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DOWNBEAT

APRIL 2020

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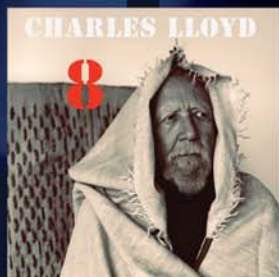


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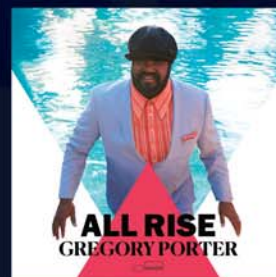
CHARLES LLOYD
8: KINDRED SPIRITS
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Jazz legend **CHARLES LLOYD** celebrated his 80th birthday in 2018 with a grouping of musical friends including guitarist **JULIAN LAGE**, pianist **GERALD CLAYTON**, bassist **REUBEN ROGERS**, and drummer **ERIC HARLAND**, with special guests organist **BOOKER T. JONES**. **8** commemorates the first 8 decades of Lloyd's remarkable journey and arrives in a limited-edition deluxe box set that includes 3-LPs, 2-CDs, and a DVD, along with a 96-page hardcover book and 2 photo prints, as well as standard LP/DVD, CD/DVD, and digital versions.



BILL FRISELL
HARMONY

Acclaimed guitarist **BILL FRISELL** makes his Blue Note debut with **HARMONY**, a gorgeous and evocative journey across the landscape of American music of the last century featuring vocalist **PETRA HADEN**, cellist & vocalist **HANK ROBERTS**, and guitarist, bassist & vocalist **LUKE BERGMAN**.



GREGORY PORTER
ALL RISE

2-time GRAMMY Award winner **GREGORY PORTER** follows his loving tribute to Nat "King" Cole with a return to his deeply soulful original songwriting on **ALL RISE**. The album is a potent mix of jazz, soul, blues, gospel, and pop featuring longtime bandmates pianist **CHIP CRAWFORD**, bassist **JAHMAL NICHOLS**, drummer **EMANUEL HARROLD**, augmented by a horn section, string orchestra, and a dynamic production aesthetic courtesy of **TROY MILLER**.



KANDACE SPRINGS
THE WOMEN WHO RAISED ME

Singer and pianist **KANDACE SPRINGS** pays tribute to the great female singers who influenced her growing up with this stirring collection of songs by Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Carmen McRae, Roberta Flack, Dusty Springfield, Astrud Gilberto, Bonnie Raitt, Sade, Lauryn Hill, Norah Jones, and Diana Krall. Produced by **LARRY KLEIN**, the album features guest appearances by **NORAH JONES**, **CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE**, **DAVID SANBORN** & more.



HERBIE HANCOCK
THE PRISONER
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HERBIE HANCOCK's 1969 album **THE PRISONER** is a powerful but overlooked masterpiece that paid tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King the year after his assassination. The album is part of the **Tone Poet Audiophile Vinyl Reissue Series: all-analog 180g vinyl releases in deluxe gatefold packaging** produced by **JOE HARLEY**, mastered by **KEVIN GRAY** from original master tapes, and manufactured at **RTI**. For more titles visit store.bluenote.com



NDUDUZO MAKHATHINI
MODES OF COMMUNICATION

After collaborations with Wynton Marsalis and Shabaka Hutchings, the visionary South African pianist and composer **NDUDUZO MAKHATHINI** is set to release his Blue Note debut **Modes of Communication: Letters from the Underworlds**, an expansive album in which lyrical, plaintive horns mingle with percussion, pained yelps and urgent lyrics in a musical exploration of ancestral realms.

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APRIL 2020

Inside

ON THE COVER

26 Gregory Porter *'Past the Gates of Genres'*

BY JOSEF WOODARD

DownBeat catches up with Gregory Porter in his hometown of Bakersfield, California, to discuss his sixth studio effort, *All Rise*. The stunning album, which features original compositions that explore various aspects of love, reflects the singer-songwriter's gospel roots and his desire to blend genres.

FEATURES

32 Delfeayo Marsalis

Merchant of Joy

BY TED PANKEN

36 Dave Liebman

'Conscious of Every Breath'

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

40 Lakecia Benjamin

Pursuing a Spiritual Quest

BY SUZANNE LORGE

64 Musicians' Gear Guide

Best of The NAMM Show

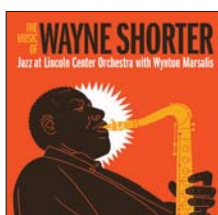


Cover photo of Gregory Porter shot by Hyou Vielz

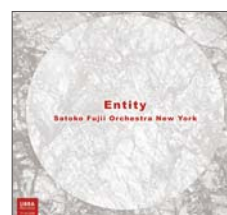
ERIKA GOLDRING



48 Shabaka & The Ancestors



50 Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra



51 Satoko Fujii Orchestra New York



52 José James

SPECIAL SECTION

73 Brass School

74 Practicing for Endurance

BY REX RICHARDSON

78 Master Class

BY IAN CAREY

80 Pro Session

BY JOHN RAYMOND

82 Transcription

Nick Finzer Trombone Solo

84 Toolshed

DEPARTMENTS

8 First Take

10 Chords & Discords

13 The Beat

16 Brecker & Rovatti

19 Jeremy Cunningham

22 Jimmy Heath

45 Reviews

86 Jazz On Campus

90 Blindfold Test

Paolo Fresu



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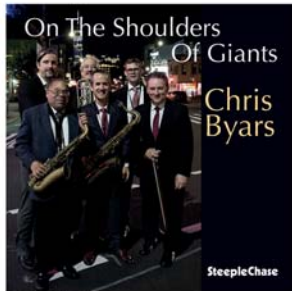
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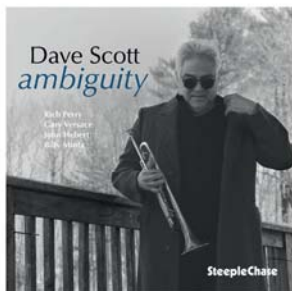
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Gregory Porter's new album is titled *All Rise*.

Injection of Positivity

IN OUR COVER STORY ON SINGER-SONGWRITER GREGORY Porter, he talks about how he can win over fans at festivals, and about how his music has a spiritual, therapeutic dimension.

Many people in the jazz world—including yours truly—have witnessed the following scenario at a festival: Fans who seemingly have never heard of Porter (and those who are skeptical of him) are milling about, dejectedly standing in line to get a beverage, intently staring at their phones or casually talking to friends. Then, as Porter kicks his set into high gear, and injects it with gospel fervor, people stop whatever they're doing and turn their attention to the stage. Folks who were not interested 10 minutes ago suddenly are clapping along and literally dancing in the aisles. It's almost as if they were touched by a supernatural force. At that moment, audience members not only feel overjoyed, they feel connected to the people around them.

During Porter's conversation with DownBeat journalist Josef Woodard, the singer talked about his early performance experiences, which took place at churches and religious gatherings: "These tent services or outdoor services were a big thing. These were some of my first moments of public singing, outside of my mother's church. At the outdoor services, I remember having a feeling of being touched, spiritually, by God. So, the song 'Thank You' is a 'thank you' to the people who helped me—my mother, my family. In my mind, I'm also singing 'thank you' to my fans now."

That revelatory comment didn't make it into our cover story, which begins on page 26. (Porter had so many interesting things to say, we couldn't pack them all into the article.)

As a person and as a performer, Porter exudes positivity. He's managed to weather storms of conflict—including incidents of racism—and become an artist who celebrates justice, inclusiveness and the power of song. He told Woodard, "I'm thankful for these [past] moments of conflict, in a way. You form your life and how you want to live and how you want to be, and how you think of other people—'others.' When you've tasted 'otherness,' you want to not be that way. You taste it, bigotry. You want to be as open and positive as you can be with people."

Trying to be the best person you possibly can be: That's a concept everyone can support, regardless of their taste in music, their social status or their political stance. Not only is Porter a brilliant entertainer, he seems to be the therapist our society needs right now.

KEN WEINGART

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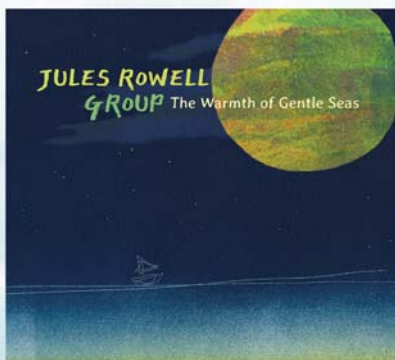


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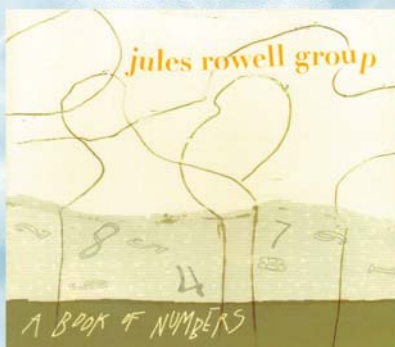
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Rex Richardson
- Rex Richardson

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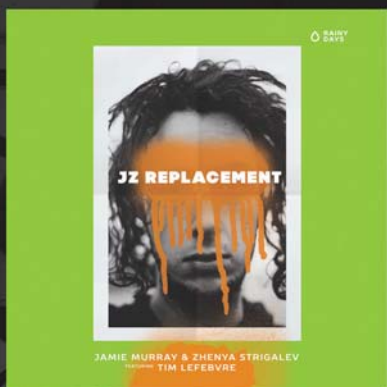


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Amazing Longevity

So, 3½ stars for the Lee Konitz Nonet's *Old Songs New*, bestowed by reviewer Alex W. Rodriguez in your February issue? How generous for some splendid music by a 92-year-old. Is it not miraculous that the sole survivor from the legendary *Birth Of The Cool* sessions now presents another nonet, with unique instrumentation, playing with unimpaired beauty and imagination seven decades later?

I would give Lee 5 stars for just breaking wind! But maybe I'm prejudiced, having just become a fellow nonagenarian. We must stick together!

DAN MORGENSTERN
DMORGENS@SCARLETMAIL.RUTGERS.EDU



A Salute to Lyle Mays

Lyle Mays came of age at a time when jazz and electronic music slammed into each other like two cars colliding at an intersection. But instead of turning that collision into something chaotic, like a lot of early fusion, Mays put things into a slow-motion perspective. His expansive harmonies brought out the true voice and expression of these new electronic instruments.

While experimenters like Tangerine Dream and Jean-Michel Jarre were getting lost in the technology, and mundane, repetitive sequencing, Mays' approach (influenced heavily by Bill Evans) created entirely new, fresh sounds. Music—not just jazz—would never sound the same again.

If there is any doubt, just scroll through any modern synthesizer and you'll find the sounds that Lyle made famous built in as standard patches. Anyone who has paid attention to the significance of synthesizers in the evolution of modern music can point to Lyle Mays in the late 1970s, with his original Oberheim Four Voice synthesizer.

You can hear the evolution of his sound creations, from the Pat Metheny Group's self-titled album (1978), to the fully formed signature Lyle Mays sounds on *American Garage* (1979), to the Grammy-winning album *Offramp* (1982).

Lyle Mays' recordings and the time stamp they leave behind will resonate profoundly for anyone who is really listening.

BRIAN MALONE
BRIAN@MALONETV.COM

More Love for Lyle Mays

Lyle Mays' absence will take me time to sort through. He had such a command of melody, a deftness with complex rhythmic juxtaposition, a supple shifting of left hand/right hand emphasis. He played synthesizers as if their sounds were breathed—not struck or programmed.

I'm emotional about his death, because

I'm grateful for his gifts—but also for selfish reasons, because I'll never get to hear what more this guy could have done.

TED SAMORE
TED@TEDSAMORE.COM

Celebrating a 'Groovy' Box Set

Thank you to Bill Milkowski for his feature on Jimi Hendrix and the box set *Songs For Groovy Children* in your February issue.

One thing the article failed to mention is the fact that the box set is missing perhaps five songs—so it's not truly complete, but it is still great and long overdue. Those missing songs can be found on various bootlegs of the Band of Gypsys' Fillmore East concerts.

STEVE SKERRETT
MR.JAZZFUSIONHIPHOP@GMAIL.COM

Corrections

- In the print edition of the March issue, in *The Beat*, the caption for the photo of Rachael Price and Vilray misspelled the band name Lake Street Dive.
- In the March cover story, the photo credit for Steven Sussman was missing from the concert photo of Pat Metheny and Linda May Han Oh.
- In the Reviews section of the March issue, a composition credit was misattributed in the review of vocalist Michelle Lordi's *Break Up With The Sound*. Lordi and guitarist Tim Motzer wrote the song "Double-Crossed." Additionally, in the lead Hot Box review of the Karrin Allyson Sextet's *Shoulder To Shoulder: Centennial Tribute To Women's Suffrage*, there was an inaccuracy regarding the development of commercial radio. All the aforementioned errors have been corrected in the digital edition of the March issue.

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

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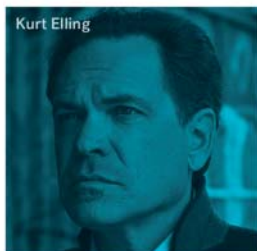
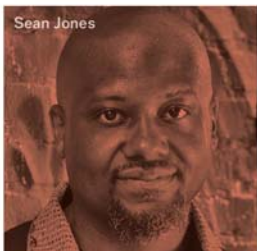
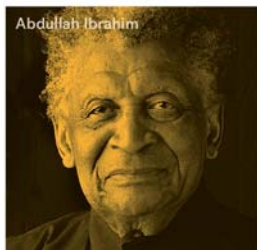
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ARTISTS, PRICES AND PROGRAMS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

February 28

**Abdullah Ibrahim
& Ekaya**

March 21

SFJAZZ Collective celebrates
the 50th anniversaries of Miles Davis'
In a Silent Way and Sly & the
Family Stone's *Stand!*
with special guest
Dee Dee Bridgewater

April 3

Fly Higher: Charlie Parker @ 100
featuring Rudresh Mahanthappa and
Terri Lyne Carrington, Charenée Wade,
Adam O'Farrill, Kris Davis,
Larry Grenadier and DJ Kassa Overall
Sean Jones Quartet

April 17

Artemis featuring Renee Rosnes,
Anat Cohen, Melissa Aldana, Ingrid
Jensen, Noriko Ueda and Allison Miller
Jazzmeia Horn

May 1

Kurt Elling and special guests
celebrate the 25th anniversary of
Close Your Eyes

June 5

Dianne Reeves *Beleza Brazil*

The

Inside >

- 14 / Winter JazzFest
- 15 / Haden Triplets
- 16 / Brecker & Rovatti
- 20 / European Scene
- 22 / Jimmy Heath
- 24 / Lyle Mays

Beat

Actress Close, Saxophonist Nash Explore 'Transformation' at JALC

A few years ago, actress Glenn Close and saxophonist Ted Nash started to toss around ideas for a new collaborative project. They were fresh off the success of Nash's Grammy-winning recording, *Presidential Suite: Eight Variations On Freedom* (Motéma), which had featured Close's spoken word, and Nash had just received a commission from Jazz at Lincoln Center for another such inspired work.

On Jan. 30–Feb. 1, they presented that new project, *Transformation with Glenn Close and Ted Nash*, in the Rose Theater at JALC. A kaleidoscopic pastiche of music, dance and recited texts, the two-hour program focused on several socially charged issues—racial and religious discrimination, gender identity, sexual orientation, addiction, the environment, justice. With this program, however, they sought not to incite or challenge, but to invite the kind of personal reflection that leads to deeper social transformation.

"We wanted to create an evening that would comfort and inspire people," Close said in a joint phone interview with Nash. A piece, she added, that underscores "our common humanity."

Close took on the formidable task of curating the texts for such an effort, and Nash, a JLCO member and composer, wrote or arranged all of the music. To begin, Close selected excerpts from a few classic literary works that held transformation as their underlying theme.

"[These pieces] were so absolutely perfect for what we were trying to express," Close said. "They're the foundation on which I built the rest."

At the top of the program, Nash and the 15-piece JLCO introduced "Creation," from poet Ted Hughes' *Tales from Ovid*, using only a smat-



Ted Nash conducts the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra during a presentation of *Transformation*.

FRANK STEWART

tering of sounds, tossed out randomly before the audience had quieted. Soon, Close and actor Wayne Brady took the stage and delved into Hughes' retelling of humankind's birth—the "transmogrifications in the stuff of life"—against the spare backdrop of Nash's composition.

Probably no story was more personal than Nash's own. "My son [Eli] is transgender, and he wrote a piece about that," Nash said.

That piece, "Dear Dad"—performed by Eli on two nights and actor/transgender advocate Morgan Sullivan on another—is a gentle explanation of Eli's decision to transition to a male body. Over Nash's sweet, subdued accompaniment, Eli's words spoke of transgendered individuals as just "another beautiful color" in the "rainbow of diversity that is the human species."

"There are so many personal stories being told [here]," said Nash, whose galvanizing through-composed pieces reflected the evening's narratives and enriched their telling.

Intriguingly, one of the most viscerally touching stories of the evening was wordless. As Nash led the orchestra, modern dancer Nijawwon Matthews moved from shame to pride while looking into a mirror, throwing off societally imposed denigration of his African American identity.

But Close also knew that she wanted to include a scene from Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. In it, Close and Brady describe the heavenward ascent of newly departed souls who join hands to form a network that saves the Earth from humanity's destructiveness. Its message: On the other side of transformation lies redemption.

With *Transformation*, Close completes her fifth project with JLCO. Through these collaborations, she's changed, too: "I used to be intimidated by jazz," she said. "But now I feel that it is a really profound expression of the human spirit."

—Suzanne Lorge



Diana Krall

MARY MCCARTNEY

Newport News: The Newport Jazz Festival has announced the performers for its 2020 edition, to be held at Fort Adams State Park in Rhode Island Aug. 7–9. It's a litany of top-tier talent, with a number of notable return performers, including pianist/vocalist Diana Krall, who's making her first Newport appearance in about 20 years. Robert Glasper is set to play each day of the fest, and Wynton Marsalis, Charles Lloyd, Jimmy Cliff, Hiromi and Joe Lovano all are included in the lineup.

newportjazz.org

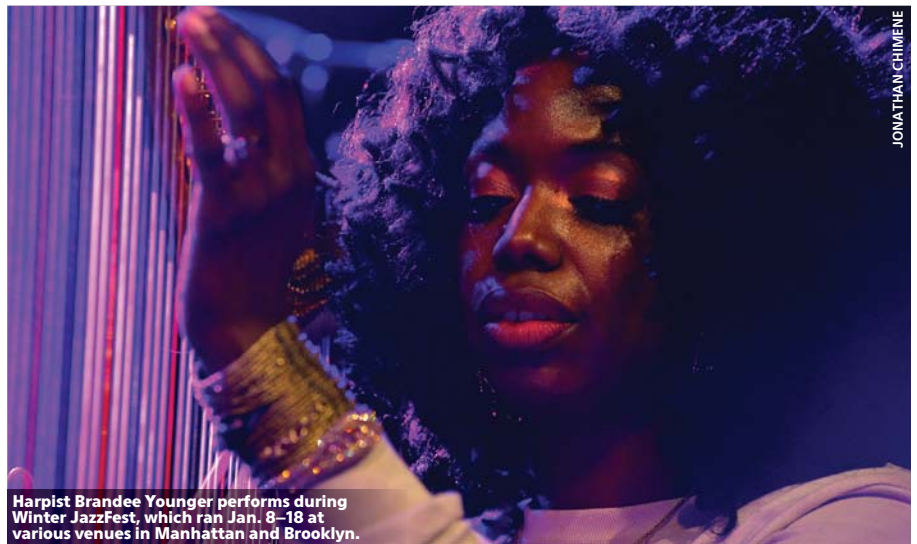
Kamasi on Film: Los Angeles-based saxophonist Kamasi Washington has released a concert film through Amazon Music, *Kamasi Washington Live At The Apollo Theater*. The February 2019 performance alongside his ensemble The Next Step features selections from the bandleader's ever-expanding discography, including work from *The Epic*, *Harmony Of Difference* and *Heaven And Earth*. West Coasters DJ Battlecat and vocalist Dwight Trible also contribute to the set.

music.amazon.com

LiPuma Literature: Pianist and writer Ben Sidran is set to release *The Ballad of Tommy LiPuma* (Nardis Books), a work that covers the Grammy-winning producer's career alongside luminaries like Miles Davis, The O'Jays, Barbra Streisand and George Benson. The book is due out May 5 in print and as an e-book.

bensidran.com/project/nardisbooks

In Memorium: New Orleans trombonist Lucien Barbarin, a member of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band and Harry Connick Jr.'s big band, died Jan. 30 after battling prostate cancer. He was 63. ... South African vocalist Joseph Shabalala, who founded Ladysmith Black Mambazo, died Feb. 11 at the age of 78. Shabalala began performing during the 1960s, offering Zulu culture to an international audience and catching the attention of stars like Paul Simon, who would collaborate with the vocalist on the heralded 1986 album *Graceland*.



Harpist Brandee Younger performs during Winter JazzFest, which ran Jan. 8–18 at various venues in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

JONATHAN CHIMENE

Winter JazzFest Embraces Physical, Mental Well-Being

WINTER JAZZFEST'S ALREADY TREMENDOUS musical scope has been widening in recent years to include crucial ideas and concepts from within the jazz community. Social justice has been an ongoing concern, with festival-sponsored panels addressing the questions of race, gender and immigration. And for WJF's 2020 iteration, which ran Jan. 8–18 at various venues across New York and Brooklyn, it added a major new component: physical and mental wellness.

"This conversation needs to normalize talking about mental health, talking about wellness," said Jennifer Leff, senior director of health and human services at MusiCares, while moderating a Jan. 12 panel of artists sharing stories about their struggles. "There's this taboo notion that people don't share. ... We need to talk more, and that's why this is happening."

Also on the panel was Revive Music founder Meghan Stabile, who already had lived up to Leff's urgings: The night before, during a wellness benefit concert called "Revive Yo Feelings" at Webster Hall, she delivered a raw, unflinching monologue during which she acknowledged that she had been raped at the age of 5—but that when she told her family, nobody believed her.

"It was an experience that taught me what neglect felt like, what betrayal felt like, what abandonment felt like," she said, adding that she had turned to drugs and alcohol, and finally a suicide attempt, to cope.

The wellness theme filtered down into the festival's music, especially WJF's signature two-night marathon event. This year, the marathon was spread across venues scattered around Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side. Not all of its 106 performances touched on wellness, though. While it was an ongoing topic at Webster Hall on Jan. 11—with luminescent sets by harpist

Brandee Younger, drummer Makaya McCraven and keyboardist Robert Glasper, punctuated by poetry and testimonials about wellness—virtuoso guitarist Pasquale Grasso never mentioned the word at Zinc Bar. He just got down to business, speaking only to introduce his trio and each of the compositions, which he performed with jaw-dropping prowess. The trio's rendition of "Bebop" was a miracle.

Artists drew from a broad palette in addressing the theme. On one hand, there was MAE.SUN's serene, stratospheric Jan. 10 set at The Dance on Lafayette Street. The sextet's leader, saxophonist and flutist Hailey Niswanger, mentioned wellness and healing only in passing, yet also seemed to tether her music to it with an opening benediction: "Let's meditate together." On the other hand, trumpeter Steven Bernstein, playing with his Millennial Territory Orchestra at Le Poisson Rouge earlier that same night, mentioned it explicitly—indeed, he literally shouted, "Wellness!" as the spirit moved him.

Of course, attendees could draw strength and healing from the music however they wanted. There were no tune titles—in fact, almost no words at all—during Blacks Myths' Jan. 10 gig at Nublu. Bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Warren "Trae" Crudup III simply locked in, playing music that often surged into aggressive bursts on the drums or powerfully plucked riffs on the electric bass. More often, though, it was just a sympathetic demonstration of ideas, Crudup shifting into place to accompany Stewart's otherworldly, buzzsaw-like hums, or the bassist building up the funk to match Crudup's pointed figures.

If this inspiring chemistry didn't promote wellness, nothing did. —Michael J. West

Hadens Find Songs' Simplicity



Tanya (left), Rachel and Petra Haden have recorded a new album of music associated with their grandfather.

FOR ALL THE ADVENTUROUS CHORD SUBstitutions and complex solos musicians might enjoy playing, it's good to remember that the heart of music often is quite simple. It can be tempting to get lost in the fields of imagination, rather than appreciate the spirit that nourishes those fields.

The Haden Triplets' second album, *The Family Songbook* (Trimeter/Thirty Tigers), is all about that spirit. Planted in the folk tradition that was the creative foundation for their father—the late bassist and DownBeat Hall of Fame inductee Charlie Haden—these 12 songs are akin to vintage black-and-white photos, haunted by hints of history and long-forgotten stories. Petra, Rachel and Tanya Haden render them with delicacy, love and respect. Their singing is warm and pure, with minimal vibrato and triads placed squarely on beats, rather than swung.

The sisters began thinking about *The Family Songbook* after completing their eponymous album in 2014. "We love that record," Petra said. "But right away, we started talking about trying to do something more along the lines of a Haden family songbook."

"*Rambling Boy* was our dad's vision of doing a family album," Tanya added, referencing Charlie Haden's 2008 recording and its stellar lineup of guest artists. "But it didn't turn out to be specifically our family. Even back then, we were thinking, 'God, it would be nice to do a real Haden family album: the music of our grandfather.'"

That gentleman, Carl E. Haden, performed frequently on rural radio during the Depression era, singing original compositions as well as familiar tunes of the day. He died when the triplets were just 3 years old, but they grew up aware of his story. So, when serious work on *The Family Songbook* began, they asked their uncle, Carl Haden Jr., to look through his home back in Missouri for souvenirs of his dad's work. He came up with a small booklet of songs, which

longtime family friend Woody Jackson transcribed and delivered to the sisters.

"We pressed the 'record' button, picked out harmonies and sang," Rachel recalled. "And all of a sudden these songs came to life. That was so great, because we'd only heard stories about Carl from our dad."

At Electro-Vox Recording Studios in Los Angeles, with Jackson producing, they interpreted four of their grandfather's compositions: "Ozark Moon," "Gray Mother Dreaming," "Memories Of Will Rogers" and "Who Will You Love." Most of the other tracks reflect Carl's aesthetic and the times in which he lived. The sisters knew some of the tunes well; others were new to them.

But "Wayfaring Stranger," the album's opening cut, always has held special meaning for them. "Our father sang this song," Petra explained. "It was the one song he wanted to sing on the Quartet West album *The Art Of The Song* [1999], even though he hadn't sung since he was a kid because polio had ruined his voice."

"When we started recording it, Rachel started the vocal alone," she continued. "I joined in a little later and sang the melody along with her. Then Tanya came in, singing the melody. When one of us started to sing a harmony, Woody said, 'It sounds beautiful as it is. Let's just keep it in unison.'"

The Family Songbook's ultimate success lies in how Jackson and the sisters framed these tunes in ways that make the music feel intimate: the deep tremolo of Bill Frisell's electric guitar, Greg Leisz's ephemeral steel and Joachim Cooder's drums—when there are any—distant and spare, adding to the atmosphere more than keeping time.

"We want to show the purity of this kind of music," Tanya said. "If you can use technology to do that, it's not a bad thing. Music isn't a competition about who can make the biggest or most complex thing. Sometimes, it's just nice to hear the song."
—Bob Doerschuk



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Saxophonist Ada Rovatti composed all the songs on a recent album that features her husband, trumpeter Randy Brecker.

Brecker, Rovatti Team Up on New Album

WHEN SAXOPHONIST MICHAEL BRECKER died from a rare blood disorder in early 2007, trumpeter Randy Brecker lost both a brother and a bandmate. Together, they formed one of the most powerful front lines in jazz.

These days, Ada Rovatti, Randy's wife of 19 years, is ably holding down the saxophone chair in a reconstituted edition of the Brecker Brothers Band. At the same time, she's supplying fresh compositions and an emotional boost to her husband.

"We're as close as can be," Brecker said as he gazed at Rovatti over a salad at their Long Island home during January.

The simpatico was evident on the bandstand a few days later as the couple—fronting a septet Randy dubbed the Brecker Brothers Band 2020—dazzled on the second night of a midweek engagement at the Broadway club Iridium. Sparks flew between the two, from the opener, 1975's "Sponge," to the closer, "Some Skunk Funk," the title track of a 2005

concert album that earned Randy one of his seven Grammy awards.

The couple's closeness was especially apparent halfway through the 90-minute set, when the band launched into "Sacred Bond," a riveting Rovatti original inspired by the couple's feelings for their 11-year-old daughter, Stella. As Rovatti's tenor reached into the upper registers, a knowing glance yielded to an uncharacteristically wide smile on Brecker's face, softening his countenance.

"Sacred Bond" was drawn from a new album of her original compositions, *Brecker Plays Rovatti: Sacred Bond* (Piloo). So, too, were the soulful "Reverence," an ode to Aretha Franklin, and the episodic "The Baggage," a ballad that morphed into a no-holds-barred colloquy between drummer Rodney Holmes and percussionist Café Da Silva. Both musicians also appear on the album, as do the others who performed at the Iridium gig: guitarist Adam Rogers, keyboardist David Kikoski and

bassist Alexander Claffy.

The album, 10 tunes in all, was a long time coming. Rovatti, a native of Italy who studied at Berklee College of Music, met Brecker in 1996. Randy was a star, she an inexperienced 19-year-old saxophonist. But Rovatti has played classical piano since age 4. "My first language is really music," she said. "I learned music before I learned words." And over the years her saxophone playing evolved. In 2003, she appeared on Randy's Grammy-winning album *34th N Lex* (ESC), one of three saxophonists—the others were the veterans Ronnie Cuber on baritone and David Sanborn on tenor—to join Michael Brecker among the personnel.

That same year, Randy appeared on Rovatti's second album, *Under The Hat* (Apria), alongside luminaries Mike Stern (guitar) and Don Alias (percussion).

Two years later, when Michael became ill, Randy tapped Rovatti to fill in at a live performance with the Brecker group and Igor Butman's big band in Russia. The rest is musical—and marital—history.

"She was kind of thrust into it," Brecker explained. "It was trial by fire. She learned all the tunes and sounded great. She didn't try to play like Mike. I don't want someone to sound like Mike, specifically. There's an influence there, but she really sounds like herself."

To be sure, Rovatti has assimilated the Brecker-like synthesis of John Coltrane and King Curtis. And her study methods recall Michael's—keeping voluminous notes, which are stored in her music room down the hall from Randy's in the converted basement of the home that they also share with two cats. Michael's notebooks now are a part of his archive at William Paterson University.

"He wrote everything down," Brecker said. "Ada's the same way."

But there are distinct differences. For starters, Michael abandoned the soprano saxophone, while Rovatti concentrates on it—as evidenced by her wicked turn at the Iridium gig on "Above And Below," the vehicle for which Randy earned a Grammy nomination for best jazz instrumental solo in 1993. This year, Randy won in that category for "Sozinho," off *Rocks* (Piloo), a collaboration with the NDR Bigband, for which Rovatti plays both soprano and tenor.

Ultimately, Rovatti might be most distinguished by the particulars of her writing. In the sly dissonances of "Mirror" (a reflection, she said, "on a woman struggling to see who she used to be"), the brooding inflections of "Helping Hand" (a plea to "help in a world without much kindness") and the pulsating lyricism of "Sacred Bond"—all on the new album—she adds to an oeuvre shaped in no small measure by the personal and professional influence of her husband. —Phillip Lutz



Carla Bley / Andy Sheppard / Steve Swallow
Life Goes On

Carla Bley piano
Andy Sheppard tenor and soprano saxophones
Steve Swallow bass

“Musical mastery of a rare order” is how The Telegraph recently described the unique, collective sound of Carla Bley’s long-standing trio. The striking album of three suites of new music begins with a stoical blues, at first melancholic then hopeful. The second piece is full of plenty of Bley’s dark wit, and the third explores the notion of call-and-response. Throughout, Carla’s distinctive piano is beautifully framed by Swallow’s eloquent, elegant bass guitar and Sheppard’s yearning saxes.



Wolfgang Muthspiel
Angular Blues

Wolfgang Muthspiel guitar
Scott Colley double bass
Brian Blade drums

The Austrian guitarist is paired here with long-time collaborator Brian Blade on drums and Scott Colley, whose especially earthy sound helps give this trio its own dynamic. Muthspiel alternates between acoustic and electric guitar playing his characteristically melodic originals and some standards.



Avishai Cohen
Big Vicious

Avishai Cohen trumpet, effects, synthesizer
Uzi Ramirez guitar
Yonatan Albalak guitar, bass
Aviv Cohen drums
Ziv Ravitz drums, live sampling

“We’re all coming from jazz, but some of us left it earlier”, Avishai says, summing up the stylistic reach of his cohorts. “Everyone’s bringing in their backgrounds, and that becomes part of the sound of the band.” Textures from electronica, ambient music and psychedelia are part of the blend, so too grooves and beats from rock, pop, trip-hop and more. A wide-open approach is also integral to the Vicious vision.



Oded Tzur
Here Be Dragons

Oded Tzur tenor saxophone
Nitai Hershkovits piano
Petros Klampanis double bass
Johnathan Blake drums

This is the ECM debut of New York based, Tel Aviv born saxophonist Oded Tzur, a strikingly original player and musical storyteller. His graceful and fluid tenor sax sound has been influenced by studies with bansuri master Hariprasad Chaurasia, and the concept of raga is subtly embedded in his elegant compositions, played with verve and imagination by his outstanding Israeli-Greek-American jazz group.

