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630-941-2030
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Musical Instruments & East Coast Schools
Ritche Deraney
201-445-6260
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Advertising Sales Assistant
Theresa Hill
630-941-2030
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OFFICES

102 N. Haven Road
Elmhurst, IL 60126-2970
630-941-2030 / Fax: 630-941-3210
<http://downbeat.com>
editor@downbeat.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE

877-904-5299
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CONTRIBUTORS

Senior Contributors:
Michael Bourne, John McDonough

Atlanta: Jon Ross; **Austin:** Michael Point, Kevin Whitehead; **Boston:** Fred Bouchard, Frank-John Hadley; **Chicago:** John Corbett, Alain Drouot, Michael Jackson, Peter Margasak, Bill Meyer, Mitch Myers, Paul Natkin, Howard Reich; **Denver:** Norman Provizer; **Indiana:** Mark Sheldon; **Iowa:** Will Smith; **Los Angeles:** Earl Gibson, Todd Jenkins, Kirk Silsbee, Chris Walker, Joe Woodard; **Michigan:** John Ephland; **Minneapolis:** Robin Jannes; **Nashville:** Bob Doerschuk; **New Orleans:** Erika Goldring, David Kunian, Jennifer Odell; **New York:** Alan Bergman, Herb Boyd, Bill Douthart, Ira Gitter, Eugene Golovinsky, Norm Harris, D.D. Jackson, Jimmy Katz, Jim Macnie, Ken Micallef, Dan Ouellette, Ted Panken, Richard Seidel, Tom Staudter, Jack Vartoogian, Michael Weintraub; **North Carolina:** Robin Tolleson; **Philadelphia:** David Adler, Shaun Brady, Eric Fine; **San Francisco:** Mars Breslow, Forrest Bryant, Clayton Call, Yoshi Kato; **Seattle:** Paul de Barros; **Tampa Bay:** Philip Booth; **Washington, D.C.:** Willard Jenkins, John Murphy, Michael Wilderman; **Belgium:** Jos Knaepen; **Canada:** Greg Bulum, James Hale, Diane Moon; **Denmark:** Jan Persson; **France:** Jean Szlamowicz; **Germany:** Detlev Schilke, Hyou Vielz; **Great Britain:** Brian Priestley; **Japan:** Kiyoshi Koyama; **Portugal:** Antonio Rubio; **Romania:** Virgil Mihailu; **Russia:** Cyril Moshkov; **South Africa:** Don Albert.

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SEPTEMBER 2012

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BY JOHN MCDONOUGH

A two-CD set of previously unreleased 1968 performances by Bill Evans—*Live At Art D'Lugoff's Top Of The Gate* (Resonance)—provides yet another reminder of the singular genius of the pianist, who was elected into the DownBeat Hall of Fame in 1981.

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James Blood Ulmer (left) and David Murray at The Iridium in New York City

Cover photo of Bill Evans by Jan Persson. Image above by Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos.



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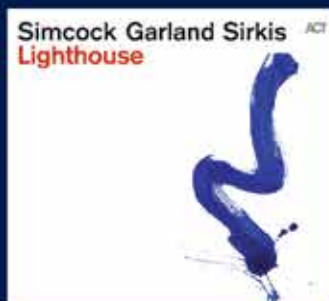


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First Take | BY BOBBY REED



Ain't Even Funny

If laughter is the best medicine, then the jazz world could be in trouble. Does anybody remember laughter? What about daring, gleeful, enthusiastic showmanship? There seems to be a dearth of these elements among the majority of today's successful, gifted, high-profile jazz technicians. Yes, these musicians impress us with their astounding virtuosity, but can they make us guffaw, chuckle or even giggle?

Previous generations included numerous artists who could make your jaw drop with their musical improvisations and then make you bust a gut with laughter: Lionel Hampton, Cab Calloway, Lester Bowie, Tito Puente and, of course, Dizzy Gillespie.

The cover story of the Nov. 5, 1964, issue of *DownBeat* was about an unusual presidential candidate—John Birks Gillespie. Dizzy held a press conference at Shelly's Manne-Hole in Los Angeles, where he discussed his platform and explained who would be in his cabinet if he were elected. The Minister of Foreign Affairs would be Duke Ellington, and the Minister of Defense would be Max Roach. The Minister of Agriculture would be Louis Armstrong because, according to Gillespie, Satchmo "knows all about growing things." The head of the CIA would be Miles Davis. Gillespie stated that his choice for vice-presidential running mate is Phyllis Diller because she "seems to have that sua-a-a-ve manner" and she "looks far into the future."

Besides displaying his terrific wit at this press conference, Gillespie also addressed serious subjects, such as civil rights, racism, the war in Vietnam and the policies of Sen. Barry Goldwater and President Lyndon B. Johnson. (This fascinating article is included in our 75th anniversary book, *DownBeat—The Great Jazz Interviews*.)

With a presidential election coming up this fall, who among today's jazz musicians would dare to declare his or her faux candidacy in a press conference that included jocular and intelligent commentary? We don't mean to imply that funny jazz musicians are nonexistent today. Drummer Matt Wilson, baritone saxophonist Gary Smulyan, pianist/vocalist Harry Connick Jr. and reedist Paquito D'Rivera are all that rare breed of artist who is a combination of virtuoso musician, sly comedian and clever showman. They are *entertainers* in the best sense of the term.

We'd like to hear your thoughts on this subject. Tell us about your favorite artist who mixes mirth and musicianship on the bandstand, whether it's someone in jazz, blues or Beyond music, such as the witty Nellie McKay. Send an email to editor@downbeat.com and Like us on Facebook. Toss in a jazz joke while you're at it.

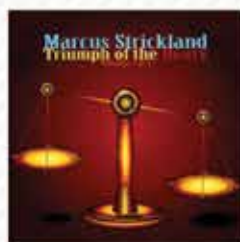
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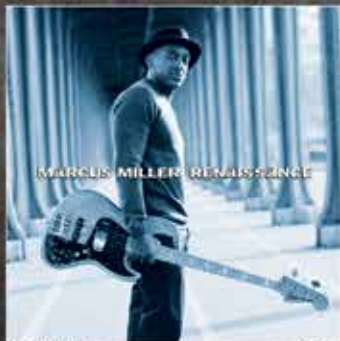


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Vijay Iyer

A BOUNTY OF EXPLORATION

By Ted Panken // Photography by Bill Dauterive

The critics have spoken: Vijay Iyer chronicles 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, *Apocynthion* (ACT Music), won Best Jazz Album.

The music is a quiet, intimate affair, a collection of songs that are both personal and universal. Iyer's music is a blend of jazz, classical, and contemporary, creating a sound that is both familiar and new. His playing is a testament to his deep understanding of the instrument, and his compositions are a reflection of his unique vision. The album is a journey, one that takes the listener through a series of emotional landscapes, from the quiet intimacy of the opening tracks to the more expansive and energetic pieces that follow. Iyer's music is a gift, one that is both beautiful and powerful.



Ire for Iyer?

It is curious to contrast the critics' assessment of Vijay Iyer with that of the jazz-listening public ("A Bounty of Exploration," August). Iyer's trio recently played a date at Orchestra Hall here in Detroit. The seasoned, knowledgeable jazz listeners were underwhelmed, and a startling number of them headed for the exits between each tune. I've been attending jazz concerts there for many, many years, and I have never witnessed so many attendees exercise their option to leave early. Evidently, the public is less infatuated with Iyer than the critics are.

JOHN LIEBERMAN
DETROIT

Editor's Note: Vijay Iyer had wins in five categories of the 2012 DownBeat Critics Poll, and our readers obviously like him, too. His trio's album *Historicity* (ACT) was in the top 10 of the 2010 DownBeat Readers Poll, and his CD *Solo* (ACT) was in the top 20 of our 2011 Readers Poll.

Trumpeting Norwegians

The biggest laugh I get each year comes from reading the DownBeat Critics Poll. Today's three best trumpeters are Arve Henriksen, Mathias Eick and Per Jørgensen, none of whom was even mentioned in the Trumpet category of your ridiculous, wasteful poll.

EGILL OSCAR GUSTAFSON
SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS
MEXICO

Preservation Memories

That was a great article by Jennifer Odell on the Preservation Hall Jazz Band ("50 Years of

New Orleans Artistry," July). Years ago, when my wife and I were dating in New Orleans, we spent many hours on the floor at Preservation Hall sipping on a Hurricane from Pat O'Brien's while the band soared. As I recall, if you wanted the PHJB to play "When The Saints Go Marching In," it was a \$5 item even then.

DON CRESWELL
SAN CARLOS, CALIF.

Powell's Power

There are conventional wisdoms that raise their not very attractive heads in James Hale's review of *The Quintet: Jazz At Massey Hall* (Historical column, August). Hale discusses "ragged edges" and blames them possibly on Bud Powell's "mental state." I challenge Hale to find even a single 256th note that is ill placed by Mr. Powell on this recording. Powell, as was his custom when playing with other established giants, cuts the other musicians throughout the concert.

MARSHALL ZUCKER
WANTAGH, N.Y.

Corrections

- In the August issue, the Blindfold Test did not indicate that Sunnyside Records is the label that released the album *Eternal Interlude* by the John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble.
- In the August issue, a review of the album *Double Portion* by Edmar Castaneda misspelled the song title "Zeudi."

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Beat

Amazing Bass

Stanley Clarke Among the Many Highlights at Montreal Jazz Fest

A free outdoor performance by pop artist Rufus Wainwright and two indoor concerts by veteran singer-songwriter James Taylor helped kick off the 33rd annual Festival International de Jazz de Montreal on June 28, boosting attendance figures and raising enthusiasm to predictably high levels. But it was a series of shows revolving around acoustic/electric bass master Stanley Clarke that delivered the goods to jazz devotees who showed up en masse to this year's edition of the world's largest jazz festival.

One of this year's two Invitation Series artists at Montreal, Clarke started his four-concert run that same day in a duo performance with the young piano sensation Hiromi, with whom he shares a deep rapport. Friday night, Clarke teamed up with the Harlem String Quartet, a cutting-edge modern classical group that not only proved itself capable of nailing Clarke's complex charts but also demonstrated great capacity for content-rich improvisation.

This wasn't the kind of string section that pads and sweetens; first violinist Ilmar Gavilan, second violinist Melissa White, violist Juan Miguel Hernandez and cellist Paul Wiancko collaborated with Clarke as an artistic entity that displayed top-notch chops, sensitive ears and surprising guts. It was their first time performing with Clarke, who solicited his regular pianist Ruslan Sirota and drummer Roland Bruner to serve as the rhythm section for the evening.

Clarke joined fellow bassists Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten on June 30 for one of the most seismic and exciting concerts ever presented at the Montreal Jazz Festival. Billed as SMV and performing material from their 2008 CD *Thunder* (Heads Up) and subsequent tour, this three-bass reunion easily scored above 5.0 on the funk Richter Scale, shaking Montreal's elegant Théâtre Maisonneuve to its very founda-



From left: SMV members Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten

tion. Their chops alone were enough to blow minds, not to mention the fact that they managed to play through meaningful, intricate arrangements without getting in each other's way or muddying up the mix. Amid countless jaw-dropping solos, these three heroes executed actual "parts" for two straight hours without relying on cheat-sheets, and audience members threw decorum to the wind as they screamed and whistled their approval throughout the set. It all added up to a great big birthday party for Clarke, who turned 61 that day.

Clarke's final performance, on July 1, featured his regular quartet of Sirota, Bruner and guitarist Charles Altura—each about 30 years his junior—playing songs from the 2010 CD *The Stanley Clarke Band* (Heads Up) as well as new material that showcased the ensemble's wide dynamic range and highlighted each member's dazzling solo chops.

Like an aftershock to SMV's Saturday-night spectacle, bass and alto saxophonist Colin Stetson roared with hurricane force during his

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solo set at the intimate Salle de Gesù. A native of Montreal, Stetson took his hometown by storm, treating listeners to his unbelievably original compositions, which initially came across as free-jazz improvisations but eventually revealed themselves as actual tunes that have a slight resemblance to whale songs. Employing extended saxophone techniques such as circular breathing, multiphonics, rhythmic key-pad thumps and simple vocalizations, Stetson sustained riveting, tempestuous spheres of theme-and-variation that seemed to emanate from some otherworldly orchestra.

Compelling performances were in abundance during the first weekend of the festival. Ninety Miles—featuring vibraphonist Stefon Harris, trumpeter Nicholas Payton (in place of original member Christian Scott), tenor saxophonist David Sánchez, pianist Edward Simon, bassist Ricardo Rodriguez, percussionist Mauricio Herrera and drummer Henry Cole—conducted a syncopated cultural exchange that brought together Afro-Caribbean and straight-ahead jazz genres in Montreal's Club Soda. Pianist/vocalist Eliane Elias achieved similar results in the same room with guitarist Rubens de la Corte, bassist Marc Johnson and drummer Rafael Barata the following night, placing particular emphasis on bossa nova grooves. Guitarist/vocalist Kelly Joe Phelps brought his regular steel-string and his National slide guitar to the Guitarissimo stage for a soul-searching solo set of deep-rooted, bluesy spirituals and highly personal gospel reflections.

The festival's artistic director, André Ménard, expressed optimism for this year's event based on solid programming, the completion of several construction projects on the festival grounds and the quieting-down of student protesters who had recently taken to the streets of downtown Montreal in response to tuition hikes.

"The feeling is great here, and the festival vibe is out of this world," Ménard said. "Stanley Clarke has played with lots of people, and he's about all sorts of music—acoustic, electric. But mainly I wanted SMV. I was very jealous when they did their [original] tour because they could not stop in Montreal; they went straight to Europe. For this year's Invitation Series, I told Stanley, 'We have to do SMV.' He said, 'You talk to the two other guys, I don't mind.'"

This year's recipient of the Bruce Lundvall Award, which originated in 2009 to honor an individual who has contributed to the development of jazz through the media or the record industry, went to producer and archivist Michael Cuscuna. The festival's Spirit Award, which since 2006 has been given to a musician in the pop realm for contributions to the music world at large, went to Taylor—whose studio and touring bands frequently include jazz artists such as keyboardist Larry Goldings, saxophonist Lou Marini, trumpeter Walt Fowler, bassist Jimmy Johnson, drummer Steve Gadd and percussionist Luis Conte.

Picking up the Invitation Series baton from Stanley Clarke, Norwegian pianist Tord Gustavsen settled into the intimate confines of Salle de Gesù for four nights on July 4–7. Gustavsen opened his run with the quartet featured on his recent ECM release, *The Well*: saxophonist Tore Brunborg, bassist Mats Eilertsen and drummer Jarle Vespestad. Gustavsen never forced any driving agenda as he worked gorgeously in tandem with Brunborg's tenor. With Eilertsen's bass steering and responding like a deep rudder, the collective aesthetic of the ensemble was quietly spellbinding. To Gustavsen, each note seems to hold sacred power. During a solo concert later that week, under the evocatively illuminated Gesù, Gustavsen communed, backed arched, with the solitary gravitas of the "Phantom Of The Opera."

The final engagement of the Invitation Series reached an exquisite peak when Gustavsen met compatriot vocalist Solveig Slettahjell, who sang both in Norwegian and English. Slettahjell revisited sacred songs from the album she recorded with Gustavsen in Bethlehem, as well as heartbreaking renditions of Abba's "Winner Takes It All" and trumpeter Sjur Miljeteig's "Leave Me Here."

—Ed Enright

(Additional reporting by Michael Jackson)

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Louis Armstrong

Preserving Louie: The Louis Armstrong House Museum was awarded \$150,000 in discretionary funds from the Partners in Preservation grant contest. The funds will be utilized to help preserve Armstrong's Garden, in which the trumpeter famously celebrated his 71st birthday before passing away two days later. Throughout the summer, the museum will host a series of free public events in honor of Armstrong, including concerts and a book signing.

Sing Thing: The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) and WBGO-FM 88.3 announced the first annual Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, which is set to take place on Oct. 21. The five finalists, who will be selected by the Jazz Education Network, will perform at NJPAC's Victoria Theater in Newark, N.J.

Off-Air Drama: On July 13, Boston-based WGBH-FM canceled its "Eric In The Evening" and "Jazz WGBH With Steve Schwartz" programs, which both have had a profound influence on the proliferation of area venues and artists. The public has since formed two Facebook groups, including "Save Jazz At WGBH," which petitions for the company to rescind its initial decision.

Creative Curator: New York-based independent label 577 Records has begun its new curator series, which will result in the release of three titles featuring an artist and songs from other artists with whom he or she collaborates. The label has assigned the first curation to area saxophonist David Schnug.

Farewell to Abram: Trumpeter and composer Abram Wilson died of cancer in London on June 9 at the age of 38. The British musician, who won a BBC Jazz Award for best new album in 2007, was famous for performing with trumpeter Roy Hargrove, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Ruth Brown.

Bobby Sanabria



Latin Jazz Grammy Category Reinstated

In April 2011, the Board of Trustees for The Recording Academy enacted a sweeping change by slimming the number of Grammy award categories from 109 to 78, partially by eliminating the gender distinction in some categories. The action impacted the Hawaiian, Native American, Cajun/zydeco, r&b, gospel and contemporary jazz fields. But the loudest hue and cry came from the elimination of the Latin Jazz category. In June, the Academy reversed its decision, reinstating Latin Jazz Album as a category for the 55th annual Grammy awards.

"I'm not gloating that the Board of Trustees decided to make a wise decision," said percussionist and bandleader Bobby Sanabria, a prominent opponent to the elimination. "One of the biggest things I learned was you only lose when you don't fight."

Sanabria attributed part of the success to a "multidimensional front" that swayed the vote to reinstate Latin Jazz as a viable award category. "We used the Internet, made phone calls, wrote letters and sent in petitions, and a lot of stars came out in support of us," Sanabria said. He added that Carlos Santana, Herbie Hancock, Bonnie Raitt, Paquito D'Rivera and Paul Simon publicly expressed concern. "T.S. Monk even wrote an articulate three-page letter in protest."

Sanabria also teamed with performers Mark Levine, Eugene Marlow and Ben Lapidus to file a lawsuit against the Academy. While the suit was thrown out of court in April 2012, Sanabria and company had planned to appeal. But since the reinstatement of the category, the lawsuit has been dropped.

Academy President and CEO Neil Portnow said the lawsuit didn't directly contribute to the reinstatement of the Latin Jazz category. "We chose several years ago to review the entire process of giving out awards," Portnow said. "We wanted to insure that the process resulted in the

highest standards of excellence." He said the major factor in Latin jazz being a category again was a proposal sent to the Academy.

"[The proposal] included information and a rationale that we felt warranted the Academy's support," Portnow said. "The Latin jazz community was very proactive."

As for the class-action lawsuit, Portnow complained that there was no basis for it: "It cost the Academy money to defend it, which took away funds that might have been used otherwise, such as for scholarships."

Percussionist and historian John Santos is skeptical about the decision. "Basically, I feel it's a hollow victory," Santos said. "They pushed all of us overboard, tossed a life vest to two or three of us 14 months later, and are trying to spin it as if they are good citizens. ... We fought hard for the right to be included. They arbitrarily took it away with no good reason and now all is well?"

Santos added that there was a dignity to their protest. "[Our victory] is little more than a thorn in their foot and a small pain in the ass," he said. "But it means a great deal to many of us. They have proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that music is entertainment and money above all else for them. It is identity, education and honoring the ancestors for us."

As for other categories, Portnow said that Cajun and zydeco are now included in the American Roots category. "The people we've talked to feel it's more meaningful to be there," he said. "They're receiving nominations in a bigger playing field instead of having the same artists be in the same category every year."

Sanabria said he hopes the victory will inspire other musicians to fight for the other categories that were eliminated. "After all, that's the DNA of America," he said. "We felt we had a moral obligation to speak out against the injustice. We had no other recourse." —Dan Ouellette

Rudi Records: A Product of Live Production

Massimo Iudicone fell for jazz at a young age as part of his sweeping interest in the arts. At 17, Iudicone began organizing concerts and exhibitions and sought ways to combine dance, visual art, cinema and music.

Twenty-five years later, Iudicone is still obsessed with the arts. He's never stopped trying to make things happen, but in the last two years, his work has turned to something more archival and portable. Iudicone's young Rome-based label, Rudi Records, has quickly become a valuable part of Italy's diverse jazz and improvised-music scenes. It focuses largely on homegrown players and their collaborations with musicians from abroad, whether it's bassist Silvia Bolognesi improvising with New York reedist Sabir Mateen on *Holidays In Siena*, or the Iranian percussionist Mohssen Kasirossafar working with pianist Antonello Salis and trombonist Giancarlo Schiaffini on *Live In Ventotene*.

Iudicone said the turning point in his aesthetic interests occurred in 2000, when he was introduced

to the freewheeling, deeply inventive Italian Instabile Orchestra.

"It was love at first sight," Iudicone said. He began managing the group and working on festival productions with saxophonist Mario Schiano, a longtime member of the group. "After concerts, we would often meet with musicians in the lounges of the hotels and enjoy a good whiskey, talking about projects and the need to document certain types of music," Iudicone said. "In 2008, Italy had a drastic cut in public funding to culture, and many of the festivals and exhibitions that I organized couldn't continue. Hence, starting my own label in November of 2010 was almost natural."

Since then, Rudi has released 10 albums with a couple of more due by year's end. Iudicone sees production and recording as an extension of his work as a festival programmer. "Now I produce albums that are purely artistic projects, artists that I would've wanted to invite to my festivals," Iudicone said. In fact, quite a few of the Rudi founder's releases were recorded

live at one of his events. *Live In Ventotene* was actually recorded back in 2002 at the first installment of Iudicone's Festival Rumori Nell'isola. For other projects, he assembles bands himself, such as the bracing trio of alto saxophonist Sandro Satta, bassist Roberto Bellatalla and drummer Fabrizio Spera on *Re-Union*.

"Authenticity is the basis of my work with the label," Iudicone said. "With improvised music, when a musician has something to communicate, to share, they are forced to do so if it's a genuine gesture as an expression of their uniqueness. It's no coincidence that I prefer, when possible, to have the recordings taken from concerts. A performance is unique and unrepeatable."

In addition to recording Mateen, Rudi has also released another Bolognesi collaboration with American players: *Hear In Now*, a terrific string trio featuring New York violinist and singer Mazz Swift and Chicago cellist Tomeka Reid. The label's Italian talent ranges from well-known players like Schiaffini and fellow trombonist Sebi



Massimo Iudicone

Tramontana on the improvised duo album *Wind & Slap* to lesser-known artists such as composer and flutist Massimo De Mattia. De Mattia finds an unusual intersection between chamber jazz, contemporary music and free improvisation on his meticulous *Black Novel*.

"I'm definitely very interested in documenting Italian music," Iudicone said. "Often, some of the greatest musicians are ignored because there is little about them in the media. But I certainly do not preclude the chance to continue working with musicians from around the world." **DB**

Festival Favorites and Fond Farewells

The 34th edition of the Playboy Jazz Festival, which took over the Hollywood Bowl on June 16–17, was a showcase of crowd-pleasers, including bluesman Keb Mo (pictured). Master of Ceremonies Bill Cosby, who has emceed the festival for the last 31 years, announced that 2012 would be the final year of his tenure.

As part of this year's program, Cosby handpicked a series of performers to make their festival debut. This year's "Cos Of Good Music" included pianist Farid Barron, bassist Dwayne Burno, drummer Ndugu Chanler, saxophonist Tia Fuller, bassist Matthew Garrison, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen and percussionist Babatunde Lea. Other festival highlights included performances by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Christian McBride and Spectrum Road (with Vernon Reid, Jack Bruce, John Medeski and Cindy Blackman Santana).



KEB MO

Finding Common Ground

Béla Fleck and Marcus Roberts Embark on Collaborative Musical Journey

After-hours jam sessions at jazz festivals can be inspiring events that reunite one-time bandmates and introducing young, local players to their heroes. For banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck and pianist Marcus Roberts' trio with bassist Rodney Jordan and drummer Jason Marsalis, it was a chance meeting in Georgia back in 2009 that quickly led to a beautiful musical friendship.

"Béla and my group were both playing the Savannah Music Festival," Roberts said. "There's a jam session on the last night. My group was up there, and he just came up and played with us."

Roberts added, "A lot of soul—that's what I remember about his playing. He has a remarkable command of his instrument: He's got virtuosity, but not without substance."

"I just remember how much fun it was to play with Marcus," Fleck said when asked about his recollection of the initial meeting. "I wasn't expecting him to be so open to a hybrid musician like me, especially coming from his deep jazz background. We had a pretty amazing connection from the first note."

A veteran of several Wynton Marsalis groups and an accomplished solo performer and bandleader, Roberts kept in touch with the eclectic banjoist. (In addition to leading his own Flecktones group, Fleck has collaborated with Chick Corea, Zakir Hussain and Edgar Meyer.) The quartet returned to play the Savannah Music Festival together in 2011 and recorded an album, which Roberts and Fleck co-produced.

Across The Imaginary Divide was released on June 5 by Rounder and features six originals by Fleck and six by Roberts. "The range is most attractive to me," Roberts said. "I wrote with Béla in mind."

"I wanted to celebrate his virtuosity and also introduce it to our trio concept," he added. "His [compositions] have a bluegrass sound but are not limited to that. It's fascinating how much ground we cover."

The instrumental setting was unusual, though not new, for all the participants: "The great Danny Barker really taught me about playing the blues," Roberts recalled. "And I love the sound of my instrument and its rhythmic feel."

Fleck said his experience playing with a

traditional jazz piano trio has been limited. He recalled a session he recorded with McCoy Tyner, which included a few tunes with bassist Ron Carter and drummer Jack DeJohnette.

"That was a trial by fire, and was an experience that I treasure," Fleck said. "But this is quite different."

"For one thing, the rhythmic understanding is so different in every group, and the way a group feels time impacts how things go when I play with them," Fleck explained. "In this group, the time sense is so precise, that it makes it very easy for banjo—which is in some ways a percussion instrument—to fit in and find a groove."

On May 23, the four musicians embarked on the first part of a two-leg North American tour, which will conclude in Atlanta on Nov. 10. Touring and gigging has increased considerably for Fleck and Roberts since their two Savannah Music Festival performances and subsequent studio sessions.

"The more I relax, the better this thing goes, and it doesn't work if I am meek," Fleck said. "Marcus has encouraged me to go ahead and play whenever I want, including during his solos, and that's great because I can usually find a role for myself if I start playing. But if I lay out all the time, I'll never figure out

what works."

He added, "I think that because we are so in sync on rhythm and time, we are not having the kinds of issues that folks typically run into when guitarists and pianists play at the same time."

Roberts and Fleck each have long-running bandmate relationships. The pianist and drummer Marsalis have been playing together since 1994. Fleck founded his longstanding Flecktones group in 1989.

"We're not struggling to manage what we're going to do, so it's comfortable," Roberts said of his trio. "We're creating interactive collaboration, and we certainly welcome anyone coming out of soul and blues."

"The Marcus Roberts Trio is an incredibly flexible and able ensemble," Fleck explained. "Despite my need for growth in harmony and in ear training, somehow things seem to work."

"A reason it's going well could be because of the banjo's role in some of the early jazz that these guys really know and love. So they are not biased against me in principle; in fact they are on my side, and very encouraging," he concludes. "And because the five-string banjo has never had a place in legit jazz, they understand how hard I am working to find one."

—Yoshi Kato





From left: Jeff, Gerald and John Clayton

Caught

Heritage, Mentorship Celebrated in Pittsburgh

During the first weekend of June, locals and tourists celebrated Pittsburgh's rich jazz heritage. Thanks in part to Director Janis Burley Wilson, the Second Annual Pittsburgh JazzLive International Festival mirrored much of its host city's character—laid-back, inviting and intimate.

Much of the festival's lineup recognized Pittsburgh-bred giants such as Erroll Garner, George Benson and Art Blakey, and a key theme was honoring the role that their mentorship continues to play in jazz.

The Clayton Brothers' set provided the memorable image of bassist John Clayton smiling down on his son, pianist Gerald Clayton, with admiration. Joined by saxophonist Jeff Clayton, trumpeter Terrell Stafford and drummer Obed Calvaire, the group opened with "Big Daddy Adderleys" from the album *Brother To Brother* (ArtistShare). The group pulled no punches with the tight harmonies on the straightforward number.

"You shouldn't be shy about swinging if it's in your soul," John Clayton said. Jazz history is populated with well-known sibling teams, and it's no secret that such an intrinsic bond can often give familial bands a slight edge.

Trumpeter Sean Jones, the festival's artist-in-residence, was charismatic on "Liberty Avenue Stroll," an original composition that he dedicated to Blakey and another Pittsburgh legend, drummer Roger Humphries. Jones delivered strong phrasing on "Transitions," about the "roller coaster ride" that comes with turning 30, and lingering, steady tones on a more somber number, "B.J.'s Tune," off his 2005 album *Gemini* (Mack Avenue). There were tonal similarities to Freddie Hubbard's

"Mirrors," but Jones' playing reflects an array of influences. Although he said that the number was "spiritual" and not religious, Jones closed out with a stirring improvisation of gospel singer Donnie McClurkin's "Speak To My Heart."

The festival's late-night jam sessions allowed fans to interact with artists in smaller, more intimate settings. Drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts, a Pittsburgh native, played with numerous groups throughout the weekend—from the David Budway Band featuring saxophonist Steve Wilson to trumpeter Jerry Gonzalez and his Fort Apache Band. Young players like Gerald Clayton and keyboardist Robert Glasper intently studied Watts as if they were taking a master class. Glasper focused on material from his new album, *Black Radio* (Blue Note), but also nodded to the Herbie Hancock classic *Head Hunters*.

The theme of mentoring continued with the arrival of two surprise additions to the lineup: saxophonist Donald Harrison and trumpeter Brian Lynch. Harrison and Lynch joined promising young upstarts The Curtis Brothers and veteran drummer Ralph Peterson Jr. to kick off the final day of the festival. Having Jazz Messenger alumni perform illustrated how far-reaching Blakey's vision for jazz truly was.

"Art Blakey was one of the greatest human beings to walk the planet," Harrison said. "The most important thing he gave young musicians was the experience of playing night after night with a true master of jazz. He, in effect, passed down the history of the music to each of his musicians, and The Jazz Messengers maintained the essence of mainstream modern jazz." —Shannon J. Effinger

JoAnne Brackeen



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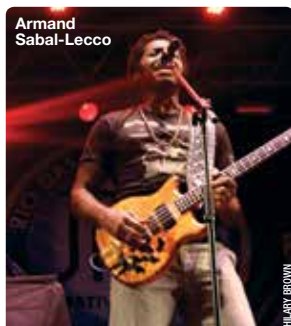
Amid Stormy Weather, Rio Das Ostras Artists Bring Musical Thunder

Navigating the winding Brazilian boulevards en route to Rio Das Ostras requires an astute comprehension of fluctuating terrain, temperamental climate, whirlwind directional changes and the welfare of your travel companions. Rounding out the weekend programming of the seaside town's namesake Jazz & Blues Festival, which ran June 6–10, was an erudite clan of genre-infusing pros who embraced this exploratory mindset on weather-torn stage setups.

For the first time in the fest's 10-year existence, Producers Stenio Mattos and Big Joe Manfra combatted the wrath of the elements. The peninsular Búzios venue Praia da Tartaruga became a tidal battering ram, forcing the production team to rescind on a slew of beachfront performances. But with some hurried rescheduling, the production team allowed inhibition-free late-night jams on the muddled grounds of the Costazul mainstage.

Touching on the works of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, pianist Kenny Barron diligently guided his pack with trademark elegance and narrative approach. Drum wunderkind Johnathan Blake unbridled a flood of chaotic fills and extemporized time changes that garnered a wave of applause. Blake has a talent for creating dynamics or reinventing straight-shooting post-bop in a way that's freer, faster and more penetrating. With Blake, it's always a roller coaster of intensity, yet you're confident you'll get off safely—there's a combination of full-throttle drama and effortless gliding. He propels himself into the cookers but can also pull on the reins and backpedal into the pocket. Bassist Kiyoshi Kitagawa definitely knows how to hold down the fort with precise, no-nonsense walkers and lighthearted, quixotic material. A master of fluidity, trumpeter/flugelhornist Mike Rodriguez maintained an intuitive, melodious slant on each tune.

Ever-evolving modern jazz guitar pundit Mike Stern served up a panoramic, autobiographical outing saddled to his aptly titled release *All Over The Place* (Heads Up/Concord). Stern is a genre-mixing adventurer whose lengthy resume wreathes with shifting geography. Leave it to his perfected miscellany of rhythmic support and an unlikely onstage partnership with hometown hero Romero Lubambo to deliver two sets of experimental upsurges and balladic vales. Alternately, Stern threw his signa-



Armand Sabal-Lecco



Michael Hill



Kenny Barron



Mike Stern (left) and Romero Lubambo



Michael Rodriguez



Johnathan Blake



Lagoa de Iriri stage

ture Yamaha into sinewy, honeyed romps and effortless successions of hammering, but then showcased an obvious ability to swing as he dropped into cool-hued, harder bop jaunts. Drummer Lionel Cordew and bassist Janek Gwizdala contributed spot-on, understated rhythmic side conversations. On the throwback "Chromozone," Stern and his fellow axmen spun into an unruly, climactic three-way joust that thundered off the rocks of Tartarugas prior to the storms.

A strong contrast existed between the venues, as smaller stages functioned as proper battlegrounds for groove-infused, insouciant jamming versus the epic storyboarding of the larger bandstands. Drummer Billy Cobham and his longtime French faction performed a frenzied collection of fusion tunes on the windy, war-torn Costazul mainstage on Saturday, while their Sunday evening set on the intimate Lagoa de Iriri stage consisted of more laid-back wanderings from Cobham's forthcoming album, *Tales From The Skeleton Coast*, and the groove-infectious 2010 disc *Palindrome*. On either stage, Cobham similarly explored the dynamic of

his Miles Davis days, and provided a flashy yet open-ended centerpiece for his counterparts to flex their obvious chops. The circular, classic Cobham tune "Stratus" was a delightful musical theater for the smoldering bends and high-end neck work of guitarist Jean-Marie Ecay as bassist Michael Mondesir cemented the mixture with unfaltering drive. What truly set the performance ablaze, however, were fiery but even-keeled attacks on the steel pan by percussionist Junior Gill.

