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AUGUST 2022

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Assistant to the Publisher	Sue Mahal
Bookkeeper	Evelyn Hawkins

ADVERTISING SALES

Record Companies & Schools

Jennifer Ruban-Gentile
Associate Publisher
630-359-9345
jenr@downbeat.com

Musical Instruments & East Coast Schools

Ritche Deraney
Vice President of Sales
201-445-6260
ritchd@downbeat.com

Advertising Sales Manager

Grace Blackford
630-359-9358
graceb@downbeat.com

OFFICES

102 N. Haven Road, Elmhurst, IL 60126-2970
630-941-2030 / Fax: 630-941-3210
downbeat.com
editor@downbeat.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE

877-904-5299 / service@downbeat.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Senior Contributors:

Aaron Cohen, Howard Mandel, John McDonough

Atlanta: Jon Ross; **Boston:** Fred Bouchard, Frank-John Hadley; **Chicago:** Ayana Contreras, Alain Drouot, Michael Jackson, Bill Meyer, Paul Natkin, Howard Reich; **Indiana:** Mark Sheldon; **Los Angeles:** Gary Fukushima, Josef Woodard, Scott Yanow; **Michigan:** John Ephland; **Minneapolis:** Andrea Carter; **Nashville:** Bob Doerschuk; **New Orleans:** Cree McCree, Jennifer Odel; **New York:** Herb Boyd, Bill Douthart, Philip Freeman, Stephanie Jones, Matthew Kassel, Jimmy Katz, Suzanne Lorge, Phillip Lutz, Jim Macnie, Ken Micallef, Bill Milkowski, Allen Morrison, Dan Ouellette, Ted Panken, Tom Staudter, Jack Vartoogian; **Philadelphia:** Shaun Brady; **Portland:** Robert Ham; **San Francisco:** Yoshi Kato, Denise Sullivan; **Seattle:** Paul de Barros; **Washington, D.C.:** Willard Jenkins, John Murph, Michael Wilderman; **Canada:** J.D. Considine, James Hale; **France:** Jean Szlamowicz; **Germany:** Hyou Vleiz; **Germany:** Peter Margasak; **Great Britain:** Martin Longley; **Portugal:** José Duarte; **Romania:** Virgil Mihaïu; **Russia:** Cyril Moshkow. **Contributor Emeritus:** Michael Bourne.

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AUGUST 2022

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Jazz Artist, Beyond Artist & Beyond Album of the Year

BY SUZANNE LORGE

On the surface of things, it seems counterintuitive that DownBeat critics would name the same musician both Jazz Artist of the Year and Beyond Artist of the Year, until you learn that the musician in question is Jon Batiste, and suddenly the double billing makes sense.

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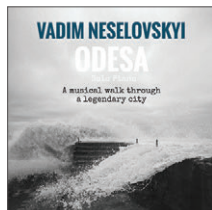
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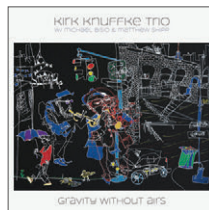
"She was, like Betty Carter, a musician's musician," Ora Harris said of Hall of Fame entrant Geri Allen. Harris managed both.

Cover photo by David Needleman

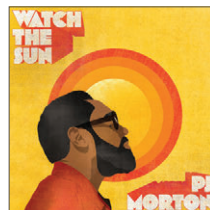
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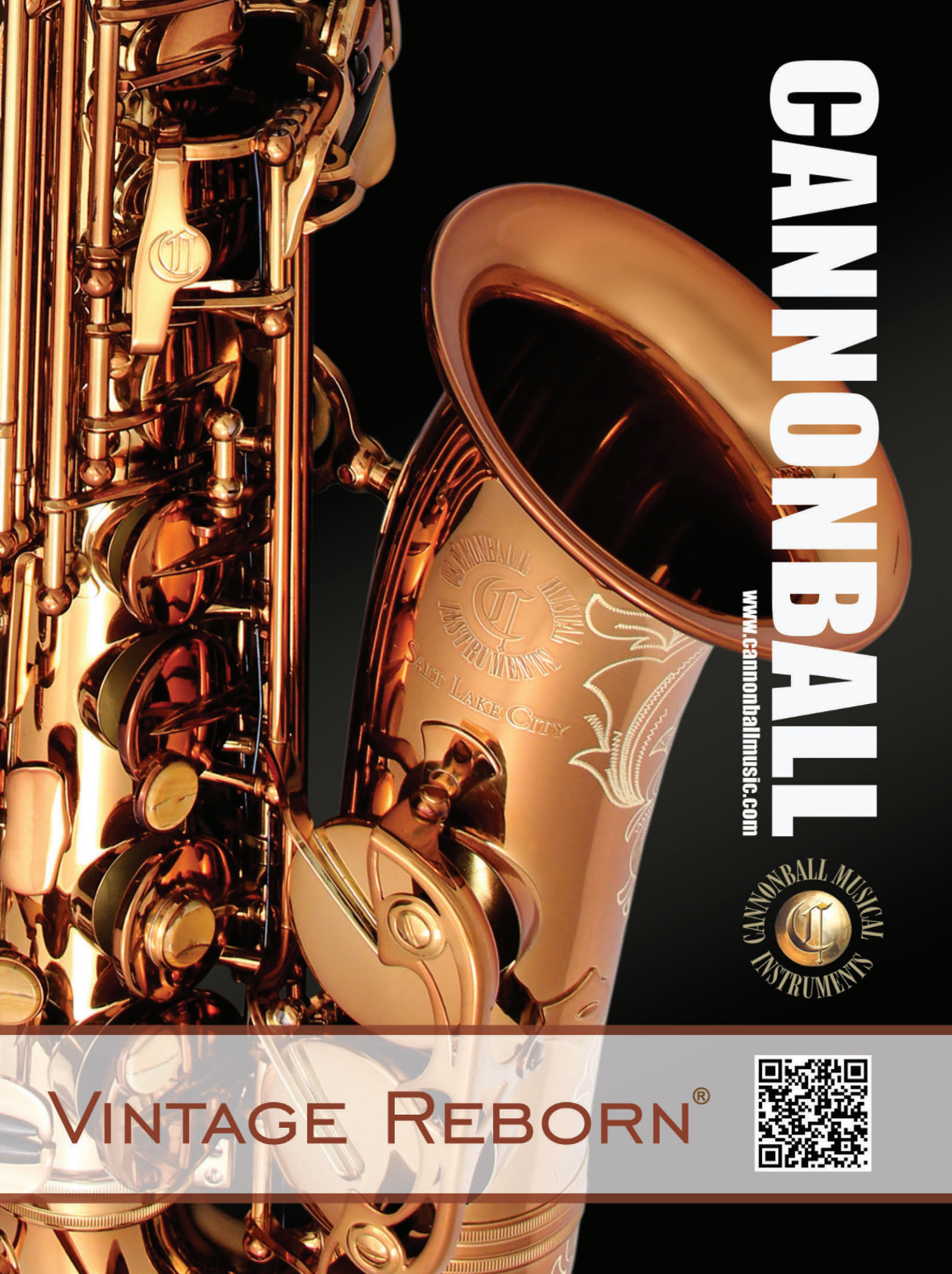
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Jesse Davis

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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



Jon Batiste makes history as DownBeat's first-ever Jazz Artist of the Year and Beyond Artist of the Year.

Beyond Making History

THE TAGLINE "JAZZ, BLUES & BEYOND" first appeared on the cover of DownBeat magazine in April 1990. It was born because improvised music and artists were going in so many directions, and we didn't want to be bound by the constraints of genre. But categorizing is human nature, isn't it? So, the question became how to make sense of it and offer the broadest, most beautiful road ahead.

Jazz will always be at the core of this magazine, its birthright; blues, that's its roots; and beyond represents music and artists that are, frankly, "beyond category," as the great Duke Ellington was fond of saying.

"I think what people hear in music is either agreeable to the ear or not," Ellington once said in an interview. "And if this is so, if music is agreeable to my ear, why does it have to have a category?"

Exactly. But it's certainly a concept with which artists, music lovers and even humble music journalists have struggled.

The "Beyond" categories first appeared in the 41st Annual DownBeat Critics Poll in 1993. Our first Beyond Artist of the Year? Tom Waits, a pop artist who certainly had one foot in the jazz world. The first Beyond Album of the Year? Mario Bauza's *Tanga* (Messidor). Bauza, of course, was a founding father of Cuban jazz.

And ever since, the great Beyond has added significant color, depth and flair to DownBeat's Critics and Readers polls as well as our news, reviews and features sections.

This year, we have some Jazz, Blues & Beyond history to report. For the first time ever in a DownBeat poll, an artist has been named

both the Jazz Artist of the Year and the Beyond Artist of the Year. As journalist Suzanne Lorge so aptly points out beginning on page 20, it seems almost inconceivable, until you find out the artist is pianist, vocalist, composer, TV bandleader and Grammy-winner Jon Batiste.

Batiste has the heart of a jazz musician. Back in 2018, his solo piano concert at the Newport Jazz Festival was one of the best performances this writer has ever seen. Armed with a full command of his instrument, Batiste displayed that his vast vocabulary of jazz ... and beyond ... was firmly at his fingertips. One of the true treats of that show was seeing how Batiste had seated dozens of Jazz House Kids Summer Workshop students behind him on stage so they could watch him work up close.

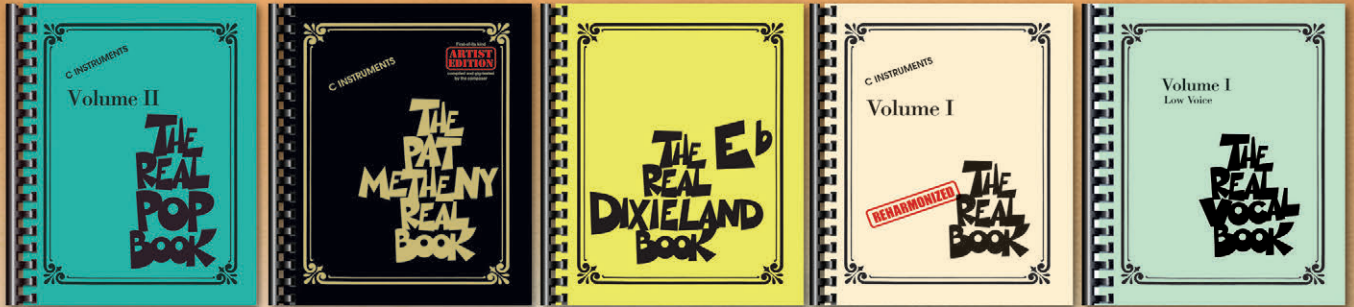
Batiste's 2021 recording *We Are*, which our critics have voted Beyond Album of the Year, certainly isn't jazz, but it's jazz-influenced. How could it not be? That's why he is the *Jazz and Beyond Artist of the Year*.

And if you want a clue as to why Batiste casts such a wide stylistic net, the answer is in his hit song "Freedom." After all, that's what jazz has always been about.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In a failed experiment, we tried to expand the Veterans Committee, which selects overlooked-but-deserving artists to the DownBeat Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, none received the requisite two-thirds majority for entry this year. Les Paul and Paul Gonzalves each received more than 50% of the vote. DownBeat regrets that we couldn't get at least one in. We'll revamp and try again next year. **DB**

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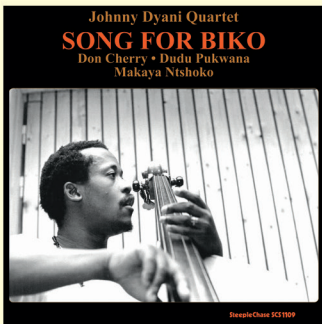
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In Praise of Jones

Thank you for another excellent issue [DB July], this time cover to cover. I thoroughly enjoyed reading Frank Alkyer's cover interview with Sean Jones.

Sean is a great storyteller, very funny and has reached all the goals he told his mother [he would] when a child. I laughed out loud when reading the Wynton Marsalis telephone call story.

I have seen Sean performing at the Jazz Showcase for quite a few years, and he is one of my favorite trumpet players. His record *Live From Jazz At The Bistro* is one of my favorite Jazz trumpet records.



MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Sean's role as an educator is no surprise to me. Back in 2017, I saw his quintet play at the Detroit Jazz Festival one night. After the last show, his quartet led the second jam session at the DJF host hotel. Sean got Frank Lacy, Henry Butler and several Detroit trumpet players up on the bandstand. After that, he started getting the young musicians up on the bandstand. For the last song, while one young trumpet player was playing, Sean had about eight trumpeters in a circle accompanying him.

Big Thanks for Erwin

Thank you for Howard Mandel's excellent and very informative article on Erwin Helfer [July]. I regretfully admit that I wasn't familiar with him, though there were so many familiar names of musicians in the piece that strongly rang out to me that the more I read, the more I wanted to know about and hear Helfer.

Perhaps the first artist that caught my attention was Otis Span, one of my favorite blues pianists. My interest was further aroused when I learned that Helfer lived for a time in New Orleans, my hometown, and that while in the Crescent City he met Baby Dodds, who became an early pioneer of the drum set. Little did I imagine that the names of faves like trumpeter Lester Bowie and saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell would also turn up.

GERALDINE WYCKOFF
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

the head. That tune by itself is enough for me to buy the CD.

BILL BENJAMIN
BILTMORE LAKE, NORTH CAROLINA

Ticket Prices, Ouch!

As a music lover living on the mid-peninsula in the Bay Area, I was happy to hear that Menlo Park's Guild Theatre, formerly an art movie house, would reopen as a live music venue.

As a jazz fan, I was intrigued by the Guild's posting on Facebook announcing that tenor saxophonist Kamasi Washington would be performing at the theatre in July. My happy anticipation quickly changed to disappointment when I saw that tickets were over \$140 each! This is about twice as expensive as the same gig would be at the SFJAZZ Center.

BOB ZANDER
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

Editor's Note: Bob, expensive? Yes. Worth it? In Kamasi's case, more than worth it. At DownBeat, we are proponents of the artists. Our artists need to be paid.

Corrections & Clarifications

The following errors from the July 2022 issue have been corrected in DownBeat's digital edition:

- Peter Margasak's insightful words about Polish pianist Marta Warelis in our "New Sounds From Europe" feature were incorrectly attributed to another writer.
- Our review of the Sadowsky Frank Vignola Archtop mistakenly indicated that the late jazz guitar legend Jim Hall was present at one of Vignola's recent Guitar Nights. DownBeat regrets the errors.

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Jazz Master Suggestion

When is Louis Hayes going to be an NEA Jazz Master? He has played with just about everyone, been a member of bands with Oscar Peterson, Cannonball Adderley and Horace Silver, and is older than all the new inductees.

GEORGE JOHNSON
VIA EMAIL

Perpetual Goodness

Thanks to Bill Milkowski for his review [DB June] of *Perpetual Pendulum* by Goldings Bernstein Stewart. Also an extra special thank you to Bill Stewart for his composition "FU Donald," dedicated to the former president. Love the four-note phrase repeated in

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Giant Step Arts founders Jimmy and Dena Katz

Giant Step Arts Releases Recordings from Central Park

While Manhattan was in the throes of the COVID-19 shutdown during 2020, renowned photographer, recording engineer, label head and lifelong jazz advocate Jimmy Katz, with his wife and artistic partner, Dena, got an inspired notion for bringing live music back to the people again: “There were a lot of organizations that were doing streaming at the time, but I really felt that jazz is a live art form. So I wanted to still have live concerts but do them in a safe way.”

That led to the creation of a free concert series in Central Park, which Katz dubbed “Walk With the Wind” in honor of the late U.S. representative and civil rights leader John Lewis, whose powerful 1998 autobiography was titled *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*.

The series, which provided much-needed economic, social and creative opportunities for musicians during a literal shutdown of live music, kicked off on Aug. 28, 2020, with a free,

open-air concert by tenor saxophonist Wayne Escoffery leading a trio of bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Mark Whitfield Jr. on the Central Park Mall. It was only fitting that Escoffery inaugurate the series, since it was he who gave Katz the idea.

“That summer, I left the Highbridge section of the Bronx and rented a sublet in a high-rise on the Upper West Side near Central Park,” the tenor man recalled via Facebook. “I made a post about the move and asked if anyone was in the neighborhood who wanted to play. Bassist Joshua Levine reached out and invited me to play with him and his crew of musicians at Ladies Pavilion in Central Park. At that time, many of the younger guys on the scene were busking in the park to keep their chops up, so I figured, “Why not join them?” And the first time I did it, I ran into Jimmy Katz there. He and I had a nice talk, and shortly thereafter, he called and ran the idea by me about sponsoring real well-paid performances

in the park. I thought it was a great idea, and I did the very first one and a few after that.”

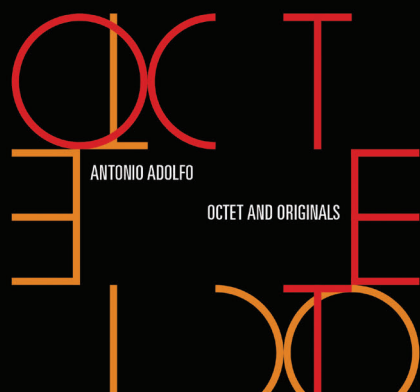
The series continued through the fall with a who’s who on the current New York jazz scene, from the Marquis Hill Quartet and the Michael Thomas Trio to the Eric McPherson Trio and the Leap Day Trio with Matt Wilson, Mimi Jones and Jeff Lederer. Crowds ranged from 50 to 300 people for these regular weekend afternoon performances on The Mall by the likes of Joel Ross, Nasheet Waits, Mark Turner, Immanuel Wilkins, Melissa Aldana and Nicole Glover. Chris Potter closed out the fall series that year when the weather started getting too cold to play in the park.

When the series resumed in the spring of 2021, Katz relocated to a new location on the west side of the park, in an area historically known as Seneca Village. The first free Black settlement in New York City, it was founded in 1825 and thrived until the mid-1850s when the city took it over to build Central

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JIMMY AND DENA KATZ

Jason Palmer's quartet delivered *Live From Summit Rock In Seneca Village*.



JIMMY AND DENA KATZ

Abraham Burton, left, and Eric McPherson delivered *The Summit Rock Session At Seneca Village*.

Park, which opened in 1858. "The Mall had gotten kind of crowded with buskers playing 'Stairway To Heaven' while one of our artists was trying to play a ballad," Katz explained. "So I wanted to move it, anyway, and I thought Seneca Village was really the perfect place to continue the series. What really impressed me was how much these events meant to all the people who showed up. People told me that they organized their whole week around coming out to the park and hearing these concerts, and the musicians were so excited to play in front of other human beings. The vibe was so great."

There was no summer edition of "Walk With the Wind." As Katz explained, "The whole time we were doing concerts, I was concerned that the Parks Department or the police were going to shut us down. Finally, I contacted them in July of 2021 and explained that I had already done 35 concerts, and they promptly said, 'You can't do any of those things out in the park.' So we shifted locations to Hunter College, where we did a series of free concerts in the winter of 2021 called 'Meditations on Freedom,' curated by Nasheet Waits."

Giant Step Arts plans to continue its free indoor series this summer at Hunter College. "I have to say, I'm not unhappy that we're moving inside because it's really challenging and very stressful recording outside," said Katz. "Wind is really the biggest issue, of course, when you record outside. So I had wind-screens on everything. And I was concerned about my microphones and recording equipment getting rained on and damaged because we were totally exposed to the elements out there. There was no concert stage or anything like that. But in retrospect, the musicians and I really liked having all of those external noises because it gives you a sense you're outside in Central Park."

Those ambient sounds can be faintly heard on two new album releases from Giant Step Arts: one by the Burton McPherson Trio with bassist Dezron Douglas and another by trum-

peter Jason Palmer with tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, bassist Edward Perez and drummer Johnathan Blake. Both were recorded live in the park at Summit Rock. And like all Giant Step Arts releases, the musicians have total control of their artistic projects. They receive a complete run of 700 CDs and digital downloads of their music. They also retain complete ownership of their masters. Giant Step Arts also provides promo photos, videos and PR. It's an unprecedented formula.

"My mission is to put as much money into the hands of musicians as possible from what I raise," Katz said. "So one of the things that made this Central Park concert series so wonderful is that all the money I raised went right to the musicians. And then on top of it, musicians got donations from audience members who came out and gave donations afterwards and bought CDs. It was a really nice, loose hang for people. It was designed kind of like a block party, except you had Chris Potter and Mark Turner and Nasheet Waits playing."

Upcoming recording projects for Katz and Giant Step Arts include Mark Turner's first live recording as a leader (at the Village Vanguard with trumpeter Jason Palmer, bassist Joe Martin and drummer Jonathan Pinson), a new Tarbaby recording with Nasheet Waits, Orrin Evans and Eric Revis, and an all-star band featuring Waits, Turner, vibraphonist Steve Nelson and bassist Rahsaan Carter.

Katz's catalog for Giant Step Arts, a label he founded in 2018, has maintained the distinctive visual signature of the cover photography he and his wife Dena create.

"My visual cues really come from the sound of specific saxophone players, whether it's the way Joe Lovano sounds or Pharoah Sanders sounds," he said. "I'm trying to have a real 'sound' as a photographer, and I use them as my guiding light on how to do that. You know, Jackie McLean does not sound like Paul Desmond or like Lee Konitz. Each one of these artists has a really strong sound, and that's what I've always worked on: having a real visual signature."
—Bill Milkowski



Brian Landrus' latest album pairs his proclivity for music with his love of animals.

Landrus Dedicates CD to Endangered Species

BRIAN LANDRUS CAN REMEMBER THE exact moment he stopped eating animals. It was during lunch in the sixth grade, and after grabbing a hamburger from the cafeteria, he took out from his bag a pamphlet from PETA that his parents had left around the house. Having already sworn off pork due to a childhood affection for pigs (despite his love for the taste of bacon), the rather graphic photos on that pamphlet of what truly went on inside slaughterhouses further confirmed his empathy for all living creatures. “I said to my friends, I’m never going to eat meat again,” Landrus remembered, speaking over video from his Brooklyn home. “They all laughed, and I laughed, too, but something just clicked, and I never did again.”

Landrus is known for his exceptional low-woodwind playing — he’s been a mainstay in the DownBeat Critics Poll since 2015 on baritone saxophone and bass clarinet — and for composing and arranging. He will enter the fall as a full-time professor of jazz composition at Berklee College of Music. Yet he has felt a calling to do something that was, in his words, “more important than blowing air through a tube.”

He doesn’t regret going into music, but Landrus once considered becoming a veterinarian, or even environmental activism. “I’m not sure how [that] would have gone, because I probably would have been aggressive,” he said, cryptically.

In a discussion with a representative for Save the Elephants, a U.K.-registered char-

ity based in Kenya, he learned more about the war between illegal poachers and activists, dubbed “hunter-hunters” for their extreme, sometimes violent tactics. He explained soberly, “I don’t think I would be around, is what I’m trying to say. I think I would have gone out in a blaze of fire ...”

Refocusing his conflagrant ardor to music was perhaps a better career choice. For his 11th album, Landrus pairs his proclivity for music with his love of animals, resulting in *The Red List* (Palmetto), a collection of 15 original pieces dedicated to the most endangered animals on Earth.

The Red List was established in 1964 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a regularly updated accounting for an ever-increasing number of endangered animal, plant and fungus species.

To date, more than 142,000 species are on the Red List, with 40,000 of those brought to the brink of extinction. “I was blown away by the number of animals that have gone extinct, and the amount of creatures going extinct, that are on the verge, that I had never even heard of,” Landrus lamented. He mentioned the plight of the Vaquita, the world’s smallest porpoise; its population currently stands at eight. “The more I learned,” he said, “the more passion I had in trying to do something to bring awareness.”

Landrus reached out to many environmental organizations before finding a partner in Save the Elephants. He started an online cam-

paign to finance the project, donating 20% of the proceeds and 100% of any profits to the organization.

He then put his band together, drawing upon long-time collaborators such as guitarist Nir Felder, bassist Lonnie Plaxico and drummer Rudy Royston. He added some other friends, old and new, to the mix: trombonist Ryan Keberle, saxophonists Ron Blake and Jaleel Shaw, trumpeter Steve Roach, vocalist Corey King, keyboardist Geoffrey Keezer and percussionist John Hadfield. Landrus waited until the both the band and the studio dates were confirmed before sitting down to write the music, which came together quickly, in a span of about 10 days.

His discography is as diverse as the world ecology he strives to save, ranging from saxophone trio to full jazz orchestra with strings. With this band and for this cause, he followed more of a contemporary jazz playbook, a cross-pollination along the genetic lines of Weather Report, Pat Metheny Group and Steely Dan, acknowledging an intention to make the music more universally accessible for the sake of the message.

The results are energetic, catchy and colorful. Landrus attempted to capture the essence of each animal with a musical analogy. On “Canopy Of Trees,” the intervals of thirds reflect the calls of orangutans. He explained, “I watched a lot of videos to hear their interactions. I kept listening to these different calls from different animals, same species, and they were all using major thirds. They were pitched differently — a different starting point, whether they were going down or up, and that was fascinating to me.”

Landrus stressed the significance of the project to his band before and during the recording, having sent out information on the animals they were honoring. The players responded with unified urgency. “The session felt more meaningful than anything I had ever done. There was an intensity and a camaraderie that I think [is] very rare, in my experience of session work,” he said.

Save the Elephants will be using Landrus’ music in its own outreach and awareness projects. He plans to go to Africa next year to meet the people on the front lines for the group.

“I would love to do some concerts out there, and we’ve talked about that,” he said. “They’re doing a lot more important work on the ground than I can do. I’m happy to raise funds for them and do as much as I can, but they’re literally putting their lives on the line with poachers.”

Yet, Landrus has found new meaning from putting his talents in service for a larger cause. “If I could do anything to help get the word out and make something positive happen from this, then that would be the best reason for,” he paused, “living.”

—Gary Fukushima



The Jazz Cruise pool party stage.

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An all-star jam during Blue Note at Sea.



Arturo Sandoval enjoying the cruise life.

JOHN ABBOTT/JAZZ CRUISES



Cyrille Aimée rocks the boat.

JOHN ABBOTT/JAZZ CRUISES

Return of the Jazz Cruises

THE PANDEMIC NOT ONLY SHUT DOWN clubs, concert halls and festivals, but tours ground to a halt and the urge to travel in search of arts-minded musicians was thwarted.

But a careful reopening has replaced doom-and-gloom with surviving clubs presenting again and land-locked festivals penciling in acts and selling tickets.

The same is true when it comes to jazz on the high seas. Jazz cruises that connected artists and audiences in one of the most unique ways possible were completely and cruelly grounded during the past two years. But that tide finally looks to be turning, said Michael Lazaroff, executive director of the jazz-fueled Entertainment Cruise Productions.

Its three marquee, weeklong jazz excursions — The Jazz Cruise, which started in 2001; the two Smooth Jazz Cruises, which first got off the docks in 2004; and the Blue Note at Sea Cruise, the youngest and most adventurous, first setting sail in 2017 — are on course to return to the salt waters in 2023 with cruises in January and February.

The fact that the cruises have returned is a

small miracle considering the toll the pandemic took. Cancellations affected more than 8,000 passengers, with an income dive of \$29 million. “We dug deep into our resources to be able to hang on,” said the St. Louis-based Lazaroff. “We kept pushing everything back to the next year. We addressed everyone’s setbacks. But we’re happy that more than 6,000 people rebooked for ’23. We have a group of guests from over the years who have been very loyal and very supportive. Since we started, more than 120,000 people have been entertained, while more than 5,000 people have gone on four or more cruises.”

Lazaroff said he’s happy to say cabins are selling quickly. “I’m very excited to be sailing again,” he noted. “Hopefully we’ve reached the end of all this mess. Maybe life will go back to the way it has been for us.”

Lazaroff stressed that the cruises are not typical festivals, “There is no festival or event in the world that compares to our jazz cruises. Our bands don’t have to worry about packing up each night to travel to their next stops on a tour without much offstage interactions.”

Instead, the cruises plunge an act into immersion, where the music and parties continue non-stop as one multi-venue space existing with little sense of time.

More than 250 hours of jazz are performed by over 100 musicians, from headliners to top-notch support groups. There are daytime shows (some around the pool), concert-dinner performances and the ever-present late-night/early-morning jams.

“The fans may spend the money for these cruises, but we buy the services of the greatest artists who get the finest sound,” said Lazaroff, who books talent for each cruise. “I spend \$5 million on jazz musicians. I want to create an interactive experience where, up-close, the crowd gets excited. That turns on the performers who kick it up a notch.”

He also added that he’s happy to give employment to the artists. “We sail in January and February when artists often aren’t very busy,” he said. “We provide a good pay day until the summer when they may be touring.”

A 10-year veteran performer on Lazaroff’s jazz cruises, trumpeter Randy Brecker cham-

pions the warm weather and calm breezes at sea instead of the deep winter back home.

"This is the greatest event of the year," he said. "It's not only the best festival, but it's also features the best jazz players. Starting at 10 a.m. and going to 2 a.m., you always have the choice of hearing amazing music. It's a great way to start out the new year."

Performing on both The Jazz Cruise and the Blue Note at Sea Cruise, Brecker opts out of visiting ports of call in favor of hanging on the ship. "I'm not into sightseeing, so I stay onboard," he said. "The jazz fans are respectful, cool and friendly. It's nice to be around them." As for his colleagues, Brecker embraces the hang. "We all get to see other in one fell swoop," he said. "We see each other in the hallways, at the restaurants, in the room where food is always available. It's quite a reunion, but I also make a lot of new musician friends."

Lazaroff said he's learned a lot in booking The Jazz Cruise and the Smooth Jazz Cruise. For the later, he admitted that, at first, he didn't know a thing about the music.

But his newfound love is the Blue Note sail. "What happens there is the real music," he said. "No categories, no rules, no restrictions. Just good music."

Next year's program, slated for Jan. 13–20, is packed, including Cécile McLorin Salvant,

Christian McBride, Brad Mehldau, Chief Adjuah (aka Christian Scott), the Baylor Project, Sheila E., David Sanborn, Chris Botti and more. Hosting the main shows will be Marcus Miller, Robert Glasper, Don Was and comedian Alonzo Bodden.

Other featured performers include Brecker, Cyrille Aimée, Gerald Clayton, Emmet Cohen, Derrick Hodge, José James, Julian Lage and others. Eric Marienthal serves as musical director. Expect Marienthal and Brecker to play music from their recent duo album, *Double Dealin'*.

The Blue Note cruise came about serendipitously. Lazaroff was asked by the Cunard Cruise Lines to advise the mammoth company on how to modernize its entertainment. He suggested jazz on a full-charter Cunard ship. His first stop was to contact Don Was, the head of Blue Note Records, knowing full well that it had a "contorted relationship" with the Blue Note Entertainment Group (which includes the Blue Note jazz clubs), since the two organizations share a name.

"Don liked the idea but was obligated to present this to the entertainment group, which thought the link was terrific," Lazaroff said. "Two thousand jazz fans are going to love this for seven days and seven nights."

For a different experience, the Jazz Cruise

sails from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Jan. 6–13 on the Celebrity Millennium. Its ports of call include Costa Meza, Cozumel and Nassau. The headliners on this straightforward cruise include Wynton Marsalis, Dee Dee Bridgewater (who headlined the very first Jazz Cruise event in 2001), Christian McBride, Kurt Elling, Bill Charlap and several others with John Clayton directing the big bands. Expect inspired sets by Bridgewater and Charlap, who have been collaborating lately with a future album in mind.

The Smooth Jazz Cruise, billed as The Greatest Party at Sea, takes place twice in 2023 (Jan. 20–27; Jan. 27–Feb. 3). The first round-trip sail leaves Fort Lauderdale with ports of call in Grand Cayman, Cozumel and Grand Bahama Island. The second's ports of call include Costa Meza, Cozumel and Nassau.

The smooth lineups include Marcus Miller, Candy Dulfer, Jonathan Butler, Boney James, Mindi Abair, Take 6, Michael McDonald, Peter White, Gerald Albright and more. It's a packed crowd of musicians for a full ship of fans.

Reading this in summer may feel like a vacation in warm weather is far away, but the steamy days are fleeting. Come January, sea, sun and a sweet breeze will go well with jazz again. —Dan Ouellette



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Grace Kelly

Grace Kelly Joins Berklee Board:

Saxophonist Grace Kelly has been named to Berklee College of Music's Board of Trustees, becoming the youngest board member in Berklee history at the age of 30. "Grace Kelly is not only a singular musical talent, but her passion for creating, sharing, teaching and healing through her art has led her to become an incredible ambassador and community leader," said Martin Mannion, board chair.

Presenting Wayne Shorter Way:

WBGO, Newark Public Radio, celebrated renaming of the street in front of the station in honor of saxophonist/composer Wayne Shorter, a beloved son of the New Jersey city. Shorter, also known as the Newark Flash, grew up in the city's Ironbound section and attended Newark Arts High. With the renaming, WBGO and neighboring New Jersey Performing Arts Center reside appropriately at the corner of Wayne Shorter Way and Sarah Vaughan Way. Vaughan was also a Newark native.

Gonzalez Announces Nine-PM:

Music business pro Anthony Gonzalez has launched Nine-PM Records, a new jazz label "dedicated to the genre of jazz, from traditional to neo-contemporary and all the sub-genres of jazz." Gonzalez manages Latin Grammy Award-winning flutist Nestor Torres, who will deliver the label's first record.

Jenkins Delivers Jazzology: Savage Content has launched a web series where guests compete by testing their jazz knowledge. *Jazzology* is a friendly competition between seasoned jazz enthusiasts. The series, which runs alternate Fridays on Savage Content's official YouTube channel, is hosted by veteran jazz promoter and journalist Willard Jenkins. "Jazzology helps keep alive the rich history of an art form that has inspired so much of today's music, and we've come up with a great format to test someone's musicology in both an enjoyable and challenging way," Jenkins said.



"You actually need this record in your life," said IF Music owner Jean-Claude.

An Introduction To Enja Records

You Need (to Read) This!

'YOU NEED THIS! IT'S BECOME MY MANTRA,' said irrepresible record man Jean-Claude of IF Music in London during a Zoom interview. The London vinyl retailer triples as a DJ and producer of deep-dive compilations, the most recent being *IF Music Presents You Need This! An Introduction to Enja Records* (BBE Music). And at age 60 he's easily as enthusiastic as a teenager about his personal musical tastes and discoveries.

"It really goes back to when I worked in my first record shop," he explained. "Customers would come in and ask, 'What do I need?' and my answer was, 'You need this!' It wasn't a question of whether you knew it or whether you wanted it — you actually need this record in your life, because it will make your life better."

A collector's "need" may be negotiable, but there's no doubt Jean-Claude has generated hours of invaluable listening by applying refined taste to generating compilations, remixes and (until pandemic shutdowns) tracks sequenced for parties around the world. He drags along cartons of esoteric EPs and LPs, even to far-flung sets.

"I don't play off memory sticks or CDs," he scoffed, "because vinyl is vinyl. I don't call myself a purist, because I have nothing against technology. But I understand about compression. I can hear the differences between analog sound and MP3s, and after all, I own a record shop, so I shouldn't DJ using digital files then turn around and sell records," he said. "There are serious pitfalls when you don't compromise, but take the rough with the smooth, right?"

Sure, how else? Jean-Claude has been a true believer in high-quality music across genres — jazz, of course, but also hip-hop, funk, blue-eyed soul, classic r&b and soundtracks — some 40 years ago. In the 1990s, he formed a duet, The Amalgamation of Soundz, with fellow DJ Mark

Harbottle. They ran shows and released albums, including Blue Note and Disney remixes during the United Kingdom's "halcyon house and techno days," until 2008, "when sampling went atomic." He did analog arranging, editing and sequencing; digital tech wasn't his thing.

Jean-Claude opened IF Music in 2003 in the Soho neighborhood, which he left in 2020, due to COVID. Today he hosts two radio programs and a video chat show and deals vinyl and associated merch from the IF Music website.

Indeed, Jean-Claude's *You Need This!* compilations such as his intro to Enja convey a personal stamp rather than doubling down on fan favorites or cultish obscurities. Tracks by acclaimed pianists Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand) and Mal Waldron, trumpeter Marvin Hannibal Peterson, bassist Cecil McBee, vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson and singer Jon Hendricks buttress those by lesser known, but equally beguiling, reedsman Prince Lasha, oud player Rabih Abou-Khalil, saxophonist John Stubblefield, guitarist-sitarist Nana Simopoulos and multi-instrumentalist/composer Marc Levin.

Packaged as two platters in a gatefold cover with Jean-Claude's extensive liner notes, the Enja music offers a colorful, provocative, spirited if not parochially spiritual vibe. The result is a varied but cohesive collection, inviting newcomers with surprises for longtime Enja devotees, too.

His previous BBE compilations include three volumes titled *Journey Into Deep Jazz*. He plans to curate an Abou-Khalil anthology and a soul-funk compilation. But Jean-Claude's next compilation will celebrate the 20th birthday of IF Music with players from the bubbling U.K. new jazz scene. "There are a lot of great jazz artists in England who haven't gotten the support, the hype, the love, the column inches," he said, hoping to do something about it. —Howard Mandel



"This music is about contemplation and meditation," JoVia Armstrong said of *The Antidote Suite*.

The Future Is JoVia Armstrong

JOVIA ARMSTRONG SPECIALIZES IN CREATING sonic universes. That ingenuity goes beyond her gifts as a drummer, percussionist and composer as evidenced by her debut album, *The Antidote Suite* (Black Earth Music), an engrossing, Afrofuturist voyage, centered on healing.

Threads of techno, future soul, hip-hop and chamber jazz float throughout the five-part adventure as Armstrong sublimely reconciles electronic ingenuity and left-wing jazz improvisation. She crafts the music with her Eunoia Society, a group of kindred spirits who collectively perform euphoric improvisations intended to seduce audiences into personal introspection. With Armstrong playing a hybrid cajon drum kit, the remaining members consist of electric bassist Damon Warmack and violinist/viola player Leslie DeShazor. The music broadens with guests that include guitarist Jeff Parker, bassist Isaiah Sharkley, keyboardist Amr Fahmy, singer Yaw Agyeman, rapper Teh'Ray Hale and flutist Nicole Mitchell, who owns Black Earth Music.

"This music is about contemplation and meditation," Armstrong explained. "Back in the '60s, we had John Coltrane and Alice Coltrane doing what has been deemed as 'spiritual jazz.' I'm going into that realm but using electronics and cave

technology. In ancient society, people would go into caves to worship, to do rituals, to hold their ceremonies. This is a place that has a ton of reverb and reflections. There are these reflections, which is what we do when we meditate."

With her technology experience, Armstrong transports audiences into immersive worlds where the sonic designs travel naturally instead of emitting from conventional front speakers with left and right channels.

In late May, she was preparing for the oral defense of her doctorate dissertation, "Black Space: Composing Meditative Music Through the Black Lens to Combat Unconscious Bias," at the University of California Irvine. There, she was a doctoral degree candidate in the Integrated Composition Improvisation and Technology program. When explaining the program in which many musicians use electronics to create their art, Armstrong said that she's more interested manipulating computer hardware than mastering software programs. With her strong background in expansive jazz and R&B, it's vital for Armstrong to have kinetic live instrumentation in her music. But the manipulations of computer hardware enable the Eunoia Society to provide new personalized colors and textures.

"While we're playing our instruments, we will hook them up to different hardware devices to create new instruments," she said before explaining how DeShazor might run her violin through a processor so the audience hears an entirely different instrument. "In my practice, I'm looking at those processed sounds as separate entities. And we can mix the music in a certain way where the audience hears the dry signal of the violin as well."

When describing her ideal performance setting, Armstrong references Herbie Hancock's concerts from *Future 2 Future* (Transparent), his 2001 drum-n-bass heavy album where he used surround sound audio technology. For her concerts, Armstrong prefers a 16-speaker multi-channel system and Unity gaming software to create three-dimensional worlds.

"We have various sounds flying around the room," she said. "We invite the audience to not just sit in their seats and listen but become participants in the sonic world. They were able to walk around the venue and listen to the sounds move around them. In the real world, this is how we hear sound."

Armstrong grew up in Detroit, where techno, Blackness and pioneering music coincide. The Mother City is home to a swath pioneering Black techno, deep house and hip-hop artists such as Carl Craig, Derrick May, Moodymann, Jeff Mills, Theo Parrish and J Dilla. Detroit was also the city where Parliament-Funkadelic recorded most of its Afrofuturistic funk classics. One of Armstrong's early mentors was drummer, percussionist Francisco Mora Catlett, who worked with Sun Ra, and has released his own Afrofuturistic works such as the Henry Dumas-inspired *Rare Metal*.

She continued developing her craft in Chicago, where she linked up with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Through drummer Vincent Davis, Armstrong met Mitchell at an ACCM event in 2000. During that time though, Armstrong quit music because of her encounter with rampant sexism. Mitchell began hiring Armstrong regularly, which helped revitalize her music career. "We've been working together ever since," Armstrong said. "She's a really close friend and a mentor."

In Chicago, Armstrong taught kids music software like ProTools, Garage Band and Logic. "Now, I want to show Black kids how to build their own computers, because every time I'm at a NAMM show, I don't see us," she said. "After years of going to NAMM shows, it really started to dawn upon me, as Black people, we always seem to be accepted as performers. But when it comes to manufacturing, how do we get into those spaces? We know how to use the tools. We'll learn them inside and out. But what could we do if we built these machines? What type of creativity would we conjure up as technologists?"

—John Murph



JAZZ ARTIST
OF THE YEAR
BEYOND ARTIST
OF THE YEAR
BEYOND ALBUM
OF THE YEAR

THE BEAUTY OF Jon Batiste's SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

By Suzanne Lorge Photo by Stu Brinin

On the surface of things, it seems counterintuitive that DownBeat critics would name the same musician both Jazz Artist of the Year and Beyond Artist of the Year — until you learn that the musician in question is Jon Batiste, and suddenly the double billing makes sense.

Batiste actively promotes the normalization of musical ambidexterity. True, many contemporary musicians embrace the ethos of creative pluralism — why would anyone want to limit their musical identity? Even so, nobody does it better, or more fully, than Batiste.

Consider his Grammy sweep this year. Batiste scored 11 nominations, including those for Best Roots Song, Best R&B Album, Best Jazz Instrumental Album, Best Contemporary Classical Composition, Best Music Video, and Best Score Soundtrack for Visual Media. Of these nominations, he took home five trophies, among them the prized Album of the Year award for *We Are* (Verve), a musical tour de force that earned top honors as Beyond Album of the Year in the 70th

Annual DownBeat Critics Poll.

We caught up with Batiste in early June, just after he'd rallied from a bout with COVID. The timing of his illness couldn't have been worse, mere days before the Carnegie Hall premiere of *American Symphony* — an opus he'd spent more than three years composing — originally scheduled for May 7. He was forced to postpone the concert, now rescheduled for September.

"It really hit me hard. I had COVID and pneumonia simultaneously, so I was out for about two-and-a-half weeks at home, alone," he recalled. "It really deflated a lot of things."

Batiste also worried about infecting his wife, Emmy-Award winning journalist and author Suleika Jaouad, who is immunocompromised.



Batiste performing at the 2018 Monterey Jazz Festival.



Batiste performing his hit "Freedom" at this year's Grammy Awards.

(Jaouad chronicled her battle with leukemia in the 2021 bestseller *Between Two Kingdoms: A Memoir of a Life Interrupted*.)

Batiste's new large-scale work is more than just another milestone in an already spectacular career. The piece makes a strong declarative statement about where Batiste is heading. Specifically, *American Symphony* portends a cultural evolution not just in the way that we understand new music today, but in the way that we talk about our national heritage.

"*American Symphony* is a recontextualization of American music, and thus world music, given how deeply entrenched in our culture the concept of a melting pot is," he said. "The symphony itself is about bringing together musicians from all different cultures — jazz musicians, classical musicians, electronic musicians, Native American folk musicians, brass band musicians. This is the kind of thinking that's happening in this digital age, where everything is so connected. I think there's an opportunity now to have a deeper, more relevant understanding of American culture and to transform the educational practices surrounding that."

Fundamental to this cultural reckoning would be an acknowledgment of certain truths such as the unheralded contributions of Black genius to American culture and the destructive legacy left by the oppression of whole groups of Americans. Still, Batiste sees a way to greater unity in the democratic ideals on which the U.S. was founded — and the birth of jazz is an example of that, he said.

"[Democracy] holds all of these disparate cultures together in one culture, and out of that one culture, jazz music emerged," he said. "It's called jazz now, but it really was a cultural phenomenon. Lifting the lid of oppression just a little bit gave a wider variety of people the chance

to express their truth. And those people made art — in an irrepressible, creative form — just by expressing the amazing truth of American life.

"I think that now we're at a point in history where something yet to be named is happening. Many of my peers and colleagues have been striving to find the name for it, and to create the sound of it. It's an outgrowth of jazz, in that it holds together all of these modern influences. This art form, this way of thinking, has yet to be really codified. I call it 'social music.'

"To say that jazz is at the center of it would be wrong, but that's not far from the truth. It's an outgrowth of the incredible phenomenon that we call jazz, but it's beyond even that."

It's hard to deny the socially galvanizing force of *We Are*. From Batiste's exuberance on the video for "Freedom" through the raw ache in his voice on "Cry" to the triumph of the chorus on the title cut, just try not to move or be moved. Lest his intention with the album get buried, though, Batiste spells it out explicitly on the cover: to recognize "the dreamers, seers, griots and truth tellers, who refuse to let us fully descend into madness."

"There's so much to say about the people I dedicated the record to," he elaborated. "People need to know, in their quest, that what they're doing is important, even if no one sees it and they're not [winning] Grammys or [performing] on a big stage. The people who are taking care of their communities, who are teaching the next generation, who are in temples and synagogues. The people all across the country who are standing there, in integrity, without anyone seeing them."

Batiste's sense of social responsibility seems to grow with his rising visibility in the entertainment world. Always prolific — Batiste has released or collaborated on more than 20

records since 2003 — his career reached a flashpoint after he became musical director of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in 2015. Soon after, he was hired to write 16 jazz originals for the 2020 Disney/Pixar animated feature *Soul*, which earned him an Academy Award and a Golden Globe. And next year, he'll make his feature film debut as an actor, originating the role of Grady, a gifted jazz pianist, in a second film adaptation of *The Color Purple*, this one based on the Broadway musical.

These high-profile accomplishments augur well for the success of his social and creative advocacy. But beyond discussing the film, due out December 2023, Batiste is quiet on the specifics of his new projects. All he'll admit is that, for sure, there's another album in the works.

"I'm starting with the nucleus of *We Are*, which is the incredible producer-songwriter Autumn Rowe; the producer-songwriter Kizzo, from the Netherlands; and my executive producer, Ryan Lynn," Batiste revealed. "Ryan and I are working not just on a follow-up to the album, but on several different projects that I can't speak about yet. Just know that there's a lot of new music coming, and it's going to be really, really exciting to share once we're done."

Casting a shadow on the exhilaration of these career highs, however, is the ongoing challenge of Jaouad's leukemia, which recurred earlier this year. Batiste, even as he works unflinchingly for a more equitable future, understands the importance of living in the present.

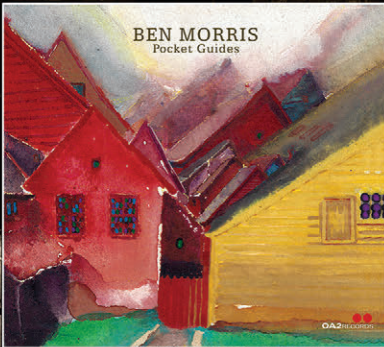
"I don't have any goals in my day other than to love [Suleika] thoroughly and to commit to what that entails in the peaks and valleys [of her illness]," Batiste said. "We look at each day as, 'This is what we have.' It's a long road. But it's made me realize that we're all going to have this moment where we're at the edge of our mortality. It does us all a service to look at each day, and our most cherished loved ones, like that. If we're not doing that, then we're not doing it right. More than anything, that [realization] has been a gift in this struggle."

Batiste met Jaouad at the Skidmore Jazz Institute when they were just teenagers, before he earned his jazz degrees at Juilliard and launched his career as a musician under the careful mentorship of jazz artists like Curtis Fuller, Louis Hayes, Mulgrew Miller, Roy Hargrove and Wynton Marsalis. He notes that what followed, in both his private and personal lives, emerged from those fertile musical environments.

"It's so deep," he reflected. "Just to see where I am now, with all of these incredible opportunities to share my art and to be a light in the world, but also to have this keen awareness of my own mortality. And to think that it started with this skinny kid from Louisiana coming to New York at 17 years old, wanting to play jazz. It's just incredible." **DB**



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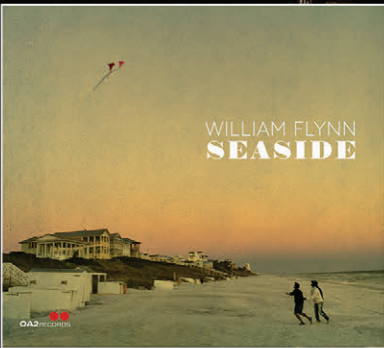
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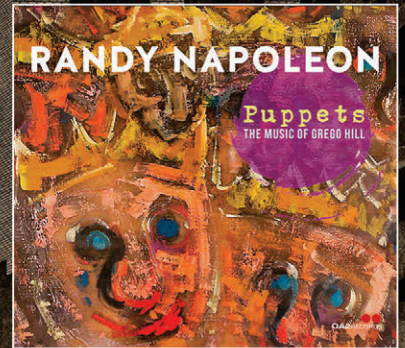
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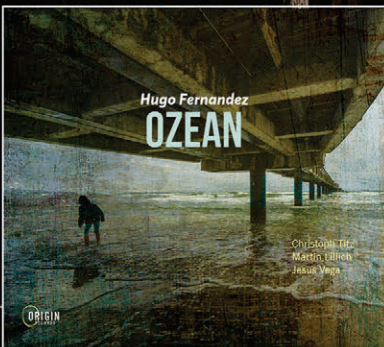
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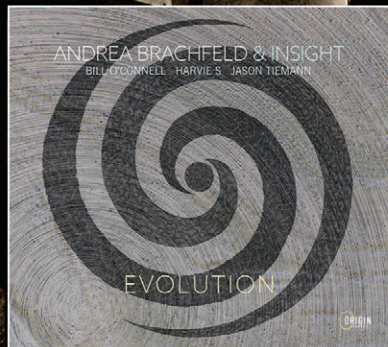
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Gerri Allen

ENTERS **THE DOWNBEAT** **HALL OF FAME**

By Allen Morrison

Photo by Michael Jackson

Everybody wanted to play with Gerri Allen — Ornette Coleman, Betty Carter, Ron Carter and Tony Williams, Charlie Haden and Paul Motian, Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette, Esperanza Spalding, David Murray, Terri Lyne Carrington, and on and on.

The serious-minded, soft-spoken pianist and composer, who died of cancer in 2017 at age 60, was humble enough that she might have been surprised at her induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

“Gerri didn’t really know how people felt about her,” said drummer/composer Carrington, a frequent collaborator. “That’s why we have to acknowledge our genius players while they’re here.” Friends and fellow musicians interviewed for this article said she would have been overjoyed by the honor, however.

“She was, like Betty Carter, a musician’s musician,” said Ora Harris, Allen’s long-time manager, who also managed Carter. “Musicians adored Gerri. She never knew how much she was loved. I would tell her all the time how revered she was.”

Allen long ago secured her reputation as a piano powerhouse with dazzling technique, a post-bop composer who, while steeped in jazz tradition, was also a restless, profoundly creative experimentalist. One of the more eclectic pianists in jazz history, she blurred distinctions between jazz and what has come to be called creative or serious music (with a poverty of expression). She could groove, or not; swing, or not; play any style, from classical to bop to free and atonal. Her original investigations of rhythm — for example, “Drummer’s Song,” or “The Dancer” (featuring tap dancer Maurice Chestnut) — were wildly inventive. She could take diverse source material, even a Christmas carol like “Angels We Have Heard On High,” and make something startlingly new from it. And when she played standards, Allen never sounded more like her own unique self, and no one else.

“In this music, there was before Geri Allen and after Geri Allen. She’s that important,” wrote pianist Ethan Iverson in 2017. Just two weeks before her death, Iverson elaborated on his *Do The Math* blog in honor of Allen’s 60th birthday: “Kenny Kirkland took the virtuosic McCoy Tyner/Herbie Hancock/Chick Corea axis to its logical endpoint. Around the time of Kirkland’s greatest prominence, Geri Allen broke something open by offering a radically different approach, bringing back the surrealism of Thelonious Monk and Eric Dolphy. Allen’s solution would

school system. By the time she was a young teen she knew she wanted to be a jazz musician. At Cass Technical High School in Detroit, which produced bassist Paul Chambers and trumpeter Donald Byrd, she studied with trumpeter and educator Marcus Belgrave. Later, at Howard University, she became one of the first students to graduate with a degree in jazz studies, in a program directed by Byrd.

She went on to earn a master’s degree in ethnomusicology from the University of Pittsburgh in 1982. Teaching stints followed

whom she dedicated the song “In Appreciation.”

Her commitment to others manifested itself in her devotion to teaching and, in particular, to inspiring the next generation of women. Some of today’s most accomplished female jazz artists, like the composers/bassists Spalding and Linda May Han Oh, have cited her as a major influence on both their art and their sense of what was possible. Allen served as program director for the annual All-Female Jazz Residency of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). She was all about “ensuring that women had a sense of place and agency and power,” as pianist Jason Moran told journalist Shaun Brady shortly after her death.

“She always wanted to do big projects,” Harris recalled. “In 2006, she wanted to celebrate women in jazz, and she wanted to do it at The Apollo Theater. My job was to make it happen. Dianne Reeves, Terri Lyne, Lizz Wright were all part of it. It was a dramatic production called ‘Great Apollo Women,’ and it was beautiful.” After the tragedy of 9/11, Allen conceived *For the Healing of the Nations*, a sacred jazz work, in tribute to the victims and survivors. “It featured AfroBlue, the choral ensemble from Howard University. She just woke up one day, and it was all in her head,” Harris said.

Allen had three children with her husband, the late trumpeter Wallace Roney. Asked by jazz writer John Murph about her secret to balancing a career and a family, Allen replied with a laugh, “I don’t want to talk about it, because as soon as you talk about it, everything falls apart. I just pray a lot.” The marriage ended in divorce.

When the children were young, Allen would frequently bring them with her to gigs. “There is a photo in which Geri is performing at the piano, and she has a child on her back in a papoose,” Harris said. “Sometimes one or two of them would be under her piano bench, very quiet. But she wouldn’t leave them in the dressing room.”

She was deeply spiritual. Herzen said, “Geri used to tell me that her favorite Bible quote is from Luke 1:37, ‘For nothing will be impossible with God.’” Her life seemed to embody that maxim.

Allen was a lifelong churchgoer. “We used to go to Bethany Baptist Church, near her home in Upper Montclair,” Harris said. “It was Saturday night at the Vanguard, Sunday morning in church, no matter how late we had been out. And I had to go; it wasn’t optional.

“I think it began with her family,” she added. “Her father and mother were jazz lovers but embedded in the church. She grew up in the church, and it stuck with her all her life. Her spiritual view was her North Star. There was always a spiritual component in her thoughts. I’m a believer, too, like Geri, an old Southern Baptist. [She needed] something to believe in beyond herself.”

DB

‘EVERYBODY HAS A BIT OF THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, BUT SOME ARE MORE INDIVIDUAL THAN OTHERS.’ —Terri Lyne Carrington

go on to be vastly influential. There were other avatars from the late ’80s and early ’90s, perhaps most notably Marcus Roberts and Brad Mehldau. Many of the celebrated younger pianists of the current moment — a recent poll has names like Jason Moran, Vijay Iyer, Craig Taborn, David Virelles, Kris Davis, Matt Mitchell, Aruán Ortiz — don’t play like Kirkland, Roberts or Mehldau. They play like Allen.”

Allen told critic Ted Panken in 2010 that she was comfortable crossing stylistic lines and incorporating both inside and outside approaches. “I don’t see this as a conflict,” she said. “All artists have the right to make a statement, and it’s my right to interject all my influences, to walk through different points of view, to give respect to all these musics I love while remaining grounded in jazz as my core expression and embracing the rigors of that choice.”

Allen had her own harmonic and melodic identity. According to Carrington, “Everybody has a bit of their own language, but some are more individual than others. Some have said playing Geri’s pieces made them a better pianist. They are so unique to her that it can be hard to hear other people play her music. And some of the pieces she wrote only she could play.”

Allen’s wide-ranging approach was the product of a lifelong immersion in the jazz repertoire, a strong work ethic, and rigorous academic training. Born in Pontiac, Michigan, in 1957, she grew up in Detroit, the daughter of a defense-contract administrator for the federal government and a principal in the Detroit

at Howard, New England Conservatory, Montclair State University, the New School and the University of Michigan, where she taught for 10 years. At the time of her death, she was director of jazz studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

Allen began her recording career in 1984 with *The Printmakers*, a striking trio recording with bassist Anthony Cox and drummer Andrew Cyrille that emphasized Allen’s hard-charging, polyrhythmic approach and advanced piano technique. About 20 more albums followed as a leader and many more as a sidewoman, on labels including Blue Note, Polygram, Telarc and finally Motéma.

“I gave her complete freedom,” said Jana Herzen, Motéma’s founder. “She called me ‘The enabler.’ And as a woman running a label, there was no effort involved for me to respect her.”

She recorded a trilogy of extraordinary solo piano albums with Herzen: *Flying Towards The Sound*, *A Child Is Born* and the Detroit-themed *Grand River Crossings*. “The way she explored Motown and Detroit was so creative, and her swing was so deep,” Herzen said. “That left hand — it never faltered.”

Allen championed the work of Mary Lou Williams, a lifelong inspiration, in her 2006 album *Zodiac Suite: Revisited*, an interpretation of Williams’ celebrated long-form work.

“She always felt strongly that she stood on the shoulders of giants,” Harris said. “She was dedicated to the spirit of honoring them, whether it was Mary Lou Williams or Rosa Parks,” to

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ALBUM OF THE YEAR
RISING STAR GROUP
OF THE YEAR





James Brandon Lewis

THE SOUND

By Bill Meyer
Photo by R.I. Sutherland-Cohen

OF THE MOMENT

A recording may become Jazz Album of the Year by epitomizing the sound of the moment or by pointing the direction where music is going next.

Without meaning to do so, tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis conceived precisely the music that a lot of people needed to hear, and recorded it with a band that pushed its leader to new heights.

Jesup Wagon is dedicated to Dr. George Washington Carver (1864–1943), a son of slaves whose boundary-defying life accrued accomplishments in music and painting, in addition to transformative advancements in investigative and applied sciences. It is named after the vehicle that Carver used to travel the American South in order to teach farming communities sustainable practices.

The album's seven compositions pay homage to the plants and practices that Carver cultivated and studied, as well as places where he worked and the communities he strove to uplift. Celebrating an African-American scholar who dedicated his life to the redemptive potential of scientific inquiry, community service and creative practice made *Jesup Wagon* a welcome balm upon its release last May — after more than a year of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid an ongoing plague of increasingly toxic social discourse.

Lewis' horn opens the title track, calling the proceedings to order, punctuating incantatory phrases with coarse cries. After about a minute of solo saxophone, the other members of Red Lily Quintet, DownBeat's Rising Star Group of the Year — convened specifically for *Jesup Wagon* — join him.

Cornetist Kirk Knuffke's high notes vault over the saxophonist's broad-shouldered statement, cellist Chris Hoffman plucks a jubilant countermelody and drummer Chad Taylor strikes up a surging attack that feels nearly out of control but anchors the actions with martial precision. Then the horn-and-string coin flips as Knuffke and Hoffman drop out while Lewis returns in tandem with bassist William Parker.

By the time the track is done, there's a good chance that whatever blues have been dogging you have been banished.

'THERE'S A LOT OF LYRICISM IN ALL OF MY MUSIC, AND A LOT OF EMOTION.'

On subsequent tracks, Parker sometimes switches to the guembri, a Moroccan bass lute, and Taylor to the mbira, a Zimbabwean thumb piano. Speaking by video-chat from Pittsburgh, where his trio was set to perform with a pair of wordsmiths at City of Asylum on the final night of Jazz Poetry Month 2022, Lewis explains, "I wanted instruments that represented the Earth. They sound organic, they sound not electrified, and I needed that to convey some soil."

On *Jesup Wagon*, tones establish character; themes and rhythms evoke cinematic visions. "Arachis," which is named after the Latin appellation for the peanut, grew from an image of Carver in the lab with his students, using Bunsen burners. "I'm literally imagining visuals; I'm trying to paint with that," Lewis says. "There's a lot of lyricism in all of my music, and a lot of emotion. It's pretty much drenched in emotion, without being overly sappy."

The empathic support that the rest of Red Lily Quintet brings to the album is especially remarkable given that the group had little time as a unit prior to the recording. However, the musicians were hardly strangers. "Individually, I play with all of these folks," says Lewis. "Chad and I have a duo. William and I have worked together for the last 10 years in different ensembles. I met Kirk in like 2013, and we haven't played a lot together, but we've played enough. Actually, one of the first conversations that he and I ever had was about George Washington Carver. The only person that I'd only played with once was Chris Hoffman."

Lewis is both bemused and grateful about the ongoing positive response to *Jesup Wagon*. "I don't know why this album specifically reso-

nated with so many people, but it did, and that's cool, and I'm thankful that it did." He reckons that the praise it draws reflects not only upon him, but the musicians who have inspired, guided, and encouraged him. "This album wasn't all about me," he says. "It was about the community of people doing work on the fringes, and when the album wins, we all win. Those who paved the way for me, the Wadada Leo Smiths, the Anthony Braxtons, the Henry Threadgills of the world, the William Parkers and Matthew Shipp, all of these people, Angelica Sanchez,

you know? When one of these albums gets some kind of notice, it helps the community. I want to stress that."

The originating impulse to work on *Jesup Wagon* was an invitation from another member of that community. "At the beginning of the COVID, Whit Dickey, who is an amazing drummer, called me up and said that he was going to start a label."

The name of that label is Tao Forms. But the project's first seeds were planted decades earlier. Lewis was born in 1983, the son of a preacher and an educator. "My exposure to George Washington Carver started when I was a kid. My mom was a science and social studies teacher in Buffalo, New York, where I'm from, and we would spend our summers with her as she was either working on exams for the city of Buffalo or doing different workshops. She was a hands-on teacher, and she exposed my siblings and me to that. So, eventually, as a young person being assigned to write an essay on somebody for science, I remember being exposed to George Washington Carver. A lot of times in my adult life I would go back and dig in my memory, and peel back the layers even more."

The combination of self-directed and externally structured learning, during which Lewis often revisits earlier lessons, threads through his development.

He picked up the clarinet at age 9, and taught himself to play simple melodies before enrolling in Buffalo's arts magnet middle school the next year. He played in school and church bands throughout high school, and then went to college at Buffalo State and Howard University. After a stretch of living in

Denver, he resumed study at CalArts, where he fondly remembers the classes of Charlie Haden. "Charlie wasn't a theoretical guy. He would tell us about his grandkids, or he would tell us about a hike he went on, and he would talk about beauty a lot. I never heard him waste a note that he played in class; every note meant something, and I tried to put a lot of that in my own playing, to play a melody where it means something. So, yeah, that's one of the main reasons that I went to CalArts. Wadada (Leo Smith) and Joe LaBarbera ... Alphonso Johnson, who I worked with after I graduated ... you know, all nice people, too. I can't stress that enough. Hella musicians, but also nice. I did not feel any ego at all." Since 2012, Lewis has lived in New York. Since 2014, he has made eight albums as a bandleader or in duo with Chad Taylor.

Since recording *Jesup Wagon*, Red Lily Quintet has only played a few concerts, but a second album is being planned. Lewis currently leads a high-energy trio with Hoffman and drummer Max Jaffe; the James Brandon Lewis Quartet, with Taylor, pianist Aruán Ortiz and bassist Brad Jones; and the plugged-in Unruly Quintet. He is also a founder and continuing member of the words and music collective Heroes Are Gang Leaders. In April, Lewis became the first recipient of the Balvenie Fellowship for a doctoral program in Creativity at University of the Arts. "It's an opportunity for me to get some questions answered from my own research, questions regarding molecular systematic music, which is something I've been working on since 2011," he explains.

Molecular systematic music is the concept informing the saxophonist's compositions for his quartet. In essence, the system involves the application of insights gleaned from Lewis' study of genetic structures to his compositional choices. "Viewing music through molecular biology to recontextualize everything gives me a fresh start with music. You know that's no different than if you hear about Sonny Rollins or someone going on a sabbatical, or Coltrane locking himself away in a room. I would say that molecular is my sabbatical, entering a new realm to discover something new to me. All of my albums and all of my theories have to do with me trying to reach the truest version of myself before I die."

Ten days prior to Lewis' conversation with DownBeat, 10 Black people died and two more were wounded in a racially motivated mass shooting that took place in his hometown. He closed the interview with these words: "Buffalo is a tight-knit community. I went to school with a young woman who lost somebody in that situation, and it's unfortunate. It would be nice if we could all come together as humans and, rather than bickering and fighting, come up with some real solutions that can bring togetherness rather than division." **DB**

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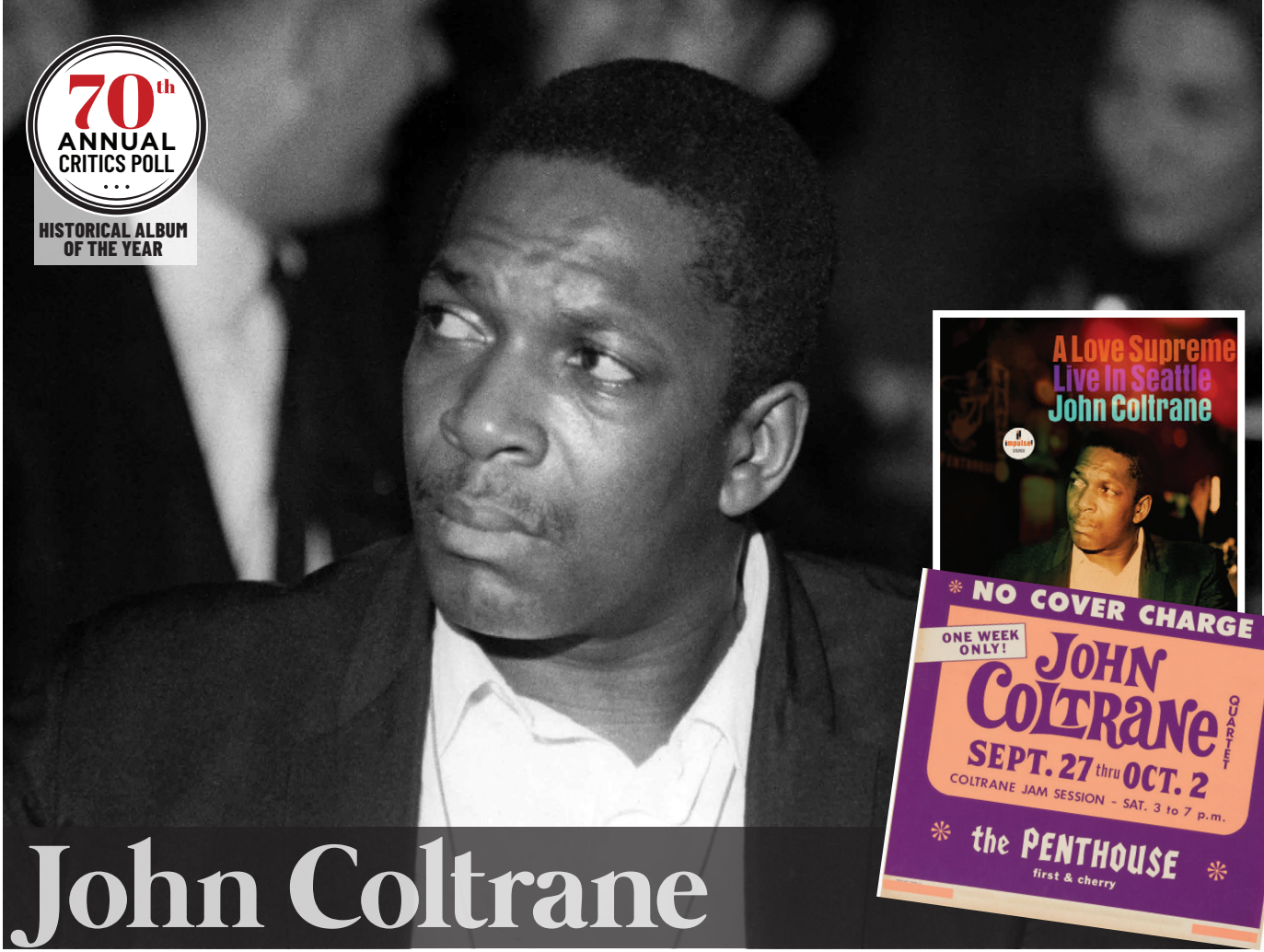
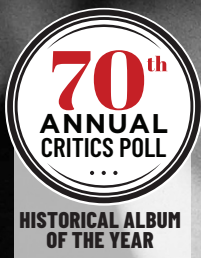


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John Coltrane

A LOVE SUPREME: LIVE IN SEATTLE

By Paul de Barros Photo by Raymond Ross Archives, CTSIMAGES

Until last year, John Coltrane was widely thought to have performed his masterpiece *A Love Supreme* only once live, on July 26, 1965, at the Festival Mondial du Jazz Antibes, in France.

That assumption was upended with the October 2021 release on Impulse! of a private recording made some two months later, on Saturday, Oct. 2, 1965, the last night of a six-night stand at Seattle’s Penthouse jazz club, the same engagement that also yielded the professionally recorded album *Live In Seattle*. The new tapes were found by Seattle saxophonist Steve Griggs in a vast collection left by another Seattle sax man, the late educator and activist Joe Brazil. Griggs made the discovery while sorting and digitizing Brazil’s collection of 750 reel-to-reel tapes and 80 videos, many made while Brazil taught jazz history at the University of Washington. Griggs still remembers the exact date he realized what he had found.

“It was April 24, 2015,” he said. “I heard

‘Psalm’ first, and I was blown away, because I knew it was rare, that he never played it in public, except in France. But then when I turned the tape over and realized here’s Joe Brazil doing his matinee set, then it ends, then the next thing is the opening fanfare (of “Acknowledgment”), and — Oh, my God! — I realized the whole suite is here.”

More than a mere rarity, the new recording is an avant-garde gem that offers new insights into Coltrane’s iconic work. At 75:28, it runs more than twice as long as the original studio recording and has a loose, open-ended, wilder feel, which lives up to the Penthouse billing of a “John Coltrane Jam Session.” In addition to the members of what is now known as the classic quartet — pianist McCoy Tyner, bassist Jimmy Garrison, drummer Elvin Jones — the

Penthouse band featured saxophonist Pharoah Sanders and bassist Donald Rafael Garrett, plus then-Seattle resident, alto saxophonist Carlos Ward, who sat in after opening for Coltrane as part of Brazil’s band on the Saturday matinee. The new players brought the shrieks, dissonance and diffuse rhythmic patterns of free jazz to the bandstand, as well as doubling atmospherically on an array of percussion instruments.

Between the four movements of the original piece — “Acknowledgement,” “Resolution,” “Pursuance” and “Psalm” — Coltrane made room for solo features, presented rather arbitrarily on the album as separate tracks called “interludes.” The first is a sinuous bass duet, with Garrett playing deftly in the upper range; the second, a smacking solo by Jones with some splendid cymbal work. Interludes three

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Geri Allen

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and four are actually one long, often jaunty solo by Garrison that was interrupted by a change of reels (admirably spliced). Surprisingly, and perhaps a disappointment for some listeners, the sidemen's solos outshine those of Coltrane himself. Tyner thunders and sparkles through a long, splendid outing on "Pursuance." Sanders howls with intensity on "Acknowledgement" and "Pursuance"; and Ward offers a stuttering, urgently expressive solo on "Resolution" that makes it clear he has been listening to both Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy.

Many locals still vividly remember Coltrane's engagement at the Penthouse, which regularly hosted A-list acts such as Miles Davis, Stan Getz, Carmen McRae and Oscar Peterson. Bassist David Friesen, who along with Ward played in the house band with Brazil, recalled that "everyone seemed to know that something special was going to happen."

Indeed, the program was a shocking departure. The first couple of nights, the sets went on so long that Penthouse owner Charlie Puzzo, though no philistine and an adamant champion of jazz, told Griggs he had to ask Coltrane to take breaks so he could turn the house and sell more drinks. Coltrane complied, but the crowd was still not quite ready for what it heard.

"A lot of people, myself included, still had in mind Coltrane the ballad player with the Miles [Davis] Quintet," said Seattle DJ Jim Wilke, who broadcast part of the Thursday night set on KING-FM. "It was hard to get a handle on."

For Seattle bassist Pete Leinonen, Ward was the clear standout of the night. Coltrane apparently agreed. After the set, he encouraged Ward to move to New York, where he later famously played with Abdullah Ibrahim's jazz octet, Ekaya.

Such on-the-scene comments highlight just how differently we regard *A Love Supreme* today than we might have in 1965, none moreso than this intriguing recollection by Seattle composer-pianist Marius Nordal:

"I saw the Saturday one where he filled the set with just one piece. It was so powerful that at the end, people were glassy-eyed and stunned and there was little applause. One professional-looking guy with a grey goatee stood up to do a lonely, clapping ovation ... as if to say, 'What's wrong with you people? Don't you realize what you've just heard?'"

That night in the fall of 1965, *A Love Supreme* had only been on sale for nine months. It's a good bet that very few people knew what they were hearing, especially since Coltrane never even announced the piece.

It's as if, said Coltrane biographer Lewis Porter, Coltrane were telling his band, "You want to jam on it? That's fine." Trane was almost ridiculously humble. He was not self-important, so even if he may have thought of this [*A Love Supreme*] as his big statement, that doesn't mean he saw it as an important moment for everyone else.

"I am a very level-headed person," he added. "I never jump out of my seat. But believe me, when I heard this my heart was pumping."

Could other live versions of *A Love Supreme* surface? "Hearing him play it informally in October '65 makes me think there's no reason to assume that he didn't play it at other clubs," Porter said.

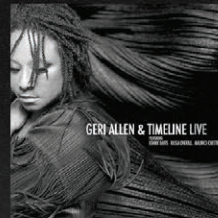
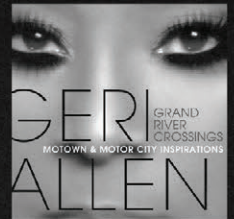
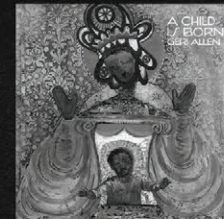
Still, why did Coltrane perform *A Love Supreme* in Seattle? Joe Brazil may be the answer. Brazil knew Coltrane in Detroit, where they often compared notes on Eastern spirituality, in particular, the Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita. In a 1989 oral history interview, Brazil said he had "about 10 versions of the Gita, the 'Hindu Bible,' and Trane was interested in some of those versions that I had." While Coltrane was in Seattle, he and Brazil spent time discussing spiritual interests and also recorded the overtly spiritual album *Om*, with Brazil playing wooden flute. It's not a stretch to credit Brazil with putting Coltrane in the frame that prompted him to revisit *A Love Supreme*. Griggs agrees.

"The more I tried to re-create the scene of Coltrane in Seattle, the more Joe Brazil became the main thread," he said.

Whatever the reason behind Coltrane's decision to revisit his masterpiece, we are lucky to have it and can only hope it will lead to the discovery of many more.

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ARTISTS OF POWER AND DISTINCTION



The Marvels, from left, Bill Frisell, Eric Harland, Charles Lloyd, Reuben Rogers and Greg Leisz

Charles Lloyd & the Marvels

By Phillip Lutz Photo by D. Darr

Leading a secluded life in the expansive hill country above Montecito, California, Charles Lloyd has plenty of time and space for contemplation.

And when he gathers his thoughts, Lloyd — a veteran of the counter-culture wars who famously tuned in, turned on and dropped out — will sometimes veer from the light.

“I’m paranoid,” the saxophonist, flutist and composer said in a late-May Zoom call from his home, “because I was around in the ’60s and wanted to change the world with the beautiful stuff of music, and I haven’t done that.”

But, Lloyd said he is also an “obstinate” sort. A self-described dreamer, he won’t quite give up on the power of music to heal or its ability to transport him back to moments in his life when he has put that power to work.

And he has found no better vehicle for such trips than his poll-topping Jazz Group of the Year: Charles Lloyd & the Marvels.

The Marvels, in fact, were hatched out of a desire to recapture a moment of spiritual oneness when, as a young man of color, Lloyd played with Al Vescovo, a white pedal steel guitarist, and, in doing so, bridged the racial divide in his hometown of Memphis. Decades later, on Nov. 15, 2013, he invited pedal steel guitarist Greg Leisz to join him and his working group — electric guitarist Bill Frisell, bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Eric Harland — for a trial-by-fire audition during a concert at Royce Hall at UCLA. The resulting interac-

tion, he said, was a marvel, and the quintet, name and all, was born.

“I was so enthralled,” he recalled. “Al Vescovo had come back to me.”

Since then, the Marvels have provided many opportunities for Lloyd to commune with old buddies. He does so with Ornette Coleman on “Peace” and “Ramblin’,” two cantering Coleman covers off the Marvels’ latest album, *Tone Poem* (Blue Note, 2021). Coleman, he said, was a fellow traveler in 1950s Los Angeles, sharing with him all manner of sustenance, musical and otherwise, before decamping for New York at the end of the decade. Lloyd followed a year later.

"I just wanted to say hello to him," Lloyd said in explaining why he played the Coleman tunes.

Lloyd's musical chats with Thelonious Monk are marked with some frequency, too. They are also touched by melancholy, based on a rendering of "Monk's Mood" that appears on the Marvels' 2018 album *Vanished Gardens* (Blue Note) and on a slightly evolved version included on *Tone Poem*.

Wistfully, Lloyd recalled that, as a relative novice on the New York scene, he once naively ignored Monk's offer to join his group because it came through a third party. He regrets that decision to this day.

"I speak to Monk all the time," he said.

That Lloyd speaks to old colleagues through music does not mean that the music dwells in the past. To the contrary. Lloyd's interpretations of any given tune are timeless marvels of rolling invention that subtly shift from moment to moment, night to night and, ultimately, year to year until the tune's possibilities seem spent and it is temporarily removed from rotation, according to Rogers, who has been a fixture in Lloyd's ensembles for 18 years.

"We'll put a song away for four or five years and bring it back," he explained. "It's fresh again. Then we're able to expand on it. That's been his thing all his life."

Beyond the practice of rotating tunes, the addition of Frisell and, on the guitarist's recommendation, Leisz (the two had a long working relationship that predated their work with Lloyd) has conspicuously altered the atmosphere, yielding the kind of billowing sonic bed on which Lloyd's otherworldly expansions sit so naturally.

In fact, it's remarkable he has only assembled the unit in the past decade.

"It feels like we've been playing together for a couple of lifetimes," Frisell said.

In part, Frisell's feeling of familiarity reflects the openness of thinking and breadth of background he and Leisz have shared with Lloyd from that first concert at UCLA. Like Lloyd, who played with everyone from the Beach Boys to the Grateful Dead, Frisell and Leisz both had substantial experience playing with performers mainly known for their work outside the jazz world.

"Greg is like a brother to me," Frisell said. "We had been playing since the late '90s. We never had to figure out what to do."

The Marvels' first two albums found them collaborating with vocalists who either skirt the jazz world (Norah Jones, who laid down one track on their Blue Note debut, 2016's *I Long To See You*) or operate largely in another realm (country star Willie Nelson, who also did a track on that album, and roots mainstay Lucinda Williams, who laid down multiple tracks on *Vanished Gardens*). While *Tone Poem*

does not feature vocalists per se, Lloyd sees himself as one, though he decided early on that he could best give voice to his ideas through an external instrument.

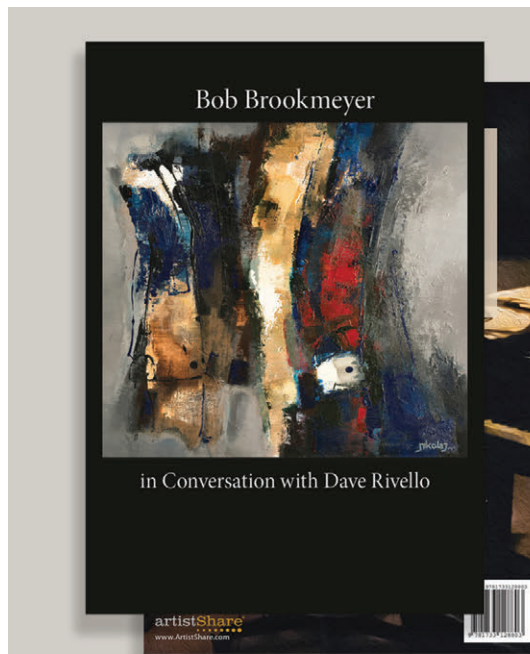
"I'm a singer, and I have a saxophone now," he said.

Lloyd made it clear that all his bandmates, and by extension their collective voice, must exhibit that singing quality. And he was confident they would do just that as he prepared to leave on a summer tour of North America and Europe that would include July dates with the Marvels in the U.K., Poland, Romania, Belgium

and The Netherlands.

At the age of 84, Lloyd seems strong of mind and heart, and he has used the pandemic time for deeper contemplation. But the problems outside the confines of his house amid the hills haunt him, and so he will venture forth, seeking insight into why, despite the example of artists like himself, so many people still choose darkness over, as he has written, "the light of Peace ahead."

"I'm raring to go out and play," he said, "because I'll find something that will explain the inexplicable." **DB**



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LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE
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Maria Schneider

DATA LORDS & BEYOND

By Phillip Lutz Photo by Brian Lermite

A year ago, Maria Schneider was, like many people, stuck in a pandemic holding pattern. With live gigs for The Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra canceled or postponed, she was spending an inordinate amount of time in archival cleanup, reconciling discrepancies in old scores for the sake of posterity.

“I didn’t want to leave pieces of things hanging out there with mistakes in them,” she said recently. As the pandemic’s impact eased, she has turned her attention to other projects. None has been more pressing than scheduling bookings for the 18-piece orchestra, which has won Large Jazz Ensemble of the Year in the 2022 Critics Poll, as it has every year since 2007.

After 18 months with no gigs — the longest period of inactivity in the band’s 30-year history — it reemerged at the outdoor DC Jazz Festival in September. The experience, according to

Schneider, was imperfect: The set was short, the wind was unkind and a couple of tempos were a bit off. “It was a little rough,” she said.

Yet it also proved cathartic, allowing a long-awaited opportunity for the band to air material from its Grammy-winning double-disc opus *Data Lords*. Kinks notwithstanding, performances of pieces like “Don’t Be Evil,” “Sputnik” and the title tune offered evidence that all would be well. A few more gigs, ending with a week at Birdland in March, confirmed that proposition.

“We blew the stink off,” Schneider recalled with a smile.

The successful return was by no means pre-ordained. A European tour set for February was called off because of a COVID spike. Beyond that, the December 2020 death of the band’s pianist and *éminence grise*, Frank Kimbrough, weighed heavily. The consensus replacement was Gary Versace, the band’s highly respected accordionist, but no one knew how that would alter the ensemble’s delicate balance.

“It’s hard when you have people, and your

band is built around them, and they're such a part of your sound," Schneider said. "You're wondering, 'How is this going to change? Is it going to feel like a loss?' There's just a lot of emotions and things.

"The whole band was feeling it. I think Gary was feeling it: 'How do I come in and now make it my own, yet still honor the kind of dynamic that we built over the years,' which also, by the way, was built by Gary."

For his part, Versace was realistic: "There's a transition period to adapt to a new person and a new musical voice on the instrument, because Frank was so much a part of what the band is. So I just try to respect that."

While Versace felt the loss as much as anyone — Kimbrough was both a colleague and friend — the accordionist's 20 years with the orchestra equipped him with the potential to take the piano chair and make it his own.

"They both have the esthetic of being great listeners and collaborators," Schneider said, adding that Versace "carves out every note with the amplitude of how he touches the note. It's not just the line, not just the chord. It's how he caresses them."

Versace, Schneider said, not only brought a new voice to the piano but also helped ease the way for Julien Labro, who had been occupying the accordion chair, a position made trickier by

the presence of a guitar in the band.

"I have a rhythm section with three chordal players — that's a disaster, generally," Schneider said. "So I value people who really appreciate not playing and listening and waiting for the right moment to make their entrance. Gary's been helpful helping Julien find that space."

She said Versace might lead her to try new kinds of writing for piano, and Labro, whose experience extends into the classical realm, might lead her down new avenues for accordion.

Data Lords, inspired partly by her collaboration with David Bowie and his penchant for the darker writing of her early period, represented something of a return to that mode. The album reflected her concerns about big technology companies. But that topic has, for the moment, run its course in her work.

"It's on my mind, but I'm not I'm not making new discoveries about it," she said. Rather, Schneider may be entering a more pastoral (if no less serious) period, like the one that reached its apotheosis with the Grammy-winning *The Thompson Fields*. That album drew on her childhood on a Minnesota farm.

She is at work on "The Great Potoo," a piece about a bird she encountered on a trip to Brazil. While birds are a long-held interest, she said, she wasn't aware that they would return as an artistic inspiration when she came up with the

piece's core motif. Yet, "After 15 years of not thinking about the potoo much, something in my head said, 'Look up the potoo again on the internet. Remind yourself about that bird.' When I saw it, I said, 'Oh, my god, that's what this piece is.'"

The bird emits a piercing sound that, in her mimicking, came across as something between a squawk and a shriek. The sound will be assigned to the trombone, she said, when she finishes adapting the work from a commission she has already produced for a group from the Eastman School of Music, where she received a master's degree in 1985.

Other pieces about birds are also percolating in her mind, she said, all of which could ultimately coalesce into a theme for an album. But such thoughts are premature. Even as she hoped to have "The Great Potoo" in shape for this year's Newport Jazz Festival, the band will continue to make up for lost time playing music from *Data Lords*.

Wherever her writing takes her, she said, she is happy with the direction of the group.

"I have a new optimism that it somehow feels OK to enjoy where it's going and not feel that's wrong, too, because we've lost Frank. Frank would want that. That's where we are. It's a very good place to be — a very complex dynamic." DB



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Melissa Aldana's SHARP FOCUS

By Phillip Lutz Photo by Eduardo Pavez Goye

To those who have followed saxophonist Melissa Aldana's career, her victory as Rising Star Artist of the Year is no surprise.

The trajectory has been clear from her days as a teenage standout at the club Thelonious in her native Santiago, Chile, to her March debut as a leader at the Village Vanguard. That gig celebrated the release of her Blue Note debut, *12 Stars* — and cemented a place in the jazz firmament that may have been, well, written in the stars.

A legendarily hard worker determined to wring the most out of her gift, Aldana has the fire within. She is more focused on the intoxication of creation than the roar of the crowd.

"When I play music, to me if there's an audience or not, of course there's a difference — but it's not going to change the way I'm going to be into the music," she said.

Like her lodestar Sonny Rollins, who inspired her to switch from alto to tenor at age 12, she has acquired a reputation for intense commitment to her instrument. On the road, her early morning long tones have been known, to the bemusement of her bandmates, to rouse hotel guests.

But for Aldana, that work is a means to an end. "As much as I can practice seven, eight hours a day, that is not a problem," she said. "But when I'm playing, I want to be in the moment. If not, I'm not going to allow myself to grow and figure out what I have to say."

Colleagues are some of her greatest admirers. Singer Cécile McLorin Salvant, who performed with Aldana in the estimable all-wom-

an group Artemis and did the cover art for *12 Stars* and Aldana's previous album, *Visions* (Motéma), said that from the first time she heard Aldana play, at the winter jazz festival at Umbria, in Italy, she has reacted "viscerally."

"When you hear somebody that has a really personal way of playing and communicating, it's really something," McLorin Salvant said. "She always puts herself in situations where she's challenging herself musically. Rarely does she rely on some already cooked ideas she had. She is always painting herself into a corner and getting out of it."

During the pandemic, Aldana wrote feverishly, documenting musically some of the most personal aspects of her life: the child she has yet to have ("Emilia"), the look she will never have ("The Bluest Eye") and life upended in her hometown ("Los Ojos De Chile").

Along the way, she discovered that the tradition of tarot offered some spiritual guidance and artistic inspiration. In a tantalizing suggestion of growing confidence about herself as a player and a person, the album's title track refers to the stars that adorn The Empress, a symbol of creation. The tune, she said, reflected a personal awakening.

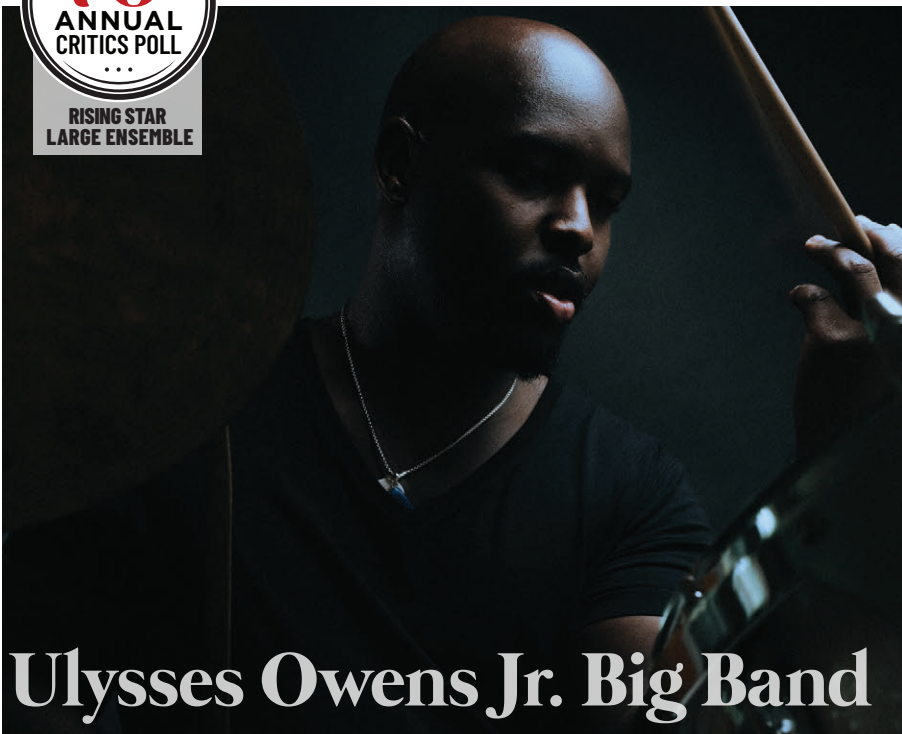
Amid the pandemic fever, occasional gigs provided moments of release. She and the group did livestreams at Smalls and a couple of modest outdoor concerts, notably one in Central Park, where she, bassist Pablo Menares and drummer Kush Abadey set up under a statue of William Shakespeare and, for two, uninterrupted hours, blew the top off a set of standards and the odd original.

The audience, a mix of casual park visitors and avid fans, responded with the kind of appreciation that comes with the recognition that, in the modern age, great live music is not a given. What they didn't know was that, behind the scenes, Aldana, Menares and Abadey were, in regular get-togethers at her apartment, workshoping material that didn't air in the park — material that ultimately became *12 Stars*.

With the core trio augmented by Sullivan Fortner's keyboard musings and guitarist Lage Lund's lush lines and inventive electronic touches, the album presents Aldana in a fresh setting, and she responds with new and even shapelier sonic surprises.

During the pandemic, she said, the possibility of recording for Blue Note came to her in a vision. "I thought, 'Why not? Why not?'" Label president Don Was, contacted by her representative, was captivated by her previous work and signed her without an in-person meeting.

"What is success?" she said. "Success means to be able to have a consistent band where we can play so much that we can develop a concept. Whatever I have to do, I just want to be able to call the guys and we go out for a month and make good money and just take care of the music." **DB**



Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band

PAST, PRESENT

& FUTURE

By Alexa Peters

Photo by Miguel Emmanuelli

The votes are in, and the Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band has been selected as Rising Star Large Ensemble of the Year in the 70th Annual DownBeat Critics Poll.

The honor comes on the heels of the band's acclaimed performances at Dizzy's Club pre-pandemic and a live debut record called *Soul Conversations* (Outside in Music, 2021). Celebration of the group has led Owens Jr. — a fiery and creative drummer known for his playing with the likes of Kurt Elling, Joey Alexander and Christian McBride — to focus energy on developing his 19-piece big band.

"I've been going back and forth between big band and [other styles] my whole career — I love the big band," Owens said. "In my big band, there's a freedom that I have to orchestrate and to play that's very different than what I do with Kurt or McBride or Joey or whomever."

Owens said the recognition has been especially affirming for him because the band has been well-received by new audiences, and because it is emblematic of a return to his early musical roots: playing drums in the Black

Sanctified Church, devouring a favorite Buddy Rich video his parents gifted him and admiring his early teachers who were heavies in the world of big-band drumming, like Ricky Kirkland, who played with the Ray Charles Big Band.

Raised in Jacksonville, Florida, Owens' exposure to the music scene began in the church where, as 7-year-old, he was appointed the drummer of the church choir. That role gave him his first glimpse into the responsibility of leading an ensemble from the drum throne.

As a high school freshman, Owens studied drums privately with Kirkland and was encouraged to audition for his school's jazz band, beating out the presiding senior for the drum seat. By age 15, he dived headfirst into Jacksonville's heavy jazz scene, nurtured by the proximity of University of North Florida, and began playing regularly with and around UNF folks like jazz program founder and Grammy-winning big band low-brass player Rich Matteson.

From there, Owens received a full scholarship to attend Juilliard's inaugural jazz studies program, then he was offered two high-profile gigs.

"The same week that Kurt Elling called to hire me, the Basie band called and wanted me to be the drummer," Owens said. "Butch Miles wanted me to take over for him, and he had been grooming me for probably two years, and I had done a few gigs with the Basie band."

He decided on Elling and went on to win his first Grammy in 2010 for *Dedicated To You*. But, not long after, another opportunity to play in a large ensemble came knocking — this time the Christian McBride Big Band, and Owens earned his second Grammy in 2012, playing on *The Good Feeling*. That experience bolstered Owens' confidence, and inspired trombonist and bandleader Michael Dease to approach Owens about putting his own big band together.

"He was like, 'Ulysses ... there's something about your playing that comes alive when you're with a big band in a way that doesn't come alive in other configurations,'" Owens recalled.

So, when Dizzy's called and asked him to bring in a band, Owens went out on a limb and put together a big band crafted to be more diverse in age, gender and sexual orientation.

"We wanted to have women in the band," Owens said. "I felt like everybody always talks about jazz and gender and justice. They talk about it, and they sit on the panels and their bands don't change. I told them, I don't want tokenism. We started looking for the baddest women on their instruments."

The band is a melting pot — including alto player Alexa Tarantino, tenor saxophonist Diego Rivera, who also arranges for the band, Bahamian jazz trumpeter Giveton Gelin and soulful Japanese pianist Takeshi Ohbayashi.

The lineup and the repertoire — comprising many arrangements and compositions by band members — turns heads. Along with performing some of Owens' originals, like the gliding, tenor-led waltz "Red Chair," the group does an inspired rendition of Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" and a saucy cover of Neal Hefti's "Girl Talk."

Owens brings variety with intention.

"We need new generations of listeners, but also people who have not listened to this art form before," he said. "One of the things I love about this is that I found people buying this big band record who had never bought a jazz record before, let alone a *big band* record."

The band will be back at Dizzy's from Nov. 29 through Dec. 4, then go into the studio.

"I think [big band jazz] can teach us what Dizzy Gillespie talked about, which is you should have one foot in the present, one foot in the past and one foot in the future," Owens said. "I think my band echoes the past but also presses toward the future, which is what I think people need today."

DB



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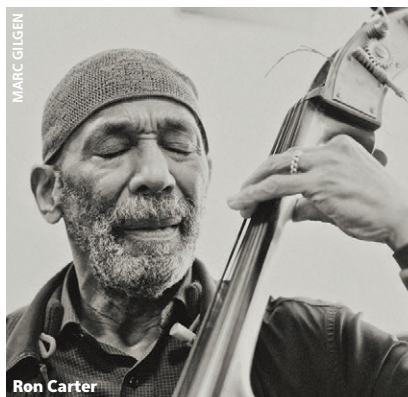
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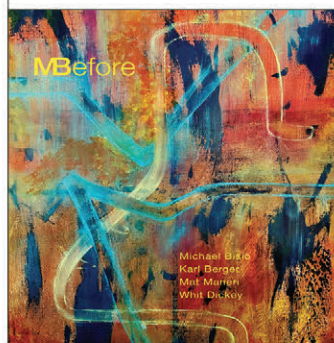
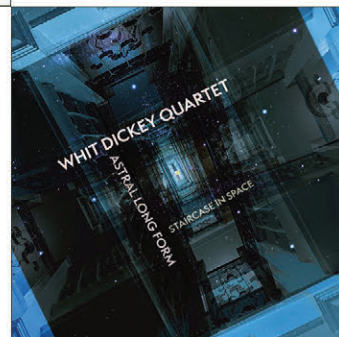
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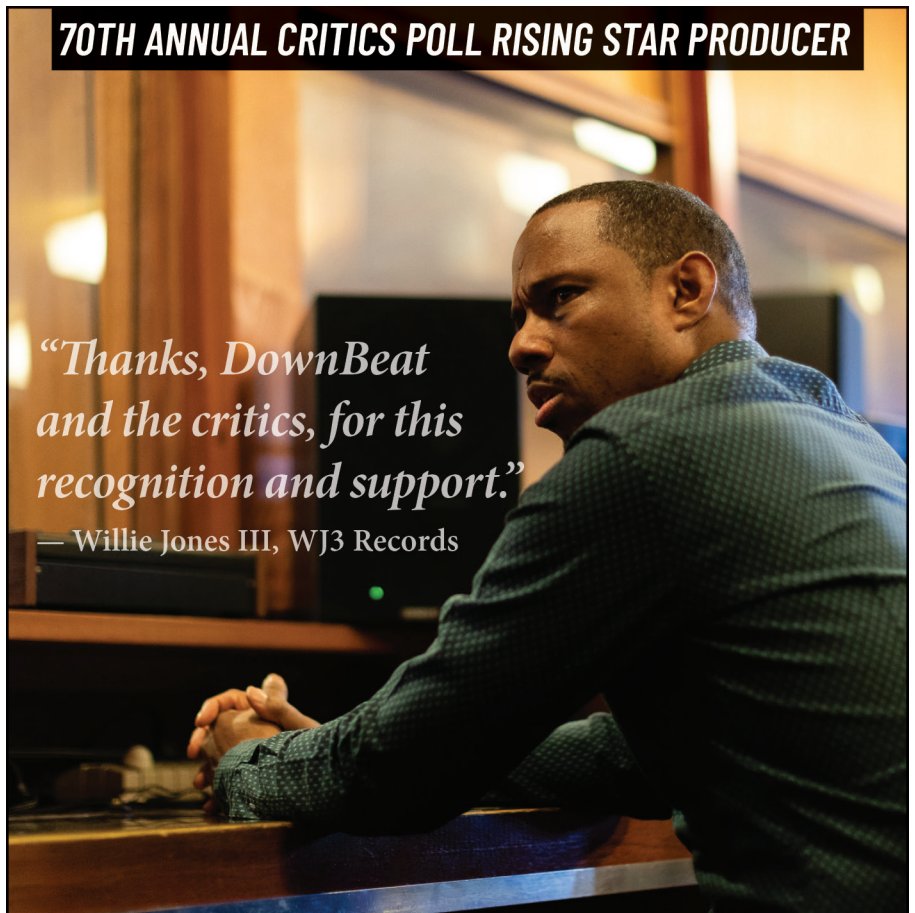
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Mikko Innanen

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ROG WALKER



Miho Hazama

CRAIG LOVELL

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THE CRITICS

Below are the 114 critics who voted in DownBeat's 70th Annual International Critics Poll. According to the rules, critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices in each category, with no more than 5 points going to any single artist or group. They voted for both Established Talent and Rising Stars. Note: The asterisk [*] denotes critics who are members of the Veterans Committee.

Frank Alkyer: DB

Larry Appelbaum: JazzTimes

Mirian Arbalejo: La Cesión de las Voluntades

Bridget Arwine: Beets and Bebop Media

Glenn R. Astarita: All About Jazz

Mark R. Bacon: Real Westway, Main Event, LEO

Chris J. Bahnsen: DB

Michael Barris: DB

Peter Bastian: Jazzthetik

Bill Beuttler: Boston Globe, Boston Magazine

Edward Blanco: All About Jazz, WDNA

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

Philip Booth: JazzTimes, Jazziz, Relix

Shaun Brady: JazzTimes, Philadelphia Inquirer

Rainer Bratfisch: Jazz Podium

Jon Bream: Minneapolis Star Tribune

Marcela Breton: Freelance Journalist

Nelson Brill: bostonconcertreviews.com

Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum

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

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

Enzo Capua: Musica Jazz, Umbria Jazz

Henry Carrigan: DB, Living Blues, No Depression, Folk Alley, Publishers Weekly, BookPage

James Catchpole: Tokyo Jazz Scene, OK Jazz Podcast

Brad A. Cohan: JazzTimes, TIDAL, Bandcamp

Aaron Cohen: DB, Chicago Reader

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

J.D. Considine: DB, JazzTimes

Ayana Contreras: WBEZ, DB, Bandcamp Daily

Paul de Barros: DB, The Seattle Times, Earshot

C.J. de Jonge: Jazzism, Jazz Bulletin, Doctor Jazz

Anthony Dean-Harris: DB, KRTU San Antonio

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

Laurence Donohue-Greene: New York City Jazz Record

Alain Drouot: DB, Citizen Jazz

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

Tina Louise Edwards: The Telegraph, The Guardian, DB, WeJazz

Shannon J. Effinger: The New York Times, NPR Music, Pitchfork

Ed Enright: DB

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

David Franklin, Cadence, JazzTimes, Jazz

Forum, Jazz Notes

Philip Freeman: DB, The Wire, Stereogum, Bandcamp Daily

Takao Fujioka: Way Out West

Gary Fukushima: DB

Jon S. Garelick: DB, Boston Globe, Jazziz, Arts Fuse

Dustin Garlitz: JazzTalent.com

Richard Gehr: Relix, Los Angeles Times

Ted Gioia: *The Honest Broker*

Ludovico Granvassu: All About Jazz

Steve Greenlee: JazzTimes

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

Frank-John Hadley: DB

James Hale: DB, SoundStageXperience.com

Eric Harabadian: DB, Big City Rhythm & Blue, Music Connection, Aoido Magazine

Kazunori Harada: Jazz Japan Magazine

George W. Harris: Jazz Weekly

Kazune Hayata: Jazz Life,

Chris Heim: KMUW

Andrey Henkin: New York City Jazz Record

Geoffrey Himes: JazzTimes, Paste, Washington Post

Rob Hoff: WQLN, NPR, JazzErie

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

C. Andrew Hovan: DB, All About Jazz

Dick Hovenga: Written In Music

Tom Hull: tomhull.com

Tom Ineck: KZUM Radio, Lincoln Journal Star

Michael Jackson: DB, Jazzwise

Ammar Kalia: DB, The Guardian

Richard Kamins: Step Tempest

Yoshi Kato: DB, San Francisco Chronicle

Larry Kelp: KPFA-FM

Reinhard Köchl: Jazz Thing, Jazzthetik, Die Zeit, Augsburgener Allgemeine

Jeff Krow: Audiophile Audition

David Kunian: DB, Offbeat, 64 Parishes

William Layman: PopMatters

Angelo Leonardi: All About Jazz Italia, Musica Jazz

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

Phillip Lutz: DB

Jim Macnie: DB, Lament For A Straight Line

Howard Mandel: DB, The Wire, ArtsJournal.com/JazzBeyondJazz

Peter Margasak: DownBeat, The Wire, Bandcamp

Daily, Chamber Music

Daniel Margolis: DB

John McDonough: DB

Kerlie McDowall: Canadian Musician

Peter McElhinney: Style Weekly, Richmond Magazine

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

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

Bill Milkowski: DB, The Absolute Sound, Jazziz, Guitar Player, Jazzthing

Ralph A. Miriello: Notes on Jazz

Allen Morrison: DB, JazzTimes, TIDAL, Grammy.com

Brian Morton: DB, The Wire, Tablet

John Murph: DB, TIDAL, Jazzwise, JazzTimes

Joshua Myers: DB

Michael G. Nastos: Hot House, WCBN, Paradiso Dei Musicisti

Ron Netsky: City Newspaper (Rochester, New York)

Jon Newey: Editor In Chief, Jazzwise

Ivana Ng: DB, New York City Jazz Record

Dan Ouellette: DB, Jazz & Beyond Intel, The Landfill Chronicles, Qwest TV

Ted Panken: DB, Jazziz, JazzTimes

Terry Perkins: DB

Alexa Peters: DB, Audiofemme, Seattle Times, Seattle Magazine, Crosscut, Paste

j. poet: DB, East Bay Express, Lone Star Music, New Noise, Relix, Rockandroll Globe

Norman Provizer: KUVO Jazz

Howard Reich: DB

Mark Ruffin: SiriusXM

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

Gene Seymour: CNN.com, The Nation, Baffler

Thomas Staudter: DB, The Croton Gazette, River Journal, Hudson Independent

Denise Sullivan: DB, San Francisco Chronicle

Laurence Svirchev: misterioso.org

Otakar Svoboda: Czech Radio Vltava

Jean Szlamowicz: Spirit of Jazz

Hobart Taylor: DB, Tainradio.org, KUCI-FM

Larry Reni Thomas: Jazz Corner, WCOM-FM

Chris Walker: LA Jazz Scene, California Tour & Travel

Ken Weiss: Candence, Jazz Inside

Michael J. West: JazzTimes, DB, Washington Post

Josef Woodard: DB, All About Jazz, San Francisco Classical Voice, Santa Barbara Independent

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



"It's a way of living the art: going on stage, where we have the magic in our hands," Nicole Johänttgen said.

NICOLE JOHÄNTTGEN BLAZES TRAILS FOR FEMALE IMPROVISERS

The multifaceted jazz saxophonist Nicole Johänttgen is a DIY dynamo with a remarkably prodigious career. Raised in Germany, she studied classical piano before switching to saxophone and self-releasing the first of her 20 albums at age 17.

Ten years later, while spontaneously improvising at a festival gig, she had an epiphany that transformed her path as an artist and inspired her to become a trailblazer for other women by founding Support of Female Improvising Artists in 2014.

"We started playing like we were in a trance, and I felt this magical force come over me," Johänttgen recalled via Zoom from her longtime home in Zurich, where the fifth biennial SOFIA had just wrapped a five-day session of DIY music business workshops capped by live improvised performances. "When I woke up [from that trance], the people in the audience were all screaming like, 'What is this fire?' And from that time on, I had the fire in myself."

Johänttgen's two latest albums on her own Selmabird label showcase her versatile range as an improviser. *Solo II*, recorded at the top of Switzerland's Gotthard Pass, is

a meditative soundscape that echoes off the mountains, while *Henry III* evokes the funky second-line beats of New Orleans, where her band called Henry was born.

Equally adept as an organizer, Johänttgen upped the ante for this edition of SOFIA. Held in the spacious Zurich home of longtime music supporter Richi Irniger, 83, it drew artists from several countries and featured special sessions with the Ukrainian Youth Jazz Orchestra. Participants feasted on organic food and practiced yoga on the lawn before reassembling at night to perform for enthusiastic audiences around Zurich.

Johänttgen was on a creative roll when she spoke in a conversation punctuated by much laughter and a pop-in visit from her 2-year-old son, whose favorite instrument is the cello. He and her husband, Daniel Bernet, a magazine editor who shoots

many of her promo photos, will accompany Johänttgen on some of her *Solo II* dates during a busy summer that includes a Henry tour and several masterclass workshops.

SOFIA looked amazing, judging from your photos and videos. But before we talk about that, let's rewind to your two latest releases.

I recorded *Solo II* on a very important point in Switzerland at the top of Gotthard Pass, in this tiny, tiny chapel with the most amazing reverb.

That's all natural, everything is acoustic, nothing is added to the recording. The older I get, the more I love to have a clean acoustic sound. I also want to play more in churches, because it attracts, like, normal people who never go to jazz concerts, who come up to me with tears in their eyes to tell me they loved it.

You really surprised me on the final track when you started singing, which was lovely. Have you done a lot of singing during your solo performances?

No. [laughs] No. Do you think I should go on singing?

Absolutely!

OK, I will write that on my wall like a mantra: more singing! A Swiss radio station offered to record me in September, which I want to do with tuba, conga, percussion and sousaphone. And maybe I could do what you said now: sing!

That lineup sounds a lot like your Henry band. And though you recorded Henry III with European musicians, the band was born in New Orleans, where you recorded your first album. What brought you here?

I got a scholarship that sent me to New York, and while I was there, I thought it would be nice to discover another city of jazz. I immediately saw New Orleans in my head, a city with music like fireworks. I didn't know any local players, but a friend of mine recommended some drummers and sousaphone and trombone players. We recorded the first time we met, in one room, where we played a tune three times: one for soundcheck, one for rehearsal, one for the recording. And there was pure, pure love, pure fireworks.

There was also a lot of love and fireworks at SOFIA. What inspired you to create that?

SOFIA is the little daughter of the Sisters in Jazz program in America, which had a big annual conference that stopped happening for a while. So I thought, OK, I want to do something for female musicians in Europe that also includes music business workshops. Because we need to survive after we come out of the university: How do we get gigs? There was a time you got discovered by a big label, but that time is over, and it's especially hard for women. Germany, a country of 80 million people, still has only two female jazz professors.

Sadly, that's not surprising. But SOFIA is helping to change that. What were some of this year's highlights?

The yoga, because the exercises were combined with awareness. How were you feeling before you went on stage? We had a very experienced drummer from Paris who gave us performance feedback. Like, go closer to the microphone and be more confident. That was very important because at the last gig, I was watching in the audience and said, "Hey, now you're talking!" [laughs] We also had two awesome improvising sessions with the Ukrainian Jazz Youth Orchestra.

Later, one of the young Ukrainian women who's in her early 20s took me aside and asked me privately: "Did you play

when you were pregnant? How did you do it?" So I gave her some advice. Instead of two medium reeds, I used two soft reeds. And after six months, I stopped traveling abroad. I played little gigs in this country and recorded one CD when I was high, high pregnant. [laughs]

You've done some remarkable things without a label or a manager, and you have quite a heavy touring schedule. How do you pull that off?

I like to plan by myself, because my family can join me for some of the solo concerts, which are only 30 minutes. So this is good for family life. I'm not over exhausted. I still play and I love to play. It's a way of living the art: going on stage, where we have the magic in our hands. The whole jazz world is like a planet: the musicians, the concert organizers, the media people who help us find an audience. Because we need the audience to complete the circle.

Any advice for young women in jazz who are just starting out?

Be patient. If you work so hard that your ego takes over, it's like sticking your finger in an electric socket. You are a human being. You need inspiration, and inspiration comes when you have a moment for yourself, not when you are under stress. So be patient. I'm 40, and I want to stand on stage for the next 40 years. —Cree McCree

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"I ended up becoming a producer because I couldn't keep my mouth shut on the sessions, anyway," Roberto Occhipinti said.

ROBERTO OCCHIPINTI THE UNPLANNED LABEL HEAD

In a thriving creative community, there are players who empower others for the greater good. For the jazz and Afro-Cuban music scene in Toronto, one of those individuals is Roberto Occhipinti.

In the first half of this year alone, the bassist/producer/arranger and his Modica Music label represented Toronto-based musicians by releasing the debut album by Cuban Canadian alto saxophonist Luis Deniz; classical bassist Joel Quarrington's piano duo and bass quartet project; and *The Next Step*, Occhipinti's own debut piano trio recording as a bandleader. The story of how the native of Ontario's capital city became an unplanned indie label head is as charmed as the man himself.

"I did my own recordings," Occhipinti said in a Zoom interview from his home. "I had five. And then I started doing recordings for other people, like the pianist Hilario Durán. And then I just ended up becoming a de facto record producer."

Presenting himself with what one might assume is a Canadian sense of modesty, he downplays what an invaluable one-stop shop he's become. In addition to producing and releasing albums, he also plays on them and can arrange charts, too. Durán's Juno-winning debut album, *New Danzón* (Alma Records, 2004) was supposed to feature John Patitucci and drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernández. Patitucci was unavailable, so Occhipinti offered to do double duty

as bassist and producer.

"When I produced records for people, they would say, 'What about a label?' And I'd tell them, 'Well, you can be on my label. But I'll tell you what my label will do for you — absolutely nothing,'" he recounted with a chuckle. "But I don't take any money, either. So it just became sort of a clearinghouse.

"After releasing so many albums, I had to start acting like a record label," he continued. "Meaning in Canada, we get support from an organization called FACTOR." The Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings is "dedicated to providing assistance toward the growth and development of the Canadian music industry," according to the non-profit's mission statement.

"So, I get FACTOR money, and now I have to do things like sign contracts and fill out studio logs," he said. Within the past few years, Occhipinti has even been able to offer a space to record.

"I was working at a studio and, through a set of circumstances, I ended up buying the building," he said. After moving his personal piano there, he started recording his own sessions. When the pandemic hit, he was able to offer a socially distant set-up. So mu-

sicians were calling him desperate to record, and play with others, he remembered.

Occhipinti sold the building, heeding the call of Toronto's astonishing real estate market, and is in the process of relaunching in a new spot. He has around 10 unreleased sessions in the can from the previous space.

One project that stands out is by guitarist Lorne Lofsky, a Toronto music hero and veteran of groups led by Oscar Peterson and Chet Baker. He hadn't released an album of his own in 25 years, so Occhipinti invited his old friend into the studio.

Lofsky released *This Song Is New* on Modica Music in April 2021. "It got all sorts of great press and some really nice reviews," Occhipinti said. "And it's got some life, still."

"It's great that Roberto's getting these recordings of people like Lorne, who haven't been recorded enough," said soprano saxophonist and flutist Jane Bunnett, Occhipinti's former bandleader. "They're really high-quality recordings, and these [independent] labels are so important right now because there are all these great musicians out there but not enough support for them."

Occhipinti was a studio musician in Toronto when Bunnett recruited him as a sub for her group. "Jane rescued me from that life, and I got to tour and connect with all these Cuban musicians through playing with her," he reflected.

Splitting his interests between jazz and classical, Occhipinti had twin mentors. Quarrington, whose *The Music Of Don Thompson* was released by Modica in June, provided classical guidance that led to gigs with the Winnipeg Symphony, the Hamilton Philharmonic and the Canadian Orchestra Company, as well as a tour with modern composition titan Terry Riley. Dave Young, whose most recent set of albums Occhipinti produced, served a similar role on the jazz side. Subsequent recording sessions with beloved Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn and a tour with the cartoon alternative rock band Gorillaz were all Occhipinti.

"As soon as I got to Toronto in 2004, I started doing things with Roberto," said Deniz. "I was only 21, and he gave me a lot of opportunities. And it's not just music: He helped me get my mother out of Cuba. So he's like a mentor, an uncle, a godfather and a friend."

Released by Modica in late May, Deniz's *El Tinajon* features Occhipinti as a band member. "He's someone who's very, very valuable in a recording situation," Deniz noted. "He's also always very positive, and he wants to get things done the right way."

On his in-studio manner, Occhipinti had a more humorous take. "I ended up becoming a record producer because I couldn't keep my mouth shut on the sessions, anyway," he quipped. "So people finally said, 'OK, you produce it, then.'" —Yoshi Kato

NEW RELEASE



Bill Ortiz
POINTS OF VIEW

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ED NEUMEISTER INDIE ECLECTIC

As Ed Neumeister approaches his 70th birthday this September, he can look back on six decades of very diverse musical experiences.

If there was an award for jazz eclecticism over a career, he would be an odds-on favorite. According to Neumeister, that diversity was a key factor in his development as a first-call trombonist, as well as a critically acclaimed composer and arranger.

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, Neumeister began playing trumpet at the age of 5. At 9, he switched to trombone. At 13, he performed J.J. Johnson's solo on "Mack The Knife" at the halftime show of an Oakland Raiders game.

He had a union card at 15, played gigs with rock groups and later worked as the music director for a band that backed stars like Chuck Berry and Chubby Checker. He studied classical trombone and composition at the University of California at San Jose.

After returning to the Bay Area from Paris in 1975, his approach to music continued to expand — he joined the Sacramento Symphony Orchestra, backing the likes of Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan and Nancy Wilson and more. He also played with Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia in a short-lived project called Reconstruction.

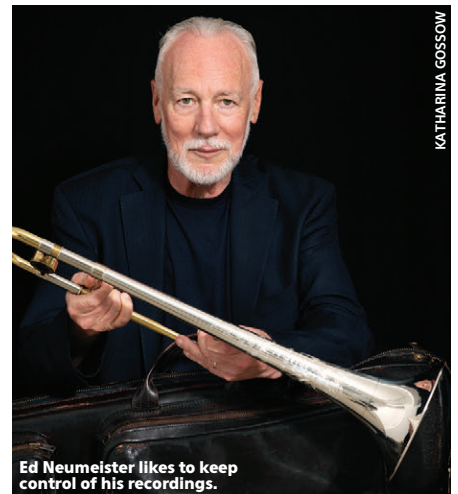
"By then, I was in my late 20s, and I wanted to develop my own voice on my instrument," Neumeister said. "I consciously stopped listening to other trombone players."

"I started paying more attention to musicians like Coltrane, Miles, Herbie and Freddie Hubbard, and their approach to playing — as well as composition. In many ways, they became my primary influences."

Neumeister moved to New York and landed gigs with Lionel Hampton, Buddy Rich, the Duke Ellington Orchestra and Gerry Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band. Most importantly, he had an extended tenure with the Mel Lewis Orchestra, which evolved into the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra.

"I'd always been composing and arranging horn charts since my early days in rock bands," Neumeister said. "But it was really through my relationship with Bob Brookmeyer, the music director of Mel's band, that I seriously got into composing."

After teaching, playing and composing in Europe for almost 20 years, he returned to the U.S. in 2017, working on film scores and



KATHARINA GOSSOW

Ed Neumeister likes to keep control of his recordings.

teaching around New York as he reestablished himself on the jazz scene.

He founded his own record label, MeisteroMusic, after facing difficulties dealing with major and independent record labels.

"One of my musical heroes, Anthony Braxton, had his own label," Neumeister said. "If you're doing music that's not pigeonholed and what I'll call 'left of center,' it just makes more sense to keep control of your recordings."

The label has eight of Neumeister's albums as a leader — including his latest quartet release, *What Have I Done?* — as well as its first release by another musician: *The Jazz Cave*, featuring pianist Bevan Manson's trio.

After recording *What Have I Done?* in 2021, Neumeister's quartet finally played it live at Birdland on Memorial Day.

"We performed to an enthusiastic, packed house, and the quartet played magnificently," Neumeister said. "I was literally grinning ear to ear when I wasn't playing."

With live music and touring happening again, Neumeister is planning more quartet performances and a possible tour in the fall.

He's also performing with his new band, the Assemblage Jazz Orchestra. He described the ensemble as "a band that's as diverse as possible — male, female; black, white; old, young; straight, gay; everything — playing a wide scope of improvised music with no compromise on quality."

—Terry Perkins



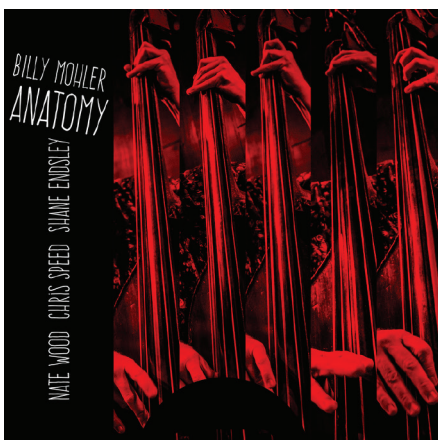
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Brad Felt utilized euphonium and tuba as lead instruments, extending modern jazz traditions.

A veteran of two European tours with Howard Johnson's Gravity, he shared the stage with Roy Brooks, James Carter, Gerald Cleaver, Frank Foster, Freddie Hubbard, Thad Jones, Dave Liebman, Lew Tabackin and Clark Terry.

This collection of previously unreleased performances pairs Brad's euphonium with the bass of **John Dana** (a veteran of bands led by Rashied Ali, Art Blakey and Roland Kirk) and celebrates the legacy of two late, great artists.

"Felt plays the euphonium with such a compelling combination of brains, facility and a command of contemporary post-bop that he makes you forget that his instrument is still a rarity in jazz. Few players handle the big horn with as much authority in this idiom."

Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press

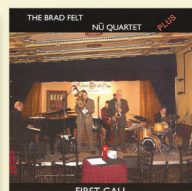
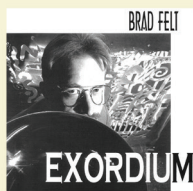
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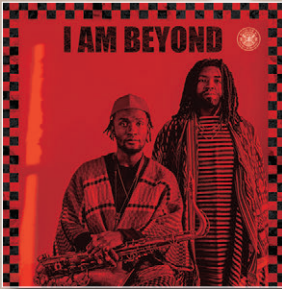
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Reviews

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



TIFFANY SMITH

Saxophonist Isaiah Collier and drummer Michael Shekwoaga Ode have joined forces as the duo I AM.

I AM *Beyond* DIVISION 81 ★★★★★

A storm is brewing. The skies are darkening and there is a humid thickness in the air; the wind is eerily calm. Then a flash of light, silence and the tooth-rattling force of the thunderclap. Its sounds reverberate, coaxing the clouds to burst and release their sheets of rain. The storm has come.

For saxophonist Isaiah Collier and drummer Michael Shekwoaga Ode, this roiling chaos is their creative space. Within it they eke out the anticipation of coming cacophony, they explode forth like thunder and lightning, and finally rest within the quietude of survival.

Having first met during Collier's audition for Oberlin College, the twentysomething pair

have developed an improvisatory telepathy far beyond their years. On their debut album as a duo, *Beyond*, they channel the rhythmic fury of drum and saxophone pairings such as Kenny Garrett and Jeff "Tain" Watts and Albert Ayler and Sunny Murray.

Across its seven tracks, *Beyond* plays through a wide dynamic range while Collier and Ode take turns to battle each other for musical supremacy.

Opener "Introduction: Take Me Beyond" features the spoken-word poetry of Jimmy Chan, setting the anticipatory scene for the coming aural onslaught with a trance-like ambience. Collier's keening saxophone then moves us into the body of the suite, charging over Ode's rolling toms on "Suns Of Mercury (Storms Of Revelations)" before settling into an earthy swing on highlights "Confessions Of the Heart" and "The Vessel Speaks."

Producer Sonny Daze takes expert control of the reverb throughout, often making Collier's long lines sound electronically processed to wash over Ode's cymbal work. Yet, it is in the acoustic rawness of this duo's playing that their strengths lie.

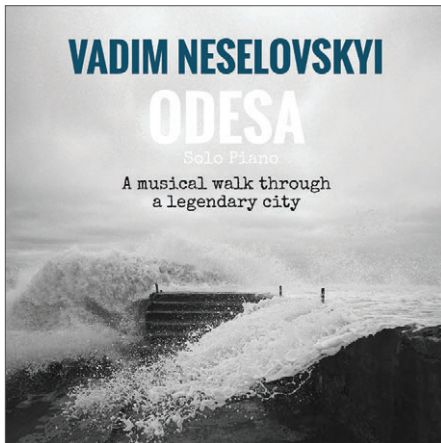
Listening to *Beyond* can feel like a challenge owing to its intensity, but surrender to Collier and Ode's musical flow and you will be taken by their forces of nature, at once elemental and emotive.

—Ammar Kalia

Beyond: Introduction: Take Me Beyond; Suns Of Mercury (Storms Of Revelations); Confessions Of The Heart; Bend Of The Universe (Trust With All Your Heart); The Vessel Speaks; Omniscient (Mycellium); Hymn: Love Beyond Compare. (61:39)

Personnel: Isaiah Collier, saxophones, world instruments; Michael Shekwoaga Ode, drums; Jimmy Chan, gong, singing bowls, world instruments, vocals (1).

Ordering info: division81records.bandcamp.com



Vadim Neselevskiy
Odesa: A Musical Walk Through A Legendary City
 SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

This is almost critic-proof. Anyone who has an ounce of empathy for Ukrainians who were displaced, killed or who are still fighting for their country after Russia ignited an unprovoked war will undoubtedly project enormous sentiments onto *Odesa*, pianist Vadim Neselevskiy's poignant musical portrait of his Ukrainian hometown. There's the added emotional weight of the revenue generated from album's sales and relat-

ed concerts benefiting Ukrainian humanitarian efforts. How can you not root for this album?

That question hinges on whether one would shower praise on *Odesa* had Russia not invaded Ukraine. It's important to note that album was recorded before Russia's February 2022 invasion. Fortunately, Neselevskiy's orchestral improvisations and evocative compositions lull on their own terms. His music leans more toward European classical music and Eastern European folkloric music than Black American-rooted jazz. Swing and swagger are of limited quantity. And if a blues sensibility is a necessity for a listener to consider it jazz, then the person will have to reexamine their definition of the idiom to determine whether *Odesa* is actually jazz.

Although I've yet to visit Ukraine, I get a sense of Neselevskiy's keenness of evoking the soul of his people on the jittery "Jewish Dance," which incorporates a lullaby that was sung by his maternal grandfather, and the haunting "Odesa 1941," which captures the horror of Romanian troops, under Hitler's command, persecuting Ukrainian Jews. —John Murph

Odesa: A Musical Walk Through A Legendary City; Intro To Odesa Railway Station; Odesa Railway Station; Winter In Odesa; Potemkin Stairs; Acacia Trees; Waltz Of Odesa Conservatory; Odesa 1941; Intro To Jewish Dance; Jewish Dance; Interlude, My First Rock Concert; Interlude 2, The Renaissance Of Odesa. (55:30)

Personnel: Vadim Neselevskiy, piano.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Carol Sloane
Live At Birdland
 CLUB44

★★★★★

Live At Birdland blends upscale jazz-club intimacy with a mix of American songbook standards and distinctly neglected non-standards that have been Carol Sloan's cup of tea since the start. She is joined by Scott Hamilton, whose Ben Webster-ish elegance along with pianist Mike Renzi reminds us of Sloan's 1963 LP encounter with Webster himself.

Sloan has rarely looked to contemporary material, even in her early days when top writers were still on board. Now that she has lived long enough to see that unique class of professionalism largely deteriorate into an under-equipped laity of singer-songwriters, she is more comfortable than ever where she's always been: the past.

Accordingly, her classicism is not for everybody. Sloan missed her chosen golden age by a generation. She's become a student of a period that began in her childhood and moved backwards. She rooted herself in basics, avoiding retro caricature. She sings (and scats here and there) with a cool, contemporary sensibility while conveying the period ambiance of a song like "I Don't Want To Walk Without You"



strictly on its merits. Maybe this is why she had been held in higher esteem by her elite circle of peers than the public at large.

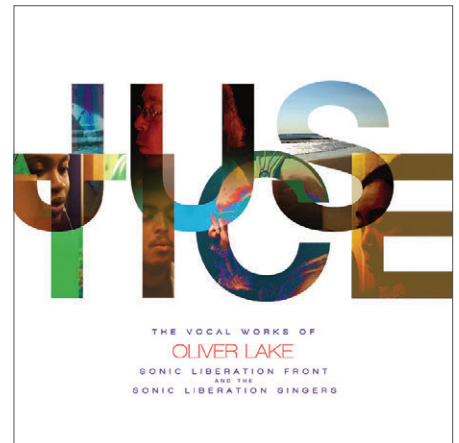
She closes with a 1990-ish Johnny Mandel obscurity called "I'll Always Leave The Door A Little Open."

—John McDonough

Live At Birdland: Having Myself A Time; Blue Turning Grey Over You; I Don't Want To Walk Without You; As Long As I Live; Medley; Glad To Be Unhappy; I Got A Right To Sing The Blues; If I Should Lose You; You Were Meant For Me; The Very Thought Of You; You're Driving Me Crazy; Two For The Road; Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams; I'll Always Leave The Door A Little Open. (71:41)

Personnel: Carol Sloane, vocals; Scott Hamilton, saxophone; Mike Renzi, piano; Jay Leonhardt, bass.

Ordering info: club44records.com



Sonic Liberation Front
Justice: The Vocal Works Of Oliver Lake

HIGH TWO

★★½

A tart, incisive voice on alto saxophone — whose extensive recording catalog includes appearances with Björk and Lou Reed, as well as some of wooliest free improvisation released in the past 45 years — Oliver Lake has never been reluctant to step outside what some may perceive as his wheelhouse.

Spoken word and other types of vocalization are forms of expression that have remained deep in Lake's arsenal until his recent appearance with bassist Reggie Washington and DJ Grazzhopa on *Black Lives: From Generation To Generation*, an album of contemporary protest music co-curated by Washington. Now, Lake has teamed with Philadelphia's Sonic Liberation Front, led by percussionist Kevin Diehl, to realize a goal of creating an album of his vocal works.

Featuring a quartet of singers (Lake recites two poems, as well) in close harmony, *Justice* sometimes echoes the type of rhythmic bounce captured in Lake's compositions for the World Saxophone Quartet. Although the choral voicings and Veronica Jurkiewicz's charged violin sound focused and precise, rough edges abound elsewhere. The bass and drums on "Dedication" sound especially tentative, and the multifaceted "Clouds" lacks integration to the point where it seems more like a pastiche than a fully realized arrangement. A more grating issue is the sound mix, which favors the vocalists and Elliot Levin's tenor saxophone. Like many projects realized during the COVID lockdowns, *Justice* was performed and recorded remotely, lending it a "field recording" feel. —James Hale

Justice: The Vocal Works Of Oliver Lake: What; Ain't Nothin' Real But Love; Aztec; Justice; Clouds; Dedicated; Round 2000; Lucky One. (40:30)

Personnel: Jameka Gordon, flute; Elliot Levin, tenor saxophone; Veronica Jurkiewicz, violin; Oliver Lake, Shanon Chua, Chaela Harris, Ravi Seemarine, Michael Ford, vocals; Matt Engle, bass; Kevobatala (Kevin Diehl), drums, percussion.

Ordering info: sonicliberationfront.com

The Hot Box

	Critics	Ammar Kalia	John Murph	John McDonough	James Hale
Beyond <i>I AM</i>		★★★★	★★½	★	★★★★½
Vadim Neselovskyi <i>Odesa</i>		★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Carol Sloane <i>Live At Birdland</i>		★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★½
Sonic Liberation Front <i>Justice</i>		★★★★	★★★★½	★★½	★★½

Critics' Comments

Beyond, *I AM*

Equal parts, cagey and cathartic, this sonic exorcism offers more ecstatic escapism than memorable melodic destinations. —John Murph

Faith is our irrational alter ego where we see the world we wish. So the fervor Collier pours on neither rescues us from its mayhem nor enlightens us to its meaning, which is his alone. Screams only to itself. —John McDonough

Gen Z'ers Collier and Ode throw a contemporary spin on ecstatic sax/drums duets. Seeking transcendence, the duo is best when deconstructing recognizable musical tropes like the frantic boogaloo on "Omniscient (Mycelium)." —James Hale

Vadim Neselovskyi, *Odesa—A Musical Walk Through A Legendary City*

Pianist Neselovskyi's musical ode to his hometown is painfully prescient following the Russian invasion of the country. His solo compositions traverse everything from the tripping melodies of "Odesa Railway Station" to the emotive progression of "Jewish Dance." A fitting, if somewhat sparse, tribute. —Ammar Kalia

Thematic coherence gives these well-dressed solo portraits of Odesa a formal sonata feel. The line between composition and improv, if any, is vague. Either way, compelling and inviting. —John McDonough

Darkly beautiful, Neselovskyi's highly personal impressions of his hometown reflect his conservatory training but gain emotional clout when he allows more space to enter. —James Hale

Carol Sloane, *Live At Birdland*

Sloane's voice is full of warmth and character on this live recording from 2019. There are moments where her timbre falters, but the sprightly backing from the late pianist Mike Renzi and saxophonist Scott Hamilton, as well as the metronomic stability of bassist Jay Leonhart, provide ample support, making this a pleasant, if not groundbreaking, listen. —Ammar Kalia

Sheer elegance and erudition. —John Murph

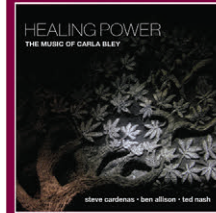
Fix a drink and picture yourself relaxing in Midtown Manhattan. With more than 70 years on stages like this, Sloane knows how to choose great material and embrace it with her aging voice. —James Hale

Sonic Liberation Front, *Justice—The Vocal Works Of Oliver Lake*

Saxophonist Lake is in fine form for this first collection of his vocal compositions in 50 years. While his arranged melodies are funky ("What"), forlorn ("Aztec") and ethereal ("Clouds"), it is the work of the Sonic Liberation vocal quartet that shines, providing luscious stacks of harmony and dexterity to his songs of social urgency like "Justice." —Ammar Kalia

An intriguing if enlightening view of Oliver Lake's spiky, earthy and exploration compositional voice through the lens of a vocal ensemble. —John Murph

Sweet Mancini-ish vocal blends interact with astringent violin and tongue-tied tenor interludes. A dry but ironic anxiety feels emotionally indecisive. The tension has periods of soft but unsettling uneasiness. —John McDonough



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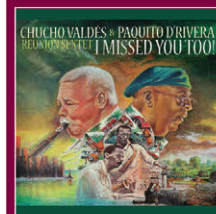
The music of Carla Bley straddles the musical sensibilities that this collective trio has focused on for over a decade.



RANDAL DESPOMMIER
A MIDSUMMER ODYSSEY
THE MUSIC OF LARS GULLIN
SSC 1668
available 7/15/2022

RANDAL DESPOMMIER alto saxophone
BEN MONDER guitar

The central focus is the highly accessible yet always enigmatic music of Swedish baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin (1928-1976).



CHUCHO VALDÉS & PAQUITO D'RIVERA
REUNION BAND
I MISSED YOU TOO!
SSC 4562
available 7/22/2022

CHUCHO VALDÉS piano
PAQUITO D'RIVERA alto saxophone, clarinet
DIEGO URCOLA trumpet, valve trombone
DAFNIS PRIETO drums **JOSE A. GOLA** bass & electric bass
ROBERTO JUNIOR VIZCAINO percussion

The past few years have found the old friends reunited for a handful of performances. It was only natural that they take the reunion to the next step and record an album. The Cuban legends and their stalwart collaborators met in early January 2022 in Miami, Florida to capture the grand event.



ALLISON MILLER
CARMEN STAAF
NEARNESS
SSC 1673
available 7/29/2022

ALLISON MILLER drums **CARMEN STAAF** piano
Their sonic conversation expresses nearness without the need for proximity or even words.



Sunnyside

sunnysiderecords.com



Billy Mohler
Anatomy
 CONTAGIOUS
 ★★★★★

Aside from his early jazz education at Berklee College of Music, most of bassist and Laguna Beach native Billy Mohler's life and livelihood has occurred in California, where he has had a successful career as a producer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. After his first jazz album, *Focus* (Make Records), was released to universal well-regard in 2019, it was only natural for this Grammy-nominated Hollywood denizen to immediately begin planning for the

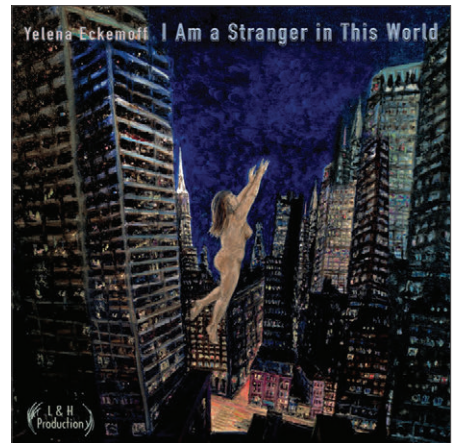
sequel. *Anatomy* delivers in that aspect, bringing back the entire cast — tenor saxophonist Chris Speed, trumpeter Shane Endsley and drummer Nate Wood — in an encore performance of what worked so well the first time.

Mohler's instincts and experience in rock and pop translate well to writing original jazz music that, despite the seriousness and sincerity of the craft, manages to remain engaging and — yes — fun.

This stems from the bottom-up with infectious bass ostinato grooves that sync with angular, mostly unison lead lines from the horns.

"Nightfall" utilizes a clever clave in 13, horns along with the bass before moving into counterpoint against it. "Exit" introduces a forlorn, atonal melody over a primal three-note bass figure, featuring a flighty solo by Speed, followed by Endsley, who is enhanced with added spontaneous echo effects from producer Daniel Seeff. "Speed Kills" is one of two loping modal swing tunes à la late Coltrane, the open two-feel allowing for plenty of free-range exploration by Endsley and Speed, who are both in top form throughout, their solos intricate, expressive and surprising. —Gary Fukushima

Anatomy: Abstract 1; Fight Song; Nightfall; Equals; Abstract 2; Perseverance; Exit; Abstract 3; Speed Kills; Moonglow. (43:22)
Personnel: Billy Mohler, bass; Shane Endsley, trumpet; Chris Speed, saxophone; Nate Wood, drums.
Ordering info: contagiousmusic.bandcamp.com



Yelena Eckemoff
I Am A Stranger In This World
 L&H PRODUCTION
 ★★★★★

Yelena Eckemoff, born in Russia and based in North Carolina, converted to Christianity while still living in Moscow. She has long been interested in setting verses from the Bible's Book of Psalms to music, composing jazz originals that in some cases are word-for-word musical recreations. In 2018, she recorded many of these compositions on *Better Than Gold In Silver*, a set that contained both vocal pieces and instrumentals.

The two-CD *I Am A Stranger In This World*, which is strictly instrumental, includes three selections that were left off of the earlier set due to lack of space: the title cut, "Like Rain Upon The Mown Grass" and "Every Beast Of The Field." Those performances team the pianist-composer with trumpeter Ralph Alessi, violinist Christian Howes, guitarist Ben Monder, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Joey Baron. The other six numbers were recorded at the height of the pandemic in December 2020 and have Eckemoff joined by Alessi, Gress, guitarist Adam Rogers and drummer Nasheet Waits.

Eckemoff's originals are full of rich themes and, because these are instrumentals, one does not have to be religious at all to enjoy the music. The melodies often reflect her classical training, the explorations are inventive (particularly those of Alessi), and the interplay between trumpet, guitar and piano often blurs the lines between solos and ensembles, composition and improvisation.

—Scott Yanow

I Am A Stranger In This World: As Chaff Before The Wind; Lighten My Eyes; Make Haste To Help Me; I Am A Stranger In This World; Truth In His Heart; Like Rain Upon The Mown Grass; Keep Not Your Silence; The Wine Of Astonishment; I Shall Not Want; At Midnight I Will Rise; Every Beast Of The Field. (121:11)
Personnel: Yelena Eckemoff, piano, keyboards; Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Adam Rogers, Ben Monder, guitar; Christian Howes, violin; Drew Gress, bass; Nasheet Waits, Joey Baron, drums.
Ordering info: yelenamusic.com

Francisco Mela/ Shinya Lin
Motions Vol. 1
 577 RECORDS
 ★★★★★

An extended improvisation in two parts, *Motions Vol. 1* showcases drummer Francisco Mela's dynamic movements and young up-and-coming pianist Shinya Lin's cerebral yet richly textured lines. There's no doubt Lin was influenced by Mela well before the two even stepped into the studio to record this album. Lin recently graduated from Berklee, where Mela, a mainstay on the Boston jazz scene, currently teaches. In this debut collaboration, Mela and Lin are equally matched and both visionary in their own right.

Mela's charismatic and uninhibited drums complement Lin's introspective approach to piano and prepared piano. As a result, the duo's collaboration is expansive and cinematic in scope. "Part I" begins like a noir film, with dark, languorous beats, industrial sounds on prepared piano and dramatic, punctuated piano notes. Lin's improvisational style is analytical yet unrestrained. He moves deftly between organic melodies and experimental tone poems, while Mela's feverish drums give



way to sheets of sound and frenetic pulses. Just as they approach entropy, they come to a halt, taking a collective breath before Mela's guttural vocals call on them to reset and recenter on a more focused and angular improvisation.

The range of textures and motifs that Mela and Lin explore in "Part II" is even more diverse. It gradually advances to more muscular uptempo percussion and angular melodies.

—Ivana Ng

Motions Vol. 1: Part I; Part II. (50:27)
Personnel: Shinya Lin, piano, prepared piano; Francisco Mela, drums, voice.
Ordering info: 577records.com



Cornetist Kirk Knuffke's latest trio release bristles with originality and daring.

MADELINE VENTRICE

Kirk Knuffke Trio *Gravity Without Airs*

TAO FORMS
★★★★½

Editing the cerebral explorations of *Gravity Without Airs* must have been challenging for cornetist Kirk Knuffke, bassist Michael Bisio and Matthew Shipp, the pianist who gives this drumless trio its gravity. Rewarding, too: This

hour-and-a-half from the Kirk Knuffke Trio bristles with originality and daring.

These works, seven on each of two disks, burst with fresh notions of musical collaboration, from the playfulness of “Time Is Another River” to “Blinds,” a mercurial track Knuffke launches birdlike, Shipp placating, Bisio muttering below.

The journey begins with the title track. Knuffke enters breathily, slowly brightening

against Shipp’s blocky playing and Bisio’s careful bass. Shipp and Bisio weave a quarter of the tune in, Shipp releasing a solo of commanding touch. Knuffke returns, sparsely yet declaratively, Bisio and Shipp protecting him in this tune of whirls and eddies. It is improvisatory in the best sense, never disclosing all at once, always promising and exciting. Knuffke and the increasingly percussive Shipp become explosive, Bisio struggling to keep them in check. The escalating drama draws one in as these musical sages advance and retreat, upping the intensity.

“June Stretched” may be the highlight of the second disk. It starts with a Bisio-Shipp duet that builds a platform for Knuffke. He and Shipp circle each other, ultimately going down different, improbably intersecting paths. The dynamics are motile, the trajectory of the tune steady if unpredictable.

“Today For Today” ends this triumphant, modern jazz collection on a spare, warm note. It’s a beautiful tune that feels like a benediction. Don’t miss Francis Davis’ spirited liner notes.

—Carlo Wolff

Gravity Without Airs: (CD 1) Gravity Without Airs; Stars Go Up; Between Today and May; The Sun Is Always Shining; Birds of Passage; Time Is Another River; Paint Pale Silver. (CD 2) The Water Will Win; June Stretched; Blinds; Piece Of Sky; Shadows To Dance; Heal The Roses; Today For Today. (44:16/44:05)

Personnel: Michael Bisio, bass; Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Matthew Shipp, piano.

Ordering info: taoforms.bandcamp.com

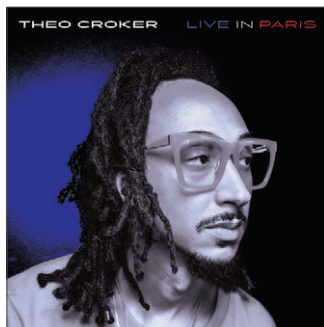
Theo Croker *Live In Paris*

SONY MASTERWORKS
★★★★

As he has progressed in his career, trumpeter Theo Croker has become a maker of vibes just as much as he is a maker of music. This is certainly the case in the quick three-song live studio EP session recorded at the Deezer HQ in Paris while he was touring the *BLK2LIFE* || *A Future Past* material. This session captured where Croker was melding hip-hop into jazz for what is now a standard undertaking in Black American music, while still maintaining those identifiably clear ingredients in the stew.

Opener “Where Will You Go” settles into the soul just as much as it haunts with Croker’s vocals. Nothing creates a vibe like jamming out to Mos Def’s “UMI Says,” with Michael King taking moments throughout that are as lush as the perfect rug that brings the room together. Bassist Eric Wheeler and drummer Michael Shekwoaga Ode complete this picture with the ability to dazzle as individuals while meshing seamlessly as a unit. This is no better displayed than in their take on the closer “Fair Trade,” the Drake tune, where the group exists brightly while fading into the fabric as the necessary parts that make the piece whole, that keep it together. It’s a good enough to exist as its own thing until Croker’s next album comes along later this year.

—Anthony Dean-Harris



Live In Paris: Where Will You Go; UMI Says; Fair Trade. (18:57)

Personnel: Theo Croker, trumpet, vocals; Michael King, keyboards; Michael Shekwoaga Ode, drums; Eric Wheeler, bass; D’leau, background vocals (2).

Ordering info: sonymusicmasterworks.com

Stan Killian *Brooklyn Calling*

SUNNYSIDE
★★★★

Tough Texas tenor turned New Yorker Stan Killian, a regular at Greenwich Village’s late and lamented 55 Bar and host of a popular Queens jam session, salutes his post-COVID homecoming on his fourth album for Sunnyside, which adds

the jazz-rock flavor of atmospheric guitarist Paul Bollenback to long-time bandmates Corcoran Holt bass and McClenty Hunter drums. The album showcases seven complexly woven originals in a variety of feels, with Killian’s fetchingly robust, throaty sound and logical lines front and center. Soloists excel, but the accent is on interplay, with Hunter’s diffuse drumming recalling former Killian sideman Antonio Sánchez, and Holt offering engaging vamps and counterpoint.

Justly known as a soulful swinger, Killian doesn’t disappoint with the cheerful lobe of the opening tune, “Horizon,” which conjures the shimmering feel of staring out to sea before fluid tenor and guitar solos. The band swings easily in and out of 5/4 on “Holocene,” with sparky chorus trades and Holt walks fast under the excellent “Buyback,” with Killian alternating between biting staccato and legato flow.

—Paul de Barros



Brooklyn Calling: Horizon; Holocene; Buyback; Shibuya Crossing; Concept Of Peace; Brooklyn Calling; Open Doors. (53:22)

Personnel: Stan Killian, tenor saxophone; Paul Bollenback, guitar; Corcoran Holt, bass; McClenty Hunter, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Brother Ray Set the '70s Pace

Ray Charles was soaring in 1972. His voice had taken on a new force that came with maturity. In the 20 years since his recording debut, he had become a beloved global star. No idiom seemed beyond his grasp — whether he wanted to delve into jazz, country, gospel or the R&B that he built. Also an entrepreneur, Charles' own Tangerine record company was also releasing his singles and albums along with those from his colleagues. Two releases from the Tangerine archives highlight how he was setting the pace in the early 1970s.

Live In Stockholm 1972 (Tangerine; 39:00 ★★★★★½) was originally issued as part of the 2021 six-disc box set *True Genius: The Ultimate Ray Charles Collection*. As one of the few documents of live Charles from this period, this LP offers copious insights into his development.

Charles retained some of what always worked onstage as he dug into his own songbook. As always, he also transformed sounds that were happening at that moment. All of which makes *Live In Stockholm* particularly revelatory after comparing it to *Ray Charles Live In Concert*, which was recorded in 1964. During these two dates he kept some distinctive live moves — such as a Chopin-inspired piano interlude before launching into “I’ve Got A Woman.” But in Stockholm he turned its key riff into a more elongated incantation and extended improvisation. He stretched out “What’d I Say,” emphasizing a churning jazz organ groove along with sensuality in his back and forth with the Raelettes.

Each Raelette also had a spotlight turn on their feisty version of Joe South’s “Games People Play.” Meanwhile, Charles still knew everything about the power of restraint and when to shout. When he holds back on “Don’t Change On Me” and “I Can’t Stop Loving You” his phrasing conveyed a quiet magic. Even with the changes in music and society throughout the decades, his delivery and the orchestra’s vivacious swing wound up making Irving Berlin’s Tin Pan Alley chestnut “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” sound current even at the tail end of the hippie era.

But the most telling exchanges came during Charles’ commanding version of the

1940s standard “I’ve Had My Fun.” His way of alternating single note piano lines with gradually rolling chords continue to show that his instrumental prowess equaled his singing voice. All of which built up to that tension and release Charles had perfected. Then he expounded and repeated the line, “That’s the blues!” Nobody in his Swedish audience would have doubted that.

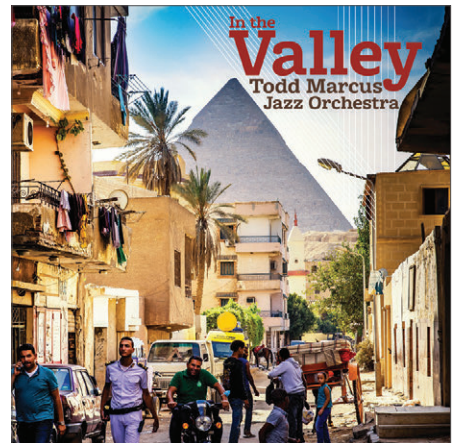
Back in the United States, the country was enduring the impact of its ongoing war in Vietnam, urban riots and other fissures. Charles responded with **A Message From The People (Tangerine; 39:00 ★★★★★)**, a large-ensemble concept album that addressed the nation’s troubles alongside deep love for his homeland. His statement remains relevant 50 years later.

To deliver that message, Charles brought in some longtime friends who also kept their ears attuned to different contemporary sounds, primarily arranger Quincy Jones. Throughout the album, this crew tied together its array of idioms and perspectives with Charles’ unmistakable voice being the strongest bond. Looking at the state of the nation — and perhaps the crossover success of such church-based activist groups as The Staple Singers — he provides bold takes on the African American anthem “Lift Every Voice And Sing” and the modern blues lament “Seems Like I Gotta Do Wrong.”

Charles focuses on funk in his protest statement “Hey Mister” while maybe challenging his disciple Stevie Wonder on “Heaven Help Us All.” Through each step of the way, Jones and his orchestra match Charles’ assertiveness while such session veterans as bassist Chuck Rainey expertly ascends and descends with his voice.

Somewhat surprisingly, Charles’ definitive take on “America The Beautiful” was not widely heralded at the time. Possibly the nation was not ready for the deep inflections he brought to this panorama or his sensibility didn’t capture the national mood. But eventually many more came to recognize that his voice is what the United States should be all about. **DB**

Ordering info: raycharlesstore.com



Todd Marcus Jazz Orchestra In The Valley

STRICKER STREET

★★★★★

Bass clarinetist Todd Marcus explores his Egyptian heritage during most of the selections on *In The Valley*, recorded in June 2019. His late father was Egyptian and, as a child, Marcus visited Egypt several times. He returned in more recent times to visit family and in 2015 and 2018, when he performed some of his originals from his previous album, *Blues For Tahrir*, during tours.

On *In The Valley*, Marcus contributed all five compositions, four of which blend together Egyptian scales and melodies with Western harmonies and jazz improvising. He utilizes a six-horn nonet for this difficult but successful task.

After pianist Xavier Davis plays a brief introduction, “Horus” (named after an ancient Egyptian deity) sets the standard for the program. The ensemble plays some fast lines that sound very Middle Eastern, Marcus creates a fiery bass clarinet solo and Alex Norris contributes some fluent trumpet over the swinging rhythm section.

Drum breaks, a brief tradeoff of the horns and the return of the speedy theme conclude the piece. “The Hive,” a tribute to modern-day Cairo, is most notable for trombonist Alan Ferber’s solo, which becomes increasingly more passionate the longer he plays.

The most colorful and accessible piece is “Cairo Street Ride,” which depicts the somewhat chaotic but ultimately logical traffic of Cairo. “Final Days,” which was written a few months after Marcus’ father’s death, is quietly emotional and somber. —Scott Yanow

In The Valley: Horus Intro; Horus; The Hive; Cairo Street Ride; Final Days; In The Valley. (45:24)

Personnel: Todd Marcus, bass clarinet; Alex Norris, trumpet; Alan Ferber, trombone; Greg Tardy, tenor; Brent Birkhead, flute, alto saxophone; Russell Kirk, alto saxophone; Xavier Davis, piano; Jeff Reed, bass; Eric Kennedy, drums.

Ordering info: toddmarcusjazz.com



**Jane Ira Bloom/
Mark Helias**
See Our Way

RADIOLEGS
★★★★

The album title itself is an invitation into the sound world of two seasoned improvisers, soprano sax explorer Jane Ira Bloom and her longtime collaborator, bassist Mark Helias. Together they take the listener on a journey that travels from sublime intimacy to jaunty swing, mesmerizing soundscapes and edgy avant garde extrapolations. A purely improvised session in the studio, these pieces have the aura of spontaneous composition, a testament to the

Steven Feifke
*The Role Of The
Rhythm Section*

LA RESERVE
★★★★

Steven Feifke is pretty darn good at the piano and arranging (particularly with his big band), and he thinks Dan Chmielinski and Bryan Carter are pretty darn good at the bass and drums, respectively. So, he's made a piano-bass-drums album of seven standards and one original composition (the penultimate tune, "Sunrise In Harlem") to show just how much he appreciates them. And for yet another of this sort of "hearkening the classics" album, it's also pretty darn good.

His solo approach to "Tea For Two" is playful and concise; at moments, he laughs like he's marveling at how it's coming out of his fingers.

Its transition into the Thelonious Monk tune "I Mean You" with the rest of the trio is a perfect fit, like a drop-in that the band would take advantage of as a break during the live set. He plays this same trick with his own composition, "Sunrise In Harlem" — a sweet, contemplative piece that's easy to get lost in — before ending the album with a rousing take on Romberg and Hammerstein's "Softly, As In A

duo's innate telepathy.

The gently melodic title track opens the collection on a sparse rubato note, recalling the intimate encounters between Ornette Coleman and Charlie Haden on 1979's *Soapsuds Soapsuds*. Helias puts some bounce in his boldly resonant walking lines on the upbeat "Cut To The Chase." His bowed overtones and harmonics blend beautifully with Bloom's soprano on the adventurous "Laser Plane," and his aggressive arco work creates a hypnotic effect on "Imaginary Fences."

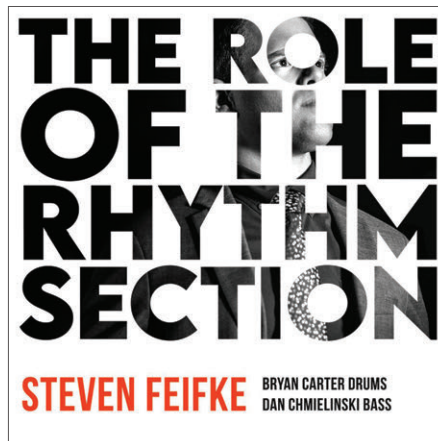
The two engage in some playful call-and-response on "Detectives" and also on the driving swinger "Hard Science," then space becomes their partner on the meditative "As Close As It Gets." Perhaps their most engaging encounter happens on the winsome "Folks Sing," which finds Bloom soaring on soprano. "Hold The Wire" and "Quelle" both represent edgy detours into skronkville, while closer "Second Hand Lonely" is a return to hushed elegance.

Recorded over several months in 2021-'22, *See Our Way* is a followup to their first release as a duo, 2021's *Some Kind Of Tomorrow*. And this time, they go even deeper. —Bill Milkowski

See Our Way: See Our Way; Cut To The Chase; Laser Plane; Detectives; As Close As It Gets; Perfect Memory; Hard Science; Imaginary Fences; Folks Sing; Hold The Wire; Time Shear; Quelle; Second Hand Lonely. (56:01)

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

Ordering info: markhelias.bandcamp.com



Morning Sunrise."


For this trio, which functions as the core of Feifke's big band, highlighting these standards is a literal communication of the role of the rhythm section. Using these pieces as examples of these players is an argument for their particular prowess as much as it is about their overall function.


—Anthony Dean-Harris

The Role Of The Rhythm Section: Stabilemates; Dolphin Dance; Here's That Rainy Day; Tea For Two; I Mean You; Celia; Sunrise In Harlem; Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise. (37:30)

Personnel: Steven Feifke, piano; Dan Chmielinski, bass; Bryan Carter, drums.

Ordering info: lareserverrecords.com

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Idiosyncratic Musical Visions

The originating impulse of spontaneity has never been exclusive to jazz, but has often served as a bridge between it and other forms of music. These five recordings walk that span in order to express idiosyncratic musical visions.

The trio **Bloodmist** convened late in 2020 at Brooklyn's Pioneer Works, a former iron-works, to record **Arc** (5049 Records; 56:07 ★★★★★). This is the ensemble's third album, and practice has perfected the beyond-bleak darkness of their ambience. The space's re-sounding acoustics amplify the bring-out-the-dead vibe of the bass guitarist's stark cadences. The flickering emanations from Mario Diaz de Leon's synthesizer and drum machines seem to leap from one boom to the next. Effects similarly magnify the frequency range of Jeremiah Cymerman's clarinet, which swings like a hyper-luminous scythe through the music's vastness. One caveat: You'll need speakers with a robust bass response to get all that this album has to offer.

Ordering info: 5049records.com

Terry Jennings (1940-'81) first played **Piece For Cello And Saxophone** (Saltern; 1:24:38 ★★★★★½) in December 1960, when composer La Monte Young invited him to open a concert series at Yoko Ono's loft. Jennings hoped to play the piece with Scott LaFaro, but the bassist couldn't make the gig. A three-minute fragment that he recorded four years later with cellist Charlotte Moorman sounds like a missing link between modal jazz and minimalism, with Jennings' incantatory alto saxophone phrases gracefully suspended over a static string drone, but Young heard something more in the piece. Three decades later, he transposed its tuning from equal temperament to just intonation, turning it into something like an extended alap for a raga. He performed during the 1980s and 1990s as a duet for his voice and Charles Curtis' cello. This recording by Curtis, only the second ever, features the cello playing both parts. The drastically slowed-down melody has become a gradually shifting sequence of opportunities to enter, leave and re-enter the meditative states that can be unlocked by a couple of pitches. This edition's process of personal transformation remains true to its spirit.

Ordering info: forcedexposure.com

Alto saxophonist **Masayo Koketsu** has performed widely in Japan and Europe, but **Fukiya** (Relative Pitch; 46:32 ★★★★★½) is her first American release. While Koketsu credits Charlie Parker as an early inspiration, her work here lies closer to Mats Gustafsson or Peter Brötzmann. Like them, Koketsu is an expressionistic player who treats her horn's limits as opportunities. This album, whose name translates as Blowgun, comprises a complete



Bloodmist

solo performance in which her approach between alternates long tones interspersed with silence, and briefer, intricate explorations of line using an instrumental voices that ranges from barely audible exhalations to raw, coarse-grained cries.

Ordering info: relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com

The Swedish saxophonist **Martin Küchen** plays five different horns in diverse settings, including the Mingus-like large band **Angles9**, the free-jazz **Trespass Trio** and sparse meta-improvisation with Keith Rowe. **Utopia** (Thanatosis; 51:51 ★★★★★) is an excellent example of his approach to solo performance, which uses accessories that fill out the sound and enhance the music's emotional impact. Radio broadcasts of choral music and a female soprano singer amplify the anguished quality of his deliberately paced, melodically focused performances on alto and tenor saxophone. Ordering info: thanatosis.org

In 2021, the Yellow Barn Music Festival in Putney, Vermont, commissioned tenor saxophonist **Travis Laplante** to compose a response to Miles Davis' *On The Corner* and the knowledge that he was listening to the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen when he made it. Laplante used process rather than sound to focus on the act of transmission. He met personally with the eight chamber musicians who would accompany him in concert, so that he could write for their personalities as well as their instruments. The sumptuous acoustic string voices, rich brass harmonies and rainbow percussion heard on the ecstatic **Wild Tapestry** (Out of Your Heads; 30:40 ★★★★★) uses imploring melody and building tension to reach a state of ecstatic communion that sounds nothing like *On The Corner's* baleful, looping funk, but places a similar emphasis on tonal color. Laplante, for whom music-making is an intimate, shared process, has once more found a way to share his reflections on the mystery of communication. **DB**

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.com



Henry Kaiser/ Rome Yamilov *The Lenoir Investigation*

LITTLE VILLAGE

★★★★½

A primary takeaway from the *The Lenoir Investigation*, featuring adventurist guitarist Henry Kaiser, supports the notion that the blues, for all its rudimentary musical values, can accommodate outside aesthetic intervention and reinvention. Foundationally, the project led by Kaiser and vocalist-guitarist Rome Yamilov celebrates individualist blues legend J.B. Lenoir (1929-'67) — plus Bo Diddley's "Rollercoaster." These 11 tracks operate mostly within blues rules, with a handful of chords and a variety of grooves (some taking liberties with the sources), delivered within organic, unassuming charm.

What sets this project apart, blues-wise, is the wildcard Kaiser factor.

Over his unclassifiable musical life, Kaiser has found ways to inject left-of-center sensibilities into groove-driven settings. He channeled another alt-avant-blues spirit, à la Captain Beefheart, on *Crazy Backwards Alphabet* and echoed the electric Miles Davis voodoo-era sound of Pete Cozy on *Yo Miles* (with Wadada Leo Smith in the Miles role).

The core band, with blues harp ace Aki Kumar, bassist-vocalist Kid Anderson, drummer June Core and trusty pianist/organist Jim Pugh, lays down grooves not always in keeping with the Mississippi/New Orleans/Chicago home turfs of Lenoir. Ska sneaks into the mix on "The Whale Has Swallowed Me," and we get hints of a Tuareg/Saharan feel on "Mojo Boogie," funk sauces on "God's Word" and cumbia meets Norwegian lyricism on "Na er Jeg I Form! (Play A Little While)."

—Josef Woodard

The Lenoir Investigation: The Whale Has Swallowed Me; People Are Meddlin' In Our Own Affairs; Round And Round; I Feel So Good; How Long; Na Er Jeg I Form! (Play A Little While); Feel So Good; Rollercoaster/The Mojo Boogie; God's Word; What About Your Daughter; I'll Die Trying; Alabama March/Down In Mississippi. (80:26)

Personnel: Henry Kaiser, guitar; Rome Yamilov, guitar, vocals; Kid Anderson, bass, vocal (6); June Core, drums; Aki Kumar, harmonica, vocals (5, 7, 10); List Leuschner, vocal (3); Jim Pugh, organ, piano.

Ordering info: littlevillagefoundation.org



Mark Winkler *Late Bloomin' Jazzman*

CAFÉ PACIFIC

★★★★★

Mark Winkler is an unsung hero of West Coast jazz. The singer and lyricist has been quietly churning out idiosyncratic hipster songs with a slightly retro feel for years. His 20th album, *Late Bloomin' Jazzman*, may just be his best.

It may also be his most personal. His crafty lyrics reflect on age (the title cut, “Old Enough”), human frailty (“Marlena’s Memories”), love and loss (“In Another Way,”

“Before You Leave”), and the power of art to transcend time (“Bossa Nova Days” and “If Gershwin Had Lived”).

When he’s not singing his own compositions, co-written with a stable of talented composers, he chooses excellent covers by composers from the Gershwins to Michael Franks, to Burton Lane and Yip Harburg, to Shelly Berg and Lorraine Feather. He also has the smarts to surround himself with such first-class L.A. musicians as John Clayton, David Benoit, Bob Sheppard and Jamieson Trotter. As a result, lovely arrangements and tasty soloing abound.

As a singer, Winkler is a storyteller, an avuncular presence who imparts a hard-earned wisdom: “I’m old enough/ Not to be fooled by the lights and the show/ But I’m young enough/ To know I don’t know all that much, don’t you know.”

Throughout this fine set, his voice is wry, unpretentious and warm. In short, he is a mensch — and splendid company.

—Allen Morrison

Late Bloomin' Jazzman: It Ain't Necessarily So; Don't Be Blue; When All The Lights in the Sign Worked; Late Bloomin' Jazzman; In Another Way; Bossa Nova Days' Old Devil Moon; I Always Had a Thing for You; Before You Leave; Old Enough; Marlena's Memories; If Gershwin Had Lived.

Personnel: Mark Winkler, vocals; David Benoit, Jamieson Trotter, Rich Eames, Jon Mayer, piano; John Clayton, Gabe Davis, bass; Christian Euman, Clayton Cameron, drums; Grant Geissman, guitar; Bob Sheppard, tenor saxophone, flutes; Brian Swartz, trumpet; Nolan Shaheed, flugelhorn; Kevin Winard, percussion.

Ordering info: markwinklermusic.com

Spanish Harlem Orchestra *Imágenes Latinas*

OVATION

★★★★★

Any album dedicated in part to the late Gonzalez brothers — Andy, whose bass lines bounced with a deep Latin flavor, and his brother, Jerry, a trumpeter and percussionist with flair — has a gold standard to achieve, and *Imágenes Latinas* by the Spanish Harlem Orchestra accomplishes this and *muy mas*. Each one of the 11 tracks is infused with lively toe-tapping, thigh-slapping tempos that require a highly disciplined urge not to leap from your seat and throw down a few private steps of salsa, mambo or cha-cha. “Llego La Hispanica,” composed and arranged by pianist Oscar Hernandez (also the album’s producer) is a feverish example of the ensemble’s way of conjuring the Gonzalez beat, and this becomes all the more apparent on “Mambo 2021,” where Jeremy Bosch’s flute blends wonderfully and alternately with Mitch Frohman’s baritone saxophone licks. The trumpets of Alex Norris and Manuel “Maneco” Ruiz contribute brilliant, sizzling interludes that push the song to another level of intensity. And then Hernandez’s piano solo tastefully aug-



ments a track that is brimming with images of a summer stroll through East Harlem. “Como Te Amo” slows things down, and the vocalization here, rendered by Marco Bermudez, Carlos Cascante and Bosch is as harmonically tight as the instruments.

—Herb Boyd

Imágenes Latinas: Llego La Hispanica; Imágenes Latinas; Vestido De Flores; De Mi Para Ti; Romance Divino; Como Te Amo; Mambo 2021; Sentimiento y Son; Cuando La Hispanica Toca; Mi Amor Sincero; La Musica Latina. (55:86)

Personnel: Oscar Hernandez, piano; Marco Bermudez, vocals, cora; Carlos Cascante, vocals, cora; Jeremy Bosch, vocals, flute; Manuel “Maneco” Ruiz, Alex Norris, trumpet; Doug Beavers, Juan Gabriel Lakunza, trombone; Mitch Frohman, baritone sax, flute; Luisito Quintero, timbales, maracas, guiro; George Delgado, congas; Jorge Gonzalez, congas; Jerry Madera, bass.

Ordering info: ovation-records.com



PJ Morton *Watch The Sun*

MORTON/EMPIRE

★★★★½

Armed with magic and mastery, PJ Morton has fashioned a collection of tracks for our time that is forward-leaning while still capturing the Cognac-richness of *crème de la crème* of vintage soul music. A child of two New Orleans ministers, Morton’s career began in the church, and though his songs are primarily secular in nature now, *Watch The Sun* is bursting with evidence of PJ’s continued ministry: delivering messages rooted in positivity and perseverance on tracks like the gospel cut “The Better Benediction.” The singer also implores listeners with the Buddhism truism popularized by Bruce Lee to “Be Like Water” (on the track of the same name) in the face of adversity.

On *Watch The Sun*, PJ assembles a veritable who’s who of featured artists (both young and seasoned) including Jill Scott, the incomparable Stevie Wonder (whose profound influence runs deeply through Morton’s work), El DeBarge, JoJo and Alex Isley, all to great effect. Scott’s restless spoken-word exhortation at the top of “Still Believe” perfectly complements Isley’s wistful refrain. “So Lonely,” which successfully melds the schoolyard chant of “rain, rain go away” with a laidback second line-ready habanero groove proves to be the perfect centerpiece for D.C.-bred rapper Wale’s outstanding bars. “On My Way” features El DeBarge, who delivers a stunning take alongside Morton.

This album highlights the fact that while PJ is a virtuosic songwriter and vocalist, he’s also a sensational producer who knows how best to showcase the talent of others. PJ Morton is particularly well-suited to make music engineered to be a balm for the mind, heart and spirit.

—Ayana Contreras

Watch The Sun: Love’s Disease (Just Can’t Get Enough); Biggest Mistake; Please Don’t Walk Away; Watch The Sun; My Peace by PJ Morton & JoJo; Be Like Water; So Lonely; Still Believe; Lil’ Too Heavy; On My Way; The Better Benediction. (37:40)

Personnel: PJ Morton with numerous featured artists.

Ordering info: store.empi.re

Anthony Wilson *The Plan Of Paris*

GOAT HILL

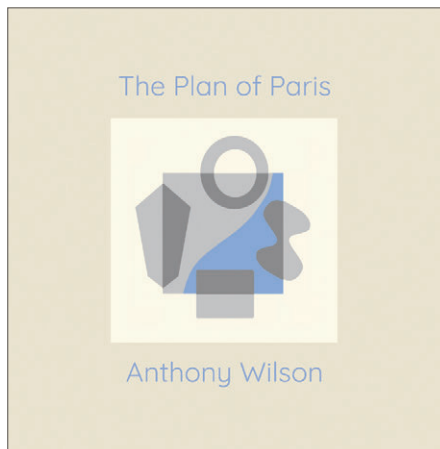
★★★

The title track of Anthony Wilson's 13th solo album is exceptional. Not only will it encourage Paris lovers to experience that magical city again and again, it is a sharply written mini-memoir of a vexing love affair. Old-fashioned in its verbal craftsmanship, this romantic, mesmerizing tune should become a standard.

The first five tracks of the alternately satisfying and maddening *The Plan Of Paris* (a digital-only release) are vocals showcasing guitarist/vocalist Wilson's easygoing delivery and Gerald Clayton's subtle keyboards. The last three are instrumentals stressing the expertise of Wilson's band. There's no doubt Wilson is a pro — he's been Diana Krall's guitarist for more than 20 years — and the instrumentals are flawless and pleasant. But they don't deliver on the promise of the vocal numbers.

What starts as a kind of concept album about love and loss — Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* comes to mind — reduces to technically expert, pleasant instrumentals. Still, there are satisfactions, and Wilson's versatility, and his willingness to transcend category, give the album unusual, if not fully realized, personality.

Other highlights: "A Postmaster's



Daughter," a vocal that shifts the scene from Paris to rural New England, is a Southern Gothic tune about divorce. The guitars are beautiful, Byrds-like. Wilson doesn't want to let this tune go. The first instrumental, "Noontide," showcases the empathy between Clayton and Wilson. Whether it arrives at a destination is less important than the mood it creates.

—Carlo Wolff

The Plan Of Paris: No Recap, No Intro; The Plan Of Paris; A Postmaster's Daughter; Dreams And Diamonds; The Bridge; Noontide; Already Won; Pilgrim. (38:05)

Personnel: Anthony Wilson, guitar, vocals; Gerald Clayton, piano, keyboards; David Piltch, bass; Brian Walsh, bass clarinet (2); Patrick Warren, keyboards (7); Harrison Whitford, guitar (3); Jay Bellerose, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: anthonywilson.bandcamp.com

Keith Hall *Made In Kalamazoo*

ZOOM OUT

★★★★½

This is a carefully structured project built around a clear and focused vision. Drummer Keith Hall offers solo tribute to three legendary drummers — Billy Hart, Elvin Jones, and Max Roach — at the beginning, middle and end of this 20-track album. Those border seven compositions played by a trio featuring Andrew Rathbun on reeds and Robert Hurst III on bass, and 10 reeds-drums duos in a more avant-garde style. Many of the trio pieces have a churning, heavy-footed groove thanks to Hurst's booming bass, and Rathbun's melodies (which are often more like riffs) and solos are reminiscent of JD Allen's work with his trio featuring Gregg August and Rudy Royston.

On "Boiling Pot," he overdubs short bass clarinet phrases behind his tenor saxophone; you almost don't notice them at first, but they become crucial by the end. On "Coming Of Age," he switches to soprano and the rhythm section creates a kind of meditative rubato backing. As the piece winds down, Hall sweeps it away with washes of cymbals. The duos are significantly more abstract and experimental than the trio pieces; Rathbun pushes his horns



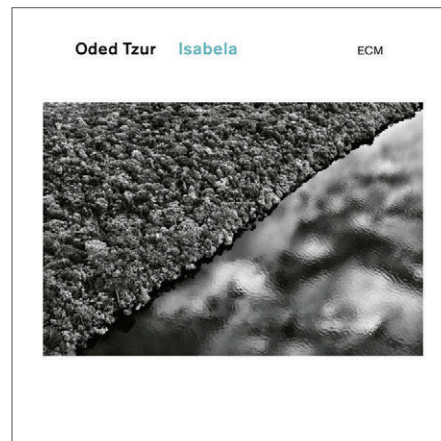
through echo and reverb on "Mop It Up," and makes it sound like a vintage analog synthesizer from Stevie Wonder's arsenal on "Get Up Get Out," while Hall lays down driving beats. "Dream Sequence" is even weirder; Hall keeps his cymbals dancing and his snare work martial, as Rathbun journeys through deep space.

—Philip Freeman

Made In Kalamazoo: Be Curious (For Billy Hart); Douglass King Obama; Kzoo Brew; The Promise; Boiling Pot; Coming Of Age; Creative Force; Well Of Hope; Interlude; Mop It Up; Sweep; Get Up Get Out; Dream Sequence; Sympathetic Vibrations; Lakeside; My Man; What You Say; Young Man's Game; Landscape; Thank You, Max. (66:53)

Personnel: Andrew Rathbun, tenor and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet, electronics; Robert Hurst III, bass; Keith Hall, drums.

Ordering info: keithhall.bandcamp.com



Oded Tzur *Isabela*

ECM

★★★★★

The Indian classical raga form is one with blurred edges; its soft melodies fade in and out of focus, ultimately cohering to weave a tapestry of enveloping sound that can feel like it will never end, like light breaking at dawn.

Saxophonist Oded Tzur has become an expert in blending the improvisatory jazz tradition with the raga and its ever-expanding presence. Training with Bansuri master Hariprasad Chaurasia, Israeli-American Tzur has developed a unique style on his tenor, a softly undulating tone that mirrors the piping of Indian flutes, while containing an earthy, reed-driven power ready to be unleashed at key moments.

Tzur's second release on ECM, *Isabela*, is the most fully realized iteration of his North Indian-inspired jazz compositions. A suite of five tracks, the album opens with an ambient, unmeasured "Invocation," in the tradition of the raga alap, before undertaking its own dynamic arc — from the pensive, gossamer melodies of "Noam" through to the rhythmic piano of "The Lion Turtle" and ending on the percussive explosion of "Love Song For The Rainy Season."

In gradually building the range of his intensity, Tzur and his band take the listener on an emotive journey. There is the romantic longing of the title track, featuring a deft interplay between Tzur and pianist Nitai Hershkovits's voicings, the forlorn longing of "Noam," given grounding by bassist Petros Klampanis, and finally the full band bombast of the closing track. Here, drummer Jonathan Blake expertly pushes his rhythms until the entire quartet is cooking, while Tzur blows forcefully to contain us within his intensity. In that sound, dawn moves into day and bright, blinding sunlight.

—Ammar Kalita

Isabela: Invocation; Noam; The Lion Turtle; Isabela; Love Song For The Rainy Season. (35:27)

Personnel: Oded Tzur, tenor saxophone; Petros Klampanis, bass; Nitai Hershkovits, piano; Johnathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Pianist Alan Pasqua (left), drummer Peter Erskine and bassist Darek Oles recorded *Live In Italy* during a November 2021 tour.

COURTESY OF FUZZY MUSIC

Peter Erskine/Alan Pasqua/Darek Oles *Live In Italy*

FUZZY MUSIC

★★★★

While releasing four slamming projects with his dynamic Dr. Um Band, drummer Peter Erskine has maintained a strictly acoustic trio

with pianist Alan Pasqua. Their initial two releases on Erskine's Fuzzy Music label, 2000's *Live At Rocco* and 2002's *Badlands*, featured West Coast bass great Dave Carpenter, who died in 2008. Darek Oles came onboard with 2007's *Standards* and further established his chemistry with Pasqua and Erskine on 2010's *The Interlochen Concert*, 2010's *Standards, Vol. 2* and 2019's *3 Nights In L.A.* Their latest high-

ly empathetic outing finds them going even deeper.

Recorded at the end of a two-week tour abroad in November 2021, *Live In Italy* opens with Pasqua's introspective, three-minute solo-piano intro to his "Agrodolce" before Oles and Erskine enter, walking on eggshells on this melancholic gem. Pasqua also penned the lilting "New Hope" and the medium-tempo swinger "Old Blues," the latter featuring some hip melodic fills from Erskine, whose own sparsely exquisite "Three-Quarter Molly" culminates in some masterful storytelling on the kit. Oles, a superb soloist, contributes two compositions in the shimmering "Snowglobe" and the uptempo swinger "The Honeymoon," which finds Pasqua in full-on burn mode and also features some boppish trading between bassist and drummer.

Elsewhere, they take their time on a gorgeous reading of Django Reinhardt's "Nuages," turn in an entrancing polyrhythmic rendition of Dizzy Gillespie's "Con Alma" and pay tribute to Chick Corea on Pasqua's briskly swinging homage "Dear Chick." —*Bill Milkowski*

Live In Italy: Agrodolce; New Hope; Old School Blues; Nuages; Three-Quarter Molly; Turnaround; Con Alma; Snowglobe; The Honeymoon; Dear Chick. (69:00)

Personnel: Peter Erskine, drums; Alan Pasqua, piano; Darek Oles, bass.

Ordering info: petererskine.com



Jon Balke's new music pays homage to multiple muses and cultural contexts.

Jon Balke Siwan *Hafla*

ECM

★★★★½

As a fitting opening concert at this spring's Vossa Jazz festival in Norway, frequent Voss visitor Jon Balke was back in town, and enmeshed in one of his worldly conceptual projects. The Arabic-gear band Siwan, which

Balke founded in 2007 and to which he has returned with the fascinating album *Hafla* this year, landed with a dramatic impact in concert.

With its innovative, cohesive mesh of ensemble parts — sinuous strings by the group Barokksolistene, multi-ethnic percussion (headed by the unique and ever-sensitive Helge Norbakken), charismatic Algerian vocalist Mona Boutchebak and Balke's tasteful keyboards — the sum effect conjured up

an entrancing pan-ethnic tapestry on stage. The magic also translates beautifully to the pristine recorded artifact on ECM Records, although recorded in Copenhagen via delayed, distanced stages and logistics vis-a-vis COVID challenges. Based on texts by 11th century poets Wallada bint al-Mustakfi and al-Andalusian poet Ibn Zaydun, Balke's new music pays homage to multiple muses and historical and cultural contexts, to rich ends.

Vocalist Boutchebak is consistently mesmerizing and was central in the formative conceptual stages of the project: She wrote the yearning love ballad "Mirada Furtiva" (key line: "I save for you all my longing"). After the wending, interlinked trek of 12 pieces, with propulsive unison string lines and solo turns by Iranian kemençe player Derya Turkan and the percussive elegance of Pedram Khavar Zamini's tombak, the set closes on the compact, bittersweet "Is There No Way." Here, violist Per Buhe lends the male voice in the suite's love saga angle. —*Josef Woodard*

Hafla: Tarraqub; Enamorado de Júpiter; Mirada Furtiva; La Estrella Fugaz; Arrihu Aqwadu; Ma Yakunu Li-Annaha; Diálogo en la Noche; Línea Oscura; Saeta; Uquállibu; Wadaactu; Visita; Is There No Way. (45:20)

Personnel: Mona Boutchebak, vocals, kwitra; Derya Turkan, kemençe; Bjarte Eike, baroque violin; Helge Norbakken, percussion; Pedram Khavar Zamini, tombak; Per Buhe, vocals, viola; Jon Balke, keyboards, electronics, tombak; Barokksolistene: Peter Spissky, Louise Gorm, Arsema Asghodom, violins; Torbjörn Köhl, Mikkel Schreiber, violas; Mime Yamahiro Brinkmann, Judith-Maria Blomsterberg, cellos; Johannes Lundberg, double bass.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Building Fluency & Rapport

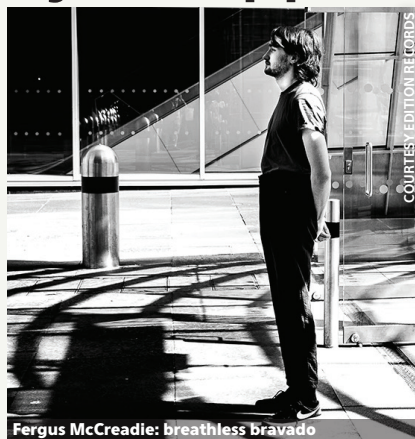
There's no missing the rapport Scottish pianist **Fergus McCreadie** has developed with bassist David Bowden and drummer Stephen Henderson on the group's third album, **Forest Floor** (Edition; 54:58 ★★), attacking his appropriated themes with breathless bravado. The trio unleashes an impressive power and unity throughout the new album, but listening to them play is a bit like watching a troupe of acrobatics practice. They achieve remarkable feats of physical dexterity and precision, but the compositions are either high-velocity exercises or florid trifles that exist primarily to give the musicians a platform to flex their chops. Rarely does the group reveal a dynamic sensibility beyond pedal-to-the-metal, filling every bit of space with unerring strings of steeplechase virtuosity. "The Unfurrowed Field" begins with an air of contemplation, yet the trio seems unable to resist hitting the accelerator. "Morning Moon" is bona fide ballad, but in this case that simply means the group merely slows down and plays quietly.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com

There's also boundless virtuosity featured on **Trinaiska** (AMP; ★★), the second album by the sextet led by Swiss-based clarinetist **Tome Iliev**, but here it comes across as a means to an end. The bandleader is Macedonian, and here and there he borrows the elaborate time signatures of music from the Balkans, although far less so than on the group's 2019 debut *Sketches Of Macedonia*. In fact, several tunes incorporate bits of reggae. The production brings out a rock-like gloss, especially in the hurtling sound of Adrian Böckli's drumming, that suggests that the group brings a party-like atmosphere to live shows, yet they don't allow that energy to smother the improvisational fluency of the musicians.

Ordering info: ampmusicrecords.com

The superb Finnish reedist **Mikko Innanen** — just celebrated for his recent work in bassist Petter Eldh's Koma Saxo — celebrates the 15th anniversary of his agile trio Plop by collaborating with Finn Juhani "Junnu" Aaltonen, one of his homeland's most accomplished winds players. The book of original music on **Plop & Junnu** (Fiasko; 58:40 ★★½) is rooted in post-bop pleasures, from the briskly swinging opener "Letter To Han," where drummer Joonas Riippa embraces the rhythmic grace if not the eccentricity of the titular Dutch master Han Bennink, and the two reedists chew up the scenery with soulfully twinned lines. There's a glistening lightness of touch on the group improvisation "Alasamu," while Innanen's "Täysistunto" supposedly mirrors the action in a plenary



session of Finland's parliament.

Ordering info: fiasco-records.bandcamp.com

Norwegian bassist **Sigurd Hole** was able to present the music featured on **Roraima** (Independent Release; 78:02 ★★) in Oslo during a pause in one of his homeland's pandemic lockdowns. The live recording nicely captures the way he blends exquisite chamber arrangements with field recordings from rainforests in the titular Brazilian state made by soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause. Hole leads a fantastic ensemble featuring Frode Haltli (accordion), Håkon Aase (violin), Helga Myhr (Hardanger fiddle), Trygve Seim (saxophone), Tanja Orning (cello) and Per Oddvar Johansen (vibraphone) that instills his skeletal, mournful compositions with lush timbres, phrases that sigh and sob, and harmonies that vibrate, with chanted instrumental phrases that evoke the microtonality of the Middle East and Scandinavian folk rather than Brazilian traditions.

Ordering info: sigurdhole.bandcamp.com

Drummer **Tommaso Moretti** is from Italy, but since relocating to Chicago in 2013 he's become an integral figure on the scene. While he closes his terrific new album **Inside Out** (BACE; 57:19 ★★) with the traditional Neapolitan song "Era de Maggio," most of his tunes evoke the sound of Brazil, from the gently sashaying art-pop of "Redefine The Purpose," a pandemic-era recording where he plays acoustic guitar, drums and xylophone in addition to singing, while "Edge Of A Decade" is fueled by a propulsive Batacuda parade groove and enhanced by lyric cornet interjections from Ben LaMar Gay. His band is deftly helmed by bassist Ben Dillinger and Brazilian guitarist Edinho Gerber, who can't seem to help suffusing everything he plays with the music of his homeland. **DB**

Ordering info: bacerecords.com



Lucian Ban *Ways Of Disappearing*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

A century ago, Béla Bartók was traveling through England and Wales with a fellow composer who preferred to go under the name Peter Warlock. The Englishman was fascinated by Bartók's heroically patient fieldwork in traditional Eastern European folk music. It's a body of research that offered modernism an alternative to the 12-tone route and its influence is felt to this day: nowhere more so than in the music of Lucian Ban, among whose previous records was a set of trio improvisations with John Surman and Mat Maneri based on the Bartók field recordings.

The influence is still evident on this solo album, produced by Maneri and recorded on a grand-toned Bösendorfer in the Baroque Hall in Timisoara, in the heart of Ban's native Transylvania. The more explicit influence this time is arguably Carla Bley and to a less definable degree Annette Peacock, who are represented by coolly daring interpretations of "Ida Lupino" and "Albert's Love Theme," respectively.

Effortlessly eclectic and encyclopedic in his knowledge of most jazz forms from classic to free, Harlem stride to Tristano, Ban creates the impression that each track could be the threshold to a different album, but the whole coheres around his most personal and exposed improvisation yet, with "Cristina's Hope" at the end (she is the dedicatee of the whole) as raptly self-transcending as anything Bill Evans ever committed to record. An astonishing stylist with a near-perfect instinct for dynamics and effective pedaling, Ban is now unquestionably in the major league of contemporary pianists. In his day, and this is one of them, there's hardly anyone to match him. —Brian Morton

Ways Of Disappearing: The Heart Of What Does Exist; Flatbush Avenue Breakdown; Remorse; Albert's Love Theme; Jalisco; Ways Of Disappearing; Mojave; Owners Of Silence; My Blues; From The Other Side; Rush; Ida Lupino; Guerrero; Cristina's Hope. (62:04)
Personnel: Lucian Ban, piano.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

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Tony Malaby sets up for a session under the New Jersey Turnpike.

Beneath the Overpass

How Jam Sessions Under the Turnpike Inspired My Latest Project

The culture of sessioning in the New York area is like nowhere else on the planet. Everybody gets together. When I first moved there, I used to session two times a day, and those get-togethers ended up turning into bands. That's how I connected with that community. Before COVID hit, I was consistently playing sessions at my Jersey City home two or three times a week. It's important to my well being and to my craft. It's a way of developing camaraderie, trust and musically with people, and I didn't want to lose certain connections.

Once the COVID pandemic made indoor sessions impossible to host, my friend Billy Mintz remembered a spot under the New

Jersey Turnpike near the feed out of the Lincoln Tunnel. We'd gotten together and played there once a few years before COVID, and we always talked about going back. I went and checked it out and practiced there and it felt safe. It was very colorful. The atmosphere was very energetic. Even playing there by myself, there was so much sound from all the traffic, from sirens. There's a lot of activity, plus it's kind of abandoned in a way and rather *Batman*-like.

I'm lucky players came out from as far as Queens, Brooklyn, Harlem and the Bronx. Trumpeter Dave Ballou came up from Baltimore. Michael Formanek lives in Jersey, John Hebert lives in Jersey. Tom Rainey came

out. Tim Berne came. William Parker was a regular, as was Chris Hoffman. I just wanted to keep the ballgame going in a way.

We had to play totally acoustic. We got into long tones. And we were able to go in a whole other direction with dynamics and really develop triple pianissimos. At the same time, it felt great when you played loud there. And I wanted to create a sound that was transparent, but huge, and that I could play in that place without losing the attack of the bass note.

It became my practice space. I would interact with wildlife, traffic, machinery and sirens, and work on approximating how those sounds were formed, harmonic-wise, shade-wise, color-wise. Were they blaring? The type of attack

— was it a short attack, a marcato thing?

I worked on scales and getting back to fundamentals like triads and arpeggios. When I started playing there with Hebert, one of the funnest things was playing tunes, like Thelonious Monk's "Evidence" and a piece called "Just Me, Just Me" (a contrafact of "Just You, Just Me" that I kind of improvised and came out sounding whole.) That's the last track on my most recent album, *The Cave Of Winds*, which emerged from those sessions under the overpass.

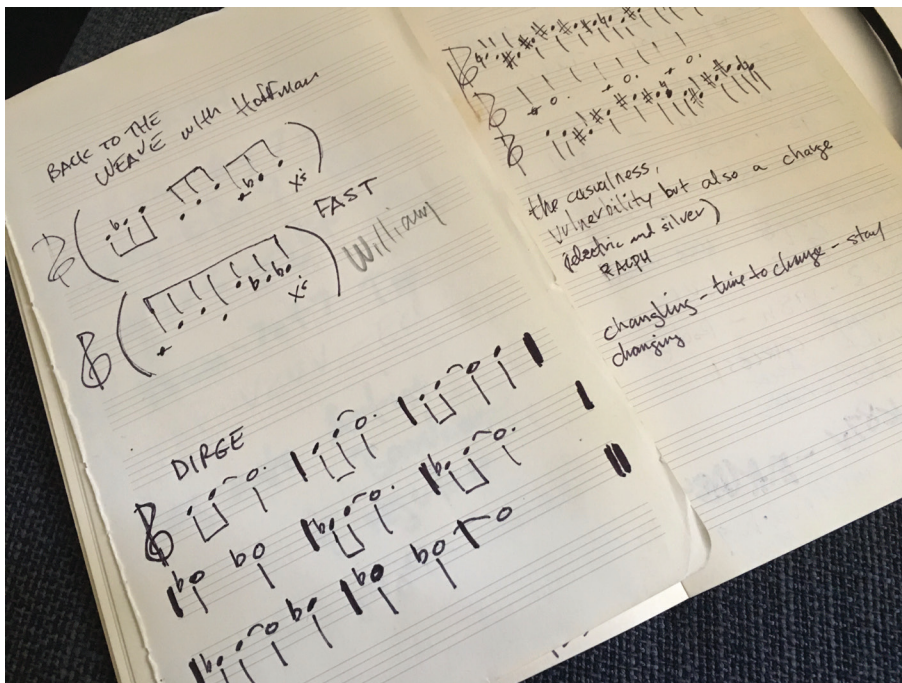
I remember comping for Hebert sometimes on the saxophone, and I would play the shape that became the bridge of the album's title track. It's very Monkish, but the melody itself on the "A" section is very lyrical — it really feels like I improvised that. It doesn't feel like I sat there and worked it out at the piano. It's because of playing down there. We would also play "Woody 'N You." And, again, I was working on developing one idea for a long time, Sonny Rollins-esque.

Another thing that came out of me was a kind of pentatonic shape — something I once worked really hard to escape from because I come from the early-'70s Elvin Jones *Live At The Lighthouse* with Dave Liebman and Steve Grossman generation. So, here I am playing with Hebert under the turnpike and this pentatonic thing just comes rolling out from playing off of the melody of "Woody 'N You." As my solo unfolded, I started playing that shape, and that became a thing that I developed. When I gave it to Ben Monder and Michael Formanek and Tom Rainey with the title "Corinthian Leather" for the studio recording, it went beyond anything I had expected.

I had it on a piece of paper from playing with Hebert and Mintz at the turnpike, a little postcard I'd keep on the side. And when Pyroclastic label head Kris Davis approached me about making the record, I had all these little postcards of things that I was 'shedding. I was getting into contrafacting, one of the ways that I worked when I was very young. I started checking out various contrafacts and thinking about all the tunes Charlie Parker wrote that were contrafacts. The only tune he did that wasn't a contrafact was a minor tune called "Segment."

There's another tune that I was playing with Mintz and Hebert, and I started working out a type of chromaticism just by surrounding the home minor triad — putting the minor triad a half step up, and the one from below. Those tones became a tone row, and I came up with this thing from exploring those shapes with them and trying to be melodic and lyrical while not forcing patterns or licks.

I'm trying to mix color and create shading and tone. That's something that I worked on the whole time I was down there. And it got



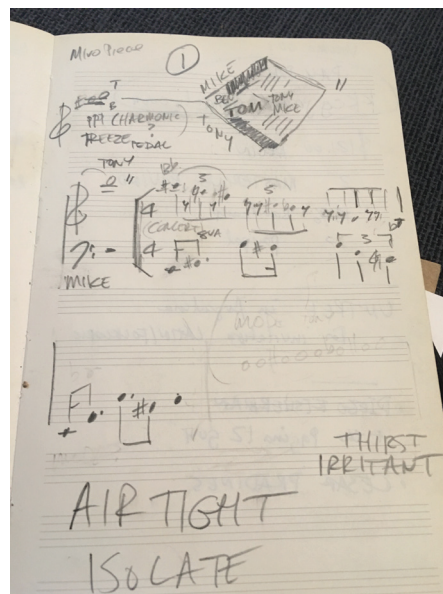
An example of the cells that Malaby would play with cellist Christopher Hoffman, bassist William Parker and drummer Billy Mintz. The top cell became the title track on *The Cave Of Winds*, and the one marked "dirge" became "Scratch The Horse."

to a point where it just becomes part of your sentence structure and also your palette with harmony, and melody, and creating tension with these kinds of tools. It becomes second nature. We recorded that trio of me with Hebert and Mintz, and there are YouTube videos of us playing together down there (youtu.be/X9SXdlV5CN8).

The Cave Of Winds' title comes from Mintz being down there under the bridge with me in late January and the whole month of February. It would howl and we were freezing our butts off, but once we started playing, it's like jumping into a cold river: You just acclimate and the music just grabs you. The wind would start howling and I would get into sonic things with that. I would continue to pretend that I was playing with the wind and how it soared through there, and how it had a point, and how it hit, and how it dissipated. It had this distance and was so full of mystery.

I want things to flow that way when I play. And rhythm is a big part of it. There were a lot of rhythmic things that were working, and Hebert and Mintz were into developing these kinds of polyrhythms — not polymetrics, but polyrhythms. We were trying to not play in each other's time lines and create tension and rub with that, and doing it by playing fast and being able to move in that way. We would work on 5 over 4, or 5 over 3. "Corinthian Leather" is 5 over 8.

Up to the point of COVID, most of the stuff that I played and recorded was completely improvised. Now, under the turnpike, I suddenly found myself wanting to get back to



Malaby's sketch for the tune "Insect Ward"

basics to hone my harmonic palette. And I discovered that everything has evolved in terms of how I'm able to learn and how I'm able to retain things now. It's not how I was when I was a kid. Today, I have a bigger picture of the scope of jazz, its history and my place within the art form.

DB

Tony Malaby is a tenor saxophonist whose work bridges the realms of post-bop and free improvisation. Originally from Arizona, he was based in New York from 1995 until 2021, and recently relocated to Boston and joined the faculty of Berklee College of Music. Malaby has been a member of such notable jazz groups as Charlie Haden's Liberation Orchestra, Paul Motian's Electric Bebop Band, Mark Helias' Open Loose, Fred Hersch's quintet and bands led by Mario Pavone, Tim Berne, Chris Lightcap, Kris Davis, Angelica Sanchez, Michael Attias and Marty Ehrlich. He leads several projects of his own including: Apparitions, the Tony Malaby Cello Trio, the quartet Paloma Recio and the trio Tamarindo. His latest quartet recording, *The Cave Of Winds* (with Tom Rainey, Michael Formanek and Ben Monder), was released in January on the Pyroclastic label.

COURTESY OF BRIAN BROMBERG



Brian Bromberg

Returning to Live Performances

Hey, everyone, Brian Bromberg here. For those who don't know me, I am a bassist, recording artist, producer, composer and bandleader. Like the rest of you, the past couple of years have been a real challenge on so many levels because of how COVID-19 essentially just stopped everything in its tracks. For all musicians who tour and perform live, the door slammed shut — *bam!* Overnight our live performance calendars got wiped clean — *poof!* — all gigs gone. At least for me, I can record and produce at home and was able to do three complete projects in 2020. But, the serious downside was that I, as well as most other musicians, couldn't perform or play live music with other human beings until recently. In my entire 45-year career as a jazz musician, this was by far the longest period that I didn't play music.

The productions and recordings I was able to work on were lifesavers in many ways for me, but one thing that I realized in this whole process is how when you play regularly, your hands, strength, endurance, ownership of

your instrument and overall musicality feels strong and powerful. When you don't regularly play, all of that suffers greatly, especially being a bass player, since in jazz the bass rarely ever stops playing. We provide the rhythm and harmonic foundation for everyone else to play on and to build on. There is an old saying, "If you don't use it, you lose it."

Man, is that statement true, especially walking through fast changes or trying to blow on a fast bebop tune.

Maybe it's just me and the fact that my life is evolving, but after locking myself in a practice room for half my life, playing at home by myself with nothing on my calendar for so long felt like hiking up a hill with a '64 Cadillac Coupe DeVille in my backpack. It is so hard to get or be inspired to play at home with no real creative outlet to make music with humans for humans on the horizon. I knew at some point things would start opening and that I would need to be ready to perform at the highest level I could, as I have dedicated my life to just that.

Even though emotionally and musically it

was not very rewarding, I forced myself to at least try to practice and keep my ability up, as you never know when you are going to get the call. I always try to split my time between electric bass and upright bass. I have upright and electric basses on stands all over the house to always remind me who's boss (and it ain't me) and to kind of force me to pluck basses throughout the day, even if it's just a few notes here and there as I walk by.

The last two years have been a life-changing experience on so many levels. I'm so glad things are getting better and live music is coming back for real. I am just so happy to be playing again. With new recordings coming out, I want to play as many dates as possible.

Practice Time

My approach to both the acoustic and electric bass is quite similar when it comes to a practice routine. Honestly, I don't have a major practice routine at this point in my life. But I do have a few rituals that I try to adhere to. I never pick up the acoustic or electric bass and

just start playing a zillion notes — just can't do that, nor should I. I have done so much tendon and muscle damage to my arms over the years from playing too fast, too hard, too long when I was younger and didn't warm up properly that I have been paying the price for it my whole career. What I do now is pick up a bass and start nice and slow with scales and long notes. I make sure that I have the proper blood supply to my arms and hands and that I am nice and warm before I start playing faster and more challenging things.

I never plug into a bass amp or play through my studio rig to practice, even on my electric bass. The reason I do that is that your sound is the relationship between your fingers and your instrument. If you can't make a good acoustic sound on your bass and you plug it into an amp, your amp will reproduce your not-very-good sound and make it louder.

I want my sound to be in my hands and not in my rig, even on electric bass. The only time I use an amp or rig when I practice electric bass, for the most part, is when I must learn specific written notes and need to hear them, or if I am playing to rehearsal tracks in preparation for a gig to make sure that I remember my songs and where to put my fingers.

I play many basses that are tuned differently, which means that I am playing in different keys than the actual key of any given song — so it's easy to forget what the heck I'm supposed to be playing!

As I said above, if you don't use it, you lose it. You need to play often enough to keep your strength and endurance, as well as your dexterity and musicality. The only way to be connected to the music and what you hear is to not have to think about your ability to play your instrument. The minute you are thinking about playing your instrument, then you are not playing the music on your instrument. It all must be second nature. The best way for it to be second nature is to play enough and be so connected to your instrument that there is nothing to think about, you just sing through your instrument. We devote our entire lives to putting in the time on our instruments to be able to play like that.

No Apologies: A Bombastic Approach

Just my opinion here, but in many ways, what separates the great from the good isn't just what they play, it is *how* they play it. Everyone has their own unique voice and style that makes them sound like them. How many tenor players out there play the same Selmer sax model, same mouthpiece, same reeds, same song and sound different? Not just sound, but style. Stan Getz and Boots Randolph both played tenor sax and sounded completely different in their sound and approach to the instrument. Marcus Miller, Stanley Clarke and the late Jaco



COURTESY OF BRIAN BROMBERG

I don't want to just play the bass. I want to tell a story that is real, deep and full of humanity.

Pastorius and Rocco Prestia all played four-string electric bass and sound different from each other in every way. You hear one or two notes from each guy, and you instantly know who it is you are listening to.

That brings me back to the attitude and the approach of funk bass playing. Funk is all attitude, vibe, groove, intensity, pocket, power, strength. No apologies!

That is my approach to playing that music. In your face and undeniable, all attitude. You can play softly and even tenderly but still have that attitude and conviction.

Again, it's not just what you play, but *how* you play it. I didn't spend half my life practicing and dedicating so much to playing the bass to play apologetically or to play radio edits live. If I am going to play for real, I am going to throw down, period.

One of the first guys who inspired me to play that way when I was young was the incomparable, late, great Freddie Hubbard. He took

to the stage, put the horn up to his lips, stood in that amazing position with such confidence and power, and would just blow the roof off the joint. The command of his instrument and the music was second to none. He was one of the cats who inspired me to play with that kind of attitude and energy. Just infectious attitude.

I try to play bass like that, especially on a funk or slap-bass song. I don't want to just play the bass. I want to tell a story that is real, deep and full of humanity. You can't do that if you are holding anything back. **DB**

Bassist Brian Bromberg has performed, toured and/or recorded with some of the greatest jazz, pop and crossover artists of our time. He has also contributed to and produced numerous film soundtracks. Bromberg's most recent album as a leader, 2021's *A Little Driving Music* (Artistry Music/Mack Avenue), follows his wide-ranging 2020 holiday album *Celebrate Me Home* and the remixed and remastered digital release of his stunning tribute album *Bromberg Plays Hendrix*. This summer, Bromberg will digitally release five CDs that have not previously been available in the Western Hemisphere. Album titles include *Hands*, *A Bass Odyssey*, *Brombo I*, *Brombo II* and *Brombo III*, available on all of your favorite streaming platforms. Visit Bromberg online at brianbromberg.net.



Tomeka Reid uses the composition's loose time-feel to her advantage as an improvising soloist.

MICHAEL JACKSON

Tomeka Reid's Cello Solo on 'Cultural Differences'

When considering the key elements of jazz, many musicians would mention chromaticism, swing and a driving pulse. All three of those are noticeably absent in cellist Tomeka Reid's improvisation on "Cultural Differences," from the 2017 album *Not Live In Fear* from the trio Hear In Now, consisting of Reid with violinist Silvia Bolognesi and bassist Mazz Swift. She employs other powerful musical devices to create a highly emotive improvisation that I would consider within the realm of jazz.

During the solo, Swift plays a slow ostinato in C that I've written out at the start of the

transcription. But with all the space in the line and the absence of any other rhythm section players, the time is very loose, which Reid uses to her advantage, bending the time to her will. This means that, as the transcriber, I have to make choices (or guesses) as to how to present these rhythms, and I recommend you don't treat them as metronomic, but instead as an interpretation of Reid's elastic phrases.

Reid often plays over the barline, which adds further ambiguity to her solo lines, most of which don't create the sense of starting or landing on a downbeat (a rare exception being the concurring downbeat of cello and bass

at measure 6). This does get compounded by the construction of the bass line: even though this section is in 4/4, Reid has the bass coming in on beat 3 of the second bar and then playing dotted quarters, making it sound like a full measure of 3/4 (or 6/8, really). It sounds like a bar of 5/4 followed by a measure of 6/8. Even so, Reid doesn't land on the second beat of the second bar very often, either. She starts out there sometimes (for example, bars 3 and 5), but through the remainder of this solo she tends to improvise right over it.

Reid's choice of notes also contributes to a feeling of ambiguity in her solo. This section is

clearly in C, and the bass line could be heard as a IV–I progression. Reid does stay within the C major scale for the entire solo. However, she doesn't seem to make any attempt at making it sound like chord changes. She frequently emphasizes various parts of the C scale, and not always within the implied chord.

The first few bars are centered around the E (third of C) but in measures 5 and 6 Reid switches to leaning on the A and B. You could make the argument that these are the thirds of the F and G in the bass line, and therefore Reid is playing as if there are changes, except the A and the B show up three beats ahead of those chords. Also, when it resolves back to C in the next bar, Reid lands squarely on A natural (the sixth). Though any note could be labeled as either a chord tone or an extension of these harmonies, the way Reid varies her stressed notes all over the scale and doesn't come to rest on strong beats produces a much different emotional effect than playing changes.

Adding to this effect, Reid stops using F natural completely after the first few bars, despite it being a note in the bass part. This skipping over a pitch makes her playing sound less scalar overall. Reid will sometimes omit the C as well (see the ends of measures 5 and 7, and bars 11 and 14). Skipping over the tonic creates more of this wash of tonality, as the bass is defining the key but the melody is playing most everything else.

Besides the thirds created when Reid jumps a note, there are a few instances where she uses larger intervals. We hear ascending minor sevenths in bars 6 and 16, a descending fourth at the end of measure 10 and the middle of bar 12, and an ascending fifth in measure 20.

Jazz improvisations are generally constructed in this manner: mostly scalar motion with thirds to break it up, and the occasional use of larger intervals. But if everything remains scalar all of the time, a solo can come across like practicing — and ultimately be less interesting. If larger intervals are used too much in a solo, it can sound disjointed (or at least unmelodic). Like a chef combining ingredients to create a new dish, improvisers and composers must grapple with which of the various musical elements at their disposal to include in any given phrase — and in this sense, Reid strikes a wonderful balance.

As Reid's solo comes to an end, the violin picks up the line as the group moves into another written section. This style of transition is another thing you don't hear often in jazz, but it's an effective and highly musical means of leading our ears out of Reid's improvisation and into the rest of the composition. **DB**



The trio *Here In Now* consists of bassist Mazz Swift (left), cellist Tomeka Reid and violinist Silvia Bolognesi.

NISHA SONDHE PHOTOGRAPHY

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He recently released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass, titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.

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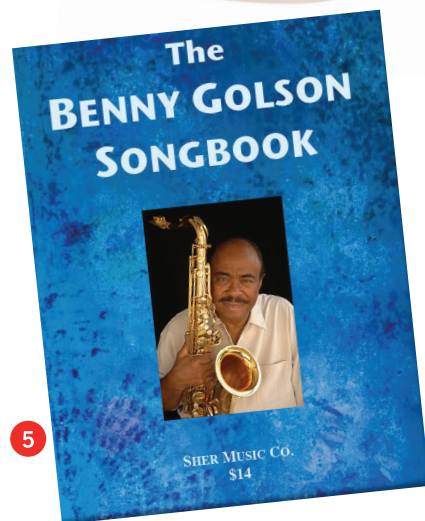
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Summertime Programs a Hit at CJC's Jazzschool

AS THE SUMMER WINDS DOWN, WE LOOK

at one of the great jazz learning opportunities that's been happening this year, the 25-year-old Jazzschool program in California. Located in the heart of Berkeley in Northern California, Jazzschool held its first Summer Youth Program in 2002. Now a part of the California Jazz Conservatory — the sole independent and accredited conservatory devoted to jazz through its associate's, bachelor's and master's degree programs — Jazzschool continues to offer focused summertime study through its single-, three- or five-day series.

The Jazzschool's current summer programs fall under three categories: the Jazzschool Young Musicians Program and High School Intensive; The Girls' Jazz & Blues Workshop series; and, on the adult side, the Summer Jazz Piano Intensive, the Summer Jazz Guitar Intensive and the Summer Vocal Intensive.

"The idea for a summer program was to not let a significant number of weeks go by without offering something," said Susan Muscarella, CJC's founding president and dean of instruction. The idea of bridging what students were learning either in their school's band rooms or through the Jazzschool from school year to school year was popular among parents and motivated students, too.

"I grew a lot as a pianist by getting introduced to a lot of different genre approaches," said pianist, composer and vocalist Samora Pinderhughes, who was a 2022 Doris Duke

Charitable Foundation Creative Inflections grant recipient, of his experiences as part of the inaugural Summer Youth Program. The Berkeley native attended as a middle school student and is part of a growing list of professional artists who attended, including pianist/accordionist Sam Reider and Lorenzo Loera, bassist for The California Honeydrops at the same time he was there.

"Like Brazilian music, for instance," he said, "my parents listened to it, but I never played it until Jazzschool, where there were a lot of Brazilian teachers. I was playing music from different places while I was studying there. Also, it's just a dope community. A lot of folks I played with during that time I met through the Jazzschool"

For 2022, all instruction returned to being in-person at the Jazzschool's campus in the Downtown Berkeley Arts District, about half a mile from the famed University of California, Berkeley campus.

The Young Musicians Program, directed by Erik Jakobson, is for middle school and high school students. Musicians meet twice a week (either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday) for three weeks, with middle school ensembles learning jazz repertoire and improvisation, and high school combos delving deeper into jazz improvisation approaches and exploring theory.

Michael Zilber leads the High School Intensive, which matches each student with

a teacher on the same instrument. "So there's two ensembles in the room together, working, as opposed to the traditional model where there's just an ensemble with one teacher for the whole group," said Rob Ewing, Jazzschool community music school director. The Summer Youth Program unfolds over the course of five six-hour days, while the High School Intensive runs across five five-and-a-half-hour days. It also includes private lessons, master classes and student-run rehearsals.

Junior high and high school students attend not only from the East Bay, in which Berkeley is situated, but also from San Francisco, Marin County and Silicon Valley, he said. The campus is about a block away from the Downtown Berkeley Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station. "The kids can come by themselves on BART, and it's an easy walk over," Muscarella pointed out.

The Downtown Berkeley Arts District itself is a destination neighborhood. Both the Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Freight & Salvage non-profit community arts center are on the same block, and restaurants serving international cuisine can be found all within a five-minute stroll.

"Students might want to take an acting class or go to one of the Freight and Salvage concerts," she noted. "It's really exciting for them to see all of the arts organizations around us."

Taught through specific instruments, the adult intensives were led by pianist Muscarella; guitarist Mimi Fox, a CJC associate professor; guitarist Howard Alden, this year's special guest faculty member; Laurie Antonioli, chair of CJC vocal jazz studies; and vocalist Theo Bleckman. The students, including some advanced teens, attend from various part of North America and the world, studying skills like comping and playing unaccompanied in the case of piano and guitar programs; for vocalists, improvisation, phrasing, arranging and more.

Five of the programs conclude with concerts that are open to the public on the final evening. Young Musicians Program participants perform in an all-student concert, while High School Intensive and Guitar Intensive Friday evening showcases feature a combination of students and faculty members. The Piano and Vocal Intensive participants, in turn, perform with faculty rhythm sections.

Having a week or a weekend of concentrated study and rehearsal readies students in any of those five courses to perform at the end.

"At that point, they feel good about doing a show for friends and family," Muscarella said. "And it's a highlight of their time here."

—Yoshi Kato

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Spike Wilner

As the proprietor of two globally famous Greenwich Village jazz clubs, pianist Michael “Spike” Wilner, 55, has booked most of New York’s finest practitioners of the 88s since he purchased Smalls in 2007 and opened Mezzrow in 2014, while continuing to refine his own, distinctive tonal personality on the instrument, as documented most recently on *Aliens And Wizards* (Cellar Live), with bassist Tyler Mitchell and drummer Anthony Pinciotti. This is his first Blindfold Test.

George Cables

“Too Close For Comfort” (*Too Close For Comfort*, High Note, 2021) Cables, piano; Essiet Okun Essiet, bass; Victor Lewis, drums.

The trio plays the shit out of that amazing, dense arrangement, then sounds great on the blowing — very modern vocabulary, lyrical taste and beauty and driving swing. Jeb Patton’s trio? I’m wondering who else I know who plays like that. Obviously a contemporary player — younger than me, in other words. He’s not? [afterwards] Three masters. 5 stars.

Aaron Diehl

“Milano” (*The Vagabond*, Mack Avenue, 2020) Diehl, piano; Paul Sikivie, bass; Gregory Hutchinson, drums.

That’s Aaron Diehl. I’m not familiar with this piece — whether it’s an original or something he adapted for the trio. From the first few notes, before I realized it was Aaron, I heard the gorgeous piano sound. The touch is beautiful, like a classical pianist almost. I noticed it had a very Chopinesque vibe, then it went into this groovy Erroll Garner-esque feeling, but with so much beautiful modern harmony. The trio is well-disciplined. A remarkable piece of music. 5 stars.

Geoffrey Keezer

“Brilliant Corners” (*On My Way To You*, MarKeez, 2018) Keezer, piano, Fender Rhodes; Mike Pope, bass; Lee Pearson, drums.

My immediate first thought was Robert Glasper. The change of textures surprised me — they started the Monk tune as a traditional trio and then transitioned to an electric feel, and really went for it. A visceral performance. Fantastic, high-level playing by everyone. Gerald Clayton? Sometimes I have conservative objections to taking something from Monk ... but in this case, it was so well-done and so cool. I think it’s a masterpiece. It blew my mind. 5 stars. [afterwards] Geoff lives in this rarefied stratosphere of musical talent — monster facility on the piano, monster ideas and vociferous energy. Aggression, but with beauty; nothing ugly there.

Matthew Shipp

“Prelude To A Kiss” (*To Duke*, RogueArt, 2015) Shipp, piano.

“Prelude To A Kiss” on acid or something, where you’re in a familiar room and all of a sudden everything starts melting away. It’s a Dada approach to this music, but such a lovely, creative sense of harmony on the piano, and obviously a great piano player. 5 stars.

Renee Rosnes

“Swoop” (*Kinds Of Love*, Smoke Sessions, 2021) Rosnes, piano; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Christian McBride, bass; Carl Allen, drums.

Everyone falls into the category of top professional New York player, to my ears. I’m sure I know them all. The tune is super-cool, kind of a Tristano vibe with the tenor and piano playing that great line together, and strong hits. The pianist is a very strong improviser, playing great lines in the upper register, with a beautiful touch and a facility to execute



“10,000 stars,” Spike Wilner said of Ahmad Jamal.

with clarity, which is a jazz pianist’s calling card — and you don’t hear it that often. The tenor player is killing. 5 stars.

Robert Glasper

“Portrait Of An Angel” (*Canvas*, Blue Note, 2005) Glasper, piano; Vicente Archer, bass; Damian Reid, drums.

A professional trio by any standard — very good musicians. That’s a beautiful piece of music. I love the transition to solo piano interlude. The solos are motific and lyric, a modern sound, with good feeling, and great solos from the bass and drums. 5 stars. [afterwards] That track proves to anyone who had any doubts what a great piano player and what a sophisticated jazz musician Robert is.

Gerald Clayton

“My Ideal, Take 1” (*Bells On Sand*, Blue Note, 2022) Clayton, piano.

“My Ideal.” I thought about Brad Mehldau, Fred Hersch — people who play a lot of counterpoint in their improvisation. I liked that it wasn’t derivative when they finally got into their thing, during the second chorus. Beautiful touch. The time feel was strong, but still open, and the lines were beautiful. Very creative. The sound quality on this recording was remarkable. 5 stars.

Ahmad Jamal

“The Awakening” (*The Awakening*, Impulse!, 1970) Jamal, piano; Jamil Nasser, bass; Frank Gant, drums.

“The Awakening,” Ahmad Jamal Trio with Jamil Nasser and Frank Gant. That record is in the top five greatest jazz albums ever recorded, in my opinion. This track typifies everything we want from music: the dynamic changes, the incredible swing feeling and textures, the great beauty and subtlety of his harmonies. Every pianist should digest this record and make it part of their musical fiber. Everything else you played for me today, it’s like the nursery school kids, and now the teacher has arrived. 10,000 stars.

Kirk Lightsey/Rufus Reid

“Oleo” (*The Nights Of Bradley’s*, Sunnyside, 1985–2004) Lightsey, piano; Reid, bass.

“Oleo.” Someone who loves Phineas Newborn, who knows how to play an uptempo “Rhythm” changes, and throw down on it. Frenetic energy. My immediate impression is it’s someone from a generation older than mine, but I’m at a loss as to who — so many people could play in that way. These guys obviously play a lot of duo; they took care of business in terms of time and fire. 5 stars.

DB

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



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Downbeat 70th Annual Critics Poll - Baritone Saxophone