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BOB JAMES

Once Upon A Time:
The Lost 1965 New York Studio Sessions

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Previously-unissued studio recordings from jazz piano icon **Bob James** captured with no audience at Wollman Auditorium in NYC on January 20 & October 9, 1965 by Resonance founder **George Klabin**. This limited-edition 180g LP features James in two different trio settings with a mix of straight-ahead jazz standards and experimental original compositions. Includes an extensive booklet with rare photos by **Tom Copi**; essays by jazz writer **Mark Stryker** (*Jazz from Detroit*) & engineer **George Klabin**; plus interviews with Bob James, Bob Pozar and pianist **Makoto Ozone**. Mastered by **Bernie Grundman**, cut at 33 1/3 RPM and pressed by RTI. [AVAILABLE APRIL 18]

BILL EVANS

Some Other Time:
The Lost Session from the Black Forest



Limited-edition 2LP second pressing of the only studio album ever made by **Bill Evans** with **Eddie Gomez** and **Jack DeJohnette**. Recorded in the Black Forest 5 days after their tour de force show in 1968 at the Montreux Jazz Festival. Newly mastered by renowned engineer **Kevin Gray** at Coherent Audio, cut at 33 1/3 and pressed at RTI. Includes 8-pg insert of rare photos taken at the actual session by **German Hasenfratz**; essays by acclaimed writer/author **Marc Myers** and MPS studio manager **Friedhelm Schulz**; plus interviews with Gomez, DeJohnette and more. [AVAILABLE APRIL 18]

Yeager Pursues Sociopolitical Path

PIANIST JASON YEAGER HAS A PENCHANT for combining his artistry with an interest in cultural and societal issues. That combination is particularly potent on his new album, *New Songs Of Resistance* (Outside In).

Yeager already had established impressive credentials even before the recording was released last fall. Through a dual-degree program involving New England Conservatory and Tufts University, he earned degrees in music and international relations, and then earned a master's degree from the Berklee Global Jazz Institute. He currently is an assistant professor at Berklee, where he has taught since 2012.

In addition to performing with the Ayn Inserto Jazz Orchestra, Yeager's collaborators have included violinist Jason Anick and saxophonist Randal Despommier, with whom he will give a duo performance on Carnegie Hall on May 20.

"When I decided to get my master's, I had to craft a thesis with a recording," Yeager explained during a January interview at the Jazz Education Network conference in New Orleans. "I recalled the time during junior year in college when I spent a semester in Argentina, where I learned about *nueva canción* protest music. And I went back to that music as a foundation for my thesis."

Nueva canción, or "new song," arose in the 1950s and '60s in South America and combined folkloric rhythms and instrumentation with lyrics that promoted democracy and criticized political dictatorships. Yeager explored that music deeply, especially artists such as Chile's Victor Jara and Violeta Parra, Brazil's Chico Buarque and Argentina's León Gieco.

Panamanian pianist Danilo Pérez, who was Yeager's primary teacher at NEC, encouraged his efforts to combine jazz with Latin American folkloric rhythms.

"When I got back, Danilo asked me to play Monk's 'Ask Me Now' using *chacarera*, an Argentinian folk rhythm," Yeager recalled. "Pérez used folk rhythms on Monk tunes on [his 1996 album] *PanaMonk*. I see now the seeds for [my] latest record were planted years earlier.

"In coming up with my thesis, those *nueva canción* songs made me think about the relationship between music and politics; I wanted to explore how that relationship might work today. I took a real deep dive, not just into rhythmic and stylistic ideas, but into the his-



Pianist Jason Yeager's latest album reflects his strong interest in Latin American composers.

tory and context of that music.

"I put everything I had into the recording and hired the best musicians around Berklee. Everyone on the record is on faculty or a student. And everyone played great."

On the new album, Yeager recruited three vocalists—Erini, Farayi Malek and Mirella Costa—to help him explore songs by Jara, Parra, Buarque and Gieco. He wrote new arrangements for a piano trio setting (with electric bass), as well as ones that incorporate other instrumentation, including trumpet, flugelhorn, clarinet, bass clarinet and cello.

"I love that blend of strings, woodwinds and brass," Yeager explained. "I was trying to get an orchestral feeling from as few instruments as possible, and get a wide range of color and timbre that formed a warm foundation that enveloped the [singer's] voice sonically."

Yeager also wrote his own protest songs, including "The Facts" and "In Search Of Truth." The latter composition has lyrics that critique leaders who make misleading statements.

"Once the album was done," Yeager said, "we played it [onstage]. In Washington, D.C., a man said, 'My politics are directly opposed to yours. But that didn't once stop me from enjoying what you were doing. Freedom of expression is what makes this country what it is. You need to keep going and if you stop, that's when we have a real problem.' That was really moving to me."

—Terry Perkins



Drummer Jeremy Cunningham enlisted Jeff Parker, Jaimie Branch, Makaya McCraven and others to play on his new album.

Cunningham's Personal Message

ABOUT 12 YEARS AGO, DRUMMER JEREMY Cunningham had plenty of reasons to feel that his life was going well. He was finishing a rigorous program at the University of Cincinnati's conservatory and planned to enroll at the Manhattan School of Music. But everything changed on Jan. 5, 2008, when his brother, Andrew, was murdered during a home invasion. Cunningham experienced shock, horror and sorrow at the news—but also a determination to respond.

"It was always something that was in the back of my mind: How can I write something that would honor my brother?" Cunningham said.

"How can I let people understand what happens to a person, to a family, a community as a result of gun violence?"

Cunningham tells that story through a combination of music, recorded conversations and spoken recitations on *The Weather Up There* (Northern Spy). The album's tone conveys myriad emotions as his rage surrounding the murder runs alongside sunnier childhood memories. Dynamic, sometimes ethereal, grooves deliver these thoughts in surprising ways. Sparse instrumental arrangements move from nuanced electric keyboard passages to a drum choir that

includes fellow Chicagoans Mike Reed and Makaya McCraven.

A conversation with Reed also sparked Cunningham's decision to make the album about more than just his brother's death. "Mike asked me if I was going to tell my daughter about how my brother died or tell her other things about him," he said. "And I said, 'You're right, I can't just make this about the worst day of his life. It has to be a full picture of the person.'"

As Cunningham worked with co-producers Jeff Parker and Paul Bryan to turn motifs into fully formed compositions, he was writing with other longtime associates in mind, including saxophonist Josh Johnson. But he also allowed space for them to bring in their own ideas.

"Jeremy might have had a song that wasn't quite what it had the potential to be, then they would change the arrangement and there would be a different prompt for me to work from," Johnson said. "Sometimes that meant taking the song and completely turning it on its head. That speaks to his dedication to getting it right."

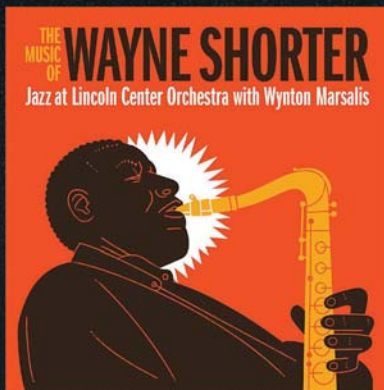
With the album, the bandleader hopes to raise awareness about gun violence and about laws that would restrict access to weapons like the assault rifle used to murder his brother. "You turn on the news right now you'll hear a terrible story," Cunningham said. "Maybe hearing [a news] story isn't enough. Maybe you have to experience it a different way." —Aaron Cohen



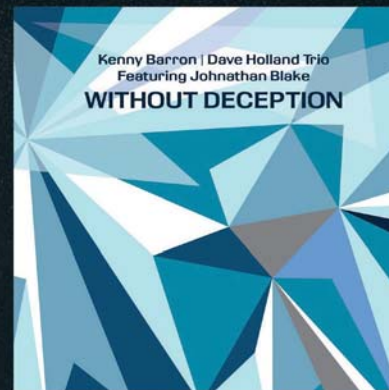
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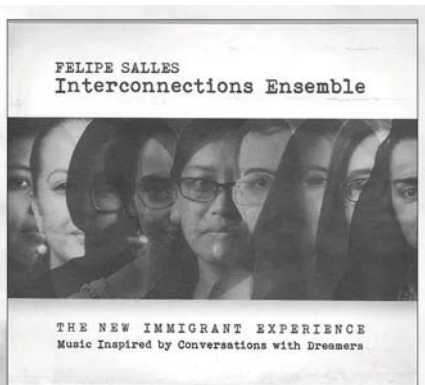


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Thomas: Prolific, Unheralded



Keyboardist and improviser Pat Thomas, 59, has been a prolific polymath on the U.K. jazz and improv scene for four decades, working in a dizzying array of projects and styles. Yet, he remains an overlooked figure in much of the world, especially in the States, where he's never had the chance to perform.

Even in his homeland, Thomas often has been taken for granted, although that began to change in 2014 when he received one of the prestigious Paul Hamlyn Foundation Awards for Artists—an annual U.K. honor akin, albeit more financially modest, to a MacArthur Fellowship.

In 2019, however, Thomas enjoyed some serious momentum, unleashing a barrage of excellent recordings—from the ruminative post-bop piano trio heard on *BleySchool*, the free improv of the collective trio Shifa, an exploratory trio with reedist John Butcher and drummer Ståle Liavik Solberg on *Fictional Souvenirs* and a stunning live solo piano set of Duke Ellington music available digitally from London's Café Oto. *The Truth*, a duo recording with alto saxophonist Matana Roberts, is due out this spring from Oto's imprint, Otoruko.

Yet the project that just might galvanize the most interest in his work is *Super Majnoon (East Meets West)* (Otoruko), the dazzling second album by the quartet Ahmed, which salutes the fascinating marriage of jazz and Arabic music pioneered by the bassist and oud player Ahmed Abdul-Malik. Along with alto saxophonist Seymour Wright, bassist Joel Grip and drummer Antonin Gerbal, Thomas reduces Abdul-Malik's themes into fiercely rhythmic kernels and then rides them into infinity with a relentless churn of constantly shifting grooves.

The foursome's first-ever performance was released as *New Jazz Imagination* (Umlaut) in 2017, capturing an extended, hard-driving interpretation of Abdul-Malik's "Anxious." The recordings on the new album

were made at Hong Kong's Empty Gallery and Café Oto in 2018, and represent a quantum leap in terms of focus and intensity.

"The first record is really great, but we were still searching," said Thomas. "On this one, we felt like we started to create a sound for Ahmed.

"We had to find a context for playing Abdul-Malik's music, and I think that's how we found this collective way of playing. If we were just freely improvising, it would be very different music. The compositions are the bedrock, the foundation for what we're doing. We wanted to do his music, but we also wanted to put our own mark on it, so we came up with this approach. We're all coming from the improvised thing while respecting the fact that there's this compositional framework, and we've used the rhythmic concepts more."

On first glance, the music strays from its roots, but there's an undeniable connection in its trance-like intensity. Thomas and Wright dig deep into terse, cycling phrases over the shape-shifting propulsion of Grip and Gerbal, each steadily chipping away at the theme through fine-tuned rhythmic alterations.

"Even though you might hear the repetition, it's not like systems music where everyone is doing the same thing," Thomas explained. "That's why people don't get bored with it—we're using this traditional free improvisation and jazz approach, shifting around the rhythms, so even though the material might be static, it doesn't get boring because the rhythm section is never doing the same thing."

This summer the quartet has planned collaborative performances in Europe with Morocco's Master Musicians of Jajouka, whose current leader, Bechir Attar, inspired part of the album title when he used the Arabic slang "majnoon"—or crazy—to describe the musicians.

DB



Claudio Roditi (1946–2020)

STEVEN SUSSMAN

Claudio Roditi Remembered

BRAZILIAN TRUMPETER CLAUDIO RODITI played like he was riding the waves that lap Ipanema Beach—gliding effortlessly along the contours of his phrases and, in the process, shaping timeless narratives. So it was at a 2018 performance honoring Resonance Records’ 10-year anniversary at the Manhattan club Birdland.

Yet, for all its easy brilliance, the performance was tempered by an urgency that, in retrospect, revealed Roditi’s time was short. So, too, did the thinness of his usually robust physique. As he confided to pianist Donald Vega that day in the

club’s basement, he was suffering from cancer.

“He sounded great, he was smiling,” Vega recalled recently. “It was just straightahead. He probably made a few jokes about it.”

Roditi, who died on Jan. 17 at age 73, was like that. “He made sure everybody was happy onstage—everybody,” said drummer Duduka Da Fonseca.

Da Fonseca and Roditi first met in Rio de Janeiro in 1966, when the former was 15 and the latter 20. They grew close, playing bossa nova and bonding over a love of bop and its variants.

In the same year, Roditi entered a jazz competition in Vienna, Austria, where he met trumpeter Art Farmer, who became a mentor. Encouraged to pursue jazz, he enrolled at Boston’s Berklee College of Music in 1970, eventually hooking up with Da Fonseca in New York, where they began to develop their synthesis of musical traditions in earnest.

Roditi’s instrumental capabilities extended to the piccolo trumpet and the flugelhorn, though it was the rotary valve trumpet to which he always returned. For a time, he played the valve trombone, most famously with the Cuban wind player Paquito D’Rivera. Ultimately, he gave it up because its larger mouthpiece was compromising his embouchure, according to trombonist Michael Dease, who played in Roditi’s band.

Through it all, those chops never wavered. They were heard to excellent effect on his final projects with Da Fonseca: 2019’s *Samba Jazz & Tom Jobim*, on which he renders the opening tune, “Gemini Man,” with a searing intensity; and as a guest with Da Fonseca’s Trio da Paz for its 12-night residency at Dizzy’s Club.

Roditi was so sick that he was only able to play nine nights. On Aug. 29, 2019, Da Fonseca said, Roditi played his last performance. Tellingly, he offered to repay the drummer for the days he couldn’t work. “He was one of the most generous men I ever met,” Da Fonseca said. —Phillip Lutz

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In Memoriam: Jimmy Heath

JIMMY HEATH, WHO DIED JAN. 19 IN LOGANVILLE, GEORGIA, AT age 93, was a master of multiple components of the jazz calling.

Not least of Heath's attributes was his suave, soulful, luminous voice on the tenor and soprano saxophones. As Benny Golson told *DownBeat* in 2001, Heath "moved through chords, not scientifically, but melodically. He plays ideas. It's like a conversation, but musical, not linguistic. He has a story to tell, and it's right in tune with those chords."

Heath told stories with equivalent panache when operating with the pen. His tuneful, harmonically hip compositions, some 140 in number, appear on two dozen leader recordings and 10 with the Heath Brothers, an endeavor he co-led with bassist Percy Heath (1923–2005) and drummer Albert "Tootie" Heath, his siblings. However small or large the context, Heath's arrangements embraced meticulous orchestration and improvisational opportunities in judicious equipoise.

Like his lodestar, Dizzy Gillespie, to whom he dedicated the song "Without You, No Me," Heath also excelled as a communicator, conveying information he'd accrued as a performer, composer and public figure. He did this both formally—helping found the master's degree in jazz studies program at Queens College—and informally, in off-the-cuff conversations with dozens of acolytes.

"Mr. Heath was always giving," said alto saxophonist Antonio Hart—Heath's protégé, student, frequent bandmate and dedicatee of Heath's "Like A Son"—who now directs the jazz studies program at Queens College. "If you did something he liked, he told you. Everything in his expression was so honest. He always talked about the need to balance science and the spirit. He encompassed all of that."

Born in Philadelphia on Oct. 25, 1926, Heath received an alto saxophone at 14. After graduating from a segregated North Carolina high school that stopped at 11th grade, he toured the Midwest with the Nat Towles Orchestra for several years. Already intimate with the great swing bands of his adolescence, Heath discovered the revolutionary recordings of Charlie Parker, whose style he emulated so skillfully that he earned the nickname "Little Bird." Back in Philadelphia, in 1947 he assembled a 17-piece band (personnel included future stars Golson and John Coltrane, trumpeter Johnny Coles, pianist Ray Bryant, bassist Nelson Boyd and drummer Specs Wright) to play bebop charts Heath transcribed from Gillespie's just-formed big band.

Heath once described his band as a "feeder" for Gillespie, whom he met in 1946 and joined in 1949, after a year with bebop trumpeter Howard McGhee. He remained with Gillespie's big band and sextet until early 1951. Soon thereafter, he transitioned to tenor saxophone, which he played in a Miles Davis-led combo—alongside his brother Percy, trombonist J.J. Johnson and drummer Kenny Clarke—which recorded Heath's bop classic "C.T.A." in 1953. That year, he performed on a Johnson session that marked trumpeter Clifford Brown's first recording. Heath seemed poised to claim his place as a major voice of the saxophone. Then, in 1955, he was arrested on narcotics charges, and received a four-and-a-half-year sentence.

While incarcerated, Heath led and wrote for the prison big band. After his 1959 release, parole requirements prevented him from traveling outside Philadelphia, forestalling an opportunity to replace Coltrane in Davis' quintet. At the instigation of Cannonball Adderley and Philly Joe Jones, he signed with Riverside Records, for which he functioned as a de facto staff arranger and led six vivid albums that debuted now-classic tunes like "Gemini" and "Gingerbread Boy."

Heath returned to New York in 1964, the year Riverside folded. Eight years passed before his next leader recording, *The Gap Sealer*, a populist "variety package" on which he expanded his tonal palette, incorporating soprano saxophone and flute, electric keyboards, traditional African melodies and funk beats. During that interim, he'd taken



Jimmy Heath (1926–2020)

steps to move beyond the "mother wit and intuition" upon which he'd previously relied, studying orchestration, string and vocal writing, and extended-form composition with Rudolf Schramm, an advocate of the Schillinger System.

These interests further cohered through his activities with the Heath Brothers—who signed with Columbia in 1978, releasing four strong-selling albums, including the Grammy-nominated *Live At The Public Theater*, produced by Heath's percussionist son Mtume—and at Queens College, where he wrote new material for his arrangement and composition students.

Heath's discography also includes the strong big band albums *Little Man Big Band* (1992), *Turn Up The Heath* (2006) and *Togetherness: Live At The Blue Note* (2014). "To me, the big band is the symphony orchestra of the jazz idiom," Heath said in a 2014 *DownBeat* cover story. "It was the fullest and biggest sound you could get before the electronics, with the most power and the most counterpoint playing."

In 2019, he recorded yet another big band album, which was planned for release this year. Named a National Endowment of the Arts Jazz Master in 2003, Heath remained productive, lucid and trenchant until the final stages of a life well lived.

—Ted Panken

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Jazz World Mourns for Lyle Mays, 66

LYLE MAYS, THE KEYBOARDIST WHO SPENT a significant portion of his career recording and performing as a member of the Pat Metheny Group, died Feb. 10 at Adventist Hospital in Simi Valley, California. He was 66.

While the specific cause of death was not made public by press time, Mays' niece, jazz vocalist Aubrey Johnson, said in a social media post that it came "after a long battle with a recurring illness."

"Lyle was a brilliant musician and person, and a genius in every sense of the word," she wrote. "He was my dear uncle, mentor, and friend and words cannot express the depth of my grief."

After the news of Mays' death was reported during the second full week of February, Metheny had the following message posted to his website: "Lyle was one of the greatest musicians I have ever known. Across more than 30 years, every moment we shared in music was special. From the first notes we played together, we had an immediate bond. His broad intelligence and musical wisdom informed every aspect of who he was in every way. I will miss him with all my heart."

Mays was born in Wausaukee, Wisconsin, on Nov. 27, 1953, to a musical family. While his parents held steady day jobs, both harbored a deep love of music and played instruments: His father was a self-taught guitarist, and his mother played piano and organ, mostly in church. Mays followed suit, taking piano lessons from a local teacher, and eventually began playing organ in his hometown church as a teen.

Around the same time, he became an ardent jazz fan after coming across Bill Evans' *At The Montreux Jazz Festival*, a live trio album on the Verve imprint that featured bassist Eddie Gomez and drummer Jack DeJohnette.

According to Steven Cantor, the co-producer of Mays' first two solo albums (a 1986 self-titled LP and 1988's *Street Dreams*), "He was completely mystified by [the live Evans recording]. He couldn't understand it at all. But given his interest in music and that he was playing piano at the time, it became something that he had to figure out."

Mays' jazz studies landed him at North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas), where he studied under the direction of Leon Breeden and joined the



JOJI SAWA/GEFFEN/DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

Lyle Mays (1953-2020)

Jazz Studies

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school's prestigious One O'Clock Lab Band, alongside bassist and future collaborator Marc Johnson and future Freddie Hubbard drummer Steve Houghton. Mays became the group's chief arranger, with his distinctive touch and impressionistic piano solos featured on the band's Grammy-nominated album, *Lab '75!*

While Mays' first professional gig out of college was playing with Woody Herman's band, it was his work with Metheny that defined the next 30 years of his career. The two first met at a jazz festival in Wichita, Kansas, during 1974. But it would be several years before they regularly began performing and recording together, starting with Metheny's 1977 album, *Watercolors*. From there, Mays became the longest tenured member of the Pat Metheny Group, co-writing much of the band's material and blending acoustic piano with an ever-growing array of synthesizers to add misty textures and whimsy to their sessions.

Mays and Metheny's creative partnership extended outside the band, as well. 1981 saw the release of their duo album, *As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls*, and Metheny had a hand in producing some recordings where Mays took top billing: 1993's *Fictionary*

(with bassist Johnson and drummer DeJohnette) and 2000's *Solo (Improvisations For Extended Piano)*. Some insight into what made their relationship so fruitful can be found in an interview Mays gave to DownBeat for the March 1993 edition, around the time *Fictionary* was released.

"We had just finished a tour, when Pat approached me and said, 'You should go into the studio. I really think your playing is the best I've heard you play,'" Mays told writer Martin Johnson. "I was like ... thanks [*shrugs*]. I was almost resistant to the idea, though. I hadn't prepared a record.

"On the first two records I did [*Lyle Mays and Street Dreams*], I spent a lot of time in preproduction orchestrating things. It wasn't even on my mind to do an acoustic record. I have to give Pat credit; he kind of talked me into doing it."

Another outlet for Mays came via commissions from Rabbit Ears, a production house that hired famous actors to read children's stories and modern musicians to provide the soundtracks. Mays created two works for the company, allowing him to tap into his long-simmering classical influences.

"If you listen to the score for *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*," said Cantor, who produced

the sessions, "it's Stravinsky. It's *L'histoire Du Soldat* instrumentation. A six- or seven-piece ensemble with lots of woodwinds. And the other one he did, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, it was cinematic. He wrote a half hour of music that was so beautiful and so expansive and worked so well with the story."

Following the release of the final Pat Metheny Group album, 2005's *This Way Up*, Mays began his slow retreat from the music world.

As Metheny put it on his Facebook page recently, the grind of touring that was expected of any working jazz musician wore on Mays.

"The lifestyle of going out on the road night after night," Metheny wrote, "for sometimes hundreds of nights at a time, is not for everyone and has real challenges ... We did a brief round of gigs a while back, and it was clear in every way that he had had enough of hotels, buses, and so forth."

Mays quietly lived out the rest of his days in California, working in the computer industry and encouraging the creative efforts of his niece. But what the world lost with his passing is, as Cantor put it, "an amazing intellect. Amazing focus and amazing clarity. And great art."
—Robert Ham

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GREGORY BY JOSEF WOODARD PHOTO BY KEN WEINGART PORTER 'PAST THE GATES OF GENRES'

When considering the artistic legacy of Bakersfield, California, many people think of country music legends Merle Haggard and Buck Owens, and the so-called “Bakersfield Sound.”

Those icons are no longer with us, but Owens’ venue in town, the Crystal Palace, remains in operation. Five years ago, Bakersfield became home to another important, influential musician. Singer Gregory Porter, who grew up in Bakersfield, moved back to town, along with his wife and now 6-year-old son. The family has settled into a spacious, Georgian-style home, situated in a different neighborhood than the one where Porter grew up.

Porter’s musical life began here as a church vocalist before moving to New York and expanding his musical reach to include theater, jazz and soul. A songwriter who craftily inserts references to his life and upbringing, he ends his new album, *All Rise* (Blue Note), with a specific Bakersfield reference. On the track “Thank You,” Porter describes an epiphany he experienced as a child singing at a Pentecostal tent service “between Lakeview and Haley Street/ That’s where the church would meet.” It seems the higher that Porter’s global profile soars, the more he leans into the roots of his youth.

Just in the past six years, Porter—now 48—has enjoyed a meteoric rise, especially in the infrastructure of jazz, but also spilling into the pop and r&b fields. After releasing two critically acclaimed albums, *Water* (2011) and *Be Good* (2012), for the Motéma label, Porter signed to Blue Note and earned Grammy awards for *Liquid Spirit* (2013) and *Take Me To The Alley* (2016).

All Rise represents a significant step forward in Porter’s oeuvre, as his most gospel-oriented and most “produced” project yet. It also marks the return of his songwriting voice, after stepping away from original material with a 2017 tribute to a prime influence on *Nat King Cole & Me*. This latest chapter, a willfully and artfully varied collection of 15 original songs, finds Porter juggling elements of gospel, soul, pop and jazz with tracks featuring the London Symphony Orchestra and horn-section charts woven into the mix.



Gregory Porter outside his home in Bakersfield, California, on Jan. 7

"People talk about music therapy, and I find myself thinking, 'Wow, that's what I'm doing, in a lot of ways,'" Porter said.

STEVEN SUSSMAN



Producer roles were handled by his longtime ally, Kamau Kenyatta, and Troy Miller, whose multiple talents—as drummer, arranger, producer, and engineer—have made him a powerful aide de camp.

In a phone interview, Miller told *DownBeat*, "On this record, Gregory wanted to be more open to exploring new things and in typical Gregory fashion—and very deliberately so—left the sessions [open] to spontaneity. That was coupled with having his band there, who have mostly been with him throughout his touring journey. This made for a really creative and communal atmosphere."

An affable conversationalist, Porter sat down with *DownBeat* on a cool January afternoon in the cozy context of his dimly lit, wood-lined den. Poised for the release of and promotional touring to support *All Rise*, he acknowledged that he will face questions about his musical style.

"Maybe my voice goes past genre," he reflected, "and some of my writing and some of the collaborations and remixes have taken me past the gates of genres. I'm OK with that. I always consider myself a jazz singer, even if I'm singing something that's not jazz, per se.

"But above that is the message—if it's a message of irrepressible love or mutual respect or justice or just something insightful about love and life. I really am most concerned about the message, and if the ears are catching it."

Below are edited excerpts from the conversation.

One theme of *All Rise* is the power of love, earthly and otherwise, at a time when the

world seems especially fragile and vulnerable. Does this album, and your music, serve as an escape or an antidote to harsher realities?

People talk about music therapy, and I find myself thinking, "Wow, that's what I'm doing, in a lot of ways." I sing to soothe and give comfort to myself. I've done it since I was a little boy. My voice and a greater message have always made me feel better, made me feel like I had something, even with empty pockets.

In college [at University of California San Diego], I was poor. I broke my shoulder and wasn't able to play football anymore. Whatever things happened, whatever difficulties came up, I always felt, "Well, I've always got my music," even if it was just me and the music. It was not even using it as a way to make money, but as a thing to comfort me.

[When] I started this album, I started to write about our dear president and the kind of space that we're in right now. The first four or five songs were about something he would do, one day to the next, some slight disrespect, some covert disrespect. I said, "Let me shake this off and go within, and eventually, something about that will find its way out in some more clever poetry." There are songs that deal with reality, like "Real Truth." Truth has many different versions.

I needed to come from my place, my home, and talk about these other things that might be on my mind, from a political or social standpoint. It had to come from my perspective, as opposed to just reacting.

I wanted to go back to my normal way, which is observation of the world and what I think about love.

This is your most gospel-oriented record, and even the title, *All Rise*, could refer to church rituals or a spiritual direction. But it could also refer to a public declaration, as might happen in a courtroom or a political context.

Yes, it's something that could happen in a public space or when some dignified person comes into the room. But I'm using it [to say] that *all* of us rise, not just a singular important person, but a roomful of important people [laughs]. We *all* ascend—the whole family.

Everybody has an expression. Children do. Broken people have something to say that can be deeper and more insightful than a college professor. A crackhead who has been there has some wisdom that can be gleaned. Maybe that's idealistic and foolish, but I think that way.

It's funny. I sang "The 'In' Crowd" on one of my records [*Liquid Spirit*], kind of in jest. I go on these television shows around the world and they asked me to do that song. They missed the point of why I did it. At the very end of the song, it's like I'm on the outside looking in.

I think about mutual respect and equality. Whether it comes out in every note or every song, the same themes keep coming out of me as I write. There's a continuity to my thought processes, however simple.

The brevity of the blues is interesting to me, and subtlety and nuance and irony, sometimes. Sometimes it's not afforded you if you have a big voice and a big sound and you're a big person. Sometimes it's not afforded you if you're black. But I try to take advantage of all of the things that exist for any writer. I think there's a wisdom in brevity.

Your songwriting does embrace brevity, focusing on simple yet powerful phrases and also on repetition. I take it you're not afraid of repetition, are you?

First of all, my family doesn't have a long, deep tradition in jazz. We have a long and deep tradition in gospel music and the church. [Porter's mother was a preacher.] Sometimes, the repetition is not for ease. It's for the build. It's for concentration. And as we use it in jazz, it's to set the framework and then to slightly step out of the framework. You repeat the phrase, but it will be slightly different—or you're singing it a third below or above.

But repetition [also involves] sending the message home, leaving the listener with something. The song has washed over them. And there's something to even vagueness, leaving it open to the listener's interpretation, but with a strong understanding that there's an emotional depth to it, so people think, "I have to figure that out. What are you saying?"

I like it when people stop me on the street and say, "What are you saying?" or, "What did that girl do?" You understand what I'm saying? "That girl did something to you. She broke your

heart. You didn't say it, but I can hear it."

I'm not afraid of repetition. ... It's a tradition of both blues and gospel. I think about these traditions and how they grew up in the same house and were played by the same people, the same families. In my household, I heard gospel and blues, and I could hear the cross-pollination.

When I was in church and I sang, and I finally got to hear a taste of jazz, I thought, "I've been doing this my whole life, singing the phrase and then deviating from that phrase, changing the rhythm, singing in front of the

who have been classified as jazz singers and ones that have not been—and you hear the gospel music in jazz. What I'm saying is: Listen to Mahalia Jackson and you'll hear jazz [laughs].

The new album opens with the uplifting song "Concorde." What was the impetus for that one?

I was on an international flight, coming back home. I had a big, long tour and had done concerts and an important TV show. The song "Concorde" just came to me. I was thinking about the actual plane that flies 60,000 feet in the air, at twice the speed of sound. I need to get

whole musical about it—*Nat King Cole & Me*, the same title as my last record. But the musical was how I came to Nat's music in the absence of my father. I needed a warm, comforting voice and words of wisdom, and they happened to come from these vinyl [records] from Nat, as opposed to coming from my father.

You can think of it as sad, but it's beautiful at the same time. He's a pretty cool guy to latch onto. In my little 5-, 6-, 8-year-old mind, I would imagine him as my father. He looked the part, if you looked at his album covers, sitting by a fire with a sweater on [points to his own sweater, glances at the nearby fireplace and laughs softly].

There is a noticeable production value on this album, maybe more than on your earlier projects.

Yeah, there is more production. But it's really just letting the songs come organically, trying different things. Sometimes, I would just have a vision in my head of what the song was, and boom—"Let's get that on wax." But this time, we would be locked into something for days. I was like, "Let's flip that rhythm around." I walked over to the bass marimba and said, "Let's put that on 'Merchants Of Paradise' and see what it sounds like."

It was in my plan to work with [producer] Troy [Miller], in maybe a bigger way, maybe a bit more produced way. But I'm still there, in the DNA of the music, and the way I do things is still there. There's no wholesale change.

The songs are more compact, and there is at least one that clocks in under three minutes.

There are a couple. There is the little folk song, "Modern Day Apprentice." There is this idea of being radio-friendly, which is maybe what you're thinking about or getting at.

Not necessarily. The songs still have sophisticated turns and things that a jazz ear would appreciate. But songs are compact, except for "Real Truth," where you stretch out and include longer solos—including a wild, cool Moog solo by Miller.

I'm thinking of the whole [package]. I think "Revival" is very different from "Merry-Go-Round." When I think of a modern jazz singer, who has to consider Frank Sinatra, Nat "King" Cole, Sammy Davis Jr. and then Leon Thomas and then go to some other eras—Andy Bey—there are so many layers, and it's all valid.

The modern jazz singer has so many wonderful choices. He doesn't always have to [sings a "ting-ting-ta-ting" swing cymbal pattern, sings "This is the end of a beautiful"] That's beautiful. I want to do that, and I also want to do something that's spiritually driven. I also want to do something influenced by the electric period of Herbie Hancock.

'I WAS SINGING JAZZ BEFORE I KNEW WHAT JAZZ WAS.'

beat and then behind the beat." That's something we played with. I was singing jazz before I knew what jazz was.

It's widely acknowledged that gospel is the basis of r&b and a lot of pop music. But we don't hear enough about it also being part of the seeds of jazz. Why is that, do you think?

Yeah. It's all over. Yes, there are these sacred songs, but it has to be considered—in particular, with the African American gospel singer. Maybe you have to get away from the Tin Pan Alley songs—but not too far. Maybe you deal with the more original songs, of a Leon Thomas or Abbey Lincoln or Dianne Reeves. There are many voices you could say that are directly connected to spirituality.

Sometimes, the people who are writing about it and thinking about it have no experience in that realm. Unless it's recorded and put in front of them and shown, maybe they don't know the connections. But I've never separated them. I close my eyes and feel this spirituality in jazz music. Yes, it can be very cerebral and thoughtful, but I've always caught the spirit in jazz music. When I sing Wayne Shorter's "Black Nile," I feel it that way. I feel it when I sing "Work Song"—I feel it like it's a gospel song.

Obviously, with the music of Horace Silver or Bobby Timmons, you can make the connection, because that hard-bop sound was directly making a connection to the blues and gospel music. But you look to the singer—the ones

home, I need to get to my 6-year-old, as fast as I can. I'm trying to get to the ground as fast as I can—my wife and my son, my family, my coffee shop. These are the things that make my home. No disrespect to being at the Grammys or television shows or these kinds of things, but the coolest reception is when I come [home] and my son runs to the car. That's dope to me.

