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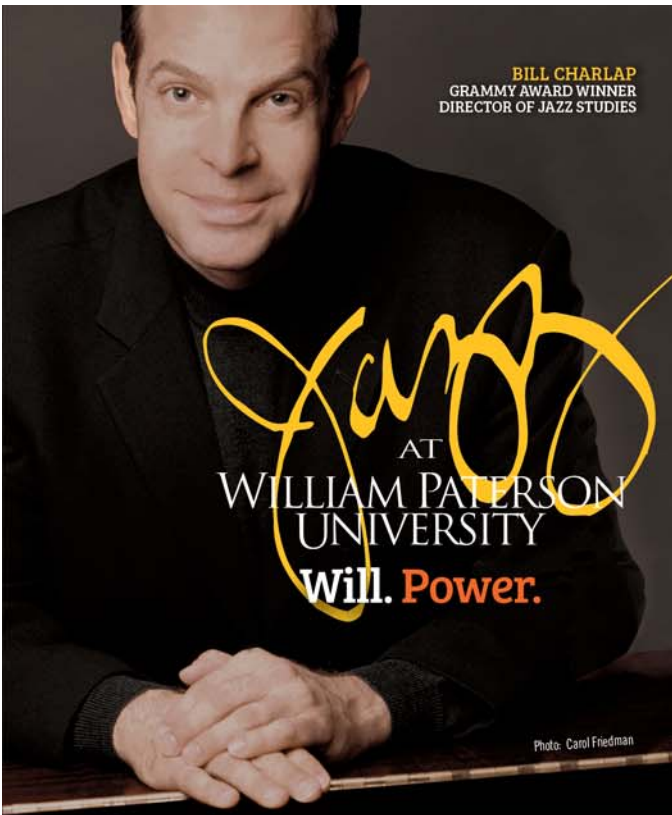
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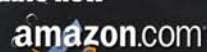


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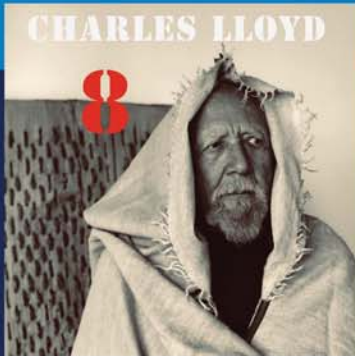
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THE YEAR IN JAZZ

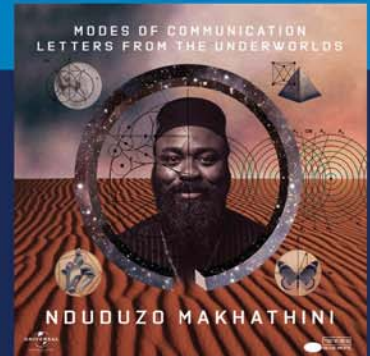
2020 was a banner year for Jazz in which the music gave us solace, lifted our spirits, challenged us, and reflected our collective humanity with artists spanning the globe and generations, transcending boundaries of genre and gender, and demanding social justice for all.



CHARLES LLOYD
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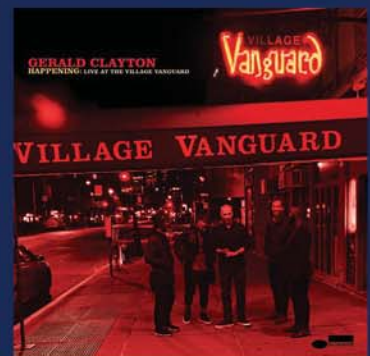
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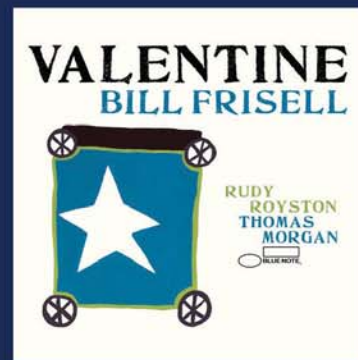
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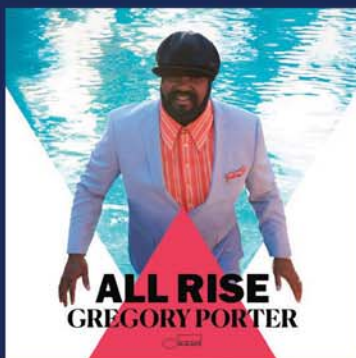
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DECEMBER 2020

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20 George Benson

'Something Nobody Else Can Play'

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

We spotlight the career of George Benson, the latest inductee in the DownBeat Hall of Fame, from his days as a child prodigy in Pittsburgh to the recording of his recent album, *Weekend In London*.



Joe Bonamassa leads his band at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium on Sept. 20.

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Cover photo of George Benson by Mark Sheldon

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★★★★ –DownBeat



With the impressive *Two Cigarettes In The Dark*, Denver-based saxophonist Keith Oxman delivers what is most probably one of the finest albums on the contemporary jazz scene today.
★★★★½ –Edward Blanco, *All About Jazz*



This is an ambitious and harmonically sophisticated retelling of some of Alec Wilder's compositions.
★★★★ –Pierre Giroux, *All About Jazz*

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First Take > BY ED ENRIGHT



DANA SCRUGGS

Immanuel Wilkins gleaned valuable advice from mentors who generously shared their hard-earned wisdom and expertise with the young saxophonist.

Connections Sustain Us All

IMMANUEL WILKINS CLEARLY NEEDED help. The alto saxophonist was just 12 or 13 years old and was sitting in with the Sun Ra Arkestra at a gig in Philadelphia, circa 2010. And he was struggling to find his way.

"I assumed that I had to come in and play a certain way, you know—like, I need to get my avant-garde stuff together," Wilkins said, looking back at what would become a stream of gigs with the storied ensemble. "I was familiar with the Arkestra's music, having checked out a bunch of recordings. And I was trying to do this faux-avant thing that I thought I'd figured out."

Whatever Wilkins was doing, it wasn't working, but help came in the form of some free advice from longtime Arkestra saxophonist and director Marshall Allen.

"After the gig, Marshall was like, 'Man, play *your* stuff. Play what *you* want to play.' I started to realize that true freedom is not about assimilating to a vibe. And that's what they were all about: complete individuality of voices."

Mentoring—whether it be spontaneous, as in the scenario Wilkins described during his interview with DownBeat (see page 16), or formal—has been essential to the evolution of jazz over the decades. The role of the mentor is tied to an underlying need for personal interaction and collaboration among jazz musicians—a tradition the current pandemic threatens to stall as many artists are left to toil in isolation.

Indeed, the coronavirus has shown us all that we're more personally interconnected than we realize. None of us is an island.

Sometimes, even the very best and most accomplished artists—those who seem capable

of doing absolutely *anything*—need a helping hand in order to improve their artistry.

Consider what Jazz Artist of the Year and Bassist of the Year Christian McBride (see page 26) told me about how heavily he relied on vocal guru J.D. Steele and arranger extraordinaire Ed Palermo to help him complete two major projects that were released this year.

Steele did the choral arrangements on McBride's opus *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait Of Four Icons* and has directed the choir—an integral part of the show—at every live performance. "There is always a different choir, because we go to different cities," McBride explained. "This is why J.D. Steele is so important to this piece. He's a master of working with voices who's been with me since the beginning."

Palermo, a veteran New York big band leader, was called upon to do arrangements of Miles Davis' "Milestones" and the blues standard "Night Train" for the Christian McBride Big Band's new album, *For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver*.

"Ed Palermo has been for my big band what J.D. Steele has been for me in *The Movement Revisited*," McBride said. "I can't tell you how many ditches Ed Palermo has dug me out of in the last 16 years. I love his writing, his band and who he is as a person."

Even George Benson, the newest member of the DownBeat Hall of Fame (see page 20), required a nudge in the right direction from producer and talent scout John Hammond Sr. back in the 1960s. Hammond suggested the multi-talented young guitarist should focus on making himself known as a jazz artist, first and foremost. And, as Benson astutely puts it, "He was right." **DB**

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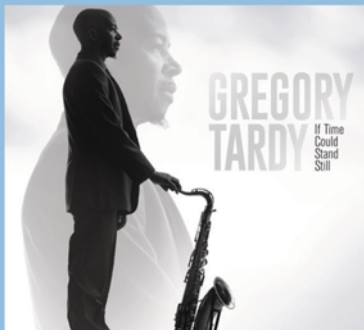
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Chords & Discords >



Gregory Tardy's *If Time Could Stand Still* convenes Willie Jones III, Alex Norris, Keith Brown & Alex Claffy for an impassioned recording that reflects on the changing seasons of life, and surges with his love of swing and the tradition.

"[Tardy] is on track to help write the next chapter in jazz history. This is exactly what more and more potential jazz listeners should be hearing."
- *All About Jazz*



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Noah's Vision

DownBeat is the only magazine I start off reading by turning to the second-to-last page—in this case, of course, to peruse the Blindfold Test. Over the past several decades, the brutally honest ones have always been my favorites, and in your November issue, saxophonist Noah Preminger did not disappoint.

Noah continued the candid-opinion tradition with comments ranging from 5 stars and "I could listen to that all day," to 1½ stars for a track about which he said, "It sounds like somebody wrote a tune for their college recital." And while I happen to own and like the "college recital" recording, I respect his willingness to share his forthright opinions.

I also appreciate his artistry and his desire to create original, thought-provoking jazz with both his saxophone and pen, as evidenced on albums as diverse as *Chopin*



Noah Preminger

Project, Preminger Plays Preminger and Meditations On Freedom.

Now, if only he would follow through on the Frank Zappa project he alluded to in Dan Ouellette's wonderful article "Perpetual Motion Machine" (April 2019). Then, I'd really get excited. Is it a case of no commercial potential?

GORDON WEBB
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

Unnecessarily Disrespectful?

In your September issue, all four of your Hot Box critics gave at least 4 stars to the terrific album *Round Again* by Joshua Redman, Brad Mehldau, Christian McBride and Brian Blade. In your October issue, you printed a letter from a reader who disagreed with that assessment. Criticizing the album, he complained that there is "no 'center' to most of it," whatever that means.

Can you explain the process you use to select the letters for Chords & Discords? It seems unnecessarily disrespectful to these extraordinary musicians to pick one general dissent and memorialize it forever in print.

MARK DONAHUE
CORVALLIS, OREGON

Editor's Note: We publish letters that convey interesting ideas. We give readers a forum to applaud us when they believe we got something right, and to criticize us when they feel we got it wrong.

"Twisted" Facts

I'd like to point out an error in your all-too-small report on the death of singer Annie Ross (Riffs, September). She recorded the first version of "Twisted" in 1952. Lambert, Hendricks & Ross recorded their rendition eight years later. If Ross hadn't made such an impact with her earlier version, it's unlikely that she'd have been asked to join Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks.

LANCE LIDDLE
LANCELIDDLE@GMAIL.COM

Valuable Sample

In your October issue, in the article on Bob James ("Lost & Found Trio Treasure"), he mentions the contributions of Idris Muhammad and Gary King to "Nautilus," a track that has been widely sampled. I wish journalist Ed Enright had asked James, "Were they compensated?"

KEN SCHMIDT
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

Fewer Black Artists in Reviews?

I have read DownBeat for more than 50 years—usually, as I am presently—as a subscriber. It feels that the deeper we move into the 21st century, the lower the percentage of Black artists who are included in the Reviews section. I suggest you look at October issues in each census year—1960, 1970, 1980, etc.—to see if my conclusion is correct. If jazz was founded by Blacks, then what does it say that we are being marginalized?

DWIGHT L. WILSON
DWIGHTLWILSON@HOTMAIL.COM

- In the print edition of November issue, the article on John Hollenbeck in *The Beat* ("Hollenbeck Takes Back Recordings, Forges Ahead") misidentified his wife. He is married to Kate Schroeder.
- In the print edition of the November issue, the review of the Diego Urcoleta Quartet's *El Duelo* mischaracterized the band's instrumentation. The ensemble did not include a piano.

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

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Matthew Shipp has over thirty years defined his own genre in the history of jazz piano. It has been a joy and an honor working with you my friend. –*Whit Dickey, Tao Forms*

There are many artists that converse in the language of jazz. Rarer still are artists that create a language which honors the past but speaks in an original voice that redefines, reimagines and reinvents. This is the essence of Matthew Shipp. This is the essence of Jazz. –*Peter Gordon, Thirsty Ear*

Each album Matthew has recorded for RogueArt was supposed to be his *last one*. Matthew, it's a commitment I am very grateful you never kept...!!! –*Michel Dorbon, RogueArt*

Matthew Shipp has been at root foundation of happenings that prompt deep thoughts & conversations, and result in creations of great magnitude concerning the nature of Existence, balance within same, and fortitude toward the eventual achievement of *grace*. –*Steven Joerg, AUM Fidelity*

Matt – lucky me to have met you years ago and our friendship keeps on going. –*Marek Winiarski, Not Two*

Matt Shipp / Matt Shipp / Shipp / Matt / Matt / Shipp / Shipp / Shipp / MattShipp (to melody of "Gruppen" by Stockhausen). –*Lars-Olof Gustavsson, Silkheart Records*

It was a pleasure to follow Matthew Shipp over three decades and be part of his continuous growth as an artist and as a human being. Thank you Matthew. His recordings have been released on the following series: hatART, hatOLOGY & ezz-thetics. –*Werner X. Uehlinger, Hat Hut Records*

Over the past three decades, Matthew Shipp has consistently been among the most interesting and exciting players and composers in jazz. He has continuously evolved in that time, upping his game to always reach new heights of creativity. Witnessing that development has been a thrill, and ESP-Disk' is honored to have been a part of it. –*Steve Holtje, ESP-Disk'*



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The

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Beat



Joe Bonamassa performs Sept. 20 at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville.

Bonomassa Brews His 'Royal Tea' in London

You can't keep a hard-working bluesman down. Despite the pandemic-related lockdown, blues-rock superstar Joe Bonamassa has remained busy in recent months, releasing two albums and doing work for the nonprofit organization he co-founded, the Keeping the Blues Alive foundation.

On Aug. 7, the label he started, J&R Adventures, released *A New Day Now*, which is a reworked version of his 2000 debut, *A New Day Yesterday*. The chart-topping *Now* album includes newly recorded vocals, as well as some new solos and instrumental passages.

"When I was making that [debut] record, I was a different singer," Bonamassa, 43, said via phone from his home in Los Angeles. "When the idea came up about the 20th anniversary of this record, I looked at [producer] Kevin Shirley and said, 'If we're gonna remix this thing and

put it out as a reissue, I want to sing this thing again.' My instincts back [in 2000] were almost 180 degrees opposite from what they are now."

On Sept. 20, Bonamassa, accompanied by his seven-member band, did a livestream concert in which he previewed the entire program of another new album, *Royal Tea*, a month prior to its release. The concert was held at Nashville's famed Ryman Auditorium, where the seats contained cardboard cutouts with photos of fans printed on them.

He recorded the album in London at Abbey Road Studios, considered sacred ground by rock fans because it was the site of recordings by The Beatles, Deep Purple and Pink Floyd.

"You have to be careful when you record at iconic places—or when you play iconic places like [the Royal] Albert Hall, or the Greek [Theatre] or Carnegie Hall," Bonamassa said.

"You can easily get overwhelmed with the grandness of it and who [has played] there. You have to play the gig, and the same thing goes with Abbey Road. I knew that I wanted to listen to the record 10 years from now and go, 'We played that studio; it didn't play us.' But that just comes with the experience of making that mistake a few times."

The material on *Royal Tea* reflects not only the influence of guitarists Eric Clapton and John Mayall but also the ambition of British prog-rock. In addition to illustrating how his vocal style has become more dynamic over the years, the seven-minute suite "When One Door Opens" is one of the most intricately crafted studio tracks in Bonamassa's oeuvre.

"I love prog," he said. "If I'm never allowed to [tour] again, I can't wait to dig in deeper and go way prog, because these songs give me the opportunity to really go medieval on an arrangement, and throw in some of those 'proggy' elements that I love so much."

The Ryman concert, like many of Bonamassa's performances, served as a fundraiser. An emergency relief effort he launched during the pandemic—the Fueling Musicians program—has supported more than 200 players with checks for \$1,000, prepaid \$500 gas cards and \$50 Guitar Center gift cards, all to help musicians hit the road again in the future. Bonamassa plans to expand this charity work.

"We're going to do an annual telethon, and I'd be honored to be the Jerry Lewis of the blues, because people are really struggling," he said, alluding to the late comedian's fundraising for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. "We're in a very fortunate position. And that's why I've dedicated so much time and effort to this Fueling Musicians initiative. I certainly can't snap my fingers and fix it all for everybody, but I'd love to. And it's not just blues and rock musicians. It's all genres. They're all fighting the good fight." —Bobby Reed



Albert "Tootie" Heath

GHYLIAN BELL & MICHAEL WATTS

Class of 2021: On Oct. 21, The National Endowment for the Arts announced its 2021 class of Jazz Masters, which includes drummers Albert "Tootie" Heath and Terri Lyne Carrington, and reedist Henry Threadgill. Radio host Phil Schaap was selected as the next recipient of the A.B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship for Jazz Advocacy. NEA is again partnering with SFJAZZ to present a ceremony to celebrate the 2021 Jazz Masters on April 21.

[arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov)

McLorin Meets MacArthur: After receiving a Doris Duke Award in September, vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant has been named a MacArthur Fellow, joining a cohort of 21 scientists, engineers, writers, scholars and artists. The award, which recognizes "talented individuals who have shown extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative pursuits and a marked capacity for self-direction," comes with a \$625,000 prize. "Through her wide-ranging choices in musical material and her manifold powers of expression, Salvant is reaffirming the timelessness of jazz as an art form and demonstrating its continuing cultural relevance in a fast-changing world," according to the nonprofit MacArthur Foundation.

[macfound.org](https://www.macfound.org)

Jarrett's Health: Keith Jarrett, whose 1975 ECM album *The Köln Concert* remains one of the most recognizable jazz albums ever released, discussed a previously undisclosed health issue in an Oct. 21 New York Times article. "I was paralyzed," the pianist, who turned 75 in May, said about a pair of strokes that occurred in 2018. "My left side is still partially paralyzed. I'm able to try to walk with a cane, but it took a long time for that, took a year or more. And I'm not getting around this house at all, really." Jarrett remains uncertain if he'll perform again.

Final Bar: Avant-garde trumpeter Toshinori Kondo died in Oct. 17 at age 71. ... Tower of Power's founding bassist, Rocco Prestia, died Sept. 29 at the age of 69.

Alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins' debut album is titled *Omega*.

DANA SCRUGGS

Wilkins Speaks to Black Experience in America

IMMANUEL WILKINS' DEBUT ALBUM, *Omega* (Blue Note), marks the emergence of a talented young instrumentalist, composer and bandleader with an instantly identifiable voice. It also makes a dramatic statement about issues associated with Black life in 20th- and 21st-century America. Recorded in January 2019 and produced by Jason Moran, *Omega* features the 23-year-old alto saxophonist's working quartet with pianist Micah Thomas, bassist Daryl Johns and drummer Kweku Sumbry, a group dedicated to Wilkins' vision of developing emotionally charged original music that speaks directly to the Black experience.

Take, for example, the album's second track, "Ferguson—An American Tradition," which conveys the intense emotions Wilkins felt as a teenager following the 2014 killing of Michael Brown Jr. by police in Ferguson, Missouri. "Growing up, my parents were always adamant in reminding me of my color, reminding me of the social situation that was going on in the world, so I always had an acute awareness," he said during a phone call from his hometown of Philadelphia. "But Ferguson hit me specifically because Michael Brown and I were close in age. And I realized that it could happen to anybody."

The piece deals with events in a reverse narrative, starting with the aftermath of Brown's killing, then working its way back to the initial experience. It's an intense ride. "A lot of what we were trying to capture was an idea of cacophony, of chaos," said Wilkins, who noted that the 7-minute track also plays to his personal fascination with the meeting of jarring and wondrous imagery in art and culture. "I've been obsessed with social media, TikTok, Twitter, Black Twitter, Black TikTok, and how there's always this kind of sublime, grotesque juxtaposition in ways that are beautiful, in ways that are hilari-

ous, in ways that are nostalgic. I'm obsessed with those type of aesthetics."

A companion piece titled "Mary Turner—An American Tradition" tells the shockingly tragic but seldom-told story of a 1918 lynching that took place in Georgia. "I had done some research after learning about the Michael Brown situation on the history of America in terms of killing Black people," Wilkins said. "And the story of Mary Turner was one of the more horrific things that I had found. When I was writing that piece I was thinking about, how do you paint a picture of that terror she must have felt?"

Omega also celebrates the Black experience in solemn and jubilant ways. The uplifting lead-off track, "Warriors," exalts family, friendship, faith and community. "The Dreamer" delivers a tranquil reflection on influential Black activist and author James Weldon Johnson. And a four-part suite of pieces informed by Wilkins' experience as a church musician and student of Bach celebrates the long arc of a romantic love affair.

Since moving to New York in 2015 to attend Juilliard, Wilkins has earned a sterling reputation as a versatile sideman who's capable of just about everything. He's worked for high-profile leaders like Moran, Wynton Marsalis, Aaron Parks and Solange Knowles, to name a few.

"I always had this mentality of, 'Why not do it all?'" Wilkins said. "My musical mission is to blend traditions. It's not about removing things from the music; it's more like stacking things on top of each other. If you're stacking cardboard boxes, once you get to a certain number of boxes, they start to crush each other. And that's not what we want to do in the music. It's not about forsaking things. The real trick, and what makes playing this music so hard, is that we've got to make sure these boxes stay intact. So, it's actually about building on the tradition." —Ed Enright

Chien Chien Lu and the Roy Ayers Effect

BEFORE 2012, CHIEN CHIEN LU HAD NEVER heard jazz. Having spent her childhood taking piano lessons and playing marimba in prominent orchestras, the Taiwanese-born vibraphonist was well-studied in contemporary percussion, but her musical diet was that of her country's—primarily classical, Taiwanese traditional music, Chinese pop and K-pop.

Less than a decade later, Lu has released her debut jazz record, *The Path*—an exploratory work that draws on her background, as well as a love of fellow vibraphonist Roy Ayers.

As Lu, 31, puts it, *The Path* only was possible after randomly tuning in to a jazz radio station while she was still living in Taiwan.

"I was just like, 'What is this music, it's so amazing?' she recalled.

Riveted by the music's freedom, Lu sought a jazz piano teacher while working on her master's in music performance Taipei National University of the Arts. And by 2015, she set her sights on Philadelphia's University of the Arts to earn another degree, this time in jazz studies.

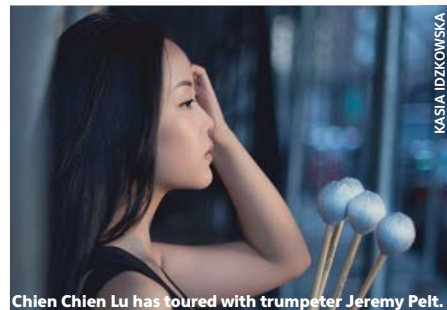
"I remember walking [in Philadelphia] and, I couldn't get used to the sounds around me," Lu said. "People would drive by me and all they listen to is rap, gospel, blues, and I was like, 'Wow, I'm really in a different country.'"