Bassist Armand Sabal-Lecco is a champion of global infusion whose sound can be defined by innate multicultural sensitivity and versatile, technical mastery. His band scurried feverishly through a bevy of West African rhythms and call-and-response anthems such as "1 For Ilda," a solicitation of rampant pentatonics from keyboardist Barney McCall amid Sabal-Lecco's low-end linguistics. Sabal-Lecco interspersed slap-bass technique with dexterous slides against drummer Nathaniel Townsley's heart-pumping flash. McCall, in contrast, settled in nicely on double-decker keys. —Hilary Brown

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Alfredo Rodríguez

Unexpected Twists

Pianist Alfredo Rodríguez is a study in contrasts. His playing can be brash, but suddenly turn to a subdued tranquility. Offstage, his well-behaved, respectful demeanor is a far cry from the rapid-fire deliveries and unexpected twists of his performances. The contrast raises a question: Is there no giant ego to go with that embarrassment of musical riches?

At the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival in Kalamazoo, Mich., two sold-out shows by Rodríguez's trio—with bassist Peter Slavov and drummer Francisco Mela—featured music from his 2012 debut *Sounds Of Space* (Mack Avenue). The music was all over the map, a travelogue of Latin confections, all of it spiced with a fully developed, idiosyncratic Cuban take on jazz.

During a lively conversation with the 26-year-old Cuban native, Rodríguez discussed his move to the United States (documented by his songs and varied instrumentation on *Sounds Of Space*) and the key role Quincy Jones has played in his life.

"I was born into a musical family," Rodríguez says in strong but slightly broken English. "My father is a Cuban singer. At 3 years old, I went to the conservatory in Havana. We in Cuba are very selective with these kinds of careers. The education is free, but you have to be selected by the teachers who work at the schools. You have to be good, and you have to have the passion. And in Cuba, we just have classical music schools—not jazz. But we have a great foundation."

For Rodríguez, however, that foundation needed some additions. "If you walk in the streets in Cuba," he notes, "you will see people who are not in the conservatory, but they play the music really good. They feel the music, they feel the drums and they dance really good. It's in their blood. So, in the Cuban music, you take this drum and start playing. And, in order to start playing, with nobody telling you what you have to do, you are improvising. As a kid, I had that balance between the roots of the country and the Cuban people just doing those kinds of improvisations without words. At the same time, I had the opportunity to be part of the academy through the classical music of the school." (Rodríguez studied music at the Conservatorio Amadeo Roldán and then the Instituto Superior de Arte.)

Then lightning struck. "When I was 13 or 14," Rodríguez recalls, "my uncle gave me a CD



from Keith Jarrett, *The Köln Concert*. I didn't have any idea of piano improvisation before that. When I heard that CD, I said to myself, 'Oh, wow, this is something more. You're playing the piano and whatever comes into your mind. So why not start to do that?' Nobody told me before that moment that I could just sit at the piano and play. And I found a lot of CDs from Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell and Lennie Tristano."

If Rodríguez wasn't going to stay and teach as part of his deal with the conservatory, but continue to pursue this new adventure, he had to leave. Jones had shown interest in his work, and the pianist desperately wanted to come to the United States to work with the legendary producer. In 2009, after Rodríguez had played some engagements in Mexico, he flew to Laredo, Texas, where he was arrested and held by the border police. They eventually released him, and he started his new life in America. Rodríguez composed the complex, adventurous "Crossing The Border"—a memorable track on *Sounds Of Space*—during the first week he lived in the States.

"I defected," he explains. "The only way I could work with Quincy was coming here to

the United States. There are a lot of Cubans who have done what I did. I didn't have the ability to share in Cuba as much as I can share here. And to travel when I wanted to, and for my learning process. He was telling me he wanted to help with my career."

Rodríguez's career received a kick-start in 2006, when he performed at the Montreux Jazz Festival and in fest founder Claude Nobs' home. Rodríguez prepared for the important event. "I put together three songs," he says. "When Mr. Nobs told me Quincy was coming to his house, he asked if I wanted to play a song for him. And that is what I did." Clearly, he clicked with Q, who co-produced *Sounds Of Space* with the pianist. (Rodríguez has described Jones as being "like a new father.")

As for what lies ahead, Rodríguez describes another kind of contrast. "A lot of different things are coming up with my trio," he says, referring to festival and club gigs. "But at the same time, I'm composing my first big piece for a symphony orchestra. It's very different from the music that I compose for my trio because it's more based in the classical, contemporary works, which I love—Igor Stravinsky or Prokofiev or even Messiaen." —John Ephland

Román Filiú O'Reilly

Pushing Forward

For his New York debut in April at the Jazz Gallery, alto saxophonist Román Filiú O'Reilly presented his quartet music with pianist David Virelles, bassist John Hébert and drummer Marcus Gilmore. It was heady, virtuoso fare, conjured from complex rhythmic and harmonic structures that evoked a variety of moods and served to springboard ebullient melodic improvisations by each band member.

Some of the music in the set list appears on Filiú's second leader date, *Musae*, a September release on Dafnis Prieto's imprint, Dafnison. Prieto shares drum duties with Gilmore, propelling Virelles, guitarist Adam Rogers and Cuban bassist Reinier Elizarde, who gathered to record the album in 2010 in Madrid, where Filiú has resided since his move from Havana in 2005. "I've always admired and looked to Román's work," said Prieto, who met Filiú 20 years ago, when both attended Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte. "He's always been extremely creative, part of a small circle of Cuban musicians who are trying to push the music forward."

The "muse" in the title refers to Filiú's wife—to whom he addresses the gorgeous love ballad "Venus"—and a dramatic thread that runs through the songs: "I want to tell stories about what I come from, people I know, what inspires me."

A native of Santiago de Cuba, Filiú, 39, grew up in a household of classical musicians. His father is a pianist and professor of theory; two brothers play violin; an older sister plays bass; and another brother and sister are conductors. His grandfather introduced him to jazz via a Saturday jazz show on Radio Martí.

At 14, Filiú moved to Camagüey to attend conservatory, then in 1992 to Havana. There he supplemented studies with salsa gigs (before joining the band Irakere in 1997, he played tenor saxophone with, among others, vocalist Isaac Delgado) and paid close attention to French classical saxophone repertoire. "The piano parts are beautiful—a lot of harmonies and different textures," Filiú said. "Playing that music made me want to learn how to write it. It opened my ears to harmony, taught me to sing on a melody."

Dissatisfied with the creative limitations of playing the same repertoire on a nightly basis with Irakere, Filiú found a mentor in Steve Coleman, who visited Cuba frequently in the late '90s and early '00s. "He was school, like a spark of lightning," said Filiú, who had previously learned hardcore jazz vocabulary from studying the works of several tenor saxophonists—first, Michael Brecker, and *Atlantis*-era Wayne



Shorter; later, John Coltrane and Dexter Gordon.

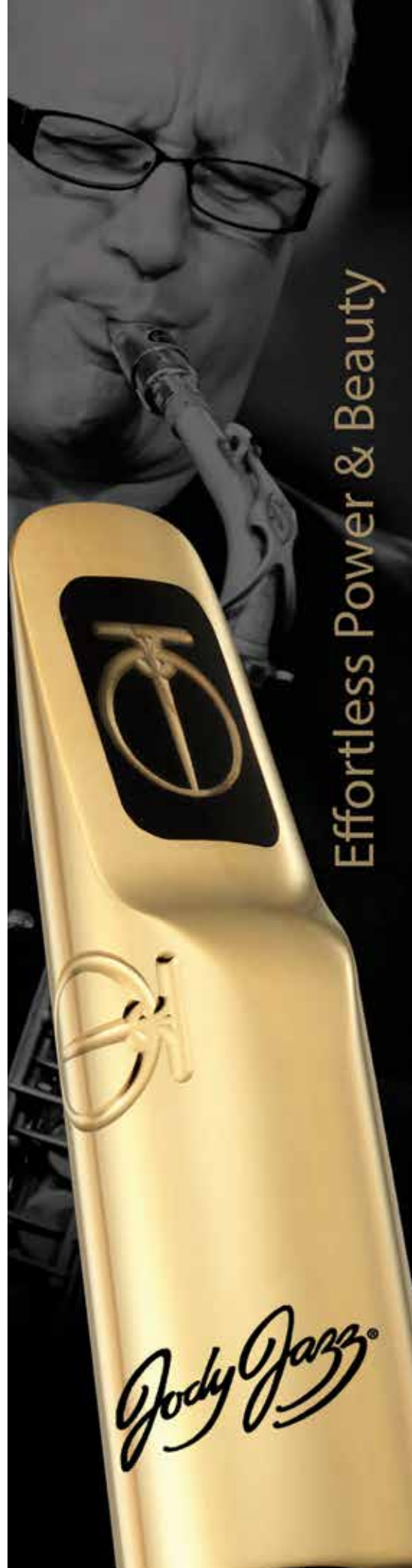
"Steve would take a certain subject—Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Von Freeman, Henry Threadgill, Andrew Hill, his own music—and we'd work on it all day," Filiú says. "It was like a lightning bolt. In Cuba, the players show off, like they're demonstrating something. But these masters know how to move you, shake you from inside. I want to feel the same way when I play."

Filiú relocated to Madrid while touring Europe with Irakere. Once ensconced, he played shows and studio dates, exchanged leader and sideman roles with fellow Cuban emigres (bassists Elizarde and Alain Pérez; pianists Iván "Melón" González and Javier "Caramelo" Massó), and in 2006 released the world-class Latin jazz CD *Blowin' Reflections* (BOST Espacio Creativo). He also learned to navigate blues-inflected African American dialects via apprenticeships with Coleman's own mentor, drummer Doug Hammond, and with tenor saxophonist David Murray. Filiú showcased his improvisational skills on the 2011 album *David Murray Cuban Ensemble Plays Nat King Cole en Español* (Motéma).

Now a New Yorker, Filiú savors the chance to absorb wisdom from elders such as Threadgill and Muhal Richard Abrams. "David Virelles told me to come with him to a lesson with Henry—after I'd been writing a song all day, but didn't like the ending," he related. "I was tired, but I went, and listened to what Henry said about music and different things. When I went home, I finished the piece and did two more."

"Steve and Henry and Muhal and David Murray have the power to free your mind. They teach you to look where nobody looks."

—Ted Panken



Kelly Hogan

A Better Mousetrap

When Kelly Hogan croons a jazz standard or belts out an r&b original, her muscular, emotive vocals can evoke bitter sorrow, sublime yearning or ecstatic joy.

Following recent work as a backing vocalist for Neko Case, Jakob Dylan and Mavis Staples, Hogan went into EastWest Recording Studios in Hollywood to record her fourth CD, *I Like To Keep Myself In Pain* (Anti-). Her band, which was assembled specifically for the sessions, included iconic organist Booker T. Jones (Booker T. & The MG's), drummer James Gadson (Herbie Hancock, Bill Withers), bassist Gabriel Roth (The Dap-Kings) and multi-instrumentalist Scott Ligon (NRBQ).

"Andy Kaulkin, the honcho at Anti-Records, likes to prove that music is the universal language by putting disparate elements together," Hogan said. "Plus, when you bait your mousetrap with Booker T., people come and say, 'Hey, whatcha got over there?'"

Hogan—who formerly fronted the band The Jody Grind and who has contributed

vocals to more than 70 CDs—drew on her past recording experiences to make *Pain* a gem.

"The day I walked in that studio [in April 2011], it took everything that I had done to date to not pee my pants," she recalled. "It was intimidating. But I always like a challenge."

The ensemble quickly meshed and enjoyed swapping tales during breaks: "One day, Booker T. goes, 'Kelly, you're a lot like Otis Redding. His mind worked like yours. He was hearing music all the time. You hear three parts—the harmonies *and* the melody.' I had gravy coming out of my mouth at lunch. To work with those people—I still can't believe it happened."

Jones' majestic organ work adds emotional heft to the domestic drama of "We Can't Have Nice Things," and he adds a gospel flavor to the poetic love letter "The Green Willow Valley."

Along with the self-penned "Golden" (a moving anthem of perseverance), Hogan solicited songs from artists such as Andrew Bird, Robyn Hitchcock and Vic Chesnutt.

A standout track is "Daddy's Little Girl," a



song about Frank Sinatra written by M. Ward. Against the gentle strum of Ligon's guitar, Hogan sings, "Miami, you were my clean, dry scotch/ Milan, you were the gold seam in my crotch/ Palm Springs, in the red-hot palm of my hand/ And nobody will ever belong the way that I used to belong."

"My vocals on that song were going through the same echo chamber that Frank Sinatra's vocals went through—so I didn't want to be haunted by him," she said. "I had to get right with God before I sang that." —Bobby Reed



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Antonio Adolfo

Student Becomes Teacher

The first words the intimidating Nadia Boulanger told Brazilian pianist Antonio Adolfo were “You are five minutes late.” Exhausted by the demands of the booming Brazilian music industry in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1970s, Adolfo had wanted to focus on his technique far away from Brazil. And he had driven to the meeting through Paris traffic, when he should have taken the train.

Adolfo recently recounted this meeting during a break at his music school, in Hollywood, Fla., where he has lived off and on since 1996, and more permanently since 2005.

Boulanger—the great teacher of Aaron Copland, Burt Bacharach and so many others—had given him precisely 15 minutes for an examination-recital. “When I played the classical exercises I brought, Nadia put her arm over my hands and said, ‘Stop,’” Adolfo recalled. “When she said to play what I like, I improvised. Finally, she smiled. She told me about Michel Legrand, her student. She talked about Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett. ‘You may come next Wednesday,’ she said. I studied there for two years.

“People couldn’t understand it. They said, ‘All that success and *now* you go to study?’ I was really impressed with her, and the spiritual way she taught a lesson. Because of that experience, later I became a teacher.”

When Adolfo went to France, he had been earning a good living as a composer, arranger and session musician in bossa nova, Música Popular Brasileira, jazz and Tropicália. After Brazilian rhythms became so important to jazz and pop, some of Adolfo’s compositions became international hits. His “Sá Marina,” with its irresistible melody, was first sung by Brazilian diva Elis Regina, with whom Adolfo toured for two years. Stevie Wonder and Sérgio Mendes both had great success with the song, redone with English lyrics as “Pretty World.” While with Regina, Adolfo contributed to the well-known “Aquarela do Brasil,” a collaboration with harmonica master Toots Thielemans.

Adolfo, 65, continues to interpret Brazilian traditional music. His genius reworkings of Brazilian songwriters like Guinga and Chico Buarque are harmonic rethinking of melodies that fuse West African, European and Moorish musical cultures. Since 1985, he has educated thousands of Brazilians at his successful music school, Centro Musical Antonio Adolfo, with its two branches in Brazil and another in Florida.

Although he has done sessions in the United States with Frederico Britos and Claudio Roditi, he performs primarily in Brazil, where he remains a potent force. Recent recordings on his



AAM label have found growing audiences in the States, both for his nimble piano arrangements and the vocals by his daughter Carol Saboya. An accomplished singer, Saboya has a girlish tone like Stacey Kent’s and a delicate delivery for jazz standards. In her Portuguese-sung numbers, her full range of emotional power is unmistakable.

The father-daughter teamwork, backed by the skillful drummer Rafael Barata, along with electric bass and rhythm guitar, earned their *Lá e Cá/Here And There* a Latin Grammy nomination in 2010. That recording of mostly jazz standards contains the original Adolfo composition “Casavel,” which is built on a deft, cascading piano riff. Adolfo’s latest CD, *Chora Baião*, explores the rich two-beat rhythms of the Northeastern Brazilian interior.

On a recent visit to the States for a concert, Saboya talked about working with such a meticulous producer as her father. “He’s a great advisor and understands what I like to sing,” said Saboya, whose just-released U.S. solo debut CD of Brazilian jazz, *Belezas*, was produced and arranged by Adolfo. “He gives me good song paths to follow.”

Even though the pianist doesn’t consider himself a purely jazz musician, his solos display a lightly percussive sound influenced by Bill Evans. Adolfo doesn’t hesitate when asked what influences his improvisation: “Brazilian percussionists, more than anything else.”

Adolfo underscored the complex relationship in Brazilian jazz between the percussion and the soloists. “Every musician who plays Brazilian has to understand what the percussion players are doing; it’s not just improvising over it. In this music, the phrasing itself comes mainly from the percussion.” —John Radanovich

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Bill Evans in Copenhagen, 1964

BILL EVANS

THE SOFTER SIDE OF THE REVOLUTION

By John McDonough | Photo by Jan Persson

PREVIOUSLY UNRELEASED CLUB PERFORMANCES BY THE LEGENDARY
PIANIST PROVIDE YET ANOTHER REMINDER OF HIS SINGULAR GENIUS

B

y the end of October 1968, America seemed to be disintegrating. The Rev. Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were dead. If you found yourself in downtown Chicago in August, you might have felt the tingle of tear gas in your throat and a mood of anarchy in the air. The moral clarity of the civil rights movement was sliding into separatist factions, and anti-war fervor was flirting with Maoist fantasies of political terror.

The jazz world was in its own spiral of radicalism by 1968. Tearing down established forms was fashionable in the inner councils of the music's avant-garde, even as old-timers such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck and even Louis Armstrong continued to anchor the major festivals and draw large mainstream crowds. Pharoah Sanders, Archie Shepp and Albert Ayler were seen by some as reflections of the larger rise of societal frustration and radicalism among African Americans. On another flank, fusion and jazz-rock were bridge-building to a more lucrative segment of the pop market. To some critics, it was a bridge to nowhere; to others, the next important wave. Like the rest of the nation, jazz was alive with anger and argument and living dangerously.

Dangerous times are easy to romanticize when the dangers have all passed. It's the people who keep their heads in the chaos who are often easy to overlook. Such a case can be made for Bill Evans. The pianist had come to wide attention in a more temperate period when the tranquility of the '50s still prevailed, first on Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue* (which displayed his compositional skills via "Blue In Green" and "Flamenco Sketches") and on his own 1960 trio album for Riverside, *Portrait In Jazz*. The trio was a uniquely balanced partnership between Evans, bassist Scott LaFaro and drummer Paul Motian. Evans turned the keyboard into a chamber orchestra of subtle pastels. His spidery body seemed to droop deep over the keys like a weeping willow, his head cocked to one side as if waiting for them to reveal some intimate secret. His first *DownBeat* cover came in December 1960.

Eight years later, in a noisy world of agitation and the street theater of insurrection, Evans was killing them softly with his songs, presiding in a wistful nimbus of civility and seduction and quietly probing the overlooked corners of the Great American Songbook. The contrast was even more striking because he spent so much of his time in that great womb of Bohemian discontent—Greenwich Village.

The trio became a pillar of the Village, first at the Village Vanguard on Seventh Avenue; and then at Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate, a moderately upscale restaurant-and-bar retreat over D'Lugoff's more famous basement-level Village Gate at 158 W. Bleecker Street. When Evans debuted in the room on Oct. 15, 1968, launching a four-week stand, he and bassist Eddie Gomez were joined by new drummer Marty Morell. It would initiate the longest-running trio of Evans' career. For the next six years it moved often between the Vanguard and the Top of the Gate, sometimes clocking 30 weeks a year between the two rooms. "There was no rhyme or reason," Gomez says of the gig schedules. "One did not preclude playing the other." The week Evans opened at the Gate, his picture appeared on *DownBeat*'s cover for the fifth time.

The economics of the New York club scene were modest then by today's standards. The



Eddie Gomez onstage at the 1967 Newport Jazz Festival

"Bill was definitely a contemporary musician, but he chose to explore what was right in front of him."

—EDDIE GOMEZ

Top of the Gate charged no cover or minimum. That October, the trio received \$1,000 a week. Out of that, Evans paid Morell \$175 a week and Gomez a bit more. Manager Helen Keane presumably received a percentage, leaving Evans a net of around \$400 a week. But it was surprisingly sufficient, Gomez recalls. "We were always working."

Evans' sense of tradition, even in 1968, seemed a throwback to an earlier era in jazz. Without irony or postmodern snark, he relied on the built-in restraints of the old-fashioned 32-bar song as completely as others were so eager to abandon them. Perhaps those restraints were more "experimental" to him than the feral, do-your-own-thing world of "freedom" that increasingly surrounded him. In part this is because the tunes were so familiar. He had to reach higher and search harder to find their fresh fruit. It was a search he seemed to enjoy.

"That's exactly what Bill would have said," Gomez speculates. "When you repeat repertoire, therein is the challenge—to dig deeper and find new things. And Bill was always about that. He could be lyrical but also pointillistic. He liked some atonal approaches, too: ['Twelve Tone Tune'] was serially composed but with traditional harmony. He was definitely a contemporary musician, but he chose for the most part to explore what was right in front of him."

The intimacy and intelligence of Evans' music at this particular moment 44 years back

can be heard with remarkable presence on a new two-CD collection, *Live At Art D'Lugoff's Top Of The Gate*, from Resonance Records, part of the non-profit Rising Jazz Stars Foundation that George Klabin founded in 2005. (Resonance Records is also offering audiophiles a numbered, limited-edition box set of three 12-inch vinyl discs recorded at 45 rpm.)

It's the latest in a pair of important Evans discoveries to come along recently, the first of which, *Bill Evans: The Sesjun Radio Shows* (Out of the Blue), arrived about a year ago and offered three '70s performances from the Netherlands. Both belong to that category of release that often is accompanied by such phrases as "the lost sessions of ..." or "newly discovered"—descriptions intended to incite a collector's sense of recovered history. Often the price of such history is poor sound. But not so here. Both the Sesjun and Gate performances shed important new light on Evans and were recorded with uncommon care, the latter by Klabin himself, who says his tapes were neither lost nor rediscovered, merely held in safe keeping to ripen.

Klabin came to Columbia University as a freshman in 1964 and a year later began programming jazz at the college's radio station, WKCR. (When he left in 1969, he was succeeded by Phil Schaap, a noted jazz historian and impresario who continues to be heard on the station.) "Because KCR was non-profit," Klabin says, "I could record musicians and play the tapes on the station. They'd get a free recording out of it, and I'd get them on the air. After a while, musicians would invite me to record on location."

In this, Klabin was following in the footsteps of Jerry Newman, who had come to Columbia as a student in 1941 just as WKCR was going on the air. Newman took his recording equipment to Minton's Playhouse, recorded the first formulations of bebop—with Thelonious Monk and Charlie Christian—and played them on WKCR, just as Klabin would do a generation later.

Newman became something of a model for Klabin, who began his own odyssey of location recording for WKCR in 1965. The contact with Evans began with a radio interview he recorded around 1966. "I remember George as very eager and ambitious," Gomez recalls. But as graduation approached in June 1968, Mark Rudd led a student strike that occupied the office of university president Grayson Kirk. "I stayed away from that," Klabin says, but notes that all final exams were suspended that spring. "How many students graduate without finals?" Having graduated, he remained with the radio station another year, long enough to make the Evans tapes at the Top of the Gate.

By then he was acquainted with Keane, Evans' manager and producer since 1963. "She called me or I called her," says Klabin. "I knew that Bill was breaking in a new trio at the Top of the Gate, and she asked if I'd like to record it—or I asked. Anyway, she gave me full permission, and I recorded two sets." Klabin had by now become a fairly accomplished engineer. He used



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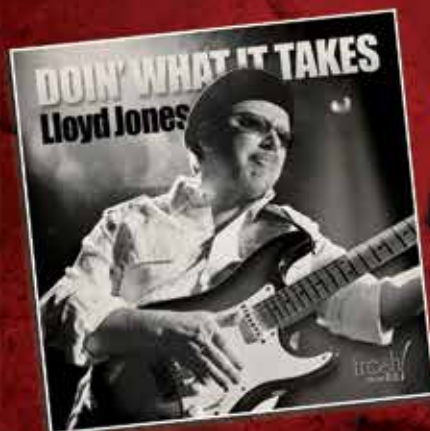
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a two-track recorder, four mics and a single stereo mixer. It all happened without any sense of occasion. There was no sound check, no time to set a balance. Any adjustments were made “on the fly.”

Large enough for 150 to 200 people and sometimes a bit noisy, the room remained an intimate setting for a trio. Nevertheless, Klabin wanted to avoid too much ambiance. So he placed his microphones close to the instruments. The result is a recording full of detail but with enough room sound to suggest a physical environment.

While the trio created a refuge of order upstairs—spinning graceful webs from the melodies of Richard Rodgers and Jerome Kern—outside on Bleecker Street, fashionable hippies and would-be Weathermen mingled with curious tourists out to experience “the Sixties.” What may be most interesting about Evans at this high-water moment of cultural revolution is that he was quietly becoming a major force in contemporary music using essentially counter-revolutionary materials. To listen to the serene proceedings in the Top of the Gate today, one can’t help noting how remote from the barricades he intended to make himself.

“Bill was not one to get into politics through his music,” Morell says. “He stood apart in a lot of ways. It insulated him from a lot of the excess of the time. Bombs could be going off and he was still going to play ‘My Foolish Heart’ with warmth and love.”

“In that climate there was a lot of music trying to break through in different directions,” Gomez says, “which only shows that you can do a lot of good things with old tools.”

Evans had a considerable catalog of his own songs by now and “Waltz For Debby” was becoming a jazz standard. But the two sets that night included only one Evans tune, “Turn Out The Stars.” Maybe it was because this was a new trio still in a break-in period. Morell was in his second week with the group. So, how did he fit into the deeply established relationships of a trio?

“I’d listened to Bill for years,” says Morell. “I knew what he was doing so I felt equipped from the start. I knew his book. You familiarize yourself with the details in the moment. At that level, you either play right or you don’t. It’s never a question of discussing music details. We never rehearsed. He never suggested any changes in my playing. You either felt it or he’d find someone else. By the time he heard me, I had listened to the group for so long that in my mind, I had been there. The first night at the Top of the Gate, after we finished, Bill said, ‘Wow, you sound like you’ve been playing with us for years.’ I said I had.”

Gomez remembers that his own induction into the trio two years earlier in Chicago had come with a degree of uncertainty. “I was fraught with tension, to say the least,” he explains, “because the job was not mine to have yet. It had been a dream of mine to play with Bill when he asked me to do a short tour as a kind of audition. That first week was harrowing. Bass plays both a



“Bombs could be going off and Bill was still going to play ‘My Foolish Heart’ with warmth and love.”

—MARTY MORELL

rhythmic and harmonic role, of course, and solos as much as Bill. There was a lot for me to do at a high level, and I was not on such sure ground because I had so much to learn. I was hoping Bill would be patient with me, and he was.”

One of the closely guarded secrets in jazz involves the element of spontaneity. Yes, the license to improvise is genuine. But even in a trio, it typically takes place within a careful design that is thought through before the first audience hears a note. Part of the jazz art is the art of illusion, a deception intended to keep those designs out of sight and invite listeners to believe it’s all materializing for the first time. “A good metaphor might be a play,” says Gomez. “Jazz is a kind of theater. You have to come at it prepared with certain pre-planned structures, then let things develop within those real-time moments. The expositions and recapitulations were the same. It was always about the development in the middle, not unlike a sonata allegro.”

The clocklike precision of the trio’s inner machinery is evident on the *Top Of The Gate* sets. Consider the two versions of “Emily” and “Round Midnight.” Each proceeds through a nearly identical series of cues and supporting ideas. Each finishes within a second or two of its mate. They are like signatures, unmistakably alike but never the same.

“Bill had everything organized,” Morell says. “We had arrangements on every tune with a format for an introduction and solo order. He

would never wing it. He would choose his material carefully and find a way to perform a composition before he would present it. He thought these things out very carefully before he would include a tune in a set. But if you listen carefully, there’s nothing that’s routine.”

The Bill Evans Trio had a fourth member: silent partner, manager and producer Helen Keane. Whatever label Evans recorded for after 1963, Keane’s name appeared as producer. She was intimately involved in his work. “She was present the night I recorded,” Klabin says. “I loved Helen. She was fair and tough and wouldn’t let people take advantage of him. Always had his best interests at heart.” This view is shared by Evans’ biographer, Peter Pettinger, critic Gene Lees and others close to the pianist. “She was Bill’s guiding angel,” Gomez says. “The world doesn’t always recognize his kind of artistry. She helped see to it that it did by being a bridge to record companies and clubs. She would suggest projects and concepts they could use.”

But there were also quiet tensions between Evans and Keane. “There were a couple of projects she pressed that were not in Bill’s comfort zone,” says Gomez.

Morell is more specific, nodding to the 1972 LP *Living Time* with the George Russell Orchestra. “She always tried to get herself involved musically,” Morell says. “And sometimes it was a problem. I know at times he disagreed with her approach, but he always gave her the courtesy of doing her job as she saw fit.”

It had been quite a coup when the trio signed with Columbia in 1971, and Evans’ first LP, *The Bill Evans Album*, won two Grammys. So Keane convinced Columbia that Evans deserved a bigger budget next time. She got \$25,000. “Helen had always wanted to do some big, earth-shattering project,” Morell says. “So it turned out to be with *Living Time*. When Helen commissioned Russell to write some large ensemble thing for the trio, George brought in this music he had already composed and wanted to record. He just stuck the trio in somewhere. I said, ‘What the hell is going on? The trio is getting eaten up.’ The record was a huge flop, not what Bill’s people wanted to hear. Columbia dropped him.”

“Basically, Bill just wanted to show up and play, and he needed someone like Helen to manage the things he didn’t want to manage. When she would start managing the music, sometimes he knew it was wrong, but he would just kind of go along with it because she had done well by him before. Bill was very apathetic, and Helen was very strong. She did a lot of good things. So you’ve got to go with the averages, and there was more good than bad.”

Gomez agrees. “Ultimately, I think she did incredible things for Bill,” he says, “and I think he was very much aware of it.”

After Klabin taped the trio at the Top of the Gate in 1968, he made copies for Evans, played them once on his radio show and put them away. Nearly 40 years later, he started the Rising Jazz Stars Foundation. In 2009, he hired Zev Feldman



Bill Evans (left) and Eddie Gomez at Shelly's Manne-Hole, 1968

to help run Resonance Records. One day Klabin happened to mention that he had recorded the Evans trio when he was at Columbia University. "What?" Feldman gasped. "Bill Evans!" Born six years after the tapes were made, Feldman saw them as treasured artifacts from a golden age he had missed. He became the main advocate for putting them out.

"George had never wanted to get involved in securing the necessary clearances to do it prop-

erly," Feldman says. "So I said I could help." He began with the Universal Music Group and Verve Records, which held Evans' recording contract at the time. (Evans had just completed a solo album, *Alone*, two days before Klabin taped at the Gate.) "They were real mensches," Feldman says, "and cooperated fully." He went on to contact Evan Evans, Bill's son; then Gomez and Morell, and even Art D'Lugoff's surviving family. "I'm happy we were able to get everyone

on board," he says. "Everyone was treated fairly."

Today, the old Top of the Gate is a CVS drug store. D'Lugoff died in 2009 at age 85. Gomez, 67, lives a few blocks north of the old Gate, continues to work in a variety of settings and adds new work to his large discography. The latest is *Per Sempre* on BFM Jazz. Morell, 68, teaches at the University of Central Florida, emphasizing to his students the need for versatility. Evans died in 1980 at 51, but he continues to cast a huge influence over musicians and scholars. A 20-year-old jazz studies major at Northwestern University recently received a research grant to transcribe a body of Evans' work.

For the Oct. 17, 1968, issue of *DownBeat*, Evans provided a handwritten transcription of his composition "Very Early." It was accompanied by a brief interview in which Marian McPartland asked the pianist to share his advice for young players. Evans said, "If you play too many things at one time, your whole approach will be vague. You won't know what to leave in and what to take out. I would say to a young musician: Know very clearly what you're doing and why—play much less, but be *very clear* about it. It's much better to spend 30 hours on one tune than to play 30 tunes in one hour."

Evans's performance on *Top Of The Gate* certainly reflects his "digging deeper" approach. However well Resonance Records does with this new release, the ultimate profit will be to the Bill Evans legacy. And it will be considerable. **DB**

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place to place

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James Blood Ulmer
(left) and David
Murray in New
York City, March 7

DAVID
MURRAY
& JAMES
BLOOD
ULMER

TOTAL FREEDOM

By Howard Mandel | Photography by Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos

A big, bearish man sat before a microphone at the lip of the stage, growling out simple, declarative rhymes while plucking raw discords and jagged melody fragments from a Gibson electric guitar in his lap. To his left, 15 cramped musicians fixed their eyes on the hand gestures and body language of their conductor, a somewhat smaller man in a blue suit and open-collar white shirt, who sometimes turned to face the audience and blow his tenor sax.

When he did so, he thrust his head forth and jaw out, puffed his cheeks, hunched his shoulders and, rocking in rhythm, projected a stream of burry notes that cut a broad path through the thicket of sound he'd just waved up from the musicians, demonstrating the myriad ways a song might turn or take off. His musicians responded with dense, bristly parts that mirrored the gutsiness of the vocalist and expanded along the lines their leader had set.

The singer-guitarist was James Blood Ulmer, the conductor-saxophonist David Murray, and the ensemble David Murray's Blues Big Band, raising a sweetly blistering ruckus in March at The Iridium jazz club in Midtown Manhattan. It was their second gig. The previous one had been in January at Teatro Manzoni in Milan.

Big band aside, Ulmer and Murray have worked together for more than 30 years, playing some of the most freely improvised small-group music imaginable. Big band convened, they were reinvigorating an aspect of the jazz tradition almost as old as jazz itself. Either way, they are a mutual admiration society.

"I love David—David was in the first band I got," Ulmer said during a conversation before

sound check on that day early last spring. "He was the first horn player to read my music off the score. When he'd just come to New York"—which was in 1978, as a graduate of Pomona College in California—"he played on six of my records, starting with *Are You Glad To Be In America?* and in the Music Revelation Ensemble, too.

"David studied music, and now he's got something he wants to do: to arrange. So he called me. He hooked up with the right person, because if I can get him to arrange my music from the standpoint of how I play my guitar, he could take arranging to a whole new level, adding to what Duke Ellington, Count Basie and the other brothers did before him."

"This project actually started when I was about 18 and saw Blood play with Ornette at the Keystone Korner in San Francisco," Murray mentioned during a break from the sound check at The Iridium. "It was my first time being up close with Ornette, and he introduced me to Blood. I loved their kind of music, the harmolodic thing," he said, referring to Coleman's concept of harmony, motion and melody moving as one for unfettered musical expression. "To me, Blood

is as much a part of harmolodics as Ornette. To me, harmolodics grew out of the way Blood plays naturally."

