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### **ON THE COVER**

# 20 Ethan Iverson

# **Doing Bud Justice**

BY ED ENRIGHT

DownBeat catches up with pianist, educator and frequent blogger Ethan Iverson to discuss his big band commission for the 2018 Umbria Winter Jazz festival, documented on the new album Bud Powell In The 21st Century. The suite-like program draws upon Powell classics like "Bouncing With Bud," "Celia" and "Tempus Fugit," as well as Iverson's own original material inspired by the DownBeat Hall of Famer's frequently overlooked contributions to the classic bebop canon.

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Too Good for America

I VIVIDLY RECALL A CONVERSATION FROM THE EARLY 1980S, AT the end of a recording session at the Nola Studios in Manhattan. Some musicians were talking to the great Mario Bauzá (1911-'93) about the course the entertainment industry was taking in our ever-changing world. The musical director and co-founder of the iconic band Machito & His Afro-Cubans told us how, in the early '40s, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Kenny Clarke, Thelonious Monk-and other young, enthusiastic members of the bebop movement-had developed a highly creative, mostly instrumental style. It was totally different from the traditional jazz listened to by most audiences at the time.

Bebop players dramatically altered the role of the singer. They virtually replaced the romantic lyrics of their songs with the angular, dissonant inflections of scat singing, which evoked the sounds of instrumentalists. Mario explained very convincingly that by taking away the vocals-and later on, the danceable aspect of the music-the new style became an exquisitely hip and modern art form, but one that was elitist and exclusive. The new style was embraced by writers, photographers, poets, painters and intellectuals of the time, moving the music further and further away from the most popular ballrooms, home parties and commercial radio stations.

It has been nearly four decades since that enlightening discussion with the legendary Cuban musician, and throughout the years, I have heard so many colleagues complain that jazz seldom is broadcast on radio or TV, nor is it taught widely enough in schools, and that students (and sometimes their teachers) believe that Louis Armstrong was the first man to set foot on the moon. So, we should remember the seeds of elitism that we sowed, how we alienated listeners in a way that led to jazz becoming-and I see nothing wrong with it-a minority-group activity, much like symphonism, avant-garde music, minimalism, opera, ballet, skydiving and swimming with sharks.

Jazz is, and always will be, an important part of America's cultural contributions to the world. Speaking ill of this country has been a fairly widespread practice in certain artistic and intellectual circles. But the undeniable reality is that today, the SFJAZZ Collective in San Francisco, the Jazz Masters fellowship program of the National Endowment for the Arts, and, above all, the monumental and unique project that is Jazz at Lincoln Center-driven by the perseverance and persuasive power of the ineffable Wynton Marsalis and his formidable team-completely refute the exaggerated concept that "Jazz is too good for America."

The truth is that jazz may not be very popular among the masses-it's true in the Bronx as in Nicaragua, Poland or Kampuchea-but it is nevertheless one of the clearest examples of individuality, independence and democracy. Therefore, its appreciation must be strictly voluntary, never imposed or obligatory. DB

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# Chords ි Discords

# Friends & Icons

I want to express a multitude of accolades for your coverage and spotlight on the passing of master percussionist and NEA Jazz Master Cándido Camero in your January issue.

I am quite fortunate and privileged to have shared the stage with Baba Cándido, and we enjoyed a wonderful friendship. In your article, when listing the extraordinary artists associated with Cándido, you omitted an extremely important person: NEA Jazz Master Dr. Randy Weston (1926–2018).

Masters Randy and Cándido had a long and intimate history of making incredible music. Their musical dialogue started in 1960 with the iconic album *Uhuru Afrika*, continued with the 1973 album *Tanjah* (which featured Cándido as a percussionist and narrator) and culminated with the 2016 release *The African Nubian Suite*.



As a member of Dr. Weston's group African Rhythms for 38 years, I was always overwhelmed with joy when Cándido augmented our band. One such highlight was at Carnegie Hall a couple of years before Randy's passing.

Long live the spirit and musical legacy of Cándido de Guerra Camero.

T.K. BLUE JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY

)

# Humor Belongs in Jazz

When did DownBeat declare open season on the reputation of its writers?

How else, then, to explain your publication of a mean-spirited letter by a reader named Bob Oberg in your January issue ("No Patience for Puns").

Oberg attacks the author of a piece on Charles McPherson, in which said author makes a harmless pun about the saxophonist's range of talent in composing both jazz and music for a ballet company ("Charles McPherson Takes A Leap," December).

Oberg ridicules your writer by suggesting that he or she was under the influence of drugs when they wrote the article. Oberg, tellingly, closes his letter by referring to jazz as "our deadly serious art form."

If there's one thing talented jazz musicians through the generations have appreciated—from Duke Ellington to Charles Mingus to Art Tatum and even the cantankerous Miles Davis—it's that humor can, at times, be just as "deadly serious" a musical component as anything else.

People like Oberg need to get off their collective high horse, and DownBeat needs to be more protective and respectful toward its dedicated writers.

CHARLES WINOKOOR FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

# Lack of Innovation?

I would like to riff on Dwight L. Wilson's letter published in your December issue ("Fewer Black Artists in Reviews?"). I am a Black man who is longtime reader of DownBeat. I, too, have noticed the lower number of Black artists in the Reviews section over the decades.

That is not my real issue, though: My problem is the lack of innovation in the

music that you do choose to review. To my ears, it all sounds like a 1960s Miles Davis rehash. The writing is mediocre, and they all sound alike. The musicians are clearly highly trained, and the recording technology is wonderful, but the players lack soul.

Mostly, I go back to my old records.

JAMES MORTON JAMES.MORTON8@COMCAST.NET

# **The Talented Few**

As a pianist, bassist and former resident of Cleveland, I want to pay tribute to pianist and Cleveland native Bobby Few, who died on Jan. 6. Before moving to New York and then to Europe, Few established himself as one of Cleveland's finest and most dedicated jazz musicians.

He was known, respected and loved by the inner core of the city's jazz community, and he will be remembered for his uncompromising and infectious love of post-bop, avant-garde jazz and world music.

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# **Historical Value**

Is there some reason you have completely stopped reviewing historical jazz releases? So much great new/old music is being released on labels like Corbett vs. Dempsey, Hat Hut, Resonance and others. Sun Ra alone is somehow releasing more music now than when he was on this planet! Your younger readers deserve to know about all this.

TONY ALEXANDER MIAMI, FLORIDA

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at editor@downbeat.com or find us on Facebook & Twitter.

# ECM

A musically diverse quartet of albums opens ECM's 2021 programme, spanning generations, genres and cultural backgrounds.







# Alexander Hits a High Note on 'Love'

n the early 1980s, pianist Monty Alexander was a huge draw for jazz clubs and festivals. His hard-swinging style, spiced with musical elements from his native Jamaica, kept him in demand all over the world. So high was the demand, in fact, that he had neither much need nor much desire to make albums.

"I never went out of my way to record myself," Alexander said. "I didn't live in a world where you're trying to document. You're just going from joint to joint, from gig to gig." While Alexander appeared on at least a dozen recordings between 1980 and 1982, most are credited to collaborators like bassist Ray Brown or vibraphonist Milt Jackson.

However, a newly released recording from Aug. 6, 1982, sheds light on what previously was an underdocumented phase of Alexander's career as a leader. *Love You Madly: Live At Bubba's* (Resonance), chronicles a gig at a restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Alexander led a fierce quartet—bassist Paul Berner, drummer Duffy Jackson and conguero Robert Thomas Jr.—that was brimming with creativity and enthusiasm, not to mention chops.

"That was fun," recalled Thomas, who still works frequently with Alexander. "That night was just high energy, every single song. It was just an incredible night of music."

Under his own auspices, Alexander led his own combos. "I would have fabulous musicians who—and I say this proudly—all seemed to love the idea of playing with Monty Alexander," he said. "They knew that we were going to play music that meant something, but more than that, that the usual resolution of the music was going to be happy." The size and personnel of the bands varied, but they tended to include Jackson and Thomas as their rhythmic powerhouse.

"Monty understood that I was not a tradi-

tional conga player. I was a bebop conga player," Thomas said. "Most bandleaders expect all conga players to do the same thing, to just play Latin licks for their entire lives, and that's incredibly boring for me. Monty always let me be myself."

Bubba's Jazz Restaurant was a supper club that brought A-list musicians to Florida. The month before Alexander's two-week residency there, however, it had reduced its jazz programming 50 percent; management hoped that bringing in pop acts would revive its sagging bottom line. It didn't: Bubba's closed in 1983.

Yet, Alexander and the band packed the seats, playing high-octane, straightahead jazz ("Love You Madly," "SKJ"), purebred blues ("Blues For Edith") and infusions with calypso ("Fungii Mama"). According to Alexander, even the reggae-tinged rendition of Christopher Cross's 1981 smash hit, "Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)," was no concession to the pop mainstream: "I was playing what I liked. It was an era when jazz still had that 'street corner' vitality to it. Not to say that 'Arthur's Theme' was street-corner music, but it was a movie theme part of the fabric of what was going on."

The set was recorded by Mack Emerman (1923–2013), founder of Miami's legendary Criteria Recording Studios. He brought his remote recording equipment, set it up in Bubba's, and gave Alexander the tape at the end of the night. The pianist put it on a shelf, never listening to it. A few years ago, when Resonance's George Klabin asked Alexander whether he had any-thing they might work on together, the pianist exhumed the tape. Even then, he didn't listen.

"[Klabin] told me it was one of the best he'd heard in terms of sound," Alexander recalled. "And when I checked it out, it reminded me of my favorite live albums—where you could hear the music, but also the energy of the crowd."

*Love You Madly* does more than provide a glimpse into one of Alexander's neglected professional high points, though. It proves that it was a creative high point, too. —*Michael J. West* 

# **Miwa Finds Focus Amid Pandemic**

hat Yoko Miwa has gone through during the coronavirus pandemic will sound familiar to a lot of other working musicians: gigs canceled, recording sessions postponed, recitals livestreamed, lessons remote. For the Boston-based pianist, the stress was compounded by tragedy: the illness and death of her father in Japan, at a time when she was unable to be with her family.

Remarkably, Miwa emerged from those first months of the pandemic with a new recording by her trio, her ninth, which, given the circumstances is remarkably upbeat and affirmative, living up to the album's title, *Songs Of Joy* (Ubuntu Music). It wasn't easy.

For starters, the band, which was accustomed to playing at least twice weekly at residencies in the Boston area, went into the studio cold, after four months apart, for a date that ended up including five new originals by the bandleader. And, of course, there were the necessary protocols for collaborating during a pandemic.

"I was really nervous for two weeks before," Miwa said. "Would we be safe?" Will Slater, the band's longtime bassist, now living in New York, usually would stay at the home of Miwa and her husband, the trio's drummer, Scott Goulding. This time, they booked Slater a hotel room for the day of rehearsal and three days of recording, in July.

"We brought hand sanitizer, and extra masks for everybody," Miwa recalled. "[Typically,] when we perform, we like to be as close as possible." But under these circumstances, the players had to set up as far apart from one another as they could.

But there's no sound of strain on *Songs Of Joy*, which kicks off with a roaring, McCoy Tyneresque version of Richie Havens' "Freedom," inspired by that singer-songwriter's iconic performance at Woodstock. Miwa's taste for unlikely covers of '60s and '70s pop also comes through in her reflective take on the Anne Bredon tune popularized by Led Zeppelin, "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" (with bassist Brad Barrett in place of Slater) and on Billy Preston's "Song Of Joy," which Sheila Jordan introduced to her at one of the legendary singer's annual gigs with the Miwa trio in Cambridge.

To stay focused during the pandemic, Miwa gave herself the assignment of writing a tune every day, running them by Goulding for feedback. Those sessions produced the hard-bop swing of "Small Talk," the Latin rhythms of "The Rainbirds" (inspired by Kenny Barron), the hooky melodic riff of "Largo Desolato" and the Bill Evans-like impressionism of "Inside A Dream."

Miwa describes her process as driven by mood and emotion. She wrote the pensive "The

Lonely Hours"—with its delicate, upper-register opening pizzicato solo by Slater—in full awareness of her father's deteriorating health. "I sat down and played, and it just came up from me," Miwa explained.

In addition to writing every day during the first months of the pandemic, Miwa livestreamed Facebook performances every Friday and Saturday, drawing some interesting audiences. "I'd be looking at the comments," recalled Goulding, who acted as cameraman, "and I'd say, 'Yoko, George Cables is watching now. … Kenny Barron is watching now."

As an associate professor at Berklee College of Music, Miwa has been teaching remotely, with individual students connecting from their homes around the world. "I actually enjoyed it," she said. "I set up two cameras, so students could see my hands on the keyboard, and I sent them recordings after the lesson. ... And students would sometimes walk around their house with the camera. I'd see their families, and they'd show me their pets. It's kind of fun."

Still the fallout from the pandemic has been rough. Miwa saw numerous gigs postponed or canceled, including a show at Dizzy's Club at Jazz at Lincoln Center and a performance at the Ella Fitzgerald Competition at the National



Mall, in Washington, D.C. Plus, the home of one of Miwa's regular weekly gigs, Boston's Les Zygomates bistro, has closed permanently.

All the more reason Miwa was glad to get into a recording studio: "I was so happy to be playing with my trio again. Even though I was very nervous about the situation, at the same time, the joy, the happiness came from our music." —Jon Garelick

# TIMELESS MUSIC REDISCOVERED BRUBECK EDITIONS RELEASES:



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# Riffs )



**Grammys Rescheduled:** The Grammy Awards will be presented on March 14, and a portion of the ceremony will be broadcast live by CBS. Big band leaders John Beasley and Maria Schneider, pianist Gerald Clayton and trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah are among the artists who have received multiple nominations for the 63rd Annual Grammy Awards. After initially announcing that the ceremony would take place Jan. 31, the Recording Academy announced on Jan. 5 that the date would be changed, citing pandemic health concerns. grammy.com

**Graves Returns:** Keyboardist and composer Cameron Graves returns with *Seven*, his sophomore album, slated for a Feb. 19 release on Artistry Music. Like his 2017 debut, *Planetary Prince*, the forthcoming disc features contributions from saxophonist Kamasi Washington. mackavenue.com

In Memoriam: Pianist Junior Mance, an Illinois-born artist who performed with everyone from Dizzy Gillespie and Lester Young to Dinah Washington and Joe Williams, has died at the age of 92. "He was just as happy holding court at the piano in his college classroom as he was playing for audiences in swanky clubs in Europe," saxophonist Andrew Hadro wrote in an email to DownBeat. "I learned more from him than just about anyone, yet I never felt like he was trying to teach."

Final Bar: Frank Kimbrough, a pianist, composer, educator and longtime member of the Maria Schneider Orchestra, died Dec. 30 in Queens at age 64. ... French jazz pianist Claude Bolling died Dec. 29 at the age of 89 near Paris. ... Cleveland-born pianist Bobby Few, who led his own dates, recorded with Albert Ayler and Steve Lacy, and left the States behind for a life in France, died Jan. 6 in Paris at age 85. ... Howard Johnson, a tuba player and multi-instrumentalist who led groups and spent five years in the *Saturday Night Live* house band, died Jan. 11 in Harlem at the age of 79.

# Joe Chambers Heads Back to Blue Note

**MALLET MASTER AND COMPOSER JOE** Chambers found his footing in 1963, when he moved to New York and built a reputation as a first-call drummer for Blue Note's stable of stars, among them Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter and Bobby Hutcherson.

"I didn't really learn how to play until I came to New York," Chambers, 78, said during December from his home in Wilmington, North Carolina. "I learned what swing was all about, what drive was all about."

It was an unfortunate coincidence that, in March, just as he had returned to the Big Apple to record his first Blue Note album in 22 years, the pandemic hit the city and he had to head back to the relatively safer confines of his Wilmington home. "New York got ridiculous with the virus," he explained. "I said, 'Later for that."

But all was not lost. Determined to deliver his album, he replaced New York pianist Rick Germanson and bassist Ira Coleman—both of whom appeared on his previous album, 2016's *Landscapes* (Savant)—with, respectively, North Carolina-based Brad Merritt and Steve Haines. In April, Haines said, he and Merritt received notes on the music from Chambers. In June, fully masked and socially distanced, they laid down tracks in a North Carolina studio. The album, *Samba De Maracatu*, is set to be released Feb. 26.

"Because of the virus everything was sort of thrown together," Haines lamented, even as he praised Chambers' ability to draw on his experience and fashion a satisfying outcome. "The thing about Joe is, he's got a tremendous width and depth of knowledge of music."

That knowledge is reflected throughout the nine-track collection as Chambers—his vibraphone and percussion, layered over previously recorded piano, bass and drums—recalls key collaborations. The disc revisits "Visions," from Hutcherson's album *Spiral*. On the new recording, Chambers, behind the vibes, reveals a rich tone and modernist sensibility that echo without imitating his former boss.

"Bobby always had his own sound on the instrument, more than Milt [Jackson] or Lionel Hampton, from the old school," he said.

Chambers took up the vibraphone in 1970, when Max Roach asked him to join his new percussion ensemble M'Boom. Under Roach's guidance, Chambers and the group's other members gathered at Warren Smith's studio on West 21st Street in Manhattan for a year of Saturdays to become proficient on a range of percussion instruments. Chambers, whose first instrument was piano, took to the vibes immediately. "It was just a matter of getting the sticking," he said.



On *Samba De Maracatu*, that labor is still bearing fruit on a Chambers contribution to M'Boom's book, "Circles." The tune appeared on M'Boom's 1984 album *Collage*, and Chambers' new treatment parallels the format of the earlier version, employing a Bahian rhythm with mixed meters, modal harmony and a sonorous improvisation in which the overdubbed vibraphone and piano play "together."

If the new album has an outlier it is "New York State Of Mind Rain." The tune brings to the fore a fragment of Chambers' "Mind Rain" that rapper Nas sampled for his 1994 hit "N.Y. State Of Mind." The tune first was heard as a mindbending keyboard duet with organist Larry Young on 1977's *Double Exposure*. The new album's spin-off, a belated response to Nas, incorporates a rap that, while smartly penned by his son, Fenton Chambers, and slickly executed by MC Parrain, does not herald a new direction for the elder Chambers.

"I'm not a fan of rap or hip-hop," he said. "I understand it. It's not new."

Instead, a stylistic counterweight is singer Stephanie Jordan's dreamy take on "Never Let Me Go." Floating over Chambers' subtle bolero, Jordan's voice projects the kind of captivating appeal that could land her a spot in a future largescale recording project of Chambers'—pending, he said, the easing of public-health concerns.

"If we get past this," he said of the pandemic, "I do want to do an orchestral record, with percussion and singer and everything."





A new documentary about Billie Holiday (seen here with planist Bobby Tucker) includes photos and film clips that have been digitally colorized by Marina Amaral.

# Billie Holiday Documentary Chronicles 2 Women's Lives

chronicled figure in jazz history. The details of her short, sad life are by now engraved in granite. But in the new documentary *Billie*, director James Erskine devises a *Citizen Kane*-like angle through which to convey a familiar tale: It is a biography within a biography in which he tells the story of journalist Linda Lipnack Kuehl's long quest to unlock Billie Holiday's story.

Kuehl was a 14-year-old with a middle-class Bronx background when, in the early '60s, she discovered the Verve LP *The Essential Billie Holiday.* The 1956 Carnegie Hall concert recording was an epiphany and cast a spell. "A strange voice," she reflects in the film, "more real and true than I'd ever heard. I had no choice. I had to listen to where that voice came from."

Her search begins several years later and becomes the film's parallel plot line. The literature on Holiday was still slim then. William Duffy's *Lady Sings the Blues* was the only book in print. But many of Holiday's contemporaries were still alive.

A "real and unsentimental" biography was waiting to be written, and Kuehl believed she was the one to write it. She began seeking out anyone who had ever crossed Holiday's path and would talk about her. During the next 10 years, she recorded more than 200 hours of cassette interviews with both the famous and the forgotten musicians, police officers, classmates, lovers, pimps, abusers, managers, rescuers and bystanders. Taken together, the interviews contain much speculation, many generalities and abundant disagreements; each witness had formed his or her own myths about Holiday by then.

