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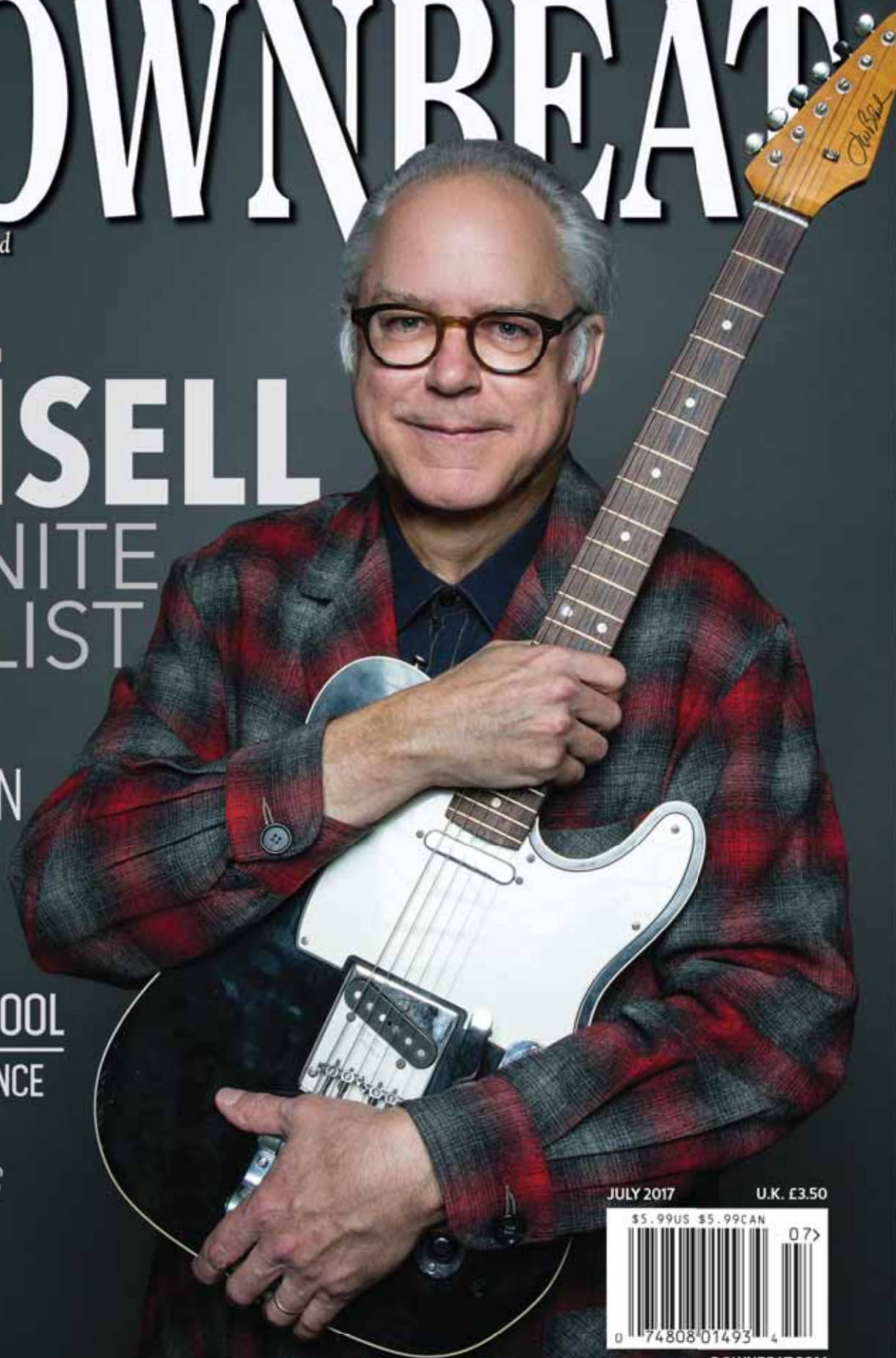
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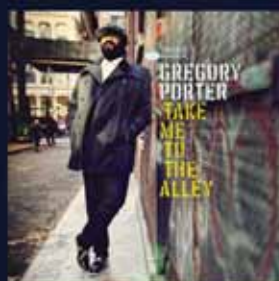
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## TONY ALLEN A TRIBUTE TO ART BLAKEY

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JULY 2017

# Inside

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#### *Infinite Set List*

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

Guitarist Bill Frisell discusses his compelling new album, *Small Town*, a duo project recorded with bassist Thomas Morgan at New York's Village Vanguard. The iconic, wildly eclectic guitarist is also the subject of a new documentary, *Bill Frisell, A Portrait*, directed by Emma Franz.

Bill Frisell (left) and Thomas Morgan have a new live album, *Small Town*.



Cover photo of Bill Frisell shot by Jimmy and Dena Katz at The Jazz Gallery in New York City on March 18. Info for this venue is at [jazzgallery.nyc](http://jazzgallery.nyc).

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## First Take > BY BOBBY REED

Regina Carter (right) conducts a workshop in Havana on April 28.



## Reaching Youngsters

**AS JAZZ FANS, THERE ARE SEVERAL IMPORTANT EVENTS THAT** we eagerly look forward to each year. They include the Grammy awards ceremony, the DownBeat Critics Poll results, the DownBeat Readers Poll results, the Newport Jazz Festival, the Montreal Jazz Festival, the Monterey Jazz Festival, the Berlin Jazz Festival and the announcement of the new class of NEA Jazz Masters.

For the past six years, there has been another key event: International Jazz Day, which takes place annually on April 30. This year's Global Host City was Havana, Cuba, and the all-star concert was held at the Gran Teatro de la Habana Alicia Alonso. And what a bash it was, as reported by DownBeat contributor John Murph (see page 14). The concert, which was hosted by Will Smith, featured dozens of brilliant musicians from around the world, including Herbie Hancock, Chucho Valdés, Roberto Fonseca, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Orlando "Maraca" Valle, Cassandra Wilson, Marcus Miller, Esperanza Spalding, Youn Sun Nah, Richard Bona, Melissa Aldana and Dhafer Youssef. (A two-hour video of the concert is archived and can be streamed at [jazzday.com](http://jazzday.com).)

While the concert got a huge amount of media attention—and deservedly so—it's important to highlight the fact that small educational workshops have always played a central role in International Jazz Day.

As Murph noted in his recap (a longer version of which is posted at [downbeat.com](http://downbeat.com)), this year's Jazz Day featured more workshops, clinics and jazz education events than ever before. As shown in the photo above, acclaimed violinist Regina Carter conducted a workshop at Havana's Universidad de las Artes on April 28. She also performed at the all-star concert. It is deeply inspiring to see someone like Carter, who can play music at the highest level, yet is also generous enough with her time to mentor young musicians. That kind of personalized attention can make all the difference in the life of a youngster.

Numerous educational events were also held in the States on Jazz Day. In the School Notes column (page 86), we've included a photo of narrator Tracy Williams-Murphy and *The Incredible Journey Of* jazz ensemble performing at the Portland Art Museum on April 30. This free program, which is presented throughout the Portland, Oregon, metro area (and supported by PDX Jazz), educates kids about the history of jazz. The band onstage delivers enough fireworks to hold the attention of even a restless child. It is these kinds of events—which touch listeners of all ages—that ensure future generations will become interested in jazz, learn how to play it (or at least appreciate it), and keep it moving forward.

We're already working on plans to help make April 30, 2018, the most impactful Jazz Day ever.

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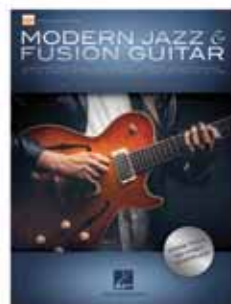
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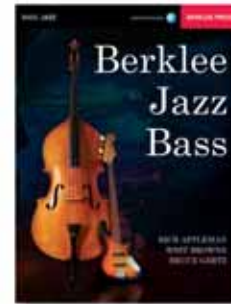
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## Chords & Discords >

### Schneider's Admirable Individuality

Allen Morrison did a fine job with his cover story on Maria Schneider (December). He presented her as a musician dedicated to her art, someone who is self-critical, and a warm human being.

The Maria Schneider Orchestra's album *The Thompson Fields* is Gil Evans-esque, yet it establishes the bandleader's individuality.

The experience of playing this music for young ears—I shared it with my children, who are tuned into mostly popular stuff—had the same “Wow” effect that Schneider describes it having on her friend's 12-year-old son.

VICTOR SNIIECKUS  
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Maria Schneider

### Compelling Sounds

I would like to correct an error in John Ephland's review of The Jazz Passengers' album *Still Life With Trouble* in the May issue. Ephland incorrectly attributed the overriding sounds in “Spring Flowers” to a cameo appearance by guitarist Marc Ribot.

While I appreciate Ribot's genius and longtime contributions to the band (he was one of the original members), the sounds on this particular cut were created by percussionist E.J. Rodriguez on a waterphone, which I then processed through a modulated delay processor (Valhalla FreqEcho by Sean Costello). If the reviewer believed this to be Mr. Ribot's work, then I will take that as a compliment of the highest order.

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### Echoing the Sentiment

I'm writing to give a big “thumbs up” to what Ramakumar Jones wrote (Chords & Discords, May) regarding the feelings of regret guitarist Larry Coryell (1943–2017) expressed in his Chords letter (April), in the aftermath of political comments he had made in a DownBeat interview.

What a beautiful letter from Mr. Jones! His letter was right on about the courageous expression of jazz.

Musicians have the right to express their opinions. I was surprised by Coryell's letter, and I wish I knew why he felt a need “to walk back” some of the statements he had made in the interview. I suspect that he got hate mail. Today's trolls can scare the hell out of you.

DON ELLIS  
LOS ANGELES

### Remembering Blythe

With sadness, I am writing this letter about the passing of an artist whose music gave me a lot of joy: Arthur Blythe (Riffs, June).

Blythe—along with Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, Sonny Fortune, Julius Hemphill and Henry Threadgill—was one of my favorite alto saxophonists when I was getting into jazz as a teenager in the 1970s.

Your brief obituary mentioned his album *Lenox Avenue Breakdown*, but *Bush Baby* was, and is, the album that I would recommend. It features lots of Blythe on alto sax, of course, but backing him are Bob Stewart on tuba and Ahkmed Abdullah on conga drums!

Reflecting Blythe's personality, this album was completely original and fearless.

As I was reading Blythe's obituary, I was struck by the impact he had on my life. I know that it's not possible for DownBeat to do this with every jazz musician who passes, but a longer, more in-depth piece would be appropriate and very welcome—not only to those whose lives Blythe's music affected in the '70s, but also to younger fans who might not know

### Corrections

- In the Historical column of the June issue, a review of Louis Armstrong's *The Standard Oil Sessions* (Dot Time Records) contained errors. The original audio, which was recorded Jan. 20, 1950, did not include the song “Sleepy Time Down South.”
- Due to a typographical error, two names were incorrect in the results of the DownBeat Student Music Awards (June). In the category Original Composition—Small Ensemble, Graduate College division, the winners from Texas Christian University are Juan Chaves and Daniel Pinilla, for their composition “Not Even A Portrait.”

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

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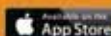
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# Beat

## Stars Salute Ella at Lincoln Center

Harry Connick Jr. strode onto the stage of Rose Hall on the evening of April 26 and proclaimed to attendees of Jazz at Lincoln Center's annual fundraising gala, "Tonight we are here, as we always are, to swing. That means to have a good time."

The annual black-tie event raises money in support of the worldwide educational and advocacy components of Jazz at Lincoln Center's estimable mission. This year's concert, titled "Ella at 100: Forever The First Lady of Song," celebrated the timeless legacy of one of music's most celebrated artists with a program of gems culled from the voluminous oeuvre of Ella Fitzgerald (1917-'96), performed by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis and a roster of guest vocalists that spanned generations and genres.

The evening had already gotten off to rousing start with Camille Thurman's performance of "Lady Be Good," which showcased the rising star on tenor saxophone and vocals prior to the opening monologue by Connick, who served as master of ceremonies. That was followed by Broadway star Audra MacDonald's melancholic rendering of "My Funny Valentine." Then, cabaret icon Marilyn Maye delivered a swinging Johnny Mercer medley that included "Day In, Day Out," "Beautiful Baby," "Jeepers Creepers" and "Come Rain Or Come Shine."

After NEA Jazz Master Benny Golson was presented with the JALC Award for Artistic Excellence, the stage was turned over to vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant and pianist Sullivan Fortner, who delivered a performance of "I've Got Your Number" that felt both contemporary and classic as it moved from hushed intimacy to a gleeful exuberance. The uplifting feeling continued with vocalist Roberta Gambarini and drummer Kenny Washington's treatment of



"Almost Like Being In Love."

Respective performances by opera singer Renée Fleming and bluegrass-country star Allison Krauss of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's "Day Dream" and Harold Arlen and Mercer's "This Time The Dream's On Me" showed the range of Fitzgerald's influence.

Diana Krall shined on piano and vocals during a winning rendition of "I Was Doing All Right," and Connick revealed his prowess as an arranger, as well as vocalist, on "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)" before Gambarini closed out the program scatting up a storm on "Old MacDonald Had A Farm."

As attendees made their way to their resplendent gala dinner tables, Wynton Marsalis and fellow orchestra members led a joyous, New Orleans-style second line parade that twisted through Rose Hall, greeting many

of JALC's generous patrons.

Taking a moment to muse on what it is about jazz that brought together such a diversity of supporters, Marsalis noted, "It's the quality. If you can play it on a high enough level, people will come to it. So it's all a matter of the quality of your playing and meaning in what you're playing. People know it's part of the history of this country and its culture, with great figures [like] Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Thelonious Monk. Everybody knows about those people, but we have to maintain it or it will go away."

Reflecting of the importance of private-sector fundraising in the face of decreasing government support for the arts, Marsalis said, "It's always shrinking for us. You've got to go out there and get people and recruit them and get them involved."

—Russ Musto



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Peter Bernstein

**Life Signs:** On July 28, Smoke Sessions will release guitarist Peter Bernstein's double album *Signs LIVE!*, which was recorded at Jazz at Lincoln Center with pianist Brad Mehldau, bassist Christian McBride and drummer Gregory Hutchinson. The only previous time that this quartet had played together was when they recorded Bernstein's 1995 album *Signs Of Life* (Criss Cross Jazz). The two-hour program includes songs that appeared on *Signs Of Life* ("Blues For Bulgaria," "Jive Coffee") as well as other tunes from the guitarist's discography and a pair of Thelonious Monk classics.

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

**Newport Lineup:** The Newport Jazz Festival has announced that Benny Golson, Branford Marsalis, Jimmy Greene, Theo Croker, D.J. Logic and Leslie Odom Jr. are among the artists scheduled to appear Aug. 4–6. "Jazz 100: The Music of Dizzy, Mongo & Monk" will feature Danilo Pérez, Chris Potter, Avishai Cohen, Josh Roseman, Roman Diaz, Ben Street and Adam Cruz.

**More info:** [newportjazz.org](http://newportjazz.org)

**Love Letter to French Town:** Pianist Ahmad Jamal's new album, *Marseille* (Jazz Village/PIAS), was recorded with drummer Herlin Riley, bassist James Cammack and percussionist Manolo Badrena. The album includes a rendition of the standard "Autumn Leaves," as well as two versions of the title track, including one that features a spoken-word performance by French rapper Abd Al Malik. The digital version of the album will be out June 9 with the physical version out July 7. **More info:** [ahmadjamal.com](http://ahmadjamal.com)

**Blues Books:** University Press of Mississippi has published two tomes that will be of interest to blues fans. With *The Original Blues*, authors Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff complete their trilogy on the development of African American popular music. *I'm Just Dead I'm Not Gone* is a memoir by producer, singer and multi-instrumentalist Jim Dickinson (1941–2009).

**More info:** [upress.state.ms.us](http://upress.state.ms.us)



STEVE MUNDINGER

Marcus Miller (background, left), Richard Bona, Esperanza Spalding, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Chucho Valdés, Barbarito Torres, Dhafer Youssef and Marc Antoine perform at the International Jazz Day Global Concert at the Gran Teatro de la Habana Alicia Alonso in Havana, Cuba, on April 30.

## Artists Collaborate, Celebrate at Jazz Day Events in Havana

**AFTER ENGAGING WITH MARCUS MILLER'S** popping electric bass ostinato, Ambrose Akinmusire's piquant trumpet harmonies and Antonio Sanchez's rhythmic thrust on a compelling version of his composition "4 a.m.," Herbie Hancock approached the podium in Havana's Gran Teatro de la Habana Alicia Alonso and recited an African proverb: "A city without music is a dead city." The crowd roared. "And I think we can all agree that tonight Havana is without a doubt the most vibrant, alive and the most spirited place on the planet."

Hancock's pronouncement—made at the sixth annual International Jazz Day all-star concert on April 30—was a reflection of his roles as a UNESCO Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue and chairman of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. Visitors traveling to Cuba as part of the Jazz Day events were frequently immersed in an effervescent music culture that pervades Havana.

"It's important for the world to see the high level of musicianship in Cuba," said pianist Roberto Fonseca, a Havana native who played on the spectacular concert opener "Manteca" and then later on "Bilongo," which also featured Cameroonian bassist Richard Bona. "I feel like I'm making history by being a part of this."

This year's all-star concert was a platform for showcasing homegrown talent. Cuban musicians performed throughout the concert, frequently resulting in some intriguing cross-pollinations, such as "Changüü," on which Tunisian-born oud player and singer Dhafer Youssef's piercing caroling commenced the composition, which eventually showcased essays from violinist William Roblejo and tres guitarist Francisco "Pancho" Amat.

Vocalist Bobby Carcassés fronted a sextet with bassist and singer Esperanza Spalding on "I Adore You." Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Chucho Valdés delivered a memorable, two-piano rendition of "Blue Monk." Singer Sixto Llorente and flutist Orlando "Maraca" Valle led a 13-piece ensemble, composed entirely of Cuban musicians, on the soul-stirring tune "New Era."

But one didn't have to attend the grand concert to hear astonishing music. It could be found in places such as Callejón de Hamel, a narrow alley where rumba groups perform every Sunday; the Fábrica de Arte Cubano, a warehouse art space; the EGREM recording studio, which houses an adjacent performance space; and music venues such as La Zorra y El Cuervo, Jazz Café and Delirio Habanero. Jazz stars also played at various jams throughout the city, including pianist Christian Sands, bassist Ben Williams and saxophonists Antonio Hart and Melissa Aldana.

As part of the Jazz Day events, the Monk Institute offered programs at schools throughout Cuba. "This year's educational component was our biggest ever, with more workshops and clinics," said JB Dias, the Monk Institute's vice president of education and curriculum development.

"Last year, when we [performed at the Jazz Day all-star concert] at the White House, I remember thinking, 'Man, it's going to be hard topping that, with President Obama being there,'" Miller recalled. "When they announced [Havana as the host city], I thought it was great because it was almost like a continuation. Thanks to the efforts of the Obama administration, the communication lines between Cuba and the U.S. are opened back up." —John Murph



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# Jazzahead! Draws Record Number of Attendees

**ANY PROFESSIONAL WHO WANTS TO** assess the state of the jazz industry can gather a profusion of information at jazzahead!, the annual gathering of music industry pros that takes place in Bremen, Germany. For the past 11 years, this conference/festival/networking event has drawn artists, managers, label executives, publicists and festival organizers from around the world, helping to foster cross-communication and drive business.

For the 2017 edition (April 27–30), representatives from 1,300 exhibiting companies (including DownBeat) gathered in the Messe Bremen conference hall—the highest number to date—with nearly 3,000 participants from more than 60 countries. With so many jazz professionals in such close proximity, it's no wonder that so many business deals were made, and not just for European participants. A growing U.S. presence at jazzahead! means Stateside artists and professionals are becoming more proactive about international touring and music distribution.

"Everything you need to know about European jazz is there," said exhibitor Jo Bickhardt, owner of Dot Time Records and an attendee for the fifth time. "It allows us to inter-face with media, journalists and radio personnel and involve them in what we're doing. But it also



Aki Rissanen (left), Antti Lötjönen and Teppo Mäkynen perform at jazzahead! in Bremen, Germany, on April 27.

COURTESY JAZZAHEDI

allows us to hear their feedback, face-to-face. You can't do that long-distance."

The conference has grown dramatically since its inception in 2006, when it consisted of a mere 91 exhibiting companies, primarily from Germany, Austria and Italy. It has since added a host of new programming elements, including a partner country showcase. This year's spotlight was on Finland.

The caliber of performers, meanwhile, has remained unfailingly high. This year's fest included appearances by Julian Lage, Robert Hurst, Camila Meza, Julia Hülsmann, Gilad Hekselman, Leo Genovese, David Helbock and Marilyn Mazur. Among the Finnish stars were

pianists Aki Rissanen and Iiro Rantala and saxophonist Mikko Innanen, who appeared with his formidable sextet, GOURMET. For many international talent managers and booking agents, this spotlight served as an in-person introduction to the bounty of talent currently making waves in Finland.

Jazzahead! Chief Executive Sybille Kornitschky is encouraged by the presence of U.S. labels hoping to expand their rosters. "If American jazz companies want to show off their artists, if they want to build bridges, if they want to book wonderful and amazing bands from Europe—they should come over," she said.

—Brian Zimmerman

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# Weiss Explores 'Fusion-Blues' Sounds with Point of Departure

**WHEN TRUMPETER DAVID WEISS CON-**venes his Point of Departure sextet for its monthly Friday night engagement at Fat Cat, the capacious Greenwich Village pool hall/jazz club, he welcomes the raucous crowd. "It's a scene," Weiss said over breakfast a few days after a recent such engagement. "On the weekend it's so loud in there, you've got to have a loud band like us."

On POD's fourth album, *Wake Up Call* (Ropeadope), the band explores several tunes from the late 1960s, a period Weiss described as being "when bebop or hard-bop had evolved to the most complex harmonic thing on earth, and everybody was trying to break away from it." Among the songs the band interprets are Kenny Cox's "Sojourn," Wayne Shorter's "Two Faced" and Tony Williams' "Pee Wee."

In contrast to the acoustic space he navigates in his two other extant projects, *The Cookers*—most recently documented on 2016's *The Call Of The Wild And Peaceful Heart* (SmokeSessions)—and the David Weiss Sextet—last heard on 2014's *When Words Fail* (Motéma)—Weiss deploys the twinned guitars of youngsters Ben Eunson and Travis Reuter to triangulate between balls-out grooves from bassist Matt Clohesy and drummer Kush Abadey, Myron Walden's inflamed-soul tenor saxophone effusions, and his own piercing, aphoristic trumpet declamations.

## WHAT'S THE ORIGIN OF THE POINT OF DEPARTURE BAND?

In 2004, I had one of those "What else can I do now?" moments, and I thought I should

play in a young band with a guitar player. So I approached a bar called Detour on 13th Street, near my place in the East Village. JD Allen and [drummer] Jamire Williams were on a lot of the first gigs, but finding a guitarist was the problem. The first people who came down were very good players with a hollowbody guitar, playing endless series of eighth notes or very pretty, like Kurt Rosenwinkel—and that's not my thing. So I put the band aside for a while until [Smalls proprietor] Mitch Borden, who was booking Fat Cat, asked me to do something with it, and told me, "There's this cute guitar player; all the girls like him and he plays great." That was Nir Felder, who did not have a hollowbody [guitar]. So we started a Thursday residency at Fat Cat in the summer of 2006. Over the next six months we figured out the material and the three guys on each instrument who could sub if one guy couldn't make it. That's still our foundation.

## HOW IS *WAKE UP CALL* DIFFERENT FROM THE BAND'S PREVIOUS FOUR ALBUMS?

The new record is much more a fusion-blues thing. I'd always wanted the two-guitar sound, but couldn't find a second guitar player. I used to work in a Haitian band that used two guitars in tandem. One guy soloed, so they called one "lead" and one "rhythm," but basically they did intertwining lines that gave the group its sound. They recorded every horn line twice, and put one in the left channel and one in the right channel to create this weird stereo effect. I thought the guitarists could be effective that way, too, on tunes

where you just want power chords. You can't do those intertwining lines for everything.

## YOUR TRUMPET VOICE IS FEATURED IN THIS BAND IN A WAY IT ISN'T IN *THE COOKERS* OR YOUR SEXTET.

The music I write isn't music that I particularly enjoy soloing over. The sextet tunes are very clear and pretty structured. I always joke, "It's saxophone music. I wrote it—now you guys do your thing." I'm totally trying to develop my own language. In *The Cookers* I imply it. But the music in Point of Departure is most conducive to my being able to apply that language.

## WHY DOES THIS BAND PLAY REPERTOIRE AND NOT ORIGINAL MUSIC?

I write originals for my sextet, which is the only band with my name on it. The push and pull between playing this complex, challenging music—and retaining a hummable melody or rhythm or groove that attracts people while we're getting our rocks off—always seemed to me what made the greatest music.

The guys who do the most homework are the most interesting to me, and these kids have a lot of vocabulary. The danger is if they can't break out of the very strong pull of that incredible music and find a creative way to access it. You can do perfectly fine living in that world, but it was a big, open world, all about creativity. As Freddie Hubbard told me, "We were trying something new every day. We never were pat about anything."

—Ted Panken



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## Terry Gibbs Returns with Homemade Recording

**IN 2015, VETERAN VIBRAPHONIST TERRY** Gibbs decided to put his mallets away for good, leaving the family musical legacy to his son, drummer Gerry Gibbs. But a funny thing happened on the way to retirement: Terry got the itch and asked Gerry to bring some players to his house for an informal jam. Gerry's wife posted a YouTube video of the get-together, which went viral a few days later. The group then decided to have a session with the tape rolling, and the result is an album Terry never thought he'd make—*92 Years Young: Jammin' At The Gibbs House* (Whaling City Sound). The loquacious Terry Gibbs was happy to talk to DownBeat about the unique circumstances behind this project and reflect on his storied career.

### WHY DID YOU RETIRE?

Let's face it—I was 91 and I do get tired. I stopped playing because there was nothing I wanted to do that I hadn't done. There's no Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Woody Herman or Benny Goodman to play with anymore. I covered up my vibes but I got a set of drums because I did a lot of drumming as a young man, and I missed it.

I wanted to jam, so I asked Gerry if he could bring a couple of guys over just to play informally. He brought Mike Gurrola, a 25-year-old bassist who's one of the best I've played with in California, and [pianist] John Campbell, who plays for Johnny Mandel. We'd jam—we didn't even talk about the chord changes—and then sit out on the patio and tell stories.

### HOW DID THE ALBUM COME ABOUT?

Neil Weiss owns Whaling City Sound, Gerry's label. He's a big fan of my Dream Band and has all six albums. He'd been trying to get

me to record for years. When he heard about the jam, he wanted to record us properly. We picked out a bunch of tunes that we all liked and Gerry brought a console over to my house and set the levels. There was hardly any preparation: no rehearsals, just call a tune, pick a key and call out the fours and eights. We did one take of each song and we didn't listen to any playbacks. I'm amazed how it came off because with a jam session you never know what you're going to get.

### YOUR PLAYING IS INCREDIBLY THOUGHTFUL ON THIS ALBUM.

We picked out 31 songs, and some of them I'd never played before; I knew them in my head but didn't always know where they were on the vibes. I hadn't played "Imagination" since the '50s. And after laying off [the vibes] for a year-and-a-half, I felt more "lyrical" about the tunes. But you're only as good as the people behind you. If I don't have a good drummer behind me, there's only so much I can do. It was so good to play with John and Mike and Gerry. If I was younger, I'd take them on the road!

### IS THIS THE START OF A NEW CHAPTER?

No more, no more. I've been so blessed in my life; I've been lucky enough to play with everyone I ever wanted to play with, and I was Steve Allen's bandleader for 17 years. In the 1940s and '50s, jazz was almost the popular music of the day. When Charlie Parker played a New York club, you couldn't get in the place; same thing with Dizzy and Bud Powell.

But it's a very hard business for young musicians today. I'd like to see my son do one-tenth as well as I have.

—Kirk Silsbee



# Convergence Factor

The Slovenian pianist Kaja Draksler has forged a dynamic career by keeping her ears open, absorbing sounds and ideas from whatever environment she finds herself in and letting them take root in her imagination. That practice has, in part, allowed her stunning music to reveal an impressive range and openness.

Since she released her remarkably original solo album *The Lives Of Many Others* (Clean Feed) in 2013, Draksler has established herself as one of the most impressive musicians in Amsterdam, where she settled after finishing her studies.

With the release of *Gledalec* (Clean Feed), a dazzling new double CD of art song and improvisation made with a generation- and discipline-spanning octet, there's no doubt that this 30-year-old is a rising star. Indeed, she's one of the boldest young artists in contemporary music.

"I've never really searched consciously for music I liked," Draksler said. Instead she checked out what friends and colleagues were into, which led her to translate early piano lessons into a deep interest in jazz. Studies with the reedist Michael Moore at the Prince Claus Conservatory in Groningen opened up her thinking about jazz, but it was the environment and ideas she encountered while earning a graduate degree at the Conservatory of Amsterdam that really changed her thinking.

"I was immediately embraced by the improv community," she recalled. "People wanted to play regardless of the fact that I was a complete beginner in that musical area, with very different aesthetics. Their music seemed odd to me at first, but I was intrigued by it, and I really liked the energy, the people and the fact that all generations worked together."

Despite her jazz training, there's no missing the way that free-improv and contemporary classical traditions have seeped organically into her work, both in her solo practice and in a growing number of improvisational duo projects—including Feecho, with Dutch drummer Onno Govaert; a project with the superb Portuguese trumpeter Susana Santos Silva; and a new duo with French pianist Eve Risser called To Pianos, which drops its debut record in the fall.

Still, no single project reflects her ambition and range like the octet, for which free improvisations are scattered among original compositions that function as settings for poetry by the Chilean genius Pablo Neruda, as well as Andriana Minou and Gregor Strnisa. The group brings together a multigenerational, international cast



with Govaert, the bracing reedist (and ICP member) Ab Baars, Argentine reedist Ada Rave, Icelandic singer Björk Nielsdóttir and Latvian singer Laura Polence, along with violist/violinist George Dumitriu (Romania) and bassist Lennart Heyndels (Belgium).

"I have had an interest in combining improvisation and composition for a long time," Draksler said. "I am interested in creating a situation where all the members in the group have an influence on the course of a piece, where we all share the responsibility for the shape of the piece. But at the same time, I want each composition to have a 'face,' a specific energy, and I think that the texts really help that."

"I love poetry, but I love the human voice even more. Voice for me is something that brings an instant connection to the music. It's something we can all feel close to, and it brings intimacy. The texts give another dimension to the music, a context, an imaginary world to navigate through."

Nielsdóttir and Polence work beautifully together, harmonizing, singing unison shapes and mixing melody with spoken-word delivery. "I wanted to have a mix of people who are good with blending in, but also a good mix of personalities, age and gender. I find that important for the growth of the group."

Draksler has other exciting projects at work, including two combos that were born in October 2016 at the October Meeting project organized by the Bimhuis. The first is a dynamic trio with the Berlin-based rhythm section of drummer Christian Lillinger and Swedish bassist Petter Eldh, and the second is a wind quartet with Silva, Rave and Trondheim-based Danish reedist Mette Rasmussen.

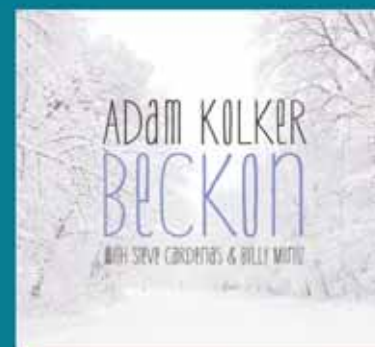
Kaja Draksler



## DOMINIQUE EADE & RAN BLAKE TOWN & COUNTRY

RAN BLAKE piano DOMINIQUE EADE voice  
SSC 1484 - IN STORES June 9

With the varied repertoire on *Town and Country*, Eade and Blake—long-time colleagues both on the stage and as educators at Boston's New England Conservatory—present a broad notion of folk song that's as diverse as the nation itself. There are the expected classic tunes and country ballads, the ill-fated coalminers, the tragic romantics grasping out their last breaths, the cries of faith and determination sent heavenward. But in the agile imaginations of these two inventive artists, who share a love for skewing the traditional through a modernist lens, the folk idea is broad enough to include film noir laments and TV-scaled road songs, moonlit love and Third Stream austerity.



## ADAM KOLKER BECKON

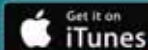
STEVE CARDENAS guitar BILLY MINTZ drums  
ADAM KOLKER tenor sax, flute & bass cl.

SSC 1486 - IN STORES June 2

For his latest recording, *Beckon*, Kolker presents a trio along with a number of pieces featuring a woodwind ensemble. Kolker's overdubbing of woodwinds has been an important element of his recorded output. With this new project Kolker wanted to more fully integrate the wind ensemble with the trio, and he assembled a fantastic group of professional woodwind players, namely flautist Lawrence Feldman, clarinetist David Gould, and bassoonist Jackie Henderson.



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# The Art of Mosaic-Making at Vossa Jazz

**PART OF WHAT MAKES VOSSA JAZZ SUCH** a distinctive and important entry in the ranks of the Norwegian—and global—jazz festival scene is the fact of its very resistance to being boxed for easy consumption.

Early April's 44th edition, one of the strongest in recent years, followed with the unstated but deeply felt agenda of surveying the breadth of jazz and related music.