Ulmer's natural way of playing is earthy, rich with overtones, insistent yet also unpredictable. He grew up poor in St. Matthews, S.C., and first played a contraption his father made him. Ulmer recalled that it was built "out of a bow, a fat piece of wood and an old milk can, strung with some wires," adding, "I used to beat it with a stick—bing, bing, boom, *boom!*" As he remembered doing that some 70 years ago, his eyes sparkled and his face crinkled up along laugh lines.

Ulmer progressed to a real instrument (what he calls a "tempered guitar") and was gigging with soul bands by the early 1960s. By the early '70s he'd recorded with organists Hank Marr, John Patton and Larry Young. But he first unveiled the full extent of his strikingly original approach on *Tales Of Captain Black*, a scorching album from 1978 with Ornette Coleman on alto sax, his son Denardo Coleman on drums, and bass guitarist Jamaaladeen Tacuma. Blood had developed an open tuning for his instrument, in which he used its lowest string essentially as a drone.

The resulting sound was primal, something like the bold, blunt guitars on early Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf records. Ulmer's background, however, was in gospel music. The blues were strictly verboten by his religious family. Of course, the two forms are not so distant, representing the Saturday night and Sunday morning of African American vernacular song, and listeners have long claimed to hear the blues or its rural folk roots in Ulmer's sound. Yet the guitarist—who the night before the interview had played a tribute to Robert Johnson at a benefit for the Blues Foundation at the Apollo Theater—said that wasn't so: "I waited till 2000 to really try to play the blues. Vernon Reid got me into it."

Guitarist Reid had been on the bill of that Johnson tribute with his band Living Colour, along with Taj Mahal, Keb Mo, Bettye LaVette, Shemekia Copeland, Todd Rundgren and Otis Taylor. "I learned so much playing in this blues thing," Ulmer mused. "Everybody was playing Robert Johnson style. Trying to. It's hard. I think Robert Johnson was the first true harmolodic blues guitar player. But I wasn't looking to sound like him on guitar. I was just singing his story. I played it *my* style."

In truth, Ulmer's embrace of the blues pre-dates 2000. He recorded *Forbidden Blues* for the Japanese DIW label in 1996; he cut *Blue Blood* with bassist Bill Laswell in 2000. Both albums spotlighted his original tunes. On *Memphis*

Ulmer (left) plays guitar while Murray conducts at The Iridium



Blood: The Sun Sessions, produced in 2001 by Reid (who played second lead guitar), Ulmer switched to covering songs by Waters, Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Willie Dixon and Son House. The repertoire was a perfect fit. Ulmer and Reid followed up with *No Escape From The Blues: The Electric Lady Sessions* and *Bad Blood In The City: The Piety Street Sessions*, which included some songs—Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues," for one—that Murray has reconfigured for Blood

to sing in front of the Blues Big Band.

Murray first thought of putting Ulmer up to that task after seeing a video of George Benson with the Count Basie Orchestra. "Benson came on and played his guitar for a couple of numbers," he recalled, "then walked off and the band did a number. Then he came back and just sang with the band. It was out-of-sight. And I thought, 'I'd like to do that with someone in my generation now, and Blood is the perfect cat.'"



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Murray blowing saxophone with the 17-member big band

The blues singer/big band format reaches back at least as far as 1926, when Bessie Smith cut “Gin House Blues” with Fletcher Henderson’s Orchestra. Basic’s band famously featured blues singers, including Jimmy Rushing, Big Joe Turner and Joe Williams. None of them, however, played guitar. Nor has a Murray big band, of which there’ve been several iterations, ever before had a singer or focused on the blues genre.

Murray’s collaborations with Ulmer typically have been akin to free-funk, hard-driving but with little attention to conventional chord progressions. “I’ve played with Blood in many situations,” the saxophonist said, “but I’ve always wanted to build a big band around him. This was our chance.”

This chance arose as Murray has turned increasingly to writing and arranging during the past year, most notably the 19 parts for strings, brass and rhythm on the 2011 album *David Murray Cuban Ensemble Plays Nat King Cole En Español* (Motéma). “I’ve kinda flipped into being a music director now,” he said. “I’m writing for Macy Gray.” Indeed, the David Murray Blues Orchestra tours with Gray this summer and fall, starting in Finland and ending in Turkey. He’s on the r&b/soul singer’s new album, *Covered* (429 Records), and Gray told the New York Times, “Whenever I do horns now, I’m going to send them his way.” Murray also has recently scored an Afro-beat project for Tony Allen, a drummer who played with Fela Kuti; Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson’s Afro-Picks revue; and a Detroit Motor City Remix with Amp Fiddler. The latter two projects took place in Paris, where Murray resides. “All this stuff writing for horns seems to have come to me,” he said, feigning surprise, “from weird situations I

wouldn’t have expected.”

It’s inevitable that Murray would get these calls, since at age 57 he has become an acknowledged champion of the jazz sax legacy, able to address its lineage from Ben Webster to Albert Ayler and beyond. Hailed early in his career for launching an avant-gutbucket movement, Murray has now demonstrated his mastery of tenor sax and bass clarinet in solo, duo, trio, quartet, quintet, octet and big band formations of his own design. In 1991 he won Denmark’s Jazzpar Prize and recorded with Pierre Dørge’s New Jungle Orchestra; he’s made five albums with the Gwo-Ka Masters hand-drummers; and he’s a mainstay of the World Saxophone Quartet, penning charts for himself with James Carter, Oliver Lake and Hamiet Bluiett.

Give Murray a challenge and he delivers. Leave him alone and he challenges himself. Melding the blues’ eternal three-chord progression and harmolodics’ implicit embrace of a limitless vocabulary may be his most daring feat yet.

“The whole idea of harmolodic music is to allow you total freedom,” Murray said. “It allows you to play in other people’s harmonics—that’s the beauty of it. As a player, once you understand it, you become completely free. That’s an objective for me in playing with Blood—to become totally free. I couldn’t do that before.”

Murray’s saxophone solos are recognized for raging unhampered from the horn’s honking bottom to shrill overblown effects. But isn’t it hard to free up the blues’ rhythmic DNA, its fundamental 4/4 backbeat?

“Well,” Murray replied, “with this band, our aggregation, we’re not trying to take it *really* far out, because the harmonies are so far out already. We play a lot of meter, yes, a lot of shuffles. With

a big band, to change meter or delete meter under a singer—you’re asking for trouble. There are little moments where we do that, but I can’t base a whole hour program on that. You might hear five minutes of us sliding around, but we need to hold it together.

“Blood and I both have done stuff so far out you can’t even guess where the one [downbeat] might be. And that’s great. But when you’ve got 17 people on the stage, somebody needs to know where that thing is.”

The 15 somebodies in Murray’s big band at The Iridium all knew, thanks in part to the stability and flexibility of a rhythm team comprising the leader’s faithful bassist Jaribu Shahid, drummer Chris Beck and pianist Steve Colson. Though usually identified as a member of the experimental Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), Colson has worked with Murray off and on since ’85. He didn’t find the blues-harmolodics hybrid to be a stretch at all.

“I’ve been playing blues quite a while,” the pianist stated. “Muhai [Richard Abrams, frequent conductor of the AACM Experimental Band] would go from era to era and often get into some romping blues mixed with more avant-garde type stuff. This is a more stable projection, because Blood is such a blues guy. But still, the Ornette thing is in it. So it’s kind of crazy but a lot of fun.”

Trumpeter Shareef Clayton, whose solos with the Blues Big Band demonstrated deep understanding of the use of mutes, agreed. “It’s always fun to solo with a big band,” he said. “I play in David’s Cuban Ensemble, too, and in his big band where we do his own compositions. You have to watch David closely, though—if

you miss a hit that he's conducted, he definitely doesn't like it."

Clayton has worked with Stevie Wonder, The Roots and Bobby Sanabria's big band, among others, and from that vantage point was impressed with Ulmer's power. "I pick up mainly on his singing; that's what I try to emulate, although he's singing through his guitar playing, too," Clayton said. "The little things he does, the details—not necessarily the notes he plays, but his emphasis, how he feels it, how he lays back on certain things—that's what makes people get into it more. Details distinguish one musician from the next. I mean, anybody can get up to sing the blues, but can you *really* sing it?"

The band member most impressed with Ulmer may be Mingus Murray, David's son. His image as a toddler may be familiar to devotees from the cover of the saxophonist's 1991 octet album *Hope Scope*, but now Mingus is a 23-year-old guitarist and visual artist who has released his own album, *Mingus*. He has been playing with his father for three years, having taken lessons from some of David's colleagues, such as Kelyvn Bell and Ulmer, whom he called "a big inspiration."

"He's one of the guys who's leading the way for guitar players," Mingus said. "After Jimi Hendrix, it's him. I wouldn't say he's experimental—he's just interesting. He's thought out what he does." So has Mingus, whose rhythm chords added to the Blues Big Band's James Brown-like groove, never obscured anything, always meshed with and supported Blood.

Ulmer was appreciative of Mingus, too. "He's a young harmolodic soldier," said the older guitarist. "That's what I call them, 'harmolodic soldiers,' all the brothers who've rebelled against Western European music and have tried to transform their instruments into other sounds than the way they were given. Believe me, this is happening. Cats come up to me and say, 'Blood, I want to be a harmolodic soldier.' I tell them, 'You *are* a harmolodic soldier!'"

Which makes David Murray a senior officer, if not a general, of a harmolodic army, though he seemed sensitive to scaring off potential audiences of his Blues Big Band (a.k.a. "Blues Orchestra") with that description.

"What I'm trying to concentrate on here is the blues aspect," Murray noted before stepping onstage for a rehearsal, "what actually brings the music more inside than what I usually do. It sounds 'out there,' anyway. But I had to go back to school in terms of the blues to do this project. I think we've come up with something that people who appreciate both my and Blood's musics can enjoy, together, plus maybe bring some new people in, too. Some people who don't like the blues might like what we're doing, and people who don't like jazz might like what we're doing. It's not a matter of selling out—it's a matter of making music people might like. Including myself."

With that, the avant-gutbucketeer went up to command his troop of irregulars through a quick review of their harmolodic-blues paces. **DB**

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THE DIRTY DOZEN BRASS BAND'S 35-YEAR PARADE



The Dirty Dozen Brass Band has a new album, *Twenty Dozen*, on Savoy Jazz.

By Frank-John Hadley | Photo by Michael Weintrob

Concerts by The Dirty Dozen Brass Band are peppered with shouts of encouragement from the musicians onstage: “Get up! Shake it! Put a *wiggle* in your walk!” This band knows everybody loves a parade, and they take their New Orleans street pageantry to dizzying extremes by giving revelers jolt after jolt of their patented funk-jazz. Over the course of 35 years, they have strutted and shuffled their way to status as a Crescent City music institution and established themselves as globetrotting ambassadors in the familial line of Louis Armstrong.

Founding members Roger Lewis and Kevin Harris (on saxophones), Gregory Davis and Efrem Towns (on trumpets and flugelhorn) and Kirk Joseph (on sousaphone) never flag in their high regard for the tradition of brass bands in New Orleans. They always find room for classic second line numbers in their repertoire and sometimes can be found in happy-sad funeral processions back home. But from their very start in 1977, the Dirty Dozen has taken a left turn away from brass band conventionalism—stiff oompah rhythms, for starters—and flaunted their delight over modern jazz and Big Easy r&b. Today, with drummer Terence Higgins (a master of clave rhythm who joined in 1996) and young new keyboardist Kyle Roussel rounding out the group, its hyper-animated parade music manages to maintain an air of fresh discovery.

The Dirty Dozen’s recent visit to the Paradise Rock Club in Boston, part of a long Stateside tour interrupted by a festival date in Japan, was typically riotous, with the formidable front line of Davis, Towns, Lewis and Calvin Johnson (filling in for Harris) proving their jazz bona fides with inside-outside solos, bebop unisons, riffing counter-melodies, old-time polyphony. Performing original tunes off their new album, *Twenty Dozen* (Savoy Jazz), along with time-tested favorites, they harnessed bravura technical flourishes just enough to keep the sonic mass of jubilation from spiraling out of control over an 85-minute set.

Rested up and all set for more road work, three Dirty Dozen stalwarts—plus Scott Billington, producer of their best records—sat down to talk about their 35 years together.

DownBeat: What’s the secret to this band’s longevity?

Roger Lewis: We don’t put ourselves in one particular musical box. My background is r&b—I was in Fats Domino’s band quite a few years, played gigs with Big Joe Turner and Bobby Bland—but when you grow up in New Orleans,

you got to play all different kinds of music. We play r&b, trad jazz, modern jazz, anything at any given time. Over the years we’ve recorded with Elvis Costello, Manhattan Transfer, Dizzy Gillespie, Branford Marsalis, the Black Crowes, Widespread Panic, Chuck D, BeauSoleil, even Dr. John and the great Eddie Bo. We’re all over the place.

Gregory Davis: We’ve always had an influx of younger musicians coming into the band—keeping youth involved and really listening to the music that’s out now and continuing to adapt to what’s there. I’m proud of relating to audiences. Even if we had the same audience we started out with 1977, that audience is 35 years older and as long as people live, the more changes they go through. But we’ve been able to consistently identify a new audience. We’ve done shows and tours with rock bands, jazz bands and r&b bands—we’ve always been able to reach people in those audiences.

We just did a show with Trombone Shorty. We’re with the same booking agency. We were out on the road and Shorty was opening for us, so that meant most of the people that were coming to show were Dirty Dozen fans, and probably most of them were older than Shorty, who’s in his twenties. But now he’s really hot and our agency flipped the script, and we’ve done some shows where we opened for Shorty. So to look into the audience and see some people in their late teens and early twenties is really a gratifying situation.

Kevin Harris: There was one gig we recently did at the Iowa State Fair. There were people dancing out there. This one particular girl decided to push her mama off the stage, so all the other kids decided to push their parents off the stage, too. The next thing you know, we just got kids dancing to the music. Now in that audience, you had the kid, the mother of the kid, the father of the mother, and the father of that father—so you had four generations!

There are several different stories

about the origins of the band. The Hurricane and Tornado brass bands merged into the Original Sixth Ward Dirty Dozen Brass Band.

KH: [Trombonist] Charles Joseph was the one who recruited me. I was driving a tow truck. He kept coming around and coming around, so I finally started going to rehearsals. We rehearsed for like two years before the Dirty Dozen first walked out and played anywhere.

RL: Charles introduced me to Kevin. Kevin played tenor. I said to myself, We don’t need no band with two tenor players. I’ll play baritone, like I was with Fats Domino. It was probably a good thing because it gave the band a unique sound. They didn’t use baritones in brass bands. The baritone don’t just function as a background instrument because it also functions as a lead instrument. Sometimes the baritone player plays what the trumpet player should be playing. It’s a free agent.

Gregory, is the trumpet another free agent?

GD: It depends. Most of the time the trumpet is viewed as the lead or melody instrument, depending on the song and what’s necessary at the time. You just have to be able to adapt and provide what’s needed—listen to a song, listen to an arrangement, figure out where you belong, find your proper place.

What was the original musical concept for the band?

RL: When we first started out playing—a lot of people don’t realize this—we played traditional New Orleans music, the marches like Paul Barbarin’s “Bugle Boy March” and hymns like “I’ll Fly Away.” But what we did was [this]: Everybody had an opportunity to play whatever kind of music they wanted to play. Period. If you want to play a Michael Jackson song, all right, we’ll learn some Michael Jackson. I say, why don’t we play “Blue Monk” because I like “Blue

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Monk," so we played it in the second line and people were dancing off "Blue Monk." The same for "Bongo Beep," a Charlie Parker tune. We started putting all these contemporary songs in, mixing it in with the traditional music of New Orleans, and the people *looved* it!

KH: The truth of the matter is that we wanted to play the kind of music we wanted to play. We wanted to play the avant-garde jazz because we were listening to Dizzy, Bird, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, even Weather Report's "Birdland." That was the basic understanding.

Not everyone approved.

KH: The established traditional jazz guys didn't want to hear nothin' but New Orleans music on the streets, but after the first parade the people dictated what was played so that's how that went [laughs].

RL: Our music was keeping the tradition *aaaalive!* Not only that but we started playing original music. I remember one Mardi Gras Day we was playing for the marching club way uptown—you know, the marching club before the parade starts. It was like 7 o'clock in the morning as we started playing "Reveille," what they usually played on the bugle when waking up the troops, right? We marched around the street playing that and then someone started playing "The Flintstones" TV theme. We got "Reveille" and "The Flintstones" going on, then we added "The Star-Spangled Banner" [laughs]. All three of those things happening, right? We just kept that up all day!

The band had its first performances at a downtown place called Daryl's. But it was your Monday night gigs at the Glasshouse that brought you wide recognition, right?

RL: Yeah, that was *the* spot. We used to put chairs in front of us as a partition because we played on the floor and the dancers would bump into us. One night we was there playing, and I looked out in the audience—if you put 25 people in there you got a packed house, and that night we must have stuffed about 75 in there—and I said, Wait a minute, that's Dizzy Gillespie and Bernard Purdie sitting at that front table! It can't be; I must be trippin' [because] I had too much of whatever. Then I looked over at the bar. It's Fats Domino over there! Man, this can't be happening! I looked at the back of the room and there was Manhattan Transfer!

Kevin, you've encountered scores of musicians from various musical camps over the decades. Is there one individual who stands apart from all the rest?

KH: Danny Barker. He was the one who influenced so many young musicians in and around New Orleans. He started the Fairview Baptist Church Band. I was in the first one he started [in 1972]. He influenced me, and Efreem was in the next band after me, with countless other musicians. Danny did a lot for revitalizing the brass band thing, getting it started back up again because there weren't too many people in it when we started. We were the youngest ones at that time.

The Olympia Brass Band was a pretty good influence also. Everybody wanted to play like Olympia—and that was the premier group for as long back as before I was born. We're from a different generation, and after us, the Rebirth Brass Band's from a different generation, and after that, Trombone Shorty's from *another* generation. He used to walk with us when he wasn't as tall as his trombone. The tradition goes back a long way.

The band's played thousands of times all over the world. Is there a one performance that stands out?

KH: In 1984, we hooked up with Dizzy Gillespie in Nice, France. That was incredible because on that show too was the Texas Tenors [including Illinois Jacquet and Buddy Tate], J.J. Johnson, Al Grey, Jimmy Woods, Clark Terry, all these people we idolized. Here we come, a jazz band from New Orleans, in Europe for the first time, and we go on after the Tenors. The crowd went berserk. We hit them with some traditional stuff that was great, but then we threw avant-garde jazz on them, like Bird's "Bongo Beat" and "Moose The Mooche." The crowd just couldn't believe a jazz band from New Orleans with a different flavor to it that they shake their butt to—that took it to another level. At the end of the set, these people we idolized

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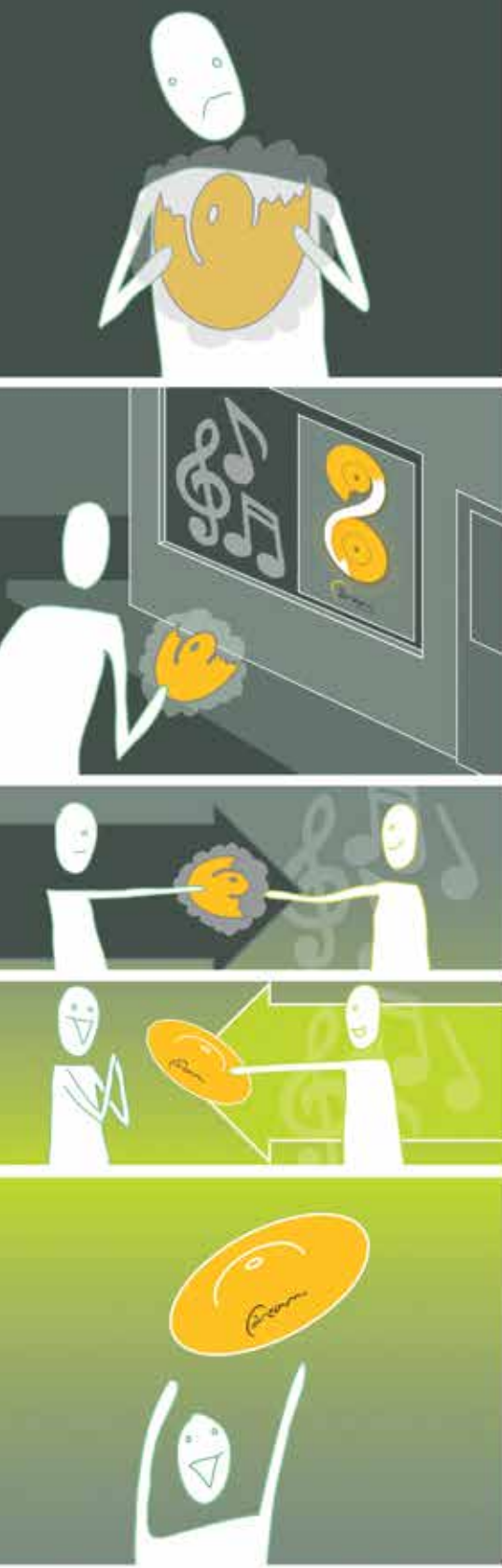
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Kirk Joseph (left) and Kevin Harris, 2010 New Orleans Jazz Festival



Roger Lewis at Tipitina's, 2006



for all of our short lives at that point were congratulating us on making the next step. Even Diz said, "Man, you all doing a good thing!" I'm talking about within the first five years of the band. Later, one of the memorable things was to hear Miles Davis in Washington, D.C.—James Brown was there, too—and Miles actually walked into the dressing room and looked at us and said, [*imitating Davis' distinctive voice*] "You guys are all right." Then he walked out [*laughs*].

RL: The highlight for me was when we played a concert with the Blind Boys of Alabama [in late 2002 at the Keswick Theatre in Glenside, Pa.]. All the years I've been playing with the Dirty Dozen, all the gigs usually are good, but this gig was exceptionally good. It was like everybody was on the same page. This one was so *spiritual*. There was so much *feeling*.

What effect did Hurricane Katrina have on the band?

GD: We had to deal with the same human things that everyone else had to deal with: the flooding of your home and property, the displacement of your family and friends. But because we were touring all the time, anyway, Katrina really didn't have much of an impact on the band. Instead of being able to say, OK, the tour bus is going to be at spot A in New Orleans, so have your family let you off, now we had to fly to the bus because we were all located in different cities. I was in Houston, Roger was in Vicksburg, Kevin was in Baton Rouge, and so on.

Has it been hard to keep everyone friendly with each other for so many years?

GD: It's like a marriage: Sometimes it works best to solve problems by knowing when to get away, knowing when to shut up, and knowing when to say it. We've gone through all of those emotions. Once in a while we've gone through some brutal arguments about different things, and after you have one of those, you still got to get out and play the show. Sometimes we've had some of the best shows right after a big knock-down, drag-out argument and fight. But everyone's professional enough to put that aside and

go out and do the show and then board the tour bus or plane and hopefully resolve the differences. You hope you do settle things most of the time and sometimes you don't, but you got to go on for the sake of the marriage.

The new album reunites you with Scott Billington, who produced five of your albums in the 1980s and early '90s.

GD: We've always loved and respected Scott as a human being, but especially the work he had done, not only with the Dirty Dozen but with a lot of other groups. We needed a neutral, honest voice to say, "This song doesn't work," or "Add this, take that out." You've got to have somebody who's knowledgeable and honest to say what they think works and what doesn't work. You don't want to have some celebrity producer pat you on the back and go, "That's great," when it really might not be. Scott tells it like it is.

Scott, what's your take on the making of *Twenty Dozen*?

SB: It was like coming home again. I'm always about trying to capture as much as possible live in the studio, especially with a band that plays together all the time. You can feel the difference. We may go back to work on solos, or to fine-tune an ensemble part, but the feeling has to be there before we have a take. At the Music Shed in New Orleans, we had separate glass-fronted rooms for the sousaphone, drums and guitar amp, so there were good sight lines for everyone. The trick is to get the arrangements tight enough that everyone can forget about them when we're finally going for it.

How has the band changed?

SB: The parade drums—separate bass and snare drum players—have been replaced by a standard drum kit. It allows the band to take a step away from the marching-style second line sound, and to expand the scope of what they can play, especially with a drummer like Terence Higgins. He was on it every take. There's also a guitar on this record. Jake Eckert's parts contribute mightily to the Afro-Caribbean feel of



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many of the songs. The band stepped up with very strong compositions. The writing is stronger than ever. Without songs this good, no matter how good the band plays, you don't have a record. Overall, the band has become more of an über-funk jazz band, while retaining every bit of the New Orleans soul and grit that set them apart.

It's been more than a decade since you've loaded an album with material from within the band.

GD: Well, on this record we have original contributions from all of us that were in the original band, and Terence has a contribution, too. So being able to contribute stuff from all of the guys is satisfying because it lets us know that everybody has something to say. We don't necessarily have the same ideas or listen to the same types of music, which has always been good for the band. We put it all together just like a real good pot of gumbo. You have some shrimp in it, some crab, some people put okra in it, some people like it with rice, some people like it without rice. It has its own flavor, which can always get better.

Your song "Get Up" is a crowd-pleaser.

GD: It was inspired by music that I had been listening to by singer Deniece Williams, who was produced by Earth, Wind & Fire. She has a song on one of her records that had a % feel to it. So I thought I would experiment with $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{5}{8}$, and at the same time I was listening to a lot of Lee Morgan and Charles Mingus. Then one day while I was on the tour bus, I came up with the opening melody. I played around with it, and two days before we recorded it, it came out right.

Kevin, your contribution is "Best Of All."

KH: It takes on a whole new experience. It has a Brazilian kind of beat. We've had a couple of different drummers in the band, but Terence is the only one who can produce the Brazilian beat. It came off great.

I must commend one of the members of the band—Efrem Towns. He has never written a tune in all the years [laughs]. His tune "Tomorrow" is excellent. It's some of the best stuff coming out of a jazz player, and it has a lot of promise. I say to him, "You've been writing 30 years." He says [imitating Towns' speaking voice], "You got to get it right. You can't just put anything out there. It took 30 years—so what!" [laughs] That makes everybody a writer now.

Do you have another 35 years in you?


RL: I'm 70 years old, and it's time to mellow out a little bit. I'm on the verge of beginning to really play the saxophone. I'm still working on it. I'm getting close, though. I'm thinking it'll be another five or six years, if God spares my life, to really play that thing. I guess that's my future; something to look forward to is waking up one day and really playing my ass off [laughs]. You have to keep it real, you know.

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KEN VANDERMARK

Defeating Expectations

By Alain Drouot Photo by Mark Sheldon

Ken Vandermark is a perpetually inquisitive musician. “With improvised music, how can you be spontaneous if you’re generating all the material?” he asks. “That paradox has always messed with my head.”

The Chicago-based saxophonist and clarinetist has displayed a rare dedication in his quests to solve questions related to composition, improvisation and ways to present his music. Disciplined and outspoken, he has ruffled a few feathers along the way.

Vandermark, who was born in Warwick, R.I., earned a bachelor’s degree in film and communications from Montreal’s McGill University. After working as a musician in Boston in the mid-’80s, he moved to Chicago in 1989. Three years later, his life could have taken a totally different course, but circumstances started to shift. A group of players around the same age, who shared similar artistic interests, joined forces to develop a thriving scene for improvised music in Chicago. Vandermark can be credited for bringing cutting-edge jazz to rock clubs and to a younger audience in search of something different, most notably with the series he curated with John Corbett at the Empty Bottle in the Ukrainian Village neighborhood.

The city that saw him blossom into an international star acknowledged his contributions by inviting him to be the artist-in-residence at the 2012 Chicago Jazz Festival. The lineup for the free fest, which runs Aug. 30–Sept. 2, includes Ambrose Akinmusire, Steve Coleman, Jerry Gonzalez, Roy Haynes, Dianne Reeves and Allen Toussaint with Don Byron and Marc Ribot. Vandermark will play in a variety of configurations, including a duo performance with drummer Paal Nilssen-Love and a

set by his quartet Made To Break. Vandermark also will premiere a commissioned composition with The Resonance Ensemble.

In the past, Vandermark’s good fortunes have been mixed blessings. When he received a 1999 MacArthur Foundation grant at age 35, controversy ensued in certain corners of the jazz community. Detractors accused Daniel Kraus’ 2007 documentary *Musician*—which used Vandermark as its subject and accurately depicted his day-to-day activities—of giving the wrong representation of the lifestyle of most jazz musicians.

Vandermark’s intense focus on his music has helped him weather this type of criticism. And it should be noted just how much hard work it took for him to achieve his current status. Nowadays, he keeps a positive outlook and relishes new challenges. He believes, for instance, that great opportunities are available because of the unprecedented access to recorded history that musicians currently enjoy. If the pitfall of duplication is eschewed, he sees the possibility to create new shapes and forms through the investigation of musical aspects that have never been fully developed or exploited before.

Last year, he retired The Vandermark 5, one of his earlier and best-known groups, in order to force a reassessment of his music. Indeed, over the years Vandermark has undertaken a slew of musical endeavors in parallel to this quintet. A quick look at his extensive discography and the fact that Vandermark himself

struggles when asked about his latest releases attest to the range of his work. Recent releases include the solo recording *Mark In The Water* (NotTwo), Platform 1’s debut album *Takes Off* (Clean Feed), The Resonance Ensemble’s *What Country Is This?* (NotTwo) and *Cement* (PNL) by Double Tandem. New recordings by Made To Break, Topology II and Lean Left, as well as a DKV Trio box set, are slated for the fall.

During an appearance at Milwaukee’s Palm Tavern as part of Okka Fest, Vandermark adopted funky modes on the tenor, went pastoral on the clarinet and swung hard on the baritone. After the gig, he paused to reflect on some key moments in his career, the life of a touring musician and his wide-ranging artistic pursuits.

DownBeat: Did you move to Chicago to find a better outlet for your music?

Ken Vandermark: No. I felt I had an understanding of the situation in Boston. The reason for moving was not just musical; it was also personal. I felt that I needed to leave and try something else. I knew I could always go back because there were musicians I was playing with there. So, I did not have a vision of what was going to happen.

Is it true that after moving to Chicago you reached a point where you considered quitting the business?

Well, not quitting the business, but going back to Boston. I moved to Chicago in



Ken Vandermark at Abrons Arts Center, New York City, June 8, 2011

September of 1989. The first couple of years, I tried to find musicians to play with and it didn't work out. I am not a schooled player. I am more or less self-taught, and a lot of people I was encountering did not like the way I was working. Then in January of 1992, [bassist] Kent Kessler called me because he was putting a group together with [percussionist] Michael Zerang. I did a few gigs with them. But even then, I was really going to move back to Boston because people I knew there, like [drummer] Curt Newton, were still playing music, and I could get more done with them. Michael Zerang convinced me to stay. He asked me to give it a year because we had just started this band. Also, at that time, I met one of my idols, Anthony Braxton, during a master class in Champaign-Urbana [in central Illinois]. My wife, Ellen Major, recommended I bring a cassette. He listened to about 15 minutes of music and was very complimentary. That was a huge moment for me. This and Michael asking me to stay were the two key factors that helped me regain my confidence. I owe Michael and Braxton a lot.

You became a MacArthur Fellow in 1999. How did this grant help further your career?

It gave me economic freedom for five years. I was able to put together the Territory Band—bringing musicians from Europe to play with Chicago players. The money helped me organize a North America tour for the Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet; it subsidized subsequent tours by The Vandermark 5 or School Days. My hope was that the funds would give the music some traction in North America, which was naive in retrospect. The biggest problem the music faces today is time and money. We very rarely get any time to rehearse. We are putting out a huge amount of music with a little budget.

The MacArthur [grant] did not alter the working methods but the possibilities of the working methods. Doing that, it taught me a lot about writing for large groups and touring. It was really hard, but being the tour manager for the Chicago Tentet was a priceless experience that not a lot of people get to do. That's part of my DNA now. The things I learned then affect everything I do now.

You're going to be the artist-in-residence at the upcoming Chicago Jazz Festival. Do you think you have always received proper recognition in Chicago?

I was very surprised when [the festival programmers] got in touch with me. But I have received tons of acknowledgments for my work in Chicago and internationally. A lot of people use the city to define me. Jazz institutions in Chicago are not interested in me because I work outside those frameworks. ... In the United States, creative artists can't rely on subsidies, and I'm not interested in the amount of compromises you have to make to get financial

support. I've always been trying to find self-sustainable situations outside of institutions and grants. Ironically, I got the MacArthur, but I never knew I was in the running for it.

Is there a parallel between the Chicago Tentet, which you have been a member of, and your own project Resonance? These are two bands that have about the same size/instrumentation and include musicians from various geographical areas.

I can see your point, but it was never really thought out that way. With the Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet, especially in the second phase, the music has been improvised, but I have always had an interest in writing music. With Resonance, the organization of the group is the result of a collaboration with [NotTwo label head] Marek Winiarski. After going to Krakow many times, I wanted a project with musicians from that area. Marek also suggested [trombonist] Steve Swell, whom I had never worked with before. A big part of it, too, was to acknowledge the importance of Michael Zerang's playing. I had only played with him in the Tentet and the Vandermark Quartet, which was a tipping point in terms of defining the music I wanted to play. I also needed people in the band who understood what I wanted to do musically and who I was familiar with, especially having people from Ukraine or Poland I had never played with. So, the band was based on different principles than the Tentet, and the music is also radically different because of the way I organize it. There are parallels, but they're more like coincidences.

You have two piano trios. Free Fall does not have drums, and Side A has no bass. Would you be interested in a project with a complete rhythm section?

I don't really think in those terms. Personnel is a big factor in those decisions rather than instrumentation. [Pianist] Håvard Wiik and I didn't want to do a conventional jazz quartet; we thought in terms of players we wanted to work with. One of the big issues for me and other musicians I work with is to have our music defined for what it is and not put in a box before you even play the first note. Our goal is to defeat expectations and to liberate the situation.

Why did you decide to discontinue The Vandermark 5?

