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# DOWNBEAT

JUNE 2015

VOLUME 82 / NUMBER 6

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**POSTMASTER:** Send change of address to: DownBeat, P.O. Box 11688, St. Paul, MN 55111-0688. **CABLE ADDRESS:** DownBeat (on sale May 19, 2015) Magazine Publishers Association.

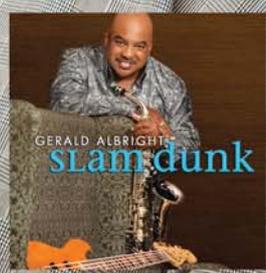
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**JUNE 2015**

# Inside

## ON THE COVER

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BY AARON COHEN

Marcus Miller's global journeys and extensive studio experience continue to inform his still-evolving style. The bassist and producer has a diverse, well-traveled background that allows him to feel at home just about anywhere. Now he's in an ideal position to pass along the lessons he has learned about drawing from the world while holding onto one's individuality.



Marcus Miller

Cover photo and above image of Marcus Miller shot by Jimmy and Dena Katz at B.B. King Blues Club & Grill in New York City on March 18. Info for this venue is at [bbkingblues.com](http://bbkingblues.com).

## FEATURES

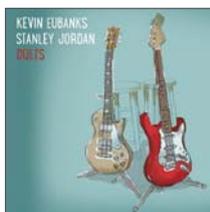
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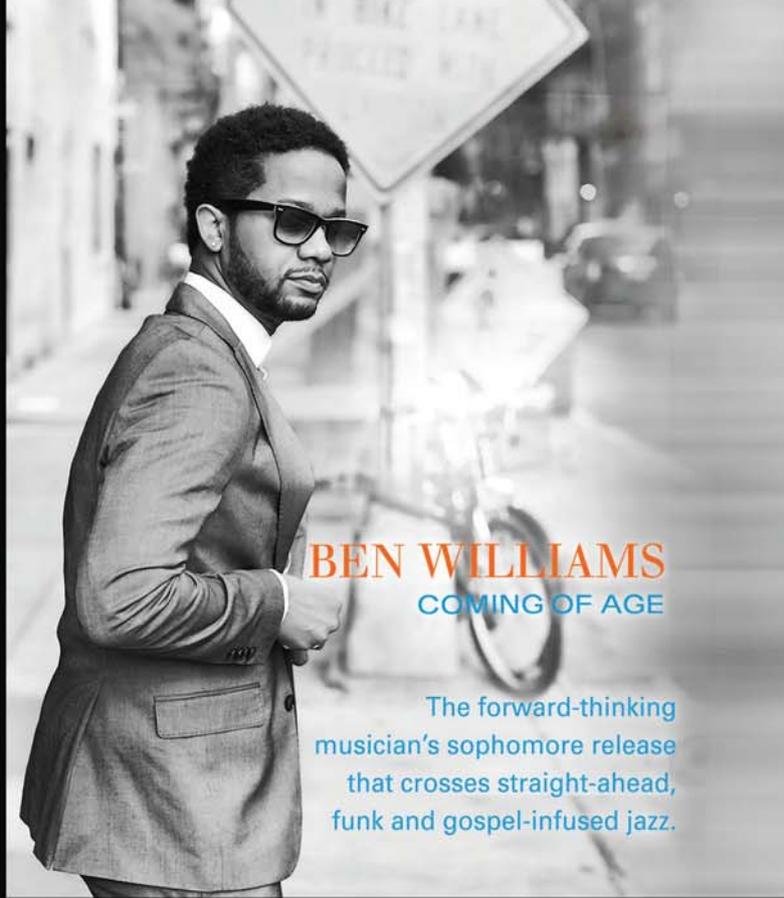
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# Ageless, Timeless Wonders

**BILLIE HOLIDAY. FRANK SINATRA. LES PAUL. MUDDY WATERS. WILLIE DIXON.** Billy Strayhorn. What do they have in common? They were all born in 1915. (Well, in the case of McKinley Morganfield, aka Muddy Waters, there's some dispute as to his actual year of birth but we know he was born *around* 1915, which is the year on his gravestone.) So 2015 is the year we celebrate the centennial of the birth of all these artists, each of whom transformed music in an important way.

We listened to their artistry yesteryear and we marvel at it today. If Muddy Waters or Willie Dixon had never been born, the blues might not have even become as popular as it is today. The 2015 Chicago Blues Festival (held June 12–14) will present centennial concert tributes, films and panel discussions devoted to both of these iconic bluesmen.

Every electric guitarist working today owes a debt to Les Paul. Every tunesmith in jazz owes a debt to Billy Strayhorn. Every female jazz singer of the past half-century has had to deal with the influence of Billie Holiday, just as every male singer has been aware of the inescapable shadow cast by Frank Sinatra.

DownBeat will salute Sinatra (who was born Dec. 12) later this year. But Eleanor Fagan (aka Billie Holiday) was born on April 7, so in this issue we're proud to present a Lady Day Centennial celebration, which begins on page 32. This lengthy section includes a review of a new Holiday anthology, an interview with José James (whose album *Yesterday I Had The Blues: The Music Of Billie Holiday* received a 5-star review in our May issue), a review of a concert by Cassandra Wilson (who is touring this year in support of her exquisite, incredibly creative Holiday tribute *Coming Forth By Day*), a review of John Szwed's new biography of the singer, and a review of Molly Johnson's tribute disc, *Because Of Billie*.

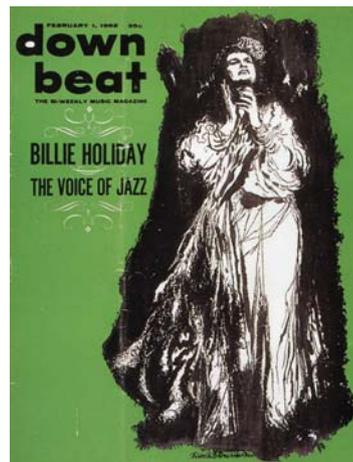
The aforementioned pieces are ancillary to the main feature, John McDonough's insightful essay "The Legend Lives," in which he examines how Holiday's popularity and stature have grown during the decades since her death in 1959 at age 44. Here's an illuminating "outtake" from McDonough's essay that we wanted to present in First Take: "I teach classes of very bright under-

graduates at Northwestern University about jazz history. Long ago I got past the sense of surprise I first felt when I learned that many had no idea who Bing Crosby or Peggy Lee or Sarah Vaughan was. But I have yet to meet a student who cannot tell me who Billie Holiday was."

Holiday was voted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame by readers in 1961. This development helped elevate her artistry in people's minds. As McDonough points out, Holiday never appeared on the cover of DownBeat during her lifetime. But an illustration of her by David Stone Martin graced the cover of the Feb. 1, 1962, issue (depicted above).

Everyone nowadays has heard some form of the prickly expression "Death is a good career move." In that 1962 issue of DownBeat, Leonard Feather begins his cover story with a paragraph that conveys a related sentiment far more eloquently: "Billie Holiday's admittance to the DownBeat Hall of Fame, though several years late, is in a sense reassuring. It could mean that the follower of jazz tends more and more now to be a sensitive student and researcher rather than a casual fan or autograph hunter. It may also reflect the peculiarly American death cult that has earned for James Dean, Charlie Parker, Lester Young and Hank Williams more publicity posthumously than they earned alive."

Feather (1914–'94) concluded his essay by opining that "for me and for so many others of our time, Billie's was the most moving human voice on earth." Well said.



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## Chords & Discords >

### Artists Deserve More

I just read Allen Morrison's piece in your April issue regarding the state of the recording industry, and I found it very depressing ("Navigating the Digital Jungle: How Jazz Artists Survive in the New Media Era"). It saddens me that artists—regardless of the genre—are losing out on so much money. It is a sad day when creative people are not properly compensated for their hard work and passion.

I don't stream. I don't use Spotify. I buy honest-to-God CDs. In part, I like having

all the information in a tidy package. Aside from the artist and list of songs performed, I want to know who else contributed to the music. I want to know the recording date, where it was recorded, and by whom. But mostly, I wish that the artist (or his estate, in the case of Miles or Hendrix) gets what is coming to them. It is, indeed, a sad day when a person with the talent of Lisa Hilton has to cash a royalty check for a single penny.

**TOM GUILFOYLE**  
AMBLER, PENNSYLVANIA

### Change the Laws

I love DownBeat's artist profiles, reviews and the Blindfold Test, but Allen Morrison's essay "Navigating the Digital Jungle" (April) was so informative and important. As always, the regulations protecting or benefiting consumers and artists lag behind technology. Fans of jazz and other music should support Ben Allison's initiatives and encourage Congress to modernize copyright and royalty rules.

**PAUL WEIDEMAN**  
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

### Discovering Treasures in DB

I want to express my gratitude to all those involved with the recording, releasing and, yes, reviewing of Keith Jarrett's trio album *Hamburg '72*, recorded with Charlie Haden

and Paul Motian (Reviews, March). I hadn't bought a CD in a long time, but after I read Ken Micallef's excellently written review, I went out and bought *Hamburg '72*. What creative, expressive music! A big reason why I subscribe to DownBeat is to discover treasures that are out there. In this case, it was a beautiful, unearthed gem from my childhood, when I was just getting into jazz. (Mr. Jarrett was a big part of that.)

I also want to offer a big thanks to Bill Milkowski for his equally well-written review of Kenny Wheeler's *Songs For Quintet* as well as to Kirk Silsbee for his review of the Steve Lacy Four's *Morning Joy (Live At Sunset Paris)* in the Historical column of the March issue. Wheeler and Lacy are both artists whose music I have greatly admired and enjoyed since the early to



mid-'70s. Please keep up the good work.

**BOB ZANDER**  
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

### Excellent Start

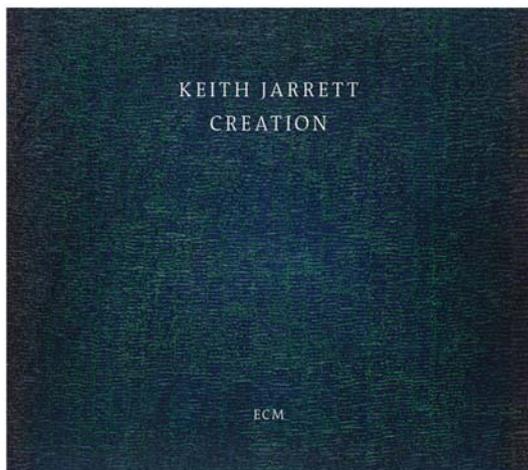
I recently signed up for a one-year subscription to DownBeat. I received a very nice surprise in the mail yesterday: your 80th Anniversary Collector's Edition (July 2014). Behavior and content like this will keep me as a customer. I also appreciate the access to past digital issues in addition to the print magazine. We are off to an excellent start. Thank you.

**DANIEL KUMMER**  
TROY, MICHIGAN

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com) or find us on Facebook & Twitter.

# May 8, 2015 Happy Birthday, Keith

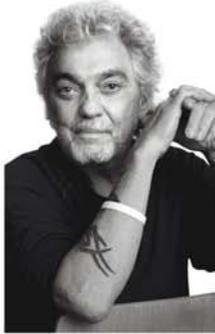
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# Steve Gadd, Zoomed In

Creative insights from one of the world's most influential drummers.



## PERFECTION IS OVERRATED

"I don't know anybody who's perfect. You go out there and do your best. And if you don't nail it, then you go out the next day and you try to get it right. That's really all you can do."

## NO SHOWING OFF

"Instead of driving the music with this need to show off, I've learned to let the music dictate what I need to do. You have to really listen in order to do that."

## SEEK INSPIRATION

"Originally you're inspired by hearing someone else doing something, and then taking it home and trying to learn how to do it. When I was growing up I would get records of Philly Joe, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, and guys like that, and slow the records down and work out what they were playing, and then work on it and put my own feel to it. That's how we all learn."

## BUT BE ORIGINAL

"You can't be a copy of somebody else, no matter how hard you try. It's impossible. I've seen people try to copy licks and get them exact, and I can tell they're not playing in a way that's natural or comfortable. That's not what music is all about. You have to develop your own bag of tricks. The worst thing in the world you can do is let your enthusiasm for somebody else's work stifle your own creativity."

## GET IN THE GROOVE

"I've seen so many drummers who have chops and technique that would make your jaw drop to the floor. People are doing some really incredible things. To me, though, I find it just as inspiring on a whole different level when I see somebody who can play a groove and get inside it and make me tap my toes. If you can get people tapping their toes, that's it – you're playing music."

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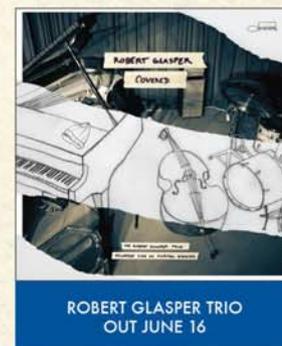
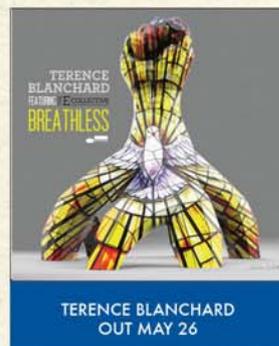
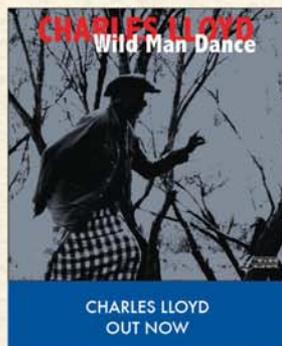
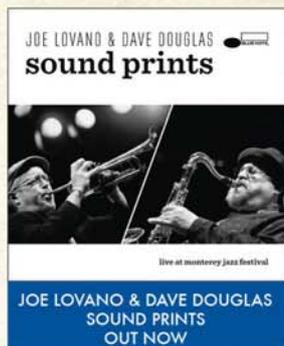
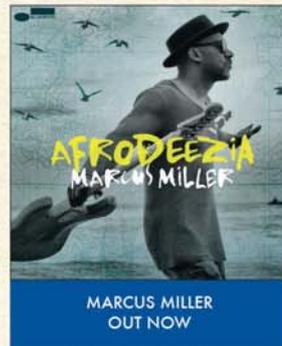
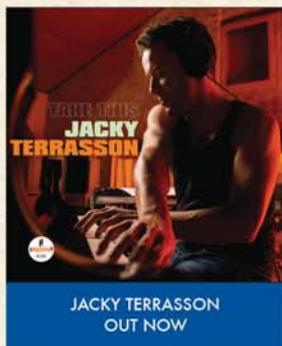
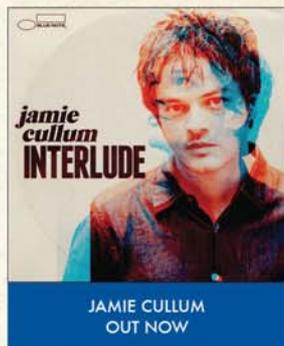
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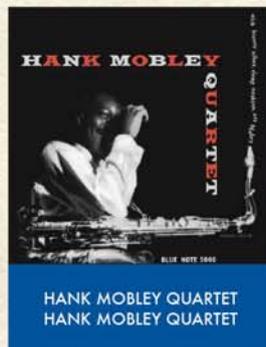
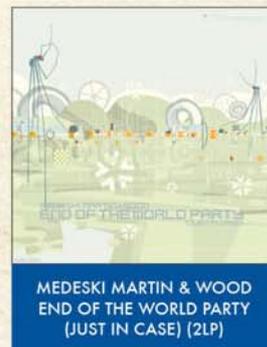
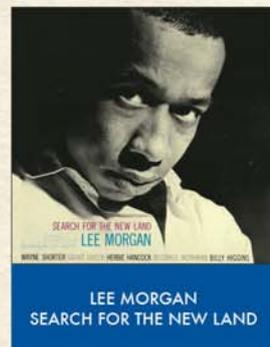
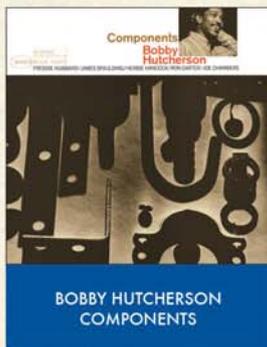
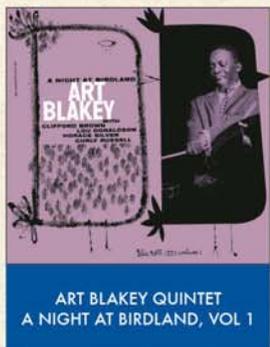
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# Sullivan Fortner Wins APA Competition

The American Pianists Association's coveted Cole Porter Fellowship competition has been called the "Super Bowl of Jazz."

Though the trophy itself is a large Tiffany crystal bowl, the cash prize of \$50,000 plus an additional \$50,000 worth of career support and a Mack Avenue record deal was what each of the five young pianists—Sullivan Fortner, Zach Lapidus, Christian Sands, Kris Bowers and Emmet Cohen—was really gunning for during the competition.

After his exemplary performances during two pressured-packed evenings, March 27–28, Fortner was announced as the winner.

The APA semifinals—held on March 27 at the Jazz Kitchen, Indianapolis' leading jazz club—had an intriguing format. Each contestant had two 20-minute segments to cook up fresh variations of five recipes: an original, a jazz standard or Cole Porter song, a blues, a trio and a solo performance.

Arriving at this moment as a contender was the latest step in a lengthy process that had started in December 2013, when nominations were solicited from respected teachers, artists, managers, festival organizers and other jazz world insiders. The event has an age restriction of 18–30, and each selected performer must be a U.S. citizen.

During a preliminary round in spring of 2014, a "blindfolded" panel winnowed down the five finalists from submitted recordings. Then, each of the five musicians was invited to Indianapolis for a week to conduct a residency at a local high school and perform a community concert at a hospital followed by a ticketed gig at the Jazz Kitchen in front of a three-person jury.

Although there was immense pressure on each pianist during the four hours of performances on March 27, each acquitted himself with an amazing level of professionalism. The pianists were backed by a hard-working rhythm section of bassist Nick Tucker and drummer Kenny Phelps.

Seated at the back of the room was a seasoned panel of judges, which included pianists Bill Charlap, Billy Childs, Amina Figarova and Edward Simon, along with Al Pryor, executive vice president of A&R at Mack Avenue.

Cohen, 24, acknowledged the influence of Ahmad Jamal after a medley of "You Don't Know What Love Is" and "Darn That Dream" that clearly evidenced Jamal's curatorial approach to dynamics and poised shifts of rhythm.

Bowers, winner of the 2011 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition, seduced the audience with his take on Cole Porter's "Let's Do It"



American Pianists Association President/CEO Joel Harrison (left) presents a trophy to Cole Porter Fellowship winner Sullivan Fortner in Indianapolis on March 28.

MICHAEL JACKSON

to close the first set, eliciting appreciative grunts of encouragement from bassist Christian McBride and vocalist Dianne Reeves, both seated in the front row.

During the finals, held on March 28 at Indianapolis' Hilbert Circle Theatre, each contestant was required to showcase his duo skills, backing Reeves during the evening's first set, followed by a performance in the second set with a big band, the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra.

Reeves offered plenty of in-the-moment spontaneity. She also had fun with Porter's "Just One Of Those Things," saucing up the lyrics and ending with an audacious descending line. Her accompanist, Fortner, skeletal-ly restructured the tune with deft suggestions of stride and a fragment of Charlie Shavers' "Undecided."

When the winner's name was announced, Fortner accepted his trophy with a smile. He had worked hard to get there. Fortner earned a master's degree in jazz performance at the Manhattan School of Music, and he has already been a sideman with Roy Hargrove, Roberta Gambarini, Ambrose Akinmusire and Christian Scott.

A 28-year-old New Orleans native, Fortner reflected on his victory with humility: "Winning this competition has given me the confidence in myself that I need to keep pushing forward in this music. Jazz is difficult, and it's important that musicians, especially pianists, hang out with one another. We need that kind of camaraderie. I am extremely humbled and in awe of all the other finalists and their musicianship. They are like brothers to me. They were all very inspiring to be around."

—Michael Jackson

## Riffs &gt;

Robert Glasper



DON O. HANNAH

**Acoustic Glasper:** Ten years after making his Blue Note debut, and following two Grammy-winning volumes of his r&b-oriented *Black Radio* albums, Robert Glasper has returned to an acoustic jazz trio format for his new album, *Covered (The Robert Glasper Trio Recorded Live At Capitol Studios)*, which will be released June 16. Pianist Glasper, bassist Vicente Archer and drummer Damion Reid—who formed the original trio featured on Glasper's Blue Note albums *Canvas* (2005) and *In My Element* (2007)—recorded the new CD in front of an intimate audience at Capitol Studios in Hollywood. Tracks include songs by hip-hop and r&b artists like Kendrick Lamar, John Legend, Musiq Soulchild and Bilal alongside the standard “Stella By Starlight.” Glasper also included tunes by Radiohead and Joni Mitchell, as well as a collaboration with singer/activist Harry Belafonte. The Glasper originals on the album include a reworking of “I Don’t Even Care,” a bonus track from *Black Radio 2* that featured Macy Gray and Jean Grae.

**More info:** [bluenote.com](http://bluenote.com)

**Duke Meets Plank:** *Duke Ellington & His Orchestra's The Conny Plank Session* is due out July 10 from Grönland Records. German producer and sound engineer Conny Plank was known for his influential work in the pop music world with Kraftwerk, NEU!, Cluster, Eurythmics, Ultravox, D.A.F. and many others. The Ellington band session was recorded at Rhenus Studio in Cologne, Germany, sometime in 1970. **More info:** [groenland.com](http://groenland.com)

**Atlanta-Bound:** The Atlanta Jazz Festival has announced the schedule for this year's 38th edition, which takes place in historic Piedmont Park on Memorial Day Weekend, May 22–24. Headliners include Thundercat, The Alfredo Rodriguez Trio, Marcus Strickland Twi-Life, Otis Brown III, Derrick Hodge, Arturo O’Farrill & The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Network Trio with Charnett Moffett/Stanley Jordan/Jeff “Tain” Watts, Diane Schuur, Banda Magda, Pharoah Sanders Quartet featuring Kurt Rosenwinkel, Mad Satta, and a tribute to Nina Simone featuring Kathleen Bertrand, Julie Dexter, Rhonda Thomas and Terry Harper. The festival, which takes place on three stages, is free and open to the public. **More info:** [atlantafestivals.com](http://atlantafestivals.com)



Roy Haynes (left) with Pat Metheny on March 13 at the Blue Note in New York City

©JACK VASTOGIAN/FRONTROWPHOTOS

## Youthful Haynes Celebrates 90th Birthday in Style

**DURING A MILESTONE BIRTHDAY GIG AT** the Blue Note in New York City, drummer Roy Haynes proved that 90 must be the new 30.

Haynes turned 90 on March 13 surrounded by a sold-out, joyous audience who hung on the sprightly senior's every word and exceptionally keen rhythms. It was the first night of a week-end residency that included performances by his Fountain of Youth quartet, as well as longtime compadres Pat Metheny and bassist Christian McBride (March 13), trumpeter Roy Hargrove (March 14) and dancer Savion Glover (March 15).

Despite his advancing age, Haynes' drumming was a marvel of grace, power, attack and swing. One could have easily imagined this nonagenarian as the fresh-faced drummer who played bebop behind Bud Powell and Charlie Parker, or as the 40-something hipster exhorting multidirectional rhythms with John Coltrane or his own Hip Ensemble, or as the ageless wonder applying his trademark “snap crackle” sound with Chick Corea, Hampton Hawes, Sarah Vaughan, Alice Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Archie Shepp, Andrew Hill, Stan Getz and Sonny Rollins.

Introduced by the club's owner, Steven Bensusan, Haynes began reciting the lyrics to Kenny Rogers' hit “The Gambler” into the microphone, with the phrases “you got to know when to hold 'em/know when to fold 'em” apparently striking some internal chord. After Haynes briskly tap-danced to his waiting drum set, Metheny broke into Charlie Haden's “Blues M45,” which the guitarist recorded on Haynes' 1994 album *Te Vou!*

Alto saxophonist Jaleel Shaw, bassist David Wong and pianist Martin Bejerano joined in,

with Haynes adding roaring full-set triplet rolls and, during Shaw's solo, rhythmic displacement. The drum solo was classic Haynes: unexpected accents, jagged rhythms and a joy-filled full stop before announcing the next bop workout with exclamatory snare/tom accents.

Metheny's “James” brought out Haynes' graceful timekeeping, the drummer practically playing in unison with the guitarist on every accent of this tricky composition.

“Happy Birthday” was sung, to which Haynes replied, “I almost forgot it was my birthday. I am telling you the truth. No shit!” McBride replaced Wong for Metheny's “H&H” (recorded with Haynes and Dave Holland on 1989's *Question And Answer*).

Monk's “Bemsha Swing” followed, Haynes accompanying Metheny's solo by tapping his sticks together in rhythm; at one point, he slapped a loud accent on his tom and Metheny followed with long, dense lines. During Shaw's solo on “Well, You Needn't,” Haynes responded to the saxophonist's mad wailing with snare jabs, bashing his toms and cymbals over an effervescent swing groove. Throughout the 90-minute set, each musician raised the bar, everyone enjoying the ride.

Haynes is a living connection to jazz's “big bang”—he's walking jazz history. But he is no moldy fig. As a musician who has endlessly reinvented himself, bringing a wellspring of creativity, vitality and unique improvisational skills to every performance and recording from the 1940s to present day, Haynes remains a marvel.

—Ken Micallef

# Elias Explores Brazilian Roots

Last winter, 33 years after she had moved to New York City from São Paulo, Eliane Elias returned to her hometown to record *Made In Brazil* (Concord), the first of her 25 leader dates done in her native land. The pianist-singer interprets two songs apiece by Brazilian icons Antonio Carlos Jobim, Roberto Menescal and Ary Barroso and performs six original compositions. Joined by her husband, bassist Marc Johnson, and a shifting ensemble of Brazilian first-callers, she dresses up the repertoire with orchestral arrangements whose melodic focus might distract you, if you aren't careful, from the lush voicings that underpin them. One track incorporates the luscious harmonies of Take 6 in full flight, and she engages in vocal dialogue with Take 6 leader Mark Kibble on three, with Menescal on two, with funky Brazilian polymath Ed Motta on one; and with her daughter, Amanda Brecker, on another.

"The shift happened naturally," Elias said of her transition to greater emphasis on vocal interpretation. "With two exceptions, every recording I've made since 2001 has been vocal. I always liked to sing a few tunes live, and audiences responded warmly, but I was focused on playing the piano. My [1998] album *Sings Jobim* did very well, and it's a nice record, but the vocals are mixed soft—I couldn't accept the piano being overshadowed. When I [signed with the label] Bluebird, they asked me to do an all-vocal recording. That was [the 2004 CD] *Dreamer*, on which I used an orchestra for the first time. It did big numbers. After that, I had to start singing more live. My piano was jealous; my right hand had to give up playing all the melodies, to let the voice have it. Now it's hard to imagine not doing both."

**You were performing from your early teens in São Paulo, when you immersed yourself in jazz pianists like Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock ...**

Also the tradition—Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Wynton Kelly, Red Garland and Erroll Garner. I prepared myself as a pianist and composer, and when I moved to New York I was ready to play with the best musicians—Steps Ahead, the Mingus Dynasty Band and others. The voice came later. It's an added color. With the voice, the way I phrase and place time is the way I play the piano, but I try to convey the message without expectation, supporting it with my harmonies at the piano and what I arrange.

**Who are some singers you modeled yourself after?**

In Brazil, you hear primarily vocal music with guitar, and on the radio I listened to interpreters like Elis Regina, but also composers singing their songs, like Jobim, Ivan Lins, Caetano Veloso, and Gilberto Gil. João Gilberto influenced me in his phrasing and singing over the barline. They



PHILIPPE SALOMON

all presented rhythm and the melody with a certain sensuality that is part of my DNA. I also really liked Frank Sinatra and Chet Baker [the subject of a 2013 tribute CD, *I Thought About You*]. But I didn't learn this music just from listening to it. I experienced it with the creators when I was a teenager. Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes. Toquinho, too. Carlos Lyra. Billy Blanco.

**How was recording in Brazil a different experience than in the U.S.?**

I went to São Paulo last February to visit my family and write music. The arrangements were pouring out of me; I heard Take 6 from the beginning, like a painter doing drawings on a canvas and then choosing the colors. I decided to record then and there. At the rehearsals, the material unfolded clearly, although I had never played with [drummer] Edu Ribeiro or [electric bassist] Marcelo Mariano or [guitarist] Marcus Teixeira. The vibe of Brazil was so different—being able to speak Portuguese, the warmth of the people, the weather. Everything was heartfelt and simpatico. I've lived in the United States for many years, but my DNA, the blood that

runs in my veins, is Brazilian.

**What was it like to sing with your daughter?**

She's something else. She listens to the song once, and then matches my phrasing.

**Her leaving the nest around the time you made *Dreamer* seemed to coincide with the new developments in your musical production.**

When Amanda was born, she became my priority. Now I'm on the road 200 days a year, but her father [Randy Brecker] and I separated when she was 6, and I couldn't tour while raising a child in a country where I had nobody else—no parents, siblings, aunts. My mother sometimes would fly here when I had something important, or bring her to Brazil in the summer. But it was exactly when Amanda went to college that I said, "OK, now I'm going to do this." I'm thankful it happened this way, that I am still young and have such a grown-up daughter.

Randy and I are good friends. He even toured with Marc and I behind the Chet Baker record. *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*, that's me! —Ted Panken



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MUSIC | DIRECT

# Robert D. Bielecki Foundation Mixes Generosity with Spirit

## IN MANY WAYS, THE ROBERT D.

Bielecki Foundation mirrors the expressive, improvisatory musical art it champions. Its mission emphasizes mutuality, gratitude and spiritual nourishment, while its operation rests on informality and collaboration. Thanks to the foundation, several significant jazz artists and organizations endeavoring to keep afloat financially on the outer edges of the music have received much-needed support in the past year—with an obligation “to earn and return” that support.

A good example of the Bielecki Foundation in action came last September when pianist and composer Matthew Shipp performed with British saxophonist Evan Parker at The Stone, a small performance space in Manhattan’s East Village that is favored by avant-garde jazz and experimental artists. Before the musicians were about to start, Shipp was told that Bielecki, a popular and steady presence at shows and concerts, wanted to say a few words.

“I figured Bob wanted to just introduce us, but instead he talked a great deal about how important our music is, and what it has meant to him over the years,” Shipp said. “And then he handed me a check for \$15,000 on behalf of his foundation. It was a startling moment, and something I certainly didn’t expect.”

Shipp noted that the Bielecki Foundation’s grant helped him record and release his new CD, *The Gospel According To Matthew & Michael* (Relative Pitch), which includes Michael Bisio on bass and Mat Maneri on viola. “I had met Bob a while back—you see him at all the gigs—and had heard through the grapevine that he was funding different jazz musicians and projects,” said Shipp. “I put out some feelers to people who know Bob, and he emailed and asked how I would spend the money if I received it from the foundation. I didn’t hear back from him until that night at The Stone.”

Since its formal inception last year, the Bielecki Foundation has awarded grants to Belgian keyboardist and composer Frank Van Hove, Shipp and saxophonist Chris Pitsiokos, plus a work-in-progress from Cecil Taylor and Bill Dixon. Grants are awarded without an application process. Often, Bielecki will underwrite residencies, concerts and programmed events, such as the 20th anniversary in March 2015 of the Other Minds Festival in San Francisco. Bielecki remarked that he’s less interested in a lengthy application process for the sake of flexibility, and he admitted that most of the grant determinations are based simply on his long “immersion in the music and arts.”

As governmental and institutional grants for artists and arts organizations continue to decrease significantly, Bielecki’s philanthropy comes at a crucial time.

“One of my concerns is that those who benefit

Robert D. Bielecki (center) with musicians Mauricio Takara, Guilherme Granado, Rob Mazurek and Thomas Rohrer



from modern art have been acculturated to devalue it monetarily, and this means artists are not being fairly compensated,” Bielecki said. “I’m hoping to help change that by helping to invest in a different economic model, and one that will serve to expand and retain audiences in the long run.”

Bielecki added: “I’m convinced that in New York City, the nation’s cultural mecca, there is an audience out there for the cutting edge. So, I’m interested in artists and organizations that are implementing smart, strategic programs, the kind that expand the infrastructure for outreach. As an audience member, I ask myself what my obligation is to this art. With these grants, I’m asking the same question of the artists and the larger cultural community: ‘What is your obligation?’ Believe me, I’m uninterested in subsidizing payments to musicians performing in empty houses.”

Prior to establishing his foundation, Bielecki, 45, was recognized as a strong financial supporter of various arts initiatives, including Arts for Art Inc., the producing organization of the Vision Festival in New York City. His appreciation for modern music dates back to his teenage years.

Originally from a small town near Buffalo, New York, Bielecki was living near Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs when he started volunteering at the college radio station, WSPN-FM. He came across recordings by Cecil Taylor and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, “and I simply could not quench my thirst for this music,” he said. As his income increased, thanks to partnerships in several travel technology companies, Bielecki attended music festivals around New York and Canada, and began to support various artists financially.

“People who are into avant-garde music know it is often hard to appreciate at first—it takes time to understand and even become a connoisseur,” said Bruce Gallanter, a proprietor of the Downtown Music Gallery in New York City and a Bielecki Foundation grantee. “But Bob has a positive way of looking at things. In terms of supporting these artists and organizations, you know he’s up for the challenge, especially if it helps change people’s lives, like it did his.” —Thomas Staudter

Caught >

Amel Larrieux at the 16th edition of the Cape Town Jazz Festival

COURTESY CAPE TOWN JAZZ FESTIVAL

## Diverse Lineup Thrills Cape Town Crowds

The Cape Town International Jazz Festival, the largest music festival in sub-Saharan Africa, presented more than 40 acts—mostly American and South African—on five stages for appreciative fans on March 28–29. Now in its 16th year, the festival is a well-oiled machine with many corporate sponsorships, drawing audiences that fill the enormous waterfront Cape Town International Convention Center.

The Kippies stage easily housed over 10,000 people, and a few performers brought the room to a shoulder-to-shoulder capacity. Hometown hero Hugh Masekela approached the stage with some limber dance moves and a big smile. The adoration for Masekela was unbreakable, and he danced, sang and played his flugelhorn to fans who were there to pay respects to a man who has been the embodiment of South African jazz since the late 1950s.

Other sets included the Malhotella Queens, who commanded the stage with charm, costumes and very high kicks for a couple of women in their 70s, and Al Jarreau, who headlined the closing night for the Kippies stage. The legendary vocalist, 75, seemed tired, and gave his band most of the heavy lifting.

On the other end of the spectrum (in terms of size) was the Rosies stage, an intimate seated room. This stage offered straight-ahead American jazz acts like the Gerald Clayton trio and Wallace Roney's quintet. Clayton, bassist Joe Sanders and drummer Obed Calvaire were sublime in their interaction, and trumpeter Wallace Roney, performing with bassist Buster Williams and drummer Lenny White, created an ambience of ethereal, laid-back vibes.

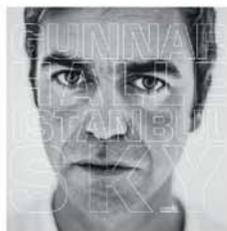
Erected in a parking lot between two freeway overpasses, the Manenberg stage seemed to have no particular theme. British saxophonist Courtney Pine closed the stage the first night opposite the Malhotella Queens, playing a jazz/reggae hybrid that paired his soprano saxophone with a steel drum player. R&B vocalist Amel Larrieux drew a particularly adoring crowd to the Manenberg stage, with sing-alongs that were part and parcel for the set with Larrieux frequently extending her microphone toward the crowd.

The Moses Molelekwa stage featured global hybrids including Purbayan Chatterjee, a sitarist, and tablist Talvin Singh. Cape Town drummer Claude Cozens followed. One of the few young locals invited to the party, Cozens was a generous leader with a perpetual groove and engaging compositional narratives. Another South African band, The Brother Moves On, brought a welcome bit of showmanship, performing shirtless and in face paint.

On the remaining stage, local hip-hop group Prophets of Da City displayed their devotion to their American forbearers with a slideshow featuring N.W.A and Public Enemy. Later, American group Cannibal Ox kept birds awake and the audience bouncing with their booming sound system, and electric bassist Thundercat closed out the weekend with keyboardist Dennis Hamm and a particularly earth-shaking Justin Brown on drums.

Rich and interesting, spurred by youth and a rapidly evolving national landscape, the Cape Town Jazz Festival was a smoothly run affair that highlighted Cape Town and by extension South Africa's dedication to America's native art form.

—Sean J. O'Connell



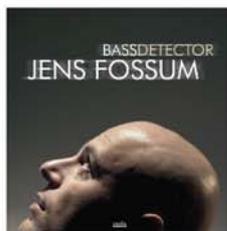
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CHRISTOPHER BALIWAAS

Players >

MARQUIS HILL  
Jazz/Hip-Hop Merger

When battling for top prize in the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition, contestants must observe historically based criteria to impress the judges. Last year's winner, Marquis Hill, more than met the challenge. His semifinal performances of "Straight, No Chaser," "When Sunny Gets Blue" and his own "The Wrath of Lark," followed by his rendition of "Polka Dots And Moonbeams" at the finals, earned the Chicago native the first-place prize of \$24,000 and a Concord Music Group record deal. But as heard on Hill's 2014 album, *Modern Flows EP, Volume 1*, the trumpeter's original music is thoroughly contemporary, with a nod to the golden age of hip-hop.

"This is my attempt to really merge hip-hop and jazz," the 27-year-old explains. "I wanted to show listeners that in this new day and age, these two genres are damn near the same. *Modern Flows*: 'flow' refers to a rapper's rhythm or the pulse they're articulating over a hip-hop beat. When you listen to a jazz musician—the rhythms and articulations and nuances that a saxophonist like Charlie Parker plays—then you listen to someone like Eminem, some of the rhythms they use are very similar. I wanted to toy with that concept of 'modern flows.'"

The jazz/hip-hop mind-meld has precedents with Madlib, Guru and Tribe Called Quest, as well as the music of Steve Coleman, Greg Osby and Robert Glasper. Informed by his rich trumpet tone and sinewy, streamlined arrangements, *Modern Flows EP, Volume 1* is a groundbreaking

addition to the style. In the past, many jazz/hip-hop experiments have leaned toward the hip-hop side of the equation, typically creating a Frankenstein-like concoction that bears little resemblance to the music of Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, et al. But Hill's elegant compositions and exceptional Chicago-based quintet (the "Blacktet") achieve true jazz and hip-hop harmony, as South African spoken-word artist Tumelo Khoza and rapper Keith Winford swing Hill's arrangements with the agility of improvising soloists.

"We're jumping in and out of these jazz tunes of mine and [delving] into hip-hop," Hill says, "moving in and out to reveal how similar the art forms really are."

From the zigzagging "Black Harvest" and the lightly pulsating "White Shadows" to the lush "I Remember Summer," Hill's Blacktet plays as one, the front line of trumpeter Hill and alto saxophonist Christopher McBride augmented by vibraphonist Justin Thomas. Completed by bassist Joshua Ramos and drummer Makaya McCraven, Hill's Blacktet is nothing short of telepathic. Hill's compositions take full advantage of the Blacktet's unique group sound.

"One of the key sounds in my band is the vibraphone," Hill says. "Unlike the piano and guitar, which can really fill up the space, the vibraphone is a drier-sounding instrument and it's also more dense-sounding. It doesn't take up as much space. It creates a more open space in the music. That really adds to the sound of my music and my

group. We've formed a sound and a vibe—this is definitely my band."

What you won't hear on this album, Hill's fourth, are endless trumpet solos. Some tracks feature trumpet, saxophone or vibraphone; elsewhere, the trumpet is heard only as part of the principal front-line melody.

"It's about the solos being organic and helping the record to flow," Hill says. "If each track is nine minutes long with a lot of solos, listeners don't want to hear that. I wanted to make a record, 45 to 50 minutes long, that when you're done listening you feel really refreshed. I didn't think I needed to highlight myself more. I write for the strengths of my band. I highlight different things for different songs. That creates the flow of the record."

A child of Chicago's diverse South Side, where he grew up playing at such nightspots as The New Apartment Lounge and The Velvet Lounge, Hill received his master's degree in jazz pedagogy from local DePaul University. The lean soul-jazz that fills *Modern Flows EP, Volume 1* is ultimately, Hill confirms, a product of what Carl Sandberg called the "City of the Broad Shoulders."

"Everything about my playing, my sound, my approach to composition, is all influenced by Chicago," Hill reflects. "I was fortunate to be on the scene with Von Freeman and Fred Anderson, talking to these great elders in the city. Just being in that environment has always been part of my music. There's definitely Chicago in my sound."  
—Ken Micallef



Players >

# JORMA KAUKONEN

Superior Simplicity

SCOTTY HALL

Two days after a monthlong tour of one-nighters in support of his rootsy, down-home album *Ain't In No Hurry* (Red House)—ending in two shows at the SXSW Music Festival in Austin, Texas—Jorma Kaukonen is back home in Pomeroy, Ohio, ready to launch the 18th season of his guitar-teaching camp, Fur Peace Ranch. “I started this in 1998, and of course our promotional material says that we’re growing guitar players,” said the indefatigable Kaukonen, a founding member of both the iconic rock group Jefferson Airplane and the acoustic folk/blues band Hot Tuna, which continues to tour. “I love to teach and was doing so well before Airplane. It was rewarding to me.”

The so-called music-farm school is open for business from March to November for long weekend sessions. Located on a serene, 119-acre spread among rolling foothills, the camp has a concert hall, recording studio, library and classrooms. The goal of the program is to make learning the guitar “as unthreatening as possible,” Kaukonen, 74, said. “We don’t grade and we seek to have a lot of fun. We work at engendering a musical community. We have cabins on the site, and we keep it small—like 30 students in a songwriting class instead of some schools that have 150.” He proudly singled out a couple of the more than two dozen teachers who have come to Fur Peace: jazz guitarist Frank Vignola and multi-instrumentalist Larry Campbell (a former Bob Dylan sideman who produced the new disc and played fiddle, mandolin and a variety of guitars during the recording sessions).

A member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and widely respected by guitarists from all genres, Kaukonen can recall his own learning process in vivid detail. A native of Washington, D.C. (where as a teenager he met future Airplane and Tuna guitarist-turned-bassist Jack Casady), he headed to Antioch College in Ohio. There, he linked up with guitarist Ian Buchanan, who had collected recordings of country blues musicians and mastered their techniques, even studying with seminal bluesman Reverend Gary Davis for five years. Buchanan’s influence on Kaukonen was profound: “Ian taught me about his fingerpicking styles as well as what

guys like Lonnie Johnson and Big Bill Broonzy were doing. I fell in love with those guys.”

When Buchanan moved to New York’s Greenwich Village, Kaukonen followed. “He’d show me things, and then I’d play them back and go, ‘How’s this?’” he recalled. “And Ian would say, ‘You suck.’ So it became my challenge to play not to suck. That’s how I created my own style. But I figured there were more loving ways to learn—which is the basis for Fur Peace Ranch.”

Kaukonen’s fingerpicking style—his thumb playing quarter notes and two fingers playing eighth notes to fuel the simple groove—infuses *Ain't In No Hurry*, an 11-song gem that features classic old tunes as well as four fresh originals. He kicks off the album with the old-timey swing of “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down And Out,” which he learned from a Bessie Smith recording and that he has been playing since 1960. He covers the Depression-era tune “Brother Can You Spare A Dime” as well as “The Terrible Operation” by Thomas A. Dorsey (aka Georgia Tom) with a dirty blues feel. The highlight, however, is a version of the country waltz “Sweet Fern,” popularized by the Carter Family. “It’s such an odd song,” Kaukonen said. “It’s another song I played in 1960 with Ian Buchanan. I wanted Larry to yodel—he’s really good at it—but he decided to play lap steel instead.”

Kaukonen also reworks one of his favorite Fresh Tuna songs, “Bar Room Crystal Ball,” in an acoustic setting (with, appropriately enough, Casady guesting on bass). “The original was slathered in guitar overdubs,” he said wryly. “My excuse is that it was the ‘70s, after all.”

In addition to putting new music to the Woody Guthrie poem “Suffer Little Children To Come Unto Me” (a request from Woody’s daughter, Nora Guthrie), Kaukonen offers up the sweet love song “In My Dreams,” the funky “The Other Side Of The Mountain” and the ruminative solo tune “Seasons In The Field”—all of which explore the theme of aging. “Hey, I’m not going to be writing a song about chasing skirts,” he said. “I’m writing about what’s on my mind. All these songs—whether they’re mine or written by others—tell a story. The guitar allows me to do the storytelling.”

—Dan Ouellette



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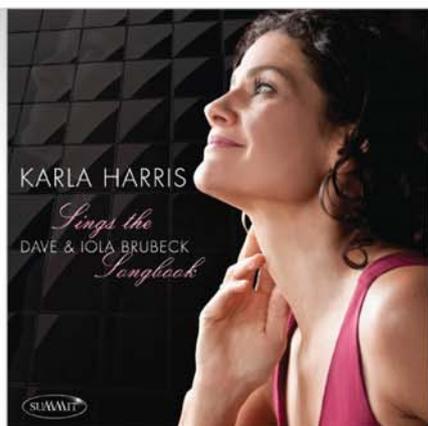
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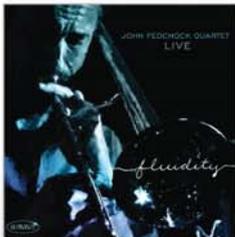


### Karla Harris Sings the Dave & Iola Brubeck *Songbook* w/ Ted Howe, piano; Tom Kennedy, bass; Dave Weckl, drums [SMT 637]

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## Players >

# THANA ALEXA

## Strategic Planner

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Admitting she was “overwhelmed,” vocalist Thana Alexa waited until she had finished her first number—a snappy, scat-filled invitation to “Take Five” via Paul Desmond and lyricists Iola and Dave Brubeck—before welcoming the capacity crowd to the CD release concert for her remarkable debut, *Ode To Heroes* (Jazz Village).

More than 200 fans, friends and family members filled Subculture, a Greenwich Village performance space, for the March 23 concert. After enthusiastically introducing the four core members of her band, with special emphasis on superstar drummer (and her fiancé) Antonio Sánchez, Alexa invited tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, a special guest, to the stage.

Her open, giddy-with-joy demeanor quickly shifted as she counted out the beat for the album's title track, one of eight original compositions on *Ode To Heroes*. Suddenly she was all business, hop-scotching with Sánchez and bassist Jorge Roeder through a tricky, syncopated intro. After delivering her inspirational lyrics (“Invigorating visions flow / Be open, challenge all you know”) in a radiant voice, Alexa stepped aside as McCaslin delivered a long, bravura solo that multiplied the energy in the room.

Alexa followed McCaslin with a solo of her own that encompassed unbridled swoops and yelps, saw-sawing dynamics, startling sounds and percussive tones. When she returned to singing the song's lyrics—matched on the melody by McCaslin and fellow New School alum Ben Flocks also on tenor sax—it became obvious that Alexa's combination of sparkling artistry and unerring confidence make her far more than just another rookie with a debut album.

The unveiling of *Ode To Heroes* was accomplished with patience and planning. With help from a \$17,000 Kickstarter campaign, the recording sessions took place in May 2012—just a few months after Alexa contributed vocals to the title track and centerpiece of Sánchez's 2013 album, *New Life* (CAM Jazz). After all of her album tracks were complete, she meticulously hunted for a label.

“I wanted to be ready to present the music in a professional, fine-tuned way when the album came out,” said Alexa. “That required a lot of practice, plus moving out of my comfort zone to focus on soloing

and scatting. Also, I worked on developing a show, putting together set lists and maintaining a level of fun through my performances.”

Born Thana Alexa Pavelić (the “h” in Thana is silent) in New York City, she grew up in Connecticut, studying violin while also digging into the jazz and r&b records in her father's collection. In 2000, when she was 13, her family moved to Croatia, where she began playing guitar and composing her own songs, taking voice lessons later at the Rock Academy of Zagreb.

A return to the States to study psychology at Northeastern University in Massachusetts left Alexa frustrated and unhappy. So she transferred to the New School in New York and finished her bachelor's degree in psychology while also earning a bachelor of fine arts degree in jazz performance.

Alexa became friends with Sánchez in 2008 after seeing him perform at Carnegie Hall with Croatian pop star Oliver Dragojević. She credits the drummer—her co-producer on *Ode To Heroes*—with helping her to progress artistically: “Antonio has seen me perform this music over the years, and the structural criticism he has offered to me has made a huge difference. We've spent a lot of time talking about putting together solos that say something, and about the rhythmic aspects of what I can do with my voice.”

Alexa is featured on Sánchez's forthcoming album, *The Meridian Suite* (CAM Jazz), recorded with his working band Migration, and she is currently writing material for her next album. “In the studio you can take your time and produce a record that showcases your talents, but playing music in front of people is something entirely different,” Sánchez said. “When I first heard Thana sing, I recognized her raw talent, but her growth as an artist has been unbelievable.”

