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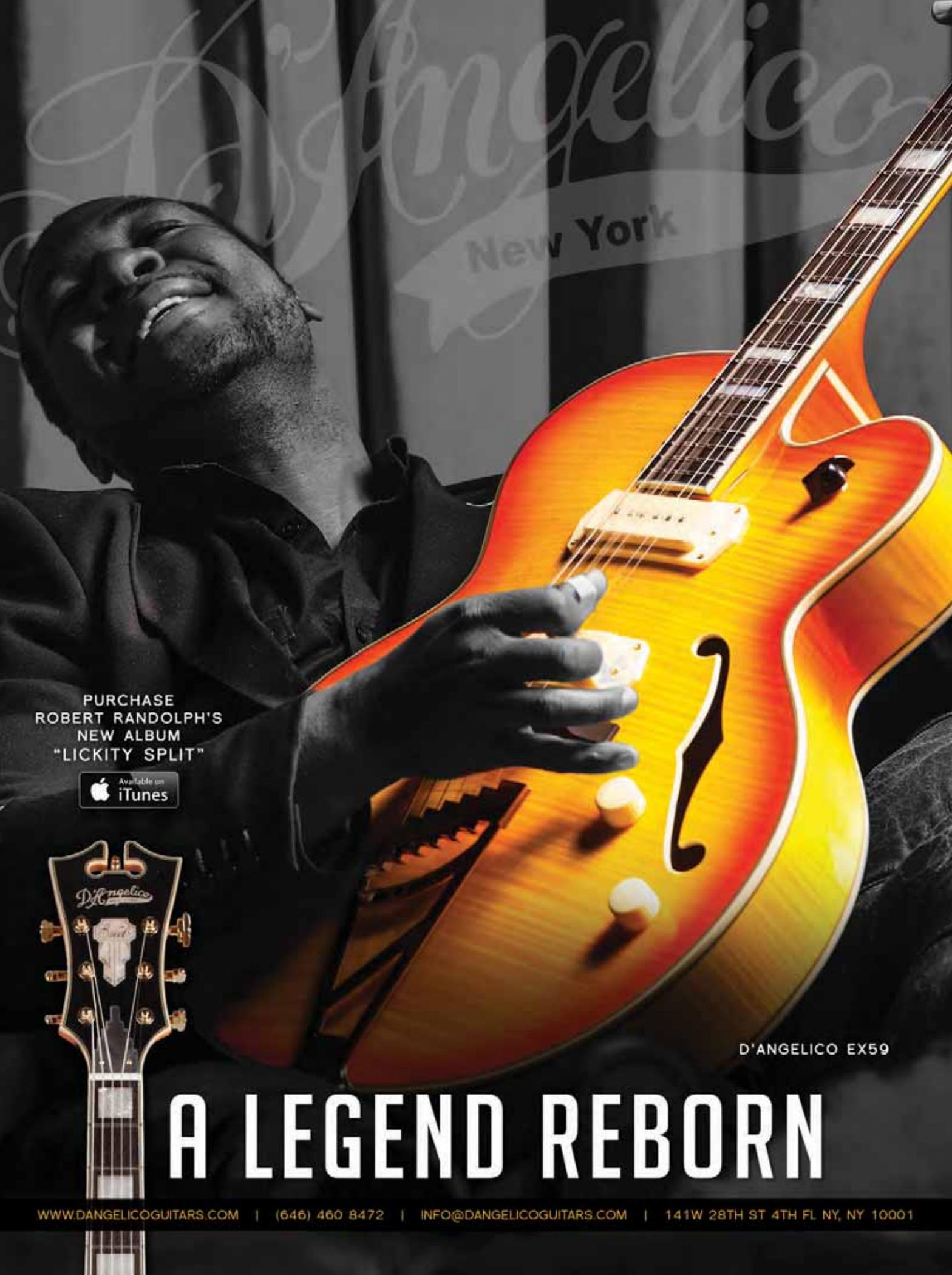
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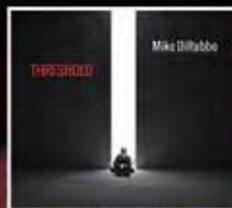
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Designer	Ara Tirado
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Bookkeeper	Margaret Stevens
Circulation Manager	Sue Mahal
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Musical Instruments & East Coast Schools
Ritche Deraney
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ritched@downbeat.com

Advertising Sales Associate
Pete Fenech
630-941-2030
petef@downbeat.com

OFFICES

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

CUSTOMER SERVICE

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CONTRIBUTORS

Senior Contributors:

Michael Bourne, Aaron Cohen, John McDonough

Atlanta: Jon Ross; **Austin:** 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 James; **Nashville:** Bob Doerschuk; **New Orleans:** Erika Goldring, David Kumian, Jennifer Odelli; **New York:** Alan Bergman, Herb Boyd, Bill Douthart, Ira Gitter, Eugene Goloursky, Norm Harris, D.D. Jackson, Jimmy Katz, Jim Macnie, Ken Micallef, Dan Ouellette, Ted Panken, Richard Seidel, Tom Staudter, Jack Vartoojian, 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 Murph, Michael Wilderman; **Belgium:** Jos Knaepen; **Canada:** Greg Buim, 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 Mihaiu; **Russia:** Cyril Moshkow; **South Africa:** Don Albert.

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APRIL 2014

Inside >

ON THE COVER

26 Ambrose Akinmusire

Life Beyond Ego

BY JOSEF WOODARD

One of the primary voices in 21st century jazz, the 32-year-old trumpeter has been zeroing in on the next phase of his development as an artist: exploring and expanding his work as a composer.



Cover photo of Ambrose Akinmusire (and image above) shot by Paul Wellman in Los Angeles

FEATURES

32 Billy Hart

Overdue Recognition

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

36 Allen Toussaint

Driving Solo

BY DAVID INMAN

42 Steven Bernstein

Spontaneous Arranging

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

SPECIAL SECTION

70 Musicians' Gear Guide

Best of The NAMM Show

81 BRASS SCHOOL

82 The Art of Lead Trumpet Playing

BY MIKE WILLIAMS

86 Master Class

BY DAVID TAYLOR

88 Pro Session

BY KIRK GARRISON

90 Transcription

Roy Hargrove
Trumpet Solo

92 Toolshed



50 Catherine Russell



52 Sarah Manning



55 James Brandon Lewis



58 Adrian Raso

DEPARTMENTS

10 First Take

12 Chords & Discords

15 The Beat

22 Players

Steve Davis
Shawn Maxwell
Kris Bowers
Anton Schwartz

47 Reviews

94 Jazz On Campus

98 Blindfold Test
Eric Harland

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Steven Bernstein

STEVEN SUSSMAN

Honorable Profession

HERE ARE A FEW TERMS THAT I AVOID: "sellout," "artistic whore," "gig slut," "nonselective musician" and "integrity deficiency." I don't begrudge other journalists for using such terms or for criticizing an artist for chasing a payday. But here's an understatement: It's difficult to make a living as a jazz musician. So if a musician wants to play a wedding or record a jingle for a radio advertisement, I'm not one to judge.

Players play. Dancers dance. Painters paint. Actors act. It's what they do. Across the heartland of America, talented thespians who were once highly paid movie stars or TV actors are now doing dinner theater for small crowds, living in budget hotels and dealing with the drudgery of travel during the winter months. That's their choice. They're working.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is British actor Michael Caine. At press time, his filmography on the Internet Movie Database listed 160 acting credits, including three films in post-production. This fellow doesn't act because he's worried about getting his next meal. He acts because he's an actor.

For a Hollywood star, the temptation to "sell out" and do a mindless action movie is quite real, and the paycheck is lucrative. But for a working jazz musician living in Brooklyn and trying to make rent, what, exactly, constitutes "selling out," versus taking a gig because you need the money?

Most fans have heard hundreds of comments from musicians about art versus commerce. Want to hear a blunt take on that? Check out our feature on trumpeter Steven Bernstein (page 42). After recounting the influence of his mentor Jimmy Maxwell, Bernstein told journalist Bill Milkowski, "Anytime that you're out there playing your trumpet, you are practicing an honorable profession. And that's why I love getting calls and why I say yes to every gig that comes my way. I love working. It's why I can own a house."

Bernstein is an example of a musician who works constantly, and is incredibly versatile, but who also

maintains a distinctive artistic voice.

Our Jazz On Campus feature looks at the Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver, which has three big bands and 12 jazz combos. The school trains students to be great jazz musicians, but it also gives them the tools to play other genres of music. In short, it's training them to make a living.

Our cover subject, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, has proven onstage that he can gracefully play in a variety of settings and genres. His credentials as a jazz player are unquestioned. He won the categories Rising Star—Jazz Artist and Rising Star—Trumpet in the 2011 DownBeat Critics Poll. A year later, he topped the Trumpet category in the DownBeat Critics Poll.

In a fascinating interview that journalist Josef Woodard conducted in Los Angeles, Akinmusire said, "I know that my goal is to create a style or an expression that can be used in any arena. I was going to say 'genre,' but I don't even know if I believe in that."

Some people reading this column didn't make it to this paragraph because they stopped to write an angry Chords & Discords email, accusing the editor of DownBeat of being the new champion of selling out. Let me assure you that nothing about the preceding comments applies to what we do as an editorial staff. When it comes to deciding which artists and albums to cover in this magazine, the quality of the music is our paramount concern. That's true whether we're listening to a jazz star on a major label or an obscure, DIY musician's self-released album.

Aspiring jazz musicians need to figure out a way to make a living as a player. Otherwise, they'll make a living doing something else, and their art will suffer, or worse, wither. This generation's John Coltrane and Mary Lou Williams might be working in a coffee shop right now. It would be a damn shame if the world never got to hear these youngsters' music because they became overly discouraged or blindly devoted to the notion of artistic principles. Players should play. **DB**

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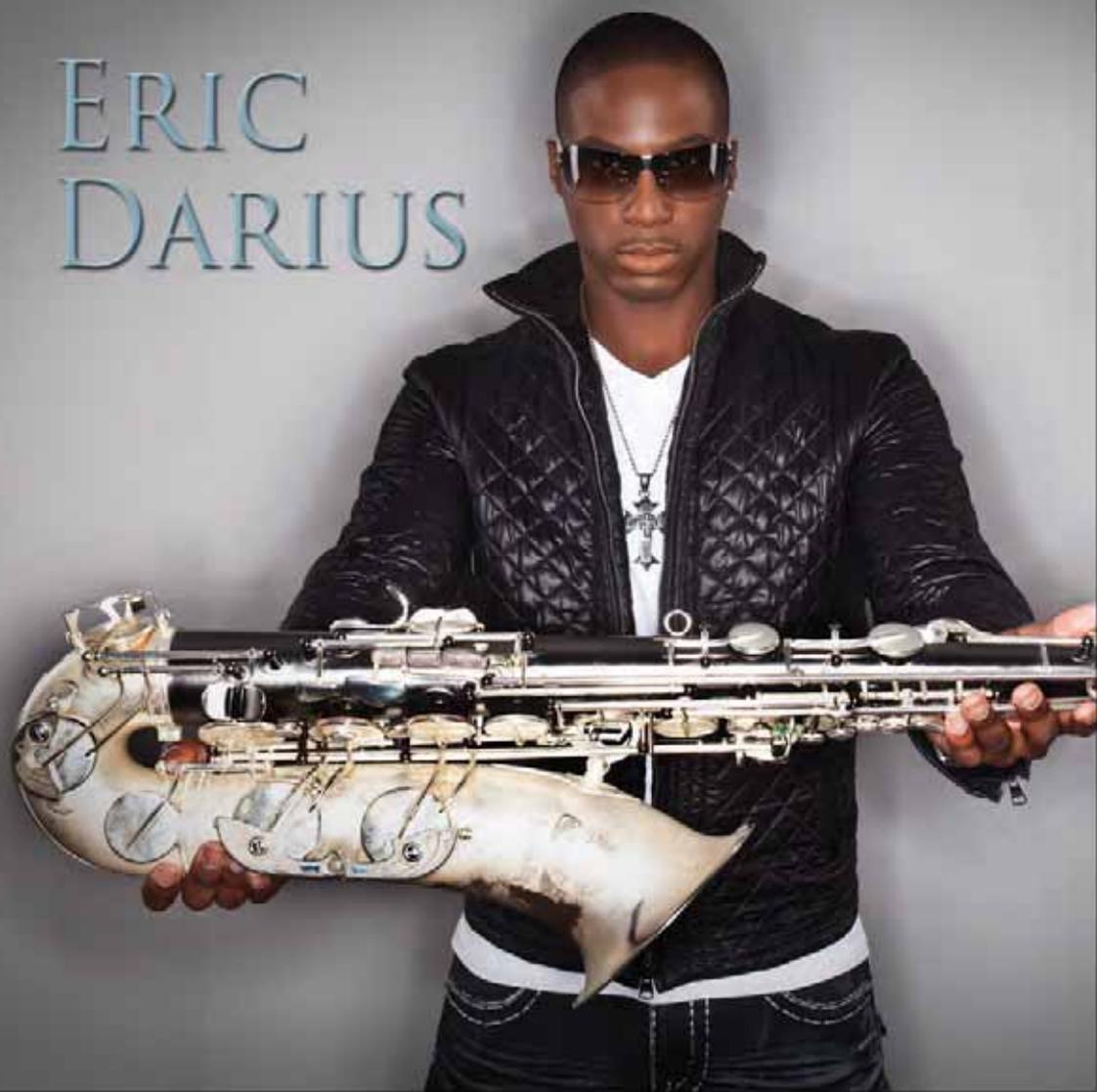
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Best Blue Feeling

I want to thank Allen Morrison for his fine 4½-star review of singer Tierney Sutton's latest CD, *After Blue*, in your January issue. The review prompted me to go get the CD, and it is beautiful, indeed. I can't get enough of this music and Sutton's lovely interpretations. As a jazz fan and a longtime Joni Mitchell fan (her *Blue* is one of my favorite records), I also want to compliment Ms. Sutton on the most beautiful and moving collection of Mitchell songs that I have heard since the originals.

I love the way the Turtle Island Quartet sounds, creatively taking the place of Mitchell's dulcimer in the original version of "All I Want." Larry Goldings' piano, particularly on "April In Paris/Free Man In Paris" is also wonderful, as are Hubert Laws' flute improvisations on "The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines." What an incredible treat all around! Please, Ms. Sutton, *please* consider a second volume of Mitchell's material. *After Blue* is a gorgeous record that has left me wanting to hear more.

BOB ZANDER
PALO ALTO, CALIF.



Tierney Sutton

TATJANA SHOHAN

Flurry of 4-Star CDs

In your February issue, I counted 27 album reviews ranked 4 stars and above. This amounts to *lots* of great music to check out: Randy Weston, The Modern Jazz Quartet, Gretchen Parlato, John Coltrane, Anoushka Shankar, Roswell Rudd and the Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra, just to name a few.

I love Jensen's previous disc, *Treelines*, which mostly flew under the radar in the United States. Your February issue's album reviews speak volumes about the health of the jazz marketplace today. (OK, Ravi's daughter Anoushka might not be a jazz artist, but she *is* amazing.)

PAUL WEIDEMAN
SANTA FE, N.M.

Not An Average Joe

Why isn't Joe Morello in the DownBeat Hall of Fame? When he was active with Dave

Brubeck, I seem to remember him consistently placing very high in the annual DownBeat Readers Poll.

He was one of the most musical drummers ever. At a concert toward the end of his career, I was puzzled when he started calling for notes from the piano while he adjusted the heads on his drums. The group then played "A Night In Tunisia." When Joe played his drum solo, you could hear the song's melody *within* his solo! It was one of the greatest drum solos I have ever heard live or recorded.

BOB BARALDI
LONGMEADOW, MASS.

Blue for Lou

Are we not going to see any tribute article in DownBeat about legendary rocker Lou Reed, who passed away on Oct. 27? Lou had the likes of Don Cherry in his band for a while and had Ornette Coleman playing on an album of his. He even made

the cover of DownBeat once upon a time [March 1991]. If any musician qualifies for the DownBeat category of Beyond, then it is certainly Lou.

BRUCE BALLAN
REXFORD, N.Y.

Editor's Note: Deciding which artists get an obituary in the magazine (or on our website) is never an easy task. While we deeply revere Lou Reed's artistry, we decided not to develop a tribute piece on this great American artist.

Correction

■ In the March issue, the review of *Far Away From Everyday* (Harp Guitar Music) by Brad Hoyt misspelled the artist's name.

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The

Inside

- 17 / Panama Jazz Festival
- 18 / Fareed Haque
- 20 / Max Roach Legacy
- 21 / Cassandra Wilson

Beat

Concert Honors NEA Jazz Masters

Educator-saxophonist Jamey Aebersold, reedist-composer-professor Anthony Braxton, bassist-educator Richard Davis and pianist Keith Jarrett were celebrated as National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters during a live-streamed and radio-broadcast event held in Jazz at Lincoln Center's Allen Room in New York City on Jan. 13.

Co-hosted by Wynton Marsalis and journalist

Soledad O'Brien, the 195-minute program publicized the U.S. government's highest jazz honors. It featured NEA-produced video profiles of the latest honorees, freewheeling speeches, music performances, several previously named Jazz Masters and emerging musicians representing a theme of "intergenerality."

"Our music has a distinguished history of old-school apprenticeship on new-school concepts,"

said Marsalis, himself a Jazz Master, in his opening remarks. Soprano saxophonist Dave Liebman validated Marsalis' assertion, leading pianist Kris Bowers, trumpeter Bruce Harris, vibraphonist Warren Wolf, bassist Yasushi Nakamura and drummer Mark Whitfield Jr. in a rendition of the late Cedar Walton's song "Bolivia." Those sidemen, plus pianist Chris Pattishall, bassist Russell Hall, drummer Jamison Ross and saxophonist

Newly named NEA Jazz Master Jamey Aebersold (second from left) plays saxophone at Jazz at Lincoln Center during the Jan. 13 event.



FRANK STEWART

Riffs >

Arturo O'Farrill



O'Farrill's Big Plans: Coinciding with the 65th anniversary of the historic *Afro Cuban Jazz Suite*—composed by the late Chico O'Farrill—pianist and bandleader Arturo O'Farrill will feature his father's seminal work along with the world premiere of his own *Afro Latin Jazz Suite* at the Harlem Jazz Shrines Festival at New York's Apollo Theater on May 10. Additionally, O'Farrill and his Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra will release a new album, *The Offense Of The Drum* (Motéma), on May 6, with a roster of collaborators that includes Vijay Iyer, DJ Logic, Edmar Castañeda, Donald Harrison and Pablo Mayor. The album features 35 different types of drums. **More info:** arturoofarrill.com

Maximum Miles: On March 25, Columbia/Legacy will release the four-CD box set *Miles Davis 1970: The Bootleg Series Vol. 3*. The set presents four nights of historic performances at the Fillmore East in New York (June 17–20, 1970), in their complete, unedited form for the first time. Davis' bandmates included Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette, Airto Moreira and Steve Grossman.

More info: milesdavis.com

Book It: London's Jawbone Press has published a biography of guitarist John McLaughlin titled *Bathed in Lightning: John McLaughlin, the 60s and the Emerald Beyond* by author and music historian Colin Harper. It draws upon dozens of exclusive interviews and includes more than 80 photographs of McLaughlin and his collaborators, including many previously unpublished images. The extended ebook edition adds 100,000 words of bonus material, including detailed discographies and concert listings that cover every known McLaughlin recording and live performance from 1963–75. Hal Leonard is distributing the title.

More info: jawbonepress.com

Jazz in Portugal: Scheduled for May 3–11 in Estoril, Portugal, the Estoril Jazz 2014 festival lineup includes Eric Alexander, Kenny Barron, Dave Holland, Francesco Cafiso, Dave Douglas, Uri Caine and others. **More info:** projazz.pt



The 2014 NEA Jazz Masters, from left: Jamey Aebersold, Anthony Braxton, Keith Jarrett and Richard Davis

Melissa Aldana, filled out ensembles led by elders throughout the evening.

After NEA Senior Deputy Chairman Joan Shigekawa hailed her agency's three-decade commitment to its Jazz Masters initiative, Liebman brought on Aebersold, recipient of the A.B. Spellman Award for Advocacy. The jazz publisher and educator read an anecdote-filled summary of his development of books and recordings meant to help students of any level improvise on chord changes, accompanied by world-class rhythm sections. As if to demonstrate, Aebersold blew alto sax on Charlie Parker's "Ornithology" backed by Pattishall, Hall and Ross. Ann Hampton Callaway followed, singing Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Wave" with Aldana, Nakamura, Ross and Azerbaijan-born pianist Amina Figarova.

Before the ceremonies, honoree Braxton said he was "grateful and surprised" about his award. Having emerged in the late 1960s from Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), Braxton has been deemed a jazz outlier due to his unique sax vocabulary and expansive, often experimental concepts. Muhal Richard Abrams, the Jazz Master who co-founded the AACM, welcomed Braxton onstage, and Braxton delivered a lengthy discussion of his wide-ranging artistic enthusiasms, creative perspective and devotion to American ideals.

Despite a high profile for his music in the mid-'70s and uninterrupted productivity, Braxton suffered a subsequent decline of opportunities and media visibility. He was appointed to a tenured position at Wesleyan University in 1990, in 1994 received a MacArthur fellowship and in 2012 was named a Doris Duke Performing Artist. Appreciative of these honors, Braxton said he had nonetheless become accustomed to being accused of not playing jazz, not swinging and not being "black enough." The Jazz Master award, he said, made him feel like a "spy who was brought in from the cold."

Coronetist Taylor Ho Bynum, guitarist Mary Halvorson, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and vocalists Ann Rose and Vince Vincent performed an excerpt from Braxton's chamber opera *Trillium J*.

Next, retired NEA administrator A.B. Spellman commemorated the seven Jazz Masters who died in 2013: Walton, Donald Byrd, Jim Hall, Chico Hamilton, Yusef Lateef, Marian McPartland and Frank Wes. Jimmy Owens (trumpet) and Kenny Barron (piano) performed a touching version of Wes' "Placitude," and Owens brought up new inductee Richard Davis.

A bassist with more than 60 years of professional experience and a longtime teacher at University of Wisconsin-Madison, Davis identified famed Chicago high school bandleader Walter Dyett, iconoclastic Sun Ra, vocalist Sarah Vaughan, conductor Leonard Bernstein and reeds innovator Eric Dolphy as his mentors. He improvised a bass solo with arco and pizzicato passages. Then tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, with Bowers, Wolf, Nakamura and Whitfield, performed "Blue Bossa," a tune Davis has recorded multiple times.

Barron read a letter from ailing impresario George Wein to introduce Jarrett, who has refined and popularized fully spontaneous solo piano concerts and led notable combos including his 30-years-old Standards Trio. At the podium Jarrett tossed aside papers left by Aebersold, saying, "A lot about education. I don't need any of that." He continued, "Music is not something you can use words to describe. Music is either in the air and you find it, or in the air and you cannot find it. You can be educated ... about everything there is to do with music, and you are still zero until you let go of what holds you back."

Later, Aebersold was asked if he thought Jarrett's dismissal of jazz education was directed at him. "No," he answered. Had he heard those sentiments before? "Not much, not recently."

Jarrett didn't play—instead, guitarist Bill Frisell and pianist Jason Moran interpreted his composition "Memories Of Tomorrow." Departing NEA Director of Music and Opera Wayne Brown was hailed; he implored everyone to "keep jazz alive." To conclude the event, saxophonist Jimmy Heath performed his waltz "New Picture" with Aldana, Pattishaw, Jamison and Ross. Intergenerality certainly was served, with touches of new jazz, too. —Howard Mandel

Worlds Intersect at Panama Jazz Festival

For the first time since it launched in 2003, the Panama Jazz Festival took place outside of Panama City. This year's edition transpired on the grounds of Ciudad del Saber (City of Knowledge), a 300-acre complex located a few hundred yards from the east bank of the Panama Canal.

On Jan. 17, the fifth night of the festival, PJF founder and Artistic Director Danilo Pérez performed repertoire from his new album, *Panama 500* (Mack Avenue), a suite that evokes Panama's half-millennium as a global crossroads, coalescing indigenous, South American, African and European flavors into stories rendered in jazz dialect. The strength of the melodies belied the complex clave rhythms and extended harmonic motion that underpin them. Pérez's ensemble—violinist Alex Hargreaves, bassist John Patitucci, drummer Adam Cruz, conguero-batá drummer-cantante Roman Díaz, and two indigenous musicians—sustained continuous flow. Patitucci executed chops-busting bass lines with grace and elegance; Cruz painted kinetic rhythmic shapes; Díaz morphed batá beats in synchronicity with the piano. Halfway through, vocalist Lizz Wright, who had opened the concert, displayed her luminous interpretive skills when she joined Pérez to sing Milton Nascimento's "Bridges," propelled by the pianist's inexorable development of the theme.

On Jan. 16, Pérez played timbales and congas on a Patitucci-directed concert by the Global Jazz Ambassadors, an octet of students from Berklee's Global Jazz Institute, which Pérez founded in 2010 and for which he continues to serve as artistic director. Among the highlights were Patitucci's electric bass tour de force on "Afro-Blue"; a guest appearance by Danilo Pérez Sr., who animated a bolero in the Beny Moré manner; and strong solos on a piece by guitarist Leandro Pellegrino and saxophonist Gustavo D'Amico, both GJI students of Brazilian descent.

The previous night, at Pérez's brand-new jazz club in the American Trade Hotel in the old section of Panama City, Patitucci displayed his six-string wizardry in trio with his brother (guitarist Tom Patitucci) and drummer Richie Barshay on wide-ranging repertoire—nuanced ballads and blues, a pair of Beatles tunes, a Larry Young number, New Orleans funk and a samba.

Earlier that night, Kenny Garrett played a stunning concert with his quintet (Vernell Brown, piano; Corcoran Holt, bass; McClenty Hunter, drums; Rudy Bird, percussion). He opened with an ascendant alto solo on which he projected a piercing, soul-searing tone. After a brief piano solo, the saxophonist faced off with the drummers, developing the melody over a relentless bass-and-piano vamp à la Pharoah Sanders. Next tune, he ratcheted the intensity, following Brown's lengthy McCoy-to-Monk solo with long tones that evolved into descending lines. He transitioned to an interstellar space duo with Hunter. There followed a theme evocative of Woody Shaw and Sanders on which Garrett tamped down the volume but not the passion.

For their first 40 minutes on Jan. 14, the Pisco Trio—tenor saxophonist George Garzone, Israeli bassist Ehud Ettun and Peruvian drummer-cajónist Jorge Pérez-Albela—moved fluidly from event to event in an open-form, conversational manner, sometimes in tempo, sometimes rubato. Garzone was endlessly creative, eliciting an encyclopedic array of textures and enviable breath control, shifting dynamics, creating melodies and discoursing fluently through a lexicon of post-1955 tenor saxophone dialects. These qualities also infused the trio's navigation of John Coltrane's "Central Park West" and "Mr. P.C." and a playful, swinging Garzone refrain titled "Strolling Down Bourbon Street." —Ted Panken



Kenny Garrett onstage at the Panama Jazz Festival on Jan. 15

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Fareed Haque's Global Experience

Guitarist Fareed Haque plays in such a variety of styles that he's difficult to categorize. He rose to prominence in the 1980s in Chicago (where he is still based), and his career has included collaborations with reedist Paquito D'Rivera, harmonica player Howard Levy, singer-bassist Sting and the late keyboardist Joe Zawinul. While firmly rooted in the jazz tradition, he has journeyed widely, playing classical guitar in chamber music settings, and funky electric guitar with the jam band Garaj Mahal. He's also a professor of guitar and jazz in the music school at Northern Illinois University.

DownBeat caught up with Haque to discuss his two most recent albums, which showcase different sides of his personality. On *Out Of Nowhere* (Charleston Square), the guitarist teams up with drummer Billy Hart and bassist George Mraz to play swinging standards. On *Trance Hypothesis* (Delmark), Haque blends jazz, funk, Bollywood and electronica into groove music with an eclectic array of instruments, including electric guitar, sitar, tabla, oud, bass flute, piano, organ and kalimba.

You have received accolades as a "world music guitarist," yet you are truly rooted in the hard-bop lineage. Talk about how world music influences and the jazz lineage feed each other and inform your playing style.

It goes back to how I grew up and the music I heard around the house. Since my mother was from Chile and my father was from Pakistan, I was exposed to Bollywood and South American folk songs. It was a given that music was a global experience in my household. On top of that, the first records my mom ever bought me were Pat Martino's *Joyous Lake*, Al Di Meola's *Elegant Gypsy* and Pat Metheny's *Bright Size Life*—which is kind of amazing when I look back on it. This was a compendium of some of the most important composing and guitar playing in the '70s. The only missing piece of the puzzle at that point was [John] McLaughlin, and I discovered Shakti not long after and worked my way back from there.

During that time, I was also studying straightahead jazz guitar and going to jam sessions in Chicago, learning tunes, which was kind of the meat and potatoes for me. I didn't even realize at the time, growing up in Chicago, how much I played the blues. Growing up in Chicago you see that that scene really has its own headspace. So it never crossed my mind when I started writing music that it was "world music"—it was just my experience.

One of your two new albums, *Trance Hypothesis*, touches upon



Punjabi folk, Bollywood and Indian improv concepts. How do you approach incorporating the vast tradition of Indian classical music into your composing and playing?

It never crossed my mind that I was doing that. The goal for me has been to find a tabla player I can play [Miles Davis] "Milestones" with. Punjabi folk rhythms have a swung eighth note, like jazz. I've come to see that a lot of Indian classical musicians have a hard time appreciating their own folk traditions, just like western classical players have a hard time enjoying bluegrass. My interest in Indian music is not in the classical tradition at all.

I like the "country bumpkins." The tabla player on my record [Shivalik Ghoshal] is not really a classical player—he's more funky and intuitive. The Indian classical tradition is just as uptight, stiff and annoying as the classical tradition in the West, and a general trend throughout the musical landscape is to get away from the stereotypical uptightness of classical music, whether from East or West, and I think that's really healthy.

A strong, danceable groove seems to be an important part of your aesthetic. Why?

I think Latin dance music underlies everything I do because I grew up with that. Also, if you live in Chicago, the blues becomes a part of you.

Do you feel connected or disconnected to the jam-band scene now? What did all that time in Garaj Mahal mean to your life and career?

I still have one foot in that world with a group called Math Games that is an electronic dance band. What I like about that scene is its open-mindedness. There is no interest in label-

ing. If there is a dance groove, the [audience members] don't care what you're doing. That focus on the beat is as old a tradition in music as life itself. It connects back to what is fundamental about music.

Why did you decide to make a straightahead swinging jazz record, *Out Of Nowhere*, at this time in your life?

It was a point where I finally felt I had something to say in that area. Not something to say emotionally necessarily, but on a good day these lines and this approach to the tradition are hopefully a little different. It's where Grant Green, Martino and McLaughlin come together for me. After 10 years in Garaj Mahal, I realized Grant Green was my bridge between Pat and McLaughlin.

How do you feel the role of the guitar in jazz has grown or shape-shifted over the last couple of decades?

A lot of guitarists have gotten increasingly afraid of guitar. Being a guitarist is so fraught with choices. All the guitarists I really love, you can hear the sound of the guitar, whether it's John Williams, Django, Wes or Pat Martino. They are really playing the guitar, not trying to sound like sax or piano players; rather, they do what the guitar does best.

McLaughlin, for instance, uses amazing guitar-centric voicings with open strings, and I think that is an overlooked innovation of his. Martino used many symmetrical finger patterns that are particular to the guitar. He embraced those "guitarisms." That has been proven as effective historically. As much as I admire a lot of younger players, they tend to limit themselves to a really dark, timid sound. It's hard for the music to have any dynamics.

—Joel Harrison

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Max Roach Legacy Collection Unveiled

At a public ceremony in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 27, the Library of Congress unveiled the Max Roach Legacy Collection, the drummer's personal papers, recordings and memorabilia, which the library had acquired from the Roach family a year earlier.

To give a sense of the roughly 100,000 items in the holdings, samples were spread across two tables. At the end of one table were several artifacts related to Roach's landmark 1961 album, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*. The artifacts include the contract with Candid Records, the original, unused album artwork, a program from a live performance and a portion of the score written in Roach's own hand.

Roach was a collector. He saved anything that might document his career: contracts, photos, posters, programs, reel-to-reel tapes, rehearsal cassettes, videos, scores, written correspondence, address books, date books, magazines, newspaper clippings and more. The documentation filled the basement cage of his Upper West Side apartment building; it spread out to as many as three self-storage units.

One item in the Library of Congress collection that jazz historians will be particularly interested in is the unpublished manuscript for an autobiography that Roach had worked on with writer Amiri Baraka (who died Jan. 9).

"He had a strong sense of his place in history,

and he wanted it documented," the drummer's oldest daughter, Maxine Roach, said at the Library of Congress. "In the last years of his life, I asked him, 'What do you want us to do with all the stuff you have in storage?' He said, 'I don't care where it goes, but I want it to stay together.'"

Maxine Roach had attended the April 2010 unveiling of the Dexter Gordon Collection at



DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

Max Roach

the Library of Congress with Maxine Gordon, Dexter's widow. Roach was so impressed by the experience that she convinced her stepmother and her four siblings to give the Max Roach Collection the same home.

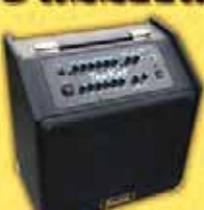
"When we were kids, they were just boxes of junk," said Maxine's brother Daryl. "But as I got older, when I spent a summer setting up his drum kit at European festivals, I realized he was more than just my dad. And now, seeing some of the stuff in those boxes, it's like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. I can see the breadth of his associations. I can see that he wanted to be viewed not just as a musician but also in a sociopolitical-economic context. He was a holistic thinker."

The Library of Congress plans to create a searchable database of all the artifacts in the collection. If a musician, academic, journalist or blogger wants to research the *Freedom Now Suite*, for example, he or she can request it and the staff will know which carton contains the related materials. The staff will bring the materials to a table at the library's reading room so that the person doing research can examine them up close.

"The purpose of these archives is not to collect boxes and put them on the shelf," said Larry Appelbaum, senior music reference librarian and jazz specialist at the Library of Congress. "We want people to come and use them."

—Geoffrey Himes

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Wilson Reprises *Blue Light* in New York City

Twenty years ago, the paradigm of a jazz vocal album was a singer, a set from the Great American Songbook and a piano trio. Maybe there was a guitarist, a horn soloist or the occasional string arrangement. Then came Cassandra Wilson's 1993 game-changing album, *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*, her first on Blue Note.

Wilson revisited the album on its 20th anniversary before a packed house at New York's Highline Ballroom on Jan. 13. She was backed by an expanded eight-piece orchestra including members of the original band (guitarist Brandon Ross, string-player Charlie Burnham and bassist Lonnie Plaxico). The concert marked the begin-

ning of a busy year for the jazz diva that will include the release of an expanded edition of *Blue Light*, a U.S. and European tour in the spring and the recording of a Billie Holiday tribute album.

beats—she performed the album from start to finish. As on the record, she evoked a sensual, all-night vigil in which the listener has the sensation of eavesdropping on a heartbroken soliloquy. “You Don’t Know What Love Is,” one of the most rueful and bluesy ballads ever written, was the perfect opener. After a rubato intro, the band adopted an undulating 6/8 meter that became the backdrop for a violin solo by Burnham. “Come On In My Kitchen” included a variety of picked and strummed instruments, including Kevin Breit’s electric mandolin, and eloquent harmonic commentary by Gregoire Maret.

One of the few songs whose live presentation



Cassandra Wilson onstage at New York's Highline Ballroom on Jan. 13

ADAM MCCULLOUGH

ning of a busy year for the jazz diva that will include the release of an expanded edition of *Blue Light*, a U.S. and European tour in the spring and the recording of a Billie Holiday tribute album.

On *Blue Light*, Wilson—with help from first-time producer Craig Street and guitarist-arranger Ross—realized an original vision of what a jazz vocal album could be. The eclectic album included her interpretations of Robert Johnson’s Delta blues (“Come On In My Kitchen,” “Hellhound On My Trail”), Van Morrison and Joni Mitchell’s jazzy folk-rock (“Tupelo Honey,” “Black Crow”), r&b, world music-flavored originals and a lone standard: “You Don’t Know What Love Is.” The songs were presented in a funky, string-based acoustic blues style with nary a piano in sight. The record was hugely influential, paving the way for artists like Norah Jones and a profusion of roots music now under the umbrella of Americana.

At the Highline show, Wilson’s stage presence and ability to tap into deep emotion made her appearance as much a theatrical event as a musical one. Draped for the occasion in a simple blue dress—her braids swaying with the languorous

arguably surpassed the album’s original arrangement was “Tell Me You’ll Wait For Me,” written by Charles Brown and Oscar Moore and made famous by Ray Charles. On the album version, Wilson’s smoky voice is accompanied only by bass and drums. At the Highline, the accompaniment was expanded to include lyrical pianism by Jon Cowherd and a haunting chromatic harmonica solo by Maret. Throughout the show, Wilson explored the emotional possibilities of the slow tempos, which served as an expansive landscape for her expert manipulation of time.

After completing the song cycle, Wilson followed up with her rhythmic explorations of *Bitches Brew*’s “Miles Runs The Voodoo Down,” her unique version of The Monkees’ “Last Train To Clarksville” and her devastating take on Holiday’s “Strange Fruit.”

Is Cassandra Wilson, as Time magazine famously called her in 2001, “America’s Best Singer”? Hard to say. Certainly in this show she demonstrated that she is in full control of one of the most flexible and dramatically expressive voices in jazz.

—Allen Morrison

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The 46-year-old musician, composer and jazz educator is an ingenious improviser and first-call sideman who has played all over the world and recorded with jazz masters including Art Blakey, Jackie McLean, Freddie Hubbard, Benny Golson and Hank Jones. Currently he can be heard playing in the big bands of Christian McBride, Jimmy Heath and Ron Carter, as well as the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band. Yet, after what has been a successful 25 years in jazz, his career seems just now to be reaching critical mass.

That's because, since 1991, Davis has balanced his playing career with raising a family and teaching at the Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz, part of The Hartt School, a performing arts conservatory at the University of Hartford. During his mid-twenties, he recalled, there were times when he grew a bit frustrated with teaching.

"I suppose I could have had a higher profile by now," he said, munching a sandwich at his favorite Hartford fish joint. Although he was honored to be working with veteran alto saxophonist McLean, his mentor, they gigged together only sporadically. Meanwhile, some of the players he knew and played with in New York saw their careers skyrocket—including McBride, Brad Mehldau, Joshua Redman and Roy Hargrove—"while I was teaching and waiting for the next gig with Jackie," he said. "But I wouldn't trade it now for the world. Because I learned patience. I learned to really teach and mean it. I learned to appreciate the opportunities that were coming. And I got

to play with Jackie. It gave me more time to get my stuff together." Davis is especially proud that his eldest son, Tony, is now a guitar student at Hartt.