It was a very difficult decision. I got very frustrated at a certain point in trying to get listeners and journalists in the United States interested in my many other projects. An important reason for my decision was for people to understand that my other projects are just as important as that group in shaping my ideas as well as my improvisational and compositional approach.

Could you talk about the collaborative re-

lationship you have developed with Paal Nilssen-Love?

Paal is in a lot of key groups for me. Through the creative aspect of playing, being on the road together and dealing with the challenge of trying to remain creative while on tour, [our] relationship has become extremely close. I trust him very much as a friend and as a musician, which is fundamental for the type of music we're playing. My work with the duo probably shows more development of my personal playing than anything else I've done. What I discover outside our relationship I bring back to the duo, and I believe it is also true for Paal. It is the most basic unit possible for a saxophone player. You've got melody and rhythm, time and sound.

Is there any type of music you've been listening to recently that is influencing your work?

The work that some members of The Ex have been doing with Ethiopian musicians has had a really big impact on me. The way Ethiopian music works has opened up a lot of ideas for me rhythmically, melodically and structurally. The phrasing and the rhythms are truly amazing. Also, in the last few years, my interest in working with electronics has had more impact, too. I like to work in electro-acoustic groups primarily because it pushes the sound palette for me. I am really passionate about extending the sonic capabilities and possibilities on the horns. The way musicians like Christof Kurzmann or Lasse Marhaug think is very different. I think that I found a better balance between working with music I am composing and projects with just open improvised situations. This balance is very important because those two things inform each other.

How have the challenges of a solo performance evolved for you?

Pretty dramatically. Solo is the hardest format. There is nothing worse than being alone on stage with nothing to play. In the early days, my focus was to come up with a system to organize the playing and not copy what had already been done. I was fascinated by Braxton's ideas about discovering these language types. I went through my own clumsy process of trying to find ways to do this. At some point, I used notated material but visualized constructions. It worked for a while, but once I figured out how to do it, I got bored with it. Then, I started writing specific pieces for solo reed, and half of it was completely improvised. Following that period I considered going the route of [trombonist] Paul Rutherford and just get on stage and play. The way he dealt with improvisation was radical. You had the feeling he was getting on stage and that's what he was going to discover at that time. So, I made the decision to play without any guidelines or anything to lean on. What I found is that the room becomes the other: the deadness or live-ness of the room, the way sound kicks.

Do you have a favorite reed instrument among the four you play? Does your preference change?

It changes from night to night. Maybe 10 years ago, I did a gig with only one horn, and that's when I realized I was a multi-instrumentalist because I really missed the other ones. For instance, I was hearing something for the clarinet and it wasn't there. Each horn is its own universe. I am not a virtuoso, and I try to discover what I can with each of the horns. But the basis is the tenor. Probably because it's the one I've played the longest but also because my fundamental stance comes from the tenor. And I compose 80 percent of the time with the tenor.

You have the habit of dedicating your pieces, and you have sometimes been chastised about it. How do you proceed with the dedications?

There is a big misunderstanding about the dedications, and I can see why. Especially when I dedicate a piece to another musician, people think there might be a correlation between the piece and the individual's music. But all the dedications are really thank-you notes. Extremely rarely is there a correlation between the piece itself and the nature of the work of somebody else. They are not portraits but acknowledgments of people who had a big impact on me. And the dedications come after the work is done or even recorded. Also, it might encourage people who are following my music to check out those people's works.

How do you deal with your grueling schedule, one day in London, the next in Geneva, and then bound for Barcelona? How does it affect the quality of your performances?

The situation with touring is very problematic. Since I started touring heavily about 10 years ago, there's been an erosion of possibilities. You used to be able to go to Europe for a few weeks and tour in one country. In recent years, it has become difficult to play a city more than once. When you do one-nighters, the only people who know what's happening with the music are the band, not the audience. And now, the one-nighters are country to country. You can't sustain that; it's brutal. And you have to deal with the fact that the audience expects you to perform at your best because it is your job and responsibility. The adrenaline rush that you get is what makes it possible every night. Like with athletes, it's the psychology of reaching for the highest level. Also, what helps me is that I've learned how to sleep standing up or anywhere.

How have things changed in Europe since you started going there?

Without Europe, I wouldn't be able to survive as a musician. The big change in Europe is about subsidies. The Netherlands and Sweden used to be artistic utopia from an American standpoint. Now they are using the American

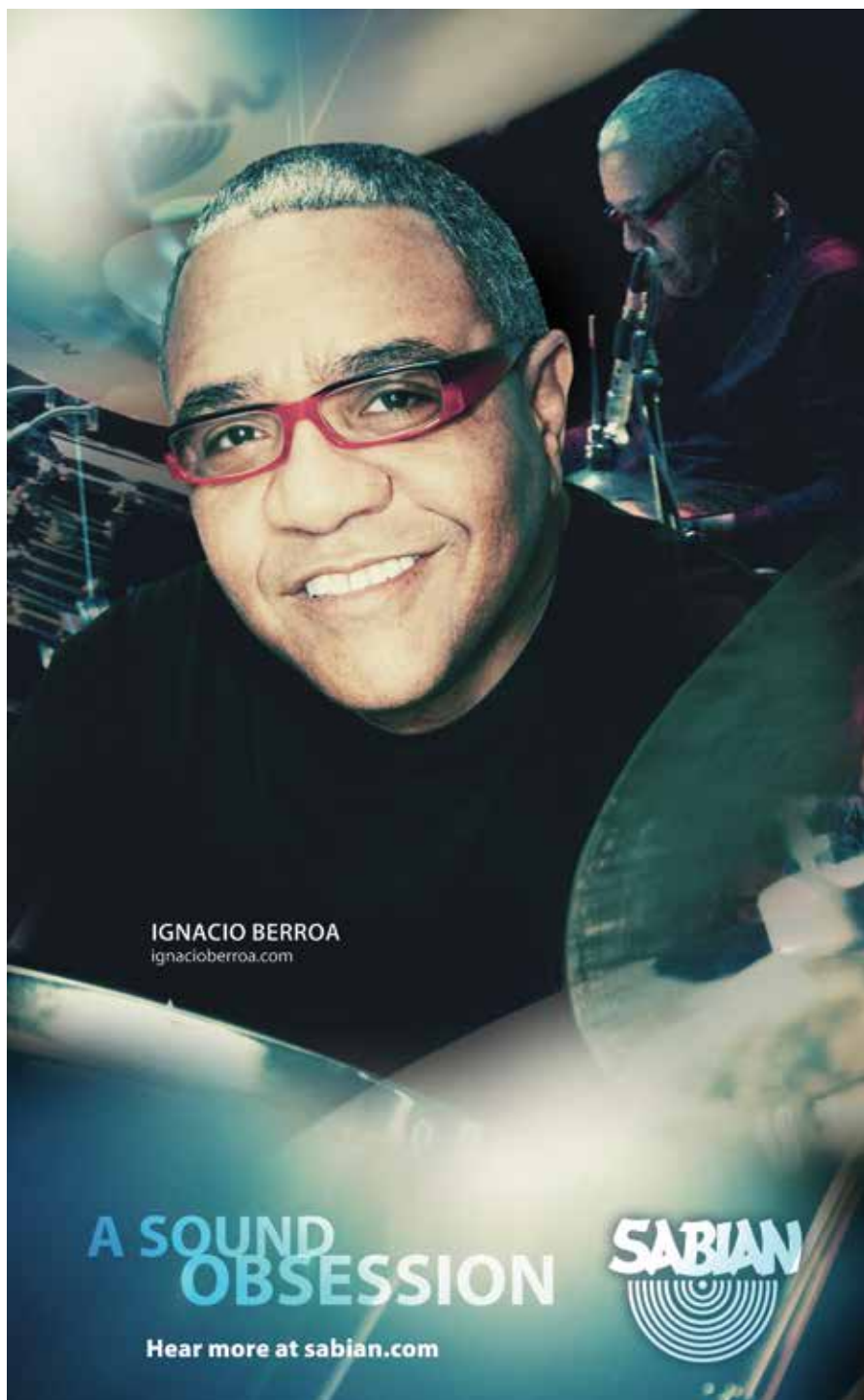
economic model. I don't know why. In a way, that might be good because how many people show up in a room might become a major factor for presenters who no longer can rely on a subsidized system.

You've been using social media outlets. What is your take on them? Can they help the music?

I don't spend much time on Facebook, and I use Twitter for updates. It's well known that I have issues with the media, and systems like Facebook can help musicians express them-

selves. I use it to get information out on what is happening on a tour, to share my experiences and give my perspective on situations. I'd rather do that than spend energy trying to correct what the media say. I also know that people who follow my posts on Facebook are shocked to learn about what we are dealing with. And that's positive. Some musicians also get frustrated at [unauthorized] YouTube posts. But we can't fight it. Instead, we need to find a way to use it, because you cannot make an argument to a kid who can get anything for free on the Internet to pay for it.

DB





CHRIS GREENE Network Builder

By Ed Enright | Photo by Ozzie Ramsay

Chris Greene is serious about his art. But when it comes to promoting his quartet and drumming up support for new recordings and live shows, nothing is off the table.

Greene has shown that he can run an indie marketing campaign that hits harder and ranges wider than most jazz musicians ever dreamed possible. The tenor/soprano saxophonist and bandleader has embraced many of the promotional methods that have long been utilized by musicians in the pop and hip-hop communities but are often overlooked by jazz artists. By

spreading the word through social media outlets and harnessing the power of aggressive fundraising techniques, promotional giveaways, creative marketing tactics and innovative online distribution channels, the Chris Greene Quartet has developed a devoted fan base and solidified its reputation among important music presenters on the Chicago scene.

"We're just using the tools of the time," said Greene, who has been able to give his band's new CD, *A Group Effort* (Single Malt Recordings), a strong promotional push thanks in part to a successful fundraising campaign through Kickstarter. "It's always a daunting task to promote your own stuff, but the cool thing is there are so many ways to get the word out there."

Greene perpetually promotes his art. His tools? Enticing email blasts. Personal notifications via Facebook and Twitter. Homemade YouTube video trailers and testimonials that serve as commercials for the quartet's gigs and recordings. Creating a band logo and band merchandise. Offering VIP seating packages for special performances. Sharing free DVDs and bonus audio tracks with select customers. Increasing his online sales through websites like ArtistData.com and Bandcamp.com. This is just a partial list of the myriad yet inexpensive methods Greene uses to generate excitement about his band, connect with listeners and turn potential new followers into true believers. And when audiences show up and express their appreciation, he goes the extra mile to make

sure they keep coming back for more.

"I have this theory that when it comes to jazz musicians, we're 10 to 15 years behind your typical indie rock or hip-hop band," said Greene, a native of Evanston, Ill., who turns 40 this August. "They're doing things like giving songs away as free downloads, and they're diligent about maintaining their email lists. Or even shaking hands with people in the audience and thanking them for coming—something like that goes a long way, and that's the kind of thing we tend to drop the ball on because we're so into playing our music and being original. That's fine, but there's a way to build an audience doing this, too."

To illustrate his point, Greene recalls an epiphany he experienced after attending a show by the rap/funk/soul band Spearhead in the 1990s. "At the time, no one knew who Spearhead was, but [bandleader Michael Franti] gave everyone a four-song cassette after the show," Greene recalled. "He asked everyone to listen to it and share it with their friends, and said they'd be back at the venue in a month. And I thought, 'This dude is crazy. He's gonna go broke giving away all this music.' But I'll be damned—I was just [barely] able to get a ticket to go see that second show because it was packed, based on the strength of the buzz he built up with that simple cassette. So nowadays, you have streaming audio, not to mention the whole Radiohead thing where people pay what they want for music on various websites. Tools like that go a long way toward cultivating a relationship between a band and the people on the scene who are willing to follow you around from club to club."

It doesn't hurt that the Chris Greene Quartet's music is rich in content, as well as just downright fun. Soulful, funky and rhythmically layered, *A Group Effort* presents a highly interactive ensemble that's well-schooled in straight-ahead jazz yet has deep connections to more modern, popular genres. Recorded live last October at Chicago's intimate Mayne Stage theater, the album consists of six groove-heavy tracks (including five originals and a backbeat-heavy interpretation of Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa"), each of which lasts 10 minutes or more. Catchy melodies abound, textures change at the drop of hat and excitement levels intensify as each improvisation unfolds.

"The one overarching thing that I like about everybody in the quartet is that we are all ostensibly jazz musicians, but we came up listening to a variety of different things as kids of the '80s," said Greene, seated at a sidewalk café in his hometown. "We're addressing traditional elements, but at different angles. I grew up listening to early hip-hop and Prince and Public Enemy, and my parents were big soul fanatics. Marc Piane, our bass player, is really into Frank Zappa and music that has those textural shifts, much like that song 'Stat' on the new CD. Marc loves Ray Brown, Paul Chambers and guys who can swing, but on a dime he can turn around

and give you some great ostinatos, and that's what I need—a guy who can do both.

"Same thing with our drummer, Steve Corley," Greene continued. "He comes out of playing on Chicago's South Side gospel scene. He knows how to respond and build music up and bring it down to a whisper—great dynamics. And just like Marc, when it comes to laying down some funk, I can call up that feel and he's right there.

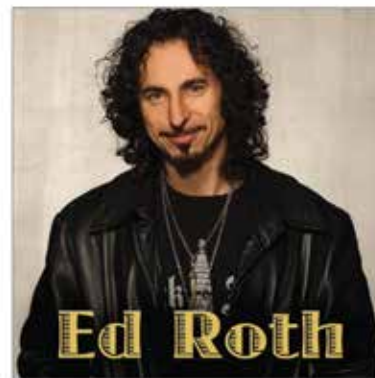
"Our pianist, Damian Espinosa, grew up listening to Rush and The Police, but he's also got a strong classical background and a ton of harmonic knowledge. He makes our songs sound hipper than they actually are and gets a lot of mileage out of his voicings."

Greene prides himself in leading a quartet whose members are locked-in regulars. Since its formation in 2007, the Chris Greene Quartet has undergone only one personnel change (when Corley was brought onboard last August). "I wanted to have a steady group of musicians, where if I handed a club owner a demo CD, at the very least, the guys you hear on the recording are going to be the same guys you see on the night of the gig," Greene said, noting that his bandmates often contribute compositions of their own to the set list. "That goes a long way toward building our sound and developing our repertoire, but also building a relationship with a club. They know there's going to be that consistency. It's not just me and three guys I can find; it's the four of us together onstage. I'm always loyal to them, and they're just as loyal to me."

The importance of consistency carries over into Greene's work ethic, too. "There are certain work habits that can make your life easier when it comes to building an audience or promoting a gig," he said. "It's our job, as much as any other thing, and the way I conduct myself as a business helps sustain a sense of professionalism. Sometimes that can be a drag, but if you combine it with Facebook and Twitter—which are, after all, social networks—you're able to inject some personality and humanity into the procedure. So you're not just a working machine; you actually look like somebody who's an interesting human being."

And it pays off. After putting so much work into the production and promotion of *A Group Effort*, Greene has learned just how much audience potential exists out there, waiting to be tapped. He says he was overwhelmed by how much money the Kickstarter campaign generated, far exceeding his goal of \$3,150. "I discovered that we've built up an incredible amount of good will over the years," he said. "There's a good market out there for us indie artists who are grinding away every day trying to push the music. As an independent jazz band, we can complain about how jazz is ignored, but the fact that people put up their hard-earned money in this economy to back what we're doing was really flattering. It's nice to know we've got a support system out there."

DB



Ed Roth

Sought-after arranger and keyboardist Ed Roth is breaking out on his own with a debut self-titled album, joined by many of his jazz contemporaries. The powerful album is packed with fresh songs, all containing a strong melody and groove.

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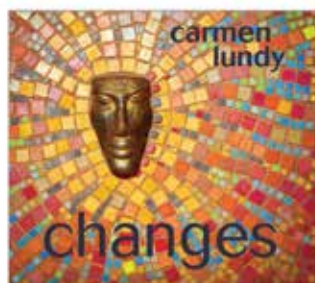
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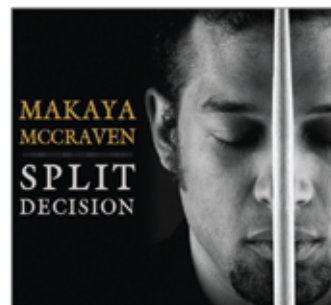


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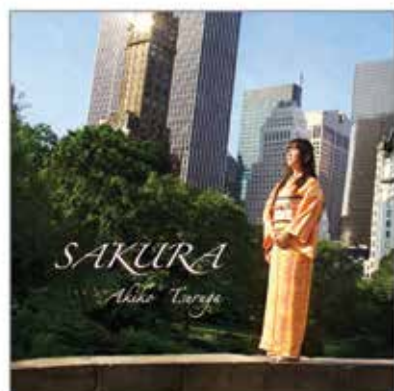
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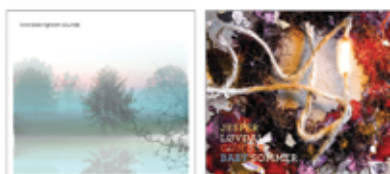
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BEN POWELL

Industrious Violinist

By Bob Gendron | Photo by Ryan MacDonald

Some guys are born lucky. And some guys combine good fortune with hard work to make things happen.

Ben Powell grew up in a household in which his mother taught Suzuki violin and his father worked as a cellist. A native of England, he began studying classical violin at the age of 2, started balancing classical and jazz violin techniques at 12 and learned the drums for fun. As a teenager, he played in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. There, his multidisciplinary approach drew the attention of guest conductor Keith Lockhart, who told him about Berklee College of Music. A scholarship

and a move to Boston followed. During his first week at the school, he supported legends such as Herbie Hancock and Paul Simon at one of the institute's anniversary concerts.

In spite of his good fortune, Powell—who straddles Hot Club jazz and classical music—doesn't lay claim to a silver spoon. Rather, the 25-year-old instrumentalist relies on his affable demeanor and savvy networking skills to make ends meet, forge personal connections and advance professional aims.

"Entering the world as a self-employed musician after being in a bubble as a student at a conservatory music school is really daunting," admits the extroverted Powell the morning after a gig at Chicago's legendary Green Mill. "The nice thing is that your friends are

probably doing the same thing as you. You're not the only one. I was lucky. I recorded my first proper CD during my last year at Berklee. I wanted to have something out so that I could send it to people and start to get the word out."

Powell's name continues to spread. The lyrical violinist's chamber-flavored album *New Street* contains four original compositions, as well as tracks that pay tribute to Stéphane Grappelli. Three songs on the self-released set feature vibraphonist/Berklee instructor Gary Burton and guitarist Julian Lage (a fellow Berklee alumnus). They appear on the stand-out track "Gary," which Grappelli penned for Burton shortly after the duo teamed up on 1969's *Paris Encounter*. When Lage introduced Powell to Burton, and the latter found out about

the protege's intent to honor Grappelli, history came full circle. Burton, more than four decades removed from receiving the composition, finally played "Gary" for the first time during the *New Street* sessions.

For Powell, this collaboration was the result of dogged self-promotion and a knack for anticipating hoped-for possibilities. He turned a Tanglewood Jazz Festival appearance into a springboard for wider recognition by paying someone to videotape the performance. Powell augmented the idea by shooting an EPK video.

"I was already thinking about how I could expose myself from that experience while performing at a level that I wanted to see myself doing more of," Powell says. "We can use those opportunities as leverage to get other things. You have to know how to work with what you've got in order to get more."

Powell cleverly employs technology to achieve such goals. "I can introduce myself to people who have 'met' me through promotion online," he says. "Every year, I meet more people on the Internet, and then meet them in person and end up playing with them. In the Hot Club/Django [Reinhardt] world, it's a small community. It's easy for me to contact them and get on their radar."

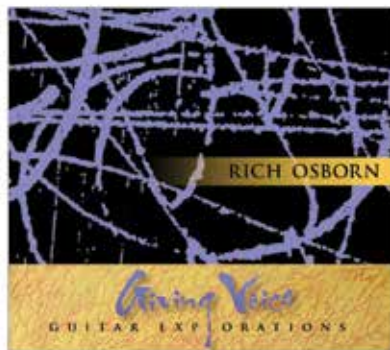
At home, the Boston resident supplements his income by teaching classical students about jazz and by playing weddings with the International String Trio. On the road, he limits expenses by crashing on friends' couches, and he reaches out to leaders in the local music community wherever he goes.

"Trips like this are important because I'm meeting people who will probably hire me to come back here—people who present festivals," he explains. "As much as I dial in on the Internet to get in touch with musicians around the world, I make even more effort to see how I can meet those people in person. The human element to any relationship remains in the memory more than any licks you play."

Indeed, word-of-mouth recommendations have landed Powell spots on other artists' CDs. These jobs help the classically trained instrumentalist pursue world and Hot Club music leads. Despite having only a handful of gigs lined up in advance, Powell recently completed a six-month stint in Paris. For the jazz violin devotee, eking out a living while playing with Gypsy musicians and seeing Grappelli's old apartment first-hand proved irresistible.

"There wasn't much money the first month," he recalls. "It was jump in and meet everybody you can meet. You play in front of anybody you can, and you just hope your music and playing does the talking for you. I got gigs at a restaurant here, a coffee shop there. I was in a wine cellar at 3 a.m. playing with people I could not communicate with linguistically, but could musically. That's a really powerful experience to have. I'll never forget it."

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Household Flourishes

A label founder reflects on his company's silver anniversary

By Josef Woodard

Now 25 years old, the independent label Household Ink Records qualifies as an accident that morphed into a tradition that refuses to die. Spawned as the “home” of the band Headless Household, the willfully diverse label traces its roots back to a natural alliance of oddball musicians, restlessly needing a collective expressive outlet in the beach-side tourist haven of Santa Barbara, Calif., in the fall of 1983.

The lineup included Dick Dunlap on keyboards, Tom Lackner on drums and percussion, Chris Symer on bass, and myself on guitar. Armed with an apparently endless fount of original compositions and concepts with dubious commercial potential, we decided a band branding was in order. As Headless Household—headless vis à vis both a democratic, leaderless ideal and an early avoidance of musical “heads” (an idea soon violated)—we culled various interests in free improvisation, sundry jazz inklings, ECM-ish lyricism, progressive-rock notions, hints of folk traditions and other inklings ill-suited to the pantheon of available, definable and salable musics of the day.

A few years into the adventure, we had a growing oeuvre that hadn't been documented and no likely prospects for a record deal. Around the same time, in my day-job mode as a music journalist, I was working on a story about New Music Distribution Service, launched by pianist Carla Bley and others as a clearinghouse for independent and artist-run record labels, especially from “new music” and alternative musical enclaves. In a hot, crammed New York City office, Yale Evelev, then head of the operation, told me, “Everyone should have a label.” Voilà, a motto and motivation. Thanks, Yale.

In 1987, we released our eponymous debut. Our new label was dubbed Household Ink, a twist on Household Inc. Naturally, one outlet for this debut vinyl LP was New Music Distribution Service, whose catalogue blurb opined, “It's hard to categorize these guys, though their music's playful, quirky, sometimes downright silly, sometimes quite soothing.”

After years of languishing and recovering, Headless Household put out the sophomore



album *Inside/Outside USA* (on compact disc) in 1993. This was our tipping point of “labeldom” as we branched out, inviting others into the fold. Soon, the label's roster included the alt-rock band flapping, Flapping; the art-folk group Dudley; and the fusion band Lean-To.

Fast-forward to now, and Household Ink Records has 36 titles and no sign of slowing down, settling into the era when digital downloads supply more income than physical product does. Logistically, the label's business model hovers around the idea of an artists' co-op: The musicians cover most of the costs of production, while the label provides infrastructure and a “corporate” home base.

Eight of the current roster's albums are by Headless Household. Among the other Household artists are trumpeter/vocalist Nate Birkey, singer Julie Christensen and bassist David Piltch—all connected to the expandable, guest-heavy Household band.

Along the path, Household Ink titles intersected with established figures from the jazz and pop worlds. Christensen's dedicated “jazz” project, *Something Familiar*, included longtime pia-

nist Karen Hammack and drummers Jeff Ballard and Kenny Wollesen. Alto saxophonist David Binney has been a fly-in soloist on several CDs.

Piltch, who spent years in singer k.d. lang's band, recorded with Headless Household and released his genre-crossing album *Minister Of The Interior* with a list of guests that included lang and guitarist Bill Frisell.

In the label's jazz niche, Birkey has been a vital force, with six albums out and a gospel disc in the works. “I believe I have been dubbed the token ‘straightahead jazz’ artist for the label, which is fine by me,” he said. “They have always been supportive of whatever I come up with, from my *Ballads* album, to my all-original album *The Mennonite*, to my Christmas album.”

Twenty-five years after the origins of Household Ink, independent and artist-run labels are far more common, and the very nature of a record label is in flux. But whatever the technological trappings and economic challenges of our modern times, an independent record label remains grounded in the raw necessity of musicians heeding the urge to make music manifest, by whatever means necessary.

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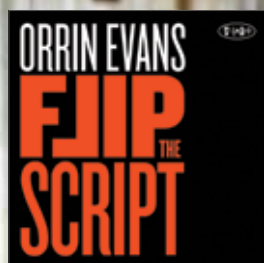
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Orrin Evans



Orrin Evans *Flip The Script*

POSI-TONE 8100

★★★★★

There's a reason action movies do so well at the box office. Audiences crave drama, tension, explosions and the lulls that nurture the power of these elements. Listening to Orrin Evans' best records, or catching the pianist on an especially hot gig, can be similar to absorbing the twists of a blow-'em-up flick. It's not two minutes into *Flip The Script* that the creative chaffing between bassist Ben Wolfe and drummer Donald Edwards elicits an edge-of-your-

seat vibe. The disc's first track, Eric Revis' "Question," can be considered an answer of sorts—if you were trying to determine how quickly three musicians could give abstraction an architectural feel while consistently recalibrating momentum. Album openers are supposed to provide a preview of what's ahead, and this one spells out *Script*'s thesis: Punchy interplay is paramount.

Corralling agitation is something this bandleader has been working at for more than a decade. His records for Criss Cross and Posi-Tone never shun lyricism, but they always shoot for (and usually achieve) a palpably physical feel.

Faith In Action found Evans turning a corner. His blend of expressionism and design attained its long-sought nexus. *Flip The Script* continues that confluence. The jaunty theme of "TC's Blues" makes room for hard-driving swing and fitful eloquence. Evans is a Thelonious Monk man in this regard. His fingers are jackhammers, and whenever he needs to punctuate a note, his jabs trigger big reactions from his colleagues.

Both Wolfe and Edwards are down with the boss' aesthetic. The bassist is expert at milking groove via counterpoint, and one of the drummer's strengths is transitioning between feathery

passages and full-tilt pummeling. "The Answer" finds them feeding Evans all sorts of gear-shifting lines to mess with. You can feel the crackle of their interplay during the ballads, too. "When" features Edwards with mallets, giving the pianist's forlorn theme extra impact. Even the wistful solo update of MFSB's "The Sound Of Philadelphia" reaches out and slaps you a bit, just to make sure you're knee-deep in melancholy.

—Jim Macnie

Flip The Script: Question; Clean House; Flip The Script; When; Big Small; A Brand New Day; TC's Blues; Someday My Prince Will Come; The Answer; The Sound Of Philadelphia. (45:20)

Personnel: Orrin Evans, piano; Ben Wolfe, bass; Donald Edwards, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Henry Threadgill Zooid *Tomorrow Sunny/ The Revelry, Spp*

PI 43

★★★★★

Henry Threadgill's uncompromising stand as a composer and leader has been manifest in a number of working bands. The trio Air gave an early glimpse of his brilliance, and, later, with his Sextett and Very Very Circus and Make A Move he developed the basic germ, which had to do with finding the seam between coherence and fracture, asserting interdependence with a high degree of independence among players, cultivating short solos and exploring the thresholds of melodic identity. With this incarnation of Zooid, Threadgill has yet again found the ideal vehicle for his evolving ideas.

As on the extraordinary discs that preceded

Tomorrow Sunny, Elliot Humberto Kavee plays drums here, bringing with him a textured and unforced sensibility, a marked difference from his less subtle precursor, Dafnis Prieto. Cellist Christopher Hoffman seems completely at home contributing fragments to the thematic whole or bowing a brief, staccato solo. The march component that had been part of Threadgill's writing is now more slight, insinuated in Jose Davila's understated tuba. Space has opened up and what was once fairly sparse now has lots of air in it, which serves a fine improviser like guitarist Liberty Ellman well. Shards of melody pass, sometimes congealing into a fully realized line, played in tandem even, but otherwise left an implication, barely recognized, transparent as a ghost.

Someone could feel that *Tomorrow Sunny* is too sketchy, but stick with it: The disc dares not to overstate. At the end of "See The Blackbird Now," Threadgill's bass flute plays a line, typically fascinating, and the track's ecology snaps into line. There are passages organized more along his earlier conventions, like "Ambient Pressure Thereby," with its pivoting, off-kilter funk, recalling the thrilling maneuvers with Air. But the string-centric chamber planet that Threadgill has cultivated is utterly magnetic, even at its least overt.

—John Corbett

Tomorrow Sunny/The Revelry, Spp: A Day Off; Tomorrow Sunny; So Pleased, No Clue; See The Blackbird Now; Ambient Pressure Thereby; Put On Keep/Frontispiece, Spp. (44:13)

Personnel: Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone, flute, bass flute; Liberty Ellman, guitar; Christopher Hoffman, cello; Jose Davila, trombone, tuba; Stomu Takeishi, bass guitar; Elliot Humberto Kavee, drums.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com



Cassandra Wilson *Another Country*

EONE MUSIC 2412

★★★½

Great singers typically find a strength and build on it. Cassandra Wilson has shown what can be done with a weakness. Her monochromatic range resides in a narrow, whispered and wind-blown voice that invites a nocturnal, meditative focus that can be remarkably expressive and, patience permitting, lulling to the senses. In *Another Country*, her move from Blue Note to eOne seems no occasion for breaking conspicuously new ground. Her work here has a good deal in common with her earlier efforts.

As before, she works in a spare and spacious environment that never crowds her sound or rolls over her words. Though supported by a soft, rippling percussion and the ambient purr of Julien Labro's occasional accordion, these calm, acoustic pieces feel more like dry duets with producer Fabrizio Sotti, a silky smooth guitarist whose only other exposure in the jazz sector (that I know of) was in 2003 on Wilson's *Glamour* CD for Blue Note.

As usual, the repertoire is a mix of styles and inspiration, though it includes one familiar melody to which Wilson adds her own Italian lyric: "O Sole Mio." Beyond that, the tunes are merely original collaborations between Wilson and Sotti, few of any note. The rewards are in the manner, not the matter. We get a bit of blues ("No More Blues"), bossa nova ("Almost Twelve") and the just plain oddball: "Olomuroro" is a simple four-bar African refrain. There is little that a singer of Wilson's talent can bring to it, so she simply rides the repeated interludes with a gentle but rather pointless counterpoint.

"Olomuroro" also uses a children's choir in much the same way Wilson deployed a similar ensemble in "Waters Of March" on her *Belly Of The Sea* album a decade ago.

—John McDonough

Another Country: Red Guitar; No More Blues; O Sole Mio; Deep Blue; Almost Twelve; Passion; When Will I See You Again; Another Country; Letting You Go; Olomuroro. (43:41)

Personnel: Cassandra Wilson, vocals (1–3, 5–8, 10); Fabrizio Sotti, Cassandra Wilson (1), guitar; Julien Labro, accordion; Nicola Sorato, bass; Mino Cinelli, Lekan Babalola, percussion.

Ordering info: eonemusic.com

Christian Scott *Christian aTunde Adjuah*

CONCORD JAZZ 33237

★★★

It's great to hear Christian Scott stretch out on this project that signals his transformation to a new name embracing his heritage as a Mardi Gras Indian and fearlessly takes on social issues. But while Scott rises to moments of penetrating emotional truth, there is a lot of chaff on this bloated epic.

But wheat first. Scott's high wail and Matthew Stevens' dark, repeated guitar riff on "New New Orleans" feels as inexorable as floodwater itself. In a warmer spirit, Stevens' guitar solo lights up "Vs. The Kleptocratic Union," soaring over delightfully interactive bass and drums. Even on these strong tracks, though, Scott is at best an episodic soloist—stabbing, wailing and tumbling with a gorgeous tone and terrific articulation, but rarely grabbing the thread of a story. When he turns to personal issues, like his marriage ("I Do"), the trumpeter glistens with the regal clarity Don Cherry achieved with the group Codona.

So it might be wise for Scott to leave tracks like "Who They Wish I Was" to self-important folks like Kanye West and concentrate on



delivering a message as straightforwardly as possible.

—Paul de Barros

Christian aTunde Adjuah: Disc One: Fatima Aisha Rokero 400; New New Orleans (King Adjuah Stomp); Kuro Shinobi; Who They Wish I Was; Pyrrhic Victory Of aTunde Adjuah; Spy Boy/Flag Boy; vs. The Kleptocratic Union (Mrs. McDowell's Crime); Kiel; Of Fire (Les Filles de la Nouvelle Orleans); Dred Scott; Danziger (60:31). Disc Two: The Berlin Patient (CCRS); Jihad Joe; Van Gogh; Liar Liar; I Do; Alkebu Lan; Bartlett; When Marissa Stands Her Ground; Cumulonimbus; Away (Anuradha & the Maiti Nepal); The Red Rooster; Cara (58:43).

Personnel: Christian Scott, trumpet, siren, sirennette, reverse flugelhorn; Matthew Stevens, guitar; Jamire Williams, drums; Kris Funn, bass; Lawrence Fields, keyboards; Kenneth Whalum III, tenor saxophone (Disc Two, 5); Louis Fouché III, alto saxophone (Disc One, 9; Disc Two, 8); Corey King, trombone (Disc One, 9, 10; Disc Two, 4, 10).

