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DOWNBEAT

SEPTEMBER 2021

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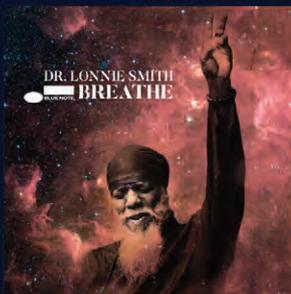
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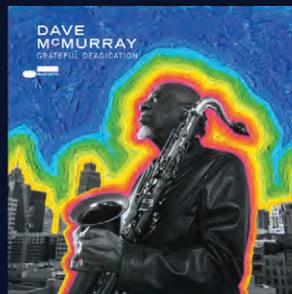
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Sings Nina

BY AYANA CONTRERAS

Ledisi's connection to the High Priestess of Soul dates back to her youth. Growing up, she said her mother would wake her up to the sound of Simone's "Mississippi Goddam." And in her darkest moments, Ledisi has turned, time and again, to Simone's music. "She became a mood for me ... and she just kept interrupting my life."



Soul modernist Ledisi taps into the spirit of the late Nina Simone for her new recording.

Cover photo by Ron T. Young

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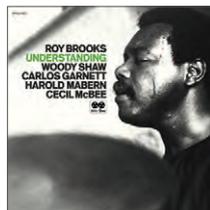
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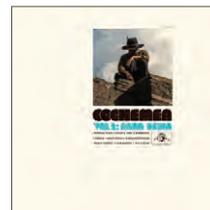
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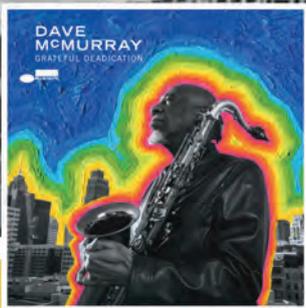
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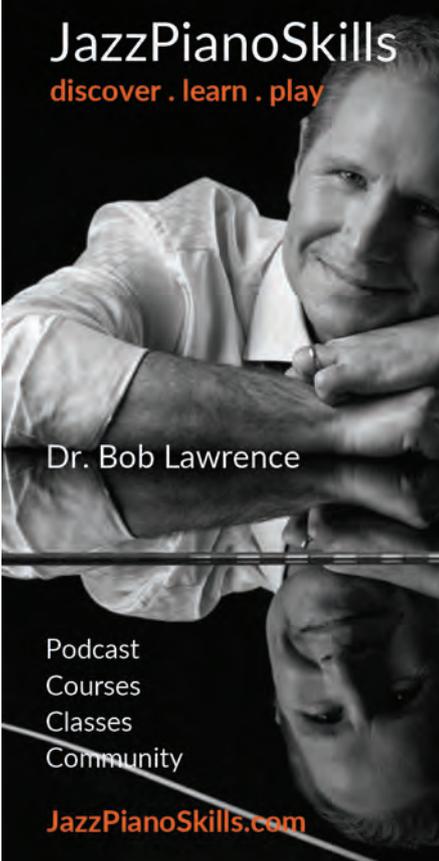


"MY GRATEFUL DEAD ADVENTURE BEGAN A FEW YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO PLAY A SHOW WITH THE WOLF BROS. THE MORE I LISTENED, THE MORE I KNEW THESE SONGS WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME A VEHICLE FOR MY JAZZ EXPRESSION." ~ DAVE McMURRAY

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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



Blues Royalty: The late Koko Taylor, undisputed queen of the blues, shares a laugh with Bruce Iglauer, founder of Alligator Records.

In a Chicago State of Mind

THIS ISSUE OF DOWNBEAT HAS A FEW Chicago-centric slants. It wasn't planned. It just happened.

If you've ever wondered why Chicago is so important to this magazine and the music we cover, there are many reasons.

First, this is where DownBeat is headquartered. The magazine came into existence shortly before Benny Goodman exploded as a star in the mid-1930s. He was a local hero. We were the local magazine with access to him. We both took off. The rest is history.

Chicago was also one of the first places to import jazz and jazz musicians who made their way north along the Mississippi River from New Orleans. Remember, during prohibition, the bootleggers and illegal saloons of Chicago brought some in of the greatest talent from this fledgling music called jazz into a fast-growing town with a thirst for booze and good music, especially Joseph "King" Oliver and his protégé Louis Armstrong.

The same is true for the blues.

Chess Records, based in the city, served as a staple for the blues from the early '50s to the late '60s, recording the legends like Muddy Waters, a young Buddy Guy, the great Howlin' Wolf, Etta James and so many more.

And 50 years ago, a young music fanatic named Bruce Iglauer started his own blues legacy when Alligator Records released the debut LP of Hound Dog Taylor and the Blues Rockers.

The talent has been here. The clubs have been here — from the old Checkerboard Lounge and Wise Fools Pub to today's Buddy Guy's Legends, Rosa's Lounge, The Kingston

Mines, B.L.U.E.s and so many more. Alligator Records has been here to capture it all.

After some 350 releases, we're thrilled to wish Iglauer and the label happy birthday with a tribute, beginning on page 36, to just a few of the classic albums Alligator has delivered.

There are certainly many more. Shoot me your favorites at editor@downbeat.com.

I've got a few top of mind, like The Holmes Brothers' *State Of Grace* from 2007, loaded with great songs and make-you-cry harmonies, especially when they turn Cheap Trick's "I Want You To Want Me" from a stadium rock pop hit into a quiet blues prayer. And then there's Lucky Peterson's *Lucky Strike* from 1989, a coming-out party for the amazing multi-instrumentalist and vocalist whom we lost in 2020 at the age of 55.

OK, one more (and we could go all day): Eddie "The Chief" Clearwater's *West Side Strut* from 2008. That's the height of house rockin'.

We also have a great Indie Life article on page 46 featuring Julia A. Miller, the new owner of Delmark Records, another Chicago institution. Miller represents the future of jazz and blues recording in this town, and, as the interview reveals, she seems able and ready. We wish her all the success in the world to carry on the great legacy of that label.

And finally, on page 60, we wish Doug Beach a happy retirement from Elmhurst University in Chicago's western suburbs. Beach is an undersung hero of jazz education who has schooled and mentored some of the Midwest's most promising young musicians over the past 40-plus years. Thank you, Doug!

DB

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Chords & Discords

Missing Mark!

We subscribe to the paper issue monthly and were glad to see the special section "We Love Vinyl." Sadly, Frank Alkyer and Daniel Margolis dropped the ball and missed the new reissue from the stellar jazz label MPS — the holy grail of jazz vocal LPs, a newly reissued edition of Mark Murphy's *Midnight Mood*, a superb record at his peak. On the website Upcoming Vinyl, this great record from MPS is shown with many others in your article. I have been watching DownBeat — looking for a call out to share awareness of this masterpiece. Sadly



it was omitted. Listen to "Sconsolato!" You'll agree "We Love Vinyl!" has a serious omission.
PAUL PHILLIPS VIA FACEBOOK

70 Years Strong

Hi, DownBeat! Glad to see you are still in business. I first started reading it more than 70 years ago. Your magazine gave me the information that I needed back then in order to stay and grow with my love of jazz. I moved in '53 to New Orleans and, as a result, I find myself embracing trad and big band for the most part. If I can tap my foot and hum along with it, I'm satisfied. I've stayed true to jazz since being introduced to it by your magazine.

VAN D. YOUNG
SYRACUSE, INDIANA

Editor's Note: Ken, we have copies! We'll reach out and get them to you. For the rest of the research world, we are always happy to hear from you and help out as much as humanly possible. We look forward to a day when ever issue of DownBeat is digitized for research — and posterity.

Corrections & Clarifications

In the past two issues of DownBeat, we have not had space on the Chords & Discords page for corrections and clarifications. Let's catch up now! Where it made sense, the following mistakes have been corrected in our digital editions. As always, DownBeat regrets any and all errors:

- On page 23 of the June issue, bassist Carlo DeRosa was misidentified in our cover article on Vijay Iyer. DeRosa, Iyer and Tyshawn Sorey were the trio jamming some 20 years ago at Iyer's apartment.
- On page 42 of the June issue, DownBeat critic John McDonough mentioned "overdubbing sounds" in his four-star review of Vincent Herring's *Preaching To The Choir*. The production team at Smoke Sessions Records clarifies that this was a live recording with no overdubbing.
- On page 38 of the August issue, multi-instrumentalist Anna Webber was listed in the Clarinet category of the DownBeat Critics Poll. She does not play clarinet. As Webber said on social media, "Please do not call me for clarinet gigs." See page 20 for an insightful article on Webber.
- On page 55 of the August issue, we misspelled the name of bassist Derron Douglas in a four-star review of the Keith Brown Trio's album *African Ripples*.

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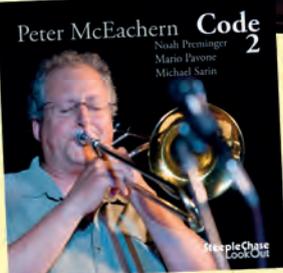
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Blood, Sweat & Scans

My name is Kevin Engelking, and I am an associate producer for Crew Neck Productions. Our latest documentary is about the group Blood, Sweat & Tears and, in particular, their heyday in the late '60s/early '70s.

In our research, we came across an issue of DownBeat where the group was featured on the cover, as well as a corresponding cover story. The issue is from Sept. 17, 1970. We have a cover image and an article scan, both of which are of particularly poor quality. I'm hoping this issue exists in DownBeat's archives and that we might get a better look at the article and the pictures. The article talks about the band's July 25, 1970, concert at Madison Square Garden with Miles Davis, which was their first major show after returning from an Eastern European tour, and the show was picketed by Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies. We'd love to know if more photos of the concert exist, as well as any photos taken of the protesters outside MSG. Both would be extremely helpful in telling our story.

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EUGENE PETRUSHANSKY



Traces of *gaita*, and other Afro-Venezuelan rhythms like *chimbangle*, can be heard throughout Benito Gonzalez's discography.

Gonzalez Explores Freedom

With a myriad of perspectives to draw on as a Venezuelan-born, New York-based jazz pianist, Benito Gonzalez considers the idea of freedom, one of America's and jazz music's most cherished values, on his fifth recording of originals, *Sing To The World*.

Gonzalez's relationship to freedom is multifaceted and surprising, and those qualities shine through. Shaped by his own personal journey toward greater self-expression, and his musings on a world that, in his eyes, is increasingly jeopardizing people's rights, *Sing To The World* addresses freedom with a ferociously melodic and often rhythmically explosive jazz approach.

Gonzalez was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela, to parents immersed in traditional Venezuelan folk music. It was through them and his musically saturated Venezuelan culture that his own interest in music was piqued.

"We had musicians on my father's and my mother's side," Gonzalez said. "And from my mother's side, they used to play Venezuelan music like this rhythm called *gaita*. So, my father's side was mostly African, the African music was drum. It's Venezuelan, but it's really African music, so I learned as a kid how to play this drum, and I play *gaita* with my aunt

and uncles, so that's what I knew since I was 3 years old."

Traces of *gaita*, and other Afro-Venezuelan rhythms like *chimbangle*, can be heard throughout Gonzalez's discography, including on *Sing To The World* — and they have a unique tie to Gonzalez's theme of freedom, as they many of these rhythmic traditions originate from West Africa and were disseminated through the Caribbean and Venezuelan slave trades — not unlike how many of the underpinnings of jazz were spread throughout the United States.

But, it wasn't until he was 10 years old that Gonzalez was first given a cassette tape of American jazz. He noticed just how related it was to the Afro-Venezuelan music he was raised on — and was grabbed by how it was also infused European musical ideas.

"A friend of mine gave me a tape and it was 'Afro Blue' played by McCoy Tyner on solo piano. I never heard anyone playing piano like that," Gonzalez said. "I kind of understood a little bit of the similarities because jazz also [has] African [roots]."

From his first listen to Tyner, who continues to be one of Gonzalez's biggest idols and whose tunes "Fly With The Wind" and "Song Of The New World" he tributes on *Sing To The*

World's title track, Gonzalez was hellbent on being a jazz piano player. Still, he struggled with feeling free enough to pursue that route because of how he was raised.

"I'm 10 years apart from my siblings. I was raised very different than they were. They were studying so much and working so hard. That's why probably why I'm in New York and they are still in Venezuela," Gonzalez said. "I don't like to be comfortable and stay in the same place so much. That's why I moved from my house when I was 15 years old, because I just didn't feel comfortable. [My parents] wanted me to be a lawyer, and I wanted to play piano."

In 1999, Gonzalez had the opportunity to come to the United States and eventually moved here permanently to pursue his music — an expression of personal freedom which he acknowledges would be more difficult to pull off in Venezuela. In fact, Venezuela and other countries like Russia — where Gonzalez's record label Rainy Day Records is based, and where he sees freedom being considerably constrained — served as further inspiration for this concept album.

"I'm noticing that people are looking for freedom everywhere," Gonzalez said.

—Alexa Peters



Hank Roberts convened his sextet for *Science Of Love*.

The Kaleidoscope of Hank Roberts

AT THE CUSP OF THE 1970S, WHEN HANK Roberts was a high school student in Terre Haute, Indiana, he aspired to be a jazz trombonist, a classical cellist and a blues guitarist. Ultimately, Roberts honed in on the cello, and during the '80s and '90s he emerged as an inspirational practitioner of that instrument via recordings and tours with Bill Frisell, Tim Berne, the string trio Arcado with bassist Mark Dresser and violinist Mark Feldman, and other members of the emergent so-called “downtown jazz” scene in New York. There were also several well-wrought leader albums that showcased his own poetic Americana-inflected jazz argot, harmonic acumen and rhythmic flair. In each context, Roberts projected a mighty arsenal of extended techniques, bowed and plucked, shape-shifting the cello into a veritable orchestra.

Roberts coalesces all the aforementioned styles and attributes on his most recent release, *Science Of Love* (Sunnyside), consisting primarily of a kaleidoscopic, 44-minute, 13-part suite titled “G.” Recorded in June 2017, it’s a bespoke, unified work tailored to the tonal personalities of a virtuoso sextet — trombonist Brian Drye, violinist Dana Lyn, woodwindist Mike McGinness, pianist Jacob Sacks and drummer Vinnie Sperrazza — whom Roberts, a father of four, met after responding to the 21st birthday of his youngest by moving to Brooklyn from Ithaca, New York. In spring 2018, Sacks and Sperrazza joined Roberts on *Congeries Of Ethereal Phenomena* (Newvelle

Records), an interactive encounter on which Roberts, functioning as the sole “horn,” efflorescently addresses six venturesome originals, an abstraction of Thelonious Monk’s “Evidence” and a swinging version of “Indiana” extrapolated onto Charlie Parker’s contrafact, “Donna Lee.”

He returned to Ithaca in 2019, where in June he spoke of his 2015 imperatives. “Although I was playing and recording, a limited group of people were hearing me,” Roberts said. “I wanted my work to be recognized and to try to make a living with it — and a sense of community by playing and communing with people on that level.”

Then 61, Roberts embarked on new projects with old friends like Berne, Michael Formanek and Marty Ehrlich, and with his next-generation Brooklyn collaborators, who deeply respected Roberts’ distinguished corpus. Soon thereafter, Drye invited Roberts — who was writing music for woodwind player Anna Webber and drummer Tomas Fujiwara — to play at Ibeam, the eminent creative music venue that he oversees in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn.

In short order, Roberts convened his sextet and began to conceive the music. “I thought of setting up a framework that would inspire and challenge each person, and bring them to a place of revelation where they can discover something and bring that excitement of discovery and self-discovery to the table,” he said.

“We would try things, and Hank made adjustments and new sections,” said Sacks, who

analogized interacting with Roberts to “playing with a great singer.” “It definitely wasn’t, ‘Here’s my piece; now we shall render it.’ It was definitely much more: ‘Who are these people? What are your sounds?’”

When we spoke, Roberts was anticipating a September tour with Frisell behind *Harmony* (Blue Note), their 10th record together, on which he sings (and plays cello) with vocalist Petra Haden and bassist Luke Bergman. Then he hopes to “set up work in New York,” where he intends to resume activity with the sextet and to follow up with Drye on the trombonist’s *Trio Love Call* (Open Stream) album with drummer Ches Smith. Other recent collaborations include Vancouver guitarist-oudist Gordon Grdina’s *The Marrow*, a jazz-Arabic-Persian oriented project that includes Roberts on Ejdeha and Safar-e-Daroon (Songlines); with Pipe Dream, an Italian quintet documented on an eponymously titled 2017 album (C.A.M. Jazz); and, separately, in duo with Pipe Dream’s trombonist, Filippo Vignato, documented on 2019’s *Ghost Dance* (C.A.M. Jazz)

“Not being with the people I connect with through music affected me,” Roberts said of his COVID experience, before breaking down the *Science Of Love* title. “It showed me how special it is to work together and communicate as we do. I’m interested in astrophysics, and enjoy looking at universal laws and principles that create life. That equates to love, too, and it’s one of the things that draws us to music.”

—Ted Panken

52nd Street

Unlacquered and unreal.





Aaron Myers has been a guiding light on Washington, D.C.'s bustling, yet underappreciated, jazz scene.

Aaron Myers' Burst of *Pride*

WHEN LISTENING TO AARON MYERS' engrossing new release, *The Pride Album*, it's nearly impossible not to think of the iconic novelist and essayist James Baldwin. Throughout the album, the Washington, D.C.-based singer, songwriter and pianist delivers songs bursting with personal and political poignancy, capped off with narrative and emotional clarity. And in conversation, Myers is as defiant about his bisexual orientation as he is about his Blackness.

Although Myers doesn't cite Baldwin as a songwriting influence, he says he listened to the writer's legendary debates and interviews constantly during his five-mile daily walks throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Myers applauds Baldwin's tenacity at unspooling his multifaceted perspective as a Black gay man contending with white supremacy in America.

"[Baldwin] articulated things in a space where it was educational and unapologetic," Myers said on an early May afternoon inside D.C.'s Busboys & Poets restaurant and bookstore. "And it was meant for you to fully understand his plight in which no one could leave the conversation without knowing the difficulties or the love that he was experiencing."

Myers enlivens his lyrics, depicting America's current racial strife ("The New Jim Crow") and clenched-teethed resolve in the face of adversarial forces ("Don't Ask Me To Smile") with a gospel-fueled jazz sensibility that betrays his Goodlow, Texas, church upbringing.

"I also think about those old Black educators who taught in the school before integration. They always wanted you to be prepared so that no matter what audience you had to stand in front of, you were going to be solid," Myers said of the inspiration behind his searing rendition of "Make Them Hear You."

On the seething ballad "Don't Ask Me To Smile," Myers reflects on witnessing some of his older family members having to smile while the proverbial boot of Jim Crow laws was stomping them to the ground. "I remember, often, my grandfather and grandmother had to smile in circumstances where there was nothing to smile at," he said. "Then I had to think of myself, of the many times I actually wore a smile to mask my pain — and specifically in front of the person who's inflicting the pain. Then it goes further because they at times demand that you smile when they know they're inflicting pain. And

that's where I had to draw the line."

Other sociopolitical moments occur with Myers' brisling covers of the gospel hymn "Down By The Riverside" and Bobby Timmons' "Moanin'." In turn, Myers offers levity with the festival instrumental "Return To Spain (Ode To Chick Corea)" and the amorous ballad "Let's Fall In Love." In sequencing the album, Myers explains that he wanted *The Pride Album* to unfold as if it were a "day in the life."

The album's beginning conveys someone waking up in the morning and taking in all the gloomy news regarding various sociopolitical injustices. "If you're an empathetic individual, that news stays with you till about noon or 1 o'clock at least," Myers argued. The mood, however, brightens during the rest of the afternoon. But when the evening comes, darker clouds emerge once again. "That's when I thought about the times when you're forced to reconcile stuff dealing with personal relationships." Still, *The Pride Album* concludes on a bright note with the tender "Please Take Care Of You For Me" and the riveting, life-affirming title track.

Myers recorded *The Pride Album* during the pandemic as an act of survival. "I underestimated and undervalued how much my music was a part of my wellness plan in my mental health," he explained before revealing that he struggles with cardiophobia. "I had an unhealthy fixation on death. But through therapy, I understand that my fixation on death is really my fixation on things that I cannot control. So, we decided to shift as a part of my wellness plan to things that I did have control over. The circumstances that I have, I don't have control over all of it. But I do have control over articulating them."

Ever since moving from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., in 2008 — by way of working on Barack Obama's U.S. presidential campaign as a field organizer — Myers has been a guiding light on the city's bustling, yet underappreciated, jazz scene. In addition to being a singer and songwriter who performs regularly at Mr. Henry's Restaurant and other local venues, he hosts a jazz show on the Pacifica radio station WPFW-FM, and he's the co-founder (along with saxophonist Herb Scott, who appears on *The Pride Album*) of the jazz advocacy nonprofit Capitol Hill Jazz Foundation. Throughout those multiple, intersecting roles, Myers combines his knowledge of policy and politics with jazz to advocate for not just more resources to the arts, but also for human rights across the spectrum.

He says that part of his tireless work on the D.C. jazz scene is due to his own selfishness. "I wanted to ensure that whatever industry I was working in was the strongest industry," Myers said. "We need to be proud that we have exceptional musicians here in this area who are touring, and that there is actually a business here that can be encouraged and bolstered."

—John Murph



UZUMA RAO

From left: Qammar “Vicky” Abbas, Ali Riaz Baqar, Zohaib Hassan Khan, Ed “Tenderlonious” Cawthorne, Kashif Ali Dhani and Marek “Latarnik” Pędziwiatr

Coltrane, Ragas & Peace

A CHAIN REACTION IGNITED WHEN LONDON’S MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST and producer Ed “Tenderlonious” Cawthorne shared his passion for ragas with the founder of Astigmatic Records, Łukasz Wojciechowski. “Why go to India when you could record with Jaubi in Pakistan?” he replied. With the addition of Polish pianist and composer Marek “Latarnik” Pędziwiatr (EABS/Bloto), an extended line-up of Jaubi was born, leading to the spiritually informed album *Nafs At Peace*.

North Indian classical music, hip-hop, modal and spiritual jazz weave across the album’s tapestry, a collection of seven tracks that explore forgiveness, betterment and faith. On “Zari,” Zohaib Hassan Khan bows an elevating melody on the sarangi — a four-stringed instrument found in Punjabi folk music — which glides in tandem upon a cooler-than-ice groove. Abundant polyrhythms contribute to a climbing momentum on “Raga Gurji Todi,” while the title track rocks and sways like unsteady breath, conjuring images of pain and prayer. “Seek Refuge,” recorded in Norway with the Vox Humana Oslo Choir, is a divine and gentle opener. The album has a penchant for sensitivity, groove and even a few beat drops, with no air of predictability thanks to the skill of Ali Riaz Baqar on guitar, Khan on sarangi, Qammar “Vicky” Abbas on drums, Kashif Ali Dhani on tabla and vocals, Tenderlonious on flute and soprano saxophone) and Marek “Latarnik” Pędziwiatr on keyboards.

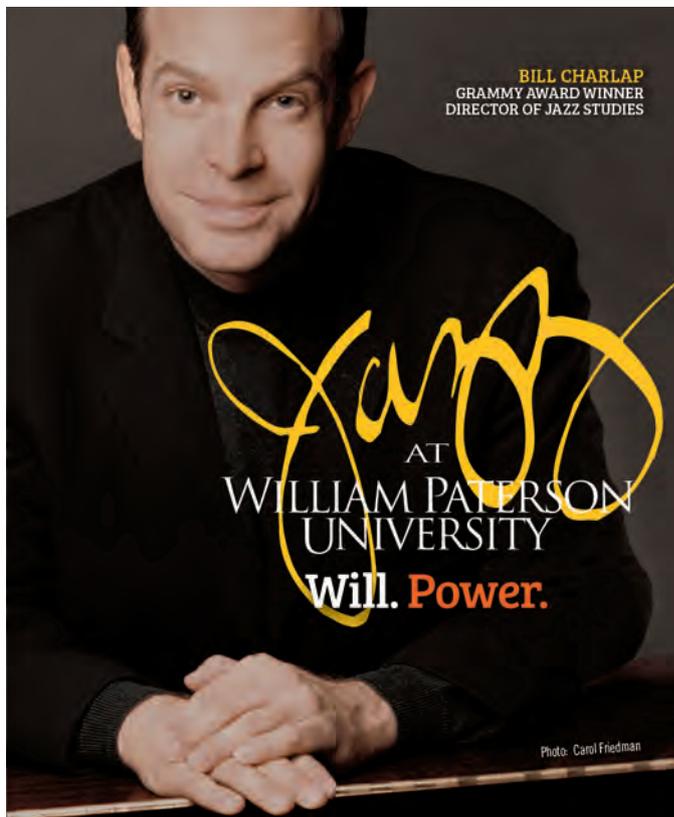
“People [in the band] were speaking to me individually about problems in their life at the time: deaths, divorce, drug addiction — really sad stuff,” Jaubi guitarist and lead composer Baqar said from his home in Melbourne, Australia. “We immersed ourselves into the music.” The album was recorded predominantly in Lahore, Pakistan. “The beauty about that trip was that the recording studio had access to a rooftop. We would only stop when the Islamic call to prayer happened. So we would go from one spiritual experience — playing music — to go outside and be with God.”

The concept of *Nafs* is a complex Islamic philosophy, which relates to the “self” in context of ego, desire, sin and much more. Although themes of Islam are entwined in *Nafs At Peace*, not all members of the band are Muslim. “I come from a religious family, but I’m not religious,” Baqar said.

“Two or three years before the album was recorded in April 2019, I was in a very dark period of my life and had stopped playing music.” Weighed down with questions, Baqar dedicated himself to studying the Quran.

With influences being many and varied, there was one reference point for Baqar that pivots this truly international collaboration. “I was listening to a lot of John Coltrane and, in particular, *A Love Supreme*,” he said. “I started reading the notes on that album; he wrote it as a way of praising God — and he was a student of Ravi Shankar, studying classical music and ragas. Today, when I listen to his music, I can hear elements of Indian music in there. I thought, why don’t I try to write a spiritual jazz raga, so to speak?”

—Tina Edwards



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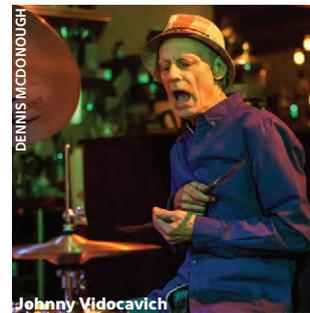
Edward "Kidd" Jordan



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Johnny Vidocovich



Helen Gillet



Mars Williams



Jameson barrel

SideBar New Orleans Provides Creative Outlets

"BEHOLD! THE SKY'S A SHINING SHELL!" Gazing out at the socially distanced crowd gathered at the open-air Broadside Theatre in New Orleans, where the moon was rising behind him in a purple-streaked twilight sky, the Seattle-based saxophonist Skerik took a moment to drink it all in. It was mid-April 2021, and for his first event in front of "real live individuals" since the pandemic started, he traveled from Seattle to play with two frequent co-conspirators: New Orleans-based cellist Helen Gillet and Portuguese percussionist Pedro Segundo. The three hit the stage like long-lost siblings, and proceeded to create a kaleidoscopic forcefield of sonic invocations and improvisations that levitated the players and audience alike. Which often happens at a Scatterjazz/SideBar show.

The Broadside show was the latest incarnation of SideBar, the little venue that could. Originally housed in a way-off-the-beaten-track watering hole, where lawyers from the nearby Orleans Parish Criminal Court once talked shop in the shadow of Orleans Parish Prison, SideBar became a nexus for a far-flung network of creative musicians, from local stalwarts like New Orleans free-jazz founding father Edward "Kidd" Jordan, James Singleton and Simon Berz to visiting artists like Hamid Drake, Mars Williams and Simon Lott. It also spawned multi-day events like SideFest, held during Jazz Fest season, where Gillet was scheduled to play her annual set of duos with Skerik and saxophonist Jeff Coffin in 2020 before the lockdown led to its cancellation.

"SideBar grew into an incredibly important place for the fertile exploration and advancement of music," said Gillet, who was an integral part of that scene from its earliest days. "And New Orleans musicians need that. All these players who are great at making people move their butts and party are extremely talented musicians,

and they need an outlet for their active, creative minds." And though the physical venue closed last August, SideBar has continued to provide that outlet.

Just days after the pandemic killed live music, when most venues across the country were struggling to adjust, SideBar founder/owner Keith Magruder started streaming high-quality shows from the shuttered venue. Last fall, those streams migrated to Magruder's own SidePorch, a block away from the old SideBar, where he hosted the 2021 SideFest In Exile, complete with a crawfish boil. Together with his Scatterjazz partner Andy Durta, a longtime curator of creative music in New Orleans, he took it to the next level by producing a regular Wednesday Scatterjazz/SideBar series at the Broadside, which also hosts special SJ/SB events. So, far from shrinking SideBar's reach, the pandemic has actually expanded it.

"Keith jumped on [streaming] right away," Gillet recalled. "Those first few weeks of the pandemic, when we were all losing our minds, I was just holding it together watching those SideBar streams. And while we were sad to see the SideBar go, it's the people not the place, and now we have the Broadside. It's gone from this tiny venue to this giant outdoor movie theater stage. The Broadside is a celebration of what the SideBar was."

What did the original venue offer? SideBar patriarch Jordan, 86, a 2021 United States Artists Fellow, summed it up succinctly: "We got to do what we do," the saxophonist said. Which was by design.

"We want everybody to do what they do," said Durta, who hopes to lure Jordan to the Broadside soon. "But Kidd, especially. It was a great honor to have him there so often, almost always in a setting he hadn't been in before."

Drawn by the freedom to explore their creativity in an intimate venue, world-class musi-

cians came from all over to play in a tiny room where the sound ricocheted off weird trapezoidal angles in unpredictable ways.

"Musicians loved that sound," Durta recalled. "Before the pandemic hit, we had a jazz educators conference, we had Instigator Fest, we had the great Dave Leibman. And when [Netherlands-based percussionist] Michael Vatcher came to town for the first time, we had Vatcher-Vest, a pun on 'fest.' Five nights of Michael playing with Phil Mitman, Audrey Chin and all kinds of great people."

Vatcher-Vest was just one of countless highlights in a room where Gillet's new duo project with Coffin was born, and Jordan traded road stories and riffs with fellow elder-statesman saxophonist Dickie Landry and rising star Aurora Nealand. And now that SideBar has metastasized into the Broadside, with an ever-growing livestream archive, it's opening the ears of larger audiences in New Orleans and around the world.

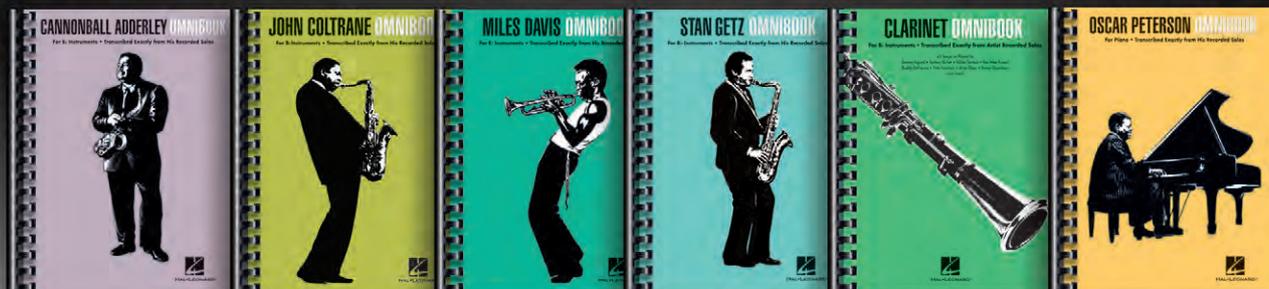
"If we can secure funding, fingers crossed, we can get SideBar back up and running," said Magruder, who's applied for a Shuttered Venue Operators Grant specifically created for small venues. "At a new, bigger and better location. Meanwhile, we've got the Broadside and SidePorch, which my neighbors really enjoy."

In whatever form it takes, SideBar may be just what the doctor ordered coming out of the pandemic. "I feel like accepting how difficult this time has been can truly be felt through improvised music," said Gillet, who was on deck to play a Scatterjazz/SideBar show at the Broadside with Coffin and preeminent New Orleans drummer Johnny Vidocovich when we spoke. "I know for a fact that my audiences have been responding to the grittiness and visceral qualities in the music. The discomfort met with resolution at times."

—Cree McCree

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Armed with a Guggenheim Fellowship and other grants, Anna Webber recorded the dual-chambered, two-disc album *Idiom (Pi)* in 2019.

CISCO BRADLEY



Anna Webber's Border Crossing

LITTLE EPIPHANIES AND DISCOVERIES CAN await the eager jazz festival-goer, even in the midst of a richly stocked festival program. So it went in August 2019, when I caught the Anna Webber Septet in action on a Sunday afternoon main stage set of Austria's prized Jazzfestival Saalfelden's 40th anniversary edition. Webber was then enjoying a major career and critical upswing for her album *Clockwise* (Pi Records). In Saalfelden, she led her compact but varied ensemble through elegant and sometimes raucous mazes of scores lined with improvisational free zones, touching on a highly personal and invigorating mixture of jazz, new music, free improv and uniquely Webber-istic notions of how to navigate between genres and sonic turfs.

Later in 2019, composer-saxophonist-flutist-bandleader Webber, armed with a Guggenheim Fellowship and other grants, recorded the dual-chambered, two-disc album *Idiom* (recently released by Pi). One disc boasts her eight-year-old Simple Trio (with pianist Matt Mitchell and drummer John Hollenbeck), and the other documents her 12-piece ensemble — a kind of avant little-big-band-meets-contemporary-chamber-ensemble entity.

What happened then, as of early March 2020,

was the "Big Silence," the COVID-19-enforced lockdown afflicting music worldwide. Looking back on her fertile period in 2019, Webber reflects that "really, everything pre-COVID seems especially artistically rich compared to what myself and most artists have been dealing with in the past 15 or so months. For me, the period directly pre-COVID felt more like a continuation of the hard work that I'd been putting in for years than an exceptionally fertile period, the difference being that I was maybe beginning to experience recognition on a bit of a broader scale, thanks in no small part to increased visibility due to being lucky enough to be on Pi."

As for the loss of live music opportunities, she asserts that "there is nothing I miss more than being on the bandstand in front of a live audience. I also think a lot of more abstract music such as my own translates best in a live situation, when an audience can feel and hear the energy in the performance. I wrote the music on *Idiom* with the visceral experience of a live performance in mind, and it's best experienced in the room with the band."

For Webber, the operative term *Idiom*, a deceptively short, simple title, relates to multiple meanings and metaphors.

"The word just felt perfect," she explains, "referring to both the extended techniques that felt like a mother tongue to my instruments, and to my own improvisational language that I've worked so hard to develop. It also gave me a way forward for subsequent pieces in the series. Once I was able to clearly define the relationship between the compositions, I knew what sorts of ideas were available to me, and what sort of syntactical rules held them together."

The British Columbia native now is rooted in Brooklyn, but made a critical stopover for studies in Berlin, and has since developed close ties with transatlantic musicians. One vital ally has been Hollenbeck, with whom Webber studied with at Jazz Institut Berlin. She says that "studying composition with John Hollenbeck, and subsequently working with him both in my bands and his bands, has been a very important mentor-like relationship for me. I've learned a lot from him over the years."

Webber's idiomatically cross-bred music entails detectable strands of muscular chamber jazz, sometimes redolent of Henry Threadgill, but also gruffer post-minimalist ideas and intricate rhythmic invention. She confirms that she has been "interested in odd-meters, mixed-meters, polyrhythms and the like for a very long time. I think rhythmic curiosity is a pretty central tenet for anyone who's serious about playing jazz or music related to jazz. Something interesting to me over the past few years is the relationship between polyrhythm and interval."

Clearly, Webber heeds more than one stylistic impulse, crossing borders between jazz, new music and the purely improvisatory realm of the free. Does that make her something of a maverick and/or outsider in music scenes with strict ideas about genre identification?

"I actually feel like we're currently living in somewhat of a golden age for people who are moving across those boundaries," she said. "I know tons of new music-trained musicians who are also incredible improvisors — several who are featured on the second disc of *Idiom* — and I also know many, many people in my corner of the jazz scene who are also interested in the sonic/notational worlds of new music."

"It's a really exciting time for cross-scene collaboration in New York specifically. The territorial divisions still exist in terms of access to granting resources and the structures of power that are in place, but I think within the musician community they are becoming less important."

Asked about lessons possibly learned under the COVID-19 clampdown, Webber reflects, "Once the existential dread of the early days of the pandemic had quieted down somewhat, I found it valuable to actually give each task the amount of time I felt I needed to do it well. I've also learned the importance of not taking any music-making situations with other people for granted."
—Josef Woodard



The late Frank Kimbrough

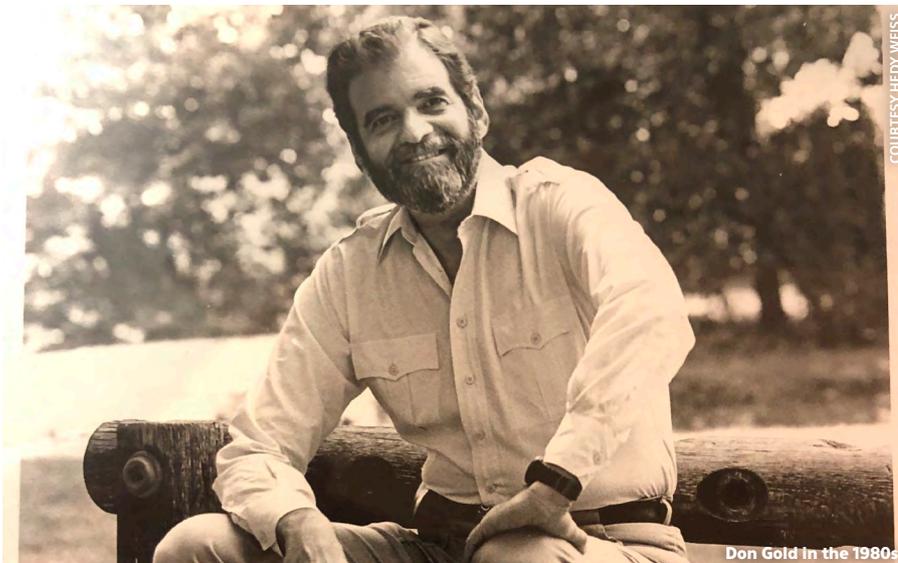
ANNA YATSEVICH

For the Love of Frank: At press time, Newvelle Records released *KIMBROUGH*, an impressive tribute to the late composer/pianist Frank Kimbrough, who passed away Dec. 30. Consisting of 61 tracks and a lineup of 67 major jazz musicians, the collection shines a light on one of the unsung heroes of jazz. “Frank was a genuine ‘musician’s musician’ whose talent as a player, composer and teacher fueled generations of artists in the New York jazz community,” said Elan Mehler, cofounder and artistic director of Newvelle Records, and a student of Kimbrough’s in the 1990s. The list of participants for the project is overwhelming, from Joe Lovano, Fred Hersch and Rufus Reid to Matt Wilson, Helen Sung, Immanuel Wilkins and more. All proceeds will benefit the Frank Kimbrough Jazz Scholarship at The Juilliard School. newvelle-records.com

Batiste Meets Whitaker: Composer/pianist Jon Batiste teamed up with 20-year-old piano whiz Matthew Whitaker for a take on Thelonious Monk’s classic “Bye Ya.” The tune was released in August on Whitaker’s new recording *Connections* (Label Logic). The album also features Whitaker and violinist Regina Carter performing a take of the Duke Ellington classic “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore.” label-logic.net

JEN Announces New Board: The Jazz Education Network has announced its board of directors for 2021–22: trumpeter Sean Jones, president; flutist Lonnie Davis, president-elect; vocalist Ashley Shabankareh, vice president; trumpeter Todd Stoll, immediate past president; Dustin Rohrer, treasurer; and David Kauffman, secretary. jazzednet.org

Iwano Steps Down: Amy Iwano, the director of Chicago Presents, stepped down from her post at the end of August. She led the organization since 2012, spearheading the presentation of the organization’s Jazz at the Logan series. She will take a new position as artistic director for Performance Santa Fe.



Don Gold in the 1980s

COURTESY HEDY WEISS

In Memoriam: Don Gold, Former DownBeat Editor

BACK IN 1956, DOWNBEAT WAS IN A trench of transition but only vaguely aware of where it might lead. The age of big swing bands, which had been the magazine’s milk and honey since its founding in 1934, was over. Waiting for big bands to “come back” or throwing in with rock ‘n’ roll were not long-term editorial options. That September, the magazine welcomed Don Gold to its staff. Within 18 months, he would become DownBeat’s managing editor and help map its future covering a rapidly evolving music scene.

On May 2, Gold died after four days in hospice care following complications from a fractured femur incurred on March 2. He was 90.

Born March 13, 1931, Gold grew up in Chicago and came of age musically during the swing years just before and during World War II. After graduating from Northwestern University’s journalism program in 1953, he joined the Army in the waning days of the Korean War. He was assigned to Army intelligence in Heidelberg, Germany, where he lived with his wife and daughter, Tracy, born in 1955. Shortly before leaving the Army and returning home, he applied for a position at DownBeat, where his close friend Jack Tracy (after whom his daughter was named) was editor. He joined the magazine in 1956.

Gold developed a rather kooky column called “Cross Section,” a kind of free-association interview that invited noted subjects to riff spontaneously on a procession of arbitrary, often unexpected, subjects. Among the topics Gold tossed out were “grilled cheese sandwiches,” “Anita Ekberg,” “Castro” and “dogs,” to which Anita O’Day answered in 1958, “My kind of people.”

As record critic, Gold penned early impressions on many now-legendary artists whose rep-

utations were then still under early construction. On John Coltrane in January 1958, he wrote, “Coltrane . . . makes his debut as leader on this LP. His tone is hard; his conception bluntly surging. There is little subtlety in his playing, but strength and confidence.” He gave Sonny Rollins’ *Tour de Force* four stars, calling him “a vital individualist . . . desperately needed in contemporary music.” And on Miles Davis’ *Relaxin’* for Prestige, Gold wrote, “After all that walkin’ and cookin’ [referring to his earlier Prestige releases] it’s time for Miles to relax. . . . He plays with his customary delicate, intricate impact . . . an attractive set.”

Tracy, Gold and publisher Chuck Suber also focused on a nascent movement for jazz performance at the high school and college levels.

Tracy left the magazine, and Gold became editor in March 1958. He would help guide DownBeat toward a leadership position in a new movement for jazz education. It was a strategy for the future that revitalized DownBeat’s place in the evolving jazz world.

In March 1959 Gold resigned from DownBeat for a plum position at Playboy, but he was not finished with jazz. He partnered with Hugh Hefner to create the Playboy jazz poll and the first Playboy Jazz Festival that year at Chicago’s Soldier Field. In 1962, he moved to New York with gigs at the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal and Holiday Magazine. He became head of the literary department at the William Morris Agency.

After working for Travel & Leisure, he returned to Chicago and Playboy, then served as editor of Chicago Magazine. Gold joined the faculty of Columbia College in 1989, where he taught magazine journalism until 1996.

—John McDonough





LIFTED

BY

BY AYANA CONTRERAS

PHOTOS BY RON T. YOUNG

NINA

Ledisi takes on the music of
Nina Simone along with the
responsibility to make her
own personal statement.

Ledisi's connection to the High Priestess of Soul dates back to her youth.



Thirteen might be an unfortunate number for some, but for multihyphenate vocalist Ledisi, it proved to be verifiably lucky. In March, she won her first Grammy for Best Traditional R&B Performance with the slow-burner “Anything For You,” which also reached #1 on Billboard Adult R&B charts.

It was her 13th nomination.

During a Zoom interview this June, the singer shared with DownBeat that the win was especially sweet because the song was released on her own label, Listen Back Entertainment, on her own terms.

“When I finally won, I was shocked, but I was also more excited about the work up to it,” Ledisi said. “We completed a full year of work on my own label, and we did that after all these years. It’s like God said, ‘No. I want it like this.’ It’s even bigger than what I wanted. I had been on a steady climb, but it’s moving faster than I can keep up with right now. I’m trying to catch up to everything. It’s beautiful.”

And so was Ledisi — warm, bubbly and engaging as she recounted that moment,

‘I’m just trying to do well, do the very best at every little thing that I possibly can. That’s from being a parent, a wife, a creator, CEO, activist, advocate: Whatever that is, do it well.’

clad in a bishop-sleeved, yellow tunic, taking a moment out in Los Angeles, on the move between recording engagements.

After such an encouraging turn of events, the vocalist concluded that it was time for her to pay a round of alms to an artist who “just keeps coming up,” an ever-present guiding force in her life during both the high and low times:

Nina Simone.

Ledisi’s connection to the High Priestess of Soul dates back to her youth. Growing up, “My mom would wake us up to ‘Mississippi Goddam,’” Ledisi said, “because we wouldn’t get up in the mornings. I thought it was my mom’s song.” Her mother, Nyra Dynese, has also worked in the business as a performer and

as a songwriter.

"Mom was preparing us for the world. She was preparing us for, 'Your Black skin ain't going to be enough, or it's going to be everything and not supposed to be everything. What's [inside] is supposed to be everything.'

"And then, in the darkest moment, [Simone] comes back up again when I'm in my twenties and forced me to study her because she saved my life pretty much. I was on the porch in a white rocking chair listening to the radio: KPFA. I was in Oakland and full of bills, exhausted, done with life. I just wanted to go. And 'Trouble In Mind' started to play, this loud piano ... just *bam!* And I went, 'Who is that?' I walked into the living room and sat there and made myself listen, and it was Nina singing all the words that described my mood. She became a mood for me ... and she just kept interrupting my life."

Ledisi said her first "big television performance" was during BET's Black Girls Rock award show in 2010, performing the Nina Simone-penned standard "Four Women" alongside Jill Scott, Kelly Price and Marsha Ambrosius. The song elegantly exhumes the humanity concealed by timeworn stereotypes, and for that retelling, each powerhouse vocalist took on a persona (Ledisi delivered an earth-shattering "Peaches"). "That performance helped open doors," she said, adding that reverberations from the event have impacted her career, "still, to this day."

She noted that her album, *Ledisi Sings Nina*, is a natural evolution of "eight years of different configurations" of interpreting Simone's work, including a performance in collaboration with the National Symphony Orchestra Pops at the Kennedy Center in 2017, followed by a show with a big band in New Orleans. After a play (penned by Ledisi) and further performances at Royal Albert Hall in London, she concluded, "Gosh, I got to record this."

"It's not like it's just a record I decided to do. This has been a long relationship that's been interrupting my life consistently. [In May], I just got a call out of the blue, an email. Come celebrate Nina in her hometown [Tyron, North Carolina]. I had never been. I went and saw her humble beginnings, this little one-bedroom home and little church across the way."

The trip made her feel an even closer kinship with Simone. "I like to honor her by touching and agreeing on certain things she would do and incorporate, but I'm not trying to be her. I want to be me while honoring her and that's why I added all my modern twist and make sure I'm who I am because there is never going to be another Nina, ever."

Ledisi just happens to know more than her fair share about honoring the ancestors, noting, "Any tribute on television, I'm the one they call." That's no exaggeration. She was charged

to sing Mary Wells' "My Guy" at a 2011 White House Motown Tribute, a gospel-tinged rendition of "Wake Up Everybody" with Kirk Franklin and Daniel Caesar at the 2017 Soul Train Music Awards, a BET Awards tribute to Anita Baker alongside Jamie Foxx, Marsha Ambrosius and Yolanda Adams in 2018, and she even paid tribute to Louis Jordan at the 2018 Grammy Awards. It's a track record that speaks to her versatility as a vocalist.

"And that's the point I'm hoping to make with this," she noted. "Showing that I'm not

your boxed r&b singer. I'm more than that. I studied classical. It just so happens that I'm loved for r&b, but my home base goes over into all these other worlds, just like Nina. She was jazz and classical, listen to her playing. She was Africa ... her rhythm and her phrasing."

Of course, in addition to her comprehensive sonic sensibilities, Simone was also renowned for her ability to stunningly convey biting political commentary. But even though Simone's legacy is intricately tied to her progressive stances, she told *Ebony* magazine in

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1969, "I hope the day comes when I'll be able to sing more love songs, when the need is not quite so urgent to sing protest songs."

Conversely, gushing, though never cloying, romantic lyricism is also present within Simone's repertoire, so Ledisi had a wide palette of moods to choose from while selecting

It's a choice that's radical in its own way. And the resulting album, which draws deep from the pool of genius that is Nina Simone's catalog, is no saccharine valentine.

If *Ledisi Sings Nina* were a perfume composed of emotion, the top note would be delight, but longing would serve as an unmis-

describe the pain? Anytime I open my mouth, I always have a longing for people to get it. That urgency. Can you please understand me every time I sing, every time?"

It's an urgency that's perhaps tied to 20-plus years in an industry rife with rampant "isms" that gnaw at the heart, regardless of the talent.

A minor Twitter scandal erupted in 2015, when at that year's Grammy awards, Beyoncé was employed to sing Mahalia Jackson's "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" in tribute to the critically acclaimed film *Selma*. That's despite the fact that Ledisi played the role of Gospel great Jackson in the 2014 film (also singing a rendition of the classic tune in the motion picture). She was a Grammy nominee that night (notably up against Beyoncé for Best R&B Performance). At that point, she had six solo albums under her belt, but Ledisi watched the performance from the audience.

But that was then.

Today, her vantage point is firmly forward-leaning. "You're on the outside looking at it. So that's what you see. But, I'm at a space now that I don't care anymore, that's why I'm just creating. It doesn't mean I don't care; it just means I'm not concerned as heavily as I used to be. I don't have time for that. I'm just trying to do well, do the very best at every little thing that I possibly can. That's from being a par-

'I wanted people to see and hear the joy of a Black woman ... because that's what Nina Simone brought me in my darkness.'

tracks for her album. Ultimately, her choices mirrored Simone's hopes that were arguably unfulfilled in her lifetime. "I didn't want to focus on activism, it's so easy to focus there," Ledisi said. "I wanted people to see and hear the joy of a Black woman. My joy for her ... because that's what she brought me in my darkness. Just got me right on out. Her joy and her audacity to go, 'Love me. I'm a Black woman. Love me like this. Give me what I ask for, what I deserve.'"

takable base note. Ledisi said that emotive cocktail was intentional. "The songs I chose were all the stuff that had joy and longing. [In] New Orleans, even at the funeral, we find joy at the end, but we're longing. We're hurt inside, but we're expressing the joy of what was."

After mentioning that "Wild Is the Wind" and "Going Back Home" are standout examples to that point, the singer laid her cards on the table: "How can you sing a Nina song and not

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ent, a wife, a creator, CEO, activist, advocate: Whatever that is, do it well."

Ledisi is quick to credit some of that growth to her study of Simone's journey.

"I've created a lane for myself within my own label where I can stretch and not be in a box. I'm just grateful God has blessed me with the opportunity to be able to be that kind of business woman, and I think that's what Nina wanted. I'm the example of what my ancestors wanted. They wanted their space to just be creators," she explained. "I had so many lessons in this process. I'm a better human. I'm more outspoken than I used to be because of [Simone]. I'm just enjoying this journey, whatever this is. I've been speaking the things I want boldly. When you look at her interviews, she's having a whole interview about music and all of a sudden, it's just so free. It's the best master class ever of how to be vocal, but that freedom part if she didn't say it, we wouldn't get it. This is what it feels and looks like. This is what it should be. This is how we should be moving in the world."

In one piece of archival footage, Simone, speaking candidly at the historically Black Morehouse University in 1969, relayed to an unseen interviewer, "I think what you're trying to ask is why am I so insistent of giving out to them that Blackness, that Black power, that Black pushing them to identify with Black culture."

Almond eyes lined in the cat-eye fashion, wide-brimmed hat tilted with intention, she continued, "I have no choice over it in the first place. To me, we are the most beautiful creatures in the whole world, Black people, and I mean that in every sense, outside and inside."

Ledisi said that during this past year of incomplete plans, "COVID has taught me that life is too short," and that hard-won lesson amplified another lesson gleaned from studying Simone. "Go and ask for the things you want. [She] taught me that. So I've just been vocal, trying new things, being open, asking for what I want and waiting on it. It's such a freeing feeling. So, when I sing 'Feeling Good,' I mean that. I feel good in my spaces, whatever they may be."

Perhaps the most commonly covered song connected to Simone would be all of those renditions of "Feeling Good" that often fall flat. Perhaps they convey sufficient *joie de vivre*, but they conspicuously miss the warm dimensionality the piece originally injected into the musical *The Roar of the Greasepaint—The Smell of the Crowd* in the mid-1960s.

An explanation for that oft-found flatness might be found in the old adage that says that you can't understand the sunshine until you've experienced the rain.

Ledisi concurred, "Until you sit in the seat, you just don't get it. You're just singing notes, but when you sing the life in between the

notes and add it to the notes, it's a whole other thing. You don't just pick up a Nina song and sing it. It's like singing 'Here's To Life,' Shirley Horn. I'm not ready to sing that song. You wait though, I'm going to be ready!

"Life is good, getting older is good. It is scary as hell, but it's so refreshing because you know who you are. You become who you're meant to be even more. I love the lane I'm in. I love it. I wouldn't change it. I'm grateful she opened the door for me."

Armed with myriad lessons from the past,

Ledisi's wide eyes are squarely trained on the future, and on building her own legacy.

"That's what I'm looking for. Is this good? Is this adding to my legacy? When I leave this earth, did I leave something great? And every moment counts for me because I remember sleeping on the floor thinking, 'Is this ever going to get better?' Or that moment on that porch [asking myself], 'Why does she keep coming up in my world?' So, I think this [album is the] step to complete something to honor her. And she's helping me. She's lifting me as I honor her." **DB**

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GO FOR IT!

By Phillip Lutz Photo by John Rogers

Faced with tough choices, pianist, composer and bandleader Orrin Evans fights the elements ... and wins.

On an early summer night in newly vaccinated New York, the Blue Note was packed with cheering clubgoers. And pianist Orrin Evans, coming off the first set, was, in his understated way, one of them.

True, the set had had its unsettling moments, among them a rumbling protest by Evans' food-deprived stomach, an underamplified piano and a spottily lit stage that threatened to dampen what was the Ravi Coltrane Quartet's post-COVID return to the Big Apple.

But the group seemed to feed off the snafus — no one more than Evans, a coolly commanding figure who alternately thundered and threaded his way through tunes by Alice Coltrane, Ornette Coleman

and Charlie Parker. Now, affixed to a stool at the bar between sets, he was seeking sustenance and pondering the totality of a musician's plight.

"Sometimes you're fighting the elements," he said, downing a drink. "You can give up or you can turn it up and go for it."

Evans has been going for it for most of his 46 years. Sometimes that has meant running from it — specifically, he said, the specter of McCoy Tyner, another powerful Philadelphia pianist to whom he has been compared countless times. That association has only been strengthened by Evans' longtime connection with saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, son of the jazz icon who famously led the trailblazing quartet of which Tyner was an integral part.



Ravi Coltrane says Orrin Evans can “reach that spirit.”

‘SOMETIMES YOU’RE FIGHTING THE ELEMENTS. YOU CAN GIVE UP OR YOU CAN TURN IT UP AND GO FOR IT.’

If Evans is like Tyner, the similarity is reflected less in his choice of notes than in an ineffable quality that allows him, by his mere presence, to raise the game of those around him. That is why, when Tyner died on March 6 of last year, Coltrane recruited Evans to play the next night on a Tyner tribute — a high-flying affair that became one of the last performances on the Blue Note stage before the COVID lockdown.

“He can reach that spirit,” Coltrane said.

Evans’ spirit has infused his COVID-era

activities. His livestream series serves as a perfect example. Run weekly from the patio of his home or, on rainy days, from a studio in nearby Glendale, Pennsylvania, the series provided a reliable link to inspired musicmaking and the occasional lesson in adaptability. One set, at the studio on a Sunday before the Blue Note gig, found Evans forced to make do with the available electric piano — a category of instrument he professed to “despise” playing — adjusting his touch to conjure two hours of sonorous display.

The series has not come cheap; the Glendale set required securing the space and the services of talents like vibraphonist Warren Wolf, bassist Buster Williams and drummer Clarence Penn. Nonetheless, Evans said, he has strived to make the sets available for free, even as he acknowledged that, with voluntary donations declining as venues reopen, the series would likely end this summer.

While running this series, Evans has played at others. Notably at Smalls, the Greenwich Village basement that turned to a nonprofit model to keep the music going. Though the space was closed to the wider public during the lockdown livestreams, Evans appeared at one at which trombonist David Gibson, a stalwart of his Captain Black Big Band, dropped in. Instrument in hand, he enlivened the subterranean party — and kept the big-band connection alive.

But the peak of Evans’ livestream efforts may have been a two-night marathon at Smoke, the cozy room on upper Broadway operated by Paul Stache, who also runs the Smoke Sessions recording label, on which Evans’ recent

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Evans' new CD was initially meant to be just a pandemic party.

debut album, *Omega* (Blue Note). But Evans said he first met Wilkins more than a decade ago, when the saxophonist was a participant in youth programs run by the Kimmel Center and Clef Club in Philadelphia.

“What impressed me about Immanuel was how mature he was, his sense of fashion and the way he carried himself,” Evans said.

For his part, Wilkins, in a phone interview, recalled Evans as a constant figure in the lives of local aspiring musicians: “He was just always kind of around as somebody who was doing stuff with our heroes and was one of our heroes. He was kind of our connection to any of that.”

In 2016, when Wilkins arrived in New York, Evans offered him work in his well-regarded *Smoke* series, *Philly Meets New York*. The gig, Wilkins said, introduced him to Evans’ first-take mentality; “I didn’t realize how loose Orrin is. He has a particular approach to band-leading, which is pretty much all about spontaneity. It comes through in the way that he leans into that initial reaction to the music.”

Wilkins’ first encounter with Evans at a recording session came with an invitation to play on the Captain Black Big Band album *The Intangible Between* (*Smoke Sessions*). Recorded in October 2019 and released in May 2020, the album, which earned a Grammy nomination, thrust him into a cutting contest with longtime

albums have been released. The two nights, in December, have yielded *The Magic Of Now*, a seven-track collection.

During a Zoom call, Evans said turning the livestream into an album was an afterthought: “It’s so hard to have a conversation about this record as a record when it wasn’t ever supposed to be a record. This was truly a party, an opportunity in the middle of the pandemic to

get together and play some music with some humans — something that wasn’t happening in that time.”

For the livestream, Evans enlisted two veterans, bassist Vicente Archer and drummer Bill Stewart, and 23-year-old alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins. Not long out of Juilliard, Wilkins’ star had been rapidly rising with the release four months earlier of his acclaimed

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Captain Black saxophonist and arranger Todd Bashore. The vehicle was “That Too,” a spiky piece Evans wrote for the WDR Big Band. The verdict, inevitably, was a draw.

“That Too’ is about the flexibility of being able to play with other people and still get what you need out of them for your band,” Evans explained. “The band has had Todd Bashore in it for years. Then there’s Caleb Wheeler Curtis and Stacy Dillard. But now, here’s Immanuel Wilkins, somebody I’ve seen grow. Here’s Todd Bashore’s solo; here’s Immanuel Wilkins’ solo. Which is better? Neither.”

Encouraging a meeting of minds by means of a ritual trial-by-fire is vintage Evans. “The music is always all about connection,” Gibson said. “That’s what makes Orrin the leader he is. He has this ability to invite everyone to contribute to the conversation. He may even press back to allow you to get a firmer footing.”

As a player on *The Intangible Between*, Wilkins more than proved his mettle. But Evans hired him for the December livestream more to explore his compositions, which gave the event a blueprint. Without it, Evans said, “There is no story. The best story is the good margaritas we got across the street, and then we just came and played two nights of music, two sets of music, and listened back and said, ‘Wow.’

“The only ‘plan’ was to play some of

Immanuel’s music. I really like playing Immanuel’s music. I love his ballads.”

Wilkins’ balladic contribution to the album, “The Poor Fisherman,” is epic. Written in his junior year at Juilliard and based on an 1881 painting of that name by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, it is a work of melancholy and, according to Wilkins, an ode to the Trinity. Suggested by the painting’s images — a series of triangular patterns featuring Jesus-like figures — the music is built around three tonal centers with an overarching melodic structure.

“I was letting the melody guide me,” Wilkins said.

Even without knowing the story behind the piece, Evans said he embraced it as a kind of trippy journey. “Immanuel’s ballads are so beautiful, and they allow you to really, truly improvise. It’s a language everybody can’t do. You feel like you’re going to different islands on one song, and they feel like they’re connected. You’re just picking up different things before you get home.”

The performance makes clear the full range of Evans’ pianistic powers as his natural muscularity is superseded by an equal and opposite passion for delicacy. Picking up on Wilkins’ fluttery effusions, he favors strings of exquisitely rendered lines that seem to traverse the painting’s turf. The painter’s spirit comes alive.

His gentle side reemerges in a deceptively prosaic “Dave,” the album’s closer. Evans wrote the tune for saxophonist Bill McHenry, whose presence as a houseguest one holiday season proved an inadvertent inspiration when Evans’ mother-in-law, also a guest, inexplicably kept referring to Bill as Dave despite being corrected.

“I thought it was the most hilarious thing,” Evans said. “So I sat down at the piano and started playing that little melody and came up with the name ‘Dave.’”

The melody’s repeated figure becomes a mantra that suggests a simple meditation. But the real message — one of personal responsibility — is brought home near the end as a creeping dissonance roils the narrative, only to resolve to a harmonious conclusion.

“The first two bars are you knowing what needs to be done,” Evans explained. “The second two bars are you not doing it. And hopefully that comfortable Stevie Wonder cadence at the end is you dealing with what needs to be done. It’s really a song about seeing what you want to see, about seeing what’s comfortable rather than dealing with what really needs to be dealt with.”

That “Dave” closes the album makes sense. The need for personal responsibility is central to Evans’ ethos, musical and otherwise. It reaches back to a childhood shaped in no small

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MARK SHELDON

Evans' ethos was shaped by his father, playwright Donald T. Evans.

measure by his father, playwright Donald T. Evans, a figure in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and '70s whose fictitious scenarios, Evans said, often foretold the dynamic in their home.

The elder Evans' death in 2003 hit Evans hard; his spare, mournful rendition of Horace Silver's "Song For My Father" — the track that appears on 2005's *Easy Now* — attests to the depth of his pain. So, perhaps, does his assertion when asked whether "Orrin," the playwright's domestic drama about a wayward son at odds with his father — produced in New York in 1972 — bore any relationship to reality.

"I hope not," he said.

While grief might not be central to Evans' aesthetic, he does make space in his songbook for homages to recently fallen colleagues, like drummer Lawrence Leathers (his plaintive "I'm So Glad I Got To Know You") and trumpeter Roy Hargrove (Gibson's astute arrangement of Hargrove's "Into Dawn"). Both tributes appear on *The Intangible Between*.

At the keyboard, Evans said, he keeps the possibility of imminent demise in his thoughts: "I always prefer to do things as if it were my last day on earth. That might sound morbid to some, but when I jump on the bandstand I want to play like that, when I jump into the studio I want to play like that."

To be sure, death has touched Evans during the COVID era. As he traveled to the Blue Note for the Tyner tribute last year, he said, he resolved to act on long-delayed plans to record with Williams, drummer Gene Jackson and trumpeter Wallace Roney. He did so four days later, and by the end of the month Roney had succumbed to the virus. Evans' godparents followed.

But now, he was back at the Blue Note and looking at bluer skies. After a three-year run with The Bad Plus, he has left the trio — on good terms, he said — to pursue more of his own projects. He has recordings in the can, including a duo with guitarist Kevin Eubanks. He has set summer release parties for *The Magic Of Now* at New York's Birdland and Philadelphia's South. And he is negotiating a residency for the big band. All of which, he said, allow for a bit of cheer.

"Music deserves some credit for being just as fine and sexy as she was, as he was, pre-pandemic," he said. "So many people came out of this still in love with her, still in love with him. That's how I look at this pandemic. It either strengthened your love or showed you some other options."

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Crawford, Keith, Monday, Austin, New Orleans

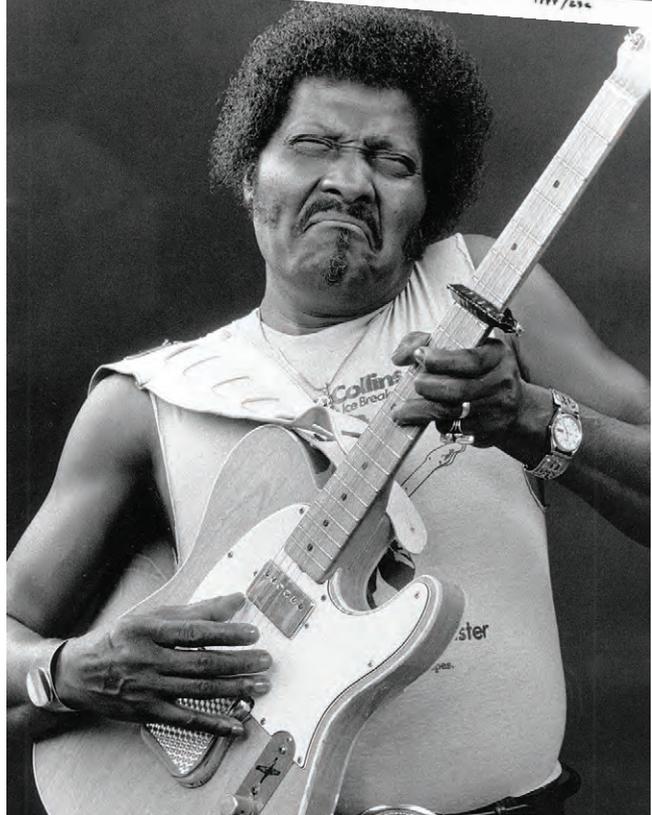
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Michael P. Smith, 1999

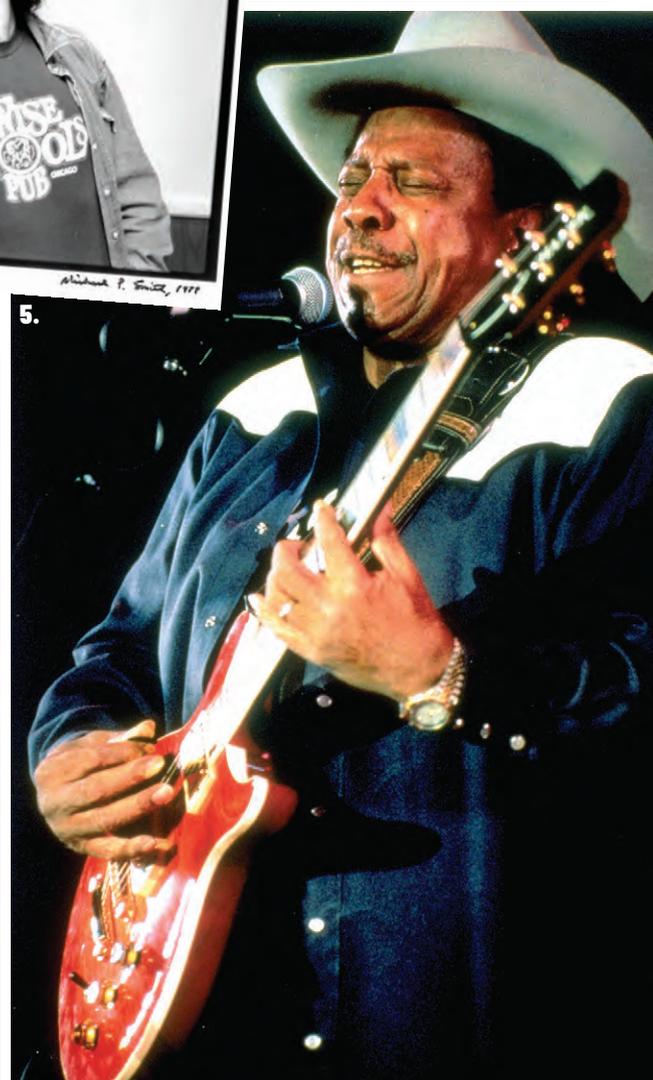


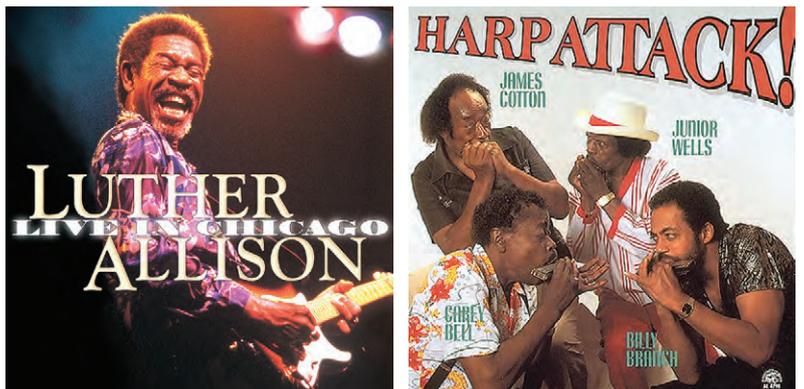
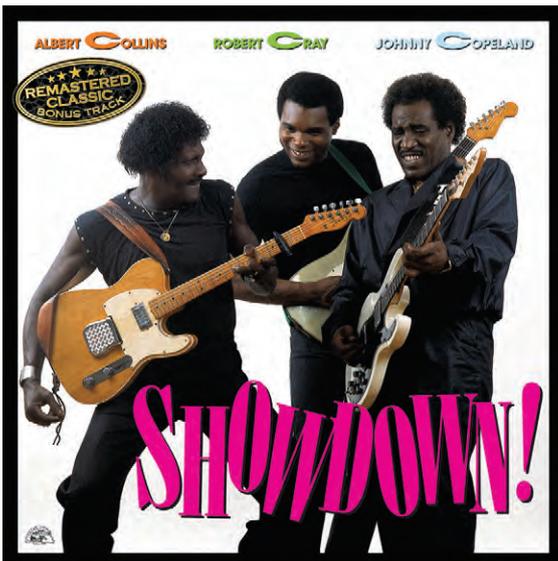
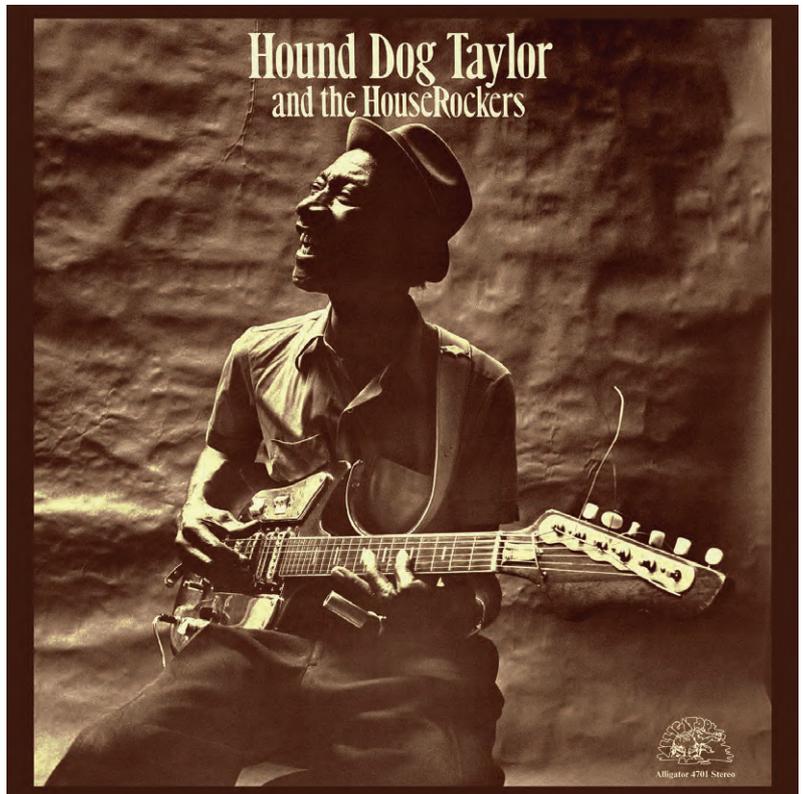
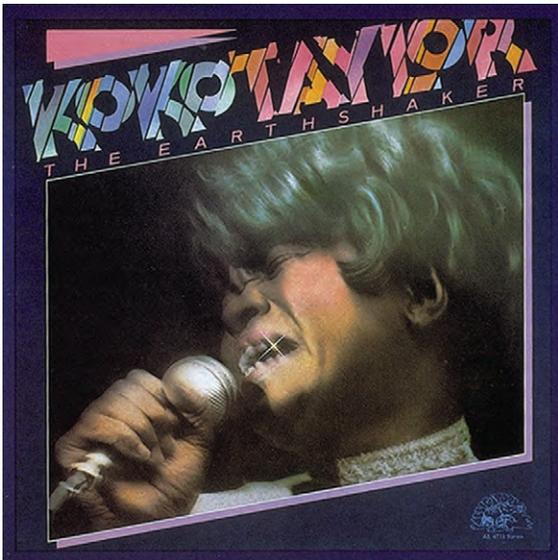
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Farsighted and unsentimental, Bruce Iglauer has spent five decades elevating Chicago-based Alligator Records above other blues labels through his vigorous devotion to Chicago blues and his sharp appreciation for other styles like Delta blues and jump blues. On the occasion of Alligator's 50th anniversary, DownBeat asked Iglauer and members of his musical family, along with blues historian-producer Dick Shurman and a few other blues insiders, to sort through the catalog's 350-plus releases and list their favorites. A merger of exhilaration and integrity sustains the blues heard on the recordings they selected.

"I love being around when the creative bursts happen," says Iglauer, the producer of many of these albums. "When artists are so excited and they get in the studio and you just can't hold them back. Those are moments you really live for in this business."

HOUND DOG TAYLOR & THE HOUSEROCKERS
Hound Dog & The HouseRockers (1971)

"This was Alligator's first release, by the band that inspired the birth of the label and our slogan, 'Genuine Houserockin' Music.' It's raw, rollicking blues straight from Chicago's South Side, played on two overdriven cheap guitars and a drum set, with Hound Dog's slide careening up and down his guitar neck while he sings at the top of his register. The energy is overwhelming. If this glorious racket doesn't make you smile, you're probably dead." —Iglauer

"This album was very much in the spirit of Delmark and other smallish independent labels, which were primarily labors of love and a desire to document worthwhile, meaningful music and gain proper recognition for its creators. ... Bruce certainly captured the live, in-your-face sound he was chasing." —Shurman

KOKO TAYLOR
The Earthshaker (1978)

"Koko's second Alligator record was the one where she truly blossomed as the 'Queen of the Blues.' It contains many of the songs that became her most requested: her women's blues anthem 'I'm A Woman' and her joyful version of 'Let the Good Times Roll' and a funky take on her Chess Records classic 'Wang Dang Doodle.' It's got an all-star band, including Pinetop Perkins on piano." —Iglauer

"Here was someone who took raw energy and electricity and spoke, graciously yet powerfully, for the women. Koko's prodigious talent took possession of all manner of material, even stuff written or performed by men, and proceeded to make it her own." —Fiona Boyes, singer/guitarist

BUDDY GUY**Stone Crazy! (1981)**

"This explosive release was recorded in a studio in France on Halloween in 1979. In many ways it's a live album, performed as if the musicians were joyously playing in front of an audience. Buddy plays and sings like a man possessed. The band is top-notch and follows Buddy's pyrotechnics with heroic prowess."

—Tinsley Ellis, singer/guitarist

"This is by far my favorite Buddy Guy album and era. Buddy is completely unhinged on this album and performs with exhausting energy and fervor. This is a staple for any guitar player wanting to learn how to do it dirty!"

—Selwyn Birchwood, singer/guitarist

ALBERT COLLINS/JOHNNY COPELAND/ROBERT CRAY
Showdown! (1985)

"This was the album that brought Albert Collins into the studio with his long-time close friends Johnny Copeland and young star-to-be Robert Cray. It was a record that almost made itself because of the chemistry between them and the love those guys had for each other. The whole record, produced by Dick Shurman and I, was cut in three-and-a-half fun-filled days with no rehearsals. It became Alligator's best seller ever, and a classic of modern blues. —Iglauer

"This is my all-time favorite Alligator

album! I grew up with it, memorized every note, went to school on it. My dad was in his prime. He and Albert were always trying to outdo each other. And Robert had really hit his stride. I still play it all the time. Every blues fan has to own it." —Shemekia Copeland, singer

LUTHER ALLISON**Live In Chicago (1999)**

"Luther had it all: aggressive, super-confident guitar attack, a huge musical vocabulary, a raw voice inspired as much by Memphis soul as by Chicago blues and an unbelievable amount of energy that he was able to communicate on recordings. In cooperation with Ruf Records, who released Luther's albums in Europe, we assembled some of his most exciting live performances into this two-disc set." —Iglauer

SELWYN BIRCHWOOD**Pick Your Poison (2017)**

"Selwyn's proven himself to be a major league bluesman over the course of his three Alligator albums and hundreds of live shows. *Pick Your Poison* is 100% Selwyn — fresh, original songs, sang with plenty of soul, played with chops, fire and passion. —Iglauer

LONNIE BROOKS**Bayou Lightning (1979)**

"Lonnie and band followed arguably the

strongest contribution to the Alligator anthology *Living Chicago Blues* with an album offering and amplifying the same strengths: powerhouse vocals, a personal and forceful guitar attack and a potent blend of swampy Louisiana vibes with the hard blues and soul of Chicago. Lonnie was a clever songwriter, too." —Shurman

GATEMOUTH BROWN**Pressure Cooker (1986)**

"This is a record [cut in France in the mid-1970s with prominent jazz sidemen] that I feel does what recording is supposed to do: simply capture a snapshot of an artist's sonic picture without the bells and whistles. Genuine, authentic music from a master musician!" —Birchwood

MICHAEL BURKS**Iron Man (2008)**

"Michael Burks was a monster guitar player with gorgeous fat tone and soaring licks, and he sang in a warm voice reminiscent of Albert King's, with lyrics about love and loss but also about small time Southern life. He was about to burst into the top level of blues artists when he died at too young an age, just 54, in 2012." —Iglauer

TORONZO CANNON**The Chicago Way (2016)**

"Toronzo was always a hot guitarist and strong singer, but I signed him because his

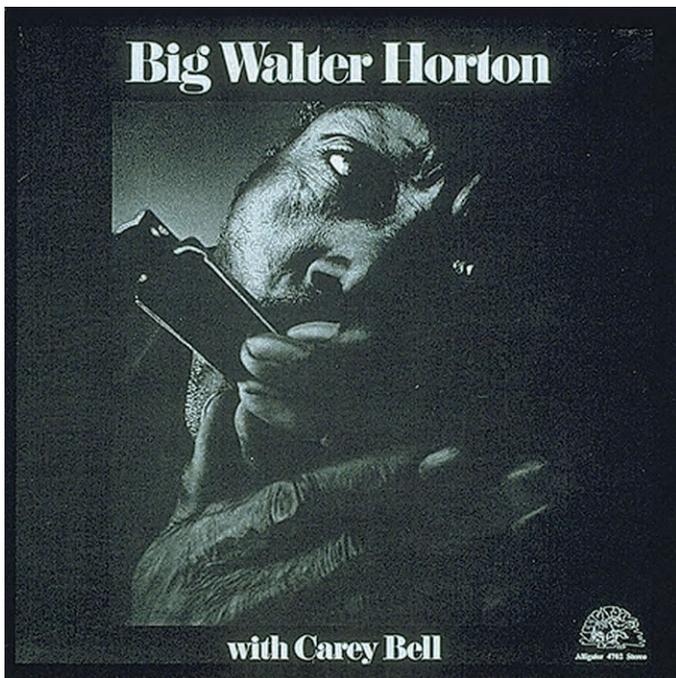
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songwriting talent had just exploded. He's writing about serious topics, like life in the ghetto in "The Pain Around Me." —Iglauer

ALBERT COLLINS

Cold Snap (1986)

"The 'Master of the Telecaster' is a crucial figure in Alligator's story. He was the first artist to come to the label with a worldwide reputation among blues fans. My co-producer Dick Shurman and I helped him find his comfortable, conversational singing voice. He was always an amazing guitar player with a sound like no other, with his strange minor-key tuning, his intensely physical playing and his signature reverb-drenched 'cool sound.' This album filled his lifelong dream of recording with master organist Jimmy McGriff." —Iglauer

SHEMEKIA COPELAND

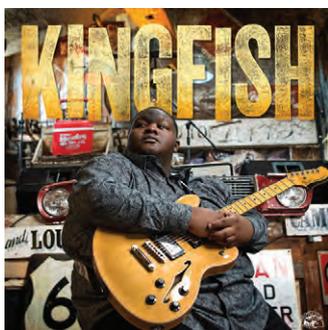
Turn The Heat Up (1998)

"This amazing debut by the woman who has become the female blues artist of her generation was cut when Shemekia was only 18, but her emotional maturity was that of an adult who had walked through fire and come out the other side. She would tell you that she is a more subtle and nuanced singer now and that's true, but this is filled with her youthful energy, her immensely soulful voice, and the excitement of cutting her first album." —Iglauer

JAMES COTTON

High Compression (1984)

"Gutbucket Chicago blues led by one of the architects. One of his great records, with Magic Slim, Pinetop Perkins and many more. I loved this man and had the honor of being his last booking agent." —Jack Randall, *The Kurland Agency*



JAMES COTTON/JUNIOR WELLS/CAREY BELL/BILLY BRANCH

Harp Attack! (1990)

"The summit meeting of Chicago's four best blues harmonica players, close friends who loved each other and also loved to 'cut heads' (try to outplay each other). We created different combinations of players on different tracks, with the harps sometimes soloing, sometimes playing together like a horn section, sometimes trading licks or fours, always challenging each other." —Iglauer



BUDDY GUY & JUNIOR WELLS

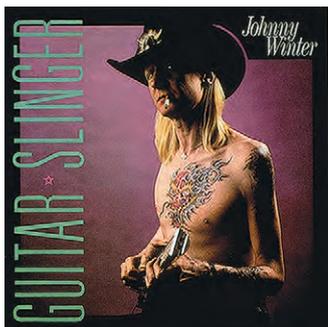
Alone & Acoustic (1991)

"When you strip back all the fixings, you get the rare bird that is Buddy and Junior in musical flight. Every nuance is revealed in this recording and nothing is there to get in the way. Two untouchable blues masters." —Cathy Lemons, *singer (The Lucky Losers)*

MICHAEL HILL'S BLUES MOB

Bloodlines (1994)

"Michael brought the plight of Black Americans into a modern context. His lyrics spoke to me as a young Black man in Chicago, and Michael's from New York City so I know his words also spoke to other Black men around the nation. It let listeners of every race know what conditions and inequities were at the time." —Cannon



BIG WALTER HORTON

Big Walter Horton With Cary Bell (1972)

"This album put harp giant Big Walter together with another harp luminary, Carey Bell, and with guitar great Eddie Taylor. How can you go wrong?" —Rick Estrin, *singer/harmonica player (Rick Estrin & the Nightcats)*

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Kingfish (2019)

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now 22), and it was a crucial announcement of a major new talent. Alligator is committed to bringing forward the great blues artists of the next 50 years and in Selwyn and Christone, we have two of them.” —Iglauer

JIMMY JOHNSON

Bar Room Preacher (1985)

“Nobody sounds like Jimmy Johnson simply because nobody else is Jimmy Johnson. His personality comes through on every note, and that’s sweet and kind. His soulful, high lonesome voice combines with his smooth guitar playing to make for deeply moving blues. Recorded in Paris with Chicago players.” —Tom Marker, *Chicago Blues DJ WXRT & WDCB*

LIL ED & THE BLUES IMPERIALS

Rattleshake (2006)

“No living band captures the original ‘Genuine Houserockin’ Music’ spirit of Alligator as well as the Blues Imperials. They’re led by Ed Williams, a ‘real deal’ singer and songwriter and a wildly exuberant slide guitarist-showman who plays on his knees, on his back or running through the audience. Ed and his band have been together with the same personnel for over 30 years!” —Iglauer

PROFESSOR LONGHAIR

Crawfish Fiesta (1980)

“The idiosyncratic pianist who gave the world an inimitable vocal style and trademark rumba boogie piano groove saw a revival in the 1970s. Bruce Iglauer and engineer Freddie Breitberg went to New Orleans in 1979, and with much local help, especially from Fess disciple Dr. John, gave him the most sympathetic showcase yet for his many quirky charms and staples.” —Shurman

FENTON ROBINSON

Somebody Loan Me A Dime (1974)

“Showcasing his falsetto-tinged voice and harmonically sophisticated guitar, Fenton was more for careful listening than dynamic entertainment. The first of his three Alligator albums has become definitive, with strong updates of the title tune and the Alligator classic ‘You Don’t Know What Love Is’ among the many highlights.” —Shurman

SON SEALS

Midnight Son (1976)

“Son Seals was a completely unknown artist when we signed him in 1973. Over the following years, he became recognized as a blues giant of his generation, singing wrenching, intense songs and attacking his guitar so hard it sounded like he’d ripped the neck off. This was his second album and the announcement of a major artist coming into his musical

maturity. For this one, he wanted to expand his band with a horn section, and he wrote a slew of new songs. Son was an artist very close to my heart.” —Iglauer

KATIE WEBSTER

The Swamp Boogie Queen (1988)

“A triple threat, Katie was an accomplished piano player and a fine singer and songwriter. Believe me, she could do a moving ballad and then do gospel then do something gritty like ‘No Bread, No Meat.’ She was just crazy talented!”

—Curtis Salgado, *singer/harmonica player*

JOHNNY WINTER

Guitar Slinger (1984)

“In early 1984, Johnny came to Chicago and, joined by Albert Collins’ top-notch rhythm section, Ken Saydak’s keyboards and the tenor sax and arranging contributions of Gene Barge, he cut what remains one of the most bulldozing hard blues releases in the Alligator catalog. His supercharged version of Lonnie Brooks’ ‘Don’t Take Advantage’ [has] an octane matched on slide outings like ‘It’s My Life, Baby.’”

—Shurman

Special thanks to Phil Berkowitz, John Hahn, Michael Hill, Matthew Stubbs, Ally Venable and Kelly Zirbes.

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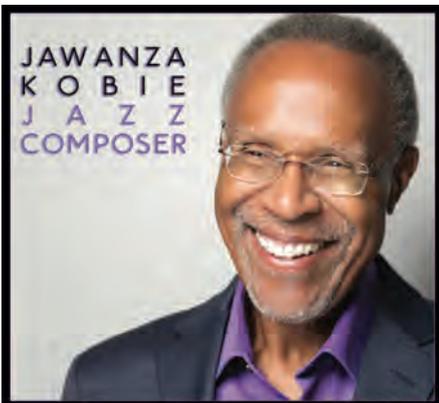
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JUDY WEXLER GOES BACK TO THE GARDEN

Inspiration can come from unlikely sources. When COVID forced the shutdown of live performances, Judy Wexler decided to change her approach to a production she was creating.

"A few years ago, I started reimagining the protest songs of '60s and early '70s as jazz tunes," Wexler said, from her home in Glendale, California. "Most of them were originally in the pop, rock or folk realms. They were written in a time of great social change, during the rise of feminism, anti-war activism and racial reckoning. I recorded 'Don't Think Twice It's Alright' on my first album, *Easy On The Heart*, in 2005."

Wexler came up with the idea of singing a whole evening of reinvented songs from the '60s a few years ago. The first iteration of the show, *Talking About My Generation*, took place in 2010, with backup singers augmenting her piano, bass and drums trio. She did a similar show in 2016, called *Back To The Garden*.

"I was working on another iteration last year," she said. "I had commissioned quite a few arrangements of songs from the period. When all performances were canceled, I decided to make a record. Since Trump was still president, I was going to call it *Back To The Garden* and subtitle it *Songs Of Love, Hope And Resistance*. As soon as Biden was elected, I changed it to *Love, Hope And Change*."

"I contacted my long-time pianist and arranger, Jeff Colella, in June of 2020. I wasn't sure what was going on with the pandemic, but once I decided to make a recording, we started working on it. I went to his house. We both wore masks. I was 12 feet away from the piano, singing at other end of the living room. We did that for a bit, working out arrangements. Most of them were already done, but some needed fleshing out. He added a string quartet to 'Since You've Asked Me' and a cello part for 'The Times They Are a-Changing.' He also wrote a string trio section for 'American Tune' and a trumpet part for 'Who Knows Where The Time Goes,' both arranged by pianist Josh Nelson.

"In the studio, I made decisions about cutting things out or adding to the arrangements. I had control. The instrumental parts were recorded safely, but there were some issues with players asking, 'What's the ventilation like?,' or 'Are we gonna be separated?' I told them, 'If you don't feel comfortable, don't



do it.' Everyone was in isolation booths. We washed hands constantly. Most folks were so hungry to play and hang out, I had to kick them out eventually, so I could get the time I needed to finish the production."

Love, Hope And Change includes familiar standards like "For What It's Worth" "Get Together" and "Big Yellow Taxi." Wexler's imaginative phrasing and ornamentations are complemented by Colella's arrangements. The album was released on Wexler's Jewel City Jazz label.

"A few years ago, I decided I wanted my own label. I thought I'd get more of the sales money, if I did it myself and put it up on CD Baby and streaming sites. I was right. I sold all my copies of my last album, *Crowded Heart*, and I could track the sales, downloads and money from streams to the countries it was coming from. People from various parts of the world were buying the CD, physical as well as downloads. This time, instead of distributing through CD Baby, I got a distributor, A Train Entertainment, in Oakland, California.

"I'm pleased with the way the album came out. It gives you a feel for what the music meant to the people of that generation. There's a feeling of hope in many of the lyrics that's still relevant today. When I recorded 'American Tune,' I was thinking how much the lyrics still resonate. The first time I recorded the vocals, I sounded so sad, I had to throw the take out and sing it more matter of factly, to let the lyrics speak for themselves."

—j. poet

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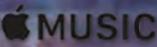
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JUDY WEXLER BACK TO THE GARDEN



Iconic 1960s Songs of Love, Hope, and Change ... Reimagined

“*Back to the Garden* breathes fresh life into these songs and gives them a jazz feel with the elegance and sensitivity they deserve. — *JazzWax*”

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Guitarist, composer, electronic musician and Art Institute of Chicago professor Julia A. Miller took a bold step three years ago when she bought Delmark Records, America’s oldest, continuously operated indie blues and jazz label, from its founder, Bob Koester.

But she was well-prepared. With more than 750 titles in a catalog rich with albums by Delta-songsters, rent-party pianists, South and West Side blues progressives, jazz traditionalists and modernists, iconoclastic and now iconic AACM musicians, and re-issues of rarities from historic imprints, Delmark had a solid reputation for quality music, a roster of active artists and plentiful inventory in its own building with a reputable studio.

However, Koester, who also owned the Jazz Record Mart in Chicago, lagged in taking advantage of many 21st century digital opportunities. And Miller, who has taught courses on music business as well as composition and the evolution of audio playback machines, knew that territory well. She had enjoyed some 25,000 downloads of her experimental *Solo Variations*, with another 50,000 or so of music by her band, Volcano Radar, which she leads with her personal partner Elbio Barilari, on the internet-only digital label Pan y Rosas.

“I could see that model had a future that needed to be implemented,” said Miller in a phone interview, fresh from jamming in the studio with guitarist Billy Flynn. “I had also been involved in an internet radio project, and I had earlier set up a very small business venture for several composition and band projects I had going on to see how this might work. I’d done a lot of research over a long time, so I understood distribution, copyrights and other fundamentals. And my family has had a series of businesses, mostly in manufacturing, for the past half-century, so I grew up seeing how such things work.”

“But Delmark was a much bigger challenge. So one condition to taking this on was to work with a professional CFO to put together a detailed business plan and projections based on analysis of the information we were receiving from the Koester family.”

She and Barilari, who is a musician, journalist and professor and now Delmark’s artistic director, invested plenty of time getting to know the company and catalog before the purchase. “We had a five-year plan when we started,” she said. “Two years into that arc, we had to switch around some planned components and accelerate others, due to the pandemic. But it’s worked out well. For example,



Delmark Records owner Julia A. Miller

we always planned to focus on the digital side, and did a ton of that work over the pandemic year, increasing our digital presence to more than 11,000 tracks from 1,500.

“People tend to overlook that, unlike before, our only retail outlet is our website. Otherwise, we sell wholesale or sell to artists. Bob Koester’s orientation was toward retail, but we’re oriented toward distribution, creation and also artist support.”

“We’ve worked really hard to make the catalog available in all digital formats: downloading, streaming, internet and terrestrial radio, and also sync placements, which are usually excerpts used in commercials, TV or film that provide good visibility for the artist and the label and income, too. We still deal in CDs, vinyl — we need to reprint covers to return some Delmark classics to availability, and even audiophile reel-to-reel versions.”

The label continues issuing vibrant new material — about 20 albums so far in Miller and Barilari’s tenure. Among the standouts: *Every Day Of Your Life*, reigniting the career of 92-year-old guitarist and singer Jimmy Johnson; *Too Hot For Words* by vocalist Dee Alexander with the Metropolitan Jazz Octet in tribute to Billie Holiday; and *General Semantics* by the trio of Geoff Bradfield (saxes and bass clarinet), Ben Goldberg (clarinets) and Dana Hall (percussion). “We look for particular recordings by particular artists,” she said. “They might be categorized as jazz or blues, but to us they are special records, critical recordings, that fit with the rest of the catalog.”

—Howard Mandel

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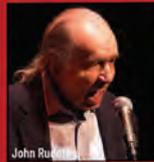
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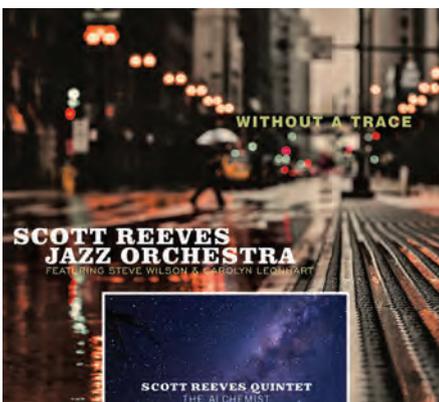
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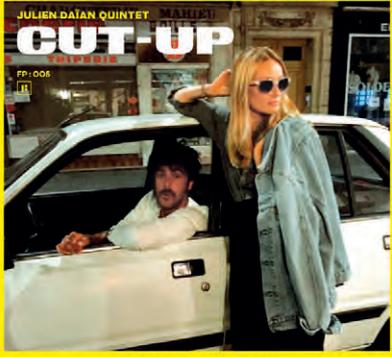
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Reviews

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



The *Snark Horse* creative team of Matt Mitchell and Kate Gentile

Matt Mitchell/ Kate Gentile *Snark Horse*

PI RECORDINGS

★★★½

The concept behind *Snark Horse*, pianist Matt Mitchell and percussionist Kate Gentile's new release for Pi Recordings, intrigues as much for its exhaustive execution as for its perspicacious musicianship. What would happen if you turned over a discrete bar of music to some superb creative musicians and let them loose to improvise? And you did that 50 times over with a different musical prompt each time? You'd end up with about six hours of jazz tone poetry of varying moods, feels and musical vantages. It's a breathless listen.

To give an idea of the range of expression here (a full reporting would be impossible), consider Mitchell's "Thumbly." After establishing the tune's ominous, repetitious harmonic sequence in the piano, the composer engages

the group's four horns, three stringed instruments and rhythm section; the so-dubbed Snark Horsekestra then plays freely — agitated, disjointed — for near 16 minutes, with periodic descents into copacetic grooves all the more soothing for their rarity. On Gentile's compositions, by contrast, the rhythmic phrasings predominate, as on the medley "F Tessellations/Chimeric Numbers," which unspools into a tumult of driving acoustic utterances. It would be a mistake, though, to limit one's understanding of these pieces by their compositional genesis; the point of each composition is its cathartic apex, where the players unleash their synergistic take on the composers' ideas.

Lest this come across as a bit intense (and it is), the duo wisely interpolates Mitchell's electronics-only compositions throughout the album's program; shorter, simpler performances like "Pheromone Quiz" and "Garlic Plastics" provide some breathing room in between the complex ensemble improvisations. The most potent mitigation of this album's intensity,

however, derives from the clever wordplay of the titles — just enough snark to cause a smile.

—Suzanne Lorge

Snark Horse: Echo Emporium: Flock Adulation; Compartments's Partial; Hem(toadaso)da; A Pouting Grimace/Greasy Puzzle; Forn; Pheromone Quiz; Deep Recess; Fertile Pinwheels; Key Tettle/Flardle; Igh/Dogmacile. (56:13)

Fraughtleau: Trapezoids/Matching Tickle; All Tall Ghosts; Nudgelet; Thumbly; Asymptotic Rest Area; Underblobb Sys; Feral Pineals; Torpid Blather/Fuck Your Capitalization Style/Pendulum Wobbles; Teeming Molten Holdings. (53:34)

Minute Egress: Thing-Fact/Theoretical Muscle; Adrenal Halos/Dog Matt(ttt)gic; Alphanotanical; Bogs And Silence; Fickle Laughing; For Teens/Spinal Thought/Peripheral Drome; Infraction Sentences; Glubz/Spelling Bad On Purpose. (52:51)

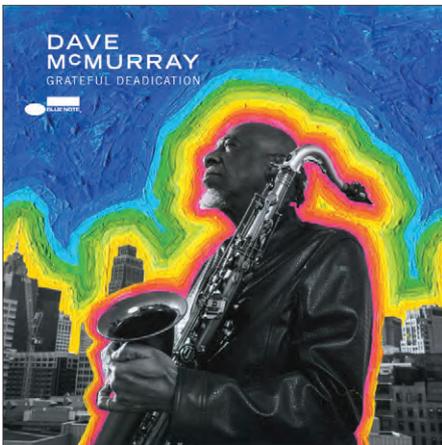
Semi-Simulacra: Garlic Plastics; F Tessellations/Chimeric Numbers; Tooth Helmet; Törn; Feebleau; Fruit Velvet; Mind Goggle/End Of Something; Regular Falutin'; Supple Bicepsual/Is Jingles/Utter Balbis. (53:00)

Subfusc Oquiddities: Phooiaux/Rejected Names/High Popes; Sartling And Diaphanous/The Gnostic And The Spastic; B; Strikes Me As Wanting To Make Me Barf/Clump 3; Mad Homonymns/Phex; Plungeon; Ought Gobs/T. (56:49)

Panopoly: Breach Zone; Elegiac Foldouts/Gluey Clamor; Mighnutes; Glue Cubes/Inkblot Terrain/Clock Levitation/Cat Secrets/Bludgegment; Catjinx; Fettleau/A Spree ... Canopy. (58:33)

Personnel: Kate Gentile, compositions, drums, percussion; Matt Mitchell, compositions, piano, modular synthesizer, Prophet-6, MicroFreak, electronics; Kim Cass, acoustic and electroacoustic bass; Ben Gerstein, trombone; Jon Irabagon, tenor, mezzo-soprano, soprano and soprillo saxophones, alto clarinet; Davy Lazar, trumpet, piccolo trumpet, cornet; Mat Maneri, viola; Ava Mendoza, guitar; Matt Nelson, tenor and alto saxophones; Brandon Seabrook, guitar, tenor banjo.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com



Dave McMurray *Grateful Dedication*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★

Although improvisation was central to the Grateful Dead aesthetic, jazz has had a curiously distanced relationship with the band's legacy. Yes, Jerry Garcia recorded with Ornette Coleman on the 1988 album *Virgin Beauty*, and in the early '90s, Branford Marsalis sat in with the Dead at stadium concerts. But apart from the group *Jazz Is Dead*, which included bassist Alfonso Johnson, attempts to rope the Dead into the jazz canon have been few and far between.

Patricia Barber *Clique*

IMPEX SACD/MQA CD

★★★★

Patricia Barber can be a cerebral songwriter, but on her sparkling new ultra-hi-fi release the Chicago singer-pianist opts for the nuanced simplicity of popular songs. Of course, with an uneasy title like *Clique*, nuance is the key. Of the seven tracks with lyrics (two are instrumentals), many play with the idea of being in, out or on the edge. Thus, even as the singer flips the bird to the burg that's shunned her on Lee Hazlewood's "This Town," you can feel the anger and hurt beneath the bravado. And in the opposite scenario, the braggart who runs with the cool kids on "The In Crowd" feels a bit too much like a gloater. And so it goes.

As if to drive home her point about complexity imbedded in simplicity, Barber convincingly sings the Portuguese lyrics to "One Note Samba," an elaborate conceit proposing that all notes (and loves) lead back to one. Alec Wilder's conflicted narrator on "Trouble Is A Man" has "nothing good to say about him," yet she "hates a day without him." Stevie Wonder's asserts through salty tears that "All In Love Is Fair," though he's not really quite ready to accept it.

Barber delivers these love stories with a

Dave McMurray was unfamiliar with the Grateful Dead until he sat in with Wolf Bros., featuring Bob Weir on guitar, in 2018. But that lack of history works to this album's advantage, because *Grateful Dedication* focuses not on the Dead's instrumental style, but on their songs.

That's most evident on "Dark Star," a tune that has been the basis for many an extended jam. Here, the emphasis is on the loose, shuffling groove, with almost half the seven-minute playing time given over to the head. Likewise, "Eyes Of The World" is less about stretching out than working a lithe jazz/soul groove, while "Franklin's Tower" fully celebrates Latin rock roots the Dead's original only gestured toward.

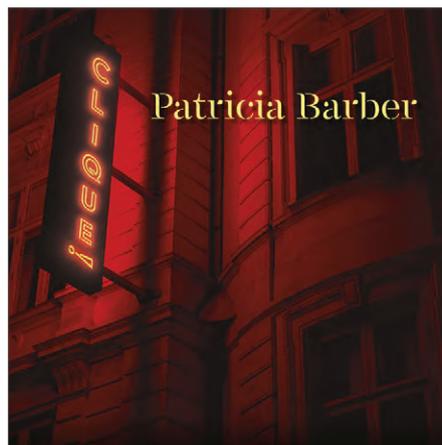
"Loser," which boasts an eloquently weary vocal by Bettye LaVette, is the most Dead-indebted performance here, and if the rest doesn't quite make a case for the band's repertoire as potential jazz standards, *Grateful Dedication* will certainly become the smooth-jazz of choice for aging Deadheads.

—J.D. Considine

Grateful Dedication: Fire On The Mountain; Dark Star; Loser; Estimated Prophet; Eyes Of The World; The Eleven; Touch Of Grey; Franklin's Tower; The Music Never Stopped. (1:00:36)

Personnel: Dave McMurray, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone (4, 9), flute (5, 8, 19), Roland AE-10 (10), keyboards (1, 2, 4, 6–10), percussion (1, 2, 4, 5, 7–9); Maurice O'Neal, keyboards, Hammond B-3 (2, 4–9); Luis Resto, piano (1, 5); Jeff Chimenti, keyboards (3); Wayne Gerard, guitars (except 3); Bob Weir, guitar (3); Greg Leisz, guitar (3); Ibrahim Jones, acoustic bass (except 3); Don Was, bass (3); Jeff Canady, drums (except 3); Jay Lane, drums (3); Larry Fratangelo, percussion (1, 5, 8–10); Sowande Keita, percussion (2); Bettye LaVette, vocals (3); Herschel Boone, vocals, vocal arrangement (7).

Ordering info: bluenote.com



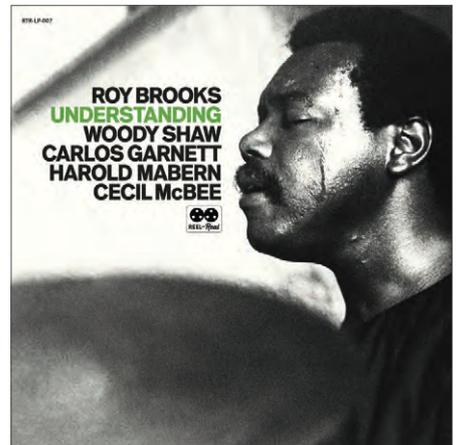
pristine clarity and intimacy enhanced by the exposed placement of her voice — as well as the beefy vamps and solos of bassist Patrick Mulcahy — in the surround-sound mix. The trio's estimable inside-outside rumbles on "Mashup" and "Straight No Chaser" can be read as a musical rhyme for the album's lyrical theme, though ultimately they distract somewhat from the narrative.

—Paul de Barros

Clique: This Town; Trouble Is A Man; Mashup; Samba de Uma Nota Só (One Note Samba); I Could Have Danced All Night; The In Crowd; Shall We Dance?; Straight No Chaser; All In Love Is Fair. (45:16)

Personnel: Patricia Barber, piano, voice; Patrick Mulcahy, bass; Jon Deitemyer, drums; Neal Alger, acoustic guitar (4, 5); Jim Gailloro, tenor saxophone (7).

Ordering info: impexrecords.com



Roy Brooks *Understanding*

REEL TO REAL

★★★★

Did you hear the George Coleman disc that dropped last December? A feisty 1971 live hit from Charm City that found the saxophonist's band truly peaking. Baltimore's Left Bank Jazz Society presented the show, and Reel To Real put it out — as did both concerns with this new Roy Brooks document, a pick-up quintet date from the fall of '70. This one isn't merely feisty, though. This one's pure fire. Let me repeat that in case you don't read this review any further: pure futhermuckin' fire.

Incendiary acts are some of mainstream swing's most engaging gambits — that feeling when a highflying groove levels up to explode a rhythm section's propulsion, or a solo is so burning that it compels the entire band to double down in the vehemence department. *Understanding* resides in these fevered zones. As the six extended tracks flaunt their ardor, it becomes obvious that Brooks' outfit — trumpeter Woody Shaw, saxophonist Carlos Garnett, pianist Harold Mabern and bassist Cecil McBee — is so united, its mind-meld won't warp regardless of how rambunctious the attack becomes. Unity bolsters frenzy at every turn.

A 25-year-old Shaw comes on like a mix of Clifford Brown and Albert Ayler. Garnett's admiration for Trane is obvious but irrelevant — he personalizes every one of his whirlwind declarations. Five bucks says that Mabern has never been captured being this physical on his instrument. And the boss is a powerhouse, giving contemporaries such as Tony Williams a run for their money. This evening of music is a mad dash towards hard-swinging delirium, truly one of those "wish I'd been there" dates. What's in the Baltimore water? —Jim Macnie

Understanding: Introduction; Prelude To Understanding; Understanding; Billie's Bounce; Zoltan; Taurus Woman; The Theme. (63:19/60:17)

Personnel: Roy Brooks, drums; Woody Shaw, trumpet; Carlos Garnett, tenor saxophone; Harold Mabern, piano.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

The Hot Box

Critics	Suzanne Lorge	J.D. Considine	Paul de Barros	Jim Macnie
Matt Mitchell/Kate Gentile <i>Snark Horse</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Dave McMurray <i>Grateful Deadication</i>	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★	★★★
Patricia Barber <i>Clique</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
Roy Brooks <i>Understanding</i>	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Matt Mitchell/Kate Gentile, *Snark Horse*

The album may be maximal, but the writing is often minimal, built mostly on ostinatos or rhythmic cells. Yet Mitchell, Gentile and their playmates pull such a wide range of textures and moods from the material that, despite its length, *Snark Horse* has no bloat. —J.D. Considine

Mitchell and Gentile's 10-piece Horsekestra — with banjo, love that! — has created a monumental collection of improvised and composed electro-acoustic music that, no matter how wild it gets, never makes anything less than musical sense. —Paul de Barros

Creating an abstract galaxy from scratch, they sound like they know every black hole and supercluster in the place. Even the densest passages have a coherence, and the joy of the creative journey woos listeners deeper and deeper. —Jim Macnie

Dave McMurray, *Grateful Deadication*

McMurray captures the unbridled soulfulness of the Dead without a hint of mimicry or diminishment. But these contemporized versions are sleeker and pithier than the originals: His sax cuts through the changes like a blowtorch. LaVette, in all of her pathos, mesmerizes. —Suzanne Lorge

Even if you're no fan of the Dead, this fetching album should grab you. LaVette's gutsy "Loser" and Herschel Boone's bedroom soul re-imagining of "Touch Of Grey" are highlights. —Paul de Barros

His super-bright tone might preclude me from returning to this disc too often, but the saxophonist charges these melodies with the kind of physical vigor that's occasionally missing from the originals. —Jim Macnie

Patricia Barber, *Clique*

Barber's throaty vocals and intuitive comping tap into the innate allure of time-hewn tunes: Her relaxed delivery barely contains the vibrancy that feeds the album's performances. Aesthetic tensions give this standards album its heft. —Suzanne Lorge

Barber's creamy alto is always a treat, but the way her phrasing and approach transform the likes of "Shall We Dance" and "Samba de Una Nota Só" is a treasure. —J.D. Considine

Working with such minimal backup is a daring move, but risk is an old friend of Barber's. Doesn't mean that the program is fully engaging, though. The more formal she treats her vocals, the less compelling she becomes. —Jim Macnie

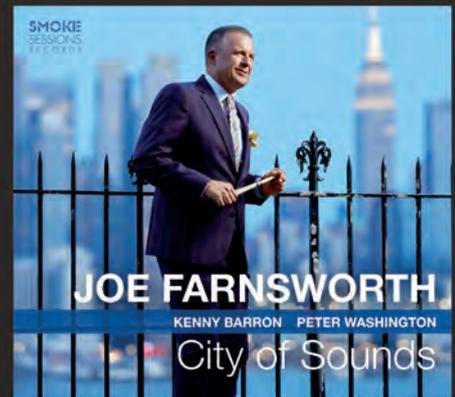
Roy Brooks, *Understanding*

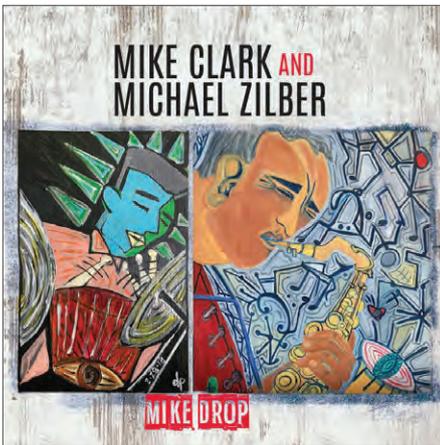
Understanding allows for immersive listening to post-bop masters at an unusually deep level. These few tracks leave a visceral imprint on the ear that retrains the psyche and only enhances one's appreciation for the musical alchemy that happens in live performance. —Suzanne Lorge

These guys are so on fire, the album ought to arrive in an asbestos sleeve. But as great as everyone else is — and this is some of the best Woody Shaw I've heard — Brooks is even better, the perfect mix of drive, complexity and swing. —J.D. Considine

This white-hot concert set is a great reminder of the technical brilliance and orchestral approach of the late Detroit drummer, as well as a showcase for boundary-pushing solos by Woody Shaw and tenor saxophonist Carlos Garnett. —Paul de Barros

THE SOUND OF SMOKE





**Mike Clark/
Michael Zilber**
Mike Drop

SUNNYSIDE
★★★★★

While drummer Mike Clark may have made his bones supplying the elastic, polyrhythmic Bay Area funk beats and sophisticated time displacement to Herbie Hancock's groundbreaking music during the early '70s, his thing since moving to New York in the early '80s has been more about swinging in a post-bop vein. *Mike Drop* finds him doing just that alongside a stellar Bay Area crew of saxophonist Michael

Zilber, outstanding pianist Matt Clark and veteran bassist Peter Barshay.

They open the program in aggressive fashion on Zilber's uptempo swinger "Barshay Fly," with its subtle allusion to Wayne Shorter's "Palladium." Drummer Clark is strictly tipping on the ride cymbal here while cutting up the beat on snare and toms in unpredictable ways. Shorter's profound influence on Zilber is also represented on the quartet's faithful rendition of Wayne's serene ballad "Miyako." Zilber also tips his hat to another sax master, Sonny Rollins, on the irrepressibly swinging "Sonny Monk (If I Were A)."

The Beatles' "Blackbird" is reimagined as a hip, medium-tempo swinger, allowing Clark to go into full Elvin Jones mode on the kit, while Zilber runs through six different keys on a clever reharmonizing of "Norwegian Wood."

Clark opens "Passion Dance" with a deft drum solo before settling into some funky time displacement for an Actual Proof-ization of the McCoy Tyner classic. And the solid program closes with a burning romp through the standard "Falling In Love With Love."

—Bill Milkowski

Mike Drop: Barshay Fly; Sonny Monk (If I Were A); Passion Dance; You Know I Care; Blackbird; Norwegian Wood; Miyako; Monk's Dream; Falling In Love With Love. (53:38)

Personnel: Mike Clark, drums; Michael Zilber, tenor and soprano saxophones; Matt Clark, piano; Peter Barshay, bass.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Lars Danielsson Liberetto
Cloudland

ACT RECORDS
★★★★★

Lars Danielsson's early records on Dragon stretched in tone from pastel to craggy discord, leading some to reach for the ECM catalogue for points of comparison. In a sense, ACT has taken over aspects of the ECM method, but Danielsson has developed in different directions than he would have under Manfred Eicher's wing. For a start, the pastel tones have firmed up into something much more solid and soaked, and while the discord has calmed, it's still implied throughout these new pieces that make up the fourth Liberetto album since 2012.

As soon as Arve Henriksen comes in on the title track, he tends to command the foreground with that famous flute-inspired trumpet sound. By contrast, clarinetist Kinan Azmeh is more anonymous, and guitarist John Parricelli doesn't push for attention, playing with subtle authority as harmony instrument and colorist.

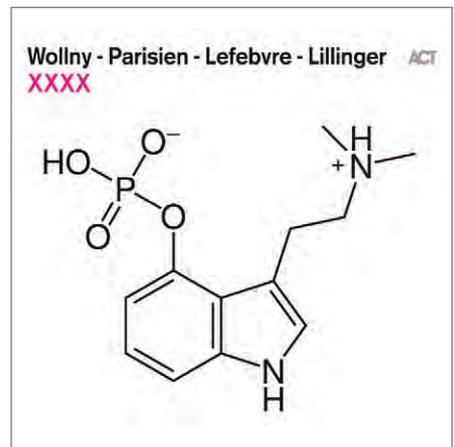
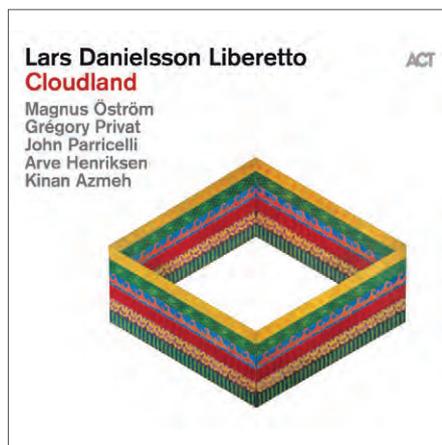
Grégory Privat has his finest moment on "The Fifth Grade," which begins as if in canon and then pushes out into more complex, rhythmically subtle territory. The pianist touches in the melody of "Tango Magnifique" and Parricelli responds on steel-string acoustic, but

the song never breaks into the effusions one waits for, instead making way for another brief but ringing solo from the leader. "Sacred Mind" does something similar. By then, the ECM analogy has largely departed and the set again confirms not just Danielsson's stature as a leader/composer, but also the distinctive direction Siggy Loch's label has taken, effortlessly blending new jazz with other forms. —Brian Morton

Cloudland: Vildmark; Cloudland; The Fifth Grade; Nikita's Dream; Tango Magnifique; Desert Of Catanga; River Of Little; Yes To You; Intermezzo; Villstad; Sacred Mind; Imagine Joao. (47:45)

Personnel: Arve Henriksen, trumpet; Kinan Azmeh, clarinet; Grégory Privat, piano; John Parricelli, guitars; Lars Danielsson, bass, cello; Magnus Östrom, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



**Wollny/Parisien/
Lefebvre/Lillinger**
XXXX

ACT RECORDS
★★★★★

XXXX is mysterious and magical. The 10 tracks are derived from eight hours of live club performance by an electro-acoustic ensemble that had not met before going onstage in Berlin in late 2019, yet achieved remarkable results. Produced, edited and mixed by keyboardist Michael Wollny, bassist and electronics player Tim Lefebvre and sonic consultant Jason Kingsland, the album is wildly colorful and dramatic, partaking of a weird, wide and evidently processed instrumental palette that serves the fluid, propulsive interactions of highly responsive, imaginative and daring players.

The ever-shifting, ever-changing XXXX soundscapes aren't kaleidoscopic, because the band eschews static patterns, allows little repetition and has strong narrative thrust. There are no obvious song forms, either, although the tone of the album is not iconoclastic but rather expansive. The four X's may represent the four individual virtuosi. Wollny, recording for the first time on electric instruments only, masterfully creates unusual timbres and deploys them in sweeping runs, subtle insertions and skittering lines. Parisien is fleet, incisive and soulful, yearning as if his soprano is an Armenian dudek. Lefebvre offers looming low-register blocks and gnarly underpinnings. Lillinger has many approaches to beats and beatlessness, too, always enhancing what's happening. But their personal contributions become all but inseparable within the confluence of their collaboration — it's impossible to know for sure who's doing what, or why it would matter.

—Howard Mandel

XXXX: Somewhere Around Barstow; Dick Laurent Is Dead; Too Bright In Here; Grandmother's Hammer; The Haul; Find The Fish; Doppler FX; Michael vs. Michael; Nörvenich Lounge; Nostalgia For The Light. (44:40)

Personnel: Michael Wollny, synthesizer, Rhodes and piano; Emile Parisien, soprano saxophone; Tim Lefebvre, electric bass, electronics; Christian Lillinger, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Sam Pilnick's Nonet Project *The Adler Suite*

NEXT LEVEL

★★★★★

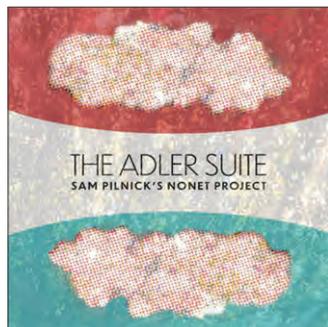
Inspired by the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, tenor saxophonist Sam Pilnick has composed a nine-part suite designed to evoke a trip into space and back. *The Adler Suite* — some tracks swinging mightily, some modern-classical, one a kind of round — succeeds in its mission. The segments span the lusty “Squawk Box,” an exciting example of Pilnick’s affinity for the lower harmonic depths; “Revolving Twins,” an expressive blend of brass and saxophones that gains in power, verging on anger; “Silver Light,” a ballad showcasing Emily Kuhn’s noir trumpet; and “House Of The Missives (Pismis-24),” a complex rocker highlighting Matthew Smalligan’s explosive percussion and Ben Cruz’s ringing guitar.

References surface in places like the hint of “Star Eyes” in “Star Launch,” a track that displays Max Bessen’s saxophone virtuosity. But originality rules, climaxing in “Falling Backwards,” which evokes an astronaut’s scary, thrilling return to Earth. Pianist Meghan Stagl’s left hand kicks off that final track, which traverses a sonic palette of saxophones, Euan Edmonds’s flashy trombone and Stagl’s warm-hearted chording. This music isn’t psychedelic, but it is a trip. —Carlo Wolff

The Adler Suite: Squawk Box; Star Launch; Revolving Twins; Silver Light; Constant Companion; House Of The Massive (Pismis-24); A Light Year; Expanding Universe; Falling Backwards. (55:01)

Personnel: Max Bessen, alto saxophone; Ben Cruz, guitar; Ben Dillinger, bass; Euan Edmonds, trombone; Ted Hogarth, baritone saxophone; Emily Kuhn, trumpet; Sam Pilnick, tenor saxophone; Matthew Smalligan, drums; Meghan Stagl, piano.

Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com



Nikolaj Hess *Spacelab & Strings*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

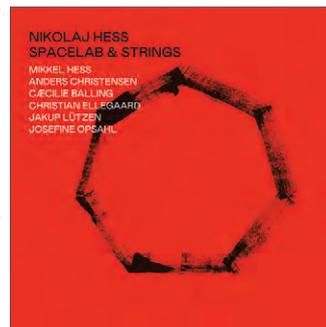
Nikolaj Hess’s new album *Spacelab & Strings* isn’t a conventional jazz record. Its title bears the names of the jazz trio Spacelab and the string quartet Strings (led by Cæcilie Balling) in a distinctly functional fashion. Yet, the album created by uniting these seven musicians doesn’t maintain the kind of stiff boundaries its identifying facade might otherwise imply.

“Indigo Meadow” encourages specific imagery, but the music still prompts wonder and delight. Strings’ soft and gingerly harmonies dance with Christensen’s intermittent bass pizzicato. The all-string emphasis makes classical prioritization seem imminent. Nevertheless, Christensen’s jazzy swing takes the lead before Nikolaj’s carefree piano and Mikkel’s relaxed brush strokes pivot the scene toward a cooler, freer flow. “Ravel Reflections” honors the late French composer, employing lively pizzicato, harmonizing tremolo and bowed flourishes. Still, when the quartet’s descending melody leads into a perfect opening for harp, flute or other orchestral element, light cymbal taps, chugging brush strokes and galloping piano usher in stylistic transformation that ebbs and flows without conflict throughout the record. —Kira Grunenber

Spacelab & Strings: ECM Country; Piece; Indigo Meadow; Ravel Reflections; Adagio; Trio2; Seven Ate Nine; Danish Accents Lost In The Bush (iabbywvin); Kontra Punk; Tinir; Trio1; Celeste; Black & White; Intro Exit. (49:33)

Personnel: Nikolaj Hess, piano; Anders AC Christensen, bass; Mikkel Hess, drums; Cæcilie Balling, Christian Ellegaard, violin; Jakup Lutzen, viola; Josefina Opsahl, cello.

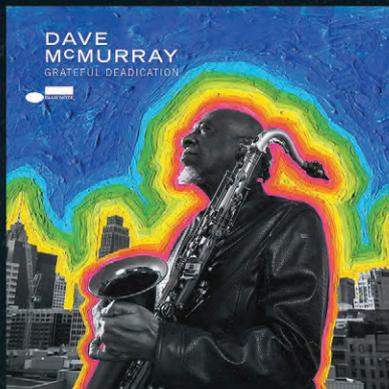
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**Dayna Stephens/
Anthony Fung**
Pluto Juice

CONTAGIOUS MUSIC

★★★★½

At 53½ minutes, *Pluto Juice* is a journey. Dayna Stephens in his continuing explorations with the Akai Electronic Wind Instrument is finding new paths to explore and taking his sweet time getting there. Alongside drummer Anthony Fung's exuberant keeping of the beat, this quartet quite adeptly makes this music boldly and courageously, like the next generation of fusion. Andrew Marzotto is a guitar-

ist worthy of your attention and certainly grabs it throughout the album, especially his lively solo on "Outskirts Of Neptune" or the penultimate track, "Approaching Pluto," with an easy groove that rises to unexpected heights.

Opener "Welcome To Our Snow Globe" is the perfect encapsulation of the album — well spaced for a chance to showcase the entire quartet, Stephens embracing the full potential (and weirdness) of the EWI, Anthony Fung making the best of every possible drum fill, and that paradoxical sense that this feels familiarly like nothing one has heard before. The only song on the album that features Stephens on the familiar soprano saxophone is "Roly Poly Universe," which feels like an anchor for every song surrounding it.

While the execution of this material is exquisite, revolving the bulk of the music around the EWI is a big pill to swallow. The rest of the quartet is the spoonful of sugar that helps this medicine go down, but one still can't ignore the fact that it's medicine, that being futuristic also literally means being ahead of the present time.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Pluto Juice: Welcome To Our Snow Globe; Pluto And Beyond; Outskirts Of Neptune; Roly Poly Universe; Trial On Mars; Zoomed Out; Green Gargantua; Approaching Pluto; Lies That Tell The Truth. (53:34)

Personnel: Dayna Stephens, EWI, soprano saxophone; Andrew Marzotto, guitar; Rich Brown, electric bass; Anthony Fung, drums.

Ordering info: daynastephens.bandcamp.com



Dahveed Behroozi
Echoes

SUNNYSIDE RECORDS

★★★★½

Classically trained pianist Dahveed Behroozi was already playing jazz professionally as a high school student from Heyward, California (often with a young bassist named Thomas Morgan). His training continued in New York with Fred Hersch before returning to his classical roots as a graduate student mentored by Ursula Oppens.

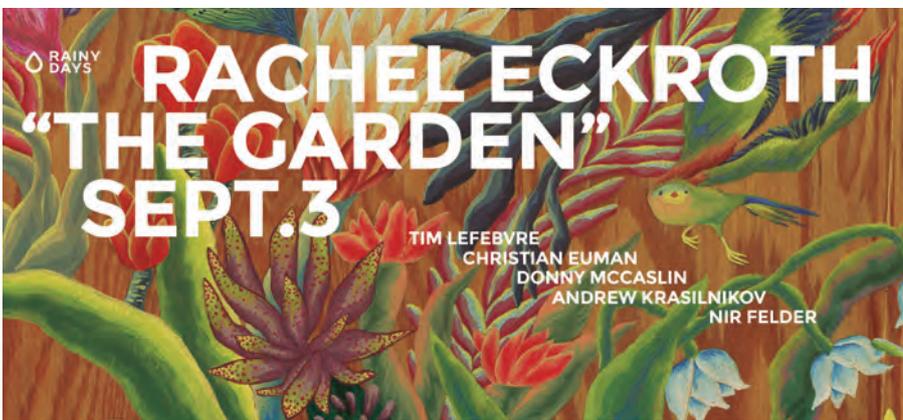
This diametrical journey between the twin pillars of jazz and classical music has left Behroozi in an apparent desire not to go anywhere further too quickly. His sophomore trio offering, *Echoes*, is stately in its chamber-music aesthetic, and leisurely in its contentedness to savor the many colors and textures the players engage in with solemn, expressive purpose. The pianist is accompanied by his high school buddy Morgan, who has since risen to the top ranks of New York jazz bassists, and Billy Mintz, who has occupied that space on drums in rarified stasis for decades. They remain remarkably focused throughout the concise, nine-track album, moving lightly within the heavily improvised vehicles.

A slowly formed narrative appears in each episodic piece. There is retrospection between two different occurrences of "Chimes," the second immediately more insistent and urgent. Some drama happens in "Gilroy," as a series of repeated chord cycles are eventually interrupted by a gentle flourish of scalar activity. "Sendoff" is an extreme departure from the album's otherwise serene demeanor — a bruising and ultimately triumphant sonic avalanche. The liveliest piece is "Tricks," a blues-inspired vignette removed from any formal harmonic shackles, allowing Behroozi to finally hint at his impressive pianistic capabilities. —Gary Fukushima

Echoes: Imagery; Chimes; Gilroy; Alliteration; Sendoff; Royal Star; Chimes (variation); Tricks; TDB. (44:27)

Personnel: Dahveed Behroozi, piano; Thomas Morgan, bass; Billy Mintz, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



RAINYDAYSRECORDS.BANDCAMP.COM RAINYDAYSRECORDS.RU FACEBOOK.COM/RAINYSPB

Cochemea Vol. II: Baca Sewa

DAPTONE

★★★★½

Baca Sewa's title refers to Cochemea's pre-colonial family name. "Sewa" also means "flower" in Yaqui, his people's native tongue. And flowers also play an important role in Yaqui culture, so it's likely no coincidence that *Baca Sewa* radiates like a blossoming flower from beginning to end.

Picking up where Cochemea's debut album, *All My Relations*, left off, *Vol. II: Baca Sewa* is a further melding of electric saxophone wails and echo-heavy percussive grooves. Specters of such psychedelic players as Eddie Harris hang like incense smoke throughout. Standout tracks include "Burning Plain," "Curandera" and "Mimbrenños."

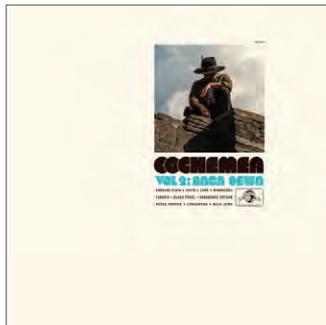
Some songs in the set feel like a welcome breeze on an August afternoon, and others lend themselves to taking a cruise in a two-tone brown Eldorado Biarritz. "Chito's Song" is one of those jams. Cochemea's chameleonic talent is in his ability to toggle back and forth effortlessly between spiritual notions and stone-cold grooves. Consequently, *Baca Sewa* is the rare album that services both carnal and mystical sensibilities with ease.

—Ayana Contreras

Vol. II: *Baca Sewa*: Burning Plain; Tukaria; Mimbrenños; Chito's Song; Nahsuareo Bwikam; Black Pearl; Peace Prayer; Curandera; *Baca Sewa* (Song); *Baca Sewa* (Chant). (33:53)

Personnel: Cochemea Gastelum, alto saxophone, electric saxophone, flutes; Elizabeth Pupo-Walker, congas, bombo; Brian Wolfe, bass drum, bombo, surdo; Neil Ochoa, conga, bongos, repinique; Giancarlo Luiggi, shekere; Alex Chakour, bass, marimba, kalimba, bombo; Victor Axelrod, electric and electronic pianos, kalimba.

Ordering info: daptonerecords.com



Alchemy Sound Project

Afrika Love

ARC

★★★★

In this third release of the Alchemy Sound Project, the five core members have a track apiece on *Afrika Love*. The title tune, composed by Salim Washington, has a tinge of the Afrofuturism so resonant of Sun Ra and his Arkestra. Washington and Erica Lindsay's tenor saxophones converge and then dart apart with a shared sense of urgency and artistic smears. Key to their separate solos is the insinuation of swing that pianist Sumi Tonooka captures flawlessly, before laying the chordal matrix for Washington's ferocious coda.

Tonooka's "Dark Blue Residue" is a study in brilliance, and the ensemble delivers a cohesion that is as perfect as it is impressive. On "The Fountain," bassist David Arend's tune (he also produced the album), it's not easy to match the speed and agility of drummer Chad Taylor, but the group succeeds and again the collective precision is remarkable. As the opening track it establishes an energy and excellence that never recedes.

"Kesii" is Lindsay's composition, but Tonooka owns it. Her performance here is invested with all the imaginative intuition that comes with careful absorption of those Detroit pianists she studied.

—Herb Boyd



Afrika Love: The Fountain; Dark Blue Residue; Afrika Love; The Cadillac Of Mountains; Kesii. (39:84)

Personnel: David Arend, bass; Erica Lindsay, tenor saxophone, clarinet, alto flute; Sumi Tonooka, piano; Salim Washington, tenor saxophone, flute, bass clarinet, oboe; Michael Ventoso, trombone; Chad Taylor, drums.

Ordering info: alchemysoundproject.com

Ben Aylon Xalam

RIVERBOAT RECORDS

★★★★

Israeli drummer and percussionist Ben Aylon is fascinated by African music, particularly the traditions of Senegal and Mali, so he created a drum kit that features 10 different percussion instruments. He also plays xalam, a stringed instrument found throughout West Africa, as well as djeli ngoni, a variation of the xalam from Mali. The melodies Aylon composed for *Xalam*, which he recorded with the late Senegalese sabar master Doudou N'diaye Rose starting in 2013, blend the sounds of Africa, the Middle East, rock, reggae and more into a pleasing sonic landscape.

The title track opens the program with interlocking melodies on xalam and cadences set up by Rose and five other sabar masters. Aylon's atmospheric touches on electric bass give the tune an otherworldly aura. His multitracked xalams and electric bass play the rippling hook that drives "Café Touba," accenting the melody with hand percussion. Guest singer Amy Scako, known as the Tina Turner of Mali, supplies vivid ornamentations to the r&b hybrid "Jonibenina." Hints of funk ("Benn Takamba"), blues ("Hulem Belibe") and even country music ("SeneGambia, Part 2") round out the set's international appeal.

—j. poet

Xalam: Xalam; Hulem Belibe; SeneGambia (Part 1); SeneGambia (Part 2); Alafia; Benn Takamba; Jonibenina; Café Touba; Mon Lov. (42:56)

Personnel: Ben Aylon, xalam, djeli ngoni, ngoni bass, kamele ngoni, percussion, synth bass, electric bass; Aveva (2), Khaira Arby (5), Amy Scako (7), vocals; Doudou N'diaye Rose, Birame N'diaye Rose, Moustapha N'diaye Rose, Ibou Galo, Dourfal N'diaye, Ousainou Mbaye, sabar (1); Ian Aylon, guitar (5).

Ordering info: worldmusic.net



Coltrane's Spiritual Touch

Alice Coltrane is noted for being John Coltrane's musical partner and wife, but also for her groundbreaking contributions to spiritual jazz. Throughout the 1970s, in addition to maintaining the busy schedule of a recording and touring artist, Alice Coltrane was immersing herself in Eastern philosophies, mythologies and Vedic religious practices. By the early 1980s, she had become a guru and spiritual teacher and began to make music exclusively for her community at The Vedantic Center, northwest of Los Angeles.

The original recording of these songs, *Turiya Sings*, was released exclusively on cassette in 1982 for the students of the center. In addition to Alice's voice and organ, the recording included synthesizers, strings and sound effects. In 2004, Alice's son and producer of this record, Ravi Coltrane, found mixes of just Alice's voice and her Wurlitzer organ, and set out on a long path toward sharing these with the world.

"As her son, growing up and hearing her playing these songs on the very same Wurlitzer you hear on this recording, I recognize this choice maintains the purity and essence of Alice's musical and spiritual vision," Ravi said. "In many ways, this new clarity brings these chants to an even higher place."

They're finally here. Recorded in 1981 and never shared in this form with the world at large, ***Kirtan: Turiya Sings (Impulse!; 61:35; ★★★★★)*** collects nine devotional songs, featuring the never-before-heard combination of Alice Coltrane's voice and organ. The music, sung in Sanskrit, is spacious and large. Alice's voice has weight and power. The effect is mesmerizing.

"On this album, your ear will be turned toward the sound of the blues, to gospel, to the Black American church, often combined with the Carnatic singing style of southern India," Ravi said. "You will hear beautiful harmonies influenced by Alice's Detroit, Motown roots, her bebop roots, John Coltrane's impact, and her absorption of European classical music, particularly that of her favorite — Igor Stravinsky."

Ordering info: impulserecords.com

Wewantsounds has announced a deluxe reissue of Frank Foster's ***The Loud Minority (Wewantsounds; 41:16; ★★★½)***. Released on Bob Shad's Mainstream Records in 1972, the album is one of the seminal political works of the '70s. Featuring Elvin Jones, Stanley Clarke, Airto, Cecil Bridgewater and Marvin "Hannibal" Peterson, it is also Dee Dee Bridgewater's earliest full recordings. This special edition includes a 20-page booklet featuring previously unseen session photos recently unearthed, an introduction by Shad's grand-



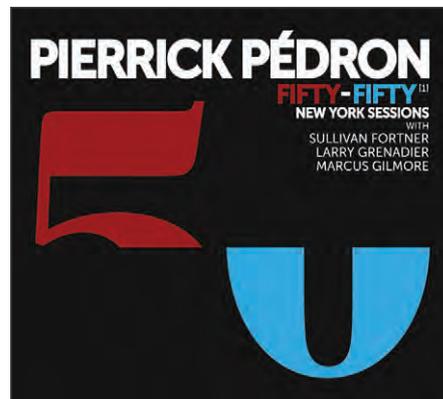
children Judd and Mia Apatow, an essay by British journalist Kevin Le Gendre and an exclusive interview of Cecil and Dee Dee Bridgewater by Paul Bowler. The album artwork has been recreated with original photos and the audio remastered from the original tapes.

When he recorded *The Loud Minority* for Mainstream, Foster had been playing saxophone for nearly 20 years with the likes of Donald Byrd, Thelonious Monk and The Count Basie Orchestra. Cecil Bridgewater remembers: "Frank, his thing was, any group that he had he wanted to give young musicians a chance."

As usual for Mainstream sessions, the studio was booked for two days and the record was cut live. What came out of these two days are four long, funky jams fuelled by two distinct lineups playing simultaneously, augmented with a six-piece brass section led by Foster.

Wewantsounds is also reissuing Michel Legrand's soundtrack for the 1969 French thriller ***La Piscine (Wewantsounds; 44:00; ★★★)***. Legrand penned the score straight after *The Thomas Crown Affair* soundtrack, and it features the same mix of memorable themes, jazzy instrumentals and funky pop songs. The full soundtrack was only released in Japan and France and is now very rare. Three bonus tracks that have never been released on vinyl have been added, all newly remastered and housed in a deluxe gatefold sleeve designed by Eric Adrian Lee with new liner notes by Jeremy Allen. This reissue of *La Piscine* is accompanied by three bonus tracks, the original queue for the opening credit plus two superb variations in the form of "Chassé Croisé" featuring Eddy Louiss' Hammond organ and "Une Enquete." The release is augmented by seven-inch packaging of Legrand's 1972 composition "Un Homme Est Mort." **DB**

Ordering info: wewantsounds.com



Pierrick Pédron *Fifty-Fifty [1] New York Sessions*

GAZEBO

★★★★

French alto saxophonist Pierrick Pédron should be as well known and highly esteemed by jazz connoisseurs in America as he is in Europe and Japan. With world-class chops, several distinctly different albums and an abundance of energy and ideas, this horn player has absorbed the lessons of his instrument's most innovative modernists and alludes to them offhandedly in the course of reveling in his own sound.

Extremely fast and fluid, favoring long, curlicued phrases yet able to pause and linger, apply space and dynamics to the flow, Pédron's playing is exciting, evocative and often seems inspired. He exploits keening highs, husky vocalizations and sighs, throbbing middle-register tones and an upbeat bounce. He has the blues and swings hard. His original works here may not immediately compel cover versions, but they are witty and evocative, launching performances that excel in narrative sense, romantic lyricism, deft tension-and-release and ensemble interaction.

Pédron celebrated his 50th birthday two years ago by convening this dream band, from which pianist Sullivan Fortner serves as the album's co-star. His accompaniments are compositional — original, unconventional, unpredictable. His solo intro to "Sakura" seems complete in itself, and he's also pivotal in the rhythm section. Which is not to take anything away from bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Marcus Gilmore.

Oddly, piano and drums are separated, respectively on left and right tracks, bass and Pédron center of the mix. But they all come together in making this music, which flows richly and, not being obvious, bears repeated listening.

—Howard Mandel

Fifty-Fifty [1] New York Sessions: Bullet T; Be Ready; Sakura; Boom; Trevis; Unknown 2; Origami; Mr Takagi; Mizue. (48.22)

Personnel: Pierrick Pédron, alto saxophone; Sullivan Fortner, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums.

Ordering info: fnac.com

Min Xiao-Fen
White Lotus
OUTSIDE MUSIC
★★★★½

Since moving to the United States in 1992, Min Xiao-Fen has bridged the Chinese opera and folk music that she was raised on with sounds from the rest of the world. While she works often in the realm of contemporary classical music, she finds jazz especially inspirational. *White Lotus* is Min's soundtrack for Wu Yonggang's 1934 silent film *The Goddess*, which depicts the travails faced by a woman of limited means who is struggling to support her son. Min plays the pipa, the four-stringed lute for which she is best known, and three similar stringed instruments. Her sole accompanist is guitarist Rez Abbasi, who proves responsive to her needs throughout.

The theme of *White Lotus* invites Min to explore the similarities between certain Chinese folk styles and the blues. The bent notes of her guqin on "Anicca," the first track, evoke Delta country blues, while her growling vocals sound like they were uttered on a stage in Beijing. The galloping rhythm and alternately elongated and snarled syllables that she utters on "Faith" convey outrage over the circumstances of the film's heroine. And the intricately entwined acoustic phrases on "Karuna" are exciting on purely musical grounds. Not every moment rises to the level of these pieces, but the music is never less than engaging. —Bill Meyer

White Lotus: Anicca; Bija; Champaka; Dukkha; Emaho; Faith; Gassho; Hatha; Ichie; Joriki; Karuna; Lotus. (45:30)

Personnel: Min Xiao-Fen, pipa, sanxian, guqin, ruan, voice; Rez Abbasi, acoustic guitar, electric guitar.

Ordering info: outside-music.com



Pete Rodriguez
Obstacles
SUNNYSIDE
★★★★

Son of salsa singer Pete "El Conde" Rodriguez and godson of composer Johnny Pacheco, trumpeter Pete Rodriguez has the joyous kineticism of Latin jazz in his blood. Having begun his career as part of Pacheco's salsa scene, Rodriguez went on to appear as a sideman with Celia Cruz and Eddie Palmieri.

As a bandleader, it may have seemed the obvious choice to simply continue this legacy in Latin jazz, but his latest offering, *Obstacles*, takes a more introspective approach to composition. Produced as a means of displaying Rodriguez's aptitude for straightahead jazz as much as Latin variants, and also as a response to the titular obstacles of prejudice he has faced, the result is an enjoyable and playfully subversive collection.

Opening with an ode to his 50th birthday while riffing on John Coltrane's "Moment's Notice," Rodriguez locks in with John Ellis' tenor lines on "50" to provide a melodically inventive take on the upbeat standard. The modal "Abraham," meanwhile, descends from a medium-tempo swing into a languid, thoughtful solo from Luis Perdomo on Rhodes.

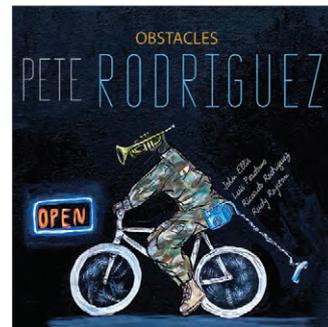
In the time-honored fashion of turning life's struggles into art, *Obstacles* reminds us that sometimes our most fraught experiences can provide the best inspirations.

—Ammar Kalia

Obstacles: 50; Abraham; El Proceso; Academic Backstabbing 101; Mi Ritmo; Triple Positive; Austin & Alley; Obstacles; Someone Else; Mary Dick Ellen; FU John. (62:58)

Personnel: Pete Rodriguez, trumpet; John Ellis, tenor and soprano saxophones; Luis Perdomo, piano, keyboards; Ricardo Rodriguez, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: peterodriguezmusic.com



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Francesco Ciniglio *The Locomotive Suite*

WHIRLWIND

★★★★

Despite the title of drummer-composer Francesco Ciniglio's second album as a leader, *The Locomotive Suite* doesn't barrel forward with aggressive, hubristic resolve or embrace complexity for its own propulsive sake. Subtlety and deceptive simplicity are more Ciniglio's m.o.

In part, the album distinguishes itself via the freshness of its textural palette, including the distinctive flavors of Matteo Pastorino's loamy bass clarinet and vibist Alexis Valet's soft touch. Ciniglio's ensemble is pan-global, and musical patinas and reference points freely roam from Italian roots to New Orleans airs and beyond.

Brief interludes and set-ups line the way in his sweetly integrated suite, as when the opening "Laura Martina" segues into the longest track, "Locomotive," replete with train whistle echoes and varying shades of rhythmic locomotion. The poetic soup-stirring drums-with-brushes etude "The Turtle" leads into the dramatic contours of the album's prize track, "Concern In The Background," an Ornette Coleman-ish long-tone melody, floats atop a brisk swing pulse which hypnotically decelerates, ending with the eight-note theme of the album's opener.

—Josef Woodard

The Locomotive Suite: Laura Martina; Locomotive; Arlene's March; Capitano; Self-Made Man; The Turtle; Concern In The Background; 945 St. Nicholas Avenue; Mon Ange. (44:00)

Personnel: Francesco Ciniglio, drums; Reynold Colom, trumpet, flugelhorn; Matt Chalk, alto saxophone; Matteo Pastorino, bass clarinet; Alexis Valet, vibraphone.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



Vezzoso/Collina/ Marchesini *Italian Spirit In Japan*

ITI

★★★★½

Trumpeter Marco Vezzoso and pianist Alessandro Collina began their collaboration in 2014, and have released several albums together since. Their first under the name Italian Spirit, on which they interpret well-known Italian songs in duo, was released in 2020; this album documents live performances in support of that record, with the addition of percussionist Andrea Marchesini. These pieces, whatever form they may have taken originally, are interpreted here in a manner that blends jazz with the romanticism of a movie score, using only three instruments.

Vezzoso's voice on the horn is sweet and rich, like caramel, but when he puts the mute in, on "Sally," his melodic phrases gain an unexpected pungency and sharpness, particularly when backed solely by Marchesini's hand percussion. It takes a minute or so for Collina to come in on piano, and when he does, things move into cinematic territory. More uptempo pieces allow the trio to come together even more strongly; on "Dance Dance Dancer," piano and percussion create a powerful, loping groove, over which Vezzoso's trumpet soars, long high notes giving the melody a contrasting, mournful quality.

—Philip Freeman

Italian Spirit In Japan: The Winter Sea (Il mare d'inverno); Diamante (Diamante); Universal Judgements (Giudizi universali); Under The Fish Sign (Sotto il segno dei pesci); Sally; Dance Dance Dancer (Balla balla ballerino); Wonderful Thought (Pensiero stupendo); For Me It's Important (Per me è importante); I Like 'O Blues (A me piace o' blues); Caruso. (47:44)

Personnel: Marco Vezzoso, trumpet; Alessandro Collina, piano; Andrea Marchesini, percussion.

Ordering info: itimusic.live



Arturo O'Farrill Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra

Virtual Birdland

ZOHO

★★★★

To celebrate the first anniversary of the "ALJA Digital Village" program, 10 compositions taken from more than 50 online concerts by the Arturo O'Farrill Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra have been released as *Virtual Birdland*. To the band's great credit, the music sounds like it was recorded live rather than remotely.

O'Farrill's "Gulab Jamon" opens the set with dense and rather wild ensembles occasionally leavened by a classical fanfare. The celebratory Moroccan dance music of "Pouvoir" has the orchestra joined by the voices of Malika Zarra and includes a fine solo from trombonist Mariel Bildsten, and the prominent congas of Keisel Jimenez. "Desert" is a modern-day caravan with trombonist Rafi Malkiel and trumpeter Seneca Black leading the way, while Larry Willis' "Nightfall" takes one through the excitement and occasional danger of an urban jungle. —Scott Yanow

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Virtual Birdland: Gulab Jamon; Pouvoir; Desert; Nightfall; Ana Mashoof; Samba For Carmen; Alafia; En La Oscuridad; Cimarron; Para Los. (68:15)

Personnel: Adam O'Farrill, Seneca Black, Bryan Davis, Walter Cano, Rachel Therrien, Kai Sandoval, trumpet, flugelhorn; Rafi Malkiel, euphonium; Mariel Bildsten, Abdulrahman Amer, Xito Lovell, Ben Barnett, trombone; Earl McIntyre, bass trombone, tuba; James Rogers, bass trombone; Alejandro Aviles, Adison Evans, Roman Filiu, Ivan Renta, Jasper Dutz, Jeremy Powell, Livio Almeida, Larry Bustamante, woodwinds; Arturo O'Farrill, piano; Bam Bam Roriguez, bass; Vince Cherico, drums; Keisel Jimenez, congas; Carly Maldonado, percussion; Malika Zarra, voice (2); Gilli Sharet, bassoon (3); Ghazi Faisal Al-Mulafi, guitar, vocal (4); Sulaiman Mayouf Mejally, Dbduljazz Al Hamli, Abdulwahab Al-Hamli, Khaled Bunashi, Ghanem Salem, percussion (4); Paquito D'Rivera, alto saxophone (5); Richard Miller, guitar (5); Everton Isidoro, Gustavo Di Dalva, percussion (7).

Ordering info: zohomusic.com



Dmitry Baevsky *Soundtrack*

FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT

★★★★½

Dmitry Baevsky calls this project his most personal album. And *Soundtrack*, the alto saxophonist's ninth offering, delivers on numerous levels. It is a window into the various movements in Baevsky's life — from his birth and origins in St. Petersburg to his long sojourn in New York and now his current abode in Paris. Jazz, of course, is indeed a soundtrack associated with these cities and settings and the music here reflects the emotions of place.

Baevsky's quartet consists of Jeb Patton on piano, David Wong on bass and Pete Van Nostrand on drums. Like previous projects, there is an embrace of legendary composers and their works. Some of whom — like Dexter Gordon, whose "Le Coiffeur" is covered here — were also known to connect their musical tapestries to multiple places. There are also originals, like "Balitskaya," where Baevsky considers the home he left as a 19-year-old. *Soundtrack* evinces the power of movement and place but as the title of the Ahmad Jamal tune which appears near the end of the album suggests, ultimately it is music that inculcates a level of "Tranquility." It is both familiar and arresting.

—Joshua Myers

Soundtrack: Evening Song; Vamos Nessa; Baltiskaya; Grand Street; The Jody Grind; La Chanson De Maxence; Over and Out; Le Coiffeur; Invisible; Autumn In New York; Stranger In Paradise; Tranquility. (65:12)

Personnel: Dmitry Baevsky, alto saxophone; Jeb Patton, piano; David Wong, bass; Pete Van Nostrand, drums.

Ordering info: freshsoundrecords.com



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Rich Perry *Happy Destiny*

STEEPLECHASE RECORDS

★★★★½

Known for the pure, mellifluous tones of his tenor saxophone, Rich Perry is a minimalist who doesn't shy away from unleashing his "Rebellion Dawgs" when the spirit moves him. And he has free rein to do that on *Happy Destiny*, his 26th date as a leader and his second all-originals album. The follow-up to *Other Matters*, the new release features the same rhythm section of pianist Gary Versace, bassist Jay Anderson and drummer John Riley.

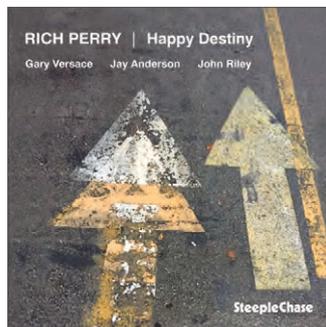
The quartet comes out swingin' on "Iron Buddha," a fresh take on neo-cool jazz that leaves no doubt who the titular Buddha is: bass man Jay Anderson, who surfaces from way down deep to undergird the sonic tapestries woven by Perry, Versace and Riley. En route to "Happy Destiny," the players also have a lot of fun, playing tag and hide-and-seek and melting together like chocolate fondue.

You can actually hear rain falling in the fecund "Plant Based," which ends in a reverie of post-coital bliss. And, far from casting a gloomy shadow, "The Long Dark Spring" shines a beacon of hope. Following a lovely call and response with the keys, Perry's sax flutters skyward, streaking across the heavens while the rhythmic heartbeat of the drum and bass invokes the meditative pulse of the "hare krishna" chant. —Cree McCree

Happy Destiny: Iron Buddha; Everything Hurts; Ricoleta; Luft; Rebellion Dawgs; Iron Buddha 2; Plant Based; Happy Destiny; Happy Destiny Part 2; Long Dark Spring. (64:58)

Personnel: Rich Perry, tenor saxophone; Gary Versace, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; John Riley, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Young Pilgrims *We're Young Pilgrims*

STONE LANE RECORDS

★★★★½

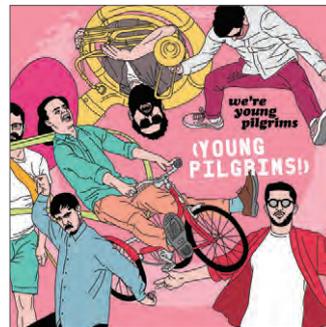
Yes, a nine-player brass band is going to be dynamically intense by default, but that doesn't mean the style of Young Pilgrims' full-length debut with Stoney Lane is a plainly read neon sign. Young Pilgrims' brass arsenal could be used to provide loud but smooth and tightly interlocked jazz chords, but trombonist and lead composer Richard Foote makes it clear with the opening "Intro" that the band celebrates a healthy amount of cacophony and irregularity with its bright, piercing blasts.

Low, droning notes collide with a syncopated, single-note motif from the trumpets. The pitch of the latter launches an immediate sense of declarative dissonance with its augmented tone. "Canal Tripping" is even more melodically disorienting but, with its true-to-life anecdote as a backdrop, this role-playing piece gives a performance engaging enough to warrant a standing ovation. That's not to say *We're Young Pilgrims* lacks clarity or finesse. The production is exemplary. Notes are clear but not scrubbed of their personality. Honestly, *We're Young Pilgrims* is meant to be experienced more than explained. —Kira Grunenberg

We're Young Pilgrims: Intro; Rufio; Hall Of Meat; Kabuki Dance; Back Pocket; Pilgrimage; Everything Means Nothing To Me; Dear Green Place; Canal Tripping; i of The Underground; Feel Like Making Love. (48:28)

Personnel: Richard Foote, Kieran McLeod, trombone; Mike Adlington, Sean Gibbs, Sam Wooster, trumpet; Michael Owers, sousaphone; Chris Maddock, baritone saxophone; Jonathan Silk, Euan Palmer, drums.

Ordering info: stoneylane.net



Nils Landgren *Funk Unit Funk Is My Religion*

ACT MUSIC + VISION

★★★★½

We cannot doubt that funk is indeed a religion to trombonist Nils Landgren and his sextet — because they proselytize about it ceaselessly on *Funk Is My Religion*. Like all proselytizing, it is obnoxious; by album's end, you may never want to hear the word "funk" again.

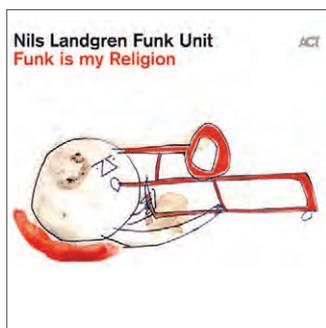
Yes, braggadocio is a tradition in funk, from James Brown to Prince. Yet those giants don't do it every time they open their mouths. Here, however, the Funk Unit tells us over and over again that they are "gonna keep it funky tonight." Even "Anyway You Want It," which doesn't mention funk, seems to suggest that "it" has less to do with love than with groove.

If this complaint seems disproportionate, it's only because the Unit is so good at letting its grooves speak for themselves. The sexy instrumental strut of "Amanda" is compounded with a sinuous bass clarinet line from Jonas Wall. Landgren's trombone and Andy Pfeiler's guitar devour "See Ya in Court" and "Es In Memoriam" (also instrumentals), and the rhythm section of Price, keyboardist Peter Bergander and drummer Robert Ikiz couldn't be tighter. When vocals enter, all one wants is for them to get out of the way. —Michael J. West

Funk Is My Religion: Amanda; Anyway You Want It; See Ya In Court; Funk Is My Religion; Es In Memoriam; Do In' It For The People; Brand New Funk; Play Funk; Kamala; NLFU Will Never Stop. (47:53)

Personnel: Nils Landgren, trombone, vocals; Magnum Coltrane Price, bass, vocals, keyboards; Jonas Wall, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet, vocals; Andy Pfeiler, guitar, vocals; Peter Bergander, keyboards, vocals; Robert Ikiz, drums.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Somi *Zenzile: The Reimagination Of Miriam Makeba*

SALON AFRICANA

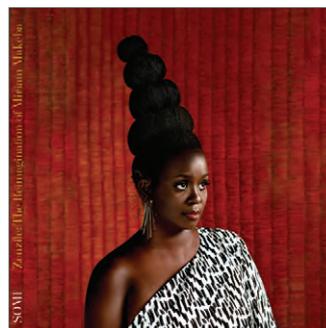
★★★★★

South Africa's Miriam Makeba was the first African musician to achieve international fame. Her many hits, and a 1965 Grammy award, gave her a platform to address apartheid and worldwide discrimination against Black people. Although they never met, Somi considers her a mentor and pays tribute to her on this collection. These 17 songs from Makeba's repertoire have been transformed with more of a jazz feel and the polish of modern production values. "Pata Pata" is the most atypical example. The tune is remade as a sound collage, with samples from Makeba's various anti-apartheid interviews spliced between with brief snippets of the melody. The rest are more straightforward. "Unhomme," the a capella track from Makeba's debut, becomes a slow ballad. "A Piece Of Ground" was originally a folk protest song; Somi gives it a swinging, jazz-funk groove. Collaborators include Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Gregory Porter and Angélique Kidjo. —j. poet

Zenzile: The Reimagination Of Miriam Makeba: Umhome; House Of The Rising Sun; Milele; Hapo Zamani; Love Tastes Like Strawberries; Khuluma; Pata Pata; A Piece Of Ground; Kwedini; Lakutshon'ilanga; Olili; Mbombela; Jike'lemaweni; Nonqonqo; Malaika; Ring Bell, Ring Bell; Mabhongo. [TIME?]

Personnel: Somi, vocals; Herve Samb, guitars; Nate Smith, drums; Michael Olatuja, bass; Keith Witty, bass, percussion; Toru Dodo, piano; Mino Cinelu, percussion; Cobhams Asuquo, organ, piano, percussion; Phindi Wilson, Bongsi Duma, Nhalanhla Ngobeni, Vuyo Sotashe, vocal chorus; Lakecia Benjamin, alto saxophone; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Myron Walden, soprano and tenor saxophones; Maz Swift, Juliette Jones, violin; Jessica Troy, viola; Marika Hughes, cello; Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Gregory Porter, Angélique Kidjo, Seun Kuti, Thandiswa Mazwai, Msaki, Nduduzo Makhathini, vocals.

Ordering info: salonafriicana.com





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SIMON YU

Rhythmic Interdependence: Freeing Your Left Hand & Improving Your Groove

Much is made of hand and limb independence, particularly among musicians who play piano and drum set. After all, the ability to do one thing with one limb while playing something else in another is critical to competence on these instruments.

But what about hand *interdependence*? How can we not only play two (or more) different things at once, but also hear how they are related to one another?

Too often, the jazz pianist's left hand is relegated to a perfunctory role where its rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic components are not truly *heard*, but rather played by rote. While we are wise to develop right-hand melodies, doing so at the expense of the left hand leaves us one-sided and incomplete.

Before experiencing rhythmic interdependence between the two hands, try comping through a B \flat blues using simple voicings in the left hand only, where the top note of the chord moves by a whole step or half step once per bar. Choose a static, repetitive rhythm, such as the "Charleston" rhythm (1, "and" of 2), and practice it at a medium-slow tempo until it feels danceable and grooving. If a blues feels like too much when you first try this, just play the exer-

cise on a one-chord vamp—for instance, B \flat 7. (See Example 1a.)

Next, choose a fixed rhythmic pattern to play with the left hand, while improvising a constant stream of eighth notes in the right hand. Keep your touch light, and pay attention to the sensation of the rebound of the keys upward after the notes are played. (See Example 1b.)

A primary cross-rhythm in African and African-diasporic musics is three against two (3:2). Feeling the ternary (three) and binary (two) simultaneously is key to playing with a great time feel and groove. First, try tapping the rhythms on a tabletop or on your lap. Say, "both, right-left right, both, right-left right" in accordance with how your hands are tapping (See Example 2a). This puts the "three" in your right hand, and the "two" in your left. Then try tapping this rhythm while counting "one-two-three" out loud, corresponding to your right hand, and after a few bars switch to counting "one-two" out loud, corresponding to your left hand. To switch these and get 2:3, tap and say, "both, left-right left, both, left-right left." (See Example 2b.)

Next, transfer this rhythm to the piano. Pick a single note (or chord) for each hand, and repeat

the "tapped" rhythms from Examples 2a and 2b.

Next, let's try a more horizontal/melodic approach: a two-note rhythm in the left hand (quarter notes) and three-note rhythm (quarter-note triplets) in the right hand (Example 3a). Then reverse the ideas to a "three" shape in the left hand and a "two" shape in the right (Example 3b). Further, one can practice the somewhat more challenging four-against-three (4:3) rhythm, another layering of the binary and the ternary. First practice tapping the three in the left hand and the four in the right hand. One might vocalize the choreography of the hands: "both, right-left right left-right" (Example 4a). To switch the hands, try "both, left-right left, right left" (Example 4b).

As we did with 3:2, take this 4:3 rhythm and apply it to a 12-bar blues. First, try four in the left hand, and three in the right (Example 5), and then reverse the hands. You can hear great examples of 4:3 in Bill Evans' "Someday My Prince Will Come" (as dotted eighths over 3/4 time) from the album *Portrait In Jazz*, and great examples of 3:4 (as dotted quarters played across 4/4 swing) from McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones on the former's iconic "Passion Dance" from *The Real McCoy* album. In your practicing, experiment with combinations of chords and single notes, as well as staccato and legato articulations. Create your own patterns.

These cross rhythms can be applied to specific grooves, such as the folkloric chacarera (often notated in 6/8) from Northern Argentina, the rhythm of which makes ample use of 2:3. I adapted this groove to an original composition, "Reckoning," from my album *New Songs Of Resistance*. (See Example 6a.) Notice how the "three" is in the left hand, but the first pulse is actually a rest.

The 4:3 is also useful when applied to a specific groove or composition. In this same tune of mine, I have a melody in dotted eighth notes — the "four" side of our 4:3 rhythm — on top of the chacarera groove described above. Check out the first few bars in Example 6b.

Two mentors and colleagues of mine, Danilo Pérez and Jerry Leake, introduced me to a key West African and Afro-Caribbean rhythm in 12/8 (Example 7a). This groove, originally brought to the West by enslaved African people, can be considered a key component of the musical DNA of jazz and global popular music. The rhythm appears in many traditional-grooves as a bell pattern with various names, including bembé in Cuban music.

As applied to the piano, one experiment can be to combine a chord or melodic shape in the right hand using the 12/8 bell pattern, and the left hand playing a chord or figure in 4.

Before playing this, clap the right-hand part and step with your feet the left-hand pattern (first measure of Example 7a), as though dancing the groove. You'll internalize the groove and feel the relationships between the rhythms better than if you go straight to the piano. Then, on the piano, this pattern can be again manifested through a 12-bar blues (Example 7b). Try the same bembé pattern with the left hand now in 3. Again, try stepping in 3 while clapping the bell pattern. Then try switching your stepping in 3 with stepping in 4. Apply this to the piano on a static chord or over a 12-bar blues (Example 7c).

Finally, here are two more advanced experiments you can try as you become more solid with the basic 2:3, 3:4, and bembé/African bell pattern rhythms. First, improvise lines of eighth-note triplets in 4/4 time, in which you slightly accent the points corresponding to the bembé rhythm in 12/8 (Example 8). In the left hand, a comping pattern like the "Charleston" (from Example 1a) can be employed, or a cross rhythm of 4 or 3 could be played. See what you like, all the while prioritizing hearing both hands and keeping the tempo steady and the groove danceable. Second, try playing straight eighth notes against the 12/8 bell pattern.

The possibilities are seemingly endless. The more I practice, however, the more I realize that it's best to patiently internalize and master one idea, regularly, over time, rather than rushing through and trying to play through countless combinations. Trying to "do it all" will not give you reliable, internalized tools for improvisation and composition. Go step by step, experiment, take chances — and enjoy yourself. **DB**

New York-based pianist-composer Jason Yeager is Assistant Professor of piano at Berklee College of Music. He recently released his fifth album as a leader, *New Songs Of Resistance* (Outside In Music). Yeager has performed and recorded with George Garzone, Noah Preminger, Jason Palmer, Sean Jones, Aubrey Johnson, Fernando Huergo and Mark Walker, and he collaborates with the Jason Anick/Jason Yeager Quintet, Fleur Seule, Randal Despommier Quartet and Ayn Inserto Jazz Orchestra. Yeager will release two albums as a leader in 2022: *Unstuck In Time: The Kurt Vonnegut Suite*, and a duo project with his spouse, the singer/actor/writer Julie Benko. Visit him online at jasonyeager.com.

Examples 1–3

Example 1a

Example 1a (swing 8ths) continue through Bb blues...

Example 1b

Example 1b continue through Bb blues...

Example 2a (even 8ths)

Example 2a (even 8ths) RH LH Both right left right Both left right left

Example 2b (even 8ths)

Example 2b (even 8ths) RH LH Both right left right Both left right left

Example 3a

Example 3a Bb7 Eb7

Example 3b

Example 3b Bb7 Eb7 Bb7

Examples 4–6

Example 4a (even 8ths)

Example 4a (even 8ths) RH LH Both right left right left right Both left right left right left

Example 4b (even 8ths)

Example 4b (even 8ths) RH LH Both right left right left right Both left right left right left

Example 5

Example 5

Example 6a (even 8ths)

Example 6a (even 8ths) Gmin/D Eb13 C7/E F#

Example 6b

Example 6b Gmin/Bb Eb7(b5) C7(b5) F#7(b5)

Examples 7–8

Example 7a

Example 7a bell pattern cross rhythm: 4 cross rhythm: 3

Example 7b

Example 7b Bb7 Eb7

Example 7c

Example 7c Bb7 Eb7 Bb7

Example 8

Example 8 Bb7



MUGA MIYAHARA

Hiromi Uehara

Hiromi Uehara's Keyboard Solo on 'What Will Be, Will Be'

“**W**hat Will Be, Will Be” is the only track from Hiromi Uehara’s 2016 trio album *Spark* (Telarc) where she solos on synthesizer instead of piano — though she starts doubling her line an octave lower on the piano starting at bar 23, exactly halfway through the solo. It’s also one of the few tracks where she improvises in 4/4. But there’s still a rhythmic twist (of course): The progression is 11 bars long, and Uehara plays through it four times. Since it’s just a single-note line over the bass, and bassist Anthony Jackson is somewhat free with his application of inversions and such, think

of the chord symbols as more of the *suggested* harmony, especially as Uehara is treating it more as just an Eb minor groove rather than defining changes.

And to that, she does a very intriguing thing in the way she structures her improvisation: As pointed out before, Uehara is approaching this as almost a modal thing in Eb minor, and the format can be seen as large swaths of Eb minor pentatonic and Eb blues (bars 4–5, 10–15, 23–26, 29–32, 35–37 and 42–44) interspersed with varying degrees of chromaticism.

The chromatics are first presented at the

end of bar 6, but Uehara is taking the motif introduced (and repeated) in bars 4–6 and warping it, moving it to different keys and intervals, so even though it’s really “outside” it’s also familiar, and so it makes sense to our ears. And then in measure 10 the motif comes back to Eb minor, but by way of Ab minor pentatonic in bar 9. Ab minor pentatonic exists within the Eb aeolian scale (the parent scale of this key), so it serves to lead us back. The Ab minor pentatonic lick sounds less “out” than the previous iteration of the motif (measures 7–8 are like E minor or A minor), but not all the way back to Eb minor yet.

This kind of aural illusion comes up again in measures 16–18. It's still E \flat minor, but now Uehara has added in the F natural (the second), which isn't outside of E \flat minor, but the manner in which she plays the notes, both in terms of which notes are emphasized and the order they're played in, makes this line sound D \flat major-ish. This and the A \flat minor pentatonic line are not strictly chromatic, but they do move our ears a bit out of E \flat minor — not nearly as harshly as in bars 6–8, though.

Which brings us to (and sets us up for) measures 20–22. Uehara starts exploring chromatics again, with the odd choice of the major third. She moves to and from this by half step, and then makes this a motif. For the next bar-and-a-half Uehara plays ascending half steps, but moves them down in half steps, making this “up a half step/down a full step” a motif that she sequences down to the low B \flat (which happens to be in the key) and then ascends mostly in half steps to get up back into E \flat minor.

We stay solidly in E \flat minor for a bit, with one little chromatic motion in bar 27, where Uehara moves from the C \flat to C natural (and back again in the subsequent measure). This is subtle, as in the same bar we heard the A \flat to A natural to B \flat (though with a G \flat in between each), which forms the blues scale, so although it's somewhat chromatic it's not outside of E \flat minor. And there's also the half-step motif we examined before, which makes this come off as a continuation of that idea, but Uehara is also cleverly playing the C natural near where the A \flat 7 is implied, so it also sounds like a chord tone. All of these elements combine to make this line sound somewhat chromatic, and yet not, at the same time.

After some more E \flat minor pentatonic, Uehara introduces that G natural again (measures 33–34). Before it was used as a chromatic decoration of the G \flat , and here it is being used similarly, but the G is emphasized a bit more, making the texture somewhat more major sounding. It also reminds us of the half-step idea from before, which makes it flow quite easily to the half-step chromaticism reintroduced in measure 38 and continues through bar 41 before returning to E \flat minor pentatonic for the remaining three bars.

Uehara isn't using diatonicism and chromaticism indiscriminately. She sets up a loose pattern of leading our ears in and out of the key, and does so using specific ways of playing chromatically — the reappearing G natural and half-step motifs — which gives the improvisation a sense of motion and completeness when we arrive at the end. **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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Casiotone CT-S400

New Lineup of Portable Keyboards Has Broad Appeal

Casiotone keyboards are back — with high-quality sounds that surpass those of most modern-day portables by leaps and bounds. Known primarily as a watchmaker and manufacturer of calculators when the first of the company’s catchy little keyboards was introduced in 1980, Casio has gone on to become a major player in the digital piano market. Recently, Casio America released three new Casiotone models for the modern age: the CT-S1, CT-S400 and LK-S450. Designed for broad appeal among musicians, students and novices, the new models feature a lightweight, minimalist build and can be played virtually anywhere.

Each model in the Casiotone series has 61 keys and built-in speakers. For this review, I play-tested the CT-S400, which offers 600 high-quality tones and a smart layout of buttons for ease of operation. It also includes an LCD screen with sharp visibility. The 61-tone CT-S1 model is designed for players of varying skill levels and comes in three color variations (white, black and red) with a matching fabric speaker net. The LK-S450, geared for beginners, features a similarly slim profile, step-up lessons and a key-lighting system that guides practice. Like the CT-S400, the LK-S450 has 600 onboard sounds, 200 rhythms and 160 built-in songs, plus a whole range of useful functions including auto-accompaniment. Each of the new Casiotones has a built-in strap lock to equip a guitar strap and convert the keyboard to a “keytar.”

Highly expressive AiX Sound Source technology brings Casiotone sounds to life with clarity and expression previously unparalleled in portable keyboards. I found myself staying up all night experimenting with the CT-S400’s hundreds of sounds, which range from very realistic pianos, electric pianos, organs, woodwinds, brass, strings, guitars, basses, percussion and ethnic folk instruments to banks upon banks of cool synthesizer patches and screaming lead tones.

All three Casiotone models have a range of connectivity options, including a class-compliant micro USB MIDI port. A USB Host port is available for the separately sold WU-BT10 Bluetooth adapter, which provides wireless MIDI communication. Players can hook up a sustain pedal for even more expressive play, as well as use the headphone output to practice in private.

—Ed Enright

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Kawai Novus NV5S

Advanced Hybrid Piano Technology in an Ultra-Compact Cabinet

Kawai’s NV5S is among the new models added to the company’s Novus series of premium hybrid pianos, first introduced in 2017 with the launch of the game-changing Novus NV-10. The next-generation Novus NV5S features an ultra-compact cabinet design and benefits from many high-tech conveniences, including a large LCD touchscreen and Bluetooth and USB connectivity. Acoustic piano players will love the instrument’s sound and feel. Based on my own recent test-drives, playing a Novus is just like playing the real thing.

The Kawai NV5S offers the touch of a world-class upright piano through its Millennium III Hybrid upright piano action. It uses a real damper mechanism to replicate the natural motion and feel of an acoustic instrument’s damper pedal, but without any dampening any actual strings. With vibrant, immense sounds powered by Onkyo transducers — including the renowned Shigeru Kawai SK-EX Concert Grand Piano — the NV5S hybrid sets a high standard for hybrid digital pianos.

Kawai’s upright piano keyboard action is known for its extended spruce key sticks and innovative ABS Carbon components that are stronger, lighter, faster and more dimensionally stable than conventional wooden parts. The specially adapted Millennium III Hybrid keyboard action utilized by the NV5S replaces traditional felt hammers with ABS equivalents that are individually graded in weight from bass to treble. High-precision optical sensors read the subtle movements of each hammer as the keys are played, using that information to reproduce the physical sounds and vibrations of a real piano.

In addition to the latest SK-EX Rendering piano sound engine, the NV5S also incorporates Kawai’s Harmonic Imaging XL technology, giving players a variety of alternative acoustic piano sounds and a strong selection

of additional instrument voices ranging from electric pianos and drawbar and church organs, to strings, human choirs and even atmospheric synth pads. Dual playing mode allows two different sounds, such as grand piano and strings, to be layered together, while the Split and 4-Hands modes divide the keyboard into two independent sections.

The NV5S features a full-color 5-inch touchscreen display discreetly embedded within the left cheek block. It allows the player to scroll through and select the instrument’s numerous onboard sounds and settings with the swipe of a finger. The hi-res, backlit screen can even be set to turn itself off once the lights go down and the performance begins.

—Ed Enright

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M-Audio's Hammer 88 Pro is a full-size weighted keyboard controller for musicians seeking real piano feel, onboard software controls and precision playing options. The top panel includes 16 RGB velocity-sensitive pads with Note Repeat, nine assignable faders and eight assignable knobs to control audio software. The Hammer 88 Pro also includes an intuitive OLED screen that makes it easy to search for and test sounds, map controls, mix and edit sessions.

More info: m-audio.com

2. Keyboard Bench Options

Gator Frameworks has launched a line of traditional wooden piano and keyboard benches featuring an upholstered vinyl cushion that provides a 1.5-inch-thick padding to keep players comfortable and focused. The series includes two standard benches (available in black or white) and a deluxe model (in black) with storage space for sheet music and accessories.

More info: gatorframeworks.com

3. Software Synth

Roland's Juno-60 Software Synthesizer is the latest addition to the Legendary series of software-based instruments available through Roland Cloud. The original Roland Juno-60 hardware synth helped define the sound of '80s music. With the Juno-60 Software Synthesizer, the authentic experience of this keyboard is now available as a modern software instrument for Mac and Windows DAWs.

More info: roland.com

4. Powerful Envelope Generator

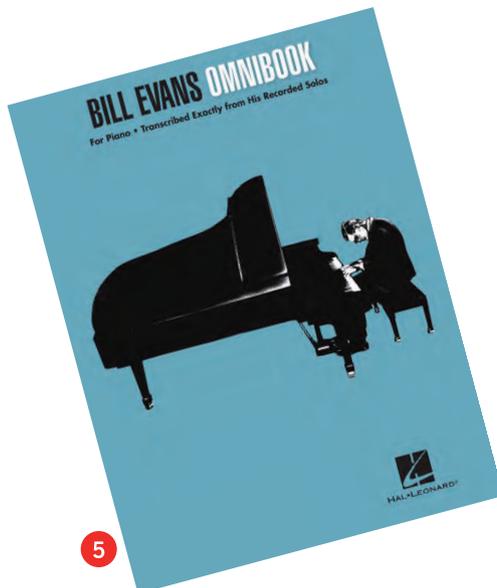
Qu-Bit's Cascade is a ratcheting envelope generator, VCA and sound source, all in a compact form factor. The unique interactions of its feature set open up new worlds of rhythmic patching and modulation. Easily create ratcheting sequences, bouncy-ball modulation and pumping compression, all within a single module. At its core, Cascade is a powerful envelope generator, which is normaled to a high-fidelity 2164-based VCA. It lets users patch in external audio to the VCA or take advantage of four internal audio algorithms: white noise, 808 kick, hi-hat and a high-frequency sine tone.

More info: qubitelectronic.com

5. Evans Omnibook

The *Bill Evans Omnibook* is the latest installment in Hal Leonard's series for musicians looking to master the compositions and improvisations of iconic jazz artists. Featuring exact note-for-note transcriptions of Evans' recorded piano solos, the *Bill Evans Omnibook's* easy-to-read notation is enhanced by chord symbols, rehearsal letters and metronome markings. The book contains a total of 40 transcriptions highlighting many works played by Evans over the course of his career, including "Alice In Wonderland," "Blue In Green," "My Foolish Heart," "My Romance," "Nardis," "Peace Piece," "RE: Person I Know," "Skating In Central Park," "Some Other Time" and "Waltz For Debby."

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Doug Beach, far right, watches as his band engages with legendary trumpeter Doc Severinsen.

COURTESY ELMHURST UNIVERSITY

Doug Beach Retires with Bandload of Memories

WHEN THE WORLD TELLS YOU EDUCATORS aren't entrepreneurial, just point them in the direction of jazz educators — some of the most resourceful human beings on the planet.

As case in point, take the career of Doug Beach, the director of Jazz Studies at Elmhurst University in Elmhurst, Illinois. After 43 years at Elmhurst U., which was Elmhurst College up until last year, Beach decided to retire at the end of the 2021 school year. He did so with a bandload full of accomplishments and memories.

"It just felt it was time," Beach said. "I love it. I couldn't have had a better job for me, the best job on the planet."

It's truly a job he created for himself after taking on the school's jazz band in an adjunct capacity back in 1978. At the time, the band was being directed by legendary jazz educator Paul Tolosko, known for his work at Chicagoland's Proviso West High School.

Tolosko was Beach's elementary school music teacher, and a lifelong mentor.

"So, I was playing in a jazz band in 1965 or, whatever it was, 1964, when I was in 6th grade," Beach chuckled. "That was unheard of. To be involved in that at such a young age, it made a big impression."

In the late 1970s, Beach decided to get off the road as a gigging musician. Tolosko asked him to sit in with the Elmhurst band for a few gigs because they didn't have enough trumpet players to fill out the section.

"At the end of the year, Paul said, 'I can't do this anymore. Would you be interested in the band?' I said, 'Sure.' So, he recommended me."

At that time, the band often didn't have enough players to field a true big band, so they'd bring in a few pros. There were even times when the big band could only field a small combo.

They'd play a few gigs on campus and play the Elmhurst College Jazz Festival, the school's legendary annual student fest started in 1967, "when they had the horses."

When Beach came in, that began to change.

"I got here and we started playing some dance gigs," Beach said. "We got hired to play a dance gig, I borrowed a dance book from a friend. We got paid for it. Then, we started doing some tours, and it just grew."

Beach's part-time, adjunct gig turned into a full-time position. Then, he started adding other adjunct faculty members. In the early years, the staff included some impressive names, like saxophonists Ed Peterson, Rudresh Mahanthappa and the late Mark Colby. Today, the program has instruction for every instrument.

That one band has become two big bands, six-to-eight combos, two guitar ensembles and two vocal jazz ensembles. Under Beach's leadership, the department has developed into a full Jazz Studies program.

His bands traditionally gig — a lot. They play local dances and weekly gigs for money, then put that money toward a fund for a sum-

mer tour to Europe each year.

"A lot of former students who are pros now, they say playing the dance gigs was one of the best [learning experiences], and they had to read a load of music," Beach said. "There's the jazz stuff we're doing, but here's 160 tunes in a dance book because we've got a gig next week. And, unless it was a new rhythm section, it would be pretty much like that. We'd run a few things down. The other guys learned on the gig. They'd read."

Beyond gigging, Beach firmly believed in the value of guest artists to fuel his band's desire to learn. Over the years, his student musicians played with everyone from Ryan Truesdell, Roberta Gambarini and Maria Schneider to John Pizzarelli, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Doc Severinsen. Severinsen was so impressed with the band, he took them on a tour of the Midwest with him a few years back.

On the night of the band's last concert this summer, with featured guests Gambarini and trumpeter Byron Stripling, an Elmhurst University alumnus offered the ultimate compliment to that tradition by donating \$500,000 to endow the Doug Beach Visiting Artist Program.

As for the future of Jazz Studies at Elmhurst University, Beach said it's in good hands. Mike DePinto will be overseeing the jazz program next year, and Kirk Garrison will take over direction of the big band. —Frank Alkyer

George Colligan

Best known for his scintillating work as a pianist-keyboardist-organist during the past three decades on the international jazz scene, George Colligan showcases his drumkit skills on *Theoretical Planets: Long Term Goals* (Portland Jazz Composer Ensemble), his 34th date as a bandleader, with a group comprised of all former students he taught at Portland State University, plus colleague Joe Manis on saxophone. This was Colligan's first Blindfold Test.

Noah Haidu

"Duchess" (*Slowly: Song For Keith Jarrett*, Sunnyside, 2021) Haidu, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

Billy Hart on drums. I know by his tuning and his cymbals. It's "Duchess" — Billy's tune. I recorded it with Billy. That's Buster on bass. Is the pianist Noah Haidu? I saw that he did a record with them. Noah studied with me. He sounds great. I like the mix. I like the piano sound, clear but a bit dark in a good way. The original recording of this tune, from Billy's record *Oshumare*, from 1985, has that loose straight-eight vibe but it's also very energetic. This is more mellow, a slow-jam version, which I like. It's very musical. 5 stars.

James Francies

"My Favorite Things" (*Purest Form*, Blue Note, 2021) Francies, piano, synthesizer; Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Joel Ross, vibraphone; Burniss Travis III, bass; Jeremy Dutton, drums; Mike Moreno, guitar.

A fresh take on "My Favorite Things." A lot of odd meters in a very intense arrangement. Dave Binney on alto? — it's that postmodern alto, which I love. Is the vibes player Joel Ross? The drummer reminds me of Terreon Gully or Chris Dave — or maybe someone younger like Mark Whitfield Jr. There's the gospel chops influence that I hear a lot now, and the snare tuning is interesting — it's maybe a piccolo snare or a smaller snare. I do wish the bass player would move around more harmonically and stay less with the pedal, though I get that it's part of the arrangement. I guess it's the pianist's record, though they don't feature themselves enough to make it obvious. I love their sound conception. Fantastic chops. Fantastic rhythm. It's amazing to see so many young cats with all the chops and creativity. It's intimidating.

Vijay Iyer/Linda May Han Oh/Tyshawn Sorey

"Drummer's Song" (*Uneasy*, ECM, 2021) Iyer, piano; Oh, bass; Sorey, drums.

This is a Geri Allen tune that I heard on her record with Ron Carter and Tony Williams. That version was much more straightforward. I think this pianist is younger. Is Linda Oh on bass? Then it's Vijay Iyer, Linda Oh and Tyshawn Sorey. Tyshawn is a genius, which is a word I don't use a lot. He can imitate anybody, go in any zone at any time. I should have recognized Vijay's touch. He does certain chromatic things, and he's heavy rhythmically with a lighter piano sound. I like Linda's sound a lot. She's an example of the modern bass player who is right in the middle — not just the mic and not just the amp. She knows how to be active in a way that makes the music go somewhere. 5 stars.

Sylvie Courvoisier

"Requiem D'un Songe" (*Free Hoops*, Intakt, 2020) Courvoisier, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Kenny Wollesen, drums.

I like the intro — spooky. I love the use of space. The arrangement has the bassline but also a lot of freedom. The pianist's technique reminds me of Matt Mitchell, but it's not him. Beautifully played. I love the freedom, the different events within one thing, the energy, the vibe, the record-



ing quality. Is Drew Gress on bass? Is this type of thing the pianist's main bag, or are other things on the record more straightahead? [afterwards] I loved that piece. Sometimes I wish I could go into that zone full-time, but something prevents me from doing that. 5 stars.

Eldar Djangirov

"Night in Tunisia" (*Rhapsodize*, Twelve Tone Resonance, 2020) Djangirov, piano; Raviv Markovitz, bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums.

Are these musicians from the Southern Hemisphere? No? I was going to say it reminds me of Gonzalo Rubalcaba. A lot of Cuban jazz I've heard leans towards fusion, maybe because they didn't get all the older records — it's like Chick Corea is their starting point. Wow, that's a lot of chops! Was the pianist trained in the East under Communism? [It's complicated, but you're close.] It's Eldar. This is amazing technically. He starts to play some things, and you wonder if he'd be able to pull that off — and he does. It's so clean, so precise. The only reason I don't play like that is because I can't! Super-impressive. 5 stars.

Alex Conde

"Oblivion" (*Descarga For Bud*, Sedajazz, 2021) Conde, piano; Jeff Chambers, bass; Colin Douglas, drums; Jose Luis de la Paz, guitar; John Santos, congas; Sergio Martinez, cajon.

Flamenco — like a rumba. This is Bud Powell's "Oblivion," which Geri Allen recorded with Charlie Haden and Paul Motian. It's an interesting choice — Bud Powell by way of Spain. I did a couple of records with Marc Miralta and some Spanish guys, and we leaned in this direction, using palmas and cajón. I love the groove, and the pianist has great chops and lots of musicality. Another great pianist who's putting me out of business!

Keith Brown

"African Ripples, Part 1 and 2" (*African Ripples*, Space Time, 2021) Keith Brown, piano; Dezron Douglas, bass; Darrell Grant, drums.

A modern treatment of a Fats Waller song — a lot of things happening here. Cool arrangement, traditional but free. Rudy Royston on drums? [Part 2 begins] Christian McBride on bass? I love what the bass player is doing. I was thinking of Jason Moran, but it's not him. This is probably a young pianist. Great playing — swinging, very rhythmic. Hip arrangement, hip approach. It's got traditional elements. It's got blues. It's got swing. It's got the freer aspects. That's how I'd classify the modern mainstream. **DB**

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

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