Lu landed in America with little experience in jazz, but armed with perfect pitch, which she said is expected of Taiwanese musicians. She could see the notes in her mind when another player soloed—but she struggled with the laid-back, swing feel. Still, Lu proved to be a quick study, particularly once Jeremy Pelt took her under his wing. Lu first met the trumpeter in 2017 at the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music, where he was on faculty, and a bit later, he asked her to record on his 2019 release, *Jeremy Pelt: The Artist*, and tour with his group.

Aided by the strength of Lu's band, pulled partially from Pelt's ensemble, feel is one of *The Path's* strengths. On songs like "We Live In Brooklyn Baby," a reworking of the 1972 Ayers track, Lu grooves like it's second nature.

"I would have never thought she was so influenced by Roy Ayers. I was like, 'OK!'" said bassist Richie Goods, who befriended Lu while on tour with Pelt and offered to produce *The Path*. "I started asking her about what she's doing with her music. Hearing her night after night—just tearing it up—I said, 'You need to do a record.'"

With Goods' encouragement, Lu found her voice, beautifully highlighted on *The Path* by three interludes where she talks about her background and path to jazz. In particular, Lu's dis-



Chien Chien Lu has toured with trumpeter Jeremy Pelt.

tinct vision crystallizes on her jazz rendition of "Blossom In A Stormy Night," a Taiwanese Hokkien folk song about a woman who turns to prostitution after her fiancé leaves her. The track begins with Lu's mother singing the 1934 tune and then builds to the bandleader adding in the tender melody and an inspired solo.

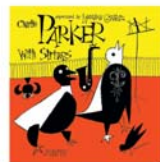
Lu said she's always liked the song, because it shows how far women have come. And, as Lu mingles her past and her newfound mastery of the jazz tradition, it poignantly highlights how far she's come herself—and where she'll go next.

"I feel like I have a clear direction for the next [album]," Lu said. "I want to add more traditional elements that really relate it to me when I was growing up. My elements, my roots."

—Alexa Peters

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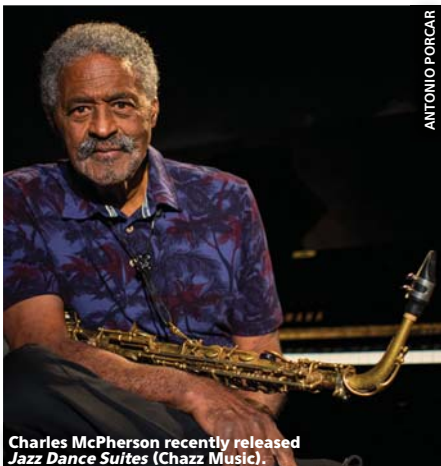
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ANTONIO FORCAR

Charles McPherson recently released *Jazz Dance Suites* (Chazz Music).

Charles McPherson Takes a Leap

IN THE COURSE OF A CAREER THAT HAS found him performing with the likes of Charles Mingus, Dizzy Gillespie and Wynton Marsalis, bebop master Charles McPherson has spent plenty of time on concert stages. Usually, he shares that space with other musicians, but in recent years, the alto saxophonist has found himself performing with dancers from the San Diego Ballet, a collaboration documented on his *Jazz Dance Suites* (Chazz Music).

“I’m a resident composer with the San Diego ballet,” McPherson said over the phone from his home in the coastal California city. “My daughter is one of the solo dancers with this company;

I got involved with the company because of my daughter, and also a grant that was available. So, we partnered up: me, the ballet and the choreographer, Javier Velasco.”

Moving from jazz composition to writing for dance was a leap for McPherson. At first, he was concerned about writing things that would support the dancers’ movements, but Velasco told him not to worry. “He said, ‘You just write. I will do the choreography,’” McPherson recalled. “You write exactly what you feel, and I’ll do the body stuff with the dancers.”

Although McPherson and his group improvise, the dancers do not, so the music requires audible signposts throughout each work that the dancers can use as cues.

“As a dancer, it’s most artistically fulfilling when you’re moving to something that really speaks to your artistic soul and spirit,” Camille McPherson, the saxophonist’s daughter, said by phone a day later. Having grown up listening to jazz, she has a natural and long-nurtured connection to the music. Even so, there are special challenges in dancing to live jazz.

“You have to be really in tune with the musicians, because they’re jazz musicians,” she said. “If you’re playing for dance, especially ballet that’s choreographed, you really have to be consistent. Jazz musicians usually have a ton of freedom, and they don’t have as much freedom when they work with [dancers]. But at the same time, it’s important that we are able to adapt to them, too—just be aware of their energy, their tempos.”

Song Of Songs, perhaps the most unusual piece on *Jazz Dance Suites*, finds the saxophonist inserting Middle Eastern modalities into the jazz vocabulary. And “Love Dance”—the opening number, based on the Old Testament’s *Song Of Solomon*—is a story of unrequited love told from a woman’s perspective and features Lorraine Castellanos singing in Hebrew.

“My approach to this particular suite was not to Xerox ancient Hebrew music, but just glean enough nuance,” he said. “I didn’t want to clone it. It’s going to be a hybrid, anyway, because I’m going to add the jazz sensitivities.”

Having to respect the structural elements of writing for dance led the saxophonist to do things compositionally that wouldn’t normally arise when writing for his quintet. For instance, the dramatic structure of *Song Of Songs* inspired him to recapitulate material from “Love Dance” in the closing “After The Dance,” providing an audible connection to the beginning and end of this tragic love story.

“I wouldn’t do that writing just for a regular bebop configuration,” McPherson said. “This is what I mean by ‘thematic writing,’ and being aware of something other than just the notes and chords. It makes me more in touch with the emotional aspect of human beings.” —J.D. *Considine*

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Melissa Aldana (left), Pablo Menares and Kush Abadey perform Oct. 3 in Central Park as a part of the Walk With The Wind performance series.

Melissa Aldana Leads Trio Through Central Park Gig

STILL IN THE THROES OF THE PANDEMIC, the world's been starved for jazz in 3D, something to distract us from the omnipresent glow of screens.

An Oct. 3 performance by Melissa Aldana—part of Giant Step Arts' Walk With The Wind series—provided some relief. For two hours, the tenor saxophonist, who was joined by bassist Pablo Menares and drummer Kush Abadey, served up a sizzling smorgasbord of standards, spiced with the occasional original, for a crowd in New York's Central Park.

Walk With The Wind is not alone in offering live jazz. Elsewhere in the country, performances have been held under a tent (at the Green

Mill in Chicago), in a vineyard (at the Exit Zero Jazz Festival in Cape May, New Jersey) and on a patio (at the home of pianist Orrin Evans in Philadelphia).

In her park concert, Aldana played it straight, at least when it came to the warhorses. From the opening number ("The More I See You") to the closer ("Just In Time"), she operated within the tunes' classic structures and let her playing do the narrative heavy-lifting.

Aldana was expansive, delivering devastating runs that morphed into notes bent nearly to the breaking point. But she could also be terse, punctuating phrases with short blasts from the extremes of her instrument's range or remaining

silent, using negative space to powerful effect. Her phraseology always fed the needs of the group, a tight-knit unit given more to taste than flash.

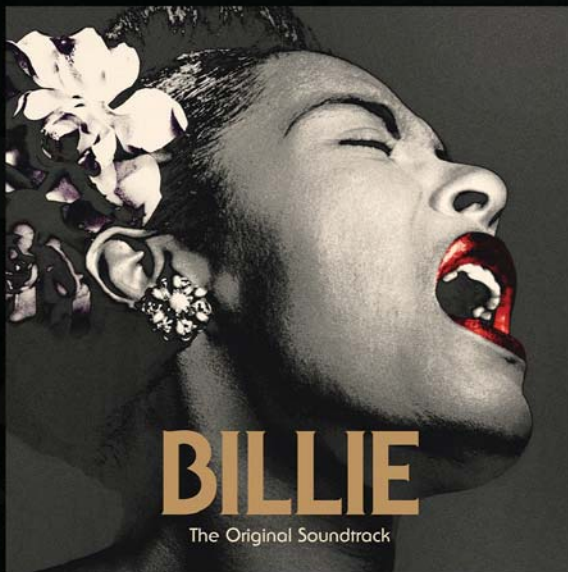
"It's not really about my solo," she said in a phone call the day after the gig. "It's about how we tell the story together."

The audience, a mix of jazz fans and casual onlookers taking in the music from park benches, was no ordinary one. Nor was the backdrop. Setting up under a giant statue of William Shakespeare, whose bronze likeness loomed over the proceedings, the musicians seemed a bit like Elizabethan troubadours. While they were paid a fee—Walk With The Wind is financed by anonymous donors—the trio also accepted donations from the public.

Yet, the situation felt right. The trio's narratives appeared to gain by proximity to the master storyteller. The acoustics of the location, at the south end of the park's mall, were excellent; despite the lack of amplification, every note could be heard in balance. And Aldana's obvious dedication to her art aspired to mirror the late Rep. John Lewis' commitment to civil rights; his memoir gave the performance series its name.

During the summer, the bandleader said she also played outdoors for eight people at the Arts Center at Duck Creek in East Hampton, New York.

"I'm taking whatever gigs I can," she said, "so I have a chance to play." —Phillip Lutz



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George Benson's new album was recorded live at Ronnie Scott's in London. (Photo: Carl Hyde)

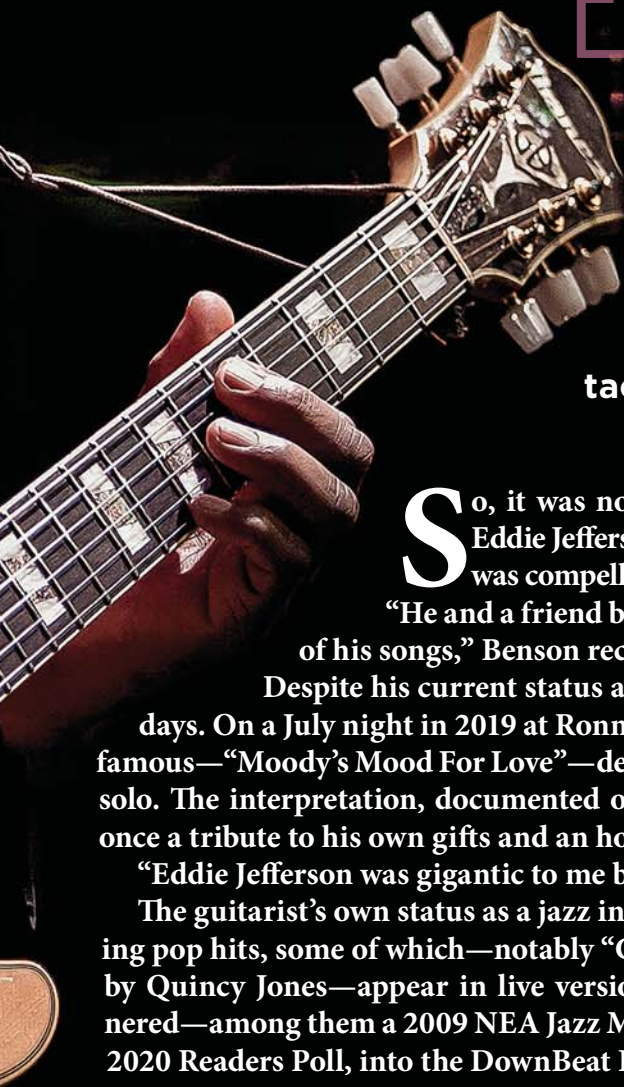
GEORGE BENSON

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BY PHILLIP LUTZ

'SOMETHING NOBODY ELSE CAN PLAY'



As an 8-year-old busker, George Benson boasted a big voice and a broken-down ukulele that he wielded with prodigious skill. By all accounts, his act was something of a spectacle on the streets of postwar Pittsburgh.

So, it was no surprise that when word of the child prodigy reached singer Eddie Jefferson—like Benson, a Pittsburgh native—the pioneer of jazz vocalese was compelled to go see the kid. Jefferson was both impressed and amused.

“He and a friend both fell on the ground laughing when they heard me singing one of his songs,” Benson recalled during a September phone call with DownBeat.

Despite his current status as a global superstar, Benson, 77, has never forgotten those early days. On a July night in 2019 at Ronnie Scott’s in London, he performed the tune that made Jefferson famous—“Moody’s Mood For Love”—deftly massaging the words crafted for saxophonist James Moody’s solo. The interpretation, documented on Benson’s latest album, *Weekend In London* (Provogue), is at once a tribute to his own gifts and an homage to his predecessor’s.

“Eddie Jefferson was gigantic to me because he was an innovator,” Benson said.

The guitarist’s own status as a jazz innovator has sometimes been obscured by his success in generating pop hits, some of which—notably “Give Me The Night,” the title track from a 1980 album produced by Quincy Jones—appear in live versions on *Weekend In London*. But the many honors he has garnered—among them a 2009 NEA Jazz Masters fellowship, 10 Grammy awards and his induction, via the 2020 Readers Poll, into the DownBeat Hall of Fame—attest to his standing as a creative force.



George Benson performs in 1976 at the Pine Knob Music Theatre near Detroit.

ANDY FRIEBERG

So, too, does the praise of a multigenerational cohort of colleagues. John Scofield, 68, said he was first dazzled by Benson on hearing his second and third albums, *It's Uptown* (1966) and *The George Benson Cookbook* (1967). Produced by John Hammond for Columbia Records, the recordings showcase Benson's fleet fingers in the familiar setting of an organ combo. Scofield said he was so taken by the albums that as a freshman at Berklee in 1970, he made sure to catch Benson's gig at the Boston club The Jazz Workshop.

"It blew my mind," he recalled. "I've been a fan ever since."

Laughingly admitting to stealing licks from Benson, Scofield said it was the fluidity of his articulation that was most impressive: "He has this technical thing he can do on the guitar where he plays something nobody else can play. There are only a couple of guys like that in the history of jazz guitar. Django Reinhardt and Wes Montgomery come to mind—and George.

"He plays jazz language, not guitar language. George really hears all those lines. He knows jazz, bebop and after, and all that just flows out of him.

"We all bow down to George. There's a whole school of younger guys trying to play like him."

Prominent among the younger players influenced by Benson is Camila Meza. Born and raised in Chile, Meza, 35, first became aware of Benson when, as a 16-year-old, she heard bootleg copies of the 1976 disc *Breezin'*. That album, pushed to triple-platinum status by the title track and "This Masquerade," was Benson's commercial breakthrough. To a jazz novice, Meza said, it was a revelation that opened up a new world.

"I was coming more from a funk-soul-rock background," she said. "This was an incredible segue into jazz and his story, all the way back to his earlier albums. It blew my mind that this was very accessible but at the same time he was playing incredible solos and singing with his guitar."

Meza has incorporated a Benson-like style of scatting and playing into her aesthetic.

"That texture will really bring an emotion out

of a song," she said. "It's like bringing in a new instrument."

Benson's merger of voice and guitar grew from a seed planted when he first heard Charlie Parker: "I was always a singer. I sang whatever was on the jukebox. I played guitar behind my singing, and pretty soon people asked me to play guitar with them. I took a few gigs and I started getting a reputation as a guitar player.

"I started going to jam sessions, where they hated me because I didn't know anything about jazz or bebop. My natural father, who played trombone, drums and piano, came to me and said, 'Why do you keep playing that corny stuff? Why don't you play like Charlie Parker?' I said, 'Charlie *who*?' And he said, 'Now I know why you can't play nothing.'"

After that conversation, Benson said, he fell for "Just Friends," from the 1949 album *Charlie Parker With Strings*: "It was on the jukebox. Every time I got a nickel or a dime or a quarter, I put on that song, and I learned that solo. I couldn't play it, but I could sing along with it, note for note. Everything else was easy. The stuff I'm doing on my records now is like candy compared with that Charlie Parker solo."

Benson serves up plenty of sweet stuff on *Weekend In London*. While his signature scatting is parceled out judiciously—a tart example is heard on "Love Ballad" (a 1979 single)—he is in fine voice, delivering honied ballads ("In Your Eyes," the title track to a 1983 album), funky hits ("Turn Your Love Around," which topped the r&b charts in 1982) and rollicking covers ("I Hear You Knocking)."

He also demonstrates his guitar skills. Brilliant fills and flourishes populate "In Your Eyes" and "Love Ballad." High-octave octaves turn up the heat in a vamp that closes "Give Me The Night," while a rubato opening cools things down on the instrumental "Affirmation" (from *Breezin'*). On "The Ghetto," Donny Hathaway's 1970 manifesto of social relevance, Benson invokes language of the period that excited

Scofield back in the day.

Providing the settings is music director and keyboardist Randy Waldman, whose airtight arrangements are executed by Stanley Banks (bass), Thom Hall (keyboards), Michael O'Neill (guitar and vocals), Khari Parker (drums) and Lilliana de los Reyes (percussion and vocals).

Banks, who has played with Benson since 1975, said the guitarist was, within limits, flexible when it came to his demands on band members: "He's going to give you all the room you need, except when he needs to hear a certain thing. More than anything else, he'll ask you for conviction."

Beyond asking for conviction, Benson professed a generally laissez-faire attitude toward the band, preferring to allow their creative juices to flow unimpeded. He asserted, for example, that he had little input into O'Neill and de los Reyes' onstage use of digital tools that add layers to their vocals.

"I don't mess with them," Benson said, "because I like to hear something slightly different. It gives me ideas, so I leave them alone."

"He's super loose," said Waldman, who has been with Benson on and off since the 1980s and backed other singers. "He's one of the only artists I've ever worked with where, as you're walking onstage, you simply have no idea of the first song you're going to play. He's so in the moment. We just know that at a place like [Ronnie Scott's], we're probably going to lean more toward jazz."

Sometimes a venue's audience can confound expectations. That, Waldman said, is what happened one year at the Montreux Jazz Festival: "We started with 'Take Five' or something. The audience started screaming for [Benson's 1978 pop hit] 'On Broadway.'"

Knowing whether to lean toward the jazz side or the pop side, Waldman said, had been a career issue for Benson: "It's almost a problem—he's too good at playing guitar and singing. When you say the name George Benson, a lot of people think of him either as a pop singer or a great jazz guitar player or a smooth-jazz artist. Most people can't get a handle on that."

Banks recalled the opprobrium some critics directed at Benson for supposedly abandoning his jazz roots after "This Masquerade" hit the charts, and he was suddenly fighting off fans and jumping into limousines.

"A lot of jazz purists weren't ready for that," Banks said.

But Benson said he had learned from predecessors who faced a similar predicament: "It can be a problem, except I had heard both sides of the arguments. I heard it from the singer's point of view; they used to talk about Nat Cole. I said, 'Man, what can you say bad about Nat "King" Cole?' And then there was Wes Montgomery. I saw an article where they gave him one star on a song. Wes Montgomery couldn't make a one-star record if he tried.



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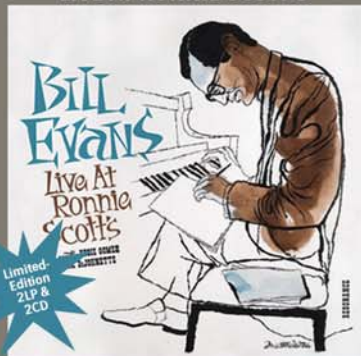
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All titles available on CD & Digital December 4th

"So when I got famous, I said, 'I've heard this before: The next line that comes out of his mouth is going to be "this," and I'm going to say "that." But I think Stanley Turrentine had the best answer of all. Someone asked him: "Stanley, you're a great saxophone player. Why do you play that funny music?" He said, 'Because I want to.'"

Whatever Benson's desires, he was aware that his mainstream success had been facilitated by market forces outside his control—including the rise of smooth-jazz as a format, precisely at the time he was developing the material for *Breezin'*.

According to Waldman, for all the exposure, there was irony attendant to Benson's career turn. "A big niche for him ended up becoming the smooth-jazz market," he said. "Some of his songs seemed to fit that mold. There's probably a chunk of his audience who think of him as that. But that's not really what he is at all. He's one of the most creative jazz musicians there ever was."

In Benson's telling, Hammond encouraged him early on to build a profile in jazz. "He said to me, 'George, I perceive that you do a lot of things, and you do them all well. You do r&b, you play jazz, you play swing music. But if you become known as a jazz artist first, your career will have longevity.' And he was right."

Though Benson does many things well, it is the guitar to which he returns at the end of the day. On tour, while the band sees the local sights during the day, Benson often sits by the hotel pool practicing his guitar. On the band bus, he falls asleep with the instrument in his hands.

"The guitar has been beating me up like that all my life," Benson said. "I love the sound of the instrument. It's always fascinated me."

As a young man, he sought out Montgomery. "When I saw he was playing, I'd go where he was," Benson recalled. "And he'd make me come up on the bandstand sometimes and play with his band." The last time that happened was in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to which he and his stepfather had driven 200 miles from Pittsburgh. "Montgomery was smoking."

Before Montgomery, he said, he was fascinated by the sound of Charlie Christian in the Benny Goodman sextet: "My stepfather met my mother when I was 7 years old, and that's all he played day in and day out, Benny Goodman records and George Shearing records."

In 1975, at a PBS broadcast honoring Hammond, Benson had the opportunity to play with Goodman, filling the Christian chair on the uptempo warhorse "Seven, Come Eleven." Even for a guitarist on the cusp of pop stardom, it was a heady experience; egged on by a demanding Goodman, Benson arguably never swung harder. But he looked back on the date with humility.

"I knew I would never be a Charlie Christian," he said. "He thought like a saxophone player. His phrasing was like a saxophonist. I'm just getting to the stage where I understand what he was trying to say."

Benson is often self-effacing. In 1968, a banner year in which he appeared on albums released by jazz notables like Lee Morgan, Larry Young and Miles Davis, he also put out albums like *Giblet Gravy*, which featured contributions from pianist Herbie Hancock and bassist Ron Carter. The album is especially memorable for some majestic exchanges between Benson and Hancock on "What's New?"

"When I first heard it," Benson recalled, "I said, 'Man, I got nerve I didn't know I had.'"

He obviously scored points. "Ron Carter called Miles Davis and said, 'Man, you better hear what George Benson did to Herbie Hancock on this record,'" he said. "That's when Miles started calling me and trying to get me to be in his band."

The resulting association with Davis was limited. But Benson's propulsive work on "Paraphernalia," from 1968's *Miles In The Sky*—his opening chords set the trippy pace for the classic Davis combo with Hancock, Carter, saxophonist Wayne Shorter and drummer Tony Williams—hints at what might have been had the collaboration continued.