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

The Hot Box

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

Orrin Evans <i>Flip The Script</i>	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★
Henry Threadgill Zooid <i>Tomorrow Sunny</i>	★★½	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Cassandra Wilson <i>Another Country</i>	★★★★½	★★★	★★★	★★★★
Christian Scott <i>Christian aTunde Adjuah</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★

Critics' Comments

Orrin Evans, *Flip The Script*

A modest trio set perhaps, but Evans is a complete package—hard-swinging piano power laced with an instinct for seasoning straightahead arcs of notes with the offbeat non-sequitur or occasional flash of quirk. In the larger historic context, nothing unusual. But in the moment, a pleasure to hear. —John McDonough

Absolutely winning program. Perfect swinging little outfit, as well balanced as the classic Herbie Nichols trios, with the modest goal of repaying attentive listening. The music has edges and corners and—within its constraints—takes chances. —John Corbett

Philadelphia pianist Evans speaks deeply from the blues and gospel, but unlike Eric Reed, say, in a warm and supple voice tempered with Thelonious Monkish quirks. I love how Evans colors outside the lines on “Big Small” and that he never plays the melody on “Someday My Prince Will Come” but still gets to the heart of it. Sometimes he seems to stop too soon, though. I’d like to hear him get more expansive. —Paul de Barros

Henry Threadgill Zooid, *Tomorrow Sunny*

Evenly split between high-strung anxiety and caprice, which is pleasantly coherent and in the moment; and a barren stillness in which the music seems entrapped in a contented stupor. The leader’s flute has a taciturn grace, while his alto tends to bark its passions. More for the loft than the club scene. —John McDonough

This is Zooid’s quiet album. All the signature syncopation is still in place, but a hush is dominant. A reliance on strings and the prominence of the leader’s flutes give this one an eerie feel. Pithy fragments stack up, and Threadgill shows how deep his designs actually are. —Jim Macnie

It’s no accident Threadgill played with a group called Air all those years. The space in between is as important in his music as the sculptural solids of the notes themselves. There’s something irresistibly, straightforwardly happy and random here, like an Alexander Calder mobile spinning in the breeze. The guitar and cello provide a soft contour for Threadgill’s spitting alto; the tuba is a droll anchor. —Paul de Barros

Cassandra Wilson, *Another Country*

The folksy matrix for the singer was established in the Craig Street years, maybe never done better. While I appreciate his fluidity, Fabrizio Sotti doesn’t bring the sound of surprise to these tracks that Brandon Ross and Kevin Breit did. The new songs and their production are too ordinary for such an extraordinary voice as Wilson. —John Corbett

Waxing sketchy is the essence of her art. A whisper here, a growl there—her voice carries the day in sparse settings, and the backdrop provided by guitarist Sotti is more hushed than usual. The downside is mood sometimes overwhelms melody. —Jim Macnie


I’ve been waiting a long time for a new Cassandra Wilson album I could really love. Brighter, crisper, faster and so much less self-involved than usual, Wilson sounds passionate and plausible, even on the bel canto warhorse “O Sole Mio.” Like she says, “Close your eyes, hear the beat and you can feel the heat.” I sure can. —Paul de Barros

Christian Scott, *Christian aTunde Adjuah*

New name and tribal-despot pose, needless distractions for an accomplished talent, who overplays a rich sound and graceful technique in flashy, high-wire flurries and fanfares. Protest angle is a strained programmatic conceit. I don’t get the hype. A strong voice still in search of something to say. Nice muted musings recall Miles Davis. —John McDonough

Much more interesting than earlier Scott releases, factoring a Radiohead curveball into the expansive proceedings. Drummer Jamire Williams propels the leader’s ambitions, keeping things loose even when they need power. Scott’s tunes seem to want to assert their significance, which makes more spacious moments like “Vs. The Kleptocratic Union” welcome. —John Corbett

Scott gets a pat on the back for the ambition. His venture into soundscape narrative is impressive. But this is a book that demands less chapters. Several of the pieces rely on mood, not interplay, to tell their story. A single album could have had more punch. —Jim Macnie



THE BOOK OF CHET
SSC 1316 / in Stores AUGUST 20
iTunes.com/LucianaSouza


LUCIANA SOUZA vocals
LARRY KOONSE guitars
DAVID PILTCH bass
JAY BELLEROSE drums

THE BOOK OF CHET is Luciana's inspired interpretation of the music of trumpet player and singer Chet Baker. Informed by his superb musicianship, his singing was heartfelt, yet detached.

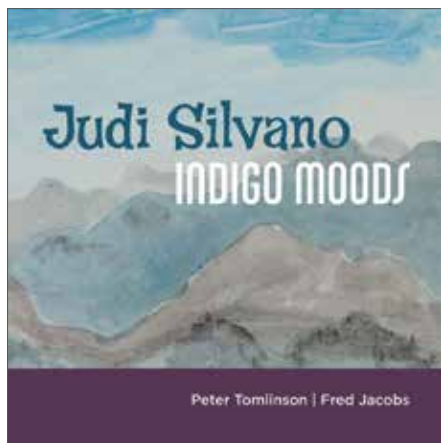
"It is a well known fact that musicians like João Gilberto were listening a lot to Chet Baker and the sounds coming out of the West Coast of the US. That kind of quiet, introspective singing was started by Chet."

On this recording (Luciana's first exclusive recording of American standards), Luciana reveals why she has been considered one of the most important Jazz singers of her generation — able to unveil the drama of the lyric and allow for intimacy with the listener.

photography by Bob Wolfenson



Available on **iTunes**



Judi Silvano *Indigo Moods*

JAZZED MEDIA 1058

★★★

To hear a singer sing without a net like Judi Silvano does on her *Indigo Moods* is to invite an intimacy that ought to be germane to the art of singing ballads and torch songs. Channeling the spirits of Rosemary Clooney and Ella Fitzgerald, Silvano takes her own path in the end, sidling up to trumpeter Fred Jacobs and pianist Peter Tomlinson for 14 standards that stay pretty much in a 20th-century time frame.

Silvano's slight vibrato is most expressive on the slower tunes, like Tadd Dameron's "If You Could See Me Now," where the gait of the

other players and the singer's phrasing suggest as to why these three may have put this music together in the first place. While their take on Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo" eventually seems to drag, it's still filled with obvious sincerity. And Billy Strayhorn's "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" reminds us how the song will always be revisited by artists patient and desirous enough to mine its immense colors and moods. That's a lot to realize in a singer, even a veteran like Silvano, who, no doubt, sings this song a tad differently than she did when she was 20 years younger.

That's not to say the upbeat numbers don't communicate. Irving Berlin's "It Only Happens When I Dance With You," an unconventional inclusion, does have that bounce, Silvano's movements with Tomlinson suggesting a real dance on the floor. And Antonio Jobim's "If You Never Come To Me" provides a window into Silvano's scat sensibilities along with perhaps the best example of this trio playing as one. Ending this set with two lovelorn melodies—a reinvention of Thelonious Monk's "Ugly Beauty" with lyrics for "Still We Dream" and the short, sweet duet with Jacobs on "I'll Be Seeing You"—proffer the kind of simple delight in a song that seems rare, indeed.

—John Ephland

Indigo Moods: Mood Indigo; You've Changed; Skylark; Let's Fall In Love; But Beautiful; If I Had You; If You Could See Me Now; It Only Happens When I Dance With You; A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing; If You Never Come To Me; You Don't Know What Love Is; Embraceable You; Still We Dream; I'll Be Seeing You. (61:00)

Personnel: Judi Silvano, vocals; Peter Tomlinson, piano; Fred Jacobs, trumpet.

Ordering info: jazzedmedia.com



Kenny Wheeler Big Band *The Long Waiting*

CAM JAZZ 5044

★★★

Kenny Wheeler sits in the shadows, biding his time. Well, not really, but on *The Long Waiting*, he lets his superb band do a lot of the flashy lifting. Wheeler is a soloistic presence on the album, of course—his flugelhorn nimbly jumping from tones in the middle of his range to stratospheric squeals—but his band-mates equally share the spotlight.

An alto saxophone takes the pole position on "Canter N. 6" and "Canter N. 1/Old Ballad," taking the melody and running with it. It's a smooth, breezy sound that establishes the pace, and the playfulness, of the album. But vocalist Diana Troto is one of the biggest beneficiaries of Wheeler's waiting approach and might be one of the main musicians, aside from Wheeler himself, who is responsible for the tone of the album. Troto appears on every tune, but not always in a featured role, alternating between taking a lead and simply being a part of the ensemble. On most tunes, her voice is merely another layer in the rich big-band concoction.

Wheeler does take the lead on the title track, a ballad. His fragile solo melody sits atop a soft bed of brass, buffeted by woodwind fills at the ends of phrases. Soft vocals in the background blend with the instruments. The piece is at odds with most of the uptempo modern tracks.

The Long Waiting is also about parallels and the continuation of tunes across an entire work. By forging track links throughout the album, Wheeler has created connections to engage the listener. The mid-tempo "Four, Five, Six" is slowed down in its mirror "Seven, Eight, Nine," with the melody becoming more disjunct and jumpy. Ideas from "Canter N. 6" are echoed in "Canter N. 1/Old Ballad."

—Jon Ross

The Long Waiting: Canter N. 6; Four, Five, Six; The Long Waiting; Seven, Eight, Nine; Enowena; Comba N. 3; Canter N. 1/Old Ballad; Upwards. (68:33)

Personnel: Kenny Wheeler, flugelhorn; Pete Churchill, conductor; Diana Troto, vocals; Ray Warleigh, Duncan Lamont, alto saxophone; Stan Sulzmann, Julian Siegel, tenor saxophone; Julian Arguelles, baritone saxophone; Henry Lowther, Derek Watkins, Tony Fisher, Nick Smart, trumpet; Dave Horler, Mark Nightingale, Barnaby Dickinson, trombone; Dave Stewart, bass trombone; John Paricelli, guitar; Chris Laurence, bass; Martin France, drums.

Ordering info: camjazz.com

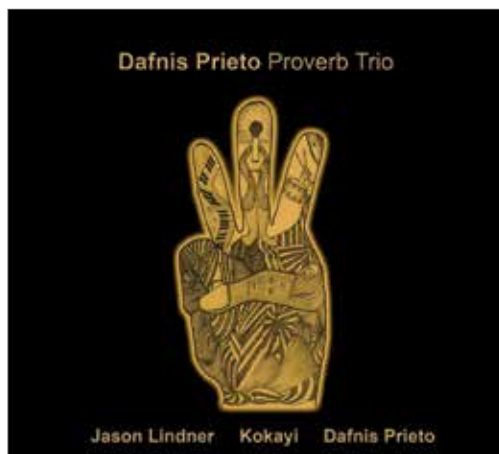
Dafnis Prieto *Proverb Trio*

DAFINSON MUSIC 003

★★★½

Drummer, composer and MacArthur Fellowship recipient Dafnis Prieto has led 1,000 lives since emigrating from Cuba in 1999. With five albums as a leader and many more as a sideman, Prieto has proven himself as one of the most inventive of young jazz drummers around.

While Prieto's earlier records largely reflected Cuban culture, *Proverb Trio* is more open-ended and free of stylistic and ethnic constraints. Joined by keyboardist Jason Lindner and vocalist/poet Kokayi, *Proverb Trio* flies through ubiquitous scalding rhythms, scat-and-funk groove monsters, hippie-fueled electronic reveries ("What Have We All Done") and even boiling second-line swing. Though Prieto boasts, "Everything was improvised, we did the album in six hours," there is plenty of structure and ordered arrangements to lead one through what is a very joyous, spontaneous outing. Lindner is the glue that holds the merriment together with his conversational Rhodes piano and bubbling, Jan Hammer-worthy synths while Prieto scalds the senses and Kokayi provides nonsensical if



pleasant vocal ramblings. *Proverb Trio*'s truly remarkable achievement is its utter lack of pretense. Even within spiraling, occasionally Joe Zawinul-inspired synths ("Vamos A Jugar"), classical intimations ("At War"), hyperactive drum grooves and the trio's fabulous fortitude, this is not a "fusion" group in the classic, or infamous, sense.

—Ken Micallef

Proverb Trio: Into The Light Love; You And Me; The Magic Danzone; Extasis; You Got It; In War; Vamos A Jugar; Talking Too Much; What Have We All Done; Dirty Us; Mystery Man; Mother Nature. (65:34)

Personnel: Dafnis Prieto, drums; Jason Lindner, keyboards; Kokayi, vocals.

Ordering info: dafinsonmusic.com

Simpatico Keys

Bruce Barth's simpatico pairing with vibist Steve Nelson on *Three Things Of Beauty* (Savant 2119; 62:10 ★★★★★) is one more beautiful thing to add to the list. Supported by Ben Street and Dana Hall, the duo explore the harmonic possibilities of six Barth originals and breathe new life into "My Man's Gone Now" and John Coltrane's "Big Nick." Both Barth and Nelson are masters of single-note articulation, and the effect of combining their voices is like expanding the tonal range and color of both their instruments. Their exchanges flow seamlessly, particularly on Barth's hard-swinging "Final Push."

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

Piano trios often distinguish themselves by the way the balance is shifted between the instruments. On *Some More Love Songs* (Pirouet 3062; 49:04 ★★★½), Marc Copland gives bassist Drew Gress priority in the sound mix, heightening the tentative romanticism in the seven standards here. Gress' taut, lyrical lines contrast with Copland's rhapsodic approach, which keeps the focus on the melodic beauty of songs like "When I Fall In Love" and Joni Mitchell's ruminative "I Don't Know Where I Stand."

Ordering info: pirouet.com

Understated but vibrant, Amina Figarova's *Twelve* (In + Out 77114; 63:35 ★★★★★) displays the easygoing confidence and collaborative nature of a mid-'60s Blue Note date. Inspired by her decision to relocate from Europe to New York City—along with her husband, flutist Bart Platteau—the dozen original compositions display a wide range of moods, from the bristling "Make It Happen" to the gauzy "Morning Pace." With trumpeter Ernie Hammes and saxophonist Marc Mommaas out front, Figarova's sextet sounds tight and vigorous.

Ordering info: inandout-records.com

So timeless in nature that the setting might be 1961 or 2011 (it's the latter), Rick Germanson's *Live At Smalls* (smallslive 0024; 53:50 ★★★★★) makes the point that bandstand-level communication remains central to post-bop improvisation. The Milwaukee-native's quartet is rock solid with trumpeter Eddie Henderson, drummer Lewis Nash and the underexposed Paul Gill on bass, and the set—recorded over two nights—is structured expertly. Turning on Germanson's thoughtful solo performance of Ellington's "The Single Petal Of A Rose," the recording's sweep—from the bossa nova groove of Bobby Timmons' "So Tired" to the charging fire of Germanson's "Edge"—is time-



Gonzalo Rubalcaba

less, too.

Ordering info: smallsjazzclub.com

If Germanson's live outing strives for timelessness, Gonzalo Rubalcaba aims squarely for modernity with *XXI Century* (5Passion 010; 48:49/40:45 ★★★★★) featuring his trio of Matt Brewer and Marcus Gilmore and numerous guests. With a recurring undercurrent of Cuban rhythm, the pianist bows to his roots, but he seems as interested in taking his music to a more slippery realm, one where time becomes more elastic and hammered arpeggios move against backgrounds that slide in and out of focus. Brewer and Gilmore are ideal compatriots for this kind of voyage, and Rubalcaba makes the most of their ability to groove while keeping the ground shifting under your feet. A secondary theme is the radical revoicing of compositions by Bill Evans, Paul Bley and Lennie Tristano, each of whom did similar sleight of hand during their own time. This is smart, adventurous fun that works well on several levels.

Ordering info: 5passion.com

Could there be a more fitting image of the jazz diaspora than Akiko Tsuruga, clad in a traditional kimono and playing greasy U.S. East Coast organ music? *Sakura* (Self-released; 65:57 ★★★★★) pays homage to Tsuruga's B3 heroes, and if there's nothing here that Dr. Lonnie Smith, Groove Holmes and Charles Earland haven't played previously, Tsuruga's quartet can't be faulted for failing to bring energy to the project. Tart-toned guitarist Bob DeVos is particularly spirited.

Ordering info: akikojazz.com

LUCIANA SOUZA IN BRAZIL



DUOS III

SSC 1315 / In Stores AUGUST 28

iTunes.com/LucianaSouza

LUCIANA SOUZA vocals
TONINHO HORTA guitar & vocal
ROMERO LUBAMBO guitar
MARCO PEREIRA guitar

After a long three-year hiatus from recording, consummate artist and singer Luciana Souza returns with two new albums for Sunnyside, produced by Grammy-winner Larry Klein, *DUOS III*, and *THE BOOK OF CHET*. *DUOS III* celebrates the ten-year anniversary of the release of Luciana's Grammy-nominated and much celebrated CD, *BRAZILIAN DUOS*. Her *DUOS II* record also went on to receive a Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Vocal Record. The last volume of this trilogy brings back her long time collaborators - guitar phenomenon Romero Lubambo, and master guitarist Marco Pereira - and introduces Toninho Horta, one of Brazil's most unique guitarists and composers.

photography by Rick Webber.com



Available on
iTunes

Will Bernard Trio *Outdoor Living*

DRECK TO DISC

★★★★½

Guitarist Will Bernard doesn't hurt for references. The Berkeley native has recorded with Don Cherry and Stanton Moore. He's jammed with Charlie Hunter, Dr. John and John Medeski. And he's collaborated with Tom Waits, Spearhead and hip-hop ensemble the Coup. While a diverse palette informs his sixth record, so does experience-garnered restraint.

Bernard's history with organist Wil Blades and drummer Simon Lott also accounts for the natural vibe absent from a majority of similar fusion-based affairs. Until recently, each member lived in a different city yet became close from the hours they spent clustered in a tour van. The album title even alludes to the road lifestyle and its array of topography.

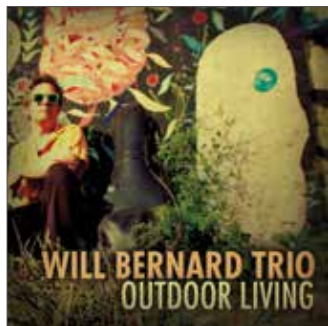
Slaving to the groove, the collective develops rounded instrumentals amidst uncluttered, wide-open soundscapes in which warm New Orleans funk, crackling Memphis soul and '60s-era San Francisco psychedelia intersect. On occasion, Bernard steps on spacey effects pedals and brings the noise ("Roaming Charges") or turns his guitar into a horn ("Nature Walk"). But the bandleader prefers to say more with less. He abides by James Brown's time-honored "give the drummer some" adage and allows Blades to smear greasy jive all over "Morgan Deux," during which you can practically picture the Leslie cabinet's rotary speaker spin.

—Bob Gendron

Outdoor Living: Nature Walk; Morgan Deux; Nooksack; 6B; Roaming Charges; Point Blank; Squeaky Chug Chug; Katskan; Implitude. (50:05)

Personnel: Will Bernard, guitar; Wil Blades, Hammond B3 organ; Simon Lott, drums

Ordering info: willbernard.com



Johnnie Bassett *I Can Make That Happen*

SLY DOG 3012

★★★★

Guitarist Johnnie Bassett has been a Detroit mainstay for 60 years. His musical style is as even-tempered as the man himself—jazzy flourishes blended with r&b grit. This album follows in the same tradition as his earlier CDs: big-band boogie that remembers when the "blues" in rhythm-and-blues meant something. Although his sound is a throwback to the '50s, Bassett is not afraid to deviate from that format. "Proud To Be From Detroit" is a funk-up tribute to his city, featuring understated bass from James Simonson. Covering Jimi Hendrix has become a blues cliché, but Bassett's remake of "The Wind Cries Mary" is surprisingly tasteful. Elsewhere, Bassett has no trouble summoning classic jump-blues. He pulls off a great duet with Thornetta Davis on "Teach Me To Love," gets slow and low down on "Spike Boy" and showcases a great house rocking instrumental on "Dawging Around."

—James Porter

I Can Make That Happen: Proud To Be From Detroit; Love Lessons; Spike Boy; I Can Make That Happen; Cry To Me; Teach Me To Love; Dawging Around; Cha'moni; The Wind Cries Mary; Motor City Blues; Let's Get Hammered. (40:55)

Personnel: Johnnie Bassett, guitar, vocals; Skeeto Valdez, drums, percussion; James Simonson, electric and acoustic bass; Chris Codish, piano, electric piano and organ; John Rutherford, trombone; Bob Jensen, trumpet; Mark Byerly, trumpet; Keith Kaminski, baritone and tenor saxophone, tambourine; Brett Lucas, guitar; Thornetta Davis, vocals; Dwight Adams, trumpet; Jim "Moose" Brown, acoustic guitar, dobro.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com



Don Braden/ Karl Latham *Big Fun(k) Live*

CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES MUSIC 3001

★★★★½

Recorded over a series of gigs at Cecil's Jazz Club in West Orange, N.J., *Big Fun(k) Live* brings together a powerhouse quartet of old friends who seem hell-bent on having a ball. It's a funky, electrified jam on seven contemporary-leaning original tunes and two covers (Beyonce's "Deja Vu" and Lennon/McCartney's "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds") spanning a range of styles from bebop to rock. The title, an obvious reference to one of Miles Davis' electric-era albums, pretty much says it all.

Saxophonist Don Braden was playing instrumental rock and funk long before he ever became known as a Young Lion of straight-ahead jazz in the '80s—and it shows in his well-developed, hard-hitting solos, which unfold with brains and brawn over the bedrock laid down by drummer/co-leader Karl Latham, electric bassist Gary Foote (of Blood, Sweat And Tears fame) and New York synth man Nick Rolfe. *Big Fun(k) Live* is thick with compelling improvisations by outstanding instrumentalists who are clearly enjoying every minute spent together onstage. The tunes are decent, but the real meat of this recording can be found in the expertly executed arrangements and the high-flying solos, which must have been a gas to see and hear live in the club.

—Ed Enright



Big Fun(k) Live: High Rise; Deja Vu; A Foote In The Door; Having A Ball; Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds; The Funky View; Heads Up; Confusion; Song For Mother; Grover Miles. (73:15)

Personnel: Don Braden, tenor saxophone (1–8, 10), alto flute (9); Karl Latham, drums; Nick Rolfe, keyboards; Gary Foote, bass.

Ordering info: bigfun-k.com

Kate McGarry *Girl Talk*

PALMETTO 2152

★★★★★

Over the course of 20 years and five albums, vocalist Kate McGarry has taken her jazz and global music background to create a songbook that stylishly delves into folk, rock and adult pop. In preparing for her first more traditionally oriented album since 2001's *Show Me*, McGarry took the unusual step of listening to interviews of great female jazz vocalists rather than to their specific music recordings.

"There was something so compelling about hearing their speaking voices detailing the struggles and triumphs of their lives and journeys," she writes in *Girl Talk*'s liner notes. The result is performed with her excellent working band with an inspired modernity.

"We Kiss In A Shadow" opens *Girl Talk*, with its arrangement dedicated to a future that includes marriage equality. Producer (and McGarry's husband) Keith Ganz's guitar and Gary Versace's piano comping provide open support for her wistful interpretation, with her vocals artfully layered after Versace's solo. The title track floats on Versace's lush organ chords and drummer Clarence Penn's buoyant cymbal and hi-hat. The joy heard in "I Just Found Out About Love," reflected in McGarry's scatting and Reuben Rogers' bass solo, recall Shirley Horn's recording from 1991. Kurt Elling makes for an ideal vocal duet partner on "O Cantador," while the guitar-and-vocals version of Jimmy Rowles and Cheryl Ernsts' "Looking Back" encapsulates McGarry and Ganz's multi-tiered connections.

—Yoshi Kato



Girl Talk: We Kiss In A Shadow; Girl Talk; I Just Found Out About Love; The Man I Love; O Cantador; This Heart Of Mine; I Know That You Know; Looking Back; Charade; It's A Wonderful World. (44:42)

Personnel: Kate McGarry, vocal; Keith Ganz, guitars; Gary Versace, organ, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Clarence Penn, drums, percussion; Kurt Elling, vocal (5).

Ordering info: palmetto-records.com

Jesse Davis Quintet *Live At Smalls*

SMALLSLIVE 0026

★★★★

The Jesse Davis Quintet's *Live At Smalls* oozes presence. It's what a live recording should feel like: five musicians playing 20-minute pieces broken up by what seems like a speedy rundown of "Body And Soul." This is a concept that lends itself to the intimate setup at Small's Jazz Club in New York. Recorded over three days, *Live At Smalls* is Davis as a subtle force. His rich alto is matched perfectly with Ryan Kisor's resonant trumpet: Neither is a flashy player, and both musicians have just enough to say to fill the allotted space.

Stretching out is at the center of *Live At Smalls*. Davis' band is in peak condition, providing an encouraging backing for solos. "I'll Close My Eyes" slowly evolves into different grooves, the rhythm section growing soft for solos, over the song's nearly 20-minute length. Davis is at his most vertiginous on the original "Piece Of The Apple," but he stays away from pyrotechnics. "Body And Soul" and Davis' "Pray Thee/Beyond The Storm" are the most introspective—the latter showcasing Peter Washington's bass on an opening duet with Davis. The former has Kisor blowing on the A section and Davis playing the B section, a further example of the expert mingling of their tone colors.

—Jon Ross

Live At Smalls: I'll Close My Eyes; Piece Of The Apple; Body And Soul; Pray Thee/Beyond The Storm; Journey From The Lighthouse. (75:15)

Personnel: Jesse Davis, alto saxophone; Ryan Kisor, trumpet; Spike Wilner, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Billy Drummond, drums.

Ordering info: smallsjazzclub.com



The Cookers *Believe*

MOTÉMA 92

★★★★

Trumpeter David Weiss put The Cookers together in 2007 for a tribute to Freddie Hubbard's *Night Of The Cookers*. The group has gone on to release three albums, most recently the scintillating *Believe*.

The septet gives off the feel of a collective. Composing and soloing duties were spread throughout the group. Save for saxophonist Billy Harper's pieces, Weiss wrote all the arrangements, which do an excellent job of balancing heads, solos and backgrounds. Harper's "Believe, For It Is True" and Wayne Shorter's "Free For All" are worth the price of admission alone. The former has an angular melody over a medium slow start/stop groove, and Harper's aggressive and penetrating solo is one of the album's highlights. With burning solos by Harper, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, Handy, pianist George Cables and drummer Billy Hart, the nearly 12-minute "Free For All" has all of the grit, swagger and fire of the original recording. Harper's programmatic "Quest" opens with a ragged four-horn fanfare before settling into a regimental head that's ordered by Hart's quasi-martial drums. Cables' playful waltz "But He Knows" cools things off before bassist Cecil McBee's outward-leaning "Tight Squeeze" and Hart's uptempo "Naaj" close the set.

—Chris Robinson



Believe: Believe, For It Is True; Temptation(s); Ebony Moonbeams; Free For All; Quest; But He Knows; Tight Squeeze; Naaj. (64:03)

Personnel: Craig Handy, alto saxophone; Billy Harper, tenor saxophone; Eddie Henderson, David Weiss, trumpet; George Cables, piano; Cecil McBee, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

Ordering info: motema.com



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Carefree & Cello-Enhanced

The Strata-Tones: *Dressed Up To Fess Up* (Fruition 001; 46:16 ★★★½) This California Central Coast-based band, with singer Valerie Johnson and guitarist Bruce Krupnik out front, really gets going three tracks into their first record when they swing “Did You Ever?” with an elation worthy of the now-defunct Lil’ Charlie & The Nightcats. Showing more restraint, Johnson and Krupnik join harp player Kevin McCracken in bringing lyricism to the love-affirming “Together For Some Time,” a second gem composed by the guitar player. Take cover: Johnson throws emotional control to the wind and douses Janis Joplin-like napalm all over the one concert track, “Ball & Chain.”

Ordering info: thestratatones.com

Seth Walker: *Time Can Change* (Roe 1201; 45:37 ★★★½) Walker’s singing has an insouciant quality that is central to the appeal of the blues- and soul-streaked songs that he and collaborators Gary Nicholson and Jarrod Dickenson have written about romance for his sixth album. Even when things don’t work out, sunshine and tenderness suffuse the material. Calling out to Ray Charles and Percy Mayfield, “What Now?” finds Walker spinning out a little beauty of a blues guitar solo.

Ordering info: sethwalker.com

Larry Hoffman: *Works Of Larry Hoffman—Contemporary American Music* (Dbbk Works 701; 60:11 ★★★½) Former blues journalist and record producer Hoffman has the integrity and compositional acumen to raise awareness of how classical compositions can support a blues sensibility without coming off stilted or contrived. (Others who’ve succeeded include William Russo, La Monte Young and Diamanda Galás.) The music of his “String Quartet #1: The Blues,” performed by the Atlantic String Quartet, breathes and flows interestingly for more than 14 minutes. “Blues Suite For Violoncello Solo,” less a cohesive whole than a bunching of five short incantations of bluesy ache and solace, is a triumph for both the composer and the virtuosic cellist Kristin Ostling, whose phrasing is more flexible than rigid. But “Blues For Harp, Oboe And Violoncello” is cerebral and static. Two more works don’t concern blues at all.

Ordering info: larryhoffman.com

South Memphis String Band: *Old Times There...* (Memphis International 0227; 38:27 ★★★½) Despite the best of intentions, these four advocates of early 20th century blues just don’t show the unity and dynamic of a true-to-life string band when they perform traditional tunes and old-



Seth Walker

sounding original songs here. Alvin Youngblood Hart, drawn to material concerning race in the Old South, has a stronger presence than the other musicians, who sometimes function on the fringe of parody. Stick with their first album, *Home Sweet Home*.

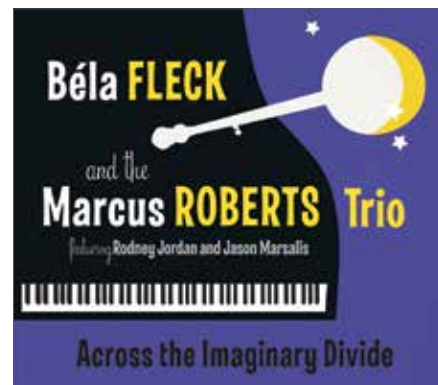
Ordering info: cduniverse.com

Curtis Salgado: *Soul Shot* (Alligator 4947; 46:41 ★★) Long a noted soul-blues singer and harmonica player in the Pacific Northwest, Salgado has the ability to possess a cover song and refashion lyrics to fit into his own spectrum of emotions. But aside from personalizing O. V. Wright’s “Nobody But You,” he loses his footing thanks to busy, overblown production that trivializes songs by Bobby Womack, Otis Redding, George Clinton and Salgado himself.

Ordering info: alligator.com

Paul Thorn: *What The Hell Is Going On?* (Perpetual Obscurity 467582; 48:07 ★★★½) Singer-songwriter Paul Thorn, a hit with the Americana crowd, radiates deep identification with no-nonsense Southern blues much the way his guests here, Elvin Bishop and Delbert McClinton, have done for decades. The native Mississippian slaps his own personality onto Bishop’s title song and other good ones borrowed from Allen Toussaint, neo-soul man Eli Reed and several free-spirited Southerners with country connections, including Wild Bill Emerson and Ray Wylie Hubbard.

Ordering info: paulthorn.com



Bela Fleck & The Marcus Roberts Trio *Across The Imaginary Divide*

ROUNDER 11661-9142

★★★½

Banjo-man Bela Fleck and pianist Marcus Roberts team up for one of this year’s strangest collaborations on Fleck’s *Across The Imaginary Divide*. Both have been known to mix it up, especially the more eclectic Fleck. You could say the disc is like playground music, manic at times, but also, well, playful. With bassist Rodney Jordan and drummer Jason Marsalis in tow, the originals by both leaders suggest Fleck’s playing could just as easily have been the role a violinist or flautist would play. Instead, it’s a banjo, and it works.

Fleck is no stranger to working with jazz pianists, his duo collaboration with Chick Corea (*The Enchantment*) perhaps his most noteworthy. And choosing Roberts’ trio to spin these tunes with makes perfect sense. The music, generally speaking, falls into two categories: uptempo swingers along with those that might contain a definite Latin tilt. In the latter slot Fleck is more the guitar-pickin’ banjo player, using single lines to state the melody and solo. Hear Fleck’s slinky, country-flavored “I’m Gonna Tell You This Story One More Time” and Roberts’ toe-tappin’ “Topaika” for good examples. Then there are the busy numbers that cook, like Fleck’s title track, which combines a refreshing lyrical quality along with an almost fusion-like fervor as the song becomes a tour de force for both players. “Across The Imaginary Divide” might have you trying to catch your breath if you stay on this uptempo swinging merry-go-round for all of its 4 minutes and 45 seconds. A bit slower is Roberts’ “Let’s Go,” which swings right out of the gate, a feature for the pianist even as Fleck gets some room to shine on the back end.

—John Ephland

Across The Imaginary Divide: Some Roads Lead Home; I’m Gonna Tell You This Story One More Time; Across The Imaginary Divide; Let Me Show You What To Do; Petunia; Topaika; One Blue Truth; Let’s Go; Kalimba; The Sunshine And The Moonlight; That Old Thing; That Ragtime Feeling. (62:51)

Personnel: Bela Fleck, banjo; Marcus Roberts, piano; Rodney Jordan, bass; Jason Marsalis, drums.

Ordering info: rounder.com



JD Allen Trio *The Matador And The Bull*

SAVANT 2121

★★★★★

In the liner notes for *The Matador And The Bull*, saxophonist JD Allen says listeners might refer to the 12 brief tracks that constitute the album as part of his jukebox aesthetic. But while the longest track clocks in at 4:45 and each tune can be taken as a glimpse of the trio in miniature, *The Matador And The Bull* is really a long, quasi-programmatic concept album. Allen, with his laid-back, never-rushed style, spewing 16th-note runs in odd meters, seems to float atop the music. Rudy Royston creates musical tension with his splashy drums, playing off Allen's relaxed manner. Gregg August holds it all together, sounding bullish on his bass.

The album's effervescence is achieved by a bit of clever architecture. On the opening and closing tracks, Allen, August and Royston are all playing in different meters. August's loping bass plugs around in the background in five, while Royston, creating a tension that stays throughout the entire album, no matter the meter, clangs away in three. Allen, given this polymetric background, charges ahead in four. The conceit gives the music a free-flowing quality.

The Matador And The Bull is Allen's fourth album with the group, and there's a complete ease between the musicians. Allen sounds like he's expending minimal effort while playing intricate phrases on his horn, and August and Royston seem to know intuitively how to follow him. They function as a unit. And the unit slowly builds up in intensity through the album, with "Santa Maria (Mother)" and other quiet tunes providing brief respites from the more energetic pieces.

Questions about if the album is actually programmatic—is Allen the matador, August the bull?—don't really matter in the presence of such compelling music.