Davis' career is blossoming anew with the release of his latest album as a leader, *For Real* (Posi-Tone), and a spring tour that will take him and his quintet (with Larry Willis on piano, Abraham Burton on tenor saxophone, bassist Nat Reeves and drummer Billy Williams) to New York City, Detroit, Baltimore, Richmond, Va., and beyond.

Meeting McLean, who personally auditioned the 17-year-old Davis at Hartt, was a life-altering experience. "He taught me the language of bebop and gave me a feeling for the music ... and he taught me how to teach it," Davis said. "I've been doing it my whole life now. I'm respected in the jazz world. I feel like I'm right where I belong, and I'm ready to contribute."

It was McLean who eventually introduced Davis to drummer-bandleader Art Blakey. "I was the last Jazz Messenger," Davis said, meaning he was the final musician Blakey hired before he passed away in 1990. Davis watched McLean call Blakey and make the recommendation. "McLean said, 'Hey, Bu, I got a little cat, a trombone player—he's bad, man. Uh-huh. Yep, he's white,'" Davis said, laughing at the recollection. It was not racism, Davis insists; his race mattered, but in a good way. "J-Mac taught us humility, not to take this music for granted. Being a Messenger was an honor, very special, something we all were striving for." Davis was 23 at the time.

From there, his career took off, including his

membership in Chick Corea's Origin band, his participation in the cooperative group One For All, and 16 previous recordings as a leader before *For Real*. He has appeared as a sideman on more than 100 albums. His career took him into close orbit with a host of great trombonists, including Curtis Fuller, Slide Hampton and J.J. Johnson.

As represented on *For Real*, Davis' composing style tends towards hard-bop. The title track is representative of a style forged in the glory days of The Jazz Messengers—a catchy melody played by the front line over a funky, danceable groove, with changes rich enough to inspire probing improvisation.

Despite the patient way Davis has pursued his jazz career, his latest work was inspired by a heightened sense of the passage of time, a sense of mortality and urgency he attributes in part to his recent, amicable divorce from his wife of 20 years. They share custody of their three children, ages 19, 12 and 7.

"Going through divorce will put things in perspective for you," he reflected. "It's pretty sobering. I don't mean to sound too dark, but there have been some tough times lately, not just for me personally, but also in jazz—like great people passing away unexpectedly. But what do we do? Do we wither up? Hibernate? Sulk? Is that what the cats who passed would want? No, we keep playing—and translate difficult feelings into something beautiful." That, he says, is the meaning of his new album's title. "It's no joke—nothing frivolous here. Playing for keeps."

—Allen Morrison

Players >

SHAWN MAXWELL

Group Experiment

MEGAN SONTAG



Shawn Maxwell tends to be direct and off-handed when he describes different aspects of his music—like writing. When asked about one of his deceptively tricky new compositions—the 13/8 “Little Ninja Groove”—the saxophonist said it’s based on how his 5-year-old daughter dances. He has a similar way of describing the origins of his new disc, *Shawn Maxwell’s Alliance* (Chicago Sessions), noting that it started as a reaction to a reviewer’s disparaging comment that his previous disc, *Urban Vigilante*, was just another saxophone quartet.

Rather than get angry, his upbeat response was to simply do something different.

“So I started joking about how I decided to put together a group of all my friends and weird instrumentation,” Maxwell said over coffee in Chicago’s Logan Square neighborhood. “Then, it was like, ‘Why don’t I at least try this and see what happens?’”

Maxwell turned that decision into the Alliance tentet. The ensemble does not have a lineup that could be construed as typical: Two basses are set against two French horns (one of which is played by his wife, Rachel Maxwell). Along with doubling on alto and tenor, Maxwell also plays flute and clarinet, sometimes intertwined with soprano saxophonist Chris Greene, other times alongside vocalist Keri Johnsrud, who the band leader asked to imitate a reed instrument.

“I started adding people in,” Maxwell said. “My plan was to do it as a group experiment. It went from being, ‘Oh, so you think we’re just a quartet,’ to ‘Wow, this actually is different and hip, and maybe we can make some cool music.’”

With such a large group, Maxwell tailored his compositions differently than he does for his working band. Instead of writing in a way that would open up multiple choruses for a few soloists, the pieces on *Alliance* are concise. The challenge was to make all of the tunes flow together.

“I just wrote,” Maxwell said. “I try to break the basic rules. I’ll write a general sketch, and then I’ll sit back and go, ‘OK, how can I screw this all up to make it a little more angular, but make it still work?’ That’s my overall approach, not to make it sound like I’m always trying to be herky-jerky and weird. I start with, ‘Here’s where it should be.’ A kind of safe place. And then I alter the hell out of it.”

Some of the source material goes back to the rock and hip-hop Maxwell heard as a young clarinetist, before he started studying jazz saxophone at Joliet Junior College and then Millikin University. Now a music teacher himself, Maxwell said that he’s constantly telling his students that their education only matters once they apply what they’ve learned in situations like the Chicago-area jam sessions he attended after he graduated. Maxwell still woodsheds regularly at Pete Miller’s, a steakhouse and jazz venue with locations in suburban Evanston and Wheeling, Ill.

As Maxwell noted the blizzard developing outside the coffee shop window, he marveled at the devoted core fan base that would drive in such conditions to see him perform at the venue.

“Thank God for having those places in the suburbs,” he said. “They’ve helped me cut my teeth and become a better bandleader and better player, so I wasn’t making the same mistakes out there in front of 200 people.”

—Aaron Cohen



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Players >

KRIS BOWERS

Cinematic Listening

Pianist Kris Bowers may have created jazz's first headphone-listening epic. An atmospheric collage of cerebral compositions that unfolds like an impressionist suite, *Heroes + Misfits* (Concord) is a bracing song cycle that traverses Radiohead-styled rock and hints of Herbie Hancock, Stevie Wonder and Rahsaan Roland Kirk. The 24-year-old Bowers titled the album after discovering a controversial theory.

"[My] generation seems to be the first in a long time that is very vocal about things happening in the world," Bowers says. "According to the [Strauss-Howe] Generational Theory, my generation is the archetypal hero generation. All these world events are happening, from the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring. It's celebrated now to be an individual and to not conform. The misfits in culture are often the heroes. So every song on the album ties into what it means to be a hero or a misfit."

Bowers, the winner of the 2011 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition, is joined on *Heroes + Misfits* by alto saxophonist Casey Benjamin, tenor saxophonist Kenneth Whalum III, guitarist Adam Agati, bassist Burniss

Earl Travis and drummer Jamire Williams. Guest vocalists José James and Julia Easterlin appear on the album as well.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Bowers cites influences from Oscar Peterson, Wynton Kelly ("for his comping and incredible feel"), Duke Ellington ("for his compositions"), Ahmad Jamal and Count Basie. These pianists are also wonderful orchestrators, which in turn led to Bowers' fascination with film composers John Williams and Danny Elfman, as well Trent Reznor's score for *The Social Network* and Jonny Greenwood's *There Will Be Blood* soundtrack. Seamless sequencing and delicate mood shifts turn *Heroes + Misfits* into a cinematic listening experience.

"I'm drawn to weird film scores and film music, because the first job of that music is to tell a story," Bowers comments. "Even with my own music, I think about telling a story before writing a song. As instrumentalists, we don't always have the luxury to write songs about something specific. But it's really important for me to think about the story behind the songs and to express emotion."

A prime example of *Heroes + Misfits*' melodic

lyricism and technological bent is "Forget-er," co-written by Bowers and Easterlin. Over Bowers' acoustic piano (he also plays Rhodes, Wurlitzer, Prophet and Minimoog on the record), Easterlin builds a choir of hypnotic, treated vocals. Over Williams' insistent drumming, the song soars through the air like a tortured spirit.

"I was on the road with Marcus Miller for all of 2012, so that [song] had to be written via email," Bower explains. "Julia would send me a loop or a part, and I would add a little piano. She came back with a melody, then I added something else. We built up layers. She wouldn't tell me the lyrics until the day of the session. She looped the five vocal stacks in the studio with foot pedals.

"Most of the album is live, but we did do overdubs," Bowers adds. "Some people might think it's cheating to overdub, but the way we intake music today is through headphones. We don't listen to music at home that much anymore. A lot of the current music I love brings you into such an incredible sonic world because of what they do with layering and effects. Listening to that music through headphones is such a remarkable experience." —Ken Micallef

Players ›

ANTON SCHWARTZ

Momentum Regained

BRUCE HUDSON



On Anton Schwartz's 2006 album, *Radiant Blue*, the tenor saxophonist's strong melodic themes and driving rhythms recalled early '60s Blue Note records. The album hit No. 4 on the national radio charts, and the Bay Area bandleader seemed poised for even greater success. Then, it took nearly eight years for him to release the follow-up, this year's *flashMob*.

Schwartz blames his record company. He accuses the label of getting distracted by other projects and allowing his momentum to get sidetracked. He knows because he runs the company, which he calls AntonJazz.

"When a release gets going, it monopolizes all my time," Schwartz explains. "And I didn't have the time to spare. I was dealing with aging parents in New York, getting married and moving to Seattle. I was afraid of losing momentum, sure, but parents and marriage are more important."

For *flashMob*, Schwartz brought back three-fifths of the *Radiant Blue* lineup: himself, pianist Taylor Eigsti and bassist John Shifflett. The leader replaced drummer Tim Bulkley with Lorca Hart and guitarist Peter Bernstein with trumpeter Dominick Farinacci. Schwartz had done a lot of writing during his eight-year recording hiatus, and when he looked over the material, he realized that the strongest group of tunes had been composed for trumpet and tenor sax.

"I had been checking Dominick out for quite a while," Schwartz reveals. "But I never met him till we played the night before the recording. His tone on the instrument is incredibly full, and it's so much fun to blend with that as a tenor player. He's got fire to his playing. He's got the Miles Davis thing down. He has an overriding sense of

melody. It's clear when he's playing that his mental process is not, 'Which of my tricks should I use next?' It's, 'Where is this music leading, and how can I help it get there?'"

Eigsti describes Schwartz as "extremely melody-driven," noting that the saxophonist "has a great way of communicating with the audience."

"I don't know an alternative to emphasizing melody," Schwartz says. "The most fundamental question one can ask of any music is, 'Why was it created?' You can answer that by saying, 'to break with tradition,' 'to reference tradition' or 'to show the socioeconomic hypocrisy of society'—and those are all valid answers. I'm writing for the sake of pure enjoyment and pleasure—for the listeners and the players—and that starts with melody."

As a teenager in Manhattan, Schwartz studied with Warne Marsh and then with Eddie Daniels. He also devoured the music of Joe Henderson, Gene Ammons and Stanley Turrentine. But just as influential, Schwartz insists, were records by Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder and Earth, Wind & Fire. On *flashMob*, Schwartz plays Kenny Dorham's "La Mesha" and Thelonious Monk's "Epistrophy." On earlier albums he covered tunes by Wayne Shorter, Benny Golson and Sonny Rollins.

"All these artists had a lot in common," Schwartz says. "Not only did they have strong melodies and an incredible groove, but their tunes had an emotional arc. They give you one message, then they move on to something else; they don't stay in one place. I don't want to be in a stationary position that a listener can check in at any point and know what they'll get. I want to embark on a journey and take the listener along."

—Geoffrey Himes

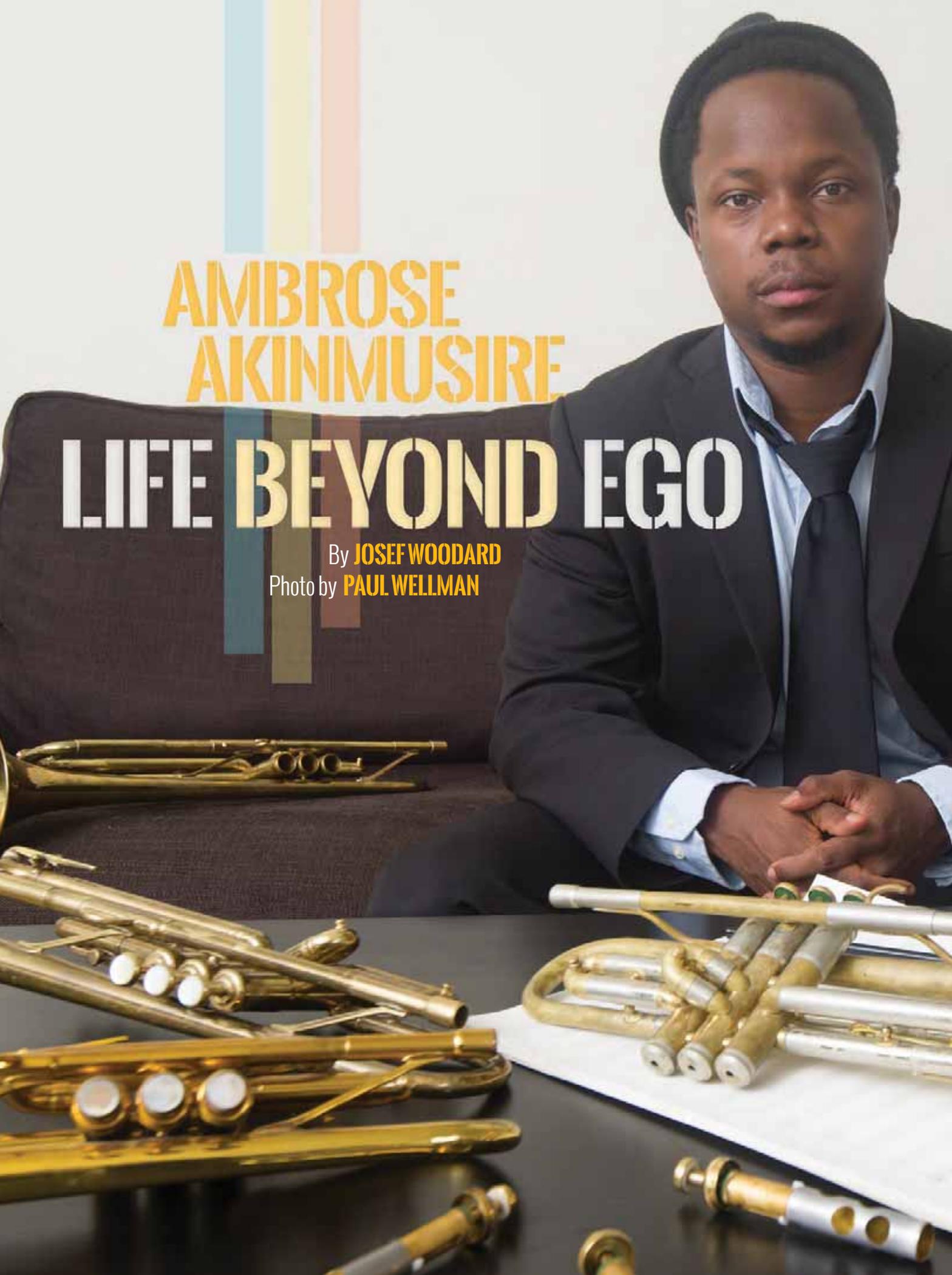
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A portrait of Ambrose Akinmusire, a Black man with short dark hair, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and dark tie. He is sitting on a dark brown couch, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. In the foreground, several brass instruments, including trumpets and trombones, are scattered on a dark surface. The background features vertical stripes in light blue, yellow, and orange. The text 'AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE' is overlaid in large, bold, orange letters, and 'LIFE BEYOND EGO' is overlaid in large, bold, white letters. Below the title, the author and photographer credits are listed in smaller text.

**AMBROSE
AKINMUSIRE**

LIFE BEYOND EGO

By **JOSEF WOODARD**
Photo by **PAUL WELLMAN**

Historical precedent and conventional wisdom hold that major players on the jazz chessboard tend to hail from New York City. Acclaimed young trumpeter and deep musical thinker Ambrose Akinmusire is a notable exception. Raised in Oakland, Calif., and previously based in New York for about a decade, the 32-year-old musician can now be found, when at home and not traveling the world, on Ambrose Avenue (it's true) in Los Angeles.

From this West Coast outpost, Akinmusire (pronounced ah-kin-MOO-sir-ee)—widely considered one of the prime and powerful fresh voices in 21st century jazz—has been zeroing in on the next phase of his development as an artist, more about exploring and expanding his work as a composer, while also deplaning around the globe with his band.

The Akinmusire story has plenty of laurels and twists. In his Oakland days, he wended his way through the famed jazz program at Berkeley High School, a stint with saxophonist Steve Coleman, studies at Manhattan School of Music and then back out West to the University of Southern California. Opportunities afforded themselves when, in 2007, he won both the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition and the Carmine Caruso International Jazz Trumpet Solo Competition, and recorded his first album, *Prelude: To Cora* (Fresh Sound).

He has been a sideman, on the concert stage and in the studio, to a long list of musicians, including Jason Moran, Vijay Iyer, David Binney, Aaron Parks, Jack DeJohnette, Esperanza Spalding and Gerald Clayton (who has also played in Akinmusire's own band). But his higher profile and more deeply personal work



Ambrose Akinmusire, photographed in his Los Angeles home on Dec. 19

came with a signing to Blue Note Records, and his distinctive pair of poetically titled albums—2011's *When The Heart Emerges Glistening* and the new, even more ambitious *The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier To Paint*.

The new album dodges easy alliance with standard definitions of what a jazz album should be. He's after new paradigms. Guest vocalists Becca Stevens and Theo Bleckmann and Canadian singer-songwriter Cold Specks weigh in, as does the Osso String Quartet, in a musical context that folds in aspects of classical music, subtle hip-hop vibes and, for old-school jazz, quintet-in-action substance, the extended closer "Richard (Conduit)," recorded live, and sounding very alive and interactive.

He is a democratically minded bandleader and has a great appreciation for his band—featuring tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III, pianist Sam Harris, bassist Harish Raghavan and drummer Justin Brown. "Everybody says this," he asserts, "but it's really true: I'm so lucky to have the band I get to play with every night. It's never the same. Even if we've traveled 10 or 11 hours and we haven't slept, and even if the gig doesn't feel the best to us, every night, everybody is trying to adhere to this thing that is higher than themselves. It's amazing. And when it's on, it's super powerful.

"We've known each other for so long. That's really important, for communication on and off the bandstand, musically and non-musically. You know when somebody is not giving 100 percent, and you can give them a look [laughs]. We don't get into arguments, but we speak frankly and bluntly to each other when needed. I think that's not something you can do if you don't have that relationship with people.

"I guess you can say that's something about growing up and being in the black community. You say what's on your mind and you go about your business. If somebody is receiving it in a certain way, that's on them. That's the way I grew up. People who have that going on—that's who I try to surround myself with.

"It just feels great, being onstage and having that trust. As a bandleader, I don't think there's any better feeling. Some people enjoy telling people what to do. I just bring in a chart and sometimes we sight-read the chart on the gig."

Akinmusire has the technical ferocity and chops-a-blazing intensity to impress on impact. More importantly, though, there is a seeking, probing musical mind at work—with just as many question marks as smugly declamatory statements—in his roles as player, composer and conceptualist.

On a late-December day in Los Angeles, the affable, soft-spoken trumpeter comes to the door with a smile and a handshake. "Yes, I know it's strange that I live on Ambrose Avenue," he says. He has lived in this particular locale, close to Griffith Park, since moving from New York a year-and-a-half ago, and he has no immediate plans to move back East. "I got what I needed from New York."

First, I have to ask about the evocative title of your new album, *The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier To Paint*. Can you explain what it means to you?

It doesn't mean one specific thing, and that's what I was trying to do with that title. Usually, with composition or album names, I have an idea

of what it's going to be. Sometimes, it's just a photo that I can usually put into words. But this one was really hard. I came up with 40 or 50 different titles. I realized that each title was barely hitting on part of the sphere of the emotional range or process that I went through or was trying to put out. It took me a while to sum things up into one title, and I think I achieved that with that one. The process of the album begins with the title, and that's why I spent so much time on it.

The title seems to concern the idea of the artist dealing with abstract notions and elements, versus more concrete or known entities.

That's part of it. I will give away part of it: There is this idea that any problem we have is external, and a lot of times, it's internal. There is this idea of a savior, a superman—"come save me . . . help me." A lot of times, it's *you*, and you need to be able to go inside yourself and be honest with yourself.

What you said is also on point. And then there is the process of painting, which is something I'm hugely influenced by lately, the idea of completing each layer—layer on top of layer—as opposed to the way I assume most musicians compose, which is left to right. I'm a horrible painter [laughs], but I do like to go to museums and to talk to people who paint, or to musicians who paint.

You don't write in standard head-solo-head structures. Things often change in your music, or pieces are asymmetrical. It sounds like you're reconceiving in your process of composition. Is that fair to say?

Yeah, that's definitely fair to say. I talked to Wayne [Shorter] one time, and it struck me as profound when he told me that a composition is never done. It's living. That meant, to me, that you have to allow it to live. There can't be an ending anymore. A tune can have a cadence—you bring it to people, and that's part of the process. The performance is part of the process, taking leave of it is part of the process and coming back to it is part of the process.

There is a chamber music-like quality to this album. Was that a conscious goal for you, something you wanted to explore?

Not specifically. I just love everybody on the album. Separately and independently, I love the Osso Quartet. Actually, the album before [*When The Heart Emerges Glistening*], I imagined to sound more like this album. Because of budgetary reasons and other reasons which happen when you're on a major label—when people think you're *here* but you're really *here* [laughs]—things didn't really work out. I wanted Becca and Theo on the album, but that didn't work out. When the string quartet thing dropped, I just gave up on the Becca thing. I was going to ask her to do something in post-production for the last album.

So I have had this sound in my head, but not because I wanted to make a chamber album—even though some of my favorite records are chamber-esque types of things, like both of Billy Childs' records, and a lot of the stuff that Vince Mendoza does. I studied with both of those guys at USC.

We didn't study chamber music, per se, but we studied

forms and string quartet stuff.

Vince is so bad. He balances the intuitive side with the math, which is really great. It's the same thing with Billy. From the first note, you're in the sphere and you just know that they're connected to something higher. That's what it's all about, this connection or this expression of something higher, and being a conduit for that.

There is something natural about the way you weave the vocal tracks into the album's sequence. Becca's tune, "Our Basement (Ed)," is touching and lyrical, different from what Theo does on his more conceptual track, "Asiam (Joan)."

Becca's song is about this homeless guy named Ed across the street. Ed is an amazing man. He saved \$250 and donated it back to the church, which feeds him every Sunday. That act was so moving to me. I see him literally every time I leave my driveway, and it's sort of a reminder. If you see him, he's really dirty and pushing a shopping cart. But I'm thinking, "Man, this guy is more in touch with humanity than a lot of these millionaires who live in the hills."

You have other characters in this set of 13 songs. There are a lot of names in parentheses linked to songs.

Maybe 90 percent of the tunes I compose have a story along with them. Some are two paragraphs, some are five pages long. Some are character analyses. They're written from different perspectives.

For this round, I wrote a lot of the tunes on specific characters in the stories. And then some of them are actual people that I know. "Asiam (Joan)" is actually written for Joni Mitchell. I wrote that for a commission I got for the Asia Society Museum in New York. At the time, I was reading Michelle

The trumpeter poses near a street sign he sees daily in L.A.





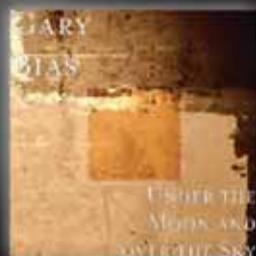
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Mercer's book *Will You Take Me As I Am*, the Joni Mitchell biography. I was also checking out an exhibition at the museum, where I played.

I wrote a paragraph about how that specific book had affected me. I think I may have sent links to some of the pictures that affected me, and sent all of that to Theo, with a piano sketch of me playing the tune. He wrote the lyrics based on that.

On the new album, you have a nice balance of performance qualities and structural ideas. You're obviously a technically gifted player, a dazzling trumpeter. But there must be part of you that is also wary of that role. There is the virtuoso player within, but also the composer who

wants to fit things into a larger context. Is that about right?

That's spot-on [*laughs*]. The whole killing, jazz power trumpet thing is just not for me. I love so many other aspects of the music that to just focus on one—especially that, which comes from the ego—is not my way of doing it. I could stand up there and play killing jazz solos—you know how you do it, start very quiet and then build into these things with smart notes and high notes. But that's just not interesting to me.

I really am trying to just be a conduit. I'm trying to remove my ego and remove the "me, me, me" thing you find in a lot of art, or that a lot of people present. I just want to be a conduit and let things go out there. That's the power of art, that it can actually change people. That's my role—not to be some killing jazz trumpet player who takes amazing solos. That does nothing for the world.

But it's a nice aspect of the music, and you have that power to tap into.

That's well-put: It's just an aspect. It's very small. A lot of people pretend like it's a big thing.

Maybe this will be to my fault, but I'm not too concerned about what people think of me. I am concerned with changing people or making people feel things. I don't want people to be indifferent to me. I want them to either say, "I hate this," or, "I've never heard anything like this before. This is amazing." I don't want the in-between stuff. I want to erase the middle ground, the indifference.

Was there a point in your life when you were focused on the technical bravado, becoming a killing soloist? Did you go through that phase of development?

No. I didn't come to the music in that way.

My mom is from Mississippi. When I was growing up, my family was hardcore Baptist. That means you go to the church and people are getting the Holy Ghost, there's shout music and people are running around the church. You never even thought about the technical aspect of things. It was always the spiritual aspect—how things were making people *feel*. When someone in the choir would step out to sing a solo, you would never say, "Oh, she's a little out of tune," or question whether or not she was a great vocalist. It would be about, How does it make you feel?

I got into jazz when I went to a jazz camp in Oakland. All of the old-school jazz musicians from the area were teaching there. They would teach the music through

records. They would take me and my friend to the flea market and we would get records—Art Blakey and Lee Morgan records. Lee Morgan was the first trumpet player I ever really heard, and it was his solo on "Moanin'." So that's my introduction, not like some hyper-technical thing. The first jazz concert I went to was the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

So I went from gospel music to Lee Morgan to the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and I felt that that was the purpose, music about feeling. The technical thing didn't really come to me until I got to college.

Do you have a particular path you follow, in terms of a faith?

No, I don't. I've gone through periods of checking out a lot of different religions. I was raised Baptist and went through a long period of checking out Buddhism, certain writings and teachings. Those are the two I've investigated the most.

To give a clearer answer, I could say that I believe in something higher than myself. I don't know that I can say that I believe in a singular person or deity. I believe in energies and something being higher than myself. I also believe in the great mind, the one thought that we are all trying to tap into. I think that the arts are a gateway into that, and so are sports. You hear somebody talk about the "flow."

Music can have religious, or spiritual, alliances, by its nature. It takes you to a place that nothing else does in life.

Right. That's one of the things I love about Wayne. He stays there. Most of us go into that world and think, "Oh, that was fun." He's just there, 100 percent of the time. That's what I'm trying to get to, what we're all trying to get to. Some of us know it, most of us don't know it. Joni Mitchell got there, and Trane. He was there.

John Coltrane has influenced jazz musicians for decades. Is Trane one of your heroes?

Oh, my God. Talk about commitment to craft. It's amazing. It's hard to even articulate. You say "Trane," and I just melt. There are other people, too, like Booker Little. Unfortunately, his story was so short. Clifford [Brown], Bud Powell, Tatum, Armstrong...

There is a whole slew of people who I love, who are great artists who never got the credit, but they still stuck with it. To me, that typifies their commitment to craft, with someone like Marcus Belgrave or Charles Tolliver or Joe Wilder—one of the baddest trumpet players. They were never the big names that everyone checks out, but they just stayed with it.

That's something that really inspired me and that I think about a lot. I feel like if I wasn't getting the attention that I'm getting, I would still be in there practicing five, six, seven hours a day.

Was Miles Davis an important figure and inspiration for you, through all the twists and turns in his musical history?

Yeah, I love Miles. He was just ballsy and courageous. I don't want to say he contradicted himself, but I think to grow, you kind of have to be willing to contradict yourself. There is a great Maya Angelou quote, where they asked her what's the

A BOLD VOICE

AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE HAS DONE HIS SHARE OF SIDEMAN WORK, including interactions

with Steve Coleman, Jason Moran, Vijay Iyer and Esperanza Spalding. But he has also steadily honed his personal work in leader mode, sculpting his unique group concept—within the classic jazz quintet format—while refining his approach to composition.

His collaborators are deeply impressed by his distinct musical voice. "Ambrose is a very conscientious person," says Moran, a Blue Note labelmate. "He aims to please, but he also aims to disrupt. Whether thinking about how he has technically mastered his way around intervallic leaps, or the tenacity to have a working band, or his ability to be 'the one' that Joni Mitchell wants to go to dinner with, he's clearly not your 'Average Joe' lead trumpeter. He isn't choosing the easy route."

Tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III, a member of Akinmusire's quintet, is a kindred spirit. The two met when both were in college—Smith at Berklee College of Music and Akinmusire at Manhattan School of Music.

"The very first time I heard him play, I remember being instantly drawn to his sound and ideas and being blown away in a way that I hadn't felt since I was first starting to get into records in high school," Smith recalls. "In that few minutes of hearing him play, it kind of changed my mind-set and path to this day."

For vocalist Becca Stevens, the process of working on Akinmusire's new album, *The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier To Paint* (Blue Note), involved much more than a casual cameo appearance on the song she wrote and sang on, "Our Basement (Ed)." Woven into the song's elaborate creative workings, Akinmusire had her compose within a set of parameters—including that the narrative be from a homeless person's perspective. He didn't tell her until later that he had in mind a real person who lives on the same Los Angeles street where Akinmusire resides.

She says the creative process "was like being given a pile of clay and a character assignment rather than a blank canvas with no paints or brushes."

Stevens is a longtime admirer of Akinmusire as a new generational jazz voice. "The emotional quality in Ambrose's playing and writing I find refreshing on a heart level," she says. "I'm on the edge of my seat during his solos, which isn't something I can say I feel very often."

On a general artistic level, Moran asserts that "Ambrose has really found his tone, his voice, his rhythm and more. It's like the artist who finds the correct medium for their work, whether film, marble, canvas, wood. Ambrose has the right band, the right repertoire and the right attitude. He clearly has ideas about texture, instrumentation and language. I look forward to more."

—Josef Woodard

most important virtue or quality that someone can have. She said, "Courage, because courage gives you the ability to grow, because it gives you the ability to say, 'What I believed in yesterday, I don't necessarily believe today.'"

To me, that's what Miles did. He said, "OK, yeah, that bebop stuff?" It's not that he didn't ever believe in it, but he said, "This is where I'm at now." Suddenly, years later, he would say, "Yeah, that was cool, but this is where I am now." I respect that.

On the list of players you've worked with, Steve Coleman and Jason Moran are both progressive-minded musicians who, I assume, made an impact on you. Is that so? What did you glean from them?

When I talk about how I was introduced to music, it's kind of crazy. I went to Berkeley High School and right when that was about to end, I met Steve Coleman. It was like a higher power was putting me on a certain path. So I met him and that changed my life. He is so dedicated to the music and to the craft. The next summer, we [Akinmusire and trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson] went on tour with him, with the Five Elements, a five- or six-week tour, and it was like being thrown into the deep end.

That was your first big exposure in the grander jazz world?

That was my first tour. I had done some things that I found later were sort of big deals. I played a little bit with Joe Henderson. I knew Donald Bailey. I knew Billy Higgins and had played with him. I played a little bit with Sonny Simmons, very random stuff. I'd been doing gigs around the Bay Area since I was 15 or 16, with local artists and people who lived locally but were pretty well-known.

But, yeah, Steve Coleman's band was my first major tour. It was kind of crazy. It was so overwhelming, I felt like I needed to work on so much. I took some time off from touring and playing gigs and just practiced. There was just so much to digest during that tour.

With Jason Moran, I was a huge fan of his coming out of high school, at the time of his debut, *Soundtrack To Human Motion*. I found his email address and wrote him. He responded with a long email, and that was our introduction. We developed a relationship. I did his Monk project [Moran's multimedia project *In My Mind: Monk At Town Hall, 1957*] with him. There have been times when I called him for my gigs and he has been able to do them.

Since Jason is closer to my age, he's someone I really look up to. Again, he's someone who is committed to craft, and his integrity is something else. To look at the beginning of his career up to where he is now, he's been like an arrow. Even with all the attention given to him, he's just like, "Boom, this is my mission." With him, you can see that he has a really fast trajectory, but he's grabbing all these things as he's going forward. There may be horse blinders on, but somehow, they're invisible horse blinders. He can see around them. He's being super-focused, while still being influenced by other things. That's something I want to do, expanding while still having a trajectory, or expanding and not ignoring aspects of yourself.

There are other people, too. Vijay [Iyer] is a huge influence, and also other trumpet players—Nicholas



Akinmusire at the 2012 Litchfield Jazz Festival in Litchfield, Conn.

STEVEN SUSSMAN

[Payton], Roy [Hargrove] and Wynton [Marsalis]. Those guys helped me out a lot when I was in high school. Anytime they came to Yoshi's [in the Bay Area], or wherever they were playing, I would get in contact with them and they would give me lessons, in their hotel rooms. I would go and play, and they would play and they would give me feedback or tell me, "You need to check out this book, and this book." I've been influenced just from the generosity level, so if anybody asks me for a lesson, I give it to them, because people gave me lessons.

Your Blue Note albums include pieces that address the racial situation in America: "My Name Is Oscar" and "Rollcall For Those Absent." Is it important for you to find ways to include on your albums these real-world reality checks plugged into present-day situations, such as the film *Fruitvale Station* and the Trayvon Martin case?

Yes, it's very important for me. If I'm really stamping time with each of these albums, then that has to go in there, you know? These are real concerns that I have. I read a great interview with Maya Angelou conducted by Bell Hooks, and in it she says, "Art is not a luxury. ... The artist explains to us, or at least asks the questions which must be asked. And when there's a question asked, there's an answer somewhere. I don't believe a question can be asked which doesn't have an answer somewhere in the universe. That's what the artist is supposed to do, to liberate us from our ignorance."

I've had so many conversations about Oscar Grant around the world. And many times it was the first time these people had even heard of him. So, while many people have now become familiar with Trayvon Martin, I assume I will be having more conversations around the world about the other names that are also on this track. Also, it's boring to just shout, "Me, me, me, me,"—I don't know how people can sleep at night doing that.

You cross over lines and artistic attitudes.

Is that a goal?

It is a goal. I can't say that I love everything, but I do enjoy most things related to music. I just love music, as an expression. I know that my goal is to create a style or an expression that can be used in any arena. I was going to say "genre," but I don't even know if I believe in that.

I had a really nice little moment in the first half of [2013]. I went on tour with the Monterey Jazz All-Stars, with Lewis Nash and Christian [McBride]. And then that ended the night before my birthday, the last day of April. Then I played the Atlanta Jazz Festival with my band, just a one-off, and then the next gig I did was in Banff, with Vijay, Linda Oh, Dafnis Prieto, Ben Monder, Theo Bleckmann and Greg Osby. Then the next week, I did a Joni Mitchell tribute with Rufus Wainwright, Brian Blade and others.

That was great. I thought, "This is what I want to do. I want to swing and then be able to do something else and be able to do this and do that." Yeah, it is a conscious thing. If you really are a great artist, you can sort of fit in anywhere. That's a definition for me. That definitely proves that it works, or that it's honest.

Are you contemplating your next album or project, or is it still too soon?

Yes and no. I have a lot of things that I want to do. I don't know if I'm thinking in terms of "next." I'm just looking at all these things I want to do. As for a "next," I don't know. Just forward ...

Forward and sideways?

Forward and sideways, with honesty and submission to this thing that's higher than us. That's all I really care about. That's my definition of success: How much can you submit to this higher thing, and how much can you express through that? How many people are you getting to acknowledge this higher thing who weren't aware of it before? That's a sign of success, not how many gigs you get or how many awards you get. I think that will always be my definition, or at least part of my definition, of success. **DB**



Billy Hart at the
2013 Detroit
Jazz Festival,
performing with
Quest on Sept. 2



BILLY HART OVERDUE RECOGNITION

BY PHILLIP LUTZ | PHOTO BY ANDREA CANTER

Holed up in the basement of his New Jersey home, Billy Hart popped a slightly worn CD into his audio player. Out came the drummer's composition "Teule's Redemption." Rendered by the maximalist ensemble Quest—Hart, saxophonist Dave Liebman, pianist Richie Beirach and bassist Ron McClure—the piece is a fierce, dense, Reagan-era artifact that demands to be heard.

Sadly, the recording remains unreleased and, after 27 years in the can, is unlikely to reach the jazz public anytime soon.

Hart's life is littered with such bits of wasted brilliance. Writ large, they bespeak a failure of the jazz world to give him his due. Even a cursory look at Hart's career reveals that, while he has been an innovative force in the music for 50 years, his profile has lagged behind his achievement.

But that may be changing and, as evidence, Hart popped another CD into the player. Like the earlier CD, this one included a version of "Teule's Redemption" that commanded a hearing. Unlike that version, though, the new one was totally reimagined; Hart and longtime bandmates Mark Turner on saxophone, Ethan Iverson on piano and Ben Street on bass left ample space for the listener to loiter in their sound world before they grabbed you by the scruff with a few well-placed gestures.

The new version, thanks to the ECM label, definitely will be heard.

"Finally, something has turned my way," Hart said.

Coming from Hart, even the most guarded optimism was a good sign at the end of a long day that had found him in a harried state. On this cold January afternoon, he had gamely entertained questions from a persistent interviewer; parried points with a phone interlocutor from the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, one of at least four schools at which Hart teaches; offered life lessons to visiting son Chris (aka Teule in Swahili); and kept a boiler repairman at bay. It was a lot of tasks to juggle, but Hart, 73, handled them all with humility, energy and enthusiasm—the same qualities that inform his masterful playing behind a drum kit.

Some of that spark was no doubt attributable to his current recording contract with the venerable ECM. His career (and his worldview) have been invigorated by the new album, *One Is The Other*, released on March 4, and its predecessor, *All Our Reasons*, released a year earlier. Though he had been playing with Turner, Iverson and Street for nearly a decade—and with major figures on some 700 albums and the world's stages for decades before that—Hart said he had never quite found a

situation that allowed him to distill his style, dispense with pyrotechnics and generally communicate through his instrument as gracefully as he has with the new label.

“As long as I can remember,” he said, “I’ve always wanted to have a more lyrical, flexible way of playing the drums. The label and the band seem to reflect a clearer picture of what I am.”

What Hart is, of course, is not so simple to divine. Generous and humble yet deeply complex, he favors expression by implication, both on and off the bandstand.