A grimmer family saga is described in "Dad Gone Thing," one of the songs you've written about your father—and his absence. Is this an ongoing investigation for you?

I'm still trying to find him. He's been gone 25 years now, and I'm still trying to find him in some way. When I went to my father's funeral, person after person would stand up and talk about, "Oh, boy, your daddy could sing," among other things I didn't know about him.

He was in the military. I knew he was an extraordinary carpenter. I knew how important the church was to him and what a charismatic, great guy he was to so many people.

He didn't show me any time or affection or interest. So when I say, "You didn't teach me a dad gone thing but how to sing," the very thing that takes me around the world is my voice. In a way, I'm slighting him and then praising him.

Do you have other father-related songs that no one has heard yet?

I've written some more. This is an ongoing inquiry. It's an ongoing conversation. I wrote a



Porter, shown here in his home, frequently tours internationally.

KEN WEINGART

[Porter channels his mother's preaching, including phrases similar to those in his song "Liquid Spirit"]: "Reroute the love. Let it flow where I want to go! There are some people down the road that are thirsty. Give them love, too! The people are thirsty because man's unnatural hand is rearranging the way we're supposed to be. Watch what happens when the people who haven't been loved catch wind that there's love coming down the way!"

It's so amazing to see them getting it but they don't even know they're getting it.

On the deluxe edition of the album, there's a song titled "You Can Join My Band." You sing, "My changes and arrangements don't fit with the modern day/ I sing of love and nobody's listening." Do you sometimes feel like an outsider?

I have, at times. I live in Bakersfield [laughs]. I'm from here. That automatically makes you an outsider. I remember so many times, both in California and in New York—sometimes, the jazz stage is a difficult stage to join, to get on. I've been dismissed many times. Funny enough, jazz is the most seemingly open, in a way, in terms of age and maybe size. But still, there can be some exclusivity. I remember many a night, just waiting to be the last singer, and still not making it at some jam session.

It seems like you were never one to zero in on what was popular at a given time, to intentionally court success.

I like my career. I like that I got here doing me. Along the way, there have been a ton of ways that people said I couldn't be, that I had to change. I had to come out singing standards. I had to do this and that—"Dump your band. Get all superstars." Maybe I'm an underachiever.

I still feel grounded. I still feel like I hear my mother, my family, my people, myself, in the music. I'm not ashamed of anything I've put on a record in terms of the content of what I said, and how I will make people feel in 20 years. I haven't talked about nobody's ass or titties. And I've still sold a bunch of records.

My mother's there. The truth is there. I like the fact that a song like "Liquid Spirit" is drawn from my mother's sermon, and it can have [millions of] streams. But it's not [about] the numbers. Ever since *Water*, my first record, I just wanted to make music that sounded good and would get my voice out, get my message and musical DNA out, and hopefully the sound would be honest and pleasing to some people. I never expected the Grammys or any of the success that I've had.

I'm just blown away, and thankful to the tradition of jazz, and other music. There is a pavement, a road that has already been laid down by some people. And I'm so thankful and amazed that I can go around the world. **DB**

What did Nat "King" Cole have to draw from? He had what came before him. But we have Louis Armstrong, Nat and everything that came after Nat. So, in addition to that, throw in the gospel influence, the soul influence, and then you're quite free. If this music is free and open, if we say that jazz means freedom and open expression, then I think there's room for all of the things that I'm uttering.

Your song "Long List Of Troubles" riffs on the theme of "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." What got you thinking on that?

When I think about the blues and its renewing quality, music has been so important in African American culture. Often, it's where we tell our troubles. It's therapy—blues and gospel.

In my church when I was growing up, we had "testimony service," where members of the congregation stood up and told any story about what they're going through. A lot of times, it would be about some sorrowful thing. Sometimes, there would be a twist at the end, where they're saved and they find some help or some resurrection. But sometimes, they didn't and it was just a bad story. I think, "Man, this is the blues."

But afterwards, everybody feels better. You sing some congregational song about "Ah, there may be trouble right now, but in the end, it will be all right." Everybody feels good when there's a telling of some difficulty that you surmount.

Is that true, in your case?

Yes, in my case, I have a passive-aggressive personality. I think it comes out in my music, too, with all these hidden slights. I have been through a lot of things and, because of music, I have a way to handle it. I even have a way to vent. I even have a way to get revenge.

I'm wondering whether your song "Mister Holland," about the father of a white high school girl you were courting, is an example of that. Was there a Mr. Holland?

A real Mr. Holland? Well, [I considered the name of keyboardist] Jools Holland, and [he has a] daughter named Rosie Mae. Those are just great names. I happened to be on tour with them when I was working on the song.

But it's a rewriting of my history. I went to the door and [the man actually said], "Get away from my door, nigger."

You are in a continuum of artists including Nat, Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder, who have blended genres. Do you feel a sense of falling in musical succession with historical figures?

I feel it's firmly part of me. How foolish would it be of me to neglect an enormous part of my tradition, which is gospel music and soul music, and finding out about the experience of the blues and realizing that my gospel expression was so close to it. It would be foolish for me to disrespect any part of that. Somebody called me an r&b singer as a slight one time, and I said, "That's a hell of a slight. Thank you." If I did anything as soulful as James Brown, to do anything like Sam Cooke—*wow*.

Or Al Green. You're doing something similar to him by delivering messages simultaneously secular and spiritual, maybe sneaking some religion into the mix. Is that the case, from your perspective?

Oh, yeah. It was funny to be in Ibiza. The music of the day there is [sings a techno beat] dance music. Being in front of this crowd of 19- to 25-year-olds, none of the guys have on shirts, all the women are in bikinis, and singing a song that is the synthesis of my mother's Sunday sermon. They're getting it.

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DELFEAYO MARSALIS MERCHANT OF JOY

BY TED PANKEN PHOTOS BY ERIKA GOLDRING

It's not hard to pinpoint why Delfeayo Marsalis' New Orleans-based Uptown Jazz Orchestra's recent release, *Jazz Party*, and its 2016 predecessor, *Make American Great Again*—both on Troubadour Jass, and both consisting primarily of his compositions and arrangements—rank among the strongest big band discs of the past 10 years.

One attribute is a percolating rhythmic palette—relentless funk and gospel grooves, ebullient second-line syncopations, Afro-Caribbean-flavored street beats, undulating old-school press rolls, the distinctive flow of nouveau swing. Then there's the breathe-as-one synchronicity of the woodwind and brass sections honed during more than a decade of Wednesday gigs at the eminent New Orleans nightclub Snug Harbor.

For a sense of the UJO sound, think of the dance-first sensibility of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band crossed with Count Basie's early riff bands and post-1952 "New Testament" orchestras. Then imagine that aesthetic being applied, at times, to rambunctious soli sections articulating voicings and harmonic colors in the sophisticated dialects of Ellington, Mingus, Coltrane and Kenny Kirkland. The prevailing attitude is serious-as-your-life swing-modernism à la Art Blakey, who hired Marsalis briefly in 1987, and Elvin Jones, a steady employer from 1993 through 2002.

There's also the sonic individualism of UJO's personnel. That quality applies not least to the trombonists, among them New Orleans veteran Terrance "Hollywood" Taplin, and Marsalis, who organizes his lovely melodic lines with architectural clarity, delivering them with a vibrato that sustains a pure, voice-like tone at all tempos and registers. Baritone saxophonist (and Dirty Dozen co-founder) Roger Lewis, whose unfettered roar channels Harry Carney crossed with Hamiet Bluiett, imparts to his section a rambunctious precision evocative of the World Saxophone Quartet. Contrasting young-blood altoists Khari Allen Lee (Jackie McLean meets Eric Dolphy) and Amari Ansari

Branford (from left), Wynton and Delfeayo Marsalis



ERIKA GOLDRING

(Hank Crawford meets Maceo Parker) engage in ongoing conversation, while tenor saxophone veteran Roderick Paulin embodies New Orleans swagger in delivery and presentation.

So does trumpeter Dr. Brice Miller, counterstated by section-mate Andrew Baham, who upholds Crescent City standards of soloistic derring-do. Fiftyish bassist David Pulphus' phat, lithe tone interlocks with thirtyish drummer Joe Dyson—best known for propelling the bands of New Orleans stars Donald Harrison, Nicholas Payton and Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah—who references, in his own argot, an encyclopedic beat lexicon encompassing Baby Dodds and Ed Blackwell, Idris Muhammad and Zigaboo Modaliste, James Black and Herlin Riley, and an array of 21st century approaches.

It's difficult to take a big band on the road, and UJO's profile barely registers outside the Crescent City. Intent on rectifying that situation, Marsalis brought the large ensemble to New York in January in conjunction with the 2020 Association of Performing Arts Professionals conference. A cohort of presenters, bookers and assorted music pros were present at UJO's opening engagement on Jan. 10, in the cozy confines of Stage 2 of Rockwood Music Hall on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

At 8:30 p.m. sharp, Marsalis—decked out in an indigo suit speckled with full-moon polka dots, complemented by gleaming white shoes—led a procession of his 14 male instrumentalists onto the dance floor, playing Taplin's strutting arrangement of 'The Soul Rebels' "Let Your Mind Be Free" as they configured in a semi-circle before the bandstand. Overcoming dicey acoustics and its ad hoc positioning, UJO launched a kinetic set consisting almost entire-

ly of repertoire from *Jazz Party*, including "Irish Whiskey Blues," a jump tune that evoked James Moody's popular octet of the 1950s; "Dr. Hardgroove," Marsalis' tone parallel to the funky essence of the late Roy Hargrove; and the polyphonic, anthemic "Raid On The Mingus House Party," which the leader described as an attempt "to answer the question of how many themes we could play simultaneously."

Following the set, Marsalis spent the next hour mingling and selling CDs. Then he joined DownBeat down the block for a conversation at the Cheese Grill.

"We don't travel as much as we'd like yet," Marsalis said. "But the guys in the band are committed to what we're doing, and it's taken a while for the concept to evolve." Although he hadn't eaten, he declined to order a sandwich from the menu, and instead picked at a portion of french fries.

He continued: "I started the band for one reason—to play Duke Ellington's *Nutcracker Suite* concert in 2009. I'd played *Nutcracker* the year before at a children's concert with a reading band that rehearsed twice, and did a terrible job—the notes were played correctly, but the feeling was way off and it wasn't resonating with the kids. The music was so un compelling that it made me realize how musicians accept the idea of reading the music and playing without spirit and soul—and the soul of the music is what's important.

"So, the following year, I pulled together musicians for the sole purpose of playing that music the way it was meant to sound. Probably half the band didn't read great, so we rehearsed every week for three months. Mission accomplished. After that, some guys wanted to keep it going, so we started playing different clubs

and settled in at Snug Harbor. The band went through several cycles before I found the right New Orleans musicians. Through them I realized the importance of the New Orleans legacy and how great that music is. Roger, the only other founding member, helped shape the direction of the band tremendously.

"We started off doing head charts, which we still do; New Orleans brass bands play nothing but head charts. The only difference is, I've got eight or 10 extra guys to do it with. I'm proud that we can jump up on a brass band, which you've got to be serious to do, because them brothers play like their life depends on it. But we can get on the jazz orchestras, too. Now, with *Jazz Party* we're adding more sounds that the youngsters are doing. Whatever the situation, we're able to represent."

Marsalis briefly referenced his eminent older brothers, Wynton and Branford, and their father, pianist Ellis. "If someone had asked, 'What's a great New Orleans-sounding group?' I would not have said myself and my family," he said.

"If you want to know about quintessential New Orleans, it's always the funky sound—Fats Domino, the Neville Brothers, Professor Longhair, Allen Toussaint. Now, it's probably Trombone Shorty. The rhythm is what makes people feel good. My concept is that almost anything is good if you know how to put it in the proper perspective. The new jazz musician has to play everything, but it has to be grooving. The people have to enjoy it. I'm not interested in this attempt at highbrow [art]. Everybody can't come out playing this complicated music."

That Marsalis is fully comfortable with complexity is evident from his 1992 debut, *Pontius Pilate's Decision*, on which he piggy-

backed off of the heady music created by his brothers in the Wynton Marsalis from 1981 to 1985.

For the recording sessions, he assembled an all-star cast—including his brothers and their bandmates Kirkland, Riley, Marcus Roberts, Robert Hurst, Reginald Veal and Jeff “Tain” Watts, as well as then-obscure tenor saxophonists Joshua Redman and Mark Turner—to perform compositions informed by stories found in the New Testament.

Taking the approach that these tales offer narrative wisdom, not sacred revelation, Marsalis conveyed them by refracting vari-

ous strains of the Wynton Marsalis Quintet’s vocabulary—the challenging structures, the chromatic approach to melodic construction, the brain-twisting rhythmic interplay—as well as the blues-and-roots aesthetic that the trumpeter developed in the late ’80s.

“THE SOUL OF THE MUSIC IS WHAT’S IMPORTANT.”

high school, I studied mostly orchestral music. Jazz and swing started when I showed up at Berklee.”

He traced his more recent focus on functional imperatives to the aftermath of the devastation wrought upon his hometown by Hurricane Katrina in 2005: “An influx of musicians arrived who weren’t as concerned with New Orleans music as with having a place to play. I realized I needed to embrace these youngsters in a way similar to how Danny Barker, the great guitarist, taught brass band music at Fairview Baptist Church to all the third generation of musicians after jazz

do on a national scale.”

One person whom Marsalis reached was drummer Dyson, who was a 14-year-old freshman at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts when Delfeayo invited him to play at a small party at his house.

“We had a great relationship,” Dyson said a few days before UJO’s New York sojourn. “Delfeayo had information and wanted to share it, and he gave me opportunities to play. Once he put the big band together, it offered me an opportunity to apply to the music of Ellington and Basie the information I had from bands I’d been playing with. The musical conversation has come from a natural place, because the majority of the band comes from the cultural heritage of New Orleans music.”

In a separate conversation, bassist Pulphus—a St. Louis native who first played with Delfeayo in 1993, after enrolling at New Orleans University to study with Ellis Marsalis—described the connection between the leader’s personality and UJO’s sonic signature. “He figures out the strengths of each band member and gives them a platform to shine,” Pulphus said. “It’s not about him just soloing all night. That speaks to who he is as a person. I see in his playing that message of touching people, helping them grow and mend whatever they’re dealing with, and taking them on a beautiful journey. That’s what New Orleans is.”

For Marsalis, the city’s essence involves “a long-standing African tradition of mentorship that New Orleans musicians generally learn through, more than in any other American city.” He continued: “That mentorship often began in the schools, where teachers demanded excellence, and it continued in professional settings. However we may differ in our musical preferences, we’re all part of the same family. In addition to my brothers, I’ve called upon Donald Harrison, Terence Blanchard, Herlin Riley and Kidd Jordan for advice. At the end of the day, we’ll always come together.”

Marsalis added that the imperative to heal extends beyond the boundaries of New Orleans to the United States’ body politic. “We’re in a reality-TV state of mind,” he said. “Everything is fragmented and decontextualized. The ramifications of an action almost don’t matter. That’s how the president was elected.

“So, we have to be conscious of the times and what the world needs, and that’s what we’re trying to provide with Uptown Jazz Orchestra. The country needs something more akin to Louis Armstrong, from the standpoint of morale. The aim is not to play like Armstrong or to play Charlie Parker licks. The aim is to bring the joy and celebration, and the love and beauty that their music brought—to have the emotional impact on our audience that Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker had on theirs.”

DB

Furthermore, by the time *Pontius Pilate’s Decision* hit the shelves, Delfeayo, who majored in production at Berklee School of Music, already had assembled an impressive resume as an audio engineer. At 12, he generated Wynton’s audition tape for The Juilliard School of Music, concocting an ad hoc setup in the Marsalis family bathroom; at 17, he produced an album for his father. As the ’80s and ’90s progressed, Delfeayo went on to oversee more than 75 major label dates, including numerous projects by his brothers, Roberts and Harry Connick Jr.

In the liner notes to one of those albums, Branford’s *Renaissance* (1987), he introduced to the jazz lexicon the term “dreaded bass direct,” referencing the then-common practice of running the bass through an amplifier instead of miking it directly.

Marsalis acknowledged that, while his brothers were rising like Icarus in the jazz firmament, he was marinating at a *sous-vide* pace. “I’m a late bloomer as an improviser and soloist,” he said. During his formative years, he elaborated, “My mother was very protective. Branford and Wynton were more like rebels, playing gigs out in the streets. We had stricter regulation. It wasn’t until later that I played with some traditional New Orleans guys. In

started.”

By 2005, Marsalis, whose parents were both educators, already had founded Uptown Music Theater, a kid-oriented nonprofit organization from which UJO emerged. A week after speaking with DownBeat, UMT headed to the iTheatrics’ Junior Theater Festival in Atlanta (a musical theater competition whose Outstanding Production Award UMT has won six times since 2011), where they would perform excerpts from *The Lion King*. Over the years, Marsalis himself has written more than a dozen children’s musicals, which he describes as “80 percent jazz-based,” in the process developing strategies to present musical narrative.

“I wrote a children’s book called *No Cell Phone Day*, and went to schools where the kids would read it, and I’d act it out or do something silly—and I’d have my horn,” he said. “One time, I did this in Chicago, and we went into [the theme from] ‘The Flintstones’—fast. The kids started clapping on 2 and 4. They could just hear where it was. I do a music dictation thing where I play two notes and the girls have to sing the top note while the boys sing the bottom, and they’re singing flat-nines and other stuff. They just hear it.

“For a lot of people, jazz is not a thing that’s real. They may have read about it in a book, or heard it on a record, but they don’t think it can exist in real time. It’s something the old people did. Our challenge is to make this real, especially for the younger kids. I want to start an initiative that will expose black kids to what we

Dave Liebman

'CONSCIOUS OF EVERY BREATH'

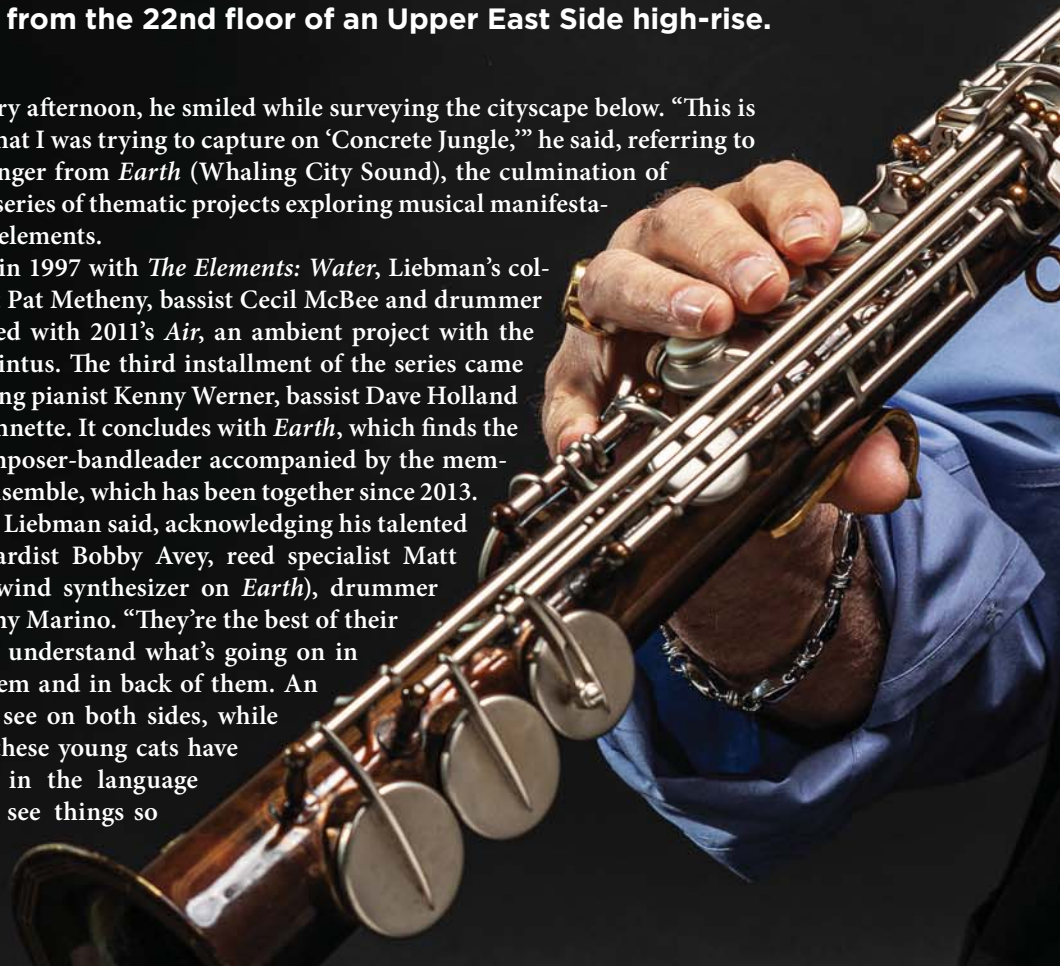
BY BILL MILKOWSKI
PHOTO BY RAY CHO

After 37 years of living in the bucolic scenery of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, a stone's throw from the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap, Dave Liebman and his wife, oboist-composer Caris Visentin Liebman, moved back to the Big Apple, where the reedist with the prodigious output was born 73 years ago. Liebman—who has played on more than 500 recordings—now has a bird's-eye view of Manhattan from the 22nd floor of an Upper East Side high-rise.

On an early January afternoon, he smiled while surveying the cityscape below. “This is it—it’s exactly what I was trying to capture on ‘Concrete Jungle,’” he said, referring to an uptempo swinger from *Earth* (Whaling City Sound), the culmination of Liebman’s decades-long series of thematic projects exploring musical manifestations of the four natural elements.

The series kicked off in 1997 with *The Elements: Water*, Liebman’s collaboration with guitarist Pat Metheny, bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Billy Hart, and continued with 2011’s *Air*, an ambient project with the late engineer Walter Quintus. The third installment of the series came in 2018 with *Fire*, featuring pianist Kenny Werner, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Jack DeJohnette. It concludes with *Earth*, which finds the revered saxophonist-composer-bandleader accompanied by the members of his Expansions ensemble, which has been together since 2013.

“I have a great band,” Liebman said, acknowledging his talented sidemen—pianist-keyboardist Bobby Avey, reed specialist Matt Vashlishan (who plays wind synthesizer on *Earth*), drummer Alex Ritz and bassist Tony Marino. “They’re the best of their generation because they understand what’s going on in front of them, beside them and in back of them. An artist should be able to see on both sides, while also looking back, and these young cats have that. They’re so fluent in the language of jazz, but they also see things so differently.”







Dave Liebman's *Earth* caps a series of albums inspired by natural elements.

Over time, Liebman has developed a unique vocabulary with his sidemen that has more to do with visualization than notes on the page. “On ‘Concrete Jungle,’ I asked them to capture this scene created out of stone that I see every day out my little dining-room window,” Liebman explained. “On ‘The Sahara,’ I had each of them think of a caravan winding its way through the sand. On ‘Volcano/Avalanche,’ I told Bobby Avey—who has this little red synth with only 61 keys on it—‘Play colors, don’t repeat anything, just keep it fresh and make it colorful.’ Same with Tony. I probably didn’t say more than five words to him about what he should do with the music the whole session. When I’m trying to paint a picture of a volcano or the Grand Canyon or the galaxy and have them thinking about the power and largeness of it all, they know what I’m looking for.”

Glancing down at the concrete jungle from his perch, he added, “People have always said to me, ‘Your music is a lot like a movie score.’ With this album, I would definitely agree. It’s all about color and texture, in the tradition of Penderecki, Stockhausen and all the guys starting with Schoenberg. It’s like the backdrop to the play. We’re all just trying to get the mood of the particular place. So, this record is basically, in the end, all about colors and creating a vibe.”

Liebman’s bandmates seemed eager to jump right into the flames with him. “He has an uncanny ability to look ahead, see goals and make it happen,” said Marino, who exclusively plays electric bass on *Earth*. “His care for every detail when recording or playing live is inspiring. He is conscious of every second and breath of the performance—musically, timing and audience awareness. He’s always looking for creativity and wants the audience to experience a new trip. From complexity to open and free with every color used in between to find true improvisation—that is the goal with Lieb.”

Liebman grew up in the Flatbush section of

Brooklyn, the son of educators Leo and Frances Liebman. “Our lives were all about education,” he recalled. “My mother laid down the law at 9 years old, when she said, ‘You’re going to play an instrument. What instrument do you want to play?’ And even then I knew I wanted to play the tenor sax because by the mid-’50s that was the main soloing instrument in early rock ‘n’ roll—before guitar became so dominant.

“You had Bill Doggett’s ‘Honky Tonk’ [featuring Clifford Scott on tenor saxophone] and [Lee Allen’s] ‘Walking With Mr. Lee.’ You also had Plas Johnson playing tenor on Duane Eddy tunes, The Coasters had King Curtis [on ‘Yakety Yak’] and Little Richard had Lee Allen [on ‘Long Tall Sally’]. But before I could get a tenor sax, my mother said I must take two years of piano first, which was the smartest move of all time. You gotta know the piano; it’s just a necessity.”

By age 11, after putting in the requisite two years on piano, he was ready for tenor, but was told by his teacher that he had to complete a full year of clarinet before moving on to saxophone. “I hated clarinet,” he said. “It was dated in my eyes, but I was forced to do it for a year. Finally, by age 12, I got a brand-new, gold, shiny tenor sax, and I ended up playing ‘Lady Is A Tramp’ on it at my own bar mitzvah ... the first time I ever played in public. So, that was the beginning.”

By age 13, he started doing club dates with The Impromptu Quartet, working the Catskills and playing bar mitzvahs and weddings. “We were just teenagers but we knew how to play ‘Anniversary Waltz,’ ‘Tea For Two,’ ‘How High The Moon’ and all that stuff.”

Earlier in his life, any musical ambitions Liebman might have harbored were sidetracked by his ongoing struggles with polio, which he had contracted in 1949, six years before Dr. Jonas Salk’s vaccine virtually eradicated the disease. “I went to Bellevue for rehabilitation once a month, and they had me pulling sandbags with my leg and all this outdated stuff,” he recalled. “My life

basically circulated around polio, because it was always, ‘When’s the next operation gonna be?’ ‘How long do I have to wear this brace?’ ‘What’s gonna happen next?’

“And because of my leg, I had a lot of interaction with doctors,” he continued. “One thing that impressed me was when a doctor walked in the room, everybody got real quiet. People immediately gave respect, and my mother talked about them like they were God. So, I did want to be a doctor. As a kid, you get interested in different things and usually it’s a passing fad, but I became obsessive about it. I read books on orthopedic surgery. I knew more about anesthesia than the doctors knew. And that kind framed my life.”

His jazz epiphany would come at age 15, after seeing John Coltrane at Birdland in February 1961. “I’m sitting there wondering, ‘Is that the same instrument I have on my bed that I practice one hour a day with?’ This was the band with Trane and [Eric] Dolphy, and I couldn’t really recognize what they were doing, but I could feel it,” Liebman said. “I remember thinking, ‘I don’t know what they’re doing, but whatever it is, I want some of it.’”

By the late ‘60s, Liebman occupied a loft in a building on 19th Street near Sixth Avenue, where his neighbors on other floors included Chick Corea and Dave Holland. Jams took place in lofts of innumerable other musicians, including bassist Gene Perla and percussionist Don Alias near the Fulton Street Fish Market, and drummer Bob Moses in the Bowery on Bleecker Street.

So Liebman made his spot appealing to other musicians. “The day I walked into my place, I got it ready quickly, because I knew that if I had drums, piano and a bass, people would come,” he recalled. “We weren’t really supposed to play after work, but there was music happening in that loft at all hours of the day.”

He eventually sold his 1,200-square-foot loft to a 21-year-old Michael Brecker, who was new on the scene and eager to participate in frantic jams with other Coltrane-inspired tenor players. Later, Brecker and his brother Randy would form the jazz-rock-pop band Dreams, and Liebman would pursue a somewhat similar aesthetic with Ten Wheel Drive, which is where he first began playing soprano saxophone to fill out the group’s innovative horn arrangements.

“Mike and Randy would go on to play with Horace Silver, and I would go on to play with Elvin Jones,” Liebman said. “So, we all got into playing more straightahead after the loft scene.”

Following his two-year stint with Jones, Liebman officially joined Miles Davis’ electric crew in January 1973, though he had participated in the landmark *On The Corner* sessions the previous summer. “People hated *On The Corner*,” he recalled. “They couldn’t figure out what he was doing, and to be honest, during my first six months with him, I really didn’t know what he was doing, either. I couldn’t psyche it out, I

couldn't know it out But one day, I suddenly heard it, and it made sense to me. And I told him, 'Miles, I think I got it!' And he said, 'I told you you would.' And he seemed happy, because he could see that he had another convert."

Up until that point, Liebman's parents had registered the typical worries about his career choice. "They would say, 'Do you know what you're doing? What's a gig? How do you make money from this? What are you gonna do when we're not here?' But finally when we did *Dark Magus* at Carnegie [on March 30, 1974], and they sat in the audience and watched me play with Miles, my mother said, 'Well, you must be good! You're at Carnegie Hall!' She didn't completely understand it, but at that point she admitted, 'I guess you know what you're doing.'

"And my father, who was strictly into classical music—Tchaikovsky, Brahms—was completely perplexed by the whole thing. He said to me, 'How do you guys do it? Your eyes are closed, you don't talk to each other, there's no music in front of you. ... It's like miracles.' And that naive, clear statement of fact was true."

During his tenure with Davis, Liebman primarily played soprano, but mostly as a practical matter. "I couldn't hear myself on tenor because Miles' music was so loud," he said. "We had three guitars at one point, with Pete Cosey, Reggie Lucas and Dominique Gaumont. I was a little frustrated in that group because I couldn't hear a note. I was always thinking, 'What I am doing here with these three guys who can press a pedal and sound like an orchestra?' So, I told Miles, 'You don't need me. Why don't you just keep it with the guitars?' And he said, 'People like to see you move your fingers.' So, I stayed, and I was able to cut through a lot better with the soprano."

Liebman later would devote 15 years (1980–1995) exclusively to the soprano saxophone. "Giving up the tenor was a major step, and it was [pianist] Richie Beirach who strongly encouraged me to do it," Liebman explained. "He said, 'Go to what's your strongest thing. Don't fuck around with the tenor.' And I remember saying to him, 'What about those tunes we play like 'Impressions' and all that burning shit? How am I gonna do that without the tenor?' He said, 'Hey, you gotta make it work on soprano.' Eventually I found that there was a possibility of finding something in the soprano that could be me."

In 1986, Liebman released the daring solo soprano saxophone album *The Loneliness Of A Long Distance Runner*. "I was fascinated by the title of that book and felt some parallels in my own thing," he said, referring to British writer Alan Sillitoe's 1959 short-story collection, *The Loneliness Of The Long Distance Runner*, which later was turned into a film.

"What we do in playing a solo instrument is a little like being a long-distance runner. You're out on your own, and you gotta come up with something. We're in this lifestyle to find something of

beauty, and it's a lonely track in the end."

Liebman's unaccompanied piece "Soprano Saxophone Interlude" from *Earth* harkens back to his evocative work on *Loneliness*. Another recent example of his signature soprano playing can be heard on his collaboration with guitarist John Stowell for 2018's *Petite Fleur: The Music Of Sidney Bechet* (Origin). "That album was, of course, very idiomatic and in his style," he said. "And what I discovered is what a great writer Bechet was."

The saxophonist's move back to New York

has allowed him to be more active in the bustling Big Apple jazz scene that once nurtured him. In January, he was seen stretching on standards at Brooklyn's Made in New York Jazz Cafe with Perla on bass and Lenny White on drums, both jamming partners from the late-'60s loft scene. In the intimacy of that Park Slope nightclub, they swung ferociously on renditions of jazz staples. And while standards remain close to Liebman's heart, his adventurous, forward-thinking agenda on *Earth* reflects an artistic restlessness as vibrant today as it was decades ago. **DB**



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Lakecia Benjamin

PURSUING A SPIRITUAL QUEST

BY SUZANNE LORGE

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH LEITZELL

When saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin finished the fourth song of her set, “Pursuance,” at Le Poisson Rouge in Manhattan on Jan. 11, a techie gave her a time warning. The amped-up crowd expressed dismay. “Don’t tempt me,” she quipped into the mic. “Any woman who made a Coltrane album will play all night.”

The notion seemed credible. That evening, the seemingly indefatigable Benjamin played with ferocious joy, keeping time in her silver high-tops, chatting up the audience, even throwing her shiny jacket on the stage in mock surrender during a particularly blistering tenor saxophone solo by guest artist Marcus Strickland. In all aspects of her craft, the young alto player seemed to be testing established boundaries as much as she was lionizing the artistry of her musical forebears.

The performance, part of Winter JazzFest, was something of a preview for Benjamin’s latest undertaking, the self-produced *Pursuance: The Coltranes* (Ropeadope), out March 27. Several of the prominent players from the album joined Benjamin on the LPR stage: In addition to Strickland, they included bassist Reggie Workman, saxophonist Greg Osby and violinist Regina Carter. These talents represent only a smattering of the musicians who contributed to the recording. But with more than 40 artists on the new release, Benjamin would have been hard pressed to fit its entire personnel on stage, even if all the musicians had been available.

“One problem I’ve always had in life is dreaming really big,” Benjamin said during an interview at a Lincoln Center café the day before the LPR show. Off stage, with her gleaming horn tucked away in its case, Benjamin revealed a different side of her musical persona: the conscientious student of jazz history, smitten with the innovators who first charted the artistic path that she now treads, albeit in silver high-tops.



Benjamin doesn't exaggerate when she talks about dreaming big. To date she's released two albums under her own name, both with casts of more than 20 musicians: *Retox* (Motéma) in 2012 and *Rise Up* (Ropeadope) in 2018. With those—devoted as much to funk and soul as jazz—Benjamin began to develop a feel for bandleading, a skill that separates forward-looking jazz innovators from the merely talented.