—Jon Ross

The Matador And The Bull: The Matador And The Bull (Torero); A Suit Of Lights; Ring Shout; Santa Maria (Mother); Cathedral; Pasajillo; Erlanger; Pinyin; Vuela (The Whisperer); The Lyrics Of Summer And Shadow; Muleta; The Matador And The Bull (Torero). (40:46)
Personnel: JD Allen, tenor saxophone; Gregg August, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

Billy Martin/Wil Blades *Shimmy*

THE ROYAL POTATO FAMILY 1123

★★★

It's got to be a daunting prospect for an organist to take the stage beside Billy Martin. The prolific drummer is best known for his long-standing partnership with John Medeski, both in the jam/jazz trendsetting trio Medeski Martin & Wood and in their duo project, *Mago*. But if Wil Blades felt any compunction about pairing with Martin, it doesn't show on their new duo outing. *Shimmy* is a completely different beast than *Mago*, more high-spirited and celebratory than Martin's more complex jousting with Medeski.

Blades brings a diversity of sound to this two-man revel mainly through his use of the clavinet alongside his B3. On the swampy creep of "Deep In A Fried Pickle," he employs a hiccupping, voice-like tone for the melody, then wails on a solo that might as well be an overdriven electric guitar. The axe tone returns on "Give," where Martin's arsenal of exotic percussion sets the stage for Blades' warm, blooming psychedelic buzz.



Every tune possesses its own identity; the Les McCann/Eddie Harris tribute "Les And Eddie" kicks off from a shuffling soul-jazz groove but suddenly blossoms into a rafters-filling gospel testimony. On "Pick Pocket," the duo become a two-man MGs, with Blades toggling between dueling guitar and bass sounds along with his organ groove.

—Shaun Brady

Shimmy: Brother Bru; Mean Greens; Deep In A Fried Pickle; Les And Eddie; Pick Pocket; Down By The Riverside; Toe Thumb; Little Shimmy; Give; Dehna Hunu. (47:43)

Personnel: Billy Martin, drums; Wil Blades, organ, clavinet.

Ordering info: theroyalpotatofamily.com



Marianne Solivan *Prisoner Of Love*

HIPNOTIC 10007

★★★★★

Trumpeter Jeremy Pelt produced this album, which places New York-based singer Marianne Solivan in minimal but supremely musical settings. In so doing, he gives maximum exposure to her low-level dynamic of an alto voice. In a way, she's a throwback to the Julie London/Jeri Southern school of jazz-informed torch singers of the 1950s. Exact diction, sure intonation, emotional longing coolly held in check and a well-chosen repertoire of melancholy ballads link Solivan with her supper club forbearers.

Solivan is most comfortable in her chest and throat tones. She uses her upper register judiciously, never pushing the voice beyond its attractive level. Solivan's a fine balladeer, tell-

ing the song's story, yet steering clear of cheap emotion. On first hearing, she might be mistaken for a cabaret singer. But few on-the-beat musical theater thrushes would risk the vulnerability of Solivan's duets with guest bassist Christian McBride.

On the McBride exchanges—"All Or Nothing At All" and Billy Strayhorn's "Day Dream"—Solivan plays her jazz cards wisely. She's loose with the text of the former, subtly playing with phrasing and accent placement. On the latter, the clarity of her voice and straight-ahead delivery allow the bass to come in behind the beat, embellish the melody, or lay out all together. It was smart to play off of rather than compete with McBride.

The instrumental accompaniment is a collective model of effective economy. Whether it's Peter Bernstein's guitar or Xavier Davis's piano, Solivan seems to require nothing more than chords simply stated or implied. Michael Kanan's spare piano contribution to her unadorned reading of Cole Porter's "After You" would be at home at the old Café Carlyle. Pelt himself makes one brief appearance on "Moon Ray," but it's a meaningful turn.

Two Betty Carter-associated numbers, "I Can't Help It" and "Social Call," swing moderately with recessed blues feeling and rhythmic aplomb.

—Kirk Silsbee

Prisoner Of Love: Bliss; The Lonely One; All Or Nothing At All; Prisoner Of Love; I Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out To Dry; Moon Ray; May I Come In; I Can't Help It; Day Dream; After You; Social Call. (48:54)

Personnel: Marianne Solivan, vocals; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet (6); Peter Bernstein, guitar (1, 6, 7); Xavier Davis, piano (2, 4, 8, 11); Michael Kanan, piano (5, 10); Christian McBride, bass (1, 3, 16); Ben Wolfe, bass (2, 4, 8, 11); Johnathan Blake, drums (2, 4, 8, 11).

Ordering info: mariannesolivan.com

Ralph Bowen *Total Eclipse*

POSI-TONE 8097

★★★★

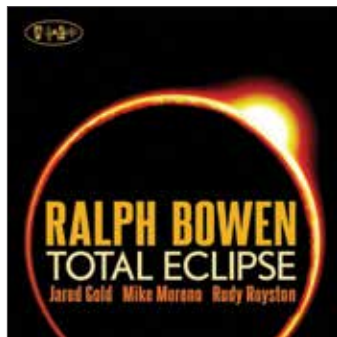
Hitting his stride on his fourth recording with Posi-Tone, Ralph Bowen steps back into the studio with a new group to buttress his dexterous saxophone playing on *Total Eclipse*. Bowen maintains a leisurely air of confidence over an hour's worth of original tunes.

His big band background is implicit in the title track, which wins its way into favor courtesy of the saxophonist's brawny chops and superior feel for what swings. "Behind The Curtain" projects a different vibe, introducing itself with a skittering organ and drums pairing that feeds a jumpy rhythm and one of many deftly performed, appealingly odd organ solos from Jared Gold. Bowen's sinewy progressions bulge and bend the melody like a rubber band in "On Green," while his lightning-fast lines on "Dowsing Rod" foreshadow the explosion of virtuosity and soulful rhythm work on "Hip Check," the album's highlight. Differences in tone and tension among Gold, Mike Moreno and Rudy Royston keep the textures malleable. Moreno's pretty guitar trills soften Gold's futuristic organ work, while his honeyed phrases balance out Bowen's solos. Though the material here is isn't exactly revolutionary, Bowen's latest effort is consistently satisfying, and undeniably fun. —Jennifer Odell

Total Eclipse: Total Eclipse; Behind The Curtain; Into The City; The Dowsing Rod; On Green; Arrows Of Light; Exosphere; Hip Check; In My Dreams. (61:25)

Personnel: Ralph Bowen, tenor saxophone; Jared Gold, organ; Mike Moreno, guitar; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Antibalas *Antibalas*

DAPTONE 028

★★★★

Antibalas last released an album five years ago, but the band's members haven't been idle in the interim. Several members worked on Bill Jones' stage musical *Fela!*, about Nigerian afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti, which is as fitting a project as possible, given the band's debt to Kuti.

The band's faithful afrobeat rendering works so well for a few reasons. First, they embraced the sound before any of their contemporaries. More importantly, the musicians understand how afrobeat feels, and that is key to creating compelling new material in a well-defined genre. Also, the band has a Nigerian singer—the rhythms of afrobeat are built partly around the rhythms of Yoruba and pidgin English speech, and having a frontman who lives with that rhythm is huge. Antibalas sounds on form here. The horns hit hard on "The Ratcatcher," the saxophonists reel off compact, memorable solos and the band's new rhythm section burns, especially on closer "Sare Kon Kon," which slips into a unique groove that plays with the form without losing it.

—Joe Tangari



Antibalas: Dirty Money; The Ratcatcher; Him Belly No Go Sweet; Ari Degbe; Ibeji; Sare Kon Kon. (42:33)
Personnel: Amayo, lead vocals; Gbedu Spirit, drum; Agogo bells, congas; Victor Axelrod, organ, electric piano, sticks; Stuart Bogie, tenor saxophone; Marcos Garcia, guitar, backing vocals; Aaron Johnson, trombone; Jordan McLean, trumpet; Luke O'Malley, guitar, backing vocals; Martin Perna, baritone saxophone, backing vocals; Miles Arntzen, drums; Marcus Farrar, shekere, sticks, background vocals; Nikhil Yerawadekar, bass; Reinaldo De Jesus, congas; Cochernea Gastelum, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone; Dave Guy, trumpet; Giancarlo Luiggi, shekere, background vocals; Yoshi Takemasa, congas, bell; Shaneeka Harrell, Afi McLendon, Lucinda Slim, background vocals.

Ordering info: daptone.com

Jazz Arts Trio *Swing Of Many Colors*

JRI RECORDINGS J131

★★½

Make no mistake, *Swing Of Many Colors* is a classical recording disguised as a jazz one. Even though the instrumentation is the jazz standard-bearing piano trio format and the tunes are vintage repertoire from heavyweights such as Ahmad Jamal, Oscar Peterson, Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea and a few others, the Jazz Arts Trio takes a deliberate approach to the material.

One can't deny the craftsmanship from the individual musicians. Frederick Moyer excels at mimicking Jamal's smile-inducing syncopated rhythms and orchestral flourishes as well as, say, Jarrett's explorative approach at interpreting standards. Underneath Foyer are bassist Peter Tillotson and drummer Peter Fraenkel, a seemingly alert rhythm section, capable of shifting gears, ranging from streamlined shuffle and swing to more extravagant cross-dialogues.

But when listening to the trio's reenactments of Jamal's delightful eight-song "The Pershing Suite," Peterson's swaggering "Night Train" or Corea's cliff-hanging "Matrix," the ultimately question quickly becomes, "Why do I need this if I either have the originals or have access to the originals?" There's the mild enjoyment of hearing examples of superb transcription and execution. Still, for those who don't want to engage in that erudite exercise, *Swing Of Many Colors* amounts to a little more than nifty audio doppelgangers. —John Murph



Swing Of Many Colors: But Not For Me; The Surrey With The Fringe On Top; Moonlight In Vermont; Musical Musci; There Is No Greater Love; Poinciana; Woody 'N You; What's New; Billy Boy; Night Train; Fly Me To The Moon; All The Things You Are; For All We Know; Matrix. (68:15)

Personnel: Frederick Moyer, piano; Peter Tillotson, bass; Peter Fraenkel, drums.

Ordering info: jrirecordings.com

El Portal *New Trophy*

CAMJAZZ 3312-5

★★★★

There are a couple of conceptual entry points when first listening to El Portal's *New Trophy*. The first is the group's origins back in the autumn of 2006, when all five members (who hail from the Midwest and East Coast) were sequestered in a Floridian house during a hurricane and conceived a new band. The second is its atypical instrumentation—tenor saxophone, electric guitar, Fender Rhodes, bass and drums.

"Vortex," the first of an entire album's worth of original compositions by saxophonist Nolan Lem, offers tight yet mesmerizing melodic lines. The playing initially sounds disciplined and unified enough to be through-composed, though Lem's explorative soloing further in carries an improvised sound and spirit. A sharp guitar and drum attack commences "Crunch I," which has a teasing syncopated approach before morphing into a straightahead burner. Conversely, "Crunch II" stretches out over a more deliberately explorative tempo.

The lovely "A Portrait Of Paul" unfolds in a dignified manner, with Lem's saxophone and Joe Rehmer's bass coming across as particularly expressive. And there's a fun, almost mischievous communal attack on closing track "Tazerpolis" as guitarist Rainer Davis and keyboardist Paul Bedal subtly jockey for advantage like competitive but loving brothers.

—Yoshi Kato



New Trophy: Vortex; Triptych; New Trophy; Crunch I; Crunch II; The Logic In My Life; Portrait Of Paul; Y-Y; Hysterics; Tazerpolis. (43:52)

Personnel: Nolan Lem, tenor saxophone; Rainer Davis, electric guitar; Paul Bedal, Fender Rhodes; Joe Rehmer, bass; Dion Keith Kerr IV, drums.

Ordering info: camjazz.com

**Evan Parker/Eddie
Prévost/John Edwards**
*All Told: Meetings
With Remarkable
Saxophonists
Volume 1*

MATCHLESS RECORDINGS 81

★★★★

**Sebastian Lexer/Eddie
Prévost/Seymour Wright**
*Impossibility In Its
Purest Form*

MATCHLESS RECORDINGS 82

★★★★

Percussionist Eddie Prévost not only co-founded the British improvising collective AMM more than 45 years ago, he is its chief annotator and its sole consistent member. With these dual roles he has both explained the aesthetic, political and ethical dimensions of an enterprise dedicated to constant self-examination and on-stage negotiation, and ensured the music's immediacy through the agency of his exactly tuned-in playing. But before he did any of that, he was a fine jazz drummer with a thing for Max Roach. Since AMM plays only occasionally, Prévost does most of his work in other settings. These two trio recordings show him on the one hand working with associates



who participate in the improv workshop he convenes every month in London, and on the other with a pair of high-powered players who put Prévost in touch with his jazz roots.

The guiding principle of Prévost's workshop is to be open to all sonic possibilities. Participants can have distinctive personal styles, and neither of his colleagues here could be mistaken for anyone else—Seymour Wright extracts long, grainy-textured ribbons of sound from his alto saxophone, while Sebastian Lexer plucks a myriad of barely perceptible utterances from his electronically enhanced piano. But they must be willing to let personal expression go in order for the music to emerge. It can seem almost independent of the

musicians who play them, and much of the music on *Impossibility In Its Purest Form* feels more like the result of a patient search than something that is made to happen. Prévost is credited with percussion, but it sounds like he's restricted himself to a bowed tam-tam. While each player's sounds can be harsh, their interactions contain a stillness that is quite affecting.

All Told, on the other hand, is all about movement. Evan Parker sticks to tenor saxophone, and Prévost plays a drum kit; the lineup is no different than that on *Way Out West*. I doubt that these players, who have worked with each other in various combinations for decades, consider themselves any less committed to freedom than Prévost's workshop fellows, but the music behaves quite differently. The intricate bass figures, brushed drums and gruff-toned, spiraling horn lines are constantly on the move, twisting around each other in an ongoing exchange of challenge and support. The music doesn't always swing, but its propulsion feels even more elemental, and every bit as involving as the starker playing on *Impossibility In Its Purest Form*.

—Bill Meyer

All Told: All Told-Part 1; All Told-Part 2, (72:03)

Personnel: John Edwards, bass; Evan Parker, tenor saxophone; Eddie Prévost, drums.

Impossibility In Its Purest Form: Trilinear α; Trilinear β; Trilinear γ; Impossibility In Its Purest Form. (71:13)

Personnel: Sebastian Lexer, piano; Eddie Prévost, percussion; Seymour Wright, alto saxophone.

Ordering info: matchlessrecordings.com

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Harris Eisenstadt *Canada Day III*

SONGLINES 1596

★★★★

Harris Eisenstadt *Canada Day Octet*

482 MUSIC 482-1080

★★★★½

The spirit of rapprochement infuses the music that Harris Eisenstadt composes for his working group, Canada Day. The Toronto-born, New York-based drummer reconciles accessible melodies and loping grooves with intricate structures and challenging improvisations. The musicians in his quintet, all of whom save relative newcomer bassist Garth Stevenson have been members since the band's inception, display equal facility not only playing inside and out, but bridging the two in ways that make sense within the structure of a musical composition. In Eisenstadt's world, we can all get along.

Most of *Canada Day Octet* is devoted to a lengthy multi-part suite called "The Ombudsman." According to Eisenstadt, the piece is intended to mediate between those who appreciate creative music and those who just don't get it.

This recording merges two recurring



streams of Eisenstadt's work. He has made four previous records with large bands, usually working musicians assembled solely for that project. Rather than build another group from scratch, this time he expanded Canada Day with three additional horn players. This gave them a head start on mastering what sounds like a very demanding score full of precise transitions between passages of choral brass and stripped-back drums-vibes dialogues.

The horns do a swell job of realizing the colorful arrangements, and the soloists, especially trumpeter Nate Wooley and alto saxophonist Jason Mears, are consistently engaging. But one wonders if the band needed just a bit more time to get comfortable with the tunes;

the ensemble's delivery of the highlife-derived melody of "The Ombudsman 4," for example, sounds a bit tentative.

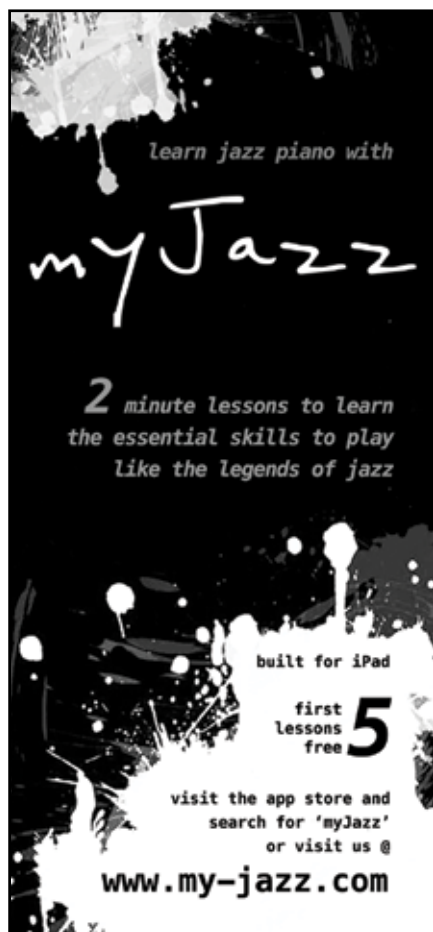
Eisenstadt's material on *Canada Day III* is at least as complex and more diverse, but more persuasively put across. The disc's eight pieces encompass a variety of moods and styles, often within a single composition. "A Whole New Amount Of Interactivity" uses an abstracted calypso theme to anchor highly contrasting solos, while the bristly "Nosey Parker" juxtaposes Wooley's elongated, sandpaper tones with constantly changing rhythms.

This group can also sustain an atmosphere to great effect, most notably on the slow, sweet dirge "King Of The Kutiriba." Wooley, tenor saxophonist Matt Bauder and vibraphonist Chris Dingman are all adroit soloists, dancing lightly upon Eisenstadt's sharp and shifting meters, and they seem comfortable enough with the material to bring its many strengths into sharp relief.

—Bill Meyer

Canada Day III: Slow And Stead; Settled; A Whole New Amount Of Interactivity; The Magician If Lublin; Song For Sara; Nosey Parker; Shuttle Off This Mortal Coil; King Of The Kutiriba. (54:57)
Personnel: Nate Wooley, trumpet; Matt Bauder, tenor saxophone; Chris Dingman, vibraphone; Garth Stevenson, bass; Harris Eisenstadt, drums.
Ordering info: songlines.com

Canada Day Octet: The Ombudsman 1; The Ombudsman 2; The Ombudsman 3; The Ombudsman 4; Ballad For 10.6.7. (46:33)
Personnel: Nate Wooley, trumpet; Matt Bauder, tenor saxophone; Chris Dingman, vibraphone; Garth Stevenson, bass; Harris Eisenstadt, drums; Ray Anderson, trombone; Dan Peck, tuba; Jason Mears, alto saxophone.
Ordering info: 482music.com



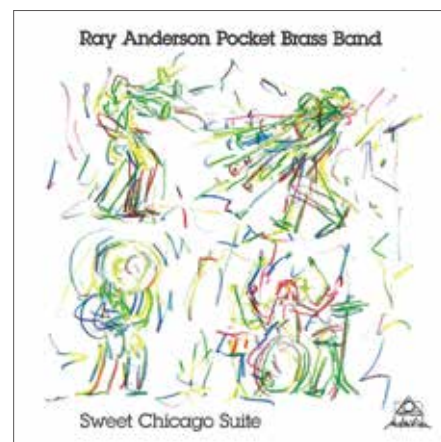
Ray Anderson Pocket Brass Band *Sweet Chicago Suite*

INTUITION 71306

★★★★

Ray Anderson's Pocket Brass Band usually sounds bigger than a three-brass-and-drums quartet, if only because trombonist Anderson and trumpeter Lew Soloff so often mix it up. They stay on each other so the texture rarely has a chance to thin out. Charles Mingus used that everybody-stay-busy gambit in his small groups. So did Chicago bands from King Oliver's to the Art Ensemble: bands where brass players might dive into guttural timbres, to thicken the stew.

Anderson's joyous *Sweet Chicago Suite* has been kicking around for a decade—he performed it to understandable acclaim at the city's jazz festival in 2002. The composer had left Chicago decades earlier, but had no trouble tapping into fond memories, of back-alley views, record shopping at the Maxwell Street market and early AACM concerts. Two newer encores are equally infused with the blues. All that said, the brass band instrumentation, raucous interplay and rhythm players' street beats conjure the Big Easy more than the Big Onion. The suite reminds us how closely connected New Orleans and Chicago are, sharing a love of vocalized brass playing, and a blues with a mambo beat, like "Some



Day." "Chicago Greys" starts subdued, a graveyard-bound procession. New Orleans' Matt Perrine may thicken the front line harmonies on sousaphone, the marching-band tuba, though more often he puffs out powerful, limber bass figures. Bobby Previte's tom-tom heavy big-beat drumming embodies the band's make-a-racket esthetic. His cymbals tend to punctuate the action rather than crowd the high frequencies—the better to let the horns' rich overtones ring out.

—Kevin Whitehead

Sweet Chicago Suite: Sweet Chicago Suite (Chicago Greys; High School; Magnificent Mistifio; Going to Maxwell Street; Get to It; Same Day); The Stingray March; Next March. (58:45)
Personnel: Ray Anderson, trombone; Lew Soloff, trumpet; Matt Perrine, sousaphone; Bobby Previte, drums.
Ordering info: challengerecords.com

Original Occupy Songster

It's fitting that Woody Guthrie's 100th birthday coincides with the Occupy era. Crooked bankers, fast-talking lawyers, calls for populist uprising—these were staples in the Oklahoma-born singer-songwriter's anthems, and nowadays they sound almost prophetic. As he sings on "Pretty Boy Floyd": "Some will rob you with a six-gun / Some with a fountain pen." Make that a subprime mortgage.

Smithsonian Folkways celebrates a century of Guthrie by digging into his treasure trove of recordings and assembling a handy new retrospective, **Woody Guthrie At 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection** (Smithsonian Folkways SFW 40200; 60:03/60:02/60:12 ★★★★★½). Packaged in a 150-page book featuring essays, track notes and the singer-songwriter's drawings, the three-disc set succeeds by managing a careful balancing act. The song selection, a varied collection with such essentials as "Jesus Christ," "Jolly Banker" and "Riding In My Car," makes *Woody Guthrie At 100* a safe jumping-off point for casual listeners and anyone too daunted to sift through stacks of his compilations. The generous bonus material—21 new tracks and six never-before-heard songs—makes the set equally relevant for fans and scholars.

Right away, listeners are rewarded with the alternate version of "This Land Is Your Land," featuring the original lyrics (i.e., the verse about a sign that "said 'private property' / But on the back side it didn't say nothing / This land was made for you and me"). The third disc features a handful of unreleased standouts, particularly "Them Big City Ways," a ditty that chronicles good people corrupted by the pitfalls of urban living. Throughout, Guthrie infuses the material with his trademark empathy, even when he's at his most political. Musically, what's striking is what a charismatic powerhouse he was with just an acoustic guitar and harmonica.

But despite his knack for writing politically charged numbers, it's Guthrie's children's songs that epitomize his rare gift. They often straddle the line between playful sing-alongs and mature folk standards. The pro-union "All Work Together" would sound at home in Bruce Springsteen's hands as a hollering stomp. "My Little Seed" might as well be a metaphor for the perseverance of the human spirit.

In the late 1990s, post-punk British songwriter Billy Bragg and Wilco brought Guthrie's playful spirit to the recording of *Mermaid Avenue*, now compiled in the box set **Mermaid Avenue: The Complete Sessions** (Nonesuch 529926; 49:20/49:47/59:57 ★★★★★½). Guthrie's daughter Nora had asked them to write songs around her father's melody-less lyrics, which had piled up in reams during



Woody Guthrie

ERIC SCHALL

Guthrie's later years in the hospital. (The process is shown in the included documentary, *Man In The Sand*.) What emerged was a folk-rock triumph that updated Guthrie's sound while maintaining a timeless quality.

The Complete Sessions features the resulting albums, *Mermaid Avenue, Vol. I* and *Vol. II*, with a slightly crisper, albeit unnecessary, remastering job by Bob Ludwig. The set also includes *Vol. III*, a scattered but strong new outtakes disc.

The best *Mermaid Avenue* songs capture not Guthrie the populist folk singer but Guthrie the earthy mystic and family man. Even the roof-raising numbers—"Christ For President" and "All You Fascists"—maintain his sense of whimsy. *Vol. I* has since gone on to become a modern classic with such gems as "California Stars," "She Came Along To Me," "Ingrid Bergman" and "Hesitating Beauty." It was followed up two years later, in 2000, with the nearly as strong second volume, featuring "Airline To Heaven," "Joe DiMaggio Done It Again" and the sublime "Remember The Mountain Bed."

But the real draw here is *Vol. III* for its bonus tracks, and on this disc, Wilco especially delivers the goods. "When The Roses Bloom Again," a dirge about a fallen soldier's last wish to be reunited with his lover, would have been a standout on *Vol. I* or *II*. The straightforward cover of "The Jolly Banker"—recorded more recently than the rest of the material, in 2009—rivals Guthrie's original. The album ends with Bragg singing "I'm Out To Get," a rollicking number about a have-not's dream of rising up against his unkindly landlord. The sentiment might be misdirected, but as with Guthrie's best songs, it has an irresistible charge. **DB**

Ordering info: folkways.si.edu; nonesuch.com

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Return To Forever *The Mothership Returns*

EAGLE ROCK ENTERTAINMENT 202572

★★★★½

Chick Corea's music can be so portable. Just listen to how this new edition of Return To Forever (IV) re-enlivens his "Señor Mouse." It's a song filled with possible gambits, twists and turns, at times funky, filled with counterpoint, endlessly musical. Here, it's handled in the best kick-ass way possible, with former colleagues violinist Jean-Luc Ponty and guitarist Frank Gambale in the fold, joining original member Stanley Clarke along with another early member, drummer Lenny White.

"Señor Mouse" is part of the recently recorded three-disc (two CDs/one DVD) set *The Mothership Returns*, a package that suggests a flair for the dramatic, in terms of self-referencing and backward glances. But for fans of this band, there are bound to be lots of hosannas as they revisit all the high points of what has been a curious history, one that's become more "reunion" than actual, since the band essentially split up after 1976's *Romantic Warrior*.

What this band has going for it is not only longevity but a corner on fun. John McLaughlin, Wayne Shorter, the late Joe Zawinul and Tony Williams, even Ponty, among others, don't have access to this world nowadays like RTF, thanks not only to Corea's pen but Clarke's and White's as well. The creative medley of two White compositions make for a major highlight here, as the band takes advantage of Ponty's lyrical style to sidle up next to a reinvention of "The Shadow Of Lo" with "The Sorceress," tunes



that hold musical interest regardless of their context.

The same could also be said for Clarke's "School Days," another song that's remarkable in part because of its simplicity, its bare-naked contrast to practically everything else here, which generally tends toward a kind of highly arranged, detail-oriented funk. "School Days," instead, just rocks, and with a catchy theme, to boot.

Another highlight apart from Corea's pen is a '70s anthem of Ponty's that the band takes full advantage of. "Renaissance," like "School Days," offers a contrast to the typical RTF vibe of intricacy and narrative extravagance. As with "School Days," it's another vehicle for pure jamming off a sweet chord progression.

Listening to *The Mothership Returns*, one might ask: Is it polish or age that accounts for the sound and look of these revisits? If you were to check out any YouTube performances of this band back in the day or were there to see them live, youngsters all, it might've

been the rough edges, a raw quality that you were most impressed with. But then you hear (and see) tunes like Clarke's "Dayride" and "School Days," what with their seemingly perennial youthful pluck and funk, and you rethink the timetable. And yes, each of these selections includes some 21st century tweaks that remind listeners that these guys have moved on, keeping the music from collecting dust, taking what they've learned along the way and inserting something new here and there.

As for the DVD, the documentary "Inside The Music" is an impeccable recording that plays like a elongated press release. The video goes in and out between black-and-white and color as the band members talk on camera, all of it interspersed with parts of songs from different shows filmed in September of 2011. *The Mothership Returns* does contain two complete, uninterrupted performances of Clarke's "After The Cosmic Rain," where one gets the sense that '70s prog-jazz-rock lives, featuring one of Clarke's crowd-pleasing, show-bizzy, pyrotechnically blistering electric bass solos.

One of the less colorful RTF tunes, "Rain" is complex without the zingers found elsewhere. Not so with the other one, Corea's "The Romantic Warrior," where, once again, the band's flair for the dramatic, and for fun, is amply displayed, but with music that refuses to ever sound dated. —John Ephland

The Mothership Returns: Disc One: Medieval Overture; Señor Mouse; The Shadow Of Lo/Sorceress; Renaissance (53:58). Disc Two: After The Cosmic Rain; The Romantic Warrior; Concierto de Aranjuez/Spain; School Days; Beyond The Seventh Galaxy (58:29). DVD: Return To Forever: Inside The Music; After The Cosmic Rain; The Romantic Warrior; The Story Of Return To Forever (1:52:26).

Personnel: Chick Corea, piano, keyboards; Stanley Clarke, acoustic and electric basses; Lenny White, drums; Jean-Luc Ponty, violin; Frank Gambale, electric and acoustic guitars.

Ordering info: eaglerockent.com

Mike Stern *All Over The Place*

HEADS UP 33186

★★½

Ever since Carlos Santana scored multiple chart-busting successes with 1999's Grammy-winning *Supernatural*, headlining musicians have increasingly given into the temptation of loading albums with heavy-hitting collaborators. Guitarist Mike Stern is no exception, flooding his prior two releases with associates ranging from Eric Johnson to Randy Brecker. The former Blood, Sweat & Tears member reprises the formula on *All Over The Place*. However unintentional, the record's title epitomizes the pitfalls of the all-but-the-kitchen-sink approach.

Unlike Santana in the late '90s, Stern doesn't seem to yearn for a revival on the pop charts. He seldom operated within mainstream parameters, and given the heart-quickening jam "Out Of The Blue" and bop-heavy



"OCD" on his new disc, evidence of his tenure with Miles Davis in the early '80s remains in swing. But if he's not pursuing commercial crossover appeal, how to otherwise explain why the majority of this unfocused, meandering and boredom-inducing set comes across

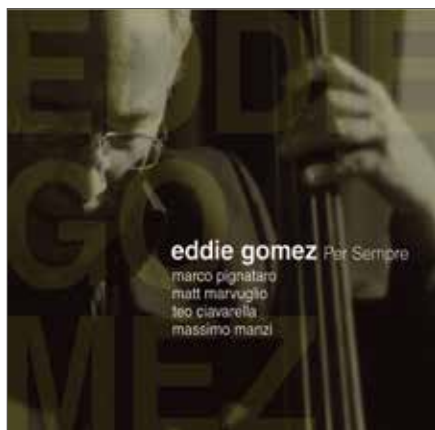
akin to the diluted music playing overhead in a department store shoe section?

In striving to touch on multiple styles, Stern does little else than sound like a pretender possessing cursory knowledge of complex traditions and fare. The rotating cast does him few favors; names mean nothing if the compositions are subpar. A stab at polyrhythmic funk via the easy-listening "Cameroon" could've been on side one of *Chicago 17*; the smooth fusion of "Flipside" belongs in elevators. Stern has a few moments, but next time, he'd be wise to pare the guest list and bar the door to the clubhouse. —Bob Gendron

All Over The Place: AJ; Cameroon; Out Of The Blue; As Far As We Know; Blues For Al; OCD; You Never Told Me; Half Way Home; Light; Flipside; All Over The Place. (75:23)

Personnel: Mike Stern, guitar; Jim Beard, piano, Hammond B3 organ; Victor Bailey, bass; Richard Bona, vocals, bass; Randy Brecker, trumpet; Keith Carlock, drums; Lionel Cordew, drums; Al Foster, drums; Bob Franceshini, saxophone; Kenny Garrett, saxophone; Dave Holland, acoustic bass; Anthony Jackson, contrabass guitar; Tim Keiper, percussion; Tom Kennedy, bass; Will Lee, bass; Bob Malach, saxophone; Chris Potter, saxophone; Esperanza Spalding, vocals, acoustic bass; Leni Stern, rhythm wah-wah guitar; N'goni Ba; Kim Thompson, drums; Dave Weckl, drums; Victor Wooten, bass.

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com



Eddie Gomez *Per Sempre*

BFM JAZZ 302 062 414

★★★★½

On this fine, sensitive recording of bassist Eddie Gomez's Italian-based quintet Bologna figures strongly in the geo-musical equation. The Italian city is the site of the recording and also the thematic hook on saxophonist Marco Pignataro's tune "Bologna d'Inverno," its moody modal air reminiscent of "Maiden Voyage" and well-suited to this particular ensemble's crepuscular charms.

The inclusion of Matt Marvuglio on flute in the ensemble, along with Gomez's own varied approaches to his instrument, can give the textural balance a chamber-esque feeling, compared to a more standard sax/trumpet jazz

quintet front line. Marvuglio, a strong player and improviser, also supplies the composition that turns out to be the album's longest track, the floaty waltz "Why Cry?" Later in the set, saxophonist Pignataro's aptly named, lyrically brooding, minor mode number "Homesick" continues a pensiveness on the album.

In the main, *Per Sempre* sticks to a fairly understated musical plan of operations, emphasizing sensitive interactions and playing generally more about introspection than extroversion. Even the album's one nod to the standards canon, "Stella By Starlight," keeps a contemplative cool and a composed ensemble character rather than heeding the will to burn on this ultra-familiar chart.

Pianist Teo Clavarella's "Pops & Alma" is another waltz-time lovely, bittersweet in spirit, and a good vehicle for Gomez's bass solo, with the bassist's familiar singalong voice murmuring in the margins. He thinks, musically, in a singing way, resulting in vocalization along the path from head to strings. Gomez's own originals for the session cover a range from the sweetly melodic opener "Arianna" (with the bassist playing the head, arco, before his limber pizzicato solo) to the supple ballad "Forever" and the brief bass solo "Epilogue," which supplies the album a tender end statement. Here, Gomez the celebrated bassist steps forward alone, after serving roles as bandleader and foundation-keeper.