“If you think you’ve got him nailed down a certain way or on a certain opinion,” Iverson said, “he’ll be the first one to turn the tables on you and show you the other side.”

Hart speaks of himself in the language of pathology, asserting that he is “addicted to music.” Of his dedication to the art, evidence abounds. Apart from a wide-screen television and a narrow couch, every inch of his basement is devoted to some aspect of the musical life. Lining the walls are vinyl records and compact discs. Center stage are two full drum sets, flanked on either side by a Yamaha electric piano and a vintage Hardman Peck upright with just enough integrity to serve the needs of a drumming composer.

Evidence of Hart’s “addiction” extends beyond his basement. He spends days at a time college-hopping, teaching at the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio and the New England Conservatory in Boston before returning to New Jersey, where he draws students from New York University and Queens College. Students who make the pilgrimage to his basement get a hands-on lesson; as a teacher, he is also a player, making use of the second drum set when the proceedings need a little kick-start.

For all the time he devotes to pedagogy, he said, he remains “a performer who teaches, not a teacher who performs.” So, at the end of the day, the bandstand often takes precedence, whether it be with Billy Hart Quartet; Quest, which reunited in 2005 after disbanding in 1991; the Saxophone Summit, with Liebman, Joe Lovano and, in its current incarnation, Ravi Coltrane; or The Cookers, a hard-bop septet with Eddie Henderson and David Weiss on trumpets, Billy Harper on tenor sax, Craig Handy on flute and alto sax, George Cables on piano and Cecil McBee on bass. Hart is a fixture across Europe as well.

Despite the time Hart has spent on the road over the years—or, more likely, because of it—he has mixed feelings about the choices he made that kept him away from home. “I don’t know if I’m that proud of it,” he said, “especially when you get to my age and you realize there’s more to life than just music. Some people are wise enough to realize that at a much younger age.” On the other hand, he explained, “A lot of the reason that I do music is because it helps me deal with everything else. Music keeps me centered somehow.”

“Then you have the financial considerations,” he added, noting that teaching and ad hoc engagements are a necessary means of support. “In this day and age, you don’t work six nights a week in the same club anymore.”

Hart’s ethos was clearly shaped by that earlier era. Starting as a teenager in the late 1950s, he was playing in the house band at the Howard Theater in his native Washington, D.C., where a varied stream



From left: Ben Street, Ethan Iverson, Billy Hart and Mark Turner

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of performers—from jazz artists like saxophonist Eddie Harris to soul stars like Otis Redding—came through as single acts. He was also a habitué of guitarist Charlie Byrd’s 18th Street basement lounge, the Showboat, into which budding Brazilian legends like Luiz Bonfá, João Gilberto and Antônio Carlos Jobim brought bossa nova music long before mainstream America had heard it.

“By the time I played with Stan Getz,” he said, referring to his three-year association with the bossa-playing saxophonist in the mid-1970s, “I had already played that.”

Meanwhile, Hart’s reputation was growing along with his Rolodex. By his mid-20s, he was touring extensively with the cream of straight-ahead players, among them singer Shirley Horn, organist Jimmy Smith and guitarist Wes Montgomery. Hart was a pallbearer at Montgomery’s funeral in 1968, after which he moved to New York.

Soon after his arrival, Hart was in demand in the city and, determined to take advantage of the range of influences and experiences available to him, he explored the geographic and aesthetic fringes. Ultimately, he landed at Slug’s, the East 3rd Street haunt known as an incubator for adventurous players like Sun Ra, Ornette Coleman and Pharoah Sanders, who, in a weeklong engagement, arranged a fraught initiation into free-jazz.

Hart recalled a tense opening night on which saxophonist Sanders offered no clue about the music they would be playing until it was time for the set to start. Suddenly, Hart recounted, “He says, ‘OK, Billy, you got it.’ I thought maybe he wants four bars, eight bars, 32 bars. But nobody’s coming up on stage, so I decided to start playing. At that point the whole band starts playing based on what I was playing.”

“That was a lesson in itself,” he said. “I had never played in a rhythmically free band. What did Coltrane call it? Multiple directions.”

The silent treatment continued for another night, but the night after that Hart arrived at the club to find a book of philosophy opened to a section on

creativity. The book was from Sanders, who had contrived the previous nights’ trial-by-fire as a means of opening a discussion about music and life that follows Hart to this day.

“I don’t think of music as a religion, but I think of it more philosophically,” Hart said, emphasizing the point by hauling out a weighty tome on philosophy, *The Urantia Book*, much as Sanders did that fateful night some 45 years ago.

“It shows you the times I come from,” Hart said.

Wistfully, he recalled a time when revolution was a topic of polite conversation, and skepticism about the commercial impulse was the currency of the day. Amid his recollections, though, he pulled back a bit, allowing for the internal logic of the commercial enterprise, even if it was a logic he rejected.

“It just doesn’t fit my philosophy,” he said.

For Hart, issues of commerce and art came to an early head in 1969, when he hooked up with Herbie Hancock. Philosophically and musically, the relationship seemed to dovetail beautifully. Both took on Swahili names: Hart’s was Jabali; Hancock’s, Mwandishi, which became the title of the first album he made with Hart.

The period was a productive one for Hart. He provided propulsion for *Mwandishi*, *Crossings* and *Sextant*, which some Hancock-watchers regard as a golden moment before the commercial rush of *Head Hunters*. Some of the rhythmic vocabulary developed for the trilogy, Hart said, would surface in *Head Hunters*, albeit in a more tightly wound form. Beyond the rhythmic input, Hart found he was exquisitely in tune with Hancock’s harmonic approach.

“I was very attracted, enamored of it,” he said. “I felt compatible with it. It was what I was waiting for. It fit what I was trying to do.”

But the band—Eddie Henderson on trumpet, Bennie Maupin on winds, Julian Priester on trombone and Buster Williams on bass—broke up in 1973, after which Hart joined pianist McCoy Tyner’s group. The breakup, which resonates with him today,

was partly the result of differences in artistic vision.

"The kind of philosophical outlook we had didn't work in the direction Herbie was ultimately going," he said. But, he added, for the time they were together, "he was my major musical influence. The music was certainly an incredible example of what I think my direction of music is."

While Hancock may have been a major musical influence, he was not the only one. Looming large was Miles Davis, with whom he recorded the material that appeared on 1972's *On The Corner* and 1974's *Big Fun*. The two musicians met when the trumpeter was casually visiting clubs in Atlanta and Detroit, where Hart was working in Smith's organ trio.

When it came time to record, Hart said, Davis was an austere figure. He said the material for *On The Corner* was recorded at Columbia Studios in New York in a series of tense sessions in which only Davis entered the control room and the opportunity for interaction with other musicians was limited, though Hart made nominal contact with Liebman, who was also on the gig.

"We were so stressed," Hart said, "I don't think we even said anything to each other."

As limited as the interaction was, it helped nurture a relationship with Liebman that developed into a performing partnership with Quest, which recorded half a dozen albums. The band functioned as a working group for 11 years before breaking up and, after a decade-and-a-half, getting back together.

The breakup coincided with the start of Hart's academic career. His ability to bridge generations with students and younger musicians became obvious immediately. Turner and Iverson speak of him with due reverence; while they were the founders of the band, they yielded leadership duties to him once it became clear that his seniority made a realignment logical. Over time, the stature gap has narrowed.

"We're gradually stepping up to him," Turner said.

"Billy comes from a generation that spent a lot of time and energy on the details of time and swing," he said, "especially the touch on the cymbal and the whole drum set. Working with him, my sense of swing has become deeper and more detailed. My understanding of it is more layered, in terms of when to push, when to hold back."

Hart's sensitivity on such matters came in handy during the recording of *One Is The Other*, especially in his adaptation of "Yard." According to Iverson, Hart understood that a subtle shift in emphasis from a swing feel, which they used in live performances, to a straight-eighths feel would help maintain the integrity of the recording.

"We had never played it that way before," Iverson recalled. "We just happened to play it that way because of the circumstances."

Other moments in the recording prompted shifts in the other direction, according to Turner. Rather than tailoring a treatment to meet the demands of the studio, he said, an attempt was made "to give a taste of what happens live." Among the notable examples in this regard were the mood-setting intros and outros, which give *All Our Reasons* much of its cohesion and character.

Among the most effective of the intros was the long and winding lead-in Iverson delivered on "Ohnedaruth," which proceeds to become an improvisation on the changes from John Coltrane's "Giant Steps." The only wholly original part of the tune,

which takes its name from Coltrane's Sanskrit moniker, is a short coda penned by Iverson.

"I guess I took credit in the end," Iverson said.

Coltrane figures elsewhere in the project, notably on the Hart original "Song For Balkis." On this tune, which opens *All Our Reasons*, Hart said he asked Turner to emulate the sound Coltrane produced on "Love," a piece that appeared on his mid-'60s *Meditations* suite. Based on Hart's reaction, Turner was a rousing success. As Hart slid *All Our Reasons* into the CD player and "Balkis" came on, the sound of his mallets deployed loosely on the floor tom led smoothly into Turner's entrance, a breathy evocation that literally brought Hart out of his seat.

"That's it," he said. "That's Coltrane to me."

The invocation of Coltrane's name triggered in Hart a recollection of one of the biggest regrets of his career. The saxophonist had asked Hart to join his group when he was planning to add a second drummer next to Rashied Ali. Overawed, Hart turned down the offer. Soon afterward, as he was playing the Hollywood Bowl with Montgomery and Getz in July 1967, Hart received a phone call from his wife telling him that Coltrane had died.

"The question is, 'Why didn't I play with him when I had the chance?'" Hart said. "If I didn't believe in myself, then I should have believed in whatever he saw." DB



Billy Hart Quartet *One Is The Other*

Mark Turner tenor saxophone
Ethan Iverson piano
Ben Street double bass
Billy Hart drums



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Allen Toussaint

DRIVING SOLO

By Davis Inman | Photo By Glade Bilby II

Allen Toussaint is savoring his time in the spotlight. Best known as a pianist, songwriter, producer and arranger behind the scenes, Toussaint has collaborated with everyone from Elvis Costello, Paul Simon and Paul McCartney to New Orleans legends like Irma Thomas and Ernie K-Doe.

But on his new album, *Songbook* (Rounder), Toussaint is alone behind the wheel. Recorded during two solo concerts at Joe's Pub in New York and released last fall, the album showcases Toussaint's formidable skills as a pianist and singer.



Allen Toussaint's latest album is the CD/DVD release *Songbook* (Rouner).

The solo performances have bolstered Toussaint's reputation as a concert performer, and lately he has received a bevy of accolades. Last July, he traveled to the White House to receive a National Medal of Arts from President Obama. A few months later, a statue of Toussaint was unveiled at New Orleans Musical Legends Park. *Songbook* received a Grammy nomination for Best Americana Album, and the song "Shrimp Po-Boy, Dressed" from the album was nominated for Best American Roots Song.

The easygoing New Orleans native says the honors have come as a surprise at this point in his career.

"My life has been spent behind the scene," said

Toussaint, 76, before a concert at Space in Evanston, Ill., last November. "I never expected great accolades, anyway. Not that I was wishing I had them, because I assumed that that's what comes when you're behind the scene—you're *behind* the scene. But to be not only recognized from behind the scene but at such a high level—as the highest in the land was, that honor [National Medal of Arts]—it was absolutely marvelous."

After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, Toussaint moved to New York and began performing solo brunch concerts at Joe's Pub, though the soft-spoken pianist says he was initially wary of the spotlight.

"I don't know how I felt when I first [played at Joe's Pub] because I wasn't accustomed to doing front-stage-center and especially as a solo [act], but I went on and did it," he recalled. "I'm so glad [I did] because after doing it a few times I began to get at ease and began to dearly appreciate a live audience. In our lives we always want to reach the people. But rather than in the studio reaching them through the red light and 'take two' and 'take five'—*there* they are."

These are good times for Toussaint. He has the air of a debonair gentleman, but also of a polished performer. Before the concert at Space, he was warm and engaging. A dark blue scarf was wrapped elegantly around his neck and his hands rested gently in his lap as he discussed his career. On stage later that night, he wore a dark pinstripe suit, looking more like a businessman than a hip music producer.

Toussaint's concerts today present a survey of songs and stories from his long career, which he began as a teenager in New Orleans in the late '50s, recording piano parts for Fats Domino sessions when the r&b star was unavailable.

Toussaint's piano style is indelibly tied to the r&b of '50s New Orleans, as well as the Storyville-era hot jazz and blues of Jelly Roll Morton.

But his most profound influence is in the carnival rhythms and Afro-Cuban-styled piano of Professor Longhair. "I'm a Fess disciple," Toussaint told *DownBeat* in June 2006, when he appeared on the cover of the magazine with Costello to discuss their collaboration *The River In Reverse* (Verve Forecast). "He's my patron saint, my Bach."

After the release of the Fess-indebted 1958 instrumental LP *The Wild Sound Of New Orleans* (RCA), the young pianist-songwriter's big break came in the early '60s when he was tapped to work as a producer and songwriter for Larry McKinley and Joe Banashak's new Minit label.

At Minit (and its sister imprint, Instant), Toussaint wrote and produced some of his most unforgettable songs: "Mother-In-Law," "Certain Girl," "Fortune Teller" and dozens more. On *Songbook*, he draws heavily from this period, and it's clear the fertile scene helped shape his artistic gifts.

"In the early sessions, we always rehearsed at home in the living room or the front room," Toussaint told *DownBeat* in the April 1986 issue. "All the artists—Ernie K-Doe, Benny Spellman, Irma Thomas, Chris Kenner—used to just hang all through the day every day. I would write one song for Irma, and we would go over it a little and take it to the next room to practice. I'd write another song for Ernie K-Doe, and he'd go in the other room. Irma comes out and we'd go over her song for improvements. Then I'd write a song for someone else. We just did that all day. It was a lasting party. When it was time to go to the studio, we just left from the house and sang the songs in the car on the way to the studio."

Songbook opens with "It's Raining," written for Thomas in 1962. Toussaint says he remembers the exact night he wrote the song.

"It was the evening—it was still daylight—but going into the evening, and Irma Thomas was sitting in a big chair—an armchair sofa," he recalled in Evanston. "She was sitting there, waiting. I was writing songs for her, not just a song. But it did start raining. And whatever I was working on before then, I stopped immediately, because I love rain.



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ANDREA CANTER

It started raining and Irma's right here and I'm about to write a song for Irma. 'It's raining'—there it is—I had best take full advantage of that. And I did write it all on the spot. And she sung it as if it had been written for years, immediately. She treated all of my songs that way because I wrote them so much for her—her whole anatomy, what I thought of her. She would give it back to me—if she thought I wanted it a certain way, she'd give it to me that way. So it was a really cohesive collaboration with Irma, always."

Toussaint sings the song with such intense feeling on *Songbook* that it's hard not to imagine him traveling back in time to that rainy night in New Orleans: "It's raining so hard, it brings back memories/ Of the time you were here with me."

In 1970, Toussaint resumed his solo recording career with a second LP, *Toussaint* (Scepter/Tiffany), followed by a deal with Warner Bros. in the mid-'70s that produced *Life, Love And Faith* (1972), *Southern Nights* (1975) and the Jerry Wexler-produced *Motion* (1978).

Toussaint also pulls from this period on *Songbook*, performing renditions of "Sweet Touch Of Love," "Soul Sister," "Southern Nights," "With You In Mind," "Lover Of Love" and "The Optimism Blues."

But one of Toussaint's biggest successes in the '70s came not as a performer but as a composer: Country singer Glen Campbell's 1977 version of "Southern Nights" became a No. 1 pop hit and was nominated for a Grammy in the Song of the Year category.

The decade also saw Toussaint back in the role of producer and arranger, now working on high-

er-profile projects.

Toussaint arranged horns for Paul Simon's "Tenderness" on 1973's *There Goes Rhymin' Simon* and produced LaBelle's 1974 album, *Nightbirds*, which produced the huge hit song "Lady Marmalade."

Toussaint and a partner, Marshall Sehorn, opened the recording studio Sea-Saint in New Orleans and produced Dr. John's *In The Right Place* (1973) and *Desitively Bonnaroo* (1974). Both albums featured the backing band The Meters—keyboardist Art Neville, guitarist Leo Nocentelli, bassist George Porter Jr. and drummer Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste—whose New Orleans funk instrumentals hit the r&b charts.

Sea-Saint attracted Paul McCartney, who held sessions for Wings' 1975 album, *Venus And Mars*, at the studio. (Toussaint and McCartney reconnected on Vanguard's 2007 disc *Goin' Home: A Tribute To Fats Domino*, performing "I Want To Walk You Home" together.)

During the '80s and '90s, Toussaint was engaged in a number of projects—he was the musical director for the Off Broadway play *Staggerlee* in 1985 and he founded NYNO Records in 1996 to release music from emerging New Orleans artists—but he mostly remained under the radar.

Though Hurricane Katrina brought the worst for New Orleans, it forced Toussaint to venture beyond the Crescent City and prompted him to embark on a new musical life.

Costello and Toussaint, along with producer Joe Henry, applied new ideas to the pianist's song-

book on *The River In Reverse*, and the album found the musicians collaborating in unusual ways.

The partnership got off to a rocky start but clicked after the British singer heard Toussaint's minor-key version of Longhair's "Tipitina" and was inspired to write new lyrics for the song, which he called "Ascension Day."

Toussaint worked with Henry again on 2009's *The Bright Mississippi*, a program of classic New Orleans tunes backed by jazz musicians like guitarist Marc Ribot, clarinetist Don Byron and trumpeter Nicholas Payton. The album also featured guest performances by saxophonist Joshua Redman and pianist Brad Mehldau.

With Henry in command, Toussaint says he assumed the reversed role of artist instead of producer.

"Joe Henry chose everything," Toussaint said. "In fact, he *did* everything except play the piano. He chose all the musicians, he chose when and where and what we would record. And I'm so glad he did. Because it was a luxury to have someone else wearing all those hats, which I'd normally wear, all my life. But here I was being placed in the arms and hands of someone else doing that. I was quite an obedient artist."

The River In Reverse and *The Bright Mississippi* were both critically acclaimed, and helped inspire him to get on the bandstand as a solo act.

He often begins his solo concerts with a tongue-in-cheek introduction. "I'm Allen Toussaint from New Orleans," he tells the audience. "I'll be doing songs that I've written over the years for various

folks, and produced and arranged. I may throw in one or two that I didn't write and wished I would have. I may even throw in one or two that I didn't write and glad I didn't."

In Evanston, he performed Steve Goodman's "City Of New Orleans." Before the show, he admitted it's a song he wishes he'd written.

"That's a marvelous song," he said. "And how dare that song be written without me! I have license to write that song. What a wonderful song it is. Everything about it: words, melody. However you can tell that [Goodman] lived it—it was from inspiration."

Chuck Berry is another songwriter whose shoes Toussaint sometimes wishes he were in. He often performs the rock 'n' roll legend's songs in concert.

"I think [Berry is] one of the greatest writers of all times," Toussaint said. "His plots and figures of speech and metaphors are just—off the hook. I've done 'You Never Can Tell.' There's some beautiful lines in that. And it's a whole nice movie, you can keep up with this life, this family life. You can go through their trials and go into the evening with them, with the rapid tempo of the music felt. It's just wonderful."

But, he's careful to add that the songwriter-envy setup is just an amusing way to honor his peers. "Those are [songs that] could easily fall into the vat of some that I didn't write but humorously saying I wished I would have," he says. "Because I've been blessed. So I just say that with a sort of humorous flair to it, of course."

Toussaint recorded the traditional tune "St. James Infirmary," a louché tale of a young man's demise, on both *The Bright Mississippi* and *Songbook*. He says it can go at the top of the list of songs he's glad he didn't compose.

"I would not have written or *wanted* to have written 'St. James Infirmary'—the lyrics," he said. "The melodic line is beautiful. Now, before we recorded it, I didn't play that song. But not because of any fear of it. I wasn't in a position where it was requested I play it, and it wasn't a song that I would lend myself to. I knew it existed but because of what it said, I was never interested in that—going down to St. James infirmary. No, it didn't suit my taste buds at all.

"However, Joe Henry, who produced that album, chose many of these American classics, that being one of them. And I totally trusted him because of the avenue he gave me to ride. And it was smooth, and 'St. James Infirmary' fit into that so comfortably. And as I played it, I began to love the melody, without even thinking of what it says. But knowing what it says, I even do a part slightly humorous having that very famous funeral lick—*dun, dun, da-dun, dun da-dun, dun, dun da-dun*. But I have grown to really appreciate that song and I can see why [Henry] likes it so much. In fact, I think he likes it a little *too* much. He's produced it on other folk as well, and they always do a wonderful rendition. But I'm glad that it's a part of my repertoire now."

But in his more than 50-year songwriting career, Toussaint's most personal expression is the epic, 13-minute rendition of "Southern Nights" on *Songbook*. This version is a stunning combination of autobiography, travelogue and artistic mission statement.

After a few sung choruses, he goes into a long spoken-word monologue, describing the weekend trips his family would take, driving from New Orleans out to rural Louisiana to spend time with

his aunts and uncles. "They wanted nothing to do with the city except us, so we came to them," he says. He vividly describes a night scene on the front porch with his family, where the old folks tell strange, intoxicating stories. "I knew that everything that was important in the whole world was on this porch," he says.

When Toussaint performs the song now, his piano flourishes evoke the wind in the trees from those country nights of his youth, and he channels the storytellers from the porch. In the middle of the song, he pauses, and reflects: "This story is forever, and it's still going on."

Though he has spent much of his career as tas-

temaker for other artists, now Toussaint is driving solo. His singular achievement as an artist comes from a deep understanding of his musical, cultural and familial heritage.

"Yes, it was my life then, getting started, and of course as you can see, you're sharing a part of my life as we sit here," he said in Evanston, explaining the spiritual continuum. "Many of those people from that era, the older ones, are all passed on—but all of their offspring are still here and doing things somewhere. So that's what I mean by that. And, of course, what they gave *me* lives with me forever, always, and it's in everything I do. And it's *why* I do everything I do."

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Kirk Garrison is an adjunct professor at Concordia Universities, lead trumpet for the Lt Dan Band, and an active composer, arranger, and clinician. For clinic information please contact kirkgarrison@att.net. Kirk plays Denis Wick mouthpieces and mutes on trumpet, cornet and flugelhorn.

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Steven Bernstein has mastered the slide trumpet (Photo: Peter Gannushkin/downtownmusic.net).



Steven Bernstein

SPONTANEOUS ARRANGING

By Bill Milkowski | Photo by Peter Gannushkin

JUST TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH

Steven Bernstein is a challenge. The trumpeter-composer-bandleader is the workingest man in show business.

Last October, during a weeklong residency at John Zorn's East Village club The Stone, he performed on consecutive nights with a different band each night. After kicking off the first night with his *Diaspora Special Edition* (with saxophonist Peter Apfelbaum, pianist Arturo O'Farrill, bassist Brad Jones and drummer Billy Martin), he followed with his punk-edged jazz quartet *Sex Mob* (with saxophonist Briggan Krauss, bassist Tony Scherr and drummer Kenny Wollesen) performing music from 2006's *Sexotica* and also interpreting the music of Italian film composer Nino Rota (from 2013's *Cinema, Circus & Spaghetti: Sex Mob Plays Fellini*). Another night it was his superb nine-piece *Millennial Territory Orchestra* performing Bernstein's rearrangements of Duke Ellington compositions and Sly Stone tunes (the latter from 2011's *MTO Plays Sly*). And on the final night of his Stone residency, he unveiled his *Cantorial Brass* project.

The following week, it was a showcase at the BRIC House in Brooklyn of the newly formed *Henry Butler-Steven Bernstein Hot 9*, which performed rousing renditions of Ellington's "The Mooche," Jelly Roll Morton's "I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say," a radically reimagined "Iko Iko" and several Butler originals arranged by Bernstein. The week after that, it was a performance by the new "superband" *Omaha Diner* at *Drom* in the East Village. This cooperative project, featuring Bernstein on slide trumpet, Charlie Hunter on seven-string guitar, Skerik on saxophone and Bobby Previte on drums, performs deliciously twisted renditions of Top 40 hits—everything from Maroon 5's "Moves Like Jagger" to Beyoncé's "Single Ladies," Gnarl Barkley's "Crazy," The O'Jays' "Love Train" and tons more. Their slogan: "If it didn't get to Number 1, we don't play it."

Continuing his active streak, Bernstein next participated in Roswell Rudd's 78th birthday bash at *Le Poisson Rouge*, where he recreated an intimate slide trumpet-trombone dialogue with Rudd on "Baby It's Cold Outside," from the elder statesman's recent *Sunnyside* release, *Trombone For Lovers*. And the following week he could be found at *Iridium* in Midtown Manhattan playing a wildly unorthodox set of brass band music with Billy Martin's *Wicked Knee* that shifted from New Orleans second-line numbers and Clyde Stubblefield-inspired funk grooves to insinuating soca and Bahia rhythms to AACM-inspired free blowing, a flamenco take on Thelonious Monk's "Bemsha Swing," a swing through Ellington's "It Don't Mean A Thing" and a romp on The White Stripes' "The Hardest Button To Button."

The guy doesn't rest. Blame it on Jimmy Maxwell, his New York trumpet teacher from the late '70s and early '80s. "Jimmy worked all the time," Bernstein said of the one-time lead trumpeter for Benny Goodman's band and studio orchestra player for CBS and NBC. "Jimmy's whole thing was, 'If you're going to be a professional trumpet player, you don't turn down a gig. You're not above any gig.' He once told me a story about one

of his students who was playing a wedding and Bruce Springsteen happened to be there, and he ended up getting a gig with Springsteen. So I took note of that.

"But it was also the idea that being a working musician is an honorable profession," he continued. "Anytime that you're out there playing your trumpet, you are practicing an honorable profession. And that's why I love getting calls and why I say yes to every gig that comes my way. I love working. It's why I can own a house."

Bernstein's retreat away from the stage is his music room in his spacious home in Nyack, N.Y., about 40 miles north of Manhattan. This enclave not only serves as a practice room, it also reveals a lot about his personal tastes. Large framed pictures of his heroes—Rex Stewart (he named his son after the one-time Ellington trumpeter), Don Cherry, Louis Armstrong, Clark Terry, Lester Bowie, Maxwell and others—adorn the walls of the cramped room. There are reams of sheet music stacked on top of towering CD shelves. Countless posters from gigs with Sex Mob and MTO, the Lounge Lizards, Spanish Fly, the Kansas City band and the Levon Helm Band adorn the walls along with a prized photo of Bernstein hanging backstage with Quincy Jones in 2011.

Spread out on the floor is a sprawling collection of trumpets, mutes, plungers and mouthpieces, all lined up in orderly fashion like a museum exhibit. A stack of Jackie Gleason's mood music albums from the '50s may have kitsch value, but Bernstein admires them for their lush arrangements and the evocative cornet playing of Bobby Hackett. Another shelf contains a slew of albums featuring great arrangers like Billy May, Don Redman, Jimmy Mundy, Shorty Rogers, Nelson Riddle and Bob Brookmeyer—all Bernstein favorites. Photos of his two beloved children, now grown and away at colleges in different parts of the country, hang on a wall near his desk.

One item in this music room is particularly revealing. It's a photo album chock-full of images of a precocious 15-year-old Bernstein hanging out with Ed Blackwell, Sonny Murray, Carla Bley, George Russell and David Izenzon, taken during the summer of '76 at Karl Berger's Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, N.Y. He and his Berkeley running buddy Peter Apfelbaum had taken a bus clear across the country to attend that weeklong, life-altering workshop in the woods. "It was fun, man!" Bernstein exclaimed. "I just loved music, and I wanted to be part of this music-making scene. And after the first day I was like, 'This is cool! This is what I wanna do.'"

In another life, Bernstein could've been a Catskills comedian, entertaining Borscht Belt crowds like a regular Shecky Greene. In whatever band he leads, his charisma beams to the back row. With perfect comedic timing and an ever-present grin, Bernstein is always ready to crack a joke or deliver a clever palindrome, or introduce a song with a self-deprecating line like, "Here's another one from the Grammy-losing album . . ." There's a touch of the vaudevillian in him, to be sure (no doubt picked up during his stint during the '80s with the Kamikaze Ground Crew, the pit band for the comedy and juggling troupe The Flying Karamazov Brothers). And yet, his scholarly pursuit of the music is obvious.

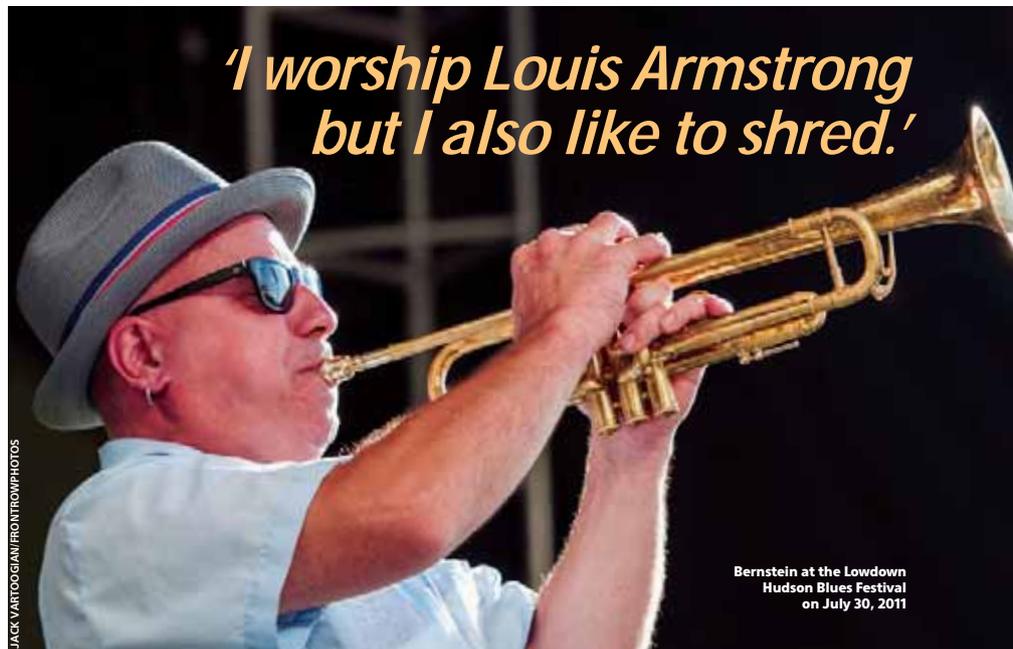
But Bernstein's greatest talent—aside from his inspired, highly expressive trumpet and slide trumpet playing—is his gift for spontaneous arranging. In both small group and large ensemble settings, he is able to pull music out of a band on the spot by trusting his instincts and making snap decisions right before a song commences, or even in the midst of one.

During his Tonic residency, for instance, he had an idea for a tune that the band obviously hadn't rehearsed and didn't have in its book. And like a quarterback in the huddle, he told them, "OK, here's what we're gonna do," then proceeded to divvy up parts among the various MTO horns by singing the riffs to each of them. Then he instructed drummer Ben Perowsky with the verbal cue, "Gimme that big Osie Johnson shuffle." After he finished instructing the musicians, he turned to the audience and said, "If this works, it's gonna be great! If not, it'll be a valiant attempt."

That fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants arranging

debut on the newly reconstituted Impulse label. "Here's the incredible thing," he said with typical enthusiasm. "I'm 52 years old and I'm in the last place I ever thought I'd be. I've been making my own records on my own steam—produced, paid for, me bringing the music stands and picking up the tape—for 20 years. I've been a DIY guy for so long, that's how I defined myself. So I just figured, 'That's how it's gonna be and I'm cool with that.' So I can't believe this is actually happening. The idea of having a record on Impulse . . . that's big, right?"

The Butler-Bernstein collaboration came about through producer Hal Willner, who, as it turns out, has been responsible for a lot of Bernstein's hookups over the years, including with director Robert Altman (soundtracks to his films *Short Cuts* and *Kansas City*), singer Marianne Faithfull (2008's *Easy Come, Easy Go*) and the late rock icon Lou Reed (2000's *Ecstasy* and 2003's *The Raven*). Bernstein explains the Butler hookup as something that evolved out of the *Kansas*



style engages the audience on another level. Suddenly, they're intrigued to see if he's actually going to pull this idea off or if they're going to witness a train wreck. And Bernstein's instincts rarely fail him. His lexicon of verbal and hand cues to the band are always understood, and the music comes off sounding completely logical, as if it were rehearsed for days. To watch him whip up an arrangement on the spot like that is like attending a workshop where the process of music-making is suddenly revealed. Of course, Charles Mingus and Sun Ra did it with their bands long before Bernstein. But he's steeped in that tradition and is carrying it on with Sex Mob, Millennial Territory Orchestra and now the Butler-Bernstein Hot 9 (which is actually a 10-piece group).

While he's already received widespread acclaim for his last two albums on the indie label The Royal Potato Family—Millennial Territory Orchestra's 2011 offering, *MTO Plays Sly*, and Sex Mob's brilliant 2013 recording, *Sex Mob Plays Fellini*—Bernstein is looking forward with great anticipation to the upcoming release of Hot 9's

City band, for which he served as musical director. "After the movie came out, Verve wanted to put together an all-star touring band and I was asked to put it together," he recalled. "There was a three-week tour already booked, but the problem was I couldn't find a piano player."

"When I told Hal about my problem, he said, without missing a beat, 'Did you call Henry Butler?' Henry was living in New Orleans at that time; he wasn't even on my radar. So at Hal's urging, I called up Henry and he came and did that tour. I didn't really know him when we started, but we ended up becoming fast friends by the end of that tour. We get along really well, and we have a very similar way of looking at music and similar ideas about the purpose of it."

Butler and Bernstein premiered their Hot 9 over four nights in August 2012 at the Jazz Standard in New York, and their collaborative connection has grown tighter since then. With members from the Millennial Territory Orchestra (Michael Blake or Apfelbaum on tenor sax, Erik Lawrence on baritone sax, Curtis Fowlkes on

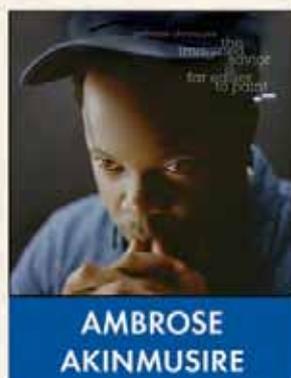


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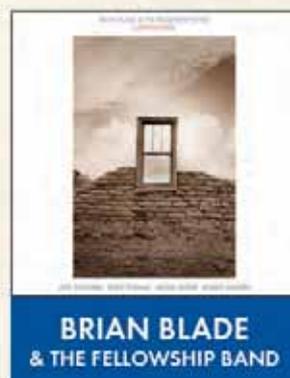
NEW RELEASES INCLUDE



Trumpeter Takuya Kuroda steps forth from José James' band to make his Blue Note debut produced by and featuring James as well as a special guest guitarist Lionel Loueke.

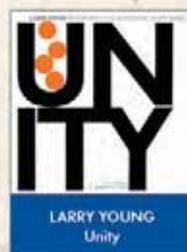
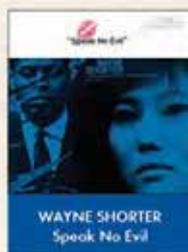
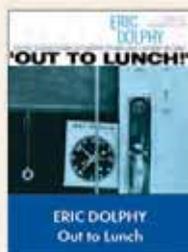
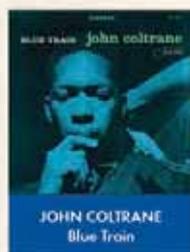
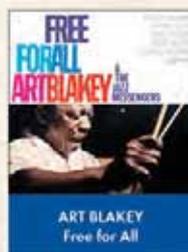


Trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire returns with an expansive album that broadens the palette of his quintet with the addition of guitar, string quartet, and vocalists Becca Stevens, Theo Bleckmann, and Cold Specks.



Brian Blade & The Fellowship Band returns to Blue Note for a deeply expressive album co-produced by Blade and Jan Cowherd and recorded in Blade's hometown of Shreveport, Louisiana.

VINYL REISSUES



Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

Inside >

- 51 / Jazz
- 56 / Blues
- 60 / Beyond
- 64 / Historical
- 66 / Books

REVIEWS >

Rudy Royston



Rudy Royston 303

GREENLEAF MUSIC 1035
★★★

Familiar to listeners as fellow Denverite Bill Frisell's drummer, Rudy Royston makes an auspicious debut as a leader here on the Greenleaf label, operated by another of his employers, Dave Douglas. A non-flashy team player, Royston serves up compelling rhythmic frameworks for his sparkling ensemble, the dominant moods being atmospheric reverence and moody, processional spirituality, animated by sprinkles of folksy humor and contrariness.

Stronger tunes would have improved the album. Some of the songs here—the impressionist “Mimi Sunrise,” mantra-like “Prayer (For The People)” and minimalist “Miles To Go (Sunset Road)” —seem only interested in articulating a mood. Others—the zig-zag “Play On Words,” gorgeous “Goodnight Kinyah” and stuttering “Bownze”—tell better stories, thanks to high-caliber solos by throaty tenor (and soprano) sax man Jon Irabagon, fat-toned trumpeter Nadja Noordhuis and fleet guitarist Nir Felder.

High points include Felder's nimble, Metheny-like guitar flight on “Play On Words”; Mimi Jones' muscular, woody bass opening to “Prayer (For The People)”; the warm, world-folksy heartbeat of “Goodnight Kinyah,” with Noordhuis' trumpet riding on top till the tune collapses into troubled sleep; Irabagon's transgressive braying and fleeting nod to “Epistrophy” on “303”; the playful stop-time of “Bownze”; and the touchingly transparent prayerfulness of the hymn “Ave Verum Corpus.”

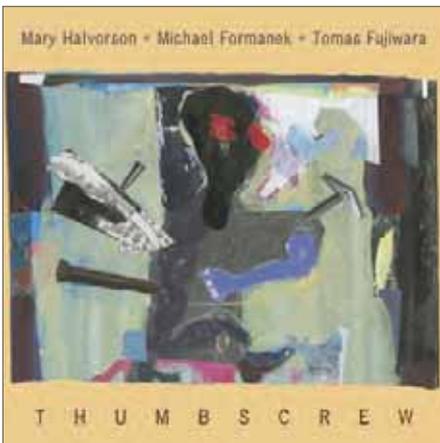
Royston himself only occasionally steps out, and when he does, he's a low-slung tubsman, whacking loose-skinned toms and bass drum (little if any snare) and hand drums, with rumbling momentum. His tilt toward the low end conspires with a production quality that at times feels a little murky.