Kuehl recorded her final interview in November 1977, two years after the publication of John Chilton's *Billie's Blues*, the first important Holiday biography. But Kuehl didn't survive to complete her book. She died unexpectedly in April 1978, a suspected suicide.

The cassettes and Kuehl's notes survived and were sold by her family a decade later to a New Jersey collector named Toby Byron. Their secrets aged in a kind of limbo. Knowledge of their existence circulated within a tight circle of Holiday experts, one of whom, Donald Clarke, gained access to them for his 1994 biography, *Wishing on the Moon.* Eleven years later, Julia Blackburn drew heavily on them for her book *With Billie*, which is virtually a transcript of the interviews. "Clarke and Blackburn were how I first discovered their existence," Erskine said from his home near Norfolk, England.

Several years ago, producer Barry Clark-Ewers asked Erskine if there were any film projects he had in mind. He thought at once of Holiday. The problem was finding a fresh frame for a familiar story. Erskine thought about the Kuehl tapes and wondered if they still existed.

"I tried half-heartedly myself to find them," Erskine recalls, "but I wasn't successful. Barry, on the other hand, was very good at finding obscure things and people. It took him just a couple of months.

"They were 40- and 50-year-old cassettes that hadn't been played in years," Erskine continued. "When we made a deal to use them, we wanted to make sure we weren't spending a lot of money on nothing. So, we took them to a studio in New York and had a specialist review them. And, sure enough, some snapped and had to be rebuilt. The first tape we heard was Charles Mingus with his deep, gravelly voice, so rich in atmosphere. And especially there were the voices of street hustlers from the '30s that are largely lost to history."

Erskine and Clark-Ewers realized they had come upon a virgin treasure trove of audio testimony that would yield a unique dual biography: one of Holiday and the other of Kuehl.

"I wanted to frame the film through the verisimilitude of Linda's journey in the 1970s," Erskine said, "her own process of getting close to Billie. But there were more than 200 hours of often sprawling conversations. So, I needed some sort of rigor in choosing what to use. What I decided was, I would only allow people to speak if they were either relating an event to which they were an eyewitness, or if they were relating a conversation they had with Billie where she related an event. I was trying to minimize the amount of hearsay."

That became the essential structure of the film. But where did Kuehl fit in?

"She was one of the draws for me," Erskine explained. "But it wasn't apparent to me at the beginning how I would be able to weave her own story into Billie's. Indeed, when I first spoke to the family, they said they had no photos of her. Then, when I visited their house and went into the den. there were thousands of home movies. We were able to restore them and add a visual portrait of Linda to remind you of who was asking the questions. And what perspective is she coming from? She was a feminist who wanted to explore Billie as a female artist and not one purely defined by the lines drawn around her by men. I thought it was really interesting to allow her to take us through those tapes and the questions she chose to ask. It gives the story an inner voice from Linda's perspective."

Erskine covers the audio interludes visually with close-ups of cassettes being slotted into and out of tape decks—in a sense, visual symbols of Kuehl's presence.

Two things stand out about the accompanying visuals. While many appear in black-andwhite, others are carefully colorized, giving them a fresh life without detaching them from their time. Overall, the quality of the images is astonishing. Especially striking is the first moving image we have of Holiday, when she sings "Saddest Tale" in the famous 1935 Duke Ellington short Symphony in Black: A Rhapsody of Negro Life. Long available on YouTube in second- and third-generation dubs, here the 19-year-old Holiday jumps off the screen with a level of visual shading and detail never before seen. Erskine wisely lets it play in black-andwhite. Similarly pristine is Holiday and Count Basie's octet from a smartly colorized 1950 short.

"The decision to colorize was partly artistic and partly financial," Erskine noted. "It is ridiculously expensive and difficult. ... In choosing to colorize or not, I didn't want to be bound by the limited technology of the day, which was forcing us into black-and-white. Billie lived in a full-color world in the '30s and '40s, and [digital colorist] Marina Amaral's colorization of the stills is amazing."

Early in the film, Tony Bennett strikes a tone of ineluctable doom, musing, "Why do all girl singers crack up when they hit the top?" Despite the sweeping sexism of his premise, he sounds a familiar note in the literature on Holiday. In pursuing an answer, Erskine necessarily finds himself confined to the darker paths that Kuehl followed in her interviews, which narrate the story. By the '60s and '70s, when Kuehl's search was underway, that darkness had been baked into Holiday's identity for more than 25 years.

"Linda may have discovered Billie as a tragic figure," Erskine speculated. "But based on her notes and manuscripts, I don't think that was the story she was trying to do. She was trying to excavate why this woman's issues led where they did. She wanted to walk that journey and remind people what was beautiful about Billie and explain how such a beautiful flower could be so crushed."

Kuehl's quest led to interviews with a fascinating, extensive cast of characters: Count Basie, trombonist Melba Liston, guitarist Barney Kessel, record producers John Hammond and Milt Gabler, dancer/singer Marie Bryant, nightclub owner Barney Josephson and even Jimmy Fletcher, the narcotics agent who helped engineer Holiday's 1947 arrest for heroin.

Kuehl's persistent efforts to understand her subject broke new ground that others, like Clarke and Blackburn, would build on and weave into existing Holiday lore. The irony seemed to come with a price.

"I found it uncanny," Erskine pondered, "that a female biographer of Billie Holiday her first female biographer—should find herself tragically dead before she tells her story. There's something about that dangerous world that Billie inhabited and that Linda entered into that lends itself to this sort of noir ending." Kuehl's journey into that dark world provides a dramatic minorkey counterpart that in some ways echoes and amplifies the major storyline.

*Billie: The Original Soundtrack* (Verve) offers a compilation of the most popular music featured in the film, all of which has been previously issued. Versions of "Strange Fruit" and "Fine And Mellow" come from the original Commodore sessions, while other selections originated on Verve and MGM albums. The soundtrack offers nothing from Holiday's classic 1935-'41 body of work or the later Decca period that made her popular. Erskine noted that studio sessions were not his focus.

"Billie's preeminence was as a performer," he said. "I wanted to be able to see Billie perform because there's not a lot of film or video where we can see her singing to us. Part of the joy of the film is to have an evening with Billie, where she stands in front of you and sings to you."

—John McDonough





# Lesser-Known Bernstein Works Spotlit by SJMO

**"JAZZ IS A VERY BIG WORD," COMPOSER**conductor Leonard Bernstein assured us when he explained jazz to America in the second of his famous CBS Omnibus programs in October 1955. But over the years, it never was quite big enough to embrace Bernstein himself, who admired it, advocated for it, occasionally fellow-traveled with it but inhabited its sensibilities like an interplanetary tourist skipping eagerly from one landmark to the next.

With a few exceptions, the jazz world has looked upon Bernstein from a similarly respectful but remote perspective that included a few tunes from *West Side Story* but little else. That's one of the reasons why Charlie Young—artistic director and conductor of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra—dove into Bernstein's oeuvre and found fresh possibilities in unexpected places.

The result is Bernstein Reimagined (MCG

Jazz), which rushes in where jazz has seldom feared to tread, showcasing pieces that rarely have been performed in a jazz setting.

In 2018, Young used the occasion of Bernstein's centennial to revisit the composer's catalog and possibly expand the range of the jazz repertoire—which, for some time, has been caught in something of a stalemate between older jazz standards of the Great American Songbook, and a torrent of new material created by musicians that very few listeners know.

"I did look for more obscure Bernstein material initially," Young said, "but only because I didn't want to do another *West Side Story* album. As I looked into his work, I looked for interesting music. 'Dream With Me' might be considered obscure because it was cut from the [1950 Broadway] production of *Peter Pan*. Others, like 'Chichester Psalms' and the *Symphonic Suite* from *On the Waterfront* are pretty well known,



certainly in the classical realm. But they're not known in jazz. One of the things I had in mind was to identify music that was clearly recognized as classical. My charge to the orchestrators was to find a fresh take on things that were very familiar in other genres and reimagine it in a jazz context."

The "orchestrators" to which Young referred are the arrangers Jay Ashby, Darryl Brenzel, Scott Silbert, Mike Tomaro and Steve Williams, who all are represented in the 10-track program.

Not all of the choices are obscure. "Times Square Ballet" (from *On The Town*), opens the album, welcoming the listener with a familiar tune, wrapped in Silbert's Ellingtonish blend of swinging brass and reeds, and invites the listener deeper into Bernstein's lesser-known world. "I've studied Ellington and love to play those plunger trombone parts," said Jennifer Krupa, who divides her time between the SJMO brass section and her role as the musical director for the Commodores, the premier jazz band of the U.S. Navy. "It was thrilling to take some of the Ellington elements and apply them to a completely different composer."

Young explained that Bernstein came of age during the height of the great 1930s swing bands and "couldn't help but be influenced by the harmonic innovation that was becoming a part of jazz then." Yet, most of Bernstein's music is completely overlooked by the jazz community.

"In revisiting his work to find what might speak to the jazz audience," Young explained, "I got past the more lyrical melodic material and moved into the emotional and harmonic corners of his music. If you can get past the simpler elements, then you see new possibilities. The music I chose was primarily for its emotional impact. A piece like 'Postlude,' from *A Quiet Place*, is rich and compelling for that reason. Does it lend itself to jazz? Absolutely. Especially when you think about how jazz colorations expanded in the 1940s, when so much of the impact was felt in its harmonic palette." Young believes that Bernstein had to be caught up in these influences.

The album, which was recorded in 2018 at Bias Studios in Springfield, Virginia, presented unique challenges for the players, because the music was new to the jazz world. "It wasn't like a Basie or Ellington program," Krupa said. "How do we play it? Do we swing certain figures? How much? In what manner? The music had never been done before. It demanded more investigation, because it had no history to draw on. So, we relied on or own educated guesses. We had a bunch of rehearsals and performed two concerts, which gave us a chance to live with it. But to this day, I can hear things I might do differently."

Young and the musicians are hopeful that an SJMO tour will be possible after the COVID-19 pandemic is more under control. Until that day arrives, *Bernstein Reimagined* will spark listeners' imaginations and help extend the maestro's remarkable legacy. *—John McDonough* 

# **Dayna Stephens Fulfills Long-Held Dreams**

**SAXOPHONIST DAYNA STEPHENS' WORLD**view differs from that of most people.

As the survivor of a rare kidney disease, he understood the threat of the impending global pandemic earlier than most. "At the beginning [of the outbreak], I was really freaked out, because I'm on immunosuppressant drugs to keep the kidney I received," he recalled. "I had a gig with [pianist] Kenny Barron in Atlanta ... and I was afraid to get on an airplane. So, I drove from New York to Atlanta."

Those early, uncertain days of the global health crisis proved transformative for the prolific multi-instrumentalist. Six months earlier, he had topped the category Rising Star-Tenor Saxophone in the 2019 DownBeat Critics Poll. And in February 2020, he launched *Liberty*, his first record for saxophone trio, released on his own label, Contagious Music. He was planning to self-release *Right Now! Live At The Village Vanguard*, the triumphal recording of his first run as a leader at the fabled West Village jazz club, in April. "But with the pandemic, it didn't seem right to release anything," he said.

Stephens had recorded these two career-expanding albums, each the fulfillment of a long-held dream, a month apart in early 2019. On *Liberty*, a spacious recording with bassist Ben Street and drummer Eric Harland, he shows off his talent for building complex musical structures—absent any chordal scaffolding.

Stephens borrowed from *Liberty* and his previous eight albums as a leader to create the set lists for his 2019 Vanguard residency, a six-night stint with Street, pianist Aaron Parks and drummer Gregory Hutchinson.

The live recording captures the quartet in deep concentration on more than a dozen tunes: Parks' comping with open, nuanced chords on "Ran"; Street's exacting, full-bodied solo on "Loosy Goosy"; Hutchinson's deftly punctuated swing on "Lesson One"; and Stephens' clever, monotone motion on "JFK International." Such moments reveal how carefully Stephens' ensemble executes his concepts.

By the time of the residency, Stephens already was a Vanguard veteran, having played there in groups alongside Barron every year since 2007. These annual gigs led, eventually, to an invitation to helm his own troupe at the club. "Getting a chance to play there as a leader was a special thing," he said. "Every time I enter that room, I become like a kid."

On Feb. 12 and 13, Stephens will return to that room to launch *Right Now!* via the club's livestream. For the saxophonist, at top of mind is



how much has changed since then-technologically, professionally and personally.

"There's an upside to being there on the stage [via streaming], inside of the music, with great sound. It's like having a front row seat," he mused, recalling the many videos of Vanguard performances that have influenced him. "For us musicians, though, it's not quite the same. The live interaction with the crowd isn't there."

But in some ways, he sees less interaction as a positive thing: "[The pandemic] has been a great time for self-reflection. I've learned that I need to spend more time [at home], to chill and meditate. With that in mind, I don't know if I'll be out as much, touring and playing." —*Suzanne Lorge* 



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# ETHAN IVERSON DOING BUD JUJST DE ENRIGHT PHOTO BY JIMMY KATZ

Whenever Ethan Iverson takes on a repertory project, his goal is to do two things simultaneously. "One side is to play it like the composer would want," said the Brooklyn-based pianist, a New York transplant from Menomonie, Wisconsin, who turns 48 on Feb. 11. "And then the other side is, you've got to make it very fresh and do something new. Both things are true. But you've got to choose your places for one or the other."

verson faithfully stuck to both self-imposed standards in creating *Bud Powell In The 21st Century*, a large-scale work that originated as a series of three commissioned performances for the 2018 Umbria Winter Jazz festival in Italy. Now, a recording culled from those shows is being released as a live album on the Sunnyside label.

Iverson's career has always struck a balance between the presentation of contemporary works and jazz history. Consider his long stint as a founding member of The Bad Plus (from 2000–2017) alongside his frequent ruminations on jazz icons of yesteryear in his blog Do the Math.

In recent years, Iverson has immersed himself in the world of large productions and specially commissioned works. In addition to leading the Powell project, he curated Duke University's 10-day MONK@100 event, put together an overview of the British jazz scene for the London Jazz Festival, wrote a piano concerto for the American Composers Orchestra, and arranged and composed Beatles-related content for the Mark Morris Dance Group production Pepperland.

As a longtime member of drummer Billy Hart's quartet, Iverson played the Village Vanguard's first livestreamed show in June. He recorded the 2018 duo project *Temporary Kings* (ECM) with tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, and 2019 saw the release of *Common Practice* (ECM), a live album with trumpeter Tom Harrell. Lately, Iverson has been posting videos of himself on Twitter playing his favorite TV theme songs. And he continues to teach at New England Conservatory.

Bud Powell In The 21st Century is a landmark not only in Iverson's discography but also in the legacy of Powell (1924– '66), a masterful pianist, bebop innovator and DownBeat Hall of Famer who remains underappreciated today. Iverson has stylishly recreated Powell's notoriously difficult compositions—which were almost always performed and recorded in a trio setting—for a concert-length big band production, using deep cuts Powell recorded with horns during a 1949 quintet session as his starting point.





With the blessing of Enzo Capua—a presenter at Umbria Jazz who helped conceive the Powell project—Iverson brought trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, tenor saxophonist Dayna Stevens, bassist Ben Street and drummer Lewis Nash along for the ride. Together, these five American jazz artists served as a core quintet that integrated itself into a larger ensemble of first-call Italian horn players assembled by the festival's musical director, Manuele Morbidini.

In their collective hands, Powell's music comes to life in fascinating new ways: as meditative chorales (called "Five Simple Spells") built upon bits of Powell melodies and improvisations, as fully fleshed-out big band orchestrations and as straightahead quintet arrangements. A pair of Iverson big band pieces composed just for the occasion are also part of the program. It all comes together as one gorgeously woven, grand tapestry that's simultaneously elegant and awe-inspiring.

For Jensen, the experience opened her ears to the more subtle aspects of Powell's work and sparked insights into her own playing. "When I was younger, bebop intimidated me because I didn't have much technique, and when Ethan asked me to do the project, I was like, 'I think you might have called the wrong person; I don't really play bebop," she said. "But at the same time, I really appreciate the way Bud approached the piano, so it deepened my awareness of the lineage. And it helped me get in touch with my inner bebopper-which isn't really bebop, if that makes sense. After doing this project and digging into the deep details, I realize that this is good music that expands through many different genres. I was like, 'This is just more deep, melodic music that I have to be able to rhythmically wrap myself around as much as I have to technically stop doubting myself."

Morbidini, who played alto saxophone in the big band, described the rehearsals and performances as an "extraordinarily stimulating" experience. "Bud Powell's music has the amazing ability to renew itself every time you listen to it," he wrote in an email from Italy. "There always seems to be some element that's new in a certain way, compared to the last time. I guess it depends on the (lucky) inability of my/our ears to grasp all that's in there at once. Dealing with it from the perspective of Ethan's vision amplified this effect: In every piece we worked on, an unexpected reference, an implicit assonance or simply something not so evident, resonated. It is a matter of details and surgical underlining—nothing is more seductive."

Iverson discussed his deep dive into Powell's music and shared personal reflections on his Umbria experience during a late-December phone call with DownBeat from his Brooklyn home.

The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

# Bud Powell In The 21st Century includes four tunes that Powell recorded in 1949 in a quintet setting, with Sonny Rollins on tenor saxophone and Fats Navarro on trumpet. Let's talk about how that material functions within the larger structure of the presentation, and how it served as the backbone for your original orchestrations.

That quintet material is the only music Bud wrote for horns. It was incredibly hard music, and you can really hear them struggling, as great as these guys are—Fats Navarro, Sonny Rollins, Roy Haynes and Tommy Potter. It's a pretty challenging session for everybody, except for maybe Bud. I would say Bud really knows what he wants, and he sounds like that as a player. But it was important to me in this project to treat that with reverence: to be like, we don't actually need to expand on that quintet music; we just should try to play it right.

# What are some of the more significant contributions to modern jazz piano that come out of Powell?

The number one bebop genius in terms of the improvised line is Charlie Parker. You even could say he gave us bebop, although other people were involved: Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach and Thelonious Monk. But I would say after Bird, the person with the most utterly devastating bebop line, as an improviser, is Bud Powell. And he's sort of unapproachable. He's very influential, but he's also up on a summit.

Of course, many people love their Bud Powell. A partial list would include Barry Harris, Tommy Flanagan, Hank Jones, Sonny Clark, Cedar Walton, Red Garland, Wynton Kelly, then finally to Herbie Hancock and McCoy Tyner. All these musicians, you know, would bow down to Bud as being "the source."

# I read something you posted online about how, in Powell's music, momentary imperfections are part of a deliberately unpolished aesthetic.

I think anyone who can play jazz at a pretty high level understands what I mean about a certain imperfection being part of a "secret sauce," especially in Bud's work. Not everyone would agree; Oscar Peterson famously said that Bud just played too many wrong notes. He was really critical of Bud as a player, which I think is not right. In Umbria, I actually cut a rehearsal because I thought it was sounding so good. And I thought there was no reason to try to force a final level of perfection into it. I thought, "Let's roll." The results were good. And the musicians love you when you cut a rehearsal.

### What was your impression of that orchestra? I understand they're somewhat of a regular group for various commission projects Umbria has presented in recent years.

I think there's something about Italians and bebop that really fit. It's dangerous to be too stereotypical because there are great musicians everywhere. But if you want to talk about playing some actual bebop, I think the country of Italy has a legacy of that.

# You've noted that two of Powell's most distinctive attributes are the vocal quality of his improvised lines and the complexity of his rhythms. Do you feel you were able to convey that in Umbria?

It's not on the album because of a copyright issue, but part of the official [staging] of my arrangement of "Bud Powell In The 21st Century" is that we play a tape of Bud scat-singing, which would then bleed into the French horn feature of "I'll Keep Loving You." I wanted to include the sound of Bud scatting because it's incredible, and it does clarify certain attributes of the music. We tend to think of bebop as a strictly instrumental music, but it's also a vocal music. It's also the blues. It's all of that folkloric information that's so crucial to getting it right. Lewis Nash is an incredible singer. He sings the blues, scats bebop, and he plays the drums that way, too. He has all these accents, and he shapes the line in a way that's very deep. It's very important for good bop to have that.