In recent years, Benson said, two of his albums from roughly a half-century ago—the Beatles excursion titled *The Other Side Of Abbey Road* (1969) and the Creed Taylor-produced *White Rabbit* (1972)—have attracted new audiences. He said he hoped the same would apply to 2013's *Inspiration: A Tribute To Nat King Cole*, a crooning turn that proved to be a global sensation, landing him major festival bookings.

Meanwhile, he said, "What I try to do is stay flexible and keep my ears open."

Last year, he released *Walking To New Orleans* (Provogue), a tasty tribute to Chuck Berry and Fats Domino that topped the Beyond Album category in the 2019 DownBeat Readers Poll. A relatively self-contained studio album, it provides a counterweight to the more-freewheeling *Weekend In London*.

Benson has attracted fans and collaborators from throughout the music industry. He is featured on funk wizard Bootsy Collins' recent single, "The Power Of The One," and in 2018 he appeared on "Humility," a hit by the band Gorillaz.

Despite the guitarist's enduring popularity, 2020 has been as restrictive for him as for others. Rather than spending 48 weeks a year on the road, he has been staying at his home in Arizona.

Even when the coronavirus wanes, he said, the future of the music business might be in the hands of power brokers rather than artists: "They have to settle into something that works. Nobody can say exactly what that is, except maybe the big wheels who are planning, trying to create a new market."

Whatever the "new normal" becomes for the music industry, Benson seems ready, as always, to stake out his territory within it.

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JIMMY & DENA KATZ



85th
READERS
POLL
2020

Jazz Artist
Bass

CHRISTIAN McBRIDE SPREADS SERIOUS FUN

Christian McBride has some valuable wisdom to share. He knows how to make jazz more popular with young people and how to widen its appeal among the general public.

“It’s got to be fun,” said McBride, who has mastered the art of audience engagement in his roles as bandleader, composer, bassist, jazz radio host, festival artistic director and jazz ambassador. “People just

have to *simply like it*, you know what I mean?”

McBride, who was voted Jazz Artist of the Year and topped the Bass category in this year’s DownBeat Readers Poll, elaborated on his point during a phone call from his New Jersey office.

“Even if you present something that’s really great, if you are dogmatic or stern and have this sort of over-analytical, erudite way of presenting the music, I don’t really think you’re going to get mass acceptance and reach a wider audience,” he said. “I like baiting people with fun. You get them to laugh and feel good, and then once they’re in, they’re like, ‘Whoa, this is serious.’ So, things that are serious can be fun.”

A case in point would be McBride’s album *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait Of Four Icons* (Mack Avenue), a large-scale project inspired by the civil rights movement that relies on dramatic spoken word to convey the messages imparted in statements and speeches by Rosa Parks, Malcom X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali, as well as former President Barack Obama. The album’s subject matter is serious in concept, no doubt, but the music comes across as a celebration of the passion, optimism, empathy, humor and intellectual liberation associated with the movement.

The Movement Revisited was set in motion in 1998 as a musical portrait of the civil rights movement when McBride received a commission from the Portland (Maine) Arts Society to write a piece for his quartet to perform with a choir. Ten years later, the L.A. Philharmonic invited McBride to reimagine the project on a grander scale for a performance at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, so he revamped it as a four-part suite that featured jazz quartet, big band, gospel choir and spoken-word narration, quoting historic speeches by four celebrated civil-rights icons. For a performance later in 2008 at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Detroit, McBride was asked to expand the suite to include a fifth movement, excerpting President Obama’s election-night victory speech from that November. After that, the piece continued to evolve with each live performance. When it came time to finally record *The Movement Revisited* in 2013, McBride chose as his narrators author Sonia Sanchez (as Parks), actor Wendell Pierce (as King), actor Vondie Curtis-Hall (as Malcolm X) and actor Dion Graham (as Ali).

Getting all the necessary permissions led to extremely long delays in releasing the recording, partly due to Ali’s death in 2016. *The Movement Revisited* finally saw the light of day in February of this year, just months before the Black Lives Matter movement would reach a peak of renewed momentum.

“Once we finished the recording, we knew it was going to be a challenge to get the legal clearances from all of the estates to be able to use the recitations and things,” McBride said. “But we didn’t think it would take six years.”

McBride acknowledged that, considering what’s currently going on in the country, now is as good a time as ever for the album to come out. “If *The Movement Revisited* gets mentioned in the context of this latest social uprising, I will

be more than happy,” he said.

Less than eight months after the release of *The Movement Revisited*, McBride unveiled another album built upon an overarching theme. This one, however, was all about the music. *For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver* (Mack Avenue), which dropped in late September, features the Christian McBride Big Band with collaborators Joey DeFrancesco and Mark Whitfield paying homage to the famous mid-'60s summit meetings of Jimmy Smith, Wes Montgomery and Oliver Nelson. Those sessions produced two classic Verve albums, *The Dynamic Duo* (1966) and *Further Adventures Of Jimmy And Wes* (1968).

Recorded in early 2019, *For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver* balances big band tracks and quartet tracks, just like the original Verve releases. It includes four tunes from the Verve albums (Miles Davis' "Milestones," the spiritual "Down By The Riverside," Montgomery's "Road Song" and the instrumental blues "Night Train"), plus some new originals (McBride's "Pie Blues," DeFrancesco's "Don Is" and Whitfield's "Medgar Evers' Blues") and standards in a similar stylistic vein (Freddie Hubbard's "Up Jumped Spring," Ray Noble's "The Very Thought Of You" and Billy Eckstine's "I Want To Know About You").

McBride noted that while his and DeFrancesco's shared passion for the source material certainly helped to drive the project, they could have recorded just about anything together and it would have come out great. "With somebody like Joey, repertoire almost didn't matter, because we go so far back," he said, noting that the two met during middle school in Philadelphia and have been friends ever since. "We could have been doing a Guy Lombardo tribute album, and it would have been fun, because we know each other so well.

"It kind of made sense that we would salute those great, fun, swinging records that Jimmy and Wes did together, and particularly with the big band angle, since Oliver Nelson is one of my biggest heroes," McBride continued. "It just seemed to be a no-brainer.

"People always ask how come Joey and I took so long to make a record together. I say, because he carries his bass player on the left side of his body, there's no need for that. Playing with a bass player cuts off one of Joey's limbs, so basically, he now just has to play the organ like a pianist—he's just kind of comping with the rest of the band and not playing any bass lines [on *For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver*]. But Joey's so versatile, that's not a big deal for him. I love playing with organ.

"In terms of the organist playing the bass line, Joey has been always been my favorite. And now he's trying to play the saxophone, too? I told him, if you even *think* about playing the bass, I will end your life [laughs]. If he

starts playing the bass, I'm now going to have to start getting serious about playing the trumpet, which I really don't want to do. But enough is enough, Joey."

With two new albums, two ongoing radio shows, occasional streaming concerts and deep involvement in virtual jazz fests, virtual jazz camps and the educational nonprofit Jazz House Kids (founded by his wife, vocalist Melissa Walker), McBride has managed to maintain his profile as a leading figure in jazz during this pandemic year of cancellations and

profound changes in the industry.

"Everything that was supposed to happen this year ostensibly will happen next year," McBride said, when asked about future plans. "That would include the reunion tour of the Joshua Redman band with Brad Mehldau, Brian Blade and me. The pandemic hit right in the middle of our European tour with Chick Corea and Brian Blade—we'll have to get back together and finish what we started. There's a lot of stuff that's going to get jammed in, fingers crossed, between the summer of 2021 and 2022." —Ed Enright



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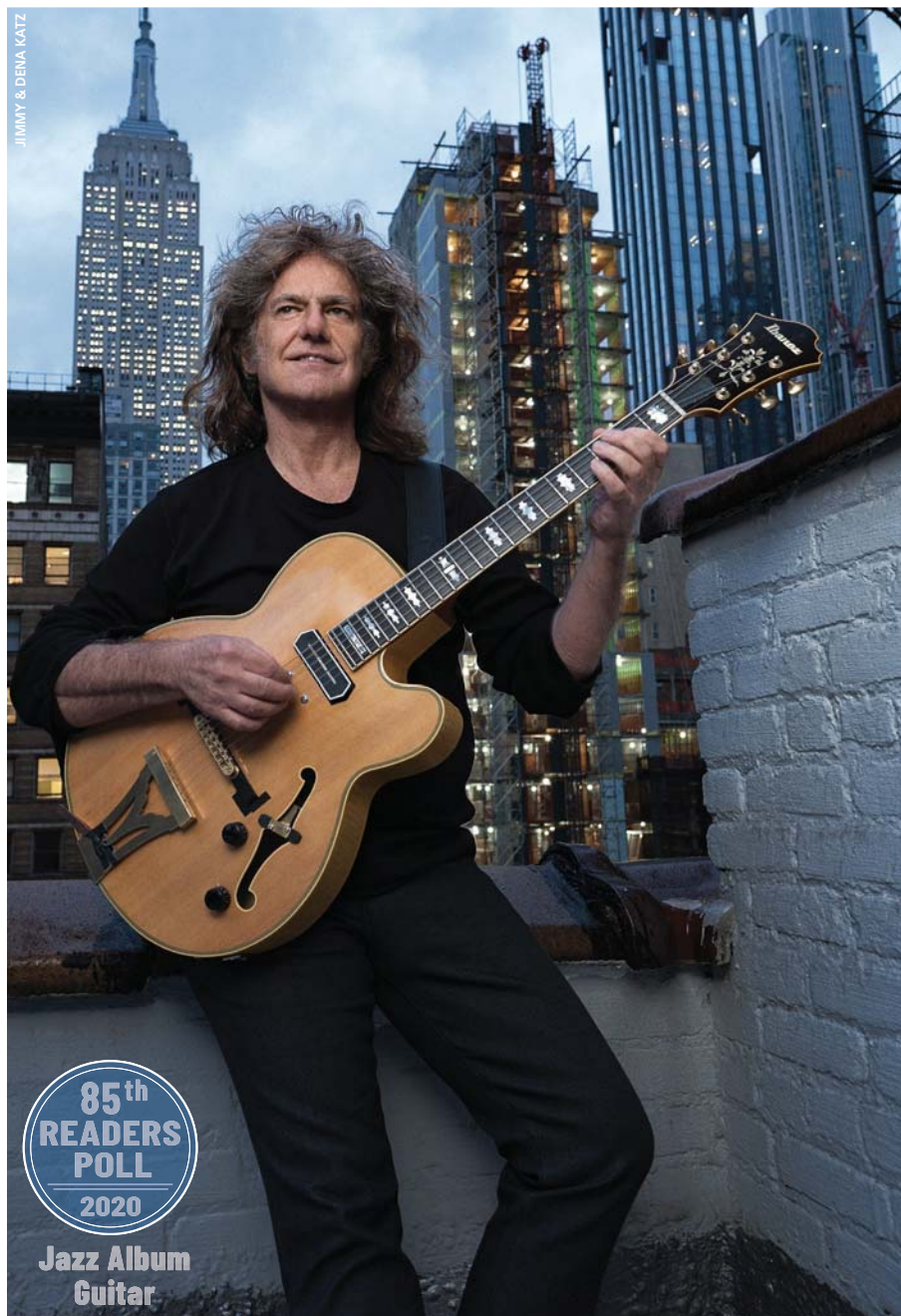


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Jazz Album
Guitar

PAT METHENY'S CINEMATIC VISION

A conversation with Pat Metheny is similar to one of his shows: Some parts seem carefully constructed, while others are loose, improvisational flights. But the thematic undercurrent is one of sturdy, satisfying logic.

DownBeat reached the iconic guitarist at his home in New York's Catskill Mountains to discuss his two wins in the Readers Poll, in the categories Guitar and Jazz Album. The latter accolade is for his transcendent disc *From This Place* (Nonesuch), featuring a program of 10 original compositions. Constructed differently from any other album in a

diverse catalog that stretches back to 1976, the core tracks for *From This Place* were recorded by Metheny (guitars, keyboards), Gwilym Simcock (piano), Linda May Han Oh (bass, voice) and Antonio Sánchez (drums).

Later, Metheny wrote orchestral parts that were performed by the Hollywood Studio Symphony, conducted by Joel McNeely. Other textures were provided by Grégoire Maret (harmonica), Luis Conte (percussion) and Meshell Ndegeocello, who sings on the title tune.

The result is not only one of the most ambitious projects in his career, but also one of the most beguiling. Metheny has succeeded in melding quartet improvisations with intricate, potent orchestrations in a way that feels wholly organic. It is not the type of album he could have made as a youngster.

"Some records function as documentaries," Metheny said. "You get some great musicians and you go into a room, and you play [each piece] a couple of times. You pick the best one, or maybe do an edit between a couple [of takes]. And that has a very specific kind of result. And most of the early records I made were [like] that, just out of necessity. I mean, you were given a day or two to make a record.

"Then, as time went on, I really started to think more in terms of, let's say, a novel or a feature-film approach to the process and the result. But regardless of the approach, I never wanted to diminish the improvisational focus of it all.

"So, doing documentary records is great, but then ... there's The Beatles. I mean, there was this whole world of what was possible under the auspices of this novel [or] feature-film way of thinking. [Miles Davis'] *Bitches Brew* would be an example of a long-form type work. But it was still built almost entirely around a documentary approach of getting guys together playing in a room, and then a lot of stuff happening in the editing of that material.

"By the time I was pretty well into my thing as a bandleader, I started pushing more into the idea of using the studio itself as an instrument."

For Metheny, who has long embraced technology as an integral component to his art, recent advancements in computer-based recording have opened up endless vistas: "The lines have blurred for me now between composer, bandleader, producer, editor, presentation MC, or whatever you want to call it. To me, it's all one thing."

On *From This Place*, those ideas are manifest dramatically on the 13-minute track "America Undefined." It features a muscular melody before shifting into a sonic collage segment, with sounds that resemble trains, crossing-signal bells and chirping birds, plus other mysterious elements interwoven with voices.

"That particular track," Metheny said, "is obviously on the Steven Spielberg side of things,

as opposed to the Frederick Wiseman side of things—in terms of, you know, a method for how to do something.”

Metheny did some of the orchestral arrangements for the album, but he also recruited two ace arrangers: Gil Goldstein, who worked on five tracks, and Alan Broadbent, who worked on four.

Broadbent—a pianist who leads his own improv-oriented trio and who formerly worked for legendary orchestrator Nelson Riddle—devised a lush orchestral arrangement that injects a timeless quality to the album’s closing track, “Love May Take A While.”

“The reason I was hired is that Pat wanted my feedback and ideas,” Broadbent said via videoconference from his home in Orange, New Jersey. “Pat gave me free rein. A lot of [band leaders] want you to orchestrate their ideas and, you know, that’s hackwork. And I’ve done it a couple of times for people who I won’t mention. But Pat wanted me to add what I could to what he had realized. So, I added my two cents’ worth to the [existing] tracks.”

In the coming months, Metheny plans to compose more music for his trio project Side-Eye, which had played shows prior to the pandemic. That band, which he said was conceptualized to have a fluid cast of personnel, currently includes pianist/keyboardist James Francies and drummer Joe Dyson.

Metheny, who was inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame in 2013, explained that he keeps a close watch on young, up-and-coming musicians on the jazz scene. He noted that he is always on the lookout for players who can offer something more than just great chops.

“Probably within 50 miles of here, I could find 200 people now who could play ‘Giant Steps’ in all 12 keys backwards and forwards,” he asserted. “It used to be, you couldn’t find anybody who could do that. But now, that kind of fluency is abundant. Now, it’s almost taken for granted that you’re going to be a good player and a good musician.

“But to get that level of fluency combined with [a playing style that makes me think] ‘What was that?’—it’s like every 10 years or so somebody comes on like that. James [Francies] is in that category. And he’s still very young.”

Metheny also heaped praise on Dyson, calling him “one of the most exciting drummers I’ve heard in years.”

Although Side-Eye hasn’t released an album yet, the band did recently film a performance in Japan. Metheny was pleased with the footage, though he generally isn’t interested in concert films.

“I don’t really like the visual thing that much,” he said. “If there was a way of doing what I do while invisible, I would love that—because to me, it’s not really about the image

of the people playing; it is only about what it sounds like.”

The guitarist, who is an avid reader, explained that the pandemic-related break from touring had afforded him the opportunity to tackle several books, including biographies of Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman, as well as physicist David Deutsch’s *The Beginning of Infinity: Explanations That Transform the World* (Penguin).

“Like probably half the people on the planet, I’m about three quarters of the way through [Robert A. Caro’s *The Power Broker: Robert*

Moses and the Fall of New York], which is, for somebody who lives in New York, both fascinating and infuriating,” he said with a chuckle, referring to the 1,344-page tome.

This extended period of time off the road also has given Metheny an itch to revisit a backlog of compositional ideas. “This is the chance to finish those 70 halfway-done tunes that have been sitting there,” he said. “I know there might be some good tunes there, just waiting to get finished. And out of that 70, I’m going to get 10 [good ones], because my batting average is about that.”

—Bobby Reed

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JIM MARSHALL

JOHN COLTRANE OUT OF OBSCURITY

In late June of 1964, in between Impulse Records studio dates for *Crescent* and *A Love Supreme*, saxophonist John Coltrane brought his classic quartet with pianist McCoy Tyner, bassist Jimmy Garrison, and drummer Elvin Jones to Rudy Van Gelder's New Jersey studio to lay down a handful of abbreviated tracks. Recorded outside of the label's purview, these off-trail tapes remained shrouded in near obscurity until September 2019, when Impulse released *Blue World*, the output from that day's session.

Intriguing for its provenance, this short collection snags Best Historical Album in this year's Readers Poll. The ranking begs comparison with last year's win in the Historical Album category, *Both Directions At Once: The Lost Album*—another belated Coltrane release from the Impulse label.

Certainly, these two recordings share commonalities: Both were recorded within 15 months of each other at the same place, with the same personnel, at a momentous crossroads in Coltrane's creative life. But the circumstances of their respective discoveries suggest the differing intents behind these recordings: The raw tracks that became *Both Directions At Once* remained in Coltrane's family, while the session takes for *Blue World* landed in an archive at the National

Film Board of Canada.

Coltrane had taped *Blue World's* eight tracks—variations on four of his oft-played originals in multiple takes and his contrafact of Harold Arlen's "Out Of This World"—at the behest of Canadian filmmaker Gilles Groulx. The Québec auteur was finishing up what would become a ground-breaking film in Canada, *Le chat dans le sac* (*The Cat In The Bag*), and wanted the restless sounds of Coltrane's horn for the city scenes. It would be the only soundtrack that Coltrane ever would record.

How one hears this release depends in large part on their vantage point. For rising star saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin—who earlier this year released *Pursuance: The Coltranes*, a tribute to the saxophonist and Alice Coltrane—there's no such

thing as an inconsequential Coltrane recording.

"Whenever you get a chance to [hear the alternate takes,] it's eye-opening because you can see what the musician actually planned, versus what they improvised," she said. "Musicians don't alter their game plan, they just play off of it."

At first listen, she thought that Coltrane had recorded *Blue World* with an earlier incarnation of his quartet—the album's repertoire was made up of tunes that the bandleader largely had moved away from by the time of the 1964 session. Stylistically, though, these tracks were of a different order.

"You can hear that they're already in the thick of the *Love Supreme*-era," Benjamin continued. "It's so interesting to hear Coltrane as he's growing into a new sound, and how those old songs took on a new life. ... If you listen to 'Naima' on *Giant Steps* and in other earlier versions, they sound more like a film score there than on [*Blue World*]. But on this album, they're imposing the 3 over the 4, and the modes are opened up. Even when they play ['Village Blues'], they're reaching in the same way that they do on their usual classic albums."

But esteemed jazz critic and Coltrane biographer Ben Ratliff reserves judgment on the album's contribution to our understanding of Coltrane's legacy.

"I'd rather hear the Coltrane Quartet between 1961 and 1965 than most bands, no matter what they were doing or why, and I didn't learn much new from *Blue World*," Ratliff, whose *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound* was released in 2007, explained. "That could be because this is music created to be secondary to someone else's audio-visual view of life, or for some other reason. But my feeling was that there are more centered, dynamic and profound studio versions of these pieces elsewhere."

Still, it's hard to resist Coltrane, even on a less notable day than usual.

"I did like the sound, though," Ratliff went on. "All the dry, sharp detail of the rhythm section, and the explosiveness of Elvin Jones' drum sound at the end of 'Blue World.' And my favorite track by far is the blues 'Traneing In.' It's the track that's least like a 'composition,' contains the most Coltrane-y casual catharsis and is, perhaps, least related to the mood of the film."

Regardless of the album's reception, its place in the Coltrane canon merits notice simply for what happened next.

"[Listening to this album] is like catching somebody warming up before they do something monumental, as if someone were talking to Martin Luther King before his 'I Have a Dream' speech," Benjamin observed. "It's a peek into *A Love Supreme*, and once *A Love Supreme* comes, Coltrane is going to move on. By the time he recorded [*Blue World*], he was already moving faster than we can conceive." —*Suzanne Lorge*



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Lee Konitz (1927–2020) was inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame in 2015.



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Alto Saxophone

LEE KONITZ

'HE ALWAYS PURSUED TRUTH'

A week after his 90th birthday in October 2017, Lee Konitz—who died at 92 on April 15—recorded his final album, *Old Songs New* (Sunnyside), which features his lucid, transparent, full-bodied improvisations on eight bespoke nonet arrangements by Ohad Talmor.

The artistry displayed on that 2019 release is one reason for Konitz's posthumous win in the Alto Saxophone category of the Readers Poll, but the honorific also acknowledges his cumulative achievement.

An avatar in the art of improvising without a preconceived harmonic, melodic or rhythmic framework, Konitz was the only altoist of his generation to develop a voice—cerebral yet warm, melody-centric, rhythmically muscular, tonally luscious—that addressed the innovations of Charlie Parker without essentially Xeroxing Bird's style.

"Lee was inspiring on the scale of Wayne Shorter or Miles Davis," said pianist Dan Tepfer, who performed with Konitz more than 140 times in various contexts between 2006 and 2019, including the duo sessions that constitute the 2018 album *Decade* (Verve). "He always pursued truth in the right-now, versus whatever may

have felt true in the past. It was always new, to the very end."

Born in Chicago to Jewish immigrant parents, Konitz fell in love with the music of Lester Young during formative years in the city's Rogers Park neighborhood.

He began his professional career in 1944, playing lead alto in several white dance bands and a Black orchestra that assigned him double duty as a blues singer on South Side gigs. Around this time, Konitz took his first lessons with pianist Lennie Tristano, with whom he sustained an intense relationship until the mid-1960s.

Konitz moved to New York in the fall of 1947, and soon after uncorked startlingly fresh solos on Gil Evans' arrangements of "Anthropology" and "Yardbird Suite" for the Claude Thornhill Orchestra. Via Evans, he joined Miles Davis' influential *Birth Of The Cool* nonet from 1948 to 1950; in 1949, he recorded groundbreaking

free-jazz sides with a Tristano-led sextet alongside tenor saxophonist Warne Marsh. After his first leader album in 1951, which included Davis and Max Roach, he toured internationally, and then joined Stan Kenton in September 1952. Four months into his 16-month stint with Kenton, he recorded 11 tracks alongside Chet Baker in Gerry Mulligan's pianoless quintet.