"In every [past] generation, you had to be a bandleader, somebody who decided to take the steps to change things," she said. "If you're playing with people, it feels great, but bandleaders have a way harder job."

Benjamin likely came to this realization during her years of experience as a side player to a host of in-demand pop, soul, funk and jazz acts—Gregory Porter, David Murray, Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, The Roots, Macy Gray, Missy Elliot, Talib Kweli and Anita Baker among them. These gigs started pouring in soon after Benjamin graduated from the jazz program at The New School in her hometown of New York.

Pursuance is Benjamin's most ambitious project so far, not only for its eye-popping lineup, but for the magnitude of its subject matter: the compositions of Alice Coltrane (1937–2007) and John Coltrane (1926–'67). The meaningful twist here is the equal weight that Benjamin gives to Alice's work, intentionally dividing the album's 13 tracks about equally between the two musicians.

For Benjamin, this balanced approach is only natural: Growing up, she was transfixed by Alice's otherworldly compositions before she even knew that John existed.

"A friend of mine had turned me on to Alice. She was friends with [Alice's] family," Benjamin recalled. "We would play her music all the time, and it really inspired me to start writing and cre-

ating. Then, out of the blue, I opened the booklet [to one of Alice's CDs] and I saw the name John Coltrane. I asked, 'Who's John Coltrane? Does Alice have a brother?'"

Intrigued, Benjamin dug into John Coltrane's discography, starting with his earliest work, through to his last. "By the end, I had a full picture of him," she said. "I'm glad I came at it that way, versus somebody playing 'Giant Steps' for me, which maybe I wouldn't have understood."

Workman—a New School faculty member who has known Benjamin since her days as a student there—is the rare living musician who has worked with both of the Coltranes, first in John's 1960s quartet and then on Alice's 1978 concert album, *Transfiguration*. "I thought he could give me some insight since he played with both of them," Benjamin said about the bassist, who contributed to her latest work.

Around the time Benjamin got in touch with Workman, the National Endowment of the Arts announced that he would be a recipient of a 2020 Jazz Masters Fellowship. This development set Benjamin to pondering the role that the Coltrane-era musicians had played in her own growth as an artist.

"I was glad that Reggie got some credit, not just the NEA Award, but also tenure at The New School," Benjamin said. "And I was thinking that people of his generation don't get enough props, especially from my generation. We say that we honor these guys, but we don't make a public statement about it in our work."

"So, I thought, 'There are a few guys alive who played with the Coltranes. Maybe [the album] would be a good way for us to pay tribute to all the work they've done. To let them know that it's meant a lot to my generation.'"

Besides Workman, Benjamin had her eye on bassist Ron Carter, who'd played on Alice

Coltrane's third album, *Ptah, The El Daoud*, and saxophonist Gary Bartz, who, like Carter, had worked closely with McCoy Tyner, a long-time pianist with the John Coltrane Quartet. She wasn't sure either would agree to record with her, but she reached out anyway.

Carter and Bartz agreed, with Workman signing on as co-producer.

"Then the project started spiraling," Benjamin said. She started thinking about all of the other great musicians whose work had influenced her. Didn't they deserve recognition, too? With this question in mind, she thought to invite some of her mentors, like saxophonist Steve Wilson and singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, and fellow rising stars, like trumpeter Keyon Harrold and drummer Marcus Gilmore. Then she started making phone calls to see who would be available for two all-day recording sessions.

The two marathon recording sessions were "like a reunion," recalled harpist Brandee Younger. "Everyone was there, and it was really special." Long a devotee of Alice Coltrane, who pioneered the jazz harp, Younger first met Benjamin about 11 years ago, around the time they both worked for drummer Rashied Ali (1933–2009), another musician who played with both of the Coltranes.

"Lakecia was absolutely thoughtful in her instrumentation and the selection of the players," Younger said. But what stuck out the most, she added, was that "Lakecia always brings an element of soul to whatever she's playing. When we recorded 'Going Home,' it was a beautiful, spiritual moment in the studio because of the soul she brought to it."

Alice released the original "Going Home" on her 1973 album, *Lord Of Lords* (which was reissued in 2018 by the Superior Viaduct label). By this stage in her music career, Alice had begun experimenting with soothing, ethereal orchestrations, writing them herself, hinting at her growing interest in devotional music. In 1976, she established the Vedantic Center in California, which later relocated to a site near Malibu and was renamed the Sai Anantam Ashram. (The site later was destroyed in the 2018 Woolsey Fire.)

Alice's final studio album, *Translinear Light*, came in 2004 and featured contributions from her sons Ravi and Oran, both saxophonists. In Benjamin's arrangement of the traditional gospel blues "Walk With Me," more than a step removed from the *Translinear* version, violinist Carter's free sections act as bookends for the bandleader's solo work, the mournful stirring of the strings contrasting with jubilant saxophone tones.

Alice didn't release any new music after this album, though several archival recordings would surface after her death. In 2017, the Luaka Bop label released the compilation *World Spiritual Classics I: The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda*. Among its tracks is "Om Shanti"—a call for peace—originally released on

cassette for the ashram's followers. Benjamin's take on the composition, a mash-up of spoken word, sung chants and soaring saxophone, featuring vocals from Georgia Anne Muldrow and bass from Meshell Ndegecello, retains all of Alice's fervor, even as it speaks of modern pain.

Benjamin's use of spoken word—just one of her stylistic allusions to hip-hop—on tunes like "Om Shanti" highlights both her comfort and her expertise with idioms outside of jazz. For instance, on "Acknowledgement," from John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, Benjamin opens with a poetic riff by Abiodun Oyewole, founder of the iconoclastic spoken-word group The Last Poets: "John Coltrane was a vessel/ Taking us to the house of God/ He spoke to God in the language God knew/ In the language of sound." With this intro she uses sound in a way that Coltrane didn't—but there's nothing amiss here. Imitation is not her way of paying respect.

According to Benjamin, the decision to incorporate spoken word was an essential artistic choice. "Words can press through sometimes when the music can't," she observed.

However, aside from the sung prayers and spoken-word sections, the album doesn't contain any text. This was not Benjamin's first idea, which was to include original lyrics by powerhouse vocalist Bridgewater on "Acknowledgement." She and Benjamin even recorded the track with lyrics, before doubling back to re-record it with a vocalese segment.

"We found out that the estate doesn't allow any lyrics to Coltrane's music at all," explained Bridgewater in a phone conversation from her home in New Orleans.

But no harm: Bridgewater's skilled improvisation on the tune only magnified its timeless musicality. And, luckily, Benjamin has some of the best vocal improvisers around on her first-call list. Jazzmeia Horn scatted effortlessly on John Coltrane's "Central Park West" for the album, and Charenée Wade stepped up to do the same at the LPR concert.

As Benjamin learned, toeing the line between creative interpretation and copyright violation is just one of the risks that performing artists face in their efforts to honor the masters of their craft. Another is the threat of comparison with those same masters. Workman issued a word of caution, however, about any such comparisons between Benjamin and the Coltranes.

"This music is in her blood, and [through the Coltrane material] she's finding a way to tell a similar story. John Coltrane would be upset if we did his work the same way that he did 65 years ago," Workman remarked, going on to point out Benjamin's smarts when it comes to contemporary music. "Her ears are open, and her roots are firmly planted. This album is her way of saying where her roots are. Firmly planted and waiting to grow."

Like Workman, Bridgewater also sees signs

of Benjamin's tremendous possibilities, not just for artistic growth, but for success in the music industry. "The word for Lakecia is 'fierce.' She's really, really powerful as a player," she said. "I think the sky's the limit for her."

For the time being, though, whatever successes might lie ahead, Benjamin finds in the work of the Coltranes a template for how she'd like her life to be, both artistically and personally. "I was looking to get closer not just to their music, but to what they meant when they talked about a spiritual life," she said. "I strive to be in a place where I can be whole within myself, where

every note I play is touching somebody on a deeper level. So, the album is called *Pursuance* because I'm still striving to get to that place. Aesthetically, I'm trying to get to heaven every time I play."

After she launches *Pursuance* at Jazz at Lincoln Center on March 11–12, Benjamin will spend some of the spring touring Europe and the States. But when asked about her upcoming plans, she mentions only one: a meeting with bebop vocal legend Sheila Jordan, 91.

"She knew Charlie Parker," Benjamin said, excitedly. She's looking forward to hearing all about him from someone who was there. **DB**

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14

15

16

17

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Inside >

- 52 / Jazz
- 54 / Blues
- 58 / Beyond
- 60 / Historical
- 62 / Books

REVIEWS >



Pianist and composer Carla Bley embraces dichotomies on her latest trio effort.

Carla Bley/Andy Sheppard/Steve Swallow

Life Goes On

ECM 2669

★★★★★

Carla Bley's longtime trio with British saxophonist Andy Sheppard and bassist Steve Swallow played one of the more memorable sets at last year's Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee, and this studio recording is a brilliant extension of their camaraderie. The album offers three suites that highlight Bley's deft sense of dramatic development, her gifts as a soloist (so often overshadowed by her composing) and the trio's deadpan minimalism and subtly organic interplay.

The pianist, 81, recently had surgery for a brain tumor, so the title (and title track) have deep personal resonance. The four parts of the opening suite—"Life Goes On," "On," "And On," "And Then One Day"—play out like a lit-

tle story about mortality, beginning with a slow and sexy blues, as if to say, "Here is bed-rock, everyday life as it should be," followed by a tender, Monk-ish ballad that has "I adore you" written all over it. After a playful, quick dance in 3—"Life is good; life's a dance"—comes the crash: a tense piano pulse, Swallow's high, hooting bass guitar chewing on dissonance, Sheppard switching from keening soprano to virile tenor, then everyone slowing down to a stop, with a final tolling bell. It's as if the band's saying, "Yes, life goes on, but in the end, it also doesn't."

Bley's ability to embrace such dichotomies lies at the heart of her genius. The noirish "Beautiful Telephones"—which takes its title from Donald Trump's commentary on White House decor after moving in—manages to be both ominous and emotionally expressive. Bley breaks out with splashy figures, as Swallow buoys her, breaking for a moment into a walk, then answers her call. Sheppard solos passion-

ately on tenor.

The trio has no drummer, so there's a lot of air between notes, and sometimes the players pair up. On the clever third piece, "Copy Cat," Bley, Swallow and Sheppard repeat or complete one another's thoughts, giving off electricity as they glance off each other's compact phrases. Sheppard's soprano spits and thrusts in a duet with Swallow, who periodically leaves the reedist to fly off the cliff into stop-time. The pianist plunks and plinks with delight, answering Sheppard.

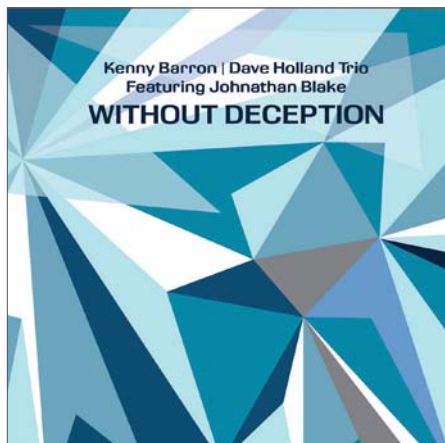
During Bley's long and rich career, there have been times when her work has merely seemed smart, but not emotionally resonant. Here, it's both, and her trio is all in for life—as long as it lasts.

—Paul de Barros

Life Goes On: Life Goes On; Beautiful Telephones; Copy Cat. (56:39)

Personnel: Carla Bley, piano; Andy Sheppard, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Steve Swallow, electric bass.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Kenny Barron/Dave Holland Trio Featuring Johnathan Blake
Without Deception

DARE2 RECORDS 011

★★★★½

The rapport Dave Holland shares with Kenny Barron is as unimpeachable as their individual talents. Six years ago, Impulse issued *The Art Of Conversation*, a master class in crafting sparkling duo performances.

That accord marks this new venture as they add Johnathan Blake—his drumming contributing a flinty dimension to the mix. Often, he

kindles the dialogues with a supple propulsion and inventiveness that never overshadow the established bond between the two elder players.

Barron's affinity for Brazilian music reveals itself immediately on "Porto Alegre," a samba-driven original that opens the disc. After Barron hammers a bouncy riff that quickly flowers into a pithy melody, Holland locks in the groove with both Barron's left-hand comping and Blake's shuffling groove. As the song progresses, the trio engages in some improvisational tradeoffs that are so superb in transition it nearly goes unnoticed, even when Blake rises to the fore with a thundering solo.

Other highlights include the title track, a medium-tempo modern-jazz original by Barron that's anchored with both bluesy and joyous vibrations, and Barron's feisty "Speed Trap," a capricious stop-start excursion, steered by Holland's fleet walking bass line, and Blake's bright ride cymbal work and snapping drumming.

Throughout *Without Deception*, Barron and Holland's artful conversing ascends and deepens with ample support from Blake's kinetic and empathic input.

—John Murph

Without Deception: Porto Alegre; Second Thoughts; Without Deception; Until Then; Speed Trap; Secret Places; Pass It On; Warm Valley; I Remember When; Worry Later. (65:32)

Personnel: Kenny Barron, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Johnathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: daveholland.com/dare2

Andrea Brachfeld
Brazilian Whispers

ORIGIN 82795

★★★★

Courageous redecoration often is a valuable stance when updating classics. I'd never imagined Antônio Carlos Jobim's "Waters Of March" as a shuffle until spinning this salute to the maestro's book by flutist Andrea Brachfeld. The signature esprit of Brazil's samba/bossa nexus gets its due, but a feisty groove dominates her band's rendering, and by the time they reach full speed, the March of the title is more "in like a lion" than "out like a lamb." In fact, its propulsion almost makes it a military march.

That kind of unique slant doesn't define all the pieces here, but the craft Brachfeld's outfit brings to the table makes many of the tracks ripple with laudable precision. In the album notes, the leader wrote that their chemistry as a working unit has deepened; the program supports that notion. Coordination dominates, and the group—pianist Bill O'Connell, bassist Harvie S and drummer Jason Tiemann are at its core, though another rhythm section holds sway on about half the album—provides plenty of supple turns and sympathetic unity. That makes jewels such as "Amparo," where they're joined by guitarist



Roni Ben-Hur, essays in tender decorum.

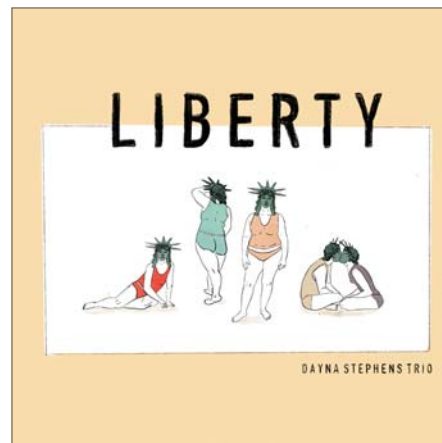
The deft alignment sustains itself when they break from Brazil, too. "Never Let Me Go" is a farewell to Roy Hargrove that brims with sensitivity. Like the Brachfeld/O'Connell original "Triste E Solitaria," it's built on an enviable poise that reveals deeper interests, while still being informally entertaining. Come to think of it, that description fits the entire record.

—Jim Macnie

Brazilian Whispers: Double Rainbow; Passarim; Waters Of March; Amparo; Sonhos E Cores; Samba Medley; Never Let Me Go; Ligia; Girl From Ipanema; Triste E Solitaria; Espaço Aberto. (63:28)

Personnel: Andrea Brachfeld, C flute, alto flute (2, 4, 7); Bill O'Connell, piano; Fender Rhodes (1, 8, 10); Harvie S, bass; Lincoln Goines, electric bass, surdo (6); Roni Ben-Hur, guitar; Jason Tiemann, drums; T. Portinho, drums, percussion (6); Chemo Corniel, percussion.

Ordering info: originarts.com



Dayna Stephens Trio
Liberty

CONTAGIOUS MUSIC 004

★★★★½

Dayna Stephens dubbed his latest album *Liberty* for several reasons. He wanted to play around with implied harmonies, so he composed for a trio, sans piano or guitar. He also wanted to make a broad statement about the interrelatedness of humanity, his compositions alluding to freedom as the most basic of human rights. And he wanted to celebrate his personal delivery from the burdens of thrice-weekly dialysis, the treatment for the rare form of kidney disease that had overshadowed his life for several years.

This album, his ninth as a leader, flows thematically from *Gratitude*, his 2017 "thank you" to those who had helped him weather his illness. On these releases, the charismatic melodicism of Stephens' solos commands most of the focus, all the more captivating for the high-wattage players alongside him. (Pianist Brad Mehldau and guitarist Julian Lage contributed to *Gratitude*.)

But on *Liberty*, Stephens introduces rhythmic variations that serve to enhance his melodic assertions. With bassist Ben Street and *Gratitude* drummer Eric Harland riding shotgun, listeners would be hard-pressed to notice the unvoiced chords. Many of them are well-known, anyway: Stephens based his compositions "Kwooked Stweet" and "Faith Leap" on John Coltrane's "Straight Street" and "Giant Steps," respectively, and "Loosy Goosy" is a spirited gambol through "Rhythm" changes.

On other tunes, like "Rhyming History" and "The Lost And Found," though, Stephens sinks into a closed-eye pulse with his sidemen, harmonic considerations (implied or otherwise) set aside momentarily as he stretches into the feel of his instrument. Listeners are left to follow where such freedom leads.

—Suzanne Lorge

Liberty: Ran; Faith Leap; Kwooked Stweet; The Lost And Found; At Least 37th Cousins; Loosy Goosy; Tarifa; Rhyming History; Planting Flowers; The Sound Goddess; Wil's Way. (47:05)

Personnel: Dayna Stephens, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone; Ben Street, bass; Eric Harland, drums.

Ordering info: daynastephens.net

The Hot Box

Critics	Paul de Barros	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie	John Murph
Bley/Sheppard/Swallow <i>Life Goes On</i>	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
Barron/Holland/Blake <i>Without Deception</i>	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½
Andrea Brachfeld <i>Brazilian Whispers</i>	★★½	★★★	★★★	★★★★½
Dayna Stephens Trio <i>Liberty</i>	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½

Critics' Comments

Bley/Sheppard/Swallow, *Life Goes On*

As these Bley compositions unspool across three riveting movements, the open spaces resonate with meaning. Mostly elegiac, but sometimes humorous and clever, Bley's unflinching musical statements here would be impossible to controvert. —Suzanne Lorge

The attractions of poise are many, and even when Bley's suites are waxing forlorn or giving the hot foot to the nimrod in the Oval Office, she's wooing us with finesse. —Jim Macnie

Much of the disc's beauty derives from the sleek melodic lines and structures of Bley's pensive compositions, and the trio's tremendous rapport and beguiling communicative prowess. —John Murph

Barron/Holland/Blake, *Without Deception*

It's been such a pleasure to hear Holland and Barron dive into swinging jazz these past few years, in both duos and trios. Blake adds spice on a churchy track like "Pass It On" and makes it easy for the troupe to coast in a zone where the notion of "free" versus "straightahead" has no meaning. —Paul de Barros

Surprisingly romantic in ambience, the album lays bare the group's effortless rhythmic gestalt and precise harmonic placements. Barron's melodic sophistication dominates throughout, generous and masterful. —Suzanne Lorge

Their inherent grace is everywhere, but the politeness that often marks such sets doesn't win the battle. There's plenty of friction at hand, and it bumps the action nicely. —Jim Macnie

Andrea Brachfeld, *Brazilian Whispers*

Brachfeld has a lovely, silvery flute sound, but this collection of Brazilian warhorses exposes her as a less-than-facile soloist. The darker, more active track "Never Let Me Go" stands above the rest for vigor and originality. —Paul de Barros

Brachfeld's forthright playing and fresh arrangements of classic Brazilian fare land just this side of outright exhilarating. With this album, the bandleader reminds us that distance can entice and whispers reveal. —Suzanne Lorge

The veteran flutist spellbinds with her assured virtuosity and clear emotional projections as she explores some of Jobim's beloved classics and a trio of alluring originals. —John Murph

Dayna Stephens Trio, *Liberty*

In the eccentric, brilliant tradition of Warne Marsh, here playing four different saxophones, Stephens comes from the aspirationally affectless "no vibrato, no clichés" school, which at times can be thrilling ("The Lost And Found") or almost willfully dull ("The Sound Goddess"). —Paul de Barros

Love the flexibility that's the defining throughline of this affair, especially the way Stephens sets the tone by keeping even the most aggressive moves lithe. —Jim Macnie

The saxophonist brings a newfound sense of strength, inventiveness and clarity to this bristling date that functions as victory lap after years of combating kidney disease. —John Murph



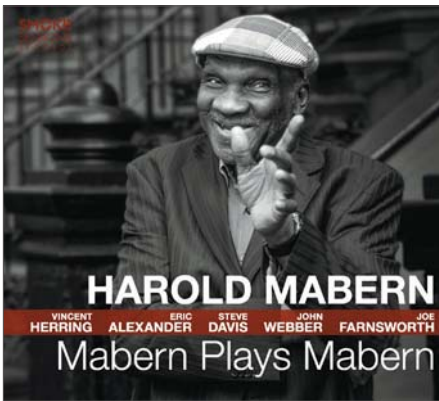
VINCENT HERRING alto saxophone
BOBBY WATSON alto saxophone
GARY BARTZ alto saxophone
DAVID KIKOSKI piano
YASUSHI NAKAMURA bass
CARL ALLEN drums



VINCENT HERRING alto saxophone
ERIC ALEXANDER tenor saxophone
STEVE DAVIS trombone
HAROLD MABERN piano
JOHN WEBBER bass
JOE FARNSWORTH drums



WAYNE ESCOFFERY saxophones
DAVID KIKOSKI piano
UGONNA OKEGWO bass
RALPH PETERSON drums
with special guests
RANDY BRECKER trumpet
DAVID GILMORE guitar



Harold Mabern *Mabern Plays Mabern*

SMOKE SESSIONS 2001

★★★★★

Even if you didn't know that the late Harold Mabern stood more than 6 feet tall, it would be possible to sense his size from the sound he got from the piano. Nicknamed "Big Hands" as a teenager, Mabern took a two-fisted approach to the keyboard, using big block chords to power an ensemble. Just listen to the ferocity with which he comps on the angular, post-bop burner "The Beehive," a tune off this posthumous live set.

After a powerhouse opening that found him shadowing the horns in thunderous octaves,

Mabern's relentless, chiming chords drive a duel between altoist Vincent Herring and tenorman Eric Alexander, fueling their interplay with such ferocity that listeners might expect one of the horns to burst into flames. Or consider his brooding, rhapsodic intro to "Mr. Johnson." There are moments when his combination of modal harmony and sustain-pedal dynamics evoke the majesty and rhythmic authority of post-Coltrane McCoy Tyner.

Recorded during the same run of shows that produced 2018's *The Iron Man: Live At Smoke*, this album—intended to eulogize the pianist, who died Sept. 17, 2019—actually burns a bit brighter than its predecessor. Some of that has to do with the addition of Herring and trombonist Steve Davis to the lineup, as they contribute luster and lyricism to the likes of "Lover Man" (one of only two non-Mabern compositions here). But even without the guests, Mabern's band was hot that night, as evinced by the explosive chemistry between Alexander and drummer Joe Farnsworth on Mabern's George Coleman tribute, "Lyrical Cole-Man."
—J.D. Considine

Mabern Plays Mabern: Mr. Johnson; The Iron Man; Lover Man; Lyrical Cole-Man; Edward Lee; It's Magic; The Beehive; Rakin' And Scrapin'. (69:53)

Personnel: Harold Mabern, piano; Vincent Herring, alto saxophone; Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; Steve Davis, trombone; John Webber, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



Shabaka And The Ancestors *We Are Sent Here By History*

IMPULSE B0031632

★★★★★

Much of London-based saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings' recent work has formed a kind of revisionist history. His 2018 release with Sons Of Kemet, *Your Queen Is A Reptile*, posited a series of notable women of color as alternative queens to the British monarchy. And the psychedelic collapse of his Comet Is Coming recordings channels the otherworldly energy of jazz futurism into new musical understandings of our past and collective visions for the future. His concepts, though, are most fully expressed on his second album with Johannesburg, South Africa-based group The Ancestors.

We Are Sent Here By History is a continuous sonic poem—featuring the striking spoken-word lyrics of Siyabonga Mthembu—its 11 tracks forming an impressionistic narrative that demand a renegotiation of our relationship to the earth and patriarchy. Each track title is taken from a line of a poem, all calls to action that buffet the listener like Hutchings' insistent phrasings. The doubling of vocals and reeds here serves to create a restlessly energetic communal expression. Opener "They Who Must Die" provides landsliding washes of sound, while plaintive clarinet and saxophone harmonies on "Behold, The Deceiver" call to mind the deeply felt work of Trane and Dolphy.

Hutchings' message and vision might be grandiose, but his expression is nonetheless heartfelt and captivating. On *We Are Sent Here*, he makes it apparent that change is necessary, lest we embrace stasis and merely accept the history we've been given.
—Ammar Kalia

We Are Sent Here By History: They Who Must Die; You've Been Called; Go My Heart, Go To Heaven; Behold, The Deceiver; Run, The Darkness Will Pass; The Coming Of The Strange Ones; Beasts Too Spoke Of Suffering; We Will Work (On Redefining Manhood); 'Til The Freedom Comes Home; Finally, The Man Cried; Teach Me How To Be Vulnerable. (64:01)

Personnel: Shabaka Hutchings, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Mthunzi Mvubu, alto saxophone; Ariel Zamonsky, bass; Tumi Mogorosi, drums; Siyabonga Mthembu, vocals; Gontse Makhele, percussion; Nduduzo Makhathini, Thandi Ntuli, keyboard; Mandla Mlangeni, trumpet.

Ordering info: impulserrecords.com

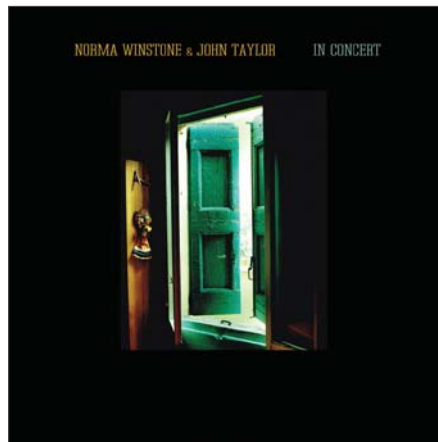
Norma Winstone & John Taylor *In Concert*

SUNNYSIDE 1534

★★★★★

Assessments of British singer Norma Winstone tend to center on her early avant-garde and mostly wordless vocal work. Assessments of her former husband John Taylor, who died in 2015 after the couple had split, usually emphasize the quiet, pastoral side of his work. Winstone, though, always has been a brilliant interpreter of song, both Broadway tunes and more recondite fare, including Provençal troubères material. And while some might think of Taylor solely in terms of limpidity, skip directly to "Coffee Time" here, a bouncing samba that has him playing with weight and energy, and using the body of the piano and damped strings to build up a rhythm behind Winstone's witty scat.

The couple's quieter, perhaps more familiar side is evident on "Celeste," a gorgeous, almost evanescent Ralph Towner ballad, with lyrics by Winstone. It brings to an end a 1988 concert all the more remarkable for having been completely impromptu, set up without notice at the end of Winstone and Taylor's teaching residency at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama. And until now, the music only had been available



via an obscure 1999 cassette release.

What might seem like a chance recovery and a nostalgic souvenir actually prompts some overdue reappraisal of the duo. The ability to program compositions at the drop of a hat by Towner, Steve Swallow, Egberto Gismonti and bright originals suggests the range and depth this partnership represented. Taylor sadly is no more, but Winstone continues to be one of Europe's most important voices.
—Brian Morton

In Concert: Lucky To Be Me; Ladies In Mercedes; Cafe; The Glide; In Your Own Sweet Way; Round Midnight/Midnight Sun; Coffee Time; Celeste. (58:40)

Personnel: Norma Winstone, vocals; John Taylor, piano.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Kandace Springs
The Women Who Raised Me

BLUE NOTE B0031597

★★★★★

Agnes Obel
Myopia

BLUE NOTE B0031470

★★★½

When it comes to vocal albums, Blue Note doesn't always color within the lines. The label, with its relatively undiluted roster of jazz instrumentalists, often will promote singer-songwriters

from the pop, soul and country arenas. Elvis Costello, Annie Lennox, Willie Nelson and Roseanne Cash all appear in the label's catalog. And this year, two new releases further enhance the label's eclectic palette.

Danish singer Agnes Obel offers *Myopia*, her first solo album on the imprint, but her fourth overall. For each of these, the singer followed the same extreme creative process: She holed up in her Berlin home studio to write, perform and record the tracks in isolation. She records mainly at night, she said—a habit that leads to some darkly contemplative places: "Broken Sleep," an intimate alt-rock tune with thrumming strings, haunting vocals and eerie poetry; and "Island Of Doom," an oddly soothing conflation of angelic layered choruses, pizzicato cello lines and apocalyptic lyrics.

Like Theo Bleckmann, Obel uses ambient sound as a backdrop for beseeching, internally focused vocals. Set up this way, her voice becomes a vehicle of unadulterated emotion. It's on instrumentals, like "Roscian" and "Parliament Of Owls," however, that the structure of Obel's music becomes clearer. Repetitive phrases provide a rhythm, and slow harmonic development creates narrative movement. There's a loveliness to this structure that belies the dystopian worldview Obel is describing—offering something restorative amid all

the sadness.

Singer/pianist Kandace Springs gives a shout-out to the vocalists who inspired her on *The Women Who Raised Me*, her fourth Blue Note album—this one comprising a dozen songs from the Nashville bandleader's formative years. The honorees here represent everything from classic and contemporary jazz to blues, pop, neo-soul and Brazilian music.

Spring's laid-back phrasing on "Solitude" summons Carmen McRae, while the emotional rawness of Billie Holiday is evident on "Strange Fruit." But Springs—no imitator—claims each tune in her own way. She uses a standard, mostly acoustic, rhythm section as an offset to her r&b-ornamented vocal lines. But the standout is Springs' duet with fellow Blue Note artist Norah Jones on a dusky, eloquent "Angel Eyes." They draw new lines with this one. —*Suzanne Lorge*

The Women Who Raised Me: Devil May Care; Angel Eyes; I Put A Spell On You; Pearls; Ex-Factor; I Can't Make You Love Me; Gentle Rain; Solitude; The Nearness Of You; What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?; Killing Me Softly With His Song; Strange Fruit. (53:12)

Personnel: Kandace Springs, Norah Jones, keyboard, vocals; Steve Cardenas, guitar; David Sanborn, alto saxophone; Avishai Cohen, trumpet; Elena Pinderhughes, flute; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Scott Colley, Christian McBride, bass; Clarence Penn, drums.

Myopia: Camera's Rolling; Broken Sleep; Island Of Doom; Roscian; Myopia; Drosera; Can't Be; Parliament Of Owls; Promise Keeper; Won't You Call Me. (39:52)

Personnel: Agnes Obel, vocals, keyboard, John Corban, violin; Kristina Koropecki, Charlotte Danhier, cello.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



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Connie Han
Iron Starlet



"The intention of this music is to continue a legacy of tough, primal, raw but still intellectually engaging straight-ahead jazz..."

— Connie Han
conniehan.com

Jimmy Greene
While Looking Up



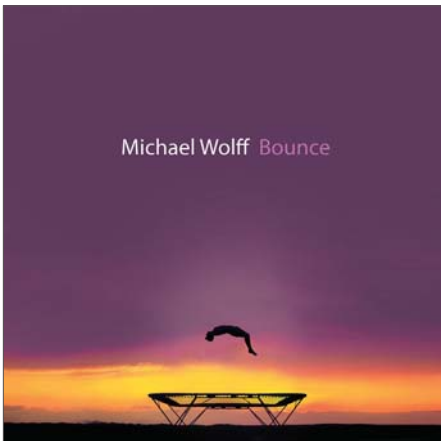
On his heartfelt new album, *While Looking Up*, Jimmy Greene was guided by the inspirational words of his pastor: "If I'm not able to find strength or peace by looking inward, or if I'm not able to do it by looking outward to my immediate surroundings, I have to look upward."

jimmygreene.com

Oscar Peterson
Oscar, With Love



Oscar, With Love is now available as a 5-LP 180 gram box set and 40-page booklet. This collection showcases Oscar Peterson as a composer and includes the world premiere of several pieces he wrote but never recorded; the compositions were retrieved from Peterson's library for the project. oscarpeterson.com



Michael Wolff *Bounce*

Michael Wolff *Bounce*

SUNNYSIDE 1574

★★★★

Pianist Michael Wolff's latest album, *Bounce*, operates as a kind of benediction. That's because Wolff, 67, recently recovered from an aggressive form of cancer for which, he was told, there was no cure. It turned out that there was—Wolff is now cancer-free—and the album functions as a celebration of the music he loves. It's a solid and soulful piano trio record, featuring bassist Ben Allison and drummer Allan Mednard—able accompanists both. Wolff's touch is just right,

too: lovely and restrained when he needs it to be, and forceful and expressive in other moments.

Wolff has had a long and fruitful career in music, having played with the likes of Cannonball Adderley, Cal Tjader, Nancy Wilson and Warren Zevon, among others. His previous album, *Swirl*, released last year, features the same group here, and is similar in style. *Bounce* is a grab bag of sorts, including both originals and covers. The opening title track is bright, buoyant and bluesy, with an optimistic mood that recalls Ramsey Lewis. The second track, "Chill," is a hip-hop-inflected nod to LL Cool J's "Around The Way Girl." "Milton," on the other hand, composed by Allison, tips its hat to Brazilian singer-songwriter Milton Nascimento, and the last track, "Omar Sharif," comes from the musical *The Band's Visit*.

