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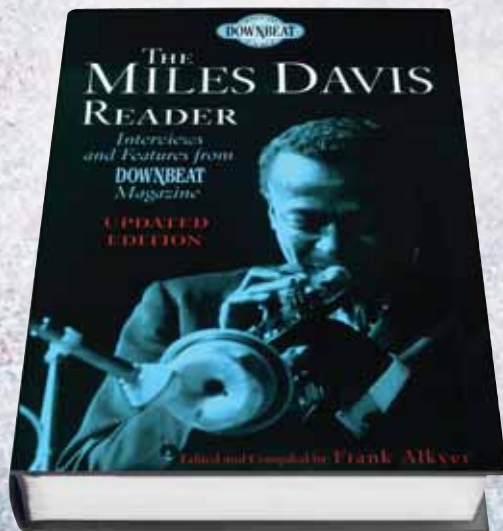
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**Reviews Editor** Dave Cantor  
**Contributing Editor** Ed Enright  
**Creative Director** Žaneta Čuntová  
**Assistant to the Publisher** Sue Mahal  
**Bookkeeper** Evelyn Oakes

### ADVERTISING SALES

**Record Companies & Schools**  
Jennifer Ruban-Gentile  
Vice President of Sales  
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**Advertising Sales Associate**  
Grace Blackford  
630-359-9358  
[graceb@downbeat.com](mailto:graceb@downbeat.com)

### OFFICES

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

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### CONTRIBUTORS

#### Senior Contributors:

Michael Bourne, Aaron Cohen, Howard Mandel, John McDonough  
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APRIL 2019

# Inside

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#### *Respectful Caretakers*

BY JENNIFER ODELL

The members of Galactic discuss their decision to take ownership of the legendary New Orleans venue Tipitina's. After decades in the Crescent City, the band has raised its profile by making the venue—the former stomping grounds of Professor Longhair—its home base. The quintet's new album is *Already Ready Already*.

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Galactic and vocalist Erica Falls perform at Tipitina's in New Orleans on Dec. 31 with guest musicians, including trombonist Corey Henry and trumpeter Shamarr Allen.

Cover photo of Galactic shot by Erika Goldring at Tipitina's in New Orleans on Jan. 4. On the cover, from left: Ben Eilman, Robert Mercurio, Richard Vogel, Stanton Moore and Jeffrey Raines.



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Stefano Bollani



Translator Isabella Ranieri (left), Journalist Ted Panken and pianist Stefano Bollani



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Jimmy Heath (left), Albert "Tootie" Heath and Wallace Roney perform at the "A Great Night in Harlem" benefit concert in 2014.



# Helping Each Other Out

**WHAT DO WE OWE EACH OTHER? IT'S A** deep, philosophical question. Lately, I've been wrestling with issues related to moral philosophy, such as what one person's fundamental responsibility is toward another specific individual. Also, what is a person's responsibility to the local community? And to humanity as a whole? For some individuals, why is the drive to help complete strangers seemingly just as strong as the drive to help a loved one?

I've been pondering these questions, in part, because of a sitcom. Sure, I could attribute all this philosophical introspection to media coverage of international events and our nation's heated political rhetoric. And those things have weighed on me. But another important factor has been *The Good Place*, a TV series centered on questions involving ethics, philosophy and the after-life. It's pretty heady stuff for a 30-minute sitcom.

The series' fictional characters repeatedly reference the real-life philosopher T.M. Scanlon's book *What We Owe to Each Other*. The book jacket blurb says: "According to T. M. Scanlon's contractualist view, thinking about right and wrong is thinking about what we do in terms that could be justified to others and that they could not reasonably reject. He shows how the special authority of conclusions about right and wrong arises from the value of being related to others in this way, and he demonstrates how familiar moral ideas such as fairness and responsibility can be understood through their role in this process of mutual justification and criticism."

I haven't read this book yet, but I plan to. Perhaps Scanlon will give me more insight into life's meaning (and my favorite sitcom).

On a recent flight, I watched several episodes of *The Good Place*. When my plane landed, I was

in Anaheim, California, where the DownBeat staff attended The NAMM Show. At the Anaheim Convention Center, I encountered an ocean of company representatives touting their new musical instruments and gear (see page 64). Within that crowd of industry professionals and products, along with all the normal commerce, there were inspiring instances of companies and organizations promoting worthy causes, such as fostering music education, providing free instruments and instruction for young people, and helping musicians protect their health.

One such organization is The NAMM Foundation, which "advances active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs." Information on this important organization and its mission, grants and scholarships is available at [nammfoundation.org](http://nammfoundation.org).

On my flight home from California, I binged some more episodes of *The Good Place*, and I read an email about "A Great Night in Harlem," the annual gala concert that raises funds for the non-profit organization Jazz Foundation of America ([jazzfoundation.org](http://jazzfoundation.org)). This year's concert will be held on April 4 at the Apollo Theater in New York (see page 46). The JFA does many things, including helping musicians who are in need, by providing housing and emergency assistance, pro bono medical care and disaster relief. When I contemplate all the ways music has improved my life, I realize that the least I can do is make a donation to help out musicians in crisis.

Scores of people are out there working tirelessly to aid their fellow human beings. Let's help out however we can. Let's think about what we as human beings owe to each other.

DB





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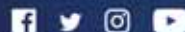
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## Chords & Discords

### Underappreciated Masters

My favorite part of DownBeat is the Reviews section. I love finding out about new music, especially if it's someone I've never heard of before. After a while, you start to notice the same names appearing in the Reviews section, either as a side person or as a leader. Musicians get a little momentum in their careers when one good side-person gig leads to another.

I've lived in the Bay Area since 1993 and have been fortunate to see many great local musicians. Scott Amendola is at the top of this list. His incredible drumming can be heard on albums by Bill Frisell, T.J. Kirk, Charlie Hunter, The Nels Cline Singers and many others.

But it is Amendola's songwriting that puts him on a different level. He has been releasing amazing original music since 1995: from ballads to blues, free-improv to straightahead jazz, and his orchestral masterpiece, *Fade To Orange*. And yet, the average jazz fan hasn't heard of him. So, it makes me wonder how many other artists like Scott Amendola are out there.

While it's impossible to recognize all of the great artists on the scene, I am hopeful that



Scott Amendola

DownBeat will try something new. How about once a year having an "Unsung Masters" issue? It could feature musicians who have been putting out great original music for 10 years or more, but who have flown under the radar. DownBeat readers could find out about new music they would not discover anywhere else.

It's extremely difficult for jazz musicians to make a living, and almost impossible without a little recognition. Maybe this would help.

SCOTT ARNOLD  
SCOTT93WEST@GMAIL.COM

### Motor City Blues

In your February issue, I was happy to see Detroit included in your feature "World's Best Jazz Cities." Accompanying the text about Detroit was a photo of Esperanza Spalding playing at the 2018 Detroit Jazz Festival. While Spalding is one of the greatest and most influential artists in the world, it would have been more meaningful to illustrate the piece with a photo of a Detroit artist, such as Regina Carter, James Carter, Kenny Garrett, Wendell Harrison, Rodney Whitaker or the late Geri Allen.

The same goes for some other cities in your article: The piece on Washington, D.C., had a photo of Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, a New Orleans-born jazz star.

When celebrating great jazz cities, it is important to recognize local stars. Without them, their respective hometowns would not be on the list.

ADAM KAHANA  
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

### Marlins vs. Rockies

I read with keen interest your article "World's Best Jazz Cities" in the February issue. I had no argument with any of the cities listed—until I saw Miami. As a Miami transplant to Denver, I laughed out loud to see it included.

Denver has more live jazz in a few months than Miami has in an entire year. We have several jazz clubs, we have world-class players, and we are blessed with several universities with jazz studies programs that have some of jazz's finest musicians as instructors.

In Denver, you can go to a different room

each night of the week to see live jazz. We have five or six weekly jam sessions, and KUVO Jazz is recognized as one of the best radio and streaming outlets for jazz on the planet.

Had any effort been made to look into the Denver jazz scene, it would have been clear that we easily outdistance Miami as a jazz city.

ARTURO GÓMEZ  
KUVO JAZZ  
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### Top of the List

Nancy Wilson will be missed (The Beat, March). I recall that your June 2004 issue included the feature "30 All-Time Favorite Jazz Vocal Recordings." No. 1 on that list was *Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley* (released by Capitol in 1962), along with comments about Wilson by Dee Dee Bridgewater, Karrin Allyson, Cassandra Wilson and other singers.

DENNIS HENDLEY  
MILWAUKEE

### Not in 'Ridgemont'

In the March issue, your otherwise fine obituary of Nancy Wilson contained an error: It said she acted in the film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Well, I had to see that for myself, and it's not her. It's the other Nancy Wilson, one of the two Wilson sisters in the rock band Heart.

LEE ALEXANDER BARNES  
ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

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Beat

## Anna Webber's 'Clockwise' Spans Musical Worlds

For decades, jazz composers have struggled for the recognition and resources enjoyed by their classically oriented counterparts. But for a new generation of jazz performers, that finally might be changing.

*Clockwise*, a new release on Pi Recordings that features a septet led by multi-instrumentalist and composer Anna Webber, exemplifies the trend.

"I think that these worlds are coming together—and specifically on the New York music scene, it's a really exciting time where people from New Music and jazz are interested in what each other are doing," the bandleader said.

Her *Clockwise* project was conceived with seven pioneering improvisers in mind: herself and Jeremy Viner on woodwinds, Jacob Garchik on trombone, Christopher Hoffman on cello, Matt Mitchell on piano, Chris Tordini on bass and Ches Smith on drums.

Drawing from 20th-century compositional languages of Iannis Xenakis, Milton Babbitt and John Cage—specifically, their work for percussion—Webber's approach offers an Ellingtonian flair that aims to stimulate the imaginations of each musician.

"I wanted to see what everybody else was capable of and really tailor my writing to those specific people—and not just to 'the trombone' or 'the cello,' but actually to Jacob Garchik or Christopher Hoffman," she explained. "So, I met with everybody and just asked, 'OK, show me a bunch of the weird sounds that you know how to do. ... [A]nd then let's improvise together, so I can get some more ideas through that, and see what kind of blends are possible.'"

Through interactions with New Music composers, Webber's learned to perceive the innovations of improvising musicians in a new light.

"Many New Music composers want to write saxophone stuff that's like Evan Parker," she



Multi-instrumentalist Anna Webber tailored her writing on *Clockwise* to the improvising musicians she assembled for the project.

observed. "It's a super-complex way of getting to what Evan Parker is doing—obviously in a very studied and thoughtful way. But it's not like he's writing it down as an 11-over-9 polyrhythm."

This led her to a new passion for translating musical improvisers' intuition into the written language of Western composition.

"We have all this facility as improvisers to do everything that everybody else is doing—in fact, they're trying to write down what we're doing. But we're not writing it down," she said. "So, why don't we write it down?"

*Clockwise* is her answer to the question, a delightfully quirky album that brings the strange virtuosity of extended techniques into the space of collective creativity. The notation guide for "Kore II" instructs the trombonist to "make a thwacking sound with tongue on mouthpiece"; "Idiom II" features an eerie microtonal tenor saxophone duet that uses a venting technique to alter pitches.

Drawing on the language of classical composition has its perks. It helped provide for Webber's four-week residency at the MacDowell Artist Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. That monthlong stay gave her the space to do the

meticulous, painful work of actually producing the scores.

"I had done all the research, I had met with everybody, I had done all my research on the instruments, I knew all the people," she said. "And then that was the last step: OK, lock myself in a room—in this case, a beautiful room in the woods with my lunch being delivered every day."

Webber is quick to insist that she's far from the first person to explore the interconnections of these seemingly disparate musics, evidenced in part by the Pulitzer Prize awards given to improviser-composers Ornette Coleman and Henry Threadgill.

"I feel like most musicians that I know don't stratify their music listening according to genre," Webber said. "A lot of what interests me as a composer, generally, is stuff that is important to classical composition—in a way that is different than a lot of jazz writing."

*Clockwise*, being drawn from the creative milieu of New York's music scene, where boundaries among styles rapidly are breaking down, might just offer a blueprint for a subsequent generation to build bridges spanning these musical worlds.

—Alex W. Rodriguez



## Riffs >

Lioness



**Inside the Den:** The band Lioness moves effortlessly from New Orleans-in-flected grooves to new-millennium bop and cooled-down swing on its debut, *Pride & Joy* (Posi-Tone), due out March 8. The group's front line of tenor saxophonist Jenny Hill, baritone saxophonist Lauren Sevian and alto saxophonist Alexa Tarantino is supported by Allison Miller behind the drumkit along with guitarist Amanda Monaco and organist Akiko Tsuruga. *Pride & Joy* draws upon material penned by Lioness band members as well as composers like Carla Bley.

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

**Armstrong House:** Kenyon Victor Adams has been named director of the Louis Armstrong House Museum, succeeding Michael Cogswell. Adams, who previously oversaw the arts initiative at Connecticut's Grace Farms Foundation, will assume his new role immediately. "I'm excited to be a part of this gem of a museum, its committed team and the truly breathtaking archives," Adams said in a press release detailing his appointment and the recent digitization project at the Queens nonprofit.

[louisarmstronghouse.org](http://louisarmstronghouse.org)

**'Grandest Gathering':** The Cape Town International Jazz Festival is set to return March 29–30 in Cape Town, South Africa. In addition to select free performances, master classes and workshops on journalism and technology, the festival's headliners will include Ibrahim Khalil Shihab, Chaka Khan, Eliane Elias, GoGo Penguin, John Scofield's Combo 66, Ndaka Yo Wiñi, Shekinah, Richard Bona, Cory Henry & The Funk Apostles, Keyon Harrold, Nicole Mitchell and Nubya Garcia.

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

**Final Bar:** Bernard Mixon, a Chicago vocalist and actor with film credits stretching from the late '80s through the early 2000s, died during December 2018 at the age of 69. Mixon's vocal career began on the South Side and eventually included work with AACM bandleader Phil Cohran, as well as George Lewis, who toured Europe with the singer.



Melissa Aldana (left), Immanuel Wilkins and Jure Puki perform at New York's SubCulture during Winter Jazzfest.

JONATHAN CHIMENE

# The Ibero-American Flavor of Winter Jazzfest

**FOR THE PAST 15 YEARS, WINTER** Jazzfest's signature event has been a weekend marathon spread across dozens of New York venues, with performances from early evening stretching out toward the dawn.

This year, for the first time, Winter Jazzfest extended over two weekends and held a half-marathon in Greenwich Village in six venues on the first Saturday of January, followed by the full and classic two-night marathon the next weekend. Both were curated within Winter Jazzfest's framework of exploring themes of social justice, this year's focus being on gender as the festival promised to offer gender-equitable programming by 2022.

Shuttling back and forth between several venues on Bleeker Street during an unusually warm January, the half-marathon was a somewhat more manageable mad-scrumble for space and sightlines than the full-marathon experience. Venues still were characteristically packed as the evening progressed.

The evening took off at The Sheen Center for Thought & Culture's elegant auditorium with the Marta Sanchez Quintet's polished compositions. The Spanish pianist, raised in Madrid, gently conducted the dialog among herself and Alex LoRe on alto saxophone, Jerome Sabbagh on tenor saxophone, Simon Willson on bass and Daniel Dor on drums, all of whom rendered the bandleader's cerebral creations with space for each musician to breathe and explore. Several of the compositions, such as Sanchez's "Danza Imposible," highlighted the rich, intertwining textures created by two frontline saxophones. Dor appeared on Sanchez's two most recent albums, and the interplay between the drummer and bandleader brimmed with a rich, unhurried beauty. As an opener to the half-marathon, the concert only hinted at what was to come.

Later at SubCulture, Chilean saxophonist

Melissa Aldana played an intense and sophisticated post-bop set. During her "Elsewhere," the bandleader's tenor and Joel Ross' fiery vibes lit up the room as Aldana amply shared the formidable skills that won her the 2013 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition. As the daughter and granddaughter of jazz musicians, Aldana has bop in her blood, and her forceful playing at times evoked earlier eras, but always lucidly framed by a 21st-century perspective.

After a long break, the night at SubCulture culminated in a Cuban firestorm, a mesmerizing duo of superstars from the Cuban jazz scene: Grammy-nominated pianist Alfredo Rodríguez and percussionist Pedrito Martinez (see page 32 for a feature on the performers). Both are lauded for their virtuosic performances, but each brings two uniquely rich worlds to the musical table. Rodríguez has the classical training of Havana's renowned and rigorous conservatories; Martinez's virtuosity emerged in the Old Havana barrio of Cayo Hueso, and was forged in the sacred drumming of Cuban Santería. Together, these two masters traded and juxtaposed riffs, laughing and delighting themselves and concertgoers in the deliciousness of their musical conversation, Martinez transitioning back and forth from traditional Cuban percussion to drum set as they moved through material from their upcoming album, *Duologue*, as well as some Cuban standards.

The first weekend was true to Winter Jazzfest's theme, with performances from artists with roots in Spain, Chile and Cuba, and several women-led ensembles. And given that the festival is easily the best way of taking the pulse of the contemporary jazz and improvised music scenes, it provided evidence of a diverse, eclectic, brilliant and inclusive Ibero-American presence.

—Catalina Maria Johnson

# Verve Celebrates Granz Centennial

**THE HISTORY OF JAZZ OFFERS A SELECT** group of rebels who profoundly bent its fortunes without ever playing a note of music. One of these lone wolves was Norman Granz (1918–2001), who parleyed his own rarified tastes and an indifference to industry norms into a vertically integrated jazz empire. By gathering everything under one thumb—his own—he created, managed and marketed his own visions of what the record industry could achieve.

Today, the eldest surviving child of that empire is Verve Records, since 1998 a unit of Universal Music. And the label is celebrating the centennial of Granz's birth with a four-CD set featuring artists with whom he worked, including Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald and Oscar Peterson. *Norman Granz: The Founder* was programmed by Granz biographer Tad Hershorn, whose lively liner notes also provide the narration.

"Even with all our labels today at Universal, Verve is still the one we use as our jazz brand," said Ken Druker, vice president for jazz development at Verve Label Group. "We hope this [box set] sells. It's an important part of our history. But it's not, as we say, a 'revenue play.'"

Danny Bennett, president/CEO of Verve Label Group, added: "Norman Granz's dedication to equality and social justice—for his artists and his audiences—was extraordinary in his time and is still relevant today. Every day we at Verve operate in the pioneering spirit of Norman Granz."

There is some irony in the notion of an enormous music corporation celebrating a man who likely wouldn't rise within its ranks today. Hostile to intrusion and indifferent to the marketplace, Granz relished his sovereignty. For him, nothing mattered but doing it his way. As a producer, though, his touch was light.

Granz began his impresario days in 1942 organizing off-night jam sessions in Los Angeles clubs. In 1944, he had an epiphany: If a jam could draw 200 in a club, why not 2,000 in L.A. Philharmonic Auditorium? "Jazz at the Philharmonic," he thought, had a nice ring to it, and the debut concert in July was recorded. As Granz listened days later, he was struck by how the concert's excitement could be felt through the recording and saw a new dimension in commercial recording: music as documentary. It would be the great innovation of his career. Granz took the Philharmonic recordings to executive Manie Sacks at Columbia, "but Sacks couldn't see the possibilities," Granz later said. So, the chance to issue the first live concert records in 1945 fell to an obscure label owned by Moses Asch.

The "Jazz at the Philharmonic" concept caught fire, fueled by the push-pull of concerts and records promoting each other. "For the first 10 years," Granz said in 1997, "the concerts sub-

dized the record company. Every artist didn't necessarily carry his own weight."

In 1956, Granz consolidated everything under a single brand, and Verve was born. Though spread across four discs, *The Founder* can't hit all the bases. But it shines light into some less expected early corners, like a track by the Ralph Burns Orchestra with Lee Konitz. "We wanted it to be a good listen," Druker said. "So, we kept the focus on the music flow." —John McDonough



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ALEJANDRO AYALA

Angel Bat Dawid's *The Oracle* splices together sonic fragments, spoken word and more.

# Angel Bat Dawid: Between Sun Ra and Gospel

**ANGEL BAT DAWID, A CHICAGO-BASED** avant-garde composer, improviser and multi-instrumentalist, hails from seven generations of ministers, and her approach to music never loses sight of the spiritual.

As she puts it: "My music, sometimes, it's just something comes over me, and then something pours out—that's all improvisation really is. You go with the sound and then it'll tell you to trust that the next thing you're gonna play is right—and it always is."

Most of her artful creations arise during serendipitous moments, and her new album, *The Oracle* (International Anthem), shares a Sun Ra-infused mixture of samples, sonic

fragments and spoken word—somehow austere and lush, simultaneously—built upon elements drawn from poems by Yusef Lateef and Margaret Burroughs, with Bat Dawid's clarinet brilliantly soaring and swooping to mimic vocal lines. It's a fierce one-woman show, with Bat Dawid playing every instrument on the album (save for Asher Simiso Gamedze's drumming on "Cape Town"), singing and completing the mix herself.

The 39-year-old artist's compositional style emerged over time as she recorded various pieces so *The Brotherhood*, her ensemble, could be kept appraised of new works. But Bat Dawid, a self-professed vinyl addict, also

brought a background in hip-hop production to the proceedings.

*The Oracle* unites a series of influences from her singular background, including time spent living in Kenya as a child of minister parents, who later "discovered their identity as 'Hebrew,'" or Black Hebrew Israelites. She describes her earliest experiences learning music as being centered in spiritual spaces and churches, and took her name—which translates to "Daughter of David"—from the Old Testament David, whom she admires for his ecstatic musicality and passion.

Returning to the States as an adolescent, Bat Dawid recalled feeling out of place, and found comfort in music, particularly Mozart's clarinet concertos. But during her early 20s, Bat Dawid's life was interrupted by a serious health condition, and upon recovery from surgery to address a benign brain tumor, she sought to explore the healing powers of music.

The entirety of the composer's past finds its way into *The Oracle*, an album shuttled into life through the use of a multitrack recording app on her phone, along with collections of sounds from traveling, as well as jams in London and South Africa. Bat Dawid, who refers to herself a "sonic archaeologist," seeks to find the sonic imprint of past events on physical spaces, incorporating them into her own music.

To collect these "vibes," she's taken her horn to spaces in Chicago's Cottage Grove neighborhood—including a lot where the Pershing Hotel, which hosted pianist Ahmad Jamal in 1958 as he recorded *At The Pershing: But Not For Me*, once stood—to gather the feeling of what's there, and use it to influence and inspire her instantaneous compositions.

As part of her constant search to find the undercurrent of the African Diaspora's spiritual practices, she titled "Impepho," a cut off the new album, for a plant that, when burnt, is said to enable contact with one's ancestors and with the divine. She's also introduced the music of South Africa into the song, finding inspiration in a 21st-century electronic music called gqom, joking that "'Impepho' is like an out-jazz version" of the genre.

On some level, Bat Dawid continued, she thinks of her music as following her family's legacy of ministry: "Some of my favorite composers and artists have been my best friends during rough times. ... I prayed over each and every song I did, and I meditated that it would bring peace and harmony, and all those good things. I [make] intentionally good music—there's a lot that's intentionally perverse and weird out there. So, I'm like, well, if they can go hard on that, I should be able to go hard on doing something that can heal people."

—Catalina Maria Johnson

# Michael Wolff's Miraculous Turn

**MICHAEL WOLFF'S FATHER ONCE SHARED** with him a psychiatrist's perspective on music and life: "Everyone who listens to Basie's band listens to the saxophones and trumpet, but if you want to know what's really going on, you gotta listen to the bass and drums."

Fascinated with what's beneath the surface, Wolff has spent his career uncovering simultaneous truths. And over the years, the pianist has collaborated with Cannonball Adderley, Sonny Rollins, Nancy Wilson and countless other deep-diving artists. He's issued a dozen records through the decades, but the release of his live recording, *Swirl* (Sunnyside), represents a depth of expression that emerged only after he'd traveled "to the brink and back."

After Wolff was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer in 2015, doctors offered a grave prognosis, and he slipped into a coma. But in what he refers to as a miraculous turn, a trial medication aided his recovery—along with his persistent will and the realization he had so much more music to share. "I'm more concerned with beauty, and not proving anything as a pianist or a composer," Wolff said. "So, I try to make sure that everything I play and record has a certain mood."

The mood Wolff's trio sets on *Swirl* is one of undeniable warmth. Interplay among the bandleader, bassist Ben Allison and drummer Allan Mednard reflects deep listening and near-intuitive reactions, helping to bring tremendous color and character to the bandleader's varied compositions, including "Jenny," a tribute to his friend afflicted with the same rare cancer, "Tough Ashkenazi," inspired by a conversation with pianist Fred Hersch, and "Allison," written for his bandmate Ben.

When Wolff fell ill, Allison often would bring over his bass, and the two would just play. "We really developed this duo language together," Wolff said. Mednard joined the unit during a 2017 Erroll Garner tribute presented by WBGO, and the trio has been working together ever since.

A deeply personal connection among the three artists, in part, creates the warmth swirling from one track to the next on the new album. Wolff relies on the connection to help him reach that other level of musicianship: "To me, there's one level that's sort of what we talk about with harmony and notes and chords and bebop. But then there's a level where you can go deeper."

Allison, too, recognizes the immense freedom in playing with openness and trust: "You



never know which way the music is going to go, which is exciting. Any musician can take a quick left turn and lose his bandmates in the process. But, the twists and turns this trio takes are always based on musical logic. We don't always know where we're going to end up, but when we get to the end, it always feels inevitable—like it was meant to happen that way."

Along with warmth, destiny might prove to be another, albeit unintended, theme of the new record. But Wolff admits his family has become his primary focus—an enduring force and source of unconditional love. "It sounds a little bit hokey," he said, "but I just think, at this point, the love and the warmth and the universality of life and music is all-consuming for me." —Stephanie Jones



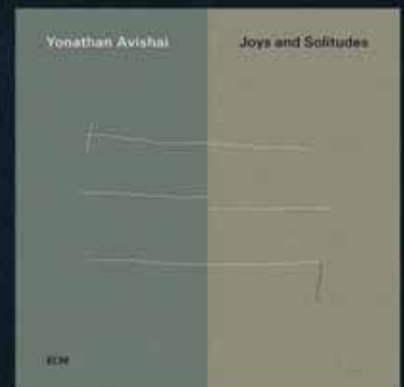
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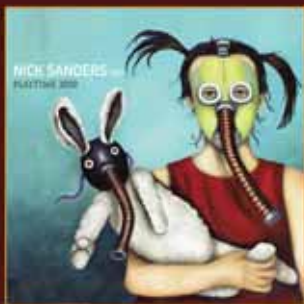




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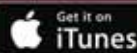
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# Rother's Solo Path

Though his résumé includes a long and varied solo career, Michael Rother's work often has been discussed in relation to the more famous ensembles and performers he's collaborated with. He counts early membership in electronic pioneers Kraftwerk; krautrock duo Neu!, his band with drummer Klaus Dinger; and Harmonia, a collaboration with the members of Cluster and, for a single 1976 session, Brian Eno.

Starting the following year, Rother went marching down paths of his own creation, propelling his motorik rhythms and atmospheric melodies toward mesmerizing boundaries.

Now, Rother's legacy is getting a proper spotlight turn with the release of *Solo*, a six-disc box set that compiles the first four LPs that he issued under his own name, as well as a collection of movie soundtrack work and an EP of live material and remixes. It's a welcome addition to the krautrock canon, but it's also best consumed in small doses. That might run counter to the binge-listening approach that most luxe releases like this encourage. But heard in quick succession, these albums start to blur together, melting into one long hypnotic, pulsating beat and peeling guitar solo.

Rother landed on the aesthetic sprawled out across the set during his tenure in Neu!, one that he attempts slight variations of throughout the box set's albums. He occasionally messes with the formula, as on "KM 10," from 1979's *Katzenmusik*, which features an extended intro of squiggling guitar lines, or the pensive opening chords of "Erlkönig," found on 1982's *Fernwärme*. Eventually, though, the chugging drums, provided throughout by Can member Jaki Liebezeit, fade into the mix like a horse at full gallop, just cresting the horizon.

That's what makes *Soundtracks*, a disc that includes Rother's scores for a pair of 2015 films, such a welcome addition to *Solo*. The hypnotic qualities of his work still are present, but are being used for dramatic effect, via arpeggiated strings and some buzzing synth drones. Even without the filmic visuals, the tension and release—especially in the four sections meant to accompany the crime drama *The Robbers*—is immediately palpable.

The nuances and emotional fluctuations of each of the studio albums included, though, are best appreciated on an individual basis. All the better to help draw out those splendid moments when Rother adjusts or abandons his formula.



Michael Rother

*Katzenmusik* offers the broadest scope with its occasional formless interludes, skittering, almost disco-like beats and "KM 11," a mist-covered solo guitar piece. But throughout his first four solo ventures, there are moments that slip away from what's expected. *Liebezeit* is given room to show off his remarkable skills on "Zeni," from Rother's 1977 debut, *Flammende Herzen*. The drummer rolls and tumbles steadily through the track, like a pilot sending his prop plane through a bank of storm clouds.

The entirety of *Solo* also provides a deluxe reminder of Rother's impact on modern experimental and alternative music. The unyielding beats and psychedelic overtones were borrowed en masse by '90s group Stereolab on its early recordings, and the legacy continues with more contemporary artists like LCD Soundsystem and Cut Copy. The *Live And Remixes* disc finds Rother connected directly with the younger set. One live track is a recording of Hallogallo 2010, his project with former Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley and guitarist Aaron Mullen, who both lean into a clenched, medium-tempo grind. And one of the remixes finds Rother smoothing out the jagged edges of a track by British post-punks Boxed In.

The set also serves as a reminder that Rother's work didn't exist in a vacuum. His German contemporaries, like Can and Cluster, were aiming to achieve the same ecstatic effects through repetition. The difference is that those groups also veered into far chopier waters of experimentation and discordance. Rother never seemed to want to be anything else, but infinitely listenable. And for the most part, that's what *Solo* is, imminently listenable.

DB

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Multi-instrumentalist Macie Stewart divvies up time between Ohmme and a batch of other projects.

MAREN CELEST



## Macie Stewart's Equilibrium

**WITH TIME SPLIT AMONG HER INDIE-ROCK** band Ohmme, Chicago's experimental jazz community and a perennial quest for her next project, Macie Stewart is a master of equilibrium.

To the 25-year-old multi-instrumentalist, that variety is paramount to remaining inspired. "I've always felt myself drawn to doing as many things as possible," said Stewart, whose ever-expanding list of collaborators includes saxophonist Ken Vandermark, cellist Lia Kohl, SZA, Wilco and hip-hop mogul Chance the Rapper. "Every skill is built upon another skill. It takes a cross-pollina-

tion of communities to ensure that you stay creative. ... It helps things stay vibrant."

Raised playing violin and piano, Stewart's foundation lies in a continued practice of classical music, which she pursued during childhood through a combination of self-study and free classes at DePaul University's Community Music Division. Later, she found her creative creature comforts in the stalwart venues of Chicago's improvised music community, such as Constellation, Elastic Arts and Hungry Brain. The constant flow of creative energy across all of

them, Stewart said, was catalyzed by friendships with local fixtures, like drummer Quin Kirchner.

With so many opportunities for collaboration, it was only a matter of time until something stuck with Stewart, and that came with her introduction to multi-instrumentalist Sima Cunningham, now a member of Ohmme. The duo's evolution was anything but intentional, a serendipitous combination of Stewart departing from her indie outfit, Kids These Days, and filling in for Cunningham during a series of 2013 performances.

Today, Ohmme boasts a handful of recordings and is planning upcoming tours. The project enables Stewart's constant movement between studio and stage: "Ohmme was really just about making a recording at first. Our songwriting style is the same, but now we're ready to play with production," said Stewart, who wields guitar in the group. "Violin is really drawing me right now, exploring the textures, the ambient noise and what different sounds I can get out of my instrument. ... There's so much more to learn about it." But first a break—something, Stewart said, she has yet to experiment with.

"I have finally taken a lot of time to myself," she said. "I now make sure not to over-schedule myself, flip my brain and change gears constantly. Recharging is critical to maintain my creative energy—and my sanity." —Hilary Brown

# JULIAN LAGE LOVE HURTS

*Love Hurts* collects a series of multifaceted, freewheeling interpretations of pieces written by a range of artists and songwriters representative of Lage's omnivorous musical appetite. "The covers on this record are like when you move into a new apartment, the last thing you do is hang your pictures on the wall," Lage says. "Those pictures define your aesthetic in a way. So the tunes we chose kind of define the aesthetic I natively love but hadn't put on a record yet."



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Michel Legrand (1932–2019)

MICHAEL JACKSON

# In Memoriam: Michel Legrand

**IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II**, when forward-looking intellectuals in France and the United States were infatuated with each other, French pianist, composer and arranger Michel Legrand was the ideal bridge between the two worlds. Still performing until his death at age 86 on Jan. 26, Legrand contributed to a number of jazz recordings, most notably *Legrand Jazz*, a 1958 session that included Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

Born in a suburb of Paris, Legrand studied

for seven years at the Conservatoire de Paris, where his teachers included the renowned Nadia Boulanger, who also would tutor Quincy Jones, Aaron Copland and Astor Piazzola. By the time he left the conservatory in 1949, Legrand had added jazz to his interests, having been enthralled by a 1947 Dizzy Gillespie concert. He would go on to record with Gillespie on *Dizzy Digs Paris* in 1953.

During the early '50s, Legrand became an in-demand accompanist and arranger for popular French performers. But what allowed him to break out was a collection of French chansons arranged by Legrand for English-language performances. Released in 1954 by Columbia, *I Love Paris* sold 8 million copies worldwide, helping Legrand become a ubiquitous figure in music.

Speaking to DownBeat in 2016, he recalled: "Columbia says to me, 'We would like to give you a present. Tell us [the kind of] album you want to make, and we'll pay for it, and you'll do it.' So, I said, 'I want to do a jazz album'—with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and I named all the jazz musicians on the album. And they said, 'Let's do it.'"

Aside from Davis and Coltrane, *Legrand Jazz* included Ben Webster, Bill Evans, Phil Woods, Hank Jones, Art Farmer and Donald Byrd, among others. An oddity in Davis' massive catalog, the session cemented a lasting friendship between the two, which would eventually culminate in a second recording, the soundtrack to the film *Dingo*, which was recorded in 1990 and released the following year.

In his 2016 interview, Legrand said that Davis summoned him to Los Angeles for the sessions, but then balked at getting underway. Eventually, Legrand pulled the score together, and Davis went into the studio with 30 musicians, including Kenny Garrett, then a member of the trumpeter's ensemble. "I remember being excited about recording with Miles and Michel—two legends," the saxophonist wrote in an email to DownBeat. "Michel composed so many great songs."

The film, starring Davis as trumpeter Billy Cross, was a box office disaster, grossing just \$132,500 in director Rolf De Heer's native Australia.