After leaving Kenton, Konitz eschewed the structured environment of working bands for the life of a troubadour-for-hire. Until about 1967, with some exceptions, he fronted blowing combos propelled by swinging bass and drums. During the ensuing decades he expanded his scope, improvising with a staggering array of partners.

"Even before I met Tristano and learned more about this music, I thought I'd be a professional journeyman musician doing whatever gigs were offered to me," Konitz told DownBeat in 2002. "For some strange reason, I like to go in and play with different guys."

One of his favorite collaborators was Tepfer, 37, who divides their association into two distinct periods, before and after 2011, when Konitz suffered a subdural hematoma.

"At first, Lee encouraged me to push harmonic language and do rhythmically intricate things—to be extremely interactive with him, like people engaged in a fiery discussion," Tepfer said. "Then he became interested above all else in harmony; the music got much calmer, introverted to a certain degree. Increasingly, he disliked the idea of a solo. It went from creating drama and excitement to creating connection; for me, from being a partner in debate to an orchestrator creating a landscape inside which he moved around."

Old Songs New was Konitz's seventh album with Talmor. They met in 1990, when Talmor was 20. "Lee was an unavoidable presence," Talmor said. "The vocabulary and language of jazz was altered because of his playing and sound and approach, and also his compositions, which were an extension of his voice as an improviser."

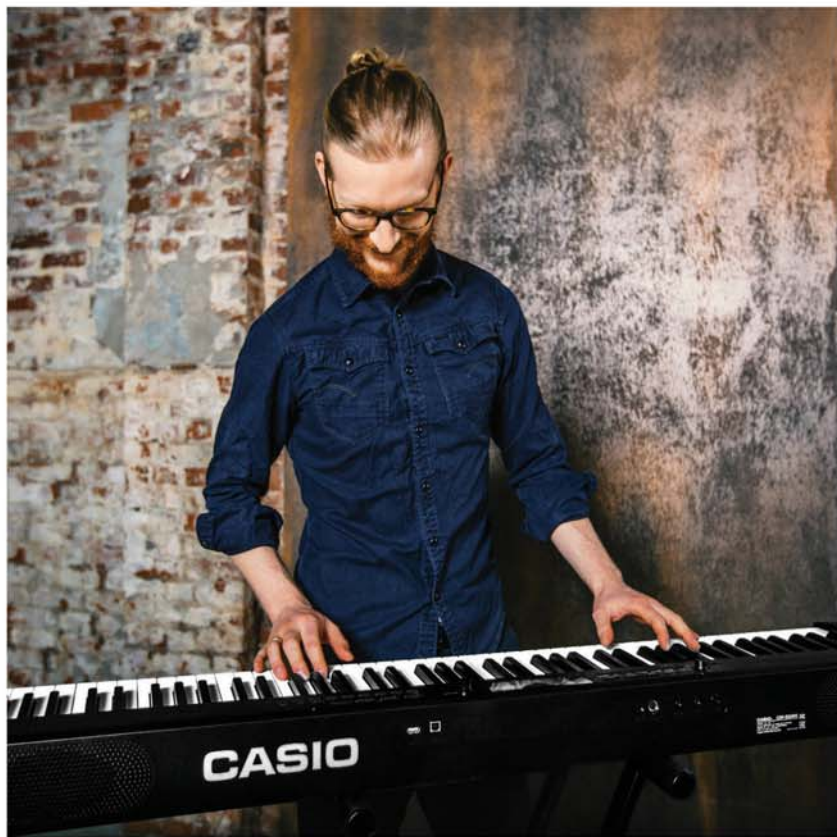
"As Lee moved towards the end of his days, he cleaned and purified his sound from any extraneous information, to be the absolute essence of the music he wanted to express. He began to sing during performances, and on his best days, his singing would echo—to a T—what his playing was. To have such a perfect equation between what you hear, and are able to sing and what you play ... I don't know many people in the history of this music who did that."

Talmor's observation comes to life in a YouTube clip from early 2020 of a seated Konitz in his music room, playing deliberate, lyric variations on "317 E. 32nd Street," Tristano's "Out Of Nowhere" contrafact, with Talmor's piano accompaniment. Konitz finishes a thought, removes his mouthpiece, and sings another chorus. He concludes, rises and chuckles. "Yup," he says. "It sounds genuine." —Ted Panken

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Trombone Shorty, winner of the Trombone category, at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in South Africa



Anat Cohen, winner of the Clarinet category



Maria Schneider, winner of the Composer and Arranger categories

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ERIC MYER

Herbie Hancock, winner of the Keyboard category



MICHAEL WOODALL

Joey DeFrancesco, winner of the Organ category



AMI SIOUX

Gregory Porter, co-winner of the Male Vocalist category



ANNA WEBBER

Kurt Elling, co-winner of the Male Vocalist category



TOSHI SAKURAI, COURTESY CHICK COREA PRODUCTIONS

Pianist Chick Corea, whose trio with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade topped the Jazz Group category

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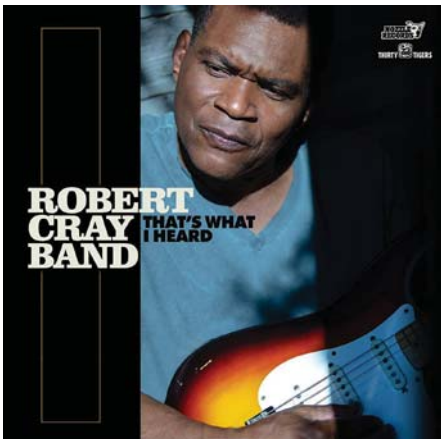
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Kurt Elling2,190 (TIE)
Gregory Porter2,190 (TIE)



Buddy Guy, winner of the Blues Artist or Group category, at the Baloise Session festival in Basel, Switzerland

© DOMINIK PLUSJ, BALOISE SESSION

Tony Bennett	1,974
Bobby McFerrin	1,137
Freddy Cole	912
Michael Bublé	867
Jacob Collier	558
Benny Benack III	507
Andy Bey	459
Leslie Odom Jr.	453
Theo Bleckmann	426
José James	414
John Pizzarelli	381
Jamie Cullum	309
Kenny Washington	270
James Blood Ulmer	264
Steven Herring	210
Giacomo Gates	189
Dhafer Youssef	180
John Boutté	174
Allan Harris	156

COMPOSER

Maria Schneider	1,302
Wayne Shorter	1,023
Chick Corea	927
Terence Blanchard	846
Pat Metheny	819
Carla Bley	765
Wynton Marsalis	639
Jimmy Heath	630
Benny Golson	483
Kamasi Washington	393
Christian McBride	342
John Zorn	342
Ambrose Akinmusire	333
Dave Holland	273
Robert Glasper	258
Tom Harrell	243
Bill Frisell	234
Anthony Braxton	228
Vijay Iyer	204

ARRANGER

Maria Schneider	1,548
Wynton Marsalis	990
Carla Bley	774
Christian McBride	708
Gordon Goodwin	561
Vince Mendoza	447

Esperanza Spalding	447
Bob Mintzer	441
Jacob Collier	435
Terri Lyne Carrington	405
Kamasi Washington	384
John Clayton	369
Dave Holland	339
Jim McNeely	306
John Zorn	306
Billy Childs	300
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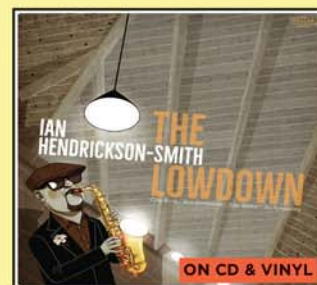
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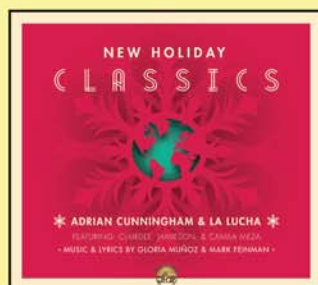
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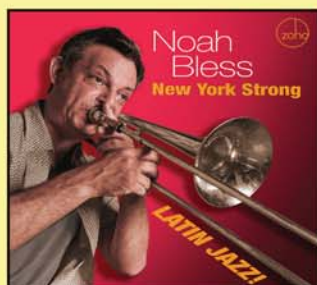
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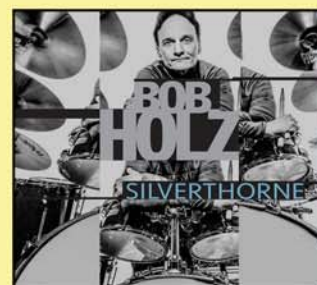
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Art Baden of Berklee College of Music was a co-winner in the Jazz Instrumental Soloist category (Undergraduate College Division) in the 2020 DownBeat Student Music Awards. (Photo: ©Yossi Zwecker)

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REVIEWS >



John Daversa's latest album offers an enticing counterpoint to his large-ensemble work.

RICKY CHAVEZ

John Daversa Quintet *Cuarentena: With Family At Home*

TIGER TURN

★★★★

When trouble strikes and it's time to hunker down, surrounding yourself with loved ones is a good way to stay strong. Relationships nurtured by home and hearth often provide solace, and, in John Daversa's case, inspiration.

The Grammy-winning trumpeter conceived this program of genteel boleros with pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba, whose mastery of the style becomes obvious with each note his instrument delivers. A slow-tempo song form that began as Spanish ballroom music and thrives here as an exercise in poise, boleros are both quaint and profound. Leading a group that includes drummer Dafnis Prieto, bassist Carlo De Rosa and percussionist Sammy Figueroa, Daversa stresses the form's elegance, casting it as a parlor music of Latin households, part of the glue that has helped bond kin through decades. Melodies written by his father and grandfather, dedications to his grandmother's remarkable lineage, valentines to

his wife and kids and even a nod to family pets create a sentimental glow of unity that radiates optimism during our stressful pandemic epoch.

Cuarentena also offers a new perspective on Daversa's interests. Most listeners likely know him through the flamboyance of his large ensembles and feisty funk-bop work, which has both pros and cons. But the intimacy of this new record is an enticing counterpoint to the occasionally florid pieces that the Frost School of Music prof has previously brought to the table. (Though props to anyone who rebuffs Trump's hateful ideas around DACA with a frenzied, rap-driven big-band spin of Led Zep's "Immigrant Song.")

The quintet's approach to these jewels stands at a nexus of shared pleasures and heartfelt cohesion. From the lyricism of the leader's muted horn on "La Bailarina (Para Tatiana)" to the rhythm section's agility on "Puppitas (Para Lea Y Maya)" (a nod to Daversa's cocker spaniels with extra oomph provided by Lea's metronomic panting), to the buoyant thrust that marks "#19," their temperament is the product of coordination and ease. And chops, too. "Oma (A La Madre Divina)" mixes the trumpet's earthy

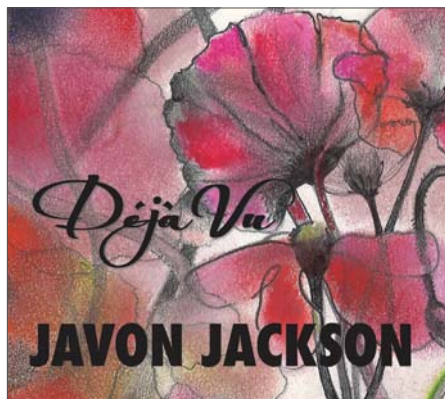
textures with the pianist's playful comping. Rubalcaba's erudition becomes more obvious with each year, and on *Cuarentena* his provocative lines keep the music percolating.

Underscoring the record's concept are spoken statements by each of the musicians, discussing the pandemic's impact and the need to cherish loved ones, protect parents, seize opportunities and be thankful for the gifts they've been given. It's a wise move, further personalizing a program that's obviously dear to its creators, and illustrating in words what the hush of "Canción De Cuna Para Hara" and rumination of "El Último Suspiro" are trying to convey instrumentally. Noble intentions ultimately suggesting that we're all connected, whether or not we share bloodlines. —Jim Macnie

Cuarentena: With Family At Home: #45; #22; John Daversa: Growing Up In A Musical Family; La Bailarina (Para Tatiana); Oma (A La Madre Divina); Sammy Figueroa Plays For Charlie Figueroa; El Último Suspiro; Soldado Distinguido (Para Sgt. Alvin York); Puppitas (Para Lea Y Maya); Fábrica De Conservas De San Francisco (La Historia De Molly Y Johnny); Gonzalo Rubalcaba: El Estilo De Vida Que Llevamos Es Muy Rápido; #19; Dafnis Prieto: Haciendo La Misma Cosa Que Siempre He Hecho; Un Bolero Para Lola; Carlo De Rosa: Can't Visit Family; Opus 1 (Escrita Por El Abuelo Austin); Canción De Cuna Para Hara. (68:32)

Personnel: John Daversa, trumpet, flugelhorn; Gonzalo Rubalcaba, piano; Carlo De Rosa, bass; Dafnis Prieto, drums; Sammy Figueroa, percussion.

Ordering info: johndaversa.com



Javon Jackson *Déjà Vu*

SOLID JACKSON

★★★★

With so many stressors this year, listening to jazz classics at the right moment can soften hearts like the sight of a flower, rising from a dilapidated sidewalk. Tenor saxophonist Javon Jackson offers such a respite as he leads a quartet through well-worn compositions on *Déjà Vu*.

The exploration, however, contains some interesting destinations that veer from many standards-heavy albums. The band turns in a gorgeous reading of Vernon Duke's "Autumn In New York," which functions as an ideal vehicle for Jackson's Merlot-flavored tone, economi-

cal phrasing and graceful improvisations. Then there's an admirable romp through Thelonious Monk's "Raise Four," where pianist Jeremy Manasia escapes the trap of mimicking the composer by offering a billowing solo.

There, too, are comparably lesser-known pieces, like Wayne Shorter's hard-bop swinger "Venus Di Mildew" and a pair of Cedar Walton tunes—the strutting "In The Kitchen" and elegant "Martha's Prize"—that enliven *Déjà Vu* while demonstrating both Jackson's canonical knowledge and interpretive command.

The bandleader does contribute one original to the proceedings, "T.J.," a marvelous ballad on which Manasia initiates a wistful, almost cinematic melody, underscored by bassist David Williams and drummer McClenty Hunter's assured medium-tempo propulsion. What's more intriguing about the song, though, is that the leader doesn't perform on it; Jackson makes his presence known as a composer. It's a gambit that often only readily identifiable writers can pull off. Here, "T.J." teases future albums that might focus more on Jackson's compositions, as well as his assured saxophone playing and band-leading talents.

—John Murph

Déjà Vu: Autumn In New York; Martha's Prize; Raise Four; Venus Di Mildew; Limehouse Blues; T.J.; My Shining Hour; In The Kitchen; Rio Dawn. (57:07)

Personnel: Javon Jackson, tenor saxophone; Jeremy Manasia, piano; David Williams, bass; McClenty Hunter, drums.

Ordering info: jvonjackson.com

Diana Krall *This Dream Of You*

VERVE 003519

★★★★★

Diana Krall's *This Dream Of You* marks a turning point in the singer-pianist's career: a full-length, self-produced album. These 12 tracks—taken from earlier sessions with Tommy LiPuma (1936–2017), Krall's dedicated producer since 1995—not only channel the collaborators' past creative relationship, but further her move in other musical directions.

Unlike most of her previous studio albums, developed with a specific stylistic repertoire and set ensemble configuration, *This Dream Of You* draws from a variety of previous successes. Krall turns out a comfortably swinging "Almost Like Being In Love" with her regular rhythm section of bassist John Clayton Jr., drummer Jeff Hamilton and guitarist Anthony Wilson. She waxes romantic on "There's No You," with her sometimes-duo of bassist Christian McBride and guitarist Russell Malone. And she fronts a shimmering orchestra led by pianist/arranger Alan Broadbent on "But Beautiful." This is the Krall who sold millions of jazz records and introduced the Great American Songbook to a generation of non-jazz listeners. But she's always advanced her interests outside of standards and traditional



pop. As with her 2015 album *Wallflower*, she turns to Bob Dylan for this album's title cut, played as an easeful, country ballad. "There's a moment when all old things become new again," Krall sings. "But that moment might have come and gone." In the face of loss, all that's left is the dream.

—Suzanne Lorge

This Dream Of You: But Beautiful; That's All; Autumn In New York; Almost Like Being In Love; More Than You Know; Just You, Just Me; There's No You; Don't Smoke In Bed; This Dream Of You; I Wished On The Moon; How Deep Is The Ocean; Singing In The Rain. (50:42)

Personnel: Diana Krall, piano, vocals; Alan Broadbent, piano, orchestrations; John Clayton Jr., bass; Tony Garnier, bass; Christian McBride, bass; Jeff Hamilton, drums; Karriem Riggins, drums; Russell Malone, guitar; Marc Ribot, guitar; Anthony Wilson, guitar; Stuart Duncan, fiddle; Randall Krall, accordion.

Ordering info: ververecords.com



Ingrid Laubrock *Dreamt Twice, Twice Dreamt*

INTAKT 355

★★★★★

Saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock possesses one of the most fetchingly original free-improv styles out there—throaty, gutsy, bravely lyrical—but recently, her composing and arranging have proven as engaging as her soloing. On *Dreamt Twice, Twice Dreamt*, Laubrock delves into emotional and psychological territory inspired by dreams and the transitional state between dreaming and waking, which takes in the disjunction of the night world, but also its cosmic absurdity.

Two ensembles—one large, one small—each play the project's five pieces (in different order), but the large-ensemble versions are in no way rearrangements of the small-group takes; they are reimaginings, Laubrock says, of the same state of mind. The small-group version of "Down The Mountain, Down The Mountain," for example, creates a mysterious aura with the twinkling microtonal intervals of Cory Smythe's keyboard, while the large-ensemble treatment goes to a similarly tenuous place, but by using three different conductors simultaneously, in different time feels.

Timbral contrasts are polar. At one extreme lies the nightmare of Sam Pluta's electronics escape on "Dreamt Twice" with the large ensemble; at the other is Adam Matlock's accordion dancing through "Down The Mountain, Down The Mountain" with the small group.

Laubrock's variety and intricacy would be irrelevant if the music were not so continuously creative, dramatically surprising and sometimes even suspenseful in an almost Wagnerian manner.

—Paul de Barros

Dreamt Twice, Twice Dreamt: Disc One: Dreamt Twice; Snorkel Cows; Drilling; I Never Liked That Guy; Down The Mountain, Down The Mountain. Disc Two: Snorkel Cows; Drilling; I Never Liked That Guy; Down The Mountain, Down The Mountain; Twice Dreamt. (60:48/54:25)

Personnel: Ingrid Laubrock, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Cory Smythe, keyboards; Sam Pluta, electronics; Robert Landfermann (Disc One), bass; Tom Rainey (Disc One), drums; EOS Chamber Orchestra (Disc One); Zeena Parkins (Disc Two), electric harp; Adam Matlock (Disc Two), accordion; Josh Modney (Disc Two), violin.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

The Hot Box

Critics	Paul de Barros	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie	John Murph
John Daversa Quintet <i>Cuarentena: With Family At Home</i>	★★½	★★★	★★★★	★★★
Javon Jackson <i>Déjà Vu</i>	★★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★
Diana Krall <i>This Dream Of You</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Ingrid Laubrock <i>Dreamt Twice, Twice Dreamt</i>	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★½

Critics' Comments

John Daversa Quintet, *Cuarentena: With Family At Home*

Daversa reaches out with subtle, stately Latin beats during the pandemic, but apart from some sizzling Rubalcaba solos and the snappy "Puppitas (Para Lea Y Maya)," this is pretty tepid stuff.
—Paul de Barros

With *Cuarentena*, Daversa takes on the softer side of the pandemic; shared adversity fosters intimacy. His muted trumpet lines celebrate the convivial excitement of the bolero as much as they underscore its tenderness. The former entices, the latter becalms.
—Suzanne Lorge

A sanguine offering that captures much of melancholy and intermittent magic that happens when quarantined with loved ones.
—John Murph

Javon Jackson, *Déjà Vu*

Jackson has come a long way since his 20-chorus, Coltranesque solos with Elvin Jones. Though still not a distinctive stylist, he's succinct and pithy on this smartly chosen set of jazz (and some pop) tunes. Pianist Manasia sparkles.
—Paul de Barros

Jackson's intuitive approach to improvisatory music gives fresh luster to these venerable tunes. Polished though they are, his reimaginings are no mere cosmetic exercise. A deep rapport with the material—and with his similarly committed fellow musicians—speaks to Jackson's lucid insight into jazz tradition.
—Suzanne Lorge

His hard-swinging approach operates on an open highway of ideas that the crew lines with eloquence. And his horn sounds as fierce as ever. Can I Venmo Hunter a fiver?
—Jim Macnie

Diana Krall, *This Dream Of You*

Has anyone come closer than Krall to the sweet spot between jazz and pop, as trademarked by Peggy Lee and Nat Cole? Not likely. Great to hear her husky whisper applied to a Dylan tune here, and "Singin' In The Rain" makes for a good pandemic anthem.
—Paul de Barros

These LiPuma leftovers glow with the singer's panache and warmth. And though the Dylan tune gets away from her, she doesn't miss by much and deserves kudos for trying.
—Jim Macnie

A quintessential set from the singer and pianist, featuring her doing what she does best with seemingly effortless poise.
—John Murph

Ingrid Laubrock, *Dreamt Twice, Twice Dreamt*

Through sure-footed writing, Laubrock reveals her gift for balancing free composition with structural intent. Yet, by presenting each of her impressionistic tracks alongside its doppelgänger—first instrumentally varied, then streamlined—she establishes expressiveness as the element most essential to her compositions. Freedom wins.
—Suzanne Lorge

I'll take the orchestral disc over its mate, but in the past few weeks, both have amped my imagination with their provocative abstractions. Parts of each truly are radiant. All hail dreams!
—Jim Macnie

Like gossamer reveries, these heady compositions tickle the mind and, at times, stir the heart.
—John Murph



CHARLES MINGUS AT BREMEN 1964 & 1975

SSC 1570 - 4 DISCS DIGIPAK & BOOKLET
STREET DATE 11/13/20

The great bassist and composer Charles Mingus had his diehard supporters and detractors. His explosive intermingling of devil may care attitude, imposing character and aggressive music was sure to rub some listeners the wrong way and was just as likely to attract adventurous fans. But his genius could not be denied; it just may have taken some time to break down barriers.