The last song of Alexa's set at Subculture was “Ghost Hawk,” written as a tribute to her brother Niki, who died in a motorcycle accident in 2010. Looping her vocals after a piano solo, Alexa created a polyphonic swell that reached a stirring crescendo, and then quieted the band and softly urged her brother to “have happy dreams”; it was quite a benediction for an emotion-filled evening.

— Thomas Staudter



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Players >

# BOB MCCHESENEY

## Stepping into the Spotlight

TODD TYLER

As a top studio player, whose playing appears on a number of film soundtracks and pop albums, the accomplished trombonist Bob McChesney belongs to that rare group of Los Angeles-based musicians whose sound has literally gone global. McChesney's extensive, diverse discography includes appearances on albums by Ray Charles, Daft Punk and Arturo Sandoval, as well as the *Rush Hour 2* soundtrack. As of this spring though, McChesney ascends to a new level of visibility and personal vision with his album *Chez Sez*.

Made and conceptualized with pianist-organist Larry Goldings (also a Los Angeleno now), alongside an ace group featuring drummer Bill Stewart, bassist Darek Oles and tenor saxophonist Bob Mintzer, *Chez Sez* serves as an impressive mission statement for an artist finally emerging as a leader. The set boasts striking, technically charged but swinging trombone solos, plus smart charts that retooled standards. McChesney has definitely stepped into the spotlight now—after hiding in plain sight for decades.

The Baltimore native, who has been based in Los Angeles since 1979, sought out Goldings' assistance for the album. "I figured it would be tough to do this myself," McChesney explained. "Larry helped me visualize the whole thing. I was going to do this [album], but I wanted somebody else's input on it, and I thought he'd be the perfect guy to do it."

Bob Mintzer plays tenor sax on five of the 11 tunes, including the title track, which is a McChesney original, and "This Thing," the trombonist's contrafact based on Cole Porter's 1929 composition "What Is This Thing Called Love?"

"Bob McChesney is one of the best trombonists I know," Mintzer said. "He has an unusual take on writing contrafacts on standards, which are challenging to play and amazingly colorful to listen to."

McChesney's voice as a trombonist is clear-burning and smooth. It's something he has diligently worked on since childhood: "I love playing. That's all I really wanted to do in my life." But when it came time to go to college, he recalled that he was "on the fence, thinking, 'Jeez, I don't know if I can make it with music.' But when I graduated, I

was really looking for a music gig."

That first notable gig was the Tommy Dorsey band, but the road life fairly quickly wore on McChesney. His college friends urged him to head to Los Angeles. "When you're young, you're just trying to find any work at all," he said. "Out in L.A., that leads to doing sessions. Of course, my heart has always been in soloing. I've worked really hard at that."

One of McChesney's claims to fame is his mastery of the "doodle-tonguing" technique on trombone, which enables his crisp, rapid-fire playing, and is the subject of a well-known book he penned, *Doodle Studies and Etudes*. His involvement with the technique goes back to childhood: "I was tonguing and articulating on the trombone like this from an age where I can't even remember how or what I was doing. Years later, when I got out of college, somebody said, 'What is that?' I wrote a book and sell those all the time, on how to articulate. I didn't invent it. Carl Fontana did it. There are even writings of trombonists back in the late 1800s using it on certain things. It's a way of playing really smooth and fast."

In his formative years, McChesney wasn't necessarily fixated on listening to the work of other trombonists. "I was more obsessed with Freddie Hubbard, with trumpet players, sax players and guitar players," he said. "That's common with a lot of jazz musicians: They love their instrument, but they get inspiration from outside of it."

McChesney's only other release as a leader came in 2000, when he recorded a set of songs by his sometimes employer—and great admirer—Steve Allen. *Chez Sez*, McChesney's truer and more personal project as a leader, has been long in the brewing stage, and he is eager to keep moving ahead. He recently launched a Kickstarter campaign for the latter.

At this point in his life and career, he is free to focus his energies on his own pursuits. "Things aren't such a struggle to stay alive, so I have more time to spend on my music," he said. "The kids have moved [out], you get a little more established in the studios, and there is not this angst. Also, as you get older, you feel like, 'Hey, I want to make statement.' I plan on doing something else pretty soon. It won't be 10 years. It will be a year." —Josef Woodard

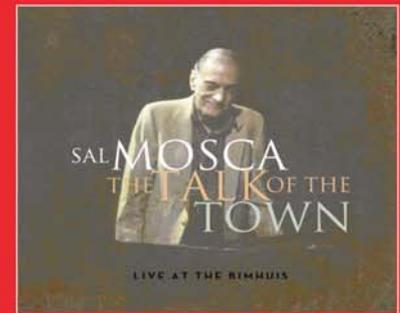


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Some artists fly under the radar, doing their work in their own time, only allowing true aficionados or lucky, open-eared listeners into their world. Pianist Sal Mosca was definitely one of those, a master musician who perfected his craft and whose work has gone mostly unnoticed, until recently. We are proud to present a wonderful document and a true testament to the extraordinary talents of the great Sal Mosca, a live recording spanning two discs entitled *The Talk of the Town*, taken from a performance on November 14, 1992 at the highly regarded Bimhuis in Amsterdam.



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Marcus Miller at B.B. King's in New York City on March 18



# MARCUS MILLER *WORLD TRAVELER*

By Aaron Cohen || Photo by Jimmy & Dena Katz

Marcus Miller has a diverse, well-traveled background that allows him to feel at home anywhere in the world. His global journeys have informed his still-evolving style, yet he's astute enough to always avoid imitation. On his new album, *Afrodeezia* (Blue Note), the bassist connects African, Caribbean and American sources with nods to both history and his own family. The disc is the end result of some recent honors—in 2013, the United Nations named Miller a UNESCO Artist for Peace—as well as the adventures that come with being a valued member of celebrated bands since he was a teenager. It also reflects a culmination of Miller's life experiences, from his youth spent eagerly absorbing a wealth of ideas in New York studios to performing last year on a big stage in Morocco. And now he's in an ideal position to pass along the lessons he has learned about drawing from the world while holding onto one's individuality.

"Musicians are products of their environments, particularly in my generation," Miller said before his band's soundcheck at the venue SPACE in Evanston, Illinois. "Now, with YouTube, a lot of musicians have access to music from all over the world, so people aren't playing with a regional sound. But when I was coming up, we knew if you were from New Orleans, Minneapolis, Detroit or Oakland. I'd walk down the street and every 10 steps, there was some other kind of music emanating from a basement, or club.

"I came up playing funk, straightahead jazz with [drummer] Kenny Washington for kids in the projects. I played with Latin bands, African bands, reggae bands. My father's family is from Trinidad, so there was a lot of calypso I played as a kid. If you're an honest musician, that's going to find its way into your music. I've always been a true fusion musician because that's how I came up."



Miller's new album is titled *Afrodeezia*.

That investigative spirit and energy were evident during Miller's performance at SPACE later that evening. The 55-year-old bandleader consistently directed and challenged his predominantly much younger band. His percussive thumb unleashed resonant funk lines in an exchange with electric guitarist Adam Agati. These were the moments the packed room cheered, but he also took chances—whether it was doubling on bass clarinet or playing the Moroccan *gimbri*, a stringed instrument he was given in that country last year.

Miller's knowing admiration for Motown house bassist James Jamerson was reflected in the way he built up tension on a stark rendition of The Temptations' "Papa Was A Rolling Stone." Still, he never abandoned his ties to jazz improvisation, just like Miller's New York accent hasn't left him even after living in Southern California for decades.

Even though Miller has been steadily building toward all of this throughout his career, the past few years have been especially rewarding. His 2012 album, *Renaissance* (Concord), marked the beginnings of Miller's current working band, which includes Agati, saxophonist Alex Han and drummer Louis Cato—musicians who have proven their ability to blend with such guests as West African string players and Brazilian percussionists. That album included his composition "Gorée," a moving piece based on Miller's visit to an island off the coast of Senegal where captured Africans were shipped to the Americas to

work as slaves. When he performed the composition in Paris and explained its origins, a UNESCO director invited him to become an Artist for Peace and follow in the footsteps of his colleague, Herbie Hancock. Part of Miller's duties in this role include being a spokesperson for the organization's Slave Route Project.

"The goal of this project is to raise awareness of the story of slavery, particularly for young people where the story is not as clear," Miller said. "We want to emphasize how amazing it is that people have the ability to overcome a situation and rise out of that.

"A lot of these captive Africans who were transported used music to sustain themselves. They couldn't read or write in the United States, so to verbalize when they were working in the fields, the music had to carry so much information. I was getting into that and wanted to emphasize the musical connection among the slaves who started in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the U.S. It's such an important through-line, and jazz is an important part of that through-line."

Miller wound up learning as much as he was teaching, and the results are interwoven throughout *Afrodeezia*, which was recorded in four continents. Last year, he accepted an invitation to play at a gnawa music festival in Morocco, where he received the *gimbri* that he plays on a track titled "The River." He saw that the gut-string instrument is played like a funk bass, "and here I was thinking that funk bass started in 1967 with Larry Graham," he said. But that was just the begin-

ning of his discoveries, as he found out when they recorded the samba-inspired "We Were There" with Brazilian percussionist Marco Lobo.

"Marco has that tambourine with the skin and played the same rhythm from the gnawa music," Miller said. "I was tripping—it was a different instrument, but it's the same rhythm. It's a 4/4 with a hitch in it that's very particular. It's a 16th-note base, but some notes are behind, some are in front. It's got its own lilt. I started investigating this rhythm and this old percussionist in Paris told me this rhythm started in Egypt, then traveled west to Mali, then up north to Morocco and Algeria.

"Then, with slavery, the rhythm crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Just hearing all this information is in the music—all of a sudden it opens you up. I feel *connected*. I'm seeing the connection all the way through. For an American black who, up until recently, if asked, I'd say South Carolina or Caribbean as my lineage—to see a connection beyond that is profound."

Miller went beyond visualizing these connections to balancing pan-global influences and his own background without diluting any of these idioms or copying them outright. "Preacher's Kid" combines his impressions of South African gospel choirs with thoughts of his pianist father, who played hymns in the Episcopal church (a cousin on his dad's side was jazz pianist Wynton Kelly). "Hylife" features collaborations with West African instrumentalists and singers, including Malian guitarist Guimba Kouyaté. Named after

the popular African dance music, the track is informed by the many years Miller spent playing jazz and r&b recording sessions.

"I always enjoyed the joyfulness of highlife, but the worst thing you can do is try to out-authenticate somebody's native music," Miller said. "It's much more interesting to say, 'I'm influenced by that, but I don't want to lose my own identity, my own regional sound.' I don't try to re-create authentic highlife. It's going to be a combination of my thing and that thing. But I got West African musicians to give me some of that real stuff. There are just these little things that you discover that gives the music a different feeling—particularly with the rhythm. The way it sits, really subtle, but it was nice to have that and feel that I was using fresh ingredients. It was all I could do to edit the thing down to six-and-a-half minutes."

Trumpeter Etienne Charles, who plays on the *Afrodeezia* tracks "B's River" and "Son Of Macbeth," observed that Miller combines his own skills with a generous spirit as bandleader.

"Marcus knows how to elevate the whole musical situation," Charles said. "He understands the supportive aspect when he's locked into the groove. He's also a vocalist in the bass sense. His bass lines actually sing. On top of that, he knows how to add his own flavor, his own opinion to

# 'THE WORST THING YOU CAN DO IS TRY TO OUT-AUTHENTICIZE SOMEBODY'S NATIVE MUSIC.'

make everyone comfortable."

That sense of empathy can be traced back to Miller's youth, when he was an in-demand session musician in New York during his teens and 20s. He remembers walking down Broadway and going in and out of the studios where he worked: "This one is McCoy Tyner, this one is Earl Klugh, this one is George Benson, this one is Carly Simon, or Elton John," he said. His job entailed being a chameleon-like team player in these remarkably different contexts. Those studio gigs, and his early choice of instrument—a 1977 Fender Jazz bass he still plays—helped him develop his own voice.

"With Fender, there was a rosewood neck, which was a dark wood, and a maple neck, which is light wood," Miller said. "The maple is harder,

but I didn't know about that—I was 15, 16 years old. It just looked cooler. I got a maple neck, and the notes don't jump off the bass playing fingerstyle with a maple neck as much as they do with dark wood. I played fingerstyle all the time, but had to work hard. And if you were a New York studio musician in the '80s, you did a lot of jingles. TV speakers then weren't what they are now. I'd watch TV with my mom and say, 'I played bass on that commercial,' and she said, 'I can't hear the bass.' So I started going into the studio and started playing everything with my thumb, even the subtle stuff. Not thumping, just attacking really subtly,

and producers loved it because you could hear the bass notes. So I started using the thumb where you normally wouldn't use it and developed a lot of control with that."

As he enjoyed steady work on the road and in the studio (alongside such drummers as Lenny White), Miller built up the percussive tone of his attack. Hiss approach on the new album adds a different dimension.

"On 'Waterdance,' where I'm putting 16th notes inside the 12/8 in a syncopated way—it's not easy, and I'm trying to figure out how to do it with my thumb," he explained. "I'm feeling proud of it, and then I'm seeing a guy in North Africa is playing with his thumb, too. I realized that there's more to discover and develop when



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Miller collaborated with Miles Davis on numerous albums.

## Positively Miles

When Miles Davis recorded some of his final statements, his former bassist Marcus Miller returned to his side as composer, arranger, producer and multi-instrumentalist. Together, they worked on the Warner Brothers albums *Tutu* (1986), *Music From Siesta* (1987) and *Amandla* (1989). Miller recently shared some warm memories of their collaborations.

"There are so many people who describe this other Miles, it's my responsibility to balance that out," he said. "If you didn't know him and approached him in a way that he didn't dig, you would get blasted. But if you were in the family, if he decided that he liked you, as extreme as that negative side was, it was just as extreme on the positive side. He called me once and said, 'Listen, man. If you're ever feeling bad, listen to that thing you played on *Star People*. You'll instantly feel better. Bye.'

"He would have me come to the house and there'd be a bunch of people hanging out. He'd say, 'Marcus, put these clothes on. Somebody sent them to me from Japan and I can't see how they look when they're on me, so you put them on.' I'd put on these clothes, walk like I'm Miles, do his mannerisms and people would crack up. Then he'd say, 'I don't like that—you keep that.' So I'd always leave his house with a bag of clothes.

"He would also say things like, 'Let me show you this. Gil Evans showed me this.' And he'd play a chord really hard and lift off all the notes except two. This was the period when we were writing *Tutu*. I was blessed to catch him in that period

because he was talkative.

"I would show him, 'This is how this tune goes.' He never asked me about the harmonies. Even if he was going to improvise over them, he never asked. He'd say, 'What key is this in?' That's all he wanted to know. I think there was one song I wrote out the changes, because it was more of a standard jazz tune, 'Mr. Pastorius.' I didn't realize until we did *Tutu Revisited* [2009] and guys would say, 'Tell me the chord changes,' that it occurred to me that Miles never asked me what the chord changes were. His ears were so amazing. He's Miles Davis—he can hear stuff.

"When we cut 'Mr. Pastorius' on *Amandla*, I was playing bass, he was playing trumpet. I knew Miles wasn't a fan of swinging in the '80s because it sounded old to him, but I wanted a little bit of that. I wrote the changes out under the melody and I said, 'OK, when we're finished with the melody, I know you don't like playing the changes these days, so let's just play a vamp in G. So that's how I set it up. He played the melody beautifully. And I had written the changes for myself, and it said vamp at the end. At the end, instinctively, he went back over the top and started soloing over the changes. I'm playing the bass, he's playing a couple notes that I thought didn't work in the chord.



Miles Davis (left) with Marcus Miller and Mike Stern at Kix Club in Boston on June 28, 1981

©ANDREW SWAINE 1981

"Then we go into a blues and he holds up the four fingers to me, which means walk. And Miles doesn't like to walk, but it's time to walk. And he's playing some *baaaaad* stuff and kept playing. I had Miles swinging, and I didn't know it would happen. I called Al Foster, and he ran up to the studio with his drums. He started to cry because Miles is playing beautifully: no mute, completely open, which was rare for Miles at that time.

"Now I got the drums, bass and Miles, but have to deal with wrong notes [during the overdub]. I got an electric piano and then I heard the notes that Miles played to incorporate them into the chord. They weren't mistakes. They were the genius notes. I called him and said, 'Listen to this thing.' He said, 'I played my ass off, didn't I?'" —Aaron Cohen



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you get to this community of people who are playing it.”

Around 1990, Miller entered into a different kind of community when he began scoring films, beginning with Reginald Hudlin’s comedy *House Party*. He had a lot to draw from at that point—time as Miles Davis’ sideman and producer, gigs with Luther Vandross and Aretha Franklin—but the bassist had to learn to adapt to entirely different circumstances in the cinema world.

“I wrote some *baaad* stuff for Reggie’s film,” Miller said. “I played it for him, and he said, ‘That’s great, but I can’t hear a word my actors are say-

ing.’ That was my first lesson: You’re there to support what the actors are saying. Your job is to have some great music to impress people, but your job 99 percent of the time is to emotionally guide [viewers] through the film. Some films required orchestral stuff. So, for orchestral arrangements, I started to refamiliarize myself with oboe, English horn, or something I wouldn’t use on my album.”

A few years ago, Miller went back to working with expansive scores in his project with The Philharmonic Orchestra of Monte-Carlo in France. He had been invited to collaborate with the ensemble in concert, but he didn’t set out to

record the performance. The late producer Francis Dreyfus located a ProTools file that the engineer had made that night. Miller liked what he heard. After he mixed it, the recording was released in 2011 as *A Night In Monte-Carlo* (Concord).

“The stage was very small so we were all up on each other, but it was a nice gig,” Miller recalled. “Since it wasn’t intended to be an album, there’s none of that self-consciousness that comes with a red recording light. It was natural, organic and a nice documentation of that—and a nice way to present music I had already recorded but in a new context.”

Future generations of musicians could receive Miller’s influence in different ways, as he has recently become more involved with education. One way is his partnership with Sire Guitars to create the Marcus Miller M3 and B7 line of affordable, quality basses.

“I wanted to see if I could put some instruments in young kids’ hands,” Miller said. “People’s mothers come up to me and say, ‘My son is thinking about playing bass—what should I get him? I don’t want to invest two or three thousand dollars if he’s just going to play PlayStation.’”

For the past six years, Miller has also led clinics in cities around the world where he’s touring, even though he had been reluctant to do so initially.

“I felt we were entering this ‘visual age’ where kids aren’t learning with their ears; they’re learning with their eyes,” Miller said. “I came up with Stanley Clarke, Ron Carter, Paul Chambers and Jaco Pastorius records with no visual. I had to pick up the [record player] needle, put it back, and use my ear to figure out what they were doing. With a lot of young guys, their ears aren’t as developed as their technique—they’re playing instruments, particularly the bass, from a visual perspective. The imagination, the ear and those other important things aren’t as developed.”

“Because of that, I didn’t want to get in front of kids and hear them ask, ‘How do you do this technique?’ But I realized that if I’m going to do the clinic, I can teach in any way I want. So why don’t I go up there and demonstrate the connection between your ear and your instrument? Why don’t I sing something and play it? And show how free you can be if your ear is developed as an improviser, player and composer.”

Such connections are especially crucial because Miller knows that merely depending on record companies, retail stores and the media to bring his music to listeners’ attention is insufficient nowadays. So after his concerts, he regularly spends time speaking to fans, who offer all kinds of different viewpoints.

“After the gigs, I got an hour just meeting people and signing autographs,” Miller said. That changes your music, too—knowing who you’re making your music for. I’m sitting there talking to *real* people. They’ll say, ‘This is my son, his name is Marcus.’ They say, ‘Your music got me through this or that period of my life.’ You’re meeting young bass players and all of a sudden, it’s real.

“I was a studio rat from ’79 to ’95. The people buying the music, I knew they existed, but I didn’t have a good sense of who they were. Now I have a real one-on-one connection with people I’m making music for. That’s important.” **DB**

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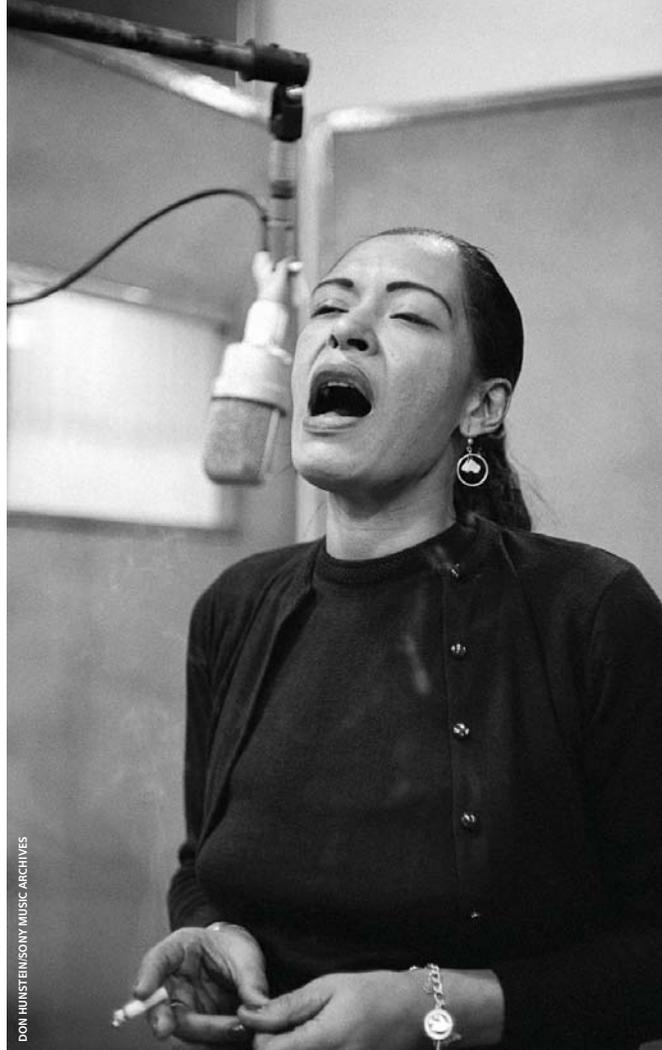


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# THE Legend LIVES

BY JOHN McDONOUGH

**T**his story is less about Billie Holiday the singer, who was born 100 years ago on April 7, than it is about Billie Holiday The Legend—how it materialized, how it was sustained and how, in her long absence, it has grown to imperial dimensions.

She died in 1959. That means that in 2015, no one under the age of 65 could have any real living memories of ever watching Billie on television or the concert stage. Yet, young people today who might not recognize names like Bing Crosby, Sarah Vaughan or Peggy Lee almost certainly know Billie Holiday's name—and might even have a T-shirt or a poster with her image on it. It makes no difference that they may never have heard a Billie Holiday record or know a song like "I Wished On The Moon" or even "Strange Fruit." Her name has broken free from the specifics of her work and assumed a meaning that transcends any musicology. She has become part of a universal vocabulary of cultural references we use like verbs or nouns. She has become an idea, a metaphor, an incarnation of larger concerns.

Basically, that's what a legend is—a unique talent wrapped inside a wow of a story. Without the story, the talent will be interred with the person. For example, most music fans today *don't* know who Mildred Bailey was. Both she and Billie were highly regarded

jazz singers who fell short of major commercial stardom. They recorded for the same record company at the same time, worked with many of the same musicians, made an equal number of records and were produced, for the most part, by the same man. And both died impoverished at the age of 44. The parallels are remarkable. The only difference—a minor one—was that in the late '30s Mildred always led Billie in the DownBeat Readers Poll. But here we are today talking about Billie Holiday, not Mildred Bailey. Mildred had all of the talent, but none of the story.

Facts don't necessarily become a legend most, but here are a few about Billie. She was discovered by John Hammond, a wealthy young record producer with an uncanny aptitude for listening through the fog of the commonplace and finding pristine originality. In 1967 he told me that he first heard Billie in April 1933 singing in a Harlem club owned by Monette Moore. "And she had a 15-year-old girl there," Hammond said (she was actually closer to 18). "I listened to this girl and I just couldn't believe my ears that here was a singer who sounded like an instrumentalist, like one of the most advanced instrumentalists there had ever been. So I started talking to Billie, [who] had had a fairly checkered career by then. She'd been in jail and everything. And Billie had already been arrested for prostitution at 14. But Billie was out of sight as an artist."

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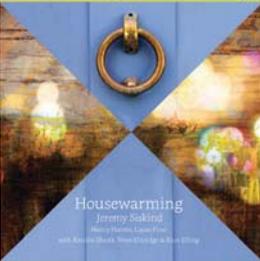
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Later that year, Hammond produced her first records with an early Benny Goodman band. But the work on which her reputation would be built began in July 1935 when he began recording her with pianist Teddy Wilson for Brunswick. The resulting records were cheaply produced at union scale with no royalties, intended primarily for the jukebox trade. But they sold well enough, and a year later Hammond began a parallel series under Billie's name for Brunswick's sister label, Vocalion. When Count Basie came to New York in early 1937, Lester Young, Buck Clayton and Jo Jones became frequent accompanists in the Wilson-Holiday partnership. Today, the Brunswick-Vocalion distinction is largely lost in what has become a single body of work. For the curious, however, Billie takes two choruses on the Vocalions, only one on the Brunswicks.

They would be the defining performances of her career; and later, among the most treasured works of the jazz canon. But they brought her neither fast fame nor wealth. She first appeared in the DownBeat Readers Poll in 1937, in 11th position, far behind Ella Fitzgerald, who topped the Vocalist category, and Mildred Bailey, who placed second. In January 1938, Billie slipped to 14. In a widely known broadcast from the Savoy Ballroom in June 1937, an announcer introduced her as "Willie" Holiday. By January 1939, she had moved up to fourth position in the poll and would continue at more or less that level through the '40s. Then she slipped back into double digits.

In 1939 she was singing at a fashionable Greenwich Village cabaret called Cafe Society when she heard a song called "Strange Fruit." It was a gloomy, somber and frightening dirge that spoke of the unspeakable—lynching. Billie was neither Southern nor political. But something

about the lyric and music moved her to record it. It was great for the sophisticated, leftish and integrated audiences who came to Cafe Society. But it was poison to Vocalion. So Billie took refuge in a small jazz-only label called Commodore. The record sold well, although no one can be sure whether it was "Strange Fruit" or "Fine And Mellow" on the other side that drove the sales.

"Strange Fruit" changed Billie Holiday from a jazz singer to a method actress. Her performances evolved into intimate, Stanislavskian theater, wherein she appeared to become the song. But it was intuitive, not methodical. She played herself, sitting on a stool framed in a pin spotlight with a gardenia in her hair singing about "black bodies swinging in the southern breeze." The record would become a classic of American protest music.

Six years later, Billie had a modest hit in 1945 when "Lover Man (Oh Where Can You Be?)" climbed to number 16. It was the last time she would do well on the charts.

The rest of her life became a resume of self-directed decline, fueled by drugs, men and a general malaise of disorder. By the '50s, her Clef and Verve albums returned her to a jazz context, but were becoming increasingly difficult to listen to. Her voice had shriveled to a kind of cackle, as the personal and professional in her life seemed to melt together. Tragedy became an increasingly central measure of her persona—as well as her cabaret act. Audiences were encouraged to hear autobiography in her performances. Fans today remain divided over her later work. To some, her broken voice lifted the pain in her songs to a startling and personal emotional authenticity. To others, it was simply the remnant of a great talent that had lost its way.

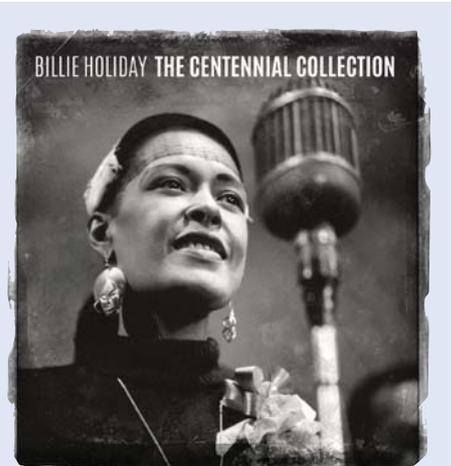
Billie Holiday passed away in New York City on July 17, 1959, hospitalized, under arrest on drug

## Lady Day's Seminal American Music

Billie Holiday's spirit soared in 1935 when she recorded "What A Little Moonlight Can Do," which serves as the leadoff track on Legacy's new compilation *The Centennial Collection*. All-star improvisers (Roy Eldridge! Benny Goodman! Ben Webster! Teddy Wilson!) were swept up in her excitement. At 20 years old, she gave genuine voice to girlish exuberance. Who *wouldn't* fall for that?

By 1944, when this collection of Holiday's early-to-mid career works ends with "Lover Man (Oh, Where Can You Be?)," the singer sounded sadder and wiser. She could still sing of yearnings and satisfactions—as on "Them There Eyes"—but she also addressed the necessity of self-sufficiency ("God Bless The Child"), the horror of lynchings ("Strange Fruit"), despair to the point of self-obliteration ("Gloomy Sunday") and many varieties of troubled romance (most of the other tunes filling two CDs here). In every instance, her act of expression is a thing of honest beauty that continues to endure—100 years since Billie's birth and 55 since her death.

Although these tracks weren't all hits upon initial issue, Columbia Records revived most of them later ("Strange Fruit," "Fine And Mellow" and "Lover Man" are licensed from Verve) and has kept them available in some form for half a century. They are foundational works of modern American popular



music and jazz classics—idiomatic, conversational, of unflinching rhythmic pull, melodically playful and models of vocal-instrumental interaction. Billie had a limited pitch range, and not all the lyrics she tackled were poetry, but she imbued every measure with feeling and meaning, inspiring immortal accompaniments. Her recordings have influenced all who followed, from Ella and Sarah, Nat "King" Cole and Frank Sinatra, to Marvin Gaye, Amy Winehouse, Cassandra Wilson and José James. If you've never heard this music, you're in for a treat—and if you have, how could you be without it?

—Howard Mandel



Holiday sings at a 1946 recording session for Decca. Photo: Ivan Black Assoc. (Wiley)

charges for five weeks and handcuffed to her bed. The New York Times ran a short, un-bylined obituary on page 15 that drew, sometimes inaccurately, from her 1956 autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*. She was 44 and left an estate of about \$1,000. That summer, the Schwann Record Catalog listed 14 Billie Holiday LPs in print, seven of them on Verve. But her classic early work was almost entirely gone. Only 12 songs remained in print on a single Columbia LP, *Lady Day*.

So these were some of the facts about Billie Holiday. In 1959 they surely seemed like small pickings for myth-making. There was no shelf of awards to verify her talents, just a cache of mostly out-of-print records. She had received a few Eskey awards from *Esquire* magazine in the '40s. But she never topped a *DownBeat* Readers Poll. In fact, she had never appeared on the cover of *DownBeat* during her lifetime.

There was no "eureka" moment when the tide of obscurity was suddenly reversed. But something remarkable slowly began to happen. Billie's music and memory lingered in the mind, and so did her story. The jazz world had known similarly tragic stories: Bix Beiderbecke and, more recently, Charlie Parker. They were a cultural inheritance of the late 18th century, when the more emotional stirrings of Romanticism became a reaction to the reasoned analysis of the Enlightenment. Poets Byron, Shelley and Keats became personifications of that romantic spirit and a template for the future that transposed easily into 20th-century celebrity culture. There would be many—misunderstood young artists of passion, originality and genius, prematurely crushed by neglect, hardship or perhaps a fatal flaw that predestined tragedy and gave such stories a Shakespearean weight.

Billie's story had all the right elements. And now her death opened up the space in which they were able to take root and breathe, unchecked by the inconvenient intrusions, contradictions and protestations of a living person. The legend that would replace her had been there for years, but would now make her vastly more famous in death than she had ever been in life.

Her renaissance began quietly. In 1961 she was finally voted into the *DownBeat* Hall of Fame, and on Feb. 1, 1962, a regal sketch of Billie by David Stone Martin, who had done her Verve album illustrations, finally made the magazine cover. Leonard Feather did a major story. But this was only one discrete symptom of a larger, mainly decentralized push to reclaim Billie Holiday. John Hammond, who had originally discovered her in 1933,

## Billie's Blues

Near the beginning of the new biography *Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth* (Viking), John Szwed includes a short, previously unpublished excerpt from a draft of the vocalist's 1957 ghost-written autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*. It is a titillating anecdote that expands on what those familiar with the skeletal details of Holiday's too short, tragic life might have guessed about her relationship with film auteur Orson Welles, one of her many amorous pals.

In *Lady Sings the Blues*, her earthy and shocking (for then) tell-all, there are some insinuations regarding Holiday's friendship with the Hollywood wunderkind while at work on his masterpiece *Citizen Kane*, but the excerpt left on the editing room floor recounts a reuniting of the two show-biz stars at a Manhattan nightclub. Their steamy embrace takes place right in front of Welles' new bride, Rita Hayworth, who gives him a good, public wallop for his impudent behavior before huffing out of the club—the perfect pretense for the resulting temporary rekindling of their forbidden flame.

Those hoping for a parade of salacious and lurid bits, however, will not find them in Szwed's book. To his credit, the author—who has also written biographies of Miles Davis, Sun Ra and musicologist Alan Lomax—is more interested in utilizing the aforementioned anecdote to help broaden the reader's understanding of the rarefied world Holiday rose to work and play in.

Furthermore, Szwed wants to locate Holiday's personhood, and make telling connections between her life and her art. In this determined "meditation," he indeed succeeds in providing much needed dimensionality to the Greatest Jazz Singer Ever.

After all, it is impossible to compete with *Lady Sings the Blues*—which stands as the modern era's confessional urtext—or the regular, quinquennial march of books devoted to Holiday. Those studies tend to put more focus on the circumstantial forces—poverty, crime, domestic abuse, drug addiction, racism—that the singer fought each step of the way in asserting her art. Lacking was a close look at Holiday's place in the cultural firmament, then and now, and a succinct explanation of the world in which her recordings were created.

To start, Szwed points out how a nervous publisher, and Holiday's "co-author," William Dufty, pulled material out of *Lady Sings the Blues* that would have given her escapades and struggles a more informed context. Holiday eagerly imparted details about her drug use to Dufty, who endeavored to capture her downward spiral, but she wanted to balance her despair with the professional triumphs and personal satisfactions she enjoyed. Fittingly, Szwed restores many of Holiday's friends, like Welles, Tallulah Bankhead and Charles Laughton, to her narrative. He also notes that Holiday's book "undermined" her stated desire to establish what she could, and could not, control in her life.

Szwed, without any self-congratulation in this regard, steps in to correct this score for Holiday. He pulls together her experiences in film and on television to show how the former opportunities may have frustrated and degraded Holiday, while an ultimate triumph arrived in the company of her beloved Lester Young and other peers in a 1957 CBS production titled *The Sound of Jazz*. A good deal of Holiday's mystique came from the lens of a camera, Szwed notes, as photos of the singer in national magazines gave her a prominence granted to few other African American women of the era.

Rather than depict Holiday as some rare supernova, Szwed shows how she emerged from a historical continuum that goes back to the minstrel shows of the late 1800s and proceeded through the rise of popular music before there were dedicated jazz vocalists. A former professor of music and director of jazz studies at Columbia University, Szwed has a deep familiarity with a spectrum of sources and research materials, which was a great benefit to his work here. In Szwed's text, Holiday's vocal antecedents—Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Mildred Bailey and Mabel Mercer—are given full measure, as are the songs Lady Day chose to interpret, and the music business entities that showcased her talents. A careful appreciation of her singing is included here, but Szwed unfortunately steps backward and relinquishes his authorial analysis to other commentators.

Other books on Holiday, even those brimming with minutiae (and too much of it sad and sordid), reinforce a prevailing understanding of the singer as a self-destructive junkie. Faced with her music, the artistry then seems like something less. Not so with Szwed. His lively and helpful discussions of some of Holiday's seminal recordings reset the compass toward the heart of the singer, which is her art. They also make you want to hear her music again—to experience the sumptuous charms that can still be found, thankfully, 100 years after her birth.

—Thomas Staudter



returned to Columbia Records in 1959 and began the long task of restoring the great Columbia jazz catalog. In April 1962, the company issued the first fairly comprehensive collection of Holiday's work of the long-play era, a three-LP box set of nearly 50 songs called *Billie Holiday: The Golden Years*. Three years later, a second volume added another 48 titles. By the middle of the decade most of her best work was available for the first time in 25 years.

By the late 1960s, there was increasing talk in Hollywood of a movie. In October 1968, screenwriter and former Almanac Singers member Millard Lampell announced that he would film "the triumphant and tragic life of Billie Holiday" with producer David Susskind. The production, *I Ain't Got Nobody*, was to be a starkly realistic account of her life and times, but it became one of several attempts that stumbled. Another proposed that Dorothy Dandridge star. When Berry Gordy's Motown Productions, however, decided that singer Diana Ross was born to play Billie, Paramount quickly became a partner.

Cast alongside Ross for the 1972 film, *Lady Sings the Blues*, were Billy Dee Williams and Richard Pryor. The biopic became one of the year's biggest hits. It earned five Academy Award nominations, and it also, for the first time, put the Holiday legend on display for a vast young audience who recognized in Billie something of the angst that afflicted its own recent fallen heroes, particularly Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. Director Sidney J. Furie's film was a highly fictionalized story, but Ross' Oscar-nominated performance caught much of Billie's essence and sealed the deal to a new generation. The soundtrack would bring Ross a No. 1 album—a fact that would alert other singers to the value of the Billie Holiday "songbook" and brand. In subsequent Hollywood productions, few period films about Harlem would leave out a reference to her. Miki Howard played her in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992), and Demetrice O'Neal sang "What A Little Moonlight Can Do" in Bill Duke's *Hoodlum* (1997).

## Tasteful Tribute

There are two poles on the tribute line, that continuum on which artists honor those who inspired and influenced them. One represents imitation, whether deliberate or not. The other involves a more ambitious foray into that music and the essence of the person who conceived it.

Most tribute projects involve both, to varying degrees. But when paying respect to true innovators—those known for the ways in which they set traditional technique aside to cultivate something new—the temptation to imitate the innovator is greater.

Among jazz instrumentalists, Thelonious Monk is the clearest example. Many pianists appropriated his whole-tone runs, his minor ninths and clusters, and considered their mission accomplished. It is far rarer to absorb the ephemera of his language; Fred Hersch, among a few others, has done so admirably.

Billie Holiday is the equivalent among singers. Elements in her delivery are easy to reference—her artful rasp, her feathery vibrato at the ends of phrases, her fidelity to the tune. What's harder to capture is the magic, the spell, the ability to tap deeper reservoirs of expression.

Molly Johnson circles but doesn't quite draw from these reservoirs on *Because Of Billie* (Universal Music Canada). Clearly, she reveres Holiday; you can hear it in her phrasing and timbre. Occasionally she does convey something beneath the surface. This happens most often on ballads: Johnson's readings of "Don't Explain" and "Strange Fruit" bring each painful narrative to life.

But sometimes the arrangements work against her here. The breezy, bossa nova arrangement of "Body And Soul" would defy any singer to connect with the desperation woven into the lyrics. And as her trio opens at double-time, slams on the breaks, downshifts into a slow bluesy groove, goes back to the lickety-split gallop and so on, Johnson doesn't have enough context to bring "Lady Sings The Blues" to life.

Pianist Robi Botos, bassist Mike Downes and drummer Terry Clarke play with consistent restraint and taste, whether on their own or with horns added for a second-line groove on "Them There Eyes," some call-and-response swagger on "Fine And Mellow" and jump-blues riffs on "Now Or Never." On these tracks, Johnson flaunts her ability to deliver up-tempo material, but throughout most of this album, it's hard to sense that quality that made Holiday an object of veneration and set standards that few of her emulators have persuasively approached. —Bob Doerschuk



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The music business had barely discovered the awards game when Billie died, and the Grammys were just beginning their run. The Recording Academy glanced indirectly at Billie just before her death in 1959 by nominating Columbia's *The Sound Of Jazz* LP in the musical show category. (It had been issued in connection with a CBS television special.) But she was only one among an all-star procession of musicians and did just one song, "Fine And Mellow." It didn't win.

Soon, however, The Recording Academy felt it had some catching up to do with her burgeoning legend. It began slowly in 1961 with Billie's only direct nomination in a solo vocal category. But after the release of *Lady Sings the Blues*, it throttled into a stampede of recognition. There would be Grammy awards in the historical category in 1979 (*Giants Of Jazz*, Time-Life), 1985 (*Billie Holiday On Verve*), 1991 (*Complete Decca Recordings*), 1993 (*The Complete Billie Holiday On Verve*) and 2001 (*Complete Billie Holiday On Columbia*).

Her coattail effect in the Grammys was striking. Any product with her name attached seemed destined for recognition. Art directors and writers collected Grammys for package design and album notes of Holiday collections. There were also the many tribute albums through which younger singers began to link their names to Billie's legend. In 1994, Etta James won a Grammy for the title track to her album *Mystery Lady: The Songs Of Billie Holiday*. Nnenna Freelon was nominated in 2005 for *Blueprint Of A Lady: Sketches Of Billie Holiday*. And Dee Dee Bridgewater won for her 2010 tribute *Eleanora Fagan (1915-1959): To Billie With Love From Dee Dee*. A half-century after her death, Billie's name on an album cover had become a more powerful marketing component than the person actually doing the singing.

At the same time, the posthumous Grammy Hall of Fame citations for once-neglected records began to pile up. The score currently stands at six. "God Bless The Child" was inducted in 1976; "Strange Fruit" in 1978; then "Lover Man," "Lady In Satin," "Embraceable You" and "Crazy He Calls Me." Billie herself entered the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1987. In all, a staggering total of 24 Grammy awards and nominations associated with Billie Holiday have gone into the record books since her death. And if that wasn't sufficient *mea culpa*, at the end of December 1999, Time magazine, which had once treated "Strange Fruit" rather dismissively as a "strange record," pronounced it the "song of the century," and her "history's greatest jazz singer." Within a year, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland hitched its wagon to her rising star. The honors piled up in a spiraling swirl of symbiosis. As providers associated themselves with a mythic force, Billie's name and music became fastened more deeply than ever in young minds meeting her for the first time.

Today, more than a half century after her death, Amazon lists nearly 25 biographies and anthologies on Billie Holiday, including the latest, *Billie Holiday: The Musician and the Myth* (Viking), by John Szwed (see sidebar on page 35). More important, every recording she ever made is in print or readily available, along with many broadcast and concert performances once thought

lost. Even the few surviving television appearances she did haven been reclaimed. Trivial songs that would have been forgotten long ago ("What A Little Moonlight Can Do," "Miss Brown To You," "Easy Living") are sung today by young singers because Billie Holiday once performed them.

Most performing artists belong to their times. Why is Billie Holiday so comfortable in the present? She had the misfortune of dying shortly before what might have been her time, the 1960s and '70s. The metaphysical immortality of legend seeks and finds its objects through a careful selection process. It looks for those who are a kind of spiritual antenna that receives, processes and transmits bits and pieces of the collec-

tive consciousness of the moment. Alive or dead, Billie is such a person. Gary Giddins called her a "pitch-perfect tuning fork" for our concerns and fears. Her powers now seem negotiable anywhere in any time. It's too bad she didn't make it into the '60s and '70s, when misbehavior ceased being a career killer and became instead a credential of credibility. She would have been an ideal personification of the things Americans began to openly talk about then: prejudice, racial tensions, drugs, feminism, bisexuality, even misogyny. All converged in her life, but mostly existed as closely guarded secrets crouching in the shadows. The fact that she lived with them is now part of the power of her legend.

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For the last 40 years or so, young audiences have expected singers to wring their songs from their own lives and experiences, not rely on professional tunesmiths or ghostwriters. Notwithstanding several fine songs, Billie was not the singer-songwriter we expect today. Instead, she was able to invest her personal life in the words that others wrote and bring to them an authenticity that suggested she had lived all the sad stories they told. That is why you hear talk about her continuing influence. She sang from inside the song. When her contemporaries like Crosby, Fitzgerald, Vaughan or even Tony Bennett performed, audiences didn't think about their personal lives or infer autobiographical metaphors from the lyrics. But with Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee and later singers, that barrier began to come down. They became actors, songs became roles, and suddenly their emotional vibrations quivered with a more genuine tingle.

Billie not only understood this, she used it, even exploited it, almost shamelessly. Her close friend, jazz critic Leonard Feather, became an occasional handmaiden to this persona. One might be tempted to call it a deception, but it really wasn't. Here's how he introduced her to a 1958 concert audience: "The raw material of Billie Holiday's singing was the raw material of her own life. Billie's was the rugged voice of sorrow. And you lived just a little bit of your life with her when you heard Lady Day singing of the love she never knew. Miss Billie Holiday."

Great talents who relentlessly court their own doom are forever fascinating to us because they are completely beyond our understanding. They also frighten us a bit. Our fears are dear to us, none more than the ones we can't see. People like Billie are human enough in life to make us see the darkness in ourselves. In death, they persistently haunt us like ghosts. Maybe that's why Billie Holiday became the mythic presence she is today in *absentia*. In life, such people can be frustrating and difficult. But once fixed in the amber of legend or fiction or theater, it becomes much easier to cope with such epic contradictions.

Mildred Bailey may be forgotten, but Billie has taken a permanent seat in our Valhalla of troubled outsiders—the ones we didn't fully appreciate until it was too late. We appoint such people legends partly as atonement for our neglect and tardiness. And there they remain safe from scourges of obscurity. New books and research may probe for fresh clues of understanding. But most of us are satisfied. As the wise editor instructed his eager young reporter in John Ford's 1962 elegy on myth, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." In addition to Beiderbecke and Bird, Billie dwells now in the company of Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, Lenny Bruce, Edith Piaf, Amy Winehouse and a long line of rockers.

The most recent incarnation of the Billie Holiday legend swept Broadway just last year like a fine and mellow miracle of illusion. The great actress and singer Audra McDonald conjured a vision of Holiday in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* that led to her sixth Tony award. She accepted it on Billie's behalf: "I want to thank all the shoulders of the strong and brave and courageous women that I am standing on ... and most of all, Billie Holiday. You deserve so much more than you were given when you were on this planet. This is for you, Billie."

DB

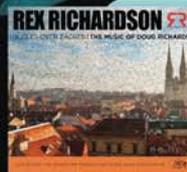


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## James Honors Lady Day's Genius

**T**hough he maintains that “Billie Holiday taught me literally everything I know about singing jazz,” it took José James years to honor that influence on record. “I didn’t think honestly that anything could be added,” he explained. “I’m always very aware that with most tribute projects for jazz masters, their work already speaks for itself.”

The wait was worthwhile. On *Yesterday I Had The Blues: The Music Of Billie Holiday* (Blue Note), the elegant young vocalist proves that the best tributes allow the spirit of yesterday’s masters to inform the work of those who follow them.

**All of the songs on this album are well known. Does that make it harder to do something different with them?**

It’s half and half: José James as a vocalist and José James as a bandleader. For me, Billie Holiday’s performance of “Tenderly” is iconic. She has the definitive version of that song. As a singer, I didn’t think there was anything I could do to surpass her—not that it’s about that. But as a bandleader, I know that a song like “Tenderly” can go in a different direction than how she did it. We really opened it up conceptually toward that post-Miles Davis/open-space world. I look at a song like “Tenderly” almost like a conceptual artist, like, “How can I place this song in a new way that shows the genius of what Billie did, the strength of the composition, and do something completely different?”

**How did you choose the musicians for this session?**

I knew I wanted Jason Moran. The pianist was

my most important choice because I didn’t want this to sound like it was created in another era. I wanted it to sound like now. To me, Jason—even more than Robert Glasper—is the original hip-hop pianist. He understands all the music that I love and know. And he’s hard-core jazz, too. Once that was locked in, I started looking at who was around. I couldn’t believe my luck that [bassist] John Patitucci and [drummer] Eric Harland were both in town and available.

**The mood you create is magical, with lots of open space, intimacy and intuitive interplay. How did you make that happen?**

It was very simple. They said, “Well, did you bring charts?” I said, “No charts, man.” And I told them that Junior Mance was telling me stories about the club called Bradley’s in the ’80s. Junior said he loved when the bar would close and it would just be musicians playing until 7 in the morning. I said, “I want this to feel like 3 in the morning. It’s just the four of us. And we’re in Bradley’s.” And that was it. They were like, “Oh, man! Wow!” They were blown away. I think they thought it was going to be just another singer date. But this was pure jazz.

Once they knew they had that freedom and it was about really playing, we all just sort of closed our eyes and Jason started playing that figure at the beginning of “Good Morning Heartache.” That was the first song. To me, that song felt very spiritual. It kind of put us all in a trance. We were all just in a deep Zen space. When we came out of it, [producer] Don [Was] was like, “Well, that’s the album.” And that was four hours later, after

we’d played all the songs in the order they are on the album. I was literally sitting in the control booth saying, “All right, what’s next?” And Don said, “That’s it. There’s nothing else.” And all of us looked at each other like, “Holy shit, are you serious?” We couldn’t believe it. It was the fastest session any of us had ever done—including Don.