Among his most famous songs for the big screen is "The Windmills Of Your Mind" from *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), which won an Academy Award for best song and became a standard. Legrand also won Oscars for his work on the scores to the 1971 film *Summer of '42* and the 1983 film *Yentl*. His final film work was on a long-lost Orson Welles feature, *The Other Side of the Wind*, released in 2018.

Overall, Legrand recorded more than 100 albums, winning five Grammys. —James Hale

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"Queen of Sass" **Aubrey Logan**'s Resonance debut, *Where The Sunshine Is Expensive*, is the powerhouse vocalist/trombonist's quirky love letter to Los Angeles. The album was recorded live in front of an intimate audience at EastWest studios in Hollywood in January 2018 and features special guests **Dave Koz** and **Casey Abrams**. Logan is a featured guest on Dave Koz's #1 selling contemporary jazz album, *Summer Horns II: From A to Z*, and her debut solo album *Impossible* (2017) charted #2 on the iTunes and Billboard jazz charts. "Aubrey is that rare artist who comes along once in a very long while." (Dave Koz)

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DREW ALTIZER

Chucho Valdés (left), Omara Portuondo and Dianne Reeves each performed during the SFJAZZ gala, held Jan. 31 in San Francisco.

# SFJAZZ Honors Chucho Valdés at Annual Gala

**LIKE A JEWEL PROUDLY SITUATED ALONG-**side some of San Francisco's most significant performing arts institutions, the SFJAZZ Center shimmered on Jan. 31 during its 2019 gala, an event honoring six-time Grammy Award-winning Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés.

The Joe Henderson Lab, an intimate space, provided the perfect setting for pre-concert performances from members of SFJAZZ's High

School All-Stars. Rebeca Mauleón, director of education at SFJAZZ, got up on stage to talk about the high-school ensemble, as well as the organization's education and outreach programs.

For Mauleón—a fan who became a close friend and collaborator with Valdés—the event was a particularly momentous occasion. “We developed a wonderful bond,” she said prior to the gala, “and I feel really lucky to be able to celebrate

with him and to honor him for all the incredible contributions he has made.”

Already warmed up and full of energy, the crowd settled into the center's sleek Miner Auditorium for an evening of music, as well as the presentation of SFJAZZ's Lifetime Achievement Award to Valdés.

The pianist sat in with a number of ensembles during the evening, showcasing his ability to maneuver up and down the keyboard with lightning precision, or to take spare, quieter and lushly harmonic journeys. Irakere 45, an extension of the ensemble Valdés helped found, rocked the stage with Afro-Cuban rhythms, before vocalist Dianne Reeves took the stage with just the pianist for a captivating version of “My Foolish Heart.” The duo then was joined by 88-year-old Cuban vocalist Omara Portuondo for a delightful version of “Bésame Mucho.”

SFJAZZ has a lot to be proud of, and the gala was a fitting tribute to its legion of accomplishments. “We do something here that is unusual in the country, if not the world,” Randall Kline, SFJAZZ founder and executive director, said before the event. “It is a new model, a blend between the focus of a concert hall, and the comfort and informality of a club. We're doing close to 500 shows a year, we've got extensive educational outreach and activities, and the bigger picture is that this music really reflects a multicultural point of view.”

—Lily O'Brien

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# Joseph Jarman Remembered

**MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST JOSEPH JARMAN**, best known as a member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago from 1970 to 1993 and again during the early 2000s, died Jan. 9 of cardiac arrest. He had been living at the Lillian Booth Actors Home in Englewood, New Jersey, for several years.

Jarman was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, on Sept. 14, 1937. He grew up in Chicago and attended DuSable High School, where he studied with Capt. Walter Dyett, one of the city's most prominent music educators.

But in 1955, Jarman dropped out of high school during his junior year and joined the United States Army, serving as a paratrooper in the 11th Airborne Division. Long before the U.S. formally entered Vietnam, he was deployed to Southeast Asia and injured in a raid on a village that resulted in the death of 18 U.S. soldiers. Jarman spent the remainder of his time in the service in West Germany, playing saxophone in his division's concert band.

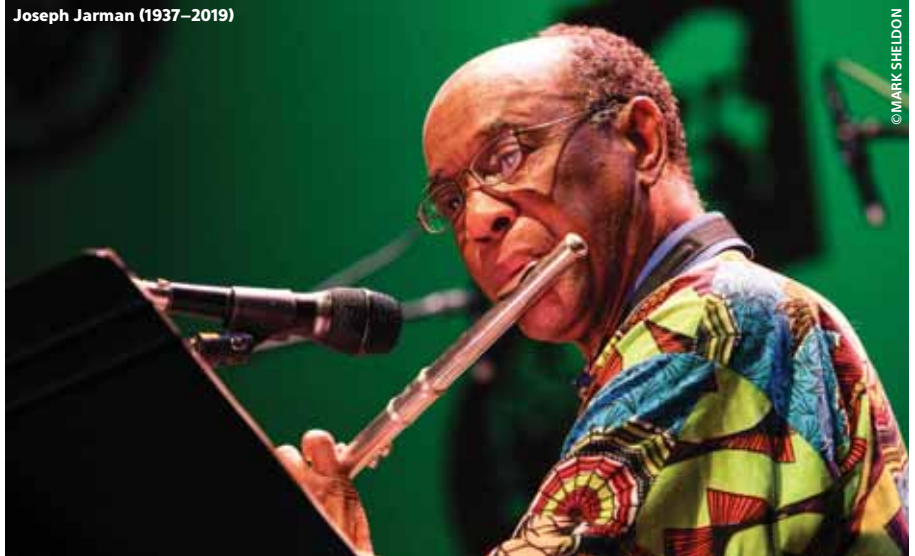
Following his discharge from the Army, he returned to Chicago and attended Woodrow Wilson Junior College, where he met Roscoe Mitchell in 1961. Other students at the time included bassist Malachi Favors Maghostut and saxophonists Anthony Braxton and Henry Threadgill. Jarman and the others became charter members of the AACM, their inaugural concert taking place in 1965, as he led a group that included trumpeter Bill Brimfield and saxophonist Fred Anderson.

The multi-instrumentalist recorded two of the earliest albums tied to AACM, both issued by the label Delmark: 1967's *Song For*—featuring the 14-minute “Non-Cognitive Aspects Of The City,” on which Jarman recites a multi-part poem in between instrumental solos—and 1968's *As If It Were The Seasons*.

In 1977, he self-published a book of poetry, *Black Case*, which contained writings from as far back as 1960. In a 1999 interview with Perfect Sound Forever, he said, “I’ve always been interested in blending all the elements. ... [S]ome even claimed I was the first quote-unquote jazz musician to incorporate what they now call ‘multimedia.’ We were doing performance art as far back as 1965, just not calling it that. ... I’ve found also in other cultures that all of these things are blended in together. Only here, because of the illusion of intellectualism, our society separates the validity of human expression.”

Shortly after the release of *As If It Were The Seasons*, Jarman joined what then was known as the Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble. When the group decamped for Paris in 1969, a promoter attached “of Chicago” to the troupe’s name, and it stuck. Jarman brought theatrical and multimedia elements to the group, wearing robes and face

Joseph Jarman (1937–2019)



paint onstage, and frequently singing lyrics, reciting poetry or inserting dramatic exhortations into their pieces, countering the professorial Mitchell and the lab-coated Lester Bowie. Jarman was, in some ways, the most political and confrontational member of the AEC; photos exist of him stripping naked in concert.

When he learned that his friend and collaborator had died, Famoudou Don Moye, who joined the Art Ensemble as a percussionist in 1970, called Jarman a “hero, friend, mentor, big brother, colleague, collaborator and co-conspirator” in an email relayed to DownBeat by Pi Recordings’ Seth Rosner.

In 1990, Jarman traveled to Japan, and was ordained as a Shin Buddhist priest. He subsequently founded the Brooklyn Buddhist Association that year with his then-wife, writer Thulani Davis, and established the Jikishinkan Aikido Dojo. In 1993, Jarman chose to retire from music to focus on his priestly duties and running the dojo.

But three years later, he returned to music at the invitation of AACM violinist Leroy Jenkins (1932–2007). Jarman, Jenkins and pianist Myra Melford subsequently formed the trio Equal Interest.

“I studied Aikido and Zen meditation with Joseph Jarman at his dojo in Brooklyn from about 1989 to 1993,” Melford recalled. “I found as I got more deeply into these practices that they had a very beneficial impact on my work as a musician. I had a keener sense of awareness of what was going on around me on the bandstand and how to respond in the moment. I was more calm and alert, and had greater physical endurance for playing high-energy music and a greater sense of how energy was moving within me, and between me and the other players and the audience.

“I also began to feel more spiritually connect-

ed in the music, and this in turn brought a new stream of lyricism and simplicity to my playing—something I observed in Joseph’s music, as well. ... I’m so grateful to have had the opportunity to study and play with Joseph for many years; the lessons continue to inform my music to this day.”

Jarman delivered an opening invocation for the first 11 years of New York’s Vision Festival and performed at the event in various contexts. Patricia Nicholson-Parker, the festival’s organizer and founder of Arts for Art, said of Jarman’s participation, “It is important how things begin. To always begin things from the most centered and spiritual place, then all that follows will be blessed. And so, the first and every Vision Festival began with an invocation by Joseph Jarman. ... His understanding of the creative imperative, of the music, of performance, and the importance of a spiritual grounding guided us for as long as he was able to do so.”

Jarman rejoined the Art Ensemble in 2003, performing on a pair of studio works, *The Meeting* and *Sirius Calling*, as well as *Non-Cognitive Aspects Of The City*, a live album culled from a series of 2005 New York concerts.

Jarman made his final public appearance in 2017, when the Art Ensemble performed at Columbia University’s Lenfest Center for the Arts. He read a poem and sang, and when he was there, the energy level of the other musicians seemed elevated. Pi’s Rosner recalled, “We were excited and honored to be able to work with him when he returned to the AEC fold. To be able to see the remaining living members once again record and perform together was a dream come true. The October 2017 concert was a beautiful event, and we are grateful to everyone who helped to realize it. It was a fitting tribute to Joseph and a beautiful way to close the book on his live performances and time with the AEC.”

—Philip Freeman

35<sup>th</sup> edition

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# GALACTIC RESPECTFUL CARETAKERS

BY JENNIFER ODELL | PHOTOS BY ERIKA GOLDRING





The members of Galactic pose inside Tipitina's, the legendary New Orleans venue that they now own. From left: Ben Ellman, Jeffrey Raines, Robert Mercurio, Richard Vogel and Stanton Moore.





During two decades of performing at Tipitina's, members of Galactic have amassed an abundance of memories tied to the historic New Orleans venue.

## Last fall, the members of New Orleans funk band **Galactic** signed paperwork to buy the historic Uptown music club Tipitina's.

The sale made them the venue's fourth owners, putting them at the helm of a local institution that's played a central role in their musical development—as a band, as individual musicians and as New Orleans music fans. The five bandmates began talking about the potential purchase back in 2015, after their manager, Alex Brahl, suggested to owner Roland Von Kurnatowski that whenever he was ready to sell, he should think of Galactic.

"We all thought he was kind of crazy at first," the band's bassist, Robert Mercurio, admits.

By February 2018, though, Von Kurnatowski was ready to sell. For the musicians, it felt like the right move, and a bold one: to become guardians of a place to which they all felt an undeniable connection. Any romantic notions about their acquisition of the 800-person capacity club, however, soon dissipated as the group began what Galactic saxophonist Ben Ellman would describe as "a nightmare emotional roller-coaster" of a negotiation process during which deals were set forth then fell apart, "sometimes in the same day."

Nine months later, the ups and downs had become so stressful that Mercurio couldn't sleep. Drummer Stanton Moore recalls having "crazy dreams" about the sale. Local media reports that Von Kurnatowski faced lawsuits alleging he had cheated people in a Ponzi scheme didn't help matters, particularly after already having been accused publicly by multiple artists of payment delays for sold-out shows.

Finally, Galactic and Von Kurnatowski reached a deal. When the Nov. 30 closing date arrived, it still seemed possible that Galactic would end the day empty-handed. Instead, they took ownership of the real estate at 501 Napoleon Ave. and the Tipitina's business, which it has been associated with for 42 years. Galactic's roller coaster ride wasn't over: "Of course, within moments of closing, we got word one of the top speakers had just blown," says pianist Richard Vogel. It was starting to feel more manageable, though, and as news of the sale went public, a tide of gratitude rolled in.

"After we closed and it was official that it was ours," Ellman recalls, "[for] the majority of

people coming up to us to say something, it was not, 'Congratulations.' It was, 'Thank you.'"

It's a Friday afternoon in early January and most of the band is seated around a table in a small office space on the second floor of the club. Ellman is nestled between a row of storage lockers and a pile of old concert posters and flyers. The stack includes an ad for a James Booker show from the late '70s or early '80s that features a drawing of the pianist's smiling face and signature eye patch. As Ellman sifts through the heap, he pauses to inspect a hand-drawn, neon-green poster promoting an array of shows in the month of August, circa the late '80s: Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Marcia Ball, Buckwheat Zydeco and a "Blues Revue" featuring Earl King, Deacon John and J. Monque'D. A Neville Brothers performance (spelled "Thee Nevilles") rounds out the month's bigger acts.

The members of Galactic have just wrapped up a rehearsal for a tour in support of their latest studio album, *Already Ready Already* (Tchoup-Zilla). But as they trade anecdotes about the unexpected "thank you" phenomenon—seemingly everyone's been thanked by complete strangers on a neighborhood sidewalk at some point—it's clear they're excited about rolling up their sleeves and getting to work as Tipitina's new owners.

After Moore shares a story about a recent "thank you" that was hollered through the rolled-down window of a passing car, triggering a round of laughter, Ellman looks up from

the posters and smiles.

"You don't get that when you buy a pizza place," he says.

"It says a lot about the establishment," Ellman continues. "And it says a lot about the fact that, yeah, we have the mortgage and the keys and such, but we all feel like caretakers. A place that's got this much history and has been around for so long, you don't own it. You just take care of it."

That history is familiar to many residents of New Orleans: In 1977, a group of 14 music fans-turned-investors opened Tipitina's primarily to give their hero, Professor Longhair (aka Henry Roeland Byrd), a place to play during the career resurgence he was experiencing at the time. Previously the 501 Club, named for its address on Napoleon Avenue, the venue survived a rocky first few months, drawing crowds for shows by Professor Longhair and The Meters. Eventually, the club became known for regular appearances by both established and emerging acts, like the Neville Brothers, Dr. John and The Radiators, among others.

The first owners experimented with different uses for the large space, including a restaurant and juice bar from which bananas were sometimes given to patrons at the door (hence the venue's banana logo). Early on, Tipitina's also shared the building with Jerry and Walter Brock, who in 1980 sent out the first WWOZ broadcast from the community radio station they'd set up in a tiny apartment unit on the second floor, where they took to dropping a microphone through a hole in the floor to capture and broadcast live music from the club below.

Galactic has amassed its own arsenal of memories at 501 Napoleon, having performed there regularly for two decades together and with their various side projects. During that time, the band's annual shows on New Year's Eve and Halloween, and during Mardi Gras and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, have become major highlights on the city's music calendar. All of these special gigs typically sell out.

Individually, each member of the band has his own history with the iconic yellow building, too, including countless hours spent watching musical heroes perform. Moore was a teenager when he first played at Tipitina's as part of an afternoon music workshop. Ellman—who worked in the club's now defunct kitchen back when he was new to the city—recalls performing with his klezmer-funk ensemble, the New Orleans Klezmer All-Stars, during an employee band night.

All of that history has percolated through Galactic's music for years, making their new role as "caretakers" of Tipitina's a natural progression.

Which is not to say that Galactic intends to stick to the status quo. The venue's legendary status means that tourists will continue seek it out, but just like every other venue in New Orleans, it must navigate an increasingly competitive music market.

Mercurio says the band is pondering plans to present early-evening jazz sets and other opportunities to utilize the space in more intimate ways than the "big rock show" vibe that's been standard in recent years.

Moore, meanwhile, expresses concern about the dearth of original New Orleans music available these days on Frenchmen Street, where he sees other clubs booking shows based more on "how many heads they can get in and how many drinks they can sell."

The balancing act of keeping a business afloat while also presenting original, compelling performances will be a key factor as the band takes a more active role in booking music.

"If you're going to try something truly different that has no precedent, it's not something you rush into—you think it through," says keyboardist Richard Vogel.

"And we have a staff in place that we respect and trust," Moore adds. "We don't want to book something amazing in here that won't work for whatever reason and have nobody show up for it—because that's not fair to the musicians."

"We have a lot of ideas," Ellman says, "but there are also a lot of people involved who have been running this place successfully, who understand the economics of it better than we do."

In addition to the existing staff, many of whom the band has known

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Galactic's latest album, *Already Ready Already*, features a range of vocalists, including Erica Falls, who also tours with the band.



and worked with for years while performing at the club, Galactic is leaning on its own manager and agent—as well as each other—during its current brainstorming phase.

spoof). By 1996, the band had ditched the condom reference in its name and enlisted Theryl “Houseman” DeClouet as a featured singer. Twenty-odd years their senior, DeClouet’s

homegoing celebration at Tipitina’s, where they’d recorded their first live album together in 2001.

Galactic’s final recording with DeClouet, 2003’s *Ruckus*, sparked another key shift for the band. Having tasked Dan the Automator with producer duties because of his remix and DJ work, they found their own vision for the album involved a bigger leap into electronic music than where the Gorillaz producer was headed. Ellman and Mercurio ultimately finished producing the album, learning the ropes from Mike Napolitano as they went. The pair has produced every Galactic album since.

“*Ruckus* was the first time we had our own studio,” Mercurio explains.

As if intuiting the rest of his thought, Ellman continues: “That creates a whole different scenario, not being forced into being in a rehearsal room and then going into a studio you’ve paid to be in for a specific time. Instead, it’s at our leisure to work and chip away at ideas.”

*Ruckus* also signaled a move toward what would become a lasting use of electronics, ranging from effects pedals and drum phasers to the samples and beats that appeared on 2007’s *From The Corner To The Block*. That album marked a new level of involvement for Ellman and Mercurio as producers.

The result was an innovative use of New Orleans hip-hop concepts, including those long embraced by the brass band community. The organic funk remained while collabo-

**‘A place that’s got this much history and has been around for so long, you don’t own it. You just take care of it.’ —Ben Ellman**

It’s the kind of open-minded, people-centric leadership style fans might expect from Galactic, a rhythm- and groove-driven quintet that long has welcomed outside voices into its mix. Whether those voices are instrumentalists like trumpeter Shamarr Allen, trombonist Corey Henry and percussionist Mike Dillon, or the variety of singers with whom the group has worked, Galactic has displayed a gift for forging symbiotic musical relationships. The results are audible, packing new dynamics into the fundamental sound they’ve developed during about 25 years together.

The group started out in the early ’90s as Galactic Prophylactic (the name of a product in a 1982 *Saturday Night Live* advertising

smooth, r&b-inflected vocals added depth and warmth to the sound of what already was a solid New Orleans-flavored funk band.

Back-to-back spins of the band’s 1996 debut, *Coolin’ Off*, and its second album, 1998’s *Crazyhorse Mongoose*, suggest the singer’s influence extended beyond the tracks on which he was featured. Within a couple of years, Galactic’s music had started to mature, its grooves were deeper and its songs were opening up in a more relaxed, soulful way. Time on the road certainly contributed to that growth, but those recordings and the live performances that came between them indicated DeClouet did, too.

After his death last year, the band hosted a

rations with the Soul Rebels (arguably the first brass band to make '90s hip-hop a cornerstone of its sound) and Digable Planets alum Ladybug Mecca underscored the band's ability to find inspiration in—and to inspire—outside voices.

All the band's albums since then, including the tightly wrought, pop-hook laden *Already Ready Already*, have incorporated different singers and often different styles, while weaving in New Orleans references, usually in unexpected ways. (Examples include a riff on the theme song of New Orleans horror-movie TV host Morgus the Magnificent and the decision to filter Allen Toussaint's voice into the song "Bacchus" on 2010's *Ya-Ka-May*.)

On the new album, guest contributors include the band's touring vocalist, Erica Falls, plus other New Orleans-based singers, like Princess Shaw and Miss Charm Taylor, who put new spins on what Falls calls Galactic's "well-oiled machine" of a sound. The guests add a fresh feel that never compromises the band's bright and rhythm-driven ensemble voice, which stretches out on instrumental tracks bookending the album ("Already" and "Ready Already").

Galactic kept things much shorter than usual with this album, too.

"We had 14 or 15 songs," Ellman explains. "We decided to make a really concise album, the concept being to put out more music on a

regular basis, instead of a 14-song record every two or three years."

Ellman and Mercurio say they sometimes find themselves intentionally striving to make a song "sound more Galactic" in the studio. With its swaggering horn lines, Ellman's blues-soaked harmonica work and a song structure that keeps the energy moving alongside Miss Charm Taylor's growl-tinged voice, the tune "Clap Your Hands" exemplifies the Galactic aesthetic.

"We're always trying to be better songwriters," says Ellman. "We're trying to write better bridges, better choruses. I don't really think it used to be as much like, head, solo, head, solo—the records were always more than that. But we're always thinking of the song. We have to think of the different singers, the different people at the front of the song, and that sometimes changes the direction of the song."

*Already Ready Already* mines the contemporary New Orleans music landscape for its ideas and direction. There's a funeral reference, but it's no traditional jazz funeral. Instead, it's the earworm "Dance At My Funeral," which features a stop-start melody and the vocals of Boyfriend, an electro-cabaret rapper with a penchant for subversive feminist themes. On this track, Galactic provides the musical lighter fluid, and Boyfriend adds the spark.

Falls is featured on the track "Touch Get

Cut," a song that explores dark subject matter, but which actually had humorous origins.

"On the road with the guys, if I would have some food left over that I wanted to keep," Falls says, "I would write on the top of the container, 'Touch, get cut.'" She laughs.

"When they were working on this tune, it was supposed to be something else, but then Ben got the idea to say, 'Touch, get cut.' From there, it went to what's happening with women and the #MeToo movement. It was sort of under that realm until they brought it to me. ... Then I put my own little spin to it, lyrically. Later, we came together as a group after working on it separately to match up our ideas for the track."

Other songs on the new album came together more quickly, including "Going Straight Crazy," featuring Princess Shaw. Ellman and Mercurio lined up three works in progress for her to hear and she zeroed in on the one they secretly thought was the best fit.

"When she heard that one, she got all excited and sang some scratch vocals that sounded really close to what the song is now," Mercurio recalls.

He adds that he was afraid Moore, who sometimes hears material later than other band members, would hate it: "I was certain he was going to be like, 'It's just kicks and snaps, and this sucks,'" Mercurio admits, laughing.



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Galactic has made a tradition out of playing at Tipitina's on New Year's Eve.

"No, hearing that for the first time, I was like, 'Damn, this is great.' Instantly," Moore assures him.

When Ellman points out that "Stanton loves the strong hook" (like the one in "Going Straight Crazy"), Moore explains that he intentionally has "tried to learn to listen for the 'big picture'—the song—and not just the drums." Over time, Moore says, "I've learned to trust the process."

When it comes to song selection, there is a lot of give-and-take among the bandmates. "Everyone has equal veto power," says Ellman, who credits the band's longevity in part on its ability to work within a democratic framework.

That doesn't just apply to the core band, though. Asked what stands out most to her about the creative process of her work with Galactic, Falls immediately replies, "Everyone is involved."

Between shows at Tipitina's, the band will perform at numerous high-profile festivals this year, including the French Quarter Festival (April 11) and the Jazz & Heritage Festival (May 4), both in New Orleans; and the High Sierra Music Festival, taking place July 4–7 in Quincy, California.

But despite the jam band label sometimes ascribed to Galactic, there isn't a lot of jamming that happens when the ensemble gets onstage—at least not in the sense of extended, winding improvisations.

"We are a well-rehearsed unit," Falls says. "That makes it very relaxed onstage. ... And

I like that because everyone knows where the train is going."

That certainly was clear when Galactic took the stage for the first time as the owners of Tipitina's for a New Year's Eve show at the end of last year. At the time, they still were rehearsing songs from the new album. Ellman says in recent years, they've "learned the album at the end," making changes as needed for their live take on the music, likely explaining why "Clap Your Hands" was the only new tune included in the performance.

Instead, Galactic delved into a wide range of material from its catalog, plus a handful of r&b covers that matched the vibe of the room, saying little as band members let the music speak for itself. The troupe opened with the brash "Karate" (from the 2012 album *Carnivale Electricos*), which saw booming horn figures shift into a funk-filled spotlight for guitarist Jeffrey Raines. As the clock struck midnight, the band leaned toward jazz with its take on "Auld Lang Syne."

From there, the still-swaying audience of celebrants was led back to the '70s with a cover of The Jackson 5 classic "I Want You Back." Among the original highlights was the older tune "Heart Of Steel," which saw Raines' sticky guitar lines punctuated by Mercurio's stutter-stopping bass. Finally, slowing things down in the encore, Galactic gave Falls' voice top billing on a gorgeous finale: a rendition of Ann Peebles' "I Can't Stand The Rain."

As the sold-out crowd meandered past the

bust of Professor Longhair near the front door of Tipitina's and outside into the New Year's Day fog, the members of Galactic started to pack up. Family and friends surrounded the musicians backstage and in the green room.

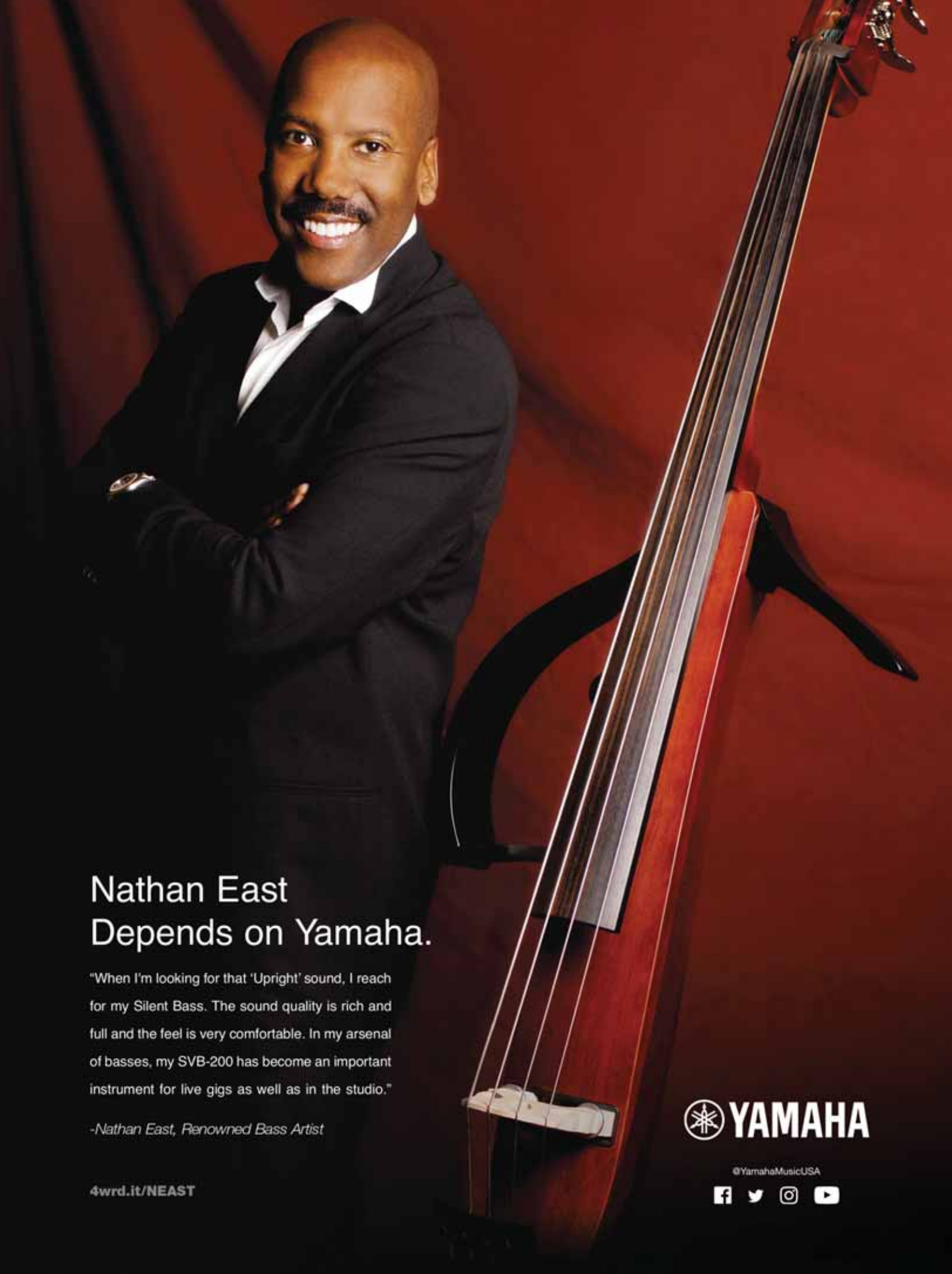
One month prior, the night after the band got the keys to Tipitina's, Ellman and some of those same friends celebrated by relocating their long-running poker night to the middle of the venue's main floor. The club was otherwise empty.

"It was Sonny [Schneidau] and Jeremy Smith and [Adam] Shipley, you know? Three people who are Tip's to-the-soul, people who *love* the place," Ellman says. His poker buddies' involvement in Tipitina's runs deep: Schneidau is one of the venue's 14 co-founders and previously worked as the club's talent buyer and sound engineer; Smith and Shipley each have served as the club's general manager and talent buyer.

"That was first night I locked the place up on my own," Ellman remembers. "I got a lesson from the GM [Brian Greenberg] on how to turn off the lights—I didn't even know where the light switches were," he says with a chuckle. "Usually, we play [poker] next door, but that game was *here*. There was a lot of emotion in it for all of us, in part with them knowing [the club] ended up in family hands, not with some corporate entity. ... Anyway, we just set up the game, fired up the PA and had a great night."

When asked what songs the poker players selected for the evening, Ellman replies, "New Orleans music."

DB

A portrait of Nathan East, a smiling man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit and white shirt. He is standing next to a large, dark-colored upright bass. The background is a warm, reddish-brown color with some vertical lines.

## Nathan East Depends on Yamaha.

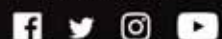
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*-Nathan East, Renowned Bass Artist*

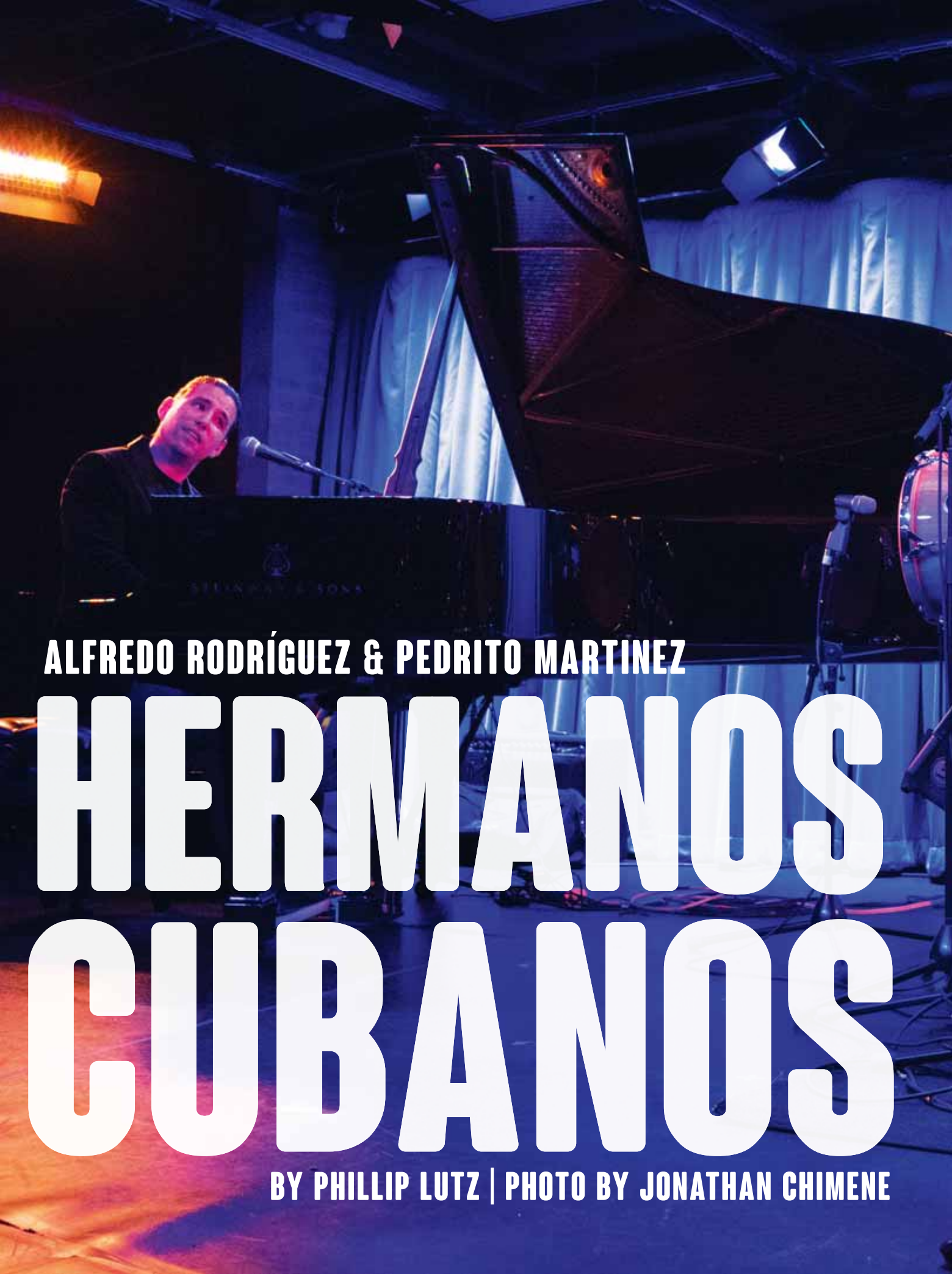
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A photograph of a man, Alfredo Rodríguez, playing a black Steinway & Sons grand piano in a studio. He is looking towards the camera. The piano has "STEINWAY & SONS" and a logo on the fallboard. The background is a studio with blue and white curtains, a microphone on a stand, and a drum set partially visible. The lighting is dramatic, with blue and orange tones.

**ALFREDO RODRÍGUEZ & PEDRITO MARTINEZ**

# HERMANOS CUBANOS

**BY PHILLIP LUTZ | PHOTO BY JONATHAN CHIMENE**



**On Jan. 5—four days after the 60th anniversary of the revolution in Cuba—two sons of that island nation, Alfredo Rodríguez and Pedrito Martinez, found themselves fiddling with wires onstage as an eager audience awaited their set at the Greenwich Village club Subculture.**

**P**erforming as a duo in support of their new album, *Duologue* (Mack Avenue), the pianist and percussionist were setting up amid the Winter Jazzfest half-marathon, a typically crowded, sometimes hectic event. Nonetheless, the overflow audience at the subterranean nightspot grew restless as the delay dragged on, pushing back the set's opening 40 minutes until nearly midnight.

