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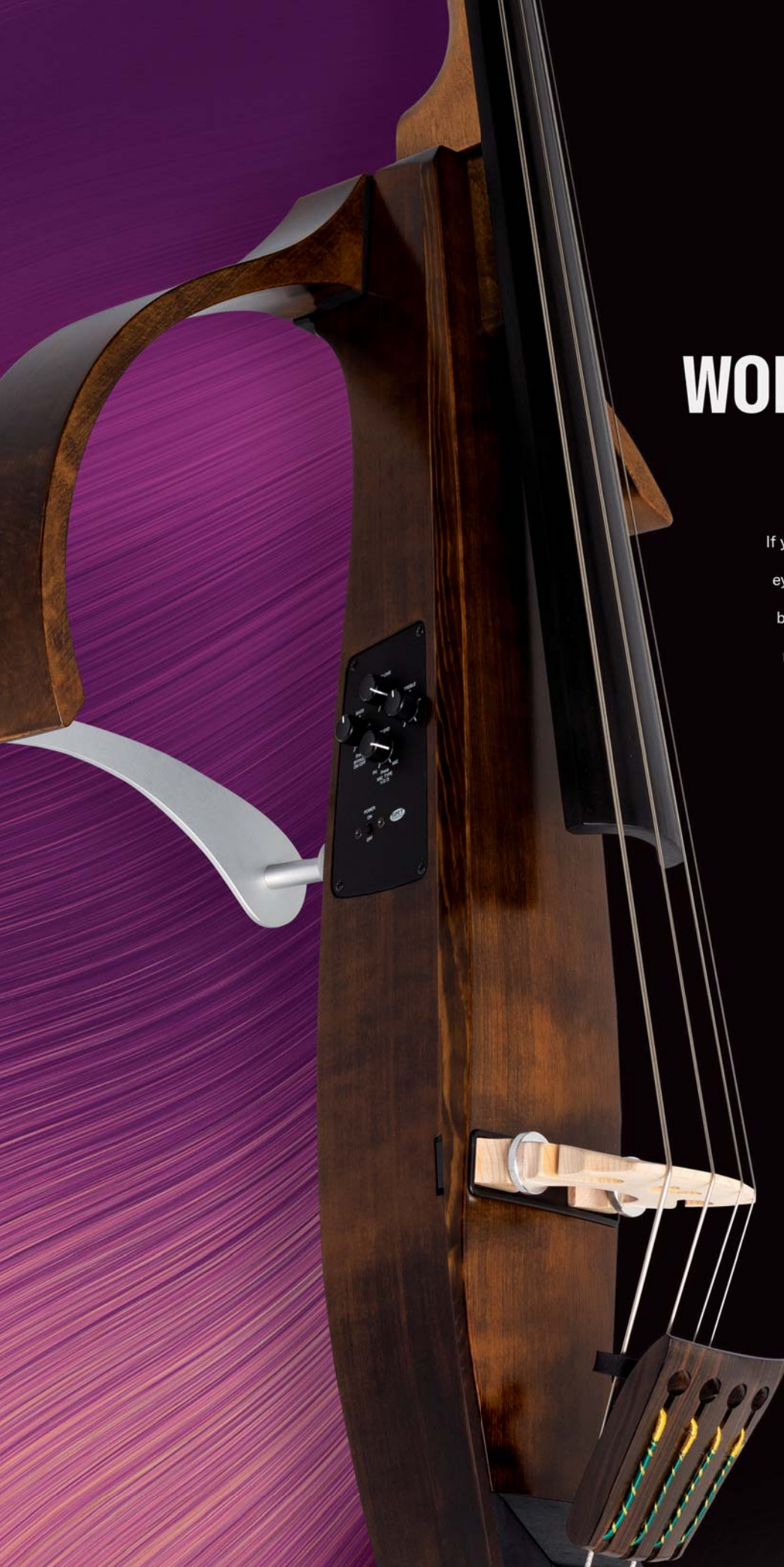
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# DOWNBEAT

## JULY 2020

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**NORAH JONES**  
**PICK ME UP OFF THE FLOOR**

**NORAH JONES'** seventh solo studio album grew out of her acclaimed singles series, as the unreleased songs unexpectedly congealed into an album of tremendous depth and beauty. Featuring a range of collaborators from **BRIAN BLADE** to **JEFF TWEEDY**, *Pick Me Up Off The Floor* is connected by the sly groove of her piano trios, lyrics that confront loss and portend hope, and a mood that leans into darkness before ultimately finding the light.



**GOGO PENGUIN**  
**GOGO PENGUIN**

The Mercury Prize nominated instrumental trio from Manchester, England consisting of pianist **CHRIS ILLINGWORTH**, drummer **ROB TURNER**, and bassist **NICK BLACKA**—have enjoyed a success matched by precious few instrumental groups post-millennium. Now back with their self-titled album out on May 1st, which signifies their conviction that they've arrived at a point they've always striven for by fusing jazz, classical and electronic influences with a thirst for innovation.



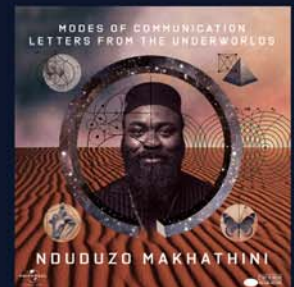
**KANDACE SPRINGS**  
**THE WOMEN WHO RAISED ME**

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.



**ART BLAKEY & THE JAZZ MESSENGERS**  
**JUST COOLIN'**

A never-before-released studio album by **ART BLAKEY & THE JAZZ MESSENGERS** recorded at Rudy Van Gelder's Hackensack, New Jersey studio on March 8, 1959, and featuring the legendary drummer—whose centennial is being celebrated this year—along with trumpeter **LEE MORGAN**, tenor saxophonist **HANK MOBLEY**, pianist **BOBBY TIMMONS**, and bassist **JYMIE MERRITT**. The 6-song set includes 2 previously unissued compositions: "Quick Trick" and "Jimerick."



**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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JULY 2020

# Inside >

## ON THE COVER

### 18 DownBeat Special Report

#### *An Improvised Life*

BY DAVE CANTOR

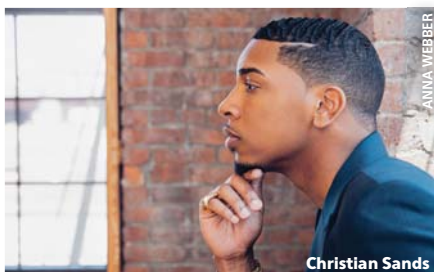
As concerts and recording sessions around the globe came to an abrupt halt, DownBeat interviewed eight artists—all temporarily homebound—to discuss their strategies for coping during the coronavirus pandemic.



Pianist Nduduzo Makhathini at his home in East London, South Africa

Cover collage, clockwise from upper-left: Nduduzo Makhathini (Photo: Nailah Makhathini); Kris Davis (Photo: ©Caroline Mardok); Wolfgang Muthspiel and his 4-year-old daughter, Flora, at their home in Vienna (Photo: Courtesy of Artist); Stanton Moore at his home in New Orleans (Photo: Lauren Del Rio); Chick Corea (Photo: Toshi Sakurai, Courtesy Chick Corea Productions); Brandee Younger and Dezron Douglas at their home in the East Harlem neighborhood of New York City (Photo: Courtesy of Artists); Christian McBride (Photo: Anna Webber).

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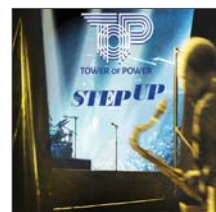
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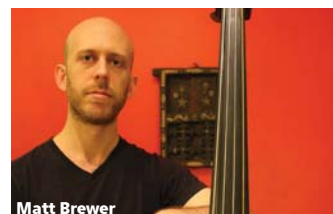
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# CANNONBALL


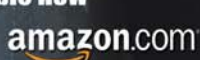
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Remember festivals? Stay Human's Jon Batiste (left) and Joe Saylor perform in a sea of humanity at the 2014 Monterey Jazz Festival.

## 'Next Year in...'

**MAY 21, 2020—TODAY MARKS DAY 63 OF SHELTERING AT HOME** for the DownBeat staff in Chicagoland. We see each other every morning via Zoom videoconference meetings, and then we email, text, call and Zoom each other throughout the day.

Previously, if someone had asked me how long we could work this way, I would have said, "Maybe a week or two—and that would be stretching things."

But that's not the case. Thanks to technology and an amazingly adaptable, flexible, thoughtful and creative crew, we have improvised new ways of working together because we have a goal: to tell the story of what our community is going through right now, and tell it for the ages.

This issue of DownBeat is a testament to that. From Allen Morrison's piece on venues and festivals on page 12 to Dave Cantor's reporting on musicians improvising through adversity on page 18, our journalists, editors and entire team are documenting the resilience of jazz artists and music professionals who are making the best of a daunting situation.

The issue you're reading is smaller. How could it *not* be, considering that our artists are on lockdown, our clubs closed for business, and our festivals canceled for this year?

But this magazine is mighty. It lets readers understand—through the eyes of the jazz universe—what all of us are going through. It captures the hope, worry and loss, but also the ability to take pleasure in small things and look toward a better future.

We face that future with a great deal of excitement and a hint of trepidation. All 50 states are now in some phase of reopening.

At press time, here in Illinois, Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced that restaurants could reopen for limited outside seating possibly as early as the end of May. But, I'm afraid this is going to be a long, slow haul. When will we gather again at a club or festival? It's still a ways away.

In the meantime, we're improvising. We're listening to great recordings—those are still coming out. Jazz artists are livestreaming beautiful, intimate shows and posting archival performances. These artists deserve our love. *By love*, we mean ears, eyes and a few bucks to help them keep going! You can find out who's performing by checking out our new "What To Stream This Week" feature at [downbeat.com](http://downbeat.com).

We're all improvising, and we're hoping to get back to the kind of communal good time you see in the photo accompanying this article.

Around the High Holy Days each year, my Jewish friends say, "Next year in Jerusalem," signifying a longing to be in the Holy Land for the holidays.

For our jazz community, I'd like to borrow that and say, "Next year in New Orleans or Newport or Montreal or Monterey, or Montreux or North Sea or Chicago or Detroit ..."

And when we finally get there, I guarantee we'll be offering up standing ovations and a few tears before the first downbeat. **DB**

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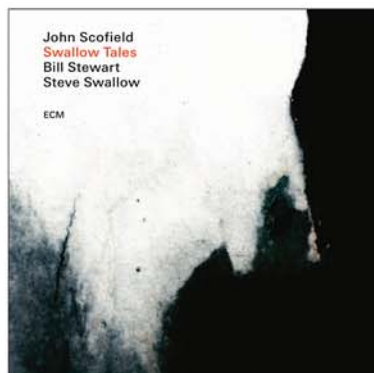

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## John Scofield Swallow Tales

**John Scofield** guitar  
**Steve Swallow** bass  
**Bill Stewart** drums

Guitarist John Scofield celebrates the music of his friend and mentor Steve Swallow in an outgoing and spirited recording, exploring compositions by Steve Swallow: a broad range including classics as well as lesser-known works.



## Marcin Wasilewski Trio w/ Joe Lovano Arctic Riff

**Joe Lovano** tenor saxophone  
**Marcin Wasilewski** piano  
**Slawomir Kurkiewicz** double bass  
**Michal Miskiewicz** drums

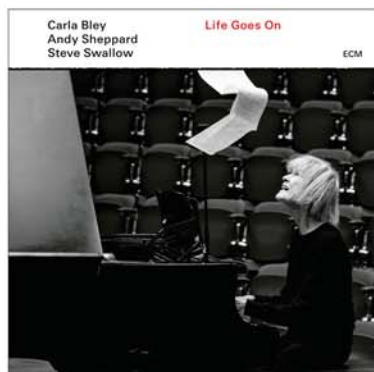
The first-time teaming of Poland's Marcin Wasilewski Trio and tenorist Joe Lovano brings forth special music of concentrated, deep feeling, in which lyricism and strength seem ideally balanced.



## Avishai Cohen Big Vicious

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

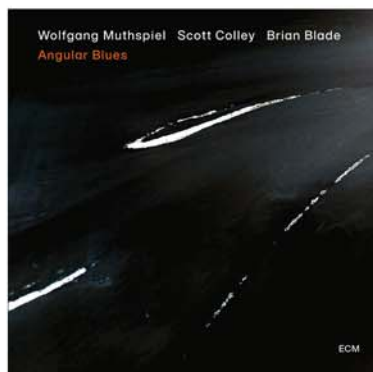
"If some tracks are fed by a raw energy coming from punk, new wave or electro, we are especially struck by the richness of the nuances, the sense of dramaturgy and the love of detail - all of which testifies to an exemplary production, bringing together acoustic, electric and electronic sounds." - *Pascal Rozat, Jazzmagazine (France)*



## Carla Bley / Andy Sheppard / Steve Swallow Life Goes On

**Carla Bley** piano  
**Andy Sheppard** tenor & soprano saxophones  
**Steve Swallow** bass

"Each instrument in Carla Bley's longstanding trio is both spare and versatile. Every player puts a premium on plain-stated melody, and gently evocative touch. There's a quietness, a loneliness together, that gives this group its special intimacy." - *Giovanni Russonello, New York Times*



## Wolfgang Muthspiel Angular Blues

**Wolfgang Muthspiel** guitar  
**Scott Colley** double bass  
**Brian Blade** drums

"A unique collection of personal statements by a very classy contemporary trio." - *John Fordham, Jazzwise (UK)*



## Oded Tzur Here Be Dragons

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

"Individual tenor saxophone notes are consumed into one long sonorous flowing. Tzur's progress feels unbroken yet undergoes myriad subtle modulations, like undulations in a rolling river. The quietude contains undercurrents of intense energy." - *Thomas Conrad, Jazz Times*



## Chords & Discords >

### Preaching & Teaching

In The Hot Box of your May issue, John McDonough gave a 2½-star rating to Christian McBride's *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait Of Four Icons*, and his dismissive comments refer to "rather preachy readings from the canon of civil rights rhetoric."

I find this mystifying. What did Mr. McDonough expect? Dr. King was a preacher. Malcolm X was a preacher. Rosa Parks was a great deal more than a tired lady who didn't move to the back of the bus. She was trained at the Highlander Folk School four months before she stayed seated on that bus. She knew how to preach.

Mr. McBride chose powerful statements, spoken powerfully. Mr. McDonough's shallow reference to them as "preachy" does them, their authors, and Mr. McBride an injustice.

You know, Mr. McDonough, there is something much less interesting than righteousness: *self-righteousness*. It is no less unattractive among music critics than it is among the pious.

On the other hand, Hot Box critic Ammar Kalia listened to the same album and heard it for what it was instead of what it wasn't. Some would call that a blessing.



Christian McBride

ANNA WEBBER

THE REV. JEFFREY H. WALKER  
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### Appreciative Fan

Every time I read an issue of DownBeat, I discover an incredible talent. In your June issue, it was pianist Connie Han, whose album *Iron Starlet* was in the Reviews section. I pre-ordered the album and received two complimentary tracks from it. These were awesome! Because of those two tunes, I also purchased her previous album, *Crime Zone*.

Thank you and keep up the good work!

DAVE BOGDAN  
DABOGDAN@COMCAST.NET

### Demanding Jazz

Regarding the cover story in your June issue: Is Norah Jones a jazz musician? Come on, DownBeat, you can do better than that!

Why don't you ever cover Billy Harper, Gary Peacock, Azar Lawrence, Roscoe Mitchell, Archie Shepp or Ronnie Cuber? Please cover jazz! If you have to cover something other than jazz, what about some flamenco? It's very close to jazz in its rhythms and improvisation.

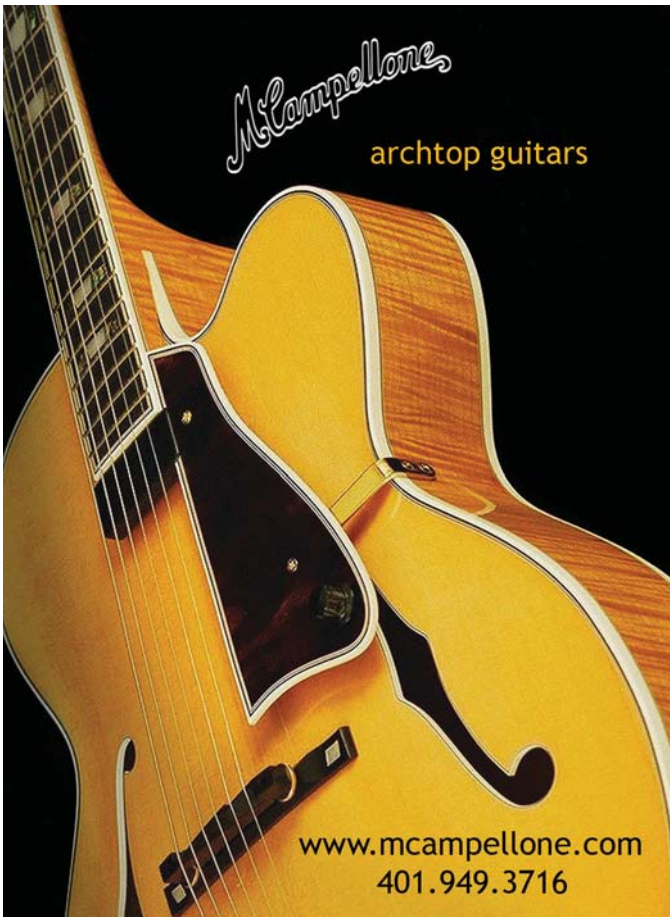
RON LA RUE  
SESATSIAB9@CHARTER.NET

### Correction

■ In the DownBeat Student Music Awards section of the June issue, there was an omission in one of the listings in the High School Honors division of the category Original Composition—Small Ensemble. One of the winners, Lucas Perry, worked with two educators when developing his composition "Salt And Pepper." Those educators are the private instructor Peter Horvath and Dr. Michael Zilber, who is on the faculty at The Jazzschool at California Jazz Conservatory in Berkeley, California.

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERROR.

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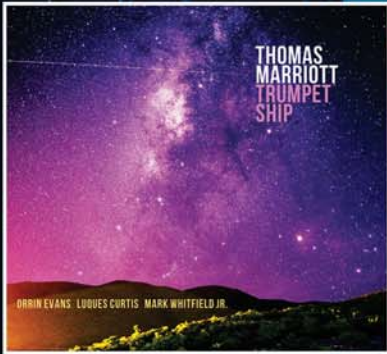
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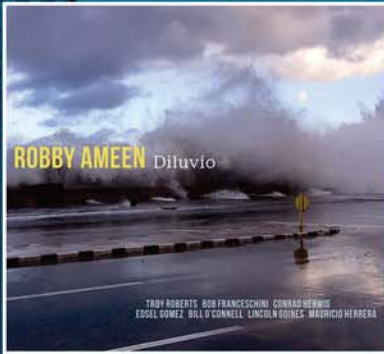




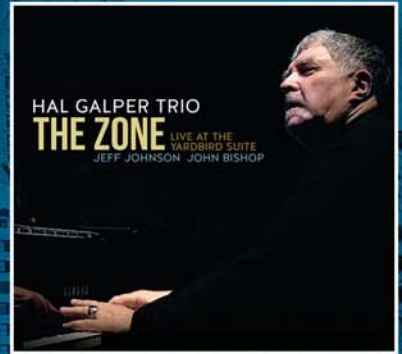
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**HAL GALPER TRIO**  
The Zone: Live at the Yardbird Suite  
Jeff Johnson / John Bishop



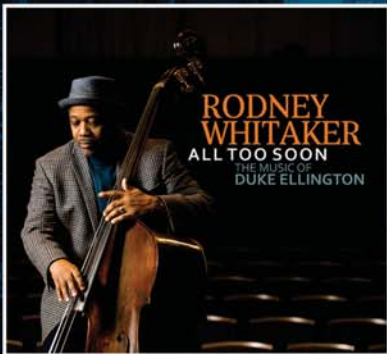
**LOLLY ALLEN**  
Coming Home  
Josh Nelson / Danny Janklow / Paul Kreibich



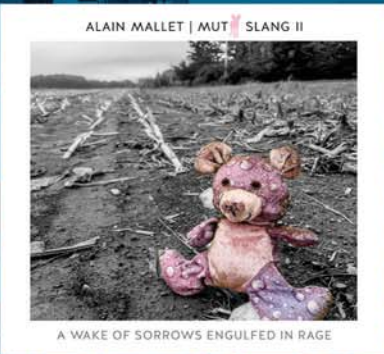
**BENJAMIN BOONE**  
with the GHANA JAZZ COLLECTIVE  
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# Beat



In response to the shutdown of live performances, the Newport Festivals Foundation—which produces the Newport Jazz and Folk festivals—has established a relief fund to aid musicians.