Held in the charming lakeside western Norwegian town of Voss, and with a special focus on things Norwegian, Vossa Jazz is more an intelligently designed mosaic than a standard jazz festival, and the mosaic worked in an especially beautiful way in the latest incarnation.

Norwegian favorites on the program included almost-octogenarian vocal legend Karin Krog and mystical trumpeter Nils Petter Molvaer (featuring pedal steel guitar player Geir Sundstøl), special projects from Anders Røine (a score to the 1930 Norwegian silent film *Kristine Valdresdatter*, working wonders despite some projector woes) and Terje Isungset's mas-



Arve Henriksen (foreground) plays into an aquarium filled with water at Vossa Jazz in Voss, Norway, on April 9.

ADNE DYRNESLI

terful new commissioned work, stocked with sonic wonder and famed Norwegian players.

Pop music fit into the programming, tastefully, this year in the form of the primary commissioned piece *Garden Of Earthly Delights*, an entrancing and ambitious art pop suite with Biblical overtones by Susanna (aka Susanna Wallumrød) and her all-female ensemble the Brotherhood of Our Lady.

Dance pop came in a stylized but relatively straightforward band Highasakite and, in the festival finale, an appearance by an enticing merger project between singer Solveig Slettahjell, blues guitarist Knut Reiersrud and

the band In the Country (led by ambi-style keyboardist Morten Qvenild).

Free-improv music was in the air as well, courtesy of a bold and bracing solo show by pianist Matthew Shipp (one of very few U.S.-based artists appearing at the fest this year) and with the riveting presence of young firebrand alto saxophonist Mette Rasmussen.

The highlight of Vossa Jazz 2017, and a self-contained statement of expansive artistic intent, was Isungset's mesmerizing, nearly 90-minute suite-like piece "Sildrande," commissioned for this festival. Isungset is anything but a conventional percussionist, composer or conceptualist. Among his projects have been the highly unorthodox—and temperature-reliant—"ice music," using instruments involving ice, which he performed on the ski resort mountaintop at the 2008 Vossa Jazz.

With "Sildrande," Isungset has created an impressionistic tone poem, oscillating from carefully staged yet collectively improvisational sections with simple but affecting fragments of melodic structure.

The leader marshaled the talents of such well-respected Norwegian players as trumpeter Arve Henriksen, hardanger fiddle player Nils Økland and In the Country's Qvenild on keyboards. Sissel Vera Pettersen lent her supple vocals to the oblique folk-like melody lines, often in tandem with Henriksen. Also in the ensemble were bassist Mats Eilertsen and fiddler Mats Eden.

"Sildrande" translates roughly to "dripping water," hence the sounds of water, and the use of an aquarium of water onstage. At times, Henriksen played his horn into the water, to fluid effect, and in a comic Dadaist moment, sloshed his instruments around in the onstage bath. Nature's influence, and sonic palette, are never far from Isungset's sense of a musical voice. In an inspiring way, Isungset's powerful "Sildrande" was a contemporary and personalized song of Norway, and a statement of the kind of post-jazz, mystical musical imagination that can emanate from this end of the earth. —Josef Woodard

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# Dharmawan Promotes Indonesian Culture

## A HEADLINER AT THIS YEAR'S JAVA JAZZ

Festival held in March in Jakarta, Indonesia, pianist/keyboardist Dwiki Dharmawan devoted much of his performances to music from his superb 2016 album, *Pasar Klewer* (MoonJune).

An activist and cultural icon, Dharmawan, 50, has been a recording artist for more than three decades. The native of Bandung, West Java, continues to promote Indonesian culture abroad even as he celebrates it at home, seeing music as a bridge to promoting peace and understanding between people of all nations.

DownBeat sat down with Dharmawan at the Fairmont Jakarta Hotel during the festival.

## WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING PIANO?

On my eighth birthday, my mother gave me an upright piano, and I studied Western classical music for five years. I could play Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky. And I really liked Gershwin. A local radio station in my hometown of Bandung always played jazz: Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker and the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

## WHO WERE THE FIRST JAZZ PIANISTS YOU HEARD?

I heard Thelonious Monk on the radio. Wow. I was so impressed. One day I bought an album by Bill Evans, and it included the song "Waltz For Debby." And I fell in love. Then I bought albums by Ahmad Jamal and Cecil Taylor. I was excited. I tried to follow everything [Taylor] did on his piano. [On another local radio station, I heard] this very complex jazz music—Joe Zawinul, the Mahavishnu Orchestra. So, I decided to stop classical piano and started learning jazz piano.

## HOW DID THE NEW ALBUM COME ABOUT?

In June 2015, I was on vacation with my family in London. Leonardo [Pavkovic, the head of MoonJune] contacted me and said,

"You can do some recording in London with some good musicians." I didn't even know bassist Yaron Stavi, drummer Asaf Sirkis, guitarist Mark Wingfield or reed player Gilad Atzmon.

## WHY DID YOU NAME THE ALBUM AFTER THE KLEWER MARKET IN INDONESIA?

I was sitting in this small coffee shop at the market, and I realized the market is not only the place of people selling and buying, but also

cultural interaction. I can see that. Traditional markets are being destroyed by big retail. Like in America with Walmart, in Indonesia we have Indomaret. To me, traditional markets are beautiful: People go to some simple coffee house and sit down to talk. And then some musicians come in, playing traditional music. And people say, "Hello, how are you?" In the traditional, small market, people are always talking and listening.

—John Ephland



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# Remembering Allan Holdsworth

## GUITAR INNOVATOR AND EXTRAORDINARY IMPROVISER ALLAN

Holdsworth had legions of fans, including many fellow six-stringers. Virtuoso guitarists like Frank Zappa, Larry Coryell, Eddie Van Halen, Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Scott Henderson and Kurt Rosenwinkel greatly admired him, and prog-rock fans worshipped him. So it was profoundly sad for guitar aficionados all over the world to learn of Holdsworth's sudden passing—from a heart attack at the age of 70—on April 15.

An enigma who reinvented the instrument with his legato approach, liquid whammy bar articulations and remarkable reach on the fretboard (which allowed him to realize uncommon chord voicings), Holdsworth carved out a personal vocabulary on the instrument during the 1970s.

He worked with such important British progressive rock bands as Soft Machine, Tempest and U.K., as well as fusion bands The New Tony Williams Lifetime (with which he recorded 1975's *Believe It* and 1976's *Million Dollar Legs*) and Bruford (1978's *Feels Good To Me* and 1979's *One Of A Kind*), as well as violinist Jean-Luc Ponty (1977's *Enigmatic Ocean*).

Holdsworth's "sheets of sound" approach to soloing (often characterized by what he called "flurries of notes as a whole") made him the envy of countless aspiring guitarists looking to break away from clichés.

Born on Aug. 6, 1946, in Bradford, England, Holdsworth didn't pick up the guitar until he was 17 years old. As he recalled in a 1985 interview with *DownBeat*: "I played saxophone and clarinet and I wanted to play oboe, but I had problems with my ear. I kept popping it from blowing and getting ear infections, so I had to stop. It was some kind of peculiar physical thing where all the pressure would build up in one place.

"I don't know, I guess I wasn't supposed to play a wind instrument. Ever since I started on the instrument I've been trying to get the guitar to



Allan Holdsworth onstage in Cologne, Germany, in 1992

sound more like I was blowing it than plucking it."

Holdsworth debuted as a leader with 1976's *Velvet Darkness* for CTI and made a more significant mark with 1982's *I.O.U.* (The album included "Letters Of Marque," a tune he continued to play in his live sets throughout the decades, including his final concert, shortly before his death). His major label debut, *Road Games* (Warner Bros.), came in 1983.

A "tech head" who liked to tinker with electronic effects and other gear, Holdsworth also explored the saxophone-like potential of the SynthAxe, which had a breath controller apparatus that allowed him to literally blow the notes through his instrument, as heard on the '80s albums *Atavachron*, *Sand* and *Secrets*.

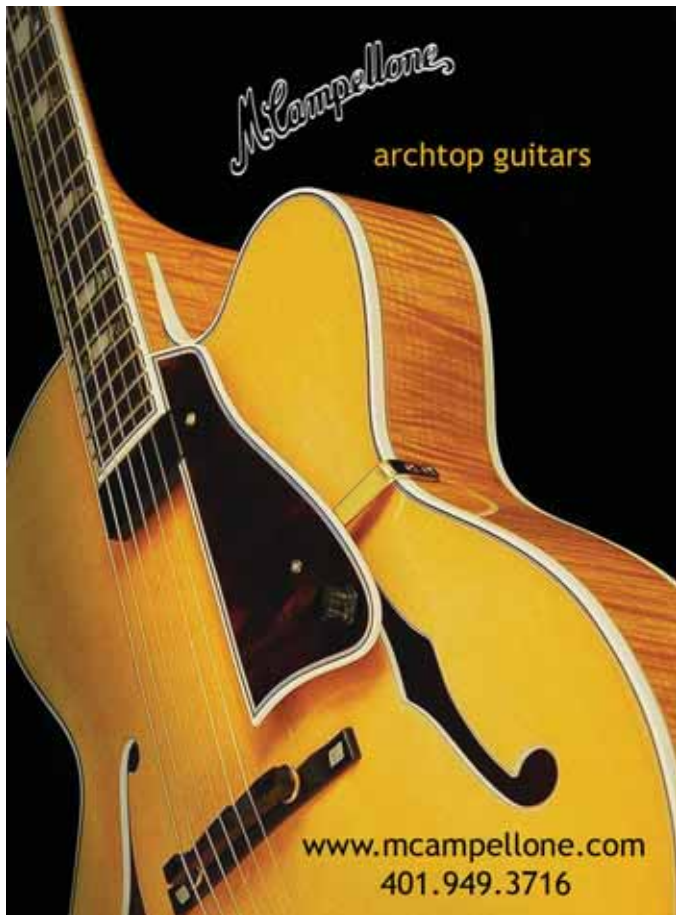
As he mentioned in a 1987 interview, "I always loved music as a kid, but the instrument I really wanted to play was the saxophone. I've always wanted to play a wind instrument of some kind, be it a wind instrument that exists now or one that is played on some other planet somewhere. So I've begun experimenting with this breath controller to get that quality. The way it works with the SynthAxe is the instrument won't make any sound until I blow. And the sound changes with the amount that I blow, both in volume and in tone. So you're blowing into your instrument like a sax player. It's a whole new ball game for me."

Holdsworth subsequently released such brilliant albums as 1992's *Wardencliff Tower*, 1993's *Hard Hat Area*, 1996's *None Too Soon* (which included interpretations of John Coltrane's "Countdown," Django Reinhardt's "Nuages" and Joe Henderson's "Isotope"), 2000's *The Sixteen Men Of Tain* and 2002's humorously titled live album recorded in Tokyo, *All Night Wrong*.

A restlessly creative spirit, Holdsworth was dedicated to improvisation. He told *DownBeat* in 1985: "I want to be able to reach a point where I can improvise without falling back on anything. Because sometimes when you play and you're in a gig situation, you kind of dry up and you fall back on the things that you've learned—all the things that you've practiced. And that's really when I feel bad, because then I'm just doing the parrot thing; I'm not really playing. I live for those few moments when I'm really coming up with new things, playing as many variations on the same theme as I can think of without ever repeating myself!"

Holdsworth's solo work is the subject of two releases that came out earlier this year on the Manifesto label: *The Man Who Changed Guitar Forever!* (a 12-CD box set) and *Eidolon* (a double-CD compilation).

—Bill Milkowski





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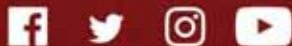


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## JAZZMEIA HORN

### Addressing 'Social' Issues

When Jazzmeia Horn, 26, takes the stage, she owns it. She exudes a fervid yet regal presence that commands respect, which augments her graceful singing.

"It comes naturally for me," she said, referring to the confidence she projects during her performances. "I'm always aware that people are watching me. So from the first moment I step onto a stage, even before the music starts, I say to myself, 'People came to see you.'"

That conviction—combined with her luminous vocals—helped her win the 2015 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition in Los Angeles. There she channeled the interactive showmanship of Betty Carter, the unapologetic honesty of Abbey Lincoln and the sophisticated sass of Sarah Vaughan. She delivered persuasive readings of such intricate standards as Monk's "Evidence," Jimmy Rowles' "The Peacocks" and Carter's "Tight."

"Even though it was a competition, I knew that I would be more comfortable if I treated it like a performance," Horn recalled. "If I thought of it like a competition, I could have easily freaked out and dropped the ball."

Horn's confidence was so resolute that she

didn't shy away from addressing societal ills that were surfacing as a backdrop to the competition. During the finals, her testifying readings of James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice And Sing" and gutbucket retooling of Bobby Timmons' "Moanin'" gave a timely sociopolitical commentary in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, the protest at the University of Missouri campus that occurred several weeks prior to the competition; and even more timely, the multiple terrorists attacks in Paris, which happened just a day before the semifinals.

For Horn, using her platform to address social issues and uplift listeners is a divine calling that was articulated by grandmother. "She would always say to me, 'You are responsible for the generation before and the generation after you.' I'm not a protester. I can't go out into the streets and protest because I have children. But I do know what my calling is. By any means necessary, I will use my music to bring light to people."

The controlled combustible energy that Horn unleashed at the Monk Competition ignites Horn's iridescent debut, *A Social Call* (Prestige). In fact, the disc features "Tight," "Lift Every Voice And Sing" and "Moanin'" as well as

poignant interpretations of The Stylistics' 1972 r&b hit "People Make The World Go Round," Brooks Bowman's jazz standard "East Of The Sun (And West Of The Moon)" and Sister Rosetta Tharpe's gospel staple "Up Above My Head."

One of the disc's more surprising if daring moments is Horn's zesty version of "I'm Going Down," which was a hit for Rose Royce in 1977 and then for Mary J. Blige in 1995. It's a lament that's often rendered with nearly paralyzing despair. Horn takes another artistic route and buoys it with redemptive joy.

"I was still little when I first heard the song, so I didn't really understand what it really meant," Horn reflected. "But later on, I saw [the protagonist as] a woman who was broken. So I took the concept of her going down but coming back—how that could be a message of encouragement, and about taking care of yourself."

*A Social Call* radiates energy, thanks to the fervent accord of Horn's ensemble: pianist Victor Gould, bassist Ben Williams, trombonist Ku-umba Frank Lacy, tenor saxophonist Stacy Dillard, trumpeter Josh Evans and drummer Jerome Jennings. Except for Williams, Horn has worked with these musicians on a consistent basis.

"I'd actually started the creative process of this album before the [Monk] Competition," Horn said. "In the case that I would win, I already knew which songs I wanted to record and who I wanted to play on the album."

Williams commends Horn on her artistic maturity. "It feels like she has a soul that's much older than she is," he said. "She's very strong, assertive and very Afrocentric. She just has this old soul that comes out in her voice and music."

Horn, a Dallas native, has been thriving in New York for the past eight years, gaining experience working with esteemed musicians such as Winard Harper, Billy Harper and Jimmy Owens. Growing up in a family in which various members played instruments in church and sang, Horn seemed destined for a career as a musician.

"On both sides of my family, there were people who could sing. I don't mean sing. They could really *sang*," Horn said with a chuckle. "When I grew up, I didn't really understand people who could not sing or play an instrument."

It was Horn's grandmother Harriett, a church pianist and organist, who bestowed upon her the name Jazzmeia.

"My grandfather would not allow her to play any music that wasn't sacred music—even though she wanted to," Horn said. "She said that she wanted to give me her gift in music. She pretty much gave me her legacy even though she wasn't able to play jazz and blues. Now I'm living that dream."

—John Murphy



## DOMINIC MILLER

### 'Spectrum of Emotions'

When he's not playing his vintage Stratocaster on tour with Sting—a gig he's held down since 1991—guitarist Dominic Miller focuses on nylon-string classical guitar as a solo artist.

Miller's love of melody and regard for space are apparent on his ECM debut, *Silent Light*, which pairs the guitarist with London-based percussionist Miles Bould in a sparse, impressionistic setting. On spacious originals like "What You Didn't Say," "Water" and "Angel," he brings an uncommonly sensitive flesh-on-nylon touch to his warm-toned instrument. Recorded at fabled Rainbow Studio in Oslo, this gentle offering is less about chops and more about evoking a mood of serenity and peaceful contemplation.

"For me, sound is king," Miller said in March during a tour stop in New York. "That's what I have to offer—sound and space. And for my first ECM recording, I wanted to do something that suits the brand, so I was moving towards their aesthetic, their philosophy. That's because I listened to [ECM albums such as] Egberto Gismonti's *Solo* when I was a teenager and also albums by Jan Garbarek, and I was seduced by that sense of space. So really, I'm just trying to do the same as my heroes."

Born in Buenos Aires, where he lived until he was 11, Miller grew up in the mid-'70s in Racine, Wisconsin. "I understand America in a way that a lot of Europeans don't, because I've lived there, in the Midwest," he explained. "I went to high school there, I got stoned there, I had a good time there. I understand what it is to be growing up in America."

Miller later moved to London, where he picked up his distinctly British accent, then returned to the States to study one summer at Berklee College of Music in Boston. He currently lives in the Provence region of France with his wife and two children.

A globetrotter on tours with Sting and an acclaimed solo artist in his own right, Miller recently performed at New York venue Nublu in a duo setting with Belgian electric bassist Nicolas Fiszman. They not only re-created luminous tunes from Miller's new album—including "En Passant," "Tisane" and an instrumental version of Sting's "Fields Of Gold"—they delivered a faithful rendition of the Beatles' "A Day In The Life," which quickly turned into an audience sing-along.

In the past, Miller produced his own albums, creating dense, groove-oriented affairs involving layers of overdubs. But for *Silent Light*, he turned the reins over to ECM label head Manfred Eicher. The resulting album feels authentic yet ethereal.

"Left to my own devices, I would've corrected some misarticulated notes," Miller said. "If I produce myself, I don't let that stuff go. I'll drop in [an overdub] or just use the best 'B' section from another take. But in the studio with Manfred, there were a couple of occasions when we were listening back and I said, 'Manfred, listen to that ... I've got to drop in there.' And he'd say, 'No, that's what you played. I like that.'"

Throughout their two-day session in Oslo, Eicher would encourage Miller to give the music more space. As the guitarist recalled, "It's very scary just playing one note and letting it hang. Because as you're doing it you think, 'I'm not saying enough.' We all want to say more. We want to fill it with more adjectives or more information, but you really don't need to force-feed the listener. Manfred's approach is to let the overtones speak. It just allows the listener to be involved with it more."

"He gets the essence out of the music and allows you to tell your story without interfering with your narrative—and yet he puts his stamp on it," Miller added. "That's what great producers do."

—Bill Milkowski

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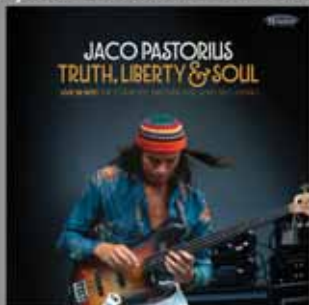
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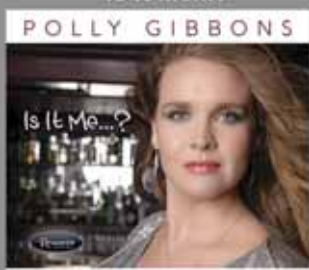
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LORI EAVES



Miya Masaoka often uses electronic effects in combination with the 21-string koto.

## MIYA MASAOKA

### Improv Explorer

Four years ago, saxophonist Anthony Braxton suggested to koto player Miya Masaoka that they improvise a concert together at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. Engaging with Braxton is not an undertaking for the faint of heart, but Masaoka didn't hesitate. "A recording date got set up and it happened pretty quickly," Masaoka recalled.

Their encounter, released as *Duo* (DCWM) 2013 (RogueArt), is a three-section, two-CD master class in the art of free improvisation. Masaoka elicits an orchestral array of sounds from her 21-string instrument—plucking to create harp-like passages, bowing to evoke an orotund cello, and sometimes evoking pianistic chords and bass lines—as she offers responses and counter-postulations to the stream of ideas that Braxton generates on alto, soprano and sopranino saxophones and SuperCollider-driven electronics. "It was stunning to hear the level of Braxton's ideas as they emerged from his horn, so thick and rich with ideas and complexities, with simplicity and emotion emerging at different times," said Masaoka, 58.

Recently, Masaoka brought her koto to a tabula rasa improvisation with flutist Robert Dick and bassist Ken Filiano at the East Village performance space The Stone, adding to a long list of concert collaborators that includes avant-garde titans Reggie Workman, Andrew Cyrille, William Parker and Joe McPhee, as well as 17-string bass koto player Michiyo Yagi.

Masaoka's discography includes a forthcoming album with pianist Myra Melford and harpist Zeena Parkins, as well as past recordings with George Lewis, Pauline Oliveros, Peter Kowald, John Butcher, Gino Robair, Fred Frith, Larry Ochs and Henry Kaiser.

On March 11 at National Sawdust in Brooklyn, Masaoka led a performance of *Triangle Of Resistance*, a through-composed narrative suite for string quartet, percussion, analog synthesizer and koto, released last year by Innova Recordings.

*Vagina Dialogues*, performed at several New York venues in January, is the latest in a series of Masaoka-conceived interdisciplinary works that involve amplification and processing of sounds and signals from the bodies of humans, insects and plants. Masaoka also delivers extraordinary solo performances, in which she interfaces the koto with MIDI controllers, using light and motion sensors, pedals and ultrasound to mold the soundscape.

"It's pretty much my life," Masaoka said of *Triangle Of Resistance*. She's a third-generation Japanese American whose family was interned and imprisoned during World War II. Raised in California, she took classical piano lessons as a child and studied koto intensively in college. By the end of the 1980s, she was performing both on koto and piano. (She took lessons from Sunnyland Slim in her early twenties, and taught blues piano during a two-year sojourn in Paris.) In the '90s, the koto became her vehicle for expressing identity, primarily within the Bay Area's Asian ImprovArts organization.

"It would bore me if I just did pieces about Japanese American internment, or that part of my personal history," Masaoka said.

"At different stages, you need different mental skills, techniques and philosophical approaches to life and to your music that are helpful to survive. The longer I do improvisation, the more I realize what a special endeavor it is to be doing it."

—Ted Panken



Trombonist David L. Harris grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and is now based in New Orleans.

## DAVID L. HARRIS

### *Bold Brass Statements*

David L. Harris' childhood in the hard-scrabble Scotlandville neighborhood of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, allowed little time for music-making. The possibility that he would one day play the trombone for a living was not even on his radar. "All my life I wanted to be a veterinarian," he said.

But fate had other plans for him. The high school marching band director needed a trombonist and he suggested that Harris give it a shot. At the age of 16, Harris took him up on his offer—and never looked back.

Now 29, Harris has developed an ability to sing through his instrument with such expressivity that it arguably renders his actual singing voice—which is excellent—a mere adjunct in his musical arsenal. Both his playing and singing can be heard to great effect on his first album, the self-produced *Blues I Felt*.

The album—11 tracks, including seven originals—gives a full airing to the expressive qualities that have impressed a range of former employers, from Delfeayo Marsalis and Dee Dee Bridgewater to Aaron Neville and Dr. Michael White.

Harris has also impressed those outside the music world, including the producers for playwright Jeffrey Hatcher's adaptation of John Kennedy Toole's novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Harris landed a role in the world premiere of the play, which was staged by the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston in 2015.

That experience inadvertently led to Harris' decision to take the plunge and record. After the play's two-month run concluded, he found that his chair in the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra—with which he had played venues from Newport to Lincoln Center—was no longer open.

"I decided to start making my own way so as not to be dependent on others to keep hiring me to play trombone," he said.

In early 2016, he assembled his band: Shea Pierre on piano, Jasen Weaver on bass and Miles Labat on drums. After a couple of months rehearsing and gigging, he booked three days in Esplanade Studios in New Orleans in March 2016. A year later, the album was released.

*Blues I Felt* is notable less for florid technique or structural experimentation than for the straightforward way in which it plumbs the personal. It does so in self-referential originals like the floating, Latin-tinged opener "A Pisces' Dream" as well as tributes to mentors, like the swinger "Dewy's Notion" (a nod to Marsalis).

Harris' personal approach is also evident in his covers. "Moody's Mood For Love" employs striking vocalese in a tribute to James Moody. "Mood Indigo"—for which Harris recruited onetime employer Shannon Powell on drums—brims with pathos, most pointedly in a muted cadenza that evokes the 20th-century trombonist Tyree Glenn.

But Harris' emotional gift may be most vividly on display on the album's outlier, an unaccompanied trombone improvisation titled "Old Man Speaks." In less than three minutes, Harris, once dubbed "Old Man" by his colleagues in Marsalis' Uptown Jazz Orchestra, offers an essay that marries technique to intent.

Harris places the track's intent in a social context: "There's a lot of racial stuff going on. People getting hurt and stuff like that. I wanted to have one moment to say something without any noise. That's the kind of the moment where I say how I feel, how hurtful it is that history is trying to repeat itself."

—Phillip Lutz



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# BILL FRISELL

## INFINITE SET LIST

BY BILL MILKOWSKI | PHOTO BY JIMMY & DENA KATZ

What is it about guitarist Bill Frisell that generates such respect from fans, critics and fellow musicians? That's one of the questions that filmmaker Emma Franz pursues in her insightful new documentary, *Bill Frisell, A Portrait*. In the film, one of Frisell's heroes and collaborators, guitarist Jim Hall (1930–2013), sums him up this way: “I think of [Frisell] as kind of a far-out, cloud-like eminence. But he can really swing, too. Bill is moving the guitar to a different place from where it had been—really inventive and musical and chance-taking. He has a unique aura about him ... .”



Frisell is the subject of Emma Franz's new documentary, *Bill Frisell, A Portrait*.

With an astounding discography of more than 200 sessions to date as leader and sideman, Frisell has left an indelible mark as a guitarist, conceptualist and uncanny interpreter of melody. His oeuvre encompasses a mind-numbing myriad of musical styles. From his hellacious skronking in John Zorn's Naked City band in the early '90s to more recent and decidedly more lyrical recordings with Zorn's chamber-jazz ensemble Gnostic Trio, featuring harpist Carol Emmanuel and vibraphonist Kenny Wollesen, to heartland projects—like 1997's *Nashville*, 1998's *Gone, Just Like A Train*, 1999's *Good Dog, Happy Man* and 2009's *Disfarmer*—to his duets with Brazilian guitarist-composer Vinícius Cantuária (2011's *Lágrimas Mexicanas*), the chameleonic guitarist continues to defy expectations from project to project. A restlessly creative force, Frisell can be fully engaged with his delightful 858 Quartet (violinist Jenny Scheinman, violist Eyvind Kang and cellist Hank Roberts) one moment, then spew raucous, heavily effected extrapolations on the fly in a solo setting the next (see 2013's *Silent Comedy* on Zorn's Tzadik label).

On Frisell's new album, *Small Town* (ECM), he and supple, in-demand bassist Thomas Morgan explore deep waters together. Recorded live at the Village Vanguard in March 2016, this intimate duo outing has the guitarist and his sympathetic partner creating a near-telepathic bond on an eclectic program that includes Lee Konitz's "Subconscious-Lee," the grooving Fats Domino vehicle "What A Party," a faithful ren-

dition of John Barry's "Goldfinger," the Carter Family classic "Wildwood Flower" and Frisell's lonesome, Americana-flavored title track.

Frisell has high praise for Morgan, who has appeared as a sideman on ECM albums by John Abercrombie, Jakob Bro, David Virelles, Tomasz Stańko, Craig Taborn and others. Frisell, who turned 66 in March, shares a precious chemistry on the bandstand with the 35-year-old bassist. "I'm hesitant to talk about it because it really minimizes what it really is," the guitarist said on a recent Sunday morning in the East Village. "There's something so fragile that happens when we play . . . Sometimes it makes me afraid to talk about it because I don't want to break the spell. It's almost like you want to remain naive about what it is. Because if you figure out how to describe it, then there's a danger of actually trying to do what you were describing rather than just doing the thing itself."

Playing with Morgan, Frisell said, "is like nothing I've ever experienced in another musician before. It's like he's connected to my fingers or my mind. Whatever I do, he's just instantly there. Some people would say if they're always waiting for you to do something it's like some sort of mimicking game or something. It's not that, it's just this constant dialog happening, but it's almost like he sees into the future or something. It's almost like he's time-traveling, where he doesn't play anything that's not in response to what I play, but sometimes he's almost doing it before I do it. It's really far-out."

Morgan grew up in California listening

mostly to Ray Brown, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Wes Montgomery. "I was hardly aware of more recent music," he recalled. "I first heard Bill after moving to New York [in 2009]. Friends at school played me *Angel Song*, the album he did with Kenny Wheeler, Lee Konitz and Dave Holland. I loved it and listened to it a lot. Bill's sound was so personal and expressive. At the first rehearsal where I played with Bill—it was actually Joey Baron's band—he didn't use any pedals and just plugged into whatever amp was there, and it amazed me that it was totally his sound. It just feels like he's putting all his attention and energy and experience into every note he plays as well as everything he hears, and that makes me not want to miss anything he's doing when we play together."

Although *Small Town* includes a few tunes that Frisell has recorded before—such as "Subconscious-Lee," which appeared on 2008's *History Mystery*—the album marks a break from the nostalgia streak that has marked many of his recent major releases. Over the past six years, the guitarist has delivered a series of albums highlighting music that shaped him as a youngster. On 2011's *All We Are Saying* (Savoy Jazz), Frisell explored John Lennon's music. Frisell's 2014 release *Guitar In The Space Age!* (Okeh) featured his versions of 1950s and '60s pop tunes by bands such as The Kinks and The Ventures. And on 2016's *When You Wish Upon A Star* (Okeh), he interpreted soundtrack music from films and TV, such as Henry Mancini's "Moon River," John Barry's "You Only Live Twice" and the theme song for *Bonanza*.

"It's like having cataracts surgery and suddenly being able to see clearly," Frisell said about tackling those vintage tunes. "I'm talking about decades of experience and then looking back at something and seeing all this complexity in it. It's like, 'Oh, I didn't realize that was there.'"

In addition to his work as a leader, Frisell has maintained a dizzying array of recent sideman work with artists such as Charles Lloyd & The Marvels (appearing on the saxophonist's acclaimed 2016 Blue Note album *I Long To See You*), blues belter Bonnie Raitt, Americana singer-songwriter Lucinda Williams and classical cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Frisell has raised the bar on eclecticism, displaying an uncanny ability to not only adapt to any musical setting, but to heighten the creativity of all involved.

As producer and collaborator Hal Willner put it in Franz's documentary: "Whatever it is—on one of his own records or with Bono, Elvis Costello, Dr. John, Marianne Faithfull, Keith Richards, Brian Eno, Lou Reed, David Sanborn, Sting—he makes everything better and takes it to a whole other level of complete heaven . . ." (See sidebar on p. 32.)

Onstage, Frisell tends to speak little, letting his guitar do the talking. At the Village





## 'There's something so fragile that happens when Thomas and I play. I'm afraid to talk about it because I don't want to break the spell.'

Vanguard on the final night of Frisell's two-week residency there in March, the guitarist engaged in three-way conversations with Morgan and drummer Andrew Cyrille. (Frisell played on Cyrille's acclaimed 2016 ECM album, *The Declaration Of Musical Independence*.) Spinning endless ideas off of memorable melodies, Frisell and his copacetic crew created a seamless flow of music by listening intently and reacting in the moment from piece to piece, using the familiar vehicles—"Body And Soul," "Round Midnight," "In A Sentimental Mood," "Moon River," "What The World Needs Now" and Frisell's own "Strange Meeting"—as jumping-off points in their collective search-and-discovery mission.

On *Small Town*, Frisell and Morgan commune in calm, Zen-like fashion on "Poet-Pearl," the longest track on the album, co-written by the two kindred spirits. Frisell's signature nuanced looping—a technique he developed into high art in the aftermath of Robert Fripp's pioneering experiments of the early '70s—is in full effect on his "Song For Andrew No. 1" and on a mournful take on drummer Paul Motian's "It Should've Happened A Long Time Ago." The track stands as a requiem for Motian (1931–

2011), with whom Frisell recorded 14 albums in a protean trio with saxophonist Joe Lovano.

Frisell's finale with Motian was 2011's *The Windmills Of Your Mind* (with Morgan and vocalist Petra Haden), a collection of jazz and pop standards released on Winter & Winter. "It was Paul's last recording, though nobody knew it at the time," Frisell recalled. "Paul just wanted to play these songs in their purest form, and he was so happy with what we did on that record." Motian passed away on Nov. 22 of that year.

*Small Town* is in some ways a throwback to Frisell's very first album, 1983's *In Line* (which includes some duos with bassist Arild Anderson), but it also recalls the wonderful interplay that Hall established with Ron Carter on albums like 1972's *Alone Together* and 1982's *Live At Village West*. "The heaviest thing about Jim was realizing how he was affecting the music by how he was reacting to who he was playing with," Frisell said of his mentor, whom he studied with in 1972 and later recorded with on 1995's *Dialogues* and 2008's *Hemispheres*. "He had a way of supporting it or subverting it or influencing it. He had an understanding from the inside out and could really orchestrate things." That same description could also very

well apply to Frisell himself.

Born in Baltimore on March 18, 1951, Frisell grew up in Denver and studied clarinet as a youth with Richard Joiner of the Denver Symphony Orchestra. His interest in guitar began with his exposure to pop music on the radio and the blues records he heard by Otis Rush, B.B. King, Paul Butterfield and Buddy Guy. Jimi Hendrix also exerted a powerful influence early on, but it was a jazz concert he attended during the summer of 1968 that really turned his head around.

