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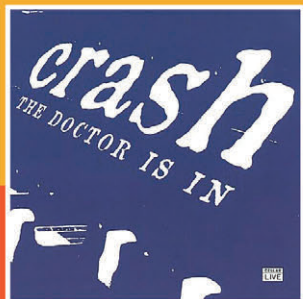
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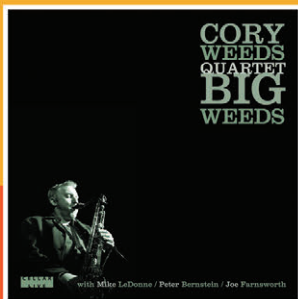
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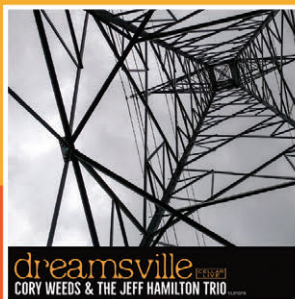
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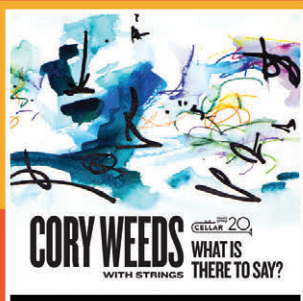
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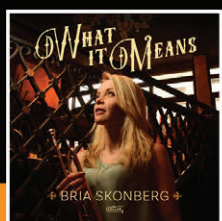


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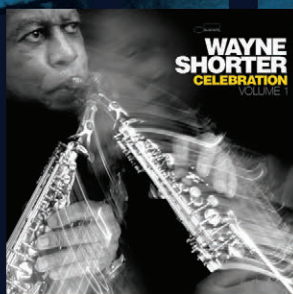
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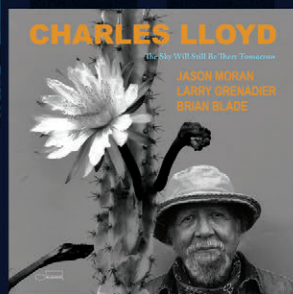
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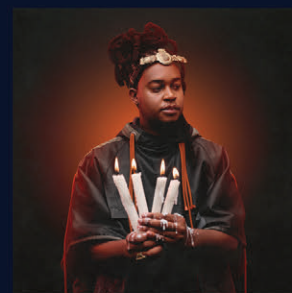
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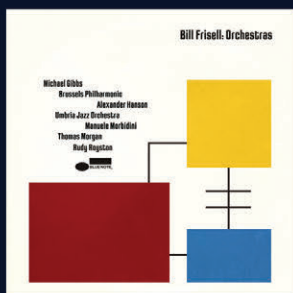
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AUGUST 2024

Inside



ON THE COVER

22 Charles Lloyd

*Hall of Fame, Jazz Artist,
Jazz Album & Tenor
Saxophonist of the Year*

BY ASHLEY KAHN

Charles Lloyd, at the age of 87, speaks with humor and humility and in unbroken, elliptical runs. Responding to a query about the news of his sweep of DownBeat's top Critics Poll awards — a first — he admits being happy about the news, but also a bit challenged to help explain it.



"I know there will be an end to it but I'm enjoying the moment right now," says Rising Star Artist of the Year James Brandon Lewis of the accolades he's received.

Cover photo by D. Darr

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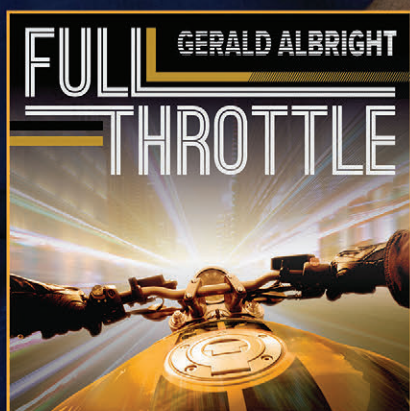
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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



From left, Keith Jarrett, Ron McClure, Charles Lloyd and Jack DeJohnette.

Charles Lloyd in the Soviet Union

CHARLES LLOYD'S AMAZING CAREER HAS come to this: Hall of Fame, Artist of the Year, Album of the Year and Tenor Saxophonist of the Year, as you will read in the coming pages. But his first feature in DownBeat was a cover article published in the July 13, 1967, edition. The writer was Ira Gitler, who was behind the typewriter for many an interesting article written for this magazine. The subject matter was not Lloyd's next recording or what he was wearing that day. It was an accounting of his quartet's travels to the Soviet Union to perform at the Tallinn Jazz Festival.

The thought of American jazz artists playing in Russia was hard to conceive amid the political currents of 1967. The Cold War was in full rage. The U.S. was facing increased pressures back home and around the globe in regard to the Vietnam "conflict."

Lloyd was breaking big-time at that moment. *Forest Flower*, that beautiful live recording that became the first jazz album to sell more than 1 million copies, was released in February of that year. And the band heading to Tallinn — with Jack DeJohnette on drums, Keith Jarrett on piano and Ron McClure on bass — were simply cooking.

But uncertain times spilled over into this tour of the Soviet Union.

Soviet jazz writers convinced the festival organizers to invite Lloyd, "who received a letter that he would be welcome as a tourist." It was "an official, unofficial invitation."

Ten days before they left, Lloyd was informed that no foreign acts would be allowed to play the fest. Then he was told that they *would* play. All of it irritated the reedman because "I

was talking about music, which transcends governments," he said. "To me, music is supreme."

The quartet was set to play on May 12, but the show was canceled by an 11-man committee. Finally, on May 14, they took the stage.

According to Gitler's account, the band played a 50-minute set. The crowd went wild.

"I played my experience from Memphis up to then," Lloyd said of the eight-minute-and-20-second ovation the band received. "There was so much stress leading up to it that it exploded."

There was no encore, with Lloyd stating, "They hid our drums so we couldn't do an encore."

Festival officials had to call for a 30-minute intermission to restore calm. As Gitler aptly stated, "Live modern American jazz had come to the Soviet Union for the first time."

The band left Tallinn for Leningrad, then Moscow with more frustrating cancellations and a few smaller gigs. They jammed with Russian musicians at the Moscow Jazz Club, where "Jarrett, McClure and DeJohnette took turns playing each other's instruments."

Upon landing in London afterward, Lloyd said, "Our bodies had arrived but our souls were still someplace else. We had been up for the greater part of 10 days."

Luckily, there is the document of that performance. *Charles Lloyd In The Soviet Union* (Atlantic, 1970) serves as a truly powerful statement of persistence. And in this election year, we at DownBeat want to second the words of the master: Music and the arts are transcendent, and always will be. From all of us at DownBeat, congratulations to him on this historic sweep of the poll, and please welcome Charles Lloyd into the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

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90th Anniversary Love

I just received your July 2024/90th Anniversary double issue yesterday. I will be reading an article a day for the rest of June.

Thank you for a thoughtful job at selecting very interesting articles from the last 90 years (many I have never seen).

I read the excellent article on Immanuel Wilkins in the "25 For The Future" feature in the July [side of the] issue — a very impressive musician with a great future. I have been reading and tracking your past "25 For The Future" articles from 1999, 2016 and 2020. Many of those musicians from those past lists are some of my favorites and have made a major impact in jazz.

I was very pleased to see six names on this year's list that are on my list — Immanuel Wilkins, Isaiah Collier, Samara Joy, Pasquale Grasso, Micah Thomas and Emmet Cohen. I discovered Emmet Cohen back in 2016 when he stood out to me on Herlin Riley's *New Direction* record, and when I saw his trio at a small performance space in Chicago (his first Chicago gig).

Emmet made it to my list that year and he hasn't disappointed. There were only two musicians that I would have liked to see on the 2024 list: James Brandon Lewis and Isaiah J. Thompson. DownBeat was responsible for introducing both of these excellent musicians to me.

MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Classic Issue, Classic Setup!

I am enjoying the 90th anniversary issue, and I particularly like your "vinyl analogy" of Side A and Side B. While I stream much of my music, I still manage to acquire vinyl along the way, adding to my collection that dates back to high school. I still have my stereo system, which dates by to my college days in the early '70s: Marantz 1060 amplifier, Dual 1219 turntable, original Advent loudspeakers. (If those components could only talk.)

Always enjoy the issues, even if I don't always agree with the reviews :) Keep it up for at least another 90 years!

JOE FRANK
KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE

The Legacy Continues

Man, the 90th edition is really special. I love it. Having read this publication since I was in high school has been such a pleasure. You have such a strong legacy of which to be proud.

Congratulations on reporting and influencing jazz and contemporary music for 90 years! Here's to 90 more.

MICHAEL SKINNER
PRESIDENT, DANSR

A Thankful Part of Jazz History

I was reading through the magazine (the vintage side) and really enjoying the articles. I couldn't believe how spot-on Dizzy was in describing the planks of his platform for his run for President of the U.S.A.

I kept leafing through and saw article after article about my heroes when I suddenly and unexpectedly — I kind of forgot we were coming up — happened upon the two-page JodyJazz [advertising] spread. I about cried.

After reading through all of that great jazz history and then stumbling upon our little section, it made me very emotional, proud and humbled. All the things I said in the paragraph in the ad are true, but those sentiments are an understatement, if anything.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for preserving the legacy of jazz, which I think can be easily taken for granted so often, and for allowing us to be a small part of helping you do that.

JODY ESPINA
PRESIDENT, JODYJAZZ/CHEDEVILLE/E. ROUSSEAU

(Properly) Remembering Trumpeter Laurie Frink

Thanks to Suzanne Lorge for her piece on Maria Schneider [June 2024]. But one correction. Due either to a typo or misinformation, one of the photos identifies the trumpeter Laurie Frink and incorrectly uses the last name of Fink. The late musician was known to be one of the most technically accurate of all New York trumpet players. Not enough people know about Laurie. She deserves all the recognition she can get, even posthumously.

BILL BENJAMIN
BILTMORE LAKE, NORTH CAROLINA

Editor's Note: You are 100% correct, Bill. We truly regret the error. Laurie Frink was a marvelous trumpet artist who passed away in 2013 at the age of 61.

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

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"It locked together 20 years of all that I've been looking for," Truesdell says of his composition for *Synthesis: The String Quartet Sessions*.

Ryan Truesdell's String Quartet Dreams

For more than a decade, Ryan Truesdell has been winning acclaim by excavating the lesser-known gems of big-band composer and arranger Gil Evans and presenting them to the public. So it was hardly a surprise that, as he took a break to chat amid a late-May run conducting Evans' music at Birdland, he was in good spirits.

But back in 2020, when the pandemic hit, his mood was far less cheery.

"No one knew what was happening," Truesdell said via Zoom from his New York apartment. "And the idea of putting 18 people in a room together for a big band again was, in our minds, never going to happen. What do we do as composers now that our main voice is not able to be together?"

The unlikely answer? Truesdell created a project enlisting 13 large-ensemble jazz composers, plus himself, to write music for string quartets.

Documented in a three-CD set titled *Synthesis: The String Quartet Sessions* (Artist Share), the project might seem to bear little resemblance to his work with Evans' music,

but Truesdell said it reveals, to great effect, a different side of the talents these composers possess. "We know their big-band writing. What would they do when they were asked to write a string quartet?"

Seeking players who could commit to the project and had the versatility to pull it off, Truesdell's first call was to Sara Caswell, an inspired improvising violinist familiar with the classical quartet format. Starting in March 2021, Truesdell and Caswell brainstormed by phone and Zoom before recruiting three other distinguished players: violinist Joyce Hammann, violist Lois Martin and cellist Jody Redhage Ferber.

As the months wore on, the group gathered in Martin's Manhattan studio to read through material. "This was a chance to get our heads wrapped around the concept of what we were doing," Caswell said. By March 2022, they had developed the template they would follow for the next year. It would include rehearsals at Martin's studio — celebratory affairs, she said, with the composers often contributing — followed, in short order,

by recording sessions at Oktaven Audio in Mt. Vernon, New York.

Truesdell said he was surprised when all the composers he asked agreed to participate. The list ranged from Joseph Borsellino III, a graduate student steeped in electronica, to Rufus Reid, the bassist and bandleader, then in his 70s. It included composers from as far away, too, such as Vanessa Perica, who was living in Australia.

But Truesdell was less surprised that, with so many composers onboard — and with no restrictions being imposed in terms of running time or style — the collection of works would be a diverse one. In fact, the project's yield, writ large, defies easy categorization.

"The element of change between each piece makes this collection in itself a genre of music," he asserted.

Though the works vary in style, many of them inevitably reflect the time in which they were hatched — none, perhaps, more than "Tilting World," by Christine Jensen.

Like most of the other composers, Jensen had impressive credentials in writing for big

bands but had not written string quartets. “This piece was a struggle, and we were going through a struggle at the same time,” she said. “I went through a battle with my psychological state.”

Nearly a year in the writing, the piece ended up with more alterations to rhythm and tempo than she had expected. But the changes faithfully parallel her evolving state of mind as she emerged from lockdown in her Montreal studio. The result, Truesdell said, is a beautifully realized “musical depiction of her growth from a kind of despair at the beginning of the pandemic.”

Truesdell did not dictate whether the participating composers should incorporate improvisation. About half did, and the context in which it appears varies widely. At one end of the spectrum is “Tilting World,” in which Caswell, amid the shifting tempos, carves out a solo break over chord changes. In Alan Ferber’s “Violet Soul,” the improvisation seems structured to help create the impression

of a jazz standard.

At the other end of the spectrum is Oded Lev-Ari’s “Playground,” in which the improvisation is collective and, as the title suggests, occurs in a game-playing environment based solely on adherence to rules Lev-Ari has concocted.

The piece, Lev-Ari said, furthers his interest in “how musicians interact with each other, with the audience and with the materials I provide.” The score is spare but hardly simple. Compared with the other pieces, Truesdell said, more time was spent hashing out a strategy for its execution.

Under Lev-Ari’s rules, a musician plays notes a half step or a whole step away from those her partner has played. One can only move in response to the other’s moves. The musicians, Caswell said, feel as though they are “chasing” each other; listeners sense an escalating push-and-pull. The experience for both groups is an intense one.

The intensity is no less real in more con-

ventionally scripted pieces. Miho Hazama’s fully notated, vividly colored “Chipmunk Timmy’s Sunny Funny Day,” a day-in-the-life depiction of a sympathetic rodent, derives its intensity from the kinetic quality of what Hazama called the musicians’ “strong sense of playing rhythmical stuff.”

Perica’s “A World Lies Waiting,” also fully notated, likewise exploits the musicians’ capacity for rhythmic drive. But the greater part of its intensity arguably derives from a searing lyricism that evokes the sense of profound isolation she felt locked down in the South Pacific before receiving the boost from Truesdell’s invitation to take part in *Synthesis*.

“I was on the tip of Australia looking out there onto the ocean,” she recalled. “But when I got the message from Ryan, I felt the sense of connection I was desperately craving.”

Truesdell, for his part, was dealing with a kind of separation as he put together his “Suite For Clarinet And String Quartet.” The separation was one of years — 18, precisely — a gulf across which he viewed himself as a master’s student at the New England Conservatory authoring a three-movement suite. He was now reviving that piece and adding a fourth and final movement to it.

Apart from shifting a few rhythms to make the modulations work better and fixing a note here or there, Truesdell left the original three movements intact. They had, he said, a “brazen youthfulness” that he liked. But the piece needed that fourth movement to reflect the man he was now. Having decided to contravene his rule about instrumentation by including the piece — a rule he relaxed for a few others — he brought in clarinetist Anat Cohen.

The new movement helps bridge the gulf between his younger and older selves by drawing on intervallic and other material established in the earlier movements. But Cohen’s exhilarating blurring of the line between interpretation and improvisation may be the more unifying agent. And that, Cohen argued, owes in no small measure to Truesdell’s willingness to entertain ideas.

“Ryan is very open,” she said. “He knows when somebody’s very strong, like Sara or me. He takes suggestions of how to make it better, to let it morph, to add our vision.”

As Truesdell sat in his New York digs, the irony of the situation seemed apparent: A musician celebrated for rescuing neglected works of others was now rescuing one of his own — and, by adding a new movement and a new soloist, elevating it to the status of a major contribution to a massive, perhaps unprecedented, undertaking of his own making.

“When Anat played it,” he said, “it locked together 20 years of all that I’ve been looking for.”

—Phillip Lutz

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"Given a good support system, each artist has the potential to be more than just a performer, but an ambassador of hope," says Louis Marks, left, ropeadope CEO, with Fabian Brown, president.

Ropeadope Records Building Community at 25

ON THE INDEX OF JAZZ RECORD LABELS

bearing fitting and poetically resonant names, we might readily cite such historic examples as Blue Note, Impulse! and Verve. Off in its own corner, ropeadope also suits the category, befitting a label that has skillfully dodged, weaved and jabbed in the genre directions of jazz, groove, neo-fusion, hip-hop hybrids, New Orleans culture and more.

Over the course of releasing 600-plus titles, the label has lived up to its moniker. This year, it earns a genuine "historic" badge of honor, having attained its 25th anniversary milestone. What started out as a grassroots adventure launched by Andy Hurwitz with the label's first release — DJ Logic's *Project Logic* — in 1999, the label continues its eclectic ways from a home base in Philadelphia where ropeadope thrives on its own multi-tentacled terms.

Louis Marks, who took over as CEO in 2014, comments, "As we wrap up year 25, we want to stay true to the original tenets of ropeadope — individuality and community. It is too often the case that anniversaries are used as a way to sell more things, so we're skipping all the typical stuff."

Among the anniversary plans is a documentary project retelling the ongoing story, a new chatbot, livestreaming with artists and company figures behind the scenes and a printing of some 250 ropeadope clothing designs produced over the past quarter century.

Fabian Brown, label president, notes, "Personally, I grew up with ropeadope as a fan and then later was fortunate enough to have experienced, firsthand, the power of our community of artists. It has been incredibly fulfilling to advocate for musicians who stay true to their creative vision while we support them with the brutal business aspects of the industry. This anniversary is a celebration of our shared journey."

How best to compare the early days of the label with its current state? "OG ropeadope had more freedom," Marks comments, "and less freedom at the same time. They were unburdened by the expectations that go with reputation, but they were limited by the old distribution system and the changes in the business. Ropeadope of 2025 will be as free as [possible]. We don't feel we have anything to prove or a need to 'compete' in today's music business, but we must shake off the

definition of us as a record label. It is far too limiting for what we are and what we will be."

Brown adds, "Ropeadope circa 2024 isn't about looking at what the music industry is doing right or wrong. Instead, we focus on nurturing and championing musical art that speaks to the soul and drives social consciousness."

In terms of the label's relationship with the broader jazz label sphere, Marks is quick to remark, "We've always felt like an outsider. I really do not pay much attention to other labels. Minding ropeadope is tough enough. But I think that we really don't belong in the club. I'm fairly certain that we are often the second or third call for an artist, and that's OK because contemporary art can be easily overlooked in the commercial world. We end up with great music because of this."

Trying to get a reliable fix or compact "sound bite" on ropeadope's content and artistic m.o. can be tricky business. To date, the label's "roster" has included Robert Randolph and other sacred steel music, Nate Smith's KINDRED, Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah, Col. Bruce Hampton, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Ramsey Lewis, Terrace Martin, Eddie Palmieri, numerous R&B/jazz/hip-hop ambient records ... and that's just scratching the surface.

"It's true," Brown notes, "putting your finger on the pulse on ropeadope's nature and roster can be challenging due to the diversity of our releases and artists. However, if you look close enough, there are definitely throughlines and connections within our discography."

"It's not really about comparing ourselves to other labels. Critical thinking is essential for us to connect musicians' art with their audience, their tribe. We focus on the unique stories each artist brings and how we can support their vision. We aren't concerned with what this label or that label is doing: Everyone has to write their own story."

One example of a ropeadope artist who has risen to great heights in the larger jazz world and visibility is saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin, a critically and commercially acclaimed artist putting her stamp on jazz, more generally. As Marks enthuses, "We are always happy when we see someone like Lakecia, who has poured her life into music, get the recognition she deserves. We are also proud of Chief Adjuah, who has deliberately and elegantly brought true history to people through his music."

"Given a good support system, each artist has the potential to be more than just a performer, but an ambassador of hope. I think the most exciting thing about Lakecia's success is that she is a powerful role model for so many, and I am looking forward to her messaging as things progress."

Another high-profile story linked to ropeadope is the popular post-fusion band Snarky Puppy, led by Michael League in a boldly independent fashion, creating its own GroundUp label under the idealistic ropeadope umbrella.

The band also dropped some Grammy gold dust into the ropeadope legacy, winning a Best R&B Performance Grammy this year for its version of "Something," featuring stylistic, wizardly vocalist Lalah Hathaway.

"Supporting artist-run labels is a true value-add to ropeadope's mission," says Brown. "We're passionate about teaching the art of business to our artists, recognizing that their zone of genius often lies in creativity and developing their art. Many artists have a desire to curate their musical tastes but need support with the administrative side of the industry."

"It's incredibly rewarding to see an artist develop their brand and business with our imprints. Snarky Puppy is a fantastic example, followed by other amazing labels under our umbrella like Ropeadope SUR, Artist First and Stretch Music (Adjuah's label). Even though the Snarky Puppy years were before my time, it's clear that ropeadope has always empowered artists to handle their business from a creative perspective. This nurturing environment allows them to thrive both artistically and professionally."

A new facet of the ropeadope company agenda is the creation — by Marks, Brown and musician/administrator Joe Pignato — of a non-profit organization called Third Way Cultural Alliance geared toward supporting the creation of that seemingly endangered cultural species: the full-length album. Brown points out, "There are many individuals and organizations who recognize the value of contemporary art and want to support it — not just the 'grandfather's jazz' of the past. There is a genuine, intrinsic drive to preserve works that represent our current culture and community. Through the Third Way Cultural Alliance, we provide patrons, philanthropists and organizations the opportunity to focus on the preservation of contemporary art, allowing artists to create full-length pieces of work."

In short, the ropeadope story, at 25, is on the long-run plan, with new ideas in progress. As Marks says, by way of an instructive historical arc, "Our first album was presenting Project Logic, an improvisational band with a turntablist (DJ Logic) taking solos. Everything else follows that. What this is really about is paying attention, listening to what is happening in real time. The music industry has a way of defining scenes after they are formed — the time when everyone is following along. I don't find that particularly interesting."

Bringing the subject full circle, Brown adds, "The goal has always been to amplify the artist by connecting them with their community, allowing them to express their thoughts, their values and their culture through creating art. The way that shows up is different from release to release, but the undertone is similar: Have a message worth communicating and make sure the right ears are listening."

—Josef Woodard

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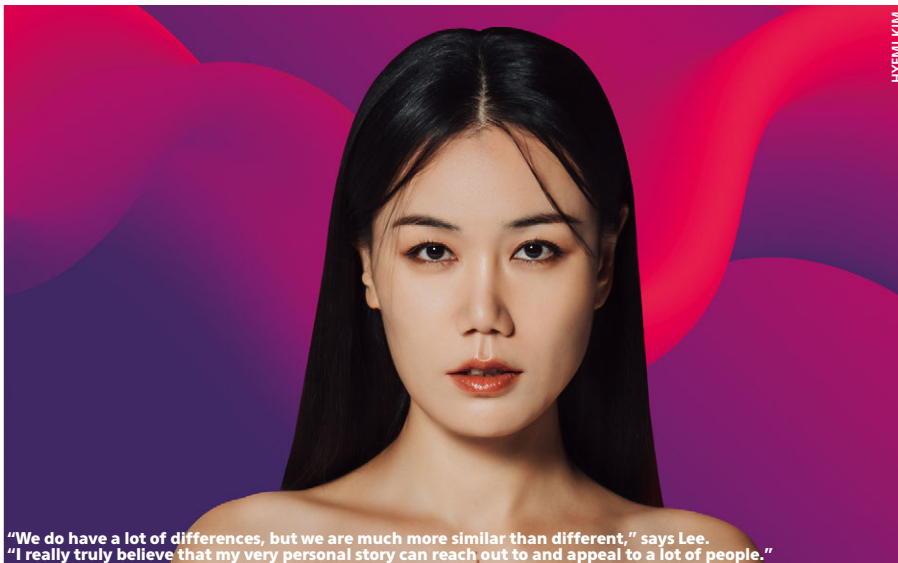
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*Artists Subject to Change



"We do have a lot of differences, but we are much more similar than different," says Lee. "I really truly believe that my very personal story can reach out to and appeal to a lot of people."

Jihye Lee: The Sound of Infinite Connections

JIHYE LEE JOINS THE GROWING RANKS OF

young, tradition-respecting and medium-rethinking big band leaders, blessed with a dramatic unfolding story, as well as a way of incorporating storytelling in her ambitious music. Born and raised in Korea and based in Brooklyn after studying at Boston's Berklee College of Music, Lee has enjoyed an advancing respect for her elegant and engaging big band writing/arranging. Her own swinging and detail-nailing Jihye Lee Orchestra made its presence known, on a broader scale, on 2021's impressive album *Daring Mind*.

But the plot of Lee's career and artistic ambition has bumped up several notches with her new album on the Motéma label, meaningfully dubbed *Infinite Connections*. This time out, her integrated compositions explore a deepening interest in traditional Korean musical elements — especially in terms of rhythm — and a passionate, mournful channeling of emotions following the death of her beloved grandmother and her mother's subsequent debilitating health crisis.

"Sometimes as an artist and composer," Lee commented, in an interview from Brooklyn, "I feel like I am guided somehow. Without me planning out my future, it just happened very naturally. Why did I think about my identity? Why did I think about my mother and grandmother? And why did my grandmother die at the moment while I was writing 'Born In 1935,' about her?"

"I happened to be making this record, and it happened to be making me really have deep thoughts about me and my mother's relationship, and me and my ancestors' relationship, and my Korean folk music relationship. It all happened simultaneously, as if someone is manipulating me to make this album."

Conceptual themes have graced Lee's past

albums. Her self-released 2017 *April* is about the South Korean Sewol Ferry disaster of 2014; she describes *Daring Mind* as being "all about my New York life." But given the new project's deeply personal resonances, she insists, "This one has the strongest concept, because [it deals with] infinite connections — it was everywhere."

As a youth in Korea, Lee first worked in music in the singer-songwriter mode, but admits, "I was a very shy kid. I still have the shyness in me. People still sometimes don't get it because I conduct. I never felt comfortable singing in front of people. Maybe part of the reason is because I'm a perfectionist, and if I perform, I can't really go back and tweak it. Composing, I can always go back and tweak it as much as I want until I feel satisfied. Facing my band, I feel comfortable. I have my back to the audience. I feel home."

Lee followed a sideways path into big band culture, as an impassioned outsider who had never heard the music before coming to Boston, partly because jazz big bands are rare in Korea. Upon arriving at Berklee, she remembers studying "jazz composition, and of course your ensemble is going to be bigger and bigger. You're gonna first learn how to write melody and rhythm and harmony. Later you're gonna learn how to put rhythm section specifically. And then five horns and up. Maybe it was a predestined path for me."

It's also a path lined with thorns and challenges, a reality she knows and continues to face. "When we composers get together," Lee comments, "we always ask the questions. 'Why do we do this?' This is not the right business model. It's a ton of work and very hard to tour with. But of course, the music is very rewarding."

"When you hear the big band live, it's like, 'Wow, what is this?' The human breath has so

much power, especially with 13 people breathing together. That sensation gave me so much shock and enthusiasm, as did the lushness. To me, it feels like you have puzzles all scattered and then you are making it, piece by piece. I love doing it."

Among the guests artists on the new album is sensitive trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, who lends his supple sound and phrasing to the opening "Surrender" and "You Are My Universe." Other notable soloists along the nine-track journey include tenor saxophonist Jason Rigby, pianist Adam Birnbaum, guitarist Alex Goodman, trombonist Alan Ferber and, navigating the tricky mix of Western and Korean rhythmic pulses, drummer Jared Schonig and percussionist Keita Ogawa.

When asked to summon up a short list of influential big band leaders and voices, Lee immediately cites Duke Ellington (not incidentally, she twice earned the Duke Ellington Award while at Berklee), along with her mentor Jim McNeely, Maria Schneider and younger up-and-comers. She greatly respects Darcy James Argue, who co-produced her last two projects. "He has a very singular voice," she observes. "I love how he uses guitar and sound effects and spatial aspects in his music. He really pushed the big band sound further from just like a regular big band music."

"I also love a lot of my fellow composers as well — to name a few, like Remy Le Boeuf [leader of his Assembly of Shadows big band] or Miho Hazama [leader of the Danish Radio Big Band and other large ensembles]. Lots of great composers are doing their thing. That's also a good inspiration, to see how they pursue their music and career. I'm blessed to be a part of that scene."

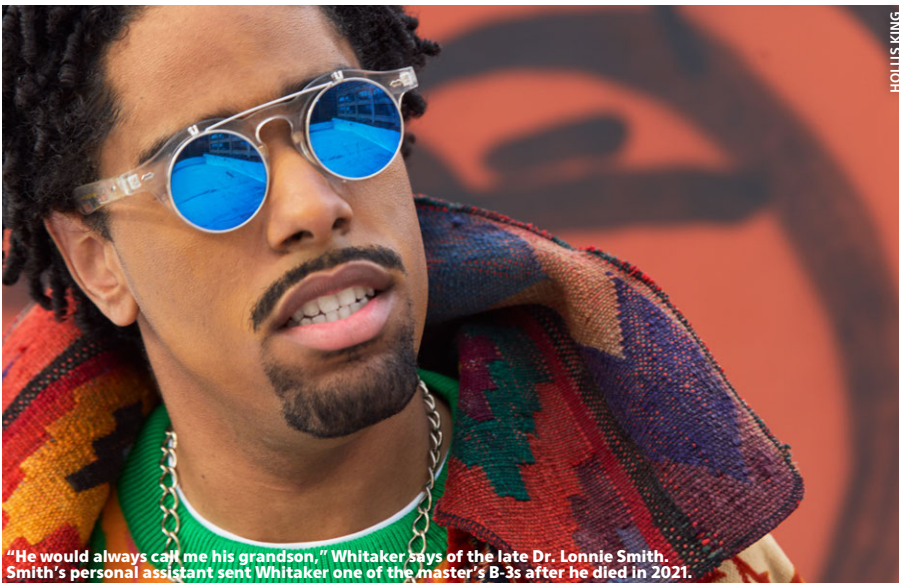
Turning back to the powerful personal undercurrents she has embedded into *Infinite Connections*, were there ways in which she found the process of making the album cathartic and healing?

"One hundred percent," she says. "In order to get over [the pain], I had to eat it and digest it. I had to be in that zone. I poured all my heart, all my emotions, all my mental torture into the music. And maybe I'm moving on. I selfishly compose for myself, but I don't think it's selfish because we are just human beings. We do have a lot of differences, but we are much more similar than different. I really truly believe that my very personal story can reach out to and appeal to a lot of people."

That said, Lee has yet to decide her next conceptual mission as a composer-bandleader, but she is considering dealing, in her own way, with the various pop musics — including K-pop — she was obsessed with as a child in Korea.

"*Infinite Connections* was a serious album, which I'm very proud of," she said. "But maybe, since I did it, next I want to do a little fun, groovy, very easy-listening type of music."

—Josef Woodard



"He would always call me his grandson," Whitaker says of the late Dr. Lonnie Smith. Smith's personal assistant sent Whitaker one of the master's B-3s after he died in 2021.

Matthew Whitaker Conjuring Organ Spirits

AT THE CLOSE OF 2021, MATTHEW

Whitaker faced a glut of options. Having met with his management team to discuss ideas for his fourth leader release, the Jersey-based composer and multi-instrumentalist felt gripped by indecision: "We kept repeating this theme, 'Album. Tribute. Heroes ... album... tribute... heroes...'" But in moments of contemplation, he couldn't quite piece together the project. He remained stuck on what kind of gesture he wanted to create, or whether a particular instrument would emerge as the focal point.

Motivated by what naturally transpires — in the studio, on the bandstand and away from the music entirely — Whitaker felt uneasy about expanding a theme into an album for the sole purpose of releasing new music. So he continued courting inspiration. "I love the whole live feel and the whole organic vibe," he says. "Every time I get a chance to play a different instrument, I'm learning something new."

Collective Spark

Whitaker's approach to life has always been collaborative. Hours spent chatting and listening to music with friends often prompt new ideas for his creative output. In September 2022, Whitaker had been corresponding with a friend who'd been sending him different tunes from Jimmy Smith. "That's how it all started," he says. When he received Smith's 1965 recording of "Organ Grinder's Swing" featuring Kenny Burrell and Grady Tate, he thought, "Oh, man. I haven't heard this song in so long — I should try to arrange this." So she gave me the initial spark [for the record]," he said.

Hit with that jolt of inspiration, Whitaker

set out to record *On Their Shoulders: An Organ Tribute*, his album-length homage to an eclectic sampling of Hammond B-3 heroes. He landed on certain artists immediately; others took time to select. But as he immersed himself in different sounds and contexts, each artist's singular style, collectively, became collateral motivation for the project.

"I really wanted to showcase my arranging skills on this [record]," says Whitaker, who invited more than 10 artists to perform on the album as part of the band. And as he prepared for the work that lay ahead by deep listening to each organ master's catalogue, he began integrating different ideas and modes of expression into his personal sound.

"Any recording is always a learning process," he says. "You're not going to play the same thing, even if you do different takes of the same song — which is great because you get more options and have more variety. For this album, I had to really hone in on a lot of other styles of playing, not just the ones I'm familiar with — had to get the right sound for a particular song or a particular section. Moving this controller, playing with this [effect], while putting my own spin on stuff."

Styles & Stories

The album interprets compositions and seminal recordings from Dr. Lonnie Smith, Joey DeFrancesco, Charles Earland and Elbernita "Twinkie" Clarke, whose Clarke Sisters single "Expect Your Miracle" features choir members from Hackensack, New Jersey's New Hope Baptist Church, where Whitaker has served as minister of music since 2020. "Twinkie's the one that's really churchy," he laughs. "She's so versa-

tile. She can play jazz, too — and classical."

On Their Shoulders features lyrical blues development, harmonic rubs, gutsy crunches and textural overlays of syncopated patterns and sustained sound. Beyond fleshing out new ideas for arranging and orchestration, Whitaker's reasons for including different tunes on the record shift from hero to hero. The album's fulcrum, DeFrancesco's "In The Key Of The Universe," compels the bandleader and his fellow artists to dig in stylistically. "It's a left turn all of a sudden," says Whitaker, who had the chance to collaborate with the widely loved organ legend before his death in August 2022.

Having listened to Earland's music since before he can remember, Whitaker arranged "Happy Cause I'm Goin' Home," featuring a solo gesture from flutist Antonina Styczen and trades from trumpet players Summer Camargo and David Sneider. "I thought, 'Let's bring this one back,'" laughs Whitaker, whose father introduced him to the tune.

A lasting, rather special connection to the instrument Whitaker was made through Dr. Lonnie Smith, whose iconic composition "Pilgrimage" appears on the record. "You don't really have to do a lot for the song to come alive," says Whitaker. "The melody is there. The harmony is there." The 23-year-old artist remembers hearing Smith perform for the first time at the Jazz Standard in New York. Smith surprised Whitaker by inviting him on stage to play with the band. "He would always call me his grandson." On behalf of the organ master, after he passed away in 2021, his personal assistant sent Whitaker one of Smith's organs, a symbol of the mentor's faith in his mentee's musical commitment: "I'm honored and grateful and blessed to have it and use it."

Reflexive Sessions

A spontaneity addict and habitual collaborator, Whitaker couldn't leave the studio without allowing some music to emerge purely from the hang: "I told the band I wanted to just hit 'record' and see what happens," a decision that would lead to releasing "Yessahh" and "Don't Count Me Out," the album's third and final tracks, respectively. "Shout-out to Andre Betts, who helped me mix this entire project together," says Whitaker. "He put up with all my ideas, including wanting some splice in these jam sessions. So if you hear a lot of samples and sound effects, that's all him."

Gleaning ideas and creative insights not only from the music and its heroes, but also from his friends, family and fellow artists, Whitaker finds inspiration in his community. He recently attended a record release party for percussionist Ivan Llanes Montejó, a friend who'd invited Whitaker to perform on and produce one of his album's tracks. "Just being there," says Whitaker, "being in the audience and listening — observing from that point of view — so good. I really appreciate that."

—Stephanie Jones



"The amazing thing that I see of great musicians on stage is their ability to utilize their lexicon of languages," says Kokayi.

Kokayi Taps the Musical Power of Language

KOKAYI LOVES LANGUAGES. HE'S FASCINATED with the spoken and musical in equal measure. In addition to his native tongue of English, he can navigate through conversations spoken in German, French, Spanish and Portuguese. He hopes to expand his lexicon with Amharic, Cantonese and Arabic languages.

As a world-renowned rapper and producer, Kokayi demonstrates his ingenuity at accessing a wealth of vocabulary from many languages then applying them into musical contexts that range from boom-bap hip-hop to modern jazz.

"My thought process is that each musician has a lexicon of languages — there are the notes that exist and the relationships with each other," Kokayi says during an interview in the lobby of the Eaton Hotel in our nation's capital. "The pedagogy often taught in school is the relationships between the notes and how one flips them on their heads. The amazing thing that I see of great musicians on stage is their ability to utilize their lexicon of languages."

Born Carl Walker in Washington, D.C., he powers his menthol-flavored, sometimes twangy voice through supple rhymes, brimming with clear enunciation, melodic and thematic cogency and improvisational swing and swagger.

Kokayi was just returning from Miami, where he performed with Terri Lyne Carrington at the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center. He was featured on Carrington's stellar 2019 album *Waiting Game* with her Grammy-winning Social Science ensemble.

In addition to performing "Purple Mountains," a song addressing various atrocities suffered by Native Americans, Kokayi played up his burgeoning talents as a DJ by running various samples during the performance. In addition to applaud-

ing Kokayi's deeply informed rhymes, Carrington admires his improvisational flexibility.

"What's beautiful about Kokayi in a live setting is [that] it's truly different every time, because his level of improvising is just as high as his instrumentalist peers," Carrington says. "He improvises with words on the spot, also with rhythm and melody. He's not just a poet and rapper; he's a vocalist, too. And when you add his being able to create electronic textures as well, it makes him a triple threat."

Kokayi recalls performing at the Village Vanguard in 2018 with Steve Coleman's Five Elements and billing himself as "wordsmith," because Lorraine Gordon, the Vanguard's proprietor, reportedly didn't like rappers and didn't want any performing in the club.

"That was my only time performing at the Village Vanguard," Kokayi recalls. "Steve told Lorraine that I was a 'wordsmith' so that she would allow me to perform on stage. After our first set, she came up to me and said, 'That was beautiful.'"

Three decades ago, Kokayi first made major impressions on the jazz scene by appearing on Steve Coleman and Metrics' mid-'90s albums *A Tale Of 3 Cities* and *The Way Of The Cipher*, as well as the supporting tours.

"The thing about Steve, which is hilarious, is that none of the stuff that we did on the record was what we played while we were on tour," Kokayi recalls. "All of those 4/4 beats that I got happy with just went out the window. The first gig we did, Steve's in 7/12 or 35 — I don't know where he was [metrically], but I was trying to say these rhymes over these intricate beats, and I was getting stuck. The first three or four gigs, it was a fumble."

After about the fourth show, Kokayi told Sub-Z that he was not going to stick to his written

rhymes in favor of freestyling.

"Once I started learning the parts, it made it easier for me to rhyme over it," Kokayi says. "My freestyling got exceptionally better. By the time I'm finishing that first whole tour, I came back to D.C. to rap with the regular cyphers, rhyming over 4/4 beats, and I'm killing everybody."

Since then, Kokayi has collaborated with an elite stream of jazz artists that includes Ambrose Akinmusire, Jamie Baum, Dafnis Prieto, Omar Sosa, Nate Smith, Paolo Fresu and Morgan Guerin. Kokayi has also recorded and toured with the underground hip-hop band Opus Akoben, and released a handful of solo albums.

In July, Kokayi released his latest album, *Kokayi: An Eponymous Jont*, its making supported by a Guggenheim Fellowship. The album embodies the central question of his fellowship thesis: "What does it feel like to create music with empathy?"

The album features him collaborating with drummer Guillermo Brown, bassist Solomon Dorsey and keyboardist Wynne Bennett in spontaneous collective live composing, resulting in an album containing 100% improvised music and lyrics with no rehearsals and no overdubs — all the songs on the album are first takes.

"We coalesced on some central themes even in how the music sounds and the narratives that goes along with them," Kokayi explains. "That's the experiment: What do we do when we start letting the language of what we do as musicians and me as a vocalist take over as opposed to creating songs for a playlist?"

The results are exemplary of spontaneous ingenuity as Kokayi waxes philosophically over several themes that include the pitfalls of self-medicating, the dangers of becoming a workaholic and contemplations on making the wisest career move.

Last year, Kokayi showed the world that he's also a master of written language by releasing his hilarious but sagacious book, *You Are Ketchup* (Backbeat Press), which he describes as a guide for artists trying to navigate the music business.

As for the title? Kokayi says artists are "ketchup" for money-making industries. "In the music business, you are about as important to the record label and the industry as a packet of ketchup," he says. "You're sauce for the fries."

And while he doesn't define "the fries," the "sauce" is someone's individual voice. "Your flavor of ketchup should always be unique," he advises. "What happens with most artists is that they believe that they are special because they do the vocation. There must be something else about you to be special. And if you don't know what that special thing is, someone else is going to tell you what makes you special. And that's how you get pimped out in this game."

"Once you figure out the unique flavor of your sauce, you can lean into what makes you special," he concludes. "Superstars are superstars because they understand the sauce that they bring." —John Murphy



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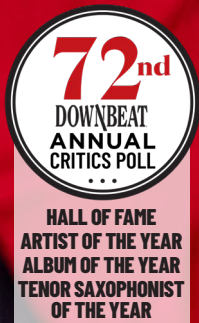
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Charles Lloyd at the 2024 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival presented by Shell

Charles Lloyd

PRAISE FOR AN AGELESS MASTER

By Ashley Kahn Photo by Douglas Mason

"To get this honor at this late stage, I suppose I'm blessed. I just know that this is a sacred song, and I'm in service, and this is my humble offering to the planet. I play for the creator, and when it reaches me and he informs me and it can touch others, this recording ..."

Charles Lloyd, at the age of 87, speaks with humor and humility and in unbroken, elliptical runs. At times, he tends to add in a self-amused chuckle. Responding to a query about the sudden news of his sweep of DownBeat's top Critics Poll awards — an occurrence that's never happened in the magazine's 90-year run — he admits being happy about the news, but also a bit challenged to help explain it. Why now? What about all the other great years and recordings he's made?

"I don't have the answer for you. It came when it came. Time eludes me. I went into the 'now' many decades ago, and I just live in there, and I don't know the phases of the moon or how history and all of that stuff works. I just know that I love the creator, and I love the music, and it's been my sustenance all of my life. It's on your desk [to write this article], and I pray that you can help this little kid from Memphis to be understood."

It's early June and the votes submitted for the magazine's 2024 Critics Poll have just

been tabulated, revealing that Lloyd clinched four top awards: Jazz Artist of the Year, Tenor Saxophonist of the Year, Jazz Album of the Year (for his long-awaited, post-pandemic statement *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow* on Blue Note) and induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame. This cross-category grand slam is a historic first for the magazine, and a singular feat for any artist, at any point in their career: all attesting to a rare convergence of legendary stature and continuing musical beauty.

None of this should surprise. Lloyd's long proven himself a groundbreaker. In 1967 alone, the year he won his first DownBeat award for Artist of the Year, he was one of the initial jazz performers to establish himself with counterculture audiences, playing San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium. That same year, he became one of the first jazz musicians to sell a million albums (for *Forest Flower*, Atlantic) and arguably the first modern jazz artist to perform behind the Iron Curtain, which yielded *Charles Lloyd In The Soviet Union* (Atlantic, 1970). His

trailblazing impact continued into the '70s and up to the present day — freely collaborating with musicians from the rock world (the Doors, the Byrds, the Grateful Dead, the Beach Boys and, more recently, Lucinda Williams) and embracing ideas and concepts and opportunities to perform with musicians from distant cultures (Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji, Greek singer Maria Farantouri). To this day, Lloyd keeps a Hungarian tárogató and Tibetan oboe alongside the saxophones and flutes in his creative arsenal.

Many are the chapters in Lloyd's story: his start in Memphis, where he benefited from the same music program at Manassas High School that helped bring forth such jazz masters as George Coleman, Frank Strozier, Phineas Newborn, Harold Mabern and Booker Little. His development in Los Angeles of the late '50s, playing with Billy Higgins, Don Cherry, Ornette Coleman, Scott LaFaro and Eric Dolphy. He served in bands led by Chico Hamilton and later Cannonball Adderley,



The quartet for Album of the Year *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow*, from left: Brian Blade, Lloyd, Larry Grenadier and Jason Moran.

eventually moved to New York City, where he stepped out as bandleader in '64 with pianist Keith Jarrett, bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Jack DeJohnette.

Setting history aside: Lloyd's four DownBeat awards were earned for what he's doing *now*. The Artist of the Year distinction is, by itself, an achievement that doesn't come to a musician resting on laurels or in the backyard napping. It's bestowed on a musician with a full schedule of projects and touring, which accurately describes Lloyd since pandemic restrictions were lifted.

Even during lockdown, Lloyd pursued recording sessions, the results appearing on the three-volume *Trio* series released by Blue Note in 2022. Lately, he's been touring as much as popular musicians half his age, headlining festivals and filling theaters, playing tenor saxophone and flute, and he still fronts a range of different ensembles: the exotic, rhythmically propulsive Sangam trio with Zakir Hussain and Eric Harland; his category-busting group The Marvels with Bill Frisell and Greg Leisz (notably, singer Lucinda Williams has not been part of this ensemble while focusing on her own touring); his guitar-and-piano trio Ocean II with Marvin Sewell and Gerald Clayton (at

times with Jakob Bro adding second guitar).

Then there's Lloyd's mainstay quartet with its rotating rhythm section: Clayton or Jason Moran at the piano; Reuben Rogers or Larry Grenadier on bass; and Eric Harland, Kendrick Scott, Marcus Gilmore or Brian Blade on drums. (A slight return to the historic overview: Lloyd's ability to attract top-tier talent into his groups has been unerringly consistent through his career — and continues. Notably, these musicians tend to make themselves available when called on, even though they are headliners in their own right.)

Recent well-attended performances featuring Lloyd's quartet configuration — at Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee, in March, at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival presented by Shell in April — were stunning examples of the ethereal/rootsy mix Lloyd still delivers so masterfully, so effortlessly. His shamanistic prowess has yet to flag. His ability to pull in crowds who could be elsewhere, attending to louder, more boisterous fare, still serves as one of strongest arguments that authentic jazz expression is an inherently spiritual act.

Onstage in New Orleans, Lloyd traded between his tender-toned tenor, tilted sideways as a nod to his hero Lester Young, and his flute,

delivering lines as if sculpting with smoke, the quartet's sound flowing with a conversational rhythm and ease. His setlist balances new material — "Defiant, Tender Warrior" and "Monk's Dance" from the new album — with older, familiar tunes like "The Water Is Wide" and "Forest Flower." There's a reductive beauty in his music, a marked feel of distillation — nothing superfluous, just what's needed. As a bandleader, Lloyd hardly speaks, favoring minimal statement or gesture, initiating tunes and stepping into solos, and leaving generous room for the other players to explore and express. In between his improvisations, he takes a seat next to the piano, listening intently, glancing up and smiling intermittently, conserving his energy — as well he should.

Of late, Lloyd has had a run of health challenges, including abdominal surgery in 2017, an unexpected bout with sepsis in '22 that hospitalized him for two weeks, and now, an ongoing battle with prostate cancer requiring radiation therapy. Lloyd is acutely aware how precarious things can be at his age. "I've got mileage now and something always comes around and visits. I don't know when the creator will call me home, I just keep trying to go forward." ("I believe we caught it early enough to knock

it out,” adds Dorothy Darr, Lloyd’s longtime companion and de facto tour manager, about the most recent scare.)

Before his New Orleans Jazzfest performance, Lloyd participated in a rare pre-concert interview, curling his lanky frame into a fold-up chair on the festival’s talk stage, and opened himself to questions from this journalist and

this music.”

One query can inspire Lloyd to speak through a range of topics, one streaming into the next, guided by its own logic. The comment that the Jazzfest date was the first of a multi-week tour leads him to mention how his routing now includes recovery days before he performs.

“I have to get in really early so I can try to

‘It’s been a lifelong quest to have this inevitable sort of communion with fellow artists to go up to the hyperions with me.’

a few festival attendees. The remainder of this article features words spoken by Lloyd at that event.

Asked about the “circle of musicians who have passed through his lineups — talk about A-teams!” — he smiles and answers: “All my life, I always loved a certain sort of chemistry that would fit with what I was dreaming of — it’s been a lifelong quest to have this inevitable sort of communion with fellow artists to go up to the hyperions with me. I mean the band with Keith and Cecil and Jack, you know, we were youngsters on a mission. But it took me so long to mature. ... I still go forward with that idea, and if you look back at my history, the people that have made music with me, I’ve been blessed.”

What criteria does Lloyd use in choosing bandmates? Does he prioritize a stylistic or generational perspective? “No.” The door’s wide open? “Right.” What about the communion of Moran, Grenadier and Blade, whose contributions distinguish his latest recording, *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow*?

“Three years ago, just before COVID hit, I had this naïve notion that I could bring some tenderness into the world, and these great artists were the ones that I want to serve this mission with me — Jason, Larry and Brian. So we sent out the call and it came back affirmative, and it took a while to get us all together because of our schedules. And it was very beautiful and very magical. ... But this idea of tenderness to the world, I’ve always been like that, you know. Thanks to those who listened or took home

acclimate and be rested. But traveling, I’m not big on it. I’m not able to keep a balance all the time, but Dorothy manages things and she blesses my life and makes the thing work.”

Lloyd mentions his first and best-known hiatus when, through most of the 1970s, not long after meeting his soulmate Darr, he disappeared from the jazz scene and returned to California. “I went back to the beach to heal from unprescribed medications and all that stuff I had fallen into. Dorothy and I went to the West Coast, and we made a simple life — simple living and high thinking.”

Lloyd recalls how, in the late ’90s, he considered giving up touring, but a fellow musician would hear none of it. Some 25 years later, he still feels the sting of that disapproval.

“I was always thinking about pulling the bridge up, you know, and staying in meditation and living a simple life. I told Master [Billy] Higgins when he showed up at our place in Santa Barbara, before he left town in 2001, I told him I had been fasting for a couple of weeks, thinking and meditating, and I said, no one cares about this music, so I’m going to go back into the forest. He looked at me and said, ‘Fuck them. We care.’ Then we recorded *Which Way Is East* [ECM, 2004]. Master Higgins gave me such a strong rebuke that I renewed and reupped my dedication, because these masters who come before me, they bring this wisdom of integration of life. It’s not for me to decide when it’s time to pull up the bridge.”

Higgins and Lloyd first grew tight in the mid-’50s, when the two of them fell under the

spell of another master Lloyd often mentions.

“Master Higgins told me that one day he and Don Cherry were playing stickball out in the streets in Watts, and they heard this sound from far away and they dropped their procedure and began to run to it. They were musicians by then, but still kids, running to this music store, and it was Ornette [Coleman] trying out a reed!

“Ornette and I became very great friends. When I first got to L.A. in ’56, I was going to USC, and I saw a sign about a Sunday afternoon jam session in the window of a club called the Stadium Club on Vermont Avenue. And so I go, and you know I’m prepared. I was an 18-year-old kid from Memphis. I didn’t know anyone. They wouldn’t let me play right away, and I had to wait all day. But there was this eccentric guy with a homemade outfit and suspenders. I’m observing all of this. The song they were playing was “What Is This Thing Called Love,” but he didn’t play the song. He didn’t entertain the changes. He just played the etymology of love, and then they invited him *off* the bandstand.

“At the end of the evening, they finally let me play and it was acceptable. [laughs] I was playing alto at the time. Ornette came up to me afterwards and said, ‘You know you can really play the saxophone, but that doesn’t have much to do with music.’ It wasn’t harsh, it was just like he was saying it as it was. He was eight years my senior. Anyway, long story short, he won me over. We began to become friends and go back and forth to each other’s houses and have conversations about the music. There are many other guys I met in L.A., of course. Don and Billy and others. Ornette had a very beautiful thought. He’d say, if you can have a group of people that believe in an ideal, then you can go forward in the world and nothing can stop you — believers, yeah.”

Lloyd loves to speak of the legends in his personal pantheon. His latest album features tributes to three favorites: Billie Holiday, Thelonious Monk and his old classmate, trumpeter Booker Little. As part of the discussion, he selected three tracks to play: Little’s “Moods In Free Time,” Monk’s “I Surrender, Dear” and Holiday’s “I’ll Be Seeing You.” He explains his last selection as a token of an early infatuation. “I heard Lady Day on the radio when I was 8 or 9 and fell in love with her, and I had this naïve notion that I wanted to marry her and take care of her and give her the long, winding driveway. I couldn’t reach the clutch pedal yet. Big dreams like that, but I didn’t get to New York in time.”

Another question comes up: After the three trio albums, and this current quartet album, what’s next — what haven’t you done yet? “Oh, man, there’s so much to do,” Lloyd says wistfully and pauses. What’s on the top of the list?

“Geri Allen and I are having this conversation. Do you know Geri Allen? [to the audience]

Lloyd back in his *Forest Flower* days.

Anyone know her? She's unsung — definitely not sung enough. The album *Jumping The Creek* [ECM, 2005], that's a real special one that I did with her. You should check it out if you don't know it. I'm trying to make an homage to her, so I'm listening to my [recorded] archives, and God bless Dorothy because she's also a sound technician and captures all the concerts we do.

"Geri first came to me one time when I was playing in New York at the Knitting Factory and got in my face and said, 'I need to play with you.' It was so darn sincere and deep, you know. I said, 'Well, OK. Welcome.' So we began to play together in a quartet with Eric Harland and different bass players. I remember I'd be here onstage and she'd be over there right into Eric's zone, and they would be in communion. We couldn't see each other, so I said, Geri, when you play you look at the rhythm section so intensely. How do you communicate with me? She said, Charles — it's all sonic. [laughs] I love her, you know. I didn't do enough recording with her. That's what's on my plate right now."

A Boston DJ in attendance asks: "You've talked about the beauty and profundity of music, but the music industry is not that. It's ugly and vicious sometimes. How have you navigated that through your 51 albums?"

"I'm a reluctant bride, so I don't navigate it well at all. As a young man, Booker [Little] pulled my coat and told me being in the music world was about character, and after Booker left, I did jump into the fast lane but I got run over by all those big Mack trucks and stuff. I didn't like the plantation mentality that they possessed in the music industry. That's why I went away at the end of the '60s. But now I don't focus on the harshness of the music business. I focus on the profundity of what we're doing because that's the real stuff. You can change the world with that. I haven't done it yet, but I'm still naïve enough to hold the dream. You said I've got over 50 records — I had no idea of that. Thank you, sir."

Another question, from a festivalgoer visiting from Santa Cruz: "Can you speak about your connection with Bill Frisell and Lucinda

Williams, and recording "Angel" with her, a Jimi Hendrix song?"

"I can. Bill Frisell and Greg Leisz introduced me to Lucinda. But before that, Allison, our [Santa Barbara] neighbor, played her *Car Wheels On A Gravel Road* [Mercury, 1998] record for me, and it knocked me out. So profound and beautiful. Then I met Lucinda at one of my concerts and we were playing "Masters Of War," and that kind of blew her away. She and I are both Southern, so we met in that place.

"We were in the studio recording, and there was no discussion about any financial thing involved, which I liked. She had some songs she wanted to sing on the album for Blue Note, and Don Was was producing. He's a great sage and storyteller. He says he heard us in Detroit in the '60s when he was a young teenager, and was touched by it. He says he asked Keith Jarrett, how much do you practice? Keith told him, 'I don't practice.' We didn't! We practiced on the bandstand every night for years.

"But I want to tell you about 'Angel.' So we had finished the sessions and everybody had gone home. It was just Bill and me and Don in the booth, and Lucinda kept saying [she] wanted to sing 'Angel.' So Don put up one microphone and we all stood around that one mic and just all played into it — one take. If you ever get to hear it, it's something."

Lloyd has to get to the WWOZ Jazz Tent to do a line check and then perform. But he has a need to tell one more story.

"When I was a little boy, I told my mom I wanted to play music. She told me, 'I don't care what you be, just be the best at it that you can be.' We had a large house in Memphis and some famous people stayed with us — like Duke [Ellington]. So she said to Duke, my son wants to be a musician. He said, no, have him be a doctor, lawyer, Indian chief. This life is too hard. He didn't know I was already bitten by the cobra. Years later he heard me in France with Keith and Jack and Cecil. He said, 'Well, if he keeps stirring that soup, he's going to have something!' [laughs] Not knowing I was a little kid, he tried to dissuade, you know.

"Here's what's going on with me. I'm not trying to be mysterious about it. My mother wasn't home when I was a little kid, and I would get real lonely. That's what you're hearing up there. I'm shy of folks, and I can be reluctant. Fortunately, Dorothy came and saved my life." He then asks pointedly — "Are you going to play the Lady Day?" — and turns to the audience. "Thank you for coming. Please listen to this song."

And that voice, another that touches hearts, generation after generation, begins to sing: "I'll be seeing you/In all the old familiar places/That this heart of mine embraces/All day through ..."

DB

HALL
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- OF THE -
YEAR

TENOR
SAXOPHONIST
- OF THE -
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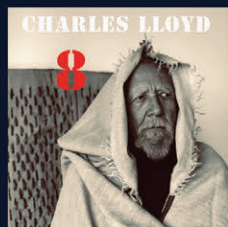
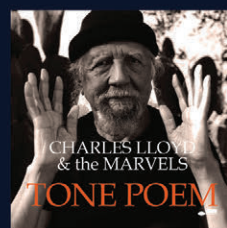
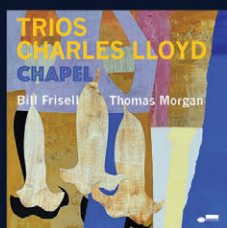
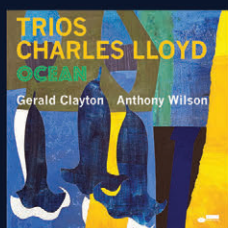
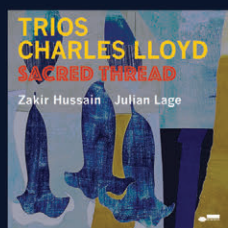
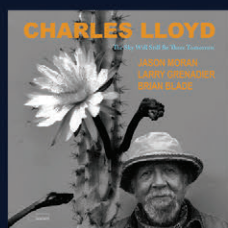


BLUE NOTE RECORDS CONGRATULATES

CHARLES LLOYD

ON THE LEGEND'S HISTORIC WINS IN
THE 72ND ANNUAL DOWNBEAT CRITICS POLL!

CHARLES LLOYD ON BLUE NOTE:





"What happens when we put special people with other special people?" asks Immanuel Wilkins, who seeks to cross-pollinate the arts.

THINKING BIG WITH *Immanuel Wilkins*

By Bill Milkowski Photo by Jimmy and Deana Katz

After bursting onto the scene with his acclaimed 2020 debut, *Omega*, Immanuel Wilkins announced his arrival as a talent deserving wider recognition.

Hitting the DownBeat Critics Poll trifecta last year with wins in the Alto Saxophonist of the Year, Rising Star Group of the Year and Rising Star Composer of the Year categories in the wake of his 2022 outing, *The 7th Hand*, only upped the ante on Wilkins' prospects. Now with wins in the Jazz Group and Alto Saxophone categories in this year's Critics Poll, Wilkins has firmly established himself as a prominent figure in jazz.

In this recent interview with DownBeat,

Wilkins chatted about his upcoming, and provocative, Blue Note release, *Blues Blood*, which examines 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 elicit confessions. Relying on actual testimony during the trial from 19-year-old Daryl Hamm, one of the accused, *Blues Blood* is also Wilkins' first vocal project. The release features guest appearances by Cécile McLorin Salvant, singer-songwriter-lyricist

Alyssa McDoom (aka June McDoom), singers Yaw Agyeman and Ganavya Doraiswamy and guitarist Marvin Sewell, all of whom augment Wilkins' working quartet with pianist Micah Thomas, bassist Rick Rosato and drummer Kweku Sumbry.

Bill Milkowski: "Blues Blood" is probably the one track on the new album that could have fit on either *Omega* or *The 7th Hand*. The rest of the tunes on *Blues Blood* have that quality of finding a more peaceful, meditative space through ostinatos and vamps, but this tune is just killing right out of the gate.

Immanuel Wilkins: That was the roundup tune. That one was the chance for all of us to get some playing in with the quartet and also feature the singers and Marvin in a way that felt like vignettes.

It's also meant to be played at the end, just because of the fact that it's all-inclusive. There are moments for Genavya, moments for Yaw, moments for Alyssa, moments for Marvin, Micah and me. So it just it feels like a collection of small vignettes. And, yeah, it's probably the most intense tune of the album. It's also the only track that doesn't have lyrics on it. On that tune I was thinking about Genavya and Yaw as improvisers, really as other instruments. It was just a way to feature everybody in a way that still felt organic and natural, but also we were able to really stretch out and play.

Milkowski: The presence of singer Ganavya also lends a kind of world music appeal to this project.

Wilkins: For sure, Ganavya is amazing. She sings in Tamil, which is a South Indian language. And I thought that Ganavya and Yaw, the male singer, and our drummer Kweku, who also plays djembe in the West African Farina Kan Percussion Ensemble, all bring the factor of improvising using a past tradition. Kweku and Yao come from the Ghanaian tradition and Ganavya comes from the South Indian tradition.

And so, when tasked with the idea of improvising within a vamp or a certain world, they are calling upon past traditions that date back thousands of years. So on the piece "Motion" from *Blues Blood*, I was just thinking about how the body kind of holds that memory in their improvisations.

Milkowski: I enjoyed those four brief interludes on *Blues Blood*, especially the West African drums on "Air" and the backwards spoken word stuff on "Assembly."

Wilkins: Kweku recorded "Air" in Ghana with a lot of West African talking drum players at a ceremony. And he got permission from them to use it for this record. And then "Assembly" ... there was a lot of post-production on that.

Meshell Ndegeocello [the album's producer] was pretty instrumental in encouraging me to experiment with stuff that I would normally just do in my house on my computer and the world would never hear. I often play with soundscapes at home and do little 30-second to minute-long interludes ... just little things that require a lot of post-production. And so she was like, "Yeah, just make a bunch of those." And then eventually she said, "OK, you have enough. Now pick which ones you love." And so, it was a way for me to manipulate the already existing material into a new space, and just find new ways of moving some of the themes around. So I was really playing like a puzzle there and seeing if I can juxtapose different things against other things.

Milkowski: The collage of voices on "Your Memory" triggers memories of Steve Reich's groundbreaking electronic music piece, "Come Over," which loops a brief fragment of testimony from Daniel Hamm and then treats it electronically with phasing, echo and other devices.

Wilkins: I was definitely drawing on that. Also, I feel like when you collage all of those voices together, it actually does feel like memory. It feels like how your mind kind of drifts from one thing to the next. The way that I found out about the whole Harlem Six incident

was via two people: Glenn Ligon, who is a visual artist, and Steve Reich. Glenn has a visual art piece called "Blues Blood Bruise," which consists of just three words put next to each other. And it was based off of the Reich recording. In working with an archivist on this record, I tried to look into the archives of Daniel Hamm to see if we could find a full recording of his testimony, but I wasn't able to find any conclusive info. There's no real reference for the full audio recording of Daniel Hamm talking. The only thing that exists is that brief fragment that Steve Reich used for "Come Over."

Milkowski: Meanwhile, you've already built an impressive body of very thoughtful, very substantial work at the age of 26 with these three Blue Note albums.

Wilkins: Thank you. But for me, I want to look back on my life when I'm 80 years old and know that I knew other people who were making things at the time that I was making things, whether that's artists or cooks or fashion designers or filmmakers. I want to look back and say I knew the other people who were being just as creative as me and my colleagues were in other avenues. I think of Ornette's obsession with Jackson Pollock and Miles Davis knowing Pablo Picasso and even Bird visiting Stravinsky at his home. It's important that writers know musicians and musicians know artists and art-

ists know filmmakers and filmmakers know chefs; that we really cross-pollinate. There's a lot of power in the collective.

A part of me is always thinking, "What would happen if we got a lot of cooks in the kitchen?" so to speak. What would happen if I get one of my favorite photographers, one of my favorite filmmakers and one of my favorite fashion designers in the room together? What do we talk about? What happens when I get my favorite vocalist and my favorite chef and my band together to make something together. You know, what happens when we put special people with other special people.

Milkowski: There you go, thinking on that big canvas again. You know where that's going to lead you? To the Metropolitan Opera. Ask Terence Blanchard.

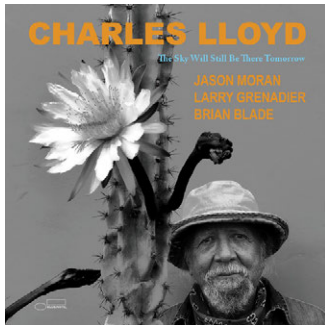
Wilkins: Well, yeah, you're right. And it's funny because I have been obsessed lately with Gesamtkunstwerk, Wagner's term for works that cover the whole thing. [Wagner's *Ring* cycle is considered the epitome of Gesamtkunstwerk, combining musical, visual and dramatic art into an all-embracing theatrical work]. I like that idea where the costume design is great, the art direction is great, the choreography is great, the singers are amazing. Firing on all cylinders like that is something that I think is important.

DB

KORG

Congratulations to long-time KORG
artist **Herbie Hancock** on being named
Keyboardist of the Year.





1. CHARLES LLOYD

The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow (Blue Note)

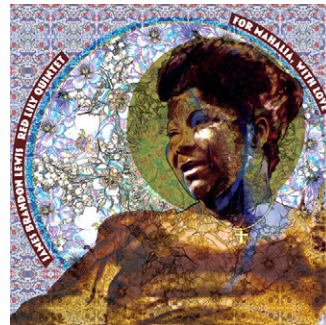
The master's beautiful double album — featuring pianist Jason Moran, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Brian Blade — serves as a soothing balm for challenging times.



2. KRIS DAVIS DIATOM RIBBONS

Live At The Village Vanguard (Pyroclastic)

The pianist and her amazing band deliver an instant classic melding her shape-shifting musical sensibility, live at one of the music's longest-standing jazz haunts.



3. JAMES BRANDON LEWIS RED LILY QUINTET

For Mahalia, With Love (Tao Forms)

Another fantastic turn from the Quintet, this time leaning toward the gospel side in honor of one of the genre's most wonderful voices.



4. JAIMIE BRANCH (TIE)

Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die (world war) (International Anthem)

The final album from Branch, who passed away from an accidental overdose. An ode to being free from genre casting.



4. VIJAY IYER TRIO (TIE)

Compassion (ECM)

The composer and pianist returns to his trio with Linda May Han Oh and Tyshawn Sorey for another set of thoughtful, beautifully performed music.



6. CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE'S NEW JAWN

Prime (Mack Avenue)

Packed with attitude, power and groove, Christian McBride and New Jawn is certainly in its prime — and you gotta love those moments of "out" the band delivers.



7. DARCY JAMES ARGUE

Dynamic Maximum Tension (Nonesuch)

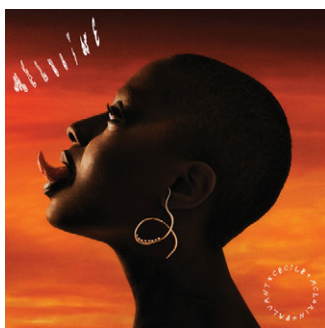
The composer and bandleader serves as one of the driving forces behind new generations of ambitious large ensemble instrumental music. *Dynamic Maximum Tension* serves as proof.



8. MARY HALVORSON (TIE)

Cloudward (Nonesuch)

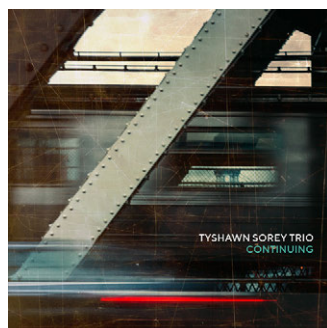
Halvorson's award-winning sextet, Amaryllis, returns with quirky cool grace following the group's 2022 Critics Poll-winning albums *Amaryllis* and *Belladonna*.



8. CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT (TIE)

Melusine (Nonesuch)

The massively creative vocalist delivers a tour de force in several languages recounting the legend of Mélusine, a woman cursed to turn into a snake each Saturday night.



10. TYSHAWN SOREY TRIO

Continuing (Pi)

Along with pianist Aaron Diehl and bassist Matt Brewer, the drummer/composer delivers a master class in slow-down, low-down groove and a new approach to playing standards.

11. JOHN SCOFIELD, *Uncle John's Band* (ECM)

12. KAHIL EL'ZABAR'S ETHNIC HERITAGE ENSEMBLE, *Open Me, A Higher Consciousness Of Sound And Spirit* (Spiritmuse)

13. AMBROSE AKIMUSIRE, *Owl Song* (Nonesuch)

14. SULLIVAN FORTNER, *Solo Game* (Artwork)

15. ARTEMIS, *In Real Time* (Blue Note)

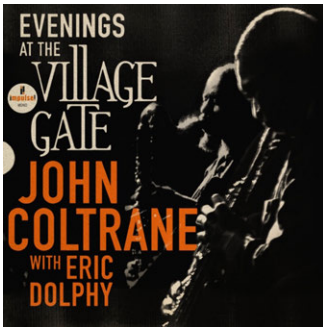
16. JOSHUA REDMAN (TIE), *where are we* (Blue Note)

16. MARK TURNER QUARTET (TIE), *Live At The Village Vanguard* (Giant Step Arts)

18. BILLY CHILDS (TIE), *The Winds Of Change* (Mack Avenue)

18. JOEL ROSS (TIE), *Nucleus* (Blue Note)

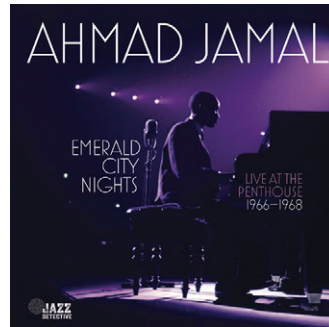
18. BRANDEE YOUNGER (TIE), *Brand New Life* (Impulse)



1. JOHN COLTRANE/ERIC DOLPHY

Evenings At The Village Gate (Impulse!)

Two avant-garde icons remind us that they were even more powerful and combustible, if that's even possible, when they came together. This live outing digs in and delivers the goods.



2. AHMAD JAMAL

Emerald City Nights: Live At The Penthouse 1966-1968 (Jazz Detective/Elemental)

This two-LP set beautifully completes a trilogy of never-before-released live recordings recorded in the 1960s at The Penthouse in Seattle, Washington.



3. GERI ALLEN/KURT ROSENWINKEL

A Lovesome Thing (Motéma/Heartcore)

Kurt Rosenwinkel and the late Geri Allen played together just three times before she passed. This recording from a concert in Paris captures their amazing rapport.



4. CHARLES MINGUS

Changes: The Complete 1970s Atlantic Recordings (Rhino)

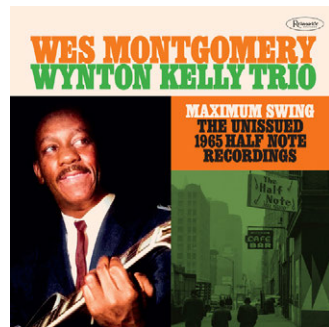
This set collects all seven records Mingus recorded for Atlantic in the last phase of his career and includes previously unreleased outtakes.



5. DON BYAS

Sessions 1944-1946 (Mosaic)

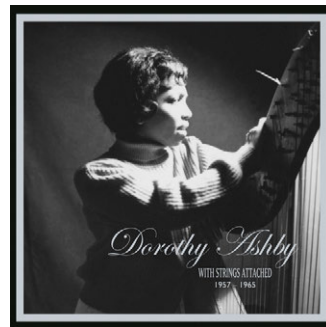
This Mosaic boxed set aims to put Byas in his rightful place in the pantheon of great jazz tenor saxophonists and affirms his status as one of the forefathers of bebop.



6. WES MONTGOMERY-WYNTON KELLY TRIO

Maximum Swing: The Unissued 1965 Half Note Recordings (Resonance)

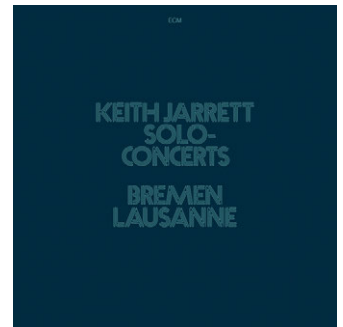
This historic recording is worth hearing just for the bassists who joined the two on stage.



7. DOROTHY ASHBY

With Strings Attached (New Land)

Here's a loving tribute to harpist Dorothy Ashby containing six studio albums recorded between 1957 and 1965 with liner notes that include a love letter from modern harpist Brandee Younger.



8. KEITH JARRETT

Solo-Concerts: Bremen Lausanne (ECM)

Originally released in 1973, ECM reissued this live solo record, considered one of many Jarrett classics. In 1974, it was the DownBeat Critics' pick as album of the year and continues to thrill.



9. CHARLIE PARKER, DIZZY GILLESPIE, BUD POWELL, CHARLES MINGUS, MAX ROACH

Hot House: The Complete Jazz At Massey Hall Recordings (Craft)

Five legends on one stage for one of the all-time great live jazz experiences.



10. BILL EVANS

Tales: Live In Copenhagen (1964) (Elemental)

This never-before-released live recording features piano icon Evans in a classic trio format with Chuck Israels on bass and Larry Bunker on drums.

11. ROY HARGROVE, *The Love Suite: In Mahogany* (Blue Engine)

12. CHICK COREA ELEKTRIC BAND, *The Complete Studio Recordings 1986-1991* (Candid)

13. LES MCCANN, *Never A Dull Moment: Live From Coast To Coast 1966-1967* (Resonance)

13. MAL WALDRON, *The Reminiscent Suite* (BBE)

15. CAL TRADER, *Catch The Groove—Live At The Penthouse 1963-1967* (Jazz Detective/Elemental)

16. JONI MITCHELL, *Archives—Volume 3: The Asylum Years (1972-1975)*

16. ART PEPPER, *Complete Maiden Voyage Recordings* (Omnivore)

16. WES MONTGOMERY, *The Complete Full House Recordings* (Craft)

19. BRIAN AUGER'S OBLIVION EXPRESS, *Complete Oblivion* (Soul Bank)

20. JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE, *Hollywood Bowl August 18, 1967* (Sony Legacy)



Hancock has a new project on the horizon but says he will not put it out until he's ready.



Herbie Hancock

ON TOP WHERE HE BELONGS

By Gary Fukushima Photo by Mars Breslow

On April 12 of this year, Herbie Hancock turned 84. How many people do you know in their 80s who are still working full time — and a lot more effectively than the candidates in this year's U.S. presidential election?

Hancock, though not the President of the United States, is certainly no ordinary octogenarian. He celebrated his recent birthday in Las Vegas. Perhaps he got a little gambling in, but Hancock was actually performing as part of an 18-show American tour, before flying halfway around the world to Tangier, Morocco, to fulfill his duties as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and concert host of the 13th International Jazz Day, serving in his role as the titular head of the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz.

Back home in Los Angeles, Hancock likes to take it a bit more easy, playing semi-regularly at his favorite local haunts, the Hollywood Bowl and Walt Disney Concert Hall. He returns to the Bowl in August for a 50th anniversary reunion of his Headhunters band with Bennie Maupin, Harvey Mason and Bill Summers. Marcus Miller sits in with the group, playing bass in place of the late Paul Jackson.

Hancock remains as active and vital as he has ever been to the current zeitgeist of jazz.

"I am honored to be selected as the 2024

DownBeat Critics Poll jazz keyboard winner," said Hancock, in a statement to DownBeat. "I am truly grateful for all the appreciation and support that the fans, critics and DownBeat have shown me over the years."

It's the fourth win in five years for Hancock in that category, but it's only his ninth honor for keyboards in the 61 years since his name first appeared in the 1963 Critics Poll in the subcategory of "Talent Deserving Wider Recognition," the precursor to DB's "Rising Star" categories. By 1966, he had moved from TDWR to "Established Talent," placing in the middle of the pack along with Jaki Byard, Erroll Garner and Andrew Hill, yet far behind Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans and Earl Hines, who won the piano category by a landslide.

Two years later, Hancock was all alone at the top of the Critics Poll for piano, where he would stay for the next three years. But then, he followed his mentor Miles Davis into the unpredictable currents of fusion, drifting into a rip tide that pulled Hancock off the DownBeat charts, vanishing completely à la Atlantis from the

Critics Poll in 1972 and 1973. He would resurface in 1974 within the brand-new categories of synthesizer and electric piano.

DownBeat's publisher at the time, Chuck Suber, curtly announced in his regular column: "Herbie Hancock has turned to syn(thesizer) and has been banned from piano." And even there, he found himself in fifth place, behind winner Jan Hammer, Paul Bley (what?), Sun Ra and Joe Zawinul.

All that seems absurd considering that just a year prior, Hancock made an album that would cement his status as one of the greatest jazz keyboardists of all time. *Head Hunters* (Columbia, 1963) sent shockwaves throughout the jazz world that reverberate to this day. Hancock had already incorporated electronic keyboard into his own albums, starting with *Fat Albert Rotunda* (Warner Bros./Seven Arts, 1969), from which came Hancock's beloved tune "Tell Me A Bedtime Story." He followed with three profound, experimental albums with his Mwandishi sextet. But *Head Hunters* demonstrated that jazz could indeed morph into new forms yet still retain that elusive essence unique to jazz. He proved that serious jazz could be unmitigated fun, and undeniably funky.

The general public went nuts for it, making *Head Hunters* the first jazz album to go platinum. But jazz-loving fans also embraced Hancock's hot new thing, voting him the top synthesizer player in the 1974 Readers Poll. The critics, however, were not as impressed, elevating Joe Zawinul or Corea over Hancock in every subsequent Critics Poll for a very long time. Granted, Hancock was always hovering near the top, but never breaking through until — incomprehensibly — 1995, more than two decades after the release of *Head Hunters*.

It wasn't for lack of new material. Take, for instance, 1974's *Thrust* (Columbia), which bolstered the trajectory of its predecessor, loading two more tunes into the Herbie canon: "Actual Proof" and "Butterfly." That same year also saw the Japanese release of *Dedication* (CBS/Sony), a solo album Hancock recorded while on tour in Japan, showcasing his utter mastery over both acoustic piano and electronic sound creation.

Hancock moved further into '70s funk with *Man-Child* (Columbia, 1975), an album that could have been produced by Stevie Wonder (who makes a cameo on harmonica). *Secrets* (Columbia, 1976) sported a more mellow, groovy vibe, and a reggae-influenced version of a re-spelled "Cantelopes Island." For *Sunlight* (Columbia, 1977), Hancock added another instrument to his arsenal: a Sennheiser VSM-201 vocoder, entertaining the idea of Hancock as jazz musician-turned-singing star in the mold of George Benson or, before him, Nat Cole.

The late '70s into the early '80s saw Hancock strut into the disco craze with four more albums for Columbia: *Feets*, *Don't Fail Me Now*

(1979), *Monster* (1980), *Mr. Hands* (1980) and *Magic Windows* (1981). Also in 1981, he would refresh his acoustic jazz roots, recording a trio record with his former Miles Davis bandmates Ron Carter and Tony Williams, adding to a second session a promising young trumpeter named Wynton Marsalis, who came to view Hancock's extended foray into popular music as a threat to the survival of jazz. But that is another story.

Hancock forged on with *Lite Me Up* (Columbia, 1982), an entertaining blend of Earth Wind & Fire, Steely Dan and early Michael Jackson. And then, Hancock would electrify the music world again with the release of *Future Shock* (Columbia, 1983) and the hit single from that album, "Rockit," through which the underground music of hip-hop was mainlined to the MTV crowd, earning Hancock a Grammy for Best R&B Instrumental Performance.

Not that the jazz critics cared. *Head Hunters*, of course, was a critical as well as commercial hit. Nat Freedland, in reviewing the album for Billboard, wrote: "Hancock is specifically trying to take his formidable jazz keyboard techniques into music that combines the appeal of soul at its funkier and the flights of free-form playing." And Chuck Mitchell in DownBeat gave the album five stars, writing: "Herbie Hancock has managed to bring his sound around to a more fundamental, easily communicable form without making compromises in the areas of energy, intensity and musical variety. He has both the skills and the creative vision to escape the trap of repetition that the deceptively simple approach will now present to him."

But Hancock's continued courting of *Soul Train* danceaholics had the prolonged effect of alienating more than a few jazz aficionados, evidenced by the fact that all or most of these later albums were either largely ignored or panned outright by jazz writers. In *The Rolling Stone Jazz Record Guide*, author John Swenson asserts: "*Feets*, *Lite*, *Magic* and *Monster* have virtually no interest from a jazz perspective, overlaid as they are with vocoders and other gimmickry." This prevailing attitude might explain Hancock's dry spell of Critics Poll wins during this era.

A dozen years after *Future Shock*, during which Hancock was relatively quiet on the recording front, making only three albums during that span (the last three he would do for Columbia), he released *Dis Is da Drum* (Mercury, 1994), another crossover album that reflected the acid-jazz/electronic music scene of the '90s. *Drum* received less than stellar marks; Rolling Stone said of the album, "Where Hancock was once a master of the danceable pulse, his latest rhythms feel bloodless."

Yet Hancock at this point had rehabilitated his jazz career, having scored and acted in the film *Round Midnight* (winning an Oscar in 1987 for Best Original Score), recorded and toured with Ron Carter, Tony Williams and Wayne Shorter along with Wallace Roney in a tribute to Miles Davis, who died in 1991, and started a new straight-ahead band, Parallel Realities, that featured Jack DeJohnette, Dave Holland and Pat Metheny. All that seemed to convince enough writers to finally award Hancock that very first Critics Poll win for keyboards in 1995.

The second half of the '90s would ensconce Hancock in his rightful role as one of the most important jazz minds to have lived. His run of albums for Verve: *The New Standard* (1996), *1 + 1* (1997) and *Gershwin's World* (1998) were commercial and critical successes, and the critics responded with another poll win for Hancock in 1996 for keyboards and an overdue return to the piano category in 1997. In 1999, they voted *Gershwin's World* Album of the Year, and they crowned Hancock as the Critics Poll Artist of the Year.

In 2005, DownBeat's readers voted Hancock into the Hall of Fame, and three years later, he was again voted Artist of the Year in the 2008 Critics Poll, bookending the Grammys he received that same year, as *River: The Joni Letters* (Verve, 2007) won for Best Contemporary Jazz Album and also Album of the Year, in a shocking upset over Kanye West, Amy Winehouse, Vince Gill and Foo Fighters. It took nearly half a century, but finally the critics and the audiences were all on the same page in admiration of their chief Headhunter.

It's a perch from which he has yet to climb down. Despite not having made an album in nearly 15 years, Hancock has been atop the Critics Poll for keyboards five more times during that span, and he has been the Readers Poll favorite for nearly every one of those years.

There is a new project in the works for Hancock, as he has been collaborating with a new generation of crossover jazz artists: Terrace Martin, Flying Lotus, Kamasi Washington and Thundercat, with potential appearances by hip-hop artists Kendrick Lamar, Common and Snoop Dog. One could speculate that their successes at blending jazz with funk, pop and hip-hop are built on the shoulders of their prime collaborator, who has spent his lifetime trying to do just that. Whatever they ultimately produce together will be the full-circling of that legacy.

But Hancock has indicated he's in no rush to put anything out before it is ready. So, as we await the next chapter in his storied career, Herbie Hancock will do what most 80-somethings do all the time: whatever the hell he wants. Fans and critics alike know he's earned it.

DB

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR ARTISTS



**JAMES BRANDON
LEWIS**



NICOLE MITCHELL



MYRA MELFORD



**LINDA MAY
HAN OH**

We're proud to have served these artists, as well as several others who placed in the 72nd Annual DownBeat Critics Poll including **William Parker, Tyshawn Sorey, Dave Douglas, Ben Goldberg, Roxana Amed, Jeff Lederer, Remy LeBoeuf, RogueArt, Riley Mulherkar, Aaron Parks, Greenleaf Music, Ryan Keberle, Adam O'Farrill, Fabian Almazan, Marta Sanchez, Chet Doxas, Michael Dease, JoVia Armstrong, Mike McGinnis, Todd Sickafoose, Kevin Sun, Yuhan Su, and many more.**

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"I walked through the world almost with blinders on to do what I did," said Bloom. "I had to, to play the music I loved with the people I wanted to play it with. Nothing would stop me."

Jane Ira Bloom

SUPERPOWER AT WORK

By Ted Panken Photo by Ken Hunt

When DownBeat last profiled Jane Ira Bloom in August 2017, the soprano saxophonist was at the start of her ongoing eight-year run atop the Critics Poll.

Bloom was then preparing to release her ambitious 17th album, the double-CD *Wild Lines: Improvising Emily Dickinson* (on Outline, her own label since 1978), with bassist Mark Helias and drummer Bobby Previte, who'd also performed on Bloom's earlier release *Early Americans*.

"In the studio, I realized how the music was freeing up — even with all the compositional cues," Bloom told DownBeat's James Hale at the time. "It's hard to record with complete spontaneity, but that's something I hope to become more comfortable with and share through the recorded medium."

Bloom has fulfilled that aspiration on albums No. 18 through No. 21, all consisting of scratch-improvised, remote post-COVID encounters with old friends — separate duo sessions with Helias, drummer Allison Miller and kotoist Miya Masaoka, captured in high-definition surround sound, on *Picturing The Invisible* (Outline); in duo with Miller on *Tues Days* (Outline); in duo with Helias on *See Our Way* (Outline); and in trio with Helias and Previte

on 2.3.23 (Radio Legs/Technocracy).

"This was not a conscious choice," Bloom explains. "We were desperate to play. It was almost euphoric when we started, creating music in the moment with bits of compositional guides, slightly different from my other recordings, on which we jump off from a more formal compositional base. We found ways to reduce the latency to play together online."

"Jane's compositions are quite detailed," said Helias, who first met Bloom at Yale University during the mid-1970s, a period when both musicians were participants in a thriving New Haven scene. "She's always pushing the envelope, coming up with gnarly stuff."

"When the pandemic hit, it didn't work to play written music together online, so we started improvising. It's been wonderful. She's got great ears, great pitch, and is super-empathic."

Helias engineered the Bloom-Miller duos on *Tues Days*, which took shape after the New School, where both are faculty, brought them together for a Zoom duo.

"We really connected, and the audience felt it, too," said Miller. "It was cathartic. So we decided to get together every Tuesday."

"Jane's free improvisation always sounds like melody, embracing dynamics and space even when she's playing densely," Helias continued. "A lot of emotion comes through. She has a very strong rhythm that harkens to African music, but it can sway like the branches of a willow tree. It gives the drummer a sense of freedom — you're responsible for making the music feel danceable, and you can play with the air and space and respond to her."

Bloom said: "I spent years playing with great pianists, like Fred Hersch, and learned how to create and respond to harmonic motion in the moment. If that's inside your heart, it's also part of your spontaneous music-making. With an artist like Mark, who can hear it right away, wonderful things can emerge. Melodic motion and flow are important to me. Phrasing. Not only sound, but melodic choice. A friend called it pearl-stringing, putting notes together, because each one is important."

Known for incorporating motion and Doppler effects into her flow and then augmenting it with live electronics since cusp-of-the-'90s recordings *Modern Love*, *Slalom* and *Art And Aviation*, Bloom also maneuvers her embouchure to sound sometimes like a cello, sometimes like a shehnai or another double reed, sometimes like Toots Thielemans on harmonica.

"I used to listen to Toots endlessly," Bloom said. "I've invested a lot of energy into creating a sound out of this instrument that I like." She cited a litany of influences — various world musics; singers ranging from Laura Nyro to Abbey Lincoln to Frank Sinatra; trumpeters Miles Davis, Booker Little and Kenny Wheeler, whose "sense of struggle" imbues her soprano voice.

Bloom, now 69, has embodied that sense of struggle throughout her half-century as an upper-echelon creative musician.

"Jane's incredible superpower, particularly as a woman in this male-dominated arena, is that she always refused to just do the go-along," said Previte, a bandstand partner since the early 1990s. "She always tested herself, tried to move forward and rejected the well-worn path. She always was willing to do things people might catch up to a few years later. That she's won these polls testifies to her indomitable will."

"Let's look at the whole picture," Bloom said, matter-of-factly assessing her worth. "Not just a woman, but a woman playing original music on the soprano saxophone, not alto or tenor. I walked through the world almost with blinders on to do what I did. I had to, to play the music I loved with the people I wanted to play it with. Nothing would stop me."

DB



Larry Goldings

LEARNING TO BREATHE

By Allen Morrison Photo by Mark Sheldon

A funny thing happened to Larry Goldings on his way to pursuing a career as a jazz pianist: He became a jazz organ master.

He has “an arranging/orchestrational talent that is all his own,” according to Brad Mehldau, who also cites his “multidimensional sense of harmony.” Producer Larry Klein cites his humor, lyricism and “exceptional intuition.” Guitar icon John Scofield thinks Goldings is “the greatest composer, and I’m picky! I love playing with him.”

Goldings, 55, has played Hammond B-3 organ in the Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart trio for the last 30 years with his partners guitarist Peter Bernstein and drummer Bill Stewart. As their quirky groove-making and expansive repertoire has attracted a growing legion of international fans, especially in the U.S. and Europe, Goldings has often finished in the top three in the organ category of both the DownBeat Critics and Readers polls. But this is his first Critics Poll win. (For a full profile of Goldings, see “Larry Goldings: The Variety of Fun,” January 2024.)

The trio purveys a brand of hard-bop taken to the nth degree, bluesy but restlessly novel, hard-driving but subtle and intense, reaching

beyond the time-honored clichés of the genre.

Goldings has also been increasingly recognized as one of the most versatile (if underappreciated) pianists around, as well as an A-list sideman to pop icons like James Taylor, John Mayer and, recently, Steely Dan, after the untimely passing of longtime keyboardist Jim Beard — not to mention his frequent forays into jazz comedy as his alter egos Austrian musicologist “Hans Groiner” and “The Guy with the Gig.”

Goldings recently chatted about his first Critics Poll win.

“There are a lot of great players out there, so I was very flattered,” he said. “I’m lucky that I’m still in people’s minds, that I can pick and choose the projects I’m on and play with the greatest players. And, of course, I instantly thought about Joey DeFrancesco. It made me sad all over again to think about that loss. He was one of the greats.”

Goldings had known DeFrancesco for years and even played side-by-side with him occa-

sionally at festivals. He cited Joey’s deep knowledge of a particular style of organ playing, which he sums up as “the Jimmy Smith approach. But I also heard him play with John McLaughlin and other players, which made it apparent how sophisticated his ears were. He could play in multiple styles. He was kind enough to play me on his SiriusXM radio show — and wrote to me afterward to let me know.”

Goldings mused about their differences in style. “I think my interests may have been a little more out front and varied than Joey’s, who concentrated on a certain tradition and did it better than anybody. Whereas I’m coming at it from a bunch of different angles. ... With the trio, we might play something that’s completely free.

“I remember I was playing in Trio Beyond with Jack DeJohnette and John Scofield (circa 2004), and Jack said to me one day, ‘You know, Larry, you don’t always have to walk the bass. You can do something else.’ And I love this idea that just because I’m at the organ doesn’t mean I have to fall into the predictable traditional approach to the instrument. There was something very freeing about Jack saying that. ... Just listen and react, and find something different on the instrument. That’s kind of how I think more and more at the organ.”

One thing that distinguished Goldings’ development as an organ player was that he didn’t start on the Hammond. His love of synths led him to play various keyboards that had organ sounds.

“That’s how I developed as an organ player initially. Playing without pedals, not even worrying about it, but really concentrating on the musical quality and the feel on the left hand. That was an extension of my early obsession with Dave McKenna, because Dave was a great solo pianist, particularly. He played walking bass lines, and I just loved that. And that’s probably what led me into playing the organ, my interest in walking bass lines.”

He was gratified by the reaction to the G/B/S Trio’s recent European tour. “We don’t play the biggest venues — it’s more clubs than halls. But wherever we play it seems we have a strong audience, including more and more young adults in their 20s. Sometimes people come up to me and say, ‘We started our own organ trio because of you guys.’”

Has he ever thought about adding some piano tunes to the trio with Bernstein and Stewart? “It’s funny you ask, because we used to,” he said. “It’s been years since I put it in the rider to have a piano there, too. When we used to play (L.A.’s) Jazz Bakery, I used to go over to the piano and play a duet with Peter or a solo piece. But, on that note, I do have an L.A. piano trio with bassist Karl McComas-Reichl and drummer Christian Euman.”

A record of that trio is tentatively scheduled for release in fall 2025.

DB

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 ...
RIISING STAR ARTIST
OF THE YEAR
RIISING STAR COMPOSER
OF THE YEAR



"There's an urgency I feel inside that I have to get this work out now, regardless of how it's received," says Lewis.

James Brandon Lewis

OF URGENCY & MAXIMUM INTENTION

By Ammar Kalia Photo by Ben Pier

It has been just over a year since this writer last spoke to saxophonist and composer James Brandon Lewis for the cover feature in DownBeat's June 2023 issue.

He was celebrating a recent run of critically acclaimed releases, including 2021's *Jesup Wagon* (Tao Forms), which honored the life and work of African American polymath Dr. George Washington Carver, his 2023 boundary-pushing debut with cult label Anti-, *Eye Of I*, and two DownBeat Critics Poll wins for Rising Star Tenor Saxophone and Rising Star Group.

While he packed for an imminent flight to take him to the first stop of a nationwide tour, he recounted his restless search for creative expression and his journey to reach wider

recognition at the age of 40. "I'm constantly searching," he emphatically stated. "If there's nothing new under the sun, I'm not interested in that kind of sun." A year later, as he now joins a video call on a summer morning from a New Jersey coffee shop, it seems as if he has only just returned.

"It's been a busy year," he says with a smile while sipping from a takeout cup. "It feels a bit like I've been everywhere, just one thing after another." Busy seems an understatement when the past 12 months are put to paper. Lewis released three albums: a tribute

to Mahalia Jackson, *For Mahalia, With Love* (AUM Fidelity), with his Red Lily Quintet; a new record with his quartet, *Transfiguration* (Intakt), playing his improvisatory system of "molecular systematic music;" and a debut collaborative album with post-punk supergroup The Messthetics, *The Messthetics And James Brandon Lewis* (Impulse!). He has also been on tour throughout Europe and the U.S. with the quartet and The Messthetics, as well as finding time to squeeze in sideman sessions on projects led by everyone from trumpeter Dave Douglas to guitarist Ava Mendoza and drummer Ches Smith. To cap it all off, he has just topped the DownBeat 2024 Critics Poll for Rising Star Artist of the Year, joining the likes of previous winners Samara Joy and Melissa Aldana, as well as Rising Star Composer of the Year.

"All of this attention and acknowledgement is totally unexpected and it feels like it's all coming at once," he says. "I know there will be an end to it, but I'm enjoying the moment right now." Indeed, Lewis' current recognition feels both well-deserved and surprisingly sudden, coming in the wake of over a dozen album releases. His prolific creativity, he explains, has been ultimately driven over the past two decades by a need for self-expression, rather than external validation.

"There's an urgency I feel inside that I have to get this work out now, regardless of how it's received," he says. "I'm always learning and growing and that feeds the music — life and my art are all one, so the music is something I have to do."

Lewis' musical education began at an early age, singing along to the sermonic melodies at the Buffalo Church where his father was a pastor, before deciding to learn the clarinet at 9 and fine-tuning his ear by figuring out songs from his favorite Disney movies on the instrument. He later progressed to the saxophone and went on to study performance and composition at Howard University and CalArts, where he was mentored by elders including Charlie Haden and Wadada Leo Smith. "My time in Buffalo and at CalArts taught me about music as a holistic space of influences, without categories or hard boundaries," he says. "We had Grover Washington Jr., Rick James, Ani DiFranco — music was just music when I was growing up and I'm thankful for that, since it's hugely informed how I play now."

Since the independent release of his debut album *Moments* in 2010, Lewis has certainly embodied a heady range of influences and musical genres within the improvisatory scope of his saxophone playing. Where *Jesup Wagon* sees him playing incantatory, clear melodic passages — while backed by cornet, cello, the guembri (a Moroccan bass lute) and the mbira (a Zimbabwean thumb piano), *Eye Of I* is earthy and raw, seeing Lewis play the changes over a

genre-hopping set of compositions that span everything from Donny Hathaway's 1973 soul standard "Someday We'll All Be Free" to the distorted cacophony of the title track and the yearning tenderness of "Womb Water."

Meanwhile, *For Mahalia*, *With Love* ventriloquises the gospel pioneer's mighty voice through the clarion call of Lewis' horn, harking back to those childhood Sundays spent in church, and on *The Messthetics* and *James Brandon Lewis* he veers between punchy, punk-influenced rhythmic phrases and full-throated freakouts amid the trio's driving grooves.

"Each project is rooted in my own story — it's like my memoir as a picture painted in sound," Lewis explains. "In terms of the ways that I change my playing style, though, it's all about what the music requires of me. *Transfiguration*, for instance, has a set of guiding principles related to my comment on 12-tone music, which means there's four bars and each bar contains 12 different configurations of notes that never repeat until you get to the next sequence. With *The Messthetics*, I'm thinking about energy and the rawness of my sound, while *For Mahalia* was about studying and capturing her sound in dialogue with myself. Every project definitely requires a dif-

ferent mindset — it's almost like multiple musical personalities that are all unique in and of themselves."

As well as playing across these diverse projects, Lewis has spent recent years participating in a Ph.D. program at University of the Arts, where he is investigating his changing improvisational methods and the philosophy behind his music. Part autoethnography and part analysis of his discography, Lewis pulls up a section of his thesis to explain his guiding principles.

"I'm not interested in the singularity of my creative process, but I am interested in the natural process of living and how that informs creativity," he reads. "One definition of music that I like is that it's the intentional organization of sound. So how do my intentions and what I'm thinking about ultimately communicate themselves through my sound? How do I comment on the human condition through my instrument?"

While the narrative of his musical communication might change from record to record, Lewis' one constant is the strength of emotion that always sits behind his breath. From the gospel ecstasies of *For Mahalia* to the knotty solipsism of *Eye Of I* and the screaming power of *The Messthetics*, each note passing through Lewis' horn does so with intent. It is a focus that stems

from an early trauma, he explains. "I didn't release my first album until I was 25 because I wasn't sure I had anything to say before then or if anyone would listen," he says. "Then my aunt died, who was always the life of the party, and it made me realize that cliché of life being short. After her death, I had an urgency in my bones to speak my narrative, to live life with the maximum intention."

On the cusp of celebrating his 41st birthday, Lewis ultimately feels somehow at the start of his celebrated career and also a jazz elder. "Coltrane died at 40 and Charlie Parker at 34, but I still feel super young," he says. "I'm not trying to reverse time — I enjoy being the age I am and still investigating my instrument. It feels like I'm just now getting my foot in."

In typical Lewis fashion, he isn't resting on his laurels but already is busy with plenty more work to come, including a new trio record loosely inspired by the music of Don Cherry, another quartet album and a new project with the Red Lily Quintet. "I never thought I'd be on the cover of a magazine like *DownBeat* since it was always full of my heroes as a kid," he enthuses. "So I'm gonna enjoy and embrace this, but when it's over I'll go back to my cubby hole to create and get out of the way for the next person to come through."

DB



Photo: Clara Pereira

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The Sullivan Fortner Trio, from left, Fortner, Tyrone Allen and Kayvon Gordon

The Sullivan Fortner Trio COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION

By Suzanne Lorge Photo by Mark Sheldon

As a pianist, Sullivan Fortner is a master at shifting gears. He spent years as a key member of trumpeter Roy Hargrove's quintet. He and vocal phenom Cécile McLorin Salvant regularly perform in concert settings large and small, but most prominently as an incomparable duo.

And last year Fortner released the one-man tour de force *Solo Game* (Artwork) to acclaim. But this year our critics acknowledge his work as the leader of a new project, granting the title of Rising Star Jazz Group to the Sullivan Fortner Trio. In a phone chat with DownBeat, the bandleader reveals what makes his latest ensemble with bassist Tyrone Allen and drummer Kayvon Gordon so exceptional.

Fortner says the tighter format of the trio allows for greater freedom, both conceptually and improvisationally. With fewer elements to consider, the group's collective imagination is the only limit on its musical exploration.

"One of the obvious gains is that I get to control the melody and how it's played," he says. "But the cool thing about playing in a trio setting is there's less input, which leaves more space to create."

Fortner and his two collaborators have no trouble filling that space with "different, fun scenarios," as Fortner describes them. Fun, in this case, means foregoing the predictable, and admittedly, he tends to put Gordon and Allen through their paces on the bandstand.

"I'm very grueling because I always change things — but that leaves a lot of wiggle room for things to happen in a trio setting," he says.

Adding to the challenge, Fortner doesn't

allow any charts on these gigs — an approach to performing that might not work as well with a larger group or a singer (Salvant being an exception). Further, Fortner prefers to keep the sound as spontaneous as possible and will often use the group's sound check as a "mini rehearsal" for the set to come; sometimes he'll even introduce unplanned tunes during the set itself. (In these situations the sight lines are important, he says, so he always sets the band up "pretty close," affording Gordon and Allen a ready view of his left hand.)

"I teach everything to the trio by ear. I just say, 'This is the song — listen to it and let's figure out a groove that works on it.' That's it. And

then we just play it on the gig," he says.

Fortner's bandleading, demanding of precocity from his players, lends a raw, unpredictable sound to the group as it digs into what is essential in the music they're performing. Not surprisingly, he's necessarily careful in picking tunes for the trio, and while songbook standards might be on default for other highly improvisational groups, Fortner favors originals, looking to avoid tunes that are too familiar to the audience ("unless it's a ballad," he clarifies).

For these originals, Fortner finds ideas everywhere: operatic arias, classical song cycles, slow blues, driving funk, rousing gospel, all of the jazz sub-genres — even television jingles. None of his compositional choices are random, however; with this eclecticism he is making a point.

"The goal is to start to break the barriers of genre," he explains. "I'm trying to dispel all of these rules and say, 'Look at these songs as just songs and look at music as just music. Get your hands dirty with deconstructing things, with reconstructing things.' We definitely have a good time with it."

Fortner, too, brings a breadth of experience in leading other trios to this new ensemble: Most notably, his second album for Impulse!, *Moments Preserved*, was a three-man session featuring bassist Ameen Salem and drummer Jeremy Bean Clemons, and a version of the Sullivan Fortner Trio with drummer Peter Washington and bassist Marcus Gilmore played the esteemed Village Vanguard last year.

The current incarnation of Fortner's trio, however, is now in its most lasting configuration. Formed in 2021, the group quickly settled into gigging, most often around New York, and within a year they were playing the Newport Jazz Festival. Much of the credit for this rapid rise goes to Fortner's far reach as a consummate player, but he readily praises his bandmates for the trio's success.

"Kayvon and Tyrone stand out for quite a few things," he says. "One is their willingness to try and stretch. A lot of people become, over the years, a little bit too precious with music, and it's refreshing to be around younger musicians who are willing to experiment while still having an understanding of its roots."

Fortner met Gordon first, on an overseas gig. Both had studied with trumpeter Marcus Belgrave — Fortner while a student at Oberlin Conservatory and Gordon as a musician in Detroit, Belgrave's hometown. A shared aesthetic sensibility contributed to their easy rapport.

"Kayvon is very well versed in different types of rhythms and grooves, from Detroit, the Caribbean, soul — all that stuff," Fortner says. "But he's a very sensitive drummer. He's not loud or overbearing, which makes him great for piano trio."

It was Gordon who suggested Allen for the group — something of a best practice on Fortner's part. "I always tell people if you want to make a drummer happy, give him a bass player he likes. Tyrone was that guy," he says.

"Tyrone [comes from] the D.C. area, where bass players have a rich tradition of being really groove-oriented. There's a certain type of swag that he brings to the music that he plays. It's really cool. And it works."

Heretofore, anyone wanting to hear how these three talents fit together would have had to catch them live. This will change early next year when the group releases its debut record, as yet unnamed, on the PIAS/Artworks label. As with *Solo Game*, the album will leverage Fortner's strong writing for electronics, percussion overdubs and voice.

But, too, Fortner has plans for his Vanguard group, which took to the studio the same week as their 2023 gig. That record, *Southern Nights*, named after the Allen Toussaint composition, comes out later next year.

"So, two trio albums in 2025," Fortner says. "It's pretty crazy." **DB**

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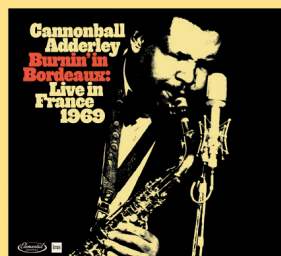
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DownBeat: "With 10 new Record Store Day releases, some of producer Zev Feldman's bounties might get lost in the shuffle this year; Burnin' In Bordeaux won't be one of them. There are beloved classics in Cannonball Adderley's catalogue that aren't this good."



**YUSEF LATEEF
ATLANTIS LULLABY
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Another highlight of this year was the release of Yusef Lateef's 1972 Avignon performance, produced by Zev Feldman and Elemental with the full collaboration of the Yusef Lateef Estate, transferred from the original tapes held in the archives of the French Institut National de l'Audiovisuel.



**MAL WALDRON – STEVE LACY
THE MIGHTY WARRIORS
Live In Antwerp**

The legendary Mal Waldron was joined by the equally impressive alto saxophonist Steve Lacy in Antwerp in 1995. Transferred from the original tapes, this release includes exclusive interviews with Mal Waldron's widow, Hiromi Waldron and reflections from Zev Feldman alongside never-before-seen photos from the concert taken by Hugo Peeters.



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Nicole Mitchell	132
Jamie Baum	115
Charles Lloyd	104
Jane Bunnett	68
Elena Pinderhughes	56
Henry Threadgill	40
Anna Webber	38
Shabaka	37
Dave Liebman	36
Hubert Laws	33
Tia Fuller	29
Anne Drummond	26
Lakecia Benjamin	24
Marty Ehrlich	21
James Newton	21
Holly Hofmann	19
Ted Nash	16
Jorge Pardo	16
Juhani Aaltonen	15
Andrea Brachfeld	15

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Kenny Barron	97
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Kris Davis	72
Vijay Iyer	64
Fred Hersch	59
Jason Moran	59
Brad Mehldau	52
Herbie Hancock	48
Matthew Shipp	37
Emmet Cohen	36
Bill Charlap	33
Myra Melford	31
Gerald Clayton	30
George Cables	27
Satoko Fujii	27
Craig Taborn	23
Benny Green	21
Abdullah Ibrahim	21
Leo Genovese	20
Chucho Valdés	20

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Larry Goldings	73
Craig Taborn	65
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John Medeski	40
Jon Batiste	35
Gary Versace	35
Leo Genovese	34
Jamie Saft	29
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Kit Downes	26
Uri Caine	23
Jim Baker	23
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Wayne Horvitz	21
Matthew Shipp	21

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Pat Bianchi	35
Delvon Lamarr	34
Tony Monaco	33
Jamie Saft	30
Cory Henry	28
Brian Auger	27
Booker T. Jones	27
Rhoda Scott	22
Barbara Dennerlein	20
Ståle Storløkken	19
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Mary Halvorson	149
Bill Frisell	135
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John Scofield	63
Pat Metheny	55

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Jeff Parker	48
John McLaughlin	42
Peter Bernstein	39
Russell Malone	34
Lionel Loueke	33
Marc Ribot	22
Howard Alden	20
Gordon Grdina	19
Miles Okazaki	19
Ralph Towner	19
Nels Cline	18
Fred Frith	18
Ben Monder	18
Charlie Hunter	15

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Christian McBride	118
Ron Carter	102
Linda May Han Oh	88
Dave Holland	61
William Parker	55
John Patitucci	52
Stephan Crump	30
Thomas Morgan	30
Larry Grenadier	29
Esperanza Spalding	29
Peter Washington	24
Buster Williams	23
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Michael Formanek	21
Joshua Abrams	20
Scott Colley	20
Rufus Reid	20
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Meshell Ndegeocello	78
Marcus Miller	73
Linda May Han Oh	67
Stanley Clarke	64
John Patitucci	62
Steve Swallow	61
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Melvin Gibbs	42
Jamaaladeen Tacuma	38
James Genus	32
Tony Levin	32
Pino Palladino	30
Brian Bromberg	25
Matthew Garrison	25
Victor Wooten	25
Larry Grenadier	24
Esperanza Spalding	24
Derrick Hodge	23
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Regina Carter	221
Jenny Scheinman	95
Sara Caswell	76
Mark Feldman	69
Jason Kao Hwang	69
Zach Brock	45
Mat Maneri	38
Jean-Luc Ponty	30
Mark O'Connor	23
Tomoko Omura	22
Carlos Zingaro	22

Eyvind Kang	20
Mads Tolling	20
Sam Bardfeld	19
Sarah Bernstein	18
Jerry Goodman	17
Aaron Weinstein	17
Jeff Gauthier	16
Carla Kihlstedt	15
Diane Monroe	15
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Jack DeJohnette	37
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Ches Smith	30
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Bobby Sanabria	44
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Susie Ibarra	36
Han Bennink	25
Chad Taylor	24
Cyro Baptista	23
Dafnis Prieto	22
Mino Cinelu	21
Kate Gentile	20
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Sammy Figueroa	19
Giovanni Hidalgo	17
Pete Escovedo	15
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Joe Locke	56
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Warren Smith	32
Simon Moullier	29
Behn Gillece	27
Sasha Berliner	25
Mulatu Astatke	24



JIM BENNETT

Zakir Hussain



LINDSAY BEYERSTEIN

Darcy James Argue



MICHAEL JACKSON

Tomeka Reid



GABRIELLA GABRIELAA

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Kenny Wollesen.....	18
Cecilia Smith.....	18
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Brandee Younger (harp).....	65
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Grégoire Maret (harmonica).....	46
Scott Robinson	
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Theon Cross (tuba).....	45
Gary Versace (accordion).....	40
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James Carter	
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Peggy Lee (cello).....	31
Ikue Mori (laptop).....	31
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Pat Metheny	22
Esperanza Spalding	22
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Vince Mendoza	30
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Ryan Truesdell.....	26
Lakecia Benjamin.....	23
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Etienne Charles	38
Adam O'Farrill	37
Brandee Younger	37
Tigran Hamasyan	35
Luke Stewart	34
Aaron Parks	32
Theo Croker	31
Veronica Swift	31
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David Virelles	29
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Keyon Harrold	107
Etienne Charles	100
Jonathan Finlayson	70
Peter Evans	55
Wallace Roney Jr.	54
Alex Sipigian	53
Bria Skonberg	53
Benny Benack III	51
Josh Evans	45
Steph Richards	45
Susana Santos Silva	37
Yazz Ahmed	34
Ibrahim Maalouf	32
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Maurice Brown	27
Sarah Wilson	25
Giveton Gelin	23
Brandon Lee	21
Josh Lawrence	19

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Jennifer Wharton	114
Natalie Cressman	84
Kalia Vandever	64
Chris Crenshaw	55
Corey King	54
Nils Wogram	44
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Stanton Moore	21
E.J. Strickland	19
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THE CRITICS

Below are the 115 critics who voted in DownBeat's 72nd Annual International Critics Poll. According to the rules, critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices in each category, with no more than 5 points going to any single artist or group. They voted for both Established Talent and Rising Stars.

Frank Alkyer: DB

Larry Appelbaum: DB

Mirian Arbalejo: Ditirambop. La Cesión de las Voluntades

Glenn Astarita: All About Jazz

Mark R. Bacon: JazzRio, Jambalaya

Chris J. Bahnsen: DB

Michael Barris: DB

Bill Beuttler: Boston Globe, DB, Boston Magazine

Edward Blanco: All About Jazz, WDNA

Ross Boissoneau: Something Else! Reviews, Strings By Mail, Local Spins

Fred Bouchard: NYC Jazz Record, BCF

Jon Bream: Minneapolis Star Tribune

Marcela Breton: Freelance

Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum

Herb Boyd: DB, Amsterdam News, Black World Media Network

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

James Catchpole: Tokyo Jazz Site

Aaron Cohen: DB, Chicago Reader

Thomas Conrad: Stereophile, The New York City Jazz Record, All About Jazz

JD Considine: DB, Rolling Stone

Ayana Contreras: DB, KUVO Jazz

Paul de Barros: DB, Seattle Times, Earshot

Coen de Jonge: Jazzbulletin NJA, Jazzism Magazine

R.J. DeLuke: All About Jazz, Times Union (Albany, New York)

Anthony Dean-Harris: DB, KRTU San Antonio

Laurence Donohue-Greene: The New York City Jazz Record

Alain Druout: DB, Citizen Jazz

Ken Dryden: The New York City Jazz Record, Hot House

Shannon J. Effinger: Freelance

Ed Enright: DB

John Ephland: DB, All About Jazz

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

Philip Freeman: DB, The Wire, Burning Ambulance

Takao Fujioka: Way Out West

Gary Fukushima: DB

Jon Garelick: Boston Globe, Jazziz, DB

Dustin Garlitz: JazzTalent.com, Sage Encyclopedia of Music and Culture

Richard Gehr: Relix, Maggot Brain

Ted Gioia: The Honest Broker

Jordannah Elizabeth Graham: New York Amsterdam News

Ludovico Granvassu: All About Jazz; All About Jazz Italia; Mondo Jazz

George Grella: The Brooklyn Rail, Red Hook Star-Review, The Wire

Frank-John Hadley: DB

James Hale: DB, SoundStageXperience.com

Robert Ham: Uncut, Portland Mercury, Willamette Week

Eric Harabadian: Music Connection, DB, Media News Group, Big City Rhythm & Blues Magazine, aoidemagazine.com

Kazunori Harada: Jaz-In Magazine (Tokyo)

George W. Harris: Jazzweekly.com

Kazune Hayata: Jazz Life

Chris Heim: KMWU, Global Village

Andrey Henkin: The New York Times, NPR, Stereophile, WeJazz, JazzWise

Geoffrey Himes: Paste, Chamber Music

Rob Hoff: WQLN, WETF, JazzErie

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

C. Andrew Hovan: All About Jazz, DB

Tom Hull: tomhull.com, ArtsFuse

Tina Inch-Edwards: Sound of Life, Composer, DB, Listen Zine

Tom Ineck: KZUM Community Radio, Lincoln Journal Star

Michael Jackson: DB, Jazzwise, Chicago Sun-Times

Ammar Kalia: The Guardian, Observer, DB

Richard Kamins: StepTempest.blogspot.com

George Kanzler: Hot House, NYC Jazz Record

Yoshi Kato: DB, San Francisco Classical Voice, San Francisco Chronicle

Larry Kelp: The Absolute Sound

Jeff Krow: Audiophile Audition

David Kunian: Offbeat, DB, New Orleans Jazz Museum

Will Layman: PopMatters.com, We Jazz Magazine

Angelo Leonardi: All About Jazz Italia

Martin Longley: DB, Jazzwise, Songlines, We Jazz, All About Jazz, The Brooklyn Rail

Suzanne Lorge: DB, NYC Jazz Record

Jamie Ludwig: Chicago Reader

Phillip Lutz: DB

Jim Macnie: DB, Lament For A Straight Line

Peter Margasak: DB, The Wire, Bandcamp Daily, We Jazz

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

Cree McCree: DB, Offbeat

Kerlie McDowall: Freelance

Peter Howland McElhinney: Style Weekly, Richmond Magazine

John McDonough: DB

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

Bill Milkowski: DB, Guitar Player, Jazziz, Absolute Sound, Substack, BillMilkowski.com ("The Milkman's Musings")

Ralph A. Miriello: Notes on Jazz Blog

Allen Morrison: DB, Tidal

Dr. Brian Morton: DownBeat, Tablet, Herald Online

John Murph: DB, NPR Music, Grammy.com, Washington Lawyer Magazine

Joshua M. Myers: DB, CapitalBop

Ron Netsky: City Magazine (Rochester, New York)

Jon Newey: Jazzwise editor-in-chief

Sean J. O'Connell: Los Angeles Times, Square Magazine

Dan Ouellette: DB, Qwest.TV, Jazz & Beyond Intel

Ted Panken: DB, Jazziz

Terry Perkins: DB

Alexa M. Peters: DB, KNKX, Earshot Jazz, The Stranger, Rolling Stone

Norman Provizer: DB, KUVO

Bobby Reed: DB, Chicago Sun-Times, Block Club Chicago

Howard Reich: DB, Gramophone

Derk Richardson: The Absolute Sound

Mark Ruffin: Real Jazz, Sirius XM

Sebastian Scotney: UK Jazz News, Jazzthetik

Gene Seymour: CNN.com, The Nation, BookForum

Thomas Staudter: DB, The Gazette, River Journal, The New York City Jazz Record

Denise Sullivan: DB, San Francisco Chronicle

Otakar Svoboda: Czech Radio Vltava

Jean Szlamowicz: Spirit of Jazz, DB

Hobart Taylor: KUCI

Chris J. Walker: LA Jazz Scene, JazzTimes, California Tour & Travel

Ken Weiss: Cadence, Jazz Inside

Michael J. West: DB, Washington Post, Washington City Paper, Bandcamp

Josef Woodard: DB, Jazziz, All About Jazz, Santa Barbara Independent

Scott Yanow: DB, NYC Jazz Record, LA Jazz Scene, Syncopated Times, Jazz Rag, Jazziz



EYAL VILNER: 'IT'S ALL JAZZ & ALL DANCEABLE'

When he was a music student in New York back in 2007, hanging out at Smalls every night, Eyal Vilner, much like his classmates at the New School, was in love with bebop and hard-bop — music not usually associated with dancing. How he came to lead one of the more notable swing dance orchestras in the world is a story about the fundamental connection between jazz and physical movement, whether it's just tapping your foot or doing the Lindy Hop.

His deeply swinging music, much of it original, is not just danceable — it's eminently listenable.

His love for swing started much earlier, in Tel Aviv, where he was a jazz-obsessed teenager attending the city's High School for the Arts. "Bird was my main inspiration," he reminisced recently. "And Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins ... that was the first stuff I loved and wanted to play." He was

trying to understand what it really meant to swing. His jazz history teacher gave him a CD of Duke Ellington's *Newport 1958* album. "He said, 'Go listen to that, and you'll get it.'"

Another incident with a different teacher proved just as indelible. "We were having a lesson in a basement in a suburb of Tel Aviv, and he said, 'Listen, you gotta feel the music!' And he made me stand up, and

he's like, 'We gotta move our bodies and dance.'" Teacher and student moved their bodies — danced, if you will — to Duke's "Cotton Tail."

These days, dancing is essential to Vilner's art. Now 39, he leads the Eyal Vilner Big Band in 10-piece and 17-piece iterations, each populated by top talent and rising stars on the New York jazz scene. His orchestras are highly favored by dance

and Lindy Hop festivals around the world, including the International Lindy Hop Championships in Harlem. He is also the co-creator and musical director of a jazz-dance/theater production called *Swing Out*, which has played extended engagements at the Joyce Theater and has toured the U.S.

While he loves vintage tunes, he is not content to simply reproduce danceable jazz from the middle of the 20th century. Vilner, who plays alto saxophone,

same-sex couples, and dancers feel freer to improvise. Today's swing dancers desire a broader musical palette than just classic big-band music.

There is also more interaction between the dancers and the band. Vilner is known to come down from the stage and interact with particular dancers in a call-and-response manner.

Vilner cites tracks from the new album to demonstrate the band's diversity of styles. "We have hard-bop, like 'I Love The

'It touches them, inspires them. You're physically moving people. What could be better than that?'

clarinet and flute, started to discover his voice in his 20s by writing for smaller ensembles before organizing, and writing originals for, his first big band in 2008. "I like to say the pencil is one of my instruments," he said.

His seventh album, *Swingin' Uptown*, recorded with the tentet, includes six Vilner originals. The band features established and up-and-coming musicians like Brandon Lee on trumpet, Julieta Eugenio on tenor saxophone, Jon Thomas on piano, Ron Wilkins on trombone and Imani Rouselle on vocals. "We recorded it after playing 22 shows in that month," Vilner said. "Everything was done in one or two takes, all in the same room together. And we invited dancers to come into the studio and dance with us as we were recording."

Vilner rejects the concept of "retro" jazz. "I'm not one of those cats who's trying to relive the roaring '20s or the '30s. We're not trying to recreate something but, rather, to be as close as possible to the source — the art form of swing dancing and Lindy Hopping — to create something new that is informed and influenced by it. To me, the album is a new take on what danceable jazz can be."

The dance community has reacted enthusiastically to Vilner's style of swing, and the Vilner band, with its more modern leanings and original material, has become a fan favorite. The swing dance community has changed in the last few decades. Where once it was mostly classic Lindy Hop with the man leading and the woman following, these days there are more

Rhythm In A Riff'; that's a bebop tune by Billy Eckstine. 'Coffee Bean Stomp Jubilee' [an original] is New Orleans-style. It's interesting to see how the different sub-styles within jazz all can have a direct connection to the dance; it doesn't need to be only from the '30's big-band era to be danceable. It's all jazz and all danceable."

He cites the need to play with "kavanah" — a Hebrew word that means sincere feeling from the heart, something honest and soulful. "I feel that when I play for dancing — and also when I'm not playing for dancing, but the music is informed by dancing."

For Vilner, as an "outsider" from the Middle East coming to jazz and Black American culture, discovering the concept of Lindy Hop, a dance born in Harlem, "was as much of an educational experience as learning the other parts of jazz — transcribing the solos, reading the history and learning the blues and bebop." He began to appreciate that "the experience of feeling the music in your body is much different than hearing it in your head and playing it. ... Nobody in jazz school is telling you to learn how to dance."

Vilner corrected that deficit in his education by taking dance lessons himself. As a result, he started to understand more about the connection between jazz and movement.

"Learning the connection makes you feel some responsibility about what you play and how you play it," he said. "It touches them, inspires them. You're physically moving people. What could be better than that?"
—Allen Morrison

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ROBERT SANCHEZ



"Being a musician, you've got to wear a whole bunch of different hats," says indie artist Curtis Taylor. "You're doing advertising, and you're doing flyers for your own shows."

CURTIS TAYLOR: THE DIY TRUMPETER

Being an independent musician in 2024 frequently requires adopting a DIY approach. For trumpeter Curtis Taylor's independently released *Taylor Made*, that ethic of self-reliance is reflected in everything from the album's artwork to the sound of its mix.

Bathed in blue and framed diagonally with a photo of Taylor playing his instrument, the cover of this long-player has faux crease marks and an intentionally worn look. The subtle visual effects give it

the look of a cherished album that's been pulled from the shelf (and perhaps even loaned to friends) countless times.

"I did the artwork myself," Taylor said. "The guy that I was going to use is phe-

nomenal — the industry standard, really. But because of that, he's so in demand and got backed up. And it was just holding up the process. So I was thinking to myself, 'OK, man, I need this album to be released. I'll just do it myself.'"

The decision to design it himself around two portraits by photographer Robert Sanchez was a natural one, he reckoned.

"Being a musician, you've got to wear a whole bunch of different hats. You're doing advertising, and you're doing flyers for your own shows," he said, by phone while on summer break in Iowa City. (During the school year, he's an assistant professor in the Jazz Studies program at the University of Iowa.) "Every time you have a show, you don't have the budget to hire someone to design something for you. So I've had some experience with that and have developed a decent eye for things by working on something until I really, really love the result.

"One of the great things about designing the album art, as the composer and one of the musicians on it, is that I have the inside track on what's contained on the album and the intent behind it," he continued. "I wanted the visual aesthetic to give listeners a retro, and familiar, feeling just by looking at the album art."

Boasting seven swinging original compositions, *Taylor Made* could alternately be called *The Curtis Taylor Songbook, Vol. 1*. He's had the pun-intended album title in mind for two decades. The pieces, though not nearly as old, are nonetheless time-tested.

"What's cool about my compositions is that they are tried-and-true ones that I have performed with my bands live for many different audiences nationally. So I've gotten real-time feedback over the years," he shared. "A lot of times, I will intersperse standard jazz repertoire that I think fits well with my original music. What I will find is that in many cases, I will get more of a response from the audience when I would play an original.

"And that's super-flattering as an artist because you've got to be very vulnerable as a composer. I'm always trying to write and play and perform from a very sincere place. But you don't know if listeners are going to dig it, and you always hope you're writing something that resonates with people."

A different piece from the Coltrane classic, Taylor's "After The Rain" is a joyful and infectious exploration that sounds like a forgotten standard. The post-bopish "Heightened Awareness" is a dizzying number that can raise a listener's heart rate, while "For Her" brings it back down with an understated elegance.

There's a thoughtfulness and a humility

to Taylor that comes out compositionally and conversationally. When asked if he always wanted to be a trumpeter, he admitted that saxophone was what he initially had in mind.

"But a student model trumpet was more affordable than a student model saxophone. So my destiny" — by way of his mother's budgetary reasoning — "was formed for me."

What was more certain was the Bedford, Ohio, native's desire to be a jazz musician. His middle school band director and mentor, the recently retired Shawn Nichols, took him to the nearby Tri-C Jazz Fest Cleveland. Jon Faddis was the special guest of a band led by another of his future mentors — Steve Enos — and it all suddenly clicked.

"I remember they just looked like they were having so much fun on stage," he said, with a chuckle. "And as a 13-year-old in seventh grade, I was, like, 'Man, I think I can see myself doing this for the rest of my life.' So I've been serious about it for a minute."

After taking community college classes while still in high school, Taylor went on to earn his bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and his master's from Rutgers University. (Taylor keeps strong ties to the former through *Taylor Made*'s tenor saxophonist Marcus Elliot, an alumnus, and double bassist Jonathan S. Muir-Cotton, a current undergraduate student there.) Performances with the likes of vocalist Gregory Porter, multi-reedist James Carter and pianists Cyrus Chestnut, Patrice Rushen and Billy Childs were part of his continuing education.

Though the majority of Taylor's experiences have been in the straightahead realm with a bit of gospel, he's not afraid to experiment. His *#Hashtagged* EP from 2017 featured live instrumentation and vocals blended with programmed tracks.

"That was all self-produced," he recalled. "And in that process, I really learned a lot about mixing. When I initially got the first mixes back (for *Taylor Made*), I was unhappy with it.

"But what was great was that I could articulate to the mix engineer very minute elements like, 'Let's widen the stereo field of the piano,' or, 'Turn this down 1 or 2 dB,' or, 'Move this to the left or right' — very specific things that I wouldn't have had the language for if I didn't have any experience making audio."

Taylor's ear became so attuned that he found himself in sync with *Taylor Made*'s veteran producer, Kamau Kenyatta (who has produced Porter and Allan Harris).

"What was cool was we listened independently, and we came back with the same notes," Taylor said. "That really vindicated what I was hearing and all that I learned, and we got something really special out of it all."

—Yoshi Kato

ALEC GOLDFARB

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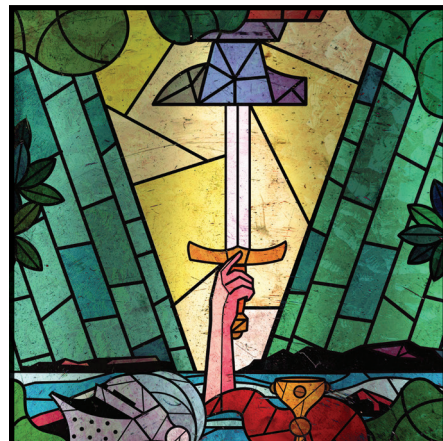
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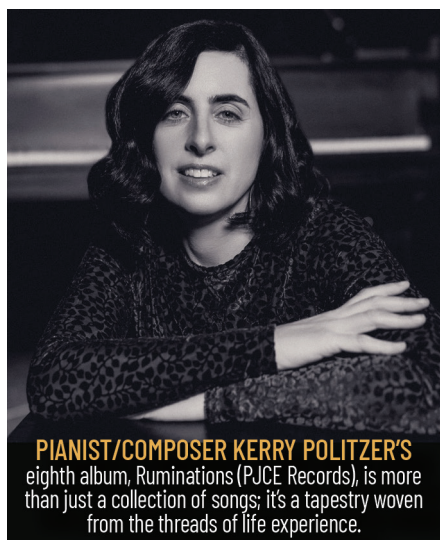


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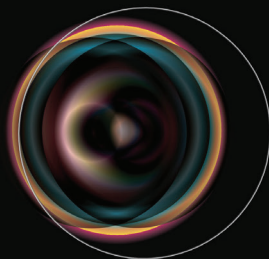
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"When I heard Jackie McLean, it was like the perfect mixture of bebop or hard-bop, but also some edge, what they called avant-garde," says Mike Monford about one of his heroes.

MIKE MONFORD: FROM DETROIT WITH LOVE

It's tough to rank jazz's most important cities, but the top centers of activity have to include Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New Orleans and New York.

Detroit in particular has produced such a stunning array of top-level jazz players that there's an entire book devoted to the subject.

Saxophonist Mike Monford grew up a hip-hop kid in the Motor City, picking up the horn as a teenager. He always had wide-ranging tastes. "I found myself loving bebop and swing and all of that," he said, "but I [also] loved what they called at that time avant-garde or free-jazz or the New Thing."

Then he discovered one musician who seemed to be at the center of all these sounds. "When I heard Jackie McLean, it was like the perfect mixture of bebop or hard-bop, but also some edge ... and when I found out that I could study with him, I zeroed in on it."

Monford worked with local heroes like trumpeter Marcus Belgrave, reeds player and Tribe Records co-founder Wendell Harrison, keyboardist and Strata Records leader Kenny Cox, drummer Roy Brooks and others, and eventually traveled to Connecticut to study with McLean at the Hartt School of Music. From there, he was off to New York, where he spent two decades working with bassist/composer Bill Lee, pianist Marc Cary and many others. Eventually, though, he returned home.

"I moved back to Detroit ... during the emergency city manager period, when the city was bankrupt," Monford says. "There

were no streetlights, there was no ambulance ... no school system. So just a lot of turmoil, and people were just kind of beat up and battle-weary."

To counter that, he began to seek out musicians who were interested in rebuilding and revitalizing the city through art. He created a multigenerational ensemble called Detroit Effervescence to make music that combined jazz, hip-hop and soul.

Monford doesn't like to describe his music with genre tags like "spiritual jazz" or "avant-garde"; instead, he calls it Afrofuturism, which puts it into a continuum that includes the Sun Ra Arkestra, Parliament/Funkadelic, Burnt Sugar, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Miles Davis' electric bands and more. "So it's like the best of the past," he said. "And then we're pushing forward with the future."

The group played around Detroit, building a strong local following, but also traveled to Washington, D.C., and even to Europe. Meanwhile, Monford was touring with the French vocal duo Les Nubians and teaching at Chandler Park Academy; sometimes, the school's concert band would open Detroit Effervescence gigs. After several years of performances, he put together a version of the group for a residency at Cliff Bell's, a legendary Detroit venue that first opened its doors in 1935.

Monford's new album *The Cloth I'm Cut From* features five extended live tracks performed by an ensemble that includes trumpet player Allen Dennard, tenor saxophonist Calvin Taylor, keyboardists Pamela Wise and William Hill, violinists Bebe Sewell and Xavier Gillium, bassist Jaribu Shahid, drummer Tariq Gardner, percussionist Kevin Jones and MC Napi Devi. Some players are in their 60s, while others are students of Monford's.

The album includes two original compositions, "Jah Jah" and "Piercing Eyes," and versions of Lee Morgan's "Exotique," Abbey Lincoln's "Throw It Away" and Jackie McLean's "Jack's Tune," rendered here as one word, "Jackstune."

The Morgan tune is a nod to his parents, both of whom were Philadelphia natives. The Lincoln piece holds great meaning for Monford; one of his daughters is named for her. And the McLean piece connects to his time as a student, but on the album, Monford uses it as a generational bridge much the way the older man bridged bebop and the avant-garde and continued to progress throughout his career. Napi Devi delivers a heartfelt hip-hop verse in the middle of the piece. "I wanted to pay homage to Jackie's innovations and take his tune somewhere else [into] the 2000s. So that's how that layer of cloth got on the album."

The Cloth I'm Cut From comes wrapped in a beautiful cover painting by Chicago-based artist Tracy Crump, featuring Monford in profile, holding his horn and surrounded by abstract, floating lines and spheres. The record took several years to produce, partly because the pandemic shut down studios and nightclubs and partly because life got in the way. Monford is a husband and father, after all, with both professional and familial responsibilities. Eventually, though, it all came together with money saved from gigs and some donations from the community, and the residency at Cliff Bell's, which allowed him to capture the music without paying for studio time.

"When the industry changed and almost went completely independent," Monford says, "artists had to become booking agents, managers, A&R, everything that a record company would have. So it takes longer, unless you have the capital already. That's the reality. So if I could tell any independent artist [anything] ... definitely be patient and don't give up. When a project isn't going anywhere for a year or two, that's when you can let it go and you'll lose it. You just want to dig in. You put it on hold for however long you have to, and then you get back to it."

As a bandleader, a teacher, a parent and a community activist, Monford is in the uplift business. Detroit has decades of jazz history to its credit, but it's people like Monford, who recognize that leadership and encouragement is just as important as musical talent, who are ensuring that it will continue to move forward, innovate and grow.

—Ken Micallef

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Reviews

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



Marta Sanchez (left), Luke Stewart, David Murray and Russell Carter

David Murray Quartet *Francesca*

INTAKT

★★★★

For years David Murray has been an avant-garde wolf masquerading in the comforting sheep's voice of a prewar swing tenor. His lush sound and bold vibrato made him an unexpected anomaly in a crowded party line of modernism full of competing Coltranes. Yet if his sound looked back, his thinking was very much in the moment and made him one of lords of the loft scene in the '70s and '80s, a hip playpen where everyone had license to bring his own bag of toys.

But Murray reached outside the loft world, moving between bursts of squawky free-jazz flak and an inviting lyricism that could swing. In those days, I could grant him a tentative appreciation (especially his World Saxophone group work) but not much devotion. Which makes *Francesca* an unexpected surprise. Maybe I've grown into it; maybe he's grown out of it. Or maybe the procession of Coltrane clones has simply become a cliché. Murray has not.

Although he's occasionally included standards in his sets, his normal preference is his own material, which he keeps active. "Ninno," "Richard's Tune," "Cycles And Seasons" and "Am Gone Get Some" have all appeared on pre-

vious Murray discs, the last with a trio in 2021. Though it would be inviting to hear him apply his methods to more familiar titles, I have no complaints here with his choices or his working quartet. If an abundance of enthusiasm sometimes produces passages that grow a little overcrowded ("Come And Go"), that comes with the territory. When he transcends to altissimo territory, he may seem briefly unhinged. But this was familiar ground for Illinois Jacquet in the '40s, and Murray shapes his leaps with controlled coherence. —John McDonough

Francesca: Francesca; Ninno; Shenzhen; Come And Go; Am Gone Get Some; Richard's Tune; Free Mingus; Cycles And Seasons. (64:07)

Personnel: David Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Marta Sanchez, piano; Luke Stewart, bass; Russell Carter, drums.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch



Kenny Barron *Beyond This Place*

ARTWORK

★★★★½

Kenny Barron is one of the most unimpeachable recording jazz artists today. With a discography that dates back to the late '60s, his batting average catapults him into the near-peerless echelon. The amount of melodic vivaciousness, poised improvisational guile and sublime interaction with his bandmates strikes a favorable chord among listeners every time he releases something new.

Beyond This Place is no exception. It's quintessential Kenny Barron, showcasing what the veter-

an pianist does best with a myriad yet solid program of jazz standards and originals. Barron's longstanding rhythm section of drummer Johnathan Blake and bassist Kiyoshi Kitagawa returns, while also giving space to a reunion with undersung vibraphonist Steve Nelson and rising saxist Immanuel Wilkins. Together, the quintet forges the bracing accord of a unit that's been together for at least a decade.

The set list is tried-and-true Barron, with the requisite nod to Thelonious Monk ("Wee See") and some touching renderings of standards ("The Nearness Of You," "Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise"). The album comes most alive when the quintet revisits Barron originals such as the jaunty "Scratch," which pushes the envelope slightly into the more adventurous side of modern jazz; the suspenseful "Innocent," whose pensive melody begs for it to be included into a movie soundtrack; and the gentle, samba-driven "Sunset," which casts a hypnotic allure thanks to Nelson's sleek melodicism and Wilkins' probing improvisations.

Beyond This Place contains no callow attempts in hipness. Instead, it offers further evidence of Barron's enduring excellence. —John Murph

Beyond This Place: The Nearness Of You; Scratch; Innocent; Blues On Stratford Road; Tragic Magic; Beyond This Place; Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise; Sunset; We See. (52:24)

Personnel: Kenny Barron, piano; Immanuel Wilkins, saxophone; Johnathan Blake, drums; Kiyoshi Kitagawa, bass; Steve Nelson, vibraphone.

Ordering info: store.pias.com

Wadada Leo Smith/ Amina Claudine Myers *Central Park's Mosaics Of Reservoir, Lake, Paths And Gardens*

RED HOOK

★★★★★

Since the 1960s, trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith and pianist Amina Claudine Myers have been creative kindred spirits, producing intricate improvisations inspired by atmosphere and natural surroundings as much as by their fellow players. Now in their eighties, they join forces for a delicate and elegiac exploration of Manhattan's most notable green space, Central Park.

Opener "Conservatory Gardens" establishes the duo's deep interplay, with Myers beginning on slowly unfurling melodic phrases before Smith's trumpet trembles and trills into sweeping notes of cutting clarity. Myers' organ underpins the busy, undulating phrases of Smith's trumpet on "Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir," replicating the surface movement and underlying placidity of water, while the bluesy trumpet opening of "The Harlem Meer" and ensuing fractal piano phrases recall a more introspective and solipsistic state.

With only Smith's piercing trumpet and Myers' harmonics to contend with, moments



of *Central Park's Mosaics* can feel challengingly sparse, yet as the record progresses structures build and coalesce. Closing tracks "Albert Ayler, a meditation on light" and "Imagine, a mosaic for John Lennon" artfully channel the work of both artists.

Uncomplicated and unadorned, this is an album of immersive and expressive feeling, showcasing two late-career masters who still wield immense power. —Ammar Kalia

Central Park's Mosaics Of Reservoir, Lake, Paths And Gardens: Conservatory Gardens; Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir; Central Park At Sunset; When Was; The Harlem Meer; Albert Ayler, a meditation on light; Imagine, a mosaic for John Lennon. (36:27)

Personnel: Wadada Leo Smith, trumpet; Amina Claudine Myers, piano.

Ordering info: redhookrecords.com



Nduduzo Makhathini *uNomkhulwane*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★★

South African pianist Nduduzo Makhathini credits McCoy Tyner with showing him how to express how the traditional Zulu people of his country dance, sing and speak. He expanded his listening to Andrew Hill, Don Pullen and Randy Weston, along with some influential masters from his own region. Now, on his 12th album, those influences are touchpoints for an effusive tribute to the traditional Zulu deity of fertility and agriculture.

The "Libations Movement" ripples with circular movement, as Makhathini alternates between spoken and sung passages, and on the opening "Omnyama" the rhythm section churns forward with loping momentum. "KwaKhangelamankengana" rides a hypnotic, five-note bass riff that forms the base for expressive playing by both Makhathini and Mela. The middle, "Water Spirits" section conveys a darker emotion, particularly on "Nyoni Le?" (where Bell le Pere provides a powerful arco center). It also contains what sounds like the album's only misstep: the choice to use the trio on the slow "Izinkonjana." The leisurely pace doesn't leave much for Mela to contribute, and his simple brushwork distracts from the leader's expansive, heartfelt playing. The final movement moves from dramatic, gestural piano to a majestic-sounding theme on "Izibengelelo" and then shifting into the trio's freest work. "Ithemba," a Makhathini solo performance, provides a gentle closing.

Makhathini has discovered paths back to the African roots of the music and created a sonic portrait that spans both time and geography. —James Hale

uNomkhulwane: Libations Movement: Omnyama; Uxolo; KwaKhangelamankengana; Water Spirits Movement: Izinkonjana; Amanxusa Asemkhathini; Nyoni Le?; Iyana; Inner Attainment Movement: Izibengelelo; Umlayez oPhuthumayo; Amanzi Ngobhoko; Ithemba. (58:55)

Personnel: Nduduzo Makhathini, piano, vocals; Zwelakhe-Duma Bell le Pere, bass, background vocals; Francisco Mela, drums, background vocals.

Ordering info: bluenote.com

The Hot Box

	Critics	John McDonough	John Murph	Ammar Kalia	James Hale
David Murray Quartet <i>Francesca</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
Kenny Barron <i>Beyond This Place</i>		★★★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½
Smith/Myers <i>Central Park's Mosaics ...</i>		★★	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
Nduduzo Makhathini <i>uNomkhubulwane</i>		★★½	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★

Critics' Comments

David Murray Quartet, *Francesca*

Fronting a new, youthful quartet, the leader sounds rejuvenated by the company as well as the sterling, modern free-bop compositions. —John Murph

The clarion call of Murray's saxophone is immediate and engaging throughout the eight compositions of this latest quartet album. From the jaunty bounce of "Come And Go" to the delicate waltz of the title track and Murray's foray into bass clarinet lyricism on "Shenzen," this is a deeply enjoyable and energetic record. —Ammar Kalia

It's great to have Murray active again — if nowhere near as prolific as he once was — and his playing sounds as raw and energetic as ever. On *Francesca*, though, his bandmates can't quite match his emotive playing. —James Hale

Kenny Barron, *Beyond This Place*

A rewarding generational diversity finds friendly tension in a repertoire that reflects Barron's infallible mastery. He's the interlocutor whose clever equilibrium guides this intimate, often lively, always smart parade of low-key surprises, including two duets. —John McDonough

Barron assembles an intergenerational quintet of mighty players for this warm and intricate album. Highlights come on their luscious interpretation of "The Nearness Of You" and the hard-swinging groove of "Tragic Magic," with Barron anchoring each composition through his lyrical piano phrases. —Ammar Kalia

Sleek and powerful, Barron's quintet is like a vintage vehicle that can handle any terrain with grace. —James Hale

Wadada Leo Smith/Amina Claudine Myers, *Central Park's Mosaics ...*

The splendors of sustained serenity, however sedating, demand patience, endurance and maybe a bit of LSD. Though crafted with fastidious care and subtle rapport, these seven still lifes are entombed in an immobility that starves them of contrast and pacing. Central Park deserves better. —John McDonough

A haunting master class in measured melodic invention and empathic dialogue. —John Murph

I'm there! That's the power of these sonic impressions by two painterly masters. —James Hale

Nduduzo Makhathini, *uNomkhubulwane*

I'm wary of musicians who believe themselves to be prophets, because I don't wish to second-guess the gods. That said, these 11 meandering piano sketches are often lovely, sometimes a bit top-heavy, and laced with vocal chants whose appeal seems more anthropological than musical. —John McDonough

Erudite inspiration, plaintive melodicism and exploratory improvisation collide into one of most soul-stirring new jazz albums of the year. —John Murph

Featuring spiritual influences as well as the polyrhythmic grooves of the African diaspora, Makhathini's three movements on the album are richly layered yet can be overly meandering in their development, leaving listeners to drift. —Ammar Kalia

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Steve Turre *Sanyas*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★

How clever that Steve Turre's first-ever live album as a leader kicks off with (and is named after) the very tune that introduced the trombonist to jazz listeners half a century ago.

That was on Woody Shaw's 1974 album *The Moontrane*, and though this "Sanyas" has much in common with its debut — a three-horn front line, an Afrocentric 5/4 groove, a virtuosic bass solo — it's no retread. Where Shaw's band augmented the drums with conga and percussion,

Lenny White carries the polyrhythmic pulse singlehandedly, playing off Buster Williams' contrapuntal bass to drive the band in style. And the band is great: feisty, conversational and collaborative, a textbook example of how an ensemble's sound can be greater than the sum of its parts.

Feisty and conversational is also an apt description of Turre's sound on trombone. Although smooth and slick on the heads, in solo mode he tends to be rough-edged and boisterous, emphasizing the edges of the horn's tone, its tailgate exuberance. At the same time, his articulation is meticulously detailed, to such an extent that the phrases in his Harmon-muted solo on "Wishful Thinking" rise and fall like syllables in a Shakespearean soliloquy.

This is clearly a band built from the rhythm section up, as "These Foolish Things" makes plain. Although Turre's upper-register plunger work is deliciously down and dirty, it's White, Williams and pianist Isaiah Thompson who carry the day, turning a bit of vintage corn into something refreshingly fun and funky.

—J.D. Considine

Sanyas: Sanyas; All The Things You Are; Wishful Thinking; Mr. Kenyatta; These Foolish Things. (49:10)

Personnel: Steve Turre, trombone, shells; Nicholas Payton, trumpet; Ron Blake, tenor saxophone; Isaiah J. Thompson, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Lenny White, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

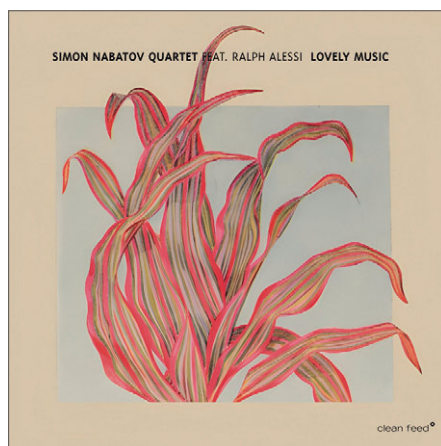
Simon Nabatov *Lovely Music*

CLEAN FEED

★★★★½

Unprepared for its frank title, we must surely expect the virtuoso Russian pianist and composer Simon Nabatov's latest album of originals to probe a less porcupined, restless output, when compared to his more agitated work for Leo Fagin's long-running Leo Records. Nabatov has the king of calmness guesting, trumpeter Ralph Alessi complementing the tenor warmth of Sebastian Gille. Jazz structuring is observed, but there's an openness to altered perceptions within a classic melodic framework.

Recording on Nabatov's home stomping ground of The Loft recording studio (and venue) of Cologne, Germany, it attains their expected production values. Tuneful, but with light nerves, "Nature Morte 8" opens with David Helm's melancholy bass bowing, then the band rise up harmoniously, suspended in lyricism, with the leader floating through a solo of tenderness, uplifted further by Alessi's pointillist progressions. Humor, liveliness and mischief imbue "Ricky," and this is where Gille holds the spotlight, spurring on with gusto, goading Nabatov and Alessi, weighing out with a strong thematic rush. Romance returns for "Autumn Music," its breathy horn



unisons building a bluesy exuberance. "Old Fashioned" possesses a reassuring swing, with Gille's tenor embrace, moving towards the slow ballad closer of "No Doubt," Leif Berger's brushes swiping enthusiastically and the whole combo a-quiver. This album represents a glowing alternative avenue into the complex vigour of Nabatov's oeuvre.

—Martin Longley

Lovely Music: Koscha's Delight; Nature Morte 8; Ricky; Autumn Music; Timwork; Amour Fou; Margarita; Old Fashioned; No Doubt. (67:00)

Personnel: Simon Nabatov, piano; Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Sebastian Gille, tenor, soprano saxophones; David Helm, bass; Leif Berger, drums.

Ordering info: cleanfeedrecords.bandcamp.com



Jon Gordon *7th Avenue South*

ARTISTSHARE

★★★★½

Jon Gordon's *7th Avenue South* is a vibrant record imbued with a profound sense of place and time. It pays homage to the many jazz clubs that once lined the titular New York thoroughfare and played a seminal role in Gordon's musical journey.

On the title track, Gordon's nonet jumps effortlessly into a post-bop groove with pianist Will Bonness playing a spritely melody buoyed by drummer Fabio Ragnelli's propulsive beat. "Paradox," composed by Gordon and originally recorded in 2000, gets a new arrangement by trombonist Alan Ferber that expands the song's dynamic range and showcases the band's expanded horns and woodwinds section. On "Ed's Groove" (inspired by the Venezuelan pianist Edward Simon, who played on Gordon's 1998 album *Currents*), a muscular, frenetic rhythm section backs Bonness' lyrical melodic lines and Gordon's bluesy saxophone.

Interspersed throughout the record are vocal tracks that demonstrate Gordon's range as a composer. "Ponder This" features Joanna Majoko's ethereal vocalizations against a bluesy melodic backdrop, while Erin Propp's gentle, lilting voice gives The Beatles' "Here, There And Everywhere" a melancholy treatment. "Spark" blends vocal warmth with dynamic instrumental interplay.

7th Avenue South is a testament to Gordon's commitment to continual growth and reinvention. Drawing from his storied career and deep roots in the New York jazz scene, Gordon reimagines past compositions and debuts new works with lush vocal arrangements and expansive ensemble orchestrations. —Ivana Ng

7th Avenue South: Witness; 7th Avenue South; Ponder This; Paradox; Here, There And Everywhere; Ed's Groove; Visit; Intro; Spark; 7th Avenue South Reprise. (58:47)

Personnel: Jon Gordon, alto and soprano saxophone; Jonathan Challoner, trumpet; Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Alan Ferber, trombone; John Ellis, bass clarinet; Jocelyn Gould, guitar; Will Bonness, piano; Julian Bradford, bass; Fabio Ragnelli, drums; Joanna Majoko (3), Erin Propp (5, 6), Joyce German, Joey Landreth, Erin Propp, Kelsey Rosentretre, Dan Kedding, Mariana Paduanu, Jocelyn Gould, Ashleigh Sadler, Elizabeth Sadler, Zachary Rushing (1, 10), vocals.

Ordering info: jongordonmusic.com



PETER GANNUSHKIN

Matt Pavolka stacks his *Disciplinary Architecture* with cinematic and literary allusions.

Matt Pavolka *Disciplinary Architecture*

SUNNYSIDE

★★½

Sometimes, knowing the titles of tunes helps you understand the composer's intentions and the music's purpose and destination. But unless you have a strong film and literary

bent, Matt Pavolka's *Disciplinary Architecture* will leave you baffled, except perhaps for "Ricin Beans." On this track, the band follows Pavolka's bass and you can almost hear Ben Monder's guitar, Santiago Leibson's keyboards and Allan Mednard's drums reciting "rice and beans." And it's here, more so than elsewhere, that the jazz and blues genre soulfully surfaces.

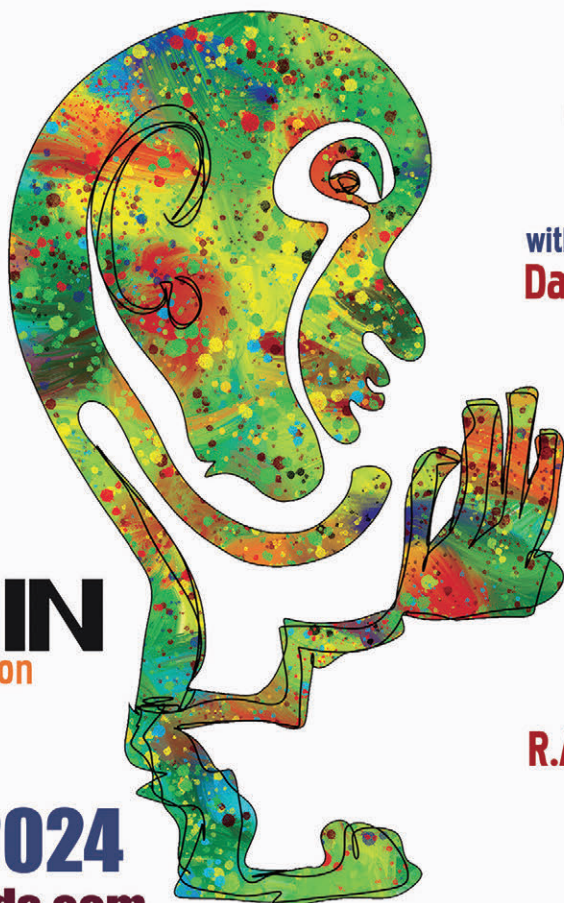
Several tracks have references to water, as in "An Aged Flamingo In A Dried-Up Pool," and you can practically envision the beautiful bird caught in the throes of a swamp, an image provoked by Pavolka's very deliberately laid-back beat and Monder's drone and smears. A similarly restrained pulse emerges on "And Then We Towed New Zealand Out To Sea," where Mednard supplies a series of well-timed, modulated snaps and cracks, each one less propulsive than the next and becoming increasingly heavy.

"Lighter-Completed Invaders From the North" finds the band relaxed in a sci-fi or futuristic mode, and if you've seen a recent viewing of *Dune, Part 2* the soundscape will be familiar. Aspects of light occur in three titles, but it's "Disciplinary Architecture" where the quartet is locked in, with Leibson and Monder possibly delivering the overall concept envisioned by Pavolka.

But bone up on your Roth, DeLillo and other modern novelists to get a better grasp on the music here.
—Herb Boyd

Disciplinary Architecture: An Aged Flamingo In A Dried-Up Pool; And Then We Towed New Zealand Out To Sea; Lighter-Completed Invaders From The North; Ricin Beans; Nuts And Bulbs; Defeating The Porpoise; The Word For Moonlight Is Moonlight; Disciplinary Architecture; Vile; In The Sunshine Crawling. (73:40)
Personnel: Matt Pavolka, bass; Santiago Leibson, keyboards; Ben Monder, guitar; Allan Mednard, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

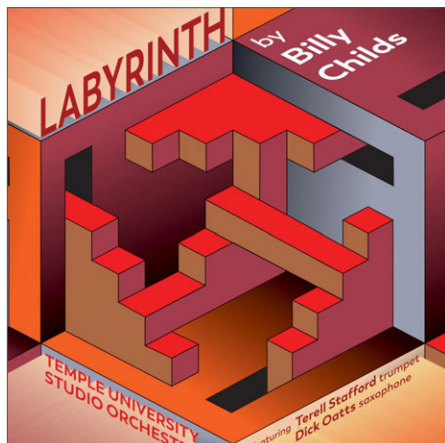


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Quentin Baxter Bill Evans
Bob Coffin Ryoko Suzuki
Gullah Geechee Yeli Ensemble
Mars Williams



Billy Childs & The Temple University Studio Orchestra

Labyrinth

BCM+D

★★★★

When Temple University commissioned the performance of *Labyrinths* to highlight pianist Billy Childs alongside Boyer School of Music and Dance faculty members Terrell Stafford and Dick Oatts, the entire endeavor felt like there was nothing to waste: Perform a couple other pieces in addition Childs' large, imposing composition; record the performance and get it out into the world; highlight everything and everyone possible in making this undertaking. However, the results feels a bit like a watered-down stew looking to spread its ingredients.

The mix on the album is quite low, like it was recorded from the back of the immense

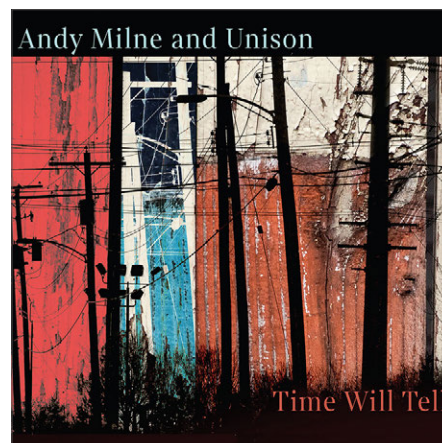
room that held this large ensemble, giving the impression that they're swept up in the immensity of this undertaking. The impetus for the album, "Labyrinth," uses a big band, a rhythm section and the Temple University Studio Orchestra to interweave various sections and their assorted time signatures into a steadily chugging climb of a song that takes a lengthy mosey in the middle through Dick Oatts' chatty alto saxophone. It's a solo worth this many resources of a buildup.

Closing tune "Rainforests" by Bill Cunliffe has a bright, cheery sound to it like it should be soundtracking a child's soccer game. It hits squarely all things required of a pleasant large ensemble. It's nice enough, but lost in the air when it's over, its memory swallowed by the massive room the music was surely born in, barely escaping through the recording from seemingly far away. —Anthony Dean-Harris

Labyrinth: *Labyrinth* by Billy Childs; *Red Braid* by Banks Sanpar; *Rainforests* by Bill Cunliffe. (42:11)

Personnel: José Luis Domínguez, conductor (1, 3) Terrell Stafford, trumpet (1, 3), director (2); Dick Oatts, alto saxophone (1, 3); Tim Warfield, tenor saxophone (3); Bruce Barth, piano (3); Mike Boone, bass (3); Justin Faulkner, drums (3); Temple University Studio Orchestra (1, 3); Alexandr Kisitsyn, concertmaster; Iuliia Kuzmina, Yuan Tian, Zi Wang, Irina Rostomashvili, Taisiya Losmakova, Samuel Allan-Chapkovski, Suhan Liang, Minghao Zhu, Sofia Solomyanskaya, Alexander Covelli, Juan Yanez, J. Pelton, Eunice China, Kyungmin Kim, violin I; Andrew Stump, Abigail Dickson, Sherry Chen, Kyle Stevens, Ryuji Jensen, Yucheng Liao, Katherine Lebedev, Congling Chen, Esmeralda Lastra, Linda Askenazi Mochon, Alysha Delgado, Alyssa Symmonds, Nicholas Sontag, violin II; Adam Brotnitsky, Jasmine Harris, Arik Anderson, Meghan Holman, Tara Pilato, AJ Stacy, Shannon Merlino, viola; Leigh Brown, Brannon Rovins, Samuel Divrigilio, Lily Eckman, Max Culp, Alfonso Gutierrez, Marcela Reina, Chloe Kranz, Gevon Goddard, Lily Perrotta, Alison Park, Samay Ruparelia, Johanna Heyer, Jonah Rose, cello; plus 31 others. Temple University Jazz Band (2): Christian Ertl, saxophone; Adam Abrams, Evan Kappelman, Jason Blythe, Zachary Spondike, saxophones; John Brunozi, Nick Dugo, Andrew Esch, Banks Sanpar, trumpet; Drew Sedlacsik, Laura Orzechoski, Michael Kaplan, trombone; John Kim, bass trombone; Anthony Aldissi, piano; Mike Raymond, guitar; Dan McCain, bass; Maria Marmarou, drums.

Ordering info: boyer.temple.edu



Andy Milne and Unison

Time Will Tell

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Pianist Milne, a Juno Award-winning composer-pianist with a dozen albums to his credit and an estimable career as an educator, created very personal music for his trio and two apt guests based on his discovery at age 51 of previously unknown biological relatives. (He'd been adopted as an infant.) Referring in the liner notes to his "mixed emotions," Milne evokes dark and ruminative states of loss, yearning, tentative outreach and hesitant connectivity, resignation if not resolution, and in "Papounet" (by drummer Penn) a tuneful uplifting of mood.

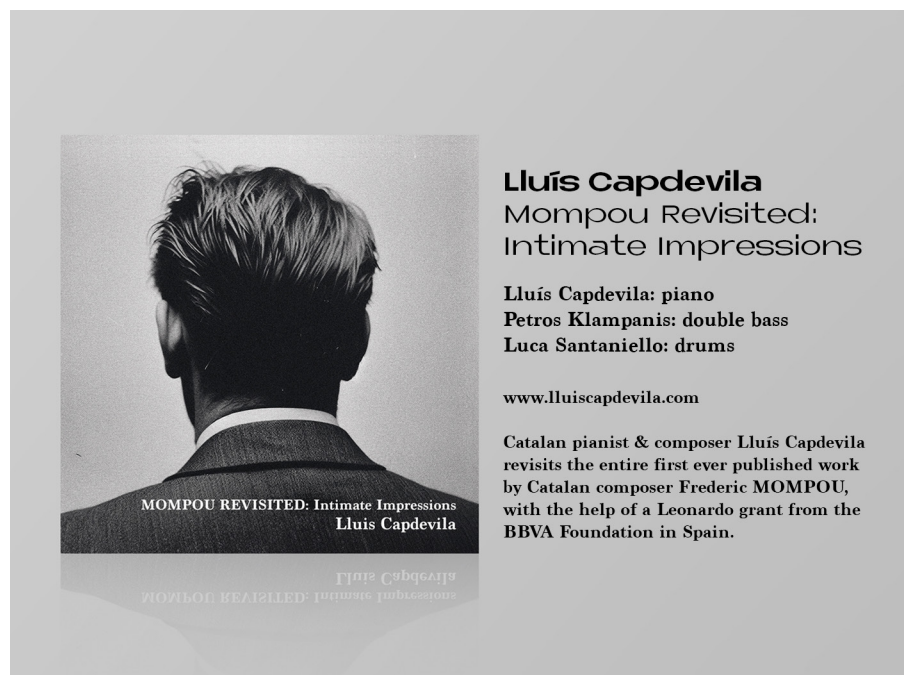
He's ably assisted: Hébert is a particularly sensitive and supportive bassist, delivering a lyrical solo on the multi-part "Porcelain Door" and quiet lushness in his ballad "Broken Landscape." Tenor saxophonist Laubrock traces Milne's themes deftly and expands on them with originality and lovely empathy; she is inquisitive and consoling by turns and employs a remarkable range of tone/timbre with unfailing taste. Kimura's koto adds haunting frisson to four tracks. The ensemble is utterly coherent; far from tacked on, the distinctive instrumentation feels central to this program, conveying it to ethereal realms.

The leader's desire and ability to grapple with issues of identity and self-examination in music make it matter. Milne plays some dazzling piano. He has precise touch and tells stories in his keyboard statements as well as his writing. His breakout on "Kumoi Joshi" flashes elegance and a masterful sense of direction; he builds "No Matter What" on a percussive figure treated with delicacy. This is a somber record, beautifully realized. —Howard Mandel

Time Will Tell: Purity Of Heart; Lost And Found; Papounet; Beyond The Porcelain Door; Solitude; Kumoi Joshi; No Matter What; Broken Landscape; Lost And Found; Reprise; Apart.

Personnel: Andy Milne, piano; John Hébert, bass; Clarence Penn, drums; Ingrid Laubrock, tenor saxophone (1, 4, 6, 9); Yoko Reikano Kimura, koto (2, 4, 6, 9).

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



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Conrad Herwig *The Latin Side Of McCoy Tyner*

SAVANT

★★★★

Who doesn't love an interpretation of a jazz standard through a Latin jazz lens? Beyond the liberal application of a habanera syncopation

here or a clave there, there's a long history of the recipe cooked up to great effect in the world of jazz. Clearly Conrad Herwig is proponent of the formula: he's applied it to cuts culled from the respective catalogues of Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis and Horace Silver, among others.

In this installment of Herwig's *Latin Side* series, Herwig works to add a Latin twist to

cuts including a descarga-fueled interpretation of "Passion Dance" and "Search For Peace" reimagined as a measured mambo (both were originally recorded on the iconic 1967 album *The Real McCoy*).

Herwig's trombone solos bear the inheritance of classic mid-20th-century jazz styling without being trapped in homage. Meanwhile, both he and his band pull out all the stops in their commitment to a Latin presentation of Tyner: "Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit" (from 1973's *Enlightenment*) even features the incomparable Eddie Palmieri. In this interpretation, the cut is translated from a slab of spiritual soul jazz to a mellow boogaloo wonder. Compositions were drawn from a wide swath of Tyner's catalogue, highlights among them is "Fly With The Wind" from 1976's album of the same name, and a slick interpretation of 1962's "Reaching Fourth."

The Latin Side Of McCoy Tyner is more than just an enjoyable, Latin-tinged jaunt: It begs for a fresh interpretation of the fairly recently departed McCoy Tyner's legacy.

—Ayana Contreras

The Latin Side Of McCoy Tyner: African Village; Passion Dance; Four By Five; Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit; Mellow Minor; Search For Peace; Peresina; Fly With The Wind; Blues On The Corner; Reaching Fourth. (59:00)

Personnel: Conrad Herwig, trombone; Craig Handy, tenor and baritone saxophones; Alex Norris, trumpet, flugelhorn; Bill O'Connell, piano; Ruben Rodriguez, bass; Rob-by Armeen, drums; Camilo Molina, congas, bata; Eddie Palmieri, piano (4).

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

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4 Decades in 4 Countries

Fifty years after his passing, **Duke Ellington's** legacy continues to grow with the gradual release of previously unknown sessions full of innovative treasures. While most big bands feature four or perhaps five soloists, at the time of *Copenhagen 1958* (Storyville; ★★★★★ 79:10), Ellington's orchestra had 11 distinctive horn soloists, not to mention the pianist. All (except Russell Procope) have their chances to shine on this concert, including Johnny Hodges ("Prelude To A Kiss" and "Things Ain't What They Used To Be"), Clark Terry ("Perdido"), Britt Woodman ("Sonnet To Hank Cinq") and four very different trumpet-ers ("El Gato"). Most remarkable is undoubtedly the most rapid rendition of "Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue" ever documented, with tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves taking the same number of choruses (27) he did at the famous Newport concert two years earlier; Cat Anderson's impossible high notes climax this very exciting version, which by itself is a reason to acquire this disc. In addition, Ellington is featured on three piano solos from 1950 and jams with tenor saxophonist Don Byas and clarinetist Jimmy Hamilton on an ad-lib boppish blues and a two-tempo version of "Body And Soul."

Ordering info: storyvillerecords.com

Fumio Itabashi, now 75, has long been considered one of Japan's finest jazz pianists. *Waterase* (Wewantsounds; ★★★★★ 46:28), a 1981 set of piano solos, has been rated by others as one of his most significant recordings although, until this recent LP reissue, it was largely unavailable in the U.S. Itabashi at times reminds one of McCoy Tyner, particularly on his four originals, which include the powerful and spiritual jazz waltz "Waterase" and the rhythmic modal piece "Tone." His slow, mostly out-of-tempo rendition of "Some-day My Prince Will Come" serves as a contrast with his joyful and celebratory interpretation of Abdullah Ibrahim's "Msundusa." Other performances include a straightforward and melodic "I Can't Get Started," the urgency of "Miss Cann" and the melancholy "Goodbye," the latter a piece with a haunting theme that should be covered by others.

Ordering info: wewantsounds.bandcamp.com

The Ipanemas, whose *Samba Is Our Gift* (Far Out; ★★★★★ 42:05) is being reissued on LP, was co-led for many years by drummer-singer Wilson Das Neves and guitarist Neco. An important force in popularizing bossa nova in Brazil from the 1960s on, the Ipanemas perform music on their 2006 release that mostly comprises gentle sambas. In addition to Neves' vocals (he is sometimes joined by background singers and strings) and Neco's acoustic guitar, the group has a



Phil Haynes led 4 Horns & What from 1989 to '95.

prominent role for trombonist Vitor Santos and an expanded rhythm section with up to three percussionists. The set mixes together vocal pieces with instrumentals, consisting of lesser-known material (no Jobim tunes) and fine solos by Santos and pianist-keyboardist Fernando Moraes. While nothing unexpected occurs, the atmospheric music is pleasing, occasionally infectious and always cheerful.

Ordering info: faroutrecordings.com

In the late 1980s, drummer **Phil Haynes** put together a two-brass, two-reed quintet that he called **4 Horns & What**, with himself being the "what." The group recorded two albums for the short-lived Open Minds label, making the music on the three-CD *The Complete American Recordings* (Corner Store Jazz; ★★★★★ 196:33) quite rare. Reissued in full are the *4 Horns & What* and *4 Horn Lore* albums from 1989 and 1991, plus a previously unreleased BAM concert from 1995 (the group's final appearance) that is actually their finest hour on record. Haynes' ensemble features trumpeter Paul Smoker, either Joe Daley on tuba or Herb Robertson on brass, Andy Laster on various reeds, and Ellery Eskelin or John Tchicai on tenor. There is no guitar, piano or bass — nor are they needed. Haynes contributed all the compositions. The moody music ranges from somber to rambunctious, from desolate passages to ecstatic group interplay, with Smoker (and Tchicai on the live date) particularly excelling. Among the more memorable of the 24 performances, "A lil Iowa Get-Down" depicts the gradual awakening of both the day and the musicians, "Point Period" is a sometimes humorous party tune, "Holler 4 Horns" looks back to field hollers, and "Corner Store Strut" goes to New Orleans. From sound explorations to joyful chaos, Phil Haynes and his sidemen never play it safe.

Ordering info: cornerstorejazz.com

AMANDA NICHOLS



Black Diamond *Furniture Of The Mind Rearranging*

WE JAZZ

★★★★★

Furniture Of The Mind Rearranging is the fourth album by this Chicago quartet. It is an advance in ambition, accomplishment and resources over its predecessors, but remains true to the ensemble's essence. At its core are Hunter Diamond and Artie Black. They both play tenor saxophone, and the tunes that each write often capitalize on their subtle differences of tone and emphasis while playing the same lines with the same horns. But they also double on flute and a variety of clarinets, enriching the music's tonal palette.

While the album is lengthy, most of its tunes are not. Black and Diamond write separately, but they share a sense of economy and patience. Their themes are clearly delineated, thoughtfully developed and pleasingly diverse in feel. They're also intended to communicate something more than their own compositional integrity. The title track, for example, expresses a wish that reordered ideas and re-examined priorities might resolve the intractable differences of this time.

One side of this double LP is devoted to a pair of austere, chamber-like improvisations played solely by Black and Diamond; the other three feature them with two other players who are more than just a rhythm section. Neil Hemphill is extroverted, but never overpowering. He augments propulsion with enough decoration to free bassist Matt Ulery to function much of the time as a third ensemble voice, either bowing in formation with the two horns or plucking a pithy counterpoint to them.

—Bill Meyer

Furniture Of The Mind Rearranging: Carrying The Stick; Dovetail; Seen; Zoetic; Jayber Crow; Mantis; Say To Yourself; Under The Garden; Furniture Of The Mind; Lost Motion; Catlett; Mycellium; Motor Neurons. (77:00)

Personnel: Artie Black, saxophones and woodwinds; Hunter Diamond, saxophones and woodwinds; Matt Ulery, bass; Neil Hemphill, drums.

Ordering info: wejazzrecords.bandcamp.com



Janel Leppin's Ensemble Volcanic Ash *To March Is To Love*

CUNEIFORM

★★★★½

Janel and Anthony *New Moon In The Evil Age*

CUNEIFORM

★★★★½

As a married couple and long-time collaborators, cellist Janel Leppin and guitarist Anthony Pirog form a communal core for the creative music scene in Washington, D.C., playing with many of its figures in ad hoc configurations and working ensembles. Lately, Pirog has garnered attention for his work with saxophonist James Brandon Lewis as a member of the Messthetics, to say nothing of his album *The Nepenthe Series*, a program of ambient duets with fellow guitarists like Nels Cline and Andy Summers.

Now Leppin returns to the spotlight with *To March Is To Love*, the second album from her versatile Ensemble Volcanic Ash, which brings an art-rock veneer to dense chamber jazz. The album is bookended by Leppin originals celebrating two of her cello heroes, Abdul Wadud and Pablo Casals. The former is feted with a searing tone poem in which her unison lines with Pirog articulate the viscous melody, while the latter is saluted with a gorgeous solo piano piece.

Wadud's influence feels more germane on the seething "Tennessee's a Drag," where Leppin's forceful lines recall the sort of slashing intensity he brought to his work with alto saxophonist Julius Hemphill. In fact, she invokes Hemphill, too, on "As Wide As All Outdoors," where her unison lines with bassist Luke Stewart recall the righteous groove on the saxophonist's classic "Dogon A.D." Over sparse chording by Pirog she uncorks a white-knuckled, sharp-edged solo that manages to stay on track despite an inertia constantly pulling it towards the abyss.

Although many of the pieces convey a



brooding darkness, Leppin leavens the mood with "Sateatime," a tender waltz that emerges halfway through and provides some emotional respite before gliding into the elegant, two-part title piece, which moves from grace to chaos to triumph with impressive fluidity. The members of the terrific band all get space to improvise, but it's the dense arrangements that drive the music forward and the solos all occur within the weave of the sonic fabric.

As much as they work together, *New Moon In The Evil Age* is the first album the couple has made as a duo since 2012, and it's here where they let their abiding ardor for art-rock take over. The album comes in two halves, starting with 10 instrumental duos followed by nine tunes featuring Leppin's singing, all of it seriously melodic. The instrumentals are marked by lapidary detail, although the cycling guitar arpeggios can become a bit predictable.

Leppin is a precise singer, but the vocal tracks feel a bit overdone and mawkish at times, and the reverb-heavy production only heightens the schmaltz level. They're richly contrapuntal, infused with a prog-rock complexity despite the transparent grace of the deft arrangements. Compared with the immediacy of the Volcanic Ash recording, these tracks can come off as fussy, telegraphing an emotional torpor that feels rather syrupy and airless.

The craftsmanship is undeniable, but for listeners more attracted to an improvisational spark the music can feel a bit turgid, much closer to Angelo Badalamenti than Anthony Braxton.

—Peter Margasak

To March Is To Love: Ode To Abdul Wadud; Tennessee's A Drag; A Man Approached Me; As Wide As All Outdoors; Union Art; Oh Johnny Dear; Sateatime; To March Is To Love Pt. I; To March Is To Love Pt. II; Guidance Received; Casal's Rainbow. (43:27)

Personnel: Larry Ferguson, drums; Luke Stewart, bass; Anthony Pirog, guitar; Sarah Hughes, alto saxophone; Brian Settles, tenor saxophone; Janel Leppin, cello, piano.

New Moon In The Evil Age: New Moon; Boom Boom; Bells Ring In The Distance; Jamie's Song; Fog Curls Round Cypress; Slight Sense: Rain Falls In San Francisco; Rhizome; Pacific Grove Monarch; crystal wish; Surf The Dead; Evil Age; Sweet And Sour; Dreams Come Alive; Innocent Human; Fly Over Iceland; Heart's Hearth; Dripping Prisms; Find A Way. (62:58)

Personnel: Janel Leppin, cello, modified cello, vocals, synthesizers, piano, koto, hammered dulcimer, bass; Anthony Pirog, electric and acoustic guitar, guitar synth, synthesizers, bass, percussion; Devin Hoff, electric and acoustic bass; Dr. Ali Analoui, daf, tonbak.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

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Spontaneous Singularity

Free-jazz can be a lot of things, often all at the same time. A good free-jazz band can project energy and display virtuosity. It can generate excitement or induce a trance-like state. But one thing that's hard to manage in a freely improvised situation is a singular statement of emotion, a unified feeling that's as easily digested and immediately relatable as a poem or a movie scene.

An example of spontaneous ensemble singularity is the remarkable European quartet [Ahmed], comprising saxophonist Seymour Wright, pianist Pat Thomas, bassist Joel Grip and drummer Antonin Gerbal. Their recent five-disc box *Giant Beauty* (Fönstret; ★★★★★ 247:15) and the single disc *Wood Blues* (Astral Spirits; ★★★½ 58:34) more than double the catalog of their absolutely infectious music, which alone is cause for celebration.

It might be a bit misleading to call [Ahmed] a free-jazz band. While by and large an improvising group, they rework and repurpose the compositions of bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik, who played with Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk and Randy Weston among others, and in his own recordings sought to bring Eastern influences into the tradition. But certainly over three-quarters of an hour or so, Abdul-Malik's fairly simple themes only guide so much of the execution. The energy has at least as much to do with the spirit of discovering new pathways through old ideas as it does with playing heads.

Earlier renderings of two of the five CD-length titles on *Giant Beauty* (recorded over five consecutive nights at the 2022 Fylkingen festival in Stockholm) were included on previous releases: "Nights On Saturn," on the 2021 disc of the same name, and "El Haris (Anxious)," which appeared as simply "Anxious" on their 2017 debut *New Jazz Imagination*, documenting their first public concert. A third selection on *Giant Beauty*, "Oud Blues," puns on "Wood Blues," recorded just a few months earlier.

With those touchstones, *Giant Beauty* might be seen as a sampler for the magnificent work of [Ahmed], although with a total running length of about four hours, it's more smorgasbord than appetizer platter. Nevertheless, it's a great introduction to the band, with titles that serve like mission statements. "Oud Blues" begins with Grip's tightly measured bass intro punctuated by Wright's slap-tongued saxophone, convincingly pantomiming the percussive pluck of a plectrum on strings. While the introductory device carries on, Thomas lays a hard-bop chord progressions over the top, then Gerbal slides a cymbal count into the back. Wright augments his



[Ahmed], an Anglo-French improvising quartet.

lines, dropping bleats within and around the pops and, by five minutes in, the piano and drums have taken over the role of the oud, but the suggestion persists. It's a thematic statement, but one made by the attack of the playing more than the sequence of notes. By the 10-minute mark, there's no suggestion of a lute left, but the throughline remains. It's really rather remarkable. "African Bossa Nova," meanwhile, finds propulsive Latin rhythms in the transatlantic cross-pollination suggested by its title.

Ordering info: ahmedquartet.bandcamp.com

"Wood Blues" — the sole track on the Astral Spirits release — also uses the plectrum illusion intro, but moves much more quickly, allowing the upbeat shuffle to develop of its own accord. Recorded live at Counterflows in Glasgow in April 2022, it's a faster-moving performance than anything heard on *Giant Beauty*, even while being nearly 10 minutes longer than the longest track in the box. Being less tethered to procedure allows the band to play more freely and, as always, they play hard.

Wright's alto, usually overblown into multiphonics and insistent rhythms, contributes as much to the count as anything coming from the rhythms section. That rhythm section, not incidentally, released a trio album as [ism] in February (*Maua*, on 577 Records); it's fascinating to compare that altogether gentler and more open-form extended improvisation with the group energy that defines their work in [Ahmed].

The [Ahmed] experiment delivered results with its first unveiling and its alchemy has only grown stronger in the seven years hence. They make (relatively) free improv easy to love and make past ideas timeless. Rarely is something so important also such an absolute pleasure.

DB

Ordering info: astralspirits.bandcamp.com



Denny Zeitlin *Panoply* SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Denny Zeitlin's *Panoply* boasts a thoughtful approach to its listening experience. He explains that the tracks are compiled with more of a "journey" in mind, as opposed to merely moving from solo piano, to duo with drums, to trio with drums and bass. As such, the album offers an abundance of intriguing peaks, valleys, twists and turns.

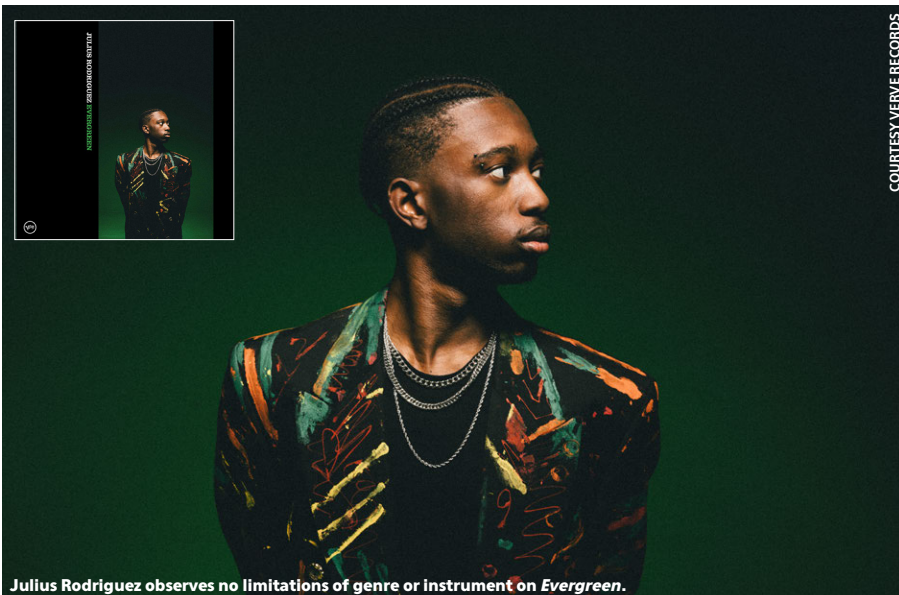
Everyone's musicianship is solid. Zeitlin excels alone on the piano. "Limburger Pie And Beeswax Crust" is particularly memorable for its melody, title and charm as a live performance. Zeitlin's solos are some of the album's strongest reflections of creativity, execution and production thriving together. Other tracks with more parts, like opener "I Was Doing Allright," "Weirdo" and even free-jazz-teasing finale "Johnny Come Lately" succeed as well, delivering very satisfying and sprightly bouts of more familiar jazz writing. The delayed and multilayered digital string plucks heard on "A Raft, A River" make a track that sounds quite contemporary by comparison but it remains approachable with regard to how unpredictable its melody, rhythm and tones want to be.

All of this in mind, some of *Panoply*'s timbres and playing techniques aren't always easy to embrace. The boldest oddities come from some notably dated synthesizer choices on tracks like "Excursion," "Music Box" and "Regret." Older/blended sounds can be great. Yet, the abruptness of '80s-style laser tones, MIDI-adjacent digital horn sounds, and default plugin-style strings end up feeling quite out of place with clear piano, drums and bass, not an enjoyably experimental combination.

—Kira Grunenberg

Panoply: I Was Doing All Right; Excursion; Only One; Ambush; Music Box; Cherokee; Regret; Weirdo; A Raft, A River; Limburger Pie And Beeswax Crust; I Should Care; Johnny Come Lately. (78:03)
Personnel: Denny Zeitlin, piano, hardware and virtual synthesizers, keyboards; George Marsh, drums, percussion; Buster Williams, bass; Matt Wilson, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Julius Rodriguez observes no limitations of genre or instrument on *Evergreen*.

Julius Rodriguez *Evergreen*

VERVE

★★★★½

To say multi-instrumentalist, producer and composer Julius Rodriguez is eclectic is an understatement. His sense of rhythmic progressiveness and keen improvisatory skills is quite impressive.

Even though he's only 25, Rodriguez has been in the game from childhood, having worked with Kurt Elling, Wynton Marsalis and Roy Hargrove. He pulled a Glasper-esque approach with his second album, *Evergreen*. While his debut *Let Sound Tell All* was more acoustic in nature, paying homage to his piano roots, with *Evergreen*, Rodriguez shuns "jazz" boundaries, leaping headfirst into a genreless state of electronica, R&B and hip-hop.

With his producer, Tim Anderson, whose credits include work with pop artists Solange and Billie Eilish, he crafts tracks like "Funmi's Groove," where Rodriguez's piano/organ duality shines amid the bass-heavy tempo. Other standouts like the rhythmic groove "Around The World" eject space-vibes via synths and also saxophone stints from Nicole McCabe. "Run To It (The CP Song)," written by R&B/jazz artist Meshell Ndegeocello, invokes a New Orleans, gospel-tinged feeling from the organ, tambourine and acoustic bass guitar, all creating the ambiance of a Sunday church service setting.

Guests on the album include trumpeter Keyon Harrold on "Love Everlasting" and vocalist Georgia Anne Muldrow on the jubilant conclusion "Champion's Call." Muldrow's haunting echoes mimic Rodriguez's continual piano line. Like the opening "Mission Statement," Rodriguez is on a mission to further the state of music on his own terms.

—Veronica Johnson

Evergreen: Mission Statement; Funmi's Groove; Around The World; Road Rage; Rise and Shine; Many Times; Run To It (The CP Song); Love Everlasting; Stars Talk; Champion's Call. (39:00)

Personnel: Julius Rodriguez, piano, Hammond B-3, Rhodes, synths, drums, electric bass, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, clarinet, programming; Nicole McCabe (1, 3), Chris Lewis (7), Emilio Modeste (9), saxophones; Jermaine Paul, bass (10); Luke Titus (1), Brian Richburg Jr. (2, 3), drums; Nate Mercereau, synthesizer (1, 3), guitar (4, 9); Philip Norris, basses (2, 3, 5, 7), drums (5); Alonzo Demetrius, (3, 7), Keyon Harrold (8), trumpet; Declan Miers, electric bass (4); Jay Adlher, Maddi St. John (4), Georgia Anne Muldrow (10), vocals.

Ordering info: julliusrodriguez.com



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Lux Quartet *Tomorrowland*

ENJA YELLOWBIRD

★★★★

Lux Quartet is a new group led by pianist Myra Melford and drummer Allison Miller, who previously collaborated on four albums by Miller's group Boom Tic Boom. Saxophonist Dayna Stephens played on *Science Fair*, Miller's 2018 album with pianist Carmen Staaf. Bassist Scott Colley is working with everyone here for the first time, but he slots right in.

The members of the ensemble write all the music, though some of the pieces have been

recorded before. For example, compare this version of Miller's "Congratulations And Condolences" to the one that opened Boom Tic Boom's 2019 album *Glitter Wolf*. That track was built around a hammering backbeat that launched cornetist Kirk Knuffke, clarinetist Ben Goldberg, and Melford into powerful mid-air spirals; here, the drummer lays back into a lighter, dancing groove (though her trademark power still manifests) and lets Stephens' soprano saxophone take the listener on a more meditative journey.

The title track belongs to Colley. It was first recorded on his 2010 album *Empire*, as a duet with guitarist Bill Frisell that was full of meaningful pauses; here, it's performed at nearly triple the original's length. The players enter in turn: first Melford alone, then Melford and Colley, then an infinitely patient Stephens and finally Miller, tapping and sliding across her cymbals as the bassist tugs the music forward, eventually descending into deep bowed groans that she matches with ominous rumbles from the toms. Eventually, it all rises to an incantatory climax, then drifts back to earth.

—Phil Freeman

Tomorrowland: Intricate Drift; 23 January; Congratulations And Condolences; Deeply Us; The Wayward Line; Speak Eddie; Dry Print On Cardboard; Tomorrowland. (61:45)

Personnel: Myra Melford, piano; Dayna Stephens, saxophones; Scott Colley, bass; Allison Miller, drums.

Ordering info: enjarecords.com

Zaccai Curtis *Cubop Lives*

TRRCOLLECTIVE

★★★★½

On Zaccai Curtis' new disc, the pleasures are multifaceted. The opening "Earl" is a tribute to Bud Powell, Zaccai's great piano inspiration. Powell also gets a nod with the beautiful Victor Young ballad "When I Fall In Love," recorded by Powell in 1956. Thelonious Monk's "52nd Street Theme" is fractalized.

But *Cubop Lives* reaches another dimension on a cha-cha-cha arrangement of "Some Day My Prince Will Come." Like Noro Morales, the pianist runs his octaves cleanly. Luques Curtis (the leader's brother) plays a remarkably melodic bass solo and the refrain borrows from Bobby Capó's classic "Piel Canela." Zaccai's original "Maria Cervantes," for the Cuban pianist-singer-songwriter known as "the grand dame of Cuban music," fingers her as a subject for further study.

The sidemen do excellent work as well. Bongocero Reinaldo De Jesus nearly steals the show with his tart playing on "Maple Leaf Rag" and unaccompanied solo intro to "Oye Men." Also worth noting is Willie Martinez's dizzying timbales solo on "Let's Do It Again," and the bassist's call-and-response exchanges on the same track.



There are quotes all over the place, most notably the leader inserting Coltrane's "Mr P.C." on "Black Rice." Things end with Charlie Parker's "Moose The Mooche," from his 1946 Dial session. But this disc is not merely an excavation or evocation of the past; this music allows each curious generation to discover its hidden secrets.

—Larry Appelbaum

Cubop Lives: Earl; Black Rice; 52nd Street Theme; When I Fall In Love; Cuban Fantasy; Woody'n You; Someday My Prince Will Come; Let's Do It Again; Jazzin'; Maria Cervantes; Oye Men; Stromboli; Rumbambola; Maple Leaf Rag; Contour; Minor's Holiday; Moose The Mooche. (72:19)

Personnel: Zaccai Curtis, piano; Willie Martinez, drums, voice, timbales; Camilo Molina, percussion; Reinaldo De Jesus, percussion, drums; Luques Curtis, bass.

Ordering info: trrstore.bandcamp.com



Cory Weeds Meets Champion Fulton

Every Now And Then

CELLAR MUSIC

★★★★

Cory Weeds and Champion Fulton's second saxophone-voice/piano duo album documents a live-in-studio set in Calgary in February 2023, four years after the Vancouver house concert that generated its predecessor, *Dream A Little*.

Fulton applies her expansive, fluidly phrased contralto to five of the nine good-old good ones (eight on the vinyl release) culled from various corners of the American Songbook. Her interpretations are fresh, both on everyone-sang-them numbers like Cole Porter's bop-friendly "It's All Right With Me" and Johnny Mercer's "Too Marvelous For Words," and less-traveled obscurities: "Linger In My Arms A Little Longer, Baby," which Louis Armstrong and Peggy Lee introduced in 1946; George Cory and Douglass Cross' "Carry Me Back To Old Manhattan," from a 1952 album by Mabel Mercer (a frequent headliner at the Café Carlyle, Manhattan's gold-standard cabaret room, where Fulton has performed); and the bluesy title track, which long-time Basie singer Helen Humes recorded thrice, initially in 1945 with Bill Doggett.

Fulton self-accompanies and solos on piano with harmonic sophistication, impeccable chops, a risk-friendly attitude and an idiosyncratic conceptual range spanning Bud Powell, Erroll Garner and several other waystations, refracted into her own argot. Weeds plays alto saxophone on these and the instrumentals ("The Best Things In Life Are Free," Fulton mentor Frank Wess' "Boss Touch" and Fulton's bop-adjacent "That's Not Your Donut" and "The Snapper"), soloing cogently and blending with her tone as he conjures apropos obbligatos.


—Ted Panken

Every Now And Then: Boss Touch; It's Alright With Me; Too Marvelous For Words; Linger In My Arms A Little Longer; The Best Things In Life Are Free; Carry Me Back To Old Manhattan; That's Not Your Donut; Every Now And Then; Carry Me Back To Old Manhattan. (53:21)

Personnel: Cory Weeds, alto saxophone; Champion Fulton, piano, vocals.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

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Notes From Underground

What a multiplicity of music flourishes around the world under the umbrella of jazz. On the **Daniel Bennett Group's** 10th album, *Mr. Bennett's Mind* (Manhattan Daylight Media; ★★★ 29:55), the New York reed man's light touch and quirky writing radiates a naïve optimism with a folk flavor. A real original, Bennett has a knack for titles that mirror his cartoonish music: "Turn Clockwise And Push" showcases his floating, legato alto saxophone; "Talk To Your Panda" and "Bank Robbers," his silvery flute. "The County Clerk" dances in 3, and "Variations On A Floating T" highlights the Tristano-like counterpoint of Jason Yeager's piano. "Three Studies On Emotion" finds a more aggressive, composerly place where the band might have profitably spent more time.

Ordering info: danielbennett.net

Maryland-based tenor saxophonist **Stephen Philip Harvey** is a straightahead band room swinger with an ear for making four horns sound like a kicking big band. He has two new live octet albums drawn from the last stop of a 2023 tour. *Elemental (Live)* (Hidden Cinema; ★★★½ 38:20), features a looser and livelier version of the eponymous studio album, which explores the Greek cosmos of air, water, earth and fire. Especially strong are the noirish "Tidal Force," which highlights the warm trumpet of Marques Carroll, and "Inhale. Exhale.," which opens up to lovely solos by (bowing) bassist Tony DePaulis and trombonist Reggie Watkins. *Live At Radio Artifact* (Hidden Cinema; ★★★ 52:58) showcases six other tunes and allows more room for stretching, but also more talk, including a whole track to introduce the band. The opener, "Witch Hunt," is a sparkler, with a quietly secretive intro that gives way to snappy repartee between horns and creamy Rhodes (Ben Tweedt). "Jay Tee" has bedroom eyes, with a sexy tenor solo from Harvey himself. There's nothing groundbreaking here, but it's firm ground nonetheless.

Ordering info: hiddencinemarecords.com

Australian reed player **Gemma Farrell** is a decent improviser on all the saxophones, but on her quintet's new effort *Electronic* (Independent Release; ★★½ 68:33) she embraces a new squeeze, the EWI (electric wind instrument). There's happy feel to the album, as she extracts a creative variety of sounds from the instrument (wooden flute, train whistle and a fun gusher of a sax soli on "Some Of The Nothings You Ain't"), but too much of the hard-edged rock-jazz here is turgid, plodding and grandiose. The best moments are acoustic: her soaring alto saxophone solos on "Drum Circle," "One For Bucket Hat Man" and "Sixth Sense," and Sam Hadlow's trombone on "Drum Circle."

Ordering info: gemmafarrell.bandcamp.com



Daniel Bennett

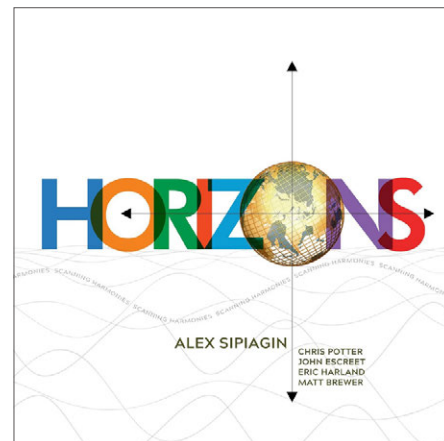
You gotta love **Maria Faust Jazz Catastrophe: 3rd Mutation's** *Moth* (Bush Flash; ★★★★★ 45:18), if only for the group's name, but there's so much more. A fierce free-jazz iconoclast, Faust hails from Estonia and lives in Denmark. She previously recorded a larger acoustic band with the same cool name but has since paired it down to a power trio, with Lars Bech Pilgaard's guitar effects and assorted electronics providing orchestral heft and Anders Vestergaard driving the occasionally obsessive rhythms. *Moth* proceeds seamlessly from track to track with the haunting beauty of a fever dream, mixing passages of ominous noise ("Nocturnal Creature," "Hells Bells") with moments of stunning, meditative beauty ("Mhm"). The arc of the tale is a fated love story, per the title of the first track, "Moth To The Flame." And yet for all the tossing and turning, daybreak finally arrives with the last, long track, the title of which nods, perhaps with a wink, to another ill-fated love story, "Undine's Purse." Not for the faint heart, but brilliantly imagined music.

Ordering info: mariafaust.bandcamp.com

Brazilian guitarist **Flavio Silva** offers a set of breezy jazz fusion with a bit of a Larry Carlton vibe on *Eko* (Break Free; ★★★ 51:04). Tasteful and sensible, Silva isn't likely to surprise or upset anyone, but he phrases beautifully. He gets his Wes Montgomery on during "Pare de Saranhar Meu Cabelo Menino (Stop Messing With My Hair, Kid)." "Sunflower" opens with a catchy walking figure by keyboardist Garbriel Gaiardo, who switches on an attractively flute/reedy synth mix on Milton Nascimento's svelte "Dom Quixote." The title track features crisp drummer Cuca Teixeira, who has a light touch and always stays connected to the fluid quartet. "To Blade And Cowherd" nails the medium-tempo mystery of those estimable players. Overall, a rather pleasant ride.

Ordering info: flaviosilvamusic.com

ALEXA DREW



Alex Sipiagin *Horizons*

BLUE ROOM

★★★★

Various factors help make *Horizons* one of the strongest albums yet for trumpeter Alex Sipiagin. For one, the Russian musician, who lived in New York for three decades before moving to Italy, has tempered his bold virtuosity and reached new levels of maturity and taste in his playing and writing. He is also in stellar, sensitive company here, alongside longtime collaborator saxophonist Chris Potter, agile drummer Eric Harland, ascendant keyboardist John Escreet and solid bassist Matt Brewer. All the pieces are in place for an impressive outing.

And then there is the Pat Metheny factor: Call it the fifth Beatle syndrome. The legendary guitarist custom-wrote two of the album's strongest tunes; one burns, the other simmers. Opening the album on an intense, knotty note, Metheny's "While You Weren't Looking" is a sneakily engaging maze for the band. Sipiagin and Potter quickly establish their mastery and musicality in their soloing, but also warm up to the lyrical demands of Metheny's plush waltz-ballad "When It Is Now" (not to be confused with Wayne Shorter's "When It Was Now").

Speaking of Shorter, the late icon's influential imprint is felt on "Overseen" and "Devil Woman," with flavors of Mingus also in the mix. Friendly post-fusion energies sneak into the room on the Miles Davis-flecked, three-part "Horizon" triptych "Lost," featuring Escreet leaning into digital sonics, although the album closer "AVIA-tion" is a deceptively idle groove-alicious party favor with an unexpectedly intricate melodic line. In all, *Horizons* is a winning package from a veteran very much on his game.

—Josef Woodard

Horizons: While You Weren't Looking; Overseen; Clean Cut; Jumping Ahead; When Is It Now?; Lost; Horizon 1; Horizon 2; Horizon 3; AVIA-tion. (60:38)

Personnel: Alex Sipiagin, trumpet and flugelhorn; Chris Potter, saxophones; John Escreet, piano and keyboards; Eric Harland, drums; Matt Brewer, bass.

Ordering info: theblueroommusic.com



Morgan Guerin *Tales Of The Facade*

CANDID RECORDS

★★★★½

Multi-instrumentalist Morgan Guerin, in his first album on Terri Lyne Carrington's resurgence of Candid Records, has made an earthy, rooted music that takes all the best aspects of

R&B and lives in that groove. It's a jam that flows together while keeping a perfect compositional balance, like these songs sprang forth and could be nothing other than this. Of course, with Guerin playing synths, Rhodes, saxophones, organ, keyboard bass, drums, percussion, bass clarinet, EWI, Wurlitzer, Mellotron, arranging, producing, mixing and probably some other aspects I'm missing, it's

clear this is a project that's built in the studio.

This isn't to say it's an entirely solo album. Sometimes Guerin is playing everything because he's providing everything necessary, especially the driving bass line, for Georgia Anne Muldrow to raise spirits on "Infinity." Sometimes it's JK Kim on drums, Kofi Hunter on percussion, J Hoard's immediately recognizable, always bright and lively vocals and Guerin on ... everything else, as on "We Are More" or its seamless transition into "Peace Of Mind," an absolute jam featuring Kokayi's lively vocals and one of guitarist Matthew Stevens' three appearances on the album. However, with Guerin playing everything but the kitchen sink, when other players appear, they tend to get a bit lost in the wash. The collaborative spirit of the music feels a bit like an afterthought, or an easily toggleable attribute in the programming software that compiled it.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Tales Of The Facade: Retopia; Delayed Green; Silhouette; Pyramid; We Are More; Peace Of Mind; Ginger Ale; Day By Day; Pen And Paper; Infinity; Something In The Air; Homeland Heroine. (41:59)

Personnel: Morgan Guerin, synths, Rhodes, keybass, upright bass, bass clarinet, EWI, flute, electric bass, drums, bass clarinet, piano, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, organ, vocals, Wurlitzer, percussion, Mellotron; Chase Guerin, vocals, keybass, spoken word; Mike King, organ, piano, Rhodes; Samantha Feliciano, harp (1); Alexis Lombre, Tareneh Mousavi, Alexandria Dewalt, Zacchaeus Paul, J. Hoard, Debo Ray, Kokayi, Cisco Swank, Melanie Charles, vocals; Milena Casado, trumpet, vocals; Matthew Stevens, guitar (4, 6, 9); JK Kim, drums (5–6, 8–9, 11); Kofi Hunter, percussion (5, 10, 11); Georgia Anne Muldrow, vocals (10), synths (10); Simon Moullier, vibraphone (12), synth (12).

Ordering info: candidrecords.shop.musictoday.com



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Fergus McCreadle *Stream*

EDITION

★★★★

This pianist became a sensation in his native Scotland with *Forest Floor*, highlighting his dazzling pianism and the marrying of modern jazz with the folk music of his heritage. In this follow-up, McCreadle and his bandmates, bassist David Bowden and drummer Stephen Henderson, lean into their blend of Scottish fusion.

They achieve this with some innovative approaches. “Driftwood” manages to take a traditional-sounding jig and deconstruct it into a

modal jam, à la McCoy Tyner’s “Passion Dance.” A lyrical melody in “Snowcap” floats over a repeated quarter-note drone, twirling like faeries in some suspended, timeless meadow of sound.

“Sun Pillars” evokes more of an Americana folklore, both in its genteel country-gospel vamp and in some of McCreadle’s Bruce Hornsby-esque runs. “Stony Gate” is a reel spun over another left-hand drone (emulating the sound of bagpipes?), before morphing into a modally reharmonized rock-oriented groove. The penultimate pièce de resistance, “Lochan Coire Ardair,” is another jig set within a wickedly clever 3-against-5 polyrhythmic scheme that remains jaunty throughout the epic complex.

McCreadle and his trio explore the gamut of expression from tender solace to intense sturm und drang to unadulterated joy. They might over-trend toward the exuberant end, but even at their most spirited, they remain steadfastly articulate in sound and savvy. What is apparent is that this is a piano trio that continues to improve upon their already-developed, singularly unique identity and sound, which should appeal to Celtic music aficionados and jazz fans alike. —Gary Fukushima

Stream: Storm; The Crossing; Driftwood; Snowcap; Sun Pillars; Mountain Stream; Stony Gate; Lochan Coire Ardair; Coastline. (59:07)

Personnel: Fergus McCreadle, piano; David Bowden, bass; Stephen Henderson, drums.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com

Josh Lawrence *Measured Response*

POSI-TONE

★★★★

In his sixth outing for Posi-Tone, trumpeter Josh Lawrence limns the relationship between sound and place. Among the most affecting moments of *Measured Response* are the moments where the compositions echo the memory of being somewhere out there: in nature, in its rhythm. In the notes to the album, Lawrence writes that these are “melodies of departure, resilience and rediscovery.”

For the journey, Lawrence brings Art Hirahara on piano, Luiques Curtis on bass, Rudy Royston on drums and Diego Rivera on saxophone, who brings several moving solos to the proceedings. For all the contemplation and reflection this record might bring, there is no singular style, no singular form, if you will. Lawrence explores the rhythm of tango just as much as there’s enough here for straightahead and blues enthusiasts to feel.

The record’s tribute to the late Barry Harris, “Prelude To A Farewell,” is perhaps the apotheosis of the project. Whether a reflection of Lawrence’s vast and diverse credits as trumpeter or of the inherent unity of these musical forms, it offers a cohesive and satisfying palette of sounds to fulfill the promise of the album. In



fact, this is where the decision to include renditions of Haden’s “Song For The Whales” and Coltrane’s “Wise One” reflects great foresight. The transcendent moments these tunes privilege allows them to act as vehicles for the path that Lawrence charts — but we are invited to find our own meaning along the way.

—Joshua Myers

Measured Response: Where Do We Go?; A Tragic Tango Comedy; Song For The Whales; Every Choice Comes With An Invoice; Stony Mountain Mist; Wise One; Between The Lakes; Flip On A Drip; Prelude To A Farewell; Texas Tenor. (56:34)

Personnel: Josh Lawrence, trumpet, flugelhorn; Art Hirahara, piano; Luiques Curtis, bass; Rudy Royston, drums; Diego Rivera, tenor saxophone.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Nir Felder *III*

LA RESERVE

★★★★

An in-demand sideman for Greg Osby, Terri Lyne Carrington, esperanza spalding, John Mayer, Diana Krall, David Weiss, Mark Guiliana, Keyon Harrold and many others, guitarist Nir Felder began branching out as a leader in his own right with his 2014 debut, *Golden Age*. *III* reunites him with bassist Matt Penman and drummer Jimmy Macbride, both of whom appeared on his similarly adventurous 2020 sophomore outing, *II*.

On the vamp-oriented opener “Mallets,” with guests Kevin Hays on piano and Orlando Fleming on bass, Felder triggers a slightly distorted tone on his instrument reminiscent of John Scofield’s cutting-edge appeal on *Still Warm* and *Blue Matter*. On the rock-fueled big production number “Cold Edge,” he dips into a Hendrixian bag of tricks, then settles into a mellower mood on “Longest Star,” his most affecting composition on the album. Felder’s fluid chops here, while beyond impressive, are strictly in service of the upward momentum of the song.

The rhythmically tricky, rock-tinged “Era’s End” finds Felder layering multiple textures on strummed guitars along with electric sitar, mandolin and swirling backwards effects to create a kind of psychedelic environment to play in. Penman’s extended, woody-toned upright bass solo kicks off the dynamic “Dream,” a blazing romp that highlights the leader’s scorching speed licks. “Sea Of Miracles,” a pleasant enough ditty, serves as a kind of palate-cleanser after that frantic fretboard ride. The exhilarating closer, “Revival,” is a challenging number that showcases Felder’s extraordinary technique and Macbride’s slamming polyrhythmic prowess on the kit to great effect. —Bill Milkowski

III: Mallets; Cold Heaven; Longest Star; Era’s End; Dream; Sea Of Miracles; Revival.

Personnel: Nir Felder, guitars, mandolin, banjo, electric sitar, key bass, Fender Rhodes, theremin, synthesizers; Matt Penman, acoustic bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums; May Cheung, vocals (2); Kevin Hays, piano (1); Orlando Fleming, drums (1).

Ordering info: lareserverecords.com

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K. MIDÓN

Raul Midón uses a wide palette to create music that defies genre.

How I Became a Musical Chameleon

Harry Partch, Béla Bartók, Arnold Schoenberg, Iannis Xenakis, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, Joni Mitchell, Thelonious Monk.

What do these artists have in common? They are musical explorers and make up a large part of the core of my musical influences.

Imagine, if you will, a small adobe house nestled in a valley surrounded by all manner of trees including elms, cottonwoods and Russian olives.

The Sangre de Cristo Mountains loom on the horizon like beacons from a lighthouse. With every breath you notice the aroma of sage brush and fresh river-water air. The sound of rushing water is punctuated by bird-song, the hiss of wind in the trees and the distant din of highway traffic. The mornings and evenings are crisp and cool even in midsummer. There is no telephone, no cable television and of course no internet. There are no clubs or bars, and very few restaurants. What you

have, in spades, is quiet time. Time to listen, to contemplate, to be in the moment. It was in this environment surrounded by love and curiosity that I became a musician.

Music, devoid of genre, permeated our daily existence. We were all, as a family, each in his own way, creators and active listeners of music.

On any given day we might spend hours playing conga drums, creating our own rhythms. It wasn't rock, folk, jazz or R&B — it

was just music. Someone would start a rhythm on the congas and we would jam on that for a while, and then almost imperceptibly the rhythm would morph into something else. It might be a batucada or a merengue or maybe a gumbo of indeterminate identity. On another day we might listen to John Cage, Harry Patch, Arnold Schoenberg, Beethoven, Miles Davis or Ornette Coleman.

lyric “when you feel your world’s on fire.”

To do this, I start adding sevenths and ninths, making the chord voicings denser, thicker. This alone would create drama, but when you add lyrics it completes the effect. So even though the tune leans folk, it contains musical elements that would be associated with jazz. That is to say, denser chord voicings in the bridge.

Composition for me is all about the narrative I’m looking to create.

It was all just music to us. Music worthy of a serious and focused listening session complete with afterward discussion.

As I became more and more interested in creating my own tunes, it simply never occurred to me to fit into a specific genre. I think of creating music in the same way I imagine a chef might put together ingredients for a new dish. This begs the question, what specific musical elements (i.e. ingredients) result in a particular genre?

The answer is surprisingly straightforward.

The fundamental elements in any musical composition are melody, harmony, rhythm and tempo. So, if I’m writing a song and I want it to lean more folk, I might give it a 1–6–4–2–5 chord progression with a descending bass line. The chord voicings would most likely contain the third, root and fifth. My tendency would be to leave out sevenths and all other chord extensions. These choices create a particular sonic palate. For me it’s like good vanilla flavoring.

You can hear this chord progression in my song “When We Remember” from my latest album, *Lost & Found* (ReKondite ReKords). I love garlic and I love vanilla. That doesn’t mean I want garlic powder sprinkled on my vanilla pudding. I chose vanilla for the “A” section in order to create a narrative story. Lyrics, chord voicing, a skippy 2/4 country rhythm and a medium tempo leave one with a feeling of pleasant nostalgia.

Melody, rhythm and harmony are powerful transmitters of feeling — even without lyrics. This becomes evident to anyone who’s played for audiences with a limited understanding of English. For the bridge, I want to create some tension and drama around the

There is another very important element with regard to genre, and that is instrumentation. Using “When We Remember” as an example, I made sure it leaned folk by adding banjo and harmonica.

With the title track, “Lost & Found,” I gave it a backbeat, added rhyming couplets, and stuck a Cmaj7 chord in the fifth bar, which is not strictly in the key of the song, which is A. This isn’t new or particularly radical; it’s been going on for a long time. What can make it interesting is what ingredients you choose and how you put them together.

Steely Dan, on their album *Aja*, manages to create music that incorporates a masterful saxophone solo by Wayne Shorter, a drum solo for the ages courtesy of Steve Gadd and a wonderfully melodic rock guitar solo by Denny Dias all in the same song. They did all this and managed to keep the record in the rock bin where it would sell many more units.

I have been very inspired by the combination of Chick Corea with Gary Burton and a classically trained string quartet. Is this Third Stream or is it just music? Genre is really a matter of meeting certain expectations.

If it’s rock, you expect some distorted guitar and most probably some singing. If it’s folk, you expect some clever lyrics and a relatively simple chord progression. If it’s jazz, many would expect it to swing and contain lots of 2–5–1’s if it’s bebop. I would argue that harmony and rhythm are a much larger part of the definition of genre than lyrics or melody.

On my *Badass And Blind* (Mack Avenue) album, and specifically the tune “Wings Of Mind,” I went full modern jazz by throwing away the notion of key all together and writing in a linear modal style. What this means

is that every chord has a different tonal center. One could say that the song changes keys every bar. How, you might ask, could that possibly sound good? The answer, my friend, is blowing in the melody. A melody can make a series of chords that may seem disjointed at first sound beautiful and coherent.

For example, in the above-mentioned “Wings Of Mind,” the first six chords are B lydian, E lydian, Gb7, C lydian, Db7sus and C7#11. If you play those chords by themselves it might sound pretty weird to some, but when you add the melody, I would venture to say it makes the tune sound good.

Composition for me is all about the narrative I’m looking to create. Does the fact that “Wings Of Mind” has a somewhat advanced harmonic structure make me a jazz musician? No more than the fact that “When We Remember,” with a much more basic harmonic structure, makes me a folk musician.

What is rewarding for me is using a wide palette to create music that defies genre. If you want to be in a particular genre, then narrow your palette so as to stay squarely inside the box. This may be the road for you if you want commercial success. If you want, however, to create music that is imaginative and hopefully more interesting, then listen and absorb many so-called genres and synthesize them into your particular kind of gumbo.

What causes people to choose one genre over another? I don’t know, but perhaps it is the social milieu in which one grows up. It may be that if you grow up in an African American community, you’re more likely to choose R&B or hip-hop as opposed to someone growing up in rural Montana.

Then again, if that were true, I might have ended up writing country music, as I grew up in the country.

Some might say this makes me a dabbler in many genres and master of none. That’s OK with me. I’ll feel free to put a 7/4 beat to “I Love The Afternoon” (*The Mirror*, Mack Avenue) and call it Brazilian funk.

I’m OK with putting dense chord voicings and Latin percussion to “Anything At All” (*Lost & Found*, ReKondite ReKords), a tune about dreaming, and calling it smooth Latin folk. As my jazz composition teacher, Ronnie Miller, used to say: “If it sounds good, it is good.”

I, for one, will continue to imagine jazz in Spanish or hip-hop with a samba beat and rap lyrics. Or perhaps an Argentine folk rhythm with bombo and English lyrics. The possibilities are limitless.

DB

A native of New Mexico who now lives in Maryland after spending years in New York, singer/songwriter and guitarist Raul Midon has earned acclaim the world over. His latest album, *Lost & Found*, is available from ReKondite ReKords. Visit him online at raulmidon.com.



Dr. JB Dyas (left) presents a Jazz Informance at the U.S. Dept. of Education with trumpeter Sean Jones and the National Peer-to-Peer Jazz Sextet.

Jazz: A Way to Run Your Business, a Way to Lead a Successful Life

As a jazz musician and educator for the past several decades, I've come to realize that the jazz paradigm, that is, the tenets jazz musicians follow, makes not only for creative music making, but also for success in all aspects of life. Businesses from local mom-and-pops to Fortune 500 companies that have adopted the jazz philosophy in their practices and organizational structure have seen substantial increases in company morale, productivity and profits. And husbands, wives, significant others, children and extended family members who have come to live by the jazz mantra have found more peace, love, harmony and happiness in their lives.

The good news is that you don't need to be a jazz musician, or even an aficionado, to reap the rewards that living a life guided by the jazz paradigm brings. You just need to know a little bit about what jazz is, how it works and what jazz musicians do when creating this music that moves the soul. In a nutshell, jazz is freedom within a framework. Here's how it works.

Think of jazz like any other language: English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, Japanese or dozens of others spoken around the world. Just like a spoken language, jazz communicates thoughts and feelings. But rather than use words to convey how they're feeling, jazz musicians use music to do the same. Just as in regular spoken conversation in which the conversers are saying what they're thinking and feeling in real time depending on what others in the conversation are saying, jazz musi-

cians are playing what they're thinking and feeling in real time depending on what their bandmates are playing. That's right: The overwhelming majority of what you hear in a jazz performance is improvised in the moment. It is not composed ahead of time, just as regular conversation is not a prepared speech. Improvisation is an essential element of jazz.

Because there's no need for spoken words, jazz is widely considered the universal language. Jazz musicians of all ethnicities, religions, backgrounds, cultures, races, personalities, socioeconomic groups, ages and genders — irrespective of their particular spoken languages — can “speak” it. It's not unusual to see a jazz ensemble comprising musicians of multiple generations from multiple countries, races and cultures all coming together for one common purpose: to make great music. If you can swing, regardless of anything else, we want you in the band.

With the exception of avant-garde or free-jazz, most jazz tunes are accompanied by a set of chords that provides support beneath the melody. This chord progression becomes the framework — called a “chorus” in jazz lingo — within which the jazz musicians improvise their own melodies spontaneously. A “chorus” is one time through a song's entire chord progression. When jazz musicians perform a song, they play numerous choruses. The reason it doesn't get boring — even though it's the same chord progression played over and over — is because something new and different

happens during each subsequent chorus. The audience doesn't know what's coming next for the very reason that the musicians themselves don't know what's coming next. It all materializes spontaneously and organically. The musicians and the audience are on a shared pathway of discovery. And if the musicians have done their homework — that is, know how to play their instruments, are creative and adhere to the jazz paradigm — it's a beautiful thing, uplifting all those within earshot.

So, just what is the jazz paradigm? What are its tenets, and how do they translate into leadership, behavior and organizational structures that drive success for all who apply them? First and foremost, jazz musicians really listen to one another. We cannot function unless we are actively and intensely listening to everyone on the bandstand. The bassist doesn't know what to play without ardently listening to the drummer and pianist, and vice versa. And the rhythm section (piano, bass and drums) has to listen to the horn players — who also have to carefully listen to each other — and vice versa, or everything falls apart and no meaningful music is made, just noise. Equally important, we support one another continuously throughout the performance, even if we don't see eye to eye, finding common ground all the while. We desperately want all our bandmates to succeed, otherwise we don't succeed. Wouldn't it be great if Congress were made up of jazz musicians?

Jazz musicians also take turns leading,

even when there's a designated leader. For instance, trumpeter Miles Davis was the unequivocal leader of the Miles Davis Quintet. However, at any given moment, the saxophonist might lead the way, or the pianist, bassist or drummer, or perhaps the rhythm section collectively. In every jazz performance, leadership changes hands seamlessly and organ-

around the country. I found the jazz students to be particularly resilient, dealing with the lockdown far better than the general high school population as reported by the media. Instead of mental health and learning loss issues, these students leaned into their jazz studies. Since they could get all their academic school work completed each day in just three

Being able to improvise, whether it be in music, business or anywhere else, is a huge plus, especially when things don't go according to plan.

ically, with every band member going along willfully and joyously with the leader of the moment. Each player feels empowered and takes ownership, being inspired by and in turn inspiring all bandmates.

Miles insisted that his "employees" led him as much as he led them, and the results were extraordinary. Businesses that follow the "Miles Davis paragon" find that they, too, are able to build stronger partnerships and coalitions among executives and personnel. Everyone feeling more empowered and appreciated leads to innovation, increased productivity and more profits.

Another superlative leadership quality that jazz musicians possess is the ability to overcome problematic working conditions. We do it all the time. When we arrive at the gig and the stage is too small, the piano is out of tune, the acoustics are bad, the drummer doesn't show up — we still have a killin' set, possibly a better set than if the drummer had shown up. If a string breaks in the middle of my bass solo, I sally forth, discovering new and perhaps even better things to play. Perseverance is everything.

During the pandemic lockdown, when jazz clubs, concert halls, jazz festivals, schools and recording studios were shut down, I found that nearly all the jazz musicians I know not only survived, but thrived. They built makeshift recording studios in their homes, streamed live pay-per-view concerts online from their living rooms, learned the technology necessary to remotely play and record with others around the world, taught music classes and private lessons via Zoom, completed the jazz education method books and videos they'd been putting off.

I, personally, taught music classes online for over a dozen performing arts high schools

hours online and no longer had a daily commute, they had more time to work on their instrumental technique, listen to seminal jazz recordings and transcribe the iconic solos on those recordings to inform their own unique voices. And since they were not able to play live with their classmates during this time, they pivoted, efficiently practicing along with recorded backing tracks from sources like jazzbooks.com in which the rhythm sections are composed of some of today's most professional and swinging jazz artists.

All this resulted in exponential musical growth, culminating in their receiving scholarships to attend the nation's top conservatories and university schools of music, including the likes of Juilliard, Berklee, Manhattan School of Music and New England Conservatory. At these institutions, a bachelor's degree costs over a quarter million dollars, a sum none of these students could have afforded. Their ability to be persistent and overcome one of the most significant problematic working conditions in modern history, the lockdown, actually helped them achieve more than they likely would have otherwise. Businesses that followed this same paradigm, pivoting creatively during the lockdown, also prospered. Those that didn't are gone.

Student or professional, jazz musicians also consistently recognize the contributions of others, another predominant leadership quality. We're always talking about how great somebody else plays. And if someone on the gig plays something truly inspired or swings extra hard, we let them know. Enlightened business executives, too, have come to know that overtly recognizing the contributions of their employees contributes immeasurably to their confidence, spirit and productivity. And enlightened spouses and partners who live by

this tenet have found more peace, love and harmony in their relationships.

Most importantly, jazz musicians totally grasp the concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that the achievement of the goal is more important than anything else. In jazz, the goal is to make meaningful music, and humility is key to its success. Jazz musicians completely understand that we can't do this alone. And we fully realize that others can have great ideas, too, and we must provide everyone on the bandstand with opportunities to contribute those ideas, however contrasting they may be to our own.

Last but not least, it goes without saying that jazz musicians know how to improvise; it's our main thing. Being able to improvise, whether it be in music, business or anywhere else, is a huge plus, especially when things don't go according to plan. Herbie Hancock tells the story of how once, when he was playing with the Miles Davis Quintet in the 1960s, he spaced out for a second and, while Miles was soloing, he played not only the wrong chord, but the "worst chord possible." Miles immediately changed his note and made it fit beautifully — better than if Herbie had played the "right" chord. It's not surprising that so many of the most successful business people in history — Sam Walton, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Oprah Winfrey, Richard Branson, Mark Cuban — have had the ability to think on their feet and turn lemons into lemonade.

Jazz is America's indigenous art form. Today, of course, the music is performed and listened to by people of all ethnicities all over the globe. Indeed, jazz is widely considered America's greatest artistic gift to the rest of the world. It represents our most deeply held American values: teamwork, unity with ethnic diversity, the correlation of hard work and goal accomplishment, persistence and perseverance, and the vital importance of really listening to one another.

There's no better example of democracy in action than a jazz ensemble performance: individual freedom but with responsibility to the group. Jazz personifies our ability to communicate with one another respectfully, regardless of race, gender, language or cultural background. Who would have thought 100 years ago that the original pioneers of this music — Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver — would be creating a bridge between people of all nations and an enlightened approach to run your business and live your life?

DB

Professional bassist and jazz educator Dr. JB Dyas serves as VP for Education and Curriculum Development at the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz at UCLA. He has performed well over 1,000 jazz and commercial music engagements and regularly presents jazz clinics, professional development workshops and leadership seminars around the world. Visit him online at jbdyas.com.



Wadada Leo Smith's ride isn't predictable but still brings the listener to a strong, satisfying conclusion.

Wadada Leo Smith's Trumpet Solo on 'Tony Williams'

For his 2023 album *Fire Illuminations* (Kabell Records), trumpeter and composer Wadada Leo Smith put together a large all-star ensemble known as Orange Wave Electric, which included drums, percussion, two bassists, three guitarists and an electronic musician. For his solo on the original composition "Tony Williams," there is a density to the ensemble backing that creates a fullness even when Smith isn't playing. And so, Smith uses a lot of space.

He even waits a half bar before coming in, then holds a half-note across the bar line, and then rests for another half bar. This bookmarking short phrases with rests (or the other way around, if you prefer) is his modus operandi for the entire improvisa-

tion. As I see it, this approach serves two functions: The spaces make what Smith does play more noticeable, sort of like how a dark figure against an empty, all-white background seems to pop out; and this economy of playing makes that sick groove the band is playing behind him more noticeable. Sometimes jazz solos aren't all about the solo, but about how the solo interacts with the rhythm section.

There's that incredible bass vamp on the tonic (just Eb-Bb-Cb on the first three eighth notes, so simple yet so earthy and effective), and sometimes Smith makes sure to not play at those points and allow us to be moved by it (such as in the very first bar, as noted above). At other times, he plays over

the top of it, allowing that high, jangly guitar (which generally plays in answer to the bass part) to be heard.

We are presenting this transcription in concert key (for the benefit of all instrumentals), and that means we have Cb's and some Fb's appearing. I considered putting it in D# minor, which would've made those dreaded flats go away, but that would've led to other issues, such as E#'s and a B#.)

Smith's approach also makes his own phrasing, and the way his phrasing moves the energy, more prominent. Between all that emptiness, there exists the difference between playing two notes (as in bars 4 and 52) or a much greater amount (such as the mass of pitches in measures 35-36 and

51), or all the variations in between. We are never sure of how much space Smith will fill after these breaks, or how dense the lines will be.

Which brings up the general flow of his phrasing: I don't think it's happenstance that Smith holds off until measure 35 before hitting us with a blast of 32nds (a bit more than halfway through his improvisation), or that he blasts us again in the next measure (bar 37). Also that he waits until measure 51 before the next salvo (close to the end).

He had foreshadowed this rhythmic density back in bar 13 — not to the extent of the 32nds we hear later on, but they are presented in the first beat (and a couple toward the end of the second). So, about 20% of the way in, Smith shows us some 32nds, then at around 60% gives us those two dense lines in a row, and then at about the 90% mark plays the last one. In between all of those we hear lines of 16ths, eighths and even quarter notes (bar 46). (Notice how mathematically these lines are skewed toward the ending: not at 25%, 50% and 75%, or some other pattern that would have been more symmetrical.)

And although most of the remainder of the improvisation is 16th-note based, Smith does play some ideas that are only eighth notes, and even quarter notes (measures 14 and 45). And just as with the 32nd notes, he doesn't place them in predictable places. The solo starts with mostly eighths, but very few of them. Then a bunch of 16ths leading to the foreshadowing of the 32nds in measure 13. Thus far, it's all been about increasing the energy.

But then he drops the bottom out with the quarter notes in bar 14, and then we're back to eighths and on to 16ths, where he stays for a while before ratcheting up to the 32nds, but with a short phrase of eighth notes beforehand. There's a sense of increasing energy, but not in a straight line.

The phrase lengths and break lengths add to this effect. The massive 32nd-note lines have plenty of rests between them and after them: some of the longer amounts of space Smith uses here. The final dense phrase has a half-measure break afterwards. And although some phrases are more than a measure in length, some are just a couple of eighth notes (such as bar 3).

Most importantly, just like with his phrase lengths, Smith isn't gradually increasing his phrase lengths or breaks in an incremental manner. That might be effective, but it might also be predictable. In regard to his spaces starting from the beginning, we have half-bar rests (measures 1, 2, 4, 9) and three-beat rests in bars 3 and 6 and across 7–8. Then we have shorter rests in

bars 10 and 11, and then back to longer rests and also shorter rests (starting at measure 18). It isn't until measure 24 that we get a rest more than a bar long, but Smith doesn't pair this with the long lines of 32nds. Instead it's placed between a bar-and-a-half of longer tones and a very melodic scalar phrase.

As we've seen, Smith does gradually increase the momentum, but not in a straightforward manner. This makes for a

solo that takes us on a ride — but just like a roller coaster or great cinema, it's a ride that, while unpredictable, still brings us to a strong and satisfying conclusion. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He recently released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass, titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at jimidurso.bandcamp.com. Jimi can often be witnessed performing/rehearsing/teaching/pontificating at twit.tv/CoincidenceMachine.

Casio Celviano AP Series Digital Pianos

Console Design Refinements, Inspiring New Hamburg Grand Tone

Casio's new trio of premium-level Celviano digital console pianos feature a handsome new style, exquisitely detailed Hamburg Grand Piano Tone, uber-realistic touch and an advanced built-in-speaker system. They provide a welcome boost to a well-established brand and a popular line that continues to make positive impressions on piano players who are in the market for a digital instrument.

Three new furniture-style models — AP-750, AP-550 and AP-S450 — are the first new Clevianos since the ultra-high-end Grand Hybrid GP-510 and GP-310 models launched four years ago, and they fill out the line's mid-level offerings, covering a range of practical price points: \$3,399 for the AP-750; \$2,999 for the AP-550; and \$1,999 for the AP-S450.

Casio crafts Celviano keys from fine-grained Austrian spruce, which adds to the weight of the keys and enhances the instrument's resilience, density and balance. Simulated ebony and ivory key surfaces are subtly textured to help finger grip. The new models incorporate the Smart Hybrid Hammer Action Keyboard Celviano Edition, a subtle yet significant refinement over the action found in the company's most recent Privia models, which provides the pleasingly quiet and smooth response you'd expect from a well-regulated grand.

The new Celviano 40-watt speaker system represents the immersive, three-dimensional sound of a grand piano as it emanates from above and below the soundboard, with no distortion — even when played at high levels. Like on a grand piano, the AP-750 and AP-550 models incorporate a top lid that can be opened to project sound forward, enveloping the player and audience with deep bass and shimmering treble.

Each instrument features a new version of Casio's Hamburg Piano Tone, which delivers the refined musical expression of pianos like the classic Steinway D model grand. Deploying dozens of meticulously placed microphones, Casio captured the natural "bloom" of a Hamburg-style piano — from the key strike, hammers, damper and string resonance to how the instrument reacts to its acoustic environment. The result is a vibrant, versatile tone that's well matched to the Celviano keys and speaker system.

I play-tested the Celviano AP-750 at Heavenly Pianos in Mount Prospect, Illinois, a great environment for checking out the vastly improved sound samples on the new models, which were captured using Casio's newest generation of AiR Acoustic Intelligent Resonator technology.

"When you play the AP-750, the pinnacle of this technology, you're not just playing back a recording of a piano sample," said Mike Martin, general manager of marketing at Casio Music Gear. "All kinds of modeling technology is happening in combination with those piano samples that really bring it to life. Otherwise, it would sound nice, but it wouldn't be such an immersive experience. When you play these instruments, the virtual strings are interacting with each other. With things like sympathetic resonance, and the subtle changes in sound you hear when you move from chord to chord or put your foot on the pedal, it becomes as close as you can get to a living, breathing acoustic instrument."

I quickly became fascinated with the realism and wide dynamic range provided by the AP-750's sophisticated new internal audio system. I was also pleasantly surprised by the way the sound dispersed in all directions with no added reverb, filling the showroom.

"With many digital pianos, you basically have speakers in your face," Martin said. "Casio's approach is very different. In fact, the eight speakers



that are underneath the AP-750 are firing up into the cabinet — not down and outward. And if you look closely, there are ports all over to allow sound to come out of the body of the instrument in a way that's very similar to an acoustic. If you open up the lid, you get even more sound coming out of the box, so to speak. We try to make the experience totally transparent."

The flagship AP-750 features 39 built-in tones, nine of which are grand piano tones. These include three of the world's finest grand pianos, including the new Hamburg Grand; a Berlin Grand, developed in collaboration with C. Bechstein, a 170-year-old manufacturer of instruments known for their warm, highly nuanced tone; and a Vienna Grand, which provides a calm and stately sound with rich bass and pastel highs when the keys are played softly.

The AP-550 features a two-channel/four-speaker system, as well as 26 built-in tones, six of which are grand pianos, including Hamburg Grand and New York Grand. This model offers a rosewood color option.

The AP-S450 inherits several style and performance features of the AP-550, including the rosewood finish option, a two-channel/four-speaker sound system and 26 built-in tones, six of which are grand pianos, including Hamburg Grand and New York Grand. As part of the Casio Slim Series, the AP-S450 brings the company's Smart Hybrid Hammer Action Keyboard to the most compact body in the line.

All three Celvianos come with the WU-BT10 Bluetooth adaptor, which allows for wireless control and connection to MIDI-capable apps — including the Casio Music Space app for iOS and Android, which provides the ability to fine-tune settings such as velocity curves, hammer response, pedal resonance, key knock and other subtle elements.

A lighted control panel located inconspicuously on the left-hand key-block of the AP-750 makes it easy to select and change sounds and settings on the fly. The panel "disappears" when you start playing and stays off until you reach over and touch it.

"That transparency is a really important part of the line," Martin said. "We wanted the technology to not be in your face, and this feature really helps give the instrument its acoustic-like appearance."

—Ed Enright

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Blindfold Test > BY MICHAEL JACKSON

Greg Ward

Alto saxophonist Greg Ward's win in this year's Critics Poll Rising Star category, at age 42, was a long time coming. But, given his prolific activity in myriad aggregations and his work as a composer/arranger, such recognition was inevitable. Notwithstanding recent tenure as an associate professor at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, Ward has maintained a hectic schedule freelancing with The Occidental Brothers, drummer Makaya McCraven, bassist Linda May Han Oh, drummer Mike Reed's groups and singer Alyssa Allgood, as well as leading his own band, Rogue Parade. This was his first Blindfold Test.

Kenny Garrett

"For Openers" (*Introducing Kenny Garrett*, Criss Cross, 1984) Garrett, alto saxophone; Woody Shaw, trumpet; Mulgrew Miller, piano; Nat Reeves, bass; Tony Reedus, drums. That's Brother Garrett from the '80s! He was 24 at the time, and I remember thinking, "I want to have my debut album out at 24, too." I caught up with him later during the "Song Book" era, but found this interesting when I first heard it in my 20s. He was still polishing, discovering, and that tone, already one of the greatest and most inspirational sounds on alto. Four stars.

Mostly Other People Do the Killing

"So What?" (*Blue*, Hot Cup, 2014) Moppa Elliot, bass; Peter Evans, trumpet; Jon Irabagon, tenor and alto saxophone; Ron Stabinsky, piano; Kevin Shea, drums. This isn't the MOPDtK version of *Kind Of Blue*, is it? Jon is amazing and does a great job here, but there's something about Cannon's articulation. MOPDtK have a lot of fun and humor in their music, and it's great to have Jon back in Chicago. Four stars.

Cannonball Adderley

"74 Miles Away" (*Phenix*, Fantasy, 1975) Adderley, soprano saxophone; Nat Adderley, cornet; Michael Wolff, keyboards; Walter Booker, bass; Roy McCurdy, drums; Airtio Moreira, percussion. Gary Bartz? Trying to catch the tone ... someone influenced by Wayne [Shorter]. Is that Freddie [Hubbard]? It's not Courtney Pine or something? [after reveal] Ah, this is *Phenix*, then. I'm hip to *Inside Straight* (Fantasy, 1973) and late Cannonball. Four stars.

Jan Klare

"Confirmation" (*Solo*, Poise, 2017) Jan Klare, alto saxophone. Is this Julius [Hemphill]? Andrew D'Angelo? Oliver Lake? Bunky Green? Jimmy Lyons? It's wild, I like it! Three-and-a-half stars.

Warne Marsh/Lee Konitz Quintet

"Two Part Invention #13, Allegro Tranquillo" (*Live At The Montmartre Club—Jazz Exchange Vol. 2*, Storyville, 1975) Konitz, alto saxophone; Marsh, tenor saxophone. That's one of those live recordings with Warne and Lee. The sound concept and melodic development, the fragments and displacement. One of my students has a book about Warne's processes for exploration. I need to check it out. Four-and-a-half stars.

Earl Bostic

"Don't You Do It?" (*The Very Best Of Earl Bostic*, Collectables, 1950) Bostic, alto saxophone; Count Hastings, tenor saxophone; Jaki Byard, piano; Gene Redd, vibes. Wow, I don't have many growlers in my library. Fathead [Newman]? Louis Jordan? Cannonball used to get that growl now and again. Believe it or not, I had a phase as a freshman, sounded like a jump-blues saxophonist. I made third place in the Fish Middleton jazz scholarship competition in Maryland one time. The judges were Buster Williams, Steve



Rising Star winner Greg Ward, left, gets a lesson in how to wear the blindfold before journalist Michael Jackson administers the test.

ALFIE JACKSON

Kuhn and Houston Person. Buster commented, "That's a very interesting sound you are going for, but Cannonball did it a little differently."

Maria Schneider Orchestra

"Data Lords" (*Data Lords*, Artist Share, 2020) Soloists: Dave Pietro, alto saxophone; Mike Rodriguez, trumpet and electronics. Is that Darcy [James Argue]? Avishai [Cohen, trumpet]? Clarence Penn on drums? Rudresh [Mahanthappa] on alto? [after reveal] It sounds more modern than I was expecting from Maria, but obviously I don't know all her music. It unfolds without repeating; patient introduction of each instrument, organic, intentional, not a moment wasted, the form grows within the solos. Five stars.

Paul Giallorenzo's GitGo

"Force Majeure" (*Force Majeure*, Delmark, 2014) Gaillorenzo, piano; Mars Williams, alto saxophone; Jeb Bishop, trombone; Anton Hatwich, bass; Quin Kirchner, drums. [commenting on the alto saxophone solo] [Nick] Mazzarella? [Ernest] Dawkins? [Dave] Rempis? It sounds like [Ken] Vandermark on alto. Is it Mars Williams? And who's the bass player? He has that hump like [Jason] Roebke. It's not Nate McBride, not Kent [Kessler]. Ah, Anton. Four stars. I liked the comping, and that was really grooving. A fun, Sun Ra-esque jam.

Kris Davis

"Trip Dance For Tim" (*Duopoly*, Pyroclastic, 2016) Davis, piano; Tim Berne, alto saxophone. Brother Steve Lehman? [Greg] Osby? [hint: it's a "downtown" cat] Tim Berne! Is that Matt Mitchell on piano? [Craig] Taborn, Vijay [Iyer], Danilo [Perez]? Oh, Kris Davis, and this is on her Pyroclastic label. I did one gig with her in a medium-size ensemble with Tony Malaby at the Stone in New York. Great interplay here, I don't know what is composed and what is improvised — I admire that aspect in any group. Five stars.

Bunky Green

"Be" (*Another Place*, Label Bleu, 2004) Green, alto saxophone; Lonnie Plaxico, bass; Jason Moran, piano; Nasheet Waits, drums. Is this later Jackie Mac? Ah, Bunky. Is this the French one Steve Coleman produced? Raw, distinct, exciting and aggressive. Bunky is such an original voice, I wanted to learn from him to discover my own voice. After initially inviting me to audition in North Florida he told me to go to New York City. Steve [Coleman], Greg [Osby] and Branford [Marsalis] learned from Bunky, so I asked Branford, "Did he help you find your own voice?" Branford said, "Just master your craft and your voice will find you." Four-and-a-half stars.

DB

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

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