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JULY 2024

ON THE COVER

22 Immanuel Wilkins

Art in Action

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

The Philadelphia-bred, Brooklynbased alto saxophonist and composer continues to chase the big picture with his *Blues Blood* multimedia piece. Wilkins leads the latest crop of bright stars in our "25 for the Future" feature!

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Cover photo of Immanuel Wilkins by Jimmy and Dena Katz



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a full issue of archival treasures from DownBeat's 90-year history!

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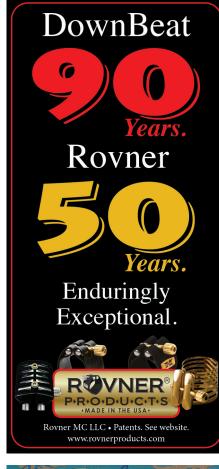
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Acclaimed composer and bassist Stephan Crump releases *Slow Water* (Papillon Sounds) featuring an unorthodox chamber ensemble of strings, horns, and vibraphone



First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



The past meets the future in this issue. For example, two alto saxophonists of special importance — Charlie Parker, left, and Immanuel Wilkins — fit beautifully in one space.

A 90th Anniversary Party

YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS A COLLECTOR'S item that's been 90 years in the making. When the first issue of DownBeat hit the streets of Chicago in July of 1934, it wasn't much to look at, just eight pages, and most of that simply listing where bands were playing around town.

So, how did DownBeat grow to be, well, DownBeat? Start with Benny Goodman, a kid from Chicago. Goodman became an overnight national sensation in 1935 — at the ripe old age of 26 — driving the dancers crazy at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles. Goodman was the local boy making good. DownBeat was the local magazine covering his stardom.

And from that single event, DownBeat found its reason to be, becoming a "bible" for jazz and all the upstart artists playing the music; growing from a local "zine," to use the parlance of today, into a national, and then international, magazine.

So, 90 years later, here we are. It's July, and we celebrate the thousands upon thousands of artists who have graced the pages of this publication and the hundreds upon hundreds of writers, editors, photographers and business professionals who have made DownBeat tick over all these years. The biggest question we had was, "How do we celebrate?"

If you've been around for a bit, you may have seen our 10th, 25th, 55th, 60th, 75th, 80th and now 90th anniversary issues. In each one leading up to the 90th, we paid tribute to the past, diving deep into the archive, slicing and dicing nuggets from the magazine's rich history. We wanted to bring today's readers more of that; to honor what has come before.

On the other hand, the improvised music scene is exploding. There's way too much great music and too many emerging artists to take a month off from what's happening right now. There has never, ever, in the history of jazz been a time like the present, where there's so much to hear and choose from each and every month.

Tribute to the past? Yes. But we couldn't let a month go by without highlighting some great new sounds, too.

So, the solution? Go back to Benny. He was a rising star and DownBeat was there. Combine the past and future into one hopefully timeless volume. If you wish to think in terms of, say, an LP, Side A is the Historical Side, packed with 18 great reads from the DownBeat Archive. Flip it over, and Side B is what we're calling the Future Side, presenting our fourth installment of "25 for the Future," a special section we publish every four years or so to catch the next wave of jazz stars just as they're beginning to rise.

We've chosen alto saxophonist and composer Immanual Wilkins for the cover of the Future this time around. He joins good company. Past 25FTF covers have featured Brad Mehldau and Regina Carter (back in 1998), Kamasi Washington (in 2016) and Veronica Swift (in 2020). Not bad company.

This issue has it all — treasures from our rich legacy, 25 innovating young musicians for the future and the inside scoop on today's artists and new albums releases. Enjoy choosing your own favorites from these gems we've selected. Happy anniversary, DownBeat and many more. **DB**

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Chords ි Discords

Editor's Note: Since it's our 90th Anniversary Issue, and letters about our 90 Greatest Jazz Artists of All Time (April 2024) keep pouring in, we give you one more page dedicated to your viewpoints!

More Love for Terri Lyne!

I'm sure you and DownBeat staff struggled mightily to narrow the numbers of the greatest 90 jazz musicians, but I'm also certain that Terri Lyne Carrington's name was on the list well into the process. Terri Lyne is a champion for women in jazz, let alone an outstanding drummer/percussionist, educator, producer and composer.

DownBeat critics recognized this dynamic force in the music industry by awarding her the first triad win for a woman in its 2020 Critics Poll, recognized as the leading Jazz Artist, Jazz Album (*Waiting Game*), and Jazz Group (Terri Lyne Carrington & Social Science). TLC is for certain a guiding light for the many women, LGBTQ and trans souls who are left in the dark, forgotten by jazz media.

The impact she is making is felt throughout Berklee College of Music where she founded and presides as director of the Jazz and Gender Justice Institute. Her contribution to the future of jazz shines in her publication *New Standards: 101 Lead Sheets by Women Composers.* Somehow, some way, Terri Lyne Carrington's name must make it on the list of the greatest artists in jazz history. If not, future readers will be the real losers.

STEVE BRAUNGINN STRICTLY JAZZ SOUNDS PODCAST PRODUCER/HOST

Terry to Woods to Brown

Putting together any "best of" list is always challenging, because deserving artists will always be omitted. But Clark Terry is one of the most accomplished trumpeters and flugelhornists, with a distinctive sound that is easily recognizable within a couple of notes. He amassed a huge discography as a leader and sideman, plus his compositions like "Mumbles" and "Sereneade To A Bus Seat" are widely known.

The other major omission is Phil Woods, an alto saxophone great and underrated clarinetist who built upon Charlie Parker's legacy and also proved himself as a masterful, prolific composer. Surely they are more important to jazz than Wynton Marsalis and Albert Ayler.

KEN DRYDEN OOLTEWAH, TENNESEE

AACM MIA

It's unfortunate that your "Greatest Artists" list didn't find room for a single member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative



)

Musicians (AACM), which laid the groundwork for post-'60s progressive jazz and of course shares a hometown with DownBeat.

Forced to pick single representative, I'd choose Henry Threadgill. (Good enough for the Pulitzer committee but not yours?) His body of arrestingly distinctive and ground-breaking work is the epitome of composing for improvisers, every bit as much as Duke Ellington's was in his day. But there are certainly other important AACM members worthy of your list, including Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, Lester Bowie and Wadada Leo Smith.

MARTIN WISCKOL HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Birth of a Playlist!

In regard to your 90 greatest artists of all time, great idea! I like that you put them alphabetically also so you didnt run into that rating thing that most lists do. Also, I liked the one song you listed with the artist. I made a playlist with all the artists and each song.

Most of the artists I knew, but some of the songs you picked I did not. So it was fun to listen to the artist play a song that I wasn't familiar with. Thanks, DownBeat.

RAJON SCOTT KENYON VIA EMAIL

90 Greatest, Readers Version?

How about conducting a readers poll of our choices? Metronome did it in the late 1950s, and it would be a great and worthwhile venture.

MARSHALL ZUCKER WANTAGH, NEW YORK VIA EMAIL

Corrections & Clarifications

In the Beat feature on Miguel Atwood-Ferguson (March 2024), Atwood spent \$120,000 making Les Jardins Mystiques, Vol. 1, not \$20,000. The title translates to the "mystical gardens" and Atwood-Ferguson is an orchestral arranger, not a string arranger. DownBeat regrets the errors.

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at **editor@downbeat.com** or find us on Facebook & Twitter.

Steve Gadd, **ZOODNED IN** *Creative insights from one of the world's most influential drummers.*

Perfection is Overrated

"I don't know anybody who's perfect. You go out there and do your best. And if you don't nail it, then you go out the next day and you try to get it right. That's really all you can do."

No Showing Off

"Instead of driving the music with this need to show off, I've learned to let the music dictate what I need to do. You have to really listen in order to do that."

Get in the Groove

"I've seen so many drummers who have chops and technique that would make your jaw drop to the floor. People are doing some really incredible things. To me, though, I find it just as inspiring on a whole different level when I see somebody who can play a groove and get inside it and make me tap my toes. If you can get people tapping their toes, that's it – you're playing music."

Zoom and Steve congratulate DownBeat on 90 years of excellence.

Seek Inspiration

"Originally you're inspired by hearing someone else doing something, and then taking it home and trying to learn how to do it. When I was growing up I would get records of Philly Joe, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, and guys like that, and slow the records down and work out what they were playing, and then work on it and put my own feel to it. That's how we all learn."

But Be Original

"You can't be a copy of somebody else, no matter how hard you try. It's impossible. I've seen people try to copy licks and get them exact, and I can tell they're not playing in a way that's natural or comfortable. That's not what music is all about. You have to develop your own bag of tricks. The worst thing in the world you can do is let your enthusiasm for somebody else's work stifle your own creativity."

Steve Hadd



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F Live



Nick Finzer Honors J.J.'s Centennial, Fay Victor, Stephan Crump, Smoke Turns 25



e with keyboardist Bob James and bassist Marcus Miller, died at age 78 after I

In Memoriam: Saxophonist David Sanborn, 1 945–2024

avid Sanborn, the star alto saxophonist who masterfully straddled the realms of straightahead jazz, R&B, rock and commercial pop, died May 12 in Tarrytown, New York, after a long battle with prostate cancer. He was 78.

Sanborn's highly stylized playing and searing signature sound - frequently ornamented with thrill-inducing split-tones, vibrant altissimo and bluesy inflections influenced generations of saxophonists who revered his ability to flat-out wail and seduce listeners within just about any musical context. In addition to releasing 25 albums as a leader or co-leader, Sanborn worked with some of the biggest names in music in the studio and on the road, including Miles Davis, James Brown and Stevie Wonder. Known for his prolific recorded output and energetic live shows, he won six Grammys and remained highly active until his passing.

Raised in the St. Louis suburb of Kirkwood,

Missouri, Sanborn contracted polio at age 3 and was introduced to the saxophone as part of his treatment therapy. After studying music at Northwestern University and with saxophonist J.R. Monterose at the University of Iowa, he went on to back legends like Albert King and Little Milton, then joined the Paul Butterfield Blues Band in 1967. His 1975 solo release Taking Off further solidified his career. Also in 1975, Sanborn was showcased on David Bowie's hit album Young Americans,

which prominently featured the saxophonist in a soloing role, notably on the album's title track. That was followed by the Brecker Brothers' self-titled debut, which featured Sanborn's alto alongside the formidable tagteam of Michael and Randy Brecker.

Other notable recordings from this fertile

Evans' *Priestess* and James Taylor's radio hit "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)." The tune "Seduction," from Sanborn's 1979 album *Hideaway*, became a hit after being featured in the movie *American Gigolo*. Later albums as a leader included guest artists and collaborators such as Luther Vandross,

Sanborn's highly stylized playing and searing signature sound influenced generations of saxophonists.

period featuring Sanborn included the Bob James collaboration *Heads*, Jaco Pastorius' "Come On, Come Over," Mose Allison's Your Mind Is On Vacation, George Benson's Good King Bad, Paul Simon's Still Crazy After All These Years, Bruce Springsteen's Born To Run, the Eagles' One Of These Nights, The Manhattan Transfer's self-titled debut, Gil Jack DeJohnette, Bill Frisell, Charlie Haden, Tim Berne, Wallace Roney, Kenny Barron, Christian McBride and Eric Clapton, among others.

A onetime member of the Saturday Night Live Band and a familiar presence on the set of *Late Night with David Letterman*, Sanborn further raised his profile via frequent appearances on television and radio. From 1988 to 1990, he hosted the TV show *Night Music*, with Sanborn presenting an eclectic mix of guests, many of them personal heroes, and sitting in with their bands. During the 1980s, he also began hosting the syndicated radio program *The Jazz Show With David Sanborn*.

Sanborn was generous with his television and radio guests, which he attributed to the sense of gratitude he felt toward his musical predecessors. In an October 1994 conversation with the iconic soul-jazz alto saxophonist Hank Crawford moderated by DownBeat, Sanborn explained, "For me, it's payback. Because by acknowledging what has come before you and what's happening around you, you feed your own soul. You're always going to find out something different. When Hank was on the show, just being with him in that context, I learned so much from just standing next to him playing, which I had never done before."

Sanborn is survived by his wife, the pianist, vocalist and composer Alice Soyer Sanborn; his son, Jonathan; two granddaughters; and his sisters, Sallie and Barb Sanborn.

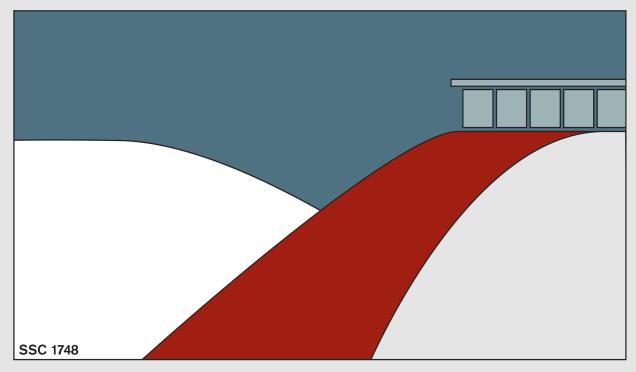
Earlier this year, he become the first recipient of the St. Louis-based Steward Center Lifetime Achievement Award in Excellence. —Ed Enright

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Nick Finzer Spotlights J.J. Johnson's Centennial

J.J. JOHNSON (1924-2001) EARNED HIS rightful place in jazz history. But does he receive enough recognition? Fellow trombonist Nick Finzer thinks that Johnson merits more consideration.

The 36-year-old Rochester, New York, native's latest album, Legacy, pays tribute to Johnson, Finzer's personal hero on the instrument and an inspiration for his own composing and arranging. The deeply felt eight-track album released on Finzer's own Outside in Music label in April, features a combination of Johnson pieces and a standards sourced from throughout his fertile career plus three originals.

"I always thought this wasn't something I was going to do," Finzer says of the Johnson tribute. "My first five or six projects have been mostly focused on original music." He did the math two years ago and realized that Johnson's centenary was coming up in 2024. "I talked to some of my teachers and mentors and asked if they were doing anything for J.J.'s 100th or knew of anyone else doing something.

know of.' Some didn't even realize it was coming up. So I decided that we can't let this go by and not acknowledge J.J.," he continues, by phone from his part-time home in Denton, Texas. "I wanted to make sure he had his moment in the spotlight, and that we shared his music again. Then if somebody else comes along and does it, too, that's great. The more the merrier."

Finzer had played with Lewis Nash in Ryan Truesdell's Gil Evans Centennial Project and peppered the drummer with questions about his time mostly gigging, but also recording with Johnson during the early to mid-'90s. "Nick always jokes and says he was like the pesky young musician asking a thousand questions about J.J.," Nash reports, in a phone interview from his home in Arizona. "And Lewis was gracious enough to put up with it," Finzer confirms.

Those conversations inspired Finzer to ask Nash to record on Tribute. He agreed and, when queried by Finzer, suggested pianist Renee Rosnes and bassist Rufus Reid to fill out the quar-

"And everyone I talked to said, 'Oh, not that I tet, as the three had been Johnson's rhythm section in the early to mid-'90s. The album was captured at the same Rudy Van Gelder studio where Johnson himself had made many classic albums, and it was Finzer's first time recording at the historic jazz landmark in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, to boot.

> "There's one piece by Renee, 'Malaga Moon,' which she wrote when he was playing with him," Finzer explains, when asked about the album's three originals. "And I wrote a couple of things ("That Thing" and "CC") trying to assimilate J.J.'s influence on me."

> "I was really impressed with not only his knowledge of J.J., but also his commitment to this album and J.J.'s legacy," Nash reflects. "It's been a really quality project and not just some knock-off thing that someone was trying to do in a timely manner because it was J.J.'s centennial.

> "He was very organized and very open," he recalls. "Even at the session, Nick was willing to alter things if we made suggestions."

"J.J.'s got so many records and so many differ-

ent parts of his repertoire — small group, big band, brass orchestra — that it's really impossible to really do it all," Finzer replies, when queried about selecting material for *Legacy*. "I just tried to cover a lot of ground in a short amount of time."

Johnson's reputation as both a bebop pioneer and a triple-threat instrumentalist/composer/ arranger has remained strong. But Finzer points out that the diverse nature of Johnson's career may have meant he was deserving of wider recognition during his lifetime, even as he was already acknowledged as a legend.

"A friend of mine, a saxophone player and a colleague, asked me, 'Does anybody check out J.J. Johnson for real?' And it got me thinking: It's probably mostly just trombone educators like myself and Michael Dease and Steve Davis," Finzer says. "I don't know how many people inside of the industry sphere or other players who aren't trombonists are talking about what Jay was doing.

"J.J. was really respected by Miles and Sonny Rollins," he points out. "But he was out of the scene for a while. He moved to L.A. to become a film and TV composer and took something like 10 years off from leading his own bands."

Finzer started on trombone in fourth grade, and Johnson's recorded legacy was his gateway into the jazz world. "I grew up in the mid-'90s, and there were two records that were re-released on one CD (Johnson and Kai Winding's *Jay & Kai* + 6 and Johnson's *J.J. In Person*). I can just still remember being a kid on the bus trying to hold my Discman so it wouldn't skip," he says. "That first CD took on a world of its own; I fell in love with the sound of the trombone during that time."

Finzer joined his high school's jazz band in 10th grade and was able to participate in Jazz at Lincoln Center's Essentially Ellington big band competition, which became another life-altering event. Wynton Marsalis was collaborating with Rochester-based choreographer Garth Fagan back then, so when the band was in town Finzer received his first private jazz-based lessons with Wycliffe Gordon, the Marsalis Septet's trombonist.

After staying East to study at Eastman School of Music and then at The Juilliard School, Finzer has led his own sextet and plays in clarinetist/occasional saxophonist Anat Cohen's Tentet. And as an assistant professor of jazz trombone at University of North Texas College of Music, he carries forth Johnson's de facto artistic motto.

"Why go through all the hardship of learning to play your instrument so well and trying to express yourself if you're not going to think about how you present yourself and your musical identity and your musical point of view to the world?" he says. "And I don't think you have to do anything crazy. You just have to be a little bit thoughtful." —Yoshi Kato

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Fay Victor Navigates Nichols

HERBIE NICHOLS IS ONE OF THE GREAT should-have-been stories in jazz. Born in New York in 1919 to parents from Trinidad and St. Kitts, he died of leukemia in 1963 having recorded only two albums and two 10-inch EPs. When he gigged, it was mostly as a sideman, and often in Dixieland or other artistically conservative contexts; he rarely got to perform his own music. In his book *Four Lives In The Bebop Business*, A.B. Spellman wrote, "If the products of an artist's life work are to be the sum of his life, then Herbie Nichols ... may be said not to have lived at all."

It's a shame Nichols was so unappreciated in his lifetime, because both his compositions and his performances of them mark him as a striking figure even at a time — the mid-1950s when jazz was at a creative peak. Spellman described his style as falling "in a musicological sense, between ... Teddy Wilson and Thelonious Monk," and that's both vivid and accurate. His melodies have the romanticism of Wilson, but the rhythmic drive and island feel of Monk.

In some ways Nichols might have been even "weirder" than Monk, as his compositions bore titles like "Argumentative," "Cro-Magnon Nights," "Amoeba's Dance" and "It Didn't Happen." But he was also deeply drawn to songcraft; in an autobiographical essay quoted by Spellman, he wrote, "The voice is the most beautiful instrument of all; that's why I'll always write songs." His most famous piece is "Lady Sings The Blues," co-written with Billie Holiday; Mary Lou Williams also recorded several of his compositions in the early 1950s, giving them new titles.

Fay Victor was born in New York two years after Nichols' death. They come from similar backgrounds: Her mother was from Trinidad, her father from Grenada. She began singing jazz in her 20s, but after a few years of struggle on the New York scene, she moved to Amsterdam, which sparked a personal and creative rebirth. She discovered the avant-garde jazz of '60s heroes. "One of my biggest influences in terms of phraseology is Eric Dolphy," she says. "I fell in love with Eric Dolphy the first time I heard *The Blues And The Abstract Truth*, from Oliver Nelson. So I just listened to follow what he did. And then by the time I got to *Out To Lunch*, I was just blown away."

Victor connected with key Dutch jazz figures, including pianist Misha Mengelberg, who she says "saw in me what I didn't even see yet, that I just had to go my own way, and he in his way [couldn't] help but encourage that." She also met bassist Jochem van Dijk, who became her boyfriend and eventually her husband; it was through him that she first heard Nichols' music.

"I was rifling through his music collection and discovered a CD of Herbie Nichols," she recalls. "I didn't know — I'd never heard the name, didn't know anything about this person. But ... I took it out and I put on the record, and a lot of it was just way above my head. But the song that connected immediately was 'House Party Starting.' And I loved it. I fell in love with it so much that I decided, Tm going to learn. I want to figure out how to sing this song today.' And honestly, at that moment, I was not technically ready to sing such a song, but it was a good challenge to get ready."

She included a version of "House Party Starting," with her own lyrics, on her 2001 album Darker Than Blue (Timeless) and continued to explore Nichols' catalog, performing his tunes alongside works by Monk and Ellington with Mengelberg and the Instant Composers Pool (ICP). When she returned to New York with van Dijk, she connected with trombonist Roswell Rudd, who had worked with the pianist at the end of his life. "I could ask Roswell questions because Roswell knew Herbie Nichols personally. For example, I got to know that the reason 'House Party Starting' is so dark is because Herbie Nichols was very, very shy, and ... I remember thinking about [how] that must be like torture, to be an excruciatingly shy person and have to perform for a house party."

Victor's project Herbie Nichols SUNG has existed for more than a decade at this point, and she's finally documented it on record. *Life Is Funny That Way* (Tao Forms) features her lyrics and arrangements, performed by alto and baritone saxophonist Michaël Attias, pianist Anthony Coleman, bassist Ratzo Harris and drummer Tom Rainey. Most tracks have new titles; the exceptions are "Shuffle Montgomery," "Twelve Bars" and "Lady Sings The Blues."

A lot of the arrangements started for piano, saxophone and vocals, put together in collaboration with pianist Achim Kaufman. "Achim and I got together over a period of years to figure out how to really break open Nichols' music ... in a way that is effective [but] would also retain the integrity of Nichols' great compositions." She explains that "each song kind of lets me know what to write, and I've never — once the lyric idea started, that was it. There was never any sort of turning back, let me go in another direction or whatever. ... I try to inhabit the composition, to let the composition say what to write."

The resulting album showcases Victor's lyrical creativity and Nichols' innovative approach to melody and swing in equal measure.

"I think he deserves the attention," she says. "I think his music is amazing, but I want other people to be engaged with his music as well."



relationship with a number of bodies of water that have been very impactful in my life," says Stephan Crump.

Stephan Crump Explores Water

OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES, BASSIST STEPHEN CRUMP HAS established himself as one of the significant voices in jazz from the adventurous and avant-minded zone. His resume includes 20 years in the acclaimed Vijay Iyer Trio and work with creative forces Tyshawn Sorey, Kris Davis, Billy Hart and countless others in regular sidemen circulation. Crump's own series of projects have commanded increasing interest and respect.

The "sideman" cometh forth, boldly, with his most ambitious project to date, the 18-part conceptual suite *Slow Water* (Papillon Sounds). The unique "chamber jazz" sextet, with strings, brass, vibraphone and his double bass, came together as a 2023 commission from the Shifting Foundation. Foundation head David Breskin gave him journalist Erica Gies' book *Water Always Wins* as a point of research and reference; it quickly became a strong impetus for the underlying theme and even musical structure of his piece.

Crump explains, "I had wanted for many years to create a project honoring my relationship with a number of bodies of water that have been very impactful in my life, which are numerous." He grew up in Memphis, enmeshed with the Mississippi River, along with other bodies of water in Seattle and his current roost of Brooklyn.

From the concept-musical juxtaposition standpoint, Crump points that that Gies book "is clear-eyed about how destructive we've been and how challenging our current and ongoing situation is. But at the same time it's solutions-oriented. It boils down to our need for control and the means by which we have sought to control water. We channel it and we speed it up, and we make it go straight.

"I really took off with that aspect of water, asking myself, what does water want to do? And how can I take that inspiration and even more than an inspiration, take it as a directive for how to approach creating this music and guiding the band into the music? I wanted to create these wetland wonderlands that go from the water and the peat beneath the water and the burling gases that were coming up, to the critters in the water and the trees and plants and the critters flying in the air, the insects, the birds, the breezes, the fog, the clouds. All of that information is part of the composition, but from there, it's completely spontaneously composed by the ensemble."

Slow Water represents a new direction in a decidedly varied discography under Crump's name, which has in recent years included the bass-andtwo-guitar approach of Outliers, a trio with Ingrid Laubrock and pianist Cory Smythe on *Planktonic Finales* (Intakt) and the solo bass album *Rocket Love* with some recontextualized standards in the mix.

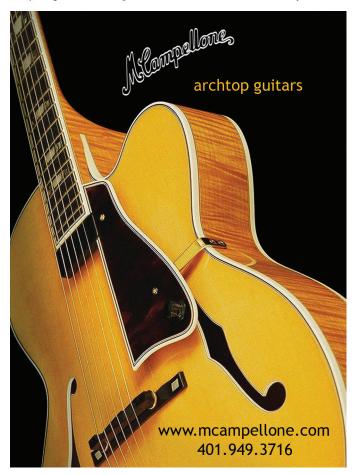
As for the new chamber sextet, Crump says he is "very much engaged in trying to find opportunities. I would like to take it to some educational institutions as well, whether it's with the full ensemble or me working with students and sharing this approach to collective music building — as a sort of spiritual opening to each other in the way that this project requires."

Crump has long been working areas where ready idiomatic descriptions fail to register. With *Slow Water*, in particular, he moves into an area of stylistic flux between jazz, per se, and new music/classical approaches, an area being provocatively explored by artists including Tyshawn Sorey, Anna Weber and Ingrid Laubrock — not to mention Henry Threadgill.

"I have never really been interested in fitting into boxes and notions of genre," he admits. "There are a lot of different musical traditions that have influenced and inspired me. On this project, I wanted the theme and the research and the inspiration from water and these wetlands and beavers to drive the music. I'm really not worried about what to call it (stylistically). But I know it's real and I know it's meaningful and that should be enough. It's absolutely its own thing. What more could I hope for?

Looking back over his evolution, which began in his rock-minded youth and shifted in a jazz direction under the strong influence of Dave Holland, Crump asserts, "When I moved to New York after college, my goal was to make a life in music. I wasn't driven to becoming a jazz star or a rock star or whatever it was. I just wanted to make real, honest music, learn and keep growing. I've always stayed on the periphery, which has been good because I can have diverse collaborations and keep growing in different ways.

"As far as the nuts and bolts of making a living, it's all very challenging and seems to get harder, but I'm still managing to do it. I have deep gratitude for the fact that I've been able to keep growing, keep discovering things with really special people and keep making music that I feel is meaningful and true. That's everything that I could hope for." —Josef Woodard





Smoke Rises with its 25-Year Legacy

IN NOVEMBER 2022, CHARLES MCPHERSON found himself in a familiar setting. Flanked on either side by his fellow artists, the saxophonist and composer arranged his music stand in front of him. Below the bandstand, patrons clustered, chattered. iPhone lenses followed black-and-white photographs along walls of exposed brick. The scene felt comfortable, welcoming — but also different.

After 23 years in operation on the Upper West Side of Manhattan — and following a two-year hiatus from in-person performances — Smoke Jazz Club had reopened months earlier as a newly renovated space pledging a renewed commitment to the music. Two separate rooms — one for ticketed patrons to enjoy the live performance, another for bar-goers to enjoy the Meyer Sound speakers as they socialized — expanded a once-concentrated atmosphere of musical reverence but maintained what had become, over many years, the sacred intimacy of hearing live music at Smoke.

"Jazz is best heard in intimate places,"

says McPherson. "The smaller club did have that right-in-your-face intimacy. There's something to be said for that, aesthetically."

The claustrophobic delight of patrons turning their bar stool sideways to avoid a collision, or flattening their bodies against the wall between twin restroom doors only enhanced the music's urgency. But change is inevitable. And within the new expansion, club co-owners Paul and Molly Stache worked hard to preserve that visceral feeling. "The ambiance is still there," says McPherson, "but with a little more room."

Spin ahead to 2024. In April, Smoke commenced a year-long celebration of its 25th anniversary with a four-night run from NEA Jazz Master George Coleman, whose history with the club includes leading his band on opening night in 1999, delivering a heartfelt performance after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and welcoming listeners back to the club for its grand re-opening in July 2022.

"I was fortunate enough to be here in the beginning," said the 89-year-old Coleman before his Saturday hit. "It's a very sentimental journey for me being here tonight." From the swinging lines he unfurled across "I Thought About You" to the ethereal beauty he drew from "My Foolish Heart," Coleman captivated a sold-out room. Behind a row of two-tops where the old bar had been, patrons squeezing against the wall enjoyed the exquisite urgency.

For 25 years, the Staches have run the club with fixed responsibilities and a fluid approach. Paul primarily handles programming and performance; Molly, house management and, as Smoke's executive chef, menu creation. But the two join forces on many artistic decisions relating to the music and the ambiance that surrounds it. "Some people do music, some do food; we're trying to do both," says Paul. "We never quite stop working. We try out recipes at home or listen to rough mixes [together]. Our thinking is, We both love jazz, so let's try to grow that. Let's not just preach to the choir. It's helpful to do that with a nice cocktail list or with a [weekly] seasonal menu. Let's lure people in [*laughs*] and introduce them to this music that we love."

But now's a challenging era for clubs. New Yorkers are swapping their 8 p.m. dinner reservations for 5:30 and clubs struggle with enticing patrons to second sets, which trend earlier than they did before the pandemic. Still, Smoke thrives.

To understand the club's grit and tenacity over the past quarter century, ask the artists.

"The music is always paramount," says pianist, composer and longtime Smoke performer Renee Rosnes. "Over the last 25 years, Smoke has consistently showcased exceptional musicians spanning all generations."

Smoke's roster is no accident. Since those early days with Coleman, the Staches have nurtured a steadfast faith in the music, its practitioners and its fans. But some leaps of faith required a starting push. Longtime Smoke stablemate, drummer and bandleader Joe Farnsworth shared the stage with Coleman, Harold Mabern and Mike Zisman on opening night, after some convincing:

"I said [to Paul], 'You've got to make an impression on that stage. If you put up money now, you're going to reap the benefits for the rest of your life because George set the tone."

"It was intimidating," says Paul, who of course obliged. And over the years, Farnsworth's admiration for the club's legacy has grown. "The people on the walls — George Coleman, Harold Mabern, Etta Jones, Cedar Walton, Charles Earland — these are the best musicians in the world," he says. "But a lot of the big-name places didn't even recognize them. And Paul, who was hanging out with us and going to hear them, opened his doors and made a home for them."

After 15 years presenting music for music lovers, in 2014 the Staches sought to capture live moments on the bandstand through their in-house music label, Smoke Sessions. Just as the club provided a platform for rising and established leaders to experiment with their sound in a live setting, the label would provide a wider distribution for those moments of spontaneity, and feature both club performances and studio recordings at Sear Sound in Midtown.

"It happened organically," says Paul, who had been recording shows at the club for years. "I reached out to my buddy Damon [Smith] and said, 'I need you to quit that corporate job and launch a record label with me.""

"I think the variety of the label reflects [freedom]," says McPherson, who issued his Smoke Sessions debut *Reverence* in May. "Even though there are different stylistic things happening, the one thing that's common is that [the label attracts] people who are into what they're doing for the love of it." As Smoke adapts to the era with livestream performances, expanded spaces and a soon-to-launch outdoor cafe, the music remains front and center. Before setting down the mic, Coleman concluded his remarks with a message reserved exclusively for Smoke patrons: "You know the music. You know what you hear. You enjoy what you hear, and we're here to give you music that you can enjoy.

"And that has made all the difference." —Stephanie Jones









25 FOR THE FUTURE IMAAAUUEL WALLANDEL MALLANDEL Art In Action

By Bill Milkowski Photos By Jimmy & Deana Katz

Since 2020's Omega, recorded when he was just 22 years old, the Philadelphia-bred, Brooklyn-based alto saxophonist, composer and bandleader Immanuel Wilkins has continued to deliver on the promise of that outstanding debut. While Omega was widely acclaimed not only for Wilkins' stunning command of his instrument on tunes like "Warriors" and "Eulogy" and turbulent, latter day Trane-inspired vehicles like "Guarded Heart" and the complex title track, it also captured the zeitgeist of the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.



B y addressing racial and social justice issues that spoke directly to the Black experience in America, from the 1918 lynching of a pregnant woman in Georgia ("Mary Turner") to the 2014 killing of Michael Brown Jr. by police ("Ferguson-An American Tradition"), Wilkins boldy introduced himself on his Blue Note debut as an artist concerned with the big picture. It was jazz as protest music, every bit as potent as Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" in 1939, Charles Mingus' "Fables Of Faubus" in 1959, Max Roach's *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* in 1961 or John Coltrane's "Alabama" in 1963.

While Omega may have set the bar high, Wilkins upped the ante with 2022's The 7th Hand. A dazzling work steeped in biblical symbolism across seven movements, it culminates in an audacious 26-minute evocation, "Lift," that channels late-period Coltrane opuses like Om and Ascension. For Wilkins, it was about getting closer to the concept of complete vesselhood, the biblical term for being open vessels for God. "It's the idea of being a conduit for the music as a higher power that actually influences what we're playing," he explained

With Blues Blood, a multimedia performance piece originally commissioned in 2021 by the performing arts venue Roulette in downtown Brooklyn, Wilkins continues to chase the big picture. His third concept album for Blue Note is also his first project to include vocals, featuring some poignant storytelling by singer and lyricist Alyssa McDoom (aka June McDoom) alongside the impassioned vocals of Yaw Agyeman (a member of the Chicago-based performance group The Black Monks) and South Indian performer Ganavya Doraiswamy, who sings in her native Tamil throughout the recording. Vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant also guests on three tracks, and guitarist Marvin Sewell augments Wilkins' quartet (with pianist Micah Thomas, bassist Rick Rosato, drummer Kweku Sumbry) on five tracks.

Based on the story of the Harlem Six — a group of teenagers falsely accused of murder in 1965 and brutally beaten by prison guards in order to seek confessions — *Blues Blood* relies on actual testimony during the trial from 19-year-old Daniel Hamm, one

of the accused. A brief fragment of Hamm's testimony was later used by Steve Reich on his 1966 experimental sound collage piece "Come Out," an early example of tape looping and phase shifting. After being repeatedly bludgeoned with billy clubs while in custody awaiting trial, the police did not allow Hamm to be admitted for hospital treatment since he was not visibly bleeding. In his recorded testimony, Hamm explains how he got the idea to open a bruise to then cause bleeding: "I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them." Those 20 words served as the basis of Reich's piece, "Come Out."

But within Hamm's quote, he mistakenly says "blues blood come out" instead of "bruise blood," putting a whole different perspective on things. As Wilkins said, "When read aloud or silently, it lends subtly to a new, abstract reading or interpretation of the sentence." Hence, the title of this release.

Originally performed at Roulette and streamed live as *Blues Blood/Black Future* (youtube.com/watch?v=adabE7XyKVA) in March 2021, Wilkins' latest multidisciplinary piece (he has also worked with filmmakers Cauleen Smith and Ja'Tovia Gary, painter Leslie Hewitt and sculptress Kennedy Yanko) incorporates the presence of a cook (Sekai Abeni) at an elevated stovetop in the middle of the stage.

"The meal being cooked onstage figures within the sonic atmosphere," Wilkins explained. "The pan and table are set up with mics, allowing the composition to fill up with the sounds of knives chopping, water boiling and oil frying in a pan. The history and preparation of most foods across the African Diaspora have been passed down through oral tradition. Mothers teach their children recipes that they learned from their mother, and their mother's mother, so on and so forth, generating a sensorial and ancestral memory through taste and smell."

So far, Wilkins has performed *Blues Blood/Black Future* only one other time, at the 2024 Winter Jazzfest in New York. He has plans to mount the production eight more times through next year, including at SFJAZZ, the Hyde Park Jazz Festival in Chicago and La Villette in Paris. "It's really a V.S.O.P. type project, so I'm hoping to get some traction with it and do it multiple times," he said. "And it does feel like this music has an opportunity to speak to more people than just jazz people, which is great."

An in-demand sideman as well as a potent bandleader who is forging his own unique place in jazz, Wilkins has appeared on albums by vibraphonist Joel Ross (2019's KingMaker, 2020's Who Are You?, 2022's The Parable Of The Poet and 2024's nublues), drummer Johnathan Blake (2021's Homeward Bound and 2023's Passage), pianist Orrin Evans (2021's Magic Time), pianist James Francies (2021's Purest Form), drummer Joe Farnsworth (2023's In What Direction Are You Headed?) and piano great Kenny Barron (2014's Beyond This Place). This interview was conducted following his week-long teaching residency at a festival in Helsinki, Finland, and an appearance with the Bronxbased culinary collective Ghetto Gastro at the Venice Biennale, an international cultural exhibition hosted annually in Venice, Italy.

BILL MILKOWSKI: All three of your Blue Note releases have been concept albums. How do you come by the big-picture vision for your work? Did it come from being taken under the wing of Marshall Allen at the age of 12 and introduced to the Arkestra House in Philly's Germantown neighborhood? Did it come from playing on Jason Moran's In My Mind: Monk At Town Hall, 1959 on his 2017 tour? Did it come from growing up in the Prayer Chapel Church of God in Christ in Upper Darby just outside Philadelphia?

IMMANUEL WILKINS: Man, all of those things! I would say definitely Jason Moran, for sure. Moran's been a big inspiration for me. Playing with Moran and seeing how he would take the small group, like The Bandwagon, and then explode it into a large ensemble while still maintaining the core band was something that I took some tangible, literal inspiration from in terms of thinking about bigger projects and thinking about how I compose and how I write. I also think about something I've heard Theaster Gates [interdisciplinary artist, professor of visual arts at the University of Chicago and founder of the Black Monks performance group] say that has stayed with me. He said, "I think that Black artists have to make work that does something. It can't just be about something, it has to do something." When we perform Blues Blood in a concert setting, it does something to the band, but there's something that happens to the audience, too. There's something that implicates the audience in the work. By being in the room, you're implicated in the activity of what we're doing. So I do think that now I am obsessed with writing and making work that does something, that actually has a concrete action to how it exists.









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'I DEFINITELY LOOK AT WHAT I DO AS A ORTAIN PERFORMANCE ART.'

MILKOWSKI: Blues Blood is a profoundly moving bit of storytelling and also marks your first work featuring vocals. How did you approach that?

WILKINS: I spent a lot of time really getting inside of each vocalist, how they function as improvisers and as singers. Most of the lyrics were written by Alyssa, who goes by June McDoom. She was the main singer on most of the melodies and she wrote maybe 80% of the lyrics.

The other 20% were written by myself, some by the cook [Sekai Abeni] and one song by Theaster Gates, which was a haiku that I put to music. So it was pretty much a collaborative process. When I began writing it, I had all the music fleshed out and I knew what it was going to look like and feel like. But in terms of lyrics, I really sourced them out, just because I'm not confident in my lyric writing yet. So I'm definitely trying to come out of that lineage of folks who are active in collaborative practice.

MILKOWSKI: It was a very powerful piece to witness and it speaks on so many levels. And that primal image of the woman cooking on stage through the entire production is somehow nurturing and viscerally moving.

WILKINS: Yeah, for sure. And I think having someone cooking on the bandstand provides a certain level of abstraction to a piece where it's kind of blurred in terms of what the actu-

al narrative is or what the representation is supposed to be. That's the beauty in abstraction. And I think that is something that I'm gravitating toward, just abstraction in general right now, especially in terms of performance. Since that Roulette performance, I've been using different people to cook on stage, so it's been kind of a rotating cast of chefs. Eventually, I want to get to a point where we can do something with the food, where we can actually feed people after the gig and turn it into some sort of cultural outreach thing. I'm just thinking of ways to kind of lift the barrier of what the concert hall means for people who don't necessarily go to those places or don't feel welcome in those spaces.

MILKOWSKI: Do you think of Blues Blood/Black Future as musical theater or performance art? **WILKINS:** I definitely look at what I do as a certain performance art. I guess my reasoning for considering that is that it feels rigorous, it feels like there's a certain level of labor that I'm submitting my body to as a means to illustrate something.

Yeah, I think there's a theatrical element. I'm always interested in investigating what performance means and I'm always questioning whether performance is actually something that I want to be doing. I think that the most special moments on the bandstand are moments where people aren't performing. I don't think that John Coltrane was thinking of the audience in the way that he was playing. I don't think that you could reach that level musically on the bandstand while internalizing a certain gaze that's on you, a certain voyeurism that comes with a stage or a bandstand. And in that way, I think that my favorite artists always find a way to escape performance. Blues Blood does that by allowing it to feel more like a living room than a stage. I wanted it to feel like a space where those strict lines between audience and performer don't exist and we're just all invited into this space together. And I think that's what the cooking does. Because maybe 15 to 20 minutes into the performance, the room is now filled with a certain smell of what's being cooked. And I think that plays a huge part into inviting the audience into the experience of being a part of the work versus viewing that work.

MILKOWSKI: I read some of the YouTube comments below that video from your performance at Roulette. One said, "Touches me very deep inside." Another one said, "There is something very '70s about this, in the best sense." And another one simply stated, "This brings hope." WILKINS: That's beautiful. I think what is actually happening with this piece is that there's a connection from the musical level to the spiritual level, so there are aspects of this project that feel larger than me. They feel like important things going on. For example, there are little phrases that we loop in certain vamp sections ... just orbits that we kind of stay in for a while ... that I feel possess some sort of healing powers. And I've said this to the band and the band has also said this to me. We kind of feel like it's important to take care of the music in a way that we're maybe not used to; a certain care of the actual properties of the music that we feel may be powerful or helpful for people.

MILKOWSKI: Most of the material on Omega and The 7th Hand is very dense, complex stuff with a lot of challenging lines and intricate harmonies. But you take a very different tact with the music on Blues Blood.

WILKINS: I'm always writing stuff that I feel will aid the quartet in growth. And I think for this piece in particular, I wanted for me, Micah, Rick and Kweku to work on being able to generate melodic material and compositional thought with more space. In a lot of my other work, there's more emphasis on written material. But for this recording, I wanted to focus on meditations, vamps and modalities rather than on complex harmonies. I was really trying to create this world for us to live in and that could be vehicles for us to spontaneously compose and make it sound radically different every night.

So a lot of this piece was just me trying to

facilitate a space where they could do what they would do if it was their band. I wanted everyone to feel agency to spontaneously compose and be as comfortable as possible. And it was one of the first times where I really felt like I could step back and do nothing, and a lot would happen. You know, a lot of beautiful things will happen by just allowing for the music to move through people and for us to kind of find it together.

MILKOWSKI: Watching it unfold at Roulette, it became clear that you seemed to be embracing a more feminine side with the lyrics and the presence of the women singers in this production, particularly on pieces like "Apparition" and the delicate "Dark Eyes Smile." That's a very different aesthetic than, say, "Lift" from The 7th Hand, which showcased a more macho side four dudes flexing their chops over the course of a relentlessly burning 26-minute improvisation. WILKINS: Totally. It's definitely not lost on me to think about femininity, and even just the broadness of all the vantage points, when making music and thinking about music. I'm definitely investigating that ... trying to get in touch with my soft side, you know?

MILKOWSKI: In some of the droning ostinatos on

Blues Blood, like on "Afterlife Residence Time," I was hearing a kind of hypnotic, almost Native American ritual drumming thing underneath.

WILKINS: That vamp was inspired by the Nichiren Buddhist chant *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. I was at a retreat with Ganavya in Houston where she gathered maybe 20 artists to convene for a meditation on Alice Coltrane. Me and Kweku both were there, and every morning Ganavya and esperanza spalding would chant *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. Watching them chant that at the speed they were chanting, it was just really a powerful experience to witness. And for a good while I was really obsessed with how to incorporate that sort of repetitive feeling into my music.

There was something about the feeling I got from it that hit me on a deeper level. I don't even know how to put it into words other than just the immateriality of that feeling was something that I wanted to capture musically.

I wanted to see if we could create those same kind of effects on our bodies through our music as chanting does for Buddhists in their body. When they chant for 15 minutes, how do they feel afterwards? What is the playing equivalent of that for the band? So I'm addressing that question on this piece.

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25 FOR THE FUTURE

For our 90th anniversary, DownBeat reflects on decades of jazz history and heralds a promising future for the ever-evolving art form. Here, we present two dozen more rising stars of jazz who, along with this month's cover artist Immanuel Wilkins, lead a new generation of emerging artists we'll be hearing about for many years to come!



LAUFEY

Multifaceted musician Laufey will spend most of this year touring internationally on the strength of *Bewitched* (AWAL), her spectacular 2023 release and second studio album. This touring encompasses several hefty gigs: the Newport Jazz Festival, Lollapalooza, the Chicago Philharmonic, the Hollywood Bowl and, notably, the 20,000-seat Mall of Asia Arena in the Philippines.

"I'm playing all of my dream venues this year, [the places] that were on my bucket list," the Icelandic cellist and singer told DownBeat.

Laufey's commanding rise to stardom has happened uncommonly quickly: She graduated Berklee in 2022, the same year that she released her first studio album, *Everything I Know About Love* (AWAL). The following year, she self-released her debut EP, *Typical Of Me*. By the end of 2023, she had launched two more EPs on AWAL and one on Blue Note, the latter a Christmas collaboration with Norah Jones. All of this prodigious activity culminated in a 2024 Grammy win for *Bewitched*, a convergence of freshly recalibrated standards and disarmingly clever originals.

"I never once thought that these songs would become big in any sense," she said. "I was just making the music that was most authentic to me."

Though Laufey claims many stylistic allegiances and plays several instruments, the Grammys designated *Bewitched* as a Traditional Pop Vocal album. Laufey accepts this honor graciously: She embraces whole-heartedly the strong compositional skills of the Great American Songbook masters and the timelessness of their output, and she looks to instill such qualities in her own writing. —*Suzanne Lorge*

ISAIAH COLLIER

A ge 27 has been the break-or-make year in many a music career, but saxophonist Isaiah Collier has already smashed it. His sophomore album with The Chosen Few, *Cosmic Transitions*, recorded at Van Gelder's studio in 2021, won a rare five-star review in this magazine. Influenced by John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* and recorded on Coltrane's birthday, for further cosmic tie-in Collier riffed on the planetary proposition of Mercury in retrograde. This spring *The Almighty* took several celestial steps further, adding strings and horns, including hometown heroes Ari Brown and Dee Alexander.

Even during his ChiArts high-school days and shortly thereafter, his titanic playing was ubiquitous in Chicago. In any given week, Collier could be witnessed at one or more of the city's top clubs like The Green Mill, Dorian's, Andy's, The Jazz Showcase or conducting open-sky pandemic jams. It was clear he wasn't afraid to compete against himself. Though humble enough to serve as a sideman in myriad aggregations and formations, he's most potent as a lodestar on mission to unite the universe.

His face-offs with drummer Michael Shekwoaga Ode under the title I AM (for reference check 2022's *Beyond* on Division 81 Records) are the stuff of fresh legend. The soulful heft of Chicago saxophone legend Ari Brown's tutelage, buttressed by Collier's primary source of Pharoah Sanders and further smelted by the unabashed self-expression of the AACM and the Art Ensemble of Chicago's preoccupation with mini percussion, have helped fashion a sanctified firebrand scarcely tethered by terra firma.

This year augurs the release of *The World Is On Fire* and in the fall another I AM out-



ing titled *Listening*, both on Division 81. A wiry 6-foot, 3 inches with a princely demeanor, Collier is an imperious talent with outstanding musical ability to belie the sartorial splendor he deploys to get message across. Few so-called final frontiers seem qualified to hold him back. —*Michael Jackson*



LIANY MATEO

When bassist Liany Mateo was a 17-yearold high school senior in Jersey City, New Jersey, she wrote out a 10-year plan. "One of my biggest goals was, and is, to become one of the most in-demand side-people of my generation," Mateo said from her lower Manhattan apartment, citing close mentors like Christian McBride, Rodney Whitaker, Ben Wolfe and Linda May Han Oh.

Mateo's full calendar during the past year indicates that, at 26, she's well on the way toward fulfilling that aspiration. Mateo spoke to DownBeat a day after she'd concluded a brief cross-country run playing electric bass with rising-star keyboardist-singer Matthew Whitaker, a frequent employer. Her recent gigs also include road time with generational contemporaries like harpist Brandee Younger, singer-pianists Kandace Springs and Melvis Santa, guitarist Jocelyn Gould and distinguished elders like singer Fay Vincent, pianist Geoffrey Keezer, composer-pianist Arturo O'Farrill and violinist Regina Carter.

"In my teens, I had a note on my bedroom wall, 'I want to play with Regina Carter," Mateo said. The connection transpired via her selection in 2023 to the Next Jazz Legacy, a program sponsored by the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, with which she interacted tangentially while earning a master's at Berklee's Global Jazz Institute during the COVID-attenuated 2020–'21 academic year. She attended the Institute after graduating from Michigan State University's practicum-oriented jazz program headed by bassist Rodney Whitaker, who met her at a jazz camp when she was 16 and took her under his wing.

Through Next Jazz Legacy's creative mentorship program, Mateo reconnected with McBride, whom she'd initially encountered while attending a Jazz for Teens program that he directed. McBride later recruited Mateo to teach at and play for Jazz House Kids, his nonprofit jazz education and performance organization. "It's been super-influential to see him perform, produce and speak publicly and convey information, on his own terms, with mobility rather than being in just one place," Mateo said.

She also draws inspiration from the vanguard role of Geri Allen, Terri Lyne Carrington, Carter and Kris Davis in "creating a safe space" within which younger women "can feel vulnerable enough to really express what they're going through in their music, and we can remove the barriers and let each other be."

Mateo grew up in a primarily Caribbean-Black American neighborhood, where she came to understand the value of dance very early on. "Music from a diasporic background speaks most to me," she said. "Dance and groove are threads that keep the quilt together. So are storytelling and the blues. As long as the music has one of those things, I'm invested all the way." —*Ted Panken*

SAMARA JOY

In the six decades that the Grammy for Best New Artist has been offered, arguably only two jazz vocalists have ever taken it home. Esperanza Spalding was the first, and Samara Joy the second.

"It's a moment that I'll never take for granted," Joy told DownBeat in a 2023 interview, soon after her win.

But Best New Artist wasn't Joy's only triumph that evening: Her Verve debut *Linger Awhile*, surprising in its faithfulness to classic jazz vocalism, also won Best Jazz Vocal Album. And the next year, "Tight," a self-produced single of Betty Carter's brisk tune (released via Verve that fall), would give Joy a third statuette.

At the time of these achievements, Joy had only been graduated from the vocal program at SUNY-Purchase for about two years. And though she had an impressive background in gospel, soul and R&B, before SUNY, she hadn't sung jazz at all. The young college student was a preternaturally quick study, however, and in 2019 she took top honors at the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, impressing its influential judges with her composed, erudite scatting.

For many, such successes would represent the pinnacle of career achievement. For Joy, however, these early accolades are simply the first grounding steps on a purpose-driven career path.

"I was so intimidated about pursuing music in the first place because I was afraid of whether or not I could still be me," she said. "Would I have to compromise something, would I have to pursue a certain aesthetic? But I think my purpose is showing people that you can develop your strengths and do it however you see fit. I'm glad that I am able to utilize the strengths that I've been given to not only be a blessing to others, but to nourish my dream." *—Suzanne Lorge*





Elena Pinderhughes

Elena Pinderhughes' name will be familiar to faithful readers of this periodical. The 29-year-old Bay Area native debuted on the DownBeat Critics Poll in 2016 as the No. 1 Rising Star flutist and was number three last year in the regular category. She's enjoyed high-profile gigs playing in bands led by the

likes of Herbie Hancock, Common, Terri Lyne Carrington and Chief Adjuah. After moving to Los Angeles from Harlem two years ago, she's been studying film scoring and has been played on scores, including ones for Marvel Studios' *The Marvels* and the Academy Award-nominated *American Fiction*. After a decade learning in the classroom and collaborating in recording studios and on the bandstand, Pinderhughes is preparing to share her own mostly original music via a pair of debut albums. "One is heavily flutefocused and acoustic, and the other has a little bit more production on it. And I might be singing through the flute, or I might be singing through the voice," she reveals, in an interview at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz, California, prior to a sublime duo gig with pianist Gerald Clayton, a member of the 25 for the Future class of 2016.

Reflecting on her eclectic background, which includes singing with conguero John Santos as a child and taking African dance lessons while also participating in Berkeley High School's heralded jazz program, Pinderhughes says she's glad to express different aspects of her artistry with her twin debuts. And she'll continue to champion her instrument, too.

"When I was younger, I was getting a lot of suggestions that I switch to saxophone if I wanted to get gigs. I even tried playing it for a little while," she shares. "While I love the saxophone, everything in me was saying that I had to play the flute." —Yoshi Kato

SAMORA PINDERHUGHES

C try to exist outside of genre," said Samora Pinderhughes. The 32-year-old pianist, vocalist, songwriter, composer, interdisciplinary artist and social activist has fulfilled all those roles on the decade-long Healing Project, which includes numerous musical and video meditations on structural violence, based on several hundred interviews, including intense conversations with incarcerated artists. Pinderhughes received a \$1 million Mellon Foundation grant in early 2023 towards developing infrastructural support; in February, he dropped the latest installment, a short film — and song — titled *Keith LaMar*: Sweet, framed around a phone call with a problematically convicted prisoner-artist who's lived 30-plus years in solitary confinement on death row in Ohio.

Pinderhughes and Chris Pattishall composed the soundtrack for *Going to Mars: the Nikki Giovanni Project*, a nuanced, searingly honest documentary of the eminent poet that was Oscar-shortlisted earlier this year. Aja Monet's 2024 Grammy-nominated *when the poems do what they do* (on the drink sum wtr label) features his keyboard playing and arranging. And he's collaborating on music for End the Exception, a campaign to excise the 13th Amendment loophole that allows slavery in the prison system.

None of these documents reveal Pinderhughes' musical scope so fully as the YouTube video of an extraordinary 70-minute solo concert in November 2023 at Bandcamp's Oakland headquarters for an admiring hometown audience of family and friends. Focusing primarily on Healing Project-inspired songs from his 2022 album GRIEF, Pinderhughes - with spot appearances by flutist Elena Pinderhughes, his younger sister, and trumpeter Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah (formerly Christian Scott) - deployed his husky tenor to render the lyrics with understated transparency, self-accompanying on piano with pared-down intention denoting his command of touch, tone pedaling and inner voicings, extracting meaning with a single note or chord.

"I've spent 20 years training on piano, though classical training came later," said Pinderhughes, who studied with Frank Kimbrough and Kenny Barron during his years at Juilliard, where he matriculated on full scholarship at 18 as a jazz piano student. "My relationship with it is less about virtuosity than sound and emotion and detail. I've learned that I'm a very physical player, in terms of finding a meeting place between my body and the instrument, which is where the emotional channel happens. My singing,



too, is purely about honesty, not technique. I assume what people connect to in my singing is the lack of pretense. It's always about the emotion.

"For me, jazz is more a lineage than a style. The artists I heard growing up who I most respect - Max Roach, Mingus, Ellington and Strayhorn, Nina Simone, Mary Lou Williams, Harry Belafonte, June Jordan, Gil Scott-Heron - always pushed boundaries thematically, sonically, in every way. I try to extend what I consider its core tenets as a way of living, music or non-music - engaging with composition in a way that's also informed by improvisation; deep listening and understanding how to sublimate the ego; embodying community in the act of improvisation by having a direct conversation with an audience, and the people you're playing with, to express exactly what you want to in that moment." -Ted Panken

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To our incoming students - welcome to the School of Jazz and Contemporary Music! at The New School College of Performing Arts



BINKER AND MOSES

With two studio albums and two live recordings under their caps, Binker and Moses demonstrate the might that a jazz duo can have. Both in their individual projects and as a team, they're equally recognized for their ability to bridge the modern and the classic with flair. Drummer Moses Boyd draws on a plethora of influences in his playing, from Max Roach and Tony Williams to the sounds of Afrobeat, electronica and West London's broken beat sound. Meanwhile, Binker Golding finds inspiration from muses as far removed as postbop and heartland jazz Americana. Together as a duo, Binker and Moses paint bodies of work that have a distinct flavor.

"I've done all the formats from solo, duo, trio, quartet, quintet to big band," says Boyd. "There is something about a duo — it's the most exposing, relentless thing to play. With solo, you're in control completely, you guide it. Whereas in a duo, you're exposed but you're not alone. Parts of that are amazing and other parts keep you on your toes. Playing with Binker as a duo definitely changes the way I play in other ensembles. It's a formation that not many musicians do regularly."

Binker and Moses released the acclaimed album Feeding The Machine (Gearbox) in 2022. Recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios with the help of Grammy-winning producer Hugh Padgham, the record saw them moving into new territory once more, concerning themselves with ambient, minimalist and experimental electronic terrains. They used modular synths and sampling to ultimately "feed the machine." When the time comes for their much-anticipated follow-up to land, bets are that they will be moving in yet another fresh direction.

As Binker says, "We don't like boring music; our way of bringing excitement is by using energy. It's just what we do." —*Tina Edwards*

PASQUALE GRASSO

The virtuosity of Pasquale Grasso is awe-inducing. Hearing the 35-year-old play guitar for the first time has the same resounding impact as the first time one hears Art Tatum or Bud Powell play piano. Indeed, he has a pianist's ear for detail and elaboration. (That Grasso has released a solo collection of Powell tunes is entirely apropos.)

Give him a bebop number, like Charlie Parker's "Confirmation," and he charges through it like those melodic twists and harmonic turns are a Sunday drive. Yet even ballads offer a level of filigree and imagination — combined with unfailing swing and a deep understanding of the songs themselves that simply astonishes. Put on his rendition of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow": You won't get as far as "there's a land that I've heard of" before shaking your head in disbelief.

It's certainly not what one might expect out of a farm boy from the Apennine foothills of southern Italy. But Grasso comes from a jazz-loving family that more than encouraged his abilities. By age 9, he was playing publicly and studying bebop with Barry Harris; by 14, he was teaching alongside Harris.



Quite cannily, Sony Masterworks had Grasso release a stack of concept EPs in 2019– 20, which is in itself a remarkable exhibition of a brilliant musical mind. More recently, however, Grasso seems to have found an artistic soul mate of sorts in the young singer Samara Joy. Both virtuosi, Grasso and Joy complement but also challenge each other in ways that enrich both. For proof, check out the delicate guitar-voice duet on "Someone To Watch Over Me" that concludes her much-lauded debut album *Linger Awhile*. If a monster talent like this can so gorgeously portray "a little lamb who's lost in the woods," imagine what he can do when he lets loose. —*Michael J. West*

RILEY MULHERKAR

Last February, during a release show for his debut record, 32-year-old trumpeter/composer Riley Mulherkar played "Cupid," an uplifting tune by the late Ron Miles. As he introduced the song, Mulherkar, a founding member of the brass quartet The Westerlies who received Jazz at Lincoln Center's Emerging Artist Award in 2020, shared deep admiration for the "generosity and tenderness" with which Miles approached the trumpet.

"The players I love, whether it's Miles [Davis] or Ron Miles, they invite you into the sound, because they have this warmth and intimacy with which they play, and the way that they get from one note to the next is always unexpected and very personal to them," said Mulherkar, who hails from the Seattle area.

The same qualities shine through in Mulherkar's playing. His distinctive debut, *Riley*, features originals and tunes vital to the tradition of jazz trumpet, shared with vulnerability, subtlety and an ear for innovation.

Riley is also in direct conversation with Mulherkar's visionary mentors, including Wynton Marsalis, who discovered him during the Essentially Ellington High School



Jazz Band Competition; pianist-composer Wayne Horvitz, an early supporter of The Westerlies; and the late pianist-composer Frank Kimbrough, a Juilliard professor and musical collaborator who deeply impacted Mulherkar.

On the heels of his initial statement as a solo artist, Mulherkar looks back with gratitude and curiosity: "It feels like every time I play I'm in conversation with everyone who came before me." -Alexa Peters



Micah Thomas

If you're not familiar with pianist Micah Thomas yet, it might be due to his ensemble-first ethos, where his playing serves whatever group he's working in rather than celebrating his own nonchalant virtuosity. Although he's released three terrific albums, including last year's *Reveal* (Artwork) — a trio date with bassist Dean Torrey and drummer Kayvon Gordon — he's probably reached more listeners through his essential contributions to the band led by saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins, to say nothing of his sporadic work with saxophonist Zoh Amba.

The Columbus, Ohio, native forged his deep connection with Wilkins when they were both studying at the Juilliard School, and since he graduated in 2020 he's become a rising presence on the New York scene, working both with other breakout artists in their mid-20s — Thomas is 27 — as well as established masters: He recently participated in a celebration of Duke Ellington's 125th birthday alongside greats like Jason Moran, Abdullah Ibrahim and Joanne Brackeen.

He's a not-so-secret weapon with Wilkins, both live and on the saxophonist's two Blue Note albums, providing breathtaking versatility and serving as an improvisational springboard for the leader, thriving both in gospel-derived settings and expansive post-Coltrane excursions.

It's rare to encounter a musician his age with the maturity to exercise restraint. While he certainly injects galvanic power when required and takes flight in the free settings with Amba, he rarely draws attention to himself, even on his own recordings. He used his 2022 recording *Piano Solo* (LP345) to leave his mark on a program of jazz standards, working within the tradition while breaking apart themes like "The Way You Look Tonight" or Cedar Walton's "Ugetsu" with a fleet modernism somewhere between Art Tatum and Jason Moran. His ceaseless improvisatory invention on *Reveal* is accomplished in deep collaboration with his equally inventive rhythm section. A second solo album is due this fall, but Thomas' art is the sort of big picture project that can't be captured by a single recording. —*Peter Margasak*





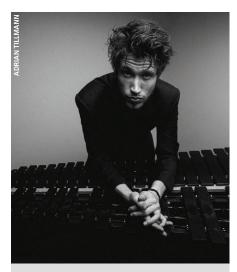
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SIMON MOULLIER

Vibraphonist Simon Moullier has produced a prolific recorded output during the last five years. His most recent work includes two important albums released in 2023: *Isla*, an independently released recording of his original compositions, and *Inception* (Fresh Sound New Talent), a strong collection of standards. In his work, Moullier – often in the company of musical compatriots Luca Alemanno (bass) and Jongkuk Kim (drums) – has sought to discover and explore every interesting sound and crevice of the jazz genre.

"I write very visual music and ... sometimes I just watch things around me ... things like the sky, the ocean, the city lights," he said on a call. "There's always a different game of lights going on no matter what time of the day. It's a completely different canvas."

This fall, Moullier is poised to release his next album, *Elements Of Light*, on the resurgent Candid Records, helmed by musical director Terri Lyne Carrington, who's been a longtime mentor to him since he arrived in the U.S. from his native France 12 years ago. "She's been so helpful at every corner and always been a true supporter," he said. "She opens so many doors for me in terms of opportunities.

"The music I wrote [for Elements Of Light] was influenced by a lot of different parts of my musical upbringing ... things that I grew up with, so it's really not just just jazz. I mixed it with other influences like Thom Yorke, Milton Nascimento, Ravel. It's inspired by a lot of impressionist music but also a lot of jazz, maybe some orchestral music, some electronic/prog-rock and then some Brazilian music – all these things. I was diving deep into this.

"I like blending acoustic instruments with more electronic textures," Moullier concludes. "The sonic blend of both of those textures were very important for me, so I spent some time exploring that." —Anthony Dean-Harris

STEVEN FEIFKE

As an accomplished pianist, composer, bandleader, orchestrator and arranger, Steven Feifke prides himself in planting one foot in the tradition and the other in the contemporary. A colorful, spontaneous dynamic comes alive in his foremost setting: The Steven Feifke Big Band, which he formed with his roommate, trumpeter-vocalist Benny Benack III, in 2012 while studying music at NYU.

Feifke has fronted a trio and septet, but the big band format has taken hold as his primary voice as an arranger. "With the big band, I can start with my original idea and then give my band members the best light to make them shine," he said. "Sharing the vision contributes to the energy." That leadership approach was rewarded with a 2023 Grammy in the Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album category for *Generation Gap Jazz Orchestra* (Cellar Live), his resounding 2022 release with trumpeter Bijon Watson. Feifke was the youngest artist to ever win the award.

"It's crazy," he said, "because I won the Grammy that a couple of my heroes, Maria Schneider and Christian McBride, had been awarded years before."



Feifke is also known for crafting astute arrangements for vocalists. "I love putting the lyrics of older and newer standards in modern settings," he says. His big band's *Kinetic* album (Outside in) from 2021 features a magnificent arrangement of "On The Street Where You Live" sung by Veronica Swift.

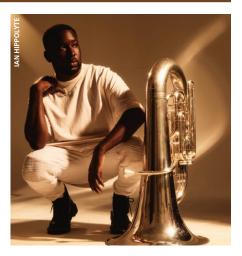
Feifke is often lauded as a prestigious pianist "who's just getting started." He heartily agrees. He released *Catalyst* (La Reserve) shortly after the Grammys in June 2023. And he has completed his eighth album, *The Roll Of The Rhythm Section, Volume 2*, to be released in November — with plenty more great recordings certain to follow. —Dan Ouellette

THEON CROSS

Ver the past decade, a new jazz scene has emerged in London, one characterized by musicians blending the diaspora influences of their global heritages with jazz improvisation. Underpinning this propulsive combination of Afrobeat rhythms, frenetic phrasing and infectious melody is a bass frequency often provided by one player: Theon Cross.

Since first picking up the tuba at 14, Cross has gone on to make the unwieldy brass instrument his voice, collaborating with artists ranging from rapper Kano to London contemporaries Shabaka Hutchings and Nubya Garcia. "From when I first performed tuba in an ensemble, I realized it played an integral role," Cross says. "It's an instrument that holds everything together."

Cross' solo music places the tuba front and center, establishing the instrument's versatility as much as its power. "The longer I play it, the more I realize that it's a world unto itself," he says. "It contains a huge spectrum from sub-frequencies up to trombone range, and I'm still learning new aspects of it." On his debut solo album, 2022's *Intra-I* (New Soil), Cross layers tuba with programmed drums to showcase this sonic world, encompassing everything from trap bass to dancefloor beats.



"Tuba was one of the first bass instruments in jazz," Cross explains. "My music is pushing the tuba forward through the passageways of the bass music I grew up hearing, like soundsystem culture and hip-hop." It's a mission he continues to pursue, with a second album in the works that he envisions as more collaborative. "Since I went small on *Intra-I*, playing solo, now I want to go big," he says. "I want to see how the tuba fares on top of the ensemble, how it can lead." —*Ammar Kalia*



Vanisha Gould

Born in California's Simi Valley, educated at both the University of North Texas and Berklee and now based in New York, Vanisha Gould says her career is "getting a little scary" after being told she's one of DownBeat's 25 for the Future, coming a year after receiving recognition as a Lincoln Center Emerging Artist.

"It's been a mantra, to take the gig," says

the soulful, sensual vocalist, who has been opening ears to her distinctive voice as well as her eclectic repertoire and her love of comedy. Her influences include Billie, Sarah and Ella. On last year's *Life's A Gig* (Fresh Sound New Talent), a duo outing with simpatico pianist Chris McCarthy, Gould not only romances with Great American Songbook standards like "Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea," but she also changes gears with her covers. Her songbook features a deep-souled storytelling take on Dolly Parton's "Jolene."

She laughs and jokingly says, "This may not be so popular to say. I don't like country music, but I love Dolly Parton. I don't like folk music, but I love Joni Mitchell, who is a genius. And I don't like jazz, but I love McCoy Tyner." She wrote words to Tyner's "Aisha" simply because "that song just feels like it should have lyrics," she says. Gould closes the album paying homage to the Thelonious Monk classic "Monk's Dream," with the Jon Hendricks lyrics. "I love that song," she says. "It's always on my set list."

The heart of the album is Gould's own beauty, "Fall In Love With Me In Fall," which opens with McCarthy's superb extended piano run before Gould enters with a swell of emotion and guest violist Kayla Williams provides some itchy grit. "That song is about my love/hate relationship with eczema," Gould laughingly says. "In the summer, I just sweat and scratch. So, wait until the fall when it passes." The song presages Gould's next album, *She's Not Shining, She's Not Smooth*, a collection of originals to be released in October on La Reserve. —Dan Ouellette

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JULIETA EUGENIO

Music, like any other form, is a medium, and a medium is a means of conveyance. While music may be Argentinian-born saxophonist and composer Julieta Eugenio's primary medium and means of conveyance, it's certainly not her only one in the realm of artistic creation.

"Artists, we like to explore, so I think it's part of it," said Eugenio, now based in New York. For her latest album, the independently released *Stay*, Eugenio never thought the album's 10 songs would make way for a poem tying them together, and she couldn't imagine painting a piece of art that would become the bulk of the album's cover.

"First of all, it's the music," she said. "Then, I think about the story of what I wanted to say. It was there ... the names were there, but I didn't think about them. So, [after I] recorded everything, I started reflecting on all these stories that were happening. One day I woke up and I was like, 'Oh, this was all connected.' It was just around that time that everything made sense for me.

"It's never about only music. I feel like it's life. Music is a way you express it, but there's a lot of things behind that. I think as artists we look for other ways to express it. And, of course, I'm a musician, but I also like and enjoy to do other forms of art. It's the same thing It's like forms of expression that everyone can do."

With Eugenio's music, there's something about her use of space that draws you in. Like Wayne Shorter, she uses rests to prepare the listener for pointed flurries of notes to come. She plays with the kind of assuredness an artist has when she can't help but create the work, in whatever medium it may be.

-Anthony Dean-Harris

NICK DUNSTON

Before relocating to Berlin, Germany, in 2021, Nick Dunston had already become a first-call bassist working with the likes of Tyshawn Sorey, Vijay Iyer, Mary Halvorson and Amirtha Kidambi. He'd also begun to thrive as a bandleader, forging ensembles with unusual timbres and compositional gambits, such as the spellbinding blend of flute, electric guitar, percussion, violin and bass on his arresting 2019 debut *Atlantic Extraction* (Out of Your Head).

The Washington, D.C., native and Juilliard grad may be rooted deeply in jazz fundamentals, but his conception as a composer and bandleader extends well beyond the borders of jazz orthodoxy. He's retained his U.S. connections, but his recent expat status seems to have fully liberated his febrile creativity.

Dunston's 2022 album *Spider Season* (Out of Your Head) celebrated a spindly sound world built around his own tactile bass, the brittle twang of DeYeon Kim's gayageum and Kalia Vandever's slinky trombone, while his Berlin-based quintet Skultura knocked down even more walls.



new album *Colla Voce* (Out of Your Head), a rigorous, living-and-breathing dichotomy between composed and improvised material and instrumental and vocal sources built on a commission from New York's mighty JACK Quartet.

Dunston and producer Weston Olencki gleefully dice-and-splice some of that music, bending it to the composer's gear-shifting muse, where a Berlin-based jazz combo also steps in and out alongside a radical vocal quartet. It's one of the most unusual, provocative and electrifying records of 2024, firmly installing Dunston as a groundbreaking figure of the future. —Peter Margasak

But Dunston's greatest achievement is his

Summer Camargo

Trumpeter and composer Summer Camargo, 22, is used to being the youngest musician in the band. She spent most of her childhood playing with musicians many years her senior, and that hasn't changed to date. Camargo is currently the youngest member of the *Saturday Night Live* house band.

Being the youngest is an advantage "because you get more experiences, and you get to meet the older generation," she said. "But I guess [it's also a] disadvantage, because sometimes people don't take you seriously."

Camargo hasn't encountered much of the latter, though. As a high school junior, she won the Ella Fitzgerald Outstanding Soloist award, and her high school band won firstplace at Essentially Ellington. Shortly after, Camargo began her studies at Juilliard thanks to the Jerome Green Scholarship.

In 2022, she participated in Betty Carter's "Jazz Ahead" at the Kennedy Center and subbed for Wynton Marsalis in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra on tour. In 2023, she earned her bachelor's in jazz studies, toured with her sextet, performed with Jon Batiste at the Newport Jazz Festival and played in the Broadway pit for Disney's *Aladdin*.

This year, she completed Juilliard's accel-



erated master's program in jazz studies and released her swinging debut album, *To Whom I Love*. Moreover, she's still working regularly with *SNL* under Lenny Pickett, affording her surreal experiences like chatting about Chet Baker with Scarlett Johansson.

The humble Florida native runs on passion and faith: "Because of the talent the Lord has given me, it is my duty to serve him through my music and embark on a musical journey to help people find joy," she said. —*Alexa Peters*



CHIEN CHIEN LU

The Taiwan-born, New York-based vibraphonist and composer Chien Chien Lu adds a fresh, global perspective to her instrument.

Born in 1989, Lu was playing classical piano, marimba and percussion by age 10.

She first heard jazz on the radio when she was 23, listening to vibraphonist Mike Manieri and his post-fusion group Steps Ahead, and was awed by the improvisational prowess of Japanese pianist Hiromi. "She looked like me," Lu says, "but she could do something

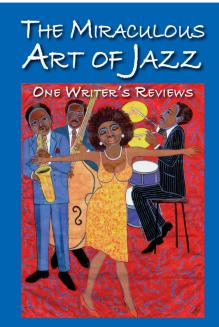
that I could not do." Inspired by Milt Jackson and Roy Ayers, Lu switched to vibraphone. She earned her master's degree in music performance from Taipei National University of the Arts, and, through the encouragement of vibraphone teacher Tony Miceli, moved to Philadelphia and studied at University of the Arts in 2015, where he is now an adjunct associate professor.

Lu graduated from the University of the Arts in 2017 and moved to New York, where she was mentored by trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, pianist Vijay Iyer (who directed the Banff Jazz Institute she attended in Alberta, Canada) and bassist Richie Goods, whom she describes as her "best friend and coworker." Lu's recordings include *Connected* (2022), a collaborative recording with Goods and two releases as a leader, *The Path* (2020) and *Built In System: Live In New York* (2023). They successfully blend American and Asian musical cultures, from her energetic update of Ayers' "We Live In Brooklyn, Baby," to the rhythmically evocative "Percussion Song (The Wheel Of Fate)."

Lu relishes the fact that she is an inspiration to fellow Asians. "I'm so happy," she proclaims. "I receive messages from a lot of female musicians who want to get into jazz because they see that I'm doing it, and they want to do it, too." —*Eugene Holley Jr.*

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ssor, Woodwind Department

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> Marvin Stamn Jazz trumpete

Benjamin Franklin V is a compelling combin fun and meticulous scholar. The passion come these writings, and the scholarship makes it in unique feature of the book is the way Franklin comments on his own reviews. It's like havin beside you as a guide. Mic

Michael Ullman Author, Jazz Lices Jazz critie, Arts Fuse

ISBN: 979-8-9894391-0-2 (paper) ISBN: 979-8-9894391-1-9 (ebook)



JOSH JOHNSON

Chicago-bred alto saxophonist Josh Johnson came to Los Angeles in 2012 to attend the Thelonious Monk (now Herbie Hancock) Institute of Jazz, one of many artists who have enriched this sun-soaked musical landscape, fertile ground for an emerging brand of creative improvised music.

"When I decided to stay, I had a lot of friends in Chicago and in New York and other places who kind of scoffed at that," Johnson recalled. "Not to say that great music wasn't happening here then, but I think it's changed, and I also think the perception of it has changed, especially in jazz or jazz-adjacent music."

Johnson is one of the catalysts for that change. He's lent his talents to jazz musicians such as Marquis Hill and Makaya McCraven, and to popular artists like Miley Cyrus and Leon Bridges. Meshell Ndegecello met Johnson through guitarist Jeff Parker and asked him to produce her record *The Omnichord Real Book* (Blue Note), earning them a Grammy in 2024 for Best Alternative Jazz Album. He said of Ndegecello, "Getting to be close to somebody whose imagination is that vivid, and whose ideas really aren't limited by things like genre ... that spirit, I really connect with that."

Johnson utilized his experience as Bridges' keyboardist and musical director to create his latest recording, Unusual Object (Northern Sky), as sonically unique an offering from a saxophonist as exists currently. Every sound is made by Johnson, mostly through manipulations of his horn through loops and effects, mostly in real-time without overdubs. "I want to use [technology] in a way that's interesting or unexpected, but I want the thing to dissolve," he said. "It's a vehicle of expression, but it's not about the thing itself." — Gary Fukushima

JUSTIN TYSON

The Los Angeles-based drummer, producer, writer and filmmaker Justin Tyson has been one of most in-demand sidemen in the past decade. He's gigged with Herbie Hancock, Now vs. Now, R+R = NOW and esperanza spalding and is currently working with the Robert Glasper Experiment.

Tyson's versatility and volcanic drumming are rooted in the Black church. Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan (and later Indianapolis), Tyson, 36, took up the drums at age 3 at Bethel Pentecostal church in his hometown. Mentored by Michigan-born drummer Derico Watson, Tyson was also influenced by drummers Dennis Chambers, Dave Weckl and Vinnie Coliauta. "Those guys introduced me into the world of music that I ended up being in now," Tyson proclaims. "Those were the three dudes that all the gospel drummers were listening to, because they were playing the stuff that was the most applicable to what we were already doing." In 2006, Tyson matriculated at Berklee School of Music for three years, where he studied the art of jazz drum pioneers Max Roach, Elvin Jones and Tony Williams before moving to New York



in 2009 and relocating to Los Angeles in 2020.

Tyson's forthcoming debut, *The Paper Doors*, is a self-produced solo project featuring Tyson on drums, keyboards and vocals. The concept centers on liminal spaces: eerie images of abandoned parking lots, halls, stairways and other surreal locales. "Those decontextualized spaces intrigued me," Tyson relates. "The album is structured in a way that emphasizes our experiences with the places that we frequent, and how they form our imaginations and our identities, and the music, which has a lot of interesting harmony, and rhythmic diversity, is reflective of that idea."

—Eugene Holley Jr.

KALIA VANDEVER

Kalia Vandever hears herself in the trombone. "It ... sounds like an extension of my own voice, both my physical voice as well as my compositional and melodic voice." Although she composes on piano and guitar, "If I'm improvising and practicing, I'll record myself and then take a melody from that improvisation and build on it, and it'll ultimately lead to a larger composition."

Improvisation lies at the heart of Vandever's 2023 album We Fell In Turn. It's her first solo release; 2019's In Bloom and 2022's Regrowth both featured guitarist Lee Meadvin, bassist Nick Dunston and drummer Connor Parks. In Bloom also had Theo Walentiny on piano, while on Regrowth, Paul Cornish filled in on piano, and alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins joined the ensemble.

The pieces on *We Fell In Turn* consist of gentle melodies and soft, repetitive figures that float in a cloud of reverb, sounding like a cross between a foghorn and a mother whale singing to her child. Most of the performances are first or second takes, shaped by Meadvin, who's produced all of Vandever's work to date. "I had prepared ideas or loose compositions going into recording, but we ultimately improvised a lot," she explains. "I say 'we'



because [Lee] was very instrumental in the process, and he would come up with prompts and I would take that and improvise, and build on that improvisation."

In solo performance, Vandever bonds with the audience by sharing the memories and emotions that inspire her music.

Her next projects are a second solo album, and a disc with a new band featuring guitarist Mary Halvorson, bassist Henry Fraser and drummer Kayvon Gordon. —*Phil Freeman*



Miki Yamanaka

On many a night, the Greenwich Village jazz club/laboratory Smalls resonates with the impressive sound of pianist Miki Yamanaka. The Japanese-born and, for a dozen years now, New York-based pianist has been honing her technical and expressive command in that hallowed basement space, usually donning a kimono.

She often performs with drummer Jimmy MacBride, her husband, and various guests

— including tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, who lends his signature musicality to her latest album, *Shades Of Rainbow* (Cellar Live), which has helped to propel Yamanaka's already rising star as an important young artist. The piano-saxophone simpatico blends with the leader's strengths as composer and keyboardist, one with a voice demanding attention.

Yamanaka left Japan, and early science studies, to pursue her musical passion in New

York, where her first eight years involved steady work in cocktail bars, hotels and other music-as-background settings. Shortly before COVID, though, she felt compelled to leap into the more personal and challenging world of the jazz artist-composer. She asserts, "I love writing tunes and I love getting together with my musicians and to create a band."

After the lockdown period, when she ran the streaming series *Miki's Mood*, a certain Village basement lubed the process. "My career definitely exists because of Smalls, honestly," she says. Yamanaka invited Turner to play there, leading to a fruitful artistic connection on *Shades Of Rainbow* and also her previous album, *Stairway To The Stars*. Yamanaka notes that "being able to actually have personal relationships and a musical relationship with him is a huge, huge deal for me."

As for influences, she immediately points to Cedar Walton, alongside Geri Allen, Sonny Clark, Paul Bley and Andrew Hill. "I like pianists who have an essence of hard bop," she says, "but do something else with it."

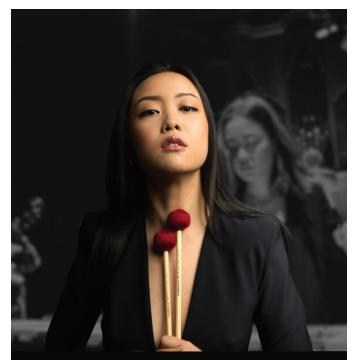
A bright future beckons for Yamanaka, headed to her first European tour this summer. Of her present situation, she notes, "I'm thankful, a hundred percent, that I'm still living in New York City and playing music. I don't do anything else. It's a success, in my humble opinion." — Josef Woodard

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Emmet Cohen

A fter the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown took effect in New York City, pianist Emmet Cohen responded to the new ecosystem with a livestream concert — sponsored by the Kansas venue he had been scheduled to play that evening — performed by his working trio (with bassist Russell Hall and drummer Kyle Poole) from his compact Harlem apartment. Spring ahead 212 weeks later to April 15, 2024,



Chien Chien Lu. The future of jazz vibraphone. **malletech**.

Photo credit: Stephen Pyo

Chien Chien Lu uses Malletech CCL13 mallets. when Cohen streamed his 118th house concert on *Live From Emmet's Place*, his Monday night Facebook-YouTube show, featuring a return visit by Nicholas Payton with Cohen, bassist Philip Norris and drummer Joe Dyson. His YouTube channel is immense, approaching 900 videos presenting content from various public appearances, such as Cohen's recent tour of the Louis Armstrong House and a trio performance there with vocalist Joy Brown.

A few days after that *Live From Emmet's Place* episode in April, Cohen, Norris and Poole landed in Europe for three weeks of one-nighters. Directly after returning to New York, they generated another *Emmet's Place*, then flew to the West Coast for a 17-day tour, including four-night residencies in San Francisco and Seattle. Cohen's June itinerary included a five-night trio run at Birdland with Ron Carter.

"It's fulfilling to graduate to headliner status, with opportunities to play multiple sets at a venue," Cohen observed the afternoon before the European sojourn. He noted that in March, he'd filled Strathmore, Maryland's 900-seat Music Center for an *Emmet's Place*-esque show by the trio with singer Jazzmeia Horn, trumpeter Bruce Harris and tenor saxophonist Stacy Dillard. Furthermore, last November, his trio and alto saxophonist Patrick Bartley sold out Tokyo's Blue Note.

"They said we were the first non-record label band that sold this well just from the internet," Cohen said. "We'd previously brought a few different projects to Strathmore, which built up to this Jazz at the Philharmonic idea of bringing musicians in their prime to a VSOP performance in a big hall where everyone meets in the middle, playing particular repertoire.

"Emmet's Place has cut down our tour-building mission by many years. It speaks to the power of the internet."

Meanwhile, Cohen continues to disseminate his message via more traditional media. On the forthcoming *Vibe Provider*, his third for Mack Avenue, Harris, saxophonist Tivon Pennicott and trombonist Frank Lacy join the trio. In November 2023, Cohen issued his fifth self-produced Masters Legacy Series album, with 89-year-old tenor saxophonist Houston Person, following encounters with George Coleman, Benny Golson, Ron Carter and Jimmy Cobb.

"It's inspiring for senior musicians to interact with young musicians who know their lives and careers and music, and want to affirm it and pass it forward," Cohen said. —*Ted Panken*



JEREMY DUTTON

Jeremy Dutton's favorite track on his debut album is titled "Truman (reborn)," for the 1998 film *The Truman Show*, about a man who realizes his life is not what he thought it was. For Dutton, it's analogous to his own journey from his native Houston to New York. On a phone call with DownBeat, the drummer said, "You have to let go of that first image ... to accept things for what they are, not what you wanted them to be."

Dutton addresses this on the independently released *Anyone Is Better Than Here*, where "here" represents the "arrival" points of one's life or career, fleeting when compared to the immutable core of one's being. Others assisted in forging that core — his mother and his mentors, as well as vibraphonist Joel Ross and pianist James Francies, friends of Dutton before they moved to New York. Ross and Francies are featured on *Anyone Is Better*, joining an impressive assembly including trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusurie, saxophonist Ben Wendel and guitarist Mike Moreno.

People, not places, are central to Dutton's life-view, informed by Daoism, something he discovered through the writings of Bruce Lee. For Dutton, Dao is the "understanding that everything in life can be more than one thing ... we're not necessarily in this binary space where things are either right or wrong." He offered, "I'm interested in asking questions and creating rooms for diversity of opinion. I have my own thoughts about music and life, and I hope that that comes through in what I do, but it's in my nature to leave space for just leaving the questions unanswered."

Lee's famous saying "Be like water" could be applied to Dutton's fluid, multifaceted drumming, in demand by many of those players who helped him to establish a notable career after all. "It definitely has worked out better than anyone could have imagined, so I'm grateful for that, always." —*Gary Fukushima*





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With MoonDial, Pat Metheny steps out for the third time as a solo guitarist.

Pat Metheny MoonDial BMG ***½

Pat Metheny's third album for solo baritone guitar rings with a cleaner, clearer sound than its predecessors, *Quiet Nights* and *What It's All About*, apparently thanks to a new species of nylon strings that allow for traditional tuning intervals (B–E–A–D–F#–B) and also sound just fine without reverb. Like a camera closeup, the mic moves in on Metheny's fingers, sliding from his lowest note, a booming open B, two octaves below middle C, through an edgy midrange that recalls steel strings, to twinkling pings up top. Sometimes he plays all three parts at once, à la Joe Pass, simultaneously offering bass, accompaniment and melody. The contemplative mood of the mostly balladic set owes something to William Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility," with the focus less on development than the melodies themselves, six by Metheny. Though the titular opening track's a killer, the tunes by other composers generally hold more interest than Metheny's. But this could be a function of familiarity; Metheny heads may find themselves transfixed throughout.

His composition "MoonDial" certainly will appeal to anyone, breathing as it does with a nonchalant mastery rivaling the great Brazilian guitarist Baden Powell. Chick Corea's classic "You're Everything" and David Raksin's "My Love and I" shimmer with tender care. "Here, There And Everywhere" glides blissfully through Paul McCartney's heavenly changes. Matt Dennis' feckless "Everything Happens To Me" morphs into Leonard Bernstein's "Somewhere," with Metheny dabbing different textures and densities into each phrase and emphasizing the song's yearning feel with a gliss up to a bluesy turn. Dennis' "Angel Eyes" proceeds with the intricacy and subtlety of a Chopin piano piece.

The quickly chugging, strummed original "Shoga" feels out of place in this garden of delicate melodies, but perhaps it's meant as a changeup. Whatever its shortcomings, we can look forward to another set from Metheny on this instrument, as he's obviously enjoying every pluck. —Paul de Barros

MoonDial: MoonDial; La Crosse; You're Everything; Here, There And Everywhere; We Can't See It, But It's There; Falcon Love; Everything Happens To Me/Somewhere; Londondery Air; This Belongs To You; Shoga; My Love And I; Angel Eyes; MoonDial (epilogue). (1:02) Personnel: Pat Metheny, baritone guitar.

Ordering info: patmetheny.com



Kamasi Washington Fearless Movement SHOTO MAS/YOUNG

In a musical season that has so far been marked by mega-releases — Beyoncé's groundbreaking *Cowboy Carter*, Taylor Swift's headlinegrabbing *The Tortured Poets Department* — Kamasi Washington's sprawling *Fearless Movement* looks very much like the jazz entry in the competition. It clocks in at 86 minutes and boasts more than two dozen sidemen and rappers, plus celebrity cameos by George Clinton and André 3000.

Jeremy Pelt Tomorrow's Another Day HIGHNOTE ***½

Tomorrow's Another Day marks a "departure from what people have known me to be," trumpeter Jeremy Pelt writes in the liner notes to his new album. It doesn't alter his approach to performance: his exquisite playing is still the focal point of each tune. Rather, he experiments here with sonic design, shaking up the usual instrumentation, form and tenor of his compositions.

Assisting in this effort is drummer and "creative technologist" Deantoni Parks, who contributed electronic enhancements (and co-wrote with Pelt) three of the album's seven originals. Opener "Ante Meridien" rides on the sometimes-disrupted pulse of Parks' drumming as much as Pelt's charismatic soloing, while "Milocraft (It's A Cartoon World)," too, succumbs to Parks' restless tempo, even as Pelt extemporizes serenely above it. The co-composers use this same technique on "Basquiat," the penultimate track, to superb effect.

This album also introduces Pelt's new band, each a master (like Pelt) of the well-crafted improvisation, though the group prioritizes cohesion over spotlight. Listen for vibraphonist Jalen Baker's resounding bebop soloing ("Earl J"); keyboardist Frank LoCrasto's dynamic changes and bassist Leighton McKinley Harrell's pace-setting

As a bandleader, Washington thinks big. Most tracks feature two drummers (one has three), multiple percussionists and dual keyboards supporting three horns and, very often, vocals. But as an improviser, he thinks small. Washington's solos tend to be formulaic and repetitious, favoring short phrases, well-worn modal patterns and predictable slow-build structure. Although he has technique to spare, Washington seems disinclined to flex it, so that on "Asha The First," an impressively prolix Thundercat bass solo is followed by the saxophonist riding a single note for the better part of 16 bars. However unsatisfying that may be as jazz, it makes sense as pop. Washington's arrangements might seem big and busy, but they're utterly uncomplicated by polyrhythms or complex harmony. It's always clear where the 2 and 4 are, the melodies are writ large and the rappers and singer provide a welcome touchstone for listeners befuddled by long instrumental passages. Jazz for Dummies, in other words. *—I.D. Considine*

Fearless Movement: Lesanu; Asha The First; Computer Love; The Visionary; Get Lit; Dream State; Together; The Garden Path; Interstellar Peace (The Last Stance); Road To Self (KO); Lines In The Sand; Prologue. (86:16)

Personnel^T Kamasi Washington, tenor and alto saxophones; Rickey Washington, flute; Ryan Porter, trombone; Dontae Winslow, trumpet; Andre 3000, flutes (6); Brandon Coleman, keyboards, vocoder; Cameron Graves, piano, keyboards; Woody Aplanalp, guitar; Miles Mosley, Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner, bass; Tony Austin, Ronald Bruner Jr., drums; and 17 special guests. Ordering info: y-o-y-n-g.com



("No A.I."); drummer Allan Mednard's subdued handwork ("Amma Is Here"); and guitarist Alex Wintz's blues-rock guitar breaks (the title track).

Aside from these rhythmically exciting originals, Pelt included one known title: "People," from the Broadway show *Funny Girl*, the only ballad on the release. In Pelt's hands this Broadway showpiece morphs into a glorious aria for trumpet — wherever Pelt's musicianship takes him, such splendor is the through-line. —*Suzanne Lorge*

Tomorrow's Another Day: Ante Meridien; No A.I.; Earl J; Amma Is Here; Milocraft; People; Basqiat; Tomorrow's Another Day. (43:50) **Personnel:** Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Jalen Baker, vibraphone; Alex Wintz, guitar; Leighton McKinley Harrell, bass; Allan Mednard (2–4, 8), Deantoni Parks (1, 5, 7), drums; Frank LoCrasto, Fender Rhodes (2), piano (7).

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com



Tomeka Reid Quartet 3+3 CUNEIFORM ****

You kinda knew it when her foursome opened its 2015 debut with Eric Dolphy's "17 West." Its singable melody, its breezy groove, its go-anywhere swag: Tomeka Reid took these elements as guideposts to express her own wily spin on comprovisation. With her vision guiding them, the celebrated cellist and her squad of bassist Jason Roebke, drummer Tomas Fujiwara and guitarist Mary Halvorson have since plowed similar terrain, and it's become more fertile with each turn. 2019's Old New refined the approach of that clever debut; now 3+3 recalibrates the action again. Where its predecessors centered on pithy tunes with discrete vibes, this project is all about flow.

The three pieces here are in constant flux, moving through a series of liquid motifs that boast as much poetic abstraction as hummable coherence. Each augments the other, and each acts as a fluid gateway to the next. A scratchy bass/cello opening to "Exploring Outward" yields to legato balladry with cumulus guitar filigree. A wash of cymbals makes the music simmer. Blink twice and you're nodding your head to a fetching little theme that emerged from the ether thanks to a four-way sleight-of-hand maneuver.

This mutability defines the music while illustrating just how bonded the band is these days. "Sauntering With Mr. Brown" is a parade of nuanced episodes between strings and batterie, first a march, then a glide. Where the transition takes place, I can't really say. David Berkman has an album entitled *Start Here, End There*. Team Reid accomplishes that goal with an enviable finesse.

—Jim Macnie

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

^{3+3:} Turning Inward/Sometimes You Just Have To Run With It, Sauntering With Mr. Brown; Turning Outwards/Funambulist Fever. (40:15)

Personnel: Tomeka Reid, cello; Tomas Fujiwara, drums; Jason Roebke, bass; Mary Halvorson, guitar.



	Critics	Paul de Barros	J.D. Considine	Suzanne Lorge	Jim Macnie
Pat Metheny MoonDial		*** ¹ ⁄2	**** ¹ /2	****½	***½
Kamasi Washington Fearless Movement		**	**1/2	****	***
Jeremy Pelt Tomorrow's Another Day		***	***	***½	***
Tomeka Reid Quartet 3+3		****	****	***½	****

Critics' Comments

Pat Metheny, MoonDial

By expanding the tonal range of his baritone guitar, Metheny expands the creative range of his improvisations, making these acoustic guitar miniatures sound breathtakingly maximal. A pretty album that's uncommonly deep. -J.D. Considine

Metheny never stops pushing our understanding of what a modern jazz guitarist can do, responding to the new while remaining committed to the foundational. —Suzanne Lorge

It's gorgeous enough to conjure memories of *New Chautauqua*'s bold lyricism. But there's something a tad snoozy about it, too. All hail a sustained mood, but this could use a couple medium-tempo cornerstones. —*Jim Macnie*

Kamasi Washington, Fearless Movement

The flannel buzz of this grand, non-stop, pulsing, chanting, chorus-encased production makes for claustrophobic listening. Sure, it's got that Pharoah feelin,' and George Clinton's cameo's a gas, but overall, no thanks. —Paul de Barros

Washington both seeks and celebrates freedom with this absorbing record. Each line seems to articulate a message just beyond verbal comprehension — yet through the effort of listening, we gain entrée to his boundless musical imagination. —*Suzanne Lorge*

He's an apostle of bluster, basing an aesthetic on flourishes and crescendos. Fun for a sec, but it lacks intriguing interplay. And those meh quiet-storm updates do little to help. —*Jim Macnie*

Jeremy Pelt, Tomorrow's Another Day

Four stars for the tracks where Pelt's warm, buttery tone shines like the sun and Jalen Baker's vibes swell to swing. But when drummer-producer Deantoni Parks gets hold of the music, which is too often, it's busy and gimmicky. —Paul de Barros

Pelt's caution about fully embracing electronica is understandable, but those tracks are easily the most interesting things here. The textures are warm and expressive, while the stuttering pulse swings in unexpected ways. More in that vein, please. —J.D. Considine

I respect the experimentation the trumpeter continuously invests in. It just seems that ho-hum stretches are also tilled while he's digging for fire. That said, this one is a fetching blend of both. —Jim Macnie

Tomeka Reid Quartet, 3+3

The deft mixes of Reid's cello and Jason Roebke's bass, arco and pizz, Mary Halvorson's judicious single-note lines and Tomas Fujiwara's sympathetic sticks make a sweet suite of beautiful melodies and open improv. Lovely. —Paul de Barros

Reid writes music that feels both deeply structured and completely spontaneous, which brings out the best in long-time playmates Halvorson and Fujiwara. But bassist Roebke is the secret sauce. -J.D. Considine

Backed by the ready experimentalism of her quartet, Reid embraces the full spectrum of the cello's sonority. Rhythmic vitality, intriguing tonality and improvisational intensity characterize this album's distinctive appeal. —Suzanne Lorge

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Luke Stewart Silt Trio Unknown Rivers PI

Unknown Rivers is the Pi Recordings debut for versatile, forward-looking bassist and composer Luke Stewart. With Unknown Rivers, Stewart, who splits his time between New York and D.C., continues to build his reputation as a fiercely original solo musician and bandleader after years of cutting his teeth in collaboration with David Murray, Archie Shepp, Wadada Leo Smith, Nicole Mitchell, Moor Mother, jaimie branch and many others.

The new seven-track record features two

Sarah Jerrom Magpie TPR ***1/2

Sarah Jerrom is a singer, pianist, composer and arranger who often veers off into experimental territory. This album is an eight-part suite, blending spoken word, the contributions of four vocalists - Laura Swankey, Galen Sedlak, Jackson Welchner and Jerrom - and a 17-piece orchestra. The performances are understated, but, since the tale deals with a woman's loss of a child, they can often appear slightly detached from the emotions being described.

The story takes place in a world where humans and birds interact as equals. It follows a woman's quest for peace along the path of loss, love and transformation. "The Road" opens with the heroine watching the approach of the magpie she melds with. Nancy Walker's sparse piano, Ernesto Cervini's cymbal brush strokes and Rob McBride's mellow bass evoke the woman's loneliness, while wordless, intertwining vocals lift her spirit to soar with the magpie. The ensemble's improvisations on "For Joy" express the freedom of flight, with Jerrom's short vocal coda balanced between sorrow and joy. "Nest Predator" merges the grief of a miscarriage with the magpie's destruction of an owl's nest.

Things resolve on "Crystallization." Jerrom's

versions of Stewart's Silt Trio and is named in tribute to the rivers of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where Stewart grew up, and for the metaphorical current of ideas and experiences that flow through and shape the music. Using a mix of live and studio recordings, Unknown Rivers features Stewart and Silt Trio's tenor saxophonist Brian Settles and alternates between the two drummers: D.C. native Warren "Trae" Crudup on the live tracks and Chad Taylor on the studio tracks.

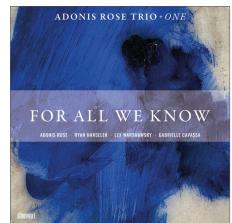
This approach, as well as the emphasis on his malleable compositions as opposed to open improvisation, allows Stewart to gently channel Silt Trio's maximalist creativity in an intentional, engaging and fresh way as compared with previous recordings from the group. On the studio tracks on Unknown Rivers in particular, the listener can hold onto the catchy bass-led melody of "Baba Doo Way" and the spacious, emphatic tune of "Seek Whence," which intermittently twinkles around Crudup's quiet, simmering beats. These minimalist songs steady the listener for extended moments of ambitious improvisation, opening minds and stretching ears. -Alexa Peters

Unknown Rivers: Seek Whence; Baba Doo Way; You See?; The Slip; Amilcar; Dudu; Unknown Rivers. (49:00) Personnel: Luke Stewart, bass; Brian Settles, tenor saxophone; Trae Crudup (1–4), Chad Taylor (5–7), drums. Ordering info: pirecordings.com



multitracked harmonies have an almost liturgical air as the band comes in, ebbing and flowing around her lead vocals. She describes a mother's plight after the loss of a child, as she realizes liberation often comes from surrendering to life's painful realities. —j. poet

Ordering info: tprrecords.ca



Adonis Rose Trio + One For All We Know STORYVILLE ***1/2

The timeless tunes of J. Fred Coots and the poignant lyrics of Alan and Marilyn Bergman are given a fresh varnish on For All We Know by vocalist Gabrielle Cavassa. Her emotional and skillful interpretation of these ballads reveals an intimate acquaintance with the songs as well as a gifted way of weaving them in and around pianist Adonis Rose's trio.

Nowhere is this expressive delivery more apparent than when she sighs, "Love me tonight," on the title track, "For All We Know." This Coots composition is followed by another, "You Go To My Head," and it's just the vehicle Cavassa needs to showcase the full range of her vocal arsenal. And here, too, is sparkling musicality when her high notes are replicated by pianist Ryan Hanseler.

For All We Know is an album of two parts, and after Cavassa's tender ballads, the trio takes over with Mulgrew Miller's "Second Thoughts" the centerpiece of the explosive closing numbers. The rhythmic pulse that changes with Hanseler's "I Still Think She's Pretty" gains in momentum and modulations on Miller's tune. Hanseler's virtuosity is answered with verve by Rose's sprint run across his battery, and the momentary deep, resonant pitch merges perfectly with Lex Warshawsky's interlude on bass.

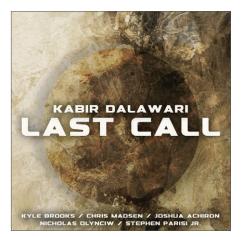
The album is a delightful balance of ballads and uptempo tunes, and Cavassa presenting her scatting chops along with the trio might be an interesting follow-up. Just one of several insightful tips from Rose's liner notes. —Herb Boyd

Personnel: Adonis Rose, drums; Ryan Hanseler, piano: Lex Warshawsky, bass; Gabrielle Cavassa, voca

Ordering info: storyvillerecords.com

Magpie: The Road; For Joy; Circling Feathers; The White Elk; Nest Predator; Carrion; The Mountain Cries; Crystallization. (86:54) **Personnel:** Sarah Jerrom, Christian Overton, Laura Swankey, Galen Sedlak, Jackson Welchner vocals; Laura Chambers, flute, alto flute, piccolo; Chieh-Ying Lu. oboe; Tara Davidson, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute; Mike Murley: tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, clarinet; Kirk MacDonald: tenor saxophone, clarinet; Shirantha Beddage: baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, James Rhodes, Kevin Turcotte, Brian O'Kane, trumpet, flugelhorn; Olivia Esther, French horn; William Carn, Zach Smith, Emily Ferrell, trombone: Tom Richards, bass trombone: Nancy Walker, piano; Rob McBride, bass; Ernesto Cervini, drums.

For All We Know: I've Grown Accustomed To His Face; So Many Stars; You Taught My Heart To Sing; You Go To My Head; For All We Know; What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life; I Still Think She's Pretty; Second Thoughts; Blues For Lex. (53:23)



Kabir Dalawari Last Call SHIFTING PARADIGM

This sophomore release showcases Dalawari as a facile drummer and fully matured composer whose rhythmic adeptness and penchant for melody, harmony and dynamics fuel the seven appealing tracks. Reminiscent of the Brian Blade Fellowship (with the twin-reed frontline of alto saxophonist Myron Walden and tenor saxophonist Melvin Butler), Dalawari's latest highlights emerging Chicago talents Kyle Brooks and Chris Madsen on saxophones

Alex Harding/ Lucian Ban Blutopia SUNNYSIDE ****

Pianist Lucian Ban and baritone saxophonist Alex Harding have been playing together for more than two decades and have made five previous albums together, including two duo discs and another where they were joined by electronic musician Silent Strike. Ban and viola player Mat Maneri have made six albums together over the last decade. Tuba wizard Bob Stewart was part of Harding and Ban's 2006 album Tuba Project. And the album's closing track, "Hymn," has been recorded twice, first on Tuba Project and again on the 2019 Harding/Ban duo album Dark Blue. So there's a lot of history here, with drummer Brandon Lewis the only member of the ensemble who's never been documented on record with the others.

The music is extremely varied. Some pieces, like the improvised opener "Speak Our Silence" and Ban's composition "Mist," are highly atmospheric, verging on chamber jazz, with Harding's groaning baritone saxophone shadowing Maneri's eerie viola. Others, like a version of Andrew Hill's "Blue Black" (from a 1975 album of the same name released only in Japan), allow Stewart to lay down a funky alongside pianist Nicholas Olynciw, guitarist Joshua Achiron and bassist Stephen Parisi Jr.

The title track finds the leader shifting nimbly from lightly swinging 4/4 to an urgent 12/8 pulse while alto and tenor saxes float over the top in pleasing harmony. "Detached" opens with a frantic drum 'n' bass groove before settling into a kind of upbeat Pat Metheny Group vibe, with pianist Olynciw playing Lyle Mays to guitarist Achiron's Metheny (which actually sounds a lot more like Kurt Rosenwinkel). The delicate "For Ma" finds Achiron exploring the sparse terrain on his warm-toned solo (with allusions to "Claire de Lune" along the way) before it morphs to a surging 5/4 backdrop for Madsen's ferocious, Michael Brecker-inspired tenor solo. Achiron's distortion-laced guitar solo at the end of the delicate "Consciousness" adds a bit of grit to the proceedings.

The lilting waltz-time "Imposter Syndrome" morphs into a frantic jam fueled by Dalawari's polyrhythmic pulse; the laid-back closer, "Outerlude," finds the leader affecting a modified J Dilla flam feel on the kit. Smartly appealing modernist fare with one foot in the tradition, one in the now. —*Bill Milkowski*

Last Call: Last Call; Detached; For Ma; Consciousness; Turbulence; Imposter Syndrome; Outerlude, (41:49) Personnel: Kabir Dalawari, drums, compositions; Kyle Brooks, alto saxophone; Chris Madsen, tenor saxophone; Nicholas Olynciw, piano; Joshua Achiron, guitar; Stephen Parisi Jr., bass. Ordering info: shiftingparadigmrecords.com



groove, much as he did on Arthur Blythe's *Lenox Avenue Breakdown* and *Illusions*. When Ban shifts from piano to Fender Rhodes, which he does on that track and on the gospelized "Spirit Take My Hand," the gravy gets even thicker. And Lewis is absolutely essential throughout, driving most tracks and adding intriguing accents to the more spacious improvised passages. Impossible to pigeonhole, *Blutopia*'s unpredictability is one of its greatest strengths. —*Phil Freeman*

Blutopia: Speak Our Silence; Blue Black; Fantasm; Hieroglyphics; Mist; Marrakesh; Spirit Take My Hand; Blutopia; Hymn. (54:28) Personnel: Alex Harding, baritone saxophone; Lucian Ban, piano, Fender Rhodes; Mat Maneri, viola; Bob Stewart, tuba; Brandon Lewis, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



5.5



GIUSEPPE CUCCHIARA MUSIC FOR YOUR SOUL with Ben Solomon, Chris McCarthy Adam Arruda "Mr. Cucchiara has an excellent command of the instrument as well as a fine innate sense of musicality" — Ron Carter

ALDEN HELLMUTH GOOD INTENTIONS with Yonne Rogers, Lucas Kadish Kanaa Mendenhall, Josh Evans Timothy Angulo "In a world dominated by conformity, it is refreshing to hear someone carefully create their own world conceptually and compositionally for the art to live in "

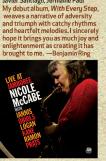


WITH EVERY STEP with Devin Daniels, Jake Chapman

avier Santiago, Jermaine Pau

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Michael O'Neill Arrival INDEPENDENT RELEASE ****½

Guitarist, producer and composer Michael O'Neill has credits as long as your arm, most prominently with George Benson and Barbra Streisand, but in recent years he's been working on film and TV soundtracks. *Arrival* finds him with



top-tier L.A. studio players. The opening "Writ Of Habeus Corpuscle" has a bridge with wide-open intervals that might remind you of Eddie Harris' "Freedom Jazz Dance." Two others aren't satisfied with just being vaguely familiar: a cover of Lennon and McCartney's "Can't Buy Me Love" and a surprising take on "Smoke On The Water" on which O'Neill plays the melody in octaves. There's an exotic appeal to "The Snake Charmer." The most ambitious track, though, is "Discovery," with O'Neill's gorgeous acoustic intro and Sadie O'Neill's (Michael's daughter) wordless vocal. It also includes sampled strings, French horn and electric piano.

O'Neill plays so many things so well, but there's a tendency to try and do too much. There are a couple of lightweight tracks and an ersatz bossa nova, but then tasty tunes like the hard-swinging "Angles" are worth the price of admission. —*Larry Appelbaum*

Arrival: Writ Of Habeus Corpuscle; Smoke On The Water (And Beyond); Cosa Buena; Lazin' In The Haze; Opposing Views; Steppin Smoothly; Snappy Snafu (Again); Yet Another Blues; The Snake Charmer; Can't Buy Me Love; Discovery; Angles. (49:53) **Personnel**: Michael O Neill, guitar; Tom Keenlyside, saxophone; Ronnie Foster, organ; Lorie V. Moore,

Personnel: Michael O'Neill, guitar, Tom Keenlyside, saxophone; Ronnie Foster, organ; Lorie V. Moore, Sadie O'Neill, vocals; John Leftwich, bass; Land Richards, drums.

Ordering info: michaeloneillmusic.net

Dayramir González *V.I.D.A.* INDEPENDENT RELEASE

******** On Dayramir Gonzalez's latest album, *V.I.D.A.*, the Cuban composer and pianist expresses a sound that's a seamless emulsion of a wide

range of anthemic sounds and sensibilities rooted in Cuban tradition. "Transiciones En Azul," fea-

turing Yemaya and Pedrito Martinez, is a full-tilt celebration of life. "La Mambo Conga" is a funky, buoyant mambo, and "In the Meantime" rings with antiquated electronic sonic cues, all while serving up a motivating, reverb-laden monologue.

All of the songs serve as vignettes of rich experience. "El Manisero (The Peanut Vendor)" tells the classic story in convivial Spanglish, while "In The La La Land" evokes a more Eurocentric jazz feeling. "Rosas & Dahlias (Lullaby)" fittingly opens with the laughter and chatter of a child, launching into a tasty dose of vocalese and luscious electric keys layered over syncopated piano. Hinting at his worldliness, Gonzalez notes, "I'm Black, I'm Cuban, I'm West African. I'm Yoruba. I studied European classical music. I'm bilingual. I'm a composer, an arranger, an orchestrator." The recipe for *V.I.D.A.* also contains multitudes. —*Ayana Contreras*

V.I.D.A: Soy Cubana; In The La La Land; El Manisero (The Peanut Vendor); Palenque (To Diango); Transiciones En Azul (Yemaya); La Mambo Conga; Habana enTRANCé; In The Meantime; Rosas & Dahlias (Lullaby); The Hook (Olokun); Principito (To Dayrik). (48:08)

Personnel: Dayramir Gonzalez, piano, keyboards, background vocals; Juan Chiavassa, drums; Dean Torrey, bass, Christian Moraga, congas, percussion; Jadele McPherson, Jackie Sanchez, Tatiana Ferrer, Greg Ogan, background vocals; Pedrito Martinez, congas, bata drums, vocals; plus 9 special guests. Ordering info: davramirgonzalez.com

48 DOWNBEAT JULY 2024



The Bobby Broom Organi-sation Jamalot STEELE

What unites the offerings available on this live recording of The Bobby Broom Organi-sation is each tune's popularity. The trio of Broom on guitar, Ben Patterson on Hammond B-3 organ and Kobie Watkins on drums



is at home with popular classics like Stevie Wonder's "Superstition," The Beatles' "The Long And Winding Road" and selections from the Great American Songbook. With a balanced diet of familiarity and creative exploration, these selections cohere despite being recorded five years apart.

The first seven tracks were recorded live while the band was touring as the opening act for Steely Dan a decade ago. Five years later, in 2019, the band held down Chicago's Jazz Showcase, which produced the final three tracks. It is here that the band really delves into the exploration that highlights the album. Their rendition of "Speak Low" finds Broom and Patterson trading minutes-long solos that encapsulate the chemistry they developed over the course of the half-decade between the outings. At the time of the Steely Dan tour, Paterson was a newcomer to the band; by Chicago, he could rightly name himself among the many organ stalwarts with which Broom has collaborated over his long career. *—Joshua Myers*

Jamalot: Intro Announcement; Superstition; Band Introductions; Layla; Tennessee Waltz; The Jitterbug Waltz; The House Of The Rising Sun; Tadd's Delight; The Long And Winding Road; Speak Low. (64:22)

Personnel: Bobby Broom, guitar; Ben Patterson, organ; Kobie Watkins, drums. Ordering info: bobbybroom.com

Shiver/Matthew Bourne Shiver Meets Matthew Bourne Volume 2 DISCUS ****

Chris Sharkey's Shiver trio emerged out of Leeds, England, around a decade ago, with this 2021 session underlining their ongoing vibrancy. Pianist Matthew Bourne is also

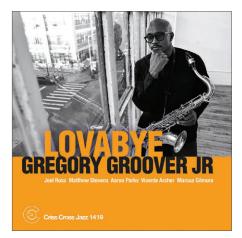


embedded in the Leeds scene, hosting Shiver at his home to lay down tracks that have made up two albums. This second volume must surely be among the more impressive recordings made by these four players.

Perched between composition and improvisation, it sounds like the musicians have directions but are not firm on the journey's details. There's a stately presentation, as "Chromakode" makes a gooey cascade into the ether. "Flight Of The Leather Bird" opens with solitary acoustic piano, which remains central as Shiver weighs in. We can still discern the instrumentation throughout, but the production brings textures and spatial qualities closer. Bells and shakers wade through the swamp on "Pasadena Gravy," Sharkey's scythe-like strokes adding to the shimmer. Three minutes into "From Ohio," a magical locking is found, with a growling bass run, low-end piano tolling, mushroomed guitar picking and shape-shifted drums skittering with grace and sharpness. *—Martin Longley*

Shiver Meets Matthew Bourne Volume 2: Chromakode; Flight Of The Leather Bird; Pasadena Gravy; From Ohio. Cactus & Roulette. (57:52) Personnel: Matthew Bourne, piano, memorymoog; Chris Sharkey, guitar, live processing; Andy Champion, electric bass; Joost Hendrickx, drums.

Ordering info: discusmusic.bandcamp.com



Gregory Groover Jr. Lovabye CRISS CROSS ****

Spirituality and jazz are intermittently linked going back generations with landmark recordings from iconic figures such as Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams and John Coltrane. Saxophonist Gregory Groover Jr. follows in these musicians' footsteps by uniting spirituality and jazz with a modern twist. His knack for melding musical forces manifested previously on *Negro Spiritual Songbook, Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*.

Groover has taken the marriage between

Amanda Whiting The Liminality Of Her FIRST WORD ***

Amanda Whiting, a classically trained Welsh harpist, uses the term "liminality" - defined as "that place in between, the transition from one place to another" — for the theme of her fourth solo album. Whiting seems to occupy a liminal space between fellow jazz harpists Dorothy Ashby's rhythmic, bebop-informed style and Alice Coltrane's more mystical, esoteric leanings. The inherent limitations of the harp itself make it all the more difficult to realize chromatic tensions found in standard jazz harmony (which makes Ashby's work all the more remarkable), but Whiting has sidestepped that through her compositions of modal diatonic grooves, finding yet another liminality withing the gradient of world music and contemporary jazz.

"Intertwined" features a catchy clave in 5, lightly driven by the bass/drums tandem of Aidan Thorne and Jon Reynolds, contrasted with the floating vocals of guest artist PEACH. "Liminal" is another animated jam that allows Reynolds and percussionist Mark O'Connor to lock into a more intricate frolic, allowing Whiting to ruminate more freely in her solo. "Waiting To Go" explores deeper levels of both harmony and affectivity, enhanced by guest spirituality and jazz further with his Criss Cross debut, *Lovabye*, comprising 11 original compositions. Filled with exalting harmonies and soul-numbing solos, the Boston-bred musician assembled a dream-team band including vibist Joel Ross, guitarist Matthew Stevens, pianist Aaron Parks and drummer Marcus Gilmore, who created a melting pot of sounds.

The album opens with "30," a ballad that introduces listeners to Groover's lush and warm timbre, which evolves on each track. His church origins come full circle on "May All your Storms Be Weathered," with gospel-tinged soloing from pianist Parks and vivid stylings from vibraphonist Ross. Another tribute to his congregation, "Joy," showcases the deep vibrancy of the Black church and its storied history.

The melancholy "5660" is a tribute to his godbrother, who was killed in 2022. "Bygone Towers" also has a darker mood and more rhythmic movement from Gilmore and Ross. With his major label debut, Groover Jr. has shown that he can cleverly combine his spiritual roots with his jazz acumen to create a body of work that is full of energy and conviction. —*Veronica Johnson*

Lovabye: 30; Bygone Towers; May All Your Storms Be Weathered; Joy; Lovabye; Stages; 5660; Ambivalence; Lovaby theme; In for a pound or penny; Cactus Lullaby. (44:06) **Personnel:** Gregory Groover Jr., tenor saxophone; Joel Ross, vibraphone; Matthew Stevens, quitar, Aaron Parks, piano; Vicente

Archer, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums. Ordering info: crisscrossjazz.com



flutist Chip Wickham. "No Turning Back" is a minor blues with a bridge that produces Whiting's most jazz-centric improvising, a welcome taste of something wished for in a larger cup.

It's a well-crafted, listenable album, though it's conceivable that Whiting is, as her title implies, merely in a transitional phase to even greater things, ultimately moving past the limits of liminality. Let's hope so. —*Gary Fukushima*

The Liminality Of Her: Finding The Way; Facing The Sun; Intertwined; Liminal; Nomad; Alchemy; Waiting To Go; No Turning Back; Rite Of Passage; Feels So Far Away. (37:48) **Personnel:** Amanda Whiting, harp; Aidan Thorne, bass; Jon Reynolds, drums; PEACH, vocals (3, 9); Chip Wickham, flute (7). **Ordering info:** firstwordrecords.com

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Blues / BY FRANK-JOHN HADLEY

Guardians of Past & Present

Rick Estrin And The Nightcats: The Hits Keep Coming (Alligator; 48:53 ****) Rick Estrin and his nattily dressed band are among the few seated at the head table in the royal court of blues. They, and their seventh album, are that good. Estrin's a born entertainer with a zany streak, a master harmonica player, a sly lyricist, a solid tunesmith and a saucy singer delighting in the peculiarity of his own voice. He exudes authority, as does guitarist Kid Andersen. The other Nightcats, organist Lorenzo Farrell and drummer D'Mar Martin, customize their work to fit Estrin's best-ever batch of tunes and one each from Muddy Waters and Leonard Cohen. Guest zest from gospel vocal trio Sons of The Soul Revivers.

Ordering info: alligator.com

Cedric Burnside: Hill Country Love (Provogue; 41:58 ★★★★) A grandson of R.L. Burnside, Cedric Burnside pivots slightly from the modern blues of his past few albums into a more tradition-conscious North Mississippi Hill Country sound. A fine singer-guitarist having invincible integrity, he knows the value of controlling emotionalism in originals about everyday life or in updates of R.L. and Mississippi Fred McDowell gems. Casting a downand-dirty atmospheric pall over this session with North Mississippi Allstar Luther Dickinson and two others is the recording site: a crumbling Hill region house strewn with junk - or maybe it's a ruined hovel in desert-blues Mali. Ordering info: mascotlabelgroup.com

Eric Bibb: *Live At The Scala Theatre* **(Repute/Stony Plain; 45:06 ****)** Eric Bibb is one of the most benign singers and guitarists in blues. On a concert album recorded near his home in Stockholm, he settles into excellent self-composed songbook favorites and a few traditional tunes with infinite feeling, elegant confidence and a combination of strength and subtlety that bespeaks his hero Mississippi John Hurt. Bibb's music suggests he's a man at peace with himself, a man with a spiritual-like acceptance of what life doles out. Accompanying him is a small crowd of friends, including a string section; they, too, make a graceful traversal of the program.

Ordering info: stonyplainrecords.com

Abdallah Oumbadougou: Amghar– The Godfather Of Tuareg Music, Vol. 1 (Petaluma; 74:58 ****) Far less known around the world than Ali Farka Toure, the Malian who connected western Africa kora music with U.S. blues, is Abdallah Oumbadougou. Beloved by nomadic Tuareg musicians of the Sahara, the late Niger-born singer-guitarist lives on in the grooves of 14 restored-and-remastered tracks (six previously unheard) collected on two records. It's an exalted example



of desert blues. Listeners are induced into a trance state by way of rich call-and-response vocals, circular guitar lines, rhythmic melodies, tempos suggesting a camel's stride, even bluesy psychedelic rock. Beyond trippy hypnosis, Oumbadougou's musical alchemy hits a nerve with its representations of emotional pain, loneliness and the Tuareg struggle for ethnic identity and independence. English translations of lyrics in the Tamashek language are provided.

Ordering info: strong-place-music.com

Anthony Geraci: Tears In My Eyes (Blue Heart; 48:41 ★★★★) Anthony Geraci has long been part of the bedrock of the Boston-Providence blues scene. In recent years. he has stepped out of the seaside shadows into the limelight of international acclaim, largely on the strength of feature albums. Tears keeps the momentum going. Blessed with a fraught musical imagination and considerable ability on piano or organ. Geraci airs out a set of original songs of blues or bluesy persuasions. There are nods to Jay McShann and Ramsey Lewis, as well as the Allman Brothers and — can it be? — Blue Öyster Cult. Standout track "Memphis Mist," an instrumental inspired by a stroll along the Mississippi River, works its magic with violin-garnished music beyond facile classification. Ordering info: blueheartrecords.com

Muireann Bradley: *I Kept These Old Blues* (Tompkins Square; 47:17 ***½) Bradley is an Irish folk-blues artist in her teens who updates the cadences and styles of past country blues giants like Blind Blake and Mississippi John Hurt. For her debut, Bradley draws on impressive musicianship; her precocious feel for rhythm is uncanny. But while her guitar stamps much of her own sensibility on Hurt's "Richland Woman Blues" and the rest, her singing is bereft of even a scintilla of mature conviction or experience. DB Ordering info: tompkinssquare.com



Leigh Pilzer's Seven Pointed Star Beatin' The Odds STRANGE WOMAN ***1/2

Baritone saxophonist/bandleader Leigh Pilzer's latest album is a solid, clean-burning mainstream package delivered by her little big band. Pilzer is a cancer survivor who channeled her healing journey into affirmative musical terms.

A textless instrumental project, the song set can be appreciated as music for its own sake, but understanding the conceptual undercurrents of the pieces adds to one's appreciation. Her "cancer suite" opens with the Strayhorn-esque establishing shot "SKCC," named after her cancer care facility, and continues with odes to caring doctors ("Lin" and "Waterkress"), closing with the cool rhythmic wooziness of "The Platinum Taxi," perhaps the first jazz tune written about the effects of a Benadryl drip.

"Beatin' The Odds," penned by bassist Amy Shook and arranged by Pilzer, is an angular ramble; the mood turns pensive and the harmonic mode suspended on "Last Year, Lost Year," with the COVID-lockdown haze as implied subject.

Through it all, Pilzer's septet of fine players from the D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia areas coalesces into a taut-yet-flexible ensemble sound. Soloists command interest without losing links to the prevailing song structures at hand, with notable turns from trombonist Jen Krupa, trumpeter Ally Hany Albrecht and pianist Amy K. Bormet. Pilzer herself shines in solo mode, but takes the floor sparingly, as on the funk-lined COVIDthemed "And Then It Stopped." Among other appeals here, it is refreshing to hear a baritone player representing a concept-minded leader and thriving survivor. —Josef Woodard

Beatin' The Odds: SKCC; Lin; Waterkress; The Platinum Taxi; Beatin' The Odds; And Then it Stopped; Last Year, Lost Year; How Much Longer; Where Will We Go? (50:32)

Personnel: Leigh Pilzer, baritone and bass saxophones, bass clarinet Ally Hany Albrecht, trumpet, Mercedes Beckman, Tim Green, alto saxophone; Jen Krupa, trombone; Amy K. Bormet, Allyn Johnson, piano; Sherrie Maricle, Frank Russo, drums; Kenny Rittenhouse, trumpet; Joe Jackson, trombone; Greg Holloway, percussion; Arny Shook, bass.

Ordering info: leighpilzer.com

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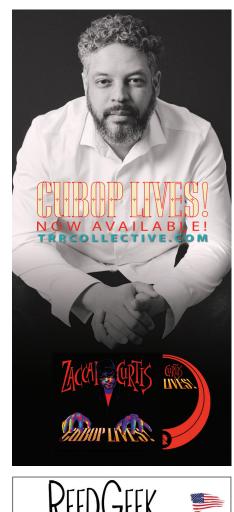
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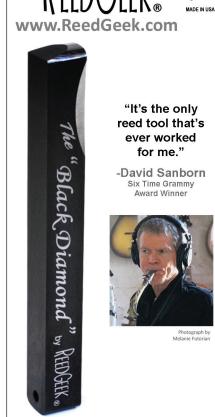
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New From 577 / BY IVANA NG

Debuts From the Deep End

577 Records has a knack for discovering exceptional emerging artists and bringing them to the forefront of jazz and improvisation. This year, the Brooklyn-based independent record label has released four debut albums that demonstrate the diverse range and fluidity of its roster. The London-based quartet Bag of Bones leans toward lyrical melodies and buovant, accessible improvisation on No One Gets Saved (39:49 ***1/2), while Room 31's Crazy Town (37:49 ★★★½) and saxophonist Ayumi Ishito's The Roboquarians, Vol. 1 (54:29 ***½) are more influenced by the downtown New York scene. The fourth debut album, the self-titled **Teiku** (57:39 $\star \star \star \star$), is more spiritual in nature, using the bandleaders' Jewish ancestral songs as a foundation for its electronic avantiazz soundscapes.

From the outset, Bag of Bones propels us forward with punchy piano and percussion on "Onwards And Upwards," setting the stage for the uninhibited energy that permeates throughout. Tenor saxophonist Riley Stone-Lonergan dances between loose bebop melodies and high-energy bursts, while Oli Havhurst's understated bass provides a steady foundation. "Chinny Reckon" showcases the quartet's ability to create controlled chaos, punctuated by Rick Simpson's uplifting piano. "For T.C." offers a dark interlude, with drummer Will Glaser's atmospheric beats and the sinewy call-and-response between Stone-Lonergan and Simpson. There is a level of ease and mastery to the quartet's improvisation that is rare to see in a first outing.

Room 31's Crazy Town has a more solemn, atmospheric vibe. Released on 577's Positive Elevation sub-label, this record is a vessel to showcase the label's dedication to experimental electronic music and avant soul. Baritone saxophonist Greg Sinibaldi and drummer/ bassist Marlon Patton channel the experience of relocating to New York City as artists into frenetic free improvisation, electronic soundscapes and psychedelic soul motifs. Patton's jangly percussion and Sinibaldi's measured melodic lines on the NuRAD evoke a journey through uncharted territories on "The Jackal." The title track pulsates with kinetic energy and avant-rock aesthetics. As the drums gradually build into a driving beat, Sinibaldi imbues the track with an otherworldly texture. Patton's unrelenting yet understated backbeat provides a foil to Sinibaldi's bluesy lines on the NuRAD and blustery, angular melodies on the saxophone.

Saxophonist Ayumi Ishito's *The Roboquarians, Vol. 1*, which features guitarist George Draguns and drummer Kevin Shea, is probably the most "avant garde" of these in that it



really leans into dissonance and angularity. "Dusseldorf Sunrise" juxtaposes frenetic electronic textures with genre-shattering motifs to evoke the feeling of being dropped into the middle of a musical maelstrom. "Diamonds In Bb" takes a different approach, with Dragon's slow, methodical acoustic melody floating atop Shea's furious drums to create a mesmerizing contrast between the meditative and the chaotic. "Mia Slavenska" and "Vibrations For Erzulie" delve into the realms of fluidity and femininity, with Ishito's saxophone taking center stage amid hypnotic percussion and bright, jangly guitar melodies. Throughout the album, the trio demonstrates tight cohesion and imaginative improvisation.

Co-led by pianist Josh Harlow and percussionist Jonathan Barahal Taylor, Teiku is a quintet that uses free-jazz to explore and connect with the bandleaders' Jewish-Ukranian heritage. Their eponymous debut album breathes new life into traditional Passover melodies that have been passed down the generations through aural tradition. Recordings of Harlow's and Taylor's parents reciting their family Passover hymns are weaved throughout the album, grounding the music in a profound sense of history and lineage. The interplay between instruments is masterful, with the woodwinds, played by Jaribu Shahid, Peter Formanek and Rafael Leafar, providing a deep, earthy resonance on "Ki Leh Noeh" and "Psalm 136." The album culminates with "Echad Mi Yodea." an intimate exploration of spiritual and mental liberation, as gongs and singing bowls mingle with sparse woodwinds and archival vocals. Teiku is a testament to the power of music to transcend time and space, offering listeners a journey of introspection and spiritual connection. Together, these albums show the depth and breadth of experimental music today. Ordering info: 577records.com



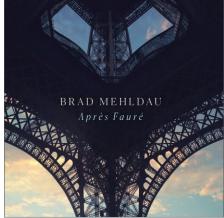
Brad Mehidau After Bach II NONESUCH ****

Après Fauré NONESUCH ★★★★

Pianist Brad Mehldau moves across the lines of genre differentiation with as much nonchalance as do the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic motifs of his original compositions on After Bach II and Après Fauré. Mehldau's newest works connect and intertwine - sometimes plainly, other times with nuance that encourages one to lean in more closely - with the enduring compositions of J.S. Bach and Gabriel Fauré, respectively. Mehldau's open-mindedness as an artist allows these albums to exist for what they are, and in the time in which they are made, while still being informed by the artistic and personal insight Mehldau has accumulated over many years, projects and lived experiences.

After Bach II displays the most explicit ties to Mehldau's musical past, as a follow-up and callback to 2018's After Bach, on which Mehldau paired original works with one fugue and four preludes from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. After Bach II revisits this pairing-minded approach with another four preludes and one fugue ("Fugue No. 20 in A Minor") from The Well-Tempered Clavier. Longtime listeners and completists will celebrate After Bach II's recording of "Toccata," the third in "Three Pieces After Bach": the co-commissioned work that set the stage for what would become After Bach, but which, unlike the other two pieces, was left off the first record.

After Bach II, and especially Mehldau's seven variations on Bach's Goldberg Variations, make for a more approachable and discernible listening experience between the two. Bach's music, though ornate, has long been an inspiration to jazz players and improvisers of all kinds throughout history. Understandably, it's some-



what easy to latch onto the vibrancy and variety heard between Mehldau's and Bach's works. The precise and intricate hallmarks of Baroqueera melody and harmony writing bond the two composers and give *After Bach II* its undercurrent of technical unity. However, this quality along with the side-by-side past and present assembly of the album's tracks emphasizes where each composer starts, ends and interplays with the other. The album stimulates, challenges and provides fastidious guidance all at once.

Après Fauré's key difference from After Bach II is in what Mehldau felt compelled to share. Après Fauré is quite focused on the latter part of Fauré's life and work. Through the music, Mehldau contemplates the realities and existentialist musings surrounding mortality, death, legacy and reconnection. Fauré's compositional style being denser and more expressive than the punctilious works of After Bach II, Après Fauré is a far more dramatic listen. Mehldau doesn't hide the compositional allusions he makes to four of Fauré's Nocturnes. Yet, they unfurl like a slow burn, the similarities and contrasts of his and Fauré's works swirling together like a fog.

Still, *Après Fauré* is well worth deliberate and patient investigation. A well of scholarly details resides in the liner notes of both albums but particularly *Après Fauré*, showing how thoroughly — on the piano, against his own life and in the very music itself — Mehldau reflected upon Fauré's perspective.

–Kira Grunenberg

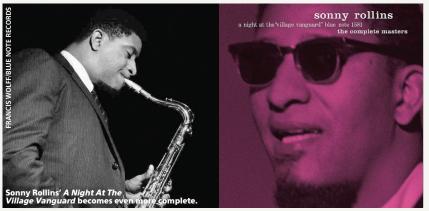
After Bach II: Prelude to Prelude; Prelude No. 9 in E Major from The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I, BWW 854; Prelude No. 6 in D Minor from The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I, BWW 851; After Bach: Toccata; Partita for Keyboard No. 4 in D Major, BWW 828: II. Allemande; After Bach: Cavatina; Prelude No. 20 in A Minor from The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I, BWW 865; Between Bach; Fugue No. 20 in A Minor from The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I, BWV 865; Intermezzo, Aria-like; Variation II, Minor 5/8 b; Variation II, Major 7/4; Variation IV, Breakbeat; Variation V, Jazz; Variation VI, Finale; Prelude No. 7 in E-Flat Major from The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I, BWW 852; Postlude. (66:20)

Après Fauré: Nocturne No. 13 in B Minor, Op. 119; Nocturne No. 4 in E-flat Major, Op. 36; Nocturne No. 12 in E Minor, Op. 107; Prelude; Caprice: Nocturne: Vision; Nocturne No. 7 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 74; 9 Extract from Piano Quartet No. 2 in G Minor, Opus 45 (c. 1887): III. Adagio non troppo. (42:50) **Personnel:** Brad Mehldau. piano.

Ordering info: nonesuch.com



Historical / BY HOWARD MANDEL



Masters of Sax, (Re-)Revisited

So much praise has been heaped (deservedly) on tenor saxophonist **Sonny Rollins'** *A Night At The Village Vanguard* since its initial release 45 years ago and its subsequent, ever-more-complete "definitive" reissues that more words might seem superfluous. But it is never wrong to point out what's so great about this legendary recording, the first documenting Rollins as a bandleader in live performance and the first-ever jazz taping at the Vanguard, Rudy Van Gelder in command.

And more of a great thing is what distinguishes A Night At The Village Vanguard: The Complete Masters (Blue Note; 130:40 ★★★★★) from Blue Note's 1999 CD. Not more music: more words. The earlier version had all 18 tracks from Nov. 3, 1957; now hear the 27-year-old tenorman's confidently casual patter with his up-close audience. The new package's booklet also has informative essays by Nate Chinen and Bob Blumenthal, an excerpt from Aidan Levy's Rollins biography, an interview by Blue Note's main man Don Was and Leonard Feather's original liner notes. A text by producer Joe Harley explains this Complete Masters is the first to use Van Gelder's newly discovered original source material.

The sound's good; I'm no audiophile, and anyway the beauty bursting from Rollins with bassist Wilbur Ware and drummer Elvin Jones (and from an afternoon set with Donald Bailey and Pete LaRoca) would shine as irreducibly through tin-can speakers. Sonny is at an inspired, glorious peak of his early powers, able to play everything that comes to mind (and so much does), his huge sound fully embodying his high-spirited imagination. It is delightful to hear him grasp indelible melodies - "Old Devil Moon," "A Night In Tunisia," "I've Got You Under My Skin," "What Is This Thing Called Love" — and turn them inside-out, de- and reconstructing them. Insights regarding timbre, phrasing, harmonic relations and fragments are worked into thematic statements flowing like Picasso's lines, cubistic, arriving from every angle, quotes irrepressible.

I could go on — it's hard to stop, the music is so exciting — but everything comes to this: Listen to that horn, buoyant, bold, bountiful with swinging, swaggering, sighing sweet song. This is jazz. Hear it. Now. Ordering info: bluenote.com

Archie Shepp, 10 years younger than Rollins, emerged not as he with the era's acknowledged stars (Modern Jazz Quartet, Miles, Monk) but its so-called mavericks: Cecil Taylor, Don Cherry and John Coltrane during his Impulse! years. Impulse! also recorded Shepp's most impactful albums: *The Magic Of JuJu*, with an unrelenting 18-minute title showcase, his politically charged *Attica Blues* and Ellingtonian *The Cry Of My People*.

At his best, Shepp's saxophone has a voluble, vocal urgency, and as a composer-playwright-teacher, he makes dramatic statements. **Derailleur (Triple Point; 47:48** ★★★), with Steve Lacy, Roswell Rudd, Denis Charles and bassist Arthur Harper, is a vi-nyl-only production of a demo Shepp self-financed circa 1954. The first side comprises "Dunbar Days & Miami Joys" (take 4) and "Viva Jomo" (take 4), intriguingly set for collective improvisation in an avant-gutbucket manner, and Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady," on which Shepp and Lacy flirt with parody. Side two of this historical curiosity and not-unsuccessful experiment is outtakes.

Ordering info: triplepointrecords.com

The House I Live In (Steeplechase; 49:50 ★ 1/2) returns to availability a 1963 radio broadcast of Shepp with Swedish baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin, Spanish pianist Tete Montoliu, Danish bassist Niels Henning-Orsted Pedersen and drummer Alex Riel. As documentation, it's OK, the tenorist playing fairly straight until rude atonality on "Sweet Georgia Brown." Guillin's heard better elsewhere, and Shepp's later duo records on Steeplechase with Horace Parlan, NHOP and Jasper are far superior. It's rough, being compared to Sonny Rollins. DB

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Ron Miles Old Main Chapel BLUE NOTE ****

Denver trumpeter Ron Miles created music of exquisite patience and lapidary detail whether he was improvising or following the contours of his meticulously shaped compositions. He preferred ballads and medium-tempo numbers, but regardless of the pace he seemed to perpetually slow down time, allowing for details that often fly by to hang in the air for all to witness. This remarkable live date was recorded in Boulder in 2011 - the next day he took the same trio, with guitarist Bill Frisell and drummer Brian Blade, into the studio to make his album Quiver — and there's no missing the almost telepathic connection with his cohorts, who worked with him right up until his tragic death in 2022 from a rare form of blood cancer.

Five of these tunes turned up in truncated form on Quiver. His originals are steeped in a peculiar strain of Americana not too far from the aesthetic engineered decades earlier by Frisell. There's the soulful spirituality of Black gospel rippling through these performances in which Miles, Frisell and Blade inhabit the tunes more than they perform them. Even when a reading feels as a fragile as "Guest Of Honor," where the music seems utterly weightless, there's nothing precious about the performance, with quicksilver reactions and breathless feints littering the hushed articulation. The album also includes two additional Miles tunes that didn't make it onto Quiver: his typically jaunty "New Medium," where the melodic grace of Ornette Coleman lurks, and the utterly sublime ballad "I Will Be Free," a proclamation steeped in the leader's religious faith, but also a statement of artistic purpose.

—Peter Margasak

Old Main Chapel: Mr. Kevin; There Ain't No Sweet Man That's Worth The Salt Of My Tears; Guest Of Honor; Queen B; Rudy-Go-Round; I Will Be Free; New Medium. (78:04) Personnel: Ron Miles, trumpet; Bill Frisell, guitar; Brian Blade, drums

Ordering info: bluenote.com

Nubiyan Twist Find Your Flame STRUT ****

On their fourth album, Find Your Flame, the Sheffield, England-based nonet Nubiyan Twist very comfortably brings "it." All sorts of "it." "It" that piques interest and fills the ears. There's a variety of sounds to hear, so carefully and palatably construct-



ed it feels as if it came from the earth itself.

The band has this perfect melding of influences - R&B, hip-hop, house, Afrobeat and jazz - that feels very specific rather than amalgamous, in much the same way as Jean-Paul Maunick's Incognito. It's hard to put one's finger on the U.K.-ness of it all, but it's there, and that finger found its own way of tapping along with the African Diaspora. Centerpiece songs "Pray For Me Part 1" and "Part 2" have the perfect one-two punch, with verses from NEONE the Wonderer followed by K.O.G. matching the energy of the moment and Mamani Keïta's vocals impeccably. It's the perfect swelling moment in the middle of a party. The transition to the super-cool "Reach My Soul" matches that same perfection in coasting to a new energy plateau for the latter third of the album. There's definitely care taken here. -Anthony Dean-Harris

Find Your Flame: Battle Isn't Over; Lights Out; All The Same; Woman; You Don't Know Me; Carry Me; So Mi Stay; Pray For Me Part 1; Pray For Me Part 2; Reach My Soul; Find Your Flame; Slow Breath. (52:15) Personnel: Finn Booth, drums; Luke Wynter, bass; Tom Excell, guitar; Lewis Moody, keyboards; Jonny Enser, trumpet, Nick Richards, alto saxophone; Denis Scully, tenor saxophone; Hannah Mae, baritone saxophone; Nile Rodgers, guitar, vocals (2); Aziza Jaye, Ria Moran (3), corto.alto (5), Seun Kuti (6), NEONE the Wonderer (8), K.O.G (9), Mamani Keita (12), vocals.

Ordering info: nubivantwist.bandcamp.com

Grégoire Maret/ **Romain Collin** Ennio ACT ****

With Ennio, harmonicist Grégoire Maret and pianist Romain Collin - both Morricone fans since childhood - embark on a trans-genre deep dive into the oeuvre of the prolific, transformative composer of

500-plus film scores. They project from the two instruments (augmented by Collin's analog pedal harmonium, foot-operated Taurus synth and Moog/Cordovox White Elephant) a timbral palette that palpably evokes the maestro's otherworldly atmospherics. On several tracks, Burniss Earl Traviss and drummer Marcus Gilmore complement the flow with a stateof-the-art beat matrix; guitarist Marvin Sewell signifies with appropriately blues-informed punctuations. All hands are on deck for "Se Telefonando," a mid-'60s Morricone vehicle for the Italian MOR singer Mina, to which Maret's long-time employer Cassandra Wilson (no stranger to Italian pop music) sings her bespoke lyric, joined by Gregory Porter. That it's nowhere close to the album's most memorable track testifies to the power of Maret's and Collin's instrumental voices, in solo flight and mutual conversation. —Ted Panken

Personnel: Grégoire Maret, chromatic harmonica: Romain Collin, Steinway D piano and keyboards: Alexandra Sopp, flute; Marvin Sevell, guitar; Burniss Earl Travis II, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums; Cassan-dra Wilson, Gregory Porter, vocals (8).

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Julien Knowles As Many, As One INDEPENDENT RELEASE * * * 1/2

A recent graduate of the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz, trumpeter Julien Knowles is joined on As Many, As One, his recording debut as a leader, by three other former Hancock students (altoist Devin Daniels, pianist Javier Santiago and



drummer Benjamin Ring) plus bassist Dario Bizio. Knowles performs 11 of his originals plus Louis Cole's "End Of The Night," adding a string quartet on three numbers.

The selections primarily set moods rather than feature memorable melodies. All of the musicians display impressive technique and potential. The set begins and ends with moody trumpet ballads. "The Boot," which generates some heat, uses a six-note line started by the bassist then played by the pianist before being adopted by the horns. Some pieces have a bit of free playing in spots and evolve as they progress, often traveling to some unexpected destinations along the way. "Duende" swings with a walking bass part of the time, while "Kintsugi" displays a Wayne Shorter influence in Knowles' writing.

Knowles is heard at his best on the ballads where his warm tone, use of space and lyrical ideas are emphasized. -Scott Yanow

As Many, As One: Opening; The Boot; Desire Path; Adam's Street Banana; Moon Theater; Solo intro// etude j; etude j; s.m.s; End of the Night; Kingsugi; Duende; Sunrise Movement. (70:21) Personnel: Julian Knowles, trumpet; Devin Daniels, alto saxophone; Javier Santiago, piano; Dario Bizio, bass; Benjamin Ring, drums; Ela Kodzas, Michelle Sheehy, violin; Damon Zavala, viola; Niall Ferguson, cello

Ordering info: julienknowles.com

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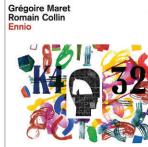
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ACT

Ennio: Once Upon A Time In America (Deborah's Theme); For A Few Dollars More: Watch Chimes; The Good, The Bad And The Ugly: The Ecstacy Of Gold; Suoni Per Dino; Once Upon A Time In The West (Intro); Once Upon A Time In The West; Cinema Paradiso; Se Telefonando (feat. Cassandra Wilson and Gregory Porter); Chi Mai-Le Professionnel; The Sicilian Clan; Tragedy Of A Ridiculous Man; Man With A Harmonica (42:32)

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More info: tech21nyc.com

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More info: heritageaudio.net

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8

Blindfold Test > BY FRANK ALKYER

John Clayton & Rufus Reid, Part I

When the International Society of Jazz Arrangers and Composers symposium hit Nashville in May, one of the most anticipated sessions of the weekend happened to be a live Blindfold Test where bassist/composer Rufus Reid and bassist/composer John Clayton gave each other the test, only the second time that two artists have Blindfoldded each other. The first? At the ISJAC symposium in Texas two years prior where Ryan Truesdell and Jim McNeely engaged in a historic "Double Blindfold" published in two parts in DownBeat (November 2022 and December 2022 issues). Rufus and John pondered, chatted, giggled and seemed to take a degree of glee in stumping each other in a lively event attended by a room full of composers and arrangers. It was a glorious insiders' listening (and guessing) session. The test started with Rufus presenting his first tune for John.

Ahmad Jamal

"Wave" (*The Awakening*, Impulse, 1970) Jamal, piano; Jamil Nasser, bass; Frank Gant, drums.

John: I think it's Ahmad Jamal.

Rufus: Yeeees. That's the easy one! [laughter]

John: The bass sound of the recording makes me think it's John Heard. Couldn't tell the vocabulary. The drummer was using those kind of bamboo sticks. I couldn't hear any of his telltale giveaways. An educated guess is that it might be, I'm going to say Lewis Nash, but I'm at a loss.

Rufus: I'm so happy to hear that. [*laughter*] Actually, it's Jamil Nasser and Frank Gant. It's from an album called *Awakening* and I had to go buy another LP because I wore it out. It's a trio that was doing so many different kinds of things. Jamil Nassar was very kind to me the first time I heard him play. He said, "You need to go to New York." And I said, "I may go there one day" And he said, "You know there's a big barrell and it's full, fresh from the cow, but the cream always goes to the top no matter how big the vat is." It gave me the impetus to keep going.

John: I had a chance to play with Frank Gant, but on my wish list, which I was never able to check off, was Ahmad Jamal.

Rufus: Me, too.

John: I knew him, but I never had a chance to play with him. Sonny Rollins was also on that list; he's not playing anymore. Ahmad Jamal!

Count Basie

"Counter Block" (Breakfast Dance And BBQ, Roulette, 1959) Thad Jones, arranger and composer.

Rufus: Ah, wow. Is that Magic?

John: No.

Rufus: The Chief?

John: [nods]

Rufus: Count Basie.

John: So, who do you think wrote the composition and arrangement? Rufus: Frank Wess.

John: Close. It was one of your former employers. [laughter]

Rufus: Well, Frank Wess.

John: One more. [laughter]

Rufus: Thad. [crowd applauds]

John: That piece is called "Counter Block" and I think it might be one of the first compositions and arrangements of Thad's that gave a preview of where he was going with his own band. And, as you know, you were so



blessed to play with Thad Jones and hearing all these colors.

Rufus: What was interesting, I was close with Frank Wess and Frank Foster as well. I knew Thad was in the band at one point. Of course, I always heard the story that Thad, he extended the band a little more than the Chief wanted it to be extended. [*laughter*]

John: I understand that this was one of the songs that extended the band in a way that even Basie liked.

Bobby Hutcherson

"My Joy" (Oblique, Blue Note, 1979, recorded in 1967) Bobby Hutcherson, vibes; Herbie Hancock, piano; Albert Stinson, bass, Joe Chambers, drums.

John: Whew! OK, educated guesses. I heard some chops in there that reminded me of Eddie Gomez. And because of that, the vibes could be Gary Burton. I don't think it was Bobby Hutcherson.

Rufus: It was Bobby.

John: It was Bobby?

Rufus: [devilish smile]

John: I knew it was Bobby! [*audience busts out laughing*] So, if it's Bobby, then not Eddie Gomez.

Rufus: No.

John: But who had that dark bottom sound like that and those kind of chops? I'd say Richard Davis, but it was almost too tame at the end to be Richard.

Rufus: True.

John: Scott LaFaro?

Rufus: No. [pauses and smiles] It's a, it's a bit unfair. [laughter]

John: That's not surprising! [audience howls]

Rufus: Albert Stinson.

John: I never heard of Albert Stinson

Rufus: Well, unfortunately, he died really too young. He and Bobby, they had too much fun with the drugs. And Bobby lived many years after that, but Albert didn't. And it's tragic because he did some recordings with [*pauses to remember, an audience member calls out Claire Fischer's name*] Claire Fischer.

Billy Childs

"The Path Among The Trees" (Autumn: In Moving Pictures, ArtistShare, 2010) Childs, composer.

Rufus: [*almost immediately*] I love this tune. Billy Childs. I saw this band live in New York with harp, string quartet, acoustic guitar and saxophone. Amazing, Billy Childs. Check it out.

John: I figured you'd get this one. This one's a little soft pitch. [laughter] DB

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

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