"I was still in high school and had recently discovered Wes Montgomery, which was ... one of those huge turning points. Wes was coming to Denver to play at Red Rocks Amphitheatre, so my dad got tickets and we were going to go together. And then Wes passed away [on June 15, 1968], right before the gig. So I told my dad, 'Well, let's go anyway and see what the concert is.' It was a traveling Newport show with Cannonball Adderley and Thelonious Monk. Dionne Warwick was there, and Gary Burton's quartet with Larry Coryell. Then a couple of months later, Charles Lloyd came to Denver and I went to see him. It was the band with Keith Jarrett, and Paul Motian was playing drums. I didn't know what any of it was. It was right at the onset of me checking out this music ... a lot of stuff was coming at me real fast, and that just flipped me out."

During his last year of high school, Frisell began studying with guitarist Dale Bruning. At the same time he was checking out Gary Burton's *Duster*, *Lofty Flake Anagram* and *A Genuine Tong Funeral*, all of which featured Coryell on guitar. "Then I started noticing that a lot of the tunes were written by Steve Swallow,



## MAGIC BEHIND THE ENIGMA

**It was through a series of serendipitous meetings that Australian filmmaker Emma Franz ended up selecting Bill Frisell as the subject for her new documentary.** Four years in the making, *Bill Frisell, A Portrait* had its world premiere in March at the South By Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas, and is currently making the rounds of film and jazz festivals around the world, with a theatrical release scheduled for the end of the year. (Information is posted online at [billfrisellfilm.com](http://billfrisellfilm.com).)

"I met Bill in Hong Kong in 2004," said Franz, who is also a jazz singer. "He was there playing a gig with his trio with Tony Scherr and Kenny Wollesen, and I was there doing a recording with Peter Scherr, who is Tony Scherr's brother. So Peter and Tony introduced me to Bill."

"Then five years later, I was premiering my film *Intangible Asset #82* at the South By Southwest Festival and I noticed that Bill was playing down the road with Greg Leisz. And there I again witnessed everyone being completely mesmerized—in a different setting and a completely different demographic. And it just hit me like a proverbial bolt of lightning that it would be interesting to try and explore some of the elements that make that happen. I wanted to try to identify some things behind the music that help it resonate with so many people."

Along with testimony from icons like Paul Motian, Joe Lovano, John Abercrombie, Jim Hall, Ron Carter, Paul Simon, John Zorn and Hal Willner, the film includes footage from rehearsals with Frisell's trio of Scherr and Wollesen, his 858 Quartet and the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Gibbs. Shot in a casual, unobtrusive style, Franz's self-funded documentary reveals the magic behind the enigma that is Bill Frisell. "I wanted people to feel that I was just hanging out with a great master," she said. "By experiencing someone's attitude and approach, you learn a lot about what they do." —Bill Milkowski

Carla Bley and Mike Gibbs," he recalled. "There's something about those people that just had a huge impact on the way that I still think about harmony and melody."

After briefly attending the University of Northern Colorado, where he studied with guitar great Johnny Smith, Frisell moved to Boston in 1971 to attend the Berklee College of Music, where he studied with guitar professor Jon Damian. After returning to Berklee in 1975, he began studying with Mike Gibbs. "I took all of Mike Gibbs' classes and I played in his student band," he said. "It was so amazing to get to spend that time with him."

Frisell left Boston in 1978 and relocated to Belgium, where he met his future wife, artist Carole d'Inverno. After a couple of months, he got a call from Gibbs to sub for Belgian guitarist Philip Catherine on a British Arts Council tour of England with the Electric Chrome Orchestra. "That was the first kind of professional real gig I ever had," he said. "That's where I met Kenny Wheeler, who was like a god to me. I first heard him playing with Anthony Braxton in Boston and then he had that ECM record *Gnu High* [a 1975 recording with Keith Jarrett, Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette], which everybody at Berklee had back then. And then to actually meet that guy was something else. John Marshall was playing drums in that band, and I didn't realize at the time I had seen him when I saw Soft Machine open for Jimi Hendrix in 1967. Eberhard Weber was also in that band, and every night Mike would give us this little segment where we'd just play duo. And Eberhard was impressed with what I did, so he asked me to play on a record date he had coming up with Gary Burton, which was *Fluid Rustle*. And that was the first contact I had with ECM."

In 1979, Frisell made the leap to New York. "I was scuffling along for a couple of years. It was like, 'Oh my God, what am I gonna do?' I was living in New Jersey and I'd drive four hours out to the end of Long Island to play a wedding or whatever. I was just trying to get by."

Eventually, he started getting calls from an old mentor. "Mike Gibbs was in New York then and had a gig at Seventh Avenue South, so he called me for that. I showed up, and there was Bob Moses and Steve Swallow in the band. So I met them, and then Moses started calling me for gigs. And then Paul Motian ... meeting him was the biggest turning point in my life. It's just incredible the way that one thing leads to another, especially in New York."

Frisell's longstanding connection with Michael Gibbs, 79, has been rekindled in recent years on a number of fronts. At the 2009 London Jazz Festival they collaborated on a

new orchestral work, with Gibbs conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra. That gala performance at Barbican Hall was captured by filmmaker Franz and provided a stunning climax for her documentary, *Bill Frisell, A Portrait*. Then at the 2013 Uberjazz Festival in Hamburg, Germany, Gibbs and Frisell collaborated once again with Gibbs conducting the NDR Big Band on his arrangements of various Frisell compositions (released on Cuneiform Records in 2015 as *Plays A Bill Frisell Set List*). "It's so amazing what Mike did," Frisell said of Gibbs' inventive orchestral arrangements. "He would find pieces that I had done with my groups and then with that orchestra he did whatever it is that he does ... kind of just spread it out. They call it orchestrating because it's way more than arranging. Like, if I play one note on the guitar, he'll hear some overtones or something and go, 'There's flute, there's this, there's that.' It's just incredible what he does."

Gibbs and Frisell collaborated a third time when the guitarist brought the arranger to Seattle in 2015 to conduct the University of Washington student big band and orchestra concerts augmented by Frisell, trumpeter Cuong Vu, bassist Luke Bergman and drummer Ted Poor. Also on the bill was Vu's quartet, with special guest Frisell, performing all Gibbs compositions. That live recording has recently been released on RareNoise Records as *Ballet*. "I'm so glad we did that," Frisell said. "That music is still in my DNA. It was around 1970 when I started to struggle with those tunes, and some of them I played thousands of times. But then 30 years went by and I hadn't played them at all. In investigating these tunes again I was seeing more complexity than I had ever imagined. But I was also seeing it more clearly. And just to play this music with those guys, I felt like we kind of transcended, that we got past the point of them being just an exercise. Because at the beginning it was this endless struggle of just trying to get the right notes, but at that concert I felt like we lifted off to the point that we could put our own personality into it."

Now, after spending 28 years in Seattle, Frisell and d'Inverno have moved to New York, the city where he launched his career in the '80s. "It's been a weird time," Frisell confessed. "We sold our house as of two days ago, and all of our stuff is in storage. We just decided to do it really fast. So there's this whole history of the 10 years that I was here, and those memories are all flooding back to me now."

Fans in New York have had plenty of opportunities to see Frisell play at jazz clubs and festivals over the decades, but the fact that he is now once again a "local" musician is certainly something to celebrate in all the boroughs. Welcome back, Mr. Frisell. **DB**





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Bobby Watson's new album, *Made In America*, celebrates unheralded African American heroes.



By Geoffrey Himes | Photos by Mark Sheldon

# BOBBY WATSON

## Saluting Forgotten Pioneers

WHEN A COMPOSER WRITES A PIECE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC AND GIVES IT A TITLE, IS THERE ANYTHING INHERENT IN THE CHARACTER OF THE MUSIC THAT DEMANDS SUCH A TITLE? OR WOULD ANOTHER TITLE WORK JUST AS WELL? IF, FOR EXAMPLE, ONE CHURNING, DISSONANT, UPTEMPO NUMBER IS NAMED AFTER AN EX-SPOUSE AND ANOTHER IS NAMED AFTER A CORRUPT POLITICIAN, CAN WE HEAR ANYTHING IN THE MUSIC THAT LETS US KNOW WHICH IS WHICH?

**A**s Bobby Watson worked on an album about underappreciated heroes of African American history, he wanted to tell those stories without lyrics but with music that would justify the dedications. If a singer-songwriter wanted to pay tribute to, say, Wendell O. Pruitt, he or she could craft lyrics that describe how this black pilot overcame discrimination to not only serve in the U.S. Air Force in World War II but to also win a Flying Cross for his daring bombing raids. But for a composer of instrumental music, such as Watson, the challenge of saluting a specific individual is more complex.

For his new album, *Made In America* (Smoke Sessions), Watson came up with an ingenious solution.

At the very beginning of the opening track, the 63-year-old alto saxophonist quotes “The U.S. Air Force Song,” better known as “Off We Go Into The Wild Blue Yonder.” That quote, however, is given the distinct warble of a Pharoah Sanders phrase, with Lewis Nash’s rumbling drums and an ostinato line from pianist Stephen Scott and bassist Curtis Lundy reinforcing the connection to the iconic avant-garde tenor saxophonist.

Watson quickly introduces a second melodic theme, a phrase that, thanks to the initial theme’s “wild blue yonder” suggestion, does sound like a plane taking off and cruising. And when Watson plays a solo, his melodic loops, twists and turns evoke a daredevil pilot’s tricks. As a result, the tune’s title, “The Aviator,” makes unarguable sense.

“I was trying to put something in there so people would know I was talking about a pilot,” Watson explained during a recent phone call from his home in Kansas City, Missouri.

“When you’re soloing, you’re often asking yourself, ‘What can I quote over the chord changes?’ I decided to turn the quote into a head. My main theme is like, we take off, we come down, but that Pharoah Sanders part is like when you’re in the air in a dogfight and you don’t know if you’re going to survive.”

Something similar happens in Watson’s tribute to Major Taylor, the African American bicyclist who became the 1899 world champion in the sprint event at a competition in Montreal. Watson found another tune to quote: “Popity Pop (Goes The Motorcycle),” first recorded in 1945 by singer-guitarist Slim Gaillard backed by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

Nash’s intro for Watson’s “The Cyclist” features a stop-and-go rhythm that suggests a human-powered cycle rather than a motor-powered one. That figure is then picked up by Scott, then by Lundy and finally by Watson, who adds a new melody of his own over the same pause-and-race rhythm.

“It sounds like he’s on the pedals: He surges and takes a breath, surges and takes a breath,” Watson said. “Major Taylor couldn’t ride in the pack, because people would throw water on him or stick something in his spokes to make him crash. So he’d hang back and then fly to the front. That’s what we do in the song.”

“I based that rhythm on the rhythm and shape of the melody Bobby played and how he talked about it being a bicycle,” Nash recalled. “I tried to find the part that might sound like a bicycle. When I found it, he said, ‘Yeah, that’s it.’”

For this project, Watson chose not to salute such frequently lauded icons as Martin Luther King Jr. or Frederick Douglass. Instead, he decided to focus on folks who’d been overlooked. So the album includes nods to actress Butterfly McQueen, jazz guitarist Grant Green, business pioneer Madam C.J. Walker, computer scientist Mark Dean, horse jockey Isaac Murphy and U.S. Deputy Marshal Bass Reeves. The track listing on *Made In America* includes the name of each honoree as part of its song title.

“The famous people have gotten theirs,” Watson said. “They’ve become part of the lexicon and the fabric of the country. But there are other people who haven’t been recognized. And if I can help that, I’ll be glad.”

“When I was growing up,” Lundy explained, “Black History Month was a big thing, but now it doesn’t seem to amount to much. Bobby and I had this discussion about how people forget that this music came from black folks right here in America. So I suggested the title *Made In America*. But how do you translate that into music? Well, music in its truest form is when you take something from the imagination and you make it a concrete reality. Bobby has always been good at that.”

The album includes a composition titled “The G.O.A.T.,” which stands for “The Greatest of All



**‘In history, as in music, a few people get the credit, but a lot of people made it happen—and they shouldn’t be overlooked.’**

Time.” The tune was written for Sammy Davis Jr., who is probably the best known of the honorees on *Made In America*, but Watson still believes that his childhood idol remains underappreciated.

“Sammy was the original Michael Jackson,” Watson said. “He was a child star who could sing and dance up a storm. [Later,] he influenced Frank Sinatra and the whole Rat Pack. He could play the vibes and the drums; he could act; he could do it all. When I started thinking about Sammy Davis, I asked myself, ‘How do you represent that in an instrumental?’ The answer was his tap dancing, and I cast the drums in that role.”

“I’m old enough to remember when you didn’t see that many African Americans on TV,” Nash said. “Davis was arguably the greatest all-round entertainer, so I wanted to make sure I was doing him justice.”

*Made In America* closes with “I’ve Got To Be Me,” which was a pop hit for Davis in 1969 (under the title “I’ve Gotta Be Me”). Watson’s instrumental arrangement has become the saxophonist’s theme song. He hopes that his horn’s singing articulation of the melody will be enough to remind listeners of the lyrics: “I’ve gotta be me/ What else can I be but what I am?”

Robert Michael Watson Jr. was born and grew up in Lawrence, Kansas. As a youngster, his church was so small that there was no distinction between the choir and the congre-

gation, so he learned how to find his note by singing along. He spent a great deal of time outdoors, barefoot.

“We’d spend the whole day playing in the woods, picking apples, climbing over fences and discovering a creek,” Watson recalled. “We’d be out till nighttime. It makes you unpretentious. It makes your music deceptively simple, even if it’s complex underneath. Musicians hear my tunes and say, ‘That’s nice—can I jump in there?’ But when they do, they soon discover there’s more going on than they thought. Pretty soon they’re saying, ‘Hey, can I get a lead sheet on that?’”

Watson met Curtis Lundy at the University of Miami in 1973. The two were part of the first group of African Americans to enroll in the music program there, a group that also included guitarist Hiram Bullock and Curtis’ older sister, jazz singer Carmen Lundy. By then, Watson was already a promising composer (he majored in composition), but Curtis had more experience as a bandleader, so they shared their knowledge and became lifelong friends.

Watson arrived in New York on Aug. 24, 1976. Trombonist Curtis Fuller took the 23-year-old saxophonist under wing and introduced him to Fuller’s bandmates in Count Basie’s band. On Oct. 11, Art Blakey’s 57th birthday, Watson was sitting in at Storyville when the drummer-bandleader, renowned as a nurturer of young talent, came into the club.



"He met me after the set," Watson said, "and asked me if I wanted to join the Jazz Messengers. It took me about a micro-second to decide. Art was the real deal; he was the sound of jazz, a major part of the history. I knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so I hung out with Art as much as I could. I was up in his armpit for four years."

This was the Golden Age of jazz apprenticeship. Bandleaders such as Blakey, Betty Carter, Horace Silver, Sonny Rollins and Johnny Griffin all hired promising young musicians and put them through a rigorous graduate school of onstage and offstage development that would enable them to become leaders themselves. All four musicians on *Made In America* shared that experience. Watson was Blakey's music director when Wynton Marsalis joined the Jazz Messengers; Watson, Nash, Lundy and Scott all played with Betty Carter; Scott and Nash played with Rollins; Lundy with Griffin.

"The generation of Bobby, me and our peers is the missing link," Lundy said, "because we were the last ones to play with the masters. Those experiences give you authenticity—the real thing."

In the decades since Watson emerged as a bandleader in the 1980s, he has hired and served as a mentor to younger musicians who went on to become leaders, such as trumpeter Terrell Stafford, pianist Orrin Evans and vibraphonist Warren Wolf. "Bobby and Curtis mentored us in music," Wolf said, "but they also mentored us in the musician's life."

Watson spent 25 years in New York, playing with a who's who of top jazz musicians, famously leading his own quintet Horizon, which included Stafford as well as drummer Victor Lewis. Among the landmark recordings Watson recorded with Horizon are the Blue Note album *Post-Motown Bop* (1990), and the Columbia release *Midwest Shuffle* (1993). The restlessly creative Watson led the nine-piece High Court of Swing, as well as the 16-piece Tailor Made Big Band, and he co-founded the 29th Street Saxophone Quartet.

Some of his other noteworthy leader albums include *Love Remains* (1986), *This Little Light Of Mine* (1991), *Horizon Reassembled* (2004) and *Check Cashing Day* (2013).

During Watson's stint in New York, he taught at William Paterson University (1985-'86) and Manhattan School of Music (1996-'99). This work led to a significant shift in 2000. As the

recipient of the first endowed chair at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance, he became UMKC's director of jazz studies—a position he still holds.

In 2011, his ambitious, seven-part album *The Gates BBQ Suite* merged his roles as composer and educator, as the critically acclaimed disc featured UMKC student musicians.

As his stature rose to tremendous heights in jazz education, his relocation to Kansas City—away from the glare of the New York spotlight—resulted in less media attention for his work as a composer and bandleader.

"There have been pluses and minuses in moving back to Kansas," he explained. "The pluses have included getting a regular paycheck and health benefits and having a big band at my disposal three times a week for the past 17 years. Another plus has been living close to my parents; I've been able to help my mother after my father passed last October. And I've been able to slow down in my playing and get into the swing thing that's big out here."

On the minus side is the reduced visibility of not routinely performing on New York stages. Stephen Scott experienced the same thing when he moved to Florida a few years ago.

"Sometimes a change in geography is good for the soul," said Lundy. "Guys like Stephen and Bobby have been missed [in New York] because they're part of a lineage that plays at a very high standard."

*Made In America* is a clear illustration of that high standard. "This album started when I discovered Major Taylor," Watson said. "He was a fascinating guy but I had never heard of him. Pretty soon I had a long list of folks, including Katherine Johnson, the woman [portrayed] in [the film] *Hidden Figures*. In history, as in music, a few people get the credit, but a lot of people made it happen—and they shouldn't be overlooked."

Although Watson hasn't received the critical acclaim of, say, Henry Threadgill, he has crafted an oeuvre that has secured his place in jazz history: More than 100 of his compositions have been recorded, and his discography includes more than 100 titles.

*Made In America* demonstrates that his artistic ambition still burns brightly. In addition, Watson has solved the problem of creating instrumental music as descriptive as its titles. Any composer attempting to do the same could learn a lot from Watson's sterling example. **DB**



Saxophonist Bobby Watson (center) performs in Jacksonville, Florida, with Thelonious Monk Institute Peer-to-Peer Sextet saxophonist Robert Gilliam and trumpeter Brett Karner.

## 'HEAR WITH YOUR EYES'

**Former Jazz Messenger Bobby Watson has picked up where his mentor, Art Blakey (1919-'90), left off. Since 2006, Watson has served as artistic director for the Thelonious Monk Institute's National Peer-to-Peer Jazz Education Program, in which he annually takes six of the country's most talented teenage jazz musicians on the road. Like Blakey before him, Watson mentors tomorrow's jazz stars about the music, connecting with the audience and being a professional.**

"Formal jazz education is great and I advocate it wholeheartedly, but there are certain things you can only learn through apprenticeship—like I did with Art," Watson said. "Art showed us the ropes, and that's what I want to pass on to these kids."

The students learn such intangibles as being present in the moment and staying keenly aware of what's happening on the bandstand at all times. "I insist they always be completely engaged, and have eye contact with me and each other," Watson explained. "Art would always say, 'You hear with your eyes and see with your ears.'"

Watson and the young prodigies generally meet and rehearse for the first time on a Sunday. The next day they begin a weeklong tour of presenting "peer-to-peer jazz informances" in high schools across the United States in an effort to develop jazz audiences for the future.

The young performers exemplify the deeply held American values that jazz represents: teamwork, democracy, collective unity with ethnic diversity, the correlation of hard work and goal accomplishment, and the importance of closely listening to one another. Ultimately, the peer-to-peer message is to find a passion for something early in life, believe in yourself, be persistent, and go for it.

"When students hear this message from kids their same age—who look like them and talk like them and are already performing at such a high level—they listen," Watson said. "There's an immediate trust that they have with those of their own generation, as well as a feeling of, 'If they can do it, then so can I.'"

The program has been presented in numerous cities throughout the country. Each tour culminates with a performance at a jazz club in the host city, such as Dimitriou's Jazz Alley (Seattle), Yoshi's (Oakland, California), the Blue Room (Kansas City, Missouri), the Dakota (Minneapolis), the Jazz Kitchen (Indianapolis), Baker's Keyboard Lounge (Detroit), Scullers (Boston) and Blues Alley (Washington, D.C.). **—JB Dias, PhD**

# Anat Cohen

## PERFECT ACCENT

By Allen Morrison | Photo by Shervin Lainez

The “great room” of clarinetist **Anat Cohen’s** ultra-modern Brooklyn loft apartment has many luxurious attributes—high ceilings, open kitchen, a gleaming black Steinway grand piano and a treasured view of the East River—but the most striking feature is an oil painting that adorns one wall.

**T**he painting, by Paul Oxborough, is titled *At Jules*. It depicts Cohen with one of her early New York groups, the Choro Ensemble, performing at the East Village bistro of the title, where the band played a weekly gig from 2001 to 2007. With the group apparently in mid-song, she is portrayed, clarinet in hand, smiling rapturously. The profound, expressly Brazilian swing of choro music—joyous, yet with a bittersweet tinge—is palpable.

One of the most acclaimed clarinetists in jazz, the Israeli-born Cohen has somehow also managed to become one of the world’s foremost practitioners of Brazilian jazz. Indeed, she is now to the clarinet what Stan Getz was to the tenor saxophone in the 1960s: a jazz musician who speaks the language of Brazilian music so fluently that she has become a beacon of Brazilian music to the larger jazz world.

“Anat is 100 percent jazz musician, but she’s also 100 percent Brazilian,” said Marcello Gonçalves, the Brazilian guitarist with whom she has recorded a new album of duets. Cohen’s playing of several different genres of Brazilian music is so faithful that she fits easily into the company of the best native-born musicians. Like Getz, Gonçalves said, “Her accent is perfect.”

A little less than two decades after joining her first Brazilian band as a fledgling Berklee College of Music graduate in Boston, Cohen has just simultaneously released two addictive new albums of Brazilian jazz: *Outra Coisa (Another Thing)*—*The Music Of Moacir Santos*, with Gonçalves; and *Rosa Dos Ventos (Weathervane)*, her second album with Trio Brasileiro, one of Brazil’s most accomplished choro groups. Both are on the Anzic Records label, which Cohen co-founded with her business partner, producer/arranger Oded Lev-Ari.

*Outra Coisa* is a duo album that achieves something very rare: It reduces the big band arrangements of the great Brazilian jazz composer Santos down to just two musicians—Cohen on clarinet and Gonçalves on seven-string guitar. The mastery of the two musicians is such as to render additional instruments superfluous.

*Rosa Dos Ventos* is inspired by traditional choro music but consists of new compositions by Cohen and each member of Trio Brasileiro. The musicians—guitarist Douglas Lora; his brother, percussionist Alexandre Lora; and Dudu Maia on 10-string bandolim (Brazilian





Anat Cohen's two new albums explore Brazilian musical styles.



Cohen collaborated with Trio Brasileiro's Alexandre Lora (left), Douglas Lora and Dudu Maia on *Rosa Dos Ventos*.

CLARA ANGELES

*‘When I play clarinet, I feel that anything is possible. I can take any melody and make it my own. The instrument is an extension of my body.’*

mandolin)—are masters of the choro style, which requires precision but also enough confidence to swing in a way that makes the music “a little dirty,” as Maia put it in a phone interview from his home studio in Brasilia, where the album was recorded.

“I met Anat in New York in 2006,” recalled Maia, one of Brazil’s finest players of bandolim. “I went to see her play with the Choro Ensemble, and I was totally blown away. I mean she can really do it. If you, as an American, see someone from a different culture playing jazz standards, you are probably very picky. You can tell if he digs it or not; you can tell the accent and the vocabulary. I was amazed. ... She was playing choro like I’ve never seen it.”

Choro (which means “cry” in Portuguese) had its origins in the late 19th century and predates the development of samba. A choro revival has taken place in Brazil in recent decades and is spreading internationally. The best analogies are to traditional New Orleans jazz, with its emphasis on collective, simultaneous improvisation; and to ragtime, with its syncopation, copious use of contrapuntal melodies and formal structure (choros are usually in rondo form). New Orleans jazz combined the influences of African, European and Latin music; similarly, choro merged European melodies, harmonies and structures, but with African

and indigenous Brazilian folk rhythms. The two styles had other things in common: They were played for dancing, and the clarinet had a central role.

“I had my first affair with Brazilian music when I was living in Boston” in the late 1990s, Cohen said. “At Berklee, I was already playing Afro-Cuban music. After I graduated, I started to play Brazilian music, and I just felt so at home, right from the get-go.” She gigged around Boston with a quartet led by Brazilian bassist Leonardo Cioglia; they played Brazilian tunes from every era. The gigs there, and later in New York with drummer Duduka da Fonseca, among others, brought Cohen into regular contact with expatriate Brazilians. She soon became a devotee of all things Brazilian.

After learning conversational Portuguese from Barron’s foreign-language books and cassettes, one day in 2000 Cohen packed a bag and flew to Rio de Janeiro. She stayed for two months. She now makes an annual pilgrimage to Rio, where she plays and hangs out with some of the finest musicians in Brazil.

“With the music came the culture,” she said. “For me they were inseparable. I loved playing it, but I also loved the way Brazilian people hung out, their warmth and passion for life. There were always parties. I was such a ...” She trailed off, then explained, “I didn’t even

drink beer before that. I was like, ‘Hey, can I have some water?’ and they’d say, ‘No, there’s only beer!’ And I’d say, ‘Oh, OK [laughs].’”

Cohen’s fluency in Brazilian jazz started with her playing in a Dixieland band in a Tel Aviv high school for the performing arts. “There was something about the polyphony that I loved—people playing lines at the same time but making it work. I play horn, so I don’t [normally] accompany. But when you play the music of New Orleans—or choro music—you can accompany with musical lines. ... I love the way everything fits together, the swing—it’s so happy. That’s the way the 3 Cohens works,” she said, referring to the band she’s in with her older brother, Yuval (soprano saxophone), and her younger brother, Avishai (trumpet). “We have no harmony instrument—my parents stopped at three,” she added.

When she was 16, she said, “a teacher in high school told me, ‘Bring any saxophone, but don’t bring the clarinet.’ Maybe it seemed old-fashioned to him. But that was the last time I brought the clarinet. I liked the saxophone, and I fell in love with Dexter [Gordon] and Sonny [Rollins]. But the clarinet stayed my friend.” She continued classical clarinet lessons but eventually had to choose between it and her new-found love of jazz—which meant saxophone. Jazz won.

Hanging out with Brazilian musicians in Boston, she was introduced to choro and wanted to play it. Her friends said she would need to play clarinet because that was part of the style; the saxophone wouldn’t really fit. “Oh, my god,” I thought. “I haven’t practiced clarinet in a long time.” There’s a physicality to choro—it’s very challenging. So it got me to dust off my clarinet case and start playing again.”

Still, when she arrived in New York in 1999, the sax was her main instrument. She joined the Diva Jazz Orchestra as a saxophonist around 1999. In 2000, the band played the March of Jazz Festival in Clearwater, Florida. There she met Kenny Davern, Buddy DeFranco and Ken Peplowski, three giants of jazz clarinet, and had an experience with them that proved pivotal.

“It was [saxophonist] Flip Phillips’ 85th birthday. We were all on stage with the orchestra playing ‘Happy Birthday.’ And it turned into ‘Rhythm’ changes, and people started to play choruses. Stanley Kay [manager of the DIVA Jazz Orchestra] said to me, ‘Where’s your clarinet?’ I said, ‘It’s up in my room.’ ‘Well, go get it!’

“I ran up to my room, and by the time I got back, everybody is playing solos. So, I go on stage with the clarinet. And nobody has really heard me play clarinet before.” When it was her turn, she took two choruses. “And when I finished those choruses, Kenny Davern pulls me by my shoulders and put me between him and Buddy DeFranco. And from that moment, suddenly, it became like, ‘OK, you’re one of us.’”



Between playing choro in Boston and listening to her clarinet heroes—including Paquito D’Rivera, with whom she now sometimes performs—she changed her opinion of the instrument: “I was like, ‘Wow, the clarinet is actually great.’ They reminded me that it was.”

Cohen began playing with Choro Ensemble in 2000, but she still viewed herself as a saxophonist. “It wasn’t until 2006 that I realized that I was doing most of my gigs with clarinet—I’m playing Venezuelan music, Colombian music, Brazilian music—so let me make a clarinet album. That’s when I turned to Omer Avital, and we recorded *Poetica* [Anzic, 2007], the first album on which I played only clarinet.” The same year she recorded *Noir* (Anzic), on which she played tenor and soprano sax, and clarinet.

“I wasn’t trying to change my career; I just love this instrument. I have a different relationship with it than I do with the saxophone. ... When I play clarinet, I feel that anything is possible. I can take any melody and make it my own. The instrument is an extension of my body; it’s instinctual.”

Cohen’s clarinet expertise has been a key element in her collaborations with Gonçalves, who turned her on to the brilliance of the composer/arranger Moacir Santos (1926–2006).

“One day [Gonçalves] wrote to me and said, ‘I have a dream—an image of playing the music of Moacir Santos with just clarinet and gui-

tar,’” Cohen said. “I thought, ‘Oh, cool.’ Then he sent me a little demo. The next time I was in Brazil, I said to him, ‘Hey, Marcello, don’t you want to hear those Moacir arrangements?’ He said, ‘Sure,’ and I said, ‘OK, let’s go.’” She expected Gonçalves to book a rehearsal studio, but instead, he booked a recording studio and brought his charts. The duo recorded the material in two days.

Gonçalves had spent a year working out reductions of the Santos big band charts. His orchestral approach to the guitar provides bass ostinatos, rhythm chords and lead lines, laying down a groove that allows Cohen to soar.

In *Rosa Dos Ventos*, a follow-up to Trio Brasileiro’s first collaboration with Cohen, 2015’s *Alegria Da Casa* (Anzic), they have continued their deep dive into new original songwriting combining choro with other styles. Their intention, explained Maia, here and on the band’s own recent album, *Caminho Do Meio* (triobrasileiro.com), is to extend the possibilities of choro, incorporating influences from Spain, India, salsa music and even rock.

“We were looking not only at the shape of the music, but the texture,” he said. When Cohen solos on *Rosa Dos Ventos*, she weaves in and out of the music in a way that reminds Maia of Wayne Shorter. “She’s not so much leading the whole thing, but making it more colorful,” he added. The mood often shifts dramatical-

ly, like the weathervane of the title, from the jubilation of “Choro Pesado” to the *saudade* of “Teimosa,” and sometimes within a single song (Maia’s rollicking, then haunting, “Das Neves”).

As central to her career as Brazilian music has become, the restless Cohen is equally involved with modern and traditional American jazz. Her next album, due in the fall, will be the first recording of her new tentet, which includes horns, accordion, vibraphone and cello, as well as a rhythm section.

As the interview concluded, Cohen retrieved a cherished memento: a framed DownBeat magazine cover from 1961 that was given to her by a fan. The cover image is a drawing of a clarinet player facing some symbolically empty folding chairs, with the headline “The Clarinet in Jazz—What Happened?”

After a long period of decline engendered by bebop, which favored speedy saxophone lines, the clarinet appears to be regaining favor, thanks to players like Cohen and D’Rivera, Peplowski, Don Byron and Marty Ehrlich. Cohen believes its future is promising as musicians not only rediscover traditional jazz, but also experiment with it in other styles.

“It’s at least as promising as the future of the saxophone or the trombone,” she said. “It’s a diverse instrument. Slowly, people will stop associating it with music of the past and see it more as part of the music of the present.” **DB**

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# C

## Christian Sands

### DRIVING IN DIFFERENT LANES

By Dan Ouellette | Photo by Anna Webber

The word “reach” is defined in its verb form as a stretch to grasp something, and as a noun it refers to the extent of range. The one-word title of pianist Christian Sands’ new album, *Reach* (Mack Avenue), seems to encompass both meanings of the word, as it conveys the evolving story of a 28-year-old artist whose jazz vocabulary is influenced by many genres.