**Where can we see Billie’s influence in today’s popular music?**

A lot of artists are really killing it in ways that are different than Billie Holiday but still very cool—people who are very understated in their delivery but have this emotional impact, like FKA Twigs or Sade or Erykah Badu. I don’t know if everybody would connect it to Billie Holiday, but I can see how it does connect. Even with someone like Drake, when he sings a ballad, he has that complete intimacy that I don’t think exists anywhere else in pop right now. The big difference is they don’t have the amazing songs that Billie had. She was living in a certain time where she had the finest songwriters who ever lived writing song after song after song.

**There’s a lesson, too, in how she could communicate even at the end of her career, with her voice ravaged.**

It’s really difficult to listen to *Lady In Satin* [1958], but I think it’s really important for every singer, because at some point singing becomes something else. It becomes pure communication from the heart.

—Bob Doerschuk



Cassandra Wilson

MARK FELIGER

## Wilson Adds New Complexity to Holiday's Music

**C**assandra Wilson found a surprising way to update Billie Holiday's oeuvre for a contemporary audience during her March 5 concert at Chicago's Thalia Hall, on tour to support her upcoming Lady Day tribute album, *Coming Forth By Day* (Legacy).

Embracing the themes of infatuation, subjugation, abuse and betrayal that suffused Holiday's music, she treated anguish as part and parcel of a fully satisfying love affair, avoiding an easy, one-dimensional view of Lady Day's oft-angushed narrators. Smiling as she sang, casually yet masterfully directing her six-piece band, Wilson was frisky rather than mordant. She worked against the grain of jazz history to make her hour-plus performance honoring Holiday (1915-'59) an expression of triumph rather than a tribute to a beloved martyr.

Reedist Robby Marshall opened the show lit by a pin-point spotlight, blowing a single bass clarinet moan and a trawling cadenza that ushered in a *Blue Light 'Til Dawn* mood, set further by languorous flecks from Jon Cowherd's grand piano, Charles Burnham's violin and Kevin Breit's guitar. Lonnie Plaxico on electric bass and drummer John Davis added dark, sometimes ominous depths.

Yet Wilson looked positively happy as she strode from the wings to launch "Don't Explain," among the most fatalistic of torch songs, at an extremely slow tempo. Wilson's pace, conviction and laughter where others might despair shifted but slightly throughout her performance. Among the most impressive effects she demonstrated was her ability to sustain grooving momentum at speeds that would typically bring a ballad to a standstill. She even offered "What A Little Moonlight Can Do"—one of Holiday's giddiest tunes—at a rhythm of deliberation.

Dramatically nuanced inflection, expert phrasing and theatrical informality are Wilson's

other dependable strengths—plus, of course, her inimitable voice. Her range has limits, as did Holiday's, but she makes better use of her fetching, smoky drawl than most vocalists do with three-octave reaches. Wilson also found half a dozen different, credible interpretations of those three most treacherous words in the English language: "I love you."

The band's support, while evocative, was nothing like the swing backing that Holiday herself enjoyed; instead, the arrangements sounded as if each musician found the perfect spot to contribute to a coherent, haunting swamp ambiance by listening closely and denying any impulse to effusion. Breit, who has worked with Wilson for two decades, created incisive moments rather than hot solos—although a couple of times he roared—while Burnham's fiddle grounded the entire production in a rootsy Americana feel.

Although the melodies and harmonies of "Crazy He Calls Me," "The Way You Look Tonight," "All Of Me," "You Go To My Head" and "These Foolish Things" are not interchangeable, it was hard to predict from instrumental introductions what tune was to come. On some of them, Wilson floated her precise intonation strategically against the band for a hint of discord, resulting in unexpected grandeur. On "Good Morning Heartache," she commanded grief to sit down as if she fully intended to entertain it.

On "Billie's Blues," the encore, Holiday's couplet "Some men like me 'cause I'm happy/Some because I'm snappy" was the rare instance when one could imagine Wilson was talking about herself instead of recalling a woman who suffered nearly lifelong victimization. Wilson did indeed seem happy and snappy—which, with her other gifts and attentive collaborators, proved to be just what the full house wanted and received.

—Howard Mandel

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# DONNY McCASLIN

## PLUGGED-IN PERSONA

By Sean J. O'Connell • Photo by Steven Sussman

**A**t 10:30 p.m. in the lobby of downtown Los Angeles's Zipper Hall, an agitated security guard was shifting his weight while more than a dozen people stood between him and the light switch. All of those people were there because of tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, who, along with electric bassist Tim Lefebvre, keyboardist Jeff Babko and drummer Nate Wood, had just rattled the polished conservatory hall with a muscular, electric sound. After the set, the tall and unassuming saxophonist joined the crowd in the lobby to say hello, pose for photographs and sign copies of his new album, *Fast Future* (Greenleaf Music).

A half-hour later, the security guard was finally free to shut off the lights. McCaslin had performed his show business duties and was ready to leave. He had arrived in Los Angeles from his Brooklyn home, where he lives with his wife and two children, only a few hours prior. Less than 12 hours later, he would be driving a rental car more than 350 miles to see family in his hometown of Santa Cruz. In between those two events, McCaslin did what most visitors to Los

Angeles do: He spent more time in a car.

During an impromptu late-night drive that included a look at the birthplace of the Beach Boys and a required stop for any displaced Californian omnivore—In-N-Out Burger—McCaslin discussed his recent forays into electronic dance music, working with David Bowie and David Binney, and the path he took to get there.

Born in 1966, McCaslin grew up in the quiet beach community of Santa Cruz, located two hours south of San Francisco. His parents divorced early, and he split his time between his mother and father. Donny McCaslin Sr. was a fixture on the local jazz scene, playing the piano and vibraphone at assorted boardwalk nightclubs for decades.

“Growing up, I primarily saw my father on Sundays,” McCaslin recalled. “He would drive me into downtown Santa Cruz and he would play Sunday afternoons at a place called the Cooper House. My ritual with my dad was to get down there, help him set up his instruments. I had a chair. I would just sit on that chair while they played the set because I was too young to wander the mall by myself. So I would sit and listen.”



Donny McCaslin's new album is titled *Fast Future*.

At the time, McCaslin was more interested in sports than music. When a junior high school fling with a photography course proved to be uninspiring, a friend convinced him to join a beginner's orchestra class. When his father asked him what he wanted to play, his son chose the saxophone. "I think it was because the guy who was playing tenor saxophone with my dad was a character," he said. "His name was Wesley Braxton. He wore tie-dyed shirts and had a long beard. He played these really wild, kind of avant-garde solos with squeaking. His solos would whip the audience into a frenzy."

McCaslin was a quick learner. His first teacher put a few saxophone albums in his hands, including Lee Kontiz's *Motion* and Cannonball Adderley's live 1966 disc *Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!* They changed his life. "Prior to that, I had been listening to a lot of John Phillips Sousa, Beach Boys and AC/DC. Getting these records was my first time listening to jazz outside of my father's group."

His middle-school enthusiasm led to a transfer to nearby Aptos High School. His band director, Don Keller, had acquired original Duke Ellington charts from a friend in the Navy. "I was lucky to essentially be playing Ellington's charts from the age of 14 to 18, five days a week," he said.

As a teenager, McCaslin occupied most of his free time with music, joining the nearby Monterey Jazz Festival High School Band for several years. There he got invaluable experience working with musicians like James Moody, Bob Brookmeyer and Clark Terry, which prepared him for four years at Boston's Berklee College of Music.

"I learned so much in Boston," McCaslin said. "I was surrounded by super-talented people. I got an offer to go out with the Buddy Rich band my sophomore year, but I knew I wasn't ready psychologically to be on the road. I needed more time to practice. I'm grateful I made that choice."

After a few more years, his patience and dedication were rewarded. Berklee professor and vibraphonist Gary Burton put together a band for a jazz cruise and asked McCaslin to join them.

He played with Burton for a couple years before bouncing around a few other bands. He moved to New York and worked with bassist Eddie Gomez before joining up with a reformed Steps Ahead, filling the big shoes vacated by saxophonist Michael Brecker. "I was heavily influenced by Michael," he said. "I had to play a lot of those tunes that I had listened to when I was young, but I had to find my own way of playing them."

"Sonny Rollins liberated me," he continued. "As a teenager, I was so into Coltrane and Michael Brecker and a certain school of playing. It was based on harmony, but my perception wasn't connecting rhythmically. In my early twenties, it came over me, this thing, Sonny Rollins. I was just overwhelmed with him. It was his rhythmic playing and the wonder of his thematic development of his solos that really hit me. In my mind, there was so much emphasis on harmony. All of a sudden with him, though it is very sophisticated, it became very simple. He weaves themes. That really connected with me and completely changed my perception of music."

McCaslin added another element to his playing when he toured with Panamanian pia-

nist Danilo Pérez in the mid-'90s. "Danilo showed me how much I needed to learn rhythmically about music," he said. "I feel like the whole trip was spent talking about clave. I came back to New York and started taking lessons on Afro-Cuban folkloric music."

In the early 2000s, McCaslin returned to the large group format when he joined the juggernaut Maria Schneider Orchestra. "She's a big influence on me," he said of Schneider. "She's such a hard worker, a tremendous writer and orchestrator. Sometimes I'm just up there playing and thinking, 'Man, this stuff is incredible.' I'm lucky to stand in front and play with that sort of sonic palette."

Last year, David Bowie became lucky to play with that sonic palette, too. The shape-shifting rock star joined a condensed version of Schneider's orchestra for a tune called "Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime)," a sinister swell that draws on the more theatrical side of the Thin White Duke. It is the leadoff track on Bowie's 3-CD compilation *Nothing Has Changed* (Sony Legacy).

"Maria and David wrote that piece together," McCaslin said. "We did that track in one day in the studio. David was there, and we recorded a scratch vocal that ended up being the primary take. I played a couple of takes over the whole track thinking they were just going to use snippets. Then I heard the thing."

The resulting recording has McCaslin all over it. He floats in and out from an alternative reality, wailing heartily amid the militaristic drums and clusters of horns. He, just as much as Bowie, rides the push to a frenetic conclusion.

All of McCaslin's bandleaders have prized him for his strong sound. He can play lightning fast but also with deliberate romantic purpose. He parries with the instrument, pushing forward and backward as a tune builds to a fever pitch. He is virile and vulnerable with a horn in his hands.

A lot of that is on display on the new album but with an element untapped by many of his contemporaries. Approaching 50 has not diminished McCaslin's consumption of new music and ideas. As he did with his last album, 2012's *Castling For Gravity* (Greenleaf Music), McCaslin has continued to explore electronic dance music (EDM).

"I process EDM by letting it just seep in," he says. "I do a little analyzing, but it is mostly living it and letting my imagination go. I was listening to specific artists to draw inspiration from: Baths, Knower, Skrillex, Deadmau5, Aphex Twin, Imogen Heap."

This is certainly not the usual list of inspirations for a modern jazz quartet, and the album reflects that. It contains ethereal digital effects, horn overdubbing, spacey keyboards from Jason Lindner, a funky thump courtesy of bassist Lefebvre and the authoritative snap of drummer Mark Guiliana, who has become known for mixing jazz chops with electronic music elements. Even producer/saxophonist David Binney contributes from behind a vocal mic.

"I cannot overstate the importance of David Binney's contribution to this record," McCaslin said of his frequent collaborator. "He adds a lot of the ambient textures and synth stuff. I'm grateful to be able to work with him and benefit from his wisdom."



The two saxophonists go back to the mid-'90s in New York. Along with drummer Kenny Wollesen and bassist Scott Colley, they formed a group called Lan Xang. The duo has worked closely ever since, with McCaslin putting a great trust in Binney's concepts.

While the term EDM is thrown about whenever a jazz artist dares to incorporate synthesizers or loops, the term is often misinterpreted. *Fast Future* doesn't offer rave tent dynamics. There are no glittery girls in fur boots and giant sunglasses grooving in the aisles—not that McCaslin would mind such a thing.

"I'm thinking about dancing as I'm writing the material," he explained. "I'm thinking about something I can latch onto. I'm always looking for a strong rhythmic thing or a bass line."

While EDM can induce a trancelike state, McCaslin's newer sound is more organic, especially live. Onstage, McCaslin and crew are the embodiment of a working jazz unit. There is consistent interaction and improvisation, but for some longtime fans the new direction is unexpected. While the young musicians in the crowd at the Los Angeles performance hung onto Lefebvre's howling low end, it was clear that more than a handful of audience members would have enjoyed a gentle rendition of "Body And Soul." But that is usually the case for any artist seeking to branch out beyond the sounds that established his reputation.

It is a bold task to reinvent oneself this far into a musical career, but McCaslin seems primarily driven by his own musical curiosity rather than some calculated bid for a younger audience. The EDM sounds that influence his last two records are a daily part of his life. He has embraced the genre's potential and is venturing into uncharted territory, with his saxophone in hand. **DB**

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Ndugu Chanler at the Jazz Education Network (JEN) conference in San Diego on Jan. 16



# NDUGU CHANCLER 'LIKE ROYALTY'

By Frank Alkyer || Photo by Suzette Niess

**T**his is the story of Leon Ndugu Chancler, a master of the drums. It is his first feature in *DownBeat*, which is easy to believe because a great deal of the 62-year-old's work has been done behind the closed doors of recording studios. But it is also an inexplicable crime, a wrong that had to be righted, for Chancler's drumbeat is the soundtrack of our times.

Harold Land, Gerald Wilson, Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard, Miles Davis, Alice Coltrane, Carlos Santana, Weather Report—Chancler played with all of them . . . before he turned 22 years old.

Joe Henderson, Marvin Gaye, Eddie Harris, Patrice Rushen, George Duke, Jean-Luc Ponty, Earl Klugh, Labelle, Flora Purim, Gato Barbieri, Lalo Schifrin, The O'Jays, Ramsey Lewis, Stanley Turrentine, The Temptations, McCoy Tyner, Lionel Richie, Stanley Clarke, Donna Summer, Maynard Ferguson, The Crusaders, Kenny Rogers, Dianne Reeves, John Lee Hooker, Robbie Robertson, Joe Sample, Blind Boys of Alabama, Quincy Jones, Patti Austin and Joe Louis Walker—he recorded with them and many more.

He co-wrote songs like "Dance Sister Dance" for Santana and "Let It Whip" for the Dazz Band. He provided that unforgettable, indelible beat on Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" for *Thriller*.

For the past 45 years and counting, Ndugu Chancler has brought grace and rhythm and soul to any and every musical setting in which he's been placed. But he wants you to know that he is a jazz musician down to his core. At the Midwest Band Clinic in Chicago last December, Chancler sat down with *DownBeat* Publisher Frank Alkyer to say exactly that during a live conversation. He told story after story about his life and times, and watched the jaws drop a little more with each famous name that crossed his lips. It became incrementally clearer to both music students and teachers alike in the crowd that they were listening to the wisdom of musical royalty.

This is Ndugu Chancler's first feature in *DownBeat*. There was no space for questions, only Chancler's wit, honesty and insight.

**I REMEMBER GOING HOME** and sitting at the dinner table and saying, "I want to be a musician," and everyone laughing. I mean, you would've thought I was Richard Pryor.

**THE ATTRACTION FOR ME** in playing music wasn't the blues, it wasn't gospel music, it was jazz. It was jazz that I heard on the radio not being called "jazz" because on the radio stations I listened to at the time, they just played music. They played Horace Silver and Cannonball Adderley and Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr. and Sam The Sham & The Pharaohs and Sly Stone and James Brown and Motown ... You had everything going at the same time.

**I MET STIX HOOPER**, who became one of the key figures in my life, period. Stix was with The Crusaders. They actually lived in my neighborhood [in Los Angeles], Wayne [Henderson] and Wilton [Felder]. I lived on 119th and Central. Wayne lived on 123rd. Wilton lived on 124th. By then, Joe Sample and Stix had moved on like 78th and 79th and Van Ness. But Wayne and Wilton lived in the neighborhood. I had this quasi connection, and then I would see Stix and Wayne at the Watts Happening Coffee House, which was a place that had jam sessions on 103rd Street before the riots. I would see him there. So, now I'm starting to get close to the music.

Stix was the next guy doing everything in L.A., and it became a natural progression for me to follow in Stix's footsteps. Stix played in Gerald Wilson's Big Band; I ended up playing in Gerald Wilson's Big Band. Stix was the drummer in The Crusaders; I replaced Stix as the drummer in The Crusaders. Stix played with Bobby Hutcherson and Harold Land; I played with Bobby Hutcherson and Harold Land—all before I was 18 (*laughs*).

**BOBBY HUTCHERSON** and Harold Land had a gig in Brookside Park out in Pasadena. A group that I played with, just some local guys—we weren't very good—opened for Bobby Hutcherson and Harold Land. Stix had a chance to play my drums. Now, I had a real cheap drum set, and some real cheap cymbals—no name cymbals. You know, the music store puts their stamp on them. But I took pride in my drums, because I worked for and paid for these drums myself. So Stix played on the drums, and after he played, he said, "Hey man, come by my house. You need some cymbals." Stix gave me cymbals. Now that's the first time anyone had ever given me anything. From there it became a whole mentoring thing. He told me what books to get, because I asked questions like, "Mr. Hooper, what do you think I should be doing?" He said, "Get stick control, get syncopation, get Podemski, get *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer*, and you need to study out of these books." We had dialogue, and that's when it started. From there he kind of mentored me through the whole thing.

**THOSE ARE A LOT OF THE THINGS** that shake me into wanting to give back, because I couldn't have gotten any of this on my own. Stix, Shelly Manne, Earl Palmer, Clarence Johnston [his drum teacher]: those are the guys that gave



Chancler has played on albums by jazz, r&b, blues, rock and country artists.

CARL STODINA

me the tools that I needed on a day-to-day basis. The drummers.

**I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL** in 1970. I was 17. The same week of graduation, I opened Shelly's Manne-hole with Gerald Wilson's Big Band. Why do I remember that? Because that's where I met [drummer] Paul Humphreys, and he took me for a ride in his Pantera. He came to Shelly's Manne-hole. I mean, he didn't know me, but the word was getting out: "There's this new young guy who's playing in Gerald Wilson's Big Band, and he's firing it up." So, Paul Humphreys, who was doing a lot of sessions, I met him and Earl Palmer that same week. Again, they kind of took a liking to me, and just started giving me some words of wisdom. I remember Earl Palmer, the first thing he said is, "Man, you might end up being a recording drummer one day, so learn to work with a click track." The first session I was on to do a recording that encompassed a click track was Marvin Gaye's *Trouble Man* album. It was myself and, guess who, Stix Hooper. We were the two drummers.

Stix just did so much for me. Stix taught me about publishing. He taught me about managing and everything. I own my own songs, my books, everything. That's what has given me the

luxury of surviving even during the lean times of being a jazz musician.

**SO, I'M 19 NOW** and I'm playing with Freddie Hubbard. I've got confidence because I've played with Joe Henderson and Eddie Harris and Monk and all these other jazz guys, but now I've got the gig that I wanted. And I'm smoking on this gig. I'm smoking. I got Freddie Hubbard playing. He's burning it, every night.

So we get to Buffalo, New York. Freddie Hubbard misses the first night. The band is there, but he's not there. We're at the Revilot in Buffalo, New York. The quartet plays. Smoked. Freddie Hubbard comes in the next night and everybody's like, "Freddie, man, this band you got is smoking. This new drummer man, he's hot." Well, we played the first set, and we were killing. Played the second set, we were killing. Freddie Hubbard called me to his room and said, "Look here. You want to play like that, get your own band. Can't have two stars in the same band. I'm Freddie Hubbard. This is my band. You're fired."

**I MOVED BACK TO L.A.** I'm painting my bedroom, and all of the sudden I get this phone call [*using a scratchy voice*]: "You want to play with me?" [*Audience laughs*.] Now, we used to joke on



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Chancler onstage with the young musicians in *Caliente* from Houston's Diaz Music Institute at the 2015 JEN conference.

SUZETTE INESS

the phone, me and a few other musicians about us being Miles Davis to one another. So, I said, "Who is this?"

"It's Miles."

I said, "Yeah, right! Yeah, *whatever*."

He said, "You want to play with me?"

Now I'm saying, "Oh, this *is* Miles." And I don't stutter, but I said, "Um, um ... Mr. Davis ... yeah, I want to play with you!"

He said, "Well get to New York!"

That was 1971. I did a European tour with Miles. Some people say, "The rest is history," but that was the life changer because it was electric Miles. It was a great musician confirming that you don't have to stay steeped in the traditional jazz thing to be a jazzier. Then, Miles Davis said, "You need to listen to James Brown and The Chambers Brothers, and Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix; whom I'd already been listening to, because I heard them on the radio with the ol' Wolfman. So, it confirmed some of my inner spirits.

#### MILES WAS PROBABLY THE GREATEST

bandleader I ever worked with. First thing is, Miles Davis treated his band first class. Now here's this young kid, grew up in South Central. I flew to New York; I flew to Europe, first class. The whole band flew first class. That was unheard of for a lot of jazz guys. Ray Charles made his band pay their own hotel bills, but Miles had us in five-star hotels with him. He treated the band like royalty from beginning to end. Limousines came and picked us up for the gigs and everything. He treated the band top-notch.

When you get behind closed doors with these people, they're different than what you see on stage. What you see on stage is what they use to protect themselves from the public and the masses. Inside, Miles was very humane. He had

a lot of humility and was very sharing.

**ALICE COLTRANE—THAT'S A SIDE** of my career that a lot of musicians don't know. I was committed to avant-garde music. I played with Bobby Bradford and John Carter and recorded with them a lot. I played with Alice.

I like to tell younger musicians that if you're trying to understand fusion, you've got to embrace the avant-garde. You've got to go to Sun Ra, you've got to go to Albert Ayler, you've got to go to Archie Shepp, you've got to go to Eddie Gale. I can go on and on and on: Andrew Cyrille, Ed Blackwell, that Ornette Coleman group with Ed Blackwell and Charlie Haden. You've got to go there to understand fusion because all Miles did by the time he got to *Bitches Brew* and *Miles At The Fillmore* was plug it in. It was that same stuff that Joseph Jarman and the AACM and all those guys were doing. You've got to embrace avant-garde music and the freedom of that if you are going to do fusion music, because there was so much of that in fusion music.

**SO I'M IN A TRIO** with Alice Coltrane and Reggie Workman. Alice and Carlos Santana are part of the same religious sect. They make a CD together. They call me for that session. That was my introduction to Carlos Santana—recording with Alice and Carlos. They record together. Later, Carlos asks me to record *Borboletta* with Santana. Myself, Stanley Clarke, Airto, we make *Borboletta*.

So, I joined Santana. Santana was based in San Francisco, so I would spend most of my time in San Francisco, but it was an hour flight, and it only cost like 25 dollars to fly back and forth. You didn't have to go through TSA or none of that. You went to a ticket machine, you bought a ticket and you jumped on a flight. So,

I commuted a lot. I would rehearse with Carlos sometimes during the day and go back to L.A. and record at night. Then, I'd go back up the next morning.

We had a two-month off period, and I was in L.A. doing a Jean-Luc Ponty album at Paramount Studios. Weather Report was rehearsing at SIR two doors down.

So, I'm walking out of the studio at Paramount doing Jean-Luc Ponty, and they're walking out of SIR at the same time. And Joe Zawinul did the Miles Davis. He said, "Why don't you come to the studio and record with us for a day?" That one "day" became two weeks, because they kept calling me back, "Can you come tomorrow? Can you come tomorrow? Can you come tomorrow?"

That's the way Miles used to do it. Zawinul got that from Miles. When they did *Bitches Brew* it was the same thing, "Miles wants you to come in today." If he liked it, "Miles wants you to come back tomorrow." Now understand, no matter what you had going on "tomorrow," you'd be there for Miles. So, it just so happens it turned into two weeks.

I made the record, and they were happy with it. So, after that, they mixed the album and all that, Joe Zawinul came to me, and he said [*imitating Zawinul's voice*], "Ndugu, what do you want to do with your life? Or you want to play that 'toot-toot' with Santana? Or you want to join the greatest band in the world?" I said, "Joe, I'm going to play that 'toot-toot' with Santana." So, I didn't join Weather Report, because Carlos was treating me very well at that time.

Carlos was another one of those, like Miles, who had a heart of gold.

#### WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT MICHAEL JACKSON, you talk about the team.

The team is Quincy Jones and Bruce Swedien. It just so happens after working with Eddy Harris at Shelly's Manne-hole, Eddy Harris called me to come to Chicago to record. We made *Excursions*. The engineer on that session at Brunswick was Bruce Swedien. That was the first time I worked with Bruce.

Years later, I'm out in L.A. I'm getting calls to work with Quincy. So, with Quincy, I did Frank Sinatra, James Ingram, Michael McDonald, Donna Summer, George Benson ... So, I'm doing all of these things with Quincy, and then the Michael Jackson session comes around.

Yeah, I did five songs on *Thriller*: "Billie Jean," "P.Y.T.," "Baby Be Mine," "Thriller" and "Human Nature." I'm on all those songs, and then I played on "I Just Can't Stop Loving You" on [Jackson's 1987 album] *Bad*.

The standing joke we had in the studio was that *Off The Wall* had sold 10 million records. So, we were in the studio hoping and praying that we could sell 13 million. 110 million later, the history was made.

DB



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CHANTALE GAGNÉ

# EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

By Phillip Lutz

Chantale Gagné speaks with the clarity and coherence of a well-spun solo. But her compositions exude a distinct air of mystery.

That is by design. The 34-year-old pianist, composer and daughter of the Quebec countryside recognizes the value of leaving a little to the imagination. The result is a burgeoning and beguiling oeuvre, to which the latest contribution is a cleverly crafted exercise in the unexpected, the self-produced *The Left Side Of The Moon*.

By Gagné's own account, the album evokes the uncertainty of everyday existence, from the portentous opening chords of the first track, "Mystère," to the quick and quirky closer, "Roach Rag." In between lie nine pieces of varying form—prominent among them the title tune, a study in radical mood-shifting inspired by the shifting phases of the moon.

"In life, you never know what's happening from day to day," Gagné, speaking in perfect French-accented English, said in explaining the subtext of her compositional style. "It's all about the unknown."

Growing up in Princeville, a small town between Montreal and Quebec City, Gagné could hardly have known that she would one day be a rising jazz artist chatting up an interviewer in a Harlem coffee bar. Her parents had filled their country home with the chansons of Edith Piaf, Charles Aznavour and the like. But it fell to her older brother to lead her to jazz.

Lead her he did. When she was 15, and something of an organ prodigy, he bestowed on her Bill Evans' *Portrait In Jazz*. The impact of that seminal work, now 55 years old, was immediate, spurring a switch to piano. It is reflected today in Gagné's tone and temperament, which, like Evans', owes more than a little to the influence of the French modernists.

Evans' impact is also mirrored in her choice of repertoire. The Evans original "Peri's Scope," which appears on *Portrait*, pops up amid a raft of originals on Gagné's first CD, *Silent Strength*. So does another tune associated with Evans, "But Beautiful."

"Without being asked," she said, "people often compare my playing to Bill Evans'."

Gagné's encounter with the music of Evans—who died in 1980, the year she was

born—led her, while still a teenager, to a deep exploration of other pianists, many of whom also made their names as sidemen with Miles Davis, including Red Garland, Wynton Kelly and Herbie Hancock.

Thus engaged, Gagné set her sights on a degree in jazz performance, which she earned at Montreal's McGill University in 2003. Her fingers filled with standards learned in coursework, she gigged in Montreal for three or four years, honing her skills before heeding the call of New York.

"I put on my backpack and took a chance to see what's going on here," she said in the coffee bar. "I liked it."

Taking an apartment near the Manhattan School of Music, she lived on savings, babysitting jobs and the odd restaurant gig, all the while building a name on the jam circuit. After bouncing back and forth between Montreal and New York, she sought her first artist's visa in 2008—a sign she had decamped to the Big Apple for the duration.

Another sign, she said, was the upgrading of her piano from a modest electric to a \$5,000 upright, which she got to know well. "I was

just composing, composing, composing," she said. "Every day I would compose something. It didn't matter if I would keep it or not. I would sit at the piano and try to write something."

She wasted little time in documenting that material in the studio. Trading on her growing reputation, she had enough credibility to approach—and, as it turned out, recruit—in-demand players like Peter Washington on bass and Lewis Nash on drums. While she was less successful in obtaining grants from the Canadian government, her parents came through financially, and in April 2007 she laid down the tracks for *Silent Strength*.

Unlike the kind of debut effort in which an artist draws on a lifetime of accumulated material, *Silent Strength* was a purposefully present-tense affair. "It was more me being in New York all of a sudden," she said. "It was the whole experience of being here, establishing myself, walking the streets, being influenced by the energy here, the action."

Meanwhile, she was already writing tunes for the second self-produced album, *Wisdom Of The Water*. Recorded in June 2010, the CD expanded the palette with the addition of vibra-



Chantale Gagné

phonist Joe Locke to the trio. Like the first album, it hit the mark artistically.

But the financing was problematic enough, and when it came time to record again four years later, she reluctantly decided to “step on my pride a little bit” and crowdfund with Kickstarter.

“I asked myself whether I want to do that, to bother people,” she said. “Then I started thinking of it more like it’s a pre-purchase. That’s how you have to see it. You can’t see it as a burden for people.”

Apart from the financing, the album’s big change was in sonic coloration, replacing Locke’s vibraphone with Steve Wilson’s saxophones and flute. Wilson said the session came off with barely a hitch, cementing a relationship with Gagné that had begun five years earlier at Smalls and reached into the personal realm when he agreed to support her visa application.

On the professional side, Wilson said he was particularly impressed with her compositions, which he found revealing. “They’re a window into her concept,” he said. “They’re not just tunes but arrangements within tunes, extended compositions with different episodes.”

More organically than most, he said, she integrates classical technique into a jazz setting. “She’s able to blend it into this context skillfully. It’s not some agenda, like, ‘I’m going to force these two things together.’”

These elements, he said, constitute a general “cultural sensibility” that is made explicit in a piece like “After You,” which opens with an unadorned invention on piano and grows more complex as it weaves Wilson’s horn into the contrapuntal fabric before segueing to a traditionally syncopated ensemble section.

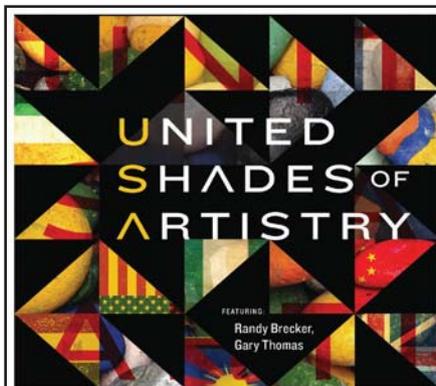
The piece’s multidimensional structure finds a parallel in the layered meanings suggested by its title. In one sense, Gagné said in an email, “you” refers to Bach and the title refers to a piece written in his style. In another sense, she said, “you” refers to “unreal” people you surround yourself with” and the title refers to a piece written about a period after she has purged those people from her life.

Whatever any particular title means, Gagné is clearly bucking a sometime jazz tradition in which titles are casually arrived at, though little time is spent in the studio dwelling on such matters. Like her earlier albums, *Left Side* was accomplished with one rehearsal and a minimum of idle talk before it was recorded, in April of last year.

In the studio, Wilson said, Gagné was a straightforward presence, ably striking a balance between soliciting ideas and channeling the talent in the room. By day’s end, he said, she had revealed the kind of inner-directed personality that has eased her journey from small-town Canada to big-city America.

“She knew she would have to come to New York and become immersed in the music,” he said, “and she deserves nothing but credit for doing that. That’s part of her appeal: having a mission and achieving it.”

DB

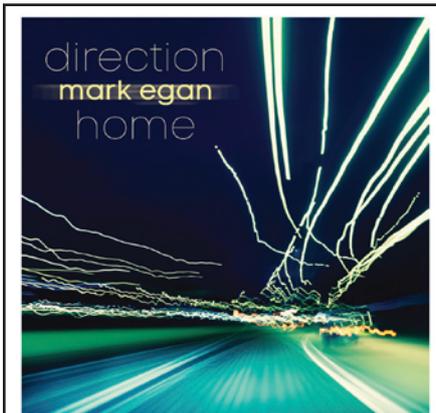


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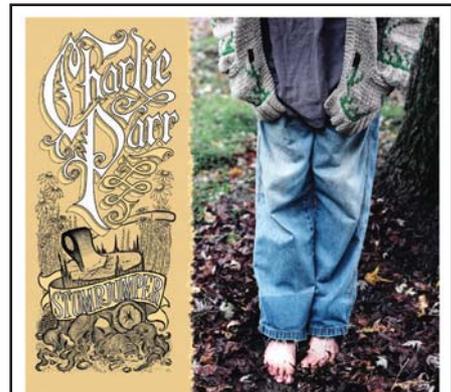
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## INDIE LIFE

BEN BAILEY

# PAYING HIS OWN WAY

By Bob Doerschuk

When Atlanta-based drummer Ben Bailey decided to make his first album, *A Bird In The Hand*, he did so without asking anyone else to chip in a dime.

"I guess I'm a little old-school," he admitted. "A lot of people in the Atlanta community know that I have a day job as a project manager and that music is not my full source of income. If I were a college student with no money, I probably would have done a Kickstarter campaign. But I just felt like it wasn't for me."

So Bailey put himself on a budget to cover the funding. Two things worked in his favor: First, he didn't impose a deadline on himself for finishing the project. If it took a couple of years to save what he needed (and it did), so be it. Secondly, he secured a weekly gig with the band at Atlanta's Spiritual Living Center and began setting aside that income, earmarking it for the project.

It wasn't easy because his plans were ambitious. *A Bird In The Hand* was conceived as a big band, neo-swing album, so he began by lining up some of the top jazz players in Nashville. He got help from his friend and mentor, veteran drummer Duffy Jackson, who served as executive producer and advised in picking charts. With very little rehearsal time and a pair of two-hour sessions to track the entire album, they included some well-known big band charts (such as Thad Jones' "The Big Dipper" and Sammy Nestico's "The Heat's On").

Bailey was careful with his finances and

devised some economical solutions for this do-it-yourself project. After doing research on royalty rates through the Harry Fox Agency, he limited the pressing of the CD to 2,000 copies, which allowed him to pay a lower rate per song to the performing rights organizations. Rather than book a studio, Bailey found an empty hall that not only was less expensive but also had ideal acoustics for his 16 or 17 players.

Jackson helped again by calling in a few favors. He recruited his friend CJ Boggs—whose extensive resume includes work with bassist Byron House as well as Taylor Swift's band—to serve as chief recording engineer, but he ended up also providing some production assistance.

Bailey also trimmed expenses by booking both dates after-hours on Monday nights. "That's when musicians are more likely available," he said. The strategy worked. He was able to assemble a star-studded ensemble that included Kenny Anderson, Rahsaan and Roland Barber, David Hungate, Tom McGinley and Denis Solee. (Each was paid union scale.)

For all his efforts to map out every upcoming expense, Bailey did overlook one critical detail. "I don't know why but when it came time to release I realized I was going to have marketing expenses," he says. "And the marketing and promotion costs at the end were killer."

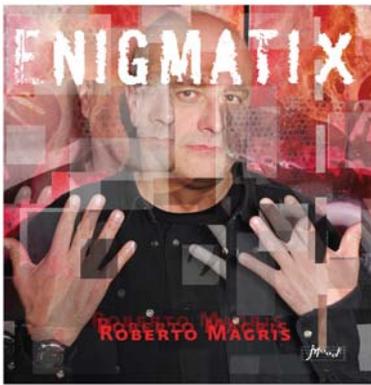
They were also well worth the effort to pay for through more of his weekly church gigs. "You want everything timed right with the release,

so there's a marketing/communication strategy around what time of the year to do the release," he explained. "Are we on the heels of the holiday season? It actually worked out well for me [to release the album last] October, because I could also do my CD release with the local band and get a significant discount at that venue."

Bailey offered a few tips for other DIY artists: "You should think about radio promotion—not only the college stations but the Internet stations and Sirius XM as well. I did a lot of phone interviews. I went to the local radio stations here in Atlanta. I went to San Diego to interview with a local station out there. I networked at the Jazz Education Network conference."

Those efforts resulted in airplay on jazz radio stations around the country as well as PRI's program *Jazz After Hours*. New fans have been emailing from as far off as Hawaii and Germany. The airplay has led to more gigs in and out of town. His CD sales may not ever equal his initial investment for the project—but that was never the top priority.

"I've realized that I have an opportunity to carry this kind of drumming style forward and expose it to people who may not know this modern, post-Sixties big-band genre," Bailey says. "And I wanted to pay tribute to Duffy. In fact, we have video from the session, and you can see me almost channeling a little bit of Duffy in my playing and in my facial expressions. So, yeah, that makes it all worthwhile. It all happened for a reason." **DB**



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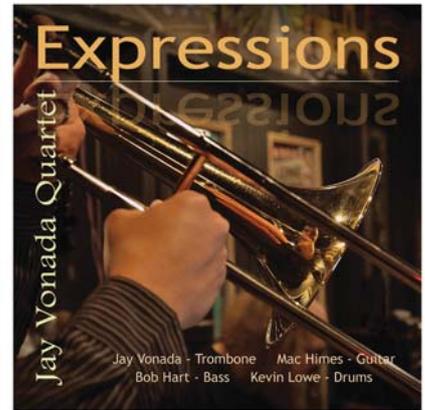
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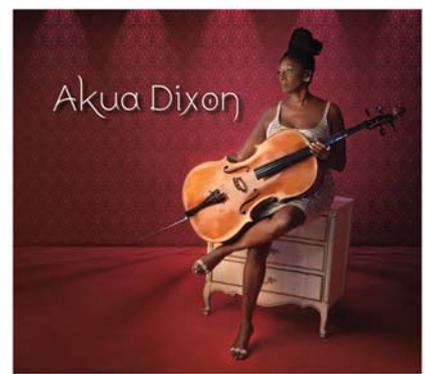


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POSI-TONE RECORDS

# WHERE JAZZ RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

By Josef Woodard

Despite the current proliferation of small and idealistic record labels in jazz, companies of the independent, artist-run, boutique and other types who brave the treacherous waters of life during the digital age, managing to find a workable, profitable business model is a built-in challenge. But it can be done, and one long-running success story is the Los Angeles-based label Posi-Tone, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, and boasts a catalogue of more than 120 titles to date, with 15 releases slated for 2015.

Part of its success has to do with the lean, streamlined and inherently “in-house” nature of the label’s record-making machinery, run by founder Marc Free, a musician and producer, and his business partner of many years, engineer Nick O’Toole. Between the producer-engineer and post-production work handled largely by the pair, wedded to a sturdy and sometimes

obsessive work ethic, the duo attends to most of the work involved. “That formula really helps us,” O’Toole said.

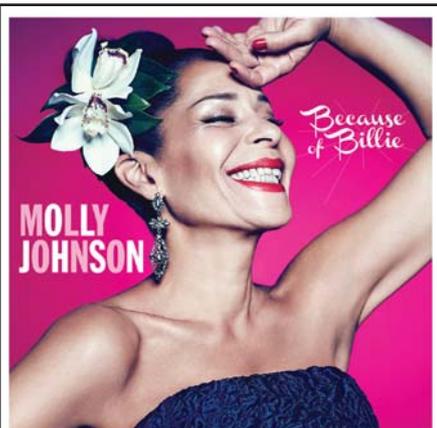
“Surviving in a tough industry,” added Free, “you have to be smart and organized and vertically integrated, through all the aspects of productions, from contact to A&R and working on things pre-production-wise, getting organized, doing rehearsals and sessions and moving through the rest of it—tapes, mixes, packaging. Keeping it in a streamlined process really saves times and effort and, ultimately, money.”



Marc Free (left) and Nick O'Toole of Posi-Tone Records

SIMON PAL

When asked about the secret to his label’s longevity and ongoing business health, Free explained, with understatement, “We make the



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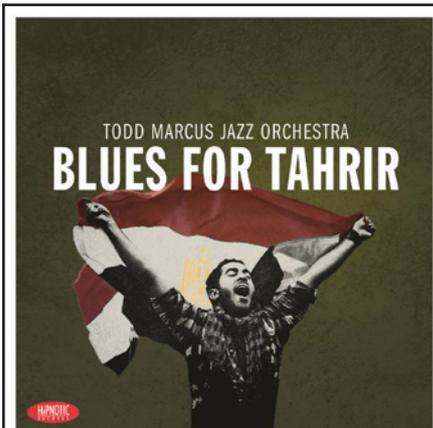
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records that we would like to listen to and buy. We just count on the fact that there are other people like us out there who are interested in the same things. And it has worked.”

What they like, and what has worked with listening/buying public, on the cohesive yet diverse Posi-Tone discography, tends to be mostly acoustic jazz with strong playing and melodic virtues, with some deviations. The label extends an ear, and an outlet, to players well worth hearing and recording, who tend to be better known as sideman, but whose profiles have benefitted from the exposure and embrace of the label. Among the artists on the roster are Walt Weiskopf (Steely Dan), Steve Davis (Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers), sophisticated pianist David Ake, Will Bernard, organist Jared Gold, saxophonist Ralph Bowen and trumpeter David Weiss.

This is a label with a modest, grassroots beginning, which found its bolder groove later in life. Free recalls a time when he was a working musician with a studio in the back of his mother’s house in Venice Beach, and working on a potential documentary project on the late, great engineer Rudy Van Gelder. After some discussions with the legend, the project stalled: “He decided he didn’t want to do a documentary,” Free recalled, “but he was saying how much he appreciated what I seemed to know about jazz. He said, ‘You should be running a label, unlike these guys I have to deal with now. You seem to really understand how to make good records and how things are done.’”

The label was founded in 1995. Free, whose early collaborators included Jamie Brunson (still involved

in the cover art and graphic/web side of the label), explains that “it started out, for lack of a better word, as kind of an underground thing that we did on the side. I had my career as a musician and these other things I was doing. In those days, it wasn’t so hard to sell CDs. It went well. We focused mostly on local acts around L.A. We went through some different phases, and people responded.”

The most significant phase came after the label recorded legendary saxophonist Sam Rivers’ 80th birthday show at Los Angeles’ Jazz Bakery in 2003, for the well-received album, *Celebration*. With the generous response to that album, Free said, “We were trying to sort things out, shift from being more of an underground thing into being more of an independent label.” The most notable shift was a bi-coastal base of operations—still being based in Los Angeles but seeking talent in New York City. That pattern has prevailed for the last decade, with the duo taking regular working trips to New York and coordinating multiple projects, each recorded in one day in the studio, to be finished back on the West Coast.

Artists on the label seem to have found a happy home there. Weiskopf, who has made albums for the Criss Cross Jazz label and others, met the Posi-Tone duo at Small’s in New York City many years ago, and his newly released Posi-Tone album is the second he has recorded for them. “Of the labels I’ve worked with,” Weiskopf noted, “I’m happiest, by far, with Posi-Tone. I love the enthusiasm for our music. Certainly the recording industry has gone through a transformation but there’s always a way for creative music to be heard when

the intent is pure.”

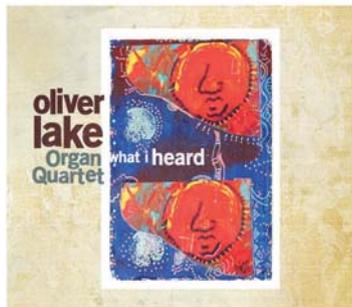
While the formidable Posi-Tone discography makes for a strong foundation and business is looking bright, the partners understand the importance of being adaptable to the changing scene. “Consciously, from Day 1 since I’ve been involved,” commented O’Toole, “we are always trying to look ahead and see what’s going to work, not dwelling on what works now or has worked. Every six months to a year, we’ve got to make some tough changes. Sometimes, those are not fun messages to deliver. But if we want to keep doing this, given the realities of the music industry at this time, we have to.”

Free added, “This is a solvent business, and we keep it that way by trying to make these smart business decisions. A lot of the stuff that we do—these practices—find their root, for example, in the practices of [Blue Notes Records founders] Alfred Lion and Frank Wolff, who themselves came here and had a dream for what they did. They focused on discovering new talent, not so much trying to capture guys who were already huge, established names. They were tastemakers.

“Blue Note almost went out of business two or three times, as the format changed, as it went from 78s to LPs ... But they adapted and did other things, and thrived, by making strong decisions to keep things in-house. They were a very strong, integrated team, much like what we’re trying to do.

“It’s not an over-simplification to say that a level of branding that we’re trying to achieve for the label is, first and foremost among the business ideas.”

DB



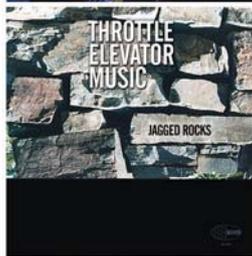
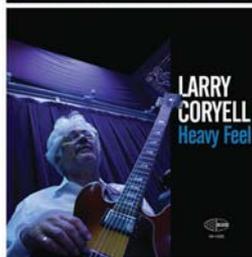
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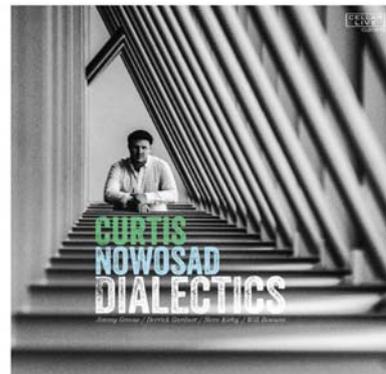
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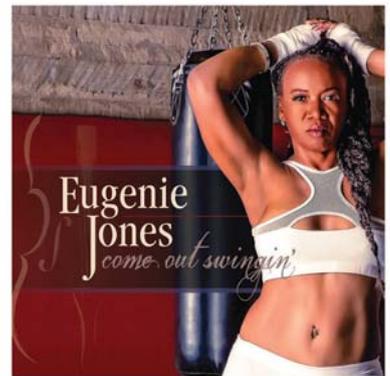
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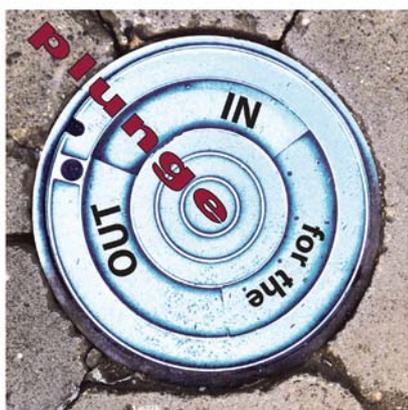
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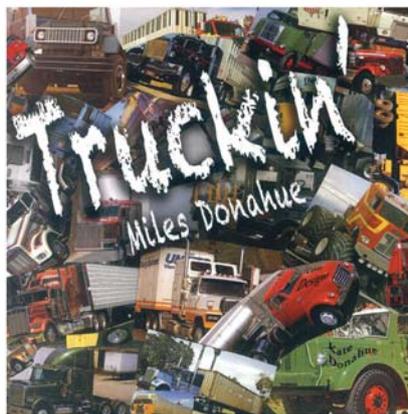


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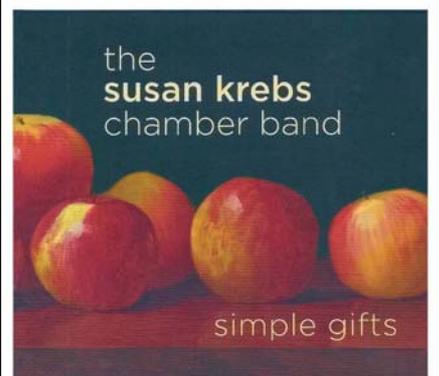
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# REVIEWS >



**Kevin Eubanks/  
Stanley Jordan**  
*Duets*

MACK AVENUE 1092

★★★

Kudos to Kevin Eubanks and Stanley Jordan—two of the fastest, finest guitar-slingers on the planet—for not turning their debut duo into a gunfight. Both men play with taste and restraint here, never showing off licks and speed for their own sake. Each partner takes a turn on piano, and while Jordan essays electric guitar only, Eubanks plays electric, acoustic, bass and even electric keyboard, with a focus on producing intimate blends. The result, though sometimes enchanting, is a bit too contained, and in some cases bland.

Like Wes Montgomery, Eubanks and Jordan

are consummate jazzers who don't turn their noses up at the crowd. That may be why the most engaging track is their slowed-down version of the Ellie Goulding pop hit "Lights," where they burrow into the crevices of its passionate repetitions. Also compelling is "Old School Jam," an off-the-cuff improv that nicely showcases their distinctive sounds—Eubanks' gnarly, bluesy edge and Jordan's fluty, fluttering glide. The sweet and gentle opening track, "Morning Sun," also combines gossamer, twinkling moments with chugging blues.