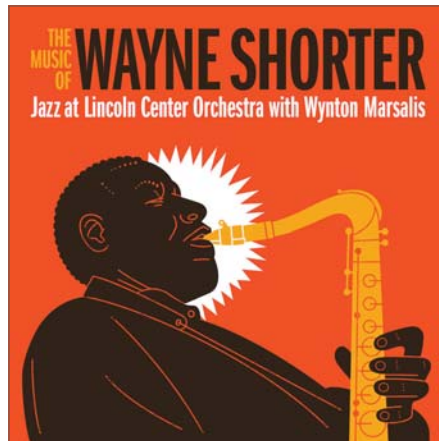
Allison's tone is deep and grounded. Mednard's drumming is never showy but always impressive. And Wolff clearly relishes the opportunity to record with these top-shelf musicians. Indeed, it is obvious, listening to this lively album, that Wolff and his bandmates have a strong rapport and are grateful for the opportunity to continue working together.

—Matthew Kassel

Bounce: Bounce; Chill; Caribbean Rain; Dance; Long Lost; Resuscitate; Cool Kids; You And The Night And The Music; Milton; Picasso; Omar Sharif. (50:09)

Personnel: Michael Wolff, piano; Ben Allison, bass; Allan Mednard, drums; Nat Wolff (6), vocals.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra *The Music Of Wayne Shorter*

BLUE ENGINE 0023

★★★★

When Jazz At Lincoln Center established its own orchestra in 1988, part of the idea was to showcase the repertoire of jazz greats. At first, the emphasis was on giants of the past, but with *The Music Of Wayne Shorter*, recorded live in 2015, the group not only salutes jazz's greatest living composer, but includes him as featured soloist.

These aren't his arrangements, however. Instead, each was written by a JLCO member, and colored as much by the band's aesthetic as by Shorter's melodic and harmonic signature. As such, the collaboration tilts toward the post-bop aspect of Shorter's oeuvre. Six of its 10 tunes originally were recorded for Blue Note, with two dating to his tenure with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. We do get versions of "Endangered Species" and "The Three Marias," both from Shorter's 1985 fusion effort *Atlantis*. There's just nothing from his time with Miles Davis or Weather Report. In fact, the album closes with "Mama G," a hard-bopper cut by the Wynton Kelly Quintet when Shorter was 26. Its original incarnation was raucous and bluesy with a surprising harmonic twist in the "B" section. Chris Crenshaw's arrangement, however, mostly emphasizes the minor-key groove of the "A" section, an approach that suits JLCO soloists, but doesn't encourage Shorter to shine. You can't blame the band for wanting to strut its stuff in front of the master, and the obvious affection JLCO holds for Shorter and his music ultimately carries the day.

—J.D. Cosidine

The Music Of Wayne Shorter: Disc One: Yes Or No; Diana; Hammer Head; Contemplation; Endangered Species. Disc Two: Lost; Armageddon; The Three Marias; Teru; Mama G. (44:34/50:57)

Personnel: Wayne Shorter, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Sherman Irby, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute, piccolo, B-flat clarinet; Ted Nash, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, C flute, alto flute, piccolo, B-flat clarinet; Victor Goines, tenor saxophone, B-flat clarinet, E-flat clarinet; Walter Blanding, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, B-flat clarinet; Paul Nedzella, baritone saxophone, alto saxophone, bass clarinet; Ryan Kisor, Kenny Rampton, Marcus Printup, Wynton Marsalis, trumpet; Vincent Gardner, Chris Crenshaw, Elliot Mason, trombone; Dan Nimmer, piano; Carlos Henriquez, bass; Ali Jackson, drums.

Ordering info: blueenginerecords.org

Felipe Salles *Interconnections Ensemble*

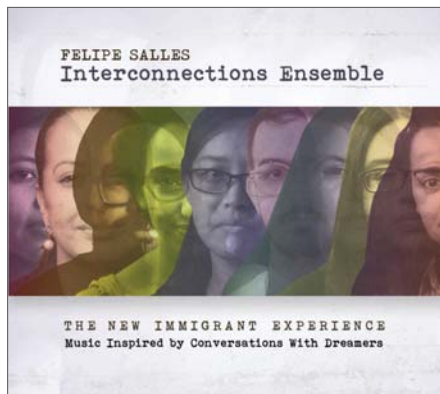
The New Immigrant Experience

TAPESTRY 76030

★★★★½

Why not award five stars to this two-CD set, which comes along with a DVD? The temptation was strong. But very few albums merit this distinction: *Kind Of Blue*, *Jazz At Massey Hall*. Now, *The New Immigrant Experience* might be recognized as a masterpiece in years to come, but today, its relevance adds to its impact.

Salles based the album on stories shared by young "Dreamers." The composer conducted interviews and found his titles for each section of the album from what they told him. More than that, he drew melodic inspiration from the rhythm, pitch and timbre of their words. As a result, his meters and structures are complex, yet never inaccessible, as if the music itself is speaking to us. "It's Just Lines On The Ground" opens with a one-note repetition, chattering out of tempo like voices in urgent conversation. This motif echoes through several rhythmic and textural settings, reminding listeners of the message behind Salles' beautifully crafted chart. Fiery moments occur, though more reflective ones



complement them and serve a greater narrative.

But this isn't about groove. It's about hearing what often-neglected people have been trying to get others to hear—a goal that Salles achieves brilliantly.

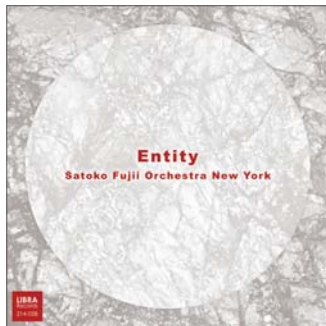
—Bob Doerschuk

The New Immigrant Experience: Disc One: Introduction; Did You Eat?; Their Stories Have Never Been Told; An Education To Begin With; A Part And Not The Other; Survivor's Guilt. Disc Two: It's Just Lines On The Ground; Built On Thin Air; Crossing Barriers; These Things That Are Taken For Granted; Coda. (46:25/40:12)

Personnel: Jonathan Ball, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute, piccolo; Aaron Dutton, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute; Mike Caudill, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute, clarinet; Rick DiMuzio, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Tyler Burchfield, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, clarinet; Jeff Holmes, Don Clough, Yuta Yamaguchi, Eric Smith, Doug Olsen, trumpet, flugelhorn; Clayton DeWalt, Randy Pingrey, Bulut Gülen, Angel Subero, trombone; Nando Michelin, piano; Kevin Grudecki, guitar; Ryan Fedak, vibraphone, marimba, glockenspiel; Keala Kaumeheua, bass; Bertram Lehmann, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: sallesjazz.com

**Satoko Fujii
Orchestra
New York
Entity**
LIBRA 214-058
★★★★★



Satoko Fujii's mastery as a pianist, composer and arranger is well-established. But even seasoned listeners might be taken aback by *Entity*, her latest collaboration with the New York iteration of her orchestra. From the massive, seasick big-band chord that launches the titular first track, *Entity* never lets up. While definitely an ensemble piece, the opener is a remarkable showcase for guitarist Nels Cline and drummer Ches Smith, who spend most of the tune in a dissonant cockfight, while the orchestra chants and bellows. It's a performance of pure sonic derring-do. Fujii probably could have arranged a full record of this kind of hi-octane squall—and made it satisfying. But *Entity* is far richer in dynamics than that. "Gounkaiku" starts slowly before cascading into aching melodic majesty; it then dips into a weaving shuffle, allowing trumpeter Dave Ballou a chance to play ringleader for a thoughtful interlude.

Entity initially might seem a bit far-out, but at the center of all these compositions is an innate sense of composition and musicality. It's fiery, sure, but never with the intention of burning anything down. —Dustin Krcatovich

Entity: Entity; Flashback; Gounkaiku; Elementary Particle; Everlasting. (63:32)
Personnel: Satoko Fujii, composer; Oscar Noriega, Briggan Krauss, alto saxophone; Ellery Eskin, Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone; Andy Laster, baritone saxophone; Natsuki Tamura, Herb Robertson, Dave Ballou, trumpet; Curtis Hasselbring, Joe Fiedler, trombone; Nels Cline, guitar; Stomu Takeishi, bass; Ches Smith, drums.

Ordering info: librarecords.com

**Wojtek
Mazolewski
Quintet
When Angels Fall**
WHIRLWIND 4747
★★★★★



Wojtek Mazolewski deserves to be known for his exemplary, if almost entirely supportive, bass playing, bandleading and arranging that successfully realize high-concept repertoire on *When Angels Fall*. A star in his native Poland, Mazolewski, 43, here interprets the works of Krzysztof Komeda (1931–1969), his compatriot and inspiration. The bassist's aesthetic and approach seem bound to the resources of his skilled players, rather than history or theory, though his rendition of Komeda's "Astigmatic" is true to the original: not swinging but propulsive, not bluesy, yet conveying that connotation via pianist Joanna Duda's tone-row, dissonant solo. There's more balladry than hard blowing on *When Angels Fall*, but the quintet is a tight unit, addressing material written mostly for Roman Polanski movies, negotiating the contrasts, contrariness and syncopation without strain. Electronic effects are sparse but effective, especially a dreamlike distortion of the entire ensemble on "Sleep Safe And Warm." Welcome Mazolewski and his quintet to the top tier of contemporary recording artists. —Howard Mandel

When Angels Fall: When Angels Fall; Roman II; Le Depart; Dwaj ludzie z Szafa (Two Men And A Wardrobe); Astigmatic; Crazy Girl; Ja Nie Chce Spac; Memory Of Bach; Bariera; Sleep Safe And Warm; Alleluja. (51:05)
Personnel: Wojtek Mazolewski, bass; Oskar Török, trumpet, electronics; Oba Janicki, drums, percussion; Joanna Duda, Wurlitzer, piano; Marek Pospieszalski, tenor saxophone.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



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Up From the Underground

During the 1990s, **Jeff Parker**, **Rob Mazurek** and **Dave Rempis** each took a turn sharpening the leading edge of Chicago's music community. Parker, a guitarist and multi-instrumentalist, moved to the city in 1991 and the following year fell in with Mazurek, who plays brass and electronics. At the time, both were engaged in straight-ahead jazz, but in each other's company they branched out to explore experimental pop and electronic music. Currently, Parker lives in Los Angeles and Mazurek in Marfa, Texas. Rempis came onto the scene in 1997 when, fresh out of Northwestern University, he was recruited to play alto, tenor and baritone saxophone in The Vandermark 5. In his roles as a bandleader, concert organizer and record-label proprietor, he has become a linchpin of Chicago's improvised music community.

While Parker has played some fiery music with the likes of Fred Anderson and Ken Vandermark, and pushed plenty of boundaries as a member of the post-rock group Tortoise, ***Suite For Max Brown (International Anthem IARC0029/Nonesuch 2-624971; ★★½ 39:55)*** shows his user-friendly side. Like his 2016 album *The New Breed*, this isn't just a record one could take home to the family; Parker puts his family on the record. Each LP displays one of his parents on the sleeve, and each features his teenage daughter Ruby on vocals. "Build A Nest" is simultaneously ingratiating and disorienting, since Ruby's multi-tracked croon doesn't quite sync up with the layers of rhythm and vocal loops. The effect duplicates things Parker used to do as a club DJ, when he'd simultaneously play records by John Coltrane and electronic musician Nobukazu Takemura. The rest of the album alternates between brief, mood-setting sketches and longer instrumental performances during which Parker drapes his lyrical guitar playing over catchy grooves and plush keyboards.

Ordering info: intlantthem.bandcamp.com

Through about a dozen previous albums and incarnations as a duo, trio, quartet and orchestra, Mazurek and drummer Chad Taylor have been the core members of The Chicago Underground. The name reflects creative common ground more than shared geographic space, since neither musician has lived in Chicago for much of the Underground's existence. Rooted in post-bop jazz, their work has encompassed electro-acoustic composition, free-improvisation and classic minimalism. Parker contributed to most of their early records, and became a full-fledged member for the sole self-titled recording by the Chicago Underground Quartet, released back in 2001. While Parker and Mazurek, who in recent years has swapped his cornet for a piccolo trumpet, have never stopped collaborating, the **Chicago Underground Quartet's *Good Days***



Jeff Parker

JIM NEWBERRY

(Astral Spirits 125; ★★★★★ 38:03) is the first time that the guitarist has sailed under the Underground's flag since then. Multi-instrumentalist Josh Johnson, who also appears on *Suite For Max Brown*, takes the place of original bassist Noel Kupersmith, so it's not quite a reunion. But this lineup possesses a broader stylistic range than its predecessor. On the opening track, a take of Alan Shorter's "Orgasm," the ensemble toggles with thrilling ease between a tough Afrobeat groove and episodes of electronically distorted freefall. Parker's pop influence yields several pithy, melodically direct compositions, which balance the polyrhythmic intricacy of a pair of Taylor-led tracks. But the most emotionally compelling performance is "Strange Wing," on which a series of eerie, winding solos hover over a loosely swinging groove.

Ordering info: astralspirits.bandcamp.com

Kuzu is Dave Rempis, guitarist **Tashi Dorji** and drummer **Tyler Damon**. Dorji, who grew up in Bhutan and is based in North Carolina, and Damon, who moved from his native Indiana to Chicago in 2018, were a duo for two years before Rempis joined them. The trio's fueled by creative friction: While the saxophonist's approach extends from a few decades spent improvising with American free-jazz musicians and non-idiomatic Europeans, Dorji and Damon grew beyond their early punk experiences after connecting with free-jazz. Their duo's high-volume music focused on the interaction of overtones, something like Sonic Youth's less song-oriented material. But ***Purple Dark Opal (Aerophonic 025; ★★★★★ 55:45)***, the trio's second album, is a rollercoaster ride comprising hard-punching energy music and quiet, restless explorations of texture and density. Much of this process-oriented music's excitement comes from hearing how its players figure out when to challenge and when to defer to each other. **DB**

Ordering info: aerophonicevents.com



José James *No Beginning No End 2*

RAINBOW BLONDE

★★★

If José James' *No Beginning No End 2* were a color, it'd be mauve. The color, though lovely, is strangely unaffectioning. It's not grey, tan, purple or pink. It's a gentle, muted blend.

These days, genres are imploding, and James is excited at not being tagged a jazz singer. He notes that "it was such a struggle for my generation, and others before, to kick these doors down of this genre and that."

Songs like "Take Me Home" and a notable cover of "Just The Way You Are" settle into a comfortable, perhaps even plush space on the vocalist's first album for his newly minted Rainbow Blonde imprint. This is not James at his most adventurous, the album marking a dramatic turn from the edgy r&b of *Love In A Time of Madness*, his last collection of originals. The first installment of *No Beginning No End* in 2013 bore more than a passing resemblance to D'Angelo's classic *Voodoo*, perhaps because of bassist Pino Palladino contributing to each project. But on *No Beginning No End 2*, James is the Les McCann of our times: a hip, approachable, jazz-tinged performer delivering music to pick up the kids to. Music to clean the apartment to.

Maybe that's the whole idea, as the title of the album comes from a Buddhist text by Jakusho Kwong that explains how to celebrate the mundane activities in our daily lives. James' "You Know What It Do" is set to a well-worn, swinging 1960s groove, complete with a hint of Hammond B-3. This is a gentle music with the smooth edges of a favorite book. Maybe in these divisive times, we can use a little gentleness. —Ayana Contreras

No Beginning No End 2: I Need Your Love; You Know What It Do; Feels So Good; Turn Me Up; Just The Way You Are; Baby Don't Cry; Nobody Knows My Name; Take Me Home; I Found A Love; Saint James; Miss Me When I'm Gone; Oracle. (51:01)

Personnel: José James, Ledisi (1), Cecily (3), Aloe Blacc (4), J. Hoard (6), Laura Mvula (7), Lizz Wright (8), Taali (9), Hindi Zahra (12), vocals; Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah (1), Erik Truffaz (12), trumpet; Brian Bender (3), Alan Hampton (11), Marcus Machado, guitar; Kris Bowers (7, 8), Brett Williams, Takeshi Ohbayashi, keyboard; Ben Williams, bass; Justin Brown, Jamire Williams, drums; Alberto Lopez, percussion.

Ordering info: rainbowblonderecords.com

Iiro Rantala
Playing Gershwin
 ACT 9893

★★★

Jazz musicians who feature with symphony orchestras are obviously and massively outnumbered, yet they have a remarkable tendency to shape the agenda. It seems likely, though, that Finnish jazz pianist Iiro Rantala brought to The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen a program of deference.

The title of *Playing Gershwin* is a misnomer; about half of its runtime is given to “Rhapsody In Blue” and a treatment of themes from *Porgy And Bess*. The former is an excellent showcase for Rantala’s playful approach to both his instrument and his own undeniable virtuosity. In an odd twist, however, the subtle liberties he takes—a trill here, some rubato there—show more improvisational initiative than anywhere else on the album. It’s violinist Antti Tikkanen who has pride of place on “Porgy And Bess Suite,” distinguishing himself with a bluesy turn on the “It Ain’t Necessarily So” section. The album’s back half is given over to five short Rantala originals. By and large, though, these might as well have been classical pieces; that’s the flavor with which he chooses to express them, adding the occasional faint tang of jazz. None of this is to say that *Playing Gershwin* is musically disappointing—unless, of course, listeners are expecting a jazz musician who drops George Gershwin’s name to actually play jazz. —Michael J. West

Playing Gershwin: Rhapsody In Blue; Porgy And Bess Suite; What Goes Up, Must Come Down; A Concert Tango; Anyone With A Heart; Hard Score; Freedom. (64:18)
Personnel: Iiro Rantala, piano; The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



CP Unit
One Foot On The Ground Smoking Mirror Shakedown
 RAMP LOCAL 48

★★★

Restless yet methodical, CP Unit’s latest record is a compact exploration of experimental jazz, prog-rock and punk themes. Each song showcases the breadth of the quartet’s instrumentation and its array of inspirations, from Ornette Coleman’s experimental funk to the freneticism of Guerilla Toss, an art-rock band that counts CPU guitarist Sam Lisabeth in its ranks.

“One Foot On The Ground” starts with an extended bluesy solo by Lisabeth and steadily builds to sultry melodic lines and heady rhythms. Bandleader and alto saxophonist Chris Pitsiokos is a commanding presence amid the simmering blues percussion, his horn forceful and deliberate. The quartet’s improvisational energy becomes more cohesive and focused on “Sibylant,” Jason Nazary’s drums building heat as Lisabeth and bassist Henry Fraser delve deeper into industrial noise motifs. Dark and organic, “Tarpit” is a dizzying call-and-response between saxophone and guitar that crescendos, then breaks into full-on punk hijinks. The latter half of the album seems to be more of what CPU is known for—multidimensional textures, prog-rock complexity and cultivated jazz improvisation. It was a meandering journey, but the quartet eventually gets there. —Ivana Ng

One Foot On The Ground Smoking Mirror Shakedown: One Foot On The Ground; Orellius; Sibylant; Tarpit. (32:35)

Personnel: Chris Pitsiokos, alto saxophone, electronics; Sam Lisabeth, guitar; Henry Fraser, electric bass; Jason Nazary, drums, electronics.

Ordering info: ramplocal.com



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Getting Beyond Routine

Jimmy Johnson, *Every Day Of Your Life* (Delmark 861; 44:42 ★★★★★) With all due respect to Pinetop Perkins and others who recorded as nonagenarians, not one showed the nails-tough fortitude Johnson does here. Despite its inevitable age-induced fraying, his distinctive high-pitched voice retains its longstanding delicate balance of aching hurt and cautious hopefulness. The Chicagoan's guitar, pleurably venomous on the original "Rattlesnake" and just as effective on eight more tracks, speaks with great personality. Like Chicago blues, r&b remains entrenched in his musical genetic code, and one of his five originals, "My Ring," even basks in sunny Jamaican rhythmic climes. Looking down from the pearly gates, sophisticated Fenton Robinson surely approves of Johnson's superb version of his signature song, "Somebody Loan Me A Dime," while Bobby Bland's "Lead Me On" seats the elder statesman at the piano for a gratefully accepted spiritual redemption. Exemplary support is provided by the likes of Rico McFarland on guitar and Brother John Kattke on keyboards.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Frank Bey, *All My Dues Are Paid* (Nola Blue 010; 55:15 ★★★★★) Bey was at the peak of his powers in the mid-2010s, singing Christine Vitale's songs with guitarist Anthony Paule's San Francisco-based band. Now, feeling fit again after a period of ill health, the 73-year-old isn't far off from being in ideal vocal form. With producers Kid Andersen and Rick Estrin, and accompanists including esteemed bassist Jerry Jemmott all on his wavelength, Bey still possesses the keen purpose that's always driven his soul-blues: He wants to boost the listener's spirits. He exerts a warm presence on songs by Estrin and Mighty Mike Schermer, but appears particularly engaged with the old country tune "He Stopped Loving Her Today" and John Lennon's "Imagine."

Ordering info: nola-blue.com

Mark Hummel, *Wayback Machine* (Electro-Fi 3459; 58:14 ★★★★★) Hummel salutes "the down home goods" played by 1930s and 1940s musicians (Tampa Red, John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson, Jazz Gillum) on a pleasant history lesson of 14 covers, plus two originals. Hummel is a fine harmonica player of many years' standing. His singing, though, lacks color and weight. A more convincing vocalist is 80-year-old guest Joe Beard, contributing to Eddie Boyd's "Five Long Years" and two others.

Ordering info: electrofi.com

Sugar Blue, *Colors* (Beeble 805; 41:50 ★★★★★) One can count on Blue for a few things. The veteran's rocket-speed runs on harmonica are the stuff of ebullient, if



overbearing, virtuosity, and his ferocious imagination makes him reach out for the unexpected. This album of songs recorded in Chicago, Shanghai, Milan and Johannesburg has the former Rolling Stones sidekick sizing up the Bo Diddley beat ("And The Devil Too"), the Beatles ("Day Tripper"), a dreamy strain of Afro-pop ("We'll Be All Right" with African show choir Afrika Riz), self-created Wild West mythology ("Bass Reeves") and Americana balladry ("Bonnie And Clyde"), along with several blues numbers. Count on Blue, too, for faulty singing that has its odd charm.

Ordering info: sugar-blue.com

Sass Jordan, *Rebel Moon Blues* (Stony Plain 1410; 33:42 ★★★★★) Canadian rock star Jordan gives the blues a try on her first recording after a decade away from the studio. The bold, big-voiced singer bestows animation on well-worn material by Willie Dixon ("My Babe"), Elmore James ("One Way Out" by way of the Allman Brothers), Brit blues-rocker Gary Moore ("Still Got The Blues") and more. Steve Marriner, playing harmonica, is a welcome presence. Two guitarists aren't.

Ordering info: stonyplainrecords.com

Champion Jack Dupree, *Champion Jack Dupree* (Storyville 1088619; 76:41/60:30/60:54 ★★★★★) Between 1960 and 1991, songster-pianist Dupree was recorded by a variety of American and European labels, most successfully by OKeh, King and Atlantic. Fifty-six of his Storyville sides, primarily cut in the early '60s, when the ex-boxer was living in France or Switzerland, are brought together for this boxed set, which also includes a DVD. There are a few performances, like "Blues Before Sunrise" (solo) and "Things I Used To Do" (with a bassist and a drummer), where the tender strength of his singing and his purposeful piano work set a tone of distinction. Yet, most of the tracks, including those having Dupree joined by a trad-jazz outfit or a generic blues band, are routine. The DVD features a 1986 Danish concert. **DB**

Ordering info: storyvillerecords.com



Benjamin Boone with the Ghana Jazz Collective

Joy

ORIGIN 82800

★★★★½

Benjamin Boone often explores the intimate confluence of melody and speech. On the two volumes of *The Poetry Of Jazz*, a collaboration with the late United States Poet Laureate Philip Levine, the saxophonist demonstrated his ability to fluently interact with and reply to a spoken text.

On *Joy*, Boone expands his penchant for conversation. Stemming from his time as a Fulbright Scholar in Ghana, Boone engages in dialogue with Bernard Ayisa, one of Africa's most esteemed tenor players, and Ayisa's partners in The Ghana Jazz Collective. Their musical speech has a West African lilt, but the language is all-the-way jazz.

On the opener, "The Intricacies Of Alice," a rollicking head leads to Boone, Ayisa and pianist Victor Dey Jr. chatting through funky medium-tempo solos. The vibe continues on a reimagining of Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage," which features a prominent bass line, and out-harmonies that arrange the saxophones and the voice of Sandra Huson in skewed triads. Dey's solo echoes Hancock's famous reading, just more calmly. Particularly impressive is "Curtain Of Light," a work written by Jonovan Cooper, an American composer living in Ethiopia. Dramatic and explicit, the tune evokes a thundering dawn breaking through mountainous crags.

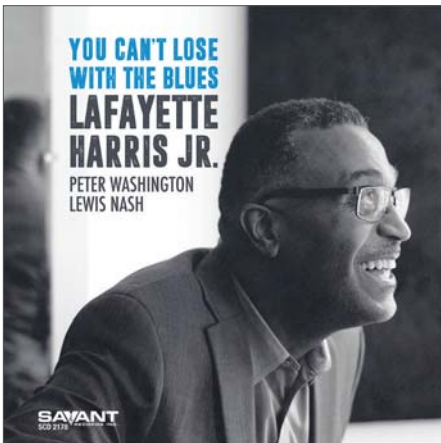
The album also features a pleasant ballad, "Without You," again highlighting Huson, and the title tune "Joy," a Gerry Niewood composition, that should remind listeners of soundtracks to breezy 1960s French New Wave films.

—Hobart Taylor

Joy: The Intricacies Of Alice; Maiden Voyage; Slam; Curtain Of Light; The 233 Jazz Bar; Without You; Joy, (40:56)

Personnel: Benjamin Boone, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Bernard Ayisa, tenor saxophone; Victor Dey Jr., piano; Bright Osei, bass; Frank Kissi, drums; Sandra Huson (2, 3, 6), vocals.

Ordering info: originarts.com



Lafayette Harris Jr. *You Can't Lose With The Blues*

SAVANT 2178

★★★★

With a title like this, listeners would expect the latest album by pianist Lafayette Harris Jr. to be greasier than it actually is. Granted, it might be more polite than expected, but the blues slant slowly sneaks in there.

Harris, a Baltimore native, has been based in the New York area since the '90s, a time that found him recording for the Muse label. While his musical background's rooted in the church,

his experience has taken him from funk bands to Broadway theater. It all comes out in his playing, too, which here is ably supported by drummer Lewis Nash and bassist Peter Washington.

The balance of the program is given over to familiar standards. "Don't Let The Sun Catch You Crying," "Please Send Me Someone To Love," "I Love You, Yes I Do" and "Things Ain't What They Used To Be" all benefit from Harris' light touch on the keys. He even manages to sneak in an '80s soul number from DeBarge. However, it's on Harris' three originals that the band really gets a chance to shine. "Blues For Barry Harris" is carried along by a fiery Latin rhythm from Nash; "The Juicy Blues" moves along with an almost Monkish feel; and the title track is a smoldering slow blues that remains true to its name.

As an aside, the album was produced by another former Muse artist, saxophonist Houston Person. Like Harris, Person knows a thing or two about fusing jazz, blues and r&b, with a string of albums under his name to prove the point.

—James Porter

You Can't Lose With The Blues: He's My Guy; I Love You, Yes I Do; Blues For Barry Harris; Don't Let The Sun Catch You Crying; Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye; Things Ain't What They Used To Be; Love Me In A Special Way; Bloomdido; You Can't Lose With The Blues; Wonder Why; Please Send Me Someone To Love; The Juicy Blues. (57:08)

Personnel: Lafayette Harris Jr., piano; Peter Washington, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

Grégory Privat *Soley*

BUDDHAM 0115

★★★★½

"D.N.A.," the third track on Grégory Privat's alluring *Soley*, exemplifies the continual creolization of jazz from sonic, cultural and idiomatic perspectives.

Privat begins the song on acoustic piano with a plaintive, circular melodic figure, with bassist Chris Jennings joining in unison. Soon after, drummer Tilo Bertholo adds color with sparse ride-cymbal work. The tune unfolds in a cinematic manner, especially when Privat's right hand moves to the electric keys, unraveling a soulful improvisation. After the song shifts into a free-form section, Privat incorporates snippets of a women's voice reading the percentage breakdown of his DNA, tracing the composer's lineage to Nigeria, Sierra Leone, North Africa, Central America, and Western and Northern Europe.

The bandleader and his drummer hail from Martinique, and his bassist is from Canada. And under Privat's leadership, they create modern jazz, imbued with Antillean references, especially the hypnotic bounce of "Le Pardon" and the fleet-footed "Transfiguration," without being too moored to them. Privat opts for oblique, yet melodically lingering, passages that sometimes



glide across the rhythmic pulse, but mostly interact feistily with the rhythm section. On occasion, the bandleader will complement his assured pianism with glints of electronica and singing, recalling the work of bassist Richard Bona.

Even absent any grand gestures, *Soley* is a sleeper of 21st-century cosmopolitan jazz with substantial transportive beauty that seduces with each listen.

—John Murph

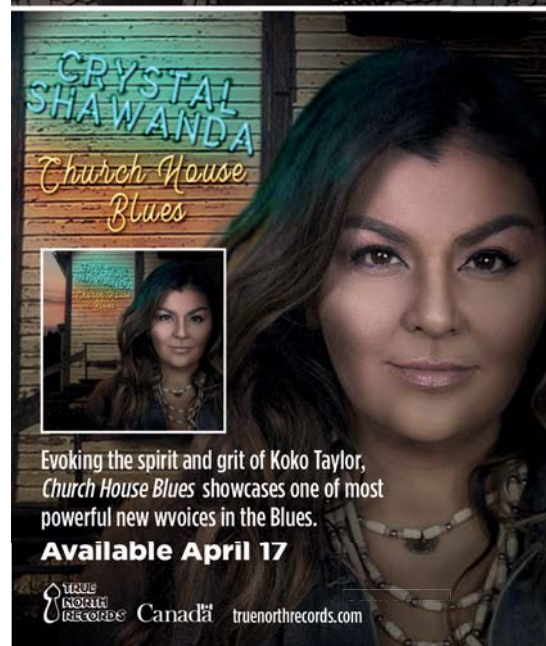
Soley: Intro; Las; D.N.A.; Fredo; Prelude; Le Pardon; Soley; Outro; Interlude; Serguei; Seducing The Rain; Exode; Manmay; Transfiguration; Waltz For M.P. (68:17)

Personnel: Grégory Privat, piano, Nord Stage 2, vocals; Chris Jennings, bass; Tilo Bertholo, drums, SPD-5.

Ordering info: gregoryprivat.com

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Pablo Held *Ascent*

EDITION 1148

★★★★½

Pablo Held's second album for Edition features the young pianist's excellent interactive trio, with whom he has played for more than a decade, and the dazzling guitarist Nelson Veras, a recent collaborator with whom the bandleader hadn't previously recorded. It's an invigorating match of old and new that basks in both the similarities and differences of the soloists' styles.

Held and Veras are both lyrical artists who favor a light, feathery and sometimes fleet sound.

Ernesto Cervini *Tetrahedron*

ANZIC 0067

★★★★★

Featuring drummer Ernesto Cervini's smart originals, *Tetrahedron's* post-bop experimentation is augmented by the quartet's sizzling exploration of jazz fusion.

Velvety tones from Rich Brown's six-string bass smoothly coax out intricate nuances and subtlety, demonstrating his mastery on the opener—the classic “Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise.” Locking the melody in, guitarist Nir Felder and altoist Luis Deniz entwine on Rich's high-energy burner, “Forward Motion,” with walking bass and tutti shots preceding Deniz and Cervini's commanding solo spots.

Citing drummer Matt Wilson as an important influence, Cervini shapes his rhythmic textures with confidence. Magnificent uptempo drum strokes hit with grandeur on his “Boo Radley,” an homage to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Guitar and bass rhythms here tease out a reminiscence of “Giant Steps,” setting up Cervini's edgy, darker harmonic mood. Selected by Deniz, Bunky Green's “Summit Song” offers a straight-up bluesy waltz, the quartet's ideas brimming, heightened by its astute, deferential attitude. Cervini's finish, “The Sneaky Two,”

But Held draws more on his classical background; the lovely excerpt from a Rachmaninoff concerto featured here is not the only track on which his high romantic leanings are expressed. And Veras, a Brazilian native based in Paris, subtly draws on his background, plying his nylon-stringed instrument.

On “Unlocking Mechanism,” an apt title for the way the trio creates spaces for Veras, the guitarist slides in behind bassist Robert Landfermann's powerful ground strokes to cast melodic light on the tune's harmonic underpinnings. During “Ascent,” another original by the leader, who wrote five of the songs here, Held and Veras pull off the feat of melding bold unison lines and spirited contrapuntal playing. There's a haunting electronic interlude, too, as there is on the ambient “Forest Spirits,” which features ghostly clarinet and vocals. Jonas Burgwinkel is such an edgy, propulsive drummer, you just wish the music would break free a little more often to ride high and loose on his rhythms.

Ascent is an album that's so good so often, it very likely will broaden Held's following on this side of the Atlantic.

—Lloyd Sachs

Ascent: Unlocking Mechanism; Dikkedeo; Poem #6; Forest Spirits; Ascent; Seizing; Musica Callada #24; Excerpt From Piano Concerto #4; 52nd Street Theme. (46:53)

Personnel: Pablo Held, piano; Robert Landfermann, bass; Jonas Burgwinkel, drums; Nelson Veras, guitar; Veronika Morscher (4), vocal; Jeremy Viner, clarinet (4, 9).

Ordering info: editionrecords.com



inspired by New York's 2 train, includes tasty 7 odd meter over Brown's dexterous bass, as a solo from Deniz displays a virtuosic command of his upper register.