But Rodríguez and Martinez took it all in stride. Both had traveled far—geographically, culturally, personally—to establish themselves as artists in and citizens of the United States. A few onstage glitches

were nothing compared with the complexities of living in—and leaving—their homeland.

“We’re coming from Cuba, where everything is a mess,” Rodríguez half-joked in a phone call a week later.

The set, it turned out, was anything but a mess. By the time the two were ready to play, the crowd was more than primed. And the musicians did not disappoint, delivering a dazzling display that drew on influences from American pop to Nigerian Afrobeat to French modernism—all informed by the Cuban experience central to their lives.





Alfredo Rodríguez began his relationship with Quincy Jones in 2006, when the pair met at the Montreux Jazz Festival.

While both musicians are from Havana, they hail from different worlds. Rodríguez, 33, is the son of a prominent balladeer and the product of classical conservatories. Martínez, 45, is a Santería priest who honed his craft on the streets.

But cultural intermingling in Cuba's capital city is hardly unknown and, though they never crossed paths there, they rapidly fostered a simpatico relationship when they met in the U.S. Each sat in with the other's band, they recorded together on Rodríguez's 2014 album, *The Invasion Parade* (Mack Avenue), and in 2017, booked themselves as a duo at St. Louis' Jazz at the Bistro.

"That was when everything started happening," Rodríguez said, relaxing with Martínez at their hotel before the Jazzfest gig. Martínez added: "We said, 'Man, let's take this serious.'"

That determination has found vivid and varied expression. At its most expansive, it has infused compositions like "Yemayá," which lit sparks in a small-group version on Rodríguez's 2016 album, *Tocororo* (Mack Avenue), but exploded at Jazzfest, where the duo format increased exponentially the possibilities for patterned interplay. As the two musicians played off each other, the tension waxed, waned and waxed again, before they segued into sprawling solo turns. Martínez, commanding his congas, cajon, hi-hat and cymbals, fashioned a tapestry of spiraling polyrhythms; Rodríguez, on acoustic piano, wove lyrical intimations of Debussy into the Afro-Cuban sonic fabric. The performance prompted multiple ovations.

More concise, but equally well received, was "Duologue"—an artfully organized mélange of disparate melodies attached to shifting Afrobeat, funk and timba rhythms. Dispatched in fewer than three minutes, the tune, which grew out of a spontaneous colloquy between Rodríguez and Martínez, was executed with precision in a pointillistic style.

So, too, was "Thriller." Buoyed by a sharply punctuated timba beat and sprinkled with judiciously placed references to Michael Jackson's

landmark recording, its debt to the larger Cuban culture explicitly was expressed in a middle section built on the type of *comparsa* one might hear during Carnival. By tune's end, the crowd was in party mode—making clear why it's become a signature for Rodríguez, and now the duo.

The emergence of "Thriller" as a duo mainstay—it's one of 11 tunes on the new album—is no accident. The Rod Temperton piece became part of Rodríguez's songbook after consultation with Quincy Jones, who produced Jackson's version. Jones has become Rodríguez's champion and a producer of his albums, including *Duologue*.

Jones became aware of Rodríguez when he was playing solo at the 2006 Montreux Jazz Festival. Permitted by the Cuban government to appear among a group of young musicians at the festival, he performed Cole Porter's "I Love You" so well that, after meeting Jones at an invitation-only get-together at the mountaintop chalet of the festival founder, Claude Nobs, Jones wanted to sign him.

But, after returning home, he found that the state of political relationships between Cuba and the U.S. wouldn't allow it: "We tried to do a record deal. He tried to bring me to the States. We couldn't do anything. That's why I made the difficult decision to cross the border."

Eleven years after Martínez found refuge in the States, staying over following a tour with saxophonist Jane Bunnett, Rodríguez defected by a more circuitous route. The odyssey, which took place in January 2009, began in Mérida, Mexico, where he was performing with his father. While there, he phoned Adam Fell, of Quincy Jones Productions.

"I said, 'I might be able to do it,'" Rodríguez recalled. "He said, 'If you make it to the States, we're going to sign you.'" Jones, in an email, confirmed that the offer had been made.

Rodríguez, scared and lacking knowledge of immigration law, hopped a flight from Mérida to Nuevo Laredo, a Mexican border town. From there, he planned to cross into Laredo, Texas. Instead, he was arrested by Mexican agents and

placed in a detention center. The agents sought money, he said, but all he had was his musical paraphernalia and his story about his prospects with Jones. Ultimately, he won the agents' sympathy, and was released after seven hours to continue his journey.

"They opened their hearts to me," he recalled. "The policeman at the airport even called a taxi. He said, 'Bring this guy to the border.'" At that point, he joined other migrants walking across the bridge to Laredo, where he was granted asylum. He then called Fell, who booked him on a series of flights to Santa Monica, California. There, he took up residence in a house with Fell.

"I was just so passionate about my dreams that I didn't care about anything," he said. "I just wanted to start a new life and work with Quincy Jones."

The experience is documented in his music—most directly in 2012's "Crossing The Border," a slightly frenetic, vaguely dissonant work that evokes the disorientation he must have felt during the ordeal. Processing those feelings during the past decade, he's developed an aesthetic that he positions as an argument against walls, physical and metaphorical, between nations and cultures. Discussing the aesthetic in January during a government shutdown related to a border wall proposed between the U.S. and Mexico, the argument gained special resonance.

"Everything we do in life is reflected in our music," Rodríguez said. "We try to find a balance that talks about unity, about breaking those barriers and borders that we put into life nowadays."

He and Martínez frequently have traversed this musical territory, most recently in *Duologue*. "We were very focused on having the record show who we are and where we came from," Martínez said. "At the same time, we wanted people to feel that we live in the United States. We have absorbed the music of a lot of cultures and incorporated them into the way we play. So, the sound of the record is global, not just local."

To be sure, the duo's Afro-Cuban origins are at the heart of things. The album opens with a straightforward ode to Africa and closes with one to Cuba—an artifact of the sequencing that, while unintended, is telling. The opener, "Africa," combines Yoruba chants with Nigerian Afrobeat and a plaintive appeal rendered by Martínez in Spanish: "Oye, que Africa te quiero cantar" ("Hey, Africa, I want to sing to you"). The album closer wistfully issues its own assertion: "Yo Volveré" ("I Will Return"). Cuba, the lyrics show, is the intended destination.

The album salutes the bond between Cuba and Brazil in "Estamos Llegando" ("We Are Coming") by way of a samba-like interlude. And in its synthesis of timba with rock, funk and even gospel, "Thriller" nails the connection with America.

Rodríguez said he first approached that tune at Jones' behest. "Quincy said, 'Since you're



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Unlike Rodríguez, Pedrito Martinez has returned to play in Cuba.

doing all these timba versions of songs that are very famous, why don't you do one of Michael Jackson's?" The result was a bracing bit of pianism, taped at his Los Angeles home with little augmentation but a rhythm machine and some household spoons. Loaded on YouTube, the video went viral.

Since then, the tune has become part of his solo and trio sets. He even performed an orchestral arrangement, by Jules Buckley of the Netherlands' Metropole Orkest, in Budapest with John Clayton conducting. Closer to home, the video's admirers included Martinez: "I said right away, 'That song has to be on the record.'"

Jones, in the email, offered high praise for both the interpreter and the interpretation: "It's absolutely beautiful to see it played by my brother Alfredo, one of the greatest piano players of all time! Alfredo always knows how to add his own personal flavor to every piece of music he touches, and this is no exception!"

Beyond such hyper-stimulating fare, the collection ranges from the sweet and simple ("Cosas Del Amor," or "Things Of Love," dedicated to Martinez's wife) to the unabashedly folkloric ("El Punto Cubano," or "The Cuban Point," a nostalgic nod to the farm workers who made up the economic and emotional backbone of "dear Cuba"). That tune, written by Reutilio Domínguez and Celina González, is one of three covers on the album and the only one whose arrangement hews closely to the original. (In addition to "Thriller," the other cover is "Super Mario Bros 3," the video-game theme by Kouji Kondou.)

For the originals, the writing process was a highly collaborative one that involved much bicoastal communication. Three or four months

before they headed into the studio, Los Angeles-based Rodríguez began sending rough demos to New Jersey-based Martinez—the lead singer and lyric-writer on all but two of the originals, Rodríguez's delicate "Flor" ("Flower") and "Mariposa" ("Butterfly").

"When he sent me the melodies, they were very structured already," Martinez recalled. "I said, 'The way you write melodies is so fresh and beautiful. At the same time, you feel the pain. It's, like, sad in a good way. It brings back so many memories.'"

Before laying down the tracks—recording took place between May 29 and June 1, 2018, at the Lair Studio in Los Angeles—the two musicians met for a week of rehearsals. And that's when arrangements were hammered out. They share credit on writing and arranging throughout.

Jones, who was privy to the demos as they were rolled out and shares a production credit with Rodríguez and Martinez, was not a constant presence in the studio. Still, he offered guidance, from choice of keys to length of songs and less tangible aspects of the process crucial to artists who come from an economic and political system different from that of the U.S.

"Those tips made the difference," Martinez said, citing Rodríguez's savvy as well. "This record changed so many things in my perception. Alfredito is playing music and thinking about many things at the same time: the video, how we're going to dress, how it's going to look. He's always producing things in his mind."

The pianist, for his part, was quick to acknowledge Jones. "My inspiration for that came from Quincy," he said. "I've been working in the States 10 years. Quincy's always some-

one who's looking for more. Even though he's 85 years old, he's always getting involved in what's happening right now. I wasn't always like that when it comes to business. I was always passionate about the music and thinking just about the music."

Jones, in his email, noted Rodríguez's capacity for developing both the artistic and business sides of his career: "This kid has got his left and right brain together, and you can tell the difference between those who do and those who don't. He has expanded the breadth of his musical tastes, and the contrast is absolutely apparent in his earlier and later works. It's simply beautiful. He has broken out of his shell and whether it's incorporating some Cuban timba sauce on a piano lick, or adding a bit of spice to a jazz fusion record, he has got the chops!"

Rodríguez's relationship with Jones has yielded many highs, including a 2015 Grammy nomination for his arrangement of "Guantanamo," off *The Invasion Parade*, which Jones coproduced. But even as Rodríguez makes his mark in the States, he seeks greater recognition in his native land. Though he regularly returns to Cuba as a visitor, he has not played there since defecting—declining an invitation to appear at International Jazz Day.

"Cuba will never tell you that you cannot play," he said. "They make you understand you're not welcome. I'm defending my roots all over. But for the government, it's like I'm a traitor. That's crazy."

Unlike Rodríguez, Martinez has returned to play in Cuba, albeit as a sideman, as recently as January. "Every time I go back, things are getting better and better," he said. With Cuba having survived recent political transitions without bloodshed—for the first time in 60 years, it is led by someone other than a Castro—the future seems an open question.

But at the moment, Rodríguez said, "It's complicated. It's difficult for us to understand the situation in our own country." So, he stays focused on matters at hand. The duo has engagements booked through May in the States and Canada, including stops at Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz, California, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival and Stratus Vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. In preparation for those dates and others, Rodríguez said he was planning to expand the duo's sonic palette, adding digital bass lines to the mix—and to do what it takes to integrate this change to the satisfaction of his long-distance music partner.

"When we go onstage," he said, "we're playing our lives—the way we grew up, the way we think. All the positive and negative things that happen in our life, we translate into musical sounds. So, it's very important for me and Pedro to find a brotherhood, musically and non-musically, so that we can keep building that relationship, so the music will be stronger." **DB**



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# PERPETUAL MOTION

Noah  
Preminger

# MACHINE

By Dan Ouellette  
Photo by  
Steven Sussman

**Concept albums help an artist establish a unique identity. They're more than a mere exercise in composing songs as vehicles for blowing or re-envisioning standards.**

**T**True concept records come from a different place—the heart, the soul, the deep doubts and the exhilarating discoveries. It's all about exploring and attacking.

That resides as the wellspring of the music created by Noah Preminger. After topping the category Rising Star–Tenor Saxophone in the 2017 DownBeat Critics Poll, Preminger entered into a prolific phase, raising his profile as a bandleader. This year, he will deliver three albums of intriguingly diverse material: an examination of the works of film director Otto Preminger; a sonic contemplation of the afterlife, accompanied by poetry; and, perhaps the most challenging, an intrepid tenor flight through a dense maze of unpredictable electronic ebullience.

In 2018, Preminger also scored a trifecta,

releasing three albums—*Whispers And Cries* (Red Piano Records), a duo session with pianist Frank Carlberg; his Criss Cross Jazz quartet debut, *Genuinity*; and *Chopin Project* (Connections Works Records) by Dead Composers Club, a collaboration with drummer Rob Garcia. For the latter, Preminger dug into Chopin's preludes, phoned Garcia in the middle of the night, and then the two fashioned an ongoing project devoted to the music of composers who have passed. Next up for the Dead Composers Club? Right now, it's a coin toss between the eclectic oeuvre of guitarist/vocalist Frank Zappa and the chants of 11th-century nun Hildegard von Bingen.

Preminger is in perpetual motion nowadays. The 32-year-old, currently living in Boston, sounds a bit worn out from the slog.







Among his numerous projects, Noah Preminger has written and recorded music based on the films of a distant relative, director Otto Preminger.

"I feel like things are missing musically for me," he said, sipping a dark beer in the West Village watering hole Kettle of Fish in mid-December. "Boston has been great after living in Barcelona for two years. It's been nice and easy, but I don't find many people to play with. After four years there, I'm thinking of moving back to New York, even though I struggled in the eight years I lived here before. The day-to-day lifestyle wasn't doing it for me."

Preminger suddenly brightens when discussing the first episode of his three-day recording sessions for an album tentatively titled *Zigzag: The Music Of Steve Lampert*, which he plans to release later this year. It's a collaboration with Lampert, a trumpeter and electronic music composer. "It's my 15th as a leader, and it's been going awesome," Preminger said. "Steve, who is a student of [the late composer] Elliott Carter, wrote all this music for me, and it's serious stuff. It's the hardest saxophone melody in my life."

An alumnus of New England Conservatory of Music who earned both undergrad and master's degrees there, Preminger plays robust tenor with angular flair, emotional intensity and genre-blending authority. He's shared the stage with Cecil McBee, John McNeil, Billy Hart, Fred Hersch and George Cables, among others, and made his mark as an upstart with a pair of critically acclaimed albums for Palmetto. He continued following his muse while developing his singular voice as saxophonist and composer.

"I have a weird career," Preminger said. "Critics seem to like what I do. I get great reviews, and I'm often in the list of top records of the year. But my straw is not the one that's drawn for work. I don't get the opportunity to play that much. I have limitations—in terms of how other musicians play in wonderful bands on a regular basis and get to travel and perform. For me, it's OK, though. I'm on a different path."

Preminger stressed that for a project to be a good fit, all the cards need to be perfectly lined up; otherwise, it's too strenuous and not enjoyable. "Most importantly, the music has to be satisfying," he said. "You can only play so loud and so intense and with so much passion. Then it's cut off." Not one to mince words, Preminger reflected on John Coltrane's short career: "I understand why Trane ended when he ended, because writing chord changes and melodies and blowing on them becomes not fun anymore. There's only a certain point you can get to, a certain point when you can't scream that loud anymore. Trane really, really lived the music, but couldn't do it anymore. He couldn't find where else to go. That's the end. It doesn't go on forever."

Even though Preminger isn't fully satisfied, career-wise, these days, bring up another special project, and he beams. Case in point: the soulful, sensitive *Preminger Plays Preminger*, released by the vinyl-only label Newvelle Records and featuring an all-star cast, including his regular bassist Kim Cass and two newcomers to his recording history: pianist Jason Moran and drummer Marcus Gilmore. "I need to be passionate about a project," Preminger said. "This was another concept, another direction. And overall, it was something to do that was fun."

The saxophonist's connection to Otto Preminger has been a subject of personal intrigue for years, ever since Ran Blake approached him during his first term at NEC. "Ran greeted me on the front steps," he said. "He told me, 'Noah, I've been waiting for you.' But he was disappointed when I told him that I was unfamiliar with Otto's films. At that point, I was only 18."

Blake inspired Preminger to begin exploring Otto's work. First, he learned that the director was a horrible person who treated women and crew members in misogynist ways. Then he dug deeper to discover that Otto was a distant rela-

tive. "My great-grandfather and Otto were supposed to have been first cousins," he explained. "But most of the people who knew for sure were dead. But my grandmother, who died last week, told me that Jack Preminger and Otto were first cousins and grew up in a town called Czernowitz in the Austria-Hungary empire."

Several years ago Preminger got the idea to interpret some of Otto's soundtrack music and then compose his own scores based on his films. He watched more than 15 movies to come up with four pieces based on movie themes and four original compositions. He got the green-light from Newvelle after finding success with his 2016 recording for the label, *Some Other Time*.

Tracks include the Americana-tinged theme from the 1954 film *River of No Return* (starring Marilyn Monroe and Robert Mitchum), which opens with a tenor flight and riveting bass solo. "I love the opening credits to the film," Preminger said. "It was the perfect arrangement for me. It's like a country folk song with the prairie, cowboys." Another standout is a quiet piece Preminger wrote for the 1953 classic *Stalag 17*, a tale of two prisoners of war trying to escape, but are shot down outside the World War II prison camp. (Otto didn't direct, but had an acting role as the arrogant Colonel von Scherbach.)

For Preminger's originals, he watched the films and isolated scenes or movements, which he wrote for. He'd hit "mute" and replay scenes until he had written melodic motifs on piano. On the haunting "For Bunny Lake Is Missing" (inspired by the 1965 thriller *Bunny Lake Is Missing*), Preminger focused on a scene in which a child is ripped away from a swing set. He also composed a sober piece, "For Laura," based on a scene from the 1944 classic. "I love the song from the film, but I decided to go for something better," he said.

Another piece was inspired by the 1962 political drama *Advise & Consent*, with Preminger writing two sections—one for the women who were in a judicial chamber of a government building and the other for men "who looked sneaky and suspect," he said. "It goes back and forth from one section to the other with me improvising first on [music representing] the women and then Jason expressing the attitudes of the men."

The best *Preminger Plays Preminger* track is an upbeat arrangement of "Way Early Subtone" by Duke Ellington, from 1959's *Anatomy of a Murder*. Moran sprinkles notes then pounces on the keys while engaging in conversations with the rest of the group. "That's a special one," Preminger said. "Jason was familiar with the film, so he was fantastic. I never send music before a recording session, but he just came in and hit it."

"That song has jumped into the jazz canon," Moran said. "It just lives in my hands, and I was able to collaborate with everyone to connect the sounds to the images." Moran met Preminger when the saxophonist was studying for his master's degree at NEC; the two clicked. "We had

lessons together, and I also formed an ensemble playing Andrew Hill music that he was in,” Moran said. “I remember Noah telling me about his Preminger album idea, so I’m glad he finally realized it. I’m into people addressing the sound of their families.”

Having composed music for the films *Selma* (2014) and *13th* (2016), Moran enjoys connecting to narrative elements through music. “It’s a captivating experience,” he said. “It’s been a real study, a real practice for me in the past 10 years. The way Noah approached this took him into uncharted territory. He did a lot of exploring.”

In the shadow of the Preminger release, the saxophonist was finishing up *After Life*, an unconventional work that addresses an unusual question: What will humans see after death? Criss Cross Jazz owner/producer Gerry Teekens had forged a relationship with the saxophonist after photographer/recording engineer and frequent DownBeat contributor Jimmy Katz had recommended him. The first Criss Cross Jazz album was with a quartet, but Teekens requested that the follow-up be a quintet date. Preminger assembled a band with his longtime trumpeter Jason Palmer, Cass on bass, Rudy Royston on drums and the rising-star guitarist Max Light.

*After Life* features new originals that come from a strange place. “I have this fucked-up existential anxiety,” Preminger said. “I don’t have a fear of dying, but I’m interested in what happens after. I’m visual. I was hoping this would help me personally to psychologically deal with this. I came up with descriptions of the worlds we may go to. It’s total sci-fi shit. I wrote down ideas and composed based on them. Then I asked my poet friend Ruth Lepson to take my descriptions and write new poems to be used in the liner notes.”

The music is a reflective mix of sober balladry and uptempo swirls with austere themes. “Nothing World” contemplates uncertainty, with Lepson introducing her poem through a quote by philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, “We can regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness,” and then concluding with her own line: “Without anything, it’s the most.” The tune opens with bass lines in a slow tempo and then shifts into bleak beauty as Preminger plays a melody that soon is joined by trumpet. There’s a funereal feel to it. And the same holds true for the somber “Warehouse World,” with lyrics about painful wriggling along “the moldy endless warehouse floor.”

On the opposite end of the sonic spectrum is “World Of Hunger,” which features a frenzy of tenor and trumpet maneuvers. It opens with this line: “When you were born again, a gold star appeared in the sky,” and closes with the somber blast of “Half the world was going hungry/ It was kind of like when you were alive/ Kind of a guy thing.”

Teekens scheduled an additional period of two months for the mixing and the melding of the poetry. Overall, did Preminger find the project cathartic? “No,” he replied. “The reality is that we are all going to die. It’s terrifying.”

One particularly life-affirming experience has been navigating the complexity of his *Zigzag* sessions with Lampert, who first met Preminger at a trio show in a storefront church in Greenwich Village nine years ago. He was catching up with his old friend, drummer Jeff Hershfield, and saying hello to guitarist Ben Monder. “The group was led by this young guy who I didn’t know,” Lampert said. “But when he played his first phrase and then a second, I could tell the depth of his musicianship combined with a deep tenor sound.”

Preminger and Lampert became fast friends. Last year, Preminger asked Lampert to write new material for an acoustic ensemble that included Cass, Royston, Palmer, alto saxophonist John O’Gallagher, pianist Kris Davis and Rob Schwimmer playing a Haken Continuum controller/synthesizer. “The music is one piece in 13 sections with the band playing at the same time, but linked through 12-tone harmony and metric modulation, combining many different genres of music in one,” Preminger said. “It’s a mishmash of synths, electronics and an acoustic jazz group layering. It’s essentially two bands. It’s a dream, working on a melody that is introduced at the beginning. Each part has a fantasy section and an open improvisation where different musicians blow together. It’s challenging and beautiful.”

Lampert, reluctant to share unmixed work, offered an invitation to his apartment in Chelsea to hear the opening section of the piece. It features expansive playing with the electronic background being a blowup of Preminger’s melodic part. There are electronic droplets that lead to exclamatory tenor punctuation. Preminger plays in a deep tone, then there are high bleeps. The music has a feel of splash and dash. “I know how ridiculously hard this music is to play,” Lampert said. “But I checked in with Noah all the way through. He knew what he was getting into.”

Preminger is impressed by Lampert’s assimilation of post-tonal classical music, modern jazz, funk, percussive r&b and hip-hop: “This is so different than anything else in jazz. The way Steve composes doesn’t just move the music forward, but it surrounds you; it circles in and out like an eight.”

Preminger’s conversation with DownBeat concluded with a discussion about politics. The saxophonist drew a lot of attention for his weighty concept album, *Mediations On Freedom*, which was recorded a month after the 2016 presidential election. It was released on the day of President Trump’s 2017 inauguration. Accompanied by bassist Cass, trumpeter Palmer and drummer Ian Froman, Preminger offers renditions of songs by Bob Dylan, Bruce Hornsby, Sam Cooke and George Harrison, as well as his own socially aware tunes like “We Have A Dream,” “Mother Earth,” “Women’s March” and “Broken Treaties.”

“I’m a news junkie,” he said. “Every morning I get up and stream MSNBC on my phone. I love [TV host] Rachel Maddow and obviously I hate Donald Trump. I decided to record a protest album; I released it fast. I thought it would be important to make a record about the freedoms we may be losing.”

As for his present activism, Preminger, who teaches in the Boston area, has given free lessons to a student whose father died due to a lack of affordable health care options. “It makes me want to be better for people through my teaching,” he said. “I want to inspire young people to play. And at the end of the day, maybe I do play more passionately when I’m pissed.” **DB**



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Rhiannon Giddens (left), Allison Russell,  
Leyla McCalla and Amythyst Kiah

A photograph of two women standing outdoors against a wooden fence. The woman on the left has long, dark hair with red highlights and is wearing a black cardigan over a black top. The woman on the right has dark, curly hair and is wearing a blue and white floral patterned top. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame. The background shows some dry grass and trees.

# Giving

# ANCESTORS

BY SAMANTHA WILLIS | PHOTO BY TERRI FENSEL





# A VOICE

When she sings certain songs, Rhiannon Giddens feels herself become an oracle. The medium her messengers speak through is music; the messengers, she says, are her ancestors long passed from the earthly plane. They are daughters of Africa—brought to this country in chains, owned by white men who enslaved them, mutilated them and put babies into their bellies only to sell them once born.



Rhiannon Giddens co-produced the new album *Songs Of Our Native Daughters*.



These black women endured the inhumane horror of the American slavery system. Giddens believes they speak through her voice because their own voices have never truly been heard.

"I've been writing songs based on slave narratives for six or seven years," said Giddens in the first frigid days of this year. After reading the personal stories of enslaved black women, Giddens began composing sketches of songs that reflected the unimaginable pain of their experiences.

"There was a voice that's trying to get through; there were spirits speaking as the songs came out. [This music] is heavy; it takes a toll. You can't sing these songs any old time," Giddens explained.

Many such songs are featured on the new album *Songs Of Our Native Daughters* (Smithsonian Folkways), a collaborative project helmed by Giddens and co-created with artists Amythyst Kiah, Leyla McCalla and Allison Russell. The album was produced by Giddens and Dirk Powell, a banjoist and fiddler who is revered in Americana circles.

The harrowing song "Mama's Crying Long" is, according to Giddens, based on "a narrative that I read years ago, and the song just came through me. I don't like to say I wrote it, because really, it was given to me."

The lyrics depict a horrific scene: "*All the men have come/ And they brought the rope/ They came here for Mama/ And they brought the rope.*"

In call-and-response style, Giddens sings the melody, her voice strong and clear, vibrato notes trailing off each phrase. McCalla, Kiah and Russell answer her, singing as one body in low, throaty voices. The only accompaniment is Giddens' hand-clapping and a recurring series of drum beats by percussionist Jamie Dick. The tune's tempo is moderately fast; save for its harrowing lyrics, it might tempt listeners to dance.

"*Mama's in a tree/ And she can't come down/*

*Mama's in a tree/ And she won't come down/ Mama's flyin' free/ And she can't come down.*"

The new album is intended as an examination of and testament to the resilient strength of black Americans, especially black women, Giddens said: "History shows us that black people have rarely had agency in this country. From the beginning, when Africans were first brought here, there was little-to-no opportunity for them as individuals to shape their lives and choose their destinies.

"For black women, that went doubly so, because you also have an entire history of sexual violence against them, their bodies literally used as breeding factories. But through all of that, there is an incredible legacy of black creativity and brilliance; they always found a way for their souls to shine through."

Assembling a group of black women, all of whom make art in musical spaces often thought of as predominantly "white"—such as folk, old-time and Americana—was a strategic decision Giddens made, one designed to correct entrenched narratives about roots music and its origins.

"When I co-founded the [Carolina] Chocolate Drops around 13 years ago, things were much less 'progressive,'" Giddens said. The Grammy-winning string-band trio consisted of Giddens, co-founder and banjoist Dom Flemons and fiddler Justin Robinson. Because all the musicians are African American, the band bucked expectations of what American folk music sounded—and looked—like. (The band, which experienced some personnel changes over years, would go on to win the category Beyond Artist or Group in the 2011 DownBeat Critics Poll.)

"Much of what is deemed folk music has its roots in Africa and African American tradition. I am obsessed with banjo as a tool of reclama-

tion for African American artists," she said, an interest that is reflected on her 2017 solo album, *Freedom Highway* (Nonesuch).

"The banjo is from West Africa," Giddens noted, "and it was black people who first played banjo music in America, which is a theme we explored with *Freedom Highway*."

The project featured original compositions by Giddens, along with covers, including the title track, a version of the Staples Singers' civil rights anthem. Giddens is more than a gifted fiddler and banjoist; her work "introducing new audiences to the black banjoists and fiddlers whose influences have been left out of popular narratives of the lineage of folk and country music" earned her a 2017 MacArthur fellowship.

First brought to America through the musical traditions of West African slaves in the 1600s, the banjo "was known as a purely black instrument until it became the centerpiece of American popular music by the second-third of the 19th century in the hands of the white players," Giddens writes in the liner notes for *Songs Of Our Native Daughters*. White people co-opted the instrument, incorporating it into one of America's most beloved pastimes: the grotesquely racist minstrel shows.

Giddens writes: "American minstrelsy became its own unique and wildly popular phenomenon with the addition of the banjo, humor and the broad parody of enslaved Americans of African descent by largely working-class white men."

In this way, the banjo's origin in African stringed instruments, like the *akonting*—and its association to black people and black music—was all but erased from the nation's collective memory.

"Performing at folk festivals, where we were often the only black people present, I kept hearing about black people's 'contributions' to American music," Giddens said. "No. What the Chocolate Drops demonstrate, and what [*Songs Of Our Native Daughters*] demonstrates, is that black people are integral to American music. We have been fueling constant cultural innovation for hundreds of years. There is no American music without black people, so why is there this perception that folk music, roots music, America's first forms of music, are strange spaces for black artists to be?"

*Songs Of Our Native Daughters* sets the record straight with a powerful quartet of black women who play banjos, fiddles and acoustic guitars. McCalla, Kiah and Russell all are soulful singers who blend genres. The four artists were fans of each other's work when Giddens brought them all together for a stage-shaking performance at the 2018 Cambridge Folk Festival, where she was the event's guest curator.

"We all came to this discovery that we'd been moving through these spaces separately," Giddens recalled. "But when we came togeth-

er, we gave each other power.” Shortly thereafter, Giddens fleshed out the concept for the album, and then she reached out to the artists.

Kiah, a Tennessee-born singer-songwriter steeped in country, blues and gospel, was “floored and very moved” when Giddens asked her to participate.

“I really enjoyed digging into different aspects of [the] sociopolitical history of African Americans with this project,” she said. “I’m here in the present, I’m alive and able to write these songs, because of the pain and suffering of these

Giddens believes that even though the new album has its origins in U.S. history, the project is also a sign of our current times.

“There is a movement of women of color who are saying, ‘Wait, wait, wait: I’m not sitting back and taking this anymore. You are going to hear me.’ These women are expressing an agency over their bodies and minds that they could not express before. I see it in TV, in movies, in music, in politics—it’s happening. Now is better than ever to address these things. It’s been needed; it’s overdue.”

## ‘I AM OBSESSED WITH BANJO AS A TOOL OF RECLAMATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS.’ — RHIANNON GIDDENS

people who came before me. What better way to give back, to honor that history of struggle, than to tell their stories?”

Kiah co-wrote three of the songs on the album: “Black Myself,” “Blood And Bones” and “Polly Ann’s Hammer.” The four women gathered in Lafayette, Louisiana, and shared a rental home for about 12 days, fusing their creative processes and minds through the music.

“It was my first time co-writing with other songwriters. I have always been hesitant to co-write, because of my intimidation,” Kiah admitted. “But at that time, I couldn’t think of a better way to get over my hang-ups than to go through this process with these women. ... To be able to get in a room and talk to each other about our experiences as black women in the Americana music world, and the situations that we’ve faced. It was the first time that we’ve been able to talk about that.”

“Polly Ann’s Hammer” is an imagined epilogue to the legendary tale of John Henry, said Russell, who co-wrote it with Kiah.

“Everybody knows the story of John Henry, this incredibly powerful black man,” Russell said. “[The folk song’s lyrics have] a cast-off line about his woman, Polly Ann, but you never hear about her again. It made me think of how so many black women’s stories haven’t been told, and that we’ve had to write our own history in a way.”

Scholars don’t agree on whether John Henry was a real person, and if he was, where his match against the machine took place. What was absolutely clear to Kiah and Russell was Polly Ann’s critical, but downplayed, role in his narrative.

“We had this idea that Polly Ann was the hero of the song,” Russell said. “She wielded the hammer for John Henry when he was sick, reared their kids and survived to tell the story.”

The album’s content also was shaped by the setting in which it was recorded. After co-writing their songs in the Lafayette house, the women recorded them at The Cypress House, Powell’s studio, a structure built in 1850 located just a few miles away in Breaux Bridge and about two hours from New Orleans.

“Being in New Orleans has had a huge impact on all of my work,” said McCalla, who has lived in the city since 2010 and is a former member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops. “I feel like it has been a big lens for me to understand the values that this country was founded on, and the conflict between our values and our actions.”

Equality and justice were not meant for everyone when America first defined itself, McCalla continued: “I feel like that reverberates today—there is absolutely no doubt about it. And you see it in a city like New Orleans, where there is gross inequality and poverty, and black people get the brunt of it.”

The album reflects New Orleans’ tie to Haitian culture and Afro-Caribbean identity, too, through “Lavi Difisil,” a swinging, light-hearted tune penned by McCalla and Russell as a tribute to troubadour Althierry Dorval. Pregnant with twins at the time of recording, McCalla played tenor banjo on “Lavi Difisil,” and sang the lyrics partly in Haitian Creole. It is, she said, the language of her ancestors—and of a people’s resistance.

“For me, it goes back to the Haitian Revolution. Haiti was the first nation to enact a successful slave rebellion and to declare its independence from French colonialism,” McCalla said. “[Haiti’s] sovereignty was never expected by the European world powers, or the U.S. It was the ‘black sheep’ of independent nations. ... Understanding how that has damaged Haiti to

this day, and how Haiti’s history connects to New Orleans and black people worldwide, has greatly impacted my perspective on why I make music, and also my worldview, in general.”

Each woman’s identity also factored into what she brought to the record’s collaborative process and influenced how they related to each other.

“I grew up mixed in the South,” said Giddens, the daughter of a black mother and white father who raised her in the rolling hill country of North Carolina’s third-biggest city, Greensboro. “You quickly become used to adjusting, and seeing how to move in every place that you go. I’ve always been adept at seeing multiple sides of issues, and that helped in birthing this album.” The minstrel tunes, for example, are “on the surface, awful. Racist and awful and ugly. But minstrel music is also America’s earliest music, so there’s this dichotomy of black people being the creators of this music, but then having it used as a weapon against their dignity and image. My goal is to explore both of those aspects, and pull from it all the beauty and wisdom that I can.”