But the rest of the album is mostly pleasant background music and doesn't hold much serious listening interest. "Summertime" and "Nature Boy" showcase Eubanks' and Jordan's contrasting orchestral guitar approaches, but come off as benign. Ditto for an instrumental edition of the

Adele arena rock ballad "Someone Like You." And while "Vibes" creates a dreamy mood, one expects more from "Blue In Green." "A Child Is Born" pushes Thad Jones' drama into melodrama.

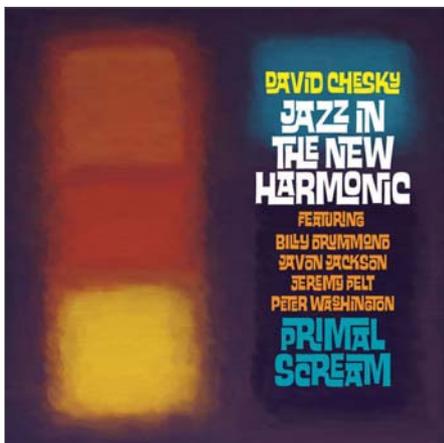
Granted, by the time the album closes with Eubanks' sweet and bluesy "Goin' On Home," it's hard not to hum along, which suggests *Duets* will probably find an audience—surely not a bad thing. It's honest, well-made music, even if it hews steadfastly to the middle of the road.

—Paul de Barros

**Duets:** Morning Sun; Summertime; Nature Boy; Someone Like You; A Child Is Born; Old School Jam; Vibes; Blue In Green; Lights; Goin' On Home. (47:48)

**Personnel:** Kevin Eubanks, guitar, electric guitar, bass, piano, keyboard, vibes; Stanley Jordan, electric guitar, piano.

**Ordering info:** [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)



## David Chesky: Jazz in the New Harmonic *Primal Scream*

CHESKY 369

★★★★★

This is a cool, calm and collected set, dry as a martini and nearly as subtle. The rhythm section, and bassist Peter Washington in particular, is relentless in their premeditated restraint—almost hypnotic in their serene tranquility. My first thought was of *Pithecanthropus Erectus*. Mingus' soft, cushiony pulse walked us through the contrapuntal crossfire with an imperturbable poise.

The difference is that here the horns are every bit as circumspect as the rhythm. The 1960s taught us to be suspicious of any jazz work that might call itself *Primal Scream*. In this case, the

## Avishai Cohen Trio *From Darkness*

RAZDAZ 4616

★★★★½

Avishai Cohen is the kind of seeker who likes to refine things as he moves forward. The esteemed bassist's signature traits stay in place, of course—there's never a lack of thrust, and his commitment to lyricism, regardless of how it's rendered, is always right up front. But clarifications crop up; it's a nuanced process that finds *From Darkness* delivering its unmistakable power in a string of subtleties.

Shai Maestro and Mark Guiliana shaped the action on 2008's *Gently Disturbed*, and their somewhat knotty romps revealed a template of how the leader likes his associates to connect with one another. This time out it's pianist Nitai Hershkovits (with whom Cohen cut a sweet duo record in 2012) and drummer Daniel Dor making the magic. *From Darkness* delivers 10 performances in just 41 minutes, and while the ambitious scope of these pieces precludes the use of the term "miniatures," they are pithy experiments that underscore one key attribute—sometimes melody, sometimes rhythm—before moving on.

"Halelyah" addresses both at once. The bassist writes at the piano, and this theme finds a balance between gentility and aggression. Hershkovits has a graceful touch whether he's rocking emphatic with the left hand or feathering the upper register with his right. Dor brings heart to his elegant math lesson.

alarm is a red herring. The music, all composed by Chesky, is well behaved, smartly ordered and far too knowledgeable about itself to indulge in any primal comportment. We can all relax.

Each piece starts with a concise rhythm setting out of which the musical theme climbs. Sometimes it slides in slowly; more often it springs to action. But it never wanders far off in terms of mood or dynamics. It's all contained in a kind of soft-shoe groove steered with quiet authority by Washington. It all has an exceptionally open sound as well, never closeted or over-recorded. The themes are bite-sized, simple, sometimes teasing little riffs you wouldn't be surprised to find in a small group swing or bop tune of decades back.

There is talk in Bill Milkowski's notes about the classical fingerprints of Ives and even Webern on this music. Perhaps. A certain braininess mangles the solos and ensembles—flashes of unexpected dissonance and edginess. But a loping blues like "Isolation," with its intimate muted solo by trumpeter Jeremy Pelt and supple tenor from Javon Jackson, seems a long way from the 12-tone controversies of a century ago. If Chesky's intent was to make the soft lines of his work an "entry point" into the higher harmonic districts of Ives, that's all well and good. If I took that ride, though, I'm not sure I was aware of it. There was enough of interest much closer at hand. —John McDonough

**Primal Scream:** Check Point Charlie; Cultural Treason; Quiet Desperation; Kill The Philharmonic; Primal Scream; Isolation; Sleepless In New York. (60:18)

**Personnel:** Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Javon Jackson, reeds; David Chesky, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Billy Drummond, drums.

**Ordering info:** [chesky.com](http://chesky.com)

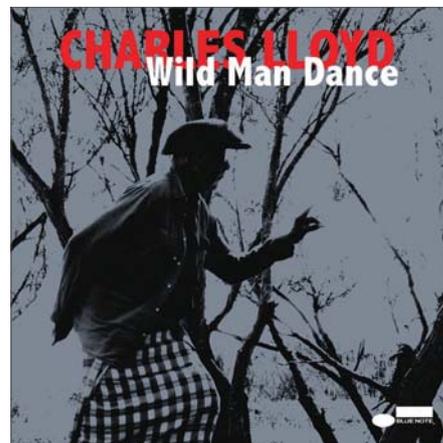


Counterpoint makes small ensembles sound richer, and that too is a Cohen tool. "Abie" moves in a crabwalk, each player advancing a singular line that enhances the music's complexity. Other tracks conjure a fugue-like atmosphere—each voice having its say. The rigor of give-and-take that gives jazz its purpose is a priority here, and with this album Cohen has pulled off a neat trick: Though stressing focus, the music still sounds worldly and expansive. —Jim Macnie

**From Darkness:** Beyond; Abie; Halelyah; C#—; Ballad For An Unborn; From Darkness; Lost Tribe; Almah Sleeping; Signature; Amethyst; Smile. (41:39)

**Personnel:** Avishai Cohen, bass; Nitai Hershkovits, piano; Daniel Dor, drums.

**Ordering info:** [razdazrecordz.com](http://razdazrecordz.com)



## Charles Lloyd *Wild Man Dance*

BLUE NOTE 002243302

★★★★★

Charles Lloyd has pursued the theme of the spiritual quest for several decades. The journey takes the saxophonist inward in terms of his playing, which has a soul-searching quality, and outward geographically, in terms of the other musical cultures he has involved in various projects.

For *Wild Man Dance*, which was commissioned by a Polish festival in Wroclaw, where it was recorded in concert, he's added lyra (a spike fiddle from Greece) and cimbalom (the Hungarian hammered dulcimer) to the conventional jazz quartet.

The way this quest is framed here gives segments of the beautiful program a strong affinity with the Coltrane quartet, particularly circa *A Love Supreme*. Lloyd is his own man, no doubt, and is a bona fide living legend, so comparing him to a dead legend might seem untoward, but I think it would be an elephant in the room if not mentioned.

On the opener, "Flying Over The Odra Valley," the connection is absolutely clear—Lloyd's tenor soars and dives over the modal background, his knotty twists and bubbly flutters conjuring an introspective mindset, the rubato rhythm section stretching and contracting to make space for him.

Pianist Gerald Clayton, who has the emotional presence required to support Lloyd, seems to pick up on Miklos Lucaks' cimbalom on "Lark," laying out the harmony in arpeggios for Sokratis Sinopoulos' lyra and then, as the wind whips up and the waves are tipped in white, Lloyd joins, a sort of soft coup de grâce.

The non-jazz instruments have a tougher time navigating more standard changes on "River" without seeming to clutter things, but maybe that more viscous sound was what Lloyd was after; Lucaks takes a riotous, insanely fast solo that reminds one of the Roma roots of the instrument.

—John Corbett

**Wild Man Dance:** Flying Over The Odra Valley; Gardner; Lark; River; Invitation; Wild Man Dance.

**Personnel:** Charles Lloyd, tenor saxophone; Gerald Clayton, piano; Joe Sanders, bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums; Sokratis Sinopoulos, lyra; Miklos Lucaks, cimbalom.

**Ordering info:** [bluenote.com](http://bluenote.com)

# The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
<b>Kevin Eubanks/Stanley Jordan</b> <i>Duets</i>	★★★★½	★★★	★1½	★★★
<b>David Chesky</b> <i>Primal Scream</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★½
<b>Avishai Cohen Trio</b> <i>From Darkness</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★
<b>Charles Lloyd</b> <i>Wild Man Dance</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Kevin Eubanks/Stanley Jordan, *Duets*

Predominantly, but not exclusively, a set of carefully etched guitar couplings. The music is quietly reflective, adorned with decorative flourishes, virtuoso craft and enough emotional sway to move it just beyond the realm of well-dressed mood music. But it could use a bit more bounce. Only a brief and repetitious "Old School Jam" gets a noticeable fix of adrenaline.  
—John McDonough

An encounter that was better than I thought it'd be. Some flagging moments, like "A Child Is Born," with Eubanks on piano, but then some real zingers, like his solo on "Summertime." Everything's got a little bluesy bend or funky twang, which wears out swiftly, but there are nice textural strata on "Vibes."  
—John Corbett

Repeated listening to this one is like kissing your grandmother when she's wearing too much perfume. You know she deserves the smooch, but the sticky sweetness has you gasping for fresh air.  
—Jim Macnie

### David Chesky, *Primal Scream*

Talk about setting out to create a mood. And succeeding! A hard-to-pinpoint nostalgic quality permeates the session, the self-conscious noir atmosphere influencing everything from the recording to Chesky's prominent piano coloration. Feels like the soundtrack for an unmade follow-up to *Blow-Up*. Dig Jackson's subdued vibe, so restrained it's ominous.  
—John Corbett

Its contrivances are stated up front: Pulse provides liftoff for sonic fabrics nodding to Webern and Ives. But in practice, it comes off as a repertory gig, a personalized refraction of *Miles In The Sky* where the improvisers handle the heavy lifting.  
—Jim Macnie

Deja vu all over again, as Yogi Berra might have said. Didn't we hear 12-tone "Third Stream" jazz 50 years ago? Not that it couldn't be done well again, but Chesky's cool, mysterious piano rarely throws a spark, except on the quirky "Sleepless In New York" and the slippery blues "Isolation."  
—Paul de Barros

### Avishai Cohen Trio, *From Darkness*

A livewire, often hammering trio program of vampy Cohen originals we don't know and probably never really will. Hershkovits defines and carries the proceedings in commanding, to-the-point fashion from the keyboard. Solid without being particularly singular. Among the softer moments, "Unborn" offers multiple endings.  
—John McDonough

Commanding self-assurance, both from the trio and its leader. Hard to argue with music that can change feel on a hairpin turn, as on "Halelya," though the gushingly emotional quality coupled with constant dramatic urgency might lose its quality of genuineness if it got any slicker.  
—John Corbett

Nice to hear from the first Avishai Cohen to hit the American scene (the bassist, not the trumpeter), but the folk-jazz gravity here—pulsing minor riffs and spooky moods—gets old. Cohen's lush tone and singing figures do not, however, and his sparkling pianist, Nitai Hershkovits, nearly steals the show.  
—Paul de Barros

### Charles Lloyd, *Wild Man Dance*

Covers much expressive ground from pensive to passionate. The steep hills of fortissimo energy inspire characteristically coda-like runs and otherworldly incantations. But there are more earthly interludes as well. "River" swings with an engaging sparkle and draws a good crowd response. Overall, a formidable performance in a forgettable work.  
—John McDonough

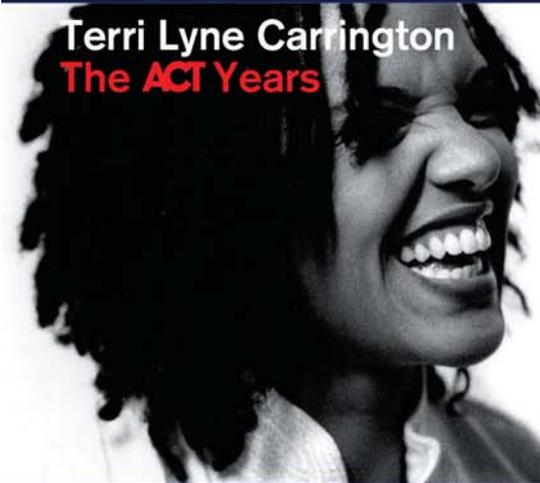
I don't mind cruising the runway for a while before takeoff, but this live date meanders as much as it soars. That said, it's one of the dreamiest trips you'll ever take.  
—Jim Macnie

What a terrific idea, to incorporate improvisers on the Greek lyra and Hungarian cimbalom into a saxophone-led jazz suite, recorded live. Add sizzling pianist Gerald Clayton to the mix and the energy is contagious. Lloyd's Coltrane-tinged cries and sighs may strike some listeners as yogic prayer—others, as pious noodling—but most will probably agree that the bottom drops out of this ambitious suite after the transcendent swing of "River."  
—Paul de Barros

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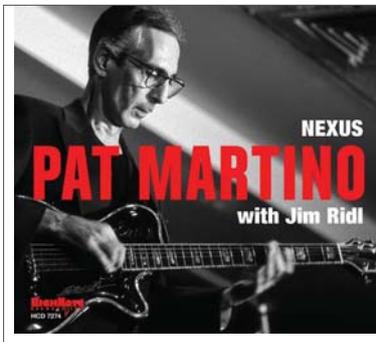
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THE ACT COMPANY

**Pat Martino/  
Jim Ridl**  
*Nexus*

HIGHNOTE 7274  
★★★★½

Pat Martino met pianist Jim Ridl in 1994 when the guitarist saw Ridl performing at a Philadelphia club. He got his phone number and soon Ridl was part of his group, recording his *Interspace* CD. They would play together on a regular basis for the next decade.



*Nexus* is a previously unreleased duet set performed at the Tin Angel in Philadelphia in the mid-1990s. The interplay between Martino and Ridl, although more modern, is a bit reminiscent of Oscar Peterson and Joe Pass; they operate as equals and neither musician allows the other to let up for a moment. When Martino solos, the pianist constantly pushes him with his assertive comping. When Ridl is in the lead, Martino does not fade into the background but instead creates rhythmic punctuations that are sometimes a bit unpredictable. From the start of the uptempo "Recollection," the first of three Martino originals, it is obvious that this is not going to be a lazy piano-guitar ballad date. Ridl contributed the catchy yet complex "Tenetree" and the lyrical ballad "Sun On My Hands." "The Phineas Trane," an obscure Harold Mabern song, is one of the highpoints. Other standouts: the sophisticated "Country Road," Martino's "Interchange," a rendition of Sonny Rollins' "Oleo" that alters the rhythms and the chord changes a bit, and a brooding "Naima." To hear Pat Martino and Jim Ridl in such an exposed setting is a joy.

—Scott Yanow

**Nexus:** Recollection; Tenetree; Sun On My Hands; The Phineas Trane; Country Road; Interchange; Oleo; Naima. (55:08)

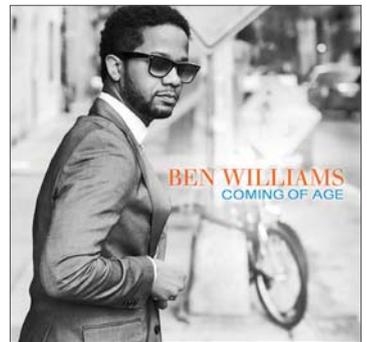
**Personnel:** Pat Martino, guitar; Jim Ridl, piano.

**Ordering info:** [jazzdepot.com](http://jazzdepot.com)

**Ben Williams**  
*Coming Of Age*

CONCORD JAZZ 37118  
★★★★½

This is the first release since bassist Ben Williams' well-received 2011 debut. The 30-year-old winner of the 2009 Thelonious Monk Competition has gone through some seasoning in the interim in Pat Metheny's band, and here he proves himself a developing writer-worth watching.



Williams favors medium dynamics, and his structures are rife with pretty harmonies. Open spaces in the ensembles allow soloists to fill or hop over them like so many puddles. And these are fine soloists: Marcus Strickland's tenor sax dances on "Strength And Beauty"; guitarist Matthew Stevens displays a cold-fire tone that he applies to judicious picking; pianist Christian Sands implies color on "Toy Soldiers"; and vibraphonist Stefon Harris is wonderfully textural on "The Color Of My Dreams." But a monotonous backbeat from drummer John Davis—on "Strength And Beauty," "Lost & Found" and "Toy Soldiers (Reprise)"—suffers from a lack of creativity. Williams is admirably parsimonious with his own solos. He spins thoughtful pizzicato lines on contrabass and grows some funk on the Fender. This is an album of promise as much as anything.

—Kirk Silsbee

**Coming Of Age:** Black Villain Music; Strength And Beauty; Half Steppin'; Voice Of Freedom (For Mandela); Toy Soldiers; Lost & Found; Forecast; The Color Of My Dreams; Smells Like Teen Spirit; Toy Soldiers (Reprise); Coming Of Age. (66:43)

**Personnel:** Ben Williams, bass, electric bass (3, 4, 10); Christian Scott, trumpet (6); Marcus Strickland, soprano and tenor saxophones; Stefon Harris, vibraphone (8); Matthew Stevens, guitar; Christian Sands, piano; Fender Rhodes (4, 10); Masayuki "Big Yuki" Hirano, synthesizers and Fender Rhodes; John Davis, drums; Etienne Charles, percussion; Goapele, vocals (4); W. Ellington Felton, emcee, vocals (10); Maria Im, Dima Dimatrova, violin (6, 8); Celia Hattton, viola (6, 8); Justina Sullivan, cello (6, 8).

**Ordering info:** [concordmusicgroup.com](http://concordmusicgroup.com)

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The MIT Wind Ensemble, led by director Fred Harris, Jr., performs with discipline and conviction on demanding suites that fuse time-honored jazz and wind-band traditions.



## Bigger and Better

**MIT Wind Ensemble & MIT Festival Jazz Ensemble, *Infinite Winds* (Sunnyside 1400; 58:34 ★★★★★)** On this impressive recording, two MIT ensembles, ably led by director Fred Harris Jr., perform with discipline and conviction on demanding suites that fuse time-honored jazz and wind-band traditions.

Argentine pianist Guillermo Klein's austere "Solar Return Suite" draws on octatonic scales from reeds, brass and a crystalline percussion section. Its textures evoke majestic sweeps of the Patagonian Andes, as Bill McHenry's tenor sax soars like a condor beneath the pitiless sun. Chick Corea's genial "From Forever" (a tribute to mentor Herb Pomeroy on the 50th anniversary of the MIT program he founded) showers solos on those leaping to challenge, notably pianist Peter Godart, vibraphonist Will Grathwohl and saxophonists Sam Heilbronner and Dylan Sherry. Don Byron's "Concerto" zestily pits fellow clarinetist Evan Ziporyn in meticulous craftsmanship opposite spiky winds in three increasingly dramatic—and difficult—movements. Pounding martial rhythms and feral, whirlwind motifs conjure shades of Chavez, Adams, Stravinsky. This entire celebratory undertaking—world premieres, MIT's debut commercial jazz venture, tip-top playing—merits a "Bravo!"

Ordering info: [sunnysidezone.com](http://sunnysidezone.com)

**Western Michigan University Jazz Ensemble, *Songsmith Collective* (Blujazz 3419; 55:04 ★★★★★½)** Producer Andrew Rathbun brightly marks his students' tentet with sky-fresh tropes, pristine patterns and serene sing-song. Reedmen Dominic Carioti, Marcus Johnson and Blake Cross contribute placid, searching settings for poems by Frost, Yeats, Langston Hughes and Traci Brimhall. Showcased vocalists Elliott Weeks (plibly logical as Kurt Elling) and Brooke Lauritzen sensitively interpret poems and wordless octave-topping vocalese. Though some callow burblings lack grit, tender forms emerge as tightly patterned suites like Carioti's "Presto" and Cross' "Wealth/Ardella."

Ordering info: [blujazz.com](http://blujazz.com)

**Michael Waldrop Big Band, *Time Within***

***Itself* (Origin 82690; 53:24 ★★★)** Texas-based drummer Waldorp writes hummable tunes that jump in guess-where twists. Here, he shares bustling charts with ex-boss Jack Cooper (hear *Mists*, his alluring Charles Ives tribute). On the title track, "Munich Musings" and "Twisted Bob," he packs missed crannies with lightning fills. Guitarist Jimi Tunnell and vocalist Sandra Dudley whine like leaf-blowers over snappy charts featuring guitarist Larry Panella and reedman Tim Ishii.

Ordering info: [originarts.net](http://originarts.net)

**Ted Howe Jazz Orchestra, *Pinnacle* (Hot Shoe Worldwide; 52:21 ★★½)** Punchless ensembles nudge along through Atlanta-based pianist Howe's dry compositions, though guests pack some wallop. Trombone guests Andy Martin and Francisco Torres blaze through an opening "Presto," trumpeter Lester Walker nails "Impromptu" with dazzling precision and guest bassist John Patitucci, bouncing gamely and carving snub solos, duos warmly with guitarist Dan Baraszu and buoys drummer Marlon Patton. A lackluster, bookish "Suite" treads but lightly in the footsteps of dedicatee Pomeroy, Howe's 1980 teacher; then an 11-minute piano "Adagio" unfurls sleepily, with grandiloquent interludes.

Ordering info: [hotshoerecords.com](http://hotshoerecords.com)

**Aidan Carroll, *Original Vision* (Truth Revolution 019; 53:52 ★★½)** Though light on personnel in this company, Carroll's ambitious quartet-plus date bristles with multi-instrumentalism (he plays basses, keyboards and percussion) and bustles with clear ideas involving shameless melodicism. John Ellis' supple tenor (bolstered by Ben Van Gelder's alto) carries clean, pure front lines that, as on "Apollo Song," blossom rapturously. "Shamanistic" opens with Sullivan Fortner's piano but expands boldly into widening gyres for synthesizer and reeds. Chris Turner sings the gently layered, gospelly "Sundays" recalling Sun Ra and Motown. Shared drum duties by Joe Dyson and Justin Brown underlie subtle currents within Carroll's basslines.

Ordering info: [trutherevolutionrecords.com](http://trutherevolutionrecords.com)

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## Saga



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### The stunning debut album by Brazilian jazz guitarist **Rodrigo Lima**

"...[An] ambitious debut album... *Saga* is a good introduction to a serious talent. [Producer] Arnaldo DeSouto has assembled an impressive group of musicians to help realize Lima's cinematic visions, including legends like Hermeto Pascoal and Hubert Laws, trombone virtuoso Raul de Souza, ace vibraphonist Mike Manieri, arranger Don Sebesky, singer Ithamara Koorax and Anat Cohen on both clarinet and tenor sax. Lima employs a diverse palette of Brazilian traditional and jazz styles. It's also exciting to hear new work by Pascoal, the grand old man from Brazilian jazz... The dreamy "Flying Waltz" with a gorgeous string arrangement by Sebesky, becomes a canvas for Hubert Laws' breathtaking legatos runs."

Allen Morrison, *DownBeat*

"*Saga* is an astonishing first release by Lima showcasing his extraordinary musicianship and sweeping passion... Captured on *Saga* is Brazil's rich tradition of lyrical, playful melodies matured with a shaker of intricate and seductive rhythms... the album is a tribute, of sorts, to CTI's sultry Brazilian jazz recordings of the 1970s, but with contemporary twists. Even the cover is by photographer Pete Turner... I can't wait to tell Creed Taylor."

Marc Myers, *JazzWax*

"...features a killer studio band... elegant, sophisticated arrangements that extend the reach of jazz itself. Lima's innovative playing is rivaled only by his wide-angle compositional and arranging skills... Its highlight is "Brahms," a 20-minute jam based on the composer's third symphony. Lima's playing is jaw-dropping in phrasing, fluidity, and eloquence; he breezes through postbop, flamenco, and classical, making it a contemporary jazz classic. Lima's taste and maestro-like abilities, combined with DeSouto's veteran experience, puts *Saga* in a class by itself. This is an expansive yet utterly welcoming offering that sounds more adventurous with repeated listening. It is holistic in conception and visionary in articulation."

Thom Jurek, *All Music Guide*

"... Nothing he does is forced or exaggerated, or overly mannered - all seem effortlessly and intuitively right. The string sound is lucid and the often chamber sound of the ensemble add warmth to the music.

The always-sensitive guitarist brings his velvety sound to the small and larger ensembles that accompany him... Mr. Lima is warmly spontaneous unleashing ardent melodies without fuss and he brings a huge range of colour overall."

Raul da Gama, *Latin Jazz Network*



### The Renga Ensemble *The Room Is*

ALLOS 010

★★★★

Clarinetist and composer James Falzone convened a half dozen of his favorite improvising clarinetists to form the Renga Ensemble. Nothing challenges a musician bent on making a personal mark quite like being placed in like company, and while the sextet contains a wealth of differently sized and pitched woodwinds, the pressure nonetheless remains. They rise to the occasion throughout this excellent recording, asserting the distinctiveness of their voices even as they pitch in and make Falzone's often rigorously charted pieces progress with delightful grace.

### Felice Clemente Trio *6:35 AM*

CROCEVIA DI SUONI 010

★★★★

On this, his 10th album as a leader, the 40-year-old saxophonist and composer Felice Clemente combines an exuberant, full-throated playing style with a love for hooky verse-chorus song forms. Supplementing his core trio of bassist Paolino Dalla Porta and drummer Massimo Manzi with Daniele Di Gregorio on vibes and marimba, Clemente varies textures and forms, finding different ways to cut loose without losing his way.

Take opener "Enjoy It," establishing a strong bass groove before shifting to the tenor theme, open and bluesy, with a nice contrasting bridge. The trio clearly relishes the form, finding new delights in each pass, Dalla Porta varying his steady, dancing pulse, Manzi using fills and strategic cymbal hits not merely as embellishment, but to drive the piece forward and support Clemente's lines. The leader, meanwhile, combines an even, aggressive attack with a relaxed approach to the beat that only enhances his authority.

Jazz musicians like to create tunes that are good to blow on, but Clemente writes tunes that stand on their own. The lovely ballad waltz "To Sara" matches Clemente's soprano with the harmonic leavening of Di Gregorio's vibes. "Mal D'Africa" is a sprightly take on township swing. There are sharp pieces by the other players as well. Dalla Porta's "Canguri Urbani" varies a folk-like,

Falzone expressly fashioned Renga's music to give each player moments when he felt at home, and moments when he had to locate footing on terra infirma. He doesn't let the players wielding less common instruments coast on the novelty; for example, he sets Ken Vandermark and Jason Stein loose like freed hounds to nip at the heels of Keefe Jackson's contrabass clarinet on "Until," turning the music into a scrimmage of assertively voiced low tones.

When the World Saxophone Quartet debuted the all-horn ensemble, they made it a point to prove that a group without a rhythm section could swing like it had one. By settling the matter at the start, they've made it safe for similar groups to not worry about it. While Falzone isn't averse to setting up a bobbing groove, he gives far more space to textures that mutate from second to second and structures that reconfigure themselves just as quickly. One of the organizing conceits is a haiku, which he breaks up to create song titles, but which in turn creates a through-line that holds disparate pieces together. This invites the listener to listen with a disassembling ear, to hear both parts and whole. They're equally valid approaches, and Falzone's rich arrangements reward both.

—Bill Meyer

**The Room Is:** Prelude; Not Seeing; The First Renga (Ben); The Second Renga (Ken); The Room Is; Interlude; White; The Third Renga (Keefe); The Fourth Renga (Ned); Until; The Fifth Renga (James); The Sixth Renga (Jason); The Red Apple; Postlude. (71:10)

**Personnel:** James Falzone, clarinets; Ken Vandermark, clarinet, bass clarinet, baritone saxophone; Keefe Jackson, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet; Jason Stein, bass clarinet; Ben Goldberg, clarinet, contra alto clarinet; Ned Rothenberg, clarinet, alto saxophone.

Ordering info: [allosmusica.com](http://allosmusica.com)



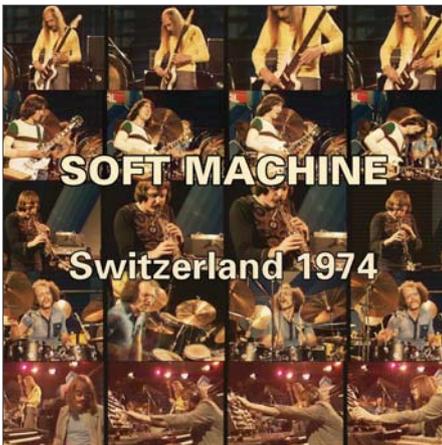
Ornette-type tune with an Afro-Latin secondary theme. Manzi's "Minoranze" is an uptempo romp for soprano and marimba, propelled by a repeated riff, with a nice stretch of fast-walking swing. Meanwhile, finale "The River" begins with a free section, with minor-mode soprano and bowed-bass harmonics giving way to yet another lovely, well-formed theme.

The album was named for the time of the birth of Clemente's daughter, and it combines a sense of joyful release with an open-hearted anticipation of whatever is to come. —Jon Garelick

**6:35 AM:** Enjoy It; Canguri Urbani; To Sara; The Wave; Mal D'Africa; Secret Love; Minoranze; Triade; The River. (64:10)

**Personnel:** Felice Clemente, tenor and soprano saxophone; Paolino Dalla Porta, double bass; Massimo Manzi, drums; Daniele Di Gregorio, vibes (3), marimba (5, 7, 8).

Ordering info: [croceviadisuonirecords.com](http://croceviadisuonirecords.com)



## Soft Machine *Switzerland 1974*

CUNEIFORM RUNE 395/396

★★★★

After its beginnings on London's far-out underground rock scene in 1966-'68, Soft Machine went through eight jazz-rock incarnations without a guitarist. Then, in 1973, Allan Holdsworth signed on for about 15 months, contributing to the studio album *Bundles* and performing on tours. As retrospectives, the concert album *Floating World Live* (taped in Germany in 1975) appeared last decade, and now there's a CD/DVD package with excellent sound restoration that finds the band at the Montreux Jazz Festival.

## Reggie Quinerly *Invictus*

REDEFINITION MUSIC

★★★★½

About three years ago, drummer Reggie Quinerly released *Music Inspired By Freedmantown*, a tribute to a historic African American neighborhood in his native Texas. While Quinerly's new *Invictus* avoids that kind of overarching narrative, he does not lack for big ideas. He just bundles them within more succinct compositions. Only one piece here exceeds the six-minute mark.

Quinerly makes those compositions, and his quintet, the focus of the disc, not his own prowess on his instrument, which he features more as musical director rather than soloist. That comes across especially on the hard-bop-inspired opening track, "Tavares," where the leader takes a low-key approach behind lively solos from vibraphonist Warren Wolf and guitarist Yotam Silberstein.

The vibist also easily moves between 4/4 and 3/4 time on the deceptively titled "Light Work." While on "Nimzo Indian"—a tricky piece named after a probably equally slick chess strategy—Quinerly makes the piece's shifting intervals flow through his light touch on the cymbals, and then opens up a bright lead from bassist Alan Hampton.

Sparse, delicate passages are key throughout *Invictus*, such as on the understated "Variation 24," and the lyrical "Kunst Überlebt," which pianist Christian Sands plays unaccompanied.

Blues tonalities also run throughout the disc,

Featured on the 17-minute opus "Hazard Profile" and some other material from *Bundles*, Holdsworth, who came of age playing guitar in Ian Carr's jazz-rock fission Nucleus and Jon Hiseman's rock group Tempest, exhibits technical feats of rocketing streams of notes. Fortunately, his uncanny facility is driven by clear musical intelligence. But all this guitar wizardry didn't make him the star of the band, with the other musicians handling ancillary duties. Mike Ratledge possesses an innate artistic discretion, with his impressive investigations of keyboards not an end in itself but at the service of an identifiable, thick-textured group sound. John Marshall is simply the premier jazz drummer in Great Britain, every bit as forcibly creative as Holdsworth and Ratledge.

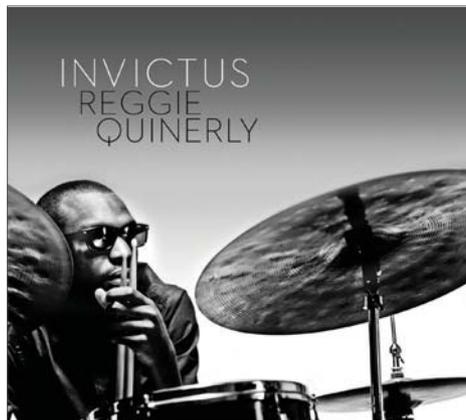
There is no mistaking Roy Babbington's true command of his electric bass guitar. This worthy successor to Hugh Hopper is at his most electrifying when unexpected fuzz-bass sonics jolt his feature showcase, "Ealing Comedy." Karl Jenkins may be disinclined to stretch out on oboe or soprano saxophone on the few occasions he picks them up, more content to stay seated at his keyboards, but he's a substantive musician and composer.

—Frank-John Hadley

**Switzerland 1974:** Hazard Profile; The Floating World; Ealing Comedy; Bundles; Land Of The Bag Snake; Joint; The Man Who Waved At Trains; Peff; The Man Who Waved At Trains (Reprise); LBO; Riff II; Lefty; Penny Hitch (Coda). (59:51)

**Personnel:** Allan Holdsworth, guitar, voice; Karl Jenkins, Fender Rhodes, piano; Hohner Planet, soprano saxophone, oboe; Mike Ratledge, Fender Rhodes, Lowrey organ, AKS synthesizer; Roy Babbington, electric 6-string bass; John Marshall, drums, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [cuneiformrecords.com](http://cuneiformrecords.com)



such as on "Lester Grant," a showcase for Silberstein and tribute to one of Quinerly's Houston mentors who played on numerous early '50s r&b records. The one *Invictus* track that Quinerly did not compose is a soul-blues version of the standard "My Blue Heaven." Hampton is sharp and insistent here, while his groove remains easygoing, as it does on the brief closer, "That Right There." This group avoids punctuating with explanation points.

—Aaron Cohen

**Invictus:** Tavares; Nimzo Indian; Light Work; The Child Of The 808 Interlude; Variation 24; My Blue Heaven; The Star, The Crescent And The Police Captain; Kunst Überlebt; The Child Of The 808; Lester Grant; That Right There. (45:50)

**Personnel:** Reggie Quinerly, drums; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; Yotam Silberstein, guitar; Christian Sands, piano; Alan Hampton, bass.

**Ordering info:** [reggiequinerly.com](http://reggiequinerly.com)

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## Serious Doin's

**Gregor Hilden, *In Phase* (Acoustic Music 319.1534.2; 57:29 ★★★)**

Impossible to pigeonhole, Gregor Hilden in Germany takes an exacting sense of craft and a thrifty efficiency of purpose to his usually excellent electric guitar playing on his 10th album. The first four tracks, starting with the Grover Washington Jr.-identified "Mr. Magic," are likeable, though they sound a bit too tidy and plotted. But any thoughts that he is a stolid, sleek automaton vanish when he spills bluesy feeling into his lines on "Desert Song" and conjures a wondrous synthesis of jazz, blues, pop and soul called "Springtime." For the rest of the way—five more original instrumentals, including slow-cooker "Naylor's Blues" and imaginative treatments of Kenny Burrell's "Chitlins Con Carne" and Peter Green's "Fleetwood Mac"—Hilden's blues inclinations indicate a strong emotional commitment.

**Ordering info:** [acoustic-music.de](http://acoustic-music.de)

**Doug MacLeod, *Exactly Like This* (Reference 135; 55:44 ★★★)** Active since the mid-1980s and with about two dozen entries in his discography, Doug MacLeod sets up camp in a rare niche of storytelling bluesmen that are attuned to the textures and rhythms of life. On this excursion, the wry Californian's distinctive singing voice and straight-talking guitar comment on a "rough-and-tumble" woman, staying true to oneself, the road back home, the splendor of the Blue Ridge Mountains and more. Subtle and firm support is supplied by seasoned pros Mike Thompson on piano, Denny Croy on bass and Jimi Botti on drums.

**Ordering info:** [referencerecordings.com](http://referencerecordings.com)

**Eliza Neals, *Breaking And Entering* (E-Records.com 889211; 51:08 ★½)** From the standpoint of blues or blues-rock being a regenerating force, there's almost nothing here. The Detroit-based singer huffs and puffs to the brink of an aneurism in hopes of intensifying human drama. Instead she only manages to define empty style and freakish histrionics. On "Spinning," guitarist Howard Glazer, to his credit, kicks a listener's solar plexus when trying to exhume Jimi Hendrix.

**Ordering info:** [elizaneals.com](http://elizaneals.com)

**Chris Daniels & The Kings, *Funky To The Bone* (Moon Voyage 2015; 41:31 ★★★½)** Most appreciative of life for having survived cancer, singer-guitarist Chris Daniels and singer Fred Gowdy—longtime regulars on the Boulder, Colorado, blues scene and collaborators since 2011—pump out horn-band "funky blues" and mingled rock, soul and jazz (plus an ounce of hip-hop) with the skill of West Coast brethren Tower of Power and Soul Vaccination. "Joy" sends their message loudest and clearest.



Gregor Hilden

MANFRED POLLERT

**Ordering info:** [chrisdaniels.com](http://chrisdaniels.com)

**Arlen Roth, *Slide Guitar Summit* (Aquinnah; 63:50 ★★★½)** Arlen Roth, a celebrated pioneer of guitar education and a faithful steward for all things blues since the 1970s, marshalled a platoon of blues and roots slide guitar proponents from around the country to participate satisfyingly in this project produced by Tom Hambridge. Roth, his mentor Johnny Winter and Lee Roy Parnell, Sonny Landreth, Jimmy Vivino, Jack Pearson, Cindy Cashdollar, Rick Vito, Greg Martin and David Lindley—a few best known to country music fans—blaze away with ardency and technique regulated by intellect.

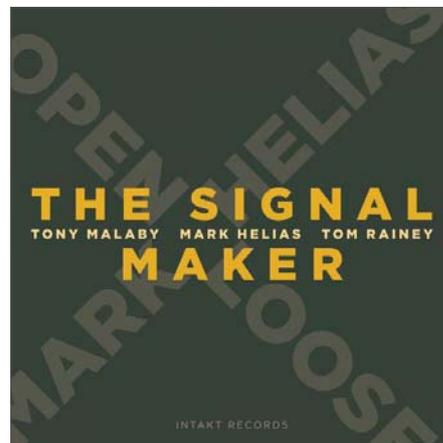
**Ordering info:** [arlenroth.com](http://arlenroth.com)

**Igor Prado Band, *Way Down South* (Delta Groove 167; 53:24 ★½)** Aspiring to credibility in North America, the utterly undistinguished Igor Prado Band from Brazil uses gringos like Kim Wilson, Mud Morganfield and now-deceased Lynwood Slim to do their heavy lifting. Yawn—blues staler than two-week-old cheese bread left uncovered in a São Paulo bakery.

**Ordering info:** [deltagrooveproductions.com](http://deltagrooveproductions.com)

**JeConte, *Down By The Bayou* (Red Parlor 1501; 39:11 ★★★½)** JeConte, who calls Northern California home, likes to record in the historical heartlands of the music he loves. His 2013 album *Mali Blues* found him in West Africa, and his latest comes from Louisiana's Cajun and Creole country, where he met up with guitarist-producer Anders Osborne, Lost Bayou Rambler fiddle and accordion specialist Andre Michot and five others. Confident as a singer and harmonica player, JeConte maintains a deliberate tone in originals that are usually slathered thick with edgy atmosphere. "Mother Africa" and "Stuck In The Mood," in particular, might get an approving scowl from Otis Taylor. **DB**

**Ordering info:** [redparlor.com](http://redparlor.com)



### Mark Helias Open Loose *The Signal Maker*

INTAKT 245

★★★★★

Nearing its second decade, this limber trio led by the muscular yet agile bassist Mark Helias serves up another powerful missive guided by trust and intuition. Of course, those are both qualities that mark the best sort of improvisational music, but for Open Loose they are bedrock traits that turn the malleable themes penned by its leader into peerless models of spontaneous invention. From the beginning, Helias has worked with the wildly inventive drummer Tom Rainey (with the ruddy-toned saxophonist Tony Malaby replacing Ellery Eskelin a few years into the trio's long run), and together they've forged a remarkable rapport that affords them to endlessly reinvent the repertoire each time they take the bandstand. For *The Signal Maker*, Malaby augments his striated tenor with soprano on five of the album's 13 tracks, broadening the group's timbral range, but ultimately it's the lines—sharp, usually contrapuntal, often diverging—that make this group so strong.

"Ça Vous Gene" is one of the tunes featuring soprano, as Malaby hurtles through the Helias theme like it was a steep chase, with the rhythm section laying out a nimble, loping groove perpetually ornamented by Rainey's terse fills before the trio melds together for a furious unison outro. "Largesse" is one of several lovely ballads; Malaby's plush tenor intimates the melody over gentle cymbal skittering and a sparse elucidating of the bass part, with plenty of silence, both open and loose, and composure. The statement is more direct on the sultry "Vocalise," with a lengthy extrapolation of the long and winding theme giving way to a nimble, shape-shifting solo by Helias, thriving in his instrument's upper range but hitting its stride in the bottom. The entire album is marked by such seamless transitions, with a sort of communication that propels any given tune in infinite directions or moods. *The Signal Maker* embraces the same basic premise that's guided every Open Loose record, but I don't know if that premise has ever worked better.

—Peter Margasak

**The Signal Maker:** The Signal Maker; Ça Vous Gene; Largesse; Post Post; Vocalise; Soliloquy; End Point; Brothers; Fast Feast; Motoric; Temoin; You'll Never Guess; Initialize. (60:53)

**Personnel:** Mark Helias, bass; Tony Malaby, saxophones; Tom Rainey, drums.

**Ordering info:** [intaktrec.com](http://intaktrec.com)



## Prism Quartet *Heritage/Evolution Volume 1*

INNOVA 906

★★★★½

The Prism Quartet has celebrated its 30th anniversary by seeking out the company of like minds from another genre. The all-saxophone chamber ensemble has reached beyond the boundaries of classical music for material and collaborators before; this time they have commissioned pieces from notable jazz saxophonists, and the composers all make appearances on this disc.

If you seek immersion in immaculate articulated sounds from across the saxophone spectrum, this album is for you. It's hard to imagine any student of the instrument not being simultaneously enraptured and intimidated by the high

## Oz Noy *Asian Twistz*

ABSTRACTLOGIX 048

★★★★★

Well known on the New York scene for his scintillating six-string abilities along with his penchant for deftly dancing on his string of effects pedals on stage, the Israeli-born guitar slinger performs tunes from his two-volume *Twisted Blues* set in live shows from a tour of Shanghai and Thailand in 2014. Accompanied by super drummer Dave Weckl and virtuoso electric bassist Etienne Mbappe from John McLaughlin's 4th Dimension Band, this power trio outing carves out its own unique niche in the same way that Jeff Beck's *Blow By Blow* did 40 years ago. That fusion aesthetic is perhaps best represented here by their intense rendition of Eddie Harris' "Freedom Jazz Dance."

Aside from his obvious chops on the instrument—from his blues-inflected single note lines to his accomplished chord melody skills—Noy has an uncanny ability to rapidly shift from clean to dirty tones, sometimes from bar to bar, to give the impression of two distinctly different rhythm and lead players on the same track, as on the opening "Get Down." His skillful manipulation of tones on searing solos, from Hendrixian wah-wah and backwards guitar effects on "Get Down" to all manner of otherworldly effects on "Downside Up," add to his envelope-pushing vocabulary.

His lazy second-line groover, "Rhumba Tumba," shows the nexus of N'awlins and

standard of musicianship evident on this double CD. Prism's members are all formidable players, capable of anything from gleaming, vibrato-free purity to elongated rhythmic passages. With that range comes flexibility. "15 Places At The Same Time," by Steve Lehman, uses precisely calculated harmonies to create the illusion of electronic processing. The tender melodies and softened tones on Greg Osby's "Covenant Of Voices" bring to mind ancient choral music. And Rudresh Mahanthappa consummates the longtime attraction of jazz saxophonists for Eastern motifs in the alap-like first section of "I Will Not Apologize For My Tone Tonight" before moving into a series of impressively precise executions of frightfully tricky unison passages.

There are moments when the playing is overly slippery-clean; their performance of John Coltrane's "Dear Lord," in particular, could use a bit of grit. And the profusion of densely plotted saxophone music, while rich in tonal variety, can be a bit too rich, so that playing the entire album is like sitting down to a multi-course meal of double chocolate cake. But taken a piece at a time, there's much to appreciate on *Heritage/Evolution Volume 1*.

—Bill Meyer

**Heritage/Evolution Volume 1:** Disc 1: I Will Not Apologize For My Tone Tonight; The Missing Piece; X Marks the Square; Name Day. (59:36) Disc 2: 15 Places At The Same Time (1–5); Line/Texture; Gesture/Rhythm; Solo; Radical Alignment; Afterlife; Covenant Of Voices; Trajectory; Dear Lord. (53:53)

**Personnel:** Timothy McAllister, soprano saxophone; Taimur Sullivan, baritone saxophone; Zachary Shemon, alto saxophone; Matthew Levy, tenor saxophone; Rudresh Mahanthappa, alto saxophone (Disc 1: 1); Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone (Disc 1: 2–4); Tim Ries, (Disc 1: 3, 4); Steve Lehman, alto saxophone (Disc 2: 1–5); Dave Liebman, soprano saxophone (Disc 2: 6–8); Greg Osby, alto saxophone (Disc 2: 6–8).

**Ordering info:** [innova.mu](http://innova.mu)



Havana, while the tough Texas shuffle "Whole Tone Blues" treads on Stevie Ray Vaughan territory. Noy reveals his lyrical side on the spacious and unaccompanied ballad "Twice In A While," then goes for the jugular on the funky "Just Groove Me," which has him channeling his inner Leo Nocentelli of The Meters. The extraordinary Mbappe, who showcases his chops throughout, is prominently featured on "Slow Grease." And Weckl fans are in for a treat with his extended solo on "Steroids." *Asian Twistz* is a hard-hitting offering that may contend as DIY record of the year.

—Bill Milkowski

**Asian Twistz:** Get Down; Rhumba Tumba; Whole Tone Blues; Downside Up; Twice In A While; Just Groove Me; Slow Grease; Freedom Jazz Dance; Steroids. (70:51)

**Personnel:** Oz Noy, guitar; Dave Weckl, drums; Etienne Mbappe, bass.

**Ordering info:** [abstractlogix.com](http://abstractlogix.com)

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STRICK MUZIK 007  
 ★★ ★ ½

As musicians, and entrepreneurs, the Strickland brothers have always presented a straightforward plan: Find accomplished, like-minded colleagues and provide them the space to create. Of course, that's always been the formula for artist-run labels, and their success comes with the source material they have, especially when that comes to writing. Drummer E.J. Strickland's *The Undying Spirit* offers the kind of compositions and collective spirit that are worthy of these top players.

While Strickland is a fierce and imaginative drummer, he's also judicious enough to hold these impulses back in deference to the overall performance. It helps that everyone here knows each other well: The core of his quintet—including Marcus Strickland and Jaleel Shaw on saxophones and pianist Luis Perdomo—were also featured on his 2009 debut, *In This Day*. So on the opening track, "Ride," E.J. Strickland's hesitations during his part set up the dual-reed interplay between Marcus Strickland and Shaw before the drummer builds up a clave pattern toward the conclusion. But this group also flexibly combines different tempos and approaches, especially on "For My Home Folks," which begins as a quiet ballad with Marcus Strickland on soprano above Perdomo's gently repeating chords before the entire group joins them. E.J. Strickland then rapidly changes things up, which allows for strong blues playing before it returns to that subdued opening. Linda Oh also continues to show why she's become such a prominent bassist over the past few years, and Shaw also commands the knotty changes of "Transcendence" with his angular approach.

Nothing is too obvious here: "Bomba For Leel And Max" does not overstate the Puerto Rican rhythm indicated in the song's name. And if the title of the concluding "Impromptivity" is a play on the notion of improvisation within rigorously planned, or intuitive, group interplay, the result strikes the right kind of balance. —Aaron Cohen

**The Undying Spirit:** Ride; For My Home Folks; Transcendence; Ballad For All Mankind; Hindsight; Bomba For Leel And Max; Midnight's Clearing; A Dance For Mojo's Return; Tune For S.C.; Impromptivity. (70:08)

**Personnel:** E.J. Strickland, drums; Jaleel Shaw, alto saxophone; Marcus Strickland, tenor, soprano saxophones; Luis Perdomo, piano; Linda Oh, bass.

