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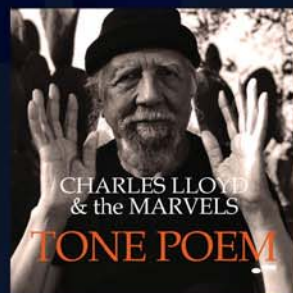
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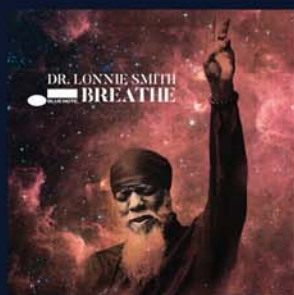
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ON THE COVER

20 Shabaka Hutchings

Authentic Expressions

BY BOBBY REED

British saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings exploded onto the jazz scene with that rare gift of getting hips to sway and minds to think. In his first DownBeat cover article, Hutchings talks about *Black To The Future*, the latest recording by his group Sons of Kemet, as well as a new book and being creative during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Cover photo of Shabaka Hutchings by Hayley Louisa Brown.

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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER

Itching for a Good Hang

BEFORE WE BEGIN THIS COLUMN, THERE must be a warning, a mantra that we've all grown to really dislike: Do not let you guard down, keep wearing masks and socially distance yourself until this pandemic is over.

With that out of the way, let's not get too excited, but we're starting to see signs of live out there—not *life*, but *live*, as in live music.

For most of us, it's been too long since we've seen a concert, let alone a festival, in person.

We miss the experience of guilt-free love for great live music and a great hang. After all, the hang is what jazz is all about.

Here at DownBeat, the signs of live are starting to fill our in-boxes, hopes and hearts. On page 18 of this issue, for example, there is a brief item from the DC JazzFest, which is now scheduled as a hybrid festival from Sept. 1–5. Hybrid. That means a live component with a live audience.

At the Newport Jazz Festival, the state of Rhode Island is allowing events this summer with modified capacities, so, while the festival may look a little different, organizers say the show will go on. Stay tuned for lineups.

Meanwhile in Italy, the 21st International Festival of Improvisation, Jazz and Global Music Rigas Ritmi also plans to go forward with live music July 1–3. Planners have pulled an eclectic mix of artists from around the world, including r&b crossover singer Clark Beckham, world music supergroup Bokanté and Spanish saxophonist and singer Antonio Lizana, to name a few.

The Moers Festival, nestled in the tiny German city of Moers, is even earlier and live, planning to celebrate its 50th anniversary May 21–24 with “hybrid stagings” of live audiences as well as streaming the proceedings. The fest promises an eclectic mix of ambitious art music that includes Paal Nilssen-Love Large Unit “EthioBraz,” the David Murray Trio and Decoy with Joe McFee.

And, out on the West Coast, the Monterey Jazz Fest is asking attendees to save the dates of Sept. 24–26 and hope like hell (my words, not theirs) California is able to open up for live events.

So, why talk about live festivals when the end zone is still a little ways away?

We need to think positively. Beyond that, the May issue of DownBeat has traditionally featured our Summer Festival Guide.

Due to the pandemic, we've moved that guide into the July issue in hopes of having a better picture of reopening the jazz scene.



Saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa (left), his son Talin and saxophonist Scott Robinson hang at the 2015 Newport Jazz Festival, chatting about Robinson's 6-foot-8-inch-tall contrabass saxophone.

Against that backdrop, it seems downright wrong not to mention festivals and live music somewhere in this issue. The crystal ball may still be cloudy, but it's clearer than it was last month. And, with a few prayers and a few more shots, maybe it will be clearer still next month.

Hopefully clear enough to see all of you out there for a good hang this summer.

Remembering Ralph with New Music

On page 16, we have a memorial to drummer Ralph Peterson Jr., who passed away March 1. I didn't know him, but I truly love his music, and any chance to see Ralph Peterson play live was a jazz holiday. Hearing his friends and fellow musicians memorialize him in the past few weeks lets me know that I missed someone special off the bandstand, too.

This issue of DownBeat was already laid out and ready to send to the press when word spread that there is a new Ralph Peterson release coming out on May 21. Rather than take away from the beautiful comments made by his friends and colleagues at the memorial, we can talk about that music here instead.

The album is called *Raise Up Off Me* and features his long-time trio of Zaccai and Luques Curtis on piano and bass, respectively, as well as guest artists Jazzmeia Horn and percussionist Eguie Castrillo. Peterson's dear friend Orrin Evans, the pianist, delivered some beautiful liner notes that are well worth reading. The record is coming out on Peterson's own Onyx Productions label. For more information, go to ralphpetersononyxmusiclabel.bandcamp.com.

Listening to his music while writing this brings a smile. As saxophonist Craig Handy said, so correctly, Peterson brought the thunder. **DB**

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Chords & Discords

Jack Bradley, Rest in Peace

Jack Bradley—a masterful photographer, a gifted sailor and a beloved Cape Codder—passed away on Sunday evening, March 21, at the Pleasant Bay Nursing Rehabilitation Center in Brewster, Massachusetts.

Born in 1934, Jack discovered his two passions—boating and Louis Armstrong—early, thanks to a father figure, Bob Hayden, who opened up his home to Jack, introducing him to Armstrong's recordings on 78s.

Through a girlfriend, Jack met his idol Louis Armstrong, soon becoming like a son to the musical giant.

"The first time I visited his home in Corona, Queens, I was so nervous that I was shaking," remembered Jack. "Louis, though, had a way of putting you at ease. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Everything's cool, man. We're just two guys hanging out.' Instantly my nerves vanished."

For the next 12 years, Jack attended hundreds of Armstrong concerts and recording sessions.

Soon an in-demand photographer, Jack's photographs of Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Coleman Hawkins and dozens of others are considered to be some of the very finest jazz photographs ever taken.

After leaving Manhattan for Cape Cod in



Nick Carlon (left), Jack Bradley and...

1976, Jack began a successful charter boat business, as well as co-founding the Cape Cod Jazz Society. A man driven by his love of jazz, Jack founded a top-notch record store, Vintage Jazz, and produced his own Jazz radio show on WFCC.

A voracious collector, Jack amassed a jazz collection of over 25,000 recordings. In 2005 Jack sold the Louis Armstrong section of his collection to the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona, Queens, nearly doubling the museum's holdings.

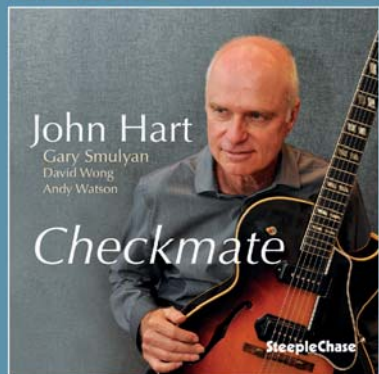
A celebration of Jack's life will be held later in the spring. He is also the subject of a soon-to-be-released documentary, *Through My Lens: Classic Jazz Visions with Jack Bradley*.

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Buster Williams Documentary

I'm writing to you regarding our newly released film, *Buster Williams Bass to Infinity*, wondering if you might be inclined to write about it. While the film focuses on Buster, it includes Herbie Hancock, Benny Golson, Christian McBride, Kenny Barron, Lenny White, Rufus Reid and Carmen Lundy. (Not a bad lineup.) Most of these folks appear in the film in conversation with Buster and in intimate duos or trios with him.

ADAM KAHAN
FILMMAKER

Editor's Note: Looks cool and we'll definitely check it out. Meanwhile, this letter came in at press time, so we'll let DownBeat readers know about it right now: Check it out at busterwilliamsmovie.com.

The Unstoppable Quarantine Duo

There are a lot of young jazz stars flying under the radar these days—especially in the realm of contemporary/traditional jazz. And while outstanding saxophone/flute player Alexa Tarantino is no stranger to DownBeat given the favorable reviews of her last two Posi-Tone releases, *Clarity* (DB Aug. 2020) and *Winds Of Change* (DB Sept. 2019), I would love to see a feature article on her and her musical/life partner, pianist Steven Feifke.

Having been forced to curtail their almost nightly performance schedules during the COVID shutdown, the Harlem-based roommates decided to form The Quarantine Duo (featuring Steven "Lock and Feifke" and Alexa "Quarantino"), launching a weekly concert series broadcast via Crowdcast, Facebook and YouTube platforms every Sunday at 8 p.m., Eastern Time. The concerts attracted a healthy following of watchers and donors (25% of all proceeds are donated to various arts organizations) and, to date, the Duo has raised more than \$10,000 for causes such as The Jazz Coalition, Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation, The New York Foundation for the Arts and numerous jazz venues located throughout the greater New York area.

As COVID restrictions begin to ease, hopefully these two artists will be able to hit the road in support of their upcoming spring 2021 releases. But until then, the weekly Quarantine Duo shows no signs of stopping or even slowing down.

GORDON WEBB
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

Editor's Note: Find out more about the Quarantine Duo at alexatarantino.com.

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Beat

Lake Street Dive Finds Beauty in Pop

Jazz educators frequently tell students that the ability to play numerous styles can be essential to making a living as a musician. A case in point is the band Lake Street Dive, which was founded in 2004 by four students at Boston's New England Conservatory. Rather than pursue a career in jazz, these NEC grads have applied their conservatory training to the creation of catchy pop tunes heavily influenced by r&b.

The band includes Rachael Price (vocals), Mike "McDuck" Olson (guitar, trumpet), Bridget Kearney (bass) and Mike Calabrese (drums). Keyboardist Akie Bermis, who has toured with Lake Street Dive since 2017, is now an official member of the band.

Through steady activity on social media, the group has won devoted fans around the globe. The band's version of the Jackson 5 hit "I Want You Back" was posted on YouTube in 2012 and has generated more than 6 million views. The group's cover of Norwegian pop trio A-ha's hit "Take On Me," posted in 2017, has racked up more than 11 million views.

The band also has shot videos for their renditions of tunes by The Beatles, Hall & Oats and Carole King, as well as clips for their original compositions, such as "Making Do."

The latter tune is a single from the band's eighth full-length album, *Obviously* (Nonesuch). The new disc was produced by Mike Elizondo, whose diverse resume includes work with Fiona Apple, Mary J. Blige, Dr. Dre and Carrie Underwood. Elizondo and Lake Street Dive had been familiar with one another's oeuvres, but they hadn't worked together prior to this album.

"He knew what he could get out of us, so he pushed a lot," Calabrese told DownBeat via Zoom from his home in Boston, referring to Elizondo.

During the same Zoom chat, Price—speaking from her home in Brooklyn—recounted that during the recording sessions, Elizondo asked



The members of Lake Street Dive (clockwise, from top left) are Akie Bermis, Mike Calabrese, Bridget Kearney, Mike "McDuck" Olson and Rachael Price.

Bermis to play a "deceptively easy" piano part on the tune "Nobody's Stopping You Now" about 30 times in order to get the perfect take.

"Sonically, this is our most confident record to date," Price said of *Obviously*. "It sounds like we really knew what choices we wanted to make, and we made those choices very boldly. And I think a lot of that came from Mike Elizondo [telling us], 'I know what you can do.'"

Another standout cut is Kearney's composition "Being A Woman." Floating atop an earworm of a melody that's punctuated with Calabrese's compelling marimba notes, Price's vocals chronicle the exhausting emotional toll of gender inequality and discrimination: "Being a woman is a full-time job/ And when we stand up and protest/ We're called an angry mob/ While another lone gunman/ Loads up his shots."

The powerful lyrics, combined with Price's

graceful, ascending vocals, make for an unforgettable tune.

"One of the secrets that we have used to put serious messages into a song is to give it a feel that you can listen to over and over again," Price explained. "The message will kind of seep in through repetition. And that's the beauty of a pop song, a bop with a message: You get to ruminate in a way that doesn't feel oppressive."

The album concludes with "Sarah," a four-part-harmony tune written by Calabrese and Bermis. When this journalist suggested that the track was reminiscent of The Beach Boys, the members of Lake Street Dive welcomed the comment as high praise.

"If you're going to do an all-vocal arrangement, what else are you aspiring to?" Price said.

Calabrese concurred: "For pop vocal arranging, that's the pinnacle." —Bobby Reed

Holiday Film Puts Drug-War Politics on Trial

DIRECTOR LEE DANIELS HAS TAKEN

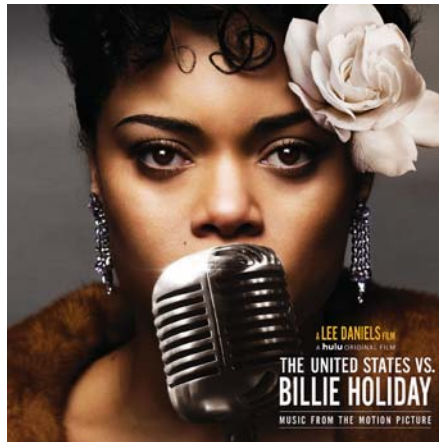
Johann Hari's drug war history, *Chasing the Scream*, mixed it with Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, shaken vigorously and concocted *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, a political cocktail both epic and evil that recently premiered on Hulu. It will be compared to *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), in which Diana Ross played Holiday in a familiar love story of public triumph concealing private pain. It remains an achievement due to the gangly eloquence of Ross' Oscar-nominated performance. But it was also a movie of its time. Its message was drug use is a malignancy that needs to be fought. Fifty years later, the battlefields of the drug wars that followed are scorched with corruption and huge prison populations.

So Daniels tells a story that could not be told in 1972. The malignancy is not drug use but the politics of the drug wars themselves. Daniels and screen writer Suzan-Lori Parks personify this in the racist monster that is Harry Anslinger, head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics from 1930 to 1962. As interpreted by Garrett Hedlund, he plays Inspector Javert to Billie Holiday's Jean Valjean, a man on a mission to pursue and destroy everything Holiday represents.

What she represents is summarized in the anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit." Like the stolen bread that ignited Javert's quest in *Les Misérables*, "Strange Fruit" becomes the original sin of Anslinger's pursuit. But "you can't arrest someone for a song," someone protests. "No," he says, "but you can for drugs." So drugs become incidental, a means to his end. It's the song he's really after. As for Holiday, she is a profoundly damaged woman by the time the story starts in 1947. But as played by Andra Day in her debut film performance, she finds in the song an unexpected inner strength to resist Anslinger's depraved tenacity.

Until recently, jazz history has been silent on Anslinger. He received attention in Martin Torgoff's 2016 book *Bop Apocalypse* (see *DownBeat* April 2017), and by most accounts he was an unrepentant racist. Daniels takes it from there, enriching Anslinger's depravity with flourishes of fictional license. In a 1947 meeting, we see him plotting with a cabal of political rogues that includes John Stennis, Joe McCarthy and Roy Cohn. Aside from being impossible (Cohn wouldn't meet McCarthy until 1953), it's unnecessary.

As for Anslinger's obsession with "Strange Fruit," that's harder to gauge. In the '40s, it was neither popular nor widely performed outside the left-wing folk circuit. Holiday never sang it on radio or in a movie, only before club and theater audiences. Its later status as Time Magazine's "song of the century" didn't take root in popular

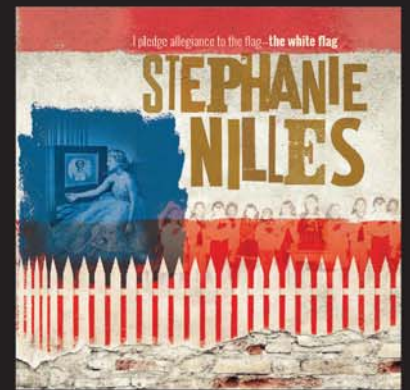


culture until after Holiday's death. So it's hard to understand Anslinger's paranoia over an obscure cult song that never got near the Hit Parade.

Perhaps Holiday herself planted the film's central conceit in an interview she gave for *DownBeat*'s June 4, 1947, issue. "I've made a lot of enemies," she said. "Singing that 'Strange Fruit' hasn't helped any, you know. I was doing it at the Earle (Philadelphia) 'til they made me stop." According to the movie, on May 27, 1947, the Earle is raided by a phalanx of cops who literally assault the stage as Anslinger watches from the rear. Daniels' precision on dates, however, is sometimes just an illusion of accuracy. The Earle gig ended on May 16. On May 27, Holiday was actually sentenced in a Philadelphia court for an earlier offense.

As far as Anslinger personally presiding over Holiday's arrests ... well, it's only a movie. But he did create a Stasi-like network of African-American agents who infiltrated and gathered evidence inside the Black drug networks. The most prominent among them was Jimmy Fletcher, an educated man with connections where they counted. Trevante Rhodes plays him with a cool confidence that drugs are a genuine curse on his people. He gains Holiday's trust, sets her up for a bust, then falls in love with her. At the crucial moment, he puts duty before love. But Fletcher becomes conflicted when he recognizes his boss's motives. Ultimately, he deliberately botches a 1949 case against Holiday and breaks with the Bureau. He regains her trust and the relationship continues to the end ... but, again, this is fiction.

Day's gritty, unsentimental performance catches Holiday's defiant recklessness without inviting pity or excuses. She owns her mistakes. Moreover, the film looks true to its time with a softly aged Kodachrome glow. Daniels has crafted some gorgeous process shots, too. When Billie walks across Times Square in the rain circa 1950, it's suitable for framing. —John McDonough



STEPHANIE NILLES

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JENNIFER WHARTON'S
BONEGASM
Not a Novelty

SSC 1612 IN STORES 4/23/21

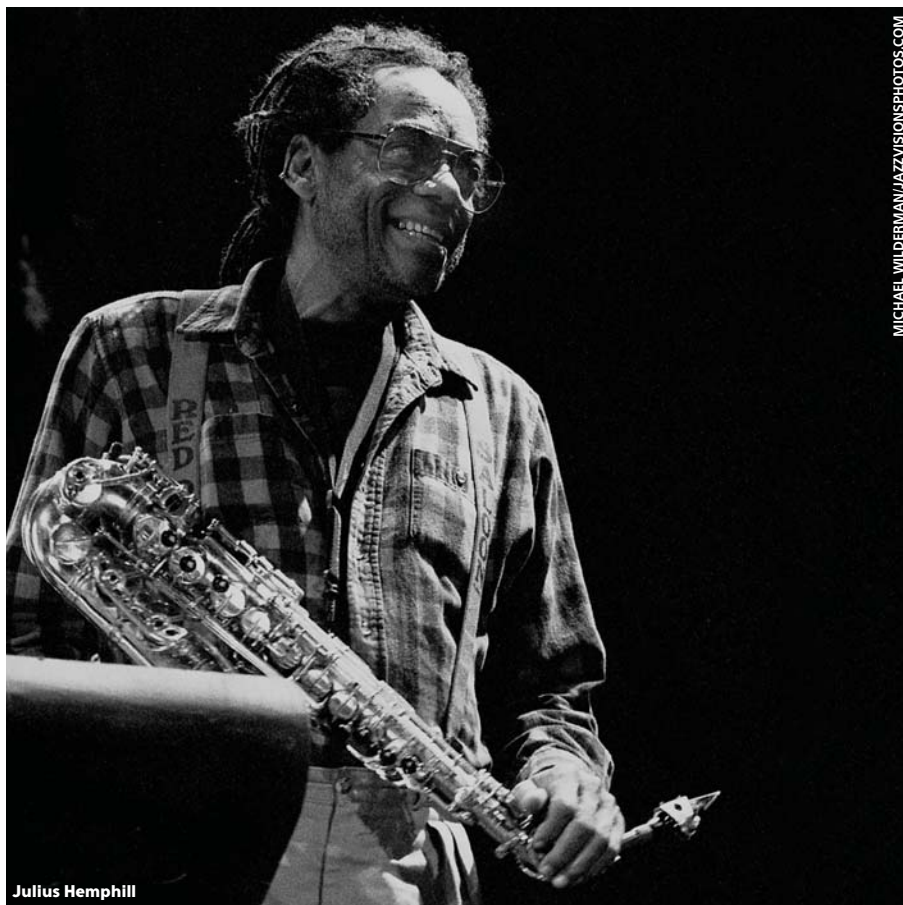
BASS TROMBONIST JENNIFER WHARTON MIGHT BE CONSIDERED BY MANY AS A UNICORN IN THE WORLD OF MUSIC. IN DECADES FROM THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT PAST, IT WAS A RARITY TO EVEN HAVE A WOMAN IN PROMINENT JAZZ BANDS AND ORCHESTRAS, BUT TO HAVE A BASS TROMBONE-SLINGING WOMAN AS LEADER WAS THOUGHT EXTRAORDINARY. WHARTON PRESENTED HER TROMBONE POWERED ENSEMBLE, BONEGASM, VIA ITS SELF-TITLED DEBUT ALBUM.