I think that as great as Bud Powell is, he is

essentially underrated. And this project is a way to at least put his name on the cover and be like, "Man, think about Bud Powell." And that part, I'm proud of. I can't remember who said this, but someone compared him to Monk and pointed out that Monk played his tunes over and over again, so everybody knows his tunes. All of Bud's great tunes, he played once. I think "Tempus Fugit" is a masterpiece. "Celia" is a masterpiece. He only recorded them both once. As far as I know, he didn't even play them on gigs. So that's part of the reason his compositions aren't as well known. He just didn't play them in public that often. They're also very, very hard. And I think in the '50s and '60s, even high-level jazz musicians didn't always play them right. They're very hard to learn. It's not just [dealing with] continuity. It's *discontinuity*. It comes from every angle.

### What did the other members of your core quintet bring to this project?

Ben Street is my man. I've hired him for almost all of my projects where I explore legacy music or legacy musicians. We played with Billy Hart; we played with "Tootie" Heath. He's on the record I released in 2019 with Tom Harrell [*Common Practice*, ECM]. He's someone who shows the way of how to be fresh and play yourself despite honoring the tradition. Someone like Ben, he doesn't say you have to play it like the record; he wants to play like it's 2020. But he also has done his homework. He's like, "OK, I'm really going to learn the tradition, but I'm really going to play it in a personal fashion."

Big band trumpet requires a certain personality. I heard Darcy James Argue's big band years ago, and Ingrid Jensen was playing. I was just blown away. I always liked her playing, but in the context of a big band, I was just like, Wow, she sounds really smoking. She's playing these hard parts, then she steps up and takes a solo. At that point, I thought, if I ever wrote big band music, and I needed a trumpet soloist, I should get Ingrid.

Dayna Stevens is a brilliant young voice on tenor. There are so many great tenor players, but Dayna stands out. He's personal. He's got some cheeky kind of surrealism in there. He's playful, but he's also a virtuoso.

### Let's talk about the original pieces you contributed.

When you do a repertory project, I think it's good to start with original material somehow. We can't do karaoke. We can't sit there and just play Bud Powell; it doesn't work. You've got to stamp it with something "today."

I saw Jason Moran and The Bandwagon, with bassist Tarus Mateen and drummer Nasheet Waits, play their Fats Waller project. When those guys play Fats Waller, it's so fresh. You can't even call it a repertory project, it's just so exciting. But I would say that almost nothing comes from nowhere. There's always a genre; there's always a container. Some people like to say, "There are no references in my music. It's totally original." But that's rarely true. Any single phrase you can play on any instrument comes with a heritage. So, in the postmodern era, it's just about understanding what that heritage is, and then controlling it in a good way.

Regarding the chorale that opens my piece "Bud Powell In The 21st Century," I think Bud would recognize those harmonies. They're a little crunchy. There's something crunchy in Bud's piano and Thelonious Monk's piano voicings that I love, and so the first thing I do is I present a chorale that's crunchy as all get-out. And then there's the continuity. In Part 2 of that piece, I play some of Bud's famous solo on "Cherokee," but there's a new bass line, and there's something about the harmony that's a little different. It's refracted into something else, but it wouldn't exist without Bud's phenomenal blowing on "Cherokee."

### Do the "Five Simple Spells" borrow from any other Powell pieces?

Yeah. Usually, there's a gesture from one of his quintet pieces [from 1949] that got me going in the composition. In fact, the very first "spell" is kind of based on one of the chords from Powell's composition "Glass Enclosure." Originally, we planned to play "Glass Enclosure," but then we ended up with almost too much music. So we cut "Glass Enclosure," but

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an echo of it remains in the first of the "spells." They all have one little idea pilfered from Bud that served as a place to start. Live, it's quite effective because the band plays these chorales without the quintet, and then we play the original quintet music. So it's sort of like there's a little volley back and forth: two minutes of chorale, three minutes of Bud. I'm happy with the record, but live it really worked. It was fun theatrically that way, too.

### What are some other examples of ways you incorporated bits of Bud into this project?

We played Bud's solo on "Celia," which is a masterpiece, as a saxophone-section soli. And you know, there is a tradition of bebop big band, which would include Gillespie and Gil Fuller, and then Thad Jones. And I like it. But it's not really my central aesthetic issue. I would say that I love small-group bebop, which is one reason I wrote those "Simple Spells" to intersperse with the quintet, because I didn't want to have an hour of thick, notey, big band charts. I would say my arrangement of "Tempus Fugit" is my one concession to the Gil Fuller tradition. You needed to have it in there. It's very beautiful. You've got to have one. But almost everything else is normal big band music.

I really love Carla Bley and what she did for Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra. And I love Stravinsky and his arrangements of older songs and classical music. And those two were people I thought about, like, How would Carla Bley arrange this? I would think that because it's simpler, it's more transparent. And it can be far more provocative. Because sometimes that modern big band style, with a lot of notes and all those bebop harmonies and screaming trumpets—it all sounds the same to me after a while. There's something I like about clarity; I want things to be very, very clear.

The first arrangement I wrote, I actually threw away. I wrote a big, long arrangement

of "John's Abbey" that had counterpoint and Thad Jones types of voicings and all this stuff. It went on for pages. It was like 10 minutes of big band charts from that world. And I sort of came to my senses: "Don't do this. Get it out of your system, but don't do this." I threw it away and made sure that everything I wrote had that kind of directness I really appreciate in the music I really love.

It's the easiest thing in the world when you're writing for all those instruments to make it very thick all the time. It becomes a real etude at some point. So when I talk about Bud Powell's vocal quality—that's what we need. We need the blues, we need vocal quality, we need simplicity. I once heard Ornette Coleman talking about his ideal orchestra: that you could hear every single person in the band while they were playing. You could hear their personality.

And that's much more my world. That's like Carla Bley, when she writes for the Liberation Music Orchestra. If you listen carefully, you can hear everybody playing their parts. The same thing with Duke Ellington's band. I'm not saying I got there with *Bud Powell In The 21st Century*, but I was trying for that. There's nothing particularly unique in what I wrote for the band in terms of standard instrument combinations. It's all sort of like Duke Ellington or Count Basie. But there are certain intervals that are my thing, and they're in this music.

# Many musicians, including Mark Turner, have mentioned your touch at the keyboard as being something that distinguishes your sound. Is there anything about Powell's touch that you've incorporated into your playing?

I'm still working on my touch, and I was actually practicing with some Bud this morning. I've got a long way to go. But there's something quite similar in the sonority between Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. Monk is a primary influence for me. For many of my contemporaries, Bill Evans was a real touchstone in terms of how to make the piano sound. And for me, that isn't what I thought about. I want to make the piano sound like Thelonious Monk. And that is perhaps closer to Bud. It's different, but Monk is a closer starting point to Bud than Bill Evans or someone like that.

# Will you be performing Bud Powell In The 21st Century in the future?

Absolutely. It has already been played once at New England Conservatory. The college band played it great, and I'm booked to do it in Washington, D.C., when we're back up and running. [Saxophonist] Brad Linde has a big band in D.C. and in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, and I'm supposed to do it with him. I would love to play it with college bands all over the country. It's not so hard that it can't be played. So it certainly would have a future.

# Tell me about your work on choreographer Mark Morris' hit production Pepperland.

I've had a very blessed life. One of the reasons is that in my 20s, I wasn't really playing jazz professionally yet. But I was doing other stuff in New York to get by. And I ended up in front of Mark Morris, which led to me playing for Mark and then becoming his music director for five years. He's one of the top choreographers of all time, so it was a profound lesson in the larger world of the arts. That opened me up to see the larger world of the arts, and communication, and the American spectrum of high to low, stuff that's very advanced and intellectual, and stuff that's sort of down-and-dirty and guttural. A lot of the best American art lives in the direct intersection of those things: high and low. And Mark is the master of it. Getting to apprentice with him was of incalculable value.

Then, like a miracle, the minute I left The Bad Plus, I got a commission from Mark to do this Beatles project in England celebrating 50 years of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band*. It was a huge hit in England and got rave reviews everywhere. And we put it on tour all over the world. We've done it probably 70 or 80 times at this point.

### Which Beatles tunes are heard in the show?

"Sgt. Pepper's," "With A Little Help From My Friends," "Within You Without You," "When I'm Sixty-Four" and "A Day In The Life." We add a sixth Beatles song, "Penny Lane," that's not from the album, but [it was recorded around the same time]. But it's an evening-length piece. So, how do you make an evening-length dance piece from these six short Beatles songs? I wrote this extended fantasia with different movements that, sort of like the Bud Powell "Simple Spells," have a tiny little piece of a Beatles tune that got me going. And then I wrote the rest of it. The band is great, including some Brooklyn jazz allstars like [soprano saxophonist] Sam Newsome, [trombonist] Jacob Garchik, [theremin specialist] Rob Schwimmer and [drummer] Vinnie Sperrazza.

The wild card was Schwimmer on theramin. He plays the melody on "A Day In The Life." It's sort of like the climax of the show, and there isn't a dry eye in the house. I gotta tell you, people lose their minds. It's so beautiful. And then, it's soprano sax and trombone. I love Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd, and that's what my idea is: Let's put Steve and Roswell in the pit with Sam Newsome and Jacob Garchik. We've got Colin Fowler on second keyboard; he's Mark's music director. And then the excellent singer Clinton Curtis. So it's eight of us altogether. There's no bass, which is kind of weird, except that I want to keep it in more of a musical-theater zone. If you have bass, then it's time to rock out. So often, rock revival things rock out harder and harder. The Pepperland music is quite delicate, more like European chamber music. We're supposed to play it again the minute we can.

# You started an epic run with The Bad Plus in 2000, and now you find yourself in the early stages of an entirely new chapter. When do you feel that the real Ethan Iverson took shape?

Even when I when I was a teenager, I was always aiming for 50. And, actually, I still feel like I'm pretty much on track. I've got two more years to really dial this in. And then I'll be good to go.

### Where are you heading now, in terms of reaching an artistic goal?

Well, it must be about synthesis, because I do really care about these different things. I really care about Bud Powell. I really care about Stravinsky. I really care about Burt Bacharach. I really care about TV themes. I really care about the avant-garde compositions of Ralph Shapey. But now that we're in the postmodern era, where everybody draws from all these traditions, the question is: How deep do you know each stream? I guess I'm trying to get a passing grade in all of these different elements so that I can control them confidently from my position as curator of the aesthetic, drawing on all these different things. I would never have the wisdom of the elders in any one language, but at least I get a passing grade in it.

### Do you have any predictions for what's going to happen in the world of the arts and the role the arts will play in post-pandemic society?

The only thing I can say is, once you don't

have anything, once you don't have what you had, you might realize how valuable it was. So it's up to the musicians and the painters and the poets and everybody to make art that reaches people and makes them demand it.

And if you're in the world of jazz, you've got to make music that makes people feel like, "I need more of that music." Everybody was going along at a certain speed before the pandemic. I think there's a possibility that given a new start, some musicians or artists or painters will have a new way of lighting a fire that everyone will get warmed by.



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# Gretchen Parlato RENAISSANCE IN BLOOM By Suzanne Lorge Photo by Lauren Desberg

In 2014, Gretchen Parlato's album *Live In NYC* earned her a Grammy nomination—a crowning glory to a decade of career triumphs—and then the singer-songwriter nearly dropped out of sight.

hrough the nine tracks on her new album, *Flor* (Edition), Parlato speaks to the personal transformation that inspired this career hiatus. The origin of the *Flor* project dates back to 2014, when Parlato collaborated with guitarist Marcel

Camargo—a friend since their days as ethnomusicology students at UCLA—on his fully orchestrated, self-produced EP *Behind Jobim*. Parlato was a natural choice as vocalist for the Brazilian jazz recording, not just for her rarefied vocal timbre, which lends itself so easily to the style, but for the specific bond the two musicians had forged over a shared love of Brazil's sultry song forms and bewitching rhythmic patterns.

Parlato, who was raised in a family of professional musicians, brought a discerning ear to the project—she'd spent decades immersed in the works of Brazilian composers and often included them in her performances. And Camargo, who was born in São Paulo, lent a native son's intuitive understanding of Brazilian idioms to the arrangements. Both agreed then that a project proceeding from this shared interest was in order.

But that session with Camargo would be Parlato's last project before her son, Marley, was born—many months before the Grammy awards were handed out on Feb. 8, 2015. *Live In NYC* would be her last leader date until *Flor*, scheduled for a March 5 release.

"When I was pregnant with Marley—and definitely once he was born—a feeling came over me to settle and focus, to shift my mindset to providing as stable an environment as possible for our family," Parlato explained in a Zoom call from the Los Angeles home she shares with her husband, drummer Mark Guiliana.

Stability on the home front meant that Parlato had to reprioritize the demands of her working life. So,

she vetoed grueling weeks on the road in favor of short, occasional tours with Marley in tow and contributing to other musicians' album projects while her own recording career remained on hold.



To understand the magnitude of this departure from the spotlight, consider Parlato's career trajectory pre-motherhood: She performed with jazz greats Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Terence Blanchard while still a student at UCLA. She won the 2004 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Vocals Competition and released her self-titled album the following year. Her subsequent albums—*In A Dream* (2009) and *The Lost And Found* (2011)—generated glowing reviews, and she topped the category Rising Star–Female Vocalist in the 2011 DownBeat Critics Poll.

Not surprisingly, those early years of Marley's life were something of "a blur," Parlato recalled. But as the pressures of new parenthood eased over time, she began to muse about the interruption to her artistic life. These musings in turn prompted a wealth of new material that tapped into Parlato's deep feelings about becoming a mother—melodies with lullaby strains, lyrics about change and acceptance, choruses ringing with joy at newfound wonders.

"Once Marley turned 3 or 4, I could finally pen the lyrics about this precious time," Parlato explained. "I hadn't given myself time to write about it, because it felt very private. Sometimes, it's easier to write about heartbreak, though that's private, too. But this was good and joyous, so I felt protective about it. It took some time for me to put it into words."

While the compositions took shape, Parlato started to pull together that Brazilian-focused group with Camargo. Such an ensemble would afford a natural return both to performing and to the gently swaying songs that had proved foundational to her development as a vocalist.

For the resultant album, which also features drummer-percussionist Léo Costa and cellist Artyom Manukyan, Parlato chose the name *Flor*, the Portuguese word for "flower." As both a descriptor for the group's delicately crafted sound and a metaphor for Parlato's artistic process, this name holds great meaning for the vocalist.

"The imagery of a flower is so profound to me," Parlato said. "I was thinking of a plant that is dormant in the winter, where there's nothing happening. It seems to be gone. That's how it felt when I took time off for motherhood. I was thinking, 'Where did she go? Where's the creativity? The album? The touring?' I knew it was still there, that it [would] come back again."

Parlato's artistic renaissance began with a few gigs to play the new material "here and there," she said, in Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and New York. To prepare for them, she turned to Camargo—who'd signed on as musical director—to arrange a mixed repertoire that ventured beyond fresh originals and treasured Brazilian standards into jazz settings of European classical music and surprising refurbishments of American pop songs. These tunes, personalized to Parlato's minimalist aesthetic, would constitute the group's program for both its tours and inaugural release.

"There's always an essence in the original [tune] that should be protected. I try to find that first—it's the thing that draws me to the material," Parlato said about her approach to new repertoire. "But as much as I love the original piece, it wouldn't make sense if I did an exact imitation. So, I use a method where I first deconstruct a song, then reconstruct it.

"The deconstruction comes with finding the purest melody and harmony and structure [of a piece]. I get to that bare-bones state, and then everything that I use in reconstructing it comes from my vision, my story. I try to find that beautiful balance between honoring what the song is and doing something different, so that people can hear it in a new way."

In listening to "É Preciso Perdoar," *Flor's* first track, one can hear the bits that constitute its essence—the lilting melody, the wistful lyrics, the mesmeric polyrhythm. As Parlato weaves her own English-language text in with the original Portuguese, she amplifies the melancholy threaded throughout the song made famous by João Gilberto in 1973.

This aesthetic choice brings to the fore a truth about Brazilian music: Much of its beauty derives from the implacable longing it conveys. But mothers' laments—like Parlato's here are rarely, if ever, expressed in jazz, Brazilian or otherwise.

She continues to distinguish herself as a lyri-

cist on "What Does A Lion Say," a silvery waltz by bassist Chris Morrissey, offset with a dark ostinato, sweeping arco cello lines and acoustic hand percussion. On this gorgeous tune, Parlato ponders the ephemera of parenthood—this time in wonder at her child's rapid metamorphosis.

"It hit me the other day, how the image of a flower is the perfect symbol for mindfulness, for being in the moment," she said, discussing the album's recurring theme. "You have to be appreciative of all the stages of its growth. When it finally blooms, it's a perfect thing that only lasts for a short time, and then it goes into another form. If I try to hold on, I feel the suffering [that comes from] wanting things to stay the same."

Parlato also contributed compositions to the project—two songs that exult with youthful elation, even as they impart sophisticated jazz concepts. She wrote the openhearted "Magnus," with its tricky 13/8 bass line, from an impromptu lullaby sung by a friend's preschooler to his soonto-be-born brother. Parlato brought the real-life Magnus, now a teenager, and his younger siblings—Thaddeus and Ashley—into the studio to record the tune's twining, layered chorus.

Parlato later explores the concept of a child's inner world on her tune "Wonderful," released as the album's first single in late 2020. Clean and direct, the track's repeated hook, backed by the crisp rhythm section, becomes a mantra of self-affirmation as it passes from Parlato to a children's chorus. The children—all related to the band members in some way—feel no hesitation in asserting their inherent value through extemporaneous spoken word. (Guests on the track include Guiliana and pianist Gerald Clayton.)

"Wonderful' is essentially about what [Marley] represents as a child. When we're young, we feel invincible. We know how amazing we are and we say it all the time," Parlato said. "But there's something that happens as we age, where we stop saying it, and maybe stop feeling it. This song is a reminder for adults, too, to know your value and your worth."

In contrast with the original compositions and their purposeful lyrics, two selections on the album show off Parlato's virtuosity with wordless, straight-toned vocalizing: "Rosa," by Brazilian *choro* composer Pixinguinha, and Bach's "Cello Suite No. 1, BWV 1007: Minuet I/II." Parlato's voice lies at its most exposed on these tracks, as she doubles Manukyan's pizzicato cello on the Pixinguinha tune and sings a cappella for almost two minutes on the Bach piece. These classical performances—voice intertwined with strings in shifting combinations are exquisite in their simplicity.

Credit for these conceptual pieces goes to Camargo, who not only suggested them to Parlato, but also proposed using cello instead of bass throughout the album.

"Traditionally, there is no bass in Brazilian music. People play a seven-string guitar, which has one low string," Camargo noted. "Many of the arrangements I was bringing [to the project] were guitar-[centered] ideas already, so there was no need for a bass, really. Instead, I thought we could use the chair for someone like Artyom, who can play the cello as a cello, but also the cello as a bass.

"This is nice with Gretchen's singing, too, because her voice is delicate, intimate. Sometimes you add a bass, and the music becomes very big. This [instrumentation] helps her voice to shine."

Parlato again sings without lyrics on "Roy Allan"—this time alongside legendary Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira, famous for his work with Chick Corea, Miles Davis and Antônio Carlos Jobim. The track—a tribute to trumpeter Roy Hargrove (1969–2018)—opens with Moreira alone, extemporizing with vocal percussion, shakers, whistles, bells and drums to establish a riveting samba for Parlato's vocalese. Through overdubs, this jaunty melody expands into a full choral passage at the tune's apogee, only to diminish gradually into Moreira's striated improvisation. It's a breathless ride.

Moreira, who lives in Brazil, has never met Parlato. He recorded his contribution to "Roy Allan" in his own studio and forwarded the track to fellow Brazilian Costa, with whom he has collaborated for many years. Even without meeting her, though, Moreira knows well who Parlato is.

"The first time I heard of Gretchen was through Flora," Moreira wrote in an email, referring to his wife, Brazilian jazz singer Flora Purim. "She was on the jury [at the 2004 Monk competition] and couldn't stop talking about this unpretentious young girl who was improvising without hesitation. Sitting next to Flora was Quincy Jones, and he commented how [Gretchen] just came out of nowhere. The rest is history. Gretchen is now one of the best jazz singers around."