“Black people live with the legacy of slavery in our bones and in our genes,” McCalla said. “Other people live with it in their minds, but we live with that trauma in our very being, and, because racism is still so rampant, we are not always seen for who we are.” Describing an incident in which a clothing store clerk followed her around, McCalla said, “I thought to myself, ‘I have a degree in classical cello. I’m not trying to steal a shirt.’ If I looked a different way, people would treat me in a different way. That awareness filters into the music.”

Russell, who hails from Canada, had been studying her family’s roots when Giddens approached her about the project.

“[My family’s ancestral research] got as far back as a bill of sale for the matriarch of our family, off the coast of Ghana.” Inspired by this woman’s incredible story of survival—“she was sold away from the only world she’d ever known, she survived the transatlantic crossing, she survived birthing several children, she survived a life of enslavement”—Russell wrote a song a in her matriarch’s honor and named it for her: “Quasheba, Quasheba.”

The album’s title is a reference to *Notes of a Native Son*, by James Baldwin (1924–’87). In one of the book’s essays, “Many Thousands Gone,” Baldwin writes: “It is only in his music ... that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story. It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear.”

Baldwin’s potent words, said Giddens, are as true today as they were when he wrote them in 1955. *Songs Of Our Native Daughters* adds context and sound to the complex story of black Americans, a story that all people could learn from and connect to. “I hope this music finds whoever needs it,” Giddens said. **DB**



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# Reviews >



Joey DeFrancesco's *In The Key Of The Universe* is marked by a strain of passion that prioritizes grace.

## Joey DeFrancesco *In The Key Of The Universe* MACK AVENUE 1147

★★★★

Pop-centric music sites make room for reviews of ancient Impulse! reissues, Kamasai Washington reignites the concept of soul-groove expressionism as both prayer book and political manifesto, and writers measure the breadth, value and impact of “cosmic” improv in pieces that dot the internet. The fire music that certain maestros conjured during the late ’60s is enjoying a heyday, and its trickle-down is having a bit more reach than even its most ardent supporters might have imagined.

A couple years ago, I wouldn’t have bet that a Pharoah Sanders and Joey DeFrancesco collab was in the cards, but *In The Key Of The Universe* finds the 47-year-old organ virtuoso and 78-year-old reed magician celebrating “The Creator Has A Master Plan,” the half-century-old song of praise that was the centerpiece of Sanders’ earthshaking album *Karma*.

Though there’s plenty of bounce and swing in play throughout the 10-track program, DeFrancesco’s self-professed embrace of spiritual jazz employs the kind of contemplative aura that gave so many of yesteryear’s exploratory efforts their personality. Functionally, it can come from the use of dreamy long tones and pensive phrasings. At several points here, a simmering heat, rather than a roiling squall, shapes the record’s temperament. A bit less predictable than previous groove-fueled DeFrancesco discs, *In The Key Of The Universe* is marked by a strain of passion that prioritizes grace. Even the emotions that Sanders reveals during “And So It Is” are refined, their gravitas bolstered by a fierce rendering of lines, not a tempest of multiphonics. With veteran drummer Billy Hart—who was part of the original “Creator” recording in 1969—contouring the action, there’s an exquisite flow to the entire program.

To some degree, this aesthetic shift could be spotted in the cool fervor of “Lift Every Voice And Sing” and “A Change Is Gonna Come” from DeFrancesco’s 2017 album, *Project Freedom*. That’s where the thoughtful impact of Troy

Roberts came into play. The saxophonist has a key role here, as well, bringing eloquence to his nuanced solos on “Vibrations In Blue” and “A Path Through The Noise,” and tastefully echoing Trane when bolstering the music’s searching quality. There’s a sobriety to his work, identifiable even on the boppish ditty “It Swung Wide Open,” where DeFrancesco returns to the kind of barn-burning romp that earned him his rep.

When Sanders and Roberts’ horns blow side by side on the title track (which sounds like it could be pinched from McCoy Tyner’s songbook), the air gets thick. And the bookend solos of the elder’s pithy excursion, and the keyboardist’s curt stroll, are a sweet intergenerational trade reminding listeners that improv can be a place where various roads converge, and everyone benefits from the exchange.

—Jim Macnie

**In The Key Of The Universe:** Inner Being; Vibrations In Blue; Awake And Blissed; It Swung Wide Open; In The Key Of The Universe; The Creator Has A Master Plan; And So It Is; Soul Perspective; A Path Through The Noise; Easier To Be. (58:30)

**Personnel:** Joey DeFrancesco, organ, keyboard, trumpet (7, 9, 10); Billy Hart, drums; Troy Roberts, saxophone, bass (6, 7); Pharoah Sanders, tenor saxophone (5, 6, 7); Sammy Figueroa, percussion.

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





## Claudia Acuña *Turning Pages*

DELFIN 001

★★★★

It's been 10 years since Claudia Acuña's last album, but the Chilean singer is as warmly expressive as ever on *Turning Pages*, her most personal effort to date, with five originals. Acuña's elemental lyrics evoke a life-affirming message, and their musical settings, though rooted in jazz, lean here toward folk-rock and *nueva canción*, guitarist Juancho Herrera having succeeded pianist Jason Lindner as producer.

Yayo Serka's annunciatory drums and Grégoire Maret's curling harmonica get the

album off to a dramatic start with Acuña's "Aguita De Corazón," which prescribes herbal tea for a broken heart. Ceremoniousness gives way to the chipper handclaps of "Hey," during which Acuña invites women to join in devotion to the moon goddess, who rises again on "Futuro," this time surreally smelling like a Federico García Lorca mix of onions, garlic, sea and roses. Seizing the fleeting moment becomes a motif—a firefly flickering through the lilting choruses of "Silencio" or the falling star one might wish upon in the dreamy "Los Tres Deseos De Siempre."

Acuña also offers a deeply moving Americana ballad, "Home," sung with a vulnerability that recalls Abbey Lincoln, whose "Bird Alone" receives a superbly spare reading, as well. By contrast, Jimmy Van Heusen's "But Beautiful" floats through an off-kilter arrangement, a minor flaw in a richly endowed album that closes with an irresistibly hooky lament, "Tu Sonrisa," a breakup song that manages to sound joyously upbeat.

Even when she's losing on *Turning Pages*, Acuña embraces life. May her next recording emerge before another decade passes.

—Paul de Barros

**Turning Pages:** Aguita De Corazón; Hey; But Beautiful; Los Tres Deseos De Siempre; Futuro; Bird Alone; Silencio; Home; Tu Sonrisa. (37:54)

**Personnel:** Claudia Acuña, vocals; Juancho Herrera, guitar, vocals; Pablo Vergara, Jon Cowherd (9), piano, keyboards; Carlos Henderson, Michael Olatuja (9), bass; Yayo Serka, drums, percussion; Grégoire Maret, harmonica (1).

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

## Theon Cross *Fyah*

GEARBOX 1550

★★★★

In the loose-knit cadre of young British jazz musicians, which gloriously was captured on Brownswood Recordings' 2017 compilation and documentary *We Out Here*, tuba player Theon Cross is its secret sauce. Whether he's anchoring the pulverizing frenzy of Shabaka Hutchings' Sons Of Kemet or lending rhythmic heft to South London combo Steam Down, Cross' stout tuba riffs and berserk smears help distinguish the scene's sonic imprint.

On *Fyah*, a follow-up to his 2015 debut EP, *Aspirations*, he recruits frequent collaborators tenor saxophonist Nubya Garcia and drummer Moses Boyd on spartan, dub-like sketches where Caribbean and West African rhythms collide with UK underground hip-hop and electronica, and of course, modern jazz. In most cases, Cross functions as the fulcrum, issuing bouncy, bottom-heavy motifs beneath Boyd's strenuous drumming, which sometimes prances with ebullient soca rhythms or swaggers with the menace of London's grime scene. It makes for intriguing, hypnotic music, especially the lurking "Activate" and the rugged "Radiation." But the music's over-reliance on choppy riffs, astringent melodies



and stern grooves also can come across like overcooked, yet underdeveloped, compositional ideas.

"CIYA" is the closest *Fyah* comes to a ballad; and it provides a more compelling vehicle for Cross to showcase a fully developed compositional sensibility as he issues the lulling melody alongside saxophone, guitar and trombone, before delivering a sensual, melodically cogent solo. More tunes like that would have helped *Fyah* burn even more brightly. —John Murph

**Fyah:** Activate; The Offerings; Radiation; Letting Go; Candace Of Meroe; Panda Village; CIYA; LDN's Burning. (43:19)

**Personnel:** Theon Cross, tuba; Moses Boyd, drums; Nubya Garcia, Wayne Francis (5, 7), tenor saxophone; Tim Doyle, percussion (5); Artie Zaitz (5, 7), guitar; Nathaniel Cross (7), trombone.

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



## Amirtha Kidambi *From Untruth*

NORTHERN SPY 113

★★★½

On the first track of her new album, *From Untruth*, composer Amirtha Kidambi leaps into her takedown of income inequality without preamble. "Eat the rich or die starving," she sings to the wheezing drone of her harmonium on "Eat The Rich." But boldly confrontational vocals are only one of the many pointed arrows in Kidambi's quiver. She has a lot to say—and many musical devices through which to speak.

As an improvisational singer, Kidambi draws easily and in equal measure from free-jazz, indie rock, and Carnatic solfège and idioms. Her band, Elder Ones (soprano saxophonist Matt Nelson, bassist Nick Dunston and drummer Max Jaffe), match Kidambi in her anarchic intensity: The tune "Decolonize The Mind," for example, opens with almost five minutes of a wildly expressive free-improv—caterwauls, a squealing horn and deep thrumming in the bass—before falling into a steady, hypnotic groove. "We won't be silenced," Kidambi intones before a perfervid spoken-word section; the tune ends in screams and static. This is not stuff that your average jazz quartet can do—or do so well.

Kidambi intersperses just enough conventional musical moments throughout the recording to keep the compositions from reading as completely dystopian. A soothing unison between the voice and the harmonium, a straightforward lick in the bass, a familiar groove in the drums. And on the title track, the last of four extended compositions, a floating, futuristic electronic line followed by the lyrics, "From darkness into the light ... ." This little drop of hope in the recording's final moments changes the overall message of *From Untruth*. We can do better, Kidambi suggests.

—Suzanne Lorge

**From Untruth:** Eat The Rich; Dance Of The Subaltern; Decolonize The Mind; From Untruth. (46:48)

**Personnel:** Amirtha Kidambi, vocals, synthesizer, harmonium; Matt Nelson, soprano saxophone, Moog synthesizer; Nick Dunston, bass; Max Jaffe, drums, electronic percussion.

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

# The Hot Box >

Critics	Paul de Barros	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie	John Murph
<b>Joey DeFrancesco</b> <i>In The Key Of The Universe</i>	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
<b>Claudia Acuña</b> <i>Turning Pages</i>	★★★★	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½
<b>Theon Cross</b> <i>Fyah</i>	★★½	★★★	★★★	★★★
<b>Amirtha Kidambi</b> <i>From Untruth</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Joey DeFrancesco, *In The Key Of The Universe*

"Soul On Soul" might have been a better title for this innovative contrast of jazz's secular and spiritual sides, with Sanders joining the perpetually swinging, spirited organ maestro on three cuts, including a rendition of "The Creator Has A Master Plan." —Paul de Barros

DeFrancesco signals the spiritual focus of his music with solemn gongs, whirring rattlers and dinging bells. But his energizing grooves belie the meditative bent of these world-music mainstays. He reminds us that spirit can be as fierce as it is gentle. —Suzanne Lorge

On this surprising tribute to Sanders, the superb organist grounds it with a subtle, yet substantial, earthiness while still touching the music's celestial peaks. —John Murph

### Claudia Acuña, *Turning Pages*

This long-awaited album reveals Acuña's talents as an intelligent, sensitive songwriter. The beloved singer (and now composer) is at her best when she unleashes the full power of her expressive contralto, whether on a Latin burner or a smoldering down-tempo tune. Here she nails both. —Suzanne Lorge

Love the way she moves so casually from a folksy lilt to aggressive syncopation like "Futuro." One of her most fetching discs. —Jim Macnie

Returning after a 10-year recording hiatus results in a sumptuous and soulful triumph that celebrates her epigrammatic songwriting as much as it does her magnetic singing. —John Murph

### Theon Cross, *Fyah*

Continuing with the throbbing and funky minimalist riffs he has become known for in Sons Of Kemet, London tuba virtuoso Cross adds African flavors, synthesizer and even some lyrical sweetness to the group's richly textured sax-tuba crosshatchings. But its relentless momentum, while initially exhilarating, also can wear thin. —Paul de Barros

Cross anchors the hypersonic originals on this recording with well-calibrated tuba lines, holding his equally busy soloists close to the melodic center. With this bottom-up approach to composing, Cross shows that low instruments, too, can gleam in the spotlight. —Suzanne Lorge

I wish everything had the liftoff of "Candace Of Meroe," but as is, there's still plenty of funk flying around. And the fact that it's a tuba in the driver's seat is rather incredible. —Jim Macnie

### Amirtha Kidambi, *From Untruth*

Fearless experimental vocalist Kidambi whips Meredith Monk-like chattering, Indian syllabic singing and modal drones, electronics, pointillistic free-jazz and avant-rock into an aggressively political mix ("Eat The Rich," "Decolonize The Mind") on this often hauntingly beautiful response to our challenging times. —Paul de Barros

As a Steve Lacy/Irene Aebi fanatic, I dig the frictional weaving of Kidambi's voice and Nelson's soprano. And the music's messages are supercharged by both the leader's provocative drama and the band's fierce designs. —Jim Macnie

This music plunges listeners into a kaleidoscopic sonic looking-glass, distinguished by sounds that are, in turn, fascinating, fetching and frightening. —John Murph

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## John Mayall *Nobody Told Me*

FORTY BELOW 022

★★★★½

Counting live discs and compilations, John Mayall's wracked up 86 albums, give or take. But wouldn't a completist stop after, say, 30? More pertinent, is there a need to add to the clutter with *Nobody Told Me*, a new disc from the 85-year-old singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and bandleader? The answer: Go for it.

For his most recent outings, Mayall's keyboards, harmonica and vocals have been front and center. His 2018 live set, *Three For The Road*, was a stripped-down workout

with Mayall accompanied only by his crack Chicago-based rhythm section. For *Nobody Told Me*, Mayall swings back to a full-ensemble sound. His vaunted ability to recruit star guitarists for various projects is on full display here, with a half-dozen six-stringers featured across 10 tracks.

The songs are well-served by the incessant wail of electric guitar, particularly the seven covers that start out the disc. Underappreciated blues-rocker Larry McCray takes full advantage of his moment in the sun, notably on Gwendolyn Collins' "The Moon Is Full," while Rush's Alex Lifeson comes out punching on "Evil And Here To Stay." Todd Rundgren's fretwork eventually overpowers Conan O'Brien's studio horn section on Little Milton's "That's What Love Will Make You Do." And while Steven Van Zandt defers to Mayall with his in-the-pocket playing on "It's So Tough," Carolyn Wonderland adds impressive flourishes to "Like It Like You Do" and the glorious slow blues "Nobody Told Me." It's enough to leave Mayall fans panting for more.

—Jeff Johnson

**Nobody Told Me:** What Have I Done Wrong; The Moon Is Full; Evil And Here to Stay; That's What Love Will Make You Do; Distant Lonesome Train; Delta Hurricane; The Hurt Inside; It's So Tough; Like It Like You Do; Nobody Told Me. (48:31)

**Personnel:** John Mayall, vocals, keyboards, harmonica; Jay Davenport, drums; Greg Rzab, bass; Ron Dziubla, saxophone; Mark Pender, trumpet; Richard A. Rosenberg, trombone; Billy Watts, guitar; Carolyn Wonderland (5, 9, 10), Joe Bonamassa (1, 6), Larry McCray (2, 7), Alex Lifeson (3), Todd Rundgren (4), Steven Van Zandt (8), guitar.

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

## Nate Wooley *Columbia Icefield*

NORTHERN SPY 112

★★★★

Trumpeter Nate Wooley has an uncommonly broad purview as both an instrumentalist and conceptualist. He's rigorously intrepid and impossible to pigeonhole, whether it's his avant-garde solo performances or such projects as his previous album, *(Dance To) The Early Music*, which found Wooley reanimating the early small-band music of Wynton Marsalis. Different again, *Columbia Icefield* finds the Oregon-bred New Yorker conjuring the epic expanse of the Canadian Rockies' titular glacier across three long, textured compositions.

The unusual instrumentation of Wooley's *Columbia Icefield* quartet feels ideal to the task: virtuosic Susan Alcorn on pedal steel, the ever-distinctive Mary Halvorson on six-string, Ryan Sawyer behind the kit, alongside the leader's often strikingly lyrical horn and occasional amplifier effects. Opener "Lionel Trilling"—the rare tune named after a literary critic—blends Steve Reich-ian minimalism with howling interludes and hovering atmospherics to absorbing effect. The high-lonesome sound of "Seven In The Woods" echoes with hints of abstracted Americana, before being capped by an



extended, wind-shear solo by Halvorson. "With Condolences," although some of its growling vocal effects are a shade gimmicky, ranges across an emotional expanse like a dark-hued tone poem, featuring Wooley's most pensive playing and an affecting recitation by Sawyer.

Evocative yet never literal, ambitious while approachable, *Columbia Icefield* easily ranks as Wooley's most beautiful music yet.

—Bradley Bambarger

**Columbia Icefield:** Lionel Trilling; Seven In The Woods; With Condolences. (53:14)

**Personnel:** Nate Wooley, trumpet; Susan Alcorn, pedal steel; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Ryan Sawyer, drums, vocals.

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



## Julian Lage *Love Hurts*

MACK AVENUE 1148

★★★★½

Julian Lage's latest, *Love Hurts*, completes a trilogy of Americana-related recordings for the Mack Avenue imprint. The Grammy-nominated guitarist's two previous efforts, *Modern Lore* (2018) and *Arclight* (2016), dug deep into the pre-bop and rock 'n' roll eras, respectively. But the subject of this latest release is the unfettered musical milieu of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when free-jazz reached toward its zenith.

Aesthetically, each album in the trilogy lays the groundwork for the next, and the bridge between *Love Hurts* and *Modern Lore* likely would be Lage's "Earth Science," a standout free-improv tune from that earlier release. On this new record—Lage's debut as producer and his first using drummer Dave King and bassist Jorge Roeder—such a progressive effort would fit right in with his blue take on Jimmy Giuffrè's "Trudgin'" and a crisp rendition of Ornette Coleman's "Tomorrow Is The Question." Lage's source material here ranges far beyond the avant-garde, however. The album includes covers of "In Heaven" from the oddball film *Eraserhead*, Roy Orbison's country rock classic "Crying" and a pair of early Keith Jarrett compositions: "The Windup" and "Encore (A)." On the surface, these all might not have much to communicate to each other. But Lage's incisive musicality and clean fretwork go a long way to bridging aesthetic divides.

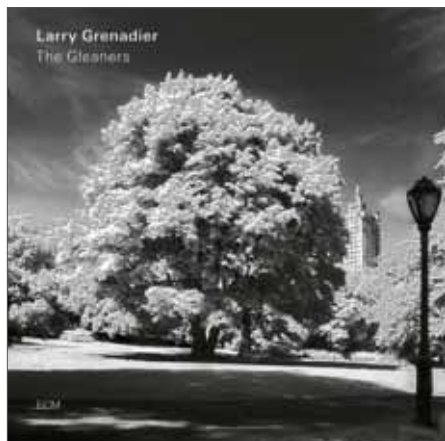
His two originals ("In Circles" and "Lullaby") are the most inclusive selections on the recording, borrowing from nearly everything else and signaling the guitarist's compositional intent: to build musical bridges firmly rooted in place, but standing outside of time and genre.

—Suzanne Lorge

**Love Hurts:** In Heaven; Tomorrow Is The Question; The Windup; Love Hurts; In Circles; Encore (A); Lullaby; Trudgin'; I'm Getting Sentimental Over You; Crying. (42:55)

**Personnel:** Julian Lage, guitar; Dave King, drums; Jorge Roeder, bass.

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



## Larry Grenadier *The Gleaners*

ECM 2560

★★★★

The upright bass might not be an instrument we're used to hearing at the front of the mix. But *The Gleaners*, Larry Grenadier's bold, poetic contribution to the solo bass genre, leaves no doubt that his bass sound belongs there. It's a purposeful artistic vision—at points melodic, athletic and gut-wrenchingly vulnerable—that explores not only the full range of the instrument's technical possibilities, but also the emotional range of a deeply sensitive jazz artist. Mostly made up of original solo pieces, the album is peppered with thoughtful interpretations of fellow musicians' tunes and a remarkably creative remix of the George Gershwin ballad "My Man's Gone Now."

The originals unfold contrasting moods and a broad range of timbres, as the flowing, bowed opener, "Oceanic," gives way to "Pettiford," a buoyant tribute to the bebop legend. "Vineland" is vigorous and adventuresome, and in contrast, "The Gleaner" is a haunting exploration of overtones and the instrument's upper register.

When Grenadier turns to songs penned by others, he channels the energy of deep friendship, offering a heartfelt interpretation of "Gone Like The Season Does," a gorgeous tune penned by Rebecca Martin, his wife. Later, he delves deeply into rich harmonies during two short "Bagatelles," written by Viennese guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel. The album's fulcrum, though, is a mysterious, focused medley of John Coltrane's "Compassion" and Paul Motian's "The Owl Of Cranston" during which their creative spirit is palpable in the bassist's searching tribute. A testament to one of our generation's true bass craftsmen, *The Gleaners* offers a pathway into a brilliant mind taking a rare and well-deserved turn in the spotlight.

—Alex W. Rodriguez

**The Gleaners:** Oceanic; Pettiford; The Gleaner; Woebegone; Gone Like The Season Does; Compassion/The Owl Of Cranston; Vineland; Lovelair; Bagatelle 1; Bagatelle 2; My Man's Gone Now; A Novel In A Sigh. (42:02)

**Personnel:** Larry Grenadier, bass.

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

## Vanessa Rubin *The Dream Is You: Vanessa Rubin Sings Tadd Dameron*

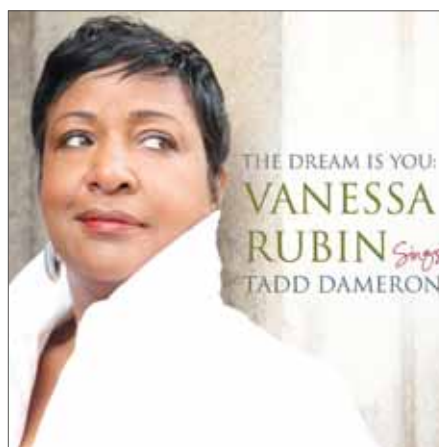
NIBUR 1001

★★★½

Cleveland pianist, composer/arranger and band-leader Tadd Dameron's importance always has been worth noting, if nothing else for his well-loved compositions "Good Bait" and "Ladybird." So, it's certainly odd that there hasn't been an album devoted to his romantic vocal work, until now.

Digging out Dameron's gems from institutions across America, fellow Clevelander Vanessa Rubin has accomplished a feat of adoration and reverence. The vocalist commissioned 12 impressive arrangements of Dameron's work for nonet and quartet, seven with original lyrics, each contributed by the pianist's acclaimed contemporaries, including Benny Golson and Jimmy Heath.

Rubin's scat choruses over "Lady Bird" features the deep sonorities of her vocal range, accentuated by the ensemble. Completely immersed, she transcends the music, allowing Dameron's sophisticated wit to take prominence. "Kitchenette Across The Hall" further illuminates Rubin's solid interpretative approach, and "Weekend" has an casual sense of play, well suited to her joyful, effortless delivery. And while Rubin soars over "Good Bait," horn and woodwind



intonation issues tend to disappoint throughout, diminishing the work's impact.

Honoring Dameron's wizardry, Rubin and her collective get straight to the matter, expressing a genius and creative legacy with the sincere respect that the often-overlooked composer truly deserves and finally has.

—Kerlie McDowall

**The Dream Is You: Vanessa Rubin Sings Tadd Dameron:**

Lady Bird; Kitchenette Across The Hall; If You Could See Me Now; Weekend; On A Misty Night; Never Been In Love; Next Time Around (Soultrane); Good Bait; Reveries Do Come True (The Dream Is You); Whatever Possessed Me; You're A Joy; I Think I'll Go Away. (54:13)

**Personnel:** Vanessa Rubin, vocals; John Cowherd, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Carl Allen, drums; Eddie Allen, trumpet; Patience Higgins, tenor saxophone; Bruce Williams, alto saxophone; Clifton Anderson, trombone; Alex Harding, baritone saxophone.

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



## Brittany Anjou *Enamigo Reciprokataj*

ORIGIN 82774

★★★½

Why did pianist Brittany Anjou title her album *Enamigo Reciprokataj*, which translates from Esperanto to "reciprocal love?" Even after giving it a listen, the answer's still unclear.

Anjou's debut album, inspired by a Stravinsky ballet, is a strong, classicist piano-trio effort that nods to the work of Ahmad Jamal, Vince Guaraldi and even modern players like Cyrus Chestnut in its focus on melody and swing, while still journeying as far afield as she thinks the music wants to go. And she's happy to lay waste to the instrument when that's what's called for: "Reciprokataj IV: Olive You" begins with a display of power that would mark the summit of most players' performances. The piece goes through multiple transformations, exploring forcefully played blues and romantic frills, before finally drifting to a delicate landing.

Throughout the majority of the album, Anjou's supported and egged on by bassist Gregory Chudzik and drummer Nicholas Anderson, who both are prominent in the mix, serving as counterweights and even challengers rather than mere accompanists. Toward the end of the disc, though, they're replaced by Ari Folman-Cohen and Ben Perowsky, and "Reciprokataj V: Flowery Distress" has a darker, almost martial feel. Perowsky's playing is more like an arena-rock drum solo than a jazz rhythm, and Folman-Cohen draws long groans from the bass with his bow. In response, Anjou pounds out low-end rumbles that feel almost pained. The album begins and ends with short tracks warped by electronic manipulation, almost as if you're tuning the music in as it's being broadcast from a distant satellite.

—Philip Freeman

**Enamigo Reciprokataj:** Starlight; Reciprokataj I: Cyrene (Flight of the Butterfly); Snuffaluffagus; Reciprokataj II: Girls Who Play Violin; Balliou For Bartok; Hard Boiled Soup; Reciprokataj III: Harfa; Reciprokataj IV: Olive You; Reciprokataj V: Flowery Distress; Reciprokataj Elektra. (57:30)

**Personnel:** Brittany Anjou, piano; Gregory Chudzik, bass; Nicholas Anderson, drums; Ben Perowsky, drums (9, 10); Ari Folman-Cohen, bass (9, 10).

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



## The Dave Douglas Variations

In the late 1960s, Miles Davis was fed up with multiple-set engagements in nightclubs. He was done with ringing cash registers and having to kill time at the bar between sets. If rock bands could play arenas and soft-seat halls, why shouldn't he?

Thankfully, while Davis' rebellion helped put a dent in nightclub business during the following decade, it didn't completely kill the concept of the four- or five-night stand at rooms like Jazz Standard in Manhattan's Kips Bay neighborhood. There's really nothing quite like the intimacy of a small venue or the experience of hearing a band as it works through repertoire during succeeding sets.

Bandleader and Greenleaf Music head **Dave Douglas** gets that, and since 2006, with control of his own production and distribution, he's released three complete runs with different bands from Jazz Standard. The third, ***Brazen Heart Live At Jazz Standard*** (Greenleaf Music 1066/1062/1057/1067; 114:41/126:39/128:45/125:11 ★★★★★)

captures his 2015 quintet—with tenor saxophonist Jon Irabagon, pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist Linda May Han Oh and drummer Rudy Royston—during the course of eight sets. Road-tested over a number of months, in support of three extremely diverse albums (2012's *Be Still*, 2013's *Time Travel*, 2015's *Brazen Heart*) the quintet tackles 26 separate songs. Most are played at least twice, with the notable exception of Douglas' "Hawaiian Punch," from *Brazen Heart*, which kicks off half of the six sets. Five songs are played only once, which is where listeners can start to nerd out over the flow and shape of these sets.

For example, the Friday night crowd got treated to three pieces the band would play only once—including a raucous cover of Gillian Welch's "One Morning," which Douglas never has recorded in the studio—while the Sunday night audience was able to hear the quintet really stretch out on a 23-minute version of "Bridge To Nowhere" and a 22-minute medley of "My Cares Are Down Below" and "The Pigeon And The Pie."

Since going out under his own name in 1993, Douglas consistently has put together bands that highlight textural complexity and distinctive voices, but this quintet stands among the very best of his many projects. Irabagon, in particular, has an exceptionally simpatico relationship with the trumpeter, and his intelligence and wit shine through on everything he plays. Oh—who also is a member of Sound Prints, the band co-led by Douglas and Joe Lovano—and Royston form a fluid and variable rhythm team.

Another benefit of running his own label has been Douglas' concept of a year-long



Dave Douglas

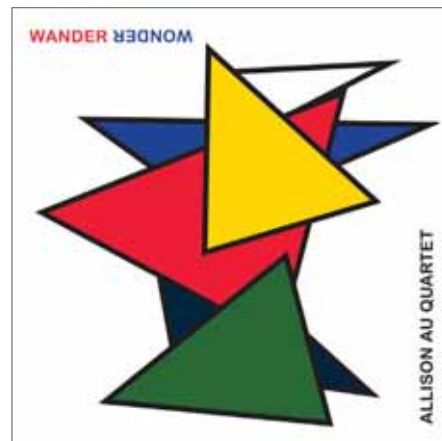
subscription series. Recently, that's taken the form of one-off projects that are recorded late in the year and posted one track at a time to Greenleaf Music members during the following 12 months.

In 2018, Douglas made a timely return to music written in response to issues related to human rights. In the past, his activism has generated some of his most compelling music, and ***UPLIFT: Twelve Pieces For Positive Action In 2018*** (Greenleaf Music 1068; 62:10 ★★★★★) is no exception. It bristles with electricity, thanks to the presence of guitarists Mary Halvorson and Julian Lage, and bassist Bill Laswell, and stands apart in Lovano's discography as a rare pairing of the saxophonist with a corps of sonic adventurers.

Halvorson's signature octave-bending smears and Laswell's dark tone set a woolly mood on pieces like "The Power Of The Vote" and "Love Is A Battle," while a composition dedicated to the Dreamers and other immigrants to America uses electronics and Ian Chang's percussion to create an unsettled foundation for pensive trumpet and alto clarinet.

Perhaps the best element of these thematic exercises is the way it sometimes can push Douglas into totally unexpected territory. Such is the case with "Sharing A Small Planet," which explodes out of the gate, with Douglas, Lovano and Chang sounding like they're accompanying Otis Redding. Before long, chaos ensues in the best possible way—a glorious, throbbing cacophony that's reminiscent of Ronald Shannon Jackson's Decoding Society. Absolutely uplifting. **DB**

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



### Allison Au Quartet *Wander Wonder*

SELF RELEASE

★★★★★

Toronto saxophonist, composer and arranger Allison Au leads her quartet through 10 pieces varied in influence, but amazingly cohesive, innovative and fresh on their third outing, *Wander Wonder*, the follow-up to 2016's Juno Award-winning *Forest Grove*.

From the top, there's no mistaking this is a modern work, signaled by Todd Pentney's electronic soundscape on "The Valley." And while Au's sphere of influence ranges from classical to pop, r&b and hip-hop, she embraces not only international jazz, but her own Chinese and Jewish heritage. Yet what comes through loud and strong is her own alto saxophone bop: From voicing, phrasing and tone, Au's personality and imprint are out front on "Future Self."

"The Rest Is Up To You," gently moves with a samba melody and the evocative touch of Fabio Ragnelli's drums. "Looking Up" highlights a band that works as a unit: Pentney's piano solo rings through, working in synch with Au's alto. "The Lie That Saves Us All," also showcases the way these players are unified in harmony and rhythm. "Red Herring" busts out as the album's most adventurous track, drums and saxophone flying as Pentney's contemporary electronic keyboard sounds hover in the distance.

The ballad "Morning" has real feel, unexpected contrast and a deep blue mood that announces this is where Au lives: She's in it body and soul. (Although, when bassist John Maharaj takes his solo, it's a fair reminder that he's quietly been holding it down throughout.)

This impressive third effort by a solidly focused and driven quartet rarely wanders: It's wonderful.

—Denise Sullivan

**Wander Wonder:** The Valley; Future Self; The Rest Is Up To You; Looking Up; Morning; The Lie That Saves Us All; Red Herring; Grounds; Force Majeure; A Trick Of The Moonlight. (52:42)

**Personnel:** Allison Au, alto saxophone; Todd Pentney, piano, Prophet Rev 2; John Maharaj, bass, electric bass; Fabio Ragnelli, drums.

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



## Wadada Leo Smith *Rosa Parks: Pure Love. An Oratorio Of Seven Songs*

TUM 057

★★★★½

## Wadada Leo Smith & Sabu Toyozumi *Burning Meditation*

NOBUSINESS 110

★★★★½

Trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith's ongoing interest in recent history, particularly the Civil Rights era, is powerfully manifested in his first-ever orato-

rio, where his ideas are expressed in words as well as sound. The work functions as a celebration of the titular figure's personal bravery, symbolic power and lasting importance, but Smith digs deeper, complementing meditations on her courage with current political criticism. On "Song 3: Change It!," he critiques the lack of representation in the U.S. Senate as vocalist Karen Parks intones, "We have not a democracy/ When 28 states have 56 senators/ California only two."

Fans of Smith's bracing trumpet playing might be disappointed, as he solos only sparingly here. His ever-shifting arrangements use various combinations of a protean trumpet quartet (Hugh Ragin, Graham Haynes and Ted Daniel), the RedKoral Quartet (the imaginative string group that's appeared throughout his Civil Rights works) and drummer Pheeroan akLaff, with improvisations judiciously placed throughout the epic. The libretto is sung by three disparate voices: African-American Parks, Mexican Carmina Escobar and Chinese pipa virtuoso Min Xiao-Fen, and the performers masterfully bring an electric coherence and introspective intensity to the bandleader's bold vision.

A more visceral, extroverted side of Smith is evidenced on the front half of *Burning Meditation*, a live 1994 recording made with the pioneering Japanese free-jazz drummer Sabu Toyozumi, an early member of Masayuki

Takayanagi's New Directions and a frequent collaborator with touring international improvisers in his homeland. Opener "Creative Music-1—Red Mountain Garden, Wild Irises And Glacier Lines" fires on all cylinders, with the drummer unleashing surging waves of energy on his kit, including some driving backbeat here and there, while the trumpeter unleashes extended streams of tonally tart melody. Things grow more meditative during the album's second half, with Smith toggling between koto, bamboo flute, kalimba and soulful chants as his partner expertly offers restraint. As different as the albums are, both clearly are imbued with Smith's spirit of generosity and humanity.

