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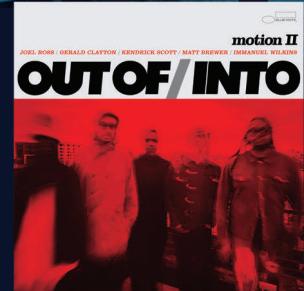
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## OUT OF/INTO MOTION II

The Blue Note collective with **Immanuel Wilkins, Joel Ross, Gerald Clayton, Matt Brewer & Kendrick Scott** presents a new album of originals pointing towards the future of jazz.



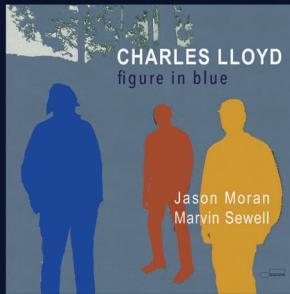
## AARON PARKS BY ALL MEANS

Pianist's luminous acoustic quartet album expands his trio with bassist **Ben Street** & drummer **Billy Hart** by adding saxophonist **Ben Solomon** to explore a new color palette.



## JULIAN LAGE SCENES FROM ABOVE

Guitar virtuoso joins forces with producer **Joe Henry** for a set of originals featuring a new band with **John Medeski** on keys, **Jorge Roeder** on bass & **Kenny Wollesen** on drums.



## CHARLES LLOYD FIGURE IN BLUE

Legend convenes a new trio with **Jason Moran & Marvin Sewell** for a double album of ballads & blues that includes homages to Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday & Zakir Hussain.



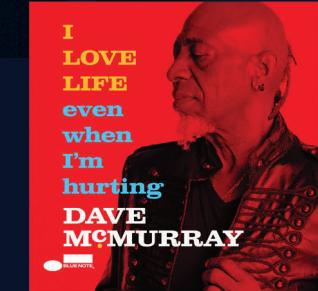
## HORACE SILVER SILVER IN SEATTLE

A never-before-released 1965 live recording captures a powerhouse line-up of the pianist's quintet with **Woody Shaw, Joe Henderson, Teddy Smith & Roger Humphries**.



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An affirmation of the saxophonist's indomitable spirit & a celebration of his Detroit hometown co-produced by **Don Was** & featuring a special guest appearance by **Kem**.



## PAUL CORNISH YOU'RE EXAGGERATING!

Pianist's lyrical debut album features the Houston native in a trio with **Joshua Crumbly** on bass & **Jonathan Pinson** on drums plus a guest appearance by **Jeff Parker** on guitar.



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# JANUARY 2026

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BY TED PANKEN WITH MATT WILSON & NASHEET WAITS

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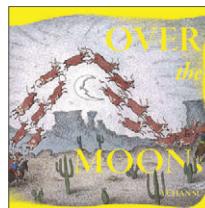
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*"It happened suddenly, and it still feels crazy to be living this life," says rising star saxophonist Emma Rawicz. "I've always struggled with impostor syndrome but I'm slowly getting better at processing it all."*

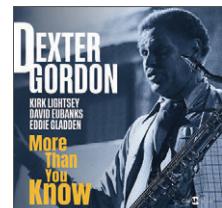
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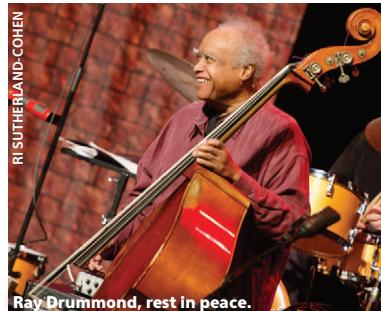
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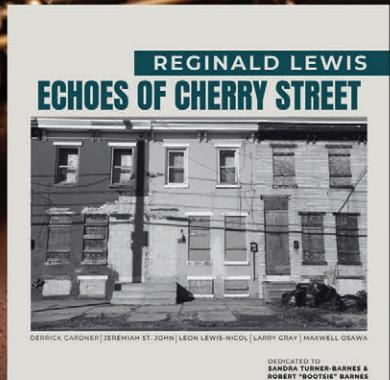
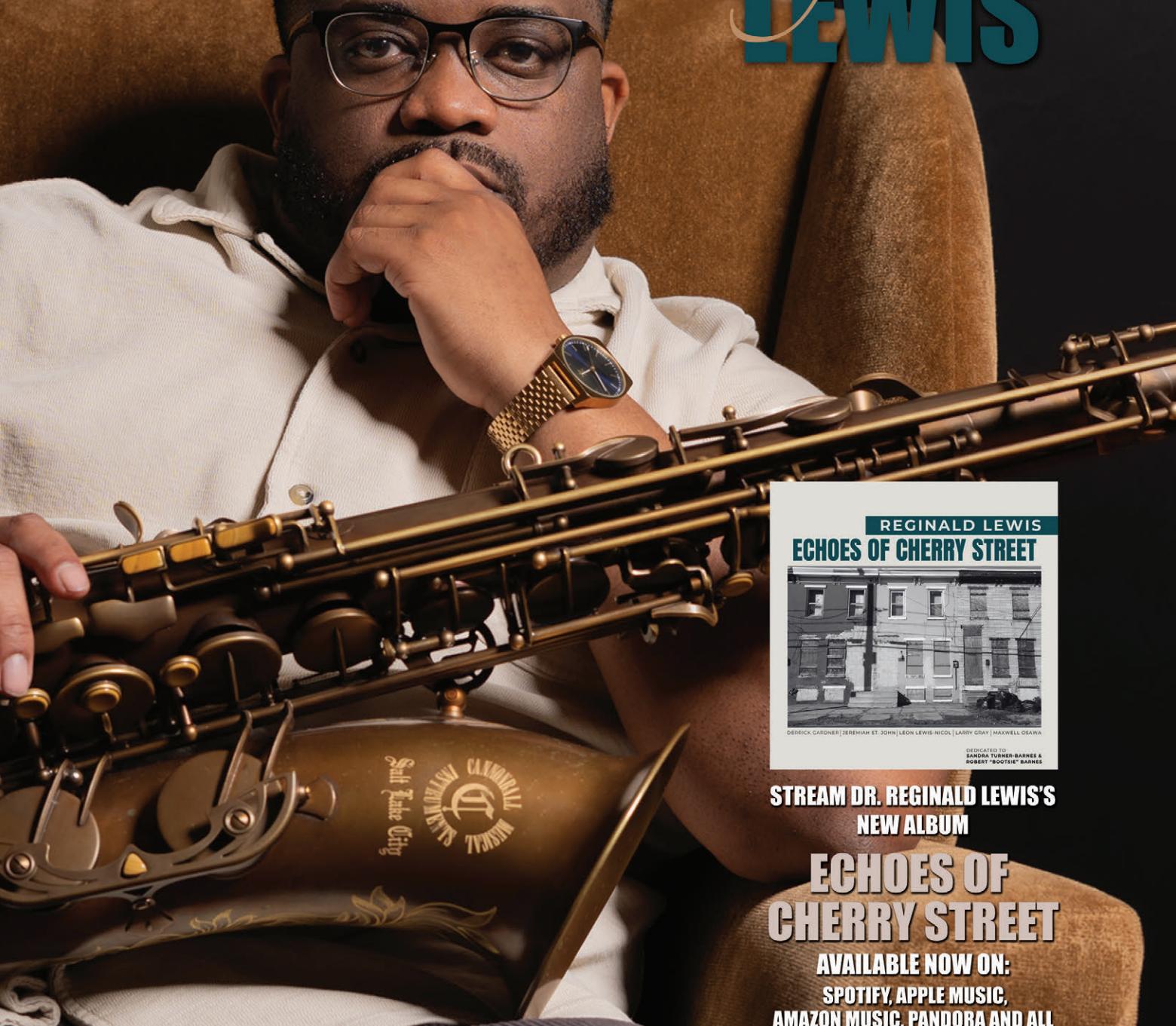
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# Reginald LEWIS



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## First Take

BY FRANK ALKYER



Andrew Cyrille — a living history of this music.

# Music for the Ages

**THE TRUE BEAUTY OF THE MUSIC WE** cover in this magazine springs from the many wells these sound explorers dip into; the journey of where they've been and where they're headed.

On the cover, we are proud to offer a *way* overdue thank-you to an 85-year-old Andrew Cyrille, who learned at the hi-hats of Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones and New York pros Willie Jones and Lenny McBrowne, then explored this music with a palette of artists so broad it would make Vincent van Gogh blush. The interview came together on a pitch from DownBeat contributor Ted Panken, who suggested a cover conversation between Cyrille and drummers Nasheet Waits and Matt Wilson. He'd conduct the interview, we'd put all three on the cover and it would be a great way to kick off a new year of publishing — our 93rd year, for the record.

But when the article came in, it wasn't as billed, and for understandable reasons. Mr. Waits and Mr. Wilson are not just artists who play the drums, they are serious students of the instrument and the masters who came before them. And Panken is more than a mere jazz scribe, he's one of the most knowledgeable historians of this music on the planet. The trio had an opportunity to visit with Mr. Cyrille, a walking, talking, brilliant history of this music dating back to the 1950s.

The piece became the three of them interviewing Cyrille and prompting him to discuss his multilayered, incredulous career. So, we did what is only good and proper. We improvised. This piece is about Andrew Cyrille, so he appears on the cover with a knowing smirk that says it all — school's in session. What appears, starting on

page 22, is a slice of the four-hour, rollicking proceedings. We will run the "director's cut" — well, in this case, the writer's cut — online after this issue is off the newsstand. So, get a taste now, and look forward to dive deeper in a few weeks. Mr. Cyrille has much to say!

### Timing Is Everything

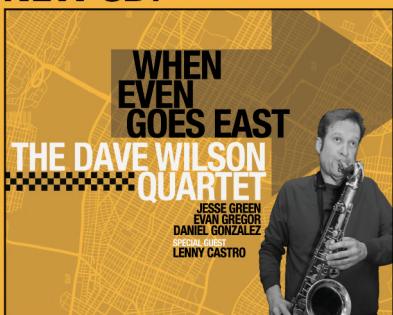
While we're dishing about how things are done at the magazine, here's a little more "inside baseball." On the Chords & Discords page, we have some lovely letters about the passing of drummer Jack DeJohnette. That's just a sampling of mail that's come in. We'll be running more in the next issue.

In our December issue, Mr. DeJohnette was inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame in the 90th Annual DownBeat Readers Poll. There was a terrific article, written by veteran critic Willard Jenkins. That issue went on the printing press on a Friday. The next day, I received a note from DeJohnette's assistant, Joan Clancy, that Jack was nearing the end of his life. Then, on Monday, she sent over this statement from Lydia, Jack's wife:

"It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Jack DeJohnette. He died peacefully in Kingston Hospital, N.Y. He was surrounded by his wife, family and close friends. Jack was a NEA Jazz Master. His legacy will live on."

It was too late to include even a brief editor's note that a hero had passed. The magazine had been printed. But we can take solace in the fact that that you, our readers, were able to let him know — while he was still with us — just how important his art, life and times were, and continue to be, to all of us who love this music. **DB**

### NEW CD!



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Bill Milkowski, Downbeat

Dave Wilson's latest release *When Even Goes East* pays a nod to his early days in New York. On this, his 8th solo album, his compositions and arrangements take you on a ride with Jesse Green-piano, Evan Gregor-bass and Daniel Gonzalez-drums, with special guest Lenny Castro.

The journey visits such pop and rock classics as Jackson Browne's "These Days", The Grateful Dead's "Eyes of the World", Jimmy Webb's "Adios" and "Wichita Lineman", Lennon and McCartney's "The Fool On The Hill", Jimi Hendrix's "Fire", and four Wilson originals.

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Carl Allen, and Paquito D'Rivera

## Chords & Discords



### Jack DeJohnette's Influence

As a drummer, the influence of Jack DeJohnette is stamped on all of us. He was unique. His sound was unmistakable. Within the first minute you knew it was him. He was free and yet straight ahead. So glad he left us with so many recordings. Rest well, Drum God.

KEVIN MCINTOSH  
STERLING HEIGHTS, MI

### DeJohnette, a Hero

The world has lost a master drummer; I have lost my hero. Rest in peace.

STEVE WINTER  
VIA EMAIL

### Shooting at Stars

As someone who has read DownBeat since I was a student and has been fortunate to appear in its pages for over two decades, I feel compelled to respond to the recent 3½-star review of my latest release (*Love & Anger*, Sunnyside) and the release by saxophonist Tineke Postma (*Voya*, Clap Your Hands), which I am guesting on, written by Ms. Ayana Contreras.

Ms. Contreras — while an unexpected choice to evaluate my work and that of Ms. Postma — responded quite favorably to the content of *Love & Anger*. So much so that I felt her words suggested a 4-star assessment. But alas, I find myself ranked somewhere between "Good" and "Excellent," which, I suppose, is not the worst place to be.

What concerns me is less the specific rating and more the editorial philosophy behind it. I understand from my publicist that DownBeat's editors recently issued a memo warning against "star inflation" and an "overabundance" of 4-, 4½- and 5-star reviews — asking writers to "curb" them in order to preserve the integrity of the scale. While such standardization may seem reasonable on paper, it turns criticism into an exercise in balance rather than insight, reducing evaluation to statistics instead of genuine engagement.

Equally troubling is the apparent trend of assigning reviews of exploratory or "art" music to writers who may not possess the background — or interest — to engage with it on its own terms. In some cases, critics are tasked with interpreting music by artists whose histories and contexts they seem entirely unfamiliar with. In

the previous issue's Chords & Discords column, drummer Gerald Cleaver put it best: "Do your homework. Connect the dots. Excuse yourself from ignorance. Move the music forward by doing your part: deeply genuine reportage, based in rigorous preparation and objectivity. Do not follow trends. Do not lazily label."

When our work is filtered through the ears of those unversed in its language or lineage, the outcome is not just a low rating — it's a distortion of artistic intent. In my own case, Ms. Contreras connected meaningfully with my interpretations of Sylvester and Frank Ocean but seemed unsure how to approach Purcell, Labi Siffre or Sheila Jordan — that disconnect is evident in the writing. The same is true for the disconnect in her writing about Ms. Postma's daring and beautiful album. Surely no one can be an expert on all things, but I believe our work deserves being reviewed by someone who can fully grasp its range and roots.

I value criticism. I believe in dialogue, disagreement and curiosity. But I also believe DownBeat has a responsibility to match artists with critics who understand the aesthetic territory being explored.

THEO BLECKMANN  
NEW YORK CITY

**Editor's Note:** Dear Theo, thanks for the thoughtful letter. I'd like to clarify a few things. You put in quote marks the words "star inflation," "overabundance" and "curb." Those are not our words. We do periodically send a note out to critics to remind them of the star ratings — 5 is a masterpiece, 4 excellent, 3 good, 2 fair and 1. Then we leave it to each critic's ears, eyes and heart to determine what to say and how to rate a recording.

Ayana Contreras was an excellent reviewer for these two recordings. She's a pro who brings her own likes, dislikes, experiences and open ears to each recording she reviews — just like any good listener should. That said, her 3½ stars might be my 4½, or my 2½. It's not an exact science, nor should it be. We offer parameters and let each critic interpret the music and those parameters on their own terms. You may not agree with a reviewer, but rest assured, DownBeat critics are well-versed in the music they write about.

### Corrections & Clarifications

- In the December cover feature on Christian McBride and Jeffrey Porter, DownBeat woefully misspelled the names of beloved vocalists Dianne Reeves and Cécile McLorin Salvant. Massive regrets!
- In the October feature on the AACM at 60, the archives of Adegoke and Iqua Colson were purchased by Northwestern University.

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com) or find us on Facebook & Twitter.

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# The Beat

**Lex Korten, Wolfgang Muthspiel, jazzhead!, Final Bar: Ray Drummond, Anthony Jackson**



Don Was and the Pan-Detroit Ensemble, seated, Steffanie Christi'an, Dave McMurray; standing, from left, Jeff Canady, John Douglas, Don Was, Mahindi Masai, Luis Resto, Wayne Gerard, Vince Chandler.

## Deep Detroit Groove with Don Was

**D**etroit runs deep through the veins of Don Was. For five decades, the producer, multi-instrumentalist, composer and president of Blue Note Records has been a force in music, shaping the sound of famous musicians and bands like the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt and Willie Nelson. Was also has an impressive history with Was (Not Was), the rock-pop band he co-founded in the 1980s that had hit records such as "Walk The Dinosaur" and "Spy In The House Of Love." He's won six Grammy Awards, including 1994 Producer of the Year. On all the records he's written and produced, Detroit's spirit can be heard in every note.

Now, at 73, Was once again honors his hometown with his new band The Pan-Detroit Ensemble, releasing his first-ever album under his own name. With all his accomplishments, why drop the album now?

"It's now or never, baby," says Was, laughing in his home studio in California, just hours before recording his weekly radio show, *The Don Was Motor City Playlist* on WDET, which he's been co-hosting since 2021 with co-anchor Ann Delisi.

Released in October, his "debut" record *Groove In The Face Of Adversity* bears the genre-fluid binding of rock, pop, jazz, country, reggae, R&B and world music — all branches of music Was navigates with aplomb.

From Hank Williams to Curtis Mayfield, the album spans a wide range of covers that are near and dear to Was. Many of the songs were chosen spontaneously from tracks he'd played on his weekly radio show.

Like the songs on the album, The Pan-Detroit Ensemble also came about as a series of random circumstances. A few years ago, his friend, trumpeter Terence Blanchard, who is the Fred A. Erb Jazz Creative Director Chair for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Paradise Jazz Series, asked Was to perform at the series. Was agreed, but six months before the concert he freaked out because he didn't have a band or any songs.

"I went back to Detroit and found nine musicians who also grew up listening to WCHB and [Detroit radio personality] Electrifying Mojo, found people who played in the same bars where I played and who played with the same musicians and who spoke the same common

Detroit musical language as me," Was recalls.

Was hired some big-name musicians from Detroit like saxophonist Dave McMurray (see the feature article on page 28) — a former member of Was (Not Was) and Blue Note recording artist — and keyboardist Luis Resto, an Eminem collaborator for the last 30 years.

That first rehearsal with the band at Rust Belt Studios in Royal Oak, Michigan, was transformative, according to Was.

"Five minutes in, I knew we had something special. It sounded like Detroit," he says. "Everyone felt the groove in the same place. It doesn't come along too often in life that you can get, especially with nine musicians, all in a room who just click."

The recording sessions captured the ensemble's cohesion. Three of the six tracks were recorded live during their 2024 performance with the DSO, including a Was original, "You Asked, I Came," featuring Blanchard, and an epic 10-minute cover of Hank Williams' "I Ain't Got Nothin' But Time."

What started as a one-off gig has evolved into an ongoing project, with the band touring Japan and the U.S. and now the album release

through Mack Avenue Records — a label he says is “still Detroit at heart.”

The album’s cover features Joe’s Record Shop on Hastings Street, formerly in Detroit’s infamous Black Bottom neighborhood.

“That store represents the home of Detroit music,” Was says. “Joe Von Battle recorded John Lee Hooker, Rev. C.L. Franklin, even Aretha Franklin when she was 14.”

Today, the site is a patch of grass beside I-75. Was calls the destruction of Black Bottom as “a northern form of racism,” adding, “It’s a horrifying chapter in the history of this country

that should be remembered — and Joe’s Record Store is where that memory belongs.”

The album cover is also reminiscent of Was’ upbringing in nearby Oak Park, Michigan, during the 1960s, when Detroit was culturally vibrant. Early on he was exposed to the blues of John Lee Hooker, the R&B sounds of Motown and jazz musicians like Barry Harris and Elvin Jones. At Oak Park High School, Was became the lead singer and guitarist in a Detroit rock band called the Saturns.

At age 14, he discovered jazz while running errands with his mother. She left him in the

car and told him to play with the radio dial, he recalls. He landed on local jazz station WCHB, just as a song called “Mode For Joe” by Joe Henderson was playing, and he’d never heard anything like it. As the saxophonist wailed and drummer Joe Chambers swung, something shifted inside him.

“It felt like Joe Henderson was talking directly to me, telling me to groove in the face of adversity. My mood changed completely. I realized that music had the power to make sense of life: to turn chaos into clarity.”

His love affair with jazz began at that moment and lasts to this day, from collecting jazz records to seeing musicians like Miles Davis and John Coltrane perform at Cobo Hall in the ’60s. It was a natural fit when he assumed the presidency of Blue Note Records in 2011, succeeding famed president Bruce Lundvall.

Although he hadn’t produced many jazz musicians, Was has overhauled the legendary jazz imprint, signing vocalists Gregory Porter and José James in his first year with the label, following up with edgy musicians like alto saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins, vibraphonist Joel Ross and pianist Gerald Clayton.

“I’d been collecting Blue Note records all my life,” he says. “Detroit made me understand the ethos of that company: honesty, soul and swing.”

Running Blue Note and touring with a nine-piece band might seem impossible, but Was takes inspiration from Frank Sinatra’s discipline, which keeps him grounded — and empathetic.

“Whatever you’re doing, be 100 percent present for it. Don’t regret what you did earlier or worry about what’s next. Be here now.”

The Pan-Detroit Ensemble will launch its next tour in January with four nights at Ann Arbor’s Blue Llama Jazz Club before heading nationwide.

Trombonist Vincent Chandler, a member of the group, credits Was for shaping the sound of the band and its groove-centered nature.

“He is the foundation of this band” says Chandler. “The sound starts with him. Impeccable groove, incredible musicianship. One thing that’s really exciting about his musicianship is his ability to develop music and to kind of lead the band from the bottom.”

“He lays a foundation that lends itself to the utmost creativity. We get a sense of the form of things, but once the gigs start, we get to go for it, and we get to do whatever comes to our hearts. He doesn’t rein us all in. We’re all free to express ourselves, which is more of what you would get if you heard us live.”

Was remains restless, honest, and grooving, keeping Detroit close wherever he goes.

“The lesson from Detroit,” he says, “is that no matter what’s thrown at you, you keep swinging.”

—Veronica Johnson

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# Lex Korten Explores the Secret and the Sensory

**"TOUCH GRASS" HAS BECOME A GO-TO** social media taunt, a reminder to the terminally online that there is a wide and beautiful world beyond the handheld screen.

A similar sentiment animates the evocative music of *Canopy*, the debut album by pianist Lex Korten. There's nothing quite so glib or direct in Korten's enigmatic compositions, but each piece conjures its own alluring environment, an array of liminal, dreamtime spaces hinted at in titles like "Abyssal Sleep" or "A Sunshower Vignette."

As Korten explained from his home in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood, "Understanding your body and its place in the living and moving world is not only a sacred or spiritual thing, but in this day and age it's also a radical thing. We're trapped by this fixation on the algorithmic and capitalistic influence all around us. It's so easy to sink into that world and be reduced to binaries. I wrote this music imagining, in a very abstract way, the open-air freedom and sensory feeling that I wanted to explore."

The music of *Canopy* is purposefully ambiguous, preferring the allusive to the explicit in both music and lyrics. Still, its insistence on sensorial experience is, Korten admits, a political statement in and of itself. Not surprising from a composer who has also maintained a lifelong passion for politics. "I've spent a lot of time writing songs about very literal subjects that involve the fabric of the modern world, as well as angsty, personal issues," he described. "In this case I wanted to write songs that were abstract enough in their title and imagery that they could invite someone in to invent alongside the music."

Though his emergence onto the scene roughly coincided with the onset of the pandemic, Korten emerged from lockdown as one of the most in-demand pianists of his generation. In 2025 alone he's been featured on recordings by saxophonists Zoh Amba and Alex Hitchcock, trumpeter Milena Casado and vibraphonist Sasha Berliner. That follows work with the likes of Jaleel Shaw, Melissa Aldana, Caroline Davis, Morgan Guerin and Simon Moullier.

It's a diverse group of bandleaders, reflecting the broad range of his tastes and influences. Yet his own music sounds like none of them. The closest antecedent, in philosophy if not in sound, would be Tyshawn Sorey. Most listeners would have first encountered Korten through Sorey's 2020 album *Unfiltered*, a three-part epic stretching over two-and-a-half hours that made the passage of time a major component of the musical experience. On *Canopy*, Korten works in a similarly incisive way with the notion of navigating through space.

"Tyshawn is at the tip of the spear of people who are tearing apart our concept of form and reincarnating it in a profoundly living, breath-



**"I wanted to write songs that were abstract enough in their title and imagery that they could invite someone in to invent alongside the music,"** says pianist and composer Lex Korten of his new recording.

ing way," Korten said. "I aspire to call him an influence. I don't want to claim that my music is channeling what Tyshawn does, but I feel moved by the way his compositions are never complete. What better to offer to listeners than to put yourself on the precipice in front of them, always searching for a new layer of something that you're familiar with."

Korten conceived *Canopy*, he said, "in the negative space of all the things that I wish I had touched on in the other parts of my musical life." To realize that elusive ambition, he assembled a unique ensemble, the main criterion for which was a willingness to take daunting leaps into the unknown. The quintet features Korten with vocalist Claire Dickson, alto saxophonist David Leon, guitarist Tal Yahalom and drummer Stephen Boegehold. Rather than adhering to their instruments' usual roles, all contribute equally to summoning the album's mesmerizing atmospherics and shimmering textures.

The challenges that Korten presented to his bandmates were echoes of those that he placed in his own path as he wrote the album. Despite his distrust of the virtual world, he borrowed a concept from smartphone apps by "gamifying" the compositional process. He placed a series of constraints on himself: writing away from the piano, or while riding the subway, or on material other than manuscript paper. He studiously avoided familiar surroundings, holing up for a time in the apartment of his aunt's neighbor, where the piano was the only point of reference.

"It became my secret chamber, a safe bubble where I could build these ideas," he said. "I think it's necessary to have a practice space where no one can hear you so you can fumble around."

Perhaps foreshadowing the mysterious

landscapes that populate *Canopy*, jazz has always been something of a "secret world" for Korten. Growing up on Manhattan's Upper West Side, he encountered no one else his age — no one at all, in fact, other than his piano teacher — who shared his fascination with jazz. Yet the historical figures he chose to write about in school were Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington, the discoveries that excited him were the likes of Jaki Byard and Brad Mehldau.

That all changed when he moved to Ann Arbor at 18, expressly to study with pianist and composer Geri Allen. When she left the University of Michigan two years later, he came under the mentorship of Benny Green, who was teaching there, along with Detroit notables like Robert Hurst, Rodney Whitaker and Marcus Belgrave. Equally important was the circle of peers that he discovered for the first time.

Since returning to New York, he's situated himself in the midst of another, thriving and ever-expanding community of venturesome musicians. In addition to the *Canopy* ensemble, he also leads a quartet with alto player Nicola Caminiti, bassist Harish Raghavan and drummer Miguel Russell, and is experimenting with various trio combinations. He'll make his band-leading debut at Winter Jazzfest in January.

Korten's myriad interests point him in varied, often divergent directions — but that's the way he prefers it.

"When I was younger, post-college, a lot of people in New York would say, 'Lex, it seems like you do a lot of this and a lot of that, but what's the real you?' I'm so happy that I didn't succumb to having to live that way and stuck it out for a little longer, trying to really be myself. There really is room for that here." —Shaun Brady



Wolfgang Muthspiel, left, with trio mates Scott Colley and Brian Blade.

## Wolfgang Muthspiel's Continuing Explorations

### IN ITS REMARKABLE 56-YEAR HISTORY

ECM Records has released more than 1,800 albums by countless artists from around the globe, all under the discerning gaze and guidance of founder Manfred Eicher. The venerable enterprise has all disseminated from the label's disarmingly humble but functional headquarters in Munich, Germany, but has featured surprisingly few Germanic artists on its roster.

One notable exception is the commanding and versatile Austrian guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel, who has built up a stellar ECM catalog leading up to his new trio album, *Tokyo*. So named for generous appreciation of his work in the country of Japan — and particularly his empathic trio with drummer Brian Blade and bassist Scott Colley — *Tokyo* is the third and strongest album yet by a trio sounding evermore mature, yet ready for a new challenge. This is still a young-ish trio, dating back five years ago to the album *Angular Blues* and returning with *Dance Of The Elders* in 2023. Clearly, as heard on *Tokyo*, the threesome is deepening its ensemble bond.

Muthspiel explains, "We all think in terms of ensemble sound, and we listen to each other deeply. There's a constant musical conversation happening, which has grown stronger over time. For me, that way of interacting has become almost essential to making music today."

Was there a core concept at work in creating the songbook for this album? Yes and no. Muthspiel asserts, "My goal was simply to create music that we genuinely want to play together — music that comes from the heart."

*Tokyo* can be viewed as the portrait of the art-

ists, reflecting varied interests and skill zones. Acoustic and electric guitar are deployed on a range of compositions, from lyrical balladry to contemporary swing ventures, pinches of rock fire and more experimental outings, all of which his trio-mates fold naturally into.

"At this point, both electric and acoustic guitar have become equally important to me. I tend to write specifically for one or the other, and that naturally shapes the repertoire I want to record. As for the range of moods, yes, I wanted a wide palette of colors, tempos, grooves and harmonies. I still think in terms of albums, and the 50-minute journey really matters to me."

Muthspiel has worked beyond the borders of jazz, *per se*, as with his commissioned work for the avant-garde contemporary music ensemble Klangforum Wien. Some of that extra-jazz impulse is heard on *Tokyo*, as on the Kurt Weill tribute with the winking pun of a title, "Weill You Wait," and tonal cluster-blitz of "Diminished And Augmented."

He confesses that, despite his clear gift for melodic writing, "after spending time with more triadic or simpler material, I often start to crave more extended harmony. Overall, the album presents many of the musical aesthetics I love, so I didn't want to limit it to a single expression. The piece I wrote for Klangforum Wien, on the other hand, was actually a 12-tone composition with an improvising soloist: a very different territory."

Muthspiel's link to ECM goes deeper than a business deal, as elements of the label's storied artists have found a sympathetic ear and left a bold influence on his musicality. In some of his

playing, it is easy to detect echoes of former ECM staple Pat Metheny in Muthspiel's phrasing and compositional leanings (especially in the realm of balladry). And in his acoustic work, hints of Ralph Towner (who he recorded with on 2013's *Travel Guide*) find their way in. On *Tokyo*, the label's imprint is touched on through his interpretations of Keith Jarrett's "Lisbon Stomp" and Paul Motian's "Abacus," which literally frame the album's sequence: Both Jarrett and Motian have had deep associations in ECM's orbit.

"Since I discovered jazz through ECM recordings, it feels completely natural to include pieces by Jarrett and Motian. They're both major influences," Muthspiel said. "I had the privilege of playing with Paul quite a bit, and I'll never forget the feeling of standing next to his cymbal and experiencing his creative force."

In another cross-reference to a guiding influence in his music, Muthspiel — who has returned to live in Vienna after years in New York and Boston — dips into the rugged Austrian jazz-folk patois of Weather Report's Joe Zawinul on the tune "Christa's Dream." As Muthspiel readily admits, "Joe was certainly a huge hero and influence. His story is still unbelievable. I think part of his aesthetic draws from Austrian harmonic language and the accordion with its different sound registers. The ballad 'Christa's Dream' on the album is definitely a nod to him."

Another significant Austrian in his life is his own brother, the pianist, composer and big band leader Christian Muthspiel. The brothers recorded together in Wolfgang's early, post-Berklee student days starting in 1985, and including the 2003 album *Early Music*, with a particular family-tied theme.

"*Early Music* was an album my brother and I recorded as an homage to our father," he explains, "using samples from his choir recordings and building our own music around them. As children with classical training, we improvised together constantly, without knowing anything about jazz."

"When we discovered that there was an entire music dedicated to improvisation, we were hooked. We played all the instruments and gadgets available in the house, and in many ways that early creative freedom still shapes the way both of us compose."

Fast-forward to now. At age 60, Muthspiel has built up an impressive and wide-ranging body of work to date and is established as a jazz guitar force to reckon with, not to mention creating some beautiful, unabashedly lyrical music.

Does he look back reflectively on the journey so far, and look forward to things to come? "I see a continuous path of immersion in music, and I still enjoy the fundamentals — practicing, composing, playing concerts, recording. If I had to summarize the journey so far, it would be something like: Music is endless. Let me go deeper."

—*Josef Woodard*



M3B/JENS SCHLENKER

Vocalist Tyreek McDole performs during Jazzahead!

## Jazzahead! Prepares for 20th Annual Conference

FROM ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IN 2006,

jazzahead! has developed into the world's leading international trade fair, talent showcase, festival and conference dedicated to jazz. Here's a look at the event has blossomed and what to expect when it celebrates its 20th anniversary April 22–25 in Bremen, Germany.

How did jazzahead! in the North German city of Bremen evolve from a small jazz trade fair in 2006, with fewer than 100 exhibitors from Germany and Austria, into the world's largest gathering for the jazz industry and community?

From those tentative beginnings, jazzahead!'s combination of a trade fair, a conference and a showcase festival has progressively grown in scale, confidence, expertise and ambition.

Despite its increase in scale, the feel of a community is palpable. To some extent, jazzahead! markets itself as a "family gathering." "There's a positive spirit about jazzahead! that is empowering," says broadcaster and journalist Arne Schumacher, who started off as a skeptic, but has attended every edition and been progressively won over.

In the early years, there was no shortage of doomsayers ready to predict jazzahead!'s demise, especially after the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE) went down in flames in 2008. But in the years since, the organizers have found both their niche and their stride.

Bremen has the distinction of being the smallest of Germany's 16 states. There are surely flashier and grander cities around, like Hamburg, Germany's second largest city, less than an hour away by train. Or, as has been actively proposed, wouldn't jazzahead! be better off putting down its roots in one of the cities with a significant jazz scene and/or a major conservatoire, such as

Berlin or Cologne?

Such suggestions receive a curt "no" from Hans Peter Schneider, the wily head of M3B, the parent company of Messe Bremen, the leader who set the whole jazzahead! vision in motion. In a recent interview, he quipped, "The winners of the league aren't the ones with the biggest stadiums, but those with the best teams."

In fact, Bremen being a smaller metropolis actively helps. As Katherine McVicker of Music Works International, a stalwart of the event since its early days, says, "The city doesn't take the people away from the conference." Smaller cities do tend to be more appreciative when they can host international events. As Mayor Andreas Bovenschulte said in a speech, for Bremen, jazzahead! is "an event with immense international prestige, a shining jewel."

The "best team" that Schneider oversees has been marshaled by Sybille Kornitschky since the venture started. Bremen-born, Kornitschky studied and worked abroad in France and the U.K. She returned to Bremen in 2002 and joined the staff of Messe Bremen. "I knew that I had a major wish to get something going in Bremen," she remembers, "and also something with an international dimension." Kornitschky was given the role of getting the venture off the ground. Rather quaintly, she kept her original title of "project leader" for more than a decade.

That job description might have sounded transitory, but her track record in steadily building the event to its current scale has been lauded by attendees, and the jazz community, as a remarkable achievement.

In the early stages, Kornitschky, who admits to having started as an outsider in the jazz world, worked with two local figures, both

with influential networks in European jazz — Peter Schulze, a broadcaster at Radio Bremen who at the time was the artistic director of Jazzfest Berlin; and trumpeter/bandleader Uli Beckerhoff. In order to build some notoriety and to win local support, jazzahead! in its early days invited well-known international bands and awarded an annual prize sponsored by car manufacturer Škoda. That prize ended in 2014, but it helped the event gain attention.

An important development of the past few years has been the arrival of Hamburg-based music journalist, author and radio/TV presenter Götz Bühler. His appointment as artistic advisor was announced in early 2023, and he has been in post since the retirement of Peter Schulze and Uli Beckerhoff at the end of that year's edition.

Bühler had attended jazzahead! "as a participant, as an exhibitor, but basically an outsider," he says. He adds that it has been fascinating to have his eyes opened to the complexity of the operation and its year-long build-up, as seen from the inside.

A strong principle of the event is the role jazzahead! can play in helping musicians build reputations and make connections. "We want to make sure that musicians will both have performance and networking opportunities," says Bühler.

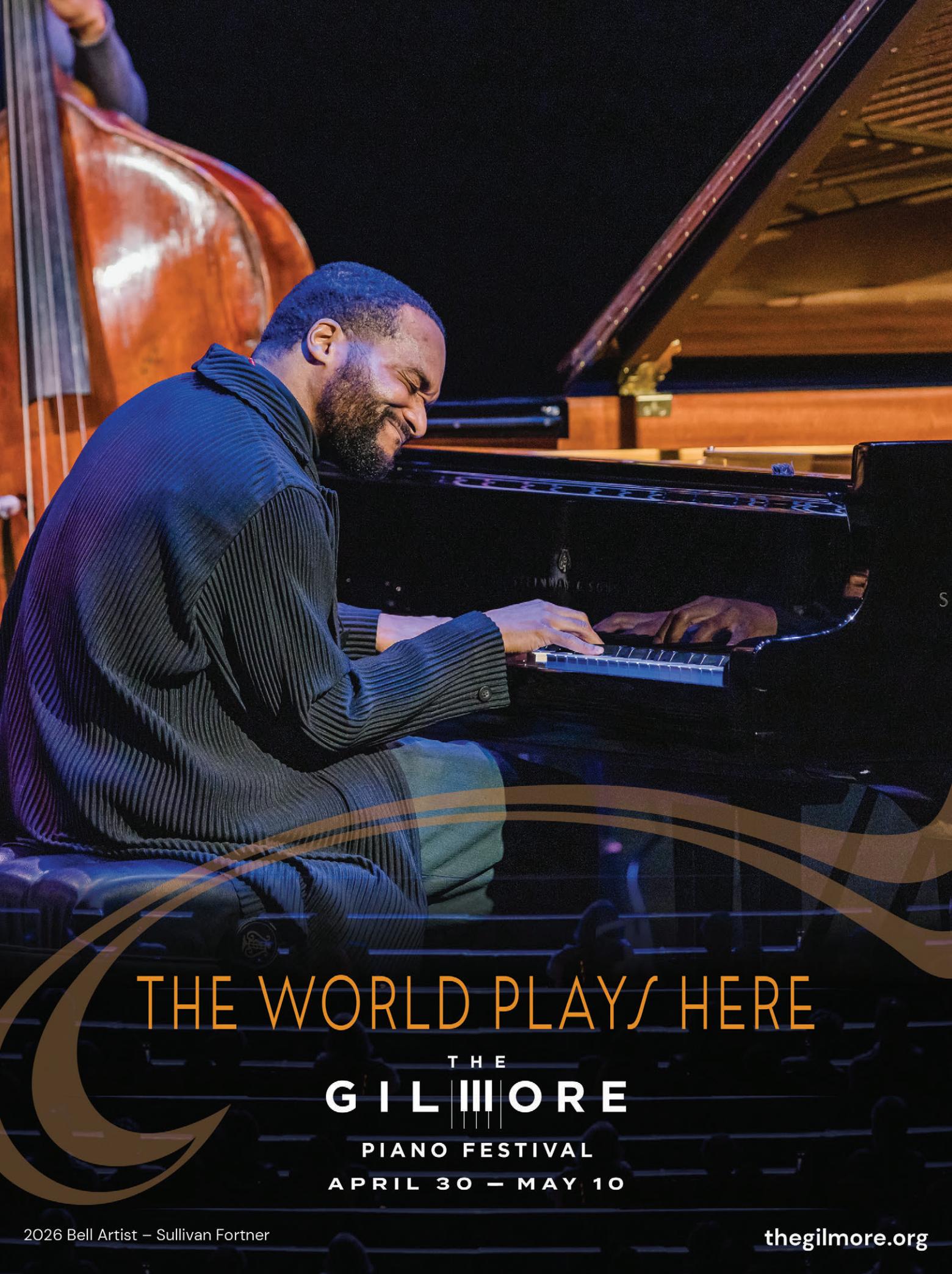
That goal is something senior figures on the German scene recognize. As Dr. Anke Steinbeck of the Deutscher Musikrat and Bundesjugendjazzorchester says: "For young musicians in particular, jazzahead! is like a 'backstage pass' to the real world of music: the entire industry is there — live, loud and unfiltered."

Being a truly international event serves as another area fundamental to the vision is the organizers. The goal is to offer as many countries as possible a visible presence at the fair. And the value has delivered results with promoters and managers hearing showcase artists and taking instant action to book or sign them.

The most obvious expression of the event's international identity is the Partner Country program, which has been running since 2011, whereby countries sponsor in order to increase opportunities for their artists and local scenes. Each year jazzahead! features a different Partner Country to focus on. To date, Turkey, Spain, Israel, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Finland, Poland, Norway, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands have served as Partner Countries. For the 2026 edition, Sweden will be the focus.

When it comes to who should attend, the answer is clear: anyone involved in the business of jazz and hopes to make a career in this music. It's a place to be noticed, inspired and recharged. As jazzahead!'s Schumacher says, "You spend three days in a safe space, a kind of bubble where everybody hugs ... and then you go back out there into the real rough world outside."

—Sebastian Scotney



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## Ray Drummond, 1946–2025

**RAY DRUMMOND, A FIRST-CALL BASSIST**

who appeared on hundreds of albums as a sideman for some of the top names in jazz since his arrival on the New York scene in 1977, as well as more than 10 recordings as a leader or co-leader, died Nov. 1 at age 78. In addition to his reputation as a supportive rhythm section player with impeccable timing, spot-on pitch, a relentlessly swinging groove and a vast knowledge of standards and bebop repertoire, Drummond was cherished by generations of mainstream jazz listeners for his authoritative tonal presence, a defining quality of his style most apparent when he played his instrument unamplified. Nicknamed “Bulldog,” he was also widely admired in the jazz community for his work as a composer, arranger, bandleader, educator, mentor and producer.

Drummond’s early years in New York found him working with the city’s top straight-ahead jazz artists, including Johnny Griffin, Slide Hampton and Lee Konitz. He quickly became a sought-after sideman for the likes of Kenny Barron, Art Farmer, Wynton Marsalis, Benny Golson, Freddie Hubbard, George Coleman, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, Toshiko

Akiyoshi, Etta Jones, Betty Carter, Woody Shaw, Milt Jackson, Hank Jones, Pharoah Sanders, Houston Person, Kenny Burrell, Stan Getz, Toots Thielemans, Ray Bryant, Phil Woods, David Murray and Benny Golson. As new generations of jazz luminaries began to appear on the New York scene, he found himself working with Bill Charlap, Joe Locke, Steve Wilson, Paul Bollenback, Benny Green, Jessica Williams, Rob Schneiderman and Jeanie Bryson.

As a leader, Drummond’s three main groups included Excursion, an all-star quintet that found woodwind players David Sánchez, Craig Handy and Joe Lovano, pianists Stephen Scott and Danilo Pérez, drummers Billy Hart and Marvin “Smitty” Smith, and Senegalese percussionist Mor Thiam among its ranks; The Quartet with Hart, Scott and Handy; and One To One with pianist Bill Mays. Additionally, he co-led The Drummonds, featuring drummer Billy Drummond and pianist Renee Rosnes.

The son of an Army colonel, Drummond was born on Nov. 23, 1946, in Brookline, Massachusetts, and was a long-time resident of Teaneck, New Jersey. He took up the bass at age 14, after starting on trumpet and French horn.



RI SUTHERLAND-COHEN

After his family settled in California, Drummond earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and an MBA from Stanford University near San Francisco, where he performed with Bobby Hutcherson, Michael White, Tom Harrell and Eddie Marshall before choosing music as a full-time career and moving to New York.

Drummond began teaching in 1975 as a faculty member of Monterey Peninsula College Music Department in Monterey, California. For years he commuted from his home in Teaneck to Monterey Bay, where he served as Assistant Professor of Jazz, Theory and Practice at California State University.

Drummond is survived by his daughter, Maya. His wife, Susan, passed years earlier. —Ed Enright

## Anthony Jackson, 1952–2025

**BASSIST ANTHONY JACKSON, A CON-**summate accompanist, renowned virtuoso and ubiquitous session player with more than 500 recordings to his credit, died at his home on Staten Island on Oct. 19 from Parkinson’s disease. He was 73.

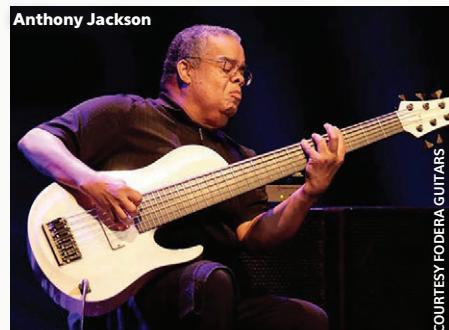
A master of the six-string electric bass, which he tuned in fourths (BEADGC) and preferred to call the “contrabass guitar,” Jackson’s extensive credits included recordings for pop singers Roberta Flack, Esther Phillips, Paul Simon, Carly Simon, Diana Ross, Chaka Khan, Anita Baker and Madonna; jazz pianists Chick Corea, Tania Maria, Michel Petrucciani, Michel Camilo, Jorge Dalto and Hiromi Uehara; guitar greats Di Meola, Steve Khan, Mike Stern, Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Earl Klugh, Lee Ritenour, David Spinoza, John Tropea and George Benson; and drummers Buddy Rich, Harvey Mason, Steve Smith, Dennis Chambers, Simon Phillips and Dave Weckl.

Born on June 23, 1952, and raised on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, Jackson began on piano and by age 12 switched to guitar. A year later, his mother bought him his first

bass. Initially inspired by Motown Records’ house bassist James Jamerson and the Jefferson Airplane’s Jack Casady, Jackson began playing in local clubs by age 16. In 1972, he joined Billy Paul’s band, later appearing on the singer’s Gold Record “Me And Mrs. Jones.” Further work with Philadelphia-based production team of Gamble & Huff led to a 1973 session with The O’Jays. It was Jackson’s pick-driven, phase-shifted bass riff on the opening to their 1974 funk-soul anthem “For The Love Of Money” that put him on the map.

As a first-call New York session bassist for more than five decades, Jackson set a new standard in precision bass playing through his unwavering commitment to excellence and his take-no-prisoners approach to the instrument.

After suffering a series of strokes and being diagnosed with Parkinson’s (health issues had prevented him from performing since 2017) he was feted at a benefit concert, “For the Love of Anthony,” held at Brooklyn’s Shapeshifter Lab on Feb. 27 of this year. Fellow bassists in attendance included Ron Carter, Victor Wooten, Christian McBride, Matt Garrison, Mike Bub,



COURTESY FODERA GUITARS

James Genus, Steve Bailey, Lincoln Goines, Divinity Roxx and Stanley Clarke. Other musicians on hand for this outpouring of love were Di Meola, Dennis Chambers, Bob Franceschini, Gene Lake, Mino Cinelu, Omar Hakim, Rachel Z, DJ Logic, Simon Phillips and Vinny Fodera of Fodera Guitars.

As drummer Dave Weckl recalled in a Facebook post: “Anthony Jackson was one of the most important people to ever pick up and play a bass guitar (correction: as he always said, ‘It’s a six-string contrabass guitar’). Incredibly unique, solid as a rock, treating space like the note itself with such precision, I learned so much from this man.” —Bill Milkowski

# Scott Thompson, 1954–2025

**SCOTT THOMPSON, A WORLD-CLASS** public relations specialist who worked with numerous jazz artists as well as prominent institutions like Jazz at Lincoln Center, died Oct. 24 at age 71.

Thompson served as Assistant Director of Public Relations for Jazz at Lincoln Center for almost a decade. He was brought in to help launch the organization's new facilities in the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle in 2004. He was also publicist for Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola. During that time, he established himself as a leading publicist in the entertainment field.

With a background in broadcast journalism, Thompson's voice and work were heard on the Associated Press Radio Network, the Mutual Broadcasting Network and NBC-AM New York. Thompson co-produced the New Haven Jazz Festival from 1994 to 2000, and worked in the New Haven Mayor's Office of Information. His experience spanned radio, television, print and the internet.

"Scott was known for his compassion and his ability to truly listen," said his wife, the freelance writer and translator María Cabeza. "He carried himself quietly, never seeking the spotlight, yet his work and his presence lit the room. As one of the finest jazz publicists in the world, he championed artists with integrity and heart. Music wasn't just part of his career — it was the rhythm of his soul."

Also a skilled writer, Thompson contributed to DownBeat, JazzTimes, Jazziz and the All Music Guide. He penned the CD liner notes to landmark albums and classic compilations, and he wrote all the monthly Playbill lead features during his JALC tenure.

While working in New York, Thompson strengthened his contacts worldwide with his strong communicative skills and his easygoing personality. He did public relations work for a huge list of jazz and blues luminaries, including Tony Bennett, George Wein, Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan, Milt Jackson, Sonny Rollins, Billy Taylor, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Sonny Stitt, Stan Getz, Ray Charles, Ornette Coleman, Stanley Turrentine, Joe Williams, Ahmad Jamal, Jimmy Heath, Wynton Marsalis, Branford Marsalis, Hank Jones, Roy Haynes, Freddie Hubbard, Gerald Wilson, Ron Carter, Nancy Wilson, Cassandra Wilson, Bucky Pizzarelli, Steve Turre, Joe Lovano, John Scofield, Pat Metheny, Mike Stern, Vernon Reid, John McLaughlin, Joshua Redman, George Duke, Billy Cobham, Carlos

Santana, Esperanza Spalding, Gregory Porter, Celia Cruz, Chucho Valdés, Eddie Palmieri, Ray Baretto, Paquito D'Rivera, B.B. King, Freddie King, John Lee Hooker, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimmie Vaughan, Taj Mahal, John Mayall, James Cotton, Charlie Musselwhite and Son Seals.

—Ed Enright



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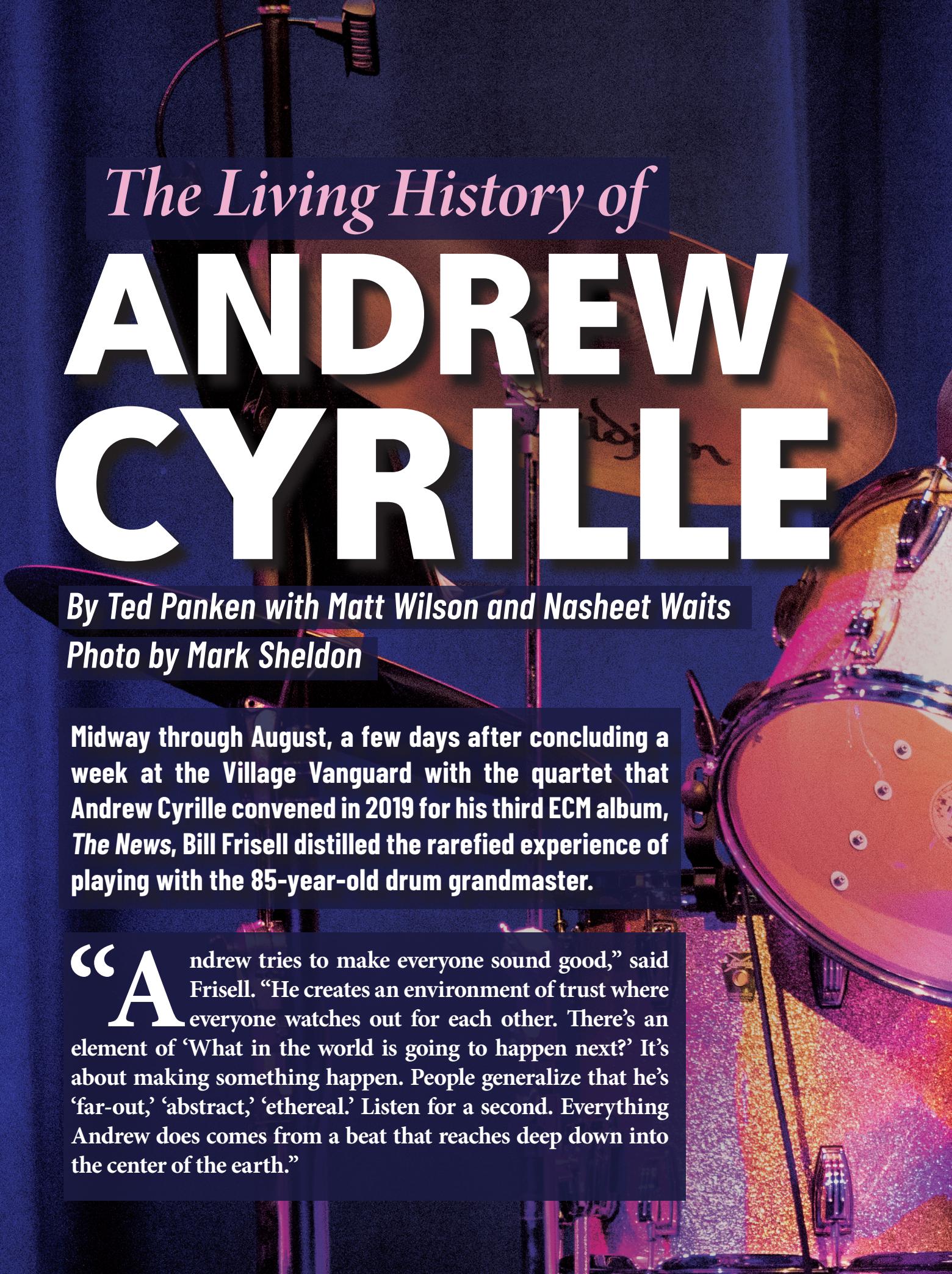
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# *The Living History of* **ANDREW CYRILLE**

**By Ted Panken with Matt Wilson and Nasheet Waits**

**Photo by Mark Sheldon**

Midway through August, a few days after concluding a week at the Village Vanguard with the quartet that Andrew Cyrille convened in 2019 for his third ECM album, *The News*, Bill Frisell distilled the rarefied experience of playing with the 85-year-old drum grandmaster.

“Andrew tries to make everyone sound good,” said Frisell. “He creates an environment of trust where everyone watches out for each other. There’s an element of ‘What in the world is going to happen next?’ It’s about making something happen. People generalize that he’s ‘far-out,’ ‘abstract,’ ‘ethereal.’ Listen for a second. Everything Andrew does comes from a beat that reaches deep down into the center of the earth.”

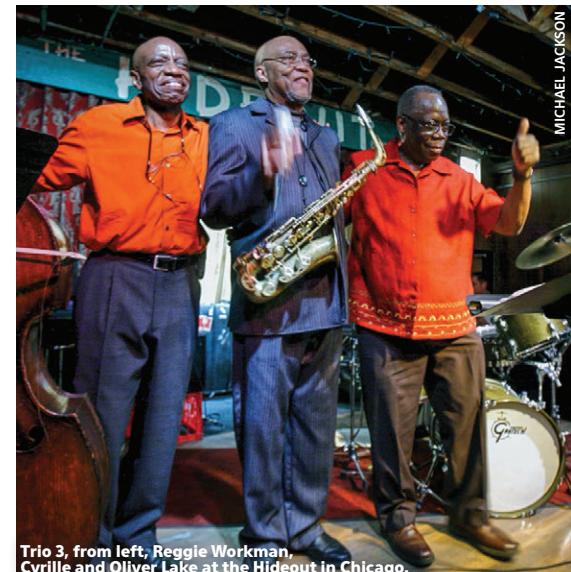




The Cecil Taylor Unit in 1975 with, from left, Taylor, Jimmy Lyons and Cyrille.



The Andrew Cyrille Quartet with, from left, Cyrille, Bill Frisell, David Virelles and Ben Street.



Trio 3, from left, Reggie Workman, Cyrille and Oliver Lake at the Hideout in Chicago.

Throughout the first set on night two, Cyrille addressed each circumstance with the decisive finesse of a tennis champion, instantly intuiting the respective intentions of Frisell, pianist David Virelles and bassist Ben Street as they spun out stories, recalibrating dynamics and rhythmic shapes, volleying back crisply executed responses to every salvo, keeping the postulations fresh with an enormous lexicon of beats and timbres.

“Every gig or project or recording feels cooperative,” Frisell said, referencing not only *The News*, but also its two ECM predecessors — *The Declaration Of Musical Independence* (a 2014 quartet album with Street and analog synth-electronics improviser Richard Teitelbaum) and a 2018 trio date with Wadada Leo Smith titled *Lebroba* — and *Breaking The*

*Shell* (Red Hook), a timbrally extravagant 2024 encounter with Kit Downes.

Street opined that Cyrille’s “magical control of his imagination” and “clarity of utterance and space” mirror the qualities that animate his favorite poets. “I know how hard they worked on their finished product, and here’s Andrew seemingly doing it in real time,” said Street. They met in 2010, while recording *Open Opus* (ILK), the first of three trio albums with Danish pianist Søren Kjærgaard — on which, Street recalled, Cyrille rendered the complexly scored charts “like he’d played it for years.”

Two years later, at Street’s instigation, Virelles paired Cyrille with batá wizard Roman Diaz on his much-praised *Continuum*, spurring a memorable week at the Village Vanguard. “I

recognize West African diasporic elements in everything Andrew does,” Virelles said. “Playing with him is a portal to the sensibility of another era. You hear all the nuances of timbre. You feel the depth of touch. You hear his ability to make micro-adjustments of phrasing and dynamics. You experience all the attributes of a consummate master, but also all the history.”

Cyrille’s history began soon after World War II when he joined a drum and bugle corps at St. Peter Claver elementary school, around the corner from his Bedford-Stuyvesant home. His mentors, local pros Willie Jones — who gigged with Lester Young and Thelonious Monk — and Lenny McBrowne, taught him the intricacies of the drumset. He and his best friend, who became Max Roach’s brother-in-law in 1949,

practiced on the maestro's drums as tweens.

By 16, he was earning pocket money playing mambos, calypsos and shuffles at local dances and social functions with a trio that included guitarist Eric Gale.

In 1958, worn down from juggling a freshman chemistry major's courseload with nocturnal musical pursuits, he opted for music, matriculating to Juilliard as an orchestral percussion student. He sidemanned in Brooklyn with eminent beboppers Duke Jordan and Cecil Payne, assembled ad hoc combos in which Freddie Hubbard and John Handy made their first New York appearances, went on the road with blues singer Nellie Lutcher and tenor hero Illinois Jacquet and played with the trios of pianists Roland Hanna (a Juilliard classmate) and Mary Lou Williams.

Also in 1958, Cyrille played for the first time, informally, with Cecil Taylor. They remained in touch as Cyrille expanded his horizons. The son of Haitian immigrants, he'd absorbed West African rhythms, having heard local drummers on a 1947 visit to his uncles near Port au Prince, and when master drummer Alphonse Cimber played for a dance held by his mother and her social club in Brooklyn.

During the early 1960s he exponentially increased his West African vocabulary in drum ensembles with Nigerian master Babatunde

Olatunji; toward the end of the decade, he joined the Believers, an operatically trained vocal group that performed spirituals, gospel and urban blues with an African drum choir.

In February 1961, Cyrille made his debut recording with boundary-pushing vibraphonist Walt Dickerson; two weeks later, he swung a relaxed standards date with Coleman Hawkins. In 1964, he joined Taylor for an 11-year run that included his informed participation on the pathbreaking albums *Unit Structures* and *Conquistador*, both on Blue Note.

During his post-Taylor half-century, Cyrille has embodied the discipline and exhilaration of speculative improvising and form-building through the consistent artistry, creativity and professionalism he brings to multiple jazz and jazz-adjacent contexts. He's recorded erudite drum conversations with fellow '60s path-breakers Milford Graves and Rashied Ali, and in the drum ensemble *Pieces of Time* with Graves, Kenny Clarke and Famoudou Don Moye. Several solo records — from 1969 (*What About?*) to 2022 (*Music Delivery/Percussion*) — showcase the orchestral concept of the drum set. He's done *tabula rasa* duos with a cohort of elite outcats and engaged in more structured encounters with Anthony Braxton, Marilyn Crispel and Teitelbaum. He's impeccably executed and interpreted the complex scores of Muhal Richard

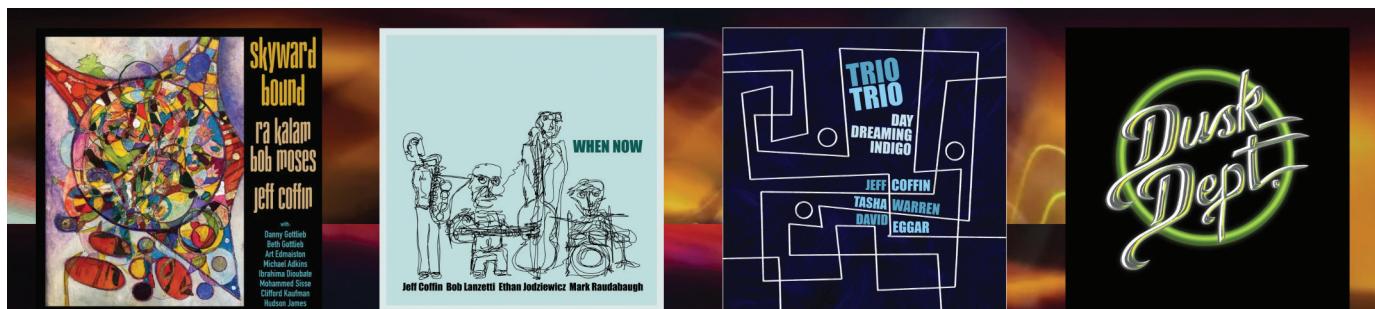
Abrams, John Carter and Cyrille's Trio 3 partners Oliver Lake and Reggie Workman, and propelled the ensembles of David Murray and Eric Revis.

In late June, he sat for a four-hour Zoom conversation with two major fans and students of his art — drummers Nasheet Waits and Matt Wilson — along with this writer. Cyrille fleshed out some of his multi-layered, comprehensive personal history. It has been edited for space and clarity.

**Nasheet Waits:** Eric Revis articulated something I also feel — you approach the music from the inside out. You get to the core and give it exactly what it needs, unobtrusively and supportively, with a certain forward motion. You gave me — and a lot of other drummers — courage to achieve swing without necessarily playing tang-tangtadang-tangtadang.

**Andrew Cyrille:** Playing from the inside-out is exactly how I think about the drums when I'm playing with different concepts. I was able to get to so many different places not just because of all of the people I'd played with before Cecil Taylor, but because when I got to Cecil, I could go anywhere I wanted. Cecil always said, "This is our music." Anyone I play with, I listen. Then I try to make the music as much mine as it is theirs.

Once, I heard Max play so much stuff during a set at Smalls Paradise in Harlem, I told him, "Damn, Max, you played everything. There's



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nothing left.” He said, “Oh, yes, there is. There’s a universe out there. Go look, and find some stuff.” Philly Joe Jones said, “You’ve got to find your own signature. Do what you need to do to make your contribution.” That’s always been in my head.

**Waits:** *What was the origin of your relationship with Philly Joe Jones, and what did he show you?*  
**Cyrille:** Joe opened a lot of doors for me. Max never showed us anything specific, and I was looking for someone to help me understand the language of this music and make music with it. I saw Joe at a concert with Miles Davis where he swirled the brushes like cooking in a pot. “Where’d he get that?! I’ve got to meet this guy.” I don’t remember exactly how we connected, but when I was 17, 18, 19, Joe borrowed my drums to make his gigs and sessions. He brought me to Bud Powell’s *Time Waits* date with him and Sam Jones in 1958. My tongue was hanging out, wishing I could do what he was doing on my drums.

I’d go to Joe’s house, where he showed me things with the brushes, and compositions with rudiments — play a four-stroke here, then a seven-stroke here and then an 11, then repeat it, and so on. Sometimes we’d ride the A-train, going to do whatever business he had to do, and he’d show me stuff on the rattan woven seats, with people watching us. He’d say he was giving me a lesson. He never charged me for it either. Maybe it was because he was using my drums! Once, at a gig in Brooklyn with Lee Morgan and Cannonball, he wanted to go out and do whatever when the next set came on. “Let the kid play.” I’m getting all this information from these powerhouses; they’d turn around, nod their heads and say, “Yeah!” —

that kind of thing, though I was still learning.

**Waits:** *That tradition of letting younger musicians or other musicians sit in doesn’t happen too often now. Definitely not as you’re describing it, an almost extension of pedagogy.*

**Cyrille:** Partly it’s because of how the music has expanded. A lot of pieces are not in AABA form that most of us can swing with, but compositions that are too complicated for cats to come up and sit in. Muhal Richard Abrams gives you a score where suddenly there’s a 1/4 beat, then you go to 11, or 3/2, or whatever it is. You’ve got to know how to count those meters. Even with Trio 3, so much was going on in some of Reggie’s and Oliver’s pieces that you had to follow it on the page to get from one place to the next. The notes don’t play the music. You play the notes, so you’ve got to learn how to interpret. Joe told me: “You got to know how to read; if you can’t read; you won’t be able to play.” That got into my head.

**Ted Panken:** *How did your Juilliard experience impact the way you thought about the drums?*

**Cyrille:** Our music comes out of Africa and also out of Europe. We’ve inherited both cultures. At Juilliard, for example, I learned how to sight-sing using solfège. When I look at a composition, I might be able to sing the pitches I see from learning that. I played etudes with Morris Goldenberg, my percussion teacher. I still have them. I use that information when I’m playing compositions by Bill Frisell, David Virelles and Ben Street. All the things I learned at Juilliard helped me in the American experience — let me put it that way — which we all are part of.

Playing for dancers at the June Taylor

School at 56th and Broadway taught me a lot about playing solo drums. A lot of great dancers came through there. I could play anything as long as they could count and dance to it and feel good. You could see the music moving through the air. After playing for dancers for two hours, you can play a drum solo that long just by imitating them. Once I went from June Taylor to a rehearsal with Cecil at Hartnett School of Music. He asked me, “How do you hear rhythm?” I said, “I hear it through the dance.” He said, “Yeah, I’m into dance also.”

He was really *into* dance. In a sense, that’s how we got together. He said, “This is our music.” He never said, “Don’t do this.” So I had to think about what I could contribute to what they were playing to help make the whole the sum total of its parts. When we recorded *Unit Structures*, I decided I could play a relative kind of mambo on the beginning. The rest of it, I used all I’d learned according to how they were playing. I had a ball. Sometimes on these concerts we’d play an hour-and-a-half. The more we played, the stronger I’d get.

**Matt Wilson:** *How did Mary Lou Williams and Philly Joe Jones respond to hearing you do this pioneering music with Cecil?*

**Cyrille:** You’ve got to be true to yourself. ... I tell my students, “If everybody loves you, then you’d have a problem.” You kiss somebody’s butt on one side, they say, “Hey, no, you kissed it too hard; kiss it on the other side.”

A bass player told me Mary Lou was looking for a drummer. I walked in the door, my chest all stuck out. “I go to Juilliard.” She looked at me and said, “Don’t you come in here with that shit now.” Pow! She talked about swing. I asked her,

"How can I start playing the ride cymbal a little different from the way it has been played?" She said, "Well, if you do that, you won't get any gigs. Some cats can't use that. You have to be able to swing with what's happening with the music." It wasn't that her ear was totally out of what was going on. Mary Lou loved Jimmy Lyons. She brought me to hear Eric Dolphy, who she said played in the cracks.

**Waits:** *You might be the drummer who has worked and recorded the most with other drummers. What has inspired that?*

**Cyrille:** Africa — and, of course, Europe, too. In the drum and bugle corps I was playing with Scottish drummers, these police guys, playing dotted-eighth licks. There's a lot of musical connections between Africa and what is played in Europe. They have some of the same scales, and a lot of European cultures have a marching element. In several countries, the Swiss Guard plays signals for military instructions from the drums, what are called rudiments, which are nothing but sticking patterns used by Westerners to make up rhythms for people who either dance or march to them. As a result of the Europeans playing those rhythms, Africans learned them. The Africans then gave the feeling that they wanted to give to the rudiments or the scales that they learned from the Europeans. Voilà or voici — jazz.

**Wilson:** *Max Roach, Mary Lou Williams and Coleman Hawkins are three of the most forward-thinking people of jazz history. They embraced so much music within their lifetime. You seem to have embraced that spirit of open-mindedness and always seeking a new adventure.*

**Cyrille:** You know what? Even today, with all those people I've played with, it's an adventure. To be honest with you, I've been fired. People said, "You can play drums, but you can't play for me." That happens. Sometimes you go home with tears in your eyes. But you've got to get back up.

**Waits:** *Some people, if they get fired, decide to try to adopt a different attitude or approach.*

**Cyrille:** But, see, Nasheet, that's how they want to live their lives. When I met Cecil, he was doing what he was doing, and he allowed me to do what I wanted. That also gave me strength. There wasn't much money for our early gigs, but Cecil knew what he wanted, and by the late 1960s he paid me more than anyone else.

I was working with different bands or groups like The Believers, but when it was time to work with Cecil I'd get somebody to sub. Apart from the money, it was the idea I could give this music my all, and he would take it. So would Jimmy Lyons and Sam Rivers. Cecil said, "I can introduce you to Europe." This cat took me to Spain, first class. I got a painting from Miró. Moving through Europe, I saw things I'd never seen before. He gave me the greatest opportunities in life through this music, even though all the other people Matt mentioned also inspired me, as did a lot of those African cats when I was playing with Babatunde.

**Panken:** *Playing with the band documented on The News seems like a great opportunity to interpret, at a very high-level, repertoire from the different areas you've explored during your career.*

**Cyrille:** They're gifted, very creative players. In 2013, after Paul Motian passed away, Sun Chung called me for an ECM record with Ben Monder and Pete Rende [Amorphae]. After that, Sun wanted to do a date with Frisell and Teitelbaum and Ben Street. I did it because it was a good band and everybody wanted to play. Everyone brought in music. Later, I told Ben I wanted someone who is open and can play the blues, and we simultaneously named David.

I play what I want and what I like. I use my knowledge artistically and professionally. If my students need to listen to what the drummer plays on "Desafinado," I can play a bossa nova. If it's something open, like what I did with Cecil or Kidd Jordan or Charles Gayle, I do that, too. I enjoy doing both. I'm happy. That means I have peace and a sense of well-being in the music at this point in my life.

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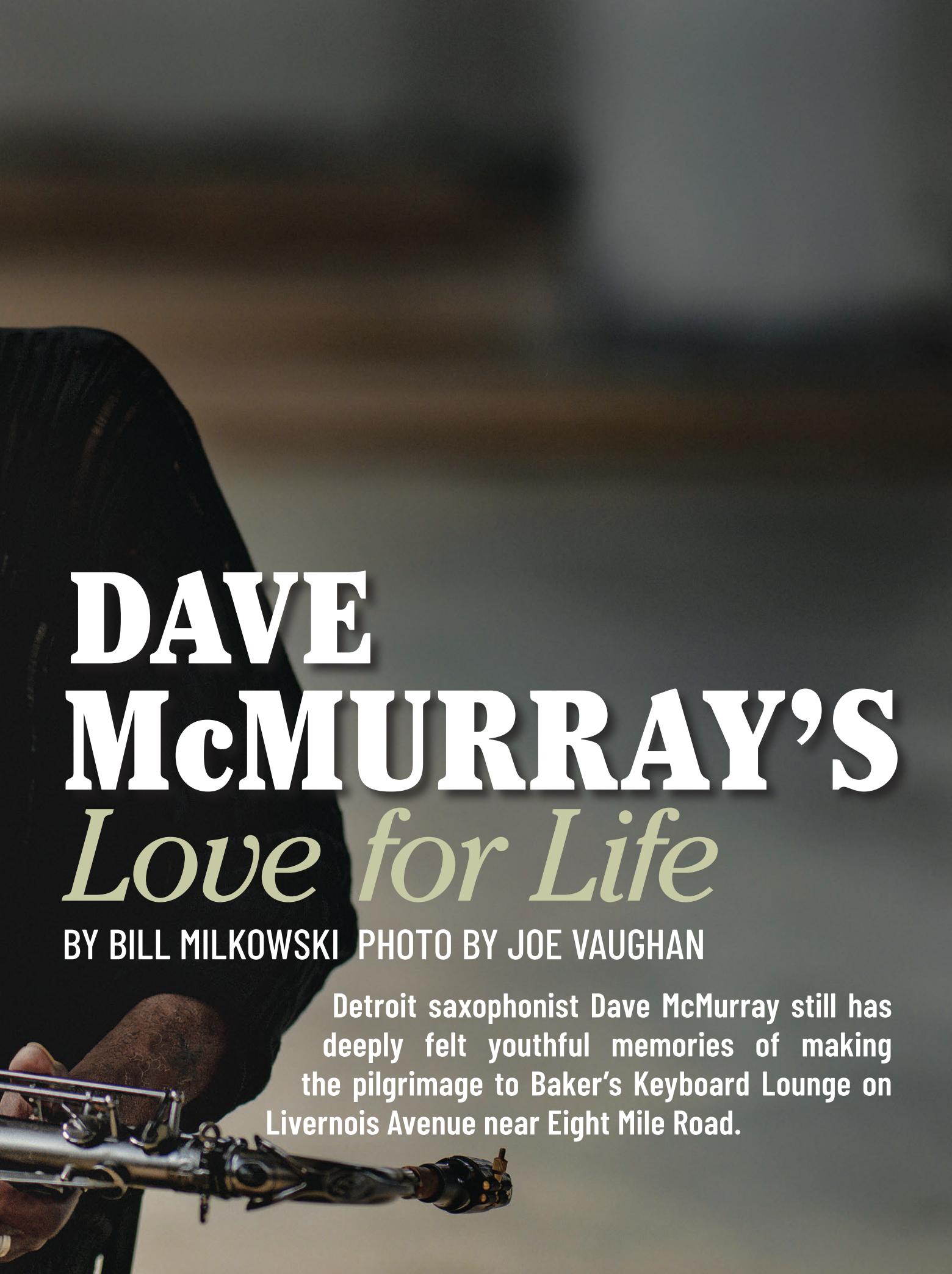
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# DAVE McMURRAY'S *Love for Life*

BY BILL MILKOWSKI PHOTO BY JOE VAUGHAN

Detroit saxophonist Dave McMurray still has deeply felt youthful memories of making the pilgrimage to Baker's Keyboard Lounge on Livernois Avenue near Eight Mile Road.



MICHAEL JACKSON

**"It's a positive record for me because I was trying to give some inspiration, more so than anything," says Dave McMurray of his new album.**

The world's oldest jazz club (established in 1934 and named a protected historic landmark in 2016), it's where he saw everyone from Dexter Gordon and Pharoah Sanders to Yusef Lateef and McCoy Tyner back in the '70s. "I hung out there a lot as a young man," he recalled. "Of course, I had to. That was where every jazz group was."

Today McMurray laughs while recounting his tale of once sitting in at the intimate 99-seat Motor City jazz club with legendary tenorist Sanders when he was still an aspiring player on the scene.

"I had seen Pharoah once before at Baker's, but this time I had my tenor with me, and I took a seat right under him in the front row. I listened to one set and was blown away. Then between sets, something just told me, 'Ask if you can sit in. All he can say is no.' So I came up to him and said, 'My name's Dave McMurray. Can I play?' He didn't say anything, but he nodded. So I went back to my seat, took my horn out, came on stage and then we started to play. At some point as we were playing, he looked at me and he nodded again, which I took to mean it was my turn to solo. And I went for it. And Pharoah was right with me. That was the greatest experience in the world. I walked away from that and was on a cloud. Afterwards, he didn't give me no advice, no words of wisdom or any-

thing like that. Just another nod."

McMurray's free-spirited excursions on his horn since that fateful meeting have been steeped in the bold-toned tenor tradition of elders like Sanders, Sonny Rollins and Yusef Lateef. He brings that same unabashed quality to bear on his fourth Blue Note recording, *I Love Life Even When I'm Hurting*. Co-produced by bassist and Blue Note President Don Was, the saxophonist's latest is primarily a paean to his hometown but also an affirmation to keep on keepin' on.

"The last couple of years have been difficult," he explained. "There's been a few deaths of close friends in my little circle. And when one of our friends passed, it was like one of those questionable things where people said, 'I think he gave up.' And I'm like, 'What?! How?! I don't know, man. I love life, even when I'm hurting.' And then in my mind I said, 'Wow, I have to remember that because I mean it.' And a month later, I wrote a song, and that's what it was. And at that point I wasn't thinking of it being necessarily the title song of an album, but I think it was a good anchor for what I was feeling at the time."

Not that *I Love Life Even When I'm Hurting* is a downer in any way. "It's a positive record for me because I was trying to give some inspiration, more so than anything," said McMurray.

"And that's why I did that first song, 'This Life,' with just the sax and me reciting that poem."

*I know despair don't care, but be strong  
Here's hoping another day  
There's a smile waiting for me somewhere  
There's a joke flying around for me  
to laugh at*

*It's music being played that has the heat  
to warm my heart*

*It's a kind word I can borrow from someone,  
even if it's not for me and just in the air*

*I sing a song that angels can't sing. I live now,  
and I pray for their vision over me*

*It's my duty to live, it's my pleasure to love. I  
love life, even when I'm hurting*

McMurray is joined on his latest recording by the same Detroit crew that played on his past five albums: bassist Ibrahim Jones, drummer Jeff Canady, keyboardist Maurice O'Neal and guitarist Wayne Gerard. Was plays bass on half the recording, including the Afrobeat-flavored "The Jungaleers"; the soulful "Find Your Peace (4 Tani)," dedicated to drummer Tani Tabbal; the soothing ballad "Just A Thought," dedicated to McMurray's wife and daughter; and the dramatic, suite-like "I Love Life." The saxophonist is also featured on flute on a calypso-tinged version of Yusef Lateef's "The Plum Blossom,"

originally recorded on 1962's *Eastern Sounds*.

Guest vocalist Kem, another Detroit native, gives a star turn on a spine-tingling recreation of Al Jarreau's transcendent anthem "We Got By," the title track of the singer's stunning 1975 debut album. McMurray engages freely in some spirited call-and-response with Kem in this callback to the late Milwaukee-born Jarreau while also delivering perhaps his most impas-

And I thought they wanted that style of playing from me. But instead, they encouraged me to just play crazy all the time. I remember Don saying to me, 'I want you to go wherever you go, like you do with Griot Galaxy.' And I'm like, 'Oh, OK. Cool!'

The saxophonist's edgy playing made him a standout in the mutant disco/funk band that deftly combined danceable rhythms with sur-

them, and when I sat in with The Wolf Brothers that night, it went great. It was so open, and nothing was expected. If it was a normal tune and was supposed to go to this or that change or go to the verse, it wouldn't necessarily go there. It'd just go somewhere else. And everybody was cool with that."

McMurray was surprised the next day that legions of dedicated Dead tapers had already posted clips online of his jamming with The Wolf Brothers the night before. "This was all new to me," he recalled. "So it just turned into a whole different experience for me, and I kind of got into it."

McMurray subsequently reimagined 10 Dead tunes on 2021's *Grateful Deadication*, including a marathon take on "Dark Star." As he recalled of that session, "We just did one song after the next, and I tried finding my way in through the melody. That's how I was finding the niche in this music. The melody is the key. So I would find songs with the good melodies and try to adapt them and see how far I can stretch them or do what I do with them. So it was a really good experience."

He repeated the process two years later with *Grateful Deadication 2*, which included such Dead classics as "China Cat Sunflower," "Truckin'" and "Scarlet Begonias." And the reception in concert has been ecstatic.

"The audience for this Grateful Dead music is so great," he said. "When I started playing in front of those audiences full of Grateful Dead fans, people would be standing up, which is already totally different than a jazz club, of course. And if I feel like playing a song called 'The Eleven,' which is in 11/4, they start dancing. And I'm like, 'What?' You know, we're up there playing this crazy music, taking long sax solos, and they're all going with it. It's a different kind of reaction and just a different energy. So when I play gigs now, I can play crazy, I can swing, I can do whatever I want to do and it all kind of works."

*I Love Life Even When I'm Hurting* includes just one Dead track, Jerry Garcia's philosophical "The Wheel," about the cyclical nature of life. McMurray unleashes some of his most powerful blowing on this track, aided by some echo-laden overdubbing on tenor. "I kept my original sax track and then I was like, 'Wait a minute, let me just put some kind of psychedelic thing on it. Let me get into this echo thing like I used to do back in the day. Let me go to Eddie Harris' *Silver Cycles*, that [1969] album where he was doing this crazy-ass echo thing.' That's a kind of weird way of thinking, but I do think like that."

The saxophonist is currently out on tour with Was' P-Funk-inspired Pan-Detroit Ensemble in support of their recent Mack Avenue release, *Groove In The Face Of Adversity*. See page 14 for more on that project. DB

# 'That was the greatest experience in the world.'

—McMurray on sitting in with Pharoah Sanders

sioned tenor solo on the record.

McMurray's heightened improvisations and unrestrained playing, like his sax-playing contemporary Kamasi Washington, often tip into the spiritual zone. As he said, "When I'm playing, I feel like I'm giving it to people. I'm not trying to pander to an audience, but I am trying to get you with me. I am trying to take you where I go and just experience what I'm experiencing. So I've never inhibited myself on stage. My attitude about playing is genuine. It's always been, 'I'm going to play crazy, and I want you to like it. I want to follow me. I want for you to get into it. And once I got you, I will keep you and take you with me on my journey.' And later when people tell me that they felt it, that is the biggest compliment to me."

The saxophonist first made his mark on the Detroit scene during the late '70s as a member of Griot Galaxy, an avant-garde group led by saxophonist-poet Faruq Z. Bey. "It was kind of our version of the AACM," said McMurray. "Faruq wrote all the music, and when I first met him, it was the craziest music I had ever heard. I just didn't get it at first. But it became a thing in Detroit because it was visual and entertaining. I mean, we had the face-painting and the whole shot. So when we played, people who didn't even like avant-garde music would get into it because they would be amazed at what would be going on."

That avant ensemble, which also included bassist Jaribu Shahid and drummer Tani Tabbal, recorded one record in 1981 (*Kins*) before McMurray joined Was (Not Was), co-led by bassist Don (Fagenson) Was and his eccentric songwriting partner David (Weiss) Was. "It was an odd group," he recalled. "One guy wrote these very odd lyrics and the other guy did the music. At the time I met them, I was doing a lot of sessions, mostly commercials and stuff.

real/humorous lyrics, as on tunes like "Out Come The Freaks" and "Carry Me Back To Old Morocco" from their 1981 self-titled debut, "Shake Your Head (Let's Go To Bed)," "Zaz Turned Blue" (sung by Mel Torme) and "Knocked Down, Made Small (Treated Like A Rubber Ball)" from 1983's *Born To Laugh At Tornadoes*, and their hit single "Walk The Dinosaur" from 1988's *What's Up, Dog?*

McMurray has maintained a longstanding friendship and working relationship with that band's co-founder Don Was, who was appointed to succeed Bruce Lundvall as president of Blue Note Records in 2012. Was subsequently signed his Detroit homey to the prestigious jazz label. McMurray debuted with 2018's *Music Is Life*, then followed up with two separate volumes of *Grateful Deadication* in 2021 and 2023.

It was the bassist-producer-record company executive Was who initially turned the saxophonist on to the music of the Grateful Dead during his brief stint in 2018 with The Wolf Brothers, a trio led by the Dead's guitarist-singer Bob Weir and featuring Was on acoustic bass and Jay Lane on drums.

"I didn't really know anything about The Grateful Dead," McMurray confessed. "And Don called me one day and said, 'Hey, we're coming to town. You want to play?' I was like, 'Hell yeah!' And he said, 'Just listen to these songs. I don't know what it's going to be because Bob runs the show, but listen to the songs and you'll get the idea.' So I pulled up a bunch of Grateful Dead tunes on YouTube and a couple of them had Branford Marsalis' sax on it [from a 1990-'91 tour]. And at first I was confused by it. I was, like, 'Wow! What are you guys doing? I mean, where's the verse?' You know, I was just trying to get the niche of it. So I listened to those Dead tunes all that day while playing along to

# THE RAPID (ORGANIC) RISE OF **EMMA RAWICZ**

By Ammar Kalia Photos by Gregor Hohenberg

The past three years have seen a meteoric rise for 23-year-old Emma Rawicz. In 2022, the British saxophonist was busy studying for her undergraduate degree in jazz at the Royal Academy of Music in London while preparing to self-release her debut album and tour a handful of pubs and small venues around the U.K.

Like many up-and-coming musicians, her career was independently self-managed and slowly growing. By the start of 2025, however, Rawicz had graduated, signed to German label ACT and released her second album, *Chroma*. She amassed close to 50,000 followers on her Instagram page, won the Parliamentary Jazz Award for Newcomer of the Year and

played over 100 dates in 12 months around the U.K. and Europe.

“In a couple of years I’ve gone from being a normal university student to suddenly being on international stages, playing four countries in four days and being at home hardly any of the time,” Rawicz says over a video call from her Berlin apartment.





**"I was afraid of not being able to catch up so I began practicing eight hours a day for years," says Emma Rawicz of starting on the saxophone as a teenager. "It was unshinged, but it fulfilled a purpose."**

**“**I t happened suddenly, and it still feels crazy to be living this life. I've always struggled with impostor syndrome but I'm slowly getting better at processing it all.”

Remarkably prolific and possessed of a startlingly mature sound, Rawicz's catalog, to date, includes 2022's debut quintet record *Incantation*, 2023's sextet debut *Chroma* (ACT), 2025's duo album *Big Visit* with pianist Gwilym Simcock, several performances with her 20-piece Emma Rawicz Jazz Orchestra and a forthcoming second record for ACT, *Inkyra*. While her compositions veer from the interlocking melodic interplay of her duets with Simcock to the Brazilian-influenced rhythms and harmonic maximalism of the Jazz Orchestra, the prog rock electric guitar tones of *Chroma* and the

deep-rooted swing of *Incantation*, the unifying force throughout is the clarity of Rawicz's tenor saxophone tone. At turns nimble-footed and fleeting or full-throated and expressive, frenetic and irrepressibly energetic or languorous and tender, Rawicz's wide-ranging sound is consistently confident.

Nowhere is this freewheeling self-belief more apparent than on her latest release, *Inkyra*. Across the record's 10 tracks Rawicz harnesses the energy of a new sextet into arrangements that span the knotty synth soloing of "Earthrise," the contrasting melodic quietude and distorted rock screeching of "Moondrawn (Dreaming)," the spirited, soaring saxophone soloing of "A Portrait Of Today," the lively Latin rhythms of "Marshmallow Tree" and the new

age ambience of "A Long Goodbye."

"I felt such confidence in these musicians, since they were all people I had long wanted to play with, and that meant I wasn't shy about including all of my influences on the album, from rock to prog, Brazilian music, synth experiments and jazz," Rawicz says. "I knew they were so versatile and open-minded that there was room for everything and we would find a way to make it all work and cohere together."

Featuring Rawicz's former Royal Academy teacher Gareth Lockrane on flute, David Preston on guitar, Scottie Thompson on keys, Kevin Glasgow on bass and Jamie Murray on drums, the album's material first took shape during a summer residency at a small live venue in West London.

"We began this weekly residency in 2022 at a really odd space," Rawicz says. "It was a tiny club with a standing audience full of people who might have walked in off the street — many of whom were not jazz fans. Sometimes the sound onstage was awful. But since it was so loose, we felt free to throw everything at it each week, and that delivered some really far-out experiences that pushed the boundaries of this music."

Bringing a new composition to each gig, Rawicz and her band began workshopping arrangements and fine-tuning elements based on crowd responses and the feel onstage. Between gigs the band would also sporadically meet up to rehearse — an unusual occurrence in a jazz scene where most musicians are too busy touring to consistently convene for rehearsal on the same material — and by early 2024 when they had booked two days in the studio to lay down the tracks, each composition had developed into its own intricate constellation of sound.

"It's rare to have a sextet spending so much time with the music, and that really impacted how it sounds," Rawicz says. "I was listening to a lot of Joni Mitchell at the time and became influenced by her universe of alternate tunings, while tracks like 'Marshmallow Tree' started in a different time signature before landing on a Brazilian vibe, 'Moondrawn' became more proggy than I had expected and 'Portrait Of Today' was so detailed and intricate we'd spend time talking about changing phrases from dotted quavers to quintuplets. Every tune has changed since it was first brought to the group and we've all been able to take ownership of it."

Growing up in Devon, England, Rawicz took an early interest in classical music and began learning the violin from age 6. Developing her ear for composition and a regular practice routine, Rawicz soon added clarinet, piano and vocal lessons before hearing a saxophone for the first time at 12 and discovering a new musical direction.

"I saw a big band play while I was at a musical summer camp and the saxophone blew me

away," she says. "I begged my parents to let me learn a fifth instrument, and when I finally got an alto at 15 everything slotted into place. The saxophone just felt so natural in my hands, and it was a whirlwind from starting lessons to switching to tenor at 16 and then finding ways to try and make it my life."

who are all featured on that record."

Balancing her studies with a burgeoning career following the release of *Incantation*, Rawicz soon found social media becoming more of a burden than a beneficial tool. "As I transitioned into what I call my real-life career, rather than just making videos, I started to

like Joshua Redman running half marathons, as it shows me he takes his well-being seriously and has a life and interests outside of music that helps his playing in turn."

As much as touring can take its toll, Rawicz emphasises it is something she also finds creatively nourishing and enlivening. "The music grows and develops when you're together with the band on the road, and it can only happen when you're so close for so long," she says. "It becomes quite addictive being on the road because we live in such an unfocused, overstimulated world that I find the slightly tiring one-directional thing of touring exciting as you're only thinking about getting to the next place and playing."

In order to make her touring life easier, Rawicz has recently relocated from London to Berlin in an effort to reduce the number of flights she might take to travel around Europe. As well as being a convenient transport hub, she has also found Berlin to be a new source of inspiration.

"Berlin is really interesting because it's a scene that rewards people for being who they are and expressing what they want to express. It's not like that in London because it's so expensive to live there and so no one has the luxury of just doing one thing," she says. "There is a thriving free-jazz scene here and being in the presence of that and seeing an audience for it has been brilliant. It's made me much more resolute in my intention to play how I want to, and it's meant I've written more music in this flat than I did in the last year I was living in London."

Among the varied new projects she is currently working on are new compositions for her Jazz Orchestra, as well as a 2026 commission to work with the prestigious German public broadcasting ensemble the WDR Big Band. "I don't quite know what will happen next, but that's what's so exciting," she says with a smile. "I'm also writing for strings and piano, and I would love to record something with my quartet as that's such a classic jazz format. One of the great things about signing with ACT is that they're such a stylistically diverse label, I never feel under pressure to fit into one box with my music."

Rawicz also has her eye on playing in the U.S. and Asia for the first time, as well as reaching out to potential collaborators from further afield that she has long admired. "I'm keen to work more with international musicians but I want it to happen organically," she says. "That is how my career has happened so far and that is how I would like it to continue, although I have no intention of slowing down or stopping writing."

Indeed, it has been a whirlwind few years for the British bandleader, but it only seems that the pace will continue to increase. Rawicz has only just begun.

# 'In a couple of years I've gone from being a normal university student to suddenly being on international stages.'

Attending the Junior Guildhall School in London, Rawicz was introduced to jazz and ensemble playing. Her early influences included Joe Henderson's 1995 album *Double Rainbow*, featuring the American tenor player interpreting the works of Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim, before swiftly moving on to transcribing compositions from the likes of Dexter Gordon, Joshua Redman, Michael Brecker, Chris Potter and Wayne Shorter, who Rawicz all still counts as erstwhile musical heroes.

Switching to Cheetham's School of Music in Manchester before being enrolled in the prestigious jazz course at the Royal Academy of Music at 18, Rawicz entered what she playfully labels her "panic shedding phase."

"I always felt behind my peers who had been playing their instruments for a lot longer than me and seemed like they already knew everything about jazz," she says. "I was afraid of not being able to catch up so I began practicing eight hours a day for years. It was unhinged, but it fulfilled a purpose."

Once the COVID lockdowns arrived in 2020, Rawicz began documenting some of this practice time on her Instagram page and soon started drawing followers who were taken with the playful honesty of her posts. "I started my little account because I grew up in a rural area in Devon and didn't know any other people my age who were into music, and I wanted to meet them," she says. "Suddenly I had a few thousand followers because I was posting so much during COVID and people seemed to like how I was documenting my mistakes and sharing the things I couldn't do. It started helping me in my career as I got a few gig offers, and it subsequently allowed me to crowdfund my first album as well as connect with the musicians

realize how unhappy social media was making me," she says. "It drains us from any sense of being in the world we're in, and I don't see a healthy future that includes us being online like we are. We have to be present with each other as human beings, and especially since jazz is about being present in a room with people as you play, scrolling on my phone all the time feels damaging."

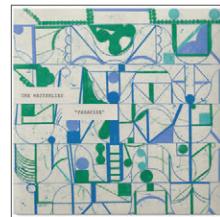
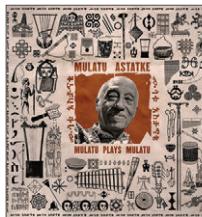
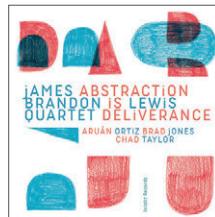
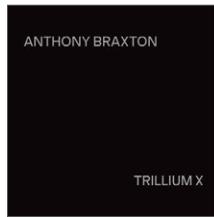
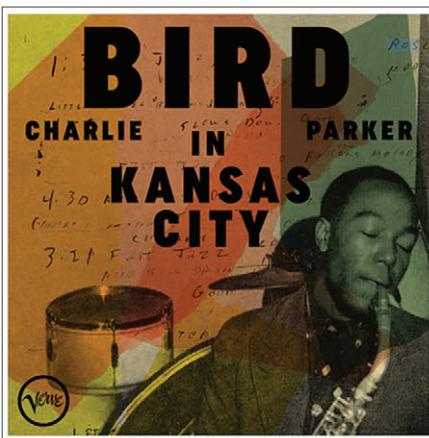
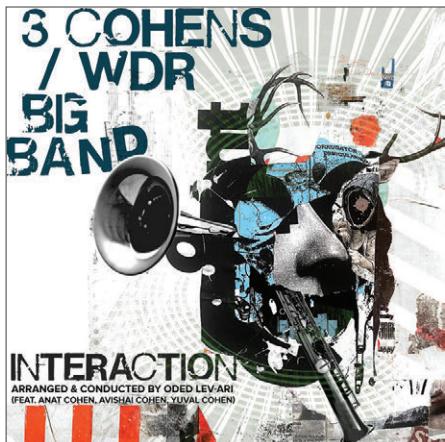
It's an impressively mature perspective from the 23-year-old and one that reflects a wider commitment to her mental health during her rapid rise in recent years. After independently recording *Chroma* and garnering interest from ACT to release and sign her projects, Rawicz has seen her international touring schedule ramp up to playing larger venues in a far more varied selection of countries.

"I've been to 18 or so countries in the past year, going from playing the back rooms of pubs in small towns in the U.K. to festival stages in front of thousands in continental Europe," she says. "It's a bizarre way to live, traveling so much and always meeting so many new people, and I've had to learn how to live like this and implement boundaries to protect my well-being."

Rawicz's current coping strategies include scrutinizing her schedule to ensure there aren't multiple dates in a row where she might burn out from playing consecutive shows, traveling each night and only getting minimal sleep. She is also a keen weightlifter and makes time to clear her head at the gym. She regularly journals to process the often overwhelming events of her days.

"This kind of self-care becomes just as important as your practice routine, and I think it's increasingly important that musicians talk about it," she says. "I love seeing idols of mine

# BEST ALBUMS OF 2025



## ★★★★★ MASTERPIECES

### ANTHONY BRAXTON

*Trillium X*  
PMP ..... Aug., 76

### JAMES BRANDON LEWIS QUARTET

*Abstraction Is Deliverance*  
Intakt ..... Aug., 68

### JON BATISTE

*Big Money*  
Verve/Interscope ..... Aug., Online

### MULATU ASTATKE

*Mulatu Plays Mulatu*  
Strut ..... Oct., 48

### DAVID TORN

*peace upon you*  
Torn Music ..... Oct., 56

### 3 COHENs/WDR BIG BAND

*Interaction*  
Anzic ..... Mar., Online

### THE WESTERLIES

*Paradise*  
Westerlies ..... June, Online

## ★★★★★ HISTORICAL

### CHARLIE PARKER

*Bird In Kansas City*  
Verve ..... Jan., 58

### STANLEY COWELL

*Musa: Ancestral Streams*  
Strata-East ..... June, 52

### CHARLES ROUSE

*Two Is One*  
Strata-East ..... June, 52

### CHARLES TOLLIVER

*Music Inc., Live At Slugs'*

## Volume I and II

*Strata-East* ..... June, 52

## DOC POMUS/ VARIOUS ARTISTS

*You Can't Hip A Square: The Doc Pomus Songwriting Demos*  
Omnivore ..... Dec., 58

## ★★★★½ NEW

### ERIC ALEXANDER & VINCENT HERRING

*Split Decision*  
Smoke Sessions ..... Sept., Online

### GARY BARTZ

*Damage Control*  
OYO ..... Oct., Online

### RON BLAKE

*SCRATCH Band feat. Reuben Rogers & John Hadfield*  
7ten33productions ..... Oct., Online

### ANOUAR BRAHEM

*After The Last Sky*  
ECM ..... July, 46

### JAROD BUFE

*Brighter Days*  
Calligram ..... Mar., Online

### TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON & CHRISTIE DASHIELL

*We Insist! 2025*  
Candid ..... July, Online

### BRIAN CHARETTE

*Borderless*  
SteepleChase ..... June, 50

### NELS CLINE

*Consentrik Quartet*  
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## GEORGE COLEMAN

*George Coleman With Strings*  
HighNote ..... Dec., 57

## GEORGE COLLIGAN

*Live At The Jazz Standard*  
Whirlwind ..... May, Online

## GUSTAVO CORTIÑAS

*The Crisis Knows No Borders*  
Desafia Candente ..... April, Online

## THEO CROKER

*Dream Manifest*  
Dom Recs ..... June, Online

## THEON CROSS

*Affirmations: Live At The Blue Note New York*  
New Soil x Division 81 ..... Aug., 70

## DAOUD

*ok*  
ACT ..... Oct., 54

## MATHIAS EICK

*Lullaby*  
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## IVAN FARMAKOVSKY

*Epic Power*  
SteepleChase ..... July, Online

## JOE FARNSWORTH

*The Big Room*  
Smoke Sessions ..... Aug., Online

## SULLIVAN FORTNER

*Southern Nights*  
Artwork ..... Jan., Online

## DANNY GATTON AND FUNHOUSE

*Live At The Holiday Inn 1987*  
Gress ..... Nov., 60

## JIMMY GREENE

*As We Are Now*  
Greene Music Works ..... Sept., 53

## JOHN HART

*Love Is*  
SteepleChase ..... May, 56

## GILAD HEKSELMAN

*Downhill From Here*  
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## NICK HEMPTON & CORY WEEDS

*Horns Locked*  
Cellar Music ..... Feb., Online

## FRED HERSH

*The Surrounding Green*  
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## STEVE LEHMAN

*The Music Of Anthony Braxton Pi* ..... April, Online

## ANDRÉ LEROUX

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Disques BG ..... Mar., 42

## FURRY LEWIS

*Back On My Feet Again*  
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## DONNY MCCASLIN

*Lullaby For The Lost*  
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## MYRA MELFORD

*Splash*  
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*Strange Heavens*  
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*The Way Out Of Easy*  
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## JOHN PATITUCCI

*Spirit Fall*  
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*First Meeting: Live At Dizzy's Club*  
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*Painter Of The Invisible*  
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**SILT REMEMBRANCE ENSEMBLE**  
*The Order*  
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**TRIO OF BLOOM**  
*Trio Of Bloom*  
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**MARK TURNER**  
*We Raise Them To Lift Their Heads*  
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**WEBBER/MORRIS BIG BAND**  
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*Understory: Live At The Village Vanguard*  
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**IGRG BELISLE-CHI**  
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**ANDY BISKIN/ MIKE MCGINNIS/ PETER HESS/ SAM SADIGURSKY**  
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**JOHNATHAN BLAKE**  
*My Life Matters*  
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**JASPER BLOM QUARTET WITH METROPOLE ORKEST**  
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| <b>SATOKO FUJII/NATSUKI TAMURA</b><br><i>Ki</i><br>Libra .....   | <b>JAMES BRANDON LEWIS TRIO</b><br><i>Apple Cores</i><br>ANTI-.....  | <b>ED PARTYKA JAZZ ORCHESTRA</b><br><i>Ed Partyka, Arranger-Composer</i><br>TCB .....                      | <b>MACIE STEWART</b><br><i>When The Distance Is Blue</i><br>International Anthem ....           |
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| <b>MARY HALVORSON</b><br><i>About Ghosts</i><br>Nonesuch .....   | <b>BRANFORD MARSALIS QUARTET</b><br><i>Belonging</i><br>Blue Note .....                                      | <b>PERCEPTIONS TRIO</b><br><i>The Wicked Crew</i><br>Independent Release....                               | <b>THREE-LAYER CAKE</b><br><i>Sounds The Color Of Grounds</i><br>Otherly Love .....             |
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# Reviews

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



LUCIANO ROSSETTI

Two's company: John Scofield and Dave Holland's *Memories Of Home* evolved out of a series of duo concerts.

## John Scofield/ Dave Holland *Memories Of Home*

ECM

★★★★★

Jazz duets often nod to the delicate side of things by leaning towards the reflective or sentimental, but with the volume cranked this fetching record's "Mine Are Blues" conjures the hard-swinging kick of, oh, say, *Bird At The Roost*. Punch, bounce, concision — it all adds up to lots of liftoff on the first duo recording by these two masters.

Guitarist Scofield and bassist Holland have long traveled in the same circles, previously uniting for Herbie Hancock and Joe

Henderson studio sessions as well as 2003's mighty ScoLoHoFo foursome. *Memories Of Home* blossomed from a handful of post-COVID duo gigs. Its chemistry is compelling, and its oomph is obvious.

Such vitality also defines "You I Love," a Holland contrafact on Cole Porter's "I Love You" that swells with the guitarist's elastic lines and cagey harmonies. Like "Mine Are Blues," it highlights the bassist at his most propulsive. In this stripped-down setting (splendidly recorded to reveal the music's granular beauty) it's a tad easier to hear how Holland's touch and intonation blend to boost his thrust. No one's missing a drummer on this date.

Along the way the guys tap the brakes to shape a more varied program. Medium-tempo

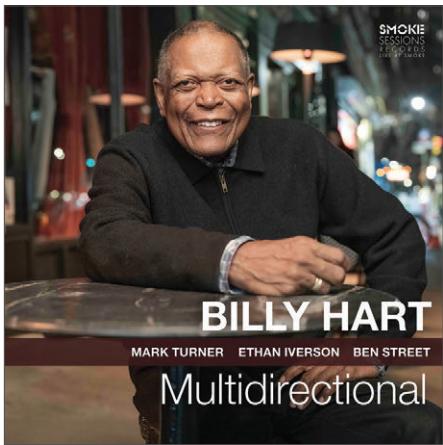
misteriosos such as Sco's "Meant To Be" and blues-centric ditties like "Mr. B" milk their grooves and examine calmer waters. Guitar-wise, the bassist has duetted with Derek Bailey, Pepe Habichuela and Lionel Loueke. But there's a rare ease at play here that lets Sco crack off clipped phrases or blow legato lines with equal aplomb: intricate yet fluid. By the time Holland's twang-slanted "Memories Of Home" rolls along, their camaraderie is ultra palpable.

—Jim Macnie

**Memories Of Home:** Icons At The Fair; Meant To Be; Mine Are Blues; Memorette; Mr. B (Dedicated to Ray Brown); Not For Nothin'; Easy For You; You I Love; Memories Of Home. (54:52)

**Personnel:** John Scofield, guitar; Dave Holland, bass.

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



## Billy Hart Quartet

### *Multidirectional*

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★½

From the very first notes of *Multidirectional*, the first live recording by drummer Billy Hart and his longstanding quartet, the shared energy between band and audience is palpable. What makes this live record stand out from their studio work is the way they play with a newfound looseness and expansiveness, embodying the album title.

One of the most cohesive working bands in jazz, the quartet achieves a rare elasticity here. Hart's effortless artistry and soulful rhythms are

well-matched by Ben Street's compelling bass. Together they form a formidable rhythm section that propels Ethan Iverson's lyrical piano and Mark Turner's sinewy tenor saxophone.

*Multidirectional* transforms the quartet's familiar material into living, shifting forms. On "Song For Balkis," which first appeared in the quartet's 2012 album *All Our Reasons*, Hart's opening solo is assured and arresting in its simplicity, giving way to his distinctive rhythmic drive. Next, the quartet add their own flavor of free improvisation to the Coltrane classic "Giant Steps" through Iverson's intervallic piano and Turner's multilayered, polyphonic sax. On "Amethyst," the title track from a 1993 release, Hart's full force rhythmic drive amps up Iverson's dramatic piano flourishes and Turner's robust, muscular lines. The set concludes with Iverson's "Showdown," an introspective bluesy ballad from the quartet's most recent studio outing, *Just*. Hart and Street's smoky, relaxed interplay gives way to a reflective duet between Iverson and Turner.

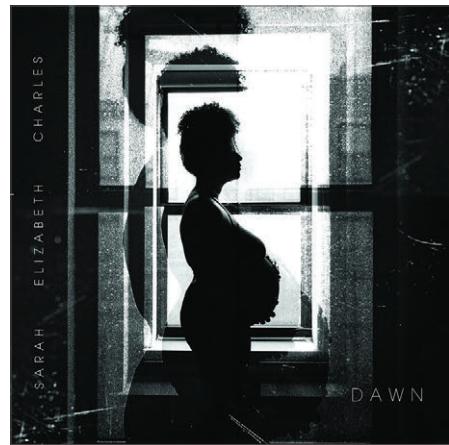
At age 85, Hart remains at the vanguard of rhythmic invention, and his quartet's ability to listen and respond with a deep interconnectedness is inimitable.

—Ivana Ng

**Multidirectional:** Song For Balkis; Giant Steps; Sonnet For Stevie; Amethyst; Showdown. (47:05)

**Personnel:** Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Ethan Iverson, piano; Ben Street, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

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



## Sarah Elizabeth Charles

### *Dawn*

STRETCH MUSIC/ROPEADOPE

★★★★

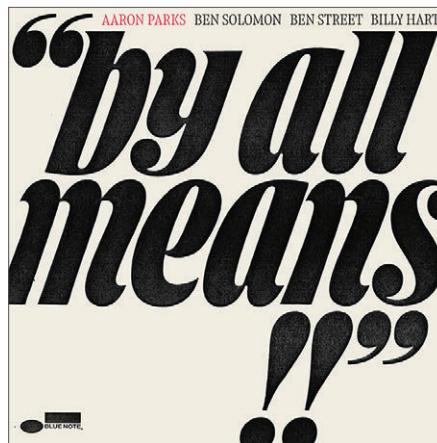
Domestic life doesn't often get its due in jazz; childbirth and motherhood even less so. As such, there aren't any obvious points of comparison for the maternally themed song cycle at the center of Sarah Elizabeth Charles' *Dawn*: either lyrically or musically.

Inspired by Charles' own experiences trying to grow a family with partner Jarrett Cherner, and recorded while she was pregnant with her second son, the songs are personal but not diaristic. She marvels at having brought life into the world ("Miracle"), delights in the physicality of pregnancy ("Kick") and struggles with the loss of miscarriage ("Angel Spark"). One needn't have been pregnant — or even a parent — to appreciate the emotions she evokes.

Credit much of that to the lustrous power of her voice, a rich, warm mezzo-soprano that exudes strength even when it barely rises above a whisper. But it's Charles' writing that completes the picture, effortlessly tuneful and blessed with a harmonic palette that deftly supports the vocal lines while leaving plenty of grist for improvisation. Even though Charles is unmistakably a jazz singer, there's such a resolute sense of melody to her writing that even when she's clearly improvising, as in the overdubbed vocal chorale in "Discovery," the notes hit with the ear-worm charm of a pop hook.

Like reproduction itself, *Dawn* isn't a solo show. Though Cherner's string arrangements may beautifully frame Charles' melodies, it's her interplay with the rhythm section — particularly bassist Linda May Han Oh — that ultimately lifts these songs to another level.

—J.D. Considine



## Aaron Parks

### *By All Means!!*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★

Aaron Parks' approach to the piano always has an all-encompassing sense of gorgeousness, something so overwhelming that it's a delight when Parks himself is swept up in it himself and starts singing along, like Keith Jarrett without the off-putting ego.

With his latest album, *By All Means!!*, created alongside his now long-standing trio with bassist Ben Street and legendary drummer Billy Hart, Parks demonstrates that he is more than well equipped to comfortably play out this expected lushness. Tenor saxophonist Ben Solomon joining the trio on this outing is a welcome addition.

The passionate "For María José," dedicated to Parks' wife, is the kind of sweeping-lush tune the pianist has become known for. "Anywhere Together" gallops along and swings in a way that reminds you this is a well and true Blue Note record, meant to stand the test of time.

The swinging "Little River," written for Parks' son, has those same recognizable touches but with a brighter energy and gives Hart more interesting places to show some head-turning flourishes.

Solomon's playing alongside Parks is perfectly balanced here, providing the clarion calls the bandleader intends in his heartfelt compositions. He sings just as soulfully as Parks does.

With this release, Aaron Parks has crafted a collection of songs, songs with lushness and bounce and character. They bloom with balance and grace. They work for all seasons.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**By All Means!!:** A Way; Parks Lope; For María José; Dense Phantasy; Anywhere Together; Little River; Raincoat. (41:28)

**Personnel:** Aaron Parks, piano; Ben Street, bass; Billy Hart, drums; Ben Solomon, tenor saxophone.

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

**Dawn:** Rainbow J; Ground; Discovery; Miracle; Kick; Plans; Rainbow T; Mother; Angel Spark; Questions. (44:59)

**Personnel:** Sarah Elizabeth Charles, vocals; Maya Keren, additional vocals, piano, Rhodes, keyboards; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Savannah Harris, drums; Skye Steele, violin (3, 4, 6, 7, 9); Marika Hughes, cello (3, 4, 6, 9).

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

# The Hot Box

| Critics  | Jim Macnie | Ivana Ng | Anthony Dean-Harris | J.D. Considine |
|--|------------|----------|---------------------|----------------|
| <b>John Scofield/Dave Holland</b><br><i>Memories Of Home</i> | ★★★★       | ★★★      | ★★★★                | ★★★★           |
| <b>Billy Hart Quartet</b><br><i>Multidirectional</i>         | ★★★★       | ★★★½     | ★★★★                | ★★★½           |
| <b>Aaron Parks</b><br><i>By All Means!!</i>                  | ★★★        | ★★★½     | ★★★★                | ★★★½           |
| <b>Sarah Elizabeth Charles</b><br><i>Dawn</i>                | ★★★        | ★★★★     | ★★★½                | ★★★★           |

## Critics' Comments

### John Scofield/Dave Holland, *Memories Of Home*

Decades of shared musical lexicon come into sharp focus on Scofield and Holland's debut outing as a duo. Both powerhouses in their own right, the two have a connection that is understated yet assured.

—Ivana Ng

An album full of constant soulful moments with intermittent pops of simple brilliance. Scofield and Holland are the duo I didn't know I needed.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Put together two guys who, between them, can play anything, and they will. The unison lines are dazzling and the whiff of country music on the title tune charms, but it's hearing Scofield dip into his bebop toolkit that truly delights.

—J.D. Considine

### Billy Hart Quartet, *Multidirectional*

The level of curiosity is equal to the level of craft on this live date. From the small abstractions to the swooping melodies, the foursome proves how and why working bands become so eloquent.

—Jim Macnie

On their first live recording, Hart feels comfortably exploratory with his long-running quartet. Everyone here sizzles, and Mark Turner really soars. It's hard to imagine this group clicking even more into place.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Hart's opening 53-second solo is so extraordinary that much of the rest seems almost anticlimactic — which, given the excellence of this band, says something. The reductionist take on "Giant Steps" is a bit arch, but "Sonnet For Stevie" swings with lean elegance.

—J.D. Considine

### Aaron Parks, *By All Means!!*

There's beauty in both the pieces and playing: Grace goes where Parks goes, and his rhythm section enhances all the subtleties. But a bit more friction would be useful at times. A lull sets in when consonance has too much say.

—Jim Macnie

A bright and joyful record that shows off Parks' tight compositions and swinging melodies. Tenor-saxophonist Ben Solomon expands the harmonic palette while the formidable rhythm section soars beneath.

—Ivana Ng

Though the cover art screams '60s Blue Note, Parks' version of the saxophone quartet is no hard-bop throwback. Instead, we get quiet, collectivist playing that affords the rhythm section maximal freedom while keeping the music melodically grounded.

—J.D. Considine

### Sarah Elizabeth Charles, *Dawn*

The miracle of birth arrives with its own set of elations and anxieties. The singer addresses this emotional breadth with a wise blend of ethereality and tunefulness that makes the entire suite intriguing.

—Jim Macnie

An intimate exposition on loss, joy, grief, birthing and transformation unfolds through Charles' raw lyrics and her new ensemble's rich orchestral arrangements. The result is unapologetically vulnerable and poignant.

—Ivana Ng

Charles' intimate, revelatory album delving into the intricacies of new life and loss is the kind of work that is exactly what art is for.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

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Live at Smoke

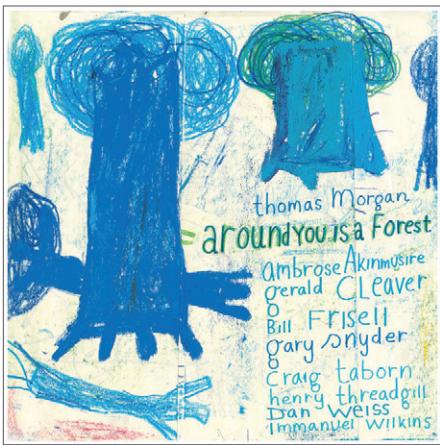
**BILLY HART**  
MARK TURNER ETHAN IVERSON BEN STREET  
Multidirectional



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## Thomas Morgan *Around You Is A Forest*

LOVELAND

★★★

Artificial intelligence is a heated point of contention within today's creative spaces, particularly around music, given the emergence of AI "artists" on platforms like Spotify and the negative implications they can have on living musicians and songwriters. With this in mind, bassist Thomas Morgan's incorporation of WOODS — a virtual string instrument of his own design that operates according to generative code — on his debut album, *Around You Is A Forest*, initially feels like

Morgan capitulating his own creativity to a digital counterpart. However, viewing the record as borne of invasive, artificial means is a mistake.

That said, this album isn't for melodic escapism. Repetitious rhythms, unpredictable solos and improvisations, and the continuous freneticism of WOODS' string notes, make each track feel like the sonic representation of complex computer language, despite the impressive duets Morgan plays with different artists on eight of nine tracks. This is a fitting parallel, as Morgan grew up around computers and has about as much intimate familiarity with their programming and creative potential as he does with composing and playing the bass. One can marvel at what Morgan was able to program an instrument to do and appreciate the true-to-self blending of Morgan's two well-cultivated but not equally public passions. The album also prompts worthwhile philosophical questions around the juxtaposition of limitations, possibilities, human input, and artificial output. As a listening experience though, *Around You Is A Forest* is more an intellectual statement than a recreational one.

—Kira Grunenberg

**Around You Is A Forest:** Around You Is A Forest; Eddies; Dream Sequence; Through The Trees; In The Dark; Assembly Of All Beings; Rising From The West; Murmuration; Here. (63:03)

**Personnel:** Thomas Morgan, bass; Dan Weiss, tabla; Craig Taborn, keyboards, synthesizers, field recordings; Gerald Cleaver, drums; Henry Threadgill, flutes; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Bill Frisell, guitars; Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Gary Snyder, voice.

**Ordering Info:** [lovelandcph.bandcamp.com](http://lovelandcph.bandcamp.com)

## Yuhan Su *Over The MOONs*

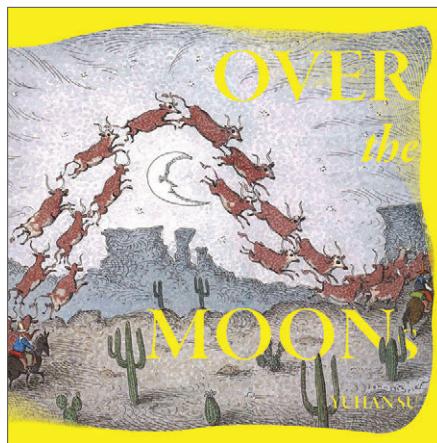
ENDECTOMORPH

★★★★½

One of the defining characteristics of jazz in the 2020s has been the rise of the vibraphone from a peripheral and occasional instrument to a central one. The rise has been sparked by the emergence of virtuosos like Joel Ross and Patricia Brennan as well as the several up-and-coming performers like Sasha Berliner, Simon Moullier and Yuhan Su. It fits the trends in the music. Jazz in the 21st century has become more densely layered, more discretely percussive, and there's a much greater emphasis on texture. The vibraphone with its resonances and versatility is a perfect fit for this moment.

Su's new recording shows that the leading players are going beyond announcing themselves and easing out of the shadows of their major influences, a ritual for most young musicians; instead, she's demonstrating unique compositional mettle and rare virtuosity.

The recording launches with "Pieces Peace," a deftly orchestrated composition that showcases Yu's solo style alongside elegant work from pianist Matt Mitchell, and a pithy feature for Anna Webber. Mitchell is also featured on the kaleidoscopic "Roaring Hours" creating a foundation for Su, guitarist Yingda



Chen and Shinya Lin's electronics. "Double Consciousness" might be the signature tune of this work, which is inspired by Su's experience as an immigrant to America from Taiwan. At times, this recording feels like a savvy updating of Bobby Hutcherson's classic *Dialogue*, and at times it feels like something wholly new that will be equally revered in decades to come.

—Martin Johnson

**Over The MOONs:** Pieces Peace; Tomorrow; Two Moons; Roaring Hours; Olfactory Memory; Genius And Dumb; Double Consciousness; Too Much Time Matching Clouds. (58:54)

**Personnel:** Yuhan Su, vibraphone; Alex Lofe, alto saxophone and flute; Anna Webber, tenor saxophone and flute; Matt Mitchell, piano; Yingda Chen, guitar; Marty Kenney, acoustic and electric bass; James Paul Nadien, drums; Shinya Lin, electronics.

**Ordering Info:** [endectomorph.com](http://endectomorph.com)

**BIG BAND BASS**

BOB MINTZER JOHN GOLDSBY

WDR BIG BAND

## WDR Big Band/ John Goldsby *Big Band Bass*

BASS LION

★★★★

You could say this music is led from the bottom up, or from the back to the front. *Big Band Bass* combines lots of brassy intonation, assorted smart solos and the leadership and pluck-ish conveyance of bassist John Goldsby, with the WDR 30 years. It's an eight-song collection of originals composed by Goldsby and one by Vince Mendoza, most of the arrangements courtesy of conductor/saxophonist Bob Mintzer. High-energy swingers alternate with repose in the form of ballad-like pieces, giving the listener both the excitement of real-time movement with a requisite amount of breathing room for reflection.

Speaking of reflection, a favorite here is the lilting waltz "Kléopatre's Secret," featuring eloquent solos from pianist Billy Test, flugelhornist Bastian Stein and alto saxophonist Karolina Strassmayer. Everything kicks off with Mendoza's peppy "Sonatinita," a flighty flute chorus opposite Goldsby's conversational bass playing leading to a pert solo from trombonist Ludwig Nuss and more playful soloing from Goldsby. "You Can Call Him Maestro" is an easygoing rocker that wanders meaningfully. Throughout, Goldsby's engaging bass solos prove to be the cement that holds it all together, the solos interspersed in natural, unobtrusive ways, proving the album's title's not just hyperbole.

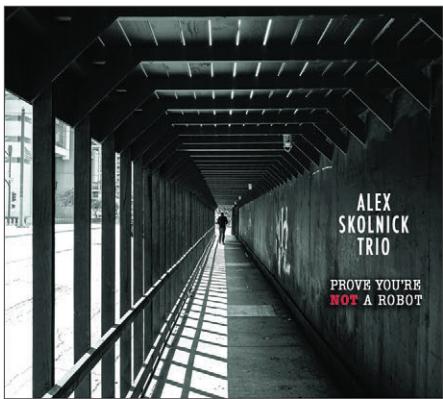
*Big Band Bass* is both an enjoyable return to a sound echoing another era but also a 21st-century picture of what mainstream large-ensemble jazz is up to these days.

—John Ephland

**Big Band Bass:** Sonatinita; In The Hills; Blue Balloon; Kléopatre's Secret; You Can Call Him Maestro; Dahlia Garden; Baron's Dilemma; Sergio. (57:03)

**Personnel:** John Goldsby, bass; Johan Horlen, Karolina Strassmayer, Stefan Pfeifer-Gallela (8), alto saxophone, flute; Paul Heller, Ben Fitzpatrick, Bob Mintzer, tenor saxophone, flute; Jens Neufang, baritone saxophone, flute; bass clarinet; Andy Haderer, Rob Bruynen, Wim Both, Ruud Breuls, trumpet; Bastian Stein, flugelhorn; Ludwig Nuss, Mattis Cederberg, Raphael Klemm, Andy Hunter, Jonathan Bobel (3-7), Phillip Hayduk (3-7), trombone; Billy Test, Xavi Torres (8), piano; Hans Dekker, drums; Paul Shigihara (8), guitar.

**Ordering Info:** [goldsby.bandcamp.com](http://goldsby.bandcamp.com)



## Alex Skolnick Trio Prove You're Not A Robot

FLATIRON

★★★½

Guitarist Alex Skolnick, a member of the influential Cali thrash/metal band Testament from 1986 to 1992, began flirting with jazz after moving to New York in 1998. He formed his Alex Skolnick Trio in the early 2000s and has explored the organic fusing of jazz and rock over the course of five albums. This sixth album finds him dabbling in a wide range of dynamics with his flexible sidemen, bassist Nathan Peck and drummer Matt Zebroski, in yet another genre-bending outing.

They open on an introspective note with

"Parallel Universe," which finds Skolnick alternately navigating some intricate finger-style chordal territory and soloing with Joe Satriani-esque abandon. He adopts a flamenco mode on "Armondo's Mood," a clever mashup of Yes guitarist Steve Howe's "Mood For A Day" and Chick Corea's "Armondo's Rhumba." The lone swinger here, the angular "Infinite Hotel," catches the trio in metal-bop mode, with Peck and Zebroski each turning in whirlwind solos along with Skolnick, who is deep in a John Scofield bag. The challenging and interactive title track is a throwback to Pat Metheny's *Bright Size Life*, while "Guiding Ethos" is more prog-rock than fusion.

Their jazzy, waltz-time rendition of Tom Petty's "Breakdown" is a pleasant surprise, as is the straightahead swing-blues number "The Polish Goodbye," which features a potent upright bass solo by Peck. They close on a gentle note with the acoustic guitar ballad "Asking For A Friend," a poignant tune that also features some of Skolnick's most expressive playing of the record.

—Bill Milkowski

**Prove You're Not A Robot:** Parallel Universe; Armondo's Mood; Infinite Hotel; Prove You're Not A Robot; Guiding Ethos; Breakdown; The Polish Goodbye; Asking For A Friend. (55:08)

**Personnel:** Alex Skolnick, guitars; Nathan Peck, upright and electric bass; Matt Zebroski, drums.

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

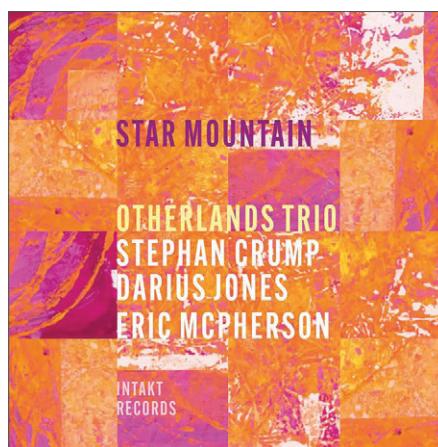
## Otherlands Trio Star Mountain

INTAKT

★★★★

When the Borderlands Trio went on hiatus in 2024, two-thirds of its complement was not ready to quit. In short order bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Eric McPherson found a new third person, and Otherlands Trio came into being. Replacing pianist Kris Davis with the tonally adventurous and emotionally authentic alto saxophonist Darius Jones ensures that certain things will not be the same, but one essential quality persists. While all three members are credited with creating the music, and they did so in real time, they do not consider themselves to be a free-improv ensemble, but spontaneous composers. The difference lies in a commitment to cohesion; they may not know what they're going to play when they start, but each participant will make sure that they have the other two's backs.

On the opening track of this studio recording, "Metamorphene," this shared purpose manifests in a bass-drums groove that continually morphs but never quits, which enables Jones to pursue a series of short, cork-screwing lines wherever they might lead. Jones once more finds freedom in the locked-in quality of the Julius Hemphill-like rhythm that begins



"Lateral Line," but he's ready to melt his own tone into Crump's to create a single stream of sound during the track's second half. Likewise, the saxophonist's pops and McPherson's staccato patterns at the beginning of "Diadromous" sound like the work of one hybrid drum kit.

*Star Mountain* necessarily sounds different from the three albums that McPherson and Crump made with Davis, but it sustains that project's creative streak.

—Bill Meyer

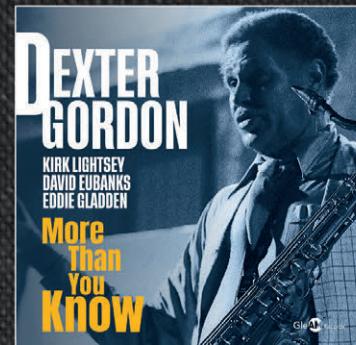
**Star Mountain:** Metamorphene; Lateral Line; Diadromous; Instared; Imago. (46:12)

**Personnel:** Stephan Crump, acoustic bass; Darius Jones, alto saxophone; Eric McPherson, drums.

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

**GleAM** Records®

New Trends in Italian and International Jazz



GleAM Records is proud to present *More Than You Know*, the new album by the great master of tenor saxophone **Dexter Gordon** with his quartet recorded live in Genova (Italy) in 1981, available on CD and digital download/streaming from November 7th, 2025.



**Francesco Negri** (piano), **Viden Spassov** (double bass) and **Francesco Parisi** (drums) presents their second album featuring the trumpeter **Giovanni Falzone**.

"Their interplay is dynamic and fearless, constantly redefining roles and blurring the line between composition and improvisation. This is music built not only on technical mastery, but on trust, listening, and the courage to imagine."

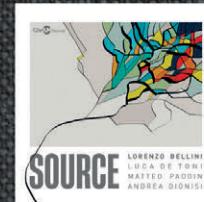
Spencer Travis



The Italian trumpet & composer **Tommaso Iacoviello** presents his first album with **Nazareno Caputo** (vibraphone), **Nicolo Francesco Faraglia** (el.guitar), **Ferdinando Romano** (double-bass), **Saverio Cacopardi** (drums).

"This project bodes well for the future of these musicians. In some tracks, the musicians' imitation of bird calls and songs sounds beautifully."

Jan Granite



The Italian pianist & composer **Lorenzo Bellini** presents his quartet along with **Luca De Toni** (guitar), **Matteo Padoin** (upright bass) and **Andrea Dionisi** (drums).

"This is an incredibly fresh sounding album, full of surprises, virtuosity and beauty - as a group they shift between colours effortlessly, and the fluidity of the solos brings everything together."

Alex Hitchcock



Best New Italian Talent 2020 in the annual Top Jazz di Musica Jazz magazine and second place as "Italian Musician of the Year 2023", the Italian bassist **Ferdinando Romano** presents his new album alone with Finnish accordionist **Veli Kujala**, Estonian pianist **Kirke Karja** and **Ermanno Baron** on drums. His music blends jazz, contemporary music, experimental, drum'n bass, and rock.



The Israeli guitarist & composer **Ron Magrill** presents his second album along with **Yonatan Riklis** (hammond organ) and **Ofri Nehemya** (drums).

"Inspired is an excellent example of refined, dense and undoubtedly modern jazz. The interplay runs parallel to the groove and the swing, while copious, is both solid and full of subtleties. We will certainly hear about Ron Magrill again."

Ernesto D'Angelo



[www.gleam-records.com](http://www.gleam-records.com)  
[info@gleam-records.com](mailto:info@gleam-records.com)

## Jazz and the Endless Rewrite

The apparently endless amount of "new" music from greats of the past means the history of jazz being continually rewritten and expanded. To wit:

Chick Corea's passing in February 2021 is still keenly felt. He was so much a part of the jazz scene for nearly 60 years, never losing his creativity, courage or youthful enthusiasm. *Forever Yours: The Farewell Performance* (Candid; ★★★★½ 75:05) is drawn from two solo piano concerts that he gave in Clearwater, Florida, in October 2020. Whether exploring a standard such as "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" or Stevie Wonder's "Overjoyed," paying tribute to piano icons, performing six of his "Children's Songs," playing a classical theme or improvising portraits inspired by audience members, Corea shows that he was still very much in prime form at this late stage in his life. Both in his often-dazzling playing and in his talking to the audience, at 79 Corea still sounds like the epitome of youth.

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

Thelonious Monk was riding high when he toured Europe in 1965 and was as popular as he would ever be during his lifetime. *Bremen 1965* (Sunnyside; ★★★★ 92:44), a two-CD set, comprises a March 1965 concert from Germany. Joined by his longtime tenor-saxophonist Charlie Rouse, plus bassist Larry Gales and drummer Ben Riley, Monk performs four of his songs along with typically unique interpretations of four of his favorite standards. While there are no surprises in the repertoire, Monk and Rouse's playing is as fresh and inventive as ever, even if the bass solos are uneventful. Particularly noteworthy are "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You" (which has a very original Monk solo mostly in the extreme upper register of the piano) and his charming solo rendition of "Don't Blame Me."

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

There is certainly no shortage of Bill Evans recordings. The pianist's style and approach to trio playing were largely formed by the early 1960s, although he grew within himself during the remainder of his career without altering his course. His impressive number of studio recordings from 1956 to 1980 have been joined by a nearly countless number of posthumous live sets, many unearthed by producer Zev Feldman. *Portraits At The Penthouse: Live In Seattle* (Resonance; ★★★★ 52:49) comprises radio broadcasts from May 12 and 19, 1966, that are the earliest examples of Evans playing with bassist Eddie Gomez (who was beginning a decade-long stint and was already outstanding) and drummer Joe Hunt (who lasted a year). The 11 performances (which include a happily swinging "Come Rain Or Come Shine," "Who Can I Turn To" and an uptempo "I Should Care") would be explored by the pianist many times



through the years, so there are no new revelations to be heard. However, the playing is at such a high level that Bill Evans collectors will certainly want these broadcasts no matter how many of his recordings they already have.

**Ordering info:** [resonancerecords.org](http://resonancerecords.org)

Dexter Gordon was 58 on July 7, 1981, when he played the concert in Genova, Italy, that constitutes the two-CD *More Than You Know* (GleAM; ★★★★½ 75:10). Joined by his regular rhythm section of the era (pianist Kirk Lightsey, bassist David Eubanks and drummer Eddie Gladden), Gordon really stretches out on this well-recorded concert. Without counting a brief "LTD" during which he introduces the band, the classic tenor-saxophonist performs four songs in just under 80 minutes, including a 28-minute version of his uptempo blues "Back Stairs" that has a thunderous 11-minute Gladden drum solo. While he would gradually decline throughout the decade, Gordon was still at the top of his game in 1981 and is captured on a very good day, whether caressing "More Than You Know" or infusing a stomping "It's You Or No One" with joy. Lightsey also sounds inspired.

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

A major bassist since the mid-1960s and still quite active, Cecil McBee has only infrequently led his own sessions. 1974's *Mutima (Strata-East/Mack Avenue)* (★★★½ 45:05) is a reissue of his first one which was formerly scarce. McBee's ensemble includes such notables as flutist Art Webb, altoist Alan Braufman, George Adams on tenor and soprano, drummer Billy Hart, a young Dee Dee Bridgewater and, on one song, his son Cecil Jr. on electric bass. The leader contributed all six originals, which are adventurous and cover a wide area, including "From Within" (which features him via overdubbing on two bowed basses), Bridgewater doing some wordless vocalizing on "Voice Of The 7th Angel" and the African-based modal piece "Mutima." **DB**

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

## NIGHT HARBOR



RAN BLAKE & JARED SIMS

### Ran Blake & Jared Sims

#### *Night Harbor*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★½

Ran Blake, the master auteur of film noir in notes and tones, offers the latest instantiation of his *sui generis* improvised dreamscapes on *Night Harbor*, thanks to one-time student Jared Sims, who plays baritone saxophone on this oddly apropos-to-the-moment suite of duos.

Recorded in a Boston-area recording studio and in Blake's apartment on Sims' laptop in 2023 and 2024, the imaginary soundtrack comprises 16 well-wrought vignettes of 20th century songs culled from various regions of Blake's conscious and subconscious memory whose melodies Sims' husky baritone voice renders and embellishes as a morphine stand-in for such world-class singers and Blake collaborators as Jeanne Lee, Dominique Eade, Sara Serpa, and Christine Correa. There are three takes of Ornette Coleman's threnodial "Sadness" and two apiece of the Fritz Lang soundtrack "Dr. Mabuse" and the standards "Almost Like Being in Love" and "You Go to My Head."

Apart from Lang and Coleman, the references include dream-world versions inspired by such long-time Blake inspirations as Abbey Lincoln ("Mendacity" and "Love Letters"), Chris Connor ("Driftwood") and Stan Kenton ("Collaboration"). Quincy Jones' "The Pawnbroker," from the Sidney Lumet noir of that name, melts at the end to dream world, while Sims begins the only Blake original contained herein, "The Short Life Of Barbara Monk," in a different key. Blake, nearing nonagenarian status when the recordings were made, surefootedly follows his dreams in conjuring the narrative flow, as he has done throughout his 65-year career as a recording artist.

—Ted Panken

**Night Harbor:** Poor Butterfly; Sadness; Collaboration; Dr. Mabuse; Pawnbroker; Driftwood; Sadness (alternate take); You Go To My Head; Mendacity; The Short Life Of Barbara Monk; Dr. Mabuse (alternate take); Love Lament; Almost Like Being In Love; Sadness (alternate take 2); Almost Like Being In Love (alternate take); You Go To My Head (alternate take). (44:17)

**Personnel:** Jared Sims, baritone saxophone; Ran Blake, piano.

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



**Dayna Stephens**  
**Monk'D**  
**CONTAGIOUS**  
★★★

Dayna Stephens trades his saxophone for upright bass on *Monk'D*, his varied tribute to Thelonious Monk, the great original who inspired Stephens during his studies at the Monk (now known as the Herbie Hancock) Institute of Jazz.

Along with Ethan Iverson on piano, tenor saxophonist Stephen Riley and drummer Eric McPherson, Stephens integrates Monk-adjacent originals like Iverson's title track and the musical portmanteau "Just You And Me

"Smoking The Evidence" with lesser-known Monk works.

Highlights include a take on Monk's "Humph" that brings out the interplay among these Monk devotees, the sassy strut of "Stuffy Turkey" and a bewitching "Ruby My Dear," likely the album's best-known Monk tune.

"Humph," like other Monk, is angular and surprising. "Brake's Sake," like other Monk, is a well-developed tune with sly musical character. McPherson's rim shots and Iverson's upper-register plunges make "Stuffy Turkey" pop, and Stephens lifts the obscure track higher with a solo so goading Riley can't help plunging back in.

While Iverson lays the foundation for a smoky "Ruby My Dear," Riley, a seductive saxophonist who evokes the similarly distinctive Steve Lacy, affirms his own authority. Ruminative and embracing, this "Ruby" is a particular keeper.

Recorded on vintage instruments in a single day at Rudy Van Gelder's storied studio, *Monk'D* reminds you why Monk's music is forever fresh. It also makes you wonder how the group might treat a chestnut like "Round Midnight," as well as Monk obscurities deserving wider recognition. —Carlo Wolff

**Monk'D:** Brake's Sake; Humph; Coming On The Hudson; Just You And Me Smoking The Evidence; Ugly Beauty; Stuffy Turkey; Hornin' In; Ruby My Dear; Monk'D. (50:07)

**Personnel:** Ethan Iverson, piano; Eric McPherson, drums; Stephen Riley, tenor saxophone; Dayna Stephens, bass.

**Ordering Info:** [daynastephens.bandcamp.com](http://daynastephens.bandcamp.com)

**Yumi Ito**  
***Lonely Island***  
**ENJA/YELLOWBIRD**  
★★★

Ito is a songwriter, pianist and composer based in Switzerland who usually tours and performs with a band. She has released six albums with various configurations of musicians. *Lonely Island* is her solo debut and contains one new song, with 10 pared-down, slightly reinvented tracks from her albums *Ysla* and *Stardust Crystals*.

The album was cut live in the studio, with Ito playing the piano and singing alone. For the first time, she allowed herself to add improvised solos to the arrangements. "Love Is Here To Stay" is an original, not the Gershwin standard. On *Ysla*, the band, and tolling bass notes from Ito's piano, deepened the dark feeling of the lyrics.

On *Lonely Island*, Ito repeats a melodic hook on the piano that lifts up the forlorn lyrics and her wordless improvisations mirror her hopes for a bit of sunlight, to help her let go of loss and fear. "Is It You" sounds even sadder, in this pared-down take, than it does on *Ysla*. Her scattered interludes make her voice sound as if it's about to break into tears. "Stardust Crystals" replaces the long instrumental breaks of the backing band on



the original arrangement, with Ito's wordless improvisations. The repeating melodic hook of her piano pulls you in, with complex melodies that drift around the scale, changing keys and tempos.

The songs all describe intimate relationships, but Ito's approach is emotionally complex, with delicate shades of sentiment and melodies that blend jazz, pop and hints of classical music. —j. poet

**Lonely Island:** What Seems To Be; Little Things; Is It You; Rebirth; Stardust Crystals; After The End; Old Redwood Tree; Seagull; Love Is Here To Stay; Tiki Taka. (42:05)

**Personnel:** Yumi Ito; vocals, piano.

**Ordering Info:** [yumiito.bandcamp.com](http://yumiito.bandcamp.com)

**Embraceable**  
**BRAZIL**  
**Tom Cohen** featuring Chico Pinheiro,  
Filó Machado, Barbara Mendes, Cidinho Teixeira,  
John Swana, Café, and Larry McKenna

**Tom Cohen**  
***Embraceable Brazil***

VERSA

★★★½

Like palm trees in the breeze, the newest record from Philadelphia-based drummer Tom Cohen is a subdued delight, highlighting his deep ties to Brazil's music scene and study of bossa nova.

*Embraceable Brazil* marks Cohen's first album of Brazilian repertoire, but he has adored its blend of jazz and samba since he was a child growing up in Newark, New Jersey. Still, it wasn't until he organized a series of recording sessions for American and Brazilian musicians in the 2010s that Cohen dove deeper into the style.

Brazilian musicians appear throughout *Embraceable Brazil*, including guitarist Chico Pinheiro, whose sensitive melodic touch and lush chords shimmer; pianist João Bueno, who plays with sensitivity and lyricism; and charming, understated vocalist Barbara Mendes. American musicians also stand out, like late tenor legend Larry McKenna, whose buttery tone on "The Girl From Ipanema" is a soulful tribute to Stan Getz.

The record's subtle twists on familiar classics from both Brazilian and American popular repertoire are also a thrill. Toninho Horta's 1975 tune "Aquelas Coisas Todas" leans into jazz fusion with atmospheric effects from John Swana on Electronic Valve Instrument (EVI). The Carly Simon classic "You're so Vain" also gets an innovative, lounge-y bossa nova treatment, Swana and melodica player Rob Hyman sharing the melody over Cohen's rock-solid Latin drum groove.

As it highlights authentic Brazilian chops and inspired renditions of classics, *Embraceable Brazil* is both a reverent and refreshing take on this beloved musical tradition. —Alexa Peters

**Embraceable Brazil:** Eu So Quero Um Xodo; You're So Vain; Francisca; The Girl From Ipanema; Tarde; Bye Bye Brasil; Brigas Nunca Mais; Look To The Sky; Adeus America; Aquelas Coisas Todas; Café com Pao; Joyous Lake; Bebe. (55:21)

**Personnel:** Tom Cohen, drums; Barbara Mendes (1, 4, 7) Patricia King (10), vocals; Cidinho Teixeira (1, 4, 7, 9, 13), Klaus Mueller (2, 5–7, 10, 12), João Bueno (3, 11), piano; Itaiquara Brandão, Madison Rast (3, 11), bass; John Swana, trombone, EVI (1, 2, 5, 8, 12); Chris Farr, tenor saxophone, flute (1, 7); Rob Curto, accordion (1); Rob Hyman, melodica (2); Edson da Silva Café, percussion; Jake Kelberman (3, 11), Chico Pinheiro (5, 6), guitar; Bennett Paster, strings, Fender Rhodes (4, 5, 8); Filó Machado, vocals, guitar (9); Valtinho Anastacio, vocals, percussion (13).

**Ordering Info:** [tomcohendproductions.com](http://tomcohendproductions.com)

# Hitting Right on Target

**Dave Keyes: Two Trains (MoMojo; ★★★★ 39:54)**

For four decades, Dave Keyes has asserted himself as one of the leading roots pianists in New York. His allegiance to blues, boogie, R&B, gospel and Band-like rock is as strong as ever on his eighth album; he plays confidently at all tempos, summons up various emotional states and carries the influence of Leon Russell and Jerry Lee Lewis deep in his subconscious. Keyes isn't to be trifled with as a singer, either, showing presence in songs he wrote with upper-level Nashville pro Mark Sameth. Five of them, those with Rob Pavarozzi's sterling harmonica present, are of surpassing worth.

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

**Billy Branch: The Blues Is My Biography (Rosa's Lounge; ★★★★ 48:59)**

Billy Branch has held a winning hand most of the time since appearing on the Chicago scene in the late 1970s. The new album has the harp maestro and able singer giving account of his life force in lyrics and music that flow with his crisp spirit and cries of the heart. In addition to straightforward blues, he imparts weight and conviction to surprising ventures onto the turfs of hip-hop, sweet reggae, soul and Latin sounds.

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

**Robbin Kapsalis: The Blues Is In The House (Blues House; ★★★½ 32:10)**

Robbin Kapsalis, a Chicago native and resident often on tour in Europe, stands apart from the legion of over-excited shouters in modern blues by singing with a cool sense of relaxation. Just the same, her alto is strong and direct and her capacity to interpret words impressive. Kapsalis handles Slim Harpo and Screamin' Jay Hawkins songs as well as anyone, but she stumbles a little trying to reanimate "Rollin' & Tumblin'" and a couple of other mossy classics. Phrases from the harp of the U.K.'s Giles Robson confirm his world-class ranking. A French studio band operates at maximum effort.

**Ordering info:** [robinkapsalis.net](http://robinkapsalis.net)

**Piper & The Hard Times: Good Company (Hard Times; ★★★½ 52:52)**

The Hard Times blues-rock band shook off about 20 years of anonymity outside the Nashville area when they won the 2024 International Blues Challenge. The buzz continues with this second effort. The central figure remains vocalist Al "Piper" Green, a gospel-trained dynamo who relishes spontaneity and imposes his personality on the music. The 55-year-old's sandpaper voice sounds as if he felt compelled to vent life lessons he's learned via mostly good original tunes.

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

**Roomful Of Blues: Steppin' Out (Alligator; ★★★½ 44:07)** The radical idea of having



Billy Branch tells all on *The Blues Is My Biography*.

a female singer out front of Roomful's revolving-door crew of jump-blues guys actually has a precedent: Texan Lou Ann Barton was with the Rhode Islanders in the 1970s. It's been worth the wait as recent recruit DD Bastos has the range, style and natural energy to easily put across the dance-inducing fun of tunes from the annals of R&B, blues and swing jazz. Thank bandleader-guitarist Chris Vachon and Bastos for digging up gems by Smiley Lewis, Big Mama Thornton and others. True to swinging form, the horn and rhythm sections supply worthy restoration work.

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

**Luther Dickinson: Dead Blues Vol. 1 (Strolling Bones; ★★★★ 39:08)** North Mississippi All-Star guitarist Luther Dickinson conceives an album that features blues and jug band oldies once embraced by the Grateful Dead. He makes sure each song gets a fully inventive makeover, having his guitar probe in unanticipated ways, using synths intelligently, building tracks from bass lines on up. Also important to the triumph of Dickinson's creative blues is the soulful singing of Datrian Johnson, who brandishes his own fervid thoughts on how to bend and twist stale tunes like "Little Red Rooster" into a near-abstract Appalachian art.

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

**Bobby Charles: Last Train To Memphis (Last Record Company; ★★★½ 128:15)**

Praise the memory of Bobby Charles, the superb roots songwriter and singer. There's a constancy of high quality to the tracks of this reissued 2004 collection, which surveys the recordings the Louisiana man made in his "reclusive years" (1971–2003). Cohorts include Maria Muldaur and Delbert McClinton. Bonus tracks galore. Also available as a two-CD set, which includes two 1990s four-star solo albums.

DB

**Ordering info:** [lastmusic.co.uk](http://lastmusic.co.uk)



## John O'Gallagher *Ancestral*

WHIRLWIND

★★★★

"Ancestral" could easily be interpreted as a reference to alto saxophonist John O'Gallagher's respect for trailblazing jazz sages, especially John Coltrane, via his soloing on his late-period albums *Interstellar Space* and *Stellar Regions*: the subject of O'Gallagher's Ph.D. dissertation and a clear influence on his own free-minded playing.

However, *Ancestral* more directly links to the legacies of legendary drummers Andrew Cyrille and Billy Hart, whose trans-linear pulse on the album is perhaps its most unique feature. Count this as an album best consumed with headphones and with all senses attuned. One of its great pleasures is beholding the twining, subtle interchange of two great jazz drummers, from ear to ear, conspiring to create a collective third drum persona.

In this bass-less instrumental scenario, O'Gallagher's fluid and sometimes antic sax voice and guitarist Ben Monder, with his signature deep distorted tone and nimble shape-shifting style, float, simmer and wail atop the solid but understated drum foundation.

Equations of structure and improvisational freedom are steadily in flux, according to the leader's plan. Lyrical bookends "Awakening" and "Postscript" frame a rangy track list, shifting into oblique swing on "Under The Wire," the wilds of "Profess" and the balladic brood of "Quixotica."

*Ancestral* proposes a fresh model in the dualistic field of inside-outside jazz, with bold playing from each player and a discernible ambition to find new spaces and ways of being in the music. The storied drummers get their due, dual spotlight.

—Josef Woodard

**Ancestral:** Awakenings; Under The Wire; Contact; Tug; Profess; Altar Of The Ancestors; Quixotica; Postscript. (44:37)

**Personnel:** John O'Gallagher, alto saxophone; Ben Monder, guitar; Andrew Cyrille, Billy Hart, drums.

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

Nat Adderley Jr. Trio

# TOOK SO LONG



## Nat Adderley Jr. Trio

### *Took So Long*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★½

Featuring a near perfect mixture of standard jazz tunes and popular musical mainstays, pianist Nat Adderley Jr.'s *Took So Long* is a fine trio album. The trio features two bassists (Belden Bullock and Chris Berger) and a revolving door of four drummers (Tommy Campbell, Vince Ector, Steve Johnson, Dwayne "Cook" Broadnax) over its 11 tracks but never loses its coherence.

The title track (the project's lone original) is a dissertation on groove. As Bullock and Ector

lock in, Adderley's crisp playing over the melodic number provokes as much as it settles. This ethos carries the momentum of the entire project, allowing us to break with the assumptions that popular musics and jazz standards represent two distinct or different worlds. Despite what has happened in the industry over the last 50 years, we might remind ourselves there was once a moment where jazz was indeed popular music and the designation "pop" is a belated attempt to channel and perhaps cheaply reproduce the musicality contained in the instrumental forms of the previous generation.

But even if one is not concerned with all that, it is simply cool to hear once again how interpretations of sounds made famous by Stevie Wonder, The Stylistics, The Carpenters, Luther Vandross and Aretha Franklin beautifully coexist alongside those written by Billie Holiday and Dizzy Gillespie. Masters of the piano trio format have gamely plumbed these associations before. But in the hands of Nat Adderley Jr., we get yet another fresh look.

—