Though noted for her exceptional soloing skill, Parlato doesn't use *Flor* as a vehicle for improvising. She stretches the bounds in other ways, though—through the odd meter on a version of Anita Baker's 1986 r&b hit "Sweet Love," for instance. Such innovation creates a slightly off-kilter feel that leaves the listener unsure of Parlato's next step, the way an improvisation would; Clayton's sleek comping on Fender Rhodes only adds to the tune's spontaneous vibe.

"The bulk of the ['Sweet Love'] arrangement came together when we were in Melbourne and at rehearsal," Camargo said. "This is something interesting about Gretchen: Whenever she feels that things are starting to settle, maybe a little too much, she'll throw in something to push us in a different direction. She pushed to take that tune somewhere else. I like that about her, because a lot of artists want to stick with what they know. But she wants to find something new."

For the album's closing tune, Parlato selected David Bowie's "No Plan," the title cut from the superstar's posthumous 2017 EP. Guilianawho contributed to the EP, as well as Bowie's final album, *Blackstar*—sits in on the intense track, adding to its relentless momentum. Much of the thrill here comes from the effects added in post-production—the echoes, oscillations and ethereal extrapolations that pay homage to Bowie's singular eccentricity.

On this tune, Bowie's lyrics about living with an uncertain future seem to resonate with Parlato; of all the tracks on the album, she sounds the most vulnerable on this one. It's easy to imagine, in listening to the lyrics, that where Bowie was contemplating death, Parlato was contemplating birth. Or rebirth. Or simply change, in its many guises.

Parlato and her band recorded the album in Brooklyn in early 2019, two days after a gig at the now-defunct Jazz Standard. That summer, Parlato and her family moved from New York, where she had spent much of her career, to Los Angeles, where she had grown up. Her plan was to continue enhancing the album in post-production, and when it was complete, to schedule a tour around its release. The pandemic changed all of that, of course.

Fortuitously, independent jazz label Edition Records—home for recording artists Kurt Elling, Chris Potter and Lionel Loueke—was interested in the album, pandemic or no. Parlato liked the deal on offer, which included her first vinyl release, and signed on.

"It's clear that Edition is the kind of label that supports its artists completely," she said. "It's a saving grace to be on board."

These days, however, Parlato is content to stay home, sharing parental duties with Guiliana, working on her music and teaching remotely. She explained that she wonders whether it would be possible just to make music at home and stop performing onstage altogether. But then she remembers the connection with the audience, how live music *feels*. So, she remains open to an uncertain future and waits for coming possibilities to unfold. Like a flower. **DB** 

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# Gary Bartz BRDGGNG BY DAVE CANTOR PHOTO BY MARK SHELDON GENERATIONS

Gary Bartz has watched the slow roll of history drag on, first from the vantage point of his childhood home in Baltimore, then in New York and the rest of the world while on tour.

The experiences have given the saxophonist perspective and a unique voice, one that's resonated with generations of musicians and listeners.

"They're our kids—the hip-hop generation. Jay-Z, his mom and dad used to come to The East to see me and to see Pharoah [Sanders]. All these kids had those records in their homes. ... It's an extension of what we're doing—I saw that immediately," Bartz, 80, said during a late-December Zoom call from his current, well-lighted home in Oakland, California.

Hearing that slant from the saxophonist explains how in 2020 he was able to record a pair of albums with performers decades younger than him, while remaining engaged with the students he teaches at Oberlin College and Conservatory in Ohio. But Bartz—whose work frequently has been sampled by hip-hop producers—still sees a need for change, musically and otherwise.

"We came up in a time when you couldn't just say certain things. I mean, it was bad enough if you didn't say things. So, if you said things, it was really bad—because we don't own anything," Bartz said. "I grew up in a segregated city: Baltimore, Maryland. Totally segregated, everything: the nightclubs, the movie theaters. In the so-called 'public park,' there was the so-called 'Black tennis court,' the so-called 'white tennis court.' Everything was segregated: My mom couldn't try on clothes in department stores. To think that in this 'modern age,' something like that in this 'democracy'—it's still happening. I mean, this is the most segregated country I've ever seen."

Bartz has maintained both a dedication to espousing the reality he sees and furthering musical explorations, something he was able to do with a UK ensemble for the Night Dreamer release Gary Bartz & Maisha—Night Dreamer Direct-To-Disc Sessions, as well as on the latest entry in the Jazz Is Dead catalog. On that latter album, JID006, the composer works alongside accomplished multi-instrumentalists Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad, a co-founder of hip-hop troupe A Tribe Called Quest.

"I don't want this to be out of place, but I feel that [Bartz and his peers] were fighting for something really important and valuable at the time—and that's why I'm kind of cautious in the way I say it," Muhammad recently told DownBeat during a Zoom interview from his Los Angeles enclave.





"When [Bartz] walked into the studio, I was like, 'Who is this 30-something-year-old man coming in here?' Because his energy level was just that youthful. But there's periods of his work that made such a difference in trying to push back against what life was like for them in their younger days. No differently than what Tribe was doing when we were 19. No different than what the younger generations are doing right now with the way that America is. And it still matters. It's very important to always make that connection, to never disconnect from all the adversity that these luminaries had to go through, just to bring their horn into a room, to bring their guitar into a room, bring their drumsticks into a room. It's really important, and their music still matters. It's just that simple.

"It may seem a bit cliche, but it really is important, which is what Jazz Is Dead is all about. It's really highlighting these luminaries and showing that their art matters, and it should be celebrated and should be honored. Blow the dust off of it, listen to it again and again and learn something new. I guarantee you heard one song 20 years ago and you'd hear it differently now."

Muhammad and Younge recently have released similarly premised recordings with vibraphonist Roy Ayers, keyboardist Doug Carn and Brazilian fusionists Azymuth, among others. But the albums grew out of live events the pair held while being spurred on by their manager, Dru Lojero, who was looking to spotlight jazz's current viability and vibrancy—in a prepandemic era, at least. There're more albums on the way, too. The only requirement seems to be that would-be collaborators deeply influenced the path Muhammad and Younge have followed.

"Well, they're all masters. It's like, when can they be here? The door's open," Muhammad said about landing musical coconspirators for the series. "When we started knocking on the door and people would see [the name] 'Jazz Is Dead,' they slammed the door on us. It was like, 'Who are these people? Is this a joke? Is this real?' Lonnie Liston Smith was one example. The fact that my name was attached to it made him go, 'OK, what are they doing? Do they really honor jazz? Tell me more.'

"Then, it's not until they're physically in the room with 500 very excited people-all ages, all ethnicities-losing it, that they really go, 'Wow, you guys are doing something really special.' And we're like, 'Great. Now, can we take this across the street to the studio and capture another level of [what] you're feeling? Because we know that your music has done everything to get us to where we are in all aspects of our career. And we know there's a lot more in you that maybe people are not [hearing].' So, when Adrian and I go into the studio, we take-not their greatest hits-but the feeling of the songs that have impacted us, and we go, 'All right, that's the foundation, and we're going to sprinkle in some new stuff on top of it."

On the Azymuth recording, *JID004*, ensemble members unflinchingly deliver strains of Brazilian jazz with lush melodies and vibrational polyrhythms, though a bit less reliant on funk than the band's earlier, 1970s incarnation. Carn, though, frequently sounds tentative at the organ on *JID005*, despite finding his footing on super-funky cuts like "Lions Walk."

For some, entrusting their sound—and potentially their legacies—to a pair of musicians and producers from a place just adjacent to the jazz world might be difficult. Bartz, though, seemed game from the start.

Out of everything Muhammad and Younge have set to tape for the label so far, their session with the saxophonist—who contributed to recordings by Miles Davis, McCoy Tyner, Joey DeFrancesco and a raft of other jazz luminaries—easily is the most beat-centric affair, coming off like a live band recreating and extending its favorite drum breaks.

"Adrian and I, our foundation is hip-hop," Muhammad said. "So, that means—at least in my era of hip-hop, because it's something completely different now—it was about the breakbeat. It was about finding all those records mostly jazz—that had the illest breakbeat sections. There's some funk records that had some great breakbeats as well. But jazz—it was something different, even the sonics of it. When you listen to a break from a James Brown recording, it's just different. [The drums] were mic'd differently. So, there's that, there's the bass line, there's the melody.

"Listening to Gary, the other element that comes [across] in addition to those, obviously, is the freeness of his horn playing, and also some of his lyrical melodies that exist in the songs. We wanted to capture that—just those elements. ... And so, him coming in and listening to the music, we're saying, 'We really want you to be you.' That's what he did. I think that had he come in and said, 'You know what, guys? I want to change this and I want to change that,' we're completely open to it and we expressed that. But he was actually comfortable with what he was hearing."

"Spiritual Ideation," the album's first track, benefits from Bartz's fantastical fluidity on alto saxophone, moving into its higher register when he feels the music needs that sort of underlining. (He picks up the soprano only for "The Message.") The same holds true for "Distant Mode," a tune that leans on Greg Paul's flurry of drumming, and the round and resonant electric bass tones that have emerged as a signature of the Jazz Is Dead recordings.

"Well, for the most part, they're like Monk and myself—the way they look at the recording process. They like the first take," Bartz said. "I like to be prepared, but I still like first takes. I've had so many different musical experiences that I look at each one like an actor looks at a role. I always want to know: What is my role in this project?"

In addition to his disregard for genre designations, Bartz often summons a familiar riff that summarizes his absolute adherence to the idea of listening and serving the music, as opposed to constantly firing off self-centered aggrandizements.

"I don't hear much music being played today," he asserted. "I hate to say it, but all I hear is ego. It's not about you. It's about the music.

"When I used to walk away from listening to John Coltrane, I wasn't thinking about him. I was thinking about the music, because that's what he was thinking about. It wasn't about him: 'Look how good I am and how many notes I can play.' Now, it's about ego, and part of that has to do with education. This is my big beef right now. This music, created in this country by people from my community and immigrants, is the greatest music ever created on this planet. There's been nothing close. To take a concept that started probably before Bach, and was done with Beethoven and Mozart-they all did theme and variation. They all did that. Every virtuoso can do a theme and variation. Beethoven used to ask the audience for melodies, and he would take those melodies and vary them. That's what virtuoso musicians do. ...

"What we discovered, and this was the great thing, is how to do it with a group of people. No one could ever do a theme and variations with two people, even; if they knew each other real good, maybe they could. But with five, six, seven, a big band of people—are you kidding? So, that in itself is a heck of a step. Greatest music ever. But yet, in the school curriculums of the United States, we value more the music from another culture and country— European classical."

That's not the only miscalculation Bartz has worked to clarify during his career as a performer and educator. However much jazz (a term Bartz doesn't use) is built upon the heroic notion of expressions of self, the saxophonist sees a practice believed to be integral to the form as a misnomer.

"I call it composing. People want to call it improvising. It's not improvised. Improvising means you didn't know what you were doing; you just did it right then," he said. "No, 60 years of study is not an improvisation. Everything I play, I meant to play it. And when I make a mistake, that's an improvisation—which I don't do too many of. But no one knows it, because I know how to clean it up. Every composition should have a great beginning, good thematic material in the middle and a great ending. If that doesn't happen, then it's not a great composition. But every chorus of a solo, you're recreating the theme that you're playing on. It's a composition; each chorus is composition, which is why it's copyrightable. I have a plan. Every solo I take, I have a plan."

His musical blueprint also incorporates a sociopolitical element, stretching from his time with Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln in the '60s to his stint in the '70s with the Mtume Umoja Ensemble and his NTU Troop, a group that sported lyrics directly and metaphorically addressing violence at home and abroad, and perhaps ranks as the closest sonic antecedent to his work with Jazz Is Dead.

"I write songs about everything, about life. And usually about something that's interesting me at the time," Bartz said. "Just living in this country under a racist system makes me think about it all the time, and you have to fight it. You go other places and you don't feel it, you don't see it. It might be there, and there may be prejudices, but those systems are not built on it. This system is built on racism and genocide. Until we figure out and decide that we want to be good human beings, it's going to continue.

"When you're young, you say, 'We're gonna fight and maybe by the time I'm 40 or 50, we will have overcome all of this.' History is slow. We won't see it—maybe in 200, 300 years, if ever."

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# **INDIE LIFE** SARAH ELIZABETH CHARLES



# ACE & SELF-REFLECTI solace and self-reflection and self-care," she said.

s an aspiring jazz singer, the teenage Sarah Elizabeth Charles wanted to be Sarah Vaughan. But after writing a lot of tunes that she imagined Vaughan might have sung, the Massachusetts native sensed that the music was not a fully authentic expression of her artistic self. She needed to reassess her goals. And she did so when she moved to New York and enrolled at The New School.

"I was beginning to see that there was a part of my voice that I wasn't allowing to come through," she said in a December conversation via Zoom. "I remember during my freshman year going out to hear so much music in New York, and all of it sounded so different and all of it was jazz. I thought, 'Maybe if I just let myself be for a little while, my voice has validity here. It just has to find its own space.""

It has. In the nine years since finishing her New School studies, she has prospered as a purveyor of social commentary, releasing protest albums with her band, SCOPE. Complementing that work, she has lectured New School students on jazz and gender, coached members of the Sing Sing Correctional Facility musical community and generally distinguished herself as an outspoken teaching artist.

Now, as she shelters in place during the pandemic, she is raising her voice by reducing the volume. Her new release, Tone (BaldHill), is a reflective duo effort crafted with her husband, pianist Jarrett Cherner. The album, eight songs written and produced during the past four years, should calm nerves shaken by the sound and fury of that time.

"This project, for me, has been a place of

To be sure, the album has its provocations. Cocooned in the Brooklyn apartment she shares with Cherner-and the couple's "quarantine guru," a cat named Raj-Charles cited "Shine On" as a tune that features both blues inflections and blunt point-making. The lyrics include this mantra: "Shine on, shine and be you."

"Shine On' is that song of self-love in the face of somebody telling you that you shouldn't have it," Charles explained.

But the album's tone generally is more plaintive than provocative. "Hanging On To Time" sustains a compelling mood of melancholy. It opens with the words of the title perched on the first five notes of a minor scale, and it closes with the melody hanging on the title words of a Robert Frost poem on which the tune is based, "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

The themes are not all tinged with sadness. If "Hanging On" stresses time's inevitable passing, "Out Loud" suggests that we can at least change our relationship to it. With a cool, clear and remarkably elastic delivery, Charles implores people to seize the day, her vowels stretched endlessly as the tempo crawls beneath the words: "If we wait then time can/ Slow right down."

"That moment is less about slowing time down and more about slowing ourselves down and allowing ourselves to be present in whatever time's dealing us at any given moment," Charles explained. "That's part of what took us so long with [the album]. We were just trying to be as present as possible and prioritize our relationship above anything else."

Navigating the creative process, Cherner said, had not always been easy: "Part of working together and being a couple is negotiating familiar routes of conflict that don't necessarily have to do with the music but have to do with the relationship. We took some advice from a dear friend: No matter what happens, the relationship always comes first."

The two musicians' collaborative efforts were so intertwined that they share songwriting credits on seven of the eight tunes. During the composition process, Charles generally devised the lyrics while Cherner drafted the music, but the artists sometimes would change roles, with him singing and her playing piano, in order to spark new ideas.

Sharing physical space, they shaped the sonic environments with similar intimacy while quarantined. They laid down basic tracks in July 2019 at Big Orange Sheep studio in Brooklyn and did additional recording at home in 2020 leading up to the album's release Nov. 6 via Cherner's label. The hope, he said, is that the label can "grow with us as we continue to release more music."

That forthcoming music might include a document of free improvisations, like the ambitious set the duo produced for the Nov. 7 edition of The Jazz Gallery's livestream series, The Online Lockdown Sessions. Other options include a record with strings or a standards album-the latter an intriguing prospect, given the experience Charles has gained since her would-be incarnation as Vaughan. Her mind, she said, is open: "I just want people to hear our music."

-Phillip Lutz

# **INDIE LIFE**

# ALONZO DEMETRIUS

# D BY ACTIVIS

rumpeter Alonzo Demetrius' thirst for social justice is evident on his leader debut, Live From The Prison Nation. "Movements transform people from individuals to a collective": Those words from journalist and activist Mumia Abu-Jamal are incorporated into "Mumia's Guidance," an ambitious, nine-minute track on the album. The disc reflects many lessons Demetrius learned while earning both a bachelor's and master's degree from Berklee College of Music in Boston. But they went much deeper than licks and chords.

In the wake of the deaths of Black citizens Freddie Gray and Sandra Bland (who each died while in police custody during 2015), Demetrius attended a number of protests in Boston, which provided pivotal experiences. "The initial concept for the album was around police brutality, but as I was doing my research, I dove into Angela Davis' work on the prison-industrial complex," he said. "It became apparent to me that I needed to have her as a feature, even if it's just to give some context." The album's powerful opener, "Expectations," includes a recording of Davis.

The album's title itself was inspired by the signature signoff Abu-Jamal-a podcaster who's been imprisoned for four decades: "From the prison nation, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal." Demetrius chose to sample a recording of Abu-Jamal because he said it expresses "the power that communities have when they come together to make really lasting change."

Demetrius wanted the album to inspire action. He crafted teaching tools to accompany the music, working with his mother, Latrice Torres, who has years of experience developing adult-education workshops and curricula. The pair created the Music To Action page on his website, which has discussion resources associated with four of the six songs on the album. Additionally, Demetrius offers facilitated workshops to spark discussions about prison reform.

The trumpeter and his quintet, dubbed The Ego, recorded Live From Prison Nation in 2019 at Berklee. One of Demetrius' key mentors, drummer and Berklee educator Ralph Peterson,

DOXAS

released the album on his independent label, **Onvx** Productions.

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"[Peterson] took me under his wing and really empowered me with the idea that what I have to say, my musicality, is important," Demetrius noted. In explaining why he wanted to release the album through Onyx, he cited Peterson's connection to drummer/bandleader Art Blakey and "the legacy of uplifting and providing a platform for younger, up-and-coming musicians."

In a separate interview, Peterson explained that he was impressed by Demetrius' "social justice message as much as his musical message." He added, "The fact that Alonzo's music has today's edge on it is exactly what I wanted for the label."

Prison Nation is one of only two titles in the Onyx catalog that are not credited to Peterson or one of the bands he leads. (The other is singer Lainie Cooke's 2015 release, The Music Is The Magic, which, unlike Demetrius' album, features Peterson on drums.)

He explained that he views artists as "the conscience of society," adding that making



Hasaan Ibn Ali – Piano / Odean Pope – Tenor Sax Art Davis – Bass / Kalil Madi – Drums





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"His playing has a relaxed assurance that comes with countless hours of playing, the finesse that abides each note and the prowess that can only come with the relationship formed with the player and instrument through time.'

-Geannine Reid, All About Jazz
political statements can be a risky move. But Peterson surmised that Demetrius has "the strength of character to take risks."

The trumpeter acknowledged the risks associated with releasing explicitly political music. But he believes that music is inherently political: "It has to be, especially when it's coming from the perspective of somebody who's been marginalized." However, he finds that "there is a large gap in framing the social and political context of the musicians that we're studying in school. It's notes, it's theory, it's licks, but what was going on in the world when this music was being made?"

Demetrius said that during his musical training, he wondered why some educators seemed intent on teaching him to simply "replicate, replicate, replicate," resulting in "being judged on how well I'm doing somebody else's music, and how well I'm speaking with somebody else's voice.

"There was a whole lot more to [legacy artists] than just notes on paper. And I feel ignoring that is stripping all of the culture away from it. It's really removing the Blackness from it."

He added, "You can't replicate humanity."

The teachers he strongly gravitated to at Berklee, like saxophonist Tia Fuller, offered the context he craved, along with a teaching style that resonated with him: "At no point did she ever say, "That lick you played was wrong." It was, "That was cool, the lines were good. You just didn't hit the 'third dimension.""

A is the Winc



Eventually, he asked her what the third dimension was. "It became almost a lesson in spirituality and being true to yourself," he recalled. Describing Fuller as a "ridiculously powerful, ridiculously successful, Black, strong woman," he praised her for instilling in him the idea that achieving mastery is about more than simply playing the right notes. He realized that he needed to play from his own perspective. He needed to be "playing life."