BONEGASM'S NEW RECORDING, *Not a Novelty*, WEARS ITS INTENTIONS ON ITS SLEEVE, OR PERHAPS MORE APPROPRIATELY, TATTOOED ON ITS ARM.



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Julius Hemphill

Julius Hemphill's Crusade

CONSIDERING THE SEEMINGLY BOUNDLESS

spring of archival music collections in the marketplace, it's surprising that so few of them provide genuine revelations outside of how a tune was composed or how it was recorded in the studio. Box set fatigue is understandable, but there are exceptions.

Take, for example, a recent seven-CD excavation of holdings in the archive of reedist and composer Julius Hemphill that not only consists exclusively of previously unissued recordings, but also goes a long way in filling out the complex story of this multifaceted artist whose breadth and vision were seriously short-changed by the recording industry.

The Boyé Multi-National Crusade for Harmony (New World) was assembled by fellow reedist and composer Marty Ehrlich, who worked with Hemphill for decades until the latter's death in 1995 at age 57. Hemphill remains one of the most dynamic and inventive figures in post-'60s jazz, but much of his modest discography has drifted in and out of print, and his legacy beyond pioneering work in the World Saxophone Quartet is criminally overlooked. He was a sublime arranger, with a gift for producing extravagant harmonies from reed instruments—a practice he spent his life pursuing.

Hemphill was born in Fort Worth, Texas, in

1938, and reflected the region's musical diversity in a similar manner to Ornette Coleman, rooted in the blues and sprung from the bebop of Charlie Parker. In 1966, he moved to St. Louis, falling in with fellow explorers like alto saxophonist Oliver Lake and trumpeter Lester Bowie. Two years later he co-founded the Black Artists Group (B.A.G.), an African-American arts collective invested in multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Hemphill's first-ever record was a duo album with the poet K. Curtis Lyle, *The Collected Poem—For Blind Lemon Jefferson*, and he worked extensively with playwright Malinké Elliott. Not long after releasing his classic 1972 album *Dogon A.D.*, he moved to New York.

Ehrlich, who grew up in St. Louis, met Hemphill in 1974, when the saxophonist was passing through town, and their connection was cemented when Ehrlich moved to New York in 1978 after graduating from New England Conservatory of Music.

He spent days informally talking and playing at the Brooklyn loft apartment of Tim Berne, where Ehrlich lived during his first year in the city, and where Hemphill spent a great deal of time. In 1980, he would join Hemphill's big band, and after the World Saxophone Quartet disbanded, he became a charter member of the Julius Hemphill Sextet, an all-reed ensemble that

extended his work with WSQ.

Ehrlich continued to lead the sextet for a decade after Hemphill's death. Given their professional and personal closeness, in 2017, pianist Ursula Oppens, the saxophonist's partner during his final years, engaged Ehrlich to create an archive for Hemphill, which found a home at the Fales Library at New York University.

The project would consume Ehrlich for the next few years, engaging in detective work matching scores with dozens of untitled performances sourced from a variety of cassette and reel-to-reel tapes, about 130 in all. He was able to identify and contextualize almost all of the 25 previously unpublished compositions included in the new set. He's currently creating professional editions of those pieces, "with scores and parts that connect for performance and study, so this music is played long past my time," he explained.

As he completed his work at the archive, the Fales librarian mentioned it to Paul Tai of New World Records, which had worked with both Hemphill and Ehrlich. In early 2020, Ehrlich began work on the release, spending most of the year curating the selections and writing the detailed annotations and Hemphill history that fills the 38-page booklet.

Between the WSQ and the sextet, much of Hemphill's work in this format has been released, but what *The Boyé Multi-National Crusade for Harmony* invaluable presents is his astonishing small-group work. There's a full disc featuring unpublished compositions played by him and Abdul Wadud—the wildly inventive cellist who worked with Hemphill in different projects for more than two decades.

There is a full disc devoted to concert music Hemphill wrote for others, including a solo piano work played by Oppens, and *Mingus Gold*, a three-movement suite featuring Charles Mingus themes reimagined for string quartet. Another disc features solo work and further performances with K. Curtis Lyle, while yet another disc features the Janus Company, an open-ended trio with longtime Hemphill partner Baikida Carroll on trumpet and a young Alex Cline on drums.

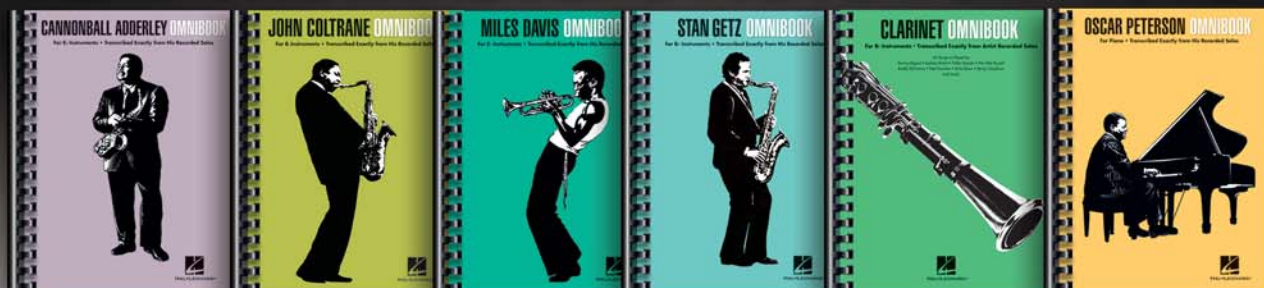
There's a quintet performance from 1978 that includes the clarinetist John Carter, who taught Hemphill in Fort Worth. A 1979 live date with Hemphill and Carroll joined by bassist Dave Holland and drummer Jack DeJohnette lives up to its promise, but in some ways it's the anomaly of the set. Hemphill maintained a tight-knit community, and most of the musicians featured in the set were close collaborators for years.

"I did this work out of love," Ehrlich said of the project. "I did it out of passion. In Black music, in Africological methodology, in the jazz tradition, whatever current thing or one wants to call it, we fight any hierarchy between notation and in-the-moment creativity. We must honor that Julius Hemphill is a protean composer of notated music."

—Peter Margasak

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Ralph Peterson Jr., jazz warrior (1962–2021)

Remembering Ralph

WHEN DRUMMER RALPH PETERSON JR. passed away on March 1, the jazz community lost a vital link between the generations of musicians he connected, friended, mentored and embraced with a combination of tough love, rhythmic force and sheer determination to create music at the highest level. He died following a six-year battle with cancer at the age of 58.

A bandleader, composer and educator, Peterson was known as a fiery, full-of-life presence on the bandstand and off. Beginning in 1983, he burst onto the jazz scene as the second drummer in a late version of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. The fact that Blakey, one of the greatest drummers in jazz history, chose the 20-year-old drum wonder speaks volumes. In Peterson, Blakey saw an heir apparent to his hard-bop throne.

Even while battling addiction problems during his 20s, Peterson didn't disappoint as a musician. His résumé as a sideman serves as a Who's Who of jazz from the 1980s forward, including Terence Blanchard, David Murray, Branford Marsalis, Charles Lloyd, Betty Carter, Uri Caine, Donald Harrison, Orrin Evans, Craig Handy and many more.

Peterson recorded 23 albums as a leader, from his first, *Ralph Peterson Quintet: V*, to his last, *Legacy Alive, Vol. 6* (with The Messenger Legacy band). His own bands—which included Triangular, several incarnations of his hard-driving trio and the Fo'tet—all included the explosive propulsion of his drum artistry. With his band Hip Pocket, Peterson played trumpet.

As a musician, educator and person, Peterson

had few equals, as evidenced by the outpouring of love during a March 6 celebration of his life in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Simulcast via Zoom and available for viewing on YouTube, the service began with Zaccai and Luques Curtis, the pianist and bassist, respectively, from a late edition of Peterson's trio, playing two of his tunes, "Inner Urge" and "Art Of War."

"I went to visit Ralph a couple of weeks ago," said Ron Savage, dean of the professional performance division at Berklee College of Music where Peterson taught. "And he said, 'You know, Ron, every day I get up, and when I open my eyes, I say, 'I'm gonna put it all in. I'm gonna put in a full day's work. Every day that God gives me, I'm gonna put it all in.' That's the way Ralph approached music. That's the way Ralph approached life.'"

Drummer Morgan Fall saw Peterson as more than a mentor and friend.

"I know all over the world there are so many people that idolize this man, and I'm one of them," said Fall, who was known as "Baby Ralph" while studying at Berklee. "And I did everything I could to be just like this man. I didn't have a father growing up, and he was my dad."

Fall said there were times when he needed things like drum sticks, and Peterson was always there to help, at a price.

"Yeah, come over to my house," Fall laughed, imitating Peterson's raspy voice. "Rake some leaves. Yeah, yeah, you thought you would come and get 'em for free?" But when Fall's mother passed away, Peterson's big heart showed. Fall said he paid for her casket.

Craig Handy said he almost stalked Peterson and cold-called him to help put out his first project, *Split Second Timing* (Arabesque). "He was so supportive," the saxophonist said. "He brought the thunder, and he changed my life. Because at that time, I was struggling, trying to figure out where I was fitting into the New York scene."

Pianist and composer Orrin Evans said he was told by a variety of musicians early in his career that he had to meet Peterson. "I said, 'Ralph, I'm supposed to meet you,'" Evans laughed. "He said, 'Here, carry this.' I carried his cymbal bag down the steps. He said, 'Can you play? I've got a gig for you next week.'"

"Not only did we play together, we fought together," Evans continued. "One time we were in Europe and we were trying to get to this flight. And the bass player said, 'Where's Far?' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Where's Far? We're gonna miss the flight.' I said, 'Who's Far?' And the bass player said, 'Far Worthy.' He had named Ralph 'Far Worthy,' and I didn't know what he meant. And he said, 'In his head, he is far more worthy than the rest of the world thinks he is.' And we busted out laughing."

In the spirit, Evans wrote a song called "Professor Farworthy" that appears on his 2002 album *Meant To Shine* (Palmetto).

"He taught us that we were worthy, and to chase that 'far more worthy' in our heads," Evans reflected. "We are better than what we're doing right now. I watched that man get better, be better and strive to be better every day."

Trombonist Robin Eubanks and Peterson were friends, touring and recording with the Legacy Band for more than three decades. Both men also practiced Buddhism. While honoring Peterson via Zoom, Eubanks said when Peterson told him he was "out of bullets," Eubanks offered to chant with him.

"As soon as I heard him chanting in my ear, I broke down and started crying," Eubanks said. "Then he started consoling and comforting me, telling me everything is going to be OK."

As Ruth Naomi Floyd sang an a cappella version of the traditional spiritual "The Sweet By And By," Zaccai Curtis could be seen wiping away a tear. Then he, trumpeter Sean Jones and Luques Curtis played another of Peterson's classics, "Tears I Cannot Hide."

In 2018, Peterson spoke to writer Bill Milkowski for *DownBeat's* December issue and discussed in his straightforward way his personal battle with cancer.

"I've had enough chances to be dead, but I'm grateful to be alive," he said. "And the focus and intensity and pace at which I'm now working and living is directly related to the spiritual wake-up call that tomorrow isn't promised."

Peterson is survived by his wife, Linea; daughter Sonora Slocum; stepdaughters Saydee and Haylee McQuay; and his spiritual daughter, Jazz Robertson.

—Frank Alkyer



Hafez Modirzadeh Reaches the Endline

LIKE GENERATIONS OF SAXOPHONISTS, the teenage Hafez Modirzadeh first modeled himself on Charlie Parker. Now 58, Modirzadeh retains, he said, the sensibility of an inside player who respects the masters of chromatic harmony, from beboppers to Bach and beyond.

But his calling has not simply been to absorb chromaticism. It has been to illuminate the biases associated with that system by elevating the status of pitches between the half-tones. In doing so, he has fashioned a distinctly rich aesthetic—if not a blueprint for pancultural parity.

“I want to decolonize the chromatic supremacy,” he said in a late February Zoom conversation.

The aim, at first, was to incorporate into his sonic concept the microtones of the Persian dastgah drawn from his father’s heritage.

“What was compelling me was to understand how these tones could be reconciled with not sounding out of tune within the jazz language,” he said.

Over the years, that framework, which he calls “chromodality,” has expanded to encompass the traditions of many lands, among them Turkey, Arabia and Native America. While he has documented his evolution on much-admired albums, their influence, by his own account, has not matched their acclaim. So, he said, he may be ready to move on to forms of self-expression yet unknown. But before he does, he has one more entry in the chromodality series: *Facets* (Pi).

“*Facets* is the endline,” he declared.

Out March 5, *Facets* is perhaps Modirzadeh’s most daring album. It not only features the retuning of a piano—an act, he said, that many aca-

demics liken to the sacrificing of a sacred cow—it presents the retuned instrument in solo and duo formats. That strategy leaves the piano—and the challenge to chromatic hegemony he is taking on by altering the instrument’s seemingly fixed set of half-tones—more exposed than on his previous albums. On them, the retuned pianos largely appear amid combos.

To meet the challenge, Modirzadeh, a longtime professor at San Francisco State University, flew east in 2018 and 2019 for separate recording sessions with pianists Craig Taborn, Tyshawn Sorey and Kris Davis. All make beautiful music playing pianos on which eight pitches are tuned down. The pitches cover an octave-and-a-half in the keyboard’s mid-to-upper register, precisely where a jazz pianist’s right hand tends to roam.

To the uninitiated, the album’s 18 short pieces might seem disorienting. But even the most

biased ear should discover a kind of familiarity in some pieces, particularly those in which Modirzadeh has integrated Thelonious Monk’s themes, like “Pannonica,” into his score. Though Davis and Taborn add their own abstractions to the material, their interpretations only reinforce the feeling that, whatever a keyboard’s temperament, Monk’s idiosyncratic intervals can evoke a quarter-tone quality.

Compared with Monk’s music, that of Johann Sebastian Bach might appear less adaptable to Modirzadeh’s world of microtonal resonance. Yet Taborn and Sorey have little trouble finding the affinities and exploiting them, using a theme from the well-tempered Baroque master’s “Goldberg Variations,” written into a score, as a reference point for solo explorations very much of that world.

“What strikes me is how quickly you begin to acclimate,” Taborn said. “[The retuning] starts to reorient your sense of how those resonances work. Then, if you go back to a well-tuned, even-tempered instrument, it sounds out of tune.”

As Sorey put it: “You hear sound in another way. You start to understand why certain notes resonate the way they do. It was about the decay of the sound. I wanted the note to hang out a little bit. It’s not really about being pianistic per se but about getting the sound itself—a meditative way of responding.”

Nowhere is that meditative response more clearly conveyed than in the album’s penultimate piece, “Facet 39 Mato Paha.” Inspired by Modirzadeh’s pilgrimage to the mountain of the title, the music has an elegiac quality. As it unfolds, Sorey’s piano lingers on each fading phrase, the retuned pitches mixing with Modirzadeh’s tenor saxophone in mournful contemplation.

With the recording of that tune, Modirzadeh said, he has come full circle. The last tone he plays on the tune and on the album—a B-flat rising to become a B natural—was also the first tone on his first album, 1992’s *In Chromodal Discourse*.

“It gets back to the idea of being and becoming—our tones, just like us, are in a state of becoming one another,” he said. “It also defies the notion of chromatic separation.” —Phillip Lutz

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Iggy Pop (left) and Dr. Lonnie Smith

Iggy Goes to the Doctor: In one of the more surprising pairings in recent jazz history, punk legend Iggy Pop and jazz icon Dr. Lonnie Smith teamed up for a soul-jazz tour around "Sunshine Superman," the 1966 pop hit by Donovan. "I was playing with my trio at Arts Garage in Delray Beach, Florida," said Smith, who lives in Ft. Lauderdale. "Iggy would come by and say he wanted to play with me. I let him play slaparoo, and he loved it. ... We thought about recording a few songs, so we went in with my trio backing us up, and it worked." The two also recorded "Why Can't We Live Together," a 1972 r&b hit by Timmy Thomas. Both cuts are on the Smith's new Blue Note recording, *Breathe*. bluenote.com

DC JazzFest Updates 2021 Plan: The DCJazz Fest will deliver a hybrid festival Sept. 1–5 consisting of a combination of live and livestreamed performances. "While we are still in the middle of a challenging time, DC JazzFest is working closely with our D.C. partners to deliver a safe, world-class festival featuring great music for the jazz enthusiast and casual fan alike," said Sunny Sumter, the festival's executive director. "The well-being of our patrons, artists and festival production team is a top priority, and the move from June to September will support a safe festival experience for all." dcjazzfest.org

Holland Partners with Edition: Bassist Dave Holland has entered into a partnership with Edition Records. Holland will be working on new projects with the label as well as bringing out recordings from the archives of his own Dare2 Records. It's the first new label home for Holland since forming Dare2 in 2005. editionrecords.com

Music Sold AZis: Long-time music publicist Chris DiGirolamo has created AZis, a new label extension of his company Two for the Show Media. AZis offers a direct distribution outlet for artists with live recordings, and all sales of the music go to the artist. twofortheshowmedia.com



Janinah Burnett

Janinah Burnett Stretches Her Wings

AS A RENOWNED CLASSICAL SOPRANO, Janinah Burnett's repertoire includes opera, oratorios, art songs, spirituals and, perhaps surprisingly, jazz and r&b.

Or perhaps it's not so surprising, considering that Burnett is the daughter of Carl Burnett, drummer for Freddie Hubbard, Horace Silver, Nancy Wilson and other legendary jazz artists. "My mother tells me that, as a baby, Nancy Wilson held me," Burnett said. "That must have given me some good energy."

She showcases that energy and her stylistic range in her first album, *Love The Color Of Your Butterfly* (Clazz Records), alternating between her classical voice and her jazz voice, sometimes in the course of a single song. She performs works by Duke Ellington (two songs from his Sacred Concerts, but also "In A Sentimental Mood"), a mash-up of Cole Porter's "What Is This Thing Called Love" and Bizet's instantly recognizable "Habañera" from *Carmen*, the tragic aria "E Lucevan Le Stelle" from Puccini's *Tosca*, Gershwin's "I Loves You Porgy," the spiritual "Keep Your Eyes On The Prize" and r&b songs from Sade and Donny Hathaway.