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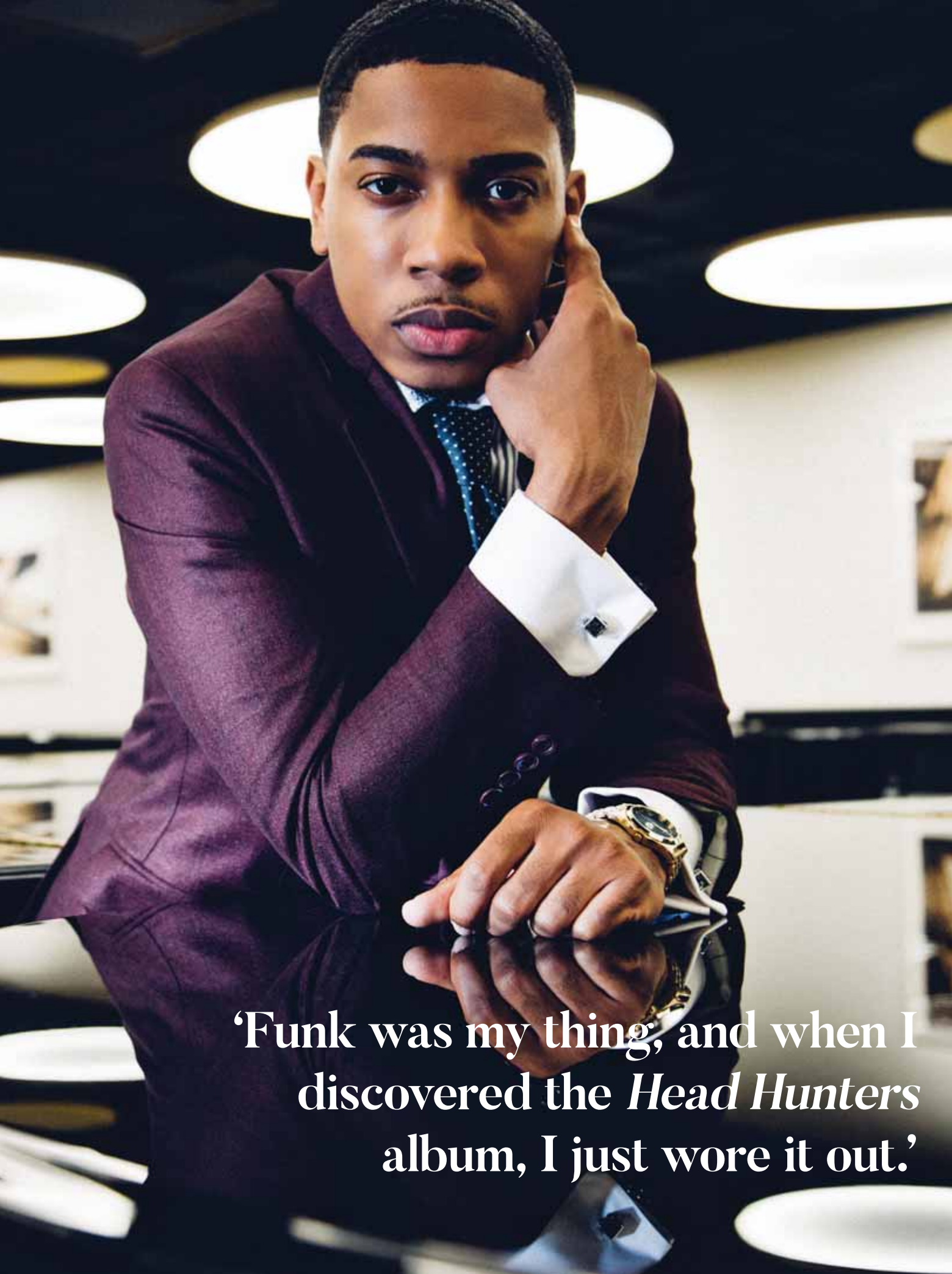
On *Reach*, Sands delves into the wide breadth of styles he’s mastered. He can tackle Dr. Billy Taylor-informed traditional swing, Headhunters-style synths, hard-edged funk, aggressive blues-rock, Latin percussive rhythms and hip-hop beats. His work nods to Chick Corea, Bud Powell and Tito Puente. Sands even counts many hip-hop artists among his influences, including A Tribe Called Quest, Outkast

and Kendrick Lamar. A finalist for the 2015 American Pianists Awards, Sands confidently declared that with *Reach* he is aiming for “a fresh look at the entire language of jazz.”

A native of New Haven, Connecticut, Sands grew up in a household filled with Motown and funk. Turning to his favorite albums for inspiration when composing and recording the tracks on *Reach*, he found a creative font in







‘Funk was my thing, and when I discovered the *Head Hunters* album, I just wore it out.’



Christian Sands performs as a member of the Christian McBride Trio at a 2015 show in Portland, Oregon.

## “After the show, an usher came over and said, ‘Mr. Hancock would like you to come backstage.’”

Michael Jackson’s 1987 release *Bad* (produced by Quincy Jones). “I’m a child of the ’90s, and I listened to that record all the time,” Sands said. “I was looking for what makes a record good, and I was thinking of albums people love, like Miles’ *Kind Of Blue* and *Nefertiti*. But Michael was right there, too. On *Bad*, he was so versatile and played so many different styles with different sounds. He used all these different lanes.”

Sands didn’t want to channel *Bad* but instead use Jackson’s aesthetics, he explained while hanging out at Lincoln Center’s Atrium on a warm April afternoon. His attire seemed to reflect the diversity of his soundscape: a white T-shirt with the word “Monk” factory-printed on it, black jeans, black sneakers, a red gingham shirt and a blue denim jacket adorned with a “Questlove Supreme” pin.

“Like Michael, I’m using all my different lanes—through different moods, different rhythms, different harmonies, to tell my story,” he said. “I’m reaching out directly to audience members who haven’t heard me play the synth or Latin styles. My Day 1 fans aren’t surprised because they’ve seen me performing since I was 8. They know me from festivals where I was playing a keyboard or a Fender Rhodes.”

For his Latin-jazz cred, Sands toured twice

with Bill Summers and Irvin Mayfield in Los Hombres Calientes when he was still in high school, and he recorded the Grammy-nominated 2009 album *Kenya Revisited Live!!!* as a member of Bobby Sanabria’s Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra at Manhattan School of Music.

But his marquee recognition came that same year via Christian McBride, first with the bassist’s Inside Straight band and more prominently as a member of his trio.

A key jumping-off point to the big leagues took place when Sands participated in the University of Massachusetts at Amherst’s Jazz in July program as a teenager. This began his apprenticeship with Taylor (1921–2010), one of the program’s founders. “It was awesome studying with Dr. Taylor in the seminars,” Sands said. “I studied voicings and the mechanics of how jazz was made, and then took private lessons with him. I was originally going to stay just the first week, but he asked me to stay on for the second week and got me a scholarship to do it.”

For Sands, Taylor was an encyclopedia of jazz. The iconic jazz educator taught him about Fats Waller, Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk and other jazz pianists, all the way up to Jason Moran. Even at age 89, Taylor was attuned to what was happening in popular music. “I

asked him if he had heard about The Roots and John Legend recording his song ‘I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free,’ and he said he really liked it,” Sands recalled. “He said he liked what The Roots were doing, expressing themselves with jazz and adding in new rhythms.”

Sands became a protégé who traveled to the Bronx to visit Taylor and accompanied him to the Kennedy Center when he served as its artistic director for jazz. Sands’ next important contact was a legend from a younger generation than Taylor’s: Herbie Hancock.

“I remember getting the [1973] *Head Hunters* album with the yellow sun face on the cover,” he said. “Funk was my thing, but when I discovered this, and it was instrumental music, I just wore it out. I played it every day. Later when I was playing with Bill Summers in Los Hombres Calientes, he was also doing *Headhunters* tribute shows, which he wanted me to play on. That was a dream come true to be playing ‘Watermelon Man.’”

Prior to recording his 2007 album *River: The Joni Letters*, Hancock had taken his arrangements of Joni Mitchell songs for a road test. One of the dates was in Bridgeport, Connecticut, not far from New Haven. A photographer friend who was scheduled to shoot the show encouraged Sands to attend; he promised to introduce the youngster to Hancock. Sands, his younger brother and their parents all bought tickets to the concert, but the photographer never showed up.

“We were sitting way up in the balcony,” Sands remembered. “After the show, an usher came over and said, ‘Mr. Hancock would like you to come backstage.’ To this day, I don’t know how that happened. But of course I went backstage, and it was as if he knew me. Press people were around him, but he motioned me over and we talked for a couple of hours about the piano, funk, computers. He gave me his phone number and email, so I wrote him a thank-you note that night. The next morning, he wrote me back. We’ve kept in contact ever since.”

Sands’ connection to McBride also came about due to a serendipitous event. At Taylor’s suggestion, Marian McPartland booked Sands to appear on her radio show, *Piano Jazz*. As fate would have it, because McPartland was ill at the time, she asked McBride to fill in as the guest host. The bassist didn’t know exactly what to expect; he figured Sands would be a straight-ahead player.

“When I reached the studio, I heard him before I saw him,” McBride reminisced. “Christian was warming up, and he was playing all this angular music that was more like Paul Bley or Andrew Hill. That turned me on. I think we played ‘Cherokee’ together. It was really fast, and he was expressing himself at a fast tempo by playing lines instead of shapes. When playing fast, a lot of young pianists play



shapes, but Christian was playing the lines—as if he had a lot of Oscar Peterson in him.”

McBride hid his excitement about discovering such a talented young player, but afterward told his manager, “We’ve got to grab him before someone else does.”

The opportunity came when Inside Straight was playing at Jazz Standard in New York, and pianist Peter Martin wasn’t available. “I called Christian to see if he could make it, and he killed it,” said McBride. “Then, when I had to go to Europe as a trio, I asked him to come with [drummer] Ulysses Owens, and it became my primary group, which served me well.”

When Sands was signed by Mack Avenue, he knew McBride would be his top choice to produce. (McBride co-produced the album with Al Pryor.) “Christian is the best bass player—*period*,” Sands said. “And we love talking about funk, James Brown, Johnny Taylor, Otis Redding—all the soul artists, but then we’ll talk about jazz artists. He knows my playing and what I want to accomplish with my music. Musically, we’re from the same place.”

Sands originally thought that his Mack Avenue debut would be a standards album, but that drastically pivoted into the diverse program on *Reach*. “What Christian is doing is disparate and all on the *same* record,” McBride said. “Initially I thought, ‘Maybe it’s not such a great idea to pummel people with *everything* you can do. Maybe save a little for later, as your career progresses.’ There’s so much diversity that you wonder, ‘How will this get programmed on a radio station?’ But I really like the way it turned out.”

But Sands wanted to create something that could reach everyone, and he feels like this album is just his first step: a program of eight originals and two covers. The first two tunes are played as a trio with the rhythm team of bassist Yasushi Nakamura and drummer Marcus Baylor. The album opens with a blazing blast, “Armando’s Song,” featuring quick flights across the keys, as well as propulsive drumming and call-and-response exchanges. “It’s an exercise in Chick-ism,” said Sands, who wrote the piece with one of Corea’s tunes in mind: “Armando’s Rhumba” (from his classic 1976 album *My Spanish Heart*).

Reedist Marcus Strickland comes on board for two Sands originals, the spirited “Pointing West” and the lyrical, mysterious “Firefall.” Sands opens the latter piece with a synthesizer glaze, with Strickland dancing on the melody and overdubbing a bass clarinet drone. After the cooking Latin-jazz tune “Óyeme!,” Sands and his trio settle into an easygoing swing on “Bud’s Tune.” On the next three tunes, guitarist Gilad Hekselman augments the trio with his tonal sophistication and get-down grit.

Sands originally composed “Reaching For The Sun” for trio, but when he played it with

the guitar sound from his computer, he realized that Hekselman would be a perfect fit for the song. “Christian said he wanted it to groove,” Hekselman said. “It’s an honor that someone would write a song with me in mind.” He reflected on his contributions to the track: “I asked myself, ‘How can I come in and add something external and be cohesive with the vibe?’ It’s like having ginger between eating different pieces of sushi.”

Hekselman stars with rock-powered lines and solo on Sands’ dirty blues rendering of Bill Withers’ “Use Me.” Hekselman explained

that his favorite track is the hip-hop infused “Gangstalude,” which started as a simple trio interlude before evolving into a complex tune.

Sands has aspirations to follow the example set by Dr. Taylor in terms of uplifting fellow artists. “There’s one thing I’ll always remember Dr. Taylor telling me: ‘You are more than a performer. You have to be an advocate and creator to allow *other* people to perform.’ So, it’s not all about you. Dr. Taylor could perform anytime he wanted, but he was much more about institution-building. He wanted give musicians the opportunity to do what they can do.” **DB**



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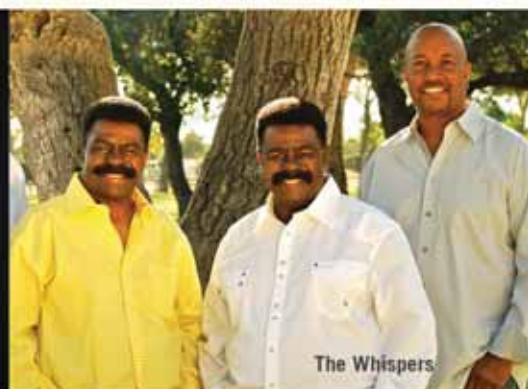
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# Reviews >



America. It's a celebratory outing showcasing Greene's piping, pure tone, compositional acumen and two outstanding rhythm sections.

Though *Vol. 2* features fewer guests than volume 1, two of the best tracks showcase vocalists singing excellent lyrics by Greene. On the title track, sung by Sheena Rattai (of the Canadian folk trio Red Moon Road), Greene imagines a note his daughter might have written to accompany a book of hand-drawn flowers he discovered among her things. On "Someday," Jean Baylor (formerly Jean Norris of the soul group Zhané) delivers advice that will bring tears to any parent's eyes: "Live every day like it's your last." Meanwhile, "Stink Thumb," a kindly reference to thumb-sucking, marches to a bluesy Brazilian street beat, Greene trading lively soprano licks with drummer Otis Brown III and Kevin Hays offering a crisp, chipper Rhodes solo. "Thirty-Two" also percolates with Brazilian rhythm as Greene moves from a chuffing low register to chomps that bristle with soul.

"December" delves into the emotional turmoil Greene says returns every year during the month when the massacre took place. His screaming tenor, Hays' clanging urgency, bassist Ben Williams' aggressive counter-lines and Brown's whipping sticks urgently render that tension. Greene gives his rhythm sections plenty of elbow room, particularly on "Big Guy," a notey, rippling outing that manages to be rhythmically diffuse while also sailing smoothly. The boppish dance "Stanky Leg" feels as much New Orleans as Brazilian, with percussionist Rogerio Boccato delivering the racket. "Second Breakfast" has the secret, childlike innocence of Chick Corea, with Renee Rosnes' Fender Rhodes underpinning a warm bass solo by John Patitucci.

This album's refusal to let darkness win in the face of grievous loss is an inspiration.

—Paul de Barros

## Jimmy Greene *Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2*

MACK AVENUE 1118

★★★★★

Upon hearing *Beautiful Life*, Jimmy Greene's deeply moving 2014 album prompted by the tragic loss of his 6-year-old daughter, Ana

Márquez-Greene, in the 2012 Sandy Hook school massacre, a friend of Ana's candidly remarked that the music was terribly slow and sad to honor a girl so fond of dancing. On *Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2*, Greene takes that youthful criticism to heart, offering less a requiem and more an ode to joy, brimming with dance rhythms from North and South

**Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2:** Big Guy; Stanky Leg; Flowers; Second Breakfast; Fun Circuits; Stink Thumb; Someday; December; Amantes; Something About You; Thirty-Two. (64:02)

**Personnel:** Jimmy Greene, saxophones; Kevin Hayes (1, 3, 6, 8, 11), Renee Rosnes (2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10), keyboards; Mike Moreno, guitar (5, 9, 10); Ben Williams (1, 3, 6, 8, 11), John Patitucci (2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10), bass; Otis Brown III (1, 3, 6, 8, 11), Jeff "Tain" Watts (2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10), drums; Rogerio Boccato (2, 4, 5, 9, 10), Otis Brown III (3), percussion; Sheena Rattai (3), Jean Baylor (7), vocals.

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



## Tomasz Stańko New York Quartet *December Avenue*

ECM 2532

★★★★

The deep collaboration between members of Tomasz Stańko's New York Quartet makes the music on its second album both a pathway to pleasure and an opportunity for solace, but it's the tone and timbre of the leader's horn that's most fetching. The 74-year-old trumpeter continues to burnish his earthy sound, and its character morphs in intriguing ways on this jewel of a date.

## Preservation Hall Jazz Band *So It Is*

COLUMBIA/LEGACY 889854179120

★★★★½

Bandleader Ben Jaffe may be the son of Preservation Hall founders Allan and Sandra Jaffe, but this is not your father's Preservation Hall Jazz Band.

In this rather short album, the PHJB attempts to leapfrog from the 19th century to the 21st, turning sharply from preservation of antiquity to renewal of itself. Tradition is rationed carefully now—a bit of slushy plunger trombone from Ronell Johnson, perhaps. But without the rich logic of the old New Orleans melodies, the band feels caged in its own cramped repertoire of relentless riffs. Energy replaces logic. Still, the strong Afro-Cuban accent and tight front line never starve the music of power or punch, and there is almost always a partnership between soloist and band.

The title track is essentially a softly voiced, 16-bar background line that opens up for a fluttering piano solo by Kyle Roussel. "Santiago" is a pumping, 12-bar rhythm riff, high on voltage but low on nuance, in which Stephen Lands lights things up with the sort of broad, bellowing strut that can rouse a crowd. For the

The Polish bandleader has embraced scads of U.S. players in the last few years. Pianist Craig Taborn, drummer Jim Black and others have gone through the ranks of his New York Quartet. But for recording, he's settled on a squad that's expert at both rumination and buoyancy. Pianist David Virelles and drummer Gerald Clayton helped him make 2015's *Wisława*; bassist Reuben Rogers replaces Thomas Morgan for this new date. Together they bask in the attractions of mood while leaving ample room for some nu-bop frolic. There's about a 70/30 split for those directions here, and the shifts between them are beveled enough to create a string of revealing transitions.

A bit of Lester Bowie cackle marks the animated passages. Stańko gets frisky on the title cut, and while the action is all quite measured, the refinement doesn't preclude anyone from searching for some friction points (Clever is key to this process). Perhaps more telling are the moments of reflection. "Cloud," "Blue Cloud" and "The Street Of Crocodiles" all find the foursome waxing instinctual while establishing a rich atmosphere. —*Jim Macnie*

**December Avenue:** Cloud; Conclusion; Blue Cloud; Bright Moon; Burning Hot; David And Reuben; Ballad For Bruno Schulz; Sound Space; December Avenue; The Street Of Crocodiles; Yankiels Lid; Young Girl In Flower. (64:16)

**Personnel:** Tomasz Stańko, trumpet; David Virelles, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Gerald Clayton, drums.

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



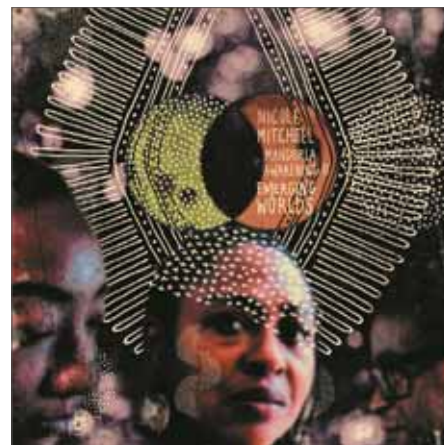
preservationists, the PHJB loses its innocence forever on "Innocence" when Roussel solos on electric piano. But tenor saxophone is percussive and pithy on "Convergence" and dominates "One Hundred Fires" with a simple r&b sound. Expect the unexpected as this sanctuary of Old New Orleans expands its identity without abandoning its calling.

—*John McDonough*

**So It Is:** So It Is; Santiago; Innocence; La Malanga; Convergence; One Hundred Fires; Mad. (34:03)

**Personnel:** Ben Jaffe, bass, tuba; Ronell Johnson, trombone; Clint Maedgen, tenor saxophone; Charlie Gabriel, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Kyle Roussel, keyboards; Walter Harris, drums; Brandon Lewis (3–6), Stephen Lands (1, 2, 7), trumpet.

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



## Nicole Mitchell *Mandorla Awakening II: Emerging Worlds*

FPE

★★★★

For this new incarnation of her Black Earth Ensemble, flutist Nicole Mitchell composed a more-or-less continuous suite as an allegorical work of speculative fiction, based on an integrative Afrofuturist ideal world in which the apparently incompatible concepts of utopia and dystopia are no longer held in opposition. Mitchell imbues the music with a full narrative, including characters and an intergalactic setting, but these elements guide the sounds rather than dramatize it operationally. Even when Avery R. Young sings, the lyrics are evocative, political and symbolic—not plot-driven.

The music directly integrates seeming oppositions, seamlessly pulling together improvised and composed passages, Mitchell's writing alternating between subtle architectural instructions and direct thematic statements. As the program unfolds, the diffuse quality of early tracks gives way to more ostinati, even funky sections like "Listening Embrace," with Tomeka Reid's wicked cello line. The instrumentation itself speaks of opposites united. Flute meets *shakuhachi*. Electric guitar meets *shamisen*. Drum kit meets *taiko*. On "Dance Of Many Hands," the latter meeting of percussionists recalls late-'50s Sun Ra, when he was experimenting with multiple drummers. Mitchell's writing certainly nods at Ra here, especially his twinned flute works, but Mitchell's sphere also includes writers like Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany, and the work feels much more exploratory, creative and transcultural than jazz-derived. —*John Corbett*

**Mandorla Awakening II: Emerging Worlds:** Egogo War; Sub-Mission; The Chalice; Dance Of Many Hands; Listening Embrace; Forestwall Timewalk; Staircase Struggle; Shiny Divider; Mandorla Island; TimeWrap. (74:19)

**Personnel:** Nicole Mitchell, flute, electronics; Avery R. Young, vocals; Kojiro Umezaki, shakuhachi; Renée Baker, violin; Tomeka Reid, cello, banjo; Alex Wing, electric guitar, oud; Tatsuo Aoki, bass, shamisen, taiko; Jovia Armstrong, drums, percussion.

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



# The Hot Box

	Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
<b>Jimmy Greene</b> <i>Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2</i>		★★★	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★
<b>Tomasz Stańko NY Quartet</b> <i>December Avenue</i>		★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★½
<b>Preservation Hall Jazz Band</b> <i>So It Is</i>		★★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
<b>Nicole Mitchell</b> <i>Mandorla Awakening II</i>		★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

## Critics' Comments

### Jimmy Greene, *Flowers—Beautiful Life Vol. 2*

New York mainstreamer Greene divides himself here between his light, coolish tenor, a slightly more sharp-edged soprano and two smartly credentialed combos. Despite a couple of song texts, the backstory is never explicit, as it was on volume 1. Instead, the music is full of bright Brazilian and Cuban rhythms that keep the spirit crisp and uplifting. —John McDonough

Enjoyable mixed program, ambitious writing and great playing. This album stakes out a sweet spot between sentimental and scorching, acoustic and mildly electric. —John Corbett

The two vocal tracks become a bit of a distraction when mixed in with the deft instrumental pieces. The heft of the latter swamps the sentiment of the former, and throws things off balance. But each element has its impressive side. —Jim Macnie

### Tomasz Stańko New York Quartet, *December Avenue*

*December Avenue* sums up the ECM aesthetic—the slower the notes, the more profound their value. But Stańko's obedience renders his accessible and lyrical themes so emotionally immobile they are somewhat consumed in their own inertia. —John McDonough

The Polish trumpeter is by now a heroic figure, a survivor who's moved through many transitions and lived to play about it. He sounds wonderful, robust reverberant as suits him. Virelles is a marvel—acute and intelligent at every turn. —John Corbett

Stańko is a giant, but this pristinely played sequence of evanescent, understated sound clouds feels passionless, save for the gorgeous "Ballad For Bruno Schulz," dedicated to a Polish writer whose novel *The Street of Crocodiles* Stańko mines for another song title. —Paul de Barros

### Preservation Hall Jazz Band, *So It Is*

Not your grampa's PHJB. Updated to a contemporary feel, barely a trad band at all, veering into the jam-friendly terrain of Medeski Martin & Wood. First-rate party music. —John Corbett

I'm loving the way these performances leap out at you. Even those that bide their time have an inherent aggression. Did I mention the broader scope, sound-wise? Helpful. —Jim Macnie

If you like your New Orleans music with a street beat, Cuban swagger and tradition catapulted into the present, this fun, triple "Hurricane" of original music will satisfy your thirst for a funky foray into the French Quarter. —Paul de Barros

### Nicole Mitchell, *Mandorla Awakening II*

On its face, a disagreeable, often frenzied procession of shrieking turbulence. Layers of clattering percussion and clashing electronics camouflage the more gentle impressionistic uncertainty. Risky listening strictly for the open-minded. You know who you are. —John McDonough

The flutist has long been woke, so this Afrofuturist call-to-arms has both feet on the ground regardless of how high it flits through the cosmos. Abstraction and pulse and politics equals a #resistance epic. —Jim Macnie

Creating music at once this free and organically developed is no mean feat. Mitchell has surpassed herself, integrating her celestial flute with an inspirational, post-Sun-Ra avant-world ensemble both utopian and clear-eyed. Great sounds, great messages. —Paul de Barros

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## Gerald Clayton *Tributary Tales*

MOTÉMA 223

★★★★½

It should be no surprise that younger jazz musicians, like Gerald Clayton, Kamasi Washington and Robert Glasper, have so embraced '70s jazz. Not only was the era's jazz-funk one of hip-hop's founding grooves, but the '70s was the last time jazz musicians could be simultaneously conceptually ambitious, stylistically promiscuous and commercially successful.

But you don't need to sound like a throwback to ride this wave; in fact, Clayton's whole

"tributary" concept hinges on the fluidity of time, and the ways the past flows into the present. Here, echoes of the past churn beneath the surface—the Thelonious Monk-like chords that frame the melody in "Wakeful," for example, or the overdriven keyboard (electric piano through a ring modulator?) that bobs up toward the end of "Unforeseen."

Clayton has clearly put a lot of thought into the album, and as such the music demands close attention and a willingness to reflect. Some ideas are expressed entirely through sound, as when "Search For" illustrates its title through resolution-chasing interplay between Clayton and alto saxophonist Logan Richardson, and lets the listener ponder what the overlaid bar-room noise meant. Others are expressed verbally, through spoken-word dialogue backed by music.

Like the waterways it evokes, *Tributary Tales* is nourishing, refreshing and full of great depths. Prepare to be swept away.

—J.D. Considine

**Tributary Tales:** Unforeseen; Patience Patients; Search For; A Light; Reach For; Envisionings; Reflect On; Lovers Reverie; Wakeful; Soul Stomp; Are We; Engage In; Squinted; Dimensions; Interwoven. (64:29)

**Personnel:** Gerald Clayton, piano, keyboards; Logan Richardson, alto saxophone; Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone, bassoon (8, 10); Dayna Stephens, baritone saxophone; Joe Sanders, bass; Justin Brown, drums; Aja Monet, Carl Hancock Rux, spoken word (8, 14); Sachal Vasandani, vocals (13); Henry Cole (1, 10, 12, 13), Gabriel Lugo (1, 10, 12–14), percussion.

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

## Ambrose Akinmusire *A Rift In Decorum: Live At The Village Vanguard*

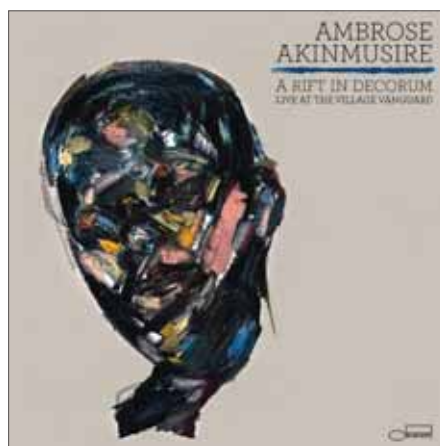
BLUE NOTE 602557649703

★★★★

Jazz may be constantly evolving, and the traditional distribution system in tatters, but for young musicians, leading a band into the Village Vanguard is still a trip to the Super Bowl and the NBA Finals rolled into one. What you and your bandmates bring to the stage can define your career for years to come.

At 35, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire no longer qualifies as a wunderkind, but a decade after winning the Thelonious Monk International Trumpet Competition, he seems poised to cement his position as a leader of his generation. (Coincidentally, John Coltrane was also 35 when he led his band into the Vanguard for a seminal recording in 1961.)

Rather than a sequential, as-it-happened set, the two-disc package features highlights with several set-ending climaxes. Regardless, the sequencing has its own logic, with the discs divided between free-ranging blowing and more linear pieces. Several of the most exhilarating pieces, including the powerful opener "Maurice & Michael (Sorry I Didn't Say Hello)" and the triumphant "Umteyo," get their



propulsive energy from long ostinatos, which Akinmusire channels in his ripe and meaty solos.

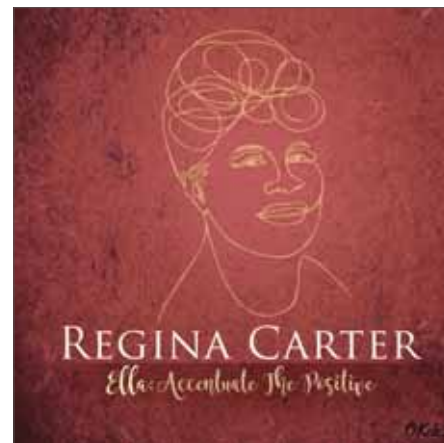
For those still not familiar with Akinmusire's brand of contemporary small-group interaction, *A Rift In Decorum* is a reassuring document of a tight young band fulfilling a rite of passage.

—James Hale

**A Rift In Decorum:** Disc One: Maurice & Michael (Sorry I Didn't Say Hello); Response; Moment In Between The Rest (To Curve An Ache); Brooklyn (ODB); A Song To Exhale To (Diver Song); Purple (Intermezzo); Trumpet Sketch (Milky Pete). (60:44) Disc Two: Taymoor's World; First Page (Shabnam's Poem); H.A.M.S. (In The Spirit Of Honesty); Piano Sketch (Sam Intro); Piano Sketch (Beyond Enclosure); Condo; Withered; Umteyo. (49:10)

**Personnel:** Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Sam Harris, piano; Harish Raghavan, bass; Justin Brown, drums.

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



## Regina Carter *Ella: Accentuate The Positive*

OKEH 88985406042

★★★★

Regina Carter's keening violin is one positive attribute on this tribute to centenary honoree Ella Fitzgerald. Her band's easy blend is another. The idea of refreshing lesser-known bits of the First Lady of Song's catalog is a third.

The album's guiding principle is that smartly arranged, sensitively played interpretations of tunes Fitzgerald imbued with warmth and joy will cast the "personal connection" with listeners that Carter herself felt upon discovering Ella's voice in her parents' record collection. Carter has previously covered Ella standbys, but here she addresses compositions including "I'll Never Be Free," "Reach For Tomorrow" and "Dedicated To You" with the undercurrents of profound longing that gave depth to the great singer's typically sunny exterior.

These choices work for the instrumentals. Carter's violin is prominent, of course, cogent and often pungent. She's cushioned by long-standing accompanists Xavier Davis on piano, Chris Lightcap on bass and Alvester Garnett on drums. Charts by Ray Angry, Ben Williams, Charenée Wade, Mike Wofford and Marvin Sewell offer distinctive counterparts, rhythm shifts and deft deployment of electric piano, bass and guitars.

The two pieces with singers depart somewhat from the main mood. The Mercer/Arlen title track, usually offered as swinging advice, gets a dark makeover, urgently delivered by Miche Braden. Carla Cook's "Undecided" is coolly coy, with a funky bass line and brief background overdubs. Neither singer alludes to Fitzgerald, but instead provide, as Fitzgerald did, some of the immediate accessibility that makes jazz popular.

—Howard Mandel

**Ella: Accentuate The Positive:** Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate The Positive; Crying In The Chapel; I'll Never Be Free; All My Life; Dedicated To You; Reach For Tomorrow; Undecided; Judy; I'll Chase The Blues Away.

**Personnel:** Regina Carter, violin; Marvin Sewell, guitars; Xavier Davis, keyboards; Chris Lightcap, bass; Alvester Garnett, drums, percussion; Miche Braden (1), Carla Cook (7), vocals.

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





**Wingfield/Reuter/  
Stavi/ Sirkis**  
*The Stone House*

MOONEJUNE 083

★★★★★

After listening to *The Stone House* multiple times, I was surprised to read that the music contained no overdubs. But more noteworthy was discovering the six pieces that make for a very rewardable listening experience were “completely improvised,” with no rehearsal and no written music.

Unlike guitarist Mark Wingfield’s previous album, *Proof Of Light*, *The Stone House* takes

his trio and makes it a quartet. Also significant is the fact that *Proof Of Light* was all Wingfield’s music, whereas *The Stone House* shares composer credits with all four members for all six pieces. All four members also share lead billing.

Added to the mix of Wingfield, electric fretless bassist Yaron Stavi and drummer Asaf Sirkis is TouchGuitar AU8 player Markus Reuter (of Stick Men and the Crimson Project fame). Reuter enhances what is already a remarkable lead instrumentalist in Wingfield, and Stavi’s bass playing not only cements the ephemeral grooves but also showcases a player who’s equally at home plugging in. And Sirkis’ flexible pulse and selective accents are especially adaptive to this music, which benefits from moments of surprise and unpredictability.

In other words, the sonic tapestry of all four instruments serves to enhance *The Stone House*’s inevitable storytelling atmosphere. The album (recorded in a mansion in Spain; see the CD cover) offers multiple delights, each player equally present.

The dreamy, ambient beginning to everything on “Rush” is suddenly jarred by Sirkis’ crisp snare work, leading to Stavi’s funky bass lines and Wingfield’s soloistic onslaughts. What has the potential to be a fusion hoedown somehow dissipates, and an improvisatory vibe washes over, thwarting any notions of genre or style.

Yes, the modal “Rush” does contain heated exchanges between Wingfield and Reuter, but the open-ended nature of the recording session seems to hover over everyone in the group. In the end, Sirkis is the ultimate driver of “Rush,” playing with a fury that punctuates the more serene, melancholy aspects of the song.