—Peter Margasak

### *Rosa Parks: Pure Love. An Oratorio Of Seven Songs:*

Prelude: Journey; Vision Dance 1: Resistance And Unity; Rosa Parks: Mercy, Music For Double Quartet; Song 1: The Montgomery Bus Boycott—381 Days Of Fire; Song 2: The First Light, Gold; Vision Dance 2: Defiance, Justice and Liberation; Song 3: Change It!; Song 4: The Truth; Song 5: No Fear; Vision Dance 3: Rosa's Blue Lake; Song 6: The Second Light; Vision Dance 4: A Blue Casa; Song 7: Pure Love; The Known World: Apartheid; Postlude: Victory! (71:39)

**Personnel:** Wadada Leo Smith, Ted Daniel, Hugh Ragin, trumpet; Graham Haynes, trumpet, cornet; Min Xiao-Fen, pipa, vocals; Carmina Escobar, Karen Parks, vocals; Shalini Vijayan, Mona Tian, violin; Andrew McIntosh, viola; Ashley Walters, cello; Pheeroan akLaff, drums; Hardegree, electronics.

**Burning Meditation:** Creative Music-1—Red Mountain Garden, Wild Irises And Glacier Lines; Burning Meditation—Uprising; Voices—Agano River Flow; Don Cherry, A Silver Flute Song; There Are Human Rights Blues; Stars, Lightening Bugs And Chrysanthemum Flowers. (62:40)

**Personnel:** Wadada Leo Smith, trumpet, koto, bamboo flute, vocals, percussion; Sabu Toyozumi, drums.

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

## Behn Gillece *Parallel Universe*

POSI-TONE 8190

★★★★

With *Parallel Universe*, Behn Gillece strives to show that a duality of introversion and extroversion—a fluctuating need for innovative musical technique, as well as public performance—exists in every artist. The sheer contrast of Gillece's meticulous post-bop songwriting and the approachable, mellower, sonic quality of his vibraphone, epitomize the philosophy.

Swift rolls of vibraphone notes about midway through the title track create bold melodic ostinatos. However, the rhythmic movement isn't like that of broad and heavy tidal waves. Rather, Gillece highlights the brighter timbre of the vibraphone within bop's affinity for quick-step tempos. Similarly, on "Eviscerate," Gillece refuses to force the vibraphone to be something it isn't. The tonal difference is obvious, as he alternates between solitary performance and bolstering Stacy Dillard's tenor saxophone, the song's primary melodic messenger. Still, the composition unfolds like a battle of differing musical strategies—one agile and punctuated, the other expansive and malleable—more so than a hierarchy of instrumental power. Ultimately, *Parallel Universe* is a compositionally fascinating collection, displaying how a single set of opposites translates to a varied artistic display.

—Kira Grunenber



## Graewe/Smith/ Vatcher *Unhesitating*

NUSCOPE 1032

★★★★½

When a session features Georg Graewe at the piano bench, certain words must be banished from one's vocabulary. He doesn't show up to pay homage or imitate anyone; he comes to play what the moment requires.

Active since the '70s, Graewe has worked with free improvisers like John Butcher and Isabelle Duthoit, but also has composed and staged operas. Don't ask him about the similarities and differences between improvisation and composition, they're both just tools to making erudite music at the moment that music needs to be made. Bassist Damon Smith and drummer Michael Vatcher are apposite partners for this task.

"Prelude," a Graewe original, starts out using short phrases and strategic gaps that establish this as music that asks and answers questions. Vatcher and Smith seem to be asking questions of their own, proposing changes of tempo and direction; no one here is hesitating. They treat "Ictus" like an ongoing negotiation of hierarchy, but not for the mere sake of control. Rather, the players seem to be sorting out how to honor both Carla and Paul Bley by using their tune as a vehicle for finding a lucid trio dynamic.

—Bill Meyer



**Parallel Universe:** Break The Ice; Bossa For R.M.; Parallel Universe; Ready For Tomorrow; Smoke Screen; Eviscerate; Downpour; Shadow Of The Flame; Evening Glow; Alice's Journey; Candle In The Dark. (58:02)

**Personnel:** Behn Gillece, vibraphone; Bruce Harris, trumpet; Stacy Dillard, tenor saxophone; Art Hirahara, piano; David Wong, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

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

**Unhesitating:** Prelude; Ictus; Semaphore #04; Pointedly Bent; Caught Stillness; Schulterblicke; Nothing Ever Was, Anyway; Barely Curve The Water; Rooms Outlast You; Semaphore #05; Rough Fields; Volume Of The Moment; Semaphore #06. (53:21)

**Personnel:** Georg Graewe, piano; Damon Smith, bass; Michael Vatcher, drums.

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





## Bendik Giske *Surrender*

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND 334

★★★

To a great degree, Oslo-based saxophonist Bendik Giske's debut, *Surrender*, is one of those experiments that's more interesting than it is enjoyable. It's a saxophone recording produced with tiny microphones placed all over the instrument, so that its sound fills and often overloads the record's sonic plane. The only accompaniment is Giske's voice, similarly recorded through microphones placed all over his body (and low in the mix, so that it forms a faint, ghostly drone).

## Jordan Pettay *First Fruit*

OUTSIDE IN MUSIC 1803

★★★

Several of the tracks on New York saxophonist Jordan Pettay's debut, *First Fruit*, are reimagined medium-tempo hymns. Pettay's evocative musicality, at once refined and raw, makes 200-year-old Christian music standards, like "I Am Thine O Lord," feel fresh.

Christian Sands lends a hand to the project in more ways than one: He co-produced the album and contributes keys throughout. His riffing during the first measures of "I Surrender All" is nothing short of soulful, the organ's rich tone and billowing vibrato bracing and sharpening Pettay's keening solos.

One of the bandleader's strengths is her obvious fluency in deep-fried Southern gospel, and her masterful ability to fuse a sanctified sound with other distinct styles—r&b and jazz, in particular. "Straight Street" takes listeners on a jaunty journey, with Jimmy MacBride's drums driving the beat at a steady clip. Sands' chording adds layers of color and complexity to the track, while Luke Sellick's bass perfectly punctuates the piece. In her playing the tune, Pettay pays tribute to John Coltrane, who penned the song in 1957, a few weeks after parting ways with Miles Davis.

In fact, "drone" is a word that describes much of the music. The close detail of the miking means that on tracks such as "Stall" and "Hole," Giske's circular-breathed notes begin to separate into their harmonic overtones. If the sound is ambient, it is so in both the musical sense and in the sense of listening to one's buzzing appliances as the air conditioner runs.

Somewhat more interesting are the tracks that use ostinato, instead of drone. "Adjust" and "Through" comprise speedy, triplet-based runs, whose looped momentum suggest a Philip Glass composition; Gendik's fingerings become percussion tracks. There's a definite meditative quality, particularly on "Up," where Giske's voice surfaces in the reverb like a distant chant. By the fourth iteration ("High"), though, it's simply become more of the same.

It is fascinating to hear the interaction of breath, fingers, instrument and voice at such minute levels as *Surrender* offers, and it has its own kind of surreal beauty. But the album also gets quite dull; its 33-minute duration is a relief. Yet at the same time, something about it remains remarkably compelling: You will listen, put it aside thinking it's a pretty trifle, and somehow be beckoned by it again.

—Michael J. West

**Surrender:** Ass Drone; Adjust; Up; Stall; Hole; Through; High; Exit. (33:06)

**Personnel:** Bendik Giske, saxophone, vocals.

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



Her sophisticated styling captures the original's spirit, ebullient with hope and the promise of new beginnings. *First Fruit* could do with more original music, though; just three new songs are included here. But the lack of freshly penned work only stokes anticipation for Pettay's next project. A worthy first effort, *First Fruit* should appeal to both saints and sinners.

—Samantha Willis

**First Fruit:** Whatever Happens; I Am Thine O Lord; First Fruit; You Make Me Feel Brand New; For Wayne; Straight Street; I Exalt Thee; I Surrender All; Are You Washed In The Blood. (53:50)

**Personnel:** Jordan Pettay, alto, soprano saxophone; Christian Sands, piano; Fender Rhodes, Hammond B-3; Luke Sellick, bass; Jimmy MacBride, drums; Mat Jodrell (1, 4), trumpet; Joe McDonough (1, 4), trombone.

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



## Anton Eger *Æ*

EDITION 1122

★★

Scandinavian drummer Anton Eger is a veteran sideman for Django Bates and Marius Neset, as well as a member of the long-standing London-based trio Phronesis. He's had plenty of time to plan his first solo effort, and on *Æ*, Eger establishes an identity quite distinct from Phronesis' acoustic, piano-based sound. Relentlessly tight and totally plugged in, the album combines a pop-derived version of fusion that was in vogue around the time Eger was born in 1980 and contemporary production techniques.

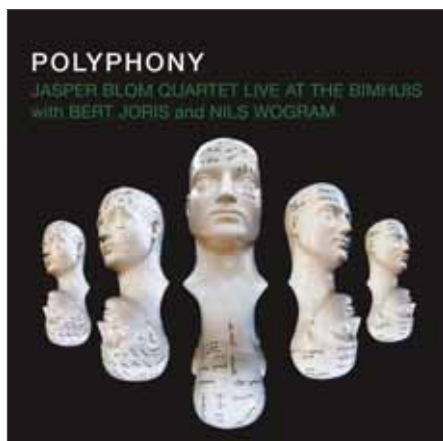
The bandleader's skills as a drummer and arranger are undeniable as he flawlessly shifts between meters and expresses melodies in tight formation with the synthesizer on "Sugaruzd +++ pT," and uses intricate bass-drum flourishes to vary the backbeat of "Oxford Supernova +++ jC." On that latter composition, a chirping synth and clipped guitar articulate convoluted variations that otherwise might be the tune of a serviceable soul ballad. And on the hip-hop derived "Severn B +++ fP," each electronic texture has its place. But all this pristine execution feels as fussy and needlessly clever as the song titles. The final track demonstrates what's missing on the rest of the album: Juliette Marland adds spoken phrases to "Sufflör +++ sB." And while a liberally applied vocoder does little to bolster the delivery, her presence points away from the music's claustrophobically crammed exercises in virtuosity. To be clear, it's not Eger and company playing well that's the problem. It's that they seem to want the music to express virtuosity, rather than any artistic perspective, making *Æ* a chore to hear.

—Bill Meyer

**Æ:** HERb +++ gA; Oxford Supernova +++ jC; IOEDWLTO +++ hP; datn +++ oS; Sugaruzd +++ pT; Monolith +++ tR; Severn B +++ fP; ?irL MIP +++ hH; Never Not +++ kMP; Sufflör +++ sB. (42:50)

**Personnel:** Robin Mullarkey, electric bass, Wurliizer, Prophet 12; Matt Calvert, guitar, Korg Trident, electronics, Juno 6; Dan Nicholls, Wurliizer, Prophet 12; Ivo Neame, Mellotron; Petter Eldh, synthesizer, electric bass, guitar; Anton Eger, drums, shake pandeiro, stunt surdo, tambourine; Juliette Marland, vocals; Otis Sandsjö, saxophone; Niels Broos, synthesizer; Mathias Heise, harmonica.

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



## Jasper Blom Quartet

### *Polyphony*

WHIRLWIND 4732

★★★½

Sprawling double live albums aren't exactly a dime a dozen. The bulk of such large-scale recordings usually are reserved for a particular set of jazz royalty and unearthed archival treasures. And while Jasper Blom performed with Lee Konitz and Chet Baker, the tenor saxophonist's standing in the annals of jazz still is a work in progress. That makes *Polyphony*, a two-disc live set caught on tape at Amsterdam's Bimhuis, an anomaly. Blom is a force in Norway's vibrant jazz scene, but does he carry enough weight to warrant a double album? Yes and no.

Augmented by his longtime quartet and featuring two special guests on each program (trumpeter Bert Joris on the first set, trombonist Nils Wogram on the second), *Polyphony* certainly boasts fine musicianship and an organic rapport. But it drags on a bit too long, while falling short on thrills. With a mixed bag of originals on the first disc, the quartet glides along with a laid-back modern jazz feel that leans on infectioniously melodic composition that boasts room for meandering improvisational territory. Loose-limbed grooves, warm hooks and free-flowing interplay are Blom and company's strong suits; their instrumentation melts into one another on the serene "Virelai" and the delicately strutting "Fontayne." But *Polyphony* doesn't kick into high gear until Wogram joins the fray, helping spearhead a muscular touch. Things finally get loud on the rollicking and funky "Running Gag" and on the herky-jerky "Least Of Your Worries," but that moxie is short-lived. *Polyphony* might be better served by plucking out the filler and paring it all down to a compact, single disc. —Brad Cohan

**Polyphony:** Disc One: Waltz For Magnus; Guidonian Hand; Virelai; Fontayne; The Lady And The Unicorn Homme; Arme; Beatus Vir; Ciconia. Disc Two: Decidophobia; Running Gag; Nancy In The Sky; Macedonian Candidate; Least Of Your Worries; Monk Fish Cleopatra; Whirl; Antidote. (60:27/50:21)

**Personnel:** Jasper Blom, tenor saxophone; Bert Joris, trumpet; Jesse Van Ruller, guitar; Frans Van Der Hoeven, bass; Martijn Vink, drums; Nils Wogram, trombone.

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

## Alex Sipiagin

### *NoFo Skies*

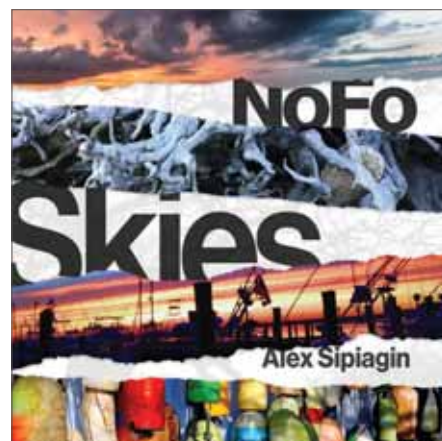
BLUE ROOM MUSIC 1005

★★★★½

For the past few years, trumpeter Alex Sipiagin has led sharp three-horn groups whose interplay injects fresh vibrancy into his deceptively tricky tunes. In 2017, he released a sharp sextet recording of such conversations, *Moments Captured*. And recently, Sipiagin reassembled the troupe for *NoFo Skies*, an album focused as much on song, groove and feel as it is on spirited exchanges (with a couple of brief detours).

Those fast and intricately interwoven parts introduce the album on the uptempo "Rush." Sipiagin, along with tenor saxophonist Chris Potter and alto player Will Vinson, blend elongated and staccato lines while framing keyboardist John Escreet's electronic explorations as Eric Harland contributes fierce, yet understated, hip-hop influenced drumming. Such combinations define much of *NoFo Skies*. Potter comes across as sounding both aggressive and relaxed on the title track, while Sipiagin eases into high notes atop of Harland's heavy accents on "Start Of ... ." On another upbeat piece, "Savoir," Escreet seems to guide the horns' multidirectional approach and Sipiagin's warm tone. Still, the track's coda would have been better with a firm resolution, rather than a fadeout.

Sipiagin abandons velocity for open spaces and minimalist arrangements on the abstract "Sky 1" and "Sky 2." Ambient synthesizer and percussive effects drive these thematically connected tracks, which serve as quiet interludes between the harmonically complex instrumen-



tals and vocalist/lyricist Alina Engibaryan leaning into contemporary r&b. She offers a low-key approach to these tunes with a breathy sound and subtle lifts, which sound particularly effective on "Recovery." Sipiagin responds with similar upward movements that blend in with the ensemble.

On longer tracks, like "Shadows," bassist Matt Brewer's funk keeps the band from flying into the ethereal. When things get too calm, though, Sipiagin quickly turns everything around during surprising twists on "Between AM's," while Harland's attack recalls classic Motown drummers like Richard "Pistol" Allen. Engibaryan's words are unfailingly optimistic, while the music echoes her ideal. —Aaron Cohen

**NoFo Skies:** Rush; NoFo Skies; Recovery; Savoir; Sky 1; Shadows; Start Of ...; Sky 2; Between AM's; For You. (76:49)

**Personnel:** Alex Sipiagin, trumpet; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Will Vinson, alto saxophone; John Escreet, keyboards; Matt Brewer, bass; Eric Harland, drums; Alina Engibaryan, vocals.

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





# Poignant Self-Expression

**Michael Jerome Browne, *That's Where It's At!* (Borealis 256; 43:16 ★★★★★)** From traditional acoustic blues and spirituals to Stevie Wonder, Randy Newman, Sam Cooke and Al Green, Browne's an outstanding interpreter who instills all the covers on his ninth album with a ring of authenticity. That's also the case with two instrumentals that this Montrealese composed himself, as well as with three songs he penned with lyricist B.A. Markus. Browne's vocals and guitar fingerings, along with turns on banjo and harmonica, are temperate, controlled, full of humility and convincing in tone. Just as welcoming are the complementary efforts of guest singers and stylistic confrères Eric Bibb, Harrison Kennedy and Roxanne Potvin.

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

**Sugaray Rayford, *Somebody Save Me* (Forty Below 021; 41:01 ★★½)** On his fifth solo release, Californian Rayford, all 6 feet, 5 inches and 300 pounds of him, brandishes a soul-blues voice that has an emotional strength equal to the plea of the balladic title track and the declaratory sweep of "Time To Get Movin'." Producer-engineer and multi-instrumentalist Eric Come composed all 10 tracks, all generally acceptable, though Radford, who was brought up in a gospel church, has a history of crystallizing his most poignant self-expression in songs he wrote himself. Rayford's fine guitarist, Alastair Greene, isn't present, a shame.

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

**Bloodest Saxophone, *Texas Queens 5* (Vizztone 0030; 42:09 ★★)** Japan's zanily named Bloodest Saxophone (a pair of saxophones, trombone, guitar, bass, drums) traveled to Austin, Texas, to record this album with leading female blues singers. These tourists don't so much connect musically and emotionally with Dianna Greenleaf, Crystal Thomas, Jai Malano, Lauren Cervantes and Angela Miller as supply them with over-studied simulations of blues and r&b forms. Greenleaf comes off as the queenliest, investing opener "I've Got A Feeling" with Big Mama Thornton-like power. BS didn't dare ask any of them to sing on the band's misbegotten roof raisers "Pork Chop Chick" and "Cockroach Run."

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

**Matt Andersen, *Halfway Home By Morning* (True North 715; 52:32 ★★½)** Canadian bluesman Andersen rates as one of the most soulful singers anywhere, and many of the lyrics of the original songs on his 12th album, recorded in Nashville, seem torn from the depths of feeling. However, he's undercut by several things, including a few so-so original songs, Music City-based Canadian Steve Dawson's paint-by-numbers production and the McCrary Sisters' irksome, overblown backup singing.

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



Sugaray Rayford

**Tommy Castro, *Killin' It Live* (Alligator 4989; 55:44 ★★½)** Fleshed out with covers of Buddy Miles' "Them Changes" and Sleepy John Estes' "Leaving Trunk," Castro's second concert release features top-tier originals from across his 15 albums and 30-plus years in music. Castro is in sterling form as a vocalist and guitarist at shows in four states this past year. And particularly good is the slow blues "Lose Lose," a display of the pain expended on a splintered love. Castro heads what might be his sharpest touring band since the ensemble with keyboardist Jim Pugh on 2000's *Live At The Fillmore* (Blind Pig).

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

**Various Artists, *Feelin' Right Saturday Night: The Ric & Ron Anthology* (Craft 00149; 70:11 ★★★★★)** Several Italian-American record producers had key roles in the good health of New Orleans r&b in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Among them was the Ric & Ron label's Joe Ruffino, who welcomed fresh input from youngblood Mac Rebennack (later Dr. John) and bandleader Edgar Blanchard. This 28-track overview, curated by ever-dependable Scott Billington with Mason Williams, soars highest with two party-time exemplars: Professor Longhair's "Go To The Mardi Gras" and Al Johnson's "Carnival Time." Almost as appealing are tracks by first-time-in-a-studio singers Johnny Adams (his heart-on-sleeve testimonials "A Losing Battle," "I Won't Cry" and "Life Is Just A Struggle") and Irma Thomas (her declarations "Don't Mess With My Man" and "I May Be Wrong"). Also acquitting themselves commendably are minor stars Tommy Ridgley, Chris Kenner, Eddie Bo and Robert Parker, along with obscurities Lenny Capello, Lee Tillman and others. Bo gets too many tracks with five, but, this caviar and several more aside, *Feelin' Right* is recommended. Alternate choice: Ace Records' 2014 Ric & Ron collection, *You Talk Too Much*, has slightly preferable song selection and sequencing.

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

SUZAN JONES



## John Raymond *Real Feels Live, Vol. 2*

SUNNYSIDE 1535

★★★★★

Albums like *Real Feels Live, Vol. 2*—a recording of an artist taking their most recent studio efforts out for a spin in front of a crowd and allowing the concert experience to inform and impact the material—are becoming rare commodities in the modern marketplace. The mood of the times seems to be to keep cranking out new material and, like a standup comedian, remove it from the live repertoire after an album has been released.

The compulsion of flugelhorn player John Raymond to release this live set was as thoughtful as the effort that went into crafting material for his 2018 studio album, *Joy Ride*. The songs are, in several cases, radically altered here with new tempos and textures, and entirely new moods applied. The best example might be the troupe's take on the 2018 album's title track: In its studio guise, the song begins with the gentle trot of a singing cowboy classic, before a broken-beat groove from drummer Colin Stranahan kicks in and points toward more modern territory. On this live take, guitarist Gilad Hekselman slows his opening ramble down to a crawl, layering fluttering atmospherics over top. When Raymond and Stranahan join in, the mood is late-night soul that slips smoothly into more abstract territory, while not losing one bit of its momentum.

What this live set also helps clarify is how much noise a contemporary trio can summon. Hekselman makes judicious use of loop pedals to help set the bass line for many of these songs, building up atmospherics. The density of his efforts is something easily achieved via overdubs and multitrack recording software, but here, he, Raymond and Stranahan are left to bring the same density of sound without a safety net. They meet the challenge, surpass expectations and turn in a spectacular work of art. —Robert Ham

**Real Feels Live, Vol. 2:** Follower; Minnesota, WI; Be Still Intro; Be Still, My Soul; Joy Ride; The Times They Are A-Changin'. (53:55)  
**Personnel:** John Raymond, flugelhorn; Gilad Hekselman, guitar; Colin Stranahan, drums.

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



## Line & The Lions *Mountain Solitude*

LOSEN 203

★★½

Contrary to the lyrical, atmospheric suggestion of its title, *Mountain Solitude*—the debut release from Line & The Lions, a troupe led by Norwegian saxophonist Line Falkenberg—leans into rock and funk. Falkenberg’s a strong and classically trained musician who followed her heart into fusion-hued terrain during the early 2000s, and has something intriguing and fresh to offer with this release.

Sturdy and spirited playing sparks the pro-

ceedings, starting with the opening track, “Vårflow (Spring Flow),” and the leader’s sharp soprano solo. Despite the promise and a sense of a work-in-progress, not everything comes together as cohesively as it might on future recordings; Falkenberg’s compositional sense can sound sketchy or just shy of originality. The title track, for instance, unfolds with her reverb-bathed intro, but lapses into an unremarkable groove, and “Loke” suffers from melodic stiffness. But artistic focus arrives later in the album, as on the melancholy tinged “Sorry” and the spooky fusion vamp of “Under Terskelen (Below The Threshold),” underscored by an ambling plectrum-played bass and Falkenberg’s smartly sculpted solo.

Jazz history speckles the path here with hints of the iconic “A Love Supreme” tucked inside a rhythm guitar part on “Shannon” and capping off the trumpet solo on “Happy.” Arabic airs swirl on the entrancing, sinuous closer, “Chicky,” along with a sense of better things to come from this outfit.

—Josef Woodard

**Mountain Solitude:** Vårflow (Spring Flow); Loke; Vassdragnet (The Watercourse); Afterski (After Ski); Alene Pa Fjellet (Mountain Solitude); Shannon; Vandren (The Wanderer); Sorry; Under Terskelen (Below The Threshold); Novbertone (November Tone); Happy; That’s it; Chicky. (71:04)

**Personnel:** Line Falkenberg, alto, soprano saxophone; Hayden Powell, trumpet; Andreas Haddeland, guitar, baritone guitar, rubab; Finn Guttormsen, bass; Jarle Verspestad, drums.

**Ordering info:** [losenrecords.no](http://losenrecords.no)

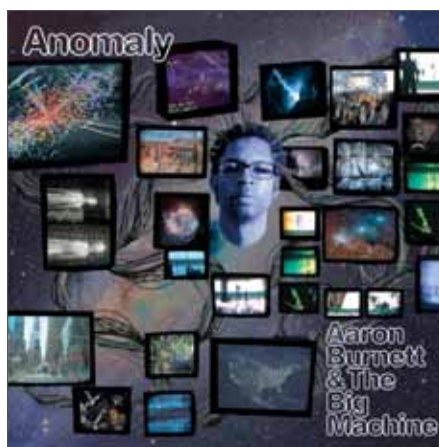
## Aaron Burnett & The Big Machine *Anomaly*

FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT 566

★★★½

*Anomaly* is a smart album, in large part because it insists on being so. Saxophonist Aaron Burnett has assembled an impressive group, most notably drummer Tyshawn Sorey, whose mentoring influence in the avant-garde certainly is apparent. But this is an album that constantly seesaws between the experimental and bop, working to balance ideas soundly, still trying to sift through countless ideas. These lengthy compositions surely convey grand concepts about the movement from bebop to post-bop and into the contemporary realm, and have no qualms about accessibility.

“Picassonite” is a burner, offering a clear example of the energy to expect across the entire album. “No More Bebop?” spans the genre’s development, swinging like a bop tune with a melody that’s like finding water in a desert with a divining rod. And “Wally’s Stepchildren” has the movement of a seismic event, as listeners wait to see where the earth finally might settle. Sorey’s drumming largely anchors “The Prototype,” his flourishes never pushing him too far from timekeeper duties. However, the interplay between Burnett



and trumpeter Peter Evans on the album closer, “Ditransparentmension,” is astonishing, raising its energy to dazzling heights before sweeping the table with Nick Jozwiak’s grounded bass solo.

For all the album’s grandiosity, full of sound and fury, *Anomaly* comes off feeling like a seminar one might attend just for future cocktail party fodder.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**Anomaly:** Frontier; Embrace Of The Goddess; Picassonite; No More Bebop?; Light Beings; Wally’s Stepchildren; The Prototype; Ditransparentmension. (71:37)

**Personnel:** Aaron Burnett, tenor, soprano saxophone; Peter Evans, trumpet; Joel Ross, vibraphone; Carlos Horns, piano; Nick Jozwiak, bass; Tyshawn Sorey, drums; Corey Wilcox (3, 5), trombone.

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



## Benjamin Boone/ Philip Levine *The Poetry Of Jazz, Volume Two*

ORIGIN 82772

★★★

The first release from the collaboration of saxophonist Benjamin Boone and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Philip Levine struck an unexpected chord: The album placed No. 3 in last year’s DownBeat Readers Poll. *The Poetry Of Jazz, Volume Two* was recorded at the same sessions that yielded the initial disc, held the year before the jazz-loving poet’s death at age 87.

While the first album included Levine’s poems about such jazz figures as Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane and Charlie Parker, this follow-up features evocations of working-class life from his native Detroit. His lyrics almost can be visually resonant, such as on “When The Shift Was Over” and “Belle Isle, 1949.” The spare, smoky setting of a workingman’s plaint, “An Ordinary Morning,” just bass and wisps of saxophone, feels ideal for the blues of a heavy head. *Volume Two* also adds instrumental versions of some cuts from the first installment, including “They Feed They Lion,” which sees Boone incorporate more grit into his sound, befitting a poem about the 1967 Detroit riots. For “The Simple Truth,” Boone includes both the track with Levine’s recitation and, less apt, an arrangement with Karen Marguth’s pure-toned vocalese. However lovingly produced, Boone’s settings can be marked by a sentimentality that just isn’t present in Levine’s words. Such lines as “White hands the color of steel/ They have put their lives into steel” seem to ache for a more cutting edge.

—Bradley Bambarger

**The Poetry Of Jazz, Volume Two:** Let Me Begin Again; An Ordinary Morning; The Simple Truth; They Feed They Lion; To Cipriano, In The Wind; The Poem Circling Hamtramck, MI, All Night, In Search Of You; Belle Isle, 1949; Yakov; Snow; Godspell; The Simple Truth; The Conductor Of Nothing; South; Saturday Sweeping; Blood; When The Shift Was Over; Godspell (Homage To Phil & Brian). (71:58)

**Personnel:** Benjamin Boone, alto, soprano saxophone; Philip Levine, Karen Marguth (8, 12), vocals; David Aus, Craig Von Berg (2, 5-7, 13, 16), piano; Spee Kosloff, Nye Morton (1, 11, 17), bass; Brian Hamada, Gary Newmark (1, 11, 17), drums; Max Hembd (4, 8, 11, 15), trumpet; Stefan Poetzsch (1, 7), violin; Asher Boone (4), trumpet; Atticus Boone (4), French horn.

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



# Substantive Turns of Metal

Terence Hannum might be known best for his work with experimental metal trio Locrian, an ensemble that emerged out of Chicago's noise scene during the past decade. But the Baltimore-based musician, author and artist also keeps busy as a member of dark synth-pop group the Holy Circle and with a variety of solo endeavors, including anti-fascist power electronics project **Axebreaker**. Power electronics is one of music's most brutal forms, which makes it a fantastic medium for exploring the darkest elements of humanity, and on **Brutality In Stone (Page 263; 42:21 ★★★★★)**, Hannum wastes no time taking hatemongers to task. Recorded live, the album's harsh atmospheres, dense drones and obscured, but impassioned, vocals challenge the listener to confront and resist the creeping influence of neo-fascism around the globe. Among the album's standout tracks are tributes to two U.S. citizens murdered by white supremacists: "Disorder (For Alan Berg)" muses on the radio host who was assassinated in 1984, and "All Monuments Fall (For Heather Heyer)," named for the activist who was killed while protesting the far-right in Charlottesville, Virginia, during 2017.

Ordering info: [phagetapes.miliduu.com](http://phagetapes.miliduu.com)

Tokyo noise/metal/rock hybrid **Endon** has gained a reputation as the kind of band its peers turn to when they want to hear something fresh and something likely to blow minds—and possibly, speakers, too. Produced by Atsuo, drummer of Tokyo psych legends Boris, Endon's latest effort, **Boy Meets Girl (Thrill Jockey 485; 29:40 ★★★★★)**, was conceived as the soundtrack of an imaginary horror film about love, and it's easy to hear the dueling forces of terror and romance throughout its cacophonous, larger-than-life sounding tracks. When the panting of vocalist Taichi Nagura morphs into breathy shrieks on "Doubts As A Source," it seems just as likely he's making those noises out of fear as because he's in the midst of getting it on. But regardless of the concept behind it all, *Boy Meets Girl* is just plain fun; if you need more evidence, just feast your ears on the Motorhead-worthy guitar riffs layered with harsh noise and rumbling low-end sounds on "Final Acting Out."

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

Since metal emerged a half century ago, plenty of clichés and stereotypes have been associated with the music, as well as its fans (some of which are not completely undeserved). Though the mainstream largely has written the genre off as lacking substance, anyone who truly loves music would be mistaken to deny the inventiveness, musicianship and artistic ambition of many who



work within metal. Richmond, Virginia's **Inter Arma** embody those qualities in its raw, majestic fusions of black metal, post-rock, sludge and doom. And on its fourth album, **Sulphur English (Relapse RR7410 67:43 ★★★★★½)**, the ensemble seems capable of both reaching the stars and burrowing into the Earth's core, often within a single song. Opening with "Bumgardner," a slow-building noise-addled tribute to their friend—Indian and Lord Mantis drummer Bill Bumgardner, who passed away in 2016—the band swiftly builds a world where haunting vocal harmonies ("Stillness") and gothic soundscapes ("Blood On The Lupines") perfectly intertwine with the grimmest guitar lines and most scathing screams the band has conjured to date.

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

London's **Teeth Of The Sea** formed in 2006, and over the years, the band's proven that the only limits placed on heavy music are self-imposed. On its fifth album, **Wraith (Rocket Recordings; 46:57 ★★★★★½)**, the three-piece instrumental group continues its tradition of nontradition; that is, the ensemble incorporates sonic flavors as varied as jazz, death metal, synth-pop, Krautrock, classical and electronic into their hypnotic, sophisticated songs, often with a host of cinematic influences. (This band would be equally at home scoring a spy caper, a spaghetti Western, science fiction or romantic film.) As sleek or as graceful as it ever gets (note the bells, acoustic strings and the ethereal, harmonious interplay from their female guest vocalists on "Fortean Steed"), Teeth Of The Sea finds a balance amid moments that are playful, jarring or seem to embody the coldness or sorrow that's part of life—such as the mournful trumpet lines folded into the shape-shifting opening track, "I'd Rather, Jack." The only real problem with *Wraith* is that when its last song ends, listeners are left pining for the band's next musical adventure to begin.

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



## Sunwatchers *Illegal Moves*

TROUBLE IN MIND 143

★★★

The cover of Sunwatchers' *Illegal Moves* depicts a radicalized Kool-Aid Man pushing back against a murderers' row of iconic conservative bogeymen, from Nixon to Thatcher to Ted Nugent. And its musical content mirrors the entertainment value of the image: utterly enjoyable, crowd-pleasingly right on and comfortably familiar.

The New York-based quartet unveiled its noisy, psychedelic jazz-rock on a self-titled 2016 album, and for its third recording, the ensemble keeps intact the formula that made its first two releases so compelling. Bassist Peter Kerlin and drummer Jason Robira underpin most songs with tight, repetitive rhythmic figures. Reedist Jeff Tobias' adenoidal squawking ratchets up the tension in some places, and in others delivers any number of the album's memorable tunes.

"Beautiful Crystals" starts with Kerlin and Robira playing a thumping, looping pattern. Tobias, doubling on keys, and guitarist Jim McHugh weave a melodic latticework that repeats and expands into fractal complexity. McHugh's distorted, wah-wah helps the track breathe, and Kerlin's subtly shifting bass line adds depth. But "Everybody Play" is the album's sincerest and jazziest statement, opening into a rolling improvisational section that finds McHugh buzzsawing and Tobias screeching freely.

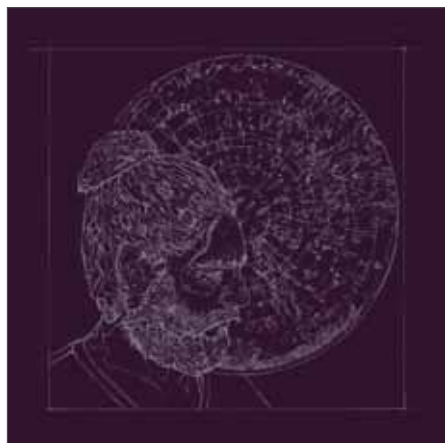
Despite the album cover's implied promise, though, nothing revolutionary takes place. Instead, *Illegal Moves* offers a highly literate, technically proficient blend of familiar sounds from templates frequently associated with insurgent potential. The album succeeds when its compositions outgrow their influences, or when moments of sincerity peep through.