But shortcomings aside, Royston's debut suggests the arrival of a talent with a deep well of spirit to draw from in the future. —Paul de Barros

303: Mimi Sunrise; Play On Words; Prayer (For The People); Goodnight Kinyah; Gangs Of New York; High And Dry; Miles To Go (Sunset Road); 303; Ave Verum Corpus; Bownze; Prayer (For The Earth). (64:06)

Personnel: Rudy Royston, drums, percussion; Jon Irabagon, tenor, soprano saxophones; Nadja Noordhuis, trumpet; Nir Felder, guitar; Sam Harris, piano; Mimi Jones (1, 3, 5, 7, 11), Yasushi Nakamura, bass.

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com



Thumbscrew
**(Mary Halvorson/
 Michael Formanek/
 Tomas Fujiwara)**
Thumbscrew

CUNEIFORM 365
 ★★★★★½

Pardon me while I gush. Mary Halvorson reminds me what there is to like about the guitar. No matter how pyrotechnical her playing gets—and make no mistake, she’s a heavy, fluid, consummate plectrist—it never loses a sense of the palpable.

Behind the motion and ideas, you detect a

The Wayne Escoffery Quintet
Live At Firehouse 12

SUNNYSIDE 1379
 ★★½

Given the surprising brevity of Wayne Escoffery’s second Sunnyside CD and the fact that about a quarter of its content is occupied with a redo of the title track from his first, one wonders, well, *why?* Why a CD of only 27 new minutes?

The album notes of Escoffery’s last disc, 2012’s *The Only Son Of One* (Sunnyside), described the project as a personal exorcism of an abusive childhood. Who could brush off such an emotionally prejudicial narrative? So, given such talking points, the superlatives began to gush, and Escoffery seemed to be at a breakthrough moment. But wait, this was a jazz set, not a confession or memoir. Without such suggestive foreknowledge, would the response have been different? Was it laced with (and perhaps distorted by) feelings of compassion and empathy over artistic ingenuity?

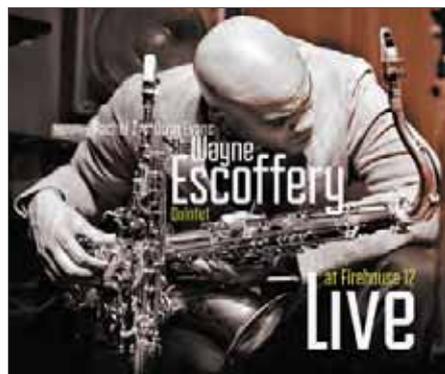
While I cast no judgment on Escoffery’s sincerity or inner motives, I try to screen out such programmatic paradigms. Better to take the music on its merits alone. What I hear here is a very talented tenor master; a man of his time with a poised, stone-cold cry and assault-speed precision. It serves him well, taking him from stoic solitude to a bashing passion, often within the same performance (“Gulf Of Aqaba”). Swing is not Escoffery’s principal plan, although after a rather tedious cadenza, you will feel a nice lift on “Blue

guitar and a physical presence. She’s such an insightful player, it’s no wonder that she’s on the top of everyone’s list lately.

This trio offers a fabulous first course if you’re not already schooled in Halvorson. Completely democratic, both in terms of compositions and in playing, the threesome brings her together with bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Tomas Fujiwara, perfectly simpatico playmates. A creative music veteran, Formanek has been getting overdue attention since signing with ECM a few years ago; his big, natural bass sound offers both brains and brawn. Fujiwara is delicate without being slight, his precision and invention never overshadowed by unnecessary bombast.

The interplay on *Thumbscrew* is super, and the tunes are suitably germinative. But, I’m preoccupied by Halvorson, who is on such a tear it’s hilarious. Out of the blue, at the end of the drummer’s cool “Nothing Doing,” the trio breaks into a prog-metal riff. The guitar muscles through nastily, but mostly Halvorson maintains a light, brilliant linearity, often queering a pitch or scrunching up for scrabbly texture. Other times, she launches into lithe lines like those in her unaccompanied break on Formanek’s deeply swinging “Still ... Doesn’t Swing.” —*John Corbett*

Thumbscrew: Cheap Knock Off; iThumbscrew; Fluid Hills In Pink; Nothing Doing; Goddess Sparkle; Buzzard’s Breath; Still ... Doesn’t Swing; Falling Too Far; Line To Create Madness. (55:33)
Personnel: Mary Halvorson, guitar; Michael Formanek, bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums.
Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com



Monsoon.” But mostly he has other ways of marshaling momentum. He uses his tenor like a surfer uses his board—to ride the impassioned waves as they come in violent ascents and plunges.

As to the *why* of it all, well, the gambit here may be more operational and less emotionally fraught than in 2012: Can music conceived with a studio as the sixth instrument survive in live performance? The unsurprising answer is: Why not? In any case, there’s almost no sense of an audience here, anyway. But you wonder why an evening of playing at the Firehouse 12 in New Haven, Conn., wouldn’t produce more CD-worthy material.

—*John McDonough*

Live At Firehouse 12: Zwi!; Gulf Of Aqaba; The Only Son Of One; Blue Monsoon. (35:34)
Personnel: Wayne Escoffery, tenor saxophone; Rachel Z, keyboards; Orrin Evans, piano; Rashaan Carter, bass; Jason Brown, drums.
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Regina Carter
Southern Comfort

SONY MASTERWORKS 104150
 ★★★★★½

Driving through cultural and familial histories in her past few albums, Regina Carter has lost some of the formality that marred her earliest recorded work. That’s a big plus. A devastating instrumentalist from the get-go, the Detroit native has turned lots of heads during the last 15 years. But her initial albums were occasionally stiff, not as playful as the otherwise enticing music demanded. I first noticed the change during a buoyant romp through “Little Brown Jug” on a disc dedicated to her mom. With 2010’s *Reverse Thread* and its examination of African folk music, everything definitely felt more relaxed. *Southern Comfort*, an insightful, blues-based disc that makes room for everything from hymns to hoedowns, takes it a step further—it’s seriously inviting stuff.

Carter makes frolic central to the cause. The difference between fiddle and violin can be debated for days, but it’s the former vibe that sets the aesthetic coordinates for this program. There’s an easy rapport between the leader and her bandmates, and the choice of instruments—from Will Holshouser’s percolating accordion to Marvin Sewell’s funky guitar—brings a variety of colors to the party. Like a jazz version of Carolina Chocolate Drops’ *Genuine Negro Jig*, the 11 tunes swoop from Appalachian hollers to Louisiana swamps.

Bassist Chris Lightcap turned Carter on to Gram Parsons’ “Hickory Wind,” and the long tones she uses to reach its essence are irresistible. Because this is a connect-the-dots kind of album, the romp through Hank Williams’ “Honky Tonkin” makes sense, too. You can almost picture Carter’s grandfather, an Alabama coal miner, carousing with his pals after work. Ultimately that’s what makes *Southern Comfort* resonate. Whether Carter is swaying at a barn dance or weeping at a gravestone, it’s all wonderfully vivid.

—*Jim Macnie*

Southern Comfort: Miner’s Child; Trampin’; Hickory Wind; Shoo-Rye; Blues de Basile; I’m Going Home; Honky Tonkin; Cornbread Crumbled In Gravy; See See Rider; I Moaned And I Moaned; Death Have Mercy/Breakaway. (56:18)
Personnel: Regina Carter, violin; Adam Rogers, Marvin Sewell, guitar; Chris Lightcap, Jesse Murphy, bass; Will Holshouser, accordion; Alvester Garnett, drums.
Ordering info: sonymasterworks.com

The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
Rudy Royston <i>303</i>	★★★	★★★	★★★★½	★★★
Halvorson/Formanek/Fujiwara <i>Thumbscrew</i>	★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
The Wayne Escoffery Quintet <i>Live At Firehouse 12</i>	★★½	★★	★★★★½	★★½
Regina Carter <i>Southern Comfort</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½

Critics' Comments

Rudy Royston, *303*

Brief flurries of firepower more than confirm Royston's skill at well-tempered rolling thunder ("Bowz") and so permit restraint elsewhere. The music is carefully structured and arranged, attractive enough, but captive to its majestic generalities. Good horns, and Harris fleshes out "Gangs." But why such mindless redundancy ("Miles")?
—John McDonough

The drummer-bandleader shows restraint, sometimes too much. Tunes are not bad, arrangements nondescript, some contributions outstanding (Harris, especially). Very good background music; decent foreground music.
—John Corbett

It's one of those records that zigzags around, but never lets you step off. The drummer is known for the judiciousness of his dynamic clout, and here that means a dose of lighthearted interplay leavens the music's rather fetching narrative.
—Jim Macnie

Mary Halvorson/Michael Formanek/Tomas Fujiwara, *Thumbscrew*

Of course they throw punches—any band with Formanek guiding it through the rocks is going to have a feisty side. But from Halvorson's increasing poise to Fujiwara's deep agility, even the rumble purrs now and again.
—Jim Macnie

Guitarist Mary Halvorson's sly, atonal skip and skronk is singular, but she's a great team player, too, as these subtle conversations with deep-voiced bassist Formanek and fleet drummer Fujiwara make clear. Certainly not for everyone, but behind the radio-static wheeps and pedal-steel-like glides lurks a quietly intense, lyrical player, especially on "Goddess Sparkle," "Fluid Hills In Pink" and "Falling Too Far."
—Paul de Barros

Vibrates with a chilly, systematically unsystematic dedication to the tradition of anti-tradition. Halvorson ranges from spindly, fragile probes to heavy, free-form thrashing in which volume poses as intensity. Rhythm duo is surprisingly cohesive but hyperactive. Conclusions are properly inconclusive. Music for the margins.
—John McDonough

The Wayne Escoffery Quintet, *Live At Firehouse 12*

Kicks off like a Vangelis record, continues with Escoffery valiantly struggling to break through a down quilt of synth, and 35 minutes later ends back where it began.
—John Corbett

Like the group sound, but the real takeaway is the furor of his horn. There's a storminess to these tenor excursions, and it reveals the depth of command Escoffery wields these days. The rhythm section tears things up, too.
—Jim Macnie

Tenor man Escoffery's rich, throaty tone, suspended time feel and consummate command of the horn are a pleasure, especially on the dramatic "Blue Monsoon" and prayerful "The Only Son Of One," but Rachel Z's atmospheric keyboard becomes tiresome even after 35 minutes—the shortest jazz CD of the year?
—Paul de Barros

Regina Carter, *Southern Comfort*

This jubilant celebration of the musical South, from gospel and Cajun to Gram Parsons' "Hickory Wind" and Hank Williams' "Honky Tonkin," benefits enormously from the ingenious inclusion of versatile accordionist Will Holshouser. But Carter's genuine curiosity sometimes get submerged in Grand Statement syndrome, which makes the album sound less natural and spontaneous than it might have.
—Paul de Barros

A catalog of dark mountain pieces in which Carter's acclaimed virtuosity finds an Appalachian twang. The material has a certain formal rigor. But "I'm Going Home" hits with the emotional precision of a Ken Burns moment. And Garnett gives "Blues de Basile" a refreshing Gene Krupa-ish kick. Call it "Regina Carter Plays Alan Lomax."
—John McDonough

Produced with a Frisell-like vibe, Carter's hopscotch jump through Americana is ultimately satisfying for its laid-back feel and the sensitive program.
—John Corbett



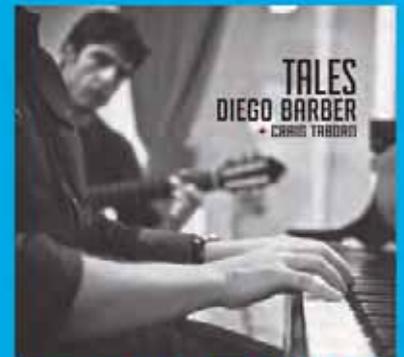
CLOVIS NICOLAS NINE STORIES

SSC 1375 / IN STORES 3/18

iTunes.com/ClovisNicolas

Ever the willing narrator, Clovis Nicolas presents an astonishing collection of musical tales on his impressive recording *Nine Stories*.

Nicolas composed five pieces and arranged four classic tunes for a skilled sextet. This configuration provided a perfect setting for his texturally rich writing while still retaining the flexibility of a small ensemble. Nicolas recruited superb and soon to be well-known musicians to form his sextet, including trumpeter Riley Mulherkar, saxophonist Luca Stoll, pianist Tadataka Unno, drummer Jimmy Macbride, and guitarist Alex Wintz.



DIEGO BARBER with CRAIG TABORN

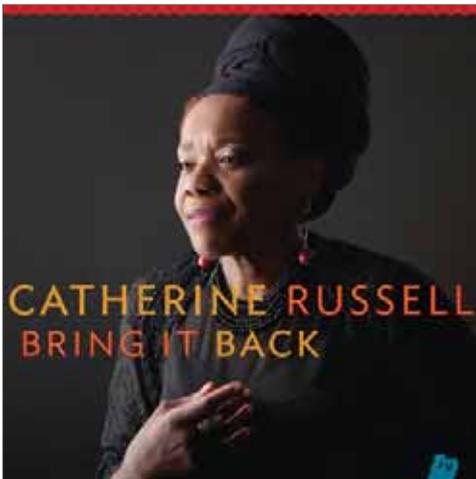
SSC 1346 / IN STORES 3/18

iTunes.com/DiegoBarber

After having heard a performance of the singular pianist Craig Taborn, guitarist Barber knew that he wanted to write music for the two of them in a duo format. Then he set his mind to it and did it. The remarkable outcome of their collaboration can be heard on Barber's new recording, *Tales*.

The pieces on this album are a blend of the classical composition style with that of contemporary improvisation. All of the pieces have a very formal structure but end up sounding organic due to the space allowed for improvisation. Taborn was very involved with the evolution of the music. The two met frequently, not only to rehearse but also to conceptualize and develop the music. This process helped to make these complicated pieces of music breath and take on a life of their own.





Catherine Russell
Bring It Back

JAZZ VILLAGE 579001
★★★★★

After decades as one of the strongest and most versatile backup singers in pop and rock (Steely Dan, Jackson Browne and Paul Simon), Catherine Russell has established herself as a premier interpreter of classic 20th-century jazz, blues and r&b.

By not trying to be “modern,” she has, paradoxically, created something new, retooling vintage tracks with vital, soulful vocals and striking new arrangements that burnish the blues and swing feeling that is the bedrock of jazz. She was the logical choice when HBO’s *Boardwalk Empire*

wanted someone to evoke the classic blues singer Mamie Smith for an episode that included the 1920 million-selling hit “Crazy Blues.” (The soundtrack won a Grammy.) Russell’s versions of classic tunes are sometimes even better than the originals.

On *Bring It Back*, she reinvigorates songs from three eras—the Jazz Age, the Swing Era and the r&b era—with equal fervor, accompanied by a sparkling tentet that transforms the tunes from museum pieces into modern-sounding vehicles for jazz expression. The album is dedicated to her famous parents: pianist-bandleader Luis Russell, who served as musical director to Louis Armstrong, and singer-bassist Carline Ray, an original member of the pioneering International Sweethearts of Rhythm.

It’s unlikely that there will be a sexier jazz vocal performance this year than Russell’s rendition of “Aged And Mellow,” the 1952 Johnny Otis gem, unless it’s her smoldering delivery of “After The Lights Go Down Low.” On *Bring It Back*, Catherine Russell turns in her most fully realized vocal performances to date—by turns sassy, sexy, humorous, reflective and joyous.

—Allen Morrison

Bring It Back: Bring It Back; I’m Shooting High; I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart; You Got To Swing And Sway; Aged And Mellow; The Darktown Strutters’ Ball; Lucille; You’ve Got Me Under Your Thumb; After The Lights Go Down Low; I’m Sticking With You Baby; Strange As It Seems; Public Melody Number One; I Cover The Waterfront. (47:57)

Personnel: Catherine Russell, vocals, percussion; Matt Munisteri, guitar; Mark Shane, piano; Lee Hudson, Nicki Parrott (6), bass; Mark McLean, drums, percussion; Andy Farber, tenor saxophone; Jon-Erik Kellso, Brian Pareschi, trumpet; Dan Block, alto, tenor (5) saxophones, clarinet (4); John Allred, trombone; Mark Lopeman, baritone saxophone; Glenn Patscha, Hammond B-3 organ.

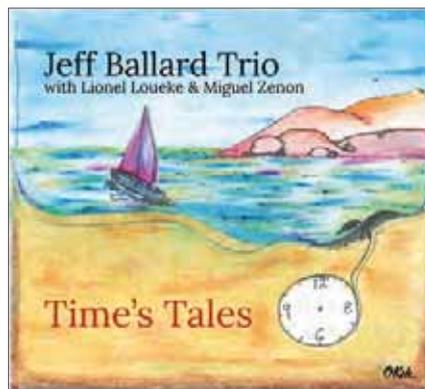
Ordering info: jazzvillagemusic.com

Jeff Ballard Trio
Time’s Tales

OKEH 88883741072
★★★★½

A wide range of Jeff Ballard’s skills as a melodicist and percussive colorist on the kit are on display throughout this wildly diverse outing. The inventive drummer’s long overdue debut as a leader comes at the age of 50 and documents his long-standing group with guitarist Lionel Loueke and alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón. A rhythmically sophisticated, bass-less trio project, *Time’s Tales* travels from Loueke’s funky African-flavored opener “Virgin Forest,” a 9/4 vehicle that has Ballard alternately playing with his hands and sticks, to the oddly Ornette Coleman-ish “Western Wren (A Bird Call),” which has Zenón and Loueke locked in tight, birdcall-type unisons on top of the drummer’s brisk brushwork, to the raucous “Beat Street,” which opens as a second-line groover and morphs into a joyful drum showcase.

The trio’s sparse, free-floating take on Gershwin’s “The Man I Love” is a heartfelt homage to the late Paul Motian and his telepathic trio with Bill Frisell and Joe Lovano. Shifting gears radically, they surprisingly cover “Hangin Tree” by the California hard rock band Queens of the Stone Age. Here, Loueke uses power chords with his distortion pedal set on stun, and wails on his ferocious solo like Steve Vai, while Ballard slams with bombastic authority on the kit. More sur-



prises come on “Dal (A Rhythm Song), the trio’s atmospheric adaptation of Béla Bartók’s “44 Duos For Two Violins,” and on “El Reparador De Sueños,” their buoyant take on a bolero by Cuban composer Silvio Rodríguez.

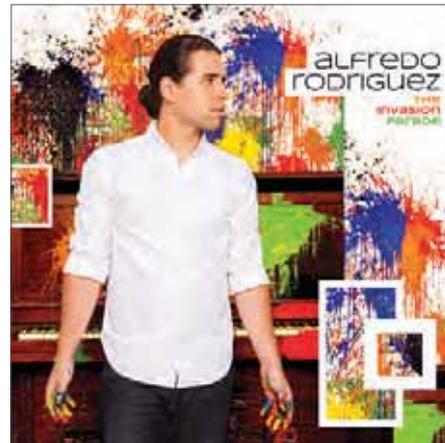
The elastic nature of this eclectic triumvirate is further showcased on Loueke’s restful “Mivakpola” and two adventurous improv excursions, “Free 1” and “Free 3.” Ballard’s intuitive crew covers a broad stretch of musical territory on his ambitious first outing.

—Bill Milkowski

Time’s Tales: Virgin Forest; Western Wren (A Bird Call); Beat Street; The Man I Love; Free 1; Hangin Tree; Dal (A Rhythm Song); El Reparador De Sueños; Mivakpola; Free 3. (56:25)

Personnel: Jeff Ballard, drums, percussion; Lionel Loueke, guitar, vocals; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone.

Ordering info: okeh-records.com



Alfredo Rodríguez
The Invasion Parade

MACK AVENUE 1079
★★★★★

Those who know Cuba beyond the mottled buildings of Old Havana and the beaches of Varadero and Caya Coco understand the country’s rich and varied culture, which extends far beyond a single nationwide signature. Local and regional musical styles abound, blended with contemporary sounds that no trade barrier can stop.

On his second recording since moving to the United States in 2009, pianist Alfredo Rodríguez dips his hands into as much as he can—the French and Haitian influence of Santiago de Cuba, the folkloric styles of the countryside and the relentless polyrhythms of Afro-Cuban music—and creates a highly personal pastiche.

The opening title song signals Rodríguez’s intention to do more than simply play within a single tradition. Instead, he hands the part of a Chinese trumpet to soprano saxophonist Roman Filiu and reinterprets the sound of a carnival parade winding through the streets of Santiago. His version of the hoary “Guantanamera” is filled with slippery drumming by Henry Cole and his own highly percussive piano. By turns joyous and sultry, “El Güije” introduces a South American vibe, with guest Esperanza Spalding paying tribute to Hermeto Pascoal with bird-like wordless vocals.

Rodríguez’s ambition to create music as dense and rich as Cuba itself is most fully realized in “Cubismo,” which puns on both the country’s name and the approach to abstract art popularized by Pablo Picasso around the same time as Cuba was gaining its independence. It’s a mash-up of modern timba dance rhythms and gutbucket stomp, highlighted by Billy Carrion’s infectious, grinding baritone sax. It ends the recording as an invitation to explore more of Rodríguez’s musical universe and the country he comes from.

—James Hale

The Invasion Parade: The Invasion Parade; Guantanamera; El Güije; A Santa Barbara; Timberobot; Quizás, Quizás, Quizás; Snails In The Creek; Veinte Años; Cubismo. (49:18)

Personnel: Alfredo Rodríguez, piano, keyboards, electronics, percussion; Roman Filiu, alto, soprano saxophone; Billy Carrion, baritone saxophone; Javier Porta, flute; Peter Slavov, bass; Esperanza Spalding (3, 7), vocals, bass; Pedrito Martínez (1, 3, 7, 9), vocals, percussion; Henry Cole, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

Kicking Brass

Angelica Sanchez/Wadada Leo Smith, *Twine Forest* (Clean Feed 287; 58:41 ★★★★★) Duo recordings are often referred to as dialogues, but this pairing of pianist Sanchez and trumpet great Smith is less conversational than synesthetic. Each gesture, no matter how minimal—and there are several moments of absorbing stillness and space on the album—seems to trigger a burst of color or texture, each responding to the other with an expressive emotional clarity. Sanchez is credited with all eight pieces, and while the line between composition and improvisation is blurry, it's her percussive attack and sonorous block chords that give the session its structure. Smith is in stunning form throughout, singing and soaring, dancing lithe flurries around Sanchez's fluid lines or smearing streaks of light between the pianist's stabbing strikes. Together they conjure an intimate, multihued environment, inviting listeners to lose themselves inside it.

Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com

David Dominique, *Ritual* (Self-Release; 35:32; ★★★) A maximalist inspired by minimalists, composer David Dominique practices a rowdy, muscular brand of modernism. Picture Charles Mingus staging a hostile takeover of the Sun Ra Arkestra with arrangements by Sonic Youth, and you'll have some idea of the garage-jazz aesthetic of the lean but raucous ensemble playing on *Ritual*. At the helm, Dominique wields a flugabone, a marching band trombone, apt for a bandleader who appreciates a brash sound and brisk maneuverability. While his order-into-chaos-and-back arrangements flirt too often with carnival snark, Dominique possesses a Zappa-esque appreciation for tongue-in-cheek complexity. From the stumble-drunk pointillism of "Ritual 4 / Release" to the monolithic dirge and brawny sludge of "Mooney In Paradise," Dominique's band teeters on the fulcrum where discipline crumbles into anarchy, enjoying the irreverent noise resulting from that precarious perch.

Ordering info: daviddominique.com

Adam Unsworth/Byron Olson/John Vanore, *Balance* (Acoustical Concepts 48; 58:43 ★★) Adam Unsworth was a French horn player with the Philadelphia Orchestra when he released his initial foray into jazz, *Excerpt This!*, in 2006. He's continued to straddle both worlds, and brings them together on *Balance*. The disc is a collaboration with Byron Olson, the arranger and conductor behind the chamber-jazz tribute albums *Sketches Of Miles* and *Sketches Of Coltrane*, and trumpeter John Vanore, a veteran Philadelphia educator, arranger and bandleader. The titular balance is an uneasy one, with the band's rhythm section ringers—pianist Bill Mays, bassist Mike Richmond and drummer Danny Gottlieb—forced to wrestle the tunes back from the bland prettiness of the string arrangements. Unsworth's sole arrangement, the careening "Tilt," is the stand-out, and his playing is vibrant if not wholly free of the starchy formalism of the symphony stage.

Ordering info: acrecording.net



Wadada Leo Smith

SCOTT GRÖLLER

Gueorgui Kornazov, *Sila* (Self-Release; 77:55 ★★★★★½) Translating to "strength" in trombonist-composer Gueorgui Kornazov's native Bulgarian, "Sila" is a single epic composition that makes up the whole of this sextet CD, recorded live in France. Inside the disc's cover, Kornazov runs through the various facets of strength, from passion to music to life, which he strives to illustrate through this multihued work. The leader draws an impressive range of emotion from the ensemble, creating the illusion of a big band with only trombone, soprano, trumpet, guitar, bass and drums. Traces of Kornazov's Eastern European heritage accent the music in places, but this is no fusion project; his focus is on creating a dramatic, ever-shifting frame for his skilled ensemble to fill, whether pairing Emile Parisien's sinuous soprano with Manu Codjia's howling, serrated guitar, or letting Gueoffroy Tamisier's bracing trumpet ride the buoyant rhythms of Marc Buronfosse and Karl Jannuska. That lineup suffices to journey from blistering rock to celebratory Bulgarian-flavored anthems, which then fall away to moments of spacious, airy introspection.

Ordering info: kornazov@free.fr

Ben Stolorow & Ian Carey, *Duocracy* (Kabocha 027; 56:08 ★★★★★) Both busy members of the Bay Area jazz community, 30-somethings Stolorow and Carey pair up here for a duo outing largely focused on tunes dating back a couple of generations before they were born. The tone is set by the warmth of opener "Little White Lies," accelerated as "Cherokee" finds rapid-fire lines erupting from Carey's trumpet, and settles back as Stolorow takes a stride-inflected spin on Monk's "Four In One." It's a lively trip down a straightahead path, never veering far from the expected route but obviously deriving a refreshing joy from the familiar sights.

DB

Ordering info: iancareyjazz.com

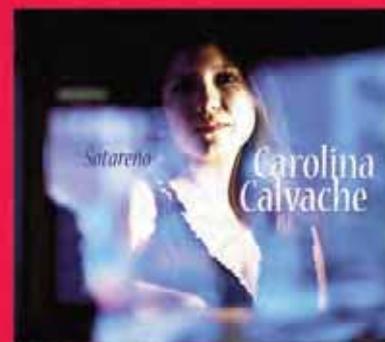


CARLOS FRANZETTI IN THE KEY OF TANGO

SSC 1384 / IN STORES 4/1

iTunes.com/CarlosFranzetti

In the *Key of Tango*, an evocative and enigmatic name for this unique project, is not only a deliberate departure from the jazz piano recordings for which Carlos Franzetti is renowned but also a return to his Argentine roots. Inspired by the great masters Trollo, Gardel, Plaza, Salgán and Piazzolla amongst others, Carlos not only plays these works as a sublime tanguero pianist, but he also adds his own personal twist to each one — an improvisational palette based on the tangos themselves, their harmonies, their rhythms, and their intervals.

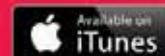


CAROLINA CALVACHE SOTAREÑO

SSC 1376 / IN STORES 4/1

iTunes.com/CarolinaCalvache

Originally from Colombia, the wonderfully talented pianist Carolina Calvache made her way to the United States to study and to pursue her dream of playing jazz with the best. In her debut recording, *Sotareño*, Calvache presents her own unique combination of jazz and Colombian folkloric music alongside a group of fabulous collaborators, including saxophonist Jaleel Shaw, trumpeter Michael Rodriguez, bassist Hans Glawischnig and drummers Antonio Sanchez and Ludwig Afonso.





Dan Weiss Large Ensemble *Fourteen*

PI RECORDINGS 52
★★★★½

New York-based drummer Dan Weiss grabs ambition by the scruff on *Fourteen*, creating a grand through-composed, seven-part suite featuring a 14-piece ensemble performing compositions expressed in Indian beat cycles, open-ended improvisation, metal guitar machinations, contemporary classical, acoustic minimalism, prog rock and chamber music.

Though daring in rhythmic concept, *Fourteen* isn't for drummers only, but anyone who likes music genres that are stretched to infinity. A

method runs throughout the disc: Each part starts with a lone instrument playing a dissonant, accented melody (typically wrapped in an odd-meter rhythm) followed by various instruments and vocalists stacking the melody and expanding upon it. Weiss' drums conduct the show, often recalling Bill Bruford bashing against King Crimson or Hatfield and the North (who also performed angular melodies adorned with an off-kilter female choir).

"Part One" is a heavy metal guitar fest. "Part Two" plies delicate cymbal work with hypnotic monosyllabic female vocals and a handclapped Indian rhythmic cycle. "Part Three" incorporates Carnatic vocal rhythms with a tenor and alto saxophone free-for-all. The heavy metal fest returns with "Part Four," and a crystalline recap of piano, vocal and harp appears on "Part Seven."

A brief summation of each part isn't meant to reduce the impact of *Fourteen* as a whole; evolution of melody, harmony and rhythm occurs within each segment fueled by plenty of engrossing improvisation. *Fourteen* has all the depth of an opera, and calls for the visuals of a live concert performance.

—Ken Micallef

Fourteen: Part One; Part Two; Part Three; Part Four; Part Five; Part Six; Part Seven. (37:56)

Personnel: Dan Weiss, drums, vocal recitation; Jacob Sacks, piano; Matt Mitchell, glockenspiel, piano, organ; Thomas Morgan, acoustic bass; Miles Okazaki, guitars; David Binney, alto saxophone; Ohad Talmor, tenor saxophone; Jacob Garchik, trombone, tuba; Ben Gerstein, trombone; Lana Cencic, Judith Berkson, Maria Neckam, vocals; Katie Andrews, harp; Stephen Cellucci, percussion.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com



Randy Ingram *Sky/Lift*

SUNNYSIDE 1377
★★★★½

Pianist Randy Ingram's core group here is a trio, with bassist Matt Clohesy and drummer Jochen Rueckert, and their starting point is Bill Evans, making an explicit nod to that piano god with his "Time Remembered."

As you might expect, there's the requisite, Evans-like flowing lyricism and ensemble elasticity throughout the album. In fact, the inclusion of guitarist Mike Moreno on five tracks is evidently an acknowledgment of Evans' collaboration with Jim Hall.

But Ingram tends to think on a different scale than his hero. Take "Silent Cinema," which is more rhapsodic than Evans' tune-based pieces. And "99" (for the Occupy movement) is more in the post-rock mode of Brad Mehldau and Kurt Rosenwinkel.

Moreno, meanwhile, articulates far more aggressively than Hall. All of these are good things, distinguishing the music as Ingram's own. Especially appealing is the simpatico playing of Ingram and Moreno. Their unison melody lines punctuate the ascent of the title cut, and Ingram seems to take special pleasure in commenting on Moreno's solos both rhythmically and harmonically, punching up the velocity with his chording or whispering quiet encouragement.

In a different mood, the guitarist and pianist take turns skating over the very Evans-like glide of the triple-time "Late Romantic." On "St. Louis," the spiky, broken unison line of the theme, with Rueckert playing freely across his kit, recalls some long-lost Keith Jarrett/Sam Brown/Paul Motian collaboration of yore. And "Nicky," for the late rock pianist Nicky Hopkins, is a kind of country-rock shuffle that allows everyone, especially Moreno, to cut loose. It might make you forget all about Bill Evans. Which can also be a good thing.

—Jon Garelick

Sky/Lift: Sky/Lift; Silent Cinema; 99; Time Remembered; St. Louis; The Sea; Late Romantic; Nicky. (64:26)

Personnel: Randy Ingram, piano; Mike Moreno, guitar (1, 3, 5, 6, 8); Matt Clohesy, bass; Jochen Rueckert, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

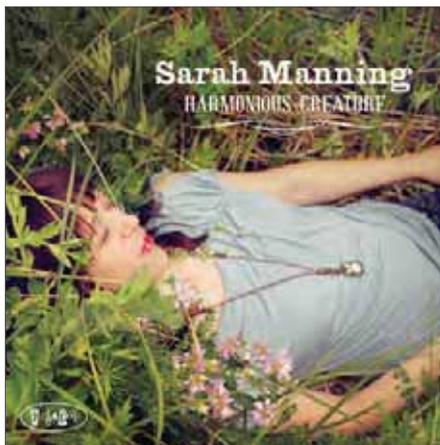
Sarah Manning *Harmonious Creature*

POSI-TONE 8117
★★★★★

What's not to like about alto saxophonist Sarah Manning's *Harmonious Creature*? In exchange for about an hour of your time, you get folk music, space, introspection and mystery. And honesty. The album feels natural. One never gets the sense that Manning is planning or plotting; the music just unfolds. And then there's the unique instrumentation. On top of Jerome Jennings' drums, Rene Hart's acoustic bass and Jonathan Goldberger's rock-influenced guitar, there's Manning and violist Eyvind Kang, who blend together beautifully.

Manning selected likeminded players who sound good together, as opposed to just calling on whoever was available or hiring big-name musicians. And the songs and solos don't go on forever. There's restraint and balance here. Things aren't loose or tight; the quintet works somewhere in between those poles. And the music is enjoyable. Not just interesting or well executed—although it is those things, too.

Manning wrote eight of the 10 songs here, and her melodies are catchy and affecting. But the quintet's take on Gillian Welch's "I Dream A Highway" is breathtaking. Beginning with just Hart's resounding low end and the leader's rich, emotional sax, the sad but hopeful ballad keeps you waiting for a beat that never comes.



Underneath it all, there's merely cymbals and percussion washing up on the shore. The song ends with peaceful guitar noise, leaving the listener to drift away on their own highway.

The album finishes with a surprise: After 53 minutes of stirring earth-jazz, Manning's original "What The Blues Left Behind" is a smiling, swaying r&b piece.

—Brad Farberman

Harmonious Creature: Copland On Cornelia Street; Tune Of Cats; Floating Bridge; I Dream A Highway; Grey Dawn, Red Fox; Radish Spirit; Three Chords For Jessica; Don't Answer To The Question; On The Beach; What The Blues Left Behind. (58:46)

Personnel: Sarah Manning, alto saxophone; Eyvind Kang, viola; Jonathan Goldberger, guitar; Rene Hart, bass; Jerome Jennings, drums.

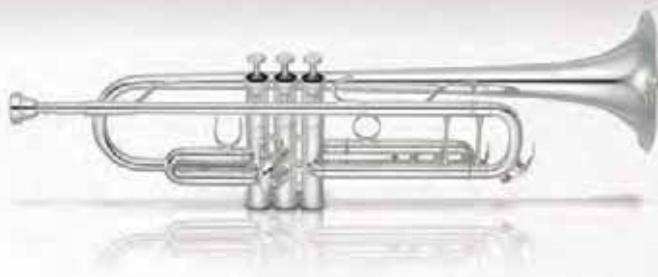
Ordering info: posi-tone.com



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Jon Lundbom & Big Five Chord *Liverevil*

HOT CUP 131

★★★★★

Jon Lundbom & Big Five Chord's exhilarating *Liverevil* should come with a caveat emptor stating the two-disc album is best experienced with a healthy intermission. Divided into two sets—the first referred to as “jazz,” the second “rock”—the record teems with elevated levels of bold intensity, imagination, prowess and playing that, like a two-pronged dinner consisting of lobster and porterhouse steak, practically demand a lengthy pause for proper digestion.

Anchored by Lundbom's Olympic-caliber

Joachim Kühn Trio with Archie Shepp *Voodoo Sense*

ACT 9555

★★★★★

To make a case for the universality of jazz, look no further than *Voodoo Sense*. Pianist Joachim Kühn, who grew up in post-war East Germany, and legendary saxophonist Archie Shepp (who guests on half of the tracks) could not have come from more different backgrounds. Moroccan guembri player Majid Bekkas and drummer Ramon Lopez, a Spaniard, round out Kühn's regular trio.

Kühn first visited New York in the 1960s when the co-called “new thing” was at its peak. It is not surprising that he chose the epic “Kulu Se Mama” to open the disc. The song was made famous by John Coltrane, who deeply influenced both Kühn and Shepp. The piece also features a percussion section and Bekkas on vocals. It is a perfect vehicle for Shepp, who achieves the right dosage of emotion and ruggedness while maintaining some invaluable thoughtfulness. The special relationship Shepp has been cultivating with pianists over the years bears its fruit once again on this disc. Empathy and cohesion are at the core of the performances here, and it is hard to believe nearly 20 minutes have passed when the song comes to an end.

African music is at the forefront of the title track and “Gbalele,” both co-written by singer-percussionist Kouassi Bessan Joseph and Kühn. The African influence is not used as a gim-

guitar gymnastics, the sextet explores everything from Wiccan prayer songs to indie-rock tunes and cacophonous hard-bop. The group's coordinated performances are as notable for what's present as much as for what isn't—namely, any loss of direction, lack of focus or temptation to solo at the expense of sacrificing structural integrity. As the finest improvisers often do, the instrumentalists here make controlled chaos seem natural, while simultaneously paying mind to the illusion that anything can happen next—meaning that every stray note and subtle tempo shift matters.

The recording's excellent sound quality further testifies on behalf of the music's urgency, vitality and command. Bryan Murray's distinctive balto! sax is the biggest beneficiary of the sonic merits. At times dissonant and disruptive, his skronking, duck-like blasts serve as punctuation marks and witty rejoinders, spurring on spirited conversations and lighthearted squabbles with fellow blower Jon Irabagon. The “punk-jazz” label occasionally affixed to the ensemble seemingly overlooks its tonal authoritativeness and way with quiet passages (“Tick-Dog”) that trace a direct line back to the exotic beauty of Miles Davis' *In A Silent Way*. —*Bob Gendron*

Liverevil: Disc 1: The Difference; Tick-Dog; Our Sun; Now Is The Time/The Maypole Dance; First Harvest/Evening Shadows. Disc 2: Bring Forth The Battalions; On Jacataion; These Changes; North Star; Have You Ever Seen A Woman As Big As Martha? (53:40/54:03)

Personnel: Jon Lundbom, guitar; Jon Irabagon, alto, soprano saxophones; Bryan Murray, tenor, balto! saxophones; Moppa Elliott, bass; Don Monaghan, drums; Matt Kanelos, keyboard.

Ordering info: hotcuprecords.com



mick. Instead, it creates new possibilities and helps to frame the pianist's use of various jazz idioms. Moreover, the relentless percussion line and the call-and-response singing and chanting are bewitching. Kühn, 70, shows no sign of slowing down; the vitality he demonstrates here makes *Voodoo Sense* a high point in an already illustrious career. —*Alain Drouot*

Voodoo Sense: Kulu Se Mama; Gbalele; L'Eternal Voyage; Voodoo Sense; Crossing The Mirror; Firehorse. (59:24)

Personnel: Joachim Kühn, piano; Majid Bekkas, guembri, vocals (1), kalimba (1), balafon (4); Ramon Lopez, drums, percussion; Archie Shepp, tenor sax (1, 3, 4); Kouassi Bessan Joseph, talking drum (1, 2, 4), zinu congas (1, 2, 4), vocals (2); Gouria Danielle, percussion (1, 4), vocals (2); Dally Jean Eric, calabash (1); Gilles Ahadji, jembe (1, 4); Abdessadek Bounhar, karkabou (1, 2, 4).