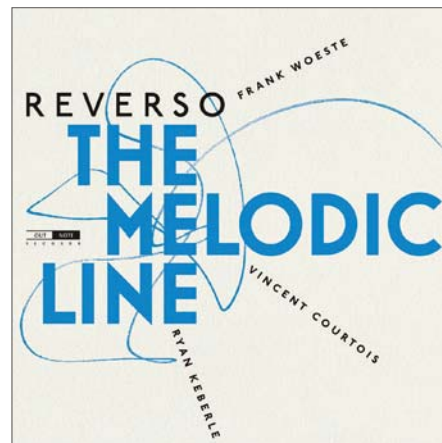
Adventurous and riveting improvisational risk-taking from the quartet is topped with gifted writing and the unit's seemingly effortless technical wizardry, affirming that this bandleader is an artist on the rise.

—Kerlie McDowall

Tetrahedron: Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise; Forward Motion; Angelicus; Boo Radley; Stro; Summit Song; Wandering; The Sneaky Two. (47:44)

Personnel: Luis Deniz, alto saxophone; Nir Felder, guitar; Rich Brown, electric bass; Ernesto Cervini, drums.

Ordering info: anzicstore.com



Reverso *The Melodic Line*

OUT NOTE 631

★★★★★

Trombonist Ryan Keberle and pianist Frank Woeste team up again as Reverso, joined on their second album by cellist Vincent Courtois. Keberle and Woeste initially came together to explore their deep training in both jazz and classical idioms. But the pair wisely avoid the hybrid high modernism that informed the Third Stream movement of the 1950s. Instead, they turn to early 20th-century French composers Les Six, whose works drew on jazz, cabaret music and other forms of then-contemporary popular culture.

The trio's engaging treatment of that work brings to mind what it might have sounded like had Les Six been afforded the opportunity to delve further into the Afro-diasporic musical logics that informed popular jazz at the time, rather than simply imitating it. Pieces on *The Melodic Line* evidence thoughtful engagement with this repertoire, while still feeling contemporary; they go far beyond trying to make jazz sound like classical music—or vice versa. Instead, Reverso demonstrates a deep synthesis of both modes of music making, and the result is as relevant to the 2020s as Les Six were to the 1920s. From the light, upbeat grooves on “Blue Feather” and “Absinthe” to the heartfelt expressivity of “Exemplar” and “Clara,” the nuances of both the chamber ensemble and the jazz trio are brought into an engaging and creative soundscape.

It helps that all three players here are masters of their respective instruments—each summoning a confident virtuosity for their performances that seems honest and unpretentious. The result is a fresh reminder that beautiful possibilities still live at the confluence of European and African musical thought.

—Alex W. Rodriguez

The Melodic Line: Blue Feather; Exemplar; Up North; Montparnasse; Absinthe; Sisters Of Mine; L'arlequin Lunaire; Major Jack; Clara. (46:56)

Personnel: Ryan Keberle, trombone; Frank Woeste, piano; Vincent Courtois, cello.

Ordering info: outhere-music.com

Viktorija Tolstoy

Stations

ACT 9740

★★½

This low-key slice of adult-contemporary pop marks Sweden-born vocalist Viktorija Tolstoy's quarter century of releasing albums, and she's amassed a set list largely unfamiliar to American audiences. The quartet here is present mostly to support Tolstoy and fill in a few spots here and there. For the first few tracks, the solos are in short supply, but bassist Mattias Svensson gets to have a little fun on "Land Of The Humble," a slow-paced smear of late-'90s confessional coffeehouse pop. "Million Miles" is a simmering Bob Dylan cover from *Time Out Of Mind*, his 1997 comeback album, but drummer Rasmus Kihlberg clings to his brushes for more than half of the record, putting them aside midway through "The Old Country." The tune is the most straightforward swinger and guitarist Krister Jonsson gets a bit of wiggle room to strike some more forceful strings ahead of Kihlberg's splashy cymbals. Pianist Joel Lyssarides gets in a few sprints, too, the band locking in on a Blakey-esque vibe. "The Great City," a rarely tackled mid-'30s Tin Pan Alley effort, benefits greatly from the guitarist's bluesy enthusiasm, and "Poinciana," another jazz standard you don't hear much anymore, is a groovy straightahead performance that Tolstoy sells with her most forceful performance on the album.

—Sean J. O'Connell



Marc Benham

Biotope

STEEPLECHASE 33140

★★★★

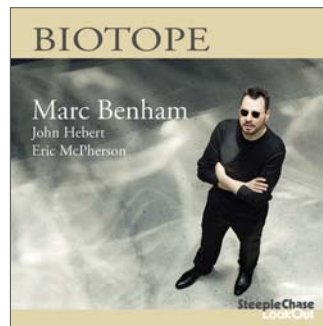
While studying classical music at an early age, French pianist Marc Benham was seduced by the sounds of early New Orleans jazz and stride piano. But after graduating from the Bill Evans Piano Academy in Paris—where he now teaches—he merged jazz and electronica in his band, Llorca.

Benham earned praise from the European press with his solo piano releases, *Herbst* (2013) and *Fats Food: Autour De Fats Waller* (2016), the latter featuring interpretations of the pioneering pianist's work. As dazzling as those discs might be, *Biotope* brings out the best in Benham's playing, in part due to his ensemble: bassist John Hébert and drummer Eric McPherson.

The set mixes inventive interpretations of standards, interspersed with the pianist's engaging originals. Benham's laser-articulated playing brims with left turns on a shifting canvas drawn from swing, bop, stride, classical and even a brief salting of funk. Benham dives headlong into "Airegin" and "Con Alma," but many of the most rewarding and inventive moments occur on restrained numbers, including the impressionist-tinged "Moonlight In Vermont." Similarly, the pianist's pensive nocturne "Year Of The Monkey" is both beautiful and eerily unsettling.

A vital voice from across the pond.

—Jeff Potter



Stations: I Should Run; Stations; The Mind Is Free; Land Of The Humble; Million Miles; The Streets Of Berlin; The Old Country; The Great City; Where The Road Ends; Poinciana; Here's To Life. (50:32)

Personnel: Viktorija Tolstoy, vocals; Joel Lyssarides, piano; Krister Jonsson, guitar; Mattias Svensson, bass; Rasmus Kihlberg, drums.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Biotope: Pablo; Airegin; La Suite De Fibonacci; Con Alma; Moonlight In Vermont; Jitterbug Waltz; Year Of The Monkey; On The Street Where You Live; Mood Indigo; Samurai Sauce. (48:28)

Personnel: Marc Benham, piano; John Hébert, bass; Eric McPherson, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

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New Stories, Retro Lingo



Michael Doucet (second from left) convenes a new ensemble for *Lâcher Prise*.

Singer-songwriter **Michael Doucet** doesn't want you to think that his new ensemble plays Cajun music. Instead, call it Southwestern Louisiana music, he says. The distinction is a fine one. Cajun music—the kind for which Doucet won multiple Grammys with his long-time group, *BeauSoleil*—draws primarily on Acadia-derived folk traditions. But the Southwestern Louisiana music that his new group plays on ***Lâcher Prise* (Compass 7-4740; 37:35 ★★☆☆)** can be, well, just about anything that this quintet of erudite musicians can come up with.

In French, “lâcher prise” means “to let go,” an analogue for the musical freedom that Doucet encourages on the new album. As with the bandleader's other ensembles, the *Lâcher Prise* sound centers on Doucet's spiffy fiddling and throaty vocals, but along with singer Sarah Quintana's powerful harmonies and the sophisticated fretwork of the group's guitarists—Quintana and Chad Viator—the lasting impression is less bayou roots and more syncretic global.

It's a fascinating mix of stuff. Take, for example, the bittersweet waltz “Abandonne,” sung in Louisiana French; the New Orleans march “Walking On A Mardi Gras Day,” led by drummer Jim Kolacek's solid monodic pulse; and the delightful “Cajun Gypsy,” an informed showdown between country and classical idioms. Southwestern Louisiana music, it seems, is a window to the world.

Ordering info: compassrecords.com

As a drummer and vocalist, **Sammy Miller** exudes pure likeability on ***Leaving Egypt* (Self Release; 37:23 ★★☆☆½)**, his debut album with The Congregation, his seven-piece jazz band. The album is a paean to positivity, but that isn't all it is. It's also a showcase for the players' outstanding musicianship.

Miller met the members of The Congregation in 2014, when they were jazz students at Juilliard, all looking for a way to use their music to engage and uplift audiences. The

nine tunes on *Leaving Egypt* do just this with their encouraging messages (“It Gets Better”), laugh-out-loud moments (“Date A Jew”) and catchy, singable melodies (all of them, really).

Miller's intended bonhomie would be lost, however, if the music weren't as expert as it is; treacle might be sweet, but it doesn't persuade. That's why the fleeting harmonic dissonances and introspective melodic lines—as on “Before,” the set-up for “It Gets Better”—are important. Instead of preaching, Miller tells a story. And the closer one listens to the tunes' musical underpinnings, the more persuasive Miller's tales become.

Ordering info: sammymlercongregation.com

If you didn't know better, on first listen to ***Nick Of Time* (Daptone 061; 36:11 ★★☆☆½)** by **The James Hunter Six**, you'd think it was a long-lost Motown record. All of the classic soul sounds are in there—the early rock-blues guitar chords, bright organ riffs, gospel shouts, a wailing harmonica. The 13 tunes are short—most come in under three minutes, just right for old-time radio play. And then there are Hunter's raspy vocals, raw in their expressiveness.

Let there be any question about it, though, the U.K.-bred singer might lean toward retro, but isn't a throwback. He's using a vintage musical language (like Doucet) to tell a present-day tale (like Miller). The modern giveaways on Hunter's new album lie in the refined, clean-edged horn arrangements and the contemporary lyrical themes. With their aura of self-determination, Hunter's words speak more to 21st-century concerns than to post-war angst: The rambunctious “Ain't Goin' Up In One Of Those Things” talks about an aversion to flying; “Take It As You Find It” challenges long-standing notions of romantic love; and the subtly swinging “Paradise For One” extols the virtues of singlehood. But even as his lyrics remind us how things change, his music suggests that not everything has to. **DB**

Ordering info: daptonerecords.com



Moses Boyd *Dark Matter*

EXODUS 003

★★★★

In the same way that scores of people, inspired by the DIY aesthetics of the late-'70s independent music scene, blithely blended genres to create what we now know as post-punk, a new school of jazz artists are embracing the production techniques of hip-hop, r&b and electronica in their compositions and performances.

That's the root of drummer Moses Boyd's debut full-length, *Dark Matter*. After building an impressive resume through collaborations with Sons of Kemet and DJ Lag, as well as a fine series of EPs, this young musician and producer from South London has released a neon-lit album suited to dancing as much as hushed conversation.

Rhythm is sacrosanct across this marvelous album, with Boyd cultivating beats from various sources. On “BTB,” he looks to the charged rumble of Afrobeat, and on “2 Far Gone,” he adds a glistening edge to the New Orleans' second line tradition. Throughout the album's most engaging track, “Only You,” Boyd manages to summon the entire discography of UK dance labels like Hyperdub and Planet Mu into one glitchy, volatile composition.

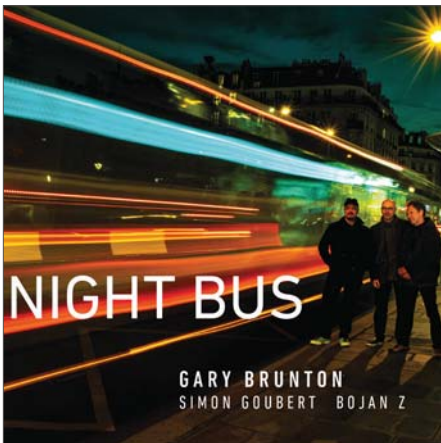
Holding *Dark Matter* back from perfection are slightly indulgent, and occasionally distracting, touches—the goofy spoken-word samples that cut through the beginning and end of the album. And the downbeat production of “Dancing In The Dark” is dulled by a rote performance from vocalist Obongjayar. At the same time, the ponderous quality of his singing serves to emphasize the brilliance that surrounds it, and helps stir up plenty of anticipation for what Boyd does next.

—Robert Ham

Dark Matter: Stranger Than Fiction; Hard Food (Interlude); BTB; Y.O.Y.O.; Shades Of You; Dancing In The Dark; Only You; 2 Far Gone; Nommos Descent; What Now? (50:18)

Personnel: Moses Boyd, drums; Artie Zaitz, guitar; Joe Armon-Jones, keyboards; Nathaniel Cross, trombone, bass; Theon Cross, tuba; Nubya Garcia, tenor saxophone; Ife Ogunjobi, trumpet; Gary Grosby, bass; Nonku Phiri, Poppy Ajudha, Obongjayar, vocals.

Ordering info: exodus.kudosrecords.co.uk



Gary Brunton/Simon Goubert/Bojan Z
Night Bus

JUSTE UNE TRACE 3558130000843

★★★★★

British-born bassist-composer Gary Brunton and Serbian pianist Bojan Z reconnect with a longtime colleague, drumming marvel Simon Goubert, on the stellar *Night Bus*, an album named for the Noctilien, a nocturnal Parisian mode of transit that took Brunton and Z home in the late '80s after they'd been hanging out at clubs. Their chemistry is as flexible as it is indelible while moving through a versatile set ranging

from delicate ECM-ish introspection to aggressive swingers and an appealing jazz waltz.

Brunton, who studied privately with bass greats Henri Texier, Pierre Michelot and Dave Holland, reveals the profound influence of his teachers in resounding, woody upright tones, insistent walking lines, impeccable intonation and authoritative soloing—all in effect on swing-blues number “Dastardly.” The bassist reaches his lyrical peak on the serene ode “Ballad For Mickey Graillier” and exquisitely expresses himself on a solo bass feature, “CRW.”

Goubert swings emphatically and interactively on the uptempo burners and plays percussive colorist with cymbals on “One Afternoon.” His approach to the kit on the free intro to “Ready For Riga” is wildly creative and remarkably musical. Pianist Z, who flexes impressive right-hand chops throughout, acquits himself with hipness on the “Freedom Jazz Dance”-flavored opener, “83 Bis,” a hard groover that also has him pushing the harmonic envelope on a compelling solo.

There’s a large degree of group-think and risk-taking riding alongside this daring Parisian trio.
—Bill Milkowski

Night Bus: 83 Bis; Hasta La Victoria Siempre; Nobody’s Perfect; Ponponita; Next Up; CRW; Back Home; One Afternoon; Dastardly; Ballad For Mickey Graillier; Ready For Riga. (50:49)

Personnel: Gary Brunton, bass; Simon Goubert, drums; Bojan Z, piano.

Ordering info: juste-une-trace.com

Claus Raible
Trio!

ALESSA 1081

★★½

Pianist Claus Raible’s stylistic resemblance to Thelonious Monk is not incidental. So say the three Monk tunes and one standard associated with him that Raible brandishes on *Trio!* But if Raible loves to wave the flag of half-step harmonies and descending glisses (with which he brackets “Smoke Gets In Your Eyes,” as if we didn’t get the connection already), he also has his own bag of tricks close at hand, saving the album from being an over-eager pastiche.

For one thing, there’s an ease to Raible’s swing on tunes like his original “The Penguin” that a few clattering Monkisms simply can’t obscure. He also has an understated gift for atmosphere: He brings a kind of enigmatic darkness to his version of “On Green Dolphin Street” that involves careful deployment of his left hand and brushwork from Alvin Queen that’s somehow both pointed and sensitive. By the time listeners get to the soulful pocket of Raible’s “Boogaloo—Baloo,” there’s no question that he’s his own pianist—despite the bandleader again nodding to Monk via a familiarly halting pace on his solo. Even so, his creative spectrum seems oddly narrow when playing his own




tunes: “Course De Ville” uses a “Star Eyes” paraphrase for its intro, and then is followed by a melody that barely tries to disguise a relation to Bud Powell’s “Wail.”


Trio feels like an artistic tug-of-war: Raible is original enough not to be crushed by the weight of jazz history, but its gravity still has a vaguely unhealthy hold on him.
—Michael J. West

Trio!: Ridin’ High; Smoke Gets In Your Eyes; I’ll Remember April; The Penguin; Night Time Is My Mistress; Thelonious; On Green Dolphin Street; Off Minor; Somewhere Over The Rainbow; Boogaloo—Baloo; Course De Ville; Round Midnight. (61:57)

Personnel: Claus Raible, piano; Giorgos Antoniou, bass; Alvin Queen, drums.


Ordering info: alessarecords.at

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Sometimes Sunny Moments



Science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke once wrote, "Behind every man now alive stand thirty ghosts, for that is the ratio by which the dead outnumber the living." Some musicians feel that current reissue programs are like that, new work crowded out by recordings made decades earlier.

While there's some justice in that thought, who would deny the pleasure of meeting overlooked or long-forgotten recordings again? In the case of **Mal Waldron's *Free At Last* (ECM 1001; 69:18 ★★★)**, many of those who'll listen to the new extended edition won't have been born when the record was made in 1969. As the catalog number suggests, it was the first release on Manfred Eicher's Edition of Contemporary Music label, a darkly brooding set of mostly originals in Waldron's then-recently developed free style, where he largely abandoned soloing on chord changes in favor of playing repeated rhythmic cells. Supported by the splendid Isla Eckinger on bass and the thoroughly undervalued Clarence Becton on drums, the album stands at the beginning of the ECM story as part-harbinger, part-outlier, darker and less lyrical than much of the label's later output.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Sometimes the past can seem darker than the present, sometimes sunnier, but definitely the latter in the case of the **Cry Babies**, whose self-titled debut disc (**Far Out FORDIS06; 42:04 ★★★**) has been reissued for the first time on vinyl. Also from 1969, its blend of Brazilian samba jazz and North American soul, masterminded by group co-ordinator Nelson Attílio and saxophonist arranger Oberdan Magalhães, seems as prescient of future directions as Waldron's ECM debut. Cry Babies continued as Banda Black Rio, but they never sounded more heartfelt and abandoned than on this one.

Ordering info: faroutrecordings.com

If Waldron's pianism came largely out of

Monk, there was a lot of **Duke Ellington** in there, too. Ellington's orchestra—the lineup that made *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*—went on a sweeping six-week tour through Europe and the Soviet Union during autumn 1971. Nowhere was it greeted more rapturously than in Sweden, which always had a special place in Ellington's heart. **Uppsala 1971 (Storyville 101842; 79:04 ★★★½)** documents the second of two performances given on a single day by a band that was not just well rehearsed, but bursting to communicate the new, rock-inspired energy of things like "One More Time For The People," one of the most eye-popping moments of Duke's career. The early part of the program is more familiar, with band themes, medleys and retrospectives, but the date clearly underlines that even in his 70s, Ellington was moving forward and keen to win new audiences.

Ordering info: storyvillerecords.com

Japanese free-jazz and fusion have received a lot of attention recently through reissues. Welcome enough, but it tends to blur the extraordinary quality of Japanese hard- and post-bop in the 1970s. No group better conveys that energy and class than **The Hideto Sasaki—Toshiyuki Sekine Quartet +1** whose semi-legendary release **Stop Over (BBE 589; 46:30 ★★★½)** was released in an edition of only 100 in 1976 and distributed largely to family and friends. BBE J Jazz Masterclass is specifically curated to present the finest in Japanese modern jazz, and this is its signature release, a torrid date that sees trumpeter Sasaki and pianist Sekine blazing through material by Denny Zeitlin, Bobby Hutcherson, a magnificent "Soultrane" and some original material.

Whether playing chordally or in modes, the group is completely assured, and it would be hard to persuade a listener that this wasn't an ensemble out of the Blue Note or Riverside stables. **DB**

Ordering info: bbemusic.com



Elliot Galvin *Live In Paris At Fondation Louis Vuitton*

EDITION 1146

★★★

Still in his late 20s, British keyboardist Elliot Galvin already has established himself as one of his homeland's most assured and curious musicians—an agile collaborator who's worked in trumpeter Laura Jurd's style-shifting Dinosaur, played free-jazz with bassist Mark Sanders and supported beat-driven rising star Emma-Jean Thackray. But his most impressive work has arrived through a nimble namesake trio that effortlessly toggles between post-Bad Plus convolutions, Baroque counterpoint and pop concision. Now, with his first solo outing—a largely improvised affair—he dips into his love for classical music to unveil a new element in his portfolio.

While no one would confuse Galvin with Keith Jarrett, he seems to draw inspiration from the elder's fluid, wide-ranging performances, especially on the ever-morphing opener, "As Above." He delves into internal piano tinkering on "Time And Everything," damping and warping strings during the unsettled introduction, before finding a contrapuntal propulsion so infectious that he tossed in a two-minute coda. Galvin's love for Bach comes through explicitly on "J.S.," an appealingly fitful-then-fluid series of deconstructed lines in steady dialogue between right and left hands. Bach also imbues the wistful, decidedly spare "Broken Windows," a folk-flavored meditation centered on a sustained drone produced by a single prepared piano string.

Galvin is assured and impressive throughout, but sometimes it feels like he's trying out new gambits, then realizing a fuller structure—a common pitfall of younger players that listeners should overlook considering his clear talent and hunger. —Peter Margasak

Live In Paris At Fondation Louis Vuitton: As Above; Time And Everything; Coda; For J.S.; Broken Windows; So Below. (41:10)
Personnel: Elliot Galvin, piano.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com

Gregg August *Dialogues On Race, Volume One*

IACUESSA

★★★★

The breadth of bassist Gregg August's jazz and classical training manifests itself on this large-group offering, where a profusion of styles and orchestration combine. To be sure, it's a jazz album, replete with incredible improvised performances from his ensemble cast—especially by tenorist JD Allen—as August draws from the colorful textures of Ellington, the dissonances of Stravinsky and the organized chaos of Carla Bley. Great American jazz composers didn't shy away from issues of race or civil rights, and August wades into the deep end. Writings by Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes and others are animated by singers and narrators, the words underscored and sometimes supplanted by August's own innovative tone poems. A notable moment comes on "Your Only Child," an expanded piece for horns, strings and haunting vocals by Shelley Washington. Art, it has been argued, isn't meant to provide pleasure, but rather to provoke. August proves it can do both.

—Gary Fukushima

Dialogues On Race, Volume One: Sherbet (Just To Be Certain That The Doubt Stays On Our Side Of The Fence); Letter To America; Your Only Child; I Rise; Sky; Your Only Child; I Sang In The Sun; Mother Mamie's Reflections; Your Only Child; Sweet Words On Race; The Bird Leaps; Blues. (84:59)

Personnel: Gregg August, bass; John Ellis, soprano saxophone; Bruce Williams, alto saxophone; JD Allen, tenor saxophone; Ken Thomson, bass clarinet; John Bailey, trumpet; flugelhorn; Rafi Malkiel, trombone, euphonium; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Luis Perdomo, piano; Donald Edwards, drums; Mauricio Herrera, percussion; Wayne Smith (2), Frank Lacy (3, 12), Shelley Washington (9), Forest VanDyke (7), vocals; Leah Asher (9), Yuri Namkung (9), Lena Vidulich (9), Johnna Wu (9), violin; Wendy Richman (9), Brian Zenone (9), viola; Madeline Lafayette, cello (9).

Ordering info: greggaugust.com



Sam Tru *Cycle*

NEXT 42001

★★★

Sam Tru's debut, *Cycle*, offers up a persistent theme of unrequited love, harmonies that entertain the ear, an excellent band and an Amy Winehouse-sounding mournfulness that overlays the eight tunes here. Five of the tracks are co-written or written by jazz vocalist Jeff Baker, which might account for the album's seeming sameness—not only in motif but in its sound.

Because love is among the dominating features of human existence, the substrata that undergirds, undermines and ameliorates it makes for good lyrics. They're just uneven on Tru's album. Nonetheless, she carries the uptempo title track like a pro, with the influence of Winehouse remaining most apparent. The engaging nature of that composition ultimately isn't carried through the rest of the album. The band, though, rides high on its own, Justin Nielsen's organ and piano playing on "Just Fine" adding church- and r&b-like timbres to the song. It rocks and rolls, summons the holy ghost and allows Tru space to get down. Let the congregation say, "Amen."

The conventions of jazz really aren't readily apparent across *Cycle*. Regardless of the tack, though, on future recordings Tru hopefully will have some stronger material to work with.

—Michele L. Simms-Burton

Cycle: Cycle; Not Enough Liquor; Just Fine; Let Me Down Easy; So Far Away; Paradise; Please Don't Go; Wheel. (37:41)

Personnel: Sam Tru, vocals; Gregory Uhlmann, guitars; Justin Nielsen, piano, organ; Clark Sommers, bass; Matt Carroll, drums.

Ordering info: nextmusiccompany.com



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The Drums Chose Buddy Rich

Buddy Rich died in 1987 at the age of 70. For 68 of those years, he was one of the world's greatest drummers, first as a child prodigy in vaudeville, then a star sideman, leader and personality. He navigated the swing era, Hollywood, bebop, the TV sitcom and talk show couch, and then finally turned out the last light of his big band.

This is a big story to compress into *Buddy Rich: One of a Kind (The Making of the World's Greatest Drummer)* (Hudson Music) by **Pelle Berglund**, which is an edited version of an original 2018 text from Sivart Books. Gone are many pictures, a timeline and (unfortunately) an index. The text survives—as well as a number of typos and errata, including a reference to “Carnegie Hall’s large stage in Chicago.” It also adds a few new ones of its own. Inaccuracies are rare, though, and almost too trivial to mention.

Though Berglund combs relevant memoirs and press accounts for details, Rich’s formative childhood and early New York days left little documentation, a vacuum he pads with milieu. Rich was a hyperactive toddler when he began banging out miraculously intuitive rhythms. Drummers were a popular attraction in vaudeville, because they were physical. Like tap dancers, they catered to the eye, as well as the ear. Young Rich studied them obsessively. By the time he was 4, he had no memory of ever not playing the drums. His gift became his destiny without ever asking his consent. It chose him. Berglund writes with an orderly clarity about how he managed, but seldom pauses for the enlivening insight, interpretive flourish or incisive probe into the particulars of technique.

Momentum hits its stride with Artie Shaw and Tommy Dorsey, where Rich enjoyed his first taste of the big time—landing spots in MGM musicals and sparking a romance with Lana Turner. He and Frank Sinatra fought as roommates on the road with Dorsey, then found great friendship after leaving the band. But before a stint in the Marines, Rich squeezed in an uncredited spot in Robert Siodmak’s *Phantom Lady*, which film noir buffs might know for its surreal jam-session sequence where Rich’s off-screen drum solo becomes a kind of maniacal opioid to Elisha Cook Jr.’s on-screen frenzy.

Rich joined the Marines to fight the Germans but instead wound up fighting flagrant anti-Semitism, a battle that landed him in the stockade. After his discharge, he marked time with Dorsey again, before launching his first big band. But the old troupes were sinking fast, and new ones were being dragged down in the undertow. Berglund paints a bleak picture, as Rich fought a two-front war with his sidemen against bebop and drugs.



After the breakup of another band, Rich found a partner in trumpeter Harry James and a place with Norman Granz’s Jazz at the Philharmonic. It was a volatile relationship; Rich’s recklessness with money was not something Granz cared to subsidize. But the ‘50s was crowded with TV, tours, marriage and a daughter, Cathy, who is a major source for Berglund. In 1957, Rich vainly tried to give up the drums for a singing career. Then in 1959, a massive heart attack almost achieved what he could not. Doctors said he would never play again.

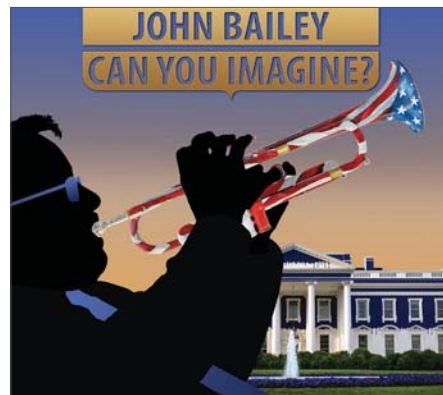
Two months later he was back.

Berglund describes Rich’s attempts to balance domestic stability and musical adventure, which in 1966 finally led the drummer back to a big band. This time it clicked. The band would sustain Rich and become the personification of his integrity, letting him enjoy the privileges of fame on his own terms.

For this, Berglund suggests, Rich owed much to talk-show host Johnny Carson. “Carson recognized Buddy’s natural quick wit,” he writes, “and didn’t hesitate to use it humorously. Going forward Rich ... became much more than a jazz drummer—he was now an entertainment personality.” Berglund gives a full picture of the band’s 20-year history and Rich’s leadership style in its many dualities, from defender of principle (canceling a South African tour) to complete jerk (the famous bus tapes).

Rooted in the rules of show business, however, Rich never disappointed an audience. Berglund helps explain how. **DB**

Ordering info: hudsonmusic.com



John Bailey Can You Imagine?

FREEDOM ROAD 001

★★★★

This tribute to Dizzy Gillespie’s 1964 tongue-in-cheek run for president is bristling with energy and the kind of *joie de vivre* that the trumpeter embodied. Along with a stellar crew, trumpeter-composer John Bailey pays homage to his hero while raising issues of social justice in America.

After opening on a blazing note with “Pebbles In The Pocket,” the band settles into the three-movement *President Gillespie Suite*, which begins with the entrancing, Latin-tinged “The Humanitarian Candidate” and has the leader emulating Dizzy’s inventive phrasing on muted trumpet. The second movement, “Road To The Blues House,” features guest Earl McIntyre with some hip vocalizations on bass trombone and finds Bailey slyly quoting from “Walkin’” over a four-horn free-for-all. The bouncing third movement, “President Gillespie’s Birthday Song,” is an uptempo swinger with a tricky, boppish line played in unison by the horns before Bailey and saxophonist Stacy Dillard break off for some scintillating trading of eights with drummer Victor Lewis. Bailey delivers with clarity and lyricism on Chico O’Farrill’s beautiful “Ballad From Oro, Incienso Y Mirra.” Dillard’s appealing jazz waltz, “Elite State Of Mind,” featuring guest flutist Janet Axelrod, has the potent young saxophonist stretching out on a bold-toned tenor solo before Stafford Hunter follows with an expressive trombone solo.

The most dramatic piece here is Lewis’ expansive “The Touch Of Her Vibe,” featuring fiery exchanges between the leader on flugelhorn and Dillard on tenor. Bailey closes with a tasty duo take of Jules Styne’s “People.”

—Bill Milkowski

Can You Imagine?: Pebbles In The Pocket; President Gillespie Suite; The Touch Of Her Vibe; The Blues House; Ballad From Oro, Incienso Y Mirra; Elite State Of Mind; Valso Rancho; From The Heart; People. (62:08)

Personnel: John Bailey, trumpet, flugelhorn; Stacy Dillard, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Stafford Hunter, trombone; Edsel Gomez, piano; Mike Karn, bass; Victor Lewis, drums, percussion; Janet Axelrod, flute, alto flute, bass flute; Earl McIntyre, bass trombone, tuba.

Ordering info: johnbailey.com



Ten

tom tallitsch

Tom Tallitsch

Ten

TT PRODUCTIONS 10

★★★★½

Though often associated with a classic hard-bop sound, New Jersey-based saxophonist Tom Tallitsch changes things up a bit on *Ten*. After a stint with Posi-Tone, the album is Tallitsch's second self-released outing and 10th overall, and for the occasion, he assembled a band of Philadelphia musicians for a restless collection of originals that ventures into soul-jazz and rock.

Given that the bandleader's previous output has found him exploring the music of David Bowie, Neil Young and Led Zeppelin, the genre-spanning nature of *Ten* shouldn't be a surprise. Still, it manages to provide the unexpected. With guitarist Mike Kennedy's echo-laden tone jostling for space with Tallitsch's warm, winding ventures, album-opener "Traveler" functions as something of a statement of purpose, as the two forces rewardingly challenge one another. As Tallitsch's soprano weaves through a contemplative melody, Kennedy keeps nudging the throttle open with a backdrop that alternately chimes and growls. At 10 minutes, "Pine" marks the record's longest venture led by Tallitsch's twisting tenor and Kennedy, whose sound recalls the big-sky amble of Bill Frisell. But the funk-shaded "Lemmings" leaves the record's strongest impression with a compact, head-bobbing hook that makes way for a deft exchange between guitar and saxophone atop percolating drummer Dan Monaghan and bassist Jason Fraticelli.

The back half of the record downshifts with the bluesy "Orange, Yellow and Red," and finds Tallitsch moving into less settled waters for "North Shore," which carries a steady pulse from Monaghan that sets aside some of the record's tension for a breezier pace. Still, as celebratory effort, *Ten* intimates that there's still much more to explore in the future.

—Chris Barton

Ten: Traveler; Pine; Lemmings; Orange, Yellow And Red; Ya Might Feel A Little Pressure; North Shore. (47:04)

Personnel: Tom Tallitsch, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Mike Kennedy, guitar; Jason Fraticelli, bass; Dan Monaghan, drums.

Ordering info: tomtallitsch.com

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BEST OF 2020 NAMM SHOW

Reporting by Dave Cantor, Dan Margolis, Bobby Reed and Sam Tornow

Visiting The NAMM Show is always an exhilarating experience. This year's edition of the global music industry's annual showcase for new instruments and gear was held Jan. 16–19 on the campus of the Anaheim Convention Center in Southern California. True to form, the sprawling event drew a cast of notable musicians who browsed the exhibit areas, gave product demonstrations and took part in after-hours concerts, all-star jam sessions and awards ceremonies. In the following pages, DownBeat presents the best of The 2020 NAMM Show.