—Andrew Jones

**Illegal Moves:** New Dad Blues; Beautiful Crystals; Greeneyed Pigmen (Get The Blade); Everybody Play; Psychic Driving; Ptah, The El Daoud; Strollin Coma Blues. (40:35)

**Personnel:** Jim McHugh, guitar, electric phin, saz; Jeff Tobias, alto saxophone, keyboards, bass clarinet; Peter Kerlin, bass; Jason Robira, drums, percussion; Jonah Rapino, violin (1, 6); David Kadden, oboe (6).

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



## Nicolas Stocker SOLO

RONIN RHYTHM 021

★★★★½

Zurich-born percussionist Nicolas Stocker isn't necessarily well-known to American jazz audiences, but he's a rising star in Europe, having recently joined Swiss pianist Nik Bärtsch's Mobile ensemble. With *SOLO*, Stocker debuts as a leader of one, five tracks recorded with no overdubs on a drum set enhanced by gongs and carefully tuned woodblocks.

"Bells For Pony, Prelude," "Bells For No One" and "Bells For Pony, Postlude" each offer myriad textures and overtones, brushing and vibrating in a timeless gambol, with the lower fundamentals powerful enough to make one's heart tremor. "Burst" is a brisk gallop on muted gongs that gives way to a building avalanche of cymbal wash, transferring to deep toms that tumble over one another, à la Japanese taiko drumming.

The signature track here, "Polyrub," is a doctoral thesis-worthy demonstration of poly-rhythm during which Stocker makes the impossible possible by simultaneously achieving with his four limbs groupings of five, seven, three, and perhaps all other prime numbers. The nearly 17-minute piece starts with a single ostinato, gradually integrating additional grooves that interlock and swirl around each other like an automated Rubik's Cube trying to solve itself, even as it adds layer upon layer of color. Stocker introduces an element of surprise in the form of what sounds like a house beat, displaying an ability to create electronic music via acoustic means.

Listening to *SOLO* requires some patience, though: The pieces all are unhurried and purposefully recurrent. Yet, Stocker manages to create genuine drama in the gradual unfolding of his plot, and the payoff is in our dawning awareness of it.

—Gary Fukushima

**SOLO:** Bells For Pony, Prelude; Polyrub; Bells For No One; Burst; Bells For Pony, Postlude. (41:40)

**Personnel:** Nicolas Stocker, drums, percussion.

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

## Carolyn Fitzhugh Living In Peace

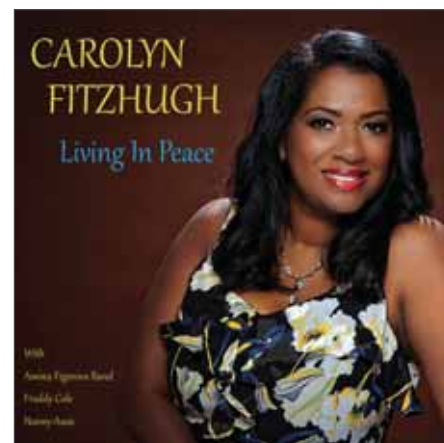
YOUWE 1010

★★★★

Carolyn Fitzhugh wraps her versatile voice around heartfelt originals and intriguing covers—not all on the mark—on *Living In Peace*, her sophomore album. Bracketed by a sparkling take on Average White Band's charmingly dated "Queen Of My Soul" and the ballad "Alone In The World," the disc's 12 tunes effectively cover a pop-music waterfront based in the '70s and '80s.

What's admirable about this easygoing album is its eclecticism. Not only has Fitzhugh eschewed the Great American Songbook, the bandleader has also come up with diverse arrangements and recastings, spanning the shimmering rendition of Gil Scott-Heron's "Combinations" and the bright arrangement of Johnny Pate's "Yes I Know When I've Had It." An alto flute solo by Fitzhugh's husband, Bart Platteau, and Wayne Escoffery's tenor lend the Pate tune some drive and body.

The Chicago-based singer can be too enthusiastic, however. Her rushed reading of James Taylor's "Secret O' Life" turns the relaxed original jumpy, and she flattens the arch, androgynous wit of Prince's "Strollin'" into something more busy than urgent. But originals, such as the upbeat title track and the ebullient "Once Upon



A Lover," are endearing, and her duet with bou-doir-voiced Freddy Cole on "I'm Not Alone (Anjo De Mim)" is just haunting.

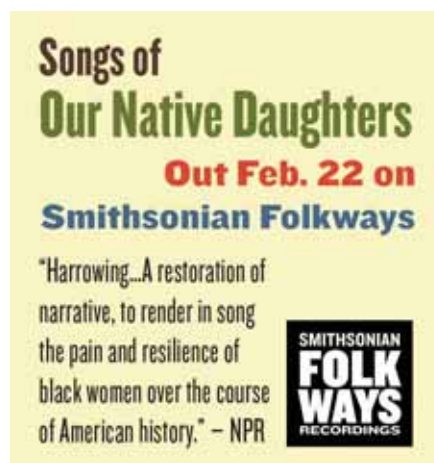
Despite a few missteps, *Living In Peace* presents a singer of taste and range, and showcases her confidence and daring alongside notable contributors like guitarist Rez Abassi and drummer Rudy Royston.

—Carlo Wolff

**Living In Peace:** Queen Of My Soul; I'm Not Alone (Anjo De Mim); Wish I Knew; Combinations; Secret O' Life; Living In Peace; Intimate Acquaintances; Strollin'; Once Upon A Lover; Yes I Know When I've Had It; In The Autumn; Alone In The World. (51:46)

**Personnel:** Carolyn Fitzhugh, vocals; Rez Abassi, guitar; Nanny Assis, vocals, percussion; Freddy Cole (2), vocals; Wayne Escoffery, tenor saxophone; Amina Figarova, keyboards; David Gibson, trombone; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Alex Norris, trumpet; Bart Platteau, alto flute; Rudy Royston, drums.

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





## Emblems of Striking Careers

**Earl "Fatha" Hines** was a transformative and transitional pianist whose style bridged the Dixieland music popularized by Louis Armstrong and the modern developments led by Charlie Parker. ***My Tribute To Louis: Piano Solos By Earl Hines (Org 1023; 38:57 ★★★½)***, issued in 1971, less than two weeks after Satchmo's death, is a heartfelt tribute to his friend and associate. Two of the nine solo renditions, "Pennies From Heaven" and "Confessin'," offer a full exposition of Hines' formidable artistry. Always at play is his sweeping virtuosity that shifts perceptibly from Dixieland to ragtime to incipient bebop motifs. On each of these numbers, the melody isn't obscured, as it sometimes is in Hines' flourishing rhythmic and orchestral sound. Hearing Hines at the keyboard is to witness the evolution of the piano from Jelly Roll Morton to Fats Waller to Art Tatum. And between these iconic figures, Hines never misses an opportunity to provide what were to become his own innovative creations, often garnished with dashes of boogie-woogie and fascinating tremolos.

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

Unlike so much that exploded during the late '60s and early '70s amid the insurgent Black Power and the Black Liberation movements, ***Imamu Amiri Baraka's It's Nation Time: African Visionary Music (Motown/UMe 0028723; 51:22 ★★★½)*** failed to gain wide popularity in 1972, when it was released. Michael Dinwiddie, an associate professor at New York University, helmed a recent panel of experts discussing Black Forum, the label for which the album originally was produced by Woodie King Jr., and concluded that the recording was poorly distributed. That lapse might have stemmed from the company's lack of enthusiasm for the product. But along with Baraka's strident voice, an ensemble of singers and musicians, including such notables as Gary Bartz, James Mtume and Reggie Workman, create a cacophony of sound that in many ways mirrored the turbulent times. Percussionist Mtume's "Chant" opens this vinyl reissue, and the insistent rhythm reaches an almost frenetic pace, so much so it tends to drown out the spoken words and lyrics. That regrettable imbalance might have been another reason why the recording initially didn't receive all that much attention.

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

In 1981, a retinue of African American artists and activists participated in the Black Musicians' Conference at the University of Massachusetts. Fortunately, the appearance there of alto saxophonist



**Marion Brown** and pianist **Dave Burrell** was captured on ***Live At The Black Musicians' Conference 1981 (NoBusiness 109; 73:88 ★★★★★)***. At the time, Brown and Burrell were among the prominent musicians in the new wave of music, often defined as "free." While they were quite capable of expressing themselves through avant-garde means, both were well-grounded in bebop and beyond, and evidence of that flows brilliantly in their treatment of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" and Brown's Latin-tinged "La Placita." Brown died in 2010, but Burrell continues to thrive, most recently at a solo performance in New York City during a tribute to Scott Joplin's music, further displaying the pianist's versatility.

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

Many **Bob Dorrough** fans probably came aboard after the popularity of the songs he composed and performed for *Schoolhouse Rock!*, an educational children's cartoon series that ran on Saturday mornings during the 1970s. But Dorrough, who died April 23, 2018, at the age of 94, left a trove of delightful music, including his final trio release, 2015's ***But For Now (Enja 9627; 51:13 ★★★½)***. Although his voice had lost some of the exuberance that characterized his performances, his interpretative feel still is apparent, particularly as his cohort—alto saxophonist Michael Hornstein and bassist Tony Marino—delve into such standards as "Stars Fell On Alabama" and "Prelude To A Kiss." Their version of "Better Than Anything" was reminiscent of the Dorrough who captivated audiences in the early years, when it was a splendid surprise to hear him on a recording by Miles Davis, performing "Nothing Like You" at the end of *Sorcerer*. All of this coheres on *But For Now* and is the hallmark of his distinguished career.

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

KATHY KIRK

Marion Brown



## Hedvig Mollestad Trio *Smells Funny*

RUNE GRAMMOFON 2203

★★★★½

When a power trio can share the stage comfortably with the likes of John McLaughlin and Black Sabbath, you know two things: They rock hard, yet provide enough harmonic content and improvisational daring to make it interesting. Norway's Hedvig Mollestad Trio does precisely that on its sixth album. Recorded live in the studio, *Smells Funny* is a metal-jazz excursion that often tips into the Sonny Sharrock zone, fueled by Ellen Brekken's rumbling bass, Ivar Loe Bjørnstad's insistent pulse and Mollestad's hellacious chops and fertile imagination.

From the crunching opener "Beastie, Beastie" to the odd-metered, Mahavishnu-esque "First Thing To Pop Is The Eye," the trio is remarkably tight, unapologetically loud and surging with energy. The lone ballad here, the delicate "Jurašek," features Brekken on upright bass and has Bjørnstad underscoring with a loosely swinging, interactive touch on the kit.

"Sugar Rush Mountain," which opens like Mollestad's answer to The Allman Brothers' anthemic "Whipping Post," eventually heads into full-blown Hendrixian territory. A free-jazz interlude, "Bewitched, Dwarfed And Defeathered," provides a kinetic platform for Mollestad to launch into some of her skronkiest fusillades of the set. And the raucous closer, "Lucidness," is a rubato noise-jazz romp that might draw its inspiration from Hendrix's "Third Stone From the Sun," while building to the "shards of splintered glass" approach of Sharrock and Pete Cosey.

When Frank Zappa famously said, "Jazz is not dead, it just smells funny," he was referring to a moldering of the music. The Hedvig Mollestad Trio aims at providing an antidote with this audacious outing.

—Bill Milkowski

***Smells Funny:*** Beastie, Beastie; First Thing To Pop Is The Eye; Jurašek; Sugar Rush Mountain; Bewitched, Dwarfed And Defeathered; Lucidness. (34:50)

**Personnel:** Hedvig Mollestad Thomassen, guitar; Ellen Brekken, bass; Ivar Loe Bjørnstad, drums.

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



## Something Blue Maximum Enjoyment

POSI-TONE 8189

★★★★★

Producer Marc Free has accomplished his goal of recalling the 1950s blue period and capturing its nuances, while constructing an accessible and pleasurable album with a sextet that paints with broad and intricate strokes, tells a story and gets funky.

From the first note of Alexa Tarantino's alto saxophone during the opener, "Slick," to Art Hirahara's masterful harmonics on "Aoi Blu" and drummer Rudy Royston dropping the

opening beat on closer "New Direction," listeners know something has shifted—in a good way. If a gap exists between that blue period and today, this album bridges any perceived gulf.

Nick Finzer's trombone exudes liquid brass on the opener, and the sextet cooks on "Coppertone," its bass line front-and-center amid a catchy melody, and the harmonic playing of saxophonists Tarantino and Sam Dillon. A cool vibe marinates in "Stunts And Twists," Hirahara's crystal-like opening, bassist Boris Kozlov's punctuations, Royston's swishing and Finzer's accenting set the mood for Tarantino and Dillon to meld tonality and color, creating layered complexity.

Some of the compositions here originated on earlier Posi-Tone releases, and others were newly penned by Hirahara, Royston, Dillon and Tarantino. There's likely a more sophisticated way of saying *Maximum Enjoyment* delivers on its title's promise. But let's applaud Free's ability to bring these performers together to create memorable music that sounds fresh, while remaining grounded in something old, familiar and intriguing. —Michele L. Simms-Burton

**Maximum Enjoyment:** Slick; Coppertone; Stunts And Twists; Aoi Blu; Overcooked; Vast; Breeze; Cluster Funk; Shift; Why Aren't You Excited; New Directions. (54:10)

**Personnel:** Alexa Tarantino, alto saxophone; Nick Finzer, trombone; Sam Dillon, tenor saxophone; Art Hirahara, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

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

## Rigmor Gustafsson Come Home

ACT 9737

★★★★★

*Come Home* marks Swedish jazz vocalist Rigmor Gustafsson's return to the studio after a four-year hiatus. Working with a cadre of long-time lyricists, she funnels a deluge of new songs into a creative reservoir edged by the fabulous trio of Jonas Östholm on piano, Martin Höper on bass, and Chris Montgomery on drums.

Behind Gustafsson's technical prowess beats a troubadour's heart. Songs like "I Think Of You" and "Take A Little Turn" crosshatch sly chord changes with unfiltered cadences and find her adapting to various subject matter with ease. Her band is equally responsive, softening her urgencies and heightening her melancholies. Guest harpist Margareta Bengtsson adds sparkle to "The Light Years," one of the album's strongest turns, while Östholm's pianism draws a bold underline from start to finish. Much of the lyrical content plays with time, as over the gorgeous colorations of Höper and Montgomery on "Winter Doesn't End" and "Enjoy The Day."

Whether in the upbeat bossa nova of "Lovely" or the anthemic title track, Gustafsson handles moods with distinct personality, espe-

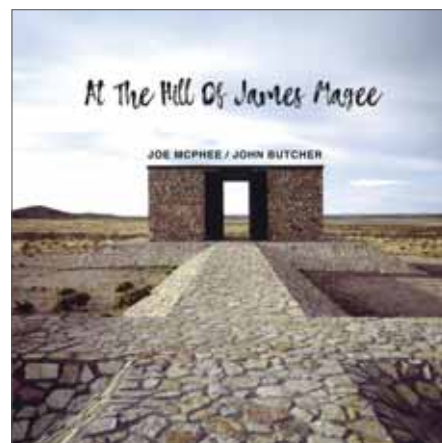


cially on the set's lovingly arranged covers. Both Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" and Kate Bush's "Wuthering Heights" highlight Gustafsson's talent for simultaneously mimicking her source and being herself, but nowhere so deeply as on "Twist In My Sobriety," which turns Tanita Tikaram's classic into a plush groove. Featuring the accordion of Lisa Långbacka, it pays tribute to an era not so much bygone as buried under our current malaise. —Tyran Grillo

**Come Home:** Big Yellow Taxi; I Think Of You; Take A Little Turn; The Light Years; This Time; Wuthering Heights; Twist In My Sobriety; Lovely; Winter Doesn't End; Enjoy The Day; Come Home. (53:38)

**Personnel:** Rigmor Gustafsson, vocals; Jonas Östholm, piano; Martin Höper, bass; Chris Montgomery, drums; Margareta Bengtsson (4), harp; Lisa Långbacka (7), accordion.

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



## McPhee/Butcher At The Hill Of James Magee

TROST 174

★★★★★

Given the respective reputations of saxophonists Joe McPhee and John Butcher in the field of outer limits sound exploration, it's fitting that *At The Hill Of James Magee*, a 2010 recording just now seeing release, finds the duo collaborating—for the first time—not just on the edges of sound, but near the edge of civilization. The titular structure, consisting of four buildings connected by a series of paths, where this album was recorded is a quasi-fortress in West Texas' Chihuahuan Desert.

That both players are aggressive in exploring the unique acoustic opportunities should almost go without saying. The opener, "Sometimes Yes, Sometimes No," uses space most explicitly, with each saxophonist traversing the monument's long walkways and the recorded stereo spectrum, crossing each other's path and ending opposite where they started.

The alternating solo tracks that follow aren't as explicit in this regard, but still impacted by space. Unconventional locales are Butcher's bread and butter, and he bounces percussive blurts and hard-angled tenor trills against The Hill's natural slapback. McPhee's alto is a more tender thing, even at its most oblique. But he's no slouch when it comes to letting his tone dance off Magee's iron doors and shale rock. The album ends with a shorter duet, "St. Ida's Breath (Less Her Neck And Teeth)," a tune as pensive as it abstract, the desert wind serving as a tentative collaborator.

Dedicated fans of either player won't be too surprised by what they do together here. Nor will they be disappointed. Like any great improvisers, McPhee and Butcher are as much masters of deep listening as they are of extended techniques, and here, they bring all those skills to bear.

—Dustin Krcatovich

**At The Hill Of James Magee:** Sometimes Yes, Sometimes No; Mine Shaft; Paradise Overcast; A Forty Foot Square Room; Torcello; St. Ida's Breath (Less Her Neck And Teeth). (49:51)

**Personnel:** Joe McPhee, alto saxophone; John Butcher, tenor saxophone.

**Ordering info:** [trost.at](http://trost.at)



## Tribe, Through a Prism of Jazz

The undeniably influential rap group A Tribe Called Quest utilized jazz samples and was proudly Afrocentric, yet it also drew on rock and music from across the globe during a six-album career. Formed in 1988, ATCQ's subject matter ranged between "people busting caps and like Mandela being free," and included dashes of humor and astute assessments of American politics and culture.

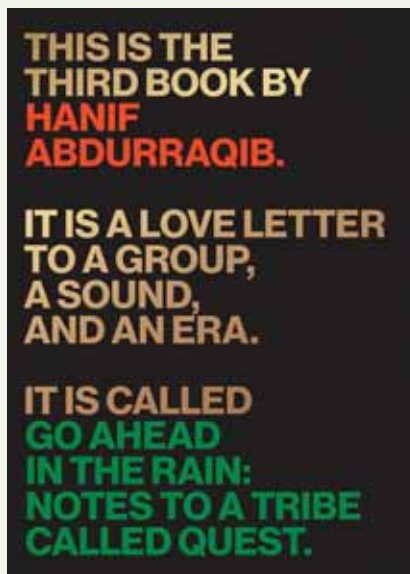
But it's mostly through the prism of jazz that poet and critic Hanif Abdurraqib examines ATCQ's artistry in his splendid book, ***Go Ahead in the Rain: Notes to a Tribe Called Quest*** (University of Texas Press). The author—who most recently wrote *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*—grew up in an Ohio household filled with jazz, and was inspired to play trumpet by Miles Davis' legacy. Abdurraqib also was child of hip-hop, and for him, ATCQ "made rap music for our parents and theirs, but left the door open wide enough for anyone to sneak through."

He traces the group's origins in Queens, where childhood friends John Fareed (Q-Tip), Malik Taylor (Phife Dawg) and Jarobi White grew up listening to Afrika Bambaataa. They later joined forces with DJ Ali Shaheed Muhammad and slowly coalesced as a group, joining a loose collective of like-minded black artists called Native Tongues that also included Queen Latifah, De La Soul, Leaders of the New School and The Jungle Brothers.

Its 1990 debut, *People's Instinctive Travels And The Paths Of Rhythm*, is understood by the author as "Q-Tip's introduction to the world at large," his conscience and quirky lyrics, as well as the eclectic sonic walls of sound, establishing the group's funky modus operandi. Apart from the Lou Reed-sampling "Can I Kick It?," which prominently features Phife, the album counts Tip's nasal, Negroidal-nuanced flow on the mellow-toned "Bonita Applebum" and the comic, *Sanford & Son*-inspired "I Left My Wallet In El Segundo." Splicing together sonic snippets from the r&b and jazz worlds, the group's debut featured samples of Donald Byrd's "Think Twice" and Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke," as it animated Wayne Shorter's "Footprints" and Grover Washington Jr.'s "Loran's Dance" put the boom-bap in the infectious "Push It Along."

What follows is Abdurraqib's commentary on how ATCQ reached its zenith with a pair of follow-ups: *The Low-End Theory* (1991) featured contributions by legendary bassist Ron Carter alongside the original, head-bobbing "Jazz (We've Got)," the Average White Band hornline-laced "Check The Rhime" and the anthemic "Scenario," which features an early-career Busta Rhymes.

Rhymes' frenetic flow returns on the torrid "Oh My God" from 1993's *Midnight Marauders*,



an album that also boasted the De La Soul-meets-Weldon Irvine single "Award Tour," and the smoothed-out, Ron Foster-derived "Electronic Relaxation," a track where Phife boasts about being a "five-foot freak" and threatens to "[b]ust off on your couch," transforming it into Seaman's Furniture.

As Abdurraqib notes, the group, "had conquered the idea of jazz bleeding into rap." But by the time it released subsequent albums, *Beats, Rhymes And Life* (1996) and *The Love Movement* (1998), tensions between Q-Tip and Phife, exacerbated by the latter's battle with diabetes, caused the group to disband.

*Go Ahead in the Rain*'s most poignant passages, though, are Abdurraqib's "letters" to members of the group and their family members. Of special note is the author penning a letter to Phife's mother, Cheryl Boyce-Taylor, where he beautifully acknowledges how her poetry influenced her son. "In your son's lyrics, I hear the rhythmic bounce between patois in his flows," Abdurraqib writes. "The dance between punch line, politics and boast."

Thankfully, the group came together for a final project, *We Got It From Here ... Thank You 4 Your Service*, before Phife died on March 22, 2016. A wide-ranging, sonically playful opus, the album featured guest spots from innumerable artists ATCQ inspired over the years, ranging from Andre 3000 and Kanye West to Consequence and Anderson .Paak. All told, Abdurraqib writes about ATCQ with the solid research of a reporter and the passion of a poet, making *Go Ahead in the Rain* an excellent primer on an indisputably important and transformational group.

DB

Ordering info: [utpress.utexas.edu](http://utpress.utexas.edu)



## Madness Of Crowds *Tulips*

HIPPO MACHINE 0001

★★★★

The city of Chicago long has been a hub for the adventurous side of jazz, producing avant-garde legends like Lester Bowie and Anthony Braxton. That spirit still is thriving today as evidenced by this awe-inspiring recording from the modern-day supergroup Madness Of Crowds. Boasting a lineup that includes multi-instrumentalist Joe Adamik, bassist Matt Lux and tenor saxophonist Nate Lepine, this debut four-song release is the product of a five-hour improvisation by the ensemble that was winnowed down to two 20-minute segments and a pair of sound collages created from their efforts.

Drawing on the feel of '70s-era Miles Davis, the sonic reference should nudge the door open for some listeners, helping them to take a leap of faith into this sonic maelstrom.

Madness Of Crowds utterly delights in the piercing atonal sounds that dominate the opening half of "Witch Mania," as Jim Baker's synth squeals and smears tones, and a heavily processed guitar covers over an otherwise head-bobbing groove. It's only when Lepine's tenor solo cuts through the mix that things settle and the textures of the music take on more clarity. The title track, by contrast, begins as an elongated riff on the opening moments of "A Love Supreme" before snapping into an elastic groove that gathers intensity as it tumbles forward.

Each spin of *Tulips* reveals new details and tonal properties, and will bring out further resonances of the unbridled joy that was coursing through the studio when the ensemble joined forces for single glorious afternoon. But *Tulips* also reminds listeners that more musicians should dare to challenge themselves like this.

—Robert Ham

**Tulips:** Economic Bubbles; Witch Mania; Alchemist; Tulips. (50:42)

**Personnel:** Joe Adamik, drums, electronics; Jim Baker, ARP synthesizer, piano, Fender Rhodes; Nate Lepine, tenor, soprano saxophones, flute; Matt Lux, electric bass, electronics; Brian Sandstrom, acoustic bass, guitar, trumpet.

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



## Simone Kopmajer *Spotlight On Jazz*

LUCKY MOJO 28941

★★★★½

Simone Kopmajer, a swing singer from Austria who has a quiet voice and a subtle delivery, is at this point much better known in Europe than in the United States. *Spotlight On Jazz* is her 13th album as a leader since 2003, and it features her singing in flawless English on six standards, five of her originals and two songs by pianist Paul Urbanek.

As with most of the originals, the opening “Spotlights” sounds like it could have been written in the late 1930s or ’40s. Kopmajer’s singing

on that number is touched by early Billie Holiday, an association accentuated by the Lester Young-flavored playing of tenor saxophonist Terry Myers (the current leader of the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra). “You Don’t Call Me” is a love song about frustration, while “Mighty Tender Love” is much happier and taken as a swinger with spirited tenor and guitar solos. “Dig That Riff” (heard in two versions, including a frivolous, if fun, remix) offers singing in unison with the tenor and guitar, but mostly is an instrumental number. The fanciful “Remember Jeannie,” the warm ballad “A Gift From Buddy,” and the rollicking blues-based “We’re Goin’ In” also are enjoyable.

Of the standards, “Pennies From Heaven” is recast as a jazz waltz, “Poinciana” retains the essence and rhythm of Ahmad Jamal’s version, and “Exactly Like You” finds Kopmajer scatting a fine horn-like chorus. The Louis Armstrong-associated “Struttin’ With Some Barbecue” infrequently is accompanied by vocals, but this rendition might lead some to reassess the song. “Mood Indigo” and a relaxed “Stompin’ At The Savoy” wrap up this satisfying set. —Scott Yanow

**Spotlight On Jazz:** Spotlights; Pennies From Heaven; You Don’t Call Me; Mighty Tender Love; Poinciana; Dig That Riff; Remember Jeannie; Struttin’ With Some Barbecue; Exactly Like You; A Gift From Buddy; Stompin’ At The Savoy; We’re Goin’ In; Mood Indigo; Dig That Riff (Remix). (64:21)

**Personnel:** Simone Kopmajer, vocals; Terry Myers, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Paul Urbanek, piano; Martin Spitzer, guitar; Karl Sayer, bass; Reinhardt Winkler, drums.

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

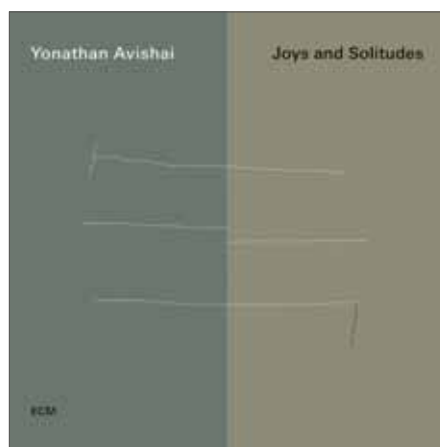
## Yonathan Avishai *Joys And Solitudes*

ECM 2611

★★★★½

Pianist Yonathan Avishai is one of the more gifted musicians to have emerged recently from the French jazz scene. Born in Tel Aviv, the pianist moved to the Dordogne region in 2000 and has been based in Paris for the past few years. During that time, he’s released two promising albums as a leader, *Modern Times* (2015) and *The Parade* (2016), both featuring his core trio, bassist Yoni Zelnik and drummer Donald Kontomanou, who also play on Avishai’s ECM debut, *Joys And Solitudes*. The album, which counts seven originals from the bandleader, is spare and contemplative: His best yet—and his most personal.

*Joys And Solitudes* has more in common with *Modern Times* than *The Parade*, a busier affair, with Inor Sotolongo on percussion and César Poirier on clarinet and alto saxophone. On *Modern Times*, Avishai’s minimalistic, blues-inflected sound is on full display, and he is sensitively complemented by his bandmates, who play simply without being simplistic. The same applies to Avishai’s latest, though his style only has become more appealing in the past four years. Avishai begins several of his compositions unaccompanied, with lush chords and



intervallic leaps that recall Thelonious Monk. His solos, spacious and unhurried, are lovely, sounding as if he’s in no rush to prove himself.

The pianist regularly has played as a sideman with bassist Omer Avital and trumpeter Avishai Cohen, and his work with those musicians has been top notch. But this record confirms that Avishai has a promising solo career ahead of him as well. —Matthew Kassel

**Joys And Solitudes:** Mood Indigo; Song For Anny; Tango; Joy; Shir Boker; Lya; When Things Fall Apart; Les Pianos De Brazzaville. (54:06)

**Personnel:** Yonathan Avishai, piano; Yoni Zelnik, bass; Donald Kontomanou, drums.

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

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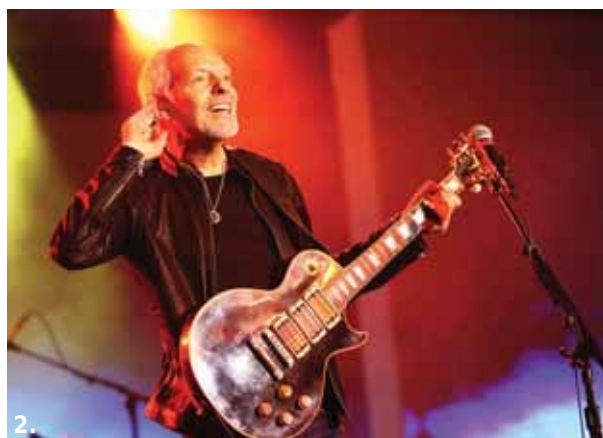


# BEST OF 2019 NAMM SHOW

Reporting by Tyra Bosnic, Dave Cantor, Ed Enright, Kasia Fejklowicz and Bobby Reed

Artist sightings are a thrilling aspect of The NAMM Show, the global music industry's annual showcase for new instruments and gear. This year's edition, held Jan. 24–27 on the campus of the Anaheim Convention Center in Southern California, welcomed a cast of visiting musicians who browsed the exhibit areas, gave product demonstrations and took part in the convention's after-hours concerts, all-star jams and awards ceremonies. In the following pages, DownBeat presents the best of The 2019 NAMM Show.

1. Bob Weir (left), Jay Lane and Don Was play a set in the D'Angelico exhibit area. 2. Peter Dinklage, recipient of the 2019 Les Paul Innovation Award, performs at the TEC Awards. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM) 3. Kirk Whalum (left), Karl Latham, Tom Scott and Don Braden take part in a JazzJam sponsored by JodyJazz, Légère Reeds and Rovner Products. 4. Elle King performs on the Grand Plaza Stage during the "Imagine Party" presented by The NAMM Foundation and The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM) 5. Omar Hakim (left) and Rachel Z walk the show floor together. 6. Singer and guitarist Danny Kortchmar performs after receiving a Boss Lifetime Achievement Award at the Boss/Roland booth. 7. Lakecia Benjamin takes a solo during the JazzJam. 8. Alan Parsons speaks during a TEC Tracks educational session. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM) 9. Richard Bona appears at the Markbass booth. 10. Allan Harris performs at the D'Angelico exhibit. 11. Hailey Niswanger pays a visit to the DownBeat booth. 12. Jerry Vivino (left), Grace Kelly and Mark Gross wail at the VandoJam sponsored by Vandoren. 13. Grégoire Maret (left) and Carlitos Del Puerto entertain attendees of a Zoom International sales meeting. 14. DJ Pierre, of the group Phuture, accepts a Lifetime Achievement Award from Roland. 15. Bobby Shriver appears at the Yamaha exhibit to promote the company's second generation of the Custom Z trumpet. 16. Victor Wooten talks shop at the DR Strings booth.









## ← RAPTOR RISING

Bari Woodwinds' Raptor mouthpiece offers ease of play and the ability to hit all registers, high and low. The mouthpiece was designed by owner Gary Spears after listening to players' requests over the past three years. The mouthpiece provides projection with minimal exertion and tonal qualities, both loud and soft. The Raptor currently is available in alto and tenor models.

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

## NY MEYER IS BACK →

In commemoration of JJ Babbitt's 100th anniversary, the company has introduced the NY (New York) Meyer mouthpiece for alto saxophone, a favorite among jazz players that's back by popular demand. This free-blowing mouthpiece offers the utmost in control and playability, offering even response, consistency and excellent intonation at all volume levels.

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

## ← FRENCH TAPER

The System 76 2nd Edition series is the classic line of professional saxophones by P. Mauriat. Each soprano, alto and tenor saxophone is based on the taper of a traditional French tube system that offers superior resistance and a tight core to the base of the sound. Finishes available within the set include gold lacquer, dark vintage lacquer and unlacquered.

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

## ← DESIGNED FOR TONE

Cannonball has introduced the Artist Series B7 professional baritone saxophone. The saxophone features an all-new design that produces a rich and focused tone, exemplary intonation, superb ergonomics and full-ribbed construction. The Artist Series B7 is available in gold lacquer and black nickel plate, adorned with Tier 2 premium engraving. It includes a lightweight case with wheels.

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

## PLAY LIKE PARKER →

Hal Leonard has announced Volume 2 of the *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, for anyone who wants to learn Bird's solos note-for-note. A followup to Volume 1—the original Omnibook—it features exact transcriptions for all types of instruments. The *Charlie Parker Omnibook—Volume 2* features 50 more of Parker's songs, as well as his takes on jazz standards.

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

## ← WARM & STRONG

The Chedeville Elite Series B-flat clarinet mouthpiece is the first launch in the company's new range of clarinet and saxophone mouthpieces. Its medium-length facing curve produces a warm, yet strong, full tone with playability that is unsurpassed. The Chedeville Elite B-flat clarinet mouthpiece is available in a comprehensive selection of tip openings: F0 (.100), F1 (.105), F2 (.110), F3 (.115), F4 (.120) and F5 (.125).

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

## ↑ REDESIGNED VALVE

Schilke's SB4-OT B-flat Soloiste trumpet was designed by Schilke artist Osamu Takahashi (principal trumpeter in the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra). The trumpet features a nonreverse leadpipe and tuning slide configuration, along with a redesigned valve section. The Soloiste leadpipe design creates a balanced, free-blowing feel, and the trumpet produces a warm and inviting orchestral sound.

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

## ↑ FAR RANGE

The interchangeable bell system on B.A.C. Music's Maverick trombone allows a wide range of options for a musician to really dial in acoustical preferences. The bell stem is constructed from standard-weight yellow brass to give a clarity and resonance from the softest pianissimo to full fortissimo.

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

### MIX ON THE GO →

Samson has expanded its Expedition Series rechargeable portable PA line with three systems: the Expedition XP208w, XP310w and XP312w. Each is equipped with a four-channel mixer that includes XLR and quarter-inch inputs for connecting microphones and line-level devices.