A good way to examine this change in listener attitudes is to investigate the differences in critical appraisals from two performances in the port city of Bremen, Germany, a decade apart. The initial performance in 1964 introduced Mingus's firebrand ways to an unsuspecting audience while his 1975 appearance was met with the expectancy of jazz royalty. The performances appear in their **first official release remastered from the original source tapes on Charles Mingus @ Bremen 1964 & 1975.**



JOE CASTRO PASSION FLOWER - FOR DORIS DUKE

SSC 1393 - 6 ALBUMS & BOOKLET BOXED SET
STREET DATE 11/20/20

The initial Joe Castro boxed set, **Lush Life – A Musical Journey** (Sunnyside, 2015), provided an insight into the world of the pianist's early meetings with the greats of jazz at home recorded sessions. These recordings included Buddy Collette, Chico Hamilton, Teddy Wilson, Stan Getz, Zoot Sims and Lucky Thompson, a Castro Big Band and the Teddy Edwards Tentet.

The second boxed set of recordings from Joe Castro's collection, **Passion Flower – For Doris Duke**, highlights his collaborations with a vast array of great musicians (Paul Bley, Paul Motian, Leroy Vinnegar, Paul Chambers, Philly Joe Jones, Cannonball Adderley). There are fine home recordings of jam sessions, studio recordings of Castro's Atlantic Records releases, recordings of projects of friends and productions that were done under the aegis of Clover Records, the label that Duke and Castro founded and briefly ran.



www.sunnysiderecords.com



Fred Hersch *Songs From Home*

PALMETTO 2197

★★★★★

Songs From Home is literally that, an album recorded at the pianist's Pennsylvania residence and inspired by our shared predicament of social isolation. The idea was, he said, "to play some music that would make people happy." And as such, the emphasis is strongly on the tuneful and familiar.

Hersch, however, is too talented to let feel-good intentions turn this into Jazz Lite. Take, for instance, the album-opening rendition of

"Wouldn't It Be Lovely." On the one hand, the rubato tempo and pastel harmonies neatly conjure the pleasures of home that Eliza Doolittle dreams of in *My Fair Lady*, giving the number a warm-and-fuzzy vibe that's easily background-able. Listen closely, though, and it's hard not to be awed by the eloquence of his pedaling on the intro, or the masterly harmonic substitutions he works in as the tune progresses. It's like getting comfort food from the French Laundry's Thomas Keller.

"After You've Gone" uses a graceful, stride-style left hand to evoke the tune's old-timey charm, and then, seven songs later, Hersch burlesques that approach for a delightfully witty amble through the Beatles' faux old-fashioned "When I'm Sixty-Four." Staccato phrasing and chattering, offbeat accents turn Cole Porter's "Get Out Of Town" into an itchy charmer, while the mournful longing of "Wichita Lineman" sparks a dazzlingly contrapuntal solo, as if rendering the lyric's romantic dilemma through intertwining melodic lines. In short, there's depth if you want it, and prettiness—everything one might wish for during a quiet evening at home.

—J.D. Considine

Songs From Home: Wouldn't It Be Lovely; Wichita Lineman; After You've Gone; All I Want; Get Out Of Town; West Virginia Rose; The Water Is Wide; Sarabande; Consolation (A Folk Song); Solitude; When I'm Sixty-Four. (57:14)

Personnel: Fred Hersch, piano.

Ordering info: palmetto-records.com



Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah

AXIOM

ROPEADOPE 600

★★★★★

"Oftentimes when we come into environments like this to play creative improvised music, someone uses the word 'jazz,' and then everyone in the room becomes a fuckin' Fulbright scholar," trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah told an audience at New York's Blue Note Jazz Club at the onset of the pandemic. "And that's cool, but that has nothing to do with where this music's power rests." *AXIOM*, which was recorded that night, is a testament to the power he mentions.

The album opens with the neon-colored "X. Adjuah (I Own The Night)," drums crackling like a campfire and imparting so much flamenco-flavored stardust that the tune sets the stakes for the whole endeavor. Elena Pinderhughes' luscious flute solo and more percolating rhythm punctuate Adjuah's "The Last Chieftain (For Big Chiefs Donald Harrison Sr. & Jr.)." As the track rolls on, a psychedelic pedal on Adjuah's horn foreshadows a manic coda that serves as an essential exclamation point. "Incarnation" sounds like the audio translation of an Aaron Douglas painting: all optimism, organic geometry, color and nods to Mother Africa. "West Of The West" is a beautiful but grizzled Rhodes-flecked cut dealing with the racist microaggressions Adjuah experienced while living in Los Angeles.

But a cover of "Guinnevere" is an electric highlight—or more specifically, a cover of the Miles Davis version of the Crosby, Stills & Nash tune is a highlight. Here—and across the album—Adjuah and his sextet continue in the spirit of Davis' radical image. —Ayana Contreras

AXIOM: X. Adjuah (I Own The Night); The Last Chieftain (For Big Chiefs Donald Harrison Sr. & Jr.); Guinnevere; Songs She Never Heard; Sunrise In Beijing; Huntress (For Cara); Incarnation (Chief Adjuah—Idi Of The Xodokan); West Of The West; Diaspora; Introductions; Guinnevere (Alt.); The Last Chieftain (For Big Chiefs Donald Harrison Sr. & Jr.) (Alt.). (107:49)

Personnel: Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, trumpet, sirennette, reverse flugelhorn, percussion; Elena Pinderhughes, flute; Alex Han, alto saxophone; Lawrence Fields, keyboards; Kris Funn, bass; WeeDee Braimah, percussion; Corey Fonville, drums, sampler.

Ordering info: ropeadope.com

Trio Grande *Trio Grande*

WHIRLWIND 4767

★★★★★

Guitarist Gilad Hekselman, saxophonist Will Vinson and drummer Antonio Sánchez each have earned acclaim as bandleaders, and are in the vanguard of their instruments. But the beauty of this disc of originals is that it's far more than an all-star session; there's an exceptional connection here. Each player brings his singular vision to the plate, but the collective sum is something fresh and exhilarating. The trio's jazz grounding openly embraces rock, funk and world influences, from the delightful Caribbean-tinged "Elli Yeled Tov" to the fuzzi-edged, atmospheric "Oberkampf," the crunchy alt-funk of "Scoville" and the heartfelt restraint of "Will You Let It."

Although the trio eschews a bassist, Hekselman reimagines the role, using an octave pedal to "split" his guitar and create a foggy electric bass sound. Vinson's alto saxophone soloing is stunning throughout, from his electrifying left turns on the frenetic, intergalactic jazz-rock-er "Gocta" to the lyrical poignancy of "Firenze." He also pulls out his lesser-used soprano for a soaring statement on "Northbound." In addition, Vinson handles electric keyboards, artfully supplementing the shifting soundscapes. Sánchez's



work behind the kit offers aggressive grooves and keen interplay that—although frequently dense with notes—never steps on toes. Using a wide variation of muffled, unmuffled and prepared drum sounds, as well as conventional kit pieces, he creates a canvas suggesting a multimember precision percussion section. And when soloing, Sánchez brilliantly weaves within the ensemble, rather than just wailing over it. Daring and enjoyably unpredictable.

—Jeff Potter

Trio Grande: Northbound; Elli Yeled Tov; Oberkampf; Upside; Scoville; Gocta; Firenze; Will You Let It. (56:55)

Personnel: Will Vinson, saxophones, keyboards; Gilad Hekselman, guitar; Antonio Sánchez, drums.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com

Yellowjackets + WDR Big Band *Jackets XL*

MACK AVENUE 1175

★★★★½

On *Jackets XL*, Yellowjackets partner with WDR Big Band, one of Germany's most illustrious jazz organizations. It seems inevitable that these two ensembles would meet up: Longtime Yellowjackets saxophonist/EWI player Bob Mintzer has been conductor of the large ensemble for the past four years. Still, adapting the dexterous fusion quartet's repertoire from the past 40 years to the tightly scripted big band took some doing.

Mintzer rearranged several mainstays here, among them the ebullient "Mile High"—a stately, horn-led anthem in this incarnation. And the gospel blowout "Revelation" is filled with buoyant brass instead of layered vocals. Keyboardist Russell Ferrante, the only original member still with the group, borrowed inspiration from composer Maria Schneider's large jazz ensemble to revamp his beautifully jumbled "Coherence." Now orchestrated, it retains the same excitement as before, this time saturated in the bright chromaticism of the winds. He also contributed two new pieces to *Jackets XL*: "One Day," a crisp medium-tempo tune, and "Tokyo Tale," a well-lit showcase for Mintzer's arpeggiated soloing.

—Suzanne Lorge

Jackets XL: Downtown; Dewey; Mile High; The Red Sea; Even Song; One Day; Tokyo Tale; Imperial Strut; Coherence; Revelation. (69:20)

Personnel: Russell Ferrante, keyboards; Bob Mintzer, tenor saxophone, EWI; Dane Alderson, electric bass; Will Kennedy, drums; WDR Big Band.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com



Alexander von Schlippenbach *Piano Solo: Slow Pieces For Aki*

INTAKT 346

★★★★★

Alexander von Schlippenbach might have been able to record *Piano Solo: Slow Pieces For Aki* at an earlier time in his career, but it seems particularly suited to this moment in his life. He

was 81 years old when he recorded this set of solo performances late in 2019.

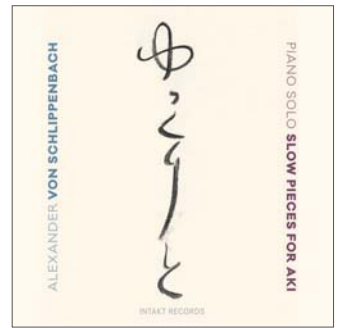
His earliest recordings with the Globe Unity Orchestra in the '60s and '70s were neither slow nor solitary, and his oft-incendiary namesake trio has represented the acme of European free-jazz for decades. Somewhere along the line, pianist Aki Takase, von Schlippenbach's spouse, asked him whether it had to be that way. This album is the answer. Like his other 21st-century solo-piano recordings, it puts aside expressionism and overt displays of technique, favoring a reflective nature. On "Cleo" and "Haru No Yuki (Frühling Im Schnee)," 19th-century classical music looms large; "Torso" sounds like an exploded diagram of Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso." But there aren't really sonic shocks or overwhelming waves of energy on *Slow Pieces For Aki*. Instead, the album represents the essential components of von Schlippenbach's music, its construction and connections laid bare in an act of musical self-analysis.

—Bill Meyer

Piano Solo: Slow Pieces For Aki: Haru No Yuki (Frühling Im Schnee); Improvisation I; Torso; Improvisation II; Improvisation III; Tell You; Improvisation IV; Cleo; Improvisation V; Naniga Nandemo; Improvisation VI; A-Blues; Blues B; Improvisation VII; I Told You; Improvisation VIII; Improvisation IX; Dydo; Improvisation X; Frage Nicht; Zycado. (52:28)

Personnel: Alexander von Schlippenbach, piano

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch



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Impressive Vitality, Variety

Saxophonist **Adam Kolker** originally conceived his new album, *Lost* (**Sunnyside 1593; 41:39 ★★★**), as a collection of Wayne Shorter tunes. But as he formulated the effort, he realized the homage didn't need to be so explicit. The premise still is steeped in Shorter's sound world, and it shines through whether on standards, originals or craftily reimagined classics by his idol, like the molasses-slow take of "Dance Cadaverous." Supported by the excellent cast of pianist Bruce Barth, bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Billy Hart, the bandleader finds new angles within Shorter's exemplary modal approach, although his own writing and arranging bring plenty to the table. His smoldering reharmonization of "Darn That Dream" applies Shorter's brooding sensibility with a touch of John Coltrane, while the leader's own "Flips" arrives as an origami exercise based on Thelonious Monk's "Evidence." On the quartet's version of "The Time Of The Baracuddas (General Assembly)," itself a Shorter revamp of a Gil Evans tune, Kolker goes straight for the jugular, uncorking a slashing tenor improvisation, leaving his agile band to sketch out contours and harmony.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

In 2016, German saxophonist **Nicole Johäntngen** met New York guitarist **Jack DeSalvo** (who played in one of Ronald Shannon Jackson's late bands) when they were both working in Matt Lavelle's 12 Houses Orchestra. They recorded the duet collection *Lumens* (**Unseen Rain 9925; 48:50 ★★**) soon after. The material includes fully improvised pieces and some occasionally schmaltzy balladry (her "Es Guete Morge Lied" sounds like a cloying children's song), and the pair clearly established a quick rapport together. DeSalvo's harmony is spiked with bits of bossa nova here and there, but his conception is pure jazz, comping, accenting and prodding Johäntngen's watery lines on both alto and soprano. Yet, even when the duo veers toward abstraction and dissonance, it all feels a bit too treacly and monochromatic.

Ordering info: unseenrainrecords.bandcamp.com

Named for an oceanographic term referring to the celestial impact on tides, *Harmonic Constituent* (**Playscape 081119; 78:06 ★★★★★**) by reedist **Jason Robinson** features music he composed during a 2018 residency in Northern California's Mendocino Country, during which he observed and was inspired by particular facets of the area's dynamic coastline. His brief liner-note essay deliberately refrains from providing specific details, but the music still bristles with vitality



François Houle

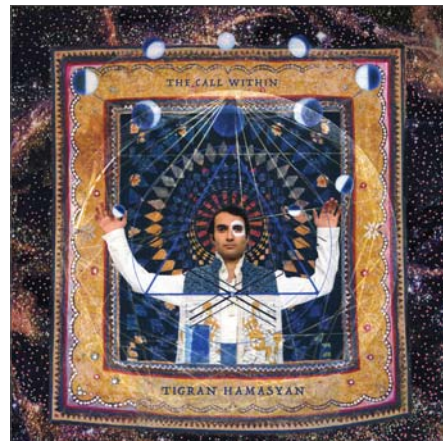
GENEVIEVE MONROE

and variety without much context, deftly conveying the awesome splendor and power of nature. Leading a fantastic band—pianist Joshua White, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Ches Smith—the pieces toggle between varied approaches, whether the brief, collectively improvised meditation of "Phase 2," the Coltrane-ish balladry of the tender "Jug Handle" or declamatory, feverish post-bop vehicles like "Seventh Wave." The leader wisely carves out space for his cohort, both on short improvised interludes and rigorous compositions, mirroring the balance of the tangible and the ineffable beauty of his geographic muse.

Ordering info: playscape-recordings.com

Bassist Mark Helias and drummer Gerry Hemingway have worked together for years with trombonist Ray Anderson in the brawny BassDrumBone, but they impart an impressive spaciousness on *Recorder* (**Songlines 1632; 53:57 ★★★★★**), a spiky quartet date led by Vancouver clarinetist **François Houle** alongside his frequent collaborator, guitarist Gordon Grdina. Those latter two play off one another with constant invention—recalling the blend that Don Byron achieved with Bill Frisell on his 1992 album *Tuskegee Experiments*—as they forge stinging counterpoint on "The Black Bird" or meld into a single glowing timbre on "Bowen." But it's the rhythm section that gives the music its elastic lift, even when the leader's writing reflects the chamber-like vibe of Jimmy Giuffrè's trio with Paul Bley and Steve Swallow. The album is broken up with a series of brief improvised interludes in which Helias picks up his original instrument, clarinet, to duet with Houle for moments that function as effective pauses between the leader's rigorous compositions. **DB**

Ordering info: songlines.com



Tigran Hamasyan *The Call Within*

NONESUCH B088KB6L6M

★★★★★

Much like the heavy metal that always has inspired Tigran Hamasyan's unique approach to the piano, his latest album pulls no punches. Simultaneously inspired, frantic and deeply reflective, *The Call Within* stands as an unfolding synthesis of the 33-year-old's lifetime of eclectic listening and studying. Hamasyan's work incorporates a fluidity in improvisation honed through bebop, devout attention to the modes of Armenian liturgical music and an intense dedication to total creative exertion that aligns with his passion for rock and metal.

The album offers an impressive range of dynamic and emotional contrast, from the wistful soundscape of "At A Post-Historic Seashore" to the hard-hitting prog grooves of "Vortex." These often manifest within the same track—the opening piece, "Levitation 21," offering a master class in these balanced transitions. Hamasyan's skillful manipulation of feedback allows for a capacity to rock out far beyond what most piano trios can muster, while also adding subtlety to some of the quieter moments on tracks like "The Dream Voyager," an expansive and heartfelt exploration with a slower groove. Bassist Evan Marien and drummer Arthur Hnatek never falter, making the execution of Hamasyan's complicated rhythmic flows sound effortless.

This is an album in the classic sense—a comprehensive artistic statement. Hamasyan claims to have been inspired by ancient cartography, and *The Call Within* does feel like a map of an inner journey that only he could lead. Hamasyan is a playful and even spritely guide, taking great pleasure in the flights of beauty and virtuosity at his fingertips. —Alex W. Rodriguez

The Call Within: Levitation 21; Our Film; Ara Resurrected; At A Post-Historic Seashore; Space Of Your Existence; The Dream Voyager; Old Maps; Vortex; 37 Newlyweds; New Maps. (47:49)

Personnel: Tigran Hamasyan, keyboards, vocals; Evan Marien, bass; Arthur Hnatek, drums; Artyom Manukyan (2), cello; Tosin Abasi (8), guitar; Areni Agbabian (2), Varduhi Art School Children's Choir (7), vocals.

Ordering info: tigranhamasyan.com

Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis

The Ever Fonky Lowdown

BLUE ENGINE 0033

★★★★½

There were a number of projects begun last year to mark the 400 years of slavery and oppression suffered by Black people in the United States. Numerous books, documentaries and theatrical productions set out to capture the fundamental inhumanity of enslavement, the length and severity of the experience. In several ways, Wynton Marsalis' *The Ever Fonky Lowdown* could be the soundtrack to any of these presentations, though it comes replete with its own fascinating, often satirical libretto.

From the opening fanfare and actor Wendell Pierce's role as narrator, interlocutor and con man, the vocalists and Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra instrumentalists evoke a broad and tantalizing tableau of American history, mainly through the nation's systemic racism, segregation, discrimination and white supremacy. It's a veritable cavalcade of musical segments—the blues, big band swing, small ensemble pieces and a good sampling of gospel. If Lerone Bennett's *Before the Mayflower* or John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* was set to music, the accompany-

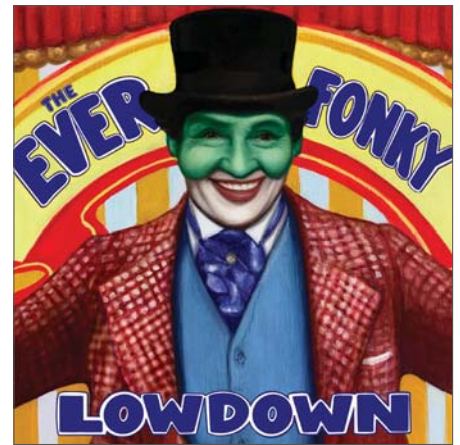
ing sounds would resemble what Marsalis has achieved here.

To highlight any one of the 53 sections would be an injustice to the holistic, light-opera texture of the album, though the bluesy interludes and the occasional saxophone solos are exceptional and provide the *olio* with a straightahead, jazzy resonance.

Like the continuity of Pierce's "Mr. Game" recitations, there is a lively interconnectedness of the music: Informed listeners might hear moments of Basie's beat, a smear of Tadd Dameron and brief spurts of scat and vocalese. While most of the tracks veer to the deep past, they soar into the civil rights era, summoning the courageous commitment of Fannie Lou Hamer. And the pandemic is referenced on "Everybody Wear They Mask," slyly alluding to Black linguistics, which also might be in play for the album's title, where "fonky" stands in for "funky."

Regardless of nomenclature, Marsalis and his crew again have tapped a vein of American culture through an innovative and impressive mélange of words and music. —Herb Boyd

The Ever Fonky Lowdown: We Are The Greatest; Mr. Game Speaks: I Am A Winner; We Are The Greatest; Mr. Game: Success Is My Middle Name; They/Let's Call Them This; Mr. Game: Beware! They're Going To Cause Problems; The Ever Fonky Lowdown In 4; Mr. Game: Talk Is A Waste Of Time; I Don't Like Nobody But Myself; Mr. Game: We Must Strike First! (Trust Me); The Drums Of War; Mr. Game: The Mandates Of Our Democracy; Consideration Blues/I Know I Must Fight/The Drums Of War Return; Mr. Game: Who Is We?; What Would The Savior Think?; Mr. Game: Winners Don't Reflect, We Celebrate; Some For Me, None For You; Mr. Game: We're Number One!; The Ever Fonky Lowdown In 5; Mr. Game:



They Deserved Everything They Got; Night Trader; Mr. Game: They, Too, Want To Be Winners; Mr. Good Time Man; Mr. Game: Shame Is For Losers; Because I Want To, Because I Like To, Because I Can; Mr. Game: A Ridiculous Plea; I Wants My Ice Cream; Mr. Game: Somebody's Got To Rule; The Ever Fonky Lowdown In 6; Reprise: What Would The Savior Think?; The Ever Fonky Lowdown In 5 & 6; Mr. Game: Your First Prize; Isms, Schisms; Mr. Game: Your Second Prize; Yes/No; Where Has The Love Gone?; Mr. Game: Your Third Prize; Consider This 'Bout The Fifth We Love; Mr. Game: Your Fourth Prize; Everybody Wear They Mask; Mr. Game: You Love These Prizes Because You Live Them; The Ever Fonky Lowdown In 7; Mr. Game: Your Wildcard; I Got A Nagging Feeling; Mr. Game: The Freedom Fighter; Fannie Lou Hamer; The Ballad Of Fannie Lou: Part 1; The Ballad Of Fannie Lou: Part 2; Mr. Game: Just Let The Memories Of Them Die; Why Do We Pick Slavery Over Freedom?; Mr. Game: Your Last Prize (The Best One); Reprise: The Ever Fonky Lowdown In 4; Reprise: I Wants My Ice Cream; I Know I Must Fight. (113:10)

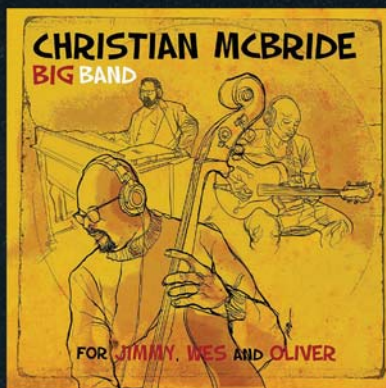
Personnel: Wynton Marsalis, Ryan Kisor, Marcus Printup, Kenny Rampton, trumpet; Sherman Irby, Ted Nash, Victor Goines, Dan Block, Paul Nedzela, reeds; Vincent Gardner, Elliot Mason, Sam Chess, trombone; Chris Crenshaw, trombone, vocals; Dan Nimmer, Adam Birnbaum, piano; Doug Wamble, guitar, vocals; Ricky "Dirty Red" Gordon, Bobby Allende, percussion; Carlos Henriquez, bass; Charles Gould, drums; Jason Marsalis, drums, tambourine; Wendell Pierce, Camille Thurman, Ashley Pezzotti, Christie Dashiell, vocals.

