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# DOWNBEAT

**JUNE 2018**

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# BLUE NOTE®



## DR. LONNIE SMITH ALL IN MY MIND

The Hammond B-3 organ legend and **NEA Jazz Master** releases a spirited live trio album recorded at the **Jazz Standard** in New York City. *All In My Mind* opens with a powerful rendering of **WAYNE SHORTER'S** "JuJu," while Smith also takes **PAUL SIMON'S** hit "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" for a 10-minute joyride.



## GOGO PENGUIN A HUMDRUM STAR

One of **New York Times'** **12 best bands at SXSW 2017**, the Manchester-based trio conjure richly atmospheric music that draws from their grounding in classical conservatoires and jazz ensembles, while merging acoustic and electronic techniques. Their latest album builds on the momentum of its acclaimed predecessors, the **Mercury Prize**-nominated *V2.0* and *Man Made Object*, and transports it to new realms.



## DAVE MCMURRAY MUSIC IS LIFE

On his Blue Note-debut, the Detroit native delivers a cohesive program of modern jazz that bristles with soul. Joined by **IBRAHIM JONES** (bass), **RON OTIS** and **JEFF CANADY** (drums), *Life* consists of 7 originals along with covers of songs by fellow Detroiters - George Clinton's funk anthem "**Atomic Dog**" and the White Stripes' rock hit "**Seven Nation Army**."



## GREGORY PORTER NAT KING COLE & ME

The **GRAMMY**-winning vocalist releases his stunning fifth studio album, a heartfelt tribute to the legendary singer and pianist **Nat King Cole**. With the help of **six-time GRAMMY**-winning arranger **VINCE MENDOZA**, and the **LONDON STUDIO ORCHESTRA**, Porter revisits some of Cole's most cherished classics such as "Smile," "L-O-V-E," "Nature Boy," and "The Christmas Song."



## TERENCE BLANCHARD LIVE (FEAT. THE E-COLLECTIVE)

Following his powerful album *Breathless*, **4-time GRAMMY**-winning trumpeter Terence Blanchard documents his band The E-Collective live in Minneapolis, Cleveland, and Dallas - cities that have been scarred by the tension between law enforcement and unarmed African Americans. *Live* features keyboardist **FABIAN ALMAZAN**, guitarist **CHARLES ALTURA**, bassist **DAVID GINYARD JR.**, and drummer **OSCAR SEATON**.



## THE NELS CLINE 4 CURRENTS, CONSTELLATIONS

Following the release of Nels Cline's Blue Note debut *Lovers*, the Wilco guitarist pares it down to **The Nels Cline 4**. The 4 features Cline alongside fellow guitarist **JULIAN LAGE**, bassists **SCOTT COLLEY** and drummer **TOM RAINEY**, on a set of seven originals plus one piece by composer Carla Bley. It's a showcase of Cline's versatility that veers from rollicking rock energy to ballads of serene beauty.

**JUNE 2018**

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## 32 Mary Halvorson

*Braxton, Fame & Building Code Girl*

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

Guitarist Mary Halvorson, who topped four categories in the 2017 DownBeat Critics Poll, begins a new chapter in her career with *Code Girl*. The album features her poetic lyrics and inventive, intricate arrangements. Halvorson's collaborators on the project are vocalist Amirtha Kidambi, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Tomas Fujiwara.



Mary Halvorson's new album is titled *Code Girl*.

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Cover photo and above image of Mary Halvorson shot by Jimmy & Dena Katz in Brooklyn, New York, on Feb. 21.

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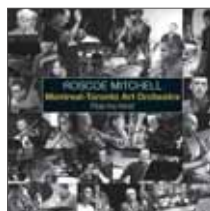
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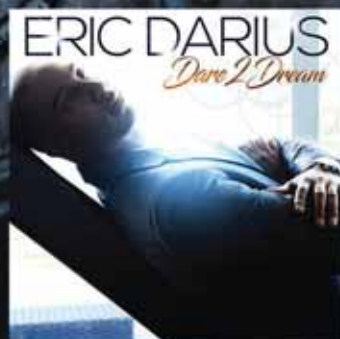
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First Take > BY JAMES HALE



Cecil Taylor at Alice Tully Hall in New York City on Feb. 28, 2002

## Unstoppable Originality

HE WOULD APPROACH THE PIANO LIKE A CHARACTER FROM *Cats*, as mysterious as a Noh actor, dressed in a tie-dyed jumpsuit. Before sitting, he would mix dance moves with meandering, mystical verses. And when he sat at the keyboard, he extended that feline energy and grace to his playing: long, cross-hatched lines of percussive interplay, shards of melody and swirls of sonic colors, interspersed with unexpected pauses, abrupt rumbles or stabbed accents.


At the piano, Cecil Taylor was muscular, single-minded, unstoppable. Creating music that was wholly singular, Taylor always reminded me of Hans Namuth's famous 1950 film footage of Jackson Pollock at work. Here was an American original, creating art that coursed through his entire body. It showed influences, sure, but it also defined the word "unique," both in concept and execution. At some points in Taylor's career, maddeningly for those who came just for the music, his solo performances could be equal parts dance, poetry and pianism. Other times—as on his best live album, *The Willisau Concert* (Intakt), recorded in 2000—he could not be contained, beginning to play before the audience was fully seated and thundering on for more than an hour.

In 2004, I covered Taylor's big band for DownBeat at New York's Iridium. In a perverse homage to Duke Ellington, one of the few musical heroes Taylor acknowledged, the entire orchestra sounded like Taylor. How he accomplished that was akin to alchemy, according to Dominic Duval, who played in the big band and was a member of Taylor's trio for about a decade. The bassist described a confounding rehearsal at Taylor's house in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, where the pianist called out chords—duly noted by each band member—and then led the musicians through music that corresponded to none of the prescribed progressions.

The last time I saw Taylor, at the 2008 Portland Jazz Festival, his pianistic movements were more refined, his music rhapsodic and flowing, with allusions to Ravel and Debussy. His explosive, percussive outbursts were confined to two short encores—seemingly self-referential nods to his earlier signatures, but still remarkable for a man of 79.

Fortunately for future generations, Taylor's performances are well documented on albums and in the films *Imagine The Sound*, *All The Notes* and *The Silent Eye*. In his later years, when Taylor's athleticism had deserted him, his mind remained as nimble as it had been on his first recordings 60 years earlier. Looking over his remarkable career, it was his ability to connect so completely between mind and body, between musical vision and technical facility, that was his triumph. **DB**



A woman with long, wavy brown hair is smiling and playing an electric violin. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with black accents. The background is dark, and there is a faint, larger image of her playing the violin in the upper left corner.

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*Leah Zeger — Violinist, Vocalist, Composer*

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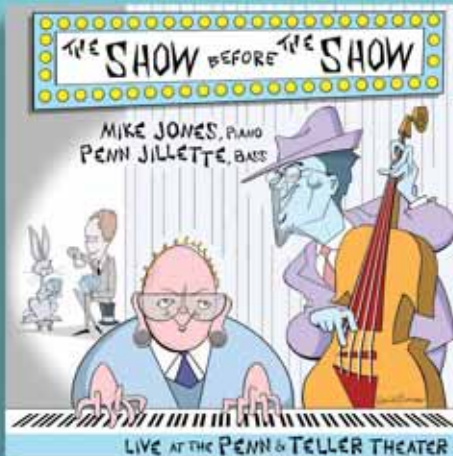
"Now in its 18th year, the Jeff Hamilton Trio makes joyous, unpretentious yet highly sophisticated music inspired by the take-no-prisoners swing of Oscar Peterson."

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★★★★ —Pierre Giroux, *Audiophile Audition*

#1 ON JAZZWEEK CHART



### MIKE JONES & PENN JILLETTE

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★★★★ —Dan Bilawsky, *All About Jazz*

### The Shape of Jazz That's Gone

With the departure of Cecil Taylor, I sense that we've arrived at the end of an era. During a 1985 interview, Miles Davis explained that Wynton Marsalis was playing music that had already been played since the 1960s. Well, Taylor represented the ultimate risk-taker in the monumental history of what we used to call jazz.

Taylor took risks at the level of defying the deeply rooted traditions of occidental music—including the standard notions of harmony, melody and rhythm—to the point of exploring the possibilities of piano played as a percussive instrument, leaving behind not only his musical comfort zone as an artist, but as a person who had to pay his bills.

Cecil Taylor's legacy should be regarded as a path to follow for listeners and practitioners of *any* kind of music. The world of Cecil Taylor is dangerous; it's the opposite of being safe.

The future of jazz should be in not compromising, not lying in comfort, but in establishing a connection to your deepest emotions.

Today, we recall the beauty of Taylor's per-



CAROL FRIEDMAN/DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

Cecil Taylor (1929–2018)

formance at a 2015 memorial service in honor of another visionary we lost, Ornette Coleman.

FRANCESCO ALVAREZ  
VIÑA DEL MAR, CHILE

### Memories of Taylor & Neidlinger

I met Buell Neidlinger at Boston University's School of Fine & Applied Arts in the late '50s. I got him to work coffeehouses, playing jazz and doing poetry with me. When I moved to New York in 1960, he played with me in the Village at the Gaslight and the Bitter End.

His roommate then was Cecil Taylor, whose recordings with Buell were very well-known to me. I was close to Jaki Byard from my Boston days, and Jaki would sit in with Maynard Ferguson at Cafe Wha?

I'll never forget Jaki looking over his shoulder and seeing Cecil listening from the door of the venue. Jaki turned back and tore that piano up—more Cecil than Cecil!

ALAN FRANCIS  
NEW YORK CITY

I am glad you guys are still around. There is nothing like a real printed magazine, and *DownBeat* was always a favorite.

JEFF MYERS  
JEFFMYERS05@GMAIL.COM

### Subjective Masterpieces

I have been a subscriber for 40 years, and I could not possibly agree more with Martin Wisckol's letter [on 5-star albums] in the Chords & Discords section of your February issue. I am fully aware that the star rating is a very subjective matter, but I find your ratings to be not very helpful.

My clear advice to listeners is to find a critic who shares your preferences and/or whom you find exciting and adventurous, and then stick with him or her. My personal favorite is Richard Williams, formerly at *Melody Maker*, now writing for *The Guardian* and his blog, [thebluemoment.com](http://thebluemoment.com).

ODD BJERKE  
BLOMMENHOLM, NORWAY

### Welcome Back!

I recently uncovered a box of old issues of *DownBeat*; I was a subscriber from the mid-'70s through the early '80s. Life happened, I got a real job and moved around, and apparently my subscription lapsed.

I pulled out my old *DownBeats* today and there was a dog-eared, well-read copy with Al Di Meola on the cover. Then I pulled up the DB website and there was an interview with Al posted today [April 12]. It must be a sign. I subscribed today and can't wait to start getting the magazine again.



### Underexposed?

Why doesn't *DownBeat* ever cover Charles Tolliver, Stanley Cowell or Barry Harris? When was the last time they were in your magazine?

What about Brussels-born Alain Cupper? He's a fine baritone saxophonist. Does an artist have to have a current recording on the market to appear in your pages?

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# Beat

## Davis Takes Humanity's Pulse

Caroline Davis has become an expert in matters of the heart, physiologically speaking. The title of the New York-based alto saxophonist's new release, *Heart Tonic* (Sunnyside), has a strong literal element to it, as the album draws extensively from the realm of cardiology. Indeed, the surging sounds of such tracks as "Constructs," "Dionysian" and "Ocean Motion" evoke a complex—and imperfect—circulatory system hard at work.

A Singapore native with a Ph.D. in music cognition from Northwestern University, Davis modeled the compositions on the album after the beat of the human heart. Hearts with the condition known as "arrhythmia," to be exact.

"For this album I spent a lot of time listening to normal and abnormal heartbeats," Davis said. "Trying to see how that can evoke tension-and-release on a very [instinctual] level. That scientific approach influences the way I write and practice music, but when I'm performing I just try to feel my way and be intuitive."

Davis' father, Michael Ansen, suffers from ventricular ejection arrhythmia, a condition that can cause dizziness, fatigue and chest pain. While he researched the cycles of digestion, movement and sleep for a possible cure, Davis examined the musical nuances of the human heartbeat and circulatory system, reflected in *Heart Tonic's* pulsating energy, almost like the sound of blood coursing through the body.

"You can hear those processes in the music," Davis said. "Sometimes, I listened to these arrhythmic heartbeats at full volume for 10 minutes at a time to immerse myself in that feeling; trying to understand what it feels like to have an arrhythmia and then remove myself from that—process it—then write music on piano or saxophone."

*Heart Tonic* embodies influences outside of the medical field as well, including the most famous composer of Europe's Baroque period and a celebrated American jazz saxophonist who, as a child, imagined the vacant lot next to his home to be "a spacecraft or a B-17 bomber during World War II."

"I've been going back to the source of voice-leading and harmony, the main source being Bach," Davis said. "That sense of functional harmony and voice-leading has informed my writing now more than ever."

On *Heart Tonic*, Davis' interpretation of Wayne Shorter's "Penelope"—her quintet delivers the song's luxurious melody at an Afro-Cuban-esque medium-up tempo—culminates in the sound of a rocket blasting into outer space.



Saxophonist Caroline Davis' new album, *Heart Tonic*, was informed by her study of the heart.

"Penelope" is a beautiful, ethereal and wanting song," Davis said. "I wanted to give it a little fire. I didn't change the chords at all—that's not possible in a Wayne Shorter tune. I only changed it rhythmically and in the tempo. Wayne Shorter's writing is perfect; I wanted to honor that."

"*Heart Tonic* reflects New York in its bustling excitement and atmosphere," said Davis, whose other current projects include the quartet-Maitri; the saxophone/bass/drums group Pedway; a trio that includes trumpeter Ron Miles; and Alula, with pianist Matt Mitchell and drummer Greg Saunier.

"These recurring, circadian rhythms that happen in our body all the time are not connected musically, but they are conceptually. The recurring rhythms in the music, these polyrhythmic structures that are all interconnecting—that relates to my concept of how the heart works, always pumping in this cyclical fashion. We have no idea of what's inside of us, but it's keeping us alive." —Ken Micallef



Stephanie Richards

CHRIS WEISS

**Sweat the Technique:** Trumpeter Stephanie Richards, who's performed with Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, Laurie Anderson and Yoko Ono, among others, is set to issue her debut solo recording, *Full Moon*, which is planned for a May 18 release on Relative Pitch, comprises nine tracks of Richards' compositions that explore extended techniques, as well as a unique editing process. Several performances are planned through May.

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

**Songs of Praise:** *Sinatra! The Song Is You: A Singer's Art*, a book by Will Friedwald that originally was published in 1995, will be reissued by the Chicago Review Press on May 1. Based on hundreds of interviews, the biography details Frank Sinatra's working relationships with individuals who factored into his recording career. The new edition of *Sinatra!* comes with 100 additional pages of information, including discographical data and photos from the studio, as well as live performances.

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

**Experimental in Quebec:** Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (FIMAV) returns May 17–20 in Québec, Canada, for the 34th installment of the event. This year's performers include William Parker, Lori Freedman, Rova Saxophone Quartet and others.

[fimav.qc.ca](http://fimav.qc.ca)

**In Memoriam:** Bassist **Buell Neidlinger**, who died of a heart attack March 16 in Washington state, staked out a space in avant-leaning jazz beginning in the late 1950s while performing alongside players like Cecil Taylor and Steve Lacy. The Connecticut-born musician would go on to work in the classical field, playing compositions devised by John Cage and others. He was 82. ... Former *DownBeat* writer and editor **Lee Jeske** died April 8 in New York. Jeske began contributing to the magazine in the late 1970s and later wrote for the *New York Post* and penned liner notes for more than 90 albums. He was 62.



Hardanger fiddler Nils Økland adds a special brand of minimalism to his indigenous Norwegian instrument while improvising as a member of the trio 1982.

ADNE DYRNESLI

## Framed by History, Vossa Jazz Hits 45

**VERSATILE DANISH DRUMMER KRESTEN** Osgood was getting busy during a solo gig at the Vossa Jazz Festival, deploying his drum kit, toys, melodica and even a potted plant in a freewheeling improvised performance. The “room” itself was anything but neutral: Norway’s Finnesloftet dates to 1295, the Viking Era, and is one of the oldest non-religious medieval halls in Western Europe.

Vossa Jazz is unique, in part, because of its inspired interaction with sites and sounds, working toward enhancing atmospherics. In that vein, the fascinating choral-chamber project *In the Beginning*, comprising Danish vocalist Kira Skov and Estonian saxophonist-arranger-composer Maria Faust, gained ambient intrigue from its setting in the town’s Vangskyrkja church building, which dates to 1277.

Held March 23–25 in this small, idyllic lakeside town, Vossa Jazz—the Norwegian jazz festival circuit’s kick-off event—celebrated its 45th edition this year. American artists are intermittently accounted for here, as the fest favors Norwegian and Scandinavian scenes. This year, the token American performer was the brave and innovative guitarist Mary Halvorson with her hard-to-categorize avant-jazz project *Code Girl*.

Opening the festival with cross-generational Norwegian jazz performers, veteran bassist Arild Andersen led an all-star aggregate. Sometimes coloring his acoustic bass sound with digital effects, Andersen was joined by pianist Helge Lien, drummer Gard Nilssen and special guest tenor saxophonist Marius Neset, a shining star of new Norwegian jazz.

One special feature of this year’s edition of Vossa Jazz was an expansion of the festival’s hallmark commissioning program. In addition to the annual Tingingsverket work, this year

supplied by Eirik Hegdal’s engaging “Musical Balloon,” three other commissioned pieces graced the program.

“Musical Balloon” struck me as one of the best commissions of recent vintage. Saxophonist-composer-bandleader Hegdal, former director of the open-to-adventure Trondheim Jazz Orkester, created a fascinating suite in a micro-big band context, laced with theatricality, moments of swinging bravura and an overall narrative ebb-and-flow. His bandmates included drummer Jon Fält (a potent, sometimes humor-lubed voice among current Norwegian drummers), ace trumpeter Eivind Lønning, limber guitarist Nils Olav Johansen, vibist Mattias Ståhl and bassist Ole Morten Vågan.

On the dogmatically quieter end of the spectrum, the unique trio 1982 settled into the intimate Osasalen performance space of the famed, folk-oriented Norwegian folk music academy, Ole Bull Akademi. Hardanger fiddler Nils Økland is ostensibly 1982’s melodic lead. He brings a special brand of minimalism to the indigenous Norwegian instrument, a rustic violin with sympathetic strings. Hints and fragments of traditional folk themes waft through the trio’s improvisational flow to meditative, but never static or predictable, ends.

Young drummer Øyvind Skarbø naturally embraced the trio’s introspective mission, but also brought jolts of absurdist humor, for comic relief. The trio has recorded fine albums for the wondrous, ambient-inclined Norwegian label Hubro. But catching the group live, as the music literally unfolds and invents itself, is a precious treat.

At 45, Vossa Jazz is going and blowing strong, with a particularly hearty program and abundantly clear statement of purpose, circa 2018.

—Josef Woodard



Photo Credit: Jason Kruppa

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# Marsalis, Guests Explore the Blues

**THE BLUES IS THE LINGUA FRANCA ON** *United We Swing: Best Of The Jazz At Lincoln Center Galas* (Blue Engine), a new compilation featuring the Wynton Marsalis Septet. The album features memorable performances by a parade of stars from the worlds of pop, gospel and blues—Bob Dylan, Ray Charles (in one of his final performances), Eric Clapton, Willie Nelson, James Taylor, The Blind Boys of Alabama, John Legend, Lyle Lovett, John Mayer, Audra McDonald, Natalie Merchant, Carrie Smith, Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks—all backed by the trumpeter's septet. As Marsalis put it in an interview with *DownBeat*, "All of them came to play."

Jazz at Lincoln Center raises money for its jazz education programs through annual gala fundraisers, which feature top-tier jazz and pop stars, typically backed by the entire Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. In recent years, guests have included Tony Bennett, Diana Krall and Paul Simon.

The 15 tracks on *United We Swing* are taken from galas between 2003 and '07, with the featured performers singing to jazz arrangements by Marsalis, Wycliffe Gordon, Andy Farber, David Berger and Richard DeRosa. Proceeds from the album will benefit education programs that introduce children to the world to jazz.

We caught up with Marsalis by phone recently to discuss the project. Below are excerpts from the conversation:

**YOU'VE GOT SO MANY YEARS OF GREAT MATERIAL FROM THE ANNUAL GALAS. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO FOCUS ON PERFORMANCES FROM 2003 TO 2007?**

We used to do two [fundraising galas] per year. The ones from 2003 to 2007 specifically featured musicians from other genres related to jazz, but playing in a jazz style with the septet. We stopped having those spring galas after 2007.

**THERE ARE SO MANY GREAT MOMENTS FROM OTHER GALAS. WILL THERE BE A VOL. 2?**

Not so much from the galas but from our other concerts. We have about 80 records of various shows. We're trying to get that archive out through Blue Engine.

**YOU'VE SAID THAT IF YOU WANT TO APPEAL TO A WIDE AUDIENCE, BLUES AND SWING NEED TO BE FIRST ON THE AGENDA. IS THAT WHY MOST OF THE MATERIAL HERE IS BLUES, OR BLUES-BASED?**

No. The reason it's blues-based is because that's what all of our forms have in common. If we look for commonality between all of the forms of American music, the blues is that root. That's our common ground. The idea of this album is to bring people together. That's what jazz is: a hybrid art form.

Many times when we come together with other musicians, we sacrifice our agendas to play with them. If you call me to play on a record, I'll come and play a solo on your music. What makes this different is that the musicians who played on this record wanted to play jazz, to play on the swing rhythm, and to play blues and roots music the way we play it. Often when jazz comes together with other art forms, jazz sacrifices all of its objectives. If I sacrifice what makes me me, I'm not coming together with you.

**SO THIS WAS A REAL MEETING OF THE MINDS?**

Yes. And we had a great time talking about the music, planning it. Everybody was really involved in their songs, how they wanted it arranged, how we could work on grooves. Everybody was having a good time playing. Bob Dylan was playing. Everybody wanted to play and was easy to work with.

**WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH HUGE TALENTS LIKE DYLAN AND RAY CHARLES?**

Everybody was doing it for free. They volunteered their time, including rehearsal time. Everybody was gracious and cool. Once, when we were on the gig and Ray started counting the tune, I thought, "Man, I don't know if he's counting it at the right tempo, because it was so slow" ... but that sure was it. I went to Ray's funeral with Willie [Nelson]. I have a lot of friendships from those experiences.

Ray was like a jazz musician, you know? He and Willie Nelson both occupy kind of a similar space. I once heard them say to each other that they both sing American popular songs, country music, they both sing and play jazz with the chord change element, and they both play blues. It was interesting for me to hear how long-standing and deep their relationship was. They were close friends going back to the 1950s.

**THEIR TUNES WERE RECORDED DURING THE SAME SHOW IN JUNE 2003, RIGHT?**

Yeah. We had one unbelievable blues show with them that year: Clapton, Ray, B.B. King—everybody on the same night.

**IS THAT YOU PLAYING PIANO ON BESSIE SMITH'S "EMPTY BED BLUES," WITH VOCALS BY CARRIE SMITH?**

That sure is me. That's an old blues I used to play all the time.

**THESE SHOWS MUST HAVE BEEN A THRILL FOR THE MUSICIANS.**

It was a monumental experience, man. These people wanted to come together. You have no idea what they did to do those shows. And when we got on the stage, it was electric. They wanted to do it because they believed in [music] education, they loved jazz, and were touched and had been influenced by it. They wanted to be part of something that was integrative, not just the same old thing.

—Allen Morrison



# Manhattan Transfer Reboots

**MANHATTAN TRANSFER IS ENJOYING A** new phase in its lengthy career with the release of its first new album in nearly a decade.

One of the most successful and versatile vocal groups in history, Manhattan Transfer was the first act ever to win Grammy awards in the pop and jazz categories in the same year (1981). Its 1985 all-jazz album *Vocalese* also made Grammy history by receiving a record 12 nominations (it won two). The group frequently explores multiple genres, moving easily between pop, jazz, gospel, funk and doo-wop.

On the new, pop-leaning release *The Junction* (BMG), the recently rebooted foursome collaborated with Mervyn Warren, one of the founders of a cappella powerhouse Take 6, who produced and arranged the vocals.

*The Junction* is the group's first recording since losing founder/bass vocalist Tim Hauser to a heart attack in 2014 at age 72. The new Manhattan Transfer consists of original members Alan Paul (tenor) and Janis Siegel (alto), who have been with the band since its founding in 1972; longtime member Cheryl Bentyne (soprano, since 1979); and new member, bass/baritone Trist Curless, a veteran of a cappella group M-Pact who had subbed for Hauser in the past.

Jazz fans will find plenty to love, including

"Cantaloup (Flip Out!)," based on Herbie Hancock's 1964 jazz standard "Cantaloupe Island" and Us3's 1993 hip-hop hit "Cantaloup," which sampled Hancock's recording. Manhattan Transfer's version includes an uncanny lead vocal by Bentyne, channeling Freddie Hubbard's original trumpet solo.

There's also a highly danceable version of the 1950s-era classic "Tequila," combined with Paul's original composition "The Way Of The Booze." Grace Kelly's "Blues For Harry Bosch" features Kelly's alto saxophone and new lyrics by Bentyne. Five originals include Paul's "Swing Balboa," Siegel's funky "Shake Ya Boogie" and "Sometimes I Do," a soulful ballad by Warren.

"We wanted to do a pop album, not just a jazz album—something that had wider boundaries and expressed different sides of Manhattan Transfer," Paul said. "There was a time when we were a Top 40 pop group. We wanted to express that on this album. Each song is like a chapter, representing some element of what we've done before."

The group was eager to explore the new possibilities generated by the addition of new member Curless. Paul made it clear that, in a sense, there was no replacing Hauser. "Losing Tim was very difficult; it was a very big gap to fill... his per-



Manhattan Transfer, from left: Cheryl Bentyne, Alan Paul, Janis Siegel and Trist Curless

sonality and what he contributed to the group," he said. "We had to find someone who could sing the bass parts, but, more than that, create something new and fresh—a new element."

Curless, 46, reflected on what it means to become a member of the legendary outfit. "It's pretty overwhelming and surreal to be part of a group that I grew up listening to and that was so influential on my musical development," he said.

Paul put the group's long history in perspective: "We were reborn twice; once when Cheryl joined the group. And now, with Trist, we're reborn again." —Allen Morrison



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# Coleman's Revolution

There's no question that Atlantic Records was keen to capitalize on Ornette Coleman's reputation as a jazz revolutionary. Just look at the titles of his first four albums for the label: *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*, *Change Of The Century*, *This Is Our Music*, *Free Jazz*. Each seemed a calculated poke in the eye to fans who believed that jazz had rules. Ornette was out to erase them.

Yet if you sit down with them now, as component parts to the 10-LP set *The Atlantic Years*, it's almost impossible to hear the world-changing power of those albums—ironically because of how completely the saxophonist changed the way we hear jazz. And not just jazz, either. Ben Ratliff suggests in the liner notes that “the plaintive crying rasp Bob Dylan used on tour in front of his electric band in 1966 could have come from lots of places, but something tells me it came from here.” There haven't been many musical revolutions with that broad an impact.

Astonishingly, Coleman achieved all of this in a mere 22 months. His first recordings for Atlantic were made on May 22, 1959, not even two weeks after his final session for Contemporary, but the music seemed to come from another era entirely. There was no piano on the Atlantic recordings, and no session men, either. Where his earliest albums made a debt to Charlie Parker clearly audible, here he was boldly original, his tone bright and elastic, his lines blues-tinged and richly melodic. The music didn't follow the rules of post-bop jazz, with regular chord changes and standard song structure, but neither did it leap headlong into anarchy and atonality. Instead, it offered an almost vocalized emotionality, from the wailing, cantorial phrases of “Lonely Woman,” which opened *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*, to the spare, almost abstracted melancholia of “Beauty Is A Rare Thing,” from *This Is Our Music*.

It wasn't just the bandleader, though. The bright, chirpy attack of Don Cherry's pocket trumpet offered brilliant counterpoint to Coleman's alto, swapping the muscular virtuosity jazz trumpeters usually traded in for something more evocative and ethereal. Likewise, Billy Higgins' drumming transformed the standard bop pulse into something lighter and more propulsive, not so much driving the soloists as running playfully alongside them. Ed Blackwell, who replaced Higgins in 1960, beginning with *This Is Our Music*, had a similar touch, but with a pronounced New Orleans accent.

Above all, there was the bass playing. Before these recordings, bassists provided



Ornette Coleman

COURTESY OF ATLANTIC RECORDS

the foundation and thus were locked into the harmonic and rhythmic structure of a tune. In Coleman's conception, however, the bass provides counterpoint, and does so with stunning freedom and flexibility. Charlie Haden completely reinvented time-keeping in this band, using double-stops, pedal tones, strummed rhythms and keening arco interjections to provide bass lines that were every bit as compelling as the solos he accompanied. Later, Scott LaFaro added a degree of thumb-position virtuosity to that approach. And for Coleman's final Atlantic sessions, in March 1961, it was Jimmy Garrison, foreshadowing the sort of aggressive interplay he would bring to John Coltrane's band eight months later.

Where *Beauty Is A Rare Thing*, Rhino's 1995 CD anthology, presented Coleman's Atlantic recordings in session order, *The Atlantic Years* compiles the original albums in the order they were released. So, after the first four, there's *Ornette!* and *Ornette On Tenor*, and then several collections of outtakes: *The Art Of The Improvisers* (1970), *Twins* (1971) and *To Whom Who Keeps A Record* (1975). There's also *The Ornette Coleman Legacy*, which was never an album before; it contains the previously unreleased tracks that were on *Beauty Is A Rare Thing*, but omits “Abstraction” and “Variants On A Theme Of Thelonious Monk (Criss-Cross): Variant 1,” no doubt on the logic that those two were recorded not for a Coleman release but for John Lewis' Gunther Shuller-composed album, *Jazz Abstractions* (1961).

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

DB

# Cape Town Honors Masekela

**ON THE EVE OF THIS YEAR'S CAPE TOWN International Jazz Festival**, which ran March 23–24, some attendees experienced slight trepidation.

Given South Africa's recent plights—a significant drought in the Western Cape, corruption charges against former president Jacob Zuma and the loss of one of its musical giants, trumpeter Hugh Masekela, on Jan. 23—the event dubbed “Africa’s grandest gathering” aimed at showcasing the country’s resilience and fighting spirit.

Amanda Black’s vocals drew thousands to the Kippies stage on Friday night. And as she belted out intense rallying cries in her native Xhosa tongue, the singer set the tone for the evening—and the weekend.

Performing selections from 2017’s *Afro-Caribbean Mixtape* (Paytone/Ropeadope), Nicholas Payton opened his set with the album’s title track. As each player settled into the groove, Payton’s melodic trumpet cut through it all. Despite the disparate sounds emanating from Vicente Archer’s bass, Marcus Gilmore’s drums and DJ Lady Fingaz’s turntables, the ensemble’s synergy was palpable, grounded by Daniel Sadownick’s mesmeric percussion patter.

A fuller lineup was in store on the Cape Town festival’s second day, and emotions were high, as much of the lineup paid homage to “Bra Hugh” and other greats of South African music. Simphiwe Dana, who has been hailed as the next Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), was backed by a driving all-female band and accompanied by three equally talented vocalists.

Like Masekela, pianist Robert Glasper—who brought his supergroup R&R=NOW to the Basil Manenberg Coetzee outdoor stage—has faced criticism for playing music outside the traditional boundaries of jazz. And alongside trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, multi-instrumentalist Terrace Martin and drummer Justin Tyson, the ensemble served as a reminder that the scope of the music actually *should* be expansive and ever-evolving.

Back at the Kippies stage, a heartfelt tribute to Masekela featured a coterie of the trumpeter’s contemporaries, including vocalist Tshepo Tshola and drummer Leeroy Sauls, as a sizable crowd looked on. Current South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was in attendance to honor a man whose music helped draw global attention to the brutality of the country’s apartheid system.

As photos of Masekela were projected on a large screen at the back of the stage, performances of the trumpeter’s classics, like “Stimela,” flowed out of the band; emotions

ran high, and for fans, it was difficult not to mourn Masekela’s death.

With the passing of Winnie Mandela, an anti-apartheid activist and ex-wife of Nelson Mandela, on April 2, it seems as though an era that produced heroes and heroines willing to fight for basic human rights might be at an end. However, as this year marks the centennial birthday of Nelson Mandela, the tone of the festival was one of hope, as a new generation is poised to take up the fight.

—Shannon J. Effinger



Tshepo Tshola sings during a tribute to the late Hugh Masekela.

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EZEKIEL ZABROWSKI

Pianist Mike Jones and bassist Penn Jillette have released a duo album.

# Jones Teams with Jillette for Live Album

**SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO, PENN JILLETTE** and his friend Mike Post went out to dinner at The Eiffel Tower—a place that Mike Jones, the house pianist at the time, remembers not very fondly as a “shitty restaurant in Las Vegas.” Today, though, he’s grateful for that gig because that’s where he and the verbal half of the magician duo Penn & Teller first crossed paths and

started hanging out together, talking music.

Jillette, who had just begun playing acoustic bass a year or so earlier, called Jones after a few weeks with a proposition. As Jillette remembered it: “I told him, ‘Jonesy, I’d like you to play before Teller and I do our show each night at The Rio. The downside is that I’m gonna play bass with you.’”

Jones recalled: “My response to that was,

‘Why the hell do you need jazz in a magic show? And you’ve only been playing bass for a year, so why get up there in front of 1,400 people and play it every night?’ And [Jillette’s] answer was, ‘Well, I’m not gonna get any better if I don’t do it.’”

To this day, an hour before each show, the duo plays a 45-minute set of standards, followed by a 15-minute solo piano performance as Jillette slips out to morph into his magician identity. The first few weeks were rocky, but thanks to his private lessons with Vegas bass stalwart Morrie Loudon, serious woodshedding and hours in action with Jones, Jillette upped his game faster than even he thought he could.

This is clear throughout *The Show Before The Show* (Capri), their new duo album. Its 10 tracks were cut live at the Penn & Teller Theater within the Rio All-Suites Hotel & Casino. The two generate a driving sense of swing together, if not an overdose of subtlety.

“This is an over-the-top, in-your-face, every-note-I-can-play gig whose whole purpose is to get people excited about seeing a magic show,” Jones explained. “And I absolutely love doing it.”

Consistent with his personality, Jillette plays aggressively, with a big tone and punchy attack. “Jonesy has a very strong prejudice against guys who play soft, with a lot of amplification,” Jillette said. “He would always say, ‘Bass is all about a big man on a big instrument, moving a lot of air.’”

—Bob Doerschuk

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# PFC's Quest for Unity

**MUSIC IS THE CONNECTION TO OVERCOME** all the divisions in our world, according to producer/engineer/filmmaker Mark Johnson, the co-founder of Playing For Change, the multimedia company that has been producing the 10-year video series *Songs Around The World*.

Launched in 2008 with an uplifting video of "Stand By Me," Johnson and his crew assembled a wide array of musicians to collaborate on the song—from street musician Roger Ridley in Santa Monica, California, to more than a dozen players in different locations, including South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Barcelona and Moscow. The video has generated more than 100 million online views, spurred a million-plus subscriber-funded YouTube channel (with more than 500 million views) and established PFC as an inspirational, transformative venture to connect cultures and ultimately, Johnson said, "to bring peace."

PFC has recorded four *Songs Around The World* albums, including the new disc *Listen To The Music* (Motéma). Largely recorded outdoors with a mobile studio, the three-year project features 210 musicians from 25 countries performing classic rock tunes, African songs and an original tune, written by members of the touring PFC Band (an 11-piece group of musicians

representing 10 countries). On its website (playingforchange.com), PFC is releasing one multi-tracked performance video per month that documents the making of each of the album's 12 songs.

Artists on the album include Buddy Guy, Dr. John, David Crosby, Warren Haynes, Ivan Neville and the Preservational Hall Jazz Band.

One of the most poignant tracks is "All Along The Watchtower," the Bob Dylan composition that Jimi Hendrix famously interpreted.

"It's like what Jimi once said: 'If there is something to be changed in this world, it can only happen through music,'" Johnson said. "People need to have that conviction, the urgency to change things. This is one of the deepest songs on the album. It was going back to the roots by traveling through Mali, to New Orleans, to Beirut and to the Lakota nation of Native Americans to show how we're all the same through the song. It's a collective group playing what I call 'the fight song for humanity.'"

In an email conversation, Neville Brothers member Cyril Neville, who sings on the track, said, "I'm a huge Dylan fan. 'Watchtower' was one of my favorite songs, musically and lyrical. Then I heard the Hendrix version, and it blew



Playing For Change's Leonardo Buono (left, standing) and Mark Johnson at an outdoor recording session in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

me away. So, it was a great pleasure to be invited to be a part of such a beautiful work of art."

A collective of supporters keeps PFC afloat. For the albums, the organization pays all the musicians involved. Some of the established stars donate their pay to support the Playing for Change Foundation, which has opened 15 schools worldwide for underprivileged students to be educated in music and the arts. "This is our way to connect kids, too, from Mali to the U.S., through the recording studios we set up," Johnson said. "We want to learn how other people see the world."  
—Dan Ouellette



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# Big Ears' Generous Cross-Pollination

WITH EVERY ANNUAL INSTALLMENT, THE Big Ears Festival feels more and more like several festivals under a single banner.

If someone only was interested in a steady diet of contemporary classical music, for example, the 2018 edition offered terrific performances by International Contemporary Ensemble, as well as a slew of concerts by Bang on a Can All-Stars and Brooklyn Rider, while global music aficionados could check out Niger's Tal National or Anoushka Shankar. But that segregated outlook misses the genius of the festival, which is about cross-pollination. Few festivals in the United States, let alone the world, program such a broad array of cutting-edge artists across all genres.

The modular notion of poly-stylistic collaboration affords numerous constellations of musicians from a single pool of talent. The singular keyboardist Craig Taborn, for example, performed in four different ensembles during the festival, leading his own corkscrewing quartet in one of the final Big Ears concerts, after working within groups led by reedists Roscoe Mitchell and Evan Parker, and playing in the collective quartet Rocket Science.

Pianist Jason Moran also was busy during the festival, leading his raucous Fats Waller Dance Party at a midnight show. But his pair of

intimate daytime performances were among the weekend's most gripping.

The pianist played a first-time duet with percussionist Milford Graves that allowed the packed house at the Bijou Theatre to discover new threads within the core of each musician. Graves isn't easy to play with—his polymetric attack, emphasis on low-end richness and surging energy demands astute listening and imagination from his partners. Yet Moran was more than able to find ways in. In fact, unlike many of the musicians who spend their time struggling to keep up with Graves, the pianist pulled off a dazzling trick by focusing one of their improvisations on hushed, lyric playing, which in turn brought out a rarely heard side of Graves' genius, and allowed him to generate a glowing murmur from his customized kit.

The next afternoon, Moran convened Bangs, a trio with cornetist Ron Miles and guitarist Mary Halvorson. The pianist joked that the troupe had existed for six years, but its Big Ears appearance was only its fourth performance. The intimacy and interaction of the players certainly hasn't suffered from inactivity.

"Cupid," a gorgeous ballad by the cornetist, sparkled with lapidary clarity, as each complementary line generated a beautifully cumula-



Pianist Jason Moran and percussionist Milford Graves perform in a duo during the Big Ears Festival, which ran March 22–25 in Knoxville, Tennessee.

tive mosaic that hung weightlessly in the air; the guitarist's "White Space" played up the chamber-like vibe of the trio.

That adventurousness and openness extended to all stripes of music at Big Ears: Erudite Vermont folkie Sam Amidon made internal connections to free-jazz and noise within his charming set, and Norwegian chanteuse Susanna (née Susanna Wallumrød) connected AC/DC, composer Henry Purcell and Southern folk icon Elizabeth Cotten within a gorgeously refined sound, constructed by harp, fiddle and accordion virtuosos. Susanna was joined on a number of songs by Bonnie "Prince" Billy, shadowing her refined vocals with a touch of rustic soul, a collision of high and low that summed up the fest's wonderfully inclusive spirit. —Peter Margasak

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Cecil Taylor (1929–2018), shown here performing in Cologne, Germany, in 1987

## In Memoriam: Cecil Taylor

**TRUMPETER EDDIE GALE ONLY MADE ONE** album—*Unit Structures* (Blue Note)—with pianist Cecil Taylor, the pioneer avant-garde pianist who died on April 5 at the age of 89. But out of a short period of rehearsal and that one afternoon of recording, Gale walked away with a lifelong friend and a crucial piece of advice that he says helped change his perspective on music.

“Cecil said to me, ‘Always be interested in listening to all types of music,’” Gale said. “Always be open to listening.”