**Ordering info:** [strickmuzik.com](http://strickmuzik.com)

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 —Digital Jazz News

[www.bobshimizu.com](http://www.bobshimizu.com)

**Milford Graves/  
Bill Laswell**  
*Space/Time •  
Redemption*

TUM 040

★★★★★

“The primary objective of the totality of the Celestial-Mystic-Spiritual-Scientific musician,” writes Milford Graves in the liner notes of this album,” is to initiate intra-dynamical thrusting force on the various particles that comprise Earth’s conscious cosmic mysteries that interact with the human biological system.” If you’ve heard Graves perform, you understand this entirely.

Drawing sounds from his drums that recall tympani, tabla, Latin, Gamelan and tuned percussion, Graves is the cosmic connection between the free-jazz of Albert Ayler, Don Pullen and Sonny Sharrock and the internal/external rhythms of the cosmos. He can play the most literal Afro-Cuban or jazz rhythm, then as effortlessly explode his drums into waves of mesmerizing, primal sound.

Joining with experimental composer, producer and bassist Bill Laswell, the duo’s *Space/Time • Redemption* is a wild ride between glowing improvisation and spooky drone theory. Playing the same psychedelic-swirl drumset he has since the early ’70s, Graves rides aloft Laswell’s flowing bass lines, playing chattering rhythms on drums, bells, bongos and all manner of odd percussion. Arcing bass lines introduce “Sonny Sharrock,” Graves entering with thunderous drums, quickly morphing to tuned bells playing a childlike melody. Graves and Laswell create punk jazz in “Another Space” and a hymn of Afro-Cuban rhythms and peace-inducing bass melodies in “Autopossession” and “Another Time.”

—Ken Micallef

**Space/Time • Redemption:** Eternal Signs; Sonny Sharrock; Another Space; Autopossession; Another Time. (61:24)

**Personnel:** Milford Graves, drums, percussion; Bill Laswell, electric basses.

**Ordering info:** [tumrecords.com](http://tumrecords.com)



**Jon Davis**  
*Moving Right Along*

POSI-TONE 8133

★★★

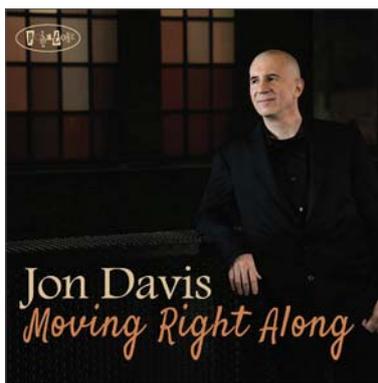
Jon Davis, journeyman pianist, offers a dozen relaxed trio tracks as a low-key lounge date—no notes, no fanfare, no worries—recreating a tasteful evening at Smalls or The Kitano. You almost hear applause amid the patter as rocks jostle your artisanal rye. Both-coaster Davis worked the Bay Area in bands with Eddie Henderson, Stan Getz and Larry Grenadier, toured long with Jaco Pastorius and Brian Melvin, then returned to New York to a more settled career. Davis’ polished technique shows, seldom flashy, on modestly pleasing originals, like an Eastern-tinged “Beauty And The Blues.” Standards ride less assuredly: a left-footed Frank Loesser *Guys and Dolls* ballad, an underwhelmingly leafy Coltrane classic and a stop-and-start take on Monk’s “Reflections.” Yet, after a Beatles chestnut lining single-note pearls and two-fisted sauce, Davis settles into an after-hours mood of easier tempos and thoughtful readings: He follows two Pastorius lovelies (starlit “Portrait Of Tracy” with Nakamura’s tidy bass solo, and the taut, boppish “Dania”) with expansive, embracing originals (folksy “Just In Case” and lightly bossa “Pensive Puff” with good solos and focused ensembles) and fades with a set-em-up-Joe broken-stride solo on a Harold Arlen/Ted Koehler Broadway belter.

—Fred Bouchard

**Moving Right Along:** Moving Right Along; Under The Stairway; Moment’s Notice; Beauty And The Blues; I’ve Never Been In Love Before; Reflections; She’s Leaving Home; Portrait Of Tracy; Dania; Just In Case; Pensive Puff; I Gotta Right To Sing The Blues. (65:46)

**Personnel:** Jon Davis, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Shinnosuke Takahashi, drums.

**Ordering info:** [posi-tone.com](http://posi-tone.com)



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## Sahelian Sounds for Western Ears

The Sahara is the world's largest desert, and the Sahel is a semi-arid band stretching across Africa to its south. There are hundreds of peoples living there, and in recent years, labels such as Sublime Frequencies have worked to uncover the sounds they make, in particular the wild guitar music that emanates from the edge of the vast desert.

Percussionist/saxophonist Rick Brown and guitarist/saxophonist Che Chen are Americans, but the music they make as **75 Dollar Bill** sounds as though it emanates from the same dusty environs as the likes of Nigerois bands Group Bombino and Group Doueh. **Wooden Bag (Other Music 016-1; 38:39 ★★★½)** is the band's third album, and its spare mix of ragged, hypnotic electric guitar and shakers feels earthy and elemental. It never eclipses the music it draws inspiration from, but it carves out an engrossing space of its own.

**Ordering info:** [75dollarbill.bandcamp.com](http://75dollarbill.bandcamp.com)

Brooklyn's **The Sway Machinery** is another American group that attempts to build bridges between North America and inland North Africa; its second album, 2011's *House Of Friendly Ghosts*, featured Malian singer Khaira Arby. **Purity And Danger (3rd Generation; 41:41 ★★★)** depicts a globe-spanning desert on its cover, and the image is appropriate, as the group kicks up dust with cycling guitar riffs closely related to the layered riffing of Tinariwen, swaying rhythm with Berber undertones, stabbing horns and frenetic rock energy.

The group ranges into other quarters as well, as Jeremiah Lockwood's unusual vocal style draws very deeply from traditional Jewish cantorial singing. The dizzying spins from punked-up Central European music to funk-ed-up Saharan sandstorms results in a full album that is surprisingly unified.

**Ordering info:** [3rdgenerationrecordings.com](http://3rdgenerationrecordings.com)

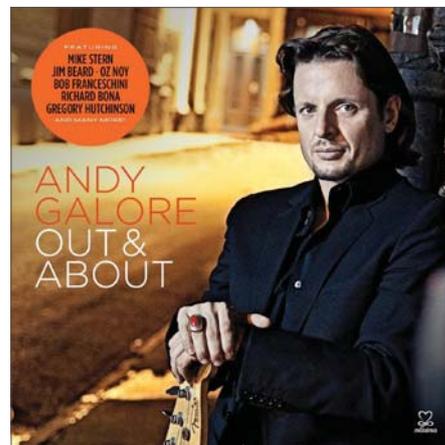
Of course, just as American bands converse with sounds from the Sahara and Sahel, bands from those regions take what's useful from Western music and repurpose it to their own ends. Niger's **Tal National** formed in 2000 and is an institution in its homeland, honing its fiery performances in marathon concerts. **Zoy Zoy (FatCat 137; 46:20 ★★★)** is its second international release, and it is brilliant. African music is known for its rhythmic complexity, but the way this band locks together is uncommon anywhere. The drums rarely play a straight beat, the guitars circle each other aggressively, and the singers call out powerfully from within the thicket. Call it Afro-math-rock, perhaps. When a guitar breaks loose for a solo, as on "Say Wata Gaya," it can be a startlingly fluid contrast to all of the music's other sharp angles. It takes a tremendous amount of practice and discipline for musicians to hear each other like this.

**Ordering info:** [store.fatcat-usa.com](http://store.fatcat-usa.com)

Further west in Burkina Faso, the guitar band tradition runs deep, spanning the entire post-colonial period. **Baba Commandant & the Mandingo Band** are among its inheritors, and **Juguya (Sublime Frequencies 097; 41:36 ★★★)** grooves in a heavy-thumping, Burkina-fied Afrobeat vein. Baba Commandant (né Mamadou Sanou) is the lead singer and ngoni player, but you'll likely find yourself paying as much attention to the bassist and drummer, who provide the sinewy undercurrent that sweeps along the guitars, horns, marimba and backing chorus. It all gels so beautifully that it's nearly impossible not to be swept along yourself.

**Ordering info:** [sublimerecordings.com](http://sublimerecordings.com)

DB



## Andy Galore *Out & About*

MOTÉMA 163

★★★★½

Skate past the cover of Miles Davis' droidy "Robot 415" and you'll land on the tracks that distill the wit and humor that make bassist Andy Galore's debut a pleasure. "23rd Street Blues" spans soft-shoe and swing, referencing the home of guitarist Mike Stern, where he and Galore used to jam. "Chicken & Scotch" sports a more boppish cast to celebrate a culinary pairing that honors the hunger that can accompany intoxication. Both tunes drive hard and feel funky no matter how tricky the meter.

On *Out & About*, his homage to New York City, Galore drives a diverse clutch of originals and judiciously chosen covers. The music is shiny and layered, the production sharply creased, the musical company accomplished and confident. Galore is a connoisseur of rhythm who doesn't stint on melody, either. That blend is striking from the start, especially on "Fingerprints," the original that brackets the recording with short and extended versions featuring the leader's bass and tart solos by guitarists Stern and Oz Noy and saxophonist Bob Franceschini.

Another original of special spunk and sass is the cleverly titled "Can You Undo This For Me?" which delivers a Head Hunters groove sparked by surround-sound synth chatter and a dash of wah-wah courtesy of Noy. Other than the pretty ballads, Galore's "Riannan" and pianist Jon Davis' "Passage To Forever," the recording is upbeat and rocking. It showcases Galore's ability to propel—and write in—numerous styles.

While the virtuosity of Galore's smartly assembled crew goes deep, it's the nimbleness and unexpected rhythmic complexity that elevate this above less ambitious forays into fusion.

—Carlo Wolff

**Out & About:** Fingerprints; Goodbye Pork Pie Hat; Freedom Jazz Dance; Riannan; Can You Undo This for Me?; Robot 415; 23rd Street Blues; Chicken & Scotch; Passage To Forever; Fingerprints (extended). (57:22)

**Personnel:** Andy Galore, bass; Oz Noy, Mike Stern, guitars; Bob Franceschini, Joel Frahm, Karel Ruzicka Jr., saxophones; Jim Beard, Jon Davis, Max Haymer, Alan Klipple, Jason Lindner, Bennett Paster, Etienne Stadwijk, keyboards; Tommy Campbell, Gregory Hutchinson, Kenny Wollesen, drums; Richard Bona, Samuel Torres, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [motema.com](http://motema.com)

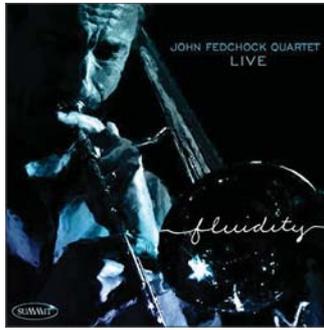
## John Fedchock Quartet *Fluidity*

SUMMIT 653  
★★★★

Trombonist John Fedchock has been making his recorded case for virtuoso status for 20 years at least. He's a Woody Herman alumnus, and hearing him expertly navigate the tight corners and hurdles of the bebop charts in this live date brings to mind an earlier time. No modal space odysseys or free-jazz freakouts for him.

Fedchock cements his reputation here as a swinger and heartfelt balladeer. For this album, he headed a quartet at the Havana Nights club in Virginia Beach, Virginia, in 2013. Aside from Fedchock originals "Under The Radar" and "Havana," the fare is familiar. Local pianist John Toomey, a talent deserving wider recognition, leads the rhythm section. He gets under the soloists and plays wry asides that always boost the music. New York drummer Dave Ratajczak covers everything from whispering brushes ("East Of The Sun") to peppery sticks on an upbeat arrangement of "Days Of Wine And Roses." Fedchock is a soulful player, too; his turn on "Make Someone Happy" almost aches. He also loves to play changes and swing. The complexities in Joe Henderson's "Homestretch" get such a thorough workout that one wonders how the trombonist would have sounded next to Clifford Brown. An album of trombone leads and solos might not be everyone's cup of tea, but in Fedchock's hands this music is fairly timeless.

—Kirk Silsbee



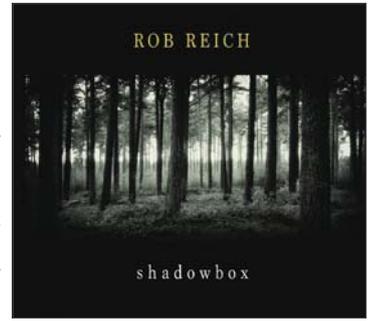
## Rob Reich *Shadowbox*

BAG PRODUCTION 008  
★★★★½

Bay Area fixture Rob Reich, a key member of Tin Hat and numerous other ensembles, shares a multiplicity of visions on his debut album as a leader, an elegant quintet date that moves effortlessly between post-bop, jazz Manouche and chamber-rock. Reich embraces the warm, lyric swell of his instrument on a piece like "Traceries," squeezing out a sweet-toned melody around acoustic guitar arpeggios by Ila Cantor, but he has no problem switching gears for "Chicken Soup," an energetic funk gem propelled by the second-line beats of drummer Eric Garland. Reich is at his most lyric on the gentle "Sleep Poem," an extended meditation that finds him switching from accordion to piano mid-tune.

Reich's jazz piano aesthetic clearly owes a much to original thinkers like Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, and that feel even comes through on the puckish "How Now," where he sticks with accordion. "Nimbus" is based on the chords of the Django Reinhardt standard "Nuages," but its feel is strictly post-bop, while "The Other Charlie," a nod to Charlie Christian, blurs the line between buoyant swing and jazz Manouche. "Hidden Stairway" is a blues with delicate fibers held together by the sturdy, insistent bass playing of Todd Sickafoose—the album's glue. Reich gets his fair share of solo space, but he remains a consummate team player on *Shadowbox*.

—Peter Margasak



**Fluidity:** East Of The Sun; Havana; I Hear A Rhapsody; Make Someone Happy; Under The Radar; Weaver Of Dreams; The Days Of Wine And Roses; I've Never Been In Love Before; Homestretch. (71:04)  
**Personnel:** John Fedchock, trombone; John Toomey, piano; Jimmy Masters, bass; Dave Ratajczak, drums.

Ordering info: [summitrecords.com](http://summitrecords.com)

**Shadowbox:** Night Heron; Traceries; Chicken Soup; Sleep Poem; Catch And Release; How Now; Interlude; The Other Charlie; See Ya; Hidden Stairway; Nimbus; This Myth. (55:05)

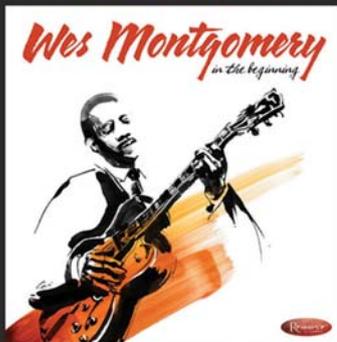
**Personnel:** Rob Reich, accordion, piano, electric piano; Todd Sickafoose, bass; Eric Garland, drums; Ila Cantor, guitars; Ben Goldberg, clarinets.

Ordering info: [bagproductionrecords.com](http://bagproductionrecords.com)



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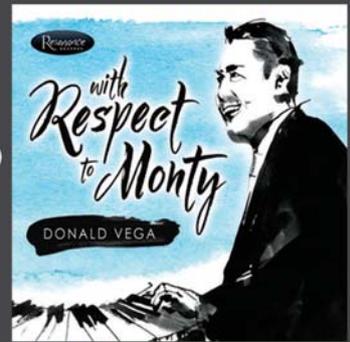
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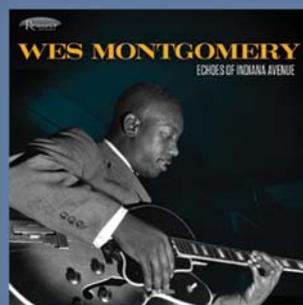
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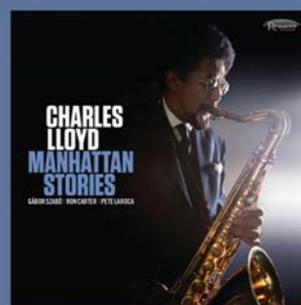
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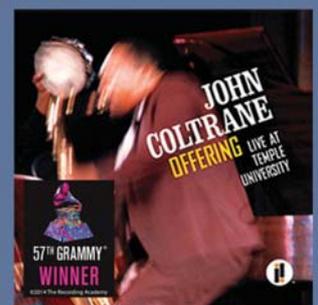
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# Settling the Score

Perhaps the key figure in European jazz after Django Reinhardt and before the stable of ECM Records is Polish pianist-composer Krzysztof Komeda, who made a classic studio LP—1965's *Astigmatic*—that prefigured the ECM sound in many ways. Atmospheric and lyrical yet with a free-minded edge, the album presents a distinctly European sensibility—one as steeped in J.S. Bach, Chopin and Scriabin as it was in Miles Davis, John Coltrane and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Significantly, Komeda partnered with Roman Polanski, creating evocative scores to the director's early films. The composer died at age 38 in 1969, after a drunken accident at a party in Hollywood, where he was scoring Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*. Polanski said of Komeda: "His music was cool and modern, but there was a hot heart inside it. ... He gave truth to my films. Without his music, they would be meaningless."



Krzysztof Komeda

WOJCIECH PIŁEŃSKI

Komeda's signature score to Polanski's 1962 breakthrough *Knife on the Water* is a highlight of the latest classy boxed set from U.K. operation Jazz on Film Records: the four-CD **Jazz In Polish Cinema: Out Of The Underground, 1958–1967 (JOF 002; ★★★★★)**. Brimming with dark-hued romanticism, *Knife on the Water* holds allure for most any jazz fan; it features Swedish saxophonist Bernt Rosengren as a special guest alongside the composer on piano and his Polish rhythm section. Komeda—whose actual surname was Trzcinski, having taken a stage moniker in an era behind the Iron Curtain when it was difficult to reconcile the cultural subversion of jazz with his work as a medical doctor—was an inspired melodist, above all. The tenor tune "Ballad For Bernt" is irresistibly slinky and sexy, while the more combustible "Cherry" evokes Atlantic-era Coltrane. In a characteristic curatorial touch, the set includes grittier live recordings of the main numbers as bonus tracks.

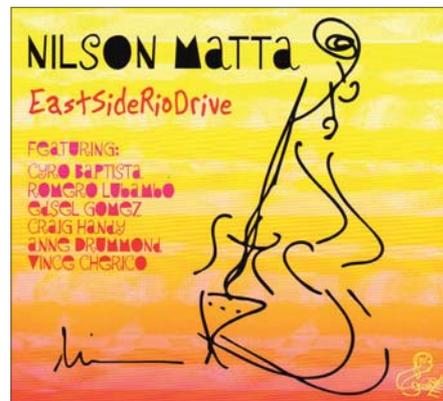
The *Jazz In Polish Cinema* set—beautifully annotated, illustrated and packaged, with diligent remastering—rescues more rarely heard Komeda scores for Polanski and other Polish filmmakers. Among them are scores for *Opening Tomorrow* (lambent, vibes-laced), *The Accident* (shades of noir) and *The Penguin* (jazz-meets-Bach), as well as the avant-tinged, Paris-recorded *Le Départ* (featuring Don Cherry and Gato Barbieri). The occasional Polish vocal or pop pastiche doesn't get in the way too much. The box also includes several soundtracks by keyboardist-composer Andrzej Trzaskowski, leader of multiple pioneering Polish jazz

bands. A key soloist in Trzaskowski's venturesome, hard-grooving score to the 1965 film *Walkover* was young trumpeter Tomasz Stanko, who also played on some of Komeda's soundtracks (as well as in his *Astigmatic* quintet). Three decades later, Stanko would release a haunted Komeda tribute album, *Litania*, on ECM.

Another recent Jazz on Film Records box is the five-CD **French New Wave: Original Jazz On Film Recordings, 1957–62 (JOF 002; ★★★★★½)**. This set's centerpiece is the Miles Davis score to Louis Malle's 1958 film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Lift to the Scaffold*), one of the trumpeter's unsung masterpieces. Playing some of his most plangent open-horn melodies, Davis led a band with bebop expatriate Kenny Clarke plus the French saxophonist Barney Wilen, pianist René Urtreger and bassist Pierre Michelot. The score is a marvel of what Malle called "elegiac counterpoint," with the group improvising off minimalist chord sketches (foreshadowing the method for *Kind Of Blue*). The young Wilen went on to score the 1959 film *Un Témoin dans la Ville* (*A Witness in the City*), with his studio band including Kenny Dorham; one of this set's rarities, the soundtrack breathes a Davis-like air of cool-toned lyricism.

*French New Wave* features two swinging soundtracks by Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers, one composed by Benny Golson (*Des Femmes Disparaissent*), the other by Duke Jordan (*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*). Also included: Martial Solal's score for *Breathless*, Michel Legrand's for *Eva* and, least compelling, John Lewis' for *No Sun in Venice* (pastels by the Modern Jazz Quartet). Again, the Jazz on Film presentation is wonderfully holistic; by the time you dig the music, read the scholarly notes and pore over the booklet's long-unseen photos and vintage posters, it can feel as if you've seen the movies in your head. **DB**

Ordering info: [jazzonfilmrecords.com](http://jazzonfilmrecords.com)



## Nilson Matta *East Side Rio Drive*

KRIAN/WORLD BLUE 302062428

★★★★½

I spent New Year's Eve, 2000, with Brazilian drummer Duduka Fonseca and his family at their Rio de Janeiro home, with its stunning views of Sugarloaf Mountain. Late into the night, Duduka da Franseca, Nilson Matta and a local pianist entertained with authentic bossa nova, the feeling of the music, the air, the family atmosphere as thrilling as if I was in the presence of Antonio Carlos Jobim.

A modern master of contemporary Brazilian music, bassist/composer Nilson Matta has recorded with Trio Da Paz (with Fonseca), Kenny Barron, Don Pullen, Joe Henderson, Claudio Roditi and his own group, Brazilian Voyage. As fine as those recordings are, *East Side Rio Drive* is something special.

While bossa nova is Brazil's most famous musical export, the country's pre-bossa nova music, with its grand '50s ballroom esthetic and regional flavor, is equally enchanting. *East Side Rio Drive* recalls the organic appeal of that older Brazilian style, yet is thoroughly contemporary.

There's an informality, a sense of flow and fun on *East Side Rio Drive* that is rare to hear on any studio jazz recording. Much of that feeling owes to Matta's excellent band, which includes saxophonist Craig Handy, drummer Vince Cherico, guitarist Romero Lubambo and pianist Edsel Gomez, who perform with an evocative sense of play. Nilson's beautiful bass work, with its singing tonality and richly rhythmic and contrapuntal motion, drives the group on resonant versions of "Blue In Green," Charles Mingus' "Boogie Stop Shuffle," João Donato's "E Menina," Jobim's "Mohave" and Matta originals.

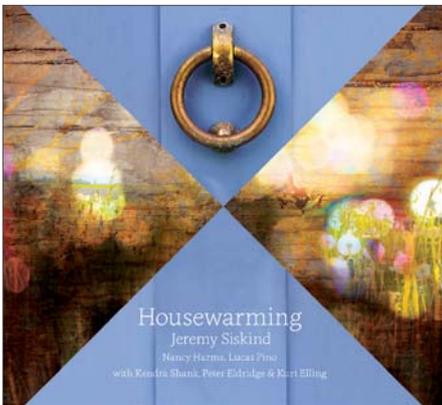
Can't make it to Rio? There's a nighttime of magic on *East Side Rio Drive*.

—Ken Micallef

**East Side Rio Drive:** Sertão; Boogie Stop Shuffle; Mohave; E Menina (Hey Girl); Verde; Blue In Green; Proemio Do Mingus; Luas de Nadine; Angela; Mambo Inn. (50:22)

**Personnel:** Nilson Matta, acoustic bass; Cyro Baptista, percussion and vocals (1, 8); Romero Lubambo, guitar (1, 4, 8); Craig Handy, tenor saxophone and flutes (1, 8), tenor saxophone (3, 5, 9, 10), bass clarinet (4, 8); Ann Drummond, flutes (3, 5, 10); Vince Cherico, drums (2, 3, 5, 9); Edsel Gómez, piano (2, 3, 5, 9, 10); Jesse Lynn, vocals (1); Ayja and Nilson, vocals (5).

Ordering info: [nilsonmatta.com](http://nilsonmatta.com)



**Jeremy Siskind**  
**Housewarming**

BROOKLYN JAZZ UNDERGROUND 053

★★★★★

**The Susan Krebs Chamber Band**  
**Simple Gifts**

GREEN GIG 032

★★★★½

Designed for intimate gatherings, chamber jazz is transparent and lovely, and a shining example of such music is pianist Jeremy Siskind's *Housewarming*.

Siskind is a pianist of limpidity and steel, surprising the listener with his unexpected alternations. His key allies are the breathy, subtle vocalist Nancy Harms and the woodwind magician Lucas Pino, a player who can make a saxophone sound like an accordion overheard during a stroll alongside the Seine.

The primary topic of *Housewarming* is intimacy. It's evident in such originals as "Decrement" (with Siskind at his most dramatic and percussive), the yearning "Hymn Of Thanks," and "Light," a bravura showcase for guest vocalist Kurt Elling. Siskind demonstrates his affinity for mood—and for sharing, as Elling sings plush over Pino's plaintive tenor saxophone. The imagery braids the notions of light and time, paralleling the merge of Elling and Pino. Siskind's other guests are New York Voices founding member Peter Eldridge, whose vocals give the title track poignancy, and Kendra Shank, an experimenter whose voice, voluptuous and precise, animates "Everything You Need."

At its best, chamber jazz arranges to showcase each player without disguise or artifice, while emphasizing the music's detail and nuance. Siskind, a deliberate player who chairs the piano department at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, has mastered this craft. He has led the core trio in the Housewarming Project since 2012, performing more than 70 house concerts, and he aims to make music that engages. His originals fit perfectly with four covers, including the tunes that bracket the disk: "Whispering Grass," a bouncy probe of nature and the finale, a world-weary version of Lerner and Loewe's "I Could Have Danced All Night," featuring Harms in narrative command and Pino at his most sinuous.

Like food cooked over a slow Bohemian fire, *Simple Gifts* is savory and satisfying. Couched in the chamber jazz sound, it is perfectly timed

and sequenced for the house concerts the band mounts; its eight tracks showcase the storytelling vocals of Susan Krebs and the nuanced textures of her chamber band, a quartet that blends strings and winds to novel, enthralling effect.

Listening to *Simple Gifts* is easy because Krebs sings in a narrative style, and her voice carries a lot of weight despite its relatively small size. Krebs also lets the song speak for itself, whether the story is Abbey Lincoln's prideful cha-cha "Throw It Away," Sergio Mendes/Alan and Marilyn Bergman's romantic "So Many Stars," the gentle pastorage of Jimmy Rowles/Cheryl Ernst's "Looking Back" or the brooding "Falling Grace."

Honed in small venues and living rooms, *Simple Gifts* is an album to ponder vignette by vignette.  
—Carlo Wolff

**Housewarming:** Whispering Grass; Light; When He Loved You; Moonlight in Vermont; Decrement; Housewarming; Ghost Story; New Old West Theme; Hymn Of Thanks; Lighter Than Air; Arise; Everything You Need; I Could Have Danced All Night. (61:10)

**Personnel:** Jeremy Siskind, piano; Lucas Pino, woodwinds; Nancy Harms, Kendra Shank (7), Peter Eldridge (6, 8), Kurt Elling (2, 11), vocals.

**Ordering info:** [bjurecords.com](http://bjurecords.com)

**Simple Gifts:** Let's Call A Heart A Heart; Looking Back; So Many Stars; Once Upon A Summertime; Falling Grace; Throw It Away; For All We Know; Simple Gifts. (40:40)

**Personnel:** Susan Krebs, vocals; Scott Breadman, percussion; Paul Cartwright, violin, viola; Rich Eames, piano; Rob Lockart, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [susankrebsmusic.com](http://susankrebsmusic.com).

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ECM

## Dafnis Prieto Sextet *Triangles And Circles*

DAFNISONMUSIC 006

★★★★★

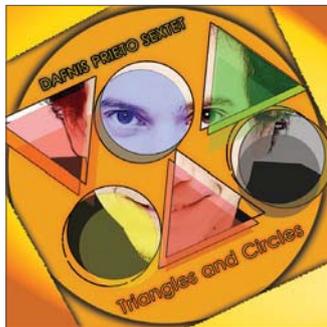
Catch Dafnis Prieto at one of his many clinics, and you'll witness hordes of drop-jawed disciples exhaling audible gasps. The drummer's dazzling cocktail of precision, independence and speed has been much rhapsodized upon. But more importantly, the qualities that have made the Cuban-born Prieto an influential voice since his 1999 arrival in the United States are his pivotal concepts. The drummer's art dramatizes that the knottiest of patterns can groove when beautifully phrased and this outing is a shining expression of that ethos.

Case in point: the wickedly witty "The Evil In You," in which drum chatter playfully fills spaces between elusive ensemble syncopations. Somehow, the band finds funkiness within the crazed-glass framework. Similarly, on the funhouse fragmentation of "Blah Blah Blah," Prieto spins grooves-within-grooves, turning a N'awlins swing/jump into a whole other monster. Pianist Manuel Valera is inspired throughout, and solo work from tenor saxist Peter Apfelbaum, alto man Felipe Lamoglia and trumpeter Mike Rodriguez is fiery and self-assured. A shot-in-the-arm is band newcomer Johannes Weidenmueller, an ideal bassist comrade for Prieto who navigates rhythmic intricacies with ease. A winner of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, Prieto has invested well in his artistic freedom, as evidenced by this forward-reaching, self-produced release on his own label. —Jeff Potter

**Triangles And Circles:** Back And Forth; Triangles And Circles; Flores; The Evil In You; Blah Blah Blah; Blah Blah; Two For One; Opening. (56:12)

**Personnel:** Dafnis Prieto, drums; Peter Apfelbaum, tenor and soprano saxophones, melodica; Felipe Lamoglia, alto saxophone; Mike Rodriguez, trumpet; Manuel Valera, piano; Johannes Weidenmueller, acoustic and electric bass.

**Ordering info:** [dafnisonmusic.com](http://dafnisonmusic.com)



## Sarah Elizabeth Charles *Inner Dialogue*

TRUTH REVOLUTION 020

★★★★★½

Sarah Elizabeth Charles has barely begun as a bandleader, but she is already stepping onto the next level. That's the level where a musician starts to sound like a genre of one and has found collaborators who can give her exactly what her music demands. On her quartet's first full-length album together, they sound like just that.

Charles' compositions are built around her voice, and they are designed for the studio. She layers herself on many of these tracks, announcing her methods on the a capella intro as she sings multiple lines at once that never quite head where you think they will harmonically. Her sense of odd harmony and her command of repetition are highly developed, as is her ear for texture. There is a moment near the end of "After Life" where her voice, as smooth as Sade's, pulls back like a veil to reveal Burniss Earl Travis II's bass, roughly bowed at the bottom of its range, and it is spine-tingling.

Every band member brings something important to this table. Jesse Elder's piano is weird, playing lines that unravel as if from a spindle, and his electric keyboard playing provides a glassy surface for Charles to skate on. John Davis drums across genres, blurring musicological lines much as Charles often blurs the line between language and wordless melody.

Charles may just be taking command of the studio, but she is fully in control, and she figures to be for a very long time. —Joe Tangari

**Inner Dialogue:** Inner Intro; Breathe; White And Blue; After Life; Yo-Yo; Choucounne; Beauty; And Now I Know; Bells; Nardis; Open the Door; More; Haitian Sunrise. (56:41)

**Personnel:** Sarah Elizabeth Charles, vocals; Jesse Elder, piano, keyboard, Rhodes; Burniss Earl Travis II, acoustic and electric bass; John Davis, drums; Christian Scott, trumpet (2, 9); Camila Meza, guitar (13); Jesse Fischer, glockenspiel (13).

**Ordering info:** [truthrevolutionrecords.com](http://truthrevolutionrecords.com)



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## Myra Melford *Snowy Egret*

ENJA/YELLOWBIRD 7752

★★★★★

The genesis of this project from Bay Area pianist Myra Melford goes back to 2004, when guitarist Fred Frith introduced her to Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. Four years later she began composing music inspired by the trilogy *Memory of Fire*, a kind of fictional history of the Americas. It took another four years before the excellent group she assembled first performed the 10-piece suite in public, and another year later Melford transformed the work into a multimedia performance with dance, video and spoken word. But the eponymous recording by Snowy Egret sticks strictly to the music, an element that stands strong on its own.

Melford certainly incorporates ideas from all over the Americas, whether the deep blues piano phrasing that opens "The Strawberry" or the clave patterns drummer Tyshawn Sorey drops into "Ching Ching/For Love Of Fruit," but her compositions eschew even the slightest hint of pastiche, opting instead for an elegantly fluid sort of shape-shifting. Apart from Snowy Egret's unusual timbre—the spindly presence of guitarist Liberty Ellum and bass guitarist Stomu Takeishi, with cornetist Ron Miles providing a clarion warmth on top—the most arresting quality of this quintet is how expertly it moves between composed and improvised passages. The group has clearly internalized Melford's conception in a profound manner, demonstrating remarkable intimacy and grace in its execution, truly extending the composer's vision without surrendering individualism. —Peter Margasak

**Snowy Egret:** Language; Night Of Sorrow; Promised Land; Ching Ching/For Love Of Fruit; The Kitchen; Times Of Sleep And Fate; Little Pockets/Everybody Pays Taxes; First Protest; The Virgin Of Guadalupe; The Strawberry. (60:22)

**Personnel:** Myra Melford, piano, melodica; Ron Miles, cornet; Liberty Ellum, guitar; Stomu Takeishi, bass guitar; Tyshawn Sorey, drums.

**Ordering info:** [allegro-music.com](http://allegro-music.com)



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by Alice Zawadzki - vocals/violin/pno  
with: Kit Downes - organ  
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Andreas Lang - double bass  
Jon Scott - drums



## SPRING RAIN

by Samuel Blaser - trombone  
with: Russ Lossing - piano/keys  
Drew Gress - double bass  
Gerald Cleaver - drums



## WOODWORK

by Matthew Stevens - guitars  
with: Gerald Clayton - piano  
Vicente Archer - bass  
Eric Doob - drums  
Paulo Stagnaro - percussion



## AUTHORITY MELTS FROM ME

by Bobby Avey - piano  
with: Miguel Zenón - alto saxophone  
Ben Monder - guitar  
Thomson Kneeland - double bass  
Jordan Perlson - drums



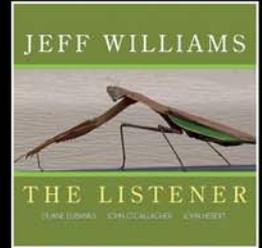
## INFINITE BLUE

by Patrick Cornelius - alto sax  
with: Michael Rodriguez - trumpet  
Nick Vayenas - trombone  
Frank Kimbrough - piano  
Michael Janisch - bass  
Jeff Ballard - drums



## POINTS OF VIEW

by Nia Lynn's Bannau Trio  
with: Nia Lynn - voice  
Gareth Lockrane - flute  
Ross Stanley - piano



## THE LISTENER

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Duane Eubanks - trumpet  
John Hébert - double bass



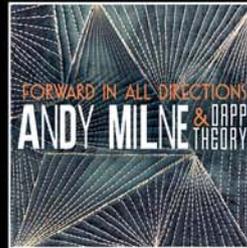
## ROBIN GOODIE

by Zhenya Strigalev - alto sax  
with: Ambrose Akinmusire - trumpet  
Taylor Eigsti - piano  
Tim Lefebvre - electric bass  
Larry Grenadier - double bass  
Eric Harland - drums



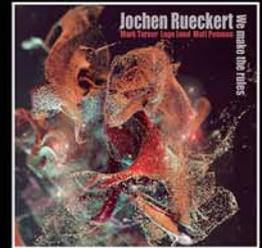
## THE NEW STRAIGHT AHEAD

by NYSQ  
with: Tim Armacost - saxophones  
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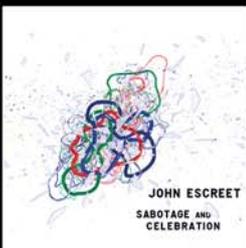
## FORWARD IN ALL DIRECTIONS

by Andy Milne & Dapp Theory  
with: Andy Milne - piano/keys  
Aaron Kruziki - woodwinds  
John Moon - vocal poetics  
Chris Tordini - bass, Ben Monder - guitar  
Jean Baylor, Gretchen Parlato - vocals  
Kenny Grohowski - drums & percussion  
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by Jochen Rueckert - drums  
with: Mark Turner - tenor saxophone  
Lage Lund - guitars  
Matt Penman - double bass



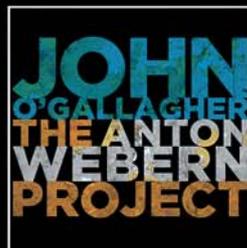
## SABOTAGE & CELEBRATION

by John Escreet - piano/keys  
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Chris Potter - tenor saxophone  
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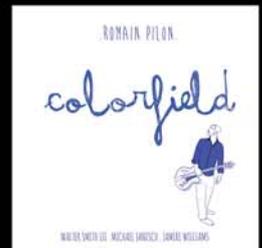
## HALFTIME

by Rachael Cohen - alto saxophone  
with: Phil Robson - guitars  
Calum Gourlay - double bass  
James Bashford - drums



## THE ANTON WEBERN PROJECT

by John O'Gallagher - alto saxophone  
with: Matt Moran - vibraphone  
Pete McCann - guitar  
Russ Lossing - h. organ, rhodes, piano  
Johannes Weidenmuller - double bass  
Tyshawn Sorey - drums  
Margret Grebowicz - voice



## COLORFIELD

by Romain Pilon - guitars  
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Michael Janisch - double bass  
Jamire Williams - drums

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**Josh Nelson**  
*Exploring Mars*

ORIGIN 82687

★★★★½

Josh Nelson is the most accomplished of the younger L.A. jazz pianist-arrangers, and he has assembled a fine group of originals, along with Holst's foreboding "Mars, Bringer of War," on *Exploring Mars*. An opening reading from Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* sets the tone, with Nelson handling the relaxed recitation over Larry Koonse's discreet guitar chords. The small ensemble music in this collection is often lyrical, harmonically rich and elegant. Like Bradbury's *Martians*, Nelson's *Mars* sounds and feels a lot like science

fiction. Singer Kathleen Grace's clear-water voice caresses "How You Loved Me On Mars," which brings to mind early '70s Randy Newman at his heartfelt best. Of course, Nelson isn't immune to fusion, and his "Solis Lacus, The Eye of Mars" makes full use of John Daversa's spacey EVI.

—Kirk Silsbee

**Exploring Mars:** Bradbury's Spirit; Sojourner Memnonia Quadrangle; How You Loved Me On Mars; Opportunity, Solis Lacus, The Eye of Mars; Mars, The Bringer Of War, Curiosity, Syrtis Major, The Hourglass Sea; Spirit. (52:18)

**Personnel:** Josh Nelson, piano, trumpet, Nord Electro 3; John Daversa, trumpet, EVI; Alan Ferber, trombone; Larry Koonse, guitar; Dave Robaire, bass; Dan Schnalle, drums; Kathleen Grace, vocals; Brian Walsh, bass clarinet; Larry Goldings, B-3 organ (4).

**Ordering info:** [origin-records.com](http://origin-records.com)

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**Chris McNulty**  
*Eternal*

PALMETTO 2176

★★★★½

The heartbreak of losing one's child is almost unfathomable. Singer Chris McNulty lost her son Sam McNulty—a.k.a. Chap One, a promising, jazz-influenced hip-hop artist—suddenly and tragically in 2011 at age 30.

McNulty has put all she has learned over half a lifetime of jazz singing and songwriting into this exquisite chamber jazz CD. The Australian-born, New York City-based singer, well-known in her native country and a veteran performer on the international jazz scene, has many gifts as a performer: a rich warm tone, an adventurous spirit and a direct channel to the emotional core of a lyric.

The very essence of the album is best expressed in McNulty's one original, the intensely moving "You Are There" (not to be confused with Dave Frishberg's song of the same name), which includes the lines, "Wherever I go, you are there / The scent of your soul, it will always be there."

On this CD, McNulty bares her soul, and one doesn't dare look away.

—Allen Morrison

**Eternal:** The Saga Of Harrison Crabfeathers; A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing; What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life; Where Is Love; You Are There; Star Dust; Nature Boy; Yesterday I Heard The Rain; Love Came On Stealthy Fingers; On A Clear Day; With Every Breath I Take; Boulevard of Broken Dreams. (58:54)

**Personnel:** Chris McNulty, vocals; John Di Martino, piano, trio arrangements; Ugonna Okegwo, bass; Gregory Hutchinson, drums; Paul Bollenback, guitar (1, 10); Mazz Swift, Josh Henderson, Amanda Lo, violins; Trevor New, viola; Meaghan Burke, Marika Hughes, cellos; Jodie Rottle, flue, alto flute; Ivan Barenboim, clarinet, bass clarinet; John Morgan-Bush, French horn; Ben Wendel, bassoon; Matthew Jodrell, flugelhorn (3, 9).

**Ordering info:** [chrismcnulty.com](http://chrismcnulty.com)



## James Singleton *Shiner*

LOUISIANA MUSIC FACTORY

★★★★

Every city with a jazz scene has its unsung heroes. These are the players who are working often and playing so well, so consistently, and so consistently well that listeners take them for granted. Bassist and composer James Singleton is a shining example of this idea, and his new record *Shiner* features several other great musicians who fill that role. Most folks will have heard of Singleton for his membership in Astral Project, New Orleans' long-running (36 years) dynamic jazz quartet, but he's also played with everyone from James Booker to James Black to his own 3Now4chestra. This recording is a live document of several nights at New Orleans' Snug Harbor, and it is live in the best aspects of the word.

It is the essence of jazz to hear a group of simpatico musicians listening and improvising and pushing each other in their art. Listeners can hear it in the opening cut, "DVS (Devious)," when pianist Larry Sieberth's furious and modern solo feeds into percussionist Mike Dillon's tablas' support and then transitions into a soulful Skerik tenor solo where he's channeling the ghost of Fathead Newman.

Singleton is known as a composer; several of his tunes have become standards of New Orleans modern jazz, and, like many of those, his songs here are marked by their groove and tendency to end up in a different yet coherent place than where they started. That trait is also present in the full-band-improvised second half of the record. This last improvised suite does not devolve into chaos or a loud, every-musician-for-themselves blowing session (not that there is anything wrong with that) but moves in directions and ends up in a very different place than where it started. This is also one of the last recordings of beloved tenor player Tim Green, whose flowing, natural saxophone lines on the second half of the record contains his usual deep spirituality and lovely tone.

—David Kunian

**Shiner:** DVS ( Devious ); Planet Of The Ape Shit; Magic Lantern; Lento; Pole Shift; Atomic; Biscuit Fuck; Green Way; Trans Movement; Shocking Hearse Winter; Shiner; Bluebelly. (65:40)

**Personnel:** James Singleton, double bass, Efx, trumpet; Mike Dillon, drums, vibraphone, tabla, percussion; Larry Sieberth, piano; Skerik, Mark Southerland, Tim Green, tenor saxophone.

**Ordering info:** [louisianamusicfactory.com](http://louisianamusicfactory.com)

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## Naturally *Tal*-ented

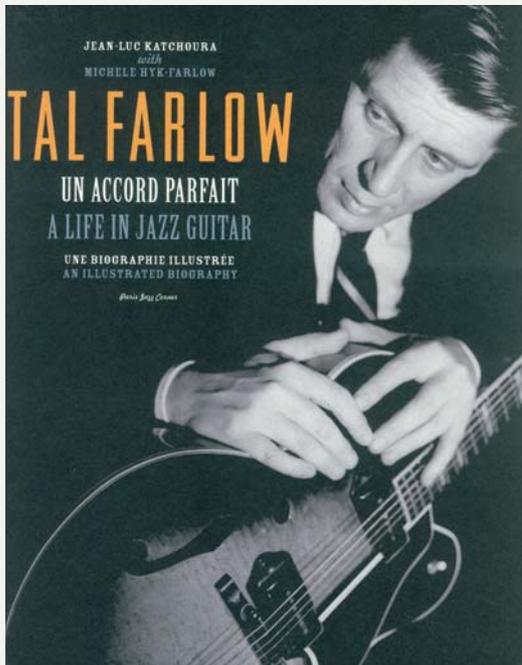
For fans of guitar great Tal Farlow, for anyone who loves jazz guitar, or for those who just love getting another slice of 20th-century jazz history, Jean-Luc Katchoura's *Tal Farlow: A Life In Jazz Guitar (Paris Jazz Corner)* is a worthwhile contribution. "Tal Farlow was the man, as far as that was concerned," says George Benson toward the book's end. "I played concerts with him, and he wiped us out. But I never felt so good getting beat up." Benson's quote is one of many pulled from DownBeat's archives that augment the telling of Farlow's story.

There are entries to *A Life In Jazz Guitar* from other sources, including Katchoura's conversations with Farlow, album liner notes, quotes from *Guitar Player* magazine, the *New York Times* and various foreign press. It's a soft-focus remembrance laced with dates, places, names and songs, starting with Talmage Holt Farlow's birth in Revolution, North Carolina, on June 7, 1921, and ending with Farlow's death at age 77 on July 25, 1998, in New York City. Drawn to music, early influences Charlie Christian and Art Tatum are complemented by the stronger pull of beboppers Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Bud Powell. Self-taught, Farlow couldn't read music, but that didn't keep him from blooming during his greatest decade of achievement, the 1950s, most famously with vibraphonist Red Norvo and bassist Charles Mingus.

Published in both English and French, Katchoura's well-researched 344-page tribute, with help from Farlow's widow Michele, puts the focus on Farlow's music. Katchoura and Farlow, incidentally, met in 1983, Katchoura working as the guitarist's agent for a European tour the following year. The two remained friends until the end.

Perhaps more striking than the story in words to this hardcover, coffee-table book is the remarkable series of photos and reproductions of album covers, advertisements and press coverage (including more than a few DownBeat covers spanning the decades). Whole pages are set aside to showcase major episodes, including Farlow's first album under his own name (his 1954 10-inch *Blue Note* eponymous release) and recording-session contact sheets. All told, there are over 400 illustrations, including 150 never-before-published photographs, that compete with the quotes and commentary. An attached CD includes Farlow playing both at home and in concert with, among others, guitarists Jimmy Raney, Gene Bertoncini and Jack Wilkins. An impressive illustrated discography, filmography and bibliography of cited media references, and extensive portraits of important collaborators Norvo, Mingus, Jimmy Lyon and Marcia Dardanelle, fill out the rest.

Historically, Katchoura appears to have covered all the bases. His discussion of the racial ten-



sions surrounding the presence and departure of Mingus in the Norvo trio indicate an openness to what little controversy seemed to exist in Farlow's professional and personal life. According to Katchoura, in 1951, as the Norvo trio was set to perform for a CBS TV special, Mingus was flagged by the primarily white members of the New York musician's union for not having a cabaret card. Facing pressure from CBS producers and the union, Norvo decided to replace Mingus with white bassist Clyde Lombardi, which enraged Mingus. Controversy aside, that same television show's producers, excited about launching their inaugural program of color TV nationwide, insisted that Farlow's guitar be seen in bright red. Farlow deferred to Gibson instead of submitting to what was perceived as a ridiculous first-request.

Years later, as Farlow remained in "semi-retirement," as a sign painter in Sea Bright, New Jersey, the first half of the 1960s would see the guitarist's growing interest in electronics and design take hold as he worked with Gibson to develop his own "Signature" guitar, and, as the decade proceeded, other guitar innovations followed, among them a preamp and octave-divider pedal.

Farlow's late-'60s reemergence on the club and festival circuits brings the story full-circle. As before, Katchoura continues in great detail to describe Farlow's ongoing recording projects that ended up as documents to a familiar sound now newly discovered. His accounting of Farlow's last years and days is a touching sendoff, as friends, family and musical colleagues emerge to pay tribute to a beloved jazz icon who, no surprise, also happened to be a pretty nice guy. **DB**

Ordering info: [parisjazzcorner.com](http://parisjazzcorner.com)



## Zhenya Strigalev's Smiling Organism

Robin Goodie

WHIRLWIND 4665

★★★★½

Alto saxophonist/composer Zhenya Strigalev's second album with this sextet is a truly fun post-bop romp. It's clear from this recording that the Russian musician knows how to create an ease and pleasant nature in those around him, inspiring everyone to be their very best.

What is this album's secret? Why is every one of its nine songs so much fun to listen to? Perhaps it's in bassist Tim Lefebvre, always a secret weapon when one really wants to enjoy jazz music. Perhaps it's drummer Eric Harland, who can rattle and hum with the rest of them, but, like Lefebvre, understands the importance of enjoying music first. Perhaps it's also Larry Grenadier on double bass, who serves the groove just as much as the jam.

Taylor Eigsti brings his pleasant brilliance to the table as expected, shining brightly and with timely precision. This is the most accessible, most direct Ambrose Akinmusire may have ever played. These compatriots bring out a different light in him that one may hope would linger more.