Listening to *Prison Nation*, it's evident that he has taken that lesson to heart. —*Ayana Contreras* 

# Debut Album

Introducing Wild is the Wind from vocalist Kari Kirkland. Featuring: Roy Hargrove, Dean Parks, John Daversa, Gregg Field, Kevin Axt, Brian Kilgore, and Shelly Berg

"There is a depth of truth and heart in her singing that is very, very compelling. I'm proud and blessed to have done this project with her Shelly Berg, Arranger/ Produce

#### **INDIE LIFE**

# ARBORS RECORDS PUTS ART FIRST

or more than 30 years, the independent label Arbors Records has put artistic concerns ahead of budgetary ones. Based in Clearwater, Florida, Arbors is run by Rachel Domber, who cofounded the label with her husband, Mat, who passed away in 2012.

Among the artists associated with the label are pianists Dick Hyman, John O'Leary and Rossano Sportiello, bassist/vocalist Nicki Parrott, clarinetist Ken Peplowski and reedist Scott Robinson.

"After my husband died, I decided that I was going to continue focusing on music," Domber said over the phone. "I'm funneling a lot of money into the record business because I just feel like I have to do that. I want to pay the musicians fairly. In fact, I'm paying them [more] right now because of the virus. Instead of donating to a cancer fund or Make-A-Wish and all that, I'm donating my money to the musicians."

Among the label's recent releases is a pandemic-themed album, *The Lockdown Blues*, by Professor Cunningham & His Old School. Vocalist/instrumentalist Adrian Cunningham—who plays clarinet, saxophone and flute, and who frequently tours in trombonist Wycliffe Gordon's band—has a long relationship with Arbors. In addition to leader dates under his own name (such as his acclaimed 2019 disc, *Play Lerner & Loewe*), Cunningham releases retro-leaning, dance-worthy titles billed to his "Professor" persona.

The Lockdown Blues features Cunningham's original compositions, including "Six Feet Is Too Far From You." Because the album was created during the pandemic, all eight musicians involved recorded their parts in their individual homes. The process required careful communication between Cunningham, his bandmates and audio engineer Bill Moss. The result is a seamless gem of an album.

"I really had to conceptualize how it was going to sound before I passed the charts out," Cunningham said via Zoom from Barcelona. "I had to have it conceptualized as much as possible, in terms of the arrangement and the energy. Because if the drummer is laying down a track, he doesn't know what's happening unless



I know what's happening. So I would tell him, 'OK, on these four bars, the horns are going to come in.''

Another gifted musician on the label's roster is Brazilian guitarist Diego Figueiredo, whose new album, *Antarctica*, features solo acoustic guitar tunes, as well as quartet tracks.

"I'm really happy and proud to be an Arbors Records artist," Figueiredo wrote via email from Brazil. "I love working with Rachel. She gives great support, besides being a wonderful person. I want to continue my work with Rachel for many, many years." —Bobby Reed





Jed Levy – tenor saxophone Adam Klemm – soprano saxophone

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#### Dr. Lonnie Smith Breathe BLUE NOTE B0033277

The stylistic parameters of "organ jazz" are so cemented at this late date, it's easy to believe that gritty grooves and churchy exclamations are the sole elements of a B-3 outfit's presentation. The aesthetic of 78-year-old Hammond maestro Dr. Lonnie Smith includes those essentials of course, and has from the get-go: Just check out the off-hand fervor of his spin on Little Walter's "My Babe" from his 1967 debut, *Finger Lickin' Good Soul Organ.* But Smith usually has something up his sleeve when it comes to enhancing the predictable approach of greasy vamps and swinging funk, and this live album has a handful of gambits to further the hopped-up soul strut expected from the form.

Recorded at New York's Jazz Standard in 2017, a bandstand immediacy courses through *Breathe*. The shows were part of a 75th birthday bash, and wisely the good doctor surrounded

himself with a feisty horn section. The expanded palette widens the music's scope. Frenetic blasts of punctuation, like those that adorn "Track 9," are so fierce, it's easy to forget this is an organ record. John Ellis, an extraordinarily expressive saxophonist, tears it up on tenor, and then trumpeter Sean Jones and bari saxophonist Jason Marshall throw gasoline on his fire. For nine minutes, it sounds like Tower Of Power at The Plugged Nickel.

The set's ballad is "World Weeps." While managing to wax both ominous and vulnerable, it delivers opportunities for guitarist Jonathan Kreisberg and the leader himself to develop valuable thoughts in a rather short time frame. The precision of the band's interplay shines here, and both solos build incrementally, calibrating drama with an expert touch. The act of patiently unpacking an idea just might be Smith's superpower. Dynamics rule, mere titillation is banished.

That doesn't mean the music isn't fiery. "Bright Eyes" and "Too Damn Hot" can be both buoyant and boisterous—refinement is central to the equation, especially when drummer Johnathan Blake nurtures a series of syncopation tacks on "Epistrophy" (he, in fact, burns throughout the program). Even the hymn featuring vocalist Alicia Olatuja is sparked by an enviable ardor.

The true surprises on *Breathe* are the disc's bookends, two studio features by Iggy Pop that find the rock icon trading his "TV Eye" yelp for a plush bari murmur. Timmy Thomas' "Why Can't We Live Together" is as slinky as one might hope, and Donovan's "Sunshine Superman," in the organist's book for about 50 years, delivers the shrugged-off savvy that's long been key to Pop's persona. Oddly, they integrate nicely with the live tracks. "Everybody's hustlin' just to have a little scene," purrs Iggy. Dr. Smith has definitely found his. *—Jim Macnie* 

Breathe: Why Can't We Live Together; Bright Eyes; Too Damn Hot; Track 9; World Weeps; Pilgrimage; Epistrophy; Sunshine Superman. (53:47)

Ordering info: bluenote.com

Personnel: Dr. Lonnie Smith, organ; Jonathan Kreisberg, guitar; Johnathan Blake, drums; John Ellis, tenor saxophone (2, 3, 4, 6); Jason Marshall, baritone saxophone (2, 3, 4, 6); Sean Jones, trumpet (2, 3, 4, 6); Robin Eubanks, trombone (2, 3, 4, 6); Alicia Olatuja (6), Iggy Pop (1, 8), vocals; Richard Bravo, percussion (1, 8).



#### **Dezron Douglas & Brandee Younger** *Force Majeure* INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM 0038

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM 003  $\bigstar \bigstar \bigstar 1/2$ 

With conventional performance venues closed and inescapable uncertainty around physical, emotional and economic well-being, bassist Dezron Douglas and harpist Brandee Younger deliver a touching laissez-faire album focused equally on a need to engage artistically and a desire to connect with an attuned audience.

Recorded and streamed midmorning from their Harlem living room between March and

#### Hot Heros/Iro Haarla Vodjanoi KARKIA MISTIKA KARMI 101

Unless you've been spending a lot of time in Pori, Finland, you're probably not familiar with the fierce, free-improvising trio Hot Heros.

Vodianoi, a first-time studio collaboration with the sternly lyrical pianist Iro Haarla, dwells in the spare, deep-focus Nordic landscape known for its cool fire and slow-motion folkloric melodies. In this hypnotic territory, Haarla and the Heros evoke roaming spirits, including the titular Finnish merman, a mermaid, a howling wolf and a dancing bear. As this is not a collaboration between a piano trio with a horn-playing guest, but rather a tenorbass-drums ensemble hosting a pianist, Haarla functions more as an equal, linear soloist than as a harmonizer. Her rhythms also are significantly less jazz-oriented than on other recordings, and the trio is less ferocious than usualwhich suits the project's quiet mystery. The result is nevertheless grittier than much Nordic jazz.

Saxophonist Sami Sippola spits out a throaty, bluesy sound on the pretty, folk-jazz title tune and the snappy, brushes- and snare-driven opener, "Kuulin Suden Ulvovan," while also diving comfortably into a passionate, Coltrane-ish 6/4

June 2020, Force Majeure charms in its naturalness, whether it's the duo encouraging listeners to stay safe or the occasional false start. But there's also the undeniable musical rapport and sparkling musicianship throughout. A wryly titled original-"Toilet Paper Romance," with its comely melody and enchanting rhythmic bounce-is worthy of future exploration with expanded instrumentation. Elsewhere, the album consists of cherry-picked jazz, soul and pop covers. Alongside Pharoah Sanders' "The Creator Has A Master Plan," the duo's mesmerizing rendition of Alice Coltrane's "Gospel Trane" and takes on a pair of John Coltrane tunes play into the current spiritual-jazz renaissance. More refreshing, however, are the lovely makeovers of the Stylistics' quiet-storm staple "You Make Me Feel Brand New," Kate Bush's poignant "This Woman's Work" and the surprising interpretation of Joe Raposo's "Sing" from Sesame Street.

*Force Majeure* ranks as a triumph of the human spirit—a time capsule that could be revealed to be a document of jazz's resilience and grace amid disastrous odds. *—John Murph* 

Force Majeure: Coffee (Intro); Gospel Trane; Equinox; The Creator Has A Master Plan; Sing; You Make Me Feel Brand New; We'll Be Right Black; Never Can Say Goodbye; This Woman's Work; Nothing Stupid; Inshallah; Wise One; Force Majeure; Toilet Paper Romance; Flatten The Curve (Outro). (63:43) **Personnel:** Dezron Douglas, bass, bass guitar, vocals; Brandee Younger, harp, vocals.

Ordering info: intlanthem.bandcamp.com



pulse on "Niin On Kehto Tyhjillään." Bassist Ville Rauhala plays with a gorgeous, blond tone on "Karhuntanssi," with Haarla ringing bell-like notes behind him, and evokes a cello-like sadness on his own "Por Qué Tu Sonrisa Me Mata." Haarla's only composition here, "Kullankaivajan Blues," as well as the closer, "Vedenneito," showcase her uncanny, Paul Bley-like ability to remain centered and focused in a diffuse, free ambiance. —Paul de Barros

Vodjanoi: Kuulin Suden Ulvovan; Karhuntanssi; Kullankaivajan Blues; Niin On Kehto Tyhjillään; Por Qué Tu Sonrisa Me Mata; Murmansk; Vodjanoi; Vedenneito. (61:10) Personnel: Iro Haarla, piano; Sami Sippola, tenor saxophone; Ville Rauhala; bass; Janne Tuomi, drums.

Ordering info: hahmot.net



#### Francisco Mela MPT Trio Volume 1 577 RECORDS 5851 \*\*\*½

Only once does drummer Francisco Mela cede control on *MPT Trio Volume 1*, his first album with tenorist Hery Paz and guitarist Juanma Trujillo. Otherwise, his unflappable grasp of momentum on the album's eight tracks is a marvel, given the overwhelming impulse as a listener to collapse into the many disparate feels and moods on this record.

The release opens with "Calipso," a free, horn-centric improvisation tinged with Afro-Caribbean joie de vivre—steel drums, dance melody and infectious polyrhythms. Extrapolating from these same sources, the group ventures into more daring, spontaneous composition on tunes like "Baldor," an open pastiche of dramatic tones and textures, and "Vino," with its gritty rock guitar sections and frenzied allusions to folkloric song.

Not all of the tracks rely on rhythm for their movement: The tension on the disquieting "Sustain" builds from the monotony of the droning guitar, and the tether for "Whisper" is the restless search for connection in the saxophone improvisation. Further, two of the tracks favor more traditional lines, like the ballad "Naima," which opens with a relaxed sax solo that leads into a comfortably familiar harmonic progression, and "Suite For Leo Brouwer" (in honor of the Cuban composer), a sequence of musical assertions that wend naturally through Cuban beats, modal tonality and minimalism.

Mela closes the album with "El Llanto De La Tierra"—or "Cry Of The Earth"—arguably the freest track of the lot and the most experimental. A tempestuous brawl of unfettered blowing, electronic wailing and wood-on-wood accents, this tune voices the raw emotion that the rest of *MPT Trio Volume 1* only hints at. —*Suzanne Lorge* 

Ordering info: 577records.com

MPT Trio Volume 1: Calipso; Sustain; Suite For Leo Brouwer; Vino; Naima; Baldor; Whisper; El Llanto De La Tierra. (42:54) Personnel: Francisco Mela, drums; Hery Paz, tenor saxophone; Juanma Trujillo, guitar.



	Critics	Paul de Barros	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie	John Murph
<b>Dr. Lonnie Smith</b> Breathe		***	****	***½	****
Douglas & Younger Force Majeure		***½	***½	***½	***½
<b>Hot Heros/Iro Haarla</b> Vodjanoi		***½	***½	**	***
Francisco Mela MPT Trio Volume 1		**1⁄2	***½	***	***

#### **Critics' Comments**

#### Dr. Lonnie Smith, Breathe

Weird, but oddly wonderful at times, especially the unlikely closing track with Iggy Pop singing Donovan's "Sunshine Superman." The tight horn arrangements are superb, but more solid swinging in the vein of "Too Damn Hot" would have been welcome. —Paul de Barros

Drenched in the blues, Smith's playing heightens the excitement of whatever vibe he's advancing, be it modern jazz, funk, swing, soul or pop-rock. His forceful presence moves decisively through each piece—sometimes in a tremor of anticipation, sometimes as a quake that cracks the tune wide open. —Suzanne Lorge

This mostly live set crackles with all the electric interaction, giddy excitement and marvelous musicianship that we've come to miss during the coronavirus pandemic. —John Murph

#### Douglas & Younger, Force Majeure

Many musicians have tried to capture the bizarre moment we're experiencing amid the pandemic, but beefy bassist Douglas and transportive harpist Younger really nail it with this conversational, casual message from home, which includes the fierce thrum of the Coltranes, Pharoah and some happy pop. —Paul de Barros

Beyond the fun banter here, this eclectic duo shares a deeply felt musical vocabulary. From opposite ends of the sonic spectrum, they traverse the distance between the dissimilar qualities of their respective instruments to create motion, warmth and beauty. —Suzanne Lorge

I watched several of the duo's streaming sessions, and their coordination equaled their determination. It's a nice balance with the bass viscerally anchoring the harp's dreamy qualities. Inspired and inspiring. —Jim Macnie

#### Hot Heros/Iro Haarla, Vodjanoi

Haarla's finely balanced ensemble benefits from spacious phrasing and precise harmonic statements. This sensitivity to aesthetics seems to derive from a lush interiority—emotions stirring just below the surface of these accomplished performances. —*Suzanne Lorge* 

As much as I admire the design of their drama, I fall prey to the tedium that accompanies it. The music's melancholy breeds a languor that ultimately dominates the interplay. *—Jim Macnie* 

The music's wistful allure is worthy of praise. More variation in temperament and memorable melodicism, however, would be greatly appreciated. —John Murph

#### Francisco Mela, MPT Trio Volume 1

Given its innovative concept, this album ought to be much more engaging than it is. But this Afro-Cuban free-jazz power trio—with debts to Albert Ayler, Ornette's Prime Time and maybe a little Derek Bailey—rarely gets out of its own head. —Paul de Barros

Working through rattling abstractions gives the trio a chance to find the music's lyricism—or, more to the point, create the music's lyricism. Unexpected and impressive move from Mela.

—Jim Macnie

At times recalling Ornette Coleman's plugged-in flights of fancy, these protean explorations titillate more than thrill. —John Murph



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#### Till Brönner & Bob James On Vacation SONY MASTERWORKS 19439700122

Sometimes, the circumstances of an album's recording are incongruent with the circumstances of its release. Till Brönner, Bob James and a coterie of first-call players have issued *On Vacation* during a time punctuated with isolation and travel bans, when few people have the ability to partake in any sort of getaway.

So, is the album—recorded in the south of France during 2019—or the theme behind it a vestige of another time, simply tone deaf or

#### **Roscoe Mitchell & Mike Reed** *The Ritual And The Dance* ASTRAL SPIRITS 145 \*\*\*\*

Saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell and drummer Mike Reed had gotten to know each other especially well by the time they performed together in Antwerp, Belgium, for this live recording from 2015, The Ritual And The Dance. They had been touring for a few years as a duo and pieces from another concert were released as In Pursuit Of Magic during 2014. That familiarity fuels their intense musical conversation throughout this Antwerp set. But their affinities go beyond onstage collaborations. Both musicians balance space and silence with free playing that explodes beyond expected tones and bar lines. All of these sounds are used to construct a strong sense of narrative, especially for the lengthy, single piece that constitutes this album.

The Ritual And The Dance sounds spontaneous, but none of its pivots seem random. After Mitchell begins with a few spacious upperregister notes, which Reed answers with similar minimalism, the duo continues to build and change up its dynamics. When Mitchell unleashes long lines of circular breathing, the sense of focus that he summons at such velocity—and another thing entirely: a well-played slice of fantastical escapism? Maybe it's all three.

"Lemonade" attempts an effervescent bossa nova, but sounds like an inconsequential distraction. Brönner favors his flugelhorn over trumpet here, but his trills on "Save Your Love For Me" are painterly delights. Tracks like "Lavender Fields" elicit the laid-back vibe of James' classic CTI outings. Hip-hop producers recognize that he's a keyboardist with astonishing rhythmic sensibility, having crafted an outsized number of songs that have been sampled, including the sunny, steel drum-studded "Take Me To The Mardi Gras." Unfortunately, that sensibility is underutilized here. The pulsing sunniness of "Mardi Gras" occasionally breaks through the clouds, appearing in the compelling interplay between the co-bandleaders on "Elysium." But the moodiness of James' work on classics like "Nautilus" largely is missing. It's a sharpness that would cut some of the cloying sweetness that makes up most of On Vacation. Instead, what listeners get is an occasional musical rally, marred by intermittent drowsiness. -Avana Contreras

Personnel: Till Brönner, flugelhorn, trumpet, keyboards, vocals; Bob James, keyboards; Christian Von Kaphengst, bass, electric bass (2); Yuri Goloubev, bass (5, 8, 11, 12); Hanvey Mason, David Haynes (2,10), Wolfgang Haffner (3, 4, 7), drums.

Ordering info: sonymusicmasterworks.com



after so many decades—is a marvel. Reed is equally sharp in his response and also provides complementary or contrasting melodic lines. Along with matching or deviating from the saxophonist's tempo, he draws on an array of different tones. Mitchell's sustained notes serve both as a contrast to the drummer's speed and also a redirection of the piece's overall ambition. A few bars of Reed's repeated drum patterns and electronic chimes conclude *The Ritual And The Dance* with a jarring stop, as if signaling to everyone in the room that it is time to exhale. —*Aaron Cohen* 

The Ritual And The Dance: The Ritual And The Dance. (36:44) Personnel: Roscoe Mitchell, reeds; Mike Reed, drums, electronics. Ordering info: astralspiritsrecords.com



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FCM

#### Keith Jarrett Budapest Concert ECM 2700 \*\*\*\*½

In the summer of 2016, pianist Keith Jarrett set out on a solo tour, concertizing extemporaneously in some of Europe's greatest performance halls. ECM, his label since the 1970s, was on hand to document the performances. *Munich 2016*, the first album from that cache of live recordings, dropped in September 2019. By the time of that release, Jarrett had suffered two paralyzing strokes, throwing into doubt the future of his pioneering, 50-year career.

The second release from that run, *Budapest Concert*, serves as a poignant companion to the first. Recorded at the Béla Bartók Concert Hall in Hungary almost two weeks before the Munich date, the album unveils Jarrett's evolving musical conception for the tour. As on *Munich*, he opened with a long, impulsive free improvisation that eschewed melodic suppositions ("Part I"), followed by a more concordant section ("Part II") and two spontaneous forays into increasingly complex rhythmic and harmonic expressiveness ("Part III" and "Part IV"). Throughout the first disc, one can hear Jarrett's signature vocalizations—the seemingly unconscious exposition of the music he's hearing in his head.