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Ståhls Trio *Jag Skulle Bara Gå Ut*

MOSEROBIE 087

★★★★★

It's not easy to establish a personal sound on any instrument, but it's especially hard to do so on the vibraphone, which tends to sound generic unless it is in exceptional hands. In the United States, Jason Adasiewicz has solved this challenge by bashing the keys like a blacksmith, like he does in his duo with Peter Brötzmann.

Swedish vibraphonist Mattias Ståhl doesn't hammer quite as hard as Adasiewicz does, but he's still willing to take things into outer space—almost literally during his trio's wiggly introduction to Sun Ra's “Satellites Are Spinning”—and the meter-free middle section of the trio's rambunctious take on Duke Ellington's “The Mooche.”

Ståhl and his confederates sound equally masterful negotiating orbits closer to a gravitational body. “Skobonka/The Healing Properties Of The Orb Were Found To Be Exaggerated,” which pairs a half-century-old theme by the late pianist Jan Johansson with a tune by the trio's bassist, Joe Williamson, is exquisitely baroque, yet free of fussiness. Where Adasiewicz establishes his singularity by playing up the vibes' capacity to generate tidal waves of sound, Ståhl establishes his singularity through the clarity of his lines and the precision of his attack.

The multifarious talents of the rest of the trio contribute to the album's success. Williamson's bass not only provides a springy foundation, but keeps the melody in sight while the rest of the combo disassembles it on the fitful “Formaldehyde.” And Christopher Cantillo plays like two men at once; one keeps strict time on the bass drum, while the other uses brushes to quest both ahead of and behind the beat. Rarely are rigor and accessibility so successfully balanced. —*Bill Meyer*

Jag Skulle Bara Gå Ut: The Mooche; Sonny Boy Williamson; Did You Give The World Some Love Today, Baby; Formaldehyde; Skobonka/The Healing Properties Of The Orb Were Found To Be Exaggerated; Undervattensvals (From “Bamse”); 10 Augusti; The Si-amese Twin; I Was Only Going Out; Satellites Are Spinning. (49:27)

Personnel: Mattias Ståhl, vibraphone; Joe Williamson, bass; Christopher Cantillo, drums.

Ordering info: moserobie.com

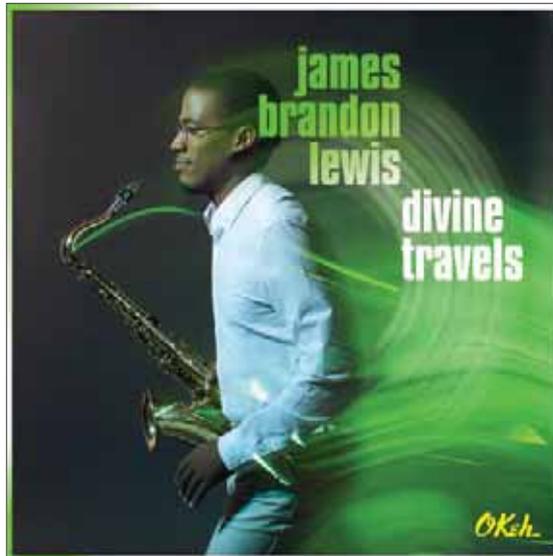
James Brandon Lewis
Divine Travels

OKEH 88883 76664

★★★★

Divine Travels, tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis's second album, evokes an era when spiritualism and poetry were key elements of the jazz avant-garde, helping to signify its questing nature. A sanctified vibe animates much of this album, with the 30-year-old Buffalo, N.Y., native exploring age-old gospel melodies and his own folk-like motifs alongside two powerhouse veterans from the New York creative music scene: bassist William Parker and drummer Gerald Cleaver. Poet Thomas Sayers Ellis adds hip verse to two tracks, one channeling an image of the church and the appeal of its music ("The Preacher's Baptist Beat"), the other dealing with race and shifting potential ("Organized Minorities").

Above all, this is an album of song-in-speech and speech-in-song. Lewis has a natural feel for the rhythms of a sermon, using accessible hooks and incantatory repetition to capture and rouse—though he is just as likely to ruminate, as if singing from a hymnal to himself. He



was raised in the church, so its sound is in his bones. Yet he left a gospel career, hearing jazz as his calling. Mentored at CalArts by the likes of Charlie Haden, Wadada Leo Smith and Alphonso Johnson, the saxophonist now lives in New York City, where he truly *got* religion when it comes to progressive music.

Divine Travels is leagues beyond Lewis' calow 2010 self-released debut, *Moments*, an unfocused and unpromising disc that included laps-

es into too-smooth r&b. This new album has an altogether earthier, more organic aesthetic center, one that sets the saxophonist with a far greater challenge. He rises to it with a tone that has grit as well as polish, and his serrated riffing in "Desensitized" matches well with the beautifully authoritative rumble of Parker and Cleaver. Those two have not only played with avant icons of every stripe; they each have an unerring feel for African-American vernaculars and how to draw inspiration from them beyond cliché in free-jazz or, at least, jazz played freely.

The album's high point is "Wading Child In The Motherless Water," which commingles the spirituals "Wading In The Water" and "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child" into a nearly 12-minute fantasia that taps a well of feeling as deep and wide as the Mississippi River. One does wish that Lewis's *Divine Travels* led to more ecstatic abandon. "A Gathering Of Souls" and "No Wooden Nickels" fade out just when things might have gotten really interesting. Here's to hoping Lewis keeps maturing as a seeker, avoiding the lures and snares that might hold him earthbound.

—Bradley Bamberger

Divine Travels: *Divine*; *Desensitized*; *Tradition*; *The Preacher's Baptist Beat*; *Wading Child In The Motherless Water*; *A Gathering Of Souls*; *Enclosed*; *No Wooden Nickels*; *Organized Minorities*; *Travels*. (61:00)

Personnel: James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; William Parker, double-bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums; Thomas Sayers Ellis, poetry.

Ordering info: okeh-records.com



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— Charles L. Latimer, *Metro Times*

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John Hammond, *Timeless* (Palmetto 2170; 54:39 ★★★)

Fifty years and 35 albums since starting out, three decades since reaching artistic maturity, Hammond carries on as an able torch-bearer for Robert Johnson and all the other blues heroes. This solo club performance held last year in Rhode Island certainly makes apparent his purity of intent and his undiminished commitment. Truth be told, his singing voice isn't as virile, nimble or dependable as it was a few years ago, and the songs he chose to cover are, as expected, well inside his comfort zone: urban and rural blues classics and two tunes on loan from his longtime friend Tom Waits.

Ordering info: palmetto-records.com
Hard Garden, *Blue Yonder*

(Hard Garden Music 004; 39:58 ★★★★★)

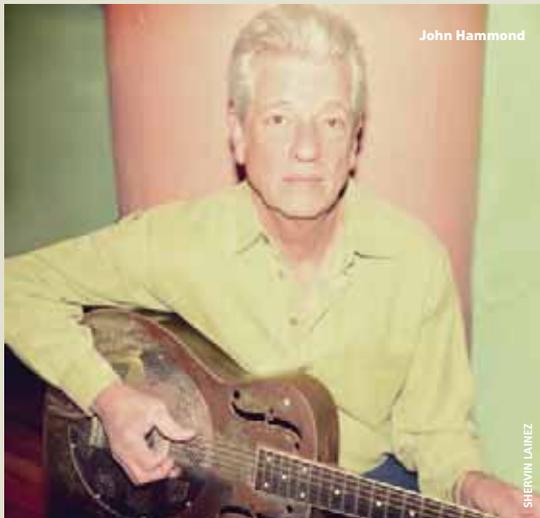
Seattle's Hard Garden trio is so adept at connecting Mississippi blues vocals, harmonicas and guitars to contemporary electronic music that all 10 original songs on their first album warrant repeated listening. Son Jack Jr. and colleagues take wicked delight in setting moods of acute uneasiness: "I Feel Evil" (bad guy in psychological distress), "The Valley" (child abandonment) and several more. But they lighten up considerably for the digital-beat dance tune "Showtime!" and the bizarre talking-dog-in-barroom tale "Pour Me Another." And their liberal makeover of Son House's cotton-field work song "Depot Blues," the only non-original, is a small wonder. It sounds like they've commandeered a locomotive at the junction of 1930s Illinois Central and 21st-century Amtrak rail tracks. The Gardeners honor blues tradition at the same time they wryly overhaul it.

Ordering info: hardgardenmusic.com

Leo Welch, *Sabougla Voices* (Big Legal Mess 0287; 33:38 ★★★½) New-to-the-studio Leo "Bud" Welch, one of the last of the Mississippi blues old-timers, has no qualms about mixing uncouth devil's music with Baptist church affirmations. Making a virtue of his ragged, sun-bleached voice, the 81-year-old evidently wants everyone to know there's no legacy as rich as trusting in the Lord. Two members of his church's choir are just as firm in their faith in supporting roles, while guitarist Jimbo Mathus joins three more secularists in espousing a rough-and-tumble blues bravado.

Ordering info: biglegalmessrecords.com

Jim Gustin & Truth Jones, *Can't Shed A Tear* (Self-Release; 63:33 ★★★) What makes most of the initial recording from Jim Gustin so enjoyable is his singing, a gravelly cry of certitude delivered in thick, textured wails of sound. A fixture on the Los Angeles blues scene since around 1980, he offers original songs on love, loss and religious belief while asking his tight band of four



John Hammond

SHERWIN LAINEZ

guys and two gals to move beyond general-purpose professionalism and respond organically to his close emotional involvement in the lyrics. The overlong program drags in its second half largely due to generic blues-rock guitar bursts and Jeri Goldenhar's unremarkable lead vocals.

Ordering info: jimgustin.com

Various Artists, *Eric Clapton Guitar Festival: Crossroads* (Rhino 537929; 76:05/78:02 ★★★½)

Last year's guitar spectacle at Madison Square Garden had a sturdy blues foundation. Robert Cray, Taj Mahal, Jimmie Vaughan and other stars generally follow the familiar rules governing blues expression for good results. Others like John Mayer, Gary Clark Jr. and Derek Trucks are more apt to push the perimeters. Earl Klugh and Kurt Rosenwinkel are out of place. Among quite a few surprises here are Jeff Beck cleverly covering the Irish folk song "Mná Na hÉireann," and Blake Mills and Keb' Mo' holding their own in the fast company of veterans Steve Cropper, Matt "Guitar" Murphy and Albert Lee on eternal crowd-pleaser "Green Onions." (Yes, Booker T. is present, leading the way.)

Ordering info: rhino.com

The Andrew London Trio, *Middle Class White Boy Blues* (Self-Release; 50:10 ★★★½)

This New Zealand-based group—song-writer Andrew London on vocals and vintage archtop guitar, with his wife, Kirsten, on bass and Nils Olsen playing reeds and flute—knows how to turn on the charm. Their sound sticks to the playful, breezy blues, pop, jazz and country of pre-1940 America. London's blithely nonchalant singing delivery reaches high levels of poise and affability while imparting witty lyrics that would draw quiet laughs of agreement from Mose Allison and Dave Frishberg. With tongue firmly lodged in cheek, London fesses up to all sorts of things, delivering the engaging blues for which the album is named.

DB

Ordering info: andrewlondon.co.nz



Tom Rainey *Obligato*

INTAKT 227

★★★★★

Over the last two decades, Tom Rainey has quietly but steadily established himself as one of the most creative drummers in New York, a selfless percussionist fully invested in ensemble-oriented improvisation. His playing with a richly varied assortment of bandleaders—Tim Berne, Tony Malaby, Fred Hersch—has always been distinctive, and he's never privileged his own musical personality over the mission of any particular project.

On *Obligato*, he's assembled a superb quintet to tackle a selection of standards. The forms are fully internalized by the players, and they don't fuss over the changes or worry about faithfully delivering the melodies. Rather, the tunes provide a loose framework for inspired group interactions.

In nearly every performance, written melodies are obscured or buried, often until the track is winding down. Phrases from the melodies of "Prelude To A Kiss" and "Yesterdays" pour out of the fluid, multilinear improvising, briefly dissolving the fog for a moment of clarity. But, ultimately, playing "name that tune" isn't the point here. The most satisfying quality of the session is hearing the band members expertly blend together, suggesting the agile and empathic lines of West Coast jazz applied to fuzzy melodic shapes. Saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and trumpeter Ralph Alessi sound utterly natural together: They don't really take solos, but braid high-wire improvisations.

The formal skeletons of the tunes provide a loose shape for the players to work within. Pianist Kris Davis never falls into easy vamps. She and bassist Drew Gress skate around the changes; sometimes it seems as though they're contorting their lines to avoid the shapes, and sometimes they're utterly embroiled in what their bandmates are doing. Rainey himself is perhaps the most liquid presence here, pushing and pulling against the grain, but never less than fully engaged.

—Peter Margasak

Obligato: Just In Time; In Your Own Sweet Way; Long Ago And Far Away; Reflections; Secret Love; Prelude To A Kiss; Yesterdays; If I Should Lose You; You Don't Know What Love Is; Just In Time Again. (52:04)

Personnel: Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Ingrid Laubrock, saxophone; Kris Davis, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Tom Rainey, drums.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

Pete Mills
Sweet Shadow

CELLAR LIVE 070813

★★★★½

On the followup to his terrific sophomore effort, *Fresh Spin* (Chicken Coup), tenor saxophonist Pete Mills works his crack quartet in so many directions the listener can hardly catch a breath. All that's left is a single thought, "Man, what a gas!" An energetic tenor player who has the exuberant soul of Mobley and the smarts of McLean, Mills kicks off *Sweet Shadow* with what sounds like a *Soul Station* homage in "Shiner." Mills swoons a catchy melody, drummer Matt Wilson unleashes his "up with people" vibrations, guitarist Pete McCann adds left-of-center hipness—it's a romp that won't quit. This is Saturday morning jazz, a top-down cruise at gale force. "Summer" and "The Snagel" lock down the swinging groove, before "Duo 1" plays it free and loose, Mills squealing and squawking while Wilson issues New Orleans snare stutters and bass drum stomps. The group dances lightly through the bittersweet title track, then hits the groove hard on Raheem Roland Kirk's "Serenade To A Cuckoo." Here, Wilson's fulsome funk and Mills' sassy swirls create a match made in retro heaven. At the center of this disc is Mills' mellow tone and joyous swing feel. He's a bighearted musician treading classic terrain, but timelessness never goes out of style.

—Ken Micallef

Sweet Shadow: Shiner; Summer; The Snagel; Duo 1; New School; Serenade To A Cuckoo; Close To Never; Duo 2; The Star Crossed Lovers; Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend; Blues For Me; Elora Dolce; Momentum. (70:21)

Personnel: Pete Mills, tenor saxophone; Pete McCann, guitar; Erik Augis, piano; Martin Wind, bass; Matt Wilson, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com



Ben Wolfe
From Here I See

MAXJAZZ 608

★★★★½

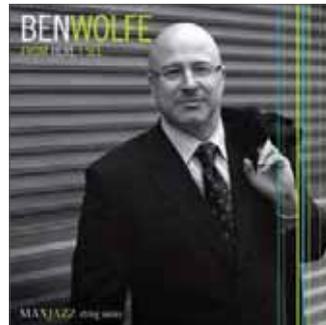
Though the market for jazz mood music was hot 60 years ago, bassist-composer Ben Wolfe believes in the primacy of melody. That informs his writing, playing and the direction of his small ensemble. Soloists include Wynton Marsalis, Russell Malone, Marcus Strickland and JD Allen, and a string quartet augments that core at times. Wolfe has given us a dozen pretty tunes, with some that swing lightly. If this album had been released in 1966, it's likely Creed Taylor would have produced it (complete with a romantic sunset graphic on the cover) and the jazz world would be asking Wolfe for an orchestral follow-up. As lovely as this melodic content is, there's an air of quaintness about the album. This is an ensemble effort, and pianist Orrin Evans is invaluable here. His lyricism is crystalline and he never wastes a note. Wolfe wisely plays just a few bass solos, limiting his playing to being a source of the group's strength. The soloists enhance the music rather than wave their own banners. Wolfe's string writing adds orchestral color in an understated way. From a programmatic standpoint, too many successive slow tunes and fadeout endings give the mistaken impression of a larger work. These are pretty, romantic numbers, and they stand alone.

—Kirk Silsbee

From Here I See: The Good Doctor; Angela; Baby Tiger; Interlude; So Lovely; Mellow As You Please; Lovely Lady; Who's Lily?; How You Love; Two-Beat Numba; From Here I See; 12 More. (55:56)

Personnel: Ben Wolfe, bass; Wynton Marsalis, trumpet (1, 5); Marcus Strickland, soprano saxophone (11, 12); Russell Malone, guitar (2, 8); JD Allen, tenor saxophone; Orrin Evans, piano; Donald Edwards, drums; Cyrus Beroukhir, Owen Dalby, violin; Kenji Bunch, viola; Greg Hesselink, cello.

Ordering info: maxjazz.com



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Adrian Raso and Fanfare Ciocarlia *Devil's Tale*

ASPHALT TANGO 4414

★★★

Here's a meeting of minds, hearts and feet between Canadian guitarist Adrian Raso and an uproarious Romanian brass brotherhood, Fanfare Ciocarlia. Recorded in Toronto and released in Berlin, this disc flaunts its international card, pulled from a king-size tarot deck.

The group's collective sound is bigger than life, if their swagger comes over as a tad cartoonish. In the slinky opener with banjo, the pace accelerates mildly, but then stays unrelentingly upbeat through a dozen tracks. Their swing

Eli Degibri *Twelve*

PLUS LOIN MUSIC 4563

★★★★½

When saxophonist Eli Degibri moved back to his hometown, Tel Aviv, he stepped away from a high-profile jazz scene in the United States where he was an ascending star. Not only had he served in Herbie Hancock's sextet, but his previous disc, 2010's *Israeli Song*, featured an all-star assembly of sidemen (Brad Mehldau, Ron Carter, Al Foster).

Returning to Israel, Degibri brought together his own group, including his longtime partner, bassist Barak Mori. Pianist Gadi Lehavi, 16, and drummer Ofri Nehemya, 18, are strong enough not to immediately trigger comparisons to their predecessors, which says a lot about their skills as players.

On the title track and "The Spider," Degibri's tone is robust yet airy, and he leads the group in subtly surprising turnarounds. Lehavi's fleet progressions, which suggest classical conservatory training, also become the ideal fills for the saxophonist's open spaces. Degibri's sudden shifts and unexpected flights contrast with Mori and Nehemya's solid clave rhythm on "Mambo." Similarly, he displays great control when moving into higher registers on "New Waltz."

While Degibri wrote most of the compositions on *Twelve*, he delivers a quietly compelling interpretation of Vernon Duke's standard "Autumn In New York." His dark shadings

styles tend toward New Orleans banjo-twang and Django Gypsy jazz, heavy with Eastern mordents and trilling clarinet.

Raso manages a bouzouki sound on occasion, pens a mellow waltz to Gypsy favorite Biréli Lagrène, and hosts spirited guest spots for guitarists John Jorgenson and Rodrigo, and drummer Kevin Figueiredo.

Cut-and-dried charts from an all-Raso book allow little space for the swashbuckling Balkans to unleash more than one-chorus solos, executed cheerily on "Swing Sagarese," with Sidney Bechet soprano flair and "Wild" Bill Davison trumpet blare.

Fanfare Ciocarlia suffers from the studio straightjacket and sound compression; the band was a lot looser at a recent concert at Johnny D's, a robust roadhouse in Somerville, Mass. Rotate this one at an international dance party.

—Fred Bouchard

Devil's Tale: Urn St. Tavern; Swing Sagarese; The Absinthe-Minded Gypsy; C'est La Vie; Quattro Cicci; Charlatan's Waltz; Devil's Tale; Leezard's Lament; Cafe Con Leche; Spiritissimo; Bireli's Waltz; Django. (40:54)

Personnel: Adrian Raso, guitar, banjo, electric bass; Costica "Ci-mai" Trifan, trumpet, vocals; Radulescu Lazar, Paul Marian Bulgaru, Trifan Craciun, trumpets; Oprica Ivancea, clarinet, alto saxophone; Daniel Ivancea, alto saxophone; Constantin "Pinca" Cantea, Monel "Gutzel" Trifan, tuba; Constantin "Sulo" Calin, tenor horn; Laurentiu Mihai Ivancea, baritone horn; Costel "Gisniaca" Ursu, large drum; Nicolae Ionita, percussion; John Jorgenson, guitar, mandolin, clarinet (3, 4, 11, 12); Rodrigo, guitar (10); Kevin Figueiredo, drums (10); Kai Schönburg, drums, percussion; Michael Metzler, Jew's harp (8); Florin Ionita, accordion (6); Marc Elsner, electric bass (12).

Ordering info: asphalt-tango.de



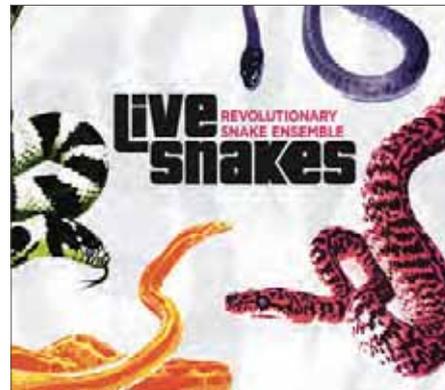
enhance the tune's sense of nostalgia. Shlomo Ydov, who wrote the lyrics to "Liora Mi Amor," has a weathered voice that works well alongside Mori's arco lines. But the vocal choir that closes out "The Cave" is a bit of unnecessary sweetening. Degibri's instrumental tone—including mandolin on this song—already conveys plenty of emotion.

—Aaron Cohen

Twelve: Twelve; The Spider; Roaming Fantasy; Mambo; Autumn In New York; New Waltz; Liora Mi Amor; Old Seven; The Cave. (47:03)

Personnel: Eli Degibri, tenor, soprano saxophone (7), mandolin (9), vocals (9); Gadi Lehavi, piano, vocals (9); Barak Mori, bass, vocals (9); Ofri Nehemya, drums; Shlomo Ydov, vocals (7); Yaron Mohar, vocals (9); Yael Shapira, vocals (9); Pini Shavit, vocals (9).

Ordering info: plusloin.net



Revolutionary Snake Ensemble *Live Snakes*

ACCURATE 5065

★★★

Ken Field's Revolutionary Snake Ensemble started playing its New Orleans brass band-meets-Balkan-tinged Sun Ra mash-up in the early '90s, at a time when space-inspired avant-garde composers and their sprawling, sequin-bedecked ensembles had strong followings in the Crescent City. Yet Field's group carved out a more parade-beat-heavy identity of its own, and eventually landed gigs during Carnival parades—a high honor for out-of-towners dipping into local aesthetics for inspiration.

Live Snakes, the band's third album in 10 years, represents a high watermark for the group. Recorded in various live settings with a gamut of players, the disc is equal parts challenging, evocative, fun and experimental. An arrangement of Ellington's "Caravan" makes novel use of the band's uncommon format, while Field's "Slots" relies on a two-drummer, two-sax combo that slides easily from tight and danceable to provocatively *out*. The most moving moment here is "For Karen," dedicated to Field's wife, whom he lost to cancer soon after recording the lush and evocative ballad. (In keeping with New Orleans musical traditions, a memorable dirge-to-uptempo rendition of "I'll Fly Away" follows.)

As with many artists delving into brass band music or avant-garde improvisation, these pieces are best enjoyed live. However, a live recording doesn't always do justice to a live music experience. Despite a memorable drum solo, "Parade" could use a stronger climax, while the horn breakdowns that should create tension on "Cassandra 4" and "Rock Of Ages" fail to pull the listener in before unleashing harsh reams of discord. But when risk-taking makes up this much of a project's reason for being, a little imperfection can be admirable.

—Jennifer Odell

Live Snakes: Parade; Cassandra 4; Rock Of Ages; Slots; Caravan; Cassandra 5; For Karen; I'll Fly Away; Que Sera Sera; I Got It; Cassandra 4 Remix; Breakdown Part 1. (68:26)

Personnel: Ken Field, alto saxophone, flutes, percussion, Thereminator; Tom Hall, Charles Neville, tenor saxophone (5, 8); Matt Darriau, tenor saxophone, flutes (1, 4, 9, 10); Jerry Sabatini, trumpet (2, 3, 5–8, 11); Dave Harris, trombone, tuba (5, 8); Danny Heath (2, 3, 5–7, 11, 12); Alex Asher (2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12); Josh Roseman (2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12); trombone; Blake Newman, acoustic bass (1–10); Alex Smith, electric bass (2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12); Phil Neighbors (1, 4, 5, 8–10); Joey Leftitz (2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12); drums; Kenny Wolleson, drums, percussion (1–4, 6, 7, 9–12); Andy Pinkham, Thereminator (11).

Ordering info: accuraterecords.com

Ryan Meagher
Tango In The City Of Roses

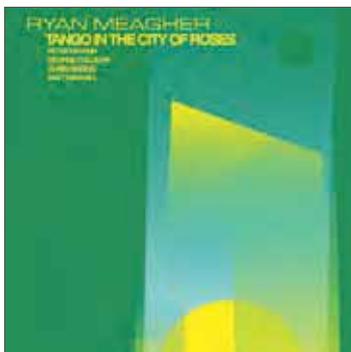
PJCE RECORDS 010

★★★★½

The Ocular Concern
Sister Cities

PJCE RECORDS 011

★★★★★



The beautiful city of Portland, Ore., promotes tourism with the slogan, “Portland is happening now.”

And that’s certainly true of the city’s fertile jazz scene. Now, the young Portland Jazz Composers’ Ensemble (PJCE) label is spreading the good word on emerging progressive voices from the City Of Roses. Each of the label’s monthly album releases is recorded live in a single session. The label originally evolved from a workshop collaborative of the same name, which networked composers and musicians for the development of new forward-looking works.

An outstanding example of the label’s pioneering platform is the captivating *Sister Cities* by The Ocular Concern. Featuring guitarist Dan Duval, pianist Andrew Oliver, drummer Stephen Pancerev, clarinetist Lee Elderton and vibraphonist Nathan Beck, the category-defying chamber quintet constructs and deconstructs intriguing pyramids of texture, counterpoint and harmony. It’s a worlds-within-worlds canvas. If M.C. Escher had led a band, *this* would be the sound of it. The group weaves in jazz, neo-classical, African dance, tango, pop, twang, blasts of crunch-rock and subtle odd-metered funk. Minimalism is a strong influence in the music’s pointed rhythmic layers, but the band delivers it all with a fluidity and warmth that minimalism often lacks.

The centerpiece is the entrancing four-movement suite “Sister Cities,” augmented by string trio and bandoneon. Composers Duval and Oliver heartily savor the offbeat instrumentation, orchestrating a cinematic spree. Although exacting and sometimes brainy, the Ocular Concern’s music ultimately charms with a melodic and almost innocent sense of wonder.

A more recent transplant to the city via New York is guitarist-composer Ryan Meagher. His third disc, *Tango In The City Of Roses*, was recorded live at Ivories Jazz Lounge and the date’s on-the-spot, heartfelt energy is robust. While Meagher refers to his previous albums as “modern jazz for the indie rocker,” this outing is decidedly rooted in jazz. It’s fitting that the one composition not penned by Meagher, “Hard Times,” is a Stephen Foster tune. There’s a strong element of folksong in Meagher’s compositions, expressed by his singing melodies and commitment to the gravity and beauty of a balanced lyrical arc. The band makes sure that solo improvisations and shifting alternate harmonies enrich and transport the songs, rather than subvert them. For the country-like sway of the Foster number, Meagher switches over to his Telecaster baritone guitar for a thicker accompaniment sound and then wraps up a sweetly swinging solo in the Duane Eddy territory.

Pianist George Colligan, who made waves last year with his disc *The Endless Mysteries* (Origin), is an electrifying counter-balance to the guitarist with his rapid-fire runs and stabbing, rhythmically intense McCoy Tyneresque left hand. Saxophonist Peter Epstein is exquisite throughout and gets raw when the moment’s right. The ballad “Greenwood” was composed with the reedist specifically in mind: The haunting melody is a poignant wonder due to his mastery of the alto’s upper register. Bassist Chris Higgins is solid in tandem with drummer Matt Mayhall’s probing, interactive pulse. Whether Meagher chooses to draw from indie rock or folk, his music is undeniably modern—because it holds no preconceptions.

—Jeff Potter

Tango In The City Of Roses: Walther’s Pond; Hard Times; Empty Spirits; Greenwood; Tango In The City Of Roses; Elle’s Lullaby; College Town Blues. (63:26)

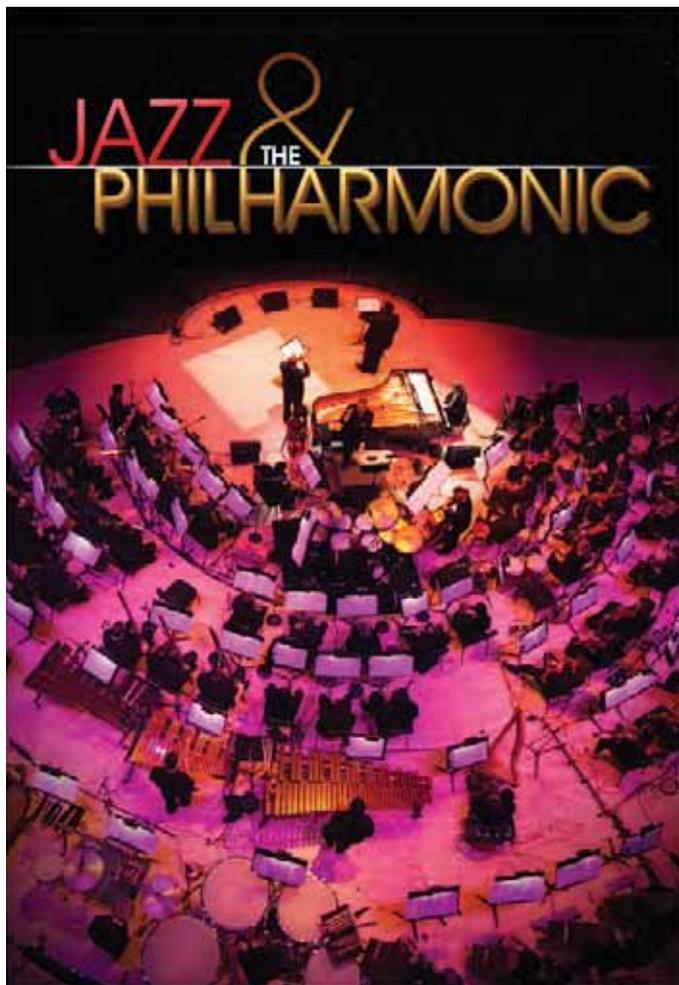
Personnel: Ryan Meagher, guitar, baritone guitar; Peter Epstein, soprano, alto saxophones; George Colligan, piano; Chris Higgins, bass; Matt Mayhall, drums.

Ordering info: pjcerrecords.org

Sister Cities: Oxygen Lake; Sister Cities Suite: Sister Cities; Portland In Reverse; Ghost Town City Council; The Island Milonga; The Ocular Concern; Lafayette; The Eclectic Piano; William S. Burroughs/Let’s Go! (50:42)

Personnel: Dan Duval, electric guitar, toy piano; Andrew Oliver, electric piano, percussion; Stephen Pancerev, drums; Lee Elderton, clarinet; Nathan Beck, vibraphone, mbira (4, 8); Erin Furbee, violin (2–5); Brian Quincey, viola (2–5); Justin Kagan, cello (2–5); Alex Krebs, bandoneon (2–5).

Ordering info: pjcerrecords.org



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Okeh
GLOBAL EXPRESSIONS IN JAZZ

New Sonic Frontiers

Claire Chase, *Density* (New Focus 135; 73:32 ★★★★★)

MacArthur fellow and International Contemporary Ensemble founder Claire Chase named her third album for the Edgard Varèse classic that ends the collection. Five other multi-tracked works of varying density fill out the program, from the dancing interlocking patterns of 11 flute lines in Steve Reich's "Vermont Counterpoint" to the bracing acoustic beating that five overdubbed lines generate against sine waves in Alvin Lucier's "Almost New



York." Each piece flows uninterrupted into the next, paring down as it goes. Chase brings both staggering technique and humanity to this sterling collection of modern flute works, which also includes an early Philip Glass piece and new work from Marcos Balter and Mario Diaz de León.

Ordering info: newfocusrecordings.com

Sarah Cahill, *A Sweeter Music* (Other Minds 1022; 78:18 ★★½) This collection by Bay Area pianist Sarah Cahill features work commissioned in the wake of the Iraq War. She opts for a tone of peaceful serenity rather than charged indignation, although the latter emerges on "War Is Just A Racket" by composer Kyle Gann, which calls for the pianist to recite a 1933 speech by U.S. Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler that indicts military engagement as a sham. The flow is a bit erratic, but it's interesting to hear the diverse readings of Cahill's concept. Terry Riley, Carl Stone, Frederic Rzewski, Phil Kline, Yoko Ono, The Residents and Meredith Monk are the other composers.

Ordering info: otherminds.org

Ken Thomson and Jack Quartet, *Thaw* (Cantaloupe 21095; 45:17 ★★★★★) Reedist and recent Bang On A Can member Ken Thomson offers two pieces for the fearless Jack Quartet, including "Perpetual," on which he plays bass clarinet. The final movement of the three-part work is titled "Don Pullen Says It's OK," and he cites the mercurial jazz pianist as an influence in boldly toggling between jagged, dissonant clusters of abstract sound and tender, blues-soaked passages. That last section is marked by somber, patiently unfurling melodies, while the bracing "Bad Idea" is a punishing assault of 16th-note fury. The title work features just Jack, but the range of moods and attacks is similar, from the stark, hard opening section of "Concrete" to the hopeful, tender evocations of the final section, where ice turns to liquid.

Ordering info: cantaloupeusic.com

R. Andrew Lee, *Eva-Maria Houben: Piano Music* (Irritable Hedgehog 009; 62:43 ★★★★★) The Denver pianist has emerged as

one the great interpreters of minimal music, especially after his towering recording of Dennis Johnson's "November" last year. Here he tackles two extended works by Germany's Eva-Maria Houben, a key figure of the Wandelweiser group of post-Cage composers. Stark, simple phrases are meticulously placed with a landscape of silence in "Abgemalt," where the disintegration of sound takes on a painterly exquisiteness. There's also plenty of silence in "Go And Stop," but toward its conclusion the sound field becomes more active, with alternating chords eating up the open space. Austerity is rarely this gorgeous and reflective.

Ordering info: irritablehedgehog.com

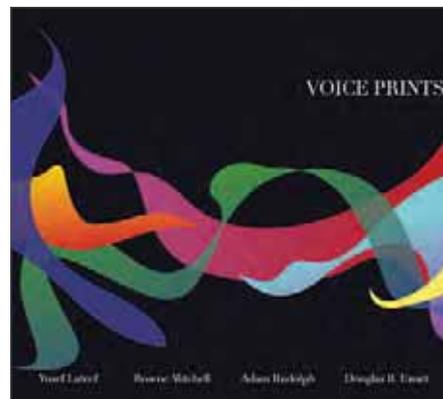
David Philip Hefti, *Changements* (Col Legno 40407; 75:45 ★★★★★) This bracing orchestral portrait of Swiss composer David Philip Hefti features work that engages in bold, challenging structural gambits. The opening piece, "Éclairs," for example, arranges 13 discrete episodes into eight action-packed, seamless minutes, but with an intention that each section is interrupted by the next, yet bridged by resting sounds. "Klangbogen" opens up from shimmering and ominous string tones. Percussive outbursts, brassy digressions and upward swoops arrive in jarring, unexpected flurries.

Ordering info: col-legno.com

François Bayle, *Les Couleurs de la Nuit* (Sub Rosa 371; 38:10 ★★★★★) One of the leading figures of musique concrète, French composer François Bayle sought to evoke natural sounds on this remarkable 1982 work, now being reissued on CD and LP. His meticulous tape manipulations yield richly textured, haunting resonances suggestive of creepy, moonlit environmental sounds, created from recordings of strings, bassoon and even the hum made by a carpenter's plane. Bayle's program notes help to draw out synesthetic connection—"An imaginary clarinet's milky tones emerge from other melodic lines (or traces of lines) and describe amber swirls"—but the listener can still drift off into a Technicolor otherworld without them.

Ordering info: subrosa.net

DB



**Yusef Lateef/Roscoe Mitchell/Adam Rudolph/Douglas R. Ewart
*Voice Prints***

META RECORDS 018

★★★★★

In a 2005 interview for the San Diego Union-Tribune, Yusef Lateef (1920–2013) asked not to be called a jazz musician. He'd been reaching beyond jazz to incorporate folk music practices from around the world for half a century. He preferred to call what he did autophysiopsychic music, which is to say that he drew on the spiritual, physical and emotional aspects of his self. But as anyone who has ever kicked back with his immortal 1964 Impulse! LP, *Live At Pep's*, can attest: The man knew how to play jazz.

This 2008 concert recording places him in sympathetic company. Multi-instrumentalists and AACM associates Roscoe Mitchell and Douglas R. Ewart have drawn upon a diverse range of styles, from Jamaican ceremonial chanting to European orchestral music and a myriad of jazz styles. Percussionist Adam Rudolph has likewise been involved with Moroccan, Ghanaian and Indian music, but also proved a faithful accompanist to Don Cherry and Fred Anderson.

They all find common cause here in performance-as-ritual. The sere flute and bright, sparse bell tones that open the record set a mood of contemplation and mystery. While solemnity remains a touchstone throughout, agitation and earthy humor have their turns. On "Sound Search" there are moments when both Lateef and Mitchell make commanding statements over surging rhythms, but it's to further the tapestry-like sound narrative of the performance.

This album was already out when Yusef Lateef died two days before Christmas last year. It wasn't necessarily conceived as a memorial, but the way he and this crack crew draw together many aspects of his life's work makes it a suitable one nonetheless.