Spike Wilner, proprietor of the New York venue Smalls, isn't sure when patrons will be able to return to his club for concerts.

## Venues, Festivals Search for Hope Amid Shutdown

Compared to the other casualties of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, it barely registers in media coverage and the public consciousness.

Yet in mid-March, the sudden shuttering of venues for live music—grand concert halls and small clubs, alike—constituted a devastating blow to jazz, strangling the livelihood of musicians and, in many cases, threatening their ability to survive.

If the indefinite closures have left musicians staggering, the cancellation of most spring and summer festivals was the coup de grâce.

Venue owners in the United States, like all small businesses, are fighting to survive and trying to pay monthly bills in the face of a complete loss of revenue. Temporary moratoriums on evic-

tions in some U.S. states, including California and New York, have helped buy time—without relieving owners of their rent obligations over the long term.

Catalina Popescu, owner of Los Angeles' Catalina Jazz Club, has been operating the venue since 1986, but shut down March 15 and laid off the entirety of her 25-person staff.

"It's been very painful," Popescu said in April. "We're OK for the time being. Nobody can force you to pay rent. [The landlords] send me an email every so often, but they can't do anything about it. ... I fought for this business for 34 years, to stay open, to make it successful, to be a great place for people to listen to music and for musicians to perform. I hope we'll be able to reopen."

In April, more than 800 stateside indepen-

dent concert presenters banded together to form the National Independent Venue Association, aiming to lobby Congress for financial assistance. By mid-May, the association had more than 1,600 members in all 50 states, according to its website.

"Independent venues were among the first to close as COVID-19 spread across the country, and unfortunately, are also likely to be among the last to reopen," the group wrote in a press release.

Clubs' financial pressures aren't any better in London, either.

"We have nearly 100 [people] on the payroll. All but six are furloughed. We're hoping the government's scheme will keep everybody happy," said Simon Cooke, general manager of Ronnie Scott's, the landmark London jazz club, while

discussing the government's furlough program, which provides businesses 80 percent of their normal payroll costs, up to £2,500 per employee. The program, which began in April, was backdated to March 1, and is scheduled to expire in June.

"We're very established, almost a national institution, been around 60 years," Cooke said. "We have about 3,500 paid members, who are very supportive; most renew annually. I think we'll be all right. If it's a very long [shutdown], it may be a slow restart."

In hard-hit New York, Spike Wilner, jazz pianist and proprietor of both Smalls and Mezzrow, was far less sanguine about the future. "Right now, I'm waiting to see if Smalls will exist in another month or so," he said in March.

At the time, both clubs—which are located on the same block in pricey Greenwich Village—had rent payments of \$20,000 apiece coming due.

"I think I'll be able to get through April, but after that, I don't know," he said.

Then on April 15, Wilner posted the following message on Facebook: "This club is coming back—we are not done!"

What changed?

"We got a PPP loan," Wilner told DownBeat later in April, referring to the Paycheck Protection Program. "That will help us secure Smalls for the next four to five months, until we can get things going again. With Mezzrow, I'm not sure what's going to happen yet."

Wilner said he went through "a dark period" following the initial closure of both clubs, but that his mood lifted considerably after receiving an early April phone call from Wynton Marsalis, who was working to secure funds for musicians and small venues. The Louis Armstrong Foundation, of which Marsalis is board president, established the Emergency Fund for Jazz Musicians to award one-time grants of \$1,000 to freelance jazz musicians affected by the shutdown. The foundation committed to awarding 1,000 grants, totaling \$1 million.

"Wynton asked me to be on his committee to help decide who gets the money," Wilner said. "I put together a list of about 350 musicians who I thought could use it. They did a beautiful thing. It's not a lot of money, but it's a tremendous morale booster."

The week before receiving the PPP funds, Wilner had completed the transformation of Smalls and Mezzrow into a nonprofit arts foundation, a project that had been in the works for two years. The SmallsLIVE Foundation subsidizes the expense of operating the clubs, assisting musicians and sponsoring jazz education programs. For a donation of \$10, supporters can access a prodigious archive of performances from both clubs—a collection of more than 17,000 live sets, dating back to 2007. Royalties are distributed to about 3,500 musicians who are included in the archive.

Wilner's own foundation has started making

emergency donations to jazz musicians in need as well.

Similarly, the Newport Festivals Foundation, which produces both the namesake jazz and folk festivals in Rhode Island, established the Newport Festivals Musician Relief Fund. Starting with a \$20,000 emergency fund, NFF Executive Producer Jay Sweet and foundation board members decided the pandemic shutdown was a "break-glass-in-case-of-emergency moment."

Sweet explained that, after only three weeks, donations had caused the fund to balloon to \$160,000. "We've had 500 applications and, so far, fulfilled 275 of them," he said in April. "These are [grants] for musicians who have played Newport, and other Rhode Island musicians—musicians whose names you would know. They each receive anywhere between \$300 and \$1,000. It's like passing out Band-Aids on the battlefield."

On April 28, both the Newport jazz and folk festivals were canceled. All artists who were slated to perform in 2020 have been invited back for

the 2021 editions. Sweet isn't worried about the foundation's survival, though.

"The foundation will be OK. [Festival founder George Wein] will ensure that," he said. "Right now, I'm focused on keeping our musicians musicians."

While some well-funded festivals plan to be back in 2021, the future for many venues is murky.

"Jazz tourism in NYC is a big thing," Wilner said. "We're so dependent on it; any club owner in town will tell you that. We can't run at capacity without our tourists, and God knows when that's gonna come back to New York."

Sweet, however, remains optimistic: "There's something in our human DNA that needs to commune with others. For some, it's religion; for some, sports; for some, music. I think the word 'normal' will be redefined. The one thing I still believe in, [and have] for my entire professional career, is the desire for human beings to congregate around music. It's being tested now. I don't think live music is remotely close to dead. People just cannot live without it." —Allen Morrison

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Jason Moran

CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE

**Armstrong House:** Pianist Jason Moran is set to curate *Here To Stay*, a permanent exhibit at the Armstrong Center, an extension of the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens. The new building, located across the street from the original museum, is set to open next year with the exhibit's premiere. *Here To Stay* focuses on Armstrong's work with other artists, as well as his relationship with his wife, Lucille. "Pops is a game changer on and off of his trumpet," Moran said in a press release.

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

**Blues Blessing:** Guitarist Joe Bonamassa has initiated the Fueling Musicians Program, aiming to raise \$250,000 for performers who have been set adrift amid the coronavirus pandemic. The initiative so far has received donations from Gibson, Fender, Peter Frampton, George Thorogood and others. [keepingthebluesalive.org](http://keepingthebluesalive.org)

**In Memoriam: Tony Allen**, whose lean polyrhythms propelled Fela Kuti's various ensembles during the 1970s, died April 30 of an abdominal aortic aneurysm in Paris. He was 79. ... **Richie Cole**, a saxophonist with a passion for bebop-era jazz, died May 2 of natural causes in Carnegie, Pennsylvania. He was 72. ... Blues guitarist, organist and vocalist **Lucky Peterson** died May 17 in Dallas at age 55. A cause of death had not been established at press time. ... Vocalist **Holli Ross**, who worked as an educator at Montclair State and Hofstra universities, died May 9 at age 63. An education fund set up in her name through MSU currently is accepting donations. ... **Judy Cites**, who worked in concert production and artist management, and lent a hand to Earshot Jazz when it started in Seattle during the '80s, died April 13. ... **Ryo Kawasaki**, a fusion guitarist first active in the '70s who worked with early synthesizer programming, died April 13 at age 73 in Tallinn, Estonia. ... **Professor Joe Torres**, a pianist who recorded a spate of Fania releases alongside bandleader Willie Colón, died of natural causes April 13 in New York at the age of 76.

# Fleck, Washburn Improvise at Home

**WORK AND FAMILY GRACEFULLY COEXIST** in the household of Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn—married banjo players who frequently have toured and recorded together. And those threads of personal responsibilities and professional activities have become even more intertwined during the coronavirus pandemic.

On March 20, the musicians launched a weekly concert series, dubbed "Banjo House Lockdown," which is livestreamed from their Nashville home. As the musicians prepared for these shows, they also were juggling parental duties for their son Juno, 7, and his brother, 2-year-old Theo.

When *DownBeat* visited their home on March 9, both musicians were eager to talk about their forthcoming concert tours—shows that now have been postponed due to the pandemic.

But each musician has plenty of irons in the fire. Fleck's new release is *Throw Down Your Heart: The Complete Africa Sessions* (Craft), a compilation that includes three CDs and one DVD. The package features *The Ripple Effect*, a previously unreleased duo album with kora master Toumani Diabaté (which is also available as a standalone title). The DVD contains an expanded version of the documentary *Throw Down Your Heart*, which chronicles the banjoist's 2006 musical trek through Mali, Uganda, Tanzania and other parts of Africa.

Washburn, meanwhile, has a new duo album, *Wu Fei And Abigail Washburn* (Smithsonian Folkways), a collaboration with longtime friend and renowned *guzheng* player Wu Fei, mixing Appalachian-style banjo and Chinese folk traditions.

Fleck, who produced the album, is accustomed to balancing career and family: "We look six months or more ahead to commit ourselves to doing concerts or recording. It's amazing how hard that is, most of all with the kids. They're the focus."

"We're getting better all the time at gauging that," Washburn added. "For example, I'm about to take the kids to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to finish off this scholarship [awarded by the Mellon Foundation] I've been doing. Meanwhile, Béla will stay here to mix his [recordings]. That's a big change for us because usually we do try to stick together."

The prep work for Fleck's new compilation, which includes two albums originally released in 2009 and 2010, gave him a deeper understanding of African music traditions that he encountered during his five-week trip.

"I had bigger epiphanies through years of editing the recordings and the film," he said.



Abigail Washburn and Béla Fleck

JIM MCGUIRE

His musical relationship with Diabaté was perhaps the most rewarding result of his trek. "He's an incredible accompanist," Fleck said. "He can make a bed that you can just sail on. The thing is, he's not in a hurry to show off. I didn't want to be the pig that does all the soloing. So, the trick is to bring him out, which I was able to do."

Washburn—an Illinois native who is fluent in Mandarin—has cultivated a similar rapport with Wu Fei, a native of China who settled in Nashville with her husband. A grant from the region's Metro Council helped finance their cross-cultural efforts, which led to surprising combinations of folk material from both of their respective cultures. The album's lyrics are sung in English, Mandarin and other languages.

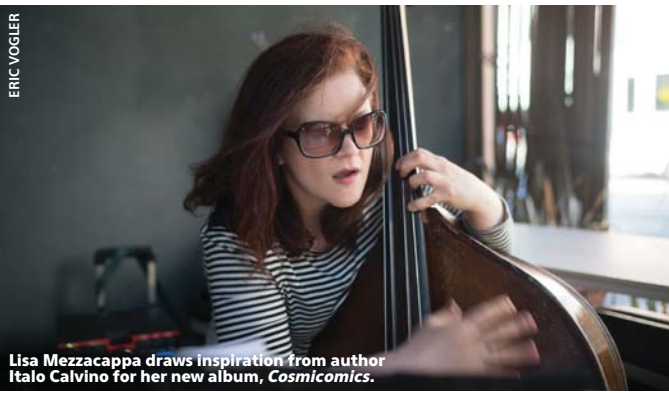
"We chose tunes based on themes and how they might connect harmonically," Washburn explained. "But it was also about having a really close friendship—going through challenges at the same time as new mothers, trying to keep our careers going while loving our kids. That spirit made us really glad to have those moments of solace on the porch, asking each other, 'What's an amazing song that helps you put your child to sleep?' And then combining them."

"This really is the most Chinese-oriented thing you've ever done," Fleck interjected, with obvious admiration. "This is the first time I've heard you go all the way in."

The couple's livestreamed concert series has given fans a chance to hear some brilliant music while peeking inside their home. To promote the series, Fleck issued a tongue-in-cheek statement during the lockdown: "Life without other people is fine, but life without banjos would be intolerable! So, we're gonna sing and play our banjos to keep everyone from going batty."

—Bob Doerschuk

ERIC VOGLER



Lisa Mezzacappa draws inspiration from author Italo Calvino for her new album, *Cosmicomics*.

# Mezzacappa's Big Plans

**LISA MEZZACAPPA DOESN'T HAVE TO GO LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION.** It seems that inspiration finds her, thanks to an artistic curiosity that prompts her to constantly read books, watch films and listen to albums.

"I have all these ideas in my mind," the bassist said from her Bay Area home. "At the same time, I'm thinking of the people in my ensembles and what I might write for them. Something comes along and sticks in my mind, and I can't get rid of it until I turn it into music. I've been lucky that I've been able to connect those ideas to the musicians I'm writing for."

Her latest album, *Cosmicomics*, takes its title and sensibility from a collection of short stories of the same name by fiction writer Italo Calvino. Mezzacappa relied on her instrumental sextet to conjure up the author's alternate worlds.

On "The Distance Of The Moon," for example, Calvino imagines a time when the moon came so close to Earth that one could row out on the sea and climb a ladder to the lunar landscape. On Mezzacappa's song of the same title, her muscular bass lines evoke the effort to stand a ladder upright in a boat; John Finkbeiner's shimmering guitar chords suggest the no man's land between the two fields of gravity, while Aaron Bennett's tenor saxophone solo implies a scamper across the moon's craters.

"Lisa usually tells us the story at some point, and that influences my playing," Bennett said. "I don't have to read the material, because I feel I get enough information from Lisa. In fact, I feel I get more from hearing her interpretation, feeding off her excitement."

As an avant-garde artist who has worked with large ensembles and choreographers, Mezzacappa is accustomed to creating ambitious projects without the support of a major record label. She is comfortable with the notion that certain works might not ever yield a profit. Fortunately, the Bay Area is filled with talented musicians who are in the same boat she is, and they're willing to help her, just as she's willing to help them.

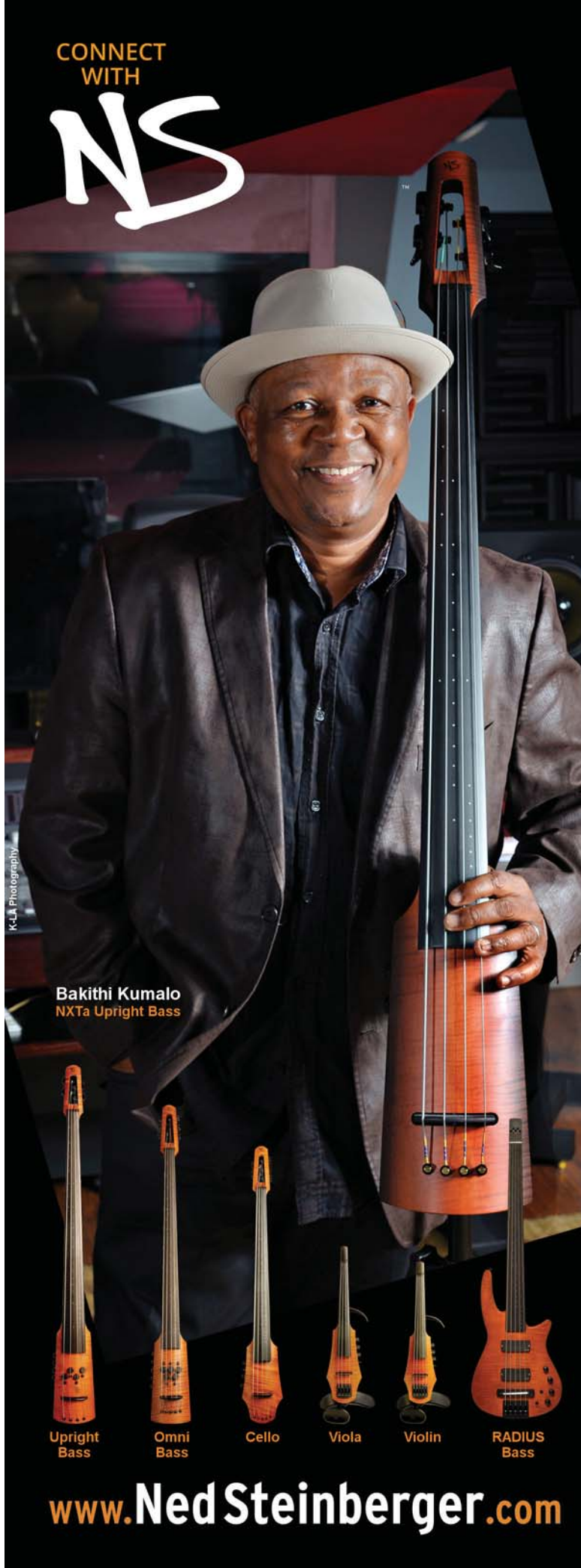
"My projects take a long time to incubate. For [the multimedia production] *Glorious Ravage*, I applied for about 30 grants and got six of them—and that's a good percentage," she said. "I started fundraising in 2012; we premiered it in 2015, and the recording came out in 2017. Fortunately, I'm a good organizer. ... I try to make the finances as good as I can for my musicians, but it's never what they deserve. What you hear on my records is the generosity of these amazing talents."

Finances are harder than ever now, due to the pandemic. From her home, Mezzacappa has been working part-time jobs for local nonprofits and teaching lessons via video conferencing. And she has continued applying for grants to fund new projects. "I've been brooding a lot about the future," she said. "What venues will be able to afford to have live music after this? ... Who will be threatened with homelessness and hunger—and how will we help them?"

—Geoffrey Himes

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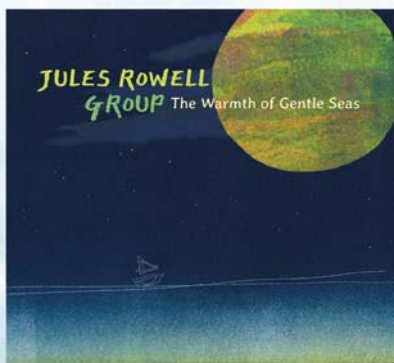


Debut album cover for "Fawn" by Debussy, featuring a man with a beard playing a saxophone. The text "Music by Hovhannes Khachatryan" is written in a stylized font.