1. Tower of Power closes out its 50th Anniversary Concert on the Yamaha Grand Plaza Stage. **2.** Bassist Bootsy Collins is all smiles as he makes his way through the aisles. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM) **3.** Saxophonist Grace Kelly wails on a brand new bari at the Yamaha exhibit. **4.** Pianist Gerald Clayton performs at a Bosendorfer reception. **5.** Percussionist Poncho Sanchez walks the show floor. **6.** Saxophonists Jerry Vivino (left), Danny Janklow and Troy Roberts perform at The VandoJam. **7.** Saxophonist Don Braden warms up at the JodyJazz booth. **8.** Singer-songwriter and producer Joni Mitchell (right) receives the Les Paul Innovation Award at the NAMM TEC Awards; Herbie Hancock (left) made the presentation. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM) **9.** Guitarist Robbie Krieger signs autographs at the Gibson booth. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM). **10.** Guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel performs with the band Ozmosys at a show hosted by D'Angelico. **11.** Saxophonist Jeff Antoniuk performs at the Eastman booth. **12.** Saxophonist Derek Brown makes an appearance at the Légère exhibit. **13.** Bandleader and multi-instrumentalist Gordon Goodwin pays a visit to the Maher Publications booth. **14.** Alto saxophonist Gerald Albright plays at the Cannonball exhibit. **15.** Vocalist Bobby McFerrin engages in a musical conversation with his audience at the Grand Rally for Music Education presented by The NAMM Foundation. (Photo by Jesse Grant/Getty Images for NAMM)



HORNS

← BARI ACCESSIBILITY

The YBS-480 Intermediate Baritone Saxophone from Yamaha is an updated design of the company's YBS-52, a model that's been popular among students and pros for the past 35 years. The new YBS-480 features a redesigned bore and neck modeled after Yamaha's YBS-62 professional model bari, improving the intonation of the instrument. Yamaha also added a detachable, adjustable peg that makes the baritone saxophone accessible to players of all sizes. **More info: usa.yamaha.com**



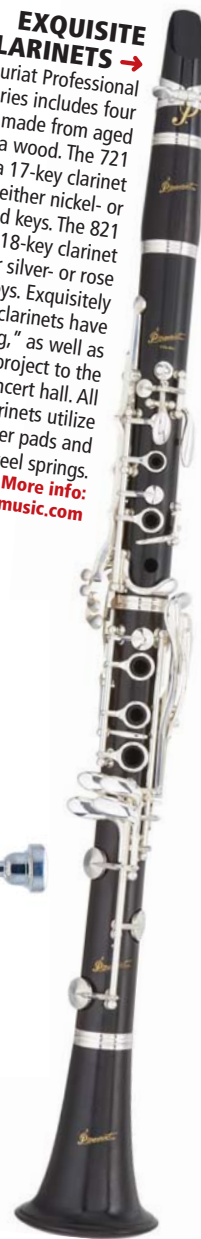
← CLASSICAL PIECE

After extensive research and development with American and European artists, Vandoren has introduced the Profile mouthpiece for classical saxophone, available in a single facing for soprano (SP3) and alto saxophone (AP3). The Profile offers great projection, excellent response, roundness of tone and stability of intonation. Its exterior design features a tapered beak that allows for playing comfort and flexibility. **More info: dansr.com**



EXQUISITE CLARINETS →

The P. Mauriat Professional Clarinet Series includes four models made from aged grenadilla wood. The 721 series is a 17-key clarinet with either nickel- or silver-plated keys. The 821 series is an 18-key clarinet with either silver- or rose gold-plated keys. Exquisitely built, the clarinets have plenty of "ping," as well as the ability to project to the back of the concert hall. All P. Mauriat clarinets utilize premium leather pads and blued steel springs. **More info: pmauriatmusic.com**



WARM & DARK →

The HR* Custom Dark Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece from JodyJazz offers a warm, dark, traditional and vintage-sounding tone. Featuring rounded side walls and a large, open, round chamber, the mouthpiece delivers plenty of projection with a surprising ease of altissimo. Like all JodyJazz mouthpieces, the HR* Custom Dark's free-blowing response is due to a superior facing curve and expert hand-finished tip rail, baffle and table. It is constructed using an exclusive hard rubber formula, developed for the company's Chedeville classical mouthpieces, that imparts more warmth and beauty in the sound due to its purity and density. **More info: jodyjazz.com**

COPPER-BELL FLUGEL →

Schilke's new 1041-FLC Flugelhorn features a pure copper bell. It boasts a lush sound that's full of overtones and warmth while maintaining an even and controlled feel throughout the instrument's range. Ideal for jazz and all-around use, the 1041-FLC provides sound that's in a league of its own. **More info: schilkemusic.com**



← REVERSE-ENGINEERED CANE

Venn from D'Addario Woodwinds combines the stability, longevity and durability of a synthetic reed with the sound and feel of natural cane. To mimic the organic structure of cane, D'Addario reverse-engineered cane itself, layering different strengths of polymer fibers with resin and organic reed elements to make up the reed blank. Venn lasts up to 20 times longer than a cane reed and is resistant to splitting, chipping and breaking. It requires no prep, and consistency is identical from reed to reed. Venn is available for B-flat clarinet and alto and tenor saxophone in core strengths. **More info: daddario.com**



← KANSAS CITY BRASS

The Plaza model trumpet and trombone are the newest additions to B.A.C. Musical Instruments' Handcraft series. The Plaza trumpet features a .460-inch bore with a 4.75-inch yellow brass one-piece hand-hammered bell, a B.A.C. Custom B25 leadpipe and a .345-inch venturi. The instrument has a yellow brass, dual-radius main tuning slide and a bright finish. The Plaza model trombone has a large bore, an 8.5-inch yellow brass hand-hammered one-piece bell, a .451-inch venturi and a nickel gooseneck. Both instruments are handmade in Kansas City and feature luxurious sound and fine hand-engraving. **More info: coolisbac.com**





← **STUDIO QUALITY, LIVE PERFORMANCE**

Earthworks Audio has expanded its offerings for the live sound reinforcement market with the release of the SR3314 and the SR5314 wireless vocal microphone capsules. These wireless capsules promise to bring studio clarity to the stage.
More info: earthworksaudio.com



SUPERIOR WEBCASTING →

Roland's GO:Livecast is a simple and affordable way to bring superior production values to your webcasting.

This hardware/app combo is a fully featured streaming studio that lets you mix sound, display titles, play media, trigger sound effects and more—without needing a computer or costly dedicated A/V gear.

More info: roland.com



↑ **INTEGRATED INNOVATION**

Luna transforms United Audio's industry-standard Apollo interfaces into fully integrated recording systems. The Luna recording system consists of a UA Thunderbolt-equipped audio interface, the Luna Application, Luna Extensions and Luna Instruments. Luna will be available as a free download for Apollo and Arrow Thunderbolt audio interface owners (Mac only).

More info: uaudio.com



↑ **ULTIMATE FLEXIBILITY**

DiGiCo's Quantum 338 follows the Quantum 7 in defining the future of audio mixing. Boasting a wealth of new design features and enhancements to create ultimate flexibility of use, plus high-speed operation, Quantum 338 is based on seventh-generation FPGAs with an entirely new system architecture.

More info: digico.biz



↑ **ALL-IN-1 SOUND**

The Concert 288m Dual-Channel All-In-One from Samson offers premium sound and flawless wireless performance for situations where two microphones are needed. It's ideal for business presentations, houses of worship, Q&A sessions, educational events and more.

More info: samsontech.com



↑ **NEW AND IMPROVED**

PreSonus' Studio One 4.6 update includes an improved version of Ampire, substantial updates to Studio One's browser and major improvements to its Pattern Editor feature. The update is free for all Studio One 4 users.

More info: presonus.com

ROCK-SOLID RELIABILITY →

The new top-of-the-line SRM V-Class series high-performance powered loudspeakers from Mackie deliver a combination of powerful sound pressure level, outstanding sound quality, advanced DSP technology and rock-solid reliability, including an all-wood enclosure with Mackie's famed "Built Like a Tank" construction.

More info: mackie.com

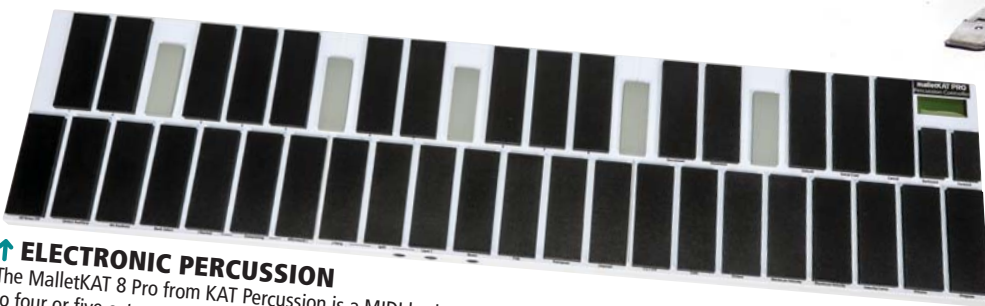




CYMBAL GRAPHICS ↑

Individual sonic expression is a hallmark of Sabian cymbals. And now there's a new visual component to the company's products. With the Graphic Cymbals, drummers can match their skills with a visual design that further expresses who they are as musicians without sacrificing tone.

More info: sabian.com



↑ ELECTRONIC PERCUSSION

The MalletKAT 8 Pro from KAT Percussion is a MIDI keyboard-percussion controller with a three-octave range, expandable to four or five octaves. An expressive alternative to traditional vibraphones, marimbas and xylophones, the MalletKAT 8 Pro offers 127 preset factory setups and 127 programmable user setups.

More info: katpercussion.com



↑ SWEEPING SOUNDS

Making use of broomcorn, grass, birch and a birch-rattan combination, the Vic Firth RE-MIX Brushes offer percussionists access to a range of new sound combinations on anything from a full kit to Latin percussion instruments. While expanding sonic possibilities, mixing and matching brushes also will add a layer of versatility to the drummer's craft.

More info: vicfirth.zildjian.com



← PERCUSSION ADD-ONS

The Head FX pack from Tru Tuner gives percussionists the ability to filigree their instruments with add-ons, augmenting or complementing each drum. Included in the kit are four dampeners, a shaker and a tambourine component that are easily affixed to either the top or bottom of drumheads.

More info: tru-tuner.myshopify.com



← THRONE COMFORT

Pearl developed the Roadster D1500TGL Trilateral Multi-Core Gas Lift Throne by using digital sensors to determine key pressure points where drummers typically sit. Easy adjustability, layers of foam and a convenient backrest make this one of the more comfortable drum thrones on the market.

More info: pearldrums.com

SUITCASE DRUMSET →

Toca's Kickboxx Suitcase makes everything from busking to bar gigs easier for drummers. The kit comes with a 14-inch bass drum (which doubles as a carrying case), a 10-inch snare and a 10-inch tom, as well as three additional posts to expand the kit. Take it on public transit, fly with it across the country or stow it with the rest of your band's gear in that old Ford Econoline van.

More info: tocapercussion.com



MELLIFLUOUS BEATER →

The KDB-2 Cloud beater from Innovative Percussion evokes the mellifluous round tones of early 20th-century kick drums. Let the low end resonate out of your bass drum, as a durable polyester wrap covers the beater's cork core, putting a modern twist on vintage sound and construction. This style of beater might initially have been used in big bands, but it's suited for use in any type of ensemble.

More info: innovativepercussion.com



FULL-BODIED TONE →

D'Angelico Guitars has debuted a version of its flagship solid-body with the introduction of the Deluxe Bedford SH, a three-pickup, semi-hollow spin on the offset Bedford. The combination of two Seymour Duncan Five-Twos in the neck and middle positions and a Seymour Duncan SM-1b mini-humbucker in the bridge contribute to the Deluxe Bedford SH's full-bodied tonal profile.

More info: dangelicoguitars.com



↓ ELECTROMATIC EXPANSION

Gretsch has made several additions to its Electromatic Collection of electric guitars, including the G5260 Jet Baritone with V-Stoptail (pictured), the G5260T Jet Baritone with Bigsby tremolo, the G5222 Double Jet BT with V-Stoptail, the G5410T Rat Rod hollow body single-cut with Bigsby and the G5655T Center Block Jr. single-cut with Bigsby.

More info: gretschguitars.com



IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE →

The Boss Waza-Air Wireless Personal Guitar Amplification System's advanced ambience setups provide three playing environments. Surround mode places the guitar amp in a virtual room and provides an immersive experience. Static mode provides natural spatial localization, where the combined amp and room sound changes depending on where the player moves their head. Stage mode places the user center-stage, with the amp sound coming from a virtual backline behind them.

More info: boss.info



← COOL COMET

The Harmony Comet is a modern take on the iconic 1960s Harmony H-72. The Comet's double-cutaway semi-hollow design boasts Harmony's proprietary gold foil pickups, hardware and premium woods. The Comet is Harmony's first set-neck design in the Standard series, and also sports a carved back and top for the first time. It has a smaller, contoured body along with a C-shape neck profile.

More info: harmony.co



SILENT BASS STRIKES BACK →

Yamaha has unveiled the SLB300SK Silent Bass, the next generation of electric upright basses that lets the performer control their sound from the instrument itself with the press of a button. Silent Bass has been used on stage by high-profile performers who note its playing comfort and clear, full upright sound. The original design of the Silent Bass gives musicians a true ergonomic feel by including all the touch points of an acoustic upright bass.

More info: usa.yamaha.com



← MAKES GIGGING EASY

With more than eight specialized storage and transport compartments built in, the Backline Gear Transport Pack makes getting everything to the gig—and keeping it safe along the way—painless. Its heavy construction, water-resistant zippers and comfort-padded contact points mean users can arrive confident, comfortable and ready to play. Compartments include a modular cable filing system, both small and large accessory compartments, microphone and mic-stand storage and discrete laptop/tablet storage.

More info: daddario.com



NATURAL PLUGGED-IN ACOUSTIC TONE →

Cole Clark's Humbucker guitar is engineered with a Spanish heel, which stops bottom-end rumble, and a carved top to focus the sound. The end result is a guitar with a natural plugged-in acoustic tone and a humbucking pickup that sounds the same as traditional guitars with humbuckers. The pickups each have a separate output to go to the right amplification required for each type of pickup.

More info: coleclarkguitars.com



PIANOS & KEYBOARDS



← BEST OF ALL WORLDS

C. Bechstein's Vario Digital System allows pianists to enjoy the vast possibilities of modern digital technology with all the advantages of a traditional acoustic instrument. The system features a silent mode that effectively mutes the acoustic aspects of the piano and allows the player to access digital sounds of various electric keyboards and concert grands via headphones for quiet practice and recording. Vario has a companion app that allows pianists to save and share hundreds of performances using an iOS/iPadOS tablet or smartphone.

More info: bechstein-digital.com



↑ DIGITAL POWER, GRAND TONE

Kawai's CA-99 and CA-79 (pictured) digital pianos are 88-key instruments that offer multi-channel sampling and resonance modeling technology for authentic concert grand tone. Both pianos offer substantial upgrades compared to previous models. These hybrid pianos feature Kawai's Grand Feel III action, which delivers a firmer, faster, more authentic grand piano feel. Attributes include fully wooden keys, a newly designed full-color touch screen and improved rendering sound technology. Both models include 360-degree diffuser panels that expand the piano's projection in all directions.

More info: kawaius.com



↑ PURE PERFORMANCE POWER

Kurzweil's PC4 Performance Controller gives players full access to the company's Variable Architecture Synthesis Technology directly from the front panel. With 32 layers per program—each offering its own signal path and a host of modular DSP tools—the PC4 offers a wealth of sound creation and modification possibilities. More than 1,000 factory presets are organized into 13 categories of programs, including piano, strings, drums/percussion and more.

More info: kurzweil.com



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More info: usa.yamaha.com

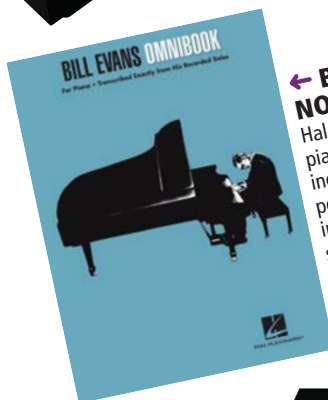


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More info: roland.com



← BILL EVANS TRANSCRIBED, NOTE-FOR-NOTE

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More info: halleonard.com



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More info: korg.com

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More info: casiomusicgear.com



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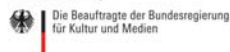


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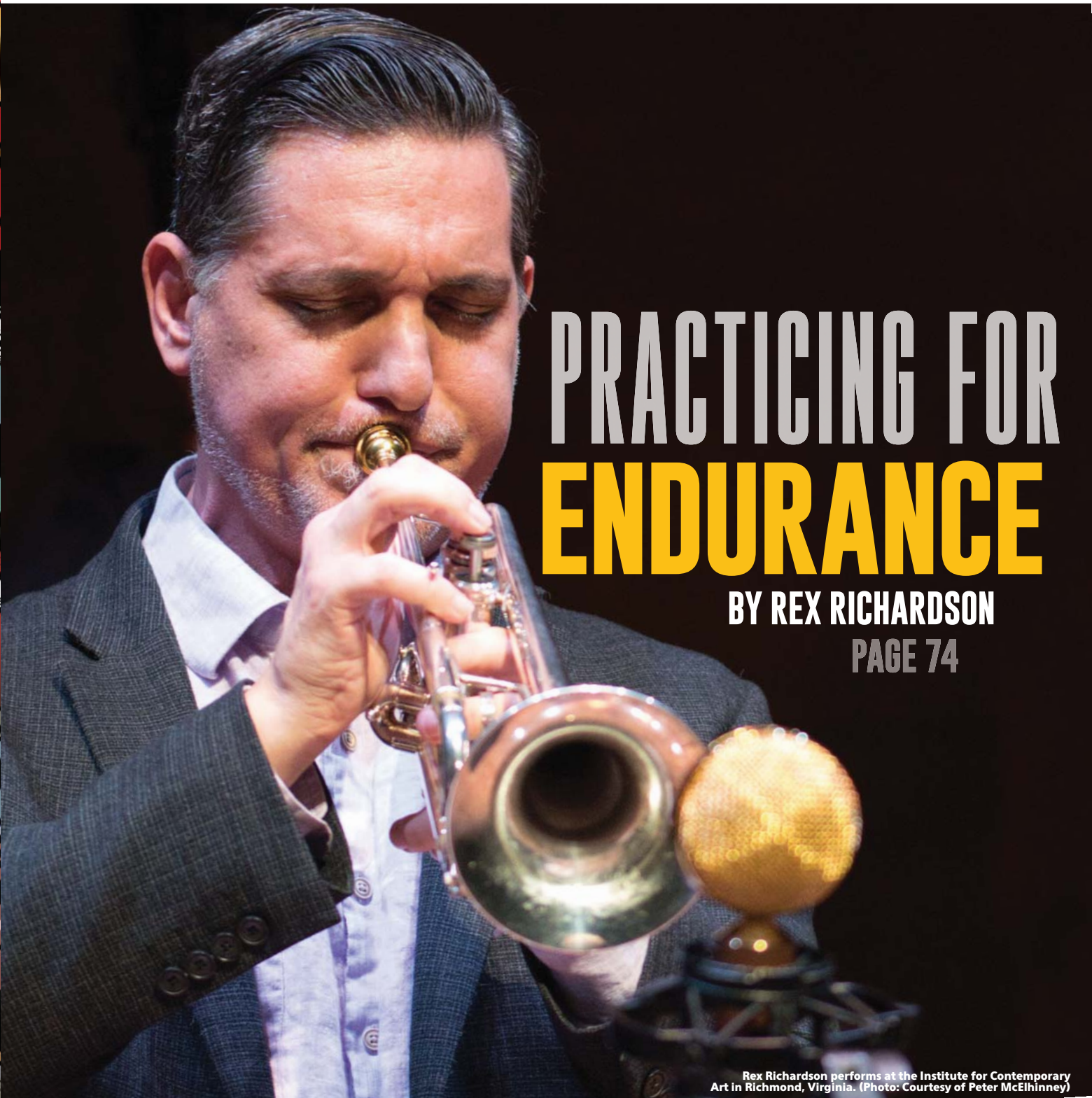




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PRACTICING FOR ENDURANCE

BY REX RICHARDSON
PAGE 74

Rex Richardson performs at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Richmond, Virginia. (Photo: Courtesy of Peter McElhinney)



IAN CAREY
Master Class
Page 78



JOHN RAYMOND
Pro Session
Page 80



NICK FINZER
Transcription
Page 82

TOOLSHED
Page 84



Rex Richardson performs in Valencia, Spain.

Stamina Through Efficiency

By Rex Richardson

As Dizzy Gillespie once said: “Some days you win, and some days the horn wins. Then you die, and the horn wins.”

Encased in Dizzy’s wryly comical quote is some hard truth about the trumpet: Sometimes it doesn’t seem to work so well, and on those days it’s usually the most fundamental elements of our technique—sound quality, range and stamina—that suffer the most. And yet, often to the great frustration of performers, even on “winning” days our stamina may prove lacking.

Every brass player has, at some time in

their career, dealt with the problem of stamina. Indeed, for trumpeters, it seems to have become a negative stereotype: Musicians often joke that trumpeters are always worried about their chops, are inconsistent and are likely to crash-and-burn at the ends of long pieces, on high notes, etc.

This is true regardless of genre. As someone who performs primarily as a soloist in both jazz and classical settings, I have watched—and heard—trumpeters “fight” the instrument in big bands, orchestras, jazz combos and recitals or solo competitions. I myself suffered from this malady as a young

student. Unfortunately, these fights never end in the performer’s favor.

As such, a mythology of “strength” has evolved in trumpet player culture, the idea being that physically strong players (whether the strength is borne mostly in their chops muscles, abdominals or generally throughout the body) are best equipped to overcome these challenges. Accordingly, methods have emerged over time that are designed to improve the strength and stamina of trumpeters and brass players in general.

The problem with this concept is that it doesn’t appear to be demonstrably true. Both

as a teacher and as collaborator with brass players at all levels (ranging from young students to top professionals), I have observed no correlation between a performer's physical size/strength and good stamina or a healthy range on the instrument.

In clinics, I am often asked about stamina, especially after attendees have seen me survive a long or especially taxing program and seem to emerge from the experience with relative ease. (It's never actually easy!) The question is usually framed as, "How do you practice for endurance?" I typically answer that I don't practice for endurance. Sometimes I let that sink in for a moment, watching the reaction of mild surprise, and then I follow up: "I practice for efficiency."

For me, efficiency is the ability to do things well, successfully and without waste. In the context of brass pedagogy, we can define it simply as "not working hard to play the instrument, regardless of the range or dynamics of the passages."

I have found that stamina is always dependent on two elements: efficiency and conditioning. The latter can change from day to day and is often a matter of common sense (playing enough but not too much, doing the right kind of playing that prepares you physically for the demands you face), but the former is a long-term project, and is essentially determined by how good your technique is. It typically takes months of thoughtful practice to develop great efficiency.

I like the metaphor used by renowned soloist and pedagogue Vince DiMartino: "If Joe has \$100 in the bank but each note costs him \$1, while Jane has \$50 in the bank but each note costs her 10 cents, then Jane will have five times the stamina of Joe." In other words, working efficiently will outperform working hard, even if the hard worker has a lot of strength to draw upon.

Even the famous method developed by Carmine Caruso works, in my opinion, because it cultivates efficiency, rather than brute strength. I've known trumpeters to injure themselves using this method, but this seems to occur only when they are impatient and try to progress too quickly, or if they ignore Caruso's own careful prescription for rest between exercises.

So, how does one practice to develop efficiency on a brass instrument? I have found that two types of exercises are the most useful: centering and flexibility.

Centering Exercises

These are based primarily on the teachings of James Stamp. See Example 1.

Play a G with a soft, clean attack. Bend it down a half step, then another half step, then back to the original pitch. Next, while hold-

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5



WALTER ZAPONIG

"I don't practice for endurance," Richardson says. "I practice for efficiency."

ing the G in place, finger an A_b; go back to fingering the G; finger an A natural; go back to fingering the G and hold it, listening to the quality. At the end of this exercise, you should find yourself right in the center resonance of the note, where the sound quality is warmest, biggest (without changing the actual volume) and has the most overtones.

This can be quite challenging at first, especially for younger students or if you've never done any bending exercises before. You can add one step at a time, as each starts to feel more comfortable: Start with the G, trying to bend a half step; then add another, etc.

You are training yourself to play in the center of the sound, developing positive muscle memory (i.e., good habits) through good concept. That is, you might feel quite accustomed to playing above the center, but if you can hear that your best sound is below that comfortable point, then through training it'll eventually feel natural (and much easier) to find that center. Because it's the strongest point of resonance acoustically, you'll get the best all-around results: It's physically the least taxing way to play, and it allows you to produce your fullest, roundest tone quality, with the best projection—all with the lightest possible workload.

Flexibility Exercises

There are a multitude of published methods for flexibility. While all of them are worth exploring, usually what we need is pretty simple: We need to train ourselves, primarily through the use of lip slurs, to move with fluidity and speed around the various ranges of the instrument, using both close and wide intervals.

Example 2 shows the simplest, most effective flexibility exercises I know.

Start slowly, aiming for smooth connec-

tion (no "bumps" or "airballs") between the notes, and aiming for the precise center of each pitch. Once this is working well (it could take a few days, or even a couple of weeks), add another permutation of the exercise: Play it starting a partial higher. Do the same patterns with different valve combinations.

It'll be time to use the metronome at this point, finding a comfortable tempo at which you can consistently execute without any difficulty. Your goal is to gradually increase the tempo and the range (in both directions, low as well as high) over time. Small increments can add up to really impressive tempos—and range gains—within a few weeks or months.

Once this exercise feels pretty comfortable, supplement it with this next one, which gradually expands to wider intervals. See Example 3.

You are training your chops—and your brain, really—to move around the instrument while relying on air and as little muscle as possible. As such, it "costs less" to play technically challenging passages. Start with lower valve combinations to make the range easier. Tip: Don't "squeeze" the notes with your lips to manage the lip slur; you are better off thinking of syllables like a singer (saying "ah" to "eee" to move higher) in order to get the mechanics (tongue position, oral cavity size) to work properly.

Routine

How should you practice these materials? First, don't overdo them. A routine lasting 20 minutes devoted to centering and flexibility, as part of a broader routine of fundamentals, should be all you ever need.

Example 4 shows how I practice the centering, adding in a bit of optional flexibility. I'll do

a different position/valve combination every day.

Example 5 shows how I practice the flexibility. I start with this routine, continuing up the harmonic series as high as is comfortable. And then I go to the exercise shown in Example 3. As with the bending exercises, I'll use a different position/valve combination each day, so during the course of a week I'll cover my whole range on the instrument.

To maintain good chops-health, I find it's best to focus on the following two areas:

- **Efficiency:** Have a good daily warmup/maintenance routine that touches on all areas of your technique (fingers, articulation, etc.), including work on centering and flexibility. Gradually increase the range and scope of your work on these exercises, but be patient and don't push it—go for gradual, incremental improvement rather than big jumps. Consistent small improvements add up to huge changes in your technique and efficiency in the long run.

- **Conditioning:** Don't forget this other element of your chops-health and stamina. Play enough, and with the right approach, to prepare you for your rehearsals and concerts—but not too much. While we need to think like athletes regarding the music, we often need to think like athletes when it comes to instrumental technique. As such, rest and recovery are crucial.

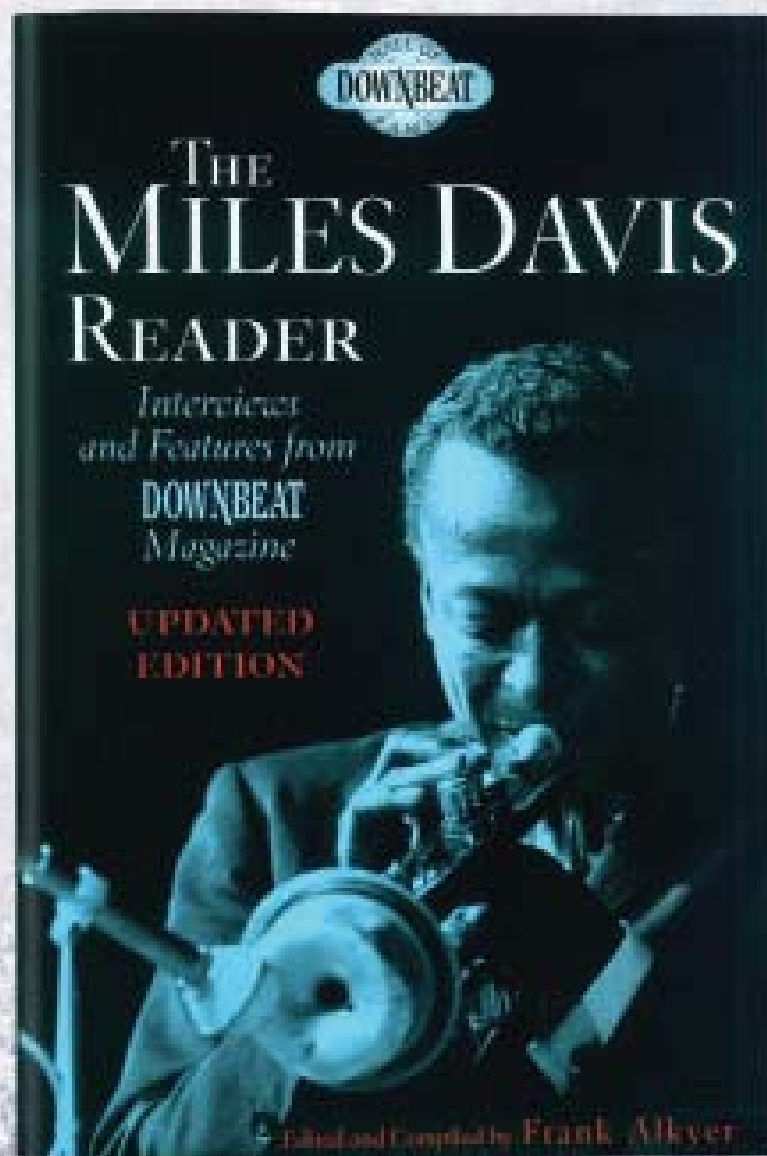
If you're playing 4th trumpet in the orchestra all week and lead trumpet in the big band on Saturday, you have to do some playing in the appropriate range and energy level for the big band gig. The reverse is also true. Don't take your chops for granted; make sure they are set up for whatever specific type of playing you're doing. Avoid poorly timed days off, but make time for easy days and the occasional day off the horn when your schedule allows. I suggest one easy day per week, wherein you only do some relaxed maintenance, and when your schedule has a bit of down time, every two to four weeks, take a day off altogether. It will clear your head, as well as allowing your chops to heal properly.

For more information about daily routines, see *Yamaha Etude and Exercise Book for Trumpet: The Secrets of Eight Master Artists and Teachers*, and check out my trumpet pedagogy videos on YouTube. For more on practicing and skill-building, see Daniel Coyle's *The Talent Code* and Anders Ericsson's *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*. **DB**

A veteran of Joe Henderson's quintet and the Chicago Jazz Ensemble, trumpeter and flugelhornist Rex Richardson tours globally as a soloist and clinician in jazz and classical contexts. He is Professor of Trumpet and Jazz at Virginia Commonwealth University, and his most recent album, *Freedom Of Movement: 21st Century Trumpet Concertos* (Summit), features large-scale, jazz-infused compositions. Richardson is celebrating 25 years as a Yamaha Performing Artist this month. Visit him online at rexrichardson.net.

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Ian Carey

JAMES KNOX

Learn the Words!

How To Internalize Standards with the Help of Vocalists

If you're an aspiring instrumentalist learning to play standards, chances are at some point you've been told by an older musician to learn the words (probably in a stereotypical grizzled jazz-musician voice). I heard it frequently when I was younger, and I'd nod and say, "I know, I know," and add it to my mental list of the thousand other things to work on.

If I asked why a contemporary nonsinger should take the time to learn the lyrics of a 100-year-old pop tune being used as an improvisational form, I might have heard something about the composer's intent or the spirit of the song. To be honest, I never bought this justification—do you think John Coltrane's version

of "My Favorite Things" was true to Rodgers & Hammerstein's original vision? Does listening to that driving maelstrom make you think of "whiskers on kittens?" Not to mention that many standards composers were less than enthusiastic about having their songs interpreted by jazz musicians. Jerome Kern, who penned such classic vehicles as "All The Things You Are" and "The Song Is You," complained that jazz versions of his tunes were "a fraudulent imitation."

But the truth is that learning the words is immensely valuable for instrumentalists. I'll tell you why this is true, as well as how to go about learning them in an efficient and musically enriching way.

Mnemonic Device

The primary value in learning lyrics to standards is not emotional, but *mnemonic*. The words help you remember the melody and the form of the tune. Musical material is easier to remember when it's mentally connected to catchy, rhyming lyrical phrases than if it's just notes memorized from a piece of paper.

I often run into students who have learned the melody to a standard without the lyrics, and their phrasing can be ... odd. For example, the Warren/Gordon perennial "There Will Never Be Another You" contains the following lyric: "There may be other songs to sing, another fall, another spring." But someone who doesn't know that might play the phrase

in a way that sounds like: “There may be other songs to sing, another fall *anahh*—[rest].”

If you have the lyrics in mind, you’re likely to play in a way that outlines the phrase, even if you’re embellishing and playing around with the line. Which brings me to the best way

If you have the lyrics in mind, you’re likely to play in a way that outlines the phrase, even if you’re embellishing the line.

to learn the words and melody: by ear.

There’s been a lot of discussion in online jazz circles recently about learning standards, sparked by a deep dive on the subject (“Deepening Your Relationship to Musical Theatre”) by pianist/writer Ethan Iverson on his blog *Do The Math*. Iverson makes the case for studying the original sheet music when learning the tunes—because by doing so you can get as close as possible to the notes the composer chose, and perhaps discover idiosyncrasies that have been flattened out in the transformation from Broadway showpieces to jazz workhorses; and because, contrary to conventional wisdom, many jazz musicians from earlier generations commonly did so.