At the root of it all is Strigalev, whose compositions are so strong that they live up to the talents of the musical titans who join him on this CD. These jams are loose and free, but never veer too far of in a path of onanism. They sound as if they were composed effortlessly, inspired more than written, and they're played similarly, with a sense of freedom and imagination.

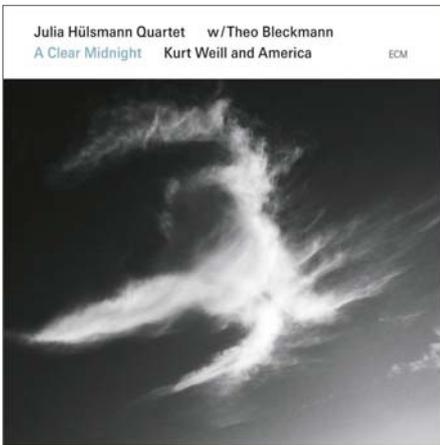
This could be the kind of jazz album that has something for everyone, not out of some sense of catering to the crowd, but because the mood it creates is so universally appealing. That mood, even more than the compositions, is paragon in *Robin Goodie*. Maybe that's the whole secret to it all.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**Robin Goodie:** KUKU; Horizontal Appreciation; Sharp Night; Pinch; Unlimited Source of Pleasure; Stake; Robin Goodie; Lorton; Personal Opinion. (73:05)

**Personnel:** Zhenya Strigalev, alto saxophone; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Taylor Eigsti, piano; Tim Lefebvre, electric bass; Larry Grenadier, double bass; Eric Harland, drums.

Ordering info: [whirlwindrecordings.com](http://whirlwindrecordings.com)



**Julia Hülsmann Quartet  
with Theo Bleckmann**  
*A Clear Midnight: Kurt Weill And America*

ECM 2418

★★★★½

The great German-gone-American composer/songwriter Kurt Weill has exerted—and continues to exert—a broad influence on various cultural corners, from his home turf of musical theater to the classical realm and certainly jazz, via contributions to the standards canon and his jazz-friendly harmonic daring. But new visions are abuzz in the project called *A Clear Midnight: Kurt Weill and America*, premiered at the 2013 Kurt Weill Festival in the composer’s hometown of Dessau, and preserved on this fine, sonically embracing ECM recording.

In some fresh and uniquely moving way, the sensitive German pianist Julia Hülsmann’s approach to Weill—as source and influence—is a blissful blending of several different stylistic touch points, along with an added attraction: At the risk of stoking an incomplete stereotype, this is Weill through the filter of an ethereal ECM sensibility, and a sublime one at that.

Vocalist Theo Bleckmann, a rare singer who moves across boundaries of theater, new music and jazz, is the ideal foil for her project, bringing clarity and elasticity to the task of realizing these introspective Weill renditions. It starts, logically, with the stage-setting version of the album’s opener, “Mack The Knife.” Slow and reflective, this “Mack” runs against the typical, salty brash type we associate with the tune. The reinventing spirit continues with the soft-edged “Alabama Song” (with tasteful trumpeter/flugelhornist Tom Arthurs playing the instrumental “vocalist” role, as he does elsewhere) and the loose-jointed, re-harmonized read on “Speak Low” reshapes that beloved standard, while “September Song” is almost a straight ballad.

Arrangement duties are inventively and introspectively taken on by Hülsmann and bassist Marc Muellbauer (who also works supply with drummer Heinrich Köbberling in the understated rhythm section). Keeping the

overall integrity of the 12-part song set, the pianist refrains from excessive improvisational action, thought demonstrating her expressive fluency in the longest, strongest piano solo, on “A Clear Midnight,” and shifts into an abstract, outside zone amidst “Little Tin God.”

Her compositional and text-setting gifts, detectably colored by Weill’s influence, on treatments of Walt Whitman poems, from the album’s most rhythmically juiced piece, “Beat! Beat! Drums!” to the hauntingly, coolly beautiful title track, with Bleckmann intoning a few enigmatically placed notes in the leader’s finely crafted, misty melancholic ambience.

Weill has the last musical word, setting Langston Hughes’ elegant words, on “Great Big Sky,” a cautiously optimistic end game to Hülsmann’s glorious and newly illuminating visit to Weill’s world.

—Josef Woodard

**A Clear Midnight: Kurt Weill And America:** Mack The Knife; Alabama Song; Your Technique; September Song; This Is New; River Chanty; A Clear Midnight; A Noiseless Patient Spider; Beat! Beat! Drums!; Little Tin God; Speak Low; Great Big Sky. (78:00)

**Personnel:** Julia Hülsmann, piano; Theo Bleckmann, vocals; Tom Arthurs, trumpet, flugelhorn; Marc Muellbauer, double bass; Heinrich Köbberling, drums.

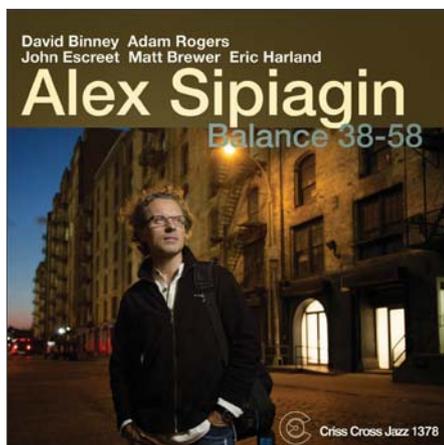
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## Alex Sipiagin *Balance 38-58*

CRISS CROSS JAZZ 1378

★★★★½

There is nothing conventional about the music and performances on trumpeter Alex Sipiagin's *Balance 38-58*. Many of the melody lines (all but the final two David Binney pieces are by Sipiagin) are extremely complex, and it is a fair bet to say that none of these songs will be showing up at jam sessions anytime soon. Due to the superb musicianship of the six musicians and their familiarity with each other (only keyboardist John Escreet is new to Sipiagin's music), their readings of the themes sound effortless and natural.

The title of the CD *Balance 38-58* might make one think that Sipiagin was referring to having a

## Alex Conde *Descarga For Monk*

ZOHO 201501

★★★★★

The affinities between Thelonious Monk's music and anything Latin jazz have been evident for a long time. (One of my favorites: Jerry Gonzalez's *Rumba Para Monk*.) And when someone can assist the listener to hear some truly marvelous music anew (in different, innovative and tantalizing ways), I imagine Monk tipping one of his many now-famous hats. I imagine him doing just that to Alex Conde's *Descarga For Monk*.

Everyone of these nine Monk tunes ("Ruby My Dear" is mistakenly listed in place of "Bemsha Swing" on the CD) has an original spin. "Played Twice" opens things with lots of hand-clapping and stepping that serves as the aural replacement of a tango, courtesy of some mean *palmas* and *compas* from Amparo Conde and Carmen Carrasco. More of that bubbly, creative ferment comes with "Thelonious," thanks to John Santos (on congas and cajon) but also the deep woody tone of Jeff Chambers' bass and some rat-a-tat-tat from drummer Jon Arkin. "Monk's Dream," on the other hand, is hampered by a more conventional reading, the uptempo swing somewhat refreshing but less ear-catching. Similarly, "Evidence" meanders through its fun tumbao groove but with less distinction than what we've already heard. Not so with "Bemsha Swing," which, apart from a bit more swinging, heralds a slight return to that slip-

balanced life during middle age, but the 38 and 58 actually refer to the range of alcohol content in Taiwan's national drink. However, there is a definite balance throughout this program, with the complex aspects of the music being offset by the warm tones of the soloists, particularly the leader.

All of the musicians make important contributions to the music, especially in the stimulating ways they play behind the lead voices. Escreet (on both piano and Fender Rhodes) and guitarist Adam Rogers constantly push the horns into expected areas; Matt Brewer's bass lines are sometimes funky but never repetitive; and drummer Eric Harland has a creative commentary going throughout. Binney on alto and soprano is a passionate soloist, and Sipiagin, whose brilliant playing sounds like a mix of Woody Shaw and Kenny Wheeler, makes it all sound logical and inevitable.

The album's standout tracks are significant for their complexity. "38-58" is one of the trickier pieces, although the passionate solos make the music seem more accessible. "Way To Her" has a mellower feel with Sipiagin on flugelhorn, even if its melody line is no less complicated, and "Momentum" has a conversational theme with rapid unisons by the horns over a medium-tempo groove.

*Balance 38-58* will keep listeners guessing while showing how jazz continues to move forward.

—Scott Yanow

**Balance 38-58:** 38-58; Way To Her; Momentum; Echoes Of Thought; Balance; Yragon; Trio Whale. (62:47)

**Personnel:** Alex Sipiagin, trumpet, flugelhorn; David Binney, alto, soprano saxophone; Adam Rogers, guitar; John Escreet, keyboards; Matt Brewer, bass; Eric Harland, drums.

**Ordering info:** [crisscrossjazz.com](http://crisscrossjazz.com)



pery, unpredictable flamenco vibe.

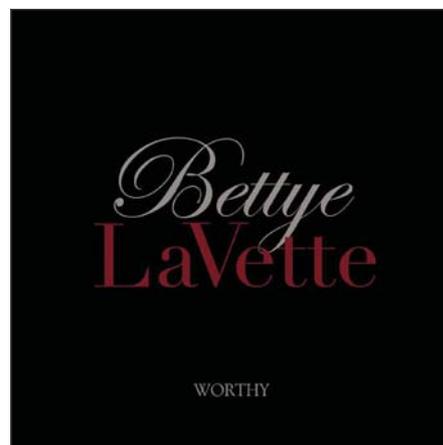
*Descarga For Monk* is Conde's third release as a leader, the 33-year-old playing beyond his years (no doubt thanks, in part, to the tutelage of Chano Dominguez). The flamenco-imbued spirit of his playing permeates, but his focus rests squarely on Monk's melodies. It's all in the interpretation, they say. And with Conde (who's also a composer), *Descarga For Monk* is as much about the twists and turns as it is in the piano playing. After all, let us not forget Monk was a piano player, too.

—John Ephland

**Descarga For Monk:** Played Twice; Thelonious; Think Of One; Ugly Beauty; Round Midnight; Monk's Dream; Evidence; Bemsha Swing; Pannonica. (53:58)

**Personnel:** Alex Conde, piano; Jeff Chambers, bass; Jon Arkin, drums; John Santos, percussion; Amparo Conde, palmas (hand claps, 1, 4); Carmen Carrasco, compas (foot stomps, 1, 4).

**Ordering info:** [zohomusic.com](http://zohomusic.com)



## Bettye LaVette *Worthy*

CHERRY RED RECORDS 6872

★★★★★

About 10 years ago, r&b singer Bettye LaVette collaborated with producer Joe Henry for *I've Got My Own Hell To Raise* (Anti). On that disc, she unleashed the accumulated raw passion and determination that built up during decades when only devoted fans knew her. Since then, she's performed on larger stages, but has retained her sharp musical sense. That discernment includes reuniting with Henry and his core team for *Worthy*. And she continues to interpret a wide range of idioms, with unexpected turns even when covering songwriters she's drawn from before.

LaVette has never been a belter, and she knows that now is no time to start shouting. Her strength comes through showing that she can enter any song in any way she chooses. That includes a loping pace on Bob Dylan's "Unbelievable" or a strut she brings to Henry's "Stop" before whispering in the right places. Alongside Patrick Warren's piano and Chris Bruce's acoustic guitar, she packs an emotional punch within a minimal amount of notes on the plaintive "Where A Life Goes."

While LaVette has covered works by the Rolling Stones and Beatles on *Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook* (Anti, 2010), she continues to find new ways of personalizing their tunes. On "Complicated," she sings as if she is shyly admitting a hidden trait—an approach unimaginable for Mick Jagger. LaVette also dramatically reworks the tempo of John Lennon and Paul McCartney's "Wait" so that it becomes a lament, not the celebration it is on *Rubber Soul*.

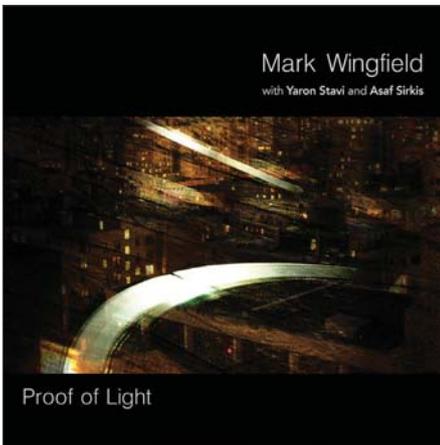
"Step Away" is the sole uptempo track on *Worthy*, and even here, LaVette sidesteps an obvious big statement, even with the horn lines echoing '60s r&b. The disc ends with the title track's message of self-esteem, which she sings in a way that promises she's not going away anytime soon.

—Aaron Cohen

**Worthy:** Unbelievable; When I Was A Young Girl; Bless Us All; Stop; Undamned; Complicated; Where A Life Goes; Just Between You And Me And The Wall; You're A Fool; Wait; Step Away; Worthy. (44:06)

**Personnel:** Bettye LaVette, vocals; Jay Bellerose, drums, percussion (1–8, 10, 11); Doyle Bramhall II, guitar (1–11); bass (7, 9); Chris Bruce, bass (1–6, 8, 10, 11), acoustic guitar (7, 9); Patrick Warren, piano, Hammond organ, Chamberlin; Ben Chapoteau-Katz, baritone saxophone (10); Levon Henry, tenor saxophone (10); Linton Smith, trumpet (10).

**Ordering info:** [mvdaudio.com](http://mvdaudio.com)



**Mark Wingfield**  
**Proof Of Light**

MOONJUNE 071  
★★★★½

The sound of this music is bigger than its component parts. Maybe it's guitar marvel Mark Wingfield's careening reverb, his vibrato or sustain, or the accompanying deep-end spaciousness of Yaron Stavi's double bass. Only Asaf Sirkis' drumming seems capable of remaining earthbound, his persistent snare stabs serving as a constant punctuation in concert with his bandmates' slightly otherworldly, tuneful ruminations on *Proof Of Light*, Wingfield's sixth as a leader.

The American-born Englishman Wingfield (add SMQ, Scapetrace and the Internet band ResRocket to his full resume) allows his mates to shine right along with him. Stavi, for one, leads the way through "A Thousand Faces." The song's lumbering gait provides a forest bed for what's now apparent midway through *Proof Of Light*: Wingfield's guitar as a piercing, darting, spectral sound full of artful glissandi and single notes perhaps in need of Stavi's more measured sustains, a kind of necessary sonic complement. By way of contrast, "Voltaic" follows in sudden, rock-like blasts like the clearing of one's throat, only to be followed by even more dreamy sustain. Stavi's resonant plucks are strewn amidst Wingfield's selective electronic sheens in place of chords, the rubato eddies a place where all three enter at opportune moments to make hay with a bit of outlandish guitar-hero wailing. Clocking in at eight minutes and 38 seconds, "Voltaic"—ending as it started with its pesky, in-your-face arrangement—serves as *Proof Of Light*'s longest piece, rightly positioned as the album's most articulated example of this trio's group cohesion.

"Summer Night's Story" and "Koromo's Tale" are features for Sirkis and Stavi, respectively, stories with different plot lines but similar, wayfaring moods. "Summer Night's Story" encapsulates a lilting beat and an eerie melody with cymbal washes and lightly plodding lines from both players as Wingfield essentially takes to the wings. "Koromo's Tale" furthers that serene, untethered vibe as Stavi "sings" the melody lines to what becomes *Proof Of Light*'s most subtly dramatic, ambling entry. And, perhaps rightly, the following track, the album-closing title song is as close to a showcase for Wingfield even as he once again

puts his compositional stamp on a tune of varying moods and textures. "Proof Of Light" provides both heat and light, airiness and cool breezes, tight orchestration and ethereal openness, the guitarist seemingly winging it but really guiding the song's intricate contours (in the spirit of at least one influence Allan Holdsworth), the trio swinging and sashaying around tune's end with more subtle touches that suggest they're having a hard time letting go of the song.

*Proof Of Light*'s nine compositions are penned by producer Wingfield (someone also active in contemporary classical music), and it's his project from start to finish. And yet, listening to it, one might just come away with the distinct impres-

sion that this isn't a guitar showcase but rather the more difficult achievement of a group creation, full of life from a generous spirit. Sticking to the pared-down trio format, Wingfield has, indeed, allowed his band to be his sound, but with three individual voices playing as one, the music full of light due to its author's perceived intent to allow for much space and room for exploration.

—John Ephland

**Proof Of Light:** Mars Saffron; Restless Mountains; The Way To Etretat; A Conversation We Had; A Thousand Faces; Voltaic; Summer Night's Story; Koromo's Tale; Proof Of Light. (53:15)

**Personnel:** Mark Wingfield, guitar; Yaron Stavi, upright bass; Asaf Sirkis, drums.

**Ordering info:** [moonjune.com](http://moonjune.com)



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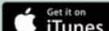
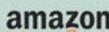
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## Hypercolor

TZADIK  
★★★★

Aggressiveness trumps tenderness and rhythm throttles melody on *Hypercolor*, the debut of a daunting jazz-rock power trio. Israeli-born guitarist Eyal Maoz is the dominant voice, but bassist James Ilgenfritz, who sticks to Maoz like a barnacle, is far more than a sideman, and drummer Lukas Ligeti sets traps for the others to pry loose. Dynamics and texture, not solos, run the Hypercolor show.

This is hard stuff, except when it's sweet, as on parts of "Ernesto, Do You Have A Cotton Box?" and "Quixotic," the dreamy final track. Trouble is that when it's sweet, the group can default to noodling, making those particular tunes more tiresome than enthralling. At best, this is a group of battle and reconciliation, of push and pull—mainly push. It has its dynamic down, a dynamic designed to appeal to all kinds of people and play to all kinds of markets. And the music is nothing if not honest. Some tunes work all the way through, like the punk blast, "Palace," the highly evolved and thoughtful "Little Brother," the haunting "Forget" and "Squeaks," the assaultive first track. Phrases like "ugly beauty" and "gawky kid" come to mind.

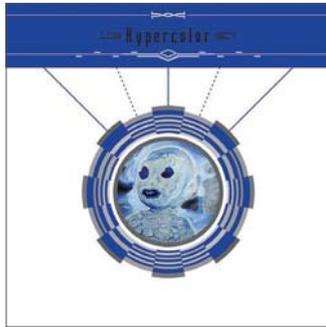
When everything gels, as on "Little Brother" and the stunning "Forget," *Hypercolor* connects on multiple levels. It's clear these musicians have absorbed everything from David Torn to Sonny Sharrock to Captain Beefheart to the Ramones, imbuing them with a fierce determination to be heard. They will be, count on it.

—Carlo Wolff

**Hypercolor:** Squeaks; Chen; Forget; Ernesto, Do You Have a Cotton Box?; Glowering; Palace; Far Connection; Transist; Little Brother; Quixotic. (49:49)

**Personnel:** Eyal Maoz, guitar; James Ilgenfritz, bass; Lukas Ligeti, drums.

**Ordering info:** [tzadik.com](http://tzadik.com).



## Jon Lundbom and Big Five Chord

*Jeremiah*  
HOT CUP  
★★★★½

Austin-based guitarist Jon Lundbom is an inventive musician with good compatriots. His group, Big Five Chord, features the playfully contentious Mostly Other People Do the Killing's Moppa Elliott and the great Jon Irabagon. On *Jeremiah*, the ingredients for fresh, intriguing free-jazz are certainly present, but for some reason, the album never quite shifts into gear.

So much depends on this rhythm section. Drummer Dan Monaghan and bassist Elliott are crucial to making these songs work. The freewheeling improvisation is emitted through a steadily, propulsive beat. However, many of *Jeremiah's* songs generally aren't that propulsive. On the first half of the album, the thumping "The Bottle" is a real head bobber, a fine opener and likely the most lively song. "First Harvest" slides along, growing maybe a little too ripe on the vine. The first half of "Lick Skillet" is three minutes of Sam Kulik's trombone groaning, a clear indication of what happens when that rhythm section falls away. Such ideas may seem cool in theory but do not quite connect in practice, at least not this time around.

Or perhaps this assessment is incorrect. Perhaps the horns here just aren't as interesting as the backbone Monaghan and Elliott are providing in the studio. Maybe for it to all come together, you just had to be there.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**Jeremiah:** The Bottle; Frog Eye; Scratch Ankle; First Harvest; Lick Skillet; Wiccan Prayer Song Medley; Screamer (Live). (56:21)

**Personnel:** Jon Lundbom, guitar; Jon Irabagon, soprano saxophone; Bryan Murray, tenor and Balto! saxophones; Moppa Elliott, bass; Dan Monaghan, drums; Justin Wood, alto saxophone, flute; Sam Kulik, trombone.

**Ordering info:** [hotcup.com](http://hotcup.com)



## Peter Brötzmann/ Jason Adasiewicz

BRO 5  
★★★★

In recent years, Chicago vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz has become a preferred collaborator of the veteran German reedist Peter Brötzmann. It's a partnership that may seem peculiar on the surface, since chill-tuned percussion would appear incapable of matching the brawny, muscular howl of the European free-jazz legend. The three extended improvisations on the vinyl-only release *Mollie's In The Mood*, taped during a live performance at Chicago's Hideout in September 2012, indicate otherwise.

Adasiewicz has forcefully demonstrated he's not a typical vibist, famously attacking his instrument as if were a drum kit, producing thick, viscous clouds of metallic overtones. In the middle of "Seasons May Vary" he carves out a slowly undulating melodic pattern so thick in harmony that Brötzmann's cranky tenor acts like a laser, penetrating the sonic fog. On the other hand, the vibist also brings out a more lyric, tender side in Brötzmann's playing, a quality that shouldn't be confused with sentimentality. The opening moments of "Round The Sun" are gorgeous in their smoky contemplation and ballad-like restraint. But as the vibes gain dissonance, Adasiewicz clanks the bars of his instrument with unbridled ferocity, and Brötzmann unleashes tightly clustered patterns with unceasing energy. On the title track, the duo runs the full gamut of attacks and moods without ever losing the thread. The stuff is as full-bodied as it is fully bloodied.

—Peter Margasak

**Mollie's In The Mood:** Seasons May Vary; 'Round The Sun; Mollie's In The Mood. (39:07)

**Personnel:** Jason Adasiewicz, vibraphone; Peter Brötzmann, alto and tenor saxophone, B-flat clarinet, tarogato.

**Ordering info:** [eremite.com](http://eremite.com)



## Duane Eubanks

*Things Of That Particular Nature*  
SUNNYSIDE 1390  
★★★★½

Trumpeter Duane Eubanks has spent the last 15 years as a sideman, propping up other people's music with his round, effortlessly laid-back trumpet sound. Between *Things Of That Particular Nature*, his third disc as a leader, and his sophomore effort, 2001's *Second Take*, Eubanks recorded on 25 discs. He was, of course, on hand to help out with recordings by his brothers, trombonist Robin Eubanks and guitarist Kevin Eubanks, but he also played with such diverse musicians as Khalil Kwame Bell, Alicia Keys, Russell Gunn and Dave Holland. But Eubanks isn't a sideman by vocation, and his time out of the spotlight was more by design than by definition.

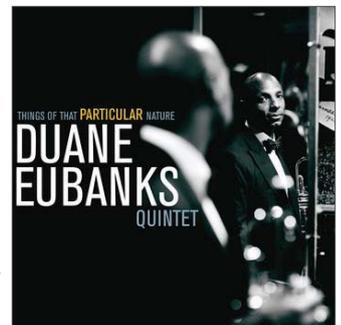
That recording resume has informed Eubanks' latest effort, a prototypical hard-bop record. As a player, Eubanks isn't flashy, and he doesn't rely on trumpet tricks or high notes during his solos. This is a refreshing change of pace from trumpet players built to impress instead of inspire. Eubanks encapsulates his range as a player right away with "Purple, Blue and Red," which begins as an ethereal ballad, led by his sure-handed but delicate trumpet. Soon, however, the tune gets a double-time, madcap feel, with Eubanks deftly navigating throughout the range of his horn. The rest of the disc is a pleasing mix of ballads and burners, with Eubanks on trumpet and flugelhorn. He has surrounded himself with a talented supporting cast; tenor saxophonist Abraham Burton is especially notable as a foil for Eubanks' musical endeavors.

—Jon Ross

**Things Of That Particular Nature:** Purple Blue and Red; As Is; Rosey; Holding Hands; Beer And Water; Anywhere's Paradise; Dance With Aleta; Aborted Dreams; Slew Footed; "P." (53:38)

**Personnel:** Duane Eubanks, trumpet and flugelhorn; Abraham Burton, tenor saxophone; Marc Cary, piano; Dezron Douglas, bass; Eric McPherson, drums; Steve Nelson, vibraphone.

**Ordering info:** [sunnysidezone.com](http://sunnysidezone.com)



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# 'Hat Tricks' Build Drummers' Control, Confidence

**I'M NOT GOING TO PULL A RABBIT OUT OF** my hat, but I do hope that some of these hi-hat tricks will add a bit of magic to your drumming.

All drummers should know how to play the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4 while playing 4/4 jazz. Before exploring some options, let's go over the basics of hi-hat technique.

Heel-up or heel-down? Short answer: both (if you like). Heel-down provides better balance at the kit and allows the drummer to play the hats as softly as possible. Conversely, heel-up means that most of the leg's weight will come into play—perfect for stronger playing, especially on beats 2 and 4 or four quarter notes to the bar, but otherwise making what should be a simple act of playing softly become a rigor of “walking on eggshells.” Remember that any action on the kit that becomes a distraction does not often work in your favor. The drummer who is comfortable with heel-down as well as heel-up technique should be able to play any rhythm in any genre at any tempo or volume with confidence.

Now, let's talk about the hats themselves. The bottom hat is most often the heavier cymbal of the pair, and you may find the best sound in terms of the foot-closing “chick” can be achieved when providing a bit of tilt to the bottom cymbal—a mechanism common to most every hi-hat stand that provides an optimal hitting angle between the top and bottom cymbals. Meanwhile, the top cymbal should not be fastened too tightly in the clutch (the mechanism that holds the top hi-hat cymbal); the top hat should move freely within the clutch.

The height of the closed pair of hats should be determined by what feels most comfortable to the drummer in terms of being able to play the hats without having to reach too far up or down (i.e., the forearm ought to be more or less perpendicular to the floor when playing on the closed hats with the right hand, while still providing enough room for the left hand to play the snare). “Open” playing on the kit, where the left hand plays “lead” on the hat while the right hand plays on the snare and other parts of the kit, allows for a lot more freedom and flexibility (and can result in unique



and terrific grooves—Will Kennedy and Billy Cobham come to mind).

In terms of which hi-hat cymbals to play: There are a lot of good things to say about 13- and 15-inch hats, but it's hard to beat a good pair of 14-inch hi-hats in terms of versatility and sound. My personal preference is Zildjian's 14-inch New Beat hi-hats. Even though I have a pair of 15-inch Zildjian Kerope hats that are pretty great, I keep going back to my New Beats for most every style of music. Whatever brand, model or size you choose, you'll want your cymbals to do the following:

- produce a good “chick” sound when you close them together on the pedal.

- make the sound you like or want when playing with sticks.
- have the ability so “speak” softly.
- give you the feeling of confidence that you can control them no matter the setting or style of music.

When playing the hat with sticks, I use the tip of the stick more often than not; the shoulder of the stick is OK for heavier playing.

While I've let my ears do most of the work when it has come to learning how to play the drums, I have also benefited from some direct advice given by seasoned and expert musicians. The first piece of advice I got was from tenor saxophonist Jay Corre, who used to play in Buddy

## Hat Trick A

"BACK AT THE CHICKEN SHACK" BEAT, SHUFFLE ALTERNATIVE...

The notation shows a 4/4 time signature with a shuffle feel. The hi-hat pattern consists of quarter notes on beats 2 and 4, each followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The snare drum plays quarter notes on beats 2 and 4. The bass drum plays quarter notes on beats 1 and 3.

## Hat Trick B

The notation shows a 4/4 time signature with a shuffle feel. The hi-hat pattern consists of quarter notes on beats 2 and 4, each followed by a triplet of eighth notes. The snare drum plays quarter notes on beats 2 and 4. The bass drum plays quarter notes on beats 1 and 3.

### Hat Tricks C & D

**C** PLAY RIDE PATTERN      **D** PLAY RIDE PATTERN



### Hat Tricks E & F

PLAY RIDE PATTERN      PLAY RIDE PATTERN

**E**      **F**



### Hat Tricks G & H

PLAY RIDE PATTERN      PLAY RIDE PATTERN

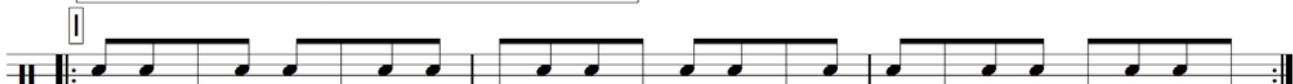
**G**      **H**



### Hat Trick I

PLAY 4/4 RIDE PATTERN, THEN PLAY 3/4 RIDE PATTERN

**I**



### Hat Trick J

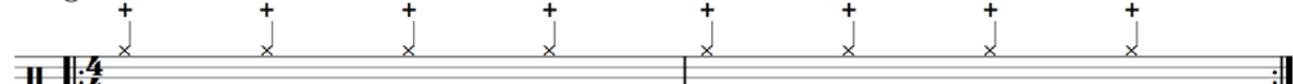
PLAY 4/4 RIDE PATTERN, THEN PLAY 3/4 RIDE PATTERN

**J**



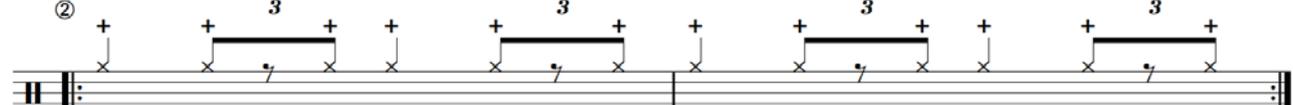
### Hat Technique 1

①



### Hat Technique 2

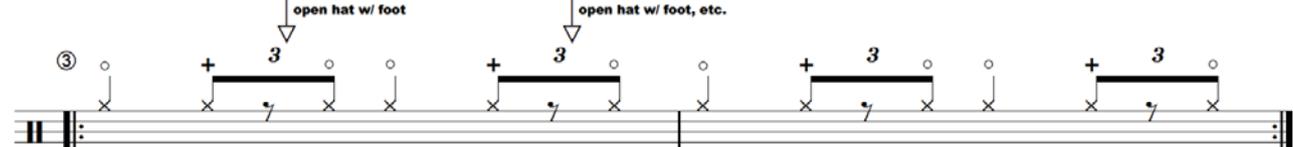
②



### Hat Technique 3

③

open hat w/ foot      open hat w/ foot, etc.



### Hat Technique 4

④



Rich's big band in the mid-1960s and is featured on several recordings from that time. Jay was an old buddy of my father's, and the two of us became good friends during the summer of 1969. Jay came to a gig I played with saxophonist Charlie Ventura, and chided me afterwards for not having kept my hi-hat on beats 2 and 4 (especially during the trading of "fours"). "Hey, man," he intoned, "you gotta keep the hi-hat going on 2 and 4 no matter what you're playing."

OK, advice heeded. Fast-forward to the spring of 1978, just as I'm about to leave the employ of Maynard Ferguson to begin working with Weather Report. I'm sitting in for jazz drumming master Billy Hart, who was not able to get back to the theater-in-the-round near Philadelphia from his daytime recording session in New York to play with Stan Getz, whose band was sharing the bill with Maynard. So, I was filling in for Billy, and while the Getz quartet was playing, the round stage was turning and all of a sudden there was Billy Hart in the audience listening to the music and checking me out. And he came up to me afterwards, thanking me for covering for him (I was thrilled at the opportunity) and telling me that it sounded good, but that I did not need to keep playing the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4 and that I ought to consider freeing up my left foot.

Take-away lesson: There are a lot of ways to skin a hat! Learn the styles, be able to play them all, and then use your ears to guide your choices. There was a period when I leaned towards playing the hi-hat on all four beats of the bar (à la Tony Williams, or so it seemed) because the intensity level was appealing to me. Nowadays I lean more towards good-old 2 and 4 with lots of Billy Hart thrown in for good measure: Off-beat syncopations can really make the beat "dance," especially when the dynamic level (or intensity) of the hat is "just right." What makes anything at the kit "just right"? Practice. Consistency and control are king.

I have provided some hi-hat exercises to help build control and confidence while adding to your vocabulary. (See "Hat Tricks" A–J.)

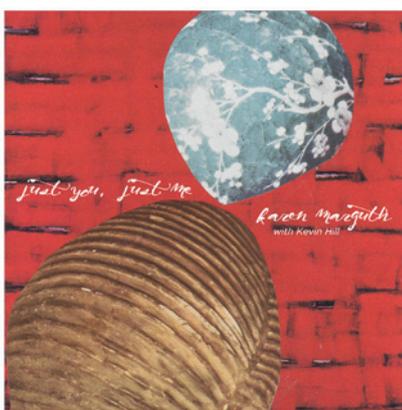
Finally, one of the best-sounding things I've heard in years was listening to Joe LaBarbera play at a jam session, and he backed up one horn soloist entirely on the hi-hat—not closed, as during a bass solo or Basie introduction, but open and loose and swinging (without the hat closing on 2 and 4). He reminded me that Tony Williams used to do this, and plenty of other drummers' names came to mind while we spoke, Roy Haynes, Mel Lewis, Gene Krupa and Papa Jo Jones among them. Try it; you will like it. And please note that when play-

ing an open-closed swing ride pattern on the hi-hat, the syncopated/swung note is played with the hat open (partially or all the way); playing the swung beat while the hat is still closed is simply wrong. (See "Hat Techniques" 1–4.)

Perhaps Mel Lewis put it best in 1985 when he told *Modern Drummer* magazine that young drummers should learn that the hi-hat is "another ride cymbal" to be played different ways—open/closed, all open, half open, half closed—in order to achieve various effects.

However you play it ... a tip of the hat to you. **DB**

Drummer Peter Erskine appears on 600 albums and film scores. Fifty albums have been released under his own name or as co-leader, and he has won two Grammy Awards. Erskine has played with the Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson big bands, Weather Report, Steps Ahead, Joni Mitchell, Steely Dan, Diana Krall, Kenny Wheeler, Mary Chapin Carpenter, The Brecker Brothers, The Yellowjackets, Pat Metheny & Gary Burton, John Scofield and others, and he has appeared as a soloist with the Beethoven Orchester Bonn, plus the London, Los Angeles, Chicago, BBC Symphony, Oslo and Berlin Philharmonic orchestras. Erskine is an author with several books to his credit; his latest, *No Beethoven* (Fuzzy Music), is an autobiography and chronicle of the band Weather Report. Erskine is currently Professor of Practice and Director of Drumset Studies at University of Southern California. He conducts master classes worldwide, and his most recent endeavors include several innovative play-along apps for iOS. He endorses Tama drums and holds an Honorary Doctorate from the Berklee School of Music. Visit him online at petererskine.com.



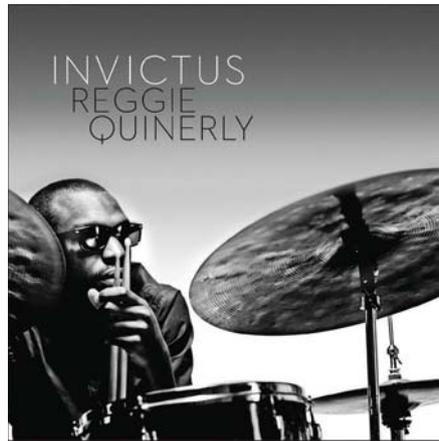
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Clockwise starting from the top left: Mark Colenburg, Kendrick Scott, Ulysses Owens Jr., and Otis Brown III.

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# Alfred Nobel and the Invention of the Microphone

**I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT TECHNOLOGY IS HERE TO HELP THE ART** form, not to overwhelm it. But tragically, with a few exceptions, the invention of the microphone (credited to the German Emile Berliner in 1876) has had truly damaging results—almost as damaging as the dynamite invented by Alfred Nobel in 1867.

Both have been abused to create irreversible devastation: namely, material destruction by the latter, and serious damage to the good taste of listeners by Berliner's artificial amplification device. All of that came to be with the support of sound engineers and the consent of the musicians—some of them talented professionals—who increasingly ask for more and more volume in their reference speakers, and consequently in the house. It seems as if we've all reached the same conclusions that the louder music is heard, the better it is; that volume is supposed to be a synonym for energy; and that the one who screams loudest is the one who wins. Doesn't it go that way? How sad!

I have witnessed the volume and reverb go up so high on Dave Valentin's flute that it converted his gorgeous, natural sound on tunes like "Obsession," the beautiful Pedro Florez classic that Valentin and his many fans enjoy so much, into something more appropriate for a heavy metal band. These days, the circus-like atmosphere, the unnatural pyrotechnics, the reliance upon gimmicks to provoke easy applause, bad taste and excessive volume have hit jazz and popular music with such tsunami-like force that everything now is forte and fortissimo.

A few years ago, the legendary recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder—who made all those famous recordings for Impulse, Blue Note, CTI and Atlantic with John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Freddie Hubbard, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, Lee Morgan and all those hip jazzmen of the '50s and '60s—had the guts to say that jazz pianists don't want or don't know how to get a decent sound on the piano. And, to a certain point, he was right, since it is really difficult to find jazz pianists with the elegant, delicate yet swinging sound of Kenny Baron, Teddy Wilson, Makoto Ozone, Renee Rosnes, Oscar Peterson or Bill Evans. There is no doubt that some of the fault lies with the drummers who play louder every day, forcing the pianists to bang on the keys and ask for more volume in their wedges, thus destroying the inherent acoustic character of the instrument. I'll bet that was one of the reasons that Nat "King" Cole many times didn't use a drummer in his trio.

"Give me more piano in my monitor" is the usual request onstage, and my response is always a simple question: "Why don't you play more softly so that you can hear what the freakin' pianist is playing? You left the brushes at home, or what?"

The great Argentinean pianist Jorge Dalto was convinced that drummers were carriers of the "original sin," and when they did play another way—meaning softly and tastefully—it was with great effort and went against their nature. "Otherwise, they would have taken up the harp or the violoncello, no?" he would say, half in jest. I think Dalto was exaggerating a little bit, since you are still able to find drummers like Ben Riley, Ernie Adams or the wonderful Brazilian Edu Ribeiro to swing your butt off without breaking your eardrums. So, please do not misunderstand me. The drum set, as well as the brass and even the saxophones, are instruments that have strong sonorous presence. I think that keeping that in mind all the time would make a big difference in balance and finesse.

Here is a statement that I've been hearing since my early days at the conservatory: "If you can't hear the guy next to you, you're playing too loud. That's the only way to play in tune." But how in heaven can I listen and play in tune with the guy next to me if I am not even able to hear my own horn with all that noise around me? And then, since the electric bass emerged on the scene, we have the bassists who think they're always playing with Kiss or Metallica. Usually they ally with the drummers, and I even think that they buy earplugs together, in sets of four, so that they can have some fun among themselves while making life unbearable for the rest of the musicians.



Paquito D'Rivera

R. ANDREW LEPEY

Wynton Marsalis told me once that he thought that mikes are here to enhance the music, not to cover it. That's probably why they have removed even the contact microphone from the contrabass of Carlitos Henriquez (I love his walking bass!) in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra—so the drummer has to come down to hear what his partner in rhythm is doing.

One evening at the annual jazz festival in Punta del Este, Uruguay, trumpet player and bandleader Terence Blanchard ordered the removal of all the microphones, including that of exquisite pianist Ed Simon. And guest what? Miraculously, everything was heard crystal-clear and with tremendous energy and swing.

The only thing required was to be quiet, and to listen with attention. That is what music was invented for in the first place, isn't it?

DB

The winner of 14 Grammy Awards, Cuban-born clarinetist and saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera is celebrated for his artistry in Latin jazz as well as his achievements as a classical composer and performer. He is also known for his heartfelt convictions and playful sense of humor. Visit him online at [paquitodrivera.com](http://paquitodrivera.com).

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# Bunky Green's Alto Sax Solo on 'With All My Love'

IN 2006, AT THE AGE OF 71, ALTO SAXOPHONIST Bunky Green released *Another Place* (Label Bleu), a collection of mostly original material. Throughout the album, he demonstrates a deftness that is impressive for a musician of any age. As an example, here's his second solo on his composition "With All My Love."

Within this short improvisation, we hear a lot of variety. There are places where Green plays very "inside," using arpeggios and consonant scales that fit the underlying harmonies closely—from straight up defining the chord, as in bars 22 (where he plays an  $E\flat_7$  arpeggio on the  $E\flat_7$ ) and 27 (an  $A_7$  arpeggio on  $A_7$ ), to scales that match the chord, like measures 16–17 ( $B\flat$  aeolian on  $B\flat_m7$ ) and 30–31 ( $B\flat$  major on  $Cm_7-F_7$ , the ii–V in the key of  $B\flat$ ). He even plays some locrian on the  $Am_7(\flat_5)$  in bar 35. There are also some more colorful choices, like the phrygian sound on  $Am_11$  in measure 3 and the lydian scale played on the  $B\flat_6$  in bar 7. Though these are a little more unusual, they still fit the harmonies quite well.

Green also makes some more "outside" choices, as in measure 11, where he plays what could be heard as  $G$  aeolian ( $D$  phrygian) on the  $D_7(\flat_9)/A$ . This provides some altered tones (the  $\flat_9$  and  $\#9$ , as well as the  $\#5/\flat_{13}$ ), but also implies the  $Gm$  chord that  $D_7$  would be the dominant of. It also gives us a contrast to the sonorities listed above.

Another curious choice is the  $F$  minor scale played in bar 15. Though the chord  $F_7sus_4$  doesn't contain a third, meaning the minor sound played against it doesn't sound dissonant, it does occur as the de facto dominant chord in a ii–V–i. As such, it would be more expected for a scale with the major third to be used, since this would create a stronger resolution to the  $B\flat$  minor. But Green goes against convention and plays an  $F$  minor sound, although this does have the effect of making the scale morph more seamlessly into the  $B\flat$  aeolian that follows.

Measures 18–21 are also peculiar. When taken as a whole, these four bars are basically an  $E\flat$  major scale, which doesn't fit the underlying harmonies so well. But upon examining Green's phrasing and note choices, you see that he tends to avoid the pitches that would be overly jarring. On the  $Am_11$ , he plays only the  $C$  and  $D$ , both chord tones. In the next bar, he plays what sounds more like an  $E\flat$  scale; but starting on the  $F$  natural (the  $\#5$  of the  $A_7+$ ) and descending just to the  $B\flat$  (the  $\flat_9$ ), it sounds a bit more like an altered dominant scale. This  $B\flat$  also makes a great transition into the  $Gm_7$  in the next bar, where Green holds



GOBERT DRIESSEN FOTOGRAFIE

the  $B\flat$  (the minor third) and then starts ascending, so we get the fourth and fifth, both tones that work fine on the  $Gm_7$ . When the  $C_7$  occurs halfway through this measure, Green resolutely sticks to the  $E\flat$  scale, which gives us the minor third and fourth on this dominant chord. At this point, per-

haps, it should start to sound a bit "out," but this  $C_7$  resolves to a ii–V in  $E\flat$  ( $Fm_7-B\flat_7$ ), where the  $E\flat$  major scale fits perfectly. It's as if Green was leading our ears to this harmony the whole time.

Green plays some altered scales on the  $A/G$  (measures 1, 36–37) as well. In bars 36–37, he plays

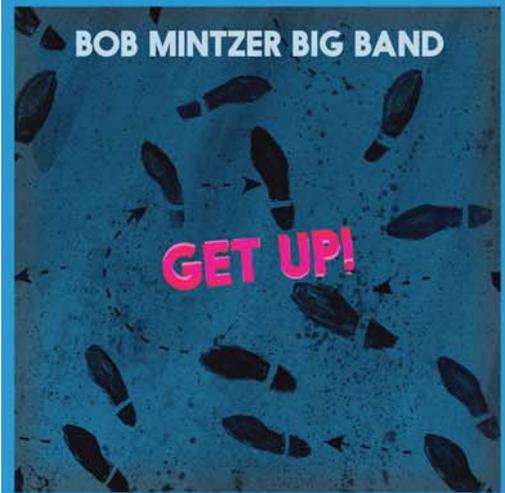
the half-whole diminished scale, a choice on dominant sevenths that is a staple in bebop as well as more modern jazz improvisation. It carries more tension than a mixolydian scale and creates a contrast to the diatonic scales used in the previous examples. Speaking of bebop, Green also brings in some chromatic lines. In bar 9 he plays chromatically from D $\flat$  to A $\flat$ , the root and fifth of the underlying chord. In the next bar, he ascends from C (the third of the Am7 chord) up to a B $\flat$  on the downbeat of bar 11 mostly with half steps.

We also hear other elements being varied, especially rhythmic ones. First of all, there's Greens use of eighth-note, triplet and 16th-note subdivisions, which create quite a diversity in the energy. There are also notes lasting a full beat and longer, providing a release of energy. Also, Green incorporates rests of varying lengths, providing space in contrast to the density of some of the lines. Notice how he'll often play these off one another. For example, after two measures of 16th-note runs in bars 23–24, Green takes most

of the next two measures off. Likewise, after the 16ths in bars 10 and 11, he plays very sparsely for two-and-a-half bars.

Another notable aspect of Green's phrasing is how he starts and ends his lines, often playing over the bar line. Some great examples are his third lick, where he starts halfway through bar 4 and ends right before the last beat of bar 6. To juxtapose this, his next line starts on the downbeat of measure 7 and concludes right before beat 1 of the next bar. His last line starts in the middle of measure 34 and continues all the way through the middle of the final bar. Also very hip is how in the middle of bar 35, Green starts playing exclusively on offbeats and continues this until the dominant harmony resolves in measure 38. This underscores the tension in the chord with a tension in the rhythm, both culminating in the B $\flat$ maj7. **DB**

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



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When I picked up the Master-97A, I was blown away by the warmth and complexity of its tone. What a sound! I soon discovered that I didn't need to work nearly as hard to keep the horn in tune with itself, even when I ventured into the bell-tone register, a tonally fertile region where the fatigue of "lipping down" can sometimes get the better of me. For a saxophone of any vintage, this is about as pitch-accurate as it gets.

I found the keywork to be incredibly fast and smooth; the way the front F key is shaped and placed, it has never been so easy for my fingers to make the transition from the instrument's natural range into altissimo territory. Speaking of which, it was as if a great big "welcome" sign had been posted where high F# leads to high G and above—an easy-speaking, gorgeous-sound-

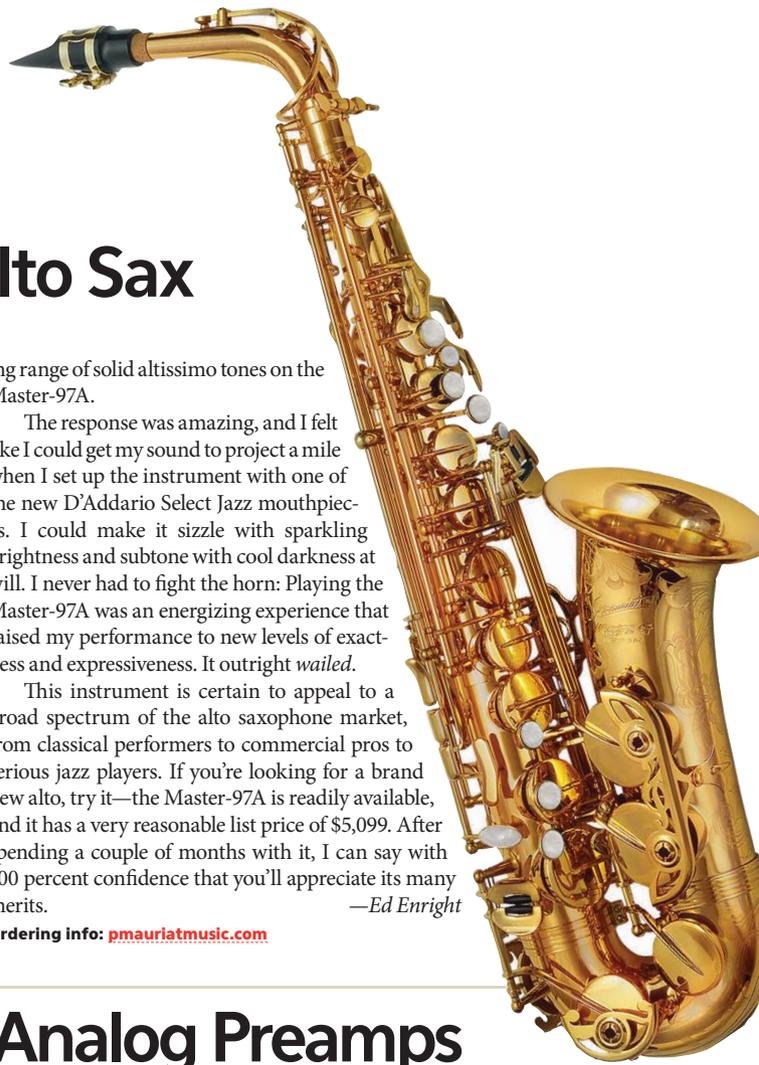
ing range of solid altissimo tones on the Master-97A.

