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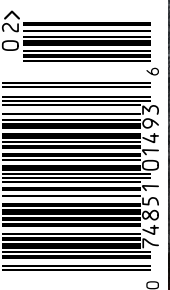
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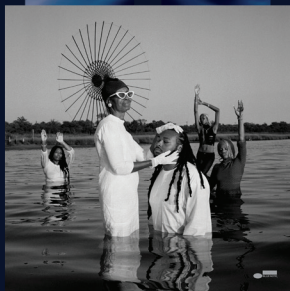


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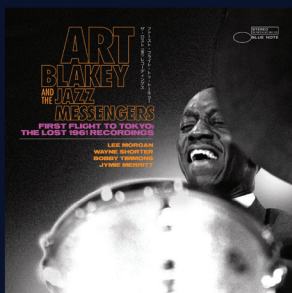
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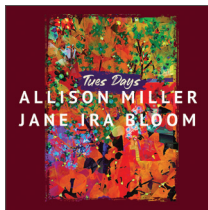
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Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Shemekia Copeland and more discuss their personal connections to the blues.

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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



Sean Jones remembers two artists who helped shape his career.

Remembering Mentors

IT'S DEC. 23 AND WE ARE HEADLONG INTO the holiday season here at DownBeat. Like all of you, the DownBeat crew has been working through the pandemic blur this past year and the start/stop, maybe/maybe-not lifestyle it has thrust upon us.

If the pandemic has done anything good, it's forced us all to reassess what we are doing and why; what's important and who is important in our lives. And that has led to so many conversations about mentors, personal and musical.

During the month, I had an opportunity to have several conversations with trumpeter Sean Jones — first, over the phone in relation to the Jazz Education Network's January conference in Dallas, then in a live interview at Midwest Clinic in Chicago.

Jones, who is the president of JEN, was preparing a tribute concert at the conference in honor of another trumpeter, Roy Hargrove, one of Dallas' favorite sons and a mentor to Jones and so many other young musicians.

"As a human being, he gave to a fault, man," Jones said. "He gave his physical self. He gave his mind. He gave his spirit. And he was always there to help. He was always there to support younger musicians."

Jones remembered first meeting with Hargrove in 2002. It was during a gig at the Jazz Gallery in New York where Hargrove, one of the founders of the club, invited a group of young trumpeters to perform that included Maurice Brown, Ambrose Akinmusire and Keyon Harrold.

"He was so gracious to us in providing that opportunity," Jones said. "He was always there. He would offer support. He used to call me Soul Trumpet, that was his nickname for me. I would always have that gospel sound to my playing, so he would call out, 'Here's comes Soul Trumpet.' He was supportive right to the very end."

He also encouraged Jones, who is the now the

Richard and Elizabeth Case Chair in Jazz Studies at the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, to follow a path toward jazz education, which was Jones' plan from the beginning.

"He said, 'Man, if you can deal with that educational stuff, we need you to get in there,'" Jones said. "At that point in time, it just solidified what my personal path would be."

Later in the month at the Midwest Clinic, an annual gathering of some 20,000 music educators and students in Chicago, Jones talked about growing up in Northeastern Ohio and being introduced to Esotto Pellegrini, a legendary local trumpeter who taught at Youngstown State University. Pellegrini turned down offers to join major orchestras because he wanted to be home for his family. Instead, he became one of the Youngstown area's most celebrated music educators. When Pellegrini found out about the talent and work ethic of a junior high school trumpeter named Sean Jones, he agreed to take him on as a student.

"He started to come pick me up and take me to lessons at his house," Jones said. "The first lesson, I'll never forget it. He pulled out his horn and it looked weird. I didn't know it at the time, but it was a C trumpet. And he started doing all of this double tonguing and triple tonguing, all this stuff. I said, 'Man, I'll never be able to do that.' So, I went home and put the horn in the case.

"I wasn't ready for the next lesson. But he told my mother, 'Get Sean ready. Get him together.' And he picked me up in his Maserati.

"He's driving this Maserati, and he's going 70, 80, 90 miles an hour. And I'm freaking out. Then, he pulls over and he says, 'How did that feel?' And I said, 'It was scary, but it was exciting.' He said, 'Yeah, you like that feeling?' And, I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'Stick with me, and that's how your entire career will be.'"

The rest is jazz history. To mentors everywhere, thank you.

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Melanie Eutorian

THEY MAY BE THE MOST HAPPY IN the room, and for 35-year-old New York City dancer and band leader Mike Hazama that certainly applies. In fact, he got the most out of the night. "I was just in luck with this band," he says. "I met Tom [Lester] and his band Ensemble with their album *Dancer in the Moon*," was appointed chief conductor of the Danish Radio Big Band for the first time, and he was invited to perform at a celebration for the Monterey Jazz Festival, one of the preeminent music events in the world.

It was a "spring of love," says Hazama, with a dancing mood, over breakfast this past September at Monterey. "But it's a big


turning point in relation to the band," he says. "I was hearing wild playing going on in the college band, written like Jim McNeely, Mark Shaefer and John Heredia. I was just in luck with their music," he recalled. "Computer music! I don't know. But that's it wonderful. And they're alive and active. I was just in luck with them. Hazama met Jim McNeely."

Waiting no time, Hazama moved to New York City, where he is a percussionist at the Manhattan School of Music, where he received a master's degree in 2002 and formed a 13-piece

band before the rise of the Copenhagen band, which was the first to play the music. The band is doing so in 2005, bouncing all year between Asia, Europe and North America.

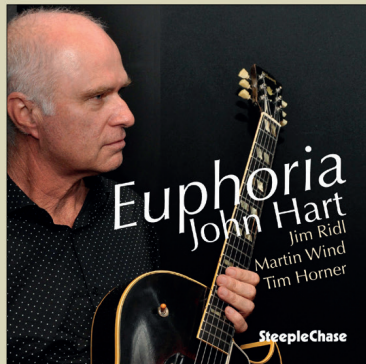
"I was just in luck with them," he says. "I was just in luck with them. Hazama met Jim McNeely."

In Europe, she not only works with the band, but she is also a percussionist and chief conductor of Holland's Mopette Orchestra in Amsterdam. Those gigs have found her in the Netherlands, where she has been playing and integrating it into her Third Stream concept, and integrate it on vivid day after with her ter-

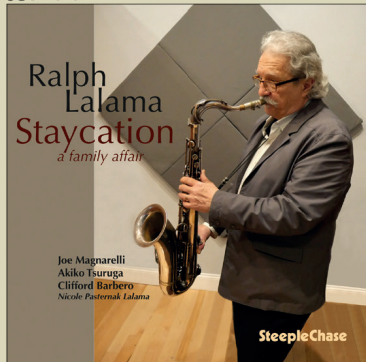


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The Beat

Kahil El'Zabar, Greg Tate, Sarah Vaughan Vocal Competition & Barry Harris



Damien "Yella P" Pearson and Cameron Kimbrough

Memphississippi Sounds: Blues at a 21st Century Crossroads

The debut release by Cameron Kimbrough and Damion "Yella P" Pearson, *Memphississippi Sounds* (Little Village), establishes the singular duo's distinctive genre: Kimbrough's Hill Country drone meets Pearson's Beale Street blues in songs infused with R&B and spiced with the poetry of straight-out-of-Memphis rap.

The opener "Who's Gonna Ride," launched with harp-driven blues you might have heard 40 years ago at the legendary juke joint run by Cameron's granddaddy Junior Kimbrough, speeds straight to 2021 with an invocation of "I can't breathe" that practically spits out the clincher: "Get cha foot off my neck, boy."

Though they speak truth to power,

Kimbrough and Pearson also write plenty of songs about every bluesman's favorite subject: women. "After you get through getting your neck stepped on, you need a little love," says Kimbrough, who was raised in rural Potts Camp, Tennessee, with a population of about 500 people, but now lives in Memphis. Case in point: "You Got The Juice," a boudoir call-and-response in which both singers whisper sweet little somethings into your ear buds. Yowser!

Kimbrough and Pearson sat down for a conversation via Zoom in late October, when they talked about everything from their own "driving while Black" encounters to their remarkable bond as collaborators.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

DownBeat: *Memphississippi Sounds wouldn't exist if you hadn't met onstage on Beale Street one magical summer night in 2017. How did you both end up in the club that night?*

Damion Pearson: Another hill country player hired both of us to play a pickup gig. I was called to play harmonica and Cam was on the [drum] set.

Cameron Kimbrough: I had never even heard Damion's music. He was onstage when I walked in, checking the levels.

DownBeat: *Checking the levels — a professional!*

Kimbrough: [laughs] Yeah! And I made up my mind, that night, we gotta do some jamming together.

DownBeat: *Both of you are singers and multi instrumentalists. But you're also incredible songwriting partners. Did you start collaborating right away?*

Pearson: Yes. Because musically it just flowed. The second time we played together, Cam called me out of the blue for a two-hour show, and we didn't have any songs. [laughs] So we were just throwin' it down on stage, but there was a vibe from the very beginning.

Kimbrough: Yeah, there was. Backstage, after the show, when the guys asked what our names were, I said I don't know. This is just the second time I've met this guy! [laughs]

DownBeat: *"Who's Gonna Ride" sets the tone for the album and brings it into 2021. How did that come about?*



"It's a conversation," Kimbrough says of making music with Pearson.

Pearson: The lyrics I wrote in the midst of the pandemic, where I was just thinking about some of my experiences with the police. I've had several! [laughs] One of the first was when they changed a law and said three or more people gathered together can be considered a gang. And I have four brothers, so just walking home, we're a gang. And the police would stop us. Ask us what we were doing.

You learn very early on that anything can happen, bad things go down with the police, and seeing what happened to George Floyd really touched me. The whole world was

marching for George Floyd, and I wondered what the impact would be if the same thing happened to me. "Who's gonna ride with me?" was a personal question. Like, dang, what if something like that happened to me?

DownBeat: Have you also had encounters with cops, Cameron?

Kimbrough: I've had several. But I don't even want to get into talking about what should have been really innocent encounters.

DownBeat: Yeah, driving while Black. Did

you both work together on the music for "Who's Gonna Ride"?

Pearson: Yeah, we do on every song. It's like we're talking to each other.

Kimbrough: It's a conversation.

Pearson: Playing with Cam, I stripped down, and I've been learning so much. Cam kind of showed me a different sound. Deeper and more bluesy.

DownBeat: Yeah, that hypnotic hill country drone digs deep. You recorded this at the famous Sun Studios, right?

Pearson: Yeah, it's pretty surreal. So is how well it's been received, because a lot of what's on the album just came off the back porch. And when we got in the studio there just happened to be microphones there.

DownBeat: And now your back porch conversation is going out to the world. What do you hope to achieve?

Kimbrough: I want the world to be inspired and the youth to be inspired by what we're doing, and make us a household name.

DownBeat: Worthy goals, all. And the Yella P Manifesto Damion wrote for the album will help you reach them. Can you send that out to DownBeat's readers, Damion?

Pearson: *Memphisippi Sounds:* A voice for the blues people, the sons of sharecroppers. A voice for the marginalized. An escape from the mainstream. A swim in muddy waters. A testimony to time, grit and grime. A healing sound. A mantra. A shot in the dark. A real awakening. A sign of the times.

—Cree McCree

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A Time For Healing band members, from left: Isaiah Collier, Justin Dillard, Corey Wilkes and Kahil El'Zabar

Kahil El'Zabar's Uplifting Soul

THE LAID-BACK, METRONOMIC BOUNCE and slap of percussionist Kahil El'Zabar's earth drum (in tandem with contrapuntal ankle bells) has been heard in Chicago and beyond for more than 50 years.

"The origin of this shape of drum comes from West and Central Africa, then to the West Indies to become Conga drums," states El'Zabar during a roundtable chat with his cross-generational quartet of trumpeter Corey Wilkes, saxophonist Isaiah Collier and keyboardist Justin Dillard, all featured on his latest release, *A Time For Healing* (SpiritMUSE). "In the early '60s, Chief Bey in NYC taught Black Harold from Chicago how to rope this drum with skin. ... Harold taught this style to younger drummers. ... We mastered this African-American drumming, different to traditional African, Latin-American or South American." The "we" El'Zabar speaks of was called the SunDrummer, and a solo piece on the new recording, "Drum Talk (Run'n In The Streets)," has its genesis in those formative days.

El'Zabar's irrevocable percussion beats build in intensity through a long-form resolve. Yet, his kit drumming is untame, splashy, exultant, buoyed or goaded by vocal caterwauls. The latter are featured on "Resolution" where his younger sidemen (El'Zabar is 68, Collier 24, for example) revisit John Coltrane's call-to-creative-arms from 1964's *A Love Supreme*.

Collier, a titanic tenor, had a chance to record at Rudy Van Gelder's studio recently, on the

same equipment that captured Trane's landmark album, but his first hero was actually Trane's sidekick, Pharoah Sanders.

"For the longest I had a lot of stuff backwards and thought that Pharoah was the one who taught Trane," laughs Collier, who's mother thought he was being possessed by demons as a kid, listening endlessly to Sander's epic rendition of "Impressions" in his bedroom. Some of Sander's raspy expressionism, via Collier's tenor, can be heard on the meditative title track, which is augured by the ancient clockwork of El'Zabar's kalimba and the gentle piping of Chinese Hulusi flute, which was a gift to Collier from Dillard. "I go through periods with different instruments," says Dillard. "I buy stuff and if I think it's cool, after a while I give it away."

Dillard's Hammond keyboard — which, live, he plays casually on his lap — variously mimics guitar and acoustic bass sounds. He prods and percolates with an ear for the range and timbre of strings and woodwinds, which he puts down to countless gigs with bassist Junius Paul, guitarist Bobby Broom and flutist Nicole Mitchell, among others. Dillard inhabits several personas on El'Zabar's tribute to multi-instrumentalist/funk pioneer Eddie Harris, with whom the percussionist first worked at Chicago's Roadrunner Lounge in 1971. "My biggest lessons from Eddie, apart from understanding the impact of counterpoint and harmonic explorations, was how to count and hold time, maintaining tempos consis-

tently," says El'Zabar. "And also how big you can make your sound with an economical ensemble."

Wilkes, a fiery musician, contributes balladry and subtlety to this release and credits long-term work in El'Zabar's ensembles with strengthening his time. "Especially in the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, where we have no chordal instrument at all, you have to rely on your intuition, your groove-ability, your ears — everything has to be honed into that thing that isn't there," Dillard says. "I learned from Corey, Corey learnt from Kahil. ... When I started playing, I was 'Mr. Notes,' then Corey would call a tune that only had one or two changes and I would be lost in space."

"Time IS," one of the sleeper tracks from the set, shimmies infectiously without ostensible fanfare; the way each member of the quartet places their beat puts ants-in-pants; on the fade, Collier mimics hand-slap-on-drumskin with slap-tongue-on-reed.

At 1 hour and 18 minutes of deeply infused music, the project came together during the thick of the pandemic, and El'Zabar's dolefully hopeful tune "We'll Get Through This" says it all. The apparently ageless percussionist and music historian insists on accentuating the positive.

"We've come through chaos, health issues, awareness of racial and social injustices," he says. "There's an emotional shift toward a compass of integrity ... we're trying to transmit something universal, soulful and uplifting. We need it now, globally." —Photo and text by Michael Jackson

Greg Tate, a poet of the vernacular

R.L. SUTHERLAND-COHEN



In Memoriam: Greg Tate, 1957–2021

THE DEATH OF CULTURAL CRITIC AND practitioner Greg Tate in New York City on Dec. 7 unexpectedly cut short the career of an exceptionally perceptive and expressive voice on jazz and other music, visual art, politics and race in America. He was 64.

A poet of the vernacular, Tate's colorful, yet erudite, writing emerged during the early 1980s in publications including *DownBeat*, the *Village Voice*, *Vibe* and *Spin* magazine, covering the works of artists ranging from Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor to Michael Jackson, Public Enemy and De La Soul. Credited in tribute obituaries in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and NPR with raising analysis of rap and hip-hop to academic levels of detailed insight while sustaining a general readership, Tate based his reportage and opinions in deep knowledge of global Black history and white legacies of art and philosophy, too.

His mission was clear from the first sentence of “Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke,” his *Voice* arti-

cle of 1986. “Somewhere along the road to probable madness or a meaningful life,” he wrote, “I decided that what black culture needs is a popular poststructuralism — accessible writing bent on deconstructing the whole of black culture. . . . The future of black culture demands that this generation bring forth a world-wise and stoopidfresh intelligentsia.”

Although Tate's works were intended to advance African-American empowerment and agency, he was neither doctrinaire nor exclusionary. Rather, his inclusionary perspective resulted in influential considerations of painter Jean Michel Basquiat, guitarist Carlos Santana, novelist Don DeLillo, scholars Henry Louis Gates and Robert Farris Thompson (who died Nov. 29), among many more. Many of Tate's essays are collected in *Flyboy In The Buttermilk* (1992) and *Flyboy 2: The Greg Tate Reader* (2016).

Tate believed that in the 20th century, “Much of what America sold to the world as uniquely American in character — music, dance, fash-

ion, humor, spirituality, grassroots politics, slang, literature and sports — was uniquely African American in origin, conception and inspiration. . . . Today, counter to Thomas Jefferson's widely known notions of Black cognitive inferiority, the grandsons and daughters of antebellum America's slave commodities have become the masters of the nation's creative profile.”

Not only documenting that profile, he also helped to raise it. In 1985, he co-founded the Black Rock Coalition with trumpeter Lewis “Flip” Barnes (his college roommate) and guitarists Vernon Reid and Ronny Drayton. In the late '90s, he stepped out as improvising conductor/guitarist/beat-producer of *Burnt Sugar*, the Arkestra Chamber (which recently released *Angels Over Oakanda*, its 20th recording). Recalling his transition from pundit to participant in a Zoom call late last September, he said, “Like everybody in my high school, I was in a little R&B band and tried to play some guitar, but I put it down. Years later, I woke up one morning and said, ‘I can't not do this. At least I've got to try my hand at putting a band together and writing songs.’”

Inspired by Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*, James Brown, Lawrence Douglas “Butch” Morris' conduction protocols, George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic tribalism and Manfred Eicher's ECM production style, Tate originally construed *Burnt Sugar* as a loose amalgam of collaborators. However, following international press attention and tours, repeat performances at the Apollo Theater and Lincoln Center, and acclaimed albums such as *The Rites* (for which Morris created spontaneous arrangements of Igor Stravinsky's themes), *Burnt Sugar* stabilized its core personnel.

Tate was also the author of *Midnight Lightning: Jimi Hendrix and the Black Experience* (2003) and editor of *Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking From Black Culture* (2003).

Born in Dayton, Ohio, to parents active in Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), at 13 Tate moved with his family to Washington, D.C., where he graduated from Howard University. His earliest journalistic experience was in community radio. He broke into publication with alternative newspapers. During the past decade he held visiting positions at Brown, Columbia, Princeton and Yale universities and Williams College.

Although held in high esteem by his colleagues and protégés, Tate was self-deferential when discussing his career.

“The singularly transcendent thing about jazz is that it allows one human being's voice the right to assume universal proportions through self-expression in a collective framework,” he wrote in a two-part examination of Davis' electric period, published by *DownBeat* in 1983.

Greg Tate's life has ended, but his efforts will generate new thinking and art for generations to come.

—Howard Mandel



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G. Thomas Allen soaks in the applause after winning the Sarah Vaughan Competition.

Allen 1st Male Winner of Sarah Vaughan Competition

G. THOMAS ALLEN'S FALSETTO VOCALS make him unusual for a male singer — and they helped him become the first man ever to win the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition last November.

The Chicago-based vocalist, composer and music educator drew on his training as a classical countertenor at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark, showcasing a four-octave vocal range.

"My gut [feeling] was that they were either going to love it or hate it because it is a very unique approach," Allen, 37, told *DownBeat* in a post-competition interview.

He was only the fourth man ever to perform in the finals of the 10-year-old competition, his entry made possible by a 2017 rule change that allowed male singers.

The contest is also known as the Sassy Awards, a nod to a nickname for singer Sarah Vaughan (1924–'90), an NEA Jazz Master and *DownBeat* Hall of Fame inductee who hailed from Newark. It was the first time a full audience was allowed to witness the proceedings since November 2019.

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 edition of the competition was held in front of the judges and only a smattering of guests, although a recording of the show was made available for viewing on Facebook.

Allen, who is the jazz and contemporary voice instructor at the Chicago High School for the Arts (ChiArts) and serves on the voice faculty

of Columbia College Chicago, received a \$5,000 cash prize for winning.

Asked how it felt to be the first male winner of the Vaughan competition, Allen, who has performed with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, said: "The first thing is gratitude because the legacy is bigger than I am."

The former Los Angeles Opera artist, who counts Bobby McFerrin as his top jazz influence, opened with "Good Morning Heartache," separating himself from the pack with his first high, long notes. Shifting into uptempo mode on "Just One Of Those Things," he intentionally sang an octave lower to highlight his versatility, which he pointed out during the interview. He closed with "Misty," a Vaughan signature number.

With Allen's victory at NJPAC, he joins the ranks of past winners Cyrille Aimée (2012), Jazzmeia Horn (2013), Laurin Talese (2018), Samara Joy (2019) and 2020 co-winners Gabrielle Cavassa and Tawanda Suessbrich-Joaquim.

This year, second place went to April May Webb, from Edison, New Jersey. Webb, a founding member of Sounds of A&R, which has toured with drummer T.S. Monk. Webb received a \$1,500 cash prize. Arta Jekabsone, a native Latvian who lives in New York and is an accomplished, veteran of jazz singing competitions, finished third and took home \$500.

The other finalists were Vik Gecyte, a Paris-based native of Lithuania, who was a finalist in the 2019 Vaughan competition, and Andrea Miller of Costa Mesa, California, who has been

active internationally, playing clubs in France, Mexico and Los Angeles.

Held as part of the annual TD James Moody Jazz Festival at NJPAC, the competition was open to solo vocalists who were not signed to a major record label. Finalists were selected by a panel that adjudicated more than 160 submissions coming from more than 25 countries.

The judges for the finals were Steve Williams, president and CEO of Newark public radio station WBGO; vocalist Jazzmeia Horn; guitarist and singer John Pizzarelli; vocalist Sheila Jordan; and pianist and composer Renee Rosnes.

Accompanying the singers was a trio led by pianist and musical director Sergio Salvatore, with bassist Gregory Jones and drummer Buddy Williams.

Before the winners were announced, the host and seven-time Grammy-winning bassist, composer and bandleader Christian McBride, teamed up with vocalist Dianne Reeves, a five-time Grammy recipient, in performances of "Lullaby Of Birdland" and "Tenderly."

Webb opened the competition, singing "Social Call," "Round Midnight" and an original, "They Keep Saying No." Next came Miller, who performed "The Masquerade Is Over," "Bye Bye Blackbird" and "Willow Weep for Me." Gecyte, up next, sang "That Old Black Magic," "That's All" and "I Got Thunder And It Rains." She was followed by Allen and then Jekabsone, who sang "Four," "Gone With The Wind" and an original, "Clouds."

—Michael Barris



"Bebop was a real musical revelation for us — like a renaissance," Barry Harris told DownBeat.

In Memoriam: Barry Harris, 1929–2021

PIANIST BARRY HARRIS, AN NEA JAZZ

Master who devoted his life to playing bebop and teaching the language of straight-ahead jazz improvisation to younger generations, died Dec. 8 of complications from COVID-19 at a New Jersey hospital. He was 91.

A product of the 1950s Detroit scene that produced the likes of brothers Hank, Thad and Elvin Jones, vibraphonist Milt Jackson, guitarist Kenny Burrell, pianist Tommy Flanagan and dozens of other Motor City jazz icons, Harris was a consummate sideman who worked alongside the art form's top progenitors for more than 70 years.

Harris performed as a leader and recorded more than 25 albums under his own name. Despite suffering a stroke in 1993, he remained active into his nineties, playing at venues around New York and leading weekly bebop workshops.

He grew up playing in the church under his mother's tutelage and studied piano with a preacher named Neptune Holloway, then with Gladys Wade Dillard, who also taught Flanagan.

"At Northeastern High School, the two boogie-woogie piano players were Barry Gordy [the founder of Motown records] and Barry Harris," he told DownBeat in 2000.