The XP310w and XP312w also include a 1/8-inch input for connecting MP3 players and mobile devices. The speaker also can stream music wirelessly from any Bluetooth device. A variable reverb control adds depth, and a voiceover ducker automatically lowers the music when speaking or singing into a microphone (XLR or wireless inputs).

More info: [samsontech.com](http://samsontech.com)



### ↑ HEAVY DUTY

D'Addario Accessories' Professional Tour-Grade Power Base is designed for the touring musician in constant transition between the stage and the road. The Power Base offers five standard-spaced outlets and three transformer-spaced outlets. Unlike most power strips that easily tip over, the Power Base features a low, wide footprint in a sturdy metal housing that remains anchored in place no matter how many devices are plugged in. The Power Base also features an integrated cable management system that lets users wrap the cord around the base for convenience while traveling.

More info: [daddario.com](http://daddario.com)



### ← CLIP-ON SOLUTIONS

Offering a crisp, well-balanced response, Audio-Technica's ATM350a condenser instrument microphone provides discreet, solid mounting solutions for a host of instruments, including woodwinds, strings, brass, percussion and piano. The ATM350a is capable of handling 159dB maximum SPL, allowing the mic to cope with a wide range of extremely powerful, dynamic sound sources. Its cardioid polar pattern reduces side and rear pickup and protects against feedback.

More info: [audio-technica.com](http://audio-technica.com)



### ← SOUND SIGNATURE

64 Audio's N8 customizable in-ear monitor is the result of a collaboration with Grammy-nominated bassist Nathan East. The N8 is designed for musicians and audiophiles who are looking for a sonic signature that delivers clarity across all frequencies with abundant headroom available in the lower end of the audible spectrum. 64 Audio opted for a hybrid design utilizing a 9mm dynamic driver for the lows and eight balanced armature drivers for the midrange and highs. The result is an intimate and smooth sound with punchy lows, luscious mids and a silky treble.

More info: [64audio.com](http://64audio.com)



### ← CLEAR SOUND

Blue's Ember is a premium XLR condenser microphone designed for vocals and instruments. Featuring a hand-tuned custom condenser capsule, Ember delivers detailed performance with a tight cardioid pickup pattern that minimizes room noise for an up-front sound with excellent isolation. It's ideal for multitrack recording, as well as capturing audio for YouTube video production and live-streaming.

More info: [bluedesigns.com](http://bluedesigns.com)



### ← RECORD YOUR GIGS

Zoom North America has unveiled the Zoom Q2n-4K, a handy camera with quality audio for musicians. With 4K UHD capability, 12 specialized scene settings and sound recording up to 24-bit/96kHz, the Q2n-4K is designed to accurately capture performances, practices and livestreams. From a dimly lit club to outside in the glaring sun, the Q2n-4K lets users get the perfect shot anywhere without being a lighting expert.

More info: [zoom-na.com](http://zoom-na.com)

### ← STAGE-FRIENDLY CONTROLS

Bose Professional has made two additions to its ToneMatch audio engine series: the eight-channel T8S ToneMatch mixer and the four-channel T4S ToneMatch mixer, which offer connectivity with intuitive control. Compact and portable, the T8S and T4S are both gig-ready. Their rugged enclosures have a magnetically coupled cover to protect controls and connectors. A chassis-bottom insert allows for standard mounting accessories to help keep the mixers within reach.

More info: [pro.bose.com](http://pro.bose.com)





## DRUMS



### ← HANDCRAFTED HARDWOOD

The six-piece Collector's Series Pure Almond kit from Drum Workshop features luminous finishes, ranging from Toasted Almond to Natural Burst Lacquer Specialty, and can be paired with a range of hardware options. Handcrafted almond wood gathered from disused trees lends the limited-quantity drums a vibrant sonic palette.

[More info: dwdrums.com](http://dwdrums.com)



### ↑ PEDAL ACTION

The Dyna-Sync benefits from three interrelated design features unique to the Tama direct-drive pedal: a distinctive drive design with efficient angles, a sturdy link from the drive to the pedalboard and, perhaps most importantly, a slidable cam. It's that last feature that allows percussionists to adjust the beater's distance from the drumhead, providing players with the ability to modify the pedal's action. And all you need is a drum key to do it. A twin pedal model also is available.

[More info: tama.com](http://tama.com)

### ↓ ALL WRAPPED UP

Why change what already works, when you can amplify success? With additions to the Rattan Series of mallets, Innovative Percussion has expanded its offerings with the RS40, RS40C, RS50 and RS50C, each featuring a graduated rubber core wrapped in either purple synthetic yarn or cord. The mallets are best suited for use with marimba, vibraphone and concert toms.

[More info: innovativepercussion.com](http://innovativepercussion.com)



### ↑ FOR SHU

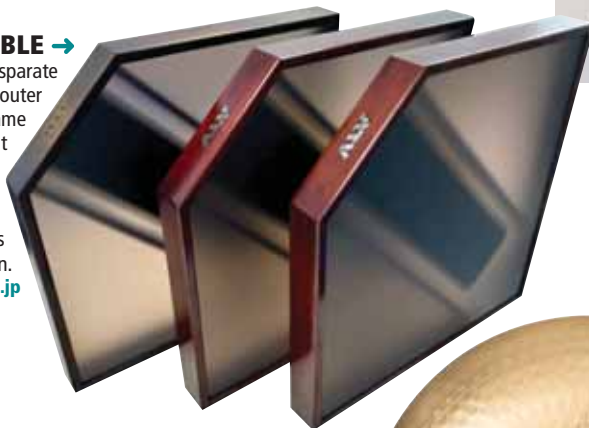
The Kelly SHU Pro (either flat black or silver high-grade aluminum) and Composite (fiberglass reinforced high-density nylon resins) models offer a solution to miking drums with ease and grace. Making use of a drum's internal hardware, the suspended system provides a durable platform for miking and recording, and can be left in place during teardown and transportation.

[More info: kellyshu.com](http://kellyshu.com)

### ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE →

The aFrame is the merger of two disparate worlds, taking drumming to the outer reaches. Based on a traditional frame drum, this percussion instrument is outfitted with a digital brain capable of augmenting every sound a player produces through the drumhead, offering limitless possibilities for expression.

[More info: aframe.jp](http://aframe.jp)



### ← EASY MODIFICATION

Some gear just seems like it should have been fully realized decades ago.

Remo and drummer Dave Weckl have introduced the Adjustable Bass Drum Dampener, which attaches to the drum's rim, enabling players to modify the feel and tone of their instrument with ease. And due to its design, the dampener won't interfere with tuning.

[More info: remo.com](http://remo.com)



### ← TONS OF TORQUE

It's just about as essential as a drum key. The Wingtastic tool's four pins attach to any wingnut, making setup time shorter and painless. The foldable tool is pretty easy to tote around, too; simply hang it off your pocket or belt. But more importantly, using one for setup is likely to preclude any mid-performance adjustments.

[More info: wingtastictool.com](http://wingtastictool.com)



### ← CYMBALS, DISTILLED

Sabian has refined its AAX cymbal series. Debuting more than 25 years ago, the line has been pared down a bit, adhering to its essential entries and qualities, even as the company has added Thin, Medium and Heavy models to expand the diversity of tones, reaching higher highs and touching on darker hues.

[More info: sabian.com](http://sabian.com)



## ← LUSH TUBE TONES

Blackstar's HT series of tube amplifiers has added three models: the HT1R-MkII, HT5R-MkII and HT20R-MkII. The 1-watt HT1R-MkII combines boutique cosmetics with impressive tube tone, resulting in a great practice amp. The HT5R-MkII, equipped with a 5-watt push-pull design utilizing the 12BH7 tube, offers the power of a 100-watt stack in a compact package. The versatile HT20R-MkII features a carefully voiced pre-amp combined with a 20-watt EL84 power amp to create lush tube tones.

More info: [blackstaramps.com](http://blackstaramps.com)



## ↑ NEW SONIC EXPRESSION

Fender's American Acoustasonic Telecaster uses a Fender- and Fishman-designed Acoustic Engine to deliver a proprietary blend of classic analog and advanced technologies that optimize the guitar's natural sound and modify the resonance to deliver a curated collection of voices. Acoustic and electric voices can be blended to create new sounds. The hollow body has an integrated forearm contour and Fender's Stringed Instrument Resonance System, which delivers a naturally loud voice with lively harmonics.

More info: [fender.com](http://fender.com)

## ← COMPACT & COMFORTABLE

Ibanez's SRMD200 Mezzo is an affordable, high-quality bass guitar that offers the comfort and benefits of a compact 32-inch scale. Designed for players of all experience levels, the Mezzo bass provides a shorter reach and tighter fret spacing, allowing for easy execution of fast runs and quick jumps across the fretboard. Despite its smaller size, the Mezzo preserves a high degree of the attack and low end of full-scale basses.

More info: [ibanez.com](http://ibanez.com)



## WIRELESS RELAY →

The Relay G10S from Line 6 is a wireless system designed to be mounted on a pedalboard. It offers up to 130 feet of range and delivers 24-bit sound quality free from dropouts and interference.

More info: [line6.com](http://line6.com)

## TUNE TONE, NEXT-GEN DIVERSITY →

The 40-watt Nexttone-Stage and 80-watt Nexttone-Artist combo guitar amps from Boss were designed with the advanced Tube Logic approach. Combining classic tube sound with next-generation tonal diversity, each Nexttone amp offers multiple channels and instant revoicing via four Class AB analog power amp types selectable from the panel. They also include built-in effects and personal sound customization using the Nexttone Editor software.

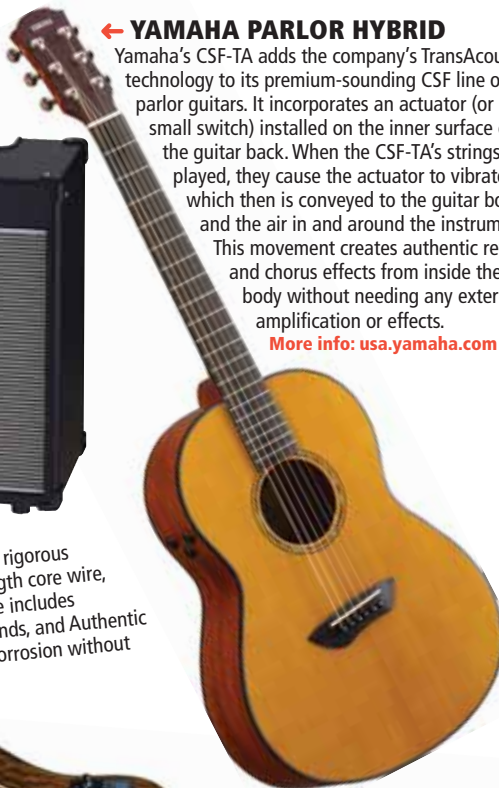
More info: [boss.info](http://boss.info)



## ← YAMAHA PARLOR HYBRID

Yamaha's CSF-TA adds the company's TransAcoustic technology to its premium-sounding CSF line of parlor guitars. It incorporates an actuator (or small switch) installed on the inner surface of the guitar back. When the CSF-TA's strings are played, they cause the actuator to vibrate, which then is conveyed to the guitar body, and the air in and around the instrument. This movement creates authentic reverb and chorus effects from inside the body without needing any external amplification or effects.

More info: [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)



## ← CORROSION-RESISTANT STRINGS

Martin Guitar's Authentic Acoustic strings are engineered to stand up to rigorous practice and frequent performance. Martin uses its highest tensile-strength core wire, then tinplates it on all six strings for added corrosion resistance. The line includes Authentic Acoustic Marquis Silked strings with a silk wrap on the ball ends, and Authentic Acoustic Lifespan 2.0 strings, which use a new technology to prevent corrosion without compromising tone.

More info: [martinguitar.com](http://martinguitar.com)



## GET SMART →

The Tramontane HyVibe series of acoustic smart guitars from Låg feature technology that turns each guitar into a mobile amplifier, speaker, effects processor, looper and recorder. The guitars can operate without external equipment or wiring. The HyVibe system effectively transforms the top of the guitar into a speaker membrane. It comes with a programmable seven-band EQ and a built-in digital chromatic tuner. Three models are available: the THV10DCE, THV20DCE and THV30DCE.

More info: [kmcmusic.com](http://kmcmusic.com)





## PIANOS & KEYBOARDS



### ← CONCERT HALL SOUND

Roland's LX700 series pianos (the LX708, LX706 and LX705) feature PureAcoustic Modeling technology that emulates the way that acoustic pianos produce sound, including the hammers striking strings and the sound resonating through the piano's body. Roland's PureAcoustic Ambience technology then recreates the sound space by emulating the acoustic properties of concert halls, studios and cathedrals.

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



### ↑ GREAT FOR GIGS

Yamaha's CP73 and CP88 digital stage pianos have three main sections that can be split or combined: Piano (featuring voices sampled from concert grand pianos, including the Yamaha CFX), Electric Piano (offering variants on 1970s sounds, such as the Wurlitzer and Clavinet) and Sub (providing strings, pads, organs, chromatic percussion and other voices suitable for layering).

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

### VIBRANT VIVO →

Dexibell's Vivo S9 digital stage piano offers the acoustic and electric pianos available in the Vivo S series, as well as organ sound engines—including the complete transistor, tonewheel and traditional organ and instrumental sounds—from the Combo J7 and Classico L3 digital organs. The 88-key S9 features a hammer-action keyboard, hands-free assignable motorized draw-faders, real wood accents and backlit controls.

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



### BEST FOOT FORWARD →

The Effigy Control Pedal is a MIDI controller foot pedal for keyboardists. It provides a viable replacement for certain controls (such as pitch bend and expression wheel) that usually require a player to interrupt left-hand play to operate. The pedal can produce any MIDI output desired by the user and send simultaneous MIDI messages to one or more devices independently.

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



### ↑ EXTRAORDINARY XD

Korg's minilogue XD offers the benefits of several of the company's proven technologies. It has a four-voice analog synthesizer circuit based off the prologue, the 16-step sequencer and micro tuning from the monologue, all of the "logue" line's programmable capabilities, the most effects processing on any of Korg's analog synthesizers, and the Multi-digital oscillator. The instrument's increased digital effects include reverb, delay and modulation.

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



### ↑ CUSTOMIZED CONTENT

Sequential's Prophet X, the company's flagship synthesizer, now allows users to import their own samples to create custom instruments and content. Sample import and mapping is done via an easy-to-use software application created by 8Dio, Sequential's factory sample content provider for the Prophet X. Custom sample import has been a highly anticipated feature of the instrument since its introduction in June 2018.

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



### ↑ GRAND SOUND, SMALLER SCALE

Casio's Privia PX-S1000 and PX-S3000 digital pianos have a sleek chassis that is about 43 percent smaller than previous models. An enhanced scaled hammer-action keyboard replicates the touch of an acoustic grand piano with escapement, and ebony and ivory textured keys. Casio's proprietary Sound Source delivers authentic grand piano sound, including multiple types of resonance and mechanical sounds.

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





**SAMSON**

## Free to Roam...

Samson is redefining wireless for horn players with the AirLine AWX Wind Instrument system. Offering true wireless freedom without the hassle of a beltpack, AWX features the world's smallest clip-on transmitter with an internal rechargeable battery and the HM60 halo-shockmounted instrument mic.

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### **THU** 25 April | **NORWEGIAN NIGHT**

Espen Berg Trio ★ Frode Haltli Avant Folk ★ Gard Nilssen's Acoustic Unity ★ Hedvig Mollestad Trio ★ Karl Seglem Band ★  
Kristin Asbjørnsen ★ Skadedyr ★ Thomas Strønen's Time is a blind guide

### **FRI** 26 April | **EUROPEAN JAZZ MEETING**

Adam Baldych Quartet ★ AJOYO ★ AKSHAM ★ Elliot Galvin ★ Flat Earth Society ★ Giovanni Guidi ★ Lisbon Underground Music Ensemble ★ Makiko Hirabayashi Trio ★ Marie Kruttl Trio ★ MDCIII ★ NAÏSSAM JALAL - QUEST OF THE INVISIBLE ★ OZMA ★  
Reis/Demuth/Wiltgen ★ Scott McLemore ★ Sunna Gunnlaugs Trio featuring Verner Pohjola ★ The Rite of Trio

### **SAT** 27 April | **GERMAN JAZZ EXPO**

Botticelli Baby ★ Der Weise Panda ★ Duo Tander/Brinkmann ★ Edi Nulz ★ Janning Trumann 6 ★ Johannes Bigge Trio ★  
Olga Amelchenko Quartet ★ Peter Gall Quintett

### **SAT** 27 April | **OVERSEAS NIGHT**

Emie R Roussel Trio ★ Isfar Sarabski Trio & Shahriyar Imanov ★ Jane Bunnett & Maqueque ★ Linda May Oh Han ★ Ludere ★  
Matthew Whitaker ★ Quiana Lynell ★ Trio Abozekrys

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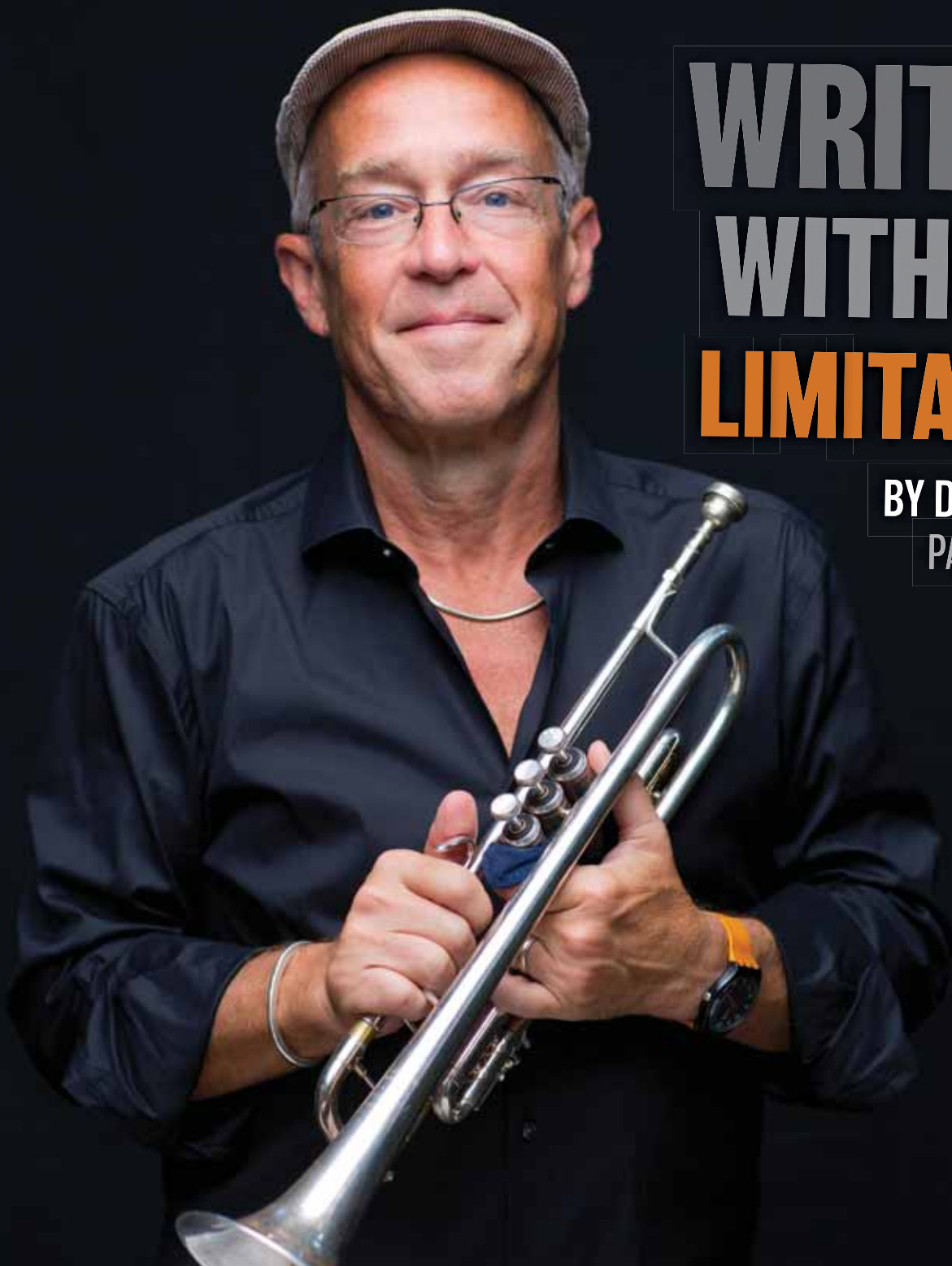
Partner Showcase-Festival



# BRASS SCHOOL»

## WRITING WITHOUT LIMITATIONS

BY DAVE DOUGLAS  
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Dave Douglas (Photo by John Abbott)



**DARREN BARRETT**  
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*Brass School >*

# Composing for an Improvised Life

By Dave Douglas | Photo by Austin Nelson

"Sounds like you took the music outside the box. Now you've got to throw the box away altogether." Advice from a hero. It was Wayne Shorter. He had just heard my band play.

**T**he advice is so mysterious to me, and it has so much to do with the way I write and think about music making. He hit me where I live. I had read that similarly, Schopenhauer said, "The fundament upon which all our knowledge and learning rests is inexplicable." Accepting the unknowable is a part of the writing process. The more you learn, the more you know you need to learn.

For that reason, the invitation to talk about how I write, and to offer some "practical tips" is daunting. Anyone who has spent countless hours slaving over an empty manuscript book will tell you how mysterious the process is. I count myself among that number.

So, how do I write? Sometimes it's helpful to start with, Why do I write? That's a bit easier to answer. At the root of it, I always write so my friends and I will have something fun to play. When musicians find the value in a certain idea, my thinking goes, others will hear it and share it, too. That's why I write: to share my love and joy in music. As Stevie Wonder said to Tom Jones about composing, "Every day you have get up and find a new way to say, 'I love you.'" Good enough motivation.









Dave Douglas is a prolific trumpeter, composer, educator and entrepreneur from New York City who's known for the stylistic breadth of his work.

Most of us share our joy through music because we love it, and we love what we got from the giants. At the same time, the legacy, the tradition, can be hard to deal with. You want to consider it *all*, and that's overwhelming. The ocean of music and sound is infinite. Around which sounds do we decide to place the frame and point our attention?

The richness of this golden era of Booker Little, Cecil Taylor, Hemphill, Wheeler, Braxton. Threadgill, Wadada Leo Smith, Muhal, Rudd, Myers, Stańko, Bailey, Parker, Mengelberg, Bennink, Frith. Carla Bley. Both Evanses. Philosopher-musicians. Creative titans. And songwriters, representing all sorts of music from near and far, young and old, men, women, people. As many ways of practicing the musical life as there are humans.

Staying open to all of that guides my writing. Trying to maintain awareness of all the possibilities so that I can be as free as possible. Percussionist Kate Gentile said it to me this way the other day: “improvised music without limitations.” I want to be able to follow my imagination wherever it goes, and that means free of expectations and assumptions about what it is supposed to be, or sound like.

This is beginning to sound vague and airy. For me, staying open to all of those possibilities frees me to get at the specifics, the nuts-and-bolts of the music. It allows me to write in different ways depending on the project or situation, and consider as many elements and possibilities as I can imagine, in as concrete a way as I can. Let's consider a few examples.

For the 2000 album *Soul On Soul*, written for my sextet, I took a deep dive into transcriptions of pianist and composer Mary Lou Williams—for my own love of the music—but also so I could explain (to myself), as specifically as possible, what the elements are in that music (and in her life) that I find so spellbinding, and why I think they are still important and compelling in our own age. That process meant that, when I finally sat down to write, I had a focal point of very specific language ideas I could go to. That became the frame within the infinite ocean of possible sounds. It helped me get started and guided me to the finish line.

For the 2017 album *Little Giant Still Life*, recorded with the brass group The Westerlies and drummer Anwar Marshall, I grew attached to the works of American painter Stuart Davis. Bold, flashy colors and shapes. Collisions on the

canvas. A wily sense of humor and an independence that kept him from ever being boxed into one particular “movement.” The paintings spoke to me, and as I wrote, musical ideas that began as intuitive feelings about the body of work coalesced into discrete compositions dedicated to particular paintings. Engaging with specific inspirations keeps me engaged in creating new sound worlds, seeing and hearing in a fresh way.

*Not* boxing myself into assumptions or expectation *allows* me to get more specific about melody, harmony, rhythm, form and all the basic elements hand.

This past couple of years I have joined many in this country who feel the imperative that each of us pitch in to effect positive change. This year I wrote a new suite for the Greenleaf Music Subscription Series called ENGAGE. It is devoted to positive action and support for organizations engaged in the issues. Because of this, I decided that all the pieces had to be based on triads, mostly major triads. I had never done that before. The music certainly has a distinctive sound. And, I hope, a *determined* one. The first few pieces have now been released.

Though I have a reputation for “bringing in sounds from outside jazz,” I have never thought of

it that way. I have learned to write by being open to my musical imagination, challenging it to go further than what I have done before. When one questions assumptions, one is bound to come up with new and different solutions.

To break free and challenge myself to find myself.

**“The purpose of studying Buddhism is not to study Buddhism, but to study ourselves.” —Shunryu Suzuki**

I often go to the public library to write. It's quiet. There are lots of books. And it's the place where I can confront silence honestly, and consider how I want the music to break it. Consideration of all the elements of music (that I can think of, and there are always more) has become an essential part of my work. Staying open to possibilities of doing things a different way. Of telling a story. Of creating an interaction.

I try to write as simply as I can. It helps me consider everything without including everything. Always start with the limitation of one page. Music needn't *describe* the times, but it must be *of* the times.

These are ideas that help me get started. I once heard Bob Brookmeyer say not to cram a bunch of stuff around your one good idea. (What he said was actually quite a bit harsher and saltier than that.) He said you don't get too many good ideas in a day, so don't hide them. Poke away to get at what that good idea is, and then figure out how to serve it up. That's what these practices are about.

You can always add more complicated ideas later. First, find one clear notion and get it down. Allow it to live and breathe. Revise it, think about it, carry around in your head and your heart, let it develop, before adding layers of complication. They can and will come. Remember that your players will be only too happy to have that space to roam and complicate matters. You want to create a platform for them to be able to do that.

As the poet Stanley Kunitz described it, “I dream of an art so transparent that you can look through and see the world.”

I have put together some parts of my process for those who are interested, along with a sort of assignment, a way of trying to instigate the openness of mind to work.

Imagine your assignment to be:

- Sit down in a quiet place with no distractions, without an instrument.
- Bring one blank sheet of manuscript paper and a pencil.
- Think about what your music might sound like.
- Develop an idea of why you are writing and what you are writing about. Pick a theme, and get a sense of how long the whole finished thing would be so you can work to a suitable structure.
- Imagine who would be playing it (what instruments, what community of players).
- Imagine different ways the music could be organized.
- Write one small idea. Notate it however you think suits the idea best.
- Move on. Write another.
- Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.
- Don't hang on to any judgments about what you've written.
- Gather your ideas. See which ones appeal to you.
- Ask yourself which ones go together, if any.
- Refine. Cut out the unnecessary. Make it playable.
- Give yourself deadlines. (This is really important.)
- Revise. Rehearse. Revise. Rehearse some more.

From Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*: “Revising is part of writing. Few writers are so expert that they can produce what they are after on the first try.”

Here are some things that I have found really helpful to consider:

- No Limitations
- No Repetitions
- Simplicity and Clarity
- Community and Improvisation, the voice of the players
- History and Tradition
- No Beginning, No Ending
- Program: What is it about, if anything?

Very often the first question I get is, What if my piece just sounds like someone else?

About the question of imitation, Strunk and White say: “Never imitate consciously, but do not worry about being an imitator; take pains instead to admire what is good. Then when you write in a way that comes naturally, you will echo the halloos that bear repeating.”

Wayne Shorter has graciously shared his wisdom with many people, and we are grateful. Around 2013, I heard him play with his great quartet and had a question. I asked him why he was playing “Water Babies” in a new key, different from the recording of the '60s. He said, “Oh, that? That's not finished.” I nodded, willing to accept that, even though the piece has long been a sacred text for people learning jazz and creative music, he considers it unfinished.

He then looked at me piercingly and added, “It also never started.”

Wisława Szymborska, the Polish poet, wrote something that seemed appropriate to this:

*Nothing can ever happen twice.*

*In consequence, the sorry fact is*

*That we arrive here improvised*

*And leave without the chance to practice.*

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## The Importance of Warming Up & Warming Down

Playing the trumpet is a physical phenomenon. It takes a lot of power, relaxation and control. That's why it's imperative that trumpeters develop a routine to warm up the embouchure to a state of readiness. It's also important to warm down the embouchure after work is done.

I get a lot of questions from students in regard to my warm-up and warm-down routine. I'd like to explore these two important aspects of brass playing and share some useful information I've received from my teachers, William Vacchiano, Donald Byrd, William Fielder and Bill Adam.

### Step 1

The most important component of playing trumpet is controlling the air stream. I begin my warm-up by whistling through the lips; Dr. Byrd taught me the importance of this, explaining that whistling gets the air moving and also connects the brain with pitch and melody. I whistle to the full range of my ability for about one minute. Next, I play a few notes on the mouthpiece, not too low, not too high. I do this for about one minute.

### Step 2

After the mouthpiece, I then would go to playing the leadpipe. Dr. Byrd carried a Bach trumpet leadpipe in his trumpet case. He

would sometimes play it while he was driving around running errands. He felt that it helped to bring his embouchure to a supple state.

Years ago, I was able to take a week's worth of lessons from Bill Adam, the well-known trumpet instructor at Indiana University whose students have included Jerry Hey, Randy Brecker and Chris Botti, among others. Adam was a big advocate of playing the leadpipe as part of his warm-up method. He said it was a way to get the air moving, which is imperative. He had me play a six-bar phrase that consisted of playing concert E flat for one bar, then rest for one bar. I would repeat this three times, concentrating on achieving a nice, full, resonant tone on the leadpipe. (See Figure 1.) Airflow is everything.

### Step 3

For most of the remainder of my warm-up, I take exercises from the teachings of William Fielder, a former professor at Rutgers University, to get my embouchure into a state of readiness. When I took private lessons with Fielder, we worked on Max Schlossberg's *Daily Drills and Technical Studies for Trumpet* (page 1, exercise 1) for three months. Everything was about maintaining an even and strong airflow. This is the first exercise I play on the trumpet after I play the leadpipe. (See Figure 2.)

Getting the maximum amount of air into

the lungs is imperative. Once that is achieved, we have to get the air out with flow. Remember that there are two parts to the breath: Part one is bringing the air in (inhalation), and part two is moving the air out (exhalation). Inhaling must be done in a passive, slow manner, and exhaling the air is done in an active, fast manner. Relaxation is key for optimal results. There must be no hesitation in this entire process; it all should happen as one motion.

I play this exercise three times using a breath attack on the downbeat of each two-bar phrase while going down the seven positions. When you release the tongue, you no longer can rely on it to make the note. If the airflow is correct, then the note clearly can be executed using a breath attack. All such exercises should be done with a metronome, because we breathe and play in the time of music. I play the exercise two times at mezzo forte, then rest for 5 minutes, then play it a third time. The metronome should be set to 70 BPM.

### Step 4

The following exercises are under the category of "airflow." When the airflow is correct, slurring and tonguing are achieved more easily. Figure 3 is from *Arban's Complete Conservatory Method for Trumpet* (page 13, exercise 10). Even though the notes are changing, it should be seen as one continuous long tone, flowing from note to note. Try to keep everything even, full and in tune. If you cannot play the entire exercise in one breath, pause on the note D in the fifth measure, then take a full breath and complete the exercise. The tempo should be set to 70 BPM.

Figure 4 is an exercise from *Arban's* (page 14, exercise 18) that helps the player create a feeling of flow within scale movement. Pause on beat 4 of the eighth and 16th measures to rebreathe and continue. Keep everything even, full and in tune. Relaxation is key. The tempo should be set to 80 BPM.

Professor Fielder introduced me to flow studies written by Vincent Cichowicz of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The Cichowicz flow studies help me to warm up the embouchure through the different registers of the instrument. For my warm-up, I practice the flow studies exercises (in the key of C) at 90 BPM found on page 2 (V.C.1) of the book *Trumpet Flow Studies* by Cichowicz.

### Step 5

By now, my embouchure is feeling good, and I'll continue with flexibility exercises. Flow is crucial to your flexibility on the trumpet. The four flexibility exercises I like to do in

my warm-up are as follows:

- Figure 5, from *Charles Colin Trumpet Advanced Lip Flexibilities* (page 9, example 1).

- Figure 6, from *Charles Colin* (page 11, example 6).

- Figure 7, from *Arban's* (page 44, example 22).

- Figure 8, from *Arban's* (page 79, example 8).

Over years of study, I've been taught many different approaches to gaining optimal flexibility on the trumpet. What I ended up gravitating toward is thinking about whistling, as Dr. Byrd taught me. If you whistle in the lower register, the tongue will naturally move to the bottom of the mouth. In the middle register, the tongue will gravitate toward the center of the

mouth. And in the upper register, the tongue will gravitate toward the roof of the mouth to produce the note. This same tongue movement applies to rapid flexibility on trumpet.

## Step 6

The next step is to warm up the tonguing aspect of brass playing. Figure 9 shows an exercise found in the *Saint-Jacome Grand Method for Trumpet or Cornet* (page 19, exercise 26). William Vacchiano enforced this exercise.

## Step 7

Once steps 1 through 6 are completed, I would play an étude from books by Theo Charlier,

Vassily Brandt, W.M. Smith or E.F. Goldman.

## Warm-Down

My warm-down is just playing long tones. I play them quietly as a way to bring everything down and relax the embouchure. I play Figure 10 one time and then rest for one minute. Then I play Figure 11 and then rest for one minute. Finally, I would play Figure 11 one more time, and my warm-down is complete.

Remember that brass players are like athletes. Warming up and warming down will help to keep us in good condition and top form. **DB**

Visit Darren Barrett online at [darrenbarrett.com](http://darrenbarrett.com).

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

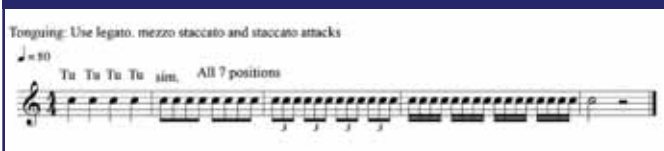


Figure 10



Figure 11







JIMMY KATZ

Steve Davis

## Playing in the Moment, Facing the Unexpected

In music, as in life, thinking ahead is certainly beneficial. But, as my old man often told me, “Life is what happens while you’re making plans ... and how you respond to it.” This concept absolutely is relevant, if not inherent, to what we do as jazz improvisers. I like to think of it as “being available or present in the moment.”