The response was amazing, and I felt like I could get my sound to project a mile when I set up the instrument with one of the new D'Addario Select Jazz mouthpieces. I could make it sizzle with sparkling brightness and subtone with cool darkness at will. I never had to fight the horn: Playing the Master-97A was an energizing experience that raised my performance to new levels of exactness and expressiveness. It outright *wailed*.

This instrument is certain to appeal to a broad spectrum of the alto saxophone market, from classical performers to commercial pros to serious jazz players. If you're looking for a brand new alto, try it—the Master-97A is readily available, and it has a very reasonable list price of \$5,099. After spending a couple of months with it, I can say with 100 percent confidence that you'll appreciate its many merits.

—Ed Enright

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Let's start off with the Pro EQ, an incredibly dynamic tool for any acoustic instrumentalist. It has a switch enabling you to choose from "guitar" or "bass" mode, enabling optimized tone for low-end instruments and higher-pitched instruments alike. The two footswitches control a backlit chromatic tuner/mute function and an adjustable boost (up to +12dB). The EQ design is impressive. In addition to bass, mid and treble, there are controls for brilliance, low-cut and a sweepable midrange notch filter.

The adjustable low-cut allows you to dial in your tone while eliminating the "boominess" that has a tendency to accompany certain performance spaces. An onboard phase switch is present to optimize tone and kill any other hints of feedback. And there's a silky smooth analog compressor, adjustable input trim, effects loop and a high-quality XLR DI with ground lift and pre/post control. Word to the wise: With all of these features comes a bit of a learning curve. Be patient and experiment, and you will be very well rewarded.

I put the Pro EQ to work with a variety of different instruments—double bass, bass guitar, acoustic guitar, solid-body electric cello and an electric upright bass. Every instrument benefited from its use. The acoustic guitar's tone shone. The electric cello had never sounded so full. The double bass was warm, clear and punchy—smooth analog goodness. The Pro EQ really lets you get the most out of your amplified signal, resulting in happy musicians, happy sound engineers and happy listeners. In fact, the soundman at one theater commented that my double bass sounded so good through the Pro EQ that he didn't need to mic it—high praise, indeed. All of this does not come without a price, however. The street price on the Platinum Pro EQ is around \$250, definitely an investment in tone worth considering.

The Stage model offers the same discrete, high-headroom Class-A preamp as the Pro EQ model, but in a more compact and portable package. Many of the features from the Pro EQ cleverly make their way onto the Stage version. The adjustable boost is now a push button instead of a foot switch. Low cut is onboard (now switchable), as well as a phase switch, balanced XLR DI out, input trim and four-Band EQ with sweepable mid control. The Stage model features a belt clip and would be ideal for instrumentalists requiring more mobility. It can be powered by a 9-volt battery, 9-volt adapter or 48-volt phantom power. The Stage's slightly scaled-down controls are intuitive and user-friendly, making dialing in your sound a breeze. With a street price around \$120, you get a lot of bang for your buck with the Platinum Stage.

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Photo by Scot Myers

# Universal Audio Apollo Twin

## Up Your Production Values

Universal Audio's UAD-2 Powered Plug-ins Platform combines a PCIe DSP Accelerator Card with a wide variety of plugins modeled after classic hardware units that run on the card's processor, leaving your host CPU freed up for other tasks inside your DAW. Recently, UA has been bringing that power to the desktop via Thunderbolt technology with its Apollo, Apollo 16 and, most recently, the Apollo Twin—a two-channel I/O that offers powerful core processing features.

The front of the Apollo Twin has a hi-Z input for guitar or bass, so you don't need a DI box. There is also a headphone jack. The back has two multi-XLR/line inputs along with two monitor outs, two line outs, Thunderbolt port and a TOSLINK optical port that can be used to interface with S/PDIF or ADAT external units for even more inputs. With its single port, you can place the Apollo Twin at the end of a daisy-chain of up to four Thunderbolt-equipped Apollos. A total of six UAD-2 devices can be linked to the unit for adding more I/O and DSP. The Apollo Twin comes in Single or Duo Core versions, giving you the option of adding the additional core of DSP if the budget allows.

It ships with Console 2.0, a sleek program that acts as the tracking interface before the audio hits your DAW. You can print to tape with plugins such as the UA 610 tube preamp, and you can choose whether or not the inserts are printed. You can also pull up an EMT 140 reverb on an auxiliary track and just use it in the headphones without sending it to tape. While you don't have to use the console software, it's a great way to save tracking settings and print certain processing to tape so you can free up some DSP for the mixing phase.

A meter and control panel are part of the install, and you will want to keep it running to monitor DSP usage. For a reference of how much DSP is available, I maxed out the DSP with six instances of the UA 610 tube pre. In a different session, I had 10 instances of the LA-2A and seemed to be at about 50 percent DSP. It all depends on how resource-hungry the plugin is. For balance, UA recommends including a popular "less hungry" plugin that you receive as part of Realtime Analog Classics such as LA-2 Legacy—the count for that is well over 40 instances.

As much as the Apollo Twin hardware is amazing to spec out and expe-



rience, it's the plugins themselves that are the real star. I did multiple takes where I would run a VO through the unit and track a session with and without the 610 tube pre. Without a doubt, the takes where I tracked with the pre-amp were better in every way possible. They were more intelligible, had more snap and overall had better body to them.

The Apollo Twin and the large assortment of available UA plugins are an ideal choice for anyone wanting to up their production values. —Matt Kern

Ordering info: [uaudio.com](http://uaudio.com)

# JodyJazz Jet Tenor Sax Mouthpiece

## Incredible Dynamics, Astounding Altissimo

When I reviewed the Giant tenor saxophone mouthpiece from JodyJazz in the May 2014 issue of *DownBeat*, I was impressed with its somewhat unique design, and even more so with how it played. So I was excited when given the opportunity to review JodyJazz's new Jet tenor mouthpiece. I had been hearing great things about the company's alto model of the Jet, which has been available for a little more than a year.

From the outside, the Jet resembles JodyJazz's HR model, but the inside is another story. I could see by the extreme baffle and thin rails that it was going to have some serious kick. I was sent size 8 and 9 tip openings, and I decided the 8 was more to my liking and closer to the tip opening that I'm most accustomed to on tenor. I chose a Rico Select Jazz 2H reed and used the Rico H ligature that comes with the Jet (cap is included also).

The Jet was a complete blast to play from the very start. After an adjustment period of about five minutes or so, I felt extremely comfortable on it. The Jet had a bit more brightness than I was used to. But while playing it over the next week, I found it was easy to control.

The dynamic range of the Jet is incredible. This piece can really scream, and I was pleasantly surprised at its ability to maintain a big, full sound when I backed way off and played softly. The Jet articulates extremely well with little effort all up and down the range of the horn. I have to make special mention of how it performs upstairs. The Jet's altissimo range is astounding. It controls with ease all the way up to double F# (that's as high as I go), with no dead spots anywhere along the way. The pitch is awesome as well, almost like it's on rails.

The Jet feels silky-smooth and packs enough punch to cut through guitars,

keyboards, loud trumpet players and the like with very little effort in all ranges. Also surprising was the great response and articulation at the bottom end of the horn. Many of the "screamer" tenor pieces I've tried give up a lot down low. That is not at all the case with the Jet.

I had several opportunities to use the Jet on gigs, and it performed beautifully. One was a horn section session for a blues recording. Pitch was locked in and dynamics were very easy to control. Blend with the section was fantastic at all volume levels. I recorded a couple of short solos on the same gig—one laid-back and one that required substantial blast and "raunch." The Jet totally delivered in both cases.

The JodyJazz Jet for tenor sax will appeal to a lot of players. For those who desire more power and presence when playing rock/r&b/salsa, it really makes a difference. Despite its power, I would not describe the Jet as a "paint peeler." Its sound doesn't thin out or disappear when you back off the volume. The \$189 MSRP makes the Jet an exceptional value for all it has to offer—comfort, smooth and consistent response top to bottom, great articulation and an altissimo that flat-out kicks butt.

—Steve Eisen

Ordering info: [jodyjazz.com](http://jodyjazz.com)





# Lots of Love

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Photo: John Abbott

## 1. 21st Century Reeds

Vandoren has added another color to the clarinetist's palette with the release of a new reed cut: the V21. A thick-blank, American-cut reed, the V21 allows the clarinetist to play with amazing presence and immediate response. Available for B-flat clarinet only, it comes in sizes 2½, 3, 3½, 3½+, 4, 4½ and 5. The reeds' flexibility will appeal to clarinetists of all levels, from students to top professionals. **More info:** [dansr.com/vandoren](http://dansr.com/vandoren)

## 2. Rhythm Handbook

*The Musician's Guide to Rhythm* (North Shire Press) is a practical handbook for all instrumentalists, vocalists, composers and teachers that presents a comprehensive approach to one of the least understood and least theorized aspects of music. Authors Julian Gerstin and Ken Dalluge introduce basic and complex rhythmic concepts clearly and progressively, and provide extensive hands-on exercises. With a focus on the rhythmic element of melody and improvisation, the book expands skills and creativity for players of all instruments. Its broad range encompasses many styles, including jazz, classical, rock, blues, Cuban, Brazilian and other world musics. **More info:** [musiciansguidetorhythm.com](http://musiciansguidetorhythm.com)

## 3. Optimized Audio

Samson's Auro X series of two-way active loudspeakers matches ultra-efficient power with extensive digital signal processing and rugged portability. Encompassing two compact designs, the Auro X12D and X15D feature a lightweight 1,000-watt Class D amplifier and Samson's proprietary R.A.M.P. (reactive alignment, maximum protection) DSP technology. Both models offer two input channels, along with three-position EQ and high-pass filter presets to optimize the speaker's performance for different setups and applications. **More info:** [samsontech.com](http://samsontech.com)

## 4. Sample Synth

iZotope has released the newest version of its sample-based synthesizer. Iris 2 is a visual instrument that combines the power of a sampler with the flexibility of a modular synth. New features include a robust modulation system, sample pools that can load samples and classic oscillator waveforms, a redesigned interface with extensive visualizations and metering, enhanced effects and filters, and fresh patches. **More info:** [izotope.com](http://izotope.com)

## 5. Organ Tones

The Electro-Harmonix C9 Organ Machine digs deeper into the cache of desirable classic tones with nine new organ presets that use the same technology found in the company's B9 Organ Machine. The Organ volume knob controls the overall volume of the organ preset, while the Dry volume knob controls the volume of the untreated instrument level at the Organ Output jack. This enables players such as guitarists to mix the sound of their instrument with the organ to create lush layers, or mute it entirely. **More info:** [ehx.com](http://ehx.com)

## 6. Laptop Mounter

On-Stage Stands has introduced the MSA5000 Laptop Mount, which saves valuable desktop space at workstations and lets users leave bulky tables at home. The MSA5000 has a tray that's 10 inches deep with an adjustable width from 14 to 16.5 inches, and ventilation slots provide air circulation to keep laptops cool. It is also suitable for small mixers, samplers, recorders and other devices. **More info:** [on-stage.com](http://on-stage.com)



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STEEP CANYON RANGERS  
THE MAVERICKS  
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THE SOUL REBELS  
THE YELLOWJACKETS  
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[romeoandjulietproject.com](http://romeoandjulietproject.com). Played by UNC Jazz Lab Band I.



# DOWNBEAT 38<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL STUDENT

## MUSIC AWARDS

### YOUNG STARS ON THE RISE

### THE BEST STUDENT MUSICIANS OF 2015

Matt Wong, a student at Independence High School in San Francisco, is a High School winner in three categories, including Jazz Instrumental Soloist. (Photo: Scott Chernis)

The St. Charles North Vocal Jazz Workshop, winner of the Small Vocal Jazz Group category for High School



## WELCOME TO THE 38TH ANNUAL DOWNBEAT STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS, A TRADITION THAT SERVES AS ONE OF THE HIGHEST HONORS THAT STUDENT MUSICIANS AND THEIR TEACHERS CAN EARN EACH YEAR.

This year's SMAs are proof of the transitory nature of music, of jazz and of life. On page 102, we present a tribute to Steve Zegree, the great vocal jazz educator and member of the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame. Steve passed away on March 7, and like the legions of students he taught, we will never forget his inspiration and dedication to excellence.

We also want to salute another Hall of Famer, Bart Marantz, director of jazz studies at Dallas' Booker T. Washington HSPVA. Bart is retiring after 32 years of teaching the next generation of jazz, a lineage that includes Roy Hargrove and Norah Jones, both winners of multiple SMAs. The students at Booker T. sent Bart out in style with six more SMAs this year, making it 245 awards in his 32 years. That's the record for one institution.

But as we say goodbye, we also say hello to the next generation of jazz, one full of hope, chutzpah and promise. In this year's edition of the SMAs, we proudly introduce an entirely new division dedicated to the great music programs at community colleges. This opens up a whole new world of opportunity for young musicians to be recognized.

If you are a parent of a student musician, here's a special note: We know that not every student who wins an SMA is going to become a big star, but studying music is great preparation for a wide variety of careers. It's a great place to start. Sure, we're fond of hearing major artists say, "I knew I could make it in this business after I won my first DownBeat Student Music Award." But we're also fond of hearing doctors and lawyers speak fondly of their SMA experience—not to mention all the executives at record companies, music publishers, institutions and instrument manufacturing firms who excelled in their junior high, high school and college jazz band.

So, as you turn the following pages, give a smile and a nod to the next generation. One or two names here might become superstars one day, several others might be the next Bart Marantz or Steve Zegree, and still more might be successful as your dentist, teacher or local business owner.

All of that is due to one simple truth: If you can learn to play jazz well, you can learn to do many things well. DB

## FEATURES

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# M Manhattan School of Music JAZZ ARTS PROGRAM

JUSTIN DICIOCCIO, ASSOCIATE DEAN, CHAIR



## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS of *Downbeat's* 38th Annual Student Music Awards

### JAZZ SOLOIST

Junior High Winner

**Esteban Castro, Piano**

Manhattan School of Music Precollege

Undergraduate College Winner

**Patrick Bartley, Alto Saxophone**

Manhattan School of Music

Graduate College Winner

**Billy Test, Piano**

Manhattan School of Music

### LATIN GROUP

Graduate College Winner

**MSM Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra**

Manhattan School of Music

*Bobby Sanabria, Director*

(pictured above at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, 4/15)

### SMALL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Honors Ensemble

**MSM Precollege Combo**

Manhattan School of Music Precollege

*Jim Saltzman, Director*

### ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, SMALL ENSEMBLE

Junior High Winner

**Esteban Castro, *Amazonia***

Manhattan School of Music Precollege

### ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, LARGE ENSEMBLE

Junior High Winner

**Esteban Castro, *For Chick***

Manhattan School of Music Precollege

### JAZZ ARRANGEMENT, SMALL ENSEMBLE

Graduate College Winner

**Owen Broder,**

***Man of Constant Sorrow***

Manhattan School of Music

### *Additional congratulations*

High School Winners in the

Jazz Soloist category:

MSM Precollege alumni

**Joseph Bell, Guitar**

**Julius Rodriguez, Piano**

# 'A Legacy of Beautiful Music'

The jazz education world lost one of its leading lights on March 7 when Steve Zegree passed away. Zegree, an internationally respected vocal jazz educator who was also an accomplished pianist and choral conductor, died in Bloomington, Indiana. He was 61 and had been suffering from pancreatic cancer.

Since August 2012, Zegree had served as the Pam and Jack Burks Professor of Music at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, where he directed the Singing Hoosiers and Vocal Jazz Ensemble I. Prior to that, he was a longtime faculty member at Western Michigan University, where he began his teaching career in 1978 and later was named the Bobby McFerrin Distinguished Professor of Music.

While at WMU, Zegree founded the acclaimed collegiate vocal ensemble Gold Company, which performed at festivals and conferences around the world and won close to 50 DownBeat Student Music Awards under his direction. He also toured and recorded regularly as a pianist with the Western Jazz Quartet, a faculty group.

Known as a dedicated mentor to generations of vocal jazz students, Zegree was held in high regard by his peers in the educational community. "It is with deep sadness but incredible gratitude that we say goodbye to our director, our friend, our motivator, our inspiration and our visionary voice, Dr. Stephen Zegree," said Ly Wilder, a member of the vocal jazz faculty at the Jacobs School, in a statement issued by Indiana University. "As a student and a colleague, I have been blessed to know the generosity and the artistry of this man. He has invested his life in the musical growth and professional development of so many young musicians, and he leaves a legacy of beautiful music in his wake."

Zegree, who was inducted into the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame in 2012, placed high expectations on his students, drawing from his own extensive experience as a professional performing musician. Although frequently described as "demanding," he was known as a compassionate teacher with boundless energy and a disarming sense of humor. His success has been attributed to his tireless personality and an underlying commitment to excellence. "I work hard; I put in a lot of hours, and I have a lot of energy," he said in the June 2012 issue of DownBeat. "If I average four or five hours [of sleep] a night, I'm feeling pretty good."

DownBeat Publisher Frank Alkyer said, "Steve was one of the true masters of jazz education. He brought a passion, energy, excellence, excitement and beauty that is rare to find anywhere on this planet. That's why we honored him in 2012 as the 21st inductee to the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame. It's a select group and Steve was the first vocal jazz educator to enter the Hall. He was just that good... and more."

Born on May 5, 1953, in Vancouver, Washington, Zegree started playing piano at age 3. He received a bachelor's degree in piano performance from Miami University in 1975 and

Steve Zegree (1953–2015) was a member of the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame.



a master's degree in piano performance from Indiana University in 1978. He would go on to receive a doctorate in choral conducting from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1989.

Zegree discovered his passion for teaching after beginning his career as a performer. When WMU hired him in 1978, he was charged with teaching piano and molding an existing ensemble called the Varsity Vagabonds into a respectable vocal jazz group. "Being a college professor wasn't something that I had aspired to or was part of my life script," he told DownBeat. "The opportunity came up and initially I thought, 'I'll try this out for a year.'"

His presence at WMU helped to boost the school's international cachet as a place to study jazz. He started an annual vocal jazz festival at the school and founded the Steve Zegree Vocal Jazz Camp for high school and college students and teachers during his stint there.

A Steinway Artist, Zegree maintained an active schedule as a performer, clinician and choral conductor throughout his teaching career. He played piano with symphony orchestras, gave solo concerts and toured as a keyboardist with national Broadway shows.

Additionally, he was the arranger and rehearsal director for actor-singer-producer Nick Lachey's winning choir on NBC's telecast of *Clash of the Choirs*, and he conducted the World Youth Choir during the 2008 Olympics in China.

Zegree recorded four CDs as pianist with the Western Jazz Quartet, and one as a leader, *Steve Zegree & Friends* (Sea Breeze, 2009). He also produced several recordings, including the Grammy-nominated *Mark Murphy Sings Nat's Choice: The Complete Nat "King" Cole Songbook, Volumes 1 & 2* (Muse, 1994).

Along with teaching, performing and recording, Zegree was a published author and in-demand musical arranger. He wrote two definitive books on jazz singing and performance: *The Complete Guide to Teaching Vocal Jazz* (Heritage Music Press/Lorenz Music Publishing) and *The Wow Factor: How To Create It, Inspire It & Achieve It* (Hal Leonard). More than 100 of his arrangements have been published and are in use by choral groups around the world.

Zegree served on the selection committee for the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival from 1992 to 1998. He was appointed national co-chair of the International Association for Jazz Education Vocal Jazz Committee from 1990 to 1994, and he had affiliations with numerous professional organizations, including the American Choral Directors Association, College Music Society, International Federation for Choral Music and Jazz Education Network.

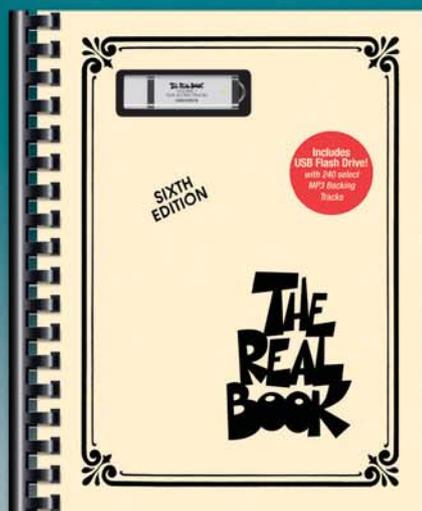
A statement released by Zegree's family described his legacy as "the thousands of singers and musicians, both professional and amateur, who had the opportunity to study, learn and perform with this most extraordinary man of such exceptional talent and warmth."

Zegree is survived by his wife, Laurie Hofmann; his children, Sarah and Nat; and his sister, Joan Zegree.

Two collegiate scholarship funds bear his name: The Steve Zegree Vocal Jazz Scholarship Fund at Indiana University (IU) and The Steve Zegree Vocal Jazz Endowed Scholarship at Western Michigan University (WMU).

IU held a tribute concert for Zegree in Bloomington on April 19, and WMU will present a tribute concert on May 23 at 4 p.m. at Miller Auditorium in Kalamazoo.

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Pacific Standard Time, of California State University, Long Beach, recipient of Outstanding Performance in the Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble category for Graduate College

## Jazz Soloist

### Junior High School Winners

#### Esteban Castro Piano

Manhattan School of Music  
Precollege Division  
Phillip Kawin  
New York, NY

#### Aleks Girshevich Drums

Denver School of the Arts  
Dave Hammond  
Denver, CO

#### Junior High School Outstanding Performances

#### Matthew Lee Drums & Trumpet

Glenfield Middle School  
Mike Lee  
Montclair, NJ

#### Zack Shubert Piano

Ralston Middle School  
Peter Horvath  
Belmont, CA

### High School Winners

#### Anton Derevyva Tenor Saxophone

Medfield High School  
Doug Olsen  
Medfield, MA

#### Matt Wong Piano

Independence High School  
Adam Theis  
San Francisco, CA

### High School Outstanding Performances

#### Joseph Bell Guitar

Princeton High School  
Joe Bongiovi  
Princeton, NJ

#### Eric Nakanashi Alto Saxophone

Northgate High School  
Mary Fettig  
Walnut Creek, CA

#### Julius Rodriguez Piano

The Masters School

Gilles Pugatch  
Dobbs Ferry, NY

### Performing Arts High School Winner

#### Max Lesser Tenor Saxophone

Colburn Community School of  
Performing Arts  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, CA

### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

#### Alex Smith Drums

Colburn Community School of  
Performing Arts  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, CA

#### Zack Stuckey Guitar

Cawthra Park Secondary School of  
the Arts  
Kirk MacDonald/Lorne Lofsky  
Mississauga, Ontario

### Undergraduate College Winners

#### Ewen Farncombe Piano

Humber College  
Brian Dickinson  
Toronto, Ontario Canada

#### Fabian Supancic Piano

University of Music and Performing  
Arts Graz  
Olaf Polziehn  
Graz, Austria

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

#### Patrick Bartley Alto Saxophone

Manhattan School of Music  
Justin DiCioccio  
New York, NY

#### Jake Chapman Vibraphone

Juilliard/Columbia  
Chris Washburne  
New York, NY

#### Caleb Davis Drums

University of Massachusetts  
Jeffrey Holmes  
Amherst, MA



Music Flagship Program

The University of North Florida is proud to recognize its winners from DownBeat's 38th Annual Student Music Awards

**Large Jazz Ensemble**  
Undergraduate College Winner:

**Jazz Ensemble 1**

J.B. Scott, director

**Vocal Jazz Soloist**  
Graduate College Winner:

**Lisa Kelly**

Dr. James Hall, professor

**CONGRATULATIONS!**

## Jazz Studies Faculty

- Lynne Arriale, piano/Director of Small Ensembles
- Todd DelGiudice, saxophone
- Dr. Marc Dickman, low brass/Director of JE 3
- Barry Greene, guitar
- Danny Gottlieb, drumset
- Dr. Clarence Hines, arranging/trombone
- Dennis Marks, bass/Director of JE 2
- J.B. Scott, trumpet/Artistic Director GAJS/JE 1
- Dave Steinmeyer, trombone/Artist in Residence
- Dr. William Prince, Professor Emeritus
- Bunky Green, Professor Emeritus

## Audition Dates 2015-16

Saturday, Oct. 17, 2015

Friday, Jan. 22, 2016

Saturday, Feb. 20, 2016

Friday, March 4, 2016



Ted Johnson, Light Moods Photography

**Graduate College Winners**

Graz, Austria

**Brian Ploeger**  
**Trumpet/Flugelhorn**  
 Washington State University  
 Gregory Yasinitsky  
 Pullman, WA

**Anibal Seminario**  
**Tenor Saxophone**  
 California State University  
 Long Beach  
 Jeff Jarvis  
 Long Beach, CA

**Billy Test**  
**Piano**  
 Manhattan School of Music  
 Justin DiCioccio  
 New York, NY

**José Valentino**  
**Saxophones, Flute  
 and Bass Guitar**  
 University of South Florida  
 Dr. Kim McCormick  
 Tampa, FL

**Graduate College  
 Outstanding Performances**

**Carl Schultz**  
**Tenor Saxophone**  
 University of Colorado Boulder  
 John Gunther  
 Boulder, CO

**Small Jazz  
 Combo**

*High School Winner*

**Emiliano Sampaio**  
**Electric Guitar**  
 University of Music &  
 Performing Arts, Graz  
 Ed Partyka

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 Folsom High School  
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 Los Angeles, CA

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 Berkeley High School  
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*Performing Arts High  
 School Outstanding  
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## Building Chops, Looking Toward the Future

By Jon Ross

Though he's one of the youngest winners in the Junior High division of the Jazz Instrumental Soloist category, drummer Aleks Girshevich already has a half-decade's worth of gigs under his belt. And he's only in the 8th grade.

Girshevich has earned all this experience playing with his father, pianist Vlad Girshevich, at concerts throughout the Denver area. Two years ago, Girshevich's teacher, Dave Hammond, approached them with an idea—enroll in the Denver School of the Arts (DSA) and become a well-rounded musician. Hammond's goal, he said, is to help Girshevich continue to develop his own personality as a musician, no matter the genre.

"At DSA, we have helped Aleks expand his knowledge of and technical abilities on mallet percussion instruments, his overall reading capabilities, his ability to play classical styles of percussion and his big and small band jazz performance," Hammond said. "We also have worked on his organizational skills—he is an 8th grader."

Matt Wong, a pianist at Independence High School in San Francisco, came to jazz by way of the blues. Music played a large part in his childhood; it seemed like his parents were always playing old r&b, rock and blues CDs on the stereo. Wong's fascination with blues improvisation eventually turned to jazz and John Coltrane's *Blue Train*, the first jazz album he heard.

"When I first heard the blues, I could really hear that that's where everything was coming from," he said. "I was really touched by the emotion and power that these old blues musicians had with just their voice or just their guitar."

Since then, Wong has immersed himself in the language of jazz, honing his piano skills through work with his trio even as he challenges himself to improve as a composer. In his short career, the pianist has already racked up a long list of awards for solo and ensemble playing, but receiving a DownBeat Student Music Award for Jazz Instrumental Soloist is a little different than the other accolades, he said.

Trumpeter Brian Ploeger, a Graduate College division winner, modeled his style after artists like Woody Shaw. Ploeger said he was drawn to Shaw's "technique of superimposing foreign, unrelated scales on standard changes." After learning from the greats, Ploeger said he came to Washington State University to prepare to teach others. And with the guidance of Gregory Yasinitsky, director of the school of music, and a teaching assistantship, he's doing just that.

The trumpeter is in the first year of a master's degree program with the goal of ascending to the director of jazz studies chair at a university. "I love performing a variety of styles on the trumpet, so my goal is to find a teaching job in a scene where I can play with great players," he said.

Ploeger added that winning a DownBeat Student Music Award validates his path through jazz, but also draws attention to the jazz program in small-town Washington.

Pianist Ewen Farncombe came to jazz through the guitar. An Undergraduate College winner from Humber College in Toronto, he began his jazz studies by playing phrases and mapping out his ideas on the fretboard before eventually shifting to the piano. Farncombe sees himself as far from a fully formed musician. He's still strengthening his abilities while expanding his repertoire.

"I am still trying to develop myself musically and find a way of expressing how I feel effectively and in a personal way," he said. "Once you have the tools, you can build whatever you see in your imagination."

DB



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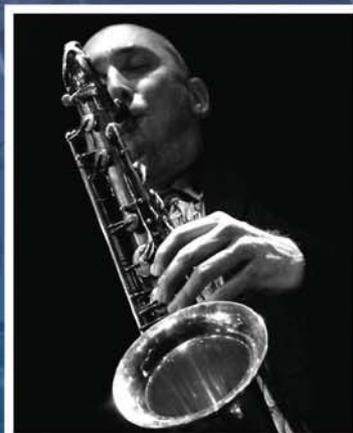
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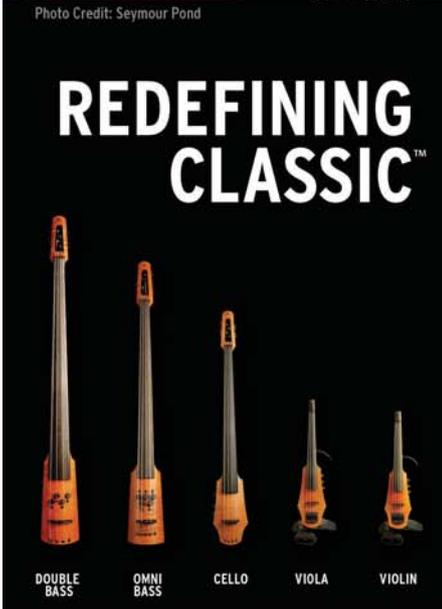


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# Diverse Sources, Unified Voices

By Yoshi Kato

**Band directors and their students** took various approaches toward their award-winning large jazz ensembles in this year's DownBeat Student Music Awards.

Through collaborating with guest artists from a variety of different musical traditions, Graduate College winners from the University of Kansas Jazz Ensemble I have been able to fortify the breadth of its musical concept. "We're in Lawrence, Kansas, so we're not exactly the cultural center point in the U.S.," joked Dan Gailey, Director of Jazz Studies and Professor of Music. "We try to bring as much talent as we can and really mix it up. We've had Steve Wilson, Jerry Bergonzi, Marshall Gilkes and a local Turkish jazz group, Alaturka. This year's [student] group has really risen to the task. They've chewed up the music and have a ravenous appetite."

"Having so many different kinds of guest artists helps us learn to switch gears at the drop of the hat and keep up," said Zak Pischnotte, a doctoral candidate in saxophone. "To be able to rise to the standards that they expect, that's been my favorite thing about the guest artists that have been brought in."

Undergraduate College winners from the University of North Florida (UNF) in Jacksonville spoke of placing a similar emphasis on drawing from a broad songbook. "In general, we're trying to play a wide variety of styles authentically," said sophomore pianist Aaron Lehrian. "In addition to straight-ahead Basie and Buddy Rich charts, we've done Latin, Afro-Cuban, funk, some things on the pop side and even Middle Eastern."

"My goal is to get them to play stylistically correct for each different type of chart," said J.B. Scott, director of UNF Jazz Ensemble I. "We also try to get our personal thing happening. The students we get are real seekers as well as learners. And they've played all year with so much intensity and heart and fire."

The Community College division is new to the Student Music Awards this year. The first large jazz ensemble winner is Lane Community College Jazz Ensemble in Eugene, Oregon. Paul Krueger, director of bands and jazz studies, explained that his band is locked in on the fundamentals. Whether it's classics from Duke Ellington and Count Basie or more recent pieces by Maria Schneider or Darcy James Argue, his group works to first emulate and then interpret.

"I'm always concerned that we're studying excellence and learning how to swing," Krueger said. "Then we talk about how they can give their own impression of the piece."

"I think the biggest theme that we focused on as a group this year was being rhythmically unified," said band pianist Alex Parthemer. "Paul emphasized the difference between being rhythmically accurate and swinging as a unit. It can be overlooked sometimes, but it's hugely important. It's something that professional groups strive for."

"I'm not really a trophy hunter at all. I try to have a lot of respect for the music by having it played at a high level," said Patrick Bowen, director of Las Vegas Academy Jazz Band, winners of the Performing Arts High School division. "We pay homage to the art, and everything else comes together."

Transition is a challenge for student bands whose personnel changes every year. Several key seniors at Las Vegas Academy graduated the year before, said pianist Angelo Monroy, leaving this year's ensemble "pretty green."

"I personally feel a responsibility to pass the torch on," Monroy said. "I get so much out of the music, and I want other members to get as much out of the art form as I do."

"I have a blast playing," he concluded. "Why shouldn't they?"

DB



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Judy Niemack  
Berlin, Germany

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University of Miami  
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*Graduate College Outstanding Performance*



University of Miami Frost School of Music's Sound Underground, winner of the Small Jazz Combo category for Undergraduate College

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University of North Texas  
Rosana Eckert  
Denton, TX

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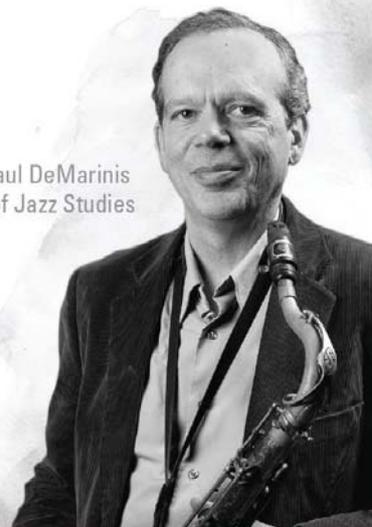


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2007 2006 2002 1999 1993

Outstanding Band Performance Winner

2010

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2012

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## Student Groups Strive for Harmonious Unity

By Jon Ross

Any large group of student musicians is bound to reveal a diversity of approaches, backgrounds and career plans. Not all of the students want to pursue music as a career, but regardless of their ultimate goals, directors of the award-winning ensembles learn to get the most out of the musicians, turning in award-winning performances year after year.

For Wallace Long Jr., director of choral activities at Willamette University in Oregon, winning a DownBeat Student Music Award further validates students' hard work, but also tells him that all the time spent cultivating a jazz program was worth it. Long has been teaching at the university for 32 years, and he started the vocal jazz program.

"I feel like it's grown to a well-rounded program that offers non-majors and majors alike the opportunity to experience music at a high level," he said of his winning group, the Willamette Singers.

To underscore the fact that a diversity of interests converge in his choirs, he pointed out that around 60 percent of the students in the winning choir are actually not music majors.

"We're talking about people who are passionate music makers who do not have the time or the inclination to pursue it as a major, but are committed to a life of music making as a very talented amateur," he said. "That brings a special type of energy to the room; you have a lot of people who are doing it for love."

For Kent Ellingson, director of the BTWHSPVA Jazz Singers of Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, this year represents his first win as director of the group. Though he has helped mold the ensemble in the four years he's been working at the high school, he deflects all of the credit for the win to his students.

"When something like this happens, it's basically reflective of the students' hard work," he said. "For that reason alone, I think it completely validates the program."

A high percentage of the students who participate in the choirs go on to study music in college, but not all of them. One of the BTWHSPVA students who will pursue a music degree after she graduates this year is Madison Russell. In addition to making students into better musicians, she said, Ellingson focuses on extra-musical skills as well.

"We learn how to work together in ensembles toward the good of the group—how to organize and work in a structure," she said, adding

that winning a Student Music Award helps validate her chosen career path.

Kerry Marsh, who runs the UNC Vocal Lab at the University of Northern Colorado, has been on the job for two years. He has spent that time endeavoring to build a creative, "drama free" environment that allows student musicians to perform at a high level. He said one of his main goals is to introduce students to innovative, challenging music.

"The college level is where so much of the development of our entire art form is happening, and I want to see vocal jazz continue to grow and thrive internationally," he said.

Marsh also puts a lot of emphasis on singing student arrangements in the group, which he said prepares them for the competitive world outside the university's walls.

"I hope that we see our graduates moving on to great teaching positions at colleges and high schools, as well as to fulfilling careers in performing live and in the studio," he explained. "I hope we're developing new generations of vocal jazz writers to keep the music fresh and exciting for years to come."

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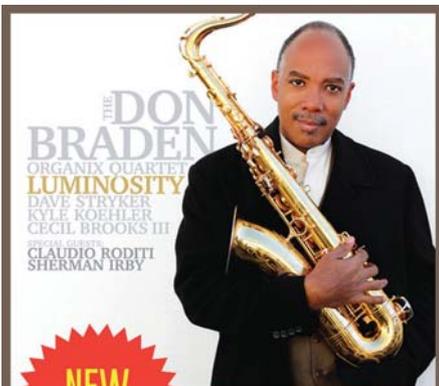


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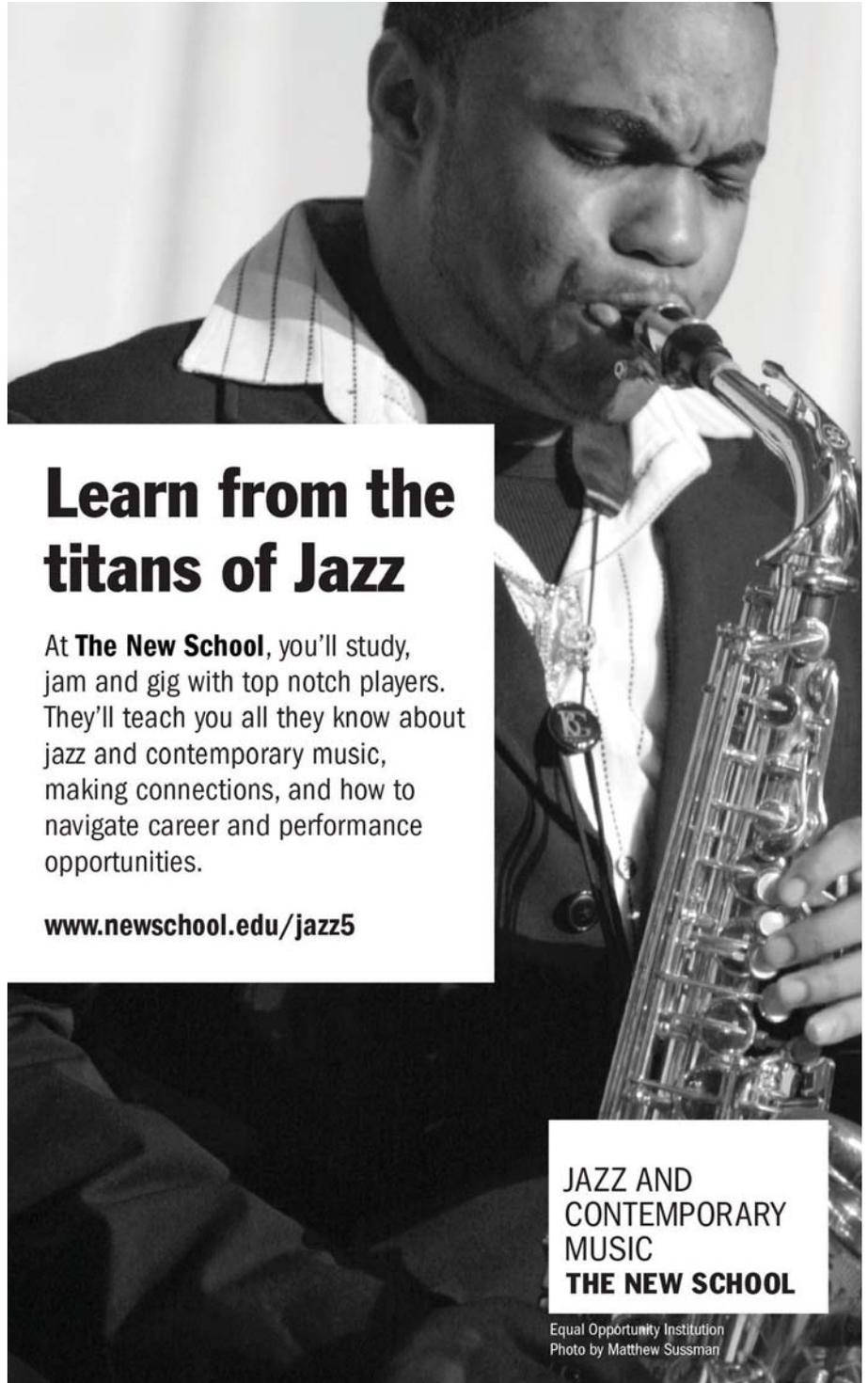
#### **J-Train**

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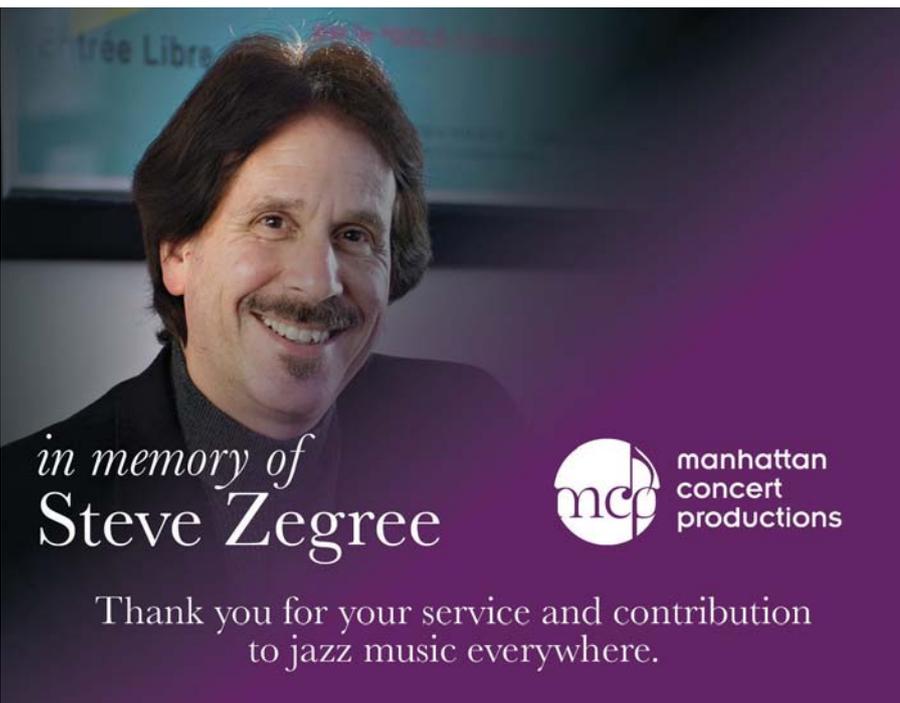
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# Latin Group Winners Merge Cultural Knowledge, Musical Skills

By Bob Doerschuk

Just as Latin jazz has continued to rise in popularity within the realm of pop culture, it is also becoming increasingly important within academic jazz studies programs. The popularity of the genre has been fueled by numerous factors, including the pool of incredibly talented headlining musicians who perform it, as well as changing demographics in the States. What's especially gratifying, though, is the interest this has kindled in the hearts of music students of all ages and geographic areas.

At the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, the next generation of potential marquee stars are playing in the Latin American Ensemble, co-directed by Kent Ellingson and Ramon Rodriguez.

Born in Cuba and known to students as "Congo," Rodriguez conveys the history and essence of the music directly to his students. "We're extremely lucky to have Congo," said senior Jane Medina, 18, who plays percussion with the ensemble. "He teaches us that what we play is more than just a song. We talk a lot about the song before we play it. That's really important because anybody can say they know salsa music, but our instructor grew up with it."

"All folk music has these elements: melody, rhythm and dance," said Uli Geissendoerfer, director of the UNLV Latin Jazz Ensemble at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. "We've lost that in jazz, but Latin music still has it. For example, when I was in Cuba in early 1994, I saw how the dancers challenged the musicians and the musicians challenged the dancers in the *timba* style, with new breaks, different and forgotten rhythms and unexpected changes in clave. I point this out to my students and try to have them feel that when they play."

Bobby Sanabria, leader of the Manhattan School of Music's Afro-Cuban Jazz Ensemble, takes this lesson further. "We do steps onstage," he explained. "I teach them the basics for mambo and cha-cha-cha. I encourage them to take lessons. Because when you dance, you completely change the way you approach the music rhythmically. Buddy Rich, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker—all of these gentlemen were good dancers."

For students in all three programs, the process of exploring Latin jazz has been transformative. "It helped open my mind to the possibilities of what you're capable of doing other than to swing," said UNLV percussionist Austin Pooley, 23. "It's opened me to world music and how different cultures take different styles and make them their own. Now, whether I'm playing rock or *plena* or Cuban salsa or bebop or whatever, I try to play it as authentically as I can. I try to think of what those guys would do."

For saxophonist Patrick Bartley, 22, the Manhattan School's Afro-Cuban Jazz Ensemble is "the centerpiece of giving you everything you need as a musician. Bobby understands what the audience expects and then he goes beyond their expectations, with respect. That's the biggest thing I've learned. It's like, 'Wow, I can actually change it up. All I have to do is pay attention to the audience and the musicians I'm playing with and see how to move forward within that context.' And that's deep."

Geissendoerfer wants his students to understand the music on a technical level and connect with it on an emotional level: "When somebody brings in an arrangement or any piece, we workshop it. We take it apart and I'll switch things around. I give the different solos. But the rest of it is, 'Guys, when you come in, feel it. This is what you're listening for.' They're not playing a chart; they're playing music."

Bobby Sanabria (left) directs the Manhattan School of Music Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra. Patrick Bartley solos on the soprano saxophone.



The Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts Latin American Ensemble



The University of Nevada at Las Vegas Latin Jazz Ensemble





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## Young Arrangers Embrace Creativity

By Yoshi Kato

**Oscar Peterson and double bassists**, both converted and natural, are two of the common elements among a sampling of this year's Jazz Arrangement winners in the DownBeat Student Music Awards.

High School winner Kanoa Mendenhall, an early graduate from NOVA Independent Study in Novato, California, arranged "Tin Tin Deo" for a sextet with trombone, alto saxophone, guitar and a traditional piano rhythm section. She enjoyed playing the Dizzy Gillespie standard at various gigs and was inspired by an Oscar Peterson recording of it.

"I always want to be true to the melody as much as possible and honor the composer," said Mendenhall, who started on cello before taking up the double bass to work with her father, pianist Eddie Mendenhall. "I wanted to create a Blakey combo feel without messing with it too much."

"Kanoa is very astute with her sense of color in arranging," said educator/saxophonist Paul Cantos, a Mendenhall family friend who also works with Kanoa in the SFJAZZ High School Jazz All-Stars Orchestra he leads. "Her understanding of the voicings of different instruments is tremendous."

Performing Arts High School winner Ethan Moffitt started on violin before adding double bass to his arsenal. The native southern Californian wrote a big band (with vibraphone) treatment of Thad Jones' "A Child is Born" and was inspired by a solo Oscar Peterson recording of it.

"I thought there were some really cool voicings in there and that I could maybe pull some out to help me with the horn parts," said Moffitt, a freshman at Colburn School of Performing Arts in Los Angeles.

"I encourage my students to write," said Lee Secard, director of jazz studies at Colburn School. "My encouragement to Ethan was to stretch out and take some chances. I think he absolutely nailed it."

"I'm also a classical double bassist and do a lot of arco, so I wanted something that could mix both worlds," Moffitt added. "It's got such a great melody that I could play on bass and expand on that."

Kyle Gordon is a jazz bass and jazz arranging major at University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton. The Undergraduate College award-winning junior got a request from a jazz vocal major to write a big band arrangement of Billy Strayhorn's "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" for her.

"I approached it like a commission," he said of his arrangement for alto flute, flute, three clarinets, five trumpets, five trombones, guitar and piano. "I didn't realize it would be such a challenge. I wanted to preserve what Strayhorn had created, and it was also difficult to protect the vocalist's range."

"He's ambitious, and that's what I like to see," said Richard DeRosa, director of jazz composition and arranging studies at UNT. "Orchestrating a big band can be daunting. It's an often laborious task that only the most diligent students will do. Kyle's been my private student for two years and has shown to have both patience and an inquisitive mind."

The instrumental focus shifts to trombone with Graduate College winner Austin Seybert. A first-year doctoral student in classical trombone performance and literature at University of Illinois-Urbana, he arranged John Coltrane's timeless "Giant Steps" for five trombones (four tenor, one bass) and guitar, piano, double bass and drums.

"I was in an advanced harmony class with the director of jazz studies and got the idea to try different modes we don't usually use in jazz," Seybert recalled. "So I mixed harmonic major modes with melodic minor modes and Coltrane changes."