—Bill Meyer

Voice Prints: Voice Prints; Sound Search; Harpers Ferry; Morning Moves (58:36)

Personnel: Yusef Lateef, tenor saxophone, oboe, alto flute, C flute, bamboo flutes, vocal, piano (3); Roscoe Mitchell, soprano, soprano, alto saxophones, C flute, bells, percussion; Adam Rudolph, conga, tumbas, frame drum, kalimba, slit drum, Berber horn, percussion, piano (2); Douglas R. Ewart, soprano saxophone, C flute glass digeridoo, voice, bass clarinet, gongs, bells, percussion, sirens, Ewart hotchiku, bass transverse flute, bamboo flutes. (58:36)

Ordering info: metarecords.com

Hera with Hamid Drake *Seven Lines*

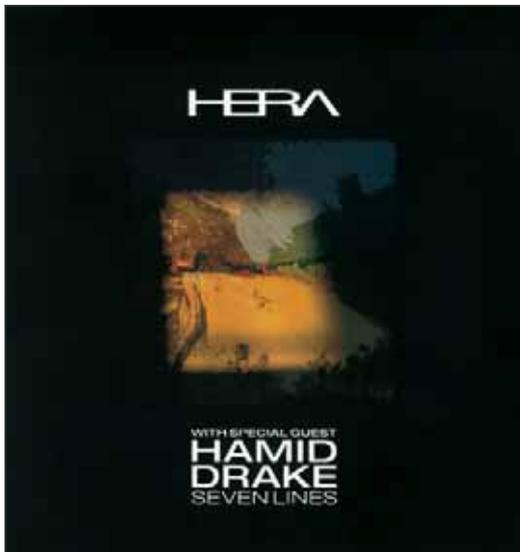
MULTIKULTI PROJECT 030

★★★★

Polish multi-reedist Waclaw Zimpel has carved out a place for himself in Europe's improvised-music world as an astute interpreter of far-flung folk music ideas, and three albums in, his Hera ensemble is shaping up to be a perfect vehicle for his imaginative hybrid of the avant-garde and the traditional. Working here with veteran drummer Hamid Drake, who plays in the left channel while Hera's drummer, Paweł Szpura, plays in the right, the group creates a ferocious noise, punctuated by haunting interludes where the principal musical themes are explored in depth.

Zimpel's clarinet and Paweł Postaremczak's saxophones combine on the main themes into a single tone that exudes melancholy and menace in equal measure, and the sour atmosphere is heightened by droning hurdy-gurdy and arco bass. Improvised music that doesn't swing generally works best when it strongly conveys a feeling, and this music expertly builds the sense that something wicked is coming, and then delivers with wild group improvisation that can snap into and back out of a groove at a moment's notice. The 17-minute "Afterimages" is punctuated by sudden slips into powerful rhythms, briefly turning funky toward the end.

The live format and extended structures of the



songs give the band lots of space to develop its ideas and find the true potential of its unorthodox instrumentation. To his credit, Drake is fully a part of the band here, occupying his channel in a sparring dance with Szpura. *Seven Lines* may not contain a single line you could hum, but it is full of fire and prone to explode in the most satisfying way.

—Joe Tangari

Seven Lines: Sounds Of Balochistan; Roofs Of Kyoto; Temples Of Tibet; Afterimages; Recalling Russia. (69:03)

Personnel: Waclaw Zimpel, clarinet, alto clarinet, harmonium; Paweł Postaremczak, tenor, soprano saxophones, harmonium; Maciek Cierlinski, hurdy-gurdy; Raphael Roginski, guitar; Ksawery Wójcinski, double bass; Paweł Szpura, drums; Hamid Drake, drums, frame drum, vocal.

Ordering info: multikulti.com



Pete Robbins *Pyramid*

HATE LAUGH MUSIC 003

★★★★

Opening an album with a chops-rich version of Guns N' Roses' oft-covered "Sweet Child O' Mine" might be viewed as a calculated attempt to reignite the debate about the merits of improvising on contemporary rock songs, particularly when it is followed five tracks later by Nirvana's "Lithium." Saxophonist Pete Robbins says it is merely a way of connecting with music that spoke to him in his formative years.

If you agree that The Bad Plus has long since

won the argument that the provenance of a composition places a distant second to what you do with the tune, you can move directly on to enjoying the way Robbins and pianist Vijay Iyer joyously pummel the opening piece or how drummer Tyshawn Sorey digs into the deep groove of Stevie Wonder's "Too High." Sorey also sounds powerful on Jimmy Webb's "Wichita Lineman," churning and kicking under Iyer and Robbins' melody lines, and then locking into a percussive dialogue with the pianist toward the song's conclusion.

Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," which the composer himself says deserves a recording moratorium, does not fare as well. Like many Cohen songs, the incantatory lyrics dominate, and without the words you are left with only a bare infrastructure, a thin basis for extended improvisation. Consequently, the middle section seems disconnected from the song itself, and it does not help that the piano sounds harshly recorded.

Robbins' four compositions offer more varied fare—ranging from the meditative title piece, which eschews Robbins' saxophone, to the multi-hued "Equipoise," which seems the ideal vehicle for the leader's choppy phrasing and tart tone.

—James Hale

Pyramid: Sweet Child O' Mine; Hallelujah; Vorp; Wichita Lineman; Intravenous; Lithium; Equipoise; Too High; Pyramid. (53:30)

Personnel: Pete Robbins, alto saxophone, clarinet (1); Vijay Iyer, piano; Eivind Opsvik, bass; Tyshawn Sorey, drums.

Ordering info: peterobbins.com

Matt Slocum *Black Elk's Dream*

matt slocum black elk's dream

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**Band of Gypsies
Reincarnation**
Electric Angelland

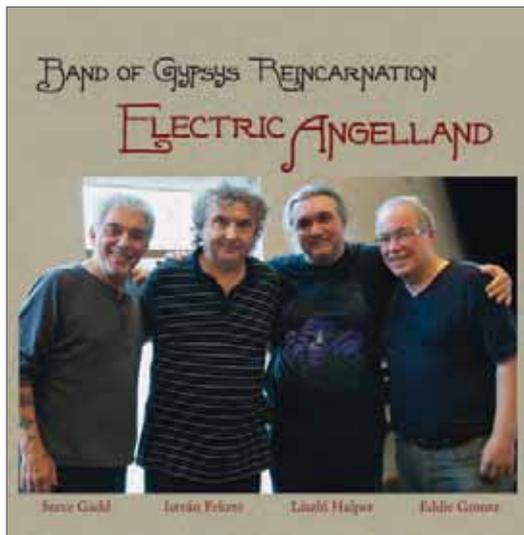
M'ARTY 001

★★★★½

The spirit and music of Jimi Hendrix touched generations of players all over the planet. Hungarian guitarist László Halper is yet another example of how Hendrix's spirit lives on. In his attempt at bringing a jazzy sensibility to Hendrix's compositions—something that Gil Evans did far more effectively—Halper recruited American stars Steve Gadd on drums and Eddie Gomez on bass.

But the jazziest touches here come not from Halper, an accomplished guitarist with rockish inclinations, nor from his all-world rhythm tandem, but from the superb veteran Hungarian trumpeter István Fekete, who provides several moments of inspired soloing on this live document (recorded before an appreciative audience at the Palace of Arts of Budapest in 2012 to commemorate Hendrix's 70th birthday).

The band name is something of a misnomer, particularly because the material here lacks the heavy-funk edge of Hendrix's Band of Gypsies trio with bassist Billy Cox and drummer Buddy Miles. And the album title is both a clever bit of wordplay and a remarkable coincidence: Halper comes from one of Budapest's best-known districts, Angyalföld, which literally translates to Angelland, recalling the name of Hendrix's 1968



studio masterpiece, *Electric Ladyland*.

With Gadd laying down his inimitable, wide beat with typical authority and Gomez providing a steady pulse with his deep-toned upright bass lines, Halper turns in his most adventurous guitar solos on the opening "Freedom," the shuffle-funk version of "Highway Chile" and the wah-wah-laden rocker "Stone Free." Perhaps no other tune reveals his love of Hendrix as strongly as the Curtis-Mayfield-inspired number "Have You Ever Been To Electric Ladyland," which he imbues with deep soul.

Gomez contributes virtuosic soloing on a

dreamy "Burning Of The Midnight Lamp," underscored by Gadd's relaxed brushwork, and offers a lovely, lyrical solo on a laid-back "Bold As Love." His fleet-fingered solo on a briskly swinging "Can You See Me" is monstrosous, eliciting cheers and whistles from the audience. Still, the jazziest touches come from Fekete, who freely explores the harmonic terrain of "Burning Of The Midnight Lamp" and stretches in adventurous fashion on "Freedom" and "Stone Free." Fekete's muted trumpet solo on "Can You See Me," against Gomez's insistent walking bass lines and Gadd's nimble brushwork, carries more of the spirit of Miles Davis than Hendrix.

Saxophonists Gábor Kollmann and Ákos Csejtey contribute what feel like tacked-on horn pads to punch up "Highway Chile," "Can You See Me," "I Don't Live Today," "Stone Free" and Mitch Mitchell's "Beginnings." (Indeed, their parts were added in the studio after the concert.) Halper demonstrates an authentic blues feel on "Red House," which has Fekete playing a rare open horn solo.

A heartfelt homage to the Voodoo Child from the land of Béla Bartók.

—Bill Milkowski

Electric Angelland: Freedom; Have You Ever Been To Electric Ladyland; Highway Chile; Burning Of The Midnight Lamp; Can You See Me; Beginnings; Blackbird; I Don't Live Today; Bold As Love; Stone Free; Red House. (72:24)

Personnel: László Halper, guitar; Steve Gadd, drums; Eddie Gomez, bass; István Fekete, trumpet; Gábor Kollmann, alto saxophone (1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10); Ákos Csejtey, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10).

Ordering info: halper.hu

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Rob Derke & The NYJazz Quartet
Blue Divide

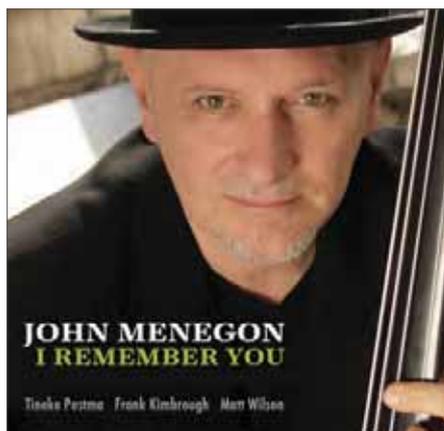
ZOHO 201401
★★★

Soprano saxophonist Rob Derke has enlisted three of the city's best youngish jazz musicians—pianist Aruán Ortiz, drummer Eric McPherson and bassist Carlo De Rosa—and composed material designed to

express (and stretch) their great skills and talents. Beyond the tunes—composed primarily by Derke with contributions from each member and a cover of Herbie Hancock's "Still Time"—*Blue Divide* is a delightful lesson in group interplay and improvisation. The NYJazz Quartet's music has an identity and immediacy lacking in many of the "cash and carry" jazz sessions (to quote Kenny Washington) currently being documented. The group's improvisations are the real highlight of the record, particularly from McPherson, who plays with such extraordinary detail, delicacy and dynamics (as in the solo to "Taksim") that he consistently connects the musical dots with a storyteller's precision. Relative newcomer Ortiz also shines, and when combined with De Rosa's lush fingering and Derke's cerebral solos, *Blue Divide* is a keenly illustrative jazz template.

—Ken Micallef

Blue Divide: Prelude; Pasillo Azul; Davey's Dreams; Dispossession; Knowing; G's Waltz; Taksim. (55:24)
Personnel: Rob Derke, soprano saxophone; Aruán Ortiz, piano; Carlo De Rosa, bass; Eric McPherson, drums.
Ordering info: zohomusic.com

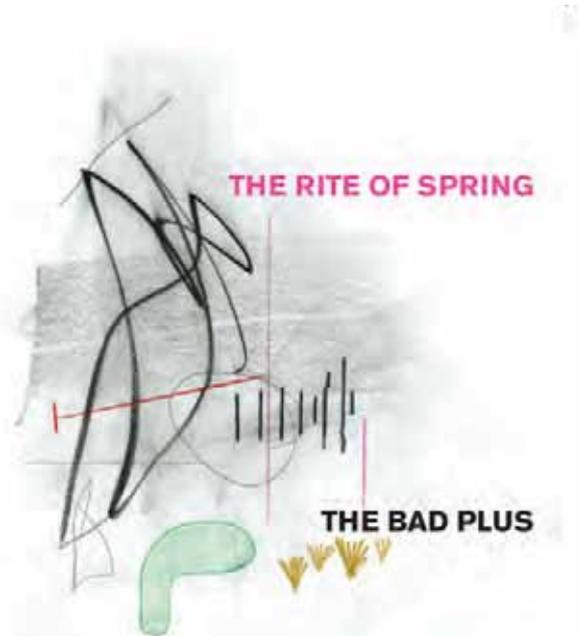


John Menegon
I Remember You
INNER CIRCLE MUSIC 036
★★★★

Canadian-bred John Menegon is in the line of George Mraz and Michael Moore: a harmonically sophisticated bassist with technical facility who swings hard when it's called for. This is his third album under his own name and like the two aforementioned mas-

ters, Menegon can articulate lyrically while laying down the law on standard changes—but he has other, more contemporary components to his music, too. Menegon's New York-based quartet serves up a sublime title tune (the only non-original), with Tineke Postma's clearwater soprano sax, but it's uncharacteristic. So much of this collection is rhythmically invigorating, and the rhythm section of Menegon, pianist Frank Kimbrough and drummer Matt Wilson gives a sense of playful exchange throughout. The push-pull of "Ray's Awareness" has each instrument displacing accents, looking for the holes and creative ways to phrase in a collective dance. It's nice to hear an album where the musicians sound like they're having a party. —Kirk Silsbee

I Remember You: Blues For David "Fathead" Newman; I Remember You; Ray's Awareness; Motian Detector; Pochismo; Gal; Late Night; New Ditty; Dewey Knew. (55:08)
Personnel: John Menegon, bass; Tineke Postma, alto, soprano saxophones; Frank Kimbrough, piano; Matt Wilson, drums; Teri Roiger, vocal (6, 8).
Ordering info: innercirclemusic.net



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Endless Possibilities

If the first wave of free-jazz breached the walls of stylistic proscription, what followed was a flood of possibility. Between the mid-'60s and early '70s, numerous artists explored the new territories.

Albert Ayler, *Lörrach, Paris 1966* (Hatology 703; 64:28 ★★★★★½) Of all the saxophonists who pushed through the gaps opened by Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, none were more emotionally and sonically compelling than the Cleveland-born tenor saxophonist Albert Ayler. The influence of his approach, which elevated melody, pure sound and emotion over any stylistic limitations, remains colossal to this day. But the story of his life and business fortunes was one of penury and tragedy only occasionally interrupted by glimmers of hope. This album comes from one of them. In 1966, he was invited to join a "Newport In Europe" tour booked by George Wein; this CD, now in its third digital edition, issues sets by his quintet, which were recorded for German and French radio. While the material overlapped, the performances were different enough, and spirited enough, that hearing them back-to-back is more of a thrill than a chore. With his trumpet-playing brother, Don, bearing down on the themes without restraint and a rhythm section that bridged march-time and no-time, and audibly enthusiastic audiences of respectable size, Ayler and violinist Samson had both a fund of energy to draw from and a sturdy foundation to launch them into the stratosphere. They took full advantage of it, taking the music to heights of gospel-steeped fervor. This record isn't quite as wide-ranging as the material Ayler recorded next year in Greenwich Village, but it's close.

Ordering info: hathut.com

Don Cherry, *Live In Stockholm* (Caprice 21832; 74:17 ★★★★★) After pocket trumpeter and multi-instrumentalist Don Cherry left Coleman's quartet in the early '60s, he went on a walkabout that took him throughout the world over the course of a decade. He absorbed sounds as he went, and incorporated them into his playing, which transformed the music he made from unfettered but idiomatically faithful jazz to a pan-global folk feast. This set dates from 1968, when he started putting down roots in Sweden. Married and buoyed by the nation's generous cultural support, he negotiated with the local Caprice label to release a set recorded in 1968 with Swedish and Turkish musicians, only to withdraw it before its release in favor of *Organic Music Society* (1972). *Live In Stockholm* did not deserve the 40-year waiting period. It's a fascinating transitional document, with stirring sections that recall Cherry's albums for Blue Note, interspersed with funky sections featuring him on piano. Loose percussion and flute passages presage the communal jams he would record during the '70s. For good measure, there's one such jam from 1971



included here, with Cherry's horn in full cry over an undulating carpet of hand percussion played by his students.

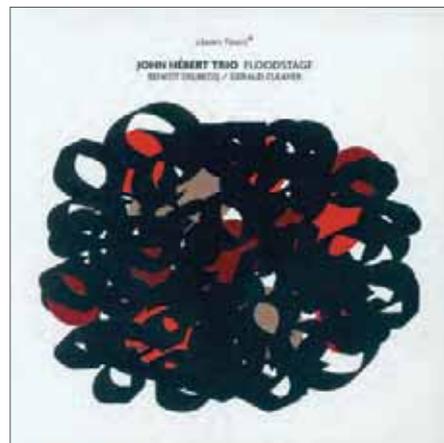
Ordering info: statensmusikverk.se/capricerecords

Brigitte Fontaine, *Comme à La Radio* (Superior Viaduct 042; 43:49 ★★★★★) Cherry wasn't the only American free-jazz musician to head to Europe in search of opportunities and receptive audiences. Members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, including Leo Smith and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, settled in Paris in 1969, where they were embraced by the city's radical student subculture. There they fell in with an actress and erstwhile pop singer named Brigitte Fontaine and her percussionist, Areski Belkacem. The resulting album, *Comme à La Radio*, uses the AACM musicians' laconic horns mixed with Middle Eastern elements that conjure up an eerie atmosphere on a set of French-language songs and incantations. This is the album's first U.S. release, and while the notes suffer from some mistakes and omissions, the new mastering job has more depth and dimension than the old French disc on Saravah.

Ordering info: superiorviaduct.com

Ran Blake, *Plays Solo Piano* (ESP-Disk 1011; 36:19 ★★★★★) Coleman hasn't worked much with pianists over the years, and they've returned the favor by rarely playing his compositions. Pianist Ran Blake stood well outside the mainstream when he covered Coleman's "Lonely Woman" on his solo debut in 1965, but not as far as he did in some of his treatments of more standard material. He combined liberal dissonance and a pitiless editor's instinct for what to leave out, with a very light touch and an evident appreciation for the blues, albeit fairly abstract blues. This record has not been part of ESP's wave of reissues until now, and the music has an aura of hiss that sounds like the CD may have been sourced from an old LP. Despite some blemishes, it's well worth seeking out in order to hear Blake's solution to the eternal question of how to establish singularity as an artist. **DB**

Ordering info: espdisk.com



John Hébert Trio *Floodstage*

CLEAN FEED 290

★★★★½

Bassist John Hébert has used his regional roots as a source of inspiration for years, riffing on the South Louisiana experience in his 2010 album, *Spiritual Lover* (Clean Feed), and touring with the support of a French American Jazz Exchange grant. The same band and mentality are in effect on *Floodstage*, with New Orleans replacing Cajun culture as his muse. That said, the Crescent City isn't so much given formal homage here. Rather, it serves as a point of departure for a musical conversation between Hébert, French pianist Benoît Delbecq and Detroit native Gerald Cleaver on drums. And because the diverse trio interprets Hébert's ideas together, it's a varied amalgam of emotions, references and cerebral constructs.

Delbecq's ghostly explorations of clavinet and effects supplement his keys on the opener, a quirky mix of tension-eliciting dissonant intervals and deeply pretty bass lines. "Red House In Nola" paints an aural picture, with Delbecq's timid key touches evoking the hollow sound of a high-ceilinged shotgun house, as Cleaver's rolling cymbal brushes and Hébert's occasional bent note suggest both warmth and impermanence. The buzzy, two-dimensional "Saints" seems out of place at first, but becomes more complete alongside its anxious partner, "Sinners." Neither plays to popular constructs of martyrdom or evildoing.

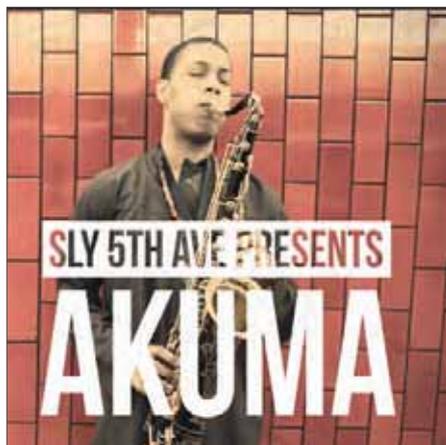
Two tracks here feel like direct descendants of Hébert's Louisiana experience. The jazz funeral standard "Just A Closer Walk With Thee" gets a slowed-down, bluesy treatment, full of sleepy pauses and relaxed time shifts. "On The Half Shell," meanwhile, reaches for groove, with the whole band having audible fun as effects skitter, pop and tweak their way across a cleverly oddball and entirely lyrical melody. Ultimately, Hébert's textured compositions and his bandmates' fearless probing of those sonic blueprints add up to something holistic, ultra-sentient and essentially human—not unlike the culture of South Louisiana itself.

—Jennifer Odell

Floodstage: Cold Brewed; Floodstage; Tan Hands; Red House in Nola; Holy Trinity; Morning Mama; Just A Closer Walk With Thee; Loire Valley; Saints; Sinners; On The Half Shell. (53:16)

Personnel: John Hébert, double bass; Benoît Delbecq, piano, analog synth (1, 2), trionics (1, 2); Gerald Cleaver, drums.

Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com



Sly5thAve
Akuma

TRUTH REVOLUTION RECORDS

★★★★★

Saxophonist Sylvester Onyejiaka, Sly5thAve, shows he is a sophisticated composer with a promising future on his debut disc, *Akuma*.

Originally from Austin, Texas, and now based in New York, Onyejiaka has toured with Prince and the New Power Generation and currently backs Prince alumna, vocalist Liv Warfield. Here he steps out as a leader, pulling together a sextet with strong contributions from guests like violinist Zach Brock and vocalist Denitia Odigie.

The music is written with care and played with gusto. *Akuma* starts off with the three-part “Suite For Ogbuefi,” and it feels more suited to a concert hall—though you might expect to find a guy named Sly5thAve in a small, bawdy club. (Which isn’t to say that the emerging “jazz-bro” crowd won’t go crazy for this release; but the songs seem to want more of a suit-and-tie presentation.)

The *Akuma* project began two years ago, when the saxophonist traveled to Nigeria to explore his African roots. On the album, he has fused those influences with contemporary jazz, and the songs reflect a mix of complexity and ebullience. There’s a lot of energy here, as if the album was recorded live, with the band feeding off a voracious crowd. There are even moments where one might expect to hear joyful shouts from the audience—though they never bubble up.

Onyejiaka’s compositional strengths are so expansive, and the songs so large and rich, that his own playing is subdued in comparison. This isn’t to say the man doesn’t have chops. Yet for a guy so talented, he has focused his attention on the work as a whole, where he functions more like an accent color in the palate, as opposed to filling up every negative space like some other young artists might do on their debuts. It’s truly something to be admired.

While Onyejiaka gives the compositions space, Trumpeter Jay Jennings—known for his work with the Grammy award-winning group Snarky Puppy as well as keyboardist Jesse

Fischer—grabs the listener’s attention every time he appears. He’s dynamic and captivating, and makes the compositions pop.

Brock, known prominently for his recent work with bassist Stanley Clarke, provides a solo in the middle of “Bach” that reaches to such dizzying heights, it seems like he has vibrated out of the song altogether—until the head appears again.

But with so much going in each composition, there aren’t a lot of opportunities for

each individual soloist to shine. Fortunately, Onyejiaka has created a cohesive group sound, setting the bar stupendously high for each player.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Akuma: Suite For Ogbuefi—I; Suite For Ogbuefi—II; Suite For Ogbuefi—III; Basslude; Akuma; Bach; Security; Prelude; Deme; Lolo; Road To Abuja; Abuja. (63:43)

Personnel: Sylvester Onyejiaka, saxophone; Ross Pederson, drums; Daniel Foose, bass; Hajime Yoshida, electric guitar; Keita Ogawa, percussion; Jay Jennings, trumpet; Brad Williams, acoustic guitar (7, 10); Cory Henry, piano; Wurflitzer (1–3, 10); Phil Lassiter, trumpet (7); John Leadbetter, flute (5, 7); Zach Brock, violin (6, 10); Denitia Odigie, vocals (8, 9).

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Dispatch From Lisbon

Give a trusted writer an assignment and you'll probably get some good writing. Let that writer write what he or she wants, you're likely to get something else entirely. That's the case with **Arrivals/Departures—New Horizons in Jazz** (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation), a 240-page book (available in English and Portuguese) celebrating the 30-year history of Lisbon's Jazz em Agosto Festival.

Three established writers—Stuart Broomer, Brian Morton and Bill Shoemaker—tackle the durable but highly innovative and unpredictable festival's history. Fifty selected artists and ensembles represent the crème de la crème of the jazz and improvising musicians who have performed at Jazz em Agosto since the festival's inception in 1984.

The book has sections on the late drummer Max Roach, Dutch saxophonist Willem Breuker, Swiss composer Sylvie Courvoisier, Portuguese saxophonist Rodrigo Amado and the Orkestrova Electric Ascension. The artist bios serve as short histories, with references to the festival and an informed list of recommended recordings. With a page layout that lets the text breathe, plus great festival photos and reproductions of album covers, *Arrivals/Departures* adds up to a handy, dandy thesaurus of what's been hep—and what's *still* hep—in the world of international jazz.

The book opens with Broomer's extensive introduction "Jazz ... And How It Gets This Way." The essay goes through jazz's history and the circuitous nature of contemporary jazz, which encompasses so much more than just a reinvention of what came before it. Broomer studiously refers to each of the included artists in ways that both introduce them but also pulls them into the narrative of the festival.

The artists in the book are presented alphabetically, from Muhal Richard Abrams to John Zorn. The takeaway here—as in all well-written, if not always spot-on, devotionals—comes from certain insights that the writers give about the artists.

About Abrams, Morton writes: "His musical instincts were formed in the perception that what he was learning as a student at Chicago's Roosevelt University ... was somehow disconnected from what he was seeing and hearing on the Chicago streets."

Broomer offers sharp insight on bassist Joëlle

Arrivals/ Departures— New Horizons in Jazz



Léandre's improvisational technique: "There is the palpable sense that Léandre starts with a blank slate for every performance, that she finds form in real time, and that whatever beauty she may create, it is a one-time occurrence, never to be replicated."

Shoemaker writes vividly about extra-musical concerns. On pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach, he writes: "Evan Parker observed years ago that improvising musicians unified Europe long before the politicians. Alexander von Schlippenbach played a singular role in the that process, bringing together musicians from both sides of a divided continent in an occupied Berlin—no small feat in the era of Mutually Assured Destruction."

Some readers may find the writing stilted, attractive only to academics, zealous fans or serious music followers. Enough! *Arrivals/Departures* is a festive and ingenious way to celebrate the work of an important European jazz festival.

Like so many cities on the continent, Lisbon is a grand meeting place, a crossroads for adventurous music-making, and Jazz em Agosto encapsulates this spirit. *Arrivals/Departures* is a portable reimagining for the dedicated listener and reader.

DB

Ordering info: montra@gulbenkian.pt



Jacob Anderskov *Strings, Percussion & Piano*

ILK 206

★★★★

By freshly marrying elements of contemporary classical music, jazz and folk, ascending Danish pianist-composer Jacob Anderskov has done the aesthetics-challenged world of so-called chamber jazz a huge favor with his latest album.

A beautifully conceived set of music for an ensemble for three string players and piano and drums—the latter two embodying the more card-carrying jazz ethos—Anderskov's album plays like a generally melancholic and contemplative suite of six connected pieces.

Known commodities and concepts are reconsidered here. The 7/4 rhythmic urgings of the opening "Soil," the album's most driving track, yields to a more introspective air on "Waldhorn." There's a restless improvisational impulse on the short but nervously energized "Impermanence I," while Arvo Pärt-ish poise meets polytonal logic on the hypnotic "Spring In B."

Anderskov has a fluid way of mating music to titles. On "Diamonds Are For Unreal People III," he reaches a Morton Feldman-ish quality of stillness and suspended repose, with tension in the wings.

The closing, 10-minute "Post Industrial Stone Age" is another melancholic rumination, and vis-à-vis the paradoxical title, the music's loose mix of scored strings and looser rumblings from piano and drums attains a quality at once earthy and cerebral.

Throughout, the pianist's own technical and expressive powers come through in measured, restrained doses. On this project, the leader surrenders to a dialogue of parts and a conceptualized whole, rather than seizing the solo spotlight. His role as composer and ensemble architect is paramount here. The results are impressive and gently groundbreaking.

—Josef Woodard

Strings, Percussion & Piano: Soil; Waldhorn; Impermanence I; Hungarian Conditions; Spring In B; Diamonds Are For Unreal People III; Post Industrial Stone Age. (46:21)

Personnel: Jacob Anderskov, piano; Christine Pryn, violin; Annette Slaatto, viola; Ida Norholm, cello; Peter Bruun, drums.

Ordering info: ilkmusic.com

Ben Flocks
Battle Mountain

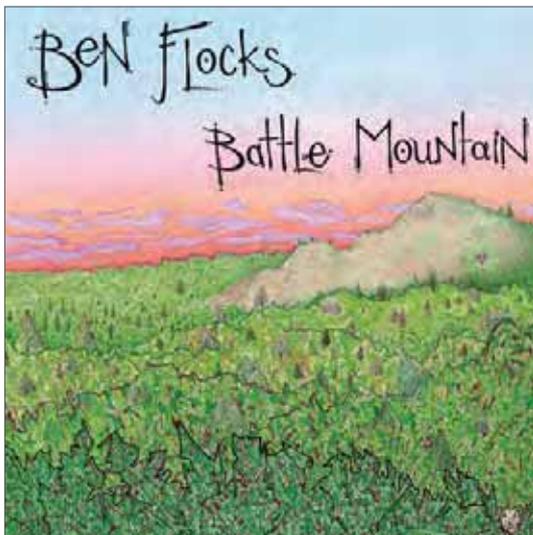
SELF-RELEASE

★★★★

The coastal magnificence between Santa Cruz and San Francisco is unlike anywhere else in the world. The roads twist and dip unexpectedly while winds can blow from any and every direction. Ben Flocks, a 24-year-old saxophonist, hails from that Pacific paradise, and his debut is a jovial mix of American musical styles well suited for a ride down Highway 1.

Guitarist Ari Chersky is an essential force on this disc, helping Flocks transmit the grooves in various ways. He hovers on album opener, "Battle Mountain," with a moody surf twang that grounds Flocks' rumbling horn and drummer Evan Hughes' riptide torrent. His sly six-string touches to a roadhouse rendition of "Gee Baby Ain't I Good To You?" add a modern feel, juxtaposed next to Flocks' Big Jay McNeely-esque honk. Keyboardist Sam Reider lends a pounding modernism to a soaring cover of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice It's Alright," before switching over to the accordion for a zydeco-inflected stomp through Leadbelly's "Silver City Bound." Unexpected to say the least, but it works well with Flocks' confident tone conjuring Sonny Rollins' "St. Thomas" at a crawfish boil.

Flocks' original "Boardwalk Boogaloo" main-



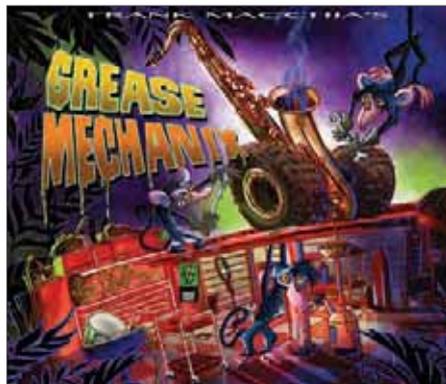
tains that hot-fun-in-the-summertime feel with an homage to Santa Cruz's seaside wonderland, no doubt wailing on his tenor with a sizable grin. Between the old-timey tunes and upbeat vibes, the band comes across as though they were booked for a school dance rather than a concert hall—and that's a good thing.

—Sean J. O'Connell

Battle Mountain: Battle Mountain; Shenandoah; Don't Think Twice It's Alright; Eagle Rock; Murmullo; Silver City Bound; Polka Dots And Moonbeams; Boardwalk Boogaloo; Gee Baby Ain't I Good to You; Tennessee Waltz; Return To Battle Mountain. (57:12)

Personnel: Ben Flocks, tenor saxophone; Ari Chersky, guitar; Evan Hughes, drums; Garret Lang, bass; Sam Reider, piano, Fender Rhodes, accordion.

Ordering info: benflocks.com



Frank Macchia
Grease Mechanix

CACOPHONY INC 524

★★★

From the cover of his new CD, *Grease Mechanix*—which portrays Ralph Bakshi-esque monkeys fixing instruments—to the overly dramatic arrangements, Frank Macchia pursues a decidedly gonzo vibe.

Most of the songs here are on overdrive, with loud trombones and high-climaxing solos from the reeds. It's refreshing in an era of *too* serious jazz to hear a band that takes their music seriously—but not that seriously. Instrumentals such as "Chicken Neck," with its cartoon-theme lines, and

"Atonal Dance Party," with its jagged syncopation and tense saxophones, push the music over the top in a good way, making some of the songs sound like they could be exciting movie soundtracks.

Continuing on the gonzo theme, several songs feature Macchia and Tracy London's raspy vocals. Every bad-luck superstition you can think of is detailed on "Bad Juju," and there's tragic lament on "Zombies Ate My Grandma." The band plays a simple and beautiful ballad, "Shhhh!," and another ballad reminiscent of Neal Hefti's work for the Basie band, "Bucket O' Tears."

Macchia and his band wear their Frank Zappa and brassy, '70s big band-fusion influence on their sleeves. (Trumpeter Walt Fowler played with Zappa, and Peter Erskine manned the drums for both Maynard Ferguson and Weather Report). But the balance between fusion and sweet-hearted ballads make this a fine record, full of energy.

—David Kunian

Grease Mechanix: Buckin' Bronco; Zombies Ate My Grandma; Chicken Neck; Shhhh!; Bad Juju; Fat Cat; Squiggles; I'm So Damn Mad!; Bucket O' Tears; Atonal Dance Party; Sweet Patootie Waltz; Bulldog; Fatback Bubblebath. (72:45)

Personnel: Eric Marienthal, alto saxophone, flute; Brandon Fields, alto, tenor saxophones, flute, piccolo; Bob Sheppard, tenor saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet; Frank Macchia, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, piccolo, clarinet, contrabass clarinet, vocals; Sal Lozano, baritone saxophone, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet; Jay Mason, bass saxophone, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet; Wayne Bergeron, Dan Formero, Walt Fowler, trumpet, flugelhorn; Alex Iles, Kevin Porter, trombone; Craig Gosnell, bass trombone; Bill Reichensbach, tuba; Ken Rosser, electric guitar, banjo, baritone guitar; Peter Erskine, drums; Brad Dutz, congas, bongos, tambourine, shaker, cowbell, flexitone; Tracy London, vocals.

Ordering info: frankmacchia.net

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Leyla McCalla
Vari-Colored Songs

MUSIC MAKER 142
★★★★★

Former Carolina Chocolate Drops member Leyla McCalla subtitles her first solo album “A Tribute To Langston Hughes.” For eight songs here, her warm, pristine singing voice, secure in tone and pacing, elicits truths from the poetry of a beloved 20th-century literary giant who wrote about the black experience, using the pulsing rhythms of jazz and blues. Also important to the success of the session is her assured playing on tenor banjo, guitar and her primary instrument, cello. (She’s also influenced by

Louisiana Creole fiddle styles.) “Song For A Dark Girl,” about the lynching of a young black woman, is suggestive of Abel Meeropol’s poem “Strange Fruit” (made famous by the Billie Holiday song, of course). McCalla draws listeners in through the haunting play between the stark heartbreak in her voice and the stinging irony of the Hughes verse: “Bruised body high in the air, / I asked the white Lord Jesus / What was the use of prayer.”

Beyond the Hughes tribute tracks, the 28-year-old New Orleanian (who grew up in New Jersey) shows she has her heart set on exploring the folk music of her family’s home country, Haiti, and its connection to Creole culture in Louisiana. (She’s surely aware of Alan Lomax’s Haiti field recordings.) Singing in Haitian Creole, McCalla gives sincere thanks to a higher power on the traditional song “Mesi Bondye.” Her strong original composition “When I Can See The Valley” points to the rural American South of yesteryear. Suffice to say, McCalla’s solo career is off to a splendid start.

—Frank-John Hadley

Vari-Colored Songs: Heart Of Gold; When I Can See The Valley; Mesi Bondye; Giri; Kamèn Sa W Fè?; Too Blue; Manman Mwen; Song For A Dark Girl; Love Again Blues; Rose Marie; Latibonit; Search; Lonely House; Changing Tide. (40:41)

Personnel: Leyla McCalla, vocals, cello (1–4, 11, 13), guitar (8, 9, 12), tenor banjo (3–7, 10, 13, 14); Tom Pryor, pedal steel guitar (1, 3, 4, 14); Luke Winslow-King, guitar (6, 9); Don Vappie, tenor banjo (11); Matt Rhody, fiddle (9); Hubby Jenkins, guitar (10), bones (11); Joseph De-Jarnette, bass (1); Cassidy Holden, bass (6, 9, 11); Rhiannon Giddens, shaker (7, 10), vocals (7, 10, 12).

Ordering info: musicmaker.org



Kaja Draksler
The Lives Of Many Others

CLEAN FEED 286
★★★★★

The young Slovenian pianist Kaja Draksler shows off a wealth of sturdy ideas and nonchalant technique on this stunning solo recording. Her music rigorously extracts ideas from contemporary classical music, situating them within the dynamic rhythmic vocabulary of jazz—yet there’s nothing here that reeks of glib hybridization of flaccid Third Stream concepts.

The album opens with the bracing title piece, where Draksler uses some kind of metallic brush to create bruising, astringent scrapes and ominously resonant beats, only to tame the thunderous volume and intensity with delicate, ritualistic bell-like clanging. The serenity creates a platform for a stunning and surprisingly melodic improvisation, in which her glistening expansion of a simple phrase suggests Abdullah Ibrahim improvising on a phrase from a Beethoven sonata. She composed everything on the album except “Vsi So Venci Vejli,” a traditional Slovenian piece treated with a glacial pace and hung with gauzy, sorrowful harmonies.

“Communicational Entropy / Andromeda” opens with a forceful, insistent pulse before exploding into glassy clusters à la Cecil Taylor, but the pianist keeps returning to manic rhythmic figures, using her instrument’s low end as a recurring exclamation mark, whether for thunderclaps or pointillistic jabs. The second half of the work settles into a delicate meditation, abruptly transferring the energy of the first half into focused contemplation. “Army Of Drops” rides on the insistent left-hand figures you might expect from Chris McGregor, but she turns them on their head with moody introspection.