Ordering info: blueenginerecords.org



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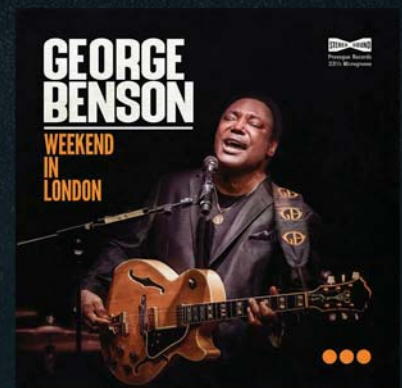
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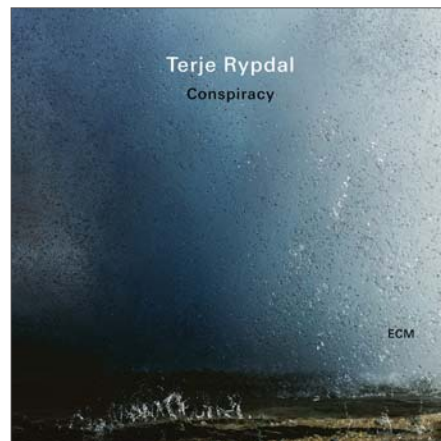
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Terje Rypdal

Conspiracy

ECM 2658

★★★

On his first new studio album in two decades, Norwegian guitarist Terje Rypdal looks into his past, revisiting the sound of his 1970s work, albeit tempered by a sense of patience. The liquid, probing sustain of his playing remains instantly recognizable, but apart from the title track, where the band builds up a serious head of steam—with Supersilent mainstay Ståle Storløkken providing seething Hammond B-3 swells and bassist Endre Hareide Hallre carving out a roiling groove with veteran drummer Pål Thowsen—most of the album embraces a meditative, searching repose.

The delicate stutter of cymbals and ethereal keyboards provide the leader with an airy foundation on the opener “As If The Ghost ... Was Me!,” a kind of Nordic riposte to Eddie Hazel’s searing pyrotechnics on Funakdelic’s “Maggot Brain,” but free of the paranoia and pain. Hallre offers some gentle counterpoint as the tune builds to its tender denouement; Rypdal rarely has sounded so self-possessed as on this autumnal feature. Thowsen is barely present on “What Was I Thinking,” which is even more ethereal in its glacial crawl, as the band merely serves Rypdal’s lyric exploration. And the entire band seems absent on the opening of “Dawn,” with only Storløkken’s sepulchral low-end organ emerging to support a couple of metallic clangs by the drummer. It’s on the slightly bluesy “Baby Beautiful” when the full band unveils its slow-burn intimacy, slinking toward the horizon without haste or waste.

There’s not much here that’s new for the guitarist, but *Conspiracy* offers a nice reminder that fusion doesn’t need to be bound up in hollow complexity or overkill. —Peter Margasak

Conspiracy: As If The Ghost ... Was Me!; What Was I Thinking; Conspiracy; By His Lonesome; Baby Beautiful; Dawn. (35:02)

Personnel: Terje Rypdal, guitar; Ståle Storløkken, keyboards; Endre Hareide Hallre, bass, electric bass; Pål Thowsen, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



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Brandi Disterheft Trio Surfboard

JUSTIN TIME 8626

★★★★½

Confidence immediately rises from bassist Brandi Disterheft's *Surfboard*. Led in slowly with solo tom and snare, the title track doesn't race along. However, the energetic, off-beat, two-note pattern from pianist Klaus Mueller instantly pulls the piece forward, injecting rhythmic tenuousness into the Jobim cover. The interaction between Mueller's melody and Portinho's prominent cymbal blends and changes over time, presenting a balanced flow that becomes more secure. Oscillating between mild uncertainty and stability is the perfect summation of the bandleader's adaptability throughout the album.

A mixture of differences is evident on the album's vocal tracks, when Disterheft leads with a tonal delicacy evocative of Norah Jones and an enunciated punch akin to Björk. The emotionally enticing and elegant flirtation on "Coup De Foudre" flourishes, too, saxophonist George Coleman adding another dimension to *Surfboard's* dexterity and fluidity. Moreover, the tracks he features on—particularly the bustling "Speak Low"—present the potential of *Surfboard's* lineup in full swing. —Kira Grunenberg

Surfboard: Surfboard; Prelude To Coup De Foudre; Coup De Foudre; My Foolish Heart; Nanã; Manhattan Moon; The Pendulum At Falcon's Lair; On Broadway; Speak Low; One Dream; Portrait Of Porto; Where Or When; Del Sasser; Reveries. (64:18)

Personnel: Brandi Disterheft, bass, vocals; Portinho, drums; Klaus Mueller, piano; George Coleman, tenor saxophone.

Ordering info: justin-time.com



Peter Bernstein What Comes Next

SMOKE SESSIONS 2007

★★★★

Peter Bernstein is attempting to lead the way through pandemic uncertainty with a rarity: an album recorded in real-time with an ensemble—face masks and social distancing in effect. In late June, a quartet worked through several of the guitarist's originals, along with some standards and a previously unrecorded calypso tune by Sonny Rollins.

The opener, "Simple As That," is a Bernstein tune he first recorded in 2003. Perhaps it's fitting to open a new pandemic-era album with a reminder of how things used to be. The guitarist's trademark sound and phrasing are clear and present, his impeccable timing resonating with the humming groove established by the luxury bass/drums combo of Peter Washington and Joe Farnsworth. Sullivan Fortner, though, is the X-factor, his unorthodox textural pianism conjuring wisps of Bernstein's longtime collaborator, Brad Mehldau. But it's an old torch song seemingly made for this time, "We'll Be Together Again," where Bernstein reveals his true vintage. The ballad cruises just bright enough to guard against sentimentality, resulting in an optimistic buoyancy. Bernstein is forging ahead like he always has: Leaning into what was once—and still is—worthy, establishing a foundation to spring into parts unknown. —Gary Fukushima

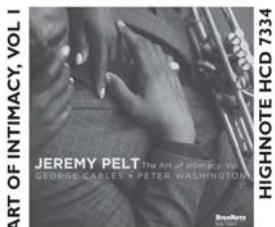
What Comes Next: Simple As That; What Comes Next; Empty Streets; Harbor No Illusions; Dance In Your Blood; We'll Be Together Again; Con Alma; Blood Wolf Moon Blues; Newark News. (58:28)

Personnel: Peter Bernstein, guitar; Sullivan Fortner, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



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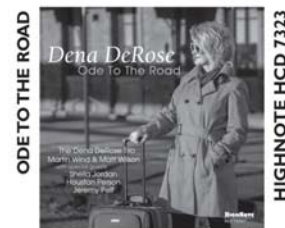
JEREMY PELT's unquenchable curiosity has led him to investigate nearly every aspect and genre in jazz from electric to eclectic, from Be-Bop to Free-Bop. With the great **George Cables** & **Peter Washington**, the trio is able to pour some old wine into new bottles, influenced by the past but operating very much in the moment.



JIM SNIDERO makes extended use of the exotic Korean traditional stringed instrument, the gayageum as he explores and combines the wide-ranging aesthetic of his own jazz background with traditional Korean music. With the world's only jazz gayageum player, **Do Yeon Kim**, **Linda May Han Oh**, **Dave Douglas**, **Orrin Evans** & **Rudy Royston**.



The New York Times said of **Toys / Die Dreaming**, "There's a sense of historical unity in the saxophone playing of **JD ALLEN**. The elegance of Coleman Hawkins and the spiraling power of John Coltrane come together. The ludic energy of, say, **Rahsaan Roland Kirk** and the sly focus of **Michael Brecker**, too."



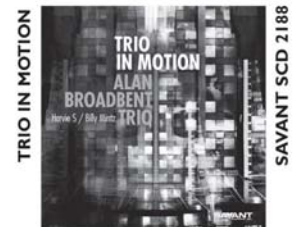
DENA DEROSE's music is like a cool breeze; she's wry, wise, impeccably musical, nonsense, and fun. Her approach to jazz resides in her swinging rhythm and insightful phrasing. Here she is joined by 3 other HighNote artists: **Sheila Jordan**, **Houston Person** and **Jeremy Pelt** along with her long-time trio partners **Martin Wind** and **Matt Wilson**.



DownBeat said that all the tracks on **CONRAD HERWIG's** latest Latin Side of... disc "brim with authenticity and invention, embracing layered syncopation, romantic longing and fiery excitement." With guest pianist **Michel Camilo** and 8 great charts, Herwig has added another winner to his Grammy-nominated franchise.



RICHARD BARATTA began his career as a jazz drummer but then became a movie producer for such hit films as **Joker**, **The Irishman**, **The Wolf of Wall Street**, and many more. This new release marks his jazz recording debut, moving from behind the movie camera to back behind the drumset. With **Vincent Herring**, **Bill O'Connell** and others.



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BREATHLINE

★★★★★

In an interview from several years ago significantly titled “Going Beyond Categorization,” Brianna Thomas talks about her sense of song already being present and simply happening upon it. That might also apply to her own songcraft, in which she already has escaped genre categorization. But a very different impression forms when you hear her doing “My Foolish Heart,” “It’s A Sin To Tell A Lie” or even something as wholly owned as “Mississippi Goddam” on this, her second album. It isn’t so much that the vocalist personalizes these old tunes, or in the case of the Simone song, one so utterly identified with its creator. It’s more that she gives the impression of inventing the song in the moment, as if it’s never been done before. And Thomas does this without bending the material out of shape, deconstructing or detouring it.

Her pacing on “My Foolish Heart” is deliberate and thoughtful, making the lyric resonate in new ways. She even seems to hint at Bill Evans’ classic solo, imbuing a deeper and more melancholy air. And when she takes on “Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying,” the soft edges of her delivery lend a new legato elegance to slight material. To be able to deliver that, as well as Lil Johnson’s “My Stove’s In Good Condition,” without a hint of tongue-in-cheek, bespeaks an artist who’s comfortable in just about every aspect of the tradition. And one who can add to it with instant classics like “How Much Forgiveness” and “I Belong To You.”

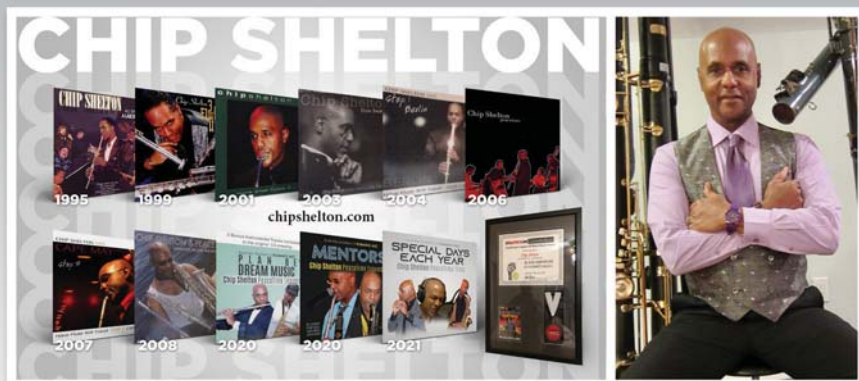
—Brian Morton

Everybody Knows: Since I Fell For You; How Much Forgiveness; It’s A Sin To Tell A Lie; My Foolish Heart; Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying; I Belong To You; My Stove’s In Good Condition; Ain’t Got Nothing But The Blues; Mississippi Goddam; The More I See You. (61:14)

Personnel: Brianna Thomas, Brian Bacchus, Fran Cathcart, Gail Boyd, Samantha Cartagena, Marvin Arias-Vasquez, Kurt Hendrickson, Jake Kukaska, Dan Offner vocals; Connun Pappas, piano, vocals; Marvin Sewell, guitar, vocals; Ryan Berg, bass, vocals; Kyle Poole, drums, vocals; Fernando Saci, percussion, vocals.

Ordering info: briannathomas.com

After 8 critically-acclaimed releases and a “recording hiatus” to grow as composer, arranger, multi-instrumentalist, vocalist and author, **CHIP SHELTON** is back with a 3-release bonanza



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November, 2020 Release #10 pays homage to music mentors past & present, singling out Jimmy Heath’s “Heritage Hum” & “Angel Man”; Frank Foster’s “Simone”; Frank Wess “Half Moon Street”; plus 5 Shelton originals and vocal flavorings on Willie Dixon’s “I Love the Life I Live” & Richie Cole’s “DC Farewell”

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Aaron Burnett & The Big Machine
Jupiter Conject
 FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT 600
 ★★½

If Aaron Burnett makes music that reflects the times we're living in, then the saxophonist's *Jupiter Conject* is an earnest and introspective journey in search of hope, clarity and momentum. His compositions blend avant-garde elements, bebop and electronic textures to artfully create space for The Big Machine, a band he's played with since 2013.

In "Color Durations," Carlos Homs' lan-

Tom Oren
Dorly's Song
 CONCORD JAZZ 00398
 ★★½

After winning the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's International Piano Competition in 2018 and graduating from Berklee last year, pianist Tom Oren is, with the release of his debut album, taking his first steps as a solo artist. They feel a little tentative.

The Israeli bandleader has chosen to record a set of tunes written by composer and educator (and Oren's mother) Dorly Oren Chazon, and, on four tracks, lets guest performer Eli Degibri take the spotlight. There's a logic to these decisions, but they make it hard to truly hear and appreciate Oren's talent. He's especially hampered by his choice to record nothing but Oren Chazon's work, the pianist's arrangements emphasizing how these compositions thinly approximate an ECM aesthetic with clean, unfussy chords and a bucolic spirit. It's only when he pulls the material in new directions—turning "Mrs. Barbarelli" into a New Orleans stomp or bringing a cool-jazz spaciousness to the ballad "Don't Let Me Wait For You"—that the album gets exciting.

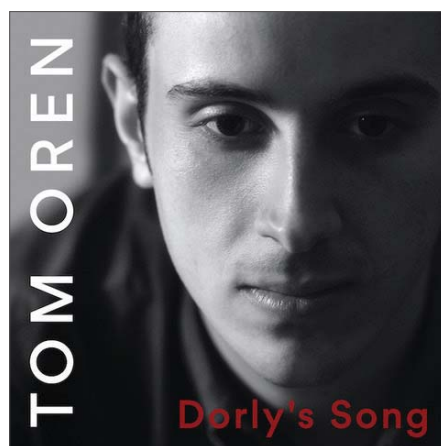
But when Oren peels off a solo, the breadth of his abilities comes alive. His Dave Brubeck-like spin through "Melody" is a delight, as are the shades of dissonance that color "Zoo." Inviting

guorous piano and Adam O'Farrill's ethereal trumpet evoke restlessness and curiosity, giving way to Joel Ross' charismatic vibraphone lines and Nick Jozwiak's sinewy bass on "The Veil." In tarot, the ace of swords represents truth, vision and breakthroughs, and these are the through-lines that the band strives for as it moves fluidly among jazz, classical, soul and electronic themes. The record moves progressively toward electronic influences on "Ether," where Burnett and O'Farrill lay down unrelenting melodies and drummer Kush Abadey matches their energy with cinematic sweeps. Electronic freneticism is on full display on "Europa," which juxtaposes Burnett's sensible ruminations against Homs' frenzied sampling. Esperanza Spalding, who contributes vocals on "Ganymede" and an alternate take of the song, adds textural tension with her dynamic scattling.

Burnett has said his compositions reflect "our urgency for freedom and peace in a world ruled by corporations." This urgency only has intensified for many of us in 2020. With *Jupiter Conject*, the bandleader envisions an expansive and creative world that's, most importantly, accessible. —Ivana Ng

Jupiter Conject: Color Durations; The Veil; Ganymede; Callisto; Io; Ace Of Swords; Ether; Europa; Ganymede (alt.). (48:57)
Personnel: Aaron Burnett, tenor saxophone; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; Joel Ross, vibraphone; Carlos Homs, keyboards; Nick Jozwiak, bass; Kush Abadey, drums; Esperanza Spalding, vocals (3, 9).

Ordering info: freshsoundrecords.com



Degibri to take the reins throughout, on the other hand, feels like a show of respect. The saxophonist has helped lead a generation of Israeli talent, including Oren, in his quartet. But on tracks like the syrupy "Give Me Peace," Degibri looms over his cohort, making it seem as though the pianist is rushing to catch up. It's a disparity that wouldn't be so noticeable were it not for moments when the two find equal footing.

—Robert Ham

Dorly's Song: Night Butterfly; Under A Carob Tree; Melody; Mrs. Barbarelli; Adolia; Zoo; Don't Let Me Wait For You; That Night I Heard; So Angela; Give Me Peace. (49:03)

Personnel: Tom Oren, piano; Barak Mori, bass; Eviatar Slivnik, drums; Eli Degibri, tenor saxophone.

Ordering info: concordjazz.com



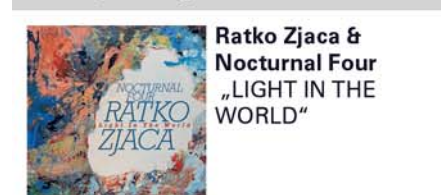
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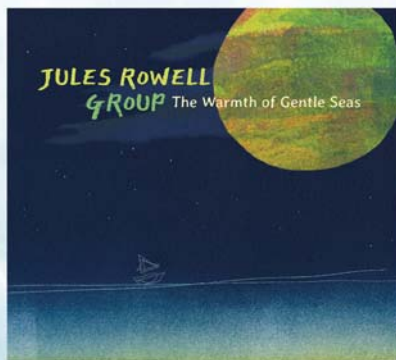
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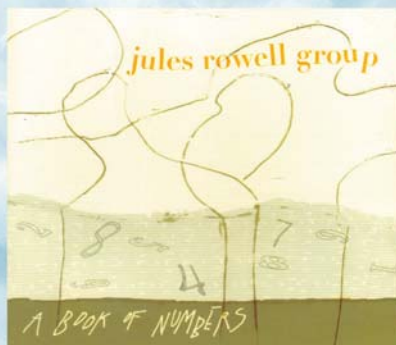
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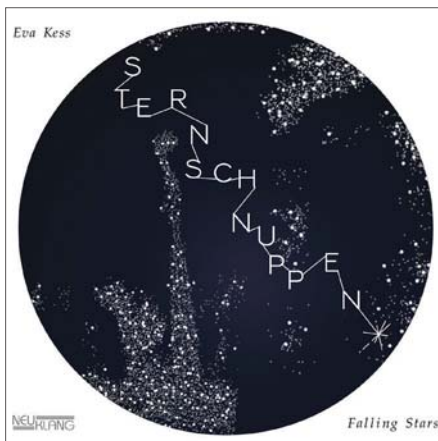
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Eva Kess
Sternschnuppen: Falling Stars
NEUKLANG 4320

★★★★★

How to be present without being dominant? Eva Kess' bass is almost the first thing one hears on "Ikigai," the opening track of *Sternschnuppen: Falling Stars*, rich-toned and resonant, but blending immediately with the violins and never hogging the foreground. The feel is more Charlie Haden, less Ray Brown.

What matters here are the compositions, which fall together in a thoroughly satisfying whole, even though there is no linking the-

matic matter. There's a temptation to describe any such record as a "suite," when it is no such thing. The dance element is not missing: It surfaces on "Porto Alegre," but it's set aside entirely on the rhythmically complex "Experimental Dreaming" and the Brubeck-like "Penta Piece."

The remarkable thing about Kess' whole conception—which embraces her writing, playing and her sense of ensemble—is how confidently she embraces both the ethereal and the strongly physical, often in the same piece. "The Subsequent Use Of Yesteryear And Futurity" is basically a strings-only conception, which perversely serves as a reminder that the piano here is not the usual rhythm-section harmonic anchor, but another voice among many.

The late Kenny Wheeler, whose work Kess' compositions often resemble, described his morning routine thus: "Get up, don't shave, play Bach." It sounds as if Kess spends a lot of time playing Bach; her counterpoint is simply stunning. It's an old-fashioned skill, but it remains fundamental and it's absolutely at the root of this beautiful and all-to-brief album.

—Brian Morton

Sternschnuppen: Falling Stars: Ikigai; Porto Alegre; Love Is; The Subsequent Use Of Yesteryear And Futurity; Sternschnuppen; Experimental Dreaming; Let The Miracle Unfold; Many Black Dots; Penta Piece. (42:55)

Personnel: Eva Kess, bass; Simon Schwaninger, piano; Philipp Liebundgut, drums; Vincent Milliodi, Susanna Andres, violin; Nao Rohr, viola; Ambrosius Huber, cello.

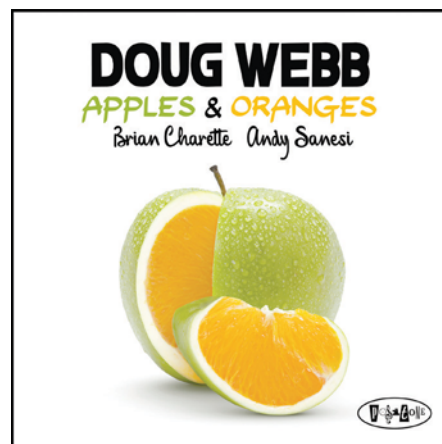
Ordering info: neuklangrecords.de

Doug Webb
Apples & Oranges
POSI-TONE 8213

★★★★½

On *Apples & Oranges*, Doug Webb delivers an inspiring performance, particularly on the up-tempo tunes. The saxophonist, unlike many of his peers, adeptly balances intellect and emotion, each feeding, rather than overwhelming, the other. When improvising he generally stays connected to the spirit and occasionally to the letter of the tune; when he stretches out, it's either for a momentary effect—a bit of overblowing or high-register squeals—or to stretch the harmonic implications of the changes, in Charlie Parker fashion. He also allows himself a lot of room for timbral exploration, echoing Pharaoh Sanders' big, open tone on "Coruba," but adhering to more of a mainstream sound on most of the other tracks.

That said, organist Brian Charette and drummer Andy Sanesi are the core of *Apples & Oranges*. The key to their synchronicity is Charette's remarkable facility on the organ pedalboard. On up-tempos his eighth-note bass lines prowl and push, driving toward the next change, while laying down a rock-solid foundation for his own fills and solos, but especially for Sanesi's nonstop, restless yet always tasteful extemporization. They're



always aware of each other: When the organ solo on "Forethought" builds to a three-note repetition, the drums keep the heat on high before signaling an end to this figure with a decisive fill and slap.

If not for some surprisingly nondescript renderings of standards—"Spring Is Here," "In A Sentimental Mood," "Estaté"—*Apples & Oranges* would be a flawless harvest and essential listening for all students of swing.

—Bob Doerschuk

Apples & Oranges: Alexico; Monkey Face; Forethought; In A Sentimental Mood; How Can I Be Sure; Coruba; Spring Is Here; Apples & Oranges; Estaté; For Steve. (56:43)

Personnel: Doug Webb, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Brian Charette, organ; Andy Sanesi, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



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Kenny Washington *What's The Hurry*

LOWER 9TH L9R2020-1

★★★★

Another Great American Songbook recording might seem like a bore, but vocalist Kenny Washington knows how to respect tradition and refresh it. *What's The Hurry*, the Bay Area vocalist's first leader date, showcases his gutsy versatility.

