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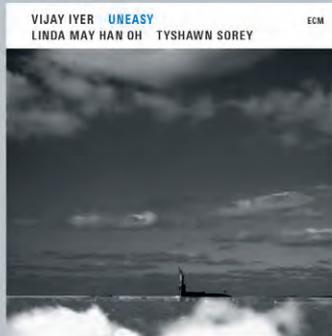
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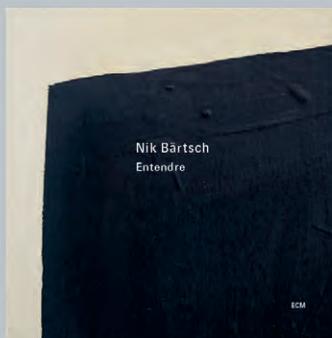
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DOWNBEAT

AUGUST 2021

VOLUME 88 / NUMBER 8

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POSTMASTER: Send change of address to: DownBeat, P.O. Box 11688, St. Paul, MN 55111-0688. **CABLE ADDRESS:** DownBeat (on sale July 20, 2021) Magazine Publishers Association.



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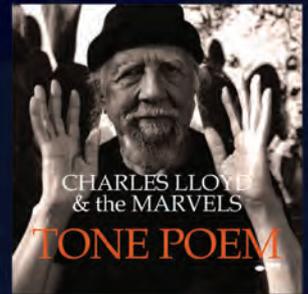
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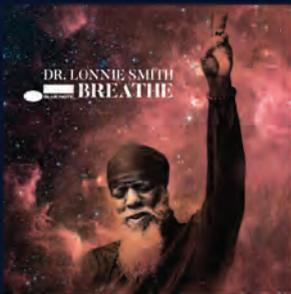
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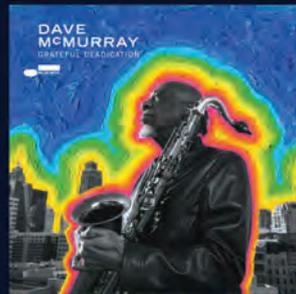
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AUGUST 2021

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The Voice

BY SUZANNE LORGE

Carla Bley's extraordinary career was a longshot, but it happened. What were the chances in the 1950s that a teenaged girl from Oakland, California, would land smack in the middle of New York's vibrant jazz scene, much less emerge as one of its most lasting compositional voices? Bley, who turned 85 this year, enters the DownBeat Hall of Fame after more than six decades of writing, recording and performing important music with the biggest stars in jazz.



STEVEN SUSSMAN

Carla Bley and Steve Swallow at the 2007 Litchfield Jazz Festival

Cover photo by Mark Sheldon

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Carla Bley performs with her big band at the 1996 Chicago Jazz Festival.

Hellos, Farewells & Ovations

OVER ALL THE YEARS I'VE SPENT WORKING at this great magazine — 31 and counting — DownBeat's annual Critics Poll each August has grown to become my favorite issue.

The reasons are many and easy to see.

First, this is truly a labor of love. More than 100 critics voted in this year's poll for no other reasons than: 1) to make their voices heard; 2) to see what the aggregate of the world's jazz writers view as the year's best music and biggest stories; and 3) to keep getting their free subscription to DownBeat.

It's not much, considering that the average ballot takes more than an hour to complete.

But writing is a solitary pursuit. This is one of the few times each year when our critics can feel like they are part of a community. It's especially true with what's happened over the past 15 months. Let's not rehash that.

The critics pay tribute to the music and the artists they love as well as the respect they have for this magazine. For that, we are forever grateful.

The poll serves as a snapshot of the jazz scene for the past year, kind of a family portrait of jazz — who made great music, whose star is rising, who is being recognized for a lifetime of achievement and who received votes in a final show of respect.

You'll notice several artists who, yes, are included in the poll this year, but have passed away. The dates of their deaths are next to their names in the listings. At the forefront, of course, is Chick Corea, recognized as Artist of the Year as well as the critics' choice for Pianist and Keyboardist — all for the final time. That's hard

to write for a kid who bought *The Leprechaun*, his first jazz album, as a teenager in 1976. Gary Fukushima's article on page 26 pays homage to one of the greatest artists to ever grace a stage.

The poll is also a chance for some long overdue ovations, none more deserved than Carla Bley entering the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

Bley has been the epitome of creativity and fierce independence for more than six decades. Writer Suzanne Lorge's piece, starting on page 18, lovingly captures the zeitgeist of a true artist with her own distinct voice, whether dueting with Steve Swallow, leading her own bands or driving Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra.

Of course, it's also great to see Yusef Lateef and Booker Little enter the Hall, too, as voted in by the Veterans Committee. Veterans Howard Mandel and John McDonough respectfully make the case for their enshrinement.

But the critics, and the poll, are ultimately about today and tomorrow.

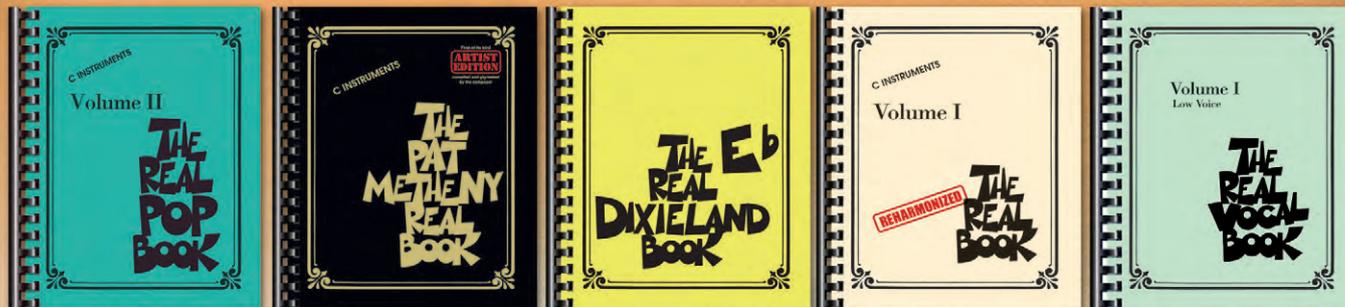
Maria Schneider is today. Her poll-winning album *Data Lords* serves as one for the ages. It's great to be alive and to behold this kind of deep, driven, visionary recording, as writer Phillip Lutz unveils on page 25.

Perhaps my favorite categories of the poll are the Rising Stars. This is where this music is heading. And, this year's crop is finding ways to get to there — together. Stephanie Jones' article, on page 34, beautifully points the way.

When people say jazz is dead, go ahead and refer them here. This poll, like this music, honors the history, basks in the now and aggressively pursues the future. It's alive, like jazz. **DB**

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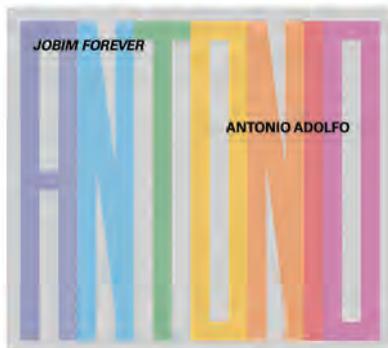
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-Antonio Adolfo

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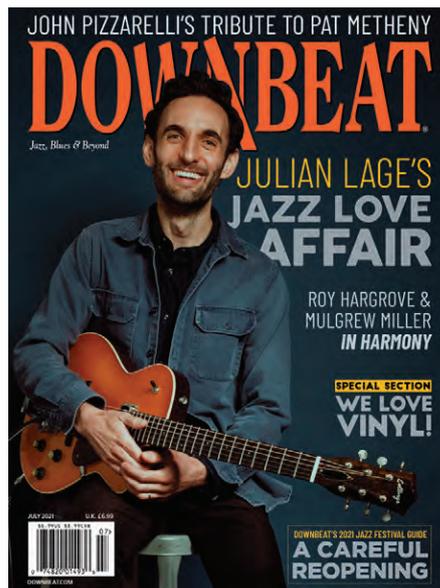
Chords & Discords >

Living Lage

Thank you for the great interview with Julian Lage in your July issue. Based on your article I am looking forward to seeing his new trio, and music from his new record, when I see him at SPACE (in Evanston, Illinois) in October. The first time I heard him live was at the same venue back in 2011. The show was with his quintet, and they were promoting his *Gladwell* record. I have been following his career since then, and I have watched him evolve.

Several years ago, I saw Lage with the trio with Scott Colley, which was much different than the quintet show. The last time I saw him, he performed with another guitarist as part of John Zorn's special project at the Art Institute of Chicago. The past six-plus years, I have seen Julian's name near the top of your annual Critics Poll. As your article mentioned, not only is Julian a great guitarist, but also a very nice person. I spoke to him after the 2011 and AIC shows and he was very nice and appreciative of his fans.

I also enjoyed the short article/interview with John Pizzarelli and his new record of Pat Metheny's music in the same issue. It was great



to learn he is a big fan of Metheny. Thank you again for another great issue.

MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Sax Battle for the Ages

I'd love to see DownBeat publish a 30-year anniversary retrospective on what was arguably the greatest official jazz talent competition ever held: the 1991 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Saxophone Competition. That was the year Joshua Redman became "famous" overnight — and eventually signed to Warner Brothers — by winning the top prize over such illustrious candidates as Eric Alexander (second place) and Chris Potter and Tim Warfield (who tied for third).

The finals were so stocked with saxophone talent that on any given "normal" year, fellow finalists Marcos Aldana (father of 2013 contest winner Melissa Aldana) or noted altoist and jazz educator Andrew Speight could have won. It would be interesting to hear reflections from all six of these finalists, not only their remembrances of the competition, but the impact the event had on their careers. There were also several lifelong friendships formed, with Andrew Speight hiring competition judge Branford Marsalis as artist-in-residence after Speight later became director of jazz studies at Michigan State University School of Music.

Tragically, four of the five judges — Benny Carter, Jimmy Heath, Frank Wess and Jackie Mclean — have since passed away, but I'm sure the lone remaining judge, Branford, would offer plenty of insight.

GORDON WEBB
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

Editor's Note: We were there. It was epic! Talk about talent, alto saxophonist Dave Pietro was one of the semifinalists. As you'll see, beginning

on page 28, he has been a long-time member of the Maria Schneider Orchestra, and a musical focal point of her last album, *Data Lords*, this year's critics' pick for Album of the Year.

On Funding Disparities

It probably comes as no surprise to anyone in jazz that classical music gets the lion's share of funding, while jazz is left with the crumbs. The questions that naturally arise are: 1) How big is this disparity? 2) Why does it exist? 3) What can be done about it?

I am a jazz bassist and data scientist, based in Philadelphia. I have been consulting for several major jazz organizations about this and other issues for some time now. In the work I have done for these organizations, it seems that no matter what my original assignment is, I keep running into the questions above. They are inescapable, and exist at the core of jazz's existence in America whether we want to acknowledge them or not.

As the leading voice in jazz print, if this topic is of interest to you and your constituency, perhaps we could in some way combine our energies and bring this story to light.

NICHOLAS KROLAK
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

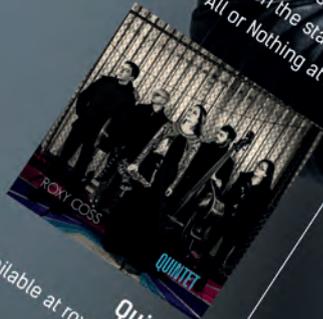
Editor's Note: It's a very interesting premise, Nicholas. It's outside of what we do, but we look forward to seeing your expanded research results. Hopefully, some of our readers will be interested in helping out.

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We All Break, front row, from left, Nick Dunston, Sirene Dantor Rene, Ches Smith, Daniel Brevil; back row, from left, Matt Mitchell, Markus Schwartz, Miguel Zenón and Fanfan Jean-Guy Rene.

Ches Smith Runs the Vodou Down

Drummer/composer Ches Smith got into Vodou drumming almost by accident. As a graduate student studying music at Mills College in Oakland, California, he was asked to accompany an Afro-Haitian dance class back in 2000. “I didn’t know anything about Haitian music,” he said recently by Zoom from his Brooklyn home. To prepare, he went to Amoeba Music and purchased a field recording of a Vodou ceremony. “It was blazing-fast drumming ... I couldn’t even tell if it was in 5/4 or 4/4.”

From that chance encounter with Haitian Vodou music grew a lifelong fascination with its complex polyrhythms and spellbinding chants, even as his career as a drummer took him in other directions. Now, more than 20 years later, Smith is releasing a groundbreaking album, *Path Of Seven Colors* (Pyroclastic Records), combining Vodou music with jazz composition and improvisation.

Smith recorded the work with his group We All Break, a cross-cultural octet including four jazz musicians and four traditional Haitian drummers and singers, who pool their talents to make a hybrid music that is

stunningly original and mesmerizing in its ritualistic power.

In addition to Smith on drum set, the octet features three musicians at the forefront of experimental and improvised music — pianist Matt Mitchell, alto saxophonist and MacArthur Fellow Miguel Zenón and bassist Nick Dunston — combined with Haitian vocalist Sirene Dantor Rene and a trio of master Haitian drummers: Fanfan Jean-Guy Rene, Markus Schwartz and drummer/songwriter Daniel Brevil, who contributed several original compositions. The album’s June release was accompanied by a 50-minute documentary on the making of the album by filmmaker Mimi Chakarova.

Smith has played a variety of experimental music forms as a leader and sideman, indulging a taste for both rock and jazz drumming. When in his 20s, Smith played with rock experimentalists like Mr. Bungle and Secret Chiefs 3. In recent years, he has recorded with jazz innovators like Tim Berne’s Snakeoil, Marc Ribot, Craig Taborn, Mat Maneri, John Zorn, Nels Cline and Dave Holland.

The group’s name, We All Break, is a refer-

ence to a staple of Vodou drumming called the *kase* (pronounced ka-say), a break in the main rhythmic pattern introduced by the lead drummer.

“It’s designed to kinda shock the initiates, throw them off balance,” Smith said. “If they’re dancing to the beat, it kinda pulls the rug out from under them. It’s essentially polyrhythmic in nature, highlighting the undercurrent of the rhythm that was in the first part.” In Vodou ritual, disorienting the initiates in this way is supposed to facilitate an ecstatic experience in which they may become possessed by the spirits the ceremony is designed to summon.

The idea of combining religious and secular music gave Smith some pause — in fact, more so than it did his Haitian collaborators. “I had reservations, but they didn’t,” he said. “I wanted to blend the two [genres] and feature this incredible drumming, but I asked Marcus and Daniel, ‘Is this a good idea?’ They said, ‘Let’s try it.’ Daniel brought some of his friends to [our] second gig, and they approved. They saw that the drums and Haitian songs were prominent in the music.”

Smith describes his attraction to Vodou music as a physical thing. “I’m generalizing, but it felt like Elvin Jones to me — it had that kind of visceral grip on me,” he said. “It just was a feeling it gave me. I almost want to say I’d feel that way even if I didn’t play drums. The way certain rhythms went together it was really funky and powerful at the same time ... and really polyrhythmic.”

Those interests began as a young teen in Sacramento, when he and his older brother, also a drummer, would play along with rock music on the radio. “At 14 or 15, I started playing all the time, reading drum magazines; I began to realize I’d better learn the rudiments.” An early teacher made him mixtapes and got him listening to jazz drummers.

Following up on his interest in Vodou music, Smith visited Haiti, attended Vodou ceremonies and began to comprehend the music’s spiritual underpinnings.

“I saw that was the reason for all this great music. There’s a spiritual reason for all the polyrhythms and the way the drumming fits together — it wasn’t just some art thing. The average person in that community understands it, too. It’s not just for the musicians.”

—Allen Morrison

Samara Joy

Samara Joy's Quest for New Tradition

SAMARA JOY IS A SELF-POSSESSED, DEEPLY emotive vocalist, a power that usually takes a lot of living to master. But the Purchase College graduate has got it in spades.

When she spoke to DownBeat via Zoom, Joy was quick to admit, “I haven’t really experienced most of what is talked about in the songs. So, I have to either immerse myself in how my heroes sang them or try to tap into a character and think of a story where I’m in that position.”

She added that she also is comparatively new to the jazz idiom, sharing that her first encounter with jazz was upon her arrival to college, where, as a jazz studies major, she found “so many people that loved the music. And I heard Sarah Vaughan’s version of ‘Lover Man,’ *Live From Sweden*, and that was it for me as far as being connected to it.”

In the wake of that connection, Joy found herself surprised that it took so long to encounter the music in a meaningful way, yet once she dove in, she found herself energized by it. “Being an African-American woman — and to have this amazing art form that was created by Black people — and I didn’t know anything about it until I was 18, it was exciting. It was a challenge. It was beautiful. And I’m really grateful to have been connected to it and gotten this far singing it.”

Joy looks up to contemporary artists like Cécile McLorin Salvant, Jazzmeia Horn and even

H.E.R., but her heroes also include Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. In fact, Joy won the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition in 2019, and her study of both Vaughan and Fitzgerald is apparent in her self-titled debut album, which reflects her novel, contemporary-leaning approach to gilded, and sometimes obscure, jazz material.

The treatment of heirloom material recorded for *Samara Joy* is refreshingly stripped back: Dominated by Pasquale Grasso’s gorgeous guitar and her voice, listeners are compelled to focus on the purity of her tone and the purity of the music. This is particularly true of her interpretations of “Lover Man” and “Jim.” The better known of the two compositions, “Lover Man,” was selected as an homage to her entry into jazz.

Meanwhile, she chose the lesser-known “Jim,” which, like “Lover Man,” was recorded by both Sarah Vaughan and Billie Holiday, because she was attracted to the universal nature of the subject matter. Joy explained that it’s about “somebody who doesn’t really care, who doesn’t put any effort into the relationship. And yet, I still can’t help the way I feel toward that person. I’ve seen a lot of romantic comedy, so maybe that’s why, but at one point or another, we have that one person that we care so deeply about.”

Her version of “Stardust” is reminiscent of Nat “King” Cole’s dreamy take on the Hoagy

Carmichael standard. And although she says she listened to Cole’s 1957 version, her pathway toward recording the composition was in consequence of hearing Louis Armstrong’s much earlier recording, to which she was immediately attracted.

“I loved it!” she gushed. “I loved it because [of] the way that he played around with the phrasing of the song.”

In due course, Joy hopes her first album will help carry on the tradition. “These are still my heroes that I’m listening to and learning from,” she said. “I’ll always be a student of it while also adding my own perspective.”

Joy also hopes that the album can be a bridge to introduce the music to “people who have never heard jazz before in their life, can appreciate the songs, can appreciate the story behind the songs and relate to them.”

She already has ideas for her second full-length offering. “There’s the standard ‘Out Of Nowhere,’ but there’s also a contrafact called ‘Nostalgia.’ I wrote lyrics for that for a course that I took, and I really liked it. I wrote lyrics for this recording of a funky blues with Charlie Parker, Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter. I wrote lyrics for all their solos as well as for the head. And I realized that I really enjoyed doing that. So, maybe you’ll hear some of that.”

—Ayana Contreras



Kari Ikonen

Kari Ikonen Invents

IN A STYLISH HELSINKI APARTMENT WITH high-vaulted windows that ushered in the sunlight from the auroral Scandinavian summer evening, Kari Ikonen stood next to his grand piano, holding in his hand a compact black device above the tuning block. He sounded a low B-flat and carefully placed a second, smaller part on the corresponding strings struck by the hammer, nestling the first device over it.

Ikonen continued to play, and as he slid the device further up the strings away from the keyboard, the pitch started to raise, creeping up an entire semitone to B natural. Somehow, the device was acting like a pitch-bend wheel on a keyboard, only this was an acoustic piano. Were hidden claws and springs inside that black box, pulling on and detuning the strings?

"This one is made with magnets, actually," Ikonen said via video from his native Finland, as he recounted two years of tinkering with various mechanisms to create microtonal effects on the piano, in order to more faithfully reproduce the maqam, the system of melodic modes found in Arabic music. He calls his invention the Maqiano (pronounced ma-key-ahn-o), a mash-up of the words "maqam" and "piano."

"I've been into Arabic maqam and micro intervals for a long time," said Ikonen, 47, who began studying that music more than 20 years ago. He found that his Moog analog synthesizer was the best solution to altering the pitch to conform to the non-Western tuning system, but he continued to search for a way to achieve a similar thing on the piano. After trying many different materials and techniques, Ikonen has found a workable, and marketable, solution. To avoid damage to the piano if it were accidentally struck while clamped to the strings, Ikonen's device holds and releases much like the magnetic charging system developed by Apple for their computers and phones. The magnets also allow

for the device to be used on upright pianos as well as grands.

Ikonen plans to assemble and sell Maqianos himself, but eventually he hopes to license the product to manufacturers for worldwide distribution. "I hope that it will make some money, at least," he said, wistfully. He has had, as of late, more free time than Euros, due to the pandemic-driven sabotage of the touring he had planned to promote his recent solo piano album, *Impressions, Improvisations & Compositions* (Ozella), while also showcasing an earlier prototype of the Maqiano. The hiatus was somewhat convenient, though, for it allowed Ikonen the time to further hone his invention and his business strategy. He would otherwise have spent roughly one third of the year on the road, performing with his own trio and his pan-European collaboration Orchestra Nazionale Della Luna, along with concerts to address his burgeoning affair with solo piano.

It certainly wasn't love at first sight. "I have to say that for a long time, I didn't like to play alone at all," admitted Ikonen, who has always enjoyed the spontaneous interaction with others. But the pianist discovered something unique about solo playing. "I have total freedom to do whatever I feel in that moment, and nobody gets lost," he said.

Ikonen's innovative and idiosyncratic pianism works well for playing solo. On *Impressions, Improvisations & Compositions*, he displays a diverse repertoire of both songs and sound, playing on, around and inside the piano. The Maqiano is featured on several pieces, including two maqam compositions tailor-made for the device. His muscular treatment of Wayne Shorter's "Pinnocchio" is a tour de force of expressive virtuosity, and the evocative, cyclical ballad "The Evergreen Earth" is a nod to Ikonen's concern for the environment. —Gary Fukushima



MIKE CLARK & MICHAEL ZILBER MIKE DROP

SSC 1623 IN STORES JULY 16, 2021

The moving performances on Mike Clark and Michael Zilber's *Mike Drop* show that kindred spirits can be found no matter the distance. Though both Clark and Zilber came from the West Coast, they found their connection in a love of the serious soul of one of New York City's distinctive styles: a seriously swinging, free range jazz.



HANK ROBERTS SCIENCE OF LOVE

SSC 1625 IN STORES JULY 23, 2021

The assembly of what would become the Hank Roberts Sextet was entirely organic, evolving out of chance meetings, preexisting friendships between members, and a quick understanding of the leader's goals. All of the musicians shared similar languages, interacting comfortably between jazz, improv, and classical musical idioms. The group proved to be a perfect size for the emerging music, a reasonably sized ensemble that could sound large.



Sunnyside

sunnysiderecords.com

Mario Pavone's Final Statement

Editor's Note: Bassist Mario Pavone passed away on May 15 in Madeira, Florida, following a long battle with cancer. He was 80.

Just 11 days before his passing, *DownBeat* published an interview with Pavone by writer Kevin Whitehead, a long-time admirer of the man and his work. It turned out to be the bassist's last. We present it here.

ON STAGE, MARIO PAVONE DOESN'T MOVE

like other bass players; his hands follow different routes around the neck. He likes splayed intervals: a low G plus a high B a tenth above it, say. It comes from his visualizing the fingerboard as if standing before it, seeing not just all the note positions, but the various intervals, scales and chords radiating out from and connecting them.

He plays with a lot of force. Mostly self-taught, he took a couple of lessons early on with new music virtuoso Bert Turetzky, who stressed the importance of really pressing down on the fingerboard to make a note's fundamental tone project and sustain. Pavone's right hand does the rest: tugging at the strings, adding resistance even when pushing the time ahead.

"I keep my strings a little high, and I overplay, a little harder than you'd pluck for an optimal balanced tone," he said. "I tend to be more architectural, or sculptural." Sometimes he wants a note to groan or creak, for expressive purposes: "When I started playing in New York in the '60s, there were no amps. I overplayed to compensate. On the loft scene, five tenors blowing for hours — I wanted to be heard."

Pavone was originally inspired to play by seeing John Coltrane at the Village Vanguard during the iconic saxophonist's epic November 1961 stand. He heard Trane's message: "Love, spirituality, goodness. But also, you too can do this, Mario." Three years later, when Pavone was visiting Chicago, guitarist Joe Diorio heard him sing along with a Wes Montgomery solo that was playing on a jukebox and told him, "Man, you should check out an instrument," Pavone remembered. He got a bass soon after.

As 2021 dawned, Pavone, "in the final stages of a cancer that I have been fighting for 17 years," set out to make a final artistic statement, in two parts. He recorded sessions early in the year, with two quartets and an overlapping repertoire of six new tunes approached from different perspectives. *Blue Vertical* (Out of Your Head) is for his ongoing "implied time" trio with pianist Matt Mitchell and drummer Tyshawn Sorey, plus trumpeter Dave Ballou. *Isabella* (Clean Feed) is for the grooving "overt time" of Mario and "the three Mikes" — son Michael Pavone on electric guitar, bopping altoist Mike DiRubbo and drummer Michael Sarin, a longtime collaborator,



Mario Pavone (1940–2021)

not least in saxophonist Thomas Chapin's fondly remembered trio. By Pavone's count, they're his 32nd and 33rd albums. *Isabella* refers back to the other side of his early development: straightahead sessions at clubs nearer home in Connecticut.

There are other retrospective touches. "Philosophy Series" recasts a line from "Sequence" heard on Pavone's 2000 septet disc *Totem Blues*. "Blue Vertical" revives a thundering ploy from the Chapin trio days: thumping an open string and the same note fingered on the next lower string, sliding the latter slightly out of tune for a booming, clashing-overtone effect. "You get a bigger vibration," Pavone said of the technique. "I may be pulling the strings rather than plucking, sliding, tapping them with the thumb."

Pavone composes on bass, and has featured his own tunes since his 1979 debut *Digit*. A typical piece originates with the bass line (which isn't always continuous: silence and space figure in his playing, too, echoing his years with trumpet minimalist Bill Dixon). Then he might harmonize it or add a counter line at the piano to build tension. Next he'll pass a tape and any sketches to an "arranger/collaborator" to properly notate

it, maybe add a top line if Pavone likes it or score it for multiple horns. Saxophonist Marty Ehrlich pioneered the process in the '90s, followed by trumpeter Steven Bernstein.

"I'm just helping him realize what's in his head," Ballou said of his work with Pavone. "He has a way of introducing material that's really rich to improvise from; he wants people to develop that material. And they better pay attention, because he may play a passage in seven one night, and in six the next."

Pavone is unstinting in praise of his musicians. He said he loves Mitchell and Sorey (and Ballou) for how they can hold back the time as well as surge ahead. "The arrangers and improvisers I've worked with — Gerald Cleaver and Tony Malaby, too — know what I'm trying to do, and they are very generous towards it. They find ways to fit their thing into what I'm trying to say, without overpowering the original intentions behind it."

"I'm just happy to get these two releases done," Pavone said. "It took every bit of energy, and the music is what got me through. I've had a great life and I'm so appreciative of all the players who jumped in and generously contributed, from the heart."
—Kevin Whitehead



FABIAN BRENNECKE

Doug Carn

Organist Doug Carn's Big Moment Arrives at Last

AFTER ALMOST 50 YEARS, ORGANIST Doug Carn is having one of his biggest moments. A series of albums he recorded in the early 1970s laid the groundwork for the spiritual jazz movement that young musicians around the world are pursuing today. Those LPs are being reissued now, and Carn recently recorded with two collaborators who brought in their experiences from funk and hip-hop. Now 72, Carn dropped hints about his influence while adding advice about how to endure.

"Never use all your strength," Carn said over the phone from his home in St. Augustine, Florida. "You don't have to blow up everything to prove a point. Don't overdo it, man. Just go for the purity."

This calm determination pervades those albums that Carn recorded for the Black Jazz company (which are being reissued through Real Gone Music). His religiously inspired compositions highlighted the label's mission of raising consciousness. He also added original lyrics to popular jazz instrumentals. His vocal wife, Jean Carn, elevated these songs on *Infant Eyes* (1971), *Spirit Of The New Land* (1972) and *Revelation* (1973).

"Jean had a tremendous range," Carn said. "I didn't have to not do something because she couldn't sing it. She could sing as high as a trumpet and lower than a tenor saxophone and way longer."

Along with the inspirational tone that the couple conveyed throughout these albums, Carn anticipated future musical developments through his harmonic extensions on an array of electric keyboards, including synthesizers that had just been developed. Through it all, he remained anchored to a quintessential Hammond B-3 jazz organ groove.

"When synthesizers came out, it was beautiful," Carn said. "You could make a lot of noise, but some beautiful stuff, too. All the new keyboards had great practicality. I use them like sea-

soning. Sometimes people use too much garlic and the seasoning should never overpower the flavor of the main dish. I used to go to fantasy land in the crib for hours at a time, fooling with the synthesizer. But when you're making dinner you have to make something that's digestible to all people."

After Doug and Jean Carn split up, around 1974, he recorded sporadically under his own name or, after his conversion, as Abdul Rahim Ibrahim (on the lively album *Al Rahmani! Cry Of The Floridian Tropic Son* in 1977). He later ran the Adagio Jazz Club in Savannah, Georgia, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Musicians trusted him because their shared artistic understandings were unlike most other venue owners. But entrepreneurship did not keep him away from stages. About 10 years ago, he started touring with Jean Carn again at their daughter's urging.

"I didn't want to be the Grinch to spoil Christmas," Carn said "The next thing, me and Jean were talking on the phone and it was like none of the bad stuff ever happened and we started playing gigs."

Meanwhile, younger groups of musicians representing different backgrounds embraced him. These included multi-instrumentalists/producers Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad. Younge and Muhammad collaborated with Carn for the fifth volume of their *Jazz Is Dead* album series (jazzisdead.co), which was released last December. While their spacious funk blends with Carn's organ sound, Muhammad connected the cultural awareness expressed on those Black Jazz albums with his work in the hip-hop group A Tribe Called Quest in the early '90s.

"Doug felt very comfortable and had an appreciation for what we wanted to do and get out of him," Muhammad said. "He didn't come in with any walls. He's a witty, sparring kind of person, so all of that is inside of the music."

—Aaron Cohen



Esperanza Spalding

Esperanza in the Lab: The first fruits of Esperanza Spalding's Songwrights Apothecary Lab have come to bear with the release of four singles: "Formwela 1," "Formwela 2," "Formwela 3" and "Formwela 4." The bassist, composer and singer launched the lab in April, with the first three singles forming a suite intended as "a salve for the grief and loneliness brought on by the pandemic," featuring a number of musicians including Wayne Shorter, Phoelix and Raphael Saadiq. The fourth installment, released in mid-June, is a lovely, understated guitar-and-voice duet. Spalding was expected to drop two more songs at press time.

songwrightsapothecarylab.com

Christian Stretches Label: Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah plans to expand the artist roster of Stretch Music, the label he started in 2015, with the release of djembe icon Weedie Braimah's debut *Hands Of Time*. Scott plans to serve as the sole curator of the label, with a goal of bringing together a community of progressive artists.

chiefadjuah.com

DC Jazz Gets More Sunny:

Sunny Sumter has been promoted to president and CEO of the DC Jazz Festival.

"We are proud to elevate Sunny to this expanded leadership role for her outstanding work on behalf of the DC Jazz Festival," said Conrad D. Kenley, chairman of the DCJF Board of Directors. "She earned this very deserving promotion through her exceptional strategic guidance, management skills, and devotion and commitment to promoting jazz in our city and beyond." Sumter, a professional jazz vocalist and arts executive, has served as executive director of the festival since 2010.



Sunny Sumter

dcjazzfest.org

Aldana Signs to Blue Note: Saxophonist Melissa Aldana has been signed to Blue Note Records with a release planned for March 2022 to coincide with the artist's debut at the Village Vanguard in New York.

bluenote.com; villagevanguard.com



69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
HALL OF FAME

Carla Bley

THE VOICE



NEW WAY & SONS

By Suzanne Lorge | Photo by Michael Jackson

Given the tenor of the times, Carla Bley's extraordinary career shouldn't have happened. What were the chances in the 1950s that a teenaged girl from Oakland, California, would land smack in the middle of New York's vibrant jazz scene, much less emerge as one of its most lasting compositional voices? Bley, who turned 85 this year, enters the DownBeat Hall of Fame after more than six decades of writing, recording and performing.

In hindsight, the serendipity of Bley's career is the stuff of movie plots: Freakishly talented composer-cum-cigarette-girl meets a rising-star pianist at a Manhattan nightclub frequented by Hollywood glitterati. Together, they absorb the new music in the air and claim a foremost spot in its vanguard.

In Bley's story, the club was Birdland and the pianist was Paul Bley, who, by the time they married in 1957, had already proven his jazz mettle as a sideman for Charlie Parker, Lester Young and Chet Baker. He was becoming a leader in his own right, and his 1958 album *Solemn Meditation* would give the budding composer her first recorded track: the precocious "O Plus One." By the early 1960s,

she would be writing most of the material on her then-husband's albums.

Paul Bley wasn't the only prominent musician who championed Carla's early work. George Russell, a leading light in the codification of jazz harmony, included her "Bent Eagle" on his 1960 album *Stratusphunk*; his imprimatur in particular granted the 24-year-old Bley legitimacy as a composer. Within the span of a decade, the number of influential bandleaders recording her work had multiplied. Jimmy Giuffre, Art Farmer, Steve Lacy, Steve Kuhn and Attila Zoller all made use of her talents.

Ever since her auspicious emergence on the New York scene, Bley's distinction as a modern composer with a voice all her own has continued unabated.



Carla Bley has recorded more than 50 albums as a composer, arranger, player or leader.

'I think the sound of my own voice, like the color of my eyes or the way I walk, has endured through all the twists and turns.'

"I've been moved to try new things in music by the ever-changing world around me. I'm strongly impacted by what I hear," Bley explained via email from her home in Willow, New York. "And I almost always write for specific musicians. I've moved through many communities of players, and I've tried to provide each one with the perfect setting for his or her voice. This has led to some drastic shifts in idiom, but I think the sound of my own voice, like the color of my eyes or the way I walk, has

endured through all the twists and turns."

From an objective standpoint, charting the twists and turns of Bley's musical evolution is tough, mostly because of the sheer volume of her creative output. She's recorded more than 50 albums as a composer, arranger, player or leader. She's performed in countless concerts with ensembles of differing configurations. And she's collaborated with scores of music legends across genre and era. But her singular aesthetic — with its contrasting musical

forms, dramatic tonalities and quirky humor — stands as the organizing principle for these many divergent elements.

If Bley's work reveals a certain appreciation for classical idioms, it's doubtless the result of years of hands-on training in childhood (her father was a church organist). This musical foundation proved sturdy enough for Bley to appreciate the complex vernacular she heard in the jazz clubs once she moved to New York; she was drawn especially to the meticulously crafted works of Count Basie and Thelonious Monk.

Duly entrenched with the avant-gardists during her initial years as a composer, however, Bley was busy turning out free, open compositions, written for others to perform. This would change by the mid-1960s, by which time she was not only composing, but arranging for, conducting and playing with the finest jazz instrumentalists of the day. Her list of collaborators from this time period is stunning: besides Bley, trumpeter Don Cherry, saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and Gato Barbieri, and drummers Paul Motian and Andrew Cyrille.

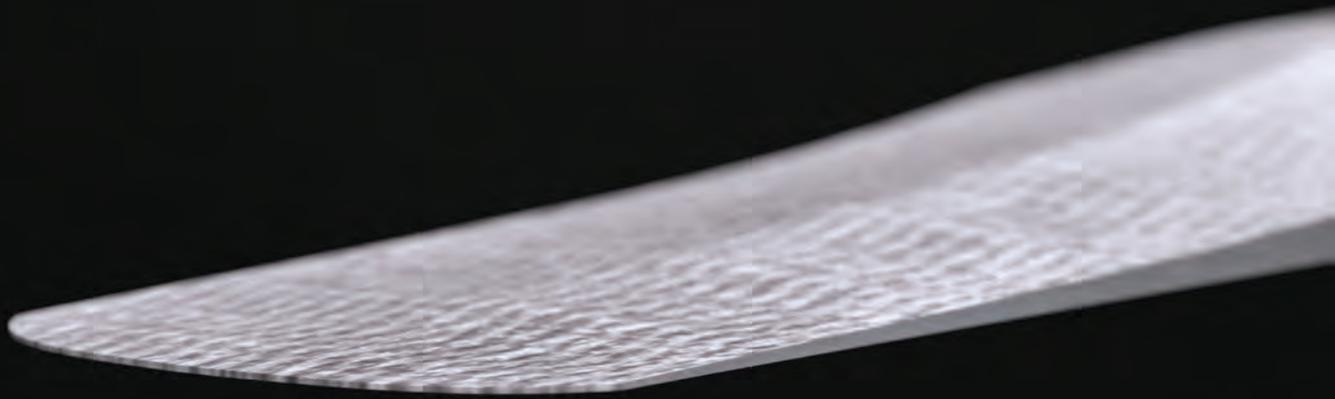
This career expansion coincided with her second marriage, to trumpeter Michael Mantler, in 1965. Together they formed the Jazz Composers Orchestra Association, a non-profit collective for experimental instrumentalists that both enhanced her influence within the jazz community and provided her the opportunity to record under her own name. The albums she recorded with Mantler and under the JCOA banner represent her earliest studio performances and document her growing stature as a free-jazz artist.

Bley earned some of her biggest career breaks during these years. She wrote her first extended composition, *A Genuine Tong Funeral*, for vibraphonist Gary Burton in 1967, a showcase for large ensemble that presaged her later long-form pieces. Bassist Charlie Haden asked her to arrange and write for his inaugural leader release, *Liberation Music Orchestra*, on Impulse Records in 1969. And in 1971 she released the JCOA recording that would cement her reputation as a composer: the eclectic modern opera *Escalator Over The Hill*, a nearly two-hour extravaganza of jazz, Indian classical music, rock and electronics, with 20 vocalists and nearly 50 instrumentalists. It had taken three years to write and record.

These successes culminated in a wealth of attention the following year, a professional turning point for Bley. In 1972 *Escalator Over The Hill* garnered critical accolades and her first industry awards, and the Guggenheim Foundation granted her a fellowship for music composition. (Her fellow recipients in the jazz category that year were Keith Jarrett, Sonny Rollins, Mary Lou Williams and Meredith Monk.)

It was in 1972, too, that Bley and Mantler

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Bley leading the Liberation Music Orchestra

'You work hard for days and weeks, and then unexpectedly you hit upon something of value and everything is changed.'

began to expand their music business operations. To address the major record companies' lack of interest in releasing experimental music, the two launched the New Music Distribution Service, a branch of JCOA that brought their members' albums to the public through a consortium of small distribution companies. Among them was ECM, Manfred Eicher's new label; Bley and Mantler distributed Eicher's releases in the U.S. and in return gained access to ECM's overseas markets.

NMDS was no small undertaking. During its 18 years of operation, the service would help foster the recording careers of composers like Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, John Zorn, Sonic Youth, Gil Scott Heron and Keith Jarrett. (NMDS also was the initial distributor for Chick Corea's first electronic jazz album, 1972's *Return To Forever*. But when demand for the album threatened to crash the service's grassroots infrastructure, ECM took over distribution for the now-classic recording.)

Most notably, however, in 1972 Bley and Mantler formed WATT, their own independent record label — a rarity at the time. Bley would make her leader debut on the label in 1974 with

Tropic Appetites, her first of almost 30 leader albums on WATT to date. (The WATT label continues to exist, but Bley has not released an album on the imprint since 2009. In 2012, she signed as an ECM artist.)

Now a formidable figure in the jazz world with proprietary access to the listening public, Bley's creative autonomy expanded further with the formation of the Carla Bley Band in 1977. The group — a rhythm section and six horns — gave Bley a ready vehicle for international touring and recording. With this band she released several albums in rapid succession, among them her first movie soundtrack, Claude Miller's *Mortelle Randonnée*. Arguably, the band lineup, though shifting, contained some of the most versatile players around: drummers Steve Gadd and D. Sharpe, trombonists Roswell Rudd and Gary Valente, saxophonist Carlos Ward, and pianist Arturo O'Farrill, then a teenager.

Bassist Steve Swallow, a longtime sideman for Gary Burton and veteran of the Stan Getz Quartet, joined the group in 1978. Swallow had first befriended the Bleys in the 1950s and had worked with both off and on since; it was

from this vantage point that he had observed Carla's rise to prominence. He came to play a larger role in both her music and her personal life in the 1980s, long about the time of a major departure from her established jazz identity — and, perhaps, her largest encounter with critical disfavor.

"There was a period when she went soulful, to the consternation of the critics who loved her for her earlier work," Swallow said in a phone call with *DownBeat*. "All of a sudden she's writing what sounds like FM radio music. She really wanted to write that, and did so at her peril. She knew that she was burning some bridges."

The albums *Heavy Heart* (1984), *Night-Glo* (1985) and *Sextet* (1987) derive from this period of Bley's fascination with soul and r&b music. Despite the seeming abruptness of Bley's mid-career embrace of these pop idioms, however, her interest in African-American music forms was long-standing. During the early 1960s, Swallow recalls, he would find Bley listening to Motown — she especially loved The Supremes — at the same time that she was writing "really abstruse, difficult music" for the experimental musicians with whom she'd started out.

"Eventually this streak rose to the surface. It took 25 years to do so," Swallow said. "[Her] soulful music was not well received [then]. But now it's beginning to have its day. A lot of young players have found something in this music that has lain dormant for a couple of decades. In fact, it's one of my favorite periods of her music. I loved playing it and still do love it. I think it has great value."

In the midst of her Motown-influenced period, Bley and Swallow also started to play duets together, first for the fun of it, then professionally. This creative venture reflected the

growing closeness in their personal relationship, a partnership that continues to this day. Over the ensuing years they released several duo albums on WATT, recordings that not only provide a glimpse into the warmth of their interpersonal connection but that shine a spotlight on Bley's riveting, deeply felt performing. ("I've been repeatedly admonished that it's not enough to write the music, I have to play it too," Bley quipped in her email.)

Even as Bley was scaling down in her duets with Swallow, she was ramping up her eponymous band. In the late 1980s she began writing and arranging pieces for a large ensemble, producing some of the most successful works of her career. Her big band would go on to tour and record for more than a decade, snagging three Grammy nominations for best large jazz ensemble, the Prix Jazz Moderne in France and multiple commissions during that time.

"There was a point in her development where she felt she had to stand up and be measured by others against [classic big band arrangers] Ernie Wilkins and Neal Hefti and Thad Jones and all of the rest of them. She went very deliberately from a medium-sized band to a full big band — four trumpets, four trombones, five reeds, rhythm section," Swallow said. "It was a very conscious choice on her part to confront that paradigm and make a statement in that context."

Bley continues to write for big bands — most recently for O'Farrill's Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra in 2020 ("Blue Palestine") and the Danish Radio Big Band in 2017 ("Roller Coaster"). But by the turn of the new millennium, Bley's primary focus as a composer had switched to chamber works for smaller ensembles, seeming extensions of a new trio with Swallow and saxophonist Andy Sheppard.

Begun in 1994 with the release of the live album *Songs With Legs* (WATT/ECM), the Carla Bley Trio today is the composer's longest-lasting ensemble. It also has served as an exquisite platform for her development as a pianist over these years.

"She's become a player, and it's been a lengthy road — but there's no denying that she's become one," Swallow said. "One of the things I love most about her playing is that the line between her writing and her playing is kind of blurred. She plays with great deliberation, as if she were writing, but responding to the need to make it up in the moment, to play without the eraser in her hand."

In February 2020, the trio released their third album for ECM, *Life Goes On*, recorded in Italy at the end of an extensive 2019 European tour. The blues-based title cut hints — with poignant levity — at Bley's recovery from brain cancer in 2018, a difficult year of health setbacks and cancelled tour dates.

Since its release, the trio has had little

opportunity to tour with the album, given the onset of the global pandemic last March. But Bley, now in remission, hasn't missed the road much.

She's happy to stay home, working on the next trio arrangement — a "half hour of challenging music called 'Bells And Whistles,'" she wrote. As a composer, first and foremost, Bley is quite comfortable with this part of the creative process, waiting for the next serendipitous twist or turn.

"The key moments in my life as a composer have occurred quietly and privately, at the desk or at the piano. If you were with me when I had one, you'd hardly notice," Bley wrote.

"Composing is solitary and unspectacular. You work hard for days and weeks, and then unexpectedly you hit upon something of value and everything is changed.

"It is such moments that form the trajectory of your life's music, that bend it in ways you can't anticipate." **DB**



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69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
 VETERANS COMMITTEE
 HALL OF FAME

Yusef Lateef

NEVER DONE BEFORE

Yusef Lateef came out of the jazz continuum to pursue a career driven by his curiosity and desire to move beyond the implications and limitations of that term, if not the genre.

Starting in the early 1970s, he referred to his manner of expression as “autophysiopsychic — music from one’s physical, mental and spiritual self.” But even before then, he had practiced that discipline in myriad forms, becoming a pathbreaker, prophet, scholar, composer-performer-improviser, poet and revered elder.

For all of that, Lateef has been elected by the DownBeat Veterans Committee to the magazine’s Hall of Fame, although he might have made it just as the multi-instrumentalist who, starting in the early 1950s, introduced a vastly expanded family of reeds, double reeds and other far-flung inventions to modernist settings. Or simply as an artist who, according to percussionist-comprovisator Adam Rudolph, with whom Lateef worked for 25 years, “Every performance he did was always all new music.”

Lateef and Rudolph collaborated from 1988 to 2013 in quartets, octets, with orchestras and most often as a duo, traveling and recording worldwide. “He always brought new music and new creative processes and concepts to each concert and recording date,” Rudolph wrote in memorial. “Yusef said, ‘With each project I try to do something I have never done before.’”

Born in 1920 (Chattanooga, Tennessee), and raised from early childhood in Detroit, he studied, at first alto saxophone, with trad-oriented trumpeter Teddy Buckner, then worked briefly with Lucky Millinder, Hot Lips Page and Roy Eldridge. The young reedist moved to Chicago in 1948, played with Sun Ra (still called Sonny Blount) and toured for almost a year with Dizzy Gillespie. While on the road he joined the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and adopted his Islamic name (born William

Emmanuel Huddleston, the surname was changed in Michigan by his father to Evans). When his wife fell ill, Lateef returned home to care for their children, and led bands with local cats, including trombonist Curtis Fuller, trumpeter Wilbur Hardin, drummer Louis Hayes, pianist Kenny Barron and guitarist Kenny Burrell, who encouraged him to enroll at Wayne State University, major in flute and take up oboe.

In 1957 Lateef recorded an astounding 10 albums with various groups of those collaborators for the Savoy, Verve and Prestige/New Jazz labels. Relocating to New York by the decade’s end, he played with Charles Mingus (in an ensemble that included Eric Dolphy and Roland Kirk, according to Herb Boyd, who helped with his autobiography, *The Gentle Giant*), Babatunde Olatunji and Cannonball Adderley, in whose sextet he’s featured on Oscar Brown Jr.’s TV show *Jazz Scene USA*.

Exoticism for its own sake was not Lateef’s intent; exploration was. He dove deeply into age-old African and Asian traditions, spending four years studying the indigenous sarewa flute as a senior research fellow at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, and embraced modalism, vocalisms, unconventional arrangements and extended techniques, making music with bells, shenai and koto. But Lateef did not abandon his blues, gospel, spirituals and swing-to-bebop roots, his sensitivity on ballads or guts playing changes.

He recorded standards (“Stella By Starlight,” “Angel Eyes,” “Lover Man”) as well as all-original programs (first one: *Jazz Mood*). He opened his album *1984* (recorded in 1965) with an entirely free rubato collective improv that embraced distorted talking, prepared piano, odd amplification, whistles, no theme, only coherent mood and tension.

Lateef was terrific onstage, but he became disgusted with the club scene, and in 1980 quit it. In 1987 he joined the faculty of University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he’d received an advanced degree in 1975, and at Hampshire College. The year after his appointment, Lateef’s *Little Symphony*, a four-movement work in which he played all instruments, won the Grammy Award for Best New Age Album.

Working in the ’70 with producer Joel Dorn he released a Blackploitation flick soundtrack, and other recordings with a string quartet, Ray Barretto, the Sweet Inspirations and the Cologne Radio Orchestra. In 1992 he established his YAL label, issuing albums he front-lined with Von Freeman, Archie Shepp and Ricky Ford, among others. He recorded with Rudolph from 1999 (*Live In Seattle*) to 2009 (*Towards The Unknown*), and they played together at Roulette in April 2013. Yusef Lateef died the next December. Long live Yusef Lateef.

—Howard Mandel



69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
VETERANS COMMITTEE
HALL OF FAME

Booker Little

CUTTING AT THE EDGES

The most wide-ranging article this magazine ever published about trumpeter Booker Little was his obituary. It was the Nov. 9, 1961, issue, about one third of a page under a one-column headline. Sixty years later, we atone as the Veterans Committee votes Little into the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

Little had died a month before on Oct. 5, 1961. At 23, he was still a newcomer in the advance guard of the '60s jazz underground and not yet prominent enough to warrant the marquee attention of the jazz press. He never saw a DownBeat cover story or a feature Q&A. Equally silent was John S. Wilson, the jazz voice of the New York Times, which did not even note his passing.

But Little's thinking was cutting at the edges of the future. It was the year of Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*, a record so polarizing that DownBeat reviewed it twice — in separate zero- and five-star appraisals. Little could easily have been part of that experiment. He shared a common sensibility with its authors — Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Freddie Hubbard, Scott LaFaro. And he heard about it quickly. An

hour after Dolphy completed the *Free Jazz* session in New York, he drove to Englewood Cliffs to record his first collaboration with Little, *Far Cry*, for Prestige. All on Dec. 21, 1960. Within a year, Little would be gone.

By the time Coleman died 54 years later, he had won a Pulitzer, a MacArthur Fellowship, a pedestal in jazz's valhalla and a front-page obit in the Times. What might have awaited Little can merely be imagined. He seemed to be onto something, but would never know such acclaim. Like Charlie Christian and Jimmy Blanton, he made his mark inside a blink of time, then left posterity to assess its impact. But Christian and Blanton were lucky enough to share a blazing spotlight with mega-mentors Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington. People knew them. Little was less fortunate, thus less noticed.

Several musicians noticed him, though, and provided early mentorships. After taking up the trumpet at 12, he had achieved a sufficient plateau of technique by his mid-teens to play informally with pianist Phineas Newborn, a fellow native of the Memphis area. Little went on to study at the Chicago Conservatory, where he met Sonny Rollins. The two were sharing an apartment on the South Side when Rollins introduced him to Max Roach, who was looking for his next Clifford Brown. Roach found what he was looking for in Booker Little, who made an impressive record debut at 20 in June 1958 on *Max On The Chicago Scene* for EmArcy. By the time he left Roach eight months later, he had recorded six more albums, including his first as leader, *Booker Little 4 And Max Roach* (UA/Blue Note).

As a trumpet player, Little played with an orderly virtuosity: clean, precise, articulate, but without the audacity and high-note acrobatics of the earlier bop masters. He followed in the gentler jurisdictions of Fats Navarro and Clifford Brown. Critic John Litweiler characterized his sound as "lyric abstraction." In New York, though, Eric Dolphy, Julian Priester and others awakened him to the possibilities that lay beyond the frontiers of hard-bop.

While he never embraced the free-jazz model, by the time he recorded with Dolphy on his penultimate album, *At The Five Spot*, in July 1961, he was clearly comfortable and engaged with its more untamed insubordinations. Perhaps this had a liberating influence on his writing, which was well showcased on his last record, *Victory And Sorrow*, for Bethlehem. While his compositions obey the extended canons of melody and harmony, according to critic Michael Cuscuna, "they are more ambitious than then standard 12-, 16- and 32-bar themes and chord sequences that prevailed in the '50s."

Little died before his place as a transitional figure in jazz was clear. No one could know where the bridges he was building might lead, least of all Little himself. The year he died, his name appeared in neither the DownBeat Critics Poll nor Readers Poll, although he did place 10th among the "new stars."

"My approach to playing," he told DownBeat during a visit to the magazine's New York office shortly before his death, "has been to find a sound around my sound and then write. Writing is a special thing to me. I want to play ... but I hear so many things for others. I'll develop ... and I'll do it in my own way. ... You can't sacrifice integrity and still be you. But there, you have to listen to what they're saying to you. I won't hit my head against the wall; I see too many people die that way."

Only days later, Little met his wall when he succumbed to kidney failure.

—John McDonough



*Chick Corea***FINAL CURTAIN CALL**

At the time of this writing, it's been a little over three months since an immortal inconceivably departed this world, one of so many bright lights in the jazz world that have blinked off in the past few years.

Armando Anthony “Chick” Corea seemed to be able to live forever, because he seemed to have been with us forever — not as a treasured-but-ancient relic from a bygone era, but as a vibrant, ageless contemporary who continued to perform, show after show, for adoring audiences, recording album after album of interesting and varied projects with the world’s greatest musicians of all time and of all genres.

Such a true historical giant can never truly be gone, certainly not in the immediate aftermath of his absence, which is why it was probably a foregone conclusion that Corea would once again top the DownBeat Critics Poll. In his swan song reappearance, he has triumphed in style, winning a triple-crown as the Pianist, Keyboardist and, ever so deservedly, Artist of the Year. DownBeat’s critics undoubtedly would have also voted Corea to the Hall of Fame if the readers hadn’t already done so back in 2010.

Consider it one last curtain call for the jazz grandmaster, who has won 23 Grammys, was knighted as an NEA Jazz Master and received the BBC Lifetime Achievement Award. But in retrospect, Corea might have been doing curtain calls under our noses for some time now, perhaps in a prescient understanding of the surprising swiftness with which a conclusion to a life even as well-lived as his could occur.

One would be forgiven for losing track of Corea’s most recent additions to his discography. He surely made himself a hard act to follow from the very first albums under his own name. If, in a terrible alternate reality, Corea had tragically passed away in 1980, all that he had done up to that point would have still earned him the honor of being one of the greatest jazz musicians of all time. Thankfully, we can joyfully disseminate the full, immense output Corea has created for the ages. (For an excellent summation of Corea’s discography, see DownBeat’s April 2021 issue.)

A quick overview of the albums Corea recorded in the last decade of his life reveals what one might call a fresh retrospective. *The Mothership Returns* (2011) highlights a reunion tour with the vaunted Return to Forever rhythm section of Corea, Stanley Clarke and Lenny White. *Hot House* (2012) saw a sublime studio reunion with vibraphonist Gary Burton. The Grammy-winning *Trilogy* (2013) brought new life to the piano trio setting Corea returned to time and again, this time in the form of Brian Blade and Christian McBride.

That same year, *The Vigil* (2013) allowed Corea to flex his

still-well-defined fusion muscles alongside of a group of impressive young men less than half his age. *Solo Piano: Portraits* (2014) is a two-hour snapshot of Corea in one of his most comfortable places: sandwiched between an enraptured audience and a Yamaha concert grand. “Welcome to my living room,” he announces before diving into the music.

Try to find a musical setting on this earth where Chick Corea wouldn’t seem completely at home. The number of fascinating one-on-one musical conversations he had with one brilliant artist after another are too many to count, and he added Béla Fleck to that list with *Two* (2015), a delightfully unusual fusion of jazz and bluegrass.

Corea turned 75 in 2016. He did not release any albums that year, but instead celebrated his birthday with a three-week residency at the Blue Note in New York, where he invited friends to partake in the merry music-making. The festivities were captured in a documentary video, as well as the triple-CD album *The Musician* (2017). 2017 was also the year of *Chinese Butterfly*, featuring a band co-led by Corea and longtime friend and drummer Steve Gadd. Recorded in 2018, *Trilogy 2* (2019) is an encore live performance by Corea, Blade and McBride, in which they pay homage to the great original trio of Corea, Roy Haynes and Miroslav Vitous with a new rendition of “Now He Sings, Now He Sobs.”

Antidote (2019) is the rub on an important touchstone for the grandson of an Italian immigrant who nevertheless claimed to have a “Spanish Heart.” Corea’s love for Latin-American music first manifested itself in the early Airtto Moreira/Flora Purim incarnation of Return to Forever, from which we get the first version of perhaps his most beloved composition, “Spain.” Those sentiments are later flushed out more explicitly with *My Spanish Heart* (1976) and *Touchstone* (1992). *Antidote* is a final injection of those things, imbibed with more of an Afro-Cuban variant.

Corea’s final album is simply, and fittingly, *Plays* (2020). It’s a true curtain call, where he reminisces and performs many of his favorite pieces, ending with a final retelling from his canonical *Children’s Songs* suite. Before playing them, he reminds the audience that they were “in the spirit of kids, that are free, that are open, and that always give us a lot of joy.” To see this wise wizard near the end of his life utter these words as he continued to embody what they have meant to him should be of comfort to those of us seeking what he managed to find. May everything old be new again, as may we all one day return to forever.

DB



69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL

JAZZ ALBUM, ARRANGER,
COMPOSER AND BIG BAND
OF THE YEAR

Maria Schneider

By Phillip Lutz

FIGHT THE POWER

Of Maria Schneider's many stories, "Data Lords" might be the most epic. The title track of the 2021 DownBeat Critics Poll Album of the Year, conjures the imagery of a sonic dystopia in which alto saxophonist Dave Pietro — "the human voice," as he put it in a phone interview — tries to thwart a takeover by the malignant forces of technology, played by the rest of the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra.

Pietro takes his case to the enemy in a raga-based solo that moves from a strategy of prayerful conciliation to one of passionate confrontation. But eight minutes into the track, the story takes an ominous turn. The orchestra moves from background to foreground, enveloping Pietro, and, with a series of blasts, announces that the takeover has begun.

"It's like a hammering down, like a jackhammer of intensity coming from the data lords, this crushing blow," an animated Schneider explained in a May Zoom session, her fists rhythmically pounding the air as if she were directing the orchestra to deliver the deadly whacks of a digital hammer. "Bum bum bum-bum-bum-bum-bum."

Despite the cinematic nature of Schneider's musical imagination, she is hardly purveying popcorn fare. She has been tireless in challenging the power of big-data companies, not least for their perpetuation of what she passionately argues are unfair revenue practices and copyright abuse. And she has done so before Congress, in the media and in the courts.

In a 400-word email to DownBeat, she also blasts pandering politicians. An excerpt: "When the data lords refuse to make their algorithms transparent, use sensitive information about us and strong-arm any changes that could reverse that, are they displaying their liberal values? Me thinks not. So why do our liberal lawmakers protect them and even appoint big tech's flying monkeys into our most important governmental positions, like our president is doing right

now with antitrust?"

While that kind of activist rhetoric might ruffle some feathers, its expression through Schneider's art has garnered wide acclaim. In addition to *Data Lords'* victory in the Critics Poll, she has this year notched wins in the poll's categories of Composer, Arranger and Big Band. The album also won two Grammy awards, giving her a total of seven.

But for all Schneider's seriousness of purpose and critical success, she has maintained a quality of lightness in her personal approach to both music and life. As dense as the sounds on *Data Lords* become, their intent remains transparent. So, too, does her willingness to acknowledge a sheer sense of catharsis in the making of this album.

"After all the letters I've written and all this stuff," she said, "letting it out and having fun and being able to put it into music — it was like, 'Yes!'"

Fun, of course, has been hard to come by during the pandemic. The album was released in July 2020, and, with gigs canceled, she has used the time to recenter — cleaning up her archive, preparing reflective videos and the like. Much of that work has been done with an eye on her legacy. Schneider, who became an NEA Jazz Master in 2019, turned 60 in November.

"I don't want to leave a mess for somebody else to fix up," she said. "I know this sounds so morbid. Maybe this is a result of the COVID year. We all start contemplating our mortality a little bit."



As dense as the sounds on *Data Lords* become, their intent remains transparent.

That reality hit home on Dec. 30, when Frank Kimbrough, the band's pianist since it played the Greenwich Village club Visions in the 1990s, suddenly died. "I spent weeks and weeks crying," Schneider said. "The qualities that Frank brought to the band and influenced my music in such a huge way were Frank's love and appetite for risk-taking, and his ability to listen, and his generosity toward everybody in the band, and his loving those moments where nobody knew where they were and feel-

ing everybody listen — and making something incredible out of it."

Among band members, the loss was keenly felt. "Frank was the heart of the band in many ways," Pietro said. "He was the first one there and the last to leave. He was everybody's cheerleader." Similar sentiments were echoed by those, like famed soprano Dawn Upshaw, who knew Kimbrough from his involvement with Schneider's rare projects outside the context of the full band. "I was devastated," she said.

Upshaw had enlisted Schneider, a classical chamber group and an improvising trio drawn from the band — Kimbrough, bassist Jay Anderson and baritone saxophonist Scott Robinson — for *Winter Morning Walks*, a song cycle based on the poetry of Ted Kooser. The piece was performed first in 2011 with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and most recently in 2019 with members of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. Upshaw said the outcome had confirmed her original feelings about Schneider's storytelling gift.

"She can really write a tune and, at the same time, I was really drawn to what I found was innovative contrapuntal writing within the medium she was working in, the jazz orchestra," Upshaw said. "I hadn't heard that kind of imagination with such beauty. I began dreaming about being able to sing her music."

Schneider was so satisfied with the song cycle that she adapted two pieces from it for *Data Lords*: "Braided Together" and "The Sun Waited For Me." Both appear on Disc 2, *Our Natural World* — the narrative inverse of Disc 1, *The Digital World*, which closes with "Data Lords."

"Braided," at just under four minutes, is the album's most succinct distillation of Schneider's naturalist instincts. Its melody is simple yet idiosyncratic in the way it wraps itself around Kooser's words, intensifying their image of a

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couple entwined: "All night, in gusty winds/
The house has cupped its hands around/
The steady candle of our marriage/
The two of us braided together in sleep."

"It's the kind of melody I never would have written if I wasn't writing it to poetry," she said.

Schneider said she adapted the piece with Pietro in mind. He, in turn, researched the poem, published in 2000 as "december 29," and ultimately reached back to his classical training to coax from the alto a delicacy of tone that reflects the words' intimacy.

"There's always a tendency to sort of 'play jazz,'" he said. "But it's more than just playing the changes. What is the story about?"

That question, writ large, will be on Schneider's mind in the coming months as she contemplates the next chapters in her musical life. An early adopter of fan-funding with ArtistShare, she will be leading a community eager to follow.

She said she had not been composing during the pandemic, and it was unclear in which direction her muse would take her when she finally put pen to paper.

Will she set the balance more toward benign subjects, as she did to brilliant effect on her last two albums, 2016's *The Thompson Fields* and 2013's *Winter Morning Walks*? Both won Grammy awards, and both allowed the Windom, Minnesota, native to plumb the pas-

toral aspect of her storytelling sensibility.

Will she pursue more projects like *Data Lords*? It does recall elements of her earliest albums, *Evanescence* (1994) and *Coming About* (1996), in which ogres of another sort ("Dance You Monster To My Soft Song," "Bombshelter Beast") inhabit her psyche, though she was quick to point out that the data lords are real.

In those early days, she said, "I had this feeling that serious jazz had to sound serious." But that changed when she sat down with David Bowie to discuss their collaboration on what would become the Grammy-winning single "Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime)."

Bowie, she said, revealed to her the pleasures of portraying evil. "I said, 'What do you think this song will be about?' He said, with a big smile on his face, 'I don't know — vampires?' I was really excited. It was kind of like, 'Dark is fun.'"

Wherever her writing takes her, Schneider is inclined to continue discussing questions of interpretation with band members directly; likewise, the odd personnel change. By consensus, the piano chair will go to the orchestra's longtime accordionist, Gary Versace — a "magnificent piano player," she said, who "knows the aesthetic of the band."

But, as it would in any finely tuned organization, the collective dynamic in the band seems likely to change. Pietro, who has been



with the group since its *Visiones* days, said: "I think we're all wondering, 'What's the band going to be like without Frank?' I don't think any of us know."

The process of finding answers should begin on Sept. 4, when the band is slated to appear at the DC Jazz Festival. The gig will be its first in 18 months — the longest, Schneider said, that it had gone without performing. Though the players will no doubt support each other, she added, they will likely not have the chance to rehearse ahead of time.

"It's going to be painful in a way because of the Frank thing," she said, her voice choking and her eyes welling up. "But it's going to be pretty amazing to make music." **DB**

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69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL

TROMBONE

Michael Dease

GIVES IT ALL

Michael Dease took a circuitous route to discovering his chosen instrument. He started out as an alto saxophonist during high school, occasionally playing a little trumpet.

“My heroes at that time were Grover Washington Jr. and Maceo Parker,” he said by phone from his home in Ohio. “I really had never heard any swing.”

But his mother, originally from Brooklyn, pointed him toward jazz.

“She said, ‘You can’t play saxophone and not know about Bird.’” His jazz journey eventually led him to John Coltrane, and “I really fumbled at it until I heard Curtis Fuller play on ‘Blue Train.’ ... I was a saxophonist, and by the end of his solo on ‘Blue Train,’ I was a trombonist.” He switched instruments the next day, and has never looked back.

Dease took to the instrument with remarkable speed. “I did not know it was hard,” he says. “As soon as I got a trombone, I figured out the notes by ear and then I just counted down the slide. The first day I [ran scales] and everybody looked at me like I was crazy.

“From there, I started learning J.J. Johnson and Curtis Fuller solos by ear and playing along to the records. That was probably weeks two and three. And I was playing every day. I remember waking up at about 2 in the morning, afraid that I had rolled over on my trombone.”

After releasing three albums independent-

ly, Dease began recording for Posi-Tone Records with 2014’s *Relentless*. He’s made eight albums for the label to date, and appeared on many others as a sideman, part of label co-founder Marc Free’s efforts to build a stable of players in the manner of classic labels like Prestige and Blue Note. It’s an artistic fraternity of sorts, a mutually supportive network, and Dease is proud to be a member.

“I always enjoy the sessions,” he said. “Posi-Tone has a strong focus on original music, so one session can be electronic, one session can be a retro look at some swing or bebop styles, but it’s always fresh and fun. I really respect what Marc is doing and how much freedom he gives the artists in choosing their direction and material and their story.”

Many of Dease’s albums are organized around a concept. *All These Hands*, from 2017, traced the path of jazz from south to north, from New Orleans to New York, expanding through the Midwest and the prairies in between. Individual tracks paid tribute to the contributions specific cities and regions made to the music, as titles like “Territory Blues,” “Chocolate City,” “Downtown Chi-Town” and “Memphis BBQ & Fish Fry” indicated.

His 2019 release, *Never More Here*, recorded with the same band (alto saxophonist Steve Wilson, pianist Renee Rosnes, bassist Gerald Cannon and drummer Lewis Nash), paid tribute to Charlie Parker in a sidelong way, by tracing Bird’s influence through the work of composers like Jimmy Heath, Jackie McLean, Billy Taylor, John Lewis and J.J. Johnson.

Dease’s latest album, *Give It All You Got*, came out in February. The music is straight-ahead hard-bop, with performances that mix slickness and grit and keep the energy level high at all times. Each of the album’s 10 compositions — six of which were written by Dease, one each by drummer Luther Allison and trumpeter Anthony Stanco, and two by organist Jim Alfredson — are thematically related to a two-week workshop Dease leads every summer at the Brevard Music Center in North Carolina. Some are tributes to fellow instructors, while others relate to aspects of the program or Dease’s attitude toward jazz education and bandleading.

That’s reflective of the trombonist’s belief that a jazz life is not only about individual success, but also about being part of a lineage. Just as he learned from Johnson, Fuller, Wycliffe Gordon, Steve Turre and others, Dease hopes to inspire younger players and pass on everything he’s learned.

“You can’t stop at just playing. You can’t stop at just touring or just teaching. You have to go the extra mile to ensure that the people behind you continue doing what the people ahead of you are doing — paying it forward and paying it back.”

—Phil Freeman

Congratulations to **MARIA SCHNEIDER** (MM '85)
DownBeat Annual Critics Poll winner
“Artist; Big Band; Composer & Arranger
of the Year” and for her significant
contributions to the world of jazz.



Photograph by Whit Lane



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69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
RISING STARS

BLUE NOTE

Gerald Clayton



ADAMA JALLOH

Nubya Garcia



RISING STARS FIND INSPIRATION & MUSIC IN THE COLLECTIVE

On a May afternoon, Angel Bat Dawid's course on Great Black Composers bled into her next engagement. She hardly noticed. Offering musical accounts from generations past, the clarinetist, singer and composer entranced her students via Zoom. "They had a lot of questions about the past," she said, pausing in thought. "If there's not an educational element to my career, what am I doing?"

This semester marks Dawid's third time teaching young men incarcerated at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Cook County, Illinois. The Critics Poll Rising Star in the Clarinet category hails from Chicago and has crafted a curriculum that meets her students where they are. "These young men are in a very adult situation," she said, "[but] they're not adults."

Typically, Dawid brings along her clarinet to the first session, asking students where they've seen the instrument before. "Of course they say, 'SpongeBob!'" she said through an audible grin. "And that's appropriate because they're in that age group. They're still boys. And I want to give them the gift of the things I've learned."

Dawid engages community. Her approach is collective and collaborative. She strengthens her individualism through a musical and intellectual exchange with others, be they students, mentors or musical peers. Today, with support from her creative cohorts, Dawid's

music embraces surges of emotion and persistent authenticity as part of a contract she signed with her musical self: "I made a pact with myself that whatever I'm feeling in [my musical] space, that is the appropriate space to deal with [it]. If it documents joy, that's the place for it. If I'm very angry — pissed off — the best place for me to deal with that emotion is that creative space. Period."

The range of Dawid's sound, present on her 2020 release *LIVE* and 2019 studio recording *The Oracle*, reflects how her emotional depth and musicality are inextricably linked. Her horn playing — florid and lyrical, microtonal and lamenting — evokes as much complexity of the human voice as her actual singing, a trait she shares with fellow Rising Star honoree for alto saxophone, Immanuel Wilkins. The New York artist from Philadelphia suggests the human voice-like quality of his sound has evolved over time. When composing, he uses both hands to play bass and chords, leaving the melody line to his voice.

"My saxophone playing is an emulation of my voice," said Wilkins, who draws inspiration from past "vocal players," citing Ornette Coleman, Johnny Hodges and Albert Ayler. "I'm trying to bend my sound like the voice does," he says. "Growl like the voice does or plead or exclaim." When he began studying at Juilliard, Wilkins remembers a compelling appeal from Wynton Marsalis: "You gotta find the cry in your sound. Everybody has to have that cry."

Accessing that cry often means confronting pain. In their respective catalogs, he and Dawid deal with, even embrace personal anguish and generational trauma. On *Omega* (Blue Note, 2021), Wilkins explores fresh, shooting pains and persistent aches, as well as collective resistance and celebration. He includes dual compositions honoring Ferguson and Mary Turner, respectively, the latter whose story he hadn't known before he began personal research for the project. "For my generation, [Ferguson] was the first real uprising we'd seen around



DANA SCRUGGS

Immanuel Wilkins



CRISTINA MARK (PHOTOMUSIX)

Angel Bat Dawid

cops killing unarmed Black people. And I felt on my back much more than Michael Brown. It felt like I was carrying generations of trauma. When we see a Mike Brown get killed, we're also carrying on our backs all these names that we may not know of, yet we're feeling that trauma perpetually in our DNA."

When Dawid feels overcome by sadness and anger or joy and gratitude, she turns to her fellow artists. Featured prominently on *LIVE*, members of Tha Brothahood include Viktor Le Givens, Kristian Espinoza, Isaiah Collier and Asher Simiso Gamedze, among other long-time collaborators. Dawid leans on their intuitive acknowledgment of her emotions in live performance, private sessions and other spontaneous, heartfelt spaces.

"Everybody [in The Brothahood] is like my real brothers," Dawid said. "Sometimes I wake up and cry just thinking about them." Her concept for the collective began as a musical outlet in service of forward-moving collaboration. "We were so inspired by the AACM and those collectives like the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra. We're drawing on the tradition of something old. We thought, 'We really don't wanna be a band. We wanna be like Art Ensemble of Chicago — like a force, a thing that's not just entertainment.'"

Nubya Garcia, this year's Rising Star, Tenor Saxophone honoree, feels similar gratitude toward her artistic collaborators. The London-based artist issued her debut album *SOURCE* (Concord, 2020) following the success of her 2018 EP *When We Are*. "[Collaboration] is a big part of what I do," Garcia said. "I'm part of a number of collectives, and I run my own band. That energy surrounds me, so it was kind of a given that I would include that way of working in this album." *When We Are* spotlights Garcia's relationship with longtime associates Femi Koleoso, Joe Armon-Jones and Daniel Casimir, but she sought to invite a number of guest artists to appear on *SOURCE*.

"My other two EPs, there was no collaboration

in the sense of guest features on tracks," she said. "I thought, 'Let's challenge how you write with other people, whether you write first and they add lyrics later or whether you're all in the room.'"

The latter circumstance prompted the emergence of the original song "La cumbia me está llamando," which features the Colombian trio La Perla.

"I really enjoyed being part of that process and being part of something bigger than the music," Garcia said. "The music comes out of how you're collaborating in the room but, spiritually, that collaboration lasts much [longer]. It continues." The very act of working closely with other artists enhances individualism, according to Garcia. "I enjoy the growth in perspective when I collaborate with other people."

For pianist-composer Gerald Clayton, one of the most important virtues of a cooperative approach is trust — with new bandmates and longtime collaborators.

"It's kind of like a long-term commitment versus going on a lot of first dates," said the Rising Star honoree for Artist of the Year and Group (for the Gerald Clayton Trio). "One of the challenges of that first-date mode is the vulnerability of not quite knowing how your expression will fit in the social interaction. So you have to keep your ears open with a sense of discovery in maybe a different way."

The L.A.-based artist has found time away from fellow musicians painful but reflective. Amid releasing his milestone recording *Happening: Live At The Village Vanguard* (Blue Note, 2020) he's found time to refine his teaching methods, work with young artists of Monterey Jazz Festival's Next Generation Jazz Orchestra and enter a new compositional chamber: film scoring for the acclaimed feature documentary, *MLK/FBI*, from acclaimed director Sam Pollard.

"All the feelings that come with a maiden voyage were there for me," Clayton said, referencing afternoons spent at the piano alongside moving images. "It was an honor to be part of

a project whose focus is heavy and important. It's a narrative that has been held back in our history, like so many accounts of the African American experience."

For a habitual collaborator inspired by freshness and discomfort, Clayton harbors tremendous respect and affection for the artists who have built a familial trust with him over the years, from his first trio mates Joe Sanders and Justin Brown to his extended musical family whose presence affects the tone, quality and spirit of *Happening*. "There are magical things that happen on the bandstand every night," Clayton said. "Actual events in the music, the other musicians channeling something with a little more passion than they did the night before, and you sort of raise your eyebrows and feel that rush to go somewhere you didn't expect you'd be going. That sense of discovery with other people, night after night, is something that now I've grown to expect."

For Wilkins, the spirit of collaboration is at the core of his music and, indeed, his entire artistic philosophy. He feels a palpable renewed energy around collective artistry, but those values, he affirms, are ages old. "I think of my relationships with Joel Ross or Micah Thomas or Kweku Sumbry — they come out of traditions where improvisation is collective," he said. "And collaboration within that is one of collectivity." Rather than a solo, Wilkins views the moment as a "solar flare" — something emerging from the collective energy of the ensemble.

For these 2021 Rising Stars, the energy vibrating around collective music making is at once focused and frenetic, and intrinsic to their varied expressions. The creative people who inspire their output and their individualism are as vital as the music itself.

"Returning to the community is *it* for me," Clayton said. "Sweaty dance floors, the masses, that energy we've been denied. There's something about making music in a room with other musicians for a group of people. It's magical."

—Stephanie Jones

69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL COMPLETE RESULTS



Hall Of Fame

Carla Bley	97
Kenny Barron	90
Pharoah Sanders	89
Charles Lloyd	82
Anthony Braxton	71
Kenny Burrell	56
Shirley Horn	46
Bobby Hutcherson	44
John McLaughlin	42
Oliver Nelson	42
Jack DeJohnette	39
Grant Green	39
Roy Hargrove	38
Jimmy Giuffrè	34
Yusef Lateef	34

VETERANS COMMITTEE VOTING

Hall Of Fame

Yusef Lateef	69%
Booker Little	69%

Note: Artists must receive at least 66% of the Veterans Committee votes to gain entry. Other artists who received more than 50% of the votes:

Mario Bauza	55%
Machito	55%
Jay McShann	55%

Jazz Artist

Chick Corea (passed Feb. 9, 2021)	141
Maria Schneider	86
Fred Hersch	86
Terri Lyne Carrington	55
Charles Lloyd	49
Bill Frisell	41
Kris Davis	40
Ambrose Akinmusire	36
Jon Batiste	34
Pat Metheny	34
Wayne Shorter	33
Chris Potter	28
Shabaka Hutchings	31
Christian McBride	30
JD Allen	29

Jazz Album of the Year

(April 1, 2020–March 31, 2021)

Maria Schneider, Data Lords (Artist Share)	133
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John Beasley, <i>MONK'estra Plays John Beasley</i> (Mack Avenue)	41
Charles Lloyd & The Marvels, <i>Tone Poem</i> (Blue Note)	39
Fred Hersch, <i>Songs From Home</i> (Palmetto)	33
Chick Corea, <i>Plays</i> (Concord) ..	32
Artemis, <i>Artemis</i> (Blue Note) ...	29
Keith Jarrett, <i>Budapest Concert</i> (ECM)	29
Eric Revis, <i>Slipknots Through A Looking Glass</i> (Pyroclastic) ..	25
Thumbscrew, <i>The Anthony Braxton Project</i> (Cuneiform) ...	24
Joe Lovano Trio Tapestry, <i>Garden Of Expression</i> (ECM) ..	23
Mary Halvorson's Code Girl, <i>Artlessly Falling</i> (Firehouse)	22
Jimmy Heath, <i>Love Letter</i> (Verve)	22
Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, <i>Axiom</i> (Ropeadope) ...	22
Ron Miles, <i>Rainbow Sign</i> (Blue Note)	21
Nels Cline Singers, <i>Share The Wealth</i> (Blue Note)	20

William Parker, <i>Migration Of Silence Into And Out Of The Tone World</i> (Aum Fidelity)	20
Bill Frisell, <i>Valentine</i> (Blue Note)	19
Matthew Shipp, <i>Unidentifiable</i> (ESP Disk)	19
Charles McPherson, <i>Jazz Dance Suites</i> (Chazz/Mack Avenue) ..	18
Ralph Peterson & The Messenger Legacy, <i>Onward & Upward</i> (Onyx)	18
Veronica Swift, <i>This Bitter Earth</i> (Mack Ave)	18
Jon Batiste, <i>We Are</i> (Verve)	17
Rudresh Mahanthappa, <i>Hero Trio</i> (Whirlwind)	16
Angel Bat Dawid And The Brotherhood, <i>Live</i> (International Anthem)	16
Regina Carter Freedom Band, <i>Swing States: Harmony In The Battleground</i>	16
John Scofield, <i>Swallow Tales</i> (ECM)	16
Dr. Lonnie Smith, <i>Breathe</i> (Blue Note)	16

Bobby Watson, *Keepin' It Real* (Smoke Sessions) 16
 Christian McBride Big Band, *For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver* (Mack Avenue) 15
 Theo Bleckmann & The Westerlies, *This Land* (Westerlies) 15
 Billy Childs, *Acceptance* (Mack Avenue) 1 15
 Redman/Mehldau/McBride/Blade, *Round Again* (Nonesuch) 15

Historical Album

(April 1, 2020–March 31, 2021)
Thelonious Monk, *Palo Alto* (Impulse!) 120
 Sonny Rollins, *Rollins In Holland* (Resonance) 95
 Paul Desmond, *The Complete 1975 Toronto Recordings* (Mosaic) 79
 Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus @ Bremen* (Sunnyside) 75
 Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, *Just Coolin'* (Blue Note) 70
 Bill Evans, *Live At Ronnie Scott's* (Resonance) 62
 Nat King Cole, *Straighten Up And Fly Right, The Best Of Hittin' The Ramp: The Early Years* (1936–1943) (Resonance) 60
 Ella Fitzgerald, *Ella: The Lost Berlin Tapes* (Verve) 47

John Coltrane, *Giant Steps* (60th Anniversary Edition) (Atlantic/Rhino) 44
 Horace Tapscott with the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra, *Ancestral Echoes–The Covina Sessions* (Dark Tree)..... 41
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 Vijay Iyer Trio 36
 Bill Frisell Group 35
 Arturo O'Farrill Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra 34
 Branford Marsalis Quartet 34
 Jon Batiste & Stay Human 32
 Nels Cline Singers 29
 Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas' Sound Prints Quintet 28
 Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah Quintet 27

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 Christian McBride Big Band ... 67
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 Sun Ra Arkestra 64
 Rob Mazurek Exploding Star Orchestra 44
 Arturo O'Farrill & The Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra 43
 Darcy James Argue's Secret Society 43
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 Satoko Fujii Orchestra 34
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 Clayton–Hamilton Jazz Orchestra 29
 Orrin Evans' Captain Black Big Band 27
 DIVA Jazz Orchestra 25
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 Wadada Leo Smith 77
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 Terence Blanchard 62
 Dave Douglas 60
 Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah .. 54
 Ron Miles 54
 Jeremy Pelt 54

Jaimie Branch 46
 Randy Brecker 45
 Wynton Marsalis 38
 Terell Stafford 38
 Marquis Hill 30
 Tom Harrell 27
 Charles Tolliver 26

Trombone

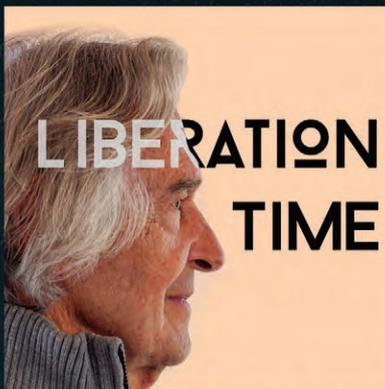
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 Steve Davis 55
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 Marshall Gilkes 48
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 Ku-umba Frank Lacy 34
 Steve Swell 31
 Papo Vázquez 30
 Wolter Wierbos 30

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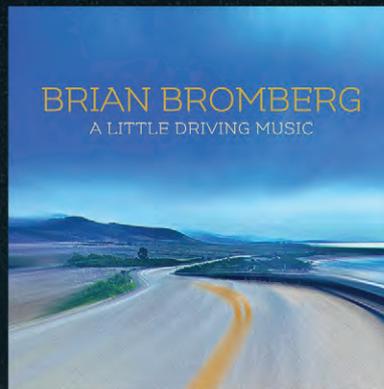
Jane Ira Bloom 132
 Dave Liebman 89
 Jane Bunnett 75
 Branford Marsalis 71
 Sam Newsome 64
 Chris Potter 64
 Evan Parker 47



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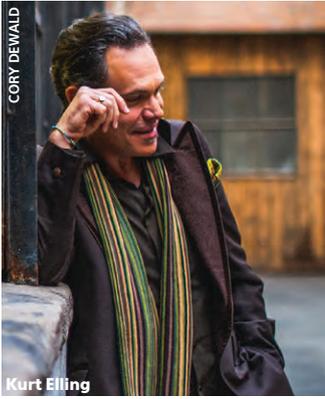
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Kurt Elling



Joel Ross

Ravi Coltrane 42
 Ingrid Laubrock 40
 Steve Wilson 39
 Kenny Garrett 37
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 Tia Fuller 35
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(passed April 15, 2020) 58
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 Greg Abate 33
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 Joe Lovano 114
 Chris Potter 77
 JD Allen 62
 James Brandon Lewis 61
 Melissa Aldana 48
 Joshua Redman 47
 Pharoah Sanders 47
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Branford Marsalis 42
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 Dayna Stephens 32
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(passed Dec. 30, 2020) 48
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 Marilyn Crispell 40
 Gerald Clayton 40
 Matthew Shipp 38



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JAZZ HIGHLIGHTS

Trombonist of the Year:

Michael Dease, MSU professor of jazz trombone, DownBeat's 69th Annual Critics Poll.



Album of the Year: Jocelyn Gould, guitarist and MSU Jazz alumna, 2021 Juno Awards, Canada, for her debut album *Elegant Traveler*.



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Mar. 14-20, 2022, Regina Carter, violin



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Dr. Lonnie Smith

FRANK DEBLASE

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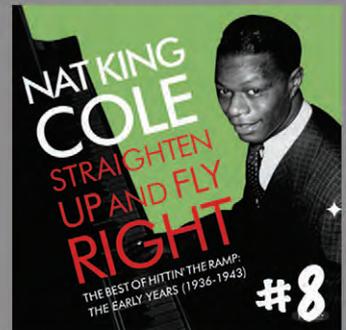
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ERIC WELLES-IVYSTRÖM

Jean-Luc Ponty	36	Chris Dingman	40
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Scott Robinson (bass saxophone)	24
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RAYMOND ALVA

Cory Henry



COURTESY: BLUE NOTE RECORDS

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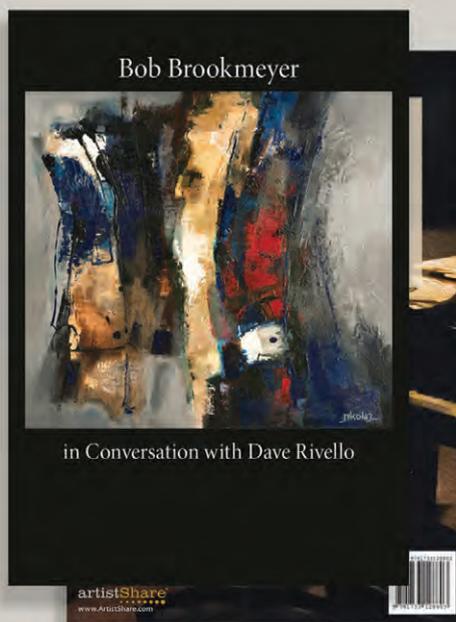
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69TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL

THE CRITICS

Below are the 114 critics who voted in DownBeat's 69th Annual International Critics Poll. According to the rules, critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices in each category, with no more than 5 points going to any single artist or group. They voted for both Established Talent and Rising Stars. Note: The asterisk [*] denotes a critics who are members of the Veterans Committee.

*Frank Alkyer: DB

Larry Appelbaum: WPFW-FM

Mirian Arbalejo: La Cesión de las Voluntades

Glenn R. Astarita: All About Jazz

Mark R. Bacon: Real Westway, Main Event

Chris J. Bahnsen: DB

Michael Barris: DB

Peter Bastian: Jazzthetik

Edward Blanco: All About Jazz, WDNA

Ross Boissoneau: Something Else Reviews, Local Spins, Northern Express

Philip Booth: JazzTimes, Jazziz, Relix

*Fred Bouchard: DB, BMI

*Michael Bourne: DB, WBGO-FM

*Herb Boyd: DB, Amsterdam News, Neworld Review, Code M

Shaun Brady: JazzTimes, Philadelphia Inquirer

Rainer Bratfisch: Jazz Podium

Jon Bream: Minneapolis Star Tribune

Marcela Breton: Freelance

Nelson Brill: bostonconcertreviews.com

Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum

Stuart Broomer: New York City Jazz Record, Point of Departure, Musicworks

Robert Bush: New York City Jazz Record, San Diego Reader, San Diego Troubadour

*Enzo Capua: Musica Jazz, Umbria Jazz

Henry Carrigan: DB, Living Blues, No Depression, Publishers Weekly

*Aaron Cohen: DB, Chicago Reader, Chicago Tribune

Thomas Conrad: Stereophile, JazzTimes, New York City Jazz Record

*J.D. Considine: DB, JazzTimes

Ayana Contreras: DB, NPR, WBEZ

*Paul de Barros: DB, The Seattle Times

Coen de Jonge: Jazzism, Jazz Bulletin, NJA

Anthony Dean-Harris: DB, KRTU San Antonio

R.J. DeLuke: All About Jazz, Albany Times Union

Laurence Donohue-Greene: New York City Jazz Record

Alain Drouot: DB, citizenjazz.com

Ken Dryden: New York City Jazz Record, All About Jazz

José Duarte: RTP Radio Television Portugal

Tina Edwards: DB, The Telegraph, The Guardian

Shannon J. Effinger: The New York Times, The Washington Post, Pitchfork, Bandcamp, NPR, Jazziz

*Ed Enright: DB

*John Ephland: DB, All About Jazz

Steve Feeney: Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, artsfuse.org

Philip Freeman: DB, The Wire, Steereogum, Bandcamp Daily, Burning Ambulance

Takao Fujioka: Way Out West

Gary Fukushima: DB

Jon S. Garelick: DB, Jazziz, Boston Globe

Dustin Garlitz: JazzTalent.com

Richard Gehr: Los Angeles Times, Bandcamp, Relix

*Ted Gioia: *The History of Jazz*

Steve Greenlee: JazzTimes

George Grella: The Brooklyn Rail, Red Hook Star-Review, New York City Jazz Record, The Wire

Kira Grunenberg: DB, American Songwriter, Throw the Dice and Play Nice, No Depression, American Songwriter

*Frank-John Hadley: DB

*James Hale: DB, SoundStageExperience.com

Eric Harabadian: DB, Music Connection, Big City Rhythm & Blues

Kazunori Harada: Jazz Japan Magazine

George W. Harris: George Harris

Kazune Hayata: Jazz Life, Intoxicate Magazine, CD Journal

Chris Heim: KMWU, Night Train, Global Village

Andrey Henkin: New York City Jazz Record

Rob Hoff: WQLN, NPR, JazzErie

Eugene Holley Jr.: DB, Publishers Weekly, Hot House

C. Andrew Hovan: DB, All About Jazz

Dick Hovenga: writteninmusic.com, Jazzism Magazine

Tom Hull: tomhull.com

Tom Ineck: NET Radio, KZUM, Lincoln Journal Star

Michael Jackson: DB, Jazzwise

*Willard Jenkins: DB, The Independent Ear, JazzTimes

Yoshi Kato: DB, San Francisco Chronicle

Larry Kelp: KPFA-FM, kpfa.org

Reinhard Köchl: Zeit Online, Jazz Thing, Augsburgener Allgemeine, Nürnberger Nachrichten

Jeff Krow: Audiophile Audition

David Kunian: DB, Offbeat

Angelo Leonardi: All About Jazz Italia, Musica Jazz

*Suzanne Lorge: DB, New York City Jazz Record, Jazziz

Phillip Lutz: DB

*Jim Macnie: DB, VEVO

*Howard Mandel: DB, The Wire, NPR

Cree McCree: DB, Offbeat, pleasekillme.com

Kerlie McDowall: DB, Inspired Magazine

Peter McElhinney: Style Weekly, Richmond Magazine

Bill Meyer: DB, The Wire, Magnet, Dusted, Chicago Reader

*Ken Micallef: DB, Stereophile, JazzTimes

Virgil Mihaiu: DB, Steaua/Jazz Context, JAM (Jazz Montenegro)

*Bill Milkowski: DB, The Absolute Sound, Jazziz

Ralph A. Miriello: Notes on Jazz

*Dan Morgenstern: Jersey Jazz

*John Murph: DB, TIDAL, Jazzwise, JazzTimes

Michael G. Nastos: Hot House, Paradiso Dei Musicisti, SEMJA Update, WCBN (Ann Arbor, Michigan)

Ron Netsky: City Newspaper (Rochester, New York)

Jon Newey: Jazzwise

Sean O'Connell: DB, Los Angeles Times, KCET

*Dan Ouellette: DB, Qwest TV, Stereophile, medium.com, uDiscover

*Ted Panken: DB, JazzTimes

Terry Perkins: DB

Jeff Potter: DB, Modern Drummer

*Bobby Reed: DB

Derk Richardson: The Absolute Sound, KPFA, Roots Magazine, Peghead Nation, Acoustic Guitar

*Gene Santoro: Author — *Dancing In Your Head, Myself When I Am Real*

Sebastian Scotney: London Jazz News, Jazzthetik, The Arts Desk

Gene Seymour: CNN.com, The Nation, BookForum

*Thomas Staudter: The Croton Gazette, The Hudson Independent

W. Royal Stokes: JJA News, wroyalstokes.com

Denise Sullivan: DB, San Francisco Examiner

Laurence Svirchev: misterioso.org

Otakar Svoboda: Czech Radio Vltava

*Jean Szlamowicz: DB, Spirit of Jazz, Académie du Jazz

Larry Reni Thomas: Jazz Corner, eJazz News, WCOM-FM

Chris Walker: DB, LA Jazz Scene, JazzTimes

Ken Weiss: Candence, Jazz Inside

Michael J. West: DB, Washington Post, JazzTimes, Washington City Paper

*Kevin Whitehead: NPR's *Fresh Air*, Author — *Play The Way You Feel*

*Josef Woodard: DB, Santa Barbara Independent, Jazziz, Cadence, All About Jazz

Takashi Yamamoto: Disk Union

*Scott Yanow: DB, Jazziz, LA Jazz Scene, New York City Jazz Record, Jazz Rag

VOTE!



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Reviews

Masterpieces ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★



John McLaughlin reached out to collaborators around the world to record *Liberation Time*.

John McLaughlin *Liberation Time*

ABSTRACT LOGIX

★★★

A sub-40-minute John McLaughlin recording that includes two solo piano tracks by the leader is bound to be frustrating. Add a pair of band recordings that echo vintage Mahavishnu Orchestra rave-ups, one of which includes a guitar solo filled with ridiculous technique, and you have a recipe for considering what might have been. Being locked down in 2020 spurred a creative outpouring that McLaughlin couldn't ignore, but it's impossible not to wish this had been a more fulsome recording — with more of the leader's guitar work to balance the piano musings.

McLaughlin reached out to collaborators around the world, utilizing five studios to patch together the same number of groupings. Adding some consistency, three include McLaughlin's long-time keyboardist Gary

Husband, who doubles on drums on the rollicking "Liberation Time" (which features the aforementioned guitar solo). Even after more than 50 years of hearing McLaughlin tear up the fretboard with solos that move effortlessly through key changes and shifting time signatures, with melodic ideas that leap forward and circle back on themselves, his "Liberation Time" solo sounds astonishing.

"Lockdown Blues," with the exceptional bassist Etienne MBappé, Husband and drummer Ranjit Barot, is another guitar-driven romp that surges joyously and culminates in Barot's spirited duet between his drums and his konkol vocal percussion.

The quartet with Husband, bassist Sam Burgess and drummer Vinnie Colaiuta sounds only slightly more constrained on the opening "As The Spirit Sings," and drummer Nicolas Viccaro shines with his quicksilver fills on the steaming "Right Here, Right Now, Right On," a McLaughlin composition rooted in hard-bop.

"Singing Our Secrets," with Jean-Michel

"Kiki" Aublette on bass and drums, and Roger Rossignol on piano, shifts from ballad to medium-tempo swing and serves up dollops of McLaughlin's rich, chunky amp tone.

As for the pair of piano solos: At 79, and forced off the road, McLaughlin has earned the right to express himself as he wants. Given his limited keyboard technique, it's an interesting choice for an artist who has redefined the guitar for so many fans, just as it's an interesting choice to release such a truncated mixture of material.

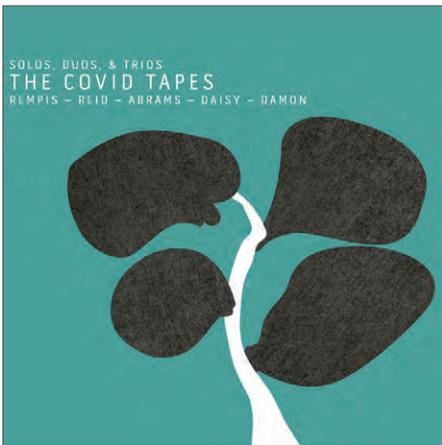
In the words of Miles Davis, "Call it what it is": McLaughlin's journal of the plague year.

—James Hale

Liberation Time: As The Spirit Sings; Singing Our Secrets; Lockdown Blues; Mila Repa; Right Here, Right Now, Right On; Shade Of Blue; Liberation Time. (37:19)

Personnel: John McLaughlin, guitar (1–3, 5, 7), guitar synth (1–3, 5, 7), piano (4, 6); Julian Siegel, tenor saxophone (5); Roger Rossignol (2), Oz Esseldin (5), piano; Gary Husband, piano (1, 3, 7), drums (7); Etienne MBappé (3), Sam Burgess (1, 7), Jerome Regard (5), bass; Jean-Michel "Kiki" Aublette, bass (2), drums (2); Vinnie Colaiuta (1), Nicolas Viccaro (5), drums; Ranjit Barot, drums (3), vocals (3).

Ordering info: abstractlogix.com



Dave Rempis *The COVID Tapes*

AEROPHONIC

★★★

Saxophonist and composer Dave Rempis captures the global anxiety of our times on this aptly titled recording. The music unfolds like snapshots of someone grappling with isolation and seeking meaningful interaction. Recorded between May and September 2020, *The COVID Tapes* finds the Chicago-based Rempis navigating between soul-stirring solo recitals to intriguing duos and trio explorations.

On solo flights such as his pensive reading

Bright Red Dog *In Vivo*

ROPEADOPE

★★★½

Listening to a free-improvisation collective, it might seem difficult to discern the difference between a live recording and a studio session, as both stem from intuitive responses provided by the presence of musicians in the same space. Such is the case with Bright Red Dog — drummer Joe Pignato's loose assembly of improvising musicians — and its latest LP, *In Vivo*.

Recorded during a single set at Brooklyn's ShapeShifter Lab, *In Vivo* is a live recording for COVID times, featuring a conspicuously muted audience who had to tune into the performance online. The six-track album presents an unedited stream of musical consciousness shared between the five musicians onstage and bolstered by poet Matt Coonan's vocalizations on the end of Donald Trump's presidency — inspired by the set taking place as the results of the 2020 election were announced.

Opening track "To Be Born Into" showcases Eric Person's serpentine saxophone (calling up Casey Benjamin or Terrace Martin's work) backed by the spacious groove of Pignato's drumming and Anthony Berman's bass. The pace is heightened into a choppy concatenation on "We Ain't Gotta," featuring Person's melod-

ic ascensions, while "Under The Porch" burns with bop swing before "Since Yesterday" deconstructs around a question-and-answer refrain.

The presence of Cody Davies' digital wizardry elevates *In Vivo* from loosely structured improvisation. Davies provides artful textures to Pignato's cymbal work on "To Be Born Into," while on "I Swear" he comps Coonan's free associations with a groaning bass drone. It provides a re-listenable depth.

—Ammar Kalia

The COVID Tapes: Knox; Toron; B My Dear; Skin And Bones; The Song Is You; Just A Gigolo; In The Wild; On Green Dolphin Street; Glitch; Isfahan. (98:07)

Personnel: Dave Rempis, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones; Tomeka Reid, cello; Joshua Abrams, drums; Tyler Damon, drums.

Ordering info: aerophonicrocords.com



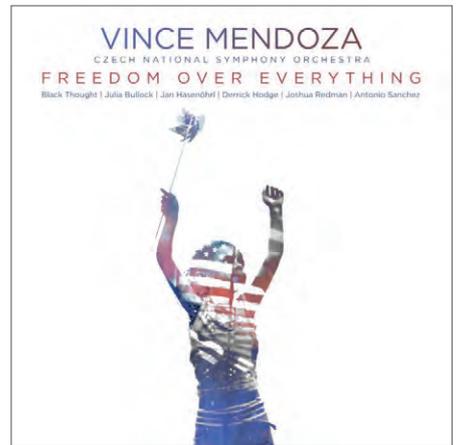
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In Vivo: To Be Born Into; We Ain't Gotta; Under The Porch; On The Way Out; Since Yesterday; I Swear. (45:49)

Personnel: Joe Pignato, drums; Eric Person, soprano and alto saxophones, flute; Tyreek Jackson, guitar; Cody Davies, sounds; Anthony Berman, acoustic bass; Matt Coonan, poetry.

Ordering info: brightdogred.bandcamp.com



Vince Mendoza *Freedom Over Everything*

BMG MODERN RECORDINGS

★★★

Movie music is an abstraction. By itself, lovely or exciting, depending on melody or drive, but still an abstraction in search of a self. It acquires identity when absorbed into the pictures, dialog and people of human experience. This is why music is so vital in amplifying the passions of love, suspense or action it accompanies on the screen — and why those feelings can be recaptured with such uncanny precision by hearing only the music.

Vince Mendoza, who once aspired to film composition, intends *Freedom Over Everything* to express the discord of the Trump years through a kind of Third Stream lens. To this end, he composed a "Concerto For Orchestra" in five movements describing a narrative arc. I knew none of this in my initial listening. It sounds like a well-crafted film score. The first movement conjures an aura of uncertainty and tension, then swells into a thundering symphonic density. Strings and brass interact in absorbing ways, to which I subjectively assign my own images, based largely on how I've been conditioned by earlier film scores. Josuha Redman's tenor cameo weaves lightly through "Meditations" without dominating. Mendoza's orchestrations exhibit a fine mastery over the emotional vocabulary of musical verisimilitude and mise-en-scène, but offer little jazz feel.

Imagine my surprise when I read the notations and learn the narrative I should have imagined. I have completely misinterpreted his intended story arc. Have I failed as a listener? No. This music is rooted in his reality, not mine. That will take time. Meanwhile, enjoy.

—John McDonough

Freedom Over Everything: American Noise; Concerto For Orchestra—Consolation; Concerto For Orchestra—Hit The Streets; Concerto For Orchestra—Meditation; Justice And The Blues; Freedom Over Everything 2; Concerto For Orchestra—Finale; To The Edge Of Longing; New York Stories; Freedom—Single Master. (58:52)

Personnel: Czech National Symphony Orchestra; Jan Hasenohr, trumpet soloist (9); Joshua Redman (4), tenor saxophone; Derrick Hodge (6, 10), bass; Antonio Sánchez, drums; Tariq Trotter (a.k.a. Black Thought) (6, 10), Julia Bullcock (8), vocals.

Ordering info: bmg.com/us

The Hot Box

	Critics	James Hale	John Murph	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough
John McLaughlin <i>Liberation Time</i>		★★★	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★
Dave Rempis <i>The COVID Tapes</i>		★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★
Bright Red Dog <i>In Vivo</i>		★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★½
Vince Mendoza <i>Freedom Over Everything</i>		★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	★★★

Critics' Comments

John McLaughlin, *Liberation Time*

The iconic guitarist admirably brings cathartic howls, defiantly joyous swing and alluring repose in response to the coronavirus pandemic. —John Murph

McLaughlin's jazz-rock fusion finds satisfying creative inspiration in the chaos of the pandemic, recording this assembly of differing musicians remotely for a medley of high-energy compositions, and peaking at the burning swing of "Right Here, Right Now, Right On." —Ammar Kalia

McLaughlin's solo torrents, churned by crashing drums, become a buzzsaw. But the steadying restraint of rhythmic civility on "Right Here" and the title track achieve a pacing that delivers better moments. Two piano cameos let and us catch some breath. —John McDonough

Dave Rempis, *The COVID Tapes*

Isolation. Frustration. Release. Rempis mines the full range of lockdown emotions, which makes for a disjointed recording, albeit with some powerful expression of feelings. —James Hale

The era of COVID records is truly upon us exemplified by saxophonist Rempis' production rate of 15 solo albums released in four months. This selection of this material, alongside group combinations, produce a charming archive of a year's worth of diverse creativity. —Ammar Kalia

One CD's worth of value padded with another of shrill, musical Styrofoam. One must dig through the primal a cappella nihilism before Rempis reveals his elegant authority. Perhaps mastering such basics entitle one to indulge in therapeutic toots. —John McDonough

Bright Red Dog, *In Vivo*

Merging assertive word-jazz doggerel with aggressive musical motifs makes for a rough ride. Their free-improv approach to trip-hop leaves the seams showing. —James Hale

The melodic cogency, rhythmic clarity and sonic ingenuity in these ad hoc live improvisations astounds. —John Murph

Proudly unanchored improvisation. A pointedly made-up-on-the-fly collage of noises and noodling whose beatnik "poetry" strikes a pompous pose of cultish coffee-house solemnity. Rhythm section galvanizes briefly, but leaves little to take away. When you improvise on nothing, that's what you get. —John McDonough

Vince Mendoza, *Freedom Over Everything*

Mendoza's reach is impressive, and while there are exceptional high points — kudos to Julia Bullock and Antonio Sánchez — some movements sound overly derivative and others excessively bombastic. —James Hale

The amount of hope, soul and redemptive blues Mendoza folds into these soaring orchestral works is irrepressible. —John Murph

Fêted arranger Mendoza is in maximalist mode for this orchestral jazz fusion charting the turmoil of post-2016 America. Highlights come via Antonio Sánchez's deft drumming and Joshua Redman's plaintive saxophone — yet the whole can feel laden with cinematic orchestration, stifling room for improvisation. —Ammar Kalia



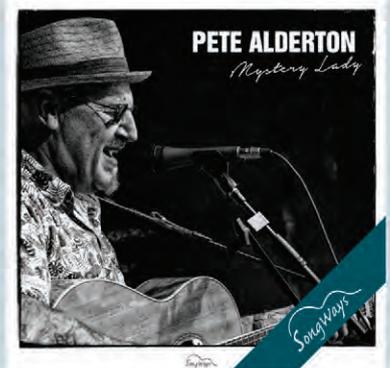
KARI IKONEN

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Alex Sipiagin *Upstream*

POSI-TONE 8219

★★★★½

A seasoned vet who has been on the scene for 30 years since moving to New York from Russia, Alex Sipiagin distinguished himself as lead trumpeter in such large ensembles as the Mingus Big Band, Dave Holland Big Band and Michael Brecker's Quintet as well as with the all-star quintet Opus 5.

His 18th album as a leader, and first for Posi-Tone, finds him fronting a crackling quartet of pianist Art Hirahara, bassist Boris Kozlov

and drummer Rudy Royston. The leader's fluency and bravura high-note displays throughout are breathtaking as his stellar sidemen push him to some dizzying heights on this excellent outing.

They come out of the gate flying on the trumpeter's "Call," which has Sipiagin and Hirahara in tight on the challenging head before the quartet leaps into serious uptempo swing mode, paced by Kozlov's surging bass and Royston's whirlwind attack. Sipiagin's laser-sharp execution and harmonic daring on this intense opener and also on the bristling "Sight" are clearly inspired by his personal hero, trumpeter Woody Shaw.

Hirahara's mellow "Echo Canyon" and the leader's "Rain" both showcase Sipiagin's more lyrical side on flugelhorn, then he conjures electric Miles Davis with some muted work on Kozlov's open-ended "Magic Square," which also has Hirahara shifting to Fender Rhodes. Royston unleashes on an extended solo over the last two minutes of this dynamic number.

On the other end of the dynamic spectrum, they luxuriate in Wayne Shorter's beautiful ballad "Miyako."

—Bill Milkowski

Upstream: Call; Echo Canyon; Sight; SipiTham; Magic Square; Rain; Shura; Miyako; Upstream. (54:55)

Personnel: Alex Sipiagin, trumpet, flugelhorn; Art Hirahara, piano, electric piano; Boris Kozlov, upright bass, electric bass; Rudy Royston, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Amaro Freitas *Sankofa*

FAR OUT RECORDINGS

★★★★

"A storm is blowing from Paradise," wrote Walter Benjamin, who said that its gusts were so strong the angel of history could no longer close his wings as he backed into the future. Amaro Freitas' music moves into the future with its eyes firmly locked on the mythical past. Sankofa is, of course, the backward-looking bird, a ubiquitous symbol of the search for roots as creative progress, roots that go down into the deep history of Brazil, once the world's largest slave-owning nation, but also the one with the longest and stormiest narrative of rebellion. That's the back story to "Baquagua," a tribute to a resister who escaped to antebellum New York and gained the skills to tell his unique story. Likewise, the deceptively light and floating "Vila Bela" evokes queen Tereza de Benguela, a Brazilian Boudicca who resisted the slavers for a whole generation.

Freitas's unique piano style — to call it a hybrid of Abdullah Ibrahim, Thelonious Monk and Chick Corea doesn't quite make it, but gets close — is apt to hypnotize, sometimes past the point where one recognizes any longer that this is trio music and that bassist Jean Elton and drummer Hugo Madeiros are as intrinsic to the sound as were Bill Evans' "sidemen." Together, they make music that can move from the full-hearted joy of "Ayeye" through the city-meets-the-forest strut of "Cazumbá" to the sheer warmth of a closing tribute to Milton Nascimento.

Freitas' first two records, *Sangue Negro* and *Rasif*, came out to almost universal acclaim, but Amaro and his men are not content merely to surf on critical approbation. This record, equally patiently crafted, flies backwards into storm, with ineffable calm and unmistakable strength and determination.

—Brian Morton

Sankofa: Sankofa; Ayeye; Baquagua; Vila Bela; Cazumbá; Batucada; Malakoff; Nascimento. (56:20)

Personnel: Amaro Freitas, piano; Jean Elton, bass; Hugo Madeiros, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: faroutrecordings.com

Adrian Younge & Ali Shaheed Muhammad/ João Donato

João Donato JID 007

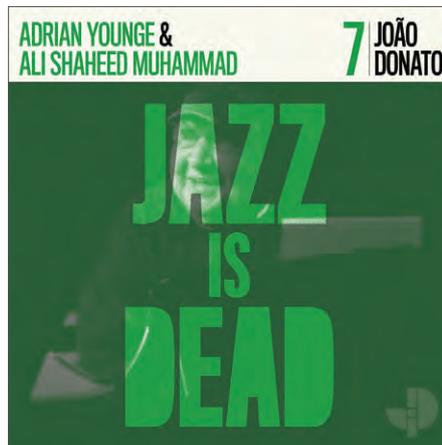
JAZZ IS DEAD

★★★★½

Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad continue their Jazz is Dead project — collaborating with jazz legends to make new material with the same instruments those legends used to make their classic albums — with its usual charming pace in its seventh installment alongside pianist João Donato. Like the other albums that preceded this, Younge and Muhammad work with their esteemed collaborator with reverence, but also exuding the confidence as artists themselves to make music as equals, to make a vibe this bold.

There is rarely a moment where this album isn't overwhelmingly pleasant, wrapping the listener in sound that captures the purity of the original moment as well invigorating the present one. Their tack on "Aquarius" is so perfectly in the pocket, it could set up shop there. "Sua Beleza e Beleza" keeps escalating and plateauing with such brilliance, it ends leaving the listener wanting so much more but maybe the dance floor just can't take it, Greg Paul's drums providing a boom-bap with panache.

This had to be the easiest-going session, so



much so that João Donato's composition "Adrian, Ali & Gregory" had to be encapsulated in a chill this definitive. This mood had to be conveyed, had to be recreated as Donato pictured it and shared for the masses. The same could be said for the rest of this album, each song just as vibrant as the last, a true album best heard uninterrupted like the legendary scions that came before.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

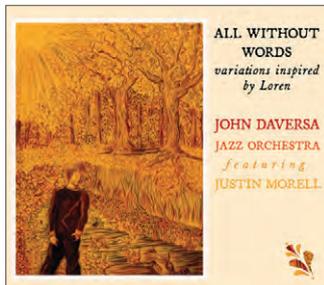
Jazz Is Dead 007: Nao Negue Seu Coração; Aquarius (Bring Her Back Home To Me); Desejo de Amor; Forever More; Sua Beleza e Beleza; Liaisons; Adrian, Ali & Gregory; Vermelho Quente; Conexão. (26:50)

Personnel: Adrian Younge & Ali Shaheed Muhammad, Hammond B-3, electric bass, synthesizer, electric guitar, flutes, alto and soprano saxophones, percussion; João Donato, Fender Rhodes, piano; Loren Oden, vocals; Greg Paul, drums.

Ordering info: joaodonato.bandcamp.com

John Daversa Jazz Orchestra feat. Justin Morell
All Without Words: Variations Inspired By Loren

TIGER TURN
 ★★★★★½



All Without Words is an ambitious concerto for trumpet and orchestra that gives voice to the voiceless in more ways than one. John Daversa's dry, expressive trumpet speaks for Loren Morell, the non-verbal, autistic son of composer Justin Morell, whose thoughtfully titled movements reflect stages in the relationship.

The movements are long, encourage introspection, and most feature a wall of strings — more in the style of Richard Strauss than Phil Spector, perhaps even more in the style of Béla Bartók.

This is a long, serious work with a complex agenda, primarily an aim to heal. It does not swing, and it's not about virtuosity, even though the musicians Daversa and Morell have assembled sound absolutely organic in Kabir Sehgal's sumptuous production.

Each track stands on its own, though the careful sequencing and thematic progression strongly suggest that the best way to experience this would be in its proper sequence at a standalone concert. —Carlo Wolff

All Without Words: Loren's Theme; Searching But Never Finding; Two Steps Forward; Seeing It Again For The First Time; The Urgency Of Every Moment; Invisible Things; Walking In Our Own Footsteps/The Circle Game; The Smallest Thing; A Day Is Forever/Like Any Other; Three Roads Diverged; Learning What It Means To Be; It's Enough To Be Here, Now. (73:00)

Personnel: John Daversa, trumpet; Justin Morell, guitars; Tal Cohen, piano; Dion Kerr, bass; David Chiverton, drums; Lev Garfein, violin; Conrad Fok, piano; choir; orchestra: strings, winds and percussion.

Ordering info: johndaversa.com

Stephan Micus
Winter's End

ECM
 ★★★★★



Long before musicians started recording and overdubbing themselves, Stephan Micus turned track tapestry-making into a highly personal art form. On his 24th album for ECM, the multi-instrumentalist delivers the hypnotically contemplative *Winter's End*.

Micus creates his own acoustic sound world and sets his own implied narrative over the course of 12 tracks, framed by "Autumn Hymn" and "Winter Hymn." Both feature a Madagascar xylophone, the chikulo, which serves as an anchoring presence. His mesmeric signature Micus chorus — consisting of between 11 and 14 layered voices — lends a vaguely Eastern European choral ambience to "The Longing Of The Migrant Birds" and "Sun Dance," and we become entranced by the varied textural palette he deftly combines using the Japanese nohkan flute, the West African tongue drum and the Balinese suling flute, as well as the de-centralized "Western" timbre of a slightly detuned 12-string guitar.

His is an organic methodology offering a generous, ambiguous view of world music through one artist's distinctive filter. This music feels at once familiar and foreign, in the best way. —Josef Woodard

Winter's End: Autumn Hymn; Walking In Snow; The Longing Of The Migrant Birds; Baobab Dance; Southern Stars; Black Mother; A New Light; Companions; Oh Chikulo; Sun Dance; Walking In Sand; Winter Hymn. (47:21)

Personnel: Stephan Micus, chikulo, nohkan, 12-string guitar, tongue drums, voice, kalimba, singing, charango, ney, satar, Tibetan cymbals, suling.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Richard X Bennett
RXB3

UBUNTU MUSIC
 ★★★★★



The Canadian-born pianist Richard X Bennett's world travels have given him access to a complex musical palette. Bringing together the world of Indian raga styles with Western classical music and jazz, his sound practices what he calls "theme and destruction." Now based in the People's Republic of Brooklyn, New York, Bennett continues that practice with *RXB3*, his first recording with Ubuntu Music. With bassist Adam Armstrong and new collaborator Julian Edmond, the record is driven by melody, which Bennett uses as a route towards exploration, a process he describes as a tearing apart. Through destruction we are introduced to those vast influences that animate his playing.

Largely consisting of original compositions, *RXB3* feels fresh and inviting. Bennett describes the rhythm section's playing with the word "bounce." There are certainly elements of that threaded throughout, but the album perhaps is most successful when that groove is fused with moments of deep contemplation. Perhaps this is most evident on tracks like "One Voice," "Vape" and "Tum Hi Ho." You hear the very real influences, while also noticing clearly the ways in which Bennett pursues his own path to take us somewhere unexpected. —Joshua Myers

RXB3: I Come From The Future; This Is My Code; It's Only July; Laughing Lion; One Voice; Made From Stone; North Atlantic; Vape; All Organic; Plastique; The Reckoning; Tum Hi Ho. (50:13)

Personnel: Richard X Bennett, piano, melodica (8); Adam Armstrong, bass; Julian Edmond, drums.

Ordering info: weareubuntumusic.com

Todd Cochran TC3
Then And Again, Here And Now

SUNNYSIDE
 ★★★★★



Todd Cochran, a chameleon at the keyboards, breaks a 10-year hiatus from recording with *Then And Again, Here And Now*. That Cochran chose to return with a standards album seems significant. But these tunes, flush with lyricism and rhythmic vitality, reflect his early grounding in the blues-based innovations of mentors like John Handy, Woody Shaw and Rahsaan Roland Kirk.

On Thelonious Monk's "Bemsha Swing," for instance, he anchors his galloping improvisations with a heavy-swinging bass line that opens into a deep-hued, arco bass solo. On Bobby Hutcherson's "Little B's Poem," he keeps the waltz groove on edge with unexpected harmonic tensions. And on the jazz bellwether "I Got Rhythm," he reharmonizes the classic changes, moves through a double-time feel and includes an extended drum solo so articulate that you can almost make out the words.

Cochran recorded with his spectacular trio, TC3, featuring bassist John Leftwich and drummer Michael Carvin. But he also devotes several of the album's 15 tracks to solo piano. The title cut proffers Cochran's final statement on the topic: It's an improvisatory swirl of classical idioms, free-jazz, percussive accents and, yes, love. —Suzanne Lorge

Then And Again, Here And Now: Softly As In A Morning Sunrise; A Foggy Day; I Got Rhythm; Verslet For The Duke; The Duke; Don't Get Around Much Anymore; Heretofore (Interstitial 1); Fantaisie—J.S. Bach Prelude XX, WTC Book II; April In Paris; Between Spaces (Interstitial 2); Invitation; You Must Believe In Spring; Bemsha Swing; Little B's Poem; Then And Again, Here And Now. (57:15)

Personnel: Todd Cochran, piano; John Leftwich, bass; Michael Carvin, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Caity Gyorgy
Now Pronouncing:
Caity Gyorgy
 LA RESERVE RECORDS

★★★★

Canadian jazz singer Caity Gyorgy, in addition to having a warm voice and swinging phrasing, is a skilled songwriter whose originals sound as if they are from the 1950s with more modern lyrics. For this 20-minute EP, she has a 10-piece band performing five of her originals.



The program begins with “Secret Safe,” a love song that includes some concise solos, a wee bit of excellent scatting, a big band sound and a joyful story. In contrast, the waltz ballad “There By The Door” is a nostalgic piece filled with regret. “12th Avenue” is about love at first sight, where Gyorgy sings with awe, wistfulness and wonder about the power of the first glance. However, that feeling is completely absent from “Why’d You Gotta,” which is about being deceived by a wandering boyfriend. However, all is not lost because her treatment of the sad tale is swinging and witty, making it clear that the singer does not care much anymore.

Throughout this EP, Gyorgy displays a lot of potential. One reservation is that these renditions are brief. Next time, she and her band should take the opportunity to stretch out more.

—Scott Yanow

Now Pronouncing: Secret Safe; There By The Door; 12th Avenue; Why’d You Gotta; The B. (20:04)

Personnel: Caity Gyorgy, vocals; Kyle Poglino, trumpet; Nick Forget, trombone; Virginia MacDonald, clarinet; Daniel Barta, alto saxophone; Lucas Dubovik, tenor saxophone; Kyle Tarder-Stoll, baritone saxophone; Felix Fox-Pappas, piano; Thomas Hainbuch, bass; Jacob Wutzke, drums; Eric Wong, flute (2).

Ordering info: lareserverecords.com

Lauren Lee
Queen Of Cups
 EARS&EYES RECORDS

★★★★

Conceptually speaking, the new album by pianist, composer and vocalist Lauren Lee diverges from being reactionary music made during the pandemic. That said, the fact that the album comes to reflect Lee’s every feeling during the height of lockdown, anyway, is a testament to, and a reminder of, just how significantly music is altered and shaped by inner experiences, whether consciously acknowledged or not.



Opening track “Cogitation” introduces *Queen Of Cups* with a very sonically transparent aesthetic. Though it’s clear from the outset that the album won’t be instrumentally dense, the music offers pleasantly surprising openness by way of natural production values and the melodic liberties of Lee’s scat vocals. The piano tone chases neither vintage quality, nor an overly polished concert hall timbre. Close-miking leaves Lee’s vocals, and piano, sounding pseudo-live, if you will.

Additional tracks like Pat Metheny’s “Unity Village” and “Mad House” evoke a similar quality. Still, the record isn’t without artistic expanse or sonic creativity. The closing track “Cocoon” exercises the most individuality. Lingering reverb and delay end *Queen Of Cups* on an ethereal and highly modern note.

—Kira Grunenberg

Queen Of Cups: Cogitation; Up In The Air; Mad House; If I Should Lose You; Another Reality; Unity Village; I Should Care; Boxes; Footprints; Cocoon. (49:08)

Personnel: Lauren Lee, vocals, piano, keyboards.

Ordering info: earsandeyesrecords.com

Simon Moullier
Trio
Countdown

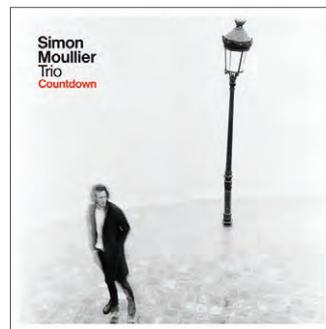
FRESH SOUND

★★★★½

If Simon Moullier’s 2020 debut *Spirit Song* was an attempt to bring the vibraphone back to prominence, the young French native’s latest album makes an even stronger case. *Countdown* is an effervescent throwback with Moullier paring back to a simple vibes/bass/drums trio and tackling jazz classics and standards — a selection that evokes the late-’50s/early-’60s period when the masters of bebop were sharing space on record shelves with exotica and lounge fare.

The vintage air of the album is balanced nicely with decidedly modern elements. Drummer Jongkuk Kim plays with contemporary flair, all rapid-fire fills and cymbal work. He keeps pace with Moullier and bassist Luca Alemanno on a speedy take of Tadd Dameron’s “Hot House” and a blistering rendition of the John Coltrane’s “Countdown.” Moullier keeps *Countdown* firmly connected to jazz’s roots. He eases into the melody of “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat” and dashes through “Turn Out The Stars” as effortlessly as Bill Evans. With few other players to work around and with, Moullier remains fixed in the spotlight throughout and, from the sounds of this spritely album, he clearly found that being the center of attention is fuel for his creative engine.

—Robert Ham



Countdown: Countdown; Work; I Concentrate On You; Goodbye Pork Pie Hat; Nature Boy; Turn Out The Stars; The Song Is You; Beijo Partido; Hot House; Ask Me Now. (41:26)

Personnel: Simon Moullier, vibraphone; Luca Alemanno, bass; Jongkuk Kim, drums.

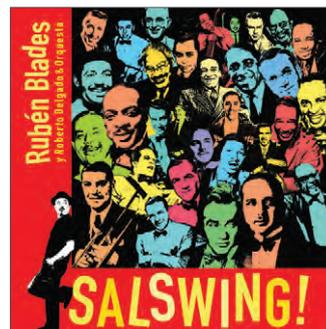
Ordering info: freshsoundrecords.com

Rubén Blades y
Roberto Delgado
& Orquesta
SalSwing!

SELF-RELEASED

★★★★

Ruben Blades continues expanding his musical vision with an 11-tune collaboration with the Panamanian bassist/bandleader Roberto Delgado.



The combination implied in the title isn’t as outside as one may think. Swing and Latin rhythms have long influenced each other. The set list includes tunes that reference Blades’ entire career, as well as various swing classics.

The tone is characterized by the opening tunes, “Paula C” and “Pennies From Heaven.” The Orquesta jumps in, horns blazing, to open “Paula C,” reinventing an early Blades hit from 1979. Juan Berna’s piano creates syncopated rhythms as the percussion section lays down a shimmering Afro-Cuban pulse.

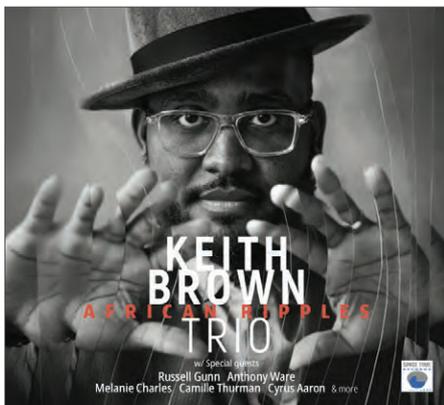
Blades trades improvised lines with the coro, while a trumpet climbs the scale to end on some impressive high notes. He croons “Pennies From Heaven,” his phrasing dancing in and out of time in a manner that would make Billy Eckstine proud.

—j. poet

SalSwing!: Paula C; Pennies From Heaven; Mambo Gil; Ya No Me Duele; Watch What Happens; Cobarde; Do I Hear Four?; Canto Niche; The Way You Look Tonight; Contrabando; Tambó. (44:53)

Personnel: Rubén Blades, lead vocals and coros; Roberto Delgado, basses and coros; Ademir Ber- rocal, percussion; Juan Berna, piano; Raúl Rivera, percussion; Carlos Pérez percussion; Juan Carlos “Wichy” López, trumpet; Alejandro “Chichisín” Castillo, trumpet, trombone, baritone saxophone; Francisco Delvecchio, Avenicio Núñez, trombones; Carlos Ubarte, flute, saxophones; Carlos Agrazal, alto saxophone; Ivan Navarro, Luis Carlos Pérez, tenor saxophone; and other artists.

Ordering info: rubenblades.com



Keith Brown Trio *African Ripples*

SPACE TIME RECORDS

★★★★

“Call it magic/ Call it ministry/ Call it music.” The opening epigraph for *African Ripples*, delivered by spoken-word artist Cyrus Aaron, sets the tone for an album that shines a beacon of hope at the end of a very dark year. “We play on for the living,” as Aaron observes. “Progress can be slowed down but it cannot be stopped.”

On his third album as a leader, Brown mines his personal history with Black music and his own life journey to send ripples of positivity that light our way to redemption. He also

enlists plenty of help. The deep groove of his core trio — with bassist Derzon Douglas and alternating drummers Terreon “Tank” Gully and Darrell Green — serves as a launching pad for an inspired roster of guest artists.

On “Queen,” dedicated to Brown’s wife, Tamara, Camille Thurman’s vocals swoop in like a shooting star that sparks the joyful noise of a heavenly choir. And when Melanie Charles sings she wants to “Come Back As A Flower” in the Stevie Wonder song, her wish blossoms.

Among the most memorable guest turns is “Prayer For My Nephews,” in which Aaron advises young Black men, “Leave nothing unspoken. Raise your voice.” But the heart and soul of “African Ripples,” a song first recorded by Fats Waller in 1934, is the core trio’s intuitive dialogue, steered by Brown’s piano.

“African Ripples Part I” invokes the big-band elegance of Duke Ellington. “Part II” gives birth to the cool, while the playful “118th & 8th” bursts with the street beats of Saturday night.

—Cree McCree

African Ripples: African Ripples Epigraph; Truth And Comfort; NAFID; Just You, Just Me; 512 Arkansas St.; African Ripples Part I; African Ripples Part II; Queen; Come Back As A Flower; 118th & 8th; What’s Left Behind; Song Of Samson; Eye 2 Eye With The Sun; Prayer For My Nephews; African Ripples. (71:18)

Personnel: Keith Brown, piano, Rhodes, synths; Dezron Douglas, acoustic and electric bass; Darrell Green (6–8, 13), Terreon “Tank” Gully (except tracks 6–8, 13), drums.

Ordering info: keithbrownpiano.com

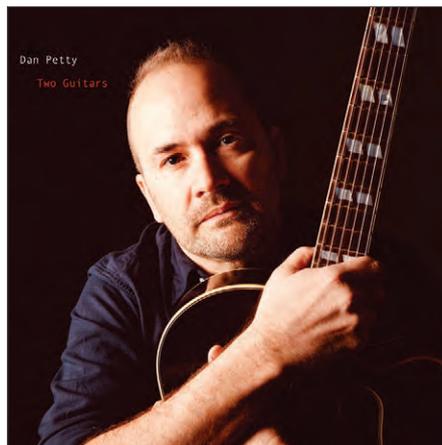
Dan Petty *Two Guitars*

SELF-RELEASE

★★★★½

Simply titled *Two Guitars*, it’s easy to assume there isn’t much to discuss in the way of sonic surprise on the new solo album from composer and producer Dan Petty. Yet, Petty not only shows ample versatility in regard to his own musicianship but also that of the album’s featured instrument: a Selmer-style Manouche guitar.

All but two of the album’s 11 tracks — Al Dubin and Jimmy McHugh’s “South American Way,” which features vocal trio The Goods, and Mike Stern’s “Chromazone,” which brings in Tim Lefevre on bass — are built on two guitar parts. Petty lays down one track each for rhythm and melody. Still, the album shouldn’t be discounted for a lack of innate challenge. Given the traditionalist nature of playing manouche guitars, the music required that more attention — specifically, physical intensity — be applied to the instrument than with a typical acoustic guitar in order to optimize its sound. Petty made a smart shift to his arrangement of “Chromazone” also in pursuit of this objective, layering the melody across two upper octaves in order to give the part a dynamically bolder presence.



The diametrically opposite panning throughout the album — rhythm on the left, melody on the right — unifies. The rounded and rich tonality of Petty’s guitar can sing without constriction through such wide spacing. This embrace of the guitar’s signature tone gives *Two Guitars* pleasant, musically approachable cohesion without diluting its otherwise diverse repertoire.

—Kira Grunenberg

Two Guitars: Blues En Mineur; Django’s Tiger; Bistro Fada; South American Way; Tico Tico No Fuba; James; Chromazone; Melodie Au Crepuscule; Donna Lee; You’d Be So Nice To Come Home To; Choti. (32:45)

Personnel: Dan Petty, manouche guitar; Lucy Woodward, Holly Palmer, Michelle Lewis, vocals (4); Tim Lefevre, bass (7).

Ordering info: danpetty.com

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Matt Ridley *The Antidote*

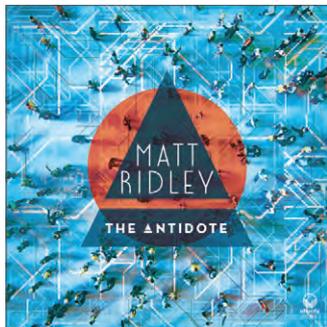
UBUNTU RECORDS

★★★★½

London-based bassist and composer Matt Ridley emphasizes aspects of rock, folk and classical within jazz. It yields a more accessible, less electronic version of Donny McCaslin's harder-edged stuff. That's a pretty good thing, at least in the case of *The Antidote*. It demonstrates a firm grasp of mood and melody, but also a zealous — at times even aggressive — approach to improvisation.

Not that the mood and melody are always restrained, but the contrast is there. "Ebb And Flow" is a thoughtful piece with a tender piano line and Ridley's expressive arco bass playing lead. The heat that saxophonist Alex Hitchcock generates with his voracious solo, and that guitarist Ant Law inherits, is unexpected. Ditto "Stranger Things," the second movement in a four-part suite, where Law offsets an introspective waltz tune with an improv that turns up the twang. Yet sometimes the inverse is true: Pianist Tom Hewson's solo acts as a coolant for the caustic first movement, "Gautoma," resisting urgent prods from drummer Marc Michel in a way that Hitchcock, the second soloist, does not.

As for Ridley, he takes long, agile solos. This bass player has something to say, and, by God, he's going to say it. —Michael J. West



The Antidote: Thalo Blue; The Minotaur; Ebb And Flow; Yardville; Infant Eyes; Suite Part 1: Gautoma; Suite Part 2: Stranger Things; Suite Part 3: Adagio For The Falling Stars; Suite Part 4: Finale. (58:56)

Personnel: Matt Ridley, bass; Alex Hitchcock, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Ant Law, guitar; Tom Hewson, piano; Marc Michel, drums.

Ordering info: weareubuntumusic.com

WRD *The Hit*

COLOR RED

★★★★½

Robert Walter, Eddie Roberts and Adam Deitch, who joined forces after crossing paths at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, have the capacity to let their playing on their debut album define jazz-funk. Organist Walter has long been part of the Greyboy Allstars, and he leads the 20th Congress band. For more than two decades, guitarist Roberts has played with The New Mastersounds. Deitch, on drums, has long been identified with Lettuce.

Two days of effort in Roberts's Denver studio shows the gears of WRD funk are well-greased, with the musicians at an impressive plateau of empathy despite their short time working together. The atmosphere of the session, which produced 10 better-than-decent originals and an adrenalized cover of Sam & the Sound Machine's "Meditation," is fun. WRD and two guests clearly relish coloring inside and outside the lines of Memphis soul, of Crescent City r&b and of organ-trio jazz orthodoxy.

Walter's technique matches his creativity, but some may think he lacks an optimal "organ vibe," not laying it down strong as a descendent of Jimmy McGriff. Be that as it may, "Meditation" is where he drives most vividly through stock-in-trade drama. —Frank-John Hadley



The Hit: Judy; Sleep Depraved; Chum City; Bobby's Boogaloo; Poison Dart; Red Sunset; Meditation; Happy Hour; Hot Honey; Corner Pocket; Pump Up The Valium. (42:34)

Personnel: Robert Walter, organ; Eddie Roberts, guitar; Adam Deitch, drums; Nick Gerlach, tenor saxophone (3, 9); Josh Fairman, bass (6).

Ordering info: color-red.com

The Modern Jazz Trio with Jerry Bergonzi

JAZZFUEL

★★★★★

Tenor saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi's earliest records as leader were influenced by his time with Dave Brubeck. Later, he went through a Coltrane phase. For years, though, he has sounded like no one but himself and, as such, rivals Dave Liebman as the best guest you can have on the stand.

He blows very freely, often with subliminal hints of a Latin rhythm, as on "Body And Soul," now so hoary a tenor warhorse one usually reaches for the skip button. Amazingly, he finds new angles not just through the chords, but on the melody as well.

The MJT is an exceptionally talented Scandinavian unit, led by Carl Winther (son of the Jens Winther) and stoked with combined power and subtlety by Finnish-born Swedish migrant Johnny Åman and drummer Anders Mogensen, the most subtly musical drummer in Europe.

It makes for a very happy meeting. The venue was a Danish jazz club and presumably recorded pre-COVID. That's the best way to catch Bergonzi, who can tighten up in a studio and overcook his ideas. With live bodies out front, he's untouchable at the moment. —Brian Morton



Straight Gonz: I See You; Xtra Xtra; All Of You; Body And Soul; Ayaz; Don't Look Back. (54:30)

Personnel: Jerry Bergonzi, tenor saxophone; Carl Winther, piano; Johnny Åman, bass; Anders Mogensen, drums.

Ordering info: jazzfuel.com

Keshav Batish *Binaries In Cycle*

WOVEN STRANDS

PRODUCTIONS

★★★★

The word "binary" indicates a state of either/or-ness. As a self-described queer artist of color who has engaged in musical pursuits rooted in different cultures, Keshav Batish has had to consider a variety of such

circumstances at close quarters. He grew up learning Hindustani classical music the old-fashioned way: from his father, sitarist Ashwin Batish. Keshav played his first concert at age 7, and went on to master several Indian instruments, but then turned to jazz and classical music.

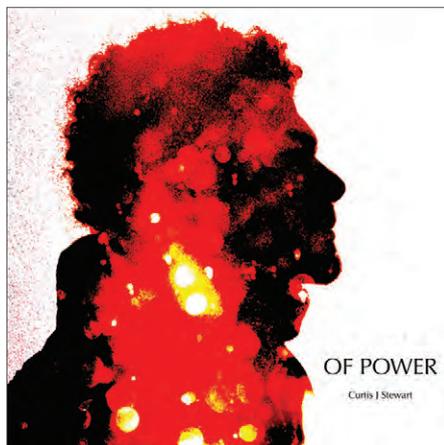
Binaries In Cycle is his recording debut as a jazz drummer and bandleader, and it is true to its title. Batish does not indulge ostentatious hybridism. While the melody and meter of "Gayatri" draw upon Indian models, the tune's harmony and ensemble sound are rooted in the mainstream of contemporary jazz. Which is to say that while "Let Go" builds up a respectable head of steam, its direction is never in doubt. The ensemble's brisk energy reflects the fact that the album was recorded on a stage, albeit without a visible audience. The band fairly flies on Ornette Coleman's "Police People," and Batish's most engaging playing comes when he articulates the melodic contours of Thelonious Monk's "We See." —Bill Meyer



Binaries In Cycle: Binaries In Cycle; Count Me In; Gayatri; Let Go; Police People; We See; Wingspan. (62:42)

Personnel: Keshav Batish, drums; Shay Salhov, alto saxophone; Lucas Hahn, piano; Aron Caceres, bass.

Ordering info: keshavbatish.bandcamp.com



Curtis Stewart *Of Power*

BRIGHT SHINY THINGS

★★★★½

The year 2020 has been described as one of wide-scale awakening. But viral videos and tragic hashtags are not wake-up calls to the oppressed, they are relentless reminders of inequality. Curtis Stewart's solo exercise *Of Power* is a tribute to the nauseating sensation of being haunted by those souvenirs.

Reworkings of material by a range of artists (including a notable adaptation of a Stevie Wonder composition) make up much of the album's content. "After The Rain" is a radical modification of John Coltrane's masterwork that somehow keeps the verve of the original amidst a dizzying ocean of effects.

Many of the spoken-word passages on *Of Power* read as jarring, stream-of-consciousness-birther fever dreams. One compelling couplet is nestled within the coda of Stewart's reworking of Childish Gambino's "Stay Woke," when he suggests, "The squeaky wheels get the grease/ But f**k the grease, I need a mop" to clean the blood spilled in police-involved shootings.

That accusatory sentiment gets a more explicit treatment on "#HerName," which is written from the perspective of Breonna Taylor's partner, Kenneth Walker, who was present during her killing in March 2020.

Of Power was mastered by Dave Veslocki and sound engineer Derek Linzy (who worked with Prince), but the vocals (and much of the balance of the tracks) have the off-mic sound of a low-quality voice memo with reverb. "Mangas," a lovely tune, is marred by tinny distortion. It may be a stylistic choice, but exhausting to experience for a long period of time. But so is inequality.

—Ayana Contreras

Of Power: Louisiana Blues Strut—A Cakewalk; Improvisation On Paganini Caprice #11; Andante; Improvisation On Paganini Caprice #11; Presto; Scapple; Lift Every Voice And Sing; 8:46; SHOOK—Sum!; StayWoke; Mangas—None; Magic Might; #HerName; Until The Glass Breaks; Beethoven2020; Our Past Is A Privilege; After The Rain; Don't You Worry About A THANG; Isn't She Lovely. (64:09)

Personnel: Curtis Stewart, violins, vocals and electronics.

Ordering info: brightshiny.ninja

Gradient Formings

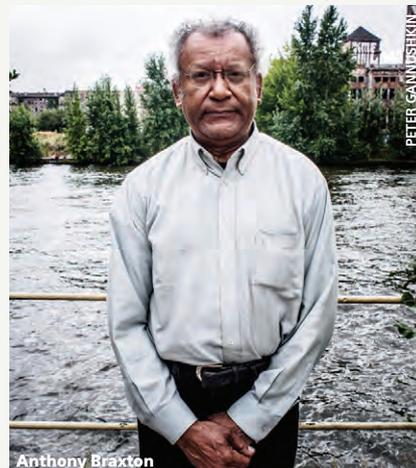
Composer, educator, reedist and theorist Anthony Braxton has spent his career building and stratifying his conceptual concerns into elaborate systems that codify his work, but also serve to direct his ever-expanding cast of collaborators.

His second album, the pioneering solo saxophone recording *For Alto*, which Delmark Records released in 1969, was the first manifestation of what he's long since dubbed "Language Music," a dozen parameters deployed to shape solo performances which he subsequently applied to ensemble work to control, liberate and generally shape the performance of his compositions. While that recording didn't explore all 12, there are explorations of "long tones," "trills" and "staccato line formings," among others. Over the decades he's devoted big chunks of energy and time to specific types of Language Music, each correlated to one of those specific sonic areas, such as *Ghost Trance Music* (long tones) and *Echo Echo Mirror House Music* (multiphonics).

Since 2014, Braxton has increasingly focused on ZIM Music, based on the 11th "house" of Language Music, which he calls "gradient formings," a rubric that involves an endless variety of changes in musical material, including tempo, tone and intensity, each achieved with fluid motion rather than abrupt shifts. **12 COMP (ZIM) 2017 (Firehouse 12; 10:38:15 ★★★★★)** is a Blu-ray Disc collecting 12 extended pieces of ZIM Music recorded between March 2017 and May 2018 with ensembles ranging from a sextet to a nonet. Pieces were performed over eight concerts and studio sessions in New Haven, Connecticut, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Montreal and London. Common to all of the performances are trumpeter/flugelhornist Taylor Ho Bynum, tuba player Dan Peck, and harpist Jacqui Kerrod, while either Shelley Burgon, Miriam Overlach and Brandee Younger appear as a second harpist on each.

Among the other participants are cellist Tomeka Reid, accordionist Adam Matlock, violinist Jean Cook, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and trumpeter Stephanie Richards. This collection is ensemble music of the highest echelon, and while each participant is constantly toggling between improvising and playing densely notated material, individual lines are ultimately in service of a fiercely holistic approach.

While ZIM Music may focus on gradient formings, nearly all of Braxton's work is interconnected, with conventional and graphic notation offering each musician potential pathways to referencing the entirety to his voluminous compositional oeuvre. In fact, most



Anthony Braxton

of the pieces included here deploy another tactic Braxton calls "extraction notation," in which computer-driven notation provides scored material that is literally impossible to realize, so each musician is expected to "extract" something from the score into their improvised performance, a conversion which serves as another layer of gradient thinking. In each performance when Braxton is not unleashing extraordinary solos — sounding as good as he ever has on his arsenal of reeds — he also conducts, redirecting and finessing his ensemble.

The physical release includes a beguiling 16-page booklet containing select score parts, along with a 13-point explanation of "Gradient Logics," in which, "It gets louder or softer," is followed by, "You are looking into her/his eyes and noticed that something is changing." Most of the writing comes in the form of tautological texts and brief aphorisms devoted to "ZIM Music," which confuse, confound and amuse, while actually striking at deep core that still transmits curiosity, enthusiasm and excitement. "Have a video game of a golf tournament that explores the music system," he writes, while also sharing far more illuminating thoughts, such as "The sun rises slowly = gradient logics."

The music ranks amid the most exhilarating and driving of Braxton's work in the last couple of decades, despite the fact that this ensemble eschews percussion and bass. His collaborators tend to be serious adherents fully committed to his work, and his current coterie of disciples are as strong, versatile and individualistic as any group he's had since the classic 1980s quartet. Braxton is a wildly prolific composer more interested in breaking new ground than perfecting older material, and this represents the first real documentation of this particular corpus.

Ordering info: firehouse12records.com

DB



Jeff Hamilton leads his own trio and is a co-founder of the Clayton-Hamilton Big Band with bassist John Clayton.

Drumming Approaches to Big Band vs. Small Group

Big band drummers and small group drummers are one and the same in many ways. Consider the iconic jazz drummers Mel Lewis and Shelly Manne, who showed considerable prowess as both small group and big band players. They had big band experience originally and became good small group drummers later.

The quality of having a dance feel in your beat that keeps people on the dance floor — which I call “dance-ibility” — is necessary whether you’re drumming in a small group or a big band. There has to be a *feel* to your drumming that will make the listener tap their foot (or at least react) to the beat. You have to be comfortable with where your beat is and offer it to the band, as Mel Lewis once said. If you aren’t comfortable with your beat, how is anyone else going to be comfortable with it? After all, you provide the band with what they need. Your goal is not to *make* the band play, but to *offer* your beat and feel to the group. If all goes well, they will want to come in.

The Count Basie Orchestra is a great example of this, where the rhythm section would set the table for the band on several of their signature arrangements. You would practically *hear* the rest of the band eagerly waiting to come in. Everything was cohesive, and everyone felt the beat the same when the horns would eventually make their entrance.

The same thing is true in a trio such as Oscar Peterson’s, whom I was fortunate enough to play with for five years in the 1990s. Everyone had a strong beat. Everybody played with conviction. It wasn’t a matter of matching the beat exactly with everyone else; it was bringing your beat to where it *felt good* to everyone else. When everyone did that, and the confidence level of each player was evident, then it all clicked. You gave each other something to play with.

In big band drumming, one of the main differences is that you have to supply clear statements to the farthest person in the band, which is usually the baritone saxophone or bass trombone player in large-ensemble setups. Don’t hide anything from them; be very clear with your statements. You don’t have to dumb down and play too simply — just be clear

with what you mean to play so there is no question of where that instrumentalist can enter.

CLASSIC JAZZ TRIOS

There are so many different kinds of trios, including those led by Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, Brad Mehldau, Ahmad Jamal and Erroll Garner. And there are so many different types of drumming that go with each of those trios. With Garner, it was based on the pianist with the sidemen providing the music and support that the pianist needed. Evans’ trio engaged in group improvisation most of the time. The time was always there, even if it wasn’t always apparent to listeners who could not hear the “floating” quality of the time-feel. You can sit down and play a ride-cymbal beat through all of Evans’ music and, I can assure you, it’s *there*.

Jamal’s trio is a piano-based group with the drummer and bass player providing solid time-feel and, of course, catching everything in the arrangements. I like trios that consist of equal parts, where everyone is contributing most of the time, if not all of the time — not competing, per se, but involved somehow aside from just playing quarter notes and time for the piano player.

BIG BAND ARRANGEMENTS

In a big band, it’s a little more difficult depending on the writer and arranger of any given chart. However, you have to look at big bands as having not just one way of playing. A lot of drummers, when they are starting out, feel it’s important to play rim shots and cymbal crashes for accents and clobber everything. You don’t really need to do all that.

Take big band leaders such as Duke Ellington, Maria Schneider and Bill Holman. You have to play differently in each one of those bands. Arrangers usually have a drummer in mind when they are arranging. You can kind of feel who they had in mind just by the way they write. For me, Holman had Mel Lewis in his head. Ellington had Sonny Greer in the beginning, then Sam Woodyard and Louie Bellson. You hear what the drummer is going to do, what they are going to provide, how they are going to be the glue for that band.

In a piano trios like Evans’, that is a little different. The creativity and spontaneity of the playing are what inspires the pianist.

SOUND CONSIDERATIONS

Another important thing to take into consideration when playing with different ensembles is the sound you get as a drummer and the sound you provide for the band. The sound of your drums is very important. A lot of higher tuning in big band gets lost because there are so many voices of all different ranges. I prefer to have the drums tuned a little lower in a big band in order to feel like the drums can get under the ensemble for support. However, every band is different.

When I first went on the road with Woody Herman’s big band, I took larger drums. It was more of a lower-tuning big band sound. Later, when I went back to sub, I took a smaller, bebop-styled drum set with a 20-inch bass drum. It was tuned just a bit higher, so that it was still under the band but it was higher tuning for quicker statements and reactions from the drums for the music.

In trios, I have been blessed with playing with some of the world’s greatest bass players. I want to hear them, so I don’t want to tune my bass drum in a range that is going to swallow up any of their sound. I try to stay out of their range. I feather the bass drum in all situations, except in a Bill Evans-type of trio. I’ll be *thinking* of feathering the bass drum, but I won’t always do it in that type of setting.

Feathering the bass drum means playing quietly. You’ll bring the beater not even an inch away the head and think of a feather touching the bass drum head. Every bass player I’ve played with (with the exception of perhaps two) have appreciated the fact that my bass drum sound blends with their bass, providing a foundation for the time together.

One night I got a cramp in my leg, so I lifted my foot off the bass drum pedal to loosen up my ankle during a tune. After two bars, Ray Brown turned to me and said, “What’s the matter, your foot broke?”

DB

Drummer Jeff Hamilton’s trio album *Catch Me If You Can* is available on Capri Records. Visit hamiltonjazz.com.

Marty Ehrlich's Bass Clarinet Solo on 'Dance No. 5'

In 2018, Marty Ehrlich released the album *Trio Exaltation* (Clean Feed), which presented a diverse mix of styles in a three-musician format. Playing without a chordal instrument is both challenging and liberating, and for this album Ehrlich makes a point of approaching that in varying ways for the different songs. "Dance No. 5" is a marked contrast to much of the other material on *Trio Exaltation* in that bassist John Hébert sticks mostly to a 5/4 vamp over which Ehrlich improvises on bass clarinet. This transcription, which includes Ehrlich's solo and a sketch of the accompanying vamp, has been transposed up a ninth for Bb bass clarinet.

Ehrlich has opted to play almost completely modally on this track, sticking to the E aeolian scale. We do hear a couple of major sixths (measures 18–19, 31), which are generally used to decorate the seventh (D), and a #4/5 passing tone in bar 31, but that's very little chromaticism for a jazz horn player. It's especially curious since in the bass vamp there is a major third on the E chord, but Ehrlich has chosen to play the entire thing like it's in E minor.

By not doing much with scale choices and chromaticism, Ehrlich draws upon other interesting aspects of his playing, such as his use of rhythms and range — both areas in which he excels.

Notice how long Ehrlich takes to get us to the lowest note of his solo (low G in bar 21) as well as the highest (the F# in measure 26). Also note how the low G only recurs once (in bar 24) and the high F# never reappears. He has waited until just after halfway through his improvisation to hit us with the full range (almost three octaves).

Observe how Ehrlich slowly expands the range from the very beginning of his solo and gradually brings it back down again, creating a long arc of sorts. This is a subtle means of generating musical movement, one that creates a definite sense of traveling and arriving. It makes the repeated notes at the end (which could be heard as the ultimate condensing of range) sound like a natural conclusion, the place we were headed for all along.

In regard to rhythms, Ehrlich has subtle ways of leading us somewhere and bringing us back. Notice how free he is within the "5" meter and how he varies the beginnings and



ERIKA KAPIN PHOTOGRAPHY

Marty Ehrlich

endings of his phrasings. In spite of this variation, or perhaps because of it, Ehrlich produces cohesion by making most of his phrases about two bars long (with the exception of the initial and final phrases, and measures 10–12, 17 and 35–37).

By starting off with one measure, Ehrlich is making his subsequent phrases go from the weak bar (the C6) to the strong bar. This creates a strong resolution, but since he doesn't land on the downbeat and stop, it sounds more fluid (and makes the odd meter feel less rigid).

When Ehrlich does change the phrasing, the sense of resolution gets flipped around. Notice how in bars 13–14 and 15–16 he's playing from the strong measure to the weak one. The single-bar phrase at bar 17 flips it back around again.

For bar 28, Ehrlich enters way late, which makes the phrase spill into the third bar, which reverses it yet again. As a result, he's playing from strong to weak bars again at bars 31 and 32. But for measures 35–37, Ehrlich makes it unclear if this is a three-bar phrase or a one-

bar phrase followed by a two-bar phrase. This ambiguity perfectly sets up the final bars, which sound like single-bar phrases, but since the rhythm has been ratcheted down to being eighth-note-based, it could also be interpreted as a slow three-bar phrase.

Check out how 16th notes are used in this solo. For the first dozen measures they rarely appear, and when they do they're generally ornamenting an eighth-note line. In bar 13, we hear the first instance of an actual 16th-note line, and it's only for a single beat. Ehrlich does make them more prominent, but gradually, so

that by measures 31–32, where his entire phrase consists of 16ths, we sense that we've been led there. Then, he makes an abrupt rhythmic shift in the final bars.

Once again, Ehrlich's creative manipulation of rhythm and range on "Dance No. 5" is subtle stuff, but it's highly effective in shaping a modally based improvisation. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a New York musician currently working on an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass. Find out more at jimidurso.com.

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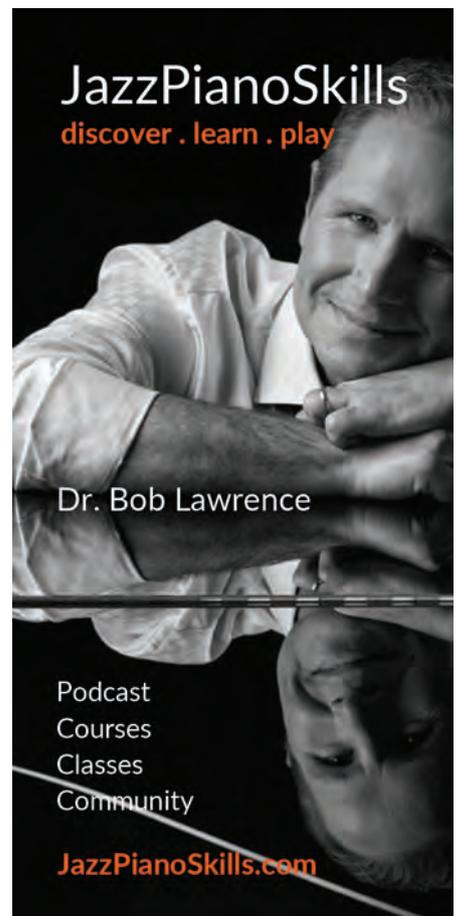


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P. Mauriat Grand Dreams 285 Saxophones

Cognac Lacquer Finish, Straight Tone Holes

P Mauriat's new Grand Dreams alto and tenor saxophones are more than just incredibly responsive, professional-quality instruments. They are also stunning to look at.

Featuring yellow brass construction throughout, the PMSA-285 and PMST-285 are the first standard P. Mauriat models to offer a striking cognac lacquer finish on a body tube featuring all straight tone holes. This combination produces a clean sound with lots of body and warmth. Both saxophones feature beautifully detailed hand-engraving on the bell and bow to complement the design.

I outfitted the Grand Dreams tenor with a D'Addario Select Jazz D8M mouthpiece and a Rigotti Gold #3 reed for play-testing. I got great results with this straightahead setup, which allowed me to explore the horn's full resonant capacity.

I started the session playing long tones in the horn's middle register (the G–C range), which gave me an initial sense of its invitingly wide "spread." Attribute that quality to the Grand Dreams' straight tone holes, which tend to allow for more sonic flexibility — as opposed to the increased focus you typically get from saxophones with rounded or rolled tone holes). With a spread like this, saxophonists will be able to use their chops and adjust their setups to access a wide range of tones, from dark and unadorned to bright and sizzling, with many shades of subtlety in between.

As I crescendoed and decrescendoed my way through a series of long tones in the tenor's low, middle and high registers, I discovered that the

Grand Dreams provided an enormous dynamic range to work within. It took everything I could put into it, and it bloomed with a flourish of colorful overtones when pushed hard. This horn is capable of explosive, punchy sound and likely won't stifle anyone's attempt to achieve maximum volume and brilliance on it. It's an expressive wailer, a real growler. It's also a great subtone horn in that it plays with a full, sweet tone even at whisper-quiet volumes.

P. Mauriat made ergonomic improvements to the key placement on Grand Dreams series saxophones for increased accuracy and speed. The tenor felt completely natural in my hands, which is about the most you can ask for in a new horn design. Everything felt right in place and easy to access, from low B-flat up to front F and high F-sharp.

Grand Dreams alto and tenor saxophones come with P. Mauriat's Super VI neck — another key to their enormous dynamic range — and black pearl key touches. An ABS Pro contoured hard case is included.

—Ed Enright

pmauriatmusic.com



IK Multimedia Uno Synth Pro

Dual-Filter, 3-Oscillator Paraphonic Design

With the new Uno Synth Pro from IK Multimedia, anyone can create virtually *any* analog synthesizer sound, no matter how fat or far-out it might be. Building upon the success of the company's Uno Synth, it breaks new ground in the synth market with its unique dual-filter, three-oscillator paraphonic design, 256 presets, 64-step sequencer, studio-grade effects, and expanded CV/Gate and audio connections designed for interaction with a Eurorack or other modular system.

The Uno Synth Pro is available in two form factors: a stage-ready version with a 37-key premium Fatar semi-weighted keybed and heavy-duty metal housing; or the ultra-portable, USB-powered Uno Synth Pro Desktop with capacitive keyboard. Under the hood, they are one and the same in terms of sound production. For this review, I play-tested the stage model, and it easily lived up to its reputation of producing incredibly flexible and realistic-sounding analog synth tones. It's also built like a tank.

The Uno Synth Pro's analog oscillators offer continuously variable waveshape, including pulse-width modulation. They can be hard-synced for more harmonically complex tones and oscillator FM. There's also ring modulation and a white noise generator.

In addition to the original Uno Synth's two-pole OTA multimode filter, Uno Synth Pro adds a new SSI two/four-pole LP filter with self-oscillation. The dual filters can be used in series or parallel with invertible phase for a total of 24 filter modes.

Uno Synth Pro offers two full ADSR envelopes, one dedicated to the filter and the other to amplitude, with both available to modulate every-



thing. Two LFOs can create classic synth vibrato, wah and tremolo, and more complex modulations.

A 16-slot modulation matrix lets users easily design sophisticated modulation schemes, with both internal and external sources, including MIDI controllers.

UNO Synth Pro can recreate the filter sounds of the most famous classic synths as well as deliver fresh new options to your sonic palette. The semi-weighted keybed is a fantastic addition that will prove invaluable to players who want to get onboard with incorporating mono synth sounds into their live shows.

—Ed Enright

ikmultimedia.com

1. Shallow & Sleek

Godin Guitars has debuted its Fairmount CH Composer QIT acoustic guitar as part of the Godin Acoustic Series. It has a comfortable concert hall body shape, with a shallow depth and sleek silhouette. The body is an all-mahogany construction with a semi-gloss finish. The top and back are solid mahogany with layered mahogany sides. The guitar also has a mahogany neck, offering rich and rounded tones, and features a Richlite fretboard, an ebony bridge and a 25.5-inch-long scale for added brightness and harmonic richness.

More info: godinguitars.com

2. Ready To Rocket

Ampeg Rocket Bass combos deliver superior performance in a lightweight package with 1960s style. The five new combos offer essential Ampeg features, including three-band EQ, signature ultra-hi/ultra-lo switches (RB-112 and up) and the new Super Grit Technology overdrive circuit. XLR line outputs, auxiliary inputs and headphone outputs ensure the Rocket Bass combos are always ready to rock.

More info: ampeg.com

3. Barrels of Bomba

Latin Percussion has launched its Barriles De Bomba, traditional drums that have been used for more than 400 years in the Puerto Rican folkloric music called *bomba*. Available in two sizes, the 26-inch-tall Barriles are constructed from two-ply Siam oak with natural rawhide heads fitted using traditional rims.

More info: lpmusic.com

4. Full-Size Monophonic

Korg has announced its MS-20 FS full-size Monophonic Synthesizer. This is the 1:1 scale reissue of the MS-20, reborn in four limited-edition colors: green, white, blue and black. Recreating the original MS-20 while adding powerful new features, the MS-20 FS is a 37-key classic analog monosynth with patch bay, external signal processor, MIDI in and USB. The original MS-20, unveiled in 1978, played a vital role Korg's history as a synthesizer brand.

More info: korg.com

5. Clarinet Ligs Add Color

Optimum clarinet ligatures from Vandoren are now available in two new finishes: pink-gold and black. The two new finishes provide slight variation in tone color and response, letting the advancing player fine-tune their sound even further. The black-finish Optimum ligature is available for B-flat and bass clarinet, while the pink-gold finish model is currently available for B-flat clarinet only.

More info: vandoren.com

6. Carter McLean Stick

The ProMark Carter McLean Signature drumstick features a custom tip shape that provides a range of sonic possibilities on any playing surface, depending on the angle of attack. It features a diameter between 5A and 5B and a slightly increased length.

More info: daddario.com



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JUSTIN ARAMATI

Pat Donaher leads Lexington (Massachusetts) High's Large Ensemble at the 2017 Charles Mingus High School Competition & Festival. Also pictured are student saxophonists Alice Troop (left), Chris Morse, Dylan Turner, Noah Jacobson and Tony Kim, and vocalist Chris Ross.

Donaher Keeps Lexington High School Swinging

ALTO SAXOPHONIST AND EDUCATOR PAT

Donaher brings a wealth of jazz experience to his teaching gig at Lexington High School just outside of Boston.

The Cambridge, Massachusetts, native and Eastman School of Music graduate was a highly engaged member of the New York jazz scene starting in 1999 before eventually returning to Boston to study large-scale composition with the legendary Bob Brookmeyer at New England Conservatory. Donaher has been recognized by ASCAP for excellence in jazz composition. And he has released four albums as a composer and bandleader, the most recent of which, *Occasionally*, came out this spring.

Donaher has a special affinity for the classic big band repertoire of Charles Mingus, Duke Ellington and Count Basie, a triumverate of iconic composers whose contributions to the classic jazz canon make up the heart of his well-funded school district's jazz programs, which started in the early 1980s under the direction of educator Jeff Leonard. Donaher currently runs Lexington High School's jazz program, teaching improvisation and overseeing two big bands and two small groups along with his colleague Justin Aramati. Toby Forman, an alumnus of the program, leads Lexington's middle school jazz groups.

Lexington High students immerse themselves in charts provided by Jazz at Lincoln Center's annual Essentially Ellington com-

petition, where they've finished as high as third place. They work up Mingus charts for the annual Charles Mingus High School Competition & Festival, which was won three times by Lexington High's Large Ensemble and three times by the school's smaller combos.

"Now, having Lincoln Center sending Ellington charts to us every year, and also working with the non-profit Let My Children Hear Music foundation to help promote the Mingus legacy — it's such a great place for a big band program to start," Donaher said. "There's nothing better.

"The stage band approach to jazz education that was the model for a lot of high school and college programs for so many years just kind of whitewashed it — pun intended," he continued. "And I think Jazz at Lincoln Center, with its focus on repertory, is a great gift. If you're teaching large-ensemble *anything*, it's got to be repertory-based. And putting the most important music at the center of the curriculum is critical."

Pre-pandemic, Essentially Ellington provided Lexington High students with the unique experience of taking a real-life trip to the jazz capital of the world.

"There's nothing like going to New York and walking to the Vanguard, walking to the Jazz Standard when it existed, and hearing music in that great environment," Donaher said. "And, in some cases, students interact

with the musicians. When you have a conversation with Miguel Zenón's piano player, or whomever, and you see them hanging out in between sets, it humanizes jazz."

Another way to humanize jazz is to bring some of the genre's top practitioners directly to the students. Drummer Allison Miller, pianist Myra Melford, trumpeter Jason Palmer and pianist Carmen Staaf have all visited Lexington High and shared their wisdom with Donaher's students.

Miller, Palmer and Staaf also contributed to *Occasionally* as members of the top-tier sextet Donaher assembled to perform pieces he wrote to commemorate special occasions. The group also includes bassist Tony Scherr and guitarist Tim Watson.

"This is the first album I've made that focuses more on compositions than improvisations," Donaher writes in his liner notes. "Over the years I feel that some of the best tunes I've written have been for special occasions, gifts for family or friends."

Occasionally is an occasion unto itself, a dual showcase for Donaher's alto playing and compositional chops that puts the spotlight on his own continuing musical development.

"The best thing you can do as an educator is model, and I'm trying to get better," he said. "That's all I know. And then you try to communicate that in a way that audiences like and the students can learn from, too." —*Ed Enright*

Brian Bromberg

Brian Bromberg, Arizona-born but long California-based, has often resided in smooth jazz circles. But the bassist, now 60, sports a hefty discography under his own name and as a sideman, one covering a wide variety of jazz situations, from accompanying Stan Getz and Diana Krall to Bromberg's tribute albums to three J's: Jaco, Jimi and Jobim. Quarantining on his rambling property in Ojai, the idyllic town north of Los Angeles, Bromberg focused his creative energies on three distance-tracking album projects during the past year, the newest being *A Little Driving Music* (Mack Avenue). For Bromberg's first Blindfold Test, we met on the patio for grass-fed beef burgers on the grill and an eight-course menu of tune-spinning.

Brecker Brothers

"Slang" (*Out Of The Loop*, GRP, 1994) Randy Brecker, trumpet; Michael Brecker, tenor sax; James Genus, bass, Steve Jordan, drums

Randy Brecker on trumpet, but not playing Randy Brecker licks. I've been playing with Randy forever. I've known him since I was 17. He's on a bunch of my records. We've done a ton of gigs all over the world together. What year was this recorded? Randy has changed a lot since then. Randy got so overshadowed by his brother, which is kind of sad for me because Randy deserves the recognition. Randy's a badass who changed the world. Who's on bass? OK. Sounds great. He had a different approach to his notes. That's why I couldn't pick him out, but it feels fantastic. If that came out now, it would be still really fresh.

John Scofield

"Radio" (*Swallow Tales*, ECM, 2020), Scofield, guitar; Steve Swallow, electric bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

Scofield. It's not just his lines, which are really inside-outside. He's one of these guys who changes our serving suggestions. It's not just his phrasing, it's how much weight is on every note. Everything's behind the beat in the right way. You know, there's so much weight in his notes because it's on the backside, but it's all feel, it's all vibe — besides the fact that, harmonically, he just does all this cool shit. The bass player? Couldn't even tell you. [afterwards] Steve, he is a great cat. The first time I saw him play was a long, long time ago. And he used to play only upright. And then he switched to electric bass and he played with a pick. At first, I was just like, "What, are you gonna join Quiet Riot or something?" And then you hear him play, and it was just like, wow. He's a really fluid player.

Chris Potter Circuit Trio

"Serpentine" (*Sunrise Reprise*, Edition, 2021) Potter, tenor saxophone; James Francies, keyboards; Eric Harland, drums.

This is a new recording, with a retro sound. The saxophonist reminds me of a few different cats, but he's a monster. I'll get myself in trouble to start giving your names. Chris Potter, Bill Evans ... Yeah, [Potter] is ridiculous. It's impossible to not hear Michael Brecker in him. But his approach to that is natural, obviously different than Brecker's. But who plays like that since Brecker, with that kind of fluidity and ownership of his instrument?

Super Bass

"Mack The Knife" (*SuperBass*, Telarc, 1997) Ray Brown, John Clayton, Christian McBride, acoustic bass.

For years, Ron Carter and Buster Williams did that thing together, where Ron played the higher-pitched upright bass [piccolo bass]. They would do a lot of stuff like this, but I'm thinking more John Clayton and Christian McBride [pauses] and, well, it's probably Ray. Ray, as we politely say,



is a fucking freight train. All these guys are great. They all came from the Ray Brown school. So here's the guru and then here's the offspring. Christian's like the next Ray Brown except with more chops, more facility, and same with Clayton. Ray was it. He was undeniable.

Weather Report

"Punk Jazz" (*Mr. Gone*, Columbia, 1977) Jaco Pastorius, bass; Tony Williams, drums; Wayne Shorter, saxophone; Joe Zawinul, keyboard.

It's Weather Report. Joe Zawinul's presence on stage was so powerful. The thing about innovators is that it's not what they play, but how they play it. One note made him sound so different from everybody else. [Regarding Bromberg's Jaco tribute album] I'm not trying to be Jaco. I knew Jaco. We used to hang out, and we played. And, you know, he was the first electric bass player that even got me to take electric bass seriously. I was totally an upright guy.

Thundercat

"Inferno" (*Drunk*, 2017) Thundercat a.k.a. Stephen Bruner, bass; Flying Lotus, production and programming; Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, strings; Dennis Hamm, keyboards.

I would have no idea who this is ... Thundercat, OK. Very inventive. Very creative. Harmonically, it's phenomenal. And it's weird, reminds me of '70s experimental rock music. It's the same inside-outside weird stuff, but harmonically, it's really deep. That's awesome.

Marc Johnson

"For A Thousand Years" (*The Sound Of Summer Running*, Verve, 1998), Johnson, bass; Bill Frisell, Pat Metheny, guitar; Joey Baron, drums.

I hear Bill Frisell and Pat Metheny in there. Bass is tough. It doesn't sound like Eddie Gomez, but I hear Gomez's influence there. Intonation-wise, it reminds me of Gary Peacock. [afterwards] Marc is the reason I got the Stan Getz gig when I was 18. He recommended me. Marc is really a lyrical cat. The Bill Evans band with Marc and Joe LaBarbera was fantastic. Since Bill passed, Marc didn't get the recognition he deserves. He's the real deal, and he opened the door for me to have the career that I have.

Marcus Miller

"Keep 'em Runnin'" (*Laid Black*, Blue Note, 2018), Miller, electric bass.

That's Marcus Miller. Obviously, he's incredibly well-respected and a star, but there's a whole group of his followers that have no idea how much of a bad-ass he really is, how deep he is as a musician. He's very underrated as a fretless player, because it doesn't sound like Marcus Miller, because he's not doing this jazz bass slap. I don't think people get the depth of his artistry.

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.

"Terrific new album. This is a winner. One of those records that we'll play a lot of."

- Michael Jewett, WEMU

"Among the best CDs of the year."

- Michael G. Nastos, WCBN

"Among ten things that made the Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival magical: The Lunar Octet."

- The Detroit News

"Favorite Performance at the Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival: The Lunar Octet. The perfect melding of the elements of Latin and jazz. The horns played the most wonderful, modern sounds, harmonic modulations, and stark and searching melodic lines, while the rhythm was unrelentingly Latin." - LA Jazz Scene

"One of the most innovative and dynamic jazz groups ever." - METRO

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"Some of the most intense, imaginative music being made, and some of the hottest percussion this side of the Amazon." - Ann Arbor News



"...likely the most universally listenable band that performs anywhere. Strong comradery, shared vision, and high-level musicianship come together to make hearing their truly original music so special." - Allmusic.com



MUSICIANS:

Brandon Cooper: trumpet, flugelhorn, vocal

Stephen Hiltner: alto saxophone, Bb clarinet

Paul VornHagen: tenor + soprano saxophone, alto clarinet

Sam Clark: guitar

Keaton Royer: piano

Jeff Dalton: acoustic bass, electric bass, vocal

Jon Krosnick: drums

Aron Kaufman: congas, bongos, vocal

Olman Piedra: timbales, percussion

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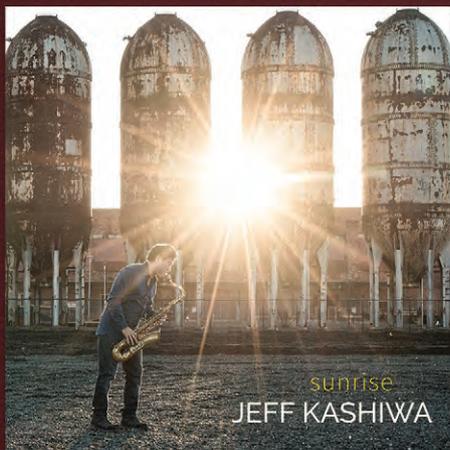


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