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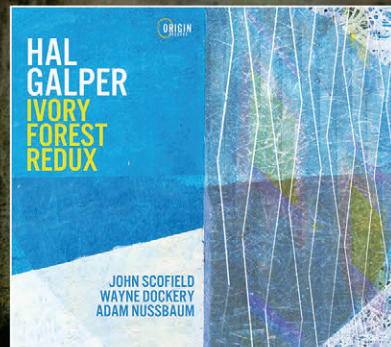
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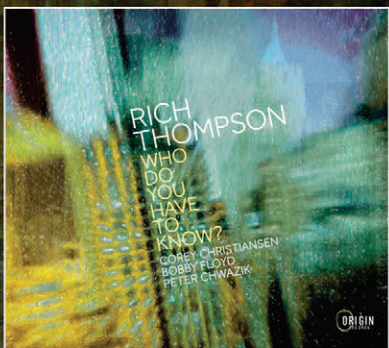
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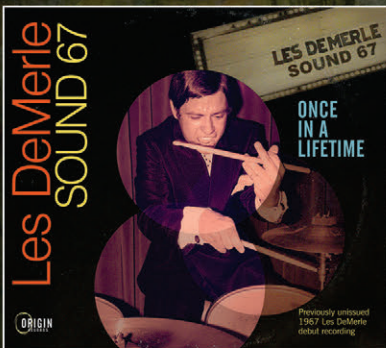
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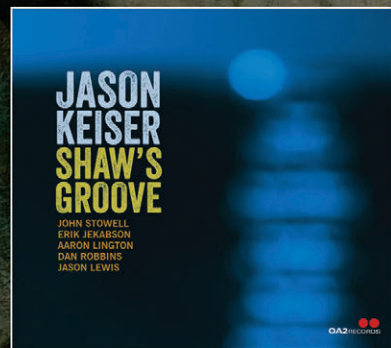
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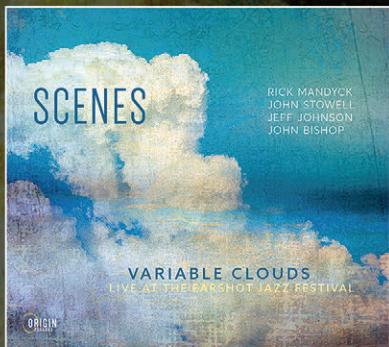
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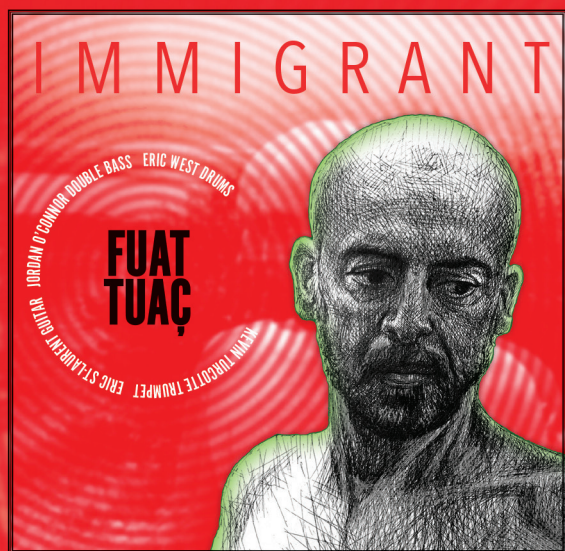
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## JUNE 2023

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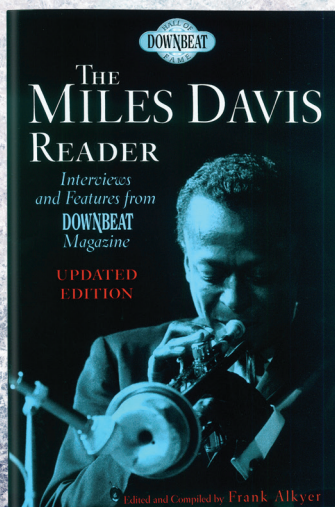
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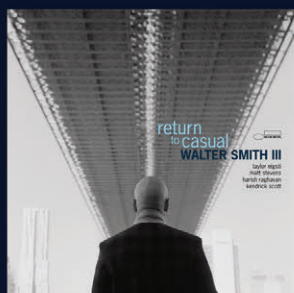
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**JUNE 2023**

# Inside

## ON THE COVER

### 24 James Brandon Lewis

#### *The Storyteller*

BY AMMAR KALIA

Lewis has released *Eye Of I*, his 10th album as a leader. The rising star saxophonist, who turns 40 this year, speaks with DownBeat about the new album and a forthcoming project celebrating the work of gospel legend Mahalia Jackson.



JIMMY AND DENA KATZ

"The thing that drives me when I'm playing my sax is the idea that there's more to be discovered," says James Brandon Lewis.

Cover photo by Jimmy and Dena Katz

## FEATURES

### 30 Rickie Lee Jones

#### *Of Intimacy and American Standards*

BY CREE MCCREE

### 38 Walter Smith III

#### *The Casual Side of Art*

BY TED PANKEN

### 44 Taj Mahal

#### *The Jazz Side of Taj Mahal*

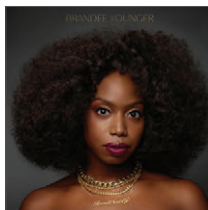
BY JOSEF WOODARD

### 76 Indie Life

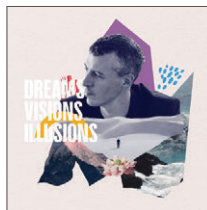
76 Leon Lee Dorsey

78 Margherita Fava

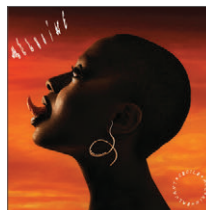
80 Vince Ector



52 Brandee Younger



54 Nick Finzer



55 Cécile McLorin Salvant



57 John Pizzarelli

## DEPARTMENTS

- 8 First Take
- 10 Chords & Discords
- 13 The Beat
  - 13 London Brew
  - 16 Ralph Towner
  - 18 Omer Klein
  - 20 Rachel Eckroth
  - 22 Wayne Escoffery
- 51 Reviews
- 66 Master Class
  - Trumpet Section Power
  - BY TONY KADLECK

- 68 Pro Session
  - Contrary Motion Within the Diminished Tonality
  - BY ALEX GOODMAN
- 70 Transcription
  - Amir ElSaffar's Trumpet Solo on 'Tipping Point'
- 72 Toolshed
  - Selmer Paris Supreme Alto & Tenor Saxophones
- 74 Gear Box
- 122 Blindfold Test
  - Joey Baron

## SPECIAL SECTION



### 83 46<sup>th</sup> Annual DownBeat Student Music Awards

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Ahmad Jamal performing at Chicago's Jazz Showcase.

## Rest in Peace, Mr. Jamal

AS THIS ISSUE OF DOWNBEAT WENT TO press, we learned of the passing of Ahmad Jamal. DownBeat will honor Mr. Jamal and the beauty of his music in more depth in a future issue, but we could not put this issue to bed without taking a moment to reflect.

Jamal passed away April 16 at his home in Ashley Falls, Massachusetts, after battling prostate cancer. He was 92.

One of the most fascinating aspects in the journey of an artist is the arc connecting where they began and where they end.

The master pianist, composer and artist has been a topic for DownBeat since even before his first interview in the magazine in the March 19, 1959, edition under the headline “Ahmad Jamal’s Way of Life.” That was shortly after he became an “overnight sensation” with his hit album *At The Pershing, But Not For Me*, an album that included his most enduring and endearing tune, “Poinciana.”

“It wasn’t so sudden,” Jamal laughed during an interview with John McDonough for his 2011 induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame. “We’d been recording for seven years. First for Okeh, then Epic in 1955, then to Al Benson’s Parrot label, and those masters were bought by Leonard Chess. Finally to Argo. Yes, I had a meteoric rise.”

But that album, and that song, made Jamal one of the biggest stars jazz has ever seen, as witnessed in 1959, when Time magazine declared his group “currently the hottest trio in jazz” and reported that Jamal’s asking rate for live performances went from \$300 to \$3,000 a week.

“It made the jazz division of Chess, and changed my life,” Jamal said in DB.

Born in Pittsburgh, Jamal made his name, and fame, in Chicago. The “Pershing” referenced in the album’s title was the Pershing Lounge in Chicago. But it wasn’t easy.

In a March 2010 cover feature with writer J.D. Considine, Jamal talked about those early days in the Windy City, and one of his early gigs playing solo at the Palm Tavern.

“What was going on there was the rent,” Jamal said. “I was there because of the bills. I was paying \$7 a week for a room, and I had to make a living. Eventually I started making \$32 per week at one of the big department stores. I was making kitchen cabinets for 80 cents an hour before I got my [union] card transferred from Pittsburgh to Chicago — it took a while. So it wasn’t a meteoric time for Mr. Jamal. I paid my dues.”

For more than 60 years, Jamal used that launching pad to write, hone, explore and expand his craft. He thought deeply about his work, eschewing the term “jazz” for “American classical music” instead, and referring to his trio — the musical format for which he is best known — as a “small ensemble.”

“With European classical music, the performer is expected to interpret the music, faithfully following the score in the hopes of reflecting the composer’s intention,” Considine noted in a February 2023 DB feature on Jamal. “With American classical music, the goal is to reinterpret the music, to find something the original composer never imagined.”

Ahmad Jamal not only reinterpreted and reimagined the canon, he added to it in ways that changed this music. Forever.

Rest easy, Mr. Jamal. And thank you for taking us with you on your journey.

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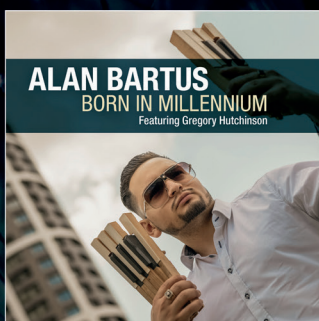
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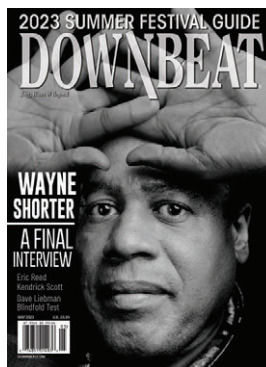


## Chords & Discords

### Love for Wayne

About 45 years ago I bought Weather Report's *Black Market* on a whim. Although I was a self-described know-it-all jazz-rock-fusion snob, I had never heard, or heard of, Weather Report or Wayne Shorter.

I will never forget the moment I sat down on the floor of my bedroom as the needle dropped and I was teleported to another land, another time, in another dimension. The dense, complex rhythms with bass, drums, percussion and electric piano darting in and out of each other created an intoxicating groove unlike anything I'd ever experienced. At around 2:20, the skies opened up and Wayne's tenor sax came beaming down to Earth. I was stunned, overwhelmingly so, and for a while paralyzed until I burst out laughing — laughter that eventually led to crying out of sheer joy. I can remember it like it was yesterday.



The next day I walked out of a Berkeley record store with *Speak No Evil* under my arm, and the obsession of all things Wayne, and jazz in general, was born. I went off on many musical tangents over the years, but Wayne always reigned supreme for me. He was the greatest, the master, the sage, the seer, the teacher, the prophet, the benevolent alien from another galaxy who almost single-handedly dragged me kicking and

screaming from fusion into jazz.

I saw him live more than any other musical artist: Weather Report, Santana, Herbie Hancock Duo, VSOP, one very memorable tribute concert and various Wayne Shorter Quartets and Quintets.

I miss him so much. The planet will never be the same without him. Thank you.

GORDON WEBB  
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

### In Praise of Reviews

I have been a subscriber to DownBeat for over 25 years. I have seen several letters recently that are critical of what I consider foundational elements of DownBeat. In particular, letters advocating for elimination of album reviews, or certain reviewers, and most recently a letter suggesting abolishing the annual polls. These are some of my favorite aspects of the magazine and what has kept me coming back for over two decades. My wife and I have purchased countless recordings based on reviews we have read in DownBeat. I'm certain many readers have had similar experiences. To my jazz friends who are critical of these elements of the magazine, I would remind you, DownBeat has existed for 89 years, longer than most of us have been alive. I think they must be doing something right. I encourage all readers, absorb and enjoy everything that is DownBeat.

TODD BOLTON  
SMITHSBURG, MARYLAND

a very important forum in providing several Black jazz writers with their earliest bylines.

Peace.

WILLARD JENKINS  
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I love your magazine, and I am looking for 1950s and '60s issues. Are these available somewhere for download?

BENOIT ST. JAMES  
VIA EMAIL

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### Corrections & Clarifications

DownBeat regrets the following errors/omissions:

- In the May issue, reedist Jim Geddes' name was misspelled on second reference.
- In the May Issue, DownBeat printed the wrong dates and location for the Healdsburg Jazz Festival. It will be held June 1–25 in Healdsburg, California. ([healdsburgjazz.org](http://healdsburgjazz.org))
- In the April issue, DownBeat misidentified the instruments played by Kit Downes and Sebastian Rochford on second reference in a 5-star review of the ECM album *Drifting*. Downes is a pianist, and Rochford, a drummer.

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The London Brew Team, from left, Shabaka Hutchings, Tom Herbert, Nikolaj Torp Larsen, Nubya Garcia, Dave Okumu, Raven Bush, Dan See, Martin Terefe, Tom Skinner, Benji B, Nick Ramm, Dillip Harris, Luke Pickering and Theon Cross.

## An homage to *Bitches Brew* — London style

In 2020, the pandemic scuppered plans for a concert at London's Barbican, which would have paid homage to 50 years of Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*. Not ones to let it slide, though, the musicians — many who are stalwarts of London's young and progressive scene — paid tribute in the studio instead.

Nubya Garcia, Shabaka Hutchings and Theon Cross are among the musicians making up the 12-piece super group London Brew. The impressive lineup also includes Benji B (decks, sonic recycling), Raven Bush (violin, electronics), Tom Herbert (electric bass, upright bass), Nikolaj Torp Larsen (synthesizers, melodica), Dave Okumu (guitar), Nick Ramm (piano, synthesizers), Dan See (drums, percussion), Tom Skinner (drums, percussion) and Martin Terefe (guitar, production).

London Brew's self-titled album is no cover project; it contains eight original tracks that have been inspired by Davis' seminal offering. Like its muse, *London Brew* was recorded over three days, with an appetite for experimentation.

Executive producer Bruce Lampcov is mostly known for his impact in the pop and

rock world, having worked with the likes of Dire Straits, Bryan Ferry and The Stranglers, but a business deal gifted him with a creative spark for this new jazz project.

"I signed a publishing administration deal with the estate of Miles Davis in 2019. One of the things I really wanted to do was help find a wider audience — especially a younger audience — for Miles' music," explains Lampcov from his L.A. home studio. "It just happened to be that it was the 50th anniversary of *Bitches Brew* coming up the next year, and I came up with the idea of a concert — a sort of tribute.

"I frequently travel to London, and some friends introduced me to the jazz scene. I went to a [Joe Armon-Jones] gig at Electric Brixton — which is like a theater-size venue, not typically where you see jazz music. There was a reggae sound machine, with bass pumping out, a DJ, and these jazz musicians that were playing on top of it. I also saw Garcia play that evening. The crowd was remarkably all of high school and college age, everyone pushing to the front. It was just like a rock gig. ... It was amazing — I'd never seen anything quite like it. And I thought, 'Well, this is perfect. This is

exactly what I'm looking for.'"

Producer Terefe is also critically acclaimed in the pop and rock worlds for his writing collaborations and productions with the likes of Jason Mraz, Coldplay and Mary J Blidge.

"Like most things in life, I became involved in *London Brew* a little bit by chance," says Terefe, speaking from his own Kensaltown Studios. "Bruce approached me about the live part of it. He asked if I was interested in recording the rehearsals for what would have been the live show and potentially put together some kind of record. I was super intrigued. I'm a lifelong Miles fan, and so I never even considered not doing it. When the live part fell away — the original event — I guess I was quietly trying to make the recording happen anyway."

And record they did, at Paul Epworth's Church Studios in North London — a 170-year-old sacred space that inspired the name of the leading single, "Miles Chases New Voodoo In The Church." The beat hits hard with punch and groove, while the woodwinds flare like a tornado of expression. Throughout the record's energetic displays and mellow

meditations, the pent-up energy of 12 musicians — who have been restricted from entering their natural habitats of studios and stages — is almost tangible.

The leading single has a certain spirit in common with “Miles Runs The Voodoo Down,” but London Brew’s offering should be listened to within its own merits and without comparison. As Terefe explains, elaborating on the production process: “There’s no direct correlation [between the albums]. It was kind of a three-day conversation, and then it

was about listening through a lot of source material.

“I wanted to create a movement forward and not kind of piece stuff together, so I started at a certain point and kept mixing until I lost interest in the melodic lines and the things I was following. When we chose titles, there were a few that definitely nodded to *Bitches Brew*, like “Raven Flies Low,” for instance. The violin player of the project, Raven Bush — his playing was remarkable. He was using a bunch of different pedals. ... We heard

strange sounds coming out of nowhere that we couldn’t really place to any one position — that was Raven. That made me think of John McLaughlin’s role on Miles’ record.”

Paying homage to such a classic record takes a bit of courage and suitable encouragement was delivered by Davis’ family. In the album’s liner notes, Lampcov explains that Davis’ son, Erin, and nephew, Vince, opened proceedings via a huge screen that had been set up in the church especially for the recordings. “No fear. Those were the words they wanted to pass on from Miles,” wrote Lampcov.

Like Davis’ forebears, Lampcov was also engaged with the recording sessions from a distance. While London-based Terefe was in the studio, Lampcov was watching from 5,000 miles away.

“I was really just kind of an observer, if you will, during the sessions,” he says, reflecting on watching from L.A. “But it was pretty amazing. I mean, the logistics of putting it together was so difficult because we were locked down whilst we were arranging the whole thing. We didn’t know if we were going to even be able to pull the thing off. I had to get people arranged for COVID testing. And, you know, no one was taking the [London Underground], so we had taxis pick everyone up, and we had to have a skeleton crew of engineers because we could only have so many people in the church together.”

On the album, saxophonists Garcia and Hutchings dig into various woodwinds, something that both musicians say they are increasingly exploring. The creative sound of Benji B, a prominent DJ and broadcaster in the U.K., serves an unusual role for a jazz record. Using a pair of DJ decks, he gathered a catalog of sounds — recorded by the artists — and fed them through the musicians’ headphones.

Listeners and music journalists alike tend to agree that *Bitches Brew* is properly heralded as being a great influence to the development of hip-hop, given its innovation with looping and sample techniques.

Lampcov agrees. “*Bitches Brew* not only brought together different genres of music, but pretty much created a whole new genre of music,” he says, noting that he feels a similar sense of newness about the London jazz scene, and London Brew’s ability to create something that transcends genre. With that confidence, he dove into producing *London Brew* without hesitation.

“Overall, *London Brew* isn’t like a typical record that Martin or I’ve ever done before, in any way whatsoever,” Lampcov reflects. “I’ve engineered many jazz records, but I’ve never produced a jazz record before — not like this. [The London jazz scene] incorporates so many influences. And jazz is about that, really. It’s about influences ... the love of music, and having a great time.”  
—Tina Edwards

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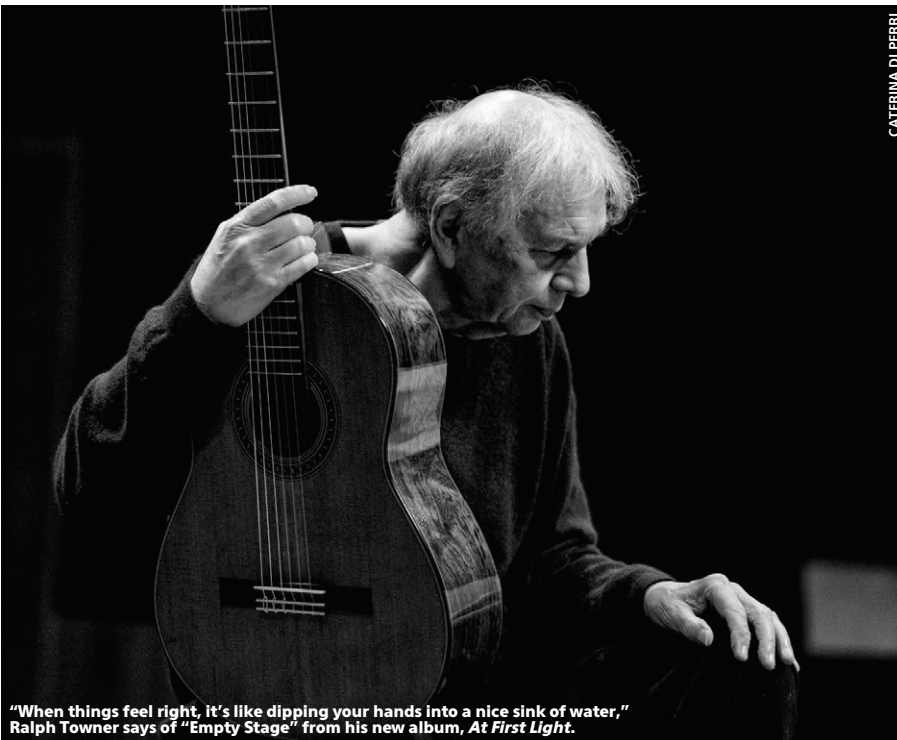
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"When things feel right, it's like dipping your hands into a nice sink of water," Ralph Towner says of "Empty Stage" from his new album, *At First Light*.

# Ralph Towner Achieves a Milestone

**AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF LIVING AS**

an expatriate in Italy, the amiable Ralph Towner is sitting comfortably at his spacious home that he shares with his longtime wife — theatrical and film actor Mariella Lo Sardi — in Rome's Via Giovanni De Calvi neighborhood. He's in his studio apartment-sized workroom, with his two acoustic classical guitars on stands near a piano and electric keyboards.

In a gray sweater and blue jeans, Towner, who just turned 83, takes great pleasure in reminiscing about his mid-1940s childhood as a musical prodigy and then jumping ahead to his new album, *At First Light*, a brilliant classical guitar solo affair.

"I like having conversations in English," Towner says warmly. "I miss the language living here. My Italian is terrible. I guess it's serviceable, but the grammar is difficult. You can easily say the wrong vowel and you end up calling somebody something wrong."

He laughs heartily and says, "But I do know how to tell a musical story on my guitar that will transport you."

Towner's 25th album as a leader (not counting the sizable catalog of the exploratory acoustic fusion band Oregon that he co-founded with Glen Moore in 1970) is an evocative outing that marks his 50th year recording for his ECM Records home base. It also stands as his seventh solo album that journeys into his vast palette of orchestral tonal colors and a rich harmonic sensibility.

On the 11-song program of *At First Light*,

Towner elevates on improvised originals like the thematic opening tune, "Flow," and covers like "Danny Boy" where he honors the legacy of Irish folk music. "It's one of the most beautiful songs in the world," he says.

Even though Towner continues to "mess around with my guitars" to create new voyages into what one observer describes as a "tiny universe unto itself," he senses that *At First Light* could very well be a milestone of his career. He writes in the album's liner notes: "The blend of keyboard and guitar technique is an important aspect of my playing and composition, and I feel that this album ... is a good example of shaping this expanse of influence into my personal music."

What's the essence of "Flow" that opens the show?

"That's been my entire life," says Towner, who was born in 1940 as the fifth of five children into a musical family in the small rain-soaked lumber town of Chehalis, Washington. "The flow has had its own direction, and it's held together. That's the hope of this whole life of music that I've had from birth."

Towner says he soon developed a good ear for improvising music. His mother — who lost her husband, her father and her oldest son in World War II combat in a span of just two-and-a-half years — moved him and one of his sisters to the 9,000-population town of Bend in central Oregon.

"This was jewel of a town that had two elementary school music departments with a sym-

phony, a concert band and a chorus," he says. "One day while we were performing a piece of music in class, I started improvising on this little plastic whistle. I wasn't playing parallel. I was doing the moving voices. I had an ear for it. I knew how it worked." Instead of getting into trouble, Towner was recognized as a special player who was allowed to improvise counter melodies at age 8 during concerts where he played trumpet and baritone euphonium.

This led Towner to eventually study the piano in a classical setting at the University of Oregon, where he got his diploma in music composition. It was a chance encounter with a psychology student practicing classical guitar that made the difference. "It just struck me," Towner says. "I was 20, 21 and I thought, 'I've got to get one and try to learn it by myself.' It was a difficult instrument, and I realized I had to drop everything and study this with a master." He asked a professor at UO if he knew anyone who could fit this bill. Bingo: Karl Scheit at the Vienna Academy of Music.

Towner studied there for two years, returned to Oregon and then to sharpen his chops, went back for more Scheit guitar studies. He dropped into New York in 1968 for a spell, playing small bars and jam sessions, meeting likeminded guitarists like John Abercrombie and John Scofield. He was a session support player for Freddie Hubbard and even hung with Wayne Shorter for a stretch that resulted in him playing on Weather Report's tune "The Moors" on its 1972 recording *I Sing The Body Electric*.

It was in this vibrant setting that, through an introduction by ECM artist Dave Holland, Towner met Manfred Eicher, who was in the early stage of launching his aesthetically advanced label. He asked Towner to come to Munich, and in two days they recorded his first album, *Diary*, played on 12-string guitar and piano in a nod to his musical hero Bill Evans. Fifty years later, Towner and Eicher are still working together.

As for what he was going to record for the new album, Towner says he had some time to think that through, even if it was a strange process. "I've been exposed to the incredible world of music from day one," he says. "I slowly collected songs like rolling around in a pile of leaves in wet clothes. Everything is sticking to you slowly. It's amazing how much music a person is exposed to and how it alters your life."

Returning to "Flow," Towner says, "It's a collective piece where everything flows into it so that it doesn't sound like I'm struggling with the instrument."

Towner ends his journey with "Empty Stage," another improvisation based on a classical duet he wrote. "This to me is being immersed in my instrument to the place where I get lost in it," he says. "It's a thing of beauty. When things feel right, it's like dipping your hands into a nice sink of water. ... It's the wonderful world that I was brought into from birth." —Dan Ouellette

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"This music can't be 100% taught. It should be rubbed on you, you should experience it," says pianist Omer Klein, center, with Haggaï Cohen-Milo, left, and Amir Bresler.

# Omer Klein Celebrates a Decade of Trio Music

**IT WAS 10 YEARS AGO THAT ISRAELI-BORN** pianist Omer Klein began exploring his intimate, conversational chemistry with bassist Haggaï Cohen-Milo and drummer Amir Bresler.

"Haggaï and I go way back and have been playing together for 20 years now in different formations," said Klein, who now lives in Frankfurt, Germany. "We first came together as a trio after having played with Amir for a concert in Paris in October 2013, and I instantly felt we were a right fit. Amir is a perfect combination of 'grounded' and 'flying,' which is exactly how Haggaï and I are trying to play as well. The chemistry developed naturally over time, with lots of touring and recording, and with us trusting each other more and more, leaving each other more and more space."

On *Life & Fire*, their fourth Warner Music release together, the three kindred spirits engage in that highly interactive chemistry through nine engaging tracks. From the crystalline purity of the darkly beautiful and introspective opener, "The Ravens," to the urgently swinging and quirky "Song #2" (with its allusions to Thelonious Monk's "Evidence") to the intricate, hypnotic romp "3/4 Mantra," fueled by Bresler's precisely percussive playing on the kit, this trio reflects a joyous loose-tight chemistry that is palpable. And the leader revels in melody throughout.

"Writing strong melodies is key for me," said Klein. "Perhaps not every tune is arranged in such a way that the melody is heard loud and clear from the beginning, but for the album opener it's

usually important for me to start right off with a strong melody. It's like the beginning of a narrative that has to grab you."

And while Klein may have been influenced by such iconic role models as Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett, he's proudly forging his own path with this trio. "Naturally, I study everyone who's great, but I don't want to play like them. In each of my tracks there is probably some influence that you could easily discern, and an array of others that you might miss. Mr. Jarrett is certainly a model for lyrical expression and richness of sound. But, for example, "The Ravens" is written in a slow 11/8 meter, which I don't think any of my heroes ever used. And that has an influence on the development of the lines that I play on that song."

Another piano hero is Thelonious Monk, which Klein hints at on "Song #2." "I wouldn't be exaggerating if I called Mr. Monk a musical god," he said. "The logic, the precision, the swing, the huge spirit, the amazing specificity ... it's all there. And, yes, 'Song #2' might well have been born after a Monk appreciation session. It uses, however, a scale that he would never use, I think, in the construction of the melody. I know it from the French composer Olivier Messiaen."

While the fast 11/8 workout "Niggun" may be a nod to Jewish folk music, the secularly raised Klein said, "To be honest, I'm no expert on traditional Jewish music. When this tune came to me, it sounded to me like a kind of subconscious inheritance from my ancestors, like a tune I wasn't even

supposed to be able to write but it was written nevertheless. So I gave it this title to signify the origin. Later on I learned all kinds of beautiful meanings for the word Niggun. One of my favorites is 'the release of energy through interpretation.'"

He added, "I certainly feel I'm spiritual. I think it goes hand in hand with music. But as for established religion, that's not my thing."

The poignant ballad "Tzuri" is a loving dedication to the pianist's grandfather, Tzuri Dvash, who was born and raised in Tripoli, Libya. Klein described him as "very deep, very soulful, but in an unpretentious way ... sunny, smiling, funny, never showed me anything other than unconditional love. Paying homage is important."

"One Step At A Time" is another delicate number that reveals Klein's gift for melody. "I called it 'One Step At A Time' because that's how the melody and harmonic progression go, very patiently, step by step, from a 'down' place towards an eventually empowered place. So I felt the tune was a metaphor for getting over an obstacle, and I definitely felt better after writing it."

"Malchut" has Klein and his crew conversing in a very Bill Evans Trio-esque manner. "The decision we made right before playing this take was a structural one: Instead of stating the melody and then starting to improvise, we'll just skip the melody and get into it from bar 1. That gives the performance, I think, a fresh, conversational vibe — we are finding the notes together and you can hear us listening and acting."

Klein began his journey into music as a teenager, discovering and gradually immersing himself in the sounds from the United States and Brazil while also studying the great European classical composers. He later attended the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with pianists and mentors Danilo Pérez and Ran Blake. "Mr. Pérez was very important because, like me, he also grew up outside the U.S. and the local music of his country is very important to him," he recalled. "He encouraged me greatly to open my ears and learn, while maintaining the strong identity I brought from home. Of course, his stories about the experience of playing in Wayne Shorter's quartet were also invaluable to me. I learned a lot about freedom, daring and mystery from him."

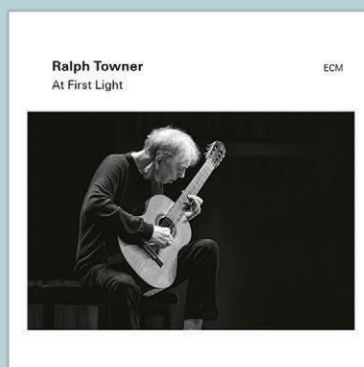
Another important mentor during his years in New York City, from 2005 to 2009, was pianist Fred Hersch. "When I was living in New York, I was playing quite a lot as a leader of my own trios at places like the Blue Note, Smalls, The Jazz Gallery and elsewhere. I took about five lessons with Mr. Hersch at the time and they proved to be extremely helpful. He helped me play the whole range of the piano, use a richer sound, be more meticulous about my voicings, and use polyphony. It was also invaluable to just stand by the piano and watch him play. This music can't be 100% taught. It should be rubbed on you, you should experience it."

—Bill Milkowski

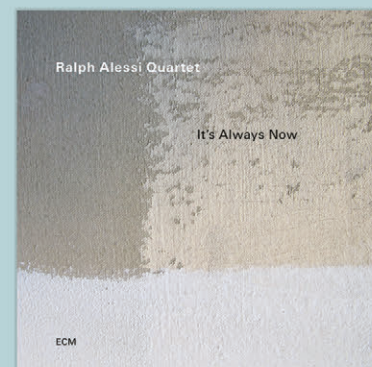
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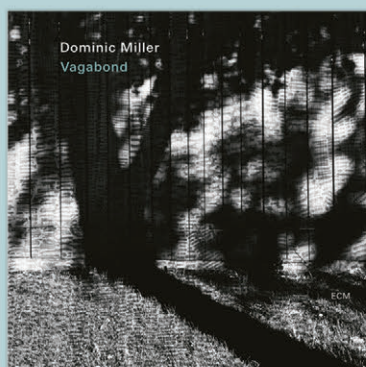
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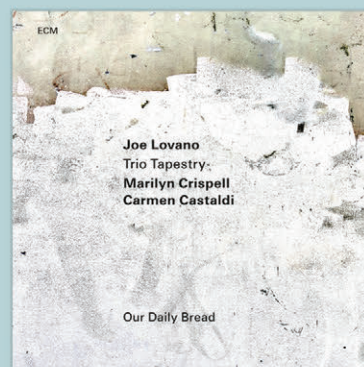
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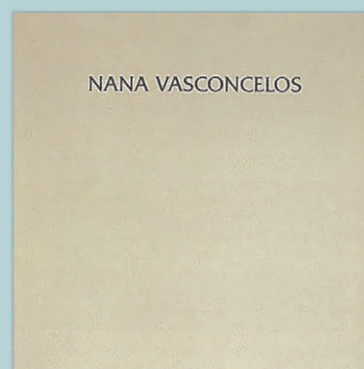
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"I don't think I've ever done a record that is the same as the last one," says Rachel Eckroth, an eclectic keyboardist for eclectic times.

# Rachel Eckroth Explores Her Jazz Predilections

**WHEN ARIZONA NATIVE RACHEL ECKROTH**

spoke with DownBeat in March, she was in Denmark, wrapping up a JazzDanmark-sponsored residency. The pianist/singer was also finalizing *Hues*, a new EP with guitarist Anna Roemer and songwriter Hannah Schnieder, two Danish musicians with eclectic careers that mirror Eckroth's own. In between gigs and an upcoming European tour to promote her Grammy-nominated album *The Garden* (Rainy Day Records), which serves as a foray into synthesized modern jazz, Eckroth launched another, wholly different release: *One*, via her own Blackbird Sessions label. This arresting collection of solo pieces for acoustic piano — entirely improvised — reveals the powerful musical mind that feeds all of her ensemble projects.

Eckroth hasn't received as much attention for her abilities as a jazz improviser compared to her other musical ventures. She's been widely acclaimed for her highly visible role as keyboardist for *The Meredith Vieira Show* and her side work for indie pop-rock stars like St. Vincent, Rufus Wainwright and KT Tunstall. She's also carved a niche for herself in the alternative singer/songwriter universe, with multiple albums as a leader and even more as a co-creator. The multifaceted musician even has a signature electric piano by Vintage Vibe.

"I like doing these other kinds of gigs — they feed my need to try all the things and my curiosity about other kinds of music," Eckroth explained.

"I'm also a gearhead, too, so I love getting into the pedals and creating my own sounds."

Despite the career demands, Eckroth has found opportunities to explore her jazz predilections. She often collaborated with celebrated players like bassist (and husband) Tim Lefebvre, trumpeter Chris Botti, saxophonist Donny McCaslin and guitarist Nir Felder. But not as the spotlight artist.

"I've been playing piano since I was 6," Eckroth said. "And in my adult career — being a sideman mostly — I really haven't done a lot of things where I'm featured on piano. Weirdly, because it's my first instrument, and it's my best instrument. And I have a master's degree from Rutgers, where I studied with [jazz pianist] Stanley Cowell. So, it's a big part of me, but I just haven't showcased it. And, in a way, I might call myself a composer over everything — over singing, over playing. Being able to compose on the spot — it's what I love."

Eckroth's affinity for spontaneous composition informs each moment of *One*, from the opener, "Don't Go," with its moody interiority, to "Three Wheels," a study in fleeting dissonance, to the closing track, "Light Sleeper," a lullaby that flirts with the harmonic complexity of modern jazz. These short works, representative of the 10 originals in the collection, are oriented toward beauty rather than technical finesse — only because, in Eckroth's case, such finesse is a given, merely the device that gives her creative visions life.

This focus on artistry is most apparent on

Eckroth's originals. She brings this same focus to her improvisational understanding of two standards: "Prelude To A Kiss," a riveting extrapolation of Duke Ellington's luscious ballad, and "Neverend," a compelling descent into the heart of this Joshua Redman composition.

"When I do these piano improvisations, I'm thinking melodically simple things, but also rhythmically — of, maybe, off kinds of things," she said. "Sometimes there are little rhythmic parts that just come out of nowhere."

The rhythmic interjections speak to Eckroth's jazz inclination, even as her compositional stance leans toward a fresh, modern impressionism. But her approach wasn't about squeezing as many idioms as possible into a known musical mold.

"When I sit down at the piano, it's about where my fingers fall and how it feels texturally and emotionally," Eckroth said. "I think in pictures and shapes more than playing changes or something like that. So while improvising for solo piano, a lot of it will be just one sound, or some simple chord changes or no chord changes. I'm not necessarily going through jazz changes and trying to build a solo on a form."

This process stands in contrast with her necessarily more structured approach to songwriter material and previous jazz projects — even *Common Mutations* (Rainy Days), a fully improvised 2022 album with *The Garden*'s small ensemble, benefits from careful crafting and in group settings like these, Eckroth necessarily and readily merges with the other players. But on *One*, you can hear Eckroth's thoughts as they happen, exposed and unadulterated, in real time.

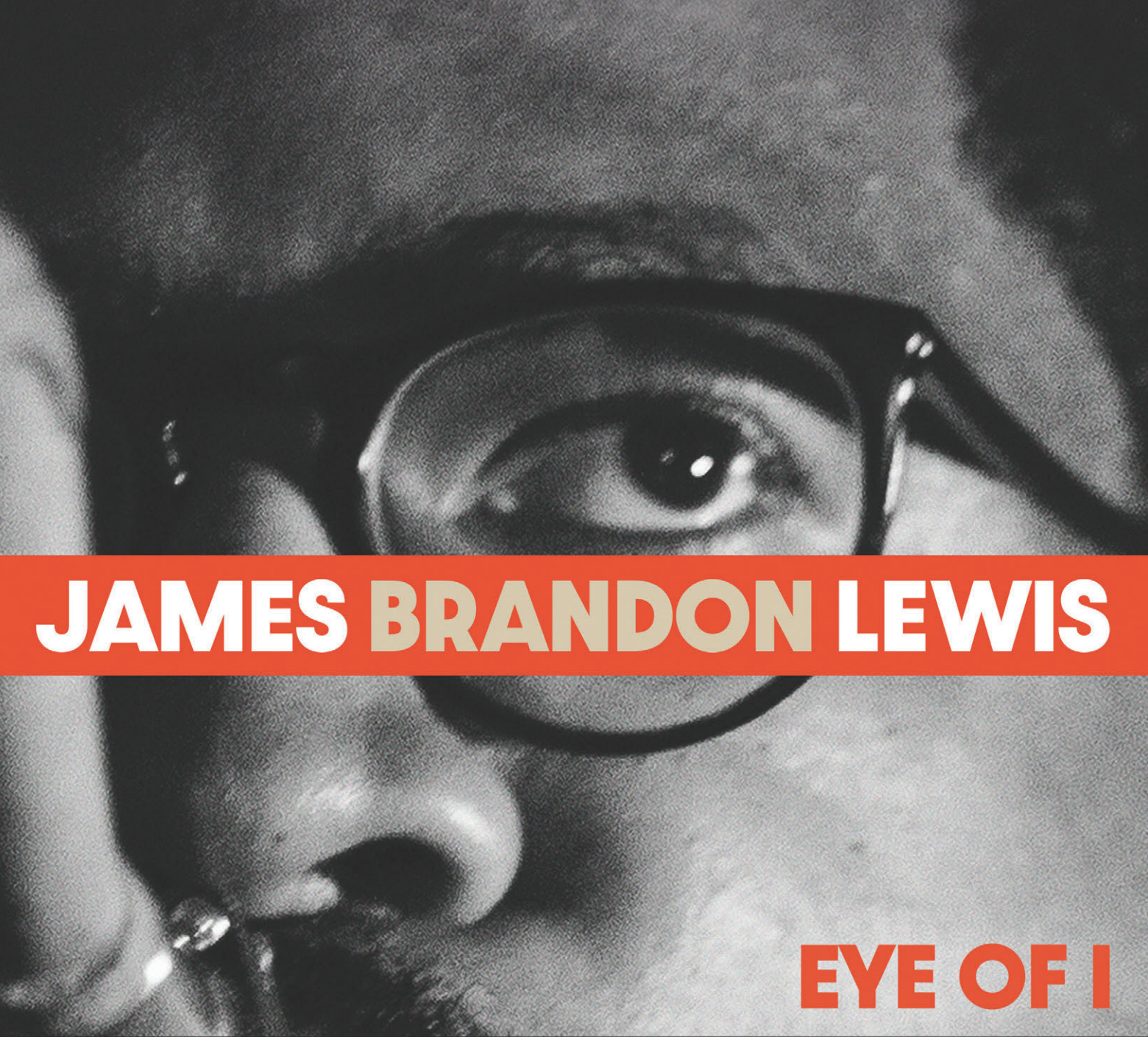
"I don't think I've ever done a record that is the same as the last one," Eckroth offered. "Personally, I'm looking for the freedom in the music. When I make songs and records and sounds, I want everything to feel good inside — it has to be pretty or happy or something. But even if it's a dark sound, I want it to hit me in a way that feels like love. I'm not trying to get too brainy — there must have been a point where I decided that music, for me, is just going to be emotional."

This summer, after some time spent touring with St. Vincent and bassist Mike Gordon, from the progressive rock band Phish, Eckroth again recalibrates toward jazz. She'll be teaching at the Brubeck Jazz Summit in Lake Tahoe before heading to Switzerland to instruct at the Langnau Jazz Nights Festival. Then she'll drop her second jazz album this year: *Humanoid*, recorded live at Sam First in Los Angeles (Sam Fist Records).

The record unveils a new sound, Eckroth says, with musicians who seem to share her penchant for pushing boundaries (guitarist Andrew Renfroe, drummer Tina Raymond and bassist Billy Mohler).

"It's probably the jazziest thing I've done in a long time," she said of the upbeat recording. "And some of my best piano playing."

—Suzanne Lorge



# JAMES BRANDON LEWIS

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# Wayne Escoffery's Circle of Like-Minded Souls

**WAYNE ESCOFFERY SITS COMFORTABLY IN** a soft chair in a hotel room in Denver. He is traveling once again with the Mingus Big Band, having played tenor saxophone with that ensemble for the past 23 years. "Just like everyone else, we've gotten through COVID," he muses, speaking to DownBeat via video about his bandmates and other musician friends. "So, we all feel revitalized, and I think there is an urgency in the air. ... We're kind of riding that wave, enjoying an abundance of work and performance opportunities." It is a return, of sorts, to life as they once knew it, but perhaps we can never truly be as we once were.

Escoffery is missing some key figures in his life. Sue Mingus, the wife of Charles Mingus and founder of the Mingus Big Band, passed away in 2022, a year after Escoffery's longtime friend and mentor, Ralph Peterson Jr., also departed this world. Those losses, during the extended time of isolation during the lockdown, prompted him to think about the things that mean the most: the other members of his band with whom he shares a kinship of thought and spirit, along with other friends who have guided the saxophonist through his formative years as an artist. Embracing those people is at the heart of his latest album, *Like Minds* (Smoke Sessions).

It was during the second wave of COVID in 2021 when Escoffery received an unusual and generous proposition: The author and Fulbright scholar Michael Sampson, whose daughter was taking saxophone lessons from Escoffery, offered his home while Sampson was studying abroad. Escoffery soon found himself away from the sequestered hives of New York and in a spacious,

sunlit abode on a road called Treasure Lane on the Gulf coast of Florida.

The change in scenery lent some new perspective. "Generally, I'm a very emotional person," he states, rather stoically, "and I definitely write when I'm inspired emotionally by events that are happening in my life, or [when] something impactful has happened to someone else that's affecting me. ... Being in Florida, being in that beautiful space, made me reevaluate what was important to me."

Peterson was important to Escoffery. They met shortly after the saxophonist moved to New York in 2001, and the elder statesman was always game to play whenever Escoffery called. "Even if it wasn't a high-paying [gig]," he remembers, "[Ralph] was happy to do it because he was nurtured and mentored by Art Blakey ... you almost feel obligated to pass on the music in that same way in that same tradition. That's an important part of this music, and Ralph embraced that as I do." Peterson's tune "Song Of Serenity" appears on *Like Minds* in tribute to the late drummer.

Seven months after her death, just days before this interview, Sue Mingus became an NEA Jazz Masters fellow, one of the highest honors any jazz artist can receive. "Sue was the matriarch of the Mingus tribe and in many ways like a second mother to myself and many of the Mingus Big Band members," Escoffery states. "She made sure that all the musicians that she chose [were] accountable for representing Mingus' music with authenticity and the highest level of artistic integrity."

2022 would have also been the year Charles Mingus turned 100. "The Mingus Big Band orga-

nization has been such an integral part of my life and my career that I couldn't make an album in the centennial year of Charles Mingus without including this composition," Escoffery adds. He is referring to "Nostalgia In Times Square," one of Mingus' best-known works, reharmonized and reimagined with a hip-hop beat, including a playful cameo from another old friend, trumpeter Tom Harrell. "The two main bands that I always wanted to be in were the Mingus Big Band and Tom Harrell's quintet, so I definitely feel blessed that I was able to do both of those things," he says.

Harrell also appears on the original composition "My Truth," a soliloquy into the duality of man — love/pain, life/death, war/peace, desire/sacrifice, even murder/justice. Those reflections came out of the images of the tortuous police killing of George Floyd, then a newly raw event Escoffery pondered in his gilded isolation on Treasure Lane. It brought to his mind another song, "Rivers Of Babylon," a Rastafari folk song he heard as a boy growing up in Jamaica. "The song kind of metaphorically tells the story of Black people living in an oppressive society," explains Escoffery. "You know, Jamaicans refer to police as 'Babylon.'"

"My Truth" and "Rivers" have lyrics sung powerfully into auralty by Gregory Porter, whom Escoffery knew well before the singer's ascent into jazz stardom, having met at the saxophonist's jam session at St. Nick's Pub in Harlem in the mid-2000s. Escoffery says, "I've always wanted to record with Gregory ... He has always been one of my favorites since the first time I heard him." Another artist Escoffery has known for a long time yet is recording with for the first time is guitarist Mike Moreno, whom he first met as a student and then in trumpeter Jeremy Pelt's band. Escoffery says of Moreno, "He's very like-minded in that he's studied the history of the music — [he] understands everything from swing music to bebop to what you might want to call the modern avant-garde."

Escoffery realizes that he has found such a thing as "like-mindedness" in his bandmates, pianist Dave Kikoski and bassist Ugonna Okegwo. They have known each other for 20 years, and played in Escoffery's band since they first came together with Peterson for a gig at Smalls seven years ago.

"The history of the music is very important to us, and making sure that we represent that history authentically is important to us, but it's also equally important that we push the envelope and try to explore new things and keep the music alive and moving forward," Escoffery says of his friends.

He also sees that quality in his new drummer, Mark Whitfield Jr., son of the well-known guitarist, and someone whom Peterson considered to be his best student. "Mark really took and ingested a lot of Ralph's teachings," he says. "When Ralph passed, it seemed quite fitting to have Mark Whitfield Jr. take the drum seat. ... It was a passing of the baton." —Gary Fukushima

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A close-up photograph of a brass saxophone, likely a tenor saxophone, is the central visual element. The instrument is positioned diagonally, with its bell pointing towards the upper right. The background is a dark, textured wall covered in various graffiti tags and street art. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic sheen of the saxophone's keys and body.

# JAMES BRANDON LEWIS IS THE STORYTELLER

By Ammar Kalia | Photos by Jimmy and Deana Katz

**"I'm constantly searching and pushing," New York-based saxophonist and composer James Brandon Lewis says. "I don't live my life by the moniker that there's nothing new under the sun — I'm not interested in that kind of sun. There's always more to be discovered."**

**T**his year, Lewis will turn 40, and that restless sense of creativity shows no sign of slowing. He just released *Eye Of I* (ANTI-), his 10th album since 2010's *Moments*, and has a forthcoming project celebrating the work of gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, *For Mahalia, With Love* (TAO Forms). He is completing a doctoral degree on his theory of "molecular systematic music" at University of the Arts in Philadelphia and is about to embark on a nationwide tour. Speaking over a video call, it's the punishingly early — or late — hour of 4 a.m., and Lewis is bright-eyed and beaming from his Brooklyn apartment, readying himself to catch a morning flight to San Diego for the tour.





"I've been in the trio format since 2014, and I love it," says Lewis of his new trio album, *Eye Of I*.

"I usually get up by 6 a.m., so this isn't a problem for me," he laughs from a darkened room. Thankfully, in London, where this writer is calling from, it has just turned 9 a.m. and the morning sun is streaming in. Notwithstanding the hour, Lewis is riding high, capping off the most successful two years of his career.

In 2021, as the COVID pandemic continued to fill lives with a lingering sense of danger and uncertainty, Lewis released *Jesup Wagon* (TAO Forms). Across its seven tracks, Lewis' horn is incantatory in its clear melodic phrases, guiding his Red Lily Quintet through meandering passages of cornet and cello or punctuating assertions of drums and upright bass. Other instrumentation includes the guembri, a Moroccan bass lute, and the mbira, a Zimbabwean thumb piano, each adding an earthy groundedness to his compositions dedicated to Dr. George Washington

Carver, a son of slaves and a polymath who developed innovative farming techniques in the early 20th Century.

Artfully interweaving this historical frame with his declarative melodies, *Jesup Wagon* — named after the vehicle Carver used to travel the American South to teach rural communities sustainable practices — found widespread critical acclaim for its cinematic themes and enveloping consistency.

Lewis went on to win the DownBeat Critics Poll Rising Star Award for tenor saxophone, while the Red Lily Quintet also topped the Rising Group category. Meanwhile, *Jesup Wagon* was voted the critics' choice for Album of the Year.

"With every album I make, there is a sense of storytelling and a sense of reclaiming my musical identity," Lewis says. "*Jesup Wagon* was me peeling back the layers of my onion

— I was thinking about my upbringing, the sermonic melodies of the church and how Carver himself was always on the fringes."

Lewis references his childhood summers spent at the Buffalo Science Museum, hearing jazz concerts while his mother, who worked as a science and social studies teacher, would be developing curricula for her students in the building. "She introduced me to Carver, and when it came to thinking about ideas for an album, I was drawn to investigating him further and the intersections of those influences of music and science," Lewis says. "Carver used to say that he spoke to the plants to come up with his knowledge — he wasn't afraid of those types of creative answers, even though he knew the academic protocol, he pressed up against it. That's the model I use."

Subverting protocol is certainly a driving force for Lewis' wide-ranging artistry. In his blues, for instance, he is untethered from rigid metronomic structures to let his changes ring free, while countermelody consistently shadows his clear-sighted tones. For *Eye Of I*, Lewis was similarly unpredictable. Rather than replicate a formula for the success of *Jesup Wagon* by investigating another inspirational historical figure to write about, for instance, he instead went back to the basics, leading a trio with Chris Hoffman on electric cello and Max Jaffe on drums.

"I went inwards with *Eye Of I*, since it is a record about spirituality and one that searches for the answers in us," he says. "I've been in the trio format since 2014, and I love it. It challenges me since there's nothing really to hold on to with so few players. I have to have a harmonic sense that's free, free to go right out to the fringes."

Composed as live performances began to reemerge in the wake of the pandemic, *Eye Of I* harnesses the raucous energy and intuitive confidence of the stage while searching for answers to the existential changes wrought by global COVID shutdowns.

"The record is part introspection and part chasing the energy — I have tracks like 'Send Seraphic Beings,' which is asking for help from above, and then 'Within You Are Answers,' which comes with such a sense of certainty," Lewis says. "There's everything from soul to free improvisation and punk rock being drawn upon."

Indeed, *Eye Of I* trades on a genre-hopping sense of vitality, playfully luxuriating in the wide-open tones of Donny Hathaway's 1973 song "Someday We'll All Be Free," which Lewis describes as being "drenched in emotion," as well as tentatively ascending to a soulful melodic monologue on "Within You Are Answers," or delving into a distorted cacophony on the title track. It draws on the tapestry of Lewis' varied career as a band-

leader and sideman, working with the likes of Marc Ribot's raw and confronting Ceramic Dog, experimental guitarist Anthony Pirog and Wilco's Nels Cline. "I'm making music without the movie and building a men-

pensity for hard-blowing freakouts, *Eye Of I* is also a record surprisingly filled with space and tenderness. On tracks like "The Blues Still Blossoms" and "Womb Water," Lewis' tenor is plaintive and yearning, breathing through

purpose," he says. "The piano lets me reach a level of simplicity that forces me to be musical in a lyrical rather than technical sense."

Simplicity also stems from immense confidence and a willingness to sing out unadorned and exposed. "As I've gotten older, the challenge for me with the saxophone is moving past all of the buttons to press," Lewis says with a laugh. "Now, I want to make small and powerful statements, just like the nuggets of wisdom my grandmother used to instill in me when I was a kid. I've spent a long time being trained and honing my technicalities, to the point where my musical sensibilities are a trained intuition. It's a practice in knowing when to play and what to play. Sometimes I'm not thinking about anything other than blowing the paint off the walls, and other times, I'm narrating a story about my life."

Growing up in Buffalo with his educator mother and pastor father, Lewis began learning the clarinet at age 9. "The few professions that I wanted to be as a kid were scientist or inventor, musician and basketball player," Lewis says with a smile. "I was fascinated with music, and in the public school I went to, you had to be 9 years old to learn an instrument. As soon as I turned 9, my mum asked me if I wanted to learn one because she noticed I was always singing the music from

# 'Really, it's an act of vulnerability since playing a show is being in the moment forever.'

— *Lewis on performing live*

tal image," Lewis says of his compositional process. "There's a sense of drama, a sense of hope. I'm trying to pull on every available aspect of the emotional spectrum. I like the idea of building something up in the listener."

Amid the instrumental tension and pro-

the gaps in rhythm and harmony as if pleading with the listener to heed its emotive message. Part of the impetus for this melodic clarity comes from Lewis composing on the piano, he explains. "Writing from an instrument that isn't my own makes me operate in a deficit on

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the movies I watched." Growing up on a diet of Disney classics such as *Aladdin* and *The Little Mermaid*, Lewis began shaping his ear for memorable melodies and soon learned how to apply them to his instrument. "I've always had this strong, melodic sense, and I was fascinated by the investigation of it," he says. "It's about finding your voice and what it is you want to say."

That investigation continued at Howard University and then CalArts, where Lewis focused on saxophone and composition while being taught by memorable mentors including bassist Charlie Haden and trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith.

"Charlie always made the melody mean something when he played, and that has really shaped how I approach composition now, too," Lewis says. "He also used to talk about being a quality human, as well as an accomplished musician, and that's something I'm always trying to work towards. Wadada would, meanwhile, study so many genres in class, always searching for 'the moment' that made each composition unique. He really opened my ears."

It is ultimately on the shoulders of the educators and undersung heroes of the contemporary jazz scene like Henry Threadgill that Lewis believes his achievements have garnered their recent success.

"None of us make it on our own, and I've had strong people in my life who always encouraged me, no matter what," he says. "If people acknowledge you, cool, if they don't acknowledge you, cool. The work continues, since this is a life's endeavor. While awards and accolades are great — the horn doesn't remember them; it meets me all the same. I'm just trying to play music at the highest level that's within me to reach."

Still, there is one accolade that stands out as particularly special. "Unbeknownst to a lot of people, Sonny Rollins has been digging my playing since he heard me in 2014," Lewis says. "He has always supported me over the years, and it's really humbling. I'm just James — it's crazy that he knows my work!"

Most recently, Rollins gave this effusive quote when it came to Lewis' playing: "When I listen to you, I listen to Buddha, I listen to Confucius ... I listen to the deeper meaning

of life. You are keeping the world in balance."

It is momentous praise from the saxophone colossus, indeed, and a support that you sense keeps Lewis striving for new heights. Most notably, he has spent the best part of the last decade working out his own "artistic DNA" through a doctoral program studying what he calls molecular systematic music. "It all started when I was studying my improvisations and, in my mind's eye, I began to see two notes oscillating back and forth, like a spiral. That led me to be curious and to formulate my own harmonic and melodic formulas that you can hear in my playing," he says. "The best way to know one thing is in the context of another, as Leonard Bernstein said, so molecular systematic music became a metaphoric system that sees how the idea of molecular biology can repack or reimagine music."

Not only is it an academic pursuit, but Lewis' work in the interstices of biology and improvisation are also the subject of a quartet who play these new melodic formulas, freed from conventional chord structures and changes. It is all expression that Lewis sees continuing in the lineage of great impro-

visers, such as Rollins himself. “So many of the greats have answered questions that we can explore further,” Lewis says. “What Ornette Coleman did with the melodic line is what Jackson Pollock did with widening and expanding the canvas. It’s all about expanding our palette or expanding our surface to allow the melodic line to travel. I’m engaging in that exploration.”

There is a molecular systematic music album already prepared for release, Lewis says, while a more immediate project nearing the horizon is his tribute to 20th Century gospel pioneer Mahalia Jackson, *For Mahalia, With Love*. Reuniting with the Red Lily Quintet from *Jesup Wagon*, Lewis’ nine-song tribute is perhaps the clearest expression of his monologuing melodic fascinations.

Through the reinterpretation of Jackson’s longing entreaties on standards like “Go Down Moses” and “Deep River,” Lewis’ expansive tenor tone performs the perfect ventriloquism of her mighty voice. Although decades separate them, on the clarion-call solo opening of “Swing Low,” as Lewis riffs on a quickening, looped phrase, it is as if their breaths are one — both vocalizing their commitment to a higher spirit.

“The thread that holds most of my albums together is my relationship to spirituality and to God,” Lewis says. “This record stemmed from a conversation I was having with my grandmother, who told me that she had heard Mahalia Jackson sing when she was a kid in Buffalo. It ignited my fascination, and I started thinking about how I heard Mahalia’s approach to ad libs even in my grandmother’s singing in church.”

With the grant from a MacDowell Fellowship that Lewis was awarded in 2022, he spent five weeks researching Jackson’s life and immersing himself in her world. “I want at least one segment of my being and playing to focus on my cultural background, and gospel music has played an integral part for me,” he says. “It’s like the artist Jack Whitten’s Black Monolith series where he’s memorializing historical figures in jazz in his own medium. I’m doing the same with Mahalia but also my grandmothers and my mom. That kind of work deserves love and attention.”

As his 40th year approaches, Lewis is putting himself further into the frame of his own work, whether it be through his theories of biology and intuitive music-making, or his tribute to his female forebears.

“The more I began to dig around in my own head and my own way of being, the better the music became,” Lewis says. “I had to decide that I was going to begin to shape and tell my own stories, because it’s my path. No one else can draw on that but me. The music and the level of personal investigation is all

one thing now. It’s all flowing.”

For now, Lewis’ flight is fast approaching and he has a different flow-state to get to, onstage. Does he enjoy performance as much as his prolific recording career?

“Performance is a playful exchange for me. It’s a way to extend the conversation of the album,” he says. “Really, it’s an act of vulnerability since playing a show is being in the moment forever. It’s intimate, which means that it can be good and it can be critical. All of those feelings are what you sign up for when you say you want to be a musician.”

It sounds like a challenging state to live in, but Lewis sees it all as part of his eternal quest for creative self-expression.

“One of my biggest fears is becoming complacent — I don’t want to be stagnant,” he says, while packing up his bag. “The thing that drives me when I’m playing my sax is the idea that there’s more to be discovered, so I’ll never shy away from my curiosity.”

Thankfully, the results of that exploration are available to hear in Lewis’ expressive playing. They are musical messages bound to ignite vital inspiration in countless others. **DB**

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# RICKIE LEE JONES

## OF INTIMACY AND AMERICAN STANDARDS

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BY CREE MCCREE PHOTO BY ASTOR MORGAN

**Rickie Lee Jones has a credo that she's lived by all her life: shouting her name out while zigzagging through musical genres and penning a series of idiosyncratic albums that defy categorization.**

**“E**verything you do is an extension of every moment you’ve lived up to then,” she says. “So, own it. You’re only here for a little while, so shout your name out everywhere you go.”

The self-titled *Rickie Lee Jones* (Warner), her 1979 debut, launched the Time magazine-proclaimed “Duchess of Coolsville” from complete obscurity to raspberry beret ubiquity with her hit single “Chuck E.’s In Love.” She was awarded the Grammy Award for Best New Artist and scaled the pop-culture pinnacles of Rolling Stone and *SNL* in less than a year. *Pirates* (Warner), her 1981 follow-up, was also a critical and commercial success. Both were produced by Russ Titelman (who has also produced the likes of Randy Newman, George Harrison, Eric Clapton and more), who has now circled back four decades later to produce *Pieces Of Treasure* (BMG Modern), a collection of American songbook standards that’s one of Jones’ most personal, intimate albums to date.

Meeting to discuss *Pieces Of Treasure*, Jones continued a conversation that’s been going on for several years — ever since she became a fellow New Orleanian. On the last deep dive, Jones had just released her compulsively readable memoir *Last Chance Texaco* (Grove Press UK, 2021).

But *Pieces Of Treasure* isn’t about her. It’s about a series of characters she created to get inside the skin of every song, and the musical framework Titelman gave her to manifest those characters — a framework that includes pianist Rob Mounsey, guitarist Russell Malone, bassist David Wong and drummer Mark McClean.

Titelman, for his part, used the album to showcase “Rickie’s artistry in full bloom. Her



After 40-something years, producer Russ Titelman, left, and Jones reunite for *Pieces Of Treasure*.

voice has always sounded a bit younger than it ought to, but on this recording the aging voice sounds even better to me than the youthful one. There's a resonance and warmth in her lower register that wasn't there before. I adore the young Rickie Lee, but I love even more the Old Dame."

The Old Dame arrived at the interview for this article wearing a North Sea Jazz Festival T-shirt, looking very vibrant and youthful, her skin glowing and her face framed by soft waves of blonde hair. At 68, she makes growing old look good.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**Cree McCree:** When I first arrived, you told me you'd just listened to the album this morning. What was your reaction to hearing it again?

**Jones:** Usually there's a point where there's a weaker song and you hate it even more as time goes by. But that hasn't happened. The woman who's singing these songs, I don't know where she came from. I mean, she's obviously a development of me, but she feels almost like somebody else. So I can listen to her and enjoy the music. Usually, I'm listening to myself and criticizing it.

**McCree:** Did you realize when you started this project that you were going to be creating a whole other persona who would be actually singing the songs?

**Jones:** No, but I knew I was gonna have to

address the issue of age in my voice. Because it's almost like glaucoma, and in the midrange it wanted to waiver. I could still punch the big notes, and I could go deep, but right here where I like to sing, I was having a little trouble. And that's where so many of these songs are. That's why so much of what happens in this album feels like destiny. Because what I couldn't do the week before, the moment I walked into the studio, I could do it. And some of that power came from the respect of the musicians.

I'm so vulnerable to what people say. And in past studio situations, I can feel defeated before I even start. But these guys came up and said, it's an honor to play with you. That's a word reserved for older people. And I feel like I'm right where I'm supposed to be.

**McCree:** And you completed the whole thing in five days, right?

**Jones:** We did. We actually had days where we did three songs in one day. It was just pow, pow, pow. I knew that I wanted to tell the story, but I didn't care about articulating the words. [*starts to sing*] "When the autumn weather turns the leaves to flame." ... There's a lot of sound in the word "flame."

**McCree:** You can actually hear it flickering.

**Jones:** It's exciting singing every sound, so I did things very differently than I have. And when I'm singing with men who've said this is an honor, we'll receive what you do, I have more courage to be creative. Because when you

have men in there looking at their watch, you wouldn't dare throw your beautiful pearls to them.

**McCree:** Let's rewind to the genesis of the project. What brought you and Russ back together again after all these years?

**Jones:** I was coming to New York to do some kind of promotional thing, and we met for lunch. And being with him is like being with the city of New York. He's so engaged and wears a hat and scarf and is always smiling and you're just caught up in all the things that could be when you're talking to Russ Titelman. So I was trying to sound him out to see if he wanted to get involved with the new stuff I was writing, but when I sent him a song, he referred to it as "that funny little song" because he's a traditional guy.

And, he in turn was saying, "I wanna do a jazz record. It's time to do a jazz record." So I said all right, then, that's what we'll do. With players who listen to the singer and can work with a woman.

**McCree:** And he found them. There are so many lovely instrumental solos that you play off. The vibes on "Just In Time" set the tone for the whole album, and that loping bass sucks you right in to start scatting at the end of "One For My Baby."

**Jones:** Frank Sinatra owned that song. And I was looking for a way in, because the one thing I don't want to do is imitate somebody else's spirit. How would I get in? So I went looking

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"We actually had days where we did three songs in one day. It was just pow, pow, pow," Jones said of the five-day recording session.

# 'I JUST HOPE IT'S REFRESHING AND UPLIFTING.'

—Jones on her new album, *Pieces Of Treasure*

and found Ida Lupino, who sang that song in this 1947 film noir [*Road House*]. And it's so contemporary, how she did it. This character in this song has been through it and is kind of rough. So there's my way in.

**McCree:** In your song-by-song analysis, you also said Frank always gives you the strength to go on.

**Jones:** I have this little group of people who, if I don't know what to do, I just become them. What would Miles do here? What would Frank do here? They can't do anything wrong because

they own Frank. They own Miles. Everything Miles does by definition is correct because it's an extension of himself. So just be Frank for a minute until you can do me again.

**McCree:** These songs were nowhere near contemporary with you, but you make them sound like you grew up with them.

**Jones:** I got them from my dad and Sinatra and "Moon River," and I have a super ability to remember songs. All I have to do is hear 'em a few times, and they become part of my palette of color. You can teach yourself how

to paint with your own language and your own voice.

**McCree:** God, you're so poetic. Just naturally. It blows me away how you come up with these metaphors.

**Jones:** When I read what I've said in a magazine, I go, "Wow, that's pretty smart," but I have no idea I'm saying it at the time. I'm confident enough not to plan — to see what will happen.

**McCree:** So you didn't have the record mapped out in your mind before you started.

**Jones:** No. It revealed itself. I had a feeling about the character, and in doing that, I heard the sound of my voice. I was like, "Wow, I can finally hear what I sound like." On so many other records, maybe because I'm competing with other instruments, I can never hear the air and sound of my voice. This is a triumph for that reason that I can hear me. It was made with discipline, and that's what Russ brought.

**McCree:** Toward the end of the album, you get into the songs that are more specifically about aging, like "September Song."

**Jones:** May to December, and automatically you think younger girl, older man. I envisioned an older man in a derby and a long wool coat



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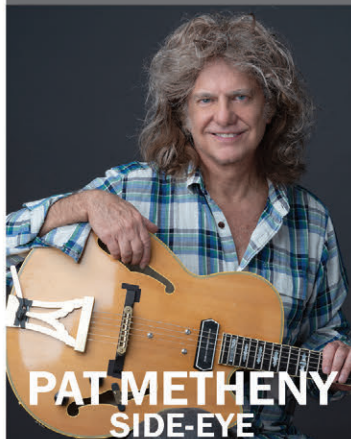
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sitting on a park bench, holding a cane with the winter trees all around him, loving some distant thing that was too beautiful to even touch.

**McCree:** That's very specific.

**Jones:** Yeah. And when I decided to sing it, I wanted to make the person on the bench a woman and give her more reality than the little derby and the cane. The thing I'm singing to is my own youth and the past and how much I love it.

**McCree:** This is an album about aging, but sitting across from me now you look very youthful and vibrant.

**Jones:** I feel at the beginning of something, not at the end of something. I'm excited to be able to keep talking to the world when I'm past my childbearing years.

**McCree:** Every song you sing is so personal. And intimate. There are some very sensual parts.

**Jones:** I just hope it's refreshing and uplifting. Like in the song at the end, "All In The Game." It's not that it's sad, it's just so much delicious feeling that there are no more words and the feeling just takes over.

**McCree:** You literally cry at the end of "All In The Game," which to me is more of a statement that that's just the way it is. What about that

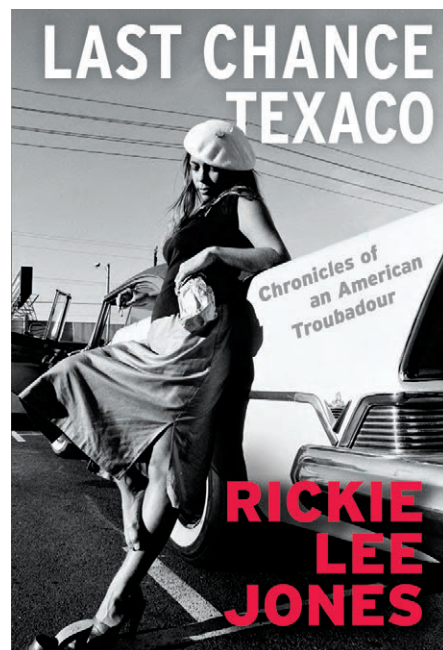
song is so devastating to you?

**Jones:** Well, because you don't know. The writer is saying things are hard right now, and the future's looking dim. But you can hang on. You can rise above it. Hold on to yourself. That's hard to do in love. I'm not the only girl who banged on the door late at night. When your future depends on one human being, everything's at risk if they don't call. When I hear my voice that way, I know we're just hanging on.

It's like when my mother saw me on *Saturday Night Live* singing "Chuckie E.'s In Love" and she said, "Oh, my gosh, when you first started the song, I thought you were gonna faint." Only she knew how terrified I was. But I left the sob on at the end because I accepted that there was something happening that was so joyful. There are no words, that's why you get to sob it.

**McCree:** Were there any songs you left out that you wished you had done?

**Jones:** No, I think it's perfect. One of the songs we were gonna do was "It Never Entered My Mind," which I've been doing for about seven years, but in the weird Rickie way. My own weird chords. And so we ended up doing three versions. One a Rickie, one a band one, and then a mix of both that we cut together. And we almost put on the one with the band because the sound of it was most like the rest.



But the fact that it's so dark and sad and a little off would've changed the feeling of the whole record, which I wanted to be uplifting. So there are other great songs, but they don't fit in the record. The Rickie ideas are what led me here. I'm 68 and can do a record of old jazz and feel very proud of it.

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# *The Casual Side of Art*

## WALTER SMITH III

BY TED PANKEN | PHOTOS BY GEORGE CLARKE

**Walter Smith III finds compositional inspiration in unexpected — and amusing — places. As an example, consider the opening track of the 42-year-old tenor saxophonist's Blue Note debut, *Return To Casual*, a whirling line titled "Contra," named after the 1980s Nintendo video game he played as a child in Houston.**

**"I**t's a writing prompt I thought of 10 years ago," Smith explained on a Zoom call (his avatar is an image of Snoop Dogg superimposed on Kenny G blowing a soprano saxophone). Smith spoke from his home studio-office in Boston, where he's chaired Berklee's Woodwinds Department since 2019.

"You enter a code at the title screen to get extra lives. Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B A B A start — I've sat down every few years to see what I can come up with. This version made me want to play it with people and not let it die on the piano bench. I spent four weeks writing the music for this record — 10 days on that one song."

It's not his first time dipping into the metaverse for material. Another video game from Smith's earlier adulthood — *Fallout 3* from 2008, which is set in a post-apocalyptic Washington, D.C. — inspired "Capital Wasteland" on his 2010 album *III* (Criss Cross). The personnel on that session included pianist Jason Moran and drummer Eric Harland, both graduates of Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts who were there before Smith entered the school and functioned as "guardian angels" for him and classmates Kendrick Scott, Robert Glasper, Mike Moreno and Jamire Williams as they progressed into their early professional careers.

Also performing on *III* was trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, Smith's frequent front-line partner over the past two decades. On *Return To Casual*, Akinmusire's bravura solo captures the surging ebb and flow of "River Styx." He dialogues at length with the leader on the eerie "Amelia Earhart Ghosted Me," which Smith conceived as a "soundtrack" to the doomed aviatrix's mysterious story. Both tracks display the mind-meld the two have shared on Smith's first four leader dates, most recently the self-produced *Still Casual*, from 2014, where he worked with Akinmusire, Scott, guitarist Matthew Stevens, pianist Taylor Eigsti and bassist Harish Ragavan. Smith reassembled the group for a *Return* engagement that included guest James Francies on piano.



"He's one of the most consistent people I know in his commitment to craft, the attention to detail and the beauty that's always there in the way he constructs things, almost like an architect," trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire says of Smith.

Smith conceived *Return To Casual* in late 2021, after the release of *In Common 3* (Whirlwind), for which Smith and Stevens — a frequent partner since both played with Christian aTunde Adjuah Scott in the late '00s — recruited pianist Kris Davis, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington. It was the final installment of a trilogy conceived around, as Stevens put it, "recording interesting groups of people we knew would share an aesthetic and a dynamic, and highlighting the chemistry that could result from their playing quickly interpretable songs that we wrote."

"The Village Vanguard offered a week," said Smith, a month after fulfilling it happened in early February. "I proposed the band from the *Still Casual* album. I've grown as a composer, so I decided to revisit a few of the prompts I used then, and then record the music and make it a release week. Then Blue Note's offer came in January 2022. I wrote everything in May, when I was home for four weeks, so everyone had it before summer tours and could sit with it before the session in August."

"The big thing was having multiple sections, ideas that develop slowly over time and don't stray too far from an initial core idea. It can be as simple as a melodic device, or a feeling or a form, whatever it is — but try to stay within one thing and make a puzzle for us to play from. I've also been into rewriting old music and doing mashups — putting two things together."

An example of the latter strategy is "K8 + BYU\$." It toggles between "Kate's Song," Smith's

tone parallel to Kate Bush from his 2007 leader debut, *Casually Introducing* (Fresh Sound), and "BYU\$" from *III*, a sweet refrain with a stuttery, metrically shifting flow. On the original version of "Kate's Song," pianist Aaron Parks and Gasper, on keyboards, engage in a long, ascendent series of exchanges, setting up Smith's furious tenor solo. On the mashup, though, Smith doesn't solo, focusing primarily on keyboard phrase-trading between Eigsti on piano and another Houstonian James Francies on keyboards.

He sent Kendrick Scott different tracks to play over. "Each time he'd chiseled away unnecessary things and added things that should be there," said Scott, who recruited Smith and Rogers to play trio on his new Blue Note CD, *Corridors* (see *DownBeat's* May issue). "This record is a great representation of Walter's writing, but also his badass playing. He's put so much time into his sound, encompassing the tradition of the saxophone but also challenging what you think it should sound like. And he understands emotional content — what it is to tell a story during a solo, and how to stay in one space for a long time and not move. He's always challenging himself, not going for stuff he knows, which has pushed his playing — and writing — to a different level."

For Akinmusire, *Return To Casual* "feels like *Casually Yours*, but grown up and matured."

"I met Walter in 2000, the first time I went to Boston, where I heard Walter with (trumpeter) Darren Barrett, who he was playing with regularly," Akinmusire recalled. "The first

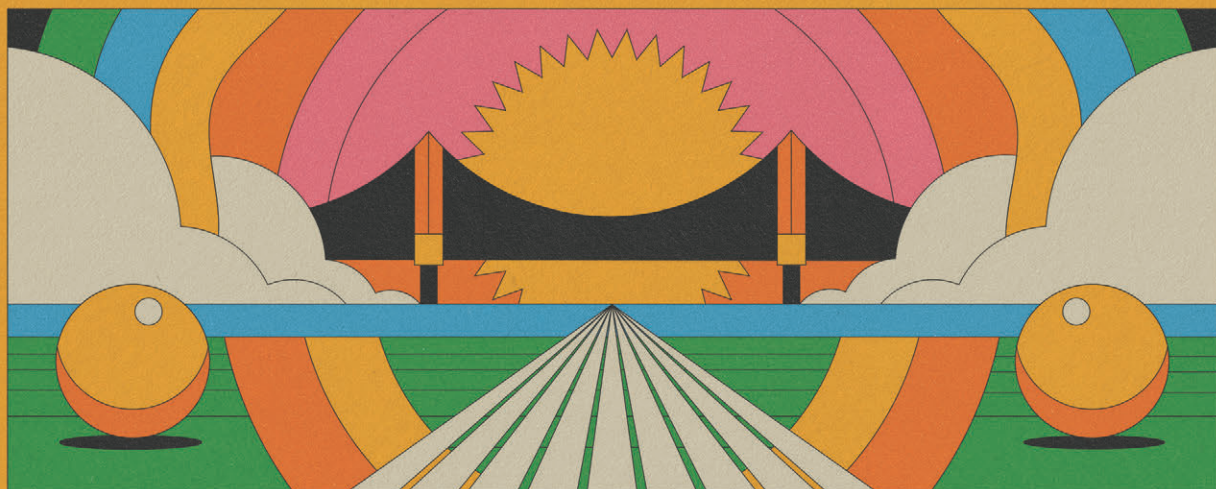
thing he did to me was a joke. 'Hey, man, come here — I heard about you.' I said, 'Oh, yeah, nice to meet you,' and shook his hand. 'You got something on your shirt.' I looked down and he ..." Akinmusire raised his arm to his face, replicating the age-old prank.

"Walter was already playing a ton of saxophone," he continued. "But it's been interesting to see him develop his artistry over the years. He's one of the most consistent people I know in his commitment to craft, the attention to detail and the beauty that's always there in the way he constructs things, almost like an architect."

Smith and Scott met more prosaically — at a school-sponsored ice cream social a week before both entered 9th grade. "Kendrick is my earliest reference for drums," Smith said. "Everything I hear has him on it — the sound of his cymbals and his cymbal choices, the way he does fills and his time feel — whether he ultimately plays on it or not. We'd push each other. Kendrick wanted to play a Michael Brecker tune from *Tales From The Hudson*, so I learned each piece, all the solos. I'd ask the same of him. We'd learn all these Josh Redman tunes. I wanted to be Ron Blake in Roy Hargrove's band and Tim Warfield in Nicholas Payton's band — and I wanted to be in Terence Blanchard's band. I never aspired to be a leader. I thought HSPVA was the ultimate level of everything. When I got to Berklee, I was disappointed because it couldn't compare to what we'd done in high school as far as pushing ourselves."

Smith credits HSPVA music director

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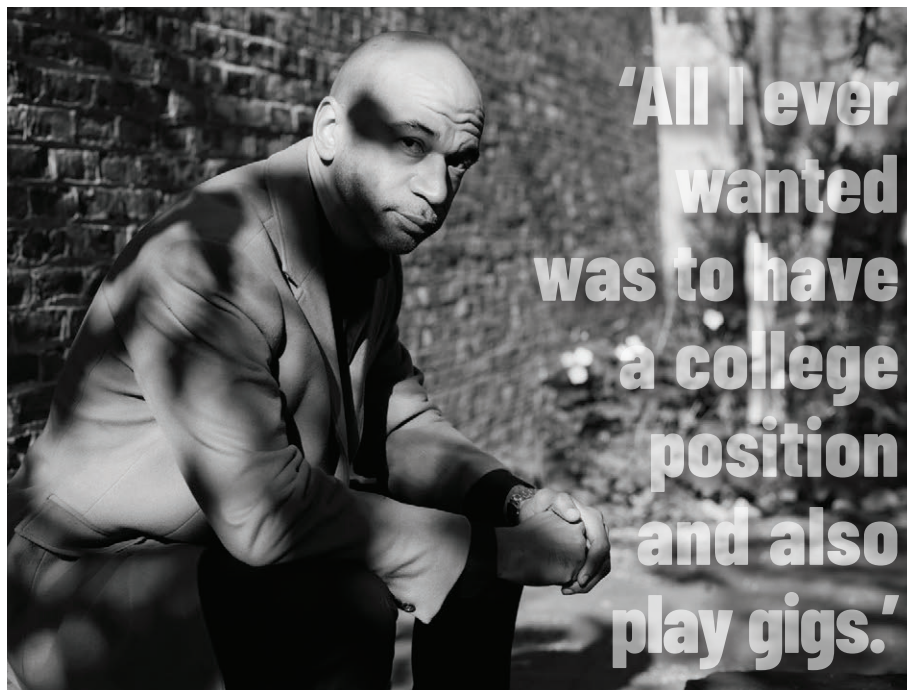
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Robert Morgan for creating a culture of achievement. “He demanded a lot, but he also had his finger on the pulse,” Smith said. “He’d bring in guest artists who were relevant to the students’ interests, like Chris Dave. Seeing someone like him gives you a blueprint of what it means to be a professional musician. We were in and out of class all the time, seven or eight function gigs a week, contracted through the school, real professional stuff in 10th grade — at hotels, background music, holiday parties, one time at Marvin Hamlisch’s house.”

Houston’s Black churches offered another training ground. One year, Smith recalled, he played soprano saxophone for five or six services a week, often with Glasper and Scott. “At one, they’d play ‘Afro Blue’ for 30 minutes and then all the way to the other side,” he says. “Playing places was a completely different experience than people at music school playing for other music students. Our audiences didn’t respond to a sharp 11th. It was the energy, the emotion you play with — using the intellectual part to create the other thing. Learning that early on was huge.”

During high school, Smith took his first teaching position, at a local summer jazz workshop he’d attended since 5th grade, “where all the Houston musicians taught.” He’d assimilated fundamentals early on through his namesake father, a band director originally from New Orleans who’d studied with Kidd Jordan and Alvin Batiste — themselves brilliant educator-performers — at Southern University. “He was always at the piano, transcribing music and writing it out for our elementary school band,” Smith recalled. “Later he wrote me a solo for ‘Blue Bossa’ that I memorized, which is why an older saxophone player invited me to play my first

gig with him at a McDonald’s. My father could explain stuff I didn’t necessarily understand the first time I heard it. He repaired my instrument. Anything you could want, he was there for.”

“Walter’s dad is a mellow person, but very focused on making sure his kids succeeded and that doing things the right way will get you far,” Scott said. “You can tell from the way Walter designed his life with stability, with a certain amount of foresight. We’d all do crazy stuff, but he never got caught — and made straight A’s.”

“All I ever wanted was to have a college position and also play gigs,” Smith declared. “It’s what I grew up seeing in Houston. I liked the idea of being the person everyone calls to play, but also being connected to the younger generation, learning from them and sharing with them, which enhances your own understanding of the information.”

Smith moved to Berklee after serving three years as associate professor of jazz studies at Indiana University, and nine years at L.A. County High School for the Arts (his students included, among others, Michael Mayo, Connie Han, Chris Fishman, Jeremy Corren, Kalia Vandever and Kyle Poole) and various L.A. area colleges. In one LACHSA class, he related, “I wrote etudes and had them analyze the structure, leading them toward discovery rather than giving them all the information. I’d pick different records, and they’d learn all the songs, memorize a solo, with a test every month.”

At Berklee, Smith teaches “ad hoc with different students during office hours,” but his duties trend heavily to administration and oversight of the 220-student woodwind department, allowing a good overview of Berklee’s evolution since his own undergraduate days. He empha-

sized the impact of the Global Jazz Institute, headed by Danilo Pérez and Marco Pignataro, and the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice Studies, headed by Terri Lyne Carrington.

“Inclusion is the buzzword everywhere in higher ed, but they’re doing something creative within that space,” Smith said. “The students who go there return with a different vision, and it changes everyone’s makeup. The point is to go out in the world and affect the scene.”

Smith’s first year at Berklee coincided with the onset of COVID-19. Two songs on *Return To Casual* explicitly reference the deaths of dear friends and mentors. “Shine,” rendered on *In Common III* as a reflective Smith-Stevens duo, transforms into a bittersweet, anthemic tribute to Jimmy Heath, Ellis Marsalis and Wallace Roney, who “had a huge impact on me, either directly or through the music I loved as a kid.” The album ends with “REVIVE,” a tender elegy named for the organization founded by Meghan Stabile, a Berklee classmate whose suicide last June was triggered by depression exacerbated by the dislocations engendered by COVID.

A week before lockdown, Smith recalled, he was at the Village Vanguard with the Bill Stewart Trio, a regular employer since 2017. “As the week progressed, the audience dwindled to nothing,” Smith said. “Three days after I got back to Boston, they shut down the school. The next week was spring break. When we returned, we’d switched to completely virtual. As department chair, I had to bring all the faculty up to speed on Zoom and how the technology would work — hearing the instrument through this format, getting people microphones, dealing with low latency, and so on. There was some excitement about developing extra skills and working on production and home recording. But the students lost out on social interaction. People returned to their homes, where they couldn’t play their instrument because their parents were working virtually, or their sibling was in whatever virtual school. It was a disaster in many ways.”

Two months after Berklee went virtual, George Floyd was murdered. When school reopened, Smith related, “a lot of Band-Aids were ripped off. A lot of new conversations were happening. Not just the students, but the entire faculty and administrative staff was talking about race. A lot has changed in the course offerings, the people who teach them, and the training that goes into it. Berklee now has an Africana Studies Division, which had been in the works, but during the pandemic it got pushed through, and now they’re doing incredible work. Attention to mental health has been the biggest growth; there’s a robust counseling center, 24 hours a day, with people on call. It’s changed the face of the college.

“It was overwhelming to lose all these people,” Smith said. “Humor and video games are the only way to get through it.”

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# Jazz Side of... TAJ MAHAL

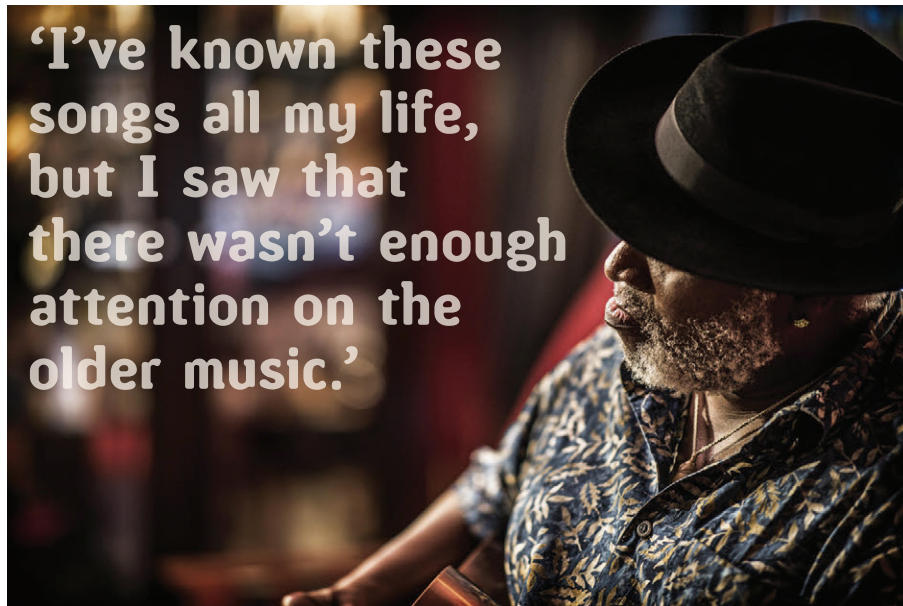
BY JOSEF WOODARD | PHOTOS BY JAY BLAKESBURG

It may come as a surprise to find that the artist known as Taj Mahal — born Henry Fredericks Jr. — has officially jumped into the realm of jazz for his new album, *Savoy*. Classic tunes from the jazz standard book are treated with Mahal's gravelly-yet-sweet vocals, delivered with a supple sense of swing and marinated with choice scatting interludes.

**T**his twist comes on the heels of his delectably unpolished gems of last year's country blues reunion with old ally Ry Cooder, *Get On Board* (Nonesuch), laureled by a well-deserved Grammy in the Best Traditional Blues category this year.

But, then again, elements of surprise, blurring of genres and roots research have been central to the 80-year-old Mahal's long and discovery-enriched musical life. Surprise is no surprise for him by now, even this deep into his self-defined and self-directed game.

**‘I’ve known these songs all my life, but I saw that there wasn’t enough attention on the older music.’**



In fact, the essence of his new jazz venture taps a personal foundation of his life, or even a prehistorical gleam in his parents’ eyes. *Savoy* (Stony Plain) refers to the legendary Savoy Ballroom, the influential seed bed of jazz in his hometown of Harlem, going back to the ’30s. It was there that his parents literally met, forging the union that would produce Mahal’s family.

After studying agriculture and animal husbandry at Amherst College in Massachusetts, music grabbed hold of Mahal’s heart and future. He headed west to Los Angeles and formed Rising Sons with fellow blues/roots enthusiast Cooder, then went solo, then went every which way in a career spanning a vast discography, a few Grammy awards, occasional acting turns, avid musicology and now life as a very hip and influential senior musical statesman.

Although Mahal — an innately hard-to-pigeonhole artist — is considered generally as a proponent of country blues and American rootsiness, his curiosity and hands-on engagement in music of the wider world and its impact on American music. To that list, thanks to his new album, we can add jazz standards, à la Savoy fare.

With deceptively simplicity, he said, “I just love music, man. I’ve been lucky to have it. There’s not a day goes, I don’t hear it, or listen to it or play it or make my connection with the Caribbean, South America, Central America, Africa. I’ve always been thinking about it.”

DownBeat caught up with the peripatetic, multitasking Mahal — officially based in Berkeley, California, these days — while he was in New York City. He was there in his capacity as the New York University Steinhardt 2022–’23 Americana artist-in-residence, and was preparing for a panel discussion with Krystal Klingenberg (curator of music at the National Museum of American History) and Leyla McCalla, from the collective Our Native Daughters (which also includes

Rhiannon Giddens). What binds these artists, and many others on the roots music reclamation movement in America, is a deep-diving commitment to both uncovering American musical histories — including lesser-known pockets of Black American experience and culture — and giving those sources new life for a new and expanding audience.

Of the pending panel, Mahal explained, “It’s gonna be kind of an armchair situation, with students being able to talk to somebody who’s had a long career in the music and been their own person, and done whatever they wanted to do — as opposed to follow along and paint-by-numbers, sing by overdub.”

Mahal naturally fell, almost hypnotically, into his known status as a walking, dancing encyclopedia of musical data and important names, stylistic family trees and the expanding universe of his research.

This interview has been edited for consistency, style and length.

**Joe Woodard:** In your livestreaming project “Roots Rising” during the lockdown, you hosted such artists as Allison Russell — who released the much-acclaimed album *Outside Child* — Ranky Tank and others. In a way, they’re following in your footsteps. Are you getting a sense of cross-generational influence from your example among younger roots-based musicians?

**Taj Mahal:** Pretty much. I started being a great dad, starting out with Keb’ Mo’ and Guy Davis. There was also Eric Bibb. There’s more out there than meets the eye. One of the things I want to do, going forward, is to create some kind of a pathway for those guys to be seen hiding in plain sight because of the way the old business is set up, and translating into the new business. It still isn’t giving them any visibility.

Keb’ Mo’ and I did this amazing album [the Grammy-winning album *TajMo* (Concord, 2017)] and went on tour. We started out 2014, thinking about this thing. Then we got it done, toured it in 2016. We went traveling around the country and around the globe and it was happening wherever we went. But it just didn’t resonate outside of that. But those things don’t deter the creativity from sneaking in the middle of the night and whispering in your ear. And that’s all I really care about.

**Woodard:** I assume you’re referring to the corporate machinery, which controls the public media pipelines. Still, with these artists you’re mentioning, I go to their shows and there’s a strong following. Do you feel that a kind of grassroots energy is keeping roots music alive, off to the side of the mainstream?

**Mahal:** It actually has been, all along. When I started out and was playing music and seeing what else was out here, I discovered that there was a kind of parallel universe of people knew who Lightning Hopkins was and appreciated Son House and Bill Monroe and Mike Seeger. And, you know, it goes on, with Mississippi John Hurt and Sleepy John Estes and Elizabeth Cotton ... I could go just rattle on for hours.

Those (old) songs were left hanging out in some vault underground. My objective is to keep that corridor open. That’s bringing the inspiration to me every day, every hour, every minute.

**Woodard:** You have rescued a lot of things from various vaults over the years.

**Mahal:** Look at the first album. I’m recording with the Rising Suns. The group breaks up around all the politics and stuff. We all break up as friends. That’s the really great thing. But we were all signed individually to the record company.

By this time, I knew “Statesboro Blues” as a 12-string guitar tune I found on a country blues album put out by Sam Charters [*Country Blues* (Folkways Records)] in 1959. In fact, there’s probably about five songs up in that album that I’ve taken in and created a new song for the era that I was coming through. Jesse Ed Davis heard “Statesboro Blues.” I left him alone with it for a while. That’s how he arranged it, with the slide guitar. He actually was the first person I ever saw play slide, like Muddy Waters played slide. And it was in standard tuning, not open tuning.

That’s what Duane Allman saw and heard, got a hold of and came out. Duane and Greg were really big fans of ours. We were all playing together around that time. When Duane got fed up with the West Coast and went back to Macon, that’s when finally Greg got back there and that scene went down. Duane brought that album over and sat in bed, with a broken arm and went like, “Hey, I can do this.” That jump started Southern rock. It was the Allman Brothers, Marshall Tucker, Lynyrd Skynyrd ...

I only found out just a few years ago that Jesse Davis (1944–'88) was kind of rankled, because everybody thought Ry Cooder was playing slide, because he was on the record and known for his slide playing. But it clearly says on the record, “Jesse Davis, lead guitar; Ry, rhythm guitar.” I was so sorry to have heard this secondhand, long after this man had passed on in this world, because I would’ve piped up right away in every interview I ever had, making sure that people knew them.

**Woodard:** There weren’t many slide players in the public ear back then, so Ry must have seemed the ripe guess.

**Mahal:** I can almost empathize with ‘em, but it’s hard because this is a great music, man, and needs a lot of respect. You gotta really dig in. Yeah, there’s a lot. I’ve lived with it for 70 years now.

They don’t know. They don’t know Sonny Roads, Black Ace [BK Turner], Good Rockin’ Robinson [LC Robinson], Chuck Berry. Then I started hearing “Sacred Steel” music — Jewel and the Keith Dominion, the Campbell Brothers, Calvin Cook and Sunny Treadway. I had no idea. Even farther, I had no idea about the whole United House of Prayer, where their choir is like 40 to 60 trombones.

**Woodard:** Ah, yes, the gospel trombone tradi-

tion. The more the better.

**Mahal:** Oh, yeah. The more the better. I mean, they have a tuba, a baritone horn. They got a snare, they got a bass drum, they got cymbals, and they got hi-hat and tambourines. Oh, my God [laughs]. That stuff is ridiculous. It’s beautiful.

**Woodard:** *Savoy* is a fascinating album. I’ve just been soaking it up. It also represents a new wrinkle in your already varied discography, given its jazz focus. Can you tell me about the genesis of it?

**Mahal:** Well, the genesis is where I started. My dad [Henry Saint Claire Fredericks Sr.] was a classically trained West Indian from Saint Kitts and Nevis, about 200 miles southeast of Port San Juan, Puerto Rico, in the British Commonwealth. And the tradition in the Caribbean is that everybody thinks that if you’re African, you have this natural rhythm. So when you’re young, they get you to play classical. They say that “at some point or another, you’re gonna be influenced by the contemporary music of your time.”

So now, if you got the ability to play classical, and then you can take those abilities and those sensibilities to jazz, ragtime, such as the way it was with Scott Joplin. I was in that movie, too, with Billy Dee Williams [*Scott Joplin*, 1977].

Anyway, my dad was like that. My mom was

a gospel-singing school teacher, graduated in 1937 from South Carolina State, in early childhood development. She came up and they met at the Savoy. My dad became a composer and copyist. So he used delivering some charts for Chick Webb as a way of getting in to be able to see this new phenom, Ella Fitzgerald. And my mom was there with her girlfriends. He came over and checked them out. And, you know, I’m the harmonic between all that meeting [laughs].

Then my father traded a music career for being basically a day laborer. Although my mother was college-educated, he was self-educated in his own life, a very bright man. In the exchange for having a big family, he didn’t mind going to work. But he had a grand piano in the house, and then we had an upright later on. He collected all the records, and kept up with the music through records. So I grew up listening to Coleman Hawkins, Count Basie, Earl Hines, Nat “King” Cole, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Helen Hughes and Hazel Scott.

[Regarding the songs chosen for *Savoy*], these were songs I was closely related to. Like “Gee Baby, Ain’t I Good To You” — I was in single digits when I first heard that. My thought was, “Wow, I can’t wait to grow up so I can figure out what that means.” [laughs] I’m certainly well enough grown to have experienced whatever the heck that’s all about, to be able to sing

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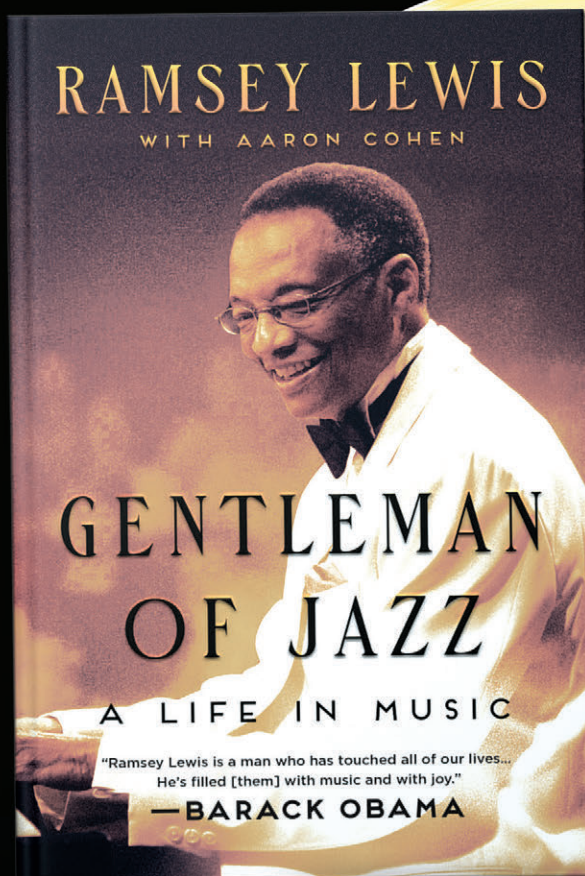
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Savoy refers to the legendary Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, where his parent met.

it with authority.

I've known these songs all my life, but I saw that there wasn't enough attention on the older music. They weren't just old and in the way. And it's not old, either, [that impression is] just because of the mindset here, the construct, the paradigm here in this 500-year-old experiment. These started in the early century — no television, no telephones, no corporate music, no satellite. And they connected that music up, generation to generation.

It's compounded. But inside of this experience, yesterday seems like it's 500 years ago. A lot of people say, "Man, you crazy." No, it's not that long. You're not paying attention to it. You get to be an anthropologist or ethnomusicologist, or any of those "ologists" out there, where you going back and looking at these songs. Let me think who else did some old songs, besides Linda [Ronstadt]. Well, Rod Stewart made an attempt at it. Attempt is the word. We won't go there. [laughs]

**Woodard:** And Savoy marked a reunion and a fresh approach with your longtime creative partner John Simon, who served as producer and arranger on the album. How did that come about?

**Mahal:** John and I have known each other since 19, since he was working with Blood, Sweat & Tears. I came into a session that he was doing when he was a staff producer at CBS. He also worked with The Band, Leonard Cohen and many other people. This guy did some fantastic work, but the work that really stays with me, aside from The Band, is his work with Marshall McLuhan. I've lived long enough to see what Marshall was talking about. In fact, you and I are communicating over it. The medium of our time is our electronic secretary. The medium is the message, you know?

John was a piano player for my albums *Natural Blues*, *Giant Step* and *The Old Folks At Home*. But then there was *Sounder* and *The Real Thing*, with Howard Johnson and Orchestra. I did an album with [tuba player] Howard Johnson called *Right Now!* and we toured in Germany. I was able to do some different things, which opened my chops up. I did a thing with Kip Hanrahan, on the *Conjure* album [*Music For The Texts of Ishmael Reed*, American Clave, 1984]. I did some things with Jules Holland, and I did a piece for *The Divine Secret of the Yaya Sisterhood*. I started opening up.

I wanted to do album of all these kinds of tunes, but bring in a bunch of different female singers, like Dee Dee Bridgewater or maybe Lady Bianca. And then I would be a part of that. But then as we got going with it, we decided that we'd go with me and see where that was gonna work.

**Woodard:** It does work. The album brings out this jazz side of your musical being, as if it was always there in your bloodstream and lineage, on such songs as "Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me," "Killer Joe" and others. Was it an easy process for you to get into the jazz vocalist head space?

**Mahal:** No, it is with me all the time. It's very easy to come from where jazz is and not know anything about what's underneath it. For me, I knew that it was built on something. You can't start building your temple from John Coltrane, where he's like really fully out there. You gotta start somewhere. Why was all this negativity toward the older music? That's the only way people knew how to do it. They didn't know how to take what they needed and leave the rest.

I'm interested in passing along something positive from generation to generation. I just didn't really want those voices to be lost out

there, and those styles of music. Personally, I didn't care whether or not it was a career to make money. I would be just as happy being a farmer playing on playing on the weekend or at night when I got done with work, because the music really was, for me, my personal therapy. I wasn't really out to try to win over the world.

**Woodard:** You have strong attributes as a jazz vocalist, including being a fine scatter and having that quality of what we could call jazz phrasing. It seems to come really natural to you. Were there particular jazz singers that you had a thing for? I'm hearing Louis Armstrong and Louis Jordan, for instance.

**Mahal:** Well, I like jazz. I like Jordan. I like Slim and Slam, and my Godfather is Buddy Johnson. When I was growing up, a lot of his music used to be around the house my parents had. They talked about him a lot. When I was 8 or 9 years old, I met him and his band. My mother cooked for about three days and set up these guys with armloads of food to go back on the bus. That was actually one of the highlights for my young life — the musicians and so much incredible energy. It still buzzes me now, the thought that some day I'd like to have a band myself, and these things have been accomplished.

**Woodard:** You set things up nicely with the opening track, "Stompin' At The Savoy," with a short spoken-word piece telling the tale of your parents' fateful meeting at the Savoy. It sets the stage of what's to come. Do you consider *Savoy* a concept album of sorts?

**Mahal:** No. That was right off the top of my head. None of that was written down. All I gotta do is look inside my life and just have a conversation. That's what records were with me. People really talk to you on records.

**Woodard:** You could be at a stage where you bask in nostalgic revery over what's gone by, but you seem to be moving forward all the time. Is that fair to say?

**Mahal:** Yeah. I'm taking my signal from some American musicians, but I take my deeper signal from musicians from another continent, born in a musician clan and class, who have been musicians for generations.

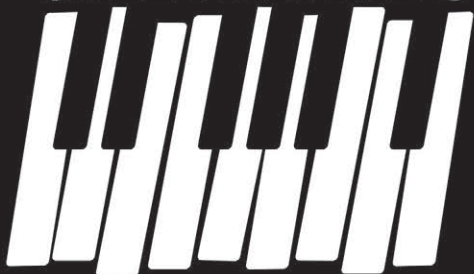
When I was in Africa in 1979, we visited 13 countries as musical ambassadors from the United States. I remember one of the conversations, when a guy came up to me, an African brother, who said, "My brother, tell me, what do you do?" And I said, "Oh, I play music." He says, "Yes, yes, I knew that. But what do you do?" [laughs]

We went back and forth with this like a couple, three times. And then I realized what he was asking me, and I said, "I'm a farmer." He says, "Oh, good, good, good." Music is like breathing there. [laughs]

DB



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# Reviews

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



## Gretchen Parlato/ Lionel Loueke *Lean In*

EDITION

★★★★

The artistic accord between Gretchen Parlato and Lionel Loueke can be compared to one Billie Holiday shared with Lester Young. Why? Because it's so winning and absorbing. And it manifests with such unforced, imaginative grace.

Parlato and Loueke's musical bond traces back more than two decades when they recorded for the ObliqSound label. Because of their respective idiosyncratic musicality — Parlato's hushed singing, chirps, clicks and other percussive vocal techniques; Loueke's rhythmic brilliance and intriguing textural harmonies and languid melodicism — the dynamic duo often

create rainforests of sonic wonder. Their aural universe expands sublimely on a few cuts with help of drummer Mark Guiliana, bassist Burnis Travis III and additional vocalists on *Lean In*, a superb album that surprisingly marks the first official duet recording between the two.

The album's title suggests a gentle invitation because, together and separately, the artistry compels listeners to lean in for the diaphanous sensuality of their music. Such is the case with the opening composition, "Akwê," a joyous West African piece, written by Loueke, that's marked by gossamer, intricate passages and billowy melodicism. The same splendor occurs on their makeover of Carlos Pingarilho and Marcos Vasconcellos' ballad "Astronauta" and Loueke's lithe "Nonvignon."

Nevertheless, Parlato and Loueke underscore *Lean In* with post-pandemic Black Lives Matter

uprising themes that encourage individualized introspection and forging more meaningful and intimate bonds amongst kindred spirits.

Saudade permeates Parlato's music. And when paired with the still lingering sense of longing — particularly for those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic and/or racially motivated injustice — with the amorous affairs of the heart, the results are mesmerizing.

With glimmering rapport and supple ingenuity, the glamouring power of Parlato and Loueke's deepening partnership captured on *Lean In* seduces with each listening. —John Murph

**Lean In:** Akwê; I Miss You; If I Knew; Okagbé Interlude; Astronauta; Mi Wa Sé Interlude; Muse; Nonvignon; Lean In; Painful Joy; Dou Wé Interlude; Walking After You. (45:03)

**Personnel:** Gretchen Parlato, vocals, percussion; Lionel Loueke, guitar, vocals, percussion; Mark Guiliana, drums, percussion (2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12); Burnis Travis, electric bass (3, 6, 11); Marley Guiliana, vocals (3, 6, 12); Lisa Loueke, vocals (3).

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



## Artemis In Real Time

BLUE NOTE

★★★★

With the death of Wayne Shorter and the publication of writer Aidan Levy's mammoth, career-capping biography of Sonny Rollins, it's difficult not to reflect on the legacies of those two towering artists and how they changed the course of jazz.

The Artemis collective — which retains trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, pianist Renee Rosnes, bassist Noriko Ueda and drummer Allison Miller from the band's debut, and adds newcomer reed players Alexa Tarantino and Nicole

Glover — didn't need to conclude its sophomore recording with a gorgeous, gauzy Rosnes arrangement of Shorter's "Penelope" to remind listeners about the lasting influence of the masters. The harmonic advancements pioneered by Shorter, Rollins and their peers are the foundational bedrock the members of Artemis build on. And they build imaginatively.

The collective's sophomore album touches all the bases: the intricate harmony and moving parts of Miller's spunky "Bow And Arrow"; the textured blends of Rosnes' "Balance Of Time"; and the spiky, Indian vibe of her "Empress Afternoon." The throughline is the characteristically thrilling work of Jensen, who has never sounded better. She soars and floats through "Balance Of Time" and paints vividly throughout her own "Timber," evocative of the devastating clear-cutting of old-growth forests in her native part of Canada.

Gender equality in jazz may still be a distant target, but Artemis is pushing forward — confident enough to expand the language while still referencing the foundational achievements Blue Note documented in the '60s. —James Hale

**In Real Time:** Slink; Bow And Arrow; Balance Of Time; Lights Away From Home; Timber; Whirlwind; Empress Afternoon; Penelope. (43:38)

**Personnel:** Ingrid Jensen, trumpet; Alexa Tarantino, flute, alto saxophone; Nicole Glover, tenor saxophone; Renee Rosnes, piano; Noriko Ueda, bass; Allison Miller, drums.

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

## Brandee Younger Brand New Life

IMPULSE

★★★★½

Harpist Dorothy Ashby has long been a creative touchstone for fellow instrumentalist Brandee Younger. Younger has often covered Ashby's jazz-referencing, soulful melodies, and on her latest LP she takes Ashby's work as her starting principle, interpolating several previously unheard tracks with well-known covers and a selection of originals composed in Ashby's spirit.

The resulting 10 tracks of *Brand New Life* are a triumph. Younger's delicate comping is the ideal match for Ashby's gossamer melodies, opening on the previously unreleased "You're A Girl For One Man Only" and adding Joel Ross' dextrous vibraphone lines to evoke the spirit of Ashby's collaborations with Terry Pollard. Each embellishment to Ashby's work is well pitched, with producer Pete Rock (who has sampled her work several times) adding turntable scratches and boom-bap drums on "Livin' And Lovin' In My Own Way" to illustrate the bridge between Ashby's harp and hip-hop instrumentals, while Meshell Ndegeocello adds a reggae swing to the groove-laden foundations of "Dust."

The highlight of the album comes in its closing number, Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic."



Here, Younger flows like liquid across her harp strings, highlighting the expansive nature not only of Ashby's session work backing the 1976 original but also the intensely emotive potential of the harp itself. *Brand New Life* plays as a paean to the unwieldy instrument, celebrating two players who have imbued it with immense creativity.

—Ammar Kalia

**Brand New Life:** You're A Girl For One Man Only; Brand New Life; Come Live With Me (Interlude); Livin' And Lovin' In My Own Way; Running Game Intro; Running Game; Moving Target; Dust; The Windmills Of Your Mind; If It's Magic. (37:11)

**Personnel:** Brandee Younger, harp; Rashawn Carter, bass; Makaya McCraven, drums; Joel Ross, vibraphone (1, 4); Yuri Popowycz, strings (6, 7, 9); Pete Rock, production (4); Mumu Fresh (2); Meshell Ndegeocello (8), vocals.

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



## Michael Dease The Other Shoe

ORIGIN

★★★★½

Michael Dease drops *The Other Shoe* only eight months after his last, *Next Best Thing*, which was a neat and literate little small-band bouquet. This time, the front line is smaller with Dease on trombone (and occasionally baritone sax) and newcomer Virginia MacDonald on clarinet, an unlikely but compatible twosome.

Focusing on the compositions of Gregg Hill, the program will be unfamiliar to most, giving listeners open-ended expectations and the players few precedents to obey. The result is another fine showcase for Dease, whose instrumental excellence is well known. But MacDonald might have made a bolder debut by jumping into warmer water. She plays with a crisp fluency and has set herself up nicely for a second shot.

Although Dease can slash, swoop and shout with the best ("Scooter's Dream"), his default voice is a more feathery legato elegance that permits him to phrase with unusual precision and detail. His sound recalls Lawrence Brown, whose virtuosity in the pre-war Ellington band became an alternative to Jack Teagarden's suave swagger and pointed a path toward the wizardry of J.J. Johnson and Bill Watrous. Dease rarely uses a vibrato and serves each note clear and clean, permitting him to play free interludes with remarkable control and coherence ("The Other Shoe").

Though born in 1945, Gregg Hill's work has only begun to surface. So far it has produced five CDs, including this and two others on Origin Records. His "Wake Up Call" is a bright and catchy stop-time opener that brackets a swinging sequence of solos. "The Goodbye" is a straight traditional blues. Dease gets a worthy foil in Joel Perez on two tracks, and Geoff Keezer's piano sparkles. —John McDonough

**The Other Shoe:** Wake Up Call; Scooter's Dream; Hello, Blues; The Goodbye Blues; The Sleeper; The Classic; Rio Mio; Summer Nights; Shorty's Tune; The Other Shoe. (69:06)

**Personnel:** Michael Dease, trombone, baritone saxophone (4, 7, 10); Joel Perez (4, 7), trombone; Virginia MacDonald, clarinet; Geoffrey Keezer (1–3, 5, 6, 9), Luther Allison, piano (4, 7, 8), Rhodes (10); Liany Mateo, Rodney Whitaker (3), Rodney Whitaker (3), bass; Colleen Clark, drums; Kevin Jones (4, 7, 10), Gwendolyn Dease (4, 7, 10), Michaels Dease (4), percussion.

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

# The Hot Box

Critics	John Murph	James Hale	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough
<b>Gretchen Parlato/Lionel Loueke</b> <i>Lean In</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
<b>Artemis</b> <i>In Real Time</i>	N/A	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
<b>Brandee Younger</b> <i>Brand New Life</i>	★★★★½	★★	★★★★½	★★½
<b>Michael Dease</b> <i>The Other Shoe</i>	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Gretchen Parlato/Lionel Loueke, *Lean In*

Spritely, delightful and snapping with syncopated percussion, this has the feel of a classic summer jam. Parlato has never sounded better.  
—James Hale

The twin vocal styles of Parlato and Loueke — melismatic and effortlessly melodic for the former, percussive and intricately powerful for the latter — are the perfect match. Through voice and guitar alone the pair create a remarkably expansive soundworld, traversing everything from soft bossa nova to flashes of fractal modernism.  
—Ammar Kalia

Gentle, well-crafted duos airbrushed with Brazilian overtones. Parlato's flat, whispered intonation caresses indifferent material with a faux-spiritual intimacy. Loueke shares and accompanies with a light and subtle acoustic touch.  
—John McDonough

### Artemis, *In Real Time*

[Hot Box critic John Murph is recused from reviewing the album due to potential conflict of interest.]

Deep-swinging and technically accomplished, Blue Note supergroup Artemis produces a stellar follow up to its 2020 debut. Bassist Noriko Ueda's "Lights Away From Home" is a highlight, interweaving sprightly horn lines with a rock-solid rhythm section to create an endlessly compelling and detailed whole.  
—Ammar Kalia

A resourceful sextet with orchestral ambitions. Writing flows in, out and around tempo with the graceful motion of a low-key film score. Provides context. Jensen's muted horn is especially warm on "Penelope."  
—John McDonough

### Brandee Younger, *Brand New Life*

The harpist ups her game on this fantastical exploration into modern jazz with shrewd interactions with hip-hop, reggae and sexy soul. It's her best album yet.  
—John Murph

So slight in both length and content, and so somnambulant and unfocused that it vanishes without leaving a trace.  
—James Hale

Angelic jazz that hovers in the heavens. Younger's remarkable skills handsomely affirm the harp's ethereal voice, but fail to find a new one that swings closer to Earth. Lovely but limited. Does little to advance harp's place in jazz beyond Adele Girard.  
—John McDonough

### Michael Dease, *The Other Shoe*

Dease proves yet again that straightahead post-bop can prove to be fertile ground for musical ingenuity and emotional heft as he tips, grandly, to composer Gregg Hill.  
—John Murph

Bustling like a mashup of Ray Anderson and Charles Mingus, Dease's band carves a broad swath through territory that seems somewhat familiar. Clarinetist Virginia MacDonald is a particular standout.  
—James Hale

Trombonist Dease's *The Other Shoe* is an admirable effort, pairing rising stars with Gregg Hill's formidable songbook. The ensemble show flashes of vitality but can often feel somewhat heavy, stuck in the groove over the course of the record and failing to produce an album of consistent intrigue.  
—Ammar Kalia

# THE SOUND OF SMOKE





## Nick Finzer *Dreams Visions Illusions*

OUTSIDE IN  
★★★★½

Following his one-man-band pandemic offering *Out Of Focus*, trombonist Nick Finzer is back to flexing his composer-arranger chops with his longstanding working sextet on *Dreams Visions Illusions*. Fronting the same talented crew that appeared on 2017's *Hear & Now* and 2020's *Cast Of Characters*, Finzer leads the way on 10 thoughtful originals that alternately swing fervently and conjure up intimate, expressive moods.

## Ralph Alessi Quartet *It's Always Now*

ECM  
★★★★

In 2020, the veteran American trumpeter Ralph Alessi landed a teaching gig in Bern, Switzerland, and through the time he's spent overseas he's quickly forged new musical partnerships. Those new connections are reflected on his fourth recording for ECM, which extends his decades-long collaboration with the German pianist Florian Weber while documenting new meetings with Swiss bassist Bänz Oester and the American drummer Gerry Hemingway, who's taught in Lucerne since 2009.

The music here obscures a febrile tension beneath a meticulously crafted surface placidity. Even when the group sparks some heat, as on "Residue," where Hemingway's active tom work effectively pulls against the plush, measured trumpet and piano shapes out front, there's an immaculate sense of control. But there's also a striated edge to the leader's terse sallies that imbues the performance with a subtle unease.

The quartet balances beauty with friction, as the latter consistently heightens the former. The title track, one of several duets between the leader and Weber, was freshly composed, and feels almost skeletal, with the pianist pierc-

The surging, swinging "To Dream A Bigger Dream" opens with tightly executed harmony lines between Finzer and saxophonist Lucas Pino before each breaks free for extended improvisations. "Aspirations And Convictions" carries a more atmospheric vibe, accentuated by Pino's bass clarinet on the brooding theme, then it's back to the burn on "Follow Your Heart," a supercharged vehicle showcasing aggressive bop-informed solos by the leader and pianist Glenn Zaleski along with a blazing fretboard romp by guitarist Alex Wintz.

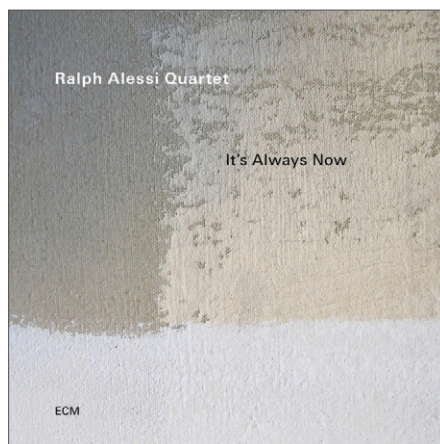
They sail through the breezy waltz-time "I Thought I Took The Road Less Traveled," with Finzer carrying the whimsical melody and Wintz soloing tastefully. Finzer's stirring chamber jazz piece, "Waking Up," opens with some gentle contrapuntal playing between trombone and bass (Dave Baron) before it segues to a buoyant fugue, underscored by drummer Jimmy Macbride's deft touch with brushes and sticks. Pino's bass clarinet solo is a highlight of this showpiece number for the sextet.

—Bill Milkowski

**Dreams Visions Illusions:** To Dream A Bigger Dream; Aspirations And Convictions; Intro To Follow Your Heart; Follow Your Heart; I Thought I Took The Road Less Traveled; But I Did What They Said; To The Top; Vision Or Mirage; Waking Up; Now, Then And When. (57:04)

**Personnel:** Nick Finzer, trombone; Lucas Pino, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Alex Wintz, guitar; Glenn Zaleski, piano; Dave Baron, bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums.

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

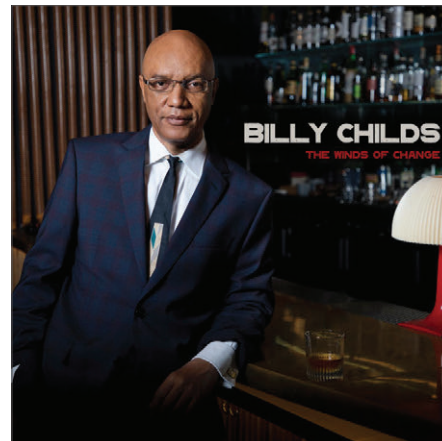


ing silence with harmonically oblique chords and Alessi transmitting a livewire sense of discovery in real-time. The tension that courses through the album exists primarily in service to an exquisite group dynamic, where every gesture feels meaningfully connected, whether on the almost levitating ballad "Diagonal Lady" or the insistent rhythms of "His Hopes, His Fears, His Tears." —Peter Margasak

**It's Always Now:** Hypnagogic; Old Baby; Migratory Party; Residue; The Shadow Side; It's Always Now; Diagonal Lady; His Hopes, His Fears, His Tears; Everything Mirrors Everything; Portion Control; Ire; Hanging by a Thread; Tumbleweed. (59:21)

**Personnel:** Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Florian Weber, piano; Bänz Oester, bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums.

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



## Billy Childs *The Winds Of Change*

MACK AVENUE  
★★★★

The novelist Raymond Chandler — and he's sort of relevant here — said that the creative artist was the only kind of man you could never meet on neutral ground. "You can only meet him as an artist," he stated.

This is pertinent to the work of Billy Childs, though Chandler's comments about the artistic ego are not, because Childs' visionary imagination doesn't break down into easily summarized component parts (that's for critic's, and Chandler also had choice things to say about them), but needs to be confronted whole, or not at all.

Childs has turned somewhat away from the formal composition that has occupied him in recent years and returned to the piano and returned to combo jazz.

But his aim on *The Winds Of Change*, inspired by film noir — but not in the brooding, storyboarding way we associate with Ran Blake — is to create a series of urban soundscapes, New York as well as L.A., that capture the bittersweet, shifting, ambiguous nature of those cities. The title track would be called cinematic if that term of windy approval weren't already so devalued.

Childs is working with a group of brilliant improvisers, but he and they still seem to conceive the music orchestrally, albeit with more cadenzas and obbligatos than you'd find in more canonical work.

There are no "mean streets" clichés, no tough-guy posing or soft-center reveals. These are brilliant, self-contained compositions that also lend themselves perfectly to the modern jazz idiom. Only Billy Childs could have pulled this off with such intelligence and certainty of vision. —Brian Morton

**The Winds Of Change:** The Great Western Loco; The End Of Innocence; Master Of The Game; Crystal Silence; The Black Angel; I Thought I Know. (52:15)

**Personnel:** Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Billy Childs, piano; Scott Colley, bass; Brian Blade, drums.

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



## Cécile McLorin Salvant

### *Melusine*

NONESUCH  
★★★★★

Cécile McLorin Salvant's "Melusine" opens with a question: "Est-ce Ainsi Que Les Hommes Vivent?" or "Is This How Men Live?" which is a rough and literal translation recalled from a long ago and practically forgotten French 101. However, no translation is necessary when this ancient legend unfolds lyrically from Salvant's expressive interpretation. It is so beautifully rendered that almost inconceivably it's about a woman who transforms herself into a snake

## Avishai Cohen/Abraham Rodriguez Jr.

### *Iroko*

NAÏVE  
★★★★★

There comes a time in jazz life where the rhythm section deserves center stage. That all-too-rare occasion is beautifully represented by Iroko, a felicitous duo meeting of bassist Avishai Cohen and conguero/vocalist/Nuyorican spirit channeler Abraham Rodriguez Jr., a pillar of the New York Latin jazz community.

Both Cohen and Rodriguez Jr. have carved robust musical lives, but something symbiotic this way comes with *Iroko*. With the leanest of musical means — a double bass and congas in taut collusion, two or three voices — they conjure an infectious and somehow filling plate of sound and atmosphere, bespeaking a relationship dating back to the '90s. After succumbing to the minimalist charms and propulsive Afro-Cuban pulses, any residual desire to imagine added textures quickly fades.

The project's sonic fold embraces with "The Healer," an undulating two-chord invitation to Afro-Cuban hypnosis. "Fahina" and "Descarga para Andy" up the game of intricacy and infectious sense of abandon.

Closing out the mostly Caribbean/Latin

each Saturday. At first there are intimations of Josephine Baker singing her signature tune "J'ai Deux Amors" (I have two loves), but the late chanteuse's romantically tinged voice does not compare to Salvant's boundless vocal range, and the apogee of this occurs on several tracks, most rewarding on "D'un Feu Secret."

In shifting tones and tempos, Salvant unpacks "Melusine" in a series of pieces, many delivered in delectable arias, and she has a way of shaping her versatility to fit the accompaniment as she does with great finesse and bounce on "Doudou," where the blend is as inseparable as it is mellifluous with Godwin Louis' alto saxophone.

Salvant is a melodious griot, a musical troubadour who, like her muse, can suddenly change almost imperceptibly. Getting your head around understanding exactly what she's conveying may be taunting, but it's less to do with comprehending the tale as the feeling delivered by the singer.

—Herb Boyd

**Melusine:** Est-ce Ainsi Que Les Hommes Vivent?; La Route Enchantée; Il M'a Vue Nue; Dites Moi Que Je Suis Belle; Doudou; Petite Musique Terrienne; Aida; Melusine; Wedo; D'un Feu Secret; Le Temps Est Assassin; Fenestra; Domna N'Almucs; Dame Iseut. (42:07)

**Personnel:** Cécile McLorin Salvant, vocals, synths (7, 9, 13); Sullivan Fortner, piano (3, 5, 6, 11, 12), synths (6, 10), kalimba (12), vocals (12), celeste (14); Aaron Diehl, piano (1, 2); Paul Sikivie, bass (1, 2); Kyle Poole, drums (1, 2); Lawrence Leathers, drums (2); Godwin Louis, alto saxophone (3, 5), whistles (3), vocals (12); Luques Curtis, bass (3, 5, 12, 14); Weedie Braimah, percussion (3, 5, 12, 14), djembe (4); Obed Calvaire, drums (3, 5, 12); Daniel Swenberg, nylon string guitar (8).

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



American-oriented 14-song set with a surprise treat, the pair lends a samba-fied spin to the would-be leisure-suited classic "Fly Me To The Moon." Cohen injects a choice bass solo and vamps on the coda in push-pull syncopated notes, underscoring the keynote chant "I love you," with the final "you" stretching out into the next room. There's a lot of love in these spare-but-vibrant tracks.

—Josef Woodard

**Iroko:** The Healer; Abe's Thing; Tintoreria; It's A Man's World; Descarga Para Andy; Avisale A Mi Vecina—Iroko; Thunder Drum; Exodus; A Bailar Mi Bomba; Crossroads; Venus; A La Loma De Belen; Fahina; Fly Me To The Moon. (45:09)

**Personnel:** Avishai Cohen, bass, vocals; Abraham Rodriguez Jr., conga, vocals; Virginia Alves, vocals.

Ordering info: [avishaicohen.bfan.link](http://avishaicohen.bfan.link)

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## Tineke Postma

### *Aria*

EDITION

★★★★

Dutch saxophonist Tineke Postma's *Aria* is many things, starting with a listening pleasure. Open and airy, the album is neither simple nor extremely difficult, but instead original, inviting and rewarding of repeated listening. In her eighth outing as leader, Postma's shows considerable mastery of freely lyrical improvisational and collaborative strategies; a warm, inquisitive, contemplative and exploratory sound on alto sax and deftness on soprano; a quirky compositional sense and at least a portion of a

remarkably wide range. She has the confidence to play gently, floating in Lester Young-mode as well to digging in like her hero Wayne Shorter with Miles in the '70s but she is not imitative, instead seemingly comfortable being herself.

Her new material for a new quartet is based on motifs or game plans the four circle around and flow through with a loose intimacy, as if they've played daily for years or are gifted with telepathy, dealing with the gracefully staggering "Sankalpa" or stop-time blurts of "Hymn For Hestia." Guitarist Ben Monder deserves huge credit as co-chief among equals here. His exquisite touch and occasional wild outbursts add multiple dimensions to each track, but what's best is how he connects with Postma.

They phrase with remarkable closeness, honored by bassist Robert Landfermann and drummer Tristan Renfrow, who keep pace, vamping, swinging subtly, accenting.

The music's overall mood is one of reflection tinged with sadness, regret or resignation fueling a vision of beauty and the impulse to go for it. The saxophonist's efforts with her quartet on *Aria* aspire to that soprano's memorable heights, in her own darkly sweet way.

—Howard Mandel

**Aria:** Sankalpa; Frede; The Sky Is Everywhere; Still Another Day; Lion's Roar; Vibe Shift; Idyll For Ellemis; Hymn For Hestia; Mysterious Duty; Learning Into The Afternoon; Loft. (49:25)

**Personnel:** Tineke Postma, alto and soprano saxophones; Ben Monder, guitar; Robert Landfermann, bass; Tristan Renfrow, drums.

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

## Samuel Blaser

### *Routes*

ENJA

★★★★

The fruity blart of the trombone has always been a key component of reggae and other island musics and the spirit of Rico Rodriguez hovers benignly over this glorious, sunlit record from an artist who once seemed to inhabit the European avant-garde, but always with a smile in his voice. Blaser has the added benediction of the (now sadly departed) Lee "Scratch" Perry, dub's Lord of Misrule, who adds his cracked vocals to "Green Island" and a second version of "Rainy Days." The latter doesn't do Carroll Thompson any favors; her version seems pretty midtown by comparison.

Blaser enlists a phalanx of fine fellow trombonists, including bass trombone player Jennifer Warthon and shells man Steve Turre, to back him on the first run-through of the former track, but it's his own playing, definitive of the trombone's natural place between sublimity and comedy, that defines the album. Together with Alan Weekes' chuk-a-chuk guitar and Alex Wilson's wheezy organ, it's a rootsy record (and, yes, the title is a pun) that offers authentic reggae mixed with a genuine jazz sensibility.



ity. If you can take your beats on the one and the three — and if not, your cardiologist will advise — this is one of the records of the summer, a genuine summer record that will dispel any cloud and calm any wind (except the ones that are playing on it).

—Brian Morton

**Routes:** Silver Dollar; Rainy Days; Thoroughfare; Green Island; Chronicles; Beautiful Bed Of Lies; Lady Rawlinson; Rainy Days; Green Island; End Of The Beginning. (56:40)

**Personnel:** Samuel Blaser, trombone; John Fedchock, Johan Escalante, Glenn Ferris, trombone; Jennifer Warthon, bass trombone; Steve Turre, trombone, shells; Soweto Kinch, alto saxophone; Michael Blake, tenor saxophone; Alex Wilson, keyboards; Alan Weekes, guitar; Ira Coleman, bass, baby bass; Dion Parson, drums; Carroll Thompson, vocals; Lee "Scratch" Perry, vocals, dub.

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



## Theo Croker

### *By The Way*

SONY MASTERWORKS

★★★★

For each track of *By The Way*, Florida native brass player Theo Croker is in harmonious concert with British-Nigerian vocalist Ego Ella May and DJ/producer D'LEAU to spectacular effect. The outing opens with "Theo Says," a spacy, yet tropical jaunt. May recounted the creation of the cut's lyrics was organic. At a London recording session, she was inspired by Croker "speaking some wisdom and throwing some golden nuggets my way, so I wrote about some of them — it was a pretty quick process."

In fact, May's lyrics on the balance of the songs, including "Slowly" and "If I Could I Would," are deeply engrossing romantic meditations. And while warped synths and liberally applied echo effects result in a sustained dreamlike atmosphere (Croker's horn sounds as though he's fully submerged in stardust), serpentine percussion (especially on "Good Day") keeps the tempo more akin to a steamy midnight prow than a tepid naptime crawl.

"Somethin' (Extended Take)" wraps up this all too short recording with a special treat: an extended version of a composition originally released on his 2022 album *Love Quantum*. This time, the Jazz Age syncopated drumbeat of the first release is omitted and the record clocks in at roughly double the length. It's a hypnotizing tune on which May channels Diana Ross' rendition of Billie Holiday in the 1972 film *Lady Sings the Blues*: the vocal equivalent of bruised, dark, sweet fruit. The gem is capped off by a chilling crescendo featuring guitarist Jeff Parker.

*By The Way* is a short, yet mighty delight: somehow sun-drenched and yet manages to take listeners straight to the moon.

—Ayana Contreras

**By The Way:** Theo Says; Slowly; If I Could I Would; Good Day; Somethin' (Extended Take). (21:55)

**Personnel:** Theo Croker, trumpet; Ego Ella May, vocal; D'LEAU, percussion; Shekwoaga Ode, drums; Eric Wheeler, acoustic bass, bass; Michael King, keyboards; Jeff Parker, electric guitar (5).

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



John Pizzarelli made his recording debut 40 years ago.

## John Pizzarelli *Stage And Screen*

PALMETTO

★★★★½

Released in celebration of the 40th anniversary of his 1983 debut recording, *Stage And Screen*, John Pizzarelli's newest record showcases the

guitarist and singer doing what he does best: precise and witty interpretations of classic and modern American songs, delivered with an inimitable sense of swing.

While Pizzarelli's last release directed attention to his guitar dexterity and the songbook of Pat Metheny, *Stage And Screen* looks at classics from Hollywood and Broadway spanning nine

decades, amply featuring Pizzarelli's cool vocals. According to Pizzarelli, son of late jazz guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli, *Stage And Screen* is full of the songs he loves to play most — lending a joyful easiness to tunes like the lighthearted opener, "Too Close For Comfort," and the clever, list-style "I Love Betsy," from the stage musical spin-off of the 1992 film *Honeymoon in Vegas*.

The nostalgia in the classic material also lends poignant bittersweetness to *Stage And Screen*. The track list deals consistently with themes of memory and lost time, including on the unique bossa nova arrangement of "Where Or When" from the 1937 Rodgers and Hart musical *Babes in Toyland*, and the *Casablanca*-associated "As Time Goes By," which Pizzarelli begins emotively with the rarely sung verse.

*Stage And Screen* also returns to the trio format Pizzarelli has historically favored, but showcases a relatively new band with bassist Mike Karn and pianist Isaiah J. Thompson. The pair offer a solid rhythmic lock and inventive improvisations, creating a sublime bedrock for Pizzarelli's charming, sophisticated performance.

—Alexa Peters

**Stage And Screen:** Too Close For Comfort; I Love Betsy; I Want To Be Happy; Tea For Two; Just In Time; Some Other Time; Where Or When; Oklahoma Suite; Time After Time; You're All The World To Me; As Time Goes By; Coffee In A Cardboard Cup.

**Personnel:** John Pizzarelli, vocals and guitar; Mike Karn, bass; Isaiah J. Thompson, piano.

Ordering info: [palmetto-records.com](http://palmetto-records.com)

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Saxophonist Sofia Zumbado  
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# Primed for Reinvention

Music has the power to bypass the conscious mind and take us on a journey that resonates in our hearts, changing perceptions of the past, enhancing our enjoyment of the present and offering hope for the future. This may be truer for songs we've heard before, reinvented by artists in a way that enhances our appreciation.

Singer and pianist **Champion Fulton** and her trio with bassist Hide Tanaka and drummer Fukushi Tainaka cut **Meet Me At Birdland** (Independent Release; 78:10 ★★★) live at the legendary club. With the exception of three instrumentals — “Happy Camper,” an original that gives Tainaka a chance to show off his rhythmic dexterity, Phineas Newborn’s “Theme For Basie” and Ray Bryant’s “I Don’t Care,” featuring Tanaka’s extended bass solo — the tunes are given the expected presentation, showing off Fulton’s playing and inventive phrasing. Her measured delivery amplifies the distress of “Just Friends” and “Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most.” She takes a more upbeat approach to “Too Marvelous For Words” and “I Only Have Eyes For You,” her vocal trills and sparkling runs adding to the bright feel of the songs.

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

While not known as a jazz singer, Joni Mitchell’s playful asides in her recordings hinted at her love of improvisation. During the COVID lockdown, **Janiece Jaffe** dove into Mitchell’s catalog and found her messages of regret and redemption reassuring. She asked her friend, pianist Monika Herzig, to write jazzy arrangements for nine Mitchell songs, resulting in **Both Sides Of Joni** (Acme; 59:12 ★★). The charts hew to a familiar pattern: Jaffe sings a verse and chorus, the band improvises on the melody and Jaffe comes back to close the track. Standouts are the bossa nova treatment of “Hissing Of Summer Lawns,” with an anguished vocal by Jaffe, and “The Circle Game,” with Herzig’s piano sounding like a music box. Just before the CD release, Jaffe died suddenly, but Herzig will be touring the arrangements this spring in the U.S. and Europe.

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

**Lizzie Thomas** stretches out on **Duo Encounters** (Dot Time; 52:17 ★★★), a program of 12 duets. It’s a set full of simmering, low-key performances by Thomas and guests. “Nature Boy” is delivered almost completely a capella, with sparse percussion interludes by Café da Silva. Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf’s cello alternates between long sustained notes and plucked tones, as Thomas sings the usually unheard lyric to Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight.” She intensifies the heartache behind the lyric of “Smile,” with the help of Guilherme Monteiro’s guitar.



Hailey Brinnel

MAT BAKER

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

On **Beautiful Tomorrow** (Outside In; 39:27 ★★★★★), her second album, vocalist and trombone player **Hailey Brinnel** once again explores selections from the Great American Songbook. She also debuts two new compositions that sound like they could become standards. “I Might Be Evil” is a gently swinging portrait of a woman trying to make her way through an uncaring world. She’s looking for love, but avoids it when she finds it. Silas Irvine’s piano and a swinging rhythm section drive home the ironic hook line: “I’m starting to think I might be evil, ‘cause I’m certainly no good.” Brinnel channels the spirit of Lambert, Hendrix and Ross on “The Sound.” She delivers the tongue-twisting, scat-like lyric with a smirk in her voice, telling prospective suitors, “My heart isn’t ready for the sound of your love.”

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

Dorian Holley and his daughter Nayanna are best known as backup singers. During the pandemic lockdown they got together to make **DNA** (Ropeadope; 43:45 ★★★★★), their debut album as **Dorian Holley + Nayanna Holley**. The set list draws on familiar songs from the ‘70s and ‘80s, from a roster of artists including Leonard Bernstein, Bill Withers and The Beatles. They chose positive music that would lift the spirits of their audience, and they do just that. Their gospel influences shine through on “People Get Ready,” delivered with a funk beat, hand claps and a call-and-response coda. Peter Gabriel’s “Don’t Give Up” is a perfect song for the pandemic, balancing the desolate images of the verses with a hopeful chorus. They resolve the tension in a long coda, softly chanting, “Don’t give up,” in close harmony. Larry Goldings’ organ and piano supply a solid foundation for arrangements that feature the restrained backing of the other session players.

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

DB



## Tony Kofi & Alina Bzhezhsinska “Altera Vita (For Pharoah Sanders)”

BBE MUSIC

★★★★★

Saxophonist Tony Kofi and harpist Alina Bzhezhsinska pay homage to spiritual jazz master Pharoah Sanders on a single track, a gentle and poignant call-and-response between romantic reeds and devotional harp titled “Altera Vita.” Composed by Kofi, the song is a reverent piece that holds space for Sanders and the enduring legacy he has left behind.

On Sept. 24, 2022, on the eve of Bzhezhsinska’s HipHarpCollective’s *Reflection* album launch, the jazz world mourned the passing of the Sanders. The late saxophonist’s spirit was definitely present in the London venue King’s Place the following night, when Kofi and Bzhezhsinska, two of his master students, led a moving tribute to the jazz legend with their goosebump-raising rendition of his iconic “Astral Travelling.”

The two had performed with Sanders back in 2017 during a concert to commemorate the 50th and 10th anniversaries of the deaths of John and Alice Coltrane, which only further cemented Sanders’ influence in their own musical journeys. Sanders himself had worked with both Coltranes, and this night served as a spiritual passing of the baton to Kofi and Bzhezhsinska, the former heavily influenced by John and the latter by Alice.

Kofi’s playing is gentle yet robust, reminiscent of the bright, mentholated notes of “Astral Traveling.” Bzhezhsinska’s improvised phrases straddle the line between modal and experimental jazz, inspired by Sanders’ meditative collaborations with Alice Coltrane. “Altera Vita” is a beautiful eulogy that celebrates their deep connection to Sanders’ musical legacy. —Ivana Ng

**Altera Vita (For Pharoah Sanders):** Altera Vita (For Pharoah Sanders). (5:34)

**Personnel:** Tony Kofi, saxophone; Alina Bzhezhsinska, harp.

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



## Bobby West *Big Trippin'* SOULVILLE SOUND

★★★★

When one starts to listen to Bobby West's *Big Trippin'*, some listeners may ask, "Where has Bobby West been all of my life?" Although he is based in the Los Angeles area, the sixtyish pianist spent much of 1993–2021 overseas, playing music in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. After his return to the West Coast, he released his long overdue debut recording as a leader, *Leimert Park After Dark*, in 2021.

*Big Trippin'*, like the previous set, features the pianist in a trio. He is supported by the late bassist James Leary and drummer Jerrell Ballard on a diverse but mostly satisfying set of originals and standards.

The music covers a fairly wide range. The opening "Big Trippin'," is a bebopish blues in which West hints at both Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell while still sounding fairly original within the tradition. He swings "Only A Rose" as a medium-tempo cooker and then shows his ease at creating a freely improvised solo on "Variations On Various Faces," which is dedicated to Horace Tapscoott. That performance, which sometimes includes a rapid left-hand pattern that sounds like modern stride, is one of the highlights.

A medium-tempo "Charade" is in 6/4 time but often has the feeling of 4/4. "Mode For Morpheus," another spontaneously improvised performance, is a colorful modal piece that has a Middle Eastern feel. Other selections include a soul jazz romp in the idiom of Bobby Timmons on "Right Here, Right Now," a tender "I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face," some light Latin music and a brief "Michelle." Throughout the set, Bobby West makes one glad that his artistry is finally being documented.

—Scott Yanow

**Big Trippin':** Big Trippin'; Only A Rose; Variations On Various Faces; Charade; Mode For Morpheus; Right Here Right Now; I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face; Tres Palabras; Michele; Say Si Si. (46:40)

**Personnel:** Bobby West, piano; James Leary, bass; Jerrell Ballard, drums.

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



Terrell Stafford of the Temple Jazz Sextet

## Temple Jazz Sextet *Fly With the Wind*

BCM+D

★★★★½

On *Fly With The Wind*, the Temple University jazz faculty come together to explore compositions by Philadelphia music royalty. Each of these four tunes bear the mark of the "sound of Philadelphia," as they also bear the craft and care of musicians well-suited for sharing the art of instruction.

It becomes difficult to listen to this album without thinking about how central music education has been to "the music" over the last several decades. And Temple's jazz program has been at the fore. Though this album is less a celebration of this legacy, the residue of that history resounds.

On John Coltrane's "Naima," the ensemble moves through an intimate and sensitive sonic register, a lingering in the solemnity that does not bother to shake us free. We are brought to that moment with the preceding title track, which offers a new arrangement of the McCoy Tyner classic, with a one-minute introduction that announces the tune. It is a herald of something else, something new.

This take, like the record itself, boldly features a coterie of jazz teachers who profess a deep and abiding respect for a city's tradition. It is hard to imagine a better group of caretakers.

—Joshua Myers

**Fly With The Wind:** All Members; Fly With the Wind; Naima; Yes I Can, No You Can't. (36:34)

**Personnel:** Terrell Stafford, trumpet; Dick Oatts, alto saxophone; Bruce Barth, piano; Tim Warfield, tenor saxophone; Mike Boone, bass; Justin Faulkner, drums.

**Ordering info:** [boyer.temple.edu/about/bcmd-records](http://boyer.temple.edu/about/bcmd-records)





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# Collective Intuition

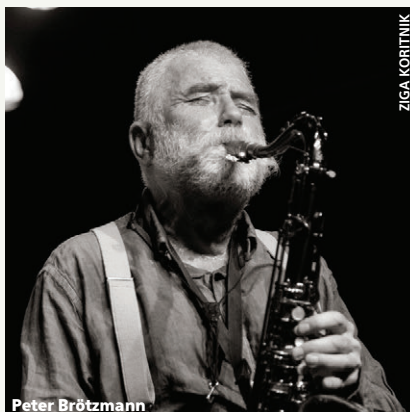
In a recent interview with the Polish publication *Dwutygodnik*, Peter Brötzmann said with typical bluntness that the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine had made the last three years the most depressing time of his life. But late in the summer of 2021 he momentarily slipped the bonds of quarantine to celebrate his 80th birthday. Musicians from different aspects of his career came to honor him. ***Naked Nudes* (Trost; ★★★★★ 38:39)**, by the **Brötzmann/Leigh/Lonberg-Holm** trio, drew together two strands from the immense tapestry of the saxophonist's musical life. He has played with cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm, a veteran of the Brötzmann Chicago Tentet and a recurring duo partner, since the late 1990s, but pedal steel guitarist Heather Leigh was his most frequent touring accompanist in the years before COVID. While Leigh favored curling, repetitive lines and Lonberg-Holm issued harsh, battering attacks, the two accompanists found common ground in a distortion-heavy sound. Brötzmann's phrasing may have shortened, but his distinctly harsh tone was quite intact, and his playing vented the tragedy of the times.

Ordering info: [trost.at](#)

Twenty years ago, pianist **Matt Mitchell** moved to New York, and since then has become a preferred accompanist for Tim Berne, Dave Douglas and Anna Webber. A decade later he released *Fiction*, his first album, a program of maximalist duos with drummer Ches Smith. His music has always been dense, but over time its scale has escalated. Snark Horse, the ensemble he co-leads with another drummer, Kate Gentile, released a six-CD boxed set in 2021. On ***Oblong Aplomb* (Out Of Your Heads; ★★½ 65:49/63:40)**, Mitchell presents one CD of duets with each drummer. Gentile is Mitchell's most frequent accompanist in recent years, and her jagged, circuitous figures integrate so immaculately into the pianist's information-rich pieces that a listener may never stop to wonder if any of this music is improvised; rather, the complexity is the point. Smith's lighter, more streamlined attack lets a bit of air in through the cracks. This makes the second disc an easier listen without diluting its spectacular virtuosity.

Ordering info: [outofyourheadrecords.com](#)

Keyboardist Pat Thomas first convened **Scatter** in London 30 years ago. The quartet, which includes vocalist Phil Minton, guitarist Dave Tucker and drummer Roger Turner, practices an improvisational method in which just about anything might happen. On ***A Clear Day Like This* (577; ★★ 37:43)** was record-



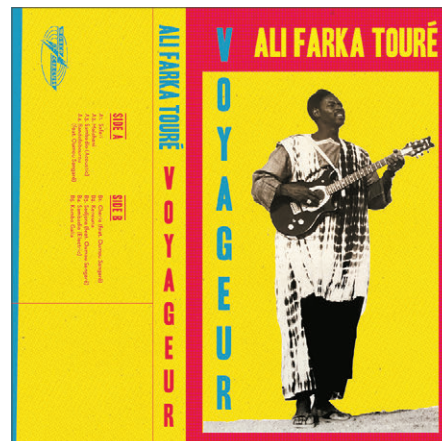
ed in concert at London's Café Oto in 2017. Minton, who applies an extraordinary array of guttural sounds, exquisitely turned yelps, precisely placed tones and intimations of invented speech, instantly grabs attention. But a listener will get more from this music by listening to how his performance fits into the ensemble's ever-changing constellations of timbre and motion. Each player brings a great deal of flexibility. Thomas can focus things with a single piano note, or sound like a ray-gun shootout; Tucker shifts easily along a spectrum from prickly acoustic chords to acidic fuzztones; and Turner can apply either hurricane force or gently rushing pressure to the action.

Ordering info: [577records.com](#)

Alto saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc moved to New York in 1973, and for nearly 50 years he was an imposing but under-documented player on the city's free-jazz scene. He and Steve Swell had been recurring partners in sound since the late 1980s, when the trombonist joined Moondoc's Jus' Grew Orchestra, and they were planning one more recording together when Moondoc passed in 2021. Undaunted, the surviving musician assembled three concert recordings from 2004 and 2005 by **Steve Swell's Fire Into Music**, which also included the peerless rhythm section of William Parker and Hamid Drake. The triple album ***For Jemeel* (Rogueart; ★★★★★ 55:30/64:01/63:43)** captures the quartet's bounty of gifts in its natural habitat — on stage. Each CD was recorded in a different city, and the music is split between the horn players' compositions and totally improvised music that nonetheless retains a strong sense of form. The band's name acknowledges the incendiary quality of its members' reactions to each other. Drake and Parker play like wild horses, which is to say that they might allow the horns to ride their fiercely swinging, mercurially changing rhythms, but the rider better hang on tight. Neither Moondoc nor Swell gets thrown, and the bluff, conversational way they respond to each other attests to their personal bond.

Ordering info: [rogueart.com](#)

ZIGA KORTNIK



## Ali Farka Touré *Voyageur* WORLD CIRCUIT

★★★★

Few artists live up to their legendary status as modestly as Ali Farka Touré. His guitar playing introduced the world to the traditional sounds of Mali, and inspired a worldwide group of musicians of all genres.

This posthumous collection includes music from all phases of his career and features a long list of collaborators, including his son, Vieux Farka Touré.

The album opens with "Safari" (the Swahili word for journey), a loose, swinging session with Touré's meandering electric guitar line dancing through a background of traditional Malian percussion instruments and the harmonies supplied by the players.

Oumou Sangaré, a singer who gained international fame with Touré's support, guests on three songs, including "Sadjona," recorded at a soundcheck for an album session. Sangaré starts singing alone and the rest of the band slips in behind her, including Vieux Farka Touré on second guitar and a subtle horn line supplied by the saxophones of Pee Wee Ellis and Josh Arcoleo. She improvised a new lyric on the spot, imagining the celebration that would take place on Touré's death, words that have added poignancy today.

Ellis and saxophone player Steve Williamson join Touré on "Sambadio," a jam with hints of rock, blues and jazz in its performance with Touré's electric guitar playing off of Ellis' horn line.

The album closes with "Kombo Galia." Touré's electric guitar meanders through the rhythms of three ngoni (traditional banjo/guitar) players and seven singers. It ends with Touré laughing and saying, "OK!" while the musicians applaud.

—j. poet

**Voyageur:** Safari; Malahani; Sambadio (Acoustic); Bandalobourou; Cherie; Kenouna; Sadjona; Sambadio (Electric); Kombo Galia. (44:59)

**Personnel:** Ali Farka Touré, guitar, vocals, percussion; plus dozens of contributing musicians and vocalists.

Ordering info: [worldcircuit.co.uk](#)



## Petros Klampanis *Tora Collective* ENJA/YELLOWBIRD ★★★★

It has been a dozen years since Klampanis included a song from his homeland of Greece on his debut album, *Contextual* (Inner Circle). “Thalassaki” proved to be a pivotal moment in the bassist’s musical development, enjoining his loves of both American jazz and the folkloric music of his heritage.

Consider this self-titled debut of his new band, the Tora Collective, a further rendering of that union. The bringing together of Grecian and other international folk and jazz talents succeeds with aplomb, thanks to the sensitive craftsmanship of all the artists and their informed authenticity as they treat these traditional songs with just the right balance of respect and innovation, girded by the deft rhythm section of Klampanis, pianist Kristjan Randalu and drummer/electronic musician Ziv Ravitz.

The album opens with a short solo rumination by clarinetist Giorgos Kotsinis, whose buzzy inflections summon an ancient musette from a bygone era. “Enteka” is a rhythmic, whimsical melody sung buoyantly by vocalist Areti Ketime. “Xehorismata” features the impassioned singing of oudist Thomas Konstantinou.

Ketime continues the sweet melancholy with “Menexedes Kai Zouboulia” as she shapes the verses with tragically beautiful affectation. “Hariklaki” offers something livelier and danceable as Ravitz’s active drumming propels Ketime’s expressive singing. Perhaps the highlight is Kotsinis on “Osmantakas,” where the clarinetist’s wide vibrato and bendy turns beget an exotic kind of blues, as if Barney Bigard had a Greek doppelgänger. —Gary Fukushima

**Tora Collective:** Tora; Enteka; Disoriented; Xehorismata; South By Southeast; Menexedes Kai Zouboulia; Hariklaki; Sibethera; Osmantakas; Milo Mou Kai Mandarinini. (50:42)

**Personnel:** Petros Klampanis, bass; Areti Ketime, vocals; Thomas Konstantinou, oud, laouto; Giorgos Kotsinis, clarinet; Kristjan Randalu, piano; Ziv Ravitz, percussion, electronics; Alexandros Arkadopoulos, clarinet (3); Laura Robles, percussion (5); Sebastian Studnitzky, trumpet (10); Andreas Polyzogopoulos, trumpet (7).

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

## Bloom/Helias/Previte *2.3.23* RADIO LEGS/RANK HIPOCRISY ★★★★

It may sound like it, and its title may suggest it, but this is not a trio blowing session. Soprano saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom, bassist Mark Helias and drummer Bobby Previte have a long history together; they can be heard on her albums *Wingwalker*, *Early Americans* and *Wild Lines: Improvising Emily Dickinson*, and Previte has been her drummer on many more releases than that.

But the music here was created remotely throughout the pandemic, initially as duos between saxophonist and bassist, recorded online from Bloom’s and Helias’ respective home studios. (They have previously released two albums of pandemic duos, the remote *Some Kind Of Tomorrow* and *See Our Way*, which was recorded in an actual studio, face to face.) Once Bloom and Helias had created the 11 pieces here, they were sent to Previte, who laid down drums and percussion in one or two passes.

The music has a loose, at-the-speed-of-thought feel, but structures emerge at a few points; on “Gumshoe,” Helias digs deep into the blues, and Bloom grants him a lot of space, only occasionally responding with a long, low



melody of her own or a fluttering line. Previte, meanwhile, adds subtle tom fills more akin to orchestral percussion than jazz drumming.

The next track, “Ground And Distance,” is a rubato ballad that makes the illusion of real-time collective improvisation seamless.

This is a beautiful, absorbing record that will make the listener want to see and hear these three musicians back onstage together, the sooner the better. —Philip Freeman

**2.3.23:** Reverse Window; Checkpoint; Where The World Went; The Call Back; Why?; You Ask; Room To Imagine; Akimbo; Spats; Gumshoe; Ground And Distance; Hawk Migration. (49:11)

**Personnel:** Jane Ira Bloom, soprano saxophone; Mark Helias, bass; Bobby Previte, drums.

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

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# The Big Jazz Jam on Wheels

Immersive listening to the entire 11-and-a-half hours of **Classic Jazz At The Philharmonic Jam Sessions (1950–1957)** (Mosaic; ★★★★★), which spans 10 CDs and a pivotal era for jazz tours by all-stars barnstorming across America, is invigorating if also exhausting. Here are the top jazz players of the time, set up to shine in concerts structured around blues, ballads, standards and battles (all in good fun, but they do take on an edge), going for cheers night after night, always acting as if inspiration was striking at the moment as it never had before.

That couldn't possibly have been true — but try to keep up with these players! This is when jazz was hot, sweaty and squealing, often of wild energy and honking grit, stirred up and released for the sheer pleasure of an amped audience. The immediacy of the artists' energy was surely genuine, and the excitement generated in concerts venues as captured on these recordings — which follow from *The Complete Jazz At The Philharmonic On Verve, 1944–1949*, Mosaic's 10-CD boxed set released 25 years ago — remains palpable.

The way Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Benny Carter, Roy Eldridge, Jo Jones, Oscar Peterson, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich and so many others played their butts off for vocally enthusiastic post-World War II crowds remains gloriously infectious and exhilarating, uplifting nearly three quarters of a century later. If these modern masters sometimes feigned instant creativity, energizing well-worn gambits, so what? They inarguably swung — and hard.

Some sterling examples: Buddy Rich's trio with Hank Jones and Ray Brown tearing up "Carnegie Blues (Air Mail Special)." Eldridge and Charlie Shavers in "The Trumpet Battle" with riffing reedists Carter, Young, Flip Phillips and a rhythm section of Peterson, Barney Kessel (who delivers a kick-ass solo), Brown and Rich.

The marvel of clarinetist Buddy DeFranco, in his early 30s, with Lionel Hampton, in his 50s, on vibes. Guitarist Herb Ellis, Brown and Rich on "Body And Soul." Hawkins and Eldridge over pianist John Lewis, bassist Percy Heath and drummer Connie Kay, two-thirds of the Modern Jazz Quartet — which also backs Stan Getz and J.J. Johnson on "Crazy Rhythm." Coleman Hawkins in his prime, commanding in every appearance on these JATP dates. Lester Young, beautiful even when ineffably sad.

Just to intone the names of these JATP all-stars is to summon the high standards of the '50s' virtuosic swing-to-bop individuals. Trumpeters Harry "Sweets" Edison and Dizzy Gillespie, tenor saxophonist Ben Webster and drum-



J.J. Johnson (left), Buck Clayton and Coleman Hawkins at a Jazz at the Philharmonic jam session.

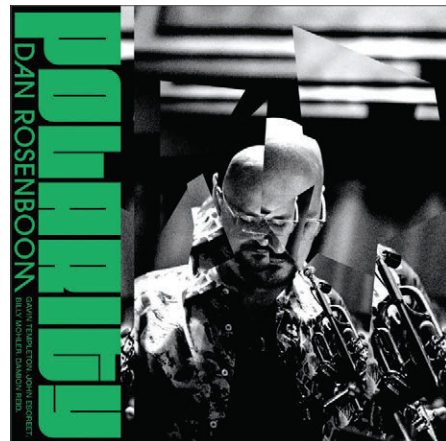
mer Louie Bellson take highly personalized, bravura turns. Benny Carter unleashes some unusually long but characteristically cogent, elegant soli, as well as demonstrating in ballad medleys how to condense a full statement into a single chorus. Peterson, fairly early in his long career, is a generous and thoroughly engaged accompanist as well as a keyboard whiz.

Sonny Stitt's bebop phrases ring out in noticeable contrast to the still transitional saxophonics mostly on display. Less-well remembered greats including altoist Willie Smith, trombonist Bill Harris and drummer J.C. Heard get their due. And immortal Ella Fitzgerald wailing on "Stompin' At The Savoy" and "Lady Be Good" is icing on the very rich, filling cake (literally, the last two tracks on the album's disc 10).

In some senses, the Jazz at the Philharmonic shows presented under über producer Norman Granz's auspices were formulaic, but the formula was devised to produce thrills, and it consistently succeeded. At the time, a "jam session" was notionally a backroom, after-hours, deliciously private cutting session of roaming roosters (the roster is, but for Ms. Fitzgerald, entirely male). Granz exploited that concept, ushering small combo jazz into far greater venues, bringing more stars to wide-spread, remote locales in one night than they'd otherwise see in a year. As he had near vertical monopoly (there were some notable exceptions), covering artists' contracts for tours as well for his brilliantly marketed record labels, Granz was the great influencer, and used his powers mostly for good.

The JATP jams sessions serve as a rich resource of cultural history, documented here by Tad Hershorn and DownBeat's own John McDonough. Trace the evolution of tenor sax styles from Hawk, Pres and Carter through Willie Smith and Illinois Jacquet to Stitt and Getz. You want pure creativity, nothing done twice? Get real. Highly skilled professional musicians, fueled by swagger and sensitivity, gigging night after night, bringing music's message of the century to all, across the land. This is history, not myth — and it lives. **DB**

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



## Dan Rosenboom *Polarity*

ORENDA

★★★★★

Los Angeles trumpeter Dan Rosenboom has been a scene fixture stretching back more than a decade, playing in numerous bands and operating Orenda Records, a key outlet documenting the city's jazz community with a broad lens.

Working with producer Justin Stanley, a figure connected more to the pop world than improvised music, Rosenboom deftly transplants some of the indelible verities of the second Miles Davis Quintet, particularly his penchant for floating, ambiguous melodies and haunting harmony, within a thoroughly contemporary rhythmic conception.

The group sets the table with the 20-minute opener "The Age Of Snakes," a sleek epic riding on drummer Damion Reid's boom-bap, pared down to the most basic sort of propulsion. He and bassist Billy Mohler carve out a deeply satisfying pocket that gives the extended solos by the leader and saxophonist Gavin Templeton space, expertly prodded by pianist John Escreet.

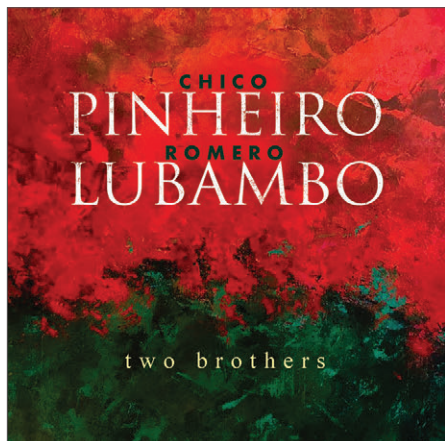
The remaining seven tracks are more compact, usually focusing on a specific melodic shard or conceptual gambit, but the rapport of the group — which was initially rooted in a fully improvised session at the L.A. creative hothouse called ETA — is what truly binds the record together. The front line articulates Rosenboom's dark-hued themes with an elastic ease, drilling down on zigzagging lines on driving, angular tunes like "A Paper Tiger" or "War Money," and loosening up on the steely beauty of "On Summoning The Will," while the rhythm section pulls the ensemble through an endlessly shifting terrain of groove.

—Peter Margasak

**Polarity:** The Age Of Snakes; A Paper Tiger; Walking Shadows; War Money; On Summoning The Will; Ikigai; Tidal Mirror; Minotaur. (67:58)

**Personnel:** Dan Rosenboom, trumpet, flugelhorn, quartertone trumpet; Gavin Templeton, alto and baritone saxophones; John Escreet, piano, keyboards; Billy Mohler, bass; Damion Reid, drums.

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



## Chico Pinheiro & Romero Lubambo *Two Brothers*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★½

A pair of mountains along the Ipanema coastline serves as inspiration for *Two Brothers*, the latest offering from Brazilian guitarists Chico Pinheiro and Romero Lubambo. The 12 duets on this Sunnyside release give expression to the breadth of the instrumentalists' musical passions, from classic sambas to jazz standards to contemporary pop.

The melancholic air "Morro Dois Irmãos" gives the album its title; in this tune, an emotional storminess roils just beneath the surface. But these darker colors only limn the light-heartedness of the album's other Brazilian selections, such as "Aquele Um," with its vibrant rhythmic conviviality, and "Samba e Amor," an exercise in nimble, intervallic soloing. The pair also joins forces on two popular Antônio Carlos Jobim tunes: "Red Blouse," its sweetly articulated intro spilling into a profusion of cheery riffs on the head, and "Wave," a soothing, bluesy mélange of both familiar and unpredictable ideas.

A bright take on Bill Evans' "Waltz For Debby" benefits from the pair's fluid approach to melody, even as Henry Mancini's "Sally's Tomato," a lesser-known songbook contender from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, provides opportunity to expand into jagged harmonies. Taking cinematic themes further, the pair uncover both the glint of hope in Michel Legrand's somber ballad "Windmills Of Your Mind" and the melodic sophistication in Sting's "Until." The biggest surprise on the album, however, is a gentle rendering of Billie Eilish's "My Future," with its bended notes and jazz changes that land just this side of defiance. —Suzanne Lorge

**Two Brothers:** Aquele Um; Samba e Amor; Windmills Of Your Mind; Red Blouse; Waltz For Debby; Wave; Send One Your Love; My Future; For No One; Morro Dois Irmãos; Sally's Tomato; Until. (57:28)

**Personnel:** Chico Pinheiro, acoustic and electric guitars; Romero Lubambo, acoustic and electric guitars.

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

## Dave Askren/ Jeff Benedict *Denver Sessions*

TAPESTRY

★★★★½

In a move more common to the rock world than jazz, per se, the latest album by the fruitful duo of Los Angeles-based guitarist Dave Askren and saxophonist Jeff Benedict pursues the concept of converging on a town/studio/context away from home to make a record. For the album *Denver Sessions*, Askren and Benedict headed east while New Yorker vibist Ted Piltzecker headed west to meet in the civic mile-high middle, home to drummer Paul Romaine and bassist Patrick McDevitt.

The sum effect on the session in the Mighty Fine Productions studio is that of a pleasant neo-traditional variety pack of mostly original tunes delivered with a sense of lived-in musical relationship from the top down, Askren and Benedict having recorded three other albums in the past decade (including a Wayne Shorter tribute, *Paraphernalia*, in 2020).

Jazz history trickles through early tracks of the sequence, from the Jackie McLean-esque "Jackie's Idea" to an homage to Rudy van Gelder's mythic jazz studio compound, "Englewood Cliffs." The competent but somewhat faceless content of the album's first act soon yields to more interesting twists, compositionally and playing-wise, as the album finds its deeper and more interesting grooves.

Benedict's "Ennui, Anyone?," with its tongue-rolling title, dives into a duskier emotional place, and features Askren's more adven-



turous guitar solo, followed by a snaky unison riff before landing back in the comfy zone of the head. Parts adding to an ultimately satisfying whole include Askren's "Memories," a moody, dusky waltz contrasting Benedict's uptempo romper "Orange Express," giving the leaders due stretching rights. Piltzecker supplies some Brazilian/Latin American compositional sauce, with the relaxed sombo resilience and the energized roil of "Rumba Liam."

Jazz history comes back to call at album's end, with a deconstructed version of "Stompin' At The Savoy," not so much stomping as tinkering with a 9/8 and halftime dotted meter for the soloists to move around in. It also gives the drummer, and hosting Denverite, a forum in which to shine.

—Josef Woodard

**Denver Sessions:** Jackie's Idea; Marie Adele; Englewood Cliffs; Poised; Ennui, Anyone?; Memories; Resilience; Orange Express; Rumba Liam; Stompin' At The Savoy. (58:32)

**Personnel:** Dave Askren, guitar; Jeff Benedict, saxophones; Ted Piltzecker, vibes; Patrick McDevitt, bass; Patrick Romaine, drums.

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Order info at: [www.bothsidesofjoni.com](http://www.bothsidesofjoni.com)



## Jane Bunnett and Maqueque *Playing With Fire*

LINUS ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★

Ten years ago, Jane Bunnett founded her all-women, Afro-Cuban sextet Maqueque, assembling some of Cuba's brightest, young instrumental talents. Maqueque might be associated with Bunnett in name, but here and on its three previous releases, the Canadian soprano saxophonist and flutist is plainly among equals.

In recent years, the group has netted an enchanting lead vocalist in Joanne Majoko, and

she doesn't disappoint, her lines pearly and precise. Longtime pianist Dánae Olano leads off Bud Powell's "Tempus Fugit" with a magisterial piano solo coyly resembling a Bach invention, which then explodes into a statement of the tune's 16th-note theme, laced with violin (Daniela Olano), congas (Mary Paz) and Majoko's scattling. Mingus' "Jump Monk" also gets a frisky treatment, eventually parting to make way for a pirouetting saxophone solo by Bunnett.

"Daniela's Theme" rightly spotlights 19-year-old violinist Daniela Olano, a new addition and pianist Dánae's younger sister. Also recording with the ensemble for the first time is guest guitarist and erstwhile Prince collaborator Donna Grantis, who streaks her supercharged sound through some engaging tunes: "A Human Race," "Sierra" and "A God Unknown."

*Playing With Fire* burns brightly but blazes out somewhat. "Tomorrow" features sterling ensemble work, but unfolds with unsentimental hurriedness. The title track is lush, but less compelling. Still, if Maqueque's goal is to highlight promising voices in Afro-Cuban jazz, it does, and then some.

—Hannah Edgar

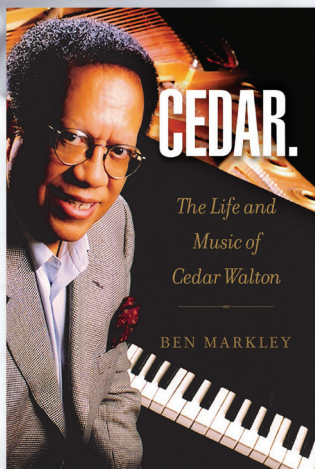
**Playing With Fire:** Human Race; Tempus Fugit; Sierra; Daniela's Theme; A God Unknown; TURQUOISE/TURQUESA; Bolero a un Sueño; Jump Monk; Tomorrow; Playing With Fire. (46:17)

**Personnel:** Jane Bunnett, soprano saxophone, flute; Joanna Tendai Majoko, vocals; Mary Paz, congas, vocals; Dánae Olano, piano; Tailin Marrero, acoustic and electric bass; Yissy García, drums.

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

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## Zack Lober *NO FILL3R*

ZENNEZ

★★★★½

Bassist Zack Lober has worked with Chet Doxas, Jamie Baum, Henry Threadgill, Butch Morris and John Escreet and he has been involved in the electronic music world, but that has little to do with the music on *NO FILL3R*. Of greater relevance is his affection for the music of pianist Paul Bley and the Jimmy Giuffre 3.

On Lober's second release as a leader (after 2008's *The Story*), which is the length of an EP, he is joined in Amsterdam by trumpeter Suzan Veneman and drummer Sun-Mi Hong. The music that results from their collaboration is quietly adventurous. Other than brief unaccompanied drums and trumpet features and the free improvisation of the title cut, all of the selections are the bassist's originals.

"Mid-Music" opens the program with the most extroverted performance, a free-bop exploration that utilizes a catchy melody. Veneman's laid-back trumpet solos over the bass and drums on "Force Majeure." "A Hymn" is a fairly brief and heartfelt tribute to both Paul Bley and Lober's grandfather.

"NO FILL3R" is a bit more heated than the other selections, with Hong being forceful, but it is still fairly quiet in volume. "Blues," where



Lober takes a rare bass solo, has an intriguing atonal melody. On that performance, the interplay between the musicians is actually closer to the earlier Jimmy Giuffre 3 in style than the freer version with Bley. Some fiery moments take place on "Chop Wood," which precedes the brief drum feature on "Sun Drums."

The set concludes with "Luck (Alice)," a melodic original inspired by Carla Bley, and "Loved Ones, a mournful solo trumpet piece dedicated to the ancestors.

—Scott Yanow

**NO FILL3R:** Mid Music; Force Majeure; A Hymn; NO FILL3R; Blues; Chop Wood; Sun Drums; Luck (Alice); Loved Ones. (30:06)

**Personnel:** Zack Lober, bass; Suzan Veneman, trumpet; Sun-Mi Hong, drums.

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

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"Please, practice things that you are struggling with, not what's easy for you," says trumpeter Tony Kadleck

# Back-Row Power & Finesse: Big Band Trumpet Sections

**B**ack in the big band era, it was the trumpet players who often attracted much of the attention, and not just musically. Harry James appeared in Hollywood movies (and was married to actress Betty Grable for several years); Louis Prima was thought of as a "musical comedian" and appeared in many films himself; and the beloved Louis Armstrong was full of charisma and became a cultural ambassador later in his life. Onstage, many of the most prominent solos emanated from the trumpet section. And while big band jazz is no longer the popular music of the day, a stel-

lar trumpet section certainly adds an incredible amount of excitement to a jazz ensemble. Let's explore how a successful section may be created and maintained.

Some players of a certain age have had the opportunity to tour with road bands — not just big bands that play occasional gigs, but groups that played nearly every night of the week for months at a time. Despite the "ghost bands" trying to keep the music alive, the touring schedules of the last of those bands obviously dwindled with the passing of their leaders (Count Basie in 1984, Buddy Rich and Woody Herman in 1987, and Maynard

Ferguson in 2006). Regardless, big bands are still as popular as ever. Names like Clayton/Hamilton, Maria Schneider and Gordon Goodwin are now on the minds of young musicians. And while younger musicians may never experience the life of touring with a big band for months at a time, they will be the ones who will carry this music forward.

Playing in a big band is basically chamber music: one person to a part, and everyone has their role. In a trumpet section, the 1st (lead) trumpet player sets the feel, style and pitch center for the ensemble. The 2nd player often acts as a split-lead player, whether taking over

for just a few bars or for entire tunes. The 3rd and 4th players act as a support system for the section and also usually share the solo duties. Each chair is important. Any lead player will tell you that the supporting cast can either make or break a section.

So, how do we determine exactly how to play something that is completely new to us? Hopefully we have listened to enough music over the years to be able to identify the style of the music, or minimally the era in which it was written (or intended to emulate). If something sounds like Duke Ellington, it might be best to play right on top of the beat and use a fast vibrato. A chart that is in the style of the 1960s Basie band may warrant a slower vibrato, one that occurs near the end of the notes. And we might decide to place those notes more toward the back side of the beat. Something more contemporary might be better off with no vibrato at all and with the rhythms placed squarely in the center of the beat. What follows are some vitally important concepts to consider when playing in a big band trumpet section.

## Balance

Within a section, balance is one of the most overlooked elements in ensemble playing. In the past, recording studios often had just one microphone for everyone in the section to hover around, so the players really had to think about achieving the proper balance. Today, almost every player has an individual mic, which has made us a little lazy. (And while we're at it, "Get off my lawn!") This, coupled with the advent of digital audio workstations, has made it easier than ever to "fix it in the mix."

Frequently, when recording engineers are setting levels, they like to hear each section play a pyramid so that every player can be carefully balanced. But for live performances, we need to self-police our own balance. Obviously, the melody must always be heard. And the harmony should certainly be present but subservient to the melodic line. Knowing when we have the melody and when we don't is imperative to maintaining good balance. Note: If all four trumpets are playing in unison, the lead player might kick back a little. Whereas people playing lower parts may boost their volume a bit. This seems to be somewhat of an unwritten rule in many trumpet sections.

## Intonation

Pitch is another important consideration when playing in a section. What might help us best lock in together? First, know *your* particular instrument inside and out. Most players know the general pitch tendencies of the trumpet: Low C# and D will be sharp, E above

tuning C will be flat, etc. But digging deeper is often necessary. Each instrument has its own idiosyncrasies, and the more of them that we are aware of, the better equipped we will be to adjust when necessary.

Sit with a tuner. One note at a time, close your eyes and play, then open your eyes and look at the tuner to see where that note lines up. Do this with all of your notes, bottom to top. And make sure to play them all at various different volumes. This is important, as the pitch of the same note can change between pianissimo and fortissimo. Know your own tendencies. Do you sometimes go sharp when your chops are tired? Be aware of the temperature in the room that you're playing in and adjust accordingly. And to take this one step further, learn the tendencies (without judgement) of those you play with on a regular basis. As with everything in music, intonation should be a team effort.

## Endurance

As trumpet players, how can we improve our endurance? The simple answer is to put in more time on our horns. And playing a consistent amount daily will put one in much better shape than playing for 15 minutes one day and three hours the next.

If I have a student who is preparing for a recital, I'll ask them to play through that recital (including counting the rests) every day for a month prior to the event, just to get the pacing. This approach is intended to ensure that there will be no surprises on recital day. Many brass players have the misconception that they don't need to play through everything (the "it'll be fine at the gig" syndrome). Not necessarily!

## Role of the Lead Player

Where to place the notes, the duration of those notes and the feel in which those notes are played are all things that are normally decided by the lead trumpet player. And it is the job of everyone else to adhere to those decisions to create a tight and cohesive ensemble. That is why the section leaders (trumpet, trombone and alto) are situated in the middle of the section, so that it's easier for the players on either side to hear their pitch, dynamics and phrasing.

It's for that same reason that the trumpets are in the back of the band. We all have to follow someone, and for better or worse in a big band it's the 1st trumpet player. It's their responsibility to make good decisions, be consistent and be easy to follow. Any time I'm playing an inner part, I try to be hyper-aware of my balance, phrasing and pitch to make sure that I'm glued to whomever is playing the 1st part. And much the way that improvisers will transcribe solos to analyze har-

monic language, it's an excellent idea to have lead trumpet players do the same.

Transcribing excerpts of 1st trumpet parts can really help a player internalize the feel of the original recordings, especially when careful attention is paid to the nuances of the part. Playing lead in a big band involves quite a bit more than only playing high notes.

## Developing Good Habits

It's important to practice good playing habits so they become and remain ingrained in your approach to the instrument. Here are a few encouraging tips to prepare yourself for any kind of gig or chart that might come your way:

- Don't limit your practicing to the type of gig that you currently have. We sometimes have a tendency to practice only things that pertain to our current job. Playing a brass instrument is *not* like riding a bike. It's best to address as many different things as we can in our practice sessions: flexibility, multiple tonguing, range building, improvisation, breathing exercises, etudes, ear training, etc.

- Please, practice the things that you are struggling with, not what is easy for you. Of course, everyone wants to sound good, and sounding bad can be demoralizing. But recognizing and fixing our issues are how we improve. I used to have a student who would only warm up in the key of C (C scale, C scale in thirds, C arpeggios). This was not something that he needed to address, so we changed it to a different key every week. What started off as a huge challenge began to improve rapidly.

- The best musicians I know are constantly *listening*. Listening is as important as practicing. Therefore ...

- Finally, protect your ears. According to an octogenarian friend who has been playing in big bands for 70-plus years, people are now playing louder than ever before. Players using amplifiers should be encouraged to keep those amps in a place where they can hear their own volume, not pointed directly at some poor, unsuspecting trombone player. When electronic instruments are overly loud, others will likely follow suit, creating a snowball effect. There is no volume knob on a wind instrument, so if it becomes necessary, learn to play with earplugs. It's not ideal, but we only get two ears, so it's important to protect ourselves. **DB**

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Tony Kadleck is one of the most sought-after trumpeters in the New York area. He has played with Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Ella Fitzgerald, Stevie Wonder, Tony Bennett and the Boston Pops. His recording credits range from Dizzy Gillespie and Natalie Cole to Michael Jackson and Luther Vandross. Kadleck lends his signature sound to the Maria Schneider Orchestra, the New York Pops and John Pizzarelli's Swing Seven, and he can be heard on many jingles, and film and TV soundtracks. He is on the faculty at Purchase College Conservatory of Music. The Tony Kadleck Big Band released its debut recording, *Around The Horn*, in 2014. The band's recent recording, *Sides*, was released in February 2023, featuring nine of Kadleck's arrangements. Website: [tonykadleck.com](http://tonykadleck.com).

LUKE MARANTZ



Contrary motion has "limitless potential to catalog diatonic harmonic sequences," says guitarist Alex Goodman

## Contrary Motion Within the Diminished Tonality

One of the most effective ways to voice-lead is through contrary motion, which has limitless potential to catalog diatonic harmonic sequences. In particular, the symmetrical nature of the diminished scale offers unique possibilities for contrary motion progressions to repeat. This lesson explores these concepts to yield a rich catalog of new musical vocabulary. These topics can help you internalize the diminished sound and integrate it more fully into your playing. It can expand the tonal colors accessible to you as a musician and deepen your understanding of voice leading, intervallic approaches and interpreting diatonic tonalities.

This lesson is for any musician, regardless of your instrument. The techniques help us refine our voice by exploring new vocabulary and means of employing it. This type of thorough and

intentional practice reveals musical approaches we might not have otherwise encountered.

Let's start with a whole-half diminished scale in C (see Example 1) with C diminished seventh chord tones in red. These chord tones are our fulcrums; we build out from them as the essential notes of a tonality.

Let's find all the two-note diatonic dyads we can from a given chord tone (see Example 2). The ones in this example come from the C root of the scale, but the two-note intervals created would be identical from every other chord tone —  $\flat 3$ ,  $\flat 5$  or 6 — due to the diminished scale's symmetry. We can then catalog what happens if we use the pleasing voice-leading device of contrary motion to these dyads (see Example 3). This example applies bottom voice down, top voice up. Still, we can (and should) investigate what happens from the additional applica-

tion of top voice up, bottom voice down.

Let's dive deeper with an example: minor third to a tritone. We can catalog this with chords (Example 4a), eighth notes (Example 4b), triplets (Example 4c) or 16th notes (Example 4d). Perhaps some of these sounds are familiar or pleasing to your ear. If they aren't, other intervallic combinations likely would be. This approach is about cataloging possibilities, investigating them and discovering personally resonant sounds. Find the sounds that stand out, deconstruct them and let that process organically expand our own personal musical lexicon. Let your ears and musical taste guide you toward the progressions and diminished colors that you find most interesting. Explore and practice those sounds to internalize them as a new part of your musical language.

If you play a chordal instrument, experiment with block harmonic applications (e.g., Example 4a) before approaching each progression note by note (see Example 4b, 4c or 4d). Make sure to work with both possible directions of contrary motion for every intervallic progression applied to the chord tones.

The important thing in this process is to understand and internalize the principles so you can access the material quickly at an instinctual level. Take note of your favorite progressions and work to integrate those into your playing. The more you practice and analyze these concepts, the more effortless their application will become. The more effortless the harmonic progressions become, the more we can channel our focus toward creative, rhythmic and musical applications.

Let's now think about further applications of these progressions. Diminished tonality can easily superimpose over different jazz harmonies. In particular, anything we learn from these techniques has tremendous potential application over dominant chords.

Let's consider how we could apply the C diminished scale over dominant harmonies. C diminished could demonstrate the sound of four related dominant chords (Example 5). Furthermore, we could also use the C# diminished scale to outline the dominant chords C7,  $E\flat 7$ ,  $G\flat 7$  and A7, and the D diminished scale to outline the four others ( $D\flat$ , E, G and  $B\flat$ ). After that, we're repeating chords that we've already studied. These dominant seventh chords have key chord tones:  $\flat 9$ , 3, 5 and  $\flat 7$ . If we apply a diminished scale starting on any of those chord tones, we outline a dominant seventh chord with  $\flat 9$ ,  $\#9$ ,  $\#11$  and 13 extensions. This principle means that any diminished concepts will work seamlessly when the scale starts from the four chord tones of any dominant seventh ( $\flat 9$ ).

Let's take these dominant applications and access the contrary motion diminished progressions in this lesson by targeting the chord tones of any dominant seventh. Think of these chord tones (♭9, 3, 5, ♭7) as *fulcrums* that we can access diminished progressions from. Take an example like a minor third to a tritone (Example 4a) and apply that movement with the top voice starting on one of the dominant chord tones and moving from there. Experiment with some of these ideas over dominant-heavy passages like the bridge to "Rhythm" changes or a standard like "Sweet Georgia Brown." You'll quickly discover potential applications and idiosyncrasies of each possible diminished progression.

Think about how we could apply the diminished tonality over other major and minor harmonies. Discover how else the diminished sound could function harmonically and use these ideas over all types of jazz chords. With a bit of exploration, the diminished sound becomes usable almost everywhere.

Even though we are exploring the diminished scale in these exercises, we could apply the same process to any tonality. Explore similar dyadic progressions from other scales and consider their potential applications. Different symmetrical tonalities, like the augmented scale, could also yield similarly applicable results.

Try playing through these examples with a metronome and keeping track of four-bar phrases. The three-note phrases of Example 4c are great practice since you'll challenge yourself to know where you are while the three-bar phrases shift their rhythmic placement. Try looping the example until you land where you started on the first bar of a four-bar phrase. Different progressions will yield other rhythmic challenges.

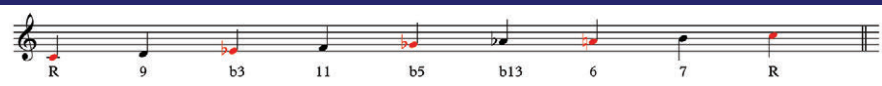
Always think about rhythm during practice. Switch up the rhythmic parameters as you play through each example, and make sure you are comfortable with the metronome on any beat or off-beat of the bar while maintaining awareness of where you are in the phrase.

All of this is just skimming the surface of the potential application of this method. We can follow the approach through two-chord progressions (Example 3), three-chord progressions and beyond. All this information is dealt with in much more detail in my recently released My Music Masterclass. Consider viewing it at the link below if you're interested in exploring these topics more deeply.

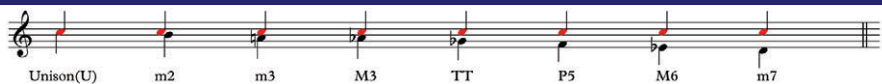
DB

Winner of first prize and Public's Choice Award at the 2014 Montreux Jazz Festival International Guitar Competition, Alex Goodman is a featured soloist on multiple Grammy- and JUNO-nominated recordings. He regularly performs internationally and at New York's leading jazz venues. Goodman has just released *The Diminished Method: Contrary Motion*, a three-part video masterclass on My Music Masterclass exploring all the ideas presented in this article. The class contains 2 hours and 30 minutes of video, more than 60 pages of materials and extensive musical demonstrations on the subject. It is available at [mymusicmasterclass.com/alexgoodman](http://mymusicmasterclass.com/alexgoodman). Learn more about Goodman or contact him through his website ([alexgoodmanmusic.com](http://alexgoodmanmusic.com)).

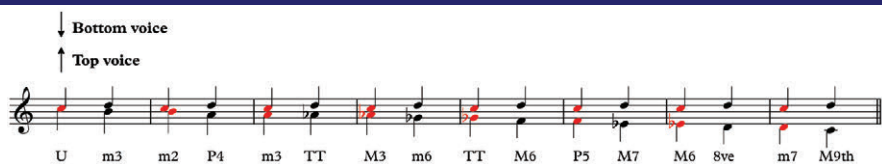
### Example 1



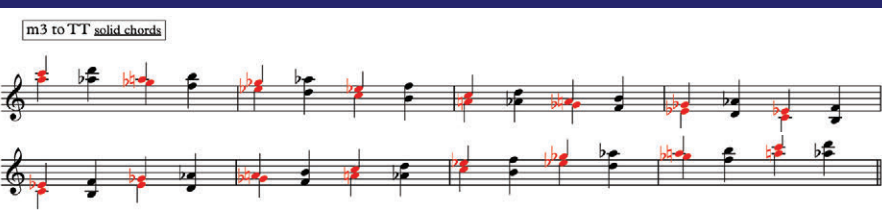
### Example 2



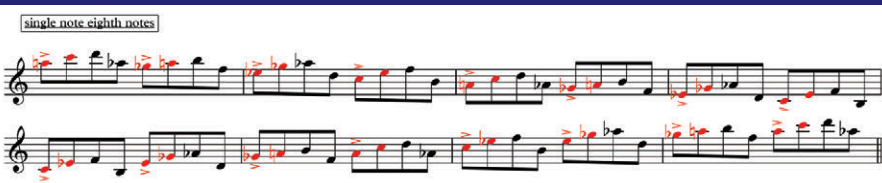
### Example 3



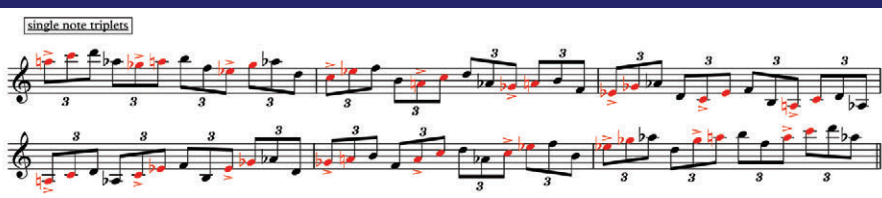
### Example 4a



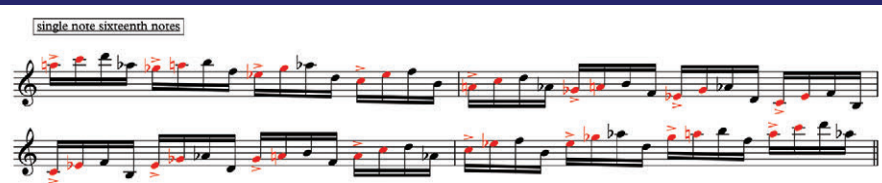
### Example 4b



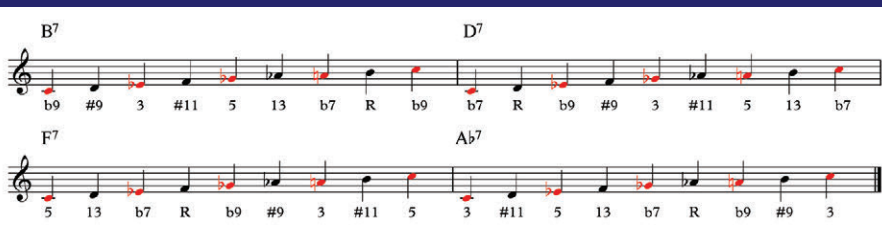
### Example 4c



### Example 4d



### Example 5



MICHAEL JACKSON



Amir ElSaffar

## Amir ElSaffar's Trumpet Solo on 'Tipping Point'

When asked to do a transcription of solo by multi-instrumentalist Amir ElSaffar, I was completely unfamiliar with his music. After listening to it (and being enthralled by it), the question “Is this even jazz?” was inevitable. There is such a strong Middle Eastern influence, and yet there are enough Western elements to make it difficult to really pigeonhole his music. Here we have the trumpet solo from ElSaffar’s composition “Tipping Point,” from the 2015 album *Crisis* (Pi Recordings).

A $\flat$ 7 First, the meter: I’ve elected to present this as a slow 5/4, mainly because when perceived this way, the drums are playing what sounds like a backbeat with an extra quarter note, and the bass is mostly improvising around what comes off as almost a walking line (shown in the top line of this tran-

scription. The trouble with this notation is that it makes the rhythms appear very dense. I’d considered doubling the rhythmic values and writing it as two bars of 4 followed by a measure of 2, which might make the rhythms clearer but could obscure the feel of the groove. (The fluctuating meters would add their own reading problems). Since music is sounds that we’re attempting to reduce to visual symbols, there are often issues such as this where there isn’t a clear answer. If the solo looks scary, realize it’s only at 69 BPM, so the licks might be easier than they appear.

Second, the scalar material: This mostly consists of what in the language of Middle Eastern music is called *maqam hijaz*. This is based on a scale I’ve often heard called “Spanish phrygian,” “overtone scale” or “Ahava Rabba” (the scale used in “Hava

Nagila”). It consists of R- $\flat$ 2-3-4-5- $\flat$ 6- $\flat$ 7 (D-E $\flat$ -F $\sharp$ -G-A-B $\flat$ -C) — essentially a phrygian scale with a major third. There’s more to maqams than just that, but I’m not qualified to be explaining it.

There are a couple of instances of an F natural replacing the F $\sharp$  (bars 4 and 7). There are a number of reasons why ElSaffar might be doing this. One is that replacing the third with the minor third makes this *maqam kurdi*, and referencing other maqams is something that musicians in this genre will occasionally do. Also, since there is no third in the main notes of the bass line, ElSaffar can play major or minor as he chooses.

He’s also set up a fourths motif at the end of bar 3, and the F natural fits the pattern better than the F $\sharp$ . It’s a very hip, “Freedom Jazz Dance” type lick, going down a fourth from

G to D, then down a whole step to reverse the motion (up a fourth from C to F), and then down another second to reverse direction again (E $\flat$  to B $\flat$ ), and then down a half step so the next ascending fourth (A to D) is still within the scale. He continues down in steps while reversing the direction of the fourths two more times.

Curiously, before the first fourth, ElSaffar did play an ascending augmented fourth (E $\flat$  to A), which fits in the key. So why didn't he play the augmented fourth C to F $\sharp$  at the beginning of bar 5? I suspect because then he would've had to descend an augmented second to get to the E $\flat$ , which would've ruined the symmetry of the line.

He morphs this into another short motif, playing up a step and sequencing this down through the scale diatonically. The second iteration goes from F $\sharp$  to G, returning us to the hijaz sound.

Another curiosity, the G half-sharp in measure 6. Notes in between the notes are not uncommon in Arabic music, and I would've expected more of them.

There are a few polyrhythmic things that ElSaffar pulls off wonderfully. Bar 5 is one. He plays 16th notes, which are rhythmically grouped in fours, but plays them in patterns of five ascending notes. Since we're in 5/4, that means the pattern repeats four times,

so ElSaffar is implying 4/4 in quintuplets. It's also the third time in a row that he's used the technique of sequencing: playing an idea at varying points in the scale. Whereas the previous two were based on two-note motifs, this one is a five-note pattern. So we've had about two-and-a-half measures of sequencing, culminating in a long polyrhythmic pattern that resolves onto the downbeat (of bar 6). That's powerful stuff.

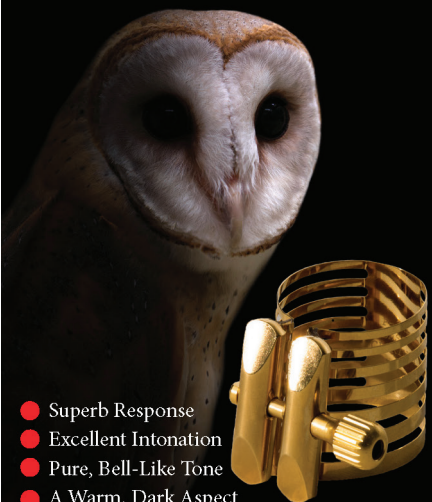
And starting on the second 16th note in measure 8, ElSaffar plays a three-16th-note group composed of a 16th followed by two 32nds, followed by another 16th. By starting it where he did, it resolves onto the fifth beat, where he ratchets it up to straight 32nds. Since he's been playing this all on one note (the B $\flat$ ), increasing the energy flows nicely into the following measure, where he continues the 32nd-note rhythm but now changes the tones, which brings the energy higher. Notice also how he plays the same figure twice, but has to squeeze in an extra note the second time to have it resolve onto the tonic. What a wonderful way to conclude his improvisation. (Thanks to Ron Perovich for assistance with maqam theory.)

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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# Selmer Paris Supreme Alto & Tenor Saxophones

## *Redesigned Bore, Lightning-Fast Keywork & Immediate Tonal Satisfaction*

The Supreme tenor saxophone from Selmer Paris has emerged as a major contender on the pro market. The second model to be introduced in the Supreme series — the Supreme alto saxophone has been successfully luring many a saxophonist since its introduction two years ago — the new tenor is a pro instrument that exhibits extraordinary balance in play-testing. All of the Supreme's design innovations in the realms of tonal quality, response, ergonomics and intonation come together in one sweet-playing, highly resonant and beautifully engraved horn intended to suit all styles of music — from jazz to classical to commercial.

The most consequential design element that separates the Supreme from Selmer's existing pro lines is the conical bore of the instrument, especially in the neck. "Being so close to the mouthpiece, all the parameters of the neck are super important," said Florent Milhaud, product manager at Selmer Paris. "The neck on the Supreme tenor has a very specific shape. It has bigger diameter at the opening, and the tenon neck receiver is bigger, too. So the overall conical shape is different. That's the objective we wanted to achieve: the impression of flexibility, of ease of response. It's free-blowing, and it projects well. There is no stuffiness in the sound; everywhere, it's very open and very even. You feel like you can really express on every note. The main complaint we've had on our modern tenors verses the vintage Selmers is the inner bore not being super open and not speaking well enough. We wanted to build an instrument that really sings." The company started with what was basically a classic Mark VI tenor bore and went to work on it, inviting select pros and amateurs alike to play-test and provide detailed feedback during the horn's long development process. They came up with an instrument that speaks immediately and provides a feeling of pleasure from the first note.

Ease of play was a high priority for Selmer Paris in designing the Supreme models. "Another comment we often get regarding our modern horns verses vintage Selmers is this sensation of fleetness," Milhaud said. "So, one of the objectives was to reduce the key heights, which is helpful in two ways. With more compact keywork, the Supreme gives the player a feeling of being closer to the body of the instrument. Also, it gave Selmer the opportunity to redo the diameter of the key caps with the tone holes to reduce the key heights without compromising the tone. When you have smaller key heights, our designers can reduce the tension of the springs, which makes the action softer and gives the impression of suppleness — more freedom, in a sense. If you don't feel any constraints in the action, then you will feel more comfortable and more focused on the music you're actually playing." The Supreme has the capacity for lightning-fast finger action and it responds just as quickly.

The Supreme alto has already gained a reputation for sterling intonation, the result of years of experimentation with tonehole placement and size. While the tenor model doesn't share the alto's innovative double C# tonehole system, which corrects the relation between middle C# and high C#, it plays in tune in all registers, as one would expect from any pro horn from Selmer Paris, while retaining a generous amount of tonal pliancy.

Other features of the new tenor include a larger bell; a three-point concentric clamp for an improved neck-to-body connection; an adjustable clamp ring made of sterling silver; optimized and more natural posi-

tioning of the mother-of-pearl side F#; an octave key system with Teflon inside the sockets for quieter play; a hinged toggle on the left-hand pinky finger keys; a more accessible front F key, redesigned shapes and placements of the side keys; shorter action of the right-hand pinky spatula keys; realignment of the height of the left-hand mother-of-pearl keys; the use of rollers in the key mechanism for greater fluidity; and multiple gorgeous-looking finish options. Selmer Paris plans to develop a Supreme soprano, followed by a Supreme baritone, in the years to come — they'll take however long they take to develop, according to Milhaud. "We set out to make a horn to really help the musician play expressively and find their own voice, and this is important because it has to do with flexibility," he said. "Whatever your sound is, you will find it easily with this horn."

—Ed Enright

[conn-selmer.com/en-us](http://conn-selmer.com/en-us)



# Spring Style



[downbeat.com](http://downbeat.com)



## 1. Medium-Sized Condenser

CAD Audio has expanded its Equitek product line with the introduction of the CAD E40 medium diaphragm condenser microphone. The nickel-plated capsule performs well on vocals, acoustic instruments and percussion. The CAD E40 includes a 100Hz hi-pass filter, 10dB pad and low-profile shock mount.

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

## 2. The John Page Advantage

John Page Classic has announced new AJ models. The guitars feature a host of functional and aesthetic advantages that grow out of Page's 50-plus years of guitar design expertise. The AJ, named by Page for his firstborn son, Adam John, features a comfortable medium-C shaped neck, Bloodline by John Page pickups, a threaded machine-bolt neck assembly, stylized front and back contours, and a lower horn and neck heel for easy upper fret access.

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

## 3. Desktop Audio Control

ESI has launched the Neva Uno and Neva Duo (pictured), two affordable, entry-level desktop audio interfaces. The Neva Uno has one phantom-powered microphone preamplifier and a guitar input, while the Neva Duo provides two of each.

More info: [esi-audio.com](http://esi-audio.com)

## 4. Blow Like a Pro

Rovner Products' Deep-V Collection includes two professional saxophone mouthpieces: the Avatar (pictured) and the Aviva. Available for alto and tenor saxophone, the Avatar's patented baffle and chamber design enhances tonal presence, allowing the full spectrum of sound to move successfully from intention to expression. The Aviva mouthpiece for alto saxophone was engineered with levels of resistance that will meet the needs of both the classical and jazz player.

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

## 5. Desktop Synth

Roland has unveiled the SH-4d, a desktop instrument focused on synthesis and sound design. With 11 OSC models and a user panel filled with knobs, buttons and sliders, the SH-4d features a multi-timbral sequencer with four synth parts and a customizable rhythm part.

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

## 6. Transparent Wireless

Shure has released its new GLX-D+ Dual Band Wireless System, providing a solution for guitarists, bassists, vocalists and presenters who want to use wireless. The system operates in 2.4GHz and now 5.8GHz, providing a consistent signal by automatically scanning for and selecting the cleanest frequencies. The GLX-D+ Dual Band avoids interference and ensures dropouts won't stop the show, enabling users to focus on performing. The GLX-D+ is available in rack-mount, tabletop and guitar-pedal receiver options with a selection of lavalier, headset and handheld microphone choices, including the SM58.

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



# *Summer Style*





"They're all magical," Leon Lee Dorsey says of the records he puts out on his own Jazz Avenue 1 Records.

## LEON LEE DORSEY & MIKE CLARK FIND SYMPATICO

When it comes to the caliber, variety and release pace of his recordings, heavyweight bassist/composer/arranger Leon Lee Dorsey isn't messing around. Dorsey's most recent leader record, *Cantaloupe Island*, on his label Jazz Avenue 1 Records, is his sixth release since 2019 — a streak of records that includes drummer Mike Clark.

Releasing music whenever and however he wants is one of the many benefits of being a fully independent artist with his own label run out of Dorsey's Manhattan home. And the bassist, who's performed with everyone from Dizzy Gillespie to George Benson, is the first to point that out. But this impressive run is also indicative of something Ron Carter, Dorsey's teacher while

he earned his doctorate in double bass from the Grad Center at City University of New York, instilled in him — discipline.

"You hear Herbie Hancock, you put on a Duke Ellington record, put on a Prince record ... you know this is not just natural talent," said Dorsey. "Tens of thousands of hours went into [them] being the sort of artists that they are. Ron taught me [that,

and] what it means to be great, mentally, and spiritually."

That said, Dorsey's dedication was there before Carter's influence. Growing up in Pittsburgh — hometown to many important jazz greats, including Erroll Garner, Ray Brown and George Benson — Dorsey's life was saturated by jazz history, and by music being made presently in the area's close-knit Black community. It helped, too, that his parents were well-connected pillars in the community as owners of a local funeral home.

"My mom knew a lot of the families, like Ahmad Jamal's. ... You met people who had played, been on the road," said Dorsey. "Matter of fact, you won't believe this, but there was a janitor at the University of Pittsburgh named Bass McMahon ... who had played with Fletcher Henderson. There were all these people [there] from each generation of jazz."

After picking up the bass as a pre-teen, Dorsey earned quite the music education growing up in the Steel City, leading to his being one of the youngest members of Lionel Hampton's band, a gig that gave the bassist an opportunity to open for Frank Sinatra while still in his early 20s. Ever the dedicated student, Dorsey went on to earn two bachelor's degrees in music from Oberlin College, master's degrees from University of Wisconsin and Manhattan School of Music and a doctorate. He now teaches at Berklee College of Music, and has steadily gigged and toured throughout his career.

It was on a pre-pandemic gig, in fact, that Dorsey first crossed paths with drummer Mike Clark, known globally for his funk stylings in The Headhunters during the 1970s. They both are a bit fuzzy on the specifics of their initial meeting, except for the fact that musically, it was love at first sight.

"He was such a nice guy and played great ... then, I ended up on a record date at his house," said Clark, recalling the session for their first release, 2019's *Monktime*. "Man, the vibe was mellow and everybody was talking a mile a minute and having fun. The music, it really swung. So, we just kind of started a phone friendship talking, and then I was like, well, let's do another project."

And so, they have — and then some. In fact, Dorsey created Jazz Avenue 1 Records to support their fruitful collaboration. He runs the label out of his New York duplex, where he also operates a full-service recording studio.

"I grew up around entrepreneurial family, so ... the label ... was [both] serendipitous and a little bit of calculation," said Dorsey. "It's almost like [when] Henry Ford put those keys in and he goes, 'I don't know if this car is going to blow up or drive.'"

Jazz Avenue 1 hit the highway. After the *Monk* tribute with guitarist Greg Skaff, Dorsey and Clark went on to put out the

Beatles-inspired *Wolff/Clark/Dorsey Play Sgt. Pepper* with pianist Michael Wolff, *Thank You Mr. Mabern* with the legendary pianist himself, Latin-focused *Freedom Jazz Dance* with pianist Manuel Valera, last year's *Blues On Top*, a well-received study of the blues with pianist Mike LeDonne, and now *Cantaloupe Island*.

The new record features Hancock's quintessential jazz-funk tune, as well as compositions from Horace Silver, Prince and more — all shaped around the soulful Benson-meets-Montgomery vibe of featured guitarist Russell Malone.

Malone, who has had a long-standing partnership with Ron Carter, has been in Dorsey's orbit for a while. As for Clark, this was his first time playing with the guitarist, but he had Wes Montgomery's "Thumb," ready to go. From there, things developed organically, as they followed the road map of tunes that Dorsey and Clark had put together with Malone in mind, including Horace Silver's spritely waltz, "Barbara," and the Latin-inspired "Bumpin' On Sunset," from Wes Montgomery's 1966 album *Tequila*.

"It would have been real easy to make [a whole swing] record with Russell, ... [but] George Benson and Wes Montgomery, they can swing, be funky and they're soulful. Russell does this in his own way," said Dorsey.

As it allows Malone to do his thing, *Cantaloupe Island* highlights the natural spaciousness guitar brings as a melody instrument, and the easy vibe of the session. The result is a collection of tunes that hold onto the spontaneity and excitement of a live gig.

"It reminded me of the old days, like three guys walk in and just play some tunes. We did have a road map. We didn't just walk in and jam, you know, ... [but] everybody was hearing everything and feeling everything, and we were all like, really listening," said Clark.


Dorsey, proud of the presence and collaboration on *Cantaloupe Island*, is revved up for the next thing. The pair have already planned out their next few records that they hope to release as soon as possible, consciously bucking the modern convention of releasing one album per year. Their independent status allows for such creative freedoms.

"Trane's entire output was in 12 years," said Dorsey. "That's averaging five albums a year. This thing with one record once a year ... that's not the model that Miles and them did. So, I'm ... like, that's what we're supposed to be doing."

Whatever comes next, Dorsey knows each project will be special in its own way, just as the last six were.

"[Our] albums, they're as distinctive as they are similar in that they're recorded in the same room, but the energy on that [session], even though Mike and myself were the constant, is still going to be new," said Dorsey. "They're all magical."

—Alexa Peters




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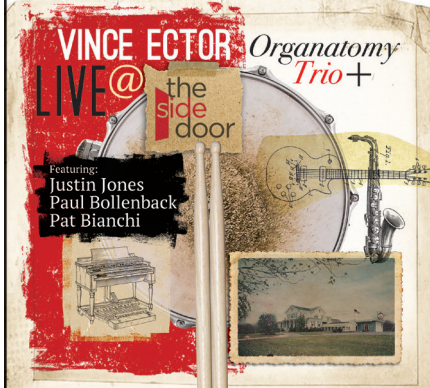
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"I'd say that Margherita was a standout among standouts," says her former teacher Greg Tardy.

# MARGHERITA FAVA FROM ITALY, WITH LOVE

Knoxville, Tennessee, seems an unlikely locale for one of jazz's most promising and enterprising young pianists. For Margherita Fava, however, the Marble City is a great place to live and work.

"It's a hidden gem," the Italian-born, 27-year-old says, speaking by phone from Knoxville. "The pandemic has been a catalyst for the scene here. A lot of natives that used to live elsewhere moved back to Knoxville, and then me and some other people, through just a series of weird events, also ended up moving here. And so I can say that we have a pretty good nucleus of gigging musicians."

Call Fava a diamond in the not-so-rough, then. But, says tenor saxophonist/clarinetist Greg Tardy — her friend, frequent bandmate and former teacher at University of Tennessee, who plays on the pianist's self-released debut album *Tatatu* — she's a diamond nonetheless.

"I have had many students come through my classes, and every now and then, I'll get someone who just really stands out," he says. "And I'd say that Margherita was a standout among standouts."

Specifically, Tardy was impressed by her compositions, six of which (along with two standards) feature on *Tatatu*. "Every single composition she wrote in my class, no matter what the parameters were, sounded like something very mature that could be re-

corded on a project," he says. "And they just kept on getting better and better." However, he is equally admiring of her piano playing: "She's a great player, and I'm expecting great things as she continues to evolve as a player as well."

If Fava's landing in Knoxville is unlikely, it's no more so than her point of origin — Follina, a village in Italy's Alpine foothills with a population of less than 4,000. That she would become a musician is less surprising, since her parents are both Baroque players (her father a violinist, her mother a cellist and singer). Indeed, her first musical memories include singing Latin canons with her mom. However, they were so determined not to push her to follow in their footsteps that it was Fava who pushed to take music lessons.

She started learning classical piano when she was 10, though she soon tired and as a teenager tried her hand at the electric bass. When she was 17, Fava's parents enrolled her, completely cold, in a summer jazz workshop in Venice. "I showed up not knowing anything about jazz," she recalls. "I didn't even know there was an audition. I was

supposed to play a standard. I didn't know a standard, so I played a classical piece that I was studying at the time."

As fate would have it, pianist Aaron Goldberg was judging her audition and heard potential. During his ear training class later that same day, he assigned Fava to learn Miles Davis's trumpet solo on "So What" — a song she had never heard before — for the next class. She did.

"That was it," she recalls. "Just the rush and the excitement and the satisfaction of being able to do that, and understanding what that meant, I was starstruck. I was like, 'OK, this is what I want to do from now on.'"

Her newfound devotion paid off just a year later, when she received a scholarship to attend Michigan State University. Bassist Rodney Whitaker, director of the school's jazz studies program, became her mentor. "I still have the notes that I took from his jazz history class, and every once in a while, I just go back and read them. It really, really shaped my perception of jazz and of music."

After earning her bachelor's degree, Fava arrived in Knoxville as a student in UTK's master's of music program. She met Tardy in the saxophonist's composition class, which she credits as being crucial to her development by forcing her to write a new piece each week. From Tardy's standpoint, however, her development was already well advanced.

"It became obvious to me very quickly that she had a real natural gift," he recalls.

Completing her degree in 2022, Fava stayed in Knoxville, working with Tardy and other musicians around town and planning her first album. *Tatatu*'s title is a word Fava coined as a toddler, annoyed when her mother tried to help her with basic tasks. "In my language at the time, it meant, 'Let me do it by myself.' It was my first way of voicing independence and autonomy," she says. "And since this is a self-released, self-produced, self-financed album, the title felt fitting."

Fava's playing and writing talents, coupled with the presence of jazz heavyweights Tardy and Whitaker (who produced the album), drew the interest of more than one label. It wasn't to be — though she says plans are in the works to release her next album with a label.

Fava is focused on promoting *Tatatu* (with tentative plans for a Midwestern tour) and on her steady work in Knoxville. She is associated with a local nonprofit organization, the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra, which both administers the titular big band in town and produces concerts and events there. A concert series called NXT GEN has regularly featured Fava and her compositions and arrangements; she has recently begun coordinating the series.

"There are other parts of art that inspire me, like visual art," she says. "I definitely want to find a way to put together different disciplines in the arts going forward." —Michael J. West

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"We can't fix any mistakes," Vince Ector says about recording live, which he felt good about because he started his career recording that way.

## VINCE ECTOR TAKES IT LIVE

Live concert albums can be a combination of aural snapshots and mini-time capsules. For drummer Vince Ector, his *LIVE @ The Side Door* (Cabo Verde Records) is both — along with several extra layers of emotional resonance.

The concert was Ector's bandleading debut at the Old Lyme, Connecticut, venue. Recorded in January 2020, it also marked the historic transition of eras. And when played after its March 2023 release, *LIVE @ The Side Door* pays tribute to two fallen titans.

"It's significant on many levels," Ector explained, by phone while driving to a gig with Houston Person at the Jazz Forum in Tarrytown, New York. "First off, I've gone into The Side Door many times over many years as a sideman. So when you have an opportunity to lead a band as an independent artist in a venue that you're so familiar with, it really means something."

The date features Ector's Organatomy Trio+ with organist Pat Bianchi, guitarist Paul Bollenback and special guest Justin Jones (a.k.a. the "+" in the group name) on alto saxophone. Combining standards, Ector originals and gems such as Benny Carter's "The Courtship," it's a lively set of music performed on the cusp of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortu-

nately, Ken Kitchings, owner of The Side Door Jazz Club, asked to record Ector's first headlining concert at his establishment.

"When Ken sent me the recording during the pandemic, I said, 'Well, this really sounds good,'" Ector recalled. "We can't change it. We can't go in, and we can't remix it. We can't fix any mistakes," which was actually great since my career started that straight-to-track way."

*LIVE @ The Side Door* is dedicated to organist/multi-instrumentalist Joey DeFrancesco, a fellow Philadelphian who died unexpectedly in August 2022. "I was on the road with Joey the summer that he passed," Ector shared. "We hadn't played together in probably 15 years. But we go way back. So for us, it was like a reunion."

The album bares DeFrancesco's musical fingerprints. In addition to Ector's time shared with him on the bandstand, it also features Bollenback, a member of the organist's first

great trio with drummer Byron "Wookie" Landham. And DeFrancesco, in turn, had befriended and mentored Bianchi since 1997.

Ector released *LIVE @ The Side Door* independently based on his own experience as a sideman on Live at Keystone Korner Baltimore, the final release from the late pianist Stanley Cowell, who passed in 2020. Cowell led a quintet at Todd Barkan's venue and told Ector that he was committed to release one more album for SteepleChase. "When the pandemic hit, Stanley sent us all a check out of the blue," he revealed. "He was a generous man and my inspiration for putting this album out on my own label."

As founder, president and executive director of the New Jersey-based Arts for Kids, Inc., Ector is familiar with the administrative and leadership duties required to run an independent label. And as both a working musician and a lecturer of jazz percussion at Princeton University, he's also intimately familiar with the concept of multi-tasking.

Having collaborated with the likes of DeFrancesco, Charles Earland, Shirley Scott and Dr. Lonnie Smith, Ector's prior two albums also feature organ. It's part of his heritage, he reckons.

"We had a heavy organ culture with everyone from Shirley, Jimmy Smith and Trudy Pitts to Jimmy McGriff, Joey and even Don Patterson" he noted. "We hold a lot of history with that instrument. And as I always tell my students, 'Put your roots into it!' That's what makes the music exciting.

"Philly, the music is just embedded in everything that we do on so many levels," he added.

Still, Ector's gigography shows his broad abilities. He's played in The Charles Mingus Orchestra and The Mingus Big Band, Orrin Evans' quartet and with Bobby Watson & Horizon and more. And time spent from 1985 to 1991 as a United States Army Bandsman helped further expand his musical points of reference, be it polkas, marches or Irish jigs.

Another aspect of having an independent label is to propagate jazz to future generations, he said. Through conversations that flow with the ease and energy of a Sonny Rollins or Wayne Shorter solo, Ector already spreads the gospel on the bandstand and in the classroom.

"Yeah, I teach, I perform, I even try to educate people I run into," he confirmed. "I can pass the word along on an elementary school and early childhood level with my non-profit Arts for Kids. We're losing our masters. So all of a sudden, it's incumbent upon us to present the information that we've learned from experience to the students we teach."

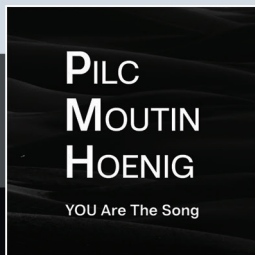
And as for each one teaching one via his new independent label? "Now that business has changed, you have to evolve," he concluded. "So if you're willing to invest in yourself, you put your own thing out."

—Yoshi Kato

Pianist Jean-Michel Pilc, Bassist François Moutin  
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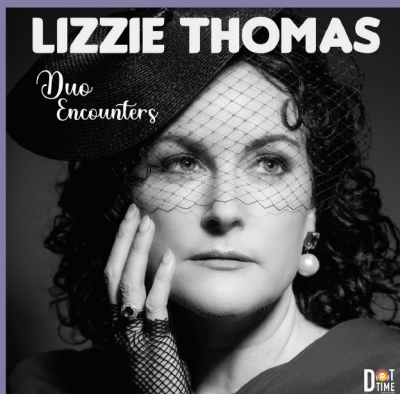
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- 100 Small Vocal Jazz Groups
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- 107 Blues/Pop/Rock Groups
- 112 Latin Jazz Groups
- 113 Original Composition — Small Ensemble
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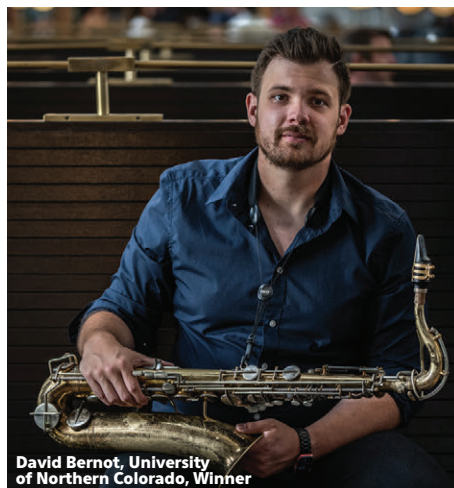
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**Benjamin Collins-Siegel**, Newark Academy High School, Co-Winner



**Jasper Zimmerman**, Hastings High School, Outstanding Performance



**David Bernot**, University of Northern Colorado, Winner



**Lieff Kapilman**, Kaufman Music Center, Outstanding Performance



**Xavier Anderson**, Osceola County School for the Arts, Co-Winner



**Max Bessen**, University of Miami, Outstanding Performance



**Matt Stark**, Northgate High School, Outstanding Performance

### JAZZ SOLOIST

#### Junior High School Outstanding Performances

##### Griffin Kelleher

*Guitar*  
Derby Academy  
Brian Martin  
Hingham, Massachusetts

##### Luca Manzo

*Drums*  
Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, Washington

#### Junior High School Honors Winners

##### Ronnie Elliott

*Guitar*  
Home-schooled  
Jonathan Kreisberg  
Greenville, South Carolina

##### Xavier Anderson

*Trumpet*  
Osceola County School for the Arts  
Jason Anderson  
Kissimmee, Florida

#### Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performances

##### Conor McMillen

*Violin*  
Speyer Legacy School  
Benjamin Sutin  
New York, New York

##### Jacob Hart

*Piano*  
Wyandot Middle School  
Scott Gwinnell  
Clinton Township, Michigan

#### High School Winners

##### Benjamin Collins-Siegel

*Piano*

Newark Academy  
Julius Tolentino  
Livingston, New Jersey

##### Benjamin Schwartz

*Drums*  
Newark Academy  
Julius Tolentino  
Livingston, New Jersey

#### High School Outstanding Performances

##### Jasper Zimmerman

*Piano*  
Hastings High School  
Eric Day  
Hastings-on-Hudson, New York

##### Matt Stark

*Alto Saxophone*  
Northgate High School  
Roberto García-Leiva  
Walnut Creek, California

##### Nicolo Boselli

*Alto Saxophone*

Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

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##### Andre Perlman

*Trombone*  
New World School of the Arts  
Jim Gasior  
Miami, Florida

#### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

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Javier Arau  
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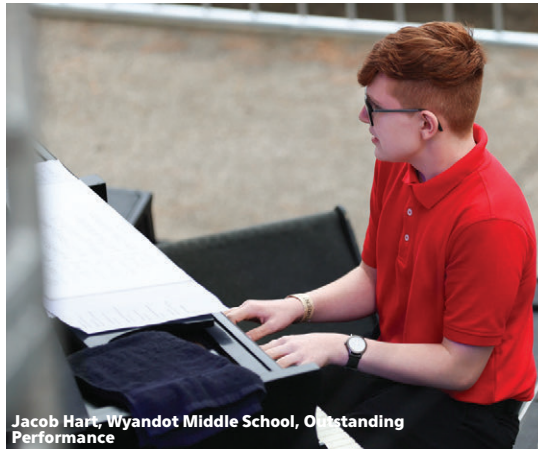
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**Michael Farina**  
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**Oliver Koenig**  
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**David Bernot**  
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**Danny Gonzalez**  
*Tenor Saxophone*  
MiraCosta College  
Steve Torok  
Oceanside, California

### Undergraduate College Winner

**Esteban Castro**  
*Piano*  
The Juilliard School

Marc Cary  
New York, New York

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

**Avery Pambianchi**  
*Trumpet*  
Eastman School of Music  
Clay Jenkins  
Rochester, New York

**Gavin Gray**  
*Double Bass*  
Eastman School of Music  
Jeff Campbell  
Rochester, New York

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# CONGRATULATIONS

## TO OUR 2023 DOWNBEAT MUSIC AWARDS STUDENT RECIPIENTS AND INSPIRING FACULTY MENTORS

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### **Undergraduate College Co-Winners**

Josephine Bianco, Vocal Jazz Soloist  
Kate Reid, faculty mentor

### **Undergraduate College Winner**

Dudley Merriam, Engineered Studio Recording  
Dana Salminen, faculty mentor

### **Graduate College Winner**

Frost Extensions, Small Vocal Jazz Group  
Sophia Garas, Outstanding Soloist on "Never Say Yes"  
Kate Reid, faculty mentor

Thomas Wenglinski, Engineered Live Recording  
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

### **Graduate College Outstanding Performances**

Jason Charos, trumpet, Jazz Soloist  
Brian Lynch and Chuck Bergeron, faculty mentors

Frost Funk Ensemble, Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Steve Rucker, faculty mentor

Frost Fusion Ensemble, Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Steve Rucker, faculty mentor

### **Undergraduate College — Outstanding Performance**

Jason Arkins, Alto Saxophone, Jazz Soloist  
Marcus Strickland, faculty mentor

Andrew Tinch, Guitar, Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
John Hart, faculty mentor

### **Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement—Vocal**

Daniel Fiamengo, Jazz Arrangement "Mind to Fly"  
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

### **Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements—Big Band**

Gary (Kaiji) Wang, Jazz Arrangement, "Frosty the Snowman"  
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

Kevin Zapata, Jazz Arrangement, "Delfeayo's Dilemma"  
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

### **Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements— Studio Orchestra**

Thomas Wenglinski, Jazz Arrangement,  
"Recuerdame (Remember Me)"  
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

### **Undergraduate College Outstanding Recording**

Dudley Merriam, Engineered Live Recording  
Dana Salminen, faculty mentor

### **Graduate College Outstanding Recording**

Kevin Zapata, Engineered Live Recording  
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor



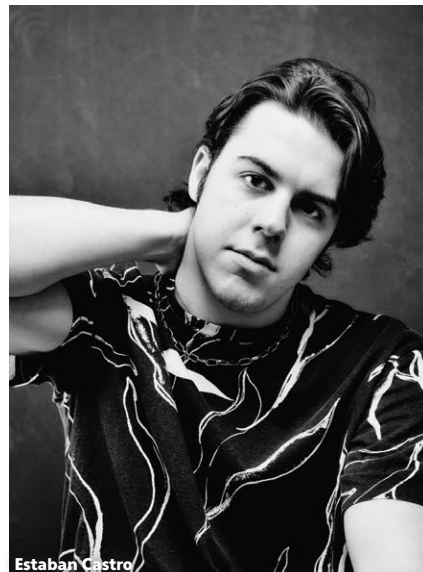
Andre Perlman



William Schwartzman



Xian Rong Wong



Estaban Castro

# DB AWARD WINNERS — THE SOLOISTS

## LEARNING TO PLAY A WELL-CRAFTED SOLO

takes a combination of musical talent, hands-on mentorship and a commitment to practice. This year's SMA Jazz Instrumental Soloist honorees certainly excel in all three categories.

Pianist William Schwartzman is a senior at Los Angeles County High School for the Arts and also attends Colburn Music Academy weekly, where he studies with Lee Secard, chair of Colburn's Jazz Workshop. Schwartzman started piano lessons at age 5, and decided to focus on jazz rather than classical after hearing ragtime his father listened to on the radio.

"I remember feeling excited by the creativity and openness I heard in that music," he recalls. "I learned some ragtime pieces, and that led me into jazz. I've been attending Colburn since I was in seventh grade, and now I'm trying to play as much as possible in settings at high school, at Colburn, jam sessions with friends and wherever I can. I'm always listening and chipping away at this infinite, unsolvable puzzle that is jazz."

Schwartzman submitted recordings to the Student Music Awards in the High School Honors category. They were pieces he recorded with the Colburn Thursday Night Band directed by Secard. "We submitted 'Evidence' by Thelonious Monk and an original of mine titled 'We Sing Together,' he says.

Schwartzman is waiting to hear back from colleges. In the meantime, he continues private studies with pianist Taylor Eigsti as well as at Colburn and LAC High School of the Arts.

"I'd love to be a professional musician and composer," he says. "The main thing for me is to just keep learning."

Trombonist Andre Perlman is a senior at New World School of the Arts in Miami who studies with Jim Gasior, associate professor of jazz and instrumental studies, and the director of the Jazz Ensemble.

Perlman has excelled on trombone, but it

wasn't his original choice of instrument. "When I was in middle school, my band director gave me the option of playing either trombone or trumpet," he recalls. "I wanted the one with the three buttons because it seemed easier, but I thought the trumpet was the trombone, so I said I'll take the trombone. I was embarrassed to say anything, so I decided to go with it. And I really have come to love playing it."

According to Gasior, that decision certainly worked out for Perlman. "Andre's love for music is very deep and broad," says Gasior. "He loves classical music and really just about every style under the sun. His breadth of musicianship also comes from a brilliant facility on the piano, and he transfers that harmonic foundation and knowledge from the piano to the trombone."

Estaban Castro, a junior piano student at The Juilliard School in New York City, is no stranger to DownBeat Student Music Awards. This year he was honored with his 16th DeeBee — this time in the College/Undergraduate category. He received his first SMA while in middle school and has been an honoree in several categories — primarily as a soloist and composer.

"I actually started applying for the awards when I was very young," explains Castro. "And I've been trying every year and seeing what happens. It's been very gratifying to be recognized by DownBeat."

Those early awards reflect that Castro began piano lessons at age 4 after exhibiting a strong interest in the toy piano his parents gave him. He started improvising and composing at age 6, after his parents gave him Sibelius music notation software. At 13, he became the youngest winner in the Montreux Jazz Piano Solo Competition, was a member of the Grammy Band in 2017 and 2018 and has been studying privately with Fred Hersch for the last seven years.

"I had a friend who was studying with him,

and I really loved Fred's playing," says Castro. "He's a super inspirational musician to me, even more so now that I know him."

In addition, Castro studied with Ted Rosenthal his first two years at Juilliard, and now studies with Marc Cary. "Marc has focused me on revisiting the work and lives of bop pianists like Bud Powell and Sonny Clark and hearing them through a new lens."

As he continues toward his degree at Juilliard, Castro is also building a presence at New York jazz clubs with performances at the Birdland Theater scheduled in June, and at Django later in the month.

Like fellow pianists and SMA honorees Schwartzman and Castro, Alton Xian Rong Wong (who also goes by Alton Wong) began piano lessons at an early age in his native Malaysia. "My mom's a piano teacher, so I really didn't have a choice at first," says Wong with a laugh. "I started on classical, but by the time I was 13, I got into jazz."

Wong lived in Sabah on the island of Borneo, but Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, was the center of jazz in the nation. "I'd have to fly there two or three times a year to take lessons with musicians there. I moved there to study at UCSI for college and continue my music studies."

After a year as an exchange student at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, he graduated from UCSI, took a year off to record his debut album, then earned a graduate assistantship at West Virginia University to study with Alton Merrell, professor of jazz piano.

"I was interested in entering the SMA competition, and worked on some arrangements with Dr. Merrell, but it really didn't turn out," explains Wong. "But during winter break, I thought I needed to submit something, so I went to the practice room and used my phone to record a solo piano arrangement of 'Old Folks,' submitted it and got a DownBeat Award!"

—Terry Perkins

# Congratulations to our students and faculty on earning 15 DownBeat Student Music Awards in 2023!

## **JAZZ SOLOIST**

Community College Winner  
Parker Woolworth, Piano  
Jim Mair, Faculty Advisor

## **JAZZ COMBO**

Community College Winner  
Parker Woolworth Trio  
Jim Mair, Faculty Advisor

## **JAZZ COMBO**

Community College Outstanding Soloist  
Henry Fears, Trombone  
Henry Fears Quartet  
Jim Mair, Faculty Advisor

## **LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

High School Honors Outstanding Performance  
Greater Kansas City Youth Jazz Orchestra  
Directed by Jim Mair

## **LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Directed by John Stafford II

## **BLUES/POP/ROCK GROUP**

Community College Winner  
Luck 20  
Jim Mair, Faculty Advisor

## **SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Directed by John Stafford II

## **SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Directed by John Stafford II  
Outstanding Soloist  
Maddie Huwe on "The List"

## **BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
Henry Fears, Trombone  
Justin Binek, Faculty Advisor

## **BLUES/POP/ROCK GROUP**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
Spitfire Sarcasm  
Justin Binek, Faculty Advisor

## **ORIGINAL COMPOSITION – SMALL ENSEMBLE**

Community College Winner  
Parker Woolworth, "Under the Table"  
Jim Mair, Faculty Advisor

## **LATIN GROUP**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Directed by John Stafford II

## **ORIGINAL COMPOSITION – SMALL ENSEMBLE**

Community College Outstanding Performance  
Henry Fears, "Look Up"  
Jim Mair, Faculty Advisor

## **ENGINEERED LIVE RECORDING**

Community College Outstanding Recording  
Erin Auman  
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Conor McMillen, Speyer Legacy School,  
Outstanding Performance



Avery Pambianchi, Eastman School of  
Music, Outstanding Performance

## High School Winner

### Valley Christian Combo I

Valley Christian High School  
Dr. Michael Jones  
San Jose, California

## High School Outstanding Performances

### Everything

#### We Do is Mingus

Rio Americano High School  
Josh Murray  
Sacramento, California

### Plano West Jazz Septet

Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

## Performing Arts High School Winner

### Emma Feld- Mugnaini Band

Conservatorium van Amsterdam  
Jesse Van Ruller  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

## Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

### Hamilton High School A Combo

Alexander Hamilton High School

Dana Landry  
Greeley, Colorado

## Graduate College Outstanding Performances

### Jason Charos

#### Trumpet

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Chuck Bergeron  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Max Bessesen

#### Alto Saxophone

Manhattan School of Music  
Jaleel Shaw  
New York, New York

Harvard-Westlake Middle School

Starr Schafel Wayne

and Wes Smith

Los Angeles, California

## Junior High School

## Outstanding Performance

### Derby Academy Organ Trio

Derby Academy  
Brian Martin  
Hingham, Massachusetts

## SMALL JAZZ COMBO

## Junior High School Winner

### Jazz Explorers

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## 2023 DownBeat Awards

### Large Jazz Ensemble

Graduate College Co-Winners

#### UNLV Jazz Ensemble I

Dave Loeb & Nathan Tanouye

### Jazz Combo

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

#### Joe Williams Honor Quartet

Dave Loeb

Outstanding Soloist:

#### Toscha Comeaux

### Small Vocal Jazz Group

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

#### Studio Scarlet

Lara Vivian Smith

### Latin Group

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

#### UNLV Latin Jazz Ensemble

José "Pepe" Jiménez



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of Jazz and Commercial Music  
Dave Loeb at [dave.loeb@unlv.edu](mailto:dave.loeb@unlv.edu)

# UNC

## DownBeat 2023

## Student Music Award Winners

### Ensembles & Soloists

Large Jazz Ensemble  
Graduate College Outstanding Performance

**UNC JAZZ LAB BAND I**

Dana Landry, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Group  
Graduate College Winner

**UNC FUNK LAB**

Brian Claxton, Director

Jazz Soloist  
Graduate College Co-Winner

**DAVID BERNOT, Tenor Sax**

Dana Landry, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
Graduate College Winner

**KELSEY WALLNER, Vocals**

Brian Claxton, Director

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
Graduate College Outstanding Performance

**DENIN SLAGE-KOCH, Guitar**

Steve Kovalcheck, Professor

Original Composition—Small Ensemble  
Graduate College Outstanding Composition

**JARED CATHEY, Sg'boy: Jesse**

Drew Zaremba, Professor

Original Composition—Large Ensemble  
Undergraduate College Winner

**TED DAVIES, The Shadow's Dance**

Drew Zaremba, Professor

Jazz Arrangement  
Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement—Medium Ensemble

**TSK NOK JERRY KO, The Scientist**

Drew Zaremba, Professor

Jazz Arrangement  
Graduate College Winner—Studio Orchestra

**JARED CATHEY, Time Remembered**

Drew Zaremba, Professor

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Director of Jazz Studies

### JSU JAZZ ENSEMBLE ONE

#### SAXOPHONES:

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Nathan Ballard  
Joshua Huffman  
Garrett Peterson  
Logan Seales

#### TROMBONES:

Issac Cargile  
Kevin Portell  
Kendall McCay  
Colby Francis  
Jonah Madaris

#### TRUMPETS:

Will Hiett  
Aaron Rucker  
Alex Rodriguez  
Isaiah Amos  
Joshua Ruff

Piano: David Clagson,  
Lamonte Gardner  
Guitar: Calvin Norris,  
Graham Pierce  
Bass: Riley Carroll, Jay Harris  
Drums: Joshua Brown, Carson Walker

### JSU JAZZ FACULTY

#### DR. ANDY NEVALA

Director of Jazz Studies,  
Jazz Ensembles I, IV, Jazz Piano,  
Jazz Theory, Jazz History,  
Jazz Combos, Jazz Arranging,  
Jazz Pedagogy,  
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#### CHRIS ENGAUSER

Bass, Jazz Combos

#### BEN WEATHERFORD,

Guitar, Jazz Improvisation

#### EMRAH KOTAN

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Latin Ensemble, Drumset Ensemble

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### SFJAZZ High School All-Stars Combo

SFJAZZ  
Dann Zinn  
San Francisco, California

### High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

### New Soil Ensemble

Young Lions Jazz Conservatory  
Gilbert Castellanos  
San Diego, California

### Random Abstract

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Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

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Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Jim Mair  
Kansas City, Kansas

### Community College Outstanding Performance

### MiraCosta Jazz Collective

MiraCosta College  
Steve Torok  
Oceanside, California

### Community College Outstanding Soloist

### Henry Fears, Trombone

Henry Fears Quartet  
Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Jim Mair  
Kansas City, Kansas

### Undergraduate College Winner

### Sergio de Miguel Septet

Berklee College of Music  
Nando Michelin  
Boston, Massachusetts

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

### Spencer Reeve Trio

University of Kansas  
Matt Otto  
Lawrence, Kansas

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Soloists

### Jace Frederick, Tenor Saxophone

Joe Miller Trio  
Western Michigan University  
Keith Hall  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

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Ryan Middagh  
Nashville, Tennessee

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Sacramento, California

**Outstanding Soloist:**

Thomas Molina, Trumpet

**Temple University Senior Ensemble**

Temple University  
Dick Oatts  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Graduate College Outstanding Performance****Joe Williams Honor Quartet**

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Dave Loeb  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**Outstanding Soloist:**

Toscha Comeaux, Vocalist

**Graduate College Outstanding Soloist****Andrew Carroll, Piano**

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Eastman School of Music  
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Heath Wolf  
Farmington, Utah

**Senior Jazz Band**

Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, Washington

**Junior High School Outstanding Performance****Jazz Band**

Washington Middle School  
Mike Sundt  
Seattle, Washington

**High School Winners****Byron Center Jazz Orchestra**

Byron Center High School  
Marc Townley  
Byron Center, Michigan

**Jazz Band**

Northgate High School  
Roberto García-Leiva  
Walnut Creek, California

**Jazz Band I**

Folsom High School  
Curtis Gaesser  
Folsom, California

**High School Outstanding Performances****Newark Academy Big Band, "Chameleon"**

Newark Academy  
Julius Tolentino  
Livingston, New Jersey

**Northwest Jazz Orchestra**

Northwest High School  
Chris Strohmaier  
Waukee, Iowa

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Co-Winners*

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## BLUES/POP/ ROCK GROUP

*Graduate College  
Outstanding Performances*

**The UNT Zebras**  
Teaching Assistant Andrew Getman  
Student Leader Reagan Garza  
Robert Parton, director

## LATIN GROUP

*Graduate College  
Outstanding Performances*

**Greenhouse**  
José Aponte, director

## JAZZ ARRANGEMENT

*Graduate College Outstanding  
Arrangements – Medium Ensemble*

**Richard Cruz, “One for ‘Grew”**  
**Greenhouse**  
José Aponte, director

## JAZZ ARRANGEMENT

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Arrangements – Big Band*

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Jacksonville, Florida

### **Jazz Workshop Orchestra**

Denver School of the Arts  
Dave Hammond  
Denver, Colorado

### **LACHSA Big Band**

Los Angeles County  
High School for the Arts  
Alex Hahn  
Los Angeles, California

### **High School Honors Winner**

#### **The Crescent Super Band**

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### **High School Honors Outstanding Performances**

#### **Colburn Jazz Workshop Big Band**

Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

### **Greater Kansas City Youth Jazz Orchestra**

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Jim Mair  
Kansas City, Kansas

### **Jazzschool Studio Band**

California Jazz Conservatory  
Dave Eshelman  
Berkeley, California

### **SFJAZZ High School All-Stars Big Band**

SFJAZZ  
Paul Contos  
San Francisco, California

### **Community College Winner**

#### **Oceanside Jazz Orchestra**

MiraCosta College  
Steve Torok  
Oceanside, California

### **Community College Outstanding Performance**

#### **Jazz Ensemble**

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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#### **Jazz Ensemble**

Lawrence University  
Patricia Darling  
Appleton, Wisconsin

#### **Jazz Ensemble I**

Jacksonville State University  
Andrew Nevala  
Jacksonville, Alabama

### **Graduate College Winners**

#### **Jazz Ensemble I**

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Dave Loeb and Nathan Tanouye  
Las Vegas, Nevada

#### **KU Jazz Ensemble I**

University of Kansas  
Dan Gailey  
Lawrence, Kansas

### **Graduate College Outstanding Performances**

#### **Eastman Jazz Ensemble**

Eastman School of Music  
Christine Jensen  
Rochester, New York

#### **Jazz Lab Band I**

University of Northern Colorado  
Dana Landry  
Greeley, Colorado

### **VOCAL JAZZ SOLOIST**

### **Junior High School Winner**

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### **Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performance**

#### **Kate Chapman**

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### **High School Winner**

#### **Sarah Stevenson**

Wellington Secondary School  
Carmella Luvisotto  
Nanaimo, British Columbia  
Canada

### **High School Outstanding Performances**

#### **Laura Perry**

Stoughton High School  
Ryan Casey  
Stoughton, Wisconsin

#### **Mikayla Smith**

The King's Academy  
Wes Lowe  
West Palm Beach, Florida

### **Performing Arts High School Winner**

#### **Chelsea Chiu**

Los Angeles County

High School for the Arts  
Pat Bass  
Los Angeles, California

### **Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances**

#### **Camila Quintero**

Osceola County  
School for the Arts  
Jason Anderson  
Kissimmee, Florida

#### **Jormilit Garcia**

Miami Arts Studio 6-12 at  
Zelda Glazer

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Elijah Thiessen, Southwestern Community College, Outstanding Performance

Cindy Ellis  
Miami, Florida

### High School Honors Winners

**Ava Preston**  
Tri-C JazzFest Academy  
Dominick Farinacci  
Cleveland, Ohio

**Jasione Veil**  
Southwestern Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Vocal Jazz Camp  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

### Community College Winners

**Jasione Veil**  
Southwestern Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

**Kiersten Conway**  
Southwestern Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

### Community College Outstanding Performance

**Elijah Thiessen**  
Southwestern Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

### Undergraduate College Winners

**Anastasia Chubb**  
Western Michigan University  
Gregory Jasperse  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Josephine Bianco**  
University of Miami,

Frost School of Music  
Kate Reid  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Kira Levin**  
University of Southern California,  
Thornton School of Music  
Aaron Serfaty  
Los Angeles, California

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

**Aanya Sengupta**  
Oberlin Conservatory of Music  
La Tanya Hall  
Oberlin, Ohio

**Ipek Göztepe**  
University of Music  
and Performing Arts, Graz  
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**Lillian Alter**  
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Kalamazoo, Michigan

### Graduate College Winner

**Emma Hedrick**  
Royal Conservatoire, The Hague  
Anka Koziel  
The Hague, Netherlands

### Graduate College Outstanding Performance

**Beatriz Guzman**  
Florida International University  
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### SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

### High School Winner

**Vocal Jazz Ensemble**  
Leyden High Schools  
Stacy Cunningham  
Franklin Park, Illinois



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### High School Outstanding Performance

#### Cary-Grove Jazz Choir

Cary-Grove High School  
Patrick Whalen  
Cary, Illinois

### Community College Winner

#### First Take

Southwestern  
Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

### Community College Outstanding Performances

#### Jazz-ology

Contra Costa College  
Dr. Stephanie Austin  
San Pablo, California

#### The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Kansas City Kansas  
Community College  
John Stafford II  
Kansas City, Kansas

#### Outstanding Soloist:

Maddie Huwe on "The List"

#### Vocal Jazz Ensemble

American River College  
Art LaPierre

Sacramento, California

### Undergraduate College Winner

#### Advanced Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Berklee College of Music  
Ned Rosenblatt  
Boston, Massachusetts

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

#### MOSAIC (Cal Poly Vocal Jazz Ensemble)

California Polytechnic  
State University  
Arthur White  
San Luis Obispo, California

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Vocal Soloist

#### Julia Smulson

Julia Danielle Trio  
DePaul University  
Kathryn Sherman  
Chicago, Illinois

### Graduate College Winner

#### Frost Extensions

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Kate Reid  
Coral Gables, Florida



Cary-Grove Jazz Choir, Outstanding Performance



Berklee College of Music, Advanced Vocal Jazz Ensemble, Winner



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# DB AWARD WINNERS — SMALL ENSEMBLES

**AMONG A SAMPLING OF THE 2023 SMALL Ensemble Student Music Award winners, one can find stories of selfless bandleaders, stylistic diversity and instrument converts.**

Recognized at the college/graduate level, the Sacramento State Jazz Combo is a sextet consisting of half graduates and half undergraduates. (According to Student Music Award guidelines, the inclusion of a single graduate student in an ensemble elevates it to graduate level.) It's also one of the school's six combos.

"The bassist also got his undergraduate degree from us, and the students have overlapped in different kinds of groups," said Steve Roach, Sacramento State director of jazz studies. "They also weathered through the pandemic together, so they've become good friends.

"I would characterize them as self-guided. It's not like they didn't need any direction, but I've allowed them to really follow their own leadership," he continued. "And it's resulted in some original arrangements and compositions and a lot of musical growth, which has been very exciting as a teacher."

Nando Michelin, associate professor at Berklee College of Music, singles out the bandleader of the Sergio de Miguel Septet. The Galacia, Spain, native's group was awarded in the college/undergraduate level and is guided by de Miguel's artistry, Michelin observed.

"He's such a mature player," he said. "He's playing like a 30-, 35-year-old, and he has a very clear musical personality. But for him, the music is always the main thing.

"That's very unique for a student his age. Sergio could be playing circles around people. His technique is that good. But he's more concerned with the sound of the group." Michelin cites de Miguel's jazz and classical as well as Spanish musical influences as well as a parallel musical pursuit.

"I remember the beginning of our classes together, he was bringing in his material," Mi-

chelin said. "And one thing that I tried to instill in him is that a composition is not just a melody and chords. A composition is also the arrangement, and everything that goes with it. So he started arranging things to sound orchestral, in a sense, even things he originally wrote for trio."

One reward for directing young musical talent is the opportunity to witness exponential growth firsthand. Each member of the Parker Woolworth Trio, winners of the community college category, have progressed in distinct ways, shared Jim Mair, professor of music and director of instrumental studies at Kansas City Kansas Community College.

"Parker came in with a lot of technique and a lot of chops, so we've been really working on the other aspects like communicating with people from the heart," he said. "Jordan Faught, the bass player in his trio, came in with no chops and was just a real soulful cat. So he's been really studying and playing great on both acoustic and electric," Mair noted. "And the drummer, Ben Garber, came in with lots of chops and lots of soul. We've been working on his reading."

In addition to playing as a tight-knit trio, Woolworth's group is the rhythm section for other school bands. "They're also the nucleus of our top jazz ensemble," Mair said. "And they have another band called Luck 20. That's all KCKCC students, and they won an [SMA] this year, too. Those guys know it's important to play all styles authentically."

Students from throughout Northern California are eligible for the SFJAZZ High School All-Star Combo, and the winning members of the High School Honors Ensemble category mostly reside in the East and South Bay Areas. All eight also play in the SFJAZZ High School All-Stars Big Band, so they're rehearsing in San Francisco once a week from 6 to 9:30 p.m.

"When I try to explain their high level of musicianship, I say it's almost like a Harry

Potter teen wizards kind of thing — they're in our world, but they don't play like it," declared Dann Zinn, SFJAZZ combo director.

"Part of the mission statement of the group is to write their own music, like the SFJAZZ Collective does," he said. "They're learning that when you're a jazz musician, you have to be a great player, sure. But you've also got to write your own music.

"They're also learning to write and arrange for an eight-piece band, which is probably a little more difficult than either a smaller or large group." The combo's instrumentation mostly mirrors the SFJAZZ Collective's classic lineup of four horns plus augmented rhythm section, though it has a guitarist as opposed to the Collective's inclusion of a vibraphonist.

Musicians have switched instruments throughout jazz's history. But an astonishing half the members of Valley Christian High School Combo I in San José, California, started off playing another one. "One of our upright bass players was a pianist who switched over the summer," revealed Mike Jones, Valley Christian Schools director of bands and jazz. "And the other bass player is a guitar convert. Our vibraphonist, in turn, was also a pianist originally."

An important aspect of this year's Combo I is that it features five juniors and a sophomore. So it's expected to remain intact for one more year. "They all can function at a certain level that they're able to feed off of each other and play off one another and react to what everyone's playing, in a mature way," Jones said. "And that's been exciting to watch."

Participating in regional and even intrastate festivals, the band approaches those experiences holistically: "They're really wanting to get in there not really caring necessarily about the competition aspect of things, although that's an added bonus," he pointed out. "They're really trying to achieve as artists."

—Yoshi Kato

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**Blair Big Band**

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Small Ensemble  
**Kevin Shinskie, "Endeavors"**

Undergraduate Outstanding Soloist  
Jazz Combo  
**Kevin Shinskie, Saxophone**



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Grass Valley Vocal Jazz, Grass Valley Elementary, Outstanding Performance



Pacific Standard Time, California State University—Long Beach, Co-Winner

**Outstanding Soloist:**  
Sophia Garas on “Never Say Yes”

### Graduate College Outstanding Performances

**FIU Panthonics**  
Florida International University  
Lisanne Lyons  
Miami, Florida

**Studio Scarlett**  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Lara Vivian Smith  
Las Vegas, Nevada

### High School Winner

#### Two N’ Four Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Valencia High School  
Christina Tavares Mocha  
Valencia, California

**Outstanding Soloists:**  
Khara Bigham and Stevie Petree  
on “Roller Coaster”

### High School Outstanding Performances

**Jazz Choir**  
Folsom High School  
Curtis Gaesser  
Folsom, California

**Outstanding Soloist:**  
Grace Sardar on “Zing”

**Vocalese**  
Valley High School  
Heather Nail  
West Des Moines, Iowa

### Community College Winner

**Singcopation**  
Mt. San Antonio College  
Bruce Rogers  
Walnut, California

### Community College Outstanding Performance

**The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble**

### LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

#### Junior High School Winner

**Eckstein Vocal Jazz Combo**  
Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, Washington

#### Junior High School Outstanding Performance

**Grass Valley Vocal Jazz**  
Grass Valley Elementary  
Natalie Wilson  
Camas, Washington

**Outstanding Soloists:**  
Layla Richey, Aubrey Zerba  
& Grace Huynh,  
“Let’s Sing Again”

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Kansas City, Kansas

### Undergraduate College Winner

#### Jazz & Tonic

California State University,  
Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Jonathan Arenas  
Long Beach, California

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

#### Mason Jazz Vocal Ensemble

George Mason University  
Darden Purcell  
Fairfax, Virginia

### Graduate College Winners

#### Pacific Standard Time

California State University,  
Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, California

#### Outstanding Scat Soloists:

Joe Buzzelli and Makayla Forgione on "Funquiado"

#### UNT Jazz Singers

University of North Texas

Jennifer Barnes  
Denton, Texas

### Graduate College Outstanding Performance

#### FIU Jazz Vocal Ensemble

Florida International University  
Lisanne Lyons  
Miami, Florida

#### Outstanding Soloist:

Emily Tang on  
"It's A Most Unusual Day"

### Graduate College Outstanding Soloist

#### Maggie Greene

Soloist on "Forever Blue"  
Village Voices - NYU Jazz  
and Contemporary  
Vocal Ensemble  
New York University  
Lauren Kinhan  
New York, New York

### BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST

### Junior High School Winner

#### Grace Chen

Organ  
Derby Academy  
Brian Martin  
Hingham, Massachusetts



Two N' Four Vocal Jazz Ensemble, Valencia High School, Winner



UNT Jazz Singers, University of North Texas, Co-Winner

# DOWNBEAT 46<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS

## Congratulations to Julia Smulson (BM '23)

### Small Vocal Jazz Group

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Vocal Soloist

### Julia Smulson

Julia Danielle Trio

DePaul University School of Music

Kathryn Sherman, Adjunct Professor of Jazz Voice



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## Junior High School Outstanding Performance

### Griffin Kelleher

Guitar  
Derby Academy  
Brian Martin  
Hingham, Massachusetts

## Junior High School Honors Winner

### Charley Chambers

Vocalist  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Zach Boorman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performance

### Sadie Hull

Vocalist  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## High School Winner

### Nicolo Boselli

Alto Saxophone  
Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

## High School Outstanding Performance

### Vuyani Saige

Keyboard  
Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

## High School Honors Winner

### Sam Cassil

Guitar  
Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## High School Honors Outstanding Performance

### Ava Preston

Vocalist  
Tri-C JazzFest Academy  
Dominick Farinacci  
Cleveland, Ohio

## Community College Winner

### Katie Graham

Vocals and Bass  
Southwestern Community College  
(School for Music Vocations)  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

## Community College Outstanding Performance

### Henry Fears

Trombone  
Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

## DOWNBEAT 46TH ANNUAL STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS



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### Coleman Hovey

Keyboard and Synthesizer  
University of Massachusetts,  
Amherst  
Jeffrey Holmes  
Amherst, Massachusetts

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

### Alyssa Curiel

Vocalist  
California State University,  
Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, California

### Andrew Tinch

Guitar  
University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
John Hart  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Robert Varon

Guitar  
Eastman School of Music  
Bob Sneider  
Rochester, New York

## Graduate College Winner

### Kelsey Wallner

Vocalist

University of Northern Colorado  
Brian Claxton  
Greeley, Colorado

## Graduate College Outstanding Performances

### Beatriz Guzman

Vocalist  
Florida International University  
Lisanne Lyons  
Miami, Florida

### Denin Slage-Koch

Guitar  
University of Northern Colorado  
Steve Kovalcheck  
Greeley, Colorado

## BLUES/POP/ROCK GROUP

## Junior High School Winner

### Derby Academy Organ Trio

Derby Academy  
Brian Martin  
Hingham, Massachusetts

## Junior High School Honors Ensemble Winner

### Infinite Mellon Collie

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Jordan Saucier  
Salt Lake City, Utah



Alyssa Curiel, California State University, Long Beach, Outstanding Performance



Katie Graham, Southwestern Community College, Winner



Andrew Tinch, University of Miami, Outstanding Performance



Robert Varon, Eastman School of Music, Outstanding Performance



Coleman Hovey, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Winner

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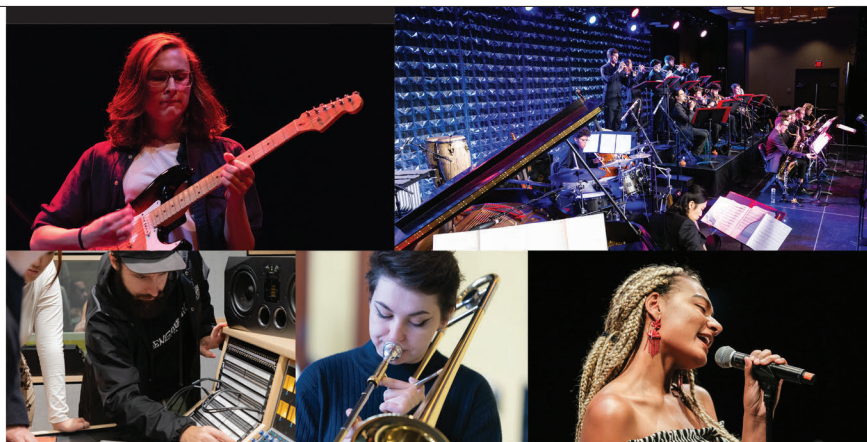
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# DB AWARD WINNERS — LATIN JAZZ GROUP

**LATIN JAZZ HAS BECOME AN INCREASINGLY** popular component of jazz education curriculums. That trend is reflected in the quality of the recordings submitted by the Latin Group ensembles honored in the 2023 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

At Hall High School in West Hartford, Connecticut, James Antonucci has made Latin jazz an integral part of his program, and the results are evident from accolades earned by the school's three jazz bands and four combos.

"We've been finalists in Essentially Ellington four times in the last six years, including 2023," says Antonucci. "With this year's DownBeat Student Music Award, we've now received SMAs the last three years."

For Antonucci, Latin jazz provides a great pathway in building jazz skills for his students. "I love Latin jazz big band music, and it's something I expose the kids to every year in a very purposeful way," he explains. "Our freshman band is Latin jazz focused, and we start with a variety of charts, for example, Tito Puente, that are really playable and the trombones and trumpets are doubled. The students can feel Latin jazz right off the bat, even if they're not playing it that well at first, and experiencing that music is something that's so palpable and so tangible for them."

As Antonucci's younger students move on to the Concert Jazz Ensemble and other groups, he continues using Latin jazz to build their musical skills. "They have a wonderful time learning all those rhythmic complexities," he says. "And when we get to the improvisation section, they're really able to express themselves. That's something I think is so important."

José L. Encarnación, associate professor of music and director of jazz studies at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, grew up absorbing Latin jazz in his native Puerto Rico. After attending Berklee and the Eastman School

of Music, he started teaching at Lawrence in 2011, attracted by the opportunity to diversify the jazz curriculum by bring Afro-Cuban jazz influences and culture, to the students.

He began with a concert that featured the Lawrence University Jazz Ensemble and Jazz Band, and led a master class tracing the history of Afro-Cuban music. "That concert and the class awakened interest in Latin jazz styles, especially among some of the percussion students," recalls Encarnación. "They knocked on my office door and wanted to learn to play music from Puerto Rico. I created a tutorial for them, and it continued to grow from there."

The Lawrence University Jazz Band was the SMA Undergraduate College Winner in 2022, and for this year's SMA competition, the band submitted recordings that Encarnación selected from a concert performed last semester.

"We had the concert recorded, and when we listened to it, we thought the band sounded really good, so we picked out three tracks and sent them to DownBeat."

Latin jazz is not strictly instrumental, as proven by the SMA awarded the UMASS Vocal Jazz Ensemble at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Under the direction of Catherine Jensen-Hole, the Ensemble has received SMAs in 2021 for Asynchronous Small Vocal Jazz Group and in 2022 for Latin Jazz Group.

Members of this year's Ensemble include Hannah White, Norah Thomas, Héloïse Gonçalves, Mae Whaley, Olivia Reduto, Jordan Kinder and Teddy Jannot — supported by pianist Coleman Hovey, guitarist Jared Cruz, bassist Dakota Gill and drummer Ellen Jacobson.

"I try to build four to six tunes that are Brazilian or Afro-Cuban into the Ensemble's repertoire each year," says Jackson-Hole. "It's important for the students to get different flavors of jazz rather than just swing. And Latin jazz rhythms are also a good stretch for the

rhythm section."

Jackson-Hole first became interested in Latin jazz while earning her master's and doctorate degrees at the University of North Texas, where she was a member of the award-winning UNT Jazz Singers.

"That's where my interest in Latin jazz came from," she says. "I love the music, and providing students with the chance to sing in Spanish and Portuguese is definitely good for them."

For this year's SMA competition, Jackson-Hole and the Ensemble submitted three Brazilian songs: "Tristeza De Amar," arranged by Jackson-Hole, Jobim's "Favela" and Claire Fischer's "Melancólico."

In the College/Graduate category, the Miguel Zenón Octet at the Manhattan School of Music earned an SMA for the group's recordings of Bud Powell's "Un Poco Loco," Fila Machado's "Baiao do Porao/Cellar Dance" and "Within, Without," written by Max Bessensen, alto sax player in the Octet. Bessensen also arranged the Powell and Machado compositions.

In addition to Bessensen, the octet includes Alex Riddout, trumpet; Adam Lamoureux, tenor sax; Hugo Caldeira, trombone; Michael Hilgendorf, guitar; Sterling Cozza, piano; Rafael Encisco, bass; and Varun Das, drums.

"I usually meet with them every Monday," says Zenón. "We have a rehearsal, and there's also a recital at the end of the semester. Many of the students, especially here, as well as at other top-tier programs, are semi-professional musicians, so they're very mature."

"Submitting these recordings was the result of their initiative — especially Max. They put it all together and ran it by me. They recorded everything and submitted it to DownBeat. This is one of the top ensembles at the school, they're playing difficult music at a very high-level. And they have the experience to know how to make a project like this happen." —Terry Perkins



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SMA WINNERS**

**KU JAZZ ENSEMBLE I**

**LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

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### Junior High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performance

#### Radio Motion

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Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### High School Winners

#### American Music Ensemble

St. George's Independent School  
Tom Link and Nathan Dumser  
Memphis, Tennessee

#### Plano West Jazz Septet

Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

### High School Outstanding Performance

#### Soular Wave

Kent Denver School  
Justin Adams  
Denver, Colorado

### Performing Arts High School Winner

#### Contemporary Arts Ensemble

Las Vegas Academy of the Arts  
Patrick Bowen  
Las Vegas, Nevada

### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

#### MIDI

Booker T. Washington HSPVA  
Terence Hobdy  
Dallas, Texas

### High School Honors Ensemble Winner

#### The Voodoo Orchestra

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

#### Max Headroom

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, Utah



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**NYU Pop/Rock Ensemble, NYU Steinhardt, Outstanding Performance**

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Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

**Vicious Beat**

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Evan Wharton  
Salt Lake City, Utah

**Community College Winner**

**KCKCC Luck 20**

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Jim Mair  
Kansas City, Kansas

**Community College Outstanding Performances**

**SMV Multiplicity**

Southwestern Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Kathryn Severing Fox  
Creston, Iowa

**Spitfire Sarcasm**

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

**Undergraduate College Winner**

**Bug Day**

Eastman School of Music  
Bob Sneider  
Rochester, New York

**Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances**

**Fredonia Jazz Flextet**

The State University  
of New York at Fredonia  
Nick Weiser  
Fredonia, New York

**Frost Funk Ensemble**

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Steve Rucker  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Frost Fusion Ensemble**

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Steve Rucker  
Coral Gables, Florida



**Anastasia Chubb**

*Vocal Jazz Soloist  
undergraduate college  
co-winner*



**Lillian Alter**

*Vocal Jazz Soloist  
undergraduate college  
outstanding performance*



**Jace Frederick**

*Jazz Combo  
undergraduate college  
outstanding soloist*



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## TO OUR WINNERS

### VOCAL JAZZ SOLOIST

Graduate College  
Outstanding Performance  
**BEATRIZ GUZMAN**

### LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Graduate College  
Outstanding Performance  
**FIU JAZZ VOCAL ENSEMBLE**

### OUTSTANDING SOLOIST

**EMILY TANG** on  
"It's a Most Unusual Day"

### SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

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**BEATRIZ GUZMAN**

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[music.fiu.edu](http://music.fiu.edu)

Miami, Florida

**Dr. Lisanne Lyons**  
Director, Jazz Vocal Ensemble  
**Dr. Jamie Ousley**  
Area Coordinator, Jazz Performance Studies



SMV Multiplicity, Southwestern Community College, Outstanding Performance

### Graduate College Winner

#### UNC Funk Lab

University of Northern Colorado  
Brian Claxton  
Greeley, Colorado

### Graduate College Outstanding Performances

#### NYU Pop/Rock Ensemble

NYU Steinhardt  
Justin John Moniz  
New York, New York

#### The UNT Zebras

University of North Texas  
Robert Parton  
Denton, Texas

## NEWARK ACADEMY

— 1774 —

The Newark Academy Arts Program  
congratulates our

DownBeat Student Music Award Winners



Newark Academy's Big Band "Chameleon" Director, Julius Tolentino



Ben Collins-Siegel

#### High School Winners

\*Ben Collins-Siegel, piano

\*Ben Schwartz, drums

High School Outstanding  
Performance

\*Newark Academy Big Band,  
"Chameleon"



Ben Schwartz



[www.newarka.edu](http://www.newarka.edu)

### LATIN GROUP

#### High School Winner

#### Hall High School Concert Jazz Ensemble

William H. Hall High School  
James Antonucci  
West Hartford, Connecticut

#### High School Outstanding Performance

#### Plano West Jazz Septet

Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

#### High School Honors Ensemble Winner

#### The Crescent Super Band

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse  
Caleb Chapman  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### High School Honors Outstanding Performances

#### Fat Cats Combo

Afro Latin Jazz Alliance  
Jim Seeley  
New York, New York

#### New York City All-City High School Latin Ensemble

Various New York City High Schools  
Alberto Toro  
New York, New York



New York City All City High School Latin Ensemble, Outstanding Performance

## Community College Outstanding Performance

### The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
John Stafford II  
Kansas City, Kansas

## Undergraduate College Winners

### Jazz Band

Lawrence University  
José Encarnación  
Appleton, Wisconsin

### UMASS Vocal Jazz Ensemble

University of Massachusetts, Amherst  
Catherine Jensen-Hole  
Amherst, Massachusetts

## Graduate College Winners

### Miguel Zenón Octet

Manhattan School of Music  
Miguel Zenón  
New York, New York

### Rafael Abdalla Quintet

University of Florida  
Scott Wilson  
Gainesville, Florida

## Graduate College Outstanding Performances

### Greenhouse

University of North Texas  
José Aponte  
Denton, Texas

### UNLV Latin Jazz Ensemble

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Pepe Jimenez  
Las Vegas, Nevada

## ORIGINAL COMPOSITION — SMALL ENSEMBLE

## High School Winners

### Alex Heidelbaugh and Nicolo Boselli, "Outpost"

Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

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## High School Outstanding Composition

### Jasper Zimmerman, “Interstellar Cable Car”

Hastings High School  
Eric Day  
Hastings-on-Hudson, New York

## Performing Arts High School Winner

### William Schwartzman, “Don’t Laugh”

Los Angeles County  
High School for the Arts  
Alex Hahn  
Los Angeles, California

## High School Honors Winner

### Gabriel Severn, “A Month of Sundays”

Loyalsock Township High School  
Eddie Severn  
Williamsport, Pennsylvania

## High School Honors Outstanding Compositions

### Julian Sachs, “Gentle Bird”

The Shea Welsh Institute of Jazz  
Shea Welsh  
Los Angeles, California

### Luciano Soriano, “Embrace”

Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

## Community College Winner

### Parker Woolworth, “Under the Table”

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Jim Mair  
Kansas City, Kansas

## Community College Outstanding Performance

### Henry Fears, “Look Up”

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Jim Mair  
Kansas City, Kansas

## Undergraduate College Winner

### Zhengtao Pan, “Era of New Celtic”

Berklee College of Music  
Steven Feifke  
Boston, Massachusetts

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Compositions

### Jonas Peterson, “B.E.S.”

University of Denver  
Peter Stoltzman  
Denver, Colorado

### Kevin Shinskie, “Endeavours”

Vanderbilt University  
Ryan Middagh  
Nashville, Tennessee

## Graduate College Winner

### Rafael Santos Abdalla, “Canco da Esperança”



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Outstanding Performance - Jazz Group

Grace Chen  
Winner - Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist

Griffin Kelleher  
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## CONGRATULATIONS JAZZ-ology

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

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Small Vocal Jazz Group

Jazz Faculty: Dr. Stephanie Austin, Clinton Day, Roger Letson, Fred Randolph

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CONTRA COSTA COLLEGE



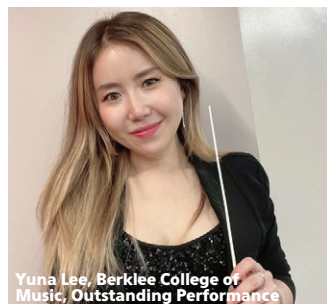
Jonas Peterson, University of Denver, Outstanding Performance



Jared Cathey, University of Northern Colorado, Outstanding Performance



Ted Davies, University of Northern Colorado, Winner



Yuna Lee, Berklee College of Music, Outstanding Performance

University of Florida  
Scott Wilson  
Gainesville, Florida

### Graduate College Outstanding Composition

**Jared Cathey,**  
"Sg'boy: Jesse"  
University of Northern Colorado  
Drew Zaremba  
Greeley, Colorado

### ORIGINAL COMPOSITION — LARGE ENSEMBLE

#### High School Winner

**Samuel Streeter,**  
"Ambivalence"  
Apple Valley High School  
David Scalise  
Apple Valley, Minnesota

#### High School Outstanding Composition

**Cal Rustad, "Tropical Breeze  
(And a Laid-Back Beat)"**  
R.L. Paschal High School  
Matthew Sawyer  
Fort Worth, Texas

#### Undergraduate College Winner

**Ted Davies,**  
"The Shadows' Dance"  
University of Northern Colorado  
Drew Zaremba  
Greeley, Colorado

#### Undergraduate College Outstanding Compositions

**Gergo Kormányos,**  
"Under Water"  
University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz  
Ed Partyka  
Graz, Austria

**Yuna Lee, "2:3"**  
Berklee College of Music

## 30<sup>th</sup> Annual SUMMER JAZZ WORKSHOP WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY



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Connect with our renowned resident faculty at the William Paterson University **SUMMER JAZZ WORKSHOP** open to commuters of all ages, and residents age 14-18. The workshop welcomes non-resident adult participants.

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Bob Pilkington  
Boston, Massachusetts

### Graduate College Winner

#### Kenton Luck, "Whaddaya Want, Birds!?"

University of Southern California,  
Thornton School of Music  
Bob Mintzer  
Los Angeles, California

### Graduate College Outstanding Composition

#### Tobias Hoffmann, "Defeat & Surrender"

University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz

Ed Partyka  
Graz, Austria

### JAZZ ARRANGEMENT

#### High School Winner

#### Cal Rustad, "Make an Omelette (from Something Rotten)"

R.L. Paschal High School  
Matthew Sawyer  
Fort Worth, Texas

#### High School Outstanding Arrangement

#### Angel Morales, "The Water is Wide"

East Leyden High School  
Stacy Cunningham  
Franklin Park, Illinois

### High School Honors Winner

#### Luciano Soriano, "We See"

Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

### High School Honors Outstanding Arrangement

#### Evan Dexter, "Alice in Wonderland"

Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

### Performing Arts High School Winner

#### Damien Blair, "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square"

Milwaukee High School of the Arts  
Raymond Roberts  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

### Undergraduate College Winner

#### Gergo Kormányos, "Like Someone in Love"

University of Music and Performing Arts,  
Graz  
Ed Partyka  
Graz, Austria

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Arrangement

#### Kevin Murphy, "Early Autumn"

Eastman School of Music  
Christine Jensen  
Rochester, New York

### Graduate College Winner — Vocal

#### Joe Buzzelli, "Nothing Like You"

California State University, Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, California

### Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement — Vocal

#### Daniel Fiamengo, "Mind to Fly"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement — Small Ensemble

#### Sam Ross, "Blue in Green"

California State University, Long Beach  
Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Andrew Langham  
Long Beach, California

### Graduate College Winner — Medium Ensemble

#### Max Bessesen, "Un Poco Loco"

Manhattan School of Music  
Jaleel Shaw  
New York, New York



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41<sup>st</sup> Annual

# Frank Mantooth

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Our non-competitive festival welcomes high school and junior high ensembles from around the country for a day of learning and inspiration. The full-day festival features:

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- Student jam sessions
- Daytime performances by Chicago's top jazz artists
- A performance by *The Director's Big Band*
- Masterclasses presented by the headlining musicians
- An evening concert featuring the finest big bands in the world!

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Damien Blair, Milwaukee High School of the Arts, Winner

### Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements — Medium Ensemble

#### Richard Cruz, "One for 'Grew"

University of North Texas  
José Aponte  
Denton, Texas

#### Tsz Nok Jerry Ko, "The Scientist"

University of Northern Colorado  
Drew Zaremba  
Greeley, Colorado

### Graduate College Winner — Big Band

#### Bruno Bišcan, "Ruby, My Dear"

University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz  
Ed Partyka  
Graz, Austria

### Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements — Big Band

#### Brian Lawrence, "Congratulations and Condolences"

University of North Texas  
Richard DeRosa  
Denton, Texas

#### Gary (Kaiji) Wang, "Frosty the Snowman"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida

#### Kevin Zapata, "Delfeayo's Dilemma"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Graduate College Winner — Studio Orchestra

#### Jared Cathey, "Time Remembered"

University of Northern Colorado  
Drew Zaremba  
Greeley, Colorado

### Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements — Studio Orchestra

#### Lee Wolf, "You're Everything"



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# THANK YOU!

**DownBeat** would like to thank our world-class adjudicators for making the **46<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Music Awards** a success.

**Jim Anderson**

**Jeff Baker**

**Janice Borla**

**Don Braden**

**Jeff Coffin**

**Claire Daly**

**John Daversa**

**Orbert Davis**

**Miho Hazama**

**Fred Irby III**

**Bart Marantz**

**Miles Osland**

**Bob Parsons**

**Dave Rivello**

**Albert Rivera**

**John Santos**

**Gregory Tardy**

**Roger Treece**

**Ryan Truesdell**

**James Warrick**

**DOWNBEAT 46<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL  
STUDENT  
MUSIC AWARDS**



**Kevin Zapata, University of Miami,**  
Engineered Live Recording Outstanding Performance



**Dudley Merriam, University of Miami,**  
Engineered Live Recording Outstanding Performance

Eastman School of Music  
Christine Jensen  
Rochester, New York

**Thomas Wengliniski,**  
"Recuerdame  
(Remember Me)"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida

## ENGINEERED LIVE RECORDING

### Community College Outstanding Recording

**Erin Auman**

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
John Stafford II  
Kansas City, Kansas

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Recording

**Dudley Merriam**

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Dana Salminen  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Graduate College Winner

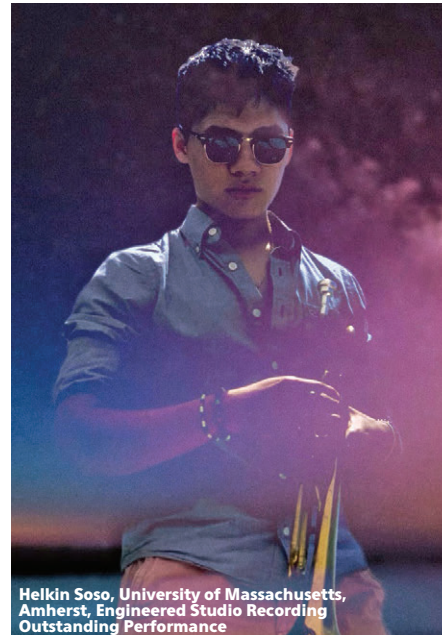
**Thomas Wengliniski**

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Graduate College Outstanding Recording

**Kevin Zapata**

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Stephen Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida



**Helkin Soso, University of Massachusetts,**  
Amherst, Engineered Studio Recording  
Outstanding Performance

## ENGINEERED STUDIO RECORDING

### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Recording

**Max Barth**

New Orleans Center for Creative Arts  
Joseph Ceponis  
New Orleans, Louisiana

### Community College Outstanding Recordings

**Elijah Thiessen**

Southwestern Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Jeremy Fox  
Creston, Iowa

**Jessie Glennon**

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

### Undergraduate College Winner

**Dudley Merriam**

University of Miami, Frost School  
of Music  
Dana Salminen  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Recordings

**Helkin Sosa**

University of Massachusetts, Amherst  
Jeffery Holmes  
Amherst, Massachusetts

**Leith McLeod**

University of Denver  
Michael Schulze  
Denver, Colorado

### Graduate College Outstanding Recording

**Nathan Borton**

University of Northern Colorado  
Socrates Garcia  
Greeley, Colorado

## JUDGING CRITERIA

### PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- 1) Overall sound
- 2) Presence or authority
- 3) Proper interpretation of idiom
- 4) Improvisation or creativity
- 5) Technique
- 6) Intonation
- 7) Phrasing
- 8) Dynamics
- 9) Accurate rhythm/time
- 10) Material

### ENGINEERING CRITERIA

- 1) Perspective: balance of channels; amount and type of reverb; blend (Do all sounds seem to have been performed at the same time and place? Do solos seem natural or do they stick out?).
- 2) Levels: saturation or other overload, under modulation resulting in excessive hiss, consistency of levels, left/right balance, etc.
- 3) Transparency and apparent transient response.
- 4) Special effects: Are they appropriate? Do they add or detract?
- 5) Extraneous noises, clicks, hum, etc. (for a non-live performance, any non-musical sound).
- 6) Professional etiquette.

### AWARDS & PRIZES

Plaques are awarded to the music department of each winning middle school, high school and college. Certificates are awarded to each winner (or Outstanding Performance honoree) and to the director of ensembles.

### JUDGES

**Jim Anderson:** Professor with the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, President of the AES Educational Foundation.

**Jeff Baker:** Recording artist, educator, producer, composer and co-founder of The Reality Book, the Jazz Forward Competition and Next Records.

**Janice Borla:** Vocalist; Director of Vocal Jazz, North Central College; vocal jazz camp founder.

**Don Braden:** Saxophonist, flutist, composer, arranger; Director, Harvard Jazz Combo Initiative.

**Jeff Coffin:** Saxophonist, composer, bandleader, educator/clinician.

**Claire Daly:** Baritone saxophonist, recording artist, composer, educator and clinician.

**John Daversa:** Chair, Department of Studio Music and Jazz, Frost School of Music, University of Miami.

**Orbert Davis:** Emmy Award-winning trumpeter, composer, educator; co-founder and conductor of the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic.

**Miho Hazama:** Composer, arranger, bandleader, Chief Conductor of Danish Radio Big Band, Permanent Guest Conductor of Metropole Orkest.

**Fred Irby III:** Howard University coordinator of Instrumental Music, trumpet instructor and Director of the Howard University Jazz Ensemble.

**Bart Marantz:** Legendary jazz educator whose bands have won 245 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

**Miles Osland:** Saxophonist; Director of Jazz Studies, University of Kentucky.

**Bob Parsons:** Saxophonist, arranger and composer.

**Dave Rivello:** Eastman School of Music Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, and Director, New Jazz Ensemble.

**Albert Rivera:** Saxophonist, composer, educator; Director of Operations, Litchfield Jazz Camp.

**John Santos:** Percussionist, clinician, label owner; U.S. Artists Fontanals Fellow; writer/historian.

**Gregory Tardy:** Recording artist, Assistant Professor of Jazz Saxophone, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

**Roger Treece:** Arranger/composer, UNC Jazz Press author and educator.

**Ryan Truesdell:** Bandleader, composer, arranger, trombonist, clinician.

**James Warrick:** Educator/clinician, former Director of Jazz Studies at New Trier High School.

# UMassAmherst

## Jazz & African American Music Studies Program DOWNBEAT STUDENT AWARD WINNERS 2023



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Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist  
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<b>Blackstone Publishing</b> ..... 47 blackstonepublishing.com	<b>JJ Babbitt</b> ..... 29 jjbabbitt.com	<b>Shifting Paradigm Records</b> ..... 77 shiftingparadigmrecords.com
<b>Blue Dolphin Arts &amp; Enterprises</b> ..... 79 brentcharles.com	<b>JodyJazz</b> ..... 124 jodyjazz.com	<b>Smoke Sessions</b> ..... 53 smokesessionsrecords.com
<b>Blue Note Records</b> ..... 5 bluenote.com	<b>John Stites Jazz Organization</b> ..... 49 johnstitesjazzawards.org	<b>Soulville Sound Recordings</b> ..... 61 soulvillesoundrecordings.com
<b>BMG</b> ..... 63 bmg.com	<b>Justin Time</b> ..... 81 justin-time.com	<b>Southwestern Community College – The School for Music Vocations</b> ..... 98 swcciaowa.edu
<b>Caleb Chapman’s Soundhouse</b> ..... 95 ccsoundhouse.com	<b>Kansas City Kansas Community College</b> ..... 91 kckcc.edu	<b>SteepleChase Productions</b> ..... 8 steeplechase.dk
<b>California Polytechnic State University</b> .... 106 music.calpoly.edu	<b>Kaufman Music Center’s Special Music School</b> ..... 119 kaufmanmusiccenter.org	<b>Syracuse Jazz Fest</b> ..... 37 syracusejazzfest.com
<b>Cannonball Music</b> ..... 7 cannonballmusic.com	<b>Lawrence University</b> ..... 82 lawrence.edu/conservatory	<b>Temple University</b> ..... 85 boyer.temple.edu
<b>Capri Records – Tapestry</b> ..... 8 caprirecords.com	<b>Lizzie Thomas</b> ..... 81 lizziethejazzsinger.com	<b>University of Kansas – KU School of Music</b> ..... 109 ku.edu
<b>Changes Music</b> ..... 79 tomasjanzon.com	<b>Manhattan School of Music</b> ..... 87 msmnycc.edu	<b>University of Kentucky</b> ..... 104 finearts.uky.edu/music
<b>Chicago Symphony Orchestra</b> ..... 12 cso.org/jazz	<b>MiraCosta College</b> ..... 106 miracosta.edu	<b>University of Massachusetts Amherst</b> ..... 119 umass.edu/music
<b>Colburn School</b> ..... 114 colburnschool.edu	<b>Modica Music</b> ..... 81 modicamusic.com	<b>University of Miami – Frost School of Music</b> ..... 89 frost.miami.edu
<b>Contra Costa College</b> ..... 114 contracosta.edu	<b>Monterey Jazz Festival</b> ..... 43 montereyjazzfestival.org	<b>University of Nevada Las Vegas</b> ..... 92 unlv.edu/music
<b>Criss Cross Jazz</b> ..... 79 crisscrossjazz.com	<b>MVD Entertainment Group</b> ..... 61 mvdshop.com	<b>University of North Texas</b> ..... 97 jazz.unt.edu
<b>DePaul University</b> ..... 105 music.depaul.edu	<b>Naïve Records</b> ..... 81 naiverecords.com	<b>University of North Texas Press</b> ..... 64 untpress.unt.edu
<b>Derby Academy</b> ..... 114 derbyacademy.org	<b>National Trumpet Competition</b> ..... 110 nationaltrumpetcomp.org	<b>University of Northern Colorado</b> ..... 93 jazz.unco.edu
<b>DownBeat</b> ..... 4, 73, 75, 118 downbeat.com	<b>New Trier High School</b> ..... 117 ntjazz.com	<b>University of the Arts</b> ..... 107 uarts.edu
<b>Eastman School of Music</b> ..... 101 esm.rochester.edu/jazz	<b>Newark Academy</b> ..... 112 newarka.edu	<b>Vail Jazz</b> ..... 113 vailjazz.org
<b>Eastman Winds</b> ..... 9 eastmanwinds.com	<b>Newport Jazz Festival</b> ..... 41 newportjazz.org	<b>Vanderbilt University – Blair School of Music</b> ..... 103 blair.vanderbilt.edu
<b>ECM Records</b> ..... 19 ecmrecords.com	<b>Oberlin Conservatory of Music</b> ..... 99 oberlin.edu/con	<b>Vandoren</b> ..... 3 dansr.com
<b>Edition Double Moon</b> ..... 10 doublemoon.de	<b>Orenda Records</b> ..... 81 orendarecords.com	<b>Vermont College of Fine Arts</b> ..... 88 vcfa.edu
<b>Epitaph I ANTI-</b> ..... 21 epitaph.com	<b>Origin Records</b> ..... 2 originarts.com	<b>Victory</b> ..... 11 victorymusical.com
<b>ESP-Disk’</b> ..... 79 espdisk.com	<b>P. Mauriat</b> ..... 123 pmauriatmusic.com	<b>Vince Ector</b> ..... 77 vinceector.com
<b>Florida International University</b> ..... 112 music.fiu.edu	<b>Paul Marinaro</b> ..... 81 paulmarinaro.com	<b>Wadada Leo Smith</b> ..... 57 wadadaleosmith.com
<b>Fredonia State University of New York</b> ..... 96 fredonia.edu/jazz	<b>Petros Klampanis</b> ..... 77 petrosklampanis.com	<b>West Virginia University</b> ..... 100 music.wvu.edu
<b>Fuat Tuuç</b> ..... 4 fuattuac.com	<b>Pittsburgh Jazz Festival</b> ..... 27 pittsburghjazzfest.org	<b>Western Michigan University</b> ..... 111 wmich.edu/music
<b>Gator</b> ..... 15 gatorcases.com	<b>Ravinia</b> ..... 33, 50 ravinia.org	<b>William Paterson University</b> ..... 115 wpunj.edu
<b>Gearbox Records</b> ..... 79 gearboxrecords.com	<b>Reed Geek</b> ..... 57 reedgeek.com	<b>XO Brass</b> ..... 23 xobrass.com
<b>Hal Leonard</b> ..... 17 halleonard.com	<b>Riverside City College</b> ..... 116 rcc.edu	
<b>Iowa City Jazz Festival</b> ..... 14 summerofthearts.org		

## Blindfold Test > BY GARY FUKUSHIMA

### Joey Baron

At 68, Joey Baron has been a lifelong connoisseur of the nuances of groove and melody-oriented drumming. Over his half-century in the trenches, he's covered a 360-degree spectrum of stylistic expression — a resume that includes, as a very short list, Carmen McRae, Hampton Hawes, the Vanguard Orchestra (when Mel Lewis was incapacitated), Bill Frisell, Tim Berne, John Zorn, Ron Carter, Dave Douglas, Jim Hall, Al Jarreau and David Bowie. Based in Berlin, Germany, in recent years, Baron often plays with MixMonk, a collective trio with pianist Bram de Looze and saxophonist Robin Verheyen, which performed in March at the Bergamo Jazz Festival, where he sat for his second DownBeat Blindfold Test.

### Walter Smith III

"Amelia Earhart Ghosted Me" (*Return To Casual*, Blue Note, 2023) Smith, tenor saxophone, composer; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Matthew Stevens, guitar; Taylor Eigsti, piano, keyboards; Harish Ragavan, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums.

The drummer is so precise, churning beautifully, all the pistons firing perfectly. The tight tuning and the technical ease of the execution tell me it's a younger drummer. It's mixed so you hear everything perfectly, but I'd like to hear how they sound in person — the blend. There's a lot of notes from everybody except the pianist. I enjoyed the piece, but the longer it went, the further away it got from maybe what it was about, and I lost interest. I'm looking for the story.

### Tyshawn Sorey Trio

"From Time To Time" (*Mesmerism*, Pi, 2022) Sorey, drums; Aaron Diehl, piano; Matt Brewer, bass.

Very patient. Technically, you can hear everything — the piano is as big as the Grand Canyon! It unfolded nicely. I liked everybody's moves. People seemed to be equally dipping into the pot of the meal being cooked. That cymbal crash makes me think of Tyshawn Sorey. [afterwards] Tyshawn is brilliant. He has utter control. He has the sensibility of letting something go, not being afraid of the silence. You can't learn what it is that he does. He has a real gift.

### Jean-Michel Pilc/Francois Moutin/Ari Hoenig

"Bemsha Swing" (*YOU Are The Song*, Justin Time Records, 2023) Pilc, piano; Moutin, bass; Hoenig, drums.

"Bemsha Swing." I liked how they were phrasing the melody, and carrying that through in the playing. The drummer sounded more interested in music than trying to fit in patterns — great feel. [afterwards] Ari goes for a literal display of melodic ideas, and does it really well. I've taken that path as opposed to the technical, "Hey, look what I can do" or super-energy thing. I'm less interested in actually playing the melody verbatim than in organizing those sounds in a way where the listener will perceive something.

### Larry Goldings/Peter Bernstein/Bill Stewart

"FU Donald" (*Perpetual Pendulum*, Smoke Sessions, 2022) Goldings, organ; Bernstein, guitar, Stewart, drums.

I love organ groups. The drummer seemed like a team player, and they all were doin' that thing! I liked the tune. It had a vibe, and who knows if it's in 4 or 7 or whatever — but I don't really care. I have no idea who it is. [afterwards] It's a team. You can tell from the start they're all in agreement. Bill has it all. He can swing his ass off. He's got a great feel and a great sound; you can hear it on records, because he's so clear. He's had a huge impact, with so many people imitating him. Bill Stewart has nothing



"Bill Stewart has nothing to prove," Baron says. "I aspire to that ethic."

ing to prove. I aspire to that ethic. You reach a point where certain things are important, and a whole ton of other shit is just not.

### John Patitucci Trio

"Three Pieces of Glass" (*Live In Italy*, Three Faces, 2022) Patitucci, bass; Chris Potter, soprano saxophone; Brian Blade, drums.

Soulful melody; real inviting to listen to. The template clearly identifies the world they're entering. The bass player's solo was very clear, so in-tune. It didn't veer off someplace where you wonder what they're doing. They sounded like much more than a trio. There was space in the head — very simple, but giving the listener room to allow what is being played to resonate. The drummer had a nice contour — I liked the little shaker things and the time felt great. The cymbal sound and the voice makes me think of Brian Blade. You can hear the engagement with the audience. [afterwards] I've talked to John and Brian, and they would want to play time in certain situations. To hear them do it is a joy to listen to.

### Terri Lyne Carrington

"Unchanged" (*New Standards*, Vol.1, Candid, 2022) Carrington, drums, Nicholas Payton, trumpet; Matthew Stevens, guitar; Kris Davis, piano; Linda May Han Oh, bass.

A lot of work went into the execution. I'm so distracted by the recorded sound that it interferes with being able to enjoy the music. Personally, I've done records I can't listen to now, even though people may enjoy them. The drummer is fantastic, with a churning flow, in control of the instrument, very clear and precise. I imagine live you'd hear their balance on the instrument and it would sound incredible. All I'm hearing here is the notes. That sounds like bassist Linda May Han Oh, who I've played with — her ideas are so clear.

### Aruan Ortiz/Andrew Cyrille

"Golden Voice (Changüi)" (*Inside Rhythmic Falls*, Intakt, 2020) Ortiz, piano; Cyrille, drums.

Very articulate playing by both musicians. You could hear the ideas; it didn't get dense or thick. The ring of the drums made me think of Andrew Cyrille, who has this particular thing on the snare drum. He makes me smile. Andrew is such a great solo player, I kind of wanted to hear that. I don't know the pianist. The scalar approach was making me lose interest. These days when I hear a pitched instrument, I want to hear some melodic ideas.

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.

Khari Allen Lee's soulful sounds are featured on his newly released EP, Khari Allen Lee & the New Creative Collective: Live at the Sound Wall. His extensive discography includes three albums as leader, as well as collaborations with Terence Blanchard, Dr. John, Dee Dee Bridgewater & the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, and Delfeayo Marsalis & the Uptown Jazz Orchestra.

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