How do we achieve this, musically? There are many factors to consider. I suppose, in order to address the “unpredictable,” one must first define the “predictable.” This involves having a deep understanding and technical grasp of such basic musical parameters as song

form, rhythm, melody, bass notes and chord changes, and being able to address and express these musical components through your instrument—in my case, the slide trombone.

Whenever the opportunity arises for me to address a roomful of (jazz) trombone players, I like to begin with discussing three basic, foundational tenets:

1) What kind of person you are will have far more to do with how you sound than anything else. Jackie McLean once said, “You’re a person first, then a saxophonist/trombonist, etc.” Of course, nobody is perfect. We are all flawed. Yet, we all have something genuine

and inspired to say. Being creative and expressive are attributes often encouraged in younger, developing musicians. Of course, it is very important to discover these qualities within ourselves, tap into them and bring them out through our playing. Also, if we try to be as considerate, thoughtful, cooperative, generous, patient, flexible, studious and thorough—as well as being as creative and expressive as possible—this will all come out in the music we play.

2) Are you walking, talking music 24/7—without the horn in your hands? Can you sing what you are about to play on the trombone? Can you tap or clap the rhythmic qualities of the tune or line you want to play? Can you hum the bass line? Do you understand the various chord qualities in the song? Can you sing the chord tones up and down: thirds, sevenths, ninths, 11ths, etc.? If the song has lyrics, do you know them?

3) How do I translate all of the above and deliver it through the trombone? Have I warmed up, done my long-tones (soft and loud) and lip slurs today? Have I practiced my various chord qualities (major sevenths, dominant sevenths, minor sevenths, ninths, 11ths, 13ths)? Have I practiced the scales related to these chords? Remember, chord=scale/scale=chord. They are one and the same: a grouping of notes to be creative with any way you want, not only in scalar fashion. How well do I play these chord/scale relationships (in various rhythmic contexts and at various tempos) on the trombone?

There is always more to consider when it comes to the “known” aspects of performing music in an improvised manner. The big question is, how much real listening to the masters of this music have you done? My mentor, McLean, used to call it “the language.” How versed in “the language” are you? The more listening to the masters (Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Bix Beiderbecke, Lester Young, Art Tatum, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Miles Davis, J.J. Johnson, Sonny Stitt, Ella Fitzgerald, Max Roach, Dexter Gordon, Stan Getz, John Coltrane, Art Blakey, and so on) and the more musical “language” and repertoire you have studied, practiced and digested, the better equipped you will be to play and improvise with other musicians.

It all comes down to loving the music you want to play. If you love the music, it won’t be a chore to do some focused, careful listening. For instance, if you’re genuinely interested in the Great American Songbook, you’ll want to explore the vast catalogs of Ella

Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, Nat “King” Cole, Frank Sinatra, Billy Eckstine and Tony Bennett. There are so many good songs to learn, play and reinterpret from all genres of music. Maybe you love Stevie Wonder’s music and want to adapt some of his great compositions into a more jazz-like, improvised format. Or a more recent, popular artist’s music intrigues you. Perhaps a traditional folk song beckons. Or you might wish to adapt a piece from the Western classical canon to improvise on. All of it already has been done by improvising jazz musicians, so the trails have been blazed for you to traverse, musically speaking, in your own way. You are free to play whatever material you’d like to play.

Perhaps you are a composer and want to play your own original compositions. Or, you want to play originals composed by some of your peers. The same principles apply as with any music you want to play. Do you know the song? Have you internalized it? Can you play it from memory?

Now, let’s talk about reacting to the “unpredictable,” dealing with the “unexpected”—or, as I like to say, “being present in the moment.” To me, this really means playing whatever the music requires at that moment. I try to think of it as having a distilled, clear musical voice on the trombone, my chosen instrument.

To all trombonists: I strongly suggest being a fan of the rhythm section. Listen to the bass, drums, piano, guitar or vibes. Try to understand their musical vocabulary and learn to speak their rhythmic/harmonic language. This will inform your playing in a deeper way than merely transcribing trombone or horn players’ licks and regurgitating them over of a rhythm section.

In my earlier days, I used to listen to my favorite piano trio records and try to picture my trombone sound blending into what was already happening. Could I fit in with this great-sounding music and not mess it up? Could I add something beautiful to it? In particular, I’m thinking of so many classic, piano-led trio recordings by masters such as Monk, Powell, Hank Jones, Horace Silver, Cedar Walton, Barry Harris, Tommy Flanagan, Ahmad Jamal, Oscar Peterson, Phineas Newborn Jr., Red Garland, Bill Evans, Wynton Kelly, Sonny Clark, McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett and Mulgrew Miller. Then think of the master bassists on these recordings: Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, Ron Carter, Sam Jones, Scott LaFaro, Bob Cranshaw, Jamil Nasser, Buster Williams, David Williams. And consider the great drummers: Art Blakey, Philly Joe Jones, Arthur Taylor, Jimmy Cobb, Ben Riley, Ed Thigpen, Louis Hayes, Mickey Roker, Billy Higgins, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams,

Paul Motian. I also used to listen to quartet recordings with vibraphonists Milt Jackson and Bobby Hutcherson, or guitarists Wes Montgomery and Grant Green.

It is advantageous to create space in your solos. This not only frames your ideas, giving shape to each statement, but it also enables you and the rhythm section players to converse musically. We’re not talking about leaving space just for the sake of it. Rather, if your intention is to allow opportunities for back-and-forth dialogue, the music in total has a chance to become very special. If you’re playing with new musicians for the first time, how can you possibly get to know their style, if you’re busy filling up all the spaces in the music? It’s more important to be a good listener in a conversation than it is to do all the talking.

No matter what the situation, it is always important to play with a strong sense of rhythm, to swing hard and deep in the groove. As I’ve heard master trombonist Steve Turre often say, “You’ve got to articulate” on the trombone to accomplish this. I try to single-tongue as many notes as possible when I play. I developed this approach from listening to J.J. Johnson, who did this as well as it can be done.

Another profound influence on my playing is my friend and mentor Curtis Fuller. He not only articulates his ideas on the horn very clearly (nobody swings as hard or plays up-tempos like him), but he also plays with such soulful melodicism. Slide Hampton’s playing and writing has been a tremendous influence on me as well. There are many other great trombonists I deeply admire. What they all have in common is each plays with a distinctive, personal sound and a lyrical quality.

Johnson, Fuller and Hampton all seemed to play language not necessarily associated with the trombone, but more often with the saxophone, trumpet or piano. This is what I’ve also tried to cultivate in my own playing over the years. I love the trombone and its natural idiosyncrasies, but don’t want to be limited to or encumbered by them. My goal is to play clearly and lyrically in as spontaneous a fashion as is possible.

Another concept that has helped me express myself as a soloist over the years is that playing the changes is essentially playing piano on trombone. It’s very important for non-pianists to spend time learning how to voice chords on the keyboard. This way, you are able to hear, visualize and internalize all types of chord qualities and consequently, deliver them on the trombone, as desired. In order to accomplish this effectively, it’s advantageous to utilize alternate-positions on the slide trombone to achieve maximum, technical efficiency. For instance, when arpeggiating an E<sub>♭</sub>m11 chord, try playing E<sub>♭</sub>, G<sub>♭</sub>, then B<sub>♭</sub>, D<sub>♭</sub> (each in fifth position), F (in

fourth position), then high A<sub>♭</sub> in third position, ascending and descending. It will take a little time to embrace using the alternate positions. Try to match timbre and play the notes in tune.

In closing, I learned a valuable lesson with regard to dealing with the unexpected and the importance of group communication during my first years playing with Chick Corea’s group Origin. I’d be listening to the band during the previous solo, thinking about what I wanted to play when it was my turn. Then, as I stepped to the mic to take my solo, Corea and the rhythm section would turn on a dime, breaking into a completely different groove. What I’d previously had in mind wasn’t going to work any longer—what do I do? Just listen, react, play something simple that fits with what’s happening and go from there. The results were always gratifying. Corea reminded us to really stay connected musically with one another on the bandstand at all time. Never to go on “autopilot.” He talked about the multiple lines of communication happening between each band member.

My latest album, *Correlations* (Smoke Sessions), is in direct reference to the same ideas, concepts and spirit of everything discussed here. Origin was a sextet. The *Correlations* band is also a sextet, consisting of extremely accomplished, creative and dynamic musical personalities. We all have long histories as friends and musical colleagues, on and off the bandstand. My goal as a bandleader is to encourage these relationships—these correlations, if you will—to thrive within the band. We trust one another. We enjoy playing and hanging together. This is why we can thrive musically in the moment, in the realms of the expected and unexpected. This results in exciting, expressive and creative music with a feeling of unity and joy. This is what makes the music special for me, for us and hopefully for audiences and listeners around the world. **DB**

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Steve Davis is one of today’s leading voices on the trombone. He has worked with jazz luminaries such as Art Blakey, Jackie McLean, Chick Corea, Cecil Payne, Freddie Hubbard, Horace Silver, Cedar Walton, Hank Jones and Benny Golson. Davis has performed at major venues around the world, including appearances on *The Jimmy Fallon Show* with Stevie Wonder and *The White House Tribute to Ray Charles* (PBS). Davis appears on more than 150 recordings, including 20 as a leader. His 2017 album *Think Ahead* (Smoke Sessions) is a collection of original compositions and time-honored classics. Other notable releases include *Say When: Celebrating J.J. Johnson* (Smoke Sessions), *For Real* (Posi-Tone) and *Gettin’ It Done* (Posi-Tone). Davis continues to work regularly with One For All (featuring Eric Alexander), Larry Willis, Harold Mabern, Dizzy Gillespie All-Stars, Jimmy Heath, Ron Carter and Christian McBride big bands. His original composition “Optimism” appears on the McBride Big Band’s Grammy Award-winning release *Bringin’ It* (2018). A long-time educator, Davis has guided a broad range of emerging musicians at the Hartt School’s Jackie McLean Institute, where he recently was honored for more than 25 years of service. Other ongoing educational endeavors include Jamey Aebersold’s Summer Jazz Workshops, the Jazz in July program at UMass Amherst, Stanford University Jazz Workshop and a longtime affiliation with the Artist’s Collective. His forthcoming album, *Correlations* (Smoke Sessions), has a release date of March 8. Visit Davis online at [stevedavismusic.com](http://stevedavismusic.com).





Kirk Knuffke

MADELINE VENTRICE-KNUFFKE

## Kirk Knuffke's Cornet Solo on 'Rise'

Cornetist Kirk Knuffke gave himself a challenge with his song "Rise," the first track from his 2015 album *Lamplighter* (Fresh Sound New Talent). It's performed with no chordal instrument, which, though it provides a lot of freedom (since there's no chordal instrument hemming him in), also creates a lot of responsibility, since now the task of defining the harmony (if that's what's desired) rests more with the soloist. This is made a bit easier on "Rise," since it's just a minor-chord vamp, but Knuffke decided to put it in C# minor, which is not the most horn-friendly key. (The transcription is presented here in concert key, in order to accommodate all instrumentalists.)

In spite (or because) of this, Knuffke tells a compelling story. It's split into three basic sections. For the first part (measures 1–27), Knuffke sticks to a simple scale, or perhaps a combination of scales is a better way of thinking about it. It's mostly the C# blues scale (C#, E, F#, G, G#, B), which sounds very soulful,

even with its tritone. But Knuffke adds in the second (D#), which makes it sound a bit more modal. Combining the G natural and D# makes for sounding "in" but with a bit more color than you'd usually hear in the funky-blues genre. It's especially effective in bars 6 and 7, where we hear the D# in the upper part of the line, but the G natural under it at the end of the lick, sounding like he's resolving there, even though it's not a chord tone.

The second part commences around bar 28, where Knuffke changes two things. First, he moves away from the scale ideas presented and starts playing more chromatically. In fact, there aren't any C# blues scale (or modal-leaning) licks until the third section starts in the middle of measure 35, so this middle section has dispensed with the harmonic material of the first. It's mostly strings of chromatic notes. But he didn't go there abruptly. Knuffke hinted at it in measure 8 with an ascending chromatic line, and even threw some chromatic notes into measures 12 and 16, setting our ears up

for the change.

The other element Knuffke changes for this second section is rhythmic. Whereas the emphasis had been on eighth notes, with occasional triplets and 16ths, from measures 28 through 36 there are almost no eighths (just a pair each in bars 31 and 32). It's brilliant how in the same way that Knuffke prepared our ear for the chromatics by foreshadowing them in the first section, he also alluded to these denser rhythms, playing some triplets in measures 1, 3, 8, 21, 22 and 24, as well as 16ths in bars 10 and 12.

For the final part, not only does Knuffke dial back the rhythms to the original eighth-note concept (with a smattering of denser rhythms), but he also returns to the C# blues scale, but in each case there are a couple of distinctions. Whereas in the opening Knuffke inserted the second (D#) into his lines, for the conclusion he only uses this note in bar 36, the transition from the middle section. He does, however, add in a couple of A#'s (bars 35 and 44–45), a note that makes it sound more

dorian (being the sixth) and was absent from his C# minor playing in the beginning.

There is also the introduction of poly-rhythm in this final section. Measures 46–47 repeat a one-and-a-half-beat figure, and in bars 52 and 54, Knuffke inverts this idea by playing two-note figures in triplets. Playing

rhythmic figures that don't cleanly fit the underlying subdivision is a simple and very effective means of producing polyrhythm, and these rhythmic ideas also are exclusive to this final part.

On one hand, Knuffke has led us from "A" to "B" and back to "A," but the last "A" is more

of an "A prime," as it has elements that distinguish it from the initial "A." In doing so, his improvised solo comes off like a complete composition.

**DB**

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

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## Yamaha Allen Vizzutti YTR-9335VSII Trumpet

### *Spectacular Ease of Play, Maximum Control*

As a professional musician, I know that Yamaha performing artists are unparalleled. Several of my trumpet idols perform on Yamaha horns. One of them is Allen Vizzutti. I first heard him perform live about 13 or 14 years ago and was astounded by his mastery of the instrument. He's at ease in both jazz and classical music. He's performed on more than 150 movie and game soundtracks, composed for many elite groups, written *Allen Vizzutti Trumpet Method*, and now has worked with Yamaha to create the Allen Vizzutti Limited Edition Custom YTR-9335VSII trumpet.

Upon opening the case, the YTR-9335VSII shines, to say the least. The silver plating is flawless. The braces are solid and clean. The gold trim on the upper and lower valve caps is beautiful. I love how the black mother-of-pearl valve buttons are highlighted by more gold trim. This is a spectacular-looking trumpet.

So, what does it sound and feel like? To find out, I took it with me for a week. Whether I was teaching or directing at school, mentoring at a student's home or performing for an audience, the YTR-9335VSII was there with me. As I was warming up prior to a big band rehearsal, I noticed that there was very little adjustment needed at the top of the staff. As with every trumpet I've ever played, D and E tend to be just a little flat, and F and G are just a bit high, but this model has been designed so well that those intonation issues are minimized. What a pleasure to find that only subtle adjustments are needed to play in tune.

The valves are quite efficient. I lightened my touch to adjust for the hard rubber on the valve caps. Because I normally play on a large-bore horn, I could feel more back pressure on the medium-large-bore YTR-9335VSII. Backing off on airflow was required. The upper register then could be played in a delicate manner with minimum effort and maximum control. Playing down low was also nice and solid. This trumpet is on the heavy

side. You can create the colors and richness wanted for a ballad and then soar in the upper register as needed. The slotting in the upper register was precise. As a side note, I brought the horn back the following week for the rest of the big band trumpet section to give a try. They all noticed the extra resistance and ease of play. They all sounded like themselves, but with a clearer sound, in my opinion. I was a bit bummed, as I didn't get to use it at all during that rehearsal.

I didn't have any classical work that week, but did have a chance to pull out my well-worn copy of *Arban's* to play through a few technical études, and was more than pleased with the results.

I played a couple jazz combo gigs over the weekend, all of it muted and mellow with just guitar and upright bass. Again, I had to back off in order to make the horn sing, but it was well worth it. Endurance was most assuredly enhanced. The back pressure was a bit too much with my heavy copper bubble mute by Jo-Ral, but it opened up and was much more playable with my lightweight Soulo harmon. I was able to create a nice mellow sound with a bucket. My favorite was with an adjustable cup mute. The colors and tonal qualities were exactly what I was looking for.

The Allen Vizzutti Limited Edition Custom YTR-9335VSII has a 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch one-piece yellow brass bell and a .459-inch bore. There's an extra brace on the first-valve tuning slide and an oversized pull knob on the third-valve tuning slide—this design is supposed to help create more player-friendly resistance and increased control. Perhaps it was the synthetic valve guide material, or possibly the silver-plated brass piston stems in this model, that left me feeling quite at ease during the fast tunes. I don't fully grasp the physics, but I can attest to the Allen Vizzutti Limited Edition Custom trumpet being a wonderful instrument with an ease of play that is truly special.

—Jim Jacobs

[usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)

## Denis Wick Pixie-Plunger Combo

### *Specialized Sounds for Trumpet*

Like music stands and valve oil, I consider mutes as basic equipment I must carry in my toolbox. The standard trumpeter's lineup includes the straight, cup, Harmon and plunger mute. I do most of my playing in big bands, which reliably calls for all of these mutes at least once during each gig. They usually reveal themselves for a few bars, or in some cases might not even see any play at all for several gigs in a row, but they serve their intended purpose just enough to keep a permanent place in my gig bag.

The pixie-mute-with-plunger combination pops up on such a rare occasions that many players never bother to get a pixie mute. I have tried to use a

plunger with my regular Humes and Berg stone-lined straight mute, which always proves pointless. Unfortunately, when a typical texture-rich Duke Ellington composition or other sophisticated '40s big band numbers call for a very specific sound quality, you don't want to cheat it by defaulting to a standard straight mute or a plunger by itself.

The very specialized composite sound of a sharp, buzzy pixie straight mute and the wahs of the plunger together create a unique sound quality that extends the possibilities beyond the usual jazz ensemble tonal structures, and thus expands the depth of story the composer can tell within a

piece of music. In addition to the edge and character of the pixie-plunger, the blending sizzle or growl and wah-wah sounds enable a trumpet player to imitate characteristics of the human voice. Everyone knows how much trumpet players like to talk, so you know we dig this aspect more than we probably should. With the pixie and plunger, the trumpet can mock, jest and whoop up some real fun.

When you combine a Denis Wick straight mute designed for an E-flat trumpet with the Denis Wick aluminum plunger mute (complete with hard PVC edges and a flock-sprayed interior) on a B-flat trumpet, you create the desired pixie-plunger combo. The size of the straight mute fits perfectly in the bell, with plenty of room for the plunger to engulf the mute and hug the bell.

Denis Wick's E-flat straight mutes come with three options for the base of the mute: aluminum, brass and bronze. The aluminum version feels weightless and provides the least resistance. The brass-base mute (shown below) produces a slightly buzzier edge to it, but only if you really listen for it. The copper-base mute creates a slightly warmer tone. Otherwise, it's a matter of personal preference involving weight and visual flair.

The plunger mute feels luxurious with its clean PVC edge to keep the integrity of your wahs, while the flock-spray interior does a respectable job of insulating and reflecting the sound. The deep construction gives a much wider range of sounds from closed to fully open as well.

Overall, the construction of the Denis Wick plunger provides much more control and better sound quality, and combining it with the E-flat straight mute brings the advantage of the pixie plunger combo to your arsenal.

—Dan Gorski

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



## Phaeton PHT-2060 Trumpet

### Balanced Response, Snazzy Appearance, Satisfying Sound

From my first glimpse of the PHT-2060 B-flat Trumpet, I responded immediately with a visceral jolt from its black copper antique finish. The flowing mix of brass, copper and brushed nickel throughout the horn creates a distinctly raw, expressive presence. The rare matte-like multi-color finish carries a steam-punk quality that makes ho-hum silver and brass seem quaint. The overall look and feel of the design gives the impression of some foreboding music-producing weapon, forged in an oddly sophisticated basement foundry by Christian Bale's version of the Dark Knight.

After my initial visual inspection of the PHT-2060, I embraced the beautiful beast. And, I soon discovered that this horn that defies traditional expectations and social norms—this confident character of an instrument that could promote itself as hipster-snazzy—performed quite well once I actually played some music.

The trumpet feels substantial to hold, but light when playing. Without any serious effort, I could produce a smooth colorful sound that filled the room, resonating much louder than I expected. I particularly appreciated the low-resistance air flow, which sure would come in handy when I get carried away with exuberant choreography on the bandstand and suddenly realize I have a shout chorus coming my way.

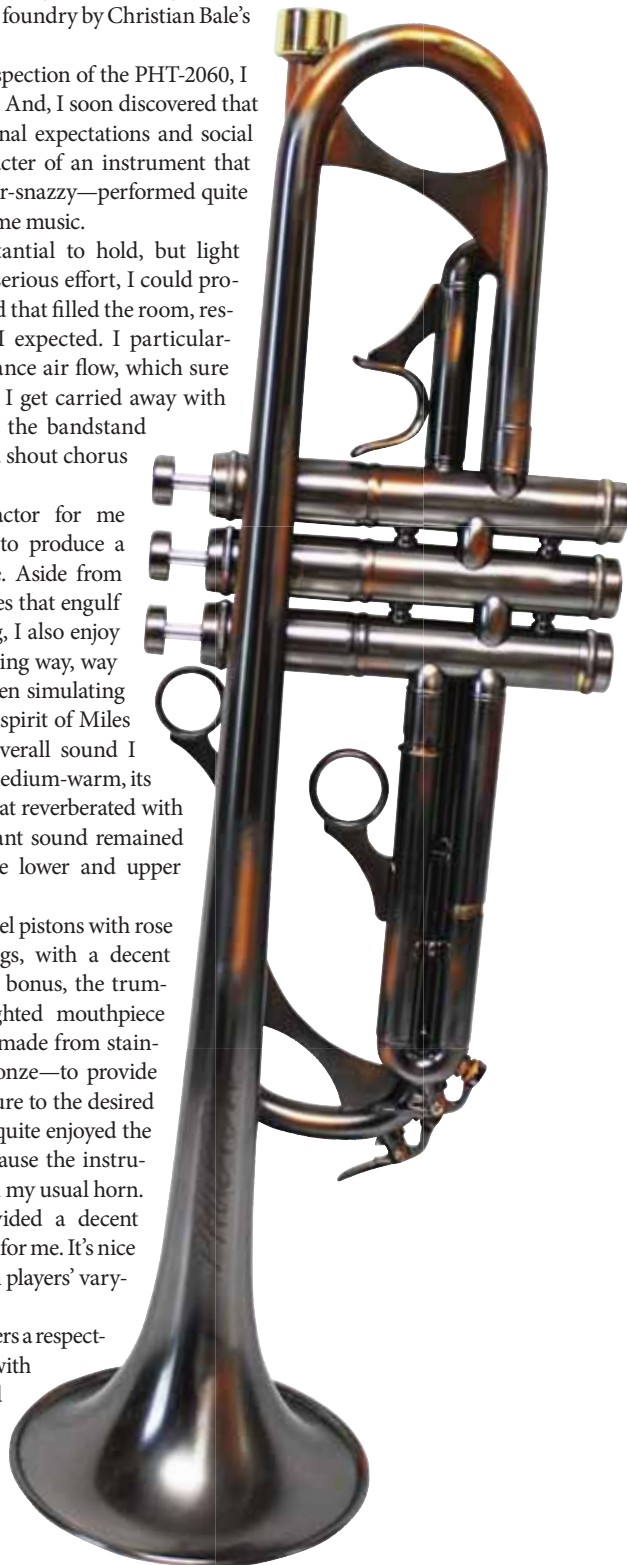
The most important factor for me revolves around the ability to produce a warm tone with rich timbre. Aside from the joy of melodic soundwaves that engulf my soul like a reassuring hug, I also enjoy sitting on fat swing notes, laying way, way back as Basie intended, or even simulating drifting half-thoughts in the spirit of Miles Davis. While I found the overall sound I could produce leaned more medium-warm, its bold fullness added a layer that reverberated with a rich spirit. And, the resonant sound remained remarkably consistent in the lower and upper registers.

The valves consist of Monel pistons with rose brass ports and brass springs, with a decent response and solid feel. As a bonus, the trumpet comes with three weighted mouthpiece receivers (screw-in inserts)—made from stainless steel, aluminum and bronze—to provide additional balance and pressure to the desired comfort level of the player. I quite enjoyed the heaviest weight, possibly because the instrument feels lighter overall than my usual horn. Ultimately, the weight provided a decent anchor and a bit more control for me. It's nice to have such options to match players' varying preferences.

Overall, the PHT-2060 offers a respectable professional instrument, with an ease of play, well-balanced response, striking appearance and a satisfying, full sound.

—Dan Gorski

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







Keyboardist/vocalist Cory Henry (left) performs with Columbia College Chicago's Fusion Ensemble during the 2018 Deep Dish Music Festival.

# Columbia Offers Multifaceted Program

**THE POSTERS ADORNING SCOTT HALL'S** office at Columbia College Chicago would be the envy of any school's band director. Hall—a trumpeter and the director of jazz studies at Columbia—has brought in saxophonist Donny McCaslin, trumpeter Dave Douglas and pianist Barry Harris, among others, to perform with and instruct students.

But rather than separate jazz students from their colleagues, the Columbia faculty encourages inclusion and genre blending through its bachelor degree programs in contemporary, urban and popular music.

"A jazz student is going to learn about jazz and blues, as well as everything else about contemporary music while they're here," Hall said. "Students want to collaborate with other types of artists and styles, have a voice and make a difference in the world. We are going to give them skills to do so—ear-training, how to listen and the process of practicing—so they can apply these fundamental concepts to the type of musical life that they want to have."

Columbia established its CUP program 10 years ago, and about 300 music majors currently are enrolled. Hall and his colleagues present foundational music courses without textbooks and without a typical initial immersion in the classical canon. So, while teaching the fundamentals, Columbia professors draw from the breadth of contemporary music—jazz, as well as gospel, r&b and hip-hop.

"Singing Bach chorales is strengthening, useful and has helped many generations of musicians understand harmony—but it's not the only way to go," said Nathan Bakkum, an associate dean at Columbia. "Dedicating ourselves to contemporary practice means embracing that at every level. So, students are doing contemporary arranging work and talking

about counterpoint using the John Coltrane quartet or Daft Punk as examples, which is different than in most music schools."

Two of the department's faculty members exemplify the CUP approach. Cassandra O'Neal, who recently became the department's practitioner-in-residence, teaches music theory using examples and anecdotes from her time as a keyboardist and musical director for Prince's band. Vocalist Bobbi Wilsyn, who has taught at Columbia for more than 35 years, comes from a more traditional jazz background. Wilsyn has seen how students benefit from understanding the connection between what they're hearing today and the music's roots.

"One of the biggest opportunities we have is to introduce students to artists [from an earlier era]," Wilsyn said. "Students see that there's evolution, so then they can take risks."

Along with a wealth of opportunities to perform, Hall said that Columbia offers a direction for students who want to concentrate on music or include it as part of a wider education. The bachelor of music program includes advanced coursework in performance, as well as management and business requirements.

Columbia's outreach efforts include its Deep Dish Music Festival, an annual event that invites high school and community college ensembles to participate in performances and workshops. McCaslin will serve as the artist-in-residence for this year's festival (to be held March 8), which is designed for ensembles playing jazz, r&b, hip-hop, rock, singer/songwriter, gospel and Latin music.

The school's Manifest Urban Arts Festival, slated for May 10, will include performances and exhibits from artists representing myriad majors and will be held throughout Chicago's South Loop neighborhood. —Aaron Cohen

Nicole Mitchell



**Mitchell to Pitt:** The University of Pittsburgh has named flutist Nicole Mitchell its William S. Dietrich II Endowed Chair in Jazz Studies, effective July 1. Mitchell also will be the director of the university's jazz studies program and a professor in the music department. She will become the third director in the program's 49-year history, succeeding pianist Geri Allen, who passed away in 2017. Mitchell said, "I have big shoes to fill, following the incredible work Geri Allen accomplished, making connections between tradition and innovation. I'm excited to explore the full spectrum of creative possibilities for jazz at Pitt." Mitchell is currently a professor of music at University of California, Irvine, where she teaches composition and improvisation in the graduate program of Integrated Composition, Improvisation and Technology. [music.pitt.edu](http://music.pitt.edu)

**New Fest:** The inaugural Princeton University Jazz Festival will be held on April 13 in Princeton, New Jersey. Performers scheduled to perform include Dave Holland, Donny McCaslin, Pedrito Martinez, Tia Fuller, Ingrid Jensen, Joel Frahm and Charenée Wade. "We are very excited to launch this new festival bringing together a wide array of today's most creative and accomplished jazz artists performing with our remarkably talented students," said saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa, director of jazz at Princeton. [music.princeton.edu](http://music.princeton.edu)

**Austrian Exchange:** Applications will be accepted through March 31 for the Zawinul Foundation for Achievement's international music exchange program. One student from Austria and one student from the United States will be honored for demonstrating exceptional musical talent and passion. The Austrian winner will have a two-week course at Los Angeles College of Music in Pasadena, California, followed by an additional week of private lessons. The U.S. winner will receive a three-week trip to Vienna, Austria, where he or she will attend courses at the Vienna Musician Institute and have private lessons at the Joe Zawinul Music School in Gumpoldskirchen, Austria. [zawinulfoundation.org](http://zawinulfoundation.org)

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## Stefano Bollani

During the JAZZMI Festival in Milan, on the morning after a sold-out concert at the Conservatorio in support of his recent album *Que Bom* (Alobar), Italian pianist Stefano Bollani came to the Teatro dell'Artie to take the Blindfold Test. The interpreter/translator was Isabella Ranieri.

### Cécile McLorin Salvant

"Wild Is Love" (*The Window*, Mack Avenue, 2018) Salvant, vocals; Sullivan Fortner, piano.

I love it. The pianist is playing a kind of Brazilian feel, but with a singer. I have no idea who she is. I also have no idea what the song is. It sounded like "I Love You" by Cole Porter, but then they took that away. I really like this piano player. 5 stars. [after] Actually, I was thinking about Cécile McLorin Salvant, who is one of my favorite singers. I love her voice, her skills—everything. I just saw her play with Aaron Diehl, who played in a totally different way, so I thought: "It's not Aaron Diehl, so probably it's not Cécile."

### Jason Moran

"South Side Digging" (*The Armory Concert*, 2017, YES Records) Moran, piano.

I have no idea of the [artist's] name, of course. You told me there [might be some] contemporary piano players—and usually we musicians prefer to listen to the dead ones. I guess the pianist is somehow related to Romania or to Eastern Europe, because he is making the piano sound like a cimbalom. 3½ stars. [the music resolves into a blues] I thought he was Romanian, and now he sounded like Harlem in the 1930s. [after] Jason's full of different talents and flavors. The flavor that reminded me of Romanian music was just one of them.

### Ehud Asherie

"If You've Never Been Vamped By A Brownskin" (*Shuffle Along*, Blue Heron, 2016) Asherie, piano; Eubie Blake, composer.

There is a chance this guy is dead. He's alive? He's really playing this! *Bellissimo*. I said that probably he's dead because he's playing a precise style from the '20s or '30s. He's definitely *into* that. So, of course, he's not French or Scandinavian. He could be one of these American monsters who can play in a lot of different styles. He has that feeling. A lot of piano players using this style have a different way of phrasing. 5 stars.

### Enrico Pieranunzi

"Simul" (*Proximity*, Camjazz, 2015) Pieranunzi, piano, composer; Ralph Alessi, trumpet.

I liked it. It's the same attitude as many things that I did in a duo with Enrico Rava, but in a more Hindemith kind of world. It is a sonata for trumpet and piano, mixing a waltz vibe with this Hindemith thing. ... I guess that's an attitude we could have developed—but it's not us. I don't know the pianist; I didn't recognize the style. 4 stars. [after] Actually, we were born on the same day, Dec. 5. So is Egberto Gismonti. While the waltz was going on, his left hand was Dave Brubeck-ing.

### Jon Batiste

"Nocturne No. 1 In D Minor" (*Hollywood Africans*, Verve, 2018) Batiste, piano, composer.

It was once easy to decide where a piano player came from. Until the 1960s, if you heard this kind of thing, you would say, "OK, he's from South America." But nowadays, things are mixed a lot, so it's more difficult to guess a musician's background. I liked it. Sometimes it sounded like the soundtrack to a Fritz Lang or Murnau character from the 1920s. Remember Max Schreck, the guy who acted in *Nosferatu*? 4 stars.



### Brad Mehldau Trio

"Great Day" (*Seymour Reads The Constitution!*, Nonesuch, 2018) Mehldau, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass; Jeff Ballard, drums; Paul McCartney, composer.

He's taking his time. Now, the bassist is soloing. I love it. But I have no idea who the musicians are. I don't know the song. It's too difficult, too contemporary. [after] I know the three of them. I've played a lot with Larry and Jeff. So, it's good that I don't recognize them, because it means they are always surprising me. 4 stars.

### Maria Pia De Vito

"Dio ce Penzarrà" (*Core [Coração]*, Jando, 2017) Pia De Vito, vocals; Huw Warren, piano; Roberto Taufic, guitar; Chico Buarque, composer.

This is a Chico Buarque song, but it's another language. Ah, it's Maria Pia De Vito. She made a record where she's singing the lyrics in Neapolitan. It took me awhile, because I couldn't get that it was Neapolitan, at least from this seat, and because I'm used to the original version. I like it very much. I think the piano player is the British guy, Huw Warren, who I like. 4 stars.

### Earl Hines

"It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" (*Earl Hines Plays Duke Ellington Volume Two*, Master Jazz Recordings/New World, 1997/rec'd 1972) Hines, piano.

This is "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing." It sounds like Earl Hines during the 1970s. I really love this guy, and this period, too. My feeling is that he put forth more energy when he was getting older; that he was pushing more, stretching out. 5 stars.

My jazz piano teacher, Luca Flores, loved Earl Hines, so I listened to him a lot when I was young. We practiced on a version of "Blues In Thirds" that he recorded solo during the '60s, which was the first thing I ever arranged for small band, trying to transfer the sound of his chords to the reeds and saxophones, as well as trying to do that on the piano.

### Jaki Byard

"The Hollis Stomp" (*Solo Piano*, Prestige, 1969) Byard, piano, composer.

I don't know this composition or the recording, but it sounds like Jaki Byard. 5 stars. I'm in love with Jaki Byard's music. That's a good example of someone who started from Earl Hines as a point of departure, and then brings the entire thing into contemporary music. He had his own world. He taught me that whatever you use for the music, whatever is your thing, it all depends on the way you mix it with the other things. And he had very good taste.

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.



A man with short brown hair and a light beard, wearing a dark blue patterned shirt and a grey vest, is holding a large brass trumpet. He is standing in front of a dark, industrial-looking background with a large, stylized 'B' logo. The trumpet is a Blessing BFH-1541RT Flugelhorn.

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