Osmosis Approach

I definitely support checking out the sheet music as part of the learning process. But I want you to think about a popular song from your childhood or adolescence that you know really well—I mean you can sing along with every word, vocal fill and guitar solo. Got one? Good.

Now, did you ever check out the published sheet music to this song? I highly doubt it. You absorbed it by hearing it and singing along with it a bazillion times. (And I’m willing to bet you’d notice if you heard a cover version with the wrong chord changes.) That osmosis-style approach works for learning standards, as well, and it’s the closest we can come to simulating what it would have been like to grow up surrounded by this music on the radio and the bandstand, as earlier generations of jazz musicians did.

I believe the best source for learning standards is the treasure trove of recordings by the great midcentury pop vocalists. For me, this journey began when I was in college, with a stack of 1950s Frank Sinatra LPs, generously gifted to me by my teacher, the saxophonist/

historian Loren Schoenberg. When I realized how useful these could be for learning tunes, I asked my dad (a diehard thrift store hound) to grab any pop-standards albums he saw. I recorded any tune I recognized onto a (then-state-of-the-art) 120-minute cassette and lis-

tened to it for an entire summer. By the time I was back in school I could sing the melodies, lyrics and bass lines to dozens of tunes, and found I could jump on to any of them on a jam session and hold my own.

Pop-Standards Recordings

Why are these versions so perfect for learning the tunes? First of all, unlike singers more explicitly in the jazz realm like Billie Holiday or Sarah Vaughan, the pop-standards singers—artists like Sinatra, Nat “King” Cole, Rosemary Clooney, Jo Stafford and Peggy Lee (plus Ella Fitzgerald, who straddled the jazz/pop divide)—tend to stick close to the original melody of the song. If you want to be able to come up with variations on a theme (as Holiday and Vaughan did), you should know the actual theme pretty well, right?

Secondly, the chord progressions on these recordings usually represent a sort of compromise between the original Broadway harmony and the more tricked-out and/or smoothed-over changes used in jazz. I often was surprised when a commonly used jazz substitution didn’t show up, but that taught me about where and how those substitutions can work.

They’re also short. The time limits of radio singles meant that all that information had to fit into an extremely focused 3-ish minutes, making internalization through listening much easier than on, say, a 7-minute cut with only a chorus of melody at the beginning and end.

Finally, you’ll discover some deeply virtuosic, beautiful performances by masters of the genre, backed by lush orchestras and swinging big bands, with charts by ace arrangers like Nelson Riddle, Billy May and Axel Stordahl (containing many tasty ideas for intros, endings and modulations, which can help generate ideas for spicing up your small-group versions).

Online Access

Now, how to go about absorbing these tunes? The good news is that you can now access myriad versions of any standard without having to visit a single thrift store. Today’s streaming services all have extensive back-catalogs of vocal albums, so when I recently dove into these recordings to expand my repertoire, I discovered many great vocalists in the same tradition.

Visit my website at iancareyjazz.com for more suggestions and a playlist of a few hundred tracks to get you started.

Begin by choosing a tune and searching for a version or two by the singers mentioned above; then put it on repeat and sing along. It can be helpful to start with a version that’s close to your natural vocal range but you can also sing it up or down an octave. Keep listening until you’re able to: 1) sing the melody and lyrics; 2) sing along with the bass line; and 3) sing improvised fills behind the melody.

Start Playing

When you can do those three things easily, move to piano or your main instrument. If you’ve internalized the melody and bass line (and have a basic knowledge of jazz harmony), you should be able to start picking out the big-picture structure—this is where it can be helpful to look at a lead sheet or sheet music version of the changes and see where it aligns with the recording and where it differs.

There will be transposing involved, but this is also great for your development; always try to think in terms of roman-numeral-style roots (e.g., “starts on the I, then to the V of V, then ii-V7 back to I, then up a major third for the bridge” instead of “Cmaj7, D7, Dm7-G7, Cmaj7, B7, Emaj7”). This will help you learn the *blueprint* of the tune rather than a series of key-specific chords or melody notes. Then listen to some instrumental versions to see what choices they made, melodically and harmonically. You’ll hear fresh nuances in the way they phrase the melody now that you know the lyrics.

Then, it’s time to play. Decide which version of the changes you’d like to use (maybe a hybrid of the version from the recording and a fake-book version?) and give it a go. And when possible, play with singers, who will force you to play in unusual keys and give you practice in blending with the ensemble. Experiment at will.

Lastly, the more deeply you internalize the source material of these songs—which as a canon I consider to be one of the high points of human culture, up there with Shakespeare and Louis Armstrong’s Hot Fives—the more you can let your individualism shine through. **DB**

Ian Carey is a San Francisco Bay Area-based trumpeter and composer whose latest album, *Fire In My Head: The Anxiety Suite*, will be released in April on *Slow & Steady Records*. Visit him online at iancareyjazz.com.



John Raymond's setup of effects pedals for trumpet and flugelhorn

Using Effects Pedals on Your Horn

In the fall of 2014, I was feeling restless to try something new—both as a bandleader and as a player. Up to that point, I had written music for both a quartet and a quintet with trumpet, piano and/or guitar, bass and drums. However, that fall I booked a gig at a venue in New York where I decided to put together a group with an instrumentation that I'd never played with before: flugelhorn, guitar and drums. This was the start of what would eventually become my working band, Real Feels, and after recording four albums and playing hundreds of gigs all around the world together, I think it's safe to say that at least something about that experiment worked.

As I look back on it, it's incredible to think about how much that one decision has transformed the way I now think about and play music. But what's arguably changed the most is my concept of sound and how I sonically fit into

the context of the group. This has happened primarily through incorporating effects pedals into my playing.

I have to admit that when I first started down this road, it was pretty intimidating. This was a whole world that I hadn't the slightest idea of where to start. As I've gotten into conversations with other horn players at gigs or master classes during the past few years, I've found that many feel the same way. The idea is appealing, but the process of deciding which pedals to use and knowing how to use them is completely foreign. As someone who's been using them for a while now, here are some things that I think are helpful to consider, if you're interested in heading down this path.

What Do You Hear?

When you start thinking about incorporating effects pedals into your playing, the first

question we should ask ourselves is, "What do I hear?" How do you hear your sound being "effected"? In what context do you hear it? How will incorporating pedals affect the music? Answering these questions is an often overlooked yet crucial step in the process. It communicates that you have a concept for what you're hearing, and it will ensure that the novelty of any given pedal doesn't distract you from what you ultimately want to sound like.

Effects pedals, for many people, are like bright, shiny objects. A person hears someone use a pedal and they quickly become enamored with it, convincing themselves that they need to buy the pedal and start using it immediately. Now, there's nothing wrong with getting inspired by other people who use effects pedals. For me personally, I'm always checking out other people's pedal setups. I genuinely want to know how people get the sounds

they play with. But, there's a big difference between being inspired by someone and blatantly copying them. Take the time to really listen to yourself and to the music you're playing, and try to define what you're hearing that isn't there already. Once you do this, you can then begin the process of figuring out what pedals will help you achieve the sound you're going for.

Know Your Options

From here, you'll want to start doing some research into the kinds of pedals there are, as well as what unique capabilities each individual pedal has to offer. Generally speaking, there are six basic types of effects pedals: reverb, delay, filter/phase, overdrive/distortion, wah and looper. Understanding how each of these kinds of pedals work will help you determine which ones will be best suited for the sound you're going for. Once you do this, you can check out different brands you're interested in and figure out exactly which one is right for you.

For my pedalboard, I use five different effects devices:

- an Arena reverb pedal by TC Electronic
- a Timeline delay pedal by Strymon, which I rotate through a handful of different delay settings, depending on the context
- a Boss Super Shifter harmonizer, which allows me to add another note at a set interval above or below the note I'm playing
- a Count to Five delay/looper/sampler by Montreal Assembly, which allows me to manipulate anything I play in any manner that I'd like
- a Ditto looper pedal by TC Electronic, which gives me the ability to loop textures on top of each other

(Also seen in the accompanying photo of my effects-pedal setup is the Strymon Ojai power supply.)

The resource that I recommend to every horn player is horn-fx.com. The website is full of product reviews, articles, forums, demo videos and artist pages specifically geared toward horn players looking to use pedals. In particular, a great "Getting Started" guide is available as a free download—an invaluable resource if you're just starting down this path.

However, this process can start as simple as asking other musicians you know (horn players, guitar players, etc.) about what pedals they use, why they chose those pedals and how each of them works. Doing so can open up doors for you to try some of these pedals yourself. This is by far the easiest—and cheapest—route to go when first starting out.

A New World of Sound

Once you've got some pedals to start playing with, it's time to start using them to see



Effects pedals have expanded Raymond's concept of sound.

what new sounds they can open up for you. These moments of exploration and discovery are often some of the most inspiring, which makes this getting-to-know-you stage one of the most fun parts of the process. While reading a manual can be helpful, I'd recommend diving in without one and learning about what each pedal can do simply through trial and error. You'll develop a much more intuitive sense of using each pedal by doing things in this way, which will help you internalize these new sounds even more personally.

From here, it's all about developing a sense of fluency. Spend time shedding with them just like you do with your own instrument. Learn the ins and outs of each pedal you use, so that you can manipulate them in any way that you want to. As you do this, you'll find that you start to feel much more comfortable and confident using them, with the end result being that they'll gradually become a natural extension of your sound and the way that you play.

Personally, one of the things I enjoy most is finding new ways to use the pedals I have. Most times when this happens, however, these experiments launch me and the music into something totally unexpected and messy. It's in these moments that I'm challenged to embrace the imperfection that using pedals can bring about, and to turn those spontaneous "mistakes" into something beautiful. In this way, effects pedals can become as much a part of our improvisational approach as any musical decision we make, which I find makes the process of using them creatively fulfilling.

Always in Good Taste

The goal is ultimately for you to develop the flexibility to use effects in whatever way is going to serve the music best. How do we know what exactly will serve the music? Asking yourself the five Ws is a great place to start:

- **Who** are you playing with? Does the instrumentation lend itself to using effects?
- **What** kind of music are you playing? Would the songs you're playing sound better with effects?
- **When** should you use them? Can you use specific sounds so they don't become too redundant or predictable?
- **Where** should you use certain pedals or effects? Does using them at that point in the music sound appropriate based on what's happening in the larger context of the song?
- **Why** are you using effects? Is it simply to look cool, or do you genuinely hear them in your sound and in the context of the band?

Answering these questions can be very important in helping you figure out if using effects pedals will enhance—or take away from—the music at any given moment. This clearly takes a lot of discernment, restraint and maturity. But, then again, making any kind of music at a high level does.

There's no doubt that effects pedals open up a whole new world of possibilities to us horn players. They present a fresh and unique way for us to discover our own voice as artists. While it can be intimidating, all you need to do to start is use your intuition to develop a concept.

Be intentional with the pedals you choose, and spend time learning them like you do your own instrument. Above all, listen deeply to the music. It will tell you exactly what to do and when to do it, if you listen closely enough. **DB**

With a singular voice on trumpet and flugelhorn, John Raymond is making his mark as an up-and-coming international jazz musician. He has released six albums under his own name, the latest being 2019's *Real Feels Live Vol. 2* (Sunnyside). Raymond has established himself as a sought-after educator, both as the Professor of Jazz Trumpet at Indiana University and as a guest clinician and soloist at schools around the world. Contact him at johnraymondmusic@gmail.com or visit his website, john-raymond.com.



Nick Finzer

Nick Finzer's Trombone Solo on 'Evolution Of ... Perspective'

One of the joys of playing music for me is getting to play with *people*. In the age of the iRealBook app and the proliferation of various kinds of play-along materials, I find that students often are inexperienced at improvising with other musicians in real time. Concurrently, utilizing the melodic material from a piece as the source material for improvisation seems to be relegated to “advanced improvisational techniques.” I think that this is the true essence of creating an improvisation that is both of the moment and develops the character of the composition itself. In my opening trombone solo from the track “Evolution Of ... Perspective” on my band’s new *Cast Of Characters* (Outside in Music), I try to capture both of these ideas.

The album opens with a dramatic piano introduction by Glenn Zaleski (on “A Sorcerer (Is A Myth)”) that serves as the compositional germ for all of the pieces on the album. It’s a polytonal idea, presented as both the D major and D \flat major tonalities played simultaneously (see Figure 1).

“Evolution Of ... Perspective” puts this same

polytonal idea into a new context (a much freer one in this case) and presents it in myriad ways throughout the introduction until we get to the main theme (see Figure 2).

As I begin my solo (see Figure 3), you can clearly hear the first idea (measure 2) is borrowed from the piano’s explosive setup into the top of the first chorus. This becomes the start of each phrase in that first chorus (bars 5, 12). Each phrase comes to some sort of conclusion, which results in a space for the rhythm section to interject their commentary.

I tell my students that they should try to play an idea to its completion, and put a punctuation mark at the end of that musical sentence. Ideally, the improviser picks up where the last phrase left off, rather than stringing together unrelated musical ideas.

The start of the second chorus (bar 17) begins with the anticipated version of the opening idea, this time transposed to new pitches and played backwards (down a whole step versus up a whole step). The whole step idea then devel-

ops into a faster phrase, which helps to build the pace of the solo (bars 21–23) and sets up the faster phrases that appear later (bars 27–31, 49–52). Throughout, I strive to improvise phrases that have clear endings, so that I can keep the band involved and interactive. This is so important. It builds a musical relationship that is much deeper.

The top of the third chorus presents a new idea: the high C# that was introduced at the start of the second chorus is returned to in the last four bars of the solo to end with an unexpected twist. I like to think about each motif as a character that needs to be developed. If we introduce a new motif, we ought to do something with it, otherwise it’s like a character in a play that says only one line and is never heard from again.

The last motif to draw attention to is the rhythmic tension built by groupings of three that is set up in bars 29–31. It serves to propel the band into the top of the next chorus, and also reappears again at the beginning of the final chorus to push the energy forward again.

The solo itself has a lot of diatonic phrases of our first key center (D major). Most of the notes that provide tension in this solo are borrowed from our secondary key center (D \flat major). The first tension in bar 11, the faster lines in bars 29–31 and the chromatics in bars 44–47 are all borrowing from that initial polytonal idea.

To say that I was actively thinking of all of this in the moment would be a lie. It wasn’t premeditated, but it was set up by years of practicing this type of thinking while improvising.

On *Cast Of Characters*, I was intentionally practicing these polytonal ideas in my improvisations, aiming for them to come out in my subconscious. This is the essence of what I mean about playing the “character” of the composition: taking the colors created by the melody and harmonies of a piece, internalizing them and focusing on painting with those colors, rather than with chord-scale theory. **DB**

Trombonist and composer Nick Finzer is Assistant Professor of Jazz Trombone at the University of North Texas. He serves as the artistic director and co-founder of the Institute for Creative Music, a nonprofit dedicated to exploring improvisation and creativity for musicians and audiences of all levels. Finzer is the founder and CEO of Outside In Music, a jazz label and media company. Visit him online at nickfinzermusic.com.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

1 F#7sus
 Dmaj13
 Bm11 Growl C#7
 F#7sus
 13

2 F#7sus
 Dmaj13
 Bm11 C#7
 F#7sus
 29

3 F#7sus
 Dmaj13
 Bm11 C#7
 F#7sus
 45

4 F#7sus
 Dmaj13
 Bm11 C#7
 F#7sus
 61

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B.A.C. Paseo, Paseo Z72 Trumpets

Artisan Quality, Resonant Kansas City Sound

Named after “The Paseo,” the iconic road that winds through Kansas City’s historic jazz district, the Paseo Trumpet and Paseo Z72 Trumpet from B.A.C. Music pay tribute to the celebrated jazz musicians who made their way along that well-traveled road, just to stomp, bop and riff in the city’s nightclubs over the years.

Kansas City-based B.A.C. crafted these recent additions to the company’s Handcraft series of trumpets with careful detail and respectable artisan quality, while using manufacturing techniques that help keep pricing affordable. More importantly, the trumpets manage to keep true to the Kansas City spirit that inspired its name.

If I could travel back to Kansas City of the 1930s, I would feel confident with either of these two B.A.C. trumpet models in hand, eager to jump into a marathon jam session typical of the time. I would stand ready to face off with fellow players, knowing that by heading down The Paseo, I could wind up playing all evening long, with performances often extending deep into the wee hours.

The Paseo model features a full 5-inch copper Reso-Tempered bell, and a yellow brass custom 1890 lead pipe with .343-inch venturi. The instrument produces a warm, balanced tone, perfect for warm-and-fuzzy ensemble playing. The .460-inch bore performs as expected, allowing a smooth, comfortable flow of air with appropriate resistance for maximum control in both the lower and upper registers. The instrument also includes a yellow brass dual radius main tuning slide.

The consistent, deep and evenly resonant sound you can produce with little effort makes the Paseo ideal for ensembles with extended playing of rich, sonorous chords—especially groups where you need to blend with many other horns, such as concert bands and brass bands. Of course,

for jazz playing, the instrument fills the room with a mellow, glowing sound that’s sure to inspire sweet and delicious blowing. When improvising on the Kansas City anthem “Moten Swing,” I found the horn’s round vibrancy so inviting, I was able to crawl right inside that tune and let it carry me around for a change. Overall, I felt relaxed, in control and liberated while soloing on the Paseo, which proved to be an extremely versatile horn.

The Paseo Z72 features a 5-inch yellow brass hand-hammered one-piece bell, as well as the same custom 1890 lead pipe found on the Paseo, along with a choice of a .460-inch or .468-inch bore and .345-inch or .348-inch venturi. The instrument also includes a dual radius main tuning slide. B.A.C. manufactured the Paseo Z72 using tooling acquired from a workshop that previously had produced horns for studio and sessions players in Anaheim, California. The result is a trumpet that can produce a similarly warm, resonant tone, with remarkable control, balanced airflow and plenty of projection throughout the instrument’s full range.

The Paseo and Paseo Z72 both offered a similar excellent quality of sound and smooth handling. I would choose the Paseo for playing in a jazz combo or a brass band setting due to the instrument’s warmer, resonant tone. When I play-tested both trumpets during a gig with a classic big band, the Paseo Z72 seemed slightly better suited for that style. Its fatter tone helped bring out the dramatic pops, accents and falls that characterize classic big band arrangements, while still blending well in tight chord voicings. While the sound of the Paseo Z72 proved warmer overall than my Bach Stradivarius, it also was more open, allowing for a notably smoother playing experience.

—Dan Gorski

coolisbac.com

Blessing BTB1488OR Tenor Trombone

Large-Bore Horn, High-End Features

The Blessing BTB1488OR tenor trombone is the newest offering from one of America's oldest brass instrument companies. There haven't been many intermediate-level .547-inch bore trombones available lately, so this is a welcome addition.

The BTB1488OR is Chinese-made, but don't let this deter you, as the build quality and playability meet or even exceed the previously reviewed Blessing BBTB-62R Bass Trombone. While some Blessing instruments of previous eras showed evidence of cost-cutting, this new model does not and even has some design features found in more high-end brands.

The open-wrap F-attachment valve is smooth and quiet, and the molded thumb lever, ball-and-socket linkage and beautifully engraved endcap recall designs by Edwards, Shires and Miraphone, respectively. The bracing on the F-attachment isolates the tubing from the 8.5-inch bell, much like on a Greenhoe trombone.

The fine build quality continues on the handslide, which has a narrow crook (like a Conn 88H) with a double radius (like a Bach 42). The slide action is smooth and true right out of the case. Not to be overlooked is the well-executed clear-epoxy lacquer finish of this horn. It's as good as any you will see from any other brass instrument maker.

The result of all this attention to detail is a beautiful horn that is easy to play with the big, warm sound you would expect from a large-bore trombone. There is a little bit more resistance to the airflow than most high-end large-bore trombones I've played, but I think this will work well for developing musicians just getting into a large-bore instrument for the first time. Where younger players often can be overwhelmed when encountering a larger bore, the BTB1488OR offers them just the right blend of playability, design and quality that has long been missing from trombones this size.

The complete package includes a Blessing mouthpiece, a deluxe zippered case with backpack-style straps and an impressive five-year warranty on materials and workmanship. At a retail price of \$2,069, the BTB1488OR is going to be tough to beat as a great new option for the advancing trombonist.

—Ryan Miller

blessingbrass.com



Yamaha YTR-8310ZII

Updated Bobby Shew Custom Z

Bobby Shew has performed with many great big bands, including ensembles led by Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Toshiko Akiyoshi/Lew Tabackin and Maynard Ferguson. A Yamaha artist and development player for more than 30 years, Shew knows what he wants in a trumpet. In 1994, Yamaha interpreted this man's needs to create the YTR-6310Z trumpet, which later led to the YTR-8310Z. Now, with assistance from designer Shunichi Niwata and R&D specialist Bob Malone, Yamaha and Shew have come up with the YTR-8310ZII, which refines the essence of its predecessors.

Yamaha is known for quality and consistency, and the updated Bobby Shew Custom Z model is no exception. The black leather double case included with the horn is quite nice on its own. When you open it up and see the brilliance of the yellow-brass 5-inch bell, the beauty of this horn is revealed. It's simple and elegant, with copper-colored highlights on the leadpipe, first-valve thumb saddle and third valve ring, as well as the French bead bell rim. Yamaha has utilized a new two-piece valve casing that adds depth and core to the instrument's tone while also balancing the playing resistance.

I played this horn for a week during private and group lessons, big band rehearsals and a couple small-group gigs. I found that this trumpet blows with ease and has a bright tone in all registers. With a step bore design measuring .445 inches, I felt an efficiency and openness in the horn that I wasn't expecting after performing on a large-bore horn since the early '80s. In a way, the less I worked, the better the horn played. I could back off on my airstream and still have great control with a crisp, forward tone quality. The valves were comfortable and quick to the touch. I did find them to be loud with the brass guides and semi-hard pads on the valve caps; I doubt, though, that anyone truly heard this out front of the trumpet. While the finger buttons on the original Bobby Shew YTR-8310Z were rounded with soft sides, the finger buttons on the new version have more sloped sides with knurling.

The YTR-8310ZII is relatively lightweight. It's well balanced and easy to hold. The bell is one-piece side-seamed yellow brass. It rings and sings. The projection was outstanding, and the feedback from the back side was excellent.

Duo and trio work is my bread-and-butter, and a majority of it is muted. Whether playing on a tight cup, bubble mute or a bucket, the YTR-8310ZII performed well for me. I could create a nice buzz on the harmon or back off a bit to create that smoky sound that is so pleasing on a ballad.

I had a few of my more experienced students try the Bobby Shew YTR-8310ZII. Their tuning and tone were enhanced instantly. Notes seemed to lock in with little or no adjustment. Initially, they seemed to struggle a bit above the staff; I attribute that to over-blowing. After I was able to convince them to slow down and relax their airstream, everything started sounding much better.

Yamaha and Shew have created a remarkably efficient trumpet in the YTR-8310ZII. It's a high-end instrument that's appropriate for a full range of contemporary styles, with a bright sound from top to bottom and well-balanced playing resistance. The included Yamaha Bobby Shew Jazz mouthpiece and TRC-801E double case with backpack straps and shoulder strap are a nice bonus.

—Jim Jacobs

usa.yamaha.com



Student ensembles from the City College of New York have opportunities to perform in venues throughout the city.

CCNY Combines Past, Present

HIGH ON A BLUFF OVERLOOKING Harlem—where Duke Ellington took the “A” train amid a cultural renaissance—the City College of New York has been writing its own chapter in jazz history.

Since 1974, when the college launched its pioneering jazz-studies program, the music’s luminaries have made long-term faculty commitments—from pianist John Lewis and singer Sheila Jordan, who started in the 1970s, to bassist Ron Carter, who began in the ’80s, to fellow bassist John Patitucci, whose tenure occurred in the new century.

These days, the program employs faculty who, like their predecessors, are forward-thinking artists bent on helping craft a future for students—and the next generation of music—by instilling an understanding of the past.

“What we try to give them is the foundation,” said saxophonist Steve Wilson, director of jazz studies. “It’s our job to give them the nuts and bolts of the history, so they can make informed choices about what they’re going to do.”

The history, as text or subtext, is baked into courses, whether it’s private lessons; ensembles; applied jazz piano, harmony and improvisation; repertory and performances practices; or composing and arranging. Jazz history is a comprehensive affair at the school, covering the full range of the music’s development, as well as its multicultural context.

That context comes alive in ensembles focusing on a range of traditions, including Brazilian and other styles originating outside the United States. Rhythm workshops for non-drummers have proven particularly popular—none more than a course in African drumming, offered some semesters by Neil Clarke, percussionist for the late Randy Weston. “Many people have said it’s transformative,” Wilson said.

The concentration on fundamentals is equal-

ly rigorous for instrumentalists and singers, as they develop proficiency in a range of critical skills, from transcription to transposition to lead-sheet preparation. Instructors ensure there is no sliding by on the ability to dispatch a melody with poise or play a bit of piano. Singers who complete the program will emerge able to create a jazz line over changes—in the moment.

“My objective,” said singer Suzanne Pittson, associate director of jazz studies and head of the vocal program, “is for the student to become confident as an improviser in a jazz setting.” To accomplish that, singers are integrated into ensembles of all sizes, giving them and the instrumentalists the opportunity to interact.

For the approximately 70 undergrads and 15 graduate students in the jazz program, the sense of camaraderie extends beyond campus confines. Student-led ensembles—often organized outside of school—perform at venues throughout the city. Some are in their backyard: The community organization Harlem One Stop regularly employs student combos for a street festival it produces.

As connected as students are to the community, they can be resourceful on their own. One student from Korea conducted an independent study of pianist Teddy Wilson (1912–’86). Her analysis of transcriptions from the 1930s through the ’60s argued that although the pianist was most associated with the swing era, he adopted and adapted elements of bebop and beyond.

Building a curriculum that encourages such insight is as critical to the program’s mission today as it was nearly a half-century ago, said composer and pianist Mike Holober, a senior member of the music department. “I’m not sure you can teach what’s happening today without teaching [about the past],” Holober said. “The best players—the ones who seem to have the message—you can tell they have the history.”

—Phillip Lutz



Bob Gullotti (1949–2020)

Final Bar: Bob Gullotti, a professor in Berklee’s Percussion Department since 2010 and a regular on the Boston jazz scene, passed away Jan. 25 at age 70. Gullotti was a founding member of The Fringe, along with saxophonist George Garzone and bassist John Lockwood, and played drums with the trio for four decades. Gullotti also performed with such jazz notables as J.J. Johnson, Joe Lovano, Tom Harrell and Bob Brookmeyer. He earned a degree in music education from Berklee in 1972, and became one of New England’s top private drum instructors. Gullotti presented lectures and classes at such schools as Dartmouth College and Harvard University. The drummer’s son, Andrew Gullotti, issued a family statement that said, in part: “My father was a great musician and a great teacher. But more importantly than that, he was an extraordinary man who changed the lives and career paths of countless musicians around the globe.” berklee.edu

Vail Jazz Changes: Howard Stone—who was the recipient of a 2017 DownBeat Jazz Education Achievement Award—has retired as president of Vail Jazz and announced plans to step down as chairman of the organization’s board of directors at the end of this year’s summer workshop. Jazz industry veteran Don Lucoff, who comes to Vail Jazz after eight years at the helm of the PDX Jazz Festival in Portland, Oregon, will take Stone’s place in the role of president. In addition, Garret Davies has been named vice chairman of Vail Jazz’s board of directors. Stone will remain on the board of directors and will continue to support Vail Jazz in development and education activities. vailjazz.org

Homecoming: The Brubeck Collection, formerly housed at University of the Pacific in California, has relocated to Wilton Library in Wilton, Connecticut, longtime hometown of the Brubeck family. The collection is a trove of recordings, correspondence, legal documents, photographs, manuscripts and other memorabilia from Dave Brubeck (1920–2012) and his wife, Lola (1923–2014). It will be available for research to musicologists, historians and jazz aficionados. wiltonlibrary.org

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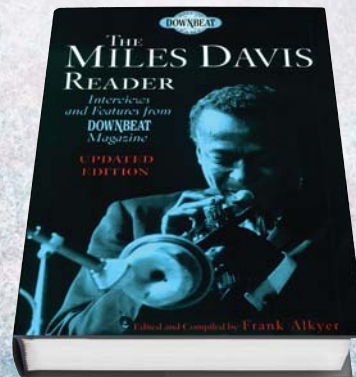
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Paolo Fresu

At this year's edition of the Umbria Jazz Winter festival in Orvieto, Italy, DownBeat invited trumpeter Paolo Fresu to the stage of the Palazzo del Popolo to take the Blindfold Test, which gave him the opportunity to not only weigh in on the music but also to tell stories. (The translator was Enzo Capua.) One of Italy's most highly esteemed jazz artists, Fresu drew 400 people to the event. Later at the festival, he played two spirited concerts with his Devil Quartet and offered his Chet Baker tribute show, "Tempo di Chet."

Enrico Rava

"Overboard" (*TATI*, ECM, 2005) Rava, trumpet; Stefano Bollani, piano; Paul Motian, drums.

[immediately] Enrico Rava. It's Stefano Bollani, too. Enrico's sound is amazing. It's personal. It's like Miles and Chet. You hear one note and you know who it is. Enrico's sound is first. It's the most important thing, especially for a trumpet player. The music is inside and the trumpet tells the story to the audience. Enrico plays the melody perfectly clear. I know this album. But I also know *all* the music Enrico has recorded. In the past, in the '80s, Enrico was the father of all Italian trumpet players.

Louis Armstrong & Duke Ellington

"The Beautiful American" (*The Great Summit: The Master Takes*, Roulette Jazz/Blue Note, 2000, rec'd 1961) Armstrong, trumpet; Ellington, piano; Trummy Young, trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Mort Hebert, bass; Danny Barcelona, drums.

That sounds like Louis. I never heard this song. The piano player is a basic player, but he sounds fantastic with the sound and the economy. Is it Duke Ellington? He was clear and somehow perfect. Duke on the piano is the conductor. The music sounds very modern with that swing. And Louis' swing was incredible.

It's amazing that he was also an incredible singer. If you look back into the history of jazz, a lot of trumpeters were also singers—Clark Terry, Chet, Dizzy, Don Cherry. I think it's because the trumpet makes a connection with the voice. The instrument puts out melodic lines like a singer. And Louis was the greatest.

Terence Blanchard Featuring The E Collective

"Compared To What" (*Breathless*, Blue Note, 2015) Blanchard, trumpet; Fabian Almazan, piano; Charles Altura, guitar; Donald Ramsey, bass; Oscar Seaton, drums.

The sound of the trumpeter is like Miles playing the wah-wah. I don't think so, but is this Randy Brecker? Whoever this is, he's an amazing player. Is the player American? I don't know. [An audience member guesses.] Wow, Terence Blanchard is one of my favorite trumpet players, but I know more of his acoustic hard-bop material. I don't know his electric music. The tempo of this is incredible. It's a nice way to hear new music for the trumpet.

Chet Baker

"Alone Together" (*Chet—Riverside Jazz Classics*, Riverside/Fantasy, 2002, rec'd 1959) Baker, trumpet; Pepper Adams, baritone saxophone; Herbie Mann, flute; Bill Evans, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Connie Kay, drums.

It's Chet, of course, but he's playing "Alone Together" in a different way. And I like how he's interacting with Pepper [Adams]. We can speak for hours about Chet Baker. Everything is perfect in his music, despite the strangeness in his life. Every note is the best one. If you listen to his solos, it's as if he's singing.

I have a great story about Chet. It was 1983. I was very young and playing at the Sanremo Music Festival, where Chet and his band were



Paolo Fresu

UMBRIA JAZZ

also playing. Our concert went well, and after we were done at the stage at the Sanremo Casino, I saw a man walk to me from the dark part of the hall. And the person was Chet, and I thought, "Oh, no." Very slowly he came to me and said, "Complimente. I heard your version of 'Round Midnight,' and I liked it very much." And then he just disappeared back into the dark. It was like a movie. We've heard stories about Chet with his musicians and especially his drummers. But he was so gentlemanly with me. So, this is a blessed story.

Miles Davis

"Maze" (*Rubberband*, Warner Bros./Rhino 2019, rec'd 1986) Davis, trumpet; Bob Berg, saxophone; Mike Stern, guitar; Robert Irving III, synthesizers; Angus Thomas, bass; Vince Wilburn Jr., drums; Marilyn Mazur, Steve Thornton, percussion.

It's Miles, of course. This sounds like it was around *We Want Miles* and *Star People*. Miles was my mentor, my inspiration. I grew up in Sardinia. My family was very poor, and my father worked in the country as a shepherd. I just had a little cassette player and a radio. I was very young when I heard Miles for the first time on the radio. Who is this? I had never heard the technique he played on the trumpet.

When I was a little older, I was in a band with young people and a teacher was teaching us new songs. He loaned us cassettes of music to practice for the next week. One was Miles playing "Autumn Leaves." That was my first lesson with Miles. I ended up spending three months just playing the first 16 bars of Miles' theme, so much so that my mother said, "Paolo, stop." But when Miles started the melody, it was so deep, almost like a voice. When Miles disappeared in the '80s and then came back, the critics were very harsh, saying this is not jazz. But even though it wasn't like what he played early in his career, it was new and you could hear his intelligence. In that way, he was exactly like he had been before.

Nat Adderley

"Work Song" (*Work Song: Keepnews Collection*, Riverside/Concord Label Group, 2008, rec'd 1960) Adderley, cornet; Wes Montgomery, guitar; Bobby Timmons, piano; Sam Jones, cello; Percy Heath, bass; Louis Hayes, drums.

From the beginning, I thought about Nat Adderley. On the solo, he played like Clark Terry with his choice of notes, but because he was playing cornet, it sounded more groovy, with a fantastic tempo and an incredible swing. The cornet is completely different from a trumpet. This is "Work Song." I like this music and I like Nat, who was not so famous. If you look at the history of great jazz trumpeters, Nat's not there. But he was one of the best ones, for me, who was in the same line from Louis Armstrong to the modern trumpeters.

DB

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.

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