The album closer, “Delicious Irony,” is something of a halting processional, its graceful melodic figures tripped up by sudden harmonic detours and unexpected rhythmic displacements. I’m curious to hear more of Draksler as an improviser, but her voice as a composer already seems fully formed.

—Peter Margasak

The Lives Of Many Others: The Lives Of Many Others; Vsi So Venci Vejli; Communicational Entropy / Andromeda; Suite; Wringer / Erier / Strong Than (Just A Thought) / I Recall; I Walked Into Yesterday; Army Of Drops; Delicious Irony. (42:00)

Personnel: Kaja Draksler, piano.

Ordering info: cleanfeed-records.com

Matt Renzi
Rise And Shine

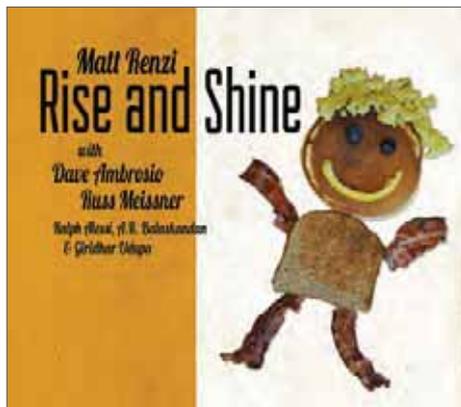
THREE P’S 003
★★½

The trio of a horn player with bass and drums is relatively rare for a reason: It’s damn hard for a lone horn to navigate all that space left by the absence of an instrument that can play chords. Matt Renzi, who plays oboe, clarinet and flute in addition to his usual sax on *Rise And Shine*, seems to like that challenge, though even he brings in trumpeter Ralph Alessi from time to time here to shore things up.

He also brings in some Indian percussion. A.R. Balaskandan’s mridangam drum livens up two tracks and is given a full-on showcase on “Tha Thom,” and Giridhar Udupa contributes some tala vocalizations at the end of opener “Noasis,” taking the song to a much stranger place than it initially seems inclined to go.

“Noasis” is a microcosm of the album’s strengths and weaknesses, opening with a robust theme but losing its sense of form as it goes. The tala section is tacked on at the end and never feels integrated with the rest of the piece.

Other tracks lose their way as well, and several solos get trapped in an odd box where



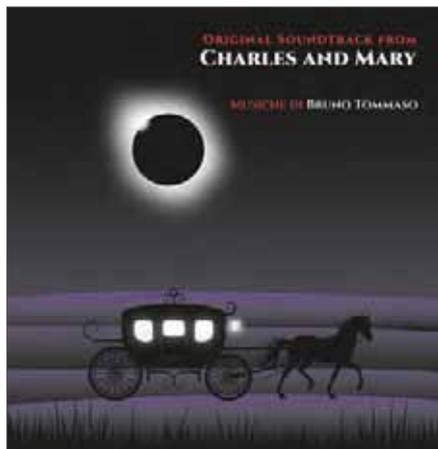
Renzi intentionally allows notes to die just shy of where the listener thinks they’re going. “SP,” on which he layers himself on his full arsenal of woodwinds, has an interesting texture, but the measured approach to recording neuters the rhythm section. Renzi has some interesting ideas and is a capable player, but *Rise And Shine* doesn’t quite deliver on either.

—Joe Tangari

Rise And Shine: Noasis; Rise And Shine; Wall Tune; SP; Tha Thom; Number Two; Animals, Come Forth; Vetro. (47:00)

Personnel: Matt Renzi, saxophone, oboe, clarinet, flute; Dave Ambrosio, bass; Russ Meissner, drums; Ralph Alessi, trumpet; A.R. Balaskandan, mridangam; Giridhar Udupa, vocal percussion.

Ordering info: threepsrecords.com



Bruno Tommaso Original Soundtrack From Charles And Mary

ONYX JAZZ CLUB 025

★★★★

Bassist-composer Bruno Tommaso is mostly known through his associations with the forward-looking Italian Instabile Orchestra and free-jazz saxophonist Mario Schiano. On his latest opus, he puts music to a story that has captured the imagination of many for centuries: In 1590, Carlo Gesualdo, an Italian nobleman and gifted composer, allegedly murdered his wife, Donna Maria d'Avalos, and her assumed lover.

To perform his score, Tommaso has assembled a 13-piece ensemble, including a string quartet. The work oscillates between chamber and orchestral jazz. Considering the historical events that inspired it, one would expect a somber mood, and quite a bit of drama. However, *Charles And Mary* is filled with lovely melodies and tasteful arrangements, showcasing rich voicings and carefully articulated transitions.

Tommaso's goal is not to offer jazz versions of Gesualdo's music. (Another Italian arranger, Corrado Guarino, did that in the late 1990s with his album *Gesualdo*.) Instead, Tommaso tries to tell the story as vividly as possible—though he achieves mixed results. The swinging, upbeat blues "Il Blues Dei 314 Servi" feels out of place. Much better suited are the slightly cacophonous "La Pulce Nell'Orecchio," an ominous sign of what is to come, and the elegiac closer, "Funebre." Pianist Andrea Pellegrini, guitarist Marco Cattani and flutist Riccardo Parucci give dedicated and inspired performances throughout.

Tommaso pays tribute to the infamous composer through the vocal quality of the ensemble passages—Gesualdo exclusively wrote madrigals and other vocal pieces—which ends up being the most original aspect of the creation.

—Alain Drouot

Original Soundtrack From Charles And Mary: Wedding March; La Chiave; La Pulce Nell'Orecchio; Falsa Battuta Di Caccia; Messaggera D'Amore; Killing Lovers; Fuga Al Castello; Rosso Cardinale; Fuga Del Castello; Fredde Accoglienti Mura; Wedding March; Il Blues Dei 314 Servi; Funebre. (42:49)

Personnel: Riccardo Parrucci, flute; Fabrizio Desideri, saxophone, clarinet; Rossano Emili, bass clarinet; Marco Bartolini, trumpet, flugelhorn; Gloria Merani, violin; Marco Domenichelli, violin; Flaminia Zanelli, viola; Elisabetta Casapieri, cello; Marco Cattani, guitar; Andrea Pellegrini, piano; Giacomo Riggi, vibraphone; Nino Pellegrini, bass; Paolo Corsi, drums; Bruno Tommaso, direction.

Ordering info: onyxjazzclub.it

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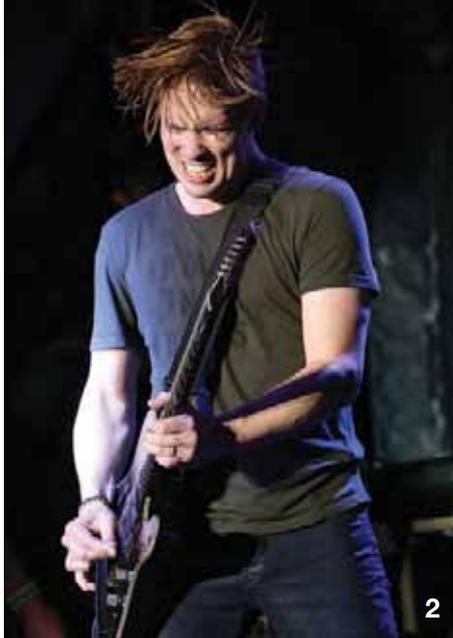
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Musicians'

GEAR GUIDE

BEST OF THE NAMM Show 2014

This year's NAMM Show, held Jan. 23–26 at the Anaheim Convention Center, brought together the entire musical instruments industry for four days of new product showcases and demonstrations. As usual, plenty of great players showed up as well—some as endorsers for musical gear, others as performers at the convention's numerous after-hours concerts and all-star jams. In the following pages, DownBeat presents the best of The NAMM Show, a trade-only event that is not open to the general public.

REPORTING BY KATHLEEN COSTANZA, ED ENRIGHT, DAVIS INMAN, KATIE KAILUS AND BOBBY REED.



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11

1. Allen Vizzutti demonstrates a Xeno trumpet at the Yamaha booth. 2. Jonny Lang performs at the NAMM GoPro Stage (Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM). 3. Greg Osby with his P. Mauriat System-76 Signature series alto saxophone. 4. Jody Espina (left) of JodyJazz and Jason Gano of Marshall USA perform on the Hilton lobby stage with The Presidents. 5. Otis Taylor plays in the Marriott lobby. 6. Todd Rundgren rocks out after receiving the Les Paul Award during the 29th Annual TEC Awards (Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM). 7. Hal Blaine (center) gets inducted into the TEC Hall of Fame by Jim Keltner (left) and Chad Smith (Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM). 8. Brockett Parsons of Lady Gaga's band shows off the PianoArc at the QRS Music Technologies booth. 9. Keith Emerson makes a surprise appearance at Hammond Organ's 2014 Soul Summit. 10. Smokey Robinson poses with his 2014 Music for Life Award (Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM). 11. Eric Marienthal wails onstage at VandoJam. 12. Jake Hertzog (left) and Eric Udel jam at the Aalberg Audio booth. 13. Tommy Igoe gives a drum demo at the Yamaha booth. 14. Keyan Williams demonstrates the Durga alto sax mouthpiece at the Theo Wanne booth. 15. Sheila E. lays down a groove at the NAMM Show Grand Plaza (Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM). 16. Orianthi performs at the Roland booth (Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM).



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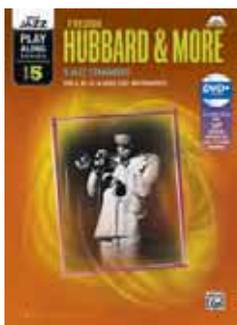


16

Band & Orchestra



CONCERT TUBA: The Eastman EBB534 is a 4/4 "American style" BB \flat tuba with four front-action valves to help players of various sizes find a comfortable playing position. With its .687-inch bore, 20-inch bell, yellow brass construction and nickel-silver leadpipe, the EBB534 has a warm, centered tone that is capable of powerful projection. It features precise intonation with good flexibility at any dynamic level. [eastmanmusiccompany.com]



FREDDIE'S JAMS: Alfred's *Freddie Hubbard & More Play-Along, Vol. 5* has parts for C, B-flat, E-flat and bass-clef instruments, with sample jazz solos written out for each tune. An accompanying DVD lets players slow down or speed up the tempo and loop sections for practice. [alfred.com]

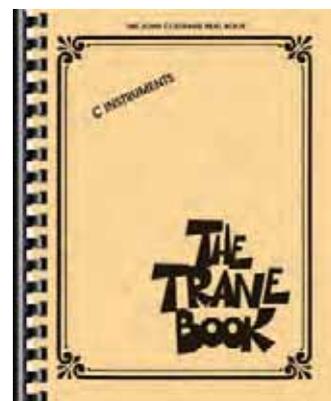


VELVETY FLUGEL: Cannonball's 779/779-L Flugelhorn (available in raw brass and lacquer finishes) features patent-pending cocobolo wood bracing and a unique combination of bell size, bell taper and bore size. The resulting tone is dark and velvety. The 779/779-L slots with exceptional ease, most notably in flugelhorn's high register. [cannonballmusic.com]

PRO-ONE COMPLETION: Soprano and baritone sax models complete Antigua's Pro-One line, which previously included only alto and tenor models. Notable Pro-One features include an ergonomic keyboard, G-sharp lifting mechanism, F-sharp bridge key and trident key arms. The baritone model has a specially designed neck by Peter Ponzol. [antiguawinds.com]



EXPANDED RESERVES: D'Addario Woodwinds has expanded its Reserve line to include the X10E hard-rubber clarinet mouthpiece. Pitched at A=442, the new model features added resistance without sacrificing response, flexibility of color or pitch. [daddario.com]



THE REAL TRANE: *The Trane Book* from Hal Leonard showcases 125 of the saxophonist's memorabilia works, including "Giant Steps," "Afro Blue," "Body And Soul" and many more. Other new Real Book publications include *The Real Jazz Solos Book*, *The Real Latin Book* and *The Real Vocal Book, Vol. 3*. [halleonard.com]



ARGENTINEAN CANE: Zonda has expanded its line of reeds, which are available for soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophone as well as bass clarinet. They are also available in two different cuts for B \flat clarinet (Supreme and Classico). All reeds are made from premium Argentinean cane. [stlouismusic.com]



NATURAL FIBERS: Fiberreed's Tantra reed, produced from organic hemp fibers, makes high-register playing easy and enables a big, smooth-sounding low register. The hemp reed is complemented by the Tantra saxophone mouthpiece by Theo Wanne, which uses a "gilled" medium chamber to produce a large-chamber tone. [fiberreed.com]



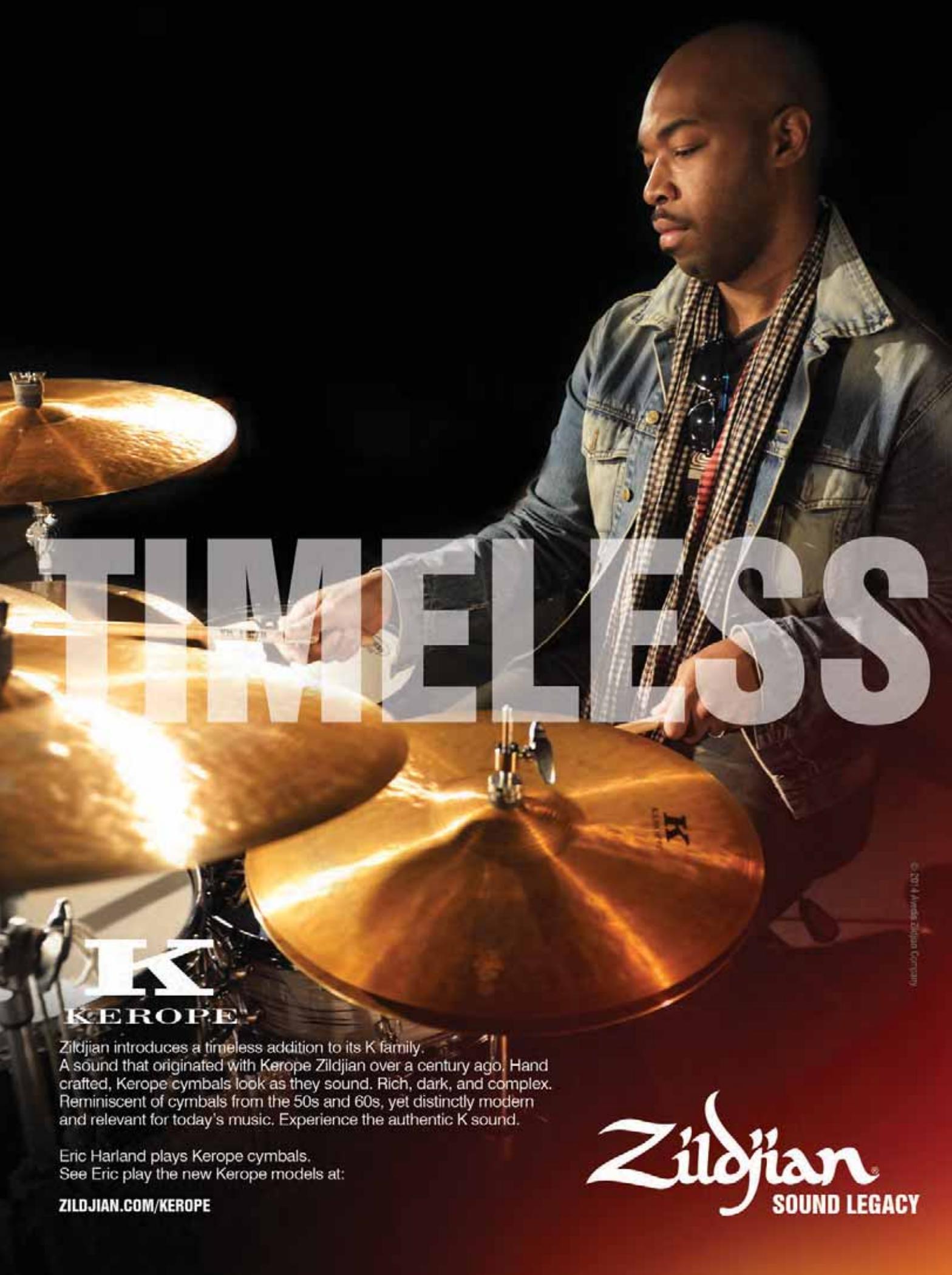
V16 REVAMP: Vandoren has redesigned and expanded its V16 metal tenor saxophone mouthpieces. The line now includes a large-chamber model with a 1940s tone, a medium-chamber model with a 1950s vibe and a small-chamber model that's virtually identical to Vandoren's original metal V16. The revamped mouthpieces have no baffle and noticeably less edge. [dansr.com]



SPACE-AGE LIG: Silverstein Works' self-adjusting clarinet and saxophone ligatures are designed to minimize surface contact and allow for maximum vibration. They hold the reed in place using a cord made of the same stretch-proof material that secured the landing parachute on NASA's Mars Rover. [silversteinworks.com]



REINVENTED FLUTES: Yamaha's revamped professional flutes have a hand-finished, sterling silver A-cut headjoint that provides colorful tone and a wide dynamic range. Heavy wall body construction on the 600 and 700 series models contributes to a warm sound and improved resonance. [yamaha.com]



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Zildjian introduces a timeless addition to its K family. A sound that originated with Kerope Zildjian over a century ago. Hand crafted, Kerope cymbals look as they sound. Rich, dark, and complex. Reminiscent of cymbals from the 50s and 60s, yet distinctly modern and relevant for today's music. Experience the authentic K sound.

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Pro Audio

ZOOM IN: Zoom's H6 six-channel portable recorder features a series of interchangeable mic capsules, including XY and mid-side modules, so users can customize their recording experience. [\[zoom-na.com\]](http://zoom-na.com)



WIRELESS PERFORMER: Shure's GLXD16 bodypack wireless system puts the performer in control. The system supports 16 hours of continuous use and features a guitar pedal receiver and tuner. [\[shure.com\]](http://shure.com)



TRUE TONE: DPA's d:vote 4099 instrument microphones capture the natural sound of instruments. The clip-style mic features a modular design that can be used for violin, guitar, woodwinds and more. [\[dpamicrophones.com\]](http://dpamicrophones.com)

PORTABLE PA: JBL's EON615 portable PA system is purposefully designed for a broad range of customers. The system features waveguide technology and has Bluetooth integration for wireless EQ control. [\[jbl.com\]](http://jbl.com)



HOME MONITORING: Tannoy's Reveal 402 monitors are ideal for use in a home studio. The monitors feature new driver, amp and cabinet designs and come with an aux link. [\[tannoy.com\]](http://tannoy.com)

HEAR THIS: Westone's UM Pro 50 in-ear monitoring headphones deliver enhanced sound for the stage or studio. The headphones combine five balanced armature drivers with a three-way passive crossover network. [\[westone.com\]](http://westone.com)



SONIC PRESERVATION: Audio-Technica has revamped its M50x headphones, adding new features like three detachable cables and improved ear-pad and headband material, while keeping the same sonic signature. [\[audio-technica.com\]](http://audio-technica.com)

GO-TIME: Mackie's DL1608 mixer takes advantage of mobile technology. The mixer can be controlled wirelessly by an iPad using Mackie's Master Fader app. [\[mackie.com\]](http://mackie.com)



RACK-STYLE: Allen & Heath's QU-16 is a rack-mountable small-format digital mixer with features that include motorized faders and iPad wireless control. [\[allen-heath.com\]](http://allen-heath.com)



MODULAR PRODUCTION: Avid's flagship S6 modular control surface brings together technology from Euphonix, Digidesign and Avid. Each section is a module, so users can assemble the width and the depth of each piece of the console. [\[avid.com\]](http://avid.com)

Drums

JAZZ STICKS: The Jive and Swing maple sticks from Los Cabos Drumsticks were designed specifically for jazz. The Swing has an elongated oval tip for depth of tone from drums and cymbals, while the Jive features a ball tip for a more focused, bright sound.

[loscabosdrumsticks.com]



TWICE THE OPTIONS:

Constructed of siam oak, Tycoon's DOHC cajon has two distinct chambers and sound holes for a combination of deep bass and snare slaps.

[tycoonpercussion.com]

REIGNING DRUMHEADS:

Made with two plies—a 7mm clear film and 7.5mm Ebony film—Remo's black Emperor Ebony Drumheads are loud and focused. They are available in 6- to 18-inch sizes. [remo.com]



ON THE EDGE:

Mapex's Armory series includes the new SONIClear Bearing Edge, which lets the drumhead sit flat on the edge of the shell for deeper pitch and easy tuning. The hybrid shell is constructed of maple and birch.

[mapexdrums.com]



DARKER K'S:

The darker-sounding cymbals from Zildjian's new Keropé line reflect the sounds of the 1950s and '60s and come in 14- and 15-inch hi-hats as well as 18-, 19-, 20- and 22-inch ride and crash models. [zildjian.com]



VERSATILE COWBELL:

Players can play Latin Percussion's stainless-steel Guira cowbell traditionally or use its textured side as a guira. The cowbells are available in handheld or mountable models.

[lpmusic.com]



OUT OF THIS UNIVERSE: Sonor's limited-edition Nebula SQ2 kit is built from high-density North American maple and features a custom airbrushed finish depicting images sent back from the Hubble telescope. The kit is handmade in Germany.

[playhohner.com]



CELEBRATORY SNARES:

Tama's 40th Anniversary snare drum series reintroduces the high-quality snares that made the company famous: the '70s Superstar Snare Drum, the '80s Bell Brass and Rosewood drums, the '90s Starclassic G-Maple and the 2000-era steel Starphonic snare. [tama.com]



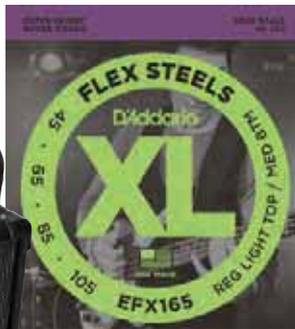
STICK FLIP: With a simple fold, this bag from Sabian's new accessories division transforms into a standing bag that holds sticks upright for easy access while playing.

[sabian.com]



Guitars & Amps

CORE POWER: Blackstar's ID:Core amplifiers feature the core attributes of Blackstar's original ID:Series. The programmable, wide-stereo guitar amps are small in size but deliver huge tone. Well-suited for personal practicing or bedroom jamming along with an MP3 player or CD, the compact ID:Core amplifiers are available in 10-, 20- and 40-watt configurations. [blackstaramps.com]



GET FLEXIBLE: D'Addario's new FlexSteels bass strings deliver flexible feel coupled with a deep, round tone and just the right amount of punch and bite optimized for—but not limited to—slap and fingerstyle playing. Available for four-, five- and six-string basses. [daddario.com]

PLAY LIKE SMOKEY: Eastman's Lil' Smokey thinline electric guitar features a big-body sound that's suitable for jazz, blues and rock. The instrument boasts a reduced 14-inch body style, a double venetian-style cutaway with hand-carved maple top, and carved solid mahogany back and sides. [eastmanguitars.com]



COMBO COILS: Fishman Fluence pickups incorporate a combination of new technologies including Fluence Core coils and true dual-voice electronics to consistently create the idealized versions of classic sounds. The "dual-voice" feature lets players transform their individual pickups from Vintage to Hot, "line-in" Clean or Death Defying (depending on the model), with the appropriate level and gain for each voice. [fishman.com]



i-COMPATIBLE AMP: Line 6's AMPLiFi combines a high-performance guitar amp, a streaming Bluetooth speaker system and an iOS app into one device. AMPLiFi is the ultimate Bluetooth speaker system for guitarists, featuring streaming compatibility with Android, iOS, Mac and PC devices. The AMPLiFi Remote app for iOS lets guitarists control every aspect of their tones from an iOS device. [line6.com]



MODERN MARVEL: Fender's '65 Deluxe Reverb amp in classic black is ideal for rock, country or blues players who want a moderately powered amp they can crank up at the gig or in the studio. It features 22 watts of tube power, two 6V6 Groove Tubes output tubes, one 5AR4 rectifier tube, four 12AX7 preamp tubes, two 12AT7 tubes, dual channels (normal and vibrato), tube-driven Fender reverb, tube vibrato, and two-button footswitch for reverb and vibrato on-off. [fender.com]



BASS LINE: Yamaha's TRBX series of electric basses come in four- and five-string models. The four-string TRBX304 and TRBX504, along with the five-string TRBX305 and TRBX505, include new EQ and pickup innovations. All four models feature a five-piece maple/mahogany neck for stability and tone. [usa.yamaha.com]



MAXIMUM VOLUUM: Sonuus' Voluum stomp box is a volume-based analog multi-effect with a digitally controlled, high-fidelity, pure-analog signal path for guitar and bass. Constant high-voltage analog power rails ensure high headroom with low distortion and low noise for maximum signal clarity. [sonuus.com]





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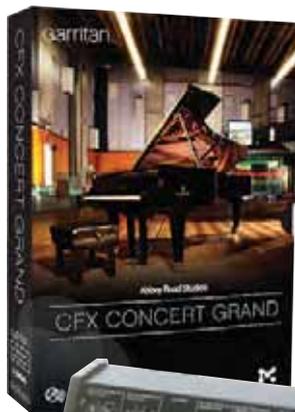
WWW.HARRELSONTRUMPETS.COM

Pianos & Keyboards

GRAND SAMPLES:

Garritan and Abbey Road Studios teamed up to create the CFX Concert Grand, a library of sounds featuring the Yamaha CFX Concert Grand Piano recorded in historic Studio One. It uses three discrete microphone perspectives. It includes the ARIA player, and is designed to work with music notation-based programs.

[makemusic.com]



SYNTH KIT:

Do-it-yourselfers can use the MS-20 Kit to build a working reproduction of Korg's original MS-20 analog synthesizer. The kit version contains all the original MS-20 specifications and features, and it is true analog, with the same circuit path as the original. Only 1,000 units will be available.

[korgusa.com]



IMPROVED DIGITAL:

Kurzweil's MPG200 digital grand piano includes a fully weighted and graded hammer action keyboard, an all-wood rim, high-quality polyester finish, 200 sounds and a 140-watt digital bi-amplified sound system.

[kurzweil.com]



PROPHET ON THE RACK: DSI's Prophet 12 module is a tabletop, rack-ready reworking of the company's popular Prophet 12 keyboard, a 12-voice hybrid digital/analog synthesizer. The module has the same voice board as the keyboard version, and it fits into a backpack. All parameters are easily editable via the module's front panel.

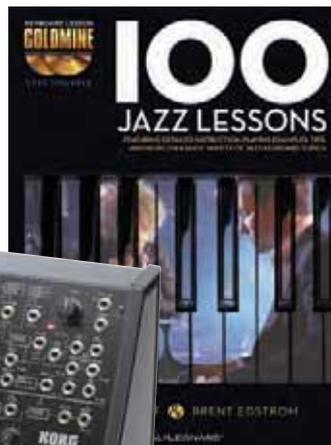
[davesmithinstruments.com]



HIP VOICINGS:

In Hal Leonard's book/CD pack *100 Jazz Lessons*, authors Peter Deneff and Brent Edstrom offer 100 self-contained keyboard tutorials with detailed instruction, playing examples, tips and photos. Topics include scales, modes and progressions; Latin jazz styles; improvisation ideas and harmonic voicings.

[halleonard.com]



KEY CONTROLLER:

The Reloop Studio Keyfadr is a compact DAW controller for producers using Ableton. It has 25 velocity-sensitive keys, eight faders, 16 rotary knobs and eight endless encoders with push function.

[reloop.com]



REALISTIC CONTROLLER: Samson's Carbon 61 USB MIDI controller has a 61-key, velocity-sensitive, semi-weighted keyboard designed for a realistic feel. It has an Edit key for adjusting up to 14 control parameters. The compact design is great for live performance and studio applications.

[samsontech.com]



NONSTOP WORKSTATION:

Roland's FA-08 Music Workstation has a huge selection of sounds, a 16-track sequencer, seamless DAW integration, an easy-to-use sampler and an 88-note Ivory Feel-G keyboard with weighted action. Continuous recording in loop mode allows users to fill up all 16 tracks without stopping the sequencer.

[rolandus.com]



WHITE GRAND:

Yamaha's GB1K 5-foot Classic Collection grand piano is now available in a polished white finish. It has a solid spruce soundboard and ribs, solid maple bridge and caps, solid copper wound bass strings and aluminum alloy action rails.

[usa.yamaha.com]



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Inside

- 86** David Taylor Master Class
- 88** Kirk Garrison Pro Session
- 90** Roy Hargrove
Solo Transcription
- 92** Toolshed



THE ART OF LEAD TRUMPET PLAYING

BY MIKE WILLIAMS



Playing lead trumpet is my favorite aspect of trumpet playing. I love to play lead. I love to discuss it, I love to practice it, and I love to listen to other great lead players.

Remember this: Lead trumpet playing is not just about playing high notes. I say this because so many young, aspiring lead players ask first how to increase their range instead of how to phrase and articulate in the lead registers.

The ideal lead player must be a good *total* trumpet player. You, the lead player, must be able to sight-read parts in all genres. You must be able to project your sound all the way to the back of the concert hall. You must be able to play in the complete range of the instrument, musically, with a command of all styles, whether it be swing, Latin, rock or a ballad. You must play with a beautiful tone quality at all dynamic levels with good intonation, phrasing, sense of time (tempo) and with consistency.

Being consistent is playing phrases, or even just one note, the same way each time. If you are playing consistently, the band will eventually know how you will phrase a certain passage even before you play it. For this to be effective, the lead

player and the drummer must be phrasing together. This is the best way to develop a “tight” ensemble.

The lead player must gain the trust of the band members through tastefulness, consistency and, very importantly, tact. Be nice. Be diplomatic. Listen to suggestions without giving up your integrity.

Ultimately, the most important facet of becoming a good lead trumpet player is learning by listening intensively to the best lead players—and that includes historical as well as contemporary players. When I was getting started as a player, I always focused my attention on the person playing the Trumpet I part while memorizing the phrasing and analyzing the vibrato, shakes, fall-offs and all of the other nuances that gave character and color to the playing.

If you want to be a good lead trumpet player, you should learn to imitate the very best, as precisely as possible.

Lead Trumpet History

The lineage of the best lead players is something that all aspiring lead players must study. If you are in a band that plays contemporary charts, your lead style will be different from the style of playing required for a band that plays music of the 1940s. Some of the main differences include the length of short accented notes, the frequency of the vibrato and shakes, and the swing feel. In the 1940s, the short accented eighth-notes were generally played much shorter than in more modern swing. Much of the time the vibrato and shakes were quicker, and the swing feel was closer to a dotted-eighth-16th-note combination as opposed to a triplet feel.

The best way to study these stylistic differences is through listening to the many lead/jazz players of all eras. Check out this link to a website that contains one of the most comprehensive lists I have found: danmillerjazz.com/lead-history.html. Compiled by fellow lead/jazz player Dan Miller, this listing contains the best of the best lead players and the bands with which they recorded, in chronological order. Possibly the two most important lead players of all time

were Conrad Gozzo and Eugene “Snooky” Young. Listen to the rich sound and lush vibrato of Gozzo. Young’s swing feel is unsurpassed. We still attempt to imitate their sound and feel to this day.

Some of my favorite examples of lead playing are from the following recordings, organized by player:

“Snooky” Young

- *The Atomic Mr. Basie* (Count Basie Orchestra)
- *Chairman Of The Board* (Count Basie Orchestra)
- *Basie At Birdland* (Count Basie Orchestra)
- *Consummation* (Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Orchestra)

Conrad Gozzo

- *Tutti’s Trumpets* (Tutti Camarata)
- *The Best Of Frank Sinatra: The Capitol Years* (Frank Sinatra)

Maynard Ferguson

- *A Message From Newport* (Maynard Ferguson)

Wayne Bergeron

- *It’s Not Just For Christmas Anymore* (Tom Kubis)

Charlie Davis

- *The Roar Of ’74* (Buddy Rich)

Roger Ingram

- *50th Anniversary Tour* (Woody Herman)

Daily Trumpet Routine

There is not one universal method for developing lead chops. Many lead players have totally different methods, techniques and equipment to meet their ends: more mouthpiece pressure vs. less pressure; large mouthpiece cups vs. shallower

Mike Williams



Eugene "Snooky" Young:
unsurpassed swing feel

TONY SCODWELL/DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

cups; large-bore horns vs. small-bore horns; pedal-tone practice vs. no pedal tones at all; an infinite number of mouthpiece-to-lip settings; tongue placement; and dozens of warmup exercises involving tonguing, flexibility, scale and range. You

must find what works best for you by using your own logic, obtaining a good teacher and practicing for many hours. Developing a routine can be a lifelong process, and your routine may continually morph along the way. Although many of the best lead players perform and/or practice differently, there is one common denominator that they all share, and that is the correct use of air. They are efficient by using only the amount of breath needed, as well as the proper amount of air compression and air speed required to play a certain passage. This is essential for optimum projection of sound. The great Don Jacoby, to get this point across to me, would say, "Baby, air isn't the most important thing—it's the *only* thing!" If the air isn't there, nothing matters. Go running, swim-

ing, bike riding or anything else that will force you to gasp for air and expel large amounts of air. This will help the less-experienced players become accustomed to taking a full breath, and it will help to keep some of the more experienced players' lung capacities to a maximum. I have seen a lack of this important technique in many young lead players, even those who are at the peak of their physical capabilities. Don't forget the air. Breathe!

Now, back to the daily routine. To begin, you should have one that includes a warmup. The routine should be basically the same every day and it should cover as many areas as possible. My routine takes about 75–90 minutes. It does not include etudes, solos or any other music for ensembles that I may be practicing. The warmup consists of soft, slow notes in the staff. You will find these exercises in the front of almost any trumpet method book. I never ascend past "G" on top of the staff for the first 30–45 minutes. I developed the rest of the routine to fit my needs as a lead player. The scales and arpeggios I play

(which are my own) are ridiculously long. This forces me to have strong air control, so I can play them in a single breath. The massive amount of tonguing with the Clarke Technical Studies, #2—played as written and then up one octave, forte and piano, but tongued instead of slurred—helps with accuracy in the upper register. You should be working on a routine for yourself that will push your limits on a daily basis: increasing your wind control and capacity, increasing your upper register very gradually, making your fortés louder, your pianos softer, your sound more pure, your tongue more flexible in the upper and extreme upper registers, and your endurance better. The routine should help to cover many of the realistic tasks we have as lead players, and it is a tool that we must maintain each day in order to be consistent.

Lead Trumpet Phrasing

Now that you are developing a routine to better serve you as a lead player, the *musical* aspects of the lead part must be addressed. Because most lead trumpet playing is in the

Lead Trumpet Phrasing

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Bobby Shew: Some of the best lead trumpeters in jazz are also great improvisers.

Brass School

RANGE EXERCISE # 1



big band jazz idiom, a strong sense of jazz phrasing is paramount. This includes swing, bebop, Latin jazz, jazz-rock and jazz ballads. Lead lines should sound as if the best jazz improvisers are playing them. Listen to the top jazz players and analyze their styles. Memorize their solos and play along with the recordings, mimicking every nuance. Then, take your lead part and apply the same concept and feel to a particular phrase. If it is in the upper register, play it down an octave and get it in your ear. You must be able to sing/hear it in your mind.

Next, you must be able to hear it in your mind in the upper register where it is written. Memorize it. Repeat it until it sounds as if it is being played by a good jazz player with jazz nuances. If you are already a good jazz soloist, this should be easy for you. Some lead players are also some of the best jazz improvisers: Three examples would

be Bobby Shew, Chuck Findley and "Snooky" Young. Another similar method used to improve jazz phrasing involves practicing passages from jazz transcription books. Play them where they are written, and then play them up an octave as if they were in a lead part. Use a metronome. I like to hear the pulse on beats 2 and 4 if it's in common time. It's like having a drummer playing the backbeat on the hi-hat. Also, do not practice loud all of the time. Learn to play softly in the upper register. When doing this, make sure you are occasionally resting with the horn off the chops. Sometimes players get excited and pound away until their chops swell to the point of damage.

Another important aspect of phrasing is in the many variations of the swing eighth notes. Whether they are written as eighth notes or as a dotted-eighth-16th, it's basically a triplet feel. One of the things that the Basie band



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RANGE EXERCISE # 2



is known for is “swinging hard.” There is a strong triplet feel to the Basie band’s eighths, with emphasis on the upbeats. But if you listen to Stan Kenton in the 1950s, you may notice less of a strong triplet feel and instead hear somethings that’s between straight eighths and triplets. Lead players who would like to be hired for *any* type of job must do the homework of listening to recordings dating all the way back to Louis Armstrong, and they must be able to differentiate between, and execute, all of the swing variations.

Upper Register & Endurance

A good lead trumpeter playing today’s music must develop a usable range from low F# to at least G above high C. Once you are able to play these notes, you must then develop the physical endurance to

perform them in an entire chart, concert or even a complete tour. The two exercises presented here are excellent for gradually increasing the upper register (see Range Exercises #1 and #2).

Choose one of the exercises and practice it until no notes are missed, resting at least five to 10 seconds between attempts. When you have played it successfully, work on the exercise in the same manner, one half-step up. If you are successful again, continue up another half-step. Be sure to rest between each attempt. If you fail to successfully play the exercise three times consecutively, stop and put the trumpet away for at least an hour. Do this every day and go as high as you are able to every day until you miss three in a row as before. Spend no more than five to 10 minutes on this per day. Do it when

you feel fresh and will have the best chance for success.

Be patient. The upper register comes quickly for some and slowly for others. Resting during these exercises will help with endurance by letting the oxygen-rich blood flow back into the muscle tissue of the lips and cheeks/corners, removing the lactic acid produced by the tightening of these muscles.

Remember this: The *higher* you play, the *farther out* you play. Never visualize ascending notes as going toward the ceiling. Think of them as if they were part of a laser light coming from your bell and going straight out toward the back of the room or concert hall. The ascending notes travel outward along the laser as you increase the air compression and speed. Visualize the notes as if they are continually trying to spring back

to your bell, but you are constantly pushing against them to hold them in their place on the laser beam.

All of the aspects of good lead playing could fill a book. I hope that the concepts and materials presented here will help the aspiring lead player reach the desired level of excellence.

DB

Mike Williams has played lead trumpet with the Count Basie Orchestra since 1987. Born in Shreveport, La., he received a BME degree from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., and attended the University of North Texas under Neil Slater while studying with the legendary Don “Jake” Jacoby during the summers. In addition to his work with the Basie band, Williams performs as guest soloist and clinician at universities and high schools across the nation and abroad. He is an adjunct professor of trumpet at the University of Arkansas in Monticello. Williams plays P. Mauriat PMT-655 and PMT-720 silver-plated trumpets exclusively, and uses a Warburton 45V cup mouthpiece. He is available for online lessons at mikewilliamstrumpet.com.

