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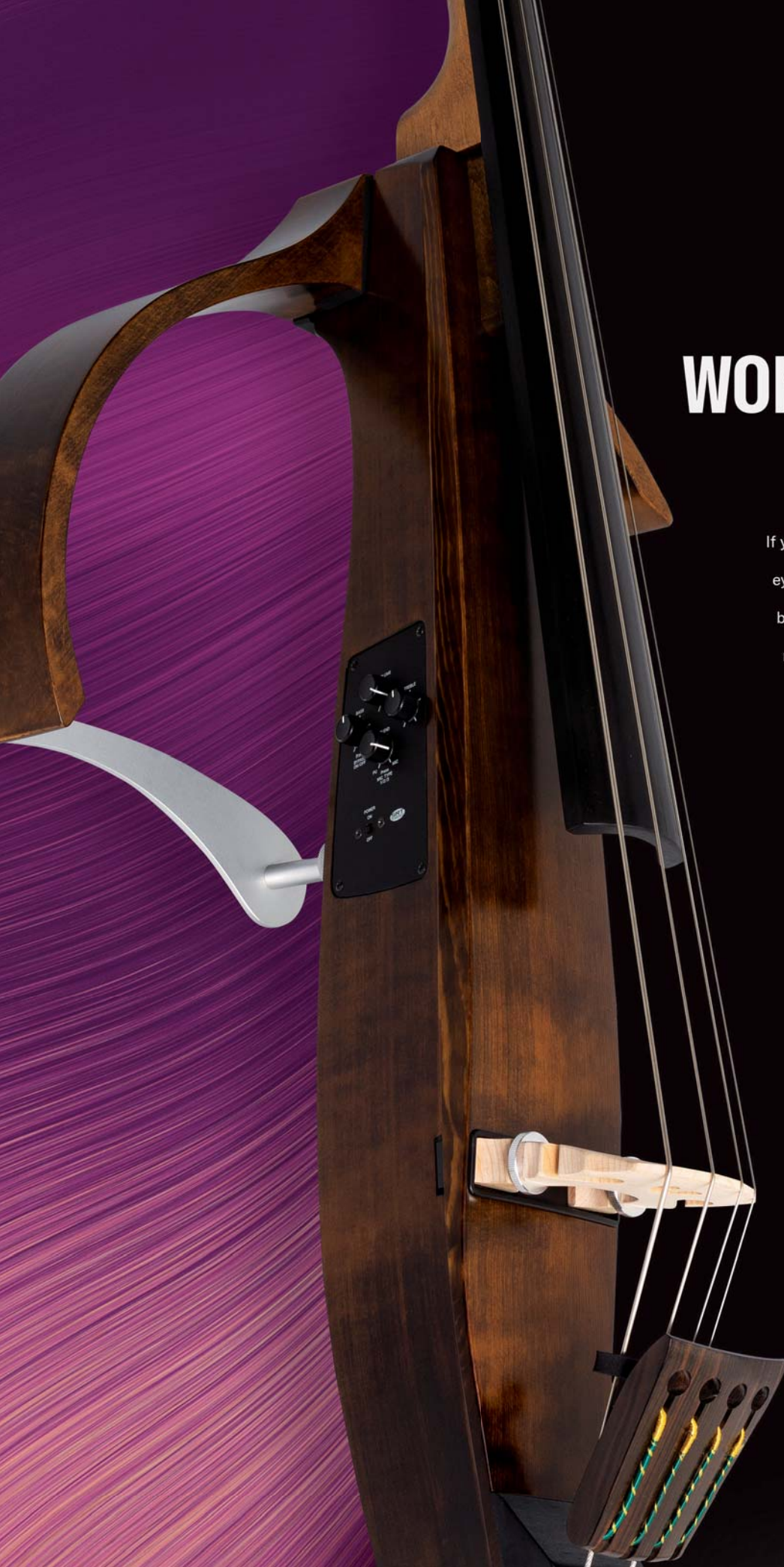
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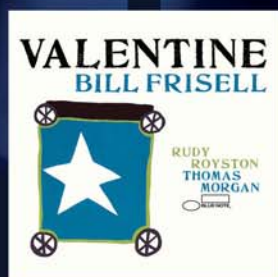
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BY SUZANNE LORGE

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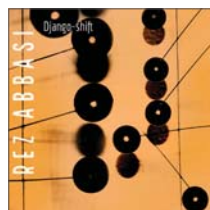
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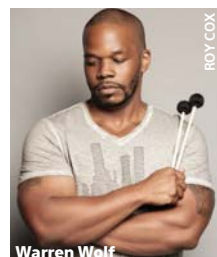
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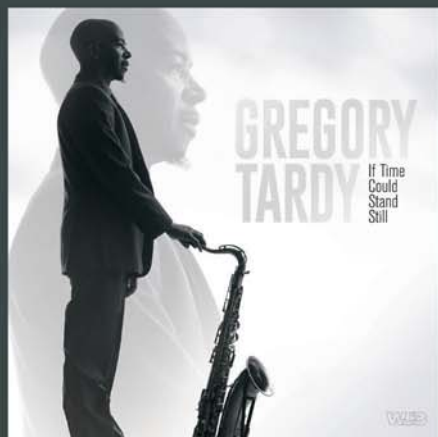
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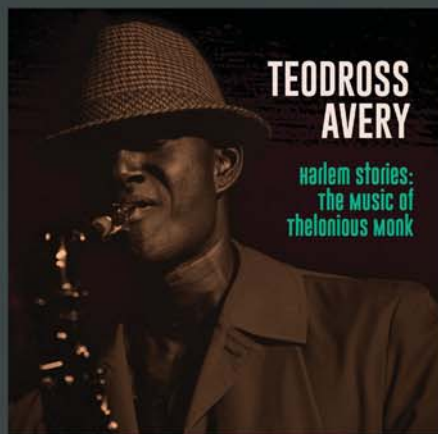
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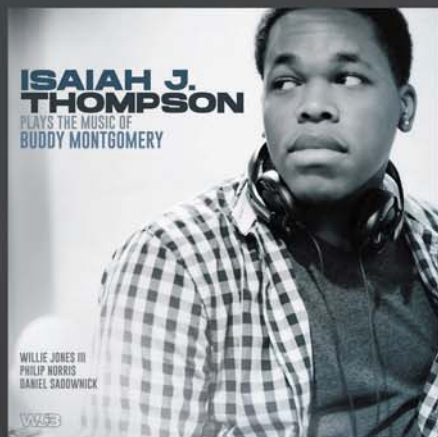




**Gregory Tardy**  
*If Time Could Stand Still*



**Teodross Avery**  
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**Isaiah Thompson**  
*Plays The Music of Buddy Montgomery*



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## First Take > BY DAVID BERTRAND

# The Hope of Fellowship

**THIS JUNETEENTH, I PUBLISHED MY** first blog post, which I titled “Black Sound, White Light.” It was a response to multiple claims of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement from musician peers in Brooklyn—where the scene, as I have experienced it, is predominantly white and generally unwelcoming (with the exception of my inner circle of friends). To me, many of these claims rang hollow because there was no true introspection, no questioning of why the scene here is almost completely white and why this latest awakening did not stir collective discomfort about the state of our own community.

After revisiting more than a decade of memories, I posted my thoughts and walked away from the laptop. I steeled myself for a rapid drop-off in friend count and an even chillier reception at jam sessions (whenever those again become possible).

When I logged back on, however, I saw that friends and contemporaries from around the world had reposted and commented with insightful sincerity. Publicly and privately, musician peers shared their own sense of alienation about being Black, immigrant or female while trying to navigate toward fellowship within and beyond the music. Some peers offered apologies for any past offense or exclusion that might have occurred. It felt hopeful.

In the wider world, systemic racism establishes structures that limit possibilities for Black people, and the jazz world is not immune. This often makes the way difficult for some but not others, and the path forward will remain a lawn of manicured euphemisms until we address and uproot entrenched imbalances.

Deftly protean, postmodern prejudice in the jazz community often masks itself under the pretext of skillfulness: A musician who plays well might be accepted, to a degree, but if not, he or she runs the risk of being scorned musically and reminded of their “otherness.” If the Black musician is inducted but observes the lion’s share of opportunities mostly remain within pre-existing cliques—often fostered by U.S. graduate programs only affordable to those with generational wealth—he or she must decide whether to continue supporting a scene that doesn’t reciprocate professionally or emotionally.

With so much of jazz life paused by the pandemic, we have ample time for deep rumination. I think the first collective step to anti-racist progress must be to assert the value of Black personhood independent of our con-



tributions to the culture. If you’re only moved to claim that our lives matter because your favorite tenor player is Black, that does not help us; a commitment to work through your own biases or apathy to become a true friend and neighbor will.

The friends I’m blessed with have done this, one in particular. Ignoring rain clouds overhead, my family met him on the last Saturday in June at Brooklyn’s Dr. Ronald McNair Park. We wanted to spend some time together before he moved back to his home state. Six feet between us, we recounted how he helped us move apartments in March, right as the NYC lockdown began. As we reminisced, my wife and I watched our baby daughter expand her picnic blanket empire.

At the other end of the park, a buoyant group of young Black people was conducting an informal photo shoot—only to leave when an NYPD patrol car pulled up, slow and obvious. Despite the sobering reminder, I was in the company of a man who sees me as his equal, on and off the bandstand. If any unwarranted attention had been directed at me, he would have challenged it. The clouds finally broke and we all ran home, laughing, to have impromptu coffee and Trinidadian pastries.

Then, as our friend takes his leave—knowing that by his own recollection he has not touched another person since a handshake on March 19—we give him a parting hug, acknowledging that amid his own journey, he has chosen to be my brother.

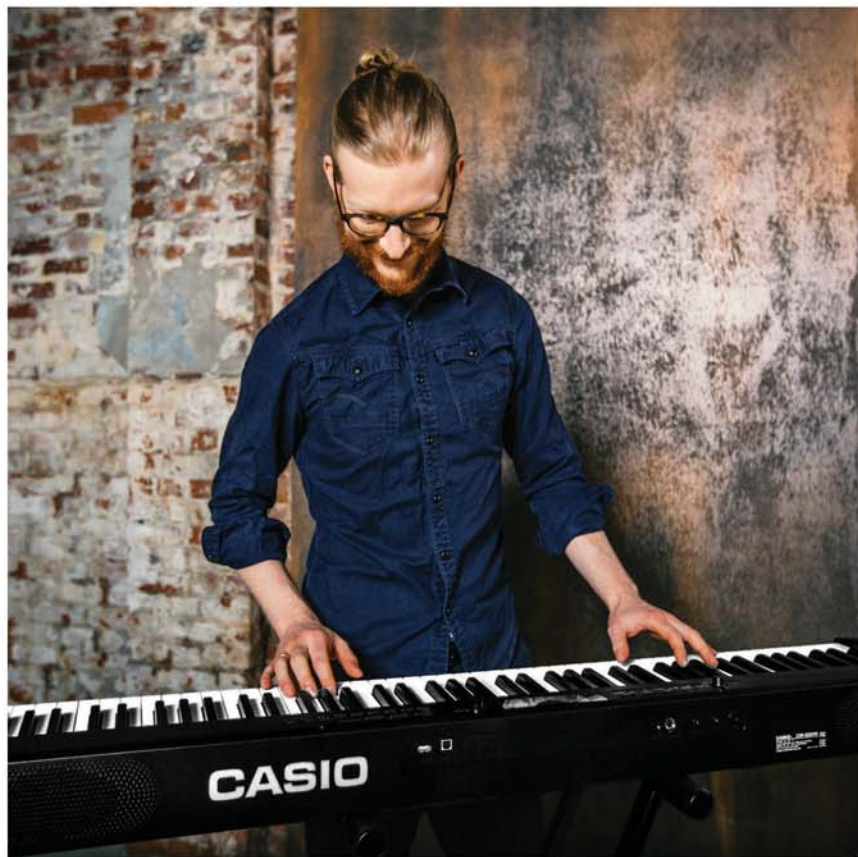
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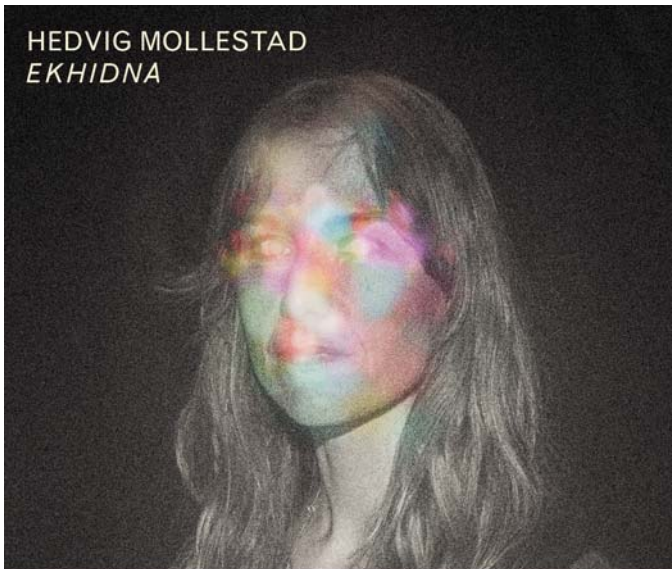
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## Chords & Discords >

### Remembering Richie Cole

Saxophonist Richie Cole was my friend for over 50 years. He was my colleague in Buddy Rich's band in 1969-'70. We were always seeking a jam session after the gig.

After leaving organized touring, Richie bought a van. That van became his transportation, his office, his practice room and his sleeping quarters.

*On the Road*, Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel, seemed to embody an aspect of the American character seeking the indefinable freedom of the soul. It has seemed to me for many years that Richie Cole virtually stepped out of the pages of Kerouac's narrative and became the realization of an epoch in jazz history.

His music is as warm and uninhibited as his character was.

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Richie Cole (1948-2020)

### Satisfied Subscriber

I was waiting. Suddenly another cover story featuring drummer Antonio Sánchez appeared in *DownBeat* ("Our Ears Together," May). I've been a subscriber to your magazine for decades, after discovering an issue with Earl Klugh on the cover in a special store that carried magazines from around the world.

Pat Metheny gave the greatest concert I have attended, with more than three hours of music, in a sold-out theater, and with an incredible band that included Antonio.

Pat was scheduled to play at that same theater when COVID-19 arrived. (I am keeping my set of eight tickets as a souvenir.) After receiving your July issue—which was thinner than ever before—I realized that it must be difficult to produce a magazine in this era of the hated virus. So, I appreciate your magazine even more.

Antonio is one of the greatest jazz musicians around (and Mexican as I am), fighting for better times, along with your great, still monthly magazine. As Pat said, "Better Days Ahead!"

GABRIEL VILLEGAS  
MEXICO CITY

### Dramatic Discord

I am writing in response to the Chords & Discords letter by the Rev. Jeffrey H. Walker in your July issue. Walker excoriates Hot Box critic John McDonough for his 2½-star rating of Christian McBride's *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait Of Four Icons*.

Walker bizarrely accuses McDonough of self-righteousness for having opined that excerpts of speeches by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. inserted in McBride's album struck him as "rather preachy." Walker concludes by heaping praise upon another Hot Box critic, Ammar Kalia, for his glowing review of McBride's album and his perceptiveness for having "heard it for what it was instead of what it wasn't."

Walker apparently doesn't appreciate the fact that he and McDonough share something in common: They both are expressing personal, subjective opinions.

My suggestion to Walker is to remember the old adage that "there's no accounting for taste."

CHARLES WINOKOOR  
FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

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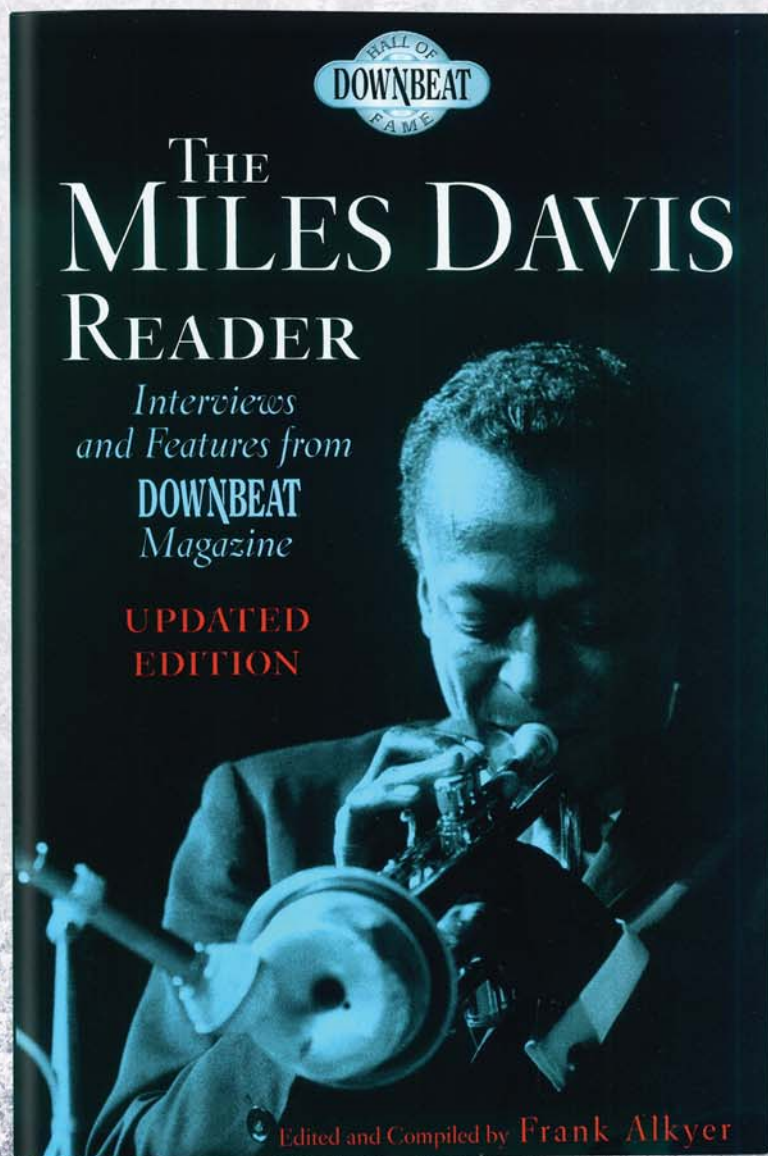
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# Beat



ANNA YATSEVICH

Matthew Shipp's *The Piano Equation* is the inaugural release on the Tao Forms label.

## Matthew Shipp's Steady Diet of Improv and Hard News

Pianist Matthew Shipp hasn't been playing with anyone recently. Most musicians haven't been, at least not in the way that we're all accustomed to. But in some ways, his latest solo endeavor—*The Piano Equation*, which came out late in May and ranks as the first release on drummer Whit Dickey's Tao Forms label—is fitting. It's a weird time filled with isolation and tension, spurring on whatever

er fissures in American society already existed.

Listeners, though, might benefit from the solemnity of a solo piano album, even if Shipp doesn't necessarily hue toward neat, straightforward work. There's a bit of off-kilter Thelonious Monk in portions of Shipp's inflection, but also interstellar grace and idiomatic systems of organization that might not, at first blush, make sense to the uninitiated. Now, though, we

all have time to sit and think. And *The Piano Equation* presents an opportunity to pore over music derived from Shipp's internal rhymes.

The pianist's own voracious devouring of culture and media is on display on his Facebook page, veering from sports to music and politics. Following his chat with DownBeat early in the spring—in which he maybe referenced Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*—the



pianist posted a story from the South China Morning Post that detailed former National Security Adviser John Bolton's criticisms of President Donald Trump from his book *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*. When was the last time you read the South China Morning Post?

**Your Facebook feed is known for being political and engaged, and it probably serves as a news source for some people. With the volume of stuff that you're going through now, how much of your day is spent just consuming news?**

**[My music] truly is an attempt to dwell in a world that is outside of space and time, outside of the particular realm of problems that we encounter.**

I've been consuming news my whole life, so I can do it quickly. I have a system down, where I can find a broad range of stuff really quickly. You know, most of my day is music, in some way—whether it's practicing or the business. I would say in the morning, there are hours of figuring out what happened overnight. Then, maybe a half hour in the afternoon, and then late at night, I finish reading and watch cable news.

It's like anything that you've been doing for a long time, you just know exactly the sources to go to. You get a system down. But I'm not going to spend all day, because I am a jazz musician. I have that to attend to. I mean, during this period, there's nothing else you're doing—you're not watching sports.

**Like a lot of Americans, I'm gonna guess that your attention vacillates between the pandemic and protests that emerged after George Floyd was killed. So, there's this dichotomy ...**

I mean, the protests are necessary. It's a historic time. To be honest, I haven't been involved with a bunch of protests, mainly because I'm turning 60—I haven't had any health issues. But the protests are necessary. They're spontaneous, they're natural. It's just the time.

The mask thing is a separate thing, you know. People should be wearing masks. It's simple.

**You're writing, playing and improvising through all of**

**this. Have you noticed a change in how you're relating to music?**

No, my music is completely metaphysical. And the world of reality as we know it here on this planet—I truly use music to go to another place, another energy realm. I don't know what to call it. It's someplace deep inside of me. And it is not impacted by current events, whatsoever. It truly is an attempt to dwell in a world that is outside of space and time, outside of the particular realm of problems that we encounter.

The psychological space I enter into is a

mystic one of somebody who is trying to transcend; the music is an attempt to do that.

**So, improvising is an escape.**

I don't know what escape means. You can't escape yourself, so trying to play yourself isn't really an escape. The harsh reality that you can see the world presenting to you—music, or all art, is either a way to confront it or a way to transcend it. Or a way to transcend it by confronting it. I don't know where I fit into that, but I do know that what I'm trying to get across to people when I play is something that is positive.

You know, I'm just trying to do my little part in all of this.

**When we spoke before, I think you quoted Bruce Lee at some point, and I've seen you post stuff about boxing, wrestling and French author Jean Genet. That's a huge diversity of interests. How do you assimilate all of that information?**

Well, first of all, everything is information—everything is energy and vibration.

Everything is a spectacle, of sorts. And everything is coded with information. It's funny you mention wrestling. Wrestling is a spectacle; it's one of the oldest things human beings have done. It's possibly the oldest sport. It's a physical activity, the nervous system's vocabulary of movements. All these things have an energy field of their own; they're coded in our DNA. And DNA is information, and at the bottom of all of it is vibration or energy. So,

whether you're vibing off of boxing, wrestling, martial arts, politics, it's all information—it's all communication. And as a musician, every aspect of human existence is a school for you to learn something.

**I just listened to a Billy Childs interview where he was talking about writing music that's asymmetrical. I didn't immediately connect that to your playing, but in my head it seems like it might apply.**

Do you see anything out here in the universe that's resolved perfectly?

**Traditional songbook stuff, maybe? But a lot of that's about unrequited love.**

There's a temporary agreement made among people that these rules work for this, but ultimately none of that has any universal applicability. If it did, every culture would have the same kind of resolutions—and they don't. There are norms that are accepted for certain periods of time: Debussy doesn't resolve in the same way Renaissance music does.

I am interested in resolutions, and they just might be more stretched, sometimes. I'm definitely interested in the ultimate harmonic. I mean, people just don't hear it the same way I do.

**I think it's safe to assume that most of the jazz community votes Democrat, so I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about Joe Biden.**

First of all, I'm from Delaware. My parents lived 15 minutes from Joe Biden, so he's been a part of my whole life, because he was our senator.

As a person, I adore him. As a politician? He's a throwback to another era, and when this cycle started, I was a big Elizabeth Warren supporter. I understand some of the reservations on the left. He is a throwback, but he's a genuine person, and he listens. That's the most important thing. And that's maybe what's needed now—not a firebrand on the left, but somebody that's willing to listen to all people.

His platform's going to be one of the most progressive that anybody who's ever run for president has had.

**Do you think that would be a function of him as a person or the imperative of winning?**

First of all, he's an empathetic person. He made some statements earlier in his career about gay marriage that would make it seem that he would get in the way. But he might be the one politician that brought it the furthest when he forced Obama's hand on it.

He's very sincere about listening and trying to evolve with the times. This is kind of weird—and I was upset when Elizabeth Warren didn't do well in the primaries. But he might be what this time and this zeitgeist is calling for.

—Dave Cantor



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**New Code:** Guitarist Mary Halvorson is set to follow up *Code Girl* with a disc due out Oct. 16. *Artlessly Falling* (Firehouse 12) expands the bandleader's collaborators, adding saxophonist Maria Grand to the mix, as well as Robert Wyatt, who contributes vocals to a few tracks. Halvorson's purview also expands to writing poetry in a variety of forms. "Poetry and music are similar in that there's a lot to be gained from more than one reading or listening," Halvorson said.

[firehouse12records.com](http://firehouse12records.com)

**Recasting Festivals:** As different parts of the world work to mitigate the coronavirus, jazz festivals forge ahead in various shapes and sizes. In Austria, where at press time the virus hasn't spiked up in the past few weeks, **International Jazzfestival Saalfelden** is planning a mix of indoor and outdoor events Aug. 20–23 with a bill largely focused on European performers. Its free outdoor offerings will require ticket reservations, given attendance restrictions. Closer to home, California's **Monterey Jazz Festival** has moved online for a mix of remote and archival streams set for Sept. 25–27. All funds raised during the events will go to performers, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

[jazzsaalfelden.com/en](http://jazzsaalfelden.com/en); [montereyjazzfestival.org](http://montereyjazzfestival.org)

**Final Bar:** Vocalist **Annie Ross**—who rose to prominence in the trio Lambert, Hendricks & Ross—died July 21 from emphysema and heart disease at her home in Manhattan at the age of 89. Known as pioneers in vocalese, the group scored a 1952 hit with "Twisted," a whimsical tune that featured Ross out front. ... Trumpeter **Eddie Gale**, who performed alongside Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor, died July 10 at his California home from cancer at the age of 79. Gale is perhaps best known for his Blue Note date *Eddie Gale's Ghetto Music* (1968). ... **Johnny Mandel**, whose work included writing the theme to the film and TV series *M\*A\*S\*H*, died June 29 at his home in Ojai, California, from a cardiac ailment. He was 94.

## Full Spectrum: Derrick Hodge Sees Endless Possibilities in Music

**NOT LONG AGO, DERRICK HODGE HAD A** conversation that forever altered his perspective.

"I had the honor of co-producing Justin Kauflin's album *Coming Home*," Hodge said about the pianist's 2018 album. "When he first came to me, he said it was because he saw colors when he heard my music. He's blind, but he saw colors, and that is what drew him to me. ... Suddenly, it could not have been less about what each individual song might have meant to me when I was composing it. For someone else, it meant something that I couldn't even imagine, and it was absolutely as valid as what I might have been feeling."

It's an awareness that every artist comes to, but an awareness that generally doesn't transform how they make art. For Hodge, however, it became an entirely new way of thinking. If there was no correct definition of his work, why define it at all? He calls the approach the "color of noise," which is also the name of Hodge's new band and his latest Blue Note album. If the name seems elusive and indeterminate, it's supposed to be.

"What 'color of noise' is, officially, is a question mark," he said. "The more you ask, the more you get no definitive answer. *Color Of Noise* is what someone makes of it. It's what the music hopefully means to a person when they hear it—beyond trying to define what it is, what it's about, what point it's trying to prove, musically. The point is for people to ask the question, but to come up with their own answers."

*Color Of Noise* is heavy on atmosphere, with pianist/organist Jahari Stampley, electronic keyboardist Michael Aaberg and turntablist DJ Jahi Sundance blending along with Hodge's electric bass into hazy washes of sound. But it's equally heavy on percussion, with dual drummers Mike Mitchell (aka Blaque Dynamite) and Justin Tyson powering nearly every track. Running through the sonic nebulae are recognizable streaks of gospel, funk, hip-hop, r&b, pop and jazz (the last being easiest to discern as the band offers up a cover of Wayne Shorter's "Fall").

Hodge, at various points in his career, has been identified with any and all of these genres: His resume includes work with Mulgrew Miller, Terence Blanchard, Jill Scott and Common, among others. Instead of musicians' frequent urge to resist being put into any of those categories, though, Hodge chooses to be in all of them.

"Part of that question mark is also the question mark of, 'Who am I?'" Hodge said. "If people choose to hear me as any one of those things, I'll take it as an honor that they accept me as an authentic being in whichever tradition that is. But I can't hold any of it too tight or try too hard to make sure I'm the best version of myself. I wanted to make sure that every part of it was about me



"*Color Of Noise* is what someone makes of it," bassist Derrick Hodge said while discussing his recent Blue Note release.

letting go and trusting what happens."

In a sense, that's another form of resistance: If Hodge belongs to every genre, he belongs to no genre, and anyone who encounters his music will decide what it is for themselves.

Hodge even fogs up the definition of himself as a bassist: At various points on *Color Of Noise*, he plays upright bass, acoustic guitar, piano, synthesizers and synth bass, and contributes vocals.

The music largely is improvised off Hodge's basic compositional ideas. Of course, that's in part due to Hodge's abiding connection to jazz—but it's also, in this case, because to compose more fully (as Hodge traditionally has done) would be to provide more definition than he now wants there to be.

He didn't want his band overthinking it, and much of the album consists of first takes.

"A lot of stuff you're hearing, the guys didn't even know that was going to be the actual take that we did," Hodge said, chuckling. "We'd finish it and I'd be like, 'I'm cool, next.'"

In a sense, the notions underpinning *Color Of Noise* are nothing new. Art being subjective is an idea as old as creativity itself, and Walt Whitman's boast that he contained multitudes is more than 120 years old (and wasn't original to him during the 19th century). Yet, Hodge's synthesis of ideas is refreshing and intriguing.

He also sees incredible potential in it.

"I want, years from now, for there to be a book club on the 'color of noise,'" he gushed. "Art and spoken-word stuff that has nothing to do with music. I gotta tell you: If, a few years from now, all people talk about with *Color Of Noise* is, 'Yo, did you hear that album? They were going for blood and killin' it! That was cool.' If that's all I'm hearing about, then something was missed."

It seems idealistic, but if Hodge's music can make a blind man see colors, maybe no one can define its limitations. —Michael J. West



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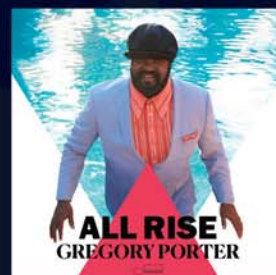
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**NORAH JONES**  
**PICK ME UP OFF THE FLOOR**

**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.



**GREGORY PORTER**  
**ALL RISE**

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



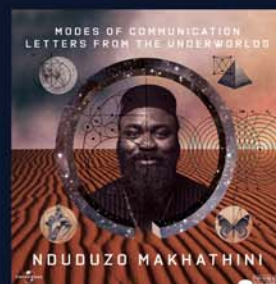
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**DERRICK HODGE**  
**COLOR OF NOIZE**

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, and producer **DERRICK HODGE'S** 3rd album *Color of Noize* reflects a melting pot of influence and experience with jazz flow, hip-hop groove, soulful depth, spiritual heft, and creative fire. Co-produced by Hodge and **DON WAS**, it's his 1st album to use a live band throughout with **JAHARI STAMPLEY** and **MICHAEL AABERG** on keys, **MIKE MITCHELL** and **JUSTIN TYSON** on drums, **DJ JAH SUNDANCE** on turntables, and Hodge supplying bass, keys, guitar, and voice.



**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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Mark Anthony Lee (center)

COURTESY MARK ANTHONY LEE

### Boogie, Skating & Benson

By 1976, the initial incarnation of Stax Records was gone from the musical landscape, but the dreams of superstardom it had inspired thrived among Black Memphians. *Stone Crush: Memphis Modern Soul 1977–1987* represents some of those dreams—occasionally deferred—offered up by a wide spectrum of personalities.

O.T. Sykes, a singing dentist, traded dental work for studio time to record his funky “Stone Crush On You,” which gives the 19-song CD or double-LP *Light In The Attic* compilation its name. And Mark Anthony Lee followed a circuitous route that took him to Venice Beach and back, before recording his 1982 ode, “I’m Just A Boogie Roller.”

The tune, which combines Lee’s disparate loves of guitar playing and roller skating, is a bonus digital track on the collection.

He called the release “a second chance.”

Lee’s musical life began when, as a child, he picked up an orphaned six-string on his family’s porch and plucked out the melody to “Shortnin’ Bread.” It eventually led him to a gig as demo guitarist at Stax in the early 1970s, when he worked alongside Rufus Thomas and Albert King, among others.

“Stax was like a family of artistic people,” Lee said recently. “We played and made up music every day. It was a music factory.”

But when Stax closed its doors, it left Lee and countless others unceremoniously out of work. After a year or so of gigging around Memphis, he headed to Los Angeles, hoping to find new opportunities. What he found, though, was a new love: boogie roller skating.

“I ended up on Venice Beach and saw the skaters out there. They were doing a dance called the ‘figure eight dance.’ I was curious about what they were doing, because I’d never seen skaters skate in lockstep before,” Lee said. “Dance has always been close to

me, and these guys would have synchronized routines. So, I decided that I was gonna learn how to be a boogie roller.”

In 1980, Lee was featured in a video for guitarist George Benson’s “Give Me The Night,” which was shot partially at Venice Beach and showed the bandleader gliding around on a pair of skates. It was around the same time that Lee’s idea for “I’m Just A Boogie Roller” was born. But with studio time in Los Angeles being cost prohibitive and hard to come by, he headed back to Memphis.

Once home, Lee recorded the tune at Cotton Row Studios. And not long after, the famed roller rink Crystal Palace opened, a space that played an outsize role in Memphis music history. During the 1990s, it served as a spot where area hip-hop artists—including Three 6 Mafia—thrived, and figured prominently into the 2005 film *Hustle & Flow*.

Lee’s first “live band roller boogie show” took place there on Feb. 5, 1982. But with his self-released song lacking promotion, it eventually faded, just like that particular brand of skating.

After “Boogie Roller,” Lee returned to focusing on guitar and played with Bobby “Blue” Bland, B.B. King, Albert King and Ruth Brown. But his love of roller skating never waned.

“What attracted me to roller skating was [that] I wanted to learn to do the figure eight,” he recalled. “The Wright brothers were the first ones to figure out how to control a plane in the air, and they did it by doing a figure eight. [You use it to] balance yourself on roller skates; they used it to balance themselves on the little biplane they had. ... You know the flight path to get to the moon and to Earth and back? It’s a figure eight.”

DB

Ayana Contreras hosts *Reclaimed Soul* on WBEZ and Vocola Radio in Chicago.



# Bobby Watson Pins Down the Blues

**"YOU CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY MUSICIANS** are afraid of the blues, man," Bobby Watson said recently over the phone from his home in Lenexa, Kansas, a suburb southwest of Kansas City.

It's a natural topic, given the blues' centrality to the sound and feel of jazz, and it's particularly apt in light of Watson's latest album, *Keepin' It Real* (Smoke Sessions). Recorded with his new band, it maintains the bop-schooled brilliance that the alto saxophonist is known for, but flavors the music with a strong sense of the blues—and even gospel at one point.

It's not a revolutionary move by any means. As the title suggests, that emphasis is all about getting back to basics. But as Watson has learned in his years as a performer and teacher, those basics aren't always easy to master.

"I had this one musician, man, who asked me what I wanted to do tonight, and I says, 'Man, I want to play some blues,'" he recalled. "Now, this was a person who was, technically, way out there, who played and wrote their own tunes. I just told him, 'I want to play some blues,' and the cat begged me not to. He got tears in his eyes. 'Please, please, I suck! I don't want to play the blues.' And I'm like, are you kidding?"

Watson laughs as he tells the tale, but he understands the feeling. "The blues is something I think you have to grow into," he said. Even though he grew up with the music—"It was blues on Saturday and gospel on Sunday," he said—he understood early on that there was a difference between knowing the music and feeling it.

"I felt intimidated by the blues for many years," Watson said. "With some people, I could tell they were feeling it from head to toe. I could play it, but I didn't feel it the way they did. I felt like I was an impostor, you know?"

Given the stellar ascent of Watson's career, that might seem hard to believe. Two years after graduating from the University of Miami, where classmates included Pat Metheny and Jaco Pastorius, the saxophonist joined Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. He was in the band from 1977 to '81 (Branford Marsalis eventually took his place in the alto chair), and has released dozens of albums, both as a leader—often with his Horizon quintet—and as part of the 29th Street Saxophone Quartet.

Through all that, Watson was learning—not how to play the blues, but how to connect with the blues inside himself. "I can reach back to my childhood and realize that the blues has always been a part of me," he said. "We didn't listen to it around the house, but it was always there. Once I started to connect the dots, I realized where I fit [into] my version of the blues.

"The more seasons you get, you want to put

that out there more," he added. "You are who you are."

It might be tempting for fans to imagine a connection between this emphasis on the blues and the end of the Horizon lineup, but Watson suggests a more prosaic culprit: success.

"As guys grow and their name starts ringing, they get gigs, man," the saxophonist said. "And you can't get 'em when you need 'em. Especially rhythm section players. [Horizon drummer] Victor Lewis used to put his drums in the Vanguard and leave 'em there for three weeks."

Needless to say, this made booking dates a scheduling nightmare. "The last time we got together it took a year-and-a-half of planning ahead of time—for four gigs!" He laughed, and added, "And even at that, [bassist Essiet Essiet] couldn't make it."

Of course, with the new band—which, in addition to longtime collaborator Curtis Lundy on bass and veteran Victor Jones on drums, includes Victor Gould on piano, and either Giveton Gelin or Josh Evans on trumpet—booking a tour poses a different challenge: There's no place to play.

Like the rest of us, Watson has no idea how the pandemic is going to play out, but he thinks we'll all get through this. "[Everyone will] make adjustments," he said. "I mean, mankind survived bubonic plague and malaria and all this other stuff. I figure it's just a matter of being patient."

And in the meantime, there's always the blues.



Over time, saxophonist Bobby Watson has learned to connect the idea of the blues in his life and in his music.

JIMMY & DENA KATZ

"I started playing a blues on my gigs several years ago," he said. "Just a blues. I call it 'Up To The Minute Blues,' based on this week's current events. And I start preaching on the horn." He sings a blues phrase to the lyrics, "I just saw Donald Trump. Oh, what a dummy he is."

He laughs. "Obviously, I'm just thinking as I play. 'He's a jive motherfucker ...'" He laughs again. "That's what will be going through my head when I'm playing those slow blues. I just start telling people about my day."

—J.D. Considine

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# Singer-Pianist Freddy Cole Dies at 88

## THE CAREER OF SINGER AND PIANIST

Freddy Cole stretched from a time when recordings were pressed on shellac to the 21st century. He died June 27 from complications of a cardiovascular condition at his Atlanta home. Cole was 88.

Cole's grace and longevity as a bandleader are illustrated by his Grammy nominations, all coming in the new millennium for a series of recordings beginning with the 2000 Telarc album *Merry Go Round* (which featured a front line that included saxophonists Eric Alexander and Gary Smulyan) and followed by a succession of HighNote releases. While each of his nominated CDs found critical favor, none netted Cole an award.

Accolades in the family generally skewed another way: to his older brother, singer-pianist Nat "King" Cole, and his niece, vocalist Natalie Cole.

The title of Freddy Cole's 1977 album, *The Cole Nobody Knows*, seemed to acknowledge that, as a performer, he was working in his brother's shadow. But his 1991 Sunnyside release came with a more forceful title: *I'm Not My Brother, I'm Me*. The recording closed with the title track, but was preceded by a 10-min-

ute medley of pieces associated with his brother. Maybe Cole didn't actually live in the shadow of his better-known family members; he just followed a different path.

Lionel Frederick Cole was born Oct. 15, 1931, in Chicago and began playing piano as a child, around age 6. By the time he was a teenager, Cole was performing at area clubs. He went on to study music at what was then known as the Roosevelt Institute in Chicago. Later, the bandleader moved to New York and studied at The Juilliard School before earning a master's degree at New England Conservatory in Boston.

Cole's first recording was a 1952 single titled "The Joke's On Me," followed the next year by "Whispering Grass," both released by Dot Records. The label also issued his full-length 1964 debut, *Waiter, Ask The Man To Play The Blues*. In addition to an interpretation of Leroy Carr's "Blues Before Sunrise," the album included the bandleader's original "I'm All Alone."

"I'm like an old penny," the singer said in an article published in the November 2009 issue of DownBeat. "I turn up anywhere. That's what I've done throughout my years in the business.



Freddy Cole (1931–2020)

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES/FANTASY RECORDS

I don't look at myself as a so-called star. I'm just plain Freddy. That's all you can be."

Cole, who lived in Atlanta for more than 35 years, is survived by a daughter, Crystal Cole; a son, Lionel Cole; and several other family members.

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CONCERT PHOTOGRAPHY

Noriko Ueda



Ingrid Jensen

# ARTEMIS IS FIERCE!

By Suzanne Lorge

Last fall, Blue Note Records made history by signing pianist **Renee Rosnes'** adventurous septet, **Artemis**, to its roster.

**T**his deal stands out for its departure from the norm: Blue Note typically represents solo artists and bandleaders. The self-led groups it does represent tend to be small. And, regardless of size, Blue Note bands overwhelmingly comprise male musicians. By welcoming Artemis into its pantheon of esteemed artists, Blue Note upends these precedents and expands the diversity of its ranks.

The label will release Artemis' superb eponymous debut on Sept. 11.

While the band pushes several boundaries—cultural, generational—it's hard to miss that its lineup is exclusively female. By now, though, the all-female jazz band isn't as surprising as it once was. After all, Sherrie Maricle's DIVA Jazz Orchestra has been together for more than 25 years; Terri Lyne Carrington

released *The Mosaic Project* (Concord) in 2011; and Monika Herzig created her SHERoes ensemble in 2018. (Several members of Artemis have performed with these groups, in fact.)

So, what makes Artemis exceptional isn't how they identify, but how they compose, perform, lead and collaborate as the elite musicians that they are.

Collectively, the sheer force of the group's



Artemis performs at the 2018 Newport Jazz Festival.

STEVEN SUSSMAN

ability is staggering. First, consider that Canada native Rosnes, Artemis' musical director, has been turning out award-winning albums for three decades. Juno Award winner Ingrid Jensen, also Canadian, has contributed to nearly 50 albums as a leader or side player, making her one of the most prominent trumpeters of her generation. In addition to being an esteemed bandleader, American drummer Allison Miller has worked with major headliners from the worlds of pop, rock and jazz, and tours consistently with several musically diverse ensembles. Chilean-born tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana was both the first woman and first South American musician to win the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Saxophone Competition in 2013.

Clarinetist Anat Cohen was the first Israeli ever to headline at the legendary Village Vanguard in New York City and has become an in-demand musician around the globe. Bassist Noriko Ueda, who grew up in Japan, received a scholarship to attend Berklee College of Music and later won the Charlie Parker Jazz Composition Prize from the BMI Foundation. And vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant, born in the States and now living in France, is a frequent DownBeat Critics Poll winner who has three Grammy Awards.

Now, imagine all this talent on stage at the same time.

Beyond their achievements as performers, these musicians also excel as leaders, arrangers and composers—individualized strengths that Rosnes wisely leveraged for the group's

first album. Five of the band members contribute originals to the program, with Rosnes and Jensen providing additional arrangements and Salvant curating the vocal selections. If taken in isolation, each of these unique tracks stands as a glowing testament to the musical prowess of its champion. But taken together, they provide insight into how the group balances the seemingly conflicting musical values of structure and freedom, stillness and movement, assertion and acquiescence.

For instance, on Miller's composition "Goddess Of The Hunt," she creates a propulsive context for strategic harmonic interplay among the three horns, in contrast with the supportive, loping groove that she sets on Lee Morgan's "The Sidewinder," arranged by Rosnes, a track with some of the brightest horn solos on the album.

Likewise, on Ueda's high-velocity instrumental "Step Forward," the ensemble functions as a decisive unit, with ferocious solos all around, only to fall back into gentle comping on Salvant's tour-de-force performance of Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic," also arranged by Rosnes.

Such profound musical discernment is not easily achieved.

In its eponym, the group finds an apt symbol for such virtuosity. Traditionally, the Greek goddess Artemis governs several contradictory natural forces—chastity and childbirth, the moon and the earth, the hunt and the hunted. Her superpower is her skill with a bow and arrow, her knack for hitting dead-center every

time. Swap the arrows for instruments, and you have Artemis—jazz musicians with unswerving aim.

The members of Artemis joined DownBeat for a Zoom conference call in June, just as the coronavirus outbreak was abating in the New York City area, where most of the musicians had been living in lockdown. (Cohen dialed in from Rio de Janeiro.) On the call, they discussed the creative process behind the album, their views on inclusivity in jazz and what the post-pandemic future might hold.

**DownBeat:** You'd been playing together as a septet for a few years before signing with Blue Note last year. How did the band originate?

**Renee Rosnes:** The first incarnation of the group was in 2016. A French promoter invited me to put together a band to celebrate Women's Day for some concerts in Paris and Luxembourg. We decided afterwards that we wanted to do some more work, and in 2017 we did a summer tour—three weeks on the European festival circuit. And we just had a blast. So, we thought we'd explore the possibilities of continuing to play together.

**Artemis is a commanding figure in Greek mythology. Why did you adopt her name for the band?**

**Ingrid Jensen:** What happened was, my husband [drummer Jon Wikan] and I were talking about our Norwegian Viking roots, thinking there might be some cool names from that [era]. But there aren't—they were all horrible people



[laughs]. So, we looked at the Greek gods and goddesses to see if we'd have any luck there. I was reading about Artemis—she has a bit of a dark side, but for the most part she's pretty awesome. That powerful part of her, there's that energy in [our] music. It's just like on Ali's tune "Goddess Of The Hunt."

**That particular track opens the album with such a solid musical statement. Allison, can you speak to its significance?**

**Allison Miller:** Writing "Goddess Of The Hunt," I was thinking about each member of the ensemble and their incredible feminine power. I wanted to explore that sonically, how the strong traits of women would sound. Resilience, persistence, elegance. So, the rhythm section groove during the tune represents the persistence of women, the determination that we have. Next, there's a harmony part with Melissa and Ingrid, in juxtaposition to the rhythm section. That's the elegance, the mysterious quality of women. And then, when Anat and Renee enter with that angular melody, it's like a pounce. You know, don't mess with women, because we can really be fierce. I was thinking about all those things. And everybody in this band is such a badass that [the tune] just played itself.

**The group synergy is unmistakable on this album. Even so, your distinctive musical per-**

**sonalities come through in the writing and arranging. For example, "Big Top" races just as hard as Allison's tune, but the vibe is lighter, more whimsical. Renee, how did you conceive this one?**

**Rosnes:** Initially, when I began to compose a piece for the recording, I was thinking about the perception—in the past, anyway—that female jazz players are novelties. I wanted to take that stereotype and repurpose it, to rob it of its power. I also was thinking about a circus metaphor, where [the composition] has different acts, as in a circus. I love the part towards the beginning where Allison is playing an amazing drum solo and the horns play little bits of circus motifs, almost commenting on what's going on. It was so exciting to me, because I could completely see a high-wire trapeze act as [they were] playing. And in writing it, I was actually attempting to have the band reflect all of the qualities that Allison mentioned.

**Renee, you also wrote an eloquent septet arrangement of Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic" for Cécile to sing.**


**Rosnes:** We first performed this tune at the Newport Jazz Festival in 2018, as a duet, just the two of us. Every time Cécile sings, I get goose bumps, but that particular afternoon it was so special—the energy on stage, the audience, the sailboats and the message of the song. It real-

ly affected me. When we came to talk about recording, this piece came up, and I thought that the whole band should play it. The recording was the first time that arrangement was played.

**Cécile, along with the Stevie Wonder tune, you chose to perform a lesser-known Maxine Sullivan song. You can really hear the group's formidable straightahead chops on "Cry, Buttercup, Cry." Where did you get the idea for this one?**

**Cécile McLorin Salvant:** The first band that I ever played in was called Kirby Memory, a tribute band to John Kirby's music. He was an incredible arranger, bass player and bandleader, and Maxine Sullivan sang some beautiful songs with [his ensemble], including "Cry, Buttercup, Cry." It's funny, though, because both of my songs on this album deal with love, but they're different from your typical torch songs. "If It's Magic" deals with pervading love and aspiring to be extremely loving to all. And "Cry, Buttercup, Cry" is a song about hope after lost love. I think it's important for women to perform these kinds of songs, with this kind of subject matter. They aren't about romantic notions of love from a woman's perspective: They're broader and more complex than that.

**In your other work, and especially in your original compositions, you often express the**



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The members of Artemis are drummer Allison Miller (left), pianist and musical director Renee Rosnes, bassist Noriko Ueda, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant, clarinetist Anat Cohen and tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana.

**strong, self-determined point of view found in these two songs. What it's like for you to sing them with an all-female group?**

**Salvant:** This is the first and only time, I think, that I've ever performed with an all-female band. But I almost don't want to answer that question. On the one hand, I don't want to consider Artemis an all-female band, because that's a little reductive. At the same time, it's important that we acknowledge it, because it's extremely rare. We're still at a place, I think—and I might be wrong—where having an all-female band is a deliberate choice, with a deliberate message. I wish that it would just be an afterthought, you know, that we happen to be all women. Then I look at these incredible musicians and [remember] growing up, studying the piano and never really seeing any women play. Being able to see and hear women play on an extremely high level is really powerful. But in the moment, playing with them, it makes very little difference to me that they're women.

**To Cécile's point, isn't there value for young players to see groups of all-female musicians like Artemis?**

**Rosnes:** When we play, it doesn't need to be said that we're an all-female group. And the day is coming when this won't be any more remark-

able than a band full of guys. It's just a matter of time. Because music transcends gender. We need to let the music speak for itself. Today, women are players. They're composers. They're leaders. And we're playing together because we dig the music we're making.

**Miller:** To add to what Renee said, this band is a group of strong musicians having a musical conversation that's deep, fulfilling and inspiring. If there's anything about this band that's unique, it's how multigenerational and multicultural it is. Those are the two things that come to mind for me right away—how we bring a feeling of inclusivity to the stage.

**The album contains several compositions that give a nod to artists from different cultures and from outside of jazz. Melissa, what led you to write "Frida"?**

**Melissa Aldana:** A couple of years ago, I was commissioned by the Jazz Gallery [in New York City] to write a full piece of new music. I was inspired by [Mexican painter] Frida Kahlo, but it didn't occur to me that she was a woman and Latin American. I'd been in love with her work since I was very young, and I used to do a lot of painting in oil. So, it was a natural thing to do something related with the visual arts and her story, and to connect that through the music.

[The commission] became a six-piece movement that I recorded for my album *Visions*. And one of the tunes that I didn't use for that album—"Frida"—seemed right for Artemis.

**And Anat, what impelled you to write "Nocturno," arguably the most contemplative composition on the record?**

**Anat Cohen:** I was thinking about what to write for the band and decided to bring in a ballad. I didn't imagine that anybody else was writing one for the album, and I was right. But composing doesn't always come easy for me. So, I was trying to play Chopin—which, as a non-piano player, was quite a struggle. But I was so inspired by one of his nocturnes. I was by myself, trying to express [that] solitude, and imagining a melody that Melissa and Ingrid and I [would play] together in unison. I'm accustomed to imagining the horn player parts—I grew up with two [brothers who are] horn players. So, I created a sound with just this breathy melody together over an ongoing rhythm, while the rhythm section creates a vibe. Then I showed it to Renee and she helped me to touch up the arrangement.

**Next on the album is the contrasting "Step Forward"—so hard-swinging and irrepressibly fun. The band improvised really well on**



**this one. What was your inspiration, Noriko?**

**Noriko Ueda:** I started writing it, I remember, really late at night with headphones on, and suddenly the introduction came to my head. It brought back to me a memory from my childhood, when I was practicing a [children's] piano piece composed by Yoshinao Nakada, the Japanese composer. Usually, it takes me a long time to compose, but the night after that introduction came to me, the whole tune just came through. So, I wrote it very quickly, not because I was in a rush, but because I was thinking of everyone [in the group]: about what great players they are, and how it's going to sound, and how they're going to soar. I heard all of their instruments when I was composing, and that really helped me to write the chart.

**What kind of influence do you think such a diverse and inclusive group like Artemis can have on the next generation of musicians?**

**Miller:** I think it's really important for young men and young women to see this group. I hope that when we get back to touring that we can perform and work with students in universities, high schools, middle schools—but also in underserved communities. Because, first of all, we're playing music that's rooted in history and systemic racism—this music is resistance music. I hope that as a band we can take that resistance and push forward even more for all kinds of justice. Not just gender justice, but all kinds of justice. I think that the youth really want that in the music today.

**Jensen:** Also, we're supposed to be apolitical as artists, I believe, but I don't think that's possible anymore. The tune that I arranged for the album, [The Beatles'] "The Fool On The Hill"—it's not a protest song, so I'm not going to say that it is. But it certainly is relevant to this time when we have this beyond-foolish situation, when so much good stuff is being kept down. Arranging that tune, for me, was about the beauty of the sound of the three horns. When the three of us first started playing together, we had such a magical blend and connection. The orchestration of our three voices was just stunning. So, [this band] is like a little orchestra, with the background lines, like the sound of a crowd, leading to a point of total screaming and chaotic insanity. Then it resolves with a fairly insistent vamp, with some punches [in the coda]. That's us, insisting that something is going to move.

**In the short term, how has the pandemic affected your gigs?**

**Rosnes:** We had so much work on the books, but, of course, everything is on hold now. We're hoping that a lot of, or all, of the [tour dates for 2020] will be rebooked. We had a lot of exciting things planned—a tour of Europe, the Hollywood Bowl, Chicago, Seattle, SFJAZZ.

**How do you see yourselves as musicians moving through the post-pandemic world?**

**Rosnes:** I think about the gravity of this moment in history all day long, and it definitely affects my music. During this time of isolation, I've had more opportunity to play than usual, and I find that when I sit down to play or compose, there's so much emotion. I feel the need to match the moment, to express the feelings that are swirling around in the world. To try and make it a better world.

**Salvant:** I think that we're all rethinking how we make music and what we make music for. Sometimes I feel that it is purposeless—who does this serve? But then, I was talking to an essential worker the other day, who was saying how important listening to music was to him. It drives him, and when he feels completely depleted it gives him energy. I hope that when this album comes out, it goes into the ears of some protesters, and that it gives them energy and hope and drive. All we can hope for right now is that our music gives people the lift that they desire so badly.

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Maria Schneider's new release is a double album titled *Data Lords*.





Maria Schneider

# NAVIGATING DISPARATE WORLDS

• By Ed Enright • Photo by Briene Lermite

As one of the top composer-arrangers on New York's big band jazz scene, Maria Schneider has covered a vast swath of musical territory since her namesake orchestra began recruiting ace instrumentalists and captivating listeners in the early 1990s.

Over a series of acclaimed recordings starting with her 1994 breakout album, *Evanesence* (Enja), Schneider's writing style has evolved through multiple phases, incorporating the transparent tonal colors of Gil Evans' large ensemble works, exploring folkloric flamenco rhythms, applying orchestral concepts to the big-band palette and embracing the wide-ranging pastoral beauty of Americana.

Schneider's recent creative output has taken a more divergent approach—one that's rooted in her ongoing struggles to deal with the dichotomies of modern living. As she finds herself ping-ponging between the polar extremes of today's device-obsessed "digital world" and the simpler "natural world" she grew up with in rural Minnesota, she has fought to reclaim a sense of personal space where she can hear herself think and still connect with people in meaningful

ways. She misses the deepness of times past.

Schneider also has emerged as an outspoken musicians' advocate by calling out corporations such as Google and YouTube—and other entities she refers to as "data lords"—for policies that she feels have been unfair to composers and creators of various kinds.

When DownBeat checked in with Schneider on the occasion of her Grammy-winning recording *The Thompson Fields* (ArtistShare) topping the Jazz Album category of the 2016 Readers Poll, she had recently completed a piece commissioned by the Library of Congress Da Capo Fund titled "Data Lords." Now, a studio recording of that composition and a series of more recent conceptual pieces that grew out of her frustration with big data have been released as *Data Lords*, an elaborately packaged double album that explores the conflicting relationships between the digital and natural worlds.



Maria Schneider (right) conducts her 18-piece orchestra—including band members Gary Versace (accordion), Ben Monder (guitar) and Scott Robinson (saxophone)—at the 2012 Newport Jazz Festival.

The first of *Data Lords*' two discs is subtitled *The Digital World*, while the second CD is called *Our Natural World*. Together, they constitute Schneider's fifth project created and documented through ArtistShare, the crowdfunding platform that she first used to create her 2004 album *Concert In The Garden*.

"I wanted the music on this album, especially the first disc, to be very evocative and grab you in some kind of way, even if it feels disturbing," Schneider said during a mid-June phone conversation. "It had to have something else to it. I wanted it to *feel* like something, rather than *sound* like something."

She cited the album's title track as a prime example. "There were certain figures where I asked the band to create a sense of ricocheting off of something or having one instrument playing violently vibrato, so that there's kind of an intensity and a rawness that feels improvised and doesn't feel too tight or too perfect," she said. "It takes some time for everybody to feel the form of the piece. It's not something you can just read."

"At one point, the brass are hitting these bouncing figures, and rather than being rhythmically notated, I'm conducting those and literally thrusting my hands down and making them bounce and get faster as the motion gets smaller, like a ball would. I was surprised how quickly the band responded to that, but it has taken us quite a lot of performances to get the timing of those with the soloist and the rhythm section."

At the 2017 Newport Jazz Festival, the Maria Schneider Orchestra debuted "Don't Be Evil," a piece commissioned through ArtistShare by David and Ginger Komar. It musically mocks Google, and its title refers to a motto that formerly was part of the company's official code of conduct.

"This was a piece where a lot developed in the performance of it," Schneider said of the 13-minute song. "When I first listened to [the band run through it], I said, 'Oh, this doesn't sound like mockery, but I'm mocking Google.' So, I started asking some of the horn players to play with a very over-the-top vibrato, kind of a *na-na na*

*na-na* thing, so that really made a difference. And the same kind of concept applied when the full ensemble comes in at the end—that was another place where I felt it was too perfect. It sounded like a college big band. I was like, 'No, no, no, it's gotta have something raw.' So, I changed the writing to make it a little bit more chromatic. I added a few trombone players doing a big vibrato, while others are doing the [more straightforward] figures just to create tension inside of the thing. It [evokes] this sort of world that's overtaking us, that we're so seduced by. It's like a takeover of our economy, our psyches, our creativity, our children, our culture, our politics—all of it."

Harmonically, "Don't Be Evil" is based on a sequence of unusual-sounding chords established in the first eight bars. "The sound and color of those chords endure throughout the entire piece," Schneider said. "They are all major sharp-11 sharp-9 chords. It's a very unusual color, and I really like it because it's dark, but it's not brooding dark; it's conflicted."

The track "CQ CQ, Is Anybody There?" marks an even further departure for Schneider. It's built entirely upon rhythms that spell out Morse code messages like "power," "greed," "S.O.S." and "CQ" (ham radio code for "calling any station," or, "is anyone there?"). A touch of humanity makes its way into the piece via the signal "W0ABE," which was the ham radio call sign of Schneider's late father.

"Sputnik" evokes the feeling of thousands of corporate satellites orbiting the planet, and "A World Lost" longs for a simpler time when humans were more connected to the earth, and to each other.

*Our Natural World* finds Schneider tuning out the distractions of the digital world to embrace the things to which she is authentically drawn, such as landscapes, the sky, people, poetry, art and silence. Tunefulness and light come streaming through on tracks like "Sanzenin" (a Gary Versace accordion feature inspired by ancient Japanese temple gardens), "Stone Song" (which makes use of a whimsical piece of pottery),

"Look Up" (composed with trombonist Marshall Gilkes' silky timbre in mind), "Braided Together" (inspired by Ted Kooser's poetry), "Bluebird" (featuring great solos by Versace and alto saxophonist Steve Wilson) and "The Sun Waited For Me" (a chorale-like piece on which Gilkes and tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin bask in vibrant glory). The windows are wide open in this natural world, and there's ample space for the music to breathe.

Together, the two discs of *Data Lords* are the product of Schneider's involuntary reaction to everything going on around her in both the digital and natural realms. She never intended to record a double album—until the idea was suggested by a friend, and she realized that it made perfect sense.

"I was thinking about the fact that I was writing music, and I would like to record it, but it was all so polarized," she said. "One piece was about a garden in Japan, and then there was 'Don't Be Evil.' And I was talking to one of my earliest ArtistShare participants, a wonderful guy named Justin Freed, and I said to him, 'I don't know how to record this—you can't have an album that's so schizophrenic in its feeling.' He said, 'Well, why don't you make two albums?' It gave me a gut ache to even consider it."

"But when I went home, I started thinking, 'What is this music? Ultimately, what's being said here?' Because it wasn't really conscious. And then I realized what it is: the polarization within myself, the struggle to hang on to that world that we've lost, that desire to just turn my phone off and go birding, and not be sucked into that other world. And music was coming out of that. I realized there was a lot of music I had written that was connected to art. Then I just thought, 'Wow, this should be a *double* album, not two separate albums.' It's a concept I didn't think of; it just appeared as a natural outgrowth of doing what I do."

Much of the material on *Data Lords* bears the influence of the late rock artist David Bowie, who recruited Schneider to collaborate with him on "Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime)," from his 2014 compilation, *Nothing Has Changed* (Columbia). "These pieces were written not that long after I worked with David, who really drew my dark side out of me," she said. "He was really into my older, darker music. And then with everything that was going on in my life, in terms of my activism about big data, it was a perfect storm that made this new music come out."

No new Schneider composition is ever complete, though, until her esteemed band members get their hands on it. Scott Robinson, the band's baritone saxophonist and woodwind doubler extraordinaire, has been with Schneider from the start. He compared the group's approach to interpreting and refining Schneider's compositions, under her direction, to a visual artist working with clay.

"One of the important qualities in Maria's music is that everything is shaped in some way,"



said Robinson, who travels the spaceways as the featured soloist on “Sputnik.” “You have to be a bit like a sculptor. You can never just play the notes—she won’t stand for that. She’s demanding in that way, and rightly so. It’s all about shaping a part and having it feel like each note grows out of the previous note and grows into the next note. When you’re in the band, you’re part of the process. And she always reminds us of this.”

Electric guitarist Ben Monder, who came onboard during the early-’90s recording sessions for *Evanesence*, provides many of the shimmering, distorted aural textures that characterize the first disc of *Data Lords*. He stressed the importance of taking part in the creative process and letting Schneider’s music develop organically, over time, with each performance or rehearsal.

“The first few times you play something, you have your nose in the music and you’re not necessarily hearing the big picture,” Monder said. “You’re not necessarily aware of how phrases work within the structure. But after reaching a certain critical mass of familiarity, it starts to flow out of you.”

Schneider encourages band members to take liberties with their parts and “be themselves” during solos. For *Data Lords*, she reached out to many of them personally in a spirit of collaboration and experimentation.

McCasin recalled the numerous conversations that took place among himself, Schneider and other band members while preparing “CQ CQ, Is Anybody There?” During his solo, chord changes fall by the wayside as the rhythm section transitions to a free aesthetic.

“There was a lot of experimentation with, ‘What should that free thing look like?’” McCasin said. “We talked about making it not sound like what we would normally do if it was free. We didn’t want to sound like four guys playing free in a jazz club in New York City. Maria wanted it to be more evocative and mysterious.”

Trumpeter Mike Rodriguez had productive conversations with Schneider regarding how to approach his solo on “Data Lords.” “She didn’t want a real jazzy kind of swinging solo,” he said. “It doesn’t call for that—more like shapes and sounds. So, I started to think more about texture. Then she asked me if I had any interest in working with electronic effects, and I was totally open to it. I was able to mess around with a pedal rack and use that on the recording.”

Band accordionist Gary Versace noted the high level of empathy among members of the ensemble. “People automatically change their role on the fly to fit with whatever’s going on,” he said. “It keeps it spontaneous. We find a path as a piece evolves. It’s a wonderful way of including all our individual voices into the process of composing. That’s the beauty of her music—she is so open about what happens.”

Pianist Frank Kimbrough, who’s been in the group since 1993, credited its success and longev-

ity to a combination of Schneider’s strong leadership and an undeniable spirit of group camaraderie. “She’s smart, she’s honest and she treats the cats well,” he said. “That’s the thing about this band: It’s a great collection of human beings.”

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Schneider had intended to work on a commissioned piece for the New York Philharmonic. But with that plan temporarily on hold, and no current opportunities to tour in support of *Data Lords*, she remains uncertain about her plans for the future.

“I think I’ll just start writing and see what

comes,” Schneider said. “I never set out to write about something. It’s whatever comes up. I just start writing and then all of a sudden, I have four or five pieces. And I look at them and I say, ‘Where did that come from?’”

“It’s almost like the music is some sort of psychoanalysis: You look at your behavior or your dreams and you say, ‘What does *that* mean?’ And then it tells you something about yourself. In a way, my music is like dreams. And then I look at them and suddenly realize, ‘Oh, I guess I’ve got a problem with Google.’”

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Pianist Billy Childs revisits compositional highlights from his past and expands his vision on new works throughout *Acceptance*, his latest Mack Avenue collection.



# VAST BILLY CHILDS MUSICAL VISION

BY DAVE CANTOR   PHOTOS BY RAJ NAIK

**5TH STREET DICK'S WAS A NEIGHBORHOOD COFFEE SHOP AND VENUE IN LOS ANGELES—NOW CLOSED FOR ABOUT 20 YEARS—WHERE FOLKS WOULD SIT OUTSIDE TO PLAY CHESS, SIP DRINKS AND EAT PASTRIES, WHILE PIANIST BILLY CHILDS WAS UP ON THE BUILDING'S SECOND FLOOR, INVESTIGATING HIS EXPANSIVE VIEW OF WHAT MUSIC COULD AND SHOULD BE.**

// Leimert Park was an inspiring environment to be in. It gave me a lot of ideas of how I can combine poetry with music,” Childs said about the L.A. neighborhood that inspired and provided the title for a track on *Acceptance* (Mack Avenue), an eight-song program that just about perfectly renders his artistic berth. The recording isn’t so much an assemblage of storied moments, but rather a recasting of some of the bandleader’s older compositions, set alongside fresh ruminations.

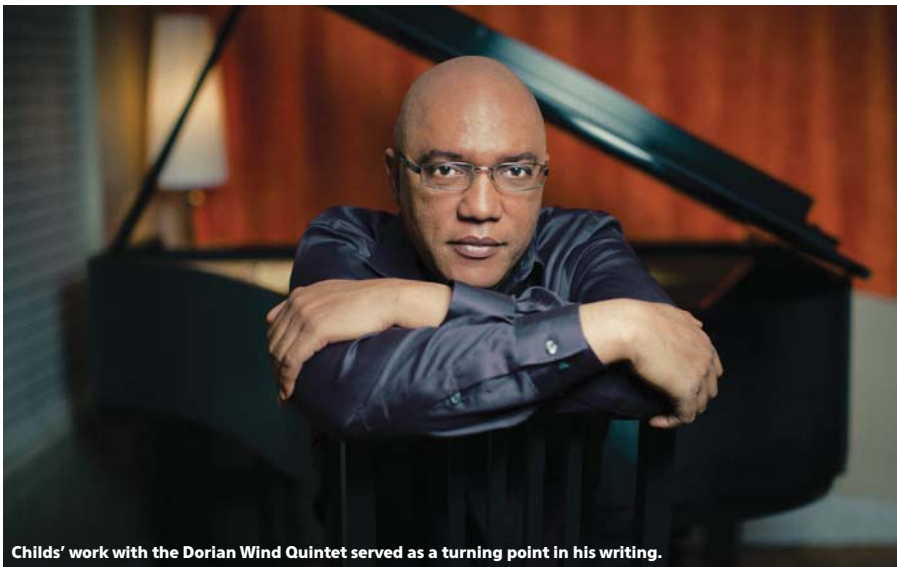
“I would go [to 5th Street Dick’s] on Saturday nights, and I would play there with this group called the Underground Railroad, which was led by a guy named JMD—Darryl Moore,” Childs, 63, recalled. “He was a drummer, and he put this collection of musicians together to act kind of as a house band for MCs to come up and freestyle.”

Among the performers Childs supported were two members of Freestyle Fellowship—Aceyalone and Mikah 9—a group that JMD helped produce and one that decades later still would be remembered for helping to define an underground aesthetic that prized knot-

ty rhymes filled with artful references to sociopolitical ideas. Chick Corea and Bennie Maupin, the pianist said, dropped by to jam at various points, too. While Childs’ composition “Leimert Park” doesn’t actually reference hip-hop—nor does most of his work—the song easily ranks as the new album’s most funky cut, featuring phased keyboards and heavy percussion.

“I wrote the song with Mike Clark and Paul Jackson, who kind of changed music—kind of changed the idea of jazz-funk,” Childs said about the drummer and bassist, respectively, who played on Herbie Hancock’s 1974 LP *Thrust*. For *Acceptance*, Childs recruited drummer Eric Harland, bassist Hans Glawischign and reedist Steve Wilson to back him. “It has a very ’70s feel, and that ’70s feel is reminiscent of what they used to do with Herbie. But it also reminded me of Leimert Park in the mid-’90s.”

Southern California’s music scene, perhaps mimicking its sprawl, seems to shun boundaries, whether it was the embrace of beat music and wayward jazz at 5th Street Dick’s or the West Coast Get Down’s



Childs' work with the Dorian Wind Quintet served as a turning point in his writing.

more recent disregard for genre adherence. An L.A. native, Childs has built a body of work just as broad, one that spans generations and effortlessly encompasses the classical world, too.

"There's a very solid classical music scene in New York, but it has this huge tradition behind it and huge legacy. You could look at it like it's weighted down by the baggage of the legacy, and therefore, you're entrenched in only one thing," Childs said over Zoom from his home in Southern California during late June. "So, here in Los Angeles, there wasn't a lot of that happening. And also there was a big studio scene here. So, if you studied classical violin, your hope for employment would be the studio scene ..."

"If you're [a classical musician] in a studio, you have to be able to play with a drum set, you have to be able to play with a click track. You have to be able to play different genres of music. So, there's more interaction between the genres. And it makes it easier for someone like me, who's a composer, to create music that combines genres. There's no attitude, from either side, about [the music being] too classical or too jazzy. I grew up with that ethos, and I was able to experiment and learn a lot about combining genres."

Abundance might be the defining quality of Childs' career. Whether it's the breadth of music history his work can encompass on any given album—or really, any given song—the stories he tells through composition or his endless and unerring cast of collaborators, there seems to be nothing but a desire to continue opening up the music, stretching toward new creative horizons.

In 2017, Childs endeavored to again fully embrace jazz on his Mack Avenue debut, *Rebirth*, a disc that earned him his fifth Grammy. During a 40-year career, he'd never really left the music behind, but his connections to the Kronos Quartet and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, as well as time spent with bandleaders like trumpeter Chris Botti, had pulled focus from Childs'

leader dates, which stretch back to his 1985 debut, *Midland*. But it was Child's engagement with the vastness of other musics that led to a deeper connection with the notes on the page.

"The Dorian Wind Quintet—their manager had called me, and they were looking for someone to compose a piece for piano and wind quintet," Childs recalled about a moment in the '90s. "I knew that they were one of the oldest and most respected wind quintets on the scene, so it was a huge honor for me, and I wrote this piece called *A Day In The Forest Of Dreams*, and it's in two movements. ... It was a challenging piano part, challenging for the ensemble, because it was very rhythmically complex and had a lot of counterpoint. So, I had to go to New York to rehearse it."

"I get there, and when they break out the music and we're going over it, someone said something like, 'In measure 43, does that phrase extend from the "and" of 2 to beat 3 of measure 44, or does it go to measure 45, beat 1?' I had no clue how to answer that, because I had just written the notes. I think I made up something: You know, 'Go to measure 45.' But what it did was it made me realize that I had to know every reason that I wrote every note. And it made me really pay attention to the details of the music. When I started rehearsing with them, they were very particular about breathing together, about volume and dynamics, about the phrase, about the meaning of the phrase, about how this phrase affected that one. I had never thought of music in that much detail, so it made me want to transfer that to a jazz situation. That was kind of the beginning of my jazz-chamber concept."

The two movements come in contrasting moods, colors and tempi, all exquisitely executed by the ensemble on the 1999 release *First Glimpses Of Sunlight*. Childs, though, really had been exploring the ideas that his experience with Dorian foregrounded on earlier albums issued through the Windham Hill Jazz imprint.

*His April Touch*, a 1991 disc, included some smoothly rendered features from reedist Bob Sheppard, an L.A. mainstay, while a few years later, in 1993, *Portrait Of A Player* set Childs in a stately piano trio, where it wasn't uncommon for his keys to find spotlight moments as his ensemble-mates lay out. But it wasn't solo piano music and it wasn't solely flights of jazz acumen that propelled the latter album. It was the compendium of ideas that Childs had been dealing with since his time as a young musician working with bandleaders, divergent in both temperament and intent.

"I started to look at the jazz ensemble as a kind of chamber ensemble, where piano, bass, drums and saxophone function kind of in the same spirit as a string quartet might—where everything's interdependent," Childs explained. "There's heavy counterpoint. There was a lot of through-composed music. But I always felt as though I wanted to incorporate composition with my jazz, even when I was playing with Freddie Hubbard—even when I was playing with J.J. Johnson, when I was 20 and 21. I was studying composition and I wanted to figure out a way to fuse that with jazz, much in the same way as the prog-rock people infused classical composition with rock."

Childs' enthusiasm for a borderless concept of music has made him not only a tirelessly creative composer, performer and collaborator, but also ideally suited to serve as president of the board of directors for Chamber Music America, an organization that aims to bolster small ensembles working in a variety of genres with grants and other professional development opportunities. He's held that post—a first for a "jazz musician"—since 2016.

"Billy brings a bunch of things to the organization," said Richard Kessler, who serves as CMA board chairperson, as well as working at The New School in New York City as the executive dean for the College of Performing Arts and dean of Mannes School of Music. "The breadth [of his work] is really impressive. He has a real love for music and particularly small ensembles—and it is jazz and it is rock 'n' roll. Look at his [*Map To The Treasure: Reimagining Laura Nyro*]. You can talk to him about prog-rock. He's happy to talk with you about [Yes keyboardist] Rick Wakeman. So, what you get there is someone who's not a snob. You get someone who's not seeking to protect a slice of the musical pie, because he loves and respects—and has been influenced by—so many different styles and forms. That works particularly well for the organization."

*Acceptance* vividly illustrates Childs' ability to take in just about every kind of music that he's encountered, and assimilate the bits and pieces he finds most interesting into his own compositions.

Opening the album is the composer's ode to his friend and collaborator Dori Caymmi, simply titled "Dori." It might not instantly recall



one of the Brazilian singer-songwriter's works—Caymmi remarked to Childs that the tempo was a bit fast—but the song insinuates rhythms particular to the South American country into a contemporary jazz context that enables Childs to slot in brisk improvisations.

Initially performed in 2016 at Michigan State University, “Do You Know My Name?,” the album’s third track, explores human trafficking, an unrelentingly grim topic that’s filtered through the vocal performance of Alicia Olatuja. As devastating as the narrative is, Olatuja’s dynamic turns—and almost supernatural flourish on the chorus—take the somber piano motif and drill down with pathos.

“When you’re telling a story, you do take the time to really pull it in and make it an authentic experience for yourself, before you can expect to make it an authentic experience for your audience,” Olatuja said recently from home in New York, while discussing her preparation. “But as far as trafficking of human beings, this is something that was experienced by my ancestors. It also tapped into that level of generational trauma that I can understand. At the time [of the original performance], interestingly enough, it was right around a particular family reunion. And we’re putting together stories of our ancestors and just tracing it back several generations. Every single story of my ancestors was horrible: She was taken from here and then her kids were taken to a different state. And then she was killed by this particular slave master, because she was trying to care for a crying baby. It was all these really painful stories that I was reading about my ancestors, you know? We’re in that same situation, but amplified. So, it’s something that isn’t new, unfortunately. And that really impacted my unique perspective of the subject matter.”

Olatuja’s appearance on *Acceptance* ranks as her second recorded contribution to a project Childs has helmed, *Rebirth* being their first in-studio collaboration. The composer—who said if he could sing, he would—frequently enlists vocalists for his projects, and Olatuja seemed to find their partnership to be one of profound understanding.

“You can hear the jazz influences, you can hear the classical study, you can hear the understanding of the voice, which is so important when you’re working with a composer,” she said. “I think he understands my history, I think he understands the different genres and vocabulary. ... So, the songs that he has written for me, specifically, where he’s heard my voice over a particular piece of music, it’s always just a perfect fit.”

On “Oceana,” a wholly improvised work conjured in the studio that concludes *Acceptance*, Childs opens quietly as Wilson wends around his chords and Glawischnig trickles in. Harland, somehow funky in such a hushed environment, colors the tune without hitting on a regular statement of purpose. It’s an ephemeral five minutes,

capping an album that otherwise relies on Childs’ exacting writing and arrangements.

“I just started playing this thing on the piano and then everybody joined in. It was almost like a Rube Goldberg machine: One thing affects the other, affects the other,” the bandleader said about that impromptu moment. “Steve started doing these elongated notes, which reminded me of the ocean. In my mind, that’s what we were thinking of when we were going through this journey. It started making me do piano figures that might have swam by you—or you would have encountered if you were diving.”

The fecundity of Childs’ inventiveness—seeing colors and vignettes where others might just hear notes, progressions and musical themes—hasn’t been impacted by the pandemic, though not being able to impart his “vision to the world” is a bummer. But the same creative spirit that’s propelled him from the bands of bop giants as a twentysomething sideplayer to a composer renowned throughout concert halls and across jazz festival stages remains unhampered.

“It never stops until you stop,” he said, “your desire—the hunger to accomplish something else.”

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KAHIL EL'ZABAR

# A LONG FRIENDSHIP GROWS DEEPER

**K**ahil El'Zabar and David Murray have been exchanging spiritual energy for more than 40 years. When they met in 1975 in Chicago, El'Zabar was a percussionist and vocalist deeply involved with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, and Murray was a tenor saxophonist on a road trip as part of an independent study program at California's Pomona College.

"We met on a basketball court, and it was just a real good vibration," El'Zabar recalled during an early July video chat that also included Murray. "From the first time we met, we were able to play together on the same team. We had the ability to see each other's spaces."

Murray has vivid memories of that initial meeting, and of the first time he saw El'Zabar perform. "He had that beam up to the universe, that beam of stream-of-consciousness," Murray said before directing his comments directly to his friend. "Sometimes, you get on that wavelength, when the words are hooking straight up with all the universe, and you're like the guy that gets struck by lightning."

It was years later that El'Zabar, now 66, and Murray, 65, would record together, but their discographies eventually became heavily intertwined. Among the many projects on which they have collaborated are the duo albums *Golden Sea* (1989), *One World Family* (2000) and *We Is: Live At The Bop Shop* (2004). They also have logged thousands of road miles as a duo.

That shared history certainly informs their musical rapport, as evidenced on the new album *Kahil El'Zabar's Spirit Groove Ft. David Murray*, released by the London-based label Spiritmuse. For this quartet project, the veterans teamed up with musicians from a younger generation: Emma Dayhuff (bass) and Justin Dillard (piano, organ, synthesizer).

The program—which includes live and studio recordings made in Chicago during 2019—mainly consists of El'Zabar's compositions, with an emphasis on extended jams. In addition to his authoritative vocals, the leader utilizes an array of percussion instruments, including a drum set, cajon, kalimba and foot tambourine.

The band burrows into a deep groove on "In The Spirit," with Dillard's poignant piano lines and Murray's potent tenor gracefully complementing El'Zabar's passionate vocals: "In the spirit/ Opening your third eye/ Let your dreams, let them fly." Elsewhere, Murray fuels his tune "Necktar" with an insistent tenor riff as the leader chants, "Open up the door." The longtime collaborators conclude the program with a transcendent concert version of "One World Family," which they co-wrote years ago.

"When we decided to do this *Spirit Groove* record, it seemed like ['One World Family' conveyed] an appropriate message for a higher ideal," El'Zabar said. "Some people think it's too lofty to believe that there can be any kind of collective empathy in the world—where we can't see that we actually are all connected, when it's obvious by the history of DNA that we all come from the same ancestors. We are connected biologically. And [we wanted] to create a spiritual connection using art as that bridge and anchor. That's why we thought 'One World Family' would fit for this project."

Murray discussed the adrenaline rush he felt during the live, 15-minute rendition of the tune. "You think the song is going to end, as I'm kind of going in and out, and in and out," he said. "But it just *can't* end, because there's just too much feeling, too much spirit groove going on. It just brings

Kahil El'Zabar (left) enlisted David Murray for his latest leader date.



AVE PILDAS PHOTOGRAPHY

me back and I have to play a little more, and then I pushed Kahil to do a little more singing."

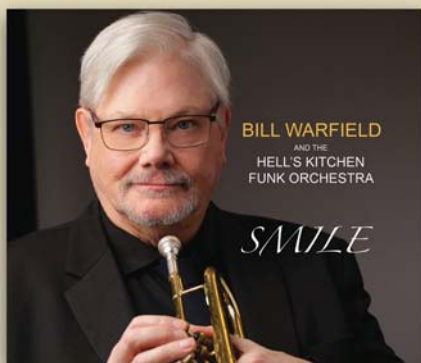
Whether they are onstage or in a Zoom interview, these two longtime friends radiate a deep mutual respect. "I enjoy working with David so much because it makes me prepare, musically," El'Zabar explained. "I work hard, in terms of practicing and being ready for the telepathy, because in the moment, we don't know exactly what's going to happen. But the more that you prepare—and work on your abilities as a musician—it helps you adapt. So, I'm thankful for that relationship, because I'm always growing musically inside of it."

Thea Ioannou and Mark Gallagher, the producers of the radio show *MadOnJazz*, founded Spiritmuse in 2018, and they consider El'Zabar to be the label's flagship artist. In addition to the 2019 release of *Be Known: Ancient/Future/Music*, by El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, the label plans to reissue a Ritual Trio disc recorded by the percussionist alongside his now-departed AACM colleagues Lester Bowie (trumpet) and Malachi Favors (bass). Also in the works is a disc by vocalist Dwight Tribble's band Cosmic Vibrations, as well as a project from multi-instrumentalist David Ornette Cherry, the son of trumpeter and DownBeat Hall of Fame inductee Don Cherry.

—Bobby Reed



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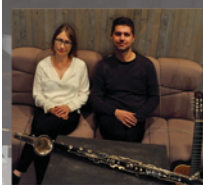


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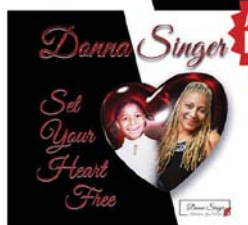
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## INDIE LIFE

### JOYCE GRANT



# EMBRACING FAMILY HISTORY

For 22 years, vocalist Joyce Grant had a nearly uninterrupted weekly engagement at Zingari Ristorante, located in San Francisco's Club Donatello hotel. Then the global landscape shifted, due to the twin upheavals of the coronavirus pandemic and the public protests over the killing of George Floyd on May 25.

"This hatred has always been there—it's been going on my whole lifetime," Grant said, referring to racist attacks on African Americans. "You would think in 2020 that we would have gotten passed this," she continued, via phone from her home in Vallejo, California. "But, nope."

Four months prior to that interview, Grant and her pianist/music director Doug McKeehan were onstage at Zingari, entertaining a steady flow of regulars and tourists with an ease cultivated during more than two decades together on the bandstand.

Music has always been a part of Grant's family life. She is the paternal great-great grandniece of Scott Joplin (c. 1868–1917), her sister was a music major and her cousin worked as a music teacher. Even today, Grant's mother occasionally comes out to sing guest duets. Gifted with a flexible mezzo-soprano range, Grant's vocal style lives up to the tagline of her 2010 album, *In The Morning*: "a little jazz, r&b and a little bit of me."

Following the first of three sets of standards, pop hits and originals—including the melancholy title track to her new album, *Surrounded By Blue*

(Blujazz)—Grant and McKeehan sat down to discuss the disc.

"I've worked with Joyce for a long time, and I had some songs that were in the back in my head that I always wanted to hear her sing," McKeehan said.

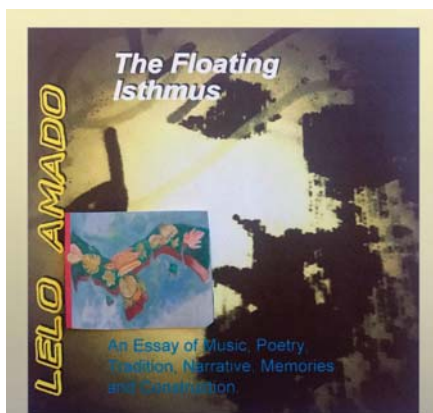
Regarding a dramatic rendition of The Beatles' "Help," McKeehan said, "I wanted to arrange that as a slow, gospel kind of song, like Aretha [Franklin] might have done it. I also had a couple of my originals I could hear her singing." From a version of "(Back Home Again In) Indiana" that incorporates modern vocal processing to an unexpectedly breezy reading of "Tenderly," Grant and McKeehan offer fresh interpretations of familiar favorites.

Growing up in the East Bay, Grant first sang in church. But it was a pair of Hollywood movies that sparked the idea of seriously pursuing performance as a career. Grant recalled that seeing Diana Ross portray Billie Holiday in the 1972 biopic *Lady Sings the Blues* made her say to herself, "This is what I want do."

The soundtrack to the 1973 film *The Sting*, which featured Marvin Hamlisch's versions of Scott Joplin compositions, was also key to Grant's aspirations: "My father would tell us about Scott Joplin from the time we were very, very young. I'd just go, 'OK. That's nice. Whatever.' Then that movie, *The Sting*, came out, and that's when it clicked."

—Yoshi Kato





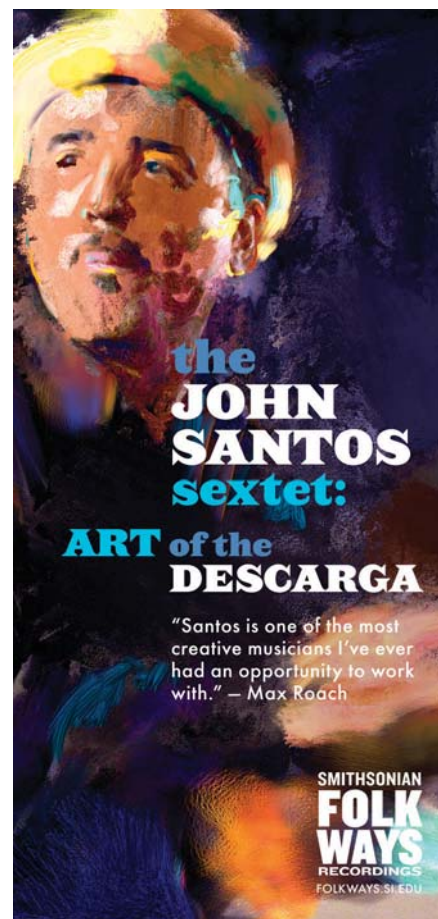
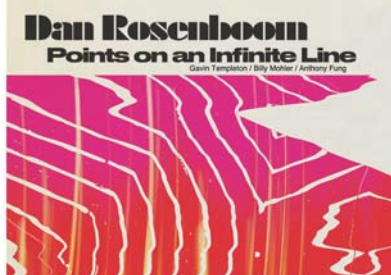
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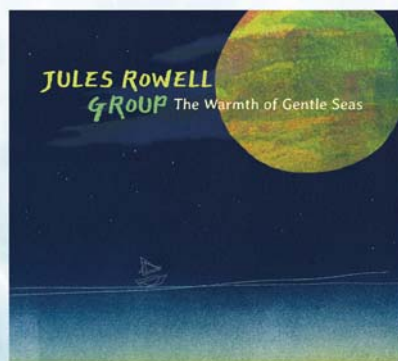


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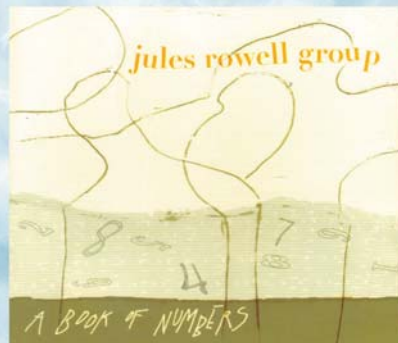


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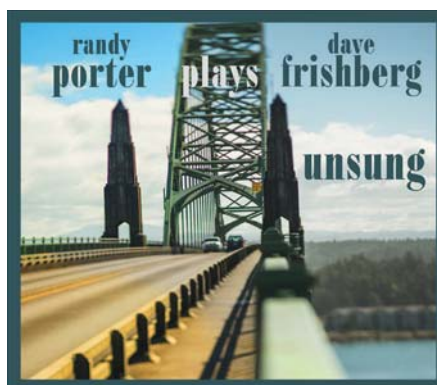
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ADAMA JALLOH



Source is the first full-length leader date from saxophonist Nubya Garcia.

## Nubya Garcia

### Source

CONCORD JAZZ 00302

★★★★½

Back in 2016, something was brewing in London. Free-to-attend workshops offered by organizations like Tomorrow's Warriors and Kinetika Bloco had been schooling kids in the art of improvisation each weekend for a decade. Student musicians were getting to be old enough to start putting on their own shows, and by extension draw in a new, young crowd to what previous-

ly had been seen as an inaccessible, chin-stroking traditionalist's genre. At the forefront of this nascent, multicultural movement was one young saxophonist with a keening sound, a soulful fluidity backed by a percussive bite.

This was Nubya Garcia.

Garcia established herself as a key member in many of the collectives that were springing up around the English capital, playing off a blend of Afro-Caribbean soundsystem culture and off-the-cuff takes on standards. You could hear her pulsing tenor saxophone in the ensemble Nérija, drummer Jake Long's band Maisha and tuba

player Theon Cross' trio.

While each of these groups was busy putting out its own albums, in 2017 Garcia released her debut solo EP, *Nubya's Five* (Jazz re:refreshed), and the following year saw another take on her brand of upbeat, driving jazz with the 12-inch *When We Are* (Nyasha). Now, signed under the weighty lineage of Concord Jazz, she's issuing her long-awaited debut, *Source*.

To those familiar with Garcia's work, *Source* will be an unsurprising listen. Collaborating with her longtime band of keyboardist Joe Armon-Jones, bassist Daniel Casimir and drummer Sam Jones, the album's nine tracks play as a thematic continuation of her previous dancefloor-primed EPs.

Numbers like "The Message Continues" and album opener "Pace" pair a neo-soul-influenced hook—one that would slot perfectly onto a Roy Hargrove recording—with Garcia's deft, rhythmic soloing and Jones and Casimir's locked-in, intricate grooves. And tracks like "Stand With Each Other" and "La Cumbia Me Esta Llamando"—with Garcia's Afrobeat and cumbia-influenced melodies—seem of a piece with the staccato, cross-cultural style of fellow London-based saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings.

There's also gesturing toward a wider, spiritual message at play in the meandering lassitude of these compositions, and in the infectious ensemble piece "Before Us In Demerara & Caura," as well as the trip-hopping "Boundless Beings." Yet, Garcia holds back just short of delivering the intensity we know she's capable of achieving during live performances. It ultimately makes for a tantalizing listen, but one that would be enhanced by the bandleader's confidence to fully cut loose and elevate her ensemble along the way.

Therein lies the key to pushing this now well-established London scene further into a truly individual moment of unfiltered and radical expression. Until then, *Source* is simply a satisfying debut.

—Ammar Kalia

**Source:** Pace; The Message Continues; Source; Together Is A Beautiful Place To Be; Stand With Each Other; Inner Game; La Cumbia Me Esta Llamando; Before Us In Demerara & Caura; Boundless Beings. (60:43)

**Personnel:** Nubya Garcia, tenor saxophone; Joe Armon-Jones, piano; Daniel Casimir, bass; Sam Jones, drums; Ms MAURICE (3, 5, 8), trumpet, flugelhorn; La Perla, Akenya, Richie Seiwright, Sheila Maurice-Grey, vocals; Karen Forero, Diana Sanmiguel, Giovanna Mogollón, vocals, percussion.

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## Benny Green *Benny's Crib*

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★★★★

For many of the best second- and third-generation bebop pianists, the electronic keyboard remains an occasional time-share, rarely a residence. But here we have Benny Green on *Benny's Crib*—a gentle, soft-spoken, well-mannered trio set—in which he takes a rare plugged-in side trip.

As a change of tone and texture, it is nice enough, though he seems reluctant to deeply immerse himself into its many options. Only on “Coral Keys” does Green dip sparingly into the

keyboard’s synthesizing potential, producing some soothing ponds of ambiance. The essential approach here remains very “Benny Green,” his elegance lightly airbrushed by the frosted filterings of the semiconductor aesthetic.

Green refreshes four previously recorded pieces, and for its third outing, “Harold Land” is bookended with a pleasant cameo by flutist Anne Drummond, though Green provides the even-tempered solo center. “Central Park South” reaches back to the bandleader’s Blue Note days and gets a smart but restrained performance.

Much of *Benny's Crib* actually lingers in a similar gear, moving from dreamy meditation to well-dressed but modest energy. Only once do things spring to life: The title track, originally an instrumental on Green’s *Magic Beans*, jumps to attention with a crackling Annie Ross-style vocalese turn by Veronica Swift, who steers the sharp boppish turns of phrase with a meticulousness exultation. I expect little from vocalese because of an inherent contradiction between the freedom of improvisation and the rigor of language. But it’s welcome here as the high mark in a low-key session.

—John McDonough

**Benny's Crib:** Tivoli; Central Park South; Coral Keys; My Girl Bill; Harold Land; Did We Try?; Seascape; My One And Only Love; Something In Common; For Tomorrow; Benny's Crib. (39:50)

**Personnel:** Benny Green, piano, electric piano; David Wong, bass; Aaron Kimmel, drums; Anne Drummond (3, 5), flute, alto flute, bass flute; Veronica Swift (11), vocals; Josh Jones (3), congas.

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

## Laubrock/Davis *Blood Moon*

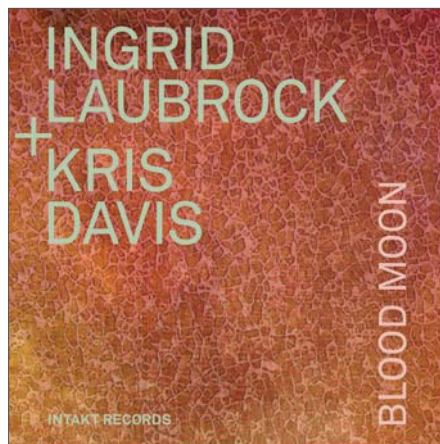
INTAKT 345

★★★★½

The big question to ask about reedist Ingrid Laubrock and pianist Kris Davis’ duo album is simple: What took them so long?

The German saxophonist and Canadian pianist first teamed up in 2010, joining drummer Tyshawn Sorey in the remarkable trio Paradoxical Frog. Their compatibility was immediately obvious—both improvised with an almost reflexive compositional rigor and reacted to each other (and Sorey) as if mind-reading. Moreover, they kept turning up together, whether in ongoing ensembles, such as Laubrock’s Anti-House and the LARK quartet, or on one-offs like drummer Nick Fraser’s recent *Zoning* (Astral Spirits). In every case, they’ve fit together like yin and yang.

*Blood Moon* makes that connection explicit. Laubrock and Davis have naturally complementary skills, balancing composition and improvisation in mutually beneficial ways. Laubrock’s writing and playing offers an attention to detail that pays off both structurally and aesthetically, ensuring that the long lines and extended harmonies of “Flying Embers” are as satisfying melodically as they are intellectually.



Davis, for her part, buttresses the intervallic logic of “Snakes And Lattice” with a deft sense of rhythmic counterpoint, while the quietly absorbing read of “Golgi Complex” here offers a groove that’s as implicit as the initial versions on Davis’ own *Diatom Ribbons* were explicit.

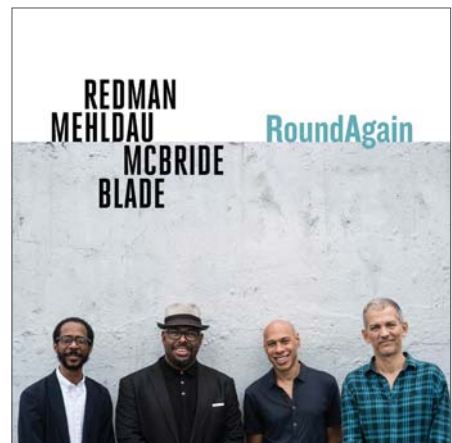
Throughout, *Blood Moon* comes off as a conversation between two equally intriguing poly-maths, leaving the listener hungry for more.

—J.D. Considine

**Blood Moon:** Snakes And Lattice; Blood Moon; Gunweep; Flying Embers; Whistlings; Maroon; Golgi Complex; Elephant In The Room; Jagged Jaunts. (52:45)

**Personnel:** Ingrid Laubrock, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Kris Davis, piano.

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



## Redman/Mehldau/ McBride/Blade *Round Again*

NONESUCH 627594

★★★★½

Imagine your neighbor owns an exotic car. It seldom leaves the garage, but when it does roll out of the driveway, there’s no missing its great lines, its refined exhaust note and the way it accelerates away with coiled power to spare. That’s the mystique and magnetism of this all-star quartet, which makes its first recorded appearance here since 1994, when it came together under the leadership of saxophonist Joshua Redman.

While Redman contributed the most compositions to *Round Again*—three of the seven—there’s a remarkable equanimity on display, making it seem like each piece was written with the others in mind. While Brad Mehldau’s circular “Moe Honk” provides him with a vehicle for a dizzying piano solo, it’s also an ideal showcase for Redman’s effervescent virtuosity on tenor as he plays over and around the hard-charging rhythm section. Drummer Brian Blade’s “Your Part To Play,” which closes the album on a meditative note, allows each musician to develop the theme’s rising intensity in his own way without disturbing the surface unity.

On song after song, the musicians pass ideas seamlessly, anticipate and respond engagingly, and maintain an infectious energy that makes the listener feel like there’s nothing beyond their abilities. They play as one, although Blade—who, on other recordings, often distinguishes himself with his barely contained enthusiasm—stands apart with endlessly creative cymbal work. Like the playing itself, the sound is so well balanced that every part of his kit carries the same weight.

No recording is truly effortless, but this one churns forward with such precision and grace that it sounds like it is.

—James Hale

**Round Again:** Undertow; Moe Honk; Silly Little Love Song; Right Back Round Again; Floppy Diss; Father; Your Part To Play. (44:41)

**Personnel:** Joshua Redman, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone; Brad Mehldau, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Brian Blade, drums.

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



# The Hot Box

|  | Critics | J.D. Considine | James Hale | Ammar Kalia | John McDonough |
|--|---------|----------------|------------|-------------|----------------|
| <b>Nubya Garcia</b><br><i>Source</i>       |         | ★★½            | ★★★★½      | ★★★★½       | ★★★            |
| <b>Benny Green</b><br><i>Benny's Crib</i>  |         | ★★★★½          | ★★★        | ★★★★½       | ★★★            |
| <b>Laubrock/Davis</b><br><i>Blood Moon</i> |         | ★★★★½          | ★★★★       | ★★★         | ★★★            |
| <b>Redman Quartet</b><br><i>RoundAgain</i> |         | ★★★★           | ★★★★½      | ★★★★        | ★★★★½          |

## Critics' Comments

### Nubya Garcia, *Source*

Kamasi Washington did *The Epic*. Nubya Garcia gives us *The Prosaic*. —J.D. Considine

Akin to Pharoah Sanders in intensity, intent and tone, Garcia proves she's a voice to contend with, even as her debut wavers between stylistic approaches. —James Hale

Garcia's big, warm-toned tenor treads the changes with arpeggiated runs that swell into shouted peaks with a gospel-like energy dynamic. Good gift for pacing, but newish artists should be discouraged from serving as their own composers. —John McDonough

### Benny Green, *Benny's Crib*

Green's articulation of harmony and rhythm is a consummate statement of mainstream jazz orthodoxy, but his impeccable control of dynamics on electric piano adds an extra dimension to the music, making even the mundane seem unexpectedly charming. —J.D. Considine

Love it or leave it, there's no denying the electric piano has warmth and resonance that sets it apart, but it's more garnish than main course here. Even with Green's deft touch, this collection never rises above background music. —James Hale

Green takes the unmistakable sound of '70s pop and soul, and translates it into an oneiric medium for compositions by Dexter Gordon, Kenny Barron and himself. A breezy, uplifting listen packed with thoughtful moments. —Ammar Kalia

### Laubrock/Davis, *Blood Moon*

Cat and mouse. Hand in glove. Pas de deux. Laubrock and Davis flow and step together in every combination imaginable, never less than compellingly. —James Hale

Laubrock and Davis produce an uncompromising if somewhat inscrutable collection. While numbers like "Gunweep" and "Whistlings" are subsumed by their own intricacies, it's on the quieter, more pensive compositions—like the title track—where the pair allow ample space for beautiful, tender interaction. —Ammar Kalia

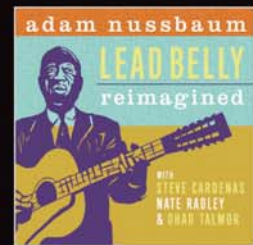
An austere jigsaw puzzle, combining preening soundscapes with a staccato, often-serrated precision. Cartoonish, angular minuets tiptoe asymmetrically with a sometimes playful but always stern cerebral rigor. Invites seriousness in return for its intellectual severity. —John McDonough

### Redman Quartet, *RoundAgain*

Typically elegant playing from Redman and Mehlau, and a joy to hear, but it's McBride and Blade who throw enough fat on the fire to get these tunes to sizzle. —J.D. Considine

This immensely powerful quartet showcases its continued, almost telepathic improvisatory connection 26 years after its previous studio album. Blade plays with an unrivaled, mercurial fluidity behind the kit, teasing song from his drums, while Redman's rhythmic, acerbic saxophone locks in with Mehlau and McBride's journeying phrasings. A real treat. —Ammar Kalia

For Redman, the first among equals in this all-star summit, his happiest, most likable work since *Back East* in 2007. Original compositions offer fertile, sometimes brainy ground where unexpected surprises sprout. A lively froth from four smart players who've hung together a long time. —John McDonough



### ADAM NUSSBAUM LEAD BELLY REIMAGINED SSC 1578 - IN STORES August 28

Two years ago, Sunnyside released drummer Adam Nussbaum's fantastic tribute to one of his idols, *The Lead Belly Project*. Nussbaum's band of saxophonist Ohad Talmor and dual guitarists, Steve Cardenas and Nate Radley has recorded a follow up album. The musicians' comfort with the material and each other can be heard in the results, as the pieces have an emotional intimacy that goes beyond their prior efforts.



### BRIAN CULLMAN WINTER CLOTHES SSC 1592 - IN STORES September 11

At once raucous and tender, *Winter Clothes* is Brian Cullman's most fully realized album to date, one with nothing to prove, just the easy camaraderie of first-rate musicians playing in tandem, the snap crackle pop of the rhythm, and the smoky beauty of the songs.

This is Cullman's first fully cooperative album with longtime friend and collaborator Jimi Zhivago (Glen Hansard, Ollabelle). Zhivago was crucial in helping to shape eclectic sounds to Cullman's lyrics & melodies.

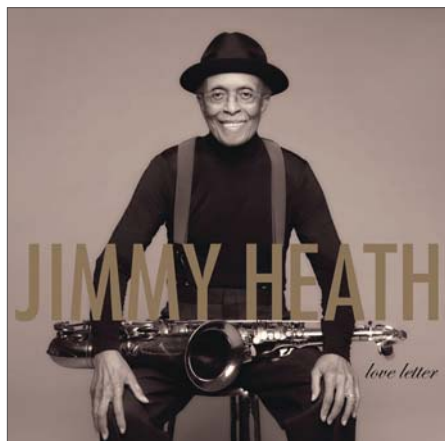


### ADAM KOLKER LOST SSC 1593 - IN STORES September 25

The quartet Kolker assembled includes longtime collaborators and friends, all equal in making this remarkably communicative music. Pianist Bruce Barth has been a sounding board both on and off the concert stage, his ease and wit fitting easily alongside Kolker. Bassist Ugonna Okegwo remains one of the steadiest timekeepers and most powerful accompanists. Drummer Billy Hart is remarkable on every level, bringing energy and an air of professionalism to everything he does.



www.sunnysiderecords.com



## Jimmy Heath *Love Letter*

VERVE 0712470

★★★★½

*Love Letter*, completed just weeks before Jimmy Heath's death in January, represents a significant first: Of the saxophonist's more than 20 albums as a leader, this poignant farewell is his only recording solely consisting of ballads.

Throughout the album's eight down-tempo—a selective complement of lesser-known pieces and time-honored standards—Heath reveals a refined emotionality that bebop hubbub seldom allows. Take his long, mournful tenor solo

on “Don’t Explain,” one of the album’s two nods to Billie Holiday, or the disarming lilt of his soprano on “Inside Your Heart.” Reflective moments like these define the album, but the recording’s success rests in no small measure on the subtle responsiveness of Heath’s rhythm section. His generous arrangements underscore the value he accorded these players, as on “Con Alma,” where a twisting melody finds its rhythmic center in drummer Lewis Nash and bassist David Wong’s decisive groove. The same goes for pianist Kenny Barron’s velvety setting on “La Mesha,” Heath’s wistful duet with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

Heath also pairs off with two other formidable guests: vocalist Gregory Porter, on a version of “Don’t Misunderstand” that’s so crushing future balladeers might pause before taking it on; and vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant, on “Left Alone,” an aching melody that undergirds Holiday’s despondent lyric about isolation and loss. During the outro of that latter tune, Heath faithfully echoes Salvant’s phrases, but drops out before the final line. The unvoiced riff rings all the louder for its absence.

—Suzanne Lorge

**Love Letter:** Ballad From Upper Neighbors Suite; Left Alone; Inside Your Heart; La Mesha; Don’t Misunderstand; Con Alma; Fashion Or Passion; Don’t Explain. (44:20)

**Personnel:** Jimmy Heath, tenor saxophone; Wynton Marsalis (4), trumpet; Kenny Barron, piano; David Wong, bass; Lewis Nash, drums; Cécile McLorin Salvant (2), Gregory Porter (5), vocals; Monte Croft (1–3, 6, 7), vibraphone; Russell Malone (2, 3, 6, 7), guitar.

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

## Eddie Henderson *Shuffle And Deal*

SMOKE SESSIONS 2005

★★★★

Heading into his 80th birthday, Eddie Henderson issues *Shuffle And Deal*—a material addition to his vast oeuvre of leader dates. The album builds on several long-term creative relationships fostered during the trumpeter’s prolific career. He returns to the studio with practically the same winning lineup from his 2018 release, *Be Cool*, and daughter Cava Menzies and wife Natsuko Henderson again contribute compositions. Most notably, though, the aesthetic pull of the album derives from Henderson’s deep affinity with freakishly empathic pianist Kenny Barron.

The word “shuffle” is a play on the groove of the title cut—a sophisticated, Miles Davis-inspired composition Henderson penned for the album—but also describes the recurrence of tunes from his and his players’ established repertoire. Henderson includes two Barron compositions: “Flight Path,” a fervent, melodic imperative, and the charming Latin medium-tempo “Cook’s Bay.” There’s also altoist Donald Harrison’s “Burnin’” and four lovingly polished standards—recognizable ballads rendered all the more touching alongside the rambunctious originals.

Besides Henderson’s own pieces, two other tunes are all-new with this release. Menzies’ clev-



er, mixed-meter “By Any Means” delights with its clean horn lines and irresistible harmonic undertow, and Natsuko Henderson’s neo-soul “Boom”—featuring Mike Clark’s high-velocity drumming—sparkles with intensity.

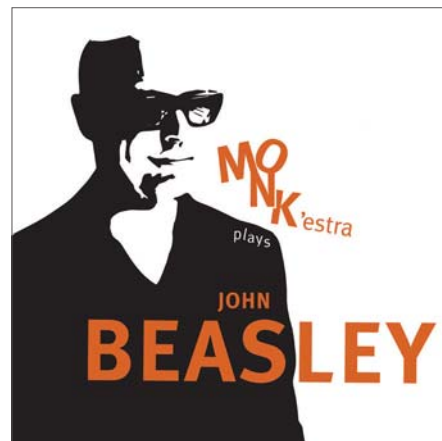
But it is Henderson’s clarion trumpeting that guides the crush of talent on this album. His musical wisdom, gleaned during decades spent on the best jazz bandstands, informs every unerring note.

—Suzanne Lorge

**Shuffle And Deal:** Shuffle And Deal; Flight Path; Over The Rainbow; By Any Means; Cook’s Bay; It Might As Well Be Spring; Boom; God Bless The Child; Burnin’; Smile. (58:57)

**Personnel:** Eddie Henderson, trumpet; Donald Harrison, alto saxophone; Kenny Barron, piano; Gerald Cannon, bass; Mike Clark, drums.

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



## John Beasley *MONK'estra Plays John Beasley*

MACK AVENUE 1172

★★★★★

John Beasley has arranged the brass brighter and brasher, the low horns to be more growly and his tasty keyboard parts to be artfully highlighted on his third far-reaching album with MONK'estra. Extending marvelously synchronized section motifs—those indelibly quirky Monk phrases—into swelling backdrops that balance freely impassioned soloists, Beasley as a pianist and composer, too, draws out even more melodic, harmonic and rhythmic implications in music by Monk, Bird and Duke.

The intricate recasting of “Donna Lee” contains several thrills, but the motifs throughout are colored vividly, etched with fine yet robust lines and graceful in their surprising twists. The large ensemble’s performance seems flawless and the small group Beasley’s assembled for a few tracks with longtime colleagues such as bassist John Patitucci, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta and soulful harmonica player Grégoire Maret is bonded in camaraderie. Among the virtues of Beasley’s charts is that they never outstay their welcome; instead, they leave us wanting more. And with the abundance of details to absorb here, that’s really saying something. Beasley has a brilliant musical mind and warm yet exploratory touch, and his originals fit sweetly amid the time-honored repertoire. Jazz history is beautifully served here by Beasley leading his orchestra to embody his own unique vision.

—Howard Mandel

**MONK'estra Plays John Beasley:** Steve-O; Sam Rivers; Monk’s Mood; Donna Lee; Song For Dub; Five Spot; Implication; Masekela; Rhythm-A-Ning; Off Minor; Be.YOU.tiful; Locomotive; Come Sunday. (66:23)

**Personnel:** John Beasley, keyboards; Bob Sheppard, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Danny Janklow, alto saxophone, clarinet; Chris Lewis, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Thomas Luer, Ralph Moore, tenor saxophone; Tommy Peterson, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Adam Schroeder, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Wendell Kelly, Ryan Dragon, Ido Meshulam, Steve Hughes, Francisco Torres, trombone; Bijon Watson, Kye Palmer, James Ford, Brian Swartz, Rashawn Ross, trumpet; John Patitucci, Benjamin Shepherd, bass; Ulysses Owens Jr., Vinnie Colaiuta, drums; Terreon Gully, drums, percussion; Joey De Leon, conga; Grégoire Maret, harmonica; Joey DeFrancesco, Hammond B-3; Hubert Laws, flute; Jubilant Sykes, vocals.

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



## Hedvig Mollestad *Ekhidna*

RUNE GRAMMOFON 2215

★★★★½

Guitarist Hedvig Mollestad is well known to fans of guitar crunch; she's led an eponymous trio through a handful of studio dates and a blistering double-live LP since 2011, all blurring the line between fusion and hard rock. The very different ensemble on *Ekhidna*, a group that includes a trumpeter and a pair of keyboardists, displays another side of the guitarist's personality.

For "A Stone's Throw," a powerhouse rock riff is simultaneously bolstered and subverted by tumbling waves of drums and a countermelody from Susana Santos Silva's trumpet. Eventually, Mollestad and Silva fall into sync, embarking on a jazz-rock odyssey straight out of 1969. One-third of the way through, things get placid and Pink Floyd-ish, with spacey keyboards swaddling exploratory guitar. "Antilone," the album's centerpiece, is even more amped-up, a full-tilt boogie that kicks off with a passage of solo guitar. As on the rest of the disc, the tune reveals more layers and subtleties as it continues, shifting from floor-shaking jazz-rock to psychedelic introspection, even heading into territory reminiscent of early-'70s Santana. *Ekhidna* is meant to be played good and loud through speakers, but it's also an album that rewards close listening through headphones. —Philip Freeman

**Ekhidna:** No Friends But The Mountains; A Stone's Throw; Antilone; Slightly Lighter; Ekhidna; One Leaf Left. (39:16)

**Personnel:** Hedvig Mollestad, guitar; Susana Santos Silva, trumpet; Marte Ebersson, Erlend Slettevoll, keyboards; Torstein Lofthus, drums; Ole Mofjell, percussion.

Ordering info: [rune Grammofon.com](http://rune Grammofon.com)



## Matt Wilson Quartet

*Hug!*

PALMETTO 2196

★★★★½

Between the plague and politics, 2020 seems like a good year, if you tote a pitchfork and walk on cloven hoofs. The rest of us could use some lifting up, and no one's better suited to that job than Matt Wilson.

The drummer knows what it takes to trek past the darkness toward the light, and he's walked the walk. In 2015, he memorialized his late wife with a warmhearted recording by his large ensemble, Big Happy Family. Who better to offer us all a hug right now? The material on *Hug!*—its title now serving as an unrealistic promise—is split between Wilson's originals and tunes selected to show off his ensemble's strengths, bouncing from one bright spot to the next. "The One Before This," a Sonny Stitt and Gene Ammons tune, shows just how jaunty a hard-bop blues can be. But Wilson can't entirely ignore the world's bad news. His "Space Force March" marshals grating tones to express reservations about 45's priorities, then segues into a jubilant run through Sun Ra's "Interplanetary Music." Some tunes can edge toward cuteness, but one wonders if the mercifully brief mugging of "Man Bun" will be in the band's book by the time clubs open up again. —Bill Meyer

**Hug!:** The One Before This; Jabaloni; In The Moment; Every Day With You; Space Force March/Interplanetary Music; Joie De Vivre; Sunny & Share; Hug!; King Of The Road; Man Bun; Hamba Kahle (Goodbye). (45:47)

**Personnel:** Matt Wilson, drums, xylophone, vocals; Jeff Lederer, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, clarinet, piccolo, vocals; Kirk Knuffke, cornet, soprano cornet, vocals; Chris Lightcap, bass, electric bass, eight-string space bass, vocals; Matt Combs (8), strings.

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



ridesymbol.com

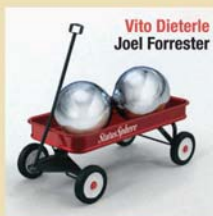
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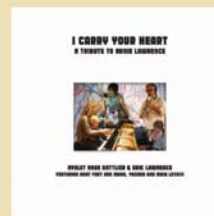
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RID-CD-30

*Ace saxophonist DiTerle leads a state-of-the-art tenor and organ combo*



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*Status Sphere*  
RID-CD-25

*DiTerle teams up with bandmate Joel Forrester for originals by Monk and Forrester*



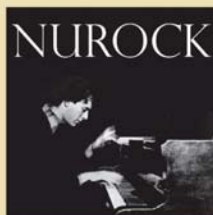
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## Rez Abbasi *Django-shift* WHIRLWIND 4762

★★★★

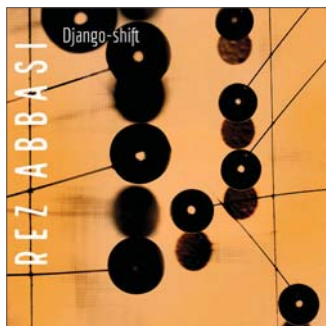
In a strange way, Django Reinhardt has been as much a casualty as a beneficiary in the resurgence of “gypsy jazz.” Although widely recognized as a jazz giant, his influence has been restricted to a single corner of the jazzworld, and apart from the occasional rendition of “Nuages,” almost nobody plays his music anymore.

With *Django-shift*, Rez Abbasi does his best to change that. Rather than replicate the sound and feel of Reinhardt’s performances, though, the guitarist focuses on his compositional style and melodic sensibility to bring this music into the present. And alongside electronic keyboardist Neil Alexander and drummer Michael Sarin, Abbasi offers an entirely new instrumental palette for these tunes. “Diminishing,” which in its original incarnation presents as quirky minor-key swing, is reimagined by Abbasi as a sort of dub fusion, with synth and fleet-fingered guitar over a loping, asymmetrical groove. Thanks to a liberal use of distorted keyboard and free time, “Swing 42” sounds way too modern for its retro title, while “Hungaria,” which in Reinhardt’s hands was all jivey pep, is here slowed down and rhythmically altered. Even something as familiar as the Kurt Weill chestnut “September” (a Django favorite) is made fresh, as Abbasi’s fretless guitar channels Reinhardt’s gift for melodic ornamentation.

—J.D. Considine

**Django-shift:** Diminishing; Swing 42; Heavy Artillery; Django’s Castle; Anniversary Song; Cavalerie; Douce Ambiance; Hungaria; September Song. (48:55)  
**Personnel:** Rez Abbasi, acoustic guitars; Neil Alexander, keyboards, electronics; Michael Sarin, drums.

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



## Cecile Strange *Blue*

APRIL 76

★★★★

Languid, moody and dreamy, the aptly titled *Blue* sets listeners adrift on a soundscape painted with tonal colors that are both melancholic and warm. On her second album as a leader, the young Danish saxophonist Cecile Strange draws a rich, deep tone out of her tenor that blends seamlessly with the minimalist playing of her perfectly modulated quartet.

“Bridge,” the first of six original compositions, sets the tone for the album with a hazy ambiance that makes everything that follows seem as effortless as breathing. In “Hymn To Papa,” a muted saxophone floats above a contemplative keyboard progression, while Thommy Andersson plays his bass like a guitar, plucking a rapid series of runs. After a long pause, Strange’s tenor emerges, offering a lovely coda suspended in tranquility. *Blue* heads way up north for “Mykines”—a remote village on the Faroe Islands—with a jazzier sound that mirrors the rolling hills and precipitous cliffs that surround the North Atlantic hamlet. Borne aloft, “The Dance #4.2” swings on Strange’s tenor tremolos, then retraces *Blue*’s opening theme on “First Step.” Atmospheric and evocative throughout, the album ends on a suspended note both haunting and hopeful, and makes a perfect companion for these often lonely pandemic times.

—Cree McCree

**Blue:** Bridge; Bjergkøbing; Hymn To Papa; Mykines; The Dance #4.2; First Step. (43:40)

**Personnel:** Cecile Strange, tenor saxophone; Peter Rosendal, piano; Thommy Andersson, bass; Jakob Høyer, drums.

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



## Potsa Lotsa XL *Silk Songs For Space Dogs* LEO 878

★★★★½

The name of saxophonist Silke Eberhard’s ever-morphing ensemble Potsa Lotsa derives from an alternate title for the Eric Dolphy composition “Number Eight.” When she started recording under the name, Eberhard was devoted to celebrating Dolphy’s work. In this beefed-up version of the group—a tentet featuring cello, vibes and plenty of horns—the concentration is on original material, but material tapping into Dolphy’s sound.

Each track on *Silk Songs For Space Dogs* nestles into a zone where free-jazz and post-bop start to bleed together. “Max Bialystock” opens with various instruments sputtering out little runs of notes and noise, clashing and connecting until it all bursts forth into a trampling rhythm that’s equal parts Duke Ellington and The Lounge Lizards. Kay Lübke’s drums and Gerhard Gschlößl’s trombone merrily tumble into one another at the midpoint of album closer “Song In Orange”; the mischievous tension between the two sides of Eberhard’s compositional brain gives *Silk Songs* its spark. Those moments of disarray never seem to arrive when you expect, though. And on the rare occasion that Potsa Lotsa decides to play it entirely straight, the relief that arrives as suspense vanishes is divine.

—Robert Ham

**Silk Songs For Space Dogs:** Max Bialystock; Crossing Colours; Skeletons And Silhouettes; Fünfer, Or Higher You Animals; Ecstasy On Your Feet; Schirm; One For Laika; Song In Orange. (51:47)

**Personnel:** Silke Eberhard, alto saxophone; Nikolaus Neuser, trumpet; Gerhard Gschlößl, trombone; Jürgen Kupke, clarinet; Johannes Fink, cello; Patrick Braun, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Taiko Saito, vibraphone; Antonis Anissegos, piano; Igor Spallati, bass; Kay Lübke, drums.

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



## Black Art Jazz Collective *Ascension* HIGHNOTE 7329

★★★★

In nearly every sense of the word, democracy reigns on *Ascension*. The Black Art Jazz Collective is an evenly balanced sextet, three in the rhythm section and three horns up front. And apart from Jackie McLean’s “Twin Towers,” that equanimity is almost shared in the compositions and solos.

Pianist Victor Gould’s ostinato on the album’s title tune is an invitation to his cohort to show their wares, and saxophonist Wayne Escoffery and trumpeter Jeremy Pelt eagerly oblige, the contours of their creativity never far from Gould’s harmonic layers or drummer Mark Whitfield Jr.’s rippling tempi. On “Involuntary Servitude,” there’s a full ensemble effect that’s topped off by Whitfield’s rapid-fire conclusion; Pelt’s power and imagination, as elsewhere, are ever-present spices. “No Words Needed” is the shortest tune here and the only ballad, but it lacks none of BAJC’s togetherness, the band being gifted with a resonance that characterized Miles Davis’ prime ’60s quintets. Think *ESP*. Better yet, think BAJC, because the ensemble has an eye on tradition, a feel for the past’s turbulence and a way of looking back as they forge ahead. It’s something their Afrocentric forebears called “sankofa.”

—Herb Boyd

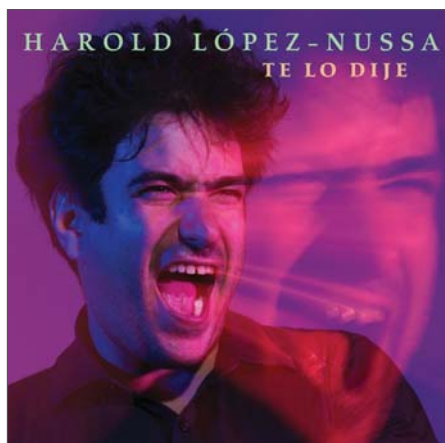
**Ascension:** Ascension; Mr. Willis; Involuntary Servitude; Twin Towers; No Words Needed; Tulsa; Iron Man; For The Kids; Birdie’s Bounce. (47:38)

**Personnel:** Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Wayne Escoffery, tenor saxophone; James Burton III, trombone; Victor Gould, keyboards; Rashaan Carter, bass; Mark Whitfield Jr., drums.

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







## Harold López-Nussa *Te Lo Dije*

MACK AVENUE 1179

★★★★

*Te Lo Dije* is used throughout Cuba to mean, “I told you so.” True to the defiant spirit of the phrase, Havana-based pianist Harold López-Nussa’s new album explodes and expands contemporary narratives around modern jazz, ingeniously incorporating myriad Afro-Cuban styles.

The album opens with “Habana Sin Sábanas,” a high-octane track that combines the intricacies of an uptempo Latin vamp, salsa-style trumpet and a complex piano *montuno* with a syncopated bebop-like head and harmonic structure. The latter stylistic qualities might be assumed to be outside of the Afro-Cuban tradition, but on many of the songs here, López-Nussa deftly closes these supposed gaps imposed by the silo of genre.

In fact, on the closer, “Van Van Meets New Orleans,” López-Nussa specifically signifies where *songo*—a term coined by the beloved Cuban band Los Van Van—meets New Orleans. By drawing the comparison, López-Nussa elucidates the Cuban roots that helped make jazz what it is. And the bandleader again draws the parallel on “Timbeando (To Chick Corea),” a tribute to the iconic composer’s *Elektric Band*.

*Te Lo Dije* is rip-roaring fun, often flying by at a breathless clip. It’s also astonishingly fresh. Though firmly seated in the rhythmic syncopation and interwoven melodies Latin music is known for, the recording is catapulted into new realms with López-Nussa’s fearless sense of stylistic combinations.

—Alexa Peters

**Te Lo Dije:** Habana Sin Sábanas; Te Lo Dije; The Windmills Of Your Mind; Lila’s Mambo; El Buey Cansao; Timbeando (To Chick Corea); Un Día De Noviembre; Jocosa Guajira; Jazztón; Sobre El Atelier; Van Van Meets New Orleans. (42:57)

**Personnel:** Harold López-Nussa, Jorge Aragon (9), keyboards; Julio César González, bass; Mayquel González, trumpet; Ruy Adrián López-Nussa, drums; Vincent Peirani (3), accordion; Cimafunk (5); Kelvis Ochoa (8), vocals; Randy Malcolm, José Julián Morejón, percussion; Heikel Fabián Trimiño, trombone.

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

## Charles Tolliver *Connect*

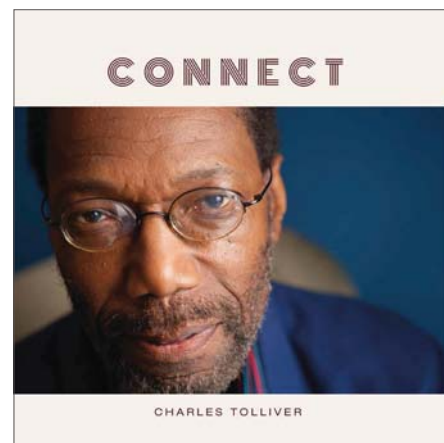
GEARBOX 1561

★★★

Following a lengthy hiatus, *Connect* is the welcomed return of veteran trumpeter Charles Tolliver. It picks up on the same energy he emitted on the big-band dates *With Love* (2006) and *Emperor March: Live At The Blue Note* (2009), despite the ensemble here being a smaller group.

With its rugged amalgam of hard-bop swagger, backbeat funk and steely Afrocentric sense of determination, the timing of the album couldn’t be more ideal, given the current swell in interest around 1970s underground jazz on labels like Strata East, which Tolliver helmed alongside Stanley Cowell. That music’s gone on to inform generations of players, including British tenorist Binker Golding, who guests on two tracks here.

Those who caught Tolliver’s live shows from the previous decade probably will recognize the repertoire on *Connect*. It starts with the thundering “Blue Soul,” where drummer Lenny White, pianist Keith Brown and bassist Buster Williams pound an insistent rhythm before engaging in a loping medium-tempo groove on which alto saxophonist Jesse Davis joins Tolliver in a street-player melody. Tolliver’s tart, avant-blues improvisation reveals a weathered beauty that best can be compared to the emotive prowess of singers



like Jimmy Scott or Sarah Vaughan in their later years.

The ensemble also explores Tolliver’s moody “Emperor March,” which moves at a disquieting rubato tempo, bouncing back and forth between jazz-funk and a jangly samba groove. The fetching hard-bop burner “Copasetic” recalls Tolliver’s glory years, while the driving, Latin-tinged “Suspension” captures the combo at its most fierce.

—John Murph

**Connect:** Blue Soul; Emperor March; Copasetic; Suspension. (39:15)

**Personnel:** Charles Tolliver, trumpet; Lenny White, drums; Buster Williams, bass; Keith Brown, piano; Jesse Davis, alto saxophone; Binker Golding (2, 4), tenor saxophone.

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



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# New Voices in a New Century

"We are complex people," clarinetist, band-leader and composer Anat Cohen tells Bill Beuttler at one point in ***Make it New: Reshaping Jazz in the 21st Century*** (Lever Press), a rewarding book that examines some of the key voices directing contemporary jazz. "We're not just one thing," she concludes.

That sentiment can easily be applied to Vijay Iyer, Jason Moran, Esperanza Spalding and the other artists examined throughout Beuttler's book. And yet, one of the most fascinating aspects of *Make it New*—which functions as a welcome companion to Nate Chinen's 2018 book *Playing Changes: Jazz for the New Century*—is its consideration of the varying factors that connect all the figures being discussed.

Some relationships are ethereal, such as a shared admiration and immersion in the music's history, including the work of influential figures like Andrew Hill and collectives like the AACM. The book also documents how each artist is compelled to find their most honest, undiluted approaches to expression while drawing on their own pasts. Other connections are more surprising, such as consecutive chapters on Cohen and saxophonist Miguel Zenón, who were in a band together called Mango Blue while both studied at Berklee.

In detailing the various meeting points among all of his subjects, Beuttler establishes not so much a sense that jazz is a small world, but that those who reach its creative heights are more alike than different.

Opening with an engrossing look at Moran's far-reaching creative pursuits, Beuttler—a former critic for *The Boston Globe* and contributor to *DownBeat*—uses a Geri Allen tribute concert to establish a direct line to subsequent chapters and to Iyer, the younger pianist's "friendly rival." That Allen tribute concert also featured Spalding, who teaches at Harvard with Iyer.

The chapter on Moran is transfixing for the author's depiction of a relentless drive to create alongside mezzo-soprano Alicia Hall Moran, the pianist's wife.

"I'm not fighting with him," she told Beuttler of the couple's at-times contentious creative process. "We're fighting with the idea, and we do that very well. It's one of the most exciting things."

Iyer is equally illuminating in interviews, especially with regard to his thoughts on issues of race and gender within the music. In recounting some of the backlash he faced from fellow performers in the wake of critical success, Iyer notes the dynamics at play, pointing out that his detractors frequently have been white male musicians who have admitted to not exploring the pianist's catalog



before calling him overpraised.

"It's just white male aggression," said Iyer, sounding exasperated in recounting a brief online back-and-forth. "That's the real problem, and that's its own book right there."

Iyer also played his own role on social media in another controversy examined here: the sexist off-hand comments made in a 2017 interview between keyboardist Robert Glasper and The Bad Plus' then-pianist Ethan Iverson. Iyer pointed out the lack of female interview subjects on Iverson's *Do the Math* blog, and Beuttler questioned Iverson and Glasper about their roles in the controversy.

In their conversation, Glasper alludes to a quote Herbie Hancock attributed to Miles Davis about the value of paying attention to your audience. But it's Spalding who supplies the definitive response here: "Robert is very silly and says dumb shit sometimes," she said. "I think it's easy to address all our frustration to an easy target and Robert was an easy target."

In addition to all the recent history here—including Iverson's departure from The Bad Plus—illuminating but comparatively harmonious chapters on Zenón and Cohen lack the same frisson. But from Spalding's sharp, sometimes contrarian conversations with Beuttler on creativity and society, to the author's discussion with Glasper around a visit to the Morans' home in Harlem that seemed near-sacramental with its mix of painting and dinner, *Make it New* confirms that this is a unique moment in time to be alive and listening to jazz. Its definition might be uncertain and ever-changing, but its future is not. **DB**

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



## Spanish Harlem Orchestra *The Latin Jazz Project*

ARTISTSHARE 05177

★★★★½

Despite Spanish Harlem Orchestra considering this its first full-length Latin-jazz recording, those who love the ensemble's intoxicating blend of Afro-Latin rhythms, bright melodies and multi-hued harmonies won't find *The Latin Jazz Project* to be a grand departure from the band's past.

With the help of esteemed guests—vibraphonist Joe Locke, saxophonist Dave Liebman, trumpeter Tom Harrell, vocalist Kurt Elling—the orchestra ups the jazz ante by presenting a sterling package that includes a marvelous make-over of Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight," where a flaring trumpet solo from Jonathan Powell would make Dizzy Gillespie proud. The rendition also highlights the prowess of Oscar Hernández, the orchestra's leader, on piano.

Jazz standards, however, don't overwhelm the disc, with Hernández's originals being granted a significant spotlight. He infuses his writing with punchy rhythms, intricate polyrhythmic fire, satiny harmonies and, most crucially, lingering melodies. A highlight includes his gentle ballad "Silent Prayers," where Liebman's soprano melody soars across a billowing rhythm. The composer also pays tribute to Jerry and Andy González on the triumphant "Fort Apache," which again affords a platform for the leader to unravel a commanding solo before helping propel the momentum with a *montuno* pattern.

From start to finish, Spanish Harlem Orchestra flaunts its jazz bona fides without dismissing its statement of purpose. —John Murphy

**The Latin Jazz Project:** Ritmo De Mi Gente; Bobo; Invitation; Acid Rain; Las Palmas; Silent Prayers; Round Midnight; Fort Apache; Latin Perspective; Joe And Oscar; Descarga De Jazz. (53:17)

**Personnel:** Oscar Hernández, piano; Héctor Colón, Manuel "Maneco" Ruiz, Jonathan Powell, trumpet, flugelhorn; Tom Harrell (5), Michael Rodriguez (8), trumpet; Doug Beavers, Noah Bless, trombone; Bob Mintzer (2), Bob Franceschini (4), Miguel Zenón (6), Dave Liebman (6), Jorge Castro, Mitch Frohman (11), saxophones; Luisito Quintero, George Delgado, Jorge González, percussion; Gerardo "Jerry" Madera, Jimmy Haslip (6), bass; Jeremy Bosch, flute, vocals; Kurt Elling (3), Marco Bermudez (11), Carlos Cascante (11), vocals; Joe Locke, vibraphone (9, 10).

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



## Jeff Hamilton Trio *Catch Me If You Can*

CAPRI 74163

★★★★

A versatile, tastefully swinging and eminently musical drummer in the tradition of his mentors Shelly Manne and Mel Lewis, Jeff Hamilton colors this music with hands, sticks and brushes in subtle yet masterful ways.

Flanked by pianist Tamir Hendelman and bassist John Hamar, the bandleader makes tunes like John Williams' "Make Me Rainbows" and George Cables' "Helen's Song" feel good with his relaxed approach and unerring instincts on the kit. Hendelman's challenging stop-time vehicle "Catch Me If You Can" is a swinging showcase for the bandleader's trademark brushwork, while Baden Powell's alluring bossa nova "Lapinha" has him exercising ultimate finesse, playing with his fingers on the snare before resorting to brushes. One of Hamar's two contributions, "Bucket O' Fat," opens with a virtuosic extended bass solo, before the trio jumps in at the 1:30 mark on the earthy, folksy refrain. Elsewhere, Hamilton filigrees the proceedings with his discerning use of cymbals, skins and rims on Artie Shaw's "Moonray."

From a drummer's perspective, there's plenty of technical flash here, but it's all happening strictly inside the music, rather than on top of it—more Ed Thigpen than Billy Cobham.

—Bill Milkowski

**Catch Me If You Can:** Make Me Rainbows; Helen's Song; Catch Me If You Can; The Pond; Lapinha; The Barn; Bucket O' Fat; Bijou; Big Dipper; Moonray. (58:02)

**Personnel:** Jeff Hamilton, drums; Tamir Hendelman, piano; Jon Hamar, bass.

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



## Nicole Zuraitis *All Wandering Hearts*

DOT TIME 9090

★★★

Nicole Zuraitis had been a mainstay in New York jazz clubs up until the pandemic halted life, and the bandleader's originals on her latest outing convey themes that resonate in times like these. *All Wandering Hearts*, her fourth album as leader, shows how the vocalist and pianist adapts the skills learned from fronting large bands to a set of solid pop songs.

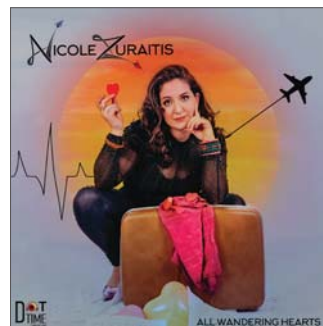
Throughout, Zuraitis keeps her vocal phrasing understated and seems to be in no hurry to show off her considerable range, befitting the meaning of her lyrical commentary on contemporary life during "Overdrive Mind." On "Sugar Spun Girl," deep into the album, Zuraitis is playful in her start-stop staccato wordplay, combining with Idan Morim's guitar. For the closing "Send Me On My Way," Zuraitis performs the kind of wordless vocal improvisations that she developed in Manhattan jazz clubs. And while she conveys a warm lilt on "What A Wonderful World," it's a tune that remains reinterpreted too often. Morim's electric guitar leads also needlessly detract from her voice on a couple of tracks. But ultimately, her own strengths throughout *All Wandering Hearts* reaffirm that Zuraitis will sound ready when her city's venues open up again.

—Aaron Cohen

**All Wandering Hearts:** Make It Flood; The Way Home; I Would Die 4 You; Overdrive Mind; What A Wonderful World; Gold; Sugar Spun Girl; Rock Bottom; Lullabye; Send Me On My Way. (43:49)

**Personnel:** Nicole Zuraitis, vocals, piano; Idan Morim, guitar; Alex Busby Smith, bass; Dan Pugach, drums; Carmen Staaf, Rhodes, organ; Thana Alexa, Elise Testone, vocals; Chase Potter, strings.

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



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## Maria Faust Sacrum Facere Organ STUNT 2007 ★★★★

During the past six years Maria Faust, a Copenhagen-based saxophonist and composer from Estonia, has employed a practice she calls “memory analysis”—a mixture of collective memory, forgiveness, historical research and more innate recollections—to shape a series of conceptual projects that recast musical traditions of the past. *Organ*, her latest endeavor using the methodology, is built around the titular church instrument.

The recording was made using an organ and the reverberant acoustics of Tallinn, Estonia’s rebuilt St. Nicholas Church—which was destroyed during World War II—to shadow and collide with the lines of the six horn players in the ensemble. At times, the organ takes center stage, while elsewhere it provides dazzling counterpoint or ghostly harmony. Here and there, individual members of the group emerge to improvise, as on the biting, unaccompanied tenor saxophone solo that Ned Ferm unspools on “Nin.” But more often than not, the music is meticulously mapped out, allowing the grand edifice to become the focal point, letting the acoustic sounds occupy the space on compositions that move among ideas gleaned from sacred music, minimalism and slow-motion post-bop. —Peter Margasak

**Organ:** Stroma, Part I; Move; Hold; Milk; Nin; Stroma, Part II; Bloom; Stroma, Part III; Room. (39:29)  
**Personnel:** Maria Faust, alto saxophone; Emanuele Maniscalco, Ulla Krigul (1, 6, 8), organ; Ned Ferm, tenor saxophone; Francesco Bigoni, clarinet; Tobias Wiklund, trumpet; Mads Hyhne, trombone; Jonatan Ahlborn, tuba.

**Ordering info:** [sundance.dk](http://sundance.dk)



## Nir Felder II ROPEADOPE 572 ★★★★

Nir Felder’s sophomore album moves fluidly from meditative notes to explosive riffs with a forceful throughline of rock, blues and jazz. It is a natural culmination of the past decade for the guitarist, when he honed his craft by touring and collaborating with innovators across the musical spectrum.

Felder convened a new trio for *II* with bassist Matt Penman and drummer Jimmy Macbride, and the pair provides a foil to Felder’s philosophical motifs and textural musings, able to deftly summon evocative melodies and powerful hooks. Rich instrumentation—the trio recorded live with a variety of overdubs—adds delicate complexity to an already intricate record.

Felder builds elaborate textures to convey time and movement throughout; the sumptuous “Big Heat” evokes the bandleader’s experiences bringing together avant-jazz artists for extended improvisational sets. And “Fire In August” features Macbride’s explosive drums beneath Felder’s free-wheeling melody and Penman’s bluesy, bass-driven riffs. *II* demonstrates a diverse lexicon of influences and technical acuity, but the trio is just scratching the surface. Felder has a follow-up—titled *2.1*—planned for this year, which should delve even deeper into the ideas explored here. —Ivana Ng

**II:** The Longest Star; Interregnum; Fire In August; Coronation; Big Heat; Big Swim; War Theory. (46:58)  
**Personnel:** Nir Felder, guitar, mandolin, banjo, electric sitar, keyboards, Floyd; Matt Penman, bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums; Jeff Babko (1), piano; Doug Yowell (5), percussion; MPEC Red Crow Westernman (5), vocals.

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



## La Lucha Everybody Wants To Rule The World ARBORS 19473 ★★★★

John C. O’Leary III (a classically trained pianist from Mexico), Alejandro Arenas (a Colombian heavy-metal bassist) and Mark Feinman (a punk-rock drummer from Florida) all came together in college to play jazz. And their latest offering as La Lucha finds all three members contributing original material that sits alongside jazz versions of songs by pop rock stars like The Beach Boys and David Bowie.

Melissa Aldana’s big, warm tenor is a welcome addition to the ensemble on a few tracks, finding a joyful balance between virtuosity and lyricism. She’s undoubtedly the star of the title track—a hit by ’80s band Tears for Fears—reinterpreting the melody (maybe too much) and developing it with concentrated, swirling phrases into an emotive flashpoint. The intricate arrangements here reveal imagination and attention to detail. However, it would be nice to hear a deeper sense of groove and precision within the rhythm section, especially in the funk and rock-based tunes. But the overall effect is energetic, eclectic and uplifting. —Gary Fukushima

**Everybody Wants To Rule The World:** Por La Tarde; Space Oddity; Lullaby Medley; Lullaby Of The Leaves/Lullaby Of Birdland; Blues For Houston Person; 1+2; The Sundering; Otra Vez; Don’t Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder); Everybody Wants To Rule The World; Lili; Dance Dance Dance; She’s Like The Wind; Samba Pra Diego. (72:51)

**Personnel:** John C. O’Leary III, keyboards; Alejandro Arenas, bass, electric bass; Mark Feinman, drums, percussion; Melissa Aldana (5, 7, 9), Houston Person (4), tenor saxophone; Diego Figueiredo (1, 13), acoustic guitar; Ken Peplowski (1, 2, 7, 8, 12, 13), clarinet, keyboards; Chuck Redd (3, 4, 13), vibraphone; Tom Beemer (13), vocals.

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



## Cory Weeds Quartet Day By Day CELLAR 082619 ★★★★½

One of the leading lights in Canadian jazz, Vancouver-based saxophonist Cory Weeds wears multiple hats north of the border. An educator, producer and label chief, Weeds also owned the city’s Cellar Jazz Club from 2000 until its closure in 2014.

Here, however, Weeds is back in fine form in his role as a leader and features a new quartet that includes pianist David Hazeltine. A veteran who’s backed Eddie Harris and Chet Baker, among others, Hazeltine plays beautifully alongside Weeds’ lush tone. “It’s Easy To Remember,” memorably performed by the likes of Billie Holiday and Shirley Horn, begins on a ram-bunctious note from drummer Jesse Cahill before Weeds mashes on the accelerator and navigates a maze of swerving runs with Hazeltine matching him stride-for-stride. And yet, the record’s standout moments draw from a different lineage. Hazeltine’s “Relatively Minor” carries a head-bobbing drive in the pianist’s nimble hands, while the ballad “Sterling Silver Sailboat” offers an uncommon tenderness. Written by Weeds’ father, the song unfurls slowly as the saxophonist maneuvers through the melody’s twists and turns with loving care. It’s maybe a less-familiar moment than those that came before, but one that’s no less memorable. —Chris Barton

**Day By Day:** Blues De Troye; Nancy With A Laughing Face; It Could Happen To You; Sterling Silver Sailboat; Relatively Minor; Day By Day; Tangerine; Lullabye Of The Leaves; The Shining Sea; Nobody Else But Me. (54:27)

**Personnel:** Cory Weeds, alto saxophone; David Hazeltine, piano; Ken Lister, bass; Jesse Cahill, drums.

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





Rava Herbert Guidi FOR MARIO (LIVE)



## Rava/Herbert/Guidi *For Mario (Live)*

ACCIDENTAL 139

★★★★

When does three equal four? In this case, the explanation is as simple as the results are remarkable. Composer and piano/electronics experimenter Matthew Herbert took samples of Enrico Rava and Giovanni Guidi, and manipulated them into a backing track, over which the veteran trumpeter (also on flugelhorn here) and the up-and-coming pianist improvised. Hence the outwardly surprising “live” subtitle; these are concert recordings.

## Ryan Porter & The West Coast Get Down *Live In Paris At New Morning*

WORLD GALAXY/ALPHA PUP 016

★★★★

On *Live In Paris At New Morning*, trombonist Ryan Porter directs the three-piece front line of fluid collaborators known as The West Coast Get Down. Their melodic polyphony plays off a rhythm section that is so deep in the pocket, you can almost feel the lint.

The recording is super live and lo-fi with the audience’s chatter and responses to the music playing heavy in the mix—a throwback to ubiquitous mid-20th century concert albums that stressed the atmospheric and immediacy of hearing jams in the club. The ambient sound, however, isn’t the only connection to that tradition. Tenorist Kamasi Washington, in particular, supplies deep callbacks to ’70s soul music, hitting that sweet spot between Sonny Rollins and Maceo Parker.

On the ballad “Mesosphere” pianist Brandon Coleman’s neoclassical solo is illustrative of just how committed the ensemble is to utilizing a broad musical vocabulary. There are Miles Davis-style funk echoes, too, that underpin loping melodies and are punctuated by a stinging trumpet solo from Jumaane Smith on “The Psalmnist.”

The multipart suite begins quietly, slowly building into a cityscape of chorused traffic noise, shouted greetings and ambiguous encounters. Herbert’s interest in anger as a creative principle surfaces as the music builds to a climax, fades and mounts again with extra menace. Part II opens more conventionally, with horn and piano over a slow rumble, the whole reminiscent of Don Cherry’s Desert Band. Everything is held in check for nearly five minutes, before giving way to a clanking, faintly sinister ostinato that smacks of Italian Futurism and its *Intonarumori*.

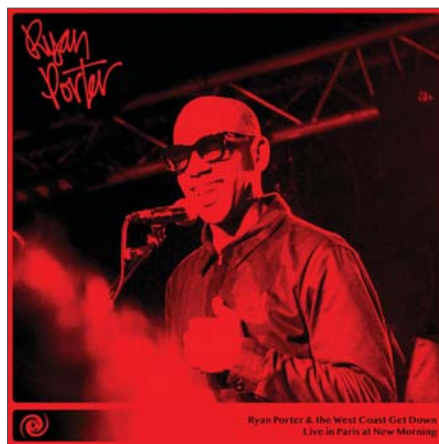
Part III is the longest and the only time when the approach starts to seem a little mannered, though what Herbert effectively does is create a virtual rhythm section for the duo. Rava is more Miles Davis-like here, but without his distinctive rasp. The short fourth section allows the electronics to dominate: machine sounds that give way to crashing piano chords and flugelhorn yelps. Part V might be described as elegiacally defiant. There’s an air of sorrow, too: The record is dedicated to Mario Guidi—the pianist’s father and trumpeter’s manager—who attended the concerts but subsequently died. There’s also anger and determination, but wholly integrated and coherent.

—Brian Morton

**For Mario (Live):** Parts I–V. (42:20)

**Personnel:** Enrico Rava, flugelhorn, trumpet; Giovanni Guidi, piano; Matthew Herbert, samples, electronics.

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



“Oscalypso” doesn’t seem to be the Oscar Pettiford tune, but the composition serves as a tribute to the bassist. Porter’s trombone leads a sinuous melody in an extended and insistent statement here, before Washington and Coleman respond with simultaneously intense filigrees. It all mounts to ecstatic moans and wails as bassist Miles Mosley deftly signals the changes and lays down the funk.

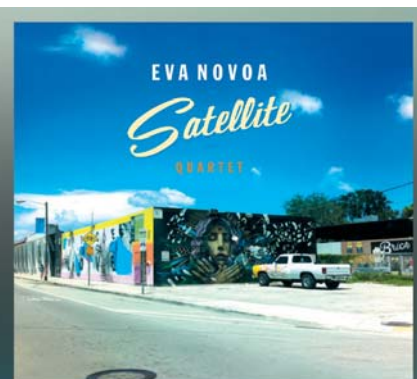
—Hobart Taylor

**Live In Paris At New Morning:** Strasbourg/St. Denis; Madiba;

Mesosphere; The Psalmnist; Oscalypso; Anaya; Carriacou. (79:18)

**Personnel:** Ryan Porter, trombone; Kamasi Washington, tenor saxophone; Jumaane Smith, trumpet; Brandon Coleman, keyboards; Miles Mosley, bass, electric bass; Tony Austin, drums.

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



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CATERINA DIPERRI

Carla Bley during a recording session for her 2013 album *Trios*.

## Carla Bley's Piano Solo on 'Vashkar'

“Vashkar,” the composition by Carla Bley, was first recorded by pianist Paul Bley in 1963, and subsequently through the years by drummer Tony Williams, vibraphonist Gary Burton, drummer Cindy Blackman and others. But it wasn't until 2013, a half-century after composing it, that Bley herself got around to recording her own version—on her 2013 release *Trios* (ECM)—and we finally get to hear her play a piano solo on it.

The first thing many of you will notice (especially those who own early versions of the *Real Book*) is that these aren't the “right” changes. They're also not the chords played behind the melody (on this or any other version I'm familiar with), and they're not even the changes played for Andy Sheppard's soprano saxophone solo that occurred on this recording just before Bley's solo. I suspect Bley and bassist Steve Swallow are treating this more like a “free” tune and improvising the harmonies in

addition to their notes and lines. Her right hand leading up to bars 5 and 11 are great examples of Bley indicating where she wants the harmony to go. There also are places where Swallow indicates the changes. A lot of deep listening is going on with both players.

I'm also struck by the economy in Bley's playing, especially in the left hand. There are only a few three-note chords (measures 7–10, 23), some two-note voicings (1–2, 4–6), single notes (3, 10–11, 13, 15, 17, 19–22) and even empty space (14, 16, 18). And the paucity isn't just in the vertical density, but also the horizontal. When Bley plays a chord, she tends to hold it for a while, often a whole note or longer, and even her single-note comping tends to be short ideas with a lot of space on either side.

This left-hand sparseness is also a good way of not clashing with the bass notes. When improvising on changes, besides attempting to be clear about one's direction, it can be a good

strategy to avoid conflict. For a pianist, there are two main means of accomplishing this: either playing less vertically (smaller voicings) or horizontally (fewer notes across the bars). Bley uses both approaches. This not only prevents clashes in the event of a miscommunication, but also creates some vague harmonies that can be hard to identify. Take the second bar: You could call this B $\flat$ maj7+, or B $\flat$ maj7(b13), or F#7(#9)/A#, or perhaps something else. I don't think there's a “right” name for this harmony—and that's often how this music works. Some harmonies are clear and defined, and some are murky and vague, giving the listener another form of contrast to take note of.

Looking now at Bley's right hand, we also find a lot of space. There are some strings of eighth notes, but they tend to be short and infrequent. Also, notice how the left hand sometimes reinforces the right (measures 4–6, 9–12), and other times plays against it (1–2, 7–8 and 9–11,



which also contain examples of reinforcement, 13 and 19). Bley occasionally blurs the distinction between melody and accompaniment, with melodies that cross between the hands, as in bars 15–16 and 19–22, making this improvisation sound like she's hearing the entire piano as one voice.

Bley puts a lot of drama into this solo. For most of the improvisation her right hand stays toward the bottom of the treble clef, but in the exact middle of her improvisation (bars 11–12) she climbs to a high C, by far the highest pitch in the solo. This is also a dynamic high point, the loudest Bley has struck the keys, adding to the climax. She also leads to this peak with chords played as dotted-quarters, creating rhythmic tension. But rather than resolving on the downbeat of measure 12, Bley leaves that downbeat blank and resolves a dotted-quarter later, on the “and” of 2, creating still more drama.

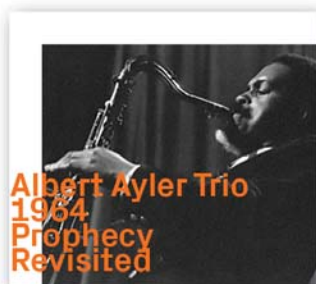
Bley also takes advantage of Swallow's bass line consisting of roots and fifths. Bar 11 is treated like a C minor chord, but in bar 12, the peak, she resolves the low E<sub>b</sub> up to E natural, turning it into a major chord. This sudden brightness really makes this hit home. Returning to C minor in the next bar and coming back down in range to where she had been turns the solo around and moves us toward the culmination.

Speaking of which, when Bley gets to the end of this improvisation, for the final three bars she references the center climax. There is the climbing (though done more gradually here), the dotted-quarters (also varied here as each bar only starts with two dotted-quarters and they are split between the hands) and, of course, the ending, where she lands squarely on a major triad. None of these elements are done to the lengths she employed back in bars 11–12, but it still serves to acknowledge that middle piece, letting us hear this as a solid conclusion. **DB**

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

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## Kawai CA99, CA79

### Concert Artist Hybrid Digital Pianos

Kawai has updated its Concert Artist range of hybrid digital pianos with the introduction of the flagship CA99, successor to the company's CA98 model, and the CA79 (pictured), which replaces the CA78. The new instruments incorporate Kawai's Grand Feel III wooden-key action with Ivory & Ebony Touch key surfaces, which contributed to a decidedly firmer, faster and more grand piano-like response during a recent play-test at Cordogan's Pianoland in Geneva, Illinois. I found both models to be extremely realistic and expressive, capable of accommodating a striking range of dynamics and tonal shadings.

The gorgeous sound and presence of the flagship Shigeru Kawai SK-EX concert grand lie at the heart of the new instruments, which also include renderings of Kawai's EX concert grand, SK-5 grand and several upright models. A variety of high-quality organs and electric pianos are onboard as well, plus harpsichords, mallet instruments, strings, pads, guitars and acoustic and electric basses.

Some of the notable improvements on the CA99 and CA79 include a SK-EX rendering sound engine with enhanced multi-channel acoustic piano samples; a new Virtual Technician function with 22 adjustable parameters to control the attack/release/sustain characteristics of each piano sound; and a sophisticated speaker system with 360-degree diffuser panels that expand the piano's tonal projection in all directions.

The CA99 and CA79 feature beautiful new cabinetry with rounded details and a contemporary character that retains the elegant aesthetics of



their predecessors. The CA99 has an actual piano soundboard built into the rear of the instrument, which enhances all of its internal sounds via transducer technology.

The CA99 and CA79 have a 5-inch LCD color touchscreen with a user interface that's optimized for pianists while providing easy access to additional sounds and functions. This interface also can be controlled via Kawai's Piano Remote app for iOS and Android devices, with all settings and adjustments recalled automatically every time the instrument is powered on.

Digital pianos have become a hot commodity in this era of staying at home and sheltering-in-place. Consider one of these outstanding new models from Kawai to liven up your living room or studio.

—Ed Enright

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

## Yamaha YC61 Stage Keyboard

### Authentic Organ Sound, Real-Time Control

Yamaha's YC61 Stage Keyboard is an organ-focused instrument that combines the sought-after keyboard sounds of jazz, blues and pop music with sonic versatility and real-time control in a compact, lightweight unit. During a recent test-drive, the new YC61 delivered on its promise of providing an authentic-sounding playing experience that organists can easily relate to.

The YC61 employs Yamaha's newly developed Virtual Circuitry Modeling Organ engine. VCM models the behavior of vintage electronics at the component level, which gives it the power to reproduce the natural saturation and warmth of sound that are characteristic to tonewheel organs. A new VCM Rotary Speaker effect enhances authenticity even further by recreating the "spinning" sensation of the two-speed Leslie speaker that's often used to enliven organ sounds onstage and in the studio.

Playing the YC61, I had complete command of my sound, thanks to its nine solidly built drawbars, which quietly click with a nice "notched" feeling and allow you to instantly check current settings via LED illumination. Organ aficionados will appreciate the ability to personalize the organ and rotary speaker settings, like drawbar leakage, key click, rotor speed-up and more. Its 61-note semi-weighted waterfall keyboard is true to the organ legacy and allows for smooth playing techniques, such as glissandos and palm smears. Built-in effects like delay, chorus and distortion give keyboardists the ability to create and change sounds on the fly. All controls

needed for onstage use are placed in dedicated sections on the YC61's top panel for quick access.

Pro keyboard players will love the fact that the YC61 goes beyond organ sounds. Two comprehensive "Keys" sections offer a range of realistic-sounding acoustic and electric pianos derived from Yamaha's CP series, along with a selection of strings, brass and analog-style synths. The instrument also features an FM tone generator with 128-note polyphony.

Comprehensive MIDI control (including a Class Compliant USB Audio/MIDI interface) and powerful Master Keyboard functionality allow for easy connection with software synths and other external devices. I was quite successful in configuring the YC61 with two foot controllers (one for "expression" and one for "pedal wah") and a second keyboard instrument to emulate a traditional two-manual organ setup.

—Ed Enright

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





## 1. Multifunctional Module

The Disting Mk4 from Expert Sleepers is a multifunctional module that offers a variety of CV and audio processes, including a selection of oscillators (LFOs/VCOs). All algorithms have two high-precision inputs and outputs, and a third control input, exposed on a front-panel knob and a CV input. The Disting is also a sample (WAV) file and MIDI file player, with a variety of options for sample triggering, playback speed, etc. New in version 4 is a matrix display, which makes browsing through menus easier. The microSD card slot is now situated on the module's front panel.

More info: [expert-sleepers.co.uk](http://expert-sleepers.co.uk)

## 2. Patch or No Patch

The O-Coast single-voice patchable synthesizer from Make Noise utilizes classic modular synthesis techniques and is designed to operate with or without the use of patch cables—making it semi-modular. Its name reflects the fact that it utilizes techniques from both the “East Coast” and “West Coast” paradigms, but is loyal to neither and thus implements “no coast synthesis.” The necessary connections have been made from circuit to circuit, so the O-Coast can operate as an expressive, musical monosynth. Using the included patch cables, users can get more scientific and experiment with new ways to wire up the circuits.

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

## 3. Continuum of Sounds

The Plaits Eurorack module by Mutable Instruments is a macro-oscillator with a large palette of raw sonic material covering the whole gamut of synthesis techniques. It's a spiritual successor of the company's Braids voltage-controlled sound source, with hardware and software redesigned from scratch. The fragmented islands of sound in Braids are now part of a continuum of sounds in Plaits.

More info: [mutable-instruments.net](http://mutable-instruments.net)

## 4. Gritty Synthesis

Korg's MS-20 FS semi-modular synthesizer is faithful to the company's gritty MS-20 analog synth from the 1970s in every way. Both early and late versions of the MS-20 filter are available. The patching system of the MS-20 FS lets you create complex sounds by changing the connections between the various units with patch cables. Different combinations of the modulation input/output and trigger, noise generator and sample-and-hold can produce a virtually limitless variety of sounds.

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

## 5. Mama Moog

Moog Music's Matriarch is a patchable, Eurorack-compatible, four-note paraphonic semi-modular synthesizer. Featuring a retro design that recalls Moog models from the past, this all-analog 49-key synth shares the same built-in arpeggiator and 256-step sequencer with the Moog Grandmother, and features four analog oscillators (twice that of the Grandmother) plus dual Moog Ladder filters and a stereo analog delay with MIDI sync.

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



# Schools Devise Multiple Plans for Fall

**THIS FALL, LIFE ON CAMPUSES ACROSS** the country will depend on safety guidelines related to the coronavirus pandemic. Because so much is uncertain, institutions have developed multiple potential plans to keep students safe while providing them with a quality education. DownBeat reached out to several educators to get commentary on preparations for remote learning, in-person classes on campus and a hybrid system that would combine the two approaches.

Like many schools, Columbia College Chicago pivoted entirely to online classes in order to complete its spring semester. Now, the faculty is mining those experiences to see what worked well as it makes plans for the fall. According to Sebastian Huydts, the interim music chair, his team is gleaning information from successful online instruction that took place before the pandemic.

“We have a [Master of Fine Arts] program in Music Composition for the Screen, and this past semester, before COVID-19 started, we had a composer in residence who had so much work in Los Angeles that he couldn’t [travel to Chicago],” Huydts said. “So, we started doing those classes remotely. It was a huge hit with the students. They were amazed by how ‘up-close and personal’ you can actually make this. With a platform like Zoom, it is so easy to share your screen and to share what you’re doing. So, they felt that they got a lot more personal instruction and better instruction than they had in previous semesters.”

At The New School in New York City, all classes in the fall will be held online. Keller Coker, dean of the institution’s School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, explained that the fall curriculum would be shaped by feedback from student surveys conducted this summer: “We ask them, ‘Who do you want to study privately with? Who do you want to be your ensemble director?’ We’re going to build the coursework based on what we hear back from students: What do they need and what do they want?”

Describing The New School’s approach regarding any future on-campus activities, Coker said, “We’re not doing anything that isn’t completely within the guidelines of state and federal government. We want the environment to be safe.”

In the spring, the California Jazz Conservatory in Berkeley pivoted to put its courses online for the institution’s degree programs, as well as the courses at its community



JEFF DENSON

Jeff Denson, dean of instruction at the California Jazz Conservatory in Berkeley, has shifted to teaching online classes.

music school, known as the Jazzschool. In the coming months, the staff plans to expand its offerings in high-tech learning.

Susan Muscarella, the CJC president, wrote in an email: “Given the challenging circumstance we find ourselves in—that is, that we’re most likely going to have to run our degree programs entirely online this fall—the California Jazz Conservatory made the decision to roll up its sleeves and revise its curriculum to embrace, rather than reject (or even fear), the technology and technological skill needed for optimal online learning. Specifically, new technologically relevant courses were created, including ‘The Virtual Jazz Ensemble,’ ‘Building the Home Studio’ and ‘Remote Recording Ensemble.’”

One enormous hurdle to online learning that schools have encountered is that musicians in ensembles generally find it impossible to play in real time due to the latency, or time delay, involved in internet communication.

Jeff Denson, CJC’s dean of instruction, has ambitious plans to tackle that huge problem. “There is technology out there that allows for real-time online performance [that is] essentially latency free,” the bassist, vocalist and educator said. “Programs do exist that allow it. The only thing is they’re pretty complicated. The top-of-the-line program is JackTrip.”

Denson has tested the technology with numerous experts, and plans to have it ready for student ensembles to use in the fall.

At press time, administrators at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami planned to welcome students back to campus in the fall. This would mean that the large ensembles conducted by John Daversa—the chairperson of the Department of Studio Music and Jazz—will have to take extraordinary steps.

“Instrumentalists who can wear face masks will certainly be wearing them,” Daversa said. “And there are even special head covers for some of the wind players. And certainly there will be plexiglass separators between musicians, plus we’ll be spacing everybody out as much as possible. The university has made available many larger spaces that we can spill into. For the big bands, we’re still going to meet, but probably, for the most part, we’ll meet as sectionals.”

Although the new normal will present hardships and challenges, Daversa maintains a strong faith in the communal bond that musicians share: “The part that is still fun and always will be, is working with the human beings who are involved. That common love for the music and for [creative] expression, and that generosity of spirit—those things make you want to come back to work.”

—Bobby Reed



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# DOWNBEAT JAZZ EDUCATION AWARDS

DOWNBEAT JAZZ EDUCATION HALL OF FAME—ROBERT “DOC” MORGAN

## Morgan Demanded Excellence

IN 1976, ROBERT MORGAN DID SOMETHING extraordinary. A freshly minted Ph.D. with a tenured position at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, he quit to teach high school.

“My friends thought I was nuts,” said Morgan, the newest inductee in the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame. “But my ‘little voice’ said, ‘Do it,’ so I did.”

Looking back over the 23 years he spent at Houston’s High School for the Performing and Visual Arts—where he taught future jazz stars like Jason Moran, Robert Glasper and Eric Harland—Morgan, now retired, doesn’t regret a moment.

Founded in 1971, HSPVA already had a burgeoning reputation when Morgan joined the faculty, and in many ways he was the ideal teacher for the school. Born in Houston, but raised primarily in Dallas, he was the son of a former professional banjo player and grew up immersed in the music of Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington.

Both Robert and his older brother Bill studied piano before taking up, respectively, trumpet and tenor saxophone. As a teen, Robert was the youngest member of the Euel Box Orchestra, (the Dallas area’s most popular big band), and in his senior year of high school he held the principal trumpet chair in the Texas All-State Symphony.

“I was a good player,” he said. “In high school I was one of the busiest gigging trumpet players around Dallas. Our dad didn’t want us to follow him into music, but when he realized he couldn’t dissuade us, he made sure we had great horns and private instruction. He also said he’d only pay for my college tuition if I agreed to get my teaching certificate.”

Determined to build a career as an instrumentalist and arranger, Morgan enrolled in what was then called North Texas State College, where he became only the second freshman trumpeter—after Marvin Stamm—to win a spot in the prestigious One O’Clock Lab Band. Insurmountable embouchure problems forced him to switch to valve trombone, but he remained focused on a career in New York until he fell in love with teaching during what he thought would be a temporary stopover at Sam Houston State.

“I was teaching classical theory and counterpoint—things that had nothing to do with jazz,” he said, “and I was surprised how much I enjoyed it. I hadn’t anticipated the joy that comes from a light bulb going on over a student’s head. It was very rewarding.”



Robert “Doc” Morgan (second from right), the newest inductee in the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame, enjoys a moment with HSPVA alumni Chris Walker (left), Matt Mullenweg and Robert Glasper.

DAVID DEHOYOS PHOTOGRAPHY

“Doc” (Morgan’s nickname at HSPVA) was a commanding force, recalled Chris Walker, an alumnus who played bass in Ornette Coleman’s Prime Time band and later became a producer and jazz and r&b singer.

“He demanded excellence on every level, and created a loving, competitive atmosphere, which helped all of us grow as musicians and human beings,” Walker said. “I vividly recall taking an improvisation class with Doc and predominantly seniors. I was the only sophomore and was completely lost. Doc was very patient and made sure I absorbed the information and translated it to my instrument. I went from [earning] D’s to A’s under his tutelage.”

Pianist Helen Sung was a classical student at HSPVA, but she said Morgan was impossible to miss.

“I remember being a little afraid of Doc,” she said. “He would stalk up and down the halls with his purposeful, quick gait, with what I thought was a stern and serious expression. I knew his students won all sorts of awards and played all over town, and that they all respected and loved Doc immensely.”

Sung’s experiences with Morgan since leaving high school and switching to jazz speak to his influence beyond the walls of

HSPVA. She described his excitement at seeing her play at a jazz band festival at the University of Colorado.

“He came backstage,” she said, “and was so kind and complimentary. I’m incredibly touched by Doc’s declaring that his teaching must have been so effective that it reached me without me ever stepping foot into the jazz band classroom. He’s continued to be so supportive of me as my career has developed.”

While he chafes at taking credit for the success of HSPVA’s best-known music graduates, Morgan pointed to two factors that made him successful.

“One, I was a good musician, and I had figured out a lot of what I learned on my own; there weren’t a lot of books in those days,” he said. “Two, I think teaching requires a passion to help young people with this wonderful art form. I would never, *never* take credit for making anyone the musician they’ve become, but I do think I was able to communicate my enthusiasm and wisdom.”

Walker, who created DocFest—a non-profit aimed at promoting further education for HSPVA alumni—in his former teacher’s honor, said, “Doc treated all of us like professional musicians, which prepared us for the real world.”

—James Hale



## DOWNBEAT JAZZ EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD—LEE SECARD

# Secard Sets High Standards

### IN A REHEARSAL ROOM AT THE COLBURN

School of Performing Arts, the illustrious arts academy across the street from the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, Lee Secard has two whiteboards set up to help students learn jazz standards. “I haven’t handed out a lead sheet in years,” Secard said. “I used to dramatically make people throw their *Real Books* into the trash can!”

Traditional harmony, composing jazz pieces, playing in groups and learning music by ear are essential to the teaching philosophy of Secard, the recipient of a 2020 DownBeat Jazz Education Achievement Award. As the longtime chair of the Colburn Jazz Workshop, Secard has seen his young musicians win accolades year after year, including in DownBeat’s annual Student Music Awards. Some of his students have continued their education at such prestigious institutions as Harvard University, the University of Miami and New England Conservatory. Notable Colburn alumni include pianists Victor Gould and Kris Bowers.

As a youngster, Secard studied classical composition at the University of Southern California before working with alto saxophonist Gary Foster at Pasadena City College and taking lessons from vibraphonist Charlie Shoemaker and tenor saxophonist Warne Marsh, who stressed the im-

portance of aural learning through memorizing and singing solos by ear. “That was his whole thing,” Secard said of Marsh. “If you can sing the solo, you’ll be able to play the solo. So, that had a lot to do with how I was proceeding as I had an opportunity to [teach].”

That opportunity came in 1987 for Secard, who by then had played in Bill Watrous’ big band and toured as the member of a pit band for musicals. Secard applied and got a job teaching saxophone at the Colburn School. “I had one student,” he recalled.

Today, scores of jazz pupils—students in 5th grade through high school—head downtown after school and on weekends to benefit from Secard’s tutelage. Many of them are already musically advanced. “Right now,” he said, “I have an eight-piece band full of 11- and 12-year-olds. And they’re pretty much geniuses.” For Secard, the goal is to help these precocious young performers navigate both the intricate language of jazz and the challenging path to realizing their full potential.

One of his many teaching slogans is: “Don’t be frustrated, be curious.” He encourages students to go as far as they can in satisfying their curiosity. “You gotta go the whole way,” he frequently says to them. “If you become anxious, anxious doesn’t mean stop. You’ll get past it. Fin-



ish it. The best way to write a tune is to finish it.”

“The thing that struck me about Lee when we first started teaching together,” said Dr. Walter Simonsen, whom Secard brought on board in 2014 to be his assistant director, “was his commitment to setting a very high standard for the students, and being unwavering about the fact that we expect [them] to get there.”

“I know exactly how lucky I’ve been,” Secard said, reflecting on his 33 years at Colburn. “Like a lot of fortunate people, I didn’t see this—when I was 25—as being my future. Man, what a blessing. It’s been pretty unbelievable.”

—Gary Fukushima

## DOWNBEAT JAZZ EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD—TINA RAYMOND

# Raymond Leads by Example

**DRUMMER AND EDUCATOR TINA RAYMOND** has become a reliable fixture on the Los Angeles jazz scene. Her discography encompasses numerous credits in the catalog of L.A. label Orenda Records, including albums by pianist Cathlene Pineda and saxophonist Jon Armstrong, as well as her own leader date, *Left Right Left*. Jazz fans regularly see her onstage at venues such as the Blue Whale and Sam First.

“I try to play a couple times a week,” Raymond said, “but I look at the ending times of gigs now. If a gig goes till 2 a.m., I’ll have to rethink that. Nobody likes a grumpy professor.”

Raymond, who recently became director of jazz studies at California State University Northridge, is the recipient of a 2020 DownBeat Jazz Education Achievement Award. The Detroit-raised musician spent years playing in municipal bands, school bands and any other setting where she could find work. She had her first paying gig at age 13 and was fortunate enough to work with the Detroit Civic Jazz Orchestra under the direction of trumpeter Marcus Belgrave (1936–2015).

As a double major in jazz and classical percussion at the University of Cincinnati, she studied with drummer John Von Ohlen, a veteran of Woody Herman’s and Stan Kenton’s big

bands. “He taught me to use gravity, and how to play free,” she said.

With that wealth of experience and the encouragement of drummer Jeff Hamilton, Raymond made the move to Southern California, where she studied with Joe LaBarbera at the California Institute of the Arts.

Raymond pursued a path as an educator, working at a few different schools, with the grade level of her students increasing along the way. Each leap—from teaching middle school to high school to college—came with new hurdles. “My students now are dealing with things I never had to deal with,” she said. “Los Angeles is expensive, and a lot of them are living with family and are expected to contribute to the income of the house, help pay for rent and childcare, and pick up their brothers and sisters.” Raymond realized she had to step back to see the bigger picture, and understand where music studies fell in among the priorities of her students and how she could be a positive presence.

“Tina holds students to a very high standard, yet she remains approachable,” said Dr. Christine Gengaro, a voice and music history professor at Los Angeles City College, where Raymond previously taught. “She has no ego in the classroom. It’s not about her.”



Raymond is leading by example. Her students see her dedication to her craft, her pursuit of a singular sound amid her role as a keeper and interpreter of the flame. Her impressionable students also realize that her office hours might occur between gigs.

“Being a teacher makes you a better musician,” Raymond said. “It keeps you connected to younger generations and what the new generations are listening to. It keeps you practicing and improving your own skills as a performer and educator. It’s almost selfish to be a teacher, because you are keeping your own skills fresh.”

—Sean J. O’Connell

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*Beyond the Notes*

## Warren Wolf

A classically trained musician who can play several instruments—including vibraphone, marimba, piano and drums—Warren Wolf has won acclaim as an accompanist and bandleader. He has toured with Christian McBride, Bobby Watson and Tia Fuller, and he currently is a member of the SFJAZZ Collective. His latest leader album, *Reincarnation* (Mack Avenue), mixes jazz with r&b influences. For this Blindfold Test, Wolf commented on the music via Zoom from his home in Baltimore.

### Lionel Hampton

"Blue Moon" (*Silver Vibes*, Columbia, 1960) Lionel Hampton, vibraphone, xylophone, celeste; Tommy Flanagan, piano; George Duvivier, bass; Elvin Jones, drums.

I'm going to assume that's Lionel Hampton. It was throwing me off for a minute, because I'm not used to Lionel playing anything outside of the key. I'm used to hearing him pretty much just swing out really hard over nice bop changes.

When the recording first started, I thought that's definitely Lionel because of the vibrato in the vibraphone, and the way that he phrases. He has a particular sound—the mallets he uses to strike the instrument. But then, the thing that threw me off is the recording. I was like, "Wait a minute, this sounds a little bit ... newer." Nice effect, Lionel on the xylophone [at the end]. I've never heard him play the xylophone.

### Renee Rosnes

"Lucy From Afar" (*Written In The Rocks*, Smoke Sessions, 2016) Renee Rosnes, piano; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Peter Washington, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

I have no idea who that is. I like the song, especially when it went to the vibes and the piano, just duo. It went to this sort of classical-like feeling, but there was a lot of interplay between the two.

[after] If that was Renee Rosnes, it can't be Steve Nelson. It is? I never would have guessed that was Steve Nelson. Steve typically uses harder mallets. There are times when I've heard Steve play when he completely wails on the instrument, and I mean that as a good thing.

### Steps Ahead

"Northern Cross" (*Steps Ahead*, Elektra, 1983) Michael Brecker, tenor saxophone; Mike Mainieri, vibraphone; Eliane Elias, piano; Eddie Gómez, bass; Peter Erskine, drums.

I know that's Michael Brecker. Was it Mike Mainieri? OK, I was like, "Man, there's a lot of reverb on this." So, that's Steps Ahead. It's just nice to hear something in a major key. Mike was really going for it. He is one of the true masters of the instrument. I know he likes to do a lot of electronics in his music as well.

### Joel Ross

"III Relations" (*KingMaker*, Blue Note, 2019) Joel Ross, vibraphone; Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Jeremy Corren, piano; Benjamin Tiberio, bass; Jeremy Dutton, drums.

That is Mr. Good Vibes, Joel Ross. He's my man, one of the new young voices of the vibes. He's a great player. The thing about Joel—which he does on this recording—he likes to stretch outside the original changes, even if it's his own composition. He'll play 'em for a little bit, but he's always trying to figure out how to raise the bar musically and see what else he can do to elevate the band.

He called me a while ago; he was like, "Dude, I need some new sticks." He couldn't find a good pair of sticks that would last. Joel is a really tiny dude. Joel weighs like, 45 pounds [laughs]. But he plays with so much force. When he really starts to get into it, he starts moving his body around, he starts singing some of the tune. He's just trying to elevate anybody who's around him, to make music, which is great.



Stefon Harris, he's been such a great influence on Joel. And many others, but I think Stefon Harris has been his dude. That's a great record.

### George Duke

"That's What She Said" (*I Love The Blues, She Heard My Cry*, MPS, 1975) George Duke, keyboards; John Wittenberg, violin; Daryl Stuermer, guitar; Byron Miller, electric bass; Leon "Ndugu" Chancler, drums; Airtio Moreira, percussion; Emil Richards, marimba.

I wasn't too crazy about the track. Don't get me wrong—I like fusion—but it just felt like the time was a little off for me. Typically, for my ears only, when I listen to jazz-fusion, I want to hear some type of vamp, over maybe four chords or something like that, but they were moving around a lot. I can respect it. But it wasn't my thing.

[after] I've never heard of Emil Richards. I give him tons of credit for playing that melody. It was a lot of runs; typically, a lot of mallet players don't play stuff like that.

### Brad Mehldau

"Wave/Mother Nature's Son" (*Largo*, Nonesuch, 2002) Brad Mehldau, vibraphone; Darek "Oles" Oleszkiewicz, bass; Matt Chamberlain, drums; Jon Brion, guitar synthesizer, guitar treatments, percussion; Victor Indrizzo, drums, percussion; Justin Meldal-Johnsen, bass guitar, programmer.

I liked that. My only negative thing to say about that would be: Why only play the melody to "Wave," and that was it? It's a pretty melody, and he or she was playing it broken up over the time.

I would love to hear the rest of the record before I make this next statement: I cannot tell if this person has a strong vocabulary of improvisation. Part of me wants to say yes, because when it got to the section with the strings, it was moving into this classical-type harmony, and the vibraphonist was definitely playing [the harmony]. But the times when the strings were not being played, the vibraphone was demonstrating very basic improv. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but he was just kinda jamming over one note. He or she did not really spell chords a lot.

I have no idea who that was. [after] OK. I know that Brad has tons of harmony. That's why I said earlier I would love to listen to the rest of [the album]. I recorded with Brad; he was on my record [*Convergence*].

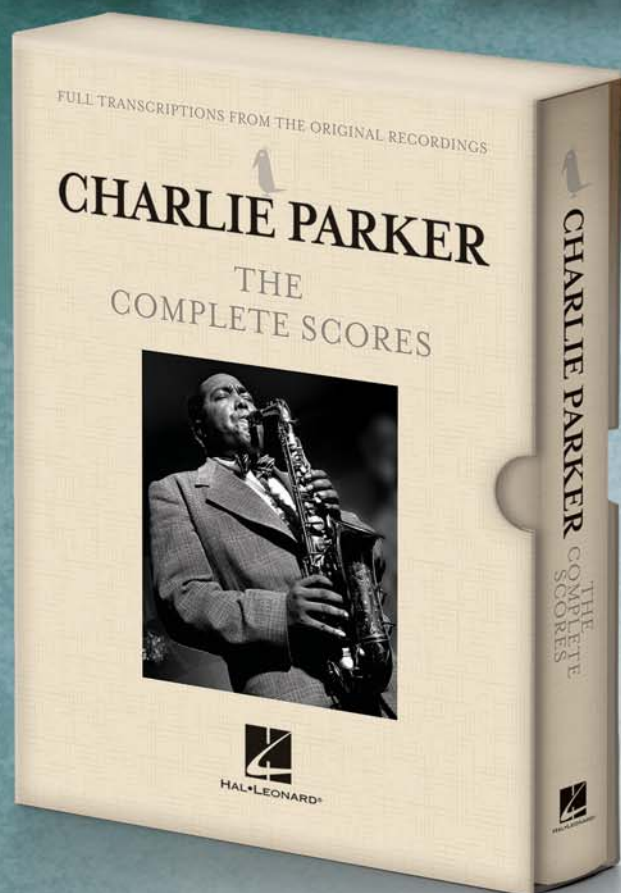
Actually, you telling me it's Brad is kinda cool, because there was one part when we got to that classical section—there's a particular line that Brad plays that a lot of piano players and saxophone players play. Robert Glasper does it, my buddy from Baltimore Tim Green does it, Aaron Parks does it. There's one particular line that he's known for, and when he does it, he'll play it in time, but then he'll slow it down 5 or 10 knots. I would have said, "OK, this vibes player listens to Brad Mehldau," but I would never think, "That's Brad Mehldau" [laughs].

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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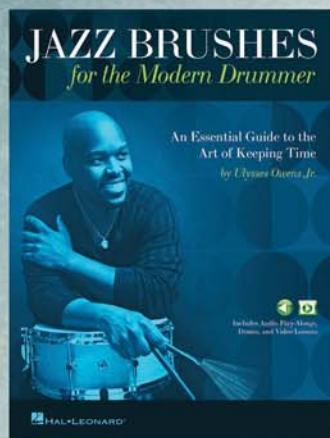
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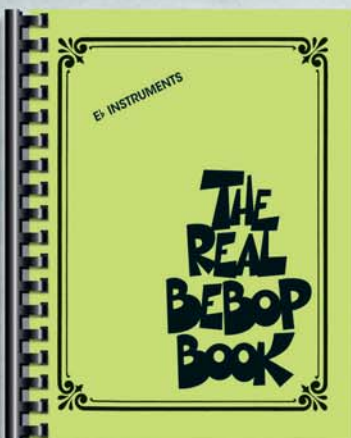
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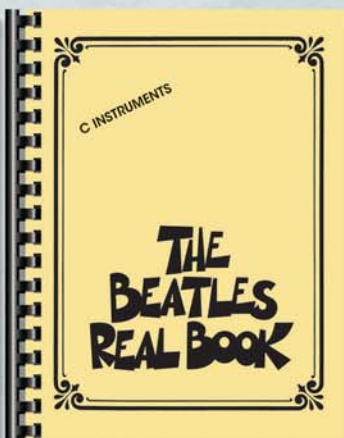
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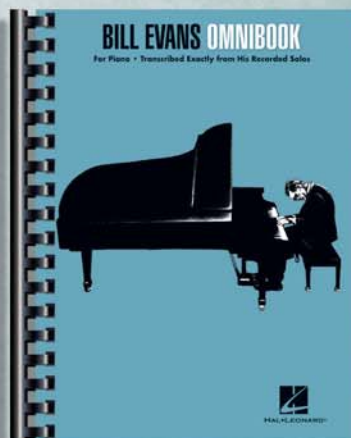
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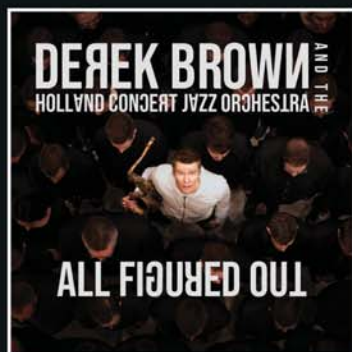
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