—Josef Woodard

Per Sempre: Arianna; Bologna d'Inverno; Why Cry?; Forever; Pops & Alma; Stella By Starlight; Homesick; Epilogue. (55:00)

Personnel: Eddie Gomez, bass; Marco Pignataro, tenor and soprano saxophone; Matt Marvuglio, flute; Teo Clavarella, piano; Massimo Manzi, drums.

Ordering info: bfmjazz.com

Sara Leib *Secret Love*

OA2 2208

★★★★½

Young jazz singers often go through a phase of pretending to be horns. That's what Sara Leib does on her sophomore effort. But Leib is not a horn, and assuming that posture shortchanges the emotional content of her material.

She has a sparkling alto that doesn't want for personality. Where she might use it most effectively, on, say, "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," she breezes through the song with no more attention to the words than if she were flipping through the day's mail. Similarly, she tries to hold her own with saxophonist Dayna Stephens on "Some Day My Prince Will Come" and gets steamrolled. Drummer Eric Harland sticks loudly; great for a full-bodied tenor saxophone, but here it sounds like so many drum and cymbal darts whizzing by her voice. Leib sounds most effective on "The Way You Behold," a ballad she co-wrote. She sings it straight, holding her notes with little or no monkeying. On "With My Own Two Hands," she's rhythmically fearless, no matter the results. Stephens' tenor and Taylor Eigsti's



blues-drenched keyboard counterbalance her occasional excesses. She also connects to Bob Dylan's "To Make You Feel My Love," where Leib exhibits a little developing soul.

—Kirk Silsbee

Secret Love: It Might As Well Be Spring; Night And Day; Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye; So This Is Love; The Thrill Is Gone; With My Own Two Hands; To Make You Feel My Love; Some Day My Prince Will Come; The Way You Behold; Willow Weep For Me; Secret Love; All I Have To Do Is Dream. (51:57)

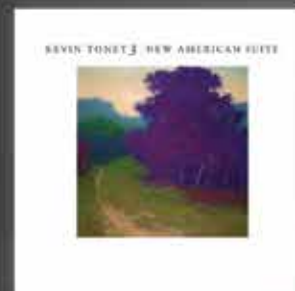
Personnel: Sara Leib, vocals; Dayna Stephens, tenor saxophone; Taylor Eigsti, piano, keyboards (1, 2, 4-6, 10); Aaron Parks, piano, keyboards (3, 7-9, 11, 12); Harish Ragavan, bass; Eric Harland, drums; Richie Barshay, percussion, tabla.

Ordering info: saraleib.com



Jeff Kashiwa *Let It Ride*

Rippingtons saxophonist returns with an all-new album featuring guitarist Russ Freeman, pianist David Benoit, and keyboardist Tom Schuman. ON TOUR THIS FALL WITH THE RIPPINGTONS AND THE SAX PACK. Available August 21



Kevin Toney 3 *New American Suite*

New American Suite is a nine-song work that Toney conceptualized as a salute to the spirit of the United States. Highlights of *New American Suite* include eight original tunes and Scott Joplin's classic "The Entertainer"



David Reinhardt Trio *Colombe*

Guitarist David Reinhardt, grandson of Django Reinhardt released his critically acclaimed first album in 2008. *Colombe* features a wide repertoire of original material, an Ivan Lins bossa classic, as well as a Jimmy van Heusen classic "Here's That Remy Day."



Denise King & Olivier Hutman Trio *No Tricks*

Philadelphia-native Denise King accompanies Olivier Hutman's performance on the piano. A mixture of jazz standards and original pieces composed by Olivier Hutman.



Benoît Delbecq *Crescendo In Duke*

NATO 4375

★★★★

This is a change of pace for French pianist Benoît Delbecq, who has so far focused most of his career on playing original music. The project is divided between, roughly, a European band and an American combo with a strong Minneapolis connection and a more rock-tinged orientation.

Delbecq being a resolute modernist, one might expect an iconoclastic agenda where—as the idea is driven by a desire to shed some light on lesser-known tunes from the Duke Ellington repertoire—tunes for the most part culled from his late period. The material is therefore treated with respect, dedication and

wit. The performances are also imbued with a great deal of tenderness that translates into a deliciously nonchalant sway but avoids nostalgia. This is accomplished with some major support from the two rhythm sections, which equally succeed at subtly altering their backdrop even if that of the Minneapolis ensemble tends to rely on a heavier and steady beat.

Ironically, the better-known pieces provide the highlights, which is also a tribute to Delbecq's skills as an arranger. "Blue Pepper" is populated with alluring exotic sounds, and the pianist adroitly transcends "Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue" to clearly establish a link between past and present. But to bring the set to a successful close, Delbecq takes the matter in his own hands with a solo rendition of "Fontainebleau Forest."

While producer Jean Rochard must get his share of credit for putting this project together and drawing attention to musicians deserving more recognition such as British veteran Tony Coe, it is Delbecq's talents that help conjure up a joyful celebration of Ellington's music.

—Alain Drouot

Crescendo In Duke: Bateau; Portrait Of Mahalia Jackson; Portrait Of Wellman Braud; The Spring; Acht O' Clock Rock; Whirlpool; Goutelas Suite: a) Fanfare; b) Goutelas; c) Get With Itness; d) Something; e) Having At It; Blue Pepper; Tina; Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue; Fontainebleau Forest. (65:27)

Personnel: Benoît Delbecq, piano, prepared piano, bass-station; Tony Coe, clarinet, soprano sax (2, 6, 7–11, 14); Tony Malaby, tenor sax, soprano sax (2, 6, 7–11, 14); Antonin-Tri Hoang, bass clarinet, alto sax (2, 6, 7–11, 14); Jean-Jacques Avenel, bass (2, 6, 7–11, 13, 14); Steve Argüelles, drums, electronics, timpani, percussion (2, 4, 6, 7–11, 13, 14); Michael Nelson, trombone (1, 3, 5, 12); Steve Strand, trumpet, flugelhorn (1, 3, 5, 12); Dave Jansen, trumpet, flugelhorn (1, 3, 5, 12); Kenni Holmen, tenor sax, clarinet (1, 3, 5, 12); Kathryn Jensen, baritone sax, alto sax, bass clarinet (1, 3, 5, 12); Yohannes Tona, bass (1, 3, 5, 12); Michael Bland, drums (1, 3, 5, 12).

Ordering info: natomusic.fr

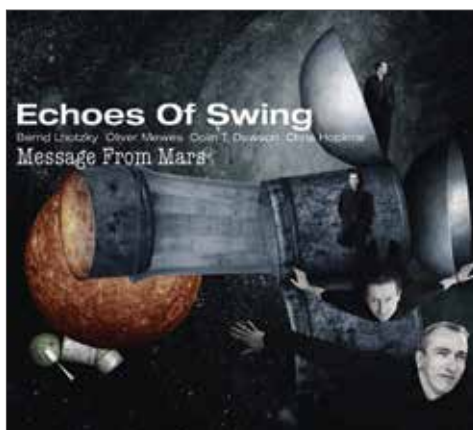
Echoes Of Swing *Message From Mars*

ECHOES OF SWING 4506

★★★★

This admirable international quartet (trumpeter Colin Dawson, alto saxophonist Chris Hopkins, pianist Bernd Lhotzky, drummer Oliver Mewes) mines the neglected pre-bop swing of the 52nd Street vintage small bands. The spread-chord harmonies, trumpet and alto apportionment, and precision ensemble work can fool the ear that this band is a larger unit. Resourcefulness isn't limited to the fine playing and the arrangements; they have a nose for good, neglected material. Analogous originals—Dawson's "Ghost Of Marsden Grotto," Lhotzky's "His Honour And The Vermin" and Hopkins' "Twilightnin' Hopkins"—make this group artistic kin to the best of the Arbors swing scholar/players, like Howard Alden and Dan Barrett.

Instrumental synchronicity and flawless uniformity in dynamics immediately bring to mind the John Kirby Sextet. "Shake It And Break It" has such smooth ensemble cohesion that the band seems to be one multi-faceted voice. Impeccable up-tempo execution on Sid Phillips' title track channels the conveyor-



belt modernism of Raymond Scott. Like the Kirbyites, Echoes swings the classics beautifully: "Butterfly Chase" is Lhotzky's dazzling chart on a Chopin's etude; Fritz Kreisler and Shostakovich also receive canny jazz recastings.

—Kirk Silsbee

Message From Mars: Shake It And Break It; Message From Mars; The Ghost Of Marsden Grotto; Don't Explain; Butterfly Chase; Goon Drag; Delirium; His Honour And The Vermin; Moonlight Fiesta; Liebesleid; "Twilightnin' Hopkins; Don't Save Your Love For A Rainy Day; Odeon; Bughouse; Spring Is Here; Gavotte. (58:39)

Personnel: Colin T. Dawson, trumpet, vocals (4, 12); Chris Hopkins, alto saxophone, piano (13); Bernd Lhotzky, piano; Oliver Mewes, drums.

Ordering info: echoesofswing.com



John Abercrombie Quartet *Within A Song*

ECM 2254

★★★★

The idea behind John Abercrombie's latest release was for the guitarist to pay homage to a single artist. The concept expanded to a more general tribute to Abercrombie's formative influences, 1960s post-bop icons like Sonny Rollins, Bill Evans and Ornette Coleman. Still, while the selections draw from a number of sources, Abercrombie returns to the core influence of Jim Hall, and particularly the guitarist's landmark partnership with Rollins.

On *Within A Song*, Rollins' part is played by Joe Lovano, and the pairing proves ideal. Enveloped by Abercrombie's diffusive tone, Lovano's husky tenor lets a reedy vulnerability show through the cracks, a fragility underlying his strength. The album contains two selections drawn from Rollins' *The Bridge*: "Where Are You" replaces the original's bluesy moan with a tender yearning, while Abercrombie fuses "Without A Song" with his titular original piece on the disc's liveliest number, buoyed by the spring in Drew Gress' walking step.

Hall was also a member of Evans' band on the album *Interplay*, whose title tune allows Lovano and Abercrombie to weave raveling lines around one another. And Sergio Mahanovich's "Sometime Ago," which closes the album on a wistful note, was a staple of the Art Farmer-Jim Hall Quartet. Some of the leader's knottiest playing can be found on Coleman's "Blues Connotation," which also inspires a melodic fog of a solo from Joey Baron. The drummer is also key to the hypnotic rendition of "Flamenco Sketches."

All four musicians are more than capable of muscular playing and are well-versed in these standards; making a sprint through the material an obvious option, they choose the opposite tack. They examine each tune with an almost sensual delicateness.

—Shaun Brady

Within A Song: Where Are You; Easy Reader; Within A Song/Without A Song; Flamenco Sketches; Nick Of Time; Blues Connotation; Wise One; Interplay; Sometime Ago. (61:11)

Personnel: John Abercrombie, guitar; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone; Drew Gress, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Lighting Up Montreux

Comprising 10 discs and more than 18 hours of music, ***The Definitive Miles Davis At Montreux DVD Collection 1973–1991*** (Eagle Rock Entertainment 303669; ★★★★★) is a one-of-a-kind document of how Davis evolved as an artist/performer beyond the 1960s. A 48-page hard-cover booklet with liner notes, a scant number of photos and a foreword by festival founder Claude Nobs augment this modestly designed package.

It all starts on July 8, 1973. And nobody was doing a piece like “Ife” before or since (including Davis). The camera is too focused on Davis, missing other members of the band (drummer Al Foster doesn’t appear until the end). Also featuring reedist Dave Liebman, guitarists Reggie Lucas and the late Pete Cosey, Michael Henderson on electric bass and percussionist Mtume, there’s lots of sweat and on-stage choreography with this elongated, unconventional and mesmerizing downshift of a funk staple.

Fast-forward to July 8, 1984, and it’s two lengthy shows in one day. In this afternoon set Foster and bassist Darryl Jones are busy working overtime as the reemergence of Davis at Montreux begins. The camera work is good, not great, as it focuses on Davis’ visual connections especially with guitarist John Scofield, who he seems to feel is the anchor to this band, which also includes reed player Bob Berg, keyboardist Robert Irving III and percussionist Steve Thornton.

The two-a-days continue through July 14, 1985. The afternoon show is energetic early on with Davis’ tone clear, more resonant. The high temperatures no doubt feeding the hot, bebop-like chops of Berg on tenor with Scofield’s and Jones’ playing a close second. And yet, following a tender reading of “Human Nature,” Davis sounds like he’s still trying to find his groove, seeming to struggle with his tone on “Time After Time,” with or without the mute. The band comes out swinging, Davis seemingly incapable of letting go of his horn, with everyone on fire.

With evening-only sets now, the July 17, 1986, concert is a funk fest with everyone swinging hard from the git-go. On guitars, new members Robben Ford and Adam Holzman add heft, Ford’s playing especially adding a serious bluesy element to “Maze.” It’s more of a playground setting as Davis moves around the stage. “Human Nature” modulates from its typical quiet to Ford moving it to a hard-rock, bluesy world. Guests George Duke and David Sanborn turn things upside down. Sanborn’s exchanges with Berg on “Burn” and Davis with Ford on “Portia” are standouts. The closer, “Jean-Pierre,” shows Davis as the



Miles Davis

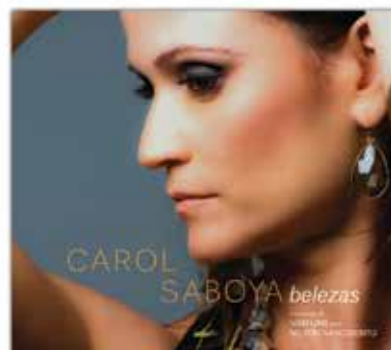
master of dynamic range, his playing all over this now-perennial favorite. Yet another new band emerges with the July 7, 1988, concert, particularly Kenny Garrett on alto. The highlight comes from the percussion/drums feature “Carnival Time.” Davis looks on in admiration as percussionist Marilyn Mazur threatens to steal the show.

It’s another new band for July 21, 1989, Davis sounding strong, a new arrangement of “New Blues” taking it up a notch. Tenorist Rick Margitza has replaced Garrett, and while he’s no Berg, his playing on “Hannibal” turns the song into a bona-fide, incendiary rocker. Singer Chaka Khan enters the picture on “Human Nature,” the camera work a tad shoddy. Saving grace is Davis’ duet with her on the coda. But the closer, “Portia,” finds Davis playing a short, seemingly uninspired solo as he leaves the stage prematurely.

Miles At Montreux climaxes with the rightfully acclaimed July 8, 1991, concert with Quincy Jones conducting the combined, super-sized Gil Evans Orchestra and George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band, Garrett back on alto with trumpeter Wallace Roney in tow. Davis allows himself one trip down memory lane with re-orchestrated versions from the Davis/Evans playbook, primarily from *Miles Ahead* but also including selections from *Birth Of The Cool*, *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain*. More symbol than substance, this concert finds Davis soldiering on despite his obvious frailties and shows how tough Evans’ charts were to execute.

DB

Ordering info: eaglerockent.com



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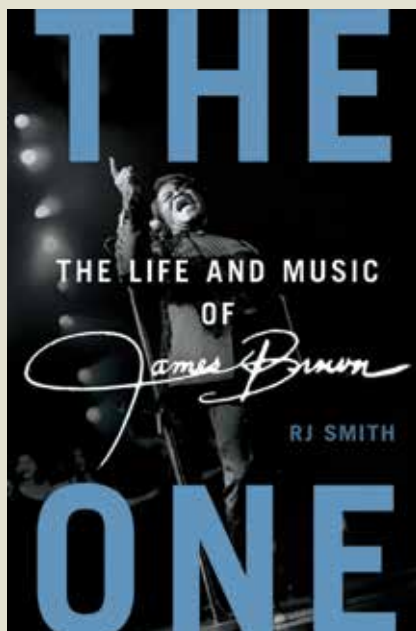
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The Raw Truth On Soul Brother No. 1

Just like the man's music, R.J. Smith's biography about James Brown is extremely blunt. There is no getting around it. If you're going to pen a book on a person who already has one thorough (for the most part) autobiography on the market, you'd better find hidden truths, dig up all the skeletons, surprise the readers and generally come correct. Smith raided quite a few secret stashes to explain why Brown was the man he was in *The One* (Gotham Books). The results don't always cast him in a positive light, since he reportedly stepped on as many people as he helped out, but the man's art still remains the central focus. The book breaks down the evolution of Brown's music from standard 1950s r&b to pioneering soul to otherworldly funk, especially crediting and describing the bassists and drummers who helped it evolve. Testimonials from his musicians are key: They knew his quirks inside and out and they prove more than willing to talk. Bobby Byrd, Richard "Kush" Griffith and Bootsy Collins in particular add plenty of details. Through it all, Smith's book makes plain not just the rhythmic meaning of the number that is the book's title, but also how Brown earned that ranking for himself.

Along with such colleagues, Brown's friends, family, lovers, crucial (if lesser-known) King Records employees and even rivals are dealt with in detail. Smith talked with these people where it was possible, and in the case of the deceased, sheds new light on oft-told tales, like the legendary violent feud with Joe Tex, which supposedly had its genesis when Brown stole Tex's wife. Several former band members, from the Famous Flames to the JBs to the Soul Generals, fully attest that Brown wasn't the easiest boss. In Brown's 1986 autobiography *The Godfather Of Soul*, his countless girlfriends and wives are limited to supporting roles; here, their involvement with him is more vividly exposed. As his fame grew, so did his circle of contacts. Everywhere he went, there was always some mythical white establishment figure blocking his every move, including record company presidents who thought he was a little too "smart" for his own good. All of this gave Brown a unique insight into American society. Smith even recounts an appearance on "The Mike Douglas Show," where Brown argued openly with David Susskind about racial integration.

Through it all, Smith's writing makes the story come to life. While he is clearly a fan of the man's work, his admiration is not blind, and he retains a sense of humor that never comes close to being snarky. With a personality as complex as Brown's, there were a lot of lines to be read through. Smith sees through

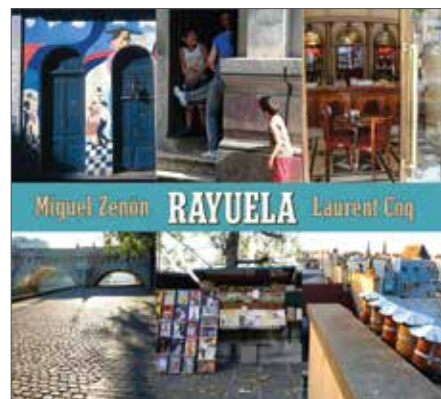


those lines with accurate vision. While *The One* is, essentially, a bootstraps story of success through hard work, it's also a scary example of corrupted power. If James Brown was ever just another replaceable r&b singer, he got over that trip quickly. Somewhere around the time of the groundbreaking *James Brown Show* album (a.k.a. *Live At The Apollo*) in the early 1960s, he became numero uno on the chain. If it took money or a pistol to keep him on top, then that's just the way it went.

But the narrative truly soars when it describes the post-1975 years. As the bandleader's key sidemen left him, his music became less original, and desperation began to fuel his business operations. This was when a younger crop of funk, and some rock, musicians had caught up with (and in some cases surpassed) Brown's innovations. David Bowie has a hit with "Fame," which totally bit Brown's style to the point where he covered the exact same song as "Hot." When Brown made his mid-'80s comeback, he came close to being an oldies act, something he steadfastly fought against. While he was starting to gain respect as an icon, he had to impress a new set of youngsters who only know him through a cameo in the movie *Rocky IV* and a series of arrests. Smith does a superlative job of describing the world changing around Brown, as well as Brown's reactions to those changes and the tumult that followed.

The One hardly puts Brown on a pedestal, as there are moments here where his dark side is on display in a glass case. For those who are aware of his eccentric streak, but still retain a love for him and his music, the book is an intriguing read about a man who could be simultaneously infallible and human. **DB**

Ordering info: us.penguinroup.com



Miguel Zenón/Laurent Coq *Rayuela*

SUNNYSIDE 1299

★★★★

In 1963, author Julio Cortazar encouraged readers to peruse the chapters of his revolutionary novel *Rayuela* ("Hopscotch," in English) non-sequentially, in the hopes that by becoming actively engaged with the work, they would uncover new meanings within it. From that perspective, Miguel Zenón and Laurent Coq's ambitious project is almost as much of a literary achievement as it is a musical one.

A series of "meditations" on events and people in the book, *Rayuela* experiments with song structures and the connections between tunes to express emotions and motifs each artist observed by reading the Argentine author's masterpiece. And Zenón's long held fascination with mathematical systems in music syncs perfectly with the story's numeric compulsions.

The first clue that patterns affect meaning comes in the disc's packaging, where the tracks are printed out of numeric order against a hopscotch board background. A riff on the character "La Maga" appears opposite a song about the death of her son ("La Muerte De Rocamadour"); "El Club De La Serpiente," a reference to the salon of artists whose philosophical discussions are central to almost everyone in the story, holds court at the top of the hopscotch board, even though the track is 10th on the recording. Such patterns continue within the compositions: a reversed version of the tabla beat and piano refrain that open "La Maga" echoes in the introduction to Rocamadour's elegy.

Most compelling, though, is the range of emotions evoked by the album as a whole. A sense of nostalgia permeates tracks like "Buenos Aires," as Coq's lush and stormy piano foundations bolster billowing melodies. Zenón's sinuous lines intertwine Dana Leong's bowing and Dan Weiss' raindrop-like tablas on "Talita."

—Jennifer Odell

Rayuela: Talita: La Muerte de Rocamadour; Gekrepten; Beunos Aires; Morellana; Oliveira; Berthe Trepas; Traveler; La Maga; El Club de la Serpiente. (67:26)

Personnel: Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; Laurent Coq, piano; Dana Leong, cello, trombone; Dan Weiss, tabla, percussion.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Guy Klucsevsek *The Multiple Personality Reunion Tour*

INNOVA 819
★★★★½

CD sleeve photos of accordion chameleon Guy Klucsevsek wearing five different hats belie still more corners to his persona. A 2010 Collins Fellowship gave Klucsevsek an opportunity to compile his favorite music styles with help from Dave Douglas, Kenny Wollesen and associates from polka and Texas swing traditions.

Klucsevsek keeps his tour short and sweet with several tracks under two minutes, tipping one or other hat to Bulgarian accordionist Ivan Milev, Basque trikitixa great Kepa Junkera, colleague Lars Hollmer plus Martin Denny, Erik Satie and dancer Sandy Silva. Humor busts

through Klucsevsek's joyful eclecticism and the upbeat polyphony of his squeezebox, here via Satie's wryness, there via reference to a disparaging accordion joke. Slovenian/American waltzes are represented but South American tango traditions ostensibly bypassed; this isn't cultural tourism but closer to home, though the desert-bound "Pink Elephant" sounds more Middle Eastern than Balkan. Multi-instrumentalist Jeffrey Barnes, listed on "ocarina, bag o' birds, harmonica, ukelele" and pictured on bass saxophone, is resourceful, as is versatile co-producer Carl Finch.

The disc starts hot with the fleet Bulgarian beats of "Breathless And Bewildered" punctuated by tuba and tenor banjo. "Waltz For Sandy" takes a mood shift after the circuitous melody, adding a cameo from John Hollenbeck on drums and xylophone. "Lädereld" is Hopalong Cassidy territory, featuring Ginny Mac, the leader, on melodica and Finch on mouth percussion; "Hymnopedie No. 2," a play on Satie's influence, is a chaste feature for Douglas. Cheese mixes with heartfelt nostalgia, Klucsevsek the ringmaster often surrendering limelight to fellow undersung musicians.

—Michael Jackson

The Multiple Personality Reunion Tour: Breathless And Bewildered; Waltz For Sandy; Gimme A Minute, Please (My Sequins Are Showing); Larsong; Ratatouille; Hymnopedie No. 1; Hymnopedie No. 2; Hymnopedie No. 3; Pink Elephant; O'O; Lädereld; The C&M Waltz; Moja Baba Je Pijana. (45:28)

Personnel: Guy Klucsevsek, accordion; Alex Meixner, accordion, trumpet; Brandon Seabrook, tenor banjo, acoustic guitar; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Kenny Wollesen, drums, percussion; Pete Donovan, bass; John Hollenbeck, drums, xylophone; Jo Lawry, Theo Bleckmann, Peter Eldridge, vocals (3); Ginny Mac, accordion; Dave Douglas, trumpet; Jeffrey Barnes, saxophones, clarinet, ocarina, bag o' birds, ukelele, percussion, harmonica; Carl Finch, piano, organ, guitar, keyboards, accordion, percussion, mouth percussion; Little Jack Melody, fretless bass; Alan Emert, drums.

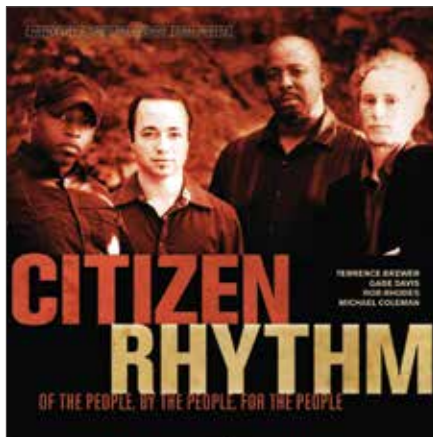
Ordering info: innova.mu

Citizen Rhythm *Of The People, By The People, For The People*

STRONG BREW MUSIC 06
★★★★½

Everyone deals with standards in their own sweet way. On *Of The People, By The People, For The People*, the debut album from Bay Area guitarist Terrence Brewer's Citizen Rhythm quartet, the strategy is to prop them up on funk rhythms, replacing the sizzle of the swing beat with the fire of soul-jazz drumming.

An early highlight on the album is the transformation of McCoy Tyner's pensive "Passion Dance" into a rollicking affair featuring a singing solo from Brewer, a long, thrillingly precise fill from drummer Rob Rhodes and frisky, uncluttered organ ruminations from keyboardist Michael Coleman. On Charles Mingus' "Nostalgia In Times Square," the head is stretched over a mysterious odd-meter groove, but solos are taken over a mellow dub reggae passage. "Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise" is given new life by bassist Gabe Davis' sly classic rock arrangement, in which the melody is stated over a crunchy electric piano vamp and steady rimshots on each beat.



But the pinnacle of is Brewer's reimagining of Jimmy Heath's "Gingerbread Boy." Beginning with a fast, fusion-y riff fueled by the bashing of open hi-hats, Heath's tricky bebop tune becomes a bouncy, ecstatic dance contest, replete with thick, rubbery bass lines and juicy wah-wah solos.

—Brad Farberman

Of The People, By The People, For The People: Speak No Evil; Passion Dance; Crystal Silence; Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise; Gingerbread Boy; Wildflower; E.S.P.; Nostalgia In Times Square; Prince Of Darkness; Crystal Silence; Nardis. (58:08)

Personnel: Terrence Brewer, guitar; Michael Coleman, keyboards; Gabe Davis, bass; Rob Rhodes, drums.

Ordering info: terrencebrewer.com

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Back to Bach: Keys to Jazz Piano Prowess

Playing solo jazz piano is a tricky business. The piano alone, in the hands of a great proponent of the art, can be many things at once—or in succession: a large drum set with pitches, an orchestra, two (or three or four) simultaneous horn-like voices, a big band and more. One of the keys to success as a soloist is how the hands work together.

I have taught for many years, and with rare exceptions, the student ends up playing for me alone. And I have heard countless times, “I wish you could hear me with a trio—I sound much better.” Truly, the modern jazz piano approach stresses “voicings” (chords without roots) in the left hand and single-note lines in the right. At its worst, the left hand sounds like what I call “the claw” as it stabs out chords that are often played by rote. Such voicings usually aren’t heard clearly, due to the focus on the right-hand lines. They don’t help the lines and are often too loud. The hands hardly work together at all—partly because the lower part of the right hand is not used at all, as it is only playing single notes and has no chance to connect with the left.

I once heard it said that pianists practicing alone should learn every tune three ways: 1) as a solo piece; 2) as if you are accompanying an imaginary horn player or vocalist (that is, playing chords with roots in the lower and middle range of the piano that convey some knowledge of chord substitution and establish a groove); and 3) as if you are playing with an imaginary trio. To those I would add memorization, transposition into at least two keys and perhaps playing in a variety of tempi and meters.

The only textbooks I ever ask any student to buy are the *Charlie Parker Omnibook* (I recommend learning to play the heads and some of the solos in a relaxed, “non-fingery” and swinging way—they are almost small jazz etudes unto themselves) and *371 Harmonized Bach Chorales and 69 Chorale Melodies with Figured Bass*, Riemenschneider edition.

It’s also a good idea to collect as much material by Great American Songbook composers as you can afford so you can learn the lyrics and the correct melodies. And I encourage piano students to get the complete book of tunes by Thelonious Monk. I have never owned a *Real Book* and am proud of that fact!

The Bach chorale book is virtually a Bible of four-part voice leading. They were written to be sung by actual voices, so each part is melodic. Voice leading, in addition to harmonically opening up the tune, also serves a rhythmic function,



MARKINS KAREN

each voice being rhythmically independent. But in order to make voice leading effective, pianists must learn from the root up, in four voices and by learning to pass the upper part of the left hand to the lower part of the right hand and vice-versa. Bach chorales are full of instances where the span between bass and tenor ranges from a 10th to an octave-and-five, so the tenor must be picked up by the thumb of the right hand. Refer to Examples 1a and 1b on the next page.

I thought it would be a good exercise to apply the principles of the chorales to the first four bars of a jazz ballad made famous by Coleman Hawkins. Something that I have found helpful is to restrict the top voice so that it must move on each successive chord but only up or down a half step or a whole step. It’s harder than jumping around but leads to smoother voice leading in the long run. If I were to do this linearly with eighth notes, it might look something like Example 2. (By the way, this approach can be used by any improviser to familiarize yourself with a set of chord changes and to overcome fear of “avoid notes” or routinely jumping to safe, triadic “in the chord” pitches). Don’t look for the “perfect” note, just keep the flow going; and sustain all of these activities for a period of time; I use a kitchen timer.

Now, using this top voice restriction, and changing chords/bass notes each half note,

and not doubling any voices, one might get Example 3. Remember that whatever chord you start on will impact where you can go, since you are restricted by the above-mentioned limits.

Using only passing quarter notes—with and without suspensions, and with half and whole steps in the top voice—might yield something like Example 4.

Now, where it gets really interesting is when you add in eighth notes and suspensions and achieve four really independent parts, à la Bach. See Example 5.

This is not easy! But I am convinced that if you practice each step as I have outlined above for a significant, sustained period of time, it is achievable.

Pick a tempo that is manageable and try not to stop—you may play a wonky chord, but just keep moving instead of stopping and looking for a perfect solution. And try to challenge yourself not to repeat the same chords every chorus—this requires knowledge of basic nuts-and-bolts jazz theory: passing chords, interpolated chromatic II-V chords, ascending and descending bass lines, changing roots and changing chord qualities (e.g., substituting a dominant seventh chord with a suspended seventh, or a dominant seventh chord for a seventh/flat-five). But this is only possible if you are really hearing all four

Example 1a



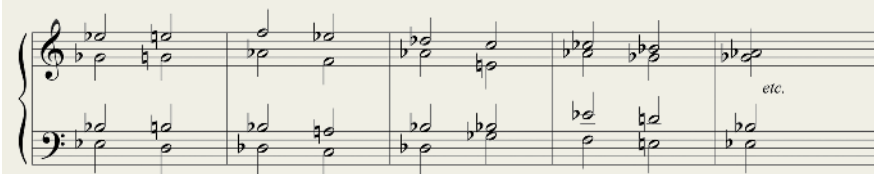
Example 1b



Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



Example 5



voices and your hands are used to passing lines between them.

Getting back to the Bach chorales themselves: There is an approach to playing them that may be helpful for you. Take the first phrase up to the fermata (usually two-to-three bars) and start by just playing the soprano and the bass, then alto and bass, tenor and bass, alto and tenor, soprano and tenor, and soprano and alto—all the pairs of two voices. Then, play through groups of threes: soprano, alto, bass; soprano, tenor, bass; alto, tenor, bass; soprano, alto, tenor. Only then should you proceed to play all four voices together. (You can also play three voices and sing the fourth.) Take the same

approach with the next phrase—when done, string the first two phrases together. Then, in an additive fashion, you will eventually play all the phrases in sequence after you have taken each one apart.

Do one Bach chorale each day, and you'll get through the entire book of 371 in about a year. A small amount of time spent daily with these treasures will yield enormous results on many levels.