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Forming Brass Technique Based on Your Strengths & Weaknesses

“THOSE WHO STAY IN THE BUILDING ... WILL STAY IN THE BUILDING!”

This is one of the main principles of my teaching. I use this statement to remind students that they must jump into the scene and participate in all areas of “the street,” and practice knowing what to do when graduation rolls around.

The street is where I received my real education for musical and business experience. No matter where you live, the street is everywhere the public goes to hear music. During my first year at Juilliard, I immediately went to the street and played in community orchestras and other groups. Living and studying in New York allowed me to work with amazing musicians and enjoy a diversity of styles and genres.

When I switched to bass trombone in my fourth year of school, I added big bands and chamber music to the mix. This wasn't as easy as you'd think because there was no jazz program at Juilliard, and participation in the jazz scene was frowned upon. But by the time I left school, I was working, doing what I call “genre jumping”—playing in all idioms.

To survive in the street, you have to be able to adapt at a very fast pace. Because you see your strengths and weaknesses readily, you form your technique and style based on both. You learn who you are, what you want to do and what you have to do to communicate in the moment.

Back in the day, the bass trombone had one valve; the extensive range below the bass clef staff was just beginning to be utilized. When the double valve became standard in the mid-'60s, the instrument's color and use grew exponentially. In big bands and other improvising ensembles, as well as classical chamber ensembles, the bass trombone became the instrument that often lays the time down. This change in the instrument's function forced me to reinvestigate my basic approach to brass playing: diaphragm control, embouchure and articulation.

A big part of college education is to teach you how to learn on your own, and I think I utilized my education well. I wanted immediate response from the instrument to put my ideas into use without hesitation and contribute to a group's impact—not just blend. Articulation is one of the main ingredients in personality and interpretation, and it is perhaps the primary ingredient in what makes one instrumental group sound different from another.

Because I had been playing in the street for six years by the time I was finishing my master's degree at Juilliard, I was playing in many of New York's first-rate symphony orchestras, big bands, chamber music groups and rock bands, as well as subbing in Broadway shows.

When my studio-recording career began, the more advanced and individual-sounding musicians I encountered kept me honest in realizing I needed to continue developing a personal style. I knew I wanted to develop as a soloist for both artistic and business reasons. I knew a combination of classical recitals and improvisation was the way to go for me. While I was in Thad Jones and Mel Lewis' big band, the great trombonist Jimmy Knepper told me early on, “If you want to do what you want, you'd better be a star.” I interpreted this as, “Be who you are—a person unlike any other person—and this will propel your growth with the support of the community.”

Because I always played instruments that were lighter (with more brilliance) and mouthpieces that were not humongous, I guess my style first started by the sheer fact that I could always be heard: loud or soft. But to be able to shape the sound and phrase with the nuance I wanted, I knew there were technical problems I had to solve.

I used a lot of embouchure pressure, which limited my comfort range and endurance, and I didn't have a concept of the articulation process. This non-definitive tonguing hampered immediacy, prevented me from

having enough point on the front of my notes and didn't allow for economy of air supply. I noticed my throat was being used too much in the articulation process, which affects clarity, intonation and attack. I wanted a warm sound at all volume levels, which involves better diaphragm support for a slower air stream.

I began evaluating what my tongue was doing while initiating an attack. I found that through the registers and various volume levels, my tongue was hitting the roof of my mouth and teeth in too many different spots, and at times stayed in the way of the air stream. Many times my tongue went through my lips, providing no consistency, taking too much mental energy and wrongly utilizing the lips for attack. I tried the various ways we use syllables such as *ta, ta, tow, tow, tee, tee, taw, taw*, double- and triple-tonguing, and doodle tonguing. I found that for me, on the bass trombone, they involved too much jaw movement. For me, these systems limited the color changes and sometimes limited interpretation and pitch definition. I also began to feel the use of syllables was an extra step away from the individual style I wanted. I was forming a vision of the music I wanted to make, but the vision wasn't clear.

I experimented with going from a high note (G above middle C) and playing a G major scale down to D below the bass clef staff. I didn't concentrate on tone, just tongue placement. Where did my tongue strike with definition, and where (if at all) did my embouchure change? Even though guys were trying to play their whole range without breaks in embouchure, my chops didn't work that way.

Thankfully, I had the courage to realize that both strengths and weaknesses make you who you are. So, I embraced the fact that my embouchure broke at the low G (bottom line of the staff). After much experimentation, I made a decision to tongue every note from that low G all the way up to high C (an octave above middle C) with my tongue hitting the “meaty” (middle) part of the back of my top teeth, and to attack every note starting on the F# (bottom space of the bass clef) going down to my lowest pedal note with my tongue hitting the back of my top lip. (The point where I change my tongue position moves up a fifth when I play loudly.) Avoiding going through the lips made my technique much more concise.

Although this sounds like an easy thing to do, it's not. It still requires hours of daily practice, but it also changed my whole concept of embouchure and diaphragm support. Fundamentals such as these require repetitive exercises, so I had to be very careful not to practice incorrectly. I distilled my exercises to playing major scales very slowly. These exercises allow me to concentrate on all phases of the process. I also vary speed and keep volume at a moderate level.

This change in my articulation affected my embouchure because the new tongue placement made me purse my lips rather than stretch them. My lips naturally had to have corners in. Then I added learning how to articulate my legato tonguing, hitting the same spots as my marcato tonguing. Because the three muscle groups were now isolated, I was able to concentrate on the amount of pressure each of these groups needed to exert. This balance allowed me to bypass any throat problems.

These scales also included playing notes slightly higher than my instrument's range was known to play, and slightly lower (all the “money” notes). I also practiced the extreme higher and lower notes, but not as part of a strict routine. I did it with a relaxed “let's see” mentality.

By practicing slowly this way for hours every day, I was able to achieve many things:

- 1) I learned how to prepare my articulation in the rhythm of the music I was playing, which is not only a musical aid but a great way to overcome nervousness.

2) I became able to change the shape of mouth for greater colors because my tonguing was precise.

3) I was able to concentrate on the relationship of muscular control and pressure between the three muscle groups: diaphragm, embouchure and tongue.

4) I did away with using syllables for articulation. This was of major importance to immediacy. My constant practice allows the three muscle groups to communicate with each other, leaving my mind free for the "non-thought" needed in expression.

5) I realized through this process that control of the aperture (small oval opening in the center of your embouchure, where the air enters the mouthpiece) is the secret to unfettered facility.

These results in the practice room allow me to perform without thinking about my technique. This helps me be "in the moment" during performance. And because my fundamentals have become so strong, it gives me more freedom to tell a story.

Gil Evans and I were strolling in Venice one night. I was in his band for five or six years and played on his Grammy-winning CD, *Live At Sweet Basil* (unfortunately, somebody made a mistake and listed me as Dave Tucker—oh, well). During that stroll, Gil told me that Duke Ellington told him, "If you keep yourself open, you never know who will come along and pull your coat left!" I've never forgotten that advice, and even when I question what someone says, I leave myself open for possibilities. **DB**

David Taylor started his playing career as a member of Leopold Stowkowski's American Symphony Orchestra and by appearing with the New York Philharmonic under Pierre Boulez. Simultaneously, he was a member of the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra and recorded with groups ranging from Duke Ellington to The Rolling Stones. He also has recorded solo CDs on Koch, New World, ENJA, DMP, Tzadik, CIMP, PAU and his own label, Triple Letter Brand.

Taylor performs recitals and concerti around the world. He has been involved in dozens of commissioning projects for the bass trombone in solo and concerto idioms. He has appeared with and recorded chamber music with Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman and Wynton Marsalis and performs with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, Orpheus, and the St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra.

Taylor has performed and recorded with major jazz and popular artists—including Barbra Streisand, Miles Davis, Quincy Jones, Frank Sinatra, J.J. Johnson, Aretha Franklin, Dave Matthews, Joe Henderson, Jaco Pastorius, Bob Mintzer and Michel Camilo—and he has appeared on numerous Grammy-nominated and Grammy-winning albums. He has won the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences Most Valuable Player Award for five consecutive years and has been awarded the NARAS Most Valuable Player Virtuoso Award. Taylor is on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and Mannes College. He plays Edwards bass trombones exclusively. [Website: davetaylor.net](http://www.davetaylor.net).



David Taylor

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An 8-Step System for Transcribing Jazz Solos



THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO STRIVE FOR improvement with regard to improvisation skills. In this age of technology, there are dozens of practice aids that provide opportunities for us to improve. Jamey Aebersold started the ball rolling decades ago with his Jazz Play-A-Long sets on LP and cassette tape. Today, we have access to volumes of publications and practice tools via modern digital media.

Although it is helpful to embrace technology as an aid to improve your improv, it does not replace hours of dedicated practice and in-depth study. One irreplaceable technique for refining your skills is to transcribe solos played by jazz virtuosos of the past and present. Transcribing is a difficult and daunting task at first. Many musicians of varying skill levels avoid doing it because they aren't sure where to start.

To help you get started on the road to solo transcription, I have broken down the process into eight manageable steps.

Step 1

For starters, you'll need plenty of patience, curiosity, a pencil, staff paper and a huge eraser. Although some musicians start learning solos on their instrument first, I prefer to use it later in the process.

Step 2

Select a solo that is accessible. This is very important. Woody Shaw would definitely not be a good example of the first trumpet soloist

you try to transcribe. Look for a tune that you are familiar with that is diatonic, modal, makes use of space, falls within a reasonable range and is at a moderate tempo. If the solo has been published, don't look at the published version before you start your work. Some published transcriptions are not entirely accurate. The most important process in transcribing is the act of writing down a solo yourself.

Step 3

Listen to the solo in its entirety several times. Don't start writing or figuring out licks with your horn or at the piano right away. Listen for form and structure. Sing passages as you get more familiar with what is going on. Observe how phrases are shaped and try to notice recurring themes. Learn what the soloist is doing with regard to dynamics, articulation and stylistic nuance.

Step 4

Map out the phrasing of the solo on staff paper. Four measures to a line is a good way to start. Be sure that you write lightly, as you will be erasing frequently. If the tune is a standard form such as AABA or 12-bar blues, you will be able to put double bars where they are needed. This will help you keep track of where you are. Sometimes it's helpful to mark the location of where a phrase begins or ends by noting the minutes and seconds on the recording.

Step 5

Start writing. Try to write as much as you can without using a musical instrument (you may require some kind of musical reference point to establish the key). It will be cumbersome at first to write solely using a pencil (and eraser), but you'll tap into your inner musical ear and may actually be surprised at how easily identifiable pitches, intervals and rhythms become.

Step 6

Add your instrument to the mix to figure out idiomatic nuances such as articulations and technical passages. You'll also be able to add chord changes with relative ease at this point in the process because of familiarity with the tune.

Step 7

Copy the transcription so it is legible. The first draft is usually a mess by the time you complete it. Entering the solo into music notation software or copying by hand are fine at this point. Remember that a solo transcription is more than just notes indicating pitch and rhythm. Pay close attention to details such as articulations and dynamics. *The Complete Arranger*, by Sammy Nestico, has some helpful instructions and an articulation chart by Roger Rickson.

Chord changes can be difficult to add but must be included. Sometimes decisions have to be made on how specific the nomenclature should be. Rhythm players and soloists will play alterations that strengthen a chord's function, but notating them may not be necessary.

Step 8

The final step is to learn and be able to perform the solo with as much detail as possible. Listening to the recording while following along with your written interpretation assists in capturing the virtuosity of the artist. Playing the transcription with the recording is also an excellent way to emulate and imitate.

Once you become comfortable transcribing solos on your main instrument, it is imperative that you explore others. There is no limit to what can be learned by studying the musical ideas that come from any jazz artist, regardless of what they play. The instrument itself is not nearly as important as the musician who uses it as a vessel to express himself or herself.

For beginning transcribers, several of the Miles Davis trumpet solos from the album *Kind Of Blue* (Columbia/Legacy) are great candidates. Perhaps a first attempt could be "So What," which is a brilliant example of an accessible solo, as described in Step 2.

A software program called the Amazing Slow Downer is very helpful in transcribing advanced solos.

DB

Jazz trumpeter Kirk Garrison is an active musician, composer and arranger residing in the Chicago area. He is an adjunct professor at Concordia University and Elmhurst College. Endorsement and sponsorship is provided by Schilke Trumpets and Denis Wick Mouthpieces & Mutes/Dansr USA. For clinician information, contact Garrison via email: kirkgarrison@att.net.

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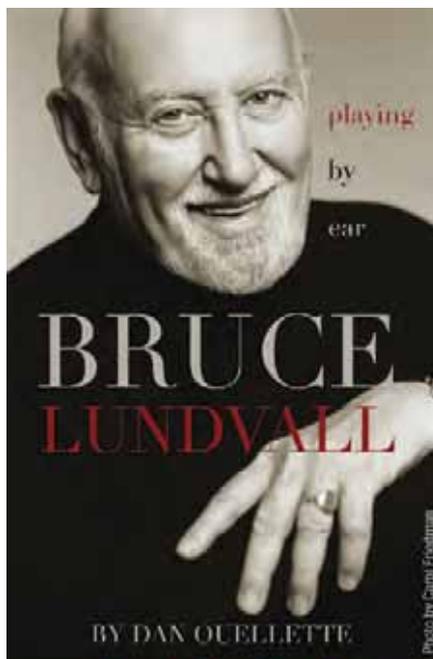
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Roy Hargrove's Solo on 'Strausbourg-St. Denis'

THOUGH BRIEF, ROY HARGROVE'S TRUMPET SOLO on "Strausbourg-St. Denis," from his 2008 Emarcy album, *Earfood*, is very effective. In 24 bars (three times through the chord progression) he utilizes various techniques to construct a statement that is logical and simultaneously soulful.

The first technique is in Hargrove's phrasing. His playing here is mostly staccato, which adds to the funkiness of the solo. The first five measures are solely short notes. It's at measure 7, when the chords are about to resolve to the tonic, that Hargrove finally gives us some legato phrasing. He does this for the remaining three measures, and when the next chorus starts, we're back to staccato notes. He brings the legato back at the same point in the second chorus (measure 15), making the release in the harmony more effective. But at this point he doesn't go back to the clipped phrasing, creating a natural climax in his final chorus.

Another aspect of Hargrove's phrasing that moves the solo along is his use of space. In the first eight bars there is more space than notes. Sixteenth notes are rare, and there are half measures and even a full measure where he lays out. In the second and third choruses, there is a marked decrease in the amount of space, and in the second half of both of these choruses Hargrove plays more 16th-note phrases. Mea-

sure 16 is almost complete 16ths. This adds to the increased energy we have from the legato phrasing.

And there's also range. The first chorus doesn't go past C until the last measure (bar 9), where he only goes up to a D natural. But the next four bars go up an additional half step to E_b. Then, in rapid succession we get an A_b and B_b in measures 14 and 15, and then in measure 18 he establishes a high C as the high point (an octave above his original ceiling). Three bars later (measure 21) he climaxes at an E_b, a minor third up from that. This acts as the apex, and Hargrove uses the remaining four bars to bring us back down and end his statement.

Choice of scales is also a big part of Hargrove's approach here. His main choice is A_b major pentatonic. This not only helps to reinforce the key (since most of the chord progression doesn't emphasize the tonic) and to give his solo a soulful vibe, but it also has him playing tones other than the root on the D_b maj7 harmony, as in measure 7, where he leans on the major seventh, and in measure 21, where he lands on the ninth on the downbeat.

This D_b harmony is also where Hargrove fills out the pentatonic, making it more modal. He adds in the D_b and G, producing a full A_b major scale, at the end of measure 15 (on the D_b maj7, coincidentally). The other two points at which

210 Ebm7 Ab/C Dbmaj7 Ebm7 Ab/C

3 Dbmaj7 Ebm7 Ab/C Dbmaj7

8 Abmaj7 F7

10 Ebm7 Ab/C Dbmaj7 Ebm7 Ab/C

13 Dbmaj7 Ebm7 Ab/C Dbmaj7 Abmaj7

17 F7

18 Ebm7 Ab/C Dbmaj7 Ebm7 Ab/C

21 Dbmaj7 Ebm7 Ab/C

23 Dbmaj7 Abmaj7 F7

Hargrove does this are also on the D_b (bars 7 and 28), but instead of using both notes, Hargrove only puts in the G natural here. This note being the sharp-four of this harmony, Hargrove creates a more Lydian sound.

There are only three instances where chromaticism is used, and all three of them involve the F7 chord. This is the V of the ii chord, which leads us back to the beginning of the progression. It's also the only chord with a note that is not part of the A_b major scale (the third, A natural). A_b major pentatonic (or A_b ionian) would work fine over this, but Hargrove chooses these places to deviate from the A_b sound. This highlights the fact that these points digress from the tonal center. In measure 9 he plays what is in essence a G major triad with the ninth. Though this does give us the third of the F7 (a tone missing from the A_b scale), it also puts

the ninth, sixth and sharp-four into it.

This is just a taste. The next time this harmony shows up (bar 17), Hargrove plays an F# diminished arpeggio (which gives us the third, fifth, seventh and flat-ninth) and then resolves to the root at the end of the measure. But in the measure before this (bar 16), he adds in some chromatic passing tones, setting us up for the upcoming lick and also extending his time outside of the A_b scale.

In the final measure, he uses the A natural as a passing tone and plays the G_b once, resolving it to the F. So we still get the chromatic flavor on the F7 that he set up previously, but in a more reserved manner, which creates a nice conclusion to his improvisation. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at jimidurso.com.

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Harrelson Summit Trumpet

Science Meets Sound

The Summit Trumpet in B-flat from Harrelson Trumpets plays as good as it looks, and looks as artful as it sounds. This custom-built horn has a warm, full-bodied trumpet sound in all registers and is versatile enough to play in a multitude of settings. After just the first few licks, I felt an overwhelming connection between my chops and my ear.

In play-testing the Summit Trumpet, I found the resistance of the horn to be well balanced. Using my own modified version of a 7C mouthpiece, I played some long tones at different volume levels. The Summit responded eloquently at double-piano and did not break up at all approaching double-forte. The response was fluid as well, from the attack of each long note all the way through the release. I then worked with a tuner and situated myself at A=440. I focused on several notes in different registers: low G, middle C, high G and double F. The core resonance or “slotting” of each note was in tune, and it produced a pure, no-nonsense trumpet sound with no perceptible air or “fuzz” at all.

Next, I focused on the action of the valves. I ached my way through a few of the Arban Characteristic Studies, and the valves responded well. Then I pulled out one of my old Clifford Brown CDs and played along with his rendition of “Cherokee.” The cyclic link between my fingers, my ear and my chops felt strong and confident. Once again, the Summit delivered. After that and a few lyrical ballads, I knew this would be an ideal horn for playing jazz.

Moving on to the upper register, I slapped in my heavywall copy of a Warburton 7S and loaded up a recording of Maynard Ferguson playing “Gonna Fly Now.” Playing along, the Summit responded well and felt great, but I did notice that it didn’t have that cutting sound of an MF or Chase. It may not be the best axe for playing lead in a big band—this is probably due to the fact that this trumpet was customized to produce a warmer sound. However, it would definitely be a good horn to bring into the recording studio because of the intonation and accuracy it affords in the upper register.

This particular Harrelson Trumpet was custom built specifically for me and adjusted to my playing style after I spoke at length with owner and designer Jason Harrelson about the horn’s configuration. The company offers an option of 10 different leadpipes, three types of water keys, a multitude of mouthpiece receiver gap solutions, several bell brace options, five different valve top caps and bottom caps, three different pinky rests on the leadpipe, and more. Harrelson also inquired about my hand size to determine the position of the first- and third-valve slide rings. The entire process seemed a bit overwhelming at first. Harrelson took the time on the phone to get to know me as a player so he could build a solid horn that would not only sound exquisite, but also meet my needs as a professional. The “Dave Ruth configuration” accomplished just that. Because I don’t play lead as much as I used to, this horn’s warm sound and smooth, legato phrasing are preferred on most of my gigs. I also requested an extra bell-crook brace to add some stability. I have to admit the horn is a bit heavy, but that is certainly what my chops prefer. Harrelson offers many configurations that are substantially lighter and some that are designed specifically for lead playing.

Harrelson Trumpets’ slogan, “Where Science Meets Sound,”



certainly rings true with the Summit. There is some serious engineering that goes into these horns. They are quite stunning. The craftsmanship of the valve tops and tuning slide clearly separate this horn from most I have seen. Harrelson can also design some ornate bell and tubing engraving as well as one-of-a-kind sculpting of the braces to create an artful masterpiece. I would definitely recommend the Summit Trumpet to any freelance professional who is looking for a new horn or a new sound.

—Dave Ruth

Ordering info: harrelsontrumpets.com

Denis Wick DW5582 Trombone Travel Mute

Won't Wake the Neighbors

Denis Wick dubbed the new DW5582 trombone mute a “travel mute,” but in fact it serves equally well as a general practice mute. Sure, it comes in handy for hotel-room practice, but that’s just one of many applications for this little fire-engine-red, sound-dampening dynamo. Trombonists will find it just as useful for last-minute warmups on the gig, or practicing late at night without annoying family or neighbors.

A good trombone practice mute should be lightweight, compact enough to be stored in the bell when stowed away in a case, and very quiet. The DW5582 fits the bill in every way. It’s finished with an internal cork damper and thick neoprene pads that mute the sound to a barely audible tone. According to the manufacturer, it emits approximately 5db less sound than comparable practice mutes. While I can’t verify that claim with any scientific certainty, I would have to agree it’s the quietest mute of any kind I’ve ever played. Moreover, it has excellent intonation for a practice mute, and the response feels natural.

I find myself using it daily. I pop it in while warming up at home or on the gig, and sometimes just to give my own ears a break. Next vacation, I plan to pack the DW5582 with my pBone as a lightweight and inoffensive practice tool. I’m sure my wife will be grateful.

—John Janowiak

Ordering info: dانسr.com





P. Mauriat PMT-720 Trumpet

*Balance of Resistance
& Brilliance*

The P. Mauriat PMT-720 trumpet is the culmination of artist input received over the past three years since the release of the company's 700 series, popularized by such artists as Terrell Stafford and John McNeil.

"While complementary to the finer aspects of its parent horn, the PMT-720 offers an alternative with an even balance of resistance and brilliance," said co-designer and P. Mauriat Product Specialist Adam MacBlane.

The heart of the PMT-720 is a solid yellow brass valve block harnessing the fluid dynamic of stainless-steel valves. A 4.8-inch, one-piece gold brass bell and boxed-style, dual-braced main tuning slide pair well together to help create a brilliant, warm sound with efficient resistance behind the horn. The addition of nickel-silver outer slides is also a contributing factor to its overall feel and response. It will be produced in three finishes—unlacquered, matte lacquered and silver plate—with custom options coming later this year.

I played the matte lacquered version in a variety of venues, and it handled beautifully, providing the response, clarity and timbre appropriate for each situation. In an intimate brass quintet gig, the horn easily blended with the other trumpet player's 37 model Bach while providing the free-blowing feel of a much brighter, lighter horn. At first I thought that the matte lacquered finish of the horn would limit the color spectrum, but I was pleasantly surprised to discover the meaty edge that could be produced when I used it to play lead in a big band concert. You can definitely lead with this horn. Although it's not as bright as many lead horns, the PMT-720 delivers a core-driven sound that can certainly do the job. The horn feels like it wants to work for you, and it responds with a very light touch. The slotting is solid, providing great intonation without feeling rigid.

An additional bonus is the solid construction of the hardwood double trumpet case with gun-metal latches. —Mike Pavlik

Ordering info: pmauriatmusic.com

Yamaha Xeno 8335RS Trumpet & Silent Brass

Fresh Sounds All Around

Over the last two decades, Yamaha's Xeno professional trumpet has garnered a reputation as a go-to horn with an even, controlled tone throughout all registers and a quick response at all volumes.

Now Yamaha has made major upgrades to the Xeno line. The company's designers set out to retain all of the favorable qualities of the old design while "taking the sound to the next level," according to Jonathan Goldman, Yamaha product marketing specialist.

A common difficulty with the old Xeno series was that they sometimes felt just a bit too heavy when going for a sparkling, brilliant tone. After all, the first Xeno trumpets were modeled after Yamaha's old 6335 heavyweight series. The new Xeno's lighter valve casings and pistons, along with the new yellow brass alloy leadpipe, contribute to a quicker, lighter response and the ability to adapt the character of sound. I found I could go from a relatively warm and dark sound to a lively tone with enough zip suitable for playing lead or in a rock band.

I played the reverse-leadpipe, medium-large bore version of the Xeno, model 8335RS. I was initially impressed with how the notes seemed to jump out of the horn, effortlessly slotting right into place no matter the tessitura. The completely redesigned, hand-hammered bell (which takes a cue from Yamaha's Artist Model Chicago C trumpet) does help to provide a secure feeling of resistance and ease of accuracy in faster passages and in slotting higher notes. As I was able to relax a bit into the feel of the instrument, it was quite easy to adapt the sound, alternating successfully between flowing Haydn-esque passages to a burning bebop head or raucous big band shout section. A bonus feature for me was the new third-slide stopper port, which extends the horn down to a true low F—I saw this as an opportunity to experiment with some fresh-sounding alternate fingering improvisations.

All the new updates to the Xeno contribute to a more balanced horn that allows for a wide range of musical expression.

Along with the Xeno 8335RS, I checked out Yamaha's upgraded Silent Brass system for trumpet, which lets you practice with great headphone sound. The new system is much lighter and more portable than previous versions, with vastly improved sound quality and playability. (New Silent Brass systems are also available for trombone, French horn and



flugelhorn.) The Silent Brass pickup mute has been made small enough to fit completely inside the trumpet bell. Now you can leave it attached to the instrument inside the case, ready to play whenever inspiration strikes. I found a comfortable resistance playing with the mute without having any dead zones—high or low—and it was as quiet as any practice mute I've used.

The mute features 360-degree Brass Resonance Modeling, which surprised me with its realistic brass sound upon the initial note. Another system component, the compact Personal Studio unit, includes a headphone jack and allows for easy attachment of an external audio player in order to practice with your favorite play-along. —James Davis

Ordering info: usa.yamaha.com

Lamont School of Music Fosters Students' Ambition

ANYONE GLANCING THROUGH DOWNBEAT'S annual Student Music Guide, published each October, will notice a lot of similarities in the names of collegiate jazz programs. That is, until you get to the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music and its program of Jazz Studies and Commercial Music.

It is a name that Malcolm Lynn Baker inherited when he took over as the program's director in 1993, but one he has grown to embrace wholeheartedly.

"It was a title waiting for meaning," says Baker, noting that enrolment was at a low point and there was not much to connect the jazz component of the program to its aspirations of preparing students for the world of popular music.

Analyzing the comments of young musicians who had applied to the school but decided not to attend was an eye-opener, and Baker set about building a strong, long-lasting faculty that could translate the study of jazz into making a living in music.

"We build from the rhythmic bedrock, the language that is rooted in African-American music, and train our students to be both conversant in that language and the kind of chameleon you need to be to play whatever comes along."

As the instructor of a freshman course in jazz theory, pianist Marc Sabatella sees a lot of teenagers who have dreams of pop stardom, yearning to be the next John Legend or Sara Bareilles.

"By exposing them to the language of jazz, we make them better, more sophisticated versions of what they want to be," says Sabatella, the author of *A Jazz Improvisation Primer*.

In addition to offering a bachelor's degree in Jazz Studies and Commercial Music, Lamont also has graduate programs, such as master's of music in performance (jazz emphasis).

Sabatella, who received a master's of music in composition (jazz emphasis) from the University of Denver and now teaches at his alma mater, says the school stands out for its low student-to-teacher ratio.

"Students get a lot of one-to-one time here, and that is established in their first year," he says.

"My approach is to teach less and mentor more," says Baker, who was a recipient of a DownBeat Achievement Award for Jazz Education in 2005. "A lot of our time here, we're in the band, playing. We try to replicate the traditional way of learning on the bandstand, and there is also a lot of peer pressure on students when they're trying to express themselves in our weekly jam sessions."

The core framework of the program is the rotating set of a dozen combos, which give students in-depth exposure to rhythm-intensive forms like hard-bop, Latin and modal jazz, as well as more harmonically advanced bop, fusion and standards. This format accommodates both



Malcolm Lynn Baker

instrumentalists and vocalists.

"We don't pander to singers here," says Baker. "They're equal to everyone else. They spend two years in the combo format, where they learn to prepare lead sheets and work with a live rhythm section."

After the requisite combo rotation ends, students are expected to form their own groups and seek out a faculty member who will serve as their coach.

That kind of initiative and collaboration is a reflection of what Baker looks for when he auditions prospective students.

"We require an audition video and a live performance, but in addition to how they play and improvise I look for three traits: curiosity, dedication and ambition. Regardless of their musical skill set, those are the things that tell me whether a student will get over the bar we set for them. I want to ensure they have the intensity level to match well with other students."

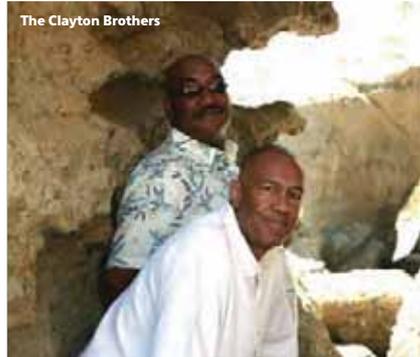
Over his 30 years in jazz education, Baker says he has seen students become much more entrepreneurial, just as he has seen the boundaries between jazz and commercial music fade.

"The new generation of students have a much more contemporary view of the world, and really, the traditional boundaries don't need to be there. In response, we try to encourage an upward spiral of curiosity and ambition among our students, and—as clichéd as it might sound—maintain a family atmosphere."

Having seen the program from both sides, Sabatella relishes the balance that Baker has achieved.

"Most jazz programs I've seen lean one way or the other," he says, "but I think we provide students with a great sense of freedom within structure."

—James Hale



The Clayton Brothers

Get Cool: North Carolina Central University's Jazz Studies department is one of the event partners for the Art of Cool Fest, to be held April 25–26 in Durham, N.C. The lineup includes Maceo Parker, The Clayton Brothers, Christian Scott, Kneebody, Russell Gunn, the Revive Big Band and Kate McGarry with Keith Ganz. Miguel Atwood-Ferguson will present a tribute to the music of jazz legends who hail from North Carolina, including John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk. **More info:** aocfestival.org

NEC Musicians Honored: New England Conservatory Jazz Studies student Andrew Schiller and alumni Jeff Schneider and Christopher Zuar have been selected to receive 2014 Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Awards. Schiller is a jazz bassist and composer working toward his master of music degree at NEC. Schneider is a composer and multi-instrumentalist who earned his bachelor of music degree in Jazz Performance from NEC in 2009; this is his third Young Jazz Composers Award. Zuar, a composer and arranger, also earned his bachelor of music degree in Jazz Composition from NEC in 2009. The recipients, who receive cash awards, are selected through a juried national competition.

More info: necmusic.edu/jazz

UTJO Music: The University of Toronto Jazz Orchestra under the direction of Gordon Foote has released the album *Reflections—Featuring Mike Murley*. The recording features original compositions and arrangements by Murley (he is also a featured saxophone soloist) as well as arrangements by two other University of Toronto Jazz faculty members: trombonist Terry Promane and trumpet player John MacLeod. **More info:** uoftjazz.ca

Gift to Frost: The Frost School of Music at the University of Miami has announced a \$2 million gift from Swanee and Paul J. DiMare through the Paul J. DiMare Foundation in support of the Frost School of Music Building Fund. This gift supports the construction of a planned 200-seat recital hall at the Frost School.

More info: miami.edu/frost

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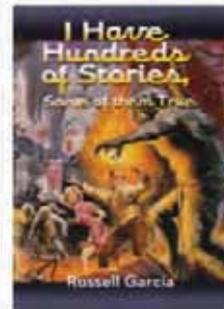
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Eric Harland

Drummer Eric Harland, 35, established his bona fides sidemaning for the likes of McCoy Tyner, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Charles Lloyd and Terence Blanchard, and as a member of the SFJAZZ Collective. He also leads his own ensembles and is currently a member of Dave Holland's Prism with guitarist Kevin Eubanks and keyboardist Craig Taborn. "I teach around the world, and drummers approach me and say, 'Eric Harland is my favorite drummer,'" Jason Moran said recently, referring to his fellow Houston native. This is Harland's first Blindfold Test.

Christian McBride

"Cherokee" (*Out Here*, Mack Avenue, 2013) McBride, bass; Christian Sands, piano; Ulysses Owens, drums.

Only a few drummers can play at this tempo and make it feel this nice. Lewis Nash. No? Is the drummer older or younger than me? Younger? Then Ulysses Owens. Ulysses has amazing brushwork. So it's Christian McBride's trio with Christian Sands on piano. 4½ stars. Ulysses is a great drummer in this style. He's tight, precise, pays a lot of attention to the history, and has a lot of language. His playing feels as kind and considerate as he is as a person.

John Escreet

"Animal Style" (*Sabotage And Celebration*, Whirlwind, 2013) Escreet, piano; Jim Black, drums; Matt Brewer, bass; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; David Binney, alto saxophone.

I like the rhythmic approaches and unique sounds the drummer is getting. Greg Osby on alto? Steve Coleman? Neither? Wow. David King on drums? Nate Wood? I've heard them in this style with similar drumkit tuning. Nice feel. Nice pocket. Gene Lake? That's definitely Chris Potter on saxophone. Nate Smith on drums? Can't be. Chris makes everything feel good. I like the alto player, too. I love people with individual sounds that strike you right out the gate. The drummer played some interesting ideas in the beginning, but he just stayed in the cut. 4 stars—because of Potter.

Pat Metheny

"Mastema" (*Tap: John Zorn's Book Of Angels, Vol. 20*, Nonesuch/Tzadik, 2013) Metheny, guitars, orchestrion; Antonio Sanchez, drums.

I like how it's starting, and I'm praying it remains interesting. Very well-executed, but they're staying on this groove a bit too long for me. Ah, here we go. It reminds me of Mark Giuliana—I know it's not him—but I'm thinking Zach Danziger. They aren't afraid to use different sounds affiliated with strong electronica. There's a lot going on, so there's no chance to hear an authentic sound to identify any of the other instrumentalists. It could have changed up more, but that's just me. [after] When they started, I thought, "Only Pat Metheny has that guitar sound," but then it changed, and since I've never heard him travel down this road, I thought maybe someone was trying to cop Pat's sound. Nor have I heard Antonio play this style. I think it's a road they should travel down more and do something even more creative. Knowing they were trying something new, 4½ stars.

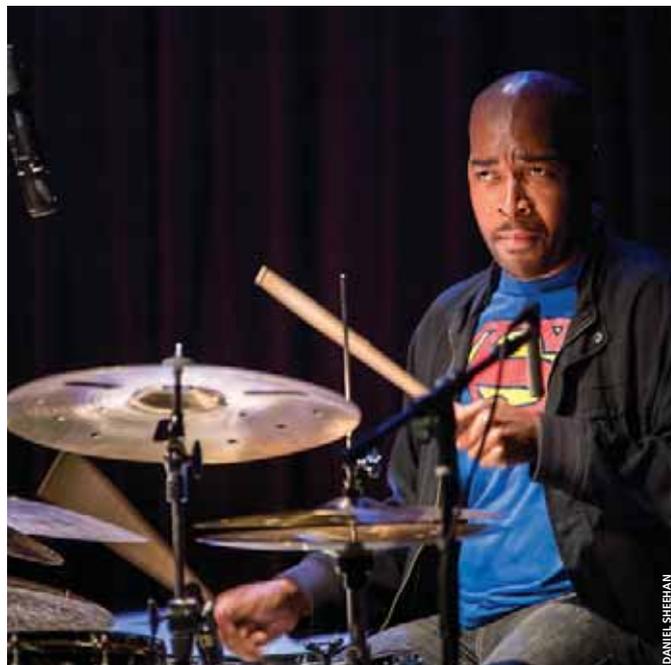
David Virelles

"Mañongo Pabio" (*Continuum*, Pi, 2012) Virelles, harmonium, Wurlitzer organ; Andrew Cyrille, drums.

I love the interplay between the drums and the keyboard line. I'm sure it's a synthesizer, but it's an organ-like synthesizer. It makes me feel like a kid in a candy store. The drummer sounds so innocent. Simply beautiful. I'm stumped. 4½ stars. [after] The innocence in his playing touched me from the start. Andrew has vision and authenticity in his sound and approach. You could try to explain it, but it's more a thing that you feel. Amazing. David's ideas and concepts are equally amazing.

David Gilmore

"Four: Formation" (*Numerology: Live At Jazz Standard*, Evolutionary Music, 2012) Gil-



DANIEL SHERMAN

more, guitar; Jeff Watts, drums; Christian McBride, bass; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano.

I like the drum-piano intro. Is Miguel Zenón on alto? Is it the guitarist's record? The drummer sounds like Jeff Watts—new Tain, though. Since leading his own band, Tain has expressed more of his compositional voice, which brought out a different side in his playing. Everybody knows how he sounded with Wynton and Branford for so long, but now he has another sound, that seems to come from the M-BASE tradition. It's so innovative, like a way of having the pocket, but still with a polyrhythmic consciousness—and to *feel* so authentic. I hear a lot of Afro-Cuban elements, too. Interesting piece, ambient but also with a strong sense of pulse and groove. Everybody in the group is very conscious of how each part fits together. 4½ stars.

Günter Baby Sommer

"2 Besen für Philly Joe" (*Dedications—Hormusik IV*, Intakt, 2013) Sommer, drums, voice.

Nice voice-drum intro. It's a great drum composition. I love how he revisits the theme with the brushes, the certain pattern he uses on the snare drum, the tones. If it wasn't written, I liked how he was composing on the spot. All the ingredients were there—sound, touch, groove, technique, the mystery. Flawless. It reminds me of Han Bennink. 5 stars.

Terence Blanchard

"No Borders Just Horizons" (*Magnetic*, Blue Note, 2013) Blanchard, trumpet; Kendrick Scott, drums; Brice Winston, tenor saxophone; Fabian Almazan, piano; Joshua Crumbly, bass.

From the phrasing, the way he came in with press rolls, I thought it was Bill Stewart, who has a great way of combining the press roll with the bass drum. But it's not him. I love the drum intro. Henry Cole? There's a Latin-ish pulse. Obed Calvaire? Oh, it's Kendrick! [after] I didn't recognize him initially because he was doing some things I hadn't heard him do lately. Is this Terence's new record? Great composition. 4½ stars.

Benny Green

"Benny's Crib" (*Magic Beans*, Sunnyside, 2013) Green, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

Lewis Nash? No? Kenny Washington? [after] Only a few people can swing like that. When Kenny or Lewis play swing, it's a lifestyle. They live and breathe it. The trio is great. Is the bassist Peter Washington? I can't name the pianist. 4 stars.

DB

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.

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