On the second disc, these vocalizations diminish as Jarrett falls into a stretch of gentle melodicism, expounding on a sonorous motif ("Part V"), a boisterous bop head ("Part VI"), a regret-filled ballad ("Part VII") and a heart-searing meditation ("Part VIII"). "Part IX" and "Part X" signal a return to the dark, ponder-ous free expression that opened the concert, and "Part XI," an unhurried waltz, tempers the fren-zy of these two preceding tracks. For the finale in Budapest, Jarrett resolved the musical epic with a growling 16-bar blues ("Part XII), before closing with some oft-played encores, an almost unbearably tender farewell. —*Suzanne Lorge* 

25 Years: Disc One: Parts I–IV. Disc Two: Parts V–XI; Part XII–Blues; It's A Lonesome Old Town; Answer Me. (37:39/54:41) Personnel: Keith Jarrett, piano.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

**On Vacation:** Save Your Love For Me; Lemonade; Late Night; Lavender Fields; September Morn; Elysium; I Get It From You; Miranda; Scent Of Childhood; On Vacation; Sunset Vale; Basin Street Blues; If Someone Had Told Me. (65:29)

#### WOLFGANG LACKERSCHMID CHET BAKER



#### Wolfgang Lackerschmid/ Chet Baker Quintet Sessions 1979 DOT TIME 8018

#### \*\*\*1/2

Chet Baker. Larry Coryell. Buster Williams. Tony Williams. Wolfgang Lackerschmid. One of these names is not like the other, which raises the question: How did Lackerschmid, a solid if little-known vibes player from Germany, end up fronting such a stellar quintet?

In 1978, Lackerschmid met Baker at a festival near Munich, and mentioned he was working on some duets for trumpet and vibraphone. When Baker expressed interest, Lackerschmid arranged the studio session that produced *Ballads For Two*, which was reissued by Dot Time in 2018.

Flash forward a few months. Larry Coryell catches the Lackerschmid/Baker duo live and expresses interest in recording with them. Lackerschmid jokes that he'd do it if they had a drummer and bassist named "Williams." A few weeks later, Baker's manager lands Tony Williams and Buster Williams, and a session is convened.

If only the music itself were so full of serendipity. Although Lackerschmid more than holds his own, offering a nicely funky turn on Tony Williams' "Mr. Biko" and perfectly rendering the dreamy mood of Coryell's "Rue Gregoire Du Tour," Baker barely registers. He plays some quietly pretty lines on "Here's That Rainy Day," but otherwise seems content to ride the rhythm section's energy. Not that listeners should blame him: Both Williamses are on fire throughout, hard-swinging and giddily polyrhythmic, while Coyrell's solos are soulful and incendiary. This reissue adds a pair of previously unheard alternate performances, pumping up the playing time to a respectable 48 minutes. -I.D. Considine

Quartet Sessions 1979: Mr. Biko; Balzwaltz; The Latin One; Rue Gregoire Du Tour; Here's That Rainy Day; Toku Do; Rue Gregoire Du Tour (Rehearsal); Balzwaltz (Alternate). (47:39)

**Personnel:** Wolfgang Lackerschmid, vibraphone; Chet Baker, trumpet; Larry Coryell, guitar; Buster Williams, bass; Tony Williams, drums.

Ordering info: dottimerecords.com

#### Angel Bat Dawid And Tha Brotherhood

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM 0037 ★★★★

Listening to these live performances, mostly captured at the 2019 edition of the JazzFest Berlin, is an alarming, revelatory and ultimately rewarding experience. The Berlin concert showcases an artist vibrating with so much unfettered emotional conviction that it sometimes threatens her composure. And there's ample reason for that.

Two days before the performance, singer Viktor Le Givens, Angel Bat Dawid's longtime collaborator, passed out on the Chicago streets, en route to the airport to make the Berlin concert. He woke up in the hospital without his personal belongings. When Dawid's manager explained the situation to festival producers, they reportedly responded coldly that if she couldn't find a replacement, her performance fee would be reduced. She and her band also reportedly experienced multiple shards of racist microagressions at the Duke Ellington Hotel in Berlin.

While Le Givens eventually made it to Berlin in time for the performance, Dawid's seething anger nearly was irrepressible. That crackling fury kindles the concert. Dawid's a gifted multi-instrumentalist, singer and composer who's already prone to shamanistic performance art. She and her ensemble superbly use their rage and proclivities toward theatrics to their artistic advantage.

Toward the end of brooding "Black Family," Dawid pleads with the audience to affirm Black lives by singing with her, "The Black family is the strongest institution in the world." In the face of a



reticent audience, her request grows angry, eventually exploding into sobbing caterwauls in an act of demanding respect.

"Why do you hate us so much?" Dawid asks in cathartic admonishment.

She counters that rebuke, however, with such uplifting yet equally confrontational excursions as the searing "We Are Starzz" and the sardonic "The Wicked Shall Not Prevail," a celebratory gesture toward Le Givens' delayed arrival to the festival. If there's any recent jazz album that embodies the old adage "lightning in a bottle," this is it. —John Murph

Live: Enlightenment; Destination; Capetown; Black Family; What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black; London; We Hearby Declare The African Look; We Are Starzz; VIKTORious Return; Tha Wicked Shall Not Prevail; Melo Deez From Heab'N; Dr. Wattz N' Em; HELL (79:08)

Personnel: Angel Bat Dawid, clarinet, keyboards, vocals; Deacon Otis Cooke, vocals, synthesizer, Viktor Le Givens, vocals, auxiliary instruments; Xristian Espinoza, tenor saxophone, percussion; Norman W. Long, electronics, synthesizer, Dr. Adam Zanolini, bass, bass guitar, flute, soprano saxophone, percussion; Isaiah Collier, Asher Simiso Gamedze, drums.

Ordering info: intlanthem.bandcamp.com





Marquis Hill Soul Sign BLACK UNLIMITED MUSIC GROUP

Marquis Hill understands what we call "vibes." That feeling of being in tune with unseen forces, one with the rhythm of our moment. During the past few years, his beat tapes—released through his own Black Unlimited Music Group imprint have been able to capture that sensation. Moving through hip-hop and neo-soul, his latest effort, *Soul Sign*, is a continuation of these sounds, relying heavily on lyrical contributions from a few guests. And it works.

#### **Binker and Moses** *Escape The Flames*

GEARBOX 1570LTD ★★★★½

Though live performances still are paused, the past several months saw an avalanche of archival concert recordings be released.

Saxophonist Binker Golding and drummer Moses Boyd captured some magic one evening in June 2017 at London's Total Refreshment Centre, running through the first half of their 2017 album Journey To The Mountain Of Forever (Gearbox). So many of the compositions on Escape The Flames are opportunities for Boyd to find every impeccable beat to push behind Golding's playing. Surprisingly, though, the reedist plays sparingly throughout the evening. This isn't to say it's not flashy, just precisely what's called for. Golding's more adventurous showing on "Trees On Fire" definitely can induce the stank face. But it's Boyd's drumming that's unrelenting, always on beat yet always finds new ways to go beyond it.

Things open up more on "The Shaman's Chant," where the pair explicitly prove their simpatico, weaving in unison and giving listeners a sense of their live performance as the album's energy builds. There's an arc here that happens organically, as opposed to the sequencing of their

Joining the trumpeter are two Bronx astrologers, Mecca Woods and Boro the Lucky Libra. They offer both poetic and prosaic knowledge to support and enliven the meaning of every sign of the Zodiac, which gives each track here its title. Those wisdom-filled lyrics often take the form instructions, as on "Aquarius | I Change | Uranus & Saturn," when Mecca Woods reminds listeners that, "Aquarius, as independent as you are, there are times where you'd much rather be a part of a community than be alone, to the point of shrinking yourself to belong. But never give up who you are, Aquarius. What makes you lovable are the very things that set you apart from the crowd."

Though the spoken-word pieces are central to *Soul Sign*, the album never feels too preachy or heavy-handed. Most importantly, the music remains inviting. Hill offers both trap beats and ballads, a kind of dissonance that perfectly captures the various aspects of the Zodiac. The crisp production from ChallyMikes, MitchyTime and Gengis Don breathes across the album, and Hill's horn lights our souls afire. *—Joshua Myers* 

**Personnel:** Marquis Hill, trumpet; Junius Paul, Evan Lawrence, bass; Gengis Don, ChallyMikes, MitchyTime, production; Mecca Woods, Boro the Lucky Libra, vocals.

Ordering info: marquishill.com



studio releases. It has more to do the open time a live performance might have granted them, as opposed to the fierce acuity of a studio session. Yet, *Escape The Flames* is one of those live performances that really merited a release, regardless of the pandemic. The album now could serve as a kind of consolation, providing a sense of connection and discovery—elements captured in their finest form on one summer night in London.

*—Anthony Dean-Harris* 



#### Natsuki Tamura/Satoko Fujii/Ramon Lopez Mantle NOT TWO 1003 \*\*\*½

A prolific composer, improviser and bandleader, pianist Satoko Fujii has spent the past three decades blurring the lines of free-jazz, contemporary classical, Japanese folk and experimental music. The expanses of her artistic vision and boundless music are unparalleled. But on *Mantle*, she finds worthy partners in trumpeter Natsuki Tamura and drummer Ramon Lopez. As a trio, they work across the spectrum of avant-garde jazz, moving adeptly from modern improvisation to bebop to rock and back.

Fujii and Tamura, who have been collaborators on countless projects since the early '90s, have a fluid, almost instinctual discourse, her romantic melodic lines balancing out his blustery horn on "Nine Steps To The Ground." Tamura brings in more familiar bebop phrases on "Metaphors," but gradually moves into extended technique for both "Encounter" and "Straw Coat." Lopez anchors the frenzied discourse with understated percussion, while matching Fujii's languorous notes with measured pacing and melancholy for "Your Shadow." In contrast, the drummer is uninhibited and expansive on "Came, Left" and "Autumn Sky," moving among gentle rolls, marching rhythms and energetic sheets of sound.

There's a narrative feel to each song on *Mantle*, with distinct chapters of free-improvisation, melody and rock-influenced interludes. The trio also uses silence effectively to build tension as it interrogates the boundaries between the experimental and the accessible.

Though the group hasn't worked together long, its debut recording showcases a dynamic partnership that charts new territory in creative music. —Ivana Ng

Ordering info: nottwo.com

Soul Sign: Aries | I Am | Mars; Taurus | I Have | Venus; Gemini | I Think | Mercury; Cancer | I Feel | Moor; Leo | I See | Sun; Virgo | I Analyze | Mercury; Libra | Balance | Venus; Scorpio | I Desire | Mars; Sagittarius | I Seek | Jupiter; Capricom | I Utilize | Saturn; Aquarius || Change | Uranus & Saturn; Pisces || Dream | Jupiter & Neptune. (38:37)

Escape The Flames: The Departure; Intoxication From The Jahvmonishi Leaves; Fete By The River; Trees On Fire; The Shaman's Chant; Leaving The Now Behind. (66:41) Personnel: Binker Golding, tenor saxophone; Moses Boyd, drums. Ordering info: gearboxrecords.com

Mantle: Nine Steps To The Ground; Metaphors; From Spring To Summer, Your Shadow; Encounter; Straw Coat; Came, Left; Autumn Sky; The Temple Bell. (60:07) Personnel: Natsuki Tamura, trumpet; Satoko Fujii, piano; Ramon Lopez, drums.

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### RUSS OSSING META MORPH1SM

**Russ Lossing** Metamorphism SUNNYSIDE 1607 \*\*\*\*

Composer and improvisor Russ Lossing arrived on the New York scene during the early '80s, when he studied with John Cage and became a pivotal member of the Paul Motian Quintet during a 12-year stint marked by weeklong residencies at the Village Vanguard. With the release of Metamorphism, Lossing shines as brightly as any of the jazz pioneers who preceded him in mapping out their own musical journeys.

#### Tania Giannouli Trio In Fading Light RATTLE D105 \*\*\*

During the past decade, introspective Greek pianist Tania Giannouli regularly has experimented with different instrumental settings, radically changing the timbre and tone of her music without altering its charged air of mystery. On one recording, she played intimate duos with Portuguese reedist Paulo Chagas, while another was a trio with New Zealand taonga pūoro-a traditional Maori wind instrument-player Rob Thorne. She continues the practice on In Fading *Light* with a trio formed to play at Jazzfest Berlin in 2018. On most of the 12 pieces, Giannouli and oudist Kyriakos Tapakis carve out moody ostinato patterns-delicately embroidered with pretty melodies-that clear space for the drifty explorations of trumpeter Andreas Polyzogopoulos.

On "Labyrinth," a measured piano line cycles meditatively as the oud freely casts about before falling into shadowing accents, giving a wide berth to the trumpeter's smears, unpitched breaths and floating phrases. "When Then" reframes the plot with an aggressive, driving attack, as a hammering left-handed piano line intertwines with a twangy oud lick, propelling Polyzogopoulos toward a sharper tone and phrases that slash, rather than glide. The folkish

In 2019, the pianist honored the ever-adventurous late drummer with Motian Music and again pays tribute to him on Metamorphism's title track with intervallic layers of sound. Here, and throughout the album, Lossing's longtime ensemble of frequent collaborators-saxophonist Loren Stillman, bassist John Hébert and drummer Michael Sarin-is completely attuned to the bandleader's compositional vision, freeing each performer to take their own flights of fancy.

On the opener, "Three Treasures," Lossing telegraphs an urgent message with keyboard triplets, echoed and amplified by Stillman's horn, setting the tone for a call and response among players who trust each other implicitly. From "Mai's" evocation of smoky latenight blues, caressed by Hébert's languid bass, to the peck-peck-pecking of Sarin's drums on "Pileatus" and the wideopen space of "Blind Horizon (For Andrew Hill)," a contemplative tribute to the late pianist and composer, Metamorphism reveals a series of worlds lit from within by Lossing's singular playing and composing styles. -Cree McCree

**Metamorphism:** Three Treasures; Sojourn; Metamorphism (For Paul Motian); Mai; Pileatus; Blind Horizon (For Andrew Hill); June Jig; Canto 24. (68:16) Personnel: Russ Lossing, piano; Loren Stillman, alto saxophone; John Hébert, bass; Michael Sarin, drums. Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



"Hinemoa's Lament" lies somewhere in between. But there are pieces that depart from that form: the elliptical "Fallen," when all of the musicians impart silence magnificently; the more abstract improvisational gambits of "Disquiet"; or the high-speed, Hungarian-flavored "Bela's Dance."

The players reveal a strong collective rapport across the album, and every gesture and phrase seems generous and empathic. But the pervasive moodiness can feel like a damper on what might have been accomplished with a more varied emotional palette. -Peter Margasak

In Fading Light: Labyrinth; When Then; Hinemoa's Lament; Night Flight; Fallen; Bela's Dance; Ingravida; Moth; No Corner; Disquiet; Inland Sea; In Fading Light. (60:25) Personnel: Tania Giannouli, piano; Andreas Polyzogopoulos, trumpet: Kvriakos Tapakis, oud

Ordering info: rattle.co.nz



#### **Don Braden/Joris Teepe Quartet** In The Spirit Of Herbie Hancočk O.A.P 2020 $\star$ $\star$ $\star$ $\star$ $\frac{1}{2}$

A followup to their 2017 outing Conversations, this live 2019 concert recording from The Netherlands features longtime musical partners Don Braden and Joris Teepe, accompanied by Dutch pianist Rob Van Bavel and Americanborn drummer Owen Hart Jr. Van Bavel, a veteran of the European jazz scene, should be a revelation to Stateside jazz fans. His gifts become immediately apparent on the opener, a relaxed "Maiden Voyage" that finds the pianist flaunting chops and exploring with impunity on his solo. Braden's bold-toned tenor solo is unrestrained and delightful here, though one misses the original version's trumpet harmony. Teepe also delivers a virtuosic bass solo, while Hart exhibits a looseness and penchant for melodicism on the kit, buoying the proceedings.

Teepe's brisk reimagining of "Watermelon Man"-full of reharmonization and intricate stop-time breaks-is fueled by Hart's driving sense of swing and interactive abandon. Van Bavel is funky here, while also pushing the harmonic envelope during the spirited workout as he slyly alludes to "Giant Steps" in his solo.

The ensemble handles "Actual Proof" like a lush ballad and features some remarkably expressive playing by Braden. The quartet's mellow rendition of "Butterfly" showcases Braden's flute playing, then Van Bavel's extended gospel flavored solo piano intro to "Driftin" sets the tone for a 3/4 recreation of the soul-jazz classic. Teepe's "Role Model" and Braden's "The Ingenious Catalyst" also are firmly in the spirit of the album's namesake.

-Bill Milkowski

In The Spirit Of Herbie Hancock: Maiden Voyage; Watermelon Man; Actual Proof; Speak Like A Child; The Ingenious Catalyst; Role Model; Butterfly; Driftin'; Yesterdays. (67:32) Personnel: Don Braden, tenor saxophone, flute; Joris Teepe, bass; Rob Van Bavel, piano; Owen Hart Jr., drums.

Ordering info: oaprecords.com



#### The Warriors Of The Wonderful Sound Soundpath CLEAN FEED 556

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For nearly two decades, veteran Philadelphia saxophonist Bobby Zankel has helmed The Warriors Of The Wonderful Sound, and while the big band originally focused on his own large-scale compositions, it increasingly has brought in outside composers. The group has performed a concert of Julius Hemphill big-band pieces and commissioned new work by the likes of Rudresh Mahanthappa and Steve Coleman. And in 2011,

#### Patricia Brennan Maquishti VALLEY OF SEARCH 005 \*\*\*%

The sheer tonality of Patricia Brennan's marimba and vibraphone summon the concept of freedom. It's one of the reasons why the percussionist titled her debut *Maquishti*, a word from the Nahuatl language—native to parts of central and southern Mexico, including Brennan's home state of Veracruz—that means liberation. And a unique sort of independence shines through on each of the album's 12 original pieces.

Opening with "Blame It," the tune introduces Brennan's vibraphone, using moderate amounts of reverb and dampening to showcase the instrument's ethereal but familiar character. The melody, however, demonstrates Brennan's embrace of freedom and morphs from sparsely discordant to distinctly modern with chromatic patterns. "Solar" seemingly builds on these qualities, as the improvised piece immediately presents an even looser frenetic flow of notes with shifting tonal centers. The gradual integration of additional effectsnotes decaying with character akin to the soft beeps of a radar-fosters an almost alien ambiance. And "Point Of No Return" incorporates binder clips to give Brennan's perZankel enlisted pianist and AACM cofounder Muhal Richard Abrams. *Soundpath*, originally a 90-minute piece, premiered in 2012 with Abrams serving as conductor. According to Zankel's liner-notes essay, Muhal "gave generous improvisational space to all of the assembled musicians," though this studio rendering of the uninterrupted piece is just over 40 minutes.

The recording was made in Philadelphia following a live performance at the October Revolution festival in October 2018, about a year after Abrams died at the age of 87. Zankel called on a frequent Abrams collaborator, saxophonist Marty Ehrlich, to conduct the ensemble, who complemented a core of Philadelphia players and ringers from New York. The result is redolent of the kind of harmonic density and contrapuntal writing that distinguished the composer's music. The improvisations flow organically, erupting from the shape-shifting landscape with meticulously plotted grace, reinforcing Abrams' gift for both writing complex ensemble-oriented music and respecting the individual voice of the cast.

-Peter Margasak

#### Soundpath: Soundpath. (40:34)

Personnel: Marty Ehrlich, Bobby Zankel, Julian Pressley, alto saxophone; Robert DeBellis, tenor saxophone; soprano saxophone; Hafez Modirzadeh, tenor saxophone; Mark Allen, baritone saxophone; Dave Ballou, Dwayne Eubanks, Josh Evans, trumpet; Graham Haynes, cornet; Steve Swell, Michael Dessen, Alfred Patterson, trombone; Jose Davilla, bass trombone; Tom Lawton, piano; Michael Formanek bass; Chad Taylor, drums. Ordering Info: cleanfeed-records.com



formance a rattling, unsettling quality while expanding the concept of what sounds a vibraphone can create.

Comfort with long silences and slowly building apexes typify Brennan's masterful touch as an improvisor. But her more conventional performances—as on "Derrumbe De Turquesas"—are just as creative and impactful, and imbue *Maquishti* with a beautiful revelry. —*Kira Grunenberg* 

Maquishti: Blame It; Solar; Improvisation VI; Sonnet; Episodes; Improvisation III; Magic Square; Improvisation VII; I Like For You To Be Still; Point Of No Return; Away From Us; Derrumbe De Turquesas. (56:42) Personnel: Patricia Brennan, vibraphone, marimba.

Ordering info: vallevofsearch.com

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#### Jazz / BY SUZANNE LORGE

### **Perelman's Massive Oeuvre**

In 2020, soon after the pandemic reached Brooklyn, **Ivo Perelman's** base of operation for decades, the tenor saxophonist decided to relocate to Fortaleza, a city in the northeast corner of his native Brazil. Perelman appreciates the daily routines he's established since then: a jaunt to the beach, diving in the Atlantic Ocean and hours of studying bel canto opera. Since his move, these disciplines have provided Perelman with "the perfect combination for life," he said during a December Zoom call.

Arguably, Perelman stands as one of the most prolific free improvisers around: In the past three decades, he's recorded about 100 albums, the bulk of them for British label Leo Records. His eponymous 1989 debut, *Ivo*—with its coterie of notable guests like drummer Peter Erskine, percussionist Airto Moreira, pianist Eliane Elias and singer Flora Purim—established his bona fides as an avant-garde talent; he would go on to work with eminent creative musicians like drummer Andrew Cyrille, bassist Reggie Workman, and pianists Paul Bley and Joanne Brackeen.

Perelman recently added three new albums to his massive oeuvre, each project wholly improvised and unique in character. In crafting each, the only concept Perelman brought into the studio with him was "to open my ears and heart to my fellow musicians, because that's how the dialogue takes place."

In November, Perelman released **Sha**manism (Mahakala 009; 50:04 \* \* \*<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>), a trio album with two of his long-standing collaborators, pianist Matthew Shipp and guitarist Joe Morris. Shifting between lyricism and bold expressivity, the album's 10 tracks show off the bandleader's ease in the challenging altissimo register on the saxophone. While Shipp and Morris probe fleeting harmonic ideas on tunes like "Spiritual Energies" and "Religious Ecstasy," Perelman catapults from the lower sonority of his instrument into the breathy, highpitched wails and rasps that characterize his instrumental style.

Shipp and Morris join the reedist in this esoteric musicality as equals; each player contributing in fair measure to the heft of impromptu compositions. Perelman acknowledges that the trio's easy rapport makes for an advanced collective expression: "It's a three-way synergy of sorcerers," he said.

#### Ordering info: mahakalamusic.com

For his January release, **The Garden Of** Jewels (Tao Forms 004; 50:57 **\*\*\*\***), Perelman chose a different tack for the trio



format. With Shipp again on piano, Perelman invited drummer Whit Dickey to contribute a percussive layer to the intuitive communication. But he "didn't want this album to become a 'Perelman-Shipp duo plus drums,'" he noted.

Excitement arises out of the trio's adherence to the inner logic of Perelman's ideas—the synced rhythmic patterns on "Tourmaline," for instance, or the textural shading beneath the continuous horn line on "Turquoise." The radiant sound of the ensemble led Perelman, who also is a painter and jewelry maker, to the project's apt title: "[All of the tunes] are like a precious stones, exquisitely polished—like a garden of jewels," he said.

#### Ordering info: taoforms.com

Perelman never had played in a duo with a trumpeter until **Polarity** (Burning **Ambulance 71; 39:15 \*\*\***), his February release alongside Nate Wooley. On this album—the most idiosyncratic of the three the pair uses just breath and imagination to craft articulate expressions of spontaneous communication. One hears how Perelman's study of bel canto has paid off: His control of each declarative phrase is superb, as he integrates aesthetic elements culled from the classical repertoire.

#### Ordering info: burningambulance.com

As the pandemic stretches on, Perelman has begun to think about returning to Brooklyn. He's eager to get back into the studio and apply recent breakthroughs in his daily practice to improvising. In fact, he's hoping to rerecord some or all of his existing discography with the same personnel, simply to see how his playing has changed. It's a wild idea, he admits, but likely to happen. "Somehow, I always end up doing things that sound impossible," he figured. DB



#### Kevin Sun (Un)seaworthy ENDECTOMORPH 009 ★★★½

A listing ship is pictured on the cover of Kevin Sun's *(Un)seaworthy*, but it's not reflective of a music that, for the most part, is on an even keel. Whether modifying a melody, as they do on "Bad Lady" or "Facsimilate (Unlike You)," Sun's trio is locked in a highly creative, imaginative mode. The bandleader's explosive saxophone, à la Anthony Braxton, is tonally and rhythmically in sync with bassist Walter Stinson and drummer Matt Honor, as he alternates breathless runs and intervallic leaps to their constant beat.

Immediately, it is clear that bandmembers have an intuitive feel for each other, and Sun knows exactly how to keep them alert and focused without stripping out their singular inventiveness. On "Prelude/Genuflecting At The Cathedral Of The Perpetual Hustle," the ensemble's full expressive force erupts, and Sun weaves with precision between the snap and pop of Honor's drums, and Stinson's sonorous bass. There are separate and distinctive moments when the rhythm team converses, especially on "Latinate," demonstrating lavish musical continuity. A heap of history is evoked across the album, too, though Sun is the sole composer and chief innovator with his Coltrane-like sprints up and down scales, and his nod to the past with suggestions of Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young. Evidence of this prevails on "Facsimilate (Unlike You)," where Sun offers a charming intimation of "Jitterbug Waltz" at the song's close.

Overall, (Un)seaworthy is both a glance back and a look forward, indicating the vast promise of Sun and his trio's potent understanding of jazz forebears. Theirs is a fervent, collective creativity—and it's only a beat or two from total fulfillment. —Herb Boyd

Ordering info: kevinsun.com

<sup>(</sup>Un)seaworthy: Bad Lady; Seaworthy (Unseaworthy); Latinate; Prelude/Genuflecting At The Cathedral Of The Perpetual Hustle; Facsimilate (Unlike You). (35:23) Personnel: Kevin Sun, tenor saxophone; Walter Stinson, bass; Matt Honor, drums.



Matt Piet (pentimento) AMALGAM 029 ★★★★

Chicago pianist Matt Piet set himself a tough challenge to overcome a creative block and "mental collapse," resulting from accumulated problems—but triggered directly in 2018 by the death of his hero, Cecil Taylor. Borrowing a structural strategy from Bill Evans' innovative 1963 album *Conversations With Myself*, Piet spent a day overdubbing improvisation upon improvisation to create keyboard works no single player—or even three together—ever could accomplish.

#### Javier Subatin Trance EARS&EYES 20-124 \*\*\*1/2

The title of guitarist Javier Subatin's *Trance* is a slight misnomer. This collection of thematically interconnected "Trance" pieces all are based on short recurring phrases, while some also connect to his South American roots. For his trio, this means a wide array of improvisational possibilities. But far from conveying a trance-like or meditative vibe, the sharp movements feel energizing.

Subatin was born in Argentina and its rhythms underlie some tracks here, in particular "Trance#5," which reflects the 6/8 Argentinian dance called the chacarera as its movements create a sense of tension within wide open spaces. Saxophonist Daniel Sousa is by turns angular and lyrical as he builds lines alongside Subatin's vibrato, especially on "Trance#1." While drummer Diogo Alexandre frequently takes a quiet approach, he makes his presence felt, redirecting "Trance#8" from the background. Even though "Solo#2" originated from the guitarist's wanting to play unaccompanied, the resulting performance is another example of the group's cohesion with Subatin and Sousa's shifting call-and-response. Sousa's soaring lead atop Subatin's crashing chords during the concluding "Trance#4"

Sixty years ago, Evans recorded mostly familiar songs, but Piet used only conceptual prompts, such as "open fifths," "inside the piano" and "within one octave" as the basis for each of the 15 constructs on *(pentimento)*. He completed each piece stacking three sequential passes without relistening to the already inscribed tracks, relying on memory for what he'd just done and instinct for immediate reactions.

There's no post-improv editing. These are discrete and varied sonic events, rather than developed or connected themes, and Piet's music here (he's led or been featured on some two dozen albums since 2014) is more often gestural, adventurous and exploratory than self-reflective or notably systematic. But it's his imaginative range that's beguiling. "To Elijah" is almost conventionally beautiful and "Plod On As One" is church-like, yet other tunes are eerie under-thelid forays, reorienting the piano as a harp, windchimes, finger-cymbals or balafon.

Spontaneity is this album's watchword and self-involvement its discipline, yet some of these improvisations have moments that could be distilled, their implications hinting at works to come. —*Howard Mandel* 

(pentimento): Only A Phase; Alt-Man; Swipe Left; Hands Of Time; A(Whole)Nother Thing; Fluster Cuck; 750 ML; Held Hostage; Danse Macabre; Insense; To Elijah; Say On; The Power And The Freedom; Momento Mori; Plod On As One. (29:07) Personnel: Matt Piet, piano.

Ordering info: amalgamusic.org



provides an extroverted conclusion. The purpose of the nonsequential numbering system on *Trance* remains mysterious, but this riddle is one more reason why the album calls for repeated listens. Along with Subatin's compositions, his trio interprets Duke Ellington's "C Jam Blues," following a similar game plan of compressing the piece into a small repeating theme. In this sparse rendition, the group still swings, but does so its own way. —*Aaron Cohen* 

Trance: Trance#1; Trance#8; Trance#2; Solo#2; Trance#5; C Jam Blues; Trance#4, (55:14) Personnel: Javier Subatin, guitar; Daniel Sousa, alto saxophone; Dioco Alexandre. drums.

Ordering info: earsandeyesrecords.com



#### Petr Cancura/Charlie Hunter/Geoff Clapp Don't Let It Stop! ROOTS2BOOT 20-11 \*\*\*½

Saxophonist Petr Cancura has a sound and approach not unlike Jan Gabarek. Many of the tunes the bandleader wrote for this live trio date come off like they could have been from a Gabarek-featuring '70s quartet helmed by Keith Jarrett: blues and gospel grooves occasionally laced with jazz-centric harmonies, finished off with one-chord vamps.

Other influences abound. "Soulidity" sports a Horace Silver-ish Latin-rock boogaloo vibe. "Country Song" is a loping slice of Americana, reminiscent of Bill Frisell's memorable guitar/ saxophone/drums trio with Joe Lovano and Paul Motian. Charlie Hunter does a great Frisellian impression here, while also handling the bass part on his modified guitar. Hunter's a pioneer of the style, his uncanny skills utilized to the fullest on "Gettin' Ready" and the title track, where his ability to lay down such a heavy bass groove alongside perfect double-time guitar riffs defies explanation. Hunter hooks up nicely with drummer Geoff Clapp, who measures out just the right blend of colorful attitude and sonic sensitivity.

But it's Cancura who is the heart and soul of this project. An avid student of American blues and folk, he learned how to play mandolin and banjo, an extreme commitment for a saxophonist who emigrated to Canada from Eastern Europe. But Cancura's jazz pedigree peeks out from time to time, as he remains impressively focused on the integrity of the music, sticking to bluesy growls, flutter tonguing and altissimo playing that's less Lovano and more Lenny Pickett. And in this context, that's a thing that should be treasured for as long as possible.

—Gary Fukushima

Ordering info: roots2boot.com

**Don't Let It Stop!:** Soulidity; Boogie Nights; Gettin' Ready; Don't Let It Stop!; Country Song; Chug Chug; There Is A Chance; Here To Stay; Good Times. (106:59)

**Personnel:** Petr Cancura, tenor saxophone; Charlie Hunter, guitar; Geoff Clapp, drums.



Ramón Valle Inner State IN+OUT 77144 \*\*\*½

Ramón Valle is an extraordinary pianist who strives to create picturesque music, and practically every tune on *Inner State* evokes at least a dazzling image or two.

His treatment of "Free At Last," words so inseparably linked to the sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., begins slowly, like a call to prayer, before an eruption of chords summon bassist Omar Rodriguez Calvo and drummer Jamie Peet to join him in a holler of liberation. His octave configurations have the resonance you hear in some of Chick Corea's performances, but with an even stronger dash of cinnamon.

In several ways that opening track is a prelude to "Hallelujah," Leonard Cohen's signature song, and it's made all the more ecclesiastical when Valle applies harp-like strokes to his cluster of solos. On one swift passage of notes, he approximates a carillon; Valle has a way of sustaining that sound of bells. The only things missing from the invocation is a choir and an "Amen." Exciting moments occur near the close of the album on "Cinco Hermanas," when Valle's vocalizations, a little scat and a bunch of harmonic phrases converge with explosive notes from his piano. A tune that began in a classical mood soon became a festive shout, Valle's voice mimicking the tone and velocity emanating from the keyboard. But perhaps the most engrossing effort here is "Mamita Yo Te Quiero," where Valle's flurry of fingers matches Peet beat for beat and Calvo swings in a Latin context.

The pianist and composer has presented an array of colorful images and soundscapes that abound in his native Cuba, and should summon visions of his home. —*Herb Boyd* 

Inner State: Free At Last; Little, Irreplaceable Things; Hallelujah; Mamita Yo Te Quiero; Te Extraño; Levitando; Cinco Hermanas. (61:47) Personnel: Ramón Valle, piano, vocals; Omar Rodriguez Calvo, bass; Jamile Peet, drums.

Ordering info: inandout-records.com

#### Jazz Orchestra Of The Concertgebouw The Jazz Influencers JOC 013

The Jazz Orchestra Of The Concertgebouw, recorded before a live audience in February 2020, offers a dozen detailed compositions by nine millennial musicians out to establish their individual voices. Except for guesting alto saxophonist Tineke Postma, the composers don't themselves play, and half the program is arranged by Rob Horsting, whose stamp might be nuanced sectional blends and free use of space.

Its liner notes avow that this European cohort's music is distinct from American jazz by virtue of it being written and performed by young musicians in Holland adopting a "more inclusive approach" to the music. But the compositions here embrace conventions of concert masters like Ellington and Kenton, while also nodding to Maria Schneider. The edgier legacy of Holland's Instant Composers Pool is muted, but there are moments of affecting polyphony, such as the horns-only passages of "Whiplash." Trombonist Bert Boeren's solo on "Open Water" is another highlight, with Marco Kegel and Simon Rigter on sax, sustaining the song's exoticism. Indeed, all the soloists aim high, supported by a rhythm



section providing sensitive coloration, as well as power and sometimes swing. Throughout, the orchestra performs sectional call and response, rich harmonies, tricky syncopation and counterpoint faultlessly. It doesn't resist going big, making full use of the dynamic and harmonic potentials of brass and reeds. —*Howard Mandel* 

Personnel: Marco Kegel, Tineke Postma, alto saxophone; Simon Rigter, Sjoerd Dijkhuizen, tenor saxophone; Juan Martinez, baritone saxophone; Wim Both, Erik Veldkamp, Ruud Breuls, Jan van Duikeren, trumpet; Jan Oosting, Ilja Reijngoud, Bert Boeren, Martin van den Berg, trombone; Peter Beets, Rob van Bavel, piano; Martijn van Iterson, guitar; Frans van Geest, bas; Marcel Serierse, drums. Ordering info: challengerecords.com



#### Altar Double Quintet We Salute The Night REAL MUSIC HOUSE 2393-037 \*\*\*1/2

The treatment by Europeans of an American folk tradition as a bastion of high art has resulted in a rich panoply of outstanding jazz. Adding to this legacy are Slovakian pianist Luboš Šrámek and saxophonist Nikolaj Nikitin, who along with their Eastern European colleagues in the Altar Quintet sport an accomplished strain of improvised music. Collectively, the players have considerable experience with American jazz musicians, and for *We Salute The Night* they tap three A-listers to add authentic seasoning to their skillful blending of jazz and classical influences.

For "Kunzo," trumpeter Tom Harrell fabricates a delicious strand of melody that weaves effortlessly through the shifting harmonic structure, sandwiched between confident solos by Nikitin and Šrámek. Bassist Drew Gress and drummer Johnathan Blake are also significant contributors, with Gress revealing a conservatory-like accuracy of pitch and placement on "Rain," while Blake demonstrates the right amount of fiery attitude on the hard-swinging "Gipsy Moustache." The rest of the album is handled by the core working quintet with immaculate attention to detail, including a faithful treatment of the Kenny Wheeler title track, a poignant arrangement by Nikitin of Bach's "Jesu, Meine Freude" and the exquisite ballad "Stayin' Alone."

The one smudge on an otherwise highly polished effort is the unfortunately titled "Smells Like MILF Spirit," which starts out as a rock chorale that's somehow simultaneously dark and corny, devolving into a spirited but polite homage to Kurt Cobain's hallowed grunge anthem. Apparently, not all Americana translates well abroad. —*Gary Fukushima* 

Ordering info: nikitin.sk

The Jazz Influencers: Giant, Whiplash, Lunar, Mercurial; Saturnine; Mushroom; Mynah; Brothers Keeper; Freya; Open Water; Pixelated Pariside; The Peter Cat. (75:35)

We Salute The Night: Kunzo; Rain; We Salute The Night; Gipsy Moustache; Stayin' Alone; Smells Like MILF Spirit; Short Affair; Jesu, Meine Freude. (59:24)

**Personnel:** Luboš Šrámek, piano; Nikolaj Nikitin, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone; Tom Harrell (1, 2, 4), Kornél Fekete-Kovács (5, 6), Juraj Bartoš (3, 7, 8), trumpet, flugelhorn; Drew Gress (1, 2, 4), Nenad Vasilic (3, 5, 6, 7, 8), bass; Johnathan Blake (1, 2, 4), Klemens Marktl (3, 5, 6, 7, 8), drums.

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### **Reflect, Assess & Project** Pandemic Crisis Presents an Opportunity for Jazz Artists to Assess Their Career Goals

ho would have imagined a year ago that we'd be in a virtual quarantine due to a virus that's spreading worldwide? I know I wouldn't have. Plans for tours, projects, personal growth, etc. were all put on hold, delayed or completely scrapped, and we all found ourselves slowly losing work, places of employment and, in some cases, the will to even practice our crafts for a time, as there wasn't a place to do it. We've all been shaken to our core due to the uncertainty of the future, prompting the anxiety of the present.

That said, I feel that this moment in history is an opportunity—an opportunity to look back by way of the lens of the present as we plan for the future.

Being still is very difficult in a culture that is predominantly about movement. The pressure to create new content and to be as current as possible seemed to be the norm up until we were all forced to pivot to the difficulties of a virtual world. That said, I feel that we were given a gift. We were all forced to be still. We were forced to be in the moment and literally reflect on what has worked, what doesn't work in our current predicament and how to move ahead in a new reality that is constantly evolving. This is why I feel that it is imperative that we reflect, assess and project, as we are all in a state of stillness.

"In order to move forward, you must look back." To paraphrase the words of Dr. Cornel West, we must reflect on the past in order to have a clearer view of the future. Now is a great time to take a look at your career or body of work, and look at what you've done well and what you can improve upon. Personally, I've taken a good look at my body of work to see what's missing. What haven't I done and have always wanted to do? Or what haven't I done because I've been afraid of how the outcome would be received?

These are important questions to ask as we all strive for growth and evolution. And for those who are just getting started, it might be a good time to reflect on the "why?" Why did I get into this field in the first place? Reflect on the first sounds that inspired you to want to perform this music. Think about the joy you first had when you figured out a new progression, conquered a technical challenge or wrote your first song. It's always a good idea to take a step back and remember what got us to this present moment.

Some of the most difficult moments in our lives happen when we look in the mirror. The mirror gives you the truest reflection of who you are currently. As we look into the mirror, we have two choices. We accept the truth of what is there. Or we create a mask in an attempt to disguise our truth. If we really want to improve ourselves, we must be honest with where we are. For the past several months, I've had many mirror moments, and believe me, they were very painful at times. I myself realized that I was wearing several masks in my personal and professional life, inhibiting my own personal growth.

Now that I can't run from myself, I'm forced to deal with myself. We all are. I'm making the choice to peel away the masks and be my authentic artistic self and to prepare in mind, body and soul for the future. So, is there something in your career or personal life that's keeping you from being the real you? Now might be the best time to eliminate that from your life or at least make a vow to improve on it.

The future is a reality. It's not something that you can pick and choose. It is coming whether we are prepared for it or not. Planning, dreaming and setting goals are some of the first steps in preparing for the future. My good friend Tia Fuller, at the start of her career, would make post-it notes and place them all over her apartment with technical goals on the saxophone, financial goals and personal spiritual goals. Fast-forward 20 years, and she has met and exceeded every single goal that I was aware of. This is a true testament to the importance of setting goals and creating a plan for these goals.

I suggest projecting a general time for yourself to complete your goals, and then work backwards from the goals to solidify a plan that will get you there. This takes focused thought, attention to detail and discipline. In the words of the late, legendary educator Joe Clark, "Discipline is not the enemy of enthusiasm." It is with this determined enthusiasm that one can prepare the road map for the journey ahead. As the future is surely certain, it is also certain that the music will be there as well, and we will all need to turn our dreams and visions into reality.

With that, I look to John Coltrane. The album A Love Supreme forever changed my ideas and purpose for playing music. I have a personal analysis of this work of art, as I do with many of the sources of inspiration that I've collected over the years. In short, the album is in a few parts. Part one is "Acknowledgement," the awareness and recognition of your current state of existenceyour purpose. Part two is "Resolution," the active decision to alter or continue the perusal of that purpose. Part three is "Pursuance," the relentless pursuit of that purpose. And finally, part four, "Psalm," is the song you sing when you can look back at where you've come from and how you got there. It's the prayer that is the current moment.

This analysis has gotten me through the darkest moments of my life, including the darkness of our current reality. We will get through this as long as we have the hindsight to reflect on what got us here, the poise to stand in the present, and the courage and will to forge ahead into the future. This is *A Love Supreme*—a love that I've known my entire life. A love that will unite and heal the world through this music—born on the soil of the land known as the United States—that we call jazz.

Trumpeter, bandleader, composer, educator and activist Sean Jones occupied the lead trumpet chair for the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra from 2004 until 2010, and he was a member of the SFJAZZ Collective from 2015 until 2018. As a leader, Jones has released eight recordings on the Mack Avenue label, the latest being Sean Jones: Live From The Jazz Bistro (2017). Jones has recorded/played with Illinois Jacquet, Jimmy Heath, Frank Foster, Nancy Wilson, Dianne Reeves, Gerald Wilson and Marcus Miller. He has also performed with the Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Youngstown Symphony Orchestras, as well as Soulful Symphony in Baltimore, and in a chamber group at the Salt Bay Chamber Festival. An internationally recognized educator. Jones was recently named the Richard and Elizabeth Case Chair of Jazz at John Hopkins University's Peabody Institute in Baltimore. Before coming to Peabody, Sean served as the Chair of the Brass Department at Berklee College of Music in Boston. He currently sits on the Board of the Jazz Education Network. Visit him online at sean-jones.com.

(799 Mar)

We will get through this as long as we have the hindsight to reflect on what got us here, the poise to stand in the present and the courage and will to forge ahead into the future.

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### BRASS SCHOOL Woodshed > SOLO BY JIMI DURSO



### **Enrico Rava's Trumpet Solo** on 'Thank You, Come Again'

lancing at the chord changes, with the of "chromaticism that isn't." strings of modulating ii–V's, one would expect Enrico Rava's "Thank You, Come Again" (from 2009's New York Days, ECM) to be a bebop tune. Listening to the rhythm section of drummer Paul Motian, bassist Larry Grenadier and pianist Stefano Bollani makes it sound not as much so. And then, looking at Rava's trumpet solo, he's taking bebop harmonic motion but putting a different spin on it.

For one thing, there aren't many chromatic passing tones, a staple in bebop. Measures 5, 30, 39, 57 and 61 are the only instances, with some other chromaticism in bars 10 and 58, as well as an approach tone in bar 48, which is fairly subtle. So, Rava eschews bebop vocabularv for this improvisation.

But Rava does create a sense of chromaticism by playing over the barline. Look at bars 6 and 7. So far, Rava has stayed within the F major scale (which fits seamlessly on the Iii-V-I progression), but ends this long phrase on  $E_{b}$  and  $D_{b}$ , which fits great in the key of  $A_{b}$ set up by the  $B_{b}m7-E_{b}7$  (ii–V motion) but is quite outside the key we had been hearing. As a result, it sounds inside and outside. It's also a very effective means of emphasizing the sound of the key change, and creating a kind

The same technique is used over bars 10-11, only it's more exaggerated. At the end of measure 10, Rava plays Bb and Ab (in the key of G<sub>b</sub> that's alluded to) and then resolves on the downbeat to the A natural in between, which is also in the new key, and most assuredly not in the previous key. Repeating this note makes it even more effective.

We again hear Rava using this idea of changing scales over the barline between measures 24-25, 46-47 and 56-57. There's also an instance where the idea is used more obscurely: measure 25-27. Most of the changes are treated as ii-V's in major, but in this section, he seems to be hearing it more as V-i in minor. Notice how he plays F# (the second) on the Em7 in bar 25, but then plays F natural at the end of the bar, setting up the A7 to resolve to D minor.

But as great an idea as it is to resolve to nonoverlapping tones to bring out key changes, Rava has the sense that doing the same thing over and over has a tendency to not be musically fulfilling. Notice how often Rava doesn't emphasize the key shifts, such as measures 7-9. It's quite clever how Rava not only doesn't play in bar 8, avoiding calling attention to the key change, but when he does start playing again in measure 9 it's continuing the downward scale he started back in bar 7. And since those first two notes (Eb and Db) are part of the both keys (Ab and Gb), Rava is not just avoiding calling attention to the key change; in this case he's actually obscuring it. An additional clever thing: Rava brings back this same descending sequence in bars 41-42, the next time we hear the key of G<sub>b</sub>.

Leaving space between the key changes is something we hear quite a bit of in this improvisation. Between measures 12-13, 14-15, 22-23, 32-33, 38-39 and 54-55 are further instances. His improvisation is almost split evenly between the ideas.

Thinking of groups of chords as keys may have another advantage: We hear Rava emphasizing nonchord tones quite often. Bar 4 is one example, where Rava culminates on a high A, the sixth of the Cmaj7, but the third of the key (F major). Bar 18 is a better example, where after a series of descending thirds in C major, Rava lands on a D. He often seems to be more concerned with the shape of the melodic line than with the chord tones. After a brief pause, he continues the descending thirds motif, this time resolving to chord tones. This creates a sense of completeness.

There's also the aforementioned F# on the Em7 in bar 25, and from here, as it's changing to the key of C, he starts on a high A and goes down the scale, but rhythmically this creates some nice contrasts. We land on the G in measure 27, the fourth of the Dm7, and just as this resolves to the chord tone F at the end of the bar, he immediately continues down to E, which is the sixth of the following chord. This is delicious enough that he plays the E again in the next measure, where it is now the ninth.

The next phrase, still in C, ends on an A natural, the sixth of the Cmaj7 (bar 31). Also clever, when it returns to the key of F in measure 33, Rava starts on this same A natural, the third of the key and the chord, connecting the keys and phrases.

Rava leans on this A again when we next hear the key of C major, emphasizing it in bar 49. Then he plays a scalar run that keeps bouncing between B and E. On the Cmaj7 these are the third and seventh, but on the Dm7 and G7 they're the sixth and ninth, or third and sixth, mostly nonchord tones.

Rava's ideas on this solo are simple, but he uses them very effectively to create a moving improvisation. DB

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at iimidurso.com.





### **B.A.C. Paseo Trombone** Hand-Built Production Model With Vintage American Sound

ansas City-based B.A.C. Musical Instruments is well known for building custom trombones that are not only fine instruments, but playable works of art.

Best American Craftsmen (B.A.C.) is the brainchild of repair technician and instrument historian Michael Corrigan. Once a small repair shop in the basement of Mike's Overland Park, Kansas, home, the company has since grown from those humble 2004 roots to occupy a factory near downtown Kansas City's historic jazz district. Today, B.A.C. is hand-building some of the most unique instruments available anywhere, and although their customization options and imagination seem endless, the manufacturer continues its quest to preserve the quality and sound of the quintessential vintage American-made instrument.

This incredible level of customization and craftsmanship often comes at a price. While there are other American companies making modular horns at a lower price point than a full one-off custom, even those instruments can be expensive and the many design and options downright dizzying. That makes the B.A.C. "Handcraft" series a welcome option, indeed. This instrument line is still hand-built but narrows down the endless options of their custom horns to fixed designs that don't lose the feel of owning something really special. The Handcraft series includes both trumpets and trombones and is further broken down into the Paseo (jazz models) and Plaza (orchestral) lines. This review will focus on the Paseo model jazz trombone.

As I open the B.A.C. stenciled Protec case, the visual appeal of the Paseo model is striking with its satin-finish full copper bell, nickel silver neckpipe and satin yellow brass slide tubes. And that beautiful hand-lettered engraving adds a classy touch of distinction. The visual effect isn't full-on "steampunk" like some B.A.C. custom designs, but it is stunning. The tuning slide's counterweight could also be seen as a steampunk element, looking like another piece of tubing through which no air could actually pass (or could it?). These different materials are there for more than just looks, however, as each one will serve to color the horn's sound.

The first thing I notice while assembling the Paseo is the angled lefthand grip. The lower cork barrel is moved forward a bit so the bottom of the brace is angled forward (actually fitting the human hand). Because most trombones are built with this brace set perpendicular to the slide tubes, it felt awkward at first. However, I quickly grew to like this design, and started to wonder why trombones haven't always been made this way.

The right-hand grip uses a slightly smaller-diameter tubing, giving the slide a lighter, more precise feel. The slide is light and its action is fast and smooth. The slide positions relative to the bell are closer to those of a wide-slide orchestral trombone. I happen to like that, but if you're looking for narrow-slide positions, you may be thrown off.

I also really like the internal slide lock, its slick design hiding the working parts for a clean look. My only beef with this awesome slide was the water key placement. Its central location meant leaning to the left to use it. This is hardly a deal breaker, but worth noting.

Most trombones of this size are either .500 or .508., so this dualbore slide (.500/.508) is a bit unusual. I thought I might find evidence of the intonation quirks sometimes present in dual-bore horns with a larger spread between the two bores, or be thrown off by an unfamiliar back pressure. But if I didn't already know it was a dual bore, I wouldn't have guessed. Perhaps the bores are too close to notice, or maybe the fixed Williams 6 leadpipe gets some of the credit for this great balance. Regardless, the response is immediate with no intonation surprises, and the back pressure is even in every register.

Here's where the design of this horn gets really interesting. Remember that this trombone has three very different alloys in its design. As I see it, the solid core sound from the yellow brass slide tubes and tuning slide should have some "snap" added to the articulations by the silver neckpipe, and then all of that is amplified by the beautiful, resonant copper bell. A great deal of thought went into these choices, and when paired together with the .500/.508 bore slide and the Williams leadpipe, the results are wonderful. Such a great sound: dark with plenty of core at any volume, and with a surprisingly even response in any register.

I can get some bite in the sound if I press the volume or sharpen my attacks, but I never need to do that just to get the notes to speak. It is such a treat to play a smaller-bore trombone that doesn't require a strident tone in the extreme registers and where all the notes feel the same, all with the same great sound. I have found this in some Americanmade orchestral trombones, but never in a trombone this size. I didn't think it was possible; I stand very much corrected.

The Paseo is a fantastic instrument, but its price point also makes it a great deal. Buyers can get a hand-built B.A.C. horn that looks, feels and plays like something truly special without having to navigate a world of endless custom options. Including a Protec Pro-Pac case sweetens the deal even further.

The Paseo is the best production-model trombone I have ever played, and I am going to be very sad send this demo model back home to Kansas City. —*Ryan R. Miller* coolisbac.com



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### Jazz On Campus >



### **NEC Welcomes Students Back to Campus**

**AS THIS ISSUE OF DOWNBEAT WENT TO** press, the United States was facing frightening trends in terms of COVID-19 positivity rates. Many educational institutions were gleaning information from their fall 2020 experiences to help them prepare for multiple scenarios for spring and summer coursework, which might include fully remote learning, along with in-person classes held with strict safety protocols. At some schools, music students have followed a hybrid approach, wherein their performance-based classes were held in person, but their academic classes met online.

One such school is New England Conservatory in Boston, which welcomed students back to campus in the fall. NEC had about 700 students enrolled, with approximately 400 pursuing Boston-based instruction and another 300 taking classes remotely.

In mid-December and early January, DownBeat conducted Zoom interviews with NEC educators and an NEC student to get a sense of how the fall semester had transpired.

"Every class that could be [taught] fully online was held online," said NEC President Andrea Kalyn, describing the school's approach. "We really kept the performance-based work in person, as much as we could, although with social distancing, masks and [other protocols]."

Ken Schaphorst, chair of the jazz studies department, taught three classes in person. Students in his classes often were positioned farther than six feet apart, and the musicians always wore masks. Wind instrument students would remove their masks only when it came time to play.

Schaphorst and his students learned to adapt. "With a big band, where we need to be spread out in a large room, we've had to listen in a very different way," he said. "We've learned to listen better. I've learned that if you *look* at someone, you actually hear them better. If I'm looking across the room at the trumpets, I mean, they might be 30 feet away."

NEC presented numerous student concerts during the semester. These performances were either livestreamed or prerecorded, but in both situations, there was no in-person audience.

Delfina Cheb—a vocalist who graduated from Berklee College of Music and now is pursuing a master's degree in NEC's Contemporary Improvisation program—frequently was tested for COVID-19 during the fall. Cheb remained healthy throughout the semester, and she took pride in the level of musicianship that she and her peers were able to achieve.

"Everything that we presented just felt so well-rehearsed and so focused," Cheb said. "When we were there [together] in the room, we all really wanted to be there. I really think that educationally, it's been one of the best experiences I've had so far in my life."

In terms of remote instruction, NEC educators described a contrast when comparing their experiences in the early days of the pandemic to what they were doing in late 2020.

David Zoffer—jazz department chair of NEC's Preparatory and Continuing Education Program—has become an expert in assembling musicians remotely for real-time performances. He spent much of last year mastering the nuances of SoundJack, free software that, when combined with other new technology and relatively inexpensive hardware, allows for low-latency, synchronous music making. Zoffer has reached the point where he and his students essentially can play in sync without the lag that has become so frustratingly familiar to musicians during the pandemic. NEC has set up Low Latency Rooms on campus to help students take advantage of the technology.

"Once you get it working, it's miraculous," Zoffer said. "I think this is going to change rehearsals forever. ... Anybody within a 500mile range can do this with each other."

Kalyn believes that pragmatic hurdles can enhance a person's appreciation for music: "At the beginning of [the pandemic], we stopped to think, 'OK, what is the place of music in a world stricken by something so deadly, something so all-encompassing?' What became very clear, very quickly, was that music is ... so elemental to our humanity. To watch everybody apply incredible human ingenuity to come together—digitally, and in person, with these restrictions—is very affirming." —Bobby Reed Blindfold Test > BY GARY FUKUSHIMA

### Jason Palmer

In 2007, DownBeat named Jason Palmer one of the "25 Trumpeters for the Future," and 14 years later, he has done nothing to dispel that prognosis, winning the 2009 Carmine Caruso International Jazz Trumpet Solo Competition and going on to contribute to more than 50 albums as a sideman or leader.

His latest album, *12 Musings For Isabella* (Giant Step Arts), is a concert suite inspired by the theft of 12 art pieces from Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in 1990. Palmer has spent more than two decades in that city, transitioning quickly from a gifted student at the New England Conservatory to a heralded professor of jazz at Berklee College of Music, as well as at NEC and Harvard.

DownBeat caught up with Palmer, who offered insights on the music via video chat from Spokane, Washington, his residence since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Ingrid Jensen/Steve Treseler

"Kind Folk" (Invisible Sounds: For Kenny Wheeler, Whirlwind, 2018) Jensen, trumpet and effects; Treseler, tenor saxophone; Geoffrey Keezer, piano; Martin Wind, bass; Jon Wikan, drums.

For the composition, I'd say 4 to 4½ stars. Kudos to the trumpet player for telling a story in such an eloquent and interesting way. In terms of even approaching the instrument, there was a lot of cool false fingering that was happening in the mid to upper register. I felt the trumpet player was taking some really unique risks on the horn, so I was really impressed by that. If it's not Kenny Wheeler, it's somebody that's influenced by Kenny. I'm leaning towards Ingrid Jensen on this one.

#### **Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah**

"Incarnation: Chief Adjuah–Idi Of The Xodokan," (*Axiom*, Ropeadope, 2020) Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, trumpet, sirenette, reverse flugelhorn, percussion; Elena Pinderhughes, flute; Alex Han, alto saxophone; Lawrence Fields, piano, keyboards; Kris Funn, bass; Weedie Braimah, djembe, congas, bata; Corey Fonville, drums, sampler.

I'm going to give that trumpet performance all the stars. I'm pretty sure that's Christian Scott, his latest live record. He really writes to his strengths. Just to hear him play in F minor, I could hear him play in that key all day. Although this is a live record, over the past 12 to 15 years, his sound on the trumpet is probably one of my favorite recorded sounds that's been documented in the studio. His sound is as huge as a truck, his ideas are clear, and his upper register is very clear.

I met Christian when he first moved to Boston. He's one of the leading lights in the young trumpet movement.

#### John Daversa

"#22" (Cuarentena: With Family At Home, Tiger Turn, 2020) Daversa, trumpet; Gonzalo Rubalcaba, piano; Carlo De Rosa, bass; Dafnis Prieto, drums; Sammy Figueroa, percussion. Whew, man! Give that player all the stars. That's a tough one to put a finger on because of the mute. At first, I was thinking it could be someone like Jeremy Pelt, but then I started listening to the content of the ideas. It made me lean more towards a player like Mike Rodriguez. Whoever this trumpet player is, it's just phenomenal. I'm going to check out more of this player if I haven't already. Just to be able to get around and be so clear with the Harmon mute, that's not easy to do if you don't do it all the time.

#### Jonathan Finlayson

"Feints" (*3 Times Round*, Pi, 2018) Finlayson, trumpet; Steve Lehman, alto saxophone; Brian Settles, tenor saxophone; Matt Mitchell, piano; John Hébert, bass; Craig Weinrib, drums. Dynamite! That is my cup of tea right there. If I get this wrong, I should be ashamed of myself, but there is something to be said for players



throughout the history of this music who have forged an identity via their ideas, as opposed to their sound. This song has a real strong M-BASE bent to it. My guess would be Jonathan Finlayson. I think that may be Steve Lehman on alto.

Whoever's playing trumpet on here, their playing is so dynamic and original, to the point where I would call it "specialty trumpet."

#### Dan Rosenboom

"Heliopteryx" (*Absurd In The Anthropocene*, Orenda, 2020) Rosenboom, cornet; Gavin Templeton, alto saxophone; Tim Lefebvre, bass, electronics; Zach Danziger, drums; Troy Zeigler, electronics.

For the composition and the playing, I'd say 4½ stars. The composition and the production were impressive. The trumpeter is somebody that I haven't checked out at all or enough of, but I have a few guesses. Based on the sound design of this, maybe Rob Mazurek. Or, there's a cat that I've been checking out recently named Daniel Rosenboom, or Peter Evans. Great flexibility, nice extended techniques. Real grungy overall. I like the lack of abandon they play with. No fear in that music.

#### The Birdland Stars (The East-West Jazz Septet)

"Two Pairs Of Aces" (*The Birdland Stars On Tour*, *Vol. 1.*, RCA Victor, 1956) Conte Candoli, Kenny Dorham, trumpet; Phil Woods, alto saxophone; Al Cohn, tenor saxophone; Hank Jones, piano; John Simmons, bass; Kenny Clarke, drums.

The first trumpet player on this one sounds like the man of a thousand substitutions, Kenny Dorham. And to think of the style of the alto player, my guess would be someone like Herb Geller, assuming it could be a West Coast session. The other trumpet player was playing a few Dizzyisms. I keep wanting to say Joe Gordon, but I don't think he played with Kenny Dorham at any point. ... But when I heard KD, that's 5 stars.

#### **Jaimie Branch**

"Waltzer" (*Fly Or Die*, International Anthem, 2017) Branch, trumpet; Tomeka Reid, cello; Jason Ajemian, bass; Chad Taylor, drums.

I'd give it 4.25 stars. This trumpet player at the beginning wasn't speaking as profoundly as toward the middle and the end part. And then the trumpet player took the mute out and really started to warm the horn up. To me, it almost sounded like two different people.

It could be a young trumpet player named Jaimie Branch, that I knew in Boston, though she may be in New York by now. Either Jaimie, or Wadada [Leo Smith], but I think he uses more space than that. Taylor Ho Bynum is my other guess. [*after*] She has this kind of yin-yang thing in her sound, where she can really push the horn or play it in a less aggressive way. Not many players have that kind of duality in their playing. **DB** 

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

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