The disc is produced by drummer Terreon "Tank" Gully, a veteran of ensembles led by Christian McBride, Stefon Harris and John Beasley. He is also responsible for much of the highly creative, nontraditional arranging. A friend of Burnett's since their days at Spelman College, Gully called in an exceptional group of musicians to accompany her: pianists Christian Sands, Sullivan Fortner and Keith Brown; bassists Luques Curtis and Ben Williams, and Casey Benjamin on vocoder.

Burnett's classical credentials are impeccable. After singing both classical and jazz music at Spelman, she earned a master's in vocal performance and literature at Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Fresh out of gradu-

ate school, she landed the starring role of Mimi in Baz Luhrmann's hit 2002 Broadway production of *La Bohème*. She has spent eight years with New York's Metropolitan Opera and has toured internationally in a production of the Gershwins' monumental opera *Porgy And Bess*, playing the roles of Bess and Clara.

But she feels propelled to sing jazz by "the ancestors," she said. She is, in fact, just the latest in the long tradition of artists blending classical music with African-American genres like jazz, blues and spirituals. That list includes Duke Ellington and many other composers including the Gershwins, Scott Joplin, Harry Lawrence Freeman and H. Leslie Adams, one of whose art songs Burnett sings on the new album. "There is so much about American music that remains hidden," she said. "All of the music was there. All I had to do was sing it."

Burnett was unsure whether to use classical or jazz musicians on the album. "Terreon insisted on people who spoke the language of jazz, and he had to convince me. He felt that jazz musicians could more easily stretch out into these other idioms," she said.

"In my experience working with some of the best musicians in the world, I knew that they also study classical music," Gully said. "They had all the things they would need—technique, facility, familiarity with the classical repertoire, interpretation—but also knew how to play jazz."

At first, Burnett was nervous about working with such top-flight jazz artists, "because it's a new thing we were doing—new for me and for them." She relaxed as she began to realize that her collaborators shared a deep understanding of the nuances of jazz and classical music.

"That's what I discovered from doing this album: that if you speak the language of music well, there's nothing you can't do."

—Allen Morrison

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SHABAKA HUTCHINGS AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION

BY BOBBY REED | PHOTO BY HAYLEY LOUISA BROWN

Shabaka Hutchings' music makes fans dance *and* think. The dual ability to get hips swaying and synapses firing has made him one of the brightest stars in the jazz universe.

Based in London and named after an Egyptian pharaoh, the 37-year-old multi-reedist has made waves with three bands, all of which are signed to the Impulse record label: Shabaka And The Ancestors, The Comet Is Coming and Sons of Kemet.

In the 2020 DownBeat Critics Poll, Hutchings topped the category Rising Star Jazz Artist of the Year, and Shabaka And The Ancestors won the category Rising Star Jazz Group. Those accolades

are the latest evidence that fans far beyond the U.K. are championing his artistic output.

His incendiary new album, Sons of Kemet's *Black To The Future*, addresses the historical and contemporary impact of racism. The program is bookended with performances by musician/poet Joshua Idehen, whose fiery lyrics pull no punches on the opener, "Field Negus," and the closer, "Black," both of which are searing indictments of the brutality stemming from racial inequality.



'For me, it was like trying to grasp every morsel of information I could about what it was to actually develop a language and a vision, and how to navigate this music.'

Idehen, who has collaborated with Hutchings in various settings for many years, spoke with DownBeat via videoconference from Stockholm, where he has been living during the pandemic. "They're both quite complementary," he said, referring to the tracks to which he contributes on *Black To The Future*. "One comes from anger, and one comes from a certain weariness, like pleading, a defiance or resistance to any sort of stereotype, or any attempts to demean a Black person or Blackness. And then at the very end [of "Black"]—I think I had done about three takes—and on the last take, I yelled, "Leave us alone."

Those are the words that conclude the album, echoing the pain heard in the voices of Black protesters in recent years.

Between those two tracks are songs with vocals from hip-hop artists, such as "Hustle," featuring Kojey Radical, and "For The Culture," featuring D Double E, as well as instrumental numbers that could fill the dance floor. Even the instrumental tracks

supply potent commentary, thanks to titles such as "In Remembrance Of Those Fallen" and "Throughout The Madness, Stay Strong."

On this, the fourth album by Sons of Kemet, Hutchings showcases his skills on a variety of wind instruments, including tenor saxophone, clarinet and flute, while his bandmates—tuba player Theon Cross and the drumming duo of Eddie Hick and Tom Skinner—establish deep, mesmerizing grooves, flecked with grit. Among the other guest contributors on the sessions, produced by Hutchings with Dilip Harris, are Moor Mother and Angel Bat Dawid, who supply vocals on "Pick Up Your Burning Cross."

"For the most part, at the recording sessions for the album, it was just drums, tuba and saxophone," Cross said via Zoom from his home in London. "And the amazing thing about that is it gives me so much space to move around. Often, I'll play some sections in a low register. Then I might do the same thing in a higher register. And once I go into that higher register, I'm sharing it with Shabaka,

who's in the tenor register. So, it's almost like alternating between octaves, just utilizing the space. I'm playing the bass line, but also playing riffs. Sometimes I'll even do multiphonics, where I'll sing and play at the same time."

DownBeat caught up with Hutchings in London, where he has pursued numerous creative pursuits during the pandemic. He has been working on a solo album, listening to tracks for a forthcoming album by The Comet Is Coming, developing the manuscript for memoir and overseeing projects for Native Rebel Recordings, a label he launched in 2020.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

You posted on Twitter that you are working on your first book, to be titled *Letters To A Young Musician*. What was the impetus for that project?

It started with a letter that I had to write for the Casco Art Institute in the Netherlands, where they said, "You can write a letter and

then we'll send it to our followers." And I wrote the letter to a hypothetical young musician. I really enjoyed the process. I've been thinking about writing an autobiography for a while, and writing to a young musician directly gave me a really great way to frame my thoughts, in terms of, how to position the lessons that I've learned being on the road for all of these years, and what I've learned, trying to find my own voice and music.

I assume you were thinking about the type of letters that you could have benefited from when you were a young musician.

Yeah, exactly. When I was coming up, it was a constant struggle just to get information about what it is that you're supposed to be doing, especially in a context where you're looking at the culture of jazz from a detached place. So, maybe if you are in America, where the music has been formed and you can meet the elders and you can see the way culturally it has [evolved], it might be a different situation. But for me, it was like trying to grasp every morsel of information I could about what it was to actually develop a language and a vision, and how to navigate this music.

You have played some important gigs in New York. When you travel there, do you find yourself thinking about the history of jazz that has come out of the city? Or are you thinking more about the current jazz scene that's there today?

I'm thinking about how the history *created* the current scene. The ways that people operate, the attitudes that people have toward other musicians, toward going forward musically, those are things that you can feed on if you engage with them. That's what I get from New York. There's a certain type of hustle. There's a certain type of forward thinking, a readiness to project themselves into the future.

When I was in college, I went to a workshop with [bassist] John Patitucci [around 2006]. He said that a lot of people come to New York to *find* their voice. Whereas, from what he'd seen, it's better if you come to New York once you have a strong idea of who you are and what you want to play. Then you're able to merge your voice to other voices. And that has stuck with me all these years.

Two of the guest collaborators on *Black To The Future* play tenor saxophone: Kebbi Williams and Steve Williamson. Why was it important for you to have them on the album? Let's start with Mr. Williamson, who plays on the opening track.

Steve is one of my heroes. I used to follow him around London. I tried to follow him to every gig that he did and just try to figure out

his thinking. He's a real deep thinker. He's one of the first people that influenced me to start with an idea of what you want music to be like, and then adjust your practice and your physical actions on the instrument to the idea—as opposed to just practicing and hoping that an idea comes.

And what about Kebbi Williams? You brought him in for the track "Envision Yourself Levitating."

When I first moved to London [in 2004], Kebbi, just by chance, was on a six-month

break in London to see some family, I think. He just blew me away. I still remember one of the first solos I heard him play. It was at the Jazz Café, and he played so quietly that you could hear the scraping of the strings from the bass playing behind him. It was the most amazing, quiet playing that I've ever heard, and it was completely dynamic: It had a massive range. [At first,] the sound was tiny. That happened for maybe two or three tunes. And everyone was really focused and getting into it. And then at some point, he played the loud-

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est solo I've ever heard. And it was so dramatic. ... I had not thought about the journey of how you actually structure a set, in terms of drama. And as soon as he did that, I was like, "This is my guy. I will follow whatever he does for as long as I can." And the same [was true] when he went back to America. I followed him on YouTube, and then contacted him.

I've been a legitimate fan of what he's done for many years. There were years when I was not confident in what I was doing, the direc-

the music and enjoy the music and that [could] be the start of a process of them maybe realizing there are things that they do not know. This is an idea of depth, rather than surface.

If you have a surface-level understanding of racism or the legacy that we're referring to, then if you encounter the music and suspect there is something deeper [with] the rhetoric around the album, and the message behind the album, it gives you clues and hints of ways to explore. For me, that's the best thing, in that it gives people a way of going forward.

'I was using social media as a way of alleviating boredom. And actually, boredom is necessary for deciding what to do next.'

tion I was taking. I was kind of losing vision and direction. And I remember specifically that Kebbi was one of the players that in listening to him, I got an energy back and a spark and a love of music.

With a song like "Hustle," there are Black fans who immediately will know exactly what you're talking about. There is also an educational aspect of your music, perhaps opening some white listeners' eyes to the scope of racism, and the impact of the long history of enslavement and imperialism. So, talk a bit about the idea of making music that resonates with a listener who gets it immediately, as well as the listener who maybe has their eyes opened a bit.

I really see the process of getting information as being circular: Everyone is on a position toward understanding, and everyone is at different points within it. So, for me, if someone is at a position where they understand where we're coming from—from a cultural perspective—well, that's great. But if they don't, then at least this might be one point in their journey.

The aim of artists is to put information out there, and when people are ready, they can come to it—and hopefully further themselves. The music, contrary to popular belief, is not universal, but it has the ability to *universalize*; it can become universal. It's a process. I would [hope that] people who don't get it, [would] listen to

In a previous interview with DownBeat, you talked about how when you get in the studio, you like to just let tape roll, and then later you go back and construct the final songs.

I decided that for every tune, the drums are going to start playing for a long, long period of time before even a bass line or the melody comes in. So, the drums might be playing for 10, 15, 20 minutes, just jamming with each other and actually developing a communication with each before the other elements are added.

It's a technique I heard about, that both James Brown and Fela Kuti did. They would just let the songs go on and on and really get the vibe going before the tune itself. I think that's essential in loosening up the group.

When that red light comes on [in the recording studio] and everyone says, "Go," there's an initial tension. Even if everyone is a complete professional and knows what they're doing, there is necessarily going to be a tension. And that tension is the thing that I'm trying to alleviate in all my work, you know, how to get the least tension in the creative process. So, for me, if the red light goes on and if the drummers play for 15 minutes before even the bass line comes in, by the time the bass line does come in, they're really intertwined with each other and deep in the groove.

And by the time I come in, I understand what the groove is. Because even though I write the music, what the music is in my head

is going to be a different thing to what happens when other human beings are interpreting it. So, the big challenge is, how do I, as quickly as possible, align my expectations with the reality happening in the moment?

Talk a bit about your relationship to classical music and the piece that you performed at the London Jazz Festival in November.

It's Copland's Clarinet Concerto. It was written for Benny Goodman. I love the piece, but I had to really get my clarinet chops up to shape. It really brought my technical ability up, more than I could ever imagine. That's the reason I decided to study classical clarinet [at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama]. I didn't necessarily want to be an orchestral musician, but I wanted to go through the same process of study and training that any clarinetist would have. I didn't want there to be a differentiation between the training that I got studying jazz and the training that a classical musician would get.

In practicing for [the performance of the Clarinet Concerto], I had to re-energize that part of my brain. Classical music has influenced me in an asymmetrical way that a lot of people don't understand. When you're playing classical music at a high level, what you're doing is allowing yourself to be a medium from which the intentions or the emotions of another composer can come through you. You're a vessel. [For example,] you've got a program and you're playing a Stravinsky piece, and then you're playing maybe a piece of Brahms' and then you might play a modern piece by Morton Feldman.

You've got to get into the mindset of—and the intentions of—each of those composers, who are operating in three very distinct time periods. To do that, you've got to just step back from the music as an individual, and allow yourself to be prostrate before the intention of the greater music. And that's what I try to do with my jazz music. I'm not trying to come to the music with a sense of who I am or what I can do. I'm trying to come to the music and say, "I will serve the music as truly as possible."

During the pandemic, have you been making a lot of phone calls and doing a lot of Zoom chats with musicians and friends?

No, I'm a social person when I'm in the presence of people, but then as soon as I get cut off, I am a hermit. I bury myself away, and I do my stuff. I've not talked to many people, actually, for a long time, you know? But I like that. I grew up an only child, with a single mother, so I'm used to just being by myself and getting on with what I need to do.

I want to get your perspective on something that has been a big deal here in the States:

the poet Amanda Gorman reciting “The Hill We Climb” at the inauguration for Joe Biden. I was just wondering what it was like for people in the U.K. to see that.

I heard about the poem but I [didn’t see the inauguration]. About a year ago, I deleted everyone that I follow on social media, so I don’t follow anyone. People share stuff that’s cool that I don’t get. I use social media for posting outwards, but I don’t get anything back inwards. So, there’s some elements of popular culture that I completely miss out on.

Why did you decide to disconnect from social media in that way?

Many reasons. I can start with the fact that I got to a stage where I was using social media as a way of alleviating boredom. And actually, boredom is necessary for deciding what to do next. So, not knowing what to do and actually sitting there and going, “I am bored. I do not know what I’m doing next,” that means I start thinking about what I actually *do* want to do.

Next, I don’t want to know what everyone is thinking. Basically, I just can’t handle it. I know everyone has thoughts about things, but I would rather encounter those thoughts in the context of real life, rather than seeing what people download out of their brains directly onto the screen. And I’ve just been trying to be more holistic about my mental well-being. It’s easy to become addicted to these formats if you’re not careful—especially if you are a performer.

I would rather just do my artistic processes and then talk to people in real life. And then, if I want to access someone on social media, I go towards them—as opposed to having people pushed onto me.

DB



Hutchings doesn't follow anyone on social media.



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Wadada Leo Smith

ACROSS THE

THRESHOLD

By Dave Cantor | Photos By Petri Haussila

During decades of recording and work alongside a cast of co-conspirators that could serve as a summation of jazz's avant-garde wing, trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith has mapped his inspiration. And he continues to do so.

During the next several months, at least three sets featuring or conceived of by the Pulitzer Prize finalist are set for release. *Sun Beans Of Shimmering Light* (Astral Spirits), live recordings where Smith joined reedist Douglas R. Ewart and drummer Mike Reed in 2014 and '15, is a modern-day Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians convergence that features interactive and in-the-moment explorations by generations of the Chicago-born collective.

But it's a pair of three-disc sets planned for May on the TUM imprint that Smith sees as burnishing his legacy, one that's recently been supported by his selection as a 2021 United States Artists Fellow. The 79-year-old composer, who retired from the faculty of California Institute of the Arts in 2013, still seems to have an almost endless stream of inspiration to prod him along.

Trumpet, featuring more than two hours of music from 2016 solo performances at a historic religious structure in Finland, finds Smith ruminating on Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, saxophonist Albert Ayler, Sufism and members of his AACM cohort. His tinny tone cuts through the church's stillness to deliver a wending and emotive sermon on the excavation of ideas from our collective past, as well as the creative impulse.

More in line with *Sun Beans*, the triptych *Sacred Ceremonies* filigrees a portrait of the trumpeter alongside bassist Bill Laswell and the late drummer Milford Graves in duos with each player and also in a trio setting. Recorded in 2015 and '16, the music reflects not just the historical figures referenced in the song titles, but also a well-honed compositional aesthetic that Smith said allows for impromptu moments of exploration within a structural framework.



Wadada Leo Smith is set to release three projects during the next several months and has more in the works.



Sacred Ceremonies (TUM) filigrees a portrait of Smith alongside bassist Bill Laswell (left) and the late drummer Milford Graves (right) in duo and trio settings.

The trumpeter doesn't use the word "improvisation" at this point in his career, citing a variety of reasons, but recalled one poignant story to illustrate the difference between thoughtful creative command and self-indulgence.

"In Japan, I was doing an event with a poet and a drummer," Smith said over Zoom from his home in New Haven, Connecticut, in late February. "And after I finished, I sat down on the floor and put my trumpet on my lap. And guess how long I was sitting there. Another hour."

Listening to Smith and Graves assess history on "Baby Dodds In Congo Square," it's difficult to keep track of the drummer's poly-rhythms, as the trumpeter narrates the importance of both the titular place and musician. It's the sound of selflessness. When in duets with Laswell, the information being transmitted about song dedicatees Tony Williams or Donald Ayler is no less potent. And when Smith, Laswell and Graves perform together on *Sacred Ceremonies*' final disc, a sort of philosophical fervor electrifies the sonic discussions of myth, justice and healing energies.

The composer and bandleader recently spoke to DownBeat about these upcoming projects, the ritualistic nature of performance and why he references so many historical moments and people in his work.

The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Is there a significance to your recording *Trumpet at St. Mary's Church in Pohja, Finland*?

I met the pastor there, and I met some of the members. The town is where [Petri Haussila], who owns TUM Records, lives. And so, in that town is the 16th-century church, and we had been talking about it for the last several years—maybe four—that it would be a nice place to record.

One summer, I went up to Pohja, to [Petri's] home. I went there just to record that music. We spent four days recording. It was really a very beautiful time. We would get up in the morning, have breakfast, go to the church, record. Have a slight lunch, record and go home—have a sauna. Then, I would go to my room to work on whatever I'm going to do the next day.

It's almost like not being in an ordinary community—definitely a way to maintain my focus and my creativity.

You open that set with a song dedicated to saxophonist Albert Ayler, and in the liner notes you talk about the ceremonial nature of his playing. Is there a connection between your perception of his work and performing at St. Mary's?

He was a spiritual person. And he looked to use and elevate his music, so that it would offer an environment for people to either have a spiritual experience or some kind of reflective or meditative awareness. We would call an art-

ist like him a spiritual artist. He and his brother Don, those guys were brought up in a very unique family. ... They believed in the Holy Ghost and the touching of the Spirit. And those things, if you've ever been in that kind of environment, around those kinds of people, they are real. They are not artificial. It's not something that people pretend.

They go into these states, and these states have been recorded all throughout history, by all kinds of religions—from Judaism to Islam to Christianity to Buddhism, all across the spectrum. So, what they were doing and what he was doing—I use the word ritualistic, because I'm referring to the fact that it was not ordinary. The stage, for him, was not an ordinary space. It was a really profound space, where he conducted rituals. It's this idea of spiritual transformation.

The CREATE Festival didn't happen in 2020. But in your talking about the stage being a locus of spirituality, it makes me wonder if you intended the festival to be a kind of ceremony.

CREATE was that for me. But any stage that I walk on, I don't just walk on stage. When my ensemble and I prepare to perform, normally I separate myself from them—not for any kind of strange ego thing. I separate from them because I have to maintain focus. I have to prepare myself for what I'm going to do. And often when there's more than one person sitting around in a room—no matter what they're going to do next—it becomes a social environment. And people are laughing and talking, and telling jokes and remembering when they last saw each other. I don't want to be involved with that.

What I want to do is slip away, be somewhere else. Keep my reflection. Keep my mood. And then when I come on stage, I'm going to be ready. And I don't just walk on stage. I step on stage in a specific way; I step on the stage with the right foot.

Why's that?

Because that's the lead. I'm right-handed, and it makes me realize that I've stepped across this threshold, this other zone. If I just casually walked out there, there's no indication that I've crossed this kind of a threshold. There's no indication of that. But if I specifically mark how I step onto the stage, then it's there.