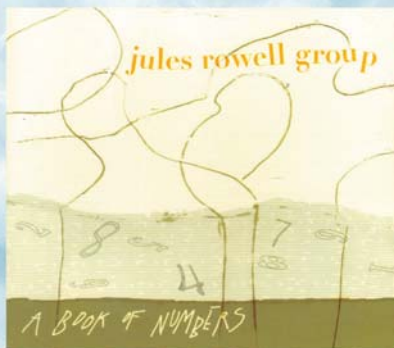
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Saxophonist Russ Nolan's new album is titled *Sin Fronteras*.

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# Russ Nolan Explores Multiple Latin Styles

**THE ORIGIN STORY OF SAXOPHONIST RUSS** Nolan's new album, the Pan-American-oriented *Sin Fronteras*, dates to 2007, five years after he moved from Chicago to Queens. Nolan—who had earned a black belt in taekwondo—retired from that practice because, he said, “The danger of hurting myself for good was great.” Looking for another physical activity, he decided to take up salsa dancing.

Early in the process, Nolan took lessons three nights a week from Eddie Torres (aka “The Mambo King”), a “melodic dancer” whose sage advice on “telling a story, phrases, breathing and using space” broadened his rhythmic palette. Meanwhile, Nolan spent quality time at the popular Jackson Heights venue Terraza 7, whose owner had cultivated a number of traditional dance styles. Around 2010, he became friendly with Colombian drummer Juan Felipe Mayorga, a recent emigrant who was moonlighting as the room’s bartender.

“Juan had the keys to Terraza 7 during the day, and we started calling sessions,” said Nolan, who was already exploring possibilities of fusing Afro-Caribbean rhythms with post-bop harmony in groups with pianists Manuel Valera and Michael Eckroth.

Eventually, in 2016, Nolan and Mayorga began weekly midday rehearsals there with Swiss pianist Manu Koch and Bulgarian bassist Trifon Dimitrov. Nolan used the sessions as opportunities to further coalesce his investigations into transmuting various south-of-the-border rhythmic structures into musical narrative.

How these encounters bore fruit is apparent throughout *Sin Fronteras*, a collection of 10 tunes written or arranged by Nolan. The band incorporates metrically modulating beats culled from various sources, including Puerto Rican *plena* (“The Long Ranger”), Spanish *bulería* (“Nature Boy”), Afro-Peruvian *festejo* (“Somewhat Festive”), Afro-Cuban *abakuá* (“Chachalokafun”), rumba (“Cruzado”) and bossa (“Nublado Y Claro”). Throughout the program, Nolan uncorks melod-

ic, across-the-barline improvisations on tenor and soprano saxophones.

“Russ is always researching, always writing,” said Mayorga, who plays on the album alongside Dimitrov and Koch. “Russ never stops if something isn’t familiar—he just does it. He’ll present a tune with a rhythm I don’t know a lot about, so I do some research to make it more traditional. Perhaps the interpretations don’t show precisely how a specific style is played, but I don’t think it matters. We’re trying to have a basic understanding, with some of our own fingerprints.”

A son of Gurnee, Illinois, Nolan ascribes his can-do persistence to his father (“a quietly motivated cancer researcher who always stayed in the lab trying to find cures”) and his no-nonsense mother (“one of 13 from a North Dakota farm family, so there wasn’t a lot of talk about ‘How am I feeling?’”).

“I could certainly get down and depressed about aspects of the music business, but life is short, and I can’t spend another minute being negative,” Nolan said in late February, the day before a high-octane happy-hour show with organist Pat Bianchi at the Marriott Vacation Club Pulse hotel in Midtown. “In the end, it’s the joy it brings me. If I can share that joy, I think I’ve done my job as a human being.”

In an email exchange with DownBeat in early April, Nolan explained how, during the coronavirus lockdown, he had been using video conference calls to provide instruction to the adult musicians who normally study with him in person at JazzLabNY, the music education company he founded.

Despite the economic hurdles presented by the complete halt of his live performances, Nolan remained optimistic.

“Musicians—and many other professions—must continually reinvent themselves, reassess their strengths, be honest about what they are willing and unwilling to do, and make serving other people with their music a priority,” he said. “Find a need and fill it.” —Ted Panken



# Konitz, Others Succumb to COVID-19

## ALTO SAXOPHONIST LEE KONITZ DIED

April 15 in New York from complications caused by pneumonia and COVID-19. He was 92. An NEA Jazz Masters fellow and a member of the DownBeat Hall of Fame, the Chicago-born Konitz was revered for his work alongside Miles Davis on a series of 1949 and 1950 nonet recordings that eventually were compiled into the landmark 1957 album *Birth Of The Cool*.

Konitz would go on to record dozens of albums during a career that spanned nine decades. *Subconscious-Lee*, an early leader date that featured pianist Lennie Tristano, exhibited a bebop influence, even as the saxophonist helped to define the “cool” sound that would rise to prominence on the West Coast.

In a 2017 interview with DownBeat, Konitz discussed a concept that he’s closely associated with: the contrafact, a musical work based on an earlier composition. “That’s a technique I just picked up along the way from whoever invented it, whether it was Bird or whoever,” he said. “I thought it was a legitimate addition to the vocabulary. I consider it equivalent in some way to adding homemade lyrics to a melody that you could deliver the standard changes on. But then you change them somehow.”

Bassist **Henry Grimes** passed away April 15

at age 84. His death was attributed to complications from COVID-19. The Juilliard-trained Grimes worked with Konitz, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus and Cecil Taylor, among others.

Grimes’ leader debut, *The Call*, was released in 1965, but after a prolific period in New York early in the decade, he relocated to Los Angeles in 1968. Finding little work, he dropped out of the music scene altogether. In 2002, a social worker tracked down Grimes, who didn’t own an instrument at the time. William Parker eventually gave him a bass, setting in motion one of the more intriguing comebacks in jazz history. Grimes went on to play hundreds of concerts, and appeared on *Spirits Aloft*, a 2010 duo project with drummer Rashied Ali, as well as guitarist Marc Ribot’s 2014 album, *Live At The Village Vanguard*.

Free-jazz saxophonist, clarinetist and flutist **Giuseppe Logan** died April 17 in New York at age 84. His passing was related to COVID-19. After an auspicious start to his career on the 1960s avant-garde scene, the Philadelphia-born Logan, like Grimes, disappeared from public life for decades before making a comeback in 2009.

Saxophonist **Robert “Bootsie” Barnes**, a pillar of the Philadelphia jazz scene, fell victim to the coronavirus on April 22. The brawny-toned tenor saxophonist and bandleader—known for



Lee Konitz (1927–2020)

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

his work in bebop groups—was 82.

Rock bassist **Matthew Seligman**, who was a member of The Soft Boys and later worked with Thomas Dolby and David Bowie, died April 17 in London after being admitted to the hospital with symptoms of COVID-19. He was 64.

Gospel singer and Grammy nominee **Troy Sneed** died of complications from COVID-19 on April 27 at age 52. Sneed’s latest album, *All My Best*, was released last year. **DB**



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MICHAEL JACKSON

Harpist Brandee Younger, seen here onstage in Chicago, has teamed with her partner, bassist Dezron Douglas, to livestream duo concerts from their home in East Harlem.

# AN IMPROVISED

**It wasn't supposed to be like this. Musicians around the globe had gigs, recording dates, mixing sessions—stuff to do. But now, players are stuck inside their homes.**

The coronavirus pandemic has forced artists to rearrange their lives and livelihoods, but it hasn't stifled creativity. Harpist Brandee Younger and bassist Dezron Douglas have responded to the crisis by offering up brunch-time concerts, livestreamed from their East Harlem apartment.

"I have to be honest: I didn't think it would impact others at all," Younger said about their late-morning sets. "We look at doctors, we look at EMTs—they're saving people's lives every day. Cops, they're putting their lives on the line. We're playing music, and I sometimes feel silly, thinking about—not to say our job is nonessential—but I didn't really understand the intangible impact that it has on people—versus a job where you're actually fixing something or fixing a person."

The unemployment rate passed 14 percent in May as the United States wrestled with strategies to mitigate economic damage while balancing it with the human toll of the pandemic. It'd be generous to say

that the response from the federal government has been diffuse and, at such a large scale, problematic at times. On May 12, congressional Democrats unveiled what they dubbed the "Heroes Act," a \$3 trillion coronavirus relief package that would bolster unemployment benefits, generate a second round of stimulus checks and allocate funds for state, local, territorial and tribal governments. Pundits predict it will be "dead on arrival" when it reaches the Senate.

Other piecemeal efforts to quell looming financial issues seem likely to continue, though: Independent fundraising efforts aimed at helping full-time freelancers, musicians and service-industry people have cropped up. And musicians temporarily cooped up in their homes have turned to livestreaming in an attempt to replace income from canceled gigs and festival dates.

But none of these strategies have staved off the ball of existential dread people have been toting around in their guts since the pandemic began. The jazz world seems especially hard hit.

"Twelve-hundred dollars—that might be someone's mortgage [payment] in Topeka, Kansas, or Cheyenne, Wyoming, or maybe Richmond, Virginia," Douglas said during a chat about the stimulus checks the IRS began issuing to U.S. citizen tax payers in April. "But that's a third of someone's mortgage in New York City.

"The five boroughs are pretty much built on freelance work. They weren't prepared for the unemployment of people who are W2ers, let alone the people who are freelancers," Douglas continued. "That being said, Brandee has been way more diligent about going through the process. And, me personally, it's something that I get frustrated with





MICHAEL JACKSON

Pianist Kris Davis, shown here at a Chicago gig, has continued to teach, practice and run her label, Pyroclastic Records, from her home north of New York City.



ANNA WEBBER

Bassist Christian McBride's work as a de facto talent scout has been put on hold during the pandemic.

# LIFE BY DAVE CANTOR

real fast, as far as paperwork goes. So, this Monday, I attempted my [New York state unemployment] application and things are going really smooth. And then for some reason, I got locked out and had to start all over again.”

While millions simply are working to maintain a slice of the lives they knew before the pandemic, nearly all the artists DownBeat spoke with shared an anecdote about some surprising kindness visited upon them by a close friend or just a casual acquaintance.

Pianist Kris Davis experienced humanity’s generous side while working from home north of New York during the lockdown—teaching, practicing and tending to label business. Pyroclastic Records, the label she founded in 2016, is on track to maintain its release schedule this year; pianist Cory Smythe’s *Accelerate Every Voice* is due June 12. But Davis noted that younger performers, those yet to become established on the ruthlessly competitive New York scene, are facing multiple hurdles.

“Often they had restaurant jobs or coffee-shop jobs, and now their income that they were using to support themselves, that’s gone as well. So, I’ve been really impressed with the many calls I’ve received from other artists just checking in: ‘Hey, are you cool? You need anything?’ And I’ve been trying to do the same,” said



TOSHI SAKURAI, COURTESY CHICK COREA PRODUCTIONS

Pianist Chick Corea, seen here onstage, doesn't have a plan when he livestreams performances from his home in Florida.



NAILAH MAKHATHINI

Pianist Nduduzo Makhathini, speaking from his home in South Africa, said musicians’ careers in the future increasingly will rely on the digital world.





BRANDEE YOUNGER



LAUREN DEL RIO

Bassist and producer Dezron Douglas, seen here in the apartment he shares with musician Brandee Younger, said that maintaining a “hustler’s mentality” will help him weather the pandemic.

Drummer Stanton Moore has used his spare time at home in New Orleans to cultivate video skills, posting new clips to the Stanton Moore Drum Academy website.

Davis, who serves as associate program director of creative development for the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice in Boston. “It always amazes me—our community and how people come together and support each other. ... I just want people to know that the community is strong and if there’s anything that they can do to support artists—whether it’s going to their online concerts and paying some kind of fee to see those concerts or purchase records or anything—everything will help and we’ll get through this.”

Davis’ optimism is refreshing, even as the federal government and states’ governors squabble over a timeline to responsibly reopen parts of the economy. By late April, though, public opinion in some European countries reflected a broader consensus about how governments had responded.

“There’s a kind of feeling that people here trust the decisions that are being made,” said Vienna-based guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel, who recently issued *Angular Blues* (ECM). “It looks like the [Austrian] government is aware that the whole arts sector is one that we have to protect.”

As countries struggle with the far-reaching impact of the virus, established performers—who perhaps are less financially strained than emerging artists—have supplied fans with hours of entertainment on the web. Interested in watching Questlove livestream a deejay set

or taking in a Biophilia Records showcase with bassist Linda May Han Oh, pianist Fabian Almazan and trumpeter Adam O’Farrill? You can. Looking for an online music lesson from reedist Dave Liebman, saxophonist Caroline Davis or trumpeter Jeremy Pelt? They’re available.

One unexpected result of the lockdown is that fans now have the chance to glimpse the private lives of their heroes.

“When I do these livestreams, I’m completely alone in my room with the piano. Just me,” Chick Corea said from his home in Florida, following a truncated European tour with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade. “No one else is around, and so I start my iPhone, and I write a little thing—*hello*. I practice some drums to get things started, and it’s just me. I remembered, that’s the way it was when I was kid. It was me in my room, just playing. So, the only difference now with doing the livestream is that there’s thousands of people viewing it.

“Many times, I’m not even announcing when I’m going to come on,” the veteran pianist and bandleader continued. “There’s no schedule to it, although I’ve been going on every day. There’s no sound engineer, there’s no stage, there’s no curtain, there’s no curfew. There’s no airplane. There’s no hotel—nothing. So, it’s a very interesting, stripped-down, direct experience to music. It’s my feeling for

the music, without anything in-between.”

Our current predicament brings to mind other moments when humanity has faced adversity. And unfortunately, we don’t have to look back too far to find them.

“Everybody lost so much, and people didn’t have places to live,” Galactic drummer Stanton Moore said, comparing the pandemic to his experience as a New Orleans resident during Hurricane Katrina. “With this, it’s more tolerable, from my personal end of things. It does have its challenges—you know, staying positive and productive if you can’t leave the house—but at least we are all in our homes.”

Moore, like nearly every musician, has seen his plans for 2020 dramatically altered. Just as shelter-in-place orders swept across the country, Galactic was set to tour in celebration of its 25th anniversary. And to compound the problems Moore’s facing, he and his bandmates purchased the New Orleans club Tipitina’s in 2019.

“It’s scary in that we don’t know when we’re going to be able to go back to work,” the drummer continued. “It’s a little scarier, too, because of the unknown. Katrina happened and then it was over: ‘OK, let’s start rebuilding.’ This, it’s still happening, and we don’t know how bad it’s gonna get.”

Although the club received Paycheck Protection Program funds on May 1, Moore said the venue is on uncertain footing. And by



mid-May, the Tipitina's website included ways for fans to make donations directly to the club.

Disasters and tragedies bind humanity together, and few things resonate emotionally in the same way as 9/11. Americans might not live side-by-side in harmony, but chaos, fear and anger only rarely wash over the entire population all at once.

"Having lived through 9/11 and this, this is unlike anything else because the entire world was not affected by 9/11," bassist McBride said from his Montclair, New Jersey, office in April. "There were certain areas of the country—and the world—that went right on about their business ... . During 9/11, if you wanted

time when we're all fearful of getting too close to strangers at the grocery store, others simply aren't wired that way. McBride, though, expressed confidence in the internal lives of the creative class.

"That's really all you can do—you have to go into your creative pool," he said. "I mean, there really is no excuse *not* to tap into that creative pool or different ways of finding creative expression. That's all we have—time to practice and write. So, creatively, I predict some real amazing things are going to come out of this crisis."

There already have been a few notable expressions of creative perseverance, works

gonna be new relationships with audiences after this," Makhathini said. "What we have now as an alternative plan will stay as a parallel sort of reality for artists. People are going to be consciously regarding the online [approach] as an option. So, for instance, there's gonna be people playing stuff from studios and broadcasting from a studio. When I do my next record, I would love to broadcast the session."

That idea might have seemed revelatory a few years ago—but it could become the norm after the pandemic. An antecedent arrived in 2017, when bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding opened up her life to fans while working on *Exposure*, streaming 77 hours in the studio and emerging with a recording that displayed not just her musical prowess, but also a meta train-of-thought beyond what most musicians were brash enough to attempt.

Becoming stars of their own movies might not actually be a huge leap for some musicians, though. Most already have at least some experience booking gigs, running bands, arranging recordings and negotiating with everyone from label executives to talent agents and publicists. Livestreaming from the studio would only add one more aspect to their careers, and Makhathini believes the creative set contains multitudes.

"[There] is absolutely no differentiation between being a healer, being an artist, being a dancer, being a diviner—all of these things," Makhathini said. "There is a kind of totality in them."

As venues, labels and independent performers scramble to find reliable sources of revenue, it still might be too early to envision some grand structural reorganization in jazz that will prove workable after musicians and fans can safely congregate again. But for now, the loss of gigs, studio sessions and teaching opportunities has forced a reckoning with who we are as individuals and as a society, and who and what we value most.

What we think of as the life of a musician could be profoundly different by 2021.

"We already had to have a lot of skills before—but these are extra skills that we have to learn," Younger said while discussing the outsized role of livestreams in the current jazz ecosystem.

Douglas noted that negotiating the pandemic should prompt musicians to develop some sort of plan for becoming more self-reliant and visible after the world returns to semi-normalcy.

"I have a hustler's mentality, so whatever [the scene] is going to be, I'm going to be involved in it," the bassist said, confidently. "Whether the scene, whether my peers, whether they like it or not—they don't have to. That's the beauty of art: You don't have to appreciate everyone's art. But you can't deny it." **DB**

# 'There is going to be a shift in terms of how people engage the artist after this.'

— *Nduduzo Makhathini*

to leave New York and go to Kansas, you'd be fine, right? But that's not the case now."

As one of the most visible figures of the genre—leading his own ensembles, performing in groups led by Corea and Joshua Redman, hosting the radio show *Jazz Night in America*, serving as the Newport Jazz Festival's artistic director, and acting as artistic chair for the jazz education organization Jazz House Kids—McBride occupies a unique place in the music.

He's also served as a de facto talent scout while playing at clubs and festivals over the years. But that role has been rendered ineffective during the pandemic.

"The truth of the matter is, scouting people means that you see them play at a jazz festival—or the word of mouth is always the best way," McBride said. "No matter how much technology has progressed over the years, when some musician you respect or trust says, 'Hey man, you should check out such and such a person,' that tends to go a long way, more so than searching someone out online. ... You want to see them live, and you want to feel them in the raw. So, the YouTube clip or whatever they do online, that's only the introduction."

The pandemic also threatens to put on hold the hopes of a generation of emerging performers—and stifle momentum that mid-career players have been amassing. And while some artists are easily inspired to find ways to create something vibrant during a

time when we're all fearful of getting too close to strangers at the grocery store, others simply aren't wired that way. McBride, though, expressed confidence in the internal lives of the creative class.

During a Zoom interview, pianist Nduduzo Makhathini paused and asked his kids to give him a minute, as he chatted from the bedroom of the East London, South Africa, home he shares with his wife, daughter and two sons.

In April, he seemed upbeat, having just completed a pair of streaming performances to celebrate the release of his Blue Note debut, *Modes Of Communication: Letters From The Underworlds*.

"There is definitely gonna be space for alternatives," Makhathini said. "So, all of these efforts that we're seeing on social media, it's definitely something that we can keep going [after the pandemic]. We'll reimagine the field—'the field' meaning the bandstand. There is a particular way in which human beings imagine gathering; there are different registers of how people gather."

