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2021 was a year of rebirth as live music began to return to our beloved clubs & festivals. Renewal was in the music too, with artists reinventing revered songbooks as vehicles of their own expression. There were Blue Note debuts, newly discovered treasures & legends built upon their legacies. We also bid farewell to a Blue Note legend with the passing of the great Hammond B3 organ master Dr. Lonnie Smith.

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CANNONBALL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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Roy Hargrove grew from young lion into thoughtful mentor.

Cover photo by Jack Vartoogian

Three years after he passed away at the age of 49, Roy Hargrove enters the DownBeat Hall of Fame. The trailblazing trumpeter bridged the worlds of hard-bop, hip-hop, funk and neo-soul throughout his prolific career, serving as a role model for young musicians to find their own voices in his wake.

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EASTMAN
The Rivers of Jazz Run Far and Wide.

Through styles, generations, communities and attitudes, they crisscross the topography of art, spilling one into another before washing into that great sea of sound.

Some of our artists find a tributary to glide down easily, making that sound sweet and gentle. Others prefer the wild and unpredictable, riding the aural rapids of abandon. Still others constantly search for what’s next, perhaps the river never traveled before.

In this issue, DownBeat pays tribute to those brave travelers, some for the first time, some, sadly, for the last.

In 1952, Louis Armstrong became the first artist inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame. In 2021, another great trumpeter, Roy Anthony Hargrove, becomes the 166th member of this revered group.

Sadly, we bestow this honor posthumously. Hargrove passed away in 2018, far too young, as detailed in our feature article on page 22.

If he were still living and performing today, Hargrove probably would have waited another decade or two before being honored. The Hall of Fame generally has been reserved for artists much further along in their careers.

That said, Hargrove optimized the best of the jazz esthetic: a dedication to the art form, a reverence for the masters and the will to find something new. His entry into the Hall of Fame was a given. The question was simply when.

Unfortunately, he also fell prey to the baggage associated with the jazz life, although much less so now than in earlier generations. He was human, with frailties, and those frailties led to an early grave. Let’s leave it at that, because this magazine has had a long and loving relationship with this trumpeter.

His name first appeared in our pages as the winner of a DownBeat Student Music Award in 1986, when he was a star pupil at what is now known as the Booker T. Washington School for the Performing and Visual Arts. Around that time, he also blew away a crowd in Chicago at MusicFest USA, a DownBeat student festival that ran for several years during the 1980s.

Hargrove’s first DownBeat cover was in June 1992. The headline read, “The Young Lions: Have They Delivered?” That article featured Hargrove, Christian McBride and Benny Green and other then-emerging artists. Hargrove’s presence in the Hall of Fame today answers the question posed in that classic headline once and for all.

He graced DownBeat’s cover five times, but that first one is a favorite. It demonstrated the exuberance of youth, a love for what came before and a thirst to learn.

“I’m thankful to Lester Bowie,” Hargrove said in that piece. “He was listening to me play at the Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy, and after I finished, he said, ‘Damn, Roy, you sound good! But you’ve got to pick some different notes. Play some wrong notes. You don’t have to play inside all the time.’ So I took his advice, and it really opened me up to a whole new realm of things.”

He spent a career exploring those possibilities, and influencing generations to do likewise. He’s mentioned several times throughout this issue, as a friend, as a mentor and, ultimately, as a once-in-a-lifetime artist.
MORGAN GUERIN

SAXOPHONIST, COMPOSER, ENGINEER AND PRODUCER.

Whatever this wunderkind saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist is up to, it’s probably worth paying some attention.” - Giovanni Russonello, New York Times

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Poll Keepsakes
In Frank Alkyer’s First Take column in the August issue, he wrote that the annual Critics Poll issue is his favorite every year. It is also my favorite issue, but for other reasons: 1) I look forward to seeing how my favorite and recently discovered musicians and bands have been acknowledged by the critics; 2) Starting in 2015, I began collecting drummer’s autographs on a drumhead with a goal of getting as many drummers from your Critics Poll lists (By 2019 I had three drumheads and 41 autographs — 38 from the 2015–2018 Critics Polls); 3) I have four guitar pickguards with 14 signatures (all from the Critics Polls); and, 4) I record in a file all the musicians and bands that I see every year that appeared in the issue. I was very happy to see Data Lords selected as best record of the year. I thought it was a masterpiece and Maria Schneider’s best record. Great to see her other awards, too. It was also great seeing that James Francies made it to the Rising Star Piano list. I was impressed with his shows with Pat Metheny Side-Eye and his own band in 2019. Thank you for another great issue.

MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, IL

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Chords & Discords

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PROGRAMME ADVISER, CHELTENHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL

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JAMES DORSEY
BERWYN HEIGHTS, MARYLAND

Erroll Garner Remembered
I was saddened to read that Erroll Garner “seems to have been forgotten by younger jazz critics and pianists.” As noted, “a legacy needs strong advocacy,” and I am pleased that the Erroll Garner Project, Octave Recordings and Mack Avenue, through their ongoing reissue program, are jointly involved in a meaningful effort “to reinvigorate his musical and cultural legacy.” Erroll Garner was a true original and remains on an extremely short list of the greatest jazz pianists. His recordings, while spontaneous and inventive, remain warm and accessible. Especially in a live setting like Complete Concert By The Sea or Nightconcert, Erroll Garner’s exuberant music never fails to leave me in a better mood than I had been in when I put the album on. I hope the ongoing effort to reinvigorate interest in Erroll Garner’s music and legacy is a rousing success.

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Dr. Lonnie Smith, one of the greatest musicians to ever lay hands on the Hammond B-3 organ, died Sept. 28 at home in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. He was 79.

His death was confirmed by his manager, Holly Case. The cause was pulmonary fibrosis.

"Doc was a musical genius who possessed a deep, funky groove and a wry, playful spirit," said Don Was, president of Blue Note Records, the label for which Smith recorded many of his masterworks. "His mastery of the drawbars was equaled only by the warmth in his heart."

Smith made his name on Blue Note in the late 1960s and returned to the label in 2016. He was born in Buffalo, New York, on July 3, 1942. His mother sparked his love of gospel, blues and jazz. As a teenager he was introduced to the Hammond organ and began immersing himself in the records of Wild Bill Davis, Bill Doggett and Jimmy Smith, as well as paying attention to the church organ.

Smith's first gigs were at the Pine Grill, a Buffalo club where he came to the attention of Lou Donaldson, Jack McDuff and George Benson, eventually joining Benson's quartet and moving to New York City.

After appearing on Benson's albums It's Uptown and The George Benson Cookbook, Smith released his debut, Finger Lickin' Good, for Columbia. He then joined Donaldson's band and made his first Blue Note appearance on Alligator Boogaloo, the saxophonist's 1967 hit album. Two more Donaldson dates followed (Mr. Shing-A-Ling and Midnight Creeper) before Smith was offered his own Blue Note deal. He made his label debut in 1968 with Think!, produced by Blue Note co-founder Francis Wolff.

Smith recorded for many labels, including Groove Merchant, Palmetto and his own label, Pilgrimage. His wide-ranging musical tastes found him covering everyone from John Coltrane to Jimi Hendrix to Beck.

In 1969, DownBeat poll named Smith Organist of the Year. Many other awards have followed. Smith was named an NEA Jazz Master in 2017.

"I always sang," Smith said in a March 2008 cover article for DownBeat. "My family sang spiritual music at home, and before I went into the service, I’d sung in churches. Then we had a four-part harmony singing group called the Supremes, which we changed to the Teen Kings. A disk jockey named Lucky Pierre managed us, and we made a record. But I always loved to play musical instruments. The first time I touched a piano, I’d just graduated to third grade, and I went to visit my aunt. I got up to the piano and figured out how to play 'Crying In The Chapel.'"

"A friend played me Jimmy Smith’s Midnight Special record, and I heard Wild Bill Davis, Bill Doggett and Milt Buckner, too."

Earlier this year, Smith released his final album, Breathe, a dynamic eight-song set, six tracks of which were recorded during Smith’s 75th birthday celebration at the Jazz Standard in New York in 2017.

"I have so much passion," Smith told DownBeat writer Ted Panken in 2008. "I had an algebra teacher who got real involved, and would shout, 'Yeah, that’s it!' and start writing out the answer. That’s how I feel when I’m playing, so enthused and so happy. I’m pleasing myself first, and you’re next. The Hammond is such a warm sound — the feel of the earth, the sun, the moon, the water — and it matches so well with the Leslie. The horn that goes around inside the Leslie moves slow and fast — when you close the switch on it, it’s like a nasal sound; when you open the switch, it’s like the earth opened."

Part of the joy Smith brought was from his soulful music, but another was from his persona. He was often asked about being a “doctor” and why he wore his trademark turban.

"I know you were trying to get to it," he said, mildly amused. "You got it. Sun Ra had a miner’s cap, and Sonny Rollins had the mohawk hairdo. But I’m a doctor of music. I’ve been playing long enough to operate on it, and I do have a degree, and I will operate on you. I’m a neurosurgeon.

“But when I go up on that stand, the only thing I’m thinking of is music. I’m thinking to touch you with that music. I don’t think about the turban, I don’t think about the doctor — I just think about how I’m going to touch you.”

—Frank Alkyer
LAST MAY, GUITARIST BRUCE FORMAN was driving to a gig when something unusual happened. “On my way there,” he recounted via video chat from his home in Carmel, California, “I swear to God, Barney Kessel visited me.”

Kessel, the legendary jazz guitarist, passed away in 2004. He had been a constant mentor to Forman, taking an upstart twenty-something virtuoso under his wing, becoming a lifelong friend. They even went on tour together. Kessel didn’t appear as a ghostly apparition or whisper anything on that day, but Forman sensed him, nonetheless. “I could even smell his aftershave.”

The supernatural encounter was the catalyst for Forman’s longtime quest to own Kessel’s prized possession, his Gibson ES-350. Kessel’s widow had auctioned the guitar off years before, and Forman had put it somewhat out of his mind — until that fateful experience in the car. Upon arriving at that night’s venue, he sent an email to the owner of the guitar, wondering if he might ever want to sell it. And, after the first set, Forman came offstage to discover a response. Within a week, he was driving to Colorado to complete the deal.

“I don’t really believe in the afterlife, but Barney would have wanted me to have this,” Forman said. On the video screen behind Forman’s right shoulder, the headstock of Kessel’s guitar was visible, responding with an imperceptible nod of approval.

The acquisition led Forman to pursue another lifelong goal: to record a tribute to one of Kessel’s best-known groups, a trio with bassist Ray Brown and drummer Shelly Manne, also known as The Poll Winners. Named for the fact that each member of the group had risen to the top of all the major jazz polls from 1956–’60 (Metronome, Playboy and, yes, DownBeat), Kessel, Brown and Manne recorded The Poll Winners in 1956, the first of five albums the trio would make for Los Angeles-based Contemporary Records. These recordings were some of the first to establish guitar, bass and drums as a viable trio format.

Forman’s concept was to record the album the way the original Kessel/Brown/Manne group had done, with players who had been mentored by those masters — along with the actual instruments they had played on during that time. He likened it to “kids playing their parents’ instruments.”

John Clayton was in high school when he first met his mentor, having signed up for an extension course at UCLA taught by Brown. “Ray Brown saw how green and hungry I was,” said Clayton, speaking via video from his California home, “and he let me follow him around.” Brown was responsible for Clayton’s early stints with Monty Alexander and the Count Basie Orchestra. Brown even bought Clayton his first and current bass, flying all the way to Toronto to pay for it himself. After Brown’s death, Clayton repaid that favor by buying Brown’s bass from his widow. “She told me what [Ray] said the bass was worth,” Clayton recalled, “and I was shocked. But you know what? It didn’t matter.”

Drummer Jeff Hamilton played with Brown for the better part of 16 years, and he was befriended early on by Shelly Manne, who invited the young drummer to his home for dinner not long after he had moved to Los Angeles.

“Ray and Shelly put their heads together and thought that they would take a shot at me being a member of the L.A. 4,” remembered Hamilton, on video from his Southern California home studio. He took over for Manne in that famous quartet alongside Brown, guitarist Laurindo Almeida and saxophonist/flutist Bud Shank. And to show how these careers and players kept crossing paths, Shank for years led a jazz camp every summer in Port Townsend, Washington, a role that was eventually passed to John Clayton. It was at that camp where Hamilton first came
across the vintage 1963 Leedy drum set once owned by Manne, brought there by Portland area drummer Gary Hobbs.

Forman, Clayton and Hamilton, like their mentors before them, have forged a lasting bond. Clayton and Hamilton met in college at Indiana University and played together in Monty Alexander’s trio. The pair would eventually form Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. Hamilton and Forman met on a Mark Murphy recording date, *Bop For Keurac* (Muse, 1981), and they both played with Ray Brown at the Loa, a happening, but short-lived, jazz club in Santa Monica. Their careers have crisscrossed many times over the decades, but coming together as a trio seemed like it might be a new development.

“Have the three of us ever played together?” asked Hamilton.

Forman replied, “Yeah … somewhere, somehow.”

Hamilton, with a straight face: “That’s right, it was very memorable.”

“You guys are so fuckin’ old,” Clayton retorted.

Having three “old” jazz musicians on the same video chat made for an entertaining Saturday, filled with stories, hilariously terrible jokes and pearls of wisdom. “Barney said to me when we were on the road, ‘You ever wonder why I picked you?’ Forman recounted. “I like you because you play the way I play, but you don’t sound like me.”

Hamilton recalled that Ray Brown admonished the then-young drummer, who had dutifully learned everything his mentor Shelly Manne had played on their albums, down to the shakers and triangles. “We know what Shelly Manne can do,” Brown told the young drummer. “We hired you for you.”

“I remember at some point,” added Clayton, “I don’t know what it was I was doing, but he stopped me and pointed his finger in my face, which he often did, and he said, ‘Do your shit. Play your music.’” He exhorted Clayton to keep it honest and to be himself.

“The interesting thing is they didn’t think of themselves as being ‘pioneers’ and ‘cutting edge’ and all that stuff,” Clayton elaborated. He said Ray Brown had transcribed so much of Slam Stewart and Oscar Pettiford that he became known early on as Slam Pettiford. “Thank God no one said to him, ‘Get your own shit. Nobody did that to him!” he exclaimed, without irony. “People get hung up on this idea of ‘finding your own voice.’ That’s bullshit. You have your own voice, anyway, and it’s going to change, because you change. If you listen to your music now versus five to 10 years ago, it sounds radically different now. That was your voice 10 years ago, this is your voice now — and you’re going to have a different voice five years from now.”

“The problem with that,” Hamilton interjected, “is now I have all these voices in my head that I’m trying to get rid of.”

Forman offered, “The thing that I’ve found when I’ve played with people who are directly quoting other players, is that they’re not present on the bandstand. ‘They’re somehow dancing with a ghost that the other players aren’t playing with.’

There seems to be a fine line between an imitative loss of self and an irreverent blindness to the rich tapestry of what has come before. Wherever that line is, Forman and his cohorts are committed to toeing it with the grace and athleticism of seasoned trapeze artists. Their trio album, *Reunion!*, is designed to capture the spirit of the old Poll Winners records, but Forman was careful to stay away from any direct lifting of arrangements from the earlier albums, enabling the three of them to play music authentic to them on their terms. Regardless, the homage to Kessel, Brown and Manne still can be heard, amplified by the fact they are performing on their mentors’ instruments. Hamilton felt that more through hearing Kessel’s guitar rather than playing Manne’s drums.

“I felt like I was channeling more of Shelly’s concept — not what he was playing, but what he would think in responding to what Bruce was playing, just based on the guitar.”

Clayton noted, “When I got together with Bruce and Jeff, I noticed it sounded like we were influenced by their sound and concept. What they did dictated was what I was supposed to do, which is of course, what Ray Brown did. I wasn’t trying to copy him, but it just fell into that. It’s hard to explain. It felt like there was a vibe in the room.”

Was that “vibe” from dancing with the ghosts of the men who might still inhabit their instruments? Forman pondered that question. “Can an instrument hold someone’s soul inside of it? The answer is … probably not. But it can enable us to tell stories, to bind generations, and it’s enabled the three of us to get together. So, in a weird way, the answer now is kind of … yes! There was no attempt by any of us to channel these guys, but of course they were in the room.”

Since Forman met one of them inside his car, it’s certainly a possibility. — Gary Fukushima
ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO, SAXOPHONIST Darius Jones took a break. At the time, the New York-based musician found himself getting busier and busier, having recorded a series of ambitious albums that expressed their own blend of afrofuturism and swing.

Stepping away is part of the jazz tradition, especially in New York City — like Sonny Rollins’ retreat to the Williamsburg Bridge 60 years ago. A recent result of Jones’ journey is the solo recording Raw Demoon Alchemy (A Lone Operation) on Northern Spy. During a conversation from his Brooklyn apartment, he was resolute about the “pause” that became the album. “When you’re kind of wrapped up in all of it, you’re putting out records, doing all of those things, you can get lost in that cycle,” Jones said. “I wanted to be better and present something that was more true to myself and the only way I could get to that was to stop and to be courageous when I made my next statement as a leader.”

Jones’ trajectory was both communal and solitary. He toured by himself, performing as a soloist or collaborating onstage with musicians who live in different cities. Jones also composed for chamber and vocal ensembles. During the COVID lockdown, he listened to the recording of a Portland concert from his fall 2019 tour and used it for Raw Demoon Alchemy. “Through that process, I got to to know what I like, confront fears, anxiety and all types of emotions that existed, and it was powerful,” Jones said. “There were moments when I was saying to myself, “This is annoying, but I like it. Give in to it.” Also, when you play solo, you are not alone in the space; the space is giving you things. Silence is counterpoint.”

Jones added that collaborating with such leaders as drummer Mike Reed and bassist Eric Revis as well as the group Ceramic Dog encouraged him to pursue his voice through interpreting the compositions of others. Raw Demoon Alchemy consists of his takes on Roscoe Mitchell, Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra, a more recent piece by Georgia Anne Muldrow and the 1930s standard “Beautiful Love.” The album’s title honors the late rapper MF Doom, but Jones also referred to why he creates musical alter egos, such as the Demoon character. “It’s easier for me to embrace a character and let the music be that thing,” he said. “Demoon is the most beautiful character I’ve created, but he’s a villainous two-tongued individual. I’ve stolen these pieces — they’re mine now, not yours anymore.”

Since Jones’ 2009 debut as a leader, Man’ish Boy (A Raw And Beautiful Thing), his alto tone has echoed the lyricism of Johnny Hodges while carving out its own place in the free-jazz continuum. “I love just playing a melody and slightly embroidering it with playing over the bar line,” Jones said. “Or bending a note a certain way, or adding just the right note as an addition to the melody, or repeating something inside of the melody over and over again because it just touches me so deeply. It reminds me of being in church and getting caught up in a sound, in a feeling.”

The involvement of Black churches in social justice causes also informs Jones’ composition “We Can Change The Country.” Darcy James Argue conducted the piece at Brooklyn’s Roulette on the eve of the 2020 election. The voices and instrumentalists respond to video clips connected to history and events that led to the Black Lives Matter movement. The track’s message is clear. “What I’m trying to say is that in our society there’s an overseer, someone conducting things, moving things around, putting us in certain places,” Jones said. “During the performance, participants also made calls in real time and reminded people to vote.”

Similar public-spirited determination directs Jones’ role at the New School, where he’s been a part-time faculty member since 2018. “I’ve teared up at hearing a young musician blowing into their horn with so much meaning behind it,” he said of his experience working with jazz students. “That helped me to remember why I’m doing what I’m doing.”

—Aaron Cohen
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Final Bar: George Mraz, the iconic Czech bassist, passed away Sept. 16 at age 77. After graduating from Prague Conservatory, Mraz played throughout Europe before moving to the United States to attend Berklee College of Music in 1968. He joined Dizzy Gillespie for dates in New York, then went on the road with Oscar Peterson for two years. Mraz would go on to play with some of the biggest names in jazz, including Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Stan Getz, Bill Evans, John Abercrombie, Tommy Flanagan, Pepper Adams, Kenny Barron, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Bob Brookmeyer, Benny Carter, Joe Lovano, Charles Mingus and Carmen McRae. He became a bandleader including Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Stan Getz, Bill Evans, John Abercrombie, Tommy Flanagan, Pepper Adams, Kenny Barron, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Bob Brookmeyer, Benny Carter, Joe Lovano, Charles Mingus and Carmen McRae. He became a bandleader.

$2 Million for Jazz: South Arts, a nonprofit regional arts organization, awarded $2 million in grants to support jazz musicians through its Jazz Road initiative. The individual grants, which ranged from $24,700 to $40,000, were delivered to 52 musicians to support a variety of creative residencies. Grants went to established and up-and-coming artists. southarts.org

BACK IN THE 1960S, WHEN SINGER JAY Clayton was just in her 20s, she landed a regular jazz gig at Pookie’s Pub, a dive bar on Manhattan’s Lower West Side. In anticipation of a move to Europe — so many of New York’s jazz musicians were moving there then — she’d sublet her unheated loft on Lispenard Street, in Tribeca. But a gig is a gig, so she changed her mind and stayed.

“I played Pookie’s every weekend, and on my way home [Charles] Mingus walked in,” recalled Clayton, who recently turned 80. “He liked what he heard and told the owners that he’d help put their place on the map. Sure enough, a few weeks later, he played a couple of tunes with me, and of course the place was packed. It was just so far-out to be up on that stage, at 22 or 23, with Mingus.”

Clayton’s career is full of such serendipities. When composer Steve Reich was looking for a jazz singer who could read, a mutual friend recommended Clayton, whose loft happened to be a block away from his. Their subsequent collaboration, captured on his 1971 recording Drumming (John Gibson + Multiples), lasted several years.

It was during those early days of the free improvisation movement in New York that Clayton developed her signature style of spontaneous composition: rangy, syllabic vocals; melodic rendition; and impromptu riffs of poetry and spoken word. Later, she would add looping and other electronic effects to her live performance.

Her inventive approach soon caught the attention of jazz, classical and avant garde composers. She would go on to record more than 40 albums as a leader or guest with musicians as varied as jazz innovator Muhal Richard Abrams, experimental classical composer John Cage and cool jazz icon Lee Konitz.

“At that time, I was interested in anything that the voice could do,” Clayton said. “I didn’t sing words, and I doubled the instruments.”

Clayton was one of the first musicians to present loft concerts in lower Manhattan. In the late 1960s, along with her then-husband, drummer Frank Clayton, she hosted the likes of Sam Rivers, JoAnne Brackeen, Hal Galper, Jeanne Lee and Bob Moses at her roomy Tribeca space.

Since those early days, Clayton’s career as a creative vocal musician has continued unabated. As her reputation grew, she began concertizing and teaching regularly, both overseas and throughout the U.S. In 1995, she forged a relationship with Sunnyside Records, releasing Beautiful Life with pianist Fred Hersch.

In January 2020, Clayton released her ninth Sunnyside CD, Alone Together, a duo set with drummer Jerry Granelli. In this exposed setting, Clayton’s subtly expressive voice demands a close listen, as she immerses herself in the late Granelli’s melodically percussive lines.

Later, in November 2020, she launched 3 For The Road (Meistero Music), a trio album with pianist Fritz Pauer and trombonist Ed Neumeister. This vault recording from 2001 gives a representative sampling of Clayton’s eclectic repertoire, as she segues from melodic disjunction (“Love Is A Place”) to gentle balladeering (“Two For The Road”), to wild extemporizing (“Ba Da Da Dat”) and meditative wordlessness (“Gobblers Nob”).

With little opportunity to promote these albums last year, this fall Clayton decided to embark on a short U.S. tour. Beyond promotion for the albums, these concerts are something of a victory lap for the singer, in celebration of her six decades as a jazz musician. Even during a global pandemic, Clayton finds a way to perform.

“Art is a big philosophy of mine is to follow what you love,” she said. “Just know what you’re going to do next, and that usually leads to another thing. [In the loft days], I was just trying to sing better. It wasn’t like I had anything specific in mind. All of my vocal improvising came out of that.”

—Suzanne Lorge
THE SOUND OF SMOKE

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City of Sounds

RENEE ROSNES
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ORRIN EVANS
The Magic of Now

HAYS STREET HART
All Things Are

VINCENT HERRING
Preaching to the Choir

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Three years after he passed away on Nov. 2, 2018, at age 49, trumpeter Roy Hargrove enters the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

A transitional figure who profoundly influenced a generation of musicians, Hargrove bridged the worlds of hard bop, hip-hop, funk and neo-soul throughout his prolific career, serving as a role model for young trumpeters to find their own voices in his wake. As close friend and mentee Maurice “Mobetta” Brown, a trumpeter from the south suburbs of Chicago put it, “The first time I heard him play, it made so much sense to me because it showed me other possibilities outside of what I was hearing at the time. He was the guy that let me know that, ‘Hey, it’s OK to push and express yourself.’”
Brown, who appeared on The RH Factor’s 2003 album Hard Groove, added, “I visited him two weeks before he passed away. He gave me one of his horns. I didn’t even know that he was sick like that. I just downplayed it. So I got the horn and said, ‘Thanks so much.’ But I didn’t realize that that would be the end.

“He was definitely a mentor of mine,” Brown continued. “He was not a guy who would sit down and show you stuff, but the fact that I would have access to him, to hang out with him and do stuff, meant a lot to me. I learned a lot just being around him and watching how he operates.”

Rising star trumpeter Giveton Gelin is another young player who was inspired by Hargrove’s example. “Roy was always the trumpet great that I found myself being drawn to again and again,” said the 22-year-old Bahaman musician, who performed at a star-studded, five-hour musical blow-out at Rose Theater on Jan. 8, 2019, to celebrate Hargrove’s memory. “I listen to his music today, and it hits me like it’s the very first time. His sound pierced through the horn like a light beam. His sound transcends all things fixed. His sound will be with us forever.”

Neo-jazz star Theo Croker, whose critically-acclaimed 2019 album Star People Nation catapulted him into the limelight, saw Hargrove as one who embraced the tradition, as well as music in its wider context.

“For me, Roy Hargrove was one of the most dedicated stewards of this music, the Black American tradition, Croker said. “He could play everything on a high level without disregarding any other aspect of the music. He could come out on a rap song with Common and play bebop — the vocabulary of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie — with the swing of Louis Armstrong, the intensity of Freddie Hubbard, and the soul of Lee Morgan. Roy was one of the greatest...
that’s ever lived. Musically, he showed us that all of these different aspects of Black American music belong together and how important it is as young Black artists to understand our language and vocabulary. He showed us by incorporating it into his music and putting it all on the same level, not one above the other, as so many other people like to do.”

Croker explained how Hargrove’s respect and love for the younger musicians he inspired went above and beyond, often playing out in unexpected ways. “When my career was first starting, any time Roy heard me on the radio he would call and congratulate me. Roy invited me to his crib, introduced me to transcribing Fats Navarro, and gave me a Martin Committee trumpet that I still use to this day, simply because he believed in me. On my (2014) album AfroPhysicist, I had recorded his song ‘Roy Allan,’ and called him from the studio phone to tell him I was doing it. He came by and sang on it! By doing these things, I felt supported and loved by Roy. Over many conversations, he would always try to instill upon me understanding rhythmic and harmonic things out of the vocabulary of our Black masters like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. I still have recordings of conversations we had.”

In a 1990 New York Times Magazine article, coinciding with the release of his debut on the RCA/Novus label, Diamond in the Rough, Hargrove told writer Tom Piazza: “To get a thorough knowledge of anything you have to go to its history. I’m just trying to study the history, learn it, understand it, so that maybe I’ll be able to develop something that hasn’t been done yet.”

Born in Waco, Texas on Oct. 16, 1969, Roy Anthony Hargrove was a preternaturally gifted trumpeter who began playing his father’s cornet at age nine. With a maturity beyond his years, Hargrove’s playing began turning heads when he attended Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas. Wynton Marsalis, who met Hargrove in 1987 during a performance/workshop at the school, was one of the first to spread the word about the budding trumpet star. Marsalis invited the 17-year-old Hargrove to perform with his quintet at the Caravan of Dreams Performing Arts Center in Fort Worth, Texas. At first, Hargrove did not take up Marsalis’ offer. But after three nights of the run, he built up the courage to sit in. That one event gave him the confidence to return to the club again and again while in high school to sit in with the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard and Bobby Hutcherson.

Hargrove’s reputation grew rapidly and reached the North Sea Jazz Festival’s Paul Ackett, who arranged for the young trumpeter to perform there in July of 1987, leading to a month-long European tour. Word quickly reached the heads of jazz record labels in New York. Around that time, Bruce Lundvall, the legendary president of Blue Note Records then, excitedly played this writer a tape of “this kid from Dallas who sounds like Clifford Brown.”

From Dallas, Hargrove enrolled at Berklee College of Music in 1988, but Boston was too far from where he wanted to be. A year later, he transferred to The New School in New York, and became a ubiquitous figure on the scene, hanging at The Jazz Gallery, sitting in at Small’s until the wee hours and frequently participating in the late-night jam sessions at the Blue Note. The diminutive figure of Hargrove could be seen nervously pacing the floor of the subterranean Small’s until it was his time to sit in, and then unleashing his horn with an assertive, fireball intensity that rivaled his role model Freddie Hubbard in his prime. Indeed, Hargrove felt about Hubbard the way that Gelin, Brown and Croker would later come to feel about him — a towering figure
with a magnetic, overpowering attraction.

Hargrove’s first sideman sessions in New York came in 1988–’89 with alto saxophonist Bobby Watson (No Question About It, Blue Note), tenor saxophonist Ricky Ford (Hard Groovin’, Muse), drummer Carl Allen (Piccadilly Square, Timeless) and Don Sickler (Superblue, Blue Note) before he recorded his debut as a leader, Diamond In The Rough, at age 20.

He followed with a string of superb offerings for the RCA/Novus label, including 1991’s Public Eye (with altoist Antonio Hart, pianist Stephen Scott, bassist Christian McBride and drummer Billy Higgins) and 1992’s The Vibe (with Hart, pianist Marc Cary, bassist Rodney Whitaker, drummer Gregory Hutchinson, guest tenorists Branford Marsalis and David “Fathead” Newman, plus trombonist Frank Lacy and organist Jack McDuff).

As a side project to his solo and quintet recordings, Hargrove was also the leader of The Jazz Networks, an ensemble which released five albums and featured other notable jazz artists, including Antonio Hart and Joshua Redman. Hargrove was commissioned by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and wrote “The Love Suite: In Mahogany,” which premiered in 1993. His 1994 outings, Blues ‘N Ballads and Approaching Standards, highlighted the other side of his fiery trumpet style in the gorgeous tone he achieved on flugelhorn, especially on relaxed, lyrical ballads like “Easy to Remember,” “What’s New?” and “You Don’t Know What Love Is.” (Hargrove would pursue this mellower direction on his 1999 album, Hargrove With Strings, which featured his golden-toned flugelhorn work playing on moody standards like “You Go To My Head,” “A Time for Love,” “I’m a Fool to Want You” and “The Very Thought of You.”)

He experimented with a trio format on 1995’s Parker’s Mood, with bassist Christian McBride and pianist Stephen Scott, then won a Latin Grammy for his 1997 album Habana with his Afro-Cuban band Crisol. In 2001, he toured with tenor sax titan Michael Brecker and jazz piano legend Herbie Hancock, backed by the all-world rhythm tandem of bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade, resulting in the 2002 live Verve recording, Directions In Music: Live At Massey Hall, which won a Grammy for Best Jazz Instrumental Album.

The following year, Hargrove made a radical shift, incorporating funk and soul
grooves into jazz with his hybrid band RH Factor while also performing and recording on the side with neo-soul singer D’Angelo during his Voodoo tour and appearing that same year on Common’s album Like Water For Chocolate and on Erykah Badu’s Worldwide Underground.

In that same incredibly productive year, he also appeared as a guest soloist on Shirley Horn’s last studio album, May The Music Never End (Verve), performing brilliantly on Duke Ellington’s breezy “Take Love Easy” and also on a chilling rendition of Harold Arlen’s “Ill Wind.”

Hargrove’s string of albums with RH Factor — 2003’s Hard Groove, 2004’s Strength, 2006’s Distractions — liberated a generation of aspiring trumpet players, allowing them to heed the call of bridging urban soul and jazz by incorporating hard grooves and the attitude of hip-hop along with potent improvisations. Those breakthrough albums featured the contributions of D’Angelo, Common, Erykah Badu, Karl Denson and Q-Tip.

He continued to embrace acoustic post-bop with his quintet on 2008’s Earfood, which included the ebullient and joyfully upbeat anthem “Strasbourg/St. Denis” (which had celebrants dancing in the aisles at Hargrove’s memorial) and also with his 19-piece big band on 2009’s Emergence.

Though Hargrove struggled with kidney failure and had been on dialysis for the last 14 years of his life (including while on the 2001 Directions In Music tour with Brecker and Hancock), he continued carrying the torch for jazz, gigging and sitting in until the end before passing away from cardiac arrest stemming from his long-time fight with kidney disease.

During the marathon Roy Hargrove memorial celebration at Rose Theater in Jazz at Lincoln Center, emcee Christian McBride, who knew the trumpeter since they were teenagers, described his late friend as “the kind of person you’re lucky to know once in a lifetime,” adding, “When you heard Roy play, you clearly understood where he was coming from. He was a man with a huge heart, lots of empathy and understanding. Roy understood that the key to unlocking the true wisdom in this music was to spend time around the elders. He couldn’t wait to spend time and talk with them. Roy decided to play the language of all his elders and gain their respect and, therefore, gain credibility, and then work on creating something fresh. What could be more fulfilling than that?”

This sentiment played out on Hargrove’s 1994 Verve album With The Tenors Of Our Time, which featured elders Johnny Griffin, Joe Henderson and Stanley Turrentine.

Always hip, later in the memorial proceedings, emcee McBride quipped that Hargrove was “the first brother I saw to wear Air Jordans with an Armani suit.”

In a cover story for the March 2006 issue of DownBeat, Hargrove talked to journalist Jennifer Odell about playing music that blended genres.

“It’s the same thing I used to see when I was going to Berklee. The jazz guys would be like, ‘The funk cats don’t know tradition, don’t know how to play, don’t know any harmony.’ And then the funk cats would be like, ‘You guys are too heady, never play the groove, play too many notes.’ But there’s a middle ground there, and it’s about understanding a style. If you’re gonna play some funk, you gotta know how to bring it in and not play too many notes.

“You gotta know how to give enough, to lend to the groove that makes people’s feet tap, makes them nod their heads or clap their hands. When you’re playing jazz, you have to have a knowledge of theory and dexterity. It’s a matter of being right in the middle.”

DB
Throughout an international career starting in the late 1980s, Tim Garland has become known as a shape-shifter on the international music scene. As a saxophonist, his first break was joining Ronnie Scott’s band age 23. Later, he teamed with Chick Corea as a regular member of several globetrotting projects over a 17-year stretch, including Corea’s 2013 project and album called *The Vigil* (Concord). Playing tenor and soprano saxes, bass clarinet and flute, Garland also won a Grammy for his symphonic orchestrations on Corea’s 2008 release, *The New Crystal Silence* (Concord). Shortly after Corea’s passing on Feb. 21, Garland penned this tribute to his friend and mentor. DownBeat is proud to publish his tribute here in honor of the readers selecting Chick Corea once more as Artist, Pianist and Keyboardist of the year as well as naming the Chick Corea Trio (with Christian McBride on bass and Brian Blade on drums) as Group of the Year.

For 21 years, I was lucky enough to call Chick Corea both my mentor and my friend. His insatiable appetite for live music and, crucially, its communication, was infectious, inspiring those around him to produce their very best, most heartfelt music. His incredibly full schedule was, of course, a result of his huge popularity. Some of the promoters that we shared post-gig meals with would seem like his oldest friends, harkening back to concerts from the late ’60s on! As a band leader, Chick’s experience seemed unparalleled, and there are precious few who toured to the extent that he did.

In equal measure, he was super-disciplined and playfully childlike. His discipline showed up in his respect for the efficiency of those around him. During those inevitable “rise and shine,” early morning, hotel-lobby-to-airport calls, he would set a great example of good-natured punctuality. His hotel room was always equipped with a full-sized keyboard for regular practice before, and often after, a concert. Leaving a venue we’d sometimes have to wait as Chick would be up on stage again practicing Mozart while the cleaners swept their brooms around the stage.
Early on, Chick was patient when there were things us newbies needed to learn and quickly forgiving of errors of judgement. He taught us how to communicate on larger stages and how to minimize barriers between yourself and the music, as well as the music and the audience.

On one of my first performances with him, Chick beamed at me as I walked past the piano after taking a solo, and shouted over “That’s the shit, Tim!” I was so pleased to have heard the word “the” in there. As if a foil to Chick’s sense of discipline was his sense of playfulness. He was playful in his sense of mischief and endless inventiveness on stage. I can’t think of one concert when he wouldn’t have played some phrase that would produce a kind of joyful laughter from his sidemen, something so hip and fresh, so individual and so locked-in with the groove. I remember after my first gig with him at The Stables Theatre in Wavendon, England (When it was still actually a converted stable), we were discussing how it felt to be locked in rhythmically, his groove was so visceral, crisp and decisive that it pulled you into its orbit. In his company, one was made aware of how to place notes and phrases, how to be truly playing as part of the band and never simply over it.

On our many long bus rides, he’d be talking to one or other of the band. The subject matter was always fascinating, Chick’s attitude and ear always open and questioning. He was eager to share his experience and to learn new things. He was still stretching his wings and growing along with the rest of us.

He had a passion for the drums being a drummer himself, his talks with Marcus [Gilmore] would bear the impression of two music students sharing experiences and digging what they love. Forget the 45 years that lay between them, it certainly had no place in that conversation. He gave exceptional regard to his drummers, they were “the High Priests” of the music, and he sometimes referred to the piano keyboard, for obvious reasons, as an extended drum kit.

With me, Chick might talk about orchestration, composition and approaches to getting the very best out of everyone on stage. He also gave exceptional respect to composers. My great buddy, the composer Billy Childs, who first introduced me to Chick, was quick to remind me of how he often spoke of us in the same sentence. What a blessing.

In these personal moments, I was deeply honored to hear so many stories of musical heroes first hand, like when Miles’ band members all swapped instruments on stage before he came out. “You guys are crazy” was the raspy reaction he gave when they played him on. Chick’s playfulness was there back then and it stayed. He got fed up at one point during a tour of Europe — playing in lavish halls threatened to make the listening experience stuffy and overly polite — so he tried to break out by having us all actually set up our gear at the beginning of the gig in front of the audience, cases everywhere, whilst he sat at the piano improvising his way into the first piece of the set.

Sometimes he’d surprise an unsuspecting band member, suddenly inviting them to introduce the next song, or he might just leave the piano, pick up a percussion instrument and start an impromptu rhythmic party. He got the audience involved, too, inviting them to sing, to come up on stage, to call out suggestions; no wonder thousands of music lovers felt they knew him beyond just his music.

His five decades of musical creation and risk-taking, that did not diminish with age, led to fans from 75 to 25 united in grief at his parting. I remember occasions at band rehearsals for The Vigil when Chick would walk in, clutching sheet music for brand new compositions, throwing them up on our stands with maverick enthusiasm.

To think of the scope of the music that came from him, could there be any jazz composer that hasn’t assimilated a part of Chick into the very marrow of their bones? And such diversity. Think of well-known pieces like “Litha,” “La Fiesta” or “Humpty Dumpty,” the knotty mischief of his orchestral pieces such as “The Continents” or the episodic romping fusion themes of the Return To Forever band.

Chick’s eclecticism was truly unparalleled, and in this I am remind-
ed by my buddy, Kris Campbell, our road warrior tour manager and unsung backstage hero, saying that “Everyone has their own book they can write about Chick.”

As often the only one traveling in from Europe on a tour or project, my jet lag was the reverse of the others. One time I was nodding off in the hotel after a long-haul flight and at about 2 a.m. Chick calls up and says, “I’m having a steak downstairs, they kept the kitchen open, see you in five?” — and one had to weigh up issues of personal health regarding sleep, against hanging out in deep conversation with the Chickster, talking about Henri Dutilleux or Art Tatum or how there was not enough good humor in contemporary music.

Humor was central. He’d often quote the comedians he’d grown up watching, as well as Monty Python, and old jokes of Ronnie Scott’s. But I remember a time when I tried to get him into Alan Partridge (a blast of self-deprecating Brit humor). That went down like a lead balloon. Why so? Chick had limited time to identify with the humor of self-pity or self-destructive behavior. His central modus operandi was appreciation. He was totally attuned to lifting everyone’s feeling of self-worth through his attentive appreciation. Just look at the amount of people sharing selfies with him, and how often he’s pointing at them, the fans, acknowledging their importance, encouraging us all to feel inspired in our own endeavors.

Chick not only believed in us as his fellow artists, but genuinely relished the input we could offer and with that came the possibility that we might take a risk of our own that he didn’t actually dig, and you’d realize later that his interest was centered chiefly around the band, and that within risk-taking there had to be dialogue. Music for him was communication.

His investment in the talents of others meant he never ran out of things to say as a musician with such a long career. I remember sitting next to him on a flight to Tokyo and mentioning, “This is my fourth time now,” his reply being that he’d been at least twice a year since 1966 (the year I was born).

In Chick’s later years, he was still incredibly resilient. During a potentially violent uprising in Argentina, we were forced to leave our hotel in the dead of night driving off in a rickety bus headed for our next venue 14 hours away. There were rumors of buses being forcibly boarded by strikers in Buenos Aires. We took a heavily bumpy ride through the outskirts of the country. Chick bore the lack of comfort with such resilience that I didn’t dare make any complaint myself.

He always asked after Amanda, my wife, and my kids Rosa and Joe and we, of course, got to know Gayle, the love of his life. The last time I played at the Blue Note, Gayle took Mandy for a surreal 1 a.m. Chinese foot-massage just over the road “while the boys did their thing.”

How very New York, and how very Gayle.

Chick, you have left a gaping hole that we are all left staring into. We never imagined a world without Chick Corea in it, without him sending songs with Gayle singing as Christmas gifts, or releasing project after project (I was just in four of them, but that was life-changing enough) or sharing his life’s wisdom. Thank you for lifting the spirits of millions and reminding us of what is possible.

Thank you for showing such fearlessness in a world so wracked with fear, and my humble thanks for believing in me, a lad from Kent who was as hooked on music as you, and who was privileged to share just a fraction of your experience. You have been the most inspirational man I am ever likely to meet and our global musical family within and beyond the world of jazz has been stunned into silence. Yet I can hear your voice saying that you have merely Returned to Forever, and there you are just pointing at our instruments saying, “C’mon, man — let’s hear what you’re working on now!”

— Kriss Campbell

The Perfect Blend

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Still feeling the effects of a fiery four-night run at Ronnie Scott's in London, Kurt Elling — DownBeat's Male Vocalist of the Year — was safely back in the music-filled lair of his Chicago home, but operating in a zone between exhaustion and exhilaration.

“They were really some of those peak nights that you remember for the rest of your life,” the baritone vocalist said, momentarily diverting his eyes from the Zoom camera as his 5-year-old son, August Gerhard, vied for his attention. “It’s like when you know you’re playing at the top of your current abilities, and everyone is pulling together.”

That was hardly preordained. Elling, known for employing seasoned jazz musicians, had instead surrounded himself with millennial groove masters Corey Fonville on drums and DJ Harrison on keyboards, along with two backup singers and his generational peer and producer, Charlie Hunter, a remarkably adaptable guitarist who has, along with his jazz chops, explored the world of hip-hop since the 1990s.

At first blush, the dance-club quality of the onstage assemblage might have seemed at odds with Elling’s sensibilities. But in the days of pandemic, a little change was in order. As he put it, this new mode of expression “was, and is, an ongoing COVID experience” — one conceived as a release from the stir-craziness acquired during lockdown, which consigned him to staring at a wall of plaques that honored a musical prowess he was unable to fully share.

The project began as a kind of persona-warping lark, its attendant album, *SuperBlue* (Edition), intended to involve Elling virtually. It became flesh-and-blood reality in the early-autumn engagement at Ronnie’s, where, for the first time, the band spent consecutive days together. From set to set, they said, the grooves became deeper, strengthening the foundation on which Elling could fashion fresh takes on some old-school mannerisms.

Since his earliest days in Windy City haunts, as part of a duo at Milt Trenier’s Show Lounge or with the house band at the Green Mill’s late jam, Elling had cultivated the wine-and-cocktails unflappability of crooners like Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee, whom he heard as a boy on the car radio during family road trips. Tony Bennett became a lodestar after the youthful Elling saw him on TV performing live with the Woody Herman band. “Here’s the band, and it’s roaring, and all the band is in black dinner suits and looking sharp,” he recalled. “And they say, ‘Now, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Tony Bennett.’ And he comes out and he’s got a white dinner jacket on, and he gets to sing, and to sing like that. And I was like, ‘That’s the guy you want to be.’”

That, in no small measure, is the guy he became — and arguably more. On one level, he has developed into an interpreter of popular song whose presence on the scene has, without evident irony, kept alive a style and standard of presentation. His first Grammy for best jazz vocal album — earned for 2009’s *Dedicated To You: Kurt Elling Sings The Music Of Coltrane And Hartman*, recorded live as part of Lincoln Center’s American Songbook Series — is a case in point.

On another level, he has become an artful conveyer of meaning through words, an acolyte, then colleague of singer-writers like Jon Hendricks and Mark Murphy whose achievements in vocalese have added another dimension to jazz melodies.

His second Grammy, earned this year for *Secrets Are The Best Stories* (Edition), offers ample evidence. The album became a vehicle for some of his best poetry and, he said, for uncovering secrets pianist Danilo Pérez might hold by dint of his close association with Wayne Shorter.

In an age of cultural pluralists, Elling’s contributions to the pure jazz idiom are so profound that they can, to the uninitiated, seem almost anachronistic. No surprise there; they echo the obsessions of a self-described “dorky” kid who missed his time. Now 53, Elling wasn’t born into the generation from which his version of jazz singing emerged; he was, rather, surrounded in the streets by the sounds of funk and the stirrings of hip-hop. So when he...
Elling calls the new album *SuperBlue* "an ongoing COVID experience."
decided to swing in that direction for the current project, it may have been late in coming — but it wasn’t a disorienting move for artist or audience. At Ronnie’s, the raves came from a younger crowd than Elling usually attracts.

“I knew that he could cut this shit,” Hunter said in a phone interview.

Hunter’s opinion was not offered in a vacuum. He and Elling met at Chicago’s Elbo Room in 1995, got to know each other as members of the Blue Note Records artist stable and over the years worked together in various settings — like a multidisciplinary show of Elling’s at the Steppenwolf Theater, an album of Hunter’s and a tour with drummer Derrek Phillips.

Early in the pandemic, Hunter and Elling — holed up in their homes and seeking a creative outlet — pieced together videos and uploaded them to the internet. In one, a so-called quarantine jam in which drummer Steve Hass joins them, Elling — sporting shades, a goatee, and a trilby hat — offers an improbably loose-limbed performance that now seems a possible precursor to the SuperBlue project.

“That gave Kurt the idea that maybe we can expand on this and make a record,” Hunter said.

Elling’s enthusiasm for the project was tempered by misgivings. And he said as much when Hunter suggested that the project go forward. “Charlie reached out and said, ‘Bro, I think now is the time,’” Elling recalled. “I said, ‘How are we even going to do that?’ I had a certain amount of trepidation coming into working with Charlie and Corey and DJ at this level because it’s not the usual stuff I do. Its jazz adjacent.”

“Because the project was ‘not in my primary wheelhouse,’” Elling said, “we were wary of being drawn into a research ‘labyrinth’ in preparing for it. Recalling the rhetoric of doubt he voiced at the time, he said: “‘How much Roy Ayers do I have to listen to now? How am I going to get my hands on all this California soul?’”

But those who know him are unsurprised that he would meet the challenge. “His voice is God-given, but his work ethic and imagination are totally boundless,” said pianist Bill Charlap, who won a 2016 Grammy with Bennett and, as an impresario, has featured Elling singing standards at New York’s 92nd Street Y, in 2008 and, most recently, in July.

Agreeing to move forward, Elling passed the baton to Hunter. “It was up to me to make it happen,” Hunter said. So in November 2020, he drove north from his home in Greensboro, North Carolina, to Richmond, Virginia, where Fonville and Harrison lived, and the latter had a home studio in which the three could work. He made three or four such trips. In February, raw material in hand, he drove west to Urbana, Illinois, where he, Elling and engineer Anthony Gravino tracked and mixed the record.

“With this record,” Hunter explained, “I just wanted to write some great grooves that Kurt could turn into cool lyrical things.”

Apart from one tune — “Circus,” on which Elling recites Tom Waits’ words atop a freely improvised boogaloo — those grooves were cut in extended jams given structure by bodies of songs Hunter had brought to Richmond. Within those structures, the musicians were free to shape the material with few constraints beyond the general directive to create music to which Elling could apply his gifts.

Fonville, in a phone interview, described the sessions as relaxed: “We just let the tape roll and cut it up. He allowed us to just be ourselves.” Elling, he added, provided real-time feedback on the music, even as he worked on the words. “Kurt was on standby. He kept writing as we sent tracks to him from the studio.”

The effort yielded originals that project a sense of fun with serious undertones. Jammed with Elling’s bluesy rasp and lyrics by turns portentous and playful, they include “Manic Panic Ephanic,” a lightly baked COVID-era confection showcasing Harrison’s Wurlitzer and punctuated by a disquieting falsetto; “Can’t Make It With Your Brain,” a disquisition on
disinformation driven by Hunter’s split-brain bass/rhythm guitar; “Dharma Bums,” a kicky nod to the Beats animated by Hunter’s wah-wah vibe; and “This Is How We Do,” a minute-long, voice-modulated fadeout that functions as an apt coda to the collection.

Writing credits on the originals go to the group, with and without Elling. But as the back-and-forth of the writing progressed and the workings of the Richmond bubble assumed a distinct form, Elling realized that something was needed beyond the collective compositions, and he asserted himself: “If it’s going to be like that,” he recalled saying, “then I’ve got some jazz things I want to do.”

The balance of the collection — save for a take on Cody Chestnutt’s R&B chestnut “The Seed” — thus became covers of jazz tunes. Overlaid with homage, they include the title track, a fusion artifact recalling the spirit of Freddie Hubbard; “Sassy,” a soul-based, bop-inflected Sarah Vaughan tribute first recorded by the Manhattan Transfer; “Where To Find It,” a swampy meditation on Shorter’s undulating ode to Burma’s now-fallen idol, “Aung San Suu Kyi”; and “Endless Lawns,” Carla Bley’s “Laws” rendered as a slow burn.

“Endless Lawns” also appears in an appropriately expansive version on Elling’s acoustic album from 2018, The Questions. But in the charged context of SuperBlue, its restraint packs a particular punch: As an encore at Ronnie Scott’s, Fonville said, it struck a powerful chord as Elling traced Bley’s inviting intervals with a closing lyric that is as close to poignant as he is likely to come: “Come climb the sky with me/ Come hear and come to see/Melody in perfect symmetry/In love./In light./In key.”

“It was a silent killer,” Fonville said. “Every time we played it, people teared up.”

Ever unflappable, Elling himself is not easily given to tears. But he did well up when recalling the kindnesses shown to him by elders like Chicago saxophone legend Von Freeman, who agreed to appear on what became Elling’s debut album for Blue Note, 1995’s Close Your Eyes. Perhaps the most surprising act of generosity he could summon also centered on that album — one in which a friend gave him $10,000 to make a studio-quality demo that, after reaching Blue Note Records’ then-chief Bruce Lundvall, prompted a contract signing and became the core of the collection. A Grammy nomination followed.

“It was a dream come true that I didn’t even know I could have,” he said.

Fourteen albums later, he is conjuring new dreams — reaching new audiences with SuperBlue, to be sure, but also with overseas projects like one he is undertaking with Scottish saxophonist Tommy Smith, who has recruited him to write lyrics on tunes by living European jazz composers. The dramatist in him is also taking center stage: Leading up to the Ronnie Scott’s gig, he mounted his radio play The Big Blind at the Detroit Jazz Festival. He also performed at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s centennial tribute to Hendricks.

With all the activity, he was obviously glad to be home, where son August was now a fidgety on-camera presence, trying to help Elling open a bubble-lined bag holding the plaque that recognized his honor this year as the Male Singer of the Year in the DownBeat Critics Poll. The win was his 17th; the plaque recognizing his 14th Readers Poll victory would soon be in the mail.

“It’s lovely,” he said, pointing to the plaques on the wall. “I treasure each and every shiny thing.”

Elling’s gratitude for the recognition represented by music awards was offered with the sincerity of a onetime divinity-school scholar who felt compelled to give up the study of Immanuel Kant for that of Jerome Kern (and, with the advent of SuperBlue, maybe a bit of Jay-Z). The decision, abandoning a lifetime of self-imposed expectations, had been a difficult one. But he has never looked back.

“It was like I had found True North.”

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*How Does Christmas Sound?*

**KIRK WHALUM**

*How Does Christmas Sound?*

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Kenny Garrett’s latest album, *Sounds From The Ancestors*, is a message to all of the legendary artists who helped shape his artistic prowess. In addition to his appreciation for the straightahead jazz heroes of yesteryear and prominent postmodern improvisers on today’s scene, *DownBeat*’s Alto Saxophonist of the Year is quick to acknowledge those non-jazz musicians who have played a major role in shaping his tastes. In Garrett’s view, it all comes from the same source, however varied.

“My mom listened to Motown, and my father was listening to jazz, so I just heard everything in the house. I never thought about Aretha Franklin as being something separate or Marvin Gaye as being something separate, or John Coltrane being something separate. They were all part of this whole picture,” Garrett said in an October phone conversation with *DownBeat*. And his connection to this broad confluence of sounds started early in life.

“When you’re introduced to the music, if you’re hanging out with your peers, you’re going to listen to what’s currently going on,” he said. “But as you grow up, you’re hearing your parents’ music, and that’s the root. That’s the ancestors, that’s the root that we’re hearing. I’m listening to B.B. King. I’m listening to James Cleveland. I’m listening to whatever they’re listening to. They’re passing it on to me.”

In addition to being inspired by his parent’s record collection, Garrett had the music he and his peers dug into as teenagers, like “Earth, Wind & Fire, Kool & the Gang and The Ohio Players.” And then there’s Detroit. His upbringing in the burly Midwestern city, and his adjacency to the legendary 1960s and ‘70s music scene there, also played a role in shaping him artistically.

“My mom used to take me down to the Fox Theatre to hear the Four Tops or the Temptations or the Supremes because she wanted to expose me to that music. My father was actually a deacon, and he actually lived right across the street from Aretha Franklin’s father’s church [the famed Reverend C.L. Franklin],” Garrett said, noting that the scene in Detroit was not subject to strict genre divisions, not even at the city’s iconic bastion of soul music — Motown Records.

“Stevie Wonder, to me, is a jazz musician,” Garrett said. “He was around jazz musicians who were helping him to understand that music. A lot of those guys who were part of The Funk Brothers [the Motown house band that featured famed musicians like prototypical drummer Benny Benjamin and positively mythic bassist James Jamerson] were jazz musicians. They wanted to take care of their families, so they could just keep playing jazz.”

Garrett credits Wonder’s early tutelage from those musicians to the Motown star’s prodigious musicianship.

In a sense, Wonder’s early tutelage mirrors Garrett’s own experience while coming of age and finding his own musical voice in Detroit. “Musicians like [trumpeter] Marcus Belgrave, and then [my teacher, saxophonist] Bill Wiggins, who were from Detroit, really put me in a place to be able to be prepared for that music,” he said. “Bill Wiggins was preparing me to take his place. Marcus Belgrave was exposing me to Freddie Hubbard and The Mel Lewis Orchestra and all those musicians that I encountered and I met later in New York.”

“There was one guy by the name of Bobby Barnes, he was [a saxophonist] from Detroit. He gave me a couple of lessons, and I don’t even know if I had to pay for the lesson. But that was the best for me. I learned so much from him. And I caught up with him years later, called him, and I told him how much I appreciated him. And he didn’t even know. His wife said he was in tears.”

With all of these indelible influences in mind, Garrett set out to produce *Sounds From The Ancestors*. He said the album, “examines the roots of West African music in the framework of jazz, gospel, Motown, hip-hop and all other genres that have descended from jùjú and Yoruban music.”
“Stevie Wonder, to me, is a jazz musician,” says Garrett.
The intergenerational core of the band on *Ancestors* includes drummer Ronald Bruner Jr., Rudy Bird on percussion, Corcoran Holt on bass and Vernell Brown Jr. on piano. All of the musicians are remarkably accomplished, but two in particular have deep history with Garrett.

Bruner has played with Stevie Wonder and George Duke, but Garrett disclosed, “I was the first one that brought him out and introduced him, gave him an opportunity to come out and play. So, he’s like one of my students.” Meanwhile, Garrett and Rudy Bird played together many years ago with Miles Davis and the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

*Ancestors* is not just about the historical roots of the music that shaped Kenny Garrett. The album attempts to express the genre-agnostic spirituality that exudes from his influences. “The concept initially was about trying to get some of the musical sounds that I remembered as a kid growing up — sounds that lift your spirit from people like John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, Aretha Franklin, *Amazing Grace*, Marvin Gaye, *What’s Going On* and the spiritual side of the church,” Garrett noted. “When I started to think about them, I realized it was the spirit from my ancestors.”

But that sense of spirituality is also cosmopolitan, according to the saxophonist, and not limited to his early influences. “Even when I endeavor to check out Asian music, if I’m listening to Middle Eastern music, if I’m listening to Turkish music, I’m still trying to find that same string that touches my soul and my heart and uplifts me.”

He wanted *Ancestors* to exude deep-rooted spirituality, as well.

Garrett said that he’d spoken with Cuban bandleader Chucho Valdés about contributing to the project from its infancy because “the spiritual quality [of Valdés’ music] reminded me of my music, but different: coming from an Afro-Cuban perspective.” Garrett credits Valdés as being a part of this album indirectly because he connected with Afro-Cuban singer Dreiser Durruthy while playing with Chucho’s band. Durruthy’s chant laces the opening track “It’s Time To Come Home” with deeply spiritual seasoning.

An inspired feature from vocalist Dwight Trible on “Sounds From The Ancestors” came about after Garrett caught the singer performing with Kamasi Washington at Harlem’s Apollo Theater. The concert led Garrett to cast Trible (who serves as vocal director for the Horace Tapscott Pan African Peoples Arkestra, a Black Arts Movement-rooted institution based in Los Angeles) for the role of a preacher on the title track, adding another layer of resolute spirituality, this time articulated in Yoruba.

Another notable track, “Hargrove,” serves as a tribute to the deeply revered trumpeter Roy Hargrove, now in the DownBeat Hall of Fame, who Garrett crossed paths with many times, particularly while playing with Roy Haynes. They recorded together on Haynes’s tribute to Charlie Parker, 2001’s *Birds Of A Feather*.

“[Roy was] a kindred spirit,” Garrett said. “I know how he played, because we played together. And I know he [thought] about funk music and hip hop, all that, because we were coming from the same place, just different generations.” Garrett was Hargrove’s senior by nearly 10 years.

“I embraced all of it,” the saxophonist continued. “If you check out my track record, I’ve played with hip hop artists, to classical things. I just do it all. But I never separate it.”

The process of composing “Hargrove” was remarkably uncomplicated for Garrett. “I’d written the chord changes first, and I was saying, ‘You know what? I hear this melody in my head that fits this song, and it reminds me of Roy.’” Trumpeter Maurice Brown was brought in “to capture that spirit. His fire. I just want—
ed to pay my homage to [Roy], because he really influenced a lot of musicians.”

Garrett has a positively magnetic attraction to honoring influencers and predecessors. It’s a quality that’s been baked into his artistry since the beginning of his professional career. Fresh out of high school, one of his first major gigs was working with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, which was then led by the legendary bandleader’s son, Mercer Ellington. The experience was a master class in musicianship for the young alto player.

“That was a great experience, because I got a chance to play with Cootie Williams,” Garrett said. “I got a chance to sit under Harold Minerve, who was under Johnny Hodges, who was also a protege, and sit under Norris Turney, who was also a protege. Some of those musicians were still the original musicians who played with Duke, so it was a learning experience. When I first joined the band, all the guys were already in their 50s. And I was a young guy, so I was still a dreamer. I’m still a dreamer … but I was a dreamer.”

Just as those artists learned from the masters, Garrett learned from them.

“I was playing my saxophone,” he said, offering an example of their tutelage. “They said, ‘Well, don’t play those snakes in here.’ I was in the dressing room. So, I would leave out of respect and go where the next available room was. And they said, ‘I can still hear you. Don’t play those snakes in here.’ Well, they were saying, ‘Don’t practice. We already heard all that. We don’t want to hear that.’

“So I’d go to the ballroom. They said, ‘Oh, don’t play those snakes.’ And I kept going further and further away, but I was determined that I wasn’t going to stop. I just wasn’t going to disrespect them.”

Ultimately, the young dreamer understood “that they weren’t in the same place that I was in. But also, I could learn a lot from them, because the lead alto player, Harold Minerve, took me under his wing and showed me about music after they understood that I respected the past. They understood that I was a young guy and had a good foundation. And I went on to play for about three and a half years there.”

His lessons learned certainly didn’t stop there. “I always wanted to be by the altar,” he said. “If you look at my first record, Introducing Kenny Garrett [1985], I had Woody Shaw. On my second record [1989’s Garrett 5], I had Elvin Jones and Ron Carter. African Exchange Student [1990] was the one with Ron Carter and Elvin Jones. On [1992’s] Black Hope, I had Joe Henderson. I always wanted the elders to be there, so I can make sure that I was moving in the right direction. I’ve just been blessed to be around so many great musicians.”

Once while recording with Shaw, Garrett remembered the horn player remarking, “I was wondering how you were going to resolve that.” Well, I was wondering, too, but I least he knew what I was trying to do. [The elders are] there for that reason. And sometimes we forget, because we’re moving, and we’re trying to find ourselves, and we’re trying to find our way. But I always paid homage to the elders.”

“Sometimes we can’t get to the person, but I don’t like to do tributes to the elders when they’re not here. I really like to speak to them while they’re here. And that’s why I’ve had great relationships with people like Sonny Rollins and Brother Yusef Lateef, who’s since passed on.” The saxophonist credited those crucial relationships with helping take Garrett “to the next level” as a young player.

Though Garrett remains mindful of the ancestors, his work is never mired in the past. Sounds From The Ancestors is no exception. The recording typifies the Ghanaian concept of Sankofa, a time-unifying notion of retrieving the past, while simultaneously facing forward. He concludes, “I think about the past and the elders and connecting everything together, and it being as a whole, or as one.”

DB
**HALL OF FAME**

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**JAZZ GROUP**

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  - **Billy Hart**
  - **Berkeley 8**
  - **Chick Corea & The Cookers**
  - **Chick Corea Latin Quartet**
  - **Chick Corea Trio & Social Science**
  - **Chick Corea Thelonious Monk Quartet**

- **Dave Holland**
  - **Dave Holland’s Big Band**
  - **Dave Holland Group**
  - **Dave Holland’s New Jawn**

- **Ambrose Akinmusire**
  - **Ambrose Akinmusire Quintet**
  - **Ambrose Akinmusire Trio**

- **Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas’ Sound Prints Quintet**

**JAZZ ARTIST**

- **Maria Schneider**
  - **Maria Schneider, Data Lords**
  - **Maria Schneider, Keepin’ It Real**
  - **Maria Schneider, For Jimmy, Wes And Oliver**

- **Christian McBride**
  - **Christian McBride Big Band**
  - **Christian McBride & Friends**
  - **Christian McBride’s New Jawn**

- **Wynton Marsalis**
  - **Wynton Marsalis Big Band**
  - **Wynton Marsalis & The Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra**

- **Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas’ Sound Prints Quintet**

- **John McLaughlin**
  - **John McLaughlin & the 4th Dimension**
  - **John McLaughlin & The 4th Dimension**

- **Pat Metheny**
  - **Pat Metheny Group**
  - **Pat Metheny Unity Band**

**JAZZ ALBUM**

- **Maria Schneider, Data Lords**
  - **Maria Schneider, Keepin’ It Real**
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- **Charlie Parker**
  - **Charlie Parker, Birdland**

- **Gary Bartz**
  - **Gary Bartz, JIDOO (Jazz Is Dead)**

**DATA LORDS**

Maria Schneider is the readers’ choice for Album of the Year with “Data Lords.” She was also honored as Big Band, Composer and Arranger of the Year.
**HISTORICAL ALBUM**
(UJune 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021)

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<td>Bria Skonberg</td>
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**Baritone Saxophone**

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**Flute**

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**Organ**

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**Keyboard**

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**Saxophone**

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**Tenor Saxophone**

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**Organ**

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Elvin Bishop & Charlie Musselwhite, 100 Years Of Blues (ALLIGATOR) .... 1,319

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Enraptured by his first encounters with Miles Davis’ 1966 live recording ‘Four’ & More as a boy, trumpeter Nicholas Payton has been on the hunt ever since for the uniquely metropolitan thump of Ron Carter’s bass accompaniment. Seemingly finding no adequate substitute, Payton’s latest LP, Smoke Sessions, sees him finally paired with the legendary bassist, alongside longtime drummer Karriem Riggins and guest features from another ‘Four’ & More alumus, saxophonist George Coleman.

The 10-track collection is far from a tribute to ‘Four,’ though, comprising non-Davis compositions that range from Riggins’ hip-hop swagger to Carter’s walking consistency and Payton’s own funk-inflected fluidity. Opener “Hangin’ And A’ Jivin’” sets the tone, with Payton playing his sprightly melody on the keys and taking an expansive, deep-swinging solo first behind the piano then on trumpet, while Riggins and Carter lock into a tessellated groove. Saxophonist Coleman then makes the first of two appearances on “Big George,” a tender balladic opening that morphs into a swampy funk, before his second showing on “Turn-a-Ron” gives him ample space to fly through chromatic 16th notes over Riggins’ brushstrokes.

Payton’s skill comes in allowing room for Carter and Coleman’s virtuosity to shine, while placing them in subtly updated contexts. There is the J Dilla-esque beat of “Big George,” where Coleman swings to a boom-bap, for instance, while the version of Herbie Hancock’s “Toys” sees Carter play over almost atonal dissonance on the keys, before implementing a descending walking line. The suite “Lullaby For A Lamppost,” dedicated to New Orleans jazz musician Danny Barker, meanwhile, artfully transposes a traditional funeral procession song into a neo-classical melodic minimalism. Here we hear Carter’s economy of phrasing, plucking plaintively over Riggins’ snare drum brushwork, before the second part of the 12-minute suite picks up the pace, swinging into a distorted funk that provides the momentum for a delicate solo from Payton.

In this way, Payton showcases the timeless-ness of Carter and Coleman’s skill — their inef-fable capacity to slot into new combinations and compositions with the open-eared will-ingness to swing. Theirs is the beating heart of jazz and long may its mantle be carried by Payton, Riggins and those yet to come.

—Ammar Kalia
New Here.

But McCraven widens the remix/reimagination arc to harken back to the label’s earliest foray into DJ culture. The opening cut — a rugged makeover of Hank Mobley’s “A Slice Of The Top,” introduced by Birdland’s iconic emcee, Pee Wee Marquette — could have been featured on Us3’s 1993 acid-jazz classic Hand On The Torch. McCraven approaches the Mobley gem with velvet gloves, underscoring the opening melodic chorus and tenor sax-trumpet improvisational exchanges with boom-bap looping. Except for adding live drumming, his take here is similar to Us3’s “Cantaloop (Flip Fantasia),” which also featured Marquette.

By recruiting some of McCraven’s finest contemporaries, such as vibraphonist Joel Ross, alto saxophonist Greg Ward and trumpeter Marquis Hill, Deciphering The Message connects the dots between previous jazz/hip-hop hybrids with the Blue Note catalog — notably Madlib’s blunted Shades Of Blue (2003) and the compilation Blue Note Revisited (2004) — with its latest iterations.

—John Morph

Source # We Move
★★½

This seems like an odd move for a U.K. artist seeking to establish herself outside her native country. Presumably released to capitalize on the nomination of Source (her 2020 release) for the 2021 Mercury Prize, Source # We Move is ultimately a more effective showcase for the eight DJs represented than for Garcia’s considerable talent.

The original album provided a fulsome view of Garcia’s ability to blend the influence of Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane with her experience as a person of deeply rooted African/Caribbean cultures. Sources also offered an expansive introduction to Garcia’s working quartet, particularly drummer Sam Jones.

Source # We Move is more aggressively propulsive and less probing than the original material, but let the remixes speak for themselves.

Several of the DJs push vocals to the front, with Blvck Spvde using choral vocalizations and a strong lead to transform the pulsing “Inner Game,” and Suricata creating an effective call-and-response between the blended voices of the Colombian trio La Perla and Garcia’s tenor on one of two versions of “La cumbia me está llamando.” A vocal trio is also used as counterpoint to Garcia’s sax on the Dengue Dengue Dengue remix of “Source,” rendered here with an unrelenting, stabbing rhythm bed. Most successful is Nala Sinephro’s version of “Together Is A Beautiful Place To Be,” an atmospheric haze with Sheila Maurice Grey’s trumpet as a blurrty presence.

—James Hale

Source    We Move:
Mogollón (1, 7), Karen Forero (1, 7), vocals; Diana Sanmiguel (1, 7) vocals, maracas.
Nubya Garcia, tenor saxophone; Cassie Kinoshi, tenor saxophone (8), vocals (6); Sheila Maurice Grey, trumpet (2), vocals (6, 8), Joe Armon-Jones, keyboards, piano; Daniel Casimir, bass; Sam Jones, drums; Alexeya (5), Richie Seawright (6, 8); Giovanna Mogolón (1, 7), Karen Forero (1, 7), vocals; Diana Sarmiento (1, 7) vocals, maracas.

Ordering info: concordjazz.com

ARCHITECTURE OF STORMS

Remy LeBoeuf’s Assembly Of Shadows
★★½

Commenting on his recent recording Assembly Of Shadows, Remy Le Boeuf remarked on the value of metaphor, on how something can be created out of “the absence of something” — meaning shadows. It was a neat little intellectual conundrum from a thoughtful man who not only understands the many dimensions of music, but also knows that a good metaphor provides evasive cover. It can conceal or escape the confines of intentions, or lack thereof.

In Architecture Of Storms, Le Boeuf seeks asylum in the emotional metaphor of bad weather as lost love, an idea expressed with poetic décor by lyricist Sara Pirkle and vocalist Julia Easterlin on the title track. But the metaphorical umbrella ends there.

This is not a suite of storms, but a procession of varied ensembles, hues and moods. They are agreeable in the moment, but don’t take root in memory. They showcase Le Boeuf’s light, sober alto and other soloists in sumptuous, wall-to-wall orchestrations that are neither quite jazz nor classical. Depending on how you prefer to see it, Le Boeuf suggests the way composers such as Stravinsky, Copeland and Gershwin borrowed from jazz in the ’20s to invigorate the concert hall. Or the way jazz musicians pushed away from their forms in the ’50s to borrow classical modes and create a Third Stream genre.

If Le Boeuf’s thematic intentions remain inexact, his craft is impressive, varied and clever. The plus-size orchestra handles the material with total poise.

—John McDonough

Ordering info: remyleboeuf.bandcamp.com
Nicholas Payton, *Smoke Sessions*

The composition’s cinematic elegance and the bracing rapport concocted by the musicians make you forget that these sessions were recorded during the pandemic. —John Murph

Like the best reunions, this superb, intimate seminar takes ‘Four’ & More as a reference point, then finds its own raison d’être. Payton’s pride is palpable, relaxing in eloquence with his elders. The music is literate and leisurely. A rare treat. —John McDonough

As great as Payton and Coleman sound, the interplay between Carter and Riggins commands the ears, with the younger player sounding like he’s absolutely reveling in coloring outside the lines of the master. —James Hale

Makaya McCraven, *Deciphering The Message*

McCraven’s self-sampling comes into its own when paired with the fascinating Blue Note archives. He pulls highlights from the likes of Hank Mobley on the hip-hop swing of “A Slice Of The Top” and Horace Silver on the breakbeats of “Ecaroh.” —Ammar Kalia

Another try at turning Music Minus One into an art form. McCraven and his intruders largely upend the proportionality and balances of the originals like loud and uninvited guests crashing a private party 20,000 midnights ago. —John McDonough

Like a fever dream from Birdland, with Pee Wee Marquette playing the part of The Man From Another Place in *Twin Peaks*, McCraven’s reimagining of hard-bop effectively uses dub techniques to make it sound wholly contemporary. —James Hale

Remy Le Boeuf, *Architecture Of Storms*

Le Boeuf’s orchestral arrangements are admirably intricate for this 20-piece ensemble, but the overall thematic tone is jarringly skittish, veering from indie songwriting sensibilities to big band bravado and tender balladry. It proves hard to wrap your ears around this involved project, placing it ultimately as something of an acquired taste. —Ammar Kalia

With its varied pulses and influences, this orchestral outing never ceases to capture your imagination and heart. —John Murph

A composer/arranger with a broad set of influences, Le Boeuf makes allusions to Maria Schneider and Leonard Bernstein with equal aplomb, yet appears to be creating his own signature with his ability to cover so much stylistic ground. —James Hale

Nubya Garcia, *Source & We Move*

A heavy set of remixes. Broken beat pioneer Kaidi Tatham lends his expertly percussive hand to a polyrhythmic take on “La cumbiame esta llamando,” while drummer Moses Boyd’s jungle odyssey on “Pace” is an homage to the pair’s upbringing on London’s nightlife. —Ammar Kalia

Too often Garcia’s greatest asset — her scorching saxophone improvisations — get completely obliterated in these mostly listless remixes. —John Murph

A kinetic Afro-Caribbean cocktail of pumping rhythms roams through chilly lunar landscapes, digital trickery and voice backgrounds. A poor showcase for Garcia, whose tenor seems stifled, starved for breathing space and swamped under the electronica layers. —John McDonough
In a celebrated 1927 letter to Sigmund Freud, the French mystic Romain Rolland made reference to what he called an “oceanic feeling,” a sense of being at one with the whole of creation in the way the ocean binds together the earth. It serves as a useful description of the otherwise impossible-to-categorize music of Omar Sosa and Seckou Keita, which not only bridges the impossible-to-categorize music of Omar Sosa and Seckou Keita, which not only bridges the Atlantic from Cuba to Senegal, but offers a genuine “world music.”

What the pianist and kora master create on this second album, after 2017’s Transparent Water, feels like a sonic voyage, mostly calm and untroubled, but with deep-sea swells just under the surface. On tracks such as “Voices On The Sea” and “Floating Boat,” the imagery is made more explicit. Morelenbaum’s cello and British-French percussion maestro Argüelles play a critical role in touching those extra dimensions, but for the most part attention falls on Sosa’s spacious keyboard shapes and Keita’s quietly commanding voice and rippling kora part. The album, relatively brief by today’s standards, but — not a second too long or short — is probably best heard as a continuous suite.

British keyboard artist Pat Thomas has recently spoken about the often-overlooked Arab influence on jazz. There’s evidence for that here, with intimations of rhythms not often encountered in bop or swing but somehow implied and available throughout the body of our music. As we look more urgently to the fate of the oceans, we need also to acquire the gift of oceanic hearing, and that’s what Suba offers.

—Brian Morton

Ordering info: bendigedig.org

Delayed by the pandemic, and released in the wake of Hurricane Ida, NOJO’s second release under the artistic direction of founding drummer Adonis Rose shines a beacon of light and hope. Full of joie de vivre, which has set La Nouvelle-Orléans apart since its 1718 founding, the lushly orchestrated album is anchored by the consummate French vocalist and recent New Orleans transplant Cyrille Aimée.

In the title-track opener, “Petite Fleur,” the French chanteuse wraps her rich, velvety voice around Sidney Bechet’s 1951 jazz standard, written while the New Orleans clarinet legend was living in France. Then, intimate as a whisper, she asks, “What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life,” singing the romantic Michel Legrand ballad in much-sexier French. And on “Si Tu Savais,” Aimée and a sizzling trumpet transport us to the Hot Club heyday of guitarist Django Reinhardt, whose latter-day gypsy carts lured her from her Samois-sur-Seine bedroom window to Reinhardt festivals.

Elsewhere, Aimée dives deep into quintessentially New Orleans styles, rocking out like Fats Domino on “I Don’t Hurt Anymore,” chugging cold ones on the stoop with “Get The Bucket” and leading her own second line on “Down,” a percussive Aimée original that gets the big-band NOJO treatment it deserves. Studded with homages to Billie Holliday (“Undecided”), (“Crazy He Calls Me”) and Ella Fitzgerald (“Undecided”), Petite Fleur is a rich collaboration that moves seamlessly between both cultures and pays tribute to both. —Cree McCree

Ordering info: storyvillerecords.com
It’s not uncommon to reimagine tunes from a small group album for big band — repertory bands have been created from the works of Monk, Mingus and Joe Henderson, to name just a few. What is more rare (and perhaps never before attempted) is to have the corresponding big band arrangements released right alongside the initial small group versions as part of the same recording. And yet, that is exactly what drummer/composer Jared Schonig has done on Two Takes, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.

Taken on its own, the stripped-down quintet recording would be a worthy offering of original music, played at the highest level by some remarkable performers. Trumpeter Marquis Hill and saxophonist Godwin Louis are in top form, and pianist Luis Perdomo is exquisite in every way, especially his extended solo on “Sound Evidence.” Schonig and bassist Matt Clohesy are completely locked in. Their transition from a broken rhythmic ostinato to straightahead walking on “White Out” feels like accelerating onto the freeway in a brand-new BMW. Schonig’s drumming is energetic, precise, and with the exception of the solo interludes, never steals the spotlight, as would be the temptation on any drummer’s album.

But the true brilliance resides in the decision to release the quintet recordings as a kind of source material to show how the music is transformed in spectacular fashion by some truly incredible arrangers. Laurence Hobgood, Miho Hazama, Darcy James Argue, John Daversa, Brian Krock, Alan Ferber, Mike Holober and Jim McNeely each take one of the eight quintet pieces, turning them all into tours de force, demonstrating the lasting power of the large jazz ensemble deep into this century.

The music is performed flawlessly by some of the best session players in New York, punctuated by some outstanding soloists, including guitarist Nir Felder and saxophonists Quinson Nachoff and Donny McCaslin.

This inspired conception ultimately belongs to Schonig, but the credit for this remarkable display of original writing should be shared by so many in the New York jazz community. Sometimes, it truly takes a village to do something extraordinary.

— Gary Fukushima
African diasporic music.

Kazemde George is out to capture the ethos of African diasporic music. I Insist is not only a nod to the monumental We Insist! by Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach. It is also a paean to those elements of Black creativity emergent in the depths of groove, manifest through ebb and flow of swing.

But George also understands something else about these musical traditions: They are both performance and ritual.

Composition takes on tracks like “Balance” and “This Spring,” where we hear the swing, so resonant in African American sounds.

ROVA
The Circumference Of Reason
ESP-DISK
★★★★

After 40-plus years in action, the ROVA Saxophone Quartet has mastered and reinvented the sound of four varied saxophones working together, individually and toward some “X” factor collective voice. That unique legacy gains further proof of vision and forward motion on its new project on ESP.

Covering a range of tools in the saxophonic toolbox/palette, the combined forces of Bruce Ackley, Steve Adams, Larry Ochs and Jon Raskin offer up six tracks, bristling with the characteristic mesh of free play (often group improvisation versus soloing) and taut structural passages. Additional saxophonic reference comes in the form of homages to the late Glenn Spearman (who shared with ROVA a San Francisco Bay Area grounding). An Ochs-arranged version of Spearman’s “The Extrapolation” opens the album, which closes with Adams’ muscular elegy “The Enumeration,” dedicated to Spearman.

Keeping options and concepts open and subject to change is a long-running ROVA mandate, as evidenced here by two very different versions of the tune “NC 17,” by turns atmospheric and antic.

While essentially operating under the aegis of jazz, nebulous though that moniker can be, ROVA incorporates aspects of modernist harmony and rhythm — shades of Messiaen, Bartók and unraveled Ravel, for instance — and swing-free minimalist kinetics, reminding us of the saxophone’s original intention as a “classical” instrument (an intention that never fully came to fruition). Here, “Xenophobia” and the title track, “The Circumference Of Reason,” assert chamber-like frameworks, interlaced with solo outings.

In all, Circumference teems with the stuff that makes ROVA an important institution, including locomotion, abstraction and a particular avant-reedy glory of its own devising.

—Josef Woodard

Marc Johnson
Overpass
ECM
★★★★½

Aside from its inherent strengths, quiet beauties and technical assurance, veteran bassist Marc Johnson’s new solo bass project assumes its place in a lofty — and necessarily deep-toned — label legacy. ECM, under the leadership of Manfred Eicher, originally a double bassist himself, has championed the rare solo bass art form, from Dave Holland’s 1978 Emerald Tears through bold recent entries from Barre Phillips, Larry Grenadier and now Johnson.

Johnson takes to the format with remarkable, fluid ease. On Overpass, recorded in Sao Paulo in 2018, the warm, real-time/realtwoood physicality of ambience is enhanced by the occasional sound of Johnson’s breathing, in time with the music. He wisely paces and diversifies his palette, in repertoire, tempo and degrees of spaciousness. Touchstones from his resume appear, from his seminal work with Bill Evans, on “Nardis,” to the slinky wiles of “Samurai Hee-Haw,” from Johnson’s 1986 ECM album Bass Desires.

Johnson flexes technical firepower and invention on the uptempo opener, “Freedom Jazz Dance,” and originals “And Strike Each Tuneful String” and the aptly named “Whorled Whirled World.” His balladic sensitivity emerges on his contemplative “Yin And Yang,” and lends fresh, memorable luster to “Love Theme From Spartacus,” another Evans songbook set-piece, “Spartacus” may, in fact, be this album’s expressive apex, as Johnson artfully reworks the standard and spotlights its poignant shift from minor to major.

The population of ECM’s subcategory of important solo-based albums has grown by one.

—Josef Woodard
The second studio album by Austrian organist Raphael Wressnig and Brazilian guitarist Igor Prado, with Igor’s kid brother Yuri on drums, is a small treasure. It’s a true organ trio effort smeared in fat and grease — no fakery. Uncommonly adept at the art of nailing down funk rhythms, this intercontinental threesome infuses groove music with elements of jazz, blues, R&B, soul and gospel as if they’d found the Holy Grail to be the early-1970s, cross-genre funk of Jimmy McGriff.

Suggestive of McGriff, but with a modern approach, Wressnig changes the tones and drawer setting throughout a song, plays block chords (rare in a funk context) and deals from a deck of Jimmy Smith-inspired R&B lines, hooks and licks. The fortyish Graz resident displays tremendous spirit and keen musical intellect as he accentuates the natural beauty of the Hammond. His creative engine drives the Meters’ “No More Okey Doke” and little-worn old songs linked to notables like James Brown, the Isley Brothers, Junior Wells, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Bob Marley. Succulent bottom-feeder “Shrimp Daddy” is the lone original.

—Frank-John Hadley

Groove & Good Times: Kissing My Love; I Know Who You Been Sockin’ It To; No More Okey Doke; Blues & Pants; Bring Love; Snatch It Back & Hold It; Ain’t No Love (in The Heart Of The City); Shrimp Daddy; Crossfire; Soul Shakedown Party. (43:48)

Personnel: Raphael Wressnig, organ, electric piano, vocals (4); Igor Prado, guitar, vocals (5); Yuri Prado, drums, percussion; Jenni Rocha, vocals (5).

Ordering info: raphaelwressnig.com

The Daptoone Super Soul Revue Live At The Apollo

The scale of this package hints that there’s a helping of myth-making that plays a role in its very existence. It’s also important to note that the albums that the sets captured here at New York City’s Apollo Theater are rare, and therefore important. But looking beyond the album’s decadent packaging (celebrating the label’s 20th anniversary), the music captured within also speaks volumes, even if inadvertently.

This record serves as a powerful gateway drug, a means of discovery for those who missed the heyday of mid-century American soul, funk and gospel music.

—Ayana Contreras

Various Artists

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Linda Fredriksson

Juniper

Linda Fredriksson is a multi-instrumentalist and songwriter from Finland best known for her work with Superposition, the Ricky-Tick Big Band and the punk-jazz group the Mopo Trio. Juniper is her first album as a leader.

Fredriksson planned Juniper as a type of singer/songwriter album but played by a jazz group. The recording is all instrumental other than the use of her wordless singing on “Lempilauluni (My Loved Song).” While there is improvising around the themes, the emphasis is on her folk melodies with her saxophones taking the place of her voice. “Neon Light” has a peaceful melody played by Fredriksson on alto over a quiet keyboard. “Juniper” has a complex but accessible rhythm with a strong forward momentum. Here, as on several of the pieces, Fredriksson shows that her strongest voice is on the baritone.

“Nana–Tepalie” has her harmonizing on both saxophones via overdubbing. “Lempilauluni” is a light rhythmic piece in 5/4 time with interplay between her baritone and guitar, while the drone piece “Clea” wraps up the intriguing set, which serves as a solid start to Fredriksson’s solo career.

—Scott Yanow
Trombonist Peter McEachern has worked with bassist Mario Pavone since the early ’80s, and drummer Michael Sarin since the early ’90s. The three recorded as a trio on 2018’s Bone Code, and on this album, they’ve invited saxophonist Noah Preminger to the party.

The compositions often dwell in the chordless zone, but McEachern’s trombone has a deep New Orleans blues feel. The unison melodies are performed with precision, but afterward the two horns go their separate ways. For most of its running time, this is effectively a trio record, with either tenor or trombone leading. Preminger plays with a keening tone and has a thoughtful way of phrasing.

McEachern may be the only musician to have worked with both minimalist composer La Monte Young and blues guitarist Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown. He’s capable of getting as abstract and cerebral as you like, but is just as happy to stick his feet in the mud, and his sound stays big, no matter how quietly he’s playing; it’s an astonishing display of control backed by real emotion. —Philip Freeman

### Charged Particles With Tod Dickow
**Live At The Baked Potato!**
**SUMMIT**
★★½

A good live album brings edge and excitement to even the slow songs. Live At The Baked Potato! Charged Particles With Tod Dickow Play The Music Of Michael Brecker contains only one slow song, simplifying the task.

So, do the fusion-leaning Bay Area trio and tenor saxophonist Dickow succeed at bringing edge and excitement to Brecker’s oeuvre? The answer: intermittently.

As the album’s featured soloist, Dickow bears a clear Brecker influence but is no slavish imitator — on the saxophone, at least. When he’s on, he produces exciting, satisfying stuff. On “African Skies” he adds muscle and character to the 12/8 groove, and projects supreme confidence all over “Not Ethiopia.”

The album highlight is “The Mean Time,” a peak both for himself and keyboardist Murray Low, the secondary soloist, who builds mystery and surprise while Dickow goes for aggressive energy and labyrinthine melody. At other times, though, Dickow spins his wheels, relying on stock patterns and devices. —Michael J. West

**Live At The Baked Potato!**
Peep: Arc Of The Pendulum; African Skies; Never Alone; Not Ethiopia; Strings And Amours; Talking To Myself; The Mean Time; Song For Barry; (72:37)
**Personnel:** Tod Dickow, tenor saxophone; Murray Low, keyboards; Aaron Germain, acoustic and electric basses; Jon Krisnick, drums; Omar Ledezma, congas (3).
**Ordering info:** summitrecords.com

### My George Jones Songbook
**Staci Griesbach**
**STACI GRIEBACH MUSIC**
★★★★

George Jones is widely acknowledged as the finest country singer of all time, and Los Angeles-based singer Staci Griesbach takes 14 of his best and makes them her own on this new songbook release.

Sparse accompaniment from Artyom Manukyan’s cello and Jeremy Siskind’s piano intensify the feeling of desolation on “He Stopped Loving Her Today.” Griesbach’s vocal is marked by long sustains that make the feelings of loss and grief palpable. “Golden Ring” gets a smoking horn-driven R&B arrangement. “Why Baby Why” features Stuart Duncan’s fiddle swinging madly between Bob Will’s Texas and Grappelli’s Paris, while “The Race Is On” starts with a slow syncopated verse sung over Joe Baggs’ organ and Kevin Axt’s sparse bass. Griesbach slows down “A Picture of Me Without You” even further than Jones’ version. Her forlorn vocal expresses the feelings of an empty heart.

—j. poet

**My George Jones Songbook**: The Grand Tour; He Stopped Loving Her Today; A Good Year For The Roses; He Thinks I Still Care; Walk Through This World With Me; A Picture Of Me Without You; Golden Ring; Bartender’s Blues; Why Baby Why; Take Me; White Lightning; You’re Still On My Mind; Tender Years (Tis Tender Annoys); The Race Is On. (49:25)
**Personnel:** Staci Griesbach, vocals; backing vocals, producer; Jeremy Siskind, piano, arranger; Otmaro Ruiz, piano, piano, piano; arranger; Tanner Hendelman, piano, piano; arranger; Addison Frei, arranger; Rich Hinman, pedal steel; Kevin Axt, bass; Jake Reed, drums; Artyom Manukyan, cello; Bob Sheppard, flute, tenor saxophone; Bruce Forman, guitar; Nando Raio, bass; Aaron Serfaty, drums, percussion; Stuart Duncan, fiddle; Joe Baggs, organ; Wille Murillo, trumpet, horn arrangement; Rahsaan Barber, tenor saxophone; Brian Clancy, tenor saxophone; Ryan Dragon, trombone; Wille Murillo, trumpet; Brian Clancy, tenor saxophone; John Hatton, bass.
**Ordering info:** stacigriesbach.com

**Girl Talk**
**Sasha Dobson**
**SELF RELEASE**
★★½

Ambitious and ambidextrous, Dobson cut her jazz teeth at home, where she was raised by the vocalist Gail Dobson and the late, great pianist and arranger Smith Dobson. But when she flew the coop, her creative spirit took flight, too. Over the course of two decades as a guitar-singing singer-songwriter, Dobson shared stage with everyone from Dan Was to Willie Nelson to Neil Young, as well as a slew of frequent collaborators. Chief among them: her close colleague Norah Jones, in their hit trio Puss n Boots.

Girl Talk plants Dobson’s flag firmly in jazz vocalist turf. Sassy and sly, the original title track, sung with Jones, is a real hoot. The Curtis Lewis paean to New York, “This Great City,” recorded during the pandemic lockdown, cries out for help while Peter Bernstein’s pitch-perfect guitar gently weeps.

Though it’s a fine solo debut that gives Dobson wings to fly in multiple jazz-vocalist directions, Girl Talk also has a few too many hopeless-ly romantic numbers sung in a girly voice that lacks range and depth. Here’s hoping she gets meaner and grittier, and really lets loose with some belters, on the next one.

—Cree McCree

**Girl Talk**: Better Days; Sweet And Lovely; Girl Talk; Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps; You’re The Death of Me; The Great City, Softly; As In A Morning Sunrise; Time On My Hands; Autumn Snowtime; These Boots Are Made For Walking. (46:29)
**Personnel:** Sasha Dobson, vocals; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Neil Miner, bass; Dred Scott, Kenny Wollesen, drums.
**Ordering info:** sashadobson.com
Johnathan Blake
Homeward Bound
BLUE NOTE
★★★★

In 2006, Johnathan Blake was the drummer in trumpeter Tom Harrell’s band when fellow bandmate, saxophonist Jimmy Greene, announced the birth of his baby girl. Six years later, Ana’s tragic death along with 19 of her classmates and six teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School shook the world to its core, especially those in the community who knew Greene, his wife, Nelba Marquez, and their precious little girl. Ana’s spirit remains as a touchstone in Blake’s memory, as he memorializes her life with a song and an album dedicated to her.

Yet Homeward Bound is not a requiem — rather, it’s a celebration of life and legacy, bursting with exuberance and lighthearted energy. The title track unfolds gently with a loping ostinato bass line from Blake’s longtime musical mate Dezron Douglas, growing more urgent with lighting-fast trades between altoist Immanuel Wilkins and vibraphonist Joel Ross, continuing with no less velocity down a more thoughtful row by pianist David Virelles. “Rivers & Parks” is a clever homage to both Sam Rivers and Aaron Parks, with a short-form 16-bar tune written as they might have.

Overall, the music dances with the uncounted number of a 6-year-old. “Shakin’ The Biscuits” is Eddie Harris-styled jazz-funk, fun and fierce. “Abiyoyo” is a Waltz-like African lullaby that precedes the fireworks of the uptempo “LIL” and a delightfully unpredictable version of Joe Jackson’s 1982 chart-topper “Steppin’ Out,” featuring an epic Coltrane-inspired solo by Wilkins and an even more grandiose drumming fantasy by Blake. — Gary Fukushima

Burnt Sugar the Arkestra Chamber
Angels Over Oakanda
AVANT GROIDD
★★★★½

The latest salvo of this shape-shifting New York juggernaut led by writer and theorist Greg Tate and electric bassist Jared Michael Nickerson sounds both familiar and alien, a dense sonic cauldron of fever dreaming. Tate led an ongoing reappraisal of Miles Davis’ early-1970s output through his trenchant critical analysis nearly three decades ago, and that body of work has been a keystone for the Burnt Sugar sound.

Tate has led the ensemble by embracing the conduction methods of Lawrence “Butch” Morris, and that procedure is palpable on this recording’s epic title track, where he shapes groove, texture and lyric evocation while his versatile cast makes hay from the written material. “Repatriation-Of-The-Midnight-Moors” is built from the same irresistible rhythm track that forms the backbone of “Lisala Over inna-Oakanda,” where a rapidly descending bass line by Nickerson and a shuffling Double Dutch/reggae-ton hybrid groove serve as an armature for disparate investigations. The former was crafted by producer and drummer Marque Gilmore, where his slinking 12-minute track is embroidered by meandering flute improvisation and pile-driver synth swoops, while guest singer Lisala Beatty brings an insouciant soulfulness to the latter. Nickerson’s coolly simmering “Oakanda Overdrive” is a jazz-oriented jam driven by the cosmic Fender-Rhodes of Leon Gruenbaum and polished by punchy horn charts, dense polyrhythm and the composer’s roomy low end. — Peter Margusak

Ordering info: bluenote.com

Kevin Sun
<3 Bird
ENDECTOMORPH
★★★★

The result of a pandemic-driven deep dive into the brilliance of Charlie Parker, Kevin Sun’s <3 Bird is an original, witty, engaging take on the great bebop co-founder’s legacy. Over 15 mostly brief tracks realized with compatible collaborators, gifted reedist Sun admiringly identifies, shuffles and re-folds melodic strains, rhythmic strategies and harmonic implications derived from specific bits of Parker’s recorded ouevre — music that jazz has now drawn on for some 75 years — into revelatory and entertaining new sounds and shapes.

Impressively, though, this album stands on its own. The close-but-loose horn interactions of Sun and trumpeter Adam O’Farrill may recall Bird and Dizzy Gillespie, Ornette Coleman and Jon Corny, Steve Coleman and Jonathan Finlayson, or just two pals tossing punchy horn charts, dense polyrhythm and the composer’s roomy low end. — Peter Margusak

<3 Bird: Greenlit; Adroitness, Part I; Adroitness, Part II; Composite; Onomatopoeia; Dovetail; The Appel; Salt Peanuts; Call-And-Response; Schapple From The Appel; Salt Peanuts; Arc’s Peel; Talk-Over A Tense Situation

Ordering info: endectomorph.com

Ordering info: blueennote.com

Ordering info: burnt sugars.com

Ordering info: endectomorph.com

DECEMBER 2021 DOWNBEAT 55
Paul Simon introduced South Africa’s Bakithi Kumalo to American audiences when he hired him to play bass on his seminal Graceland album. Already a well-known session player in his home country, Kumalo joined Simon on the Graceland tour and soon became a sought-after sideman in the United States. He went on to add his distinctive sound to records by Cyndi Lauper, Grover Washington Jr., Mickey Hart and The Lion King soundtrack.

On What You Hear Is What You See, his sixth album as a leader, Kumalo collaborates with 31 musicians from across the jazz and world music spectrum. The arrangements present a fusion of the many sounds he’s explored in his career.

“Zululand Nation” opens with four percussionists playing crisp, intertwining rhythms to support Kumalo and Nonhlanhla Kheswa, as they sing a traditional African tune. As the vocals fade, pianist Oscar Williams and vibraphone player Christos Rafalides exchange high, sparkling arpeggios that complement Kumalo’s subtle bass line and Alex Silver’s saxophone solo.

—j. poet

Chad Lefkowitz-Brown and the Global Big Band
Open World
LA RESERVE
★★★

Chad LB has assembled an album that epitomizes the sentiment of, “They make that look easy!” Nine crisp, bright-toned and shrewdly balanced original pieces offer a melodically colorful and incredibly approachable listening experience. Almost two dozen musicians, plus engineering and production staff, were involved in the project, and the resulting record is nothing short of a shining display of skillful collaboration.

Engineer Dave Darlington executes utter wizardry in his combining of the big band’s 21 parts — none of which were captured simultaneously, even from the players’ 23 different remote locations. The compositional direction and orchestrations of Open World are as vast as the album’s title.

This sentiment echoes throughout the album, despite the fact that the number of moving parts and the band’s total dynamic potential would seem to run the risk of some tonal homogeneity. The project clearly demonstrates the personnel’s amazing collective adaptability. To realize just how many countries, cultures and styles of musicianship are represented on Open World truly brings the project’s international vision all together. —Kira Grunenberg
Theo Croker’s sixth album aims to send “coded frequencies to activate our sleeping, ancestral DNA” that bubble up throughout this ode to Blackness. It’s a daring work of psychedelic jazz in which Croker, playing trumpet and flugelhorn, brings together forebearers like saxophonist Gary Bartz, softly resplendent on the lovely “Anthem,” and Fugee Wyclef Jean, miltitant on “State Of The Union 444,” with futurists like Malaya, the frisky vocalist of “Happy Feet” — and the visionary auteur Croker.

Largely shaped by Todd Carder’s production, Croker’s horns occupy various sonic positions on these 13 tracks. His trumpet can act as a kind of director, pushing from the back on “Lucid Dream,” a showcase for poet/vocalist Charlotte Dos Santos.

Each track has its pleasures, from the biting “State Of The Union 444” to “Impenetrable Star,” an effort highlighting Croker’s ability to construct soundscapes both dense and dreamy. What may be the album’s most ambitious track is the heady “Hero Stomp,” where Croker ratchets up the energy with a spiky, argumentative solo. Dubbed, sampled and looped here, Croker sets up the energy with a spiky, argumentative solo. The family’s tradition continues.

Ordering info: davidornettecherry.bandcamp.com

David Ornette Cherry
Organic Nation Listening Club (The Continual)
SONY MASTERWORKS ★★★★★

Music is the Cherry family business. Eagle Eye and Neneh Cherry have gotten the most mainstream attention, but their older brother, David Ornette Cherry, is the one whose work is closest to father Don’s. Not only is he the one to take up the douss’n gouni, the Malian stringed instrument that was one of his father’s favorite implements of sound production; he is the one to most thoroughly embrace Don’s multicultural folk esthetic.

On Organic Nation Listening Club (The Continual), this esthetic is expressed partly by combinations of stringed and percussive instruments from around the world. On the Sun Ra-like “Cosmic Nomad,” Paul Simms’ trumpet snakes through a web of hand drums and exotic reeds. Tablas mix with funky keyboards and guitar on “Cultural Workers (The Continual); flutes, marimba and sampled bird-song engage in a courtly dance on “Najour.” Cosmic invocations of Mother Africa assert the music’s cultural roots, and hip-hop beats connect it to a more contemporary, international method of oral transmission, while also affirming Don’s own indulgences in rhythmic wordplay.

The programmed beats underpin righteous admonishments to keep it real, but while these elements contribute to the music’s pop sheen, they also feel a bit off-the-rack. The more abstract and atmospheric passages are also more involving. On “The Frame of Creativity,” a forest of humid percussion casts an eerie light upon the leader’s piano playing. And on the aptly named “Hidden Sounds,” the farther one listens into the collage that swirls behind Ranato Caranto’s foregrounded saxophone, the farther one wants to go.

It’s worth noting that Neneh’s daughter, Naima Karlsson, and her partner in the group Exotic Sin, Kenichi Iwasa, contribute keyboard and winds to the mix. The family’s tradition continues.

—Bill Meyer

Organic Nation Listening Club (The Continual): So & So || So & So; Parallel Experience: Ancestors Are Calling; Cultural Workers (The Continual); The Frame Of Creativity; Eagle Play; Hidden Sounds; Najour; Cosmic Nomad; Organic Talk (CD exclusive). (43:20)

Personnel: David Ornette Cherry, vocal, soundscapes, douss’n gouni, percussion, electronic percussion, piano, keyboards; Crystal Blacksheek, Carlisle, spiritual message, vocals; Gerri Taylor, guitar, Joe Janiga, African banjo, John L. Price, drums, duni duni, pahkiagudu, timpani; Kenichi Iwasa, muted trumpet, Don Cherry’s instrument blue reeds; Nadene Rasmussen, viola; Naima Karlsson, electric piano; Ollie Elder Jr., acoustic bass, electric bass; Paul Simms, trumpet; Ralph Jones III, Vietnamese flute, Norwegian flute; Renato Caranto, saxophone; Tyson McKey, vocal soundscapes.

Ordering info: davidornettecherry.bandcamp.com
During the upcoming holiday season, it is inevitable that you will find yourself playing some traditional tunes straight out of Santa’s musty old bag. Having some fresh arrangements of them, therefore, is a must. The following solo guitar arrangement and reharmonization of the public-domain chestnut “Jingle Bells” strives to be both a study of useful arranging techniques as well as a musically satisfying work in itself.

Techniques such as harmonic expansion, chromatic bass motion, counterpoint, vamps and form expansion are used and should be studied and applied to your own arrangements.

While learning to play this arrangement, keep the following in mind:

- This arrangement is meant to be played fingerstyle.
- Choose fingerings that allow the melody to be as legato as possible.
- Feel free to alter some of the rhythms slightly to add rhythmic interest (especially the vamps at measures 16 and 35).
- Although most of the chords are written as quarter notes, in many cases you can let them ring as long as possible until the next chord change.
- You may want to arpeggiate some of the chords or delay some bass notes for either musical or technical reasons, especially when it makes grabbing chord changes easier.
- In general, the “A” section is more rubato while the “B” section is more in tempo. However, you may wish to make some parts more rubato for a smoother performance.
- Lastly, feel free to expand the form as you see fit. You can repeat either the “A” or “B” sections as desired, or improvise over them as a solo section. The “C” section functions as a coda.

Analysis

The first two measures of this arrangement are just a reharmonization of the tonic chord with an add9, a sus4 and a maj7 voicing to add some color and texture. These fuller, richer sounding chords also help to balance the single-line passages surrounding them.

After that, the IV chord (Bb6) contains some chromatic bass movement to leads to a ii–V in the tonic key (Gm7–C7), which is then interrupted by a back cycling of whole step ii–V progressions until it resolves to the tonic chord (Fmaj7) in measure 8.

Measure 9 begins a descending chromatic bass line reharmonization of the melody all the way until the tonic chord (F6/9 chord) in measure 14. This is then followed in the same measure by a dominant chord cycle progression going around the circle of fourths for one beat each, until the ii chord (Gm7) in measure 15.
In measure 16, instead of going to the V chord to set up the melody of the chorus, the tonic note F is reharmonized with a b2 chord instead (Gb maj7#11). This also provides a place to delay the resolution to the tonic and extend the form with a vamp as well as a place to add some space. It is also an opportunity for some improvisation over the G#maj7(#11) chord if desired.

The “B” section starts with a bit more of a classic holiday reharmonization sound with the tonic chord going down a whole step and then proceeding down chromatically until it leads to the ii–V of the IV chord (Dm7–Db7–C13–F7). Note that the F7 chord in measure 23 does not contain a melody note and should be thought of as an accompaniment or passing chord.

In measure 24, instead of going to the major IV, however, it instead goes to the minor iv and adds some harmony using a Bbm7 and Bbm6 chord followed by a secondary dominant of the V chord (G13). That then tonizes the ii–V (Gm9–C7#9), eventually leading back to the Fmaj7 or tonic. Note the added extensions, especially the note A on the Gm9 chord in measure 27, which creates a very beautiful dissonance in the inner voice.

Measure 28 states the second half of the melody, this time with a complete texture change, using moving lines in the inner voices. Pay special attention to using fingerings here that allow all voices to be heard and ring as long as possible.

In measure 32 there is more descending chromatic bass motion and also it starts on a Bmaj7 chord. This unusual chord choice creates a very unexpected sound in this key being a tritone away from F. It makes the melody note become the major seventh, which is a very pretty color in this instance. After that are some more back cycling ii–V progressions.

Measure 35 is another form extension that functions as a vamp to add some space as well as opportunity for more improvisation either melodically or rhythmically with the chords. These voicings could also be thought of 9sus4 voicings from the lowest note, and are all easy to play on the guitar on the middle four strings. The motion of going up a minor third, returning back and then down a minor third provides some nice shifting away from the tonal center for a chromatic effect. This then ends with the C7(b9) which has some smooth voice leading from the Bb/C chord before it and serves to set up the V chord and resolve to the tonic key.

The “C” section is more of a coda where the first four bars of the “Jingle Bells” melody are stated as an afterthought. Here they are harmonized as a sort of two-part invention with a chromatically moving lower voice to create some more intricate counterpoint.

In the last measure it all resolves to a nice, simple major triad with no added extensions. As with all transcriptions you study, find the parts you like best and transpose them to different keys. Then use those techniques in your own solo arrangements.

Eric DiVito is a guitarist, composer and educator based in the New York area. He performs regularly as a solo guitarist and leads his own groups at various jazz clubs, festivals and other live music venues. DiVito is also an active composer and arranger and teaches music and band in Westchester (New York) public schools. He has released several albums, including his 2012 debut Breaking The Ice and his 2013 sophomore release The Second Time Around (both on PJC Records). DiVito is available for lessons both online and in-person. Visit ericdivito.com for more of his work and music.
Nord Piano 5
Dual Piano Engines, Dual Sample Synths & Twice the Memory

The Nord Piano 5 takes everything that was great about its predecessor and expands upon it in major ways. Equipped with dual piano engines and dual sample synths, it has twice the memory capacity of the Nord Piano 4 and represents a massive improvement in sound quality and playability. It also adds a smaller 73-key version to complement the standard 88-key model, so keyboard players now have two size options to suit their studio setups and stage rigs. During a recent trial run, I found myself blown away by the immersive sounds and realistic feel of this next-generation, professional-quality instrument.

The Piano and Sample Synth sections of the Nord Piano 5 each contain two independent layers, so they can be used together in a variety of split or layer configurations. Using the onboard filters and effects, including new reverbs and delays, you can experiment with a wide range of sound combinations to create classic ensemble settings or lush soundscapes. LED-lit volume pedals and/or sustain pedals can be assigned to each layer. These levels of layer control are virtually unprecedented in the digital piano world, giving the Nord Piano 5 a distinct edge.

The Nord Piano 5 has dedicated dials and buttons for hands-on control during live performance. Transposing, setting up a split point with optional crossfades or creating a layered sound can be accomplished instantly, and on-the-fly transitions between sounds and programs are glitch-free.

The Nord Piano Library has nine pristine grands, nine distinctive uprights and 10 enhanced electric pianos, plus clavinet, digital pianos, marimba and vibraphone. Nord’s state-of-the-art sampling technology does an amazing job of capturing the essential nuances and tonal character of the source instruments. The Piano section features 120-note polyphony and Nord’s Virtual Hammer Action technology with a triple-sensor keybed for improved dynamic control and a customized playing feel. Advanced String Resonance technology accurately reproduces the complex interplay of the piano strings and also adds the rich ambience of a real acoustic instrument when playing with the sustain pedal down.

The Nord Piano 5’s expanded Sample Synth section contains new sounds like solo wind, solo brass, solo strings, basses and guitars, plus a collection of classic analog leads. Sounds can be quickly replaced using the Nord Sound Manager, and you can create your own sample instruments using the free Nord Sample Editor software. The Sample Synth section has intuitive controls for attack, decay/release and velocity response, and new soft/bright timbre settings provide an easy way to shape synth tones.

Across-the-board improvements make the Nord Piano 5 a powerful tool capable of delivering an exceptional playing experience. —Ed Enright

P. Mauriat PMST-600XJ
Versatile Tenor Saxophone for the Serious Player

The PMST-600XJ is P. Mauriat’s best tenor to come along in the affordable-pro-level price range since the company’s overtone-rich, free-blowing System 76 model first caught on in the saxophone community more than a decade ago.

The 600XJ is based on P. Mauriat’s 66 body tube, known for its extreme flexibility, but instead of featuring the rolled toneholes that come standard on that line of horns, it uses straight toneholes instead. The desired effect: “It reins in that flexibility just the right amount so that a player who’s got a strong air column can make that thing roar,” Craig Denny, vice president of band and orchestra at St. Louis Music, said of the PMST-600XJ.

The new tenor is an exhilarating blow. It plays with light resistance, but, like the highly responsive System 76 series, you can push it to cool extremes and access a wide palette of overtones and textures. During several test-drives, the 600XJ was a paragon of projection and big, fat tone production. Altissimo notes popped out on command, sure and strong.

I made it growl in a manner appropriate for raunchy blues or gritty rock. I made it flutter effortlessly through an arpeggio etude of my own design. I applied a bit of vibrato and rounded my embouchure during a sweet-sounding medley of quasi-classical melodies. I experimented with bluesy pitch inflections and explored a whole world of tonal shadings. The 600XJ came up aces on all accounts. Sometimes I found it hard to set down.

In terms of keywork and balance, the 600XJ felt just right. This is a comfortable horn to play — everything lays nicely under the fingers, even at fast tempos or in clumsy key signatures. The neck is tapered and angled to accommodate the instrument’s unique bore-tonehole combination and achieve maximum response.

Featuring P. Mauriat’s standard 70/30 yellow brass construction, the 600XJ is a raw brass instrument, which is supposed to allow for maximum body vibration. According to Denny, the actual look of the instrument will brighten up over time from being played and handled. Other than some sweet hand-engraving and a bit of silver plating, the horn is slightly toned down from an esthetic point of view compared to some of P. Mauriat’s rolled-tonehole horns.

“It’s in the vein of everything you need and nothing you don’t,” Denny said. “That’s one of the things that will draw serious players to this horn, for sure.”

The 600XJ is outfitted with blued steel springs, Pizoni Pro pads, metal resonators and a high F-sharp key. The suggested street price is $4,699 — very affordable for a tenor of this caliber.

—Ed Enright

P. Mauriat PMST-600XJ
1. Mics in the Lights
512 Audio has two new microphone offerings. Limelight (pictured) is a dynamic vocal XLR mic for close-range, talk-focused podcasts, broadcasts or livestreams. Its hypercardioid pattern creates a hyper-focused pickup field to capture voice and cut out unwanted ambient noise. Skylight is a large-diaphragm condenser XLR microphone featuring a 34mm, gold-plated capsule and a voice-tailored frequency response to capture the warmth and detail of speech and singing vocals. It has a fixed cardioid pickup pattern.
More info: 512audio.com

2. K-Mix Goes Blue
Keith McMillen Instruments has announced the K-Mix Blue, an 8x10 digital mixer, USB audio interface and advanced touch sensitive MIDI/DAW control surface with on-board digital effects. The Blue edition features low-noise, USB-powered preamps and a precision tactile control surface.
More info: keithmcmillen.com

3. Tube Tone for Today’s Pro
Fender has added a 200-watt model to its Tone Master amp line. The Tone Master Super Reverb amplifier is a replication of the legendary tube amplifier with modern features for today’s demanding professionals. Featuring Fender’s proprietary Tone Master modeling process, combined with player-centric features, the amp is a combination of a mid-1960s black panel amplifier circuit and four 10-inch speakers.
More info: fender.com

4. Ecological Comfort
D’Addario has launched its Eco-Comfort line of recycled guitar straps. All Eco-Comfort guitar straps are made from Repreve, which provides high-quality fibers that are certified, traceable and made with 100-percent recycled materials. The line is available in 10 different models featuring three basic color straps (black, red and grey) and seven different jacquard designs.
More info: daddario.com

5. Bouncin’ Bud-Style
The Bud Powell Omnibook from Hal Leonard presents 35 full transcriptions from the iconic bebop pianist’s most popular recordings. The 272-page collection includes Powell’s versions of “All The Things You Are,” “April In Paris,” “Autumn In New York,” “Body And Soul,” “52nd Street Theme,” “Hallucinations,” “I’ll Remember April,” “A Night In Tunisia,” “Ruby, My Dear,” “Tea For Two,” “Un Poco Loco” and more.
More info: halleonard.com

6. Low-Volume Heads
Rtom has launched its LV Mesh Heads, which replace a player’s existing acoustic heads to allow for low-volume drumming. LV Mesh Heads feature a sound patch at the center of the head that enhances the realism of the response and provides a more audible attack. They are a suitable option for drummers on a budget who want to outfit their entire kit with a high-quality, low-volume practice solution.
More info: rtom.com
HOLIDAY HITS!

There’s a sleigh full of music to consider this holiday season as gifts for others … or for yourself! Here are a few new releases of the vintage variety that we’d like to see wrapped in fancy paper under our trees.

ART BLAKEY AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS
First Flight To Tokyo: The Lost 1961 Recordings (Blue Note)

At the start of 1961, Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers arrived in Japan as one of the first modern jazz groups to tour the country. Japanese audiences were lucky to take in one of the band’s all-time great lineups, featuring Lee Morgan on trumpet, Wayne Shorter on tenor saxophone, Bobby Timmons on piano and Jymie Merritt on bass. When the band stopped in at Hibiya Public Hall in Tokyo, someone was smart enough to tape it, and these recordings have now been unearthed and were released this fall on double-vinyl and double CD. The band is in fine form, particularly on their spirited, swinging hit, “Moanin.”

JOHN COLTRANE
A Love Supreme: Live In Seattle (Impulse!)

As seminal as A Love Supreme is — as the saxophonist’s public declaration of his personal spiritual beliefs and universalist sentiment won a Grammy and has continued to resonate with listeners of all stripes — until now there’s been only one way to hear it live. But this fall, Impulse! released a recently unearthed second outing of the material that sees Coltrane expanding his band, adding Pharoah Sanders on second saxophone and Donald Garrett on second bass to an already stacked lineup. Available on double-vinyl or CD, this expands the story of both a great musician and a timeless piece of music.

LENNIE TRISTANO
Personal Recordings 1946–1970 (Dot Time/Mosaic)

As box sets go, this one’s pretty personal. A compendium of never-before-released groundbreaking material from Lennie Tristano’s personal tape collection, Personal Recordings, released in November, captures the pianist play-
ing alone and all over the place over the span of 24 years. When not solo, he’s sitting in with a long list of musicians including Billy Bauer, Arnold Fishkin, Lee Konitz, Warne Marsh, Joe Shulman, Jeff Morton, Peter Ind, Al Levitt, Tom Wayburn, Sonny Dallas, Nick Stabulas, Sonny Dallas and Zoot Sims. Listening in over six CDs, you hear not just Tristano evolve but jazz itself.

DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS ORCHESTRA
Berlin 1959 (Storyville)

Berlin’s Sportpalast has a checkered past, serving as the site of speeches by Adolph Hitler and other Nazis decades before Ellington brought his orchestra to the indoor arena in 1959, as captured here. But listening to this date, the arena feels freed from its past. On the band’s European tour, Ellington’s orchestra featured Clark Terry and Andres Merenguito on trumpet; Booty Wood, Britt Woodman and Quentin “Butter” Jackson on trombone; Wendell Marshall on bass; and Jimmy Johnson on drums. Ellington, of course, directs like a master conductor and accompanist from the piano. On 28 tracks spread out over two discs, Duke and his band run through hits like “Things Ain’t What They Used to Be” and intricate instrumental showcases like “V.I.P.’s Boogie” with confidence. An audibly enthusiastic audience reacts to every changeup from the band.

IMPULSE! RECORDS:
Impulse! Records: Music, Message & The Moment (Impulse!)

Impulse! Records is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year and kicked off the festivities with a box that’s not just a jazz lover’s dream. It’s a graphic designer’s dream, too, as its white cover has Impulse!’s iconic exclamation point cut out right-side-up and upside-down, giving a sneak peek at what’s inside. And that’s a lot — the package is generously stuffed with two gatefold double-LPs splashed with the label’s trademark orange, black and white and compiling the best of its vaults. Side for side, the discs are expertly curated and feel like true albums, even while placing names like John and Alice Coltrane, Stanley Turrentine, Amhad Jamal, Quincy Jones and Albert Ayler alongside each other. The box doesn’t stop there — it comes with a fun turntable slipcover and the liner notes are presented as a ’60s-looking magazine in a brown paper bag. It’s a perfect gift for anyone who loves what Impulse! once marketed as “the new wave in jazz.”

ERROLL GARNER
Liberation In Swing: Centennial Collection (Octave Music/Mack Avenue Music Group)

Octave Music and Mack Avenue Music Group this year celebrated the 100th anniversary of Erroll Garner’s birth with three releases focusing on the pianist’s self-released catalog from 1959 to 1975. The centerpiece is a stunning, previously unreleased Jan. 17, 1959, concert recorded at Boston’s Symphony Hall in front of a sold-out crowd. The date heralded Garner’s return after a lengthy battle for control over his catalog, and captures the unparalleled genius of Garner’s live performances at the beginning of one of the most defining periods of his life. Limited to 300 copies, the box set comes with a book featuring unpublished orig-
inal artwork from Garner, previously unseen photos, and essays from Robin D. G. Kelley, Terri Lyne Carrington and Cécile McLorin Salvant.

JOE HENDERSON
Mirror Mirror (MPS)

This summer, MPS Records opened the vault to reissue 31 albums by some of the genre’s greats on vinyl and CD. This included titles by Ella Fitzgerald, Freddie Hubbard, Dizzy Gillespie, George Duke, Dexter Gordon & Slide Hampton, Don Ellis, Lee Konitz & Martial Solal, Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, Rolf Kühn, the Count Basie Orchestra, Baden Powell, Dave Pike Set, Eugen Cicero, Gilles Peterson, Joanne Grauer, Mark Murphy, Monty Alexander and others.

Among all this was saxophonist Joe Henderson’s 1980 album Mirror Mirror, on which the Grammy winner is accompanied by a stellar acoustic lineup recorded in Los Angeles featuring Chick Corea on piano, Ron Carter on bass and Billy Higgins on drums. Corea and Carter each contribute two compositions to the set list, while Henderson’s “Joe’s Bolero” is a piece exemplifying this hard-bop, avant-garde recording, a cut that reflects one of the saxophonist’s primary influences, John Coltrane. Henderson’s virtuoso tenor emotes mellow melodies on the disc’s lone standard, “What’s New?” Although credited as a solo Henderson album, each member of the all-star quartet is given equal opportunity to shine. It’s available as a limited-edition green vinyl disc, a festive gift.

OSCAR PETERSON
A Time For Love: The Oscar Peterson Quartet—Live In Helsinki, 1987 (Mack Avenue)

What’s captured on this momentous album is the final gig of a long international tour that began with four concerts in Brazil. This date was the 14th of a European tour that took the quartet all over mainland Europe and Scandinavia. Having performed together this consistently to this date, the synergy and empathy of the ensemble is audible. Listening to the band air out “Cool Walk” here is remarkable as the players are perfectly aligned and display no signs of fatigue. The two-CD set becomes available Nov. 26.

RAY CHARLES
True Genius (Tangerine Records)

Ray Charles has been given the box set treatment many times, but this one is something special. True Genius is a newly remastered, limited-edition set featuring 90 of the greatest songs from his legendary career and all of Charles’ biggest hits. The listener here is reminded of what Charles could do with any material. He takes the Beatles’ 1966 chamber pop song “Eleanor Rigby,” preserves all of its melancholy and melodic sophistication and makes it swing in a way the Fab Four never could. The set also includes a special bonus disc of eight previously unreleased tracks recorded live in Stockholm in 1972. The box was released on Sept. 10 in celebration of what would have been Brother Ray’s 90th birthday.

FRANK ZAPPA
200 Motels (Zappa Records/Universal)

The 1971 Frank Zappa movie 200 Motels had a lot going on, with appearances by Zappa himself, of course, but also Ringo Starr, Keith Moon, Aynsley Dunbar, George Duke, Pamela Des Barres, Theodore Bikel and much more, all of them running around attempting to capture, on film, the craziness of life on the road. The music, and its corresponding soundtrack, was equally diverse, a wild pastiche of avant garde rock and orchestral compositions interspersed with dialog from the film. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of its release, Zappa Records/Universal has taken the original soundtrack and blown it up into a six-disc box set, available Nov. 19, filled with unreleased and rare material including original demos, studio outtakes, work mixes, interviews and an early audio edit of the film. This is not for the faint of heart, but Zappa fans are long used to that.

DB
Jeff Hamilton Trio
MERRY & BRIGHT

Revered jazz drummer Jeff Hamilton reunites with his trio, featuring bassist Jon Hamar and pianist Tamir Hendelman, on a recording of Hamilton’s favorite Christmas tunes.

Capri Records Ltd. caprirecords.com

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innerurgemusic.com
The year in books has been as dense with a pandemic-inspired wave of activity among writers who had time to pen long-pondered projects. Here are eight titles we’re digging now.

**LIFE IN E FLAT**
The Autobiography of Phil Woods (Cymbal Press)
By Phil Woods with Ted Panken
The great alto saxophonist Phil Woods may have passed away in 2015, but his words, larger-than-life persona and spirit live on through the stories told in *Life in E Flat* with jazz journalist Ted Panken. It’s a gift of wit, wisdom and hard-scrabbled humor. “I could read fly shit and interpret it,” he said, for example. “There wasn’t many of me.” It’s the kind of no-nonsense, colorful language Woods favored, the kind that makes one think, smile, even laugh out loud and shed a tear. He played like he spoke.

**SIGHT READINGS**
Photographers And American Jazz 1900–1960
(University of Chicago Press)
By Alan John Ainsworth
Here we have a thinking man’s guide to early jazz photography that will appeal to fans of the art and science of photography, fans of history and fans of the photos and photographers who took the shots. It only makes sense when looking at author John Ainsworth’s resume. The Scottish scholar has a track record of writing about jazz, photography and the history of photography, architecture and design. It makes for insightful reading and viewing.

**THERE WAS A FIRE**
Jews, Music And The American Dream (Nardis Books)
By Ben Sidran
From his Talking Jazz oral jazz history series to *There Was A Fire*, pianist Ben Sidran has been dedicated to diving into the music and finding out what drives people to make it. The book follows how popular music defined the American Dream from a very Jewish perspective. “As the saying goes, the world teaches you what you need to learn when you’re ready to learn it,” he said in press materials. “I am only now beginning to realize how writing this book was an act of self-discovery, my trying to find my own Jewishness through the lens of popular culture, finding the humanity in the gig, as it were.”

**BEBOP FAIRY TALES**
An Historical Fiction Trilogy On Jazz, Intolerance, And Baseball
By Mark Ruffin
Jazz historian and DJ Mark Ruffin’s *Bebop Fairy Tales* weaves stories about a chance meeting between choreographer Bob Fosse and saxophonist Gene Ammons, the clash between a baseball player and the Klu Klux Klan, and a self-described love letter to the 1964 Philadelphia Phillies into well-crafted fiction. The result is a commentary on music, race and sport, for sure, but moreover, the impact of jazz on history.

**MISHAKOSMOS**
The Music Of Misha Mengelberg (ICP Records)
By Michael Moore
Here’s one for serious students (and followers) of European avant garde composer Misha Mengelberg. In MISHAKOSMOS, Michael Moore, a key member of the Instant Composers Pool, curates and collates what amounts to a Real Book of more than 75 Mengelberg compositions. This will be sought out by fans and performing artists alike as the first such collection of Mengelberg’s work.

**DOUBLE HELIX**
A Memoir Of Addiction, Recovery, And Jazz In Two Voices (Reedswrite)
By Ed and Diane Reed
Sometimes in music, life happens. That’s the case with *Double Helix*, which tells the story of why the career of Ed Reed, a professional jazz singer from the San Francisco Bay Area, didn’t take off until he was in his late 70s. Battling addiction led him down wrong track after wrong track, including four stints in prison. Diane Reed’s story of the journey struggles with codependence and recovery, too. That said, this book has a beautiful silver lining.

**UNSTRUNG**
Rants And Stories Of A Noise Guitarist
By Marc Ribot
Fans of the iconic guitarist Marc Ribot will leap for this slim tribute to a guitarist and writer who has always had a quirky and darkly funny point of view. Through essays, short stories and, yes, rants, Ribot discusses his relationship with the guitar, his influences, life on the road and artists’ rights. He spends an entire chapter blissfully geeking out on the beauty of smaller overdriven amps over Marshall stacks. In *Unstrung*, he’s a whip-smart, funny teenage smart-ass wrapped in a 67-year-old man’s body.

**THE BLUES DREAM**
Of Billy Boy Arnold (University of Chicago Press)
By Billy Boy Arnold with Kim Field
Harmonica legend Billy Boy Arnold tells his life story with the help of writer Kim Field. Adding his self-taught sound to hits by Bo Diddley, Otis Rush, Howlin’ Wolf, Muddy Waters and more, Arnold also delivered his own fair share. At 86, he’s still standing, telling stories with heart and humor.
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HOLIDAY MOOD MUSIC

Tis the season. Treasurable Christmas jazz albums from the past are getting gift-wrapped again. The Vince Guaraldi Trio’s *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (first out in 1965, with multiple reissues since) returns as a vinyl record from Craft, its jacket decked with a silver foil. Ella Fitzgerald’s *Ella Wishes You A Swinging Christmas* (1960) comes to town with Santa one more time as part of the Verve Acoustic Sounds line of record releases. And Duke Pearson’s *Merry Ole Soul* (1969) now appears in the Blue Note Classic Vinyl Reissue Series. There’s plenty of other newly released holiday music to check out, too; a few of the albums reviewed below may even stand the test of time.

**Norah Jones**

*I Dream Of Christmas* *(Blue Note)*

Back in 2012, Norah Jones showed she was good company for Christmas by recording the single “Home For The Holidays” with Cyndi Lauper. Further holiday music activity in the studio hasn’t followed … until now. Worth the wait, her initial Yule album, the equivalent of a box of cherry cordials, has her determined to find new ways to freshen standards such as “White Christmas,” “Christmas Time Is Here” and “Winter Wonderland.” For a surprise, she lends maturity to Alvin and the Chipmunks’ “Christmas Don’t Be Late,” a 1960s pop bagatelle recast here as a stroll through Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans. With her phrasing and breath control ever so precise, the singer also connects clear-eyed emotional concentration with a holiday feel in thoughtful songs of her own. Temperamentally and musically attuned to Jones’ personality are producer-saxophonist Leon Michels and other colleagues like drummer Brian Blade and bassist Tony Scher.

bluenote.com

**Jeff Hamilton Trio**

*Merry & Bright* *(Capri)*

Over the last 20-plus years, five albums by Jeff Hamilton Trio featuring the drummer and pianist Tamir Hendelman have engendered considerable acclaim. (Current bass play-
er Jon Hamar came aboard in 2018.) The winning streak continues with their first perusal of the Yule songbook, yielding fresh-as-newly-fallen-snow revisions of standards “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas” and “The Little Drummer Boy” as well as two unexpected delights composed by 1940s/’50s jazz man Alfred Burt: “Caroling Caroling” and “Bright Bright The Holy Berries.” Hendelman endears himself to the melodies but he’s really on his game stretching out a bit in medium-tempo and ballad arrangements. The stimulating sense of creativity in the studio and the overall warm vibe of the music is also attributable to Hamilton and Hamar. As expected, the trio leader plays with easy lyricism; he has keen, unstudied instincts and a sublime time feel. Jeff Hamilton Trio Christmas jazz is like hot mulled cider: mildly exhilarating, a little sweet, perfect for the moment.

caprirecords.com

BENNY BENACK III WITH THE STEVEN FEIFE BIG BAND
Season’s Swingin’ Greetings (Cellar Music Group)
Recording almost half of this jazz album remotely, singer-trumpeter Benny Benack III and pianist-conductor-arranger Steven Feife put their enthusiasm for Christmastime and the eight days of Hanukkah to good use on wintry material played by a 16-piece band and smaller groups. Just shy of Rat Pack smarminess, Benack’s suave voice exploits the mirth in “I’ll Be Home For Christmas” and the fruitcake humor in the self-penned “My Girlfriend Is An Elf.”

cellarmusicgroup.com

José James
Merry Christmas From José James (Rainbow Blond)
José James relies on his smooth-textured voice and charisma to give listeners relief from stress during Yuletide. He’s comfortable with time-hallowed melodies, and he shows empathy for the lighthearted grace of “The Christmas Song” and other evergreens like “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas.” Very nice, but one wishes he had given freer rein to his imagination when picking tunes for his first holiday album. James’s most intimate performance comes on his self-written tune “Christmas In New York,” where pianist Aaron Parks gives a good accounting of himself.

rainbowblonderecords.com

Mick Kolassa
Uncle Mick’s Christmas Album (Endless Blues)
Unheralded bluesman Mick Kolassa, who lived for three decades in Mississippi before relocating to Memphis, makes good albums on a regular basis. His first Xmas one is better than good; it has the stuff to become a minor classic. Inventive makeovers of the usual Xmas picks and some strong original songs show the value of Kolassa’s slow-and-easy approach to singing lyrics. His weathered, imprecise voice aches with true-blue experience, even when he keeps a strong upper lip. The performance with its sharpest edge of emotion is his bittersweet tune “The Best Christmas Ever.”

endlessblues.com

Morgan James
A Very Magnetic Christmas (Hedonist)
Morgan James, a Juilliard-trained singer with Broadway credits, announced herself as a soul-rock singer with Memphis Magnetic in 2020. For her first Christmas outing, she continues to steer her new stylistic course with returning producer-guitarist Doug Wamble, who’s no stranger to jazz fans, and with a few other musicians from the earlier record. James employs a formula: She starts off predictable material and original tunes at a slow, friendly pace then gradually builds her voice up to nuclear-strength passion à la Etta James (no relation) or Otis Redding. More revealing singing of a quieter sort introduces a version of “O Holy Night” and stirs a revival of Julie London and Bobby Troup’s mid-1950s tune “Warm In December.”
morganjamesonline.com

Season’s Greetings from Roseanna Vitro

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*An artist who knows how to make a song her own, Henry aims right for the emotional center.*

- *Billboard*

*Every gesture and inflection conveyed confidence and mastery... conviction that made you recommit the words.*

- *The New York Times*
JALC’s Big Jazz Ed Outreach

HAVING JOINED THE JAZZ AT LINCOLN Center education program 10 years ago, Todd Stoll has overseen the organization’s enormous growth to become the largest exclusively jazz education program in the world. The vice president of education stresses the three legs of the success: performance, education and advocacy.

“We are advocates for music, musicians and audiences,” said the 58-year-old trumpeter and educator. “We feel it’s important to teach the next generation. We want to give them a platform to grow. You have to remember how the jazz elders like Dizzy and Benny Carter always pushed for educational outreach.”

As the culture gradually inches its way out of the closed-door strictures of the pandemic, the JALC education department reflects back on how the shutdown opened the opportunity to work in new ways, to develop across departments, to become a more of a community. Most of the marquee projects in the multitiered program were forced to continue remotely. That included JALC’s keystone Essentially Ellington high school competition in its 27th year; Swing University (an online lifeline to a global audience) and the Let Freedom Swing social justice school residencies, which have reached near-ly a half million students topping 3,000 performances throughout a nine-year run.

But Stoll has hopes for the new opening of live music. The Essentially Ellington competition and festival, which reaches more than 7,000 schools in 55 countries, has been scheduled as an in-person event for May 2022. The Jazz for Young People Family Concert: What is the Blues?, hosted by singer Catherine Russell, is on the calendar for Rose Theater on March 26. Then there’s the relatively new initiative, the Jack Rudin Jazz Championship, for its in-person sophomore year.

“We started this just before the pandemic,” Stoll said. “We recognized that we had been reaching out to young people, from elementary, middle schools and high schools, but didn’t have anything for collegiate bands. Our goal is to reach folks at a high level of education who are the next generation of players and educators. We want to engage more deeply. We’re just started with this and for now it’s by invitation.”

Stoll is encouraged by the opportunities that JALC has created for students. “We have a pretty good handle on the young and up-and-coming artists,” he said. “We make lots of music available. You can have 17-year-old kids playing Jelly Roll Morton music and then studying Wayne Shorter. We want them to be informed. Pianist Isaiah J. Thompson and saxophonist Alexa Tarantino are good examples of artists who came through our programs. Plus, there’s someone like pianist Aaron Diehl who has become very successful. I’m very enthusiastic and optimistic that the seeds we plant will come to full bloom.”

One of the key elements going forward is talking about social justice and civil rights. “Jazz is a celebration of Black excellence,” Stoll said. “It brings people together. That’s the DNA of the music. Jazz is democracy put to rhythm and tuned to help people understand each other. When Wynton [Marsalis, JALC’s artistic director] wrote a blog post after the death of George Floyd, it started an important conversation about justice and history.”

Stoll said that the next three years will have an aggressive outreach in this regard. For example, in the Let Freedom Swing program, the young artists serving as teachers will work with jazz as a mode of democracy — teaching American history by using jazz as a primary source in discussing civil rights, social justice and the many great migrations in this country.

“The young bands adopt a school and return three times a year,” Stoll said. “It’s all about the music starting an education with students, who form a relationship with their teachers, who they can relate to. It’s about community, which is our goal. This is what Wynton, with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, has been doing. In 2019, they had a two-week residency in Brazil, and he and band members taught classes every day.”

Under Stoll’s leadership, the education elements have expanded, including Webop, which exposes children, from eight months to 5 years old, to the music in interactive family settings. In-person classes will restart in a limited capacity in January. Also impressive is a free virtual program called A Closer Look. “During the pandemic, that became important,” Stoll said. “It’s a hosted program where a variety of topics are presented, whether it’s about a new recording or a new book on jazz or just diving deeper into various artists’ lives.”

What does the future look like to Stoll? “I feel there’s still a lot of work to do,” he said. “There are more places to go on tour, and we’d like to collaborate with other grass-roots jazz organizations. Our country has had a wake-up call in the last few years with the protests, the pandemic, the economy. But that makes our mission all the stronger. The music itself can be a force for social justice. We plan to train teachers and spread the word.” —Dan Ouellette
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Blindfold Test › BY TED PANKEN

Don Byron

It’s hard to think of a jazz, Afro-Caribbean or new music/classical genre upon which Don Byron, an immediately recognizable voice on clarinet, has not placed his stamp as an improviser and composer since he began recording at the cusp of the 1990s. His most recent project is a duo with Cuban pianist Aruán Ortiz, documented on Random Dances And (A)Tonalties (Intakt). This was his first Blindfold Test.

Dr. Michael White


It’s an attempt to combine some traditional New Orleans stuff with one of those African mallet instruments. I can’t say they knit together particularly well; it’s more like a political statement, trying to say something about the African-ness of New Orleans music. The tune sounds very traditional, or is written to be traditional. For me, the reed is very soft, the intonation very uneven, especially between the high and low registers — I don’t go for the idea that that’s authentic. The person knows chords, but approaches it in a very basic, arpeggiated way. The musicianship is there; just not choices I would make.

Anat Cohen/Paquito D’Rivera

“Um A Zero” (Chiaroscuro, Anzic, 2012) Cohen, D’Rivera, clarinets; Jason Lindner, piano; Joe Martin, bass; Daniel Freedman, drums; Gilmar Gomes, percussion.

That’s “Um A Zero” by Pixinguinha, who has become my favorite Black composer — certainly in the Americas. Most of what they played, other than the improvisations, are from the records. The modernism of tone and line of the second soloist was more noticeable than the first person, whose tone was more Goodmanesque, which is not my thing. It’s cleanly played — they didn’t drop any notes and nobody squeaked. Pixinguinha’s music suggests that. He could execute a lot of notes, taking a breath never seemed to be a problem, and he wrote very well in chords. He’s very “this chord, this scale,” like Bach, Richard Strauss, people like that.

Ben Goldberg

“Cold Weather” (Everything Happens To Be, BAG Productions, 2021) Goldberg, clarinet; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Ellery Eskelin, tenor saxophone; Michael Formanek, acoustic bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums.

The clarinetist is quite accomplished, even though something about the approach to the air gives me the sense that this person plays a few different instruments, not just clarinet. The beginning of the tune was almost an old-time ballad, like Deanna Durbin from the ’30s, and then it went to some free stuff. It was well-rounded. Had a nice esthetic to it. Interesting. Very Chicago-esque.

Gabrielle Mirabassi

“Espinha de Truta” (Tabacco e Caffé, Dodiciune, 2014) Mirabassi, clarinet; Pierluigi Balducci, bass guitar; Nando Di Modugno, classical guitar.

A lot of harmonic twists and turns, an attempt to string together modern harmonic tropes in a choro vibe. I’m not sure they really knit together. A lot of information crammed into it. It’s in tune. I didn’t hear much improvising. That’s a lot of head, almost as much head as a Pixinguinha thing. To play that twice takes a lot of breath. So I give it up to somebody for being able to get through that. If somebody does some hard shit and executes, is it beautiful? Is it great? I don’t know.

Eddie Daniels

“My Little Suede Shoes” (Mean What You Say, IPO, 2005) Daniels, clarinet; Hank Jones, piano; Richard Davis, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

Very accomplished player, going for that Eddie Daniels level on some of the chords substitutions, the articulations — but my overall esthetic impression was a little cornball. [It’s Eddie Daniels.] Hah! I guess he was going for that. Technically, it’s up there, with that sheen that students of Leon Russinoff had. But I didn’t think esthetically it was a super-hip choice to play “My Little Suede Shoes” — nothing in that arrangement updated it.

J.D. Parran


That’s pointing towards new music contemporary clarinet, like William O. Smith. I liked the way he was keeping the time, and then maybe playing one note, then playing a widespread arpeggio — that suggested good musicianship. I liked that. I couldn’t tell you who it is. [afterwards] My man! Certain guys are just trying to play jazz on the instrument. But it’s some people’s job to bring together more of the things that we all study.

Ken Peplowski/Adrian Cunningham

“Background Music” (Duologue, Arbors, 2018) Peplowski, Cunningham, clarinet; Renee Rosnes, piano; Martin Wind, bass; Matt Wilson, drums.

It’s a head written on “All Of Me” that sounds like the kinds of heads Lennie Tristano made with Warne Marsh and Lee Konitz. The clarinet playing was somewhat modern, with some technique, and I liked it OK. I thought the first person was technically stronger than the person who played during the clarinet-drums duet, which didn’t mesh like I wanted it to. The playing was in the vibe of the head, which is a little out there. The piano player, who was good, took a solo that was a little out there, which set it up that the clarinet solos were a little out there. Not out there like A Love Supreme, but a bit left-of-center.

Ted Nash

“Maria” (West Side Story Songs, Plastic Sax, 2019) Nash, clarinet; Steve Cardenas, guitar; Ben Allison, bass.

This person was being modern more with intervals than the actual line, playing something very triadic, then some fourths and fifths. While the clarinet player was doing that, the guitar player was getting into some sound outness, and the clarinetist didn’t respond to the sound, but just was trying to play cool intervals. Real modernness I think is responsive. I found that unresponsive. “Maria” is not necessarily designed for blowing. I thought a couple of chords in the arrangement could have been longer, because they’re surprising, and maybe you want to lay on them. But this felt like the chord changes were rushed through.

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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