A lot of your work—including the upcoming sets on TUM, as well as previous recordings like *Ten Freedom Summers*—seems to be about assessing your relationship to various people, or it's a reflection on different moments in history. Amina Claudine Myers and Reggie Workman are among the people you reference on the upcoming albums. Why

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Wadada Leo Smith outside of St. Mary's Church in Pohja, Finland

are these kinds of appraisals important to your writing?

What I try to do in all of my compositions and performances, I try to render a psychological profile of what it is I'm looking at. The psychological reality is something that can be accessed through art. But because of symbolism and all kinds of philosophical and mystical ideas, these studies can be connected. So, when I look at any of the artists whose names I use, I'm after a profile of them—psychologically—or I'm looking to see about something they did. And that's something I want to showcase or put into perspective.

If you read things I say about Reggie, I looked at his profile based off of how he plays the bass. And how, by playing with him and

recording with him a couple of times, I discovered a lot of people that I knew were influenced by him—and I didn't even know it.

Is music the culmination of education, philosophy and religion? Is it the most powerful delivery system of ideas?

Music models democratic principles in ... the way in which the composer introduces material. It's almost like a real congressional deliberation that music is brought in. It has what that composer wants in it, but it's only a model of what he needs, because it's creative music.

On stage, the most powerful line—not the loudest, not the most erratic—will cause the ensemble to move in another kind of way. And

that's non-argumentative. It's something that performance has that a lot of other [art forms] don't have. That's its power. It doesn't change things, but it allows us the opportunity to make these changes. It allows us a moment to reflect and become truly engaged, so that we can actually change things ourselves.

Sacred Ceremonies was mentioned in a 2017 DownBeat interview. How long have you actually been planning the album?

I have enough music in my house and on other people's shelves for two pieces to come out for the next 10 years. So, that project with Milford and Bill, we planned it for a long time and then finally, when it happened, it gets [put] in line with whatever else is [ready to be released]. Now, it's coming out, but really my 12 string quartets record should be coming out. What I'm saying is, there's a lot of material.

How do you decide which projects to prioritize, if there's that much music?

When I'm thinking of a project, I think of people. And that motivates me to say, "Let's do this next, let's do that next." With Bill and Milford, I pulled a couple pieces from 40 years ago. "Ascending The Sacred Waterfall" was written like 20 or 30 years ago. I went back and reshaped it, took away a little bit and added a little bit, because it's 20 years down the road.

I'm the same person, but I have a little bit more wisdom. Which means that if there's a note that doesn't touch me completely, I'll etch it out and find the one that does, and put that in. I got a lot of Wite-Out in the house, because I don't write on the computer, I write on [paper].

It's an unfortunate coincidence that Milford recently passed away, and your collaboration with him only now is coming out. Were you two frequently in touch?

We spoke from time to time. I'm basically a loner. I don't really speak to a lot of people. I'm a worker. I work alone. I live alone, you know?

Milford and I spoke, I wouldn't say every month, but we spoke often enough to be in touch. And whenever we're working on a project, we had really good, extensive conversations. He was a magnificent, creative guy. Philosophical and spiritual.

I imagine a lot of your conversations focused on stuff like that.

We talked mostly about rhythms. One of the things he told me after we did the duet record was that I was the first trumpet player to get him to slow down. I didn't ask him what he meant; I wish I had. I don't know if he meant in terms of how many rhythms he'd throw out or how fast the rhythms were or the timing of them. I don't know; I should have asked. For some reason I didn't. I just said, "Cool." **DB**

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JENNIFER WHARTON & BONEGASM

TROMBONE ECSTASY

BY SUZANNE LORGE PHOTOS BY JOHN ABBOTT

The trombone's warm, reverberating sound often goes unappreciated, contends Jennifer Wharton. Look to jazz history for the reason: The trombone, once the bellwether of swing, lost its popular footing when bebop arrived. Slides just can't move as fast as valves.

“People forget that the trombone is so glorious,” Wharton remarked in a remote interview from her New York home. “It can be like going to church, or getting ready for battle. It can be a lot of things.”

Wharton, a bass trombonist, continues to challenge the prevailing view of her chosen instrument with *Not A Novelty*, her second Sunnyside album featuring Bonegasm, her trombone quartet with rhythm section. The March release serves as a timely sequel to the group's self-titled 2019 debut, an uncommon record that landed on the jazz charts within a week of its launch.

“As a trombone album,” Wharton said, still marveling at the anomaly of it.

Bonegasm's sophomore album rides on the unexpected momentum of this debut: Subsidized by a 2019 grant from the New York City Women's Fund, Wharton's latest effort sees the return of the group's core players—besides Wharton, veteran trombonists John Fedchock, Alan Ferber and Nate Mayland, along with bassist Evan Gregor, drummer Don Peretz and pianist Michael Eckroth. Two jazz luminaries also signed on to the project: Grammy-winners Kurt Elling, on an exceptional vocal track, and percussionist Samuel Torres, on two electric Latin tunes.

To be sure, much of Wharton's career to date defies the norm. First, there just aren't that many trombonists, especially bass trombonists, heading up jazz ensembles of any sort—much less trombone-centric groups. Further, Wharton came to this calling mid-career, after years of symphonic training and performance. She studied classical trombone at Los Medanos College in California before transferring to the prestigious New England Conservatory of Music, furthering her studies post-graduation at the Manhattan School of Music. Ultimately, she landed on Broadway as an in-demand pit musician. Arguably, however, for many years the most anomalous thing about her career was her gender.





The creative approaches of jazz musicians “lit a fire” under Wharton’s playing.

“For a long time I was the only female trombonist in New York,” Wharton recalled. “And when I first moved here [in 2005], I was the only female trombonist playing on Broadway.”

Since Wharton’s first days in New York, her career—and the music business—have changed considerably. For one, Wharton is no longer the only female trombonist in town. Today, players like Sara Jacovino, Natalie Cressman and Andrea Neumann also claim top spots on prominent jazz, theater and studio gigs.

But opening new doors seems to be part of Wharton’s creative persona: Where others see novelty, she sees opportunity. This broad-mindedness is what led her, ultimately, to jazz. As the exigencies of gigging moved her further afield from the classical world, her interest in improvisatory music grew—largely the result of her exposure to the high-profile jazz musicians she was meeting on various big band gigs.

Wharton had always played in big bands, from her school days through her theater stints, sometimes subbing out her Broadway seat to take those jobs as they arose. In the chart-heavy world of big band, what she might have lacked in improvising experience she made up for in technical expertise. “I love sight-reading, and there’s a lot of sight-reading in big bands,” she said. “So, they became my happy place.”

In these ensembles, the jazz musicians’ creative approaches to playing “lit a fire under my

ass,” she added. “I was comfortable with not trying anything. But for musicians, being stagnant is one of the worst things there is. So, I was really unhappy, even though I was working. It took the presence of bass trombonists [who were improvising]—a thing that I never thought I was supposed to do—that led me to do something about it. That’s when I fell in love with Alan’s tune and saw what could be.”

In 2016, Alan Ferber was recording his first big band album, with Wharton in the bass trombone chair. His arrangement of “North Rampart,” a soulful anthem originally written for nonet, came as a revelation to the classically trained player.

“It was the first time that I’d ever wanted to improvise,” she said. “I never felt like I had anything to say until I heard that song. It hit me like a ton of bricks.”

This bit of inspiration opened the door to Wharton’s next epiphany: to form a trombone-based ensemble that would push the frequently overlooked horn into the spotlight.

“In January 2016, my husband [John Fedchock] and I were asked to play in a jazz trombone quartet,” Wharton remembered. “This group was the first time that I heard what I’d been imagining and wanting to do. And [I realized that] I am totally qualified to do this. I’ve played in a zillion big bands, this is exactly the music I want to do, and there’s not a ton of

music out there for it. But, how to do it? I decided to put the band together first, then commission pieces for the trombone.”

Within a year, Wharton had formed Bonegasm, performing customized arrangements by trombonists Jacovino and Robin Eubanks, bassist Edward Perez and the band’s own players. Then, in March 2018, the group, now squarely on its feet, went into the studio to record that initial charting album, which included Ferber’s “North Rampart,” this time arranged for four trombones.

From the start, Wharton worried that the septet might fall into trombone clichés, with the bass trombone at the greatest disadvantage. What Wharton wanted was to borrow from the big band template, but modify it to suit her individual aesthetic.

“My instrument is basically a workhorse in almost every situation,” she said. “It’s a very physical instrument to play. It can be very musical, but many times people don’t play it that way. I was searching for a deeper role [for the instrument]. That’s what has been difficult for me, to explain that to the people who are writing for me. It isn’t just that I want to be featured, but that I want to be an important part of this thing. I can’t play just the normal bass trombone part, like roots and fifths.”

Wharton found the arrangers who understood her concerns among the big band musi-

cians with whom she'd worked over the years. Unsurprisingly, the better these players understood the instrument and its idiosyncrasies, the better their writing for the septet.

"It was easy to go to that well because they're used to writing for four trombones," she said. "You just take away the other elements of the big band and leave the meat of the arrangement."

The arrangements that her commissioned musicians came up with for *Not A Novelty* run the stylistic gamut from blues to swing to Latin to modern jazz to revamped alt-rock. The through-line amid all of this heterogeneity, however, is the primacy of the trombone's rounded tones, either grouped or solo.

Ferber's chic arrangement of saxophonist Chris Cheek's "Ice Fall," for example, accentuates the forward positioning of the ensemble's core quartet against the rhythm section, just as Wharton imagined. The tune's clean, waltzing lines progress in unison, break into deep-hued harmonies and fall away into solo turns for each of the trombonists without ever losing the balanced timbre of the ensemble.

But if Ferber's arrangement of "Ice Fall" displays the ensemble's traditionalist bent, pianist Carmen Staaf's "Manta Rays" shows their ease with shifting rhythmicity and complex sonic patterns. Staaf, known for her exciting modern compositions rather than large ensemble writing, brought one of the more adventurous tunes to the album. This original, soaring on a breezy head, flirts at times with dissonance and jagged melody, puncturing any expectations of conformity in the brass.

In a nod to Latin America's rich contribution to trombone music, Wharton also added two Cuban jazz titles to the album's program. The opener, "Bongasmo," by ensemble pianist Eckroth, rings with vivacity, enhanced by Mayland's vibrant soloing and Torres' riveting percussion. Later on the record, Torres brings the same exhilaration to Manuel Valera's "La Otra Mano," with its darkly dramatic spin on the Latin groove.

These last two tunes especially evince Wharton's ideas on the role of the rhythm section in a brass-led ensemble: These three players furnish most of the album's propulsive movement, thus allowing the trombones to explore the melodic terrain so often denied them in large group settings.

Wharton also appreciates the rhythm section's savvy improvising, and not just for the energy that their solos add to the record. "[They] give our faces a chance to get the blood back into them," she joked.

Affectionate quips aside, listen to bassist Gregor on Ferber's quirky "Union Blues," a tune full of drag and depth. His motile solos leave a subtle imprint on the ear, one that guides the listener through the intriguing turns of phrase and deviations from standard blues. Similarly,

drummer Peretz's delicate touch on "Face Value," saxophone Remy Le Boeuf's odd-meter vignette, imbues the track with subtle color and infectious motion.

Pianist Eckroth provides most of the comping on the album, finessing quixotic harmonic shifts—on Ayn Inserto's "Blue Salt," for example—and soloing elegantly ("Face Value," "Manta Rays," "La Otra Mano"). But it's during his rippling solo on "Little Cupcake," pushing against the edges of the tune's tonality, that he reveals his modernist leanings.

"Little Cupcake," Fedchock's billet-doux to

Wharton, lends itself to such exuberance. In writing the deceptively simple piece, Fedchock sought to capture the dichotomous nature of his wife of 10 years.

Once he understood this as his motivation, "the chart almost wrote itself," he said.

"Jen is very sweet, but she has a bawdy side," he explained. "Every time she comes out with a bawdy comment, I say, 'That's my little cupcake.' So, like Jen, this one has a sweetness to it. But there's a part where the harmony gets deeper, that shows her depth as a person."

Wharton's appreciation for blue humor is

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"When I was coming up, I didn't know of many other women doing what I wanted to do. That's changing and I'm happy to be part of that change."

JENNIFER WHARTON
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most obvious in the name she selected for the band. She defines “bonegasm” as “a climax of musical excitement, characterized by feelings of pleasure centered in the ears and experienced as an accompaniment to hearing a group of trombones.”

Fedchock also honors Wharton on the Tori Amos song “Twinkle,” not just with his orchestral-sounding arrangement, but with his soothing, buttery solo—one of the most personal performances on the album.

“Jen has been in love with this tune ever since she was a kid, so I had to approach it with a lot of reverence,” he said. “The tune is basically one or two chords, so I wanted to find a way to infuse it with more jazz sounds, more variations on harmonic ideas that still worked within the confines of [Amos’] melody without changing it.”

Wharton’s playing resounds through all of the tracks on *Not A Novelty*, and she solos on six—more than any other player on the album. Her standout performance, however, appears on the remarkable final track: “The Day I Tried To Live,” a Soundgarden grunge song from the mid-1990s.

Arranged by bandleader Darcy James Argue, the Bonegasm rendition of this powerhouse cut pairs Wharton’s growling horn with Elling’s gritty vocals, tightly stacked horns peeling on either side as the tune descends into

tumult. Intentionally or not, at times a horn will sound like a voice, and the voice will sound like a horn. Should any questions linger as to what the bass trombone can do, this would be track to listen to.

Bonegasm had rehearsed the album only once before the coronavirus forced New York City into lockdown in March 2020. Fedchock, as the album’s producer, bore the brunt of the recording’s COVID-related challenges. Not only did he set up remote rehearsing, but he also deferred the session for a few months while the band worked on their parts individually.

Trickiest of all, however, was the recording session itself—neither Elling nor Mayland could travel to Brooklyn for the date and had to overdub their parts. Without Mayland in the studio, Fedchock, on lead trombone, had to nail the intonation on each tune without the harmonic support of the full quartet. Phrasing issues that would normally be handled in rehearsal got fixed either on the session or in post-production. As a result, editing ended up costing twice as much as usual.

The grant from New York City’s Women’s Fund helped to defray some of these costs. This is fortuitous, Wharton said, because by the time Broadway reopens, she’ll have been without work for almost two years.

While she waits for work to return, however, Wharton is anything but idle. In mid-2020

she accepted a scholarship for a master’s program in jazz performance at New Jersey City University in Jersey City, New Jersey. There, she’s strengthening her improvisation skills and studying jazz composition/arranging for the first time.

“The scholarship just fell into my lap,” Wharton said. “I saw a posting in a Facebook group for female/trans/non-binary brass players—it said that [the university] was looking for a female trombone player to do a master’s. They really push there for complete representation, which is beautiful. You know, I hate that I got the spot just because I’m female. But someone has got to do it, so why shouldn’t it be me?”

During the work hiatus, Wharton is happy to take this step back and fill the gaps in her practical knowledge of jazz, difficult as that is after decades as a professional instrumentalist. It’s her responsibility as a band leader, she believes, to keep raising the standard for her ensemble.

Already, this course of study bears fruit. Earlier this year, Wharton received her first commission as a composer in her own right. The resultant piece, she says, will definitely be on her next album, which will mark her emergence as a jazz arranger/composer. This is a door she’s yet to open, a threshold she’s yet to cross. But someone’s got to write for the trombone. Why shouldn’t it be her?

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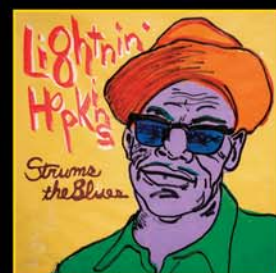


Muddy Waters performing at Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969

Photo by Tom Copi



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JIMMY KATZ



Pat Metheny *Road To The Sun*

BMG 5053863932

★★★★

Pat Metheny's latest, *Road To The Sun*, represents several departures for the individualistic guitarist-composer. First off, with this record he steps away from his longtime label at Nonesuch to join the recently formed Modern Recordings, an imprint of BMG devoted to jazz-classical-electronic hybrids. Then, he doesn't play much on the album, turning his two lengthy, multipart compositions over to leading classical players to perform. He does reserve one track for himself, though—Arvo Pärt's "Für Alina"—on which he plays his 42-string Picasso guitar, the odd, cubism-inspired instrument that allows him to mobilize as many tones as possible in one sitting. Finally, there's little here that qualifies as strict improvisation, so the album's focus rests largely on Metheny's nuanced writing rather than his virtuosic playing.

Jason Vieaux's faultless delivery of "Four Paths Of Light," a through-composed piece for solo guitar in four movements, reveals how exquisitely melodic Metheny's approach to composition is—even the arpeggiated chords resound as a solitary line. So, it's no surprise that the title track—his six-part opus for the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet—is just as singular in its impact. The four players (John Dearman, Matthew Greif, William Kanengiser, Scott Tennant) move so elegantly through the composition that, despite its harmonic richness, one voice comes to predominate—Metheny's, offering his modern understanding of what classical guitar can do.

On the Pärt, too, Metheny upends assumptions, and not just with the eccentric guitar he uses to render the tintinnabuli style of the original piano work. Light and somber, Metheny's playing captures the introspective mood of the original but leaves off the heartbreak—gravity doesn't need to be so weighty. —Suzanne Lorge

Road To The Sun: Four Paths of Light (Parts 1–4); Road To The Sun (Parts 1–6); Für Alina. (56:40)

Personnel: Pat Metheny, Jason Vieaux, John Dearman, Matthew Greif, William Kanengiser, Scott Tennant, guitars.

Ordering info: modernrecordings.de

Road To The Sun focuses on Pat Metheny's nuanced writing.



Jon Batiste

We Are

VERVE B0033337

★★★★½

"Epic" has become an empty cliché, but its classical meaning—a sweeping poem containing history—applies nicely to multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Jon Batiste's new album, *We Are*. Declaring personal and social affirmation across Saturday night frolics and Sunday morning prayers, it serves as a welcome vaccination against the virus of despair. Though its reach sometimes exceeds its grasp, it is inspiring and often heartbreakingly beautiful.

María Grand

Reciprocity

BIOPHILIA RECORDS BRE0024

★★★★

Imminent parenthood has inspired wondrous creative expressions of various artistic disciplines. Tenor saxophonist and composer Maria Grand is the latest jazz musician to use her pregnancy and the birth of her son as creative fuel, resulting in the intriguing *Reciprocity*.

Grand's steady, protean saxophone lines interact with Savannah Harris' jostling drum patterns and Kanoa Mendenhall's bubbling bass lines on such kinetic cuts as "Fundamentals, Part II" and "Whabri." When the trio engages in wistful interplay such as the first half of "Creation, A Home In Mind" and "Creation: Ladder Of Swords," the music evokes the caressing touch of a mother cradling a newborn.

Wielding a pliant, sinewy tone, Grand's improvisations often alternate between writhing, well-paced lines that uncoil with remarkable ease and wayward logic, and probing slow-moving passages marked by elliptical melodicism or shamanistic motifs. With Harris and Mendenhall, she forges a sterling accord.

Reciprocity unfolds in a programmatic manner as the compositions ebb and flow in

Funk is the album's musical North Star, but its variety reflects the influence of Batiste's omnivorous hometown, New Orleans. The title track, fervently celebrating Black lives, features a NOLA choir; the nostalgic reverie "Boyhood" name-checks "Bayou Maharaja" pianist James Booker and features New Orleans hero Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews; a buoyant sousaphone on the stately, prayerful love song "Adulthood" conjures a Tremé parade; and the infectious churchy "Sing" invokes the falsetto whisper of Aaron Neville.