Wingfield and Reuter’s styles of playing are complementary—their blistering unison lines follow up in tandem on the roiling, restless rocker “Silver” in what is one of the album’s most heated trade-offs. The looser, free-jazz vibe of “Fjords De Catalunya” resonates in part because of its patience and ambiguity, each player digging up something deliciously unexpected.

In many ways, the latter song is the heart of the album, where everything lingers. “Tarasque” shares that vibe but is somehow different, Wingfield’s guitar insistent, Sirkis frenetically all over his drums, Stavi busy up and down his fretless board, Reuter holding down the fort.

As with everything else here, the band seems to know intuitively when they’ve reached their destination.  
—John Ephland

**The Stone House:** Rush; Four Moons; Silver; Fjords De Catalunya; Tarasque; Bona Nit Señor Rovira. (59:50)

**Personnel:** Mark Wingfield, guitar; Markus Reuter, TouchGuitars AU8; Yaron Stavi, bass; Asaf Sirkis, drums.

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



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## Steve Davis *Think Ahead* SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★½

For trombonist Steve Davis, thinking about the future surely involves a bit of controlled aggression—or at the very least, confrontation. The opening notes of *Think Ahead*, Davis' 19th album as a leader and his first release since 2015's *Say When*, form a driving, almost pugnacious melody. Taken by itself, the riff on the Tony Williams tune "Warrior," backed by a pounded piano downbeat and a driving swing, sets a theme of antagonism. But Davis' first solo

turn—showcasing his sweet, melodic tone—adds a caveat to that message. He steps away from that forward momentum ever so slightly, laying back in the pocket instead of standing on top of the beat.

Davis has peppered the release with a wide variety of styles, but the level of heat presented on "Warrior" dissipates as the album progresses. It's a personal album, and he has gathered an outstanding array of sidemen for the date. These musicians blend perfectly as an ensemble, but also bring interesting solo ideas to the record. With a horn-heavy front line that includes alto saxophonist Steve Wilson and tenor saxophonist Jimmy Greene, Davis is able to probe expansive harmonies, creating a deep richness to every tune. The rhythm section, anchored by pianist Larry Willis, follows Davis in lock-step from uptempo bebop numbers to introverted ballad tunes to quasi-sidewinding funk.

Taken as a whole, "hope" might be a more apt message for Davis' tunes. "Mountaintop" contains a similar plea as "Warrior," but the title track characterizes Davis' outlook as more reasoned objection than frenzied dissension. —Jon Ross

**Think Ahead:** Warrior; Abena's Gaze; A Little Understanding; Atmosphere; Mountaintop; Polka Dots And Moonbeams; Love Walked In; Think Ahead; Little B's Poem; Evening Shades Of Blue; Farewell, Brother. (75:28)

**Personnel:** Steve Davis, trombone; Steve Wilson, alto saxophone; Jimmy Greene, tenor saxophone; Larry Willis, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

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

## Somi *Petite Afrique* OKEH 88875191262

★★★★½

Somi models herself after such compelling storytellers as Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln and Oscar Brown Jr. Her yarns often draw upon personal experiences as a first-generation African American of Ugandan and Rwandan parents. Most of the time, her phenomenal singing chops take a backseat to epigrammatic verses that evoke rich images and poignant narratives. Sometimes, though, the conceit of her original compositions proves more beguiling than the actual content.

That said, *Petite Afrique* is Somi's best effort yet. Using Harlem's shifting African diaspora ecosystem as the setting, Somi explores various issues such as gentrification, cultural displacement, identity politics, police brutality and immigration, topped off with lots to do about coffee, tea and blackness. Whether she's embodying a solemn African immigrant strolling through Harlem ("Alien"), lamenting the crumbling consequences of gentrification ("The Gentry") or grieving an arranged marriage while longing for her true love ("BLUE"), Somi's poised, phantasmagoric vocals cast spells over the evocative arrangements, yielding the same



mesmeric sensations of Julie Dash's 1991 movie, *Daughters of the Dust*. And like that movie, the meditative nature of *Petite Afrique* may take more than a few spins to firmly lodge in both mind and heart. But once it does, it'll surely haunt. —John Murphy

**Petite Afrique:** Disappearing Act I; Alien; Black Enough; The Wild One; They're Like Ghosts; The Gentry; Kadiatou The Beautiful; Holy Room; Disappearing Act II; Let Me; BLUE; Go Back To Your Country (Interlude); Like Dakar; Midnight Angels. (53:00)

**Personnel:** Somi, vocals; Liberty Elman, guitar; Nate Smith, drums; Keith Witty, bass, percussion, keyboards (3); Marika Hughes, cello (2, 5, 7); Toru Dodo, piano; Michael Olatuja, bass; Etienne Charles, trumpet (3, 6, 10, 13), percussion (10); Rhodes (14); Marcus Strickland, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet (3, 6, 13); Jaleel Shaw, alto saxophone (3, 6, 13); Jessica Troy, viola (5, 7); Dana Lyn, Mazz Swift, violins (5, 7); Aloe Blacc, vocals (6).

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



## John Patitucci *Irmão De Fé* NEWVILLE RECORDS 007

★★★★

Lester Young believed it was important for an instrumentalist to know the lyrics to a tune in order to create the right mood when playing it. But what about the listener's responsibility? Though there are no vocals on John Patitucci's Brazilian-themed *Irmão De Fé*, the LP's sleeve notes (by co-producer Elan Mehler) includes translations of the lyrics to two of the nine songs, to ensure that the listener has a deeper sense of what the players are trying to express.

Focussing on the song, as opposed to the improvisational possibilities it might present, often leads to bland jazz—but not here. Instead, by emphasizing the emotional content of the material, Patitucci and company work out a balance between interpretation and improvisation that does the songs justice while still leaving plenty of room to play.

It helps that Patitucci, guitarist Yotam Silberstein and percussionist Rogério Boccato have chops to spare. "Desvairada" finds Patitucci's double bass and Silberstein's guitar skittering effortlessly through unison lines in a brisk 6/8, while "Nilopolitano" pivots deftly between the boppish 16ths of the melody and the trio's funky jamming. But their virtuosity isn't all flash, as one of the album's most technically impressive performances, "Olha Maria," makes its point through a simple arco statement of the melody.

Audiophiles will thrill at the vividness of the analog sound here, especially the rich depth of Patitucci's six-string bass on "Sinhá." But Newville's devotion to the LP does have one drawback: It's hard to imagine anyone listening to this music and not wishing there was room for more. —J.D. Considine

**Irmão De Fé:** Irmão De Fé; Catavento; Pr'um Samba; Desvairada; Olha Maria; Samba Do Grande Amor; As Vitruines; Nilopolitano; Sinhá. (38:34)

**Personnel:** John Patitucci, double bass, electric bass; Yotam Silberstein, guitar; Rogério Boccato, drums, percussion.

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





## Dispatches from the Great White North

The Canadian music scene is hopping from coast to coast, and the soundscape is brimming with well-established and emerging artists. Here's a look at what's happening from East to West.

Montreal alto saxophonist **Remi Bolduc** kicks it up with *Swingin' With Oscar* (Productions Art and Soul PAS1701; 55:48 ★★½), and it's all about joie de vivre in the spirit of Canadian piano legend Oscar Peterson. Peterson's poignant "Laurentide Waltz," Latin flavors and lively uptempo Peterson originals like the fiery "Riff Blues" and "Place St. Henri" showcase Bolduc's lightning-quick melodic lines.

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

Rising Toronto composer/tenor saxophonist **Chelsea McBride** is a mere 24 years old, but she's an unabashedly old soul, with a saxophone sound and compositional approach beyond her years. McBride's first complete jazz orchestra album project, *Twilight Fall* (Browntasauras Records NCC-1701J; 62:55 ★★★★★), with her Socialist Night School ensemble is an exhilarating melodic romp featuring vocalist Alex Samaras. It's an impressive kickoff.

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

Romance beckons on **Micah Barnes'** *New York Stories* (eOne Music B01JTD-2N10; 42:01 ★★½). The Toronto singer/pianist's latest album delivers swinging jazz tracks that honor New York City's famous music haunts. Guests Jackie Richardson and Michael Shand add soulful touches to the album, and Barnes brings songwriting expertise. His portrait of New York shows a flair for the art of song and is a polished jazz debut.

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

The **Monik Nordine Trio's** *The Old New Town* (Magenta Music 02-1; 50:57 ★★★★★) creates a cheerful ambience with happy-go-lucky originals like "Bubbe's

Blues" and "Round The Bend." The established Victoria, British Columbia, alto saxophonist soars, showing off solid performance and writing chops. A handful of standards showcase Nordine's saxophone prowess.

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

For more than a decade, Vancouver's consistently excellent Drip Audio label has been bringing creative Canadian musicians to light. Formidable guitarist **Ron Samworth's** *Dogs Do Dream* (Drip Audio DA01296; 59:00 ★★½) project presents an evocative creative/jazz/rock/New Music-influenced fantasy. Primal stream-of-consciousness thoughts are observed from the impulsive, animalistic and sensual perspective of a dog. It's exceptional artistry.

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

Initially inspired by David Milch's HBO series *Deadwood*, multi-award winning Vancouver cellist/composer **Peggy Lee's** *Tell Tale* (Drip Audio DA01207; 57:00 ★★½) features Film In Music's dramatic improvisation with seven composed sections. Elite Vancouver musicians join Lee exploring deep cinematic textural journeying and Zen-like moments. Haunting solos transcend from the rapturous Lee. Divine.

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

Vancouver's **Fond of Tigers'** vinyl release *Uninhabit* (Offseason Records OFF007; 38:00 ★★★★★) while uncategorizable, is a brilliant and beautifully intense release. The album features innovative writing and improvisation sourced from avant-rock, free improvisation and art music. The JUNO-winning supergroup is repeatedly described as "post-everything." Led by captivating guitarist/vocalist Stephen Lyons, the band merges edgy textures and extended instrumental effects into groovy hipster oneness. Pure bliss.

DB

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



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## Louis Hayes *Serenade For Horace*

BLUE NOTE 00602557617825

★★★★

Having drummed in the original Horace Silver Quintet and remaining a close friend of Silver's until the pianist's passing in 2014, Louis Hayes certainly has the bona fides to lead a tribute session. But *Serenade For Horace* isn't just homage paid to a jazz great; it's also a testament to the vitality of Silver's songbook.

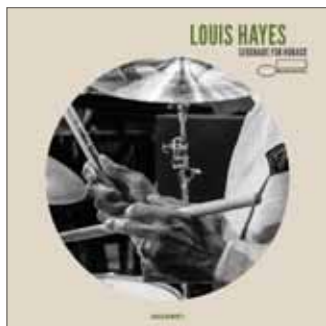
Impressively, Hayes accomplishes this feat by focusing on the hard-bop end of Silver's catalogue, rather than funkier fare. He underscoring each tune's structure with snare accents, cymbal splashes and various bits of rhythmic counterpoint. Joined here by his working band and vibraphonist Steve Nelson, Hayes maintains an almost telepathic rapport with the players, and it's a kick to hear him stoking the flames behind tenor man Abraham Burton's bluesy ramble through "Juicy Lucy" or trading eights with Nelson on the boppish "Room 608."

Some of the album's best playing, though, can be found on the heads, thanks to arrangements that treat the rhythm parts as though they were as integral as the melody—which, of course, they are. As such, there's an extra dimension to the shuffle that drives "Señor Blues" and a freshness that lifts "Song For My Father"—sung soulfully by Gregory Porter—above the samba clichés too often bestowed on it. —J.D. Considine

**Serenade For Horace:** Ecaroh; Señor Blues; Song For My Father; Hastings Street; Strollin'; Juicy Lucy; Silver's Serenade; Lonely Woman; Summer In Central Park; St. Vitus Dance; Room 608. (58:53)

**Personnel:** Louis Hayes, drums; Josh Evans, trumpet; Abraham Burton, tenor saxophone; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; David Bryant, piano; Dezron Douglas, bass; Gregory Porter, vocals (3).

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



## Marc Copland *Better By Far*

INNERVOICEJAZZ 103

★★★★½

"Day And Night," the Marc Copland original that opens the second album by the pianist's loose-limbed quartet with trumpeter Ralph Alessi, drummer Joey Baron and longtime bass partner Drew Gress, boasts such a ravishingly fluid melody that you might swear it was a vocal standard if you didn't know better. Magical writing, improvisation, atmosphere—it's a totally captivating opener.

Copland owns a glowing piano sound and one of the most richly lyrical compositional sensibilities around, with such highlights as "Gone Now" offering a melody more indelible than the deepest kiss. Unlike 2015's *Zenith*, with its pair of double-digit tracks, *Better By Far* lacks any epic explorations. But like that previous album and its slinky version of Duke Ellington's "Mystery Song," the new record has its own individualist interpretation of a vintage number: an oblique take on Thelonious Monk's "Evidence," led by Baron's fantastically detailed grooving.

One might wish the band hit harder, but these four players bring out the subtle best in each other, maintaining rare collective tension in the darkly elliptical "Room Enough For Stars." Blending clarity with warmth, the beautiful studio sound adds to the allure.

—Bradley Bambarger



**Better By Far:** Day And Night; Better By Far; Mr. DJ; Gone Now; Twister; Room Enough For Stars; Evidence; Dark Passage; Who Said Swing? (62:32)

**Personnel:** Marc Copland, piano; Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Drew Gress, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

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

## Cuong Vu 4Tet *Ballet: The Music Of Michael Gibbs*

RARENOISE 079

★★★★

Not surprisingly, trumpeter Cuong Vu's take on composer/arranger Michael Gibbs is idiosyncratic and heartfelt. And it helps when you have a band that lives in a world between genres, sliding in and out of interpretation, suggestive emulation and outright reinvention.

Guitarist Bill Frisell joins regular Vu bandmates Luke Bergman (bass) and Ted Poor (drums) in a selective exploration of an important composer's canon. Frisell and Vu's first recorded collaboration was on the trumpeter's 2005 release, *It's Mostly Residual*, and this particular quartet more recently performed Gibbs' music as part of a larger orchestral two-night set of shows at the University of Washington. This recording is from that second night.

The band's playful, swinging take on "Blue Comedy" and their more dramatic, full-bore dive into "And On The Third Day" hit the melody and then some, the moods changing at a moment's notice. The title track's swinging pulse and thorny arrangement (if one can call it that) obscure this pretty tune only so much. As for closer "Sweet Rain," repeated listens bear out Vu's and, especially, Frisell's love of a true jazz standard, melody pretty much left intact.

—John Ephland



**Ballet:** Ballet; Feelings And Things; Blue Comedy; And On The Third Day; Sweet Rain. (41:49)

**Personnel:** Cuong Vu, trumpet; Bill Frisell, guitar; Luke Bergman, bass; Ted Poor, drums.

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

## Dayna Stephens *Gratitude*

CONTAGIOUS MUSIC 002

★★★★½

It's a rare recording that dwells exclusively in balladic or medium-tempo territory, and many that do so leave the listener craving some dynamic tempering. On his second recording with the lineup of guitarist Julian Lage, pianist Brad Mehldau, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Eric Harland, muscular saxophonist Dayna Stephens creates deep and often wistful meditations. While the pace never reaches the boiling point, Stephens fills each piece with energy.

The lilting ballad "Emilie" sets the stage with Grenadier's lyrical, meandering bass and Harland's tapestry of percussive accents. Stephens' tenor sounds both tender and tough as he builds an opening solo full of highly arpeggiated phrases, broken by sudden cries and stuttering retrenchments. The exchanges with Mehldau in the final third of the performance are particularly compelling, as Harland churns underneath.

Reminiscent of some of Jan Garbarek's moody electro-acoustic recordings, *Gratitude* provides a highly cinematic listening experience, full of roiling seas and shifting skies.

—James Hale



**Gratitude:** Emilie; In A Garden; Amber Is Falling (Red And Yellow); Woodside Waltz; We Had A Sister; The Timbre Of Gratitude; Isfahan; Don't Mean A Thing At All; Clouds. (53:39)

**Personnel:** Dayna Stephens, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, EWI, synthesizer, bass (9); Julian Lage, guitar (2, 4, 6–8); Brad Mehldau, piano (1, 3, 5), tack piano (4); Larry Grenadier, bass (1–8); Eric Harland, drums (1–6, 8, 9).

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



# Stars Can't Shine without Darkness

**Guy Davis & Fabrizio Poggi, *Sonny & Brownie's Last Train* (M. C. Records 0081; 44:05 ★★★★★)** In an Italian studio, guitarist-vocalist Guy Davis pairs with harmonica player Fabrizio Poggi in homage to Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee with warm adaptations of time-honored songs associated with those past. Davis, who has portrayed Terry in Broadway plays, never falters in his aim to follow his imagination wherever it leads. He's a wonder of individual expression. While more predictable in his approach to country blues, Poggi has enough presence of mind to avoid being overshadowed by Davis.

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

**Hayes McMullan, *Everyday Seem Like Murder Here* (Light In The Attic 152; 62:45 ★★★★★)** Musicologist Gayle Dean Wardlow's 1967-'68 recordings of little-known Hayes McMullan, performing at his sharecropper shack in the Delta or in a Memphis studio, are wearing their age well. Showing surprisingly good form despite 30-plus years away from blues activity, his vocals on almost all 31 songs please for their calm virility, clear diction and easeful delivery. Just as engrossing, McMullan's guitar work in several tunings bespeaks a dramatic heft that is somewhat different from the hard purposefulness typical of other Delta cohorts, such as the cantankerous Charlie Patton. Nine tracks are short reminiscences. A 28-page insert includes lyrics, an essay by Wardlow and guitarist-teacher John Miller's song annotations.

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

**Various Artists, *Classic Piedmont Blues* (Smithsonian Folkways 40221; 64:29 ★★★★★)** The hands-down best collection of folk-blues of the Appalachian foothills to appear in recent years swarms with a gentle liveliness and easy lyricism compliments of solid practitioners Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Elizabeth Cotton, Josh White, Rev. Gary Davis, John Jackson, Hobart Smith and others. Twenty-one numbers, impeccably chosen by academician Barry Lee Pearson, issued on the Folkways label over seven decades-plus, are sterling exercises in fingerpicking guitar. Includes an informative 36-page booklet assembled by Pearson.

Ordering info: [folkways.si.edu](http://folkways.si.edu)

**Billy T Band, *Reckoning* (Big H Records; 40:17 ★★★★★)** After a dozen years



Hayes McMullan

GAYLE DEAN WARDLOW

backing guitarist Eddie Kirkland, bass player Billy Troiani moved to Norway in the late 1990s. Since then, he's rooted himself at Oslo's Muddy Waters Blues Club in addition to releasing four acclaimed albums that slice the difference between modern blues and old blue-eyed Philadelphia soul. Troiani's a confident vocalist and songwriter with a gift for conjuring wistful emotional states without being overstated or bombastic about it. Highlights are the splendidly easy-paced "Reckoning," "Sad Man" and "Gone," their arrangements making efficient use of a string section. None of the other seven songs can be judged less than entertaining, though Troiani and his usually unflappable sidemen aren't on their game performing Meters-style r&b on "It Ain't Right."

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

**Jim Gustin & Truth Jones, *Memphis* (Self Release; 43:43 ★★★★★)** Jim Gustin's singing voice is a steel-wool-textured rasp. It's the last thing you'd want to hear if abruptly awakened in the night and sensed the presence of an intruder. Fear not, this veteran of the L.A. blues scene employs his earth-gouging roars for friendly accounts of love trouble. And Gustin isn't the whole story. Truth Jones (aka Jeri Goldenhar) steps to the fore as vocalist on the shuffle "Big Hearted Woman" and three more likeable tunes. Furthermore, Gustin and Jones' blues-soul-rock band with sure-fingered Steve Alterman on keyboards and Teresa James on backup vocals is right on the money, neither static nor overheated. **DB**

Ordering info: [squareup.com/store/jimgustinandtruth](http://squareup.com/store/jimgustinandtruth)  
**Jones.**

## Roxy Coss

### *Chasing The Unicorn*

POSI-TONE

★★★★★

One of the first sounds on *Chasing The Unicorn* is a unique, ephemeral idea in its own right—a soprano saxophone tone that is supple and bright, well-rounded but buoyant. Roxy Coss' soprano opens the title track, and the result is an engaging, playful medium-tempo tune that ends with a solo full of grit and bite.

Coss mixes original tunes with a handful of jazz and pop covers. The two pop tunes—Willie Nelson's "Crazy" and The Beatles' "Oh! Darling"—stand out for the careful arrangements that make them sound part of the jazz idiom. "Darling" is transformed from a lovesick ballad into a bluesy lament anchored by drummer Jimmy Macbride, while in Coss' hands, "Crazy" somehow feels more heartbreaking and lonesome than the original.

Throughout the disc, Coss proves her versatility on a range of instruments, and though she leans toward tenor, conjuring up a forceful reedy bark from the saxophone, she is equally adept at soprano and bass clarinet. *Chasing The Unicorn* also showcases her original compositions, like the pleasingly disorienting "Never Enough," which mixes musical sophistication and know-how with an inherent listenability.

—Jon Ross

**Chasing The Unicorn:** Chasing The Unicorn; A Shade Of Jade; You're There; Free To Be; Oh! Darling; Never Enough; Virgo, Unwavering Optimism; Benny's Tune; Endless Cycle; Crazy. (56:53)

**Personnel:** Roxy Coss, saxophones, bass clarinet; Alex Wintz, guitar; Glenn Zaleski, piano; Rick Rosato, bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums.

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



## Yamaki/Laswell/ Douglas

### *The Drawing Center*

M.O.D. TECHNOLOGIES

★★★★½

This single 46-minute piece "The Science Of Imaginary Solutions" was recorded live at The Drawing Center, a small gallery in New York's SoHo district, in August 2016. It centers around drummer Hideo Yamaki, who has been collaborating with bassist Bill Laswell since the 1980s. Trumpeter Dave Douglas was subsequently added to the duo lineup as a guest, but there is no hierarchy of time in this resourceful improvisation. Following a brief exploratory wander, Laswell is already formulating a shimmery bass line. Yamaki keeps gentle time on hi-hat-with-bells, and Douglas awakens into a fanfare solo. The trumpeter seems especially suited for this kind of effects-aided soundscape, fresh from his adventures as the leader of the jazz/EDM outfit High Risk. Here, he sports a refracted tone that's reminiscent of Randy Brecker's sound on "The Purple Lagoon," that late-1970s Frank Zappa chestnut from *Zappa In New York*.

Around halfway, the palate is cleansed, Douglas emitting smears and blurts, at first sharply, then answered by his own effects, like an electro-acoustic Don Cherry. Laswell takes a solo as Yamaki whistles softly in the background. To conclude this invigorating piece, the threesome regains the calm of their opening moments.

—Martin Longley

**The Drawing Center:** The Science Of Imaginary Solutions. (45:47)

**Personnel:** Hideo Yamaki, drums; Bill Laswell, bass; Dave Douglas, trumpet, effects.

**Ordering info:** [mod-technologies.com](http://mod-technologies.com)



## Julia Hülsmann Trio

### *Sooner And Later*

ECM 2547

★★★★★

*Sooner And Later* dwells in many places where pianist Julia Hülsmann and bassist Marc Muellbauer lead and follow each other. Along with drummer Heinrich Köbberling (who emerges with pronounced force on his upbeat, tuneful "You & You"), Hülsmann and Muellbauer contribute original compositions, including one inspired a melody written by 12-year-old Kyrgyzstani violinist Rysbay Abdykadyrow (the reharmonized, solemn "Biz Joluktuk") and another by Radiohead (a gentle, somber "All I Need").

The album, Hülsmann's sixth for ECM, tacks toward visitations that come and go in unconventional ways. The writing serves the purposes of melody most often, with improvising subtle and understated. Muellbauer's "The Poet (For Ali)" begins modestly, only to build in intensity with the album's strongest rhythmic pulse.

One of the album's liveliest numbers comes with Hülsmann's bouncy, slightly funky "J.J." The song's theme conveys the band's playful sides, the tune ultimately rolling into the album's most delicious song.

—John Epland



## Noah Haidu

### *Infinite Distances*

CELLAR LIVE 080216

★★★★★½

Drive and depth inform this meaty album by Noah Haidu, the assertive pianist and innovative composer leading its 11 sizzling tracks.

Inspired by a conversation with Branford Marsalis about Rainer Maria Rilke, Haidu wrote 10 of these tunes, six of which form a suite based on the German poet's provocative dictum: "Among the closest people there remain infinite distances."

"The Subversive" sets the tone—rarely has bristling playing been so alluring—that carries through the recording. Haidu regularly surprises, making his Cellar Live debut after two Posi-Tone recordings an unexpected delight. The title track, launched by an ascending, minor-key Haidu figure, blossoms into romantic melody, unison saxophones ushering in a ruminative Haidu solo and alto saxophonist Sharel Cassity's fierce skirl. Trumpeter Jeremy Pelt contributes bright solos to the appropriately brisk "Momentum," the leisurely waltz, "Hanaya," and the witty "They Who?" That last could have come from the Horace Silver songbook.

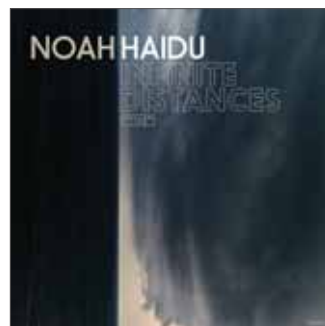
The album closes with a warm interpretation of "Serenity." Irabagon's dainty, and later propulsive, soprano saxophone and a Haidu solo give the Joe Henderson tune unusual elasticity.

—Carlo Wolff

**Infinite Distances:** The Subversive; Infinite Distances; Against The Sky; Hanaya; This Great Darkness; Can We Talk; Guardian Of Solitude; Momentum; They Who?; Juicy; Serenity. (69:52)

**Personnel:** Noah Haidu, piano; Sharel Cassity, alto saxophone; John Davis (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11), Mark Ferber (1, 2, 3, 7), drums; Peter Brendler (1, 2, 3, 7), Alejandro de la Portilla, (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11), bass; Jon Irabagon soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet, flugelhorn.

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



**Sooner And Later:** From Afar; Thatpujai; You & You; Biz Joluktuk; All I Need; The Poet (For Ali); Offen; J.J.; Soon; Later; Der Mond. (49:27)

**Personnel:** Julia Hülsmann, piano; Marc Muellbauer, bass; Heinrich Köbberling, drums.

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



A full-body photograph of Jeff Coffin, a bald man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a maroon button-down shirt and dark pants. He is holding a gold tenor saxophone with his right hand. A white rectangular box is superimposed over his chest.

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WOODWINDS



## SFJAZZ Collective Music Of Miles Davis & Original Compositions

SFJAZZ RECORDS

★★★★

For most of its 13th season, the SFJAZZ Collective chose to honor the music of Miles Davis. Members of the all-star octet each wrote an arrangement of a selection from the legendary trumpeter's songbook and also penned an original piece. As has been the case since its opening in January 2013, the SFJAZZ Center was the setting for these live recordings.

The Davis material is sourced from pieces

first released in 1958 ("Milestones," "Nardis") through 1986 ("Tutu"). The all-time popular *Kind Of Blue* is unsurprisingly the source of two numbers.

Trumpeter Sean Jones' uptempo arrangement of "So What" opens the album. Drummer Obed Calvaire's gyrating ride work and pianist Edward Simon's assertive comping drive trombonist Robin Eubank's fluid solo. Eubank's arrangement of "Tutu," in turn, showcases the interlocked playing of the front line (including vibraphonist Warren Wolf) and Jones' shimmering muted playing, which takes the spotlight when the original theme is introduced a little over halfway through.

Clocking in at almost 11 minutes, the Collective's Calvaire-arranged take on the title track to Davis' 1970 *Bitches Brew* reflects the haze-filled exploration of the original. Simon switches to electric keyboard and helps bassist Matt Penman sustain tension during an indefatigable solo. The addition of vibraphone and Wolf's masterful use of sustain adds an extra meditative level to "All Blues."

Jones has played in various acoustic and electric Davis tribute projects since 2011, and his original "Hutcherson Hug" was an emotional standout whenever it was played live during a season in which SFJAZZ honored SFJAZZ Collective co-founder and Bay Area resident Bobby Hutcherson (1941–2016).

Named after the demonstrative way in which the late vibraphone and marimba master would greet his bandmates—and most anyone else he knew—"Hutcherson Hug" appears on the Davis tribute album, with an extended introduction by Wolf.

Penman's "Your Turn" features another exciting introduction, this time by the entire horn section. The composer himself follows up nimbly with support from his rhythm section mates; Simon's spiraling playing and Calvaire's insistent snare frame the bassist's patient note choices.

The Collective's vocal chops are put to use at the front end of alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón's "Tribe," while tenor saxophonist David Sánchez's "Canto" draws from Haitian and Puerto Rican traditions.

A couple of unexpected Collective member originals provide fun moments of surprise. Wolf's "In The Heat Of The Night" is the ultimate acoustic slow jam, and Simon's "Feel The Groove" closes the album in an infectious danceable manner.

—Yoshi Kato

**Music Of Miles Davis & Original Compositions:** So What; Nardis; Milestones; Tutu; Bitches Brew; All Blues; Joshua; Teo. (65:10)

**Personnel:** Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; David Sánchez, tenor saxophone; Sean Jones, trumpet; Robin Eubank, trombone; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; Edward Simon, piano, keyboard; Matt Penman, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums.

**Ordering info:** [sfjazz.org/shop](http://sfjazz.org/shop)

## Courvoisier/ Halvorson Crop Circles

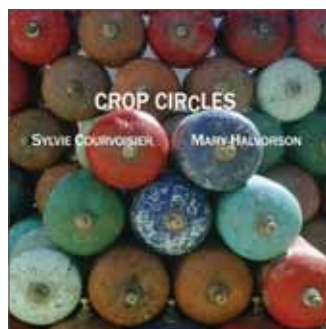
RELATIVE PITCH 1045

★★★★

This debut recording between two of New York's most idiosyncratic and distinctive improvisers reveals just what careful listeners pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and guitarist Mary Halvorson really are. Each musician contributed pieces to the album, which is deeply chamber-like in its deft, interactive intimacy. But the real action is where they take those written themes.

"La Cigale" gets its febrile energy from the mixture of Courvoisier's inside-the-piano tinkering, while Halvorson continues to warp her tones into something as alien and consonant as metallic clatter. Here and elsewhere there's no missing the intense dialogue that occurs, with the musicians eschewing easy back-and-forth in favor of free association, routinely coming together and drifting apart with unspoken grace. The hurtling "Downward Dog" contains none of the meditative calm that title might suggest, instead serving up a bounty of twined episodes where knotty passages are essayed in coiled lockstep, only to witness the women untangle their lines and start all over again. It's all about the way they navigate the writing as a pair of individuals, always serving the cumulative sound but remaining very much themselves.

—Peter Margasak



**Crop Circles:** La Cigale; Aftershock; Eclats For Ornette; Absent Across Skies; Downward Dog; Your Way; Water Scissors; Woman In The Dunes; Double Vision; Bitter Apple. (46:19)

**Personnel:** Sylvie Courvoisier, piano; Mary Halvorson, guitar.

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

## Bokanté Strange Circles

GROUNDUP

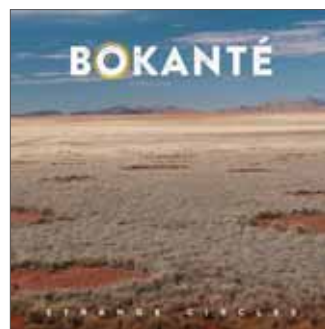
★★★★

Snarky Puppy ringleader Michael League has a worldly new project that combines a variety of musicians from all over the globe. It's called Bokanté, which is Creole for "exchange." That name is fitting, as the eight musicians—hailing from

four different continents—come together and exchange different musical ideas to birth something totally fresh. Through words sung by Malika Tirolien in Creole and French, sonic landscapes created by blending Snarky Puppy members with lap steel guitarist Roosevelt Collier, and percussion by André Ferrari and Keita Ogawa, Bokanté's debut melds Caribbean and African sounds in psychedelic new ways.

On "O La," polyrhythms give way to Collier's spacey pedal steel guitar, which emerges as one of the leading voices on *Strange Circles*. With "Roudesann," the Creole soul of Tirolien is at the forefront, until some Afrobeat riffing gives a loose, improvisational feel that fans of Snarky will certainly enjoy. "Apathie Mortelle" is a spiritual slow-burner that gives way to one of the most intensely energetic cuts on the record, "Vayan." When sounds from across the world collide in the pop landscape, it can often come off as cheesy. Luckily, with League at the helm, this diverse group of musicians really nails it.

—Chris Tart



**Strange Circles:** Joue Ké Ouvè; Nou Tout Sé Yonn; O La; Zyé Ouvè, Zyé Fèné; Roudesann; Limyé; An Ni Chans; Apathie Mortelle; Vayan; Héritier. (49:53)

**Personnel:** Michael League, baritone guitar, bass; Malika Tirolien, vocals; Jamey Haddad, André Ferrari, Keita Ogawa, percussion; Chris McQueen, Bob Lanzetti, guitar; Roosevelt Collier, lap steel guitars.

**Ordering info:** [groundupmusic.net](http://groundupmusic.net)





Thiago Costa (left), Edu Ribeiro, Bruno Migotto, Chico Pinheiro and Filipe Salles are The Reunion Project

## The Beautiful Sound

Brazilian music and jazz have been cross-pollinating since at least 1921, when the great sambista, flutist and bandleader Pixinguinha and his orchestra enjoyed a hugely successful six-month engagement in Paris, during which he was exposed to American jazz. Upon his return to Brazil, he began to play the saxophone and to incorporate some of the ragtime and jazz tunes he heard there. Brazilians ever since have been integrating jazz harmonies, rhythms and instrumentation into their sambas and other homegrown musical genres. Four excellent new albums by Brazilians both at home and abroad demonstrate the durability and variety of samba jazz, and its continuing cross-pollination with American jazz.

**The Reunion Project** is indeed a reunion of four old friends from São Paulo who grew up together, then separately went on to become among the most accomplished musicians in Brazilian jazz. The four are guitar prodigy Chico Pinheiro, saxophonist Felipe Salles, pianist Thiago Costa and drummer Edu Ribeiro. With the addition of newcomer Bruno Migotto on bass, their album **Varanda** (Tapestry/Capri 76027; 66:39 ★★★★★) shows off their chemistry, virtuosity and serious songwriting chops. This is challenging yet tuneful modern jazz that doesn't always wear its Brazilian pedigree on its sleeve. We can only hope it's the first of many reunions.

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

**Romero Lubambo** has been the first-call Brazilian jazz guitarist working in America for the last two decades or so, and for good reason: He uses his lightning speed judiciously, his timing is impeccable and he has an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz and Brazilian music. **Sampa** (Sunnyside 1466; 51:45 ★★★★★) is all about Lubambo's virtuosity and personal songbook. With two highly proficient São Paulo-based collaborators—bassist Sidiel Vieira and drummer

Thiago Rabello—he presents a wide-ranging program that includes Brazilian classics like the bossa nova “Estamos Aí,” two lovely songs by Brazilian accordion master Dominguinhos and poignant originals like “Paquito In Bremen” (written for his friend Paquito D’Rivera) and “Luisa” (written for his daughter). On **Sampa**, Lubambo demonstrates once again why he is probably the greatest exponent of Brazilian jazz guitar since Baden Powell.

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

What if Wayne Shorter had been born in Rio? That's the question that **Antonio Adolfo** poses—and answers—in most satisfying fashion on **Hybrido—From Rio To Wayne Shorter** (AntonioAdolfoMusic.com; 54:49 ★★★★★). The distinguished pianist/arranger/composer softens Shorter's hard-bop edges slightly, adding a sensual Brazilian lilt to eight of the master's tunes, plus one original, with a first-rate band. If you had only heard Adolfo's version of “Footprints,” you'd be surprised to learn it wasn't written in Rio. The captivating version here includes beautiful the wordless vocals of guest singer Zé Renato.

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

Rio de Janeiro-born pianist **David Feldman** was tutored by Luiz Eça, pianist of Brazil's legendary Tamba Trio. His third album, **Horizonte** (David Feldman Music; 59:11 ★★★★★), featuring exceptional support from bassist André Vasconcellos and drummer Marcio Bahia, emphasizes tuneful originals that are by turns wistful, romantic and melancholy. The three well-chosen covers are by Oscar Castro-Neves, Johnny Alf and Toninho Horta, who also appears on two tracks. Feldman's delicate touch and swinging lyricism are reminiscent of Fred Hersch and Bill Charlap. If that sounds like high praise, it is meant to be.

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

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## Ben Markley Big Band *Clockwise: The Music Of Cedar Walton*

OA2 22139

★★★★★

By taking tunes pianist Cedar Walton created during his tenure with the Jazz Messengers (“I’m Not So Sure”), wrote for Joe Henderson (“Black”) and composed for trios and quartets bearing his own name, Ben Markley has lovingly crafted an exciting, intense disc that brings a new perspective to Walton’s music.

*Clockwork* is a retrospective of sorts. The compositions span Walton’s entire career, but Markley—along with a group of highly talented musicians and guest trumpeter Terell Stafford—aren’t creating staid tribute music. On “Martha’s Prize,” Markley allows the full band to carry the opening piano melody, broadening the harmonic content and using the melody as a way to explore Walton’s writing. The main figure is passed throughout the band, but always handled delicately and musically. In addition to outstanding solo turns, *Clockwise* really excites when highlighting smaller ensembles within the group. Markley’s writing for the saxophones is invigorating, and when he allows the trumpets to navigate vertiginous lines of bebop, it brings a bit of added flair.

—Jon Ross



**Clockwise:** Cedar’s Blues; Clockwise; Fiesta Espanol; Hindsight; I’ll Let You Know; I’m Not So Sure; Holy Land; Bolivia; Martha’s Prize; Black. (75:32)

**Personnel:** Ben Markley, piano; Wil Swindler, Scott Turpen, Peter Sommer, Serafin Sanchez, Sam Williams, saxophones; Scott Crump, Paul McKee, Adam Bartczak, Gary Mayne, trombones; Pete Olstad, Greg Gisbert, John Lake, Terell Stafford, trumpets; Steve Kovalcheck, guitar (2, 6); Ken Walker, bass; Chris Smith, drums.

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

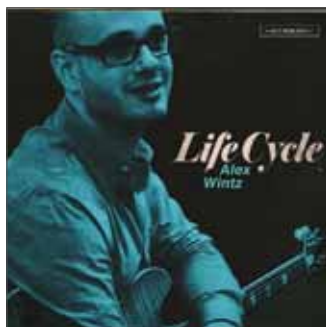
## Alex Wintz *LifeCycle* CULTURE SHOCK MUSIC

★★★★½

The most surprising thing about Alex Wintz’s *LifeCycle* is its range. It’s an album that starts in a straight-ahead mode—safe, conventional and pretty darn pleasant. Wintz isn’t a flashy guitarist. He’s capable, talented and learned. Yet as each track progresses over the hour, there are a few more touches of razzle-dazzle. It takes some warming up. By the end, the more contemporary elements rear their heads.

The first half is a sweet collection of relatively gentle songs. There’s even a charming take on the old chestnut “Sweet And Lovely.” Taken in context with the more progressive second half of the album, these songs speak to a forward movement in style of play, a life cycle of creative development. Wintz is mastering the basic elements of jazz guitar before breaking down the form. To achieve this balance, Wintz’s accompanying band also covers an impressive range. Dave Baron plays bass throughout, adding buoyancy and drive. And Lucas Pino’s tenor saxophone makes lovely runs at a startling pace. Drummer Jimmy Macbride goes everywhere Wintz is prepared to go, and he gets there with more than enough gusto. Wintz made a nice album that grows as you hear it, making for an engaging voyage.

—Anthony Dean-Harris



**LifeCycle:** Action/Reaction; Sweet And Lovely; Life Cycle; I Don’t Stand A Ghost Of A Chance With You; Seeing Distance; The Low Country; Taking Sides; Shared Stories; Locust Ave. (51:00)

**Personnel:** Alex Wintz, guitar; Lucas Pino, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 5, 7); Jimmy Macbride, drums; Victor Gould, piano (1, 3, 5, 8); Ben Williams, bass (1, 2, 5); Dave Baron, bass (3, 4, 6–9).

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

## Gregory Lewis *Organ Monk, The Breathe Suite*

SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

In this ambitious six-movement suite, Hammond B-3 organist Gregory Lewis addresses the sinister and sharply rising count of African American deaths at the hands of police officers. *The Breathe Suite* is a major development in his work, and an elaboration of the Organ Monk combo’s 1960s-inspired groove concept.

This album’s individually dedicated suite movements are divided between a tight trio (featuring regular guitarist Ron Jackson) and a quintet formation (featuring guests Marc Ribot and Nasheet Waits). Each movement tends to have its most intricate sequences near the beginning, acting as a platform for subsequent directness. On the second movement, “Trayvon,” Lewis leaps up to the high end of his organ, trilling, racing and frilling, as Jackson solos with a mellower liquidity. The quintet pieces tend to reveal greater complexities, as expected, with the fourth movement, “Eric Garner,” featuring a portentous organ and guitar dialogue.

Lewis has retained the groove, but now has a high concept, and a series of elaborate framing devices. This work immediately demands a heavy itinerary of live performances.

—Martin Longley



**Organ Monk, The Breathe Suite:** Chronicles Of Michael Brown; Trayvon; Aiyana Jones Song; Eric Garner; Ausar And The Race Soldiers; Ausar And The Race Soldiers (Reprise). (49:32)

**Personnel:** Gregory Lewis, Hammond B-3 organ; Ron Jackson (2, 3, 5), Marc Ribot (1, 4), guitar; Jeremy “Bear” Clemons (2, 3, 5, 6), Nasheet Waits (1, 4, 6), drums; Riley Mullins, trumpet (1, 4, 5); Reggie Woods, tenor saxophone (1, 4, 5).

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

## George Colligan *More Powerful* WHIRLWIND 4708

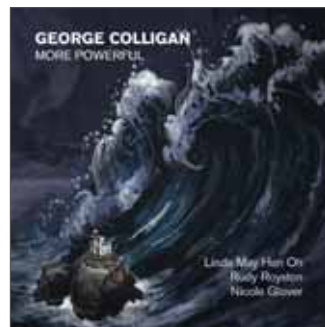
★★★★★

Pianist George Colligan unleashes an eclectic collection of original compositions with the swaggering *More Powerful*. Three of the nine tunes reference *Star Wars*, including the title track. The opener, “Whiffle Ball,” conjures the pianist’s childhood games, others attest to the stillness of the Arizona desert, and the album ends with “The Nash,” Colligan’s peppery nod to a favorite Phoenix jazz club.

Alternating trio and quartet selections, the album bridges the prickly and the pretty, keeping listeners on their toes and demanding their engagement. Take “The Nash.” Like “Whiffle Ball,” it’s a breakneck, rhythmically startling tune. It launches with Nicole Glover’s soprano saxophone, braiding bassist Linda Oh and drummer Rudy Royston into the mix before Colligan takes off fast. His solo is percussive and rhythmic, his bright tone reflected in Royston’s flashy beats.

Colligan, who has been a sideman with artists including Jack DeJohnette, Vanessa Rubin and Don Byron, is comfortable in numerous modes, from the frenetic to the pastoral. His own style is hard to classify and impossible to ignore, making *More Powerful* essential listening.

—Carlo Wolff



**More Powerful:** Whiffle Ball; Waterfall Dreams; Effortless; Today Again; More Powerful Than You Could Possibly Imagine; Retrograde Pluto; Southwestern Silence; Empty; The Nash. (54:23)

**Personnel:** George Colligan, piano; Nicole Glover, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Linda Oh, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

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



# Spiritual Awakenings

There's plenty of things to be said about the Luaka Bop release of historic recordings made by **Alice Coltrane** (1937–2007). On the one hand, they are an important part of jazz history, continuing to shed light on the path she and her husband, John, might have taken had he lived longer.

They also show her as an innovative artist and thinker who continued to grow and challenge herself after she retired from public performance to focus her attention on spiritual practice. They prove that she took a philosophical approach to her music much like she did her faith, considering and absorbing different ideas and even bringing her gospel background into the music she made for her Eastern religious practice.

But there's another point that shouldn't be missed. At the risk of tempting fate, it should be noted that whoever is the first producer to drop a sample from **World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda** (Luaka Bop 0087; 60:09 ★★★★★) onto a Beyoncé or M.I.A. cut is going to make a million.

That's because the 10 tracks that constitute this new collection exude an inner strength that maybe isn't exclusive to African American women but is certainly familiar to them. This is music that is assured and communal. It isn't brash or boastful; it is forward-thinking and resolute. From the fullness of the recording quality to the spirit behind it, this is contemporary and committed work.

The remarkable career of Alice Coltrane (she would add the "Turiyasangitananda" in the late 1970s) after her husband's death is too little remembered today; she seems often to be considered either a footnote or a clinger-on. But in the late 1960s and early '70s, she crafted a music that was new and very much her own. In addition to piano, she played harp and organ, explored Indian modalities and worked with many of her late husband's bandmates, as well as such top-notch players as Ron Carter, Ornette Coleman, Charlie Haden, Joe Henderson and Carlos Santana.

Her musical and spiritual journey were along the same path. In 1969, she began studying and practicing Vendata Hinduism. Within a few years she had moved with her four children (one from her first marriage) to California and founded an ashram.

After a few years, she began bringing her music into the practice. She built on the melodies of traditional Indian and Nepalese devotional songs, creating layered, vibrant



Alice Coltrane

works to be performed with the congregation.

Those efforts were heard on her albums of the 1980s and 1990s, but were also the basis for the cassettes she sold in runs of 100 at the ashram. Those tracks, at once more personal and more communal, are collected on *The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda*.

There are, to be certain, some meditative tracks in the collection, but it's surprising how upbeat and energetic some of Turiyasangitananda's devotional music was. The album opens with the joyous chants and handclaps over synthesizer clouds of "Om Rama," eventually giving over to a powerful tenor singing a Sanskrit gospel. The organ-driven "Om Shanti" borders on contemporary r&b, except that it swells with a choir rather than breaking into verse and chorus. From there, well, it would be a mistake to call it a party, but it's no midnight mass.

It's remarkable and commendable that David Byrne's Luaka Bop label is throwing itself behind the little-heard work of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda.

On top of that, the Red Bull Academy music festival gave the album a proper New York City launch on May 21. A sunset concert inspired by her musical services and led by Surya Botofasina, who grew up in the ashram, was followed by a set by son Ravi Coltrane with a band that includes Reggie Workman (who played with both Alice and John) and some talented younger players, including pianist David Virelles and harpist Brandee Younger.

Perhaps there's hope that, a decade after her death, the mystic wife, widow and mother might find a new and well-served audience.

DB

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



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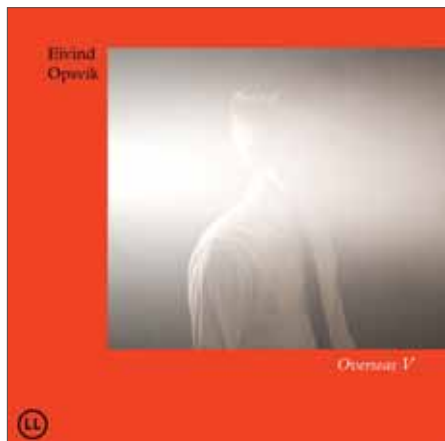


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## Eivind Opsvik *Overseas V*

LOYAL

★★★★

It's already been five years since Eivind Opsvik's excellent *Overseas IV* came out. The Norwegian-born, New York-based bassist does not like to rush, and we should not blame him. If this new opus does not quite reach the same heights as its predecessor, it remains a more than worthwhile statement by an ensemble that produces a thoroughly distinctive sound.

This time, Opsvik aims at merging rock energy with a sophisticated jazz aesthetic.

Rarely has such dissonant and disjointed music sounded so melodic. In the search of a group sound, tenor saxophonist Tony Malaby, guitarist Brandon Seabrook and keyboardist Jacob Sacks are not so much soloists as they are leading voices. Drummer Kenny Wollesen and the leader lay out a solid foundation and provide a steady pulse.

While "Extraterrestrial Tantrum" and "Shoppers And Pickpockets" are restfully hypnotic, "First Challenge On The Road" could qualify as trance rock, with short motifs repeated over relentless rhythmic patterns. Against a constant backdrop, the three lead voices seem to join in or opt out—and their contributions are devoid of unnecessary gestures. Seabrook oscillates between spacey and harsh phrases, Sacks basks in angularity and Malaby is most delightful when letting his gruffness show.

Some of the tunes could have been more developed, but more often than not they are packed with enough finely detailed surprises and ideas to make it a deeply satisfying experience.

—Alain Drouot

**Overseas V:** I'm Up This Step; Hold Everything; Extraterrestrial Tantrum; Brraps!; Cozy Little Nightmare; First Challenge On The Road; Shoppers And Pickpockets; IZO; Katmania Duskmann. (38:55)

**Personnel:** Eivind Opsvik, bass, synthesizer, drum machine, hand claps; Brandon Seabrook, electric guitar; Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone; Kenny Wollesen, drums, percussion, drum machine, hand claps; Jacob Sacks, piano, organ.

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



## DR. MiNT *Voices In The Void*

ORENDA 0037

★★★★

From the futuristic graphics to the expansive download that comes with the vinyl recording, DR. MiNT leaves no forward stone unturned. A collaboration between a Los Angeles-based front line and a shape-shifting, New York-based rhythm section, *Voices In The Void* is consistently stimulating and ambitious, even when it devolves—rarely—into cacophony.

This iconoclastic group expresses the collective vision of trumpeter Daniel Rosenboom, saxophonist Gavin Templeton, guitarist/effects wizard Alexander Noice, electric bass/effects man Sam Minaie and drummer Caleb Dolister. Together they build "archestrations," collaborative compositions created on the spot from a template that might be rhythmic or melodic.

DR. MiNT's fifth album includes "Kingdom In The Middle," the record's launch cut, so thick it's impossible to tell who plays what; "Down To One," at its core a duel between Templeton and Noice; and "N-Drift," the longest tune on the album (which, it's worth mentioning, has been stylishly pressed on red vinyl).

The bonus digital album, *Beyond The Void*, is much longer and perhaps more ambitious. It starts with the wittily titled "Benny Hill Bath Salts," then follows with "A Voice In The Noise," a showcase for the similarly free-spirited Templeton at his most pointed. The download ends with "Everything Is Going To Be Okay (Pt. II)," which covers march, dirge and, in its very satisfying middle, a deep, floating groove showcasing Dolister and Minaie's simpatico rhythmic flexibility.

—Carlo Wolff

**Voices In The Void:** Kingdom In The Middle; Spacerobot (Dance); Down To One; The (Two)(Three) Sun Erupts; Fanfare Mécanique; A Bird, An Assassin; Nymbists; Emptyrean; N-Drift; Anathema. (36:24)

**Beyond The Void:** Benny Hill Bath Salts; A Voice In The Noise; The Single Echo; Sublime Design; Light Is Broken; The Crossing; Everything Is Going To Be Okay (Pt. II). (57:02)

**Personnel:** Daniel Rosenboom, trumpet; Caleb Dolister, drums; Sam Minaie, electric bass, effects; Alexander Noice, electric guitar, effects; Gavin Templeton, saxophones.

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







## Amir ElSaffar/ Rivers Of Sound Not Two

NEW AMSTERDAM RECORDS 088

★★★★

Trumpeter Amir ElSaffar goes out of his way to banish dualities on his latest recording, *Not Two*. Its name derives from a Zen Buddhist lesson intended to shake off the distortions of dualistic thinking.

Two Rivers, the sextet he has led for the past decade, was named to reflect ElSaffar's intent to combine jazz with the Iraqi musical form

known as *maqam*. (ElSaffar, a recipient of the 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, was born in Chicago to an American mother and Iraqi father.) Rivers of Sound, the 17-piece orchestra that plays on *Not Two*, likewise pulls back from binary modes. He even insisted on recording the music with analog technology, although you will be able to purchase it in digital formats.

The music that he has composed for the 17-piece orchestra Rivers Of Sound flows in a flux of ever-shifting colors, with bold brass fanfares giving way to classically Middle Eastern-sounding strings and sinuous reed melodies evolving patiently over unhurried, swinging rhythms that are accented by the distinct tonality of frame drum and dumbek. Over the course of eight tracks cut onto four sides of vinyl, ElSaffar introduces a series of cultural traditions, musical forms, and creative methodologies, and then mixes them together in a process of synthesis rather than addition.

On "Ifitah," oud and vibraphone lines spiral around each other like strands of DNA, and the leader's santur (a hammered dulcimer) melts into a swirl of strings and piano chords like elements being smelted into a hardy alloy. And on "Hijab 21/8" ElSaffar's trumpet, Mohammed Saleh's English horn and Ole Mathisen's tenor saxophone trade phrases that

fold the microtonal intricacy of maqam into a swaying groove that rises and recedes against the against the hard banks of repetitive chords played on guitar and vibes.

Likewise, ElSaffar's own playing hits the notes between the notes in ways that articulate and reinforce the music's structure rather than ornament it. This isn't to suggest that this music lacks feeling, but rather that the emotional elements are contained within something larger.

ElSaffar's mission to this point has been to integrate the vocabularies of jazz, classical and traditional Middle Eastern music. It's a mission he's accomplished in part as Music Curator at Alwan for the Arts, New York's hub for Arab and Middle Eastern culture, which hosts semi-monthly concerts and the annual Maqam Fest. But with *Not Two*, he's moved beyond building bridges; his music has become the river.

—Bill Meyer

**Not Two:** Ifitah; Jourjina Over Three; Penny Explosion; Ya Ibni, Ya Ibni (My Son, My Son); Layl (Night); Hijab 21/8; Shards of Memory/B Half-flat Fantasy; Bayat Declamation. (43:39/42:48)

**Personnel:** Amir ElSaffar, trumpet, santur, vocals; Carlo DeRosa, bass; Craig Taborn, piano; Dena ElSaffar, violin, jowza; Fabrizio Cas-sol, alto saxophone; George Ziadeh, oud, vocals; Jason Adasiewicz, vibraphone; JD Parran, bass, saxophone, clarinet; Miles Okazaki, guitar; Mohammed Saleh, oboe, English horn; Naseem Alatrash, cello; Nasheet Waits, drums; Ole Mathisen, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Rajna Swaminathan, mridangam; Tareq Abboushi, buzuq; Tim Moore, percussion, dumbek, frame drum; Zafer Tawil, percussion, oud.

Ordering info: [newamsterdamrecords.bandcamp.com](http://newamsterdamrecords.bandcamp.com)

## Howard Johnson & Gravity Testimony

TUSCARORA RECORDS 001

★★★

Jazz tuba pioneer Howard Johnson has been refining his art since 1963, working with Charles Mingus, Gil Evans, Carla Bley and, later, the Saturday Night Live Band. The Gravity group—consisting of four tubists—debuted on Taj Mahal's 1971 album, *The Real Thing*. Their latest recording doesn't involve a tuba tussle, but rather a harmonious engagement between the 75-year-old Johnson and five low-brass allies.

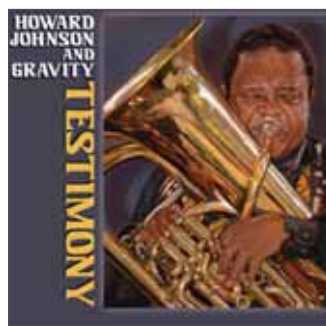
"Working Hard For The Joneses" is composed and sung by Johnson's daughter, Nedra. It's a blues that provides one of the album's atypical stretches, where the tuba-soloing dominance is dispersed. Another is "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" (as popularized by Aretha Franklin), where the low horns act more like a string section, burnishing with democratic attention to coloration of the tune. Johnson's own "Little Black Lucille" is another such instance, with its composer soloing on penny whistle. This blending of measured ego, tubas off-the-leash and a varied repertoire delivers an album of many facets, most of them highly satisfying to all low-brass aficionados.

—Martin Longley

**Testimony:** Testimony; Working Hard For The Joneses; Fly With The Wind; Natural Woman; High Priest; Little Black Lucille; Evolution; Way Back Home. (53:37)

**Personnel:** Howard Johnson, tubas, baritone saxophone, penny whistle; Velvet Brown, Dave Barger, Earl McIntyre, Joseph Daley, Bob Stewart, Joe Exley, tubas; Carlton Holmes, piano; Melissa Slocum, bass; Buddy Williams, drums; Nedra Johnson, vocals; CJ Wright, Butch Watson, Mem Nahad, backing vocals.

Ordering info: [hojotuba.bandcamp.com](http://hojotuba.bandcamp.com)



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## Trouble Kaze

June

CIRCUM-DISC LX009

★★★★

The fact that this album was recorded live in concert performance only underlines the breadth of its daring and imagination. The triple duo/double trio combination of musicians—all led by Japanese pianist-composer Satoko Fujii—makes for a fascinating contrast in density and virtual silence.

The musical sounds created by this Franco-Japanese ensemble are from the outer reaches of what's possible on standard jazz instruments. It's only the occasional vocal sound that reminds you that this music is being made by humans at all. By "Part II" the listener is probably as comfortable with the sheer randomness of it all as he or she is going to get, but there are always sudden sounds waiting to entrap the unwary, a constant feeling of aural tension that heightens the experience of listening. "Part III" allows some trumpet sounds, which have been hitherto submerged in the mix to move forward, and with space comes additional extremism. But "Part IV" dies down into virtual silence, as though the musicians are holding their collective breath. "Part V" is similarly silent, until the song develops with seriously intense stabs from all the players—silence shattered by noise. The challenge of this work is its reward, but get used to it before you hear it on headphones.

—Simon Scott

**June:** Part I; Part II; Part III; Part IV; Part V. (46:15)

**Personnel:** Natsuki Tamura, Christian Pruvost, trumpet; Sophie Agnel, Satoko Fujii, piano; Didier Lasserre, Peter Orins, drums.

**Ordering info:** [circum-disc.com](http://circum-disc.com)



## Billy Mintz Ugly Beautiful

THIRTEENTH NOTE RECORDS 010

★★★★

With this generous double-CD package, Billy Mintz gifts us with challenging yet communicative music. Whether setting the stage for free blowing or powerful through-composed themes, the drummer-composer has fashioned an album whose excellence runs wide and deep.

*Ugly Beautiful* is many things. One thing it is not is a vanity project. There are only a few moments throughout these two-plus hours where Mintz plays alone, and those moments are always in service of the music. The first three minutes of "Shmear" are nothing but drums, played thoughtfully, with muted dynamics and minimal flash. They draw the listener into an almost trancelike state, so that when the band comes in at an insanely rapid clip with a sputtering three-note motif, it's like a friendly—almost comic—slap to the face.

Mostly, *Ugly Beautiful* is an ensemble achievement, within which the participants play at the peak of their powers. As leader of this gifted assembly, Mintz distinguishes himself for his ability to draw from multiple wells and satisfy our thirst for music that honors tradition and exploration equally.

—Bob Doerschuk

**Ugly Beautiful:** Disc One: Angels; Vietnam; Dit; Flight; Flight (Ballad); Cannonball; Shmear; Dit (Alternate Take); Umba. (80:23) Disc Two: Tumba; Dirge; Love And Beauty; Ugly Beautiful; Relent; Retribution; After Retribution; Cannonball (Extended). (76:20)

**Personnel:** Billy Mintz, drums, percussion; John Gross, tenor saxophone; Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Roberta Piket, piano, keyboard; Hilliard Greene, bass.

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



## GoGo Penguin Live At Abbey Road EP

BLUE NOTE 602547743176

★★★★

British piano trio GoGo Penguin have garnered acclaim over the years for their precise sound, which creates an almost electronic vibe from their mostly acoustic endeavors. That same sensibility guides their four-song EP, recorded live at Studio 2 of London's Abbey Road Studios. The roughly 15-minute recording has a prudent quality to it, not overly flowery but filled with enough depth to allow for repeat listens.

These are live versions of songs from the band's 2016 album, *Man Made Object*, and they reveal a similar sense of restraint. That's certainly the case for "Ocean In A Drop," which rolls along confidently and smoothly. The experience of recording a few songs at the legendary Abbey Road must have been amazing, but the passion and zeal of that experience doesn't exactly come through in the recording. There's professionalism and practicality, sure, but these songs don't quite burst with exuberance. There are no new corners turned, no new flourishes at which to marvel. This was a lovely indulgence for a trio who have turned heads and made their way to the legendary Blue Note label. It's impressive that they can record in the hallowed halls of Abbey Road. If only they could have done more with its mystique.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**Live At Abbey Road EP:** Branches Break; Initiate; GBFISYSH; Ocean In A Drop. (18:00)

**Personnel:** Chris Illingworth, piano; Nick Blacka, bass; Rob Turner, drums.

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



## Brad Myers & Michael Sharfe Sanguinaria (Hopefulsongs)

COLLOQUY 13214

★★★★

This album is a creeper that becomes a keeper. Fundamentally a duo disk, it beds the careful guitar of Brad Myers in the warm embrace of bassist Michael Sharfe. Its judicious selections consist of four Myers originals, two contributions from friends of this Cincinnati duo and six works by veteran jazz icons.

The haunting title track, distinguished by Dan Karlsberg's melodica, paves the way for a modest but endearing album that speaks to Myers and Sharfe's deep knowledge of the jazz canon. No chestnuts here, though the finale, a perky take on Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way," comes close. The other contributions with special appeal are "New Moon," a sultry tune by Steve Cardenas featuring Tom Buckley's drums and cymbals; a solo bass take on Keith Jarrett's "Country"; and Jim Hall's "Waltz New," an homage to a guitarist who was quite familiar with duos himself.

Myers and Sharfe are at their best when they speed it up, as on the Myers originals "In From Somewhere" and "Norm's Ridge," a rippling, swirling tip of the hat to Pat Metheny's "Bright Size Life."

—Carlo Wolff

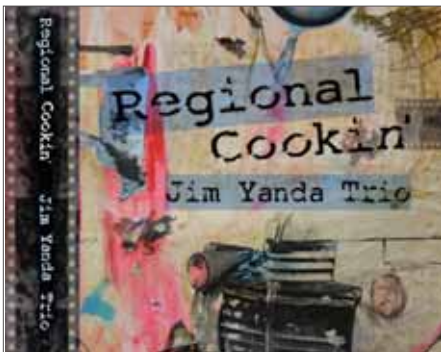
**Sanguinaria:** Sanguinaria (Hopefulsong); In From Somewhere; Line For Lyons; Waltz New; New Moon; Norm's Ridge; Country; Falling Grace; A Feeling Inspired By Maria; Bentley's Blues; Great Pumpkin Waltz; In Your Own Sweet Way. (59:47)

**Personnel:** Brad Myers, guitar; Michael Sharfe, bass, percussion; Dan Dorff Jr. (2, 6, 8), Tom Buckley (5, 9, 12), drums; Dan Karlsberg, melodica (1); Mark Wolfley, percussion (9, 11).

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







## Jim Yanda Trio *Regional Cookin'*

CORNER STORE JAZZ 0056

★★★½

There's a Zen quality to the Jim Yanda Trio's approach: no distractions, no beefy saxophones, none of the clutter that comes with keyboards. Mostly, there's air and a feel of high altitude, in which this trio seems right at home.

That's not to say they don't swing or crank things up, performance- and volume-wise, though when they do, as on "No More Outs," they skim rather than dig in.

But some of their most effective moments are among their sparest. On "Nu's Theme" Yanda restricts his guitar to single notes and a few Wes Montgomery-type octave moments for nearly four minutes, before finally dropping a couple of chords to bring his solo home. In the process, he flaunts melodic imagination and a brisk feel for swing.

These same qualities distinguish his work throughout *Regional Cookin'*. On "My Belle" he quotes from "Westminster Chimes"—you know, that 16-note piece that marks the top of the hour from bell towers at college campuses. And just for fun's sake, he tosses in the last two bars from "The Mickey Mouse March," which turn out to fit rather well into the centuries-old composition.

What's missing is variety. Yanda does tweak his tone a bit, distorting just a tad over a somewhat sludgy groove on the very spacious "Boutiba's Dream" as if to evoke a Jerry Garcia jam in sunny Golden Gate Park some 50 years ago.

Still, there are few real surprises, except maybe for an arrangement of "Round Midnight" that improbably escalates into a double-time sprint studded with drum accents and cymbal crashes. Maybe going full Stevie Ray on the blues-tinged "Situation Ethnics" wouldn't have been a bad idea.

—Bob Doerschuk

**Regional Cookin':** Nu's Theme; Tale Weaver; Believing; My Belle; Situation Ethnics; Boutiba's Dream; Three Thang; Folk Song; Round Midnight; No More Outs. (65:04)

**Personnel:** Jim Yanda, guitar; Drew Gress, bass; Phil Haynes, drums.

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

## Books / BY TERRY PERKINS

# Breaking Jazz's Glass Ceiling

Kansas City has a rich jazz heritage, with roots that go back to the founding of Musicians Protective Union 627, and a list of members that included early 1920s band-leaders Bennie Moten, Andy Kirk and Walter Page as well as jazz legends Count Basie, Mary Lou Williams, Lester Young, Charlie Parker and Jay McShann.

Kansas City's jazz legacy has been well documented with several histories and an extensive list of biographies of the major musicians. But **Carolyn Glenn Brewer** uncovers a neglected aspect of K.C. jazz history with *Changing the Tune: The Kansas City Women's Jazz Festival, 1978–1985* (University of North Texas Press).

Brewer, a music educator, musician, author and frequent contributor to Kansas City's Jazz Ambassador Magazine (JAM), first became interested in the Women's Jazz Festival while interviewing one of the event's founders, Carol Comer, about the history of the Kansas City Jazz Festival. A subsequent 2011 JAM article overviewing the Women's Festival was the first step in Brewer's decision to write *Changing the Tune*, and the result is a definitive look at the first major women's jazz festival and its lasting impact.

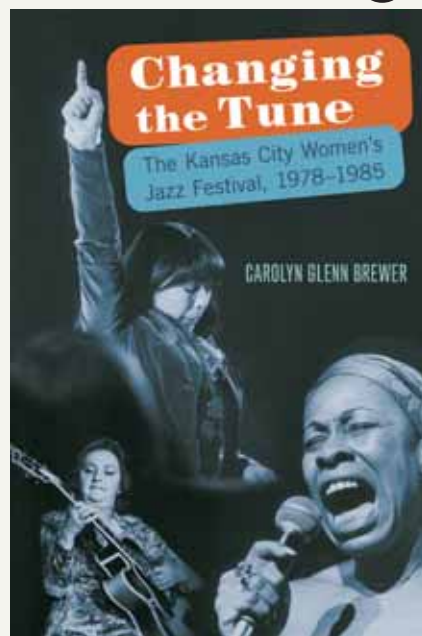
Comer, co-founder Dianne Gregg and board member Mike Ning provided Brewer with total access to their extensive archives of Women's Jazz Festival board meeting notes, photos, recordings, reviews and programs. In addition, Brewer also conducted extensive interviews with many of the musicians who performed at the seven festivals held from 1978 through 1985. (The festival did not take place in 1984.)

The book follows the chronological history of the festival, from Comer and Gregg's initial inspiration to create a jazz event focused on female musicians to the festival's eventual demise.

Comer, an active musician on the Kansas City scene, and Gregg, who hosted several jazz shows for the city's NPR station, KCUR, both covered the Wichita Jazz Festival in 1977, and a subsequent conversation focused on the lack of female musicians at the event, aside from Sarah Vaughan.

Comer suggested a women's jazz festival in Kansas City, and after thinking it over, they agreed to test the waters. Gregg called pianist Marian McPartland in New York to get her thoughts, and the response was enthusiastic. McPartland immediately recruited jazz critic Leonard Feather to the cause, and planning began for the first Kansas City Women's Jazz Festival in March 1978.

In addition to providing a detailed overview at the evolving formats and musical



lineups of each of the seven festivals, Brewer also takes the reader behind the scenes. From the constant struggle for funding to board politics and the effort and dedication of producers and volunteers, all aspects of running the non-profit festival are covered. But the primary focus throughout remains on the music and the musicians who played at the festival—from headliners such as McPartland, Williams, Betty Carter, Carmen McRae, Carla Bley, Shirley Scott, Nancy Wilson and Anita O'Day to then up-and-coming artists like Dianne Reeves and Jane Ira Bloom.

Through biographical asides about many of these musicians, Brewer also provides insight into the struggles and obstacles they faced as female artists in an environment dominated by male players. Especially telling are the moving stories of talented, lesser-known musicians who attended festival jam sessions at their own expense, who played in new talent competitions, or who were members of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, an all-girl band that began in 1938 near Jackson, Mississippi. The surviving members of the band were reunited at the 1980 festival in an emotional event.

*Changing the Tune* is a fitting tribute to the Kansas City Women's Jazz Festival's achievements and influence, as well as a valuable record of the ongoing struggle of talented female musicians to gain their rightful place in the jazz world.

DB

**Ordering info:** [untpress.unt.edu](http://untpress.unt.edu)

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# REVIVING THE PAST,

## Guitar Amps in the Modern Age

By Keith Baumann

**The idea of electronically amplifying a musical instrument is a notion that has been around for more than 100 years, and through the decades advances in technology have carried the guitar from the intimacy of a front parlor serenade to the high-decibel power of an arena rock concert. At the heart of this journey lies the amplifier, which has been as much a factor in defining the guitar's evolutionary path as the instrument itself. With the original intent of simply offering a means to increase volume, the amplifier became so much more, impacting popular music in ways that its early designers could never imagine.**

As the amplifier's undeniable influence on guitarists began to actually shape new musical styles and enhance creativity, manufacturers responded with new designs to meet the needs of the rapidly changing landscape. Today, advances in technology continue to open the doors to a universe of possibilities that are taking guitar amplification down entirely new and uncharted roads. Indeed, the amp market is at a pinnacle with a dizzying array of choices available to the musician. With options including vacuum tube, solid-state, compact, pedalboard and digital modeling, it can be an overwhelming task for the guitarist trying to navigate these deep waters. In taking a closer look at the current state of the guitar amplifier market, DownBeat spoke with several of today's innovative builders to learn more about what they do and why they do it.

### BOUTIQUE AMPLIFIERS

Early amplifiers appeared in the 1920s and typically suffered from poor sound due to the use of a radio horn speaker. The cone speaker introduced in 1925 along with the advent of AC powered amps (which could run off of standard household current) paved the way for the first commercially viable instrument amps. Based on radio broadcast circuitry, several manufacturers began to offer amps in the 1930s, largely driven by the Hawaiian steel guitar craze. These early amps were typically low wattage (no more than 15 watts), but in the mid-1950s Leo Fender changed all that by introducing models that were larger and more powerful, allowing them to produce clearer sound at higher volumes. He also began to add effects such as tremolo and reverb to his amps. Marshall and Vox followed in the 1960s, and together these three companies established the blueprint and set the standard for nearly all other guitar amps to come. These amps were designed specifically to output a clean signal, and the distortion that occurred at high volume—initially considered to be a shortcoming—appealed to certain guitarists. The rest, as they say, is history.

With the demand for vintage amps growing and the supply limited, prices for these classic units have skyrocketed. This fact, along with an overall decline in quality among many big-name manufacturers resulting from increased



Carr Impala



Alessandro Italian Greyhound



# DEFINING THE FUTURE

pressure to reduce costs and outsource manufacturing, presented an opportunity for skilled craftsmen to enter the market and produce high-quality handmade amps. These “boutique” builders, as they have come to be known, employ many of the same circuit designs and hand-wiring techniques originally utilized in the '50s and '60s to produce some of the world's most sought-after guitar amps.

Steve Carr of Carr Amplifiers (carramps.com) has been building vacuum tube amps since 1998. Like many of his peers, Carr's experience as a guitar player has played a key role in his business. He hand-builds several models of amps and points out that he is not a “clone” builder. “Vintage amps are pointers for me, not final destinations,” he declared. To Carr, it is

critical that his amps stand up to his personal standards as well as those of his staff. “As players here, we are also our own customers,” he said. Carr is a true artisan and points out that his amps are not “built on paper”; he begins with only a basic outline, constantly tweaking and adapting his designs along the way. In describing the sound of his amps, Carr uses words like clarity, warmth and responsiveness. In addition to a strong focus on quality and consistency, Carr feels that the esthetics of his amps are extremely important, and all his cabinets, hand-crafted in-house, are works of art in themselves.

When comparing his amps to vintage models, Carr said that his original creations are more versatile and more reliable than older amps. He noted that there will always be a demand for tube amps, and his business has remained steady for the past 20 years. He also noted that younger players

seem to be gravitating toward vintage and boutique amps these days and that the increasing scarcity of vintage amps is helping fuel the demand for his products. In his view, boutique amps appeal to a narrow and somewhat exclusive market, but as a small company, Carr Amplifiers is at the optimum size to survive any market fluctuations.

George Alessandro, owner of Alessandro High End Products (alessandro-products.com) has had a lifelong passion for vintage amps and began his career as a repairman before building his first amp and later founding his company in the mid-1990s. Alessandro offers a select line of hand-wired vacuum tube amps, which include the Italian Greyhound model, targeted specifically toward the jazz player. As a builder he strives to re-create the magic of vintage circuitry and then expand on it by using modern audiophile-grade components. “Amps are musical instruments that should inspire the player and eliminate



Quilter MicroPro Mach 2



Henriksen JazzAmp



Vox MV50



Custom Tones Ethos pedalboard amps



the roadblocks,” he said. He adds that to build one, “It takes a musical ear as well as a technical brain.” He does not consider himself a “clone” builder and describes his basic philosophy as starting with everything that vintage amps are capable of and then moving forward from there. Alessandro’s amps utilize a separate head and cabinet design and can be purchased as a matching set with both amp and speaker enclosed in hand-built cabinets made from beautifully figured exotic woods.

Alessandro said he senses that younger players today are relying more on the pedalboard for tone and not the amp, and he suggests that this has perhaps lowered the bar for overall amplifier quality among many manufacturers. He insists, though, that nothing will ever completely replace the demand for vintage amps, since they offer a comfort and nostalgia to players that can never be replicated. And he acknowledges that a quality modern amp can definitely be more functional than older models. In speaking of his own designs, Alessandro said, “Where most vintage amps begin to break up, ours start to add.”

## COMPACT AMPLIFIERS

Considering an unwavering popularity that has spanned 70 years, it’s interesting to learn that vacuum tube amp design and construction has remained surprisingly consistent since the 1950s. There was, however, a significant split in the road fueled by the introduction of the transistor that inspired a new wave of solid-state amps in the 1960s. With the hope of being a less expensive and more reliable alternative to vacuum tubes, these early attempts fell short in terms of sound quality and dependability. Although solid-state amps never actually succeeded in edging out vacuum tubes, there were some success stories, particularly in the jazz market with companies like Roland and Polytone.

Solid-state amps had a rocky start and may still suffer from a negative connotation among some players today, but the technology is definitely coming of age. In particular, it has played an integral role in the development of another emerging trend in guitar amplification: miniaturization. The introduction and refinement of the highly efficient Class D amplifier and switch-mode power supply coupled with the decreasing size of electronic components have made it possible to construct high-power devices that are extremely compact and lightweight.

Pat Quilter, chief product architect at Quilter Labs LLC (quilterlabs.com), entered the audio market in 1967 and eventually founded the Quilter Sound Co., which later became QSC. With decades of experience building solid-state power amps, Quilter decided to finally pursue his longtime dream of starting a company to design and build amps for guitar and bass that would completely obliterate the limits of solid-state technology. Quilters Labs was launched in 2011 and soon after released its MicroPro combo amp. The company now offers a complete line of amp heads and combos including the MicroPro Mach 2, which packs an amazing 200 watts of power into an extremely compact and lightweight package.

Besides the obvious benefits of its small size, Quilter points out that he is the first to “crack the solid-state code” and is able to design products that sound and behave just like a boutique tube amp. “We are making the new collectibles of tomorrow, the classics of the future,” he said. Quilter is yet another advocate of the theory that shrinking stages are driving demand for portable rigs. And he notes that the longstanding reputation of solid state as a cold, sterile technology is a hurdle that he continues to face.

Henriksen Amplifiers (henriksenamplifiers.com) is a company that has been firmly rooted in the jazz market ever since its founder, Bud Henriksen, a jazz guitarist himself, created the company’s original JazzAmp, which was actually designed around a Sadowsky Jim Hall model archtop guitar. Now headed up by Bud’s son, Peter Henriksen, the company currently offers its flagship combo model in both 10-inch and 12-inch speaker configurations. Henriksen makes it clear that the



company is focused on building high-quality, no-compromise amps for the working jazz musician. "We engineer with our ears first," he proclaims, noting that the company prides itself on its ability to deliver clear, uncolored sound and power in a small package. Henriksen hand-builds each amp and points out that unlike many others in this market, his amps do not use a Class D amplifier and feature the more traditional A/B analog power. In his opinion, "Class D has limitations for sound, and there is definitely a 'feel' difference." He claims that improvements in digital reverb, plus advancements in speaker design, have helped Henriksen Amplifiers achieve its goals.

Henriksen reports that the demand for his product is growing rapidly. He sees more players starting out younger, advancing more quickly and receiving more exposure to jazz through the Internet. Henriksen also points out that the Internet has played a crucial role in empowering small companies like his. Like many others, he believes that gigs in general are getting smaller and will continue to require smaller gear.

The Vox ([voxamps.com](http://voxamps.com)) name is well known among musicians, and its AC series of tube amps built in the 1960s have reached legendary status among vintage connoisseurs. Today, the company puts out a robust line of guitars, effects and amps that cater to a wide variety of customers. Recently, Vox has taken a serious step into the compact amp market with its new MV50, a 50-watt, 1-pound Class D head that features Nutube, which according to R&D Manager Dave Clarke, "is the biggest development in tube technology since the 1960s." A complete re-visioning of the vacuum tube, Nutube was developed by Korg (parent company of Vox) and is exclusive to the company's product line. Its extremely small size allows it to be placed into the preamp stage of the MV50 and offer guitarists authentic analog tube tone. According to Clarke, the MV50 has been extremely well received in the market. He feels that among guitarists, the large heavy iron mentality of the past is long gone and high-wattage amps are not needed in today's market.

## PEDALBOARD AMPLIFIERS

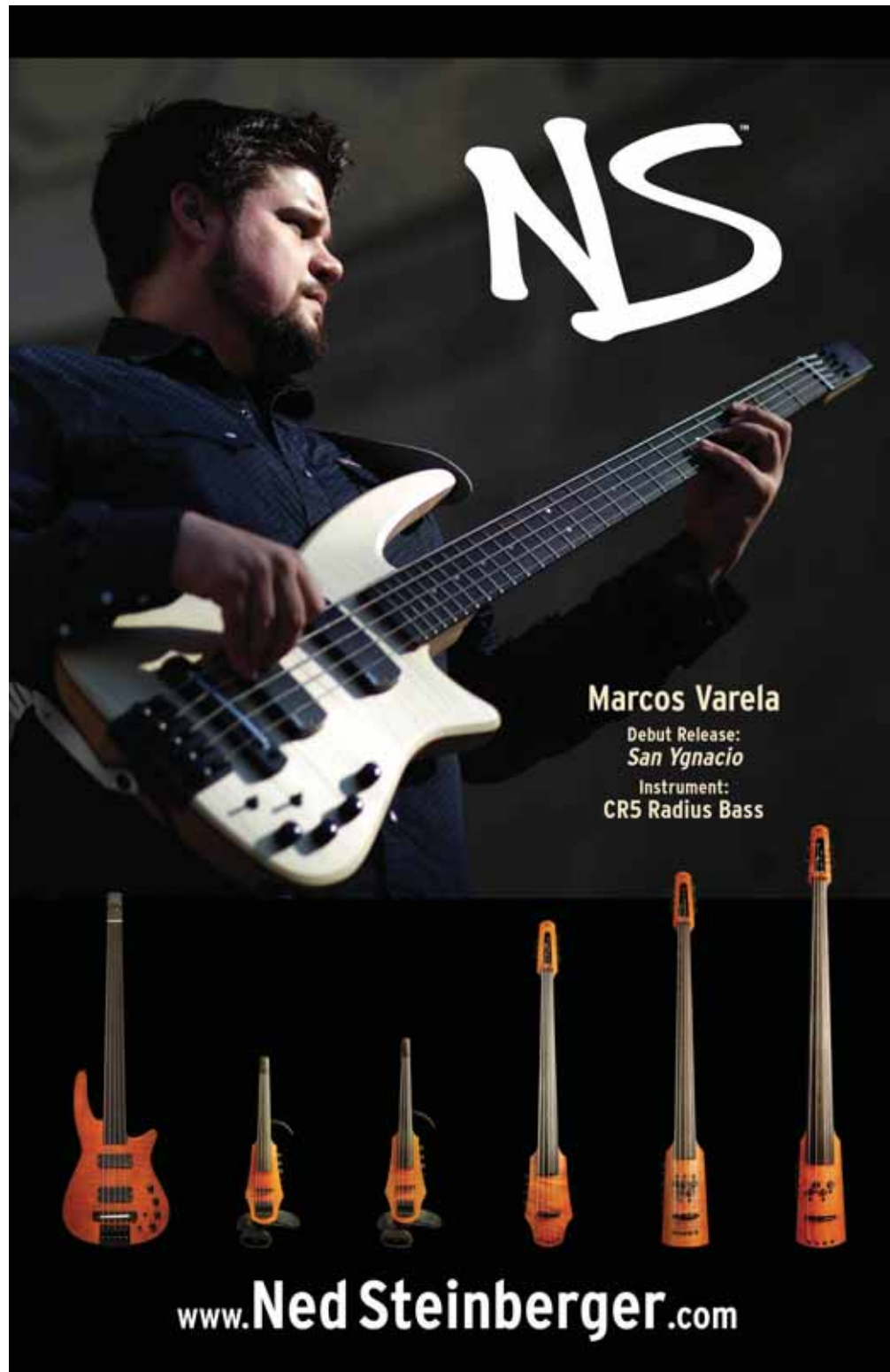
With technology rapidly advancing and considering that we live in a world where walking around with a powerful computer in our pockets is practically an everyday necessity, it's no surprise that guitar amp designers have continued to push the boundaries of what is possible. One of the latest trends in amplification is the pedalboard amp, which breaks new ground in terms of size and functionality. As the term implies, these ultra-compact amps are designed to fit right onto your pedal rig and offer guitarists the ability to plug directly into a speaker

cabinet or P.A. system.

Major changes in the entertainment industry and the economy have resulted in smaller gigs and smaller stages. Gone are the days when bands could carry large amplifier stacks on the road with them. The reality is that in today's gigging world, there is simply no need for an amp capable of filling a entire room with sound. In addition, with the trend toward in-ear monitoring, and as the industry continues to move toward a "silent stage" approach, large cabinets can actually become a hindrance. Pedalboard amps provide guitarists with complete control

over their sound, since they no longer have to rely on the great unknown of backline amps.

As a touring musician, Thomas Blug, CEO, founder and designer at BluGuitar ([bluguitar.com/english](http://bluguitar.com/english)) understood the need for a portable solution for guitarists, and with a background in both amplifier and sound design, he was the perfect person to build one. Blug envisioned an opportunity to deliver the old-school analog tube tone he loves so much in a completely new format that musicians could carry on the road. The result was the Amp 1, a 100-watt, 2-pound amp released in 2015 that is small enough to



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mount directly onto a pedalboard. The Amp 1 utilizes Class D technology in the power stage driven by a special design circuit that uses a small subminiature vacuum tube that Blug calls Nanotube. Blug describes it as “no-compromise sound quality with a real feel that is so close to an actual old-school tube amp.”

Squarely aimed at the touring musician, the four-channel Amp 1 gives guitarists total control over their sound without the hassle of having to wrestle with backline equipment night after night. Blug feels there is a growing demand for his product, but admits that market acceptance

better acceptance of new technology, while older players, who may have stronger reservations, are realizing that their ‘lugging’ days are over and will eventually be won over by the convenience factor,” he says.

## MODELING AMPLIFIERS

Amplifier modeling has been around since the mid-1990s, when Line 6 released its first product. In this process, a guitar’s signal is converted into a digital format and passed through a microprocessor, where software algorithms alter its tonal characteristics in order to simulate the sounds of various amp models and speaker cabinets. The benefits of this technology are obvious, and modeling can theoretically offer guitarists access to many of the world’s greatest amps at the flip of a switch. Since it’s a software-based technology, modeling can be integrated directly into an amp, presented as a separate outboard unit, or even offered as a software-only package to run on a computer.

Although it was extremely well received by the recording industry, modeling has been rather slow in gaining acceptance in the world of live performance. However, advances in the technology, along with opportunities created by new demands arising from today’s rapidly changing musical environment, are beginning to bring modeling more into the mainstream. In a world of shrinking stages and smaller gigs, the ability to travel with this level of power and versatility literally thrown over your shoulder is starting to gain some serious traction.

Cliff Chase, founder and president/CEO of Fractal Audio Systems ([fractalaudio.com](http://fractalaudio.com)), will tell you right off that his modeling technology is absolutely capable of replicating the sound of a tube amp. He explains that remaining doubts about modeling are due to an apples-to-oranges comparison: amp models are typically paired with speaker models specifically designed to reproduce the sound of a close-miked guitar speaker, rather than the sound a guitarist hears when listening to an amp at a familiar distance. In this configuration, “Modeling will sound right to the front of house but may not to the player,” he says. “Many musicians do not get the paradigm.” This misunderstanding, coupled with the fact that early modeling products were under-powered, generates a negative bias in the market, in his opinion. Chase has always felt that modeling technology had serious potential and, believing it could be done much better, launched Fractal

# It’s more apparent than ever that the amplifier market is exploding with options.

and education present a challenge. He also points out that although technology will continue to offer the opportunity to design smaller amps, user functionality will ultimately define the limits of what is practical.

Rob Hall, technical creator/designer at Custom Tones LLC ([customtonesinc.com](http://customtonesinc.com)), has been obsessed with great tone ever since he heard his first Dumble guitar amp at a Larry Carlton concert. Hall, a guitarist with a strong interest and background in electronics (BSEE), had built several of his own amps prior to founding Custom Tones. He credits the Internet with allowing him to share his design concepts with guitarists around the world, which led to the Ethos line of guitar amplifiers, released in 2008. The Ethos pedalboard amps are available in three variations: Ethos Overdrive, Ethos Clean II and Ethos Clean Fusion II, offering guitarists the option of selecting the particular model that best suits their style. At the heart of the Ethos is a Class D power amp running at 30 watts and an all-analog solid-state preamp. The amp can be connected to a cabinet and/or fed directly to a P.A. using onboard speaker simulation. Hall has translated the tube amp experience into a solid-state product that can offer boutique vacuum tube tone to the average player.

Hall is confident that the demand for pedalboard amps and compact gear in general is on the rise. “It takes a paradigm shift to accept these, and younger players have a





Audio Systems in 2006 and released his original Axe-FX product. Fractal now offers the AX8 floorboard unit and Axe-FX II XL rack unit, which feature amp modeling, speaker cabinet simulation and multi-effects.

Chase is confident that modeling technology is here to stay and will continue to gain acceptance in the marketplace. Digital processors are now powerful enough to handle the task easily, and modeling is perfectly suited to the rising trend of in-ear monitors and silent stages. Judging by Fractal's impressive list of professional endorsers, a wide range of guitarists, composers and musical directors seem to agree.

Christoph Kemper, CEO of Kemper Amps ([kemper-amps.com](http://kemper-amps.com)), entered the guitar market with a strong background in synthesizers and established a solid reputation with his Access Virus product. A desire to develop something specifically for guitar players inspired him to found Kemper Amps in 2010 and create the Kemper Profiler, a groundbreaking digital guitar amp that takes this technology to a new level by providing the ability to sonically measure any amp and generate a custom profile for it. This is a radical departure from the typical scenario in which the user is limited to the onboard profiles that ship with modeling devices.

According to Thomas Wendt, official spokesman for Kemper, "Christoph did not want guitarists to be stuck with an engineer's idea of what an amp sounds like." The profiling process is quick and easy, with the Profiler sending a series of calibration tones to the amp and receiving the audio signal from a microphone placed on the cabinet.

Once a profile is created, it can be easily compared side by side with the original amp signal and tweaked as needed. Wendt insists that the Profiler is capable of producing sounds that are indistinguishable from the original amp signal, and he notes that its convenience will save a lot of time and effort in the studio and on the road.

## AMP RENAISSANCE

It's more apparent than ever that the amplifier market is exploding with options. Although there are obvious differences of opinion among the sources we spoke with, most share a common belief that rapid changes in the music business, combined with a new generation of young players, have created enormous opportunities in the guitar amplification market. And no matter how advanced the technology may become, these experts all agree that fascination with the old stuff will never fade away.

This is an especially interesting time to be a guitar player. With amp innovations coming at us from all directions, it's exciting to know that there will always be those who cling to the past, those who revive it and those who bravely carve out entirely new paths into the future. **DB**

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# Establishing the Perfect Groove

It's remarkable how something so subtle can have such a huge impact on us—influencing our mood, dictating a physical response and completely affecting an innocent person going about their business. Indeed, the power of rhythm throughout history has been significant to our existence. It exists in just about everything we do, starting with the beat of our hearts. I believe that the groove doesn't come from a mathematical equation, but is manifested from a vibe and a continuous energy flow that may or may not be symmetrically in sync. In music, a great groove can happen immediately, or it may take time to settle in. Because I am constantly playing with a variety of great drummers who sound and feel completely different—like the precise, raw power of Camille Gainer Jones, the colorful, inventive Justin Faulkner or the genre-bending expert Henry Conerway III—I've had to concoct methods to lock in quickly to any rhythmic adaptation.

## Importance of the Bass

All bass players should understand that the bass is quintessential to creating the groove and establishing the overall sound of the group. It singlehandedly glues the different instruments in the band together and translates the rhythms into melodies by adding definitive tones to the mix—ultimately creating the foundation and harmonic structure of the entire experience. The bass resonates and moves our souls spiritually.

As a bassist, it's important to know who's sitting in the drummer's seat and be able to quickly determine which part of the beat they naturally gravitate to. Discovering the commonalities and blending are key. Even if the drummer is inexperienced, you can always make the groove sound good by widening the beat space or playing more rigidly. The entire rhythm section adds to the feel, but the bass and drums establish the foundation of the groove.

## Big Fat Beat

I've come to learn that one single beat can be huge. People are either laid-back, uptight or somewhere in between, and the same goes for musicians and where they decide to place the emphasis of the beat—more to the back of the beat, more to the front, right down the middle or somewhere in between (which I like to call the “gray areas”). If everyone in the band leans too much to one side of the beat, it will begin to rush or slow down. If they play in extreme opposite directions, the beat will flip.

Example 1 (see opposite page) illustrates how I envision the beats. Note that while the bass keeps time and dictates the harmonic structure, it is also creating a consistent and even flow of energy that supports the ensemble with a pillow of sound. Once the bassist and drummer relax into their preferred positions on the beat, and everyone is aware of what the other is doing, one can begin to manipulate the beat and ultimately feel the feel. This is where the fun begins.

In any genre or variation of beat patterns, the rhythm section can aim to play the groove straight down the middle, or a little off, and then take turns subtly mixing and matching. (Warning: Attempt only if your time is solid and you can actually feel the middle of the beat. Practice with a metronome until it becomes second nature.)

In John Coltrane's quartet, Elvin Jones was powerful and laid-back on the drums, while pianist McCoy Tyner was on top of the beat on



fast tempos and down the middle on medium tempos. As Miles Davis' rhythm section in the mid-1960s, drummer Tony Williams played ahead of the beat, Ron Carter played in the middle and Herbie Hancock played far behind the beat, which really made this band's groove super dynamic.

## Subdivisions & Emphasis

Bass players, let's loop a bar of 4/4 swing. Subdivide the quarter notes into eighth-note triplets (see Example 2). Emphasize the first and third beats of the triplets in your soul, and occasionally play the triplets here and there—it instantly begins to swing and groove. Drummers, do the same on your ride cymbal. Experiment with widening the subdivisions into the “gray areas” of the beat, and also try making them more rigid.

You can do this with any groove. For example, take a 4/4 hip-hop/funk groove and find the subdivisions of eighth notes (with the drums playing backbeats on 2 and 4). Experiment with widening the subdivision placements, but make sure to keep the tempo constant. It's like walking down the street with a limp, but somehow you still get to your destination at the same pace you would have if you were walking upright with an even gait. D'Angelo's “Playa Playa” on his 2000 album *Voodoo* (EMI) is a good example of this feel.

You'll notice that if you start to spread beats apart (while holding the tempo, of course), the groove becomes progressively loose and in turn creates a gritty, down-to-earth feel. Tighten up the beats and play them straight down the middle, and you'll get a crisper sound. I try to master both of these approaches. For a funkier feel, experiment with adding more consecutive notes. You can introduce eighth notes, or simply play half notes on beats 1 and 3, occasionally accenting other notes from the chord on other beats. Establish and maintain a feel, then experiment with variations of that same pattern. Remember that it's your job to keep a consistent energy flow at all times.

## Bass Line Construction

When constructing bass lines for a 4/4, 3/4 or 5/4 swing groove, practice playing the notes of the chord ascending and descending (1-3-5-7)



and eventually resolve into different tones (1-3-5-7) of the next chord. Then practice playing up and down the scales derivative of the chords, and without breaking the motion land on the next nearest resolution of the following chord.

Practice quarter-note melodic phrases that sound good under the soloist. Eventually aim to randomly add to your lines some of the accents from the underlying swing triplet feel implied by the various time signatures. This will have the effect of raising the energy level. Be careful not to overdo it, though; many musicians and listeners don't like a busy bassist.

Example 3 shows how Ron Carter used triplet runs on Wayne Shorter's "Speak No Evil."

Example 4 shows Ray Brown's use of triplets on the bass line to his composition "Buhaina Buhaina."

Experiment with adding a rest on beat 3 or beat 4. This has the potential to build a feeling of excitement underneath a soloist from time to time. Or, pedal on a root and fifth and get the drummer excited.

More advanced players will combine all of these approaches and more: jumping octaves to grab a 10th instead of a third; landing on exten-

sions of chords and resolving on beat 2; playing an entire section of the song or an entire chorus utilizing various intervals (fourths progressions, thirds, sevenths, chromatics, etc.); and altogether reharmonizing existing changes with alternate chords. As I go about constructing bass lines, I make sure that I am listening to and connecting with the chordal instrument and supporting the soloist while maintaining that consistent flow of energy.

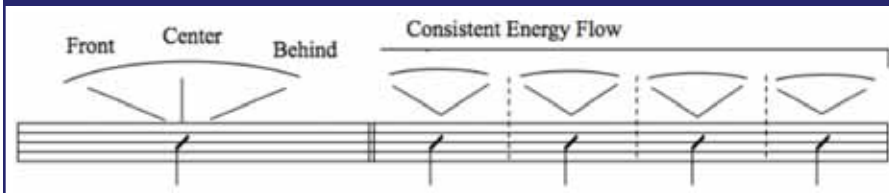
Jaco Pastorius and James Jamerson played memorable bass lines that were lyrical and pretty much defined the song. Paul Jackson played down the middle like an anchor, while Taurus Mateen messes around in the "gray areas" of the beat.

Keep on grooving, y'all.

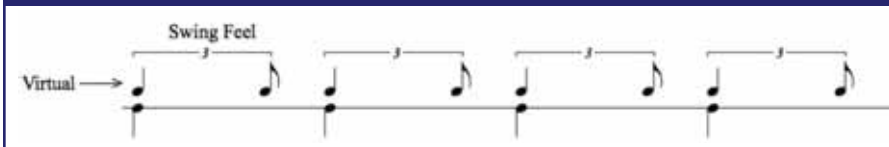
DB

Bassist/vocalist/producer Mimi Jones has played with Kenny Barron, Ravi Coltrane, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Frank Ocean, Dianne Reeves, Tia Fuller, Ingrid Jensen, Marc Cary, Beyonce, Rachel Z and Terri Lyne Carrington's Mosaic Project. She has released three albums as a leader on her own label, Hot Tone Music, including her most recent, *Feet In The Mud*. A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Jones has toured extensively throughout six continents as a leader and sidewoman. Jones co-created The D.O.M.E. Experience, a multimedia project that inspires its audience to make a difference in environmental and social issues through art. Visit her online at [mimijonesmusic.com](http://mimijonesmusic.com).

#### Example 1



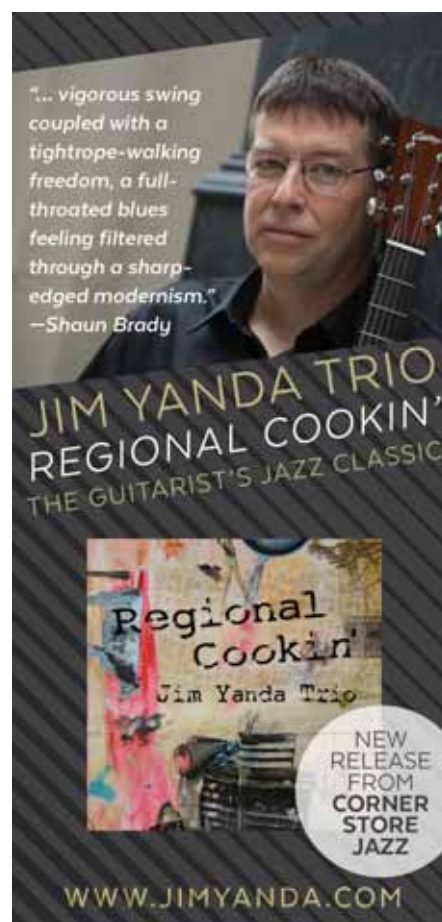
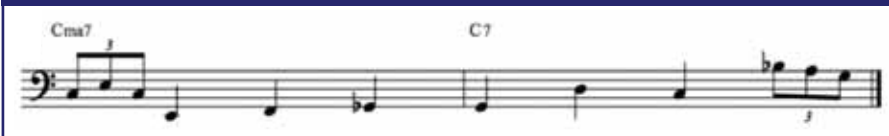
#### Example 2



#### Example 3



#### Example 4



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# Applying 12-Tone Rows to Bass, Guitar

In the 1920s composer Arnold Schoenberg developed a system of 12-tone music, or serial composition. The basic idea was to free music from tonality by creating melodies that used all 12 notes of the chromatic scale without repeating any. These were termed 12-tone rows. Although Schoenberg never intended (to my knowledge) for this idea to be placed in the context of improvised music, the nature of the bass guitar (and regular guitar) provides a means of easily creating 12-tone licks.

Our instrument is tuned in fourths, and we can reach four chromatic tones using four fingers, placing one finger per fret. If we move our hand up a fret as we cross the strings, going from the thinner (higher) to the thicker (lower) strings, after crossing three strings we have played the entire chromatic scale (see Example 1). There are 24 possible variations for the four fingers on each string. As shown in Example 2, if we start with the first finger, there will be six permutations of the four notes: 1-2-3-4, 1-2-4-3, 1-3-2-4, 1-3-4-2, 1-4-2-3 and 1-4-3-2. Since we can start on any of our four fingers, and have six possible patterns for each,  $6 \times 4 = 24$  permutations. If you become familiar with all these patterns, and change patterns with every string change, you get a 12-tone lick. One such lick is shown in Example 3. These may not be tone rows by Schoenberg's original definition, but that's not important for our purposes here.

You may want to start by taking one pattern and getting to know it by playing a row just with that. Example 4 is one using the 1-4-2-3 pattern (as is Example 1, actually, using the 4-3-2-1 pattern). When you know a few patterns really well, try alternating between them and creating variations in which a different one comes first, second and third.

So, how would we use this in actual music? Most of us aren't playing music with the intent of eliminating a sense of tonal center. But using these pseudo tone rows can be a way to create greater tension (due to their chromaticism) and thus stronger resolution in your improvised lines.

A very simple approach is to know which pattern you'll be playing *last* before you start. Then have that last note be a chord tone. For instance, if you're playing on a C minor vamp, Example 3 works great, as it ends on the tonic. You could also have played it ending on another chord tone, as in Examples 5 and 6.

If you're playing on changes, you can make this especially effective by thinking ahead. Let's say you're playing a blues in Bb and you want to start off a chorus with this lick and resolve to the IV chord (Eb7) in the second bar. Since our pattern is 12 notes, we can play them as triplets, and by starting just after the downbeat we'll end on the first beat of the second measure. (You can use eighth notes or 16th notes and resolve to other points in the measure—you'll just have to do the math). Then, think of the note you plan on resolving to and where it fits in the pattern you're playing; move your hand down two frets and begin on the first string. Example 7 shows this idea resolving to the third of Eb7, which allows us to use the lick from Example 6 again. In this example our



lick starts on a chord tone (the fifth of the Bb7), which isn't essential, but does make it sound a bit more "inside." The line gives us a burst of chromaticism while still sounding connected to the changes. The farther removed from the underlying chords the first and, especially, the last notes are, the more "out" these lines will sound.

To make it sound more legato, or to vary the phrasing, you can add slurs. Example 8 is a rewrite of Example 7, slurring every pair of notes. Play Example 8 and Example 7 back to back and notice the effect the slurs have.

There's no rule that says you have to *descend* through these rows. Example 9 is the same point in a 12-bar blues, using the same sequence of patterns we've been using (3-2-4-1, 2-3-1-4, 2-4-3-1), but this time we play them *ascending* across the strings. By playing it in eighth notes and starting a half bar before the beginning, we still end up starting and ending on chord tones.

All this may come off as cold and technical, but as you practice these ideas they will become sounds you hear in your head and not merely "theoretical constructs." They may show up in your playing even when you're not consciously using them. Use your imagination when practicing them, and create as many variations as you can. Make these ideas your own. A method I've found useful is to first apply it in a modal setting—this way I only have three or four target notes (depending



on whether I'm resolving to sevenths or not) to deal with, and I can resolve at any point. I also suggest resolving to extensions (the ninth, for example) and learn how that feels. The next step (at least for me) is to apply this idea to a blues or any other simple chord progression (even a two-chord vamp). Now we have to deal more with time and rhythm, and at what point we resolve these rows. Start out resolving to downbeats on chord changes, as this is the strongest rhythmic resolution. Then try resolving to other points in the measure and notice how these feel. After this you can start playing rows over more dense chord progressions. Before too long you may even find yourself incorporating rows on "Giant Steps" matrices. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He regularly contributes Transcription articles to DownBeat. Visit him online at [jimidurso.com](http://jimidurso.com).

#### Example 1



#### Example 2



#### Example 3



#### Example 4



#### Examples 5–6



#### Example 7



#### Example 8



#### Example 9



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# Wolfgang Muthspiel's 5/4 Guitar Solo on 'Boogaloo'



OLIVER JISZDA

points where he does lean on a downbeat are bars 9, 23–24 and 37—though the last one hardly counts, as even though he lands on the “1,” Muthspiel slides up from that note while it is decaying.

What makes Muthspiel's phrasing especially striking is that he doesn't just play across barlines, but does so even on chord changes, and in a way that helps define the harmonic motion. An early example is crossing into measure 5. He plays the root and ninth on the F9/C, but when the chord changes to an F7 altered, he moves this motif up a half step, making it the flat ninth and sharp ninth. This is especially effective as both chords are F dominants, so this change makes it clear that they are different F chords, but also creates a strong melodic motion by moving a simple idea by a small amount.

Muthspiel uses similar techniques a few more times. The high D $\flat$  in bar 14 (the fifth of the G $\flat$ 7) becomes D natural in bar 15 (the third of the B $\flat$ add9). The D-up-to-F in bar 16 (third and fifth of the same B $\flat$ add9) morphs to F $\sharp$ -to-D in the next measure (now third and root on the D7/B $\flat$ ); similarly, across the same chords from measures 32 to 33, the G resolving down to F (the fifth) drops an octave for that F to resolve up to F $\sharp$  (the third on the new chord). So on one hand he's blurring the barlines by rhythmically phrasing over them, but at the same time he's helping to define the barlines by making radical note and scale changes over them.

Muthspiel shows his ease with 5/4 in a more radical way when he doesn't play over the barline but leaves space there. We hear this done quite effectively across measures 3–4, 11–12 and 21–22. Also, across bars 12–13 and 17–18 we get the same effect when Muthspiel cuts his final quarter note short (producing a de facto rest), and then rests on the downbeat. Putting rests on both sides of the downbeat requires having a strong internal sense of where that downbeat is, but also creates an improvisation that sounds more flowing, without the stiffness created when strong beats are overstated.

A similar technique, but done the opposite way for the same effect, is when Muthspiel

Odd meters scare some people. In a culture where music is primarily in 4/4, improvising in a context where there are five beats per measure can feel awkward.

Not so for Austrian guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel. On his most recent ECM album, *Rising Grace*, Muthspiel's composition “Boogaloo” showcases his skills at soloing in 5/4

time, improvising with fearlessness.

When uneasy with an odd meter, players will often overemphasize the downbeat, creating the sense that they're sill counting their way through the song. Muthspiel not only avoids overemphasizing the downbeat; he rarely even emphasizes it at all. Notice how often he phrases over the barline. The only



holds a note over the barline, as in measures 2–3 and 30–31. This further obscures the barlines as we lack not only a rhythmic indication but also a harmonic demonstration of where the downbeat is.

Across bars 30–31 Muthspiel holds an A $\flat$ , which is sort of a common tone between the chords it spans (ninth of the G $\flat$  and flat seventh of the B $\flat$ ). This pitch is harmonically distant enough from both chords to not sound like a resolution for either. For the G natural held over the 2–3 barline, the same concept holds: It's the sharp ninth on the E7 and the ninth on the F9, not a very strong chord tone in either case.

Muthspiel uses an analogous approach at points where he plays over the chord change barlines but again blurs the downbeat by not changing scales. Across bars 24–25 is one example, where the G $\flat$ –F he plays on the B $\flat$ add9 gets repeated on the D7/B $\flat$  in the next

bar, so it sounds like he's in the same harmonic place even though the underlying chord has shifted.

The other place Muthspiel presents this technique is in measures 34–35. Though he does change notes here, the scale is basically the same across the chord change, none of the drastic note changes that defined the new harmony that we had heard him play before.

Muthspiel has spent the majority of this solo de-emphasizing the downbeat, making the odd meter feel more fluid. So it's quite a punctuating effect when, for the conclusion of his solo, he lands squarely on the downbeat, and on the lowest pitch of this improvisation. As noted before, he still can't seem to just let this strong beat sit, and he slides off the note.

**DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at [jimidurso.com](http://jimidurso.com)



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## Vintage 47's VA-185G Amplifier

### *Reviving the Charlie Christian Soul*

When guitarists talk about vintage amps, they tend to focus on the classic Fender, Marshall and Vox designs of the '60s and '70s. But manufacturers were producing amps as far back as the 1930s, and to many, these designs are among the finest ever made. One aficionado of the early models is Steve Woolley of Vintage 47, who specializes in hand-building amps based on pre-1960s circuitry. His VA-185G pays tribute to the Gibson EH-185, which, along with its younger brother the EH-150, defined the sound of electric jazz guitar in the '30s and '40s with players like Charlie Christian, Oscar Moore and Django Reinhardt.

Vintage 47 builds amplifiers based on early tube designs from manufacturers like Valco, Rickenbacker and Gibson. Instead of typical nine-pin vacuum tubes like the 12AX7, these early amps utilized nine-pin Octal tubes in the preamp. According to Woolley, the Octal tube is significantly larger than the 12AX7 and produces a warmer, thicker tone. Another important feature of these amps is that they are relatively low-wattage devices (5–20 watts), a significant factor in their overall tonal color.

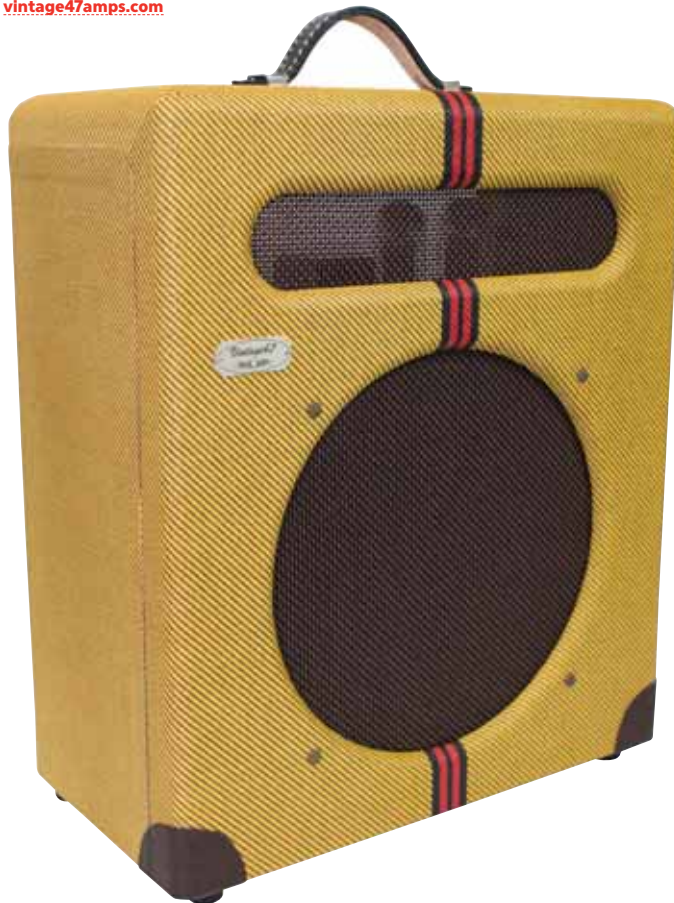
The VA-185G offers increased headroom compared to many of the company's other models, which makes it a good choice for jazz players who desire a smooth, clean sound. The back of the amp shows off its clean and simple layout with only a power switch, basic volume and tone control plus three inputs: two labeled "instrument" and one labeled "microphone." The semi-open back also allows for a clear view of the tube complement, which features a GZ34 rectifier, 6SN7 inverter, two 6L6GT power tubes and a 6SQ7 NOS (new old stock) metal jacketed Octal tube for the preamp. The VA-185 is available direct from Vintage 47 for \$995.

Playing through the VA-185G is a unique experience. Housing a 12-inch speaker pushing only 15 watts, the Octal circuitry produces a color and response that's all its own. For those of us who appreciate early jazz guitar sounds and lust after that horn-like tone that Christian popularized, this amp is beyond cool. It's interesting how with such a basic set of controls, this amp is capable of a surprisingly wide variety of sounds. The VA-185G is very sensitive to the output level of your pickups, and adjusting your guitar's volume knob results in a range of options, from clean to a bit dirty. My favorite tone was with the amp turned about three-fourths of the way up and my guitar turned down to about half. Each of the three inputs is voiced differently as well, presenting even more options.

Guitar amps like the original Gibson EH-185 are of a special breed, and they appeal to players who can truly appreciate their particular characteristics. If you are one of those select few on the quest for that unique sound and the cost of an original EH-185 is out of your price range, the VA-185G may just be your Holy Grail amplifier.

—Keith Baumann

[vintage47amps.com](http://vintage47amps.com)



## Santa Cruz Guitar Co. FS Model

### *Fingerstyle Versatility, First-Rate Sound*

The Santa Cruz Guitar Co. has been making boutique acoustic guitars since 1976, building instruments for heavy hitters like Tony Rice and Eric Clapton. The company's FS model is designed mainly for fingerstyle playing, as the original impetus for its creation was the proliferation of contemporary acoustic players who were using alternate tunings and needed a less "boomy" guitar. A team of Santa Cruz luthiers (Jeff Traugott, Michael Hornick and Steve Palazzo) conceptualized a guitar that would, according to the company, "respond with immediacy and volume from the minimized energy imparted from the fingertips and the reduced tension of many open tunings." Starting with the wood—it features an Indian rosewood body and a cedar top—the FS is well on its way to achiev-

ing this goal. Also, for facilitating fingerpicking, it features a wider neck.

Picking the FS up out of the case, I was struck by how light and sleek it is. Yet when I strummed a simple D or G chord, I was surprised at the volume and power that came from this almost delicate-feeling instrument. To test the fingerpicking aspects of the guitar, I decided on David Crosby's Emin11 tuning (E–B–D–G–A–D) and began playing his folk hit "Guinnevere." Even while using the flesh of my fingers only, I noticed immediately I didn't have to play very hard to get a fairly big sound. The minor 9 chords and beautiful dissonances of that guitar part really shimmered. I also did some hybrid picking in open-D tuning and D–A–D–G–A–D, and the bass notes combined with banjo-type rolls all spoke evenly.



The wider neck and resultant string spacing definitely facilitated all the fingerpicking patterns in my repertoire.

However, when I moved to flatpicking, I was pleased to find that the FS is also excellent for straightforward chord strumming and single-note lines. To test the guitar in these areas, I played some guitar-and-mandolin duets with another musician. We ran through a few Bill Monroe/Doc Watson duo arrangements of “9 Pound Hammer” and other bluegrass songs that feature aggressive chord strumming and heavy bass runs. I usually play a Martin D45, but I discovered that this guitar, which works so well for fingerstyle playing, also does the job as a “bluegrass machine.” The bass notes all had a beautiful character, and like the fingerpicked notes I mentioned before, could be achieved without having to dig in too hard. When I played even harder on the bass notes, the guitar responded in kind. When it came time for my solos, the guitar was an inspiration, whether playing fast lines higher up the neck or picking hard on lower strings to get a “slappy” sound. For many players, I would assume that the fingerstyle-friendly wide neck would not work as well for single-note playing. However, in my experience, slightly wider necks always work well for single-note playing on acoustic and electric guitars, so that was a definite bonus for me. Also, the instrument features a cutaway, so if you want to play your solos up high, you’ll be in business.

On its website, the Santa Cruz Guitar Co. emphasizes the fingerstyle aspects of the guitar. I would add that the guitar has an undeniable versatility and first-rate sound in all applications. From simple strumming of basic chords to solos and extreme open tunings, you can’t lose with the Santa Cruz Guitar Co.’s FS model.

—Curt Morrison

[santacruzguitar.com](http://santacruzguitar.com)



## ToneWoodAmp

### *Thinking Inside the Box*

In the overly crowded world of guitar gear, where fresh ideas and true innovations can be rare, Ofer Webman has come up with a winner: the ToneWoodAmp, a multi-effects processor that allows acoustic guitarists to access DSP effects without the need for any external amplification.

The ToneWoodAmp is a small device that mounts on the back of an acoustic guitar and actually uses the instrument’s body to amplify its effects. The signal is generated via a transducer/exciter pressing against the guitar’s back, and its vibrations drive the sound chamber. The DSP effect is heard through the instrument’s sound-hole mixed with the natural acoustic tone of the guitar. Webman, ToneWoodAmp’s CEO, describes his invention from an easy-to-grasp perspective: “The exciter is the driver, and the guitar’s body is the speaker cone and enclosure.”

As a guitarist and a movie sound designer, Webman said he’d always felt a bare acoustic was a bit “empty” and began searching for ways to enhance a guitar’s natural tone. He had been aware of transducer/exciter technology and felt it could be used to create a solution. “I wanted to give acoustic players the ‘electric guitar experience’ without the need for an amp,” he explained. What is unique about the ToneWoodAmp is that it uses the transducer in reverse, driving the signal into the instrument as opposed to carrying it away.

The ToneWoodAmp processor is a small box that attaches to a guitar’s back using a magnetic X-brace that is mounted inside the instrument. Once the brace is installed, the unit can be easily attached and removed in seconds. The ToneWoodAmp’s input jack accepts the signal from your pickup. It takes a bit of experimentation to configure the device for optimum performance, but there are plenty of user-controlled global and effects-specific parameters to work with. The ToneWoodAmp currently has eight effects: hall, room and plate reverb, delay, tremolo, Leslie, auto wah and overdrive. I found the reverbs and delays to be the most useful. There is also a DI output for sending your signal to an external amp or P.A.

Available at an MSRP of \$249, the ToneWoodAmp is a totally unique concept. Webman’s vision to use a guitar’s body as an amplifier offers guitarists a brand new playing experience. The device’s USB ports are a sure indicator that there will be more to come in future software updates and that for the ToneWoodAmp, this is only the beginning.

—Keith Baumann

[tonewoodamp.com](http://tonewoodamp.com)

# Framus Mayfield Pro 16-3106

## Balanced, Warm & Classic Sounding

Framus also offers a wide array of electric and archtop guitars, and one such model is the Mayfield Pro 16-3106, a thin archtop in the style of a Gibson ES-335. It comes in a beautiful burgundy red finish with laminated maple top, back and solid sides. The aged chrome hardware and Bigsby tremolo bring the classic aesthetics together.

Right out of the case, the Mayfield Pro passes the sound-and-feel test with flying colors. The first thing so many of us guitarists do when we pick up an electric guitar is play a few blues licks unplugged. This can act as an early test of the quality of an electric guitar. The Mayfield Pro immediately struck me as an instrument with a very balanced and musical sound. Then, I plugged into a Fender Deluxe, set the toggle switch to the Seymour Duncan Antiquity neck pickup and started playing some straightahead jazz licks. Buttery single-note lines flowed out, with the tone knob all the way up or darkened a bit. Chord melody passages were exactly what you want to hear: rich and classic sounding.

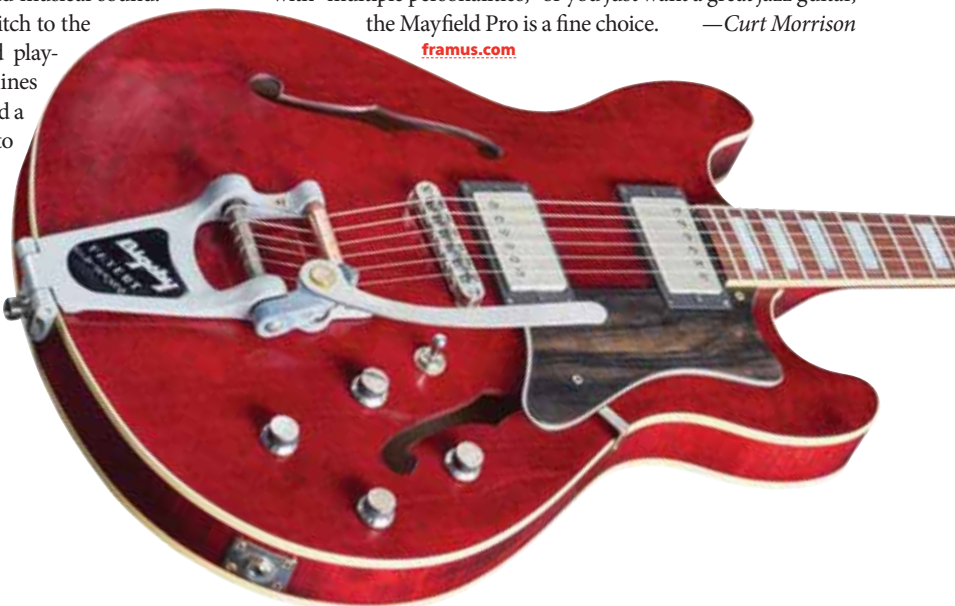
Switching to a blues style of playing while still on the neck pickup, single-note lines and bends sang with full-bodied richness. The guitar responded well when digging in and picking harder. For more overdriven tones, I used a clone of a 1958 Fender Deluxe with some overdrive from a Fulltone OCD. Again, the Mayfield

Pro did not disappoint. Still on the neck pickup, I played Larry Carlton's recorded solo from the Steely Dan song "Kid Charlemagne," and the spirit of 1970s L.A./jazz/pop/rock was summoned.

On to the Seymour Duncan bridge pickup, I increased the overdrive and hit some standard AC/DC-type A, G and D power chords; hard rock tones were easily achieved. On the same pickup I played some of Eric Clapton's classic "Crossroads" solo, and the lead tones screamed.

This guitar has a surprising amount of warmth, but it can rock in the most straightforward way, too. If you're looking for a beautiful instrument with "multiple personalities," or you just want a great jazz guitar, the Mayfield Pro is a fine choice. —Curt Morrison

[framus.com](http://framus.com)



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If you'd like to start a chapter or a jazz society in your community, please email us at [chapterinfo@jazzednet.org](mailto:chapterinfo@jazzednet.org).

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## 2. High Power, Warm Attack

Hartke's HD500 bass combo packs two 10-inch Hartke HyDrive speakers with neodymium magnets and a 500-watt Class D amplifier into an enclosure weighing 35 pounds. The unit's HyDrive speakers blend paper and aluminum materials into a speaker cone that produces warmth and attack. **More info:** [hartke.com](http://hartke.com)

## 3. Silent 6-String

Yamaha has introduced the SLG200NW Silent Guitar with a bodiless design that results in an acoustic sound 90 percent quieter than a conventional acoustic guitar. It's ideal for practicing, whether listening through stereo earphones or playing completely unplugged. It includes an SRT Powered pickup and microphone system that re-creates the body resonance of an acoustic guitar and includes onboard reverb/chorus. **More info:** [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)

## 4. Capo Up

Shubb has introduced its Fine Tune capo series. Made of polished stainless steel, the traditional stirrup-yoke styled capo has interior rubber bumpers on the sides to protect guitar necks and a knurled tension adjustment knob. Fine Tune capos come in three models: F1 for steel-string players, F3 for wider-necked guitars and F5 for banjo. **More info:** [shubb.com](http://shubb.com)

## 5. Nickel Bronze for Mandolin

D'Addario's Nickel Bronze strings are now available for mandolin. Providing a crisp, clear sound as well as balance and harmonically rich overtones, they are available in light, medium, custom-medium and medium-heavy gauges. **More info:** [daddario.com](http://daddario.com)

## 6. Guitar Duo Études

*Prof Hof's Thirty Nearly Impossible Études for Guitar Duo* by Eric Hofbauer helps advancing players grasp essential concepts in a musical context. Designed to be practiced and performed with another guitarist, the études cover all 24 major and minor keys, mixed meters, polyrhythms, polytonality, extreme range, block-chord melodies, 12-tone melodies and extended techniques, as well as a range of articulation and timbral choices available on the instrument. Although several of the études might seem nearly impossible to execute, they are all ultimately playable. Some require a great deal of practice, while others can be learned quickly. **More info:** [erichofbauer.com](http://erichofbauer.com)



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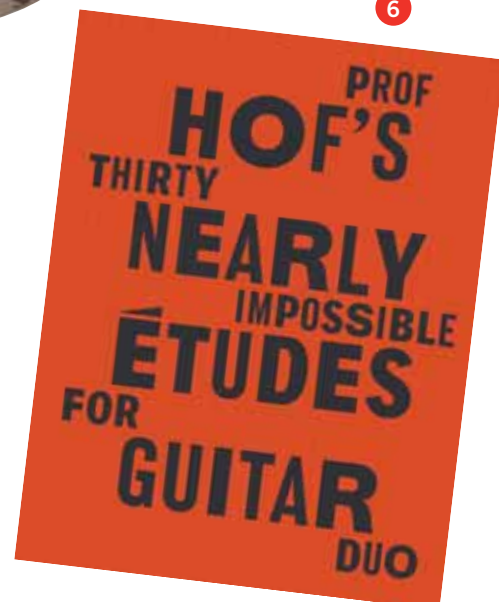
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Dr. Keller Coker talks with students in Arnhold Hall at The New School in New York.

# Coker Fosters Customized Learning at New School

**SOME INSTITUTIONS BECOME SO CLOSELY** identified with their leaders that it's difficult to imagine them being led by anyone else. It might seem strange to think of The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music without 30-year veteran Martin Mueller as its dean, but Mueller's replacement, former associate dean Dr. Keller Coker, is prepared to make the transition go smoothly.

A trombonist and arranger who founded the American Metropole Orchestra and has worked with artists as diverse as trumpeter Cuong Vu and r&b singer Martha Reeves, Coker won the support of the search committee, which was co-chaired by faculty member Jane Ira Bloom.

"Keller is a rare breed," Bloom said. "Aside from his wide-ranging professional and academic expertise in music—from performance and composition to musicology—he takes the role of administrator as a high calling."

"This is a very special place," Coker said. "What attracted me to it was the fact that it has always been a very powerful proponent of developing progressive programs."

While he said he is awed by what Mueller accomplished with the jazz program—which started in 1986 under the auspices of the Parsons School of Design and became its own school in 2013—Coker recognizes a need for curricular reform in the program that leads to a B.F.A. in jazz and contemporary music.

Bloom, whose soprano saxophone has been a leading voice in improvised music for 40 years, said the program is unique for using as much creativity to teach improvisation as it takes to play it. One thing that sets the program

apart is its focus on mentorship over more traditional pedagogical models. With more than 400 New York-based working musicians on its roster of active mentors, the school offers enormous flexibility to pair students with teachers who can meet their needs.

"Unlike other institutions, the personnel in our ensembles is constantly changing," Coker explained. "As a participant, you can answer the question, 'Who would you like to work with as leader?' The individual voice is really developed and honored, and students get to customize their experience to reach their goals."

While he continues to develop his vision for the program, Coker has already decided to add a studio orchestra for the 2017–18 academic year. Other changes are already underway, including the introduction of increased interdisciplinary course work, which followed the 2015 merger of the School of Jazz with the Mannes School of Music and the School of Drama to form the New School College of Performing Arts. "The new structure as a single college makes collaboration that much easier," said Coker. "It really positions us to make that next jump."

One upcoming development that Coker is particularly excited about is the March 2018 move of John Zorn's East Village performance venue The Stone to The New School's Glass Box Theater on West 13th Street. "Zorn is a heroic figure in terms of the kinds of artists we hope we're producing," Coker said. "It's beyond belief that we're going to have this collaboration with him and this amazing community he's created. It's going to double the tremendous energy we already have here."

—James Hale



Narrator Tracy Williams-Murphy and the IJOJ ensemble celebrate International Jazz Day at the Portland Art Museum on April 30.

**PDX Supports Education:** *The Incredible Journey Of Jazz* is a free, 60-minute interactive program for students in the Portland, Oregon, metro area. Students learn about the origins of jazz in Africa, its development in the United States and its current role in global culture. The program features a PowerPoint presentation, a narrator and a live jazz band. Elements include the exploration of rhythm, melody, call-and-response, counterpoint and the interweaving of music and cultures from around the world. The program was developed in 1999 by Darrell Grant, an associate professor of music at Portland State University, and editor/broadcaster Lynn Darroch. "The most important benefit of *IJOJ* is the opportunity to experience this art form live," Grant said. "Live music is transformative and emotionally powerful." [pdxjazz.com/education](http://pdxjazz.com/education)

**Change at Juilliard:** The Juilliard School has selected Damian Woetzel—director of the Aspen Institute Arts Program, artistic director of Vail Dance Festival and former principal dancer at New York City Ballet—to serve as its seventh president, beginning July 2018. Juilliard's current president, Joseph W. Polisi, announced in October that he will be stepping down at the end of June 2018. "Building on collaboration has been a defining principle of my life in the arts, and I can think of no greater privilege than to help shape the future of this extraordinary institution of music, dance and drama," Woetzel said. His past projects include the Kennedy Center's interdisciplinary *DEMO* series and *Spaces* by Wynton Marsalis for Jazz at Lincoln Center. [juilliard.edu](http://juilliard.edu)

**NEC Salutes Monk:** To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the New England Conservatory and to honor the 100th anniversary of Thelonious Monk's birth, NEC will present the concert "Monk's Dream: Thelonious Monk at 100" on Oct. 19. It will feature NEC faculty and alumni, including Ran Blake, Frank Carlberg, Fred Hersch and Jason Moran, plus the NEC Jazz Orchestra and the jazz icon's son, drummer T.S. Monk. Additionally, acclaimed jazz historian/biographer Robin Kelley will speak about Monk's life and music. [necmusic.edu](http://necmusic.edu)





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## Mary Halvorson

Over the past decade, guitarist Mary Halvorson has established a reputation as a generous collaborator and a stellar bandleader. Whether she's playing solo, in a small combo or fronting her octet—as documented on the 2016 album *Away With You* (Firehouse 12)—her creativity seems unlimited. DownBeat met up with Halvorson at ShapeShifter Lab in Brooklyn for her first Blindfold Test.

### Joe Morris

"Plexus" (*Elsewhere*, Homestead Records, 1996) Morris, guitar; Matthew Shipp, piano; William Parker, bass; Whit Dickey, drums.

Joe Morris. He was my teacher and he has a totally identifiable sound. It's about his phrasing, his attack. He plays lines like no one else. He's such a force as a guitar player. I've heard his records with tons of effects pedals and playing walls of noise, but here he's playing clean tones. I took lessons from him when I was 19; the first thing he taught me was to not copy what he was doing. The focus of our lessons was to find my own thing and experiment, to learn from other guitarists but not imitate. 5 stars.

### Marc Ribot

"Ol' Man River"/"Solitude" (*Don't Blame Me*, DIW, 1995) Ribot, guitar.

This is a record I'm going to have to buy. The vibrato and attack are really cool and the melody is mixed with unexpected weirdness, which I love. It sounds like Ribot. I love that subtle weirdness that he goes into and takes the tune in a totally different direction. Everything he plays is perfect—not in the sense of 'clean' perfect, but his *choices* are perfect, the way he synthesizes all those blues and jazz influences to make his sound totally unique. Everything he plays is captivating all the way through with a real recklessness and crazy energy. 5 stars.

### Fred Frith/Maybe Monday

"Image In And Atom" (*Digital Wildlife*, Winter & Winter, 2002) Frith, guitar; Larry Ochs, saxophones; Miya Masaoka, koto, electronics; Joan Jeanrenaud, cello.

Is this Fred Frith? I love how he combines melodies with his interesting world of prepared guitar. He has such a great ear; that comes out in the way he's interacting with all these musicians—the way he weaves in and out and plays off of them. I got to play with him last year for the first time in a trio with [drummer] Chris Smith. I got a chance to see how his brain worked. He cares about the melody and creating spontaneous forms and then a bunch of crazy noise. 5 stars for him and for his ensemble.

### George Benson Quartet

"Clockwise" (*It's Uptown*, Columbia, 2001; rec'd 1966) Benson, guitar; Ronnie Cuber, baritone saxophone; Dr. Lonnie Smith, organ; Jimmy Lovelace, drums.

I love it, especially the guitar-organ blend. I like the swing. This is like a lot of the music I listen to that deals with form and structure and time. I probably listen to that kind of stuff more than free-improv. I practice it, too, even though I don't play it live. And I've never played with an organist—but maybe sometime in the future. Recently I've been obsessed with Johnny Smith. A friend went to a yard sale and picked up a bunch of his vinyl. And then I started to listen to a ton of his music. [after] This is George Benson? He's one of those players who I haven't listened to as much as I'd like. This is a good reminder. 4 stars.

### Derek Bailey

"Should Be Reversed" (*Takes Fakes & Dead She Dances*, Incus, 1998; from *Progressions: 100 Years Of Jazz Guitar*, Columbia/Legacy, 2005) Bailey, guitar.

Derek Bailey [1930–2005] is another easily recognized guitarist because of his attack and his use of harmonics. They're a part of his main lan-



Mary Halvorson

© JACK VARTOOGIAN/FRONTROWPHOTOS

guage. He uses them in an integral way that makes him an original. Because he has such a strong foundation in playing jazz, he can deconstruct chordal music in a very interesting way. I listened to a ton of his records, but never saw him live. When he was going to be at The Stone for a month, I had already decided to go every single night to make it up, but he died a few months earlier. He was another early influence. 5 stars.

### David Fiuczynski

"Uira Happy Jam" (*Flam! Blam! Pan-Asian MicroJam!*, RareNoise Records, 2016) Fiuczynski, guitars; Utar Artun, microtonal keyboards, piano; Jake Sherman, piano; Rudresh Mahanthappa, alto saxophone; Justin Schornstein, fretless bass, effects; Alex "BisQuit" Bailey, drums, bells, percussion.

I'm very curious as to who this is. It's very cool. I love the tune, the melody, the playing. The microtonal feel makes for interesting effects. It gives this tune strong melodicism combined with tension. There's an on-edge feeling. 4 stars. Oh, it's Dave Fiuczynski. I'm always shy to guess, but he had crossed my mind based on hearing him play live recently in a different setting. He was performing a section of John Zorn's *Bagatelles*. He had so many interesting ideas and crazy solos. He's another example of someone who has a mastery of the guitar but is looking to try something different.

### Mahavishnu Orchestra

"Birds Of Fire" (*Birds Of Fire*, Columbia, 2000; rec'd 1972) John McLaughlin, guitar; Jerry Goodman, violin; Jan Hammer, keyboards; Rick Laird, bass; Billy Cobham, drums.

Sounds like Mahavishnu and McLaughlin. He has such a distinct sound and the melody is so epic. I haven't listened to this in a long time, so it took me a minute to get back into that head space. So it's really cool to hear this again. I like the way they move between different sections, and the fills and the sense of melody. The guitar playing is amazing. It's so fluid, and so guitaristic—meaning he uses all the qualities of the guitar, such as the bends, the slides, the blues and a strength in intention. [When I was] in college, my friends and I went through a Mahavishnu phase. So it's almost nostalgic because I haven't heard it for so long. But it was a formative group for me at a time when I was getting into all different kinds of music and branching out. This was one of the groups that I was really excited about. It's a classic. 5 stars.

DB

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.



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