Along with a reassessment of public spaces, the pianist also foresees a realignment of our interior lives and an adjustment in how performers rely on previously established industry norms.

"There is going to be a shift in terms of how people engage the artist after this—and there's



‘This big sea turtle appeared, and it just kept coming closer until it was sitting right at our feet.’



# Christian Sands

## 'EMPTY YOUR MIND'

By James Hale | Photos by Anna Webber

**When Christian Sands turned 30 in May 2019, he felt an urge to take stock of his life. For some millennials, that exercise might be a bit deflating, but few of his peers have so many achievements to contemplate: piano prodigy at the age of 4, leading gigs at 12 and playing with masters like Billy Taylor, Oscar Peterson and Herbie Hancock during his teens.**

Sands' studies at the Manhattan School of Music led to more success, including playing on one album by the MSM Jazz Philharmonic Orchestra and two by Bobby Sanabria. At 20, he began a six-year stint with bassist Christian McBride, and in 2017 he signed with Mack Avenue, which has just released his third album for the label, *Be Water*.

"Thirty is a big year for people because everything changes," Sands said over Zoom while seated in front of the grand piano that dominates a room where he was spending the majority of his time during the coronavirus lockdown. "[At age 30], you're not a young individual, but you're not old, either. You are more specific about what you want to do. You make certain choices that really define who you are."

His 30th birthday coincided with several events that helped define the form *Be Water* would take. Those included relocating to Stamford, Connecticut (40 miles from where he grew up in New Haven), encountering a doctor who suggested he consume more water, reading a

book titled *The Mysticism of Sound and Music: The Sufi Teaching of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, and revisiting Bruce Lee's classic martial-arts films, which he watched alongside his father when he was growing up.

"The final straw happened when I was performing in Hawaii," Sands said. "My bassist, Yasushi Nakamura, and I had some time to kill after we checked out of the hotel. So, we went to this park, put our swimming trunks on and put our feet in the water. Out of the blue, this big sea turtle appeared, and it just kept coming closer until it was sitting right at our feet."

It was then, Sands said, that he knew his next project would explore the concepts of water and flexibility, centered around a favorite quote of Lee's: "Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless, like water. ... Water can flow, or it can crash. Be water, my friend."

While his previous two leader dates reflected his love of Hancock-style funk, Latin percussion, hip-hop and the mainstream swing that Taylor schooled him in, *Be Water* significantly expands his sonic palette to include



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the blues-inflected playing of guitarist Marvin Sewell, ethereal movements and a rollicking cover of Steve Winwood’s “Can’t Find My Way Home.” Frequent collaborators Nakamura, drummer Clarence Penn and saxophonist Marcus Strickland are on board, as are trumpeter Sean Jones and trombonist Steve Davis.

Despite its disparate parts, the album coalesces around the theme of flexibility but without assaulting the listener with the high concept behind it. Most provocatively, the program includes the ambitious track “Be Water II,” which gracefully merges a piano trio with a highly textured string quartet, performing an arrangement written by Sands’ former MSM peer Miho Hazama.

“I wrote it as a piano sonata for students to practice movement,” Sands explained. “I’m a big fan of Mozart, and I’ve always loved certain things about his music, like his arpeggios. So, I was playing this piece, trying to figure out what to do for this next album, and I was like, ‘Can I put a string quartet on there?’ A lot of things I come up with are from the question of *why*. I decided to just keep it there and further it along, and Miho immediately came to mind.”

For Hazama, there’s irony in having her old friend turn to her for the kind of string arrangements in a jazz setting that has become her calling card: She credits Sands with determining her career path.

“He was a year behind me at MSM,” Hazama said. “When I got to New York, I still had plans to become a jazz pianist, rather than just a composer and arranger. But then I heard him play—just jamming before classes one day. His technique and groove were so phenomenal, and his playing was so organic that he made me rethink my plans. I knew, given my background as a classical pianist in Japan, that I could never achieve that.”

Among the elements that made Hazama recognize Sands as not just another young key-

board hotshot with loads of technique was his ability to draw color from the piano.

“A lot of jazz players just work on their technique and don’t focus on tone, but he gets that,” she said. “I used to have my ‘dream sound’ in my head and be able to play it in the classical setting. He plays that dream sound, those tone colors. It’s sophisticated and sexy. He has a very strong core in his body, so he can use less power in his playing yet draw out these very thick notes.”

Aside from his playing, Hazama also remembers being impressed with Sands’ outlook at MSM.

“He was always reaching out to classical students to learn specific things,” she said. “That’s such a wonderful attitude as an artist.”

“Most jazz musicians, especially when they’re young, are musical tourists,” said Sanabria, who was one of Sands’ mentors at MSM. “They look at things at a superficial level. They think they can learn a style of music like Afro-Cuban by just learning patterns. Christian got involved in the culture. He didn’t want to be a tourist. He wasn’t on an ego trip; he was very poised, polished and enthusiastic, which I think is a reflection of his work with Dr. Billy Taylor.”

Like Hazama, Sanabria recalled first hearing Sands at MSM, and his own reaction.

“He was assigned to my Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra,” Sanabria said. “At the first rehearsal, I heard these young guys, and said to myself, ‘Holy shit.’ Right then was when I decided to do those albums with them. I got him the Tito Puente Scholarship to study with Sonny Bravo, one of the true giants of Latin music, and he was able to really get inside that heavily percussive style of playing, as well as being able to play bebop with a really fast, light touch.”

If there’s an overarching motif to Sands’ career to this point, it’s his ability to astound listeners when they first hear him. Strickland is no exception.

“We were on a [bassist] Ben Williams gig together about five years ago, and the first thing I noticed was how young he looked,” Strickland said. “I was like, ‘Man, this guy looks like a baby,’ but he played like a grown man. It was very impressive to see someone his age have so much knowledge, and I’ve seen him grow so much since then.”

Now on his third recording with the pianist, Strickland said Sands has a distinctive way of hearing harmony and weaving melodies.

“His compositions are always challenging,” said the saxophonist. “He’s not someone who tells you how to play them, either. He gives you that information through his piano playing, and he always gives me a different way of expressing myself than I might’ve thought of.”

The pattern of surprise sonic attacks continued with McBride, who related to *DownBeat* in 2017—after he had produced Sands’ Mack Avenue debut, *Reach*—how he hired the pianist immediately after hearing him rehearsing for a segment of Marian McPartland’s *Piano Jazz* radio program he was guest hosting.

The late Geri Allen, too, fell under the young man’s spell, inviting him to participate, along with Jason Moran—another of Sands’ mentors at MSM—in a 2015 tribute to pianist Erroll Garner at the Monterey Jazz Festival. Together, the three performed the music from Garner’s legendary *Concert By The Sea* in celebration of the album’s 60th anniversary. Learning the music in a duo rehearsal with Allen in New York was a revelation to the younger pianist.

“I would talk about Garner with Dr. Taylor,” Sands said, “and he would show me some things that Garner would do, but it wasn’t in full detail. It wasn’t until I sat with Geri and we really dove into the music that I really got it. We would sit together and discuss, ‘So, *why* is he doing this passage?’ or ‘These octaves in the right hand with the chords in the middle, how does he do that at light speed?’ Even at that point, I assumed, you know, that everybody knows. This is just something that I haven’t got to yet because I’m only 25.”

As plans came together for the Erroll Garner Archive at the University of Pittsburgh, where Allen led the jazz program, she asked Sands to join the Erroll Garner Jazz Project as its youth coordinator to bring a younger perspective to the music of Garner, who died in 1977.

“When I was approached by the Garner estate and Octave Music to create more of a social network presence for the project, I didn’t know that Geri had already talked to them about it,” Sands said. “Geri was going to continue to do what she had been doing with it. She wasn’t officially the creative ambassador, but that’s what her position was. And then she got really sick.”

Sands said he visited Allen in June 2017, just days before she died from pancreatic cancer. Unbeknownst to him, she had put plans in



place for his future.

"She couldn't speak at all, but we communicated the best we could. We played some Garner and I talked about his music. About two weeks after she passed on, I got a call from Peter Lockhart and Susan Rosenberg [of the Erroll Garner Jazz Project] to ask me if I would take on the role of ambassador because that was Geri's wish."

Through the Garner estate's deal with Mack Avenue, announced last fall, the Octave Remastered Series will release a dozen albums culled from the archive—which includes some 7,000 reels of tape and more than a million documents—to celebrate Garner's centennial, culminating with his 100th birthday on June 15, 2021.

Sands hopes that the series will not only reignite interest in the late pianist, but also set the record straight about what he accomplished.

"You know, if you Google 'Erroll Garner,' the first things that come up are how small he was and that he couldn't read music," Sands said. "I didn't grow up reading music, either. I mean, I could read, but it was just so much easier and quicker for me to just hear it. But there's this story that Art Blakey told about Garner just playing the shit out of music that he'd only played a few times. So, it's like, 'OK, my man didn't need to read music.' It's not because he couldn't; it's like, at a certain point, he didn't need to. He *was* the music."

A big part of the reason he identifies with Garner's approach, Sands said, is what he learned from elders like Taylor and renowned trumpeter/educator Clark Terry. He recalled playing with older musicians who would have charts that looked to him like indecipherable handwritten notes.

"What I learned was that you need to get the essence of what you're playing," he said. "You want to get the feel of it."

That approach hasn't changed for Sands, even as he has moved into teaching via educational programs such as Christian's Jazz Kids in Copenhagen, Jazz at Lincoln Center's Jazz For Kids and Jazz In July at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He said there's nothing that can replace learning from the source.

"Education is such a big thing in everything I do, and it's not just being in the classroom. There's things I play on purpose to make sure you know what this is. Like block chords. I didn't come up with that, but let me show you about George Shearing or Nat Cole or Billy Taylor, and let me show you the difference between the three."

The latest educational project Sands has become involved with came about through his role as music director of the Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour project in 2018-19, and is part of his appointment as artist-in-residence at the festival itself, which has been postponed to 2021

due to the coronavirus. While part of his duties as a teacher and mentor have been scrubbed due to the pandemic, he remained hopeful that he could participate in some of Monterey's other educational initiatives in 2020.

Meanwhile, the long weeks of COVID-related isolation have been an opportunity for Sands to learn more about his craft.

"I'm really getting to, like, deconstruct my own playing," he said. "How can I improve on this? I'm influenced by so many different things, so this is a chance to get out of the thing that I was doing and really shift. I think a lot of

musicians are going to sound a little different after this [because] they're by themselves, just practicing."

Monterey Jazz Festival Artistic Director Tim Jackson described Sands as "a bright light" in the next generation of jazz pianists.

That's an outlook shared by Strickland, who said, "When I see Christian, I get a very promising experience. It makes me feel fulfilled to see the way that he's carrying the torch for jazz. With his broad appreciation for tradition, pop music, funk and hip-hop, he's basically the new template for what we call a jazz musician." **DB**

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# Kurt Rosenwinkel

# TECHNOLOGICAL MAESTRO

BY J.D. CONSIDINE | PHOTO BY RENATO NUNES

**When DownBeat reached Kurt Rosenwinkel via phone in Sweden, he was three dates into an eight-city tour. Asked where, exactly, he could only laugh. “Damn! Stumped me on the first question,” Rosenwinkel replied in mock consternation, before valiantly trying to pronounce Härnösand, the name of a port city 370 kilometers north of Stockholm.**

It was a Wednesday in mid-March, and Rosenwinkel was playing trio dates in advance of his new album, *Angels Around*. His road band included Dario Deidda, the prodigiously gifted Italian bassist who appears on the album and composed the title tune, and drummer Mark Whitfield Jr., in the chair occupied by Greg Hutchinson on the recording. Hutchinson was supposed to have been on tour in Europe with Joshua Redman at the time, but was instead stuck at home in Rome—on coronavirus lockdown, just like the rest of Italy.

*Angels Around*—released through Rosenwinkel’s own label, Heartcore Records—is his second collection of trio standards, following 2009’s *Reflections* (Word of Mouth Music). But whatever the two albums might share in concept and instrumentation is overshadowed by a pointed difference in sound and strategy. *Reflections* drew heavily from the Great American Songbook, and took a fairly conservative approach to the material, with Rosenwinkel backed by bassist Eric Revis and drummer Eric Harland. “I was going for a more traditional guitar sound,” Rosenwinkel said. “I’m in a place that’s quite different

from where I was when I recorded *Reflections*.”

That much is obvious from the first track. *Angels Around* opens with the Thelonious Monk tune “Ugly Beauty,” which on the original recording, from the 1968 album *Underground*, is played in slow, deliberate 3/4 time. “I believe it’s his only composition in 3,” the guitarist noted. But Rosenwinkel’s version does its best to hide that. The guitarist launches the tune with a dreamy eighth-note figure in D-flat, with the top note moving from the major seventh to the sixth; the downbeat doesn’t become obvious until the bass and drums enter, and even then, the waltz feel that Monk used is undercut by Deidda’s tango-style bass line, which puts equal emphasis on beats 1 and 3.

Deidda’s performance on the tune was informed by his experiences with Argentine musicians in Europe who taught him about *bolero*, *chaquarera* and tango. “I tried that bass line and Kurt liked it immediately,” Deidda explained via email. “I believe it is a line influenced by the Argentine *bolero* and the Cuban *chacha*. And the interesting thing is that it sounds good on a groove that Greg played that is more of a marching rhythm.”





HEART  
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Kurt Rosenwinkel released *Angels Around* on his own label, Heartcore Records.

“Usually, everyone plays it how Monk plays it,” Hutchinson said from Rome. “We played it a bunch of times live, and it always had that groove to it, but in the studio we bumped it up a little bit more. And Dario, he’s my Italian brother from another mother. He’s always grooving, man. He sets the tone, and we just fall in.”

That sense of groove is enhanced by Rosenwinkel’s sound. Although the tone of the opening rhythm figure is as straight as anything on *Reflections*, once he begins to state the melody, everything changes. The guitar’s tone is sweeter, with more brightness and sustain, but what really stands out is the phrasing, which at times swaps the percussiveness of the plectrum for something that sounds closer to the more liquid articulation of bow-on-string. But it’s not one or the other; instead, Rosenwinkel sounds like he’s switching between techniques, as if the melodic line itself chose the means of articulation, instead of the instrument or player.

Rosenwinkel described this shift in technique as “steps towards the way that I really hear the guitar in my mind,” reflecting his frustration with certain aspects of guitar playing, and his determination to overcome them.

He started out as a pianist, and to a certain extent, that shapes his expectations of guitar: “Being a pianist, I’ve always loved, first, having two hands. But also loved having a sustain pedal. But with guitar, unless it’s an open string, your fingers have to remain on the note for it to ring. And once you play the note, if you want to have sustain, you just have to hold it and hope”—he laughed—“that it continues.”

This is where technology comes to the rescue. Although rock and pop guitarists have spent

decades using pedals and signal processors to shape their sound, many current jazz guitarists are operating like it’s still 1950. Not Rosenwinkel. “I’ve always been very involved with seeing what’s available to me to broaden the scope of the expression,” he said. “Whether it’s the sustain portion of the note, or the attack/transient portion of the note, or the decay of the note, I’ve done a lot to tailor those different aspects of the sound to the way that I hear it in my mind.

“The first thing I tried to do was to integrate delay, and control the delay with the expression pedal so that I could play a note, then feed it into a delay, release my fingers, and have that note still ringing—and then play another chord, to get a kind of approximation of multi-note voicings, hybrid chords, upper structures, superimpositions and these more complex harmonies that I gravitate to.”

Rosenwinkel also wanted to approximate the way wind players can use their breath to shape the contours of a line, in terms of volume and texture. Obviously, he couldn’t breathe through his guitar, but he could use pedals and electronics to alter the timbre of his sound on the fly. “I can play and sculpt lines in a way where the twists and turns have a certain kind of tactile feeling to them,” he said, “the way that I hear them to be, which is more akin perhaps to saxophone players like Joe Henderson or Charlie Parker. I can create a very big chordal sound, and then at the same time come off with a little ornament or a riff that has a kind of vocal quality or woodwind quality to it.”

Another key ingredient in the sonic stew is Deidda, who is credited with playing bass guitar, but whose contributions sound remarkably

like an upright—thanks to his Marcustico bass, built by luthier Joaquín Marco.

“Dario is just really determined to get an experience of the bass that feels like an upright, because that’s the way he feels the music,” Rosenwinkel said. “His bass is acoustic, it has a hollow body, and it has the same kind of bridge as an upright. So, it kind of like looks like an upright, sideways, with a small body. But when he solos, oh, my god—it’s this wonderful double threat. He’s walking like Ray Brown, and then he’s soloing like Clifford Brown.”

The trio took a variety of approaches to the song selection for *Angels Around*. “Ease It” is a Paul Chambers bop number that comes from his 1959 album, *Go*. “Jorge Rossi gave me a cassette tape of this album in like 1991, and I fell in love with that album,” Rosenwinkel said. “It’s just a blues.”

“Punjab,” which Joe Henderson wrote for his 1965 album, *In ’N Out*, was composed with a two-line melody, and Rosenwinkel plays both parts, making it sound not like chords but two distinct voices. “It was difficult,” he said. “It was very difficult. I had been playing a single-note version of that for a long time, and then I thought, ‘Let me get to what the tune really is.’ I worked on that for a while, and the physical formations on the guitar were really awkward. But because it’s so awkward, it’s like those two voicings are completely distinct in the physical way that you have to play it. So, it gets the feeling of two separate voices together.”

During this conversation with DownBeat, Rosenwinkel’s phone died mid-sentence. So, after some email correspondence, we agreed to pick things up the next day, when he and the band would be about 180 kilometers north of Härnösand, in Umeå.

But bad news beat me to him. By the time I got him on the phone, Rosenwinkel had learned that, due to the coronavirus pandemic, his spring tour plans had all been canceled. “I was going to go from here to New York, and we were going to play Carnegie Hall,” he said. “Then we’d go out to L.A. and play there, and play in Phoenix, and in Oakland at Yoshi’s. Then we were going to fly to Antigua to play a surprise birthday party for Eric Clapton at his house there. That got canceled. And then I was supposed to fly to Richmond, Virginia, to do a thing with a big band. That got canceled.

“Two of my musicians are sitting in the Lisbon airport, waiting to find out what they’re supposed to do,” he added. “It’s a fucked-up moment.” Meanwhile, the *Angels Around* trio still had four dates remaining on its Swedish tour. Given the overall situation, Rosenwinkel decided to reschedule our conversation.

A week later, back at his home in Berlin, he was in a much better mood. “My idea of a great vacation is to just stay at home,” he explained, noting that Germany’s stay-at-home order was



# MUSIC CAN CHANGE LIVES



“like a forced vacation for me.”

Earlier in the day, he had been in the studio, working on a Heartcore project by Brazilian guitarists Pedro Martins and Daniel Santiago, who perform as a duo under the name Simbiose. “I’m producing it, engineering it and mixing it,” he said. “It’s going to be a really beautiful album.”

Last year, Heartcore released *Vox*, an album by Martins, one of several acts who are part of the label’s roster. Others include the jazz sextet Sun Dew, the alt-pop band Montë Mar and pianist ELEW (aka Eric Lewis), who has used the term “rockjazz” to describe his music.

Rosenwinkel’s own output for Heartcore illustrates the stylistic breadth the label hopes to encourage. Before *Angels Around*, he released *Searching The Continuum* with the electronic trio Bandit 65. Working with guitarist Tim Motzer and drummer Gintas Janusonis, the group’s material is totally improvised onstage—not simply the melodies and harmonies, but also the instrumental textures. The result is not just spontaneous composition, but instant orchestration as well.

During an interview with Janusonis from his home in Brooklyn, the drummer noted that sometimes the music can be dreamily ambient, and sometimes driving and linear. “But there’s always this cohesion,” he said. “We have this creative telepathy between the three of us.” He joked that he and his bandmates are always a bit amazed that they end together, adding, “It speaks to our musical relationship that we feel things move at the same time.”

Rosenwinkel’s first release on Heartcore, *Caipi*—a program of original compositions influenced by Brazilian styles—is the label’s cornerstone. The album was also atypical for the guitarist, who contributed vocals and played nearly all the instruments, with guest appearances by Martins, tenor saxophonist Mark Turner and guitarist Eric Clapton.

It was the desire to record the songs that made up *Caipi* that, in many ways, led to the creation of Heartcore. “*Caipi* developed over 10 years,” he explained, indicating the project was a natural outgrowth of his creative process. Rosenwinkel views himself as a conduit for the music: “As a composer, I feel like songs are born *through* me, and I don’t really control what they are. In a way, I don’t even feel like I write anything. I just get the earthly credit.”

Clapton was a key factor in pulling the *Caipi* project together. “We met at the Village Vanguard, I think in 2011,” Rosenwinkel recalled. “We hit it off and kept in touch through texting and sending music back and forth. All through developing *Caipi*, he was really supportive and really into it. He was involved in releasing it, and finishing the music. It was a very deep and personal connection that we share through the music.”

Looking ahead, Rosenwinkel has a number of projects in the works at Heartcore. In December, he recorded a Bandit 65 session in Philadelphia, and he is developing *The Nowhere Abstracts*, a forthcoming album that will spotlight solo guitar pieces. “I built this system of live looping, and I would do these solo performances where I would make loops and create actual song forms,” he explained. “I basically wrote my own code for a system that would control the music, and it was crazy. It was too intensely technical. But it yielded some songs.”

Plus, he has an album nearing completion that he described as “kind of like a rock album,” and he’s also at work on a collection of solo piano pieces. “There’s material for at least two more albums with my jazz quartet,” he said, and added that he has started to work on an album of orchestral music. He also is pondering a project in which a variety of singers would interpret his compositions.

“There are many ways to make music, and I love making music in different ways, because I love the difference in the result,” he said. “For me, there’s always a surprise at the different manifestations that can occur.” He said he has no fear of confusing listeners by offering so many different versions of Kurt Rosenwinkel: “I’ve noticed that my music always ends up sounding like me, in different ways, anyway.”

“There’s nothing you can do to get away from yourself completely,” he continued, with a chuckle. “No matter how hard you try.” **DB**



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Pianist Orrin Evans leads a brass-plated juggernaut on *The Intangible Between*.

## Orrin Evans and The Captain Black Big Band *The Intangible Between*

SMOKE SESSIONS 2003

★★★

Helming The Captain Black Big Band is one of several identities Orrin Evans has juggled over the years. After about a decade, though, the ensemble has slimmed to a nonet, a word that still evokes the Monet-ish pastels of Miles Davis' cool period. But there's nothing pastel about this

brass-plated juggernaut, whose brushstrokes are written with the broad blast of a Magic Marker. With fewer reeds here than in the past, the band's power is more a metallic monochrome with fewer contrasts and dynamics. The compact lineup could be looser, but the group's main strategy typically has favored a dense, coiled energy over easygoing swing.

The personnel is a mix-and-match of Captain Black regulars, with bassist Luques Curtis, trombonist David Gibson, and saxophonists Stacy Dillard and Todd Bashore still in their original

chairs. Even at nine pieces, the ensemble delivers a big-band punch.

"Proclaim Liberty" begins with a fanfare before sliding into the main material. Evans' swirling piano seems washed into a rut before Josh Lawrence's trumpet pulls the piece to higher ground. "This Little Light Of Mine," the familiar children's gospel tune, gets a patiently oblique introduction, and then emerges in punchy little jabs, which gives drummer Jason Brown ample space to push back with flurries of percussive balance.

"That Too" is an original piece with an engaging theme. But the real interest is in the back-and-forth battle between Immanuel Wilkins' soprano and Bashore's alto. They finally collide in a bloody, close-quarter tangle that draws sparks. Evans bashes out plenty of percussive comps to roil the mix. But don't be fooled by the false ending—a prankish red herring that heralds nothing but a farewell flourish. With four basses to mark time, "Off Minor" swings with quirky, asymmetric abstraction, amplifying its Monkisms, before finding a more comfortable groove with Sean Jones' trumpet. Dillard takes it back to the outskirts, where it remains through Evans' whirling flights. The frantic finale hunts for an exit line, but can't find one.

Judging from its quarter-hour span, "Tough Love," seems to be the magnum opus of *The Intangible Between*. If so, it's the victim if its own expectations. Nicely propelled by a pair of walking basses throughout, various spoken digressions by Evans get in the way, leaving the whole piece torn in two directions.

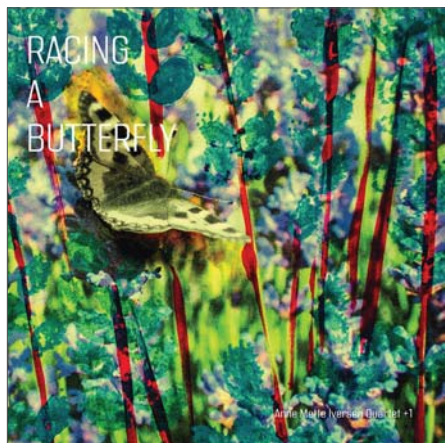
Elsewhere, Jones has time to stretch out during a softly underplayed "A Time For Love." The band is largely absent, and Evans is unusually restrained. Jones and Dillard lean in a bit harder on the other ballad, "Into Dawn."

—John McDonough

**The Intangible Between:** Proclaim Liberty; This Little Light Of Mine; A Time For Love; That Too; Off Minor; Into Dawn; Tough Love; I'm So Glad I Got to Know You. (64:49)

**Personnel:** Orrin Evans, piano, vocals (7); Thomas Marriott, Sean Jones, Josh Lawrence (1, 4, 6), trumpet; David Gibson, Stafford Hunter, trombone; Immanuel Wilkins, tenor saxophone (1), soprano saxophone (4); Todd Bashore, Caleb Wheeler, alto saxophone; Stacy Dillard (3–6, 8), Troy Roberts (2, 7), tenor saxophone; Reggie Watkins, trombone (1, 2), Rhodes (3); Joseph Block (5), Rhodes; Madison Rast (1, 4–6), Luques Curtis (2, 3, 5, 7, 8), Eric Revis (5, 7), Dylan Reis (5), bass; Anwar Marshall (1, 5), Jason Brown, Mark Whitfield Jr. (4, 5, 7), drums.

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



## Anne Mette Iversen Quartet +1

### *Racing A Butterfly*

BROOKLYN JAZZ UNDERGROUND 070

★★★★

Any notion that the word “butterfly” in the album’s title signifies the record being a light and fluttery offering immediately is quashed by the opening “Triangular Waves,” a jolting injection of jagged energy. Everything—the thrusting ostinato that holds center stage, the heady lines that saxophonist John Ellis and trombonist Peter Dahlgren chase each other through, the interplay of the leader’s bass and Otis Brown III’s

drums, and the propulsive block chording by pianist Danny Grissett—locks perfectly into place.

That remarkable level of cohesion is the mark of a band that has been shaping its sound for almost 20 years, and it should be enough to make Anne Mette Iversen much better known. A co-founder of Brooklyn Jazz Underground, the bassist made a mark on the New York scene in the early aughts, but has had a lower profile in the mainstream since relocating to Berlin in 2012.

Her writing here is never less than melodious, often returning to the ostinato as a signature. But even ballads—like the first part of “Parallel Flying”—maintain tensile strength because of the resonance of her bass and the grit in everything Dahlgren plays. In fact, much of *Racing A Butterfly* calls to mind the brawny bustle of Art Blakey’s *Jazz Messengers*—particularly the Curtis Fuller years, thanks to Wahlgren’s presence and the way he trades phrases with Ellis. Iversen’s unfussy playing forms a firm central element and provides Brown the freedom to improvise a number of unexpected routes. His fleet touch is as close as this set comes to resembling a butterfly.

—James Hale

**Racing A Butterfly:** Triangular Waves; Racing A Butterfly; Parallel Flying Part 1; Parallel Flying Part 2; Butterfly Interlude; Dancing Butterflies; Cluster; Reworking Of A Butterfly; Butterflies Too. (48:31)

**Personnel:** Anne Mette Iversen, bass; Peter Dahlgren, trombone; John Ellis, tenor saxophone; Danny Grissett, piano; Otis Brown III, drums.

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

## James Brandon Lewis/Chad Taylor

### *Live In Willisau*

INTAKT 342

★★★★

There is a particular charge when tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis and drummer Chad Taylor play together. Their 2018 duo release, *Radiant Imprints*, was a master class in Lewis’ impeccable, breathless form, rattling off endless melodic lines atop Taylor’s textural rhythms.

The pair’s subsequent release, the 2019 concert recording *Live In Willisau*, is just as virtuosic and no less formidable. Recorded in Switzerland at Jazz Festival Willisau—on the same stage as historic performances from the likes of Dewey Redman, Ed Blackwell and Ornette Coleman—the duo’s nine-track show is as indebted to its forebears as to opening up new avenues of expression.

Lewis is typically chameleonic in his approach, switching at a moment’s notice from straight-laced swing to swampy blues riffs and then coruscating, reed-testing runs. And all of this in just the opening two numbers, “Twenty Four” and “Radiance.” The latter especially traces the duo’s influence from the likes of groundbreaking drums-and-sax pairings—such as John Coltrane and Rashied Ali with its reworking of their tune “Seraphic Light”—while “Willisee” later pays trib-



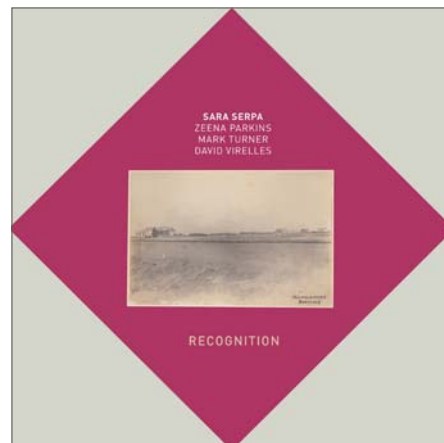
ute to Redman and Blackwell in its hard-swinging, shuffling kineticism, ending in Lewis’ ecstatic shouts of approval. As the crowd’s applause displays a welcome appreciation for this duo’s relentless pursuit of creativity, it’s clear that Lewis and Taylor are perfectly channeling the rawest edges of their instruments: They’re a sharp burst of light to behold live and a necessary continuation of the emotive power of jazz’s free-form potential.

—Ammar Kalia

**Live In Willisau:** Twenty Four; Radiance; Matape; Come Sunday; Imprints; Watakushi No Sekai; With Sorrow Lonnie; Willisee; Under/Over The Rainbow. (62:16)

**Personnel:** James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Chad Taylor, drums, mbira.

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



## Sara Serpa *Recognition*

BIOPHILIA 0018

★★★★½

There’s always the temptation when reviewing a soundtrack album to temper one’s sense of the music by how well it serves the images. In hopes of avoiding that, I spent a week or so getting to know the music on *Recognition* before taking a peek at the film, and I’m glad I did.

*Recognition*, both the film and album, is about Portuguese colonialism in Angola. Its images come courtesy of Super-8 film shot in 1961 by vocalist Sara Serpa’s grandfather, and the conceptual framework derives from the band-leader’s own critical reading of Portuguese and Angolan history. The story is finessed into a compelling narrative by director Bruno Soares.

Although it lacks the detail of a true documentary, Serpa frames its home-movie details with damning clarity, making the cost of colonialism painfully clear. The music isn’t quite as specific, in part because Serpa’s approach to jazz singing lets melody and phrasing do the work that words accomplish for other singers. But it’s just as powerful.

Her compositions are lean and quiet—with a definite pulse, but little in the way of jazz groove. “Free Labour,” for instance, makes its point with cycling rhythms that recall Steve Reich, while “Mercy And Caprice” shifts between a relentlessly simple thrum and an almost impressionistic rubato. Her melodies are flowing and intervallic, with an occasionally eerie quality that’s amplified when she sings in unison with Mark Turner’s tenor, as on “Lei Do Indigenato, 1914.” As for the spoken-word pieces, even without the historical context, the emotional power of “Beautiful Gardens” or “Queen Nzinga” makes the message of *Recognition* impossible to deny.

—J.D. Considine

**Recognition:** Lei Do Indigenato, 1914; Occupation; The Multi-Racialism Myth; Free Labour; Beautiful Gardens; Mercy And Caprice; Civilizing Influence; Queen Nzinga; Absolute Confidence; Control And Oppression; Propaganda; Unity And Struggle. (52:48)

**Personnel:** Sara Serpa, vocals; Zeena Parkins, harp; Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; David Virelles, piano.

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



# The Hot Box

	Critics	J.D. Considine	James Hale	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough
<b>Orrin Evans</b> <i>The Intangible Between</i>		★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★
<b>Anne Mette Iversen</b> <i>Racing A Butterfly</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
<b>Lewis/Taylor</b> <i>Live In Willisau</i>		★★★	★★½	★★★★	★★½
<b>Sara Serpa</b> <i>Recognition</i>		★★★★½	★★½	★★½	★★★

## Critics' Comments

### Orrin Evans and The Captain Black Big Band, *The Intangible Between*

Yes, the blowing is great—with soloists like Jones, Roberts and Wilkins, how could it not be? But with arrangements this minimal, Captain Black seems less a big band than a combo with a lot of extra horns. —J.D. Considine

A swaggering house party of an album. Social music at its best proves to be the ideal antidote to weeks of social distancing. Evans' crew is equally adept throughout a wide range of dynamics. —James Hale

Another sumptuous offering from the pianist's ever-evolving big band, featuring a joyous mix of hard swing, soulful melody and strident soloing. —Ammar Kalia

### Anne Mette Iversen Quartet +1, *Racing A Butterfly*

There's much to admire in Iversen's ensemble writing, which makes these five voices sound like many more. Trombonist Dahlgren is an agile and inventive soloist, but the real magic here is the rhythm section, whose time churns and tumbles like a butterfly's flight path. —J.D. Considine

Iversen's latest is another ineffably light yet no less complex offering, continuing her take on intricate, modernist jazz. Highlights come on the title track's interplay between pianist Grissett and saxophonist Ellis. —Ammar Kalia

Sometimes so-so music redeems itself in a lone twist of inspiration. Beware! It's a critic's way of being nice. Iversen and her group are the opposite: a pleasure from start to end. The work is smart, fresh and friendly, and Ellis and Dahlgren fit one another hand-in-glove. —John McDonough

### James Brandon Lewis/Chad Taylor, *Live In Willisau*

Kudos to Lewis for acknowledging how much this *Live In Willisau* owes to the one Redman and Blackwell made in 1985. Apologies, also, for my preferring the earlier album. —J.D. Considine

Do you need more free-blowing tenor and drums in your life? Let's be clear: Lewis and Taylor aren't Coltrane and Ali, and the level of improvisation here never rises above a handful of well-worn moves and responses. —James Hale

In a tradition where speaking in musical tongues is passed off as authentic emotion, this duo manages to pause the fury and find appealing periods of coherent rapport. Still, it's that feral individualism that remains the original sin of *The New Thing*. —John McDonough

### Sara Serpa, *Recognition*

Serpa's distinctive voice has never sounded better, but the cinematic elements don't completely translate to this often-weightless set of art-music originals. Turner's carefully modulated horn is the ideal accompaniment, while Virelles contributes depth and drama. —James Hale

An intriguing multisensory work from Serpa, pairing meditative and often experimentally atonal compositions with a color-washed selection of found footage. It's an amorphous album, one that works far better in unison with its visual collage. —Ammar Kalia

Serpa's performance is soft, waifish, pitch-perfect cool with an angelic lightness, divulging neither a quiver of vibrato nor a degree of warmth. In this film score, her music freely floats in ambiguity and withdrawal, absent the images it was created to amplify. —John McDonough

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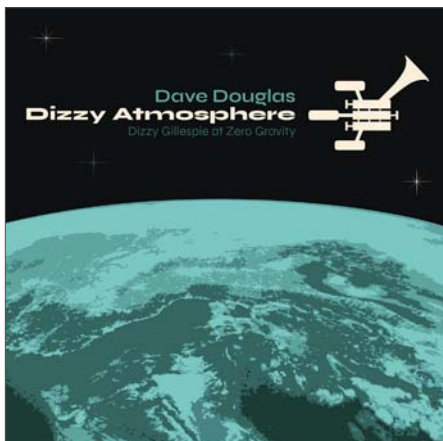
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**Dave Douglas**  
*Dizzy Atmosphere: Dizzy Gillespie At Zero Gravity*

GREENLEAF MUSIC 1076

★★★★

Anyone who's encountered Dave Douglas' past dedications to folks like Wayne Shorter or Mary Lou Williams knows better than to expect a conventional tribute from the trumpeter. *Dizzy Atmosphere: Dizzy Gillespie At Zero Gravity* does, however, fit Douglas' own conventions given those earlier efforts.

Two of nine tracks here are Gillespie covers; the others are originals whose inspirations most-

ly are cloaked in Douglas' own envelope-pushing conception. It's not easy to detect the bebop giant in the unearthly atmosphere of "See Me Now," Matthew Stevens' guitar chords seeping into Douglas and second trumpeter Dave Adewumi's counterpoint like a strange afterglow. A quote from Gillespie's "Bebop" is allegedly hidden in Douglas' "Mondrian," a tune as abstract as its namesake; this reviewer has yet to find it.

The trumpeters' interplay is a recurring motif, though not a competitive one: Adewumi brings a dark trepidation to Douglas' bright urgency on "Cadillac" and the pretty "Pacific." The other through-line is the whip-smart rhythm section of pianist Fabian Almazan, bassist Carmen Rothwell and drummer Joey Baron, as steady and sensitive on "We Pray" as they are unshakable on "Subterfuge's" change-ups. Then there's the instrumentation: unusual, but matches Gillespie's 1970s quintet (in which Jon Faddis was often featured, thus the second trumpet). Gillespie's legacy isn't completely dissolved in this matrix, though that fact ends up saying more about Douglas' brilliance than the subject of his homage.

—Michael J. West

**Dizzy Atmosphere: Dizzy Gillespie At Zero Gravity:**

Mondrian; Con Almazan; Cadillac; See Me Now; Manteca; Pickin' The Cabbage; Pacifica; Subterfuge; We Pray. (58:16)

**Personnel:** Dave Douglas, Dave Adewumi, trumpet; Matthew Stevens, guitar; Fabian Almazan, piano; Carmen Rothwell, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

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

**Lennie Tristano**  
*The Duo Sessions*

DOT TIME 8016

★★★★

On *The Duo Sessions*, Lennie Tristano wends his way through the liminal spaces bridging bebop, cool jazz and free-improv. The album's 16 tracks, recorded after Tristano's final public appearance in 1968 but never previously released, reveal not only how intuitively the pianist parsed these languages, but how skillfully he crafted improvisational relationships.

Each of the sidemen here—saxophonist Lenny Popkin, pianist Connie Crothers, drummer Roger Mancuso—elicited a different musical response from the master improviser. Thus, the respective duo recordings depart from each other in subtle ways, even as they build on the pillars of Tristano's precedent-setting arrangements for quintet.

On tunes with Popkin, Tristano disrupts the vertical structures when comping against the tenor player's discordant solos; his attenuated walking bass lines and pounding chords only allude to harmonic congruity. But his own nimble solos, with their liquid, chromatic runs, would suggest that any seeming incongruity derives from the narrowness of the view, not the vision. With Crothers, Tristano takes on the only



four-handed piano composition he ever recorded ("Concerto: Parts 1 And 2"). The pianists' intense mental rapport verges on the telepathic. The cuts with Mancuso spotlight Tristano's delightfully inventive contrafacts, built atop the drummer's sturdy polyrhythms. Tunes like "Palo Alto Street," a twist on "It's Alright With Me" and "Home Again," tickle the imagination and satisfy the mind.

—Suzanne Lorge

**The Duo Sessions:** Out Of A Dream; Ballad; Chez Lennie; Inflight; Ensemble; Melancholy Stomp; Concerto: Part 1; Concerto: Part 2; Palo Alto Street; Session; Changes; My Baby; Imagery; That Feeling; Minor Pennies; Home Again. (70:25)

**Personnel:** Lennie Tristano, piano; Lenny Popkin, tenor saxophone (1–6); Connie Crothers, piano (7, 8); Roger Mancuso, drums (9–16).

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



**Aaron Parks**  
*Little Big II: Dreams Of A Mechanical Man*

ROPEADOPE 564

★★★★½

There's a sneaky power to Aaron Parks' music. Take "Friendo," a track that appears early on *Little Big II: Dreams Of A Mechanical Man*. The title feels goofy, and the song starts with a cyclical piano/bass/drums pattern that feels more roots-rock than jazz or funk. But as the song starts rolling along, and Parks and guitarist Greg Tuohey start layering melodies over a taut groove, the music takes on depth and shape, evoking the infectious feeling of a wide, natural grin.

Much of *Little Big II* blooms in a similar fashion. Parks and the members of his ensemble rarely open a track with a loud announcement of their collective intentions. They build their musical argument layer by layer, each element sliding smoothly, discreetly into the mix.

"The Ongoing Pulse Of Isness" opens with the sound of chimes and glockenspiel jangling together for a full minute before Parks' piano becomes apparent. The rest of the group slips in behind him and settles into what feels like a glassy-eyed homage to vintage Pat Metheny Group, anchored by Tuohey's watery guitar lines. Even the most upbeat track, the reggae-informed "Where Now?," fades into being, as if not wanting its busy bass lines and Stylophone-like synth tones to scare anyone off.

By that point, though, as it's *Little Big II*'s penultimate track, Parks and his band already should have listeners under their spell. Or at least basking in the music's soothing calm and quiet strength—qualities that are much needed in this unprecedented era. That might not have been their intended goal, but they hit the mark with seemingly little effort.

—Robert Ham

**Little Big II: Dreams Of A Mechanical Man:** Attention, Earthlings; Here; Solace; Friendo; Is Anything Okay?; The Shadow & The Self; The Storyteller; Dreams Of A Mechanical Man; My Mistake; The Ongoing Pulse Of Isness; Where Now?; Unknown. (70:45)

**Personnel:** Aaron Parks, keyboards, vibraphone, glockenspiel, chimes, vocals; Greg Tuohey, guitar; David Ginyard Jr., bass; Tommy Crane, drums, percussion.

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





**Dinosaur  
To The Earth**

EDITION 1154

★★★½

On Dinosaur's first two recordings, the quartet drew on the melodic idiosyncrasies of North African microtonalism and Celtic folk music, as well as the rhythms of American, Scottish and North African drumming, all while emphasizing a plethora of curious, almost-machine-like synth effects and sounds. Both achieved an artful, yet somewhat obvious, sort of modernism, steeped in technology and intersectionality. *To The Earth* approaches modernism differ-

ently, leaning more into the acoustic simplicity of chamber music and stripping itself bare of electronic effects. In this configuration, the ensemble finds a fresh palette to express its ideas: the metallic ring of strummed piano strings, guttural trumpet noises, shakers and other tinny percussive instruments. The acoustic emphasis also primes Dinosaur to explore overlap among the compositional techniques of trumpeter Laura Jurd's favorites: jazz greats like Charles Mingus and Duke Ellington, and classical heroes like Igor Stravinsky.

On "Held By Water" a boisterous jazz improvisation from Jurd floats above rich Stravinsky-like piano chords. Similarly, on "Banning Street Blues," the bandleader transitions between a jutting, staccato melody in the brass recalling Stravinsky's percussive *Ebony Concerto*, and groove in the bass, drums and the prominent piano ostinato that suggests a new version of The Headhunters' "Watermelon Man." In this way, Jurd frequently oscillates back and forth between seemingly disparate musical perspectives, underscoring curious parallels between eras, composers and melodies that expand the definition of what modern jazz is and can be. —*Alexa Peters*

**To The Earth:** To The Earth; Slow Loris; Mosking; Held By Water; Absinthe; Banning Street Blues; For One. (41:18)

**Personnel:** Laura Jurd, trumpet, flugelhorn, tenor horn; Elliot Galvin, piano, synthesizer; Conor Chaplin, bass; Corrie Dick, drums.

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

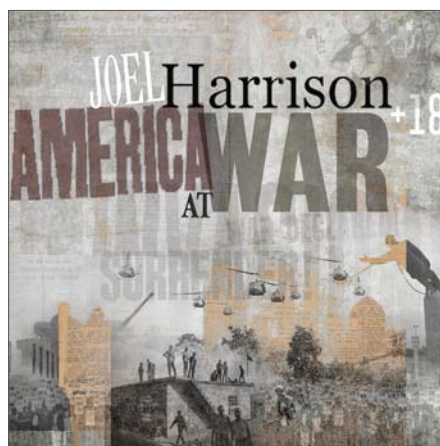
**Joel Harrison +18  
America At War**

SUNNYSIDE 1590

★★★★

For all of guitarist Joel Harrison's 62 years, the United States has been entangled in overseas military exploits, sometimes bringing the conflict home. This epic saga warrants bold and thoughtful compositions, and throughout *America At War*, Harrison's music proves ideal for such a demanding story. The album also marks Harrison's return to the orchestral approach he brought to a 19-member ensemble for 2013's *Infinite Possibility*. The group here shows its flexibility not only in adapting and personalizing different eras' musical cues, but through tonal and tempo shifts within each piece.

"March On Washington" blends the big band's lush textures with Harrison's funk in a way that recalls blaxploitation soundtracks that Johnny Pate assembled in the early 1970s. But about midway through, his guitar solo leads the band in a surprisingly different direction. Jared Schonig's drum attack breaks the serenity of Ned Rothenberg's shakuhachi on the haunting "My Father In Nagasaki," while Harrison makes his political inclinations clear on "Yellowcake," a tune that includes samples of President George W. Bush's stated reasoning for the 2003 Iraq



invasion; Jon Irabagon's saxophone lifts the song beyond polemics. And on "Stupid, Pointless, Heartless Drug Wars," the music itself delivers the message, the ensemble summoning the sounds of a New Orleans funeral march. —*Aaron Cohen*

**America At War:** March On Washington; Yellowcake; My Father In Nagasaki; The Vultures Of Afghanistan; Requiem For An Unknown Soldier; Gratitude; Honor Song; Day After Tomorrow; Stupid, Pointless, Heartless Drug Wars. (72:39)

**Personnel:** Joel Harrison, guitar, vocals; Seneca Black, Ingrid Jensen, Chris Rogers, trumpet; Dave Smith, trumpet, flugelhorn; Marshal Sealy, French horn; Alan Ferber, Sara Jacovino, Curtis Haselbring, trombone; Ben Staap, tuba; Ben Kono, English horn, oboe, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, flute; Ken Thomson, alto saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet; Stacy Dillard, tenor saxophone; Jon Irabagon, tenor saxophone, flute; Lisa Parrot, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Ned Rothenberg (3), shakuhachi; Daniel Kelly, piano; Gregg August, electric bass, bass; Wilson Torres, percussion; Jared Schonig, drums.

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

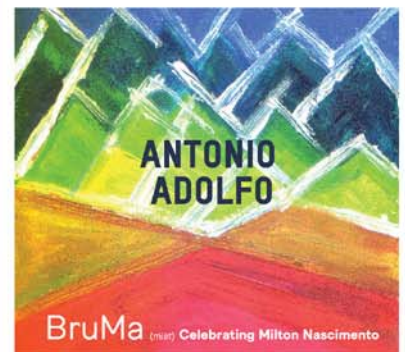
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## Shadings of the Genre

**Lucinda Williams, *Good Souls Better Angels* (Thirty Tigers/Highway 20 H2006; 59:46 ★★★★★)** Early concerts and dawn-of-her-career albums in 1979 and '80 portrayed Williams as a torchbearer for blues music. Ever since, she's retained Delta blues imagery as part of her palette, even while securing cult-figure stature in alt-country and rock. Now, more than 10 albums later, Williams fully reveals herself to be a resourceful, iconoclastic blues singer, projecting the craggy shadings and astringent, blurred tones of her natural voice on new material written with her husband, Tom Overby. Williams knows the human condition can be dark; unnerving, edgy songs concern domestic abuse ("Wakin' Up," evoking a Patti Smith-like apocalypticism), the 45th president ("Man Without A Soul"), depression ("Big Black Train"), the Old Testament ("Pray The Devil Back To Hell") and the fall of man ("Big Rotator," somewhat reminiscent of "John The Revelator"). She's up for raw, tough-minded confrontation, emboldened by hope, fortitude and a moral code.

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

**Andrew Alli, *Hard Workin' Man* (EllerSoul 20201; 38:30 ★★½)** Alli's first full-length shows his main strength to be an ability to captivate with a harmonica sound that nods to his idols—Big Walter Horton, Little Walter and George "Harmonica" Smith—without impeding the development of his own style. On originals and numbers associated with those three historical figures, the 31-year-old takes his time and hits the right notes. A regular in Richmond, Virginia-clubs, Alli also possesses a skillful intensity of appeal and convincingness as a singer. In the band, California guitarist Jon Atkinson consistently renovates tradition to suit modern expectations.

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

**Avey Grouws Band, *The Devil May Care* (Self Release; 35:35 ★★½)** Semi-finalists at the 2020 International Blues Competition, Iowa's Avey Grouws Band channels its pent-up enthusiasm and not slight musical ability toward an individuated brand of blues-rock that recommends its first album. Jeni Grouws' limber voice rings with conviction, ratcheting up intensity on original tunes sans artifice. She shares the dominant aural presence with far-above-average guitarist Chris Avey, who ranges from Robert Crayish spikiness to jazzy lyricism. Standouts "The Devil May Care" and "Dirty Little Secret" explore an emotional world where lust rivals mental-physical stability. Of eight more, just "Long Road" disappoints for



Lucinda Williams

DANNY CLUNCH

its fake-profound rock gestures.

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

**Ryan Perry, *High Risk, Low Reward* (Ruf 1278; 52:39 ★★½)** Best known as a member of the Homemade Jamz Blues Band, Mississippian Perry solidifies his position at the vanguard of blues millennials with this recorded-in-Berlin debut. His way-down-low voice and soul-probing guitar work, forcibly agitated on occasion, points to someone open to understanding the bewildering vicissitudes of romance. His gift for casting moods, both self-assured and defensive, through songwriting is evidenced on most of his eight compositions. A Gil Scott-Heron-type compassion informs his vocal on "A Heart I Didn't Break."

Ordering info: [rufrecords.de](http://rufrecords.de)

**Watermelon Slim, *Traveling Man* (NorthernBlues 0066; 65:20/33:03 ★★½)** Slim—celebrated the past 15 or so years after a few decades of obscurity—holds the attention of Oklahoma clubgoers during a pair of 2016 solo shows. His singing in a weathered, starkly affecting voice and his careful playing of harmonica and electric slide guitar bring a certain charisma to the no-frills country-blues he's penned about mortality, retirement and the road. He's at his most poignant communicating the feelings evoked by his reworkings of Mississippi Fred McDowell's "61 Highway" and a traditional work song favored by McDowell, "John Henry." It is serious fealty: as a soldier in Vietnam, Slim kept sane learning to play guitar from McDowell records.

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

**Casey Hensley, *Good As Gone* (Vizztone 02; 34:34 ★★)** Following the well-thumped path opened up by forebears like Janis Joplin and Koko Taylor, Hensley renders the originals on her initial studio album with a four-alarm blaze of a voice. But the Californian's hyper-enthusiasm is mired in mannerisms. Real interaction between Hensley, in her mid-twenties, and the truth of the song being sung takes a back seat to theatricality. A supercharged band with guitarist Laura Chavez helps her turn each tune into an aria. **DB**

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



## Roscoe Mitchell with Ostravská Banda *Distant Radio Transmission*

WIDE HIVE 0347

★★★½

In recent years, reedist Roscoe Mitchell has been mining gold from his rigorous improvisation practice, creating meticulously detailed compositions by transcribing and mapping out scores from past spontaneous creations. This new collection gathers several iterations of such procedures, its source material going back decades.

The centerpiece is the title work—the only piece featuring Mitchell as a performer—which was transcribed from a 2013 trio improvisation. The densely polyphonic piece was performed here by Czech new-music orchestra Ostravská Banda, with quicksilver overlays from Mitchell on soprano saxophone, James Fei on electronics and Thomas Buckner on vocals. The arrangement provides a fascinating demonstration of Mitchell's multi-directional thinking, and a powerful rejoinder to those who denigrate free-improv as gibberish, as the 20-minute excursion unfolds in peaks and valleys.

"Nonaah Trio" is the latest in a series of transcribed versions of the 1976 solo piece "Nonaah," reconfiguring its corkscrewing core into something more expansive but no less idea-packed. "Cutouts For Woodwind Quintet" isn't based on improvised material, but a revision of the 1984-'85 composition, resulting in melodic eddies twirling in harmonious motion. The album closes with "8.8.88," a technically bruising solo piece featured as an automated performance programmed by Seth Horvitz for a Yamaha Disklavier piano, which perfects its execution, but loses some of the warmth of the human version on the reedist's 2011 album *Numbers*. —Peter Margasak

**Distant Radio Transmission:** Distant Radio Transmission; Nonaah Trio; Cutouts For Woodwind Quintet; 8.8.88. (52:11)

**Personnel:** Roscoe Mitchell, soprano saxophone; James Fei, electronics; Thomas Buckner, vocals; Dana Reason, piano; John C. Savage, flute; Catherine Lee, Christa Robinson, oboe; Roberta Michel, flute; Carlos Cordeiro, clarinet; Sara Schoenbeck, bassoon; John Gattis, French horn; Seth Horvitz, keyboards; Ostravská Banda, strings, brass, reeds.

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



## Walter Smith III & Matthew Stevens *In Common 2*

WHIRLWIND 4755

★★★★½

The cover for *In Common 2* is identical to its predecessor, except the out-sized heads of pianist Micah Thomas, bassist Linda May Han Oh and drummer Nate Smith are photoshopped onto the bodies of the first album's rhythm section. In other words: same concept, slightly different players.

Like its predecessor, *2* starts with a duet between the principal members, guitarist Matthew Stevens and tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III. But instead of a collective improvisation, this time they deliver a sweetly elegiac rendition of the late Roy Hargrove's "Roy Allan," an intro that underscores how *2* emphasizes writing. But a more structured approach to rhythm is what distinguishes the two recordings: "Cowboy" rides in on a groove built on a bass ostinato, which Oh continues to allude to even as the playing gets freer. "Type Rider" is similarly ostinato-oriented, although this time it holds even as Smith solos against the band. All that structure doesn't box the music in, though. If anything, it seems to energize the rhythm section, which in turn brings out the best of Stevens and Smith. Listen to how the itchy pulse beneath "General George Washington" sparks a taut solo from Smith and churning lines from Stevens' acoustic.

—J.D. Considine



**In Common 2:** Roy Allan; Lotto; Cowboy; Clem; Van Der Linde; Provinces; General George Washington; Little Lamplight; Opera; Type Rider. (39:08)

**Personnel:** Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Matthew Stevens, guitar, acoustic guitar; Micah Thomas, piano; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Nate Smith, drums.

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

## Charles Rumback *June Holiday*

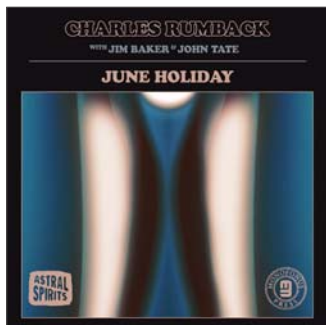
ASTRAL SPIRITS 111

★★★★

Drummer Charles Rumback is the sort of musician who makes Chicago's scene tick. He's a sublimely versatile player who consistently but quietly lifts up every session he's involved in. Over the years, he's led a variety of groups, but this agile trio with pianist Jim Baker and bassist John Tate is proving to be his most profound.

*June Holiday* is the group's least aggressive, but the leader frequently builds in an exquisite sense of tension, pitting surface placidity against rumbling anxiety. All three musicians contribute tunes here, and most of them convey a distinct ballad-like feel. The tunefulness comes in spare, single-note tangles: Overtones hang in the air only to be juddered by spasmodic clusters of cymbals and toms, summoning something far more meaningful than an unabashed love song or a freak-out. Baker has been a key fixture on the Chicago scene for decades and *June Holiday* arguably could stand as his most impressive performance on a recording. His opening "Foglights" is suitably hazy, with Rumback's sensitive, shuffling brushwork underlining a Herbie Nichols vibe, while the darting, broken-glass figures the pianist brings to "Huh?" evoke the sound of early Cecil Taylor—an off-kilter but unapologetic sense of swing pushing even the most abstract phrases forward.

—Peter Margasak



**June Holiday:** Foglights; Burning Daylight; Huh?; Hard Goodbye; Here And Now; Portrait Of Lorena; Reorg. (44:37)

**Personnel:** Jim Baker, piano; John Tate, bass; Charles Rumback, drums.

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

## Tom Misch & Yussef Dayes *What Kinda Music*

BLUE NOTE 2812124273

★★★★

Yussef Dayes is a unique drummer to behold: poised, precise and uncompromisingly relentless. His work with keyboardist Kamaal Williams as part of the Yussef Kamaal group was a touchstone for the London jazz resurgence. And since then, Dayes has gone on to form his own trio and collaborate with the likes of guitarist Mansur Brown.

With that pedigree, Dayes' collaboration with guitarist/vocalist Tom Misch is a surprising move toward pop marketability. *What Kinda Music* quells Dayes' vital rhythmic energy in service of Misch's crooning, making for a serviceable, yet ultimately underwhelming listen. The opening title track sets the tone: a hip-hop referencing string melody supplemented by a Dayes breakbeat before Misch's singing comes to the fore. Throughout, any sense of intrinsic interplay between the musicians or a foregrounding of Dayes is stifled. Instead, the hooks continue, as on the Radiohead-referencing "Festival," and seems like a woeful misuse of both artists' talents. A glimpse of the record's potential, though, comes on the Aretha Franklin-sampling "The Real"—a tantalizing mix of rare groove and classic soul. Sadly, it's too little, too late.

—Ammar Kalia



**What Kinda Music:** What Kinda Music; Festival; Nightrider; Tidal Wave; Sensational; The Real; Lift Off; I Did It For You; Last 100; Kyiv; Julie Mangos; Storm Before The Calm. (50:48)

**Personnel:** Tom Misch, guitar, synthesizer, vocals; Yussef Dayes, drums; Rocco Palladino, bass; Freddie Gibbs (3), vocals; Kaidi Akinnibi (12), saxophone.

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

## Matthew Shipp *The Piano Equation*

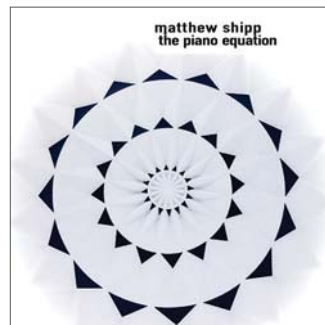
TAO FORMS 01

★★★★

Two years have passed since Matthew Shipp's previous solo album, *Zero*. That record's title reflected his cosmic preoccupations, as well as the thought that no matter the depth of a pianist's experience, at the moment they sit down to improvise, they begin from nothing. But Shipp is thoughtful enough to return with another solo disc informed by the opposite notion: There is a system at work in his music.

*The Piano Equation* could be additive, since the sum of Shipp and a piano is a sound identifiably different from the sum of any other performer and that same instrument. Maybe it's the sum of certain musical qualities. One would be the clarity of his playing; for a guy who has spent a lot of time rumbling behind very loud saxophonists, Shipp articulates the title piece's theme and elaborations with exquisite delicacy. Another would be the maneuverability that enables him to pivot from a Monkish groove to dense, dizzying runs on "Swing Note From Deep Space." And one aspect of his practice that's grown especially rewarding is his encoding complex emotional experiences in abstract musical information, as he does on the Ellington-derived fantasia "Land Of The Secrets." It all adds up to a rewarding return to Shipp's most irreducible musical setting.

—Bill Meyer



**The Piano Equation:** Piano Equation; Swing Note From Deep Space; Piano In Hyperspace; Vortex Factor; Land Of The Secrets; Void Equation; Tone Pocket; Clown Pulse; Radio Signals Equation; Emission; Cosmic Juice. (51:05)

**Personnel:** Matthew Shipp, piano.

**Ordering info:** [aumfidelity.com/taoforms.htm](http://aumfidelity.com/taoforms.htm)

**Myra Melford/  
Zeena Parkins/  
Miya Masaoka**  
*MZM*

INFREQUENT STREAMS 1015

★★★★

Three of the most inventive improvisers on the creative music scene joined forces for the first time on *MZM*, a 2017 album now seeing its reissue. The result is always compelling, often surprising and swings effortlessly between the wildly manic and deeply meditative. Though electroacoustic koto player Miya Masaoka is the only artist to have actually performed with live insects, the natural world inspires the titles and soundscapes of several tracks. Beginning with “Red Spider,” a lighthearted meet-and-greet where the trio weaves a web that draws listeners in, *MZM* gets stickier as it progresses. The head-on collision of “Bug” foreshadows the penultimate track, “Ant,” on which the tiny titular insect is depicted through the force of Masaoka’s wildly percussive koto, the eruptions of Zeena Parkins’ harp and Myra Melford’s machine-gun keyboard clusters. But *MZM* is hardly earthbound, soaring to “Saturn,” surrounded by rings generated by Parkins’ synthesized harp, and creating its own DNA “Spiral” with toy piano and Masaoka’s bowed 21-string bass koto. This reboot gives a well-deserved encore to the power of *MZM* and these three inimitable improvisers.

—Cree McCree



**MZM:** Red Spider; Bug; Saturn; Eight-Burst; Retina; Taurus; Southern Owl; Spiral; Ant; Rosette. (51:44)  
**Personnel:** Miya Masaoka, 21-string koto; Zeena Parkins, electric harp, electronics; Myra Melford, piano.

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

**David Tranchina**  
**Large-ish**  
**Ensemble**  
*The Ogre*

BIG EGO

★★★★

“Snow In Altadena” begins as epics are supposed to, *in media res*, with a no-nonsense chart of stacked winds and a driving, looped rhythm. It sets the tone for a powerful album by bassist/composer David Tranchina, who can’t help writing with dramatic intent.

Tranchina’s models are, pretty transparently, Ellington and Mingus, the former in tailoring the charts to his soloists, and the latter in building the music very much from the bass. Tranchina himself is the iron core to every track, even “The Ogre,” which has an unexpectedly gentle sway, more big-friendly-giant than fierce nemesis. The arrangements are uniformly impeccable and seem to lead logically, even inevitably, into solo features. This is music of rugged romanticism, the “-ish” part of the band’s name a sign that there is a lot of power held in reserve on every track, nothing pushed to extremes, but modulated carefully in the service of the music. Tranchina’s earlier work offered hints that he would be a monster—or ogre—on a bigger stage, and this one confirms it in every measure.

—Brian Morton



**The Ogre:** Snow In Altadena; Subhuman; Swashbuckler; The Ogre; Blood In Your Veins; Funk In Space. (40:32)

**Personnel:** Greg Zilboorg, Dan Rosenboom, trumpet, flugelhorn; Ryan Dragon, trombone; Juliane Gralle, tuba, bass trombone; Michael Mull, alto saxophone, clarinet, flute; Joe Santa Maria, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Ted Taforo, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, clarinet, flute; Brian Walsh, bass clarinet, baritone saxophone, clarinet; Cathlene Pineda, piano; Alex Noice, electric guitar; David Tranchina, bass; Tina Raymond, drums.

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

**Blaer**  
*Yellow*

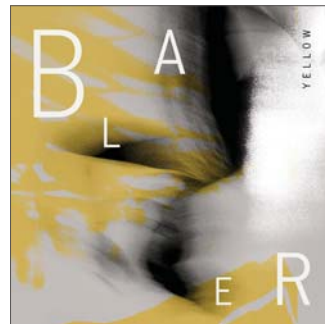
RONIN RHYTHM 023

★★★★

As heard on its impressive third album, *Yellow*, Blaer lives somewhere between jazz and the structural realm of new music. Centering this unique Swiss quintet is pianist/composer Maja Nydegger, whose natural idiom-crossing feats find ways of energizing her largely minor-mode palette.

Opening with the gentle title track, Nydegger creates minimal but carefully conceived compositional structures and explores fresh musical notions of how to reinvent the “jazz” band. While her anchoring piano often moves in deceptively simple patterns—conjuring moody atmospheric effects—she deploys improvisation, via a standard jazz-related definition, in a sparing role here. Undulant reed textures rise from a nearly silent mist on “Epilog,” recalling Norwegian Christian Wallumrød’s mystical inventions, while “All We Need” sounds like a sensuous math puzzle, with Philippe Ducommun’s drumming energies beneath the pianist’s mesmeric design. The album-closing and almost hymn-like epic “Arktis” grows gradually out of Nydegger’s simple one-note motif, mulling and musing, while building waves of intensity in ways listeners won’t immediately recognize or be able to easily categorize. More generally, a seductively slippery identity graces *Yellow*—and the ongoing Blaer adventure.

—Josef Woodard



**Yellow:** Yellow; The Unknown; Years; Kosmo; Epilog; All We Need; Arktis. (55:58)

**Personnel:** Maja Nydegger, piano; Nils Fischer, saxophone, bass clarinet; Claudio Von Arx, saxophone; Simon Itern, bass; Philippe Ducommun, drums.

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

**George DeLancey**  
*Paradise*

SELF RELEASE

★★½

There always will be a notion of jazz as a warm, nostalgic blanket. And for the cohort with that mentality, bassist George DeLancey’s *Paradise* should hit the spot. There are no nods to the form’s outer limits or the decades of evolution since the dawn of cool jazz

and hard-bop. It feels like something that’s been trapped in amber. If you take it for what it is, though, *Paradise* is a well-executed affair, with no shortage of indelible melodies. Half the album is populated by DeLancey originals, and while he’s yet to distinguish himself as a singular voice, the bassist shows himself to have decent taste: As a composer, he leans toward carefully arranged ballads, with “To Another Girl” and “Alone Time” owing a debt to Gil Evans’ sumptuous arranging. The band’s take on other composers’ work is risk-averse, too, but expertly done. The Modern Jazz Quartet waltz “Skating In Central Park” wafts by with just the right touch of melancholy, aided by pianist Tadataka Unno’s delicate touch. If DeLancey and his band are committed to older forms, let it be said that they go all the way. *Paradise* is clear and crisp, and while there are no real surprises, it’d be hard to deny that DeLancey has accomplished his goal.

—Dustin Kratovich



**Paradise:** Paradise; Bohemia After Dark; To Another Girl; Skating In Central Park; Alone Time; Locomotive; While I Was Away; All The Things You Are. (32:01)

**Personnel:** George DeLancey, bass; Caleb Wheeler Curtis, alto saxophone; Jonathan Beshay, tenor saxophone, clarinet (4); Tony Lustig, baritone saxophone, soprano saxophone (1); Mike Sailors, trumpet, flugelhorn; Robert Edwards, trombone; Tadataka Unno, piano; Lawrence Leathers, drums; Tatum Greenblatt, trumpet (8); Ray Cetta, tuba (8).

Ordering info: [music.apple.com](http://music.apple.com)



## Frisell/Lage/Riley John Zorn: *Virtue*

TZADIK 8370

★★★★½

On *Virtue*, derived solely from John Zorn compositions, guitarists Bill Frisell, Julian Lage and Gyan Riley place a premium on delicacy, melody and lyricism, while summoning a work reminiscent of *The Guitar Trio* by John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola and Paco De Lucia.

The comparison is immediately apparent on the evocative opener, "Juliana," inspired by Julian of Norwich, a 14th-century abbess and one of the founders of Christian mysticism. The three guitarists come out of the gate with dazzling virtuosity on this intricate labyrinth of arpeggiations over shifting chords and stop-time terrain. By contrast, the dissonance, dramatic use of space and extended techniques on "Visiones" and "Infernal Night (Sin Is Behovely)" recall Bola Sete's 1975 solo LP *Ocean*. The rubato "Divine Revelations" is a more open-ended exploration of tone and texture by the sympathetic trio, and the gently meditative "Per Amica Silencia Lunae" shows uncommon sensitivity and an uncanny group-think. For sheer accessibility, though, it doesn't get any more buoyant and infectious than "Conveniens." Tight ensemble work, expertly executed with elegance and impeccable taste by three team players.

—Bill Milkowski

**Virtue:** Juliana; Apart From The World; Visiones; Conveniens; Divine Revelations; Per Amica Silencia Lunae; The Hazelnut; An Orb-Like Canopy Of Gentle Darkness; All Shall Be Well; The Ground Of Our Beseeking; Ancrene Wisse; Infernal Night (Sin Is Behovely). (46:25)

**Personnel:** Bill Frisell, Julian Lage, Gyan Riley, guitar.

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



## GoGo Penguin *GoGo Penguin*

BLUE NOTE 0878918

★★★½

Chris Illingworth's lonely piano opens this affair, joined by the sound of rain and eventually distant children. And the chilling bleakness that kicks off GoGo Penguin's latest album remains the center of attention for all 10 tracks.

More often than not, the U.K. trio sounds like a documentary soundtrack: It's propulsive, yet rarely commanding of complete attention. But that doesn't mean the band isn't working hard. "Signal In The Noise," perhaps the most purely acoustic effort here, sizzles and floats as bassist Nick Blacka injects humanity and a sense of control amid his careening band-mates. "F Maj Pixie," a title hinting at the nerdistry at work, is the closest the album gets to a pop sound. There are melodic snippets from the echoey piano, and Illingworth even throws out some rapid-fire notes before laying out, a break in the perpetual sound. Of course, his left hand is still typing out a strict rhythm; space feels like the enemy here. The dramatic builds on "Kora" and "Totem" find drummer Rob Turner giving it his all, though Illingworth's minimalist repetition grows tiresome. If there is a place for a remix here, it would be to strip away everything but the drums. That's where the meat and the variety lies. This album is jazz, but without swing, without solos, without dissonance and without much conflict.



**GoGo Penguin:** 1#; Atomised; Signal In The Noise; Open; F Maj Pixie; Kora; Totem; Embers; To The Nth; Don't Go. (42:44)

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

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

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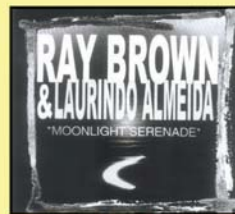
—Midwest Record Reviews  
SUMMIT RECORDS



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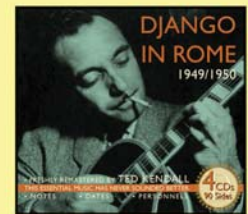
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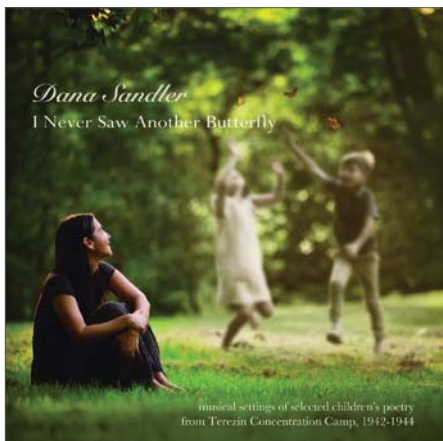
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**Dana Sandler**  
***I Never Saw Another Butterfly***  
 FRACTAMODI 014

★★★★

Theodor Adorno's famous dictum—writing “poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”—is a good rule to abide by. It seems insensitive at best to try and create art inspired by such an incomprehensible horror—though many have tried with varying degrees of success. Composer/vocalist Dana Sandler finds a way around Adorno's exhortation with *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, based on the collection of the same name that consists of poetry and drawings done by children who lived in

the Theresienstadt concentration camp in what now is the Czech Republic. Fifteen-thousand children were sent through the camp; fewer than 100 survived. Sandler isn't the first to interpret this material, but her jazz background puts her in rarefied territory. The album functions as a kind of song cycle with four parts, each dedicated to a different child.

Accompanied by a top-notch sextet—including ace klezmer clarinetist Michael Winograd, whose evocative lines summon the *shtetl*—Sandler puts forth a series of contemplative tracks, some of which are short and instrumental, functioning as vignettes that set the mood before a new poem surfaces. Her voice is clear, direct and unembellished, letting the words shine through. So, in that spirit, here are the last two stanzas of Pavel Friedmann's poem that serve as lyrics on “The Butterfly”: “For seven weeks I've lived in here/ Penned up inside this ghetto/ But I have found what I love here/ The dandelions call to me/ And the white chestnut branches in the court/ Only I never saw another butterfly/ That butterfly was the last one/ Butterflies don't live in here/ In the ghetto.”

—Matthew Kassel

***I Never Saw Another Butterfly***: Dear Pavel; The Butterfly; Dear Franta; Home/The Old House; The Garden; Dear Alena; Untitled; I'd Like To Go Alone/Ani Ma'amin; Tears; Dear Anonymous; On A Sunny Evening; Birdsong/Butterfly Reprise. (40:03)

**Personnel**: Dana Sandler, vocals; Carmen Staff, piano; Peter Kenagy, alto saxophone, clarinet; Michael Winograd (8), clarinet; Jorge Roeder, bass; Austin McMahon, drums, percussion.

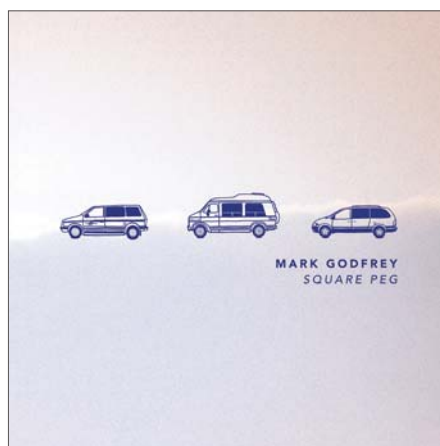
**Ordering info:** [danasandler.com](http://danasandler.com)

**Mark Godfrey**  
***Square Peg***  
 SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

*Square Peg* is Mark Godfrey's second release as a leader, and it finds the Canadian bassist taking a quintet through 10 originals that he wrote during a four-year period while frequently traveling between Toronto and New York in a 2006 Dodge minivan. Many of the song titles have to do with making that drive, although “One Game Away From Winter” is a meditation on baseball.

The opener, “Black Stars,” begins with some otherworldly electronics before it becomes a fertile vehicle for solos by tenorist Allison Au and pianist Chris Pruden, briefly returning to the electronics at its conclusion. “Square Peg” is an atmospheric work with Godfrey commenting on the proceedings—à la Charlie Haden—as Pruden's trills on the piano add some color. “No Gig Today” is relatively playful, a little reminiscent of Keith Jarrett's American Quartet of the 1970s, and has plenty of interplay between the pair of saxophonists, including a surprising unaccompanied section. The slow and somewhat gloomy strut of “U.S.S. Rent-A-Car” makes one wonder if that particular car will survive the trip, while Matt Woroshyl's adventurous preaching on the tenor takes honors. Other highpoints include



the wistful ballad “One Game Away From Winter,” the hyper “Forty Minutes Or More”—which sounds like an attempt to get through a traffic jam—and a feature for Godfrey's unaccompanied bass, the thoughtful “Bucket List.”

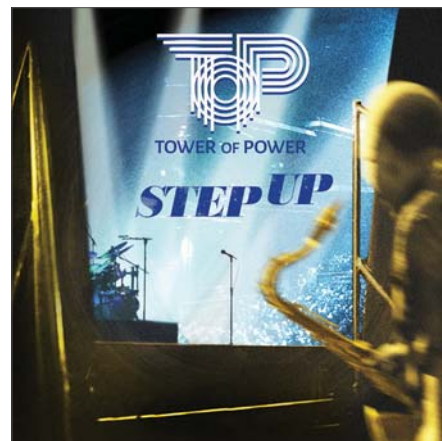
There are fine solos from each of the musicians here, but it's Godfrey's instrument that provides constant commentary and consistently sets the post-bop direction.

—Scott Yanow

***Square Peg***: Black Stars; Square Peg; No Gig Today; U.S.S. Rent-A-Car; Skyline; One Game Away From Winter; Forty Minutes Or More; Driving Westbound; McDuff; Bucket List. (59:14)

**Personnel**: Mark Godfrey, bass; Allison Au, alto saxophone; Matt Woroshyl, tenor saxophone; Chris Pruden, piano; Nick Fraser, drums.

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



**Tower of Power**  
***Step Up***  
 ARTISTRY/MACK AVENUE 7067  
 ★★★★★½

*Step Up* opens with “East Bay! All The Way!,” a minute-long horn-heavy affirmation of exactly where Tower of Power is coming from; the group has been proudly representing the Oakland area since its 1970 debut, *East Bay Grease*.

Since then, its calling card has been the famed Tower of Power horn section, a collective featured on recordings by Santana, Al Kooper and dozens more. Here, the section supplies a full, sweet brassy bite that's all too often missing in contemporary soul music. Saxophonist/composer Emilio Castillo, baritone saxophonist/lyricist Stephen “Doc” Kupka and drummer David Garibaldi each have been with the group since that very first album, contributing to a sense that the heart of the outfit has remained unchanged during the ensuing years. Tracks like “Addicted To You” and “Sleeping With You Baby” are hooky, horn-drenched grooves that harken back to classic ToP love songs like “So Very Hard To Go.”

*Step Up* is chock full of the romantic tunes like these, but it also features tracks that speak to current social and political situations (another hallmark of the band's catalog). “Any Excuse Will Do” expressly decries the divisive culture of finger-pointing just as “Only So Much Oil In The Ground” criticized cavalier consumption during the 1973 oil crisis. Both feature lyrics by Kupka, and clearly, he still has a lot to say, again proving that a stone jam also can provide listeners food for thought.

—Ayana Contreras

***Step Up***: East Bay! All The Way!; Step Up; The Story Of You And I; Who Would Have Thought?; Addicted To You; Look In My Eyes; You Da One; Sleeping With You Baby; If It's Tea Give Me Coffee; Beyond My Wildest Dreams; Any Excuse Will Do; If You Wanna Be A Winner; Let's Celebrate Our Love; East Bay! Oakland All The Way! (54:34)

**Personnel**: Emilio Castillo, tenor saxophone, vocals; Stephen “Doc” Kupka, baritone saxophone; Francis Rocco Prestia, bass; David Garibaldi, drums, timbales (1, 7, 12); Tom Politzer, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone; Adolfo Acosta, Sal Cracchiolo, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jerry Cortez, guitar, electric sitar (4), vocals; Roger Smith, keyboards, vocals; Ray Greene, trombone, vocals; Joe Vannelli, keyboards, percussion; Chuck Hansen, bass saxophone (12); Leah Meux, Tiwana Porter, Melanie Jackson, Marcus Scott, vocals; Tower Of Power Strings, violin, cello (4, 5, 8).

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# Applying a Dyadic Approach to Harmony

A dyadic approach to harmony has nearly infinite potential for creative applications. The technique was conceived to develop fluency with harmonic approaches that Jimmy Wyble incorporated into his book *The Art of Two-Line Improvisation*, a collection of etudes written during the '70s. Going through this process has greatly benefited my harmonic sense. It has helped with comping and solo guitar playing, and has also influenced monophonic linear construction in a way that can benefit any instrumentalist.

There are five different four-note chords that shape the majority of jazz harmony. These chords are major 7 (1, 3, 5, 7), dominant 7 (1, 3, 5, ♭7), minor 7 (1, ♭3, 5, ♭7), minor 7♭5 (1, ♭3, ♭5, ♭7) and diminished 7 (1, ♭3, ♭5, ♭♭7). Let's start with the major 7 sound. If we take a Cmaj7, we get the notes C (root), E (major 3rd), G (5th) and B (7th). For the dyadic technique, I want to apply the concept of harmonizing a scale. If we were to harmonize a C major scale in 4ths, we would get something that looks like Example 1.

In this example, we are adding a diatonic fourth to our C major scalar melody. If we think of the arpeggio (see Example 2) as a "scale" and apply the same idea, harmonizing in fourths would result in what we see in Example 3. We could harmonize in 2nds and 3rds as well (see Examples 4 and 5).

Let's start with Example 3. Begin with the lowest available note on your instrument and take these shapes up the full range. On guitar it

would look something like Example 6.

Try this ascending and descending in all 12 keys to develop a strong command of harmonized chord tones.

On guitar, I like to apply this approach positionally. There is a position for each of the four chord tones. Try starting in your lowest available position and shifting to the next position at the top or bottom of that position's range. Keep track of the "imaginary root" chord tone on the sixth string. Loosely think of position as what you can comfortably access from your imaginary root without having to shift your hand position up or down the fretboard. This approach ascending would look like Example 7.

Try this approach ascending and descending, and in all keys. On guitar, try different fingerings and string combinations to find different shapes. For monophonic instrumentalists, try playing the dyads broken, and experiment with different creative rhythmic approaches.

Use a metronome for the exercises, thinking of it on different beats (or partials of the beat), and keep track of eight-bar cycles. Start by trying with the metronome on beats 1, 2, 3 or 4, or on the four possible upbeats (swung and straight). Once those feel comfortable, try the metronome on the different triplets or 16th notes of each beat. Try different time signatures, try dotted quarters. Keeping track of simple forms will develop steadiness as ideas go over the bar line.

Continuing on, the major 7 actually has 12 different harmonic implications. If we think

of the chord starting over all 12 notes, we get 12 different chord qualities. Let's think of the major 7 in distances away from the new root; e.g., Cmaj7/F will be up a perfect fifth. Staying in C, we get Example 8.

Let's continue using our five main chord qualities to classify potential applications of the major 7. Some of these implied harmonies are challenging to even classify. Play around with the sounds and reflect on how you hear them; you might come up with different results. From the example, we realize the following 12 potential applications of a major 7:

- Major: starting on root (/C); up a 5th (/F); up a 4th (/G); up a major 3rd (/A♭); up a major 2nd (/B♭).
- Dominant: up a minor 7th (/D); up a major 6th (E♭); up a tritone (/G♭).
- Minor: up a minor 6th (/E); up a minor 3rd (/A).
- Minor 7♭5: up a major 7th (/D♭); up a minor 2nd (/B).
- Diminished: N/A (?)

The basic major 7 material we worked on can now be applied for a plethora of new sounds. Use your ears to see which of these superimpositions draw you in. Judge them in terms of utility and level of consonance. These sounds range from "inside" to "outside"—see if you can categorize them.

Let's revisit our dyad exercise, starting with the sounds that appeal to your ear the most. You should now be comfortable with your root-position major 7 dyads. To be thorough, I like to work from the most inside sounds to the more outside ones, but follow your ears and investigate whatever sounds you are excited and curious about. Perhaps you won't use all 12 permutations of the major 7—that's OK. Some are much more stable than others and imply stronger harmonies. Let's start with up-a-minor-3rd (/A) as our first example since it creates a nice minor 9 sound.

Using this, our dyads in Examples 6 and 7 now have completely new connotations. To facilitate hearing the new sound, imagine the new root in your head, or, if your instrument allows, sing it while playing. You've already prepared for this exercise by approaching the major 7 sound in its basic form; we are just taking it one step further and finding new applications. Work on these exercises thinking of a new root until they feel as comfortable as they did with the original root. All of a sudden you are accessing minor sounds (and an extended range of harmonic extensions) without any new chords. You can see how this process can be applied to all 12 root permutations of the major 7.

Up until this point, we have used major 7 for



all of our examples. This process can and should be applied to each of the five main chord groups. By following this process, you will not only refine fluency with fundamental chords, but will access harmony that takes you far beyond the basics.

Think of any four-note chord. The same process can be applied and will systematically develop your facility with it. After doing the five basic four-note chords, move on to commonly used jazz chords like min/maj7, dom7sus4 and maj7#5. From there, extend into others like maj7sus2, min/maj7#5, etc. Chase sounds that appeal to you and create your own personal and unique chordal vocabulary. Think about restarting the process with dyads from harmonized arpeggios in 2nds or 3rds (as in Examples 4–5).

If playing a chordal instrument, move between block dyads for an alternate approach to harmony. If playing a monophonic instrument, develop lines around these dyads and experiment with different four-note chords for varying levels of consonance and dissonance. The possibilities are nearly endless. Think creatively to keep finding new ways to practice and develop your harmonic musicianship. **DB**

Winner of first prize and Public's Choice Award at the 2014 Montreux Jazz Festival International Guitar Competition, Alex Goodman has been hailed as "a definite musical voice" (Guitar International) and as a musician of "dazzling improvisational dexterity and engagingly smart composition" (NYC Jazz Record). He is a multiple JUNO nominee, and regularly performs internationally and at New York's main jazz clubs. Goodman has just released *Etudes*, a method book developing a contrapuntal approach to guitar, and a new double CD, *Impressions In Blue And Red*. Access the book and CD, or contact him for online lessons, at alexgoodmanmusic.com.

**Examples 1–3**


**Examples 4–5**

**Example 6**

**Example 7**

**Example 8**


chord tones: implied harmony: 1, 3, 5, 7 Maj7	b3, b5, b7, 7 min7b5(add 7) ?	2, 4, 6, b7 13sus4	b2, 3, #5, 6 +(add b2, 13) - 13b9#5 ?	R, b3, 5, b6 minor b6 (aeolian)	2, #11, 5, 7 Major7#11sus2
/C (starting on root)	/Db (Maj7 up maj7th from new root)	/D (...up min7th)	/Eb (...up maj6th)	/E (...up min6th)	/F (...up P5th)
b2, 4, b5, b7 dom7sus4b2b5	R, 3, 4, 6 Maj6 add 11	b3, 3, #5, 7 Maj7#5#9	2, b3, 5, b7 Min9	b2, 2, #11, 6 Maj6sus2#11b9	R, b2, 4, #5 C/B (locrian)
/Gb (...up tritone)	/G (...up P4th)	/Ab (...up maj3rd)	/A (...up min3rd)	/Bb (...up maj2nd)	/B (...up min2nd)

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## D'Angelico Excel Throwback Style B

### Modernizing Tradition

John D'Angelico produced some of the world's finest archtop guitars, with original vintage models currently selling for as much as \$60,000. After John's passing in 1964, the D'Angelico name remained dormant for decades until the trademark was purchased and the iconic brand was revitalized with an entirely new line of instruments that pay tribute to the master's vision, while remaining surprisingly affordable. D'Angelico Guitars recently unveiled its Excel Throwback collection with revamped versions of the company's EXL-1 and Style B guitars, which offer classic John D'Angelico styling at an attractive \$1,999 price point.

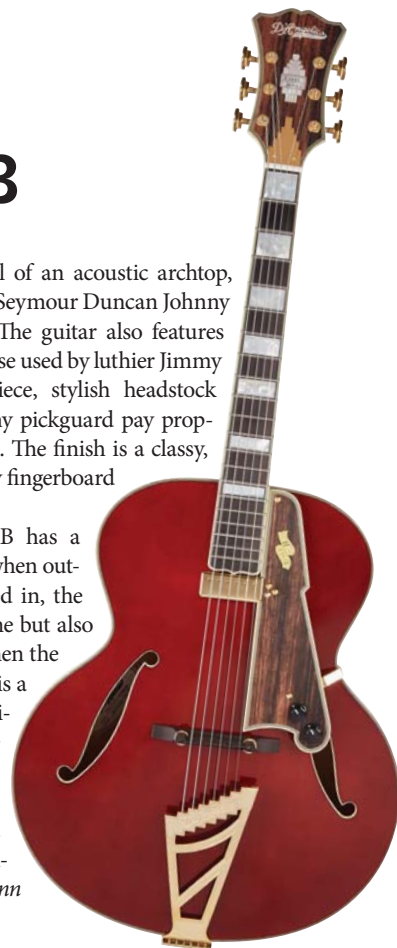
While John D'Angelico's original hand-carved instruments were all solid wood, the current D'Angelico team has taken a different route, manufacturing guitars in Korea using laminate construction in order to keep prices low, but still retaining many of John's original design elements. "Our goal is to rebuild the brand in a modern light," said Ryan Kershaw, vice president of product development and artist relations for D'Angelico Guitars. "We are inspired by John, but are also moving forward." The Excel Throwback collection utilizes many of D'Angelico's postwar aesthetics from the late 1940s.

I play-tested the Style B, which arrived in a pro-grade hard-shell case. At first glance, the guitar is extremely attractive with a distinct Art Deco vibe. The Style B is a non-cutaway with a full 17-inch bout and a comfortable 2.8-inch depth, slightly thinner than the 3-inch EXL-1. It has a 24.75-inch scale and 20 frets to the body (also a bit shorter than the 25.5-inch

EXL-1). Its construction is typical of an acoustic archtop, with a floating ebony bridge and a Seymour Duncan Johnny Smith floating mini-humbucker. The guitar also features enlarged f-holes reminiscent of those used by luthier Jimmy D'Aquisto. The gold-plated tailpiece, stylish headstock design and elegant macassar ebony pickguard pay proper homage to the company's roots. The finish is a classy, deep red-wine color, and the ebony fingerboard boasts tasteful full-block inlays.

The Excel Throwback Style B has a strong acoustic tone, particularly when out-fitted with heavier strings. Plugged in, the guitar is capable of a solid jazz tone but also has a surprising amount of bite when the treble is cranked. The maple neck is a comfortable "C" profile, and the guitar played great using a pick or bare fingers.

D'Angelico has done an admirable job of balancing quality, style and cost to deliver these new vintage-inspired instruments. —Keith Baumann  
[dangelicoguitars.com](http://dangelicoguitars.com)



## Fender Tone Master Twin Reverb

### Classic Tube Tone Without the Weight

Fender's Tone Master series combines old designs and new technology to create accurate digital versions of two classic analog tube amps: the Fender Twin Reverb and Fender Deluxe Reverb. They look and sound nearly identical to their older brothers while offering several key enhancements, including a significant reduction in weight.

Fender entered the modeling market in 2001 with the Cyber Twin amp and has since added the Mustang and Champion lines to its digital offerings. Like most modeling amps, these offered options to simulate various amp, speaker and cabinet combinations. Recently, Fender came up with the idea of applying all of its modeling expertise into building a "single purpose" digital amp. "We've offered do-everything modeling amps like Mustangs for a long time," said Shane Nicholas, Fender's director of amplifiers and pro audio. "We thought it would be mind-blowing to throw about four times the Mustang's processing power at doing just one thing very, very well." That one thing was emulating a '65 Reissue amplifier as closely as possible. The Twin and Deluxe Reverb models were both selected for development, and the Tone Master amps were introduced last summer.

In creating the Tone Master line, Fender had two goals in mind. First and foremost, the amps had to look and feel exactly like their tube

counterparts. And second, they had to sound like them. I play-tested the Twin Reverb, and I can safely say that it looks identical to a '65 Reissue Twin Reverb (except for the Tone Master badge on the grill). This concept of a single-purpose modeling amp is unique, and kudos to Fender for blazing the trail. This twin of a Twin has the vibe for sure and easily could be mistaken for the original, at least until you pick it up. The new amp weighs a mere 33 pounds—32 less than the tube model—and that is a very big deal.

With its identical front panel layout, the Tone Master version operates exactly like a standard Twin. I was impressed with how much it sounded and performed like the tube version. It has that in-your-face presence and sparkle, and the spring reverb and vibrato are dead-on.

The Tone Master offers some nice bonuses.

The rear panel features a six-position attenuator switch for selecting the output power from 1 watt up to the full 85. This allows you to tailor the volume of the amp and affects the level at which breakup will begin to occur. There is also an XLR direct out that utilizes Impulse Response profiles to add room, microphone and speaker emulation to the line out.

Available for \$999, the Tone Master Twin Reverb is a game changer that is truly worth twice its weight in gold. —Keith Baumann

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# Matt Brewer

Assistant Matt Brewer, 37, is widely respected for the technical wizardry and wide musical scope he has brought to a panoply of sideman engagements with, as he put it, “people who write challenging music.” In addition to being a member of the SFJAZZ Collective, Brewer is an esteemed educator on the faculty of San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The most recent of his three leader albums on Criss Cross Jazz is *Ganymede*, a trio date with tenor saxophonist Mark Shim and drummer Damion Reid.

## Dave Holland/Zakir Hussain/Chris Potter

“Ziandi” (*Good Hope*, Edition, 2019) Holland, bass; Potter, tenor saxophone; Hussain, tabla, percussion.

The way the vamp was set up sounds like something Dave Holland would do. Sounds like an 11-beat cycle. Dave has experimented for a long time playing different meters, and he’s still pushing himself. His playing always has this pristine quality—a refined, pretty sound, that never feels strained or like he’s playing too hard. In the solo, he has a very fast vibrato; everything is very controlled, pristine, kind of perfect.

That must be Zakir Hussain, a modern master of music, and it’s obviously Chris Potter, also a modern master. It’s an interesting instrumentation: Not having a chordal instrument presents a lot of challenges, but the harmony was clear, and you didn’t feel like you missed any chords.

## Rodney Whitaker

“Just Squeeze Me” (*All Too Soon: The Music Of Duke Ellington, Origin*, 2019) Whitaker, bass; Brian Lynch, trumpet; Richard Roe, piano; Karriem Riggins, drums.

Is that “Just Squeeze Me”? I liked the drummer, really swinging but also understated and relaxed—a light, bright cymbal sound that allows the bass to speak and doesn’t get in the way of the low frequencies.

The bass player has nice facility in the higher register. He sounds like he’s coming from Ray Brown, with the right-hand articulation, clear punctuation and clean, crisp sound that Ray got from Jimmy Blanton. Sometimes people play the bass too hard to prove how great their beat is; here, the beat feels relaxed, without trying too hard to swing.

## Christian McBride’s New Jawn

“Sightseeing” (*Christian McBride’s New Jawn*, Mack Avenue, 2018) McBride, bass; Marcus Strickland, tenor saxophone; Josh Evans, trumpet; Nasheet Waits, drums.

This is Christian—New Jawn. I don’t think anybody [else] has that right-hand facility. He articulates so cleanly and so quickly. He’s also coming out of Ray in placing the beat and the percussive element of his sound. He’s clearly one of the great virtuosos of our time. Nasheet is one of my favorite people to play with—super swinging and super open. With him or Christian, no matter how abstract or complicated or free the music is, there’s some underpinning of groove and swing—some dance element. That track was a great example. It could go a million places and never really lose that thread.

The trumpet solo was ridiculous, too. Is this a tune from a Miles [Davis] record? Obviously, nobody [here] sounds like anybody in Miles’ band, but it’s reminiscent of Miles’ second quintet. It’s fun to hear Christian play this open. He can do *anything*.

## Edward Simon/Scott Colley/Brian Blade

“Kingspin” (*Steel House*, ArtistShare, 2017) Simon, piano; Colley, bass; Blade, drums.

That’s Scott Colley. Brian Blade’s cymbal sound is unmistakable. Ed Simon on piano. I could tell it was Scott from the particular way his



notes bloom; when he plays 16th-note ideas, they’re very clean but with a certain dynamic shape. Nice tune. I loved when it went to the release, the pretty changes, for a nice contrast after that long vamp in C-minor. Ed and Brian are such good accompanists. Ed is so strong rhythmically, so sensitive and funky, that you can take the music anywhere, and he has such a great touch. Brian is also incredibly sensitive, with a huge dynamic range and such a pretty drum sound.

## Michael Formanek’s Elusion Quartet

“Culture Of None” (*Time Like This*, Intakt, 2018) Formanek, bass; Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone; Kris Davis, piano; Ches Smith, drums.

I really liked that pointillistic melody at the end, which I would not have expected, given how the piece started. The whole form was interesting. I like the way the tenor player managed to play in a melodic, expressive way in the midst of music that I love but might be challenging for some people. Was it Malaby? Is Michael Formanek the bassist? Great bass player. Great sound. I know him more from his older records. Was this his composition? I dug the intervals he chose.

Was it Craig Taborn on piano? [after] “Kris is a great piano player . . . . The few times we’ve played together, she’s been amazing.

## Peter Slavov

“Bye” (*Little Stories*, Slavov Music, 2019) Slavov, bass; John Ellis, bass clarinet; Nitzan Gavrieli, piano; Diego Ramirez, drums.

Very strong bass playing. Eric Revis? Good intonation. Great sound. I like the composition a lot. At the beginning, I enjoyed the combination of bass and bass clarinet. It’s an interesting sound that you don’t often hear, and they blended well—smart use of orchestration. Joe Sanders? He put out a record that has bass clarinet. I have no idea who it is.

## Tiger Trio

“Honesty” (*Map Of Liberation*, RogueArt, 2019) Jöelle Léandre, bass; Myra Melford, piano; Nicole Mitchell, flute.

I dug that. I have no idea who it is, but the bass player has a really good sound with the bow, excellent intonation. Obviously, someone who’s studied the bow. You could categorize this music as experimental or avant-garde, but there was a good blues element in it—it was still very grounded. The blues is also very experimental and avant-garde. I liked hearing that aspect in this performance.

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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