The pinnacle is "Cry," a slow, muscular, lament, but "Freedom," a funky blues, is a close second. Introduced by a recording of the late Mavis Staples, it slides into a slinky "Watermelon Man" feel, as Batiste, sounding ever so much like Prince, exults dancing Black bodies as the ultimate embodiment of freedom.

The album was recorded in multiple studios, which makes it feel a bit like a potpourri. I like that it ends on an unresolved chord—just what it feels like to be alive today.

—Paul de Barros

We Are: We Are; Tell The Truth; Cry; I Need You; Whachutalkin-bout; Boy Hood; Movement II; Adulthood; Mavis; Freedom; Show Me The Way; Sing; Until. (47:59)

Personnel: Jon Batiste, vocals, keyboards, synths, guitar, bass, drums, drum machine, drum programming, alto saxophone, theremin, percussion; and a cast of dozens including Louis Fouché, saxophone; Joe Saylor, drums; Endea Owens, bass; Marcus Miller, bass; Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, trombone.

Ordering info: ververecords.com



a cyclical fashion. Throughout, Grand casts a ceremonial vibe that imbues the music with an enticing sense of mystery.

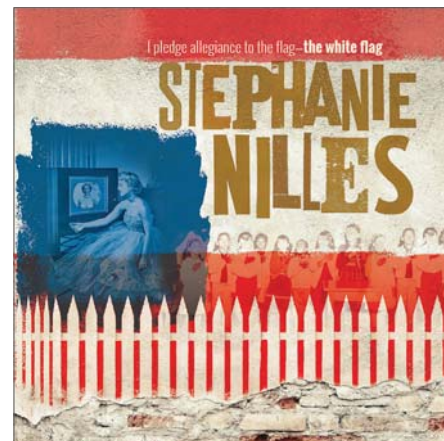
There's an enigmatic braininess to *Reciprocity* that prevents it from being easily digestible or catchy. Nevertheless, the music possesses an emotional allure that increases with repeated listening.

—John Murphy

Reciprocity: Creation: The Joy Of Being; Whabri; Creation: A Home In Mind; Fundamental Pt. I; Fundamental Part II; Creation: Ladder Of Swords; Prayer; Creation: Interlude; Now, Take, Your, Day; Creation: Superbear; Creation: Matrescene; Canto Mantra; Creation: Welcome, Starseed. (54:11)

Personnel: Maria Grand, tenor saxophone, voice; Kanoa Mendenhall, acoustic bass, voice; Savannah Harris, drums, voice.

Ordering info: biophilarecords.com



Stephanie Nilles

I Pledge Allegiance To The Flag—The White Flag

SUNNYSIDE 1606

★★★★½

A background in classical piano and a yen to flag the inequities surrounding race and class—Stephanie Nilles comes to the challenge of interpreting Charles Mingus with a handful of tools that should help her animate both the maestro's deep appreciation for melody and the sizzling wit that drove his indictments.

The singer-songwriter, deemed by some as a purveyor of barrelhouse punk, ain't a purveyor of deep improv per se, but she does have insight, imagination and a knack for dynamics. *I Pledge Allegiance* rises and falls as those attributes reveal their strengths and limitations.

An occasional NOLA resident with a love of dive bars and the gritty wisdom that can be garnered within, Nilles laces up Mingus' boxing gloves to throw a few punches here. A decade ago, on a record entitled *Fuck Off, Grizzly Bear*, she romped through a duet of "Fables Of Faubus" with a requisite smirk and sneer, tickled to ride its caustic cascade. She kicks off the new disc with the same tune, only this time it's awash with dramatic exposition that veers toward Rachmaninoff rather than a Bywater barroom.

When she unpacks "Devil Woman" or "Pithecanthropus Erectus," Mingus' grit has been usurped by a novice's sense of grandeur. Her blues moves are a bit too rote to match the material's depth. Nimble romps through "O.P." and "Remember Rockefeller At Attica" are filled with pluck, but they're more charming than chilling. Nilles has done a good job reminding us just how radiant the composer's themes remain, but in the large, *I Pledge Allegiance* feels like she's bitten off more than she can chew.

—Jim Macnie

I Pledge Allegiance To The Flag—The White Flag: Fables Of Faubus; East Coasting; Oh Lord Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb On Me; O.P.; Goodbye Pork Pie Hat; Free Cell Block F; 'Tis Nazi USA; Devil Woman; Peggy's Blue Skylight; Pithecanthropus Erectus; Remember Rockefeller At Attica; Alabama. (1:14:41)

Personnel: Stephanie Nilles, piano.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.bandcamp.com

The Hot Box

	Critics	Suzanne Lorge	Paul de Barros	John Murph	Jim Macnie
Pat Metheny <i>Road To The Sun</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★
Jon Batiste <i>We Are</i>		★★★½	★★★½	★★★½	★★★★
Maria Grand <i>Reciprocity</i>		★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★
Stephanie Nilles <i>I Pledge Allegiance ...</i>		★★★	★★	★★★★	★★½

Critics' Comments

Pet Metheny, *Road To The Sun*

Actually an album of two brilliant new Metheny compositions played by classical guitarist Jason Vieaux and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet (plus one track played by Metheny on his 42-string Pikasso guitar), this gorgeous outing sparkles with the guitarist's legendary gift for melody, flowing narrative and coherent development.

—Paul de Barros

Metheny's long-form compositions, matched with crisp interpretations from Jason Vieaux and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, admirably glisten.

—John Murph

The swirl of the music's contours, the grace that defines each section of the suites—a lithe elegance marks these performances by Pat, Vieaux and the LAGQ.

—Jim Macnie

Jon Batiste, *We Are*

Batiste taps into a collective need for catharsis on this powerful album. Each of the 13 tracks uses a discrete feel to impart a meta-musical message; taken in sum, these funk-backed, gospel-fueled messages affirm that hope and joy are not only possible during dark days, but necessary.

—Suzanne Lorge

Born against the backdrop of the COVID-19 virus and racial strife, this album is both a celebration of multiple Black American music forms and a testament to Batiste's indomitable artistic spirit.

—John Murph

Its hip-hop adjacent vibe grabs you hard, suggesting that, when done right, pastiches of Black music styles can make a fresh impact.

—Jim Macnie

Maria Grand, *Reciprocity*

Grand's clean, unadorned saxophone lines irradiate the spare trio arrangements on this album. The appeal of such simplicity attests to her charisma as a musician—it's hard to resist the invitation into her sonic world. Once inside, its breadth impresses.

—Suzanne Lorge

Swiss tenor saxophonist/singer Grand is one of most creative and exciting new voices in jazz, but this free-ish trio meditation on her experience of childbearing, though it shimmers with a lovely, spiritual vibe, meanders a bit too much in its own thoughts.

—Paul de Barros

Love it. This punchy, swinging, thoughtful tenor outfit dazzles on every turn. And the ballads are just as engaging as the bumpy stuff.

—Jim Macnie

Stephanie Nilles, *I Pledge Allegiance To The Flag—The White Flag*

Nilles' pianistic precision is a perfect foil for her diffuse jazz ideas. As she trips dexterously through these Mingus tunes, she displays an uncommon mix of erudition and expressivity, not the least on her distinctive blues vocals. The album's fun almost—but not quite—belies the material's harsh provenance.

—Suzanne Lorge

Bravo for the nod to the ever-timely Charles Mingus. Nilles, while technically dazzling, is an often awkward improviser, which probably explains why the best track here is her deft limning of the melody of "Goodbye Porkpie Hat."

—Paul de Barros

Nilles' inventive solo piano interpretations of Charles Mingus' music prove its enduring artistic and sociopolitical power.

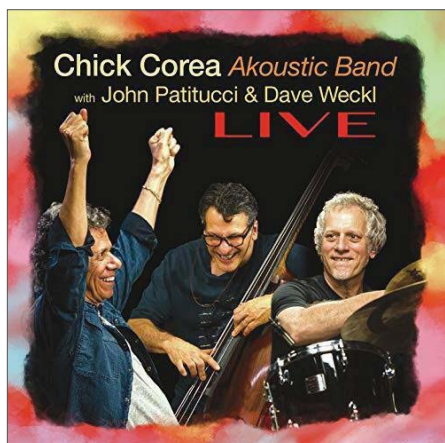
—John Murph

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Chick Corea Akoustic Band *Live*

CONCORD JAZZ CJA00291

★★★★½

It's tempting to say that Chick Corea's Akoustic Band picks up on *Live* right where they left off 20 years ago. But the truth is, they never stopped playing together. Bassist John Patitucci and drummer Dave Weckl were also the rhythm section of Corea's complementary—and regularly working—Elektric Band, thus the creative chemistry between band members was as strong as ever during these recent live sets.

Jason Moran *The Sound Will Tell You*

YES RECORDS

★★★★½

The title of pianist Jason Moran's third solo album comes from the late cultural worker Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor's instructions for preparing fried chicken: You know when it is ready, because the sound will tell you.

This is an album that evokes instructions. Like the early forms of Black music heard in the fields, these new compositions are like spirituals, which often concealed plans to escape while remembering things some believed were lost.

Beginning with "Follow The Light," the album moves through a series of compositions that make meaning out of depth and softness—and the occasional "attacks" on the keys. With "For Love" and "Only The Shadows Know (Honey)," the listener is moved to stillness. Yet it is the final third of the program that perhaps best encapsulates the album's depth of emotion. It begins with the energy of "How Much More Terrible Was The Night," a pulsating movement that Moran says highlights "America's current state of pandemonium." It then returns to tranquility with "The Only Morning Coming (Tear)," and to resolve with "Hum Then Sing Then Speak." The final tune, "Toni Morrison

"Japanese Waltz," in Corea's book since at least 1984, gets treated with all the thrill of a brand-new tune, with the pianist and Weckl enjoying a push-and-pull tension as Patitucci turns in a thematic solo. They apply the same relish to Corea's "Humpty Dumpty"—which appears on each of the album's two discs, each time with new invention—and even to well-worn standards like "That Old Feeling" and "On Green Dolphin Street."

Ballads, meanwhile, are greeted like old friends. A long and unaccompanied piano decoration of "In A Sentimental Mood" stretches far from Duke Ellington's melody, yet contains enough allusions to it (and titular sentiment) to come off as reverent. The closing "You're Everything," featuring Corea's wife, Gayle, on vocals, finds both Coreas gently teasing the tune out of their instruments.

In short, *Live* finds the Akoustic Band sounding as good as they always did. As it was Corea's final album before his untimely death in February, there's comfort in knowing he was on top of his game to the last. —Michael J. West

Live: Morning Sprite; The Japanese Waltz; That Old Feeling; In A Sentimental Mood; Rhumba Flamenco; Summer Night; Humpty Dumpty (set 1); On Green Dolphin Street; Eternal Child; You And The Night And The Music; Monk's Mood; Humpty Dumpty (set 2); You're Everything. (134:32)

Personnel: Chick Corea, piano; John Patitucci, bass; Dave Weckl, drums; Gayle Moran Corea, vocals (13).

Ordering info: concordjazz.com



Says Black Is A Rainbow (Shadow)," like other tracks here, evokes the wisdom of Morrison, an author Moran has returned to in these months of pandemic. If Morrison's colorful and resonant language evokes connections to memories, Moran is telling us to listen to the sound, for what it will tell us, to listen to how sound feels, how it looks.

—Joshua Myers

The Sound Will Tell You: Follow The Light; Spoken In Two (Tear); For Love; My Mother's Handful Of Tea; Only The Shadow Knows (Honey); Body & Soul With Intimate Friends (Shadow); Dawns After The Dream; Bee Mantra (Honey); How Much More Terrible Was The Night; The Only Morning Coming (Tear); Hum Then Sing Then Speak; Toni Morrison Said Black Is A Rainbow (Shadow). (42:06)

Personnel: Jason Moran, piano.

Ordering info: jasonmoran.bandcamp.com



Reggie Quinerly *New York Nowhere*

REDEFINITION MUSIC 1004

★★★★

As a drummer, Reggie Quinerly favors the old school. He takes an understated-but-hip approach to the kit, propelling the music from the inside rather than laying on top with flurries of combustible chops. In that regard, he is more Thigpen than Tony, more Cobb than Cobham.

This team-player approach serves the music well on the Houston native's fourth album. He's the kind of bandleader who understands that when the pieces fit and everything clicks, the music is greater than the sum of its parts.

There's a relaxed chemistry among the musicians here. From the easy swinging opener, "Reflections On The Hudson," to the shuffle-swing feel of "Somewhere On Houston" to the uptempo burner "New York Nights," they are truly on one accord. Trumpeter Antoine Drye and tenor saxophonist John Ellis, friends since high school, exude a natural blend on Quinerly's appealing melodies and subtle harmonic shifts. Bassist Sean Conly lends an unerring pulse and a bounce to the proceedings. Pianist John Chin provides sterling accompaniment throughout, comping slyly and percussively while also throwing off a few sparks of his own, particularly on his envelope-pushing solo on "New York Nights" and his earthy solo on "Somewhere On Hudson."

Quinerly solos only once, on "Wine Cooler Heads Prevail." But that's not the point here. It's his winning compositions—like the elegiac ballad "Dreaming In Place," the lyrical bossa nova flavored "Celso" and the catchy "Reflections On The Hudson"—in combination with his inherent gift for swing, that really grow on you and hold up to repeated listenings. —Bill Milkowski

New York Nowhere: Reflections On The Hudson; Dreaming In Place; Somewhere On Houston; New York Nights; Celso; Wine Cooler Heads Prevail; New York Nights (Revisited). (32:56)

Personnel: Reggie Quinerly, drums, composer; Antoine Drye, trumpet; John Ellis, tenor saxophone; John Chin, piano; Sean Conly, bass.

Ordering info: reggiequinerly.com

Dave Stryker *Baker's Circle*

STRIKEZONE 8821

★★★

Veteran guitarist Dave Stryker has long thrived within organ combos, and on his latest outing he expands his trio with the addition of the versatile tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III, a player who serves as an excellent front-line partner while also routinely cutting against the grain of the format's traditional sound. His presence injects a subtle tension into the straightahead proceedings. Smith's stabbing solo on the leader's opening original, "Tough," for example, offers a master class on motific improvisation, as he pulls apart a series of hiccupping licks from every possible angle, standing in contrast to solos that surround him by the leader and organist Jared Gold. Stryker is not an innovator, but a devoted student of the music's history, finessing, digging in and flourishing within post-bop convention.

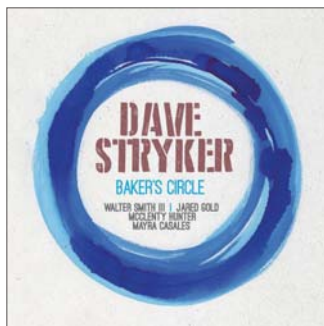
"Dreamsong" is a steamy ballad that seems to pile up beats in the turnaround, precipitating an effective release that arrives with each solo. The humid sentiment in the group's reading of the Carpenters hit "Superstar" feels a bit disingenuous, with a kind of furrowed-brow profundity that's more treacly than tender. The group fares better on a funky interpretation of Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues" and the ebullient shuffle it embraces on "Trouble (No. 2)."

—Peter Margasak

Baker's Circle: Tough; El Camino; Dreamsong; Everything I Love; Rush Hour; Superstar; Baker's Circle; Inner City Blues; Love Dance; Trouble (No. 2). (57:20)

Personnel: Dave Stryker, guitar; Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Jared Gold, organ; McClenty Hunter, drums; Mayra Casales, percussion (2, 7, 8).

Ordering info: davestryker.com



Franco Ambrosetti *Lost Within You*

UNIT RECORDS 4970

★★★

A fixture on the Swiss jazz scene since the 1960s, trumpeter Franco Ambrosetti spent three decades with Enja before signing with Unit and making a splash with *Long Waves* in 2018, thanks in part to sidemen such as pianist Uri Caine, the late guitarist John Abercrombie, bassist Scott Colley and drummer Jack DeJohnette. *Lost Within You* mostly reunites the *Long Waves* band—Caine plays on just three tracks, with Renee Rosnes on piano for most of the rest—but only features the whole ensemble twice. Instead, it emphasizes a lean, languid approach, its pulse often carried by Colley alone.

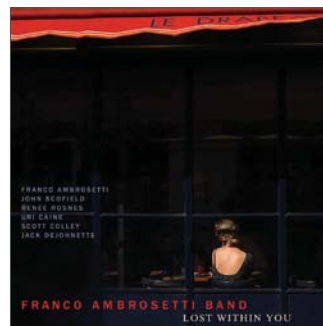
It's not clear, though, that the music benefits from an uncrowded bandstand. Given the charm of his drumming, from the playfully busy samba behind "Silli In The Sky" to his conversational take on "Body And Soul," the album could use more DeJohnette. Likewise, John Scofield's solos are invariably insightful and expressive—so why are there only three of them? Rosnes is a real plus, thanks to the rhythmic jolt her solos provide. But despite the luscious warmth of his flugelhorn, what Ambrosetti delivers is mostly vapor, lines that curl through the changes without leaving anything of weight or substance.

—J.D. Considine

Lost Within You: Peace; I'm Gonna Laugh You Right Outta My Life; Silli In The Sky; Love Like Ours; Dreams Of A Butterfly; Body And Soul; People Time; Flamenco Sketches; You Taught My Heart To Sing. (1:12:48)

Personnel: Franco Ambrosetti, trumpet, flugelhorn; John Scofield, guitar (1, 3, 9); Renee Rosnes (2–6), Uri Caine (7–9), piano; Scott Colley, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums (3, 5, 6, 8, 9), piano (1).

Ordering info: unitrecords.com



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ANGEL AIR



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Russell Ferrante Trio
Inflexion
BLUE CANOE RECORDS 01456P
★★★★

Yellowjackets keyboardist Russell Ferrante makes his recording debut as leader of an acoustic piano trio with *Inflexion*. It should come as only a slight surprise that he seems like an old hand at the task, working admirably with bassist Michael Valerio and drummer Steve Schaeffer through a balance of original compositions and nicely chosen standards.

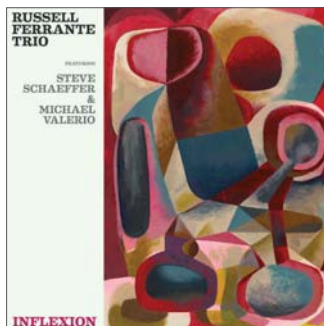
Although best known as a master of electronically engaged “fusion” composing, Ferrante here proves he deserves acknowledgement for the chops and wit required to render warhorses such as “All The Things You Are,” “How Deep Is The Ocean” and Thelonious Monk’s “Rhythm-a-ning” freshly. That said, what’s distinctive here are Ferrante’s own pieces. “Stick” is an intricate yet playful melody, “Network” a reflective piece inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King. Like “I Do” and “57 Chevy,” those pieces have been recorded by Yellowjackets, and fit this format equally well. The two “Inflexion” tracks are Ferrante’s tests of his hands’ independence. Far from cold etudes, they have their charms, akin to folksy children songs dressed up for a prestigious recital while retaining their roots.

—Howard Mandel

Inflexion: Stick-to-it-iveness; Network Of Mutuality; Inflexion D; Rhythm-a-ning; Isfahan; Inflexion A; Spoons; I Do; 57 Chevy; How Deep Is The Ocean; We Shall Overcome; All The Things You Are (bonus track); New Glen (bonus track). (69:20/80:57 including bonus tracks).