DB

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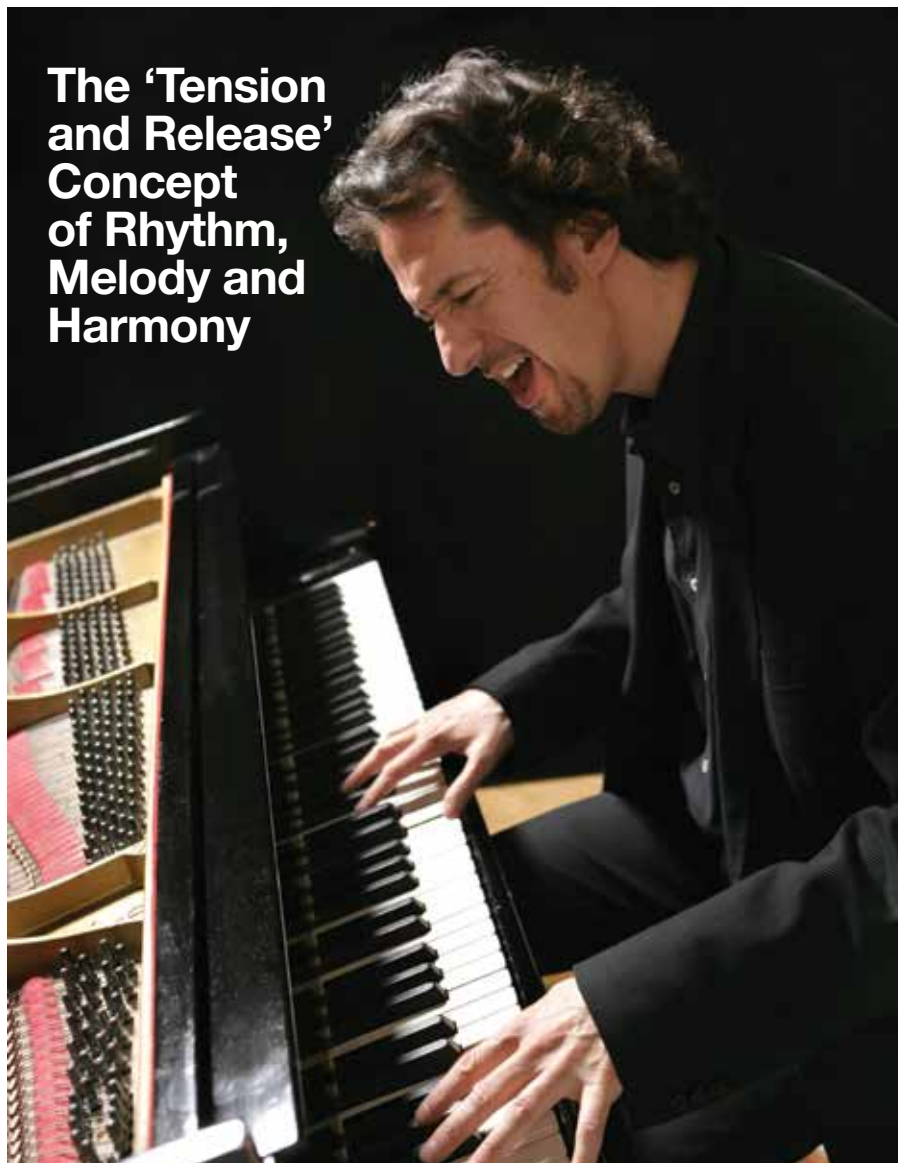
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The 'Tension and Release' Concept of Rhythm, Melody and Harmony



Think about taking a rubber band between the thumb and index finger of your right hand. Then take another part of it between the thumb and index finger of your left hand. Move each hand away from the other and slowly stretch the rubber band as tight as you can without breaking it. Slowly bring your hands back together until the rubber band is not stretched at all.

As you separate your hands, you see and feel the rubber band getting more and more stretched, and you feel more and more tension in the rubber band until it is as tightly stretched as possible. As you bring your hands closer together, you feel the tension in the rubber band diminish. That is tension and release.

The same concept of tension and release exists in music. When we have a certain rhyth-

mic groove with a specific subdivision of the time, the pulse feels like "home base." As long as we play rhythms that utilize only the home-base subdivisions, we feel the groove is relaxed. The minute we change the subdivision, perhaps from duple (x2) to triple (x3), we create tension. Then, when we return to our original subdivision, we feel a release.

The same concept applies to notes in the scale. If we are in the key of C major, the C note is the root, the home-base note. All other notes of the scale feel like they need to resolve to the root due to the tension we feel until the C is played. Certain notes create more tension than others in that they seem to demand resolution in a stronger manner.

The fifth degree of the C scale, G, has a very strong need to resolve to the C. The seventh

degree of the scale, B, is very strong also. The fourth and the second notes of the scale, F and D, have a lesser pull to the C, though they do have tensions that need to be resolved, either by going to the C or to a note that is less tense than itself. And finally, the third and the sixth of the scale have a lesser need to resolve to the C, but they do have some tension in them that can be released by going to the I.

This same concept applies to chords. In the key of C, the V chord (the dominant), G, is the most tense and has the most urgent need to be released to the root. That is the V-to-I progression, the strongest in the diatonic tonal musical world. The 7 diminished chord, a B diminished triad, is almost as strong in its need to resolve to the C chord. The F chord, the subdominant, is next in the line to need to be resolved to the root chord. Similarly full of tension is the II chord, the D minor.

The two diatonic chords that have the least tension—and therefore the least pull to be resolved—are the III chord (E minor) and the VI chord (A minor). Each of those chords consists of three notes, two of which exist in the root chord of C major.

As we get more advanced in our theory of tension and release, we start feeling the tension of notes outside the diatonic scale and feel their need to resolve to the root. It all feels like variations of the V-to-I chord tension.

This is a way to have an overview of rhythm, melody and harmony. It is not merely intellectual, as I always feel these tensions and their subsequent releases in my body, primarily in my solar plexus.

I was first turned on to the tension and release concept of music when I was 18 years old and beginning to study music at UCLA. I had an amazing classical piano teacher, Abie Tzerko, who taught a master class of five or six of us. He had been a prodigy of the great Beethoven interpreter Artur Schnabel and was a fantastic pianist himself. He said, "Playing the piano is not about being relaxed. Your fingers can't be loose and floppy. It is about having them flexed when need be, and then relaxed when you no longer need to use that particular finger." As I practiced after that, I would feel when I needed to use my strength and purposefulness in my fingers and hands, and when I could relax them.

It was a little later when I was listening to jazz pianist McCoy Tyner, trying to figure out and analyze his harmonic approach on a song of his called "Passion Dance," that I figured out he was using tension and release in his melodic and harmonic concept. "Passion Dance" is based on an F pedal tone, and the whole song revolves around that F tonality. But Tyner ended up using every chromatic tone over that F. I began to hear and understand how he started in the key of F,

actually F mixolydian, as it was an F dominant (F7) with a flattened seventh.

His basic chords were stacks of the interval of a fourth, and the primary structure of his improvisations was the pentatonic scale, which to my mind is an extension or elaboration of a major triad.

When Tyner played the triads that were "inside" the mixolydian scale, there wasn't a whole lot of tension. Some notes seemed further away from the root than others, but they really seemed to sound as colors around the F root. When Tyner played pentatonic scales, the ones that only included the notes in the mixolydian scale sounded "inside" to me. He was playing modally, utilizing the seven notes of the F mixolydian mode. In his right hand, Tyner was playing F pentatonic, E-flat pentatonic and B-flat pentatonic scales based on the F, E-flat and B-flat triads.

With his left hand, Tyner played fourth chords that were also in the F mixolydian scale. He seemed to move them around almost melodically, rather than thinking of them as separate chord roots. He used them modally. The ones with perfect fourths—like F, B-flat and E-flat—sounded very "home base"-like. The ones that had a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth—like B-flat, E-flat and A—seemed to have a little more intensity to them, but they were still part of the "home base" sound of F7 and the F mixolydian scale.

However, at certain points Tyner introduced notes outside of the F mixolydian scale, and that's where I began to intuitively feel tension being created. He might add an E-natural to the fourth chords in his left hand, so that he'd play E-natural, B-flat and E-flat. This would feel like it needed to be resolved, and functioned like a V7 chord (like a C7 in the key of F). But the bass player stayed around the F pedal tone and didn't change to give the root of the V chord, C.

Tyner's right hand also introduced scale tones outside of the F mixolydian scale, and more tension was created.

A lightbulb went on in my head. That's when I began to figure out what my solar plexus was responding to when I listened to music and felt tension come and go from the chords and melodies I was hearing. I wanted to master and control—or at least have a complete comprehension of—this tension-and-release feeling I was experiencing.

Thus, I began to comprehend how harmony, melody and even rhythm work to create and resolve tension in all kinds of music. **DB**

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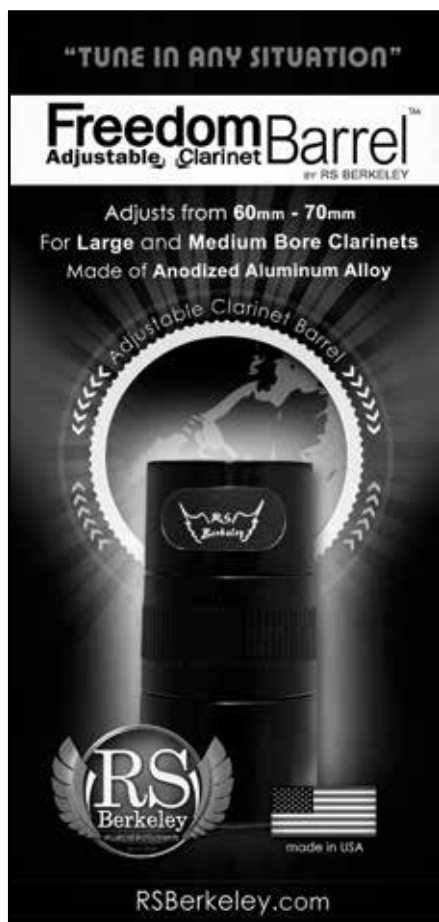


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Brad Mehldau's Piano Solo on 'Sky Turning Grey'

On "Sky Turning Grey (For Elliott Smith)" from Brad Mehldau's 2010 CD *Highway Rider* (Nonesuch), the pianist elegantly fuses musical connectivity with compositional sophistication. As is often the case with Mehldau's groove-based solos, instruments other than the piano play a harmonic role, negating the prominence of Mehldau's otherwise active left hand. Therefore, this transcription shows the treble stave only.

The form is 64-bar AABC, where B and C share the same melody but different changes. An almost constantly descending bass line is spelled out by Mehldau's changes—largely a mixture of diatonic chords derived from the key, some tritone substitutions and elongated functional II-V-I cadences. An example of this harmony can be found at measures 14–17, where a II-V-I is played in B \flat minor, however an E \flat m/B \flat extends the C half-diminished sound for a measure, before the V chord at measure 16.

Mehldau's improvisation evokes a sense of relaxed maturity and stylistic confidence. Chorus one includes strong references to the melody on a regular basis, such as measures 0, 6–7, 11, 16–18, 26–28, 32, 40–41 and 55–60. There is much antiphonal content, too. The opening phrase, based on the first two notes of the melody, is a four-beat cell that is stated then answered during bars 1 and 2. The next phrase starts at measure 4, for two measures, and is answered during bars 6–7 before a blues figure at bar 8. Motivic repetition is heard in several places (e.g., bars 55–60); also, chromatic references can be heard throughout the improvisation, either acting transitionally or to approach chord tones. Mehldau introduc-



Brad Mehldau

es harmonic imposition within the first quarter of chorus one by playing a line derived from C# Locrian #2 mode over a Cm7 \flat 5, effectively side-slipping up a semitone.

In chorus two, an increased sense of intensity and drive is achieved with rhythmical features such as four-note chromatic or melodic triplets (bar 68). Mehldau employs tension by way of juxtaposing uncommon note choices; at measure 74, he plays an A and B, the sharp ninth and perfect 4th of G \flat major. This precedes a D over a D \flat major chord in the next measure, spelling a flat ninth—all risky choices, but placed within a firm melodic context, they work well. At measure 77, the solo culminates with a long 16th-note passage from 77–80, then again at 87–89. **DB**

MARK BAYNES IS A JAZZ PIANIST IN AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND. HE IS STUDYING THE MUSIC OF BRAD MEHLDAU FOR A DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS DEGREE AT AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY. BAYNES TEACHES AT BOTH THE NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY. VISIT BAYNES ONLINE AT JAZZPIANO.CO.NZ

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Chords and notes visible in the notation include: C#7(b9), Eb7/Bb, F7/A, D#maj7/Ab, G7alt, Gb6/b9, C7+, F7, F7/Eb, Gb7(#11)/Db, F#7/C, Bb7, F#9/A, Ab+7, Gbm7, C#m7/E, D#7(#11), Ebm7/Db, C#7(b9), Eb7/Bb, D#maj7/Ab, Db7/Ab, Gbmaj7, Bb7/F, Eb7, Gbmaj7/Db, CHORDAL C#7(b9), Bb7, D#7/Ab, Gbmaj7, F7(b9), C#m7/E, D#7(#11), Ebm7/Db, C#7(b9), Gbmaj7/Bb, D#maj7/Ab, Gbmaj7, D#maj7/F, Eb7, Ebm7/Db, C#7(b9), Eb7/Bb, F7/A, D#maj7/Ab, Gbmaj7, Db6/b9/F, Eb7, Bbm7/Db, C#7(b9), Ebm7/Bb, F7/A, Bbm7/Ab, Gbmaj7, D#maj7/F, Eb7, Ebm7/Db, C#7(b9), Eb7/Bb, F7/A.

SOLO CONTINUES ...



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Yamaha's newest entries in the workstation market are the MOX6 and MOX8 music production synthesizers. The MOX series uses the Yamaha Motif XS's sound engine, complemented by a huge array of features designed to enhance your live and computer setups. I tested the 61-key MOX6 for this review (the MOX8 has a fully weighted 88-key manual).

The first thing that I noticed upon unboxing is the weight and construction of the unit. The MOX6 is all-plastic, which was no doubt a decision made to reduce the weight of the instrument. And while the plastic body may initially feel a little chintzy, it is in fact a very robust case, and upon further inspection feels like it could weather the rigors of live performance without incident. Another unfortunate concession to weight is the wall wart—no internal power supply here, which I think is necessary in a pro keyboard. However, this is a very portable board, weighing in at just 15 pounds.

The front panel includes a large, readable display in the center, a bank of eight knobs to access and tweak many parameters quickly, including two assignable slots, and lots of buttons to help navigate the deep capabilities of this synth. My favorite front-panel surprise is the level meter, which can be used for input or output monitoring—nice. The rear panel offers all the usual connections, but also two inputs with switchable mic/line gain, and two separate USB connections, one type A for connection to your computer, and a type B for plugging in a USB key for data backup.

The MOX6 is extremely well thought out when it comes to computer connectivity. It includes a four-in/two-out USB audio interface, which allows you to record both the internal sounds and sounds from the two audio inputs

directly into your DAW over the USB cable. There are a number of different ways to route the signals, and the inputs can be routed through the MOX internal effects—and this also applies to live performance. You can also route your vocal through the nice-sounding vocoder on-board. The A/D conversion sounded good to my ears, and the effects were very clean. In addition to the standard MIDI control you might expect, the VST mode of the MOX allows you to control your softsynths from the front panel and route them through the main audio outs in a live situation, so all you need to bring to the gig is your laptop. This feature is incredibly handy.

Included with the MOX is a copy of Cubase AI, Prologue (Steinberg's VST vintage synth emulator) and a clone-wheel VST from Yamaha, but the real treat for me was the included editor. The editor is deep and responsive, and enabled me to get into the nuts and bolts of the sound engine right away. And these sounds are complex: They are the same eight element voices found on the Motif XS, including Yamaha's CFIII piano—totaling more than 1,200 available sounds. Being able to get into those patches and tweak everything onscreen in real time, with real-time feedback from the front panel controls, made it simple to adjust even the most complicated patches. Kudos to Yamaha for spending the time to get the editor right—it feels like a part of the MOX, rather than an add-on.

In addition to the large library of patches, there are Performances (saved presets), which include up to four patches in split or layer combinations and can also carry a dizzying array of arpeggiator options per part. And if you like one of these Performances so much that you want to build a track around it, you can automatically transfer all of these settings into the 16-part,

220,000-event sequencer with a couple of button-presses, then play in the patterns you like and add tracks over it. This saves setup time and makes quick arranging a breeze.

Navigation through the sounds is set up in Yamaha's usual fashion, with patches and performances being searchable by category, as well as being able to assign "favorite" status to your most used sounds. When you do pull up those sounds, the eight knobs are instantly active to adjust 12 of the most common parameters, as well as EQ, effects and arpeggiator settings.

And how are the sounds? Impressive. The synth sounds are particularly well done: warm analog tones, crisp digital textures, and the D/A conversion really packs a punch. Few current keyboards in this price range sound as solidly fat as the MOX. As you would expect, there is a huge sample library of acoustic and electric instruments on-board, and for the most part, they are excellent. The CFIII piano does not disappoint, either, and is useful in both live and recording situations. The drum sounds are a bit of a mixed bag, but all the acoustic drum kits are great and all of your electronica favorites are available.

There are very few, if any, holes in this synth's arsenal. The 64 voices of polyphony did feel a little restraining at times, but this was only because the sequencer and Performance constructs are so powerful that you will likely want to keep adding sounds.

There is no aftertouch here, either, which many will lament, but at this price point, there is nothing to complain about. The concerns I had about the build quality vanished as I got more used to the feel, but be aware of it. Overall, the MOX6 (and MOX8) seems like a winner to me.

—Chris Neville

Ordering info: yamaha.com

Kawai ES7 Digital Piano

Touch, Tone & Tweaks

Kawai has incorporated the distinctive touch and tone of its best acoustic grand pianos into a portable, 256-note polyphonic digital keyboard that you can tweak to the nines and take with you just about anywhere. The new Kawai ES7 digital piano has the best sound and feel of any of the company's portable boards to date, and its potential for fine-tuning and editing/storing personalized settings is vast.

Sounds and polyphony are important to me as a keyboardist, but it's a digital piano's touch that appeals to me the most. The ES7 has a relatively new kind of weighted-key action that Kawai calls Responsive Hammer 2. Highly stable with realistic movement, the RH2 action accurately mirrors the heavier bass hammers and lighter treble hammers of an actual grand piano. Combine that with Ivory Touch key surfaces—made from a synthetic material that could easily pass for the real thing—and you've got a virtual piano under your fingers.

The tones of the ES7 are beautiful in their complexity and realism. Kawai uses Progressive Harmonic Imaging technology to record and reproduce all 88 keys of its best concert grands at different dynamic levels. Several different piano types are preset into the ES7's sound banks, including concert grands, studio grands, mellow grands and modern/rock pianos. The imaging process also does a remarkable job of taking string resonance into account.

One of the coolest parts of the ES7 is the instrument's built-in Virtual Technician, which

gives you the tools to shape various piano characteristics to your liking. These include touch sensitivity (from very light to very heavy, and also constant), voicing (from mellow to bright, plus a "dynamic" voicing that changes tone depending on the strength of a key strike), damper resonance, string resonance, and subtle hammer and key-release noises. The Virtual Technician can also tune your piano any way you want.

The ES7 is by no means limited to acoustic piano sounds. It has a strong selection of electric pianos and organs, complete with the appropriate amp simulations to go with them. "Having a variety of acoustic piano sounds is very beneficial for all types of jazz music," said Tom Love of Kawai. "But there's also a new collection of vintage electric piano sounds. Call up one of those, lay an amp simulation on it, and you're ready to crank out some classic fusion."

Mallet instruments, basses, strings and choirs sound great when layered with the piano sounds in Dual mode. In Split mode, you can get a fairly real-sounding wood bass going with your left hand while playing piano lines with your right. And Four Hands mode



divides the keyboard into two equal parts so two people can play at the same time—great for teachers and students.

Other highlights include a selection of 100 full rhythm-section accompaniments, MP3 and WAV recording capabilities, an abundance of connectivity options for easy access to computers and MIDI devices, and a built-in sound system that will fill a room without needing an external amp. A couple of foot-pedal options are available (including a three-piece setup) as well as an optional designer stand and a soft road case on wheels.

The ES7 comes in Elegant Gloss Black finish, and an Ivory White version will become available this fall.

—Ed Enright

Ordering info: kawaius.com

Golden Age Project Comp 54

Vintage-style Audiophile Compressor

Golden Age Project created a buzz with its Pre-73 microphone pre-amplifier in 2008. Based on the Neve 1073 console, it delivered a warm, vintage-style tone that was far beyond its modest \$299 price tag. Once again inspired by Rupert Neve, the company has released the Comp 54 Vintage Style Compressor.

As with the Pre-73, the Comp 54 is a single-channel unit that resides in a half-rack sturdy metal housing. An optional rack adapter allows for mounting two boxes side-by-side, useful for a stereo configuration or for pairing with a Pre-73. Like the original 1970s Neves, the unit features true class-A circuitry and uses no integrated circuits in its signal path. Obviously, to offer the unit at \$399, Golden Age had to make a few



compromises. The company accomplished this by manufacturing in China and also through the use of Chinese transformers as opposed to the significantly more expensive Carnhills found in the original Neves. After releasing the original Pre-73, many users began to upgrade their boxes by swapping out the stock Chinese transformers for Carnhills. This was a fairly complicated rewiring job, but the Comp 54 is designed with upgrade-ready sockets that allow you to make this alteration with plug-and-play simplicity.

I ran the Comp 54 through various tests, on both microphone and DI instrument signals, and it performed well in all cases. The Comp 54 gave vocal tracks a nice up-front quality and added just the right amount of color to the tone. Rear-panel connections consist of both XLR and 1/4-inch jacks as well as a link for connecting two units in stereo. On the front, there are dials for setting threshold, ratio, attack, release and output gain, and a high-pass filter for side chain operation. The VU meter can be set to indicate either the output level or amount of compression being applied.

Golden Age Project has hit the mark a second time with this one.

—Keith Baumann

Ordering info: raddist.com

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CUTTING-EDGE CLASSIC

Akai Professional has introduced MAX49, a USB/MIDI/CV controller for use with virtually any MIDI or Control Voltage hardware and MIDI software. MAX49 offers a fully immersive experience with virtually all VST plug-ins and music software. Featuring 49 semi-weighted keys, 12 MPC pads, LED touch faders and vintage CV and Gate outputs, it combines cutting-edge Akai Pro technology with classic capabilities. **More info:** akaipro.com



KEYS ON THE MOVE

Line 6 has released its Mobile Keys premium keyboard controller for iPad, iPhone, Mac and PC. Mobile Keys 25 and Mobile Keys 49 are lightweight portable keyboards designed to control iOS music apps and double as USB MIDI controllers for Mac and Windows computers. **More info:** line6.com



FULL ACCOMPANIMENT

Lowrey's Virtual Orchestra is a new digital product line with a variety of accompaniments. "Pianist" mode transforms the Virtual Orchestra into a richly toned piano. When a player wants a complete band, they can select the "full band" mode. "Guitarist" mode yields a variety of guitar-based orchestrations and voicing sets. **More info:** lowrey.com



REAL DRAWBARS

Clavia has updated its Nord C2 Combo Organ with the Nord C2D, which includes two sets of physical drawbars per manual. The Nord C2D features a redesigned simulation of the characteristic mechanical key clicks that are an essential component of the classic tone-wheel experience. The new left-hand preset sections offer better hands-on control, and the upper manual and panel have been tilted for improved ergonomics. An LCD display has been added for easier access to programs and settings. **More info:** americanmusicsound.com



SOUND SOURCES

Casio has unveiled the XW synthesizer series. The XW-P1 is designed for recording pros, and the XW-G1 (pictured) is suitable for dance music performers. Both synths are equipped with a step sequencer that lets artists build and mix performances as they go, as well as a six-oscillator monophonic solo synth that uses Casio's Hybrid Processing Sound Source. **More info:** casiomusicgear.com



CONTROL FREAKS

Alesis' Q-series USB MIDI controllers—the Q61, QX61 and QX25—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

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Stax Schools on the Science of Soul

Saxophonist Kirk Whalum's office at the Soulsville Foundation in Memphis, Tenn., is above the former home of r&b label Stax Records. But when Whalum, Soulsville's chief creative officer, discusses education, he references another locally based business.

"Memphis is the hub of FedEx," Whalum said. "Any package that goes anywhere has to come here first. So I tell students, 'You have a package to deliver that's completely unique.'"

In 2000, the Foundation started the Stax Music Academy, which has provided after-school and summer music classes to more than 2,500 students. Five years later, it opened the Soulsville Charter School, a college-preparatory program serving 6th through 12th graders. Soulsville's first high school graduation took place last May, and that entire class has been accepted into college. The 49 graduates have been offered scholarships that collectively total \$3.8 million.

"The legacy of Stax Records was a natural seedbed," Whalum said. "That legacy of achievement in spite of whatever you're lacking inspires us to make sure that these students are not lacking."

For years, Stax's importance had been neglected, as was the surrounding neighborhood. Stax went bankrupt during the mid-1970s, and its studio was torn down in 1988. In the late 1990s, the Soulsville Foundation set out to rebuild the company's legacy. One way included constructing the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, which opened in 2003, on the company's former site. Foundation board member Deanie Parker—a former Stax artist and publicist—said that music education had to be part of this redevelopment.

"We had to have a program that would focus on music industry education and provide

creative outlets," Parker said.

Those outlets began with the Stax Music Academy, which started in an elementary school and unveiled its own two-story building on the museum campus in 2002. About 80 students are enrolled in its programs and perform internationally.

"If kids come in with some skill and a lot of passion, they're perfect," Whalum said. "We'll make a connection between the music that is relevant now and music that was relevant then, especially the music that was recorded here."

"You have to know what came before you to move ahead," added former Academy student Khari Alamin, who will attend Berklee College of Music this fall.

Music is also a component of the Soulsville Charter School, and its rhythm and strings orchestra plays Stax hits. But Executive Director NeShante Brown said its mission is "to provide a world-class education for kids who might not have otherwise encountered such an education." Advance placement courses are offered to its 450 students in all academic areas, but musical images emerge even in history and math classes.

"Respect, integrity, scholarship, empathy and community comprise our core values," Brown said. "We call our point system Grammys—a scholarship Grammy for giving a great answer in class."

With students coming from environments often described as "potentially at-risk," Whalum pointed to one success story that epitomizes what the school has accomplished. "A student here was, without question, otherwise going to be in a gang," Whalum said. "Fast-forward, and he's a graduating senior, accepted to four colleges and unbelievably gifted. He's a microcosm of what can happen here."

—Aaron Cohen



Hoosier Pride: The Indiana University Jacobs School of Music has announced that internationally recognized vocal jazz conductor and educator Steve Zegree will join its faculty in the fall as the Pam and Jack Burks Professor of Music and director of the legendary Singing Hoosiers. Zegree currently serves as the Bobby McFerrin Distinguished Professor of Music at Western Michigan University and will assume his new position at IU this fall.

Details: indiana.edu

Drum Corps: Jazz drummers Joe Porcaro and Ralph Humphrey led a series of instructional master classes at Los Angeles Music Academy's Drummer's Reality Camp on June 28. The camp, which ran from June 27–30, also included a roundtable with professional jazz percussionists, a concert featuring Stanton Moore and Roger Walter and a tour of the DW drum factory.

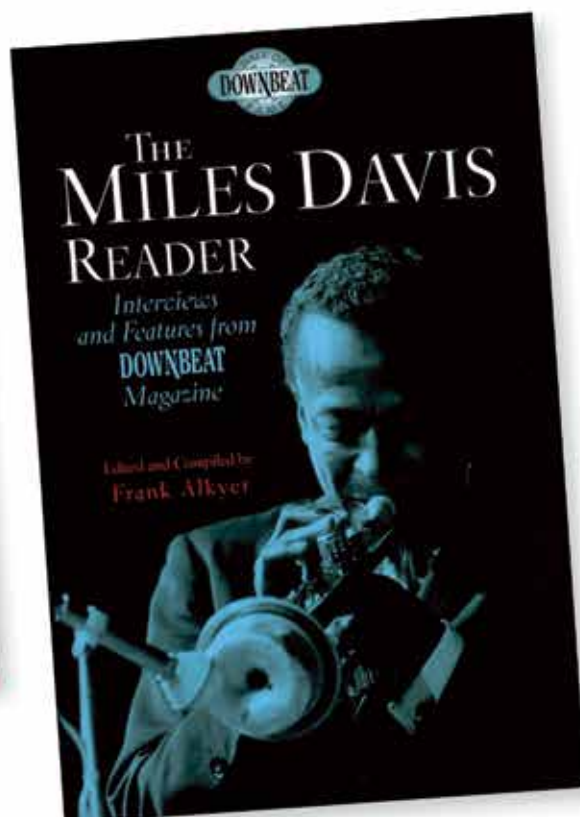
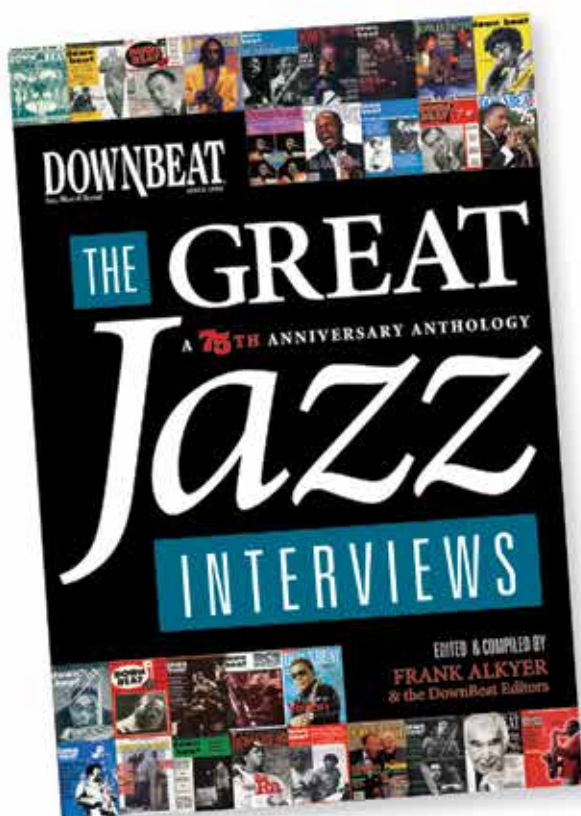
Details: lamusicacademy.com

Uncharted Territory: Brooklyn Charter School recently developed a unique after-school program that focuses on percussive studies from around the globe. The BCS after-school percussion curriculum has also offered instruction from such Latin Percussion (LP) endorsers as Wilson "Chembo" Corniel, as well as author and educator Victor Rendón.

Details: brooklyncharter.org

Scholarly Efforts: Tenor saxophonist Matthew Sieber-Ford, a senior in the Rochester City School District's School of the Arts who also studies at the Eastman Community Music School (ECMS), has been named this year's recipient of the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival/Eastman School of Music Scholarship. Sieber-Ford was recognized on June 25 during the festival's annual scholarship performance.

Details: rochester.edu



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Frank Kimbrough

Highly regarded as a solo and trio pianist of broad scope and imagination, with 16 leader or co-leader albums in his oeuvre and many more as a sideman (Jazz Composers Collective, the Maria Schneider Orchestra, Ted Nash), Frank Kimbrough is a powerful presence on the jazz landscape.

Vijay Iyer Trio

"Wildflower" (*Accelerando*, ACT, 2012) Iyer, piano; Stephan Crump, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums.

That was Herbie Nichols' "Wildflower." I'm not sure who it was [playing]. About the third or fourth chorus, it started getting really nice. I liked the interaction, and I think they played it true to Herbie's spirit. Herbie used dark, ambiguous voicings in the left hand; if you try to cop that, you run the risk of sounding like you're aping him, but at the same time you want to give respect to his sound—it's a fine line to deal with. I wish they'd played the intro as an outro again, the way Herbie did, but I'm fine with how they chose to end the tune. 4 stars.

Chick Corea/Eddie Gomez/Paul Motian

"Mode VI" (*Further Explorations*, Concord-Stretch, 2012) Corea, piano; Gomez, bass; Motian, drums.

Paul Motian's tune. Paul's playing drums, right? I've played it—though not with Paul—but I can't remember the name. I have a whole book of Paul's tunes at home. Oh, this is Chick and Eddie Gomez. "Mode VI." This is from their two-week date at the Blue Note a few years ago. That was beautiful. I'm surprised it took me so long to recognize Chick, because he usually gives himself away immediately. Playing with Paul and playing Paul's music put him in a different zone. I think it's a bit of a stretch for him, but he played it beautifully. Sometimes, if you add one note to what Paul has on the paper, it sounds stupid. If you subtract one note, it sounds stupid. It's about paying attention to the line and the phrasing. Even though Paul sometimes used upper partials of the harmony, he liked simple harmony—he could say more with a triad than most. Eddie Gomez sounds the best I've ever heard him. To play arco way up there, as he did on the melody, is one thing in the studio—where you can go back and fix it—but to nail it like that onstage is extraordinary. 4½ stars. I could easily give it 5.

Aaron Goldberg/Omer Avital/Ali Jackson

"Way, Way Back" (*Yes!*, Sunnyside, 2012) Goldberg, piano; Avital, bass; Jackson, drums.

Sounds like older cats, a working band, well attuned to each other. The bass player was great. I heard an Oscar Peterson vibe, a "Blues For Big Scotia" sound just before and coming out of the bass solo. The earth isn't shaking under my feet, but it's crisp, clean mainstream trio playing like I heard in the clubs 30 years ago when I first came to New York. 3½ stars.

Alfredo Rodríguez

"Qbafrica" (*Sounds Of Space*, Mack Avenue, 2012) Rodríguez, piano, melodic; Peter Slavov, bass; Francisco Mela, drums.

It makes me think of Guillermo Klein. I'm hearing Brazil—the melody reminded me a bit of Hermeto, but it's not him. The melody was very catchy. Whoever the pianist was played well. The bass and the drums are solid, riding out that I-VI-II-V minor vamp, giving the pianist plenty of space to do what he's going to do. Just a simple melody, and the rhythm grabs you right from the start; not much development of the idea in the solo, but that's OK. The pianist has a lot of facility. Nice colors. 4 stars.



Craig Taborn

"Avenging Angel" (*Avenging Angel*, ECM, 2011) Taborn, piano.

That's an interesting improvisation, to take one rhythmic idea basically and run with it. Is that Craig Taborn? That's his new ECM record. He maintained the vibe throughout the piece, expanding on it all the while. The improvisation made sense, never got monotonous, and sounded like itself throughout. That's the hallmark of an improviser who thinks like a composer. Nice sound. Nice ideas. 4½ stars.

Aki Takase/Han Bennink

"Locomotive" (*Two For Two*, Intakt, 2012) Takase, piano; Bennink, drums.

That's "Locomotive" by Monk. It's not Schlippenbach, is it, from *Monk's Casino*? I haven't heard that, but I've heard about it. At first it seemed self-conscious, like the ideas were being forced, but later it felt more natural. I liked the idea of melody somehow trumping changes in the solo. That frees you up a lot. The drummer had a deep bass drum sound together with the trashy cymbal sound that reminded me of Tony Oxley, but I'm sure it's not him. 4 stars.

Ahmad Jamal

"Blue Moon" (*Blue Moon*, Jazz Village, 2012) Jamal, piano; Reginald Veal, bass; Herlin Riley, drums; Manolo Badrena, percussion.

Ahmad Jamal. He patented that sound. I think every trio in the last 55 years has come under his sway. Is this from the new record, *Blue Moon*? It's a beautiful vamp. Couldn't be simpler. I love the way he takes the simplest idea and can just work it for a whole day. Oh, this is "Blue Moon." He plays with so much intent, so organic. He has as much freedom as he could want, phrasing the melody, returning to the melody at any point, or just playing over the vamp. You can hear when somebody is just trying to get it right and when somebody is playing it because they mean it. 5 stars.

DB

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