

# THE BEYOND ISSUE! DOWNBEAT®

Jazz, Blues & Soul

## JAZZ IS DEAD

A LOVE LETTER

FROM ADRIAN YOUNGE  
& ALI SHAHEED MUHAMMAD

WADADA LEO SMITH  
DEREK TRUCKS  
VOID PATROL

Yellowjackets  
*Blindfolded, Part I*  
DOMi & JD BECK


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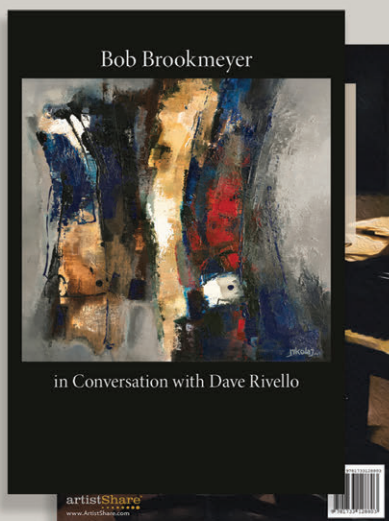
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"Brilliance and wisdom abound in this treasure of a book that is pure Brookmeyer gold. We can all be thankful to Dave Rivello (whom Bob loved and trusted) for having the foresight to conduct these wonderful interviews. Thanks to Dave, Bob's tremendous insights are not lost treasures, but ones that will continue to enrich us all."

— Maria Schneider, composer and bandleader

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— Bill Holman, composer and bandleader

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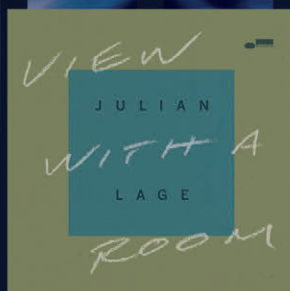


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# SEPTEMBER 2022

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BY JOHN MURPH

Despite its macabre trademark, Adrian Young describes Jazz Is Dead as a "romance." He, with Ali Shaheed Muhammad, are the co-founders of the Los Angeles-based, buzzworthy record label that has been turning heads for the past two years with eye-catching album artwork and, more importantly, a roster of jazz veterans.



"We had 20-some tunes and hours of material, so then it became a question of what to do with it all," said Derek Trucks. The answer is *I Am The Moon*, an epic, four-LP offering by the Tedeschi Trucks Band.

Cover photo of Adrian Young and Ali Shaheed Muhammad by Jazmin Hicks

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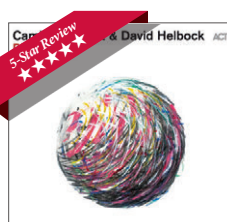
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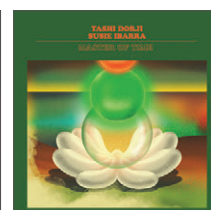
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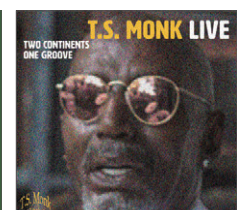
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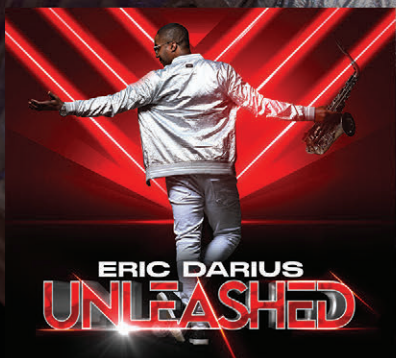


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★★★★ DownBeat Review  
*"Late Bloomin' Jazzman just may be his best" - Allen Morrison*



**MARK WINKLER**  
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**Featuring:**  
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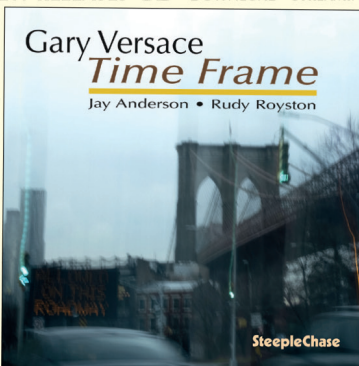
Late Bloomin' Jazzman is vocalist Mark Winkler's homage to growing older and all the blessings and drawbacks that come with it. Winkler is a prolific recording artist and lyricist whose songs have been recorded or performed by a Who's Who of renowned vocalists.

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## First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



While we're at it, let's lose the term "improvise," says Wadada Leo Smith.

# Jazz Is Dead? Again?

**BACK IN 1989, I JOINED DOWNBEAT AS** the editorial director of the magazine. I thought I'd be here for a few years, have some fun and move on. In other words, youthful bliss, a lark.

A few months into the gig, a grizzled, old publicist (who was probably the age I am now, ugh), called and made a pitch for one of his clients. At the end of the conversation, he asked, "So, what's it like to be the curator of a dead music?" I chuckled, and my response then is the same as it would be today. If jazz is dead, let's throw one hell of a wake for the next few centuries.

Of course, our publicist friend was wrong. Maybe the style of jazz that he grew up with in the 1950s and '60s — the world of Armstrong, Ellington, Goodman and Sinatra and Nat Cole, et al — was beginning to fade into the fabric of history, but jazz wasn't dead then, and it's certainly not dead now.

To say jazz is flat-lining always gets a rise out of people — either to the positive, to the negative, or even a good laugh. Take Frank Zappa's famous quip, "Jazz isn't dead, it just smells funny." I don't care who you are, that's still a damned good line.

And Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheen Muhammad certainly tweak the purists and moldy figs (to use the parlance of a bygone era) by branding their record label as Jazz Is Dead, even though, as they clearly state in John Murph's terrific article beginning on page 22, their work is a love letter to the music under the umbrella of a tongue-in-cheek brand.

Still, it's polarizing. We get it. And we fully invite your letters pro and con on the subject.

Just send them to [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com). We'll publish as many as we can.

The Jazz Is Dead subject dovetails into the other major theme of our September coverage: The Beyond Issue. As stated last month in our August Critics Poll Issue — where keyboard genius Jon Batiste won honors for both Jazz Artist and Beyond Artist of the Year, which was a first — DownBeat has been flying under the flag of Jazz, Blues & Beyond since 1990. But when we sat down and said we were doing this issue a year ago, who knew exactly what it meant?

The answer became clear as the music swept across our desks — it meant that artists (and DownBeat editors) want a tabula rasa, a clean slate to create on. They don't want to be pigeonholed into a corner where music and creation becomes in any way predictable.

Sometimes, youth has the answer. As DOMi, the 23-year-old keyboardist from the duo DOMi & JD BECK, notes in an article beginning on page 13, "We don't really call ourselves jazz or any other type of players. We're just musicians, and we want everybody to be able to listen and be, like, 'Whoa, what is this?'"

At the other end of the experience spectrum, 80-year-old Wadada Leo Smith wants to throw out the term "improvisation" altogether, which he believes is a worn-out, misguided word created by academics for academics with little use on the bandstand. Instead of asking artists to "improvise," he simply asks them to "create." His story begins on page 30.

And so it goes. All we can say is to all those seeking wide-open vistas and music without boundaries, welcome to The Beyond Issue. **DB**



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## Chords & Discords >

### Overlooked Jazz Greats

Please pass this on to the Veterans Committee. As time goes by, some very important musicians from the past are being forgotten. Here are a few I think are worthy of consideration to the DownBeat Hall of Fame: trumpeters Buck Clayton and Red Allen; tenor saxophonists Don Byas and Lucky Thompson; the remaining Four Brothers,



Al Cohn, a first-rate tenor saxophonist and composer and arranger, and Serge Chaloff, arguably the greatest baritone saxophonist of the modern era; Shorty Rogers and Shelly Manne, two key figures in West Coast jazz; and Carla Bley, the most important non-vocalist female contributor to the music since Mary Lou Williams.

DON FRESE  
VIA EMAIL

### Hall of Fame Lament

DownBeat is the document of record for our music. It was a terrific step ahead when in the decade of the 2000s a Veterans Committee was able to elect greats who have been neglected in the DB Hall of Fame. Therefore, it was with great sadness when I saw that the committee did not make selections this year. As a reader since 1965, and a subscriber since '68, the omission of such great current musicians as Terry Gibbs and Kenny Burrell [is unfortunate].

Past greats such as Red Norvo, Buddy DeFranco, Frank Trumbauer, Tony Scott, Cal Tjader, Sonny Clark and Elmo Hope are among the many deserving musicians who should be included.

I greatly respect your initiative in making current musicians known to the jazz-loving world. Please increase your commitment to being the document of record in this music in not allowing these deserving greats to be forgotten.

MARSHALL ZUCKER  
WANTAGH, NEW YORK

**Editor's Note:** Don and Marshall, great suggestions. Carla Bley was inducted into the Hall of Fame last year. As noted, this year, no artists received the required 2/3 vote to be inducted by the Veterans Committee. We will revamp the committee in an effort to get more of these great names where they belong — into the Hall of Fame.

Samara Joy on the Rising Star Female Vocalist category. This year I have seen these new singers, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Cécile McLorin Salvant live.

I preferred Lucy and Samara's performances more — beautiful voices without unnecessary embellishment. I was also very happy to see that Chicago's own Isaiah Collier debuted in the poll for Rising Star Tenor and Soprano Saxophones and also for his band. I expect to see his name in the DownBeat Critics Polls.

Thank you for another great issue.

MARC NEBOZENKO  
EVANSTON, IL

### In Search of Sánchez

How come I've not seen an interview with David Sánchez (tenor saxophonist), but you did Miguel Zenón? I consider David so much more talented than Zenón.

ALVARO MALDONADO SALBORENGUE  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

**Editor's Note:** Alvaro, don't make us choose between favorite children ... I mean, artists! We last caught up with David in 2019. We look forward to his next DownBeat interview.

### For the Love of ...

One of the best jazz histories ever assembled is your book of interviews [DownBeat: The Great Jazz Interviews]. A second would be if you were to publish, in chronological order, side by side, DownBeat's musician rankings. I would purchase such a book, with or without commentary. Or, as an author and audiophile, I would be willing to write the book if you sent me the lists.

DWIGHT L. WILSON  
VIA EMAIL

**Editor's Note:** So, you want us to do more work! We will take that under advisement.

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TEHILLAH DE CASTRO



"We don't really call ourselves jazz or any other type of players," said DOMi, left, of the music she makes with JD BECK. "We're just musicians."

## DOMi & JD BECK's Youth Movement

DOMi & JD BECK had an auspicious record release gig for their debut album, *NOT TiGHT*. It was scheduled to drop on the last Friday of July, as the young keyboards-and-drums duo was on the bill for the inaugural Blue Note Jazz Festival Napa Valley, with a headlining set by Dinner Party featuring Terrace Martin, Robert Glasper and Kamasi Washington. The pair was on the marquee for the next day, too, along with the likes of Flying Lotus, Keyon Harrold and host Dave Chappelle.

But the fledgling duo wasn't out of place on the Northern California Wine Country festival's poster, since other participating artists such as rapper/pop culture icon Snoop Dogg and bass guitarist/bandleader Thundercat are showcased on *NOT TiGHT*. An NPR *Tiny Desk* concert and a performance on late-night talk show *Jimmy Kimmel Live* were also on the docket leading up to the debut, giving them further national exposure.

Through previous appearances at other

festivals and concerts, 23-year old DOMi (a.k.a. DOMi Louna, a.k.a. Domitille Degall) and 19-year-old BECK have already garnered considerable attention. At press time, a Zildjian LIVE! video from 2021 starring BECK and featuring DOMi had 2.5 million views. R&B vocalist/drummer/producer Anderson .Paak signed them to his new APESHIT label, which partnered with Blue Note Records to make their debut its first release.

"There is a thread that links all of the artists who've ever recorded for Blue Note: They've all studied and mastered the preceding fundamentals of the music and then applied that knowledge to pushing the boundaries of jazz," wrote Don Was, president of Blue Note, in an email. "DOMi and JD are no exception, and they are boldly headed to where nobody's gone before. ... I have no idea where they're gonna take things, but I'm dying to find out, and the ability to stir up that kind of curiosity and fascination is one of the hallmarks of great artistry."

In a Zoom interview from BECK's native Dallas, both musicians were in good spirits given the amount of interviews they've already handled. They use "DUMMY" and "DJ" as their screen names, displaying their trademark levity, and are already at a point in their creative partnership where they can seamlessly complete each other's sentences.

An immediately noticeable characteristic of DOMi & JD BECK performance videos is the economy and simplicity of their musical concept without any loss of sonority. BECK uses a single cymbal and two toms, while DOMi favors a simple pair of keyboards and, more recently, a MIDI foot pedal unit.

"I think we're just minimalists," BECK said. "When it comes to me, I feel like I sound worse when I have more drums. There are so many possibilities with even just one drum."

"When I give myself all these other pieces, I feel like I'm trying too hard to utilize them. So if I had a lot of drums, I feel like I wouldn't be able to



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stand my own playing," he continued.

"Limiting options expands your creativity," DOMi added. "So I like trying to be the most creative with only the tiny 49-key M-Audio keyboard. That's nearly all I used for the album, because I don't ever want to write on auto-pilot, write what I already know."

The duo becomes a two members become a trio with DOMi handling bass duties on keyboard. "That came actually from the fact that in all my jazz ensembles, there would never be a bass player," she said. "My brother also played piano. So he would be on the piano, and I would be on the Rhodes playing the bass lines. And then we would switch. And then I kept going, and I was, like, 'I love this!'"

In a different section of the multiverse, the two would have switched roles: "My dad just really wanted me not to have a regular job and to do an artistic creative thing," DOMi said. "And he loves music, so he built a drum set out of cans when I was 2." She switched to a electric piano a year later. BECK, in turn, started with piano lessons at 5 before moving behind the kit.

DOMi's musical background also contributes to her self-sufficient keyboarding style. Alternating between home schooling and music conservatories back in France, she studied classical and jazz before attending the Berklee College of Music on a Presidential Scholarship. "The classical definitely helps — playing Chopin and Rachmaninoff," she reflected.

Milestones of BECK's early musical journey occurred on the bandstand. "A co-worker of my dad's told him about Erykah Badu's band having a jam session every Wednesday in Deep Ellum," he recalled, referencing Dallas' popular arts and entertainment district. "So when I was 10 or 11, I went up there to play drums with them and did that regularly."

The initial teaming up of the two one-time child prodigies occurred at the 2018 NAMM Show. Drummer Robert "Sput" Searight of Snarky Puppy invited them to demo in-ear monitors by playing as a duo at one of the music product convention's many booths. The noisy, cavernous setting was surreal, but the collaborative seed quickly sprouted.

"We went all the way to back to L.A. for an actual jam session that was completely outside of NAMM," DOMi recounted, fondly looking back at the gathering that took place at The Mint, an 85-year-old music and comedy venue. "It was really chill, and that's when we became friends."

The composing phase of the partnership began during lockdown in Dallas, recording basic bedroom demos "through iPhone mics using MIDI sounds," BECK said. Once they signed with .Paak, "We moved out to L.A. into his little space, and we had a tiny little room where we did the same thing as before but at a higher quality, like with real mics."

*NOT TiGHT*'s special guests were mostly recorded live out West. Herbie Hancock, with whom the duo sat in with on "Chameleon" at the Hollywood Bowl in 2021, joined them at Larrabee Sound Studios in North Hollywood to guest on the kinetic "Moon." The alternating flutter and breezy "Two SHriMPS" with Mac DeMarco was recorded at the alternative singer-songwriter's house.

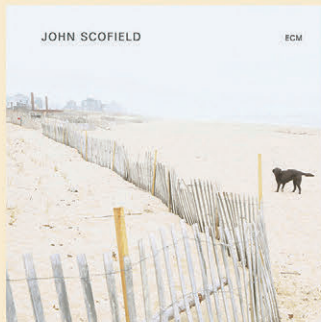
The two exceptions were MC Busta Rhymes' contribution "PiLOT," which also features Snoop Dogg and .Paak. "WOAH," boasting Kurt Rosenwinkel's expressive guitar lines, was also done asynchronously.

Dubbed Generation Z ambassadors between the worlds of jazz, hip-hop, R&B and electronic music traditions, DOMi and BECK create bridges between demographics and genres. Like newer schools of players, they're as comfortable exploring late producer Dilla's innovations as they are revisiting a standard such as "My Favorite Things."

"I think most of the people we meet in person are younger kids who are around our age," BECK said. "But we always get those comments and messages saying, 'I'm a 50-year-old jazz player, and I love your shit,'" DOMi added. "And it always feels nice because we don't want to put any [audience] limitation on our music. So we don't really call ourselves jazz or any other type of players. We're just musicians, and we want everybody to be able to listen and be, like, 'Whoa, what is this?'"

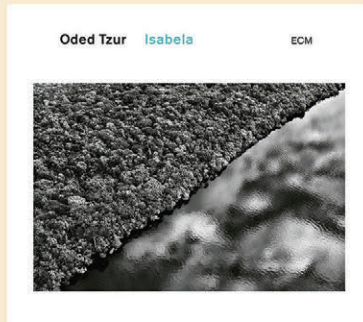
—Yoshi Kato





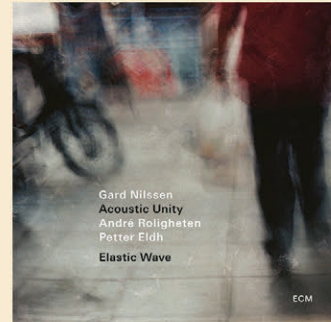
**JOHN SCOFIELD**  
*JOHN SCOFIELD*

JOHN SCOFIELD: GUITAR  
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**ODED TZUR**  
*ISABELA*

ODED TZUR: TENOR SAXOPHONE  
PETROS KLAMPANIS: DOUBLE BASS  
NITAI HERSHKOVITS: PIANO  
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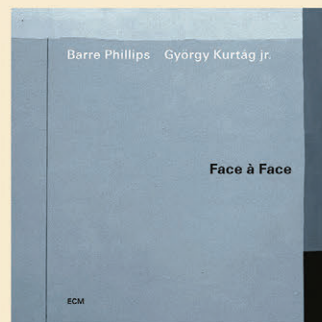
GARD NILSSEN: DRUMS  
ANDRÉ ROLIGHETEN: TENOR, SOPRANO  
AND BASS SAXOPHONES, CLARINET  
PETTER ELDH: DOUBLE BASS  
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AN ANTHOLOGY*

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PIANO, PERCUSSION  
MARC ANDERSON: CONGAS, PERCUSSION,  
STEELDRUM, GONGS, HANDPAN  
JIM ANTON: BASS  
ERIC ANDERSON: BASS  
BOB HUGHES: BASS  
MIKE OLSON: SYNTHESIZER  
MARCUS WISE: TABLE  
CLAUDIA SCHMIDT: VOICE  
RHEA VALENTINE: VOICE  
MICHELLE KINNEY: CELLO, DRONES  
TIM WEINHOLD: VASE, BONGOS

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"This is a tough time for all of us, and we put it into our music," Sachal Vasandani, left, said of his new project with Romain Collin.

DAVE STAPLETON



## Vasandani, Collin Explore Quiet Intensity

**IN SPRING OF 2021, SACHAL VASANDANI** (who was DownBeat's 1999 collegiate vocalist of the year) and Grammy-nominated pianist-composer Romain Collin released *Midnight Shelter*, a pared-down, poignant collection of songs inspired by the pandemic's isolation. On July 15, the duo released *Still Life*, a sister project that continues to explore the timbre of life since March 2020.

"I feel like this music is intense ... in a quiet way," Vasandani said. "The truth is we're both calm and even-headed, but this is a tough time for all of us, and we put it into our music."

Years before this tough time, Vasandani and Collin met as many jazz-bred musicians in New York do — over a drink after being introduced by a mutual acquaintance, pianist Gerald Clayton. For a time, they were just friends who admired each other's work, but once Collin returned from an unexpectedly long stint in Iceland and COVID restrictions lessened in Summer 2020, Vasandani asked Collin to join him in the studio.

*Midnight Shelter*, the result of that encounter, seethed with the pain of the pandemic, and triumphed in the joy of reconnection. As COVID rages on in 2022, *Still Life* continues to lean into the subtle urgency unique to this time as it recontextualizes Vasandani's "No More Tears," which appeared on his acclaimed 2015 release *Slow Motion Miracles*, as well as long-beloved songs like Simon & Garfunkel's "Sound Of Silence," with a delicate use of jazz language.

A lyrical theme on the album is the idea of

missed connections — a disagreement between lovers, a missed train stop, a lack of light or understanding — and yet, the pair say they had no preconceived parameters when choosing songs for this record. They just dropped songs they liked into a shared playlist.

In that process, they found a lot of seemingly simple pop songs that they identified with emotionally. The challenge, then, was for Collin to see if there was enough for him to do with the song harmonically to keep it interesting and best support Vasandani, who he views as a storyteller.

"Sachal delivers songs in a way that is very much the feel of storytelling," Collin said. "If that's not there, if it's not honest to the core in terms of what story we're delivering, it just falls flat. And the song might be great, but I might not feel like [there's anything] to bring pianistically ... there's a very fine line between stripped-down and boring."

Vasandani, likewise, sees himself more as a bard in this duo than in other more straightforward, Sinatra-esque settings. He is quite exposed in this configuration and in pop music, the lyrical story is foregrounded.

"The record, it's not really about Romain, it's not about me, it's about the song," Vasandani said. "And that's distinct from jazz. It's not a question of what are the chords. It's not a question of what is the rhythm. It's — what are you serving? And in jazz, sometimes, it's not a bad thing, but we're serving our ... own flights of fancy, our own desire to improvise. But, in this case, the song is

the North Star."

Likewise, the simple harmonies in the songs demanded an emotional presence that felt uniquely challenging as compared with previous projects.

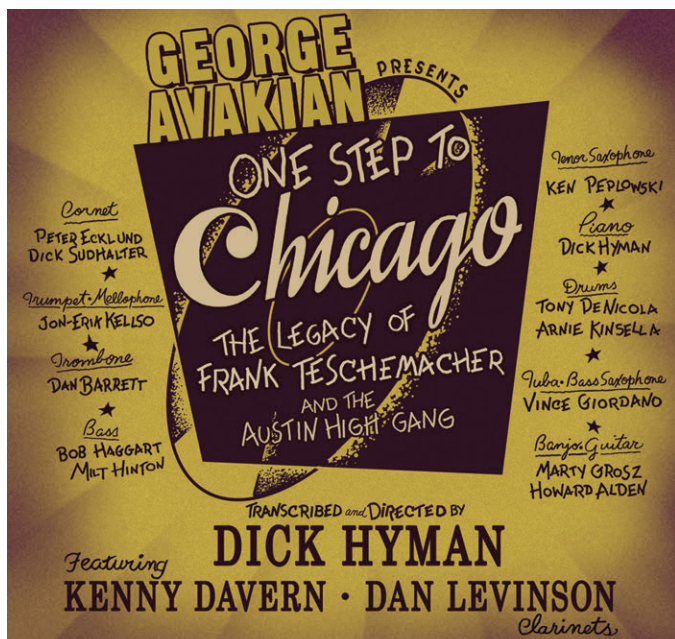
"You can use a lot of big words to talk to somebody, or you can just say, 'I love you,'" Collin said. "But if you say, 'I love you,' unless you say it a certain way, it just doesn't mean anything, you know? It's just three words as opposed to a whole paragraph to say how amazing you are. If you're going to stick to those three words, it better come from a very clear place in your heart and mind for it to hopefully be received in a moving and impactful way."

While *Still Life* is in some ways an ode to simplicity, it also embodies the emotional complexity and improvisational spirit of contemporary jazz. Vasandani, with his perceptive phrasing and unguarded delivery, rediscovers new soul in radio hits like James Bay's "Let It Go" and Billie Eilish's "I Love You." Likewise, Collin's playing often transcends the piano — becoming Elizabeth Cotten's left-handed guitar strumming pattern on "Freight Train."

In this way, *Still Life* casts the idea of jazz, a style that often silos itself from other styles of music, in a less rigid light — and it beguiles. As Vasandani said, "Explore all the tributaries to all the rivers to all the oceans that you want, but just do it with jazz in your boat. That'll make the whole experience that much richer."

—Alexa Peters





## 'One Step To Chicago': Reminiscing in Tempo

**ONE STEP TO CHICAGO IS A REMEMBRANCE OF A REMEMBRANCE.**

More accurately, of a body of remembrances. Recorded in 1992 but released now, the object of its celebration is "Chicago style" jazz, a wildly original and intuitive variation of early New Orleans music that flared briefly between 1927 and 1929 before being snuffed out by the Great Depression. For the next century, its main mission became remembering itself.

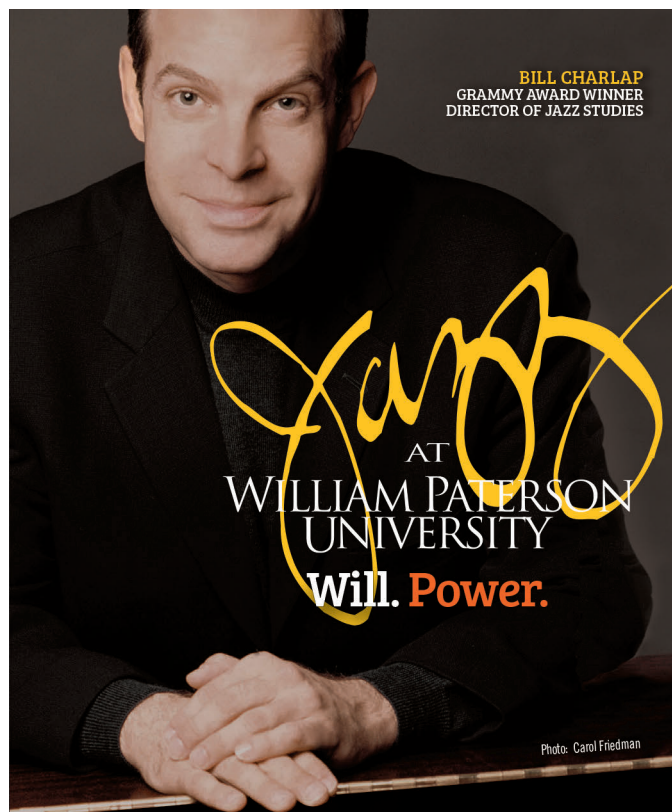
It is dedicated to one of the Chicagoans' most devoted Boswells, producer George Avakian, who convened the original reunion for Decca in 1939-'40 and was still on the scene 50 years later to take a hand in the present CD. In the interim, Avakian, who died at 98 in 2017, recorded a shifting cast of Chicagoans many times.

So much so that when, in 1992, the 92nd Street Y in New York devoted an evening of its Jazz in July series to the Chicagoans, it seemed especially timely because only a year earlier the last two survivors of the original group, Jimmy McPartland and Bud Freeman, had died within two days of each other. So music director Dick Hyman, who was born the same year as Chicago style jazz in 1927, assembled a team of dedicated archeologists to locate the letter and spirit of the original music. Dan Levinson, Vince Giordano, Ken Peplowski, Kenny Davern, Marty Grosz, Milt Hinton, Dick Sudhalter and nine others recorded the present CD the day after the concert.

During its present day, Avakian was enthralled by the Chicagoan legend. Being 19, he was also worried. The players were in their mid-30s, some nearing 40. The way they lived, he once told this writer, "I thought, 'They'll all be dead soon.'" So he persuaded Decca to record a new album of as many Chicagoans as he could round up using improved 1940 technology. He gathered 23 originals and associates, divided them into three groups and made Decca Presents An Album Of Chicago Jazz. The cover art of *One Step To Chicago* stands on the design of its historic ancestor.

With no Chicagoans left alive by 1992 and working from careful transcriptions by Hyman, *One Step To Chicago* (Rivermont Records) takes a different turn. With an almost scholarly rigor, it reaches outside its time to find and capture a vanished sensibility and to think inside the heads of the dead. The music is a vibrant seminar in original intent, a rarified skill of historical empathy and imagination. The horns here are exciting, meticulously paced and authentic to their period. A welcome little masterpiece in the art of reproduction.

—John McDonough



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"When you play the drums, tell a story," Jonathan Barber remembers his father saying.

# Jonathan Barber: The Drummer as Storyteller

**DRUMMER JONATHAN BARBER HAS HAD** the rare good fortune of being around the same like-minded crew of musicians since attending Hartford's Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz, the jazz studies program within the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford. He and his colleagues — guitarist Andrew Renfroe, pianist Taber Gable and bassist Matt Dwonszyk — studied, woodshedded and gigged together during their years at Hartt. They moved to New York together around the same time (in 2014) and even lived together in a Harlem apartment for a period while establishing themselves on the New York scene by playing together at Smalls, where Barber hosted late-night jams for three years. Eventually, after adding alto saxophonist Godwin Louis to the group in the fall of 2016, they began recording together as Jonathan Barber & Vision Ahead.

After cultivating a collective sound on 2018's self-titled debut and 2020's followup, *Legacy Holder*, they've hit on a winning formula on their third studio album, *Poetic*. Recorded at Hartford's Parkville Sounds, a rehearsal and recording studio established in 2017 by drummer and fellow Hart School alumni Stephen Cusano, this latest offering by Jonathan Barber & Vision Ahead travels from the leader's melodic title track, underscored by his signature interactive drumming and polyrhythmic aplomb, to guitarist Renfroe's lyrical "Gathering," to a suite of three potent compositions by Louis: the hymn-like "Give Us This Day," the Ornette Coleman-influenced "Lead Us Not Into Temptation" and the thoughtful "Now And Forever," the latter a

lightly swinging number underscored by Barber's whirlwind exclamations on the kit. Taber's gospel-tinged "Acceptance" and his contemplative "South" both feature the leader essentially soloing from bar to bar in the highly interactive manner of his drumming hero Roy Haynes. The lone groove number, Barber's rock-tinged, Thundercat-inspired "Denim," is the drummer's catchy ode to his favorite fabric. "There's something about the feel of a good pair of jeans or a good jean jacket that's undeniable," he laughed.

Taber's use of Fender Rhodes electric piano throughout *Poetic* sets a retro '70s tone for the group, while Renfroe's slightly distorted, post-Scofield guitar lines bring a modernist edge to this band of brothers, marking Vision Ahead as a kind of contemporary corollary to the Brian Blade Fellowship.

"I'm definitely a fan of Brian's drumming with Wayne Shorter, Joshua Redman and as a leader," said the 32-year-old Barber. "Coming up, I was inspired by drummer-bandleaders like Art Blakey, Tony Williams, Ralph Peterson and Brian Blade... guys that have a definite band sound in mind and are not just putting a gig together."

His method of shaping up the music with fragmented beats, responsive polyrhythms and a surgical precision from behind the kit places him solidly in the ranks of other creative under-40 drummers on the scene today like Marcus Gilmore, Allan Mednard, McClenty Hunter, Justin Brown, Kush Abadey and Mark Whitfield Jr. "I started playing the drums because my father was a drummer who played in church,"

he explained. "I always remember him saying, 'When you play the drums, tell a story.' That was his thing. So I began playing in church, too, and then at home my dad would play records by George Duke, Yellowjackets, Weather Report. I was just listening for pleasure, but then when I got to the Artists Collective for the summer program between my junior and senior years in high school, that's when I got into the whole history and lineage of the music."

Rene McLean, who took over running the Artists Collective when his father, Jackie McLean, died on March 31, 2006 (just a few months before Barber began his summer program there), became an important mentor for the young drummer. "He took me under his wing, and that's when I learned who Jackie McLean was, who his friends were and who he played with. It just opened up a whole Pandora's box for me and made me want to dive deeper into that."

During Barber's tenure at Hartt, he came under the tutelage of trombonist Steve Davis, bassist Nat Reeves and drummer Eric McPherson, all former members of Jackie McLean's quintet. Both Davis and Reeves also used the young drummer on gigs, while McPherson became a hands-on mentor.

"I owe a lot of my development to him," Barber said. "Eric is a very musical drummer and orchestrates from the kit by playing very melodically, which really opened my eyes. And then, after I moved to New York, I got close to other drummers like Nasheet Waits, Louis Nash, Ralph Peterson, Gerald Cleaver. To me, they all shared another side of the narrative of jazz drumming and what it is to be musical."

While hosting the late-night jams at Smalls, Barber was introduced to a slew of musicians on New York scene.

"It kind of legitimized us," he said. "For maybe two to three years, every second and fourth Monday at 1 a.m., we would play a set, and then I would run the jam session. So we definitely got a lot of traction from that and people started recognizing us as a unit, which led me to wanting to kind of take it to the next level. So I came up with the band name Vision Ahead and started to brand it that way. One thing led to another, and we started getting more gigs at places like Smoke and the Jazz Standard and at festivals. Then, suddenly, we're touring and recording. It's all been a series of stepping stones to being viewed as a band and also a staple of our generation."

"I definitely want to showcase our sound, the maturity of our compositions and also share this other side of our musicality," he continued. "And as the drummer, I want to add commentary to it. Usually, that's more the role of a horn player or piano player, but I want the drums to actually color and give commentary to the overall sound. That's kind of the aim of *Poetic*."

—Bill Milkowski



# Carrington's Grand Montreal Invitational

**ATTENDING TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON'S** three-day Invitation Series at the 42nd annual Festival International de Jazz de Montréal (July 4–6) was to marvel a master unwilling to sit on her laurels.

With all of her achievements, Carrington could have easily used her Invitation Series as a retrospective victory lap. Instead, she used her laurels as launching pads for artistic explorations that subverted expectations. Each night inside the Church of Gesù's concert hall, Carrington embodied jazz as a kinetic, time-defying entity. She anchored her sets with the combusive, improvisational propulsion of bebop while edging toward the future.

Her first show was the most confrontational of the three. Carrington engaged in a blistering duo performance with poet and sound sculptor Moor Mother; their performance was their first meeting face-to-face as collaborators. The pair upended the dark vim underneath the United States' Independence Day as Moor Mother imbued newfound fire and fury inside Frederick Douglass' famous 1852 speech, "What To The Slave Is The Fourth Of July?"

Carrington's second night was another duo performance — comparatively more serene but no less penetrating. This one highlighted her



The three-show Montreal Invitational displayed Carrington as a kinetic, time-defying entity.

FRÉDÉRIQUE MÉNARD

astonishing rapport with pianist and composer Aaron Parks, who is a member of her Social Science combo. Carrington began the recital with symphonic suspended cymbal work under which Parks eventually laid down small melodic cells, which flowered into abstracted bolero-like passages. As the performance gathered steam, Carrington and Parks engaged in wondrous interplay, sometimes nailing oblique melodic passages in unison.

The third night provided the best vehicle for her bandleading gifts to shine with one of her newest ensembles, the Art of Living, which consists of pianist, composer and frequent collaborator

Kris Davis, saxophonist Morgan Guerin, bassist Devon Gates and trumpeter and flugelhorn player Milena Casado Fauquet. The quintet performed music from its forthcoming release, which will be a part of Henry Threadgill's 13-disc set *Baker's Dozen*. Here, Carrington demonstrated her reverence for jazz's past glories by offering imaginative new works based upon some of Charlie Parker's solo transcriptions.

In all, Carrington's invitation series was so dynamic that it deserves to be released on disc. The lightning-in-a-bottle performances Carrington gave deserve proper documentation for future generations.

—John Murph

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# Hargrove, the Documentary

**THERE IS A POIGNANT MOMENT**, almost like a musical epitaph, toward the end of *Hargrove*, a documentary of the late trumpeter Roy Hargrove, where he's sitting alone in what appears to be a window sill, working his way through Frank Loesser and Jimmy McHugh's "Say It (Over & Over Again)." In a slow dirge-like pace, the beautiful melody eases from his horn, at times given a quick flurry of notes.

It's a mournful tune that in its haunting treatment signals the film's sorrow and sadness. But in contrast to this extended lament are those swift exciting executions, the bravura passages that typified Roy Hargrove at the peak of a performance, and director Eliane Henri has tastefully and strategically placed them to either enhance commentary or to let the film breathe free of too many talking heads.

Even so, the notables she has summoned to speak to Hargrove's style, whether on the bandstand, his apparel, or his musical tendencies are highly informed and can be compared to Hargrove's way of assembling his ensembles. In fact, the mere diversity of the voices — Questlove, Erykah Badu, Yasiin Bey (Mos Def), Herbie Hancock, Christian McBride, Sonny Rollins and Wynton Marsalis — is reflective of Hargrove's varied musical interests and curiosity. And the recurring comments from trombonist Frank Lacy, pianist Marc Cary and Christian McBride provide the personal ballast from musicians who frequently performed with him. One memorable quote came from pianist Taber Gable, who said Hargrove "was very generous with his music."

The vérité documentary showcases Hargrove in various locations with different groups, and, depending on the audience, a mixed repertoire that could take flight on a R&B tangent and shift to hip-hop before landing smoothly on a bebop ballad.

His technique was uninterruptedly exquisite, and one of his solos, and it may have been during a Blue Note date, was imbued with sizzling references to Dizzy Gillespie and then subtle nods to Miles Davis. Davis is cited and seen in a few clips and photos, one with Hargrove, possibly during their first meeting when Miles reportedly told him, "I heard of you, I heard you're supposed to be a bad motherfucker." A memory of Miles is ineluctably forged when Hargrove is on stage thrilling a standing crowd with a refrain from "So What."

And it would have been splendid to have had more than a few bars of Hargrove and company rendering their version of Benny Golson's "I Remember Clifford."

Directing a documentary on a musician in



failing health presented a number of challenges for Henri, who first met him in Hollywood in 1990. She was 18. Twenty-eight years later, she started shooting the film. Since she wasn't able to film his performances abroad, particularly in Italy and France, she had to rely on old clips and footage from the U.S. engagements. These fleeting segments provide hints of Hargrove's majesty and how proficient he could be no matter the genre.

Questlove summed it up, saying, "There was big band Roy, funk Roy, trio Roy, sort of dissonant fusion Roy and hip-hop Roy." No matter the definition, as Lacy summarized, there was a divinity to his music, and in the words of saxophonist Ralph Moore, "He could hear paint dry."

Amusing portions of the documentary capture Hargrove beyond the bandstand, and Henri does her best to keep his music in the forefront as she and her crew follow the intrepid trumpeter to the lovely provinces of France and Italy. On these occasions Hargrove's affable humanity is highlighted, particularly when mingling among the residents, shopping for sneakers or visiting an ice cream parlor.

Some of these scenes are embellished by Hargrove and ensemble on differing bandstands as a way to recount his brief-but-productive career, and there are times when he is clearly fatigued by the travel, the gigs and even recalling parts of his life for the camera. Henri deftly weaves these fragments of emotion and pain

while tracking the evolution of his musical journey from Dallas, where as a teenager he was an astonishing prodigy, to a final tour in Europe. As he ambles wearily down the cobblestoned streets, you can see the questioning facial expressions of people in quaint towns, perhaps wondering who this celebrity was. At one stop, outside a shop, Hargrove takes a break from walking and has a friendly chat with two young men before entering.

As Hargrove moves from scene to scene, Henri engages him in conversation, asking him to speak about his early years coming of age in Texas, about his family, even about his love life, about which he demurs, noting how unsteady it is, given the travel and lifestyle. "Maybe someday I will," he concludes about the possibility of settling down.

In the midst of this more than 105-minute film, there is a disturbing encounter between Hargrove and his manager Larry Clothier. It's pretty heated, with Henri witnessing it all. At one point, Clothier, who evolved from Hargrove's road manager to become his overall manager, said, "I am not a racist." While the argument breaks up the narrative flow, it adds a very interesting piece of drama that is not often understood about

a relationship in the world of music, one between artist and manager. Henri allows Lacy, Bey and Cary to comment on it and the ramifications it has historically and between the two men.

A return to the music is welcomed, although it takes a morbid turn when Hargrove and Henri visit a cemetery in France. Most viewers were aware that Hargrove was ill and did not live to see the finished product, and Henri, with care and sensitivity, approached his illness, something he related more than once in the film — as well as his love of drugs, the reluctance to pursue a kidney transplant and the routine of dialysis. During the tour he said, "Every other day I had a dialysis treatment."

Those treatments came to an end when he returned to the states in 2018, was hospitalized and for two weeks and in a coma before his death from a heart attack on Nov. 2. He was 49.

Many of friends anticipated his passing, and eulogized him to Henri. Hancock said, "He was an amazing musician." "A bridge," added pianist Glasper. Both were keenly aware of what Hargrove meant when he said, "If you can sing it, you can play it." Hargrove could sing it and play it with great virtuosity, and there was no way to contain the poetic gifts that flowed from his horn as lyrically as his words. Henri captures that wonderful moment when he delivers the lyrics to "Prisoner Of Love," another lovely instance of his musical and literary genius. —Herb Boyd





"I am ambassador of Brazilian music," guitarist Diego Figueiredo proudly proclaims.

# Diego Figueiredo: From Brazil with Chops

**WHEN BRAZILIAN GUITARIST DIEGO** Figueiredo took the stage of Hollywood's storied jazz club Catalina Bar and Grill recently, it didn't take long to establish the qualities that make him special. With his signature burst of hair, beaming demeanor and Ovation nylon string guitar, Figueiredo got busy with his playful work, in solo mode.

He launched limber-yet-lyrical on the anthemic Brazilian nugget "Brazil," spinning out fanciful variations and hopscotched ideas on the fly. Switching gears into a more characteristically jazz-colored dialect — the genre switch-hitting skill being one of his trademarks — Figueiredo called on an inventive reharmonization of "All The Things You Are." (After the gig, he described the arrangement as a case of "changes upon changes"). He then medley-morphed into a quirky, perky "Tea For Two," spiced up with virtuosic fireworks.

Figueiredo's easy mix of charm and technical bravado has drawn comparisons to the late, great Baden Powell, boasting a charismatic stage presence. He seems ever-eager to connect with the crowd on a given night. "Sorry," he announced early in the set, in what we assumed was half-jok-

ing self-deprecation, "I didn't have a chance to warm up before coming out."

Although Figueiredo invited gifted friends to join him onstage that evening — pianist David Garfield, vocalist Natasha Agrama and soulful spoken word artist Nnabike Okaro — it was his solo work that impressed most, as he took on the challenging forum of self-reliant, solo-guitar adventuring.

Not represented this night were the fruits of his latest labor, the new album *Follow The Signs* (Arbors). An alluring collection of original compositions (plus a spin on "Misty" and the all-improvised "Imagination"), the album amply showcases his guitar mastery and compositional aplomb, with the added bonus of his distinctive arrangements for string quintet in the mix. In a procedural reversal, his string parts were written and flown in after the central trio of guitar, bass and drums were laid down.

*Follow The Signs* validates that he took resourceful advantage of the pandemic downtime. In an interview the day before his Catalina show, the affable Figueiredo explained, "When I decided to record this album, I was thinking I could put that traditional feeling of the old

school strings with a modern touch, while also showing my guitar, my ability and my compositions. The idea was to keep the Brazilian tradition of that feeling of Joao Gilberto, the Brazilian atmosphere, but with some of my originals and thoughts on guitar."

Those thoughts often freely mix ideas from jazz and bossa nova. While discussing his organic crossover between native Brazilian sounds and jazz, Figueiredo admitted, "I think it comes natural to me." He flipped into demonstration mode, picking up his Ovation to lay out classic Brazilian chordal moves and rhythms, sliding seamlessly into a swing feel and identifiable jazz changes and back.

He appreciates the pan-idiom sympatico he enjoys with many jazz musicians, including his duet partner, clarinetist Ken Peplowski. "We love to play with each other," he said, "because when I bring Brazilian feeling to his jazz improvisations, it feels so good. I think it was because that when I was young, I was always walking with the jazz and the bossa together."

Figueiredo, 42, was born in Franca, Brazil, and is currently based in Sarasota, Florida. He honed his skills at Berklee College of Music with foundational classical training in his early years. Although he has been buzzing around the jazz scene and touring the world for years, he remains somewhat under the radar, a musician's musician waiting for his deserved close-up.

To date, Figueiredo has collaborated, in duets and larger settings, with a list of musicians including Larry Coryell, Peplowski and Stanley Jordan, and has enjoyed long, ongoing connection with French vocalist Cyrille Aimée. "We are kind of brother and sister, not only because of our hair," he points up top and laughs. "I met her in a very special situation, at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 2007, where we both won awards. And since then, I invited her to go to Brazil, where we did a tour in 2009.

"On the last day of the tour, we had one afternoon free. She said, 'Let's record an album together. Let's go to this studio.' And we recorded our first album, *Smile*, in five hours — including mixing and mastering," he said with a laugh. "Amazing."

It was, in fact, the experience of creating a string arrangement for Aimée's "Marry Me A Little" — which earned his first Grammy nomination, last year — that seeded his current work. The affirmation of the Grammy nod and the fresh challenge of writing for strings led to the concept for *Follow The Signs*, his first with integral string parts.

Wherever he goes, and whatever musical scenario he finds himself in, Figueiredo proudly bears and promotes his Brazilian heritage.

"I am ambassador of Brazilian music," he declared. "I feel honored to represent that. I love the jazz, but my heart is Brazilian."

—Josef Woodward





Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad,  
co-founders of the Jazz Is Dead movement





# JAZZ IS DEAD

## LONG LIVE JAZZ

BY JOHN MURPH   PHOTOS BY THE ARTFORM STUDIO

Adrian Younge describes *Jazz Is Dead* as a “romance,” its macabre-sounding trademark notwithstanding. He’s a co-founder of the Los Angeles-based record label, a buzzworthy outfit that has been turning heads with eye-catching album artwork and a roster of luminary jazz veterans for the past two years.





Live with JID: The crowd grooves to Digable Planets.



Arthur Verocai leads a 30-piece orchestra for the Jazz Está Morto series.



From left, Youngue, Marcos Valle and Muhammad at a recent show.



Lonnie Liston Smith, left, and Youngue share a moment.

After launching *Jazz Is Dead 001* in 2020 — a compilation that featured vibraphonist Roy Ayers, saxophonist Gary Bartz, Brazilian jazz-fusion combo Ayzmuth, singer Marcos Valle and keyboardists João Donato, Doug Carn and Brian Jackson — *Jazz Is Dead* issued full-length serial LPs with each of those artists, playing along with a consortium of relatively unknown L.A.-based musicians, as well as Youngue and his main co-conspirator, Ali Shaheed Muhammad, on an assortment of instruments — bass, guitar, clarinet, keyboards and percussion among them.

Youngue likens making those albums to giving the musicians their flowers while they are still living.

“We are basically creating love letters to those who came before us,” he said.

“These luminaries have given us so much,” Muhammad added. “Our intent is to pay homage to them by having them in the studio, taking those influences that they had given us, then creating something that’s more of the now.”

*Jazz Is Dead*’s first batch of LPs became collectors’ items among crate-diggers who connect the dots between jazz samples used during hip-hop’s halcyon years and the original source material, often released on obscure labels like Black Jazz, Perception and Strata East. Youngue and Muhammad’s goal wasn’t so much to give the artists a 21st-century overhaul as it was to evoke the sensibilities of their respective artistry during their heyday, which often was the late 1960s and early ’70s.

“We’re not doing anything that’s en vogue for the moment,” Youngue explained. “We’re not coming to these legendary artists, saying, ‘Hey, the kids like trap music right now. Let’s do a trap album.’ There is no reason any of these folks to be on a trap song.”

Put in a broader international context, indeed, *Jazz Is Dead* resides in a DJ-centric ecosystem where artists and listeners seek to reconnect modern hip-hop, R&B and other hybrid dance music to its jazz roots. These efforts go back to the late 1980s — when Paul Bradshaw founded the influential U.K. magazine *Straight No Chaser* to track the bubbling acid-jazz and global underground jazz scenes in the wake of London’s Second Summer of Love — and the early ’90s, when Maurice Bernstein and Jonathan Rudnick spearheaded the New York dance party Groove Academy.

Since then, robust transatlantic initiatives like London’s jazz re-freshed and the recently departed Meghan Stabile’s Revive Music have extended the relationships. Then there’s the West Coast Get Down Scene, which has been buzzing for nearly a decade thanks to the meteoric success of bassists Thundercat and Miles Mosley, saxophonists Kamasi Washington and Terrace Martin and keyboardists Cameron Graves and Brandon Coleman, among others.

Besides the compelling *JID010*, a remix compilation on which left-wing hip-hop and broken-beat producers such as DJ Spinn, Georgia Anne Muldrow, Kaidi Tatham and Cut Chemist gave 10 tracks from its inaugural col-

lection a more electronic makeover, the music on *Jazz Is Dead* releases is decidedly lo-fi and analog, built around rugged drumming, lumbering bass lines and abstract keyboard harmonies. Youngue’s obsession with vintage analog recording techniques and instruments establishes the vibe of those albums. That vibe imparts the woozy sensation of someone waking up from a music-drenched dream, set in the early ’70s, and they recall more of the sonic qualities of the music than any distinctive melodies, grooves or solos.

This summer, *Jazz Is Dead* issued a follow-up compilation, *JID011*, consisting of tracks showcasing singer Jean Carne, bassist Henry Franklin, pianist Garret Saracho, drummer Tony Allen, keyboardist Lonnie Liston Smith, trombonist-and-woodwind duo Phil Ranelin and Wendell Harrison, and the L.A.-based ensemble Katalyst.

The accompanying musicians have also expanded to include guitarist Jeff Parker, flutist Scott Mayo, alto saxophonist Phillip Wack and tenor saxophonist Jaman Laws.

When discussing *Jazz Is Dead*’s artistic progression in the past two years, Youngue compares it to a television series that steadily blossoms into greatness. He and Muhammad gained a lot of insight from working with their heroes such as Ayers, Bartz and Valle during the first run. In turn, they incorporated some of those lessons into the second series.

“Our first series was basically us realizing that we could create a proof of concept,” Youngue





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In the studio with JID: Roy Ayers listens intently.



Valle, left, Muhammad and Younge



Azymuth's Ivan Conti, Alex Maheiros and José Roberto Bertrami



Drum legend Tony Allen

theorized. “The fact that we could actually bring in someone like Roy Ayers or Marcos Valle to record with us. We learned so much from them. We grabbed some of the energy that gave us and poured into the second series of albums. It’s not easier for us to do it now; it’s more us having a better understanding of what we’re doing.”

Muhammad added that the learning curve has given them a deeper understanding of their intent behind *Jazz Is Dead*. “We’ve learned also from the first series to always remain open-minded and be mindful of past and what’s possible in modern times to project what the future can be.”

Younge and Muhammad both come from the expansive world of hip-hop. As a producer, Younge has worked with hip-hop royalty such as the Wu-Tang Clan, Souls of Mischief and Jay-Z. Muhammad was a member of one of hip-hop’s most cherished combos: A Tribe Called Quest. After A Tribe Called Quest’s breakup, Muhammad, singer Dawn Robinson, and bassist and producer Raphael Saadiq formed the short-lived but beloved neo-soul supergroup Lucy Pearl.

In 2013, Younge invited Muhammad to work on the Souls of Mischief’s album *There Is Only Now*. They officially joined forces as the Midnight Hour and released a 2018 eponymous LP that highlighted Muhammad’s penchant for jazz-laden grooves and Younge’s hazy, Blaxploitation-era arrangements. Soon after, the dynamic duo partnered with con-

cert promoter Andrew Lojero and music-industry veteran Adam Block in launching a jazz concert series with the potentially polarizing name, *Jazz Is Dead*.

As a live music platform, *Jazz Is Dead* celebrates its fifth anniversary this year. Its first concert featured trumpeter Keyon Harrold on Dec. 17, 2017, at the Lodge Room in Los Angeles. Lojero recalls being frustrated with the tickets sales prior to the show, so he conceived the snarky trademark, *Jazz Is Dead*. And to his surprise, it caught on.

“The more I told people about the name of the series, *Jazz Is Dead*, the heavier the reactions it received,” Lojero said. “Some people loved it; others hated it. I realized that no matter what kind of reaction it got, it was exactly what was needed to tap into a younger demographic who was looking at this music as the stuff of their grandparents. We needed to figure out how to put an edge to [the branding].”

Younge sees *Jazz Is Dead*’s provocative branding as a rhetorical question instead of a definitive statement. “*Jazz Is Dead* basically provokes a response,” he explained. “There’s an academic side to it; there’s an irreverent side to it. But in all, it’s really an invitation to all open-minded, open-hearted folks to celebrate the spirit of the genre.”

“There’s so many ways you could analyze *Jazz Is Dead*,” Younge continued. “Especially when you think about who guards the music. Secondly, there are so many musicians who

played and continue to play this music who hate the word ‘jazz.’ But there are so many other musicians who really embrace the word. But if you look what we’ve done for the last five years, do you think that we really believe that jazz is dead? If we called our label something else, we probably wouldn’t be as advanced right now as we are because those type of conversations would not have happened regarding what we are doing.”

Younge and Muhammad often recruit the veteran musicians for *Jazz Is Dead* recordings on Lojero’s recommendation soon after they perform at the Jazz Lodge. And no matter how busy their schedules are, the duo tends to accommodate with enthusiasm as they lead extemporaneous jam sessions inside Younge’s Linear Lab studios right across the street from the performance venue.

This year’s *JID 013 Katalyst* is the best album, so far, issued on *Jazz Is Dead*. What elevates it above the rest is that *Katalyst* is a nine-piece ensemble that has developed its own chemistry and sound prior to coming into the fold. Two years ago, *Katalyst* released its debut album, *Nine Lives* (World Galaxy Records), and it became a Bandcamp hit. On the new album, songs like the breezy “The Avenues,” the haunting “Summer Solstice” and the Marvin Gaye-influenced “Daybreak,” the grooves swing with more propulsion — the melodies and improvisations are more pronounced, and the tunes sound more developed.



Muhammad praises Katalyst as being part of the younger guard of musicians emerging from Los Angeles' iconic Leimert Park neighborhood.

"They are keeping things very much underground, vibrant and alive," he said. "We had the honor of having a few of those cats play on some of the albums we made with the jazz luminaries. So, it seemed only appropriate to record Katalyst. They are legends in the making."

The other Jazz Is Dead albums certainly have their titillating charm. But so far, none of the musicians sound as if they are fully prepared to record with Younge and Muhammad's coterie of musicians, thus yielding some tentative, vamp-heavy tracks. After all, Younge and Muhammad share top billing on all of the records. So, basically, the iconic musicians are entering their world.

Greg Paul, the drummer for Katalyst, also participated on the sessions with Ayers and Bartz. He describes Younge and Muhammad's creative process of making records as "definitely unorthodox."

"The musicians get in and try to flesh out a basic idea from musical sketches. That's it," Paul said. "There's not really too much thinking about it; then overproducing the results. When they presented the idea to us to make a record, I was definitely interested in seeing how

our two styles would merge. As a band, we are kind of similar. When we perform, the music is sort of off the cuff. Our music is very much in the moment. While recording, we took maybe two takes, max, on each song. And that was it."

In an April 2020 DownBeat interview, Valle recalled being both excited and a bit nervous when he recorded with Younge and Muhammad because of the quick turnaround of writing music arrangements and lyrics then recording within five days. After Valle, drummer Malachi Morehead and Younge on bass recorded basic tracks, Muhammad and Younge added overdubbed instrumentation and vocals.

"When I saw how everything was happening, I realized that it was an incredible experience," Valle said. "Even for the vocals — the results were so surprising, because when we recorded the bass, drums and Rhodes, I started creating the vocal arrangements very hurriedly. We didn't have time to think about changing a phrase here or there. I understood that they were looking for my first impressions of the songs. They were trying to capture that moment. It was totally different from what I did before."

After doing some swift post-production on the recordings, Younge says that it's always rewarding to send out the finished product to

the musicians. "The real reward is saying, 'Hey, Henry Franklin, this is your finished album.'" Younge said. "Then watching them hear it because they haven't heard themselves on an album since the '70s or '80s. It's really moving."

Lonnie Liston Smith said he was surprised when he heard the results for his first single, "Love Brings Happiness," a percolating jazz-funk excursion that features post-production vocals from Loren Oden added to the mix. The song could easily fit on any of Smith's classic albums recorded for Flying Dutchman or RCA. He recalled being taken aback about the recording procedures because he hadn't written any songs for the date.

"It was strange because you usually come in with a few songs in mind that you want to record," Smith said, "Instead they had these little motifs to work on. In the studio, it was just me, Greg Paul on drums and Ali on bass. After we developed these little motifs, they developed around whatever we finished with. So, I don't know how it's all going to come out. I'm looking forward to hearing the finished album. It's going to be interesting. The first single, 'Love Brings Happiness,' came out pretty good. I said, 'OK, I can live with that.'"

From a live music perspective, the Jazz Is Dead brand has expanded well beyond its boutique albums. Presented by the adjacent

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ArtDontSleep artists management and promotion company, Jazz Is Dead has thrown concerts featuring a wealth of top-tier talent outside its label roster — bassists Ben Williams and Christian McBride, harpist Brandee Younger, vibraphonist Joel Ross with saxophonist James Brandon Lewis, singer and sound sculptor Melanie Charles and pianist Dom Salvador.

With a new series of recordings expected this year, Jazz Is Dead is also mapping out a West Coast touring package with dates in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland and Port Townsend, Washington. The lineup, consisting of

Younger, Muhammad, Doug Carn, Henry Franklin and Katalyst, was also scheduled to host a showcase at this year's Newport Jazz Festival.

Lojero hopes that the touring package will expand to 15 cities in North America and 15 cities in Europe, Japan and Australia.

"We've developed a trust within a community in Los Angeles and other places where even if they don't know the artist that we're presenting, they trust that they'll still be attending one of the best parties in town," Younger said.

In addition to prepping for this mini tour,

Muhammad and Younger have been busy scoring music for the Onyx Collective's TV show, *Reasonable Doubt*, which is now streaming on Hulu; and Starz Originals' *Power Book III: Rising Kanan*.

Younger reports that they are also working on movie scores that are currently in the production stage.

And, of course, there's the continuation of the Jazz Is Dead album series showcasing more unannounced luminaries.

"We've been recording a lot," Lojero said. "I don't think we've recorded this much before. We have enough for our third and possibly fourth batch. We've never had quite a year like this, of people ruining our schedules and blessing our lives."

"It's hard to think of life before Jazz Is Dead," Younger said. "Because we're in this thing daily now. This cyclical process that we are addicted to in terms of making records with our jazz heroes has come to the point where we have to figure out how to make time for other things. When Andrew calls us to work with these legendary musicians, we can't say no, because it is our divine responsibility to work with them. We have to continue the conversations with these legends. It's an ongoing love story."

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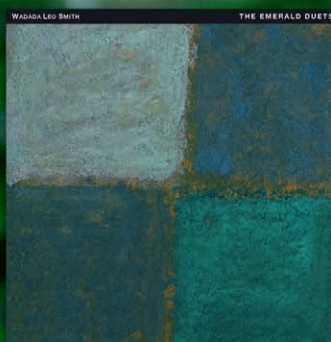
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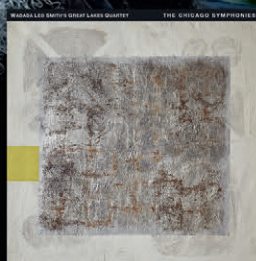


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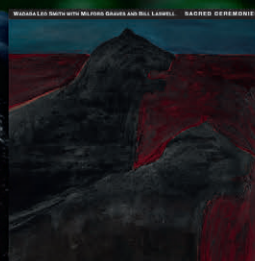


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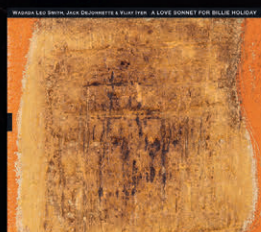
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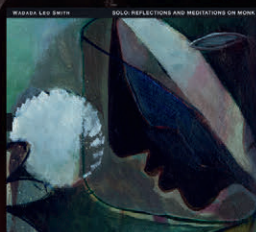
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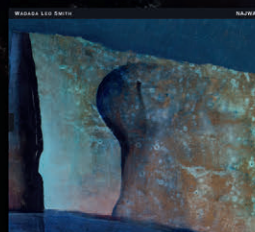
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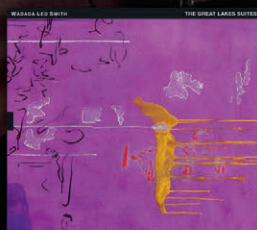
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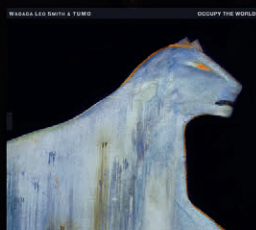
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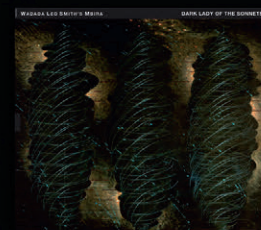
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# WADADA LEO SMITH CREATES

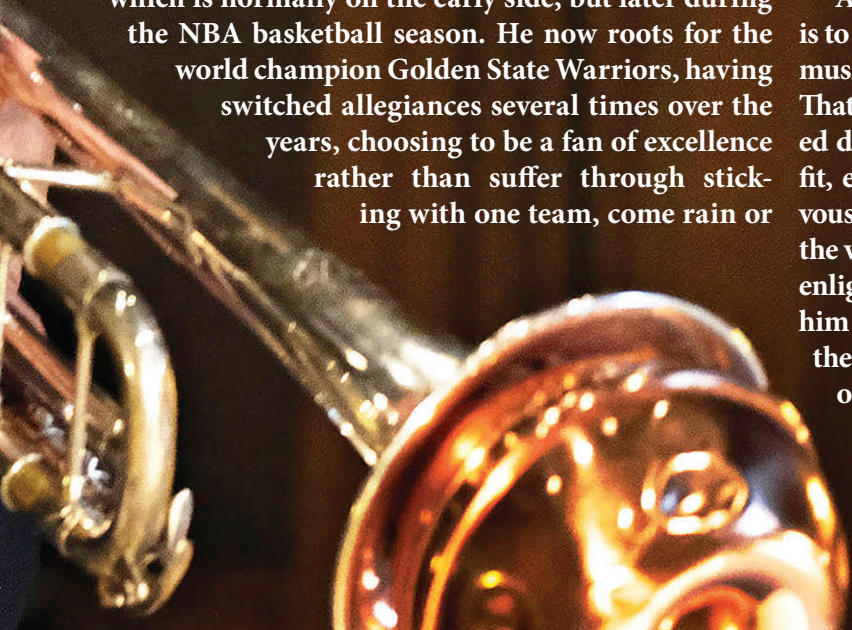
BY GARY FUKUSHIMA      PHOTO BY ENID FARBER

At 80, Wadada Leo Smith seems to be having the time of his life. He maintains a healthy diet, drinking only one cup of coffee a day — along with four to five cups of tea.

**H**e enjoys trying to play video games with his grandchildren. He exercises by walking 10 to 15 minutes around his New Haven, Connecticut, home every evening before bedtime, which is normally on the early side, but later during the NBA basketball season. He now roots for the world champion Golden State Warriors, having switched allegiances several times over the years, choosing to be a fan of excellence rather than suffer through sticking with one team, come rain or

shine, out of some misguided tribal loyalty. He is the ultimate fair-weather fan, always moving sunward to that which brings him delight, which is perhaps why he is so joyful.

And, at 80 years of age, what Smith delights in most is to create things, rising daily with the sun to compose music, a ritual he has maintained for decades. “I work. That’s my joy,” Smith says, his long, dark, grey-flecked dreads a stark contrast against his crisp white outfit, elegant but comfortable. As he talks, his mischievous smile and the twinkle in his eyes radiate across the video screen, all the way to Los Angeles, once again enlightening this erstwhile student who studied with him in the City of Angels nearly two decades ago, when the composer and trumpeter was also the director of the African American Improvisational Music Program at the Herb Alpert School of Music at California Institute of the Arts.







The Red Koral Quartet with Smith (center), from left: Ashley Walters, Andrew McIntosh, Shalini Vijayan and Mona Tian

Truth be told, Wadada is as he ever was: his humor and enthusiasm in fine form, issuing poetic commentary with a folksy patois that uncovers, beneath his pedigree, the deep roots of his hometown of Leland, Mississippi. The only thing that has truly changed is that his already bright star continues to rise. He is now one of the most celebrated new music composers of this young century.

In this year-long celebration of his eighth decade, Smith has released two more tomes on the TUM label, adding to his extensive legacy: *String Quartets Nos. 1–12* and *The Emerald Duets*. The latter comes as a series of duets between Smith and four notable drummers: Pheeroan akLaff, Andrew Cyrille, Han Bennink and Jack DeJohnette. “Like I told somebody the other day,” Smith says, grinning, “80 is never going to come up again, so you have to do something good with it.”

Some of this music was recently performed live by Smith and others at the 2022 Vision Festival in Brooklyn, New York, where the composer was honored with the festival’s Lifetime Achievement Award. It’s the latest in a series of accolades that include a 2013 nomination for the Pulitzer Prize in Music for *Ten Freedom Summers* (Cuniform), receiving the 2016 Doris Duke Artist Award and leading the DownBeat International Critics Poll in 2017 as Jazz Artist, Trumpeter and Jazz Album of the Year for *America’s National Parks* (Cuneiform). Smith was also awarded an

honorary doctorate in 2019 from CalArts, alongside actor Don Cheadle, who directed and starred in a film about another famous trumpeter, one Miles Davis.

Smith’s composition class at CalArts was as inspiring as it was challenging. He threw the gauntlet down right away, asking students, “What is your goal? To play the perfect solo?” When I remind him of that, he adds some perspective, saying, “When I was growing up, I heard this language all the time, about going to the woodshed and playing the greatest solo ever. I always thought that was kind of strange, because how are you going to come up with the greatest solo ever until you do it?”

Paul Desmond had said something like that when they met, shortly after the success of the alto saxophonist’s seminal hit with Dave Brubeck, “Take Five.” Even back then, that thinking bothered Smith: “I believe that it’s inspiration that gives you [a great solo], and inspiration will only come to you at the right moment when you’re doing it — not dreaming about it, planning it, trying to construct it. Why spend your life doing that? Just make art.”

But when is “the right moment”? Smith believes every authentic performance has what he terms a “musical moment,” a point of inspiration that is not only unique to the performer, but that “doesn’t exist in anybody else’s music, ever before or in the so-called future.” He said we can find those moments in recorded

works through intent listening, but it requires some discipline and restraint to capture them mid-performance. “That’s why I have silence in [my] music, because those reflective moments need that space in order to read the whole inspiration fully,” he explains, revealing the intent behind his well-documented use of profound spaciousness within his pieces.

It was in Smith’s composition class where this writer first had a chance to see and attempt to translate his unique compositional graphic scores — something he calls “Ankhrasmation Symbolic Language,” a series of vivid yet abstract illustrations designed to inspire musicians without dictating too much specificity. “There ain’t no beats in there,” he explains. “There ain’t no counting in this. This is all images and colors and shapes that have to be researched for every single piece.”

Other students who learned Smith’s language ultimately led to the formation of the Red Koral Quartet, the string ensemble that Smith used for *Ten Freedom Summers* and *America’s National Parks* and the obvious and only choice to record his string quartets. Three of the four Red Koral members were mentored under Smith at CalArts, and the group as whole are, as he says, “the most proficient in the Ankhrasmation language of any other ensemble, past, present, period.”

But Smith’s fascination with strings predates his discovery of Ankhrasmation. He began writ-



ing for string quartet in 1963, publishing his first set of pieces in 1965. He studied masters of the genre, citing Beethoven, Bartók, Shostakovich, Cage and Schoenberg as some of his favorite composers, along with Ornette Coleman and John Lewis. The inclusion of Black and brown composers in a field saturated by the work of white European men is paramount to Smith, who noted that string music from Ethiopia, Egypt and China predated better-known Western forms.

"When I picked up the trumpet, after many of my ancestors picked up the trumpet," Smith explains, "they took the trumpet out of the cultural and political and social context of Europe by being able to play it differently, and to make different music off it. And when I started to experiment with string music, I took the string quartet out of all its socio-political cultural foundation, and my experiment is to see how to use that four-unit ensemble to make music that's relevant to my social, economic and political experience." Smith's quartets are something new, he says, because they utilize "the language of create," Smith's preferred term for improvisation. "Improvisation is simply dead," he pronounces. "Every academic in these institutions now all have got something out on improvisation, whether they be writers, painters, whatever the hell they are. It was never meant for music. And you never find [that word] in the language of the New Orleans musicians or the blues people of that day."

A year after renouncing "improvisation," Smith himself stopped being an academic, retiring in 2014 from full-time teaching after his 21-year tenure at CalArts. Originally drawn to the school for the innovative apprenticeship teaching model espoused by its founder, Walt Disney, Smith felt the institute had, over time, slipped into a "conservatory model," anathema to someone trying to move past conventional musical notions. His departure coincided with a resurgence in his career. During that time of transition he received word of his Pulitzer nomination. Perhaps less time spent teaching went toward realizing his artistic goals.

"I think more that it was the time that evolved, as opposed to me having more time," Smith counters, "because I did just as much work then as I do now. People always tell me, 'Oh, my gosh, teaching is wearing me down, I can't do my work. I look at them, and I say that's just absolutely crap. All you got to do is get up [early] or stay up late and do your work.'"

Case in point: Smith had written all of *Ten Freedom Summers* and recorded it while he was still at CalArts, and much of the music he has released since then had already been written then. The first recordings of his string quartets took place sometime after 2007 and finally completed in 2019. His composing has far outpaced the practical ability to realize all his compositions in sonic form. He intends to finish his 17th string quartet sometime next year. "It's a gift," he says simply. "Everybody don't write as much music as I do."

Smith's life has been governed by an unwavering artistic vision, something he also imparted to his students. He praised pianist Keith Jarrett for that very thing, saying how his refusal to compromise on his ideals is what led him to his fantastic success. He still considers Jarrett "a person of great musical character and beautiful sincerity."

The recollection brings to mind a disagreement Smith had with ECM founder Manfred Eicher. "Manfred had wanted me to record with Keith Jarrett," he recalls, "and I had asked him about recording with [Jack] DeJohnette. And because he didn't want me to record with DeJohnette, I didn't record with Jarrett for him. It could have been resolved easily. He could have said, 'OK, let's do Jack and then do Keith, or Keith and then Jack.' But he said no on Jack, and because I wanted to do Jack as well, I said no [on Keith]."

Smith eventually realized his wish to record with DeJohnette, the long-standing drummer in Jarrett's Standards Trio. The two met in the late '60s when DeJohnette was in Chicago to play at Soldier Field with Miles Davis. Smith had relocated to Chicago and ended up playing an informal session with DeJohnette and pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, cofounder of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, of which Smith had become an integral member. It would be many years

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later that Smith would finally collaborate with DeJohnette, first for the inaugural version of his Golden Quartet in 2000, and a dozen years later for *Ten Freedom Summers*. After another decade, DeJohnette rejoined Smith as one of the four drummers on *The Emerald Duets*. In a surprise twist, we hear at times both DeJohnette and Smith on piano and Rhodes electric piano, respectively. “I started using the piano about five years ago,” Smith says. “It’s something that I know, but I use it based off my musicality as opposed to my knowledge of how to play the piano. That fortunately allows me to play the piano as sound, which I really love.”

DeJohnette and Smith on two keyboards represent a unique “musical moment” for Smith, who once told this writer that the goal of every performance should be to discover something you had never played before. “In a system that has a majority of redundant material, that system is at fault; it cannot be creative,” he says. “All you need to balance out maximum redundancy is one small instance of something that’s creative ... the central balance of a physical body can be knocked off balance with just a slight pluck of the thumb,” citing an ancient Tai-Chi proverb.

Smith says the way to avoid creative inauthenticity is to “follow your inspiration.” Authenticity seems to guide each of the four duets on the new album. All four drummers

have a long working history with Smith, and it’s fascinating to hear Smith reinvent himself as a response to what his counterparts are putting forth sonically. The best example of this is the piece “The Patriot Act, Unconstitutional And A Force That Destroys Democracy.” Smith performs the same piece with three of the four drummers on the album (his session with Han Bennink had occurred years before the entire project took shape), with startlingly different outcomes each time. Smith recommends listening to all three versions in one sitting to appreciate the variations on the same theme.

It’s a theme that recalls a difficult time in America’s recent history, but current events dare to compete with the severity of emergency for our ideals and freedoms.

For Smith, the sirens have been blaring for ages. In 1973 he published *notes (8 pieces) source a new world music: creative music*, a treatise on the importance of creative music in the world around us. In it, he writes: “This music will eventually eliminate the political dominance of Euro-America in this world. When this is achieved, I feel that only then will we make meaningful political reforms in the world: culture being the way of our lives; politics, the way our lives are handled.” Nearly 50 years later, have we moved any closer to achieving this? “No, we have not,” Smith answers bluntly. “And that’s unfortunate,

because there are serious waves of art in every category, but it’s not being responded to in the same way as it would have been during the ’60s and ’70s. I wish I had a better report than that, but I don’t. What’s shattering to me most is this: I’ve lived all my life hoping that America would become the kinds of dreams that are expressed in the Constitution, and I always felt that it would move closer and closer to that. But that dream no longer exists.”

It’s a rather dark proclamation from an otherwise eternally jovial figure.

Still, Smith persists in creating music that he hopes will help. One of the most important lessons he teaches is that art is a representation of our lives, our communities, our stories as human beings. Once, I disputed the premise, asking if art could simply exist for its own sake, as a pure act of creation.

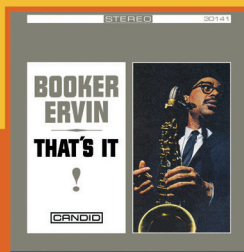
Smiling at the memory, Smith answers. “It can’t, and I remember the question. It’s [about] placing art and placing the artist inside the community, because we are social beings as well. To not do it, it won’t destroy one’s life. But if one connects the social aspect to them and their art, then it’s going to benefit the society, either now or later.

“And you don’t have to figure out whether it’s now or later — you just simply do it and keep moving.”

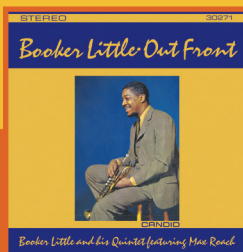
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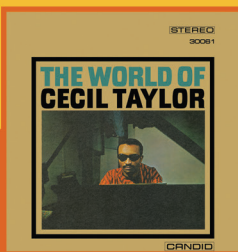
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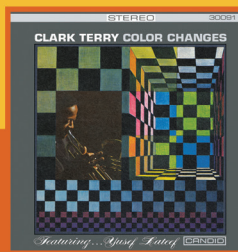
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# DEREK TRUCKS REACHES FOR THE MOON

By Bill Milkowski    Photos by David McClister

**It is hard to fathom the depth of loss that Derek Trucks must have felt in 2017. First, his uncle Butch Trucks, a founding member of the Allman Brothers Band, died on Jan. 24 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.**

Three months later, on May 1, Trucks' longtime friend and mentor Col. Bruce Hampton suffered a massive heart attack and collapsed onstage at Atlanta's Fox Theater at his own 70th birthday party. Given his well known penchant for theatricality and practical jokes, including routinely falling down onstage, the band played on for several minutes before Hampton was taken to a hospital, where he passed away.

And, yes, bad things come in threes. Gregg Allman — who Trucks sat in with as a 10-year-old guitar prodigy and later played alongside for 15 years after joining the Allman Brothers Band in 1999 — died that May due to liver cancer.

But perhaps the biggest hit came when Trucks' longtime friend and bandmate Kofi Burbridge passed away in 2019. A member of the Derek Trucks Band from 1999 and a key member of the Grammy-winning Tedeschi Trucks Band since its inception in 2010, Burbridge passed from an ongoing cardiac issue on the very day that the band's fourth album, *Signs*, was released. It's enough to trigger an existential crisis. What Trucks and his wife, guitarist-singer Susan Tedeschi, did instead was play through the pain.

COVID slowed them down, but couldn't stop them. Yes, it resulted in the immediate cancellation of tour dates — as in 20 months without a paid gig — but they retreated to their home in

Jacksonville, Florida, and their band members followed, engaging in creative brainstorming as the collective delved into *Layla & Majnun*, a 1,000-year-old epic written in the 12th century by Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi. That same poem was the source material for Derek and the Dominos' classic 1970 album, *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs*, which served as a guitar summit between Eric Clapton and Trucks' slide guitar idol, Duane Allman.

Over a six-month period of remarkable productivity, the band (Trucks, Tedeschi, keyboardist-singer Gabe Dixon, singer Mike Mattison, bassist Brandon Boone, drummer Tyler Greenwell and others) wrote so much new music inspired by *Layla & Majnun*, an enduring tale of star-crossed lovers, that they started recording at Tedeschi Trucks' home studio, Swamp Raga, with Trucks behind the soundboard as producer and longtime studio engineer Bobby Tis recording and mixing the work. The resulting project, *I Am The Moon*, consists of four CDs, each released individually in successive months beginning in June. Vinyl configurations, including individual LPs and the four-LP *I Am The Moon Deluxe Box*, will be available Sept. 9. Corresponding immersive visual companions created by filmmaker Alix Lambert debut three days prior to each audio release.

It's no small coincidence that four album titles — *Crescent*, *Ascension*, *The Fall*, *Farewell* — bear some resemblance to the four



The Tedeschi Trucks Band pulled together, commune-style, to create *I Am The Moon*, an epic, four-CD series of recordings.



parts of the suite in John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* ("Acknowledgement," "Resolution," "Pursuance" and "Psalm"). As Trucks noted, "The two albums that we were listening to a lot in our downtime were Jimi Hendrix's *Axis: Bold As Love* and John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. And I remember looking at the running time of each and being shocked that *Axis* was just 36 minutes and *A Love Supreme* was only 32 minutes. These perfect pieces of music were really not that long. So that triggered the whole idea of us doing four separate albums, each around 32 to 34 minutes. And the way *A Love Supreme* is laid out definitely influenced our idea here."

The spirits of Trane and Jimi, Butch Trucks, Gregg Allman, Col. Bruce Hampton and Kofi Burbridge hovered over TTB's fifth studio release, which stands as the group's most ambitious project to date.

### Was this prodigious output that resulted in *I Am The Moon* a function of not being on the road and having your own home studio at your disposal?

That was one of the silver linings of the lockdown for us. We had never had time before lockdown to just write and create and hang together. And honestly, we were talking about taking three months off in the beginning of that year, anyway, kind of to lick our wounds after losing Kofi.

There had been a lot of loss in a short time, and we just wanted to make sure that our heads were clear, and we were doing what we were supposed to be doing as a group. I just felt like after Kofi's passing we needed time without just running down the road. As a band, we just needed time to think and take a deep breath.

And it was Mike Mattison, who's been with me for maybe 15 years now, who had the great idea two months into lockdown, in May, of

everyone reading Nizami's *Layla & Majnun*, just so everyone was digging into the same source material and had some common thing to talk about when we did get back together as a band. Mike had dug into the lyrical content of *Layla*, which we had already performed at a show in Virginia [on Aug. 24, 2019, as part of the Lockn' Festival with guest guitarist Trey Anastasio, later released as *Layla Revisited: Live At Lockn' (Fantasy)*].

So we were familiar with *Layla's* connection to the Nizami poem, which is coming out of the Sufi tradition. There's been operas written about it, and some people think *Romeo and Juliet* was inspired by *Layla & Majnun*. The *Layla* record maybe only hit on one note of that story, which was the idea of this man being in love with somebody he can't have. And Mike's first thought was, "Well, what was Layla's take on this? What did she think about that?" That's when the light bulb kind of went off. And especially with Sue being the voice of this band, it made perfect sense. And then when I found out that Derek & The Dominos' *Layla* was released on Nov. 9, 1970, which is the day that Sue was born, I got chills.

### How quickly did things develop at your place in Jacksonville?

When we finally were able to get people tested and get them to the house, all these song ideas started floating around. We weren't planning on making a record, we just needed to play. It had been too long and there were no gigs in sight. Everything was still shut down, so it was just an excuse to keep moving the boulder up the hill.

There were a few songs early on that Mike Mattison brought in, and then when Gabe Dixon

brought in the tune "I Am the Moon," that's kind of when it all crystallized. His idea for that tune and some of the lyrics gave me the feeling that I had when I was reading the Nizami poem. And Sue fell in love with it. She'd walk around the house with an acoustic guitar playing it all the time. So then everyone just kept writing towards that, and it kind of took on a life of its own.

We had 20-some tunes and hours of material, so then it became a question of what to do with it all. It was obviously too much for one record, so we started thinking about episodes. I think that approach gives people time to digest each part and then maybe look forward to the next one. And the label was great about it. When we finally came to them with, "We have a project. It's four records. We don't want you to put out any singles. We want to release them once a month," we were just waiting to hear all the "no"s. But we were actually kind of shocked at how receptive they were.

### "Pasaquan" sounds like Jimi Hendrix's "One Rainy Wish" meets "Whipping Post."

Totally, and maybe a little bit of the Allman Brothers' "Mountain Jam" in there, too. When we first started playing that groove, I immediately thought of Uncle Butch and Jaimoe. And instead of trying to pull away from that, we just leaned all the way into it.

Pasaquan is this compound in Buena Vista, Georgia, out in the middle of nowhere that was created by this great visionary outsider artist who lived there named St. EOM, Eddie Owens Martin. I almost think of him as like the white, visual Sun Ra. He turned his house and property into a safe place for all the hippies and freaks in the '60s to go hide away, and he just painted



and sculptured everything on his property. But he's also a kind of philosopher. There's interviews with him where he says, "I'm just a poor man's psychiatrist. People come for the head work, they don't come for the arts." And his whole philosophy just really felt like home to me.

Our good friend Col. Bruce Hampton was friends with St. EOM, so I'd heard about this sort of magical place in Buena Vista, Georgia, forever. And we finally snuck over there right out of the lockdown. So that place and those stories kind of felt like part of our thing too. There's just something about this outsider artist in Georgia in the '60s that resonates with me. These were brave things to think and feel and do at that time in that place.

**You mentioned that Col. Bruce Hampton was an important mentor for you.**

Yeah, I miss Colonel, man. He was the one that cracked my head open about music. I met Colonel when I was 12 years old. Actually, one of the first times I was at his house in Atlanta, he was playing me a VHS tape of a 10-minute documentary on St. EOM and Pasaquan. That was one of the first times I hung with Colonel.

He took me record shopping around the same time, and he bought me a vinyl copy of Hampton Grease Band's *Music To Eat*. Later on, he bought me *A Love Supreme* and Sun Ra's *Live At The Village Vanguard*. That was life-changing shit for me in my early teens. I remember after listening to *A Love Supreme* with Colonel, I just kind of sat there trying to figure out what just happened. I don't think it hit me until about an hour later. There was this delayed reaction with that record.

But, yeah, it was never the same after hanging with Colonel. He really changed the trajectory of a lot of musicians' lives and careers. He turned you on to what was important and tried to kill the ego side of what people were doing. He would break you down into a thousand little pieces, and you try to grow back up better for it ... or you just stop playing, which is maybe what you were supposed to do, anyway.

**Did your father also spark your interest in music early on?**

Definitely. He was the one who took me to the Metropolitan Park in Jacksonville to see Miles Davis and Ray Charles, and all the music I saw before I was playing. He was moved by the right stuff. My dad saw Hendrix open for the Monkees here in Jacksonville, and he told me it was the first time he had ever dropped acid. Pretty intense.

**I can hear a little bit of B.B. King's "Thrill Is Gone" on "Yes We Will."**

Oh, 100%. That was Sue's song. And when she started playing the riff, that's immediately what I thought of, and our band just kind of naturally fell into that groove so we didn't even have to say anything. It was one of those where you just kind of look and nod and you're like, "Yeah, this is where it should be." We became pretty close with B.B. the last three or four years of his life when we toured with him and the TTB. We would sit in with him occasionally and had some really incredible hangs. He's one of those heroic figures, that kind of spirit. You don't meet many like that in your lifetime. Actually, you don't meet any. You meet one — B.B.

**Sue knew him pretty well?**

Yeah, even before I joined the Allman Brothers in '96 or '97, Sue started doing that B.B. King Blues tour. She did a lot of tours with him, and he was just always really sweet to her and really great, even to the point where Sue was dating somebody early on who maybe wasn't so great to her and B.B. kind of knew that.

And when I first started dating Sue, he was very protective of her until he got to know us together, and then he opened up. I really appreciated that. He really loved her and wasn't going to let me just come on in there without ... let's just say, I got side-eyed once or twice. I love that. He was being protective of her.

Actually, the first performance that me and Sue did coming out of the lockdown was at a memorial for B.B. They re-did B.B.'s grave the way he wanted it done and they had a show at his museum in Indianola,

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Charlie Trucks, son of Derek and Susan Tedeschi, receiving a pick from B.B. King back in the day.



Mississippi. They asked me and Sue to be there, so we showed up for that.

It was really incredible being there. I got to play Lucille and clean B.B.'s headstone. Robert, who runs the B.B. museum, was telling us before the show we did that night that one of B.B.'s only requests was just the Blind Lemon Jefferson tune, "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean." During the encore there were probably 30 guitar players on stage, and there was no one at his grave at that moment. So I was like, "I'm just going to go have a moment with B." I went over there and there were footprints on his grave. And I was like, "Nope. That's not gonna happen." And I was holding Lucille while I was cleaning his grave. So we had a moment. It felt like the right way to come out of lockdown.

**Every guitar player who ever bent a string owes a debt of gratitude to B.B. King.**

Absolutely. I was thinking about how none of us ever knew life before B.B. King. And I was also thinking about all my guitar heroes like Hendrix and Duane; B.B. was their guitar hero. I definitely felt like there was guitar before and after B.B. When he passed away, we were on the tour bus heading to Jackson, Mississippi, and I remember waking up in my bunk and hearing a B.B. King record playing on the stereo in the front of the bus. And I'm wondering, "Who is cranking B.B. at 7 a.m.?" So I walked to the front of the bus and there was Sue, playing B.B. King records. And I could just see in her face what it was.

I guess she had gotten a call in the middle of the night that B.B. had passed. And at that very moment, we were passing the exist for Indianola, which was B.B.'s hometown. It was really intense. I have this photo that was taken at Newport of B.B. and our son Charlie when he was 3 or 4. B.B.'s in a golf cart leaning over and handing Charlie a guitar pick. My son is 20 now and I tell him, "I just want you to know how incredible this moment that was captured is."

Then maybe a year before that picture was taken, B.B. was in Jacksonville, and we went to see him. After the concert, we walked to the

back of his tour bus, and our son bounces in, and B.B. goes, "Young man, you know who I am?" And Charlie goes, "Yes, sir, you're B.B. King." And B.B. pulls out a \$100 bill and gives it to him. When we walked off the bus I was like, "Charlie, give me that. That's going in a frame. I'll give you a different hundred dollar bill. You ain't spendin' that one." Yeah, B.B. was family.

**Your daughter Sophia's middle name is Naima. You also recorded that John Coltrane tune on your debut album in 1997, along with Trane's "Mr. P.C." And now the A Love Supreme connections are evident on I Am The Moon. Clearly, he's had a huge influence on you.**

Yeah, his records — *Giant Steps*, *A Love Supreme* and *Live At Birdland* — were game-changers for me. I stopped listening to guitar players for a while after hearing *Live At Birdland*. There's this moment coming out of a McCoy Tyner solo where Elvin is just ramping this thing up until it's just about to explode, then Trane comes in with this repeating pattern. It reminded me of just the feeling I got when I first heard the Allman Brothers' *At Fillmore East*, where it felt like the stereo was about to explode.

Those are those moments where when you first hear them — probably mid-to-late teens — you just rewind it a thousand times trying to find out how do you get to that place? How do you tap into that power? So, yes, Trane was certainly game-changing.

I have this famous Jim Marshall photo that he took of John Coltrane in 1960. Sue got it for my 30th birthday, and it's just beautiful black-and-white profile of Trane. And then during the Obama years, we were invited to go play at the White House [an all-star event titled "In Performance at the White House: Red, White and Blues," which took place on Feb. 21, 2012, and featured appearances by B.B. King, Buddy Guy, Gary Clark Jr., Shemekia Copeland, Mick Jagger, Jeff Beck and Keb' Mo']. And I brought that framed Jim Marshall photo of Trane and gave it to President Obama. There's this amazing photo of the president hanging up this John

Coltrane photo in the West Wing. And in that moment I was thinking, "You know what? We got a picture of Coltrane hung in the fucking White House. This is a good day."

**You must have been similarly affected when you first heard qawwali singer Nusrat Ali Khan.**

Without a doubt. That was probably the other leg of the stool, for me. It was actually Colonel's drummer, Jeff Sipe from the Aquarian Rescue Unit, who turned me on to Nusrat. And then Ali Akbar Khan was a Colonel recommendation. Those two — Nusrat and Ali Akbar Khan — opened up a whole different world for me. And especially with the slide guitar, I felt like you could explore some of those nuances and the micro-tones, just the way you get in and out of a note.

**You can hear that influence on "Rainy Day" and "Hold That Line."**

Yeah. And because of the underlying story coming from *Layla & Majnun*, it felt appropriate to go to those places musically. It felt like the story was asking for it, and it didn't feel like you were trying to shoehorn something in. It felt comfortable there. And those are some of my favorite moments, [when] you can get into those places.

Along with B.B. King's *Live In Cook County Jail*, which is my all-time favorite, and the one I go to to this day if I'm ever feeling uninspired with my own playing. There's also Ali Akbar Khan's album *Signature Series, Volume Two*, another one where if I feel out of gas creatively, I can go back to that. It just reminds you of the source.

**You've been soaking up all this powerful music since you were a kid.**

Yeah, it's been a surreal ride. Looking back on some of the people I was able to play with as a kid of 9, 10 years old, I got to meet a lot of my heroes. And I feel really lucky that I was born when I was and not earlier or later. I didn't get to see all of my heroes, but I definitely got to feel connected with some of them in a way that I don't think young musicians can now. At 9, I started sitting in with my guitar teacher at this little blues club in Jacksonville called Applejack's.

I remember sitting in with Koko Taylor at nine years old and just meeting all these Chicago blues heroes. I remember playing with this lady named Diamond Tooth Mary, a Florida blues singer. This was in 1989 and the gig was billed as the youngest and oldest living blues artists. She was 93 and I was 9.

Later on, you look back and you just realize how impossible it was that you got to connect with these people. In fact, I was just thinking, "How the hell did that happen?" Really incredible. So I feel like Forrest Gump sometimes, where you just kind of end up in places and you just kind of take it all in.

DB



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In July, when the Downbeat 70th Annual critics poll was announced, Horn was among the top listed in the following 3 categories...

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Jazz Album of The Year, 8th of 29

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**Sep 04 Dallas:** Riverfront Jazz Festival

**Oct 28 Philly:** Kimmel Center

**Nov 05 Canada:** Koerner Center with Toronto Ontario Big Band

**Nov 10 New Jersey:** NJPAC opener for Fantasia

### MORE INFO

[www.artistryofjazzhorn.com](http://www.artistryofjazzhorn.com)

Drew Bordeaux Photography





On the Void Patrol, from left, Elliott Sharp, Collin Stenson, Billy Martin and Payton MacDonald



# VOID PATROL

# LONG-DISTANCE

**F**or almost all of 2020, it was unsafe for musicians to gather together in small rooms and throw ideas back and forth in collective creation, challenging their very existence. They responded in incredibly creative ways, some focusing on solo music (alto saxophonist Steve Lehman released an EP of music recorded in his car), while others embraced

long-distance collaboration, exchanging files and assembling tracks in Pro Tools.

This has long been common practice in all sorts of music, particularly rock and pop, where sounds are slotted like Lego bricks and subject to micro-adjustments until perfect. Sonic verisimilitude and human interaction aren't even part of the artistic conversa-





# ADVENTURE

By Philip Freeman

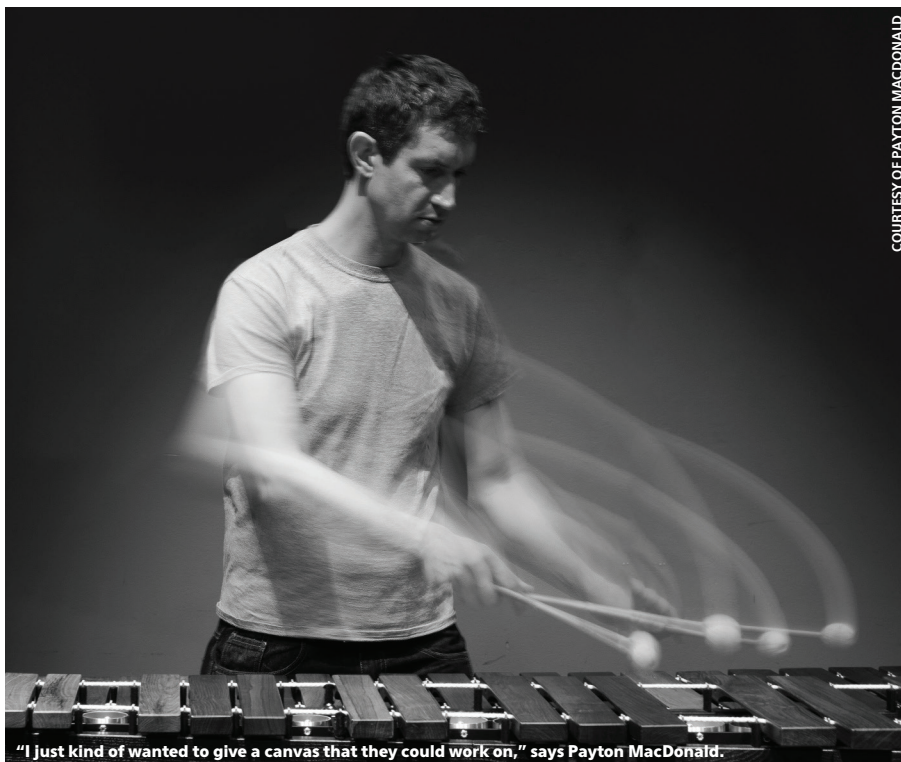
Photo by Reuben Radding

tion. But for jazz, it's still fairly new territory. Which makes an album like *Void Patrol* a genuinely path-breaking work of art.

*Void Patrol* (Infrequent Seams) is a collection of five tracks, all named after stars and all constructed remotely, layer by layer, by percussionist and composer Payton MacDonald, guitarist Elliott Sharp, saxo-

phonist Colin Stetson and drummer Billy Martin. It has qualities derived from each player's other work — repetitive melodies from MacDonald, “weird” guitar from Sharp, hypnotic yet subtly aggro sax from Stetson, megadoses of groove from Martin — but sounds nothing like any of them have done elsewhere. It is its own thing, newborn into the world.





"I just kind of wanted to give a canvas that they could work on," says Payton MacDonald.

The project was put together by MacDonald. A founding member of the avant-garde modern classical ensemble Alarm Will Sound, his primary instrument is marimba, though he'll smack anything that promises to make an interesting noise. He's been involved with projects ranging from acoustic interpretations of work by electronic composer Aphex Twin on Alarm Will Sound's 2009 recording *Acoustica* to *Sonic Divide*, a film that documented a 2,500-mile mountain bike trip along the Continental Divide, during which he performed dozens of new pieces by various composers, including Sharp and Martin. In addition to composing and improvising as a percussionist, he has also studied the Indian vocal tradition known as Dhrupad for decades. MacDonald is prolific: Since October 2020, he's been releasing roughly an album's worth of music a week as part of his Explorations series. There are 64 volumes as of this writing.

Each of the other group members has their own unique pedigree. Sharp has been a key figure on the New York music scene since the 1970s, working in jazz, free improv, modern composition, electronic and avant-rock contexts, as well as territories for which no map or label exists. He's not just a composer, but also an instrument builder and tinkerer, always at the margins yet, in many ways, crucial to the development of any number of musical ideas.

Stetson is a phenomenon unto himself as well, exploring the range and capability of reed instruments across solo albums, collaborations with fellow saxophonist Mats Gustafsson and

violinist Sarah Neufeld, and guest and session work with a stunningly broad range of rock and pop acts. He's also a prodigious film scorer, with his eerie and unsettling sounds suited well to horror films like *Hereditary*, *Color Out Of Space* and the recent *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake.

And Martin, though best known for his work in Medeski, Martin & Wood, has played and recorded in a broad range of contexts, including gigs with the Lounge Lizards and percussion duos with Grant Calvin Weston. Outside of MMW, he's recorded with the likes of Iggy Pop, John Scofield, DJ Spooky and Dave Burrell, to name a few.

The genesis of *Void Patrol* was fairly straightforward, albeit in line with the general uncertainty of the artist's life. MacDonald got a grant through William Paterson University, where he teaches, and, as he explains it, "I could do whatever I wanted with [the money], and I had been dreaming of this collection of talent for a long time. I just intuitively felt there would really be a beautiful synergy with the four of us. And I approached the guys and said, 'Look, would you be willing to explore a long-distance collaboration? I have a little bit of support,' and to my delight they were willing to do it."

He initiated the music by laying down a foundation for six tracks, "very simple backing stuff, just to give some overall structure to the tonality and the shape of things." He then circulated the music among the other three via "this little factorial operation ... to kind of rotate it around." For example, Sharp might get

one piece first, then pass it along to Martin, who would pass it to Stetson. Another piece might go to Martin to Stetson to Sharp. "And you work through so that everyone has the chance to add something but in a different order."

The first piece, "Antares," begins with a shimmering run across Sharp's strings, with a second layer of guitar twanging following. MacDonald launches a repetitive marimba figure, and Martin comes in with a steadily ticking beat, his snare loose and rattling as though he's playing it with house-painting brushes. His toms, meanwhile, are high-tuned and plastic-sounding, recalling the playing of Tony Oxley.

There is no lead instrument; everyone sits equal in the mix, and Sharp may actually be slightly quieter than the others. It takes more than three minutes (of an almost 11-minute piece) for Stetson to enter, and his horn is distorted as though playing down a telephone line. His phrases loop so tightly together as to sound like circular breathing exercises, but every few repetitions they seem to slide off track for an instant.

There are no solos; the changes in the piece come from the shuffling of elements, one sound or another dropping out and returning, as in dub or the music of Weather Report, which Joe Zawinul famously described as "no one solos, everyone solos."

Although they had never worked together as a quartet before, each musician had connections going back years, even decades. Martin and Sharp have known each other since the early 1990s, when the drummer was playing with singer-songwriter Samm Bennett in his band Chunk. (Sharp had been in another one of Bennett's groups, Semantics, years earlier.)

MacDonald's connection to Martin dates to 2014, when Alarm Will Sound and Medeski, Martin & Wood collaborated on what became the 2018 album *Omnisphere*. He's collaborated with Sharp in the past, too. They made an album together in 2011, in collaboration with an equally forward-thinking trumpeter, Peter Evans. ("I wanna hear it," Martin says, during a four-way Zoom call.) They worked together again in 2019, with drummer Steven Crammer, playing several of MacDonald's "Modules" compositions, which he describes as open scores that may be played by any size group, with any instrumentation.

MacDonald has known Stetson the longest, though. He says via email, "Colin and I met in 1993. We are exactly the same age, and we were in freshman theory class together at the University of Michigan. We played together in various ensembles for four years in school and were friends and hung out quite a bit. After school we stayed in touch, though we were living in different parts of the country and didn't do any more playing. I was delighted to reunite



with him for this project.”

MacDonald says that the compositional sketches he sent around were minimal and intended to be suggestive rather than laying down roadmaps or drawing borders. He started with drones — almost literally just frequencies to surround or build upon.

“I knew the other guys were interested in drones in certain ways, too, via conversations and just listening to their work,” he says, “and I’d been studying Hindustani music for many decades, and Elliott and I had had some good conversations about Dhrupad ... but also I just kind of wanted to give a canvas that they could work on.”

Sharp says the group “really just went with our gut feelings ... knowing that there would be an editor somewhere in the process, or someone to mix it to make sense out of all the contributions. I mean, if I had previous tracks sent to me, I would listen to them and try to decide what might best fit with the direction of the track, or if someone was covering a lot of low end, I would stay out of that frequency range, things like that, just to vary the spectrum of sound available to the mix.”

One of the fascinating qualities of all the music on *Void Patrol* is how rhythm-based it is. It doesn’t groove in the conventional sense, but the parts sync up like gears, keeping everything

rolling with uncanny smoothness. One could call that logical, given that the music was kicked off by a percussionist, but MacDonald takes no responsibility.

“I did not go into this with trying to push a particular aesthetic direction,” he says. “I mean, I guess it happened because I laid down the first tracks. Certainly, just by nature of being the first one to make the sonic imprint, I’m already sort of setting up something. But I don’t recall that we ever had discussions on email or Zoom about, ‘Let’s try to do this, let’s try to do that.’ My feeling is, we were really doing what we would do onstage, which was just a lot of listening and creative composing, swirling together.”

Being left to their own devices, the participants were able to try some entirely new things. “I was using some instruments that I have never recorded with,” Sharp says. “I build a lot of instruments, and I know I played some viola and some synth on some things, which I don’t use very much.”

Martin can be heard playing bamboo leaves, using them as an alternate device in place of brushes.

“That was probably the first recordings of bamboo leaves on a record,” he says. “Other than that, everything else was drum set, percussion, some melodic talking drum.”

Sharp adds, “I tried to take a textural approach rather than thinking of myself as playing leads. I thought they would be woven into the material. I also think that a different mix would reveal a completely different set of characteristics. Everybody’s personality might come out in a completely different way.”

Martin agrees, saying, “I think it’s contrapuntal, we’re all counterpoints to each other, and I think the way Payton laid down the drones or the rhythm, we could go anywhere, really. It’s sort of weaving a tapestry in a way and creating sort of impressionistic pieces. I call it rhythmic harmony.”

Thus far, the group has only performed live once, at the Sultan Room in Brooklyn. The gig was recorded, and according to everyone it was both highly successful and completely different from the album. “We were off-road for 50 minutes straight,” says MacDonald.

“We’re all good listeners, which is really important,” says Sharp. “What you don’t play is probably as important as what you do play, and everybody gave each other a lot of space. Different instruments coming into the lead, sometimes everybody joining in on the same gesture, sometimes very contrapuntal. So it was a completely different group than what you heard on record.”

And hopefully one with a future.

DB



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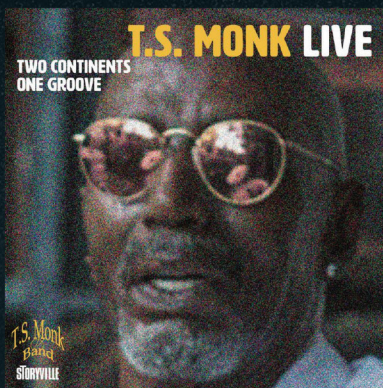
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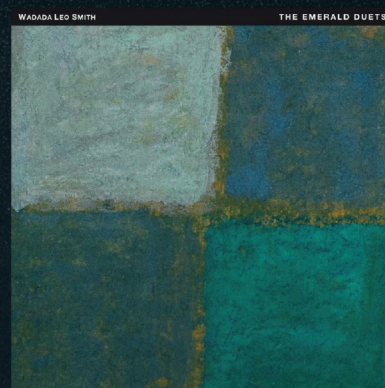
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# Reviews

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



JOHN ROGERS



Tyshawn Sorey and his trio mates are as grounded in tradition as they are willing to push its boundaries.

## Tyshawn Sorey Trio *Mesmerism*

YEROS7 MUSIC

★★★★½

If the mainstream jazz combo were distilled to its essence, what remains would likely be a piano trio. So it's no surprise that would be the format drummer/composer/polymath Tyshawn Sorey would choose to make his statement about what he calls "the straight-ahead continuum" of jazz.

His songbook includes chestnuts by Horace Silver, Duke Ellington and Herb Ellis, alongside lesser-known but equally worthy work by Muhal Richard Abrams and Paul Motian, while his playmates — pianist

Aaron Diehl and bassist Matt Brewer — are as grounded in tradition as they are willing to push its envelope.

Take "REM Blues," something Duke Ellington contributed to his *Money Jungle* session with Charles Mingus and Max Roach. As Sorey sets out a relaxed shuffle and Brewer maintains a nicely elastic groove, Diehl states the theme with elegant finesse, a sly evocation of *Money Jungle*'s dynamics.

But in true Ellingtonian style, these three don't "play the blues" while playing this blues; instead, Diehl amplifies and extrapolates on the harmony, Brewer's solo is a narrative masterstroke and Sorey quietly illustrates the infinite possibilities of groove. It's wonderfully simple, yet breathtakingly deep.

As is the rest of *Mesmerism*. There's a shapeshifting, panoramic take on Ellis' "Detour Ahead," a richly lyrical, rhythmically subtle framing of Abrams' "Two Over One" and a version of "Autumn Leaves" that understands the changes so deeply that it's immediately recognizable despite not stating the melody. Throughout, Sorey and company underscore what makes a song great, and how much can be found within it.

—J.D. Considine

**Mesmerism:** Enchantment; Detour Ahead; Autumn Leaves; From Time To Time; Two Over One; REM Blues. (47:53)

**Personnel:** Tyshawn Sorey, drums; Aaron Diehl, piano; Matt Brewer, bass.

Ordering info: [tyshawnsorey.com](http://tyshawnsorey.com)





## Chucho Valdés/Paquito D'Rivera Reunion Sextet *I Missed You Too!*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Two of the brightest stars in the Cuban firmament share their heat, light and abiding affection on this lively, long-time-coming reunion. Acclaimed internationally in the '70s for Valdés' great Afro-Cuban big band, Irakere, the pair has rarely collaborated since D'Rivera left Cuba in 1980 and Valdés moved to Spain some 30 years later. Featuring an estimable sextet that includes the great Diego Urcola on

trumpet and valve trombone and Dafnis Prieto on drums, the recording bursts with ebullient abandon as well as the heart-on-sleeve candor of old friends reuniting in their autumn years.

Chucho's "Mambo Influenciado," which hearkens back to their early days, is the perfect opener, encapsulating the fiery fusion of bebop and Cuban rhythms pioneered by Dizzy Gillespie, but with a flowing, cool-jazz twist, highlighted by Chucho's quote from John Carisi's "Israel." Paquito's clarinet lows seductively, middle-register, then sparkles flawlessly up top on his upbeat waltz "I Missed You Too."

The rhythm goes seriously Cuban and diffuse on Hilario Durán's ode to D'Rivera, "Pac-Man," which ends with Chucho's delightfully clanging montuno, and tart, crunchy trades between piano, alto saxophone and Urcola's marvelous valve trombone.

The dark and driving modal blues "El Majá de Vento," co-written by the leaders, has Paquito grabbing a couple of quick quotes from "It Ain't Necessarily So" and Chucho launching tidal waves from the keyboard.

—Paul de Barros

**I Missed You Too!:** Mambo Influenciado; Mozart a la Cubana; I Missed You Too; Pac-Man; Claudia; El Majá de Vento; El Día Que Me Quieras. (49:55)

**Personnel:** Chucho Valdés, piano; Paquito D'Rivera, alto saxophone, clarinet; Diego Urcola, trumpet, valve trombone; Dafnis Prieto, drums; José A. Gola, bass; Roberto Junior Vizcaino, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [sunnysiderecords.bandcamp.com](http://sunnysiderecords.bandcamp.com)



## Shabaka *Afrikan Culture*

IMPULSE!

★★★½

Bandleader Shabaka Hutchings, now known as Shabaka for solo projects, departs from the usual with *Afrikan Culture*, his solo debut on Impulse! Not that the Barbadian-British tenor player traffics much in the usual. Since joining the historic label in 2018, he's released five iconoclastic records under its aegis: two with his Afro-futuristic rock-jazz trio, The Comet Is Coming; two with the island-beat quartet Sons of Kemet; and one with Shabaka and the Ancestors, his modern jazz confab with an eclectic group of South African musicians. On the new record — eight soothing tracks of less than a half hour's total duration — Shabaka defies expectations yet again, this time by plunging headlong into music as meditation.

To conjure the correct atmosphere for spiritual contemplation, Hutchings relies primarily on the sounds of the shakuhachi, a bamboo flute from Japan, in various combinations. At different times he'll ground the flute's ethereal strains with a drone-like thrumming on the kora, a resonant plunking on the mbira, an electronic oozing from the music box or interpolations of metallic hand percussion. This instrumentation affords Hutchings little rhythmic traction; instead, the irresistible pulse of these compositions derives from a place of inchoate interiority.

Note, for instance, how the layered flutes coalesce into a swaying counterpoint against tinkling chimes on "Black Meditation," or how the stringed and wind instruments flutter together in a cascade of angelic sound on "Call It A European Paradox." A thematic melody and rapid improvisation drive the motion on "Ital Is Vital."

—Suzanne Lorge

**Afrikan Culture:** Black Meditation; Call It A European Paradox; Ital Is Vital; Memories Don't Live Like People Do; Ritual Awakening; Explore Inner Space; The Dimension Of Subtle Awareness; Rebirth. (28:22)

**Personnel:** Shabaka Hutchings, shakuhachi flute, kora, mbira, music box, vocals.

**Ordering info:** [impulserecords.com](http://impulserecords.com)

## Ronnie Foster *Reboot*

BLUE NOTE

★★★½

Let's address the history up top. When you're talking funky-'70s Blue Note titles, you're talking *Two Headed Freap*. With the pulsing "Chunky" and sultry "Mystic Brew," organ whiz Ronnie Foster's '72 label debut (newly reissued on vinyl) is one of the era's archetypal groove discs, able to tickle you silly while kicking your ass. And guess what? These classics ain't anomalies. A half century later, after helping Stevie Wonder cut *Songs In The Key Of Life* and George Benson make *Breezin'*, Foster still has a way of blending funk and swing into a zesty romp.

The 72-year-old keyboardist's first album in 36 years has the kind of swag that has long helped soul-jazz dates get over the hump. Meaning the songs have to be solid enough to house the flash of the solos and give the rhythm section room to frolic. These elements, each meant to forge pleasure, define *Reboot*. Cocky and catchy "Swingin'" and the title track check the essential boxes. And though it's little more than a sketch, "J's Dream" is a bittersweet gem built on an earworm.

The leader's trademark oomph secures an unwavering spot in the foreground. Insightful



plays on "Isn't She Lovely" and "After Chicago" remind us of the sly moves that dot his canon. The aggressive beats and Latin percussion of "Carlos" are feisty enough to position it as an *Abraxas* outtake, and the elegaic solo piano piece that closes the record suggests that Foster glances in several directions at once. No question, versatility and authority are the through lines of this reboot.

—Jim Macnie

**Reboot:** Reboot; Sultry Song II; Swingin'; J's Dream; Isn't She Lovely; Carlos; Hey Good Lookin' Woman; After Chicago; After Conversation With Nadia (44:00)

**Personnel:** Ronnie Foster, organ; Michael O'Neill, guitar (1-3, 5-8); Chris Foster, drums (1, 5, 7, 8); Jimmy Brandy (2, 3, 6) drums; Lennie Castro, congas (2, 6, 8); Luis Conte, timbales, shakers (2, 6, 8).

**Ordering info:** [bluenote.com](http://bluenote.com)



# The Hot Box

Critics	J.D. Considine	Paul de Barros	Jim Macnie	Suzanne Lorge
<b>Tyshawh Sorey Trio</b> <i>Mesmerism</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
<b>Valdés/D’Rivera</b> <i>I Missed You Too!</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★
<b>Ronnie Foster</b> <i>Reboot</i>	★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½
<b>Shabaka</b> <i>Afrikan Culture</i>	★★★½	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Tyshawh Sorey Trio, *Mesmerism*

Is there anything Sorey can't do? The volcanic drummer and finely calibrated modern classical composer has now turned in a gracefully intricate piano trio album that features pristine leads from pianist Aaron Diehl and magnificent bass work from Matt Brewer. —Paul de Barros

A key addition to his impressive discography, not because we learn he equally treasures Muhai and Horace, but because his dedication to detail casts these "straightahead" gems anew. —Jim Macnie

With Diehl and Brewer, Sorey forms a near-perfect trio for his modern reframe of these select jazz classics. The trio manages — without corrupting the originals — to find fresh musical associations and hidden emotional complexities in the familiar structures. —Suzanne Lorge

### Chucho Valdés/Paquito D’Rivera Reunion Sextet, *I Missed You Too!*

Fans of Irakere will enjoy a jolt of nostalgia here, and not just from the way "Pac-Man" reclaims the band's sound. But the real fun comes from the casual virtuosity manifest in such playfully eclectic fare as "Mozart à la Cubana." —J.D. Considine

Can't tell if it's the grace or the exclamation that impresses most. The two old pals exude verve and carve up plenty of lyricism. Secret Weapon: Dafnis Prieto. —Jim Macnie

This overdue record not only chronicles the relationship between these two global emissaries of Cuban jazz but affirms the steadfastness of their musical fraternity. D’Rivera's silky melodicism and Valdés harmonic fluidity are all of a radiant, unbroken piece. —Suzanne Lorge

### Ronnie Foster, *Reboot*

Funky drumming and fusion flourishes certainly suffice for casual listening, and the occasional flash of deep groove is encouraging. But it's doubtful the crate-diggers of the future will find much gold in these tracks. —J.D. Considine

After years in the studios, the funky, swinging '70s Blue Note organ maestro reemerges with a warm, inviting and entirely believable album, flowing naturally over driving bass pedals, and even offering an acoustic piano romance and a shuffle vocal. —Paul de Barros

Foster's virulent funk, ferocious swing and roiling blues command our attention for their unalloyed fervor. So his sudden tangent into romanticism — a poignant, acoustic original as the final track — hits all the harder for its novelty. —Suzanne Lorge

### Shabaka, *Afrikan Culture*

That Shabaka anchors his Afrikan Culture on a Japanese flute says a lot about the breath of his vision, and the soundscapes he builds from overdubbed shakuhachi and clarinet are impressively vast. If only the writing were on a similar scale. —J.D. Considine

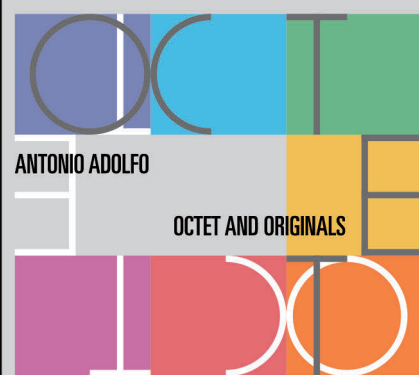
The overdubbed flute and clarinet passages on "The Dimension of Subtle Awareness" are intriguing, and so is Shabaka's pure shakuhachi sound, but it's hard to say whether these airy, atmospheric journeys are deep dives or highly competent massage music. —Paul de Barros

The kid of balm we could all use a bit of these days. This parade of meditations transcends mere ambiance by assuaging all sorts of anxiety. —Jim Macnie

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**Camille Bertault & David Helbock** ACT  
**Playground**



**Camille Bertault  
& David Helbock**  
**Playground**

ACT  
★★★★★

Eclecticism can be the emptiest of gestures. The clue's in the title. David Helbock may look a serious bloke, but there is an intense playfulness in his work; not whimsy, not satire or pastiche, but simply the sense that music is a playground in which impossible things become possible and unlikely things happen all the time. In this, he has the ideal partner in Camille Bertault,

who has her own sense of mischief.

It's significant that the other artists nodded to in the course of *Playground* are Egberto Gismonti (the opening "Frevo"), the arch-trickster Thelonious Monk ("Ask Me Now") and, right at the end, a tribute to the puckish Hermeto Pascoal, whose early work is currently enjoying a revival.

The air of mystery is sustained in the originals, notably Helbock's "Das Fabelwesen," meaning "mythical creature," as well as Bertault's wistful "Bizarre" and Poulenc-like "Aide-moi."

These players have classical backgrounds, but as "Lonely Supamen" shows, they know the blues as well, even if their take on the form is unusual. They incorporate everything, from Russian and Icelandic mysticism to cryptozoology.

Jazz has always been large, always contained multitudes, but it's acts like this — and labels like ACT — that keep the door open for new influences and experiences.

—Brian Morton

**Playground:** Frevo; Good Morning Heartache; Lonely Supamen; Etude In C-Sharp Minor, Op. 2, No 1; Aide-moi; New World; Das Fabelwesen; Dans ma boîte; Ask Me Now; Never Lived; Bizarre; Para Hermeto (52:37)

**Personnel:** Camille Bertault, voice; David Helbock, piano, percussion, live looping, effects.

**Ordering info:** [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)

**Grant Stewart**  
**The Lighting Of The Lamps**  
CELLAR

★★★★½

This is the type of session that bebop fans love.

It features a classic tenor-trumpet quintet, high-quality solos that are full of enthusiasm and excitement and revivals of some obscure gems.

Grant Stewart, a tenor saxophonist whose tone occasionally reminds one of Paul Gonsalves and early Benny Golson although his ideas are his own, leads his longtime quartet with pianist Tardo Hammer, bassist David Wong and drummer Phil Stewart, plus the fiery trumpeter Bruce Harris. It makes for a potent combination.

Their repertoire includes two rarely played Clifford Jordan songs (the jazz waltz "Little Spain" and "Bearcat"), Thad Jones' "Bitty Ditty," Benny Golson's "Out Of The Past," Elmo Hope's "Mo Is On" (a rapid run through of rhythm changes) and Stewart's "A Piece Of Art."

The latter has a pair of Art Tatum phrases in its melody and utilizes the chord changes of "All God's Children Got Rhythm." Hammer's piano solo here is very much in the Bud Powell tradition. The two standards are renditions of



"Ghost Of A Chance" and "I'm A Fool To Want You" that are taken a bit faster than usual.

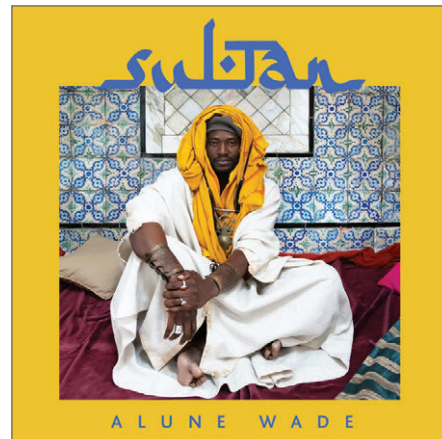
Clearly these musicians were not in the mood to play slow ballads, and coasting was not an option. One can sense the feeling of happiness at this session from November 2021 that the musicians must have had in getting to finally play live with others.

—Scott Yanow

**The Lighting Of The Lamps:** Little Spain; A Piece Of Art; Ghost Of A Chance; Out Of The Past; Mo Is On; I'm A Fool To Want You; Bearcat; Bitty Ditty. (56:10)

**Personnel:** Grant Stewart, tenor; Bruce Harris, trumpet; Tardo Hammer, piano; David Wong, bass; Phil Stewart, drums.

**Ordering info:** [cellarlive.com](http://cellarlive.com)



**Alune Wade**  
**Sultan**

ENJA  
★★★★★

Alune Wade's first outing, *Mbolo*, was a fusion of Afrobeat, jazz and traditional West African sounds, a recipe he largely follows here. But this time, he includes highlife, rap, Cuban, North African and Middle Eastern sounds, creating an international mix that's both familiar and distinctive. The music was recorded in Tunisia, Paris, New York, Turkey and Cuba, by an impressive list of players, then assembled in the studio with the help of producer Nic Hard.

"Nasty Sand" is a funky blues tune, punctuated by R&B flavored horn blasts and shredding guitar solos by Guimba Kouyate. "Café Oran" celebrates the fusion of styles that evolved in Tunisia and gave birth to raï. The horn lines suggest the ornamentation of flamenco, while Wade's simple bass line is echoed by the band's scatted vocals.

"Dalaka" rides a syncopated rhythm, anchored by an acoustic piano, with a hint of son Cubano in the melody line. The vocal chorus laments the tribulations of Africans forced to flee their homeland due to climate change and political instability. The title track blends African, Cuban and Arabic elements with Wade's propulsive bass. Midway through, they slip into a ska-like rhythm to bring the track home.

—j. poet

**Sultan:** Saba's Journey, Donso, Sultan, Nasty Sand, Uthiopic, Portrait de Maure, Djolof Blues, Dalaka, L'ombre de l'âme, Lullaby For Sultan, Célébration, Café Oran. (61:29)

**Personnel:** Alune Wade, bass; Christian Sands, piano; Cédric Duchemann, Farfisa organ, Rhodes pump keyboard, organ; Bobby Spark, keyboards, organ; Hugues Mayot, tenor, soprano and baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Carlos Sarduy, trumpet; Cyril Atef, drums; Mustapha Sahbi, oud, guembri; Adriano Tenoriod, percussion; Cheikh Anta Ndiaye, sabar; Senegalese percussion; Leo Genovese, piano, keyboard; Draman Dembele, flute; Mounir Troudi, vocal; Malika Zarra, vocals; López-Nussa, piano; Paco Sery, Drums, triangle; Hein Benmiloud, flute, Zokra; Nasreddine Chebli, percussion; Guimba Kouyate, guitar; Thomas Henning, trombone; Mehdi Nassouri, Gnawa vocals; Aziz Sahmaoui, Gnawa vocals; Daniel Blake, soprano and tenor saxophone; Josh Deutsch, trumpet; Nora Mint Seymali, vocals; Adriano Tenorio, percussion; Lenny White, drums; Djani, rapper; Eric Mouquet, piano, keyboards; Ismail Lumanovski, clarinet; Laurent Bonet, alto saxophone; Daril Esso, drums; Faris Ishaq, flute; PPS the Writah, rap.

**Ordering info:** [alune1wade.bandcamp.com](http://alune1wade.bandcamp.com)





**Daniel Carter/Matthew Shipp/William Parker/Gerald Cleaver**  
***Welcome Adventure! Vol. 2***

577 RECORDS

★★★★★

The piano-bass partnership of Matthew Shipp and William Parker has been the fulcrum for

some heavy soloists over the years. David S. Ware heads the list, of course, but there's also Ivo Perelman, Wadada Leo Smith, Joe Morris, Roy Campbell and Mat Maneri. But the duo has no connection more enduring than their association with Daniel Carter. Carter, whose multi-instrumentalism encompasses trumpet and numerous woodwinds, has been playing with Parker since the 1970s and Shipp since the 1980s.

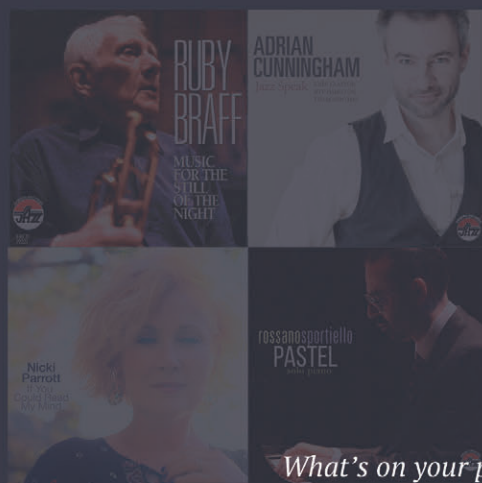
The three musicians have a rapport so strong that not just anyone could join them and contribute as an equal, but drummer Gerald Cleaver is up for the challenge. He brings a different approach to each of the five collectively conceived pieces on *Welcome Adventure! Vol. 2*. His steaming, multi-layered groove pushes "Sunverified" into mid-1960s Miles Davis quintet territory, simultaneously putting an individual spin behind each of the other players' exploration. On "Wordwide," Cleaver inserts intermittent accents into Shipp's winding line, which in turn wraps around Carter's laconic alto saxophone. Shipp and Parker permit their usually impregnable alliance to dissolve on "Blinking Down," laying out while Carter alternates between long, coarse tones and short, rippling phrases while Cleaver transforms a door-knocking barrage into an undulating maelstrom.

It's fair to note that all of these musicians are so well represented on record that even a confirmed fan might ask, do I need to hear another one? But, with its highly attuned interaction and stylistic variety, *Welcome Adventure! Vol. 2* is not the one to skip. —Bill Meyer

**Welcome Adventure! Vol. 2:** Sunverified; Blinking Dawn; Mask Production; Wordwide; Da Rest Is Story. (41:09)

**Personnel:** Daniel Carter, saxophones, clarinet; Matthew Shipp, piano; William Parker, bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums.

**Ordering info:** [577records.com](http://577records.com)



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# Little Feat in Full Force

Rhino Records aims to cover every possible fan base with a newly mastered *Waiting For Columbus*, the great live recording **Little Feat** released at the start of 1978. Where the original, two-LP set memorialized 1977 shows at Washington, D.C.'s Lisner Auditorium and London's Rainbow Theatre, the eight-CD **Waiting For Columbus Super Deluxe Edition (Rhino; ★★★★★)** adds three previously unreleased 1977 performances from those two venues and from Manchester (England) City Hall.

*Waiting For Columbus* — from its opening command to “join the band” to “Feats Don't Fail Me Now,” the beautifully symmetrical coda ending the original second LP — documents a band having a party and looking to pump one up.

Little Feat was one of the best bands of the 1970s. Its finest music — “Oh Atlanta,” “Rock And Roll Doctor,” “Willin’,” “All That You Dream,” “Be One Now,” the undeniable, salty “Skin It Back,” the inexplicably moving, Bo Diddley-based “Fat Man In The Bathtub” — hasn't dated at all. *Waiting For Columbus* may be the closest the band ever came to a great-hits album.

These recordings capture the band at the peak of its powers, wondering why it didn't break bigger in the United States even as it enjoyed popularity abroad. Backed on several tracks by the Tower of Power horn section, the band on these recordings was vocalist-guitarist-leader Lowell George, guitarist-vocalist Paul Barrere, keyboardist Bill Payne, drummer Richie Hayward, bassist Kenny Gradney and percussionist-vocalist Sam Clayton. This is full-force Feat, captured before George, its co-founder with Payne and its foundational songwriter, withdrew from the group to pursue a solo career.

The 73-track set features compositions from the band's first six albums, starting with its gnarly, eponymous debut of 1971 and ending with 1977's *Time Loves A Hero*. Its key early recordings are a 1972–74 trifecta: the aching *Sailing Shoes*, the sly and knowing *Dixie Chicken* and the surreal, funky *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*. After *Feats*, the band's memorably melodic unconventionality and pathos began to recede even as its music grew shinier. George died of a heart attack in 1979. He was 34. The band broke up soon after.

Some tunes recorded at these shows also made it onto *Hoy-Hoy*, a 1981 double album featuring old Feat tracks along with some newer material. The band reformed in the '80s and continues to tour.

Born in Los Angeles, seasoned in D.C., Little Feat blended the sauciness of The Meters with the plaintiveness of The Band. It was



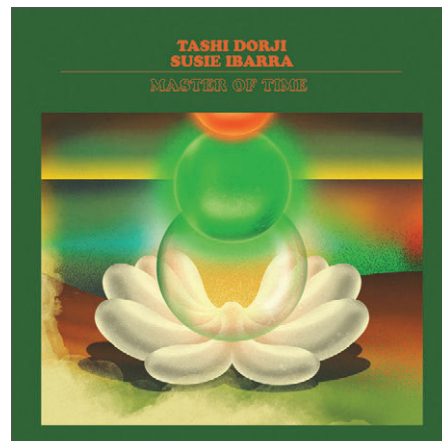
highly improvisational, even daring, particularly in its rhythm section. It was inherently jazzy, a harmonically accessible complement to Steely Dan, its smoother, more successful and similarly eccentric contemporary.

The jazz element is explicit on “Dixie Chicken,” a driving conflation of Crescent City rhythms and Dixieland tropes done to a turn on the original LP. Jazz also is at the core of a deep-fried, July 29, 1977, rendition of Allen Toussaint's “On Your Way Down” pitting Payne's florid, elegant keyboards against the wiry guitars of Barrere and slide master George. That July 29 concert also yielded a deliciously blowsy recasting of “Sailin' Shoes,” the title track of the group's intoxicating 1972 album. Even more Payne, seesawing between impish and forceful, surfaces on an even thicker take on the Toussaint classic from an Aug. 10 concert in D.C.

No matter the track, the band is both relentless and joyous; check out the Aug. 10 take on “Feats Don't Fail Me Now,” like many other Feat tunes an inquiry into travel both terrestrial and otherworldly. The harmonies are gloriously ragged, and Hayward is explosive. “Day Or Night,” a dramatic cut from the not-so-ironically titled *The Last Record Album*, was done to a turn in the same concert. Sparked by the rhythm section, Payne's tune about being lost in the city traverses funk and fusion. Payne's synthesizer, rising against George's and Barrere's guitars, is supple and insistent, the rhythm section implacable.

At best, the band memorialized here was a musical train, melding country, jazz improvisation, soulful vocals and rock propulsion into an unstoppable force demanding listeners sing along whether they knew the words or not. Payne has said he and George conceived of the band as an elastic entity, adding horns when its force field demanded, irreverently and organically blending musical genres. How could jazz not be in the Little Feat mix? **DB**

Ordering info: [rhino.com](http://rhino.com)



## Tashi Dorji/Susie Ibarra *Master Of Time*

ASTRAL SPIRITS

★★★★

Though *Master Of Time* is drummer Susie Ibarra and guitarist Tashi Dorji's first recording as a duo, there is a fluidity in their improvisation that feels incredibly comfortable and familiar.

“Confluence” begins with understated percussive vibrations and contemplative strings, before turning to darker, industrial tones and sharp notes. The extended improvisation builds in heat over time, with Dorji's guitar becoming more feverish and Ibarra's drums morphing into sheets of sound.

The duo hits their stride on “The Way Of The Clouds,” with Ibarra's propulsive percussion the perfect match to Dorji's dynamic strings. On this track, Dorji is imaginative and virtuosic, moving deftly through pulsing rock motifs, mentholated guitar riffs and ominous atonal lines.

Ibarra and Dorji are more solemn and introspective on “Moments Of Time” and “Mist Of Light,” which are bonus tracks included only on the digital version of the album. Ibarra shows off her mastery of tempo with crisp and iridescent percussion on “Moments In Time,” while Dorji's warbling tones take center stage in “Mist Of Light.”

Recorded live at the Tang Teaching Museum in April 2019, *Master Of Time* was a live performance commissioned as part of the exhibition “The Second Buddha: Master Of Time,” which showcased the story of the Indian Buddhist master Padmasambhava, who was said to have the ability to see through time to predict troubled times in the future. *Master Of Time* brings together two virtuosos in their own right.

—Ivana Ng

**Master Of Time:** Confluence; Moments Of Time; The Way Of The Clouds; Mist Of Light. (51:20)

**Personnel:** Susie Ibarra, drums and percussion; Tashi Dorji, guitar.

Ordering info: [ibarradorji.bandcamp.com](http://ibarradorji.bandcamp.com)





## Darrell Grant *The New Black: Darrell Grant Live At Birdland*

LAIR HILL

★★★★½

In 1994, pianist Darrell Grant's debut for Criss Cross records, *Black Art*, was greeted with critical acclaim for its hard-swinging, rhythm-for-

ward approach. Featuring upstarts Brian Blade and Christian McBride, *Black Art* heralded a new generation of improvisatory talents on the cusp of genre-dominating success.

In 2019, Grant took to the stage at Birdland for a 25th anniversary outing of the album with a killer new band, featuring Kendrick Scott on drums, Marquis Hill on trumpet and Clark Sommers on bass.

Sommers left his tape recorder onstage and the ensuing material now makes up the live record, *The New Black*.

Owing to the lack of close mics, the resulting compositions contain a raw feeling of unpredictability; as if the listener is perched on a stool stage-side, eagerly awaiting the changes. Opener "The New Black" kicks off in high energy with a soaring solo from Hill, while "The New Bop" showcases Scott's swinging dexterity, and ballads "Foresight" and "For Heaven's Sake" illustrate Grant's delicate voicings.

The band takes each opportunity to spur each other on, as much as supports each other texturally in the softer moments of introspection. Yet, the monodirectional recording is disappointing. Despite the novelty of its immediacy, ultimately it does the work of the band a disservice. Scott's drumming is largely washed out, while Grant's lower register is muddled, leaving only high-end melody clearly available. It was lucky that Sommers captured this stellar set. If only we had a better-quality recording, we could relive it in its proper glory.

—Ammar Kalia

**The New Black:** Introduction, The New Black, Tilmon Tones, Foresight, For Heaven's Sake, The New Bop, Einbahnstrasse, Blue in Green, Freedom Dance. (69:59)

**Personnel:** Darrell Grant, piano; Marquis Hill, trumpet; Clark Sommers, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums.

**Ordering info:** [darrellgrant1.bandcamp.com](http://darrellgrant1.bandcamp.com)



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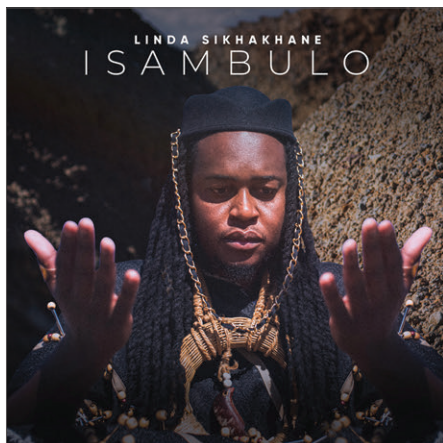
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**Linda Sikhakhane**  
*Isambulo*  
ROPEADOPE

★★★★

Impressive young South African saxophonist Linda Sikhakhane followed his heart and sense of artistic mission to New York City, studying at New School and soaking in New York jazz culture while maintaining a strong sense of rootedness in his heritage. That balancing act is evident on Sikhakhane's potent third album, *Isambulo*. The title translates from the Zulu to "revelation," fittingly for an album that effectively crosses borders and blurs cultural arche-

types to create a brand of neo-Afro-jazz.

Sikhakhane conveys the focused power of his saxophone on the album but seems less concerned with showboating than in the integrity of the larger musical statement being made on the collection and by the collective. Hypnotic ostinatos, played by piano and bass, sometimes ground the exploratory tracks, as on the modal opener "Inner Freedom (Revisited)" and the slow-brew title track, fortified by the presence of trumpeter Matthias Spillman.

The teasingly brief "Umbhedesho" moves in a brisk free-bop direction.

Selective vocal parts fold into the fabric, without distracting from the overall focus, from Paras' entrancing Zulu speak on "uNon-goma" to Anna Widauer's lyrical, dusky tone on a soul-jazz reflection on time and heart, "A Day Passed." The album closes on the peaceable note of "Hymn For The Majors," on which Sikhakhane taps into the legacy of Coltrane's meditative modalities, imparting beauty and hope through his horn.

—Josef Woodard

**Isambulo:** Inner Freedom (revisited); Gog'uldah; Isambulo; uNongoma; Umbhedesho; A Day Passed; Ikhandlela; Hymn for The Majors. (38:57)

**Personnel:** Linda Sikhakhane, tenor and soprano saxophone; Lucca Fries, piano; Fabien Iannone, bass; Jonas Ruther, drums; El Hadji Ngari Ndong, percussion; Matthias Spillman, trumpet (3); Paras, vocal (4); Anna Widauer, Vocals (6).

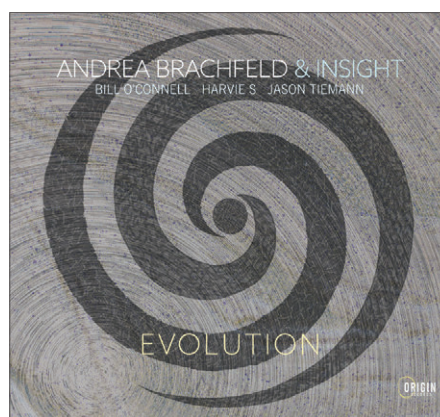
**Ordering info:** [ropeadope.com](http://ropeadope.com)

**Andrea Brachfeld & Insight**  
*Evolution*  
ORIGIN

★★★★½

Flutist Andrea Brachfeld, a veteran virtuoso who has worked deftly in jazz and Afro-Cuban music for decades, pulled together the pieces and passions of her latest album, *Evolution*, over three sessions spanning from before the COVID-19 lockdown to the end of 2021. On this intriguing set, abetted by the empathetic allies of her group Insight (with pianist and co-producer Bill O'Connell, bassist Harvey S and drummer Jason Tieman), Brachfeld extends the tighter focus of her earlier *Brazilian Whispers* to a more pan-global landscape. Brachfeld manifests worldly sympathies by channeling musical languages from afar, and includes indigenous instruments not often heard in jazz circles. Colombian clay flute, African wood flute and kalimba enhance and expand the record's anchoring Western flute sonic protagonist role.

The album's sequence leaps out boldly with the assertive tunes "What's Up" and "Decimation Of Transformation" but weaves artfully on ethnic detours into Inuit culture ("Qinguaait") and African Baka tradition ("The Hut Song"), in

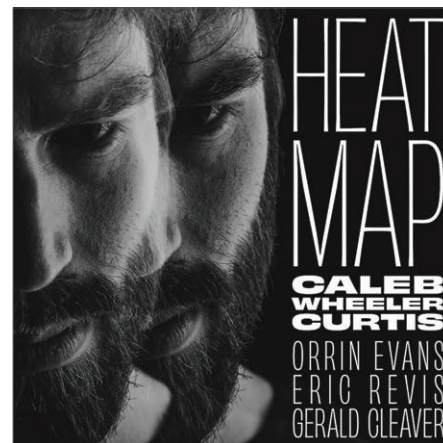


jazz-aligned garb. The sole spoken-word piece, "Child Of The Earth," becomes an explicit declaration of one of the concepts underscoring the album: her compassion for the fate of the world's children, especially in this fragile period. We're easily drawn back for repeat listenings to the album's engaging musical tapestry, fortified by supple soloing, palpable ensemble dialogue and an organic conceptual agenda. —Josef Woodard

**Evolution:** What's Up; Decimation Of Transformation; Qinguaait; The Hut Song; Child Of The Earth; The Unraveling Of It All; Ko Ribon; Being With What Is. (50:08)

**Personnel:** Andrea Brachfeld, C flute, alto flute, spoken word, Colombian clay flute, African wood flute, kalimba; Bill O'Connell, piano; Harvey S, bass; Jason Tiemann, drums, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)



**Caleb Wheeler Curtis**  
*Heatmap*  
IMANI

★★★

*Heatmap* marks saxophonist and composer Caleb Wheeler Curtis's third release as leader on Imani Records. Boasting a lineup that includes Orrin Evans, Gerald Cleaver and Eric Revis, an abundance of skill and spirit is contained within the album's 10 tracks. The experience of these players, blended with Curtis's appreciation for the negative space of music, carves out peaks and valleys, which form *Heatmap*'s musical character. The music isn't oversaturated in technique, nor is it a room with too many cooks in the musical kitchen.

Curtis weaves a delicate but striking current of melodic eccentricity around the rest of the band, either contrasting with a track's chosen imagery or further embodying it. On "Heatmap," the music gradually and collectively rises in intensity like the creeping mercury in a thermometer, while Curtis' saxophone cuts across the top with notes on a far less straightforward trajectory. Whereas in "Trembling," Curtis' improvisatory approach complements Cleaver's rapid cymbals, Evans' high octave chords and nimble right hand flourishes, and Revis' bustling bass plucks. Together, they create an air of frenetic anxiety befitting of the piece's title but each player's individuality is heard via how they opt to present this emotion, while never crashing into one another.

Curtis' shift to a more restrained melody and legato playing style on "Spheres" combines with Evans's cyclical motif to close *Heatmap* with a calmer but nevertheless vivid concept. *Heatmap* radiates with brilliance, highlighting the very act of playing music and the intangible but irreplaceable energy that doing so creates.

—Kira Grunenberg

**Heatmap:** Heatmap; Tossed Aside; Surrounding; Limestone; Splinters; Trees For The Forest; Trembling; Whisperchant; Closures; Spheres. (50:55)

**Personnel:** Caleb Wheeler Curtis, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, compositions; Orrin Evans, piano; Eric Revis, bass; Gerald Cleaver, drums.

**Ordering info:** [imanirecordsmusic.com](http://imanirecordsmusic.com)



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Dave Thomas and Dave Greenslade teamed up to record *G&T*.

## London Town Lowdown

English indie label Wienerworld is on a winning streak with five box sets in the Down Home Blues series, a big dig of primarily rare 1940s, '50s and '60s blues tracks recorded in Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, New York and other American cities. Shifting to home turf London, their latest successful blues excavation project is ***Something Inside Of Me: Unreleased Masters & Demos From The British Blues Years 1963–1976*** (Wienerworld; 72:36/70:41/73:15/74:40 ★★★½). Accompanying four CDs — 96 remastered tracks in all — is a 150-page book with essay, musician profiles, session information and photos.

Viewed through the mist of time, the British blues era may seem like little more than a training course for future rock stars such as the Rolling Stones, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and the Kinks. Look closer. It was a sizable explosion with legions of musicians expressing ardent admiration for the blues and R&B of African-American musicians they heard on records and in local clubs. To be sure, these Britons relied upon enthusiasm to compensate for lack of the Black life experience, but more than a few had authentic-sounding mournful yearning or bittersweet-joy at the core of their adopted music.

*Something Inside Of Me* doesn't pretend to be a survey of the 1960s blues heyday and the early 1970s when blues-rock shoved trad purists into the margins. None of the rock stars or trailblazers appear. Compiler Peter Moody instead showcases 15 soloists, duets, trios or bands that are, with a couple of exceptions, unknown to almost everyone today.

One-man band Duster Bennett, a headliner in clubs, offers five so-so performances that pale in comparison to his released records on the Blues Horizon label. Guitarist Simon Prager and harmonica player Steve Rye (a.k.a. Simon & Steve) fare better performing 14 country blues that make it clear that they hold Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee in deep respect. Solo pianist Bob Hall makes a brief appearance with the lively tune "The Spider,"

and pre-Mac Danny Kirwan, age 18, shows promise playing guitar with his first band Boilerhouse. Trio leader Dave Kelly, near the beginning of a long-lasting career, demonstrates on several numbers his sure interpretative way with the music of Sonny Boy Williamson and Big Bill Broonzy. Al Jones, eternally unappreciated, is the collection's biggest little treasure. He's a singer and guitarist with a special folk-blues style who pinpoints the drama in Robert Johnson and Skip James classics.

Ordering info: [mvdshop.com](http://mvdshop.com)

British blues is a faint breeze rather than a gale force wind these days. Nevertheless, **Emma Wilson**, the UK Blues Award's 2021 "Emerging Artist of the Year," rages with intense lung-power efficiency on "Not Paying," the highlight of her first studio album, ***Wish Her Well*** (Emma Wilson Music; 40:01 ★★★). She's cooler and calmer everywhere else, revealing that her singing isn't particularly rich in consistency and natural presence.

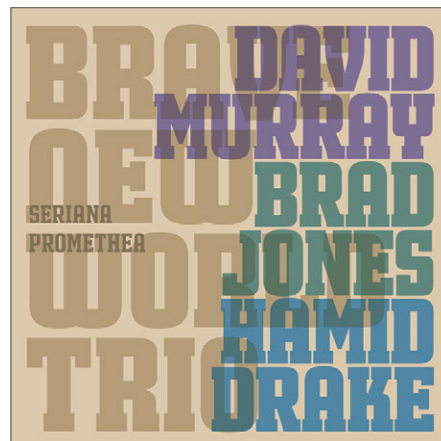
Ordering info: [emmawilson.net](http://emmawilson.net)

Dave Thomas, once a member of the minor 1970s rock band Blonde on Blonde, joins Colosseum keyboardist Dave Greenslade for the blues-rock-soul album ***G&T*** (Angel Air; 44:37 ★★★). Thomas' voice is past its sell date, but it gets by. Greenslade has been one of the U.K.'s top keyboardists for many years. The standout track is the homage "Otis Rush's Day."

Ordering info: [mvdshop.com](http://mvdshop.com)

Born in England and long a Montrealer, **Sass Jordan** belongs at the front rank of singers. On her ninth album, ***Bitches Blues*** (Stony Plain; 27:16 ★★★★★), she immerses herself in the blues music with a stirring voice of honesty and purpose. There are no incidences of histrionics as she interprets choice material by Taj Mahal ("Chevrolet"), Freddie King ("Ain't No Big Deal") and Mississippi Fred McDowell ("You Gotta Move"). Jordan's no slouch as a songwriter, either; savor her catchy "Still The World Goes 'Round.'" **DB**

Ordering info: [stonyplainrecords.com](http://stonyplainrecords.com)



## David Murray/Brad Jones/Hamid Drake *Seriana Promethea*

INTAKT

★★★★

In 2017, when interviewed by Paul Devlin for Ethan Iverson's Do The M@th website, David Murray observed the way age changes a tenor saxophonist's playing.

"We tend to play fewer notes, but with more authority," he said. "We play the truer tones." While he often plays with economy and acuity on *Seriana Promethea*, he can still blow dense and hard with unassailable fluency.

This group, which Murray calls his Brave New World Trio, is a COVID-era creation. He first played with the fearlessly flexible rhythm section of bassist Brad Jones (Muhai Richard Abrams, the Jazz Passengers, James Brandon Lewis Quartet) and drummer Hamid Drake (Archie Shepp, William Parker, Peter Brötzmann) in Italy in November 2020. After touring throughout Europe, they recorded this session exactly one year later. They sound simultaneously fresh and deeply acquainted with each other.

The concept of freedom expressed here involves drawing freely from myriad styles, minting them into music that is both uncompromisingly rigorous and directly communicative. He plumbs the microtonal blues for patiently articulated truths on "Metouka Sheli," and derives intricate, rhapsodic variations from the boldly tender theme of "Rainbows For Julia." Then, he takes a dizzying, high-register tightrope stroll over an intoxicating Caribbean rhythm on "Switchin' In The Kitchen." And on the record's sole non-original, Sly Stone's "If You Want Me To Stay," Murray's gruff, interval-leaping explorations never compromise the tune's funky groove.

—Bill Meyer

**Seriana Promethea:** Seriana Promethea; Necktar; Metouka Sheli (Ballad for Adrienne); Rainbows for Julia; Switchin' in the Kitchen; Anita et Annita; If You Want Me to Stay; Am Gone Get Some. (57:39)

**Personnel:** David Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Brad Jones, bass; Hamid Drake, drums.

Ordering info: [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch)





## Charlie Musselwhite *Mississippi Son*

ALLIGATOR

★★★★½

Misty romantic movies obscure the fact that while falling in love sometimes sort of happens to you, staying in love is a series of decisions. Charlie Musselwhite's *Mississippi Son* is a stripped-down little number that enshrines a handful of early moments when through sheer kismet, the blues knocked a then-young Charlie upside his head, but the album is also a pleasing testament to his decision to surrender to a life-long love affair with the music.

## Flock *Flock*

STRUT

★★★★½

Reflecting the open-eared, collaborative nature of the London-based jazz scene, Flock consists of some of its longstanding and most exciting players, who came together for an improvised recording session in summer 2020.

The resulting 10 tracks make up the group's eponymous debut, featuring Vula Viel band-leader Bex Burch on gyl and vibes, drummer Sarathy Korwar, Comet is Coming member Danalogue on synths, Maisha pianist Al MacSween and Collocutor band-leader Tamar Osborn on woodwinds. Despite the fact that some of the group had never even met in person before the session, *Flock* has a remarkably cohesive feel, prioritizing space for breath, ambience and melody throughout.

Opener "Expand" builds a light-touch motif over a tom riff from Korwar, while Danalogue supplements airy textures through synth arpeggios. This wide-ranging scope continues on the bass clarinet rumblings of "Sounds Welcome" and the rhythmic undulations of "It's Complicated."

The latter's 13-minute runtime sees the only instance of the group reaching the cathartic

Many of the cuts, such as "Remembering Big Joe" (a tribute to his one-time roommate, the unparalleled blues great Big Joe Williams) are solo affairs, recorded in a manner that captures a sense of intimacy. In the case of "Big Joe," Musselwhite even enlists one of Williams' old guitars. Covers of "Crawling Kingsnake" and "Hobo Blues" are shuffling remembrances to Musselwhite's late night listening sessions, clock radio tuned to John Lee Hooker on WLAC in Memphis, sessions that "appealed to [him] so much that [he] just had to learn those tunes."

His originals in this collection are also a treat. "Stingaree" is a sinuous little love bug, while "Pea Vine Blues" is a grooving rocker augmented by Ricky "Quicksand" Martin's outstanding turn on drums. The tunes each bear a bit of the artist's soul, and as Musselwhite explains in the liner notes, are "based on things I think about and/or witnessed. They all somehow are extensions of me." They are also natural extensions of a lifetime spent choosing to truly love the blues.

—Ayana Contreras

**Mississippi Son:** Blues Up The River; Hobo Blues; In Your Darkest Hour; Stingaree; When The Frisco Left The Shed; Remembering Big Joe; The Dark; Pea Vine Blues; Crawling King Snake; Blues Gave Me A Ride; My Road Lies In Darkness; Drifting From Town To Town; Rank Strangers; A Voice Foretold. (41:12)

**Personnel:** Charlie Musselwhite: guitar, vocals, harmonica; Ricky "Quicksand" Martin, drums (1, 2, 5, 8–10, 12); Barry Bays, bass (1, 2, 5, 8–10, 12).

Ordering info: [alligator.com](http://alligator.com)



burst of a full-throated crescendo.

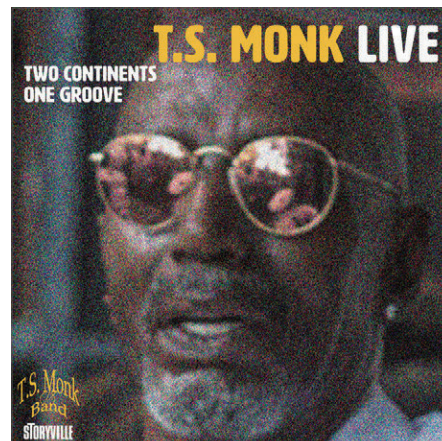
While Flock members are right at home in these medium-tempo explorations, the album could ultimately benefit from more risk-taking moments that allow each member to soar. Without challenging its own sense of consistency, the collective feels as if the members are holding back and resisting the pull to play to their full potential.

—Ammar Kalia

**Flock:** Expand, Prepare To Let Go, Sounds Welcome, It's Complicated, What Purpose, Mummuration, Bold Dream, My Resonance, How Many Are One, Fully Breathed. (67:37)

**Personnel:** Bex Burch, gyl, vibraphone; Sarathy Korwar, drums, tabla; Danalogue, keyboards; Al MacSween, piano; Tamar Osborn, bass clarinet, flute, soprano sax.

Ordering info: [flock.bandcamp.com](http://flock.bandcamp.com)



## T.S. Monk *Two Continents One Groove*

STORYVILLE

★★★★

It has been some time since drummer T.S. Monk released an album as a leader. He has led a straight-ahead jazz sextet since 1992 and this new Storyville release, which was recorded in New York in 2014 and Bern, Switzerland, in 2016, is his first live recording with his group.

The personnel is the same on both sessions with tenor-saxophonist Willie Williams being the only original member of the sextet other than its leader from 24 years earlier. There are no songs included by T.S.'s father, Thelonious Monk, although trumpeter Josh Evans begins his original "Earnie Washington" by playing the melody of "Brilliant Corners" unaccompanied. The sextet, which is joined by guitarist Dave Stryker on the leader's "Sierre," otherwise performs two songs by Randy Weston, a straightforward "Seven Steps To Heaven," Jymie Merritt's modal "Nommo," which was recorded in the late 1960s by Lee Morgan, and Helen Sung's "Brother Thelonious."

There are enough subtle surprises, passionate solos and inspired playing to hold one's interest throughout this modern hard bop set. "Sierre" has an unexpected double-time section that adds to the piece's momentum. The medium-tempo strut "Brother Thelonious" includes particularly energetic solos from Evans and Williams. Randy Weston's boppish "Chessmen's Delight" gets a rare revival, and "Earnie Washington" becomes a bluesy number and a fine showcase for Evans. With consistently rewarding solos from Sung, Williams, Evans and altoist Patience Higgins, and stimulating support by bassist Kenny Davis and T.S. Monk, the album lives up to its potential.

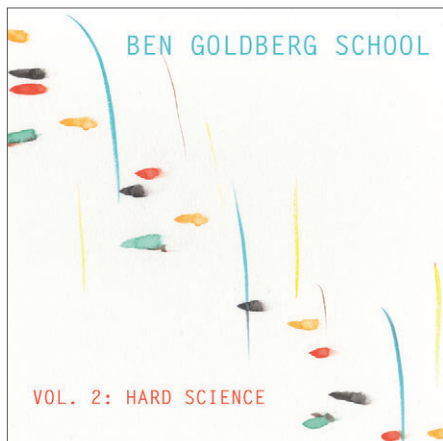
—Scott Yanow

**Two Continents One Groove:** Sierre; Brother Thelonious; Chessmen's Delight; Seven Steps To Heaven; Earnie Washington; Nommo; Little Niles. (59:59)

**Personnel:** T.S. Monk, drums, percussion; Josh Evans, trumpet; Patience Higgins, alto saxophone; Willie Williams, tenor saxophone; Helen Sung, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Dave Stryker, guitar (1).

Ordering info: [storyvillerecords.com](http://storyvillerecords.com)





## Ben Goldberg *Ben Goldberg School, Vol. 2: Hard Science*

BAG PRODUCTIONS

★★★★

Ben Goldberg's tribute to the slain Black Panther Fred Hampton was a highly regarded presentation of his political bona fides, and that composition, released in 2021 and included on *Everything Happens To Be*, was enticement enough for activists unfamiliar with his music. The composition is at play on *Ben Goldberg School, Vol. 2: Hard Science*, but with a completely new ensemble, which is just as compe-

tent though they had to learn the songs by heart since no written music was brought to the studio. Goldberg, according to the album notes, asked the musicians to jump in whenever they chose to, and they chose to with vigor.

Each of the unnamed 14 or 15 tracks, depending on the listings here and elsewhere, has a mix of sonic variety, and for the most part the album is like an extended concerto without the traditional three sections. It begins with a refrain that has an overture-like feel to it and, to some extent, it occurs again later, although with a blend of different instruments, mostly with Goldberg's clarinet in tandem with either Kasey Knudsen's alto saxophone or Bob Reich's accordion. In fact, there are moments when it's difficult to separate the blend — and that is of no consequence.

Jeff Cressman's trombone provides a pleasant but rhythmic bottom to the various improvised passages.

The remarkable drumming of Hamir Atwal stands out. He brings a lively and knowing facility that when mated with Nate Breener's electric bass invests the often repeated melodic cycles with fresh sonority. —Herb Boyd

**Ben Goldberg School, Vol. 2—Hard Science:** Tracks 1–15. (52:35)

**Personnel:** Ben Goldberg, clarinet; Kasey Knudsen, alto saxophone; Bob Reich, accordion; Nate Breener, electric bass; Hamir Atwal, drums; Jeff Cressman, trombone.

**Ordering info:** [bagproductionrecords.com](http://bagproductionrecords.com)

## Zoh Amba *O Life, O Light Vol. 1*

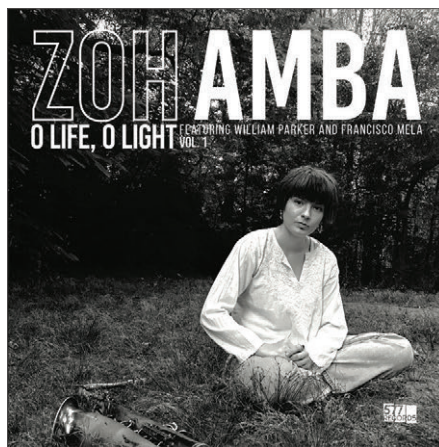
577

★★½

Zoh Amba is a young, New York-based tenor saxophonist, flutist and composer working on the outer edges of the new music scene. Her music is a scrappy mix of whoops, wails and plaintive shouts to the universe. Comparisons to the lineage of John Coltrane and Albert Ayler are apparent. While promising, it is way too early for that. Let's just say Amba is a young artist fighting hard to find her voice.

On her latest recording, *O Life, O Light* (577), Amba is in good company with bassist William Parker and drummer Francisco Mela. The three mesh on a trio of extended-play tunes — “Mother's Hymn,” “O Life, O Light” and “Mountains In The Predawn Light.” (There is also a bonus track, “Satya,” on some versions.)

Amba grew up in the Appalachian mountains, bringing an earthy tone, timbre and attitude to her art. But her studies with David Murray are also apparent in her playing. On “Mother's Hymn,” she controls an aggressive vibrato in the lower registers and pushes her tenor saxophone beyond the edge on the highs. On “Mountains In The Predawn Light,” Amba effectively switches to flute, offering another,



more chill, side to her work. Throughout the set Parker and Mela simmer beneath the swoops, stirring the pot — Parker effectively employing arco in just the right places, Mela serving as an always-tasty foil on drums.

With *O Life, O Light*, we hear where she's going. Her next challenge is to make us feel it, too. Expect more from Amba in the coming year, including Vol. 2 of this collection.

—Frank Alkyer

**O Life, O Light, Vol. 1:** Mother's Hymn; O Life, O Light; Mountains In The Predawn Light; Satya (Bonus Track). (34:05)

**Personnel:** Zoh Amba, tenor saxophone, flute; William Parker, bass; Francisco Mela, drums.

**Ordering info:** [577records.bandcamp.com](http://577records.bandcamp.com)

## WOLFGANG HAFFNER DREAM BAND LIVE IN CONCERT

ACT

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BILL EVANS  
NILS LANDGREN  
CHRISTOPHER DELL  
SIMON OSLENDER  
THOMAS STIEGER

## Wolfgang Haffner Dream Band Live In Concert

ACT

★★★★

German drummer Wolfgang Haffner makes no bones about his retro instincts, drawing on his strengths as leader-composer-dreamer to summon up an old-schooled, funk-basted jazz sound without apology. His Dream Band, the range and power of which is well captured on this two-disc live set from 2021, is clearly a talent-fortified unit, with Americans Randy Brecker and saxist Bill Evans and multiple personality Swede Nils Landgren up front.

Haffner penned most of the 20 tunes here, with Evans' “Soulbop” and Brecker's “The Dipshit” also in the mix. Cover-wise, Haffner is a careful curator, logically tapping the soul-jazz legacy of Nat Adderley's “Walk Tall” and “Sweet Emma.” Landgren puts in an aptly understated vocal on Brenda Russell's pop-soul tune “Get Here.” Miles Davis' simple, iconic riff-based “Jean Pierre” is slyly alluded to. Other historical points of reference filter through the Dream Band's agenda, almost as if the operative dream is a nostalgic reverie for fusion-esque sounds of old. “Star” revolves around a deceptively simple theme and dynamically morphing fast-city groove bowing to Joe Zawinul's influence. Things slide over into a passage nodding to *In A Silent Way*, albeit more in a slick way than with the original's organic looseness. Chick Corea's “Spain” and other Spanish-tinged fusion manners figure into Haffner's “Tres Hermanos,” a fine showcase for bassist Thomas Stieger.

The varied groove-fest comes to a lovely sigh of a finale, with Haffner's semi-lullaby “Silent Way,” in his silent way. —Josef Woodard

**Live In Concert:** Drums Ahead; Soulbop; New Life; Walk Tall; Bones From The Ground; Dando Vueltas; Tubes; Star; Sweet Emma; The Dipshit; You Dig; Get Here; Tres Hermanos; Q; Leo; Keep Going; Simple Life; The Real Thing; Jean Pierre; Silent Way. (1:41:50)

**Personnel:** Wolfgang Haffner, drums; Randy Brecker, trumpet; Nils Landgren, trombone, vocals; Bill Evans, saxophone, vocals, piano; Christopher Dell, vibraphone; Simon Oslander, keyboards, piano; Thomas Stieger, bass.

**Ordering info:** [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)





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# Beginnings & Entrances

Debut albums are tough. They're first public statements of artistry, of the ideas one has had percolating in all the time from birth to now. The second album is thought of as the following ideas, having its own peccadillos, but nothing quite like the debut.

Drummer **Aaron Seeber's** *First Move* (Cellar Live; 59:40 ★★★★★½) knows one of the better ways to make a debut is to enter with the right company, like bringing along veterans like pianist Sullivan Fortner and vibraphonist Warren Wolf. Seeber's live recording is a hard-driving, straightahead set that plays to the greats, gives everyone a chance to shine and fits in with the overall scene in such a way that it feels like the 29-year-old has been around for quite a while.

Don't sleep on Wolf. He never fails to impress or give his all on his instrument, and everything he does on *First Move* is no different. Tim Green is also a highlight on alto saxophone, resounding and impressing all throughout the hour with a kind of playing upon which one could really hang one's hat.

Ordering info: [cellarlive.com](http://cellarlive.com)

New York-based guitarist **Aleksi Glick** makes his solo COVID album, *Guitar & Me* (55:51 ★★★★★), just as fair and easygoing as this type of album usually fares — for both solo albums and their COVID-related variants now exist as a specific type of album. His suddenly singing the close of "Georgia On My Mind" feels weirdly intrusive. He brings this same energy to the rootsy closer, "Long Black Veil," which works slightly better once it doesn't feel like it came from nowhere. Choices like these and the set nature of this album makes the entire endeavor feel a tad hokey, almost highlighting the need for a project like this to need some kind of outside input or collaboration, even if it would be counterintuitive to the nature of what this album is. However, it could be said that an album like this really shouldn't have been Glick's debut.

Ordering info: [aleksiglick.com](http://aleksiglick.com)

Vocalist **Anson Jones'** three-song EP *A Way With Words* (Ropeadope; 12:04 ★★★★★½) on Ropeadope by way of the independent shingle Modern Icon Records is poppy, expressive, vibrant, rich and textured. Her music has real Lauren Desberg vibes, finding all the right tones of jazz, R&B and singer-songwriter tropes while never adhering strictly to any of them. It's not an uncommon direction in the music and she's doing it all right. Bruce Flowers shines in the right moments with his piano runs. Adrian Harpham finds just the right snap on the drums and sound design. Maybe this works because three songs isn't long enough to lose focus on a larger idea, but the band Jones assembled only leaves one



excited to hear what more they can pull off. They're definitely capable of it.

Ordering info: [ropeadope.com](http://ropeadope.com)

The physical copy of Slovakian vocalist **Ester Wiesnerova's** self-released album *Blue Journal* (64:08 ★★★★★) comes with a blue 120-page journal filled with poetry translated into English, assorted nature and band photography, and an overwhelming amount of negative space. It's a bit much, and if it weren't the exertion of will of a debut artist who feels compelled to get all her ideas out at once, it would seem most unnecessary, and even in these circumstances, such a claim is not far off. Wiesnerova's voice is light and sweet, but not particularly exceptional, and her compositions could be described as playing to her strengths; they could also be said to be staying in such a chamber music-adjacent wheelhouse that there isn't much interesting notable range.

Ordering info: [esterwiesnerova.com](http://esterwiesnerova.com)

**Gabriel Ólaf's** *Solon Islandus* (Decca; 43:11 ★★★★★½) is a precious ambient dream. It's haunting and ambient in ways that can put one at ease at the sheer beauty before possibly gliding the listener off to dreamland. It's a bold, moody album that plays like the film score he envisioned to accompany Davíð Stefánsson's novel (from which this album takes its name) about an Icelandic drifter, and Ólaf's takes to the concept of film scores well. Were this set to visuals, this would be the ideal match-up. This is beautiful music that's easy to get lost in, which can be its strength or its weakness. There's much in the same spirit as the music of Sigur Rós, but one must admit that those guys knew at some point to include drums.

Ordering info: [decca.com](http://decca.com)



## Will Bernard *Pond Life*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★★

Will Bernard's *Pond Life* is redolent with styles that are at once conversational in tone, as on "Still Drinkin'"; spacey when the group delivers "Type A"; an abundance of reverb complements John Medeski's piano on "Four Is More"; a bluesy motif permeates the title tune; and there's a smooth in-the-pocket penchant on "Moving Target" with an occasional foot on the wah-wah pedal.

Bernard, as ever, is as generous a leader as he is a profoundly gifted composer. His sense of sharing has an intuitive feel that allows Medeski to stretch out on "Poor Man's Speedball" on the Hammond B-3, and it's a swinging dominance that folds neatly into the crevices of a down-home rhythm.

While Bernard allocates moments for Chris Lightcap's bass, particularly on "That Day" and "Lake Of Greater Remnants," and for Tim Berne and Ches Smith on "Pond Life" — and what a chatty exchange they have — the leader has set aside ample room for his expositions, none more engaging and brilliantly extended than on "Motooz." And the album with a bounty of shifting themes and varied paces would not have suffered with more of Bernard's lengthy runs and inventive romps that in a single phrase can conjure Hendrix, McLaughlin and Mary Halvorson.

The real pleasure here is how the singular spins mutate and shape a tableau of sound that may be akin to what is meant by *Pond Life* where a variety of living things are in concert and at last a reflection of something beautiful, deep and approximating the ripple of notes this talented ensemble exudes.

—Herb Boydy

**Pond Life:** Poor Man's Speedball; Type A; Surds; Still Drinkin'; Pond Life; Four Is More; Moving Target; That Day; Motooz; Lake Of Greater Remnants. (40:29)

**Personnel:** Will Bernard, guitar; Ches Smith, drums; Chris Lightcap, bass; Tim Berne, alto saxophone (4–6, 8); John Medeski, piano, Hammond B-3 organ (1, 2, 4, 6).

Ordering info: [willbernard.com](http://willbernard.com)



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ANTONIO PORCAR CANO

## Noah Preminger *Some Other Time*

NEWVILLE

★★★★

Noah Preminger teams up with an all-star trio of Ben Monder, John Patitucci and Billy Hart here to offer a beautiful collection of music. Although these are not all original compositions, these arrangements give a cohesive feel, almost if they could have been composed as a suite. And, indeed, the only original composition, “Semenzato,” almost effortlessly converges with the standards that define the project.

*Some Other Time* was originally released on vinyl in 2016 to critical acclaim. Preminger’s

reputation for developing a sound that would appeal to audiophiles is well-earned. But there is more than just technical mastery here. The ballads offer the coolness one would expect from the personnel involved. This is an album that successfully combines the best of improvisation with the romantic gestures that ground these compositions. It’s good that this record is now widely available; like the finery out of which it emerged, these takes have aged well.

—Joshua Myers

**Some Other Time:** My Little Brown Book; Semenzato; A Ghost Of A Chance; An Alm; Porcelain; Try A Little Tenderness; Melancholia; Boots Of Spanish Letter; Some Other Time. (38:29)

**Personnel:** Noah Preminger, tenor saxophone; Ben Monder, electric guitar, John Patitucci, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

**Ordering info:** [noahpremier.bandcamp.com](http://noahpremier.bandcamp.com)

## Randal Despommier featuring Ben Monder *A Midsummer Odyssey*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★½

Alto saxophonist Randal Despommier’s *A Midsummer Odyssey* is a deep mood. A project that features all compositions written by Swedish baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin, Despommier returns us to his time spent in Europe, where first encountered Gullin’s music in the mid-2000s. Gullin is an interesting muse. Known for what was called “fäbodjazz,” he was a performer who was deeply influenced by Swedish folk music. His compositions offer an opportunity for creative explorations, particularly in a moment where the category of jazz feels more open.

A duo album with guitarist Ben Monder, Despommier’s reworkings of Gullin’s music are driven by a robust sound, full of feeling but less than overbearing. Their light touch and palpable chemistry produce a lovely jaunt through tunes that breathe easy. This is perhaps most successful on “Silhouette,” a ballad where this connection shines through. This is where Despommier’s attempt to do something new



with Gullin’s work is perhaps most striking. Monder establishes a foundation that allows Despommier to traverse a landscape evoked by the imagery of a midsummer’s odyssey. And if the intent was to reveal something of the heart of Gullin’s music, this effort was worth the journey.

—Joshua Myers

**A Midsummer Odyssey:** Toka Voka Oka Boka; Igloo; Danny’s Dream; BBC Blues; Mazurka; Dyrningar; Silhouette; I min smala sång; I Hope It’s Spring For You. (33:59)

**Personnel:** Randal Despommier, alto saxophone; Ben Monder, guitar.

**Ordering info:** [sunnysiderecords.bandcamp.com](http://sunnysiderecords.bandcamp.com)



## Pasquale Grasso *Be-Bop!*

SONY MASTERWORKS

★★★★

“A Night In Tunisia” is 80 years old.

How great it would be to hear it for the first time all over again?

Pasquale Grasso just about makes that possible with these dazzlingly fresh interpretations of material by bebop icons Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. He even does a guitar version of Bird’s famous alto-saxophone break on the classic recording: an Easter egg for bebop fans, maybe, but more than just a facile glimpse of Grasso’s virtuosity.

Though it might look as though Grasso is being extruded through some kind of A&R mill — predecessors on the label include solo standards, ballads and holiday fare, as well as homages to Thelonious Monk, Bird again and Bud Powell — he’s no more an industry shill than he is an empty technician with classical pretensions; there’s a Paganini quote on the opening track, but Bird would have been hip to that.

Odd though it may sound odd to emphasize it, but this is a group record. Bassist Ari Roland and drummer Keith Balla are in perfect accord with the leader, both playing with intense musicality and judgement and each, Roland in particular, contributing to the reinvention process.

Samara Joy comes in for “I’m A Mess,” and it’s the perfect cameo. It was sung by Joe Carroll on Dizzy’s *School Days*, so the connection is maintained.

*Be-Bop!* isn’t simply another heritage album. It reinvigorates this music. Try listening to the original recordings again after playing Grasso’s album. He’s added new shades and textures to them.

—Brian Morton

**Be-Bop!:** A Night In Tunisia; Be-Bop; Ruby, My Dear; Shaw ‘Nuff; I’m A Mess; Chery; Ornithology; Quasimodo; Lamento della Campagna; Groovin’ High. (58:22)

**Personnel:** Pasquale Grasso, guitars; Ari Roland, bass; Keith Balla, drums; Samara Joy, vocal (5).

**Ordering info:** [sonymusicmasterworks.com](http://sonymusicmasterworks.com)





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TIM HALL/GETTY IMAGES

Kenny Kirkland's playing is a great example of being aware of textural options.

## Kenny Kirkland's Advanced Approach to Soloing on 'Rhythm' Changes

Kenny Kirkland was one of the most in-demand jazz pianists of the 1980s and '90s. His advanced harmonic and rhythmic contributions are still relevant for any pianist or musician trying to modernize their playing. In my book *Kenny Kirkland's Harmonic and Rhythmic Language: A Model For The Modern Jazz Pianist*, Kirkland's playing on standard forms like "Rhythm" changes, blues, modal jazz, pop and advanced compositions like "Giant Steps" is examined and broken down into examples of advanced applications of modern harmony and rhythm through each song form.

By studying Kirkland's playing on common standard forms, we can see the ways in which he brings his own advanced techniques to common compositions that students are using to devel-

op and broaden their own skills. Additionally, looking at Kirkland's playing through different genres also showcases an advanced player's choices regarding taste, and how to apply certain concepts appropriately for each genre.

Examining some selected examples from Kirkland's solo during an extended jam on "I Got Rhythm" (from a set with the Branford Marsalis Quartet at the 1992 Pori Jazz Festival: [youtube.com/watch?v=9n78qhV\\_iU&t=551s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9n78qhV_iU&t=551s)) will showcase some of these harmonic choices that the pianist makes to push the harmonic possibilities within the tune to create a more advanced modern solo.

One way Kirkland achieves a more modern and dissonant sound while still working within the harmonic form is by opting to continually voice dominant and altered dominant

shapes in the left hand in place of minor chords. (See Example 1.) This left-hand technique is also often utilized by Chick Corea, and it allows for a constant pianistic hand shape or structure to be utilized while opening the harmony to be more dissonant in the process.

By changing the implied harmony from diatonic minor chords to dominant 13th and altered dominant chords, Kirkland can complement those voicings with more right-hand language reflecting those chords/scales. This allows for more dissonant scales like the diminished scale and the altered dominant scale to be applied to create more harmonic variety as opposed to only playing minor scales and chords. This is a creative way of using the root motion to create more harmonic variety than just the suggested chord



changes. This harmonic technique is a valuable application on any song form to create more modern, dissonant harmonies in place of the diatonic chords in any composition. Kenny alluded to this himself in an interview with *Musician* magazine in 1991, noting that, “When I’m soloing, I usually play the same voicing in the left hand, and that keeps everything in the same tone. When you change the voice, the right hand is suddenly freer, you encourage yourself to play something different.”

Kirkland uses other techniques to push dissonance and varying textures to help diversify the content of the solo to create more points of interest. In Example 2, Kirkland plays diatonic lines in sixths before side-slipping a half step down to create dissonance by then playing sixths in A major over the B $\flat$  tonic. This creative approach enriches the texture while going back and forth between consonance and dissonance to create an entirely new conceptual approach. This is an example of moving through the chord changes with a concept where the changes take a figurative backseat to the harmonic concept being applied. After playing in A major for four measures, he slips back into B $\flat$  to return to a consonant sound. Kirkland’s intentional contrasting of consonance versus dissonance is another fundamental skill-set of an advanced player.

Kirkland uses a variety of textures through his “Rhythm” changes solo, including line playing with left-hand chords, playing lines simultaneously in two hands, right-hand line playing over a left-hand pedal-point and playing in block chords. Altering the pianistic textures is another valuable tool that Kirkland varies many times in the span of a three-minute solo to create tension and release. Kirkland is a great example of being aware of these textural options and applying them throughout a solo to create more variation than just right-hand line playing.

Examples 3 and 4 show Kirkland totally departing from the chord changes to create even more dissonance and harmonic freedom. There are two sections within Kirkland’s solo where he uses a circle-of-fifths harmonic device that is independent from the traditional chord changes. He chooses to play two-note collections (dyads) as opposed to three-note triads in these sections. He plays major third dyads a fifth apart to create harmonic ambiguity while using varying rhythms to paint ambient tone colors as the chord changes move along through his solo. This allows Kirkland to move away from the traditional changes to incorporate his own advanced concept. At the same time, he keeps track of the rate of chord changes, reentering change playing wherever he chooses. This is just one of the ways the Kirkland goes “outside” of the har-

#### Example 1



#### Example 2



#### Example 3



#### Example 4



mony amongst his many creative ways to navigate harmony, which are further explored in the full book.

DB

Dr. Geoffrey Dean has authored and compiled a collection of Kenny Kirkland piano transcriptions and analyses as a tool

for jazz education. He received an undergraduate degree from Berklee College of Music, a master's in jazz studies from University of Tennessee and a doctorate in jazz performance from University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana. He currently teaches and performs in the Washington, D.C., area. Kenny Kirkland's *Harmonic and Rhythmic Language: A Model For The Modern Jazz Pianist* is available online at [kennykirkland.com](http://kennykirkland.com) and via the Jamey Aebersold website [jazzbooks.com](http://jazzbooks.com).





Ahmad Jamal is a study in understatement.

# Ahmad Jamal's Piano Solo on 'Saturday Morning (Reprise)'

Pianist Ahmad Jamal is currently in his nineties, and he's still playing. With a discography spanning all the way back to the 1950s, it's inspiring to see he's still at it. We're going to be examining Jamal's solo on "Saturday Morning (Reprise)" from his 2013 album *Saturday Morning* (Jazz Village).

This improvisation is a study in understatement. First, it's remarkably short for a jazz solo. Sixteen bars and done? Who does that?

Second, notice how comfortable Jamal is with not playing. Bars 9, 14 and 16 have nothing in them from the piano. Measures 7 and 11 are almost empty. Not having the need to fill space and the composure to allow the rhythm

section to groove through is considered by some to be a sign of musical maturity. It also can be heard as adding weight to what he does play, just like the quiet person who when they finally speak everyone takes notice.

Additionally, his left hand is used so sparingly. There's what might be a short jab supporting the melody in measure 2, though it may be played by the right hand, and then we hear nothing else from the left hand until bar 8. Bars 11–13 have the most we've heard of the left hand, but in 12–13 it's just one note (the slur at the end of 13 could be the left or right hand, or a combination. It really doesn't matter, we're still left with a lack of any counter-

point or accompaniment.)

Then there's the development of his first seven measures: Jamal starts out with an ascending chromatic idea from tonic to third, and tagging that with some mixolydian stuff (mostly descending). He then explores this idea over the next five bars, creating variations, such as displacing it forward a beat (starting the motif on beat 1 rather than 2), truncating it to a one bar phrase for measures 3, 4 and 5, and in the final two iterations not playing the entire chromatic sequence, and altering how he plays the tag. It's wonderful to hear this idea explored in depth, but also note that Jamal devotes almost half his improvisa-



♩ = 92 D $\flat$

1:53

5

9

13

tion to this lick. That's commitment to an idea.

And continuing with that commitment, check out his last lick, where Jamal uses the same chromatic idea, but ascending from third to fifth instead (measure 15). He also varies it by inserting the major seventh between most of the notes, and he starts this phrase on beat 2 again, which was how he'd first introduced us to this motif (and we haven't heard since measure 1). Referencing the opening, but not restating it, it creates a sense of return but without a full-out recapitulation.

And while we're discussing the seventh: that's another intriguing thing about Jamal's improvisation. The vamp is built off a D $\flat$  chord, but is it D $\flat$ maj7 or D $\flat$ 7? In the opening five bars we have some C flats, suggesting D $\flat$ 7, but then they completely go away until bar 11 (creating more of a D $\flat$ 6, or major pentatonic sound). But at the end of this solo we have all those C naturals (bars 13, 15), suggesting D $\flat$ maj7. Between these we have measure 12, where Jamal plays both (the C $\flat$ , notated as B natural here), even letting them sustain into one another. It appears as if he's not hearing it

as either D $\flat$ 7 or D $\flat$ maj7, but as a D $\flat$ , that he can mold into either (or neither, or both) as fits his expression. It's also helpful that the bass isn't defining it as either chord. Was this discussed among the band beforehand or did it occur spontaneously during the improvisation?

Something that I often point out in this column is how musicians will use the range of their instruments. For seven bars, Jamal restricts himself to one octave. At measure 8 (the midpoint of his solo) his range expands in two ways. The melody moves up an octave, and the left hand is added an octave down (starting out doubling the top line, making this enlargement of range quite obvious). The following melody lick (measure 10) and left-hand chord (measure 11) remain in those octaves, but in bars 12–15 he brings it back almost to within where he started. It's curious that he plays the E $\flat$  in the upper part that is a step above his initial octave and the C in the lower part that is a step below, so just outside the beginning parameters.

More subtle: Jamal's phrase endings. That beginning motif landed on the tonic, but as

he explored this idea he changed the arrival point (the seventh in bars 3 and 5, the fifth in 4 and 7). All basically chord tones (let's not start the major seventh vs. flat seventh argument again). Though he deviates from this motif, the phrase endings are still chord tones: root in bar 8, third in bar 10 and then the fifth for the final resolution in measure 15.

Did you notice I skipped one? The phrase in measure 13 ends on an F $\flat$ . This is totally fine on the D $\flat$  chord, as playing a minor third on a major chord is a common blues sound, but it's usually combined with a dominant chord, producing a 7(#9) vibe. Here Jamal is running from the major seventh up to the #9 (minor third). This makes the F $\flat$  sound a bit more "out" to my ear. I think it makes for a nice flow that after exploring landing on chord tones, Jamal's penultimate phrase resolves to a tension, making the ending sound more final.

**DB**

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](http://jimidurso.bandcamp.com).



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The CT-S1000V from Casio is the first vocal synthesizer that can turn any text — such as song lyrics — into a musical phrase and then “sing” it in full harmony based on any notes played on its keys. Casio has built 100 lyric tones (phrases inspired by familiar songs) into the CT-S1000V, which can be overwritten, and there’s space for 50 more brought in from the Lyric Creator app. The instrument supports both English and Japanese text.

More info: [casiomusicgear.com](http://casiomusicgear.com)

## 2. Kawai ES Series Digitals

Kawai America has debuted a new model in its ES series of portable digital pianos. The ES120 replaces the ES110 portable piano and compliments the larger ES520 and ES920 models. Upgraded attributes include a quieter action, connectivity to Kawai’s PianoRemote and PiabookPlayer apps for iOS and Android, and Low Volume Balance, which balances the tone when played at low volumes and Bluetooth audio. The ES120 utilizes the RHC action with 88 grade-weighted keys, giving pianists a smooth, natural and highly authentic playing experience.

More info: [kawailus.com](http://kawailus.com)

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More info: [groovesynthesis.com](http://groovesynthesis.com)

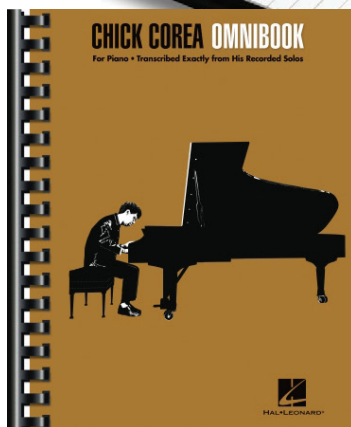
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*Chick Corea Omnibook* from Hal Leonard pays tribute to the late jazz pianist with 26 note-for-note transcriptions featuring easy-to-read notation, chord symbols to facilitate harmonic analysis of the solos, rehearsal letters, rhythmic styles and metronome marks and recording references for each composition. Available in softcover and digital versions, the 272-page book contains Corea’s solos on “Armando’s Rhumba,” “Blue Miles,” “Bud Powell,” “Chick’s Piano Solo (Spanish Fantasy Part 3),” “Eternal Child,” “500 Miles High,” “La Fiesta,” “Mirror, Mirror,” “Spain,” “Windows,” “The Yellow Nimbus” and other tunes from his extensive and challenging repertoire.

More info: [halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com)

## 5. Yamaha CFX Concert Grand

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More info: [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)

## 6. Novation Launchkey 88

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More info: [novationmusic.com](http://novationmusic.com)

## 7. Studiologic Numa X Piano

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More info: [studiologic-music.com](http://studiologic-music.com)

## 8. Oberheim OB-X8

Oberheim Electronics has returned to operation to meet the rising global demand for its instruments. The company's first new product, the OB-X8, is an eight-voice polyphonic analog synthesizer that combines all of the key features of the legendary OB-X, OB-Xa and OB-8 products from the 1980s — including all the original presets that gave them their signature sounds. Users can now combine the various OB voice architectures in ways that produce unique and interesting new sounds and capabilities.

More info: [oberheim.com](http://oberheim.com)

## 9. Pearl River Kayserburg Pianos

Pearl River Piano Group's Kayserburg pianos are now available in the U.S. The handmade pianos combine German precision craftsmanship with the latest advancements in acoustics and state-of-the-art manufacturing technology to provide a rewarding playing experience for advancing players and discerning piano aficionados. Among the company's new models on display at this year's NAMM Show was the Kayserburg GH160C 5-foot 3-inch Baby Grand Piano.

More info: [pearlriverusa.com](http://pearlriverusa.com)





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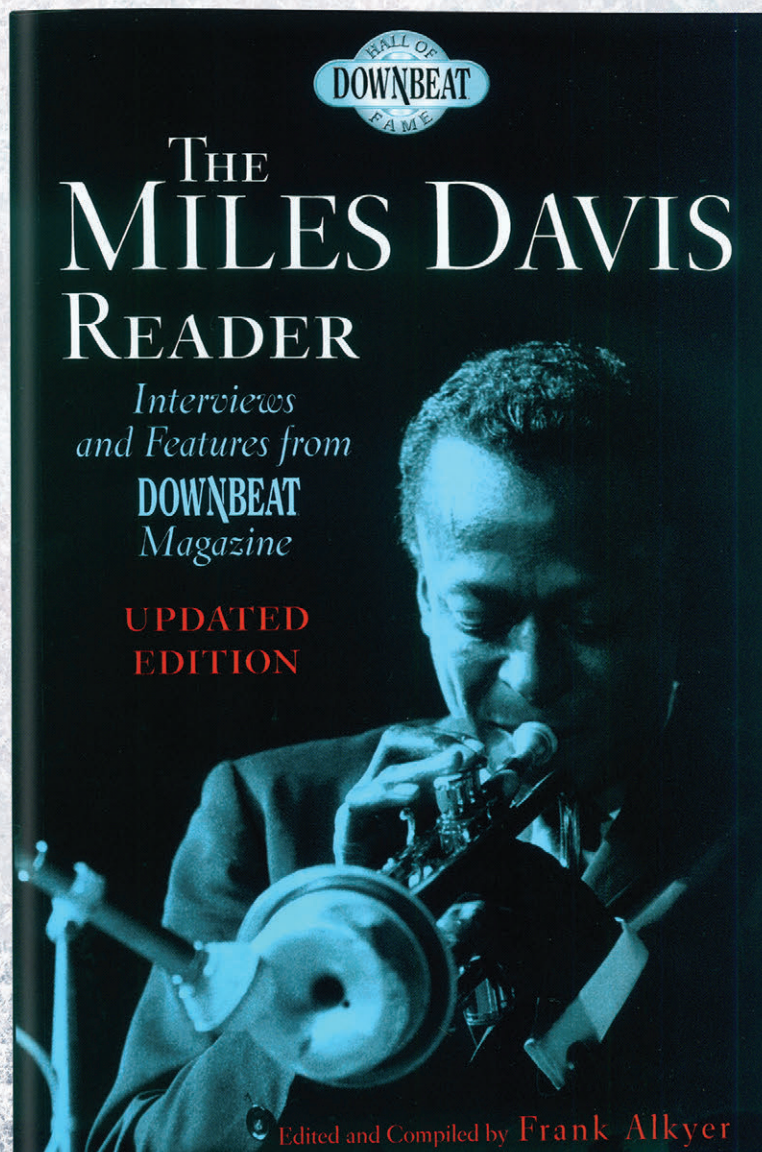
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The Osceola County School for the Arts Jazz A Band, winners of the 2022 Essentially Ellington competition

# Osceola County School for the Arts: The Road to Winning Essentially Ellington

**ALBERT EINSTEIN ONCE SAID, “IN THE MIDDLE of difficulty lies opportunity.”** That’s certainly what musician and educator Jason G.M. Anderson discovered after moving with his family from the New York metro area to Florida several months after COVID hit the U.S. in 2020.

Anderson, who took over as director of jazz studies at Osceola County School of the Arts in Kissimmee, Florida, last August, helped his new band shake off the coronavirus blues, took his Jazz A band to the Essentially Ellington finals at Lincoln Center in May . . . and won first place.

A graduate of the Berklee College of Music, he had been teaching and performing in the New York area for more than 15 years, where he and his wife, vocalist Monica Lynk Anderson, were deeply involved in the music performance and education scene.

He was teaching jazz at the Newark Academy, as well as the New Jersey Youth Orchestra’s jazz program, and both he and his wife taught private lessons. But with a family — their young daughter and trumpet-playing son — it made sense to think about a move away from New York’s intense COVID hot spot.

“We decided to move down to Florida,” Anderson recalled. “We weren’t sure exactly where in the state we wanted to move, but since my son played trumpet, we wanted to find a school with a good jazz program that was also top-rated academically. When I was teaching at Newark Academy, I worked with Julius Tolentino, the jazz director there. He was deeply involved in the Essentially Ellington program, so I thought I’d check out Florida schools

that had done well in the competition, and Osceola School for the Arts had qualified several times — 2014, 2017 and 2018. And it was a 6th through 12th grade school, so my son could attend. We applied and Xavier got in.”

The summer of 2021, Anderson checked with the school office about a jazz summer camp for his son, only to discover the jazz director left — and the school was interviewing candidates that week.

“At the time, I was doing Zoom music lessons and my wife was teaching private vocal lessons,” Anderson said. “I thought eventually I’d look for a teaching job, but this was a great opportunity, and a chance to teach at the school where my son was enrolled. I sent in my resume right away and was interviewed and hired that week.”

Anderson knew that OCSA had a strong music program, but discovered the pandemic had hit it hard, just like every school across the country.

“My top priority was to get them to love listening to jazz, since I only had a couple kids who were all in on jazz at the beginning of the year. We called the room we practiced in the Jazz Cave, because it was smaller than the rooms for the orchestra and symphony bands. Every lunch period, I’d allow the students to come into the Jazz Cave and listen to music and jam out. By the end of the year the room was almost bedlam.”

Anderson’s efforts to develop a jazz culture paid off when Jazz A was named one of the 15 finalists for Essentially Ellington.

“The band had been working their behinds off rehearsing and recording the tunes we sub-

mitted for Essentially Ellington,” said Anderson. “I was thinking it would be great to make a good impression and maybe, at best, be at the competition. But they earned their spot in the finals.”

Once Anderson and the band knew they would be going, the first question was how to pay the expenses for a trip to New York?

“Just going to New York, you’re going to spend a fair amount of money,” said Anderson. “Thankfully, Disney World in Orlando looks for organizations that are doing good in the community, and they surprised us at a meeting in the school auditorium by donating \$20,000 to cover our expenses.”

In addition to the band’s win, trumpeter Nathaniel Williford was named Outstanding Trumpet and won the Snooky Young Award for trumpet lead and solo excellence.

Jazz A’s trumpet and trombone sections received outstanding performance awards, the rhythm section and reeds received honorable mentions, Solomon Geleta received an outstanding alto saxophone award, Kiara Rouse received honorable mentions for tenor and clarinet and Violet Mujica received an honorable mention for trumpet.

“The whole year was such a wild ride,” Anderson concluded. “But it ended very happily, indeed. And I’m hoping this will be the start of things to help bring more attention to OCSA and our music program. The goal is to continue to build the program for these students, and especially to provide an incentive for the younger middle school kids coming up.”

—Terry Perkins



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## Yellowjackets, part I

To celebrate the 45th anniversary of Yellowjackets, the group made its latest album, *Parallel Motion* (Mack Avenue), an all-hands-on-deck affair. The 55-minute recital consists of three compositions apiece by pianist and group co-founder Russell Ferrante and saxophonist-arranger Bob Mintzer, a member since 1990; two by bassist Dane Alderson, who joined in 2015; and one by Will Kennedy, who rejoined Yellowjackets in 2010 after holding the drum chair from 1987 to 1999. In keeping with the collective concept, the group requested to be Blindfolded together via Zoom, with the encounter taking place in June on the final day of a coast-to-coast U.S. tour. Ensconced in their respective hotel rooms, the four listened and responded to repertoire representing many other long-standing units. This has been edited for space and clarity considerations.

### Branford Marsalis Quartet

"Lykief" (*Requiem*, Sony, 1999) Branford Marsalis, soprano saxophone; Kenny Kirkland, piano; Eric Revis, bass; Jeff Watts, drums.

**Russell Ferrante:** Obviously someone really influenced by Keith Jarrett's European Quartet, that sensibility, with Jan Garbarek and those guys. I'll take a wild guess — Oregon? All the playing was stellar. The saxophonist had a beautiful sound, great command of the instrument. Along with the free stuff, there were these funny, like, blues licks that came a bit out of left field — but fit the character of the song. I loved that it was so loose and they were just going for it.

**Bob Mintzer:** I concur with Russ. Soprano sometimes can have little tuning issues. But this guy had a serious command, and a broad approach that went from almost a classical style to bluesy to out-there. Same with the piano player. It sounded to me like a Keith Jarrett group, but I couldn't figure. ... It may have been early-on Garbarek, but Jan sounds different than that. I thought maybe Dewey Redman. But then again, I thought it could be Paul Bley or somebody like that. There were even little smatterings of Cecil Taylor, but it wasn't out enough for that. I'm stumped. But I really enjoyed it, and particularly the arc — the way it started, subdued and transparent, and then picked up in activity and intensity and got into this free thing, and then returned to almost a reinstatement of that initial theme, where they played the ballad segment.

**Will Kennedy:** It sounds like a mildly contemporary recording. I'm thinking of which players can command the soprano saxophone like that.

**Kennedy:** I would throw Branford Marsalis into the mix, with the classical and bluesy or jazz influence; the quality of the recording; and obviously the musicianship is incredible. We may not have done this free, non-pocket or non-groove-tempo approach to a song on any of our recordings. It was fantastic. I'd throw Branford in there.

**Ted Panken:** Don't throw him in there. Place him very gently. It was Branford's quartet in 1998. It's Branford's piece, and it's called "Lykief."

**Kennedy:** It's not easy for a drummer to express yourself freely that way. Drummers in general are initially trained to be with the time. This free expression thing is everything that you know, everything that's in your heart. Tonally, that's "Tain"'s voice. The ability to grab everything, from a rudimentary standpoint to the qualities of that swingy jazz drumming style — it's all there. And the quality of sound is stellar. 5 stars.

**Group:** Unanimous, 5 stars.



From left: Will Kennedy, Russell Ferrante, Dane Alderson and Bob Mintzer

### Joe Henderson

"Old Slippers" (*Black Miracle*, Milestone, 1975) Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone; "Daw-illi Gongga" [George Duke], keyboards; Lee Ritenour, guitar; Ron Carter, electric bass; Harvey Mason, drums; Bill Summers, percussion; Oscar Brashear, Snooky Young, trumpet, flugelhorn; Don Waldrop, bass trombone, tuba; Hadley Caliman, flute, tenor sax.

**Mintzer:** Joe Henderson. He didn't have a band with ... that didn't sound like Lenny White. But he did some funk ... something with Herbie, that *Fat Albert Rotunda* record — but it's not that. This is a weird stab, but didn't he play with Blood, Sweat and Tears for a hot minute? But that's not them. Is this a CTI record?

**Kennedy:** That's a George Duke synth sound.

[After several guesses about the bassist, Ron Carter's name is revealed.]

**Ferrante:** I never would have guessed. I can't say it's my favorite kind of thing. But it was fun and lively and exciting for the time. Through the years, I hung out a lot with George Duke, recording at his studio, and he produced a lot of projects that I played on. He was an incredible human being, so upbeat, encouraging, positive at all times — and very generous.

**Mintzer:** The piece sounds pretty generic. A lot of music in that era conformed to a certain trend, a certain style. What stood out to me was Joe Henderson. His sound and style is so identifiable.

**Ferrante:** Compositionally, it was pretty much a jam. I also was thinking it was Joe Henderson, but I couldn't believe he would be in that setting. That totally threw me off.

**Kennedy:** Harvey has a distinct sound in how he tunes his drums, and there were a few signature licks, fills that gave it away. ... It doesn't sound like everybody's going to be 5 stars. I understand people's opinion, and yes, it's a jam environment, but that's a 5-star for me.

**Alderson:** I'll give it a 5.

**Mintzer:** It's not my cup of tea at this juncture, so why rate it? I'm in a different place. And it sounds like the '70s. There was some great music in the '70s, don't get me wrong. But this sounded like a thrown-together session of some kind.

**Ferrante:** I'm caught between Will and Bob. I'd say 3 stars. One reason it would get downgraded ... well, not so much compositionally, but also it's so identifiable within an era. Some music sounds timeless; this music definitely sounds locked in a certain time.

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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