Kanoa Mendenhall



Kyle Gordon



Austin Seybert

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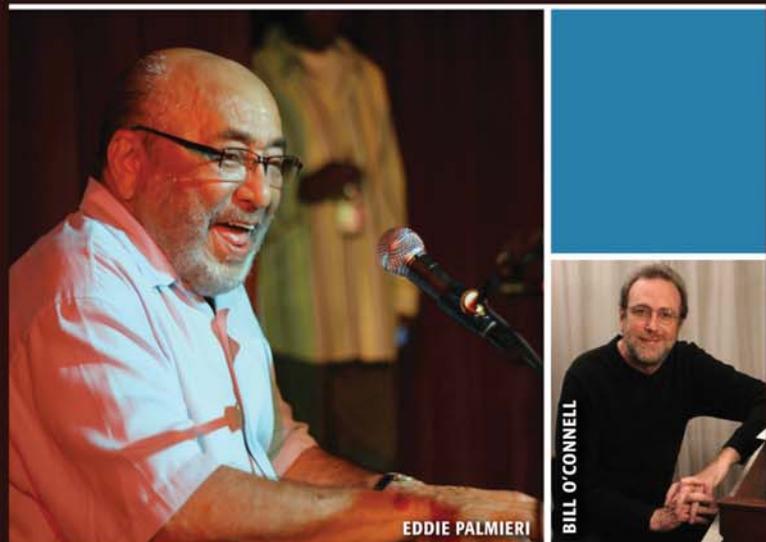
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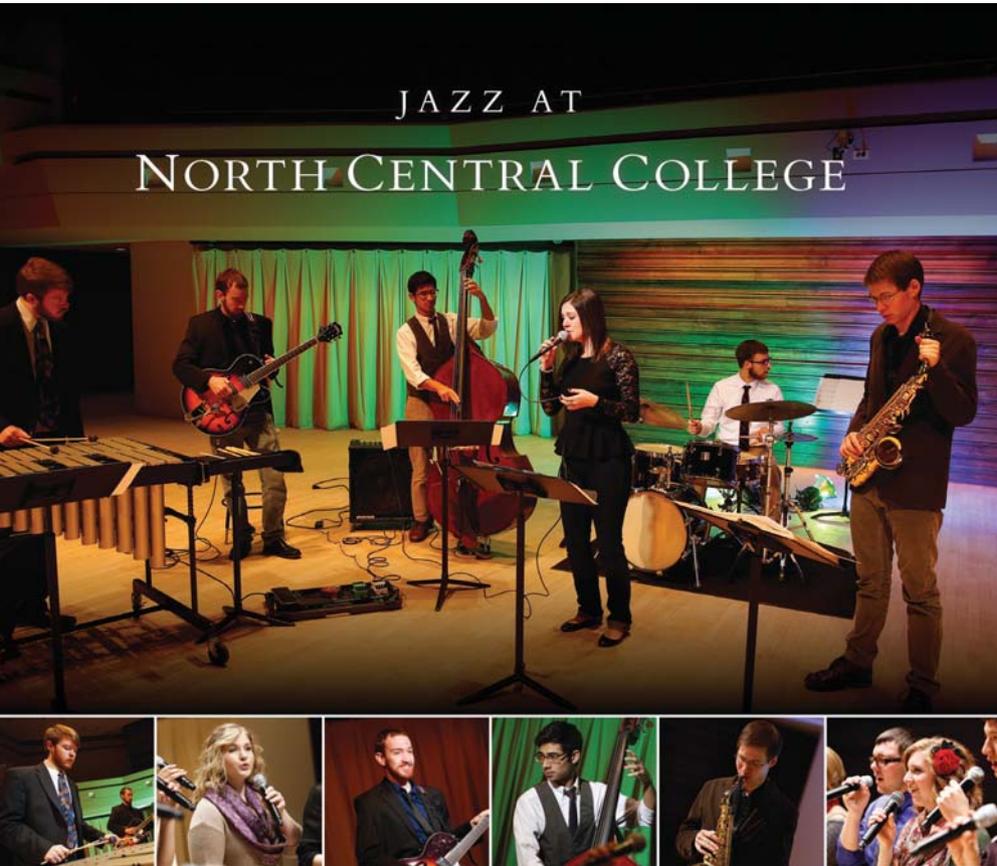
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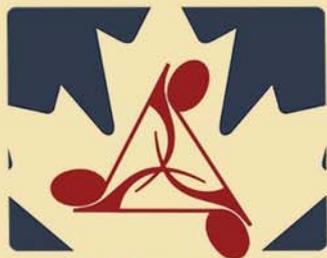
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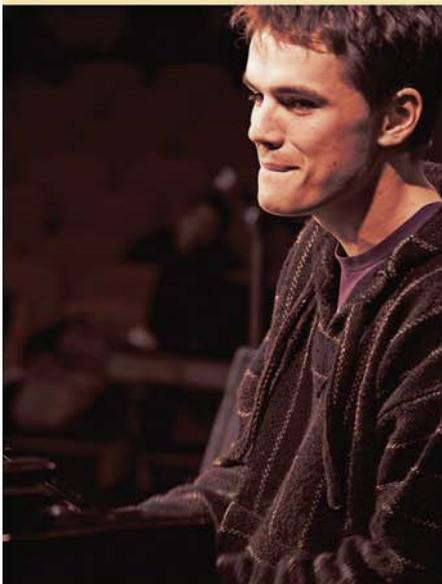
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**Rayburn Wright**  
Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York

## Reminiscing on Ray

By Antonio J. García with Donald Hunsberger

In October 2012 about 100 colleagues and former students of Prof. Rayburn Wright (1922–'90) gathered with his family at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music to reflect on and celebrate his enduring influence. There they dedicated Rehearsal Room 120—the home of so many marvelous recordings and rehearsals—as “The Ray Wright Room.” This dedication celebrated what would have been the 90th birthday year of the man whose numerous awards included Eastman's Eisenhart Award for Excellence in Teaching and its Luminary Award, a CASE Professor of the Year Award, the IAJE Humanitarian Award, and an induction into the IAJE Hall of Fame.

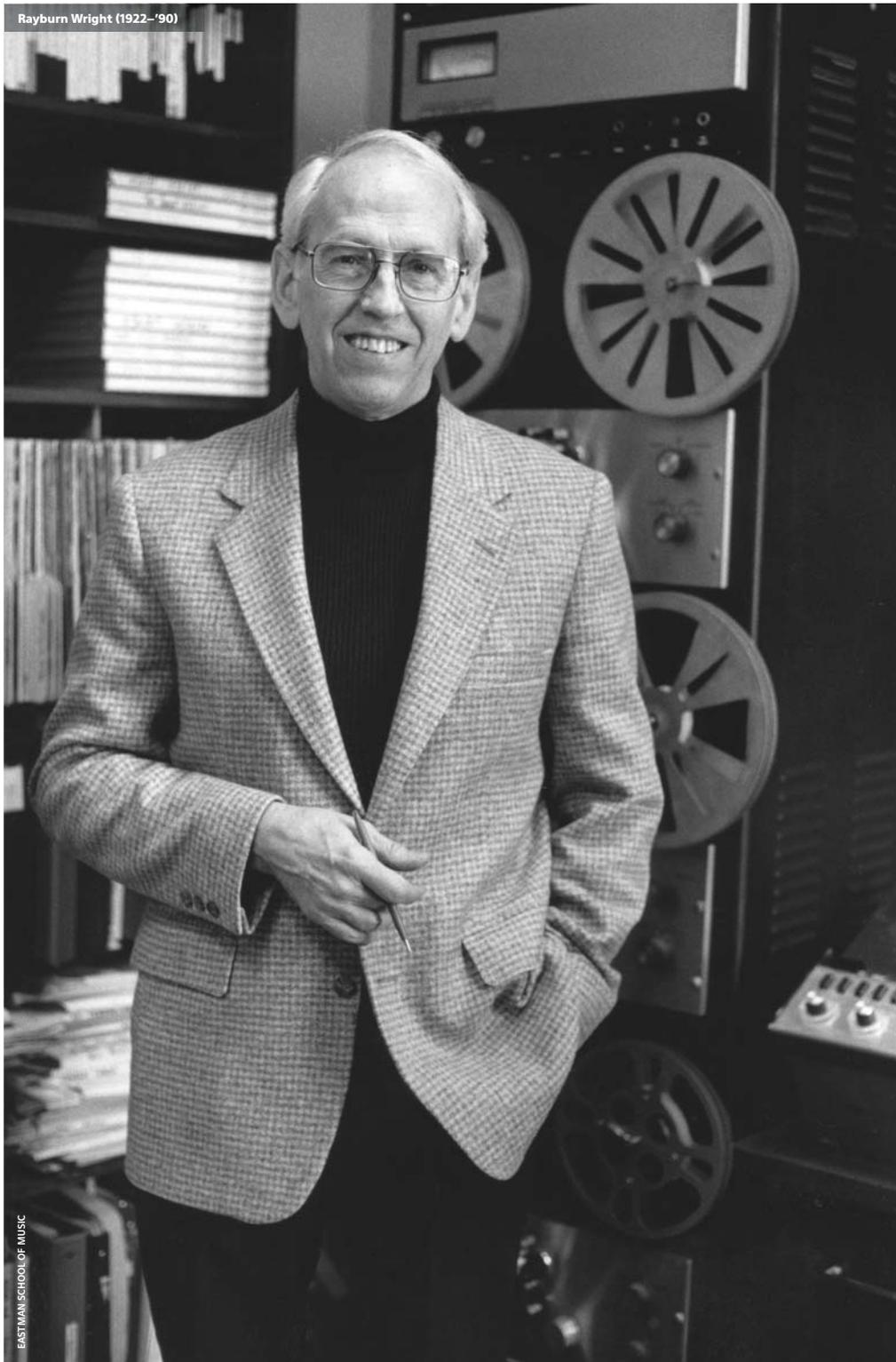
Now he has been inducted into the Down-Beat Jazz Education Hall of Fame. His widow, Doris, commented on the accolade: “Since I know how much Ray valued music education and how strongly he felt about sharing everything he had learned through the years with his students, it pleases me that he is receiving this award. When I see any of his students, I hear them say how his guidance, his listening to their voices and his encouragement led the way in their musical careers; and that's what teaching is all about. I know he would feel honored to be inducted. Thank you so much.”

Ray Wright started the Arranger's [Holiday] Workshop at the Eastman School of Music's Summer Session in 1959 while still living in New York. He directed Eastman's Jazz and Contemporary Media Program from 1970 to 1990, following a distinguished career as a trombonist and arranger in the U.S. Army Band, Glenn Miller Orchestra and Tony Pastor Band, ultimately leading to his post as co-director of music at Radio City Music Hall from 1950–1969. His arrangements dotted major labels; he received a Grammy and two Emmy nominations; he authored and co-authored definitive books on arranging (*Inside the Score*) and film-scoring (*On the Track*).

Wright's impact on his students was perhaps the richest of all—and continues even today, 25 years after his passing. He founded graduate and undergraduate degree programs and created the Eastman Studio Orchestra. Under his direction, the Eastman Jazz Ensemble won Down-Beat Student Music Awards every year from 1980 through 1986. His students frequently did the same. Wright and the Eastman Jazz Ensemble also released four commercial recordings and were invited to perform at the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival.

In 1989 Wright said, “I can't tell you the number of times my fondest dream has come true: that students have learned not only what I've taught them, but also how to learn—by analyzing the continually evolving musical models in the world and extending their craft by imagina-

Rayburn Wright (1922–'90)



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tive efforts. The most wonderful thing is to see students going beyond what I can take credit for—to see them turn their amateur efforts into professional work in terms of technical skill, consistency and expressiveness.”

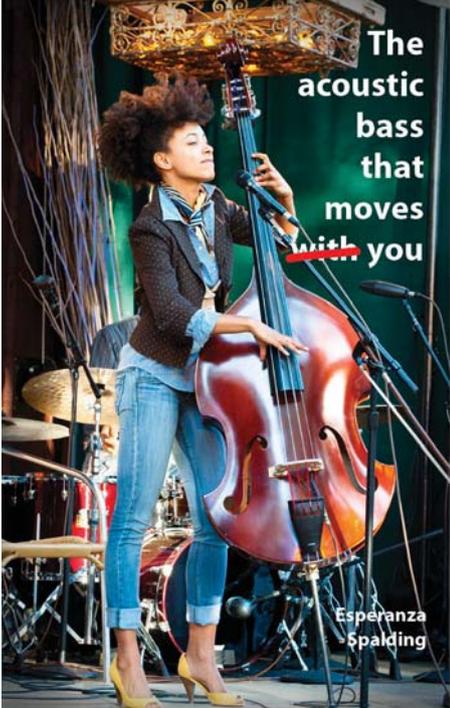
Below are thoughts on his legacy from musicians whose credits are too numerous to list:

Ray was so secure about his own consummate musicianship that he could be an ideal facilitator. Whether working with student writers or rehearsing an orchestra, it was all about enabling the musical content to achieve its highest potential.  
—Bill Dobbins,

Coordinator, Jazz Composition and Arranging Program, Eastman's Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media (JCM) Department

He insisted that I conduct my arrangement on the band's last concert. I was terrified. I'd have never imagined that *that* would end up becoming my life. I've never known an individual who exhibited such excellence, perfection, strength, organization and artistry with such calmness, deftness, lightness—even warmth, humor and kindness—as Ray. He shows us all that excellence and balance can coexist.

—Maria Schneider, MM '85—JCM



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If I had to name just one master who informed and inspired my musical life, it would be Ray. He came from the professional music world and realized what one had to do to survive. That was great training. Everything I do now is on a deadline. Creative artistry is important, but at the end of the day you have to turn something in.  
—Jeff Beal, BM '85—Trumpet

His teaching philosophy was to give the students *almost* enough information to do the assignment. That way they came to the next class very hungry for the information they didn't have, yet they came with solutions they discovered on their own. In my private lessons, I learned not just about music but about all of life: deadlines, professionalism, expectations, high standards and integrity.  
—Dave Rivello, MM '89—JCM

“That's not going to sound the way you think it's going to ...” (*without* my telling him how I thought it would sound).  
—Scott Healy, BM '82—Composition

I had arranged Roland Hanna's ballad “Seasons” for him to play as a waltz. Roland said, “I don't play jazz waltzes; maybe I'll play this one by myself.” I was so upset. Then Ray suggested we do the piece as a slow ballad; salvage the intro and use it as an ending, too; and play some of the worked-out string and horn backgrounds in the ballad tempo. We were back on track in minutes.  
—Mike Patterson, MM '80—JCM

During a Susannah McCorkle session, he realized he'd left a part at home, so he called his

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wife, Doris. When she arrived, they shared a brief kiss. She gave him the part, and they moved on. One of the most organized persons I knew could make an error. Problem solved without drama. An expression of love. It was a tiny moment to them, but these were some of the most important lessons I'd learn at Eastman.  
—Antonio García, MM '85—JCM

Ray Wright was probably the most influential teacher in my life. Professionalism was second nature to him; and he was always superbly organized and prepared for every concert, class, or even sailing expedition I was invited to crew for. Every time I compose, arrange, or lead a big band, I always ask myself, "What would Ray do?"  
—Ellen Rowe, MM '82—JCM

I never had the privilege of working with or even meeting Ray Wright, but I have experienced his influence as reflected in the lives of those who did. When I hear someone speak of Ray, it is clear that he was a person of great integrity. He brought out the very best in his students and colleagues and gave them the confidence to reach the highest levels of artistry and professionalism.  
—Jeff Campbell, MM '92—JCM, DMA MusEd '02; Chair, Eastman's JCM Department

His approach to the reading sessions for the studio orchestra replicated real-life situations. Composers had a limited amount of time to get their work recorded; and that reflected onto the players, who were under pressure to play it right the first time.  
—Phil Markowitz, BM '74—Theory

Ray's example—in teaching, rehearsing, mentoring and problem-solving—was an ongoing series of lessons in how a true professional approaches life.  
—Manny Mendelsohn, MM '79—JCM

A few years after I graduated, the veteran copyist looking over my scores says, "I don't understand it: You've got almost no experience, and yet your scores read like someone who has been in the business for years. How is that possible?" I tell him, "I studied with Ray Wright." "Oh," he says, "that explains it."  
—Doug Besterman, BA '86

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*Graduate College Outstanding Compositions***Emiliano Sampaio, "Vienna"**

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**Caleb Chapman**

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**Caleb Chapman and his Crescent Super Band** had just returned from Cuba, still abuzz about the experience they had in the partially off-limits country.

"I'm really grateful we went when we did because I think we're seeing the last glimpses of what Cuba has been," Chapman said, noting that his students were able to experience Cuba before the United States began easing trade restrictions.

The educator—who has coached bands in the Salt Lake City suburb of American Fork, Utah, since the turn of the century—revealed that he almost passed on the invitation from the Cuban government to perform at the Festival Del Tambor. But ultimately, he saw the real-world teaching benefits of the trip.

"It's life-changing," Chapman said. "Hopping on a plane, going to Cuba for a week, sharing the stage with bands from all over the world, having to represent yourself, your band and your country—there's a whole lot of other life skills that come along with that.

"We got booked for that gig a year ago," he continued, noting that he and his students required artist visas in order to perform there. "We had some other travel plans—I thought about not doing it, but decided to do it so the kids could see Cuba pre-embargo. It turned out they went just in time."

The Crescent Super Band is packed with high-school talent. Students in Crescent and Chapman's other elite ensembles have won 25 DownBeat Student Music Awards since 2007—but musical prowess is only a small part of the band's goal. Chapman

said only 25 to 30 percent of Crescent members make a career out of music, a number that is startlingly low when the musicality of each member is considered.

"Some of my earlier students are now making their marks in the world, and they're coming back and telling me how this program has impacted them," he said. "Not surprisingly, while the music training is a big deal, it's definitely not the most important thing to any of them, I don't think. It's not the most important thing to me, either."

Performing at the Cuban festival was not an anomaly. The band's schedule is jam-packed with appearances at major jazz festivals.

"When these kids take the stage, they're not on the kiddie stage," Chapman said. "They're on the main stages."

Chapman's bands have played some of the most prestigious venues in the world, including recent performances in Sweden, France, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Italy and Mexico. Their national presence is equally as impressive with performances in most every major U.S. city, including New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

The bands have played with nearly 200 guest artists, including David Sanborn, Randy Brecker, Joe Lovano, Peter Erskine, Kurt Elling, Gordon Goodwin, Wayne Bergeron, Esperanza Spalding, Christian McBride, Stefon Harris, Dave Weckl, Nicholas Payton, Jeff Coffin, Eric Marienthal, Ernie Watts, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Randy Brecker and Bob Mintzer. They have been featured with musicians from such recognizable bands as Journey, Dave

Caleb Chapman (left) and his students have toured internationally.



Matthews Band, Neon Trees, Steve Miller Band, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Tower of Power, Genesis, the Saturday Night Live Band and many others. Additionally, Chapman's bands have received national airplay on Sirius XM.

The Crescent Super Band has won eight "Best of State" awards for Utah and twice won the prestigious Best of State Statue Award identifying Chapman's program as the top organization in Arts and Entertainment in Utah, beating out every other professional music, arts and film organization in the state for the honor.

Chapman works to inform students about jazz's place in the world. He'll soon take over as president of the Jazz Education Network, and that duty has him reflecting about artistry and the role of musicians.

"The reason we play music and we enjoy music, the reason we consume music, is it makes us happy, it makes us better people, it increases our quality of life," he said. "That's the purpose of all of this. And if we're not enjoying ourselves when we're playing music or we're listening to music, then all of a sudden it becomes pretty unimportant in the grand scheme of things.

"Sometimes I think in jazz music, especially, we take ourselves way too seriously," Chapman continued. "I've been thinking about this a lot: What is our music mission? Why are we always struggling with audiences and record sales? I think it comes down to—and this isn't just a symptom of jazz—trained musicians in general. We feel like we lose the purpose of the music because it is so much work for us to get to a level of performance necessary to be able to execute. The focus is all put on studying, the practice room, chops and technique and all that kind of stuff, and sometimes we lose sight of why we play music in the first place."

Bassist Chris Croce first met Chapman as a high school sophomore when he joined Chapman's salsa band. One year later, he found himself in the Crescent ensemble. Chapman's dedication to the music convinced Croce to stay.

"He has such great ears and hears everything, and does a great job of guiding us in the right direction and teaching us how we need to sound, but never doing it in a negative way," said Croce, who went on to study music at the University of Miami.

Croce said the key to the band's success is Chapman's ability to get the best out of his musicians.

"He pushes his students to strive for the very best sound they can get, and holds them to very high expectations," Croce said. "His bands sound so tight because everyone buys into the model and the program, and with everyone motivated to perform at their very best, the whole group is locked in, connected, and gets an amazing sound."

After all the practicing and the woodshedding, Chapman takes pains to keep the music fun and approachable while staying true to the group's mission.

"Never am I going to ask these kids to dumb down what they're playing or to not play with integrity," he said. "What we do is we play with energy. We show the audience that we're having fun with our music.

"This isn't about diluting the music—making the music accessible can have a negative connotation for some people. It doesn't mean playing pop. But let's frame it in a way that's exciting and engaging to the audience. That's how you make a vibrant scene."  
—Jon Ross

**Elmhurst College Congratulates**  
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[www.elmhurst.edu](http://www.elmhurst.edu)

photo by Sam Schacker

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# Jazz Arrangement

High School Winner

## Kanoa Mendenhall, "Tin Tin Deo"

NOVA Independent School  
Paul Contos  
Novato, CA

High School Outstanding Arrangement

## Matt Wong, "Voyage"

Independence High School  
Adam Theis  
San Francisco, CA

Performing Arts High School Winner

## Ethan Moffitt, "A Child Is Born"

Colburn Community School of Performing Arts



The Vocal Jazz Ensemble from American River College in Sacramento, California, winner of the Small Vocal Jazz Group category for Community College

Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, CA

University of North Texas  
Richard DeRosa  
Denton, TX

Undergraduate College Outstanding Arrangements

Undergraduate College Winners

## Tim Carrigg, "Once Upon A Time"

Lawrence University  
Patricia Darling  
Appleton, WI

## Brendan Lanighan, "Lament"

Eastman School of Music  
Jeff Campbell  
Rochester, NY

## Kyle Gordon, "A Flower Is A Lovable Thing"

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- o Fosters and supports individual creativity.

- o Regularly supports interaction between students and world-class artists.

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**June Lee, "Acapella Christmas Medley"**

Indiana University,  
Jacobs School of Music  
Dr. Steve Zegree  
Bloomington, IN

*Graduate College Winners*

**Reginald Bowens, "Human Nature"**

Vocal arrangement  
Indiana University,  
Jacobs School of Music  
Ly Wilder  
Bloomington, IN

**Gabe Condon, "In A Sentimental Mood"**

Large ensemble arrangement  
Eastman School of Music  
Bill Dobbins  
Rochester, NY

**Julian Tanaka, "Orbit" (Unless It's You)**

Large ensemble arrangement  
Eastman School of Music  
Jeff Campbell  
Rochester, NY

**Austin Seybert, "Giant Steps"**

Small ensemble arrangement  
University of Illinois Urbana/  
Champaign  
Jim Pugh  
Urbana, IL

*Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements*

**Owen Broder, "Man Of Constant Sorrow"**

Small ensemble arrangement  
Manhattan School of Music  
Chris Rosenberg  
New York, NY

**David von Kampen, "California Dreamin'"**

Vocal ensemble arrangement  
University of Kansas  
School of Music  
Dan Gailey  
Lawrence, KS

**Keith Karns, "Up On The Roof"**

Large ensemble arrangement  
University of North Texas  
Mike Steinel



The Wallace Sextet, from Indiana University, Jacobs School of Music, recipients of Outstanding Performance in the Small Jazz Combo category for Graduate College

Denton, TX

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## to Jacksonville State University's Jazz Ensemble 1

*Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance*

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Jarrett Irish, *Tenor*  
Jessica Creel, *Tenor*  
Hayden McMahon, *Bari*

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Justin Lockridge  
Grant Thrailkill  
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Zach Nelson, *Drums/Percussion*  
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**Doug Beach**  
Elmhurst College, Elmhurst, Illinois

## Focused on Repertoire, Committed to Outreach

When Doug Beach took a part-time job at Elmhurst College in the fall of 1978, he was the school's only jazz faculty member. There were no jazz classes to teach, just a jazz band that rehearsed a couple times a week, played a few gigs each year and sometimes performed at the annual collegiate jazz festival held on campus.

Today, Elmhurst College's jazz department is considerably more substantial and active. There are two full big bands, 10 combos, two vocal groups and two electric guitar ensembles. An 11-person faculty consisting mainly of adjunct professional players offers a full range of instrumental instruction. The college offers a jazz studies degree—a program started some 10 years ago by Beach, who has held the title "director of jazz studies" for a quarter-century. The Elmhurst College Jazz Ensemble has made more than 30 overseas tours during his tenure, and the group plays 50 to 60 gigs a year in the Chicago area and regions beyond to give students live performance experience and help finance band travels. Every year, they record

a full-length, professionally produced CD.

Beach has been at the helm of the Elmhurst College Jazz Festival (currently in its 48th year) for two decades now, and its size and stature in the jazz education world have grown considerably under his direction. The festival draws college and high school bands from all over the Midwest, and it has hosted some of the most iconic names in jazz as its judges and guest performers, thanks in part to Beach's propensity for networking. Some of the more recent artists and ensembles to accept Beach's festival invitation include the Jimmy Heath Big Band, the Maria Schneider Orchestra, the Clayton-Hamilton Big Band, John Fedchock Big Band, the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Count Basie Orchestra, Ryan Truesdell's Gil Evans Project, Bill Holman, Gary Smulyan, Sean Jones, Ralph Lalama, Dennis Mackrel—the list of visiting bands and adjudicators goes on and on.

"As the festival grew over time, I made a commitment to myself," Beach said when asked how he managed to convert a student competition into an exciting, well-attended



Doug Beach



## LANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE

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For more information, contact:  
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www.lanecc.edu/perarts/music



series of ticketed concerts. "We always had great people judging, but it was only one pro concert on the weekend when the three judges would play with our band. And I said, 'Why can't we have something each night that would make it a better learning experience for the groups coming in, and would bring bigger crowds?' That means the college kids are playing for more people, but you're also making a bigger financial commitment. I thought, if I could get it to go and the crowds would come, it would be better for the students. And it worked.

"So, you've got a financial commitment—you definitely leave the realm of just running an educational festival. You're still doing that, but you also become a concert promoter. You've got to sell some tickets. I bring in artists who I think are role models. I can't think of better ones than Bill Holman and Jimmy Heath. You bring them in and you hope that the public will want to come, too. Now, we kind of have the ball rolling. But it was definitely a leap of faith in the beginning trying to do that. I'm not really out to make a ton of money. I just want to make the thing go, that's it."

Beach has made a name for himself as a composer and arranger of big band music. His company, Doug Beach Music, has published hundreds of charts since 1975, the year he graduated from Millikin University. Many of his arrangements are designed for educational use, with school ensembles of various skill levels in mind. His extensive experience as an adjudicator, all-state band director and Yamaha clinician has sharpened his writing chops for the student market.

"Even though I teach college, a big part of what I do is I spend time writing charts for young kids, junior high and high school as well," said Beach, a trumpeter who started playing jazz as a fifth-grader at the Lindop School in Broadview, Illinois, under the direction of Paul Tolosko. "I enjoy it. When I go out and adjudicate at district things around Illinois, I love doing the junior high kids. So I'll work with that level of kids, and I think that keeps me in touch with what works for these kids arrangement-wise. We try to create original jazz things that are at their level, so as they move up to music that Buddy Rich's band or Woody Herman's band played, the concepts that they learned on our stuff, they apply. As their abilities grow, they can apply the lessons they learn on the easy stuff and be successful."

Beach has learned that choosing the right arrangements for his bands has been crucial to their success. "It's the whole game, the key to making your band sound good," he said. "Yeah, you've got to know how to rehearse them once you choose the music, but having the right charts is it. I can tell pretty fast if a chart is going to be a good one for us. Not saying we've got to be able to read it down and nail it the first time—that's not it at all. But it's got to be a fit. And, of course, that changes from year to year as the guys in the band change."

Beach comes across as the kind of guy you can candidly sit and talk with in his little corner of the music building, where he's surrounded by certificates, DownBeat Student Music Award plaques, CDs, records, concert programs and posters that date back to the beginning of his time at Elmhurst

College. He has a straightforward way about him—approachable, consistently friendly, generous with his time and committed to his career. He sees himself as part of the group and cares deeply about his students and the institution he works for.

"One of the first things I do at the beginning of the year when auditions are over and I finally have my band, I tell them, 'Listen, there is a tradition here of excellence in this band, and you are all the caretakers of it right now, and it's up to you to maintain that tradition. It's one person on a part in here, and if you're not making your part happen, you're letting the chain down.' So it's very clear to them that they're part of that, and there's a real sense of pride in making the band sound good. That sense of pride is strong, and it's come over years, it's been built up from generations. And because of that, we have a very loyal alumni group. They care about the organization, and they support it financially, too. So they give back, and that makes me feel great, but it also perpetuates the program."

Beach remains committed to perpetuating jazz at the student level using whatever means he has at his disposal, whether it's hosting school bands at the festival or bringing his own groups to high schools for workshops and clinics. "I'd just like to continue to make us a place of outreach where we can go out and help high school kids get better at this art form," said Beach, who is grateful to have had mentors of his own and considers himself a product of early jazz education. "When I came here, I guess I wanted to recreate for these kids some of the experiences I had coming up." —Ed Enright

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**38th ANNUAL**  
**STUDENT**  
**MUSIC AWARDS**



Panache 7, from Corte Madera School in Portola Valley, California, winner of the Small Vocal Jazz Group category for Junior High School



California State Long Beach Concert Jazz Orchestra, winner of the Large Jazz Ensemble category for Graduate College

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## JUDGING CRITERIA

### PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- 1) Overall sound
- 2) Presence or authority
- 3) Proper interpretation of idiom
- 4) Improvisation or creativity
- 5) Technique
- 6) Intonation
- 7) Phrasing
- 8) Dynamics
- 9) Accurate rhythm/time
- 10) Material

### ENGINEERING CRITERIA

- 1) Perspective: balance of channels; amount and type of reverb; blend (Do all sounds seem to have been performed at the same time and place? Do solos seem natural or do they stick out?).
- 2) Levels: saturation or other overload, under modulation resulting in excessive hiss, consistency of levels, left/right balance, etc.
- 3) Transparency and apparent transient response.
- 4) Special effects: Are they appropriate? Do they add or detract?
- 5) Extraneous noises, clicks, hum, etc. (for a non-live performance, any non-musical sound).
- 6) Professional etiquette.

### AWARDS & PRIZES

DB Award Plaque is awarded to the music department of each winning middle school, high school and college.

DB Award Certificate is awarded to each individual winner and director of winning ensembles.

### JUDGES

**Jim Anderson:** Grammy Award-winning recording engineer and professor at New York University's Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music.

**Darcy James Argue:** Award-winning composer, arranger and bandleader.

**Janice Borla:** Vocalist, Director of Vocal Jazz, North Central College; vocal jazz camp founder.

**Don Braden:** Saxophonist; Coordinator of Jazz Studies, Montclair State University; Music Director, Litchfield Jazz Camp.

**Jeff Coffin:** Saxophonist, composer, educator/clinician.

**Claire Daly:** Baritone saxophonist, recording artist and composer.

**John Daversa:** Chair, Department of Studio Music and Jazz, Frost School of Music, University of Miami.

**Orbert Davis:** Trumpeter, clinician; professor at University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Les Hooper:** Composer, arranger for film, TV, commercials, orchestra and recordings; clinician.

**Kevin Mahogany:** Vocalist, record label owner and educator.

**Miles Osland:** Saxophonist; Director of Jazz Studies, University of Kentucky.

**Bob Parsons:** Saxophonist, arranger and composer.

**Dave Rivello:** Assistant Professor, Jazz Studies & Contemporary Media, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester.

**John Santos:** Percussionist, clinician, label owner; U.S. Artists Fontanals Fellow; writer/historian.

**Greg Tardy:** Recording artist, Assistant Professor of Jazz Saxophone, University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

**Roger Treece:** Arranger/composer, UNC Jazz Press author and educator.

**Ryan Truesdell:** Trombonist, composer, producer of new and archival material.

**James Warrick:** Clinician, former Director of Jazz Studies at New Trier High School.

**David Weiss:** Trumpeter, leader of the New Jazz Composers Octet, Endangered Species and The Cookers.

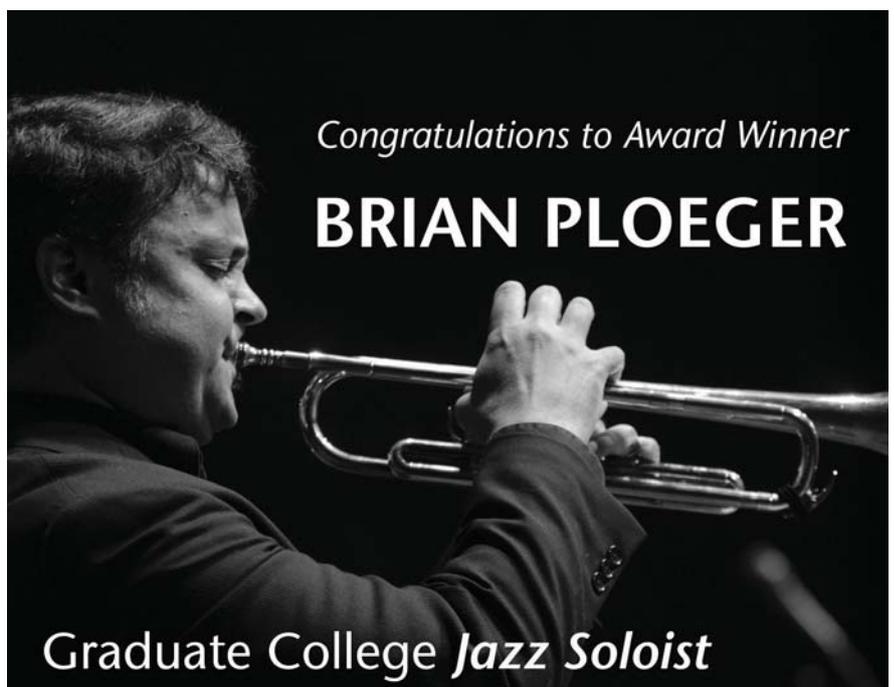
**Kenny Werner:** Pianist, composer, educator and author. Artistic Director at The Performance Wellness Institute, Berklee College of Music.



 The University of the Arts

Congratulations to the University of the Arts "Z" Big Band, Matt Gallagher, Director,  
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Visiting artist Joey Calderazzo (left) with UNCG student Melvin Holland on Oct. 20

UNC GREENSBORO

# Fundamentals at UNCG

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Miles Davis Jazz Studies Program is home to a very special trumpet: the Martin Committee Miles Davis played on *Kind Of Blue*.

How the horn ended up on display in the atrium of the school's music building and why the program is named for Davis speaks volumes about the role tradition plays in the program, which is overseen by bassist Steve Haines.

"We are all about mentorship," Haines said. "Historically, that's where the knowledge has been exchanged in jazz. We teach the fundamentals, based on the principle that the deeper the roots, the higher the tree."

The link between the trumpet and UNCG is a Greensboro native named Arthur "Buddy" Gist, whose family ran the Magnolia House Hotel, a popular refuge for black entertainers and athletes in the segregated South. After moving to Harlem in 1947, Gist met Davis at Birdland, and the two became inseparable, sharing a love for sharp clothes, fast cars and music. At some point, Gist also became the owner of the trumpet that dominates the most popular recording in jazz history. Gist donated the horn to UNCG in 2001, and the school took on the trumpeter's name for its jazz studies program.

A maximum of eight students are accepted into the program each year, and Haines said he and his five fellow faculty members look for young people who exhibit passion and commitment. The bachelor's degree program stresses the importance of foundational training.

Much of that foundation building begins with listening and transcribing, taking music com-

posed by artists like Charles Mingus, Max Roach and Billy Strayhorn and discovering how to replicate and revoice it.

"Transcribing great music teaches you the shape and contour of the composer's style," said saxophonist and faculty member Chad Eby. "It's an essential part of learning the foundation, and I want to ensure that our students have the same foundation that upheld John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter and Ornette Coleman."

Despite the focus on tradition, as Eby's examples imply, the jazz studies program is not solely devoted to mainstream music. Haines said one of the most memorable examples of a group arrangement project—which entails a concentration on the work of one musician, who then attends workshops and performances—involved saxophonist Dewey Redman (1931–2006).

"The students had to find a way to transcribe free music, to listen and identify the artist's path," Haines said. "For Dewey, it was a memorable experience because it was the first time that his music had been arranged."

In addition to two large jazz ensembles, the program offers several small jazz groups, including the Spartan Jazz Collective, an ongoing septet consisting of faculty members and students that focuses on music by such composers as Herbie Nichols and Bill Evans.

Haines noted that a focus on building fundamentals doesn't mean that the program is stuck in the past. "We're not afraid to change," he said. "I know there are young people who want to be the next Gretchen Parlato, and I can foresee us making opportunities for them, too." —James Hale

Dr. Aaron Flagg



HIROYUKI ITO

**Juilliard Jazz Chair:** Dr. Aaron Flagg will join Juilliard Jazz as Chair and Associate Director beginning July 15. Dr. Flagg has been serving as Acting Chair and Associate Director this academic year at Juilliard while on a one-year sabbatical from The Hartt School at the University of Hartford, where he has been Dean and Professor of Music since 2009. In his appointment as Chair and Associate Director, he will continue to teach courses, develop interdivisional collaborations and work closely with Juilliard Jazz Director Wynton Marsalis to oversee the department.

[juilliard.edu](http://juilliard.edu)

**Luminarts Fellows:** The Luminarts Cultural Foundation at the Union League Club of Chicago has announced its 2015 Fellows in Jazz, each of whom receives a \$5,000 grant award. This year's fellows include Thomas Caminito, a soprano saxophonist at DePaul University; Justin Copeland, a trumpeter at Northwestern University; Emma Dayhuff, a bassist at Oberlin College; Lenard Simpson, an alto saxophonist at Northern Illinois University; and Thaddeus Tukes, a vibraphonist at Northwestern University. [luminarts.org](http://luminarts.org)

**Organic Support:** University of New Orleans Jazz Studies Associate Professor Brian Seeger has recorded a new CD with the Organic Trio. The disc, which received international financial support from the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation and the Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique in Luxembourg, showcases the compositional skills of all three members of the group: guitarist Seeger, drummer Paul Wiltgen and organist Jean-Yves Jung. The group is in discussions with record labels in Japan and Europe and is looking forward to a release date in late fall. The Organic Trio also receives support from the Luxembourg Export Office. [organictrio.com](http://organictrio.com)

**Calling Doctor Mason:** Berklee College of Music President Roger H. Brown will present drum legend Harvey Mason with an honorary doctor of music degree at Berklee's commencement ceremony on May 9. Mason's groundbreaking, distinctive style has influenced generations of drummers. He remains active as co-leader and founding member of the jazz supergroup Fourplay, as well as with his newest recording project, *Chameleon*. [berklee.edu](http://berklee.edu)

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## Wallace Roney

At 54, trumpeter Wallace Roney has released some 20 albums as a leader and spent consequential sideman time with Tony Williams, Ornette Coleman, V.S.O.P., the Miles Davis Tribute Band and Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.

### Ira Sullivan

"That's Earl, Brother" (*Circumstantial*, Nessa, 1977/2014) Sullivan, trumpet; Jodie Christian, piano; Simon Salz, guitar; Dan Shapera, bass; Wilbur Campbell, drums.

"That's Earl, Brother." Dizzy named it after Earl Bostic, who was always around Bird. I couldn't identify any of the musicians. It was kind of corny; it didn't kill me. Could the trumpet player be Arturo Sandoval? 2 stars [after] With the advances in music over the last 50 years, you expect something more in the language. But that doesn't apply to Ira. He's a great trumpet player.

### Avishai Cohen's Triveni

"Dark Days, Darker Nights" (*Dark Nights*, Anzic, 2014) Cohen, trumpet, electronics; Omer Avital, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

I liked the integration of the electronics. It was OK. He was stretching. 2½ stars.

### Sean Jones

"60th And Broadway" (*Im-Pro-Vise: Never Before Seen*, Mack Avenue, 2014) Jones, trumpet; Orrin Evans, piano; Luques Curtis, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums.

It was OK. I don't like criticizing people's trumpet playing, because everybody has a right to hear what they hear and play what they want. But I feel it's predictable. I need to hear more imagination; maybe stretch it out. 2 stars.

### Tom Harrell

"Sunday" (*Trip*, High Note, 2014) Harrell, trumpet; Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Ugonna Okegwo, bass; Adam Cruz, drums.

The tenor is playing a Joe Lovano-Warne Marsh style. I don't like the trumpet player. ½ star. [after] Tom didn't sound good. Mark Turner didn't sound good, either. I didn't know it was Mark. It just sounded like another guy trying an alternative to playing modern from a Wayne Shorter-Coltrane point of view by going back to this Warne Marsh thing, which was done before. Not Lee Konitz. Warne Marsh. It was good for Warne, because he was coming out of Prez and trying to keep up with Lee. But today, man, you've got to put some fire in it, some guts. You've got to hear the field hollers and some stuff. Critics say this guy does this or that, but they don't know what they're talking about. Most of these saxophone players aren't playing innovative. Wayne is still the most innovative player.

### Paolo Fresu

"Blame It On My Youth" (*Desertico*, Tuk Music, 2013) Fresu, flugelhorn; Bebo Ferra, guitar; Paolino Dalla Porta, bass; Stefano Bagnoli, drums.

Is that Chris Botti? It sounds a little rehearsed to me. Like he's reading. I hope I don't play like that. 2 stars.

### Jeremy Pelt

"Ruminations On Eric Garner" (*Tales, Musings And Other Reveries*, High Note, 2015) Pelt, trumpet; Simona Premazzi, piano; Ben Allison, bass; Billy Drummond, Victor Lewis, drums.

He's playing like Freddie. I know every lick. [plays a few Freddie Hubbard passages on his trumpet] It might be a young guy; he'll grow out of it. 2½ stars. I like the trumpet-drum thing, but he could have done it with one drummer ... if he had Tony Williams or Elvin. Victor Lewis and Billy Drummond? They're two of my favorites. I like that they didn't get into each other's way.

### Eddie Henderson

"Sunburst" (*Collective Portrait*, Smoke Sessions, 2015) Henderson, trumpet; Gary Bartz, alto saxophone; George Cables, Fender Rhodes; Doug Weiss, bass; Carl Allen, drums.

Gary Bartz on alto. That's George Cables. That's not a new record. It is? George still sounds good! I can't tell who the drummer is. He's responding in nice places. He's musical. Ah, that's Eddie Henderson. 4 stars for Gary and George. Eddie is one of the first to blend elements of Lee



Wallace Roney at the Detroit Jazz Festival on Aug. 31

LEN KATZ/DETROIT JAZZ FESTIVAL

Morgan, Freddie and Miles and play it in a way that made it possible for some people to use him as a model.

### Brian Lynch

"La Siteria" (*Bolero Nights: For Billie Holiday*, Venus, 2009) Lynch, trumpet; Ivan Renta, alto saxophone; Alex Hoffman, tenor saxophone; Marshall Gilkes, trombone; Ron Blake, baritone saxophone; Zaccai Curtis, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Little Johnny Rivero, Marvin Diz, percussion.

I feel the trumpeter means what he's playing. It's not innovative, but I like his sound. It has more guts than the other things I've heard. 3 stars. If it was an older trumpet player, I'd have given reverence. But I'll give Brian another reverence, because what he has, the other trumpet players you've played lack. He wasn't necessarily playing anything spectacular, but you could hear in the openness of his sound that he'd played with Art Blakey and Horace Silver and these guys.

### Ambrose Akinmusire

"Marie Christie" (*The Imagined Savior Is Far Easier To Paint*, Blue Note, 2014) Akinmusire, trumpet; Sam Harris, piano.

Is that Ambrose? I really like the way he plays. You can hear he studied the history of the music. I heard him play a Monk lick; that was nice. 4 stars.

### Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra

"Blood Cry (*La Llamada De La Sangre*)" (*Vitoria Suite*, EmArcy, 2010) Wynton Marsalis, Sean Jones, Ryan Kisor, Marcus Printup, trumpets; Vincent Gardner, Chris Crenshaw, Elliot Mason, trombones; Sherman Irby, Ted Nash, Walter Blanding Jr., Victor Goines, Joe Temperley, saxophones and woodwinds; Dan Nimmer, piano; Carlos Henriquez, bass; Ali Jackson, drums.

After a while I realized that was Wynton. I can hear he's trying to add other things, other dimensions in his playing. 3 stars.

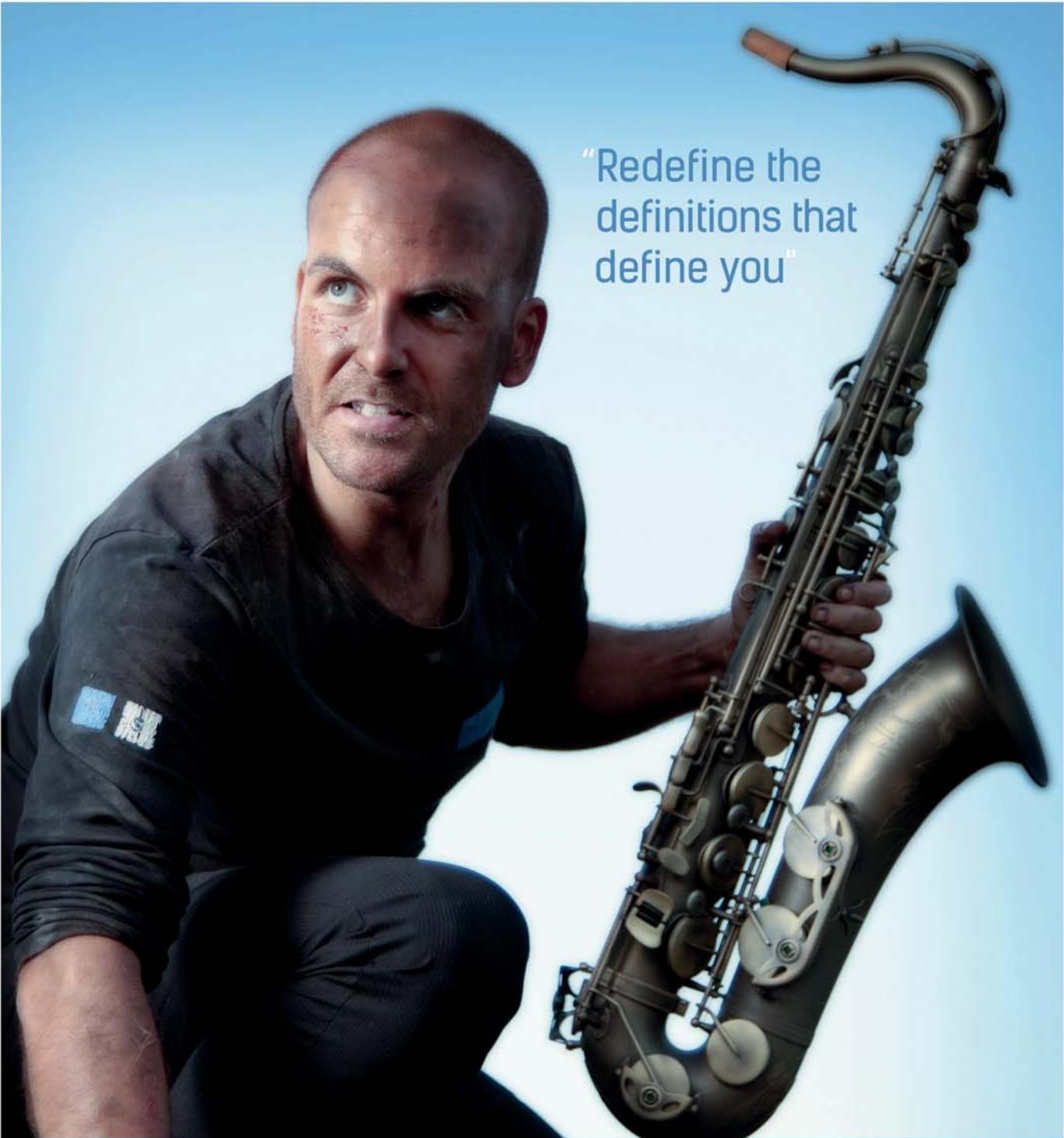
### Christian Scott

"Spy Boy/Flag Boy" (*Christian aTunde Adjuah*, Concord, 2012) Scott, trumpet; Matthew Stevens, guitar; Lawrence Fields, piano; Kristopher Keith Funn, bass; Jamire Williams, drums.

Every trumpeter you've played me so far, except for Paolo Fresu, sounds like Freddie Hubbard. To a lesser degree, Ambrose, but even Ambrose has some Freddie. Whoever this is, I hear a lot of Terence Blanchard via Wynton. Wynton's another strong influence on a lot of players. I like the groove, but the piece ain't goin' nowhere. 2½ stars.

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