As a teenager in the '40s, Harris became fascinated with the complexly structured improvisations of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk and other progressive-minded instrumentalists who sparked the then-thriving bebop movement.

"Bebop was a real musical revelation for us — like a renaissance," he said in that 2000 interview with writer Ted Panken.

Harris quickly picked up on the unwritten rules of the genre and began to formulate ways of codifying them for practice and study. In addition

to his rising profile as a first-call pianist, he soon found himself in demand as a teacher and was frequently sought after by more experienced pros who wanted to learn what were essentially Harris' instructions for the proper way to bop. Trumpeter Donald Byrd, bassist Paul Chambers, trombonist Curtis Fuller, and saxophonists Pepper Adams, Charles McPherson and Joe Henderson all studied with Harris, who shared some of his ideas with John Coltrane.

During the '50s, Harris became the house pianist at Detroit's Blue Bird Inn, where he performed with Pepper Adams and Elvin Jones and backed visiting bandleaders including Miles Davis. In addition to being extremely active on the Detroit scene, he toured with briefly in a group with Max Roach and Sonny Rollins.

He moved to New York in 1960 to play with Cannonball Adderley's group, eventually settling into the Weehawken, New Jersey, home of the legendary jazz benefactor Pannonica de Koenigswarter (where he was housemates with Monk for a while).

He played on such classic albums as Adderley's *Them Dirty Blues* (1960), Lee Morgan's *The Sidewinder* (1964), Coleman Hawkins' *Wrapped Tight* (1965), Dexter Gordon's *Gettin' Around* (1966) and Sonny Stitt's *Constellation* (1972).

As a leader, Harris' more notable recordings included *At The Jazz Workshop* (1960), *Chasin' The Bird* (1962), *Premiado* (1961), *Magnificent!* (1970), *Vicissitudes* (1975) and *Live In Tokyo* (1976). Other recommended listening includes Harris' albums *The Bird Of Red And Gold* (1982) and *Solo* (1961).

Harris is survived by daughter, Carol Geyer.
—Ed Enright

Final Bar >



Lloyd McNeill Jr., 1935–2021:

Lloyd McNeill Jr. was a talented musician, artist, photographer, poet and professor — but jazz lovers knew of his facility on the flute. McNeill, 86, died on Oct. 5 at an assisted living residence in Brooklyn. According to The New York Times, he suffered from Alzheimer's disease for the past five years.

Born in Washington, D.C., McNeill attended Morehouse College, studied at L'Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris and was the first recipient of a MFA from Howard University. He traveled the globe, always armed with his pen, flute, palette and camera. When he wasn't performing in jazz clubs, he was hobnobbing with Pablo Picasso or taking flute lessons from Eric Dolphy and Harold Jones. His competence as a visual artist is displayed on a number of albums by Sun Ra, Wes Montgomery and others.

In 2001, he retired from Rutgers University, where he was professor emeritus of Mason Gross School of Arts. At Rutgers he was instrumental in launching the Jazz Studies program. McNeill published two volumes of poetry: *Blackline: A Collection of Poems, Drawings, and Photographs* and *After the Rain: A Collection of New Poems*. In 2001, he was chosen by the U.S. Postal Service to design a postage stamp for the celebration of Kwanzaa. That stamp was released in 2009.

—Herb Boyd

Pamela Espeland, 1951–2021:

Noted Minnesota arts and jazz writer Pamela Espeland passed away suddenly on Sept. 28 after experiencing a



stroke. She was 70. A longtime member of the Minneapolis/St. Paul jazz scene, Espeland started a blog called *Bebopified* in 2005. Later she covered arts for the website MinnPost.

By J.D. Considine Photography by Jimmy and Dena Katz

HITTING BACK WITH LOVE

SHEMEKIA COPELAND & KENNY
WAYNE SHEPHERD MAKE A
PLEA FOR POST-COVID
CIVILITY

Editor's Note: For our February issue, DownBeat asked a variety of artists: What does the blues mean to you? Their responses are documented on the following pages.

What does the blues mean to Kenny Wayne Shepherd?

"Blues to me represents healing and celebration," he said. Wearing a black T-shirt and matching Stetson hat, he was speaking over Zoom from a tour stop in Rochester, New York. "Originally, the blues was birthed out of some very difficult times, but I think it evolved into something that is really about healing, and getting through whatever life's challenges are — getting to the other side, and then celebrating," he explained.

"And for me, when I write and record music, I try to focus on more of a positive message, because so many of my heroes, whether it's Muddy [Waters], or John Lee Hooker, or Albert King, when you listen to them play, you feel something here," he said, placing his hand over his heart. "But the end result is it brings a smile to my face, you know? It just makes me feel good. It's not about self-loathing. It's not about sitting around complaining all the time. It's about human beings relating, on the journey of life that we all are experiencing together, one day at a time."



Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Shemekia Copeland



"The blues is definitely a healer," said Copeland.

"At least, that's what I believe modern blues has evolved into."

"I agree with Kenny," Shemekia Copeland chimed in. Also dressed in black (but sans chapeau), she joined the discussion from her home in Oceanside, California. "The blues is definitely a healer. It helps to bring

people together, and you can tell your story. That's what I love about it. No matter what your story is, you can tell it through this music, and that's what we both do in our different ways."

Those different ways came together in a recent single, "Hit 'Em Back." Combining Copeland's powerhouse vocals with Shepherd's growling guitar, and spiced with some searing pedal steel from Robert Randolph, the single takes on the contentiousness of contemporary American life — but with a twist.

As Shepherd and the band grind through an ominous, minor-key blues progression, Copeland sings, "Every one's fighting/ They takin' sides/ You just want to run and hide." It's an apt description of today's polarized politics, and sounds true from either side of the partisan divide. But the chorus counters with an uplifting feint: "Hit 'em back, hit 'em back/ Hit 'em right back with love."

It's the sort of sentiment listeners might expect more from the church pulpit, instead of a blues song — and it's that didn't-see-it-coming twist, combined with the righteous power of Copeland's singing, that gives the song its punch.

"Down South, where I'm from, people are trying to draw lines in the sand and choose sides," Shepherd said. "It was ugly, you know? So instead of trying to divide us, Shemekia reached out to me, and we decided we wanted to express a message of unity. Because in our community, the people who make the music, we all get along, and we all respect each other, because we spent time together and know where each other is coming from."

"Absolutely," Copeland agreed. "Kenny and I have known each other for a long time, but we both do very different things and we're very different artists. And I think that coming together to do a song like this just showed that none of that matters, because it's about the music, and the genuine love and respect for each other and what we do. I think it showed people none of that other stuff matters. We can come together and do it because we're cool like that."

Where Shepherd specializes in steady-rockin' blues like "Blue On Black" (a 1998 hit reprised on 2020's *Straight To You: Live At Rockplast*), Copeland has become known for the socially conscious lyrics in her music, starting with "We Ain't Got Time For Hate," from her 2018 album *America's Child*.

"The next album I did was called *Uncivil War*," she said. Inspired by the political divisions and racial tension of post-Trump America, it was less a protest album than a plea for peace and reconciliation. As the title tune — written by her manager, John Hahn, and tunesmith Will Kimbrough — put it, "How long must we fight this uncivil war?"

"Hit 'Em Back" follows from that. "Somehow, people are still not getting it, cause everybody's still fighting and there's still so much division," she said. "It's annoying. And it was happening to the blues community, which, oh my god, just broke my heart." Hahn intended the lyrics for Copeland's next album, but when she heard them, she thought, "I got to do this with Kenny. So we reached out to Kenny, and he did the music, and it was like magic. It just it was so organic the way it happened, so fast. It was meant to be."

Shepherd worked up the chords and a vocal melody, and cut a demo for Copeland. "I'm not a singer like Shemekia, right?" he said. "Like, I'm embarrassed to even send this over to her. But it was cool to watch the whole thing come to life. When she marched in that studio that day, she had a purpose. She went in and completely knocked my socks off. Everybody in there was at the top of their game, we had the best musicians in the room, and she rose above it all. I mean, she just destroyed that vocal on that song."

A few weeks after our Zoom chat, Shepherd and Copeland would play a handful of dates together in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. But at the time of the interview, they hadn't yet performed "Hit 'Em Back" together live.

"We've got a lot of plans to get together and do this," Copeland said.


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"It's going to happen."

"Life has a way of adjusting everybody's best-laid plans," added Shepherd. "But I'm sure there'll be many opportunities in the future for us to do it together." For now, though, both artists are trying to balance the excitement of finally getting back out on the road with the reality of concert booking in the age of COVID.

"I was supposed to go on the Legendary Rhythm & Blues Cruise, and I couldn't go on because I tested positive for COVID," Copeland said. "I've done shows when I've felt much worse, and been a whole lot sicker on stage. But I tested positive for COVID, so I wasn't getting on that ship."

"A lot of these shows we're doing right now were shows that we had booked for 2020," Shepherd said. "At every city, it's a different scenario. In some cities, anybody can come and it's like nothing ever happened. And then in other cities, you got testing and proof of vaccination and mask requirements. And some people were OK with that. Some people are not OK with that. But thank god musicians are getting back to work. And it's not just musicians. It's the crew people, it's the bus drivers. It's the truck drivers that that haul all the equipment. It's the security. People that work at the venues, in the box office. The venue managers. All these people, man. I've just been dying to get back to work, and so it's good to see some of that happen."

Still, with an extended amount of COVID time off, both artists must have done a lot of woodshedding, right?

"I don't think so," Copeland said, with a laugh. "I went right into mommy mode. I was baking cookies and bread, and gardening and shit. I wasn't doing anything musical at all. It was weird. I don't think I had the discipline [to practice] because I had been working ever since I was a kid. Pretty much every week from forever, other than some holidays. It was just like I had a year-and-a-half off."

"I was a lot like Shemekia," Shepherd said. "I was playing with my kids way more than I was playing with my guitar. And it's the same thing. I toured so much my whole life that my routine was that when I would come off the road, I didn't sit around and play guitar. I mean, I have six kids and a wonderful wife, and I would dedicate myself to my family. So I was not playing a lot of guitar for almost two years."

"But, thankfully, I was able to jump right back into it. I was a little nervous the day we were in the studio to do 'Hit 'Em Back.' I told [Shemekia], 'Man, I don't know how this is going to go, because it has been so long.' But you get amongst everybody, and the energy takes over, the adrenaline and everybody rises up."

DB



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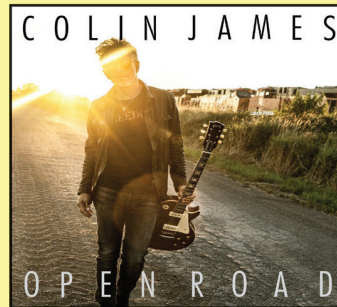


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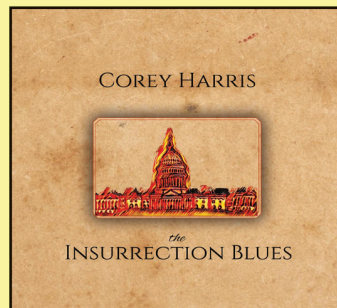


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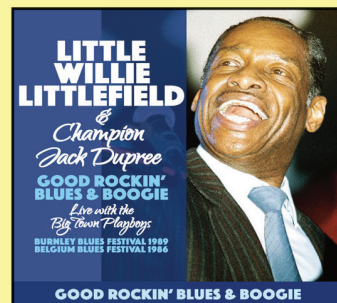


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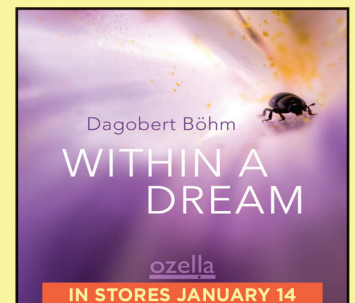


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"We used all vintage gear to add even more authenticity to the sonic picture," Haynes said of Gov't Mule's new blues album.

'THE FIRST SOUND THAT MOVED ME' WARREN HAYNES

By Frank-John Hadley Photo by Jay Sansone

At last, Warren Haynes is carrying the banner of the blues. For the first time in the long life of his jam band Gov't Mule, the guitarist has hunkered down and recorded a blues album called *Heavy Load Blues* (Fantasy).

Haynes isn't a recent convert to the cause. The blues had meaning for him way back. "The first sound that moved me, stirred up something emotionally inside me," he said, "was Black gospel music coming over the radio when I was growing up in Asheville, North Carolina, in the 1970s. I must have been 6 or 7. As we know, the blues was born out of Black gospel music and most everything I love, musically speaking, was fully or to some extent born out of the blues. That would include soul music, rock, jazz, R&B, reggae — all of which along with blues music I have listened to and studied my entire life."

Since starting up in 1994, Gov't Mule has occasionally performed arrangements of traditional blues songs during live stage shows, and recorded a few bluesy numbers on a handful of the band's 20-plus albums. Why a full-bore blues album now?

"I've been thinking about this for several years," Haynes explained, "and I even started compiling a list of cover songs that I thought would be fun to tackle when the time came. Being locked down for a year-and-a-half, I found myself writing more music than I have in decades and that included a handful of blues songs. So, I think that all of those things combined, along with going through the same emotional, psychological and even physical challenges we were all faced with, sort of forced my hand and made me want to move the concept of making a blues record to the front burner."

The live-in-the-studio approach to recording was right in Haynes' wheelhouse for getting the right blues vibe. The four musicians, who didn't wear headphones, were situated close to each other in a small studio, with every instrument bleeding into every microphone.

"I can't imagine making a blues record any other way," he said. "Blues is all about the interaction in the moment, and everything Gov't Mule does tends to adopt a blues or jazz philosophy in the way that even the more structured songs depend on that interaction. Every note or

phrase any of us plays is based on hearing what someone else just played or sang and responding accordingly.

"We used all vintage gear to add even more authenticity to the sonic picture," Haynes added. "I played a bunch of different vintage guitars through a bunch of small, vintage amps and even ran the vocal through an amp to make it sound more like those old records from 1955 to 1975, which is my favorite era of blues recordings."

"Once we made the decision to make a blues record, it was important to me that any of the original songs that we recorded stand up alongside the covers by the classic artists," Haynes added. "Some of them changed accordingly during the recording process. For example, when I first wrote 'Wake Up Dead' it was at a much slower tempo. When I showed it to the band, they started batting around different ideas, which is what we do, and at some point it just fell into this uptempo groove."

Songs linked to Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, Junior Wells and Tom Waits are what he called "select faves by my favorite artists." Haynes' makeover of Wells' "Snatch It Back," in particular, sounds like a Gov't Mule concert. "The original version is only 2:49 long, so we decided to stretch it out by incorporating this instrumental jam in the middle, then going back to the melody. We discussed it briefly and recorded the first take, which turned out to be the keeper version."

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CAROLYN WONDERLAND
TEMPTING FATE

"With incendiary guitar chops and raw, powerful vocals, fiery Texas blues rocker Carolyn Wonderland draws instant comparisons to fellow Texans Stevie Ray Vaughan and Janis Joplin." —*NPR Music*



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CAROLYN WONDERLAND'S TRAVELING BLUES

By Frank-John Hadley
Photo by Ismael Quintanilla

Carolyn Wonderland is doing just fine. She has joined the roster of Alligator, the premier blues label, with a new album titled *Tempting Fate*. And playing as a member of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers for the past three years has attracted scads of admirers around the globe.

No overnight sensation, Wonderland has worked hard for more than three decades, performing thousands of gigs on the road or in her home city of Austin, Texas. Again and again, she has proven her dedication to a musical vision that owes something to the catholic "American Music, Texas Style" created by the late guitarist-fiddler Gatemouth Brown.

"I'm happily all over the map," she said. "Certainly the Texas part of the map is well worn, anyway. I love so many kinds of songs and different music. The genre-less approach feels more honest to me. I love how bands like Los Lobos, Gatemouth Brown, Billy Joe Shaver, Freddie King, Doug Sahm and Marcia Ball can play any style and still resonate with their distinctive voices."

Blues styles mean a lot to her. "The blues is both personal and universal, simple and sophisticated, but above all, honest. You cannot be insincere when playing in the blues tradition because you are as naked as can be. It is not a museum piece and therefore is constantly evolving, but there is a foot in the past stepping in traditions. It's one of America's finest contributions to the great music tapestry that is now universally drawn from."

On the road with blues legend Mayall, who'd never before employed a female guitarist in his band, Wonderland wrote songs that roam across genre boundaries. She accumulated enough to start thinking about recording them on her next break from touring.

"I was up in Woodstock, New York," she recalled, "discussing my plans for an album with my dear friend Cindy Cashdollar. She knew I had no label, just songs and ideas. Cindy asked who I might be thinking of as a producer and I kinda blurted out: In a perfect world, I'd ask Dave Alvin to do it. I felt he would be a sympathetic ear to my slightly eclectic approach to songs. Cindy called him then and there, and he said yes. I was — and still am — over the moon about this turn of events."

Before long, Wonderland and Alvin, a roots-rock dignitary, met up in an Austin studio. Original songs like "Broken Hearted Blues" were a cinch to put down, while others, notably the political "Fragile Peace And Certain War," took more consideration. "The lyrics," she revealed, "took some time to get from being



Carolyn Wonderland: "happily all over the map."

blurted out in tears to being refined into some truths worth saying."

Wonderland had a wish list of guests. "A neat trick to making a record is to track in January when friends are less likely to be on tour, so you can get them all to come jam with you," she said.

These friends included lap steel guitarist Cashdollar, keyboardist Red Young and "ethereal, so deeply cool" country singer Jimmie Dale Gilmore. "We covered a lot of ground and had a nice journey along that map," Wonderland said.

Her good fortune continued. "I'm a touring musician, always have been, and I really don't know how to do much else in the business but to drive, play, sleep, repeat. So, I just sat on *Tempting Fate* wondering what was next. Then, out of the blue, I get a call from Alligator's Bruce Iglauer.

"He says he understands I might have something he'd like to hear, and, boy, I was thrilled to send him the recordings! I hoped he'd like the music. Turns out, he did." **DB**



"I couldn't get the feeling of the blues. I had to learn it," says Satoko Fujii.

FUSION OF THE BLUES

By Suzanne Lorge Photo By Kosuke Okahara

The blues is a personal music. But what does it mean to someone born far from America, working in a very different realm of sound. To get an opinion, DownBeat asked Satoko Fujii.

When the pianist/composer came to the U.S. from Japan to study at Berklee College of Music in the mid-1980s, she found herself surrounded by American students who'd cut their teeth on blues-based music. Adept in the musical languages she'd learned in Japan — jazz, classical, Japanese folk — the blues escaped her.

"For me, the blue note is flat three, flat five or flat seven," she said in a Zoom chat from Tokyo. "I had that knowledge, but I couldn't get the feeling of the blues. I had to learn it."

Learning the blues wasn't easy, Fujii admits, but she took away some pivotal insights: Musical ideas come from everywhere. And artistry lies in the inventiveness with which the composer fuses those ideas.

"The blues is a kind of fusion music, like jazz is," she said. "My music is jazz, even if some people don't think so. I make my music from the many things that I have heard so far."

She recalled her first big band album in the U.S., *South Wind* (Leo Lab), in 1997. For this record, she built her compositions around the Okinawan version of the pentatonic scale, with its subtly enticing flat five. Accustomed to the pentatonic scale of European classical music, the American musicians in her band had trouble finding the right feel.

"I grew up hearing Okinawa music, so I already knew how to use it," she said. "But I saw extraordinary American musicians struggling with that scale. And I remembered how it was for me to study the blues."

Last year, frustrated with the lack of performance opportunities, Fujii began to record freely improvised music at a distance, learning new technologies that required modifications to the way she usually plays. In November, she released two remotely recorded albums on Libra Records, her imprint with trumpeter (and husband) Natsuki Tamura.

To lay down the five tracks for *Mosaic*, with her trio This Is It!, Fujii and Tamura squeezed into a small, sound-proofed practice room in their home. The group's drummer, Takashi Itani, lived 400 miles away, however, so they recorded via the internet, wearing headphones. The trio synchronized without any kinesthetic or visual input — a potentially disruptive set-up for these deeply intuitive improvisatory compositions.

On her second 2020 album *Underground* — a vehicle for her duo Futari, with vibraphonist Taiko Saito — Fujii employed a different tack. She and Saito, who lives in Berlin, each recorded in isolation. They then swapped audio files, experimenting and adjusting until reaching agreement on the best interpretation of each composition.

This approach also worked: The two players seem of one mind, from the turbulence of the title cut, through the screeching vocals of "One Note Techno Punks." It's easy to forget that a continent lies between them.

"So many musicians think music should be made in the same room, and some musicians think remotely making music is wrong," Fujii observed. "But I like doing everything. I need freedom, especially in making music."

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Steven Bernstein's

BIG COMMUNITY

BY BILL MILKOWSKI PHOTO BY JACOB BLICKENSTAFF

As a ubiquitous figure on the New York scene for more than three decades, trumpeter Steven Bernstein has written arrangements for everyone from the Lounge Lizards and Levon Helm's Midnight Ramble Band to Lou Reed, Roswell Rudd, Allen Toussaint, Bettye LaVette and Lee "Scratch" Perry.

He has also done an avalanche of arrangements for his own stable of bands, including Spanish Fly, Sexmob, Millennial Territory Orchestra, the Butler-Bernstein Hot 9 and offshoot groups like Blue Campfire, Diaspora Special Edition and Omaha Diner. Add in his work as musical director of the 13-piece Town Hall Ensemble, where he wrote sweeping arrangements behind Senegalese singer-guitarist Baaba Maal, Cuban conguero Pedrito Martinez, singers Eric Mingus, Toshi Regon and Lisa Fischer, and a host of other projects that impresario Hal Willner

pulled him in on — like arranging for the soundtrack to Robert Altman's 1995 film *Kansas City*; writing arrangements behind singers Bono, Darlene Love, Macy Gray, Donald Fagen, Elvis Costello and Dr. John for Jazz Foundation of America gala fundraising concerts at the Apollo Theater; writing arrangements for Willner-produced tributes to Bill Withers and Doc Pomus at Celebrate Brooklyn in Prospect Park and to Leonard Cohen at Montreal's Bell Center — and you'd get the idea that Bernstein was, perhaps, the most prolific arranger in show business.



But most of his arrangements have gone undocumented. While many were recorded by Spanish Fly, Sexmob, MTO and the Hot 9, Bernstein's writing for the rest of those noteworthy projects was strictly ephemeral—heard for just one night, then *poof*, into the ether of live music.

In late 2019, as he approached his 59th birthday, the trumpeter began to consider issues like his own mortality and musical legacy. “I thought, ‘While I’m still on the planet, I need to start documenting my arrangements,’” he recalled in a mid-November phone interview. “I had been writing so much, and a lot of that stuff was never recorded. I would spend time on an arrangement and then we’d do it once and that was it. Or sometimes it was never played at all. When that first happened, of course, I’d be disappointed. But Hal used to always tell me, ‘There’s no such thing as a wasteful arrangement.’ And he was right.”

So, in January of 2020, just before COVID hit, and supported by a grant from the Shifting Foundation, Bernstein gathered with members of his Millennium Territory Orchestra (guitarist Matt Munisteri, saxophonists Erik Lawrence, Peter Apfelbaum and Doug Wieselmann, trombonist Curtis Fowles, violinist Charlie Burnham, bassist Ben Allison and drummer Ben Perowsky) to begin documenting these arrangements. In four days they kicked out four complete albums, an expeditious pace that harkens back to old-school recording sessions for Bob Weinstock’s Prestige, Orrin Keepnews’ Riverside, Herman Lubinsky’s Savoy or Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff’s Blue Note.

All the material recorded in that four-day span is being released on Kevin Calabro’s Royal Potato Family label as a four-volume “Community Music” series, which commenced in September of 2021 with *Tinctures In Time*,

a collection of Bernstein’s original compositions. It continues with a new volume every four months (*Good Time Music* drops on Jan. 7, *Manifesto Of Henry-isms* is scheduled for a May 6 release and *Popular Culture* will be out on Sept. 2). “It was a very easy, non-stressful situation,” Bernstein said of the marathon sessions at engineer Andy Taub’s Brooklyn Recording Studio in Cobble Hill. “I set it up so that when people showed up, the table was full of food and everyone hung out, ate, caught up with each other. And when I felt like the vibe was right, I said, ‘Let’s go in the room, guys. Let’s play some music.’”

Bernstein was also mindful of eliminating distractions during the process of recording. “The only way it was going to work was to have people sitting in chairs the whole time and just recording, which is why there was no video documentation of this. I really believe in vibrations, and when I’m making music I want all the vibrations in the room to be attuned to that music and nothing else. So if you’ve got people videoing in the room, those vibrations have nothing to do with what we’re doing, right? And like it or not, musicians are aware that they’re being filmed, so part of their vibration is not focused 100 percent on the music. So for four days the studio was only populated by people who had one desire — to play music.”

Once settled into recording mode, things moved organically and quickly. “I would rehearse a song for half an hour, 40 minutes; maybe not even run through the whole song, but just make sure all the parts were right, that everybody knew how to get out of the solo and understood how we would end the song. We’d run the song once or twice, then move on to the next song. And whenever it seemed like people’s energy was lagging I’d say, ‘Let’s take a break and go eat some food and hang out.’ And

if you think about it, of course you can record eight songs in eight hours that way.”

For Bernstein, it was a chance to hear some of his charts played for the first time. “It was basically a situation of, ‘Let’s find what this music is.’ The idea was to have invocations. And because we’re all old enough to know you don’t get an infinite amount of opportunities to do these things, nobody took this lightly like, ‘Oh, it’s just another recording session.’ No, this was a chance to invoke some real music.”

Volume 1, *Tinctures In Time*, was something new for Bernstein. Instead of applying his sly arranger’s pen to existing tunes, as he had on the past Millennium Territory Orchestra projects, he showcased all original music bearing a wide array of influences. The intricate counterpoint number “Satori Slapdown” sounds like Duke Ellington meets P-Funk, while “Quart Of Relativity” comes across like Gil Evans playing Jimi Hendrix music. “Show Me Your Myth” echoes strains of Hendrix’s “If Six Was Nine” along with a touch of Lounge Lizards minimalism, and “The Gift” is inspired by minimalist pioneer Terry Riley. There’s even direct references to Little Feat and Nirvana in a couple of these Bernstein originals. “My music has always been about bringing these different elements in, whether it’s rock elements, jazz elements, noise elements or whatever,” he said.

The poignant hymn “Angels” is the most moving piece on *Tinctures In Time*. “That song was originally written as a typical MTO raver, where you start it one way and then it goes through different variations and builds into a giant thing at the end until it’s seven-and-a-half minutes long,” Bernstein explained. “Instead, I focused on this little three-minute, unadorned middle section ... just a really beautiful piece of music where there’s no big payoff at the end. And that was something I learned from Levon Helm, the idea of just playing a simple melody without all the other stuff. I don’t think there’s that much of that in jazz, except for Duke Ellington. If you listen to a three-minute Ellington piece from 1942, you know that Johnny Hodges is going to play eight bars, and then there’s going to be some interlude followed by maybe six bars of Tricky Sam Nanton or Lawrence Brown, then maybe Cootie Williams plays a little something. It’s this idea that there’s always improvisation, there’s always writing, there’s always countermelody. And the whole time the beats are shifting and changing. So the way we played our instruments and the way I organized it is coming out of the Ellington band, where the solos aren’t these extended improvisations and the pieces aren’t all that long.”

After recording *Tinctures*, Bernstein sought feedback from his longtime friend Willner, who later passed from COVID on April 7, 2020. “I said, ‘Hal, I’m kind of amazed by this music, but I don’t know what it is. And Hal goes, ‘Well,

it's Bernstein music.' And it made me realize that all those things that I've done on other people's songs — extended intros to tunes and arrangements where there's six minutes of original music before you get to this familiar melody — that's my original music."

Bernstein confessed that during the recording of "Community Music," he felt committed to carry the torch for those who have passed. "Hal told me something when Lou Reed died. He said, 'Listen, man, it's up to us now to make our art with the same intent. Our heroes are

else, and let's see what that is. While we still have that feeling inside our bodies, let's record this music. We can't try to play it like we played with Henry but we can remember what Henry told us.' And it was deep. Everybody felt it."

On *Manifesto Of Henry-isms* (the title refers to Bernstein's term for the rhythmic and harmonic idiosyncracies in Butler's piano vocabulary) they mix it up in swaggering Hot 9 fashion on Butler's "Booker Time," Fats Domino's "Josephine" (with vocals by violinist Burnham) and Sam Morgan's 1927 song "Bogulusa Strut,"

'I WANT TO CHANGE MOLECULES. I'M GOING FOR THOSE VIBRATIONS, MAN. AND I'M JUST SO LUCKY THAT I HAVE MANAGED TO SURROUND MYSELF WITH THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO SHARE THAT DESIRE.'

gone, so we now have to use that intent when we create art.' And I feel that way. I have part of Lou in me. His last performance, in Paris, was when he was playing to an arrangement I wrote when he could barely stand. I also share musical DNA with Hal, with Henry Butler, Roswell Rudd, Levon Helm, Paul Barrere. I toured with Little Feat, I played Ellington's music with Brit Woodman and Jerome Richardson. I played free improvisation with Sam Rivers. I learned New Orleans music from being on stage or in the studio or in the room hanging with Allen Toussaint, Dr. John and Henry Butler. It's all part of me. So in a sense, I feel like I'm like their vessel."

Volume 2 in the series, *Good Time Music*, showcases vocalist Catherine Russell fronting the MTO on a program rooted in New Orleans featuring spirited interpretations of Percy Mayfield's "River's Invitation," Earl King's "Come On," Allen Toussaint's "Yes We Can" and Professor Longhair's "Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand." They also do a decidedly Sly & the Family Stone-ish take on W.C. Handy's "Careless Love." Said maestro Bernstein, "It's a continuation of the music I was making with Levon Helm, with roots in Ray Charles but reflecting the particular language of the MTO, and featuring Cath's magnificent voice."

Volume 3, *Manifesto Of Henry-isms*, features a different rhythm tandem of bassist Brad Jones and drummer Donald Edwards alongside MTO regulars, with special guests John Medeski on organ and pianist Arturo O'Farrill filling in for the late Henry Butler. "When Henry died, and we decided to do his music, I told the guys, 'Listen, Henry's not here. We're not a New Orleans band. But we're something

which develops into a Sun Ra-inspired free-jazz romp. With the iconoclastic Bernstein, Sun Ra is always just a step away. "That's something that happened less with Henry," he confided. "He was intent on preserving that New Orleans rhythm thing, so he was particularly demanding with Donald Edwards and Brad Jones. He was like, 'This isn't about you guys getting to do whatever you want. No, here's what I need from you guys.' So the music now does not sound like how we played it with Henry. It's the music we made with him, but now that he's not here the question becomes, 'How does this music keep living?' It lives on by refracting it through our own musical prism."

Their radical re-imagining of King Oliver's 1923 tune "Dippermouth Blues" has pianist O'Farrill dipping into a Cecil Taylor bag. And "X-Men" is an extension of Bernstein's original minute-long intro he wrote to Jelly Roll Morton's "Wolverine Blues" for the group's 2014 album *Viper's Drag*. An arranging tour de force on *Manifesto* is Bernstein's rendition of Duke Ellington's 1958 Newport classic, "Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue." As he recalled, "We were set to play the Newport Jazz Festival, and Henry proposed that I write an arrangement on that Duke piece. So I did, and when I announced the tune, I said to the audience, 'This music was commissioned for the Newport Jazz Festival,' but no one asked me who commissioned it. I commissioned it! And that goes back to when I moved to New York in 1979 and first started hanging out at the Knitting Factory and meeting all those people. And I didn't quite understand how everyone was making all this music, because I always

was more of a sideman, never much of a composer. So I asked Roy Nathanson, 'Man, how do you write all this music?' And he said, 'Well, I commission myself.' And that stuck with me. So I commissioned myself to do that arrangement of 'Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue' for Newport, and that was the only time it had ever been played, until this recording."

Volume 4, *Popular Culture*, features Bernstein leading the MTO through an eclectic program, including tunes by Eddie Harris ("I'm Gonna Leave You By Yourself"), the Grateful Dead ("Black Peter," with Munisteri on vocals), Bessie Smith ("Put It Right Here"), George Harrison ("Long, Long, Long" from *The Beatles* a.k.a. *The White Album*), Charles Mingus ("Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love") and Duke Ellington ("Flirtibird," from the 1959 soundtrack to *Anatomy of a Murder*).

Bernstein has dubbed the four-volume "Community Music" series as 'cannabis music.' "I was thinking about how cannabis has become so marketable and hip these days," he explained. "There is just a lot of positive energy around cannabis. And I also noticed that when you go into a cannabis dispensary it's always either hip-hop or electronic dance music going on. That's what people associate with cannabis now. And I got to thinking, 'Why do those guys get all the fun of this positive cannabis energy when jazz musicians are the ones that started the cannabis revolution?' And I remember talking to (Cab Calloway Orchestra trumpeter) Jonah Jones in the mid-'80s and he was telling me stories about when cannabis was still legal in New York. He said, 'We all smoked it. I'd get out of my matinee gig, and I'd run into Bunny Berigan and I'd give him my uptown reefer, he'd give me his downtown reefer and we'd walk down the street smoking right out in the open.'

"So jazz has always been associated with reefer," he continued. "And I'm saying to the hip-hop and electronica guys, 'Wait a second, you guys get to be the cannabis music? Jazz is kind of where it came from. We want a piece of this positive energy, too!' So you cannabis lovers don't just have to listen to some dreamy synthesizer stuff and hip-hop. You can listen to us." As for Bernstein's continuing *modus operandi*, he explained it in this anecdote: "Roswell Rudd once told me, after seeing the Charlie Haden Memorial at Town Hall, he said, 'Steven, so many fantastic musicians played, but when your friend Henry got up there, he changed the molecules in the room.' And that's what me and Henry always talked about — our desire to transform the room, to transform the people. I'm not doing this to impress anybody. I want to change molecules. I'm going for those vibrations, man. And I'm just so lucky that I have managed to surround myself with the kind of people who share that desire. That's my community."

DB



Pianist Fred Hersch stepped back from his long-planned strings project until he was ready. He's ready now!



JAZZ WITH STRINGS

By Gary Fukushima Photo by Erika Kapin

Over the past year, the breadth and fire of jazz artists dipping a toe into the classical world has been staggering — from operas by Wayne Shorter and Terence Blanchard to, moreover, a host of musicians releasing jazz with strings projects. DownBeat takes a look behind three of these new recordings by Fred Hersch, Dave Stryker and Cory Weeds.

MOVEMENT I — Fred Hersch, *Breath By Breath*

Speaking by phone from his Pennsylvania home, Fred Hersch, one of the most lauded jazz artists of the last three decades, uttered something remarkable: “In the first, at least, 10 to 12 months from March 2020 into the next year,” he confessed, “I really was not that interested in music, honestly.”

Like many others who had their musical careers sidelined by the pandemic, he was “languishing,” despite having all the time in the world, as he recalled in *The New York Times* describing the mood. “Why practice? I’m not going to play a gig anytime soon. Why write something? I’ll never hear it,” he said forlornly.

Hersch had already made plans to record a new album with a string quartet in May of that year. “In a way, I’m glad it didn’t happen then, because I’m not sure that I would have been ready,” he said. Instead, he got back into music by playing on the piano one

nist called the experience less of a showcase for him than a kind of high-level “comfort food.” As life slowly began to return to at least a semi-functional mode, Hersch realized the break did him some good, considering he had never in his life taken a year

He returned to his string project, which became the new album *Breath By Breath* (Palmetto), with an initial reading last June with his selected string players, now dubbed the Crosby Street String Quartet, named for the place where they rehearsed. They offered advice on their parts, their edits and markings eventually put into the final revised score. Yet it was apparent to them that the writing was very much in line with the tradition of string quartet — no surprise, considering Hersch started listening to that music in elementary school, while lying on the rug of his piano teacher’s studio during rehearsals by her husband, a well-known cellist in Hersch’s hometown of Cincinnati. He would start formal composition lessons at age 8, analyzing string quartets by the great masters, from Haydn to Ravel. He also learned to play the violin (“very badly,” in his words) and sang madrigal choral music in high school. “It really got me into this four-voice world,” he said of his early training, “and of course, string quartet is the ultimate four-voice world.”

Hersch’s own pianistic improvisatory style can be traced to those upbringings. He is adept at finding multiple voices in

‘I wanted to give the strings fun things to play, and not just make them play footballs [whole-notes] and backgrounds.’ —Fred Hersch

song each day for much of the lockdown, streamed live online to share with the isolated world, leading to a solo piano record, *Songs From Home* (Palmetto, 2020). The pia-

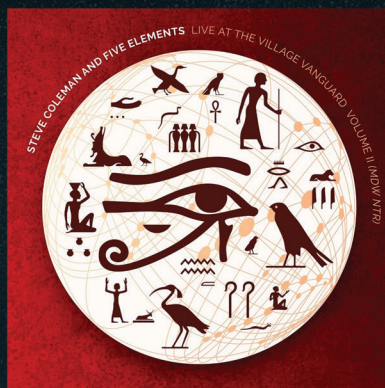
off since he started his musical career at age 18. “I feel much more inspired and loose,” he said, “and really into playing, more than I was before lockdown.”



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the moment, triggered at times by what he described to this writer and others years ago in a workshop as “the right and left hands interrupting each other.” He acknowledges he is somewhat out of step with a ubiquitous proclivity for virtuosity in jazz, yet his textural pianism translates well to the strings; in many ways, they are just an extension of his entire approach to making music.

“I wanted to give the strings fun things to play, and not just make them play footballs [whole-notes] and backgrounds,” Hersch said of his arrangements. The resultant in-and-out weaving of the rhythm section with the strings adds to the interest and intrigue of the music.

“If you hear all the strings all the time, you don’t hear them anymore,” he explained, stressing he still composes using a pencil rather than a computer program. “I was very conscious of using them when they would have meaning, and not [to] just thrown them in there.” At times, the strings and the piano alternate passages; other times, they mirror each other in texture and articulation. At one point, the strings even provide harmonic background for a bass solo in lieu of the piano.

One striking passage happens in “Mara,” where the violins somehow sound like a Middle Eastern or South-Asian instrument, plucking a rhythmic drone while melody and harmony are bowed by cello and viola. The exotic effect was achieved by tapping pencils on the strings. Hersch improvises a free solo over the texture, enhanced by percussionist Rogerio Baccato. The fun for Hersch was getting to interact with the strings in real-time. He wanted to hear and feel the strings while he was improvising and let that sensation govern his choices — as if he were hearing what they were doing for the first time. He elaborated, “My intention was not to think at all about what I was going to play, just to listen in the headphones as they played it and see where it took me.”

Having the string quartet and piano trio in the studio at the same time made for a different type of performance for Hersch. “I don’t particularly love being in the studio,” he admitted. “My playing on the album is very much of a piece with the composition, but it’s really not about me playing in that incredible zone I get into when I’m playing live. I was thinking of being a sort of high-level composer-pianist. My solos were

part of the composition. Each piece is very different in the approach I took.” And yet, he conceived all the pieces on the album as a suite, with motifs and key centers aligning to create a unified whole.

This simultaneous inducement of variance and coherence is perhaps what has made him notable not only as a performer, but also as a composer, with many of his works having been performed and recorded by other artists. Hersch, who in 2003 was awarded a Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship for composition, was scheduled to attend a performance at Carnegie Hall in early January by classical pianist Igor Levit performing the world premiere of Hersch’s piece for solo piano, “Variations On A Folksong,” an exploration of the familiar tune “Shenandoah.” That performance will happen mere days after *Breath By Breath* will have had its week-long debut by Hersch’s trio with bassist Drew Gress and drummer Jochen Rueckert and the Crosby String Quartet at the Village Vanguard. To go from COVID-induced languishing at home to two of the most-hallowed New York performance spaces marks quite a return to public life, even for this celebrated musician. **DB**

BREATH BY BREATH FRED HERSCH

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From left, guitarist Dave Stryker, bassist John Patitucci, drummer Brian Blade and pianist/arranger Julian Shore

MOVEMENT II — Dave Stryker, *As We Are*

The opening strains of *As We Are*, Dave Stryker's latest album, reveal something not found in the veteran guitarist's previous 33 albums as a leader. Violins, viola and cello announce themselves with dramatic tremolos, drifting into multiple themes woven throughout all the voices. It could be an excerpt from any of the great 20th century string quartets: Bartok, Ravel, Stravinsky, take your pick.

"Almost everything was modern," said pianist Julian Shore, in describing the music he researched to arrange the music for Stryker's album.

"It was Dave's idea to have an overture," he continued, speaking via video from his home in Brooklyn. "I thought he was joking when he told me [to write one]," Stryker wasn't joking. And somehow, Shore was able to encapsulate the themes of the entire album into a piece lasting just over a minute. "I actually wrote that in a really short amount of time," Shore confessed.

Stryker has known Shore since the pianist was a 14-year-old student in his combo at the Litchfield Summer Jazz Camp in Connecticut. "He had the band drop out," recalled Shore, "and he pointed to me and said, 'Stride! I didn't know what to do, and I started playing a bit, and he just goes, 'No!'"

Shore went from that traumatic encounter to eventually working with Stryker as co-ed-

ucators for the Litchfield Camp, the two of them forging a friendship that ultimately led to Stryker asking Shore to be the arranger for this dream project. "The first thing we did," remembered Stryker, on video from his hotel room in Burlington, Vermont, "was to share some recordings we liked. Julian was very familiar with string quartet writing and he thought that would be a cool way to go." Stryker enjoyed the strings on Keith Jarrett's 1972 album *Expectations* (Columbia) as well as those on albums by Wes Montgomery and singers Elis Regina and Shirley Horn. Yet those classic albums often featured an entire string section, providing a lush background, but otherwise detached from the soloists. "We wanted to do something where the string quartet was integrated into the music," said Stryker.

This introduced another challenge — to maintain a spontaneous, interactive small-group dynamic even with the strings, paramount for Stryker once he rounded out the rhythm section with two iconic musicians: bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade. Stryker chose to have the jazz quartet record a week before the strings, giving the band time to really stretch. "We're used to working in a quartet format when I record, and the magic that can happen with the four people in the studio," explained Stryker. "I wanted

that to happen with those guys. And it worked out best this way."

Despite the multi-session format, the strings lock in nicely with the band, in no small part to the jazz-savvy excellence of the ensemble put together by violinist Sara Caswell, who is a friend of Stryker's, one he considered a must-have for this project. Shore said the string players also "all had some background in not only improvising but playing in a jazz setting where things could be kind of flexible and the phrasing is quite different. They were all very polished with that stuff." An accomplished soloist, Caswell came to the studio a week earlier to record with the jazz quartet.

Overall, Stryker said he is ecstatic with the results. "I think it's one of the best things I've done," he affirmed. "And I think a lot of people would agree that it's something really different from me. I was able to stretch myself — improvisationally, as a composer, as a collaborator."

"Julian really stepped up to the plate," Stryker added. He recalled being moved to the verge of tears when Shore sent him the initial demos of the arrangements. "This collaboration with me and him really shows what can happen. To go from a kid that's 14 years old, who I'm probably scaring, to actually making music together. ... That's what's beautiful about music. It's a continuum."

DB



Cory Weeds, inset, employed 13 musicians, including string players, arranged in a way to make them sound like an even larger ensemble.

MOVEMENT III — Cory Weeds, *What Is There to Say?*

It's raining in Vancouver — a common occurrence for any city in the Pacific Northwest, but it's been exceptionally torrential, souring saxophonist Cory Weeds' mood. "The world is a mess, in general, and this is just adding to it," he lamented over the phone. People who grew up in that region identify with that weather-induced worldview. Weeds relates to the global malaise on a personal level. "My life in the jazz business has always been a pandemic," he cracked. "Jazz is a pandemic. It's like, 'Oh we need to learn how to survive under a bunch of new and crazy circumstances.' I mean, what a surprise."

As a saxophonist and a former jazz club owner, Weeds should be forgiven for his rainy-day pessimism, even as he continues to devote his life to improving the artistic lives of jazz musicians in his hometown. Perhaps only a cynical realist could survive the jazz business long enough to become one of the great empresarios of that music in Vancouver (or in any other city). He is at the center of many of the jazz-related happenings throughout British Columbia, producing records for his label — The Cellar Music Group — booking shows, concerts and festivals, often bringing in high-profile talent from New York and elsewhere. One of those artists, baritone saxophonist Gary Smulyan,

was invited to Vancouver by Weeds five years ago to perform the music from his album *Gary Smulyan With Strings* (Criss Cross), planting a seed for a project that ultimately led to Weeds' own brand-new album with string orchestra, *What Is There To Say?*

It was years later at a Hank Mobley tribute concert (produced by Weeds) where he thought to have Phil Dwyer become the arranger and co-producer of the album. Dwyer is something of a personal hero to Weeds — he plays saxophone and piano, is a prolific arranger and composer, and he even manufactures musical instruments, including his own saxophone line. Remarkably, he is now working as an environmental law attorney on Vancouver Island, where Weeds' Hank Mobley tribute was held, the perfect opportunity for Weeds to invite him to play. Knowing Dwyer had already arranged and orchestrated for strings, Weeds asked him if he would be interested in another one.

The two soon began tossing ideas back and forth on a shared online spreadsheet. Weeds sent Dwyer the Smulyan record. "This is what I want," he told him, envisioning a classic, strings-oriented sound featuring material from the Great American Songbook. Dwyer obliged, producing lush arrangements of some timeless standards and three of Weeds' originals.

Weeds decided to record the jazz group ahead of time and have the strings record later basing their response on what the band had done. It made sense logistically, but Weeds admitted, "If I could do it again, I probably would have figured out a way where I could have recorded with the strings, just to be in the moment and to be playing with that lush background behind me." One advantage of having the strings record later was that they could then move the chairs around and re-record the strings to make them sound like a much larger ensemble than the 13 musicians at the session.

All said and done, Weeds loves the results, and others seem to agree. "The response is kind of overwhelming. ... I'm very happy with how it's being received," he said.

Never one to care about commercial ramifications, he acknowledged the widespread appeal of a string orchestra. "This record has caused a lot of people to reach out to me about all my efforts," he explained, seeing the attention as affirmation. "It's very easy to get discouraged. Sometimes it's like pushing a boulder up the side of a mountain. But at the end of the day, I love the music, and I love the people that make the music." One must celebrate the occasional rays of light that pierce through those dark and persistent rain clouds. **DB**



REFLECTIONS ON PAT MARTINO

By Bill Milkowski

Photo by Michael Jackson

Following the news of Pat Martino's passing on Nov. 1, 2021, at the age of 77, I reflected on my personal relationship with the iconic genius of the guitar, a relationship that evolved over four decades.

While I hadn't physically seen Pat for more than three years, when he last played at The Side Door in Old Lyme, Connecticut, I was able to toast him via livestream at an "Honoring Pat Martino" event I co-hosted in 2021 with guitarist and Alternative Guitar Summit founder Joel Harrison. Pat was not well as he watched that concert from his home in South Philadelphia. It turned out to be my farewell to the guitar great whose searching spirit and peerless chops inspired scores of modern jazz guitar aficionados and players on today's scene.

Seasoned guitarists and upcomers alike regarded Pat as belonging on the Mount Rushmore of guitarists, and each has a story about their entry point into Pat Martino's music. Mine came in 1974. I was 19 and sifting through the bins at Radio Doctors, the place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for hard-to-find and newly

released titles. It was a place to lose yourself in music at a time when many a record was purchased strictly on the intrigue factor of the cover art. Sometimes it paid off, sometimes not. On this particular day, I was struck by a cover so mesmerizing I bought it on the spot without hearing a single note. It was a dramatic black-and-white photo of a very skinny man sitting cross-legged on what appeared to be a lily pad. His intense, Rasputin-like gaze dared you to take the album home and listen to what was inside.

Once I dropped the needle on the opening track, a blazing rendition of John Coltrane's "Impressions," I was hooked. Sheer velocity, fat tone, clean articulation and surging energy leaped off the vinyl. The album *Consciousness* made me a Pat Martino fan for life.

But that was just a start. It was *Joyous Lake* and *Starbright*, two fusion-oriented albums recorded in 1976 for Warner Bros., that really turned my head around. This was the most dynamic, virtuosic electric guitar playing I had heard outside of John McLaughlin's audacious statements with the Mahavishnu Orchestra. After hearing *Joyous Lake*, I felt compelled to catch Martino in person. And when it was announced that he would be playing in Madison, about 90 miles from my hometown, I jumped in a first-generation Honda Civic and drove.



Bill Milkowski, left, with Ayako Asahi and Pat Martino at the 2015 Newport Jazz Festival

The gig turned out to be an intimate duet encounter between Pat and his longtime Philly guitar partner Bobby Rose, who had played on 1968's *Baiyina: The Clear Evidence* and also on 1972's *The Visit!* As I entered the nightclub, they were swinging on Wes Montgomery's "Four On Six" followed by spirited renditions of Wes' "West Coast Blues," Pat's "Israfil" and the inevitable "Sunny," a signature tune with Pat's facility and inventive lines awe-inspiring.

After the set I sought him out. Surprisingly, he was not only approachable, he invited me back to his hotel to continue the conversation. What followed was a rather freewheeling, esoteric rap that lasted into the wee hours and touched upon aspects of guitar as it related to sacred geometry, 12-pointed stars, the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching, waves on the ocean and other metaphysical topics. "Music is food; the guitar is merely a fork," he said. Much of it went way over my head at the time, but I left inspired and determined to elevate my own game as a guitar player.

A few years after that meeting, Pat suffered a near-fatal brain aneurysm requiring life-saving surgery. The process of healing was long and arduous, especially trying to recover his memory. Pat woke up from that surgery and didn't recognize his parents, let alone a guitar. His memory had been wiped clean, and it was over the course of years that he essentially relearned the fretboard and developed a new relationship with the instrument, or "tool," as he often called it.

Pat's comeback was gradual. By the summer of 1982, he began playing unpublicized gigs at places like The Shire in Cape May, New Jersey, and Grendel's Lair in Philadelphia under his given name, Pat Azzara. He continued performing anonymously for the better part of three years before making a comeback as Pat Martino on Oct. 12, 1984, at New

York City's The Bottom Line, appearing on a split bill with former Return To Forever bassist, and fellow Philadelphian, Stanley Clarke. I distinctly remember seeing Al Di Meola and Jaco Pastorius among the star-struck fans that night.

He wouldn't record for another two-and-a-half years. Aptly titled *The Return*, Pat offered a live document of a four-night engagement at New York's Fat Tuesday's that was recorded in 1987. I attended one of the nights of that run and met Pat backstage after the set, reminding him of our encounter some years earlier in Madison, Wisconsin.

He remembered none of it.

I continued to catch his shows in various settings in subsequent years. Then, one day (the afternoon of Dec. 12, 1995, to be exact) I got a call from Bruce Lundvall, president of Blue Note, who made an offer I couldn't refuse. "Bill, lad," he said in his Santa-jazz manner. "We just signed Pat Martino, and we'd like you to produce his first record with us." He then laid out a plan for a prospective all-star assemblage of guest guitarists paying homage to Pat, each on a separate track playing alongside the master.

I agreed, but knew this would not be an easy undertaking. Pat was used to old school recording methods — rehearsing a band before going into a studio and knocking out the whole album in a single afternoon, two at the most. This all-star guitar concept would require flying to various locations, including San Francisco, where we recorded with guitarist Charlie Hunter and drummer Scott Amendola; Los Angeles, where Pat recorded duets with Kevin Eubanks and Michael Hedges' home studio in Marin County, California, for duets with Hedges and rock guitar star Joe Satriani.

We did separate sessions in New York with Mike Stern, Tuck Andress, Cassandra Wilson and Pat's childhood hero, Les Paul, that were all successful. But the method, spread out over

a year's time, required Pat to develop instant chemistry with players he either didn't know or had forgotten due to the memory loss — very much out of his comfort zone. But he adjusted and got through it with typical grit and determination, and even some laughs along the way.

My regret as producer is that we weren't able to record tracks with B.B. King and The Who's Pete Townshend. The latter had written music specifically for the proposed collaboration, but it never came to be.

I also broached the subject of having George Benson, Pat's friendly rival from the early 1960s, play on the album, which was eventually titled *All Sides Now*. But Benson demurred on being part of the project, stating one late night at Bradley's: "Any guitarist would be a fool to get in the ring with Pat Martino."

In the summer of 2008, I reconnected with Pat for 10 days at the Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy, where he performed with his group at the intimate 250-seat Teatro Pavone. As we bonded over traditional Umbrian cuisine and wine, he floated the idea of collaborating on his autobiography. Two years later, we struck a deal with Backbeat Books, which had previously published my Jaco Pastorius biography.

In late 2010, Pat and I commenced a series of interviews at his home in South Philly. I'd jump on a MegaBus or Bolt Bus or train to Philadelphia. Pat would pick me up in a new leased Cadillac and drive me to his home. We would talk non-stop in his living room for three or four hours before breaking for dinner with his wife, Ayako Asahi, a composer in her own right. Pat had met Aya at a guitar clinic in Tokyo in 1996 and was instantly smitten. They were married on Feb. 7, 1997.

By the time we began collaborating on the book, Aya had weened Pat off the roast beef sandwiches from Geno's and Nick's and gotten him on a strict macrobiotic diet. We'd eat, we'd drink, then we'd go back at it for another three hours. The result was *Here and Now! The Autobiography of Pat Martino*.

At a party to celebrate the book's release, Pat inscribed my copy this way: "Oh my God, I've come to love you!! Always, Pat Martino." Writing that book and co-hosting that livestream tribute were my way of paying back some of the love.

Through a lifetime of focused dedication, Pat Martino was on a mission to uncover the mysteries of his chosen instrument. A deep thinker and outre seeker, he was infinitely curious about how physics and mathematics could explain the mysteries of the guitar. He ended up creating a language and identity for himself, and he imbued that language with deep soul using a unique blend of ferocity and finesse. His triumphant story over incredible adversity is one for the ages. His legacy is a gift to us all. **DB**



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Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★



Jane Ira Bloom and Allison Miller

Allison Miller/ Jane Ira Bloom *Tues Days*

OUTLINE
★★★★

Some COVID-lockdown projects are gloomy; some are escapist; others carry artists in new directions. The pandemic brought drummer Allison Miller and soprano saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom together — in separate studios — for five Tuesdays during March and April 2021, and the results express joy and boundless energy.

By now, we've become accustomed to hearing musicians overcome distance and technology, but Miller and Bloom manage to convey

more of the human spirit than most remote collaborations. At the heart of their connection is the fact that these are two minimalists with deep listening skills; there are no by-rote responses or predictable plays in these joint improvisations.

On "Technicolor" Miller builds dramatic intensity from her opening solo, and as the interaction between her and Bloom moves into freer musical territory the drummer begins to generate a tom-tom rumble worthy of the great Ed Blackwell. More frequently, Miller eschews her full drum kit for the tuned hand drumming of "Rowing In The Dark," which evolves into a spacey blues, or the metallic clatter of "Five Bells," a gamelan-influenced accompaniment to Bloom's dark-hued soprano. But nothing

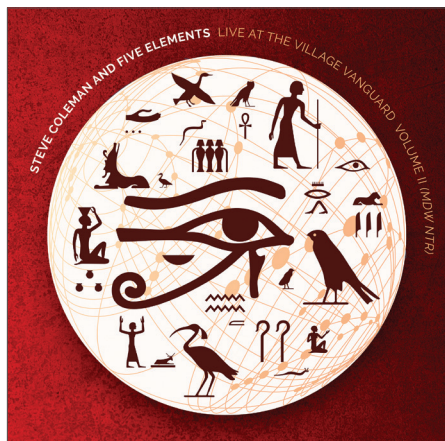
from either musician stays in one place for long. On "The Wild Frontier" Bloom introduces a bleating smear of sound and Miller responds with frantic, scurrying percussion that evolves into wooden-toned accents and bells as Bloom paints in flowing phrases.

Loose, limber and personal sounding throughout, this set of spontaneous composition is one for the time capsule of the Plague Years, the ideal reminder that the human imagination could still soar during lockdown. —James Hale

Tues Days: Tues Days; Technicolor; Rowing In The Dark; This Is It; Five Bells; The Wild Frontier; Light Years Away; A&J's Test Kitchen; Crayola; On Seeing JP; Walk Alone. (56:49)

Personnel: Jane Ira Bloom, soprano saxophone; Allison Miller, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: allisonmiller.bandcamp.com



Steve Coleman and Five Elements *Live At The Village Vanguard II (MDW NTR)*

PI RECORDINGS

★★★★

For all its interlocking rhythms and lattice-structured improvisations, some of the more captivating moments on this live date occur during the quieter times, when Steve Coleman is playing alone or alongside trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson. Often, these flashes happen at the beginning of each composition as Coleman's alto saxophone unravels a curling, quizzical state-

ment, punctuated with a lingering rising note. Soon after, Coleman's oblique lines give shape to an entrancing ostinato, which bassist Anthony Tidd mimics and eventually functions with Sean Rickman's drumming as the rhythmic fulcrum.

Before the rest of ensemble joins in, Coleman's soliloquies provide the best opportunities for listeners to take in the beauty of alto saxophone tone — a quality of his musicality that's not discussed enough. It is the perfect counterpoint for his zipping improvisations and jostling interactions with his bandmates.

Four years ago, Pi Recordings released a previous Village Vanguard live set showcasing Coleman leading his estimable Five Elements. That edition included guitarist Miles Okazaki. This companion release, however, sees rapper Kokayi stepping in for Okazaki.

Armed with rhythmic agility and the quick reflexes of a seasoned jazz musician, Kokayi is the MVP on the date. His circuitous flow often functions like a third horn player, while he imbues his propulsive improvisations with cogent narratives.

—John Murph

Live At The Village Vanguard II (MDW NTR): Memes To Midas; Unit Fractions; Little Girl I'll Miss You; Compassion (Drum Solo)—Ascending Numeration—DeAho (Reset); Pad-Thai NdW Ntr; 9 To 5; Rumble Young Man Rumble; Khet & KaBa; DeAho (Reset); 9 To 5—MdW Ntr. (134:22)

Personnel: Steve Coleman, alto saxophone; Jonathan Finlayson, trumpet; Kokayi, vocals; Anthony Tidd, bass; Sean Rickman, drums.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com

Ed Palermo Big Band *I've Got News For You: The Music Of Edgar Winter*

SKY CAT RECORDS

★★★★½

Tributes are the lifeblood of Ed Palermo's big band. Beginning in 1997 with an album celebrating Frank Zappa, Palermo's 16-piece group has gone on to release several more volumes of Zappa's music, as well as records on The Beatles and Todd Rundgren. Palermo's tributes highlight the lasting power of the original material, as well as subtly altering it into a new format.

Palermo now turns to the works of Texan bluesman Edgar Winter, seemingly ideal territory for the jazz-fusionist big band.

The band works best on numbers with a built-in swing, such as on the Ray Charles-inspired title track and the maximalist Quincy Jones references of "All Out." Guest vocalists also soar atop the vamping horns, especially Vaneese Thomas on the gospel-laced "You Are My Sunshine."

It is only on the guitar-led "Tobacco Road" and the esoteric songwriting sections of the "Winter's Dream" suite ("Where Have You Gone," "Rise To Fall") that the big band arrangements can make the sparkling melodies feel laden. Here, Palermo encounters the over-



bearing potential of the tribute.

Yet, *I've Got News* is still a largely satisfying showcase of big band versatility — an instrumental behemoth that can take almost any genre in its stride.

—Ammar Kalia

I've Got News For You: I Hate Everybody; Tobacco Road; Peace Pipe; All Out; A Different Game; Dyin' To Live; Jump Right Out; Entrance; Where Have You Gone; Rise To Fall; Fire And Ice; Hung Up; Back In The Blues; Re-Entrance; You Are My Sunshine; I've Got News For You. (58:56)

Personnel: Ed Palermo, arranger; Cliff Lyons, alto saxophone, clarinet; Phil Chester, alto saxophone, flute; Bill Straub, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Ben Kono, tenor saxophone, flute, oboe; Barbara Cifelli, baritone saxophone; Ronnie Buttacavoli, John Bailey, Steve Jankowski, trumpet; Charley Gordon, Mike Boschen, trombone; Matt Ingman, bass trombone; Bob Quaranta, piano; Ted Kooshian, electric keyboards; Paul Adams, electric bass; Ray Marchica, drums; Vaneese Thomas, vocals (15).

Ordering info: palermobigband.bandcamp.com



Edward Simon *Solo Live*

RIDGEWAY RECORDS

★★★

After enjoying this brief solo recital by Venezuelan pianist Edward Simon, I asked myself a slightly catty question: Doesn't he know any other songs? A mere five pieces in 32 minutes would have been unduly frugal in the LP days. On CD, it's downright miserly. Meanwhile, Simon may feel flattered that the biggest letdown of *Solo Live* is its brevity.

Over his 40-year career he's enjoyed productive associations with Terence Blanchard, John Patitucci and the SFJAZZ Collective, but not as a rule with the familiar songbook repertoire here or the solitude of solo piano. He handles both with an easy comfort and confidence, treating the material with more respect than surprises up his sleeve. His interpretations add elegance without flying far from song's structural gravity. The tempos are mostly leisurely, giving Simon space to probe, play with dynamics and generally create a kind of 3 a.m. candlelit quality.

His "Lush Life" gives us the verse gilded with floral arpeggios before underpinning the chorus with a gentle ostinato for contrast and tempo. He preserves the eccentricity of "Monk's Dream," softening the percussiveness but hiding the simple theme in a peek-a-booo abstraction until the end. "Monk's Mood" is more melancholy, like a ballad looking for a lyric. "Porgy" has a lyric, of course, and Simon seems to have it in mind as he lingers over the music with a reflective restraint.

Simon's own "Country" is the anomaly of the set. It has the ceaseless severity of a march and swells in a climbing but somewhat tedious crescendo to the end. More intensity than intelligence on this one, which tends to unbalance a brief but otherwise lovely set.

—John McDonough

Solo Live: Lush Life; Monk's Dream; Monk's Mood; Country; I Loves You Porgy. (32:02)

Personnel: Edward Simon, piano.

Ordering info: ridgewayrecords.net

The Hot Box

Critics	Ammar Kalia	James Hale	John McDonough	John Murph
Allison Miller/Jane Ira Bloom <i>Tues Days</i>	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
Steve Coleman <i>Live At The Village Vanguard</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★
Ed Palermo Big Band <i>I've Got News For You</i>	★★★½	★★	★★★	★★★
Edward Simon <i>Solo Live</i>	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★½

Critics' Comments

Allison Miller/Jane Ira Bloom, *Tues Days*

The 11 compositions play without any inkling of their physical distance, masterfully interweaving Bloom's lyrical lines with Miller's textural work on toms and cymbals. The only drawback is that the duo format often feels too sparsely minimal. —Ammar Kalia

Goodman and Krupa did it. Then Shaw and Rich. Here Bloom and Allison take those open-ended, clarinet-drum dialogs to less electrifying, but more unexpected new places. In tempo, they generate tension. Fluttering free, they are like socially distanced larks on the wind. Mercurial but engaging. —John McDonough

These extemporaneous duets sparkle with invigorating imagination. —John Murph

Steve Coleman and Five Elements, *Live At The Village Vanguard, Volume II*

Coleman continues his mathematical approach to improvisation, providing his longstanding Five Elements band with discrete pre-composed modules to play at will. The result is a rhythmically interlocking showcase — one that runs the risk of falling into a sense of tonal monotony, but which is ultimately lifted by the spoken word poetry of Koyaki. —Ammar Kalia

Intellectual dance music by a band that never fails to shake both asses and synapses. Rapper Kokayi has never sounded better. —James Hale

The roiling drive that hammers beneath much of this music serves Kokayi's frequent rapping better than Coleman and Finlayson's more erudite virtuosity, which sometimes feels trapped in a straightjacket of airless energy and trance-inducing loops of repetition. —John McDonough

Ed Palermo Big Band, *I've Got News For You – The Music Of Edgar Winter*

Four songs by other composers and only one Winter number newer than 45 years old make for an odd tribute to a living artist. Palermo's arrangements favor bombast over substance, adding little to music that sounds outmoded. —James Hale

In this passion project, Palermo dresses the Winter songbook in a fancy tux and gives it all the fanfares and punch of a crack show band behind a procession of guest singers. Lots of brassy footwork and finger-snapping strut wrap Winter's music in the shine of a slightly upscale pop-jazz sensibility. —John McDonough

Crackling with tingly electricity, this ballsy and passionate tribute nevertheless leans more toward "for fans only" regarding Edgar Winter's legacy. —John Murph

Edward Simon, *Solo Live*

Simon's playing is fluid and without technical fault, but it lacks a certain vitality that would really grab hold of the listener — an ineffable quality of marked individuality that would elevate *Solo Live* to a new, unique status. —Ammar Kalia

A tuneful, if somewhat bloodless, recital. Simon's playing leans toward deliberate phrasing and quiet contemplation. Where Monk swung, Simon tiptoes. —James Hale

After mapping such an illustrious career and crafting and appealing orchestral approach to improvisation, it's amazing that this is Simon's first solo piano recording. And the results are unsurprisingly meritorious. —John Murph



TARU ALEXANDER ECHOES OF THE MASTERS

SSC 1645
on sale 1/7/2022

TARU ALEXANDER **drums** ANTOINE RONEY **tenor sax**
JAMES HURT **piano** RASHAAN CARTER **bass**
HANKA G. **vocals**

On *Echoes of the Masters*, Taru Alexander creates an aural tribute to his father, the great Roland Alexander, and the tremendous musicians who passed the tradition down to him and the future generations through their impact on the bandstand and their examples off of it.

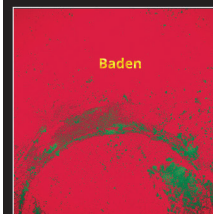


JOHN HÉBERT SOUNDS OF LOVE

SSC 1646
on sale 1/14/2022

JOHN HÉBERT **bass** TAYLOR HO BYNUM **cornet**
TIM BERNE **alto sax** FRED HERSCH **piano**
CHES SMITH **drums & percussion**

Hébert assembled an incredible band to play with the spirit of Mingus as a beacon for a number of performances from 2011 to 2013. The recording, *Sounds of Love*, presents the ensemble in their element, in a thrillingly dynamic live performance.



GUI DUVIGNAU

BADEN
SSC 1655

on sale 1/21/2022

GUI DUVIGNAU **bass** BILLY DREWES **saxes & clarinet**
LAWRENCE FIELDS **piano** JEFF HIRSHFIELD **drums**
RON CARTER **bass (5)** BILL FRISSELL **guitar (1,3,9,12)**

Years of studying and performing the music of Baden Powell led Duvignau to the idea of developing a recording celebrating the great guitarist. Duvignau's new recording, *Baden*, uses Powell's beloved songs as a foundation for explorative interpretations and improvisations from Duvignau's fantastic ensemble, along with two highly esteemed guests, Ron Carter and Bill Frisell.



CARLOS FRANZETTI IN THE WEE SMALL HOURS

SSC 1647
on sale 1/28/2022

CARLOS FRANZETTI **piano** DAVID FINK **bass**
BILLY DRUMMOND **drums**
ALLISON BREWSTER FRANZETTI **celesta (12)**

The world at large has experienced a life altering event throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of which have touched nearly everyone in some way. There hasn't been as far-reaching an event since the Second World War in terms of emotional impact on the population. Carlos Franzetti has turned to the optimistic torch songs of the 1940s and 1950s to bring listeners out of their pandemic induced gloom on his new recording, *In The Wee Small Hours*.



Sunnyside

sunnysiderecords.com



ECHOES

Jaleel Shaw *Echoes*

SELF-RELEASE

★★★★★

Jaleel Shaw follows his own path. He's possessed of extraordinary technical skill, a master of his instrument; he unspools long post-bebop lines without blinking (or pausing for breath — at least that's how it seems on some tracks) and journeys into avant-garde zones with clear-eyed self-possession.

"Tulsa" is a fierce soprano saxophone exercise reminiscent of Roscoe Mitchell's work in the way its intense lines explore a wide dynamic

range and build to piercing squeals, but there's a lyrical beauty there as well that recalls Wayne Shorter.

"Improvisation For Mom" lacks the tenderness its title leads one to expect. It feels more like a scalar exercise. But maybe that's the perfect tribute to a woman who raised a saxophonist; one can imagine Shaw's mother saying, "Very good, dear. Now wash your hands for dinner" when he's finished.

On two tracks, "Breonna" and the closing "Isolation," Shaw adds electronics to the mix. The former piece is a gentle elegy with subtle, dubby reverb, but the latter is a real journey.

His alto is fed through pedals and effects, warping and echoing it back on itself until it sounds like a harmonica, or someone singing softly into a pipe.

When the delay gets long enough and a looped passage is played against a second line, the illusion that there are two saxophonists playing in close harmony is created. By the piece's final minutes, the sound seems to be unraveling into psychedelic tendrils, no longer identifiable as a saxophone at all. It's quite an experience.

—Philip Freeman

Echoes: Lee; Breonna; Tulsa; Improvisation For Mom; Temesgen; On Being Invisible; DOOM; Silence; Isolation. (31:55)

Personnel: Jaleel Shaw, alto and soprano saxophones.

Ordering info: jaleelshaw.com

Enrico Rava *Edizione Speciale*

ECM

★★★★★

Veteran Italian horn man Enrico Rava was celebrating his 80th year on the planet when he convened his current working quartet along with some trusted older collaborators for this performance at the Middleheim Festival in Antwerp in 2019.

While the leader was certainly looking back over his fruitful career with his set list — including a spirited reading of "The Fearless Five," a tune that appeared on his eponymous 1978 quartet album on ECM alongside trombonist Roswell Rudd — there's nothing nostalgic about the crackling energy he and his excellent cohorts summoned for the concert, which masterfully conveys Rava's open ears and curiosity.

The repertoire here is dominated by original pieces that appeared on his 2015 album *Wild Dance*, made with the same core band, but here that material is expanded, particularly the opener, "Infant," a brisk, ebullient swinger that summons the sound of Ornette Coleman. But while guest saxophonist Francesco Bearzatti plays Coleman to his Cherry on the opening statement, the performance is wonderfully



abraded by the caustic electric guitar colors of Francesco Diodati as well as an explosive solo from guest pianist Giovanni Guidi.

Despite looking back on his career, Rava's playing brings a melodic heat throughout, with an unabated sense of the sense of exploration that's marked his career, and his excellent band not only matches him note for note, but they push him, too.

—Peter Margasak

Edizione Speciale: Infant; Once Upon a Summertime/Theme for Jessica; Wild Dance; The Fearless Five; Le Solite Cose/Diva; Quizás, Quizás. (64:22)

Personnel: Enrico Rava, flugelhorn; Francesco Bearzatti, tenor saxophone; Francesco Diodati, guitar; Giovanni Guidi, piano; Gabriele Evangelista, double bass; Enrico Morello, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Anna Gréta *Nightjar in the Northern Sky*

Anna Gréta *Nightjar In The Northern Sky*

ACT MUSIC

★★★★★

Anna Gréta's *Nightjar In The Northern Sky* unfolds with the metamorphic diversity of a year's seasons. The album's opener, which is also the title track, seems primed for the increasing darkness of the autumn and winter seasons. Delicate brushstrokes that sound like bursts of light rain serve as the primary rudder for the meter and a sparse piano melody that's intermittently minor in its tonality and mildly loose in its sustain and decay. It ushers forth the urge to find light and warmth, and to huddle. Conversely, on songs like "Ray Of Sun" and "Blue Streams," Gréta's dynamically light, gentle and crisp performance pairs with uptempo, major-key melodies and a drier vocal tone. These characteristics give the songs more sonic clarity and vibrance, which makes them seem, by contrast, like a natural companion for the energetic afternoons of spring or summer.

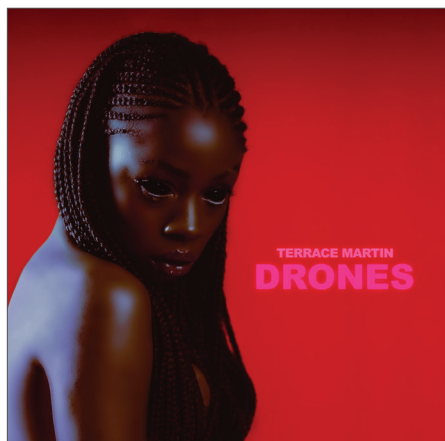
Much like the ever-changing colors of the enduring Northern lights, Gréta's voice ties the album together. However, taking in the whole experience means traversing a wide chasm of creative change. A track like "Mountain" really accentuates the stylistic distanced traveled, as the audible drag of fingers against the metal winding of electric guitar strings feels miles away from the almost impressionistic musical aesthetic presented at the outset. Yet, by the finale "Carry Me Across The Sky," the divergent emotional settings of the album converge in a song that is rich with tonal variety, harmonic expanse and percussive character — appearing to showcase the album's complete seasonal character, in the last musical journey.

—Kira Grunenberg

Nightjar In The Northern Sky: Nightjar In The Northern Sky; Ray Of Sun; Sleepless; The Tunnel; Blue Streams; Mountain; Falling Down; Like A River; Home; Waiting Never Ends; Guide The Way; Carry Me Across The Sky. (48:17)

Personnel: Anna Gréta, piano, keyboards, vocals; Skúli Sverrisson, bass; Einar Scheving, drums; Hilmar Jensson, guitar; Sigurður Flosason, saxophone; Johan Tengholm, bass; Ragnheiður Gröndal, backing vocals.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Terrace Martin *Drones*

SELF-RELEASE

★★★★½

As a hip-hop album, this works as an undisputed success. Martin has called up compatriots whom he's backed in the past to return the favor. It's a veritable who's who of current Black radio — Kendrick Lamar, Snoop Dogg, Ty Dolla \$ign, Leon Bridges, James Fauntleroy, even Kamasi Washington and Robert Glasper roll through. The production credits and featured appearances go for pages and pages, not adding bulk or bloat, but crafting an interesting patchwork quilt

one would expect from this sort of endeavor. Yet when one looks at the vast number of instruments Martin is playing here, one can feel that while he has so much to get out in this project, it's indicative of his range of talents that all just had to get out to the point of it being self-released.

This being said, you have to be in the mood for this. It is very much a hip-hop album, and not jazz, as much as some folks would like to eschew the notion of genre, but it is undeniable that while there is exemplary musical ability, this album does not at all sound like most of what is described on the rest of these pages, despite the included talents of folks who made this work who have. To use the parlance of a meme of a previous time, in his sophomore release, Terrace Martin is doing all he can to prove he's got the range, and judged on its own standards, he's proven he does indeed have it.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Drones: Turning Poison Into Medicine; Drones; Leave Us Be; Work It Out; This Morning; Tapped; Reflection; Leimert Park; Griots Of The Crenshaw District; Evil Eyes; Sick Of Cryin'; Don't Let Go; Listen. (40:42)

Personnel: Terrace Martin, saxophones, synthesizers, programming, vocals, piano, percussion; Marlon M. Williams, guitar; Robert Glasper, piano, keyboards; Jahaan Sweet, Robert "Sput" Searlight, keyboards; Trevor Lawrence Jr., drums; additional programming, percussion; Wyann Vaughn, Phoebe, Christina Barksdale, Rose Gold, Oyira Akwa, Justus West, Terrin "T Lee" Mosley, additional vocals; Jeff "Gitty" Gitelman, bass, guitar; Dennis Hamm, Kenneth Crouch, Fender Rhodes; Adam Turchin, baritone saxophone; Josef Leimberg, trumpet; Flex-A-Tone; Kid Culture, drum programming, Mellotron; Kiefer Shakelford, additional keys; Salaam Remi, beat-box; Kamasi Washington, tenor saxophone; Keyon Harrold, trumpet; Ricky Reed, bass, drum programming; Nate Mercereau, guitar; Mr. Talk Box, Talk Box; Camper, keyboard, drum programming.

Ordering info: terracemartin.link.to/drones

Harold Mabern *Mabern Plays Coltrane*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★½

No matter what track you choose on *Mabern Plays Coltrane*, there are a dazzling array of solos: trombonist Steve Davis on "Dahomey Dance," bassist John Webber on "Blue Train," alto saxophonist Vincent Herring on "Impressions," drummer Joe Farnsworth on "Straight Street," tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander on "My Favorite Things" and the late Harold Mabern, who died in 2019, on nearly everything, particularly "Dear Lord" and "Naima." These seven tunes, assembled by Mabern, are a tribute and celebration of Coltrane's formidable legacy and a few of his most significant musical moments. These are spot-on choices from Trane's oeuvre and so are the sidemen selected by Mabern for this live recording at Smoke in Manhattan.

Davis gets things underway with euphonious blasts from his horn, a veritable fanfare of notes that at times seem to be voicing lyrics. Alexander is at the throttle on "Blue Train," and he takes his harmonic and rhythmic cues from the openings provided by Davis and Herring. The pace here is only exceeded by the romp on "Impressions," where Herring's horn soars as if



summoning Trane to join the session.

Mabern was a pianist of tremendous verve and profound invention, and on each of the tracks he invokes different performers. There are lengthy runs that resemble the pulsating technique of McCoy Tyner; locked chords that bring to mind Wynton Kelly and tingling clusters that often signaled Phineas Newborn. Only this kind of ingenuity and gift could approximate the majesty that Trane bequeathed.

—Herb Boyd

Mabern Plays Coltrane: Dahomey Dance; Blue Train; Impressions; Dear Lord; My Favorite Things; Naima; Straight Street. (63:39)

Personnel: Harold Mabern, piano; Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; Vincent Herring, alto saxophone; John Webber, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

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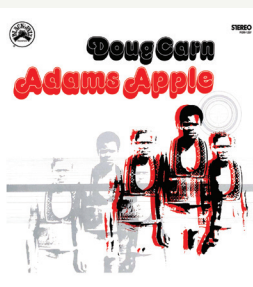
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Real Gone Revives Rarities

In the days before streaming music on the internet, or even before digital downloads, in order to hear a long-out-of-print, holy-grail record, one had to hope to find said record in the wild (in a far flung record shop), in someone's God-forsaken basement, or perhaps the curious might have procured some second or third generation dubbed bootleg cassette.

Music on demand, even tunes of the formerly impossibly rare variety, is of course a sign of our times, and three records that are poster children of late 20th century holy-grail records are now available from Real Gone Music in ways crate-diggers of old could have only dreamed of in decades past: **Adam's Apple (★★★★)** by keyboardist Doug Carn, **Proceed With Caution (★★★★½)** by guitarist Calvin Keys and **Game, Dames And Guitar Thangs (★★★★½)** by Eddie Hazel.

Black Jazz Records was a West Coast indie label that was little known beyond serious jazz aficionados in its 1970s heyday, but after a series of 1990s and 2000s reissues from the catalog (including a Black Jazz compilation helmed by U.K. tastemaker Giles Petersen in 2012), the label is now well known among rare groove collectors, and even some folks who are just nominally curious about '70s soul-jazz fusion.

Doug Carn recorded three heavy spiritual jazz albums for Black Jazz with his then-wife, vocalist Jean Carne, as well as a fourth, arguably more soul-oriented album for the label in 1974 called *Adam's Apple*. Generally speaking, the keyboardist's compositions, including the stellar "Higher Ground" (which bears no relation to the Stevie Wonder classic), are works of vocalese, where the uplifting vocal melodies follow his future-leaning Moog, organ and electric piano runs. The tight band on *Adam's Apple* features Ronnie Laws before he was a star, fresh off a stint with Earth Wind & Fire, soon-to-be-legendary drummer Harvey Mason and Black Jazz mainstay guitarist Calvin Keys.

Another gem of rare groove jazz, *Proceed With Caution's* sound is bound together by Calvin Keys' instantly beguiling guitar style. Fresh and fluid, like flowing water in a stream, his solos are in a constant state of motion, never stagnant. This recording is a

clear continuation of *Shawn-Neeq*, his 1971 recording for Black Jazz, only instead of a particularly lanky quintet, *Proceed With Caution* features a full sounding septet. The beefed-up sound was a direct product of Keys' stint studying orchestration at the Los Angeles School of Music in the interim.

"Aunt Lovey" is a classic jazz-soul romp, and Thalmus Kirk Lightsey's overmodulated keys add just the right crunch and bite to counter Calvin's gentle guitar licks and Charles Owens' sweet flute. This is not just staid soul-jazz, however. This record consistently cooks, each solo revealing prismatic nuance to already solid compositions.

Meanwhile, whereas Calvin's guitar can be considered to fall squarely within the soul-jazz canon, Eddie Hazel is a canonical funk-rock player whose legend has only continued to grow since his untimely death in 1992. His epic 10-minute solo on "Mag-got Brain," from Funkadelic's 1971 album of the same name, is routinely listed as one of the finest rock solos of all time.

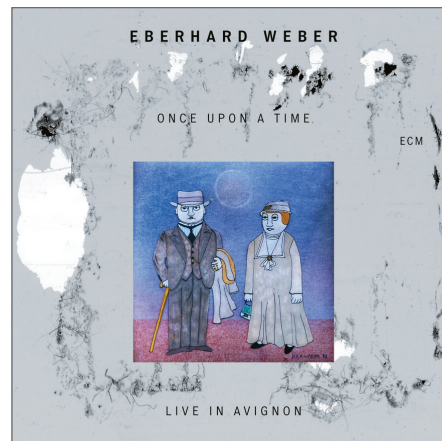
Game, Dames And Guitar Thangs marks Hazel's only solo album released in his lifetime. The record perhaps most famously features a deeply mournful, syncopated version of "California Dreamin'." Unlike the Black Jazz recordings of Calvin Keys and Doug Carn, *Game, Dames And Guitar Thangs* was released on major label Warner Brothers, and featured an all-star cast of P-Funk players at arguably the peak of Parliament's powers, but the record didn't sell well and was almost immediately taken out of print.

As the '70s progressed, Eddie's personal demons towed him further underground and by the mid-'80s, his contributions to P-Funk were seldom. Original pressings of Hazel's album routinely sell for hundreds of dollars, which begs the question: Had it been distributed widely, would Eddie Hazel have become a household name?

That can't be answered definitively in the case of any of these records, but with this trio of reissues, Real Gone Music is doing the Lord's work of reentering these rarities into the conversation of important recordings from their era.

DB

Ordering info: realgonemusic.com



Eberhard Weber Once Upon A Time— Live In Avignon

ECM

★★★★★

ECM records has, in recent years, championed the cause of solo bass albums as a noble sidebar effort, releasing memorable solo outings by Barre Phillips, Larry Grenadier and Marc Johnson. Enter another worthy legend into the club, veteran German bassist Eberhard Weber. An early pillar of the ECM roster, Weber has been an absent presence in jazz, due to a debilitating 2007 stroke, but beautifully represents on this archival jewel, originally recorded live in Avignon, France, in 1994, at Philips' Festival International de Contrebass.

With his customized five-string electro-acoustic bass, Weber blends his classically tinged approach with jazz-encoded flurries and atmospherics enhanced by arco playing and ethereal harmonics. He sometimes thickens the sonic-contextual plot with added bass voices via looping. While the album generally serves as a kind of period-piece discovery from the vaults, the inherently history-encoded timbres of Weber's bass translate well to the discerning modern ear. Things do occasionally sound moldy, as with the thump-and-slap workout of "Ready Out There."

As typified by his classic 1970s work — albums such as *Colors Of Chloë*, for instance — Weber conjures up lyrical atmospheres and with a special painterly touch. He favors evocative thematic brush strokes over conventional theme and development melodic designs, as heard on the opening "Pendulum," "Delirium" and the closing sigh of "Air." In all, *Once Upon A Time* conveys the special, virtuosic, lyrical and abidingly musical voice that has made Weber a signature bassist in his and our time.

—Josef Woodard

Once Upon A Time—Live In Avignon: Pendulum; Trio For Bassoon And Bass; Ready Out There; Silent For A While; Delirium; My Favorite Things; Air. (48:39)

Personnel: Eberhard Weber, bass.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Tony Malaby's Sabino *The Cave Of Winds*

PYROCLASTIC RECORDS

★★★★

Tony Malaby seems to have swallowed his saxophones whole, so expressively vocal and immediate is his playing, which dominates and directs the soundscapes construed by the brilliant band Sabino that recorded his debut album back in 2000. Today, at age 56, Malaby is a New York-scene veteran. With a brawny tone that can turn feather-light, a range running from roars and lyricism, a solid grasp momentum and a narrative bent, he demands

and deserves to be heard.

The Cave Of Winds comes out of the saxophonist's pandemic lockdown sessions convened with a shifting coterie of players under a thruway bridge near his home, and as a return to recording is a statement of survival. The four musicians operate team-like, proposing, discovering, adapting to and then navigating further an uncompromising field of improvisations and wide-open compositions that lead to some wild places. Though raw and sometimes despairing, the music resolves highlights the players' connections.

The titular 18-minute centerpiece is a perhaps the culmination of their collaboration. Unfolding as the players feel each other out and respond imaginatively, it arrives as pre-ordained halfway through. But before and past that point, the quartet interacts with intimacy reminiscent of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Tunefulness is beside the point (although both "Corinthian Leather" and "Just Me, Just Me" have melodies that will interest other players as well as fans). *The Cave Of Winds* is about enduring the maelstrom together.

—Howard Mandel

The Cave Of Winds: Corinthian Leather; Recrudescence; Scratch The Horse; Insect Ward; The Cave Of Winds; Life Coach (For Helias); Just Me, Just Me. (52:09)

Personnel: Tony Malaby, tenor and soprano saxophones; Ben Monder, guitar; Michael Formanek, bass; Tom Rainey, drums.

Ordering info: pyroclasticrecords.com

Ed Neumeister Quartet *What Have I Done?*

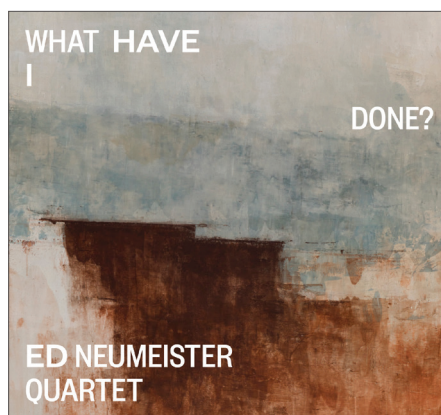
MEISTERMUSIC

★★★★½

Veteran trombonist-composer Ed Neumeister definitely fits into his own musical category. While his history includes being a member of the Mercer Ellington Orchestra, the Mel Lewis Orchestra and Gerry Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band, he also spent 17 years teaching and working in Europe, wrote for films while based in Los Angeles, and along the way developed his own individual approach to improvising and writing for jazz-based groups.

On *What Have I Done?*, Neumeister's compositions utilize what he calls "harmonic references" rather than chord changes, the notes in his melodies are unusual, and many of the improvisations are based on new and invented chords and scales. Each of the members of his quartet is an important part of the often-rhythmic melody statements rather than being accompanists to his trombone. Their colorful and concise solos uplift the music with the improvisations being a logical extension of Neumeister's pieces.

Suffice it to say that one does not leave *What Have I Done?* whistling any of the melodies. The six very brief "PickledGinger" selections



(all but one are 16 seconds or less) are excerpts from a free improvisation. Of some of the eight full-length pieces, "Riverwalk" is a jazz waltz inspired by Neumeister's walks around the Passaic River in New Jersey, "Inclusion" shifts moods and tempos a few times, and the energetic "Ridgewood" has one of Gary Versace's most inventive piano solos of the project.

—Scott Yanow

What Have I Done?: Riverwalk; PickledGinger 1; Gratitude; PickledGinger 2; Acclimation Park; PickledGinger 3; Ridgewood; PickledGinger 4; Renate; PickledGinger 5; Inclusion; PickledGinger 6; Chill'n; What Have I Done? (50:45)

Personnel: Ed Neumeister, trombone; Gary Versace, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Tom Rainey, drums.

Ordering info: edneumeister.com

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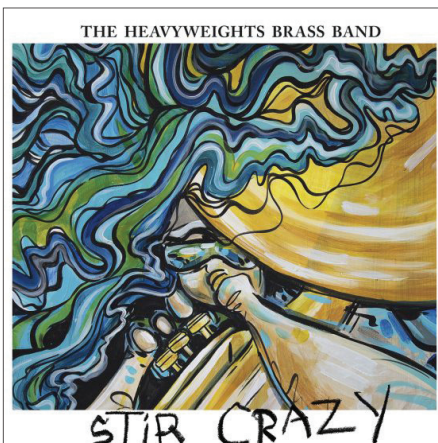
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The Heavyweights Brass Band

Stir Crazy

SLAMMIN MEDIA

★★★★

The Heavyweights Brass Band wants us to let our hair down. With *Stir Crazy*, we are invited to let go and enter a space of celebration. It is its fourth album, recorded mere days before the world shut down in 2020, and the music feels relevant now as much as ever — for those who are seeking a bit of release.

The record features traditional brass band sounds, those made famous in New Orleans,

and spread throughout the land. In this case all the way to Toronto, where the band is based and has produced seven albums of material aimed at delivering NoLa danceability with Great North style. The recording was made in three days at Union Sound Station in Toronto in March of 2020, right before the pandemic forced the band into hibernation.

While the Heavyweights focus on that New Orleans sound, there are also unique moments where popular music gets re-interpreted and folded into that sound.

The band is perhaps at its most exciting when diving into these moments. There is Amy Winehouse's "Rehab" and "Feel Like Makin' Love," a tune made famous by R&B vocalist Roberta Flack. Then the album ends with an inspired cover of Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun." The originals shine, too, with saxophonist Paul Metcalfe and tubist Tom Richards sharing the principal compositional duties.

It is a fun time. Though it might leave you wishing that the party had lasted a bit longer, there's just enough there to shake off the last bit of stir craziness.

—Joshua Myers

Stir Crazy: Sweet Pauly's Boogaloo; Feel Like Makin' Love; Skank You Very Much; Manipogo; Rehab (Intro); Rehab; Stir Crazy; Georgia Pine; Manipogo's Revenge; Black Hole Sun. (35:36)

Personnel: John Pittman, trumpet; Paul Metcalfe, saxophones; RJ Satchithanathan, trumpet; Tom Richards, tuba; Lowell Whitty, drums, percussion; Joel Visentin, organ; Aline Morales, triangle.

Ordering info: heavyweightsbrassband.com

Big Mama Thornton

Sassy Mama: Live At The Rising Sun Celebrity Jazz Club

JUSTIN TIME/NETTWERK

★★★★

This recording by Thornton was recorded live in 1977 at a club in Montreal. It shows the singer in fine form, still youthful at 51. Backed by a solid band, she presents a greatest hits program that still resonates.

The opener, "Tell Me Pretty Baby," shows off Thornton's playful side. She dances around the melody, abandoning the lyrics in favor of jovial asides to the crowd and the band, whispering, shouting and encouraging all to have a good time. She closes with a brief vamp on the Howlin' Wolf/Willie Dixon standard "Spoonful."

She invites guitarist Johnny Primer to step out on B.B. King's "Rock Me Baby," augmenting his lead with her own harmonica fills. Her powerful rendering of "Ball And Chain" opens with a shout-out to Janis Joplin, then she shows off her range with improvisations that jump between whispered asides and fervid growls.

She takes a more humorous approach on "Summertime," playing with the lyrics — "You daddy's good lookin'/ That's why I married him" — while encouraging everyone "to take to



the sky." Her big hit, "Hound Dog," gets a rock groove. She sings with a combination of anger and humor that befits the ironic lyrics.

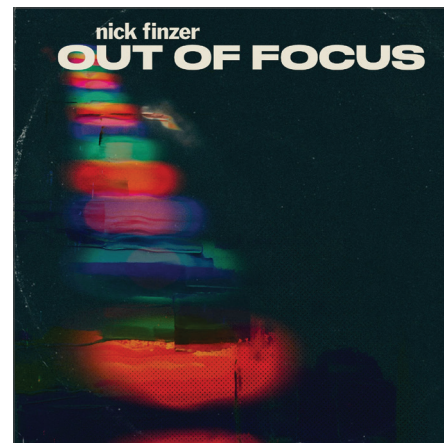
On "Sassy Mama," she abandons the libretto and gives the band space to show off their chops on piano and guitar. The last track on this reissue is an EDM remix of "Hound Dog" that's heavy on dub effects, an odd choice to tack onto such an impressive performance.

—j. poet

Sassy Mama: Live At The Rising Sun Celebrity Jazz Club: Tell Me Pretty Baby; Rock Me Baby; Ball And Chain; Watermelon Man; Summertime; Medley: Hound Dog/Walkin The Dog; Medley: Sweet Little Angel/Three O'Clock; Sassy Mama; Hound Dog (NerdStar remix). (49:10)

Personnel: Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, vocals, harmonica; Phil Guy, Johnny Primer, guitar; Johnny "Big Moose" Walker, piano.

Ordering info: justin-time.com



Nick Finzer

Out Of Focus

OUTSIDE IN MUSIC

★★★★

No one can say Nick Finzer isn't resourceful. The trombonist spends much of *Out Of Focus* as a one-man band, but only three of its eight tracks as a lone voice. Elsewhere, he works with multiples of himself. Ellington and Strayhorn's "The Star-Crossed Lovers" is here arranged for five trombones, all of them Finzer; on "Mood Indigo," he is 14 out of 15 in the arrangement (with Jennifer Wharton taking the bottom end).

Conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Out Of Focus* finds Finzer taking leave of his composure side and doubling down — in more ways than one, obviously, on his playing. Of course he's still writing, having arranged all these tunes, but it's his execution of the writing that matters. It's unclear how many layers he's put on Kenny Garrett's "Sing A Song Of Songs," but there are at least four trombones (one of them Reginald Chapman on bass) and their interplay is as splendid and joyful as if it were live and improvised. It's even more beautiful (if not as ambitious) as the multitudes of "Mood Indigo" — wherein three of Finzer's voices each solo. Perhaps the unaccompanied renderings of "Laura," "Judy" and "Single Petal Of A Rose" also seem unambitious by comparison, though let's give credit where it's due: They're splendid performances that give Finzer nowhere to hide.

Given all of that, the two pieces with a conventional trio — pianist Xavier Davis, bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Quincy Davis (who also appears on "Sing A Song Of Songs") — seem beside the point. They're perfectly nice, especially the tu-way-pocky-way setting of "Stardust." *Out Of Focus*, however, is an album for trombone lovers.

—Michael J. West

Out Of Focus: Sing A Song Of Songs; The Star-Crossed Lovers; Stardust; Laura; Mood Indigo; Judy; Bright Size Life; Single Petal Of A Rose. (43:59)

Personnel: Nick Finzer, trombone; Xavier Davis, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; Quincy Davis, drums; Reginald Chapman, bass trombone (1); Jennifer Wharton, bass trombone (5).

Ordering info: outsidemusic.com



Kirk Lightsey *Coltrane Revisited @ Bird's Eye*

STEEPLECHASE LOOKOUT

★★★★½

The title of *Coltrane Revisited* is a bit of a misnomer. Pianist Kirk Lightsey leads a European quartet (on a live date in Switzerland) through two Trane compositions; “Soultrane,” Tadd Dameron’s feature for the sax legend; two standards he covered on an obscure 1959 date; and “Habiba,” Lightsey’s own signature tune. More to the point, it’s the piano, not Gabor Solla’s tenor, that holds most of the album’s excitement.

Solla, a Hungarian jazz star, is not an unadmirable saxophonist. He actually channels Trane quite a bit, even quoting “Moment’s Notice” on the opening “My Shining Hour.” Moreover, he builds to a delicious frenzy on “Habiba.” However, he simply never achieves the distinction of, say, Lightsey’s collisions of lyricism and chords on “Like Sonny” or “You Say You Care.” What’s more, Solla’s brittle tone does him ill on the ballad “Soultrane,” coarsening the affair, whereas Lightsey goes light and luminous.

As it happens, Solla isn’t even the second most interesting player on the record. Austrian drummer Bernd Reiter has several marathon solos of his own — undoubtedly reaching his acme on the closing “Pursuance” — where he clatters through undulating rhythms that both nod to and steer away from Elvin Jones. He also makes fascinating choices as an accompanist: “You Say You Care,” done at a fast tempo that makes it sound suspiciously like Ellington’s “Cotton Tail,” features rhythmic change-ups that could steamroll a lesser pianist. That Lightsey handles them with ease is further evidence that this is a Lightsey record through-and-through. Don’t come into it looking for a Coltrane tribute.

—Michael J. West

Coltrane Revisited @ Bird's Eye: My Shining Hour; Like Sonny; Habiba; Soultrane; You Say You Care; Pursuance. (66:38)

Personnel: Kirk Lightsey, piano; Gabor Solla, tenor saxophone; Milan Nikolic, bass; Bernd Reiter, drums.

Ordering info: amazon.com



Arbenz X Vistel / Moutin *Vulcanized | Conversation #4*

HAMMER RECORDINGS

★★★★½

In his fourth release of a planned 12 albums composed of different groupings, percussionist Florian Arbenz is definitely having the interesting conversation for which he had hoped.

In what ended up being an impromptu trio album alongside saxophonist Maikel Vistel and bassist Francois Moutin, these three professionals came together well to make a truly great session that’s a total blast to listen to repeatedly.

Everyone here is finding their moments and

the right mood at all the right times. These three found a level of connection so tight, it’s a surprise they aren’t playing together on a regular basis.

Their take on Monk’s “Bemsha Swing” is the jam, with Moutin finding a groove that seeks out the hips and commands them to move with everyone else in the studio, spreading to all those subsequently within earshot following suit. Arbenz’s solo near the close isn’t anything to sneeze at, either, but this was definitely something that can be felt from Moutin’s bass line outward. Everything clicks super hard with their take on Eddie Harris’ “Freedom Jazz Dance,” a superb kind of swing that grabs the attention every time you hear it and seems like the full realization of the title in this particular conversation between these three minds working as one.

Yet with their softs being superbly soft and their hards going extra hard, *Vulcanized* is a fitting addition to Florian Arbenz’s *Conversations* series, knowing just who to call and making magic happen in the room, like all great players. It breeds confidence in the next eight.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Vulcanized | Conversation #4: Bemsha Swing; Pandemia; Freedom Jazz Dance; A Soothing Thrill; Hackensack; Scarlet Woman; Closer; Waltz For Debby. (40:16)

Personnel: Maikel Vistel, saxophone; Florian Arbenz, drums, percussion; Francois Moutin, bass.

Ordering info: florianarbenz.bandcamp.com

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“The soundscape of the album is lush and fervent, sonorous voicings and rich harmonies provide a warm and luxurious orchestral cushion for melancholy melodies and expressive improvised solos.”

— Harri Aavaharju —

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Hedvig Mollestad *Tempest Revisited*

RUNE GRAMMOFON

★★★★

A much-loved Scottish comedian named his recent autobiography *Windswept and Interesting*. The title would serve as a tagline for Hedvig Mollestad's *Tempest Revisited*, except for the realization that her album doesn't get really interesting until the end, which is where the one outbreak of humor occurs. Conceived as a series of responses to fellow Norwegian (electronic) composer Arne Nordheim's *The Tempest*, Mollestad has constructed variations

and meditations that cover the same thematic ground. One might expect, given the provenance and instrumentation, to be reminded of classic Jan Garbarek or Terje Rypdal albums, but the music is actually more retro even than that, with a curious heads-and-solos feel that isn't unpleasing, but doesn't sound very 2021.

While "Kittiwakes In Gusts" seems all on one level — and thus not very evocative of small gulls in a gale — the following "418 (Stairs In Storms)" is all build-up, 11 minutes of it, with a tacked-on climax. The best tracks are the powerfully atmospheric "Winds Approaching," on which the small phalanx of horns makes most sense, and the closing "High Hair." Here, she lets the guys loose on a few big fat riffs.

It's an exciting album in many ways and testament not so much to Mollestad's guitar playing *per se* as to her ability to shape a group round the instrument, something Rypdal was never quite willing to do, always remaining the sole front voice. As such, it will appeal to many. Others might feel inclined to turn back to older records from the same windy corner of the world.

—Brian Morton

Tempest Revisited: Sun On A Dark Sky; Winds Approaching; Kittiwakes In Gusts; 418 (Stairs In Storms); High Hair. (40:50)

Personnel: Hedvig Mollestad, guitar, upright piano, handclaps, vocal; Martin Myhre Olsen, soprano, alto, baritone saxophones; Karl Nyberg, alto saxophone; Peter Eric Vergeni, tenor saxophone, flute; Marte Ebersen, keyboards; Trond Frønes, bass; Ivar Loe Bjørnstad, drums, percussion, gran cassa.

Ordering info: runegrammofon.com

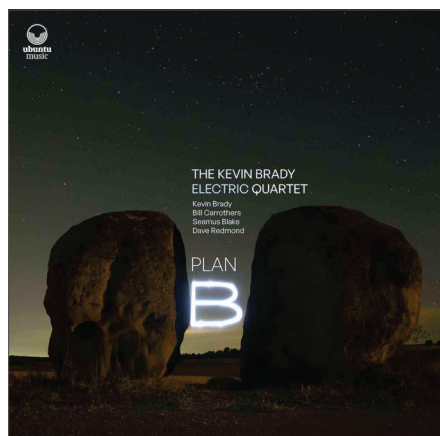
Kevin Brady *Electric Quartet* *Plan B*

UBUNTU

★★★★½

Kevin Brady is a well-regarded drummer from Ireland. Bassist Dave Redmond is a countryman, while keyboardist Bill Carrothers and saxophonist Seamus Blake are both Americans. When they come together, they create a collective sound that is classicist, yet adventurous enough to insist on its own modernity.

The opening "Airbourne" sets the tone nicely; this is not "organ jazz" in the soulful, hard-grooving sense, but traditional hard bop with a little bit of extra funk in the drums and some early '70s fusion emanating from the Fender Rhodes. Brady's playing has an organic looseness and room sound that nods to classic '70s production, while Carrothers' shimmering keyboard brings to mind Return To Forever before it went full prog rock, with some Larry Young-ish psychedelia here and there. Redmond's bass is far from superfluous; in fact, his deep, almost dubby lines allow the Fender Rhodes to float like a cloud or deliver stinging solos without having to worry about providing any kind of anchor. And Blake never treats the other three as his backing band; even



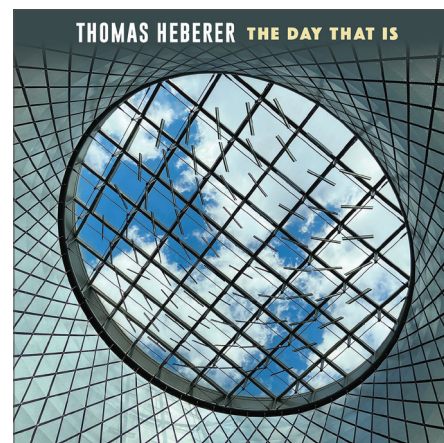
when he's soloing, he's listening. The ironically titled "Short 'n' Sweet" (it comes within 10 seconds of being the longest piece on the album) is a fast, almost danceable groove-a-thon that gives every player space to either solo or make an emphatic, but still supportive, statement. While "Suicide Squeeze" is a fascinating blend of bebop fluidity with '70s soul-jazz. Blake's long, limber excursions place his impressive technique in service of Grover Washington Jr.-esque melodic hooks.

—Philip Freeman

Plan B: Airbourne; Plan B; Short 'n' Sweet; Spindle Top; Suicide Squeeze; Quiet Beach; Out Of The Blue; Wanderlust. (55:45)

Personnel: Seamus Blake, tenor saxophone; Bill Carrothers, Fender Rhodes; Dave Redmond, electric bass; Kevin Brady, drums.

Ordering info: weareubuntumusic.com



Thomas Heberer *The Day That Is*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Trumpeter Thomas Heberer's associations with the ICP Orchestra and the Nu Band bespeak an affinity for democratic institutions, so it's particularly ironic that the German-born, New York-based musician recorded *The Day That Is* on Jan. 6, 2021. This album does not wear politics on its sleeve, but the well-oiled mechanics of its compositions, the ensemble's collegial interplay and the music's inclusive aesthetics provide argument aplenty to not let a moment be defined by its worst aspects.

Heberer built the band in stages, working the rhythm section for a while before settling on fellow German ex-pat Ingrid Laubrock as its second horn. And while the group existed before the pandemic, he spent much of the time after the virus cleared his performance schedule developing a varied set of compositions for them to play. The title tune is so festive, and the leader's growling solo so playful, that you might not notice the music's complexity. "Seconds First" opens as a somber and hushed, but then splinters into a bristling free passage. And "Caro Pook" uses intricate, non-repeating unison figures as launching pads for swaggering forays by drummer Michael Sarin.

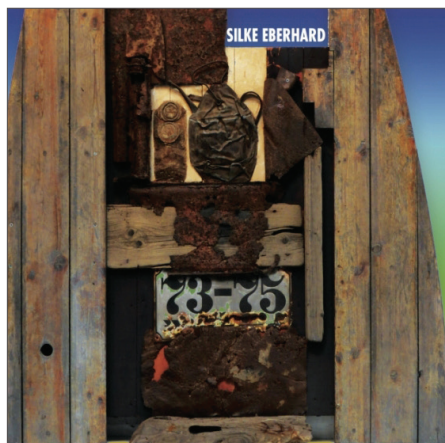
One suspects that another thing that Heberer did with his time off was tend to his chops. He negotiates the high pitches with unerring accuracy and fluid grace, and applies his circular breathing so discretely that you won't even notice how long his lines are, just how right they sound. John Hébert and Michael Sarin have a great, yin-yang partnership. *The Day That Is* goes a long distance towards redeeming the day on which it was made.

—Bill Meyer

The Day That Is: The Day That Is; Erg Chebbi; Seconds First; Caro Pook; Then There Were Three; The Sleeping Bag Unfolds; Closing The Gap; Jimi Metag; One For Roy; Mapping The Distance; The Sky Above. (43:08)

Personnel: Thomas Heberer, trumpet; Ingrid Laubrock, soprano and tenor saxophones; John Hébert, bass; Michael Sarin, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



**Takatsuki Trio Quartett
feat. Silke Eberhard
At Kühlspot**
577 RECORDS

★★★

The Takatsuki Trio Quartett takes the first part of its name from the Japanese city that rests equidistant between Osaka and Kyoto. It takes the second part — the paradoxical part — from its gig format. Besides the core trio of players (pianist Rieko Okuda, bassist Antti Virtaranta and guitarist Joshua Weitzel), the Quartett features an invited musician, usually a horn player, in hypnotic, long-form spontaneous compositions. The group's latest release, *At Kühlspot*, on Brooklyn's 577 Records, is a live recording of one such date with altoist Silke Eberhard, from August 2020.

Eberhard met up with the trio for a set at the Kühlspot Social Club in Berlin, just as live music in Germany was slowly returning after the pandemic lockdown. Reflecting the tentative re-emergence of the music scene, perhaps, the one-track recording from this set opens with breathy, exploratory sounds — barely there at all. But before too long this reserve gives way to densely packed unruliness, as the players take turns predominating in the polychromatic maelstrom.

Okuda, who favors quick, tactile movement, tends to pair off with Eberhard, the most likely of the four to insert melody into her improvisation. Weitzel and Virtaranta, responsible for the deeper colors in the mix, often provide the one element — an electronic plaint or a clacking pulse, for example — that emerges from the fray. Throughout, though, it's the moments of unexpected meditation that stand out, as when the group slows to redirect. In these pauses you can hear the next idea as it sweeps in and races through the players' imaginations.

—Suzanne Lorge

At Kühlspot: Hotspot Kühlspot. (38:56)

Personnel: Silke Eberhard, alto saxophone; Rieko Okuda, piano, voice; Antti Virtaranta, bass; Joshua Weitzel, guitar, shamisen.

Ordering info: [577records.com](https://www.577records.com)



**SWR Big Band/Magnus
Lindgren/John Beasley
Bird Lives**
ACT MUSIC

★★★

Iconic standards are grouped with Charlie Parker originals on the SWR Big Band's *Bird Lives*, with the latter making up more than half the album.

Yet, *Bird Lives* isn't meant just as an interpretive homage to Parker's writing. Nor is it a conservative retreat to established arrangements of well-worn repertoire. Instead, the album's identity exists between the two.

The majority of the album was co-arranged by Magnus Lindgren and John Beasley, except for two tunes handled by Beasley ("Scapple From The Apple" and "I'll Remember April") and one by Lindgren ("Overture To Bird").

Tracks are given new personality thanks to the production of Lindgren, the teamwork between he and Beasley and an assortment of

solos offered by Tia Fuller, Miguel Zenon, Chris Potter and more.

"Cherokee/Koko's" nimble melody and bass line; condensed, piercing timbre of the band's trumpets; and Camille Bertault's agile scat vocals underline a sense of animated urgency. One could imagine the music behind a bustling chase scene in older spy film or a montage in a lighter satirical comedy.

From there, it becomes surprising to hear "Summertime" so heavily embrace jazz fusion. The layered string introduction leads to synthesizers of varying tonal shapes that mingle with more expectant string flourishes. That said, it's evident *Bird Lives* moderates its adventurousness, which ought to keep the displeasure of jazz purists at bay.

"Overture To Bird" thoroughly blends aspects of past and present jazz sound style, in ways meant to best serve the SWR Big Band's grand sound and collective performative skill. The brief reprise of "Summertime" even shows a variation on the amount of modernization to the beloved song, and for those more traditionally inclined, it's reassurance of respect for the history sewn into this album.

—Kira Grunenber

Bird Lives: Cherokee/Koko; Summertime; Scapple From The Apple; I'll Remember April; Confirmation; Donna Lee; Laura; Overture To Bird. (51:18)

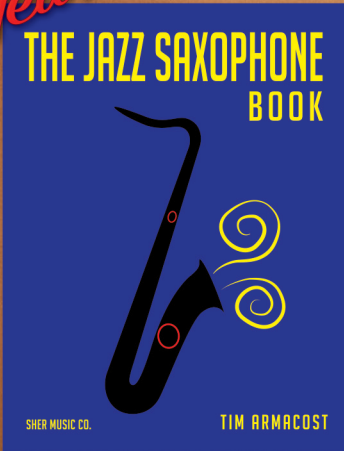
Personnel: Magnus Lindgren, music director, flute, tenor saxophone; John Beasley, piano, keys; Munyungo Jackson, Pedrito Martinez, percussion; Camille Bertault, vocals (1); Chris Potter, tenor saxophone (1); Tia Fuller, alto saxophone (2); Klaus-Peter Schöpfer, guitar (2); Martin Auer, trumpet (3); Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone (4); Axel Kühn, Tenor Saxophone (5); Marc Godfroid, trombone (5, 8); Miguel Zenon, alto saxophone (6); Decebal Badila, bass (6); Andi Maile, tenor saxophone (6); Charles McPherson, alto saxophone (7); Klaus Graf, alto saxophone (8); Matthias Erlewein, alto saxophone (8).

Ordering info: [actmusic.com](https://www.actmusic.com)

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Hasaan Ibn Ali's Time Is Now

Add Hasaan Ibn Ali to the pantheon of great jazz pianists. Add him, too, to the list of eccentric and troubled pioneers of 1960s jazz. Nearly 60 years after the enigmatic and brilliant man born William Henry Langford Jr. in 1931 first made his mark, his time seems to have come.

Omnivore Recordings, a Los Angeles label known for its rock and pop resurrections, has released ***Retrospect In Retirement Of Delay: The Solo Recordings (77:47/73:58 ★★★★★)***, a two-CD collection of the native Philadelphian's work, including an "Extemporaneous Prose-Poem" in which he vocalizes about a walk in the park. Essays and reminiscences by avant-garde pianist Matthew Shipp, author/pianist/jazz historian Lewis Porter and Ibn Ali champion/caretaker Alan Sukoienig deepen this essential package.

More than two hours of Ibn Ali's musical wellspring immerse the listener in a unique musical universe braiding rhapsody and groove in an instantly identifiable way. Nobody else sounds like the prodigious Ibn Ali, though his dazzling, explosive pianism can conjure his friend Bud Powell, his spiritual mate Thelonious Monk, even the prodigious and similarly undersung Phineas Newborn, like Ibn Ali a disciple of Art Tatum.

This Omnivore release follows another Ibn Ali recording: *Metaphysics: The Lost Atlantic Album*, featuring the pianist in a quartet setting also highlighting his soulmate Odean Pope on saxophone. It was originally recorded for Atlantic Records, where drummer Max Roach became Ibn Ali's advocate following the 1965 release of *The Max Roach Trio Featuring The Legendary Hasaan*, but Atlantic ultimately passed on it, and the tapes were destroyed in the 1970s in a warehouse fire. Fortunately, copies existed, and after several buried decades, *Metaphysics* finally rose from the ashes.

An icon of the Philadelphia jazz scene of the 1960s who is said to have worked with John Coltrane, Ibn Ali also was a fan of the similarly inventive, if sparer, pianist Elmo Hope. He might have been self-taught, but there's no doubt of his mastery, and of a technique so profound it may have scared other players. A musician so commanding might have been daunting to work with. In addition, according to the *Retrospect* booklet, Ibn Ali, who lived with his parents until they died in 1972, was mercurial, moody and an addict. He died in 1980 in a convalescent home.

None of his difficult personal circumstances prevented him from making music so unbounded and inventive it carves its own space, carrying the listener away. Ibn Ali was a piano savant. Leroy Johnson, a visual artist who was his drug rehabilitation counselor,



Hasaan Ibn Ali

COURTESY-OMNIVORE RECORDINGS

told Sukoienig Ibn Ali wasn't that interested in "talk therapy"; he would rather play a piano the building's previous owner had left in a counseling room and reminisce about the music he and fellow Philadelphian Pope, the saxophonist on *Metaphysics*, used to play.

Taped in 1962, 1964 and the pivotal year of 1965 by University of Pennsylvania students Sukoienig and his friend, the saxophonist David Shrier, these 21 tracks demonstrate Ibn Ali's marauding musical conception, which, like his technique, is dazzling and original. Recorded by Sukoienig and Shrier in informal settings at the University of Pennsylvania, these are extravagant improvisations.

Whether the vehicle is Ibn Ali's own work — the deconstructions of his "True Train" speak to his talent for different approaches to improvisation, the object of a thirst that drew him to a piano wherever he could find one — or his startling interpretation of standards, like a frenetic "Cherokee" or a relatively placid "Sweet And Lovely," his rule was to wring all possible energy out of a tune.

Surrender to that drive in his deconstruction/expansion of Monk's "Off Minor," in which Ibn Ali states the jagged melody in numerous ways, embroidering it with runaway right-hand swirls as his left hand hammers for control. For a more courtly, more romantic improvisation, try on his warm reading of Irving Berlin's "They Say It's Wonderful." For sheer bravura, dive into "Lover," the pianist's equally exhaustive and exhilarating take on the Rodgers and Hart classic.

Sukoienig's reminiscences about his interactions with Ibn Ali, bolstered by testimonials from musicians who worked with him, help explain the devotion this startling musician inspired. Ibn Ali is finally getting the due he never amassed in his short, chiaroscuro life. It's high time.

DB

Ordering info: omnivorerecordings.com



Sedato Sedato

SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

Separately, Tim Lefebvre and Jason Linder have yards-long CVs littered with names like Meshell Ndegeocello and the Tedeschi Trucks Band. Together, they've been recording with Donny McCaslin since the 2012, and backed David Bowie on his final LP, *Blackstar*. What do guys like that do when they want to cut loose?

They retreat to the studio with a sympathetic engineer, and make the electronica of their dreams. Their project's name, *Sedato*, derives from an inside joke involving a pill-popped dog they encountered at an Italian airport. It also serves to spoof their music, which is anything but sedate.

If one were to sum up the duo's sound as a punch line, it might be, "What if Jan Hammer came out of retirement to jam with Boards of Canada on the soundtrack for the next *Terminator* movie?"

Lindner's synth tones flicker like sodium lamps perceived through the fog, Lefebvre's bass is smoggy with distortion, and their programmed beats stomp and sizzle. If electronic grime is your poison, they are behind the bar, dispensing generous pours.

Balancing the sonic grit are some irrepressible pop instincts. Each of this self-released, digital-only EP's six tracks packs an unavoidable earworm. Some of their processed sounds are so vivid, they're hooks unto themselves. And right when one's senses start to dull from the onslaught, Lindner slips in a wistful keyboard melody.

However, *Sedato's* skillfully distressed surfaces are just that — surfaces. Like an overhopped IPA, they don't leave you wanting more.

—Bill Meyer

Sedato: innsaie; øvrncfndnt; sleep; xscvt mycelium takeover; so numb. (25:31)

Personnel: Tim Lefebvre, bass; Jason Lindner, keyboards.

Ordering info: sedato.bandcamp.com



Ember with Orrin Evans *No One Is Any One*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★½

The first half of Ember's latest release, *No One Is Any One*, features the Brooklyn-based trio operating within a register of simple, stripped-down melodies punctuated by strong and deep bass lines.

But when pianist Orrin Evans arrives midway through the effort, the meeting of their two styles produces something special. "Peace Of Deoxygenated Sleep" is a tune befitting its peculiar title. And Evans' presence pro-

vides ample space for what turns out to be the album's peak.

Along with that moment, there is much to appreciate here. Noah Garabedian's bass playing in particular is worth a listen. His is the first sound we hear, and as we are gradually brought into the orbit of Garabedian, Caleb Wheeler Curtis on alto saxophone and Vinnie Sperrazza on drums.

While Garabedian provides rhythmic wow, Curtis offers melodic filling. But it is Vinnie Sperrazza's consistent drum work that makes Ember's work effectively well-rounded.

The group came together in 2017, starting out with just rehearsals that were more conversations about music. Those conversations turned into gigs and gigs turned into tours.

Evans came into the session as a friend and collaborator with Curtis, just looking to help.

Some have called Ember an experimental band. Often the label experimental is used to denote a sound that defies a convention or category. And maybe that word is too small to capture what is going on with *No One Is Any One*.

—Joshua Myers

No One Is Any One: Reanimation (Zombie Tune); Josephine And Daphne; No One Is Any One; Pilot Light; Glass House; Peace Of Deoxygenated Sleep; Thomas; Graceful Without Grace; Chia-Sized Standing Desk; Harvey Pekar. (56:10)

Personnel: Caleb Wheeler Curtis, alto saxophone; Noah Garabedian, bass; Vinnie Sperrazza, drums; Orrin Evans, piano (6–9).

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.bandcamp.com

Nicole Henry *Time To Love Again*

BANISTER RECORDS

★★★★½

Since her debut album in 2004, Nicole Henry has earned time on the Billboard jazz charts as well as accolades in Japan and her adopted home of Miami. On her eighth outing, *Time To Love Again*, she offers an exuberant, joyous, immaculately executed set of '70s-ish jazz and pop love songs that doesn't always transcend the flavor of the artists she is covering. These include Nina Simone, Sade and Stevie Wonder. That said, those tracks do have staying power and Henry and her excellent arrangers stamp a measure of her personality on others.

Henry's crisp, jazzy takes on James Taylor's "Your Smiling Face" and Buffy Sainte-Marie's "Until It's Time For You To Go" are highlights, with the latter showcasing a bit of an ingenu-rasp that recalls Karrin Allyson. Henry's reading of Joan Armatrading's gospel-tinged "Love And Affection" serves as an anthemic climax. "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" comes as lightly double-clutched fusion, and Henry imparts romantic sincerity to Marvin Sewell's creamy arrangement of "Midnight At The Oasis," which features a dreamy Gregoire Maret harmonica solo. "Wild Is The Wind,"



another Simone treasure, goes atmospheric to the edge of smooth.

So: high-end lounge set or artistic breakthrough? About 50-50, but the odds are probably in her favor to do better in the future.

—Paul de Barros

Time To Love Again: Feeling Good; Midnight At The Oasis; Your Smiling Face; I Didn't Know What Time It Was; Is It A Crime?; Until It's Time For You To Go; Wild Is The Wind; Love And Affection; Overjoyed. (45:08)

Personnel: Nicole Henry, vocals; Jean Caze, Jim Hacker, Teddy Mulet, trumpet; Mulet, Jorge Doral Jr., trombone; Tom McCormick, John Michalak, Troy Roberts, tenor saxophone; Pete Wallace, keyboards; Doug Emery, organ; Aaron Lebos, Dan Warner, Camilo Velandia, guitar; Eric England, bass; Dave Chiverton, drums; Richard Bravo, Eduardo Rodriguez, percussion; Gregoire Maret, harmonica; Samantha Natalie, Nikki Kidd, Lenora Jaye, Rachel Brown, background vocals.

Ordering info: nicolehenry.com

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NEW ALBUM "ASHREINU"

JANUARY 2022





Henry Cole has released the sprawling new album *Buscando La Vida*.

HENRY COLE: AVOIDING PREDICTABLE GROOVES

When drummer Henry Cole recruited rapper Negro González to appear on “De Frente,” an outcry of an offering on Cole’s sprawling new album, *Buscando La Vida*, he expected González — a fellow native of the Villa Locura section of Añasco, Puerto Rico — to hit the ground running.

“I told him, ‘Negro, there’s no time for building up,’” an animated Cole recalled in a November Zoom call from Madrid, where he had just finished a tour with saxophonist Miguel Zenón’s band. “I want you, from the beginning to the end, on fire!”

And that is how González proceeded —

delivering the kind of compelling rap that the title, which translates to “Head On,” suggests.

The irony is that the fiery urgency Cole, 42, communicated to González — and that is present, from simmer to full flame, throughout *Buscando La Vida* — can be

traced to an actual fire that, in September 2018, consumed Cole’s Manhattan apartment. The blaze precipitated a move back to Puerto Rico, where, on home turf after 15 years in New York, he found the impetus to produce the album.

The album opens on a slow burn with

"No Estamos Solos" ("We Are Not Alone") — a lush, classically minded piece that integrates 10 members of his Villa Locura band, recorded in Puerto Rico, with the Metropole Orkest, recorded in the Netherlands. The orchestra session found Cole on a 4 a.m. video conference with the musicians, marking the end of a long struggle to organize and record with a full complement of horns and strings.

"When they started playing, I started crying," he recalled.

As with the opener, pulling together the component parts of the closer, "Vueltas" ("Turns"), proved no mean feat. Drawing on the textures of the Mississippi Delta and the rhythms of West Africa, it features a chorus set against the stylings of U.K.-born, Nigeria-bred singer Duke Amayo, who recorded his part in Atlanta. The vocal parts had begun with Cole singing in the shower — and nearly ended there as he despaired about finding a lead singer with the sensitivity to grasp, and the pipes to improve on, what he was doing in those waterlogged moments.

"It was a hard match to find someone like that," he said. But, he was able to do so with Amayo, whose interpretation captures

the complexity of Cole's aesthetic, weaving the spirit of his other band, the Fela Kuti-inspired Afrobeat Collective, into the Villa Locura mix.

The album's other tracks are a varied lot, often sharing a retrospective bent. At eight-and-a-half minutes, "Y En Sueños Te Persigo" ("And In Dreams I Chase You") is a fevered journey fashioned around a trippy solo by guitarist Giovanni De La Rosa that harkens back to Cole's days as a self-described rock 'n' roll kid. At barely a minute, "H.C.S." is a cheeky remembrance of an absent father (Henry Cole Simon), back-grounded by a chirpy clap-a-thon realized with Logic software.

Cole's voice may echo that of his native island, but across the album's eight tracks — recorded in December 2020 amid the turbulence of the pandemic and his personal travails — it emerges as grand synthesis of ever-shifting sounds that, in their refusal to settle into a predictable groove, befit the tumult of the time.

"Sometimes it's chaotic," Michael Brauer, who mixed the album, said in a tone of admiration tempered by caution.

Brauer, who has mixed everyone from the Rolling Stones to the latest Brazilian

bands, asserted that the multitude of influences in Cole's sound — and the intensity of his commitment to it — made his music difficult to place: "Where in Billboard am I going to see this record? They come up with all these categories — which one is Henry going to be played in?"

After mixing Cole's unreleased album *Simple*, recorded in 2018 at New York's Electric Lady Studios, Brauer brought the music to legendary record producer Carlos Alomar. Cole, recalling a subsequent conversation with Alomar, wrote in an email: "I remember he said the album sounded 'too real,' that it needed more processing, etcetera. But the 'real' aspect was what I was trying to showcase."

The tracks on *Simple* were real enough to use as application documents for a Chamber Music America grant he won before the pandemic hit. He has already released singles from the album and hopes to release the full collection on his label, La Música Artesanal. Meanwhile, he is forging ahead, admittedly stuck in a marketing "limbo."

"Nowadays, it's all about the playlist, and no one knows on what playlist to put this music," he said. "But I can't do anything but keep doing the work." —Phillip Lutz

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COURTESY OF JON GORDON

Jon Gordon's latest album is *Stranger Than Fiction* (ArtistShare).

JON GORDON: STRANGE TRUTHS

As a young boy living amid poverty and dysfunction in a home on Staten Island, Jon Gordon clung to the thought that the brilliant baritone saxophonist Bob Gordon had been his father. As it turned out, Bob, his alcoholic mother's first husband, was nothing of the sort — as Jon discovered around age 10.

Despite this, or because of it, Jon, who is now 54, learned to be resourceful early on. He took up the saxophone and — as he says, aided by musical “fathers” like Phil Woods, Charles McPherson and Eddie Locke — improbably became one of the sharpest and most sensitive players on the scene today.

“It’s an odd background,” he allowed in a November Zoom call.

Yet, he added, it seems a little less odd in a world in which the improbable — one

in which alternative facts and authoritarian leaders are ascendant — has become real. And that has fostered in him a desire to explore the nature of reality itself.

“In recent years there’s been a reality divide, and that was something I’ve been thinking about in my own life,” he said. “In many ways, truth has been stranger than fiction, and that is what I have been feeling.”

The vehicle for his exploration is *Stranger Than Fiction* (ArtistShare). The album, out

late last summer, is his first nonet collection in 12 years. While its 10 tracks, all originals, are neither explicitly political nor relentlessly personal — they do not wave banners or wallow in misery — they shrewdly convey a sense of the present-day disorientation.

Led by Gordon’s understated alto saxophone, the title tune plays with implication and misdirection — weaving its way through various permutations of the melody until, about six minutes into the seven-minute track, it suddenly settles into a vamp topped by a Fabio Ragnelli drum solo. Coming out of the vamp, the tune winds down and the theme never returns.

“I was thinking not to have a standard kind of motion and development,” Gordon said. “The idea is to displace that sense of where you expect it to go.”

A similar sense of displacement is conjured by the opener, “Pointillism.” On it, the members of the nonet improvise freely, creating spikey textures their painting counterparts might recognize — but with a cool abstraction they might not. In its asymmetric ebb and flow, the work never quite offers the ear a safe spot on which to land.

Yet the effort coheres, and that is no small wonder. Like the entire set of tunes, it was recorded in stages, with five musicians in isolation booths laying down a basic track in a Winnipeg, Manitoba, studio and the rest adding their parts later from locations elsewhere in Canada and the U.S. Gordon then put it all together in post-production.

“I thought, ‘Let’s see what’s possible if you put paint on canvas and shape it,’” he said.

Pandemic driven, the recording arrangements seem to feed a theme of social disconnectedness. Guitarist Jocelyn Gould, 30, said that while she felt uncomfortably separated when she first entered the studio in October 2020 — after finally emerging from quarantine, the band was again positioned at an unaccustomed remove, this time by masks and social distancing — the setup ultimately yielded interpretive dividends.

“It was a new thing, very bizarre, and we were still in a state of shock, wondering what was happening to the world,” she said. But, she added, “When I listen to the album, I hear a bit of an improvised feeling, a unique vibe we wouldn’t have gotten if we had been playing for six months.”

Gordon deals with music and life with yogic equanimity. He has quietly but forcefully overcome privation; taken on competitors, like those he vanquished in winning the 1996 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Saxophone Competition; and controlled his artistic destiny, adopting the crowdfunding ArtistShare model a decade-and-a-half ago.

“What I really like about it,” he said, “is that, at the end of the day, what I’m not happy with I’m responsible for.” —Phillip Lutz

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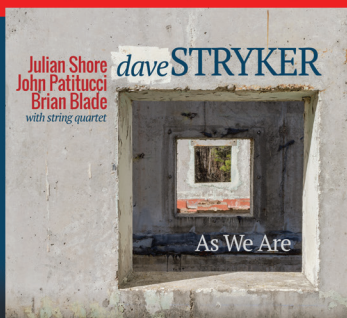
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ORENDA RECORDS: AURAL EXPERIMENTATION IN LA

Entering its 13th year, the Angel City Jazz Festival has become a regular October institution in Los Angeles, a first-rate sampling of some of the most adventurous music on the jazz spectrum from among the best creative improvisers and composers in the world, fulfilling festival creator Rocco Somazzi's vision of bringing that experience to this city.

This year's lineup included appearances by international luminaries such as Myra Melford, Elliott Sharp and Jamie Baum. But it has always been a priority for Somazzi to shine a spotlight on talent from the West side of the country, and many local artists unknown to virtually anyone outside of Los Angeles — and even within the city — have received opportunities to showcase their abilities. And for those artists, there is perhaps no greater advocate for their success than trumpeter Daniel Rosenboom, founder of the L.A.-based label Orenda Records.

Somazzi, recognizing this, decided to enlist Rosenboom as a co-presenter this year, dedicating an entire evening to a five-set celebration of Orenda. "I'm a big fan of [Rosen-

boom's] music," Somazzi said over coffee in Northridge a few days later. "He's one of those musicians who was not just interested in playing — he was interested in having a partnership where he could contribute beyond his field. He always thinks beyond the simple presenter-musician relationship."

Even Somazzi admits that watching multiple sets of experimental jazz can take its toll on an audience. It's why he eventually changed his format from a single all-day event to the current programming of multiple-evening, double-bill shows. Still, having an actual "big day" festival was alluring to the promoter, so he proposed an evening-length partnership with Orenda.

Leading off the performance, at the two-

stage venue 2220 Arts and Archives near the Echo Park district of L.A., was a big band led by trombonist Jon Hatamiya. His innovative large-ensemble writing included pieces for two electric guitarists and two bass trombones, as well as a ballad that featured a woodwind section of all alto saxophones. Next was the chamber group Bridge to Everywhere, an all-world-music ensemble with strings, percussion and a multi-purposeful performer in Neelamjit Dhillon, who played alto saxophone and bansuri flute and did stunning vocalizations of Hindustani rhythms.

Pianist Cathlene Pineda's original quartet music (featuring trumpeter Kris Tiner) demonstrated a level of expressiveness and empathy that reflects the group's long work-

ing friendship, while guitarist Alexander Noice's performance-art sextet threatened to send the audience to the ER with bleeding eardrums and blown minds. The finale featured Rosenboom on trumpet, in a quartet with pianist Joshua White, bassist Richard Giddens and drummer Mark Ferber, deftly slicing through rhythmically challenging originals and free-improv.

Rosenboom, a well-trained classical trumpeter, is one of the first-call session players for the sprawling L.A. entertainment industry. It's one of the more lucrative jobs a gigging musician can have. "I feel very fortunate to be able to work in the Hollywood studios," Rosenboom said, "because it affords me the opportunity to fund a lot of this creative experimentation in a way that I don't think a lot of artists get the opportunity to do."

The morning after the show, Rosenboom sat for an interview in his converted garage studio in a modest home in a nice neighborhood of Long Beach. Even in this overpriced housing market, he likely could afford to live a more upscale lifestyle if he hadn't, for years, been reinvesting his income into keeping Orenda afloat. "Our operating budget is basically zero," he said matter-of-factly. Still, Orenda has churned out 92 records, rapidly approaching 100 releases in just its seventh year of existence.

While his pedigree is in classical music, Rosenboom is an avid fan of all kinds of music from atonal to metal, and his label reflects that eclecticism. "These are all artists who have interesting visions, that I feel are connected via community and a like-minded approach to making music in the modern era, which is much less defined by genre or boundaries of style, and much more fluid in terms of the way that it assimilates influences from all of our listening experience," he said in describing Orenda's artist roster.

It is significant that three of the five band-leaders performing that night, and many of the artists in every group (as well as the author of this article), share a connection to California Institute of the Arts, the school founded by Walt Disney and a fertile breeding ground for Pixar. In contrast to the animation department, the music school has always shied away from such direct vocational aspirations, choosing instead to encourage making music in as pure an art form as possible. Rosenboom's father, David, just retired last year as the longtime dean of the School of Music at CalArts, telling his son after the Orenda show that he remembered the graduations of so many who performed.

Rosenboom is quick to point out that there are many artists on his label who are not even from the United States, let alone

the school he graduated from, but he nevertheless acknowledges the philosophical influence. "CalArts really embraces an open mindset about what music can be," he affirmed. "And a lot of the people I went to school with ended up staying around Los Angeles after school, so we continued to work together and create projects. What's been amazing to see in the growth of the label is that sense of community spreading its tendrils out ... to me that's the most interesting part of what the label does. Really, that's what we're all here for — connecting people and connecting with people." Rosenboom knows what it is like for independent musicians to try to foster their own creations. "It was like they were on their own little island with a megaphone saying, 'Hey, we're doing something over here.' My thought was if we could just put everyone on the same island, then people would see that there's something happening over there." And thus far, he has backed up his commitment to this hidden Los Angeles art-music community with his own money, time and a lot of effort.

"I feel he has the most impressive work ethic I've ever seen," Somazzi said. "The label itself is a testament to his abilities and organizational skills. I know it's an uphill battle, but instead of backing down, he just does more and more."

—Gary Fukushima



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Spatial Mic by Voyage Audio

Spatial Audio & Jazz

In 2017, I was about to release my second studio album, *Skyward Eye*, which is a cinematic post-jazz narrative inspired by the role-playing game aesthetic and lore of the mid-'90s. The project had me thinking day and night about what was next. How could we create music that offered a different, more immersive listening experience than jazz usually afforded? Something that placed the listener in a space of narrative control — stepping back from the performative spectacle of soloists burning over changes and eliciting the occasional collective “jazz woo” from hunched crowds. When the album was being mastered, an ad crossed my Facebook feed that would change my outlook on the experience of listening, forever.

The world's first pair of “immersive, spatial audio” headphones had just launched a Kickstarter campaign. Intrigued, I traveled to San Diego to test them. I was placed into a circle, adorned with a VR headset and was transported into an empty, white, Matrix-like space where I was instructed to reach out and grab various glowing orbs — stems of audio-looping synth sounds — and “play with them.” Clutching each sound in my hands, I moved these sounds around my head, tossed them

and drew them close: sound as a physical object. Fast-forward to 2020, and I recorded and mixed the Angel City Jazz Festival entirely in spatial audio. I recently delivered more than 3,000 immersive soundscapes to Splice, one of the world's largest sample platforms, and I suppose you can say I've established a new directionality to my career and craft.

I encourage the jazz community, from artist to broadcaster to presenter, to consider the merits spatial audio to do everything from streamlining home recording sessions and capturing incredibly realistic live shows, to creating wild, exploratory sound worlds that can only be described by being experienced.

But how do we even get started with such a “new” technology? It's not as hard as you'd think. To make it as simple as possible, we'll take a beginner's approach to exploring spatial audio for jazz.

What Is Spatial Audio?

Spatial audio, as it has become known, is best described as immersive audio that surrounds the listener. Because of its externalization (i.e. putting sound around the listener), spatial audio emulates the natural way in which we experience sound. Spatial audio

is an umbrella term that encompasses both workflow and format, of which there are many ranging from totally free and simple to expensive and complicated. The creative applications are broad, from capturing the perfect performance as experienced by the musicians on stage (or by the audience) to creating spatially driven concept albums, making VR music videos, apps and everything in between.

Best Spatial Audio Formats for Jazz

There are essentially two workflow methods and three mainstream file formats to be immediately aware of for spatial audio:

- **Scene-based audio workflows** revolve around multichannel, ambisonic captures of audio, such as live recordings of your festival or rehearsal using an ambisonic microphone.

- **Object-based audio workflows** treat individual sound sources as virtual “objects” and allow you to pan and mix them into a virtual scene, which can then be rendered as a multichannel scene (such as exporting an Atmos master) or simply left as is to be experienced in the DAW, game engine or app.

These workflows are commonly combined for best results. Some of the best tools for both workflows can be found at the end of this article in our “resources” list.

- **Binaural stereo** uses special filtering known as an HRTF (head related transfer function) to externalize the audio around the listener without the need for multichannel speaker setups. Whether you've created an ambisonic recording at a live show, or used an object-based mixing workflow in your DAW, binaural stereo is as simple as exporting the master channel from your DAW, and uploading to Bandcamp, Soundcloud, Spotify or any other platform. In fact, when you listen to an Atmos mix on headphones, you are listening to a *real-time* binaural “rendering” of the multichannel Atmos file that integrates *head-tracking* to let you turn your head while the sound stays in virtual space around you. Standard binaural audio is commonly referred to as being “headlocked” in that the listener cannot change their position and the sound moves with them. I've included a comparison of clips from stereo versus binaural at <http://overworld.studio/downbeat>.

- **Ambisonic audio** is extremely flexible and the most commonly used multichannel format in VR productions because of its emphasis on capturing a “scene” of audio. In live recording, an ambisonic microphone uses multiple capsules to capture a sound field in a sphere, which can be edited in your DAW, allowing you to render everything from mono

virtual mics, to the entire scene. Ambisonic audio can be decoded binaurally for headphone playback, or decoded for any custom speaker array. Ambisonic deliveries of a project can be incorporated into VR videos for YouTube and Facebook, to video game engines and custom projects and platforms. On devices that incorporate head-tracking, like a phone or VR headset, the listener can move their head within the space, increasing immersion.

• **Dolby Atmos** describes both a workflow and custom format, designed by Dolby, that originated in cinema as an expanded array of surround channels that include height and extra-wide speaker placements. As it exists for music, Atmos is effective in that it has created a somewhat standardized workflow in ProTools, and is the primary mainstream format for Apple Music streaming. The workflow is object based, and has excellent spatial panning and resolution.

Workflows & Deliveries

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the new terms and formats, but at the end of the day you're really just dealing with multichannel or stereo files. You may want to consult an expert engineer if you're doing a professional release. But it's not as hard as you'd think to simply get started. So where is the low-hanging fruit in terms of creative output for jazz?

Generally speaking, you'll need a DAW to work in this format. Any DAW will do for binaural (and the tools used to create binaural mixes like Dear Reality). But if you want to process ambisonic files or render multichannel deliveries, you'll need a multichannel-capable DAW like ProTools, Logic Pro X or Reaper. Based on my experience with live artists (such as the 2020 Angel City Jazz Festival) we can essentially break down the best use cases into three categories: live recording, live streaming and studio mixing.

Live Recording

Using an ambisonic microphone to capture a live performance is actually one of the fastest and most efficient ways to work. It allows for maximum spontaneity, and loads of flexibility when you import the audio capture into your DAW.

One ambisonic microphone that I recommend is the Spatial Mic by Voyage Audio. The microphone contains many specially calibrated capsules in it (in this case, eight) that capture audio from all directions surrounding the microphone. Using software, these eight channels of raw audio (usually called A Format) are transcoded to B Format or "ambisonics" audio, which can be played back on any monitoring array from a surround sound setup to a pair of headphones. This particular mic can connect easily to

your iPhone or computer via USB cable, so no external interface is needed.

Using a hybrid method, you can easily combine an ambisonic recording with close microphones (called "spot mics") and then mix them in post-production to give a very high degree of clarity that is especially useful in jazz. This method is what I used to mix the Angel City Jazz Festival in 2020, when COVID shutdowns caused the festival to go digital.

Live Streaming & Spatial Audio

Live performance and improvisation are obviously a large part of what makes jazz special, and spatial audio gives artists the opportunity to more accurately document the feeling of being at a live show. In an age of metaverses and live streaming platforms, it stands to reason that incorporating spatial audio can enhance these presentation mediums and give your show or stream a cut above the noise. This section assumes you understand audio routing to a streaming platform already.

• **Object Based Mixing for Livestream:** Most semi-professional to professional artists who are streaming on Twitch are sending their audio into a DAW and then sending the master out to Twitch, YouTube or Facebook for streaming, so why not use a few spatial audio plugins to give your audience a deeper experience? Since you'll be streaming in stereo, it's easiest to use a plugin suite like DearVR Pro, or perhaps the IEM free suite.

• **Ambisonic Microphone for Live Streaming:** If you're dealing with a band in a room, or just want to do things more simply, an ambisonic microphone like the Voyage Audio Spatial Mic can be a great choice. The work flow is simple: Set up your band around the mic and dial in your levels the way you would naturally balance a live show in an acoustic room. Next, have the Spatial Mic set up with its accompanying plugin in your DAW. Finally, add a "binaural decoder" plugin to the track after the Voyage Audio plugin to decode the ambisonics signal to binaural. Feed this stereo master out of your DAW to whatever streaming platform you're using. Everyone listening will get a great mix that sounds the way it would be sitting right there onstage with the band.

Studio Mixing

Perhaps the world I am most immersed in

at the moment is studio mixing. The tools I use range from Dolby Atmos in ProTools, to the glut of free ambisonic and object-based plugins in Reaper (an affordable DAW with multichannel support), to doing binaural production in Ableton Live or Reason Studio.

Spatial mixing in a DAW all begins with getting the best quality stems (individual tracks) from the artist as possible, and casting a vision for what kind of space that music will inhabit and what story we are trying to tell. From there, it's a matter of sound. You can move things closer, further away, above, below, behind, and using automation takes the sonic storytelling possibilities to the next level. For example, check out a spatial audio simulation mixed in Ableton, of an alien invasion in an open field, that I've posted online at <http://overworld.studio/downbeat>. In this example I used DearVR Pro in Ableton and took advantage of Ableton's slick and easy automation lanes to make tanks roll by, ships fly up above, and laser beams shoot past your ears.

For the Angel City Jazz Festival, I mixed 12 different bands using a hybrid technique of traditional mixing for stems, object mixing and ambisonic miking. In post, I used spatial panners to line up the audio stems with the ambisonic track, so as to add detail and clarity to every musician, while maintaining the big room feeling of the ambisonic microphone. The end result makes it feel like you're in the studio audience. This was done using Reaper as my DAW.

Opportunity Knocks

As a jazz artist, I feel that spatial audio gives us the historic opportunity to take back audiences, bring them in closer to what the music means to us as artists. For the presenter, it provides a way to create a realistic historical document of performances and give virtual attendees a more profound experience. If you're an artist or presenter thinking of diving in, I recommend you download the free plugins listed below and start building. **DB**

Jonathan Rowden is a saxophonist, VR film composer and producer, sound designer and technologist. He is the founder of the pioneering spatial sound design and music studio Overworld Studio, and the co-founder and Chief Business Development Officer of GPU Audio. Rowden's work can be found permeating the libraries of Splice.com as one of their preferred studios for the Field and Foley and Splice Explores labels. He is available for consultations, lessons/tutorials and production inquiries to better the lives and careers of jazz artists around the world. For more info, visit him online at the Overworld Studio website (<http://overworld.studio>).

RESOURCES

The following Spatial Audio resources include helpful setup tutorials:

- **Dear Reality** (spatial mixing plugins for any DAW)
- **Voyage Audio** (affordable spatial mic and plugins)
- **Mach1** (excellent spatial mixing tools and SDK for apps/games)
- **IEM** (free spatial mixing tools and ambisonic tools)
- **SPARTA** (free spatial mixing tools and ambisonic tools)

Sessionwire 2.0 Streamlines Online Recording Workflow

If there was any one glimmer of positivity for jazz musicians during the pandemic, it would be that many of us learned how to make music in isolation. We bought microphones, preamps, USB interfaces, reference monitors, boom stands, ring lights, phone mounts, etc. Collaborative tracks and videos by jazz artists began to flood the internet, with livestreams replacing gigs for all of 2020 into the first half of 2021. Truthfully, it was an opportunity for jazz musicians to finally catch up to where the much of the larger global music community was already headed.

"Home studios now are being used at all different levels, the beginner as well as professionals," said Peter Michael Escovedo, a music and television producer, part of the great Escovedo musical clan that includes his father, Pete Escovedo, and his sister, Sheila E. He told me over the phone from his Los Angeles home that he routinely hires musicians from out of town for his projects, turning their audio tracks into first-rate recordings without ever stepping into the room with the performers.

It's a far cry from how his famous family used to record. Escovedo, now 60, recalled sessions with his father when he was still in his teens. "Everybody was in the studio at the same time, always," he remembered. "We were all there ... the horns, percussion ... we hashed tons of stuff out in the studio.

"That's a lost art," Escovedo continued. "With the way we record [now], there's a ton of benefits from doing it in [a home] studio on a computer. Unfortunately, there's no creativity or interactive points about it, because you're in a room by yourself."

Being alone in a room is a near-universal experience as of late. Zoom and other video apps saved our society by allowing us to connect with our fellow humans. Alas, as most musicians found out, the computer screen left a lot to be desired from a musical standpoint. Latency issues made it impossible for anyone to play together with any rhythmic synchronization, let alone a groove. And it's often difficult to even hear what someone on the other end is playing, due to video conferencing apps deciding that music is "noise" that needs to be canceled out of the conversation. Why couldn't there be a video app that

worked like Zoom, but was tailored specifically for musicians?

The answer to that question just might be something called Sessionwire, an online platform currently in version 2.0.

Robin Leboe summarized his concept of the company he co-founded, speaking over video from his home in Vancouver, B.C. "We essentially took video chat, like Zoom, but now we've integrated it so that our software can talk, too," he explained, noting the difficulties of trying to run a remote recording session using a hodgepodge of apps like Zoom, FaceTime, Soundtrap, Dropbox and WeTransfer. "I've had so many conversations with people where [their] session is just a *Gong Show* of sync problems and monitoring feedback and confusion. The goal of our product is to eliminate that confusion and integrate everything into a smooth workflow experience."

How does it work? Brendan Lyons, the company's "customer success manager," explained that Sessionwire 2.0 utilizes three independent data streams. "One is for video, and that's obviously visual communication, screen sharing, etc. The next one is for talkback; it has echo suppression and noise cancellation on it, just like a Zoom call. Running parallel to that is the HQ audio stream, which is in stereo, and has no processing on it." Separating the data streams allows people to have a clear online conversation while their music plays uninterrupted in uncompressed, CD-quality fidelity, something that is literally unheard of with the current slate of video apps.

The video stream is also in crystal clear 4K resolution at 60 frames per second, meaning film composers could stream a clip of a movie to a producer or director in their state-of-the-art viewing rooms, experiencing the movie as it might look and sound in a theater.

Sharing files between users is also as simple as dragging them onto the face of the person onscreen at the other end of the Sessionwire 2.0 connection, initiating the P2P transfer. That feature is handy for sharing sheet music, as well as larger audio and video files.

How can these massive amounts of data be transferred so efficiently? Lyons explained

to me — online over the Sessionwire 2.0 app from Edmonton, Alberta — that we were on a peer-to-peer connection, as opposed to going through a server like on Zoom, which also buffers the stream to remove any glitches caused by a bad connection, at the cost of added latency. He continued: "But you and I are connected computer-to-computer. There's no server between us, so the connection is really secure, and it's also pretty fast." In addition, since only the talkback audio is digitally signal-processed with echo cancellation and noise suppression, the HQ audio feed is completely unencumbered without any DSP.

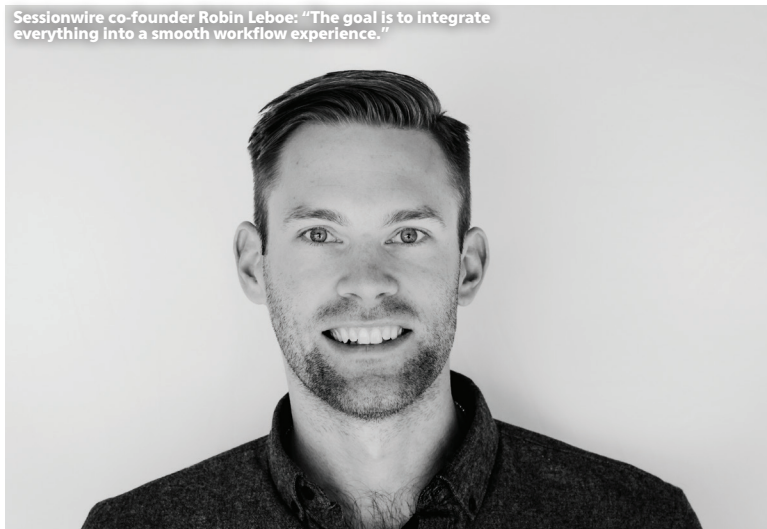
Which leads us to the million-dollar question: Is Sessionwire 2.0 fast enough to be able to play together in real-time over the internet? Is this the holy grail of true, interactive internet musical collaboration in real-time?

The answer appears to be: extremely close, but not quite. Clicking on a WiFi-looking icon at the upper right of the Sessionwire 2.0 app opened a new window that measures the performance of both the computer and the app. Using this, I could see my session with Lyons had a latency of just under 125 milliseconds — quite fast, but still many times past the threshold of human perception of lag. Leboe and Lyons both stressed that this is more of a problem concerning physics (the limitations of the speed of light) and the inefficiencies of our current internet infrastructure. Granted, it was a considerable distance between Lyons' computer in Alberta, Canada, and mine in Los Angeles, so perhaps two people who were in the same city might have a low enough latency to play together.

Yet there are still plenty of great benefits to this platform. Sessionwire 2.0 can interface with virtually any DAW — ProTools, Logic, Ableton, etc. — via the use of plugins. It was relatively easy to create an auxiliary channel strip in Logic that would route any audio coming over the internet from Sessionwire through its "Receive" plugin, and I was instantly able to record the HQ audio feed — in this case, Lyons' voice as he was guiding me through the process over Sessionwire. Conversely, I was also able to send a virtual keyboard sample back to Lyons through another auxiliary channel strip with the "Send" plugin from Sessionwire acti-



Sessionwire co-founder Robin Leboe: "The goal is to integrate everything into a smooth workflow experience."



Sessionwire 2.0 user Kenji Nakai is a recording engineer, mixer and producer based in Los Angeles.



vated. It's even possible to route the talkback feed into a DAW using a special "talkback" send or receive plugin — something ProTools users might recognize as important when trying to set up a talkback channel in that proprietary system.

Further regarding talkback, there is an auto-mute switch for the talkback stream when the HQ audio is playing, so either or both the host's and the remote users' talkback mics would automatically switch off during the music. (One can imagine why this would be a good thing.)

Finally, users can invite anyone to a Sessionwire 2.0 session, simply by sending a link that opens a webpage in their browser, allowing them to see, listen and respond to the host and their music, without ever needing to download the Sessionwire 2.0 software themselves.

All these innovative and powerful tools are packaged in an app design that is attractive, uncluttered and easy to navigate with a few buttons that activate pull-down menus for all the options. It's designed to be as simple and intuitive as possible, like any good app should be.

"I've been waiting for this kind of service and software," said Kenji Nakai, calling in from his Hollywood home studio. Nakai is a Los Angeles-based audio engineer, best known for recording and mixing the soundtrack for the hit Netflix series *Grace And Frankie*, the streamer's longest running drama series. Before the pandemic, Nakai traveled back to his native country of Japan twice a year to teach audio engineering. During the lockdown, Nakai was able to teach his course remotely from L.A., using Sessionwire and controlling the ProTools mixing session via remote desktop control software while livestreaming the entire event on YouTube. He was able to tweak the

sound of the drums in real time, adjusting the plugins on the computer in Japan, and he could hear exactly how the sound was being manipulated, thanks to the HQ audio in Sessionwire 2.0. "[Even] if you are physically not close [to the performance]," he affirmed, "you can feel close using Sessionwire." Nakai will once again be using Sessionwire remotely in L.A. for an upcoming recording in Japan for J-pop singer Maii Arai.

Escovedo recently used Sessionwire 2.0 for tracking vocals in the Bay Area for his father's latest album, *The Rhythm Of The Night*, consisting of Latin-jazz arrangements of R&B songs from the 1980s. He was planning to travel north to be there in person, but at the last minute he decided to stay in Los Angeles and sent the singer to a friend's studio.

"As soon as he started singing, there were at least 20 to 30 corrections I made right away," he recalled. If he hadn't decided to monitor what was happening over Sessionwire, he would have had to reschedule a second recording session to do the fixes. Having the ability to talk to the singer directly was key.

"The singer was in another room from the engineer, but the singer could still hear me, and I could still hear the singer," he said. "So, at that point, I wasn't even relaying it to the engineer and him telling the singer what to do," which is what would have happened if Escovedo was merely on a conference call with the engineer.

Escovedo said he started tinkering with Sessionwire a few years ago, exploring the possibilities offered by what he called "the initial beta versions" of the software.

"As much as I liked it, it was a little bit of a hassle to set up," he remembered. One of the things he likes about the new Sessionwire 2.0 is the availability of downloadable templates for virtually every available DAW, which makes it a snap to integrate Sessionwire into anyone's

current workflow. "It's so much better than it was even just a few years ago," he confirmed.

Escovedo realizes that the technology can help even when remote recording works well. "I know when I send stuff out [for others to record themselves]," he explained, "it's coming back pretty much exactly how I wanted it. What I didn't realize is that 'pretty much' is the difference in what I believe Sessionwire 2.0 brings to the table."

Escovedo estimates he's satisfied with 95% of what he hears from these remote tracks, but he added, "You start to realize it's 95% there from the guitar player, and then the bass player, and then from the horn player and then from the singer and the background vocalists. By the time you're done with the project, how much are you actually sacrificing of the difference if they were in the studio with you?"

Leboe concurs that with remote recording, "It's way too easy to hit the mediocrity button." He knows that improving the quality and immediacy of sharing video and audio can be a crucial component of music production going forward, as the events of the past 20 months have brought all of us further into the virtual world. "[That] space has evolved so quickly because of the pandemic, it's shortened the time window by years, literally," he said, referring to his need to ramp up his product to meet the demands of musicians who spend more and more time in their home studios.

Planned upgrades to Sessionwire include features like multi-channel streaming for Dolby Atmos, creating a virtual mixer for multiple users and the ability to connect many users all at once, like Zoom can do in a classroom setting. If Leboe and his colleagues continue to deliver on improving their product at their current rate, it's enticing to think about the impact this platform could have on the music industry over the next decade. **DB**

RECORDING SCHOOL Toolshed > GEAR BOX

1. Plosives Diverter

The GFW-Popfilter-MTL from Gator Frameworks saves recordings from annoying popping sounds often heard during vocal takes when consonants are produced. Slatted vents on the lightweight metal grille are designed to divert airflow down toward the floor, leaving users with a clean vocal take without pops and plosives. The pop filter attaches to any standard microphone stand or boom arm up to 18mm in diameter using the C-clamp. It provides 12.4 inches of gooseneck.

More info: gatorframeworks.com

2. Hybrid Small-Format Mixer

Part of Korg's SoundLink series, the MW-2408 is a power-packed, 24-channel mixer with a true hybrid design developed by Greg Mackie and Peter Watts. Premium components, including HiVolt mic preamps, Velvet Sound AD/DA and ALPS faders, ensure top-notch sound and feel, while features like streamlined per-channel three-band EQs and one-knob compressors, mute groups and an elegant monitor section make for easy and efficient operation.

More info: korg.com

3. Dynamic Vocal Capture

The Zoom ZDM-1 dynamic microphone delivers smooth, natural tone with built-in noise protection and sound rejection. The mic's supercardioid polar pattern captures crystal-clear detail with tight bass and smooth high end that enhances any voice. Built to handle a sound pressure level up to 135dB — somewhere between a jackhammer and a jet engine — the ZDM-1 enables you to record without worrying about clipping or distortion.

More info: zoomcorp.com

4. Do-It-Yourself Producer

Ideal for music students and music technology teachers, *Music Technology 101: The Basics of Music Production in the Technology Lab or Home Studio* (Hal Leonard) is a beginner's guide to music creation using today's most popular recording platforms and software plugins. Nearly 90 minutes of video tutorials are included.

More info: halleonard.com

5. Sound Library Suspense

IK Multimedia has released Cinekinetik, a collection of four new SampleTank sound libraries, each created to conjure a sense of wonder, mystery or suspense in the listener's mind. Together, the libraries offer evocative textures and sounds from more than 24GB of sample content and 250 SampleTank 4 instrument presets.

More info: ikmultimedia.com

6. USB-C Bandwidth Push

OWC has introduced the Envoy Pro Elektron, a USB-C bus-powered SSD that pushes the bandwidth of the USB-C interface to the max. This pocket-sized, portable drive puts professional-grade speeds, rugged construction and universal compatibility in the palm of a user's hand.

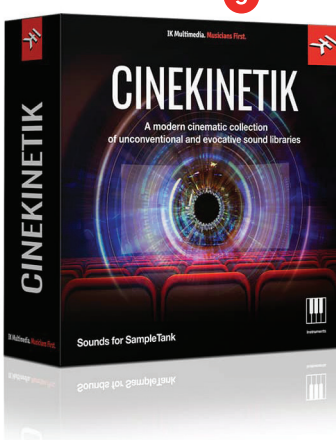
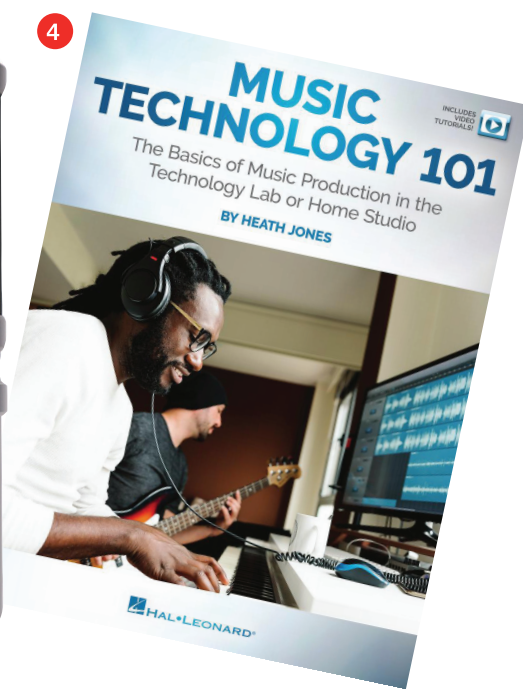
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Program founder Gene Hall directs the band.



Craig Marshall with Neil Slater, former director of Jazz Studies



Rob Parton, Jazz Studies chair



Alan Baylock, director of the One O'Clock Lab Band



Jennifer Barnes

UNT Jazz Celebrates 75th

IN THE HEART OF TEXAS, ABOUT 40 MILES north of Dallas, rests a jazz mecca, one far from the vaunted centers of New York, New Orleans, Chicago, Paris, London or Tokyo. And this year, the Division of Jazz Studies at the University of North Texas, the epicenter of this mecca, celebrates its 75th anniversary.

What makes the school special is one part longevity and one part dedication. As the first college to offer a degree in jazz back in 1946, what happened in Denton, Texas, spurred a movement of jazz education around the world.

Its alumni can be found far and wide — from singer-songwriter Norah Jones and saxophonist Jeff Coffin to keyboardist Lyle Mays, and several members of Snarky Puppy.

“What continues to draw students here is obviously the quality of ensembles,” said Rob Parton, chair of the Jazz Studies division. “There’s the the continued tradition of excellence, both academically and musically.”

So, how did a jazz program get started deep in the heart of Texas at a school then called North Texas State Teacher’s College? It required a recipe of foresight, fortitude and luck, according to Craig Marshall, program manager for the Jazz Lab Bands.

“Any one of the individual ingredients, if you take that away, I don’t think it would have happened,” Marshall said. “There was a strong tradition of music already there. There were these Saturday Night Stage Shows put on by Floyd Graham, one of the music professors.”

These stage shows, which started in the 1920s (and were presented into the 1960s),

became a launchpad for a number of popular groups and artists around Texas. Spin ahead 20 years and a young graduate student named M.E. “Gene” Hall was encouraged by the dean of music to use his thesis to outline a curriculum for a degree in dance band. The dean saw an opportunity to bring in more students, especially World War II veterans returning to colleges using the GI Bill. Hall didn’t dare call it a jazz degree for fear of having the idea shot down, or worse, being run out of town.

The first degree offered in dance band launched in 1946. Hall joined the staff in 1947 and became the school’s founding director of jazz studies. But it wasn’t easy. Hall would write that he received straight-up snubs from his fellow faculty members.

“It’s hard for us to imagine now, and it didn’t stop with Gene,” Marshall said. “It went on to Leon. Leon took the brunt of it.”

Leon was Leon Breeden, who Hall had recommended to replace him in 1959 when he left to start another program at Michigan State University. Breeden ran the program and directed its famed One O’Clock Lab Band until his retirement in 1984.

“He kept every memo that was significant,” Marshall said. “He has all these letters written to him. He got all this hate mail.”

At the center of Hall’s original curriculum was a Laboratory Dance Band, later shortened to Lab Band. When Breeden came in, he added One O’Clock to the name — not in honor of Benny Goodman’s “One O’Clock Jump,” as many surmise, but named for the time the band

met each week, at 1 p.m. Having an opportunity to play in that band has become, perhaps, the No. 1 goal of jazz students at UNT.

To get into the band, musicians have to start in one of as many as nine other large ensembles and work their way up. Marshall said he started in the Seven O’Clock Lab Band as a student. Parton directs the Two O’Clock Lab Band.

As strong as its instrumental jazz program is, UNT places equal emphasis on its vocal jazz program. With a goal of creating “vocal musicians” and not “singers,” Jennifer Barnes, coordinator of vocal jazz, said her reason for being at UNT is simple: Paris Rutherford, the founder of the program, recruited her to take his place after retirement, she said. Teaming with principal lecturer Rosana Eckert, the two currently guide a student body of 20 to 30 vocalists.

UNT today has about 230 jazz majors. In addition to the big-band training, the school provides dozens of small-group offerings.

To celebrate the 75th anniversary, noted alumni are being invited back to work with students and perform.

In March, UNT will perform a proof-in-concept concert aimed at breaking the silos down between jazz and the rest of the music department with UNT professor Rich DeRosa directing a full-scale studio orchestra with guest vocalist Kurt Elling. It’s an effort being spearheaded by UNT’s Dean of Music John Richmond, and staff members describe it as visionary.

It’s the next step in a storied history.

—Frank Alkyer

Randy Brecker

Randy Brecker has done four Blindfold Tests, according to DownBeat Archives. This one was his first in a long time, conducted in his home studio in East Hampton, New York, where he had largely been holed up for nearly two years because of the COVID shutdowns — occasionally opening up his studio to some friends and jamming with his saxophonist wife, Ada Rovatti, who pairs with him in their quintet.

Kenny Dorham

"Lotus Blossom" (*The Very Best Of Prestige Records*, Prestige, 2009, recorded 1959) Dorham, trumpet; Tommy Flanagan, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Arthur Taylor, drums. Kenny Dorham, but I can't remember the name of the tune. It's something we all know. It's "Lotus Blossom," which was used in a Japanese opera. It was sung in Japanese, but the music was bebop. Kenny is one of my favorite players. It's unparalleled in the way he gets the changes. I like the whole concept of the way he approached harmony. He's got unique changes and a unique sound. He was the sweetest guy, soft-spoken. He was one of my favorite players. The way Rudy Van Gelder recorded these sessions you can hear the air in the room and not the reverb that many trumpeters want to use today. 5 stars.

Christian Scott

"New New Orleans (King Adjuah Stomp)" (*Christian aTunde Adjuah*, Concord, 2012) Scott, trumpet; Lawrence Fields, keyboards; Matthew Stevens, guitar; Kristopher Keith Funn, bass; Jamire Williams, drums.

Once again, this is not an easy tune to play. It's probably that New Orleans trumpeter Christian Scott. I'm a big fan. He's got good range and breath control and a beautiful sound. I like how the composition is really modern. I recognize that because I have all his latest records. So it wasn't hard for me to figure this one out because no one plays like he does. He's got past, present and future all in his playing. This was 2012? So, he's only getting better. 5 stars. He's in his own category.

Art Farmer

"Art Cross" (*ARTistry: The Art Farmer Quartet*, Concord, 2001, recorded 1982) Farmer, flugelhorn; Fred Hersch, piano; Bob Bodley, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

This is a Charlie Parker tune that's been reharmonized to make it modern. The trumpeter is playing really well. I'm not totally sure, but it could easily be Art Farmer with his flugelhorn and his Harmon mute to get that vibrato effect. The mute is what threw me off. He's such a melodic player, I should have recognized him sooner. I was a big fan. He played right to end and kept getting better. Fred Hersch was great, too, reharmonizing the tune. 4½ stars.

Ambrose Akinmusire

"Mr. Roscoe (Consider The Simultaneous)" (*On The Tender Spot Of Every Calloused Moment*, Blue Note, 2020) Akinmusire, trumpet; Sam Harris, piano; Harish Raghavan, bass; Justin Brown, drums.

This is long-form. The player has a really warm sound. The more I heard, I realized that this guy has his own language, and he really gets around his horn. I'm a bebopper, but this piece is really well done even though I'd never have the nerve to do this. But it's great to hear this kind of recording. The interaction between the players is flowing, and it's in a forward motion. They all sound like they're listening to one another. It's not a lot of noise. At first thought, I was thinking of Kenny Wheeler, but I know it's not. It's Ambrose? I love the way he negotiates from top to bottom with intervallic leaps on his trumpet, and all his chromatic runs are fantastic. He has a lot of flexibility. He has his own sound and a completely different style. 5 stars.



"Don Cherry had his own original thing going on ... and you can't duplicate it," Randy Brecker says.

Don Cherry

"Elephantasy" (*Complete Communion*, Blue Note, 2000, recorded 1965) Cherry, cornet; Leandro "Gato" Barbieri, tenor saxophone; Henry Grimes, bass; Ed Blackwell, drums.

That was Don Cherry and Gato Barbieri from *Complete Communion*, and they had great interplay. I was a big fan of Ornette and Don. I bought this album when it came out. This was probably Gato's best recording before he went into a more commercial vein. Is Ed Blackwell on this? Charlie Haden? Don had his own original thing going on when he played. He had his own technique, and you can't duplicate it ... even though I tried. There's a joy to it, and everything the two played was uplifting. Some people call it avant-garde, but I call it soul music. Of course, 5 stars.

Charles Tolliver

"Copasetic" (*Connect*, Gearbox, 2020) Tolliver, trumpet; Jesse Davis, alto saxophone; Keith Brown, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Lennie White, drums

I liked the alto solo, but I don't know who the trumpeter is. Is this his date? It's well played and, once again, it's not an easy piece to negotiate, and the trumpeter at the end doesn't have the chops as if he's lost pace. It's not particularly memorable, but it's well done. 3½ stars. It's Charles Tolliver? That throws me for a loop. I would have never guessed that. I enjoyed the tune, and Charles deserves a hearing. I actually owe Charles a big thank-you. Back in the day, he was playing with Horace Silver and Max Roach at the same time. Since he was so busy with Max, Horace called me in to audition, and I eventually went into his band.

Ingrid Jensen

"At Sea" (*At Sea*, ArtistShare, 2005) Jensen, trumpet; Geoffrey Keezer, piano, keyboards; Matt Clohesy, bass; Jon Wikan, drums, percussion.

At first I was thinking of Enrico Rava, then realized it wasn't him. The trumpeter had a good range and got around the horn really well. That set a nice, floaty mood. There wasn't really a head but more like a phrase that the band interacted around. It feels like an opening mood for a record. Is this album relatively new? Then this must be Ingrid Jensen. She plays in so many different styles, but always sounds like herself. 4 stars.

Tom Harrell

"Blue 'N' Boogie" (*Number Five*, High Note, 2012) Harrell, trumpet; Jonathan Blake, drums.

They kept the form of this Dizzy Gillespie tune the whole way. It reminds me of the stuff that Jimmy Owens would play. The drummer was right in the pocket, and the trumpeter was playing with sympathetic vibration. He had terrific harmonic ideas. It was fascinating. It was Tom Harrell? He sounds in great shape here. He's in the moment. 4½ stars.

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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