Washington's easygoing voice is a tutorial in confidence on the opening "The Best Is Yet To Come," as Josh Nelson's piano contrasts nicely with the vocalist's insouciance. Jeff Massanari's Brazilian-style guitar launches "S'Wonderful," Washington's elasticity evoking a more forthcoming Andy Bey. The song, capped by sassy whistle and sassier scat, shudders with pleasure.

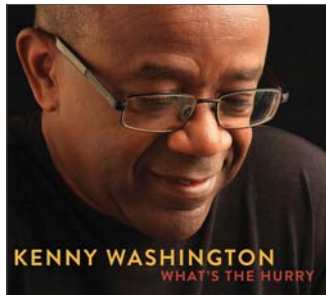
Antônio Carlos Jobim's "No More Blues (Chega De Saudade)" storms forth with unusual voicings, Washington threading a sweaty rhythm section; it winds down the album even as it stokes the fire. Washington is exuberant here singing or scatting, and Victor Goines' clarinet is so bawdy it threatens to go off the rails. Charlie Chaplin's "Smile" ends the album on a sweet note as Massanari weaves a spare obbligato behind Washington's vocal.

—Carlo Wolff

What's The Hurry: The Best Is Yet To Come; S'Wonderful; Stars Fell On Alabama; I've Got The World On A String; I Ain't Got Nothin' But The Blues; Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered; Invitation; Here's To Life; Sweet Georgia Brown; No More Blues (Chega De Saudade); Smile. (46:19)

Personnel: Kenny Washington, vocals; Josh Nelson, piano; Victor Goines, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Jeff Cressman, trombone; Mike Olmos, trumpet; Jeff Massanari, guitar; Ami Molinelli-Hart, Peter Michael Escovedo, percussion; Gary Brown, Dan Feiszli, bass; Lorca Hart, drums.

Ordering info: kennywashingtonvocalist.com



Lafayette Gilchrist *Now*

LAFAYETTE GILCHRIST MUSIC

★★★★

To appreciate Lafayette Gilchrist's double album *Now*, usual expectations—tension-and-release or any sense of momentum—need to be suspended. In their place, repetition is the foundation, signaling that we need to listen more patiently than we might ordinarily.

This is not to say that *Now* lacks passion. Undeniably, it is powerfully emotional music, much of it inspired by recent and historic outrages that are sadly familiar to us all. And so the question becomes: Does *Now* deliver in return for what it asks? For many, the answer will be, not quite.

After a while, its repetitiveness can distract as the album unfolds. It's difficult to ignore how "Bamboozled" boils down to one recurring four-bar chord sequence. Or how often Gilchrist's linear inventions seem to wander without driving toward any resolution, as on "Enough." There are technical issues as well, most notably a mix that downplays some very interesting bass work from Herman Burney or, especially on the first disc, Eric Kennedy's wildly aggressive single-stroke snare fills.

Now demands at least as much as it gives. But many will feel its intensity, which is why it shouldn't be ignored.

—Bob Doerschuk



Now: Disc One: Assume The Position; Bamboozled; Rare Essence; Old Shoes Come To Life; On Your Belly Like A Snake; Say A Prayer For Our Love; Bmore Careful; The Midnight Step Rag. Disc Two: Tomorrow Is Waiting Now (Sharon's Song); The Wonder Of Being Here; Purple Blues; Newly Arrived; Enough; Get Straight To The Point; Can You Speak My Language; Specials Revealed. (75:38/73:28)

Personnel: Lafayette Gilchrist, piano; Herman Burney, bass; Eric Kennedy, drums.

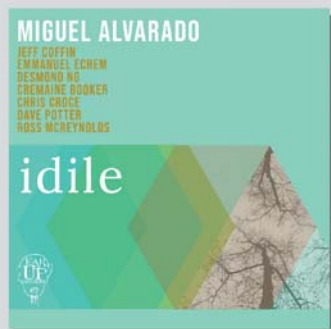
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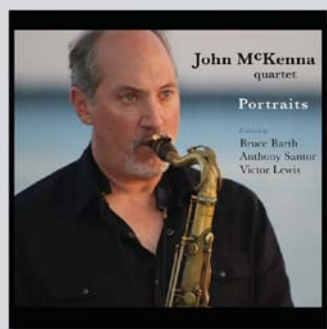
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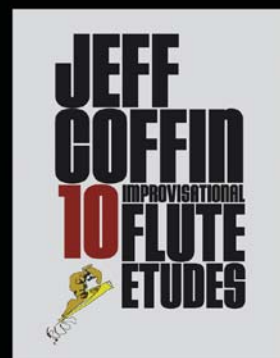
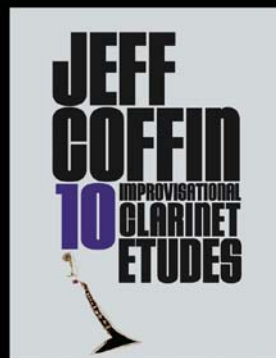


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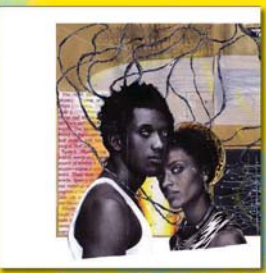


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IMMORTAL GIANTS

A four-disc Charles Mingus set is a highlight of our seasonal shopping guide for music fanatics

Charles Mingus (Photo: Joseph L. Johnson)



UNBRIDLED BIRD

CHARLIE PARKER'S ALTO SAXOPHONE remains one of the most recognizable sounds in the history of recorded jazz, even 65 years after his death at age 34. Despite recording for fewer than two full decades, the bebop progenitor played a leading role in helping to define a bold new era of the music starting in the early 1940s. This year, a handful of albums, books and prints are being released to mark the centennial of Parker's birth.

"One of the things he was particularly strong with was making use of just a few ideas," said bassist Fumi Tomita, who released *Celebrating Bird: A Tribute To Charlie Parker* (Next Level) in September. "'Donna Lee' is a good example, the Dial versions: He takes two choruses, and if you look at them, the second chorus isn't the same as the first. But it's incredible how it's similarly constructed.

"He kind of had a platform that he was improvising off of, so the same ideas come up again," Tomita continued. "One of the reasons he's such a genius is that he was able to play these lines starting on any part of the bar. It wasn't always a carbon copy; beat 1, he wouldn't play the same thing. It was such a part of him, he was able to bring that motive into a different light. And he would change it rhythmically or melodically."

Charlie Parker: The Mercury & Clef 10-Inch LP Collection (Verve/UMe) brings together five albums Parker made with producer Norman Granz in the late 1940s and early '50s: *Bird & Diz* (a 1950 recording that features Parker and Dizzy Gillespie fronting a quintet with pianist Thelonious Monk, bassist Curly Russell and

drummer Buddy Rich), *Charlie Parker* (which is bookended by hard-driving takes of "Now's The Time" and "Cosmic Rays"), *Charlie Parker Plays South Of The Border* (where Parker takes on everything from "Tico Tico" to "La Cucaracha"), and the crossover landmarks *Charlie Parker With Strings* and *Charlie Parker With Strings (Vol. 2)*. The LPs are pressed on black 10-inch vinyl and feature newly remastered audio from the original analog tapes.

The savvy and boundless improvisations on the Mercury and Clef sides helped shift the genre toward a new vernacular that's still being drawn upon today. And while there's no dearth of musicians capable of Bird's aerial feats—if not his imagination—there's an overarching context, something beyond sound and vocabulary, that still makes the saxophonist a marker for contemporary jazz players.

"For a long time, Charlie Parker's music was considered modern, and if you look at the history books, they call bebop 'modern jazz,' which in 2020 is ridiculous," said Tomita, an assistant professor in the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. "Modern jazz is very different—it's almost as far away as King Oliver or Louis Armstrong. ... But there's still the idea of music as art, and that's how Charlie Parker thought of [his work]. I believe today's jazz musicians still have that—what we play is art."

Jazz album covers conceived of by well-regarded designers and artists have long been admired by collectors and celebrated in books. Now, David Stone Martin's framed illustrations of the album covers for *Charlie Parker*

With Strings, *Charlie Parker Big Band* and *The Magnificent Charlie Parker* are available from uDiscover Music and Verve in three canvas sizes.

Then there's *Chasin' The Bird: Charlie Parker in California*, a graphic novel from Z2 Comics that's offered in two versions: a standard hardcover edition that includes a flexi-disc, and a deluxe edition that comes with a limited-edition 45-RPM single and three art prints. The book itself, drawn by Dave Chisholm and colored by DreamWorks Animation Director Peter Markowski, covers the West Coast sojourn Parker took in 1945. During his time in Los Angeles, Bird cut definitive sides like "Orinology" and "Yardbird Suite," both issued in 1946 on the Dial label.

That latter tune is included in the newly released *Charlie Parker: The Complete Scores* (Hal Leonard), a 400-page compendium of 40 Bird compositions transcribed note-for-note for alto saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass and drums from the original recordings, complete with solos. The hardcover scores come along with a slipcase, making it an ideal keepsake for musicians as well as Bird fans.

"Teaching bass students, I always give them Charlie Parker heads or solos, because I see them as jazz etudes," Tomita said. "It's a good way to get an idea of how people solo, because transcribing is hard for lots of young students. Through this material, it gives them an idea of what to expect on bebop-style soloing. ... They're technique exercises and they assimilate the language of jazz, and how you imply chords without playing chords." —Dave Cantor



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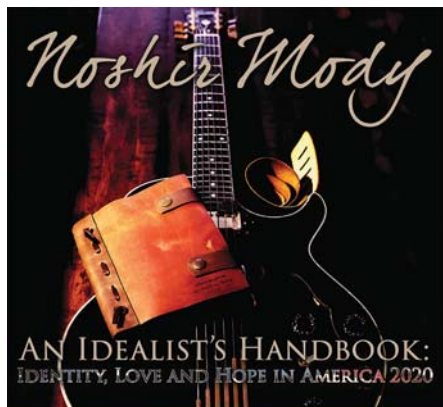
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ARTISTS CELEBRATE THE SEASON

FOR YEARS, VIBRAPHONIST WARREN Wolf and 3D Jazz Trio pianist Jackie Warren cared not a whit about Christmas music. But they've changed their tune, Scrooges no more, they now rejoice in holiday sounds with the release of Wolf's *Christmas Vibes* (Mack Avenue) and the trio's *Christmas In 3D* (DIVA Jazz). Also in a festive mood is pianist Mike Renzi, whose *Christmas Is: December Duets* (Whaling City Sounds) features singer Jim Porcella.

Wolf's first stab at Yuletide-themed music was when he contributed two tracks and a spoken-word part to the 2014 label compilation *It's Christmas On Mack Avenue*. Wolf's wife and mother-in-law then urged him to do his own holiday album. Wolf refused. Then last December, he played a holiday show at the venue Jazzway 6004 in his hometown of Baltimore. "The concert was awesome," he said. "Once we were finished, I started to think maybe I should do a Christmas project."

On *Christmas Vibes*, Wolf plays vibraphone, acoustic and electric pianos, percussion and Logic Pro sounds; for support, he turned to leading singers and instrumentalists in the region. "Making this record in the middle of the pandemic had a slightly weird feeling," he said. "But overall, the vibe—no pun intended—in the studio was great. I wanted to make every track on this record something that everybody can just have a good time to."

"Vibes and piano have a great connection, a great sound together that takes the listener into another realm. I think the two rearranged songs that'll give people that 'wonder' feeling are 'Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy' and 'Do You Hear What I Hear?'"

Mixed in among the familiar and lesser-known songs in the program is Wolf's composition "Wake Up Little Kids, It's Christmas!" The song has autobiographical origins: "The night before Christmas at the Wolf household is out of control! My kids wake up around 7 a.m. the next day, running downstairs screaming, 'Santa ate the cookies!' There's part of me that's still, 'Bah, humbug,' but I never let that out. I'm just happy to be with my family during the holidays."

Warren enjoyed Christmas growing up in rural Colorado, only to shun it as an adult. "As a pianist," she explained, "you get called upon to play so many Christmas parties that you get tired of playing the expected tradition-



Warren Wolf gets into the holiday spirit with his album *Christmas Vibes*.

al sing-along tunes. Combine this with losing my mom—whose favorite holiday in every way was Christmas—and the holiday ceased to be fun."

In 2014, Cleveland's "First Lady of Jazz" had a change of heart upon meeting bassist Amy Shook and drummer Sherrie Maricle. Both are members of the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, which Maricle leads. "From the moment Amy, Sherrie and I started playing music together, there was an instant element of joyous energy in the way we connected musically and personally," the pianist said. "Because of this joyful energy, many fans have been asking for a holiday album."

Warren remained wary. "It turned out to be one of the most fun, super-swingin' projects I have worked on," she exclaimed. "It definitely reminds me of the feeling I got as a kid, and still get, listening to Vince Guaraldi seemingly granting the world the freedom to take Christmas music out of its traditional box and swing the hell out of it."

Veteran Mike Renzi performed Mel Tormé's "The Christmas Song" many times as the singer's accompanist; he also has served Tony Bennett and other notables during the holidays, recording Christmas albums with Blossom Dearie and Maureen McGovern. "I'm more of a song presenter," he said, "and I try to orchestrate when I play the piano with colors. The harmonies are modern jazz-like, but my first priority is to give honor to the song." On *Christmas Is*, the Rhode Islander and warm-voiced Porcella redecorated the likes of Steve Allen's "Cool Yule" and, yes, that old Tormé chestnut. "These songs celebrate the spirit of the holiday, togetherness and unity, so that turns me on a lot."
 —Frank-John Hadley

WHITEHEAD EXPLORES JAZZ CINEMA

IN 1991, A PANEL OF JAZZ MUSICIANS faced an audience of fans eager with questions. One fan cited a cluster of movies—*Lady Sings The Blues* (1972), *'Round Midnight* (1986) and *Bird* (1988)—noting that it was good to see jazz receiving deserved recognition. Most agreed. But multi-instrumentalist Benny Carter politely dissented, suggesting that Hollywood was selling the idea of the jazz world as nothing but addicts and psychotics. “That’s not the kind of recognition I welcome.”

Jazz critic Kevin Whitehead’s *Play the Way You Feel: The Essential Guide to Jazz Stories on Film* (Oxford University Press) confirms Carter’s indictment. Yet, it spins a unique history of the evolving ways that motion pictures have helped shape the perception of jazz. Because there have been relatively few films about jazz—only about 70 by Whitehead’s count, from *The Jazz Singer* (1927) to *Bolden* (2019)—they’ve held sway.

Whitehead focuses here on movies about jazz, not featuring it. Soundies, documentaries and most shorts and cartoons are covered in two earlier guides, David Meeker’s *Jazz in the Movies* and Scott Yanow’s *Jazz on Film*.

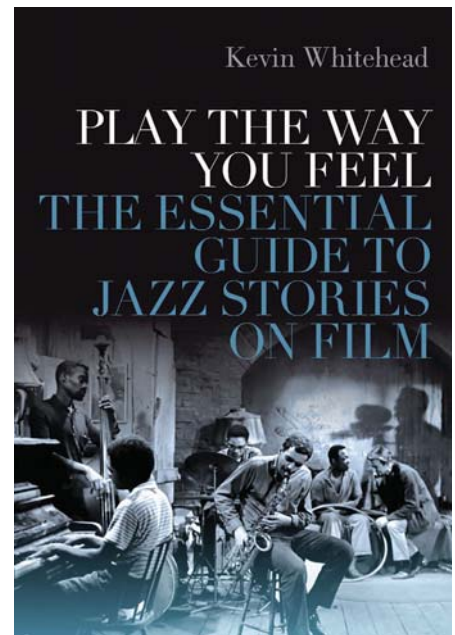
The earliest jazz films were shorts of artists like Bessie Smith and Duke Ellington. But with

the breakthrough of swing in 1936, jazz went big time, and Hollywood beckoned with a series of well-intentioned but fictionalized movies on the music. Made in the Jim Crow era, these films had to make white audiences identify with the music’s “tainted” black origins. Since African American protagonists could not be trusted with this task, filmmakers created charming white heroes to confer acceptance upon jazz and argue its cause on behalf of its originators.

Themes of modernity and authenticity addressed more subtle but sanitized subtexts of class, race and cultural appropriation. Today, these movies are viewed as period pieces inside period pieces. And “all period pieces,” Whitehead astutely notes, “are about when they’re made as much about when they’re set.”

After the demise of the big bands, jazz lost its commercial allure. So, Hollywood began to probe its more sensational sides. Tragedy replaced modernity, pinning the scarlet letter of addiction on jazz for decades.

This 400-page volume is actually too brief an overview of the complex dialog between jazz and cinema. Whitehead’s analysis is always lively, and mostly generous toward a topic he thoroughly loves. He points out what films got right and what



they got wrong. There are countless connections and cross-references, but each chapter is a free-standing essay, making this book easy to cherry-pick and wander around in.

—John McDonough

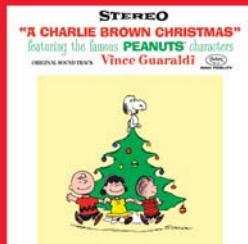
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JOSEPH L. JOHNSON

Recordings of Charles Mingus' 1964 and 1975 performances in Bremen, Germany, represent two very different periods of the bandleader's career.

MINGUS ABROAD

CHARLES MINGUS—RIGHTLY OR WRONG-ly—is frequently characterized as a wildly inventive but frustrated composer, caught between mindful brilliance and the realities of the world he had to navigate.

It's an idea revisited on the four-disc *Charles Mingus @ Bremen 1964 & 1975* (Sunnyside), where the bandleader is frozen in time, first as a figurehead of the avant-garde and then a decade later as an elder statesman of the genre.

The fecundity of live recordings from the bassist in 1964 doesn't make the music here any less enticing: Reedist Eric Dolphy flies through "Hope So Eric" and trumpeter Johnny Coles spouts gold on a 33-minute version of "Fables Of Faubus." That's just disc one.

"Around '64 is when he's really experimenting and thinking broadly about his compositions and how to communicate with the musicians who are playing his work," said Nichole Rustin, a history professor at the Rhode Island School of Design and author of *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* "And then in '75—this is when he's recognized as a senior musician. He was getting his flowers, as they say."

During a decade of both growth and tumult, Mingus continued honing a distinctive voice, one that retained a familiar sonic strain. As baroque as some of the music would become, and despite a slower pace of recording in the late '60s and early '70s, blues and swing remained incandescent ingredients in Mingus' compositions.

"I'm thinking of a quote by Stanley Crouch about Mingus' music, where he says that Mingus

recognizes that if a form of music was good in the '20s, it's good now," Rustin said. "And I think that investment in the traditions of the music, expanding the boundaries of it while keeping the core there, is what Mingus was invested in."

During the 1975 performance, "For Harry Carney" ties the band to the past while paying tribute to a reedist who long served in Duke Ellington's band. But there's also the stately swing of "Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love" and an admittedly outside take of "Cherokee."

A profound list of musicians, political figures and relatives are referenced in the bandleader's song titles, too—everyone from Dolphy to governors and the bassist's wife. But even if "Sue's Changes" alludes to an arts magazine that Mingus' wife ran, there still are myriad possible interpretations of the title. Maybe it's about her development as a person. Or a reference to a progression that Mingus, who died in 1979, wrote with her in mind. Maybe it's something totally different.

"What I like about when Mingus writes a song for you, it really is about honoring what you're bringing to him—and consequently to the music," Rustin said. "So, really, 'Sue's Changes' is all about celebrating and appreciating [their] relationship."

Wading through *Charles Mingus @ Bremen 1964 & 1975* might not reveal the meaning of the 15 tunes here, but it sets a scene. And it places one of the genre's most consequential composers on a continuum of development as a writer, a bandleader and a person who moved through this fraught world.

—Dave Cantor

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MARY LOU WILLIAMS, WRIT LARGE

MARY LOU WILLIAMS WAS AN IDIOSYNCRATIC composer, arranger and pianist whose 60-plus-year career remains ruthlessly hard to synthesize. And as Tammy L. Kernodle, author of *Soul on Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams*, observed, jazz critics previously have been predisposed to discuss Williams via hollow comparisons to her female contemporaries.

When Williams began performing live in Pittsburgh during the 1920s, she idolized Chicago pianist and bandleader Lovie Austin, who perhaps was best known for accompanying blues singers like Ida Cox and Ma Rainey (and purportedly tooling around Jazz Age Chicago in her leopard-skin upholstered Stutz Bearcat roadster). But instead of replicating her sound, Kernodle explained, Williams helped facilitate “the progression of ragtime, blues and stride bass piano styles,” noting that those “elements are the undercurrent of her style.”

The innovative Williams also served as connective tissue between stride piano and bebop. Even early in her career, Kernodle said, Williams was “engaging with the blues in unique ways in which few arrangers in the ’30s and ’40s were using them.” Her arrangements foreshadowed “the advanced harmonic language that we hear in bebop in the late 1940s and ’50s.”

In *Soul on Soul*—which in October was published in paperback for the first time by University of Illinois Press—Kernodle explained that during that time, Williams, no stranger to experimentation, was playing “what she called zombie music. This style, according to [Williams], consisted of “mainly ‘outré’ chords and ‘out’ harmonies based on ‘off’ sounds.” Later, she was friend and mentor to countless younger artists, including Bud Powell and Dizzy Gillespie.

She also mentored bopper Thelonious Monk—a relationship that dated back to 1934, when he was 16, she was in her 20s and the pair met in Kansas City, Missouri.

Interspersed with Williams’ trio recordings—which rank among the setting’s most

inspired works—were expansive, large-scale compositions and Catholic masses. *The Zodiac Suite* from 1945, which was performed by the New York Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, became a signature for the pianist, and yet, Kernodle laments, the work seldom is properly lauded.

“We’ll say, ‘Oh, look, what he did—that was progressive,’” Kernodle said about Duke Ellington’s *Black, Brown and Beige* suite from 1943. “But we won’t talk about *The Zodiac Suite*.”

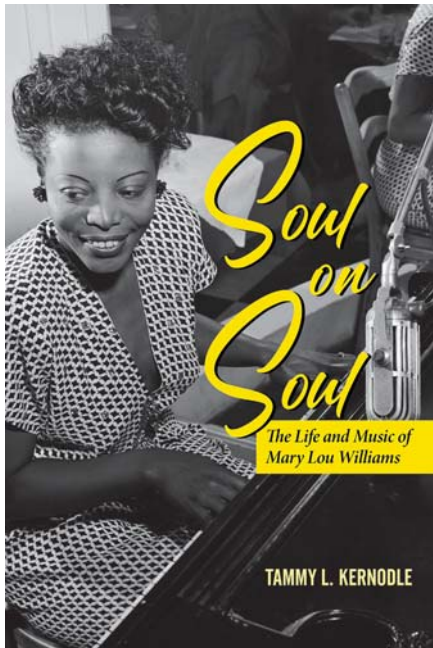
Williams’ career transpired with the backdrop of her working out of her Harlem apartment in the 1950s and ’60s to help addicted musicians return to performing, efforts that led to her founding the Bel Canto Foundation to help rehabilitate drug users.

But compounding the difficulties of being Black in 20th-century America and the oppression attached to that reality, Williams dealt with being pitted against other female performers of the era by jazz critics. Kernodle contextualizes those conversations as “representative of the larger way in which men try to frame women who move in spaces that they see as male centered. White jazz critics were always selling Mary Lou as the symbol of real jazz. Hazel Scott was always being signified as not being authentic jazz. But ultimately, there was a sense of sisterhood between them.” Williams and Scott, the author continued, generally weren’t seen as “progressing the idiom, or maybe even exceeding these men that we have established as the masters of the art form.”

In her book, Kernodle explained that the result of skewed criticism around Williams’ work resulted in a focus on her being a novelty, rather than an equal to her male peers. In 1943, *Time* magazine determined that she was “no kitten on the keys ... not selling a pretty face or a low décolletage.”

Conversely, Kernodle’s *Soul on Soul* serves as an essential text, working to set the record straight on one of the genre’s most significant—and conspicuously ignored—composers.

—Ayana Contreras



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Mute Keeper

Mute Caddy's 2020 Artist Model clamps directly onto the shaft of a music stand to hold a variety of mutes for brass instruments, making them easy to access during performances and rehearsals. Made from ABS plastic, the new version features an improved mechanism that is lightweight and more portable than the original, and it also includes two holes for mouthpieces. A storage bag with multiple pockets is sold separately. If you're a brass player who typically sets your mutes on the ledge of your music stand, the Mute Caddy Artist Model is the perfect accessory to keep your gear protected and organized so you can focus on the music. themutecaddy.com

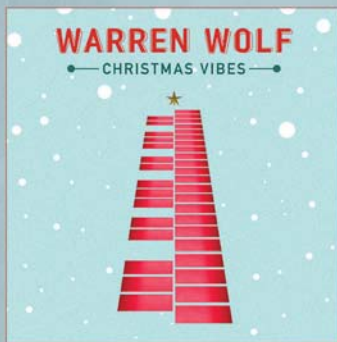


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WARREN WOLF

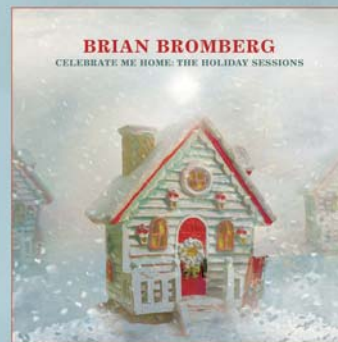
CHRISTMAS VIBES



Warren Wolf returns this Fall with his first Holiday record. Updating classics such as "Do You Hear What I Hear?," "Winter Wonderland" and "Christmas Time is Here." *Christmas Vibes* includes one original composition: "Wake Up Little Kids It's Christmas" with vocalist Allison Bordlema.

BRIAN BROMBERG

CELEBRATE ME HOME: THE HOLIDAY SESSIONS

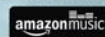


Putting his own spin on Holiday classics, Brian Bromberg has compiled some of his favorite Christmas tunes. On his first Holiday record, Brian reimagines classics such as "Deck The Halls," "Let It Snow," and "You're A Mean One, Mr. Grinch."



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Extended Possibilities in Solo Playing

I am often mesmerized by the solo albums and solo performances of saxophonists: Coleman Hawkins' immaculate recording "Picasso," or the extended intros/cadenzas of Sonny Rollins or Chris Potter. Saxophonists and other horn players usually are confined to playing one melodic line at a time. Yet, these amazing musicians have demonstrated an ability to interweave bass notes with harmonic arpeggios and melodies—all by themselves.

Throughout my musical upbringing, I sometimes would hear unusual sounds by wind players that completely caught me off guard, like Jeff Coffin making percussive "pop" sounds on the saxophone, Joshua Redman slapping out a bass line under a melody during a solo sax intro, and the wild, adventurous sonorities of avant-garde players like Anthony Braxton or Ornette Coleman.

While my young ears had a hard time appreciating some of these "extended techniques"—playing the instrument in a way it wasn't originally intended—I definitely latched onto any playing methods that helped create a funky groove. So, after learning how to recreate Coffin's "pop" sound (by biting down on the mouthpiece and reed, then violently dropping the jaw while letting up a big puff of air), I immediately wanted to use it as some sort of beat. After much experimentation, I realized I could alternate regular saxophone playing with these "pops" on beats 2 and 4, creating a simple backbeat accompaniment. (See Example 1, and check out a brief video of me playing all the examples at my website: derekbrownsax.com.)

Later on, hearing a 1924 recording of Rudy Wiedoeft slap-tonguing low notes on his C-melody saxophone, I thought of modern bass guitarists slapping out lines. After a painfully slow year, I finally learned how to slap-tongue on the saxophone, which involves pulling the reed down from the mouthpiece by way of suction from the tongue and then releasing it precisely when blowing a quick burst of air through the horn.

With these two techniques at my disposal, I realized I could be a one-man rhythm section, alternating bass lines and percussive hits (Example 2). But it wasn't until I heard the unaccompanied singing of Bobby McFerrin that I realized it's possible for a solo monophonic instrument to contain bass, percussion *and* melody by rapidly alternating between them.

I got to work applying this idea beginning with Sonny Rollins' simple blues "Tenor

Madness." Thanks to the tune's syncopated melody line, it was possible to quickly add in slapped bass notes and percussive "pops" on the downbeats and backbeats, respectively, in between the gaps of the melody, creating the aural effect of playing with a simple bass-and-drum accompaniment. Example 3 shows the original melody, and Example 4 fills in the gaps with these techniques.

Below I'll introduce some basic ways for single-line instruments to explore (1) incorporating melodies with bass lines, (2) integrating percussive elements into melodies and (3) putting all this together.

Start by alternating between the high and low registers of your instrument. Try to think of your instrument like a typical two-handed piano player: one independent line in the upper register and another separate line in the lower. Horn players aren't used to thinking like this, so it'll take some practice to become comfortable jumping between the two.

Example 5 shows one way to begin navigating two separate lines. The lower line plays repetitive C's on the downbeats, while the upper line plays up a C dominant scale on the upbeats, giving the effect of a scale being played over a drone. Example 6 reverses this idea.

Example 7 increases the complexity, with both C's and B \flat 's in the bass line, and two eighth notes in each "register moment." Use these examples as a jumping-off point to create more independent-sounding lines. When playing ideas like this, I usually slap-tongue the bass notes, which both mimics a plucked bass and allows for the notes to "pop out" more easily. Remember, though, that the most important thing is fluidity, regardless of how things are articulated.

Another approach is to play through common jazz progressions, with the bass playing the I and V of the chords on beats 1 and 3 (Example 8) or playing walking bass lines on each beat (Example 9). I've found that resolving the upper voice an eighth note earlier and the bass on the downbeat works well with the syncopated nature of jazz.

Next up is percussion. Start slowly playing a quarter-note scale or pattern on beats 1 and 3 while in between playing some type of percussive "pop" on the backbeats of 2 and 4 (Example 10).

Slowly increase the complexity of these exercises until things become more natural-sounding and you build the confidence to improvise in this manner more freely. Example



Derek Brown

COURTESY OF ARTIST

11 fills out the spaces in between the percussive with eighth notes. Next, try improvising various scales/melodies/rhythms in between.

Finally, let's incorporate all three main elements: bass notes (slapped or not) on beats 1 and 3, percussive "pops" on 2 and 4, and then filling in those upbeats with harmonic or melodic material (Example 12). You can change up the bass and upper melodic lines as you get more comfortable with this type of playing (Example 13). You could also change the rhythmic location/length of these bass and percussive notes. Example 14 shows how far I sometimes take this idea of alternating bass notes, percussive backbeats and melody from my solo tune "Catch'em Up."

Lately, I've been seeking out other extended techniques, like physically striking the saxophone with thumb rings. Example 15 shows an example of me adding rings and stomping to my playing, from my tune "Spitfire."

The history of jazz has been propelled forward by outside-the-box thinkers dreaming about what's possible. While not every musician needs to learn extended techniques to pursue their dream, I believe exploring new ways of playing and stretching our boundaries can lead to major breakthroughs. **DB**

Derek Brown exclusively uses Austrian Audio microphones/headphones, Légère Reeds, JodyJazz mouthpieces, P. Mauriat saxophones and BG France ligatures. His new album, *All Figured Out*, features his original compositions and "BEATBOX SAX"-style playing in a modern big band setting. Visit him online, and be sure to check out his accompanying demo video at derekbrownsax.com.

Examples 1–2



Example 3



Example 4



Examples 5–6



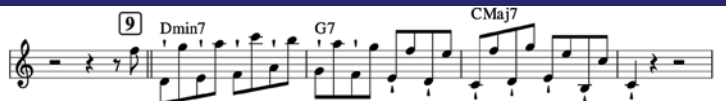
Example 7



Example 8



Example 9



Examples 10–11



Examples 12–13



Example 14



Example 15



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Martin Committee Trumpet

Revival of a Serious Player

The Martin Brasswind Company, originally known as the Martin Band Instrument Company, has returned to the scene with its bold, jazz favorite, the Martin Committee trumpet. Now based in Muskegon, Michigan, and back in family hands under the leadership of Richard Martin after decades of ownership changes, the historic company continues its tradition of horn-building with the revival of an iconic instrument loved by the likes of Chet Baker, Roy Eldridge, Lee Morgan, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Wallace Roney and Chris Botti.

The Committee looks like a basic brass trumpet with traditional construction and straight-forward features. From appearances alone, you might expect the instrument to produce nothing more than an average sound. Knowing its history, though, I knew I would enjoy playing it. But I couldn't imagine that it would actually inspire me to put real effort into improving my trumpet chops and my overall musicianship.

Key features of the Committee include its large bore, continuous tapered mouth pipe and one-piece bell. With low resistance, the horn requires proper air support to produce its signature deep, warm, engulfing sound. I was not initially prepared to give to this horn what it demanded of me, so my first attempt came out raw and exposed. Because of the simplicity of the design, sound travels straight through the Committee, with-

out any diffusing, hiding or smoothing of any kind. Designed to accommodate some of the world's finest jazz trumpeters, it has a way of exposing your personal flaws. I soon realized I would have to focus and make a substantial effort to bring the horn to its full potential in regards to tonal color, texture, resonance and dynamic range. After spending several months with the Committee, I came to the conclusion that all the time and effort I had spent learning to master the instrument had really paid off: Diligent practice on it really raised my game, and I learned how to harness the horn's subtle characteristics more effectively to play with ever-increasing levels of expression.

Much like a classic race car with a stick shift in the hands of an experienced driver, zipping along a winding highway, gripping to gravel, stretching its wheels and seemingly defying physics—this horn requires an experienced player to get the best possible sound out of it. Anyone can drive it, and have fun, but the more experienced driver can really make it sing.

The Martin Committee trumpet requires your absolute best self to take full advantage of all that makes it an authentic jazz classic. If you do decide to rise to the occasion with this horn, be prepared to really blow and reap the rewards of Martin's fine craftsmanship.

—Dan Gorski

martinbrasswind.com

Sher Music's Introduction to Jazz Piano

A Deep Dive into Fundamental Concepts

Sher Music's *Introduction to Jazz Piano, A Deep Dive* does more than just teach you how to comp and solo in a jazzy style. This thick resource, written by pianist/educator Jeb Patton, provides extremely useful tools to help you internalize the music and build a thorough foundation of harmonic, rhythmic and melodic concepts and techniques that stem directly from the jazz canon.

Listening plays a huge role in this fully immersive course, which not only directs you to vamp and solo along with classic jazz recordings, but to study the touch, the rhythmic feel and the voicings commonly used by master pianists of the genre while noting the choices they make "in the moment." Sixty workouts outlined over the course of the 225-page text get you interacting with MP3 files that provide the ultimate learning environment by putting you right in the middle of the action. Play along as McCoy Tyner comps with triads on Hank Mobley's funky "A Caddy For Daddy." Get hip to authentic down-home blues moves and grooves with Otis Spann on "Good Morning Mr. Blues." Learn to lay back on the groove of Sonny Red's "Bluesville" by practicing triplet upbeats as you play through the form. Use fourth-like voicings of the chord changes to comp along with Bill Evans on "On Green Dolphin Street" as played by Miles

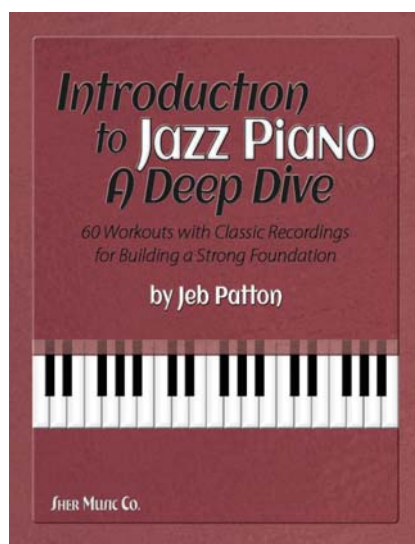
Davis. When it comes to learning jazz piano, this is about as good as it gets.

Packed with enough learning material to last a lifetime—it is, indeed, a "deep dive"—*Jazz Piano, A Deep Dive* unfolds in a straightforward, no-nonsense fashion that lets the pianist learn at his or her own pace. It starts with the very basics of building triads and seventh chords and gradually progresses through increasingly more sophisticated concepts like closed-position and open-position chord voicings, guide tones, voice-leading, extended and altered chords, rhythmic approaches to comping, scales suitable for various harmonic scenarios and building blocks for melodic soloing. (I recommend that pianists incorporate into their practice regimens the two-handed exercises outlined in the book's appendix.)

Playing through the workouts after digesting each chapter of text was an exhilarating experience. I found the sections about "A" position and "B" position voicings, mini-cadences and the concept of the sixth-diminished scale to be especially enlightening. The audio quality of the downloadable workout recordings is outstanding, and the feel of each tune is absolutely proper, providing an environment that's ideal for learning by deep listening and internalization.

—Ed Enright

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Oberlin vocal instructor La Tanya Hall (foreground) and student Diana Gruber (on monitor) meet in two "real-time rooms."

ROSEN-JONES PHOTOGRAPHY

Oberlin Emphasizes Safety

WHAT DOES ON-CAMPUS INSTRUCTION look like and *feel* like during the pandemic? As students across the nation headed back to campus for the fall semester, DownBeat decided to check in with one renowned institution to see how things were going.

During videoconference interviews in mid-September, educators at Oberlin College & Conservatory in Oberlin, Ohio, shared their views on the task of delivering high-quality music instruction while also protecting the health and safety of faculty, staff and students.

William Quillen, dean of the conservatory, explained that Oberlin has designed 10 new spaces that allow an instructor or music student to be in one room and collaborate with another musician who is in a separate room—located on the other side of a shared wall. This scenario uses an analog connection to eliminate the latency that can make music instruction over

Zoom somewhat difficult. Additionally, for performers who sing, this plan addresses the phenomenon of aerosolization, which is a risk factor for transmitting COVID-19.

"We set up a total of five pairs of rooms—so that's 10 different rooms throughout the conservatory—of what we're calling 'real-time rooms,'" Quillen explained. "We drilled a hole in the wall and [installed] high-quality microphones, 55- or 65-inch video monitors, speakers and headphones in a room, which is hardwired to the room next door. So there's essentially zero latency."

One educator using the rooms is La Tanya Hall, who teaches jazz voice. "The students are incredibly excited about the technology," Hall said. "It's much more efficient [than web-based instruction], especially from a vocal perspective, because I can hear things much better. I'm able to see the whole body of the performer. It's

quite a nice solution. It's not 100 percent ideal, but it's the closest we can get to real, in-person teaching while keeping everyone absolutely safe."

Hall also teaches some of her voice students in an outdoor tent, when weather permits. The Oberlin campus has an abundance of green space, making it easy for students to meet outdoors and stand more than six feet apart.

Bassist Gerald Cannon teaches his students indoors, with everyone wearing face coverings and standing behind large plexiglass separators.

"I'm very happy with the way things are going," Cannon said. "I feel very safe, and I think the students feel very safe. They're eager to learn. I've been really impressed with my improv class. The way I teach [incorporates] a lot of constructive criticism from each one of the students. I want them to feel kind of like a family, and I want them to understand constructive criticism from their peers."

Oberlin's administration has taken many steps to facilitate steady communication between the instructors, students, public health officials and local residents. The school's website has a section that displays weekly and cumulative results for coronavirus testing. The ObieSafe Statistics webpage indicated that for the period of Aug. 5 to Oct. 19, the school's cumulative positivity rate for coronavirus tests was 0.17 percent.

Quillen said that students generally have been vigilant about following Oberlin's strict health and safety guidelines. "The kind of students who come here—they come here not just because of their interest in musical excellence, but also because of a certain kind of intellectual and social commitment," he said. "It's a school that kids go to for a reason: They want to change the world for good." —*Bobby Reed*

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Karrin Allyson

When DownBeat caught up with Karrin Allyson, the five-time Grammy-nominated singer and pianist was weeks away from a trip to Sony Hall in New York to film a performance featuring music on her latest album—*Shoulder To Shoulder: Centennial Tribute To Women's Suffrage*, featuring her sextet with Ingrid Jensen, Mindi Abair, Helen Sung, Endea Owens and Allison Miller. For this Blindfold Test, Allyson commented on the music via Zoom from Massachusetts.

Aretha Franklin

"For All We Know" (*Laughing On The Outside*, Columbia, 1963) Franklin, vocals; Robert Mersey, producer/arranger/conductor.

That's Aretha, isn't it? Undeniably. It's such a different background for her. With the strings, lovely. That's "For All We Know." I'd never heard the verse and I'd never heard this version. I love it when Aretha's looking inward, instead of always just pushing it out, which she can do like no other. But I love when she's being sentimental ... Yeah, beautiful. In anyone else's hands, that could be so corny, but like Ray Charles, I can hear him doing the exact same kind of vibe with this tune.

Camila Meza

"Atardecer" (*Ámbar*, Sony Masterworks, 2019) Meza, vocals, guitar; Eden Ladin, piano, synthesizer, celesta, keyboards; Noam Wiesenberg, bass; Keita Ogawa, drums, percussion; Tomoko Omura, Fung Chern Hwei, violin; Benjamin von Gutzeit, viola; Brian Sanders, cello.

At first, I'm thinking I'm listening to a new Brazilian singer, but it's in Spanish, isn't it? But the groove is rather Brazilian to me. Would it be from South America, not Mexican, I imagine? Claudia Acuña? I love the percussion; I'm a percussion freak. The strings are cool. It's quite highly produced, with all the layering of the vocals and the strings. That's beautiful. [after] I'm going to have to check her out. I love it.

Norma Winstone & John Taylor

"Lucky To Be Me" (*In Concert*, Sunnyside/Enodoc, 2020, rec'd 1988) Winstone, vocals; Taylor, piano.

I love the interplay. The pianist is amazing, whoever he is. A lot of implied rhythms—I like that. It reminded me of—I know it's not Nancy King, I'd know Nancy King's voice anywhere—but it reminds me of her and Steve Christofferson's hookup. Whoever is singing is amazing. Her pitch is really great. It's not Rebecca [Kilgore] and [Dave] Frishberg, is it? [after] Ah, yeah, she's great. I feel bad I didn't get that one. [laughs sheepishly] Oh, well. Beautiful.

Cécile McLorin Salvant

"Obsession" (*The Window*, Mack Avenue, 2018) Salvant, vocals; Sullivan Fortner, piano.

This is a very cool tune. Is this Cécile McLorin Salvant? I love it, and I love the piano-voice interplay between the two of them. The energy of the song fits what she is singing. It's really angular in a way ... like an obsession. I really dig when someone's being conversational [rather] than so singer-ly all the time. She can do either one, and I like the combination that she uses here. Her phrasing is really lovely because it doesn't break up with unintentional breaths and not following through with the thought. I appreciate that in her style.

Camille Bertault

"Là Où Tu Vas" (*Giant Steps*), "Pas De Géant" (*OKeh*, 2018) Bertault, vocals; Dan Tepfer, piano; Christophe "Disco" Minck, bass, harp, synthesizer; Jeff Ballard, drums.

OK! *Arrêtez, arrêtez!* Wow, that's indeed a tour de force, literally, right? Did they do a transcription of [John Coltrane's] solo or something? It

Karrin Allyson



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reminds me of [early '60s French vocal jazz group] Les Double Six.

I can imagine if I was listening to her live, I would be like this [*jaw dropping*], with my mouth on the floor. That is very cool. That's an eye-opener—an ear-opener, I should say. I don't know who did the lyrics—it goes by really fast, and I'd have to study them—but it sounds really natural. I like the fact that it's almost comical, it's so difficult.

Becca Stevens

"Both Still Here" (*Regina*, GroundUp, 2017) Stevens, vocals, mandolin; Jacob Collier, miscellaneous instruments, vocals.

That's probably the least "jazz" thing you've played for me thus far. It's funny how pop singers—and I don't know this singer, she sounds great—have a way of saying "r," you know, "arr." We used to joke with Nancy King, one of the greatest jazz singers on the planet. We used to call her "Nancy R. King," because she'd sing, "*Heerrrr*," and just lay into that "r." You'd never ask a student to do that; you'd say, "No, honey, open that vowel."

I love this stringed instrument. Is it a mandolin? Is she playing it? Very distinctive. ... The vocal layers are interesting.

Fred Hersch & Jay Clayton

"Blame It On My Youth" (*Beautiful Love*, Sunnyside, 1995) Hersch, piano; Clayton, vocals.

Jay Clayton? Actually, is it her and Fred Hersch? I love Jay's approach. It's always fresh, and she's always in that moment. I don't want to say she's underrated, because I rate her very high.

She's got such a—I don't know how to describe it—it's sort of a mature but very childlike way of presenting her music. She means every word. There's nothing like hearing experience in someone's voice. You can layer all the shit in—you can do all kinds of bells and whistles, and no offense to any of that—but I'm still in love with the sonic sound of a beautiful piano opening up, which just happened there, and a beautiful voice opening up and sharing her truth. There's nothing like that.

DB

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

A man with glasses and a patterned blazer sits on a stool, holding a black Epiphone electric guitar. He is in a music shop with various instruments and vintage signs in the background. The text 'JOE BONAMASSA BLACK BEAUTY LES PAUL CUSTOM' is overlaid on the image.

JOE BONAMASSA
BLACK BEAUTY
LES PAUL CUSTOM

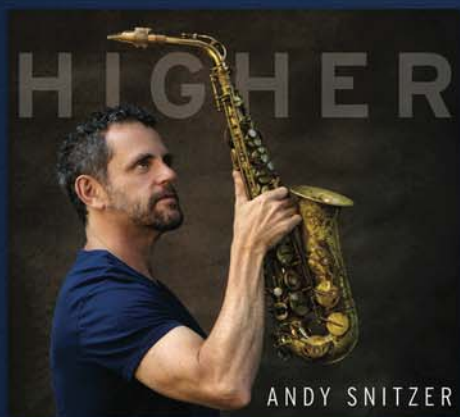
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