Personnel: Russell Ferrante, piano; Michael Valerio, bass; Steve Schaeffer, drums.

Ordering info: bluecanorecords.com



Merry Clayton
Beautiful Scars
MOTOWN GOSPEL
★★★★½

In the wake of a star turn in the Oscar-winning 2014 documentary *20 Feet From Stardom*, Merry Clayton’s decades as an A-list, backing vocalist in the shadow of artists like Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan seemed to be making way for her own moment in the sun. That is, until a devastating car accident claimed both of her legs below the knees. At first unsure if she’d ever sing again, *Beautiful Scars* is evidence of her ironclad spirit.

The album opens with a version of Leon Russell’s “A Song For You,” a song Clayton originally recorded for her 1971 self-titled solo album. Highlights include “He Made A Way,” a holy-rolling, pew rocker that would be at home on an Andre Crouch album, and the Diane Warren-penned original “Beautiful Scars.” Clayton delivers a stirring performance bolstered by her own testimony, one that proves that she is much more than the mysterious woman who sings the spine-tingling coda of the Rolling Stones’ “Gimme Shelter.”

—Ayana Contreras

Beautiful Scars: A Song For You; Touch The Hem Of His Garment; Beautiful Scars; Love Is A Mighty River; God Is Love; Deliverance; Room At The Altar; He Made A Way; Oh What A Friend; Ooh Child Medley. (39:12)

Personnel: Merry Clayton, vocals (1–10); L.A.’s Finest Choir (1–10); Soweto Choir of Zimbabwe (4); Kilyah Merry Amy (10); Chris Martin (4), additional vocal; Jackie DeShannon, background vocal (10); Terry Young, piano (1, 3–10); organ (1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10); synthesizer programming (1, 5); Ted Perlman, synthesizer programming (1, 5); Chris Martin, piano (4); Nathan East (1, 5, 6, 9, 10); Andrew Gauche (3, 7, 8), bass; Charles Fearing (1, 3, 5, 7–10); Ted Perlman (6), guitar; Kenny Elliott (1, 3, 7, 8), Harvey Mason (5, 6, 9, 10), drums; Paulinho da Costa, percussion (1, 2, 4, 9, 10); Curtis Amy (1), Gerald Albright (2, 9), saxophone; Evgeny Tonkha, cello (4); CSQ String Ensemble (6); Johnny Britt, horns (7, 9); Herb Alpert, trumpet (9).

Ordering info: motowngospel.com



Benoît Delbecq
The Weight Of Light
PYROCLASTIC RECORDS 13
★★★★½

The little-known fact that light has mass intrigues Paris-based pianist Benoît Delbecq. In a quest to elucidate the physical manifestation of such ineffable things, the improvisatory composer launches *The Weight Of Light*, his first solo piano recording in more than a decade.

Delbecq’s fascination with spatial realities and how we navigate them inspired the album’s nine tracks, each a platform for prepared piano. To record them, Delbecq placed objects of different materials (typically wood, erasers and the like) in the instrument’s strings to alter their sound. This technique—first credited to avant garde composer John Cage—stands out on brief etudes like “Chemin Sur Le Crest” and “Au Fil De La Parole.” Delbecq’s longer spontaneous compositions unfold into more detailed polymetric ruminations. The same intermittent pitched beats continue for nearly 10 minutes under a jittery solo line on “Pair Et Impair,” providing a welcome sense of unity. A repeated percussive phrase on “The Loop Of Chicago” allows for more spacious soloing in Delbecq’s right hand. And the occasional timpani-like accents on “Anamorphoses” call attention to the quiet rhythmic underpinnings of the composition’s implied harmonies.

—Suzanne Lorge

The Weight Of Light: The Loop Of Chicago; Dripping Stones; Family Trees; Chemin Sur Le Crest; Au Fil De La Parole; Anamorphoses; Havn En Havre; Pair Et Impair; Broken World. (48:59)

Personnel: Benoît Delbecq, piano.

Ordering info: pyroclasticrecords.com



Tamil Rugeon
Son Of Nyx
SOUL BANK MUSIC 001
★★★★½

The scope of Tamil Rugeon’s career encompasses everything from orchestral work to deep house music to hip-hop/electronic pop fusion. The Australian violinist’s latest release, *Son Of Nyx*, is a narrowing of focus. The music is informed and influenced by all of the various projects Rugeon has been a part of, and sent through a filter of cosmic jazz from the ’70s—pocket-sized symphonies fueled by the whimsical wow of an ARP Odyssey synthesizer and funk-adjacent rhythms.

To place himself within the churn of *Nyx*, Rugeon chose to play the viola, often doubling up on melodies with a vocalist or synthesizer, or, as he does on “Bad Sandals,” plucking out a pizzicato solo. “Momus” is thrown wide open with the help of a vocal trio soaring wordlessly over the song’s frothy backbeat and a psychedelized viola solo, while “Horns No Eyes” grows in size and power like an oncoming tidal wave.

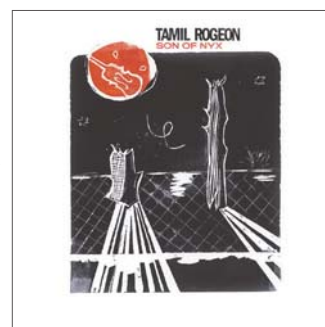
Rugeon saves those tracks for the end. At the start, he eases listeners into his music with more accessible fare. But as his other projects have shown, Rugeon has bold ideas and has enough talent to make those ideas manifest. With *Nyx*, he’d have done well to go big early.

—Robert Ham

Son Of Nyx: House No Wheels; Bad Sandals; Banished; Momus; Mount Olympus; Horns No Eyes. (43:34)

Personnel: Tamil Rugeon, viola and synths; Sam Keever, Daniel Mougerman, piano and synths; Danny Fischer, drums; Sam Anning, bass; Javier Fredes, percussion; Allysha Joy, Jace XL, Ladi Tiaray, Rita Satch, vocals.

Ordering info: soulbankmusic.com



Gustavo Cortinas

Desafío Candente

WOOLGATHERING

RECORDS 014

★★★★

Listeners familiar with Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra are sure to experience a bit of reverie after hearing the opening fanfare of Gustavo Cortinas' *Desafío Candente*. Inspired by Eduardo Galeano's book *The Open Vein of Latin America*, Cortinas has produced a veritable musical score, replete with all the revolutionary nuances and cadences invoked by Galeano. The author's critique of slavery, colonialism, capitalism and imperialism has its equivalency in Cortinas's melodies. On "Pachacuti," the tantalizing interplay between trombonist Euan Edmonds and trumpeter Drew Hansen evokes the struggle and resistance that was such a part of the fight for liberation. A similar fury resounds on "La Fiebre del Oro" when saxophonist Artie Black presents his musical credentials with a tinge of Latin verve. The revolt against oppression reaches a climax that is better understood with Galeano's book in your hand and Cortinas music in your ears. —Herb Boyd

Desafío Candente: Obertura (Overture); Abya Yala; Pachacuti (The World Upside Down); La Fiebre del Oro (The Gold Fever); El Jinete y el Caballo (The Rider & the Horse); La Nostalgia Peleadora de Tupac Amaru (The Militant Nostalgia of Tupac Amaru); Combustible Humano (Human Fuel); La Ruta de Regreso a Guinea está en el Arcoiris (The Route of Return to Guinea Lies in the Rainbow); Pax Britannica; Los Caudillos Campesinos (The Peasant Leaders); La Mano Invisible (The Invisible Hand); El Desarrollo Desarrolla la Desigualdad (Development Develops Inequality); Desafío Candente (Incandescent Defiance); Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos (A World Where Many Worlds Fit). (93:41)

Personnel: Gustavo Cortinas, drums and percussion; Kitt Lyles, bass; Joaquin Garcia, piano; Artie Black, reeds; Drew Hansen, trumpet; Euan Edmonds, Trombone; Matt Gold, guitar; Jeronimo Gonzalez on a variety of folk instruments; and Xavier Quijas Yxayoti, on different flutes.

Ordering info: mattulery.com

Roxana Amed

Ontology

SONY MUSIC LATIN 19439860962

★★★★½

It's easy to gravitate toward a sense of exoticism with *Ontology*. While vocalist Roxana Amed finds joy and takes pride in the cultural roots of her musical inspirations, upon further exploration *Ontology* reveals much deeper ethnic and experiential reflection. "Tumbleweed" emphasizes perspectives shared by Amed and saxophonist Mark Small through its sonic structure. The rest of *Ontology* encompasses Amed's quest to discern where, when and how her bond with Argentina can and/or should meld with American jazz and other artistic vantage points. "Milonga Por La Ausencia" is noteworthy in this regard. Not initially set to be recorded and done with minimal planning,—between Amed's performative honesty, the lyrics' emotional directness and the embrace of a song form important to Argentinean expression—the track shrewdly exemplifies the coexistence of Amed's thoughts, feelings and the inevitability of change. Only the title track—which references the study of the nature of being and was chosen for how Amed felt it perfectly characterized her inner ruminations—better embodies *Ontology*'s conceptual objectives. —Kira Grunenber

Ontology: Tumbleweed; Chacarera Para La Mano Izquierda; Peaceful; Virgo; Blue In Green (Sky And Seral); Last Happy Hour; Milonga Por La Ausencia; Ontology; El Regreso; Danza De La Moza Donosa; Danza Del Viejo Boyero; Goodbye, Rose St.; Amor; Winter. (72:20)

Personnel: Roxana Amed, vocals; Martin Bejerano, piano; Mark Small, saxophone; Edward Perez (1, 2, 6, 9), Lowell Ringel (3, 5, 12), acoustic bass; Ludwig Alfonso (1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 13), Rodolfo Zúñiga (3, 5, 11, 12), drums; Carlo De Rosa, electric bass, acoustic bass (7, 13); Tim Jago (3, 5, 12), Aaron Lebos (1, 13), electric guitar.

Ordering info: roxana-amed.com



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Hedvig Mollestad Trio *Ding Dong, You're Dead.*

RUNE GRAMMOFON 2219

★★★★½

A decade after arriving on the musical map, the Hedvig Mollestad Trio continues to make a strong case for the elemental brilliance of the “power trio” on its seventh full-length recording. Throughout this muscular yet supple album, the simple perfection of a guitar/bass/drums lineup is made manifest—a musical situation where the individual players have to move quickly and ably between roles.

That’s often the requirement of most jazz

players, but this trio adds the volume and tension of a heavy rock group into the mix. At its base, that means the band prefers to stomp rather than swing. Or, at least, use the swing and shuffle of jazz to add texture and dynamics to its loud, high-octane compositions in the manner of the Jimi Hendrix Experience or the James Gang.

On “Magic Moshroom” and “The Art Of Being Jon Balkovitch,” Ellen Brekken switches to an acoustic bass and her potent bounce jostles perfectly with drummer Ivar Loe Bjørnstad’s fluid playing and Mollestad’s prickling, acid rock-inspired leads. The guitarist adopts a watery tone on the title track that harkens to classic grunge, while her bandmates quietly snake around her.

Likely, the songs that are going to get the most attention are those where the band leans into its rock influences, as those are the trio’s most direct expressions. For the full effect, though, the album should really be heard in its complete form, with all the shades and moods meeting up to create a vast, colorful display of jazz-rock fireworks.

—Robert Ham

Ding Dong, You're Dead: Leo Flash' Return To The Underworld; All Flights Cancelled; Ding Dong, You're Dead.; Gimbal; Magic Moshroom; The Art Of Being Jon Balkovitch; Four Candles. (41:23)

Personnel: Hedvig Mollestad Thomassen, guitar; Ellen Brekken, bass; Ivar Loe Bjørnstad, drums.

Ordering info: runegrammofon.com

Jakob Bro *Uma Elmo*

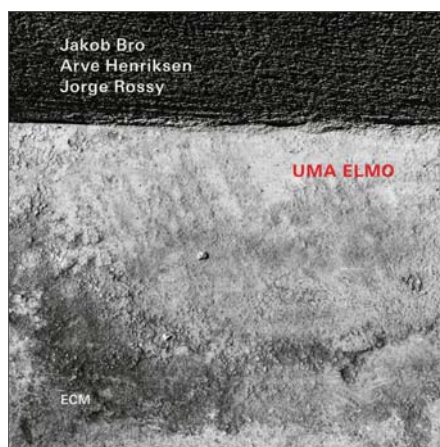
ECM 2702

★★★★½

Jakob Bro’s evolution from sideman to solo artist with vision continues apace on *Uma Elmo*, the Danish guitarist’s fifth album on ECM. For this luminous set, recorded in Lugano, Switzerland, Bro works with a unique and simpatico trio—a bass-less unit with noted Norwegian trumpeter Arve Henriksen and Spanish drummer Jorge Rossy. As might be expected of such a mix of talent and artistry, the sum effect is abundant with airy and liquid grace, as if evoking the title of the opener, “Reconstructing A Dream.”

The album’s program loosely surveys Bro’s life, musical and otherwise. His simple, affecting originals—like the atonality-salted “Beautiful Day”—serve as flexible frameworks for the trio’s open-spirited treatments and date back to his Berklee days of the ’90s. Moving to the present, he alludes to his current life as father of two small children on “Housework,” the album’s most free-ranging piece.

Uma Elmo’s song selection also pays tribute to bygone jazz greats Bro has accompanied, including a substantial connection with his primary influence, drummer-composer Paul



Motian, on “Reconstructing A Dream” and “Slaraffenland.” Another sideman gig of note was with alto saxophonist Lee Konitz, who inadvertently gave Bro the title for his beautiful ballad “Music For A Black Pigeon.”

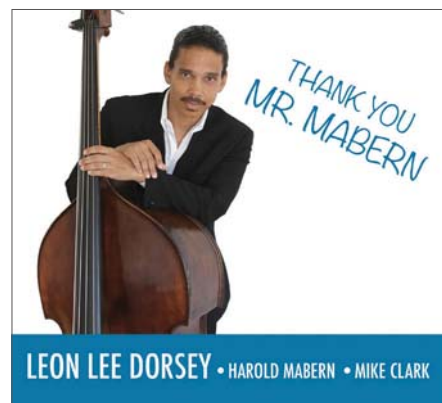
Something perhaps missing on this moving album is Bro-as-soloist. Instead, the guitarist flexes his considerable talents as composer and texturalist equipped with a discreet palette of effects.

—Josef Woodard

Uma Elmo: Reconstructing A Dream; To Stanko; Beautiful Day; Morning Song; Housework; Music For Black Pigeons; Sound Flower; Slaraffenland; Morning Song (Var.) (61:45)

Personnel: Jakob Bro, guitar; Arve Henriksen, trumpet, piccolo trumpet; Jorge Rossy, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Leon Lee Dorsey *Thank You Mr. Mabern*

JAZZAVENUE 1

★★★★½

Bassist Leon Lee Dorsey’s name is above the title—he led this July 2019 session—but Harold Mabern’s name is the title, and the draw as well. As the pianist’s final studio recording (he passed away two months later), *Thank You Mr. Mabern* finds him as vigorous and full of surprises as when he first hit the scene in his 20s.

Indeed, Mabern might even have greater zeal on these nine tracks than ever. The soul quotient of tunes like “Rakin’ And Scrapin’,” “Watermelon Man” and “I’m Walkin’” is through the roof: He could have stayed in his native Memphis and worked for Stax/Volt, a fact that drummer Mike Clark’s chooglin’ grooves acknowledge. Yet somehow Mabern is no less intense on a dramatic, waltzing “Summertime,” or even “Bye Bye Blackbird.” His two- and five-note phrases communicate as much as the whole melody does, underlining the bass solo as well before Mabern’s own solo drives it all home. Moreover, none of that prepares one for his charming Erroll Garner impression on “Misty.” To the end, Mabern was at the top of his game.

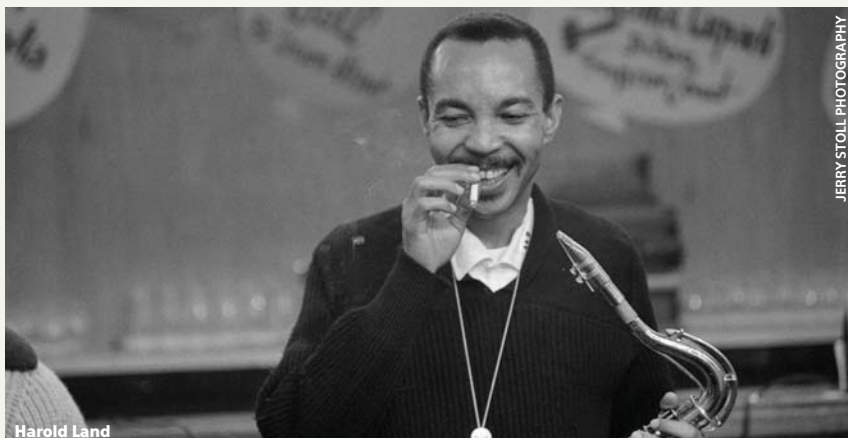
If it seems odd to dwell on the pianist on a bassist’s album, note that Dorsey formulated the title—to draw attention, one presumes, to Mabern’s winning contributions. That said, Dorsey does exceptional work as well, with fine solos on the modal “Simone” and “Softly As In A Morning Sunrise,” and otherwise shows a masterful ability to swing hard yet stay out of the way. Clark, too, reminds us all that he’s a beast, finding lines that are both supportive and creative but letting loose on “Softly” and “Moment’s Notice.” Ultimately, however, the title is right: For the music’s transcendence, we have Mr. Mabern to thank.

—Michael J. West

Thank You Mr. Mabern: Rakin’ And Scrapin’; Simone; Bye Bye Blackbird; Summertime; I’m Walkin’; Softly As In A Morning Sunrise; Misty; Moment’s Notice. (52:36)

Personnel: Leon Lee Dorsey, bass; Harold Mabern, piano; Mike Clark, drums.

Ordering info: leonleedorsey.com



Harold Land

JERRY STOLL PHOTOGRAPHY

Music Frozen in Amber

About a decade after his extraordinary recording dates with Max Roach and Clifford Brown, tenor saxophonist Harold Land still retained the smooth articulation and the straightahead exuberance that characterized his playing. On ***Westward Bound (Reel to Reel LP006; 73:04 ★★★★★)***, Land's explosive horn departs from the strict melodic lines of "My Romance," a groove established by a driving rhythm section featuring pianist Hampton Hawes, drummer Philly Joe Jones and bassist Monk Montgomery. The recording was engineered by Jim Wilke at the Penthouse club in Seattle and is part of sizzling series of Reel to Reel albums. Land joined the ancestors in 2001, but left behind a remarkable collection of recordings.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

The long dormant, now resurrected Mus-tet recording ***Visions Of The Third Eye (Early Future Records 003; 39:53 ★★½)*** by New Life Trio has been released by Early Future Records. Like music frozen in amber, the trio—drummer Steve Reid, guitarist Brandon Ross and bassist David Wertman—has lost none of the vigor and collaboration that marked its creation back in the late '70s when the avant-garde genre was the rave. Each member of the trio is a superb soloist, but it's their collective creative ingenuity that sparkles, particularly on "Egypt Rock," that has a repetitive motif resembling the African country's indigenous music that is soon overtaken by an aggressive contemporary flow. The trio takes a more oriental turn on "Chinese Rock," but the results are no less pleasing, and again the combined riffs evoke a tapestry of swirling sonic calligraphy. Reid's versatility, his evolution from the house band at the Apollo Theatre to Motown to musical moments with Fela Kuti was widely respected. And whether alone or in company with Ross and Wertman he is the consummate percussionist.

The trio's existence was comparatively brief, but each in his own way continued to

excel, though Reid died in 2010.