That kind of openness might not be immediately apparent when listening to Taylor’s work on numerous studio recordings and in countless concert appearances, where it often seemed as if the pianist was attempting to flood the room with notes and volume. But throughout his long career, the pianist absorbed a variety of styles—jazz, blues, gospel, classical, world music—and used them to color and shade his singular sound and approach to his chosen instrument.

“People call it ‘free-jazz,’ but that’s not really a sufficient or even accurate description of what he’s doing,” said pianist Vijay Iyer. “There’s so much care, even in the fusillade things he would do with both hands on the keyboard. It’s precise. And especially when you land on these ballad passages, and these delicate arpeggiated things he would do. The range of his sound and his touch, it’s done with great wisdom and care.”

Taylor was born March 29, 1929, in Long Island City, Queens. He studied at the New York College of Music, as well as at the New England Conservatory. When he started playing professionally, in jam sessions and with a quartet he assembled with soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy and bassist Buell Neidlinger (who died March 16), his music was informed by bebop but also featured jagged rhythms and brusque atonality.

Taylor’s artistic vision was fully revealed in sessions that yielded his two Blue Note albums—*Unit Structures* and *Conquistador*, both released in 1966. These records eschewed the traditional structures of jazz songwriting, opting for more

fluid and untethered playing. There were no traditional melodies, just quick snapshot phrases that were deconstructed and reconfigured.

Bassist William Parker, who first played with the pianist in 1980, remembered that while he was given a lot of musical freedom and space to move, there were guideposts along the way.

“He would play phrases on the piano and then interpret the information and give it out to the musicians,” Parker said. “Then you began to interpret it as you liked. He would never say, ‘It goes this way. You’re playing it wrong.’”

Throughout his 60-year career, Taylor sought out the contributions of players from throughout the worlds of jazz and experimental music. Frequent collaborators included composer Pauline Oliveros, bassist Sirone, saxophonist Evan Parker, and drummers Tony Oxley and Max Roach.

During his final decade, Taylor’s performance schedule slowed considerably, but his reputation as an innovator continued to grow. Admiration for the pianist culminated in events like “A Celebration of the Maestro,” which took place at New York’s Issue Project Room in 2012 and featured tributes from Iyer, Craig Taborn and Amina Claudine Myers, and last year’s “Open Plan,” which featured Taylor performing with Oxley and dancer Min Tanaka at New York’s Whitney Museum.

Taylor was inducted in the DownBeat Hall of Fame via the 1975 Critics Poll, and he was named an NEA Jazz Master in 1990. Among the other honors he amassed were a MacArthur fellowship in 1991 and the Kyoto Prize in 2014.

While Taylor leaves behind no immediate family members, heirs to his music constitute a new generation of players and listeners.

“I think the mission of the next 60 years should be to try to unpack what the hell he was doing,” Iyer said. “If you spend any length of time with his music, then you see there’s all this detail and a rich, endless well of information. There’s all this stuff to learn from it.” —Robert Ham



A close-up photograph of a person wearing a blue suit jacket and a white shirt, playing a gold saxophone. A black Samson microphone is clipped to the saxophone's body. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

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JASON KRUPPA



## GREGORY AGID

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### *Idealistic Goals*

After recording spirited takes on jazz standards like “Caravan” and “In A Sentimental Mood,” as well as some original compositions, the Gregory Agid Quartet decided to take the title of its new album—*Jamz*—to heart.

For 45 minutes, clarinetist Agid and his bandmates (guitarist Joshua Starkman, bassist Max Moran and drummer A.J. Hall) cut loose on an extended improvisation that flowed from funk breakdowns to free-jazz crumbings, which they then used as between-song excerpts

on the new album.

“That was us getting really out,” Agid said with a laugh, speaking from his home in New Orleans. “But that fit in with the concept of *Jamz*, which was to make a fun record that hopefully not only jazz aficionados could listen to and enjoy, but also people who don’t know shit about the music. We want everyone to enjoy what’s happening.”

It’s an idealistic goal, to be sure, but not an impossible one to imagine with Agid leading the charge. The lanky musician has a warm,

infectious personality that seems to lift the mood of anyone he comes into contact with. His playing reflects that spirit. Even on the most poignant ballads, there’s a lightness to his performances that floats above a song’s sorrowful qualities.

The ability for music to help push the dark clouds away is something that Agid was brought up believing in. As a kid growing up in Hawaii, his mother would encourage him to sing to himself to get over his fears. And he found a joy in creating his own music, starting off on piano before switching to clarinet in the 5th grade. As for his interest in jazz, it wasn’t until his family relocated to the birthplace of the music when he was 12 that Agid truly took it in.

Agid became immersed in the music, attending the Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong Summer Jazz Camp, where he found himself playing alongside other future stars like Jon Batiste, Trombone Shorty and Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah. It was there that Agid met a person who would help shape his future: legendary clarinetist Alvin Batiste.

“He was the first teacher I had in New Orleans,” Agid remembered. “That relationship changed my path forever.”

His path also led him to the door of Eddie Daniels, the clarinet player whose long career found him playing alongside everyone from Freddie Hubbard to Billy Joel. Agid spent a week in Santa Fe, New Mexico, studying with Daniels and getting a helpful push out the door to pursue his musical dreams.

“That was a tremendously motivating and inspirational trip,” Agid said. “I had already made the decision that I was going to play clarinet, but to be around someone who is at the top of their game, having done all the amazing things that he has done; that forever motivated me to reach that level.”

Agid has been well on his way ever since. He has logged time as a member of Delfeayo Marsalis’ Uptown Jazz Orchestra and backed up soul singer Kristina Morales. The clarinetist also has a regular weekly gig at Maison, a well-known New Orleans hotspot. It’s the vibe of those shows that he and his quartet were aiming to capture on *Jamz*.

Great as his own music is, it’s Agid’s work with younger players that could become his most important legacy. With the help of fellow musicians, he started the Second Line Arts Collective, an organization offering classes to teen players and which, for the past two years, has held its own jazz summer camp.

“For the next little while, my two main projects are trying to move the quartet forward and helping this nonprofit create educational opportunities,” he said. “And trying to find a way to make the quartet and the nonprofit work together.”

—Robert Ham



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RUFF DRAFT

## RYAN PORTER

### Jams from The Shack

Late 2008 was a memorable time in the life of trombonist Ryan Porter.

Barack Obama had just won the presidential election, and Porter's group, the West Coast Get Down, was hitting its stride. The possibilities, both personal and universal, felt endless.

"There was something about the energy and the optimism of that time," said the 38-year-old Los Angeles native, looking back on the time nearly a decade later. It's why he decided to call his latest album, recorded in those heady days, *The Optimist*—and why, after thinking for years about re-recording those early sessions, he ultimately decided against it.

"It wasn't [done in] a fancy recording studio, so it was a very, very honest recording," he said of the album, which he described as a snapshot of a time when "we really wanted to be great musicians, and we needed each other to attain that dream."

*The Optimist* (World Galaxy/Alpha Pup) was recorded in a garage nicknamed "The Shack" that belongs to the father of Kamasi Washington, West Coast Get Down's saxophonist. It was a great practice space, but not ideal for recording because it was directly below a flight path for the LAX airport. For each take, the group would have to seal up all the doors and windows, and sweat it out together, five or six musicians and a couple of recording engineers, in a space barely big enough for three.

Despite the conditions, *The Optimist* is a tight, lively set, capturing a group of young players finding their swagger three years before the marathon recording session that would yield Kamasi Washington's *The Epic* (Brainfeeder). Porter's infectious compositions, which combine elements of hard-bop and soul-jazz with rhythms inspired by funk and hip-hop, provide a framework in which every player gets a chance to shine—especially Washington, whose powerful, Sonny Rollins-like sound

graces every track and shadows Porter on the album's memorable melodic themes.

"He's my favorite musician to play a melody with," Washington said of Porter. "His tone, there's so much in there, it's actually hard to mic. He has one of the thickest, richest tones I've ever heard."

Many members of the West Coast Get Down are second-generation musicians, but Porter is not one of them. His love of jazz came from his grandfather, an auto mechanic with a vast record collection, who would let a young Porter help out in his repair shop. "I was his assistant," Porter recalled. "And that meant not only do I get to handle the tools, but I get to be the DJ after his hands get dirty."

Porter studied at the Manhattan School of Music under bass trombonist David Taylor and trombonist Steve Turre, both of whom he counts, along with J.J. Johnson, as major influences. Though he was grateful for his time in the New York jazz scene, Porter never doubted that he would return to L.A. to rejoin his West Coast Get Down bandmates, many of whom had been playing together since middle school.

"In New York, it was a lot more jazz musicians who only wanted to play jazz," Porter said. By contrast, his early mentors included drummer Billy Higgins and trombonist George Bohanon—who, like many successful L.A. musicians, did session work in a variety of styles and genres. "That was what the community of teachers there in L.A. taught us: not to make it just jazz."

Porter continues to find inspiration in unlikely places. His 2017 debut album was a set of children's songs, reimagined as soulful jazz standards, called *Spangle-Lang Lane* (World Galaxy/Alpha Pup), for which his two young daughters served as both muses and critics.

"I would put it on," he said, chuckling, "and if they found something else to do, I knew I had to go back to the drawing board." —Andy Hermann



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Lakecia Benjamin's new album is titled *Rise Up*.



# LAKECIA BENJAMIN

## Spitting Fire

Because of the music's sheer ebullience, it's sometimes hard to comprehend the somber inspiration that fuels alto saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin's long-awaited new album, *Rise Up* (Ropedope). Tunes like "Juicy," which initially bounces to a bass line groove similar to The Time's 1981 hit, "Cool"; the zesty "On The One," which resembles a Maceo Parker jam; and the head-banging "Takeback" sound unabashedly festive. Those bubbly songs pretty much characterize the vibe of the entire disc. But its impetus was far from a party.

In March 2013, the year after the release of Benjamin's album *Retox* (Motéma), she endured a tragedy when her younger sister, Jenee, died at age 22. "Losing her put me in a pretty dark place. It forced me to really find out who I was and what I wanted in life," Benjamin explained.

The New York native found the strength to keep making music and create a new album. "I'm just a super energetic person, and I have different ways of expressing that," Benjamin said.

Anyone who has seen Benjamin perform—either with her rugged Soul Squad or with Iqmar Thomas' Revive Big Band, Ulysses Owens Jr. & The New Century Big Band, Terri Lyne Carrington, Theo Croker or Gregory Porter—has experienced her cyclonic energy. Benjamin possesses a steely tone on saxophone with which she unleashes thrashing improvisations that sound like someone trying to convey enormous crucial information in a short amount of time.

Mark Ruffin, who worked with Benjamin when he produced singer Charenée Wade's album *Offering: The Music Of Gil Scott-Heron And Brian Jackson* (Motéma), recently compared Benjamin's saxophone playing to Johnny Griffin's. "They called him the 'Little Giant' because of his huge sound. That's Lakecia," Ruffin said. "She may be of a slight

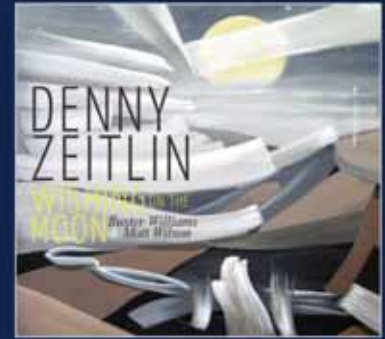
build but she has an incredibly large, hot, in-your-face sound. She spits fire in every solo I've heard her do."

As evidenced by her oeuvre, Benjamin's musicality stretches beyond jazz. She's also rocked the stage with hip-hop architects such as Pete Rock, DJ Premiere and Missy Elliott, as well as r&b icons Stevie Wonder and Alicia Keys.

Carrington praised Benjamin's versatility: "Lakecia captures the essence of traditional jazz, blues and r&b, never forsaking the importance and essential characters of the genres, while at the same time embracing the evolution of them all—while speaking to what's relevant today. Her sound is clear, urgent and soulful."

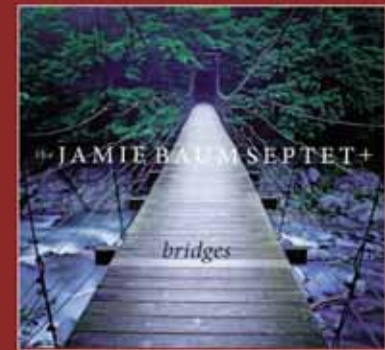
Benjamin is also an educator who teaches in Jazz at Lincoln Center's "Jazz for Young People" program and at Brooklyn's KIPP AMP Middle School. A poignant exchange with the one of the students at the latter program informed the Afrobeat-driven "Little Children." One of her aspiring music students was concerned about walking home from school with a saxophone case; he was afraid that police officers might mistake it for a gun. Benjamin soon learned that many of the music students shared the same fear. "So, I wanted to have a message to all these kids out there worried about getting shot and dying. Surviving is not thriving," Benjamin said. "I thought that there needs to be a message to them on how to be positive and be themselves within this climate."

For all the positivity in spite of circumstances that course through *Rise Up*, some jazz purists will probably scoff as they did with *Retox* about how Benjamin's electrifying saxophone improvisations often take the backseat to vocalists. "Sometimes the message and the impact isn't about me playing a lot of saxophone," she explained. "Don't get me wrong; I love to solo. But I got to do what I feel is best for the music."  
—John Murph



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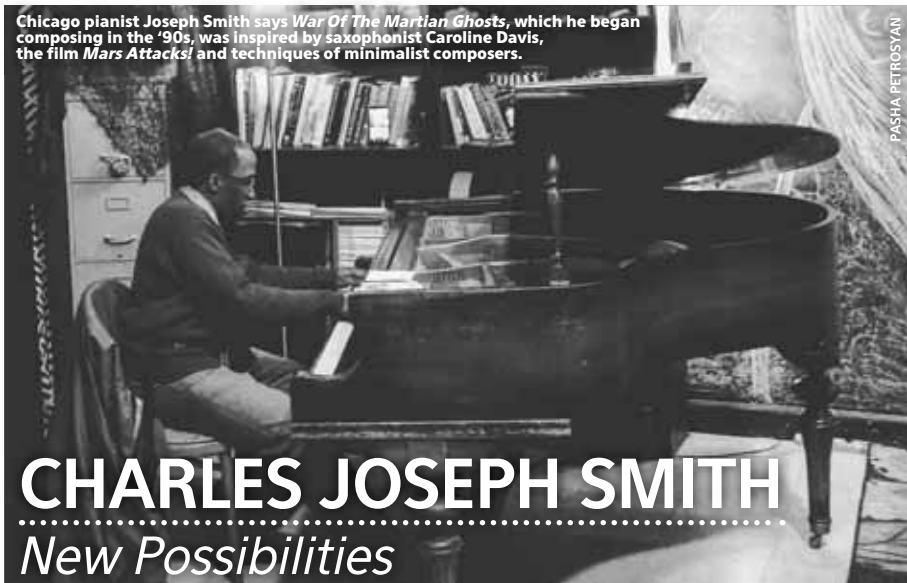
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Chicago pianist Joseph Smith says *War Of The Martian Ghosts*, which he began composing in the '90s, was inspired by saxophonist Caroline Davis, the film *Mars Attacks!* and techniques of minimalist composers.



## CHARLES JOSEPH SMITH

### *New Possibilities*

Pianist Charles Joseph Smith always has used music to challenge limitations. When this world offered him only scant possibilities, he went on to imagine a new one. His *War Of The Martian Ghosts* (Sooper) envisions battles on the planet that sound like they're being fought against a backdrop of modern ragtime. Smith also has leapt over formidable barriers within his hometown, Chicago.

Smith was diagnosed with autism when he was a child on the city's South Side. While it could have hindered some of his scholastic achievements, he completed a doctorate degree in music at the University of Illinois. Smith also refutes the image of savants as isolated, as he has sought out ideas from different musical communities alongside his own ballroom and interpretive dance performances.

"Even though there's some mis-wiring in my brain, it caused other parts of the brain to compensate," Smith said at his favorite coffeehouse in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood. "Sometimes, it comes out as finite intelligence in some subjects, but not in others. With the savant syndrome, you know a lot more about music and all that than anything else. So, I know more about music than math, or reading or science or history. But sometimes being over-fixated on music gave me an advantage."

Family and community support were also key. Smith's parents bought him a piano when they saw him avidly try to read the sheet music at his grandmother's house. He'd play jazz at home in piano/organ duos with his brother Stan. And as he combined self-taught explorations with private lessons, more people noticed his abilities as a classical pianist. The late impresario Earl Calloway, also a longtime cultural correspondent for the Chicago Defender newspaper, presented him performing Bach fugues in such venues as the Fine Arts Building downtown. After performing in student competitions, Smith enrolled in the music program at

Roosevelt University, where he could indulge his affinity for opera, especially the Spanish dances in Georges Bizet's *Carmen*.

While Smith pursued graduate-level education, the final stages of the doctoral program included its own challenges.

"When it came to thesis time, I started to fall in love with writing and wanted to do a formal thesis," Smith said. "I was afraid of doing a doctoral recital because of my autism. So, I decided to write a 400-page thesis on Franz Liszt transcriptions. But I realized I couldn't escape speaking in front of an audience. Fortunately, I passed."

Smith used this influence and a synthesizer his father bought him to start creating songs for *War Of The Martian Ghosts* in the late 1990s. He said additional inspiration came from jazz saxophonist Caroline Davis' improvisational acumen, the film *Mars Attacks!* and the techniques of such minimalist composers as Steve Reich.

"Autistics love repetition because some behaviors go on and on and on without stopping," Smith said. "Like how when you're autistic, you bob your head. That's why I also like house music."

After putting *War Of The Martian Ghosts* aside, Smith revisited it years later, recasting the score from synthesizer to piano. Smith bought a CD recorder and started selling his music around Chicago, performing in small venues, as well as participating in dance competitions at house clubs. Sooper then released his record in an unconventional manner—only on cassette and as a digital download. But Smith never wanted to stick with any kind of orthodoxy.

"My destiny was to create something neo-classical and neo-Romantic, but I try not to limit myself to these parameters," he said. "I might want to go the Buddhist route like Herbie Hancock—I need something from above. Or I might rent a van and tour from city to city. I think I'm ready for it."  
—Aaron Cohen

A man with long hair, wearing a black hat and a black leather jacket, is seated and playing a Godin Stadium 59 guitar. The guitar is a dark green color with a white pickguard and a dark fretboard. The background is a textured, grey wall with vertical wooden planks. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man's profile and the guitar.

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MARY HALVORSON

# BRAXTON, Fame & Building CODE GIRL

By PHILLIP LUTZ

Photos by JIMMY & DENA KATZ

*Inside the Village Vanguard, the famed walls of photos, which depict jazz luminaries over the decades, testify to the club's role in the making of legends. So, as Mary Halvorson sat beneath the photos of Sarah Vaughan and Charles Mingus on a quiet February afternoon, she seemed pleased—and a bit surprised—that she and her cohort of radical thinkers now were being booked in the room.*

*“I never thought I'd play here,” Halvorson said. “It's such a special place.”*

But the guitarist also had another venerated New York venue on her mind. A few days earlier, she had played her last improv night at the old Stone, the Alphabet City space that John Zorn, the proprietor, was vacating for the Glass Box Theater, a more polished room in the more upscale environs of the New School in Greenwich Village.

Halvorson had burnished her reputation—among her more recent accolades, she topped four categories in the 2017 DownBeat Critics Poll—in what she estimated to be at least 75 appearances at the Stone. She also had helped build a community, many of whose members were in the overflow crowd, cheering her on.

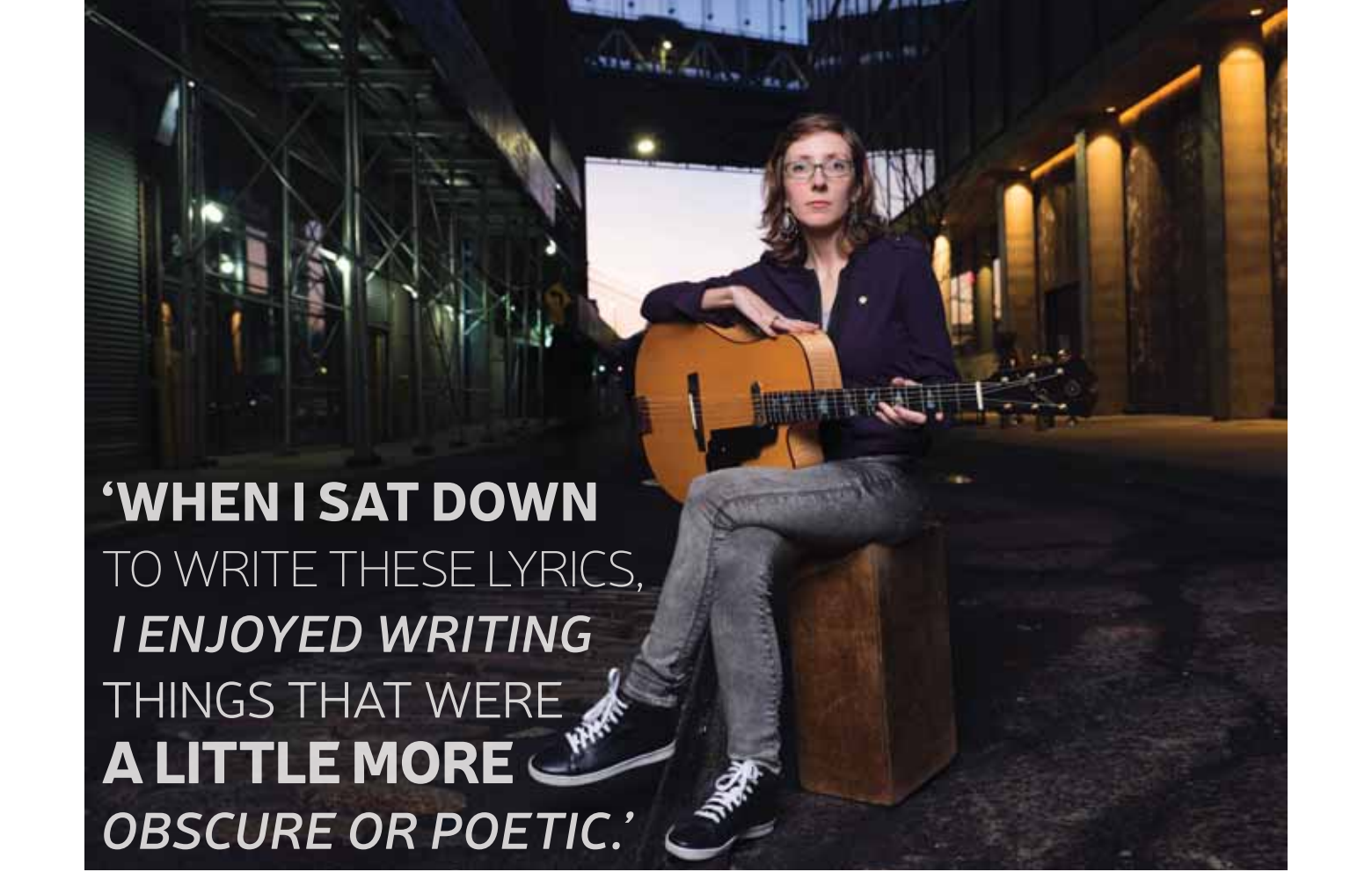
Inspired, she worked her singular alchemy—conjuring sparse, dreamlike images in an otherworldly encounter with guitarist Nels Cline and trombonist David Taylor, and, later, whipping up a rousing, roiling farewell with pianist John Medeski and drummer Tomas Fujiwara. The crowd's warm response made clear that replicating the room's DIY charms will not be easy.

“There's a lot of love that went into it,” Halvorson said.

But the reality is that, for Halvorson—and many Downtown improvisers—the center of gravity is surely, if slowly, being pulled north and west to Greenwich Village. It's not just the fact that The Stone has moved there. Last July, Halvorson brought her octet to the Vanguard; this July, she'll perform there with Thumbscrew, her collective trio featuring Fujiwara and bassist Michael Formanek.







**‘WHEN I SAT DOWN  
TO WRITE THESE LYRICS,  
I ENJOYED WRITING  
THINGS THAT WERE  
A LITTLE MORE  
OBSCURE OR POETIC.’**

Does that mean Halvorson is being co-opted by the establishment? Not likely; in fact, she is venturing down new creative paths. In a burst of literary invention—and at some artistic risk—she has produced *Code Girl*, an enigmatic double album on which she has, for the first time, written lyrics and recruited a singer to interpret them.

“The *Code Girl* thing,” she said, “is like a left turn.”

The album—which features the Thumbscrew personnel plus singer Amirtha Kidambi and trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire—was driven by a change-is-good philosophy: “I want to keep experimenting,” she said, “trying new things and challenging myself. I have no interest in making the same album over and over again.”

For the past decade, she has favored a variety of instrumental formats, starting with her first recording as a leader, 2008’s *Dragon’s Head*. That album featured her trio with bassist John Hébert and drummer Ches Smith, who formed a core as she expanded to a quintet, then a septet. In 2015, she went small with her first solo album, *Meltframe*, before going big in 2016 with her octet album, *Away With You*. Like *Code Girl*, those albums are career markers, recorded at and released on Firehouse 12 Records, a New Haven, Connecticut, label.

*Away With You* satisfied a desire to broaden her compositional canvas, providing in the process some material for last year’s Vanguard

gig. But until now, the only stabs at singing in her work were a few rough-hewed vocals with her avant-rock group People, with bassist Kyle Forester and drummer Kevin Shea, and in her duo with violist Jessica Pavone. The choice of vocalist was thus critical to the success of the *Code Girl* project.

She had known Kidambi through mutual friends since the singer came to New York, in 2009, and, after hearing her perform around the city, Halvorson grew enamored of her voice. “It’s really powerful,” she said. “She’s got a huge range, she’s a great improviser and I really like her. So, when I was thinking of doing this band, she just popped into my head.”

Kidambi, steeped in disparate modern and ancient traditions—after studying the Western classics she immersed herself in Carnatic music and a project with the late AACM founder Muhal Richard Abrams—said that Halvorson’s work with People first showed her how she could integrate the strands of her experience.

“It blew me away,” Kidambi recalled. “I started to realize there was a way to bring these traditions together as an improvising musician.”

As their paths crossed, Halvorson and Kidambi got to chatting, forming a mutual admiration society. That led to plans to work together, and the two met in preparation for *Code Girl*’s first engagement at The Jazz Gallery, which had commissioned the project with the understanding that the music would be played at a concert.

Leading up to that get-together, Halvorson had spent plenty of time alone in her Brooklyn apartment, grinding out the first batch of *Code Girl* compositions—a trial-and-error process, she explained, that involved sitting with her guitar and vocalizing.

“It’s very different writing for the voice than for the horn, and I wanted it to sound natural,” she said. “The way I would check that would be through singing, being aware that Amirtha has a bigger range than I do. I would experiment singing the words with different melodies. Through that, I would kind of shape the song.”

The melodies were molded to fit the contours of the lyrics. By the time of the Jazz Gallery concert in June 2016, she had finished about half the tunes. After the concert, Halvorson found that the writing had taken on a momentum of its own. “It felt like a different experience,” she said, “and I kept going with it.”

As displayed in a booklet intended to accompany the albums, the lyrics follow the conventions of free verse. Written in lower-case letters, the words mimic the style of poet e.e. cummings, who, like Halvorson, was a Massachusetts native and a Libra (no small point for the astrology-minded guitarist).

Like the phrase “Code Girl”—one that Halvorson appropriated from Anthony Braxton, her celebrated colleague and onetime mentor, who said it in passing during dinner on tour in Belgium—the album’s lyrics largely are ambiguous, though not purposely so.



Halvorson says she tends to be attracted to dark music.

"It's just that when I sat down to write these lyrics, I enjoyed writing things that were a little more obscure or poetic," she said. "I liked the way it sounded, the way it fit with the melodies. I tend to enjoy lyrics that are a little less straightforward."

That penchant for obscurity, as it happened, matched Kidambi's aesthetic sense. "It was very freeing as an improviser," she said. "You can really be more expressive and flexible when it's a little surreal or abstract."

In assimilating the lyrics, Kidambi said, she found it useful to draw parallels between her own life and experiences suggested by the text. "It really is a natural thing to want to find that expressive zone and tap it to your own interpretation of that experience," she said.

People like Halvorson, she added, "have super interesting compositional ideas that I respect in that they express their individuality, and you can find your thing inside that. That, or free improvising, is the ideal relationship for me."

Halvorson explained that her compositions played to Kidambi's interpretive strengths. "I might write a really simple melody," she said. "She'll sing that, but she'll also elaborate on it and really add her own thing."

"She's great about getting into the energy of the song. She'll ask me what the songs are about, and she'll take into account what I'm trying to put across. She's improvising all the time, even though the melodies are written. She's doing both at once, and I really love how she does that."

While the lyrics might revel in their opacity, they are clear in at least one respect: a predilection for bleakness. In that, they reflect the interests of the psychology student Halvorson was before becoming a music major as a turn-of-the-millennium undergraduate at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

"I tend to gravitate toward darker music and lyrics," she said. "I don't know why. I just kind of always have."

On the album, the darkness descends from the first note of the first tune, "My Mind I Feel In Time." "It's about a person going crazy," Halvorson said, "or the notion that one could go crazy at any moment."

The piece opens in solitary mode, with Halvorson, alone with her hollowbody guitar and delay pedal, weaving an internal dialog that seems to draw the listener into the recesses of the mind. Once there, Halvorson—her delivery pure and clear, without affect—falls into a determined stasis, repeating a seven-note phrase against which the lyrics play out.

The lyrics illuminate Halvorson's focus on the mind's tangled workings. They are divided into three stanzas, each of which has six lines—the second, fourth and sixth of which repeat within each stanza. In the first stanza, the repeated line—which, like the piece's title, employs tellingly twisted syntax—expresses the theme: "it is not predictable my mind."

The vocal line, structured to reinforce the lyric, has Kidambi dutifully landing on the same descending interval all three times that she sings the phrase "my mind." But the sections between the stanzas offer a chance to break free from the established cadences. In the first of these interstitial

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Halvorson (left) is accompanied on the new album by vocalist Amirtha Kidambi, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Tomas Fujiwara.

## ‘CODE GIRL IS LIKE A LEFT TURN.’

respites, Kidambi, in full improvisatory flight, sparks an artfully scrambled colloquy with Akinmusire and Halvorson that paints a sonic picture of a mind fighting to organize itself.

Fujiwara, meanwhile, provides some strategic grounding. “If the lyric is ‘not predictable,’” he said, “I don’t want to play something overtly unpredictable. I think about general moods. So, if we’re talking about the mind, I think, ‘How do you express introspection?’” Amid the tortured soundscape, he opts for nuanced textures and an attack that is stabilizing but specific to the environment.

Fujiwara retains his subtlety, even on tunes in which the action heats up and he moves to the fore. One prime example is “In The Second Before.” The piece consists of a long build to a dense churn that finds Formanek, Halvorson and her distortion pedal in a snarl, while Kidambi and Akinmusire float above the fray. The juxtaposition yields a sustained tension, which bleeds seamlessly into a swirl of a solo by Fujiwara.

“I wanted to really push to the edge and not

be contained at all, and have the sense that at any point, it could just fall apart or come off the rails,” he said.

Through it all, the center holds. The beat is clear but implicit, intensifying the power of the piece by leaving something unsaid musically. Unresolved lyrically is the question invited by the song’s title—“In the second before what?”—though the lyric implies Halvorson’s general intent: Unlike the introspective “My Mind,” the composition “In The Second Before” is outwardly focused, summoning a “voice” that comes “out of the sound/ of the million people/ we are known/ to discard.”

“This was a little bit about the depressing state of the world,” Halvorson said, “without being too specific.”

Occasionally, Halvorson gets quite specific—most pointedly in “The Unexpected Natural Phenomenon.” Drawing directly on an incident in which she was caught swimming in a lake during a freak rainstorm, the piece is by turns harrowing as she gasps for air (“trying to breathe/ while in water”) and humorous

as she contemplates death by drowning amid an inconvenient laughing fit (“when you die/ at least it’s from a laugh”).

For all the emotions conveyed in the piece, the lyrics, ending before the four-minute mark, are merely precursor to more than seven-and-a-half minutes of improvised interplay in which the musicians, led by Halvorson’s oblique and tremulous musings, fall in and out of the mix in the most unexpected—yet natural—groupings.

Ultimately, the music’s emotional ups and downs parallel those of the lyrics. Written in college and dedicated to Halvorson’s bandmates at the time, they are the only words on the album not written in 2016—and, by her account, they are, among the 11 tunes’ lyrics, the most specific.

By contrast, the lyrics of “And” are arguably the most cryptic. The song’s 13 words are decidedly impenetrable: “You squeezed the background out/ with your hand/ evil/ pure/ and/ and/ and.”

The lyrics grow no less mysterious with repeated renderings, though the paucity of clues about their meaning seems to fire the musicians’ imaginations. As the piece unfolds, the exchange of ideas escalates, with Kidambi exploring the range of her dynamic capabilities and Halvorson, in her signature manner, exploiting the disorienting power of her off-kilter picking.

“Her picking hand is a force of nature,” said

guitarist Joe Morris, with whom she studied privately from 2000 to 2002.

Along with Braxton, with whom she studied at Wesleyan, Halvorson credits Morris, another free thinker from Connecticut, with helping her find her voice. "I feel like a big part of it came from Anthony and Joe," she said. "They kept hammering into my head, 'Find your own thing. Make mistakes. Take risks.'"

Not that she needed all that much advice. Morris recalled: "She had the kind of articulation that she has now. The clarity of her playing was just as apparent. We worked on getting her to deal with pulse a little differently, open things up and exploring a little more. But her facility to get around the instrument was strong enough that she could do it."

He said that Halvorson, then as now, was self-effacing: "I would say, 'Mary, you're going to do really well with this.' She would kind of shrug it off like, 'I don't know.' Look what's happened. She's done incredibly well. And it's really just the tip of the iceberg—she's just getting started. Who knows what's going to happen?"

Morris, known for the improvisers' curriculum he has developed at New England Conservatory, said Halvorson, 37, is a "huge influence" on many guitarists he teaches who are in their 20s, especially an underrepresented group—women.

"Mary deserves a lot of credit for inspiring them," he said, citing several examples— notable among them Wendy Eisenberg, who, like Halvorson, participated in the final week of performances at the old Stone.

Halvorson, whose own talent was nurtured over more than a decade of shows in the space, remarked on how its vibe facilitated communication: "Some places are more conducive to making music than others—whether it's the environment, the sound in the room, the energy you might or might not be getting from the audience. The old Stone was one of the places where it felt great."

For all the memories she created (and all the boundaries she pushed) at the Stone, Halvorson has evinced a keen grasp of history's long sweep. "I still practice jazz and tunes and things like that," she said. "It's not like I was just checking out stuff that was left field and trying to do things I never heard before."

Like a good Libra, she added, she seeks to balance "learning tradition" and "complete experimentation."

Balance is an important component in many aspects of Halvorson's musical life, not least her recording efforts. And that is evident in the symmetry she strikes in another collection she is planning to release—one that promises to provide material for July's Vanguard gig with Thumbscrew.

Like *Code Girl*, it will be a double album. The first disc, *Ours*, will offer nine originals—

three each by the group's members. But it might be the second, *Theirs*, that generates the most interest among Vanguard habitués. That disc will consist of 11 covers, among them classics like "The Peacocks" (composed by Jimmy Rowles) and "Dance Cadaverous" (by Wayne Shorter).

Halvorson approaches such material with the humility of an artist for whom an awareness of her predecessors' work is subtext in all her playing, even at its most subversive. "I don't consider myself a standards player," she said. "But I really care about that music and learning

about it and trying to understand it."

But don't expect a conventional treatment of Rowles, Shorter or any other composer. Halvorson brings to covers the forward-looking sensibility that colors all her work. That is how she pays respect to players of previous generations, many of whom were radical in their day. Their photos line the walls at the Vanguard.

"You can feel the history," she said, glancing at the walls. "There are a lot of ghosts in this place. But I won't change conceptually. I'm really just trying to be myself and present the band in the way I'd normally present the band." **DB**

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Kurt Elling onstage at the Green Mill in Chicago



# 'Apprehend the Greatest Ideas'

By Allen Morrison

Photo by Michael Jackson

**For Kurt Elling, lunch is an event to be savored. We start early at a neighborhood Italian joint he favors, around the corner from his home on Manhattan's Upper West Side.**

**W**hen DownBeat encounters Elling at 11 a.m., he's already settled in comfortably, checking his phone and nursing his first glass of Montepulciano. As is his habit, he's looking dapper, more elegant than casual, in a sky blue shirt and burgundy fleece jacket.

Phone in hand, he's studying an Instagram photo of his favorite lunch in Chicago: an Italian beef sandwich from Portillo's, accompanied by a side of fries, two kinds of hot sauce and a generous slice of chocolate cake. When I say I've never had one, the Windy City-born vocalist replies, "Oh, ya gotta do it! It's so strong. With hot peppers all over it, and it's on that mushy bun. I get hungry looking at it."

Elling's enthusiasm and *joie de vivre* provide an interesting counterpoint to the serious intent of his

latest album, *The Questions* (Okeh), a thoughtfully curated and unusually wide-ranging collection of songs. A prolific lyricist, Elling poses questions both political and cosmic, considering the fate of America in the age of Trump, and, more broadly, the human condition: our mortality and search for meaning through love.

Elling opens the album, which he co-produced with saxophonist Branford Marsalis, by singing the first verse of Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" a cappella; then a stark, post-bop small-group arrangement kicks in, featuring a poignant statement from Marsalis on soprano and an explosive solo from Jeff "Tain" Watts on drums. Later, Elling presents Paul Simon's "American Tune," a lament that feels appropriate for the nation's current malaise.



©MARK SHELDON

When revisiting early portions of his catalog, Elling hears a “raw” singer.

Inspired by the poetry of 13th-century mystic Rumi, Elling crafted new lyrics and paired them with a Jaco Pastorius instrumental to create “A Secret In Three Views,” and he reworked Carla Bley’s “Lawns” into a new tune, “Endless Lawns,” featuring his own lyrics and Sara Teasdale’s poetry. Another tune, “The Enchantress,” pairs an instrumental composition by pianist Joey Calderazzo (a member of Marsalis’ band) with Elling’s lyrics, which adapt text from iconic poet Wallace Stevens (1879–1955). The program also includes poignant renditions of songs by Hoagy Carmichael, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Leonard Bernstein and Peter Gabriel.

Elling has been asking “the questions” since his early 20s, when he was working toward a master’s degree in divinity at the University of Chicago. He took leave of his studies to pursue his jazz career when he was just one credit shy of earning the degree. In the current age of anxiety, Elling might not have all the answers, but his baritone voice has a reassuring quality that makes the listener feel less alone in the quest.

In 2016, Marsalis invited Elling to join his quartet for a tour and some recording sessions. The result was the Grammy-nominated album *Upward Spiral* (OKeh). As co-producer on *The Questions*, Marsalis helped select the material and played on three tracks, offering a luminous soprano saxophone solo on “I Have Dreamed.”

From his home in Durham, North Carolina, Marsalis praised Elling’s artistry. “He’s one of the few non-classical singers who can change the sound of his voice to create an emotional effect on the listener,” Marsalis said. “Not that all classical singers can do it. But all the highly success-

ful ones can. The magic in music—regardless of genre—is when musicians understand the power of sound to create emotion. That’s what always excited me when I heard Kurt sing.

“I knew he was into the vocalese thing; that wasn’t really exciting to me. What excited me was that when he sang a sad song, it was like the thing that Billie Holiday had—when she sang a sad song, it was sad.”

The album benefits from Elling’s collaboration with his bandmate Stu Mindeman, who plays piano and B-3 organ, arranges several tunes and contributes the 12/8 hymn “A Happy Thought,” merging his original music with a poem by Franz Wright that wrestles with the concept of human mortality.

“I was honored to be involved with *The Questions*,” Mindeman said via phone from Chicago, his hometown. “Branford’s inspiring direction and Tain’s energy on drums really helped us achieve a fresh spirit on the album. Kurt and I have a mutual interest in the connection between poetry and music, and he takes a poet’s approach to setting his lyrics to music.”

Below are edited highlights from DownBeat’s wide-ranging conversation with Elling.

**DOWNBEAT: YOU’RE A DIED-IN-THE-WOOL CHICAGO GUY ...**

**KURT ELLING:** And yet I’ve been [in New York City] for, hmm, it’s getting to be 10 years now.

**PLUS, YOU’RE RAISING A FAMILY IN NEW YORK.**

Yes, my 12-year-old daughter and our 1-and-a-half-year-old foster son. We’ve had him since he was six days old. We’re hoping to adopt him. We call him “Ajax”; that’s his nickname because we don’t get to name him.

**IS THAT THE REFERENCE TO “MR. FABULOUS” IN THE ALBUM’S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS?**

Yep, that’s him, Mr. Fabulous. He’s our guy.

**WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO LIVE IN NEW YORK?**

Well, you don’t want to live your whole life and not live in New York if you’re a jazz musician. I love bumping into people in the street. I love not having a car. I love that you can step out any time, day or night, and there’s something happening. ... I’m happy to make the scene down at the [Jazz] Standard, Birdland, the Blue Note; and going to the [Village] Vanguard always feels like it’s a real moment in your life ... ’cause all the ghosts are in there.

But I’ve gotta say, having tried them all out, nothing beats [Chicago’s Green] Mill. The verve that’s in the room; the moxie. The young people. The drinks are being poured like it’s real. The ghosts are in there, too, but they’re ready to party ... I can’t wait to move back and get my weekly gig there again, for \$100 a night, or whatever [laughs], because it’s so much fun.

**DO YOU THINK YOU WILL MOVE BACK AT SOME POINT?**

I think so, because we’re not gonna have enough space if we [get to] keep the little man.

**CONSIDERING THAT YOUR DEBUT ALBUM EARNED A 1995 GRAMMY NOMINATION, YOUR CAREER WAS IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE WHEN YOU DECIDED TO MOVE.**

When you’re ambitious as hell, you want to give it every shot to be as big as it can be. And that’s not just because your ego is greedy, but because, I mean, what are we here for? If you’re trying to play music for people, you want to play it for as many people as you can, and encounter as many other musicians as you can, so you’ll learn more.

It’s a strange thing. I listen back to those records, and, wow, was I raw. There’s a lot of heart and intention, and I’m singing in tune most of the time, but in terms of more “jazz consequential” stuff, man, was I under-prepared. But I hope I’ll feel the same way when I’m 70 and listen back to what I’m doing now. The point is to keep making progress, to outdo yourself, and to keep, as much as you can, scoring a personal best.

**YOU HAVE SAID THAT, EARLIER IN YOUR CAREER, YOU STRUGGLED A BIT WITH YOUR STAGE PERSONA. HOW DID YOU COME OUT OF THAT PHASE?**

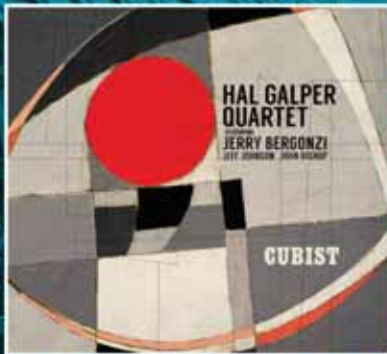
Keep living. That’s why I keep thinking about [age] 70. There are so many things I wanted to be. I was in love with [jazz] history, the recordings, and I wanted to be that. At a certain point you realize you’re not going to be that, you’re going to be you. But informed by all of that.

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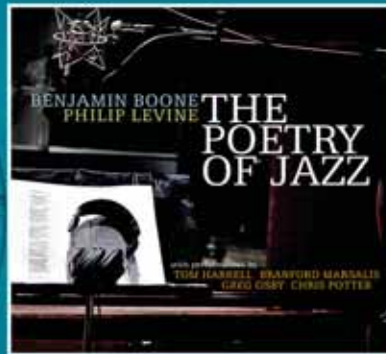




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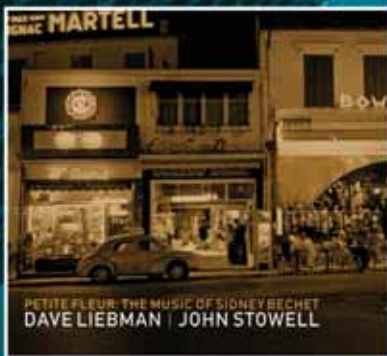
**Hal Galper Quartet**  
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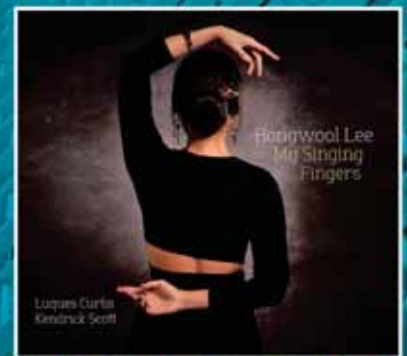
**Andrew Rathbun Large Ensemble**  
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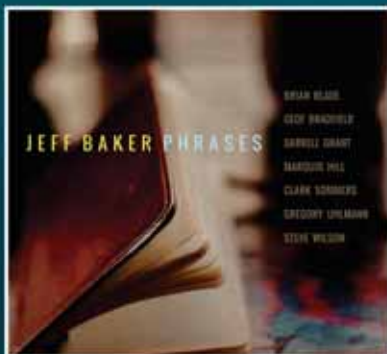
**Dave Liebman & John Stowell** Petite Fleur:  
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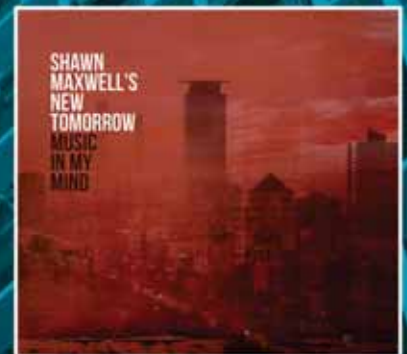
**Bongwool Lee** My Singing Fingers  
w/ Luques Curtis & Kendrick Scott



**Jeff Baker** Phrases  
w/ Brian Blade / Steve Wilson / Marquis Hill / Darrell Grant / Geof Bradfield



**Danny Green Trio Plus Strings** One Day it Will

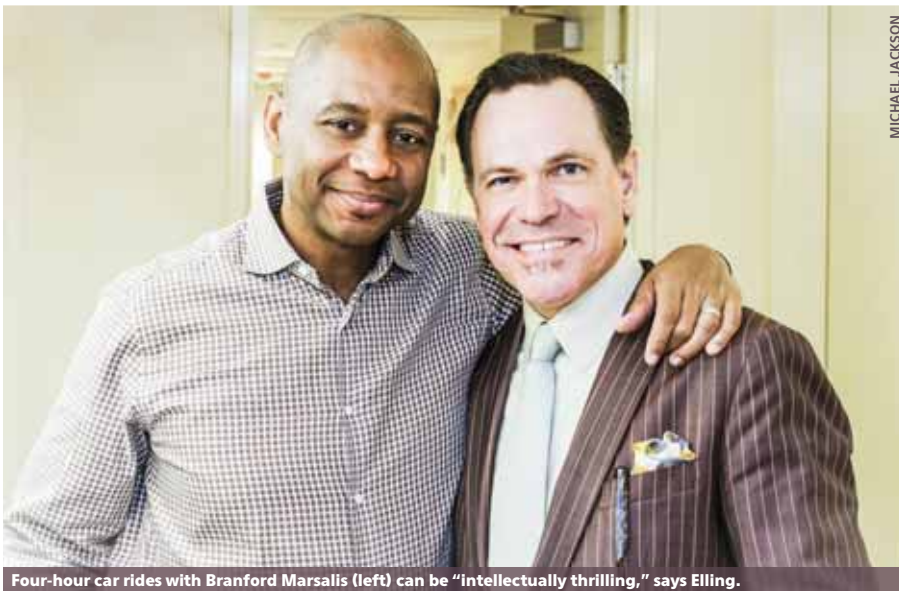


**Shawn Maxwell's New Tomorrow** Music in My Mind

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MICHAEL JACKSON

Four-hour car rides with Branford Marsalis (left) can be “intellectually thrilling,” says Elling.

**PROMPTED THIS QUESTION? HOW MUCH OF IT IS A RESPONSE TO THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION?**

Quite a lot of it is a response. Not just to the administration, but also the road that we've been going down. And Trump is just the most individually egregious example . . . History rhymes with itself, and things come around again, just like this whole rise of tribalism and fascism . . . To see the thing that you love, your nation, being assaulted from within, to see Washington, D.C., become a playground for madness, and to see the effects it is having on the weakest among us—it's not moral to stand by.

**HOW DID YOU GET THE IDEA TO START THE ALBUM WITH BOB DYLAN'S "A HARD RAIN'S A-GONNA FALL?"**

Oh, man, as soon as I knew we were going to do that composition, I had a feeling it would [be the leadoff track]—even though I didn't know it was going to be a record called *The Questions*. The lyrics are straight out of today's headlines: the Boko Haram stuff, the children with weapons in their hands, the corruption . . . it's a masterpiece of list poetry. Then when we were in the studio with it, and I realized that Branford could have a solo on it and Tain could, too, I realized that, well, *that's* done [laughs].

**REGARDING YOUR COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH BRANFORD, YOU HAVE SAID, "WE'RE HERE TO PLAY GREAT MELODIES AND EXPRESS AUTHENTIC EMOTION—TO BE THE REAL DEAL AS MUCH AS WE CAN." IN JAZZ, WHAT DOES BEING "THE REAL DEAL" MEAN TO YOU?**

It means continually investigating . . . the greatest music that's come before us.

**SO IT'S A RESPECT FOR TRADITION?**

It's not just respect; it's a desire to apprehend the greatest ideas. Because how else are you gonna play them? The wealth that's come before us is such a treasure. Branford and I love a lot of the same guys, who played incred-

ible, emotional music, and got people to move and dance and stomp and sing. Like Gene Ammons, that fat Chicago sound that gets people to be excited that they came out.

I think of Wayne Shorter, for example. There's so much intellect happening. But that's not what draws me to it so much. And I don't think that's what draws the majority of the audience to Wayne. It's the *thrill*, the chance that anything could happen. His band is the same way—it's a thrill ride. The intellect is there, but it's driven by the spirit and the passion.

Branford's band is like that, too. Talk about passion. Every night those guys come and bring their anger, their frustration, their joy, their laughs and jokes and their love for each other. I was totally inspired being with that band for a year-and-a-half on the road . . . That's the stuff. You want the swinging feeling, the melodies that connect with people, and you want the passion. What are you doing otherwise?

**HOW DID YOU AND BRANFORD SELECT SONGS FOR THE QUESTIONS?**

I always have a backlog of songs I'm interested in doing. Most of the time, it has to do with lyrics that I've written, either to famous instrumentals or to something [new] I've heard, like Joey Calderazzo's stuff. I've been working on lyrics to a lot of his things. I've got lyrics to five Wayne Shorter songs, including "Speak No Evil." I've got one to a Ben Webster tune. I just want to record what's best for the project.

In this case, I put together a Dropbox of about 20 things and tossed them over to Branford, and said, "What do you think?" And he commented in his usual pithy and direct way [laughs]. I've always been attracted to really smart people who don't put up with any bullshit. That level of certainty—I respect it. You take a four-hour car ride with Branford—it's intellectually thrilling. What music is he going to play? What is he going to say about what I

play? He spun my head around about a bunch of things I took for granted, and reinforced some things that I had suspected.

We would listen to some singers . . . As you would imagine, he has strong opinions about what makes a jazz singer, [just] as he does on what makes a good saxophone player. . . . With Branford, it's just such declarative sentences! And you'd say, "Really? How come you say that?" Then I'd point out [something I liked], and he'd say, "Nah, ain't makin' it." Those are the kind of conversations you get to have usually when you're in music school or just starting out. And here I am, a 50-year-old man, and I'm being thrilled and fascinated by conversations about great recordings again with somebody I love and respect.

**DID HE GET YOU TO LISTEN TO SOMEBODY YOU HADN'T APPRECIATED BEFORE?**

He kept putting on [classical composer Richard Strauss'] *Der Rosenkavalier*. And I said, "Wow, this is tough listening." And he said, "I know. I wanted to understand it, and I walked around with *Der Rosenkavalier* and listened to nothing else for two years until I understood it." It's true. If you want to understand the sound of something, then you've got to listen to it until you understand it.

**HOW IMPORTANT TO YOU IS WRITING LYRICS? ARE YOU ALWAYS WRITING?**

I'm trying. I think it's my strongest suit. I've written some songs, but I'm not really a composer. But thanks to Eddie Jefferson and Jon Hendricks, there's an avenue for me. Inasmuch as I can make artistic progress in that obscure and under-explored realm, and present it with clarity and it's musical, then I want to do it. I think it's a worthy pursuit. It's not gonna make me any money, but I can say a lot of things that I want to say.

**ON DEDICATED TO YOU, YOUR 2009 TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY HARTMAN AND JOHN COLTRANE, YOU DIDN'T TRY TO IMITATE THOSE MASTERS. YOU DESCRIBED IT AS "HOMAGE THROUGH INNOVATION." DOES THE SAME IDEA APPLY TO YOUR TREATMENT OF THE MODERN CLASSICS ON THE QUESTIONS?**

The most essential thing is the *force* of the sound. That's why Trane at his best is not "Giant Steps;" that was an exercise. It's not the intellect or the mathematics. It's "I Want To Talk About You," when . . . after blowing incredible, gorgeous melodies that have never been apprehended before, they return to the bridge, and he and Elvin hit [sings the melody]. *That's* the spot. That's the stuff that people respond to. So, when you're talking about innovation—I'm never gonna out-math Trane. I want to learn the math, so that I can be articulate about my passion. But we do this to get to the place where there's so much passion happening that we lose ourselves.

DB

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# Feelin'

## The Blues

By John Murph

Photos by Caterina Di Perri

LOGAN RICHARDSON looks like an urban cowboy. Dressed in matching black denim jacket and pants, he wears a black, wide-brimmed hat that covers his dreadlocks and frames his round, bearded face. A floral-print shirt gives his look the requisite pop of color.

**T**he 37-year-old alto saxophonist, composer and bandleader just arrived with his quintet at National Public Radio in Washington, D.C., to perform one of the network's intimate Tiny Desk Concerts in support of his newest album, *Blues People* (Ropeadope). The March showcase marks the band's first live performance of the material before it heads up to Philadelphia and then to New York.

If the American cowboy has long symbolized the maverick exploring wild terrain, then today, Richardson upholds that mythology by delivering bristly music that complements his urbane, honky-tonk garb. The concert blasts off with the angst-ridden longing of "80's CHILD," distinguished by Ryan Lee's pummeling drumming, Justus West and Igor Osypov's teen-spirit electric guitar strumming and Richardson's caffeinated howls. The mood grows darker on "The Settlement," as Richardson uncorks a melancholy melody that wails across the guitarists' rough-hewn harmonic bed, while Lee and electric bassist DeAndre Manning propel the groove with pounding thrust.

The intensity is quelled on "Black Brown & Yellow," a haunting ballad on which West sings the recurring verse, "Black and brown and yellow are so beautiful." He croons the song's unapologetically earnest lyrics through a plaintive melody that's underscored by snarling guitar, pulverizing drumming and Richardson's acerbic alto saxophone timbre.



## ‘I’m definitely one of those people coming out of that blues experience that Amiri Baraka wrote about.’

Between songs, Richardson responds to audience applause with heartfelt gratitude while offering tidbits about the tunes’ inspirations (e.g., racial pride on “Black, Brown & Yellow,” Richardson’s love for indie rock on “80’s CHILD”). “With each album, I try to get closer to who I am inside of this music,” he explained.

Richardson viewed his third disc, 2016’s *Shift* (Blue Note)—which featured a formidable quintet that included Jason Moran and Pat Metheny—as a summation of his musical trajectory. As a teen in Kansas City, Missouri, he played with Jay McShann, Claude “Fiddler” Williams, Ahmad Alaadeen, Clark Terry and Bobby Watson. Following a one-year stint at Berklee College of Music in Boston, he moved to New York, where he continued his studies at the New School and played with the likes of alto saxophonist Greg Osby, drummer Billy Hart, pianist Mulgrew Miller and the NEXT Collective. With *Shift*, Richardson seemed to mark the end of an aesthetic chapter in his career, but it also marked a new beginning, as it was his first

release since he’d settled in Paris in 2011.

*Blues People* sounds like no other Richardson album. For starters, he has trimmed the knotty, prolix improvisations that distinguished his first two discs: 2007’s *Cerebral Flow* (Fresh Sound New Talent) and 2008’s *Ethos* (Inner Circle). Now, his silvery alto saxophone tone unravels pithy melodies that in the sonic context of his new material beg for hooky lyrics. Richardson’s guitar-centric band infuses *Blues People* with raw urgency, as the musicians unleash brooding, high-wired passages, thrashing rhythms and jolting dissonance. The twangy guitar chords and the capacious arrangements on tunes like the propulsive opener, “Anthem (To Human Justice),” the sepulchral “Hidden Figures” and the skulking “Underground” conjure America’s vast Midwestern landscape.

“*Blues People* is my opportunity to use my platform and introduce great new artists that few people know,” Richardson said, before explaining that the music’s heartland sensibility emerged organically. Instead of composing

the music at the piano or saxophone, he revisited sketches stored in his digital library. When the band convened to record, he taught his collaborators the music, verbally.

“It was like going back to the oral tradition of how blues music was first created,” he said. “This music feeds off of some of my life experiences in Kansas City; that lines up with all the rest of us being from the Midwest, except for Igor, who’s from the Ukraine. When we were growing up, Kansas City’s inner city was definitely ‘hood. But when we would drive 20 minutes outside of the city, we’d see all this open land. We saw plenty of cows and horses, too.”

When Richardson responds to questions, he opens the floodgates. He’s loquacious. He speaks rapidly with a tendency to offer long-winded expositions that abruptly break in mid-thought, before he launches into zigzagging digressions, stuffed with peculiar analogies and keen observations. Eventually, he circles back to the original topic. A conversation with him can be simultaneously disorienting and enlightening.

Like Richardson’s previous albums, *Blues People* finds the leader surrounding himself with talented players who provide nuanced harmonic support: *Cerebral Flow* featured guitarist Mike Moreno and vibraphonist Mike Pinto; *Ethos* had Pinto playing alongside guitarist Gregg Ruggiero and cellist Patrick Petty; and Metheny and Moran provided the harmonic envelope for *Shift*. Incorporating two electric guitarists on *Blues People* gives Richardson’s music a new sonic dimension, and he said that the ideas behind the album germinated for more than four years.

“After *Shift*, I refused to put out any other project before *Blues People*,” he said. “I’d always dreamed of having a rock band. I’ve learned what’s appropriate and what’s not, playing-wise, in a rock setting. You really have to concentrate on the feeling of the music more so than showing off your virtuosic improvising skills.”

Guitarist West asserts that it takes heightened listening skills to play in Richardson’s band. “What’s interesting about many band dynamics is that some people listen more than others,” West explained. “But if you listen more—say, the rhythmic part or the underneath part—you learn how to be sensitive toward everybody else in the group. Sometimes I have to gauge other people’s sonic sensitivities in the band, then fit in. Even guitar tone choices—Igor and I have to be very specific, so that sound frequencies won’t be all over the place. But it’s cool because Logan, Igor and I are very contrasting players. Igor and I create a lot of dissonance, which makes the music sound alive and active.”

When listening to *Blues People*, it’s hard not to think of the 1963 book of the same name, written by LeRoi Jones (later known as Amiri Baraka). Just as Baraka, who was a DownBeat contributor, set out to use the evolution of

African-American music to parallel the emergence of its creators amid layers of systemic racial oppression, Richardson's music meditates on some of those persisting struggles in the age of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Richardson's piercing cries enveloped by clouds of distorted guitar and booming bass at the beginning of "Class Wars," the guttural funk that percolates underneath "Rebel Rise" and the fist-pumping rhythmic aggression that ignites "Pure Change" all evoke the simmering frustration and volatile outrage that followed the August 2014 fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Richardson acknowledges the influence of Baraka's *Blues People* on his music, explaining that the book inspired the title of his album. "That book has everything that I never got from a jazz history course or even an American history course," he said. "I was able to see myself inside of that book. I'm definitely one of those people coming out of that blues experience that Baraka wrote about.

"We constantly have been dealing with an epidemic of black culture being oppressed then extracted for other people's gain," he continued. "Our culture is rebellious and outlawed before it becomes like a certain type of caviar. I want to fight this epidemic in an intellectual and emotional way, knowing that we have certain platforms to change this—not just talk about the change, but to physically make the change."

He advocates black economic self-empowerment to build more community centers, outreach programs and other creative spaces in underserved areas that would allow kids to hone their artistic gifts. "We need to own venues and be able to calculate, establish and realize our own ticket-value as a community and as a people," Richardson argued.

As an African-American expatriate based in Europe—he now lives in Rome—Richardson's sociopolitical commentary on life in the States brings to mind several literary figures, particularly James Baldwin (1924–'87). The writer moved to Paris in 1948 to escape America's racism, and during his initial nine-year stint in Europe, he wrote two important novels—*Go Tell It On The Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room*—as well as an incisive collection of essays, *Notes Of A Native Son*. Baldwin returned to the States as members of Congress were debating the content of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. After several years of deep involvement with the Civil Rights movement, Baldwin returned to France, where he spent most of his later years.

Even though Richardson now is making his most personal and political music while living abroad, he doesn't view the impetus of his move to Europe as a desire to escape American racism. For him, it was more about satisfying an inner urge. At first, he didn't even consider himself a Black-American expat. "I did soon realize

that I was viewed by many Europeans as being less black and more American," he said.

Living in Europe also has given Richardson greater financial stability, as performance opportunities across various countries expand. "Being an African-American jazz musician, your cultural authenticity is stronger, as far as most European concert promoters and club owners are concerned," he said, before mentioning that he likely would not move back to New York. "New York City is so expensive now that unless you have a trust fund and all your

school loans are paid, there's definitely no way that you're going to make it by just having side gigs."

With further reflection on his personal growth since moving to Europe, Richardson acknowledged parallels between himself and pioneering African-American expats, such as Baldwin. And he retains that burning desire to participate in the combat against America's social injustices. "I just wonder how we keep fighting the good fight," he wondered. "For me, that's the never-ending, rotating question." **DB**

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BY YOSHI KATO  
PHOTOS BY JAY BLAKESBERG

# EXPLORING SORROW, EMBRACING TRIUMPH

Nestled between its higher-profile neighbors Oakland and Berkeley, the town of Emeryville, California, is where animation enthusiasts make pilgrimages to visit Pixar Studios. Since 2014, it has also been the home of pianist and composer **EDWARD SIMON**.

Over an al fresco lunch at a bar-and-grill a few blocks from his family's home, Simon met up with DownBeat to discuss *Sorrows & Triumphs* (Sunnyside). His ambitious new album features Afinidad, the quartet he co-leads with alto saxophonist David Binney that includes bassist Scott Colley, drummer Brian Blade, guitarist Adam Rogers, vocalist Gretchen Parlato, the Imani Winds ensemble, and percussionists Rogerio Boccato and Luis Quintero. With echoes of classical minimalism, full-bodied Third Stream grandeur and subtle electronics, *Sorrows & Triumphs* merges old and new traditions in the same way that Simon's thoughtful, measured speaking voice blends with the calming patter of a nearby fountain.



Edward Simon (far left) performing with the SFJAZZ Collective

Born in Punta Cardón, Venezuela, Simon relocated to Pennsylvania to pursue his musical education and graduated from the Philadelphia Performing Arts School at age 15. He studied classical piano at the University of the Arts in the City of Brotherly Love before transferring to the Manhattan School of Music.

Subsequent gigs with the M-Base Collective and trumpeter Terence Blanchard preceded moves to central Florida and then Northern California. In addition to being a member of the SFJAZZ Collective—which he joined in 2010—and leading his own groups, Simon also teaches in the San Francisco Conservatory of Music’s new Roots, Jazz and African Music program.

**Your new album contains two suites. Are those suites connected?**

You could say these are two collections of pieces. Each “suite” was written at different times.

The first is *Sorrows & Triumphs*. That was actually written in 2008. It was a commission I received from Chamber Music America through their New Jazz Works program, funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The grant was to write a series of pieces for Afinidad and guests, which were Adam Rogers, Gretchen Parlato and Rogerio Boccato—all of whom appear on the album.

The New Jazz Works program supports the creation of the work and at least two performances. The premiere took place at the Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and that was featured on NPR’s *JazzSet* when Dee Dee Bridgewater was hosting. We also did another performance at the Jazz Standard in New York City.

The second set of pieces, *House Of Numbers*, was basically written between 2014 and 2016. That was another commission that I received from Chamber Music America—to write a

series of pieces that are each framed around different numbers. And the instrumentation was Afinidad plus wind quintet—Imani Winds.

**Should fans listen to these pieces in a particular sequence, like one would do for a classical suite?**

In the case of these two particular suites, I thought of them as separate. They’re not necessarily connected, other than for the fact that they were written around the same period of time. So, they could be performed out of order.

Now, it does make sense to perform them in a specific order when you’re putting together a live set of music. But that has more to do with how they flow together.

In the case of *Venezuelan Suite*—my first Chamber Music America commission from 2005—those pieces are all part of the same subject. The pieces are connected where they flow nicely from one to the other.

**How were you first introduced to Chamber Music America?**

I heard about their New Jazz Works program. And interestingly enough, the first grant I ever applied for was Chamber Music America’s New Jazz Works to write my *Venezuelan Suite*. Being awarded the grant initiated me down the path of researching and exploring other grant opportunities.

**As a member of SFJAZZ, you have the advantage of rehearsing and touring behind the new composition that each of you writes every season. A commission seems like a version of that process.**

When I first came on the jazz scene, before commissions and grants, the only reason you would write is you either had a gig that you wanted to try out some new music on or you had a recording. And typically in jazz, we only have one rehearsal for a recording—two if you’re lucky. You can’t get too involved with your writing, because you’re not going to have a lot of

time to assimilate the music or to rehearse it.

With the CMA grants, because there’s funding for two concerts where people are going to get a reasonable fee to play, you can ask a little more of the musicians. You’re going to have two rehearsals, at least, and a couple of sound checks to fine-tune things. You can get a little more involved with those compositions and plan around the time you think you have.

**How is the funding distributed?**

You get half of your commissioning fee when you first get approved to just kind of get you started.

**So, it’s like an author getting an advance from a book publisher.**

Exactly. Then when the piece is completed, you get your other half. And once you have your first two performances set up, about 30 days before, you get the funding for the performances.

There’s still a lot of work you have to do because you have to find the presenters and the promoters and organize the concerts. But when you have support, it makes it a lot easier, particularly for projects of larger scales with a greater number of people.

**Saxophonist David Binney is on the album. You and he have worked together for years. How did you meet him?**

I moved to New York in the fall of ’88, and I probably met him that same year, if not the following. He’s always lived on 72nd Street, and I used to go for my lessons with Harold Danko when I was studying at Manhattan School of Music. Dave pretty much lived across the street from Harold, and he’d see me when I used to go for my lessons.

Dave came to a gig somewhere in New York when I was playing with Kevin Eubanks and introduced himself. Shortly after, he invited me to record on his first album, [1989’s] *Point Game*.

**You, bassist Scott Colley and drummer Brian Blade have worked together as Steel House.**

The trio, Steel House, is a more recent development—within the last couple of years. We released the album *Steel House* last year, on ArtistShare.

**Often, the use of strings and/or brass seems to be the default instrumentation for commissions. How did you decide on a wind ensemble?**

I was interested in the sound, and I was interested in working with Imani Winds in particular. I had been hearing of them through various other artists and on recordings they appear on. Wayne Shorter is someone I respect and love very much, to name just one. [*Imani Winds appears on Wayne Shorter Quartet’s 2013 Blue Note album, Without A Net.*]

But I knew that they are very much open to collaborations with artists outside of classical music. They’re very adventurous, and I was

thrilled when they decided to work with me.

**Vocalist Gretchen Parlato is a great fit for both commissions.**

She has a very subtle sound that is really beautiful. She knows how to make the most of a whisper.

Gretchen has a very good feel for Brazilian music; Afinidad always has had a strong leaning towards Latin-American influences. It's really a reflection of the music that both Dave and I love—different styles or genres of music. There's improvised music, of course. But Latin-American music, including Brazilian, has always informed my overall work. And classical music.

**Two tracks on the new album have lyrics that Parlato composed. Did you give her any ideas about what you wanted thematically?**

I asked Gretchen to write the lyrics for two of the tunes, "Chant" and "Rebirth." Those pieces were inspired by studies of Buddhism. I've practiced Buddhism for years now and continue to practice meditation—the Theravada tradition, which is the oldest of the three main schools of Buddhism.

And as it turns out, Gretchen also loves to read a lot great Buddhist writers and teachers of our time like Pema Chödrön and Thích Nhất Hạnh. Her lyrics are very much inspired by their writing. So, when I asked her to write the lyrics and told her what the pieces were about, she knew immediately how to convey the message. And she did it beautifully.

**Do you have any plans to do a follow-up to your 2016 album, *Latin American Songbook*—perhaps another piano trio album of Caribbean and South American music?**

Not any formal plans. But certainly, in my mind, I want to do a follow-up record to that, perhaps with special guests—maybe with percussion. I hadn't really recorded a working trio of mine until *Latin American Songbook*. My trio albums before then had been three all-star dates with John Patitucci and Brian Blade.

I really wanted to start documenting my playing in a trio that I can tour with. So, I'm hoping that I can follow up on that and do more with that trio with Joe [Martin] and Adam [Cruz].

But I haven't really decided what I want to make my next recording project. I'm entertaining the idea of doing that and also making a solo piano record.

**Have current events in Venezuela affected your art?**

Absolutely. Venezuela is under dire conditions right now, and I have family living there. My mom still lives there, and I have a lot of relatives—aunts and cousins—who are living there.

It affects me deeply to see what has happened and what's continuing to happen, because I have watched the process from afar. I haven't

lived there in over 30 years now. I have to send medicines to my mother, because they aren't available there anymore.

I've never considered myself a social activist in any kind of way. In fact, I've always shied away from any politics, overall. But as a Venezuelan, born and raised, I feel like I need to do whatever I can to bring attention to what's been happening there and what continues to happen to the Venezuelan people. They're having trouble finding very basic human needs, like toilet paper. They're rationing the electricity, and they ration the water. And the international community

doesn't really seem to be doing much about it.

So, for the first time, I am looking for ways to use my music, my art, to bring attention to what's going on in my homeland. I'm going to propose a project to a different grant-maker. At least for the time being, the working title is "S.O.S. Venezuela." And I want to collaborate with other Venezuelan artists of different disciplines—visual and spoken-word artists and dancers. That's another project that's in the pipeline.

But I'm definitely going to be a little more vocal, using art to bring awareness to what's going on there.

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LINE-UP SUBJECT TO CHANGE



## ANDREW HADRO

## PURSUING A UNIQUE PATH

Baritone saxophonist-composer Andrew Hadro has always bucked the status quo. “I just want to be different,” explained the longtime Brooklyn resident, “and that’s just part of my playing and my whole musical approach.” Rather than follow the path of bop-oriented bari blazers like Ronnie Cuber or Denis DiBlasio, Hadro prefers to play the baritone saxophone in a soft, beautiful, subtle way. And rather than waiting around to be signed to a label, he’d rather do it himself.

“It seems to me that everybody just puts out an album, they go through the motions, spend the money and they just sort of throw it out there into the sea of CDs and hope that something comes back,” said the fiercely independent musician, who has joined forces with pianist-composer Julian Shore to form the aptly named Tone Rogue Records. “I’m not interested in just blanket marketing, having anonymous people maybe check it out in passing. I’m more interested in finding the people who are interested in what I’m doing and connecting more seriously with those people. I’d rather have a few hundred people who really check it out and find it special, put it in their listening playlists and are familiar with it, will come see my gigs, email me and be in touch, as opposed to having 10,000 listeners that maybe heard my music in passing but don’t remember it.”

Fortunately for Hadro, a couple of past jobs—he worked as senior project manager at ArtistShare Records for four years and also was a web designer for fellow musicians—has given him a leg up on other musicians looking to forge their own independent path in the music industry. “What I’ve learned in the last few years really helped me to have the confidence and the knowledge to do all this stuff myself,” he said.

In Tone Rogue, Hadro and Shore have established a platform for fellow jazz musicians who don’t want to go the major-label route. “Maybe they just don’t want to deal with the business stuff on that level or they want to have more control of their music. So, we developed our label, we can generate catalog numbers and everybody can do their own thing. The artists are 100 percent in control of their albums, from album artwork to the music. And it’s actually expanded more than we ever expected.”

Along with Hadro’s two releases (2014’s *For Us, The Living* and 2018’s *For Us, The Living II: Marcescence*) and Shore’s two (2016’s *Which Way Now?* and 2012’s *Filaments*), Tone Rogue also has released recordings by pianist Carmen Staaf



Andrew Hadro is a co-founder of Tone Rogue Records.

JAMES KORN

(2017’s *Day Dream*), guitarist Ricardo Grilli (2017’s *1954*) and saxophonist Andrew Van Tassel (2016’s *It’s Where You Are*).

“These are all people we know and hang out with in Brooklyn, musicians of a similar mindset,” said Hadro, who holds down a day job at Vandoren, where he interacts with saxophonists and clarinetists in both the classical and jazz worlds. “Instead of just going through all the trouble of starting their own DIY label, they came to us and said, ‘Hey, Julian and Andrew, you have experience with this, can you help us out?’ There’s so much to do when you’re an independent artist. If you can get a little help from somebody who has something already done—who has a label or at least a name who has a website already—it just takes a few things off the to-do list.

“Most of the musicians in Brooklyn are all do-it-yourselfers,” Hadro continued, “so, we’re all figuring it out and sharing the knowledge

when we can. So, I wouldn’t mind passing on my knowledge of the business that I have definitely learned the hard way.”

Regarding his renegade approach to bari playing—evident throughout his highly produced *Marcescence*, which was three years in the making and incorporates overdubbed choirs of saxophones and flutes on several tracks—Hadro said: “I’m not necessarily against the blowtorch approach to baritone saxophone. I grew up with Ronnie Cuber. He’s one of my heroes; I’m in awe of his playing. But I’m never going to out-Ronnie Cuber Ronnie Cuber. It’s not that I think that baritone saxophone can’t be a blazing instrument and honk and play low and make loud noises; I just think it should be balanced. There should be an equal amount of delicate, highly arranged or maybe more subtle stuff. There should be more options, more variety.”

—Bill Milkowski

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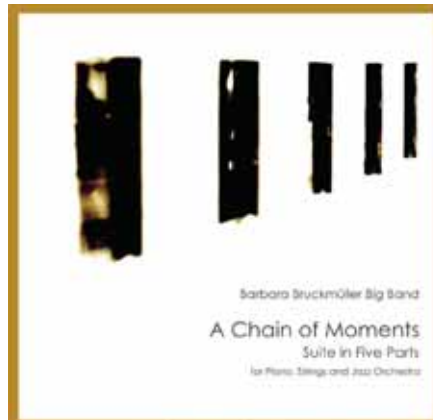
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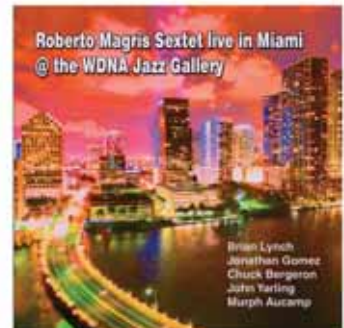
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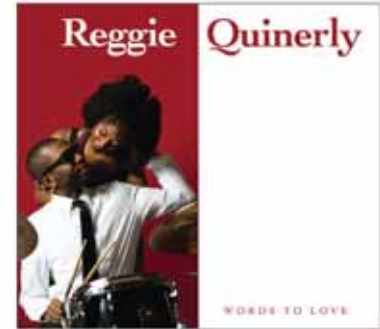


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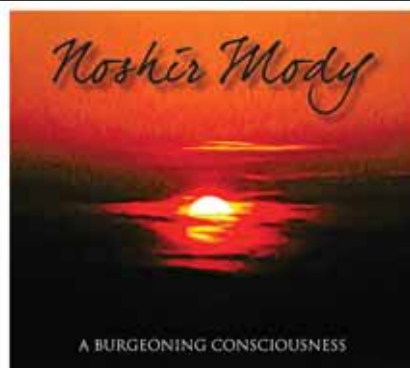
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## JUAN ANDRÉS OSPINA



STELLA K

Juan Andrés Ospina relied on an extensive Kickstarter campaign to finance his new album, *Tramontana*.

# FULL-TIME ENTREPRENEUR

“I do many things,” said Juan Andrés Ospina, over the phone from his apartment in New York. “I’m a piano player, but I’ve been producing a little bit. I do composing and arranging, and I have a comedy duo with my brother in Colombia. So, I’m not full-time at any specific thing.”

About a decade ago, when he was at Berklee College of Music, Ospina started writing for his band. By his final semester, the pianist had enough material to put on a concert of his music. And for a while, that was that. He made a solo album, *BBB: Barcelona, Bogotá, Boston* (Armored) in 2009, produced and arranged several albums, including singer Luísa Sobral’s platinum debut, *The Cherry On My Cake* (Mercury) and singer Marta Gómez’s Latin Grammy-winning *Este Instante* (Aluna Music), and—with his brother Nicolás—performed in the music/comedy duo Inténtalo Carito, whose YouTube channel has garnered more than 22 million views.

Still, he kept coming back to the big band material. He had the music, but he didn’t have a band. Nor did he have a label willing to bankroll a big band album. “The big band thing is kind of crazy, in economic terms,” he said. “It’s so expensive to do it, and so complicated to put everything together.”

Through his experience as a producer, Ospina knew what was involved in making a recording, so he started planning what would eventually become his new album, *Tramontana*.

The first step, since he didn’t already have a big band at his disposal, was to recruit players.

“It wasn’t really that difficult. Here in New York, there are so many musicians, and many of them are thirsty for music that they enjoy,” he said. “I guess that’s the main reason we all ended up moving here, because we want to be part of projects that we like.”

Once Ospina had the musicians lined up for *Tramontana*, he was able to draw up a budget. That’s when things got serious. “I talked to a couple of friends who are not musicians but are very good at business, trying to get some kind of advice,” he said. “I asked if they thought it was a good idea to try to find a sponsor, but that was very complicated. So, I ended up doing a Kickstarter.”

Ospina wasn’t simply going to ask for money and felt it would be better to have a creative Kickstarter campaign—“or a more entertaining one,” he said, “so that I would maybe attract some people who were not so much into the jazz world.”

This is where his YouTube experience came in handy. “I have a camera that is OK—not a full professional camera, but OK,” he said. “And I know how to edit, and really like to do that. That was the most important tool that I had for the Kickstarter videos.”

That first video, which shows Ospina running around New York with a microphone, recording each player separately, offered a sense of the sound

and size of the project, and also was a nice piece of comedy. But it revealed Ospina’s other secret weapon: Cuban jazz legend Paquito D’Rivera.

“He saw one of the videos that I did with my brother back in 2012, and was curious. So, he did some research, found out that we were musicians and bought my album. And then after a couple of days, he called me,” Ospina recalled. “He found my phone through Oscar Stagnaro, his bass player, who I met at Berklee, and he was very enthusiastic about the record. He said he wanted to play [“*Todavía No*”], which I arranged later for the big band.”

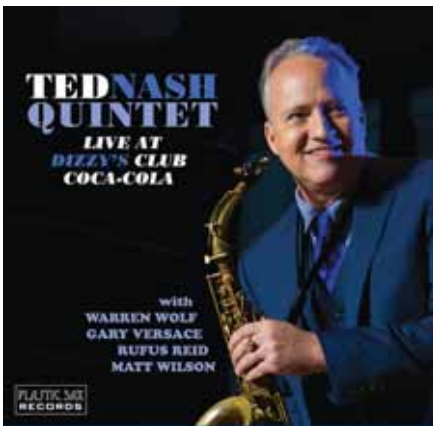
Ospina’s Kickstarter campaign wasn’t just a single video effort; there were several additional clips, and he even wrote a song, “\$20,000 Samba,” to celebrate reaching \$20,000 in pledges.

“Of course, it was tough,” he said. “I had to work a lot. But it was fun to do.” And it made Ospina a believer in Kickstarter. “For a lot of people, that’s the only way,” he said. “I applied for grants and I tried to find sponsors. Maybe there’s something else that I didn’t think about, but I really couldn’t figure out a way to fund an album of this size with a different tool.

“Technology has brought a lot of pain for creators,” he added, “because nowadays it’s hard to sell music. But at the same time, there are these new tools that were unimaginable a couple years ago. And now, you can fund an album, \$35,000, through people directly. That’s amazing!”

—J.D. Considine





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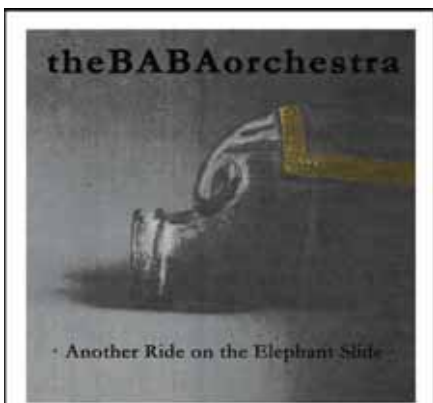


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**FROM A FAMILIAR PLACE**  
 Feb. 2018 *DownBeat* Editors' Pick

"...a terrific lineup..."  
 — Bobby Reed, *DownBeat*

"The pairing of Gilkes and Medyna recalls Sonny Rollins' trombone-and-tenor sax forays with bone man Clifton Anderson.

The group's take on Joe Zawinul's 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy' bursts with energy, featuring trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt** at his most inspired on a soaring solo."  
 — Dan McClenaghan, *All About Jazz*

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## MOTÉMA MUSIC



Donny McCaslin's second album for Motéma will be released later this year.

## FOSTERING INTENSE CREATIVITY

High hopes always accompany the launch of a record label. But many labels falter due to the challenges of today's economy and the changing nature of consumers' buying habits. A select few labels, such as Motéma Music, manage to thrive. Founded in San Francisco and now based in Harlem, Motéma is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year.

Helmed by owner Jana Herzen, Motéma has not only figured out how to weather the storm—it was a steep learning curve, she admitted, one that former Narada executive David Neidhardt helped her negotiate—but has also nurtured the careers of rising-star artists. Singer-songwriter Gregory Porter helped raise the label's profile when his two Motéma albums, *Water* and *Be Good*, each earned Grammy nominations. "After that, artists start-

ed coming to us," Herzen said. Motéma is also home to thrice Grammy-nominated pianist Joey Alexander, whose eagerly anticipated new album is titled *Eclipse*.

One veteran on the roster is Arturo O'Farrill, who has won three Grammys, including this year's Best Instrumental Composition honor for "Three Revolutions" from his 2017 collaboration with Chucho Valdés, *Familia: Tribute To Bebo & Chico*. "Arturo saw that we were doing well and decided to record his large-ensemble Latin jazz projects with us," Herzen said.

Other artists, including vocalist René Marie and pianist Monty Alexander, were impressed by the Motéma aesthetic, which is jazz-based with a groove underpinning, and it showcases artists who compose their own material. "I call it cin-

ematic jazz," Herzen said. "It's jazz that tells a story. There's a dramatic arc from the beginning to the end. With rare exceptions, you won't find people on our label who are doing jazz standards. And even though jazz is a music that takes a lot of chops to play, you won't be hearing artists display their chops from one band member's solo to the next."

Herzen has earned a reputation for encouraging artistic exploration. "Jana wants artists with vision," said saxophonist Donny McCaslin, who is working on his second album for Motéma. "She's not afraid for her artists to break through boundaries. She wants to shake things up." McCaslin's forthcoming album, with its alt-rock and electronica edge, will mark a distinct departure from his previous work. "It's a hybrid style but with no swing," he explained, regarding his new sound. "From being on the road, I felt a change in my music, and it's nothing that I could have imagined playing five to 10 years ago. Jana and her staff have been very supportive."

Motéma operates out of a Harlem brownstone a half-block away from where Art Kane took his iconic 1958 photo known as *A Great Day in Harlem*. The Apollo Theater isn't far away.

Originally Herzen envisioned the label—Motéma means "heart" in the Bantu language of Lingala and Herzen's name means "heart" in German—as a home for high-quality music of any genre. In fact, her impetus for launching the label was to release her African-infused, singer-songwriter album *Soup's On Fire*. But once in New York, she began to establish connections with the city's jazz scene.

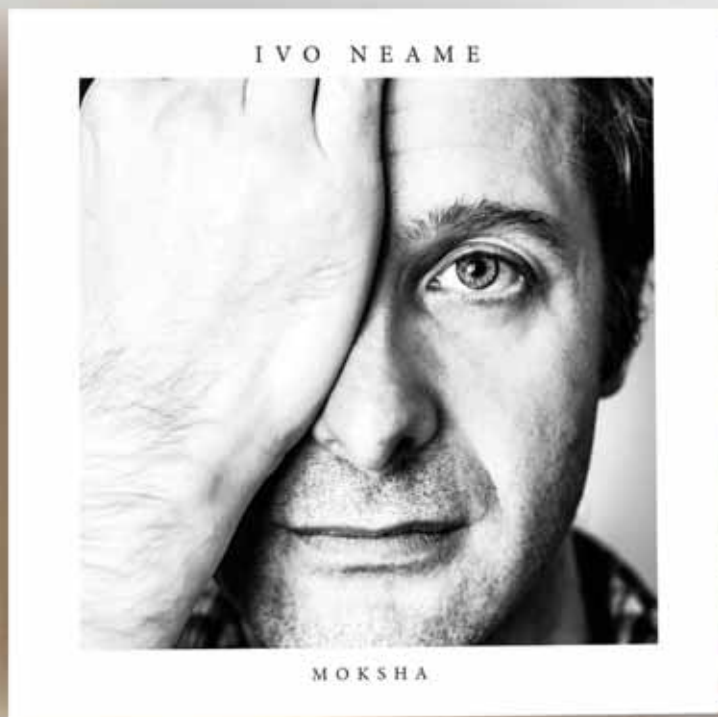
The pivotal moment for Motéma came in 2010 when pianist Geri Allen (1957–2017) sought out Herzen. A veteran of Blue Note and Verve, Allen was seeking the freedom to stretch. "It was amazing when Geri asked to join Motéma," Herzen said. "She made some artistically outstanding albums for us, a total of five. She didn't get the recognition that she should have, but since her passing, you see the rise of women in jazz. There's a shift in the tides, and Geri has been important in that."

Jazz is central to Motéma's vision, as evidenced by upcoming releases from saxophonist David Murray and vibraphonist Stefon Harris. But two of the label's current projects are less jazz-oriented, yet full of the vitality that Herzen champions: electrifying soul singer Deva Mahal (daughter of blues icon Taj Mahal) and the multi-genre international project *Playing for Change*—with its cast of more than 210 musicians, including Buddy Guy, Dr. John and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band—which Herzen described as "the ultimate project of inclusiveness of all cultures."

—Dan Ouellette

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# REVIEWS >



Joe Lovano (left), Joey Baron, Linda May Han Oh, Lawrence Fields and Dave Douglas summon the feel of Wayne Shorter's hard-bop period on *Scandal*.

MERRICK WINTER

## Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas' *Sound Prints Scandal*

GREENLEAF MUSIC 1063

★★★★

For Joe Lovano and Dave Douglas' second release as *Sound Prints*, Wayne Shorter continues to be the pair's inspirational linchpin. As on their 2015 Blue Note Records debut, the two embrace Shorter's current quartet's heralded spatial awareness, invigorating interplay and cross-conversational dialogue on the new *Scandal*. Lovano and Douglas also project their respective strong artistic voices.

Both in sound and improvisational approaches, the two offer fascinating contrasting and complementary sensibilities. Lovano's cobalt-blue tone on tenor saxophone paired with Douglas' crimson-tinged trumpet flares create startling timbres when they play in unison or intertwine improvisational lines. It's the latter on which they engage the most; their passages tend to gambol around each other like sparring partners.

As one takes the lead, the other often jabs their counterpart—pushing the conversational friction beyond rote hard-bop. Douglas' improvisations unleash like shards of broken glass that fall into place, like a melodically designed mosaic, whereas Lovano's spurt like blossoming petals of a writhing vine. Drummer Joey Baron's splintering rhythms and Linda May Han Oh's colossal bass lines boost the leaders' performances with plenty of rubato velocity and elastic cohesion, while pianist Lawrence Fields' calligraphy-like accompaniments provide the right amount of harmonic and melodic jolts.

*Sound Prints*' debut showcased two previously unrecorded Shorter compositions. *Scandal*, however, features imaginative investigations of "Fee Fi Fo Fum" and "Juju"—two gems from his '60s hard-bop period. On the former, the composition's prowling melody and eerie harmonies are intact, while the suspense is amplified by braiding loose saxophone, trumpet and piano excursions, as Oh and Baron concoct a buoyant rhythmic bed. They give the latter an inventive makeover, initially eschewing the loping rhythm while elongating the haunting mel-

ody across Oh and Baron's respective contrapuntal statements and Fields' jaunty flourishes.

Traces of John Coltrane's compositions also appear. The descending opening melody of "Scandal" alludes to "Naima" before the piece unfolds in unexpected directions, as Douglas and Lovano issue oblique melodies that give way to Oh's walking bass line. Underneath the serrated and stubborn melody of "High Noon" lie faint insinuations to the leapfrogging melody of "Giant Steps."

Those Shorter and Coltrane references don't take away from the brilliance of the originals. Douglas' gorgeous ballad "Ups And Downs," with its pithy lyricism, and Lovano's frisky "The Corner Tavern," which features wonderful cackling trumpet work from Douglas, are two originals with great potential of becoming future jazz standards.

—John Murphy

**Scandal:** Dream State; Full Sun; Fee Fi Fo Fum; Ups And Downs; The Corner Tavern; Scandal; Juju; Mission Creep; Full Moon; High Noon; Libra. (66:34)

**Personnel:** Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone, G mezzo soprano saxophone; Dave Douglas, trumpet; Lawrence Fields, piano; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

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



## Jakob Bro *Returnings*

ECM 2546

★★★

The gentle thrill of a single note richly rendered has been key to Jakob Bro's work for years now. The Danish guitarist appreciates clarity and its accompanying candor, and in keeping his music on the dreamy side, he clears a path toward the kind of interplay that sniffs around for the hidden advantages of consonance. This can be a risky business. His last two trio discs traded engagement and expression for prettiness and precision; the resultant fantasias, often bit-

tersweet and occasionally forlorn, scanned as benign. This new quartet date improves on that. The 40-year-old leader fancies textures as well. With the addition of Palle Mikkelborg's trumpet and flugelhorn, there's a welcome new tension in play.

The veteran brass player boosts the emotional resonance of Bro's pieces, providing crisp surges of energy to the music's bedrock delicacy. Bro's ballads have a folkish esprit—a trait that often causes his name to be mentioned alongside that of Bill Frisell, with whom he's collaborated—and their ghostly essence has a tendency to dissipate. Whether his instrument is muted or not, Mikkelborg's piercing lyricism, on "Lyskaster" and "Youth" in particular, brings sustenance to the table. Flexing abstractions along the way, the music doesn't abandon the dreamlike quality of Bro's previous outings, but its foreground is a bit more fetching.

Drummer Jon Christensen and bassist Thomas Morgan stress pliability and detail, even when they're at their stormiest on "Returnings." Uniting to render Bro's vision of ethereal elaboration, this agile quartet puts a little more clout in the mix.  
—Jim Macnie

**Returnings:** Oktober; Strands; Song For Nicolai; View; Lyskaster; Hamsun; Returnings; Youth. (41:47)

**Personnel:** Jakob Bro, guitar; Palle Mikkelborg, trumpet, flugelhorn; Thomas Morgan, bass; Jon Christensen, drums.

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

## Reggie Quinerly *Words To Love*

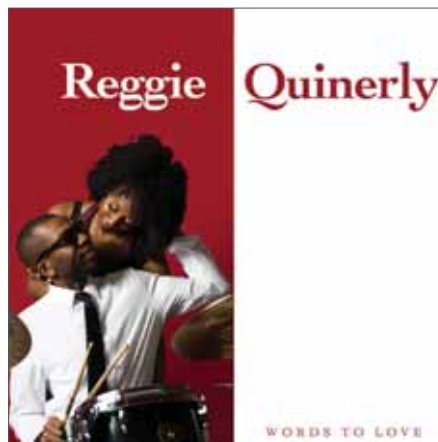
REDEFINITION MUSIC 003

★★½

After kicking off his recording career with a pair of impressive albums, 38-year-old drummer/composer Reggie Quinerly has penned a brace of love songs for *Words To Love*, sung on alternate tracks by Milton Suggs and Melanie Charles.

Quinerly's first full-on foray into songwriting, *Words To Love* features unusual melodies with subtle surprises. The prayer-like "Times We've Yet To See" slyly moves from 4 to 3 on the bridge; the joyously bluesy, triplet-driven declaration "You Bring Out My Best" swings mightily at a slow-drag tempo; and "Hope Is My Home" bristles with jazz brio. Suggs delivers all three with pristine clarity and earthy conviction; Charles' atmospheric delivery, though warm, is harder to track.

But the striking weakness of this album lies in its lyrics, which are rife with clichés ("Oh, how time does fly," "kindred ties that bind"), late-Victorian syntax ("dare not," "for you my heart still beats"), mixed metaphors ("When trees lay bare ... faith remains my anchor") and prolix phrases that stick in a singer's mouth ("these words to love represent the truth we'd hoped for"), never mind the hackneyed meta-



phor of a Ferris wheel for life's ups and downs. If Quinerly wants to swim in the deep end, he needs a songwriting partner—or a coach.

It's a shame, because the love-and-inspiration vibe of this album is attractive, and Quinerly's band proceeds with ease, in no small thanks to his own fluid and supportive stick work. With a little work on the "words" element of the album's title, Quinerly could do better.

—Paul de Barros

**Words To Love:** Until I Met You; Times We've Yet To See; Love's Ferris Wheel; Still Frames; Words To Love; Hope Is My Home; Scene; You Bring Out My Best. (36:49)

**Personnel:** Reggie Quinerly, drums; Orrin Evans, piano; Ben Wolfe, bass; Jaleel Shaw, alto saxophone; Milton Suggs (2, 4, 6, 8), Melanie Charles (1, 3, 5, 7), vocals.

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



## Larry Goldings/Peter Bernstein/Bill Stewart *Toy Tunes*

PIROUET 3100

★★★½

After more than 20 years of sharing the intimate setting afforded by their trio, organist Larry Goldings, guitarist Peter Bernstein and drummer Bill Stewart seem to operate with a shared internal dialogue. When they play together, it sounds less like they're reading one another's thoughts and more like they're having simultaneous ideas.

That's not a new vibe for these three, but they seem to be having more fun with it than ever. Their hushed and lovely 12th album sees Goldings building luminous harmonies with relaxed economy, leaving space for his bandmates' individual light to shine through and for his own delicate organ work to breathe, unhurried.

While some of the most memorable moments on this diverse mix hew more to the atmospheric and introspective—particularly Goldings' "Fagen" and Stewart's softly cymbal-centric "Calm"—a hint of playfulness gets scattered throughout the record as well. "Don't Ever Call Me Again" opens with a gently funky drum solo and a teasing, yet insistent, organ pattern whose unanswered ringing threatens to topple Stewart's groove, setting up a not-so-romantic storyline for the rest of the song. When Bernstein picks up the melody, he plays with a kind of insistence, only this time it's welcome.

In a way, it's not the title track, but rather the trio's take on Carla Bley's "And Now The Queen" that ties the album together; its mix of spacey quirk, pastoral melodicism and perfectly balanced musical responsibility serve up a subtle dose of whimsy, courtesy of the uncommon brand of teamwork the group's become known for.

—Jennifer Odell

**Toy Tunes:** Fagen; Don't Call Me Again; Lullaby For B; I'm In The Mood For Love; And Now The Queen; Toy Tune; Calm; Maybe. (47:24)

**Personnel:** Larry Goldings, Hammond B-3 organ; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Bill Stewart, drums.

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

# The Hot Box

	Critics	Paul de Barros	Jim Macnie	John Murph	Jennifer Odell
<b>Sound Prints</b> <i>Scandal</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
<b>Jakob Bro</b> <i>Returns</i>		★★★	★★★	★★½	★★★
<b>Reggie Quinerly</b> <i>Words To Love</i>		★★½	★★½	★★★★	★★★
<b>Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart</b> <i>Toy Tunes</i>		★★★½	★★★★	★★★½	★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas' *Sound Prints, Scandal*

Skirting an atmospheric mood, this quintet again lives up to its name, gamboling not so much through tunes but arenas of sound, leaving tracks as they go. —Paul de Barros

They bend and stretch like it's the only way to approach this music. Free-bop exclamations dot the land, but save room for the ballads—they're gorgeous. —Jim Macnie

Multiple layers of bright melody and dynamic group interplay peel back to reveal moments of profundity—as any homage to Wayne Shorter should. But on tracks like the rhythm-centric "High Noon," it's all executed with such a blissful sense of vitality that an overarching lightheartedness bolsters the lingering buzz of even the most cerebral cuts. —Jennifer Odell

### Jakob Bro, *Returns*

The evocative Danish guitarist is most effective here when moved by grief on elegies for bassist Nicolai Munch-Hansen ("Nicolai") and for Bro's father ("Lyskaster"). Elsewhere, his trio's slow-moving clouds are nicely tinted by trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg. —Paul de Barros

Bro's pastel guitar tone engulfed by gossamer arrangements, pensive lyricism and whispered dialogue is a thing of beauty. But that splendor struggles to sustain interest. —John Murph

The disc moves through moods that become increasingly compelling in reference to one another. "Strands," with its textured, breath-barbed horn lines and cinematic sense, is evocative and as ECM as they come. "Returns" feels like the dark side of "Strands," resolving some of the tension Mikkelborg set up in the latter song with shadowy swirls of movement. —Jennifer Odell

### Reggie Quinerly, *Words To Love*

The drummer's songs fail to make a very deep mark. No one's expecting the catchiness of pop hooks, but even at their most engaging, there's a bit of "ho-hum" in the air. —Jim Macnie

The drummer's first offering of vocal originals often elicits the cinematic allure of Bill Lee's soulful compositions for mid-'80s Spike Lee joints. With Suggs and Charles swapping lead vocals, the amorous verses and slinky melodies spring to life. —John Murph

Charles might want to hire Quinerly as her full-time songwriter, although that might pose a problem for his burgeoning career as a lyricist. The combined rhythmic energy and joy-filled melody of "Love's Ferris Wheel" feel custom-made for her. Though they lack Charles' chameleonic vocal approach, Suggs' equally impressive performance on the tunes in which he stars give more weight to the original lyrics. —Jennifer Odell

### Larry Goldings/Peter Bernstein/Bill Stewart, *Toy Tunes*

Friendly, jaunty and light, Goldings and company spirit the organ trio out of the South Side to a crisp territory of its own. —Paul de Barros

Decades of teamwork make the trio's sleek moves ripple with a deep sense of intention, and the collective informality juices all the music's emotions. —Jim Macnie

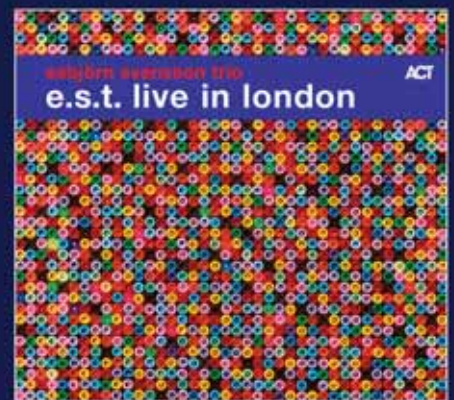
Even when the heat simmers to a lo-fi flicker, warm sanguinity continues surging thanks to this trio's frolicsome interaction, sticky melodies and savvy program of fetching originals and keen tunes, culled from Wayne Shorter's and Carla Bley's songbooks. —John Murph

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## Joey Alexander *Eclipse*

MOTEMA 0271

★★★★

Joey Alexander's genius was beyond question at 10; at 14 it only has deepened. On *Eclipse*, he ekes more imagination and nuance out of the piano than ever before. At the very least, then, his fourth album is a fine mainstream piano-trio record. Yet, when it comes to soul, Alexander presents a question mark.

"Bali," Alexander's album opener, expresses fondness and warmth as much as it does his own fluency and ingenuity. His "Eclipse" evinc-

es intrigue and tension, both emotional and harmonic/rhythmic, and his solo take on Bill Evans' "Time Remembered" emphasizes the song's mystery and its lyricism—with a half-step trill, descending through three tonal centers, executed at just the right moment.

However, the pianist also makes questionable harmonic choices on the Beatles' "Blackbird," and takes liberties on "Moment's Notice" that were meant to be subtle, but are glaring—rather basic lapses in taste that serve as reminders of his youth. His composition "Peace" is derivative of "Danny Boy," and if his solos on "Bali" and "Eclipse" are impressive, they're also somewhat hollow; it's bassist Reuben Rogers' solos on both that are moving.

Ageism is almost certainly a factor in appreciation of *Eclipse*. Alexander seems more mature at some points, in ways difficult to reconcile with a 14-year-old's experience. Do his pretty ways with "The Very Thought Of You" or "Blackbird" translate to earned wisdom about romance or triumph over adversity? Then again, can any artist truly convey these emotions? If *Eclipse* forces listeners to explore these vital questions, perhaps that's enough. —Michael J. West

**Eclipse:** Bali; Faithful; Draw Me Nearer; Moment's Notice; Blackbird; Eclipse; Fourteen; The Very Thought Of You; Space; Time Remembered; Peace. (60:13)

**Personnel:** Joey Alexander, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Eric Harland, drums; Joshua Redman, tenor saxophone (2, 7, 8).

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

## César Cardoso *Interchange*

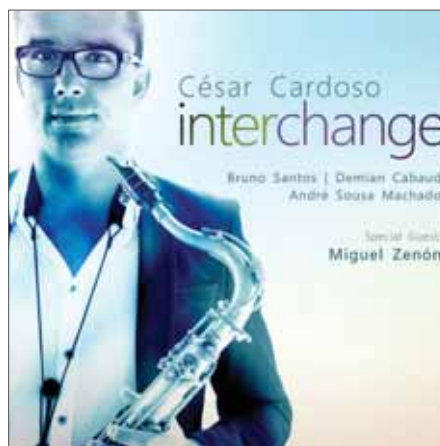
ANTENNA 2

★★★★

Portuguese tenor saxophonist César Cardoso has taken an artistic stride forward with his third album, aptly named *Interchange*. With the addition of fleet alto saxophonist Miguel Zenon, the album bristles with impressive dual saxophonic textures and strategies, as on "7 E Tal," weaving together and culminating in a sax-soli theme. Where Cardoso's approach on tenor moves smoothly and artfully between crisply articulated flights and pensive post-Ben Webster-like lyricism, Zenon's contributions often come smartly sculpted on the fly.

Thankfully, as engaging as solos on *Interchange* are, the bandleader keeps a focus on the musical integrity of the varied original material. He also understands the importance of a cohesive sound, maintaining a close rapport with guitarist Bruno Santos, bassist Demian Cabaud and drummer André Sousa Machado.

Framed by the infectious rhythmic bustle of "Interchange" and the tweaked soul-jazzy 10/4 pulse of the closing "1 De Abril," Cardoso's song-set manages the feat of being contemporary in feel and thought, while also being melodically motivated. "Tarde," a sinuous bossa-esque invention, becomes a vehicle for



Santos' liquid guitar soloing—clean of tone and ready with a volume pedal—and "Ascending" asserts a handsome post-hard-bop persona.

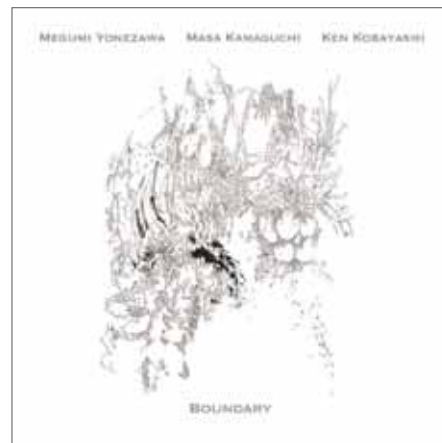
Odd meters figure into the alternately swinging and kinetic "May 1," while time melts into a rubato rumination on "Tudo A Seu Tempo." That title translates roughly to "everything in due time," a reasonable credo for Cardoso's alluring musical trajectory.

—Josef Woodard

**Interchange:** Interchange; Tarde; May 1; Reflexo; Ascending; 7 E Tal; Red N Blue; Tudo A Seu Tempo; 1 De Abril. (40:52)

**Personnel:** César Cardoso, tenor saxophone; Miguel Zenon, alto saxophone; Bruno Santos, guitar; Demian Cabaud, bass; André Sousa Machado, drums.

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



## Megumi Yonezawa/ Masa Kamaguchi/ Ken Kobayashi *Boundary*

ESP-DISK 5023

★★★★

This dazzling improvised session features three Japanese expats operating a bit outside of their usual inside-out milieu. Pianist Megumi Yonezawa and drummer Ken Kobayashi live in New York, working in various contexts; after finishing her studies at Berklee, the pianist played with Greg Osby and dropped a meditative trio session a few years ago. Bassist Masa Kamaguchi lives in Madrid, but makes regular trips to New York, where he's been a steady presence in a trio with pianist Jacob Sacks and drummer Vinnie Sperrazza. Together, though, this trio has delivered a recording that eclipses all of their previous work.

Apart from the standard "I'll Be Seeing You," which the trio dispatches in a luxuriant sprawl, the music is collectively improvised. Throughout the recording, the group operates with exquisite patience, pushing the music forward with tender consideration, primarily driven by Yonezawa's unsentimental lyricism and effective use of space—recalling the sound-spreading brilliance of Paul Bley. On upbeat material, like the skittering "Tremor," she teases out crisp variations from short, pithy phrases while the rhythm section shuffles underneath. "Wavelength" adapts an almost martial drive in its insistent sense of forward motion, with Yonezawa hammering out glassy refractions.

If *Boundary* is a listener's first encounter with Yonezawa, a performer who's been on the New York scene for a significant amount of time, the album's strength might come as a surprise. And the recording certainly should raise her profile.

—Peter Margasak

**Boundary:** Boundary; Alchemy; Tremor; Meryon; I'll Be Seeing You; Reef; Veil; Onement; Wavelength; Nostalgia. (66:22)

**Personnel:** Megumi Yonezawa, piano; Masa Kamaguchi, bass; Ken Kobayashi, drums.

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





## Roxy Coss *The Future Is Female*

POSI-TONE 8181

★★★★½

*The Future Is Female* is all instrumental, but it's message music through and through. If titles like "#MeToo" and "Nevertheless, She Persisted" don't send the message, saxophonist Roxy Coss' performance on her third album should get it across. This is hard-hitting post-bop: aggressive, determined and grim.

But the grimness can overwhelm. Some song titles, like "She Needed A Hero, So That's What She Became," suggest uplift; instead

comes unrelenting sadness, amplified by Coss' impassioned soprano solo. "Females Are Strong As Hell" is the record's fastest and swingin-gest. But guitarist Alex Wintz and Coss simply bear down and trade burning, yet mirthless, improvs with drum interpolations by an equally flinty Jimmy Macbride. But that's the point. *The Future Is Female* is a musical manifesto for the #MeToo movement—no laughing matter. Indeed, the track called "#MeToo" is perhaps the album's most heartbreaking, Coss' bass clarinet portraying weariness.

Hope, though, arrives on the last three tracks. "Feminist AF" is no less determined or aggressive than its predecessors, but features an infusion of the blues. "Nasty Women Grab Back" might be described as darkly playful, and on "Ode To A Generation" bass clarinetist Lucas Pino projects cautious optimism.

*The Future Is Female* is a benchmark in Coss' burgeoning career; while it's likely a long-term standout in her discography, few jazz recordings so fully capture their moment.

—Michael J. West

**The Future Is Female:** Nevertheless, She Persisted; Little Did She Know; She Needed A Hero, So That's What She Became; Females Are Strong As Hell; Mr. President; #MeToo; Choices; Feminist AF; Nasty Women Grab Back; Ode To A Generation. (50:22)

**Personnel:** Roxy Coss, saxophones, bass clarinet; Alex Wintz, guitar; Miki Yamanaka, piano; Rick Rosato, bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums; Lucas Pino, bass clarinet (10).

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

## Dan Weiss *Starebaby*

PI RECORDINGS 174

★★★★

Brooklyn-based jazz drummer Dan Weiss has an uncommonly wide musical purview, having studied Indian classical music, along with moonlighting in metal bands. He also has become an ambitious composer, whether fronting the large ensembles of his previous two albums or the high-impact, genre-defying quartet Starebaby. Weiss has cited David Lynch's surrealist TV series *Twin Peaks: The Return* as inspiration, and one can hear that in the album's darkly alluring, funhouse-mirror vibe. Musically, the album's a blend of metallic jazz, prog- and post-rock that melds deep sophistication with visceral impact.

Weiss has ideal partners in guitarist Ben Monder, bassist Trevor Dunn and keyboardists Craig Taborn and Matt Mitchell, each having intrepid interests from art-metal to experimental electronica. Mitchell and Taborn's electronic keyboards color the picture vividly or buttress Dunn's growling bass. But it's cool-toned acoustic piano that carries much of the melodic information on "Annica."

Weiss, thinking like a composer rather than just a drummer, favors subtlety in his expressive accents and solos. He merely heightens the



loose-limbed groove when the rest of the band drops away in "Badalamenti," the song title an homage to Angelo Badalamenti, who wrote the ethereal music for Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. That said, Weiss' work on "Episode 8" bursts with kinetic virtuosity. The recording by Ron Saint Germain (engineer for the likes of Sonic Youth and Soundgarden) captures the drummer's compositions beautifully, in all their dynamic, hooks-galore intensity. —Bradley Bambarger

**Starebaby:** A Puncher's Chance; Depredation; Annica; Badalamenti; Cry Box; The Memory Of My Memory; Veiled; Episode 8. (60:11)

**Personnel:** Dan Weiss, drums; Matt Mitchell, piano; Prophet-6, modular synthesizers; Craig Taborn, piano, Fender Rhodes, synthesizers; Ben Monder, guitars; Trevor Dunn, electric bass.

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



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Cecilia Sanchiotti

ROBERTO SCORTA

## Leading From Behind the Kit

Differences matter more than similarities in these new drummer-led releases. And that's as it ought to be. After all, there's a lot more going on than the beat these days.

Starting small, we have **Aaron Comess**, taking a break from his regular gig with the Spin Doctors to issue ***Sculptures* (Self Release; ★★★½ 36:32)**. He and four colleagues pursue an almost schizophrenic vision: "Berlin" and "Falling Leaves" are pastoral reveries, built on gentle bedrocks of acoustic guitar, with Comess playing conservatively and supportively. On the other hand, the title cut combines free-floating electronics with bursts of assertive drumming, sometimes thrashing freely, sometimes smashing out just a second or two of straight 4/4. *Sculptures* is not a primer or an instruction in technique, but focuses rather on concept, particularly in finding the sweet spot between taste and chaos.

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

**Bobby Previte** understands and adapts this approach on ***Rhapsody* (RareNoise 090; 59:01 ★★★)**. Here, the drums don't abdicate their role as fountainheads of rhythm. Rather, Previte expands on that idea, thinking of his instrument more as one of several compositional resources. The album fits into a grander vision, functioning as the second of three parts of a suite based on the experience of travel.

**Jemal Ramirez** also looked beyond the horizon for his massive ***African Skies* (Joyful Beat V516; 39:21/46:23 ★★★)**. Here, he concentrates purely on igniting the other players through the spark of the groove. He does lead the way from one base to another, settling most frequently on hard-bop, various Latin formats and funk. He's formidable in each area.

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

**Peter Erskine & The Dr. Um Band** of-

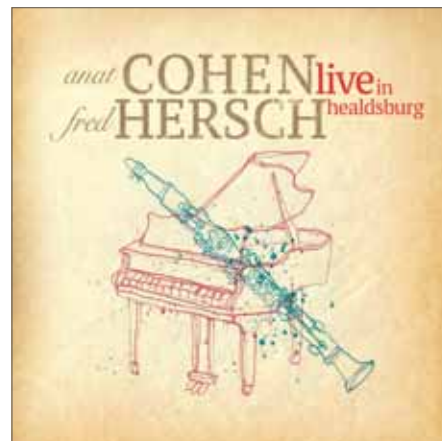
fers a twofer on its latest release, with both studio and live recordings. These differ particularly in terms of tonal subtlety and studio craft. Even so, ***On Call* (Fuzzy Music 025; 34:28/44:45 ★★★)** is to a significant degree an homage to Weather Report. Especially notable on the studio material, keyboardist John Beasley's harmonic sensibility and sonic nuances eerily replicate Joe Zawinul's aesthetic. As for Erskine, he essentially keeps time on "Silver Linings," but with so much restless inventiveness that the beat feels like a living thing, coiling and stretching, inspired and inspiring.

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

The concert material from *On Call* was captured in Italy, which happens to be homebase for **Cecilia Sanchiotti**. Throughout ***La Terza Via* (Blu Jazz 3458; 46:10 ★★★½)**, she plays with far less abandon than any of the other drummers referenced here. In fact, she's usually so laid back that her performance can be hard to hear in the mix. Sanchiotti did write seven of these 10 tracks, though, which suggests that she is presenting herself primarily as a composer, rather than an instrumentalist.

We close with the **Steve Gadd Band**. As surely as Erskine conjures the glories of Weather Report, so does Gadd harken back to his many classic sessions, particularly those with Steely Dan. On this self-titled album (**BFM Jazz 302062 411; 56:00 ★★★½**), we have the same crisp production, the pillowy but crystalline Rhodes and uncanny replications of guitarist Walter Becker by Michael Landau. Even better, we have a master class in how to keep steady backbeats alive. The elasticity of "Skulk" might bedevil rhythmists raised on the digital drip of quantized, too-perfect sequences. And they should be. **DB**

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



## Anat Cohen/Fred Hersch *Live In Healdsburg*

ANZIC 61

★★★½

Anat Cohen and Fred Hersch come from different generations and parts of the world (Tel Aviv and Cincinnati, respectively), but they have much in common, nonetheless. Both are hugely prolific, slipping easily between leadership and support roles in a dizzying array of projects. More importantly, though, neither Cohen nor Hersch ever has settled into one approach.

It's that ongoing search for new modes most clearly uniting the performers, and this also is what shines through on their first duo recording. For an appreciative audience at the 2016 Healdsburg Jazz Festival in California, the pair hops between styles on a whim, reflecting how widely each has traveled musically.

Hersch revels in abrupt shifts of tone and style, varying his approach constantly. He careens from impressionistic mats of sound to bouncing swing and passages somewhat reminiscent of Lennie Tristano's 1940s free-form experiments. For her part, Cohen is game, matching his left turns with melodic wit.

The two are so thoroughly together during "Lee's Dream" that Hersch's piano almost gives the impression that a second clarinet is harmonizing with Cohen's. At other times, they deliberately set contrasting approaches.

Drawing from such a big grab bag allows the duo to maintain a dreamlike atmosphere, though it also can make it tough to follow the thread of certain pieces—where "Child's Dream" floats beautifully over varied landscapes, "Jitterbug Waltz" feels more like it's bouncing from one place to another without a map. All told, though, it's a fine, creative set from minds more alike than a glance at their discographies might suggest. —Joe Tangari

**Live In Healdsburg:** A Lark; Child's Song; The Purple Piece; Isfahan; Lee's Dream; The Peacocks; Jitterbug Waltz; Mood Indigo (Encore). (61:32)

**Personnel:** Anat Cohen, clarinet; Fred Hersch, piano.

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



## Denis Gäbel *The Good Spirits*

MONS 874605

★★★★

Although he is the co-author of *Saxophone For Dummies* and has released *Love Call* and *Keep On Rollin: A Tribute To Sonny Rollins* (both on Nagel Heyer Records), and the earlier *Neon Sounds* (Double Moon), tenor saxophonist Denis Gäbel largely is an unknown quantity outside his native Germany. Performing his own compositions, Gäbel is supported on his fourth release as a leader by the crack U.S. rhythm section of pianist Kevin Hays, bassist

Scott Colley and drummer Clarence Penn. *The Good Spirits* is a pleasant, post-hard-bop-styled outing revealing a talented saxophonist still in thrall to his influences, despite the bandleader's compositions expanding his presence to a decidedly wider net.

Perhaps it's Gäbel's interesting changes, relaxed sense of space and arrangements or luxurious tempos that encourage Hays, Colley and Penn. But their performances are delightfully full-bodied and adventurous on *The Good Spirits*. Gäbel's tone is big and plush, like a Sonny Rollins devotee in some casual blowing session; his songs are equally rich, driving and evocative enough to make them memorable.

The Michael Brecker-ish "Urge" follows a maze-like melodic line, Colley and Penn in hot pursuit, until the song opens wide on Gäbel's solo, which automatically injects serenity into the space. Inspired and unbound by technical concerns, Gabel fires on all fours, which further inspires his bandmates.

*The Good Spirits* serves as a proper introduction to the tranquil coolness and care-free sounds of Gäbel and his merry band of American strutters. —Ken Micallef

**The Good Spirits:** The Good Spirits; Core, Wistfully Waltz; Insomnia; Urge, Heavy, Slow, Scoop; Glow; East Coasting; Shimmy; Everyone Leaves. (71:48)

**Personnel:** Denis Gäbel, tenor saxophone; Kevin Hays, piano; Scott Colley, bass; Clarence Penn, drums.

**Ordering info:** [monsrecords.de](http://monsrecords.de)

## Arild Andersen *In-House Science*

ECM 2594

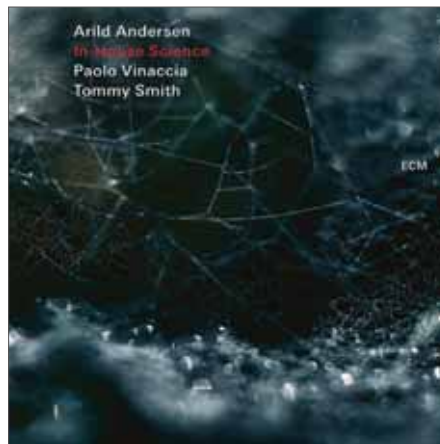
★★★★

When celebrated Norwegian bassist Arild Andersen recorded *Live At Belleville* with Scottish saxophonist Tommy Smith and Italian drummer Paolo Vinaccia in late 2007, the powerhouse trio only had been playing together for about two years. Still, it was a watershed moment in an already storied career, helping Andersen to earn the Prix du Musicien Européen award from France's Academie du Jazz in 2008.

A decade later, Andersen, Smith and Vinaccia have honed their chemistry to an almost telepathic degree. Their second live album, *In-House Science*, offers a master class in individual virtuosity in service to exquisitely fine-tuned interplay.

Recorded at the Villa Rothstein in Bad Ischl, Austria, during September 2016, the six-song set opens with the title track from *Mira*, the trio's 2014 studio album. The piece showcases the band's ability to play with texture and mood, and announces Smith as every bit his boss's equal in stretching a song's melody and chords in painterly ways.

With its eerie, looped soundscapes of bowed bass, "North Of The Northwind" is perhaps the set's most striking moment. But it's an extended



reworking of "Science," a song from Andersen's '80s fusion group Masqualero, that serves as the clearest marker of how far this group's artistry has come. The core theme of the four-minute original here gets revisited over 11 riveting minutes from every possible angle, as all three players push and pull one another with vertiginous tempo shifts and bursts of fleet-fingered modal improvisation. Few trios, even after a decade together, can build musical landscapes this dramatic and richly detailed. —Andy Hermann

**In-House Science:** Mira; Science; Venice; North Of The Northwind; Blussy; In-House. (55:31)

**Personnel:** Arild Andersen, bass; Tommy Smith, tenor saxophone; Paolo Vinaccia, drums.

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



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## Marc Ribot's Ceramic Dog *YRU Still Here*

NORTHERN SPY 98

★★★★½

To cop an apt cliché, Marc Ribot has long been an interesting bunch of people.

He's a powerhouse, but also a primal guitarist, ever-restless composer and ace sideman for John Zorn, Tom Waits, Elvis Costello and other crafty pop players. Many of those personae are freely and unapologetically channeled into his band Ceramic Dog, a trio with bite and insight, a place where punk and funk, echoes of Captain

Beefheart, jazz, fusion and Latin pulses live together—artfully, if not peacefully.

“Peaceful” just isn’t in his vocabulary for *YRU Still Here*, the band’s first release since 2013’s *Your Turn*.

With the Dog, Ribot emerges, again, as a kind of musical rebel with claws, unleashing the punkish intensity lurking within the guitarist’s musical world, and with a pair of natural, empathetic allies—bassist and multi-instrumentalist foil Shahzad Ismaily, and drummer Ches Smith, whose versatility in and out of the jazz and rock realms has made him a regular Ribot collaborator. This fired-up format, flavored and roughed-up by vintage synth noises, occasional horns and other odd color scheming, amounts to something new—and even something new within Ribot’s world of ideas.

Listeners get an idea of what’s in store with the snarling textures and lyrical sentiments of the opening track, “Personal Nancy,” with the leader bellowing, “I got a right to scream like an idiot/I got a right to bitch and moan/I got a right to yell like a stuck pig at the Walmart checkout counter.” Members of the group freely exercise their right to express themselves elsewhere, from the chant-like “Muslim Jewish Resistance” to the Latin-groove-powered tale of bullying, “Pennsylvania 6 6666,” and the anti-anti-immigration rant of the short and

punky “Fuck La Migra.”

Of late, Ribot has been experimenting with spoken-word concepts, sometimes at the expense of his strongest suit, as a distinctive guitarist and instrumentalist. But Ceramic Dog, which tends to steer away from guitar muscularity in favor of songs and vibes, represents a successful and inventive merger of his impulses, from his David Thomas-like holler to the sonic pleasures of “Agnes.” In other idiom-hopping, the trio goes all Funkadelic on “Oral Sidney With A U” and “Freak Freak Freak On The Periphique” and merges surfrock and retro sci-fi on the closer, “Rawhide.”

Ceramic Dog is a fascinating new wrinkle in the diverse terrain of the decades-deep Ribot bandscape, going back to his groups The Rootless Cosmopolitans, Los Cubanos Postizos and The Young Philadelphians. This time out, he and his crew have mustered an angry, righteously indignant, sonically feverish and engaging variation on the party-band tradition, lined with a fresh brand of catharsis.

—Josef Woodard

**YRU Still Here:** Personal Nancy; Pennsylvania 6 6666; Agnes; Oral Sidney With A U; YRU Still Here; Muslim Jewish Resistance; Shut That Kid Up; Fuck La Migra; Orthodoxy; Freak Freak Freak On The Periphique; Rawhide. (54:30)

**Personnel:** Marc Ribot, guitar, vocals; Shahzad Ismaily, bass, vocals; Ches Smith, drums.

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

## Evan Parker/Barry Guy/Paul Lytton *Music For David Mossman*

INTAKT 296

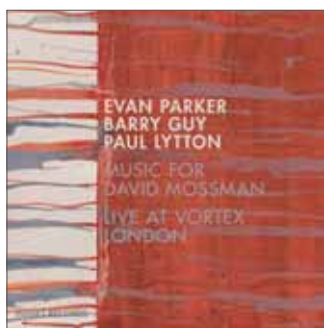
★★★★★

Saxophonist Evan Parker, bassist Barry Guy and drummer Paul Lytton are English improvisers, each communally active for about 50 years, while amassing empathy as a formal trio since 1980. They all are regular performers at London’s Vortex Jazz Club, and *Music For David Mossman*, named after the venue’s founder, was recorded live at the club in 2016, harnessing the immense energies that customarily are unleashed at the trio’s gigs.

Most of the four-piece suite operates at a fearsome pitch, but there are frequent dips into calm exploration, as the trio probes inward, just ahead of its next eruption. Their collective power usually is made up of massed details: No matter the force of delivery, there always is a vast amount of variation in the spontaneous interaction. The longest piece—the suite’s 24-minute third portion—makes digressions and takes diversions, rich in accents and elaborations, all around the edges of its propulsive heart.

Even though these players all are hovering around age 70, they each play with the tempestuousness of younger men, adding expansive layers, resulting from years of experience.

—Martin Longley



**Music For David Mossman:** Music For David Mossman I; Music For David Mossman II; Music For David Mossman III; Music For David Mossman IV. (61:46)

**Personnel:** Evan Parker, tenor saxophone; Barry Guy, bass; Paul Lytton, drums.

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

## Tiffany Austin *Unbroken*

CON ALMA 002

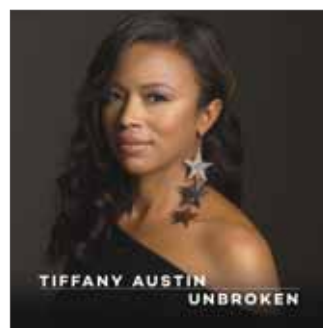
★★★★★

Exploring the African-American experience through music is something Tiffany Austin might consider a family tradition. The singer’s brother, rapper Ras Kass, titled his debut album, *Soul On Ice*, after a revolutionary 1968 book by Eldridge

Cleaver on the subject. Like her sibling, the Bay Area vocalist aims to educate as much as entertain. And on *Unbroken*, her second album, she calls up some hard truths about history, while celebrating perseverance amid sociopolitical strife.

A classy knot of 12 compositions holds *Unbroken* together and features the razor-sharp ensemble of pianist Cyrus Chestnut, bassist Rodney Whitaker, drummer Carl Allen, trombonist Mitch Butler, tenor saxophonist Teodross Avery and trumpeter Ashlin Parker. The album finds Austin growing both as a singer and lyricist. But don’t let the swing of “Greenwood” deceive you; there’s weight in those words, its title evoking a neighborhood in Tulsa, Oklahoma, destroyed during a white race riot in 1921. In 2018, West Coast vocal jazz simply gets no better than Tiffany Austin.

—Ron Hart



**Unbroken:** Blues Creole (For Amede); Greenwood; Ain’t No Grave (Can Hold My Body Down); You Must Believe In Spring; The Blessing; Con Alma; King Of Pleasure; Better Git It In Your Soul; Someday We’ll All Be Free; Music’s Gonna Meet Me There; Resolution; Keep Your Eyes On The Prize. (60:01)

**Personnel:** Tiffany Austin, vocals; Ashlin Parker, trumpet; Mitch Butler, trombone; Teodross Avery, tenor saxophone; Cyrus Chestnut, piano; Rodney Whitaker, bass; Carl Allen, drums.

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



## Sharel Cassity & Elektra *Evolve*

RELSHA MUSIC

★★★★½

While it's not unusual for the influence of American musicians to float east across the Atlantic and take hold in the U.K., Europe and beyond, it's rare for U.S. artists to sound like they've been picking up cues from overseas. Whether conscious or not, the LP-length recorded debut of reed player Sharel Cassity's Elektra mixes soul, jazz and electronica with an ease that's more common to London than New York. Interspersing compositions by

Alicia Keys and Björk with originals, Cassity explores issues of intersectionality without losing bounce or groove.

Featuring the fluttery vocals of North Carolina native Christie Dashiell on three songs, including Keys' anthemic "New Day," *Evolve* gets its instrumental depth from the presence of first-tier players like Ingrid Jensen, Marcus Printup, Mark Whitfield and Linda May Han Oh. With Jensen, Printup and big band veteran Freddie Hendrix on flugelhorn, Elektra has a wide range of brass voices to supplement Cassity's reeds.

Miki Hayama's Fender Rhodes and the surging funk rhythms of songs like "Outlier" provide a retro feel that harkens back to some of the CTI recordings of the '70s. It's a fine line between retro and dated, of course, and the assorted electronics on "The Here, The Now" and the distortion on Whitfield's guitar on "Wishing Star" detract from the organic blends that Cassity achieves between her soprano and the brass trio. —James Hale

**Evolve:** Evolve; New Day; All Is Full Of Love; Be The Change Intro; Be The Change; Wishing Star; The Here, The Now; Echoes Of Home; Outlier. (43:36)

**Personnel:** Sharel Cassity, soprano, alto and tenor saxophones, flute; Ingrid Jensen, Marcus Printup, trumpet; Freddie Hendrix, flugelhorn; Mark Whitfield, guitar; Miki Hayama, Fender Rhodes, piano, synthesizer; Richard Johnson, keyboards; Riza Printup, harp; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Jonathan Barber, Lucianna Padmore, drums; Christie Dashiell, vocals.

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

## Perry Smith Quintet *New Angel*

SMITH TONE

★★★★½

Guitarist and bandleader Perry Smith is at once urgent and laid-back on this third album, *New Angel*, the first recorded outing with his latest quintet.

The diverse moods on the album reflect Smith's own boundary-straddling style, from the shifting tempos of the album opener, "Rise And Fall," and the playful homage of "Monk's World" (written to the chord changes of Thelonious Monk's "Epistrophy") to the impeccable phrasing of "Graceful Spirit." Whether skirting fusion and funk or bursting with modern melody, Smith's compositional style, musical direction and fret boarding hit that sweet spot somewhere between classic and experimental, improvisational and fine-tuned melody. The arrangements leave plenty of space for stretching out, while bassist Matt Aronoff and drummer Allan Mednard are the glue holding it all together.

Following 2009's solo *Stars And Cars* (Red Heart) and his quartet's 2013 *Street Sense* (Brooklyn Jazz Underground), *New Angel* was co-produced by Sam Minaie, who previously served as Smith's bassist. The comfort and intimacy here among players is palpable.



Alive with spirit and purity, Smith's recordings also are a bid to wage instrumental peace, an idea as old as jazz itself and as necessary as ever. The guitarist is as soothing as he is dissonant on "Lullaby For Freedom," while the album's solo sign-off, "Hope For Peace," is an unmistakable plea for an end to the madness that awaits outside the studio door. —Denise Sullivan

**New Angel:** Rise And Fall; Deep Water; New Angel; Lullaby For Freedom; Monk's World; Notes For Nostalgia; The Old Road; Graceful Spirit; Lucid Night; Hope For Peace. (52:44)

**Personnel:** Perry Smith, guitar; Jon Irabagon, saxophone; Glenn Zaleski, piano; Matt Aronoff, bass; Allan Mednard, drums.

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



## Charles Lloyd's 80th Birthday Celebration

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## Still Bawdy and Salacious

**Barrence Whitfield & The Savages, *Soul Flowers Of Titan* (Bloodshot 258; 33:58 ★★★★★)** Barrence Whitfield's chase after the frenzied r&b past of after-hours dives and lost 45s serves him well on the most entertaining album this singer has made since his eponymous debut in 1984. The Savages lash out with a maniacal aggression that's entirely in keeping with the bandleader's full-throated antics. Prime for pulverization are new originals and unearthed early-1960s booty like Willie Wright & the Sparklers' "Slowly Losing My Mind." There's one no-flame dud: "Say What You Want."

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

**Katy Guillen & The Girls, *Remember What You Knew Before* (VizzTone/KG & G 04; 39:35 ★★★★★)** Fronting a roots-and-blues trio in Kansas City, Missouri, talented singer-guitarist Katy Guillen is possessed of an uncommonly warm delivery and a strong sense of collectedness. All 11 of her tunes are melodically pleasing, without being the least bit soft or sugar-coated. Guillen's on top of her game when her lyrics of evocative imagery assay the anxiety in relationships, as on "If You Were Gone," to name just one.

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

**Jay Willie Blues Band, *Jay Walkin'* (Zoho Roots 201710; 41:35 ★★★★★)** With its fifth release, this Connecticut-based combo again displays intelligence in regard to what repertory material benefits from rapt rediscovery. This time around, songs by Lowell Fulson, J.B. Lenoir, Irma Thomas and swamp-rocker Dale Hawkins get spiritedly transferred into JWBB's straightahead blues format. But the band's own writing is so-so, no better than their singing and that of a guest.

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

**Mud Morganfield, *They Call Me Mud* (Severn 0073; 56:46 ★★★★★)** A son born to royalty, Mud Morganfield endeavors on his third release to be comfortable in his own skin, while keeping Chicago blues off the respirator. It's a tepid victory. Using a cured and smoked baritone voice, he can't quite locate an emotional rhythm that conveys insights derived from hard-won experience. Restorations of his father's tunes join not-so-interesting Mud songs that sport an acceptable soul-blues sound (horns added on six). Producer-guitarist Rick Kreher, harmonica player Studebaker John and other Chicagoans refuse to stoop to sentiment.

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

**Tyrone Govan & Der Secret, *Champagne Lady* (Self Release; 36:37 ★★★★★)**



Barrence Whitfield

SCOTT BESELER

Friday nights at Harlem's Paris Blues club are reserved for above-average blues guitarist Tyrone Govan and his curiously named Der Secret band, with Pamela Cornelius on lead vocals. This studio album reflects their copious enthusiasm for blues and funk, plus a little rap and jazz. Govan's compositions, the best of them being the "Stormy Monday"-like blues of "Champagne Lady," are interspersed with staples by Aretha Franklin, Maceo Parker and the Crusaders.

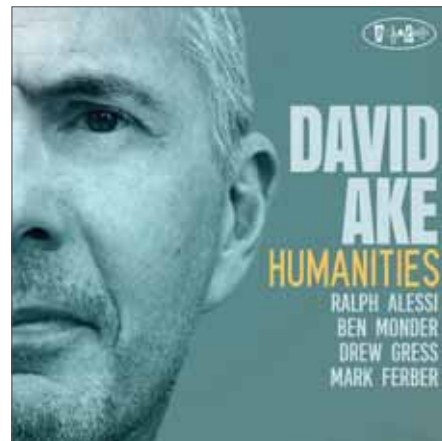
Ordering info: [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com)

**The Nick Moss Band, *The High Cost Of Low Living* (Alligator 4981; 55:32 ★★★★★)** After jam-band and rock dalliances, Nick Moss returns to the Chicago blues. Now partnered with harmonica brawler Dennis Gruenling and A-1 producer-guitarist Kid Andersen, he displays enough personality and range as singer and guitarist to keep from being pulled down by conventions. The songs, several almost guaranteed to twitch the nerve endings of listeners, are mostly his own.

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

**Various Artists, *I Ain't A Gamblin' Woman, I Got Such-A Rowdy Ways* (JSP 77209; 77:58/77:45/77:39/77:27 ★★★★★)** For 1920s and '30s blues smut, Europeans have the corner on the market with a slew of compilations to choose among. This new compilation, out of Great Britain, features eight female singers giving salacious charges to 104 tracks. Master-moaner Clara Smith, raw Lucille Bogan and rude temptress Lil Johnson each get their own disc on which to boast of their domineering sexuality. Fellow vocalists Bernice Edwards, Hociel Thomas, Sippie Wallace, Bessie Tucker and Victoria Spivey elbow for room on a fourth disc. Among the harried sidemen are Tampa Red, Big Bill Broonzy and Louis Armstrong. Adequate biographies and discographical information by compiler Max Haymes. **DB**

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



## David Ake *Humanities*

POSI-TONE 8180

★★★★½

David Ake brackets his new album with the thoughtful, turbulent title track and a wistful homage to the great newsman Walter Cronkite. What binds them together and courses through all 12 tunes is Ake's daring, yet disciplined, sensibility. Each tune has its own personality. And all but one are Ake originals.

The album spans the slippery "Hooper," a rough, modern ride on "Groundwork" and a version of "Ripple" that turns that Grateful Dead classic into a campfire song.

Ake surrounds himself with all-stars: trumpeter Ralph Alessi, guitarist Ben Monder, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Mark Ferber. The trumpeter sparkles on "Humanities," goes muted to make "Ripple" memorably dusky and, on "Drinking Song," joins Ake in an appropriately boozy weave.

Peaceful tunes like "Drinking Song" and the lovely, spacious "Stream" provide relief from edgy cuts like "Groundwork"—a showcase for Monder's sprawling guitar—and "The North." The latter track is downright smearsy: cymbal splashes, unison trumpet-guitar lines, a rare Ake solo, shredding Monder.

If this album sounds passive-aggressive in its programming, it's overtly so on "You May Have Already Won." Driven by Ferber and leavened by Monder at his most subversive, the tune speaks to the anger and ambivalence in all of us. Ake clearly leans toward the aggressive.

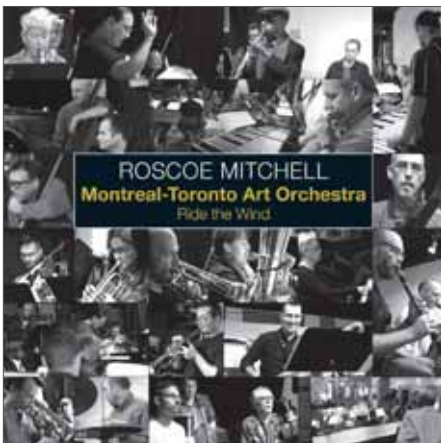
At the same time, the bandleader's playing simply can be beautiful. "Stream" has a courtly feel, framed by Ake's minimalist excursions and Gress' resonant forays. Alessi solos expressively and Ake block-chords the tune home, ending on a bluesy note.

—Carlo Wolff

**Humanities:** Humanities; Hooper; Groundwork; Ripple; You May Have Already Won; Drinking Song; The North; Stream; Resource Center; Narration; Rabble Rouser; Walter Cronkite. (60:37)

**Personnel:** David Ake, piano; Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Ben Monder, guitar; Drew Gress, bass; Mark Ferber, drums.

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



**Roscoe Mitchell/  
Matthew Shipp**  
*Accelerated Projection*

ROGUE ART 0079

★★★★

**Roscoe Mitchell/  
Montreal-Toronto  
Art Orchestra**  
*Ride The Wind*

NESSA 40

★★★★

The creative fire of reedist Roscoe Mitchell, 77, seems undiminished, whether forging fresh partnerships or renewing old ones. His musical relationship with pianist Matthew Shipp ranks as one of his most satisfying and long-lived collaborations, and *Accelerated Projection*—recorded live at the Sant’Anna Arressi Festival in Sardinia, Italy, in August 2005—captures the duo in an elevated state of interaction. The performance is broken into seven movements for the album, but the concert flowed from a single germ of introspection and blossomed into a whirlwind of shape-shifting energy.

An apotheosis is reached on “Accelerated Projection IV,” with Mitchell digging into circular breathing to generate corkscrewing patterns over Shipp’s left-handed scutter. Of course, there’s more to Mitchell’s art, and *Ride The Wind* is the latest manifestation of a practice that’s bearing serious fruit. The album is the second large band recording built on transcriptions of improvisations the reedist cut with pianist Craig Taborn and percussionist Kikanju Baku in 2013. Montreal-Toronto Art Orchestra is an agile ensemble assembled specifically for this project, equally adept at improvisational and scored music. The reedist and MTAO spent four days learning the music, which expands the spontaneous interactions produced by three musicians for a large orchestra consisting of

pairs of basses, drums and violas, along with a six-strong mass of winds and five brass players.

The music’s density points to contemporary classical, but the ensemble injects an improvisational element—not in extended solos, but within arrangements that provide interpretational latitude. Mitchell performs on only one piece, “They Rode For Them—Part Two,” in which he inserts a mind-boggling soprano solo. But the real accomplishment is the manner in which MTAO tackles these dizzying works, conveying their harmonic language, phrasing and shifting rhythms. The practice deployed here suggests that the reedist easily can unfurl another seven decades of revelations.

—Peter Margasak

**Accelerated Projection:** Accelerated Projection I; Accelerated Projection II; Accelerated Projection III; Accelerated Projection IV; Accelerated Projection V; Accelerated Projection VI; Accelerated Projection VII. (45:58)

**Personnel:** Roscoe Mitchell, alto and soprano saxophones, flute; Matthew Shipp, piano.

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

**Ride The Wind:** They Rode For Them—Part One; Splatter, Ride The Wind; They Rode for Them—Part Two; RUB; Shards And Lemons; Nonaah. (55:48)

**Personnel:** Marilyn Lerner, piano; Lori Freedman, E-flat, B-flat, bass and contrabass clarinets; Jean Derome, piccolo, flute, bass flute; Yves Charuest, alto saxophone; Kyle Benders, B-flat clarinet, tenor saxophone; Jason Sharp, baritone and bass saxophones; Peter Lutek, bassoon, soprano saxophone; Nicole Rampersaud, Craig Pedersen, trumpet; Tom Richards, Scott Thomson, trombone; Julie Houle, tuba; Jean René, James Annett, viola; Rob Clutton, Nicolas Caloia, bass; Michael Davidson, vibraphone; Isaiah Ceccarelli, Nick Fraser, drums; Gregory Oh, conductor; Roscoe Mitchell, soprano saxophone (4).

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

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# Ambient's Drift, Tension

Four decades after Brian Eno coined a term to describe the atmosphere he was aiming to create with his minimalist masterpiece *Music For Airports*, ambient music has evolved beyond providing sounds that can be just as "ignorable as it is interesting." The artists and producers working under this genre umbrella either attempt to stay true to the original intent of these nebulous sounds or put together something meant to challenge or unnerve listeners.

**Tahoe (Kranky 213; 52:20 ★★★★★)**, the latest from California-based producer **Dedekind Cut**, aka Fred Welton Warmesley III, falls firmly in that latter category. While it's named after the idyllic town that he calls home, there's a trepidation that flutters below the surface of each synth chord and rippling drone. Even at its most beautiful, as with the elegant "Virtues," an aural mass of pink and purple clouds move over the expanse of the sky. But it's clear something unfriendly is lurking in the shadows.

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

Similar gloomy shades also are present on the new album by Japanese duo **Shuta Hasunuma and U-zhaan**. The difference is that they embrace these hidden frights with an impish joy. **2 Tone (Birdwatcher 86282; 44:33 ★★★½)**, their first collaborative effort, cuts through the sometimes unsettling silence with a pulse of tablas and syncopated rhythms, or, as with "Lal," made with the assistance of Ryuichi Sakamoto, disjointed vocal samples that bounce through the stereo field.

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

**John McLemore's** music sits firmly on the line separating the soothing and disquieting qualities of ambient music. That feeling might be spilling over from his now infamous participation in the *S-Town* podcast and his 2015 suicide. But how listeners respond to **Witness Marks: The Work Of John McLemore (Dais 096; 66:50 ★★★½)** might depend on where and when the music's heard. In a certain light, these voluminous compositions (brought to completion by musician and painter Tor Lundvall) are as relaxing and skin-tingling as a steam bath. But in the right context, they become much more foreboding. Put into the hands of the right filmmaker, the steady, lava-like flow of "John B.'s Dark Spring" and the rumble of "Clock Chimes In The Mist" could provide the perfect soundtrack to a modern horror classic.

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

Things start to get much dreamier



Shuta Hasunuma (left) and U-zhaan

when entering the world of **Mind Over Mirrors**, the ongoing project of Jaime Fennelly. Created initially as part of a multimedia production that premiered at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, **Bellowing Sun (Paradise of Bachelors 040; 63:19 ★★★★★)** looks to capture the ecstatic sensations that continued musical repetition can summon. To do that, Fennelly relies on pulsing synth tones, circular melodies played on zither and fiddle, and the throb of percussion. The result is somewhere between Steve Reich's minimalism and Laraaji's hypnotic compositions.

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

The recent album that comes closest to capturing Eno's original definition of ambient comes from **Anenon**, the multi-instrumentalist and producer also known as Ben Simon. With few notable exceptions, the songs on his fourth full-length album **Tongue (Friends of Friends 164; 38:09 ★★★½)** drift calmly, anchored by Simon's free-flowing saxophone and washed-out field recordings. To keep listeners' attention focused, he counters that with songs like "Verso" and "Two For C," both driven by looping melodies that are slowly picked apart and overtaken by the broader strokes of his synths and fluttering horn lines.

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

While all of these new releases owe a clear debt to Eno's explorations of ambient music, the impact of the producer's work was felt earlier, particularly among a trio of Philadelphians known as **The Nightcrawlers**. As heard on **The Biophonic Boombox Recordings (Anthology 025; 96:20 ★★★★★)**, a collection culled from the group's self-released cassettes, this '80s-era electronic outfit took inspiration from *Airport's* lush, yet spare, mood while also paying homage to the cinematic instrumentals of Krautrock pioneers like Tangerine Dream and Klaus Schulze.

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



## Eric Siereveld's Organic Quintet *Walk The Walk*

SHIFTING PARADIGM 131

★★★★½

Eric Siereveld updates the soul-jazz of the 1960s and 1970s on *Walk The Walk*, an eight-tune nod to bop en route to funk. One might compare Siereveld—on trumpet and flugelhorn—and saxophonist Tony Barba to Horace Silver frontmen Blue Mitchell and Junior Cook; they evoke a similarly dramatic flair. But the bandleader's bite and swagger, along with Barba's meaty tonality, set apart the debut of Eric Siereveld's Organic Quintet.

The tunes are memorable and vernacular. The title track is a debonair, medium-tempo blues that Barba sets up for guitarist Jonathan Kreisberg and Hammond B-3 player Steve Snyder. "The Other Side (Of The Hudson)" is a trenchcoat blues spotlighting Snyder. Kreisberg also shines on the jaunty "Toughin' Up" and the one cover, a satin take on the Rodgers & Hart classic "Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered."

But this stylish recording launches with "The Last Innovator," an homage to Woody Shaw, who Siereveld considers the last trumpet innovator. The closing tune, "Split-Finger," is a danceable, boogaloo tribute to Blue Note antecedents and the Cincinnati Reds, Siereveld's hometown baseball team.

The album is well-sequenced, alternating fiery struts, like the driving "Occam's Razor," with more relaxed cuts like the Rodgers & Hart cover and "B-Town Bop," a tribute to the late jazz educator David Baker.

The quicker offerings suggest that this ensemble would be riveting live, as this bass-free group effectively straddles the familiar and the daring.

—Carlo Wolff

**Walk The Walk:** The Last Innovator; Toughin' Up; Walk The Walk; Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered; Occam's Razor; B-Town Bop; The Other Side (Of The Hudson); Split-Finger. (57:34)  
**Personnel:** Eric Siereveld, trumpet, flugelhorn; Tony Barba, tenor saxophone; Aaron Gochberg, conga (8); Jonathan Kreisberg, guitar; Mitch Shiner, drums; Steve Snyder, Hammond B-3 organ.

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





## Jon Irabagon Quartet

### Dr. Quixotic's Traveling Exotics

IRABBAGAST 010

★★★★½

## Jon Irabagon/Joe Fiedler/Todd Neufeld

### In Formation Network

NUSCOPE 1031

★★★★

Saxophonist Jon Irabagon blows ferocious tenor in the company of trumpeter Tim Hagans, pianist Luis Perdomo, bass Yasushi Nakamura and drummer Rudy Royston

on his seventh album as a leader for his Irabagast imprint. Together, the copacetic crew pushes the envelope with intelligence and passion on six Irabagon originals, each a unique, extended journey unto itself.

*Dr. Quixotic's Traveling Exotics* opens with the 11-minute "The Demon Barber Of Fleet Week," featuring an unaccompanied Irabagon solo that showcases his sheer command and penchant for multiphonics. "Emotional Physics/The Things" shifts from an off-kilter groove to a lush rubato section, showcasing Irabagon amid an urgent swing section that turns Perdomo loose over the indelible hook-up between Nakamura and Royston.

Hagans engages in tight unison and deft shadowing with Irabagon on "You Own Your Own" and the two float over the surging double-time pulse laid down on "The Bo'Ness Monster," before breaking into rapid-fire call-and-response over the rhythm section. Following that burner, they cool things out on the misterioso ballad "Pretty Like North Dakota," with Hagans blowing muted trumpet over Perdomo's chamber-like arpeggiating.

Irabagon also appears in a drumless collective with guitarist Todd Neufeld and trombonist Joe Fiedler on *In Formation Network*. There's a lovely balance to this unconvention-

al trio, which harkens back 30 years to John Zorn's trio on *News For Lulu* with guitarist Bill Frisell and trombonist George Lewis. Even when this group's at its most experimental, there's a strong sense of unity and harmony that prevails.

Fiedler tips his hat to German trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff with displays of multiphonics and circular breathing on his "The Next Phase" and on Mangelsdorff's melancholy "Mayday Hymn." Irabagon blows with typical authority on alto and soprano saxophones throughout this adventurous set, engaging in heated conversations on "C.G.F." and "Voodoo," and skronking audaciously on his "Wai'anapanapa." And amid the sparks, the trio delivers two patient readings of Samuel Blaser's dark lullaby "Pieces Of Old Sky."  
—Bill Milkowski

**Dr. Quixotic's Traveling Exotics:** The Demon Barber Of Fleet Week; Emotional Physics/The Things; You Own Your Own; The Bo'Ness Monster; Pretty Like North Dakota; Taipei Personality. (72:35)

**Personnel:** Jon Irabagon, tenor saxophone; Tim Hagans, trumpet; Luis Perdomo, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

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

**In Formation Network:** C.G.F.; Pieces Of Old Sky; The Next Phase; Wai'anapanapa; Voodoo; Dora's Picnic; I'm In; Mayday Hymn; Pieces Of Old Sky. (58:49)

**Personnel:** Jon Irabagon, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Joe Fiedler, trombone; Todd Neufeld, guitar.

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

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## Sarah Buechi

### *Contradiction Of Happiness*

INTAKT 299

★★★

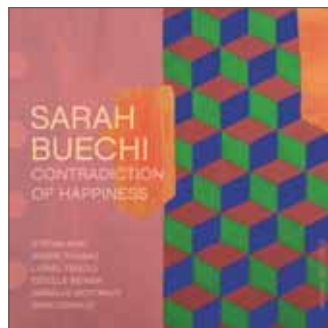
By the time Sarah Buechi, a vocalist and composer from Switzerland who also plays violin, entered college, she was most interested in focusing on singing and writing. For *Contradiction Of Happiness*, her third album for the Intakt imprint, Buechi employs the same rhythm section as on her earlier releases for the label, but adds a string trio. She arranged those string parts, and composed all of the lyrics and music for the album, except for the closer—a traditional Swiss folk song.

Buechi has an attractive voice and a wide range, although sometimes it's difficult to know what she's singing. Fortunately, her lyrics are included in the liner notes, and they reveal her to be a skilled, if often abstract, poet. Among the topics covered are the importance of fighting for one's beliefs ("Child Of Our Times"), insecurity ("After We've Kissed") and the necessity of living in the moment ("Here And Now"). While Buechi might reflect some folk-singer inclinations—with a tone sometimes reminiscent of Sheila Jordan—she also engages in wordless improvising and swings when it's called for. The result is an intriguing set of unclassifiable music by a vocalist-composer with strong potential. —*Scott Yanow*

**Contradiction Of Happiness:** Child Of Our Times; Never Enough; After We've Kissed; Fahamore (Paradise); Wheel Of Temptation; Here And Now; The Word; Snow Trail; Schönste Obigstäm. (57:11)

**Personnel:** Sarah Buechi, vocals; Stefan Aeby, piano; André Pousaz, bass; Lionel Friedli, drums; Estelle Beiner, violin; Isabelle Gottraux, viola; Sara Oswald, cello.

Ordering info: [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch)



## Subtle Degrees

### *A Dance That Empties*

NEW AMSTERDAM RECORDS 093

★★★★½

Fifty-one years after it was recorded, *Interstellar Space*, which features John Coltrane and Rashied Ali, remains the gold standard against which all saxophone-drum duo records are measured. And *A Dance That Empties* merits a comparison to that classic more than most recordings.

Coltrane's intense studies of musical and spiritual matters were motivated by a search for universal structures. And in addition to music, saxophonist Travis Laplante is a practitioner of the healing art of Qigong, which restores harmony between the energies that flow within a person, and between a person and the world. Here, the players' familiarity with one another charges the encounter with practiced empathy, as well as the need to reconnect. The altissimo whispers that open the recording can be heard as a call to prayer or to bend an ear. One key difference between *Interstellar Space* and *Dance* is the degree to which this music is orchestrated. Gerald Cleaver is credited with drum arrangements, and his intricate, evolving accompaniment completes Laplante's circular lines and insistently repeated patterns. Ritual, personal and compositional energies converge to create music that is deeply rewarding. —*Bill Meyer*

**A Dance That Empties:** A Dance That Empties I; A Dance That Empties II; A Dance That Empties III. (41:31)

**Personnel:** Travis Laplante, tenor saxophone; Gerald Cleaver, drums.

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



## Spin Cycle

### *Assorted Colors*

SOUND FOOTING 002

★★★★½

This is Spin Cycle's second album, which follows a self-titled 2016 debut. And the band has spent time on the road in between, learning the nuances of each other's compositional and improvisational languages, becoming a tight, disciplined unit.

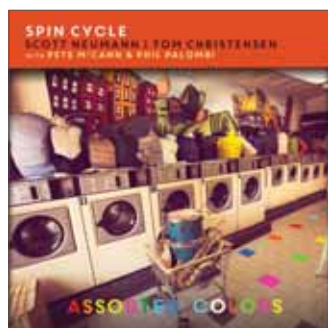
While saxophonist Tom Christensen and guitarist Pete McCann might be the natural focus of the recording, bassist Phil Palombi and drummer Scott Neumann stake out space for themselves, from the traded fours of the opening "Break Tune" to Palombi's deep, emotionally resonant solos on "Possum Dark" and "Third Floor." When Palombi switches to electric, as on the funk-rock "Etosha," the bassist and drummer set up a bouncing groove, atop which Christensen's squawking soprano saxophone and McCann's stinging electric guitar go wild.

Things rev up on the album's final track. The aptly named "Fit Bit" sounds as if all involved are working up a sweat, sprinting through the melody and then slowing down, a trick they pull several times to keep each other on their toes. Christensen's soloing here is fast and furious, in a mode recalling Joe Henderson's Milestone albums of the 1970s. —*Philip Freeman*

**Assorted Colors:** Break Tune; Two Pan Man; Possum Dark; It's Alright With Me; Third Floor; Etosha; Roots; Affirmation; To The Puente; Mist; Fit Bit. (59:26)

**Personnel:** Tom Christensen, tenor and soprano saxophone; Pete McCann, electric and nylon-string guitar; Phil Palombi, acoustic and electric bass; Scott Neumann, drums.

Ordering info: [spincyclemusic.org](http://spincyclemusic.org)



## Fernando García

### *Guasábara Puerto Rico*

ZOHO 201802

★★★★½

"Guasábara" means conflict or battle in the Taíno language of Puerto Rico, according to drummer Fernando García. He looks pretty pugnacious on the cover here, but is in essence relishing the tussle of folkloric cross rhythms that makes this *Guasábara Puerto Rico* a masterful mash-up of interlacing meter.

The opener, "Audubon," conjures a street scene from García's old neighborhood in Washington Heights, with layered time, moving in tandem like Geneva watch drives. Bassist Dan Martínez and classically trained conguero Victor Pablo are key to the clockwork of these compositions. And the unmistakable bounce of saxophonist Miguel Zenón, with his smeary articulation and dance around the beat, adds a star-turn on the title track. García dubs "Ideas Convergentes" a delta of outflowing concepts and "like a boat ride [where] you're constantly shifting on the tides and waves."

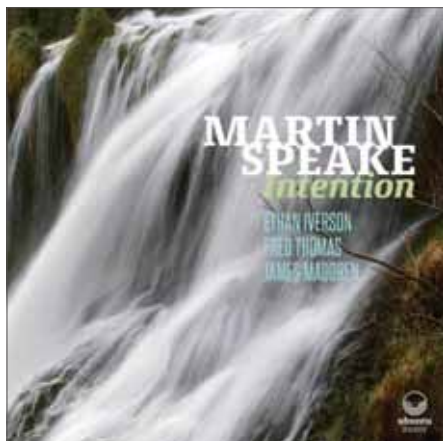
"The Element" sounds M-Base-infused, though García credits Argentinian pianist Guillermo Klein as an influence here: gripping, sinewy stuff from a disciplined new guard. —*Michael Jackson*

**Guasábara Puerto Rico:** Audubon; Ideas Convergentes; Guasábara Puerto Rico; Healing Prayer; The Element; Guaynabo Mi Tambor; Se Va; Tiempo. (49:13)

**Personnel:** Fernando García, drums, vocals (6); Dan Martínez, bass; Gabriel Chakarji, piano; Gabriel Vicéns, guitar; Jan Kus, tenor saxophone; Victor Pablo, barril, congas; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone (3).

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





## Martin Speake *Intention*

UBUNTU MUSIC 0009

★★★★½

*Intention* marks the first time in more than a decade that British alto saxophonist Martin Speake and American pianist Ethan Iverson have joined forces. In 2004, they released *My Ideal* (Basho), a bracing duo album of classic ballads. This time around, Speake fronts a supple quartet that also includes bassist Fred Thomas and drummer James Maddren.

Speake and Iverson met in 1990 at Canada's Banff Centre for the Arts, where they each briefly studied. One of their instructors was Steve Coleman, and listeners can hear a glint of his phrasing in Speake's improvisational approach, especially on the slippery "Charlie Wig." The bandleader's porous tone and wandering melodicism also strongly evoke Ornette Coleman, as evidenced by the fluttering "Magic Show," on which Speake and Iverson engage in lines that bray, then intertwine.

The rapport between Speake and Iverson itself is a thing of exquisite beauty. That's established from the get-go on "Becky," during which Iverson's spectral melody gives way to Speake's wondrous passages. Thomas' rich arco bass, and Maddren's rumbling toms and suspended cymbals add gravity and tension, especially as Iverson and Speake's winsome dialogue gently crests.

The disc reveals Speake's capricious side, too, particularly on the fanciful "Twister," where the rhythm section propels the leader's prancing melody and Iverson's blues-laden accompaniment with a Crescent City groove.

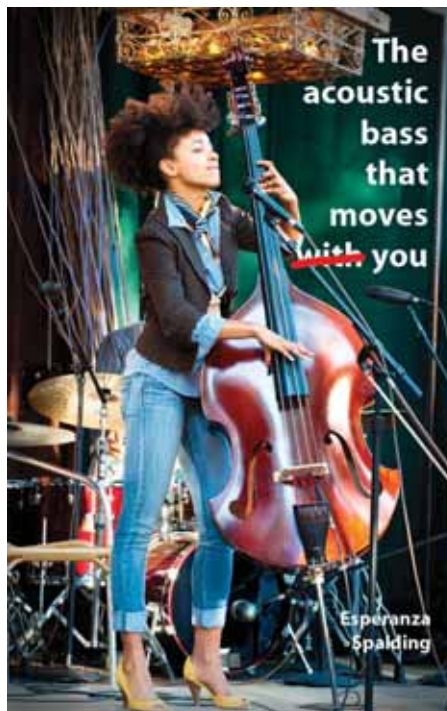
*Intention* rewards so much with each repeated listen that one hopes Speake and Iverson will collaborate again, sooner rather than later.

—John Murph

**Intention:** Becky; Twister; Magic Show; Spring Dance; The Heron; Dancing In The Dark; Charlie's Wig; Blackwell; June 2nd; Hidden Vision; Intention. (58:22)

**Personnel:** Martin Speake, alto saxophone; Ethan Iverson, piano; Fred Thomas, bass; James Maddren, drums.

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



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JAN PERSSON

Charles Mingus performs in 1973 at Jazzhus Montmartre in Copenhagen, Denmark.

## Mingus Intrepid in Montreux

Recorded just two years before he would be diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease and three years before he would become wheelchair bound, **Live At Montreux 1975 (Eagle Rock Entertainment; 57:07/26:13 ★★★★★)** documents Charles Mingus' dynamic quintet featuring tenor George Adams, pianist Don Pullen, trumpeter Jack Walrath and longtime drummer Dannie Richmond. Performing tunes from *Changes One* and *Changes Two*—each recorded in December 1974 and released after this July 1975 set—Mingus leads his ensemble with the same intrepid spirit and audacious instincts that marked his classic recordings of the '50s and '60s.

The two-disc set opens with a raucous "Devil Blues," which features Adams singing the Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown lyrics in a hoarse blues holler that serves Mingus' earthy instincts. The bassist opens the tune with an unaccompanied fusillade, before the band joins in on the raunchy 12-bar shuffle. Walrath delivers a clear, bright and in-the-pocket trumpet solo before Pullen enters with an envelope-pushing feature, offering a deconstructionist take on the blues form without truly leaving it.

The mistitled "Free Cell Block F, 'Tis Nazi U.S.A." (it's actually "Remember Rockefeller At Attica" from *Changes One*) swings with kinetic momentum and features scintillating solos from Adams and Pullen along the way. Even while he's wringing his right hand out on the keys, Pullen still is comping in a strong, syncopated fashion with the left hand. Walrath is inspired to push the envelope on his feature here, and Mingus turns in a powerful solo that reminds listeners of his prodigious chops, which often were overshadowed by his prolific writing.

The group stretches out during the

30-minute "Sue's Blues" to close out the first disc. Walrath offers some lovely muted trumpet on the theme over Pullen's lush chords on the relaxed intro, while the flexible, yet disciplined, nature of the ensemble shines through on both the briskly swinging and totally avant-garde passages on this involved, tempo-shifting suite. Every member of the band is featured on unaccompanied solos throughout this marathon, each imbued with requisite risk-taking and irrepressible swing.

On disc two, which feels like something of an after-thought at only 26 minutes, guests Gerry Mulligan and trumpeter Benny Bailey join the quintet on renditions of Mingus' "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" and Duke Ellington's "Take The 'A' Train." Mulligan's baritone saxophone solo on the augmented group's hymn-like rendition of "Pork Pie" is especially noteworthy. Bailey follows Mulligan's thoughtful solo with some animated plunger work that elevates the proceedings, and he fairly blows the roof off the Montreux Casino on a flag-waving rendition of "'A' Train." Mulligan's swinging solo on that Duke chestnut takes off to another level when the band drops out and he engages in a conversational duet with Mingus' walking bass. The bandleader, who died less than four years after this date, ultimately trades eights with Mulligan and Bailey before bringing this 12-minute bit of Ellingtonia to a rousing finish.

The sound here is good, not great. But the performances are so spirited, marked by the kind of unbridled soloing that one rarely gets in the studio, that this set's definitely worth checking out. And it's an absolute must for any Mingus completist. **DB**

Ordering info: [eagle-rock.com](http://eagle-rock.com)



## Duduka Da Fonseca Trio Plays Dom Salvador

SUNNYSIDE 1507

★★★★★

Outside of Brazilian jazz circles, the name Dom Salvador is unlikely to ring bells. But in the mid-1960s, he was at the forefront of a movement to bring a genuine jazz sensibility to the samba. Unlike contemporaneous bossa nova efforts, which dressed Brazilian rhythm in jazzy harmony, Salvador's recordings—most notably *Rio 65 Trio*—pursued a more organic fusion, expanding possibilities in both directions.

Drummer Duduka Da Fonseca grew up on those recordings, memorizing them as a teen in Rio de Janeiro, and then cemented his connection to the music in New York, where he began working as Salvador's drummer in 1980. In short, it would be hard to imagine a tribute with better bona fides than this.

What animates the album isn't the obvious affection Da Fonseca feels for the music so much as the ongoing vitality of Salvador's approach. Take, for example, "Farjuto." The feel on the *Rio 65 Trio* version is playfully varied, as if Salvador and company can't be constrained by a single groove. Da Fonseca's trio, by contrast, opts for an everything-at-once tack, layering the rhythms so that the Da Fonseca's Blakey-like accents always are flavored by the relentless swing of David Feldman's piano, and vice versa. Same idea, different iteration. Feldman does an admirable job of fleshing out the harmony in Salvador's writing without underplaying the rhythmic content, and his phrasing on "Mariá" and "Para Elis" leaves one wondering why those ballads aren't better known. But it's the poly-rhythmic group interplay on "Gafieira" that make the strongest case for Da Fonseca's adoration of Salvador, and the listener's admiration for Da Fonseca. —J.D. *Considine*

**Plays Dom Salvador:** Farjuto; Transition; Mariá; Antes Da Chuva; Samba Do Malandrino; Temátrio; Gafieira; Para Elis; Valsa De Esquina; Clauditi; Meu Fraco É Café Forte. (49:08)

**Personnel:** Duduka Da Fonseca, drums; David Feldman, piano; Guto Wirtti, bass; Jacques Morelenbaum, cello (8).

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



## Heavyweights Brass Band *This City*

SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

One might presume from the Heavyweights Brass Band's *This City* that the group is based in Atlanta or New Orleans. When listeners realize the ensemble hails from Toronto, surprise easily can convert to admiration for the band's devotion to stylistic sincerity. Even better than *This City's* objective to be an homage to New Orleans' jazz is the way the Heavyweights approach achieving such musical candor.

The potpourri of contributing players avoids sounding disjointed across the record. Though exemplary performances shine throughout, the execution of each song, and the flow of the album, seem cohesive, like a group gelled with years of interwoven experience.

*This City* exudes energy indistinguishable from what one might expect to hear in the French Quarter. Nevertheless, David Farrell's mix helps retain the album's nuances, while providing sonic clarity and giving the tonal range of the Heavyweights' arsenal the ability to stand out and coexist accordingly—whether by maintaining balanced levels when transitioning from a single saxophone to a full band on “Dance Out On The Corner” or allowing the faintest of snare ringing on “I've Got Time For You.”

The spirit of jazz often involves improvisation, collaboration and camaraderie. And *This City* creates a blending of musicianship, but also life experience among musicians, which undoubtedly will enhance future work from the Heavyweights.

—Kira Grunenberg

**The City:** Hands Down Lo'; Tell Me Something Good; Two Foot Ticket; I've Got Time For You; Roger's Intro; Dance Out On The Corner; Rosco's Big Hit; This City. (28:18)

**Personnel:** John Pittman, trumpet; Chris Butcher, trombone; Paul Metcalfe, tenor saxophone; Tom Richards, tuba, keyboard (3), trombone (1); Lowell Whitty, drums, percussion; Jackie Richardson, vocals (8); Kevin Breit, guitar (3), mandolin; Roger Lewis, baritone saxophone (5, 6); Ashlin Parker, trumpet (1, 7); Joe Lastie, bass drum (1); Eugene Grant, vocals, congas, trumpet (1); Marla Dixon, vocals (6).

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

## Martin Wind *Light Blue*

LAIKA 3510357

★★★★

Bassist Martin Wind summons many colors on his 12th album as a leader, with an all-star cast that clearly enjoys the meticulously detailed compositions and arrangements grounded by his superb instrumental skills. The hues are mostly brighter than light blue or reflect the sweetly sad cast of Brazilian “saudade.”

Wind's fleet, tone-perfect pizzicato improvisation is showcased from the start on “While I'm Still Here,” a romp based on “Sweet Georgia Brown,” fleshed out by Gary Versace's organ, Scott Robinson on tenor saxophone and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, with brisk brushing by Matt Wilson.

Wind's bass anchors that aggregate through his ballad “Rose” (on which Robinson makes an aching taragota statement), the jaunty “Ten Minute Song” (Robinson blends perfectly with Anat Cohen's clarinet on the head and has a three-chorus bass saxophone solo) and “February,” in which the mix makes trumpet and overdubbed alto and tenor parts a backdrop through which Versace's highest piano notes and Wind's gentle, firm strums can shine.

“Power Chords,” perhaps the darkest and freest piece included on *Light Blue*, is almost like an acoustic extrapolation of Miles Davis' 1986 album *Tutu*. Wind's low bowing sets an ominous vibe, then rips. Jensen's solo is far-reaching; Robinson's bass saxophone and Versace's organ spar, growl and roar; Wilson



rocks and drives.

The next five tracks, from a second day in the studio, shift personnel and sensibility. Jensen and Versace are gone, Cohen spotlight (in a clarinet duo with Robinson on “Genius/Saint”) and Bill Cunliffe at the piano. “Seven Steps To Rio” exemplifies these songs: Maucha Adnet sings in Portuguese, her husband Duduka Da Fonseca playing true samba rhythms, Cohen flowing over Wind's acoustic bass. “De Norte A Sul” has an intricate horn episode, while “A Sad Story” and “Longing” are moody themes.

*Light Blue* can offer listeners variety, structure, spirit and finesse.

—Howard Mandel

**Light Blue:** While I'm Still Here; Rose; Ten Minute Song; February; Power Chords; A Genius And A Saint; Seven Steps To Rio; A Sad Story; De Norte A Sul; Longing. (60:25)

**Personnel:** Martin Wind, bass; Anat Cohen, clarinet; Ingrid Jensen, trumpet; Scott Robinson, saxophones, taragota, clarinet; Maucha Adnet, vocals; Bill Cunliffe, piano; Gary Versace, piano, organ; Matt Wilson, Duduka Da Fonseca, drums.

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# Jazz in the Americas

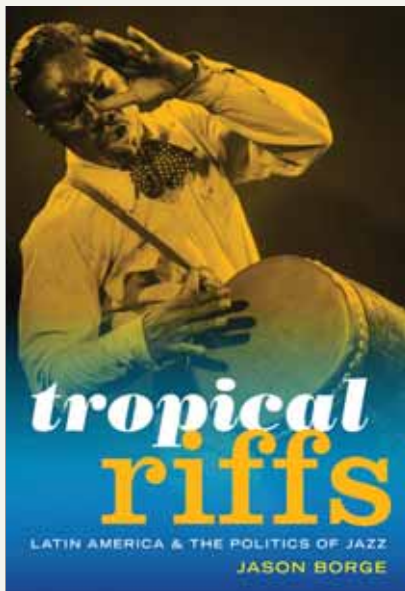
When Jason Borge watched Ken Burns' *Jazz*, he decried the series glossing over the so-called Latin jazz idiom. Now, his book ***Tropical Riffs: Latin America & The Politics Of Jazz*** (Duke University Press) is a welcome and much needed extension and elaboration of jazz as an American cultural product on a hemispheric scale.

Borge—a professor of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Texas, and author of *Latin American Writers and the Rise of Hollywood Cinema*—examines how jazz was accepted, played and challenged between the 1920s and '60s, primarily in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba. "To a greater extent than any other region outside the United States," he writes, "I would argue, Latin America did not just embrace and repudiate, consume and purge, imitate and appropriate jazz. The region and its musicians actively participated in the global jazz enterprise to such a degree that its imprint eventually had to be acknowledged, even if ultimately disavowed, marginalized or bracketed off."

Borge examines Latin Americans' multifaceted and contradictory relationship with jazz through an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on media studies, literary criticism, musicology, history and political science, and from newspapers, magazines, TV, film and, of course, recordings. The author also features the visual artistry of Hermenegildo Sabat and Miguel Covarrubias, and references several Latin-American literary figures, including Gabriel García Márquez and Jose Luis Borges, as well as a range of scholars including Alejo Carpentier and Ned Sublette.

According to the author, Argentina was an enthusiastic embracer of jazz, but it had no problem identifying African-American performers as "the key purveyors of jazz authenticity." This was the case because the roots of the tango were partly African. Buenos Aires, as late as the 19th century, boasted significant black populations, who created the African-derived *candombe* rhythms that ultimately gave birth to the tango. But this recognition ran afoul with Argentina's racist policy of *blanqueamiento*, the whitening of the population that brought in millions of white Europeans to offset the numbers of black citizens. Commensurate with that ideology was a wariness of adopting any cultural export from the U.S., which at the time was flexing hemispheric control. In Argentina's case, there were those who felt that an acceptance of jazz would mark the tango as an endangered species.

This pattern of jazz lure and loathing—to varying degrees—abounds throughout the Americas. In the case of Brazil, the question



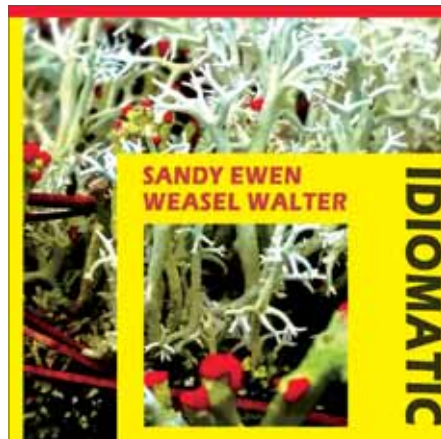
of musical nationalism was even more incendiary than it was with its Argentine neighbor. Borge documents how jazz took hold of Brazil in the 1930s, via the influence of American films *Swing Time*, *Hollywood Hotel* and *Birth Of The Blues*, and by the creation of the world-famous bossa nova sound of the late '50s—with its obvious debt to West Coast jazz. The best manifestation of that country's schizophrenic attitude toward the genre is Carlos Lyra's early bossa nova hit "Influencia Do Jazz," which laments the corrupting influence of jazz and Afro-Cuban music on Lyra's "poor samba." But as Borge notes, the song "celebrates in musical terms the very influences the lyrics seem to decry."

Cuba provided the most sustained musical influence on American jazz: from the mambos of bandleader Dámaso Pérez Prado to the fusion of Chano Pozo's Afro-Cuban religious drumming and Dizzy Gillespie's big band bebop in New York.

Borge's informative book shows that musicians like Pozo, Argentina's Astor Piazzolla, the architect of Nuevo Tango, and Brazil's Antonio Jobim, the co-creator of the bossa nova, highlight the futility of borders, with American jazz as a cultural lingua franca of the Americas.

"The many parallels and frequent interactions and overlaps between jazz and loosely analogous Latin American forms ... strongly suggest that the word 'jazz' was better suited as an umbrella term for a whole range of musical practices in the hemisphere than as a stable signifier for a discretely national form." **DB**

Ordering info: [dukeupress.edu](http://dukeupress.edu)



## Sandy Ewen/ Weasel Walter *Idiomatic*

UGEXPLODE UG69

★★★★

When free improvisation first flowered in the latter half of the 20th century, it was often characterized as non-idiomatic. This description distinguished the music from the omnipresent practice of improvising within the context of an idiom. But it quickly became problematic, as it became clear that a community of players improvising outside the mandates of genre had created another one with its own proscriptions and practices. Guitarist Sandy Ewen and drummer Weasel Walter know that history, and plenty of others besides.

In addition to improvising in her old hometown of Houston, as well as her current base in New York, Ewen has played rock music with *Weird Weeds*; Walter's been playing rock, metal, punk, no wave and various free musics for decades. And the two have a shared history of their own, having recorded twice before with bassist Damon Smith. Combine those collective pasts with nonpareil approaches to their instruments and you've got an idiom unto itself.

Ewen sets her electric guitar in her lap and manipulates its strings and its body with bolts, rods, steel wool and lengths of chalk. Walter summons myriad timbres from a conventional drum kit, which he navigates with speed and precision, and muddies his clean attack with cheap microphones, digital delays and a synthesizer. They don't relate in terms of notes, chords and measurable meters, instead focusing on contrasting textures and densities of attack. Their collaboration yields plenty of visceral thrills, but becomes even more rewarding when they throttle back to devise exchanges of alien information in a language that is purely their own. It still makes perfect sense. —Bill Meyer

**Idiomatic:** (22:38); (23:43); (29:29); (75:55)

**Personnel:** Sandy Ewen, guitar; Weasel Walter, drums, live electronics.

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



## Akira Sakata and Chikamorachi with Masahiko Satoh

### *Proton Pump*

FAMILY VINEYARD 104

★★★★½

Alto saxophonist Akira Sakata is a veteran of Japan's free-music scene of the late 1960s. He's heard here with his current Chicamorachi trio—bassist Darian Gray and drummer Chick Corsano—and augmented by pianist Masahiko Satoh. The music on *Proton Pump*, recorded in 2015 at Tokyo's Pitt Inn, would have been right at home in any number of American lofts a few

decades back.

Satoh's piano seems to react to Sakata's tirades on the title track, but on the torrential "Voyage Of Eukaryote," he veers from the whirlwind to play chords before signaling its conclusion with blues changes. This outfit can ramp up the intensity quickly, and the ensemble work favors sonic thunderstorms, but not without some much-needed lyrical and pastoral interludes. Corsano's drums are more prominent than the piano, and they push the band hard, if not envelop it, during the conclusion of "Bullet Apoptosis." Satoh mixes practiced piano technique with bursts of hammering and jabbing.

The bandleader goes out of his way to vary the instrumental color, his tone wavering from glassy to barbed; one hears shades of Dolfy and Coltrane. His clarinet leavens "Voyage," though his solfeggio vocals on "Chemiosmotic Coupling Of Acorn"—which soar, bellow and scream—are thankfully brief. Still, the range of sound and color by these performers is admirable. And while the run-time looks a bit skimpy, with the frequent denseness of the music, it's just about right. Too much of a good thing, you know?

—Kirk Silsbee

**Proton Pump:** Proton Pump; Bullet Apoptosis; Chemiosmotic Coupling Of Acorn; Voyage Of Eukaryote. (43:41)

**Personnel:** Akira Sakata, alto saxophone, clarinet, vocals, percussion; Masahiko Satoh, piano; Darian Gray, bass, percussion; Chick Corsano, drums.

Ordering info: [family-vineyard.com](http://family-vineyard.com)

## Manuel Valera Trio

### *The Planets*

MAVO 1109

★★★★½

Russian composer Nicolas Slonimsky's 1947 masterpiece *Thesaurus Of Scales And Melodic Patterns*, with its sesquiquintetone progression frolicking happily among interpolations, might seem somewhat intimidating to the non-musician. But Havana-born Manuel Valera's latest trio album, *The Planets*, is the pianist's galactic take on the heady explorations contained within the pages of the book, which was studied by John Coltrane, among others.

Contributions from bassist Hans Glawischnig, drummer E.J. Strickland and Valera's brainy explorations bloom from motivic melodic seeds. After working together as a trio for four years, impressionistic cosmic interpretations emerge, sourced from ancient Greek and Roman planetary mythology, as Valera (a Grammy-nominated New York resident) features Debussy and Ravel-inspired interludes.

"Sun Prelude I" launches the suite with stormy, pensive piano, segueing into a bass ostinato groove and modal flavors with Valera's "Mercury The Messenger." Stream-of-consciousness "Venus-Peace" shows Valera is on top of Slonimsky's scalar and chromatic shapes, borrowing from the kaleidoscop-



ic classical music tradition with a Latin-jazz sensibility.

Modal trading with piano call-and-response finalizes "Neptune-Prophet Of The Seas." Valera's dazzling piano lines lead to playful solo drums and torrential melodies, capping his ambitious planetary suite and offering both turbulent closure and satisfying resolution.

—Kerlie McDowall

**The Planets:** Sun Prelude I; Mercury—The Messenger; Sun Prelude II; Venus—Peace; Intro To Earth; Earth—The History Of Us; Mars—Ancient Warrior; Sun Prelude III; Jupiter—Joyous Thunder; Saturn—The Wise One; Uranus—Morphing Skies; Neptune—Prophet Of The Seas. (55:58)

**Personnel:** Manuel Valera, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; E.J. Strickland, drums.

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

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# Take Excellent Care!

## Health & Fitness for Musicians



Don Braden performs at the Litchfield Jazz Festival.

NATHAN TURNER/LINDSEY VICTORIA PHOTOGRAPHY

The most important thing we can do to enhance the quality of our music is to take excellent care of ourselves. This maximizes our natural energy, confidence, longevity and sense of well-being. It contributes to both the joy of expressing music and the efficacy of the *work*: studying, practicing, performing and traveling. For me, taking excellent care means consistently making smart choices that lead to healthy, strong living, and therefore creative, productive and fun music-making.

Central to all this is eating clean (healthfully) and exercising regularly, but making good choices is not always easy. Our stressful, yet sedentary, modern lifestyle means that we regularly eat for convenience, not health, and that we too often choose not to exercise because of limited time or energy. Furthermore, the standard American diet contains significant amounts of processed foods laden with refined wheat and sugar. These are tasty and addictive (and unhealthy), and therefore influence our decision-making.

Changing and sometimes conflicting information about diet and exercise in general adds more confusion. The net result is that we often do not properly feed or move our bodies, which increases the odds of gaining extra body fat—and of facing conditions such as obesity, chronic inflammation, diabetes (type 2), cancer and atherosclerosis. It also decreases our energy and our will to make better health choices.

Baseball legend Mickey Mantle famously said: “If I had known I would live this long, I would have taken better care of myself!” That idea is consistent with my observations during years of touring. Some people, like Roy Haynes, Avery Sharpe and Robin Eubanks, for example, decided early on to stay healthy and strong for the long term, and the good results are obvious when you see (and hear) them. However, most of us have struggled with our health and fitness, and as we have aged, the challenges have increased. How do we face these challenges, make better choices and keep

swinging for as long as possible?

Based on years of research and experimentation, I recommend the following four ideas:

- 1) Maintain a *lifelong* health-priority mindset.
- 2) Understand that every healthy choice has a positive effect.
- 3) Develop a set of practices to stick with consistently, at home and on the road.
- 4) Embrace the power of teamwork.

A health-priority mindset means energizing your mind to feel strong and healthy 24/7, and embracing the joy and power of that feeling. Being weak is no fun, and being strong is awesome! It also guides daily choices, like taking the stairs and not the elevator, walking instead of standing on the escalator or moving sidewalk, skipping the french fries and ordering salad or a baked potato, selecting brown rice over white, or waking up a few minutes early to do calisthenics. You can train your mind by setting clear health goals. Then take actions to support those goals: visualize (imagine how you want to look and feel), enact mental/verbal affirmations (“I am strong!”), read solid health information and engage with inspiring people. Naturally, feeding your body excellent food also invigorates your mind.

Understanding the power of each choice means you can start health-positive actions right now, regardless of your current condition, and gradually get stronger and healthier. Even small actions help. You achieve the goal of doing 10 (or 100) push-ups a day by starting with one push-up—then keep going.

Developing healthy practices that stick involves knowing yourself and being able to distinguish the things you actually love from those to which you are addicted. It also involves knowing what motivates you, and understanding your personal process for building new habits. The right diet or exercise plan—the one to which you would actually commit—can be very helpful. Most importantly, it involves keeping your daily activities consistent with your life and health goals. All these things require self-reflection, discipline and solid information about healthy, strong living.

Embracing the power of teamwork means that interacting with the right people can be great for your health and fitness. In general, humans are far more effective in pairs



or groups than alone, just like on the bandstand. Find a workout partner or class, a fellow health-conscious musician, a mentor or mentee, someone to cook or shop with, etc.—you will motivate each other. If you fear lack of discipline in yourself, which is common, find the right teammates.

I developed this approach in response to my own bad health habits, which included eating sweet or starchy “comfort food” to feel better. As I aged, this led to increased body fat and lowered energy. I got a further shocker when I had a potentially career-ending medical situation: a cyst inside my jawbone had to be removed surgically by literally opening the jaw itself. Happily, it ended well, and that experience further inspired my health journey. My time as music director of the Litchfield Jazz Camp also has proved invaluable because of its focus on health and fitness in addition to jazz.

The excellent results I have experienced—I’m in the best shape of my life at 54—galvanized my belief that we must commit to a *long-term* vision of taking excellent care of ourselves. That means we address, among other things, those central components of healthy, strong living: eating clean and exercising regularly.

## EATING CLEAN

Like all living things, we function best with food from the Earth—“real” food. Eat and drink a variety of nature-based, nutrient-dense foods, mostly plants, that are as minimally processed as possible. Organically grown is best. This food has thousands of micronutrients that the human body needs for optimal function and stress management. Examples are vegetables, fruits, nuts (raw or sprouted, especially walnuts, cashews, almonds, pistachios), fresh fish (especially those high in omega-3 fatty acids), poultry and eggs from their natural habitats, and organic dairy products in moderation, if your body can handle it.

Avoid food/drinks mainly created in factories. They can taste good, be convenient and cheap, and have a long shelf life. However, most have very little nutrition (even those “fortified” with vitamins), have chemical colorants and preservatives, and many contain significant amounts of refined wheat and sugar. Examples include most bread, pasta, cake, cookies, pie, pastries, crackers, processed meats (all deli meats, hot dogs, Spam) and anything with hydrogenated oils (salad dressing, Nutella, many snack foods).

The most healthful drink, by far, is water. Herbal teas are also good. Minimize the fake drinks—they’re full of chemical sweeteners and colors. Freshly made juice is fine, but most commercial juices, including orange juice, are not healthful because of the processing.

Many Americans simply eat too much, so be mindful of portion sizes. Eat slowly and

chew thoroughly.

You must know your body. Many people can’t tolerate certain real foods containing lactose or gluten, “nightshade” plants (such as tomatoes and eggplants), nuts, shellfish, etc. If your body feels abnormal after eating, seek help from a qualified medical professional.

Intermittent fasting (IF) is simply the practice of fasting for a while every day. IF proponents typically fast for a period of 13 to 16 hours (called a fasting window) and eat during the remaining eight to 11 hours (called the feeding window). The fasting time allows the digestive system to rest, can promote insulin sensitivity (great for blood sugar control) and stimulates the utilization of body fat for fuel. On most days, I break my fast around 1 p.m. and have my last food by 10 p.m. (musician hours!). When I started working out before breaking my fast, which took a little getting used to, my excess body fat easily burned off.

**Get additional health-related wisdom and advice from Don Braden at [downbeat.com/health](http://downbeat.com/health)**

Because real food is perishable, eating healthfully does require more frequent food shopping. In general, I shop the periphery of any grocery store, since that’s where most of the healthy food (produce, dairy, fresh meat) lives. I go through the aisles for olive oil, canned beans or dark chocolate, but the aisles mainly contain packaged factory-food. I try to shop in as eco-friendly a way as possible.

Key to healthful eating on the road are preparation and knowing which foods travel well. I usually carry a small dedicated food bag when I travel, and every day I stock it with whatever healthy stuff I can find: apples, nuts, boiled eggs (in the shell), carrots and celery sticks. Many transport hubs now have decent packaged salads, “protein mixes” of nuts and cheese, and other good options. While I don’t recommend protein bars (most have too many chemicals and sugar), I usually keep a couple of Kind or GoMacro bars handy in case everything else runs out. I usually bring a water bottle (stainless steel is the safest—avoid plastic) and refill it regularly.

## EXERCISE

Our bodies are designed to move, so developing good physical strength, agility, flexibility and balance is important. Plus, *a strong body handles stress much more effectively than a weak one*. Daily exercise is ideal, but you don’t have to go to the gym for hours. Here are some tips:

- Envision how you would like to look and feel. This is very important. You become what you think, so imagine yourself as strong as you would like to be and synchronize those thoughts with the appropriate actions. Nurture your health-priority mindset.

- Check with your doctor before you begin a new exercise program. Start gradually and do not overdo it, especially at first. It can take some weeks for your body to adapt to a new, strenuous routine.

- Learn about fitness approaches. Ask your fit friends. Read books and blogs. Try some things to see what works for you. Activities like running, biking, basketball, weightlifting and yoga are great.

- You can do basic calisthenics—push-ups, squats, planks, leg lifts, curls, pull-ups—in almost any location. Even five to 10 minutes daily is beneficial. Remember to breathe, use excellent form and move slowly—this really works the muscles.

- Build natural exercise into your daily routine, whether that involves long walks or hikes, gardening, cycling or walking up stairs. Unless you’ve got a lot of gear to unload, park as far away as possible, and enjoy the walk. Little things like that add up to an active lifestyle.

- Long, low-intensity aerobic sessions are not particularly good for you. Twenty to 30 minutes of aerobic work plus 20 to 30 minutes of strength training is much more effective for overall health, strength and body fat reduction. Also, high-intensity interval training is excellent when you’re ready for it.

- Stretch during and after every workout.

The key to staying fit on the road is realizing that even small actions help. Any travel day can be approached “actively”—for example, take the stairs, or carry your bag instead of rolling it. A morning walk before breakfast is a great way to start the day. Many hotels either have their own fitness rooms or have an arrangement with a local fitness center—inquire when you check in, or, better yet, when you book your reservation.

These days, we have a lot of knowledge and many tools to help us achieve healthy, strong living. With some discipline and a little help as needed, we all can reach our maximum musical and life potential. So, breathe, grab a friend and do something good for your health today and every day. *Take excellent care*, and enjoy life’s journey all the more! **DB**

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For more than 30 years, saxophonist/flutist Don Braden has toured the world leading his own ensembles, as a special guest and as a sideman with jazz greats Betty Carter, Wynton Marsalis, Freddie Hubbard, Tony Williams, Roy Haynes and numerous others. He has released 21 albums as a leader—including his latest, *Earth Wind And Wonder* (Creative Perspective Music), featuring jazz arrangements of songs by Earth Wind & Fire and Stevie Wonder. A renowned educator, Braden has spent more than two decades giving master classes at schools and universities and running first-class educational programs, such as the Litchfield Jazz Camp, NJPAC’s Wells Fargo Jazz For Teens and, most recently, the Harvard University Monday Jazz Band. Visit him online at [donbraden.com](http://donbraden.com).



Pete McGuinness

# Big Band Brass Voicings That 'Ring'

When arrangers refer to a voicing that “rings,” what do we mean? Are there bells in our heads? What it means is that the voicing uses notes that are orchestrated and pitched in a way that, when played as a group, sound supported and solid. You get the feeling that all the instrumental voices work together to create a balanced sound that helps embellish the lead note.

When writing full voicings for the standard eight-member brass section of a big band/jazz orchestra (four trumpets/flugels, four trombones), several things affect the overall sound.

Some of these include the science of overtones, where specific chord tones are placed range-wise and the relative level of intensity a note emits (trumpet vs. trombone). But with some knowledge of solid technique (and some common sense), the beginning arranger can create great brass voicings.

Remember that when writing fully harmonized tutti passages for the entire big band (saxophones included), the brass voicings should be created first. Then you can overlay solid saxophone voicings in a variety of ways (another subject entirely). This article will focus on sev-

eral commonly used tutti brass voicings that have been used by countless arrangers for many years. These will not be, by any means, the only voicings available, but ones that will help novice arrangers get started.

First thing to remember: A trombone is basically a “big trumpet” pitched exactly one octave lower. That said, a trumpet and a trombone when voiced in one octave will have the same level of “intensity.” In brass tutti writing, we are harmonizing the lead trumpet down. The lead trumpet is the melody, so we don’t want the ear to fight to hear it. Even if on a lower note, if the lead trombone is voiced much higher relative to the trumpet’s level of intensity, there might be an imbalance in the overall sound. Be careful. Likewise, if the ’bones are voiced much lower relative to the trumpets, their lower level of intensity might not support the higher level of the trumpets (unless one uses the saxes to “fill the gap”). There is no single way to solve these issues; just keep this basic idea in mind.

There are many voicings for the trumpet and trombone sections that work together nicely. Before we look at them, consider a couple of common-sense tips. Tight voicings (close or cluster) can sound shrill for higher-range trumpets and can be difficult to play in tune. The opposite is true for the trombone section, where tight low-range voicings can sound muddy. This trombone voicing problem relates to the “lower interval limits” of chord tones/intervals. I suggest reading *Jazz Arranging Techniques* by Gary Lindsay for more on this, as well as many more specifics not covered in this article (ranges/transposition, other types of voicings/combinations, etc.).

Much of the time, it is the job of the trombones to provide the third and seventh of the chord quality below the trumpets (which might be in a structure that does not provide one or more of these chord tones). That said, here are a variety of commonly used voicings that create different overall sounds for the brass section.

Example 1 shows these various voicings for both trumpets and trombones. All of the trumpet voicings work with flugel horns as well. But keep in mind that flugels generally don’t have as high a range as trumpets, but do have a fuller sound in the lower register. I have gone from tightest to widest for both trumpets and trombones. Note that trumpet voicings go from “cluster” to “ambi” (Lindsay’s term) and seldom span more than one octave, while trombones can have a much wider overall voicing range.

Different combinations of trumpet/trombone voicings will create different effects. From the rich/tight sound of both sections in cluster, to the “skyscraper of sound” achieved with

trumpets in triad/double lead (with trumpet IV an octave below trumpet I) over a big-spread voicing in the bones, there are many possibilities. It all depends on the effect the arranger wants.

I generally start with voicing the trumpets first, then add the trombones below, after selecting a good lead trombone note to voice down from. It might be overlaying a lower trumpet (“coupling”) or using an entirely different note than the trumpets for more harmonic richness. The “Basie style” tutti voicing is very easy to create (trumpets in four-way close voicing, repeated exactly one octave lower in the trombones), keeps the melody very clear (as it is doubled in octaves via trumpet I and trombone I) and is excellent for faster/more dense moving passages. This voicing style was popular with many of the writers for Count Basie and also can be found in many charts by Bill Holman. The wider “triad over spread” might work best when there is a dramatic moment in the chart, perhaps on a longer note using powerful high trumpets and a need for a large-sounding structure. Note that the trumpet triads can be made up of more basic chord tones or built on upper extensions (referred to as “upper structure triads”).

Thad Jones was very fond of trumpets in “UST” over a variety of ’bone voicings (close, drop-2, spread, others). The more cluster-oriented voicings might work best when trumpets are in their lower range and when the arranger wants a more rich and/or intimate sound. I often think of flugels and softer volumes with this structure. Both sections can be in clusters, or only the trumpets with ’bones using other types. If you only learn to use the three tutti structures mentioned above, you are well on your way. Note all combinations shown in Example 2.

Finally, let’s look at some examples from actual big band arrangements. The first (Example 3) is from a shout chorus I wrote many years ago in one of my earliest efforts as an arranger. This example employs the “Basie style” throughout. Note the passing tone harmonization types as well. The second (Example 4) is from an arrangement I did on “O Tannenbaum” (aka “Oh Christmas Tree”), which my own New York big band recently performed. It is set in a slower tempo with lower-range trumpets in a quiet, relaxed setting. Using flugels for trumpets here would be a nice option. The third (Example 5) is from the same “O Tannenbaum” chart, here at the beginning of the big “shout chorus,” featuring strong high-register trumpets. Note the style of voicings used versus those in Example 4 (e.g., frequent triad/double lead structures in the trumpets, bigger voicings in the bones at times, etc.).

Of course, there are many other things that can be done with brass: unisons/octaves, counterpoint, one section as melody/the other as accompaniment, not to mention how they can interweave with the saxes and/or woodwinds. There is also the big world of mute combinations. But for the beginner, it is good to get the basics under the fingers, first learning these craft-oriented techniques.

I also suggest listening for these structures when hearing actual big bands (on recordings or live), where the brass is in tutti structures, to see if any of the voicing types learned here can be detected. And, of course, studying great arrangers’ works (ideally while listening to respective recordings) is key to getting all of this into the inner musical ear, which is the most important place for the imagination to work.

Once these and many other successful voicings are understood and can be used well, the maturing arranger can experiment with new or undiscovered structures from a true place of knowledge and the rich historical background of this great art form we call big band/jazz orchestra arranging, creating sounds that may “ring” in new ways. **DB**

Pete McGuinness is an Associate Professor of Jazz Studies/Arranging at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey. He has been a performing jazz artist (trombone, vocalist, composer-arranger) in New York City since 1987, has released four CDs as a leader and appears on more than 50 others. McGuinness leads his own New York big band, The Pete McGuinness Jazz Orchestra, and has received three Grammy nominations for his arranging work. Many of his big band compositions and arrangements are available from Kendor Music and Smart Chart Music. He is also a member of a new jazz vocal group known as The Royal Bopsters. Visit McGuinness online at [petemcguinness.com](http://petemcguinness.com).

### Example 1

Example 1 shows musical notation for trumpets and trombones. The trumpet part includes four voicing options: a) Clusters (Cma7), b) "4-way close" (Cma7), c) Triad/double lead 8vb (C13#11, Cma7), and d) "Amibi\*" (C13#9, C11#9, (C13#11)). The trombone part includes: a) Clusters (Cma7), b) "4-way close" (Cma7), c) Drop-2 (dr. 2+4) (Cma7), and d) "Spread" (root in tb 4) (Cma7, C13, Cm7). Annotations include "(no 1/2 step with lead)", "(w/9th for root)", "(A6/C7)", "E- G D (UST)", "(w/step and 4ths less-defined chordality)", "Note: both 3rd and 7th in all voicings b-d", "(low/'muddy'?)", "(based on close w/voice 2 8vb)", and "(w/low root/5th)".

### Example 2

Example 2 shows musical notation for trumpets and trombones. The trumpet part includes: "Basie\*" (4-close w/ lower bones), "Muddy Basie\*" (fixed thw-higher!), Clusters OK, and high'shrill 1/2step. The trombone part includes: "muddy" (OK), low/muddy, and F = "avoid tone". Annotations include "(above various bones)", "(E min tri.)", "(G)", "C13#11", "C7alt", "(Ab triad cluster)", "(UST)", "C13sus", "GMa7 close", "close", "spread", "drop-2", "drop-2", "spread", "cluster", "dr.2", "dr.2 b9 (interval)", "add half below for low root?", and "tb. 1 voiced high vs. trp. 1 (unbalanced)".

### Example 3

Example 3 shows musical notation for trumpets and trombones. The trumpet part includes: Med. Fast Swing ♩ = 160, Passing tone chords: a) = chromatic, b) = diatonic, Cma7, A7alt, Dm7, G7alt, Em7, Ebm7, Dm7, G7sus G7tr. Annotations include "(a)", "(b)", and "mf".

### Example 4

Example 4 shows musical notation for trumpets and trombones. The trumpet part includes: Med. Slow Swing ♩ = 120, F7, Gm7, A7, D7(b9), Gm7, (A7), Bb6, C7(b9), F7. Annotations include "mp" and "mf".

### Example 5

Example 5 shows musical notation for trumpets and trombones. The trumpet part includes: A7, D7alt, Eb7, D7alt, Gm7, Gm7(b5), Gm7(b5), C/Bb7, C7alt, F#Ma9, Etc. Annotations include "fp", "f", "ff", "mf", and "mf".

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BY JIMI DURSO

## Jimmy Heath's Tenor Saxophone Solo on 'Gingerbread Boy'

Tenor saxophonist Jimmy Heath qualifies as a jazz icon, performing in the genre for more than 70 years, and composing a number of songs, some of which have become standards. In the 1990s Heath began fronting a big band and recorded *Little Man Big Band* (Verve), which showcases both his ability as a soloist, as well as some of his iconic compositions, including "Gingerbread Boy," a 12-bar blues in B $\flat$ . The transcription here is in concert key transposed down one octave.

Heath's improvisation on these changes provides a great lesson in approaches to straight-ahead jazz playing. We hear a plethora of scale choices, from the meat-and-potatoes of major (bars 10, 19, 34–38, 45), mixolydian (27–28), minor pentatonic (5–6), blues scale (24, 32) and major pentatonic (14), along with chromatic passing tones (ends of bars 9, 18, 35, 45) and arpeggios (8, 17, 23, 37–39, 40, 43) to more esoteric choices (though still within the bebop lexicon), such as diminished scales (4, 23, 40, 46) and melodic minor (9, 15, 21, 23).

Worth noting is how Heath switches between these. Some of the more "outside" sounds, such as the chromatic scale in measure 13, are juxtaposed with more "inside" sounds, like the B $\flat$  major pentatonic in the next bar. He also goes "outside" in the subsequent bar. This back-and-forth happens numerous times, e.g., the diminished scale in bar 4 followed by E $\flat$  mixolydian in the next two bars, as well as the heavy chromaticism in bar 40, leading into a fairly tame long tone on the third of the E $\flat$ 7.

We also hear another common straight-ahead technique in the use of four-note groups. There are two common versions of these: R–2–3–5 (more typical in jazz) and R–3–4–5 (more typical in rock and blues). We hear both in this improvisation: the first in bars 14, 20, 21, 36 and 48, the second in measures 1–3 and 5–7. The advantage of these note groups is that they help define the chord without sounding like an arpeggio—not quite a scale, but not quite a chord. For example, Heath's first lick (bars 1–3) is a B $\flat$  triad with the fourth added. Notice it sounds like the B $\flat$  chord, but also creates a melody. In bars 14 and 19 we have the same thing, although this time with the second, rather than the fourth, added to the triad.

Playing these four-note groups on the chords they relate to is effective, but sometimes Heath uses them in other ways, such as the end of bar 36, where he plays the R–2–3–5 B $\flat$  group on an



Jimmy Heath

F7 chord. This makes sense, as not only is the key of the song B $\flat$ , but the chord in the very next measure is B $\flat$ , and Heath is anticipating the change. Even more interesting are bars 20 and 48. In the latter, he plays a C group (R–2–3–5) on a C minor chord. This also works, as it implies the dominant that would resolve to the F7 coming up (and the E $\flat$  he puts on that makes the "outside" E natural in this chord resolve nicely). There's also the R–3–4–5 in bar 6, which is very clever as he plays a B $\flat$  minor group on an E $\flat$ 7 chord, but this fits well since the B $\flat$  minor group (B $\flat$ –D $\flat$ –E $\flat$ –F) is the fifth, seventh, root and ninth of the underlying harmony. This is especially clever, as the lick works with E $\flat$ 7 but connects it to B $\flat$  (the key of the song).

In bar 20, we hear an E $\flat$  group, but played on a D half-diminished, which seems odd as it contains only one of the chord tones of the underlying harmony. Heath resolves this to what is basically an A $\flat$ m(maj7). Playing the melodic minor scale (which includes the notes of the minor major-seventh chord) a half step up on a dominant chord is another common technique (it also occurs in measure 15), and Heath appears to be thinking of this, but playing the arpeggio instead of the scale. His four-note E $\flat$  group is just setting the A $\flat$ m(maj7) up, which resolves to the Cm.

A similar technique is used with arpeggios in bar 39. The measure begins with descending triplets in the B diminished scale (or the B $\flat$  half-

whole diminished, if you prefer). He then goes into 16th notes and changes to arpeggios—first B $\flat$  (the current chord), followed by D $\flat$ —then plays an E $\flat$  mixolydian lick that resolves into the next bar (an E $\flat$ 7 chord). It's worth noticing that this is the only measure in the entire solo with 16th notes and two beats of triplets in a row. It's not surprising that Heath has intensified the rhythm this close to the end of his improvisation, creating a climax.

In the middle of all this jazz, Heath isn't above some more earthy sounds. In measures 26–32 we hear him using false fingerings, giving his unison F's (G's on tenor) in 26–27 and 31–32 and unison B $\flat$ 's (C's on tenor) in 29–30 different timbres. This

is a common blues trick, imitating the bent-string licks of guitarists. He combines this with another sound common not just to jazz and blues but occurring in most other styles of music: hemiola. By playing two F's with one B $\flat$  (or, in bars 29–30, two B $\flat$ 's and one C) as eighth notes, we have three eighths repeated against a duple subdivision, creating a 3-against-2 polyrhythm.

So, on a common form, the 12-bar blues, Heath presents a solo that shows many of the concepts common to straightahead jazz improvisation. **DB**

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



## Sabian FRX Cymbals *Play 'Quietly' Without Holding Back*

**T**he clever new FRX (Frequency Reduction) line of cymbals from Sabian aims to help drummers keep their perceived volume down without sacrificing sound quality.

The most noticeable feature of these cymbals is the series of holes drilled around the base of the bell. The ride cymbals have an additional series of holes drilled around their edge. Sabian claims that this reduces certain frequencies in cymbals that can be associated with higher volume. The theory is that by reducing these frequencies, the perceived stage volume will be reduced. It's important to state that ultimately the player should be able to control the volume. Sabian, though, has designed cymbals to help drummers have a further degree of control over their cymbals in situations that require a lower or controlled volume. There are several sizes available, including 16-, 17- and 18-inch crashes, 20- and 21-inch rides, and 14-inch hi-hats.

The ride cymbals are a nice medium weight. The bell is unlathed, which gives it more of a raw, cutting sound. Overall, they have a darker, drier sound as a result of the holes, and stick definition is excellent. Even when playing the FRX rides hard, the cymbal wash never gets out of control, and they always keep their composure. Sabian hits the mark here, as these characteristics are

very handy if you're trying to "hold back." Both rides produced a certain high-pitch frequency that I found somewhat distracting when performing more intricate stick patterns (e.g., fast swing or Latin styles), but this is only a minor problem considering the major benefits these cymbals offer.

The trio of crash cymbals are a nice complement to the two rides. They are a medium-light weight, and have a focused, airy, dry sound. You can hit the crashes rather hard and they never get out of control. The 16-inch speaks quickly, like some of the best fast crashes. The 17- and 18-inch also speak quickly, but have a bit more body and cutting power. Out of the entire FRX line, I think these three crashes best accomplish what Sabian was going for.

The hi-hats are similar in design to the other cymbals. The top cymbal has a single row of holes around the base of the bell, and the bottom cymbal has no holes at all. The bells are unlathed and they are a nice medium weight. Stick definition is excellent, and they have a clear, defined "chip" sound. They blend very well with the other cymbals in the FRX line and are easy to control.

If you want to reduce the sonic space your cymbals occupy in quieter performances environments, Sabian FRX is a great option. —Ryan Bennett

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

## Zylia ZM-1 Microphone *Multi-Track in a Single Pack*

**W**hat if you could combine the convenience of a single microphone setup with the editing power of a multi-track recording session? Poland-based manufacturer Zylia set out to do just that, and the result is the ZM-1, a USB mic capable of capturing multiple sound sources in a single pass and separating them into individual audio tracks on the fly.

At the core of this new concept in recording is the hardware: a spherical microphone that houses 19 individual omnidirectional capsules arranged in a 360-degree pattern. Basically, the ZM-1 captures a three-dimensional, 19-channel image of your music by utilizing the array of microphones. The rest of the magic is executed through the Zylia Studio software, which can

detect the individual sound sources and decode the multi-channel file. The Zylia package can be purchased in two configurations. The Studio Set (\$499) features the ZM-1 microphone and the Studio software package, providing everything needed to record and export your audio files. The Studio Pro Set (\$749), which adds the Studio Pro plug-in and Ambisonics Converter for surround sound, will add a higher level of control.

Getting started with Zylia is surprisingly quick and easy—the company has done an excellent job in making a fairly complex technology extremely user friendly. I was impressed with the ZM-1's futuristic appearance and sturdy build quality. A long USB cable is included, as well as a tripod stand for table-

top use and a threaded socket for mounting on a microphone stand.

The first step is to download and install the drivers, followed by the software installers. After connecting the mic and launching the software, you are given the option to start a new session or open a previously created session. When creating a new session, Zylia prompts you to select a preset configuration or create your own. To create a session, choose the “automatic calibration” option, which brings you to the sound source selection window. Here, you add the instruments and voices that will be recorded during your session.

The calibration process begins with each sound source being recorded individually for eight seconds. (According to Zylia, this is an absolutely critical step in the process.) The software will process each source and identify its exact location around the ZM-1, displaying the results in a circular diagram on-screen. You can drag individual icons to tweak the exact location after calibration.

Now, you are ready to record. Zylia records in 24-bit, 48kHz WAV format, and your completed recording can be previewed in stereo. You also can choose to export the stereo file or the “raw” file, which is the full 19-track image that the ZM-1 captures.

The real power of the ZM-1 comes alive when you take the next step: separating the individual tracks of your session. You can individually adjust the levels of each track, solo/mute and even pan. Once you achieve a satisfactory mix, it can be exported in stereo, or you can export each track separately for further editing in your DAW. I found that you really can get amazing results by tweaking angle and distance of sound sources around the ZM-1.

The Studio Pro Set provides additional control over tracking and post editing. The AU and VST Pro plug-in is compatible with any DAW that supports tracks of at least 19 channels, so software such as Pro-Tools, Logic Pro and Cubase are not directly compatible. Zylia recommends packages such as Reaper or Ardour, or you can achieve indirect support through Rewire. The extended functionality offered through the Studio Pro Set plug-in includes the ability to record with Zylia directly within a DAW or import a “raw” 19-channel file from Zylia Studio, real-time separation of sound sources and post-production editing of virtual microphones.

The Zylia system is a visionary product that offers a world of possibilities to musicians who now have the ability to create a more accurate representation of their art with just a single microphone and a laptop.

—Keith Baumann

[zylia.co](http://zylia.co)



## Casio CT-X700

### Powerful, Portable, Amazing Price Point

Casio has been offering great affordable keyboards in the portable format, and the CT-X700 continues this tradition. Weighing in at a feather-light 9.1 pounds, and featuring battery power (six AAs), it’s pretty amazing how much the company was able to fit into this little board, and how good it sounds at a street price of only \$175. You read that right—\$175!

The CT-X700 has 61 full-size keys, which are piano-style, though not weighted. It feels a little springy, but comfortable to play, and sturdy. There are speakers built-in—still keeping things portable—and although they are only 5 watts (2.5 watts each), they put out enough volume for home use, and sound decent, too. Should you want to go through an amp or mixer, you can use the headphone output, which you’d have to split, but that’s a solution that’s only a cheap “Y” cable away. Casio also includes a smartphone shelf on the front panel, big enough for a phablet.

The back panel has a damper pedal jack, and a 1/8-inch input, so you can play your portable music player through it, too. Thoughtfully, Casio has included an effects algorithm to remove vocals should you want to sing along to your favorite tracks. There is also a jack for the included AC adapter, and a USB “B” port to connect to your computer, both for MIDI and data transfer. There are no full-size MIDI ports, but again, at this price, you are getting a lot, and adapters are available if you need the five-pin option.

Internally, the CT-X700 comes with 600 “tones” (which is Casio’s term for patches). These are surprisingly good, and owe that to the new AiX chip inside. This sound generator is specifically designed to enhance the acoustic samples inside—piano, bass, guitar, etc. There are a wide variety of these sounds, including 20 pianos, assorted organs and a well-thought-out assortment of others. Synth sounds are well represented, too, and they sound fat and meaty. There are no pitch or mod wheels, which would have been nice, but in a package this small with internal speakers, the omission is understandable. You also can easily split the keyboard, and the split point is assignable—a nice touch in this budget range. Layers are easy, too, and you can combine a layer into a split. While the CT-X700 won’t be replacing your Montage or Stage 3 any time soon, it blows away everything else remotely close to this price and portability.

Also included in the CT-X700 are 195 rhythms and 160 songs. The songs are there for you to play along with or learn, and using the Step-Up lesson system, you can follow the notation and fingering on the display. You can also connect the keyboard to your computer and download new songs as they become available. Arranger functions make it easy to put together songs using the six-track sequencer—and again, all of your work can be uploaded to a computer to make more room as you need it. Casio has included a wide range of drum and percussion sounds to help make sure you can create good tracks in whatever style you choose. The on-board arpeggiator is robust and offers a lot of options to spice up your playing, both sequenced and live. And if you just want to dash off a quick sketch, you can use the standard record/playback recorder.

Once again, Casio has demonstrated its commitment to bringing a quality instrument to the budget range with the CT-X700. If you are looking for something small to learn on, or a portable board to bring along to the beach, or even something small to stash in your car for unexpected jamming possibilities, you have to give this one a look.

—Chris Neville

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

## S.E. Shires CVLA B-flat Trumpet

*Vintage Design, Open Sound, Multiple Bore Options*

When invited to play-test the new S.E. Shires CVLA Vintage Los Angeles B-flat Trumpet, I was quite excited. I was also a bit doubtful, because I've performed on the same instrument for several decades. I had never played on a Shires horn but was aware that they're known for their high quality.

From the moment I opened the case, I saw something special. The traditional floral-pattern engraving on the bell is quite elegant. The craftsmanship, clean lines and solid feel gave me confidence to try something new. I tooted a few notes and was quite pleased. I decided to put it through my daily grind of playing for a week, including private and group music mentoring, a concert band setting, big band rehearsal and several combo gigs.

This particular S.E. Shires Vintage Los Angeles model, the CVLA-M, had a .545-inch medium bore. Large-bore (CVLA-L, .462-inch) and extra-large-bore (CVLA-XL, .465-inch) versions also are available.

Warming up on long tones felt effortless, with a bit more back pressure than I am used to on my

large-bore horn. The notes centered in all ranges. This is an extremely efficient trumpet. I was able to back off, yet keep a bright, open sound. This was particularly true in the upper range. Notes below the staff and pedal tones spoke with an ease that is hard to describe. As I picked up my pace, the valves felt fluid. Scales and etudes flowed extremely well.

Next came visits with my students. All noticed the change from my regular horn and wanted to know what was in my hands. I explained that the CVLA-M has a 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch extra lightweight yellow brass bell with a standard bead—and, although you can't see it, a brazed side seam. I showed them that when you flick the bell with your fingernail, it has a nice ring to it.

The U26 lead pipe with .346-inch venture can create a change in air velocity that helps to give this horn its special sound and feel. The valve pistons are hand-lapped Monel for strength and durability. The two-piece casings on the valve clusters are lightweight with yellow brass balusters. The lacquer finish will last for years. Often, blending with a student can be a challenge. During duets with my

students, I was able to match their volume and/or intonation issues with ease. The flexibility of this Shires trumpet made it easy.

As a former big band lead player, I find it difficult at times to blend in a concert band setting. I was surprised to find that with a little effort, I could match others within the trumpet section. Again, the ease and playability of this trumpet astounded me. Other players in my section tried the CVLA-M and made similar comments. Being on the opposite side of the horn, I was able to appreciate the tonal quality and resonance of the instrument.

Big band rehearsal was so much fun. Section work blended extremely well. Solos were fluid. On ballads, I was able to back off to create a rich (if a little bright), balanced sound. Sixteenth-note licks flowed quite well. The slotting in the upper register was impeccable. Popping out double G's toward the end of a two-hour rehearsal brought some smiles to the room. Not once did I feel a need to pull my regular horn out of its case.

Combo work is my meat-and-potatoes: jazz standards played tastefully on a muted trumpet from the corner of a restaurant in a duo, trio or quartet. The CVLA-M fit the bill perfectly. When playing in a bucket mute or adjustable cup, I found this trumpet to be a nice fit. With a harmon mute, there was too much back pressure for my taste—however, I'm confident that the larger-bore instruments in the CVLA line would have been more accommodating in this area.

The S.E. Shires Vintage Los Angeles trumpet is a horn I highly recommend. Its artisanship and design are flawless. It feels like a vintage horn, but it plays like a dream.

—Jim Jacobs



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More info: [hartke.com](http://hartke.com)

## 2. Get a Kick

Vic Firth has introduced the VicKick Wood Shaft Beater (VKB5), developed in collaboration with Peter Erskine. The VKB5's large maple shaft and reduced-size felt head create an even distribution of weight from top to bottom, resulting in smoother action and more control. A standard-size rod and tapered wood shaft ensure that the beater fits into virtually any pedal setup with plenty of clearance over the cam.

More info: [vicfirth.com](http://vicfirth.com)

## 3. Notation Perspectives

Berklee Press has released a new book to help musicians learn the nuances of writing notation and creating polished scores. *Berklee Contemporary Music Notation*, by Jonathan Feist, offers practical modern perspectives on the subject. From traditional staves to guitar tablature, the book discusses hundreds of notation symbols and general guidelines for writing music.

More info: [halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com)

## 4. Multi-Angle Enclosures

D.A.S. Audio's Altea 700 series includes two models: the Altea-715A and the Altea-712A. Both incorporate an injection-molded polypropylene enclosure that delivers outstanding acoustic properties while keeping the system lightweight for enhanced portability. The enclosure's multi-angle design widens the range of applications, making it possible to deploy Altea loudspeakers as stage monitors without the need of additional gear.

More info: [dasaudio.com](http://dasaudio.com)

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The Trente LED Lamp from Manhasset has 30 LED bulbs for full-width coverage of music stands. Featuring a durable ABS case construction with a pivoting lamp head to allow for easy adjustment of the light bar, the Trente LED offers high and low illumination settings.

More info: [manhassetstands.com](http://manhassetstands.com)

## 6. Copper-Bell Flugel

Schilke now is offering a copper bell option for its 1040-FL Custom series flugelhorn. The 1040-FLC-L includes an upgraded third slide trigger outfitted with exotic wood. The design adds an improved shape and length to the trigger for a more balanced, comfortable design. The copper bell creates a warmth and smoothness to the sound.

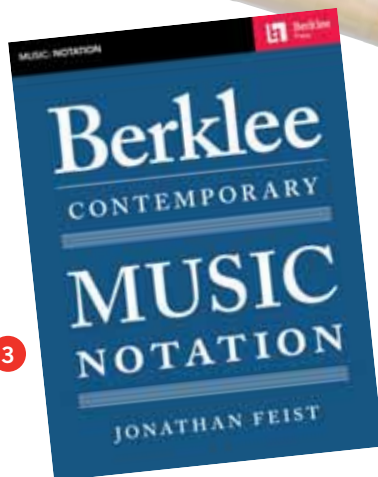
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# STUDENT

MUSIC AWARDS



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of 2018

Zack Shubert of Carlmont High School in Belmont, California, is the recipient of two Student Music Award honors. See page 100. (Photo: Jeff Bartee)

# WELCOME TO THE

## 41ST ANNUAL DOWNBEAT STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS



Pacific Standard Time from California State University, Long Beach

**THE DOWNBEAT STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS** honor the achievements of today's top student musicians and their teachers. The results of this year's 41st edition, presented in the following pages, show jazz education to be in a vibrant state at every stage from junior high to grad school.

Motivated students are digesting more information and playing at higher levels than ever before, thanks in large part to the dedicated educators who set them up for success and the schools that provide them with a proper learning environment. And, as previous editions of the Student Music Awards have proven time and again, these students are going on to do great things. Indeed, the future of jazz finds itself in good hands as this next generation makes its way through the halls of academia and begins to emerge on the scene.

As we bestow honors upon our most promising students, it's important to acknowledge the contributions of exemplary educators who have devoted their lives to preparing students for real-world work as musicians and music business professionals. This year, we are proud to honor two distinguished music teachers with DownBeat's Jazz Education

Achievement award.

Christine Helferich Guter, director of the vocal jazz program at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University, Long Beach since 2002, instills a sense of artistic honesty in her students. Her program has been honored with close to 30 Student Music Awards since 2006.

Cuahtémoc "Moc" Escobedo has directed jazz and concert bands at Seattle's Eckstein Middle School since 1994. He takes an all-inclusive approach to leading student jazz ensembles, one that has garnered 15 Student Music Award honors over the years.

The highest teaching honor this year goes to Davey S. Yarborough, whom we welcome into the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame. We celebrate his 32-year tenure as jazz studies director and saxophone instructor at Washington D.C.'s Duke Ellington School of the Arts, where he has become a role model of consistency and quality to students who have traveled to perform at prestigious jazz festivals.

Congratulations to all of this year's Student Music Award honorees. We hope you find their stories inspiring, and we bet you'll be hearing a lot more from them in the future. **DB**

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#### Junior High School Winners

##### Henry Acker

###### Guitar

Duxbury Middle School  
Jill Norenberg  
Duxbury, MA

##### Brandon Goldberg

###### Piano

Miami Arts Charter School  
Paul Posnak  
Miami, FL

#### Junior High School Outstanding Performances

##### Dylan Buckser-Schulz

###### Drums

Lagond Music School  
Jerad Lippi  
Elmsford, NY

##### Gabriel Severn

###### Bass

Loyalsock Township Middle School  
Eddie Severn  
WilliamSPORT, PA

##### Zane Smith

###### Piano

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, UT

#### High School Winner

##### Zack Shubert

###### Piano

Carlmont High School  
Peter Horvath  
Belmont, CA

#### High School Outstanding Performances

##### Esteban Castro

###### Piano

Bergen County Academies  
Phillip Kavin  
Hackensack, NJ

##### Zaq Davis

###### Trumpet

Saint Ann's School  
Jon Heim  
Brooklyn, NY

##### Eugene Kim

###### Piano

Lexington High School

Pat Donaher  
Lexington, MA

#### Performing Arts High School Winner

##### Gabe Rupe

###### Bass

Colorado Conservatory of the Arts  
Eric Gunnison  
Denver, CO

#### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

##### Summer Camargo

###### Trumpet

Dillard Center for the Arts  
Christopher Dorsey  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL

#### Community College Outstanding Performance

##### Jacob Abinante

###### Piano

El Camino College  
Amy Bormet  
Torrance, CA

#### Undergraduate College Winners

##### Luca Mendoza

###### Piano

University of Southern California  
Thornton School of Music  
Alan Pasqua  
Los Angeles, CA

##### Caleb Smith

###### Trombone

Oberlin Conservatory  
Robin Eubanks  
Oberlin, OH

#### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

##### Jamael Dean

###### Piano

University of the Pacific,  
Brubeck Institute  
Patrick Langham  
Stockton, CA

##### Anthony Ferrara

###### Tenor Saxophone

NYU Steinhardt  
David Pietro  
New York, NY



**Sean Mason**

*Piano*

University of North Carolina  
at Greensboro  
Ariel Pocock  
Greensboro, NC

**Eric Nakanishi**

*Alto Saxophone*

Berklee College of Music  
Ralph Peterson  
Boston, MA

**Graduate College Winners**

**Patrick Hogan**

*Piano*

University of Nevada,  
Las Vegas  
David Loeb  
Las Vegas, NV

**Nathan Reising**

*Alto Saxophone*

New England Conservatory  
Frank Carlberg  
Boston, MA

**Graduate College  
Outstanding Performance**

**Brandon Moore**

*Tenor Saxophone*

University of North Texas  
Richard DeRosa  
Denton, TX



Jazz Ensemble I from Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, Jacksonville, FL

**SMALL JAZZ COMBO**

**Junior High School  
Outstanding Performance**

**Jazz Combo**

Edna Brewer Middle School  
Zack Pitt-Smith  
Oakland, CA

**High School Winners**

**So Fly Zone**

Ann Arbor Community  
High School  
Jack Wagner  
Ann Arbor, MI

**The Mingus Trio**

Rio Americano High School

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**High School  
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James Wasko  
Montclair, NJ

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Los Angeles, CA

#### Colburn Jazz Workshop Monday Night Band

Colburn Community  
School of Performing Arts  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, CA

### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

#### Hamilton 'A' Combo

Hamilton High School  
Academy of Music and  
Performing Arts  
Jim Foschia  
Los Angeles, CA

#### Impulse

Denver School of the Arts  
Dave Hammond  
Denver, CO

### Honors Ensemble Winner

#### Advanced High School Jazz Workshop I

The Jazzschool at California  
Jazz Conservatory  
Michael Zilber  
Berkeley, CA

### Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performance

#### SFJAZZ All-Stars Combo

SFJAZZ  
Dann Zinn  
San Francisco, CA

### Community College Winner

#### IATA Jazz Quartet

Cuesta College  
Ron McCarley  
San Luis Obispo, CA

### Undergraduate College Winners

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#### Jake Victor 5tet

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Brubeck Institute  
Patrick Langham  
Stockton, CA

#### José Valentino & Shawn Perkinson's Jazz Artist Ensemble

Lee University  
Dr. José Valentino Ruiz-Resto  
Cleveland, TN

### Graduate College Winner

#### UNLV Honors Quartet

University of Nevada,  
Las Vegas  
David Loeb  
Las Vegas, NV

### LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE

### Junior High School Winners

#### Little Big Band

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse



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# JAZZ INSTRUMENTAL SOLOIST



Zack Shubert



Caleb Smith



Summer Camargo

## Early Experiences Shape Jazz Players

**The earliest and often most important** influence on young artists is their parents. Whether simply through support and encouragement or through hours of hands-on assistance in the honing of playing techniques, a burgeoning musician is shaped first by their family life.

For Zack Shubert, this year's Jazz Instrumental Soloist winner at the high school level, that meant having parents who recognized his natural inclinations and helped build upon them. Growing up in the Bay Area, Shubert was drawn to the piano, and he demonstrated an innate ear for melody.

"I've always tinkered around on any piano I could find," Shubert said. "My parents realized that I kept picking little things up from what I was listening to, and I started taking lessons at 5 years old."

Now a junior at Carlmont High School in Belmont, California, Shubert maintains an active performance schedule while taking courses in a program called Middle College, through which he earns credit toward his high school graduation, as well as college. While those experiences undoubtedly would give him a leg up in a professional career in the Bay, visits to New York convinced the pianist that a move was in the cards.

"I plan to go to college in New York," he said. "The first time I went there I couldn't get enough of it. I went to the Village Vanguard and to one of the late-night jam sessions at Smalls."

Trumpeter Summer Camargo—who received an Outstanding Performance honor in the Performing Arts High School division—was raised in a household where big band and

swing music were the soundtrack. That planted the seed for her love of jazz, but she also might have inherited some of her talent from her grandfather, an evangelist who accompanied his preaching on guitar. His passing shortly before the competition deadline influenced Camargo's choice of material.

"I played [Benny Golson's] 'I Remember Clifford' in memory of my grandpa," she said. "I was thinking of him when I played and tried to put as much emotion as I could into it."

A junior at the Dillard Center for the Arts in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Camargo intends to continue her studies at a music conservatory. Christopher Dorsey, Dillard's director of jazz studies and instrumental music, said, "Summer will be a force in the future of jazz, as well as in any style of music she decides to perform."

Trombonist Caleb Smith, who studies with Robin Eubanks at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio, is a winner in the Undergraduate College division of the Jazz Instrumental Soloist category (along with Luca Mendoza, a pianist at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music). Smith first heard music attending church with his parents in Cleveland, and he discovered jazz after picking up the trombone as a 5th grader. He later created a successful GoFundMe campaign to finance his trip to the Banff International Workshop in Jazz & Creative Music in Canada, where he studied with pianist Vijay Iyer and drummer Andrew Cyrille.

Inspired by such influential composer-performers as Ambrose Akinmusire, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, Smith hopes to follow in their footsteps after attending grad-



Nathan Reising

uate school. "I see myself playing my music," he said. "I've been getting into Indian classical music a lot recently, so maybe down the road I could try to insert the trombone voice into that scene. I want to be able to expand upon anything and everything."

Now in his final months in the master's program at New England Conservatory in Boston, alto saxophonist Nathan Reising is a winner in the Graduate College division (along with pianist Patrick Hogan, of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas). Reising began taking piano lessons at age 4. One of the treasures in his father's extensive record collection led him to the saxophone a few years later: John Coltrane's classic 1961 album *My Favorite Things*.

Reising's enthusiasm for instrumental jazz runs parallel to his love for singer-songwriters. He hopes to meld those two passions in some way in his future career. "I think lyrics help music resonate with a lot of people," he said. "It's important that the music I make be able to emotionally connect with listeners."

—Shaun Brady

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High School Outstanding Performance

#### Zaq Davis, Trumpet

*Precollege, Student of Jonathan Heim*

### Esteban Castro, Piano

*Precollege, Student of Phillip Kawin and Jeremy Manasia*

### Latin Group

Graduate College Winner

#### MSM Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra

Bobby Sanabria, Director

### Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Honors Ensemble Outstanding Soloist

#### Alexandra Meli, Voice

Outstanding Soloist on "Haven't We Met"

The New York All State Vocal Jazz Ensemble

*Precollege, Student of Karen Beardsley*

### Original Composition—Small Ensemble

Undergraduate College Outstanding Composition

#### Matt Wong, "Emptyful"

*Student of Jim McNeely*

### Original Composition—Small Ensemble

High School Outstanding Composition

#### Esteban Castro, "Swan Song"

*Precollege, Student of Phillip Kawin and Jeremy Manasia*

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Jazz Ensemble I from University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, UT

**Sutter Middle School Jazz Band**

Sutter Middle School  
John Zimny  
Folsom, CA

**Junior High School Outstanding Performances**

**Folsom Middle School Jazz Band**

Folsom Middle School  
John Zimny  
Folsom, CA

**Jane Addams Middle School Jazz Band**

Jane Addams Middle School  
Deborah Schaaf  
Seattle, WA

**High School Winners**

**Jazz Band I**

Folsom High School  
Curtis Gaesser  
Folsom, CA

**Jazz Ensemble**

Downey High School  
Corneliu Olariu  
Downey, CA

**High School Outstanding Performances**

**Jazz Band I**

Harvard-Westlake School  
Shawn Costantino  
Studio City, CA

**Jazz Ensemble**

Tarpon Springs High School  
Christopher De Leon  
Tarpon Springs, FL

**VCS Radio Jazz Ensemble**

Vacaville Christian School  
Ralph Martin  
Vacaville, CA

**Performing Arts High School Winners**

**Colburn Jazz Workshop Big Band**

Colburn Community School of Performing Arts  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, CA

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Las Vegas Academy of the Arts  
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FACULTY MENTOR: Dan Wall

**CALEB SMITH, TROMBONE**

Jazz Soloist, Undergraduate College  
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## Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

### Ambassador Jazz Orchestra

Orange County School of the Arts  
Daniel St. Marseille  
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### Jazz Ensemble I

Douglas Anderson School of the Arts  
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## Honors Ensemble Winners

### Crescent Super Band

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
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Salt Lake City, UT

### SFJAZZ High School All-Stars Big Band

SFJAZZ  
Paul Contos  
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### Time Check Jazz Orchestra

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, UT

## Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

### Jazz at Lincoln Center Youth Orchestra

Jazz at Lincoln Center  
Ted Nash  
New York, NY

### Studio Band

The Jazzschool at California Jazz Conservatory  
Dave Eshelman  
Berkeley, CA

## Community College Winner

### Jazz Ensemble

Mt. San Antonio College  
Jeff Ellwood  
Walnut, CA

## Community College Outstanding Performances

### Oceanside Jazz Orchestra

MiraCosta College  
Steve Torok  
Oceanside, CA

### Jazz Ensemble

Riverside City College  
Charlie Richard  
Riverside, CA

## Undergraduate College Winner

### Jazz Ensemble

Lawrence University  
Patricia Darling  
Appleton, WI

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

### Jazz Ensemble I

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire  
Robert Baca  
Eau Claire, WI

### BYU Synthesis Big Band

Brigham Young University  
Ray Smith  
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Jennifer Barnett from Haslett High School, Haslett, MI



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# SMALL JAZZ COMBO



Colburn Jazz Workshop Thursday Night Band



UNLV Honors Quartet



Colburn Jazz Workshop Monday Night Band



Kei Matsumaru Trio

## Crafting Original Works for Combos

**Strong original compositions and arrangements** were a through-line for this year's winners in the Small Jazz Combo category.

One of the submissions that alto saxophonist and Berklee College of Music undergraduate Kei Matsumaru submitted was of his trio playing his intriguingly titled work "In The Wise Words Of Drunk Koya." The composition was inspired by an episode in which Matsumaru decided to make a recording of a roommate who had been out on the town: "He was just saying some random things, and I transcribed about 10 seconds of what he said to actual pitches," Matsumaru explained. After six months of experimenting, the saxophonist was able to complete the piece for his trio.

But there were other inspirations. He drew on his time growing up in Papua New Guinea, where he heard traditional drumming; a jazz icon served as a muse as well.

"The compositional elements were inspired by Ornette [Coleman]," Matsumaru said. "I was listening to a lot of Ornette at the time—almost exclusively."

In the Undergraduate College division of this category, the co-winners are the Kei Matsumaru Trio and a student-led ensemble (at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam in The

Netherlands) called the Jake Victor 5tet

Victor, a student at Lawrence University, is a classical percussion major who applied to the Conservatorium van Amsterdam as a jazz pianist—a move that he jokingly referred to as "the Chick Corea route."

"Jake's gone absolutely wild for jazz piano," marveled Patricia Darling, Lawrence University's jazz ensemble director. "He's absolutely dedicated. I hear him practicing all the time."

As luck would have it, Victor's roommate, a guitarist, also was accepted in the Conservatorium. During their first jam session, the pair met a bassist from Brussels and a Spanish drummer, and the four instantly bonded. A tenor saxophonist from Estonia joined the jam session festivities the next night, and the Jake Victor 5tet was born. "While over there, I challenged myself to write an idea or full tune every day for a month," Victor said.

"Jake does some really nice writing," Darling said.

The winner at the Graduate College level is the UNLV Honors Quartet (from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas). The group recorded all original compositions for its submission.

"I played musical Cupid by putting these four guys together, and the group congealed

right away," said David Loeb, director of jazz studies at UNLV. "They're intense and relaxed at the same time—natural and very organic. They have a real synergy."

"The quartet was definitely a mix of perspectives," said UNLV pianist Patrick Hogan. "It was an interesting mix of experiences, and it made for some good music."

In the Performing Arts High School division, the co-winners are both from the Colburn Community School of Performing Arts in Los Angeles: the Colburn Jazz Workshop Monday Night Band and the Colburn Jazz Workshop Thursday Night Band.

"We focus on composers the students are interested in," said Lee Secard, chair of the Colburn Jazz Workshop. "But both of these groups are full of composers, so one of the most important things is to do the music that the students write."

For both Colburn's Monday Night and Thursday Night bands, students write arrangements, too. "We like to do Joe Henderson tunes a lot, [plus] Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins," Secard said. He added that young stars on the jazz scene today, such as trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire and tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III, also are influences on his students.

—Yoshi Kato



# 2018 Winners of Eleven **DownBeat Student Music Awards**

## **Large Jazz Ensemble**

Graduate College Co-Winner  
UNC Jazz Lab Band 1  
Dana Landry, Director

## **Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble**

Graduate College Co-Winner  
Vocal Lab  
Kerry Marsh, Director

## **Large Jazz Ensemble**

Graduate College Co-Winner  
All Angles Orchestra  
Mike Conrad, Director

## **Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble**

Graduate College Co-Winner  
Northern Colorado Voices  
Kerry Marsh, Director

## **Original Composition**

Graduate College Winner, Large Ensemble  
Mike Conrad, "Out of the Swamp Into the Sky"  
David Caffey, Professor

## **Jazz Arrangement**

Graduate College Winner, Small Ensemble  
Matteo Sabatini, "Footprints"  
David Caffey, Professor

## **Jazz Arrangement**

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement  
Studio Orchestra  
Mike Conrad, "What is This Thing Called Love"  
David Caffey, Professor

## **Vocal Jazz Soloist**

Undergraduate College Winner  
Allison Wheeler  
Julia Dollison, Professor

## **Vocal Jazz Soloist**

Graduate College Outstanding Performance  
Jenna McLean  
Julia Dollison, Professor

## **Outstanding Vocal Soloist**

Graduate College, Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Lauren Johnston on "Luce Skull", Vocal Lab  
Kerry Marsh, Director

## **Outstanding Vocal Soloist**

Undergraduate College, Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Nick Nelsen on "In The Wineight", Vocalese  
Jenna McLean, Director

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## Graduate College Winners

### All Angles Orchestra

University of Northern Colorado  
David Caffey  
Greeley, CO

### UNC Jazz Lab Band I

University of Northern Colorado  
Dana Landry  
Greeley, CO

## Graduate College Outstanding Performances

### Eastman New Jazz Ensemble

Eastman School of Music  
Dave Rivello  
Rochester, NY

### Frost Studio Jazz Band

University of Miami  
Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, FL

### Jazz Orchestra

Manhattan School of Music  
Jim McNeely  
New York, NY

## VOCAL JAZZ SOLOIST

### Junior High School Winner

#### Ava Preston

Hudson Middle School  
Theron Brown  
Hudson, OH

### Junior High School Outstanding Performance

#### Tessa Korver

Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, WA

### High School Winners

#### Emma Hedrick

Carmel High School  
Michael Pote  
Carmel, IN

#### Brooke Lambert

Roosevelt High School  
Jean-Marie Kent  
Seattle, WA

### High School Outstanding Performances

#### Jennifer Barnett

Haslett High School

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Miami, FL

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**Allison Wheeler**  
University of Northern Colorado  
Julia Dollison  
Greeley, CO

**Undergraduate College  
Outstanding Performances**

**Morgan Pirtle**  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chris Madsen  
Chicago, IL

**Tama Shutts**  
California State University,  
Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, CA

**Graduate College Winner**

**Monica Pabelonio**  
New England Conservatory  
Dominique Eade  
Boston, MA

**Graduate College  
Outstanding Performance**

**Jenna McLean**  
University of Northern Colorado  
Julia Dollison  
Greeley, CO

**SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP**

**High School Winner**

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Cary-Grove High School



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# LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE



Time Check Jazz Orchestra



UNC Jazz Lab Band I



Crescent Super Band



All Angles Orchestra

## Covering Every Style

In this year's Large Jazz Ensemble category, two institutions won a pair of awards within the same division, illustrating that an environment of top-notch instruction can yield extraordinary results.

Two of the three Honors Ensemble winners are from Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse. "The Crescent Super Band is our flagship group," Chapman explained. "They play a whole melting pot of styles: There's 15 instrumentalists, like a traditional big band, and they cover every style from the big band era to Bruno Mars, Beyoncé and The Black Keys.

"All of our other bands are themed," Chapman continued, referring to the 19 other Soundhouse middle and upper school jazz and pop groups. "We're located about a half hour south of Salt Lake City and have students coming from all over the state." Some student musicians have a three-and-a-half-hour drive each way.

"The Time Check Jazz Orchestra focuses on contemporary instrumental big-band music,"

Chapman said of his school's other Honors Ensemble winner. "There are no vocalists, and the focus is on compositions from the past 10 years."

Two groups from the University of North Colorado in Greeley were the winners in the Graduate College division: the UNC Jazz Lab Band I and the All Angles Orchestra. The latter is a woodwinds/brass/string quartet/rhythm section group founded by composer, trombonist and UNC doctoral candidate Mike Conrad.

"What I love about jazz composition is that you can really showcase the personalities of the players, à la Duke Ellington," Conrad said. "And that's great in a school setting, where some of us have known each other and been playing together for three years."

In the Undergraduate College division, the winner was Lawrence University's Jazz Ensemble.

Like the Time Check Orchestra, Lawrence's Jazz Ensemble emphasizes newer compositions. "They basically cover a lot of new music—student compositions and contemporary

jazz works," said Patricia Darling, Lawrence University's jazz ensemble director.

"We're a relatively young group," said Lawrence sophomore Nathan Glaser, a trumpeter. "A lot of seniors graduated, so it gave our band a new start. It's mostly dominated by sophomores, which I find crazy. We have a great drummer who's a junior and a great piano player who's a junior. The new bassist is a sophomore, and she does well."

In the High School division, the winners were both from California: Jazz Band I at Folsom High School and the Jazz Ensemble at Downey High School.

"Because we have three full jazz bands as classes, it's mainly upperclassmen with a couple of freshmen," Folsom High School Music Director Curtis Gaesser said, describing the members of Jazz Band I. "They are all totally into jazz. I spend a lot of time making sure that I expose them to as much as possible, and they do the rest in terms of exploring what's out there. My job is to stay one year ahead of them."

—Yoshi Kato

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Conservatory



Eugene Kim from Lexington  
High School, Lexington, MA

Patrick Whalen  
Cary, IL

### Community College Winner

#### Vocal Jazz Ensemble

American River College  
Dr. Art Lapierre  
Sacramento, CA  
Outstanding Soloist:  
Cody Quakenbush on  
"Joshua"

### Community College Outstanding Performance

#### Frequency

MiraCosta College  
Matt Falker  
Oceanside, CA

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

#### Kelly Schenk Quartet

University of Miami  
Frost School of Music  
Kate Reid  
Coral Gables, FL

#### Vox Now

Sacramento State University  
Gaw Vang Williams  
Sacramento, CA

### Graduate College Winner

#### VJE1

Indiana University  
Jacobs School of Music  
Dr. Jeremy Fox  
Bloomington, IN  
Outstanding Scat Soloist:  
Pascal Pahl on "Back Home Again In  
Indiana"



Jorge Machain of University of Nevada, Las Vegas

**Graduate College Outstanding Soloist**

**Julian Cunningham**  
Outstanding Soloist on "Just In Time"  
C-Sus Voices  
Sacramento State University  
Gaw Vang Williams  
Sacramento, CA

**LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

**Junior High School Winner**

**Panache 8**  
Corte Madera School  
Juliet Green  
Portola Valley, CA  
Outstanding Soloist:  
Gigi Pistilli on "Doodlin'"

**Junior High School Outstanding Performances**

**Eckstein Sr. Jazz Band**  
Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, WA

**Grass Valley Vocal Jazz**  
Grass Valley Elementary  
Natalie Wilson  
Camas, WA

**High School Winners**

**Jazz Choir I**  
Folsom High School  
Curtis Gaesser  
Folsom, CA  
Outstanding Soloist:  
Nino Cayabyab on "What'd I Say"

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# LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE



Northern Colorado Voices, UNC-Greeley



Singcopation, Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut, CA

## Building on Legacies of Excellence

Among this year's Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble winners are many students who have extended a legacy of excellence at their schools.

Kerry Marsh, artist faculty in residence for the University of Northern Colorado's Vocal Jazz program, has written the charts for many DownBeat Student Music Award honorees. His groups Vocal Lab and Northern Colorado Voices were winners in the Graduate College division this year. In the ensemble Vocal Lab, it was a junior who was recognized as an Outstanding Soloist.

"Lauren Johnston is very clearly one of the finest students—undergraduate or graduate—that I've ever had in terms of skills, ability, attitude and motivation," Marsh said. "Every day she essentially writes her own recommendation letter."

Johnston's award-winning solo is on a Marsh arrangement of the "future soul" group Hiatus Kaiyote's song "Lace Skull." "They're one of my favorite bands, and I've leaned on their music as a way of getting through some challenging times," Johnston said. "Every semester Kerry likes to throw in a song that's in a cutting-edge pop style. This time, it just happened to be one of my favorite songs."

For the past 35 years, Folsom High School Music Director Curtis Gaesser has led both the jazz band and choir. His Jazz Choir I was one of this year's High School division winners, and Nino Cayabyab was honored as an Out-

standing Soloist on a version of Ray Charles' "What'd I Say."

"I've had Nino's siblings, as well, and they're all amazing," Gaesser said. "He's probably the shyest student I've ever had. But he came in to audition as a freshman, opened his mouth and I almost fell out of my chair."

Hutchinson Community College's group Badinage was a winner in the Community College division. Neal Allsup, Hutchinson's director of choral activities, submitted his group for the first time this year. "I never thought in my wildest dreams that it could happen," he said of the group's win.

"In the whole state of Kansas, there might be four or five high schools that do vocal jazz regularly," Allsup explained. "So, my job is to go out to find musicianship."

The other winner in the Community College division is Singcopation, from Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California.

"This year was our 20th anniversary, so we resurrected charts from the past and brought back alumni," said Bruce Rogers, Mt. San Antonio College director of choral activities. "For the last 20 years, my current students [have known] who was there before them."

Over the decades, the group has won numerous Student Music Award honors. Rogers noted that Singcopation alumni are "like royalty" who "come in all the time and sit in on rehearsals."

Similarly, educator Kent Ellingson's Jazz



Folsom High School Jazz Choir I, Folsom, CA



Badinage, Hutchinson Community College, Hutchinson, KS

Singers at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas has been a frequent winner in the Performing Arts High School division. "This year's group consists of a pretty equal mix of seniors and juniors, along with a couple of sophomores," Ellingson said. "It is important to include younger students in the overall mix. It's the best way to ensure continuous progress of the group over time. The group gets exposure to as many styles as possible—swing, ballad, Latin, and contemporary—that all fit within a jazz framework."  
—Yoshi Kato





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Large Jazz Ensemble  
Honors Ensemble Co-Winner  
**Crescent Super Band**  
Caleb Chapman, Director

Large Jazz Ensemble  
Honors Ensemble Co-Winner  
**Time Check Jazz Orchestra**  
Caleb Chapman, Director

Large Jazz Ensemble  
Junior High School Co-Winner  
**Little Big Band**  
Caleb Chapman, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Junior High School Winner  
**Jukebox Antihero**  
Evan Wharton, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performance  
**Lo-Fi Riot**  
Evan Wharton, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performance  
**The Inevitables**  
Evan Wharton, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performance  
**Vicious Beat**  
Caleb Chapman, Director

Latin Group  
Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performance  
**La Onda Caribeña**  
Caleb Chapman, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
Junior High School Outstanding Performance  
**Faith Winkler, Vocalist**

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
Junior High School Outstanding Performance  
**Nathan Chen, Guitar**

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
High School Outstanding Performance  
**Hailey Hyde, Vocalist**

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
High School Outstanding Performance  
**Isabelle Johnson, Vocalist**

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Cary-Grove Jazz Choir from Cary-Grove High School, Cary, IL

**Two 'n' Four**

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Christine Tavares-Mocha  
Valencia, CA  
Outstanding Soloist:  
Therese Masangcay on  
"Summertime"  
Opening Female Soloist:  
Natasha Monnett on "She"

**Performing Arts  
High School Winner**

**BTWHSPVA Jazz Singers**

Booker T. Washington HSPVA  
Kent Ellingson  
Dallas, TX

**Honors Ensemble Winner**

**Missouri All-State Vocal  
Jazz Ensemble**

Rosana Eckert, Guest Conductor  
University of North Texas  
Denton, TX

**Honors Ensemble  
Outstanding Soloist**

**Alexandra Meli**

Outstanding Soloist on  
"Haven't We Met"  
The New York All State Vocal  
Jazz Ensemble  
Christine Helferich Guter,  
Guest Conductor



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Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Long Beach, CA

**Community College Winners**

**Badinage**

Hutchinson Community College  
Neal Allsup  
Hutchinson, KS

**Singcopation**

Mt. San Antonio College  
Bruce Rogers  
Walnut, CA

**Undergraduate College Winner**

**Pacific Standard Time**

California State University,  
Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory  
of Music  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, CA  
Outstanding Male Scat Soloist:  
Tama Shutts on "Shining Star"

**Undergraduate College  
Outstanding Soloists**

**Ashleigh Jocks**

Outstanding Soloist on  
"Corner Pocket (Until I Met You)"  
The Adelaide Connection

University of Adelaide,  
the Elder Conservatorium  
Lauren Henderson  
Adelaide, South Australia

**Nick Nelson**

Outstanding Soloist on  
"In The Winelight"  
Vocalese  
University of Northern Colorado  
Jenna McLean  
Greeley, CO

**Graduate College Winners**

**Vocal Lab**

University of Northern Colorado  
Kerry Marsh  
Greeley, CO  
Outstanding Soloist:  
Lauren Johnston on  
"Lace Skull"

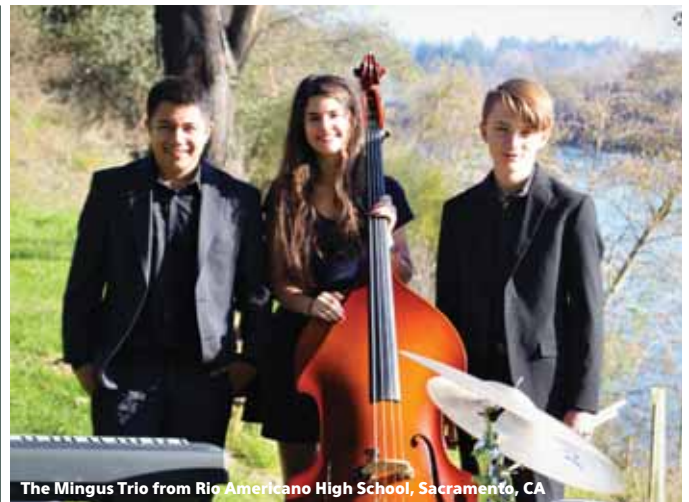
**Northern Colorado  
Voices**

University of Northern Colorado  
Kerry Marsh  
Greeley, CO

**Graduate College  
Outstanding Performances**

**UNT Jazz Singers**

University of North Texas  
Jennifer Barnes  
Denton, TX



The Mingus Trio from Rio Americano High School, Sacramento, CA



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## BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST



Hisako Ozawa



Zach Paris

# Eclectic Tastes, Exceptional Talent

**Drummer Zach Paris still remembers** the thrill of hearing his own music on the radio for the first time. But by the time a song by Righteous Vendetta, a metalcore band he toured and recorded with for two years in his native Wyoming, blasted out of his speakers, Paris was out of the band and pursuing an advanced degree at the University of Nebraska.

"We were starting to get really serious into touring," Paris recalled. "My wife and I got back from our honeymoon, and I was only home a week-and-a-half before I left on tour for 40 days. I realized right away that wasn't a good way to have a family, so I started pursuing higher education."

Paris currently is completing his doctorate at Arizona State University, where he's studied with drummer Lewis Nash, and leads the school's steel band and percussion jazz ensemble. He hopes to follow the lead of performer/educators like Nash, whose academic and artistic lives augment one another.

The musical aggression that once propelled Righteous Vendetta helped net Paris this year's Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist award at the Graduate College level. He submitted a metal song that showed off his powerhouse chops, as well as an open drum solo inspired by Buddy Rich. Such eclecticism, girded by a love of jazz, is key to several of this year's winners.

Vocalist Jennifer Barnett, a student at Haslett High School in Michigan, not only won the Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist award at the High School level, but also earned an Outstanding Performance honor in the Vocal Jazz Soloist category. For the former, she submitted songs by The Beatles and Michael Jackson, and for the latter, renditions of "Body And Soul," "Long As You're Living" and John Coltrane's "Cousin Mary."

At the outset of her voice lessons with singer/educator Sunny Wilkinson, Barnett said, "I knew what kind of music I liked and I knew what kind of music I definitely didn't like. The similarities in the music that I did like were that it all had these jazz voicings and progressions."

Barnett's songwriting blends pop sounds with jazz harmonies. She accompanies herself on guitar, ukulele and piano, and currently is auditioning for college music programs.

Ava Preston, 13, is already a performer in the Cleveland area. She's a self-described "old soul" whose tastes run from Alanis Morissette to Ella Fitzgerald, radio-friendly pop to Broadway show tunes. Preston is this year's Junior High winner in both the Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist category and the Vocal Jazz Soloist category.

Pianist Theron Brown—Preston's teacher at Hudson Middle School, as well as regular accompanist—said, "Ava has always been gifted, and her love for music is filled with passion. More importantly, she understands how she can connect with people through her music, which is a big deal at her age."

Guitarist Hisako Ozawa, who studies at Musicians Institute in L.A., moved to the States from her native Tokyo in 2011 and has since been shredding on stages around the city. Ozawa won the Undergraduate College division by showing off her chops in both Southern rock and heavy metal, turning in interpretations of songs that featured two of her favorite guitarists—Ed King on Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama," and Michael Schenker on UFO's "Love To Love."

"I came here because many contemporary musicians come out here to make a name for themselves," she said. "I wanted to be surrounded by other people who are pursuing music as their profession." —Shaun Brady

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Christine Helferich Guter, Guest Conductor



Tama Shutts

Outstanding Male Scat Soloist  
*Tama Shutts*, "Shining Star"

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WINNERS

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Christine Helferich Guter

Vocal Jazz Soloist  
Undergraduate College  
Outstanding Performance  
*Tama Shutts*



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## BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST

### Junior High School Winner

#### Ava Preston

*Vocalist*  
Hudson Middle School  
Theron Brown  
Hudson, OH

### Junior High School Outstanding Performances

#### Faith Winkler

*Vocalist*  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, UT

#### Nathan Chen

*Guitar*  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, UT

#### Easton Christiansen

*Guitar*  
Mountain Ridge Junior High  
Richard Bateman  
Highland, UT

### High School Winner

#### Jennifer Barnett

*Vocalist*  
Haslett High School  
Sunny Wilkinson  
Haslett, MI

### High School Outstanding Performances

#### Hailey Hyde

*Vocalist*  
Caleb Chapman's  
Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, UT

#### Isabelle Johnson

*Vocalist*  
Caleb Chapman's  
Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, UT

### Undergraduate College Winner

#### Hisako Ozawa

*Guitar*  
Musicians Institute  
Lyman Medeiros  
Los Angeles, CA

### Graduate College Winner

#### Zach Paris

*Drums*

Arizona State University  
Dr. J.B. Smith  
Tempe, AZ

### Graduate College Outstanding Performances

**Emiliano Sampaio**  
*Electric Guitar*  
University of Music and Performing  
Arts, Graz  
Ed Partyka  
Graz, Austria

**Gabriel Dowdy-Terracciano**  
*Violin*  
NYU Steinhardt  
David Schroeder  
New York, NY

### BLUES/POP/ROCK GROUP

#### Junior High School Winner

**Jukebox Antihero**  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, UT

#### High School Outstanding Performance

**Leyden High Schools Vocal  
Jazz Ensemble**  
Leyden High Schools  
Stacy Cunningham  
Franklin Park, IL

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Patrick Kerl  
Dallas, TX

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Los Angeles County High  
School for the Arts  
Frankie Blue  
Los Angeles, CA

#### Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

**Lo-Fi Riot**  
Caleb Chapman's  
Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, UT

**The Inevitables**  
Caleb Chapman's  
Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, UT

**Vicious Beat**  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, UT

### Undergraduate College Winner

**Frost Fusion Ensemble**  
University of Miami  
Frost School of Music  
Steve Rucker  
Coral Gables, FL

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

**Blues and Rock Ensemble I**  
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Kevin Kjos  
Kutztown, PA



Luca Mendoza from the University  
of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

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Kalamazoo, MI

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Outstanding Performances**

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Amherst  
Jeffrey W. Holmes  
Amherst, MA

**Yejin Yun  
Electric Band**

University of Nevada,  
Las Vegas  
David Loeb  
Las Vegas, NV

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**High School  
Outstanding Performance**

**Mac Jazz Ensemble**

MacArthur High School  
José Antonio Diaz  
Houston, TX

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Outstanding Performance**

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Salt Lake City, UT

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**UTA Latin Combo**

University of Texas at Arlington  
Stefan Karlsson  
Arlington, TX

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**Gabriel Severn, “Canção Para Fina”**

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Middle School  
Eddie Severn  
Williamsport, PA

**Junior High School Outstanding Composition**

**Brandon Goldberg, “The Understream”**

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Paul Posnak  
Miami, FL

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**Jett Lim, “Plan B”**  
Albany High School

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Dann Zinn  
Albany, CA

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"Here's The Thing"  
Vanden High School  
Brian Williams  
Fairfield, CA

**High School**  
**Outstanding Compositions**

**Esteban Castro,**  
"Swan Song"  
Bergen County Academies  
Phillip Kawin  
Hackensack, NJ

**Erik Nelson,**  
"This Is Not A Song"  
Albany High School  
Dann Zinn  
Albany, CA

**Zack Shubert,**  
"The Way Of Life"  
Carlmont High School  
Peter Horvath  
Belmont, CA

**Performing Arts**  
**High School Winner**

**Will Brandt, "Abditory"**  
Colburn Community School of  
Performing Arts

Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, CA

**Performing Arts High School**  
**Outstanding Composition**

**Gabe Rupe, "Dune"**  
Colorado Conservatory  
for the Jazz Arts  
Eric Gunnison  
Denver, CO

**Undergraduate College Winner**

**Jiwon Kwon,**  
"The First Step"  
Berklee College of Music  
Scott Free  
Boston, MA

**Undergraduate College**  
**Outstanding Compositions**

**Michael Orenstein,**  
"Sharing The Mirror"  
Oberlin Conservatory  
Dan Wall  
Oberlin, OH

**Andrew Saliba,**  
"Silent Minority"  
Western Michigan University  
Andrew Rathbun  
Kalamazoo, MI



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**Matt Wong, "Emptyful"**  
Manhattan School of Music  
Jim McNeely  
New York, NY

**Graduate College Winner**

**Walter Gorra, "Bandwidth"**  
William Paterson University  
Pete McGuinness  
Wayne, NJ

**Graduate College Outstanding Compositions**

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Eastman School of Music  
Harold Danko  
Rochester, NY

**Michael Spicer, "Patchwork"**  
University of Nevada,  
Las Vegas  
David Loeb  
Las Vegas, NV

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Rochester, NY

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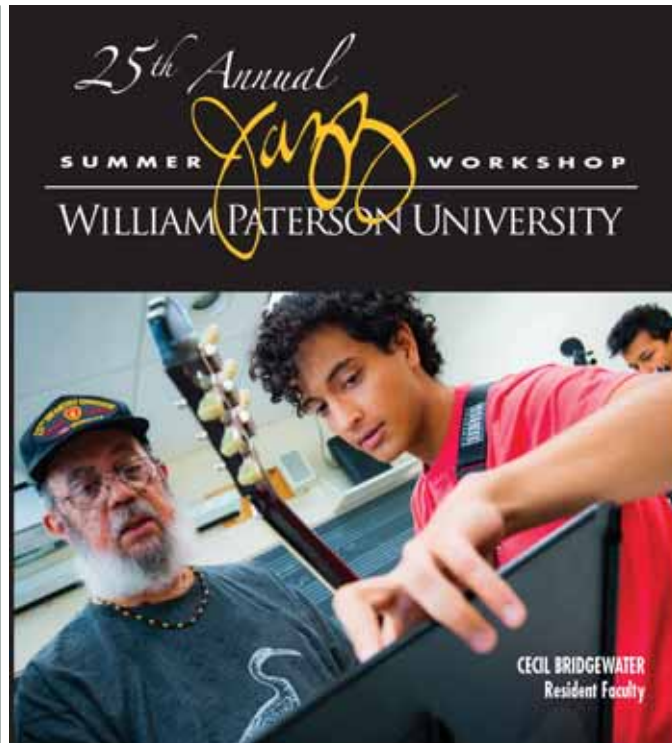
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# JAZZ EDUCATION HALL OF FAME

DAVEY S. YARBOROUGH | Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Washington, D.C.

## Yarborough's Mentorship a Part of the D.C. Jazz Tradition

This year's DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame inductee is Davey S. Yarborough, whose 32-year tenure as jazz studies director and saxophone instructor at Washington D.C.'s exemplary Duke Ellington School of the Arts involved a rather circuitous journey.

He originally was hired at the now-renovated arts specialty high school in tony Georgetown in May 1978 for a September position that was derailed by federal education budget cuts. In the interim, Yarborough served at such D.C. public schools as Wilson High School and H.D. Woodson High School. Perseverance paid off, and he rejoined the Ellington faculty in 1984—as the attendance counselor. In September 1986 he became band director.

Yarborough's original charge was saxophone instruction. When he started up the school's big band, "they put me in a small room, one-third the size of this current band room," he said, gesturing at the impressive expanse wrought by recent renovation. "It had a couple of music stands, but no equipment. Another teacher said, 'Well, the equipment was here, but it sorta walked out.' So, come my first class, I had my drummers play air drums. I said, 'You set up and act like this is your snare drum, your floor tom.' I got some music, and I had a little keyboard there, and the horn players had their horns. Lo and behold, one day a CNN camera[person] walked in the room to film a news story, asking, 'Where's the drumset?' The principal walked in, they turned the cameras around to him, and a little while later, I had a couple of drumsets."

Yarborough quickly got busy acquiring equipment for his program, shortly securing major donations from Wynton Marsalis and Joe Williams, whom he'd played with as part of a D.C. band backing the mellifluous baritone in concert. "From then, I learned how to write grants," he said. "I wrote letters to airlines, anybody I thought would donate. I got enough to do what I needed from that point on."

In the meantime, the D.C. native, Federal City College and University of the District of Columbia graduate significantly upped his Ellington quotient through the tutelage of one of the district's selfless jazz mentors, the great bassist Keter Betts.

"Keter asked me to come play with his



Davey S. Yarborough

SHARON FARMER PHOTOGRAPHY

band, and I did for about five years. When I got the Ellington job, Keter called, wanting me to come by his house," Yarborough said. "We sat in the kitchen, and he asked me about the Duke Ellington School. I was already shocked that I got the job, because a whole lot of veteran band directors wanted that job, and he could see that there was a little bit of community tension behind that. So, Keter said, 'What do you know about Duke?' I told him the little I knew. And he said, 'Well, that's not enough, because your job now is to enlighten those kids.' So, he went down to his basement and pulled out a book called *Ellingtonia* and showed me all the songs—everything—to the point of overload. I said to myself, 'How am I going to deal with this?' That's when Keter volunteered to come to Ellington before school."

Three decades later, thoroughly immersed in all things Ellington, and continuing as one of the D.C. area's most potent saxophonists, Yarborough can boast of a program whose students have copped numerous trophies—a fact made clear as he pointed to a huge cabinet brimming with awards—and traveled to perform at prestigious jazz festivals.

"I have watched him change the lives of countless children by introducing them to the possibilities that a career in music can

provide," said Ellington School CEO Tia Powell-Harris, who has observed Yarborough's teaching mastery for more than two decades. "Davey not only cultivates the musical abilities of his passionate jazz students, but builds in them strong character and a deep concern for humanity. Davey is what our students so desperately need—a role model of quality."

Prominent Ellington grads since Yarborough's tenure began include pianist Marc Cary, saxophonist Brian Settles, *Showtime at the Apollo* music director Daniel Moore and a raft of others currently contributing to D.C.'s remarkable community of resident jazz musicians.

"Davey Yarborough is the most consistent teacher I have ever met," Cary said. "Although I chose not to take his class, he found a way to teach me. He pushed me to be the best I could be. I also realized a good teacher isn't always who you, the student, think they should be. He is proof that dedication to making others reach their full potential is a quality of a great person and teacher."

Owing much to Betts' mentorship, D.C. is definitely a bass town, which might account, in part, for the remarkable run of high-class bassists who've matriculated through Yarborough's program, including Eric Wheeler, Corcoran Holt, Ameen Saleem and Ben Williams.

"To say that Davey Yarborough is committed to music and jazz education would be an understatement," Williams exclaimed. "His dedication to teaching young people is a significant part of the musical legacy that has emerged from Washington, D.C."

On the cusp of his retirement, Yarborough's induction to the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame is quite timely. His future plans include ramping up his performance career, including with his vocalist-wife Esther Williams, and further developing their Washington Jazz Arts Institute program into a student mentoring unit.

That certainly would reflect how he arrived at this point, through mentoring from such D.C. elders as Dr. Art Dawkins, Bobby Felder, Calvin Jones, Frank Wess and Betts. No one comes better equipped for the work ahead than distinguished jazz educator Davey S. Yarborough.

—Willard Jenkins



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*We would like to thank all of the amazing students that have come through our music programs over the years. We thank you for your pursuit of excellence, the tenacity to learn and improve, and all the joy you have brought to our lives over the years. Finally, a huge thank you to the Folsom Music Boosters, the Folsom/Cordova School District, and the city of Folsom for keeping Music a priority in our great city of Folsom for so many years. — Sincerely, Curtis Gaesser & John Zimny*

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*Outstanding Jr. High Performance*  
2006 / 2009 / 2010 / 2012 / 2018

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2006 / 2009 WIND ENSEMBLE

##### Best Classical Soloist

2004 / 2005 YANG LU, PIANO

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##### JAZZ BAND

*Large Jazz Ensemble Jr. High Winner*

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*Outstanding Jr. High Performance*  
2012 / 2016 / 2017

##### Best Classical Soloist

2009 ALICE ZHOU, PIANO

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# JAZZ EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**CHRISTINE HELFERICH GUTER**

Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University, Long Beach

## Assisting Students' Journeys

**When they arrive at university to** study music, young people often feel there's an expected level of proficiency they have to achieve. Not so in Christine Helferich Guter's class at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University—Long Beach, where she has directed the vocal jazz program since 2002.

"There's no bar," said Guter. "I want students to develop ownership of the music and grow to their own level of expectations. My job is to assist them to become independent thinkers and critical listeners."

"Overall, she brings support, love and positivity," said Sean Fitzpatrick, who studied with Guter as an undergraduate before returning to join the Bob Cole faculty. "She has created a culture of relentlessly high musical, professional and personal standards."

With close to 30 DownBeat Student Music Awards given to her students since 2006, it's obvious that Guter's techniques are effective.

What she aims to do, she said, is to instill in students the ability to be honest in their musical expression.

"It's not just about the technical," she said. "I want them to feel. We walk around with so much armor on that it's difficult to really reach in and perform from our hearts."

She recognizes that there's a balance that must be struck between jazz vocalists going for what's "honest" and the danger of being looked down upon by close-minded instrumentalists who suspect that singers might not have a deep knowledge of theory.

"That still goes on," Guter said, "and it's disappointing and discouraging. As a singer approaching any situation, you have to have done the work and have a professional demeanor. You have to be ready, and if you are, other musicians will recognize that."

Outside the classroom, Guter has been the model of professionalism, developing a lengthy resume, with appearances on the soundtracks of films ranging from *Happy Feet* in 2006 to *Dead Pool 2* earlier this year. She's also performed extensively as the lead singer in the quintet Vocalogy, as well as with her own ensemble, and recorded with artists as diverse as Herb Alpert and Neil Young.

Guter earned a bachelor's degree in music education from Western Michigan University in 1993 and then graduated from the Univer-



Christine Helferich Guter

GIOVANNI CARDENAS

sity of Miami's Frost School of Music with a master's in studio music and jazz. Her teaching career began at a high school in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and continued after she relocated to California.

"When I first moved to L.A., people said, 'You can't have both an academic and performing career,'" she recalled, "but I work at staying as active as I can be in the studios and onstage. I think that really brings added value to my students."

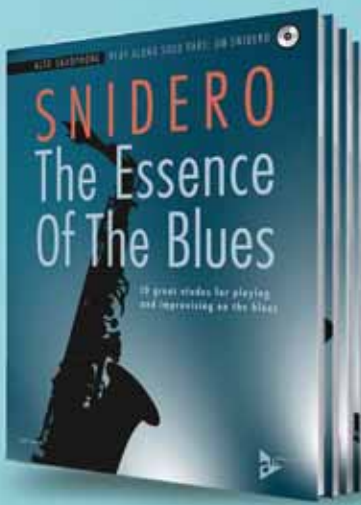
Fitzpatrick said Guter's consistently high standards and thorough approach to rehearsals made a distinct impression on him.

"Christine's teaching approach is focused on preparing her students to be consummate professionals and top-notch musicians," he said. "Rehearsal time is sacred and is used to focus on ensemble technique and music-making. One of the biggest things that sets her apart is that she does not allow the students to sing and repeat material incorrectly. If any moment of music is out of tune, not together, not dynamic, or not in the spirit of the piece, she will immediately stop them and correct it. This way, the ensemble does not reinforce mistakes, but only correct singing and musicality."

Guter credits her early teachers, such as Sunny Wilkinson and Steve Zegree (1953–2015), for inspiring her devotion to craft.

"They were role models to me, and I try to do the same," she said. "I'm so grateful to get to play a little role in the lives of my students and take just a few steps with them along their journey."

—James Hale



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**DOWNBEAT 41<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL  
STUDENT  
MUSIC AWARDS**

## JAZZ EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**CUAUHTÉMOC "MOC" ESCOBEDO**

Eckstein Middle School, Seattle, Washington

### A Legendary Work Ethic

**"How many in a saxophone section?"** asked Cuahtémoc "Moc" Escobedo, this year's recipient of the Jazz Education Achievement Award. "Five? We had 12. And we got the award."

The 55-year-old band director was sitting in the empty auditorium at Seattle's Eckstein Middle School, where he has taught since 1994. The award he referred to is a recent win for outstanding sax section at the Next Generation Jazz Festival in Monterey, California.

Eckstein jazz bands are notoriously overstuffed. Escobedo believes everyone should get a chance to play—especially girls.

"Most bands are male dominated," he said. "The way to [increase the number of] young ladies is to put in as many as are capable and let them grow into it."

Escobedo's inclusive approach is working, as evidenced by 15 honors in the DownBeat Student Music Awards over the years. In 2017, his students won five honors, and Eckstein students received two Outstanding Performance honors in this year's SMAs. The walls of the Eckstein band room are lined with trophies from the Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival, the Reno Jazz Festival and others.

Beyond the festival circuit, Escobedo received Washington State's prestigious Golden Apple in 2006, for outstanding teaching. Earshot Jazz, which produces Seattle's annual jazz festival, gave him its Golden Ear award.

Born in Mexico and raised there, and in Texas, Escobedo played trombone in orchestra and concert band in school, earning a bachelor's in music education and a master's in trombone performance from Texas Tech University. But he had scant jazz background.

"I was shocked when they put me in the first jazz band [at Texas Tech]," he recalled. "All they would tell me was, 'Lay back!' What did that mean? When I took this job, I had to really come up with a way of describing what 'laying back' was. What is the triplet feel? Because it's not magic."

Maybe not. But learning how to teach it was a challenge, especially in Seattle, where jazz education operates at a very high level.

"I still remember that first jazz concert we had," he remembered. "I heard [an ensemble from] Washington Middle School, and I said, 'OK, this is a different game! You don't come in here playing 'Girl From Ipanema.' This is



Cuahtémoc "Moc" Escobedo has taught many award-winning students who went on to have careers as professional musicians.

JESSICA C. LEVINE

about the blues and Basie."

That summer, Escobedo took lessons on jazz bass and drums, and went to every jazz clinic he could find. Additionally, he devoured charts shared by colleagues Hal Sherman, of Kent-Meridian High School, and Bob Knatt, the now-retired director at Washington Middle School.

With his duties at Eckstein including three jazz bands, three concert bands and two vocal jazz groups, it's a wonder that Escobedo has much spare time. His work ethic is legendary.

"He's here all summer," explained colleague Brad Smith, Eckstein's orchestra director. "He's in the building on weekends, after school. He teaches during his lunch hour. He's constantly working. If he worked any harder, he would have to have a cot."

The results of all that work are apparent on the national jazz scene. Eckstein alumni include trumpeter and vocalist Jumaane Smith, who tours with Michael Bublé and recorded with Rashied Ali (1933–2009); and trombonist Andy Clausen, of the innovative, New York-based quartet The Westerlies. Acclaimed vocalist Sara Gazarek was a "Moc" student as well, back in elementary school.

But the real payoff isn't famous protégés, Escobedo said. It's performance.

"Watching the kids when they're jelling and grooving, watching the audience, that's what I love," he explained. "I'm looking forward to our swing dance, here in this auditorium. Everybody will be dancing. That's what it's all about."

—Paul de Barros

## JUDGING CRITERIA

### PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- 1) Overall sound
- 2) Presence or authority
- 3) Proper interpretation of idiom
- 4) Improvisation or creativity
- 5) Technique
- 6) Intonation
- 7) Phrasing
- 8) Dynamics
- 9) Accurate rhythm/time
- 10) Material

### ENGINEERING CRITERIA

- 1) Perspective: balance of channels; amount and type of reverb; blend (Do all sounds seem to have been performed at the same time and place? Do solos seem natural or do they stick out?).
- 2) Levels: saturation or other overload, under modulation resulting in excessive hiss, consistency of levels, left/right balance, etc.
- 3) Transparency and apparent transient response.
- 4) Special effects: Are they appropriate? Do they add or detract?
- 5) Extraneous noises, clicks, hum, etc. (for a non-live performance, any non-musical sound).
- 6) Professional etiquette.

### AWARDS & PRIZES

Plaques are awarded to the music department of each winning middle school, high school and college. Certificates are awarded to each winner (or Outstanding Performance honoree) and to the director of ensembles.

### JUDGES

**Jim Anderson:** Multiple Grammy winner and professor at NYU's Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music.

**Darcy James Argue:** Composer, arranger and bandleader.

**Janice Boria:** Vocalist; Director of Vocal Jazz, North Central College; vocal jazz camp founder.

**Don Braden:** Saxophonist, flutist, composer, arranger; Music Director, Litchfield Jazz Camp.

**Jeff Coffin:** Saxophonist, bandleader, composer, educator/clinician.

**John Daversa:** Chair, Department of Studio Music and Jazz, Frost School of Music, University of Miami.

**Orbert Davis:** Emmy Award-winning trumpeter, composer, educator; co-founder, conductor of Chicago Jazz Philharmonic.

**Les Hooper:** Composer, arranger for film, TV, commercials, orchestra and recordings; clinician.

**Fred Irby III:** Howard University coordinator of Instrumental Music, trumpet instructor and Director of the Howard University Jazz Ensemble.

**Bart Marantz:** Legendary jazz educator whose bands have won 245 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

**Typhanie Monique:** Recording artist, vocalist, educator/clinician, composer.

**Miles Osland:** Saxophonist; Director of Jazz Studies, University of Kentucky.

**Bob Parsons:** Saxophonist, arranger and composer.

**Dave Rivello:** Eastman School of Music Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, and Director, New Jazz Ensemble.

**Albert Rivera:** Saxophonist, composer, educator; Director of Operations, Litchfield Jazz Camp.

**John Santos:** Percussionist, clinician, label owner; U.S. Artists Fontanals Fellow; writer/historian.

**Gregory Tardy:** Recording artist, Assistant Professor of Jazz Saxophone, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

**Roger Treece:** Arranger/composer, UNC Jazz Press author and educator.

**Ryan Truesdell:** Bandleader, composer, arranger, trombonist, clinician.

**James Warrick:** Educator/clinician, former Director of Jazz Studies at New Trier High School.

**David Weiss:** Trumpeter, composer, arranger, leader of the New Jazz Composers Octet, Endangered Species and The Cookers.



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Penn State Abington's John Pachence (center) with Music Performance and Entrepreneurship students Ben Gonzalez (far left), Casey Brown, John Spiewak and Jason Raighn

AUSTIN CHERAK/ATHIL

# Penn State Delivers Real-World Training

**UNLESS THEIR CHILD IS THE NEXT WYNTON** Marsalis or Esperanza Spalding, most parents have the same immediate reaction to being told their son or daughter wants to study music at university: I hope you have a backup plan.

"I know mine did," said John Pachence, performing arts coordinator at Penn State Abington. "In the modern-day music industry, the so-called 'backup plan' must be an integral part of the initial plan."

That's why Pachence and Roy Robson, arts and humanities division head, decided to launch a Music Performance and Entrepreneurship major at the campus.

"Our vision is for a completely vertically integrated program," said Robson. "Our students will be performing for official school events, but also setting up gear, running the board, recording and working on repertoire, public relations and communications. We take calls every semester from recording studios looking to give our students internships."

That comes as no surprise, considering the amount of research the pair did before introducing the program in 2017.

"We met with leaders in all aspects of the music industry," Pachence said. "We quickly realized that just being good at your craft might not be enough to be successful in today's music industry."

The program is a first for Penn State, combining music performance, theory and practice with music business, public speaking, technical writing, music management and marketing, studio engineering and production.

"A student studying jazz here will get all the rudiments ... but will also get the business ele-

ments that make him or her much more marketable for a career in music, onstage or off," Pachence said.

The major has three components: performance, entrepreneurship and a free-choice element that offers courses in everything from songwriting to instrument repair. In addition, students can take a five-year program that gives them both a bachelor of arts and a master of business administration degree.

"Penn State Abington is not trying to be, nor will it ever be, a Curtis or Juilliard," Pachence said. "Those are incredible institutions that turn out amazing musicians. They teach their students to do one thing incredibly well, and they're good at it."

Although the Penn State Abington program won't be for everyone, its location 30 minutes from the center of Philadelphia provides access to faculty members and performance opportunities that only an urban school can offer.

"Our students benefit from a music faculty who are professional musicians with stellar reputations," Pachence said. "Our music students are offered master classes by many of the country's leaders in music, art, new media and broadcasting. Our location also gives us the opportunity to provide stellar internships at places like Comcast and Martin Guitar."

With 4,000 students attending classes in a handful of buildings, Pachence sees growth on the horizon.

"We're bursting at the seams," he said. "Expansion is the main goal right now. With new facilities we can bring in more faculty, engage the public and serve our students even better."

—James Hale



Ellis Marsalis

NU JAZZ AGENCY

**Calling All Pianists:** The Nu Jazz Agency and West Virginia's Marshall University will present the inaugural Ellis Marsalis International Jazz Piano Competition this summer. The two-day competition will test pianists' aptitude across genre, style and format, with pianists Ellis Marsalis, Arturo O'Farrill and Jon Batiste and special guest Branford Marsalis serving as judges. The triennial event is set to run June 22–23 in Huntington, West Virginia. It will coincide with the Huntington International Jazz Festival (June 19–23). Entries will be open until May 19.

[jazzpianocompetition.org](http://jazzpianocompetition.org)

**Winning Jazz Trumpeter:** Nathan Kay, a student at Eastman School of Music, won first place in the Jazz Finals of this year's National Trumpet Competition, held March 8–10 at University of North Texas. Second place went to Gregory Newman, and Anthony Hervey took third place. The competition, which also offers master classes and concerts, has been providing an educational outlet to young trumpet players from around the United States for the past 25 years.

[nationaltrumpetcomp.org](http://nationaltrumpetcomp.org)

**MJQ Re-enactment:** On Feb. 11, University of the South presented pianist Aaron Diehl's quartet performing a tribute to a historic concert by the Modern Jazz Quartet that took place on campus in April 1961. It was the first time the MJQ performed in the South, and it was one of the first racially integrated events to occur at the university, based in Sewanee, Tennessee. The February event was a re-enactment of sorts, as Diehl, vibraphonist Warren Wolf, bassist Paul Sikivie and drummer Peter Van Nostrand revived each of the songs the MJQ played in '61.

[sewanee.edu/resources/arts-at-sewanee](http://sewanee.edu/resources/arts-at-sewanee)

**Community Partnership:** Vandoren has partnered with St. Louis Art Educator of the Year Harvey Lockhart, band director at River-view Gardens School District and founder of St. Louis' HEAL Center for the Arts. The HEAL Center for the Arts program is designed to bring quality arts programming to students from low-income communities in St. Louis.

[healcenterforthearts.org](http://healcenterforthearts.org)

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## Johnathan Blake

Few drummers have a busier itinerary than Johnathan Blake, who has enjoyed long collaborative stints with Tom Harrell, Kenny Barron, Dr. Lonnie Smith and Ravi Coltrane. Additionally, Blake has recorded with 3 Cohens, Ronnie Cuber and Russell Malone, and released two leader albums. This was his first Blindfold Test.

### Cyrus Chestnut

"Rhythm-a-Ning" (*There's A Sweet, Sweet Spirit*, HighNote, 2017) Chestnut, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Lenny White, drums.

That's Buster Williams. Lenny White for sure. Lenny has a way of building solos around the toms, and he starts very simply, which I love. Is this an older recording? Is that Cyrus? That run at the very end told me. I love the interaction between Cyrus and Lenny, how they're playing off each other. I've played in Cyrus' trio, and he's really conscious of rhythm. 5 stars.

### Nate Smith

"Spinning Down" (*Kinfolk: Postcards From Everywhere*, Waterbaby/Ropeadope, 2017) Smith, drums, keyboards; Jaleel Shaw, soprano saxophone; Kris Bowers, piano and Fender Rhodes; Lionel Loueke, guitar; Dave Holland, bass.

This drone effect in the beginning draws you right in. I can identify Lionel right away on guitar. I like hearing peaks and valleys in music, and this one takes you to these high points and then brings you down. I loved how the drummer started very soft and minimalist with mallets, and then built. Even though the cymbals are washy, you can still hear the articulation of the stick on the cymbal, which I dig. 4 stars.

### Dan Tepfer Trio

"Single Ladies" (*Eleven Cages*, Sunnyside, 2017) Tepfer, piano; Thomas Morgan, bass; Nate Wood, drums.

[A hit by] Beyoncé [with] piano! Is that Vijay? They went into 5 for a second on the bridge. Maybe the drummer has two cymbals stacked on each other; it creates this harmonic overtone but also very dry, really quick, *crck*. Also, there might be a little splash cymbal on the snare drum with maybe some kind of bell. Maybe it's someone from New Orleans who has lived in New York for a minute. 3½ stars.

### Joey Baron & Irène Schweizer

"Jungle Beat" (*Live*, Intakt, 2017) Schweizer, piano; Baron, drums.

I like how the piano and drums fed off each other rhythmically and harmonically. The pianist did certain things in the higher register that the drummer matched with cymbal colors; it felt like the pianist was catching different accents from the snare. They were in tune, like they've been playing together a long time. I heard some drum colors that sounded like something Dave King would do, and stuff that made me think of Gerald Cleaver. 4 stars.

### Barry Altschul

"A Drummer's Tale" (*Tales Of The Unforeseen*, TUM, 2015) Altschul, drums.

I can tell right away it's somebody older. Older cats have a certain language. You hear influences of Roy Haynes and Milford Graves. It's very cohesive. Is it Andrew Cyrille? 4 stars.

### Joshua Redman

"Trinkle Tinkle" (*Trios Live*, Nonesuch, 2014) Redman, tenor saxophone; Matt Penman, bass; Greg Hutchinson, drums.

That's Hutch with Josh. Hutch gets a unique bounce with the ride cymbal; he comes out of the tradition, but he's put his own modern stamp on it. Is that Matt Penman? Matt has a unique way of walking bass lines, a bit



on top, with this forward, pushing motion. Hutch interacts with everything, and he gives soloists stuff to play off of. I love his element of surprise—a crash somewhere that you don't expect, and it's killing. You can tell he and Josh have been playing together for years—they have such a rapport. 5 stars.

### The Bad Plus

"Lean In The Archway" (*Never Stop II*, Legbreaker, 2018) Orrin Evans, piano; Reid Anderson, bass; Dave King, drums, composition.

Dave King. He does unique stuff with the cymbals and hi-hat. Is this the new Bad Plus record? Did Reid write the tune? Oh, it's by Dave. It's a memorable melody; you can walk away singing it. I like what Orrin brings to the group, and how their influence manifests on Orrin's playing. It's a different sensibility than Ethan Iverson. Orrin played a lot with Reid in Philadelphia when Reid was going to school there, so Reid's a common denominator for both piano and drums, which helps the chemistry. I've known Dave a long time, and I'm a fan of the colors and texture he includes in his drumming. He has a lot of chops, but he's always about what will help make the piece pop out. 5 stars.

### Antonio Sanchez & Migration

"Channels Of Energy" (*The Meridian Suite*, CamJazz, 2015) Sanchez, drums; John Escreet, Fender Rhodes; Matt Brewer, electric bass; Adam Rogers, electric guitar; Seamus Blake, EWI.

Is that Antonio's *Meridian*? You can tell right away it's a drummer's record! The first part of the tune is very melodic, and I like the hip way he's playing off of the 3 and the 4. You can hear that he's influenced a lot by [Jeff] "Tain" [Watts]. I love his use of dynamics. I like those atmospheric sounds he's getting. Is John Escreet playing keyboard? I assume he's doing stuff using analog sounds. 4 stars.

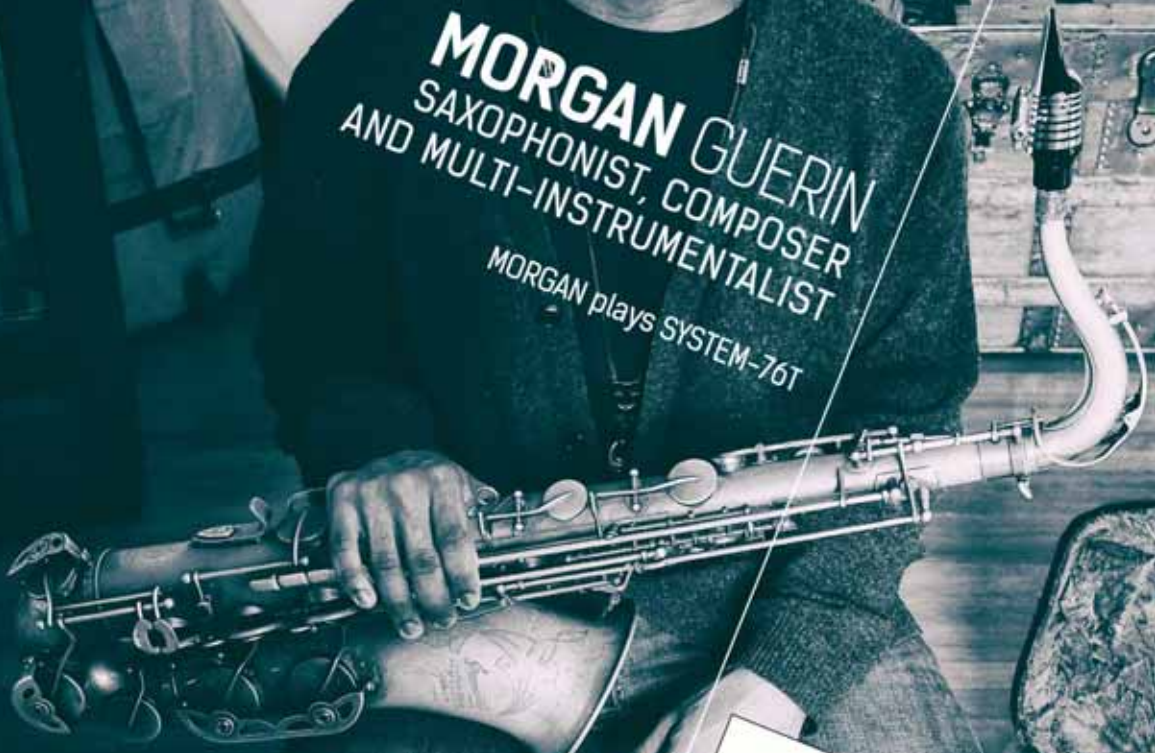
### Nicholas Payton

"Jazz Is A Four Letter Word" (*Afro-Caribbean Mixtape*, Paytone, 2017) Payton, trumpet, vocals; Joe Dyson, drums, djembe; Kevin Hays, keyboards; Vicente Archer, bass; Daniel Sadownick, percussion; DJ Lady Fingaz, turntables; Max Roach, Miles Davis, spoken word.

This is Nicholas, *Afro-Caribbean Mixtape*. "Jazz Is A Four Letter Word" [laughs]. So, that's my man Joe Dyson and Danny Sadownick. Joe Dyson is a great drummer and musician. He studied with Allen Toussaint, so that history is in his playing, but he's also checking out everything that's happened after him. I like this drum pad he uses to get an '80s-sounding snare, that they used to use on r&b records. I like the spoken-word message, too. Musicians tend to search for melodies, but I feel non-musicians latch on quicker when they hear lyrics or someone speaking. 4½ 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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