on, but has kept recording with chums from his Lincoln Center days, such as Printup, Victor Goines, Ted Nash, Eric Reed, Herlin Riley and Reginald Veal. But his circle has grown wider: "I'm open to making music in any setting. I like checking things out." Gordon has recorded traditional jazz with New York's Sidney Bechet Society, and the music of a belatedly recognized '50s hero with the Herbie Nichols Project. Gordon also contributed to Jimmy Owens' *The Monk Project* (IPO), released in January.

On a couple of tracks from Roswell Rudd's 2009 CD *Trombone Tribe* (Sunnyside), Gordon slides in beside diverse colleagues Ray Anderson, Eddie Bert, Sam Burtis and Josh Roseman. Gordon didn't have any trouble keeping up with Rudd and Anderson; he's developed some of his own unorthodox stuff, like the buzzy, Donald Duck-y mouthpiece sounds he displays on "Meatball 1, 2, 3" and 2007's *BloozBluzeBlues* (BluesBack).

"I do spend time on what I've stumbled on—blowing air through the horn, trying to simulate someone waking up," he says. "On tuba, I might sound like I'm trying to crank up a lawn mower. Or like a race car. Or the way someone laughs or speaks. Babies crying, an elephant's wail: I like to use them in a musical way. And someone turned me on to multiphonics"—singing and playing at once, for a rich, almost chordal texture—"before I ever heard [trombonist] Albert Mangelsdorff." It's all in the tradition; old New Orleans brass men like King Oliver were famous for "freak playing," too.

"I love to play trumpet, but it's a hobby, though I do practice. It's easy to play, and to carry around. But whenever I play, I realize I'm a trombonist first and foremost." The critics agree. **DB**

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Marcus Strickland
PAINTING SOUND

By Thomas Staudter // Photo by Ben Sowa

Marcus Strickland had been playing the alto saxophone for two years when, at age 13, he received a new soprano saxophone for Christmas.

"I got the soprano out of the box," Strickland recalls, "and the first song I played on it was 'Afro Blue'—a duet with E.J." He's referring to his identical twin brother, the drummer E. J. Strickland. "We had been practicing the song with the idea of impressing our parents, since I knew I was getting the soprano as a gift. We were playing away, and I looked over at my dad, and tears were streaming down his face."

Sitting in front of the New York Public Library in Midtown Manhattan on a spring day, Strickland smiles at the memory. "Maybe because that was my dad, seeing him cry meant something to me," he says. "To see how this thing that I'm so passionate about could also deeply move somebody else—right then I decided that I wanted to play music for the rest of my life."

From his home in the Florida Keys, Michael Strickland, father of the two jazz artists and a lawyer by trade, chuckles over the phone when the soprano story is recounted for him. "The boys had been listening to a lot of jazz—and it wasn't a surprise they could play so well," he says. "But I remember being amazed at how good they sounded." Michael later corroborates another one of his son's anecdotes: The twin boys, prior to grade school, constantly rocked their heads into the backseat of the family's 1980 Toyota Corolla while great music was playing—mostly Stevie Wonder, Jimi Hendrix and Miles Davis—until they had made two holes in the back rest.

Now 33, Marcus Strickland has taken top honors in the Rising Star Soprano Saxophone category of the DownBeat Critics Poll again (he won the category in 2008). He's highly regarded for his fluent tenor saxophone playing, and after many years away from the instrument, has returned to blowing the alto sax regularly. But his strong connection to the soprano stands as a key element of his musical persona, the avenue to a certain expressiveness and aesthetic rationalization.

"I see [these] three saxophones as different paintbrushes," Strickland says. "Each works best with different colors and approaches, which I choose in terms of my sensibilities and what the situation calls for. With the tenor saxophone, I'm thinking 'James Brown…testifying…preaching from the bottom of my soul.' The alto is tricky for me right now; it's so much a part of what I'm also doing on tenor and soprano. I haven't really been back on it long enough to fully separate it from the other horns. On the soprano, though, I feel like I'm soaring gracefully above everything, or I'm an opera singer. I'm more particular about the soprano than I am on the other saxophones."

Strickland focuses on communicating when soloing, he says, and not merely exploring the boundaries of sound. "I'm trying to make connections from the beginning, just by playing the melody," he says, "and rather than try to reinvent something, I go back to the idea of creating notes and ideas that will move someone. I'm not concerned with being an innovator—that's out of my control. What I *can* control is the level of honesty and personality in my playing."

The singing, incantatory quality of Strickland's soprano saxophone playing seems to have been reserved for covers on his more recent recordings. On 2009's *Idiosyncrasies* (Strick Muzik), he includes a soulful rendition of Björk's "Scatterheart" and ventures out with brother E.J. and his regular trio mate, bassist Ben Williams, on Jaco Pastorius' "Portrait Of Tracy" before giving Stevie Wonder's "You've Got It Bad Girl" a post-bop workout. Another 2009 album, *Of Song* (Criss Cross Jazz), features the soprano sax on Malian vocalist-composer Oumou Sangare's "Djorolen" and pianist Bruce Hornsby's "Shadowlands," both respectful and straightforward. While Strickland reprises the Pastorius cover with his trio on the second, live disc of last year's *Triumph Of The Heavy, Vol. 1 & 2* (Strick Muzik), the more expansive and Coltranesque side of Strickland's soprano work is reserved for original compositions like "A World Found" and "Dawn," with pianist David Bryant added, and another trio performance called "Surreal." An uptempo original, "Surreal" has a tumbling melody that the saxophonist hopscotches all over, creating perhaps his finest recording with the horn.

"I was lucky to have some great music teachers," says Strickland, who grew up in Miami and then moved to New York in 1997 to attend the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. As far as soprano saxophone goes, Strickland gives a nod to a more recent tutor—Branford Marsalis—who, he says, "gave me a lot of help with the hands-on mechanics of the instrument, and how to articulate effectively on it to produce a big sound." He notes further that Marsalis emphasized blowing *down* into the soprano sax so the airstream fills the chamber as much as possible.

After placing third in the 2002 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition and gaining wider notice of his talent, Strickland landed some choice regular gigs with the likes of Roy Haynes and Dave Douglas. He also has found steady work with close contemporaries like Robert Glasper, Lage Lund and Helen Sung, on whose 2007

CD *Sungbird (After Albéniz)* he particularly shines. Such collaborations, along with leading his own groups and running his boutique record label, have made him one of the busiest young jazz saxophonists on the scene.

"I remember being impressed by his rapid development on the soprano sax," recalls Sung, who has worked with Strickland for several years. "He has a natural, great sound, and he builds exciting, distinctive solos. It's terrific to see his continuing evolution as a jazz saxophonist and composer."

For a recent gig with the Jeff "Tain" Watts 4 at the Zinc Bar in lower Manhattan, Strickland spends most of the night playing tenor sax. But on Watts' ballad "5/15/11," Strickland picks up the soprano. Each note on the horn is big and ripe, clean and distinct.

"As long as I've known him, Marcus has always been a sharp, serious musician," says Watts a few days after the Zinc Bar gig. "He's worked hard to put things in place for his career, and now he's getting his due for being so consistently good." **DB**

Linda Oh
ADVENTUROUS EVOLUTION

By Michael Gallant // Photo by Vincent Soyez

"I wrote 'Deeper Than Happy' for my 2-year-old niece, who's amazing and just wants to make people laugh," says bassist and composer Linda Oh, referring to a buoyant track from her latest album, *Initial Here* (Greenleaf Music). "It's a beautiful thing that children have no inhibitions to express emotions like joy, and it's a shame that as adults, we learn to suppress some of that."

Twisting upward from drummer Rudy Royston's funky backbeat, "Deeper Than Happy" is anything but inhibited. Fabian Almazan adds effortless bubbles of Fender Rhodes to Royston's grooves, creating a sonic playground amongst which Oh's electric bass can bounce and weave. When the time comes for her solo, Oh builds with playful intensity, exploring the tune's open spaces with intrepidness reminiscent of her toddler inspiration.

"You can sense it in her rhythmic interplay—she's adventurous," says Royston, who first became impressed with Oh's strength and tone during a jam session at Fat Cat in New York City. "I can try anything, and she is quick and willing to venture with me. She's so well-versed in any style."

Oh brings such breadth not only to her improvisations on *Initial Here*, but also to the compositions themselves. "Ultimate Persona" builds on Oh's jagged acoustic bass stabs to create an atmosphere of intrigue, excitement and nostalgia, while "Deeper Than Sad" channels mourning through somber horn harmonies and the occasional touch of dissonance, yet soars all the same. "If I was going to write something called 'Deeper Than Happy,' I needed to write something called 'Deeper Than Sad' as well," Oh explains. "Life isn't all happiness. We need to go through dark times to appreciate the good."

Both tracks came about thanks to pianist Fred Hersch, with whom Oh took one lesson. "He taught me the kitchen-timer technique," she says. "He'll set a timer for 45 minutes and see how much he can come up with in that allotted time. I really needed that approach when I was working on this album. On previous projects, I found myself overthinking my compositions, which were through-composed. A lot of the tunes on this record are more simple, jazz-style lead sheets—'Here's the melody, chords and form. Let's go!'"

Oh describes *Initial Here* as a diverse collection, with influences ranging from the work of Charles Mingus and Ray Brown to an around-the-world journey she took to rediscover her roots. "I visited Shanghai and Malaysia, where I was born," says Oh, who moved to Australia with her parents at age 3. "It was an eye-opening experience. It was great to hear family stories, see where my parents grew up and really understand my heritage and what they went through."

A result of that journey is "Thicker Than Water," a song that features vocals by Jen Shyu. "It's half in Mandarin and half in English," says Oh. "Jen speaks Mandarin, and the way she interpreted the song was beautiful."

The track "Desert Island Dream" was partially inspired by what Oh calls "the migrant mentality." "Both in Australia and here, immigration can be a touchy subject," she says. "But that idea of taking your whole family somewhere else for better opportunities, that's something I can really relate to."

Oh's own physical and musical journey—from playing rock 'n' roll in Australian bars to earning widespread praise as a jazz player and composer in the United States—was given a boost in 2004 when she was chosen by the International Association for Jazz Education for its Sisters In Jazz program. "They sponsored me to come to New York," Oh recalls. "I was coached by Renee Rosnes, took a few lessons with Todd Coolman and had a lesson with Ray Drummond. It was an amazing experience, and I came back two years later. Once I got to know New York, I knew I had to move here." Grants from the Australian government, along with an acceptance letter to study for her master's at the Manhattan School of Music, helped make her dream a reality.

Six years deep into her New York musical life, Oh finds that her activities range far beyond those of bandleader and recording artist. She continues to compose for film, and she recently completed a residency at New York's Jazz Gallery that focused on her original music for strings. For future string projects, Oh hopes to reintroduce "music in the dark," a concept she had previously pursued. "I would like to do a series of concerts in the dark, with the audience in the middle and the string orchestra surrounding them," she says.

Oh also seeks to further hone her chops and experience as a sideperson. "I was impressed with her sound, her spirit of adventure and the fact that she's a great sight-reader," says pianist Kenny Barron, who phoned Oh on a recommendation and had her play their first gig together with no rehearsal. "I also appreciated that, in spite of her enormous gifts, she's a team player who is interested in making the band sound better."

Oh sees all of her inspirations as part of a cohesive whole. "As a sideperson, I feel like I'm growing every day, and being a leader has its own huge learning curve—you have to figure out when to be pedantic about little points and when to just let things go. Regardless of the context, it's always good to just bring everything you have to the table and see what you can create." **DB**

Marcus Gilmore
360-DEGREE SOUND

By Ken Micallef // Photo by John Rogers

Performing a solo on John Coltrane's "Countdown," from guitarist Gilad Hekselman's 2009 CD *Words Unspoken* (LateSet Records), drummer Marcus Gilmore condenses an entire drum clinic into a few seconds. Playing swift, dancelike figures, stinging snare inflections and darting cross rhythms, all within an ethereal, almost ghostly time feel, Gilmore puts his stamp on the music with all the intensity and grace of a robo-ballerina. On myriad recordings over the past seven years, the 25-year-old musician has created a brilliant rhythmic and melodic identity, and his swing pulse is as electric as his dazzling improvisations. Flashes of Elvin Jones, Dennis Chambers and Gilmore's grandfather, Roy Haynes, fill his supple drumming commentary.

"When Marcus solos, his time feel is like a flying carpet," Hekselman says. "He is extremely knowledgeable and accurate; he's able to play anything. He has this way of filling the music with sound, and he's always listening to what the music needs. He's never playing to get to his solo, but keeping the music his first priority."

At last summer's Litchfield Jazz Festival performing with Vijay Iyer, Gilmore matched the pianist's melodic storms with wave upon wave of rhythmic variation, like a field of flowers blooming within a single sunrise. Call it drumming in the multidirectional moment. Marcus Gilmore thrives on a world of rhythms.

"I checked out a lot of international music growing up," Gilmore says. "Even now I listen to South American, West African and Central African music, and of course, South Indian and Indonesian music. I definitely listened to a lot of percussion ensembles, classical percussion, folkloric music, everything from Cuba and Mali to Togo and Benin.

"The trap set is such a beautiful thing," Gilmore continues. "We have four limbs, and we can really orchestrate in ways that a lot of other instrumentalists really can't. There's so many possibilities for us. I take advantage of that."

Headliners like Steve Coleman, Dave Douglas, Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Christian Scott all have benefited from Gilmore's multidirectional drumming.

DOWNBEAT 60TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL

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A longtime member of the Vijay Iyer Trio, Gilmore is a major presence in this year's DownBeat Critics Poll. The trio's *Accelerando* (ACT Music + Vision) was voted the top Jazz Album. The trio, which also includes bassist Stephan Crump, was named the best Jazz Group, and Gilmore was voted the Rising Star Drummer.

Gilmore's expressive drumming is a key component on numerous Iyer albums, including 2005's *Reimagining* (SLG/Savoy). Additionally, Gilmore collaborated with Iyer to compose "The Weight Of Things," the opening track on the pianist's excellent 2008 album *Tragicomic* (Sunnyside). Gilmore's other recent recordings include works by Taylor McFerrin (Bobby's son), Robert Glasper, producer Shafiq Husayn and Chick Corea's *The Continents: Concerto For Jazz Quintet & Chamber Orchestra* (Deutsche Grammophon).

"Vijay sometimes writes drum chants for his pieces," Gilmore says. "He got that idea from Doug Hammond, who got it from Africa. Max Roach did the same thing with Bud Powell. 'Un Poco Loco' is a good example. I think Max just came up with that himself. It's the same type of thing, having a specific part for each tune. But it's just a reference, a starting point. It's up to the drummer to do what he wants with it and ultimately make it his own."

Gilmore's childhood was a full-on immersion in music. Uncles Graham and Craig Haynes pointed him toward international music and jazz, respectively, while grandfather Roy quenched his thirst for music recorded "back in the day." At age 11, Gilmore studied orchestral percussion at a weekend program presented by The Juilliard School. Three years at New York's Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts led to enrollment at the Manhattan School of Music, which Gilmore left a year later.

Soon he was touring and recording with artists such as Ravi Coltrane and Nicholas Payton.

Gilmore's enveloping rhythmic style reflects an equally broad tonal palette. His 360-degree sound approach is part of a broader conception that continues to evolve.

"I often change the drum tuning depending on who I'm playing with and the particular piece of music," Gilmore explains. "Even within Vijay's music, I do many different tunings. Sometimes I'm looking for a specific pitch or a specific vibration in the actual drum head. Or I might be looking for a specific texture. I want it to feel a certain way. I can get two drums that are more or less the same pitch, but the texture or the quality of the sound can be very different depending on the size of the drum. I do use the same ride cymbal on most gigs, a Zildjian prototype."

As if describing his drumming, Gilmore adds, "It's pretty warm and lush, but it also has definition. If I want to bring the volume up, it can go there, from 0 to 60 in 4 seconds." **DB**

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Results

We are proud to present the results of the 60th Annual DownBeat International Critics Poll, which includes Jazz Album of the Year (page 30) and Historical Album of the Year (page 40). Results for Established Talent are on pages 60–65, and the Rising Stars categories are on pages 66–68.


Branford Marsalis

ERIC RYAN ANDERSON

Hall Of Fame

Paul Motian 112

Anthony Braxton 78
Don Cherry 66
Lee Konitz 65
Ron Carter 63
Benny Golson 63
Oliver Nelson 63
Bob Brookmeyer 55
B.B. King 52
Randy Weston 48
Hank Mobley 47
Billy Higgins 44
Herbie Nichols 41
George Russell 41
Tito Puente 40
Abdullah Ibrahim 39
Scott LaFaro 39
Bing Crosby 35
Grant Green 33
Carmen McRae 33
Charlie Haden 31
Phil Woods 31

Veterans Committee Hall of Fame

Gene Ammons 68%
Sonny Stitt 68%

Note: Artists must receive at least 66% of the Veterans Committee votes to gain entry.

Other artists receiving more than 50% of the vote:

Eubie Blake 56%
Robert Johnson 52%

Jazz Artist

Vijay Iyer 152

Robert Glasper 108
Esperanza Spalding 105
Sonny Rollins 87
Jason Moran 85
Brad Mehldau 71
Ambrose Akinmusire 60
Christian McBride 56
Chick Corea 50
Bill Frisell 50
Jack DeJohnette 49
Rudresh Mahanthappa 42
Anthony Braxton 40
Ahmad Jamal 38
Terry Lyne Carrington 37
Keith Jarrett 35
Joe Lovano 34
Roy Haynes 30
Charles Lloyd 28
Kenny Barron 26

Jazz Group

Vijay Iyer Trio 188

Joe Lovano Us Five 143
Brad Mehldau Trio 69
Charles Lloyd Quartet 67
Miguel Zenón Quartet 61
The Bad Plus 55
Henry Threadgill Zooid 55
SFJAZZ Collective 54
Matt Wilson's Arts & Crafts 54
Tom Harrell Quintet 53
Branford Marsalis Quartet 49
Rudresh Mahanthappa Indo-Pak Coalition 47
Enrico Rava Quintet 46
Wayne Shorter Quartet 46
Matthew Shipp Trio 45
Microscopic Septet 39
Sonny Rollins Quintet 38
Keith Jarrett Standards Trio 37
Paul Motian Trio 36
Terence Blanchard Quintet 33
Christian McBride Inside Straight 33

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Mingus Big Band 107
SFJAZZ Collective 94
John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble 93
Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra 86
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Clayton–Hamilton Jazz Orchestra 63
Arturo O'Farrill & the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra 60
Either/Orchestra 58
Charles Tolliver Big Band 57
Village Vanguard Orchestra 57
Carla Bley Big Band 54
ICP Orchestra 51
Steven Bernstein Millennial Territory Orchestra 49
Roy Hargrove Big Band 40
Rob Mazurek Exploding Star Orchestra 39
Gerald Wilson Big Band 38
Peter Brötzmann Tentet 36

Trumpet

Ambrose Akinmusire 215

Dave Douglas 153
Tom Harrell 119
Wynton Marsalis 119
Wadada Leo Smith 119
Terell Stafford 110
Terence Blanchard 104
Roy Hargrove 98
Jeremy Pelt 75
Ingrid Jensen 68
Brian Lynch 65
Christian Scott 63
Tomasz Stanko 61
Nicholas Payton 51
Avishai Cohen 50
Steven Bernstein 45
Randy Brecker 43
Clark Terry 40
Sean Jones 35
Jon Faddis 34

Trombone

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Steve Turre 177
Trombone Shorty 150
Roswell Rudd 144
Conrad Herwig 133
Curtis Fuller 86
Robin Eubanks 85
Bob Brookmeyer 65
Jeb Bishop 56
Delfeayo Marsalis 52
Steve Swell 50
George Lewis 45
Ray Anderson 43
Wayne Wallace 41
Luis Bonilla 39
Steve Davis 39
Josh Roseman 39
Curtis Fowlkes 36
Slide Hampton 34
Wolter Wierbos 33

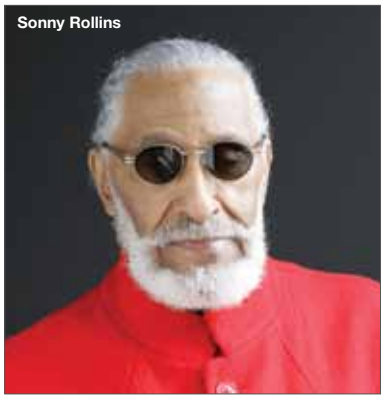
Soprano Saxophone

Branford Marsalis 202

Jane Ira Bloom 167
Dave Liebman 163
Wayne Shorter 160
Anat Cohen 136
Evan Parker 101
Joshua Redman 85
Jane Bunnett 72
Chris Potter 67
Joe Lovano 63
Kenny Garrett 57
Sam Rivers 46
John Surman 42
Sam Newsome 41


Herbie Hancock

DOUGLAS KIRKLAND


Sonny Rollins


Rudresh Mahanthappa

MARK DUGGAN, WHITE NOISE VISUALS

James Carter 38
Steve Wilson 37
Marcus Strickland 33
Ted Nash 32
Roscoe Mitchell 27
Ravi Coltrane 26
Sonny Fortune 24
Tony Malaby 22

Alto Saxophone

Rudresh Mahanthappa 181
Miguel Zenón 139
Lee Konitz 108
Ornette Coleman 100
Kenny Garrett 86
Phil Woods 82
Gary Bartz 72
David Binney 65
Donald Harrison 58
Greg Osby 52
Henry Threadgill 52
Steve Coleman 51
Anthony Braxton 50
Bobby Watson 46
Bunky Green 45
Darius Jones 38
Jon Irabagon 37
Marty Ehrlich 35
Matana Roberts 35
Steve Wilson 32

Tenor Saxophone

Sonny Rollins 234
Joe Lovano 213
Branford Marsalis 106
Chris Potter 95
Joshua Redman 86
Charles Lloyd 84
David S. Ware 68
Wayne Shorter 67
David Murray 65
Houston Person 62
JD Allen 60
Mark Turner 56
Donny McCaslin 47
Anat Cohen 38
Eric Alexander 36
Marcus Strickland 32
Yusef Lateef 30
Tony Malaby 28
James Carter 27
Von Freeman 27
John Ellis 25
Don Braden 23
Evan Parker 22

Baritone Saxophone

Gary Smulyan 327
James Carter 208
Ronnie Cuber 100
Hamiet Bluiett 97
Claire Daly 96
Joe Temperley 88
John Surman 77
Ken Vandermark 74
Mats Gustafsson 60
Scott Robinson 56
Tim Berne 49
Howard Johnson 44
Vinny Golia 41
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Dave Rempis 32
Charlie Kohlhase 25
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Gebhard Ullmann 21
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Marty Ehrlich 59
Evan Christopher 51
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Ab Baars 33
Gianluigi Trovesi 33
Louis Sclavis 32
Michael White 30
Victor Goines 29
Ken Vandermark 29
James Falzone 25
Michael Moore 25
Oscar Noriega 23
Ned Rothenberg 21
François Houle 20
Perry Robinson 20

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Jamie Baum 52
Dave Valentin 46
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Anne Drummond 26
Steve Wilson 25
Ira Sullivan 21
Mark Weinstein 21
Kent Jordan 20
Magic Malik 20
Roscoe Mitchell 20
Wolfgang Puschnig 20

Piano

Vijay Iyer 154
Keith Jarrett 147
Brad Mehldau 131
Jason Moran 119
Chick Corea 95
Craig Taborn 90
Ahmad Jamal 87
Kenny Barron 65
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Robert Glasper 60
Geri Allen 57
Matthew Shipp 56
Cecil Taylor 47
Bill Charlap 42
McCoy Tyner 42
Hiromi 40
Fred Hersch 38
Kenny Werner 32
Benny Green 31
Ethan Iverson 30
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Denny Zeitlin 25
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Larry Goldings 93
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Matthew Shipp 46
Sam Yahel 42
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Jamie Saft 40
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Jason Lindner 33
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60TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL

Béla Fleck

Zakir Hussain

JIM MCGUIRE

Amina Claudine Myers 47
Craig Taborn 46
Barbara Dennerlein 36
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Jared Gold 25
Reuben Wilson 24
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Chris Foreman 20
Melvin Rhyne 20

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Pat Metheny 90
Marc Ribot 90
Russell Malone 85
John McLaughlin 69
Kurt Rosenwinkel 66
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Jim Hall 50
Lionel Loueke 44
Bobby Broom 43
Peter Bernstein 41
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Howard Alden 38
John Abercrombie 36
Jeff Parker 36
Bucky Pizzarelli 33
Anthony Wilson 30
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Charlie Hunter 24
John Pizzarelli 23
Al Di Meola 22
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Charlie Haden 152
Esperanza Spalding 144
William Parker 100
Stanley Clarke 62
Dave Holland 62
Ron Carter 56
Avishai Cohen 51
Larry Grenadier 49
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Ben Allison 45
John Patitucci 45
Drew Gress 44
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Gary Peacock 38
Ray Drummond 35
Peter Washington 35
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Stanley Clarke 131
Marcus Miller 130
Steve Swallow 118
Victor Wooten 100
John Patitucci 79
Jamaaladeen Tacuma 75
Derrick Hodge 65
Stomu Takeishi 50
Skuli Sverrisson 49
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Richard Bona 34
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Roy Haynes 168
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Scott Robinson (BASS SAXOPHONE) 54


Maria Schneider

Cassandra Wilson

Male Vocalist

Female Vocalist

Composer

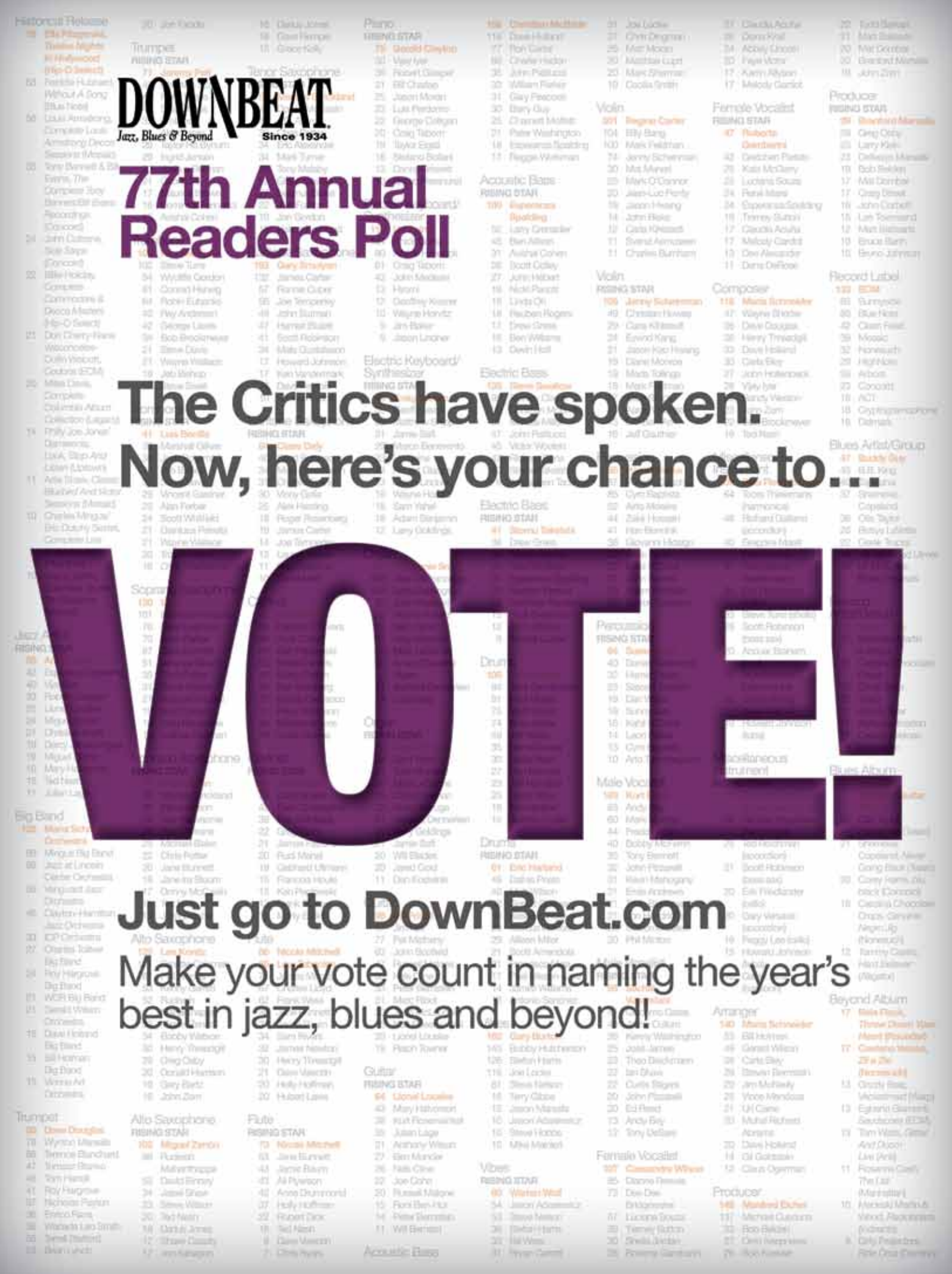
Arranger

Record Label

Producer

Blues Artist or Group

Blues Album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Beyond Artist or Group

Beyond Album

Rising Stars

RISING STAR
Jazz Artist

Robert Glasper 142
Craig Taborn 104
Trombone Shorty 75
Darcy James Argue 65
Gerald Clayton 63
Eric Alexander 60
Mary Halvorson 58
Julian Lage 53
Eric Harland 50
Gretchen Parlato 49
Hiromi 45
John Hollenbeck 44
Jeremy Pelt 43
Ben Allison 42
Avishai Cohen (BASSIST) 38
Orrin Evans 38
Dan Tepfer 38
Donny McCaslin 37
Jason Adasiewicz 35

RISING STAR
Jazz Group

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Gerald Clayton Trio 120
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Mary Halvorson Trio 93
Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue 90
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Mostly Other People Do The Killing 72
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Pilc Moutin Hoenig 45
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Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey 44
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Nicole Mitchell Black Earth Ensemble 32

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Orrin Evans' Captain Black Big Band 184
Jason Lindner Big Band 105
Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra 95
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RISING STAR
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Sean Jones 125
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Peter Evans 100
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Paolo Fresu 74
Jim Rotondi 71
Rob Mazurek 65
Corey Wilkes 60
Shane Endsley 59
Josh Evans 59
Maurice Brown 52
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Marshall Gilkes 178
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David Binney


Jason Kao Hwang

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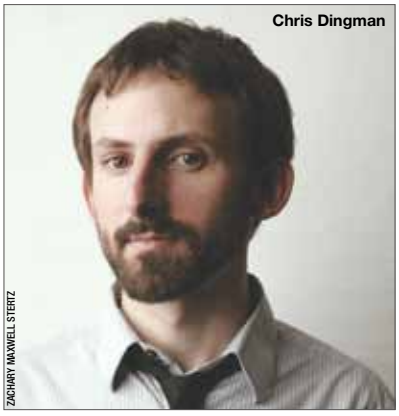
60TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL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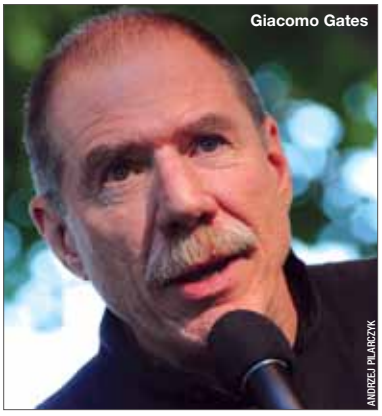
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Steve Lehman 102
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Marcus Shelby 52
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Jeff Gauthier 132
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Seth Rosner & Yulun Wang 125
Lee Townsend 89
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Craig Street 88
Spike Wilner & Ben Rubin 74
Larry Klein 57
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John Clayton 40
Jana Herzen 33
Jason Olaine 23
Luke Kaven 20

The Critics

Following are the 186 critics who voted in DownBeat's 60th Annual International Critics Poll. The critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices (but no more than 5 points per choice) in each of two categories: Established Talent and Rising Stars. (Note: The asterisk [*] denotes a Veterans Committee voter.)

David Adler: Stereophile, Philadelphia Weekly, JazzTimes

Don Albert: Artslink, Financial Mail

***Frank Alkyer:** DB

Marc Rosenfeld Antunes: Nextbop.com

Bridget Arnwine: examiner.com

Glenn Astarita: allaboutjazz.com, JazzReview.com

Hrayr Attarian: Jazziz, Chicago Jazz Magazine, All About Jazz

Bradley Bambarger: DB, Listen

***Paul de Barros:** DB, Seattle Times

Chris Barton: Los Angeles Times

Peter Bastian: Jazzthetik

Angelika Beener: DB, Alternate Takes, Nextbop

Eric Benson: New York Magazine

Peter Berkowitz: LEO Weekly

Bill Beuttler: Boston Globe, Boston Magazine, JazzTimes

Nick Bewsey: ICON

Eric Bishop: DB

Edward Blanco: All About Jazz, ejazznews.com

Ross Boissoneau: Jazziz, Progression, Northern Express

Philip Booth: DB, Jazziz, JazzTimes, Bass Player

***Fred Bouchard:** DB, NYC Jazz Record, BMI,

***Michael Bourne:** DB, wbgo.org, Mohonk Jazz on the Mountain

***Herb Boyd:** Amsterdam News, The Network Journal, Free Speech TV

Shaun Brady: DB, JazzTimes, Jazziz, Metro, Philadelphia Inquirer

Jon Bream: Minneapolis Star Tribune

Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum

Gigi Brooks: JazzTimes

Stuart Broomer: Point of Departure, NYC Jazz Record, Musicworks

***Hilary Brown:** DB

Jalylah Burrell: XXL

Andrea Canter: JazzINK.com, jazzpolice.com

Nate Chinen: The New York Times, JazzTimes

***Aaron Cohen:** DB

Sharonne Cohen: DB, JazzTimes

Thomas Conner: DB, Chicago Sun-Times

Thomas Conrad: JazzTimes, Stereophile, NYC Jazz Record

J.D. Considine: DB, Toronto Globe & Mail

Owen Cordle: JazzTimes, Charlotte News & Observer

Michael Cote: DB, Blues Revue, ColoradoBiz, Daily Camera

Stephanie Crease: DB, Chamber Music America

Anthony Dean-Harris: Nextbop.com, Jazz 91.7 FM KRTU San Antonio

R.J. DeLuke: All About Jazz, Albany Times Union

Matthew Dicker: DB, JazzTimes

John Diliberto: Echoes

Bob Doerschuk: DB

Laurence Donohue-Greene: NYC Jazz Record

Alain Drouot: DB, JazzColours

Ken Dryden: Allmusic.com, Hot House, NYC Jazz Record

Shannon J. Effinger: DB, JazzTimes, The Revivalist/okayplayer

Donald Elfman: DB, NYC Jazz Record

***Ed Enright:** DB

***John Ephland:** DB, Relix, DRUM!

Brad Farberman: The Village Voice, Wax Poetics, Relix

Steve Feeney: Portland Press Herald, Maine Sunday Telegram

David Franklin: Cadence

Phil Freeman: Jazziz, The Village Voice, The Wire, Burning Ambulance

Michael Gallant: DB, Keyboard, M, NEA Arts

Dustin Garlitz: JazzTalent.com

John Garratt: PopMatters.com

Richard Gehr: The Village Voice, SPIN, eMusic.com

Bob Gendron: DB, Chicago Tribune, TONEAudio

Andrew Gilbert: San Jose Mercury News, Boston Globe

***Ira Gitler:** DB

Stephen Graham: Jazzwise

Steve Greenlee: The Boston Globe

George Grella: The Big City, The Brooklyn Rail, Time Out New York

Reynard Guy: Jazz Hot

***Frank-John Hadley:** DB

Carl L. Hager: All About Jazz

***James Hale:** DB, Signal To Noise, CBCMusic.ca

Robert Ham: Spinner, Alternative Press, The Oregonian

Eric Harabadian: DB

George W. Harris: Jazz Messenger, jazzweekly.com

Neil Haverstick: DB, Self

Don Heckman: International Review of Music

Dave Helland: DB, Grammy.com

Tad Hendrickson: Wall Street Journal, Newark Star-Ledger, eMusic.com

Andrey Henkin: NYC Jazz Record

Will Hermes: NPR, Rolling Stone, The New York Times

Lee Hildebrand: San Francisco Chronicle, East Bay Express

Geoffrey Himes: DB, Washington Post

Rob Hoff: WQLN, JazzErie

Scott T. Horowitz: DB, JamBase, Upful Life & Times

Lyn Horton: The Paradigm of Beauty, JazzTimes.com

C. Andrew Hovan: DB, All About Jazz, Jazz Review

Tom Hull: The Village Voice, tomhull.com

Peter Hum: The Ottowa Citizen

Tom Ineck: Lincoln Journal Star

Eric Jackson: WGBH 89.7 FM Boston

Josh Jackson: WBGO, NPR Music

Michael Jackson: DB, Chicago Sun-Times, Jazzwise

Robin James: The Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

***Willard Jenkins:** The Independent Ear, WPFW (Jazz & Justice Radio) 89.3 FM

David Brent Johnson: DB, WFIU

Phillip Johnston: DB

Coen de Jonge: Jazz Bulletin, Jazzism

Richard B. Kamins: steptempest.blogspot.com

George Kanzler: Hot House, NYC Jazz Record

Bob Karlovits: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

Martin Z. Kasdan Jr.: DB, LEO Weekly, Louisville Music News

Yoshi Kato: DB, iTunes Store

John Kelman: All About Jazz

Larry Kelp: KPFA-FM, Ashkenaz World Music Center (Ashkenaz.com)

Mark Keresman: SF Weekly, East Bay Express, Signal to Noise, Icon, dB

Leslie Keros: Chicago Blues Guide

Elzy Kolb: Hot House, NextAvenue.org

Jason Koransky: DB

***Kiyoshi Koyama:** Jazz Japan, NHK-FM Jazz Tonight

Jeff Krow: Audiophile, Audition

David Kunian: Gambit Weekly, Offbeat, Beat Street, Cutting Edge

Amanda Kuyper: NRC Handelsblad + Jazzism magazine

Adam Larson: DB, Hot House, IMEA Journal

Will Layman: PopMatters.com

Christopher Loudon: JazzTimes

***Jim Macnie:** DB, Vevo

***Howard Mandel:** artsjournal.com, jazzbeyondjazz, CITYarts

Peter Margasak: DB, Chicago Reader, NPR's All Things Considered

***John McDonough:** DB

Peter McElhinney: Style Weekly

Damien McPherson: LEO Weekly

Bill Meyer: DB, The Wire, Chicago Reader, Magnet, Signal to Noise

Ken Micallef: DB, Electronic Musician, In Tune, Modern Drummer

Virgil Mihaiu: Steaua, Jazz Context

***Bill Milkowski:** Jazziz, JazzTimes, Absolute Sound, Wolfgang's Vault

Ralph A. Miriello: Huffington Post, notesonjazz.blogspot.com

***Dan Morgenstern:** Journal of Jazz Studies, Jersey Jazz

Allen Morrison: DB, American Songwriter

John Murph: DB, Atlantic Monthly, JazzTimes, NPR

Russ Musto: DB, NYC Jazz Record,

Michael G. Nastos: Cadence, Hot House, WEMU

Ron Netsky: Rochester City Newspaper

Jon Newey: Jazzwise

Stuart Nicholson: Jazzwise

Tim Niland: Music & More

Tracey Nolan: Torontoist, Coda

Sean J. O'Connell: DB, LA Weekly, NYC Jazz Record

Jennifer Odell: DB, MSN.com, CMJ

***Dan Ouellette:** DB, eMusic.com

***Ted Panken:** DB

Thierry Peremarti: Jazz News (France)

Terry Perkins: DB, St. Louis Beacon, OxfordAmerican.com

Zach Phillips: DB

J. Poet: SF Weekly, SOMA, DRUM!

Michael Point: DB

Norman Provizer: DB, KUVO-FM

David Pulizzi: Jazziz

Bruce Pulver: JazzTimes Community, JazzReview.com

***Bobby Reed:** DB

Jon Regen: Keyboard

Tom Reney: New England Public Radio, JazzTimes

Derk Richardson: AFAR magazine, The Absolute Sound

Chris Robinson: DB

Alex W. Rodriguez: NPR Music, WBGO, Ethnomusicology Review

Jon Ross: DB, ArtsATL.com, Atlanta Magazine

Antonio Rubio: DB, Correio Manhã, Jazz.pt

Mark Ruffin: Sirius XM Real Jazz

Giovanni Russonello: JazzTimes, CapitalBop.com

Eric Sandler: The Revivalist/okayplayer

***Gene Santoro:** Weider History Group, New York Daily News

Luigi Santosuosso: All About Jazz Italy

Phil Schaap: DB, WKCR

Chris Sheridan: DB, Jazz Review, Jazz Journal, Swing Journal

Kirk Silsbee: DB, Los Angeles Times

Areif Sless-Kitain: DB, Time Out Chicago

Richard Skelly: Asbury Park Press

Zan Stewart: DB

W. Royal Stokes: JJA News, Jazzhouse.org, wroyalstokes.com

Ned Sublette: DB, Center for Postmambo Studies

Andrew Sussman: Freelance

Laurence Svirchev: misterioso.org

Jean Szlamowicz: Jazz Hot, Spirit of Jazz

Jeff Tamarkin: JazzTimes, Mojo, Relix

Joe Tangari: DB, Pitchfork

Mario Tarradell: The Dallas Morning News

David Tenenholtz: rvanews.com/jazz

Larry Reni Thomas: JazzTimes.com, jazzcorner.com

Eliot Tiegel: DB

Mark F. Turner: allaboutjazz.com

Chris Walker: LA Jazz Scene, JazzTimes

Dave Wayne: allaboutjazz.com, JazzReview.com

Ken Weiss: Cadence, Jazz Inside

Jim Wilke: Jazz After Hours, PRI

***Josef Woodard:** DB, Los Angeles Times, JazzTimes, Jazziz

***Scott Yanow:** L.A. Jazz Scene, Jazz Rag

Alan Young: Lucid Culture

Zoe Young: DB

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Artist(s) subject to change.

Reviews

Ravi Coltrane
Spirit Fiction

BLUE NOTE 18937

★★★★

Awkwardly, I have always been underwhelmed by Ravi Coltrane, an obviously accomplished player who nevertheless came across as earnest, practice-pattern-prone and a little under-fueled. With its bent toward a gentle sort of free playing, this album is a profound and welcome departure. Possibly Joe Lovano, who co-produced the disc and appears on two tracks, lit a fire under Coltrane fils. Hard to say. But the music is lively and intrepid.

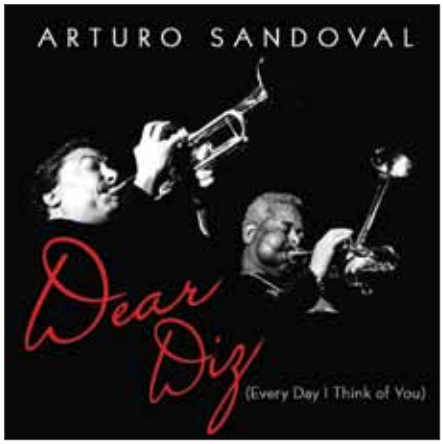
The disc alternates between two groups—a quartet with the lyrical pianist Luis Perdomo and a quintet with trumpeter Ralph Alessi, whose complex, pert compositions, along with Geri Allen's dark rambunctious piano, intensify and thicken the plot. Each group contributes a top track—Ornette Coleman's "Check Out Time," on which Lovano joins the quintet for a spirited rendition of that delightfully tricky tune; and Coltrane's "The Change, My Girl," a daydreamy quartet lament with a stunningly supple bass solo by Drew Gress and a quiet centeredness that feels very much a part of Coltrane's personal palette.

Coltrane accomplishes an open-ended feel with a variety of strategies. On "Roads Cross," the group splits in two: A descending soprano saxophone melody stealthily steals into one's consciousness as skittering piano materializes seemingly from a different world. The quartet takes the same approach on "Cross Roads" but winds up on the same page, offering an upbeat slice of time. On the title track, halves of the quartet actually recorded separately, the result being a throbbing bass line under twinkling piano and a pantonal scramble that slowly crescendos to a sweet climax. Alessi's "Who Wants Ice Cream" conjures a childlike innocence appropriate to its title, showcasing Alessi and Coltrane in animated conversation.

Some tracks feel slight. "Spring & Hudson," Paul Motian's "Fantasm" and "Marilyn & Tammy" create a mood, but don't develop much, though the moods are pleasant enough.

—Paul de Barros

Spirit Fiction: Roads Cross; Klepto; Spirit Fiction; The Change, My Girl; Who Wants Ice Cream; Spring & Hudson; Cross Roads; Yellow Cat; Check Out Time; Fantasm; Marilyn & Tammy. (58:50)
Personnel: Ravi Coltrane, soprano and tenor saxophone; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone (9, 10); Ralph Alessi, trumpet (2, 5, 8, 9); Luis Perdomo (1, 3, 4, 7, 11), Geri Allen (2, 5, 8–10), piano; Drew Gress (1, 3, 4, 7, 11), James Genus (2, 5, 8, 9), bass; E.J. Strickland (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11), Eric Harland (2, 5, 8, 9), drums.
Ordering info: bluenote.com



Arturo Sandoval
Dear Diz (Every Day I Think Of You)
CONCORD JAZZ 33020
★★★★

The list of important musicians mentored by Dizzy Gillespie comes to an end, more or less, with Arturo Sandoval. Over the years Sandoval has tossed tributes Gillespie's way a tune at a time. Here, finally, comes the grand gesture of remembrance.

Sandoval casts a wide net over his subject. Accompanied by the Morrison String Quartet, "Con Alma" becomes a plaintive chamber piece for flugelhorn, adorned with a classical rigor by Sandoval, who permits just the barest hint of vibrato for warmth. The quartet also accompanies on the final piece from which the CD takes its title, an original salute by Sandoval whose sentiment is well intended but a bit hokey and redundant. It unnecessarily spells out what 10 fine tracks have already made clear. Recorded in six studios in Los Angles and Florida, this was planned with care and peppered with cameos. But at heart it is the kind of tribute Gillespie would have appreciated: a crack big band putting his staples and rarities to the test in bright new charts. "Be Bop" ambles through three choruses at an unexpectedly relaxed tempo before snapping into high gear with Shelly Berg's piano. "Things To Come" is the dazzler of the bunch. Taken at Mach-1 speed from the first of Sandoval's opening breaks, it's the kind of big band tour de force that grabs an audience in its teeth and flings it around like some helpless prey.

—John McDonough

Dear Diz (Every Day I Think Of You): Be Bop; Salt Peanuts (Miami Salado); And Then She Stopped; Birks Works (ala Mancini); Things To Come; Fiesta Mojo; Con Alma (With Soul); Tin Tin Deo; Algo Bleno (Woody And Me); A Night In Tunisia; Everyday I Think Of You. (76:02)
Personnel: Arturo Sandoval, trumpet, vocals; Wayne Bergeron, Dan Fornero, Willie Murillo, Gary Grant, trumpet/flugelhorn; Andy Martin, Bruce Otto, Steve Holtman, Craig Gosnell, Bob McChesney (10), trombone; Dan Higgins, Rusty Higgins, Bob Sheppard, Bob Mintzer, Rob Lockartrinet, Brian Scanlon, Greg Huckins, Zana Musa (1), Eddie Daniels (6), Plas Johnon (4), Ed Calle (10), reeds; Brian Nova, Dustin Higgins, guitar; Gary Burton (2), vibraphone; Joey DeFrancesco (3–5), organ; Wally Minko (8, 10), Shelly Berg, piano; Carlitos Del Puerto, Chuck Berghofer, bass; Greg Field, Johnny Friday (10), drums: Freddie Greene (1), Joey DeLeon, Mynyungo Jackson, Andy Garcia, percussion. Ralph Morrison String Quartet (7, 11); Manolo Gimenez (8), vocal.
Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

Fly
Year Of The Snake
ECM 16820
★★★★

A palpable sense of democratic spirit pervades the sophomore release of Fly, the New York-based trio of tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Jeff Ballard. Initiated by Ballard, the threesome has carved a special identity. The group manages to build power insidiously, through a careful—but not too careful—process of holding back and slowly releasing energy.

This is clear on Grenadier's "Kingston," where an intimate improvised exchange and some pensive lines for arco bass and horn stretch out for nearly the first four minutes of a 10-minute track; by the time the bass kicks into a sweet, devilishly funky ostinato, tandem with Ballard's crisp, quietly driving kit, the powder is dry and the safety is off. Primed like this, they eventually abandon the riff, but more compositional guides push the energy higher, again without histrionics.

Turner is key to this feeling. His sound is unmistakable—yielding, vocal, a bit matte, with a beautiful lyricism and remarkable control above the natural range of the horn, he's able to control the flow with precision and deep soul. He's also a good composer, as the title track shows; here a gentle, fidgety driving rhythm section underpins

a quietly hovering line, the saxophonist singing, then building momentum, engaging his cohorts directly, constructing a compelling statement over most of the nine minutes.

Maybe the boldest move here is the inclusion of five short free improvisations, all titled "The Western Lands." Somber, even melancholic, with a mix of color and patience, they seem like miniature odes to something unstated.

—John Corbett

Year Of The Snake: The Western Lands I; Festival Tune; The Western Lands II; Brothersister; Diorite; Kingston; Salt And Pepper; The Western Lands III; Benj; Year Of The Snake; The Western Lands IV; The Western Lands V. (60:48)
Personnel: Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Larry Grenadier, bass; Jeff Ballard, drums.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Guillermo Klein and Los Guachos
Carrera
SUNNYSIDE 1286
★★★★

Let's call this Guillermo Klein's mystery album. Each of Los Guachos' previous records has boasted moments where shadows are prioritized and voicings refract melancholy enough to yield an ominous feel. *Carrera* sharpens that eloquence, refining the Argentine pianist-composer's idiosyncratic balladry and steering his acclaimed ensemble toward even more individualistic ways to express itself. No question: There's little in jazz that sounds like this group.

That said, it's hard not to hear the smooch that Klein gives Gil Evans in the opening track, "Burrito Hill." The piece saunters along with a feeling of dread hovering over it—an elegy targeted toward a still-living person. Through the muted brass, long-toned reeds and gently repeated piano figure wafts a mix of Evans' "Las Vegas Tango" and Oliver Nelson's "Stolen Moments." Waxing eerie is a memorable way to open an album, and though Klein's percussionists mess with the rhythm, "Burrito Hill" quickly sets album's tone. The bandleader's penchant for singing a tune is something that initially took some getting used to. Klein's voice is humdrum at best, but the whimsy that marks his choice to vocalize in the first place parallels Los Gauchos' anything-goes spirit. The drama he brings to "Globo" and "Mareados" also has a blue-collar beauty.

Carrera isn't all shadows; there are moments when the sun comes out. "Niños," by trumpeter Richard Nant, puts "Frères Jacques" in a fun-house mirror. Over a Philip Glass funk motif, the horn section twists its giddy lines until they almost snap, with counter themes emerging, tensions rising and trumpeter Diego Urcola sorting his way through the swirl.

—Jim Macnie

Carrera: Burrito Hill; Globo; Niños; Mariana; Mareados; ArteSano; Moreira; The Habit Of Memory; Piano Sonata op 22; Carrera. (52:13)
Personnel: Guillermo Klein, piano, Rhodes, vocals; Richard Nant, trumpet, percussion; Ben Monder, guitar; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone, flute, vocals (2); Sandro Tomas, trombone; Taylor Haskins, trumpet; Chris Cheek, tenor, baritone saxophone; Jeff Ballard, drums; Fernando Huergo, electric bass; Bill McHenry, tenor saxophone; Diego Urcola, trumpet, trombone.
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

The Hot Box

CD / Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
Ravi Coltrane *Spirit Fiction*	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Fly *Year Of The Snake*	★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Guillermo Klein *Carrera*	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★½
Arturo Sandoval *Dear Diz*	★★★★	★★★½	★★★	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Ravi Coltrane, *Spirit Fiction*

A zig-zag path here, switching between groups; interspersing a duo here, a trio there. Coltrane is nourished by close interplay with Alessi and one fluttering, dreamlike encounter with Lovano. No taste for excess, but lots of clipped tenor and soprano lines riding the familiar hills and dales of the avant mainstream.
—John McDonough

Surprising, intimate, open music on his Blue Note debut. Liking his tenor, I've not been too taken with Coltrane's soprano in the past, but he sounds great here, nothing cloying about it. His compositions are airy and loose, allowing both bands to breathe. Trio with co-producer Joe Lovano and pianist Geri Allen on Motian's "Fantasm" is distilled, a gentle little essential oil.
—John Corbett

One of his best, no question. Love the way it starts off with a free-ish hunt-and-peck routine before turning into a mercurial nu-bop romping session. Grace, lyricism and oomph unite.
—Jim Macnie

Fly, *Year Of The Snake*

Turner's hollow, bone-dry tenor conjures a desert-like aridness on "Western Lands," an impressionistic still-life, unfortunately as lifeless as its subject. That feel pervades much of the music. Grenadier plays with snap. But Turner's endless scales are not themes and his rhythms have a liturgical rigor. "Salt And Pepper" has a relaxed bluesy lope.
—John McDonough

They have an enviable chemistry, but I wish their roiling moments were equal to their pensive passages. A chamber music vibe floats through this program, and it dampens some of the music's emotional presence. That said, on a purely musical level, it's fascinating.
—Jim Macnie

Mark Turner has found an agreeable métier in this free-ish, pianoless trio with Brad Mehldau's compatriots Larry Grenadier and Jeff Ballard. They strike a nice balance between focused intention and pleasant off-handedness. Turner's piping tone is a pleasure, and he sounds refreshingly relaxed, personal and unusually conversational.
—Paul de Barros

Guillermo Klein, *Carrera*

Much soft, functional orchestration, played with care and inclined to gather texture in layered steps. But Klein sings too much in sleepy, murmured sighs, full of passive Brazilian seduction but emotionally flat. Best moments are "Niños" and "Piano Sonata," a halting but absorbing procession of percussive contrasts.
—John McDonough

A pleasing legato sensibility infuses Klein's latest, which continues his run of wonderful outings. Odd times and unexpected compositional turns are set against elegant, sensuous, even stately sections, with strong statements by the band of heavies. Counterpoint, a sense of layered time and a beautiful songfulness—the pianist's vocals are a breathy, welcome treat.
—John Corbett

Whether he's singing in his smoky midrange or yearning falsetto, Klein creates an irresistibly haunting, somber atmosphere. His complex use of rhythm and meter as a compositional device creates an alternate temporal world all his own. With soloists like Miguel Zenón and Diego Urcola, Klein can't go wrong, though the album may be more low-key than some listeners might care for.
—Paul de Barros

Arturo Sandoval, *Dear Diz*

Great Gillespie tunes, crazy mash-up of star players, terrific leader, so what doesn't completely work here? It's the arranging, which has a predictable and, in places, wooden feel, Shelly Berg's bristling take on "Birks Works" and Dan Higgins' dynamic work notwithstanding.
—John Corbett

Thoughtfulness went into the arrangements, and against-type spins on "Con Alma" and other jewels are refreshing. But there's something a bit stiff about action. It screams "recording session" rather than "album."
—Jim Macnie

Sandoval's jokey exhibitionism can be annoying, but this tribute to his mentor and lifelong idol, with its crisp and lively big band arrangements, is all heart and no shtick. Sandoval's luxurious sound on "Con Alma," with strings, is a shaft to the soul; the title ballad, with a Sandoval vocal, absolutely disarming.
—Paul de Barros

Eric Bibb
Deeper In The Well
STONY PLAIN 1360
★★★½

Not your everyday brawny acoustic bluesman, Eric Bibb is a charmer who wins over listeners with the quiet forcefulness of his articulate and direct prose. On his latest album, like prior releases, he sings in a steady and smooth voice, imbuing lyrics with a depth and thoughtfulness worthy of a scion of Mississippi John Hurt. His guitar and banjo playing is that of an understated craftsman incapable of a forced, excessive note. For a switch, he has gone to a recording studio deep in the Louisiana bayou and connected with superlative local musicians, plus his regular harmonica player, Grant Dermody, and a couple of ringers from Nashville or Montreal. Bibb soaks up the fiddles-and-triangle vibe while following his own course through the wetland, reaching a musical commonality that welcomes in the folk music of the Scots-Irish in Appalachia and that of southern African-Americans, Cajuns and Creoles.

Bibb's songs seldom occupy a bland or safe place. He's inclined to tackle serious topics, dissecting a dark heart, while favoring a mood of hopefulness. Carefully regulating conviction, he sings of the farmer's scourge ("Boll Weevil") and an unforgiving Judgment Day ("Sinner Man") and taking a stand against greed ("Movin' Up"). Bibb, too, casts a sympathetic eye on the homeless, covering Harrison Kennedy's "Could Be Me, Could Be You." For sensuality, "Bayou Belle" can't be beat, and for a blast of clean-air, country-life jubilation, the tune "Music" delivers the goods. On the debit side, there are three so-so tracks at album's end. Taj Mahal's "Every Wind In The River" is more cryptic than interesting, and Bob Dylan's 1960s anthem "The Times They Are A Changin'" sounds naive and dated. "Sittin' In A Hotel Room" is almost hokey and burdened with a buzzing swarm of string instruments. Overall, though, *Deeper In The Well* succeeds in showcasing Bibb's considerable grace as a storyteller. —*Frank-John Hadley*

Deeper In The Well: Bayou Belle; Could Be You, Could Be Me; Dig A Little Deeper In The Well; Money In Your Pocket; Boll Weevil; Sinner Man; In My Time; Music; Movin' Up; No Further; Every Wind In The River; Sittin' In A Hotel Room; The Times They Are A Changin'; untitled bonus track. (50:49)
Personnel: Eric Bibb, vocals, acoustic guitar, baritone guitar, resonator guitar, contra bass guitar, cigar box diddley bow, banjo, foot stomp; Grant Dermody, harmonica; Dirk Powell, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, accordion, upright bass, banjo, harmony vocals; Cedric Watson, fiddles, backing vocals; Danny DeVillier, drums, tambourine; Christine Balfa, Cajun triangle; Jerry Douglas, dobro (7); Michael Jerome Browne, gourd banjo, mandolin (11); Michel Pepin, electric guitar, mixing (11).
Ordering info: stonyplainrecords.com

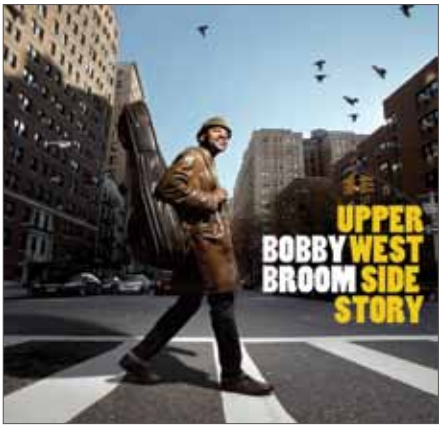
Jakob Bro
Time
LOVELAND 013
★★★★

It's formless, an exercise in meandering, with, as they say, "no there, there." It's got a definite shape, an inner logic that flows below the radar. Some usual, musically ephemeral subjects are here in all their glory: Lee Konitz and Bill Frisell, this time joined by bassist Thomas Morgan, who replaces the late drummer Paul Motian. Not having heard that album with Motian, titled *Balladeering*, it's touted as a kind of "part one" to *Time*. And *Time* itself may veer off on its own trajectory of playing with not only time but space as well.

And the lead player here from his *Balladeering* days is Danish guitarist Jakob Bro. A kindred spirit with Konitz and Frisell, these three are quite the trio of soft-focus renegades, Morgan's bass adding a new, essential dimension that goes way beyond providing "just" a pulse or bottom end. With eight originals, Bro's musical sketches serve as launching pads into a paradoxical, dreamy blend of form with space, musicality, tunefulness that is both easy on the ears and unpredictable.

Sometimes it's hard to tell where the guitarists begin and leave off, their tonal palettes being so similar, their styles as much two sides of the same musical coin as complementary. "Cirkler's" creepy-crawler attitude finds Bro's soft, scabrous birdcalls a subtle contrast to Frisell's supportive, easygoing fingering. And "A Simple Premise" could be a Frisell tune, with its slow, crawling country-and-western ache. —*John Ephland*

Time: Nat; Cirkler; A Simple Premise; Swimmer; Northern Blues; Fiordlands; Yellow; Smaa Dyr. (42:21)
Personnel: Jakob Bro, Bill Frisell, guitar; Lee Konitz, alto saxophone; Thomas Morgan, bass.
Ordering info: jakobbro.com



Bobby Broom
Upper West Side Story
ORIGIN 82617
★★★★

Starting with the very first notes of "D's Blues"—a languid but powerful riff atop busy drums and a droning bass—Bobby Broom bleeds simple, unadulterated blues from his guitar. He keeps it up, with a quiet intensity, for the rest of *Upper West Side Story*.

His use of a clean, pure guitar sound gives his chords a bit of jangle, which provides an added depth to his comping and his chordal solos. He's not an extremely fast player, but his vertiginous solos, spread out across the entire neck, have feeling and always pay deference to the tune. Each note shines.

Broom, in his tribute to the Upper West Side of New York City, reflects the laid-back hustle of the area, though much of the bustle comes from the contrast between his guitar sound and the active drum accompaniment. Bassist Dennis Carroll and the excellent drummers Kobie Watkins and Makaya McCraven push each tune forward, but they stay in the background, always shining a spotlight on the guitar. Their inspired playing works off Broom's guitar to create a contrasting dynamic.

Like Broom's guitar playing, the record itself is sparse. The tunes are shells, with melodies that sometimes, as with the inspired "Minor Major Mishap," work as simple three-note grooves to introduce solos. On the ballad "Father," Broom makes his guitar deep and big, stretching out chords and letting them reverberate. On "Fambrocious (For Fambrough)," he whittles things down, building up speed for a playful romp.

Upper West Side Story is a spectacular album when taken as a whole. Broom doesn't try to impress with explosive feats of improvisation on any one tune; his carefully crafted, solos instead weave their way in and out of an album full of pleasant music. —*Jon Ross*

Upper West Side Story: D's Blues; Upper West Side Story; After Words; Minor Major Mishap; Lazy Sundays; Fambroscious (For Fambrough); Father; Call Me A Cab; When The Falling Leaves. (59:53)
Personnel: Bobby Broom, guitar; Dennis Carroll, bass; Kobie Watkins, drums (1–3, 6, 8, 9); Makaya McCraven, drums (4, 5, 7).
Ordering info: origin-records.com

Ballister: Paal Nilssen-Love (left), Fred Lonberg-Holm and Dave Rempis

Clean Feed Marks Eclectic Decade

Over the past 10 years, the Portuguese label Clean Feed has proven to be one of the most potent purveyors of modern jazz. Reflecting the company's eclecticism, these new releases achieve varying degrees of success.

Multi-instrumentalist Elliott Sharp alternates between the saxophone and the guitar on ***Aggregat*** **(Clean Feed 250; 60:27 ★★★½)** for a loose trio date that greatly benefits from bass player Brad Jones and drummer Ches Smith's presence. Their sense of innovation and constant movement open spaces for the leader while providing a forward motion. While Sharp's guitar playing remains more radical than his sax blowing, this is as close to conventional jazz we can expect Sharp to get.

Austrian reed player Boris Hauf presents an unusual sextet on the reflective ***Next Delusion*** **(238; 42:48 ★★)**, which consists of two other reedmen and no less than three drummers, all hailing from Chicago. Doing so, he raises the expectation bar quite high and the results fall short. Only rarely does the idea of having so many drummers prove to be effective or appear to be exploited.

Sound artist Rafael Toral is joined by Minneapolis drummer Davu Seru on ***Live In Minneapolis*** **(248; 40:01 ★★★½)**. His arsenal of bleeps, purrs, or chirps is playful and mischievous. At times, the sounds he extracts from his various devices evoke the trumpet or the electric guitar, an instrument he used to play regularly. Ironically, Seru's more traditional approach to his instrument ends up being a quite viable match. The drummer provides the necessary momentum to move the music forward and keeps their exchange grounded as Toral's zaniness could easily get out of hand.

Saxophonist Dave Rempis, cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm and drummer Paal Nilssen-Love are Ballister and ***Mechanisms*** **(245; 64:45 ★★★★)** is an archetypical hard-blowing free-jazz session. While the concept is definitely not new, the sheer vitality and gusto that they bring to the table are an inexhaustible source of elation. In addition to Rempis' frenetic lines and Nilssen-Love's formidable pounding, Lonberg-Holm's probing sawing adds an electric vibe that tickles the spine. This could become the free-jazz recording to get this year.

On ***Stem*** **(249; 66:30 ★★★)** trumpeter Nate Wooley meets the Red Trio, a piano/bass/drums Portuguese outfit, for a session a tad austere. The band is tight and responsive, and there is plenty of space for each musician to maneuver. Moreover, Wooley's range of extended techniques is utterly impressive. However, the mood remains too constant to sustain interest over the course of five long improvisations, even though the band can surreptitiously raise the intensity level.

Multi-instrumentalist Joe McPhee and bass player Ingebrigt Håker-Flaten pay tribute to a New York borough for ***Brooklyn DNA*** **(242; 41:02 ★★★½)**. McPhee, who switches between soprano and alto sax as well as pocket trumpet, takes a different personality on each instrument. He favors extended techniques for the smaller horn and chisels his idiosyncratic sound on both saxophones. If McPhee takes the lead, Håker Flaten follows or dances around him without getting in the way. His ever-changing patterns sometimes push the horn player to reach greater heights.

Not unlike McPhee, Jonas Kulhammar's persona changes according to the instrument. He is as repetitive and contemplative on the baritone as he is nimble and animated on the tenor. On ***Basement Sessions Vol. 1*** **(246; 42:48 ★★½)**, the Swedish saxophonist collaborates with countryman Torbjörn Zetterberg on bass and Norwegian drummer Espen Aalberg to create a dual affair divided between strange explorations and lively post-bop numbers. **DB**

Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com

Aaron Koppel Quartet
Multiverse
CHICAGO SESSIONS 0017
★★★★

There's always a twist when the forward-thinking guitarist Aaron Koppel is in the picture. "Milky Way Goddess," the second track off his third album, *Multiverse*, starts as a straight swing ballad, with the drums being just aggressive enough to present tiny, inventive rhythms in the undercurrent. Pretty soon, everything goes haywire. The melody gets chopped up; time shifts; then, right before the solo section, a hard-driving swing beat comes to the fore.

This record is as notable for the involved accompaniment as it is for the creative, distortion-fueled guitar playing of Koppel. Rhythm is always the main priority, whether in the thick musical soup of "The Ruse"—Koppel's gritty distortion blending with Matt Nelson's cottony keyboard in a thick, dense fog—or "Crispy Bacon," which presents the band in Southern rock mode.

Koppel builds each song on a groove—more often than not, this comes in the form of a vamp that starts in the low end of the piano, doubled by the bass—and builds additively from there. There's no standard structure here, with melodies leading easily to expanded solo sections. In fact, it's sometimes hard to break the tunes into easily digestible chunks.

The solid foundation of groove fuels whatever Koppel has up his sleeve. Many of the tunes have a rock sensibility but defy easy categorization. The r&b of "When I Got Home I Lost It" is straight from an Allman Brothers show, with singing, gospel-choir keyboards to boot. *Multiverse* has so many different ideas swirling around it that the band seems to change genres with each passing track. Sometimes Koppel even changes the feel, abruptly, two or three times in a single song, as on the wonderfully disorienting "Multiverse."

The band has been together since 2004 and knows how and where to take chances. Through time shifts, mood changes and wide-branching tunes, the musicians stick closely together, keeping it all from falling apart. Though Koppel's name is on the marquee, each member of the quartet is an integral part of the finished product. *—Jon Ross*

Multiverse: The Ruse; Milky Way Goddess; Earlids; The Monk Factory; Modal Realism; Multiverse; When I Got Home I Lost It; Doorway; Crispy Bacon; 2010; Cosmic Lottery. (63:39)
Personnel: Aaron Koppel, guitar; Matt Nelson, piano, keyboards; Graham Czach, bass; Robert Tucker, drums.
Ordering info: chicagosessions.com

Harold Danko
Unriched
STEEPLECHASE 31735
★★★

There's no new ground broken on this latest offering from pianist Harold Danko. Tunes are familiar. Arrangements are generally loose, most of them likely extemporized on the spot. All of it is listenable, none of it is particularly challenging. And it's worth experiencing.

There's plenty of air in this music, so each part, and each response to it, are clear. With the exception of one track, Jay Anderson avoids walking his bass, and drummer Jeff Hirshfield seldom repeats a motif, except to contrast with something more abstract. The rhythm background shifts and morphs constantly but never disruptively, giving Danko plenty of opportunity to underplay, to let each player contribute equally. Sometimes the interactions fizzle down to almost nothing. "What's New" begins quietly and stays there, with silences framing sections of Danko's explorations. When it's Anderson's turn, he allows a long stretch of his solo, about four minutes into the tune, to dissolve into just a spare brush pattern on snare.

A similar quality animates the more up

tunes. Hirshfield switches to sticks for "Sweet And Lovely" but focuses on cymbals. Now and then he'll tap the snare or another cymbal, but the pulse stays on the constant variations in timbre and articulation he conjures on the ride. Anderson plays with similar freedom from the top, starts walking when it seems right but otherwise stays open to answering Danko's ideas. *—Bob Doerschuk*

***Unriched*:** Sweet And Lovely; Search For Peace; The Blessing; You Don't Know What Love Is; Criss Cross; The Nearness Of You; Beautiful Love; What's New. (54:51)
Personnel: Harold Danko, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; Jeff Hirshfield, drums.
Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Esbjörn Svensson Trio
301
ACT 9029
★★★

The good news regarding Esbjörn Svensson Trio's (E.S.T.) second posthumous effort, *301*: It's not the sort of cash-grab often typical of albums issued after a headlining musician has died. Primarily the result of edits performed by Svensson before his scuba-diving accident in mid-June 2008, the material was originally intended to bookend the ensemble's prior *Leucocyte* (ACT). Sound engineer Ake Linton, along with band members Magnus Öström and Dan Berglund, recently revisited the works and added final touches.

While *301* seemingly contains two showpiece tributes to the fallen leader—the opening solo piano meditation "Behind The Stars," an elegant piece true to its name, and balladic farewell "The Childhood Dream"—the release wilts from unevenness and slow pacing. Granted, E.S.T. thrives on diversity and experimentalism, qualities that don't always translate into consistency. Yet much here appears to still be in developmental sketch form.

Noisy electronic chatter, galvanized by the use of a radio transmitter, throughout "Houston, The 5th" wants for coherency and context. "Inner City, City Lights" has its moments, particularly when Svensson's ominous chords interact with ambient treatments. But this contemporary jam, a successor to the Grateful Dead's "Space" sequences, ultimately drifts, its soullessness evoking a post-modern manse constructed of glass blocks, metal staircases and concrete floors. E.S.T. fares better when it welcomes faster tempos and warmth on "Three Falling Free Part II," a rock-referencing episode that forces the listener to hold onto the safety handles as the sonic roller coaster twists around sharp turns and navigates dense webs of drama, texture and tonality. *—Bob Gendron*

301: Behind The Stars; Inner City, City Lights; The Left Lane; Houston, The 5th; Three Falling Free Part I; Three Falling Free Part II; The Childhood Dream. (61:02)
Personnel: Esbjörn Svensson, piano, electronics, transistor radio; Dan Berglund, bass, electronics; Magnus Öström, drums, voices, electronics.
Ordering info: actmusic.com

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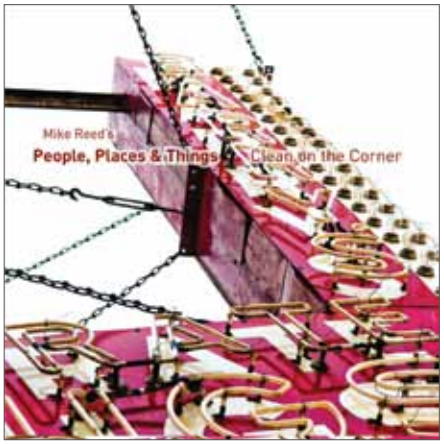


Mike Reed's People, Places & Things
Clean On The Corner

482 MUSIC 1081

★★★★

Festival coordinator, series programmer, music historian: Akin to an expert juggler, drummer Mike Reed balances myriad tasks and makes it all look easy. Despite the demands associated with his aforementioned "side jobs," he has recorded an impressive string of innovative releases and performed with remarkable consistency while maintaining a sterling reputation as someone who, like Chicago's new mayor, gets things done. In contrast to iron-fisted politicians, however, Reed doesn't wield a heavy hand. His lyricism is rooted in the art of conversation.

Such open, informative dialogues reside at the core of his ensemble's fourth album. The first People, Places & Things effort to turn away from reinterpreting unsung Chicago-based bebop spanning the mid-'50s through early '60s, *Clean On The Corner* spotlights Reed's compositional skills and glides along on the quartet's groove-based chemistry. Eight songs—six penned or co-written by Reed, one a cover of Roscoe Mitchell's "Old," the other a romp through John Jenkins' "Sharon"—come off as convivial discussions in which amicable exchanges indicate the playful democracy and shared humor at hand. No instrument or instrumentalist dominates; at no point do the wordless colloquies feel less than convivial.

The set begins ("The Lady Has A Bomb") with the unstructured, freeform clatter of what sounds like a few friends initially greeting one another at a party and, fittingly, finishes quietly ("Warming Down") via a post-2 a.m. cool-off that occurs after all the wine gets drained. Bluesy motifs and contemplative asides add variety. Bassist Jason Roebke gives space and time, molding lines owing as much to finessed swing as balladic restraint. Reed and company embrace the avant-garde on "December?"—complete with brushes, bells and atmospheric rust evocative of a skewed Tim Burton take on a classic holiday carol—yet, primarily, occupy territory informed by transparent communication. *—Bob Gendron*

Clean On The Corner: The Lady Has A Bomb; Old; December?; Where The Story Ends; Sharon; House Of Three Smiles; The Ephemeral Worlds Of Ruth; Warming Down. (45:24)
Personnel: Mike Reed, drums, percussion; Greg Ward, alto saxophone; Tim Haldeman, tenor saxophone; Jason Roebke, bass; Craig Taborn, piano (5, 7); Josh Berman, cornet (6, 8).
Ordering info: 482music.com

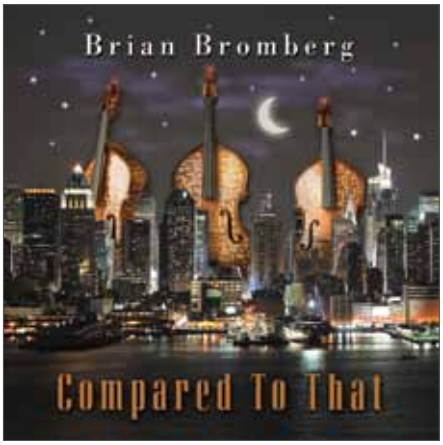
Brian Bromberg
Compared To That

MACK AVENUE RECORDS 7028

★★★★

Like a Hollywood blockbuster, bassist Brian Bromberg's 20th album as a leader is ambitious and crowd-pleasing. All but two of the numbers are supplemented with either a five-piece horn team or a string section. And like an actor-director-producer, Bromberg multitasks as the composer of eight pieces and, when he doubles on piccolo bass, a lead instrumentalist.

The grandest of all the tracks, the buoyant "Hayride" features Béla Fleck's distinct banjo and an orchestral sweep that's reminiscent of an Aaron Copland or Dave Grusin piece. Alternately, "If Ray Brown Was A Cowboy?" is a lean trio number that pays homage to the playing and type of composing that the bass great was doing at the end of his career. The title track and "A Little New Old School" are the two full-bodied standouts. The former is a response to Gene McDaniels' classic "Compared To What" and features Bromberg's limber hollowbody piccolo bass on the front line with tenor saxophonist Gary Meek, while the latter is a hearty seven-minute-plus funk-meets-big band excursion. *—Yoshi Kato*



Compared To That: Compared To That; Rory Lowery, Private Eye; If Ray Brown Was A Cowboy?; Hayride; A Little New Old School; Forgiveness; Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?; I'm Just Sayin'; The Eclipse; Give It To Me Baby. (70:55)
Personnel: Brian Bromberg, acoustic bass (1–4, 6–10), hollowbody piccolo bass (1–2, 7–10), steel string acoustic piccolo bass (4, 6), Carvin B24 electric bass (5), fretless bass (9), additional orchestral arrangements (4), co-horn arrangement (10); Jeff Lorber, piano (1), electric piano (5); Mitch Forman, piano (2, 4); Tom Zink, piano (3, 6, 7, 10), string arrangement (6); George Duke, piano (9); Gary Meek, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10); Vinnie Colaiuta, drums (1–5, 7–10); Alex Acuña, percussion (1, 4, 6, 8, 10); Béla Fleck, banjo (4); Charlie Bisharat, violin (4); Randy Brecker, trumpet (5, 8), flugelhorn (9), Gannin Arnold, rhythm guitar (5); Larry Goldings, Hammond B3 organ (7); Willie Murillo, Tony Guerrero, trumpets; Mark Visher, alto and baritone saxophones; Jason Thor, trombone; Nathan Tanouye, horn arrangements (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10); The Rising Sun Orchestra (4, 6).
Ordering info: mackavenue.com

Luis Conte
En Casa De Luis

BFM JAZZ 302 062 405

★★★★

Veteran Cuban percussionist Luis Conte delivers plenty of joy on the infectious *En Casa De Luis*. The disc gets off to a promising start with the title track as Conte showcases his versatility over a range of Afro-Cuban percussion while a chorus sings ebulliently in the background. From there the disc constantly shifts from burnished Latin jazz-fusion to vigorous, oftentimes surprising percussive evocations.

Barry Coates' sustained synth-guitar chords sometimes threaten to embalm songs like "The Last Resort" and "There's Only Love" with smooth-jazz textures. But those songs are often saved because of Walt Fowler's flinty trumpet melodies and Conte's pulsating polyrhythms.

Some of the best moments on the disc occur when Conte nearly boils down the music to its bare essence. Such is the case with the intoxicating "El Rumbero Mas Chevere," on which Peter Korpela joins Conte's battery of percussion by playing cajón and shekere, while Fowler blasts through delightful choruses with an agile improvisation that would have made Dizzy Gillespie proud. Other similarly captivating moments are the stripped-down "Water Pots," which decidedly sounds more Malian than Cuban, and the intriguing take on the classic "Fever," which displays Conte on lead vocals amidst a bedrock of overdubbed percussion and Coates' razor-sharp guitar interjections. On "Eden," he veers close to Weather Report's *Black Market* era as he displays his talents on the balafon, among other instruments. There's nary a moment in which this disc fails to elicit smiles or involuntary body movements. If this is indeed an invite to Conte's house, prepare to be moved.

—John Murph

En Case De Luis: En Casa De Luis; The Last Resort; El Rumbero Mas Chévere; Water Pots; Sticks And Stones; Fever; Conga Melody; Eden; Dance Of The Firefly; There's Only Love; Mi China. (48:03)
Personnel: Luis Conte, percussion, electric bass, synths; Walt Fowler, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jimmy Johnson, bass; Barry Coates, guitar synth, electric guitar, ukulele; Daniel Willy, background vocals, percussion; Steve Campbell, Lindsay Rust, background vocals; Larry Goldings, piano.
Ordering info: bfmjazz.com


Billy Boy Arnold

ELECTRO-FI

Confidently Looking Up At Down

Billy Boy Arnold: *Billy Boy Arnold Sings Big Bill Broonzy* (Electro-Fi 3430; 59:13 ★★★★) Chicago singer-harmonica player Billy Boy Arnold was taken with Big Bill Broonzy's urbanized country blues as a teenager in the late 1940s and since then hoped to record a homage to this great pre-World War II Chicago bluesman. It's a gem. Arnold takes his time and centers contained passion as he lays out the folksy wisdom belonging to Broonzy classics. Social mobility and freedom are the emotional flash points of his famous "Key To The Highway" (also credited to Jazz Gillum and Charlie Segar). A song character's boastful self-regard, stemming from a New Deal job program, pushes along "Living On Easy Street." On these and 13 more, Arnold shares an easy familiarity with acoustic guitarist Eric Noden, string bassist Beau Sample and two more sidemen.

Ordering info: electrofi.com

Eddie C. Campbell: *Spider Eating Preacher* (Delmark 819; 61:53 ★★★½) In 1977, Eddie C. Campbell was in his glory singing and playing West Side-style guitar on the album *King Of The Jungle*. He's never made a better recording and his latest isn't it, either, not with strain occasionally showing in the 72-year-old's voice, offsetting his still-impressive guitar work. But Campbell has never made a more rousing track than his treatment here of Jimmie Lee Robinson's "All My Life." His singing voice and guitar ride a relaxed level of confidence as he questions the worth of a romantic attachment with ironclad integrity. Singer-guitarist-harp player Lurrie Bell contributes to three songs.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Suzanne & The Blues Church: *The Cost Of Love* (Gorgeous Tone; 45:30 ★★★) Suzanne Thomas, based in Los Angeles, has emerged from a self-described "wilderness" with an enjoyable album that mixes originals with two classic covers. She's an electric and acoustic guitarist whose keen intonation isn't to be taken lightly. As a singer, the Korean-American projects fragility and toughness. Quirkiness rules over "Must Been Gone 2 Long," meant to sound like a scratchy old 78 record and the spoken country blues "Dusty 6 String Box" is so backwoods there are yelping dogs and cawing crows on the track.

Ordering info: theblueschurch.com

Sena Ehrhardt Band: *Leave The Light On* (Blind Pig 5141; 40:06 ★★★½) This Minneapolis-based father-and-daughter band informs their blues-rock with streaks of passionate rebelliousness. Young Sena Ehrhardt has the mettle of a seasoned blues trooper. Her essential vocal quality is an air of assertive defiance. Edward Ehrhardt serves the 10 songs he wrote with her well through a blend of confident technique and a questing spirit.

Ordering info: blindpigrecords.com

Deering & Down: *Out There Somewhere* (Retsina Glow; 56:44 ★★★½) Enter the unusual Memphis soul-rock-blues domain of Lahna Deering and Rev. Neil Down. Her spectral soprano brings home innocence and kittenish sensuality, alienation and acceptance, hurt and healing. His guitar, based in the blues, is partial to trance-grooves and traveling where the album title says. They write their own songs, mostly good ones, about floods, spirituality and cryptic romance. Soul giant Willie Mitchell mixed five tracks and arranged the horns on two before dying midway though the project. (Mitchell's son, Lawrence, helped finish the album.) It's no coincidence that the tunes involving the elder Mitchell are special. Lots of fine Memphis supporting players in the studio, like the Hi Royal Rhythm Section. **DB**

Ordering info: deeringanddown.com

Larry Willis
This Time The Dream's On Me

HIGHNOTE 7238

★★★½

Larry Willis belongs to that group of modernist pianists with exemplary musicianship and wonderful recordings who somehow get routinely overlooked by the mainstream. Almost a half-century in the game, Willis continues to show he got game, most recently with his sterling discs on HighNote. On his fourth outing for the imprint, he goes solo; the results are splendid.

Recorded in two days in Sacile, Italy, the disc finds Willis in an exquisite yet relaxed mode as he alternates between some wisely chosen standards and a few top-shelf originals. Obviously not inclined to give the standards callow makeovers, he burrows deep into the melodic contours of Cole Porter's chestnut "True Love." His rendering of Duke Ellington's "A Single Petal Of A Rose" is a simply a thing of beauty.

The disc mostly takes on a quiet, amorous tone. But Willis gets a bit frisky on two fetching originals: the capricious "Blues For Marco," on which Willis hints gently at Thelonious Monk, and "Silly Blues," which he fills with Ellington-like sass and sophistication. —*John Murph*

This Time The Dream's On Me: This Time The Dream's On Me; Sanctuary; True Love; Lazy Afternoon; A Single Petal Of A Rose; Blues For Marco; It Could Happen To You; Lotus Blossom; Silly Blues; My Ship. (61:38)
Personnel: Larry Willis, piano.
Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

Edmar Castaneda
Double Portion

(SELF-RELEASED)

★★★½

Over his two previous albums as a leader and a growing number of guest spots, Edmar Castaneda has already done much to expand the stylistic possibilities of the harp in jazz. His third album as a leader, which is split between duo performances and solo flights, finds him stretching further out than he has before, tying threads between the Colombian folk harp of his roots and avant-garde experimentation.

The latter is most evident on the songs featuring Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba. The title track veers through eight minutes of constantly shifting meters and tempos, with Castaneda emphasizing his own instrument's range and versatility, comping chords, playing fluid melodic runs and handling basslines with equal aplomb as Rubalcaba plays foil, hammering the low keys and trading verses.

As dazzling as his collaborations can be, though, the songs that find Castaneda working alone are the true heart of the album. As he strums, thrums and plucks his way through these pieces, he creates an amazing variety of textures, from the weightless ethereality we so often associate with the harp to much heavier, more bodied passages with striding bass lines and taut rhythms.

That gentle side is beautifully explored on "Poem Of Strings," where his dancing melodic lines create their own momentum; things get rougher on the sharply strummed interjections of closer "Samba For Orvieto." —*Joe Tangari*

Double Portion: Double Portion; Zendi; A Harp In New York; Poem Of Strings; Libertango; Ocaso de Mar; Quitapesares; Portrait d'un Jardin; A la Tierra; Samba For Orvieto. (62:21)
Personnel: Edmar Castaneda, classical harp, Colombian harp; Gonzalo Rubalcaba, piano (1, 7); Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone (3, 9); Hamilton de Holanda, mandolin (5).
Ordering info: edmarcastaneda.com

Martin Schulte NY Quartet
Pieces Of Astoria

JAZZ HAUS MUSIK 203

★★★★

Some musicians try to show how much they can play by playing everything they know, while Cologne-based guitarist Martin Schulte and his NY Quartet show on their latest album, *Pieces Of Astoria*, that less can be more. Along with tenor saxophonist Jake Saslow, bassist Craig Akin and drummer Peter Gall, Schulte leaves the listener wanting more, which is a testament to the group's artistry and maturity. The quartet's performances of six Schulte originals and Duke Ellington's "In A Sentimental Mood" sound effortless and completely natural. The low-key and relaxed vibe invites the listener to surrender himself to this fine album.

Each player here puts collective music making above his ego. "Dancing Teen," which has a brisk second-line type feel, demonstrates how adept the rhythm section is at not only supporting the soloist, but at making space for each other as well. Akin's short, descending lines dovetail with Gall's snare, while Schulte fills in brief spaces with chords and echoes Akin's line. The group displays near-telepathic abilities on the waltz "Joshua's Wish" in that they seem to know where each line is headed; these guys have big ears. Saslow's highly expressive approach is loaded with nuance and subtlety. He blends perfectly with Schulte when both play the head, as on "Brooklyn Lager," and Schulte's ringing arpeggios and reverb-laden sound complement Gall's crisp drumming and Akin's clean attack. Schulte intersperses plenty of space into his single-note solo phrases, showing that what's not said is just as important as what is. —*Chris Robinson*

Pieces Of Astoria: Brooklyn Lager; Astoria Boulevard; Dancing Teen; Drunken Monkey Blues; Joshua's Wish; In A Sentimental Mood; Turn Of The Year. (46:39)
Personnel: Martin Schulte, guitar; Jake Saslow, tenor saxophone; Craig Akin, bass; Peter Gall, drums.
Ordering info: jazzhausmusik.de

Juhani Aaltonen/ Heikki Sarmanto
Conversations

TUM CD 024

★★★

Juhani Aaltonen and Heikki Sarmanto have, in half a century of playing together, covered a lot of ground, from fusion to free-jazz. An acquaintance that long is great for fostering rapport, and they evidence plenty of that here. Aaltonen trusts Sarmanto to keep the music coherent when he goes off on some elaborate foray, and every time he takes such a flight, Sarmanto has his back. Their comfort together is unquestionable, and it leads to some elegant and simpatico performances. But this collegiality also results in a mutual tolerance that doesn't always serve the music well. Each man abets the other's most florid flourishes, piling decoration upon decoration. The piano and tenor saxophone combination on this disc facilitates the romance and rumination in their dialogues, which move in and out of focus. There are moments of undeniable beauty, but they are diluted by passages that simply go on a bit too long. —*Bill Meyer*

Conversations: Disc One: When I Was With You; So Much Happened…; What We Cannot Imagine; …It Happened Today; Le Petit Soldat; Just Like A Dream; You And The Night And The Music; Evening Prayer (57:19). Disc Two: From Nothing; No Work Bound Me; Free Souls; The Sea In The Moonlight; War Trane; Peace Talk; Alone Together; Evening Haze. (59:08)
Personnel: Juhani Aaltonen, tenor saxophone; Heikki Sarmanto, piano.
Ordering info: tumrecords.com

Aruán Ortiz & The Camerata Urbana Ensemble
Santiarican Blues Suite
SUNNYSIDE 1302
★★★★½

Aruán Ortiz Quartet
Orbiting
FRESH SOUND/NEW TALENT 396
★★★½

Two sides of the same coin. The coin, in this case, being 38-year-old Cuban pianist Aruán Ortiz. *Santiarican Blues Suite* and *Orbiting* could not be more different. Which makes for interesting listening. The *Suite* is full of mystery and unpredictable, this cocktail of world music and avant-garde flavors is both imaginative and at times captivating. And Ortiz's piano is more a background instrument as he writes and orchestrates for fellow pianist Katya Mihailova, flutist Zoe Hillengas, a five-piece string section, two bassists and percussion.

All things Cuban are written into these five movements, a suite commissioned for the Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre: contemporary classical mingling with 19th century Afro-Haitian elements like gaga, tahona and tumba francesa. Mesmerizing, the quietude of "Diaspora" enters the vocalic and percussive realms of "Palmonte," complete with the string section's own percussive drive. It's light, airy and formal but also full of folk elements. Master percussionist Mauricio Herrera's drumming pops and punctuates, the recording itself capturing each instrument in all its marvelous colors. The light, feathery touch continues with more from Hillengas and Herrera on "San Pascual Bailon," accents from the strings keeping things tuneful, always connected to everything. With "Sagrado" everything shifts, the strings taking center stage in this more modulated, almost melancholy piece. Here Ortiz's pen shines in a new light, the music lyrical, dramatic, creating suspense. "Jubilee/Comparsa" sustains those ethereal elements but also brings back the percussion, a pulse and some playful suspense with strings and flute.

Orbiting also can be heard as a suite. But unlike *Santiarican Blues Suite*, *Orbiting* is a quartet date in the sense that what we hear is a band. In this case, a band playing eight selections, half of which are Ortiz originals, the rest covers, all of them seemingly woven together from track to track. And, except for the standard "Alone Together," it all has the markings of being one long song, with contrasts built in. It's an internal conversation in the way that *Santiarican Blues Suite* is more extroverted, *Orbiting* is more around four players talking to one another, with guitarist David Gilmore as much the soloist as Ortiz. And with bassist Rashaan Carter and drummer Eric McPherson, tunes like Charlie Parker's "KoKo" and Ornette Coleman's "W.R.U." maintain their bebop affectations but are then dismantled in the explorations that follow, consistent with the album's minimalisms, roving meters and chord-less maneuverings.

—John Ephland

Santiarican Blues Suite: Diaspora; Palmonte; San Pascual Bailon; Sagrado; Jubilee/Comparsa. (35:17)
Personnel: Aruan Ortiz, Katya Mihailova, piano; Zoe Hillengas, flute; Francisco Salazar, Luis Casals, Machiko Ozawa, violin; Samuel Marchan, viola; Brain Sanders, cello; Pedro Giraudo, Anthony Morris, bass; Mauricio Herrera, percussion.
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Orbiting: Ginga Carioca; Orbiting; The Heir; KoKo; Numbers; W.R.U.; Green City; Alone Together. (54:52)
Personnel: Aruan Ortiz, piano; David Gilmore, guitar; Rashaan Carter, bass; Eric McPherson, drums.
Ordering info: freshsoundrecords.com

Heiner Stadler
Brains On Fire
LABOR LAB 7069
★★★★

This heady two-CD set, recorded between 1966 and 1973, documents the compositions of pianist Heiner Stadler, a figure somehow lost to time. But his achievement in drawing ebullient performances from Lenny White, Jimmy Owens, Reggie Workman, Joe Farrell, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Albert Manglesdorff is impressive.

These eight extended tracks, five available here for the first time, sound as fresh as if they were recorded yesterday. Beyond "free" or "avant garde" labels, Stadler's music flows, naturally and robust, as if the musicians are improvising from a single mind, or, yes, a single brain.

Where is the dividing line between composition and improvisation? That's hard to tell here, and owes perhaps as much to Stadler's open-ended compositions as the individual musicians' skills. White scalds rhythms like a whirling dervish on "Three Problems." The composition juxtaposes playful swing sections with chaotic, tumbling motion. Bridgewater has a riotous time on "Love In The Middle Of The Air," a gleeful duet with Workman. "Bea's Flat" begins as a swing vehicle but quickly deconstructs and stops, followed by scattershot solos and jarring ensemble sections.

—Ken Micallef

Brains On Fire: Disc One: No Exercise, Three Problems, Heidi, Bea's Flat (60:22). Disc Two: Love In The Middle Of The Air; U.C.S.; All Tones; The Fugue #2 (72:52).
Personnel: Heiner Stadler, Wolfgang Dauner, Don Friedman, piano; Manfred Schoof, cornet; Jimmy Owens, trumpet; Tyrone Washington, Joe Farrell, Gerd Dudek, tenor saxophone; Garnett Brown, Albert Manglesdorff, trombone; Reggie Workman, Barre Phillips, Lucas Lindholm, bass; Tony Inzalaco, Joe Chambers, Brian Brake, Lenny White, drums; Dee Dee Bridgewater, vocals.
Ordering info: laborrecords.com

The Resonance Ensemble
What Country Is This?
NOT TWO 885
★★★★

This powerful transcontinental tentet was formed in 2007 by Chicago reedist, improviser and composer Ken Vandermark at the invitation of Not Two owner Marek Winiarski. Over the years, it's developed from a one-off project into a sustained working band, although on this side of the Atlantic the group's performances have been confined to the Midwest and can be tallied on a single hand. Still, Resonance Ensemble ranks as an important vehicle for Vandermark; following projects like the Territory Band and the Crisis Ensemble, it's been an effective outlet for his large band writing and on *What Country Is This?* he makes the most of the group's range and high-energy capabilities. The album was cut in March 2011 during a mini-festival by the ensemble and various ad hoc configurations in Chicago and Milwaukee.

Vandermark the composer has always been driven to write material that gives improvisers plenty of grist for the mill, and Resonance Ensemble is no exception. These three episodic pieces are packed with shifts in tempo, texture, density and melodic shape. While each composition is marked by an almost vicious sense of propulsion, no soloist is left to blow over a repeating vamp. Instead, Vandermark keeps the landscape changing; when he improvises on baritone saxophone about five minutes into the opener "Fabric Monument," he's immediately jostling with Swedish tuba player Per-Åke Holmlander over the scrabbling percussion of Tim Daisy and Michael Zerang. And whether a solo bridges two entirely different melodic schemes or it's simply punctuated by staccato horn bursts, each improvisation is forced to adapt, change and respond to shifting foundations.

That approach makes for some dense orchestrations and, at times, the band has an almost martial intensity, but that only makes the moments of repose, as when semi-pastel colors create space for a short muted solo from Atomic trumpeter Magnus Broo on the opener, hit that much harder. —*Peter Margasak*

What Country Is This?: Fabric Monument; Acoustic Fence; Open Window Theory. (47:38)
Personnel: Devin Hoff, bass; Magnus Broo, trumpet; Per-Åke Holmlander, tuba; Steve Swell, trombone; Tim Daisy, drums; Michael Zerang, drums; Dave Rempis, alto and tenor saxophones; Mikolaj Trzaska, alto sax, bass clarinet; Ken Vandermark, baritone saxophone, clarinet; Waclaw Zimpel, clarinet, bass clarinet.
Ordering info: nottwo.com

David Berkman
Self-Portrait
RED PIANO RECORDS 14599-4410
★★★½

Though he first attracted attention in late-1990s New York in as an ensemble keyboardist, David Berkman now offers a set of solo meditations on standards and originals. They're usually not short enough to be miniatures and often comprise a head-solo-head format. The preponderance of intimate dynamics, casual attack and middle-register confinement make this something of a confessional offering. As such, the album taken all at once can blur the distinctions, which can be subtle.

Berkman looks for the pretty notes and colors; dissonance, forte playing, tone clusters, angular chords, or interval leaps are not to be heard. He sounds most dimensional on tried-and-true material, like "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," where he calibrates from caress to firm press. Two takes of the Gershwins' "But Not For Me" are redesigned, expunging the melody for solo jags. When he ties into a well-written treasure, like Alex Wilder's "Moon And Sand," Berkman is at his best, exploring harmonic color with relish. Joe Henderson's "Serenity," on the other hand, bumps along with

little variety of tonal color, dynamic or phrasing.

His originals can merely state a theme in a matter of seconds before they're finished, like the "Sketch" fragments, or exhibit tuneful possibilities, as on "Tiny Prairie Landscape." This piece, rendered in changing meters and moods, shows the greatest promise for development.

—*Kirk Silsbee*

Self-Portrait: Smoke Gets In Your Eyes; First Sketch; Serenity; Body And Soul; Second Sketch; But Not For Me 1; Sweet And Lovely; It Could Happen To You; Anniversary Waltz; But Not For Me 2; Third Sketch; Just In Time; Tiny Prairie Landscape; Moon And Sand; Milestones; Fourth Sketch; Embraceable You. (46:44)
Personnel: David Berkman, piano.
Ordering info: redpianorecords.com

Tom Harrell
Number Five
HIGHNOTE 7236
★★★½

Number Five is just as much a voice for Tom Harrell's soloing and ability to thrive in multiple contexts as it is a showcase for his excellent working group. Part of what makes this album so compelling is its varied personnel configurations and track sequencing. While the album features Harrell's working quintet, it only appears on four of the 11 cuts, with the remainder finding Harrell working both alone and in combinations with members of the group. A duet between Harrell and drummer Johnathan Blake on "Blue 'N' Boogie" opens the album with a ton of energy and momentum. Harrell's ballad "Right As Rain," a flugelhorn feature with the quintet, immediately cool things off. "GT," also for quintet, is fairly free, and shows just how good the band is. The rhythm section unflinchingly goes right with Harrell as he hints at the time, goes into time and then back out again. Tenor saxophonist Wayne Escoffery build parts of his riveting solo with bits of pianist Danny Grissett's comping figures. Blake not only fills the spaces in between Grissett's solo lines, but often finishes them as well.

The final four tracks are almost vignette-like, resulting from their brevity, atmospheric nature and differing instrumentation. "Preludium" features angular and dissonant counterpoint. The aptly titled "The Question" is a flugel/tenor/Fender Rhodes trio that asks more than it answers, while "Melody In B-Flat" is a full-bodied swinging hard-bop piece for quintet that features a burning Escoffery. The album closes with Harrell's poignant solo take of Tadd Dameron's "A Blue Time," and it's here you find his style and improvisational approach: gorgeous sound, impeccable swing and a seemingly unending string of lyrical melodies.

—*Chris Robinson*

Number Five: Blue 'N' Boogie; Right As Rain; No. 5; Journey To The Stars; GT; Present; Preludium; The Question; Melody In B-Flat; A Blue Time. (59:07)
Personnel: Tom Harrell, trumpet, flugelhorn; Wayne Escoffery, tenor saxophone (2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10); Danny Grissett, piano (2, 3, 4, 5, 10), Fender Rhodes (6, 9); Ugonna Okegwo, bass (2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10); Johnathan Blake, drums (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10).
Ordering info: jazzdepot.com


Dirty Three: Mick Turner (left), Jim White, Warren Ellis

ANNABEL MEHRAN

Electronic Stompers And Mysteries

It's been seven years since Australian instrumental trio Dirty Three released its last album, and the taut urgency of opener "Furnace Skies" indicates the group has been anxious to get back at it. ***Toward The Low Sun*** **(Drag City 511; 41:49 ★★★★)** rethinks the move toward accessibility explored on 2005's *Cinder*. Instead, this diverse outing finds them rediscovering the wealth of sounds they can conjure from their violin/guitar/drums lineup, from the drifting folk of "Moon On The Land" to the Southern-rock stomp of "That Was Was."

Ordering info: dragcity.com

With the future of Sonic Youth uncertain, perhaps it's a good time for guitarist Lee Ranaldo to step out on his own. ***Between The Times And The Tides*** **(Matador 980; 47:33 ★★½)** isn't Ranaldo's first solo album, but it's the first time the noise maestro can unequivocally claim the title of singer-songwriter. "Waiting On A Dream" kicks things off with a distorted, seductive melody in the Sonic Youth mold, but the jangling pop of "Off The Wall" steers the proceedings into a cheery simplicity from which it never recovers. Too much of the record is dominated by forgettable strumming and insipid lyrics.

Ordering info: matadorrecords.com

Mike Wexler's ***Dispossession*** **(Mexican Summer 104; 41:09 ★★★★)** weaves relatively simple elements into a mysterious, entrancing tapestry. Wexler enlists trumpeter Nate Wooley, violist Jessica Pavone and bassist Shahzad Ismaily on his second album, but it's his nasal, hushed voice that is the star here. His songs draw on psych-folk, post-rock, Indian raga and early prog.

Ordering info: mexicansummer.com

Blues Control, the duo of Lea Cho and Russ Waterhouse, recently set up house in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. Their fourth album, ***Valley Tangents*** **(Drag City 509; 34:19 ★★★)**, may reflect their new environs in its bucolic gauziness, but its swirling layers of electro-acoustic sound are anything but back-to-nature. The molasses groove of "Love's A Rondo" evokes "Canteloupe Island" played by a winding-down automaton.

Ordering info: dragcity.com

If dance music is all about the beat, why does ***Six Cups Of Rebel*** **(Smalltown Supersound; 53:12 ★★★)** begin with more than five minutes of swelling, surging organ? Norwegian producer Hans-Peter Lindstrøm brings plenty of funky bass and pounding beats over the remainder of the album, but "No Release" serves as an announcement that what follows will be eccentric. Lindstrøm introduces his own voice as yet another element to be processed and manipulated, such as on the kaleidoscopic "De Javu."

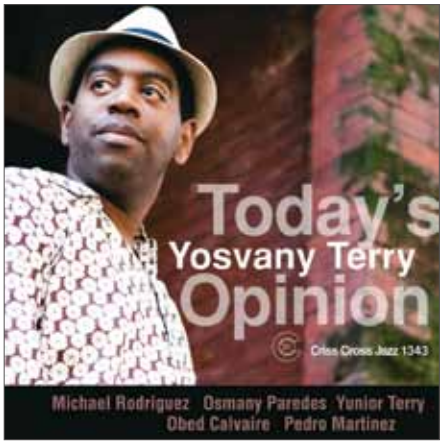
Ordering info: smalltownsupersound.com

German duo Mouse On Mars has survived for nearly two decades in the typically disposable world of techno. That's most likely because its music maintains a sense of humor as off-kilter as its glitchy, pulsating experimentation. Their ***Parastrophics*** **(Monkeytown 022; 46:14 ★★★½)**, is a sonic collage that never stops warping and decaying new textures and colors.

Ordering info: monkeytownrecords.com

Masaki Batoh is an experimental musican and acupuncturist. Stemming from an attempt to compose based on brain waves extracted via a brain pulse reader attached to an oscillator, ***Brain Pulse Music*** **(Drag City 471; 41:34 ★★★½)** took on added meaning in the wake of Japan's devastating earthquake and nuclear disaster. A combination of piercing electronics and traditional Japanese folk instruments, the music expresses grief and prayer through a violent ambience. **DB**

Ordering info: dragcity.com



Yosvany Terry
Today's Opinion
CRISS CROSS JAZZ 1343
★★★★½

Today's Opinion, Yosvany Terry's third title as a leader, is the latest dispatch from the ongoing redefinition of Latin jazz. Lyrical, complex and caffeinated, it combines the instrumentation and ground rules of the classic hard-bop quintet with the rhythmic savvy of Afro-Cuban music and long-arc compositional ambition.

We've had a taste of this before: Three of Terry's compositions were featured on Gonzalo Rubalcaba's brilliant album *Avatar*. Terry (on alto and soprano) and Michael Rodríguez (trumpet) were the horns on that album, and the Terry-Rodríguez duo returns to frontline *Today's Opinion*, along with mind-linked brother bassist Yunior Terry, pianist Osmany Paredes and drummer Obed Calvaire. Longtime collaborator Pedrito Martínez opens the set, affirming his commitment by chanting in the ritual language of Cuba's Abakuá secret society (as Chano Pozo once did), and he reappears on congas for the album's closer, "Son Contemporáneo." On that number, Rubalcaba phones in his blessing on synth—the only outside overdub on the album, which was otherwise recorded in two ensemble sessions.

Terry, who also plays shekere, has a practitioner's comprehension of the Afro-Cuban religious repertoires, and the rhythmic acuity of this ensemble is impressive. Terry's compositions explore structure as well as rhythm, melody and harmony. His orchestration wrings timbral earworms out of the quintet format via strategically weighted harmonic doublings, sometimes in minor seconds or clusters. The impact is maximized by Paredes, whose split-brain part calls on him to double a locked-in countertime ostinato with Yunior Terry's bass while his right hand doubles the horns' flying 32nd notes.

This is physical, cerebral and spiritual music, with a lot of stories to tell. *Today's Opinion* affirms that Yosvany Terry has become a composer and player of importance while the international community of clave is producing some of the most exciting music around. —*Ned Sublette*

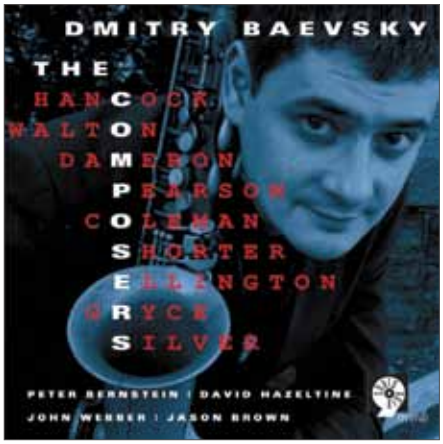
Today's Opinion: Summer Relief; Contrapuntístico; Inner Speech; Returning Home; Harlem Matinee; Suzanne; Another Vision Of Oji; Son Contemporáneo. (66:44)
Personnel: Yosvany Terry, saxophones, chekeré; Michael Rodríguez, trumpet; Osmany Paredes, piano; Yunior Terry, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums; Pedro Martínez, vocal (1), percussion (1, 6, 8); Gonzalo Rubalcaba, synthesizer (8).
Ordering info: crisscrossjazz.com

Wayne Escoffery
The Only Son Of One
SUNNYSIDE 1320
★★★★

Born in London to an abusive father, saxophonist Wayne Escoffery moved with his mother to the United States when he was 8. Needless to say, Escoffery's childhood was tough, and the music on *The Only Son Of One* is born of those experiences. So it should not come as any surprise that Escoffery's playing is impassioned and intense.

The first two tracks, "World Of The Bardo" and "Banishment Of The Lost Spirit," form a kind of miniature suite, as they both deal with the death of Escoffery's father. On the former, Escoffery unfurls fresh idea after idea in an extremely fast fashion, doubling up the time with ease. Orrin Evans continues in the same manner on Fender Rhodes, ending his solo over Adam Holzman's wash of synthesized color. The latter tune was inspired by Escoffery telling his father's spirit to leave forever in a conversation they had in his sleep, which one can almost hear during Escoffery's fiery tenor solo. The title track is a reminder to Escoffery to not end up being like his father. His playing is lyrical and angular, growing in intensity and agitation. "Presumed Innocence" refers to the loss of Escoffery's childhood innocence; Holzman is a big presence on it, as his more laid-back solo with longer note and phrase lengths sets Escoffery up to continue in the same vein. —*Chris Robinson*

***The Only Son Of One*:** World Of The Bardo; Banishment Of The Lost Spirit; Perilous Desires; The Only Son Of One; If I Am, Who You Are; Selena's Song; Presumed Innocence; Colour Spectrum; Two Souls. (69:22)
Personnel: Wayne Escoffery, tenor saxophone (1–8), soprano saxophone (9); Orrin Evans, piano (1, 2, 9), Fender Rhodes (1, 3–8); Adam Holzman, keyboards; Hans Glawischnig, bass (1, 2, 4, 5); Ricky Rodrigues, bass (3, 6, 7, 8); Jason Brown, drums.
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Dmitry Baevsky
The Composers
SHARP NINE 1047
★★★½

With four records now under his belt, Russian alto saxophonist Dmitry Baevsky is hardly a newcomer to the scene. *The Composers* is Baevsky's latest disc packed with bebop-era covers, his homage to the artists who shaped him. The record features everything from pianist Cedar Walton's "Ojos De Rojo" to "Swift As The Wind" by Tadd Dameron. This is mostly hero-worship from afar—only three of Baevsky's nine composers are still alive, and the alto saxophonist has only worked in the studio with Walton.

In his selection of covers, Baevsky is far from esoteric, but his tributes are limited to tunes somewhat off the beaten path. Baevsky does venture into well-worn territory, turning in a stirring version of Duke Ellington's "Self Portrait (Of The Bean)." Somewhat surprisingly, there are only three saxophonists in the lot—Ornette Coleman, Gigi Gryce and Wayne Shorter. Baevsky flies on Gryce's "Smoke Signal," starting with a lengthy stop-time flurry that launches into a barrage, buffeted by bassist John Webber and Jason Brown's steady ride cymbal. Baevsky moves from spitting short, frenzied phrases to weaving long sentences that rise and fall with his backing music. He effortlessly navigates the changes, making "Smoke Signal" into his own composition.

Conversely, Coleman's "Tears Inside" is Baevsky as behind-the-beat blues player, hanging in the pocket, letting his tone die down before starting the next note. His phrasing is now deliberate, and he takes time to complete each musical idea.

By paying homage to his compositional heroes, Baevsky turns in a well-rounded and perfectly executed disc that looks forward as it gazes into the past. —*Jon Ross*

The Composers: Ojos De Rojo; Gaslight; Mister Chairman; To Whom It May Concern; Self Portrait (Of The Bean); Swift As The Wind; Smoke Signal; Three Wishes; Tears Inside. (53:03)
Personnel: Dmitry Baevsky, alto saxophone; Peter Bernstein, guitar; David Hazeltine, piano; John Webber, bass; Jason Brown, drums.
Ordering info: sharpnine.com

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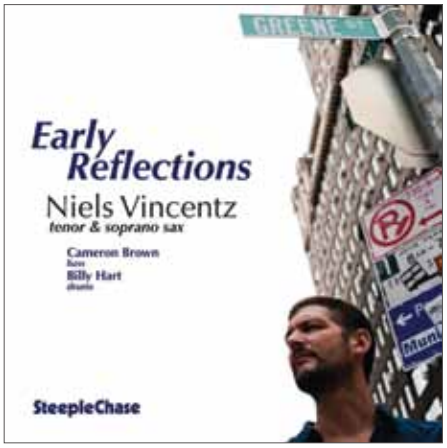


Niels Vincentz
Early Reflections
STEEPLECHASE 31737
★★★★

On "Scandicci," Danish saxophonist Niels Vincentz's nod to Steve Lacy—who he heard perform in the Italian town of the title—this bandleader's loping tenor isn't unduly spectacular. But that laid-back quality is the ultimate strength of the date.

With world-class sidemen drummer Billy Hart and bassist Cameron Brown, there's no necessity for overblowing; a multi-textured cushion is available for him to perch. Vincentz comps behind solos from Brown before embarking on his fairly brief sortie. He studiously shapes the composition, giving space to Hart's powerful brush onslaught, maintaining the line behind in tandem with Brown. Vincentz reckons he plays soprano 40 percent against 60 percent tenor but is more than a dabbler with the straight horn. "Boo's Birthday" has the investigative, corkscrewing quality of John Coltrane (an influence betrayed by the inclusion of "26-2").

Two-thirds of the set are originals, atypical for a Steeplechase outing, and Vincentz exhibits a composer's instinct and respect for his trio mates' long-running simpatico; he's not interested in empty virtuosity. That "I Remember You" is taken slow speaks volumes. The saxist sees it as a memento for his father, who died when Vincentz was a teenager. It's not a bop burner here.

Hart panoplies brawny polyrhythms on "It's You Or No One," Brown driving hard beneath Vincentz's choice soprano lines. "Happy Medium" and "Repetition" reveal Vincentz's manifesto. Of the first, he comments, "It is all about keeping the right balance in the music." And there's perfect equilibrium here: no overreaching (notwithstanding the evocative line of "Reaching" and the profound swing), no underachieving, either.

"Repetition" ups the ante; again, it's the soprano that sears, and you hear how centered Vincentz is and why these Americans dig him. As usual, it's hard to say enough about Hart's fabulously virile drumming.

—Michael Jackson

Early Reflections: Scandicci; Boy's Birthday; Little Sister; I Remember You; It's You Or No One; Happy Medium; Reaching; Repetition; 26-2. (68.35)
Personnel: Niels Vincentz, tenor and soprano saxophone; Billy Hart, drums; Cameron Brown, bass.
Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Robi Botos Trio
Place To Place
A440 ENTERTAINMENT
★★★

Canadian pianist Robi Botos has won numerous awards, including the Montreux Jazz Festival Solo Piano Competition in 2004, a 2007 National Jazz Award for Keyboardist of the Year, 2007 NOW Award for Best Jazz Artist and First Place Standing at the 2008 Great American Jazz Piano Competition.

Botos and his trio of bassist Atilla Darvas and drummer Frank Botos favor pleasant interactions and a pop-styled approach, though the pianist clearly swings in a traditional fashion.

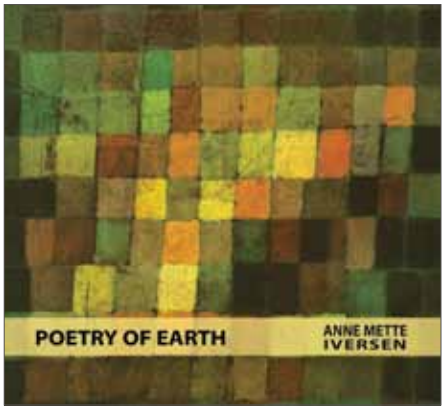
While undertaking a couple standards, the trio seems to prefer stretching on Botos' original material, which ranges from high-flying and fun ("Smedley's Attack") to thoughtful ("Emmanuel").

The samba-bulging title track wouldn't be out of place on an early Bob James record. "Tagged" swings with a slightly heavy feel but is nonetheless enjoyable. "Inside Out" apparently isn't based on the Diana Ross hit single of the same name but summons a similar spirit. The piano/bowed bass solo "Homeland" is more pensive than the rest of the album, yet is ultimately more satisfying.

Overall, Botos and his trio extend a vibrant and flowing performance, that while not as well honed and hot as the finest jazz south of the Canadian border, points (or swings) in the right direction.

—Ken Micallef

Place To Place: Life Goes On; Footprints; Be Bach; Emmanuel; Long Time No See; Smedley's Attack; Tagged; You Don't Know What Love Is; Inside Out; Homeland; First Love; What Is This Thing Called Love; What? (68:55)
Personnel: Robi Botos, piano; Atilla Darvas, bass; Frank Botos, drums.
Ordering info: a440entertainment.com



Anne Mette Iversen
Poetry Of Earth
BROOKLYN JAZZ UNDERGROUND 031
★★★★

Bassist Anne Mette Iversen wrote the music for her new two-disc collection while at an artists' residency in a thousand-year-old cloister situated on the cliffs of Italy's Amalfi coast. The dramatically picturesque scenery turned Iversen's thoughts to the relationship between man and nature, inspiring her to set poetry from the Romantic period to the present related to the subject.

The meditative solitude of the setting was also an obvious influence on Iversen's writing, as the 18 pieces maintain a consistent air of rapturous fascination. She utilizes a spare instrumentation, with John Ellis' caressing reeds, Dan Tepfer's crystalline piano and her own woody bass to support the vocals of Maria Neckam (on the English lyrics) and Christine Skou (Danish), to focus in on minute elements, meditating on the embrace of flute and bass the way a poet would on a single blade of grass or a faintly heard birdsong.

Opening the album, A.E. Housman's "Loveliest Of Trees, The Cherry Now" blooms in Iversen's treatment, as her introspective solo is joined by Neckam's wistful vocal, which gives way to Tepfer's glistening lines and Ellis' fluttering bass clarinet. Skou soars with Ellis' flute to open "Jeg taber heletiden tiden" before Tepfer turns the piece into a torch song; Svende Grøn's poem is given an operetta-style treatment, a succession of dramatic scenes. The fragility of nature (and of life) is the motivating emotion, but Housman provides the opportunity for self-deprecating humor on "When I Was One And Twenty," which gives Ellis the room to exercise the bawdy wit of his tenor.

—Shaun Brady

Poetry Of Earth: Disc One: Loveliest Of Trees, The Cherry Now; Into My Heart An Air That Kills; Going And Staying; Music; Jeg Taber Heletiden Tiden; Nar Natten Løser; Hvorfor; Some Day; Sangen om elgen og birketraeet. (48:03) Disc Two: Sensommer skygger; Der Er Dage; Det lyder Ganske Stille; On The Grasshopper And The Cricket; Staereflokke; When I Was One And Twenty; Thorns And Roses; Before Thorns And Roses; En livsvar. (43:23)
Personnel: Anne Mette Iversen, acoustic bass; Maria Neckam, vocal; Christine Skou, vocal; Dan Tepfer, piano; John Ellis, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet, clarinet, flute.
Ordering info: bjurecords.com

Vintage Sax & Brass Sessions


Charlie Parker
DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

Perhaps the only live album that is the subject of two books—and countless shorter analyses—***The Quintet: Jazz At Massey Hall*** **(Original Jazz Classics Remasters 33722; 46:40 ★★★★½)** has been issued at least once a decade since Charlie Parker led an all-star quintet into Toronto's Massey Hall on May 15, 1953. Charles Mingus had the foresight to record the meeting of himself, Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and Max Roach, and was prevailed upon not to destroy the tapes despite his angry outburst when it was apparent that his bass had been poorly recorded. This latest re-mastered version is as crisp as the one-mic recording, and Mingus' blatant overdubbing, will allow. Parker, Gillespie, Powell and Roach hadn't played together in years, and barely knew Mingus, so the performance was far from cohesive, but it is virtuosity and personality that rule here. The tension between Parker and Gillespie is evident in their interplay, even though too much has been read into Parker's truncated introduction of the trumpeter as "my worthy constituent." Gillespie cranks up the energy when he senses the saxophonist is drifting off course, and Parker returns in the second half of the concert with a blistering attack on "Wee" and "Hot House" that belies any thought that he was dogging it. Whether you attribute the ragged edges to Powell's mental state, the lack of rehearsal or the general disorganization of the event, these moments are counterbalanced by the joy contained in Roach's solos and the way Parker refuses to go quietly. Together, they add up to a piece of musical theater that sounds filled with both drama and comedic relief.

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

If you subscribe to the theory that 1963 was the last year jazz was at its commercial peak, ***The New Sounds Of Maynard Ferguson/Come Blow Your Horn*** **(Real Gone Music 0021; 79:29 ★★★)** might just sound like a handful of swan songs. Coming off his tenure with Roulette Records, Ferguson was just months away from dropping out to join Timothy Leary's acid experiments, but was still blowing high and hard. Employing top-flight arrangers—including Don Sebesky, Oliver Nelson and Bill Holman—and strong young players like baritone saxophonist Ronnie Cuber, Ferguson's band was steeped in talent, but a scan of the material indicates why the leader might've been looking to dig his head for awhile. The book veers between big band standards like "Take The 'A' Train" and "One O'Clock Jump" and novelty trifles like Billy May's theme from "Naked City" and "Antony And Cleopatra Theme." Occasionally, something interesting like a sharp take on Herbie Hancock's brand-new "Watermelon Man" pops up, but overall, the two albums lack direction.

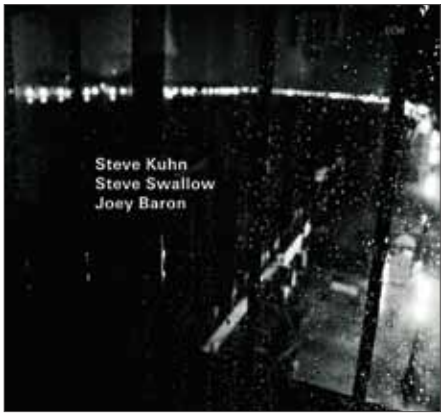
Ordering info: realgonemusic.com

After returning from Europe in the mid-'70s, it's little wonder Dexter Gordon developed a special relationship with Montreal and Doudou Boisel's welcoming Rising Sun club. ***Night Ballads: Montreal 1977*** **(Uptown 27.65; 78:47 ★★★★)** catches the aging tenor saxophonist on one of those visits, and his rapport with the audience is evident from his French-language introduction. Nothing about Gordon's presentation is hurried: from the long, multi-hued choruses he takes to the amount of solo room and harmonic freedom he gives to pianist George Cables. This quartet—with Rufus Reid on bass and Eddie Gladden on drums—formed an unbreakable support for Gordon, and he sounds both utterly relaxed and fiercely focused on wringing every nuance from the four ballads captured here.

Ordering info: uptownrecords.net

Two years before his Blue Note Records debut, 23-year-old Hank Mobley was making a name for himself around his adopted New Jersey home, and ***Newark 1953*** **(Uptown 27.66/67; 55:02/52:23 ★★★½)** shows why. With trombonist Bennie Green the star soloist, Mobley sounds assured and distinctive on two sets of mostly bop-oriented tunes that Green called. The audience's mood is upbeat—even the announcement of an illegally parked car is greeted with laughter—and the youngsters, who include pianist Walter Davis Jr. and drummer Charli Persip, reflect the vibe by playing loose and adventurously. **DB**

Ordering info: uptownrecords.net



Steve Kuhn Trio
Wisteria
ECM 16762
★★

It's never fun to disparage an album so flawed that it invites invective. It's even more awkward to seek something to say about another project that leaves so little impression that practically any commentary is unmerited.

And it's especially hard to write this kind of commentary when the musicians involved have distinguished histories and have made important contributions. When you plant Steve Kuhn, Steve Swallow and Joey Baron in a room with their instruments and a bunch of microphones, it's reasonable to expect results that inspire some kind of discussion. When that doesn't happen, it may be in part the fault of those who are expected to listen and critique. That's what's happening here.

Eight of the 11 songs are composed by Kuhn and/or other members of the trio. They are also somewhat generic and, with a couple of exceptions, predictable. Even on its first spin, you know several bars ahead that the melody on Kuhn's "Adagio" is going to settle on the ninth at the end of each verse—except for on the coda, which is also not a big surprise. The descending chord sequence on his "Chalet" is similarly formulaic.

The playing, too, leaves few ripples. Dynamics stay pretty even—no big crescendos driven by intensified playing, things quieting down only for the bass solos. Swallow takes his turns with the melodic fluency that distinguishes his style, but the lines he improvises unfold smoothly rather than daringly. His chorus on "Promises Kept," with its laid-back dotted-eighth structure, feels like an idle stroll in the park.

Kuhn's playing radiates self-assurance with only an occasional hint of risk or inspiration. His strongest moments come on the album's fastest tune, his "A Likely Story." Swallow provides supple backup, adding a few well-placed detours from his walking patterns, and Baron ignites some firecrackers on his snare as the piano solo burns through a number of verses. Here we are reminded that these outstanding players can tear it up when so inclined. —*Bob Doerschuk*

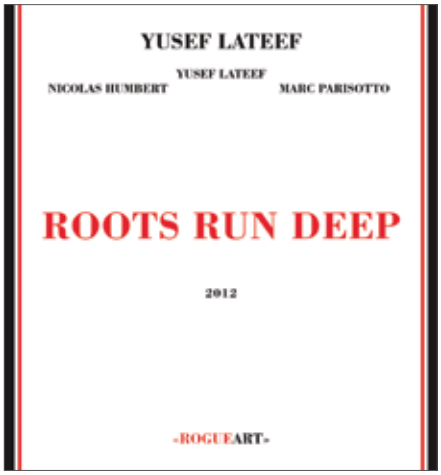
***Wisteria*:** Chalet; Adagio; Morning Dew; Romance; Permanent Wave; A Likely Story; Pastorale; Wisteria; Dark Glasses; Promises Kept; Good Lookin' Rookie. (67:16)
Personnel: Steve Kuhn, piano; Steve Swallow, bass; Joey Baron, drums.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Romain Collin
The Calling
PALMETTO 2156
★★★½

For anyone familiar with the late Nicky Hopkins, French pianist Romain Collin suggests a pop flair that rockers would want, a certain player's sophistication added to their typically more roughhewn rock sensibilities. That said, "Storms," which opens *The Calling*, is over before you know it, a cinematic quality slowly emerging once again but in a more measured way. But there's something eerie here. The storytelling elements to this disc make it hard not to feel like you are on a journey, Collin's programming treatments subtly and effectively touching certain parts of the music. The improvisation that brings the title track to a close indicates that Collin isn't just playing the score in a classical sense but demonstrating his fluency and virtuosity beyond the page. Things get a little saucy with the aptly titled "Runner's High," the uptempo swerve and intricate arrangement providing just the right platform for them to rock out and not just rock on. "Runner's High" has a center that finds the band lightening up sonically but not tempo-

wise, light but still sweating. The impression is one of arranged music, but one full of improvisation. This series of mostly originals essentially gives us the template for *The Calling*, a series that includes a variety of moods, opportunities for varied expression, all of it augured by Collin's ever-present chords, a cloudy-sky-with-patches-of-blue quality pervading everything here. —*John Ephland*

***The Calling*:** Storm; The Calling; Runner's High; Stop This Train; Burn, Down; Pennywise The Clown; Greyshot; Strange; Nica's Dream; Airborne; Aftermath; One Last Try. (64:28)
Personnel: Romain Collin, piano, programming; Luques Curtis, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums; John Shannon, guitar (1, 5, 7); Adrian Daurov, cello (5, 7).
Ordering info: palmetto-records.com



Yusef Lateef
Roots Run Deep
ROGUE ART 0038
★★★½

Nicolas Humbert, co-director of the documentary *Brother Yusef*, and Marc Parisotto assembled this short suite from improvisations and recitations recorded during filming in 2004 at Lateef's home in Amherst, Mass. The result is akin to sitting at the feet of an elder, hearing stories that reflect the soul of one profound man and his wider culture.

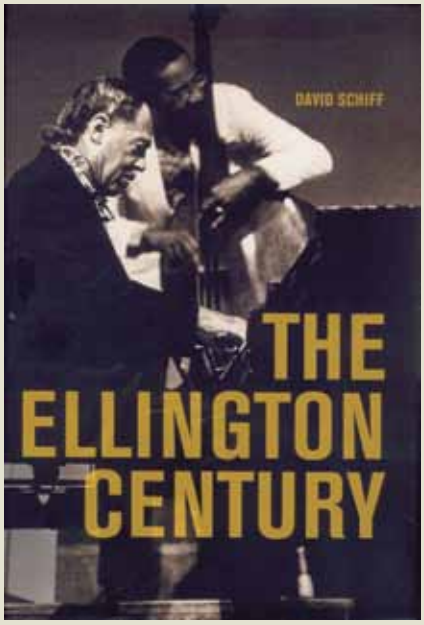
Lateef reads stories from his 1976 collection *Spheres* in a throaty near-whisper that is replicated in his husky tenor playing. Humbert and Parisotto's pairing of music and reading creates an intimate dialogue between Lateef and himself, the saxophonist's occasional grunts providing reaction and punctuation to the storyteller's accounts.

The circumstances of the recording create a stark intimacy that fits perfectly with the melancholy nature of many of the tales. "Goodbye" tells of a funeral on a bleak winter's day, while "Interior Monologue" traces a stream of consciousness from an appreciation of the narrator's natural surroundings as it opens up to thoughts of the inevitable. There's a deeply personal spirituality that runs throughout this 30-minute session, even on the lighter pieces: "Where Is Lester" is an homage to Lester Young, his influence taking on a deity-like omnipresence, while "Cream Puff" is a humorous tale of saxophones and ping-pong run through with a streak of loneliness. Lateef also hauntingly accompanies himself on piano for the two renditions of the title piece that bracket the album and for a bleakly soulful "Motherless Child."

Roots Run Deep is far from essential and certainly not a starting point for Lateef's work, but it does provide an achingly raw communion with the master. —*Shaun Brady*

***Roots Run Deep*:** Roots Run Deep I; Cream Puff; Where Is Lester; Motherless Child; Goodbye; Interior Monologue; Roots Run Deep II. (34:34)
Personnel: Yusef Lateef, piano, tenor saxophone, flute, spoken words; Nicolas Humbert, composition, recording; Marc Parisotto, composition, mixing.
Ordering info: roguart.com

Duke Ellington, Modernist Master



It's been more than 50 years since British scholar Wilfrid Mellers' *Music In A New Found Land* looked at American sounds from a useful distance and helped make separate genres appear closer together. Discussing classical, jazz and Broadway pop together, Mellers made admirable Big Connections. Such ambitious cross-genre excavations are rare. Now there is ***The Ellington Century*** **(University of California Press)** by composer/musicologist David Schiff, whose previous subjects include George Gershwin and Elliott Carter.

Schiff laments that Duke Ellington is underestimated as a giant of 20th century composition in classical circles. So he set out to place him in the art music context of his formative years, the world of Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland—not to claim specific influences, but to show their complementary or contrasting approaches to similar problems.

You can anticipate the pitfalls awaiting the classicist wading in: that he'll judge the music by inappropriate criteria, or undervalue its rhythmic complexity, or neglect the dynamic feedback process among Ellington, co-composer Billy Strayhorn and the orchestra's signature stylists. In almost every instance, Schiff knows better: He has trod carefully, done his homework, inspected the scores to see what notes are in whose hand. But really he just wants to talk about ingenious music, and make big connections. His chapter on timbre ends with the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations."

That chapter begins with 1938's "Blue Light" as an Ellingtonian meditation on tone color, one reviving "Mood Indigo"'s three-horn meld, a voicing Ellington returned to frequently. It's a blues where every chorus has a different tint, as instruments rise up, fall back and recombine. That leads Schiff to a meditation on blues form, and then—via "Koko's" harsh sonorities—to pondering the appeal of xylophone to modernist composers and to a coloristic movement in Arnold Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" where voicings change chord by chord. He finally arrives at the Beach Boys' California electronica via bank shots off musical symbolism in Debussy's "La Mer" and the audio mix of *Sketches Of Spain*. Later he compares the rhythmic swagger of *Such Sweet Thunder* to Isaac Hayes' "Theme From Shaft."

That last one's a stretch, actually, but that's how his mind works: John Cage to Ornette Coleman to the nine-beat/nine-pitch row of Eric Dolphy's "Hat And Beard." Schiff is informal but never ditzy, digressing into improbably succinct descriptions of jazz building blocks: clavé rhythms, substitute chords, circle-of-fifths progressions. He limns how a recurring A-flat in Charles Mingus' "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" assumes nine harmonic functions as the chords shift, and how Ellington, Stravinsky, Bartok (and Thelonious Monk) used rough dissonances to suggest homespun folk music.

Schiff is ostensibly addressing classical listeners, but jazz folks will find the book equally fascinating, looking over the fence from the other side, at the harmonic refinements that would enrich jazz, and at overlooked works like Ruth Crawford's string quartet.

Naturally, composer Schiff gives special consideration to some longer Ellington suites, showing their unity without specifically addressing the frequent criticism that they didn't hang together at all: myriad 10-note phrases in *Such Sweet Thunder* mirror William Shakespeare's sonnets, for example—though for Schiff that's just the beginning. His analysis of *Black, Brown And Beige* lays out the intricacies of Ellingtonian self-quotation as a way of unifying the material, not least in "The Light," where preceding themes return in a rush. Still, there are problems. Schiff tries too hard to fit *BB&B*'s themes to Ellington's parallel poem "Boola." And while the author uses the 1943 Carnegie Hall *BB&B* as a touchstone, he doesn't cite timings of specific musical passages to help orient readers. He mounts a passionate defense of the later Sacred Concerts as the culmination of the celebratory, spiritual impulse that gave rise to *BB&B*.

At times, as when contrasting *BB&B* with Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Schiff wanders rather far afield, but *The Ellington Century*'s expansiveness and shifting frames of reference are typically Ellingtonian. This lively kaleidoscopic narrative evokes Ellington's inclusive spirit. **DB**

Ordering info: ucpress.edu

Steve Lacy
Estilhaços
CLEAN FEED 247
★★★½

This live set, which originally came out on the Sassetti label 40 years ago, was the first record that Steve Lacy made with a group whose core, alto saxophonist Steve Potts and cellist Irene Aebi, would serve with him for nearly a quarter-century.

Although this is a nexus of auspicious beginnings, it is not a perfect record. The recording is a bit rough, with muffled tape dropouts and the saxophonists' levels often way into the red. If you want to hear this band recorded well, go instead to *The Gap,* which was tracked in a Paris studio three months later. But if you want to hear them on fire, this'll do just fine. Aebi sets a tone of defiance by scanning the Lisbon airwaves with her radio. She settles on some ugly martial music, and then the rest of the quintet sprints over it like street protesters vaulting the barricades. Carter sets a blistering pace while Noel McGhie plays like a cross between Sunny Murray and a pot of water boiling its lid off. Potts, as would often be the case, is anything but deferential; his playing is coarse-toned yet nimble, a goad to Lacy.

At the time that he was settling into a stable ensemble, Lacy was also working around this time to cultivate the limits of the soprano saxophone's capabilities in solo concerts, and you can hear him taking inspiration from the mysteries within his long straight horn and the combative energy of the young man blowing at his side. But even when he was courting the edge, Lacy understood the value of contrast. He pulls the group back from the edge and deep into itself during the collective improvisation that bridges "Moon" and "Dreams." This record also marks the start of Lacy's Duke Ellingtonian phase; he had a band of strong personalities, and he played them as much as he played his horn. —*Bill Meyer*

Estilhaços: Presentation; Stations; a. Chips/ b. Moon/ c. Dreams; No Baby; The High Way. (39:09)
Personnel: Steve Lacy, soprano saxophone; Steve Potts, alto saxophone; Irene Aebi, cello, transistor radio, harmonica; Ken Carter, bass; Noel McGhie, drums, percussion.
Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com

Third World Love
Songs And Portraits
ANZIC 35
★★★★

Omer Avital
Suite Of The East
ANZIC 37
★★★★

A lot of projects that aim to combine disparate musics focus so much on telegraphing the combination that they forget to just swing.

Not so with the fifth album from Third World Love, a quartet that's built its name on spiking spryly played and inventively arranged cool jazz with Middle Eastern, Jewish, African and Iberian elements. This group is confident enough that its ideas will come across that *Songs And Portraits* finds them simply letting it happen, and playing their hearts out while they do.

The Arabic and Iberian influences in the band's music are most prominent in the album's middle, which features a run of four compositions by bassist Omer Avital that revel in the modes and rhythms of Andalusian music, and flamenco in particular. They do it, however, in such a natural and subtle way that one would hardly notice without knowing what to listen for.

The ease of the fusions here can be largely credited to the inspired performances from the whole band. Avishai Cohen's trumpet soars across the whole record, whether bare, muted, or run through an effects unit as on "The Abutbuls." Pianist Yonatan Avishai handles the Andalusian themes with a fluttering, cloudy intensity that conjures the large string ensembles of North Africa.

That feel also abounds on Avital's most recent solo effort, *Suite Of The East*. Cohen and Third World Love drummer Daniel Freedman are on hand in Avital's quintet, rounded out by saxophonist Joel Frahm and pianist Omer Klein.

Where Third World Love keeps its cool, Avital's band plays hot, with Freedman's drumming lending a nearly gospel fervor to Avital's sweeping, complex compositions.

Avital wrote these tunes after three years in Israel studying the classical music of the Middle East and Europe in tandem, and the band isn't a studio group.

They got inside these compositions together over the course of a residency at Small's in Manhattan, and the time spent hashing them out for a crowd comes through clearly on the disc.

Avital works with a smaller instrumental palette, but the sense of scope contained in these works calls to mind the ambition and sense of journey of Charles Mingus, a comparison driven home by the generally celebratory, multi-voiced vibe of the music. The 10-minute title track in particular covers a huge dynamic range, balancing composition with improvisation.

Avital sometimes limits himself to repeated figures that allow the other musicians to pursue whatever flights they wish—this willingness to hang back shows his commitment to his compositions, but Avital is also an outstanding bassist.

His skill and ability to convey emotion on the big strings is vividly displayed on the closing "Bass Meditation On The Possibility Of Peace In The Middle East," a solo spot that owes much to his study of *maqam* in Israel.

The difference between these two albums is made clearest by the two versions of Avital's "The Abutbuls." Third World Love's measured and mildly experimental approach (with Cohen's processed trumpet and Avishai's flamenco piano) gives the song a majestic, world-traveling aura; Avital's quintet turns it into a whirling dervish, surging and spinning on the back of Freedman's exuberant drums.

Both approaches are exciting and stuffed with reward. These are excellent albums and excellent companion pieces. —*Joe Tangari*

Songs And Portraits: Im Ninalu; Song For A Dying Country; Sefarad Bass Intro; Sefarad; The Abutbuls; The Immigrant's Anthem (Sad Song); Song For Sankoum; Alona; A Night In Zebulon. (62:08)
Personnel: Avishai Cohen, trumpet; Yonatan Avishai, piano; Omer Avital, bass; Daniel Freedman, drums.
Ordering info: anzicrecords.com

Suite Of The East: Free Forever; Suite Of The East; Song For Peace; The Mountain Top; Sinai Memories; The Abutbuls; Bass Meditation On The Possibility For Peace In The Middle East. (69:10)
Personnel: Avishai Cohen, trumpet; Joel Frahm, saxophone; Omer Klein, piano; Omer Avital, bass; Daniel Freedman, drums.
Ordering info: anzicrecords.com

Kirk Knuffke & Jesse Stacken With Kenny Wollesen
Like A Tree
STEEPLECHASE 31739
★★★★

Jesse Stacken
Bagatelles For Trio
FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT 398
★★★★

The duo of cornetist Kirk Knuffke and pianist Jesse Stacken has previously made albums celebrating the music of Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk and Charles Mingus, zeroing in on the beautiful memories and deeply attractive shapes of the tunes. Their modus operandi hasn't changed on *Like A Tree*, but here they excavate a less-known trove of indelible jazz compositions, quietly arguing for an expansion of a standard repertory. The drumming of Kenny Wollesen subtly enhances the pair's playing, but the focus still rests on melody. Their version of Ornette Coleman's ballad "Peace" functions as an ideal model here, with the musicians saving their improvisations until they present the composition unadulterated; hearing them treat the music as a kind of sacred text during the first few minutes is just as rewarding as what follows.

There are three pieces each by Carla Bley—including a breathlessly beautiful reading of "Jesus Maria" that comes close to the lyric splendor of the 1961 version Jimmy Giuffre cut with Paul Bley and Steve Swallow—and Steve Lacy, which makes sense considering Knuffke's membership in the great Lacy rep quartet Ideal Bread, and there are also gems by Julius Hemphill, Albert Ayler, Misha Mengelberg, Gato Barbieri and John Coltrane. The duo is doing more than simply curating. Its performances are pitch-perfect, displaying an intuitive understanding that brings something deeply personal to the project.

On the third album by his excellent trio with bassist Eivind Opsvik and drummer Jeff Davis, Stacken puts his own compelling spin on the idea of bagatelles, creating 13 compositions that each explore a specific idea or approach. "Bagatelle No. 1," for example, is built around overtones, with the leader letting his notes ring out and directing his partners to scrabble around the decaying sounds, while the next piece finds the trio cycling through written and improvised material pushed against a simple ostinato figure played by Stacken through the entire piece. Other pieces explore serial techniques, rondo form and pitch sets articulated in minimal long tones. The trio brings an oblique but real heat and emotion to the performances, and as a whole the album coheres brilliantly. Certain pieces mirror others—the opening phrase from the first bagatelle resurfaces in Number 9, for example—while others return to the pure sound of struck piano keys naturally disintegrating, and in the end the album adds up to a unified, gripping suite.

—Peter Margasak

Like A Tree: No Baby; Olhos de Gato; Peace; Hypochristmutreefuzz; Art; Saturn; The Crust; The Painter; And Now The Queen; Free; A Man Is Like A Tree; Jesus Maria. (61:09)
Personnel: Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Jesse Stacken, piano: Kenny Wollesen, drums.
Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Bagatelles For Trio: Bagatelle No. 1; Bagatelle No. 2; Bagatelle No. 3; Bagatelle No. 4; Bagatelle No. 5; Bagatelle No. 6; Bagatelle No. 7; Bagatelle No. 8; Bagatelle No. 9; Bagatelle No. 10; Bagatelle No. 11; Bagatelle No. 12; Bagatelle No. 13. (55:40)
Personnel: Jesse Stacken, piano; Eivind Opsvik, bass; Jeff Davis, drums.
Ordering info: freshsoundrecords.com

Ran Blake/Christine Correa
Tribute To Abbey Lincoln Volume One
RED PIANO RECORDS 14599-4411
★★★½

This stark tribute is less about the sound than the essence of Abbey Lincoln. Christine Correa shares few of Lincoln's vocal attributes, particularly in the format that she and Ran Blake have created. There's very little swing here. For that matter, there's hardly any regular tempo. They do allude to a bossa feel on "How I Hoped For Your Love," which Blake continues all the way to the end, though during sparer moments only implying it through placement of one or two notes. And there are places where the rhythm treads almost too slowly to register. Other than that, the movement is all about lyric expression and breath. Correa embraces this with a declamatory style, adorned occasionally by vibrato. She expresses emotion effectively, especially when the intended effect is drama. The album opens with her wordless introduction to the Lincoln's "Down Here Below": Her delivery is almost a shout, though its melodic contours are clear. When Blake begins an extended rumination, she waits for a few minutes before making a more intimate entrance. While Blake and Correa choose most of their titles from Lincoln's oeuvre, they create something distinctive. Her style and his inward-looking understatements conjure an image of the singer standing in the spotlight, her accompanist somewhere beyond its glow, his presence elusive. Blake's chords always seem to search but never quite find resolution. Their diminished intervals and edgy clusters ask questions and encourage the singer to deliver the answers. Listen to "Little Niles," an examination of mother/son relations. During one passage referring to how the child "warms your heart," the chords warm and spread. Later, Blake's playing grows more prickly and pointed as Correa proclaims, like a judge levying a vengeful verdict. *—Bob Doerschuk*

Tribute To Abbey Lincoln Volume One: Down Here Below; Little Niles; Freedom Day; Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?; Christmas Cheer; Bird Alone; African Lady; Retribution; Freedom Day; How I Hoped For Your Love; Christmas Cheer; Down Here Below. (50:18)
Personnel: Ran Blake, piano; Christine Correa, vocals.
Ordering info: redpianorecords.com

Developing a Strong Jazz Vocabulary


Bob Mintzer

The real joy in playing jazz did not arrive overnight for me. Playing this music began with a good deal of frustration at not being able to articulate what I was hearing, and not being able to hear what was appropriate for the music at hand. Some of this problem arose from not playing my instrument well enough, some of it from not being familiar with the repertoire and vocabulary, and much of it from not understanding the big picture (what my role was in terms of playing with a rhythm section, and how to construct logical, viable solos in the moment). Things did begin to turn around gradually once I learned how to listen to music and how to practice, and committed a major portion of my time to musical endeavors. Thankfully, older, more experienced musicians took pity on me (maybe they also heard some potential) and were gracious enough to share valuable information on how to approach these components of musical development.

Most of the great jazz artists I know have expansive recording collections. They know these recordings with some sense of detail, and have a feel for the significance of each recording. For that matter, most great jazz artists can play in the style of music from the 1930s, '40s, '50s and onward. The connection is fairly obvious. I once heard that Tony Williams could emulate the playing of Chick Webb, Sonny Greer, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Max Roach, Art Blakey and Philly Joe Jones in a very exacting way, and then turn around and play drums like nobody you had ever heard before.

As a lad, I wore out my recordings of Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Stan Getz, Joe Henderson, Dexter Gordon, Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Freddie Hubbard and countless others. I learned the notes in their solos to the point where I could sing or play along, and also learned to mimic the inflection put on the notes. You might divide this endeavor up into three parts:

1) Attack—how the note starts (accent, scoop up to the note pitch-wise, grace note before the note, breath attack, loud/soft, bright/dark).

2) Sustain—what happens to the note over time (does it crescendo, diminuendo, brighten, darken, change in pitch, is vibrato introduced and what is the quality of the vibrato, is vocal growl introduced).

3) Decay—how the note ends (does it end abruptly or with a taper, does the pitch drop off on the end of the note à la Sonny Rollins).

I now know that paying attention to these details allowed me to see how saxophonists played with a sense of style, expression and individualism. I also began to realize that to make any kind of modern statement, I would need to know how all the great tenor saxophonists contributed to the repertoire and vocabulary.

One very important, basic component of being able to play on changes involves finding the scales that correspond to each chord quality and practicing them in a variety of ways. The most critical scales are:

- Ionian (major 7)
- Dorian (minor 7)
- Phrygian (minor 7, flat 2, flat 6)
- Lydian (major 7, flat 5)
- Mixolydian (dominant 7, also play with sharp 4 for dominant 7/sharp 11 chords)
- Aeolian (minor 7, flat 6)
- Locrian (minor 7, flat 5)
- Diminished scale whole-half (minor 7, flat 5, diminished)
- Diminished scale half-whole (dominant 13, flat 9, sharp 11, natural 6)
- Altered scale (dominant 7, sharp 5, sharp 9)

The best ways to practice scales are:

- Play the scale from the bottom to the top of your instrument twice in a row.
- Play up and down in thirds.
- Play in a pattern (e.g., 1–3–4–2; 3–5–6–4; 5–7–8–6).
- Play in diatonic sevenths (1–3–5–7; 8–6–4–2; 3–5–7–9; 10–8–6–4).

Scales should be practiced in all 12 keys with a metronome at a speed where they sound musical and even. Get in the habit of creating a crescendo on the way up and creating a decrescendo on the way down. Make music at all times! Make every note count! The above-mentioned scale exercises will have you playing arpeggios (diatonic sevenths) in scalar motion, and the thirds and patterns will bring you closer to something melodic.

There are a variety of chromatic embellishments one can add to a melody, including enclosures or upper/lower neighbor tones. "Donna Lee" by Miles Davis is full of these kind of melodic shapes, where you are aiming for the fifth of the chord but first play a half step above then a half step below the target note. There are numerous books on this subject. It's a good idea to incorporate these devices through learning tunes and solos, and being able to identify what is going on.

Another exercise I sometimes have students do is to aim for the third of the chord on the first beat of the bar and then build a melody around that third degree. ("All The Things You Are" is a brilliantly constructed tune where the melody is almost exclusively thirds on strong beats.) You can do the same thing with the seventh degree,

or any degree, for that matter. The benefit comes from being able to hear that particular degree while you are playing, and improvise around it in the appropriate chord quality in real time.

Coming at the music from a rhythmic viewpoint, you might select a motif and repeat it every other bar, using pitches that correspond to the changes in each bar. One example might be to play: quarter note–two eighth notes–four eighth notes (starting on beats 1, 2, 3 or +1, +2, +3). Or, perhaps: two quarter notes–two eighths. This exercise will help you to think compositionally in your solos. It will also help your lines to breathe and give the rhythm section a clear indication of where you are going.

The key ingredients, at least initially, in developing a jazz vocabulary are repeated exposure to the music, learning the repertoire (tunes), vocabulary (transcribing solos, practicing scales and patterns) and practicing playing on tunes (another subject for a separate article). The more you play with other people, the better. I would frequently play duo with drummers when I could not put together a whole rhythm section. This somehow forced me to really project the harmony, form and appropriate melodic material for the tune at hand, being that there was no bass or chordal instrument to rely on.

A few things that have really helped my soloing over the years include:

- Playing through transcriptions of John Coltrane solos with a trumpet player named John Dearth. Not only did I learn the solos by heart, but I also learned how to play with a trumpet player, how to blend, phrase, play in time, etc.
- Playing the piano. Voicing chords in a colorful way (adding extensions and alterations like ninths and sharp 11ths) allowed me to hear and feel a lot more on the saxophone.
- Playing drums. The experience showed me the language of the drums, how to play with and write for a drummer, and how to imply the groove in my saxophone playing.
- Recording my practice sessions to see if I was playing with good time, good phrasing, variety of color, articulation and dynamics, and a good overall musical sensibility.
- Giving a good deal of thought to how to play with others: how much or how little to play, how to build a solo and how to interact with the rhythm section.
- Writing tunes based on whatever I was working on at the time. For example, if I was shedding Lydian modal patterns, I might write a tune where the soloing was on major 7/flat 5 chords.
- Practicing tunes in all 12 keys.

The quest towards being an articulate artist never ends. The journey is a lot of fun if you remember that you are right where you are supposed to be, in the moment, depending on how much of the above work you have done thus far.

Keep working on it, and keep the faith. **DB**

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The Art of Discovering Your True Voice

One note, and you know: That's Miles. Monk. Mingus. Max. It's Diz, Dex, Bird, Bud, Billie, Horace, Hendricks, or Hendrix.

That's why DownBeat's Blindfold Test works. A musician's "voice" is more than her instrument; it's who she is and how she expresses herself through her instrument. More than tone, timbre and technique, it's his totality. And when it's authentic, you can hear it in one note.

Here—in their own voices—is how several of today's jazz musicians discovered and developed them.

George Duke

For me, it was finding an instrument that I figured would create my spoke in that wheel of musical life. It was finding that I could bend a note on a synthesizer.

I just happened to bump the instrument. It went "duhnnnnn," and I said, "Whoa, I can bend a note." So that was my way in; I figured that would be my voice.

But in the end, that's just a means to an end. Where it comes from is your soul. You have to be willing to allow that to come forth and be vulnerable enough to say, Everybody's not gonna like this because this is personal, this is really who I am. There's an energy that I think can be used for negative or positive energy, and it's up to musicians to tap into that.

Marcus Miller

Around 17 or 18 years old, I said to [vocalist] Lindy White, "I really want to find my own identity with my music." He said, "Put yourself in as many situations as you can—different from the situations that you've heard your heroes play in. Just keep playin', and one day, you're gonna hear something back."

For me, it happened my first day with Miles. We recorded *Man With A Horn* (Columbia). I said, "Man, this is an opportunity that I don't want to waste soundin' like somebody else. I gotta dig, right now, and find what I've been searching for." Miles was givin' us a hard time, and finally, I said [to myself], "Just close your eyes." And that's what I did. When I walked into the control room to hear playback, that's when I went, "Oh!"

Joseph Wooten

You already are different than everybody else.

It's like if you just walk in the room, you'll walk in like you. But if you ask yourself, "How can I walk in like nobody else has ever done it?" you can get in the way of the process. Music is something that comes naturally.

Miles said that if you feel yourself copying somebody else and it's honest for the moment, then do it until the instinct that tells you what to play tells you to do something else.

Stanley Clarke

Part of playing like yourself is being yourself. When you really have yourself together, you create the way you want to create. It's one of the magical things in life.

If you have a strong sense of purpose, you'd be amazed at how that helps you mold your sound. My approach with my students is just let it go, 'cause it's gonna happen anyway.

I like the idea of practicing stuff that I don't know, that's difficult, that's hard. It could even be a feel that I'm just trying to get. I try to get everything out of that bass that I can. It's a fun thing to do. It's not a mysterious, unattainable thing to master your instrument, really, truly master it.

Jimmy Cobb

When I first started, I wanted to sound like Max [Roach] and Art Blakey and those guys. I really wanted to play the drums, the snare drums and all that, like those guys played, really crisp. So I studied with them a little bit. Then I worked around town with all the people who were my age who were interested in music. That made me run into some guys that I wouldn't have run into 'cause that time was during war time, like the late '40s.

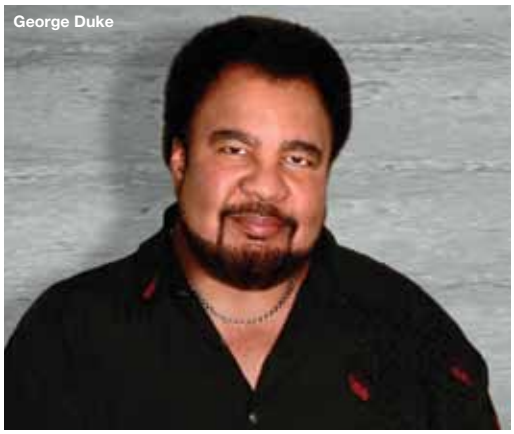
So I had the opportunity to play with older guys who were too old to go for that war. I learned a lot of things.

Larry Willis

Miles said, "You got a lot of talent. Get your own sound. 'Cause if you've got your own sound, you can play whatever you want. If you try to play like somebody else, you're gonna play their mistakes, too."

After a while you get to a point where you ask, "How am I gonna take my life's experiences, my musical training, my technical skills, my motor skills, and put that into an understanding of music in its real sense?" That has to do with having a certain amount of courage to wanna tell your own story. You can only tell your story with your voice.

Whatever you are is gonna be in your sound, real or not real. 'Cause if you're not being honest, pretty soon it's gonna show up in the music, 'cause music doesn't lie. Music is one of our closest connections to God Almighty.


George Duke


Joseph Wooten

Randy Weston

You hang out with the elders and you listen. Because the further you go back, you have a better understanding of what you do now, and what could happen in the future. Count Basie taught me on the piano how you can just play a couple of notes and get a message. Charlie Parker said you can make music beautiful by doing it this way. Dizzie Gillespie said you can make music beautiful by doing it this way.

So whenever I go on the stage, I'm always, "Thank you, thank you." Grandma, Great Grandma, Great-Great—thank you. 'Cause I'm standing on their shoulders. Duke's sittin' there with me, Nat Cole's with me. All those cats right on the stage with me. I'm playin' for them, 'cause they're watchin' me.

It's just connecting with nature, connecting with the Creator, connecting with the ancestors, and putting that into the piano. So when we play the music, we're having a spiritual experience.

Houston Person

Sound is the first thing, the way you establish your voice. Nurturing that sound, trying to

make it bigger, softer, prettier. I want to put all the emotions into that sound.

Then you use your sound to enhance melodies. And the first thing you know, you've got a uniqueness; you bring your identity to the song. I try to approach the melody like a singer, 'cause I want people to be able to hear the lyric. Play the melody with expression and know that silence is part of music, too. Silence is a note.

David Sanborn

Miles Davis told me a funny thing once. He said, "Shit, I was just trying to sound like Roy Eldridge." And sometimes the fact that you can't do that forced you to find your own way.

In a way, it's like your point of view about the world. You're taking all this shit in and sending it back out, and saying, "Well, this is how I feel about that." The music finds a way out, you just gotta get out of the way. It's about relinquishing a certain amount of your ego. Allow it to happen. Interrupt the silence every once in a while. You gotta try to just get in the moment and get in the flow of it, and commit to whatever it is.

John Di Martino

Bill Evans said you should immerse yourself in as many different styles of music as you can; your true talent will select things that help make up your own style. Anything that you absorb eventually mutates into something different, after it becomes part of your own language. The essential thing is going to the inner place where the music is. Miles always seemed to be in touch with that inner voice. He'd rest for four, five, six, seven bars waiting for that inner voice to tell him what was the natural next sound that he'd put into the universe. There's something inside you that really informs what to play, and you need to trust that.

Larry Goldings

Continually absorbing great music, for both edification and inspiration … openness to all styles of music … and thirst for knowledge—within jazz music and beyond—is the key to unlocking one's own voice.

As well as ceasing to listen to some of my earliest, biggest influences. (Paul Bley once advised me to take all me favorite records and throw them out the window.) Concentrating on writing music helps, slows you down, and gets you to discover new sounds.

Darryl Washington

Sometimes you have to listen to other cats, of course. But through that, you get the chance to get your own style together. After a while, your own chops start talking to you about things you wanna feel, and the musicians on the bandstand, they make you feel things. I think that's where you get your sound from. Not so much by practicing, but just by really listening with your ears, playing with your ears, leading off with your ears and playing with the ensemble.

It's one thing to study and it's one thing to practice, but it's another thing to get on the bandstand and really see what's going on with yourself. That's when it happens.

Jeff Hackworth

Developing your own voice has to do with figuring out your own intention as a musician and then sticking to it in an honest manner. If you know why you play, the voice will follow.

I'm a student of melody. A great melody transcends the notes and moves into the area of the human experience. So in a musical voice, the idea is to understand how tone, intonation, texture and the shape of a note convey the emotion of the melody to the listener. It's an intimate connection with your instrument, coupled with your point of view about life, that produces the voice. **DB**


John Surman

EMILE HOLBA

John Surman's Second Baritone Sax Solo on 'Going For A Burton'

"Going For A Burton" is the final track from saxophonist John Surman's 2009 ECM release *Brewster's Rooster*. Surman plays baritone sax on this cut, and it is structured almost like a palindrome—melody, sax solo, guitar solo, sax solo, melody—but then there is an improvised coda on a vamp. Presented here is Surman's second solo, between the guitar solo and melody.

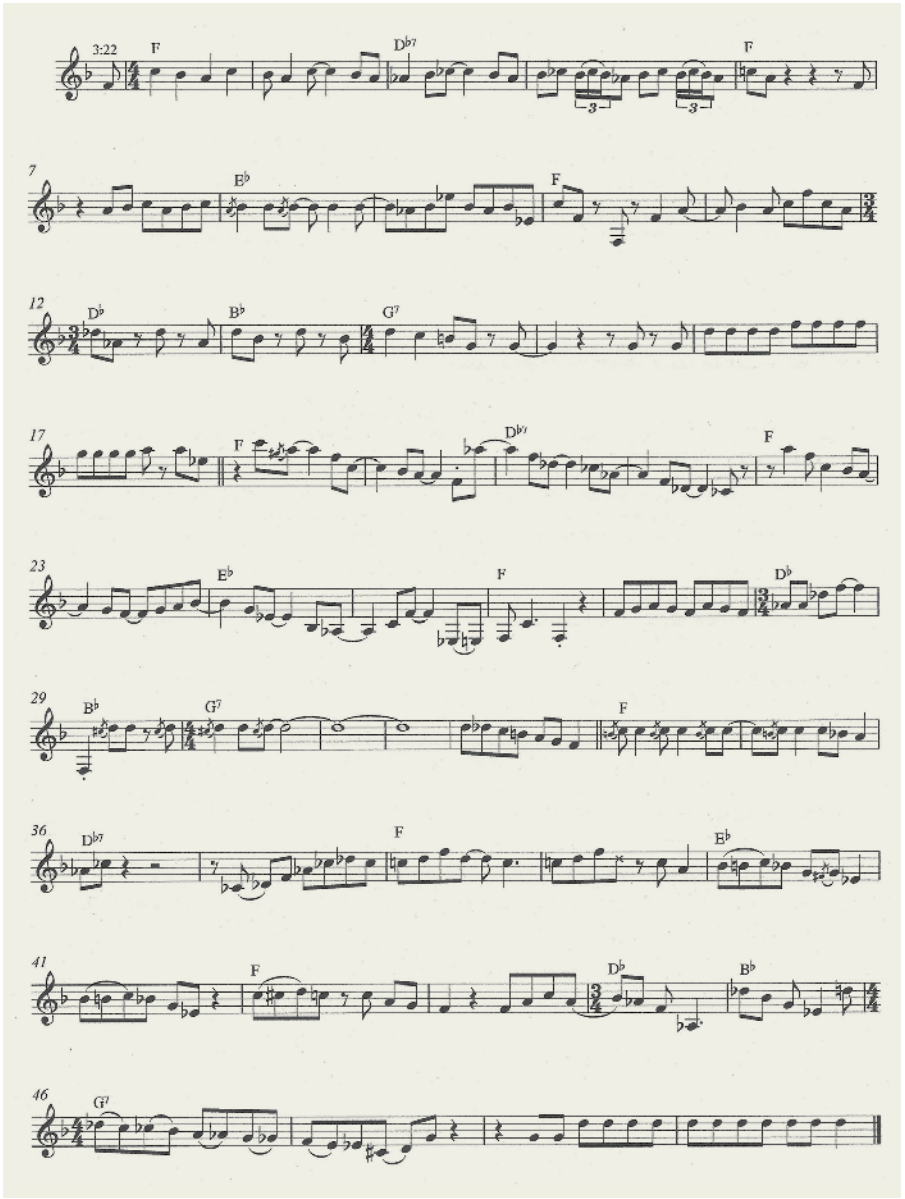
The first thing that always strikes me about Surman's bari playing is his individual sound. His tone has a subtle harshness that immediately separates him from other bari players, and yet there is also a thickness to it that sometimes makes it sound as if he's playing below the baritone range.

For this solo, it's surprising how much he sticks to chord tones and scalar figures, with very little of the chromaticism that is generally associated with jazz saxophone. In fact, the first chromatic pitch we hear occurs at the very end of the first chorus, the last eighth note of measure 17. We then have to wait until the middle of the next chorus before we get a passing tone between the E♭ root of measure 25 and the F root note of measure 26.

It takes until the middle of the next chorus before he examines this idea again, but now connecting the fifth and sixth of the E♭ chord in measures 40 and 41 as well as on the F chord in measure 42. And for the final phrases, he culminates in a long chromatic line descending from the D at the end of bar 45 all the way down an octave to the low D in measure 47, before playing a simple root-to-fifth idea to bring the melody in. This line creates a strong contrast with all the "inside" playing he's done so far.

Besides the paucity of chromaticism, for this improvisation Surman also shies away from another common jazz practice: anticipation. There are really only two instances when Surman plays the note of the next chord a half-beat early: at the ends of measures 19 and 23. One could also consider the E♭ at the end of measure 17 to be an anticipation of the F chord, but since this harmony has so far been approached as a basic triad, to my ear this doesn't come off as an anticipation.

Most of the time, Surman treats the barline as a border and often plays notes on the downbeat that are not part of the previous harmony, making the chord change abundantly clear. One obvious example is when he plays an A♭ on the change from F to D♭7 (as in bars 4, 20, 28 and 36). It's the fifth of D♭, but isn't part of the F chord or related scale. It's especially effective in measures 4 and 36, since Surman ends the previous measures on

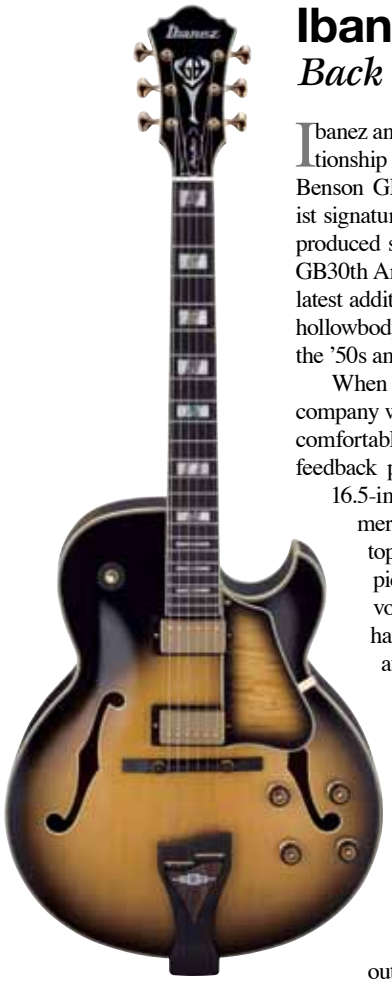


A natural, the third of F. Even without the bass and drums, this makes it obvious to the ear that the harmony has shifted.

We find the same technique applied in some other places, including measure 5, where after so many C♭s in the previous measure, Surman hits C natural right on the downbeat of bar 5 (he also plays A natural right afterwards, contrasting the A♭s in measure 4). This C♭-to-C natural sound occurs again from measures 37–38, but with the two pitches in much closer proximity. In measure 13 he nails a D natural, the third of B♭, after two D♭s (the root) in the preceding bar.

One place where Surman uses this idea, but in a manner that really brings out the harmony and form, is from measures 20–23. He starts the D♭7 on a high A♭ (the fifth) and then works his way down almost two octaves to the end of the D♭7. When the chord changes to F, he jumps up to a high A natural, the third, but near the A♭ from measure 20. He then uses this as a starting point for another descending line. It's fascinating (and musically effective) how similar the lines are, with the changes made to fit the chords (A vs. A♭, both lines go to the shared F, then C vs. D♭, B♭ vs. C♭ and A vs. A♭). In this way, Surman creates a motivic connection between these measures, while still bringing out the differences in the harmonies. **DB**

JIMI DURSO IS GUITARIST AND BASSIST BASED IN THE NEW YORK AREA. HE CAN BE REACHED AT JIMIDURSO.COM.



Ibanez George Benson LGB300 Guitar

Back to the Roots

Ibanez and guitarist George Benson have enjoyed a relationship that spans more than 30 years, and the George Benson GB10 model was the company's first-ever artist signature guitar. Three decades of collaboration have produced several Benson offerings, including the GB15, GB30th Anniversary and the GB200. The LGB300 is the latest addition to the Benson line and features a full-size hollowbody design reminiscent of the great jazz boxes of the '50s and '60s.

When Ibanez first released the GB10 in 1978, the company worked with Benson to create a guitar that was comfortable to play and could be amplified without the feedback problems associated with traditional full-size 16.5-inch archtops. The result was a smaller and slimmer 14.5-inch body design and a slightly thicker top, which, along with the custom-designed dual pickups, allowed for amplification at increased volume levels. With the new LGB300, Benson has taken a step back to his early roots and created a full-bodied guitar much like the very first electrics he played as a young jazz artist.

As with the other Benson models, the LGB300 is manufactured by Ibanez in Japan. Overall, the guitar has an attractive look with a tasteful vintage yellow sunburst finished in gloss polyurethane. The fully hollow 16.5-inch body features a Florentine cutaway with maple sides and back and a spruce top containing bound F-holes with five-ply body binding throughout. The 22-fret set-in neck is made from three-piece maple with a bound ebony fingerboard highlighted by pearl/abalone block inlays. The tailpiece is made from a hefty chunk of ebony that matches the floating bridge. The bound pickguard is made from highly flamed maple and finished with a sunburst to perfectly complement the guitar's body. The LGB300 uses a straightforward dual pickup design with two Super 58 pickups set at the neck and bridge positions, each with its own individual volume and tone controls. A standard three-way toggle handles the pickup switching system, and the guitar really sparkles with its gold-plated hardware.

Although the LGB300 looks fairly traditional at first glance, there are some well-thought-out design enhancements built into the guitar. Like other Benson models, the top is a bit heavier to help reduce feedback. Ibanez also utilizes a slightly flatter fingerboard radius and medium frets to make the guitar easier to play. This is a fairly hefty axe, but it is still quite comfortable to hold and it sounds very smooth, as a jazz box should. The dual pickups allow for an impressive variety of tones, and the LGB300 does seem to take on the higher volumes without howling. I love the neck profile, particularly the shallow radius, which, combined with flat-wound strings, makes the guitar extremely easy to play.

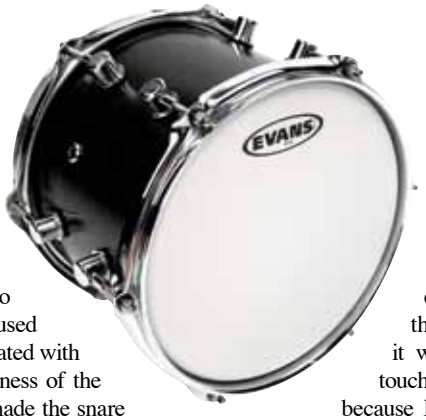
The George Benson LGB300 is a nice combination of traditional jazz guitar design and modern innovation. At a list price of $5,999.99 and available for a street price of around $4,499.99 (including a sturdy hardshell case), it is certainly not inexpensive, but then again, quality never is.

—Keith Baumann

Ordering info: ibanez.com

Evans G14 Drum Heads

Durable & Full-Sounding



I've always placed Evans in the top two or three brands I turn to when I have a kit I am outfitting with new heads, so I was eager to get a chance to check out the company's new G14 line.

The material used on G14 heads is 14 mil thick (compared to the standard 10 mil), and the adhesives used to attach the head to the rim are custom made for extended use.

I got a set of coated heads and a set of clear heads and kicked off my test by using the coated heads for a jazz gig. I noticed that the heads did not need the initial "crank the head up high and let it sit" method of breaking in. They seemed to tune up in quick fashion and did not need any radical tuning changes after the initial tweaking.

I could tell immediately that these heads had a much larger tonal footprint than what I was used to. They projected better, and the tone presence was noticeably different.

With the coated heads, I had them tuned pretty high for the jazz gig, and I had plenty of room to tighten the head up before the head started to choke. On the snare, I used the standard 14-inch coated with no muffling. The thickness of the head and the coating made the snare produce just the right amount of ring.

With other heads, I have had the issue of the coating wearing off on the heads prematurely, thereby making brushwork tougher. With the G14s, the coating seemed as intact after two weeks as it was the first day I put it on.

Next, I had a recording date where I needed a more fusion type of sound, so I changed all the tom heads to clears. As expected, the clears operated better in a range a touch lower than the coated heads. They provided a better lower, rounded sound. Again, after using these heads for a short time, it was as if sticks had barely touched them. I can't say for sure because I have not had these heads very long, but I fully expect the G14s to last longer than the average head-life I'm used to.

All in all, it's a great, full-sounding head for snares and toms. When you factor in cost savings due to the fact that these heads will be serving you for a long time, the Evans G14s are well worth your time to check out.

—Matt Kern

Ordering info: evansdrumheads.com

P. Mauriat 655, 700 Series Trumpets

Professional Options

P. Mauriat has introduced a range of professional-level trumpets, including two series that are ideal for jazz and commercial music: the PMT-655 and PMT-700.

The silver-plated PMT-655 features a 11.68mm medium-large bore, standard weight mouthpiece receiver, reversed yellow brass leadpipe, 5-inch yellow brass bell, hand-lapped stainless steel valves with thick-walled casings, recessed valve top caps and hand-lapped yellow brass slides. The extra weight of the the 655's thick-walled valve casing is immediately evident. The horn is free-blowing, and it has an even response and feel throughout its range. The slots on the horn are solid, and the intonation is quite accurate. Although the horn has a naturally bright sound, I was easily able to pull darker, broader, deeper colors without much effort. I'd certainly feel comfortable using this horn in a variety of professional settings. Available finishes on the 655 include clear lacquer, silver plate and unlacquered.

The PMT-700 features a 11.68mm medium-large bore, standard weight mouthpiece receiver, standard gold brass leadpipe, smaller 4.8-inch bell, stainless steel hand-lapped valves, medium-weight valve casings, recessed valve top caps and hand-lapped yellow brass slides. The lacquered matte finish on this model contributes to its modern look and feel. Although the 700 features a standard leadpipe, it has an open- and free-blowing feel similar to the 655. The most evident difference between these horns is the darker tonal color of the 700. And although both horns slot great, the most striking characteristic of the 700 is the remarkable flexibility it provides while also retaining a solid center or slot throughout its entire register. This "turn on a dime" quality of the horn made it a blast to play as I soloed over my favorite jazz tunes; it's the type of response that jazz musicians and commercial players require for a variety of performance settings. Finishes on the 700 include clear lacquer, silver plate, unlacquered, lacquered matte and matte silver plate.

With horns like the PMT-655 and PMT-700, it's clear that P. Mauriat is producing quality trumpets that give professional players the tools they need to get the job done. *—Mike Pavlik*

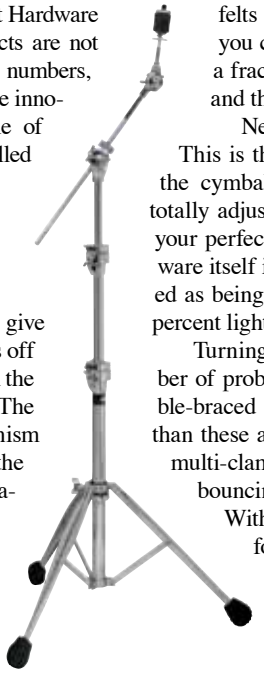
Ordering info: pmauriatmusic.com

Gibraltar Turning Point Hardware

True Drumming Solutions

Gibraltar has added Turning Point Hardware to its lineup. These new products are not just rehashed items with new SKU numbers, but a brand new line sporting multiple innovative features—the most noticeable of which is the engineering marvel called the Swing Nut auto tilter.

The problem the Swing Nut solves is one that's as old as the cymbal stand itself: You want to add or remove your cymbal from your existing cymbal stand, so you give the wingnut a spin and *zing* ... it flies off the stand and lands with a bounce on the floor under your bass drum pedal. The Swing Nut is a rotating pin mechanism attached to the stand that removes the loose wingnut entirely from the equation. In the unlocked position, the pin is straight up and the cymbal can be placed on the stand; then, with a quick press and flip of the finger, the pin is in the locked position and the cymbal and felts are secured. You will find that you can add and remove cymbals in a fraction of the time it used to take, and there are no loose parts to lose.



Next is the Gearless Brake Tilter. This is the mechanism that lets you put the cymbal anywhere you want it. It is totally adjustable, with no gears to impede your perfect cymbal placement. The hardware itself is made out of alloy and is touted as being as sturdy as steel but 20 to 30 percent lighter.

Turning Point Hardware solved a number of problems for me. My existing double-braced hardware (which weighs more than these alloy stands) could not hold my multi-clamped mounted floor tom without bouncing around while being played. With the Gibraltar hardware, I found the mounted floor tom to be rock-solid. It didn't move, and in addition I was able to place the ride cymbal exactly where I wanted it due to the gearless adjustments on the long boom arm. Plus, in tight spaces the stand was able to perform without the legs being fully extended. Throw in the fact that the stands are lighter than other double-braced hardware, and you can make a strong case for looking into these the next time you need new hardware.

I was also able to check out Gibraltar's newest drum throne, the 96082T, which is a solid double-braced throne with an impressive 16- by 13-inch seating area (available in a small variety of colors). But was it comfy? I was able to pick up this throne just in time for the ultimate challenge: my annual five-hour Mardi Gras gig.

With my old throne, halfway through the third set I would already be in pain, and for the last 30 minutes of the night I would usually be playing Slim Jim Phantom-style, standing up. But this year, guess who called the 15-minute version of "Saints" with only five minutes left in the gig? Yes, that is one comfy seat.

—Matt Kern

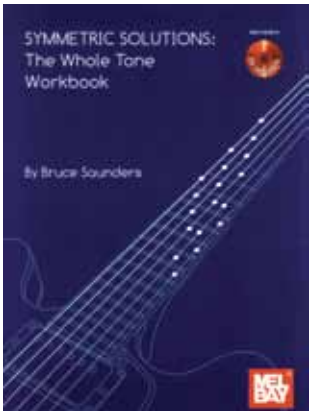
Ordering info: kmcmusic.com

IN CONTROL

Alesis has introduced the Q61, QX61 and QX25 USB MIDI keyboard controllers. The Q-series controllers are a no-nonsense way to add expressive MIDI control to any production or performance. Each controller features USB MIDI for easy connection to Mac, PC, iOS devices and traditional MIDI hardware modules, samplers and synthesizers. **More info:** alesis.com

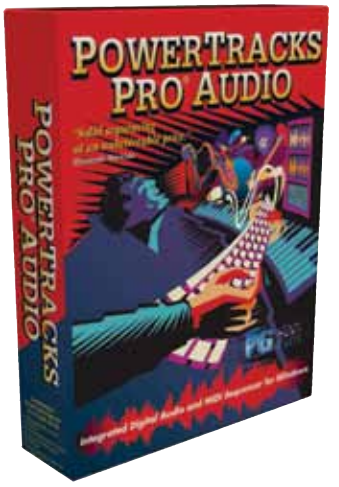
SITTIN' IN

The myJazz club has released a new volume called myJazzBand vol. 1, an iPad/iPhone app that lets pianists, bass players and drummers learn to play along with a real jazz piano trio recorded in high-quality audio. Each instrument has the option of being muted so the student can play his/her instrument along with the trio, or play with the trio in its complete form. In-app educational support comes in PDF and video form for each instrument, as well as links to forums, blogs and online help. This is the first of a series of myJazzBand apps that run in conjunction with the myJazz piano toolbox series (volumes 1–4). **More info:** my-jazz.com



SCALAR SYMMETRY

Berklee College of Music faculty member Bruce Saunders has published the second in a series of book/CDs on the subject of symmetric scales. *Symmetric Solutions: The Whole Tone Workbook* (Mel Bay) uses exercises, etudes and chord progressions from jazz standards to explore the sound of the whole-tone scale, the augmented scale and applicable drop-2, drop-3 and drop-2/4 chord voicings. **More info:** melbay.com

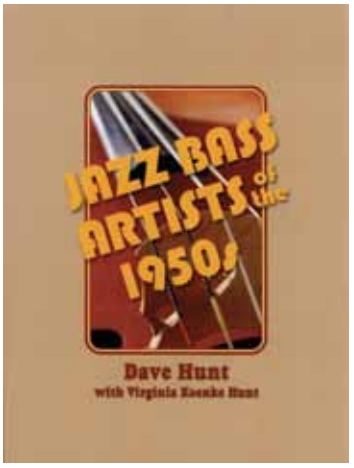


TRACK POWER

PG Music Inc. has released Version 2012 of PowerTracks Pro Audio, the music sequencing and digital audio workstation for Windows. The upgrade includes user interface enhancements for easier editing and effects processing, new hot key commands, customized track overview colors, FX and Solo buttons for individual track strips, additional buttons for custom Bar Settings and improved RealDrums arrangements. **More info:** pgmusic.com

BACK LINE HEROES

Jazz Bass Artists of the 1950s (Cranston Publications) by Dave Hunt explores the artistic contributions of 15 of the decade's leading jazz bassists. The book is an in-depth resource for today's jazz bass players who seek to expand their knowledge and enjoyment of the art. It includes profiles of bassists Oscar Pettiford, Ray Brown, Milt Hinton, Paul Chambers, Leroy Vinnegar, Red Mitchell, Charles Mingus, Doug Watkins and Sam Jones, as well as lesser-known artists like Eddie Safranski, George Duvivier, Wendell Marshall, Jimmy Woode, Joe Benjamin and Arvell Shaw. **More info:** cranpubs.com



TAKING A STAND

Manhasset's new Drummer Stand is a full desk with a 16-inch chrome shaft that attaches via a multi-angle clamp to all varieties of drum set tom mount hardware. The stand also attaches easily to other devices, providing the functionality of a full music stand while minimizing visual interference for the audience. **More info:** manhasset-specialty.com

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Keynote speaker Zandria Robinson

Singing the Blues About the Blues

The contemporary blues scene may be alienating the very musicians whose forefathers created the genre. That was the warning from prominent artists and cognoscenti who gathered recently outside Chicago for formal discussions on the blues.

At a symposium titled "Race, Gender and the Blues," scores of musicians, journalists and scholars gathered May 18–19 at Dominican University's leafy campus in River Forest, Ill., to discuss the plight of African American blues artists, particularly women, who sometimes feel like strangers in their own land.

The third in a series of biennial conferences, this symposium was by design the most provocative. "African American musicians have been marginalized in the very music that is in their bloodlines," said Director Janice Monti, who chairs Dominican University's sociology department. "We're not saying that white people can't play the blues," she added, but some participants believe the tradition of blues as "black music" is being jeopardized by the industry's powers that be.

Monti opened the proceedings by urging panelists to "go beyond the accepted platitudes about … how the blues belongs to everyone." Sugar Blue, whose harmonica work appears on albums by the Rolling Stones among others, led the charge by speaking of blues as the legacy of slavery and the Jim Crow-era South: "From this crucible the blues was born, crying, 'I will be free.'" Viewing blues as a birthright, he declared, "These blues are not of you or for you, though they may be about you. … These blues are mine and my children's, as they were my father's and grandfather's. *This* is blues power."

Chicago bandleader and harpist Matthew Skoller voiced frustration with the "money makers" who he said were shutting out black artists. Being a white bluesman, he views his role as being akin to that of a guest visiting a dear friend's home. "There's a good rule for visitors," he observed. "Wipe your feet before entering, and don't try to take over the house."

Barry Dolins, former festival coordinator for the Chicago Blues Festival, surmised that event promoters were hiring more white artists because they wanted to make the blues "more palatable to the audience," albeit at the expense of black artists trying to keep the tradition alive. Implicit in Dolins' remark was the suggestion that promoters were trying to appeal to a white audience. In a panel the next day, singer Nellie "Tiger" Travis said she made a point of playing blues at home so that her children would know the music: "I instill it in my children because that is our heritage, our culture. If we don't instill it in them, it will be taken over by others."

Singer Sharon Lewis, meanwhile, passionately spoke with a spirit of defiance. "I marched with [Dr. Martin Luther] King, and I'm still marching," she said. "I'm here because I'm tired of having to explain my heritage to those who seek to take it." Lewis addressed head-on another theme of the conference, which was the obstacles faced by black blueswomen. "Stop overlooking us," she exhorted the audience. "Stop trying to make us second-class citizens."

Sparks may have flown during these panel discussions, but less polarized presentations took place as well, such as one focusing on the intersection of blues and hip-hop, or the examination of contrasting portrayals of America by some country artists and some blues artists. On each evening of the symposium, artists and attendees decamped to area clubs, where the flame was kept burning bright with incendiary performances of blues standards and originals.

Dominican University student Nadia Elhadary said she had signed up for the conference intending to learn more about the culture surrounding the genre. "The blues has a deeper meaning than just the music," she said.

African American artists are the "cultural custodians" of the blues, remarked bandleader and harpist Billy Branch. He referenced the message of a legendary artist who has witnessed much social change: "Like Little Richard said, we don't mind y'all playing it—just remember that it's ours."

—Leslie Keros

School Notes


Nancy Wilson

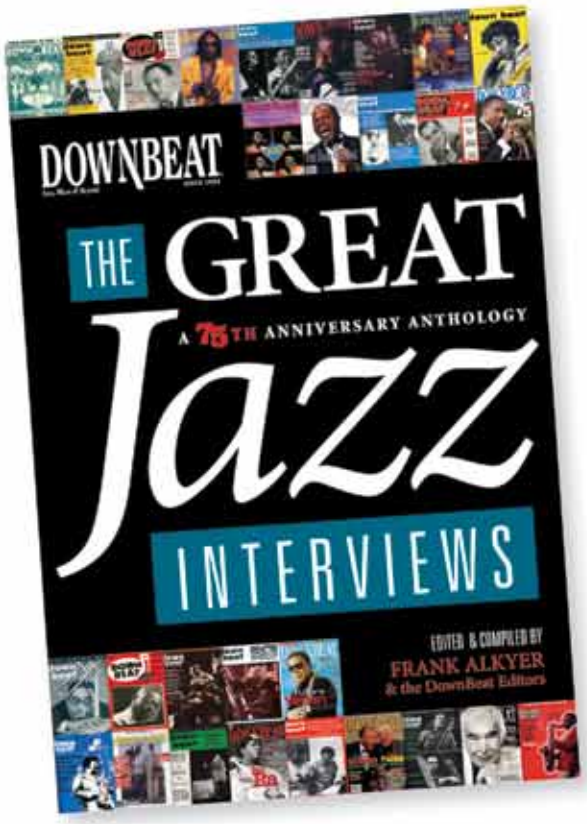
Honor Students: During The Juilliard School's 107th Commencement Ceremony on May 25, President Joseph W. Polisi awarded an honorary doctoral degree to vocalist and 2004 NEA Jazz Master Nancy Wilson. Harpsichordist/conductor William Christie, actor James Earl Jones and New York City Ballet Artistic Director Peter Martins were also recognized. **Details:** juilliard.edu

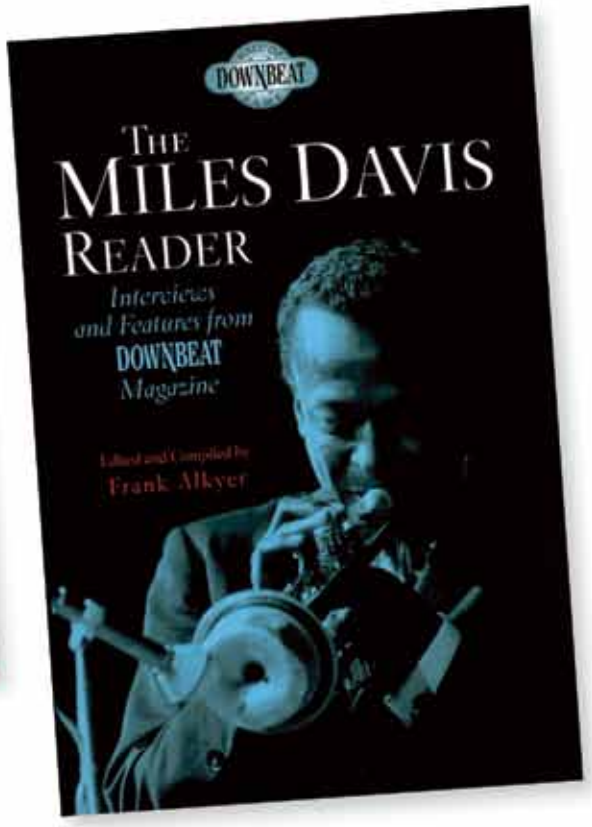
Banff Camp: Trumpeter Dave Douglas and pianist Vijay Iyer co-hosted this year's Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music May 21–June 9. The three-week workshop includes an intensive schedule of writing, performing and rehearsing, as well as club performances from such visting musicians such as Luis Perdomo, Tyshawn Sorey and Steve Lehman. Iyer will be taking over as director of the workshop in 2013. **Details:** banffcentre.ca

Show Stopper: The Chicago Jazz Ensemble and the Center for Black Music Research are facing reduced budgets in accordance with a "Blueprint For Action" implemented by Columbia College Chicago President Warrick Carter. As part of the mission to reduce expenses, the ensemble will go on hiatus for the 2012–2013 school year. **Details:** colum.edu

Key Performers: Ellis Marsalis joined 2011 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition winner Kris Bowers for a series of music education programs throughout New Orleans. In addition to performing together for the first time at the city's Warren Easton Charter High School, the duo conducted a master class at the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music. **Details:** monkinstitute.org

Changing Directions: Los Angeles Music Academy College of Music promoted Jody Fisher to chair and Bill Fowler to co-chair of the school's guitar department to fill the position recently vacated by Tariqh Akoni. Fisher has taught jazz courses and private lessons at LA Music Academy since 2006, while Fowler has been an instructor there since the school first opened in 1996. **Details:** lamusicacademy.edu





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DB Buyers Guide

Blindfold Test | BY TED PANKEN

Ted Nash

Renowned for his mastery of multiple reeds and woodwinds, Ted Nash plays the alto saxophone exclusively on *The Creep* (Plastic Sax Records). A member of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, Nash is also known for the creative brilliance of his leader projects.

John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble

"Foreign One" (*Eternal Interlude*, Cuneiform, 2009) Hollenbeck, drums; Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone solo; Gary Versace, piano.

Monk's "Four In One" but completely taken apart and put back together—almost an original composition in itself, using Monk's theme as an inspiration. The clean, in-tune quality and proficiency of the production sometimes make it sound almost electronic. I hear a lot of edits, I don't think just for best takes—these clean chops are part of the sound the composer is after. Not a cliche big band. Is it John Hollenbeck? I've heard his music a bit, and he's really creative. The way the tenor solo led into the next section reminds me of how Bob Brookmeyer, when I studied with him, was moving away from improvised solos, except to serve the purpose of the composition. Could be Donny McCaslin or Chris Potter—but the freedom sounds more like Tony Malaby to me than the others. I hadn't heard Malaby play with such a great technique in the upper register, which made me think of the other two. 4 stars.

James Carter

"Playful—Fast (with Swing)" (*Carribean Rhapsody*, Emarcy, 2011) Carter, tenor and soprano saxophones; Sinfonia Varsovia Orchestra; Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor.

I'm not familiar with this. I know Branford Marsalis did some things with orchestra. It started off very 20th century, with influences of Berg, then gravitated toward a Gershwinesque ending, poking fun at certain cliche aspects of the blues. Beautiful recording. 3½ stars. James Carter? He was my second guess because of the slap-tonguing and the technical stuff in the low register, but I hadn't heard him stretch out so much.

Vinny Golia Quartet

"NBT" (*SFUMATO*, Clean Feed, 2003) Golia, sopranino saxophone; Bobby Bradford, trumpet; Ken Filiano, bass; Alex Cline, drums.

That was intense, very influenced by Ornette and Don Cherry, but certainly later than the things they did. The saxophone player was playing a sopranino. I loved the thematic material, how they played it with a certain looseness, and it was anything-goes for a while. The piece stayed at one intensity throughout; it could have used ups and downs and shapes within the freedom. It kept my attention, though. This obviously is what these people do, and they're very good at it. 3½ stars.

Will Vinson

"Late Lament" (*Stockholm Syndrome*, Criss-Cross Jazz, 2010) Vinson, alto saxophone; Lage Lund, guitar; Aaron Parks, piano; Orlando LeFleming, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums.

I loved the alto player's sound: warm and dark without being stuffy. Very expressive. 4 stars. Everybody is playing with a lot of space and maturity, willing to let it be what it's going to be without forcing. The guitar player is gorgeous, too. [*after*] I don't know either of them. I want to check them out more. Beautiful alto sound and conception.

Yosvany Terry

"Contrapuntistico" (*Today's Opinion*, Criss-Cross Jazz, 2012) Terry, alto saxophone; Michael Rodriguez, trumpet; Osmany Paredes, piano; Yunior Terry, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums; Pedro Martinez, percussion.

Billy Drewes on alto? The sound and phrasing are similar, especially in the low register; also some freedom, yet good technique, good understanding of harmony. I didn't get to hear the trumpet improvise, but it reminds me of Tim Hagans. I'm not sure who this is. The piece had a nice flow, like a journey: You start with a vision of something, then you get to a certain point and rest a bit—like on top of a hill—then, as you're ready to sleep, you realize you've got to walk home. There was patience involved. Yet the solos had intensity—very creative. 4 stars.

John Ellis & Double Wide

"Dubinland Carnival" (*Puppet Mischief*, ObliqSound, 2010) Ellis, tenor saxophone; Alan Ferber, trombone; Grégoire Maret, harmonica; Brian Coogan, organ; Matt Perrine, sousaphone; Jason Marsalis, drums.

I love the theatrical quality. It feels like a circus, which is supposed to be fun and entertaining. The musicians are not afraid to embrace the humor; otherwise, it would suffer greatly. There's a high-wire act going on. The harmonica sounded like a real harmonica in the beginning, and then maybe a keyboard harmonica, a synth, doing things that seem technically almost impossible. The organ sounded great, and I love the tuba as a bass function. The tenor player phrases a bit like Chris Potter. It's a showcase for his risk-taking, and the playing has a lot of personality, but I haven't heard enough improvising, the way he thinks and feels, to know who it is. The drummer has a great concept of how to play over odd time signatures. 4 stars.

Marty Ehrlich's Rites Quartet

"Frog Leg Logic" (*Frog Leg Logic*, Clean Feed, 2011) Ehrlich, alto saxophone; James Zollar, trumpet; Hank Roberts, cello; Michael Sarin, drums.

A free piece within the context of something quite structured. Someone's vision is very clear. There's a lot of clarity in the performance. The trumpeter is coming out of the same influences as Ron Horton, who plays on my record, and the alto player sounds influenced a lot by Ornette Coleman. Both trumpet and alto have angular lines going. I like that there's a responsibility within the freedom in a way that involves everybody—everything is tied in together. I also like how they voiced the cello. I like using the instruments in unusual registers, such as the alto playing parts written way down low, with the trumpet maybe a 10th up. Very fresh. 4 stars. **DB**

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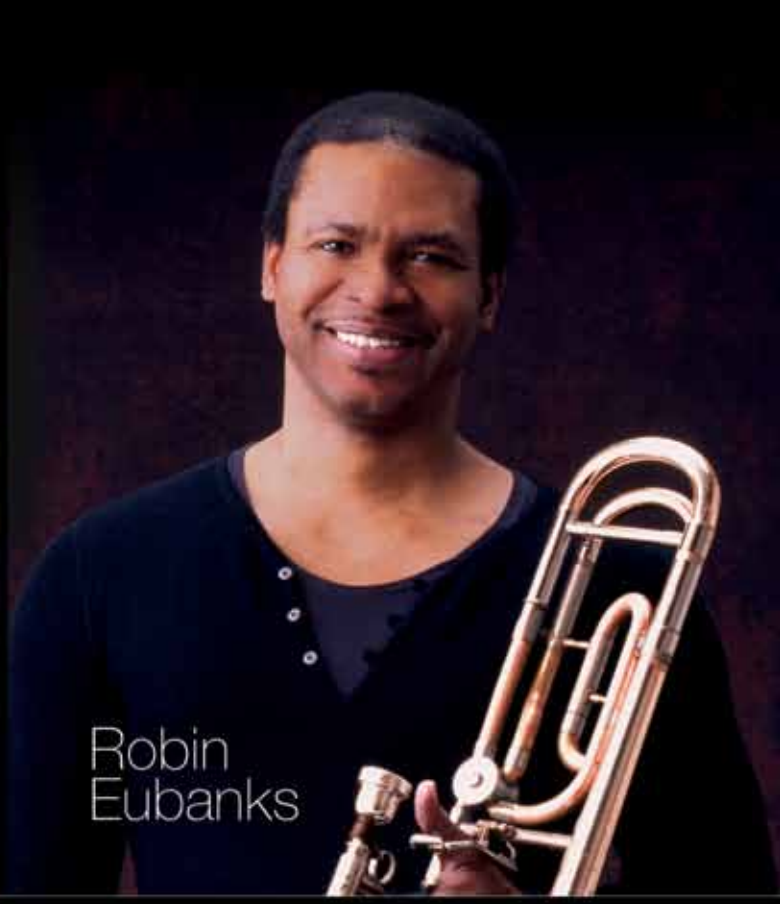

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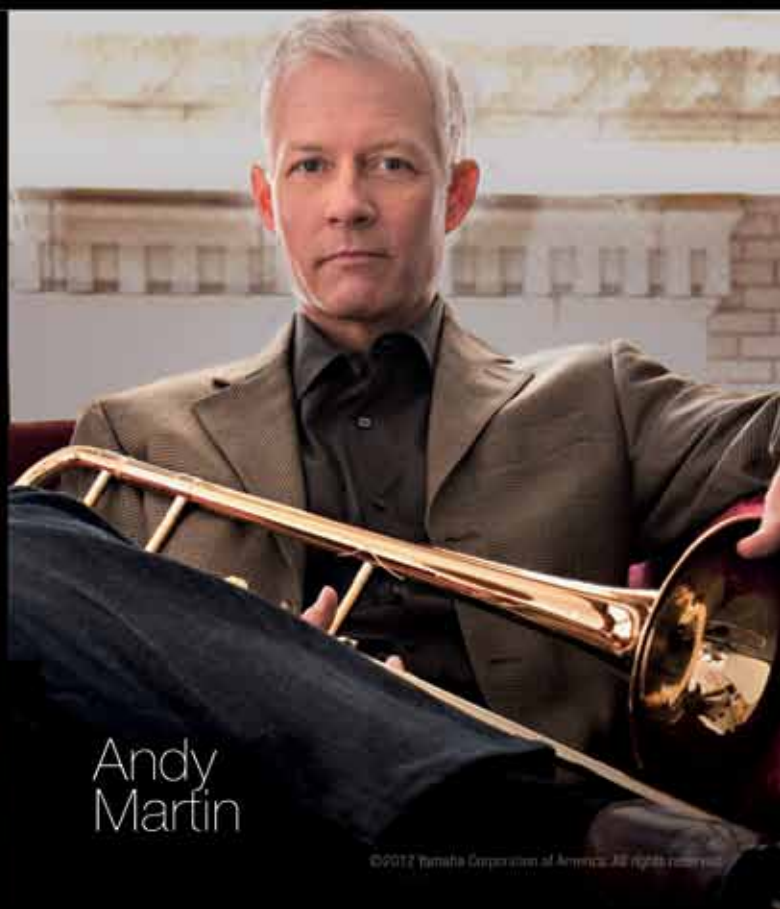

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