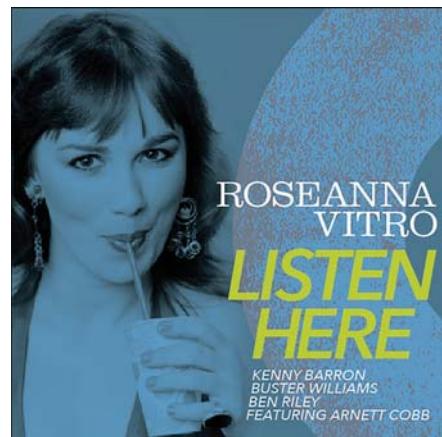
Ordering info: earlyfuturerecords.com

"Live" is the operative word of Hal Galper Quintet's ***Live At The Berlin Philharmonic 1977 (Origin 82810; 86:19 ★★★★★)***. No matter what track you choose, the results are the same—exhilarating. Pianist Galper's dazzling runs are often complemented by his punchy pointillism, and this is particularly engrossing on "I'll Never Stop Loving You." Galper alone is stunning enough, but add Michael and Randy Brecker and you have the coup de grace; the brothers are never more blistering than on "This Is the Thing" or "Now Hear This." A live audience punctuates the recording and the wish to be there is answered with videos of at least two of the tunes. Randy's facial expressions, his trumpet hanging loosely, mirrors his brothers' double-time sprints on tenor saxophone with bassist Wayne Dockery racing along, matching the furious passages. Each track has separate showcase moments for the quintet. Sometimes it's brilliantly cast intimation by Galper or a probe of harmonic inventions by Randy, or, most engaging, a stem-winding coda from Michael that is like a reference to every legendary performer on the horn, including John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins. Another highlight is the long drum solo by Bob Moses, which, in many respects, is a rhythmic schematic of this powerful album.

Ordering info: ops@discogsinc.com

From 1988 to 1993, pianist/composer Ojars Raimonds Pauls was the minister of culture in Latvia, where he found time lead a trio in a number of recordings. That said, we have no idea how this release of ***The Lost Latvian Radio Studio Sessions 1965/1966 (Jersika JRA013; 15:37 ★★)*** was lost or how it was eventually found. The album is a collection of original compositions by Pauls that vary little in mood or presentation, though on one of the longer tracks the tenor saxophone of Alexander Pischikov is quite arresting. **DB**

Ordering info: jersikarecords.com



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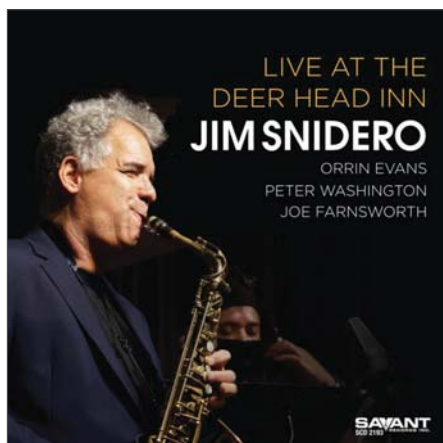
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Jim Snidero *Live At The Deer Head Inn* SAVANT RECORDS 2193

★★★★★

For his first live album since 1989, Jim Snidero, a seasoned saxophonist with more than 20 records to his name, brings together the incomparable Orrin Evans on piano, Peter Washington on bass and Joe Farnsworth on drums. On *Live At The Deer Head Inn*, the quartet's sensitivity and sensibility transports; listeners may close their eyes and find themselves sitting rapt by the stage.

Recorded at Pennsylvania's famed Deer

Head Inn on Halloween 2020 in front of a small, socially distanced audience, the recording's immediacy is heightened by the quartet's interactions with their rapt audience and the way they refer to time-honored standards to contextualize these difficult times.

On "Idle Moments," the quartet captures the ruminative mood of life in quarantine as Snidero boldly sculpts the well-loved melody. With a sweet, breathy tone and a light, skillful hand, he shapes the tune into a soundtrack for the times, while preserving and reframing the melancholy in Grant Green's 1963 original.

Likewise, "Ol' Man River" was chosen by Snidero as a nod to the Black Lives Matter movement. As Snidero's alto leads the quartet in a tender musical inquiry about racial unrest, the room quiets, the sorrow hits and the record reaches its emotional climax.

Overall, the quartet's simultaneous awareness of one another, the audience, the jazz tradition and the weight of the present era makes for a spellbinding live recording. Snidero and his band show incredible prowess and tender musicality throughout.

—Alexa Peters

Live At The Deer Head Inn: Band Intro by Denny Carrig; Now's The Time; Autumn Leaves; Intro to "Ol' Man River"; Ol' Man River; Bye Bye Blackbird; Idle Moments; Who Can I Turn To; My Old Flame; Yesterdays. (53:13)

Personnel: Jim Snidero, alto saxophone; Orrin Evans, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

Jihye Lee Orchestra *Daring Mind* MOTÉMA 0385

★★★★½

In 2018, South Korean composer/leader Jihye Lee won the BMI Charlie Parker Jazz Composition Prize for her big band chart "Unshakeable Mind," which led to a commission for a second piece, "Revived Mind." These two compositions, complex tapestries woven out of simple threads, illustrate the high concept behind *Daring Mind*, the composer's ruminations on her adopted home of New York.

Lee translates into music the emotional essence of the urban environment. She'll unleash the rhythm section on the wispy woodwinds to signal unexpected aggression, or deploy the horn section to conjure the thrill of new adventures. She uses these devices on the BMI-sponsored pieces, but expands into ominous dissonance and jarring staccato on "Dissatisfied Mind" and bustling brass over soothing, repetitious chordal sections on "Relentless Mind."

The album's remaining tracks explore Lee's flair for disparate moods. The 6/8 feel of "Suji" is all the more intoxicating for its subdued instrumentation, in contrast with the slow 3 of "Struggle Gives You Strength," an anthem of rousing proportions (with standout soloing by



trumpeter Sean Jones).

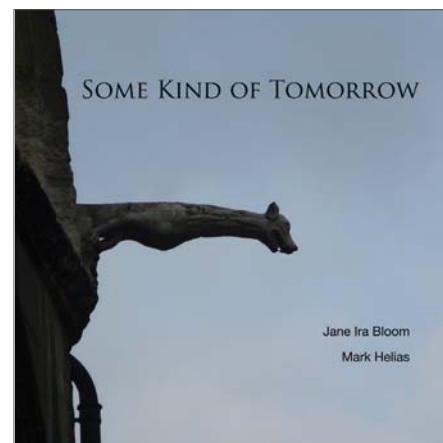
The album's final track, "GB," draws on Lee's interest in scoring and serves as a capstone for the collection. Stirring and filmic in scope, the tune changes hues at every turn—just like the city that so captivates Lee's imagination.

—Suzanne Lorge

Daring Mind: Relentless Mind; Unshakeable Mind; Suji; I Dare You; Revived Mind; Struggle Gives You Strength; Why Is That Dissatisfied Mind; GB. (1:04:46)

Personnel: Jihye Lee, composer; Ben Kono, Rob Wilkerson, Quinsin Nachoff, Jeremy Powell, Carl Maraghi, woodwinds; Sean Jones, Brian Pareschi, John Lake, Alex Norris, trumpets; Mike Fahie, Alan Ferber, Nick Grindler, Mark Patterson (2, 5), Jennifer Wharton, trombones; Adam Birnbaum, Haeun Joo (2, 5, 8), piano; Sebastian Noelle, guitar; Evan Gregor, bass; Mark Ferber, drums.

Ordering info: motema.com



Jane Ira Bloom/ Mark Helias *Some Kind Of Tomorrow* SELF RELEASED

★★★★

Perhaps the most insidious damage that COVID-19 has wrought upon humanity is the denial of our ability to be fully present with one another. Dealing with this trauma has been a unique and existential challenge for creative improvisers, and early in the pandemic, these two master musicians and friends sought to remedy their plight. Performed and recorded entirely in isolation, connected only via the internet, Bloom and Helias manage to enter into the sacred spaces of connection and communion, proving they exist outside of time and physical location.

For the better part of an hour, the duo embarks on a wide-ranging journey through various soundscapes and textures. The initial spaciousness of the title track reveals the familiar elegance of Bloom's soprano saxophone tone and the ruddy warmth of Helias' bass. "Roughing It" starts playfully and exploratory, until Bloom quotes the opening refrain from the Victor Schertzinger/Johnny Mercer evergreen "I Remember You," which seems to transport them into a bygone jazz age, as Helias drifts into walking-bass mode with Bloom swinging jauntily over the top, eventually settling into a bluesy coda. At times, they engage in a bit of role reversal, as on "Far Satellites," when Helias, through his deft use of harmonics, actually bows melodies above Bloom's sustained tones in a surprising inversion of timbral color.

Through it all, what is apparent is both Bloom and Helias are in a healing process of rediscovering each other through their sound sharing, embracing a complete gamut of expressivity that could easily be interpreted altogether as joy.

—Gary Fukushima

Some Kind Of Tomorrow: Some Kind Of Tomorrow; Magic Carpet; Early Rites; Willing; Traveling Deep; Roughing It; Far Satellites; Pros And Cons; Drift; Star Talk; First Canvas. (57:56)

Personnel: Jane Ira Bloom, soprano saxophone; Mark Helias, bass.

Ordering info: markhelias.bandcamp.com



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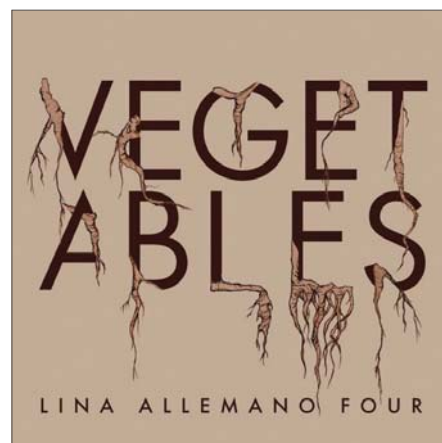
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Lina Allemano Four *Vegetables*

LUMO RECORDS 2021-11

★★★★

Since countless phrases like “meat and potatoes” or “the meat of the matter” confirm our culture’s tendency to view animal products as signifiers of seriousness, it seems downright nervy to call an album *Vegetables*. But Lina Allemano is a player with nerve to spare, and the name she’s assigned to the latest album by her long-running quartet shows that she is ready to take on the challenge of proving that vegetables aren’t just good for you; when the preparation is skilled and the ingredients fresh, nothing is more tasty.

Allemano brings plenty of experience as a composer, improviser and trumpeter. Operating from bases in Toronto and Berlin, she’s been making records since the late 1990s, playing straight-ahead and free-jazz as well as electronically enhanced experimentalism. The quartet that appears on *Vegetables* first recorded in 2005, and a decade-and-a-half of playing together has sharpened their reflexive responses to each other, as well as their ability to negotiate Allemano’s challenging compositions.

The structural shifts come so fast on “Onions” that you’ll miss one if you check your watch, but the ensemble executes them with verve and precision, and they stay similarly synced-up framing Allemano’s growling leads on “Beans” with deconstructed acoustic funk. “Brussel Sprouts, Maybe Cabbage” alternates between bold unisons and passages where each individual part feels fractured, but they fit together like a precision-tooled machine.

Each musician brings restraint as well as boldness to these performances, and the result is music that reveals new intricacies with each listen.

—Bill Meyer

Vegetables: Onions; Beans; Champignons; Brussel Sprouts, Maybe Cabbage; Oh Avocado; Leafy Greens. (35:44)

Personnel: Lina Allemano, trumpet/compositions; Brodie West, alto saxophone; Nick Fraser, drums; Andrew Downing, double bass.

Ordering info: linaallemano.com

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Dan Wilson *Vessels Of Wood And Earth*

BROTHER MISTER PRODUCTIONS/
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★★★★½

For those unfamiliar with guitarist and composer Dan Wilson, *Vessels Of Wood And Earth* offers a splendid introduction. While it's his third disc as a leader, it's his first on Christian McBride's boutique label. Channeling the warm, soulful vibes of Wes Montgomery and George Benson, Wilson specializes in post-Mo-town bop—that strain of r&b-enhanced jazz that comes across effortlessly but proves difficult to pull off with a strong sense of individuality and modernity. But with his assured sense of swing, melodic improvisations and magnetic guitar tone, Wilson triumphs.

When rendering classic soul and jazz standards, Wilson makes wise decisions. He knows how to modernize without letting structural ambition run amok. Case in point: his beguiling reimagination of Stevie Wonder's "Birds Of Beauty," a song that originally pranced to a samba groove. Drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts and bassist Marco Panascia replace the original groove with a slippery, almost broken-beat jazz pulsation, while Christian Sands' piano accompaniment retains much of the original Brazilian feel. On top, Wilson unravels curvaceous melodic improvisations that soon volley with Sands' equally enchanting improvisations.

The album contains some impressive originals, too, such as the Afro-Latin tinged "Who Shot John," and the stomping "The Reconstruction Beat," on which Wilson and the rhythm team sneak in snatches of James Brown's "Soul Power." Indeed, this smart and earthy release signals the arrival of a modern jazz guitarist who understands the enduring value of feel-good music. —John Murph

Vessels Of Wood And Earth: The Rhythm Section; Birds Of Beauty; The Reconstruction Beat; Vessels Of Wood And Earth; Who Shot John; After the Rain/Save The Children; Inner City Blues; Juneteenth; Cry Me A River; James; Born To Lose. (66:31)

Personnel: Dan Wilson, guitar; Christian Sands, piano (1–5, 7–9), synths (2), organ (7); Marco Panascia (1–9), Christian McBride (10), bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums (1–9); Joy Brown, vocals (6, 7, 9).

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

Greg Skaff/Ron Carter/ Albert 'Tootie' Heath

Polaris

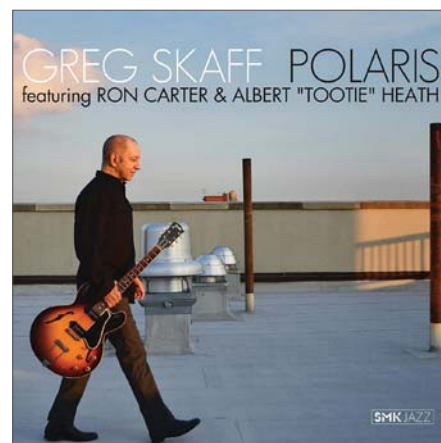
SMOKE SESSIONS SMKJ003

★★★★½

Greg Skaff doesn't often get to drive the bus. Best known for his work in organ trios, he's frequently confined to accompaniment duty, which means that his brisk, pleasingly angular, Jim Hall-like tone isn't as immediately recognizable as it ought to be. This is a session that very nearly didn't happen, but was squeezed in just as New York was going into lockdown. "Tootie" Heath was supposed to be playing at a Lincoln Center tribute to his late brother Jimmy, but it was canceled. He decided to make the Skaff date, nonetheless, reuniting him with Carter after many years.

The drummer was late for the date, which is why there are two versions of "Little Waltz," one of the bassist's best known compositions. The date also includes Duke Ellington's "Lady Of The Lavender Mist," done here with exquisite refinement.

But that isn't the band's only gear. They race through Larry Young's "Paris Eyes," a single nod to the organ trio repertory, and the opening "Old Devil Moon" is swung with considerable vigor. Skaff's originals "Mr. R.C." and



"Polaris" are bright, uncluttered and very direct in statement. The title track also references the group, since the North Star is a triple system that comes to us as a single light source; it's a nice metaphor for the tightness of the trio.

Inevitably, one spends a lot of time listening to Carter's countermelodies and Heath's highly musical drumming. But Skaff makes his presence count and, on the closing "Ill Wind," shows he's a soloist of some substance. —Brian Morton

Polaris: Old Devil Moon; Angelica; Little Waltz; Paris Eyes; Yesterdays; Mr. R.C.; Lady Of The Lavender Mist; Polaris; Caminando; Little Waltz; Ill Wind. (56:40)

Personnel: Greg Skaff, guitar; Ron Carter, bass; Albert "Tootie" Heath, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

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MARK SHELDON



Mark Turner

Practice Strategies & Personal Goals

Let's start with a question: What is practice in the context of music? I would say three things overall. Of course, there are gradations to these:

1) To engage in a discipline that encompasses our entire lives. Meaning, it affects and influences our daily activities in ways large and small

that are musical and extra musical in nature.

2) Learning how to learn.

3) Taking something that we cannot do and engaging with it until it is assimilated to the point of intuitive ability.

We will deal primarily with points 2 and 3.

In order to deal with these, we need to have

goals. Why? Music is an art form as well as a craft. The possibilities within the art of music are endless. The craft is a bit more finite. Sometimes it's hard to know which possibilities to pursue. You could spend your life searching all of them and end up basically nowhere—a jack of all trades and master of none.

My guess is that most of us would like to feel a sense of mastery in music, or at least on the way to it. Goals give a sense of direction and promote action on our aesthetic (artistic) notions. That's important. Whatever you think or feel about music, you want to put those into action as best you can. Better to play it than say it.

There are short-term goals and long-term goals. Short games within a long game. It's OK if you don't reach them. The point is to get things moving, as your goals will likely change over time, anyway. Detours are OK, even desired as what is learned along the way is what is important. This is sort of like a Medieval pilgrimage to a sacred site. Let's say, a 2,000-mile trek on foot. The goal is to reach this hallowed site, which could very well take a lifetime (or at least a decade or two). Along the way the pilgrim would run into all kinds of pitfalls, triumphs, adventures, battles, meet comrades, narrow escapes, beautiful respites, etc.

Clearly there are many roads to this one place, and they converge in some places as well. While you keep your eye on the goal you need to survive daily/monthly. These are short-term goals that eventually lead to the final one. You may find along the way that this particular sacred site is not for you, that there is another, or that you have found the place in which you want to stay. All of this is good. But, you won't realize this until you take the first step. All of us are working on basically the same things (rhythm, melody, harmony, form) and we will continue to throughout our musical lives and training. The point is finding our path within these.

How to develop goals? Here are a few ideas:

- Historical precedent. Here I mean the musical basis and foundation set by the masters as well as the high bar they set for us.

- Aesthetics. Here I mean the study of artistic beauty in music and your relationship to that. On a basic level, what do you like or dislike, and why? Be specific. Develop a critical ear.

- Failure. Failure makes us flawless. Art has "flaws" in it. Art is vulnerable. Failure is a gift. It tells us what we need to work on and gives us direction and purpose.

Access yourself in these three areas:

1) Quantitative: how many tunes you know, amount of language you have, speed of technique, etc.

2) Qualitative: how well you know each tune, in what way, what kind of language, how you play it, touch/timbre on your instrument, how your performance feels/sounds to you, value judgement.

3) Global: overall vision or trajectory of your art and craft.

The above should be viewed through these four points:

1) Rhythm: phrasing, sense of pulse/meter, clave, form, pacing, language.

2) Melody: repertoire (standards and original compositions), transcription, language.

3) Harmony: voice leading, cadences, harmonic cycles (circle of fifths, fourths, thirds, and minor thirds), harmonic rhythm, language.

4) Instrumental technique: digital, sound, touch, timbre, dynamics, etc.

Take the three larger points above to formulate clear, short-term, attainable goals. These should be leading to the long-term goals, more or less. Envision what you want to become.

Record yourself alone playing tunes in time with and without a metronome. Record yourself playing in sessions and gigs. This way you can listen to yourself in order to hear what you are actually playing, how you actually sound. Compare what you hear to your goals, especially the short-term ones. How close or far are you? Be specific. Check your individual performance as well as in group settings. Try this:

- What are my strengths?
- What are my weaknesses?
- What am I going to do about them?
- When? (I check every 3/6 weeks, 3/6 months).
- Maintain your strengths and strengthen your weaknesses.

In terms of how I play with others, my objective is to make others sound good. Some questions I would ask are: Am I in the way or am I helping? Playing too long or too short? Leaving enough space? Playing from the rhythm section or on top of them? Can I hear what other people are playing while I play? Am I listening and present when I am not playing?

What kind of learner are you?

- Global, see forest for the trees, collaborative, immersion, expressive, concrete/contextual.
- Detail oriented, see trees for the forest, solitary, reflective, intellectual, abstract/conceptual.

Of course, most of us are a combination of both or lean to one side or the other, but I think it is a good idea to look at yourself in these terms when it comes to learning music. The better you understand how you learn, the faster, more authentic and complete your practice time will be. Practice can be solitary, with others, performing, listening, etc. I break it down into reflective time, traditional practice alone; and expressive time, playing with others. Some people do best playing a lot mostly and practicing alone a little. Others do better with the opposite approach.

How long or short is your attention span? These could be general traits or just how you are feeling that day.

Let's say that you want to work on three topics. If you can spend a long time on each, then do each for one hour, making a three-hour session. On the other hand, you could spend 20 minutes on each, making one hour. Do this three times in a row or do three one-hour sessions throughout the day. Again, have fun with it; experiment and see what works for you. You may be surprised how much time there is in a day if you put together some short and long sessions throughout the day or week.

When it comes to types of practice, I break them up in these categories:

- Accumulation: amount of tunes learned, amount of language, velocity of technique, etc.
- Linear: one-to-one practice. For example, an etude to be performed exactly as practiced at home.
- Acclimation: getting used to something. For example, ear training for pitches, chords, harmonic progressions, rhythm, meter, form, etc.
- Refinement: quality, detail, nuance, subtlety, how something is performed.
- Maintenance: staying in musical shape overall. Staying on top of your game.


I'd like to say a few words about transcribing. Transcribing is a direct link between listening and ability, ear training, and practical aesthetics. Ear training here includes pitches, of course, but also timbre, nuance, phrasing, sound, time feel, beat placement, rhythm, chord voicings, etc. Train your ear to be able to hear all of these things and produce them on your instrument. This is true technique and practical aesthetics. As your aesthetic develops you will be on your way to becoming a meaningful, authentic and competent musician.

Finally, a few parting pieces of advice:

- Play the long game. Success in music takes mental and emotional endurance.
- Practice should never be mindless or careless. You will sound like that on the gig! Intention is everything.
- Some things you hate (or don't understand) now you will love later and vice versa. Keep your mind engaged, inquisitive and even.
- Vulnerability is good.
- Practice without expectation for results.
- Don't be emotionally or intellectually lazy.
- Practice so that your base level rises higher. So that even if you are tired, upset, travel all day, the sound system sounds bad, etc., you can still play "objectively" well.
- Learn simple/basic things very well as they are the basis for more complex things. Try not skip over them as they will serve you well over time.

DB


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CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE

Greg Osby's Alto Saxophone Solo on 'Tolerance'

The composition "Tolerance" is the second level of Greg Osby's *9 Levels* (Inner Circlex, 2008). Performed on alto saxophone, it has a mysterious vibe and introduces an intriguing 14-bar form for the

final improvisations. In actuality, it's a seven-bar form, since the tempo is really half of what's written here, and the rhythmic values have been doubled. This was done to facilitate reading (and because strings of 32nd

notes tend to scare musicians off). Also, the solo has been transcribed for Eb alto saxophone (up a major sixth).

The harmonies that I indicate have been loosely extrapolated from the original score, so please don't take them too literally. As Osby himself told *DownBeat*: "I typically don't write traditional chord symbols but instead give the band members direct and explicit notation. I give them the actual voicings that the chordal instruments are playing as I wrote them."

The first thing I notice about Osby's playing here is his facility with various rhythms. He can switch from triple- to duple-based rhythms and back again, sometimes in the same bar (as in measure 14 and bars 18–19). This can be tricky, especially going from 16ths to triplets, but Osby pulls it off so effortlessly that the listener might not even notice there have been changes of subdivision. It does add to the mysteriousness, creating a feeling that seems neither swing nor straight.

He also makes a point of using this technique to build his solo. Osby plays through the form three times. The first round (through bar 15) doesn't have many 16th notes, and quite a number of long rests, but the second time through (measures 16–29) there are more 16th notes, and they're strung together into longer runs (with a paucity of rests). In the third chorus, 16th notes again become a rarity, though rests aren't as prominent as they had been the first time around. So he brings the energy up, and then lets it down, but not all the way down. This helps make for a great listening experience.

Similar things can be said of his use of range. Osby shows remarkable facility all over the instrument (his improvisation covers more than two-and-a-half octaves). He also can move from smaller intervals (there are quite a number of half-step runs, like in measure 3, or the 16ths on the second beats of bars 6 and 25) to larger ones (like the stacked tritones in measure 10) and back again, but does this in the service of the statement.

His first chorus covers an octave-and-a-fifth, and his high F doesn't appear until halfway through. At the beginning of the second chorus Osby immediately drops down to a low F, giving us a full two octaves. In the final four bars of this chorus he introduces the high G# and low C, giving us the full range of his improvisation. That he covers this range in just two measures (26–27) really pushes the energy. In the first 14 bars

he spent far more time getting from one end to the other.

For the first half of Osby's last run-through, the range remains the same, but now he hits the high G#'s early on (bars 31 and 34), and drops down to the low C (written as B#) in bar 35. Although still spanning the scope within two

bars, by reversing the direction he's changed the energy again, bringing it back down. In the final half, the range goes back to a single octave as Osby brings the listener back home. **DB**

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

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The new YDS-150 from Yamaha is a digital saxophone. It's not a MIDI wind controller for reed players, but a new type of instrument that creates an authentic saxophone-playing experience digitally. Its purpose is to help students and returning adult players make great saxophone sounds right from the start, drawing on digital emulations of the company's high-end instruments, like the Custom Z and Custom EX saxophones as well as the new 62 Series baritone saxophones.

The YDS-150 looks like it could be a futuristic soprano with its straight body design, brass bell and all-black, EX-style keywork (made from synthetic material). When I picked it up to play-test, it felt like an actual saxophone. And when I began to blow, it responded in a manner similar to a real horn and produced beautiful tones with a minimum of effort.

The brass bell helps enhance acoustic presence, as the vibrations coming from the built-in speaker at the top of the YDS-150 are transmitted to the bell through an internal sound pipe. In turn, the instrument vibrates similarly to a traditional saxophone. Subtle vibrations are carried to the mouth and fingertips through the mouthpiece and keys as well to give players authentic instrumental feedback.

The mouthpiece is an actual Yamaha alto mouthpiece, outfitted with a sturdy plastic "reed" that helps to control incoming air flow but does not vibrate in the manner of real cane. Tonguing is not required to initiate sounds—all you have to do is blow—but players can easily come up with articulation techniques of their own to achieve a sax-like "attack."

The YDS-150 sounds best through headphones, revealing gorgeous reverb and tonal depth. There are 13 soprano sax voices, 17 alto sax voices, 15 tenor sax voices, 11 baritone sax voices—with plenty of options for vibrato, EQ, distortion/effects and harmonized intervals—plus 17 non-sax tones including harmonica, pipes, flutes and various synth sounds. You won't be able to trigger sound libraries with the YDS-150, but you can connect it as a regular audio input to some of the more popular DAWs on the market, including Cubase, Ableton Live 10 and Logic.

The YDS-150 is Bluetooth equipped, which lets you pair it with mobile devices through the YDS Controller app to edit voices, customize fingerings (including your altissimo range) and fine-tune settings such as resistance, response and tuning.

—Ed Enright

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Roland Aerophone Pro

Refined Design, Vast Sonic Palette

Aerophone Pro AE-30, the new flagship model in Roland's Aerophone series of digital wind instruments, sports numerous design refinements and premium components along with a large sonic palette drawn from the company's advanced SuperNatural and Zen-Core sound engines. Its thinner, more ergonomic design makes it easier to hold and allows for a more confident playing experience than its predecessor, the Aerophone AE-10.

Controls on the Aerophone Pro were noticeably easier to reach during play-testing, and the streamlined body and aluminum accents give it an understated presence that's classier-looking than the original. The discrete OLED screen feels like an integral part of the instrument and can be viewed at any angle in any kind of lighting.

User-customizable fingerings are supported, and a MIDI input for footswitches greatly expands performance options. Roland has also made the breath and bite sensors more responsive and expressive.

While the streamlined design of the Aerophone Pro makes it easier and more enjoyable to play, it's the new onboard sounds that caught my

ear. Roland has enhanced its soprano, alto and tenor saxophone and added vibrant new trumpet sounds, plus world music instruments like the duduk. New controller options give access to idiomatic techniques on a range of instrument voices.

Roland's ZEN-Core Synthesis System is the sound engine that powers the company's high-end Fantom and Jupiter-X synthesizers. Included in the Aerophone Pro's presets are a selection of vintage analog synth tones and modern hybrid sounds that lend themselves well to the expressiveness of a traditional wind instrument. Powerful onboard editing tools let you personalize sounds on the spot, and further customization and organization can be achieved using the iOS and Android editor app.

Aerophone Pro is sturdy and versatile. Its robust design, quarter-inch output and MIDI connections make it perfect for any gig, or as the center of a wind controller-based production studio. And with a headphone jack, Bluetooth MIDI, built-in speaker, battery-powered operation and ultra-light weight, it's highly portable, so you can play it anywhere.

—Ed Enright

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More info: victory-instruments.com

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More info: davidliebman.com

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Antonio García watches and listens as VCU Jazz Orchestra I members play along with a narrated click-track.

Rosenwinkel, VCU Collaborate Remotely

STRICT CORONAVIRUS PROTOCOLS AT Virginia Commonwealth University have led to some unplanned yet valuable learning experiences for students in the school's 40-year-old Jazz Studies program. Under the direction of Antonio García, jazz students had seen their hopes for an in-person hang with Kurt Rosenwinkel suddenly vanish last spring, only to emerge victorious one year later with high-quality recordings of VCU's top jazz combo and top big band performing with the guitarist—virtually.

When the fall 2020 semester started with in-person (yet socially distanced) classes and rehearsals at VCU, García had hopes of rescheduling Rosenwinkel's visit, originally planned for April 2020, for the spring semester. But as the year came to an end, COVID-19 levels in the region started to rise and García's optimism began to wane. So, he worked out an arrangement with Rosenwinkel to work remotely with VCU students on a recording project for spring 2021, a collaboration that would involve extensive nonsynchronous multitracking as well as group rehearsals held over Zoom.

The combo chose a Rosenwinkel piece, "Dream Of The Old," for which the guitarist laid down his tracks first. "That allowed us to build on his rubatos and his ambience," García said. The big band went with Bill Holman's arrangement of "I Remember You" and Shelly Berg's chart on Bill Evans' "Turn Out The Stars" with Rosenwinkel's guitar inserted in the middle.

García was able to hold productive group rehearsals over Zoom, despite unavoidable

latency issues. Band members laid down scratch tracks of their parts on university-provided portable recorders with assistance from guide tracks provided by García. Everyone was set to record and submit their best performances, which were to be rough-mixed and sent to Rosenwinkel for overdubbing, when VCU announced a return to in-person classes and rehearsals in early March.

That meant that VCU's jazz bands could record together as a group, foregoing the need to multitrack everyone's parts. An in-person recording session took place in mid-March (Rosenwinkel laid down his parts separately), and on April 13 the three completed tracks were to be presented at VCU's spring jazz concert, a hybrid event featuring livestreaming performances by university ensembles.

"I told the students that we have to look for silver linings," García said. "Although we don't have the same performance opportunities we've had in the past, this particular band of students now knows more about the process of recording themselves than any of our previous ensembles. And those students profited immensely from learning and understanding all of this."

Carmenita Higginbotham, dean of VCU School of the Arts, has been impressed with the faculty's ability to pivot multiple times during the pandemic while ensuring that students remain safe. "Despite enormous obstacles, the Jazz Studies program continues to offer a high-quality experience, with opportunities for collaboration, performance and professional development," she said.

—Ed Enright



JEN 2022 Dates Announced: Following a successful, and completely virtual, conference in January 2021, the Jazz Education Network has set Jan. 5–8, 2022, in Dallas, Texas, for its 13th annual conference—and this time, it'll be live and in-person. jazzednet.org

That's 'Dr. Harrison' to You: Saxophonist Donald Harrison will be receiving an honorary doctor of music degree from Berklee College of Music this May. Cited for cultural and educational contributions to his native New Orleans and the jazz world, Harrison joins Celine Dion as well as Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo of the Neptunes in receiving the honor. Chita Rivera and André Watts will receive honorary doctor of the arts degrees from the Boston Conservatory, Berklee's sister institution. berklee.edu

Whang Named Chair: Award-winning cellist Mimi Whang has been named the chair of Chamber Music America's board of directors. Hwang, an assistant professor of chamber music at the Eastman School of Music, succeeds Richard Kessler, executive dean of the college of performing arts at the New School and dean of Mannes School of Music. chamber-music.org

Jamison Ross Jumps In: Grammy-winning vocalist and drummer Jamison Ross took his first dive into university teaching this spring. At press time, he was scheduled to join the staff at Loyola New Orleans for the semester to coach upperclassmen in the university's School of Music Industry Studies. loyno.edu

Student Leadership: The Chicago Jazz Philharmonic's Jazz Academy has formed a Student Leadership Council to offer student input into programs and offer them opportunities to soak up knowledge from mentors like Mwata Bowden, Ernie Adams, Ari Brown, Kevin King and concert master Zara Zaharevia. The first edition of the student-run council includes saxophonist Emelie Gutierrez, clarinetist Sarah Morris, saxophonist Jordan Anders, drummer Alma Francez and saxophonist Jordan Warren. chijazzphil.org

Angelica Sanchez

When pianist Angelica Sanchez bought her home just across the Hudson River from Manhattan, it wasn't a trendy locale. But as her Jersey City neighborhood has enjoyed a steady rise to more widespread appeal, so too has Sanchez's career, to the point where she currently enjoys a stately position of influence in the "new" music scene, alongside luminaries like Wadada Leo Smith and Marilyn Crispell, both of whom she has recorded with in duo settings—the latter just this past year with *How To Turn The Moon* (Pyroclastic). Sanchez, who teaches at Princeton and The New School, has a nonet album in the works.

Keith Jarrett

"Long Time Gone (*But Not Withdrawn*)" (*Life Between The Exit Signs*, Atlantic, 1968) Jarrett, piano; Charlie Haden, bass; Paul Motian, drums.

That's so great. I hadn't heard that before. I always get early Jarrett and Bley mixed up in-between, but I would say that it's probably Paul Bley. [afterwards] It was Jarrett! [laughs] When he started playing inside [the piano] I thought, "Oh, maybe that's Bley." They definitely have influenced each other. I heard the humming in the background, but I know that Paul Bley also vocalized, so I wasn't sure. But the touch was definitely Jarrett. He was so wild when he was younger. That's a 5-star recording.

Ingrid Laubrock/Kris Davis

"Gunweep" (*Blood Moon*, Intakt, 2020) Laubrock, soprano saxophone; Davis, piano.

It reminds me a lot of Tony Malaby on the soprano saxophone. Is it Lovano on soprano? Let me think. Is that Ingrid Laubrock? And Kris Davis. I knew it was Kris. I think I've actually heard her play that tune in a different situation. Amazing players. Me and Kris are friends. She spent a lot of time up here at the house. My record with Marilyn Crispell, she put out that record [on Davis' label]. She's doing so many good things, and not just for herself, for other people. She recently asked several women to contribute to a "real book"; I sent her 20 tunes. I believe Marilyn's part of it, and Ingrid. Ingrid sounds amazing. I don't think I've heard her play soprano like that; I've played sessions with her on tenor. That's great, 5 stars.

Gerald Clayton

"Rejuvenation Agenda" (*Happening: Live At The Village Vanguard*, Blue Note, 2020) Clayton, piano; Logan Richardson, alto saxophone; Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Joe Sanders, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums.

Such a great band. I really love the pianist, and I love the group. Is it Jacob Sacks, by chance? He definitely had some Craig Taborn language, but that didn't sound like Craig to me overall. I don't know who that was. [afterwards] I don't know his recordings. Beautiful though. I really like how his language was nice and traditional, but he definitely stretched things a bit. And the way he plays with time, I enjoyed that. You can tell they've been playing for a long time, because they have such a tight sound. He had a real natural sound. It didn't sound forced, like, "Here's my modern language and here's my bebop language." In my mind, they're the same, it's not like one's an extension of another. It had a nice flow to it. The architecture of his solo was really great. Nice touch, too. 5 stars.

Matthew Shipp

"Piano Equation" (*The Piano Equation*, Tao Forms, 2020) Shipp, piano.

The touch reminds me of Marilyn [Crispell] a bit, but the shapes are different. Man, such great playing. I've never heard this piece before. It's not Matt Shipp is it? I really love Matt Ship. Of course, I've met him and spoken to him before, but I don't know him personally that well. He doesn't



Angelica Sanchez

E. CARDONA

have any boundaries whatsoever; he makes whatever music he's playing really, really great. And he always draws me in. 5 stars.

Jeff Williams

"She Can't Be A Spy" (*Bloom*, Whirlwind, 2019) Williams, drums; Carmen Staaf, piano; Michael Formanek, bass.

Sounds like Formanek on bass. Was that Craig [Taborn], by chance? I feel like I know that piano player. The drummer, I'm not sure, maybe Gerald Cleaver? Michael plays with everybody. It's funny that's who I recognized. When you have those musical marriages, you have that sound in your head. I really like that piano player. I like how he interplays with the group; the way he's listening is great. And he—or she—has a lovely touch. [afterwards] Of course! Jeff's going to be so pissed at me. He gave me this CD. Jeff's an old friend. He was somebody that when I first moved to New York, he was really lovely and introduced me to people and took me around to different clubs. He's always been like an uncle to me. 5 stars.

Vijay Iyer/Craig Taborn

"Shake Down" (*The Transitory Poems*, ECM, 2019) Iyer, piano; Taborn, piano.

It's great. Most of the recordings you played for me all have Jarrett influence. There aren't that many modern two-piano recordings out that I know. I really did hear some of the sounds that Marilyn and I have played together. But it's not Marilyn. Is Craig Taborn one of the pianists? And Vijay? Craig has this really crisp touch that I know. He's a force of nature when you hear him play. Once I heard him play a solo concert. We all thought the piano was just going to explode, because he's just got so much power. Of course, Vijay's a wonderful pianist. When I first started playing with Wadada [Leo Smith], he recommended me to Wadada. I'm always grateful to him for that.

Adam Benjamin

"The Star-Spangled Banner" (*Alphabets And Consequences*, F. Boo, 2010) Benjamin, piano.

That's great. It reminds me of Ran Blake. It's not Matt Shipp because the touch is so different, but I've known him to play songs that way. I feel like I've heard this person before. It's not Django [Bates], from England, is it? [afterwards] Ralph Alessi was teaching [at University of Nevada-Reno], and he told me the guy who runs the jazz program [Benjamin] is awesome, and that's why he went. So now I know why. I told him, "Ralph, why are you going out there? It's terrible there." [laughs] He's like, "No, this guy is cool." But I think it only lasted a couple of years, because there's only so much Reno you can take. But [Benjamin] is so great. It also takes some courage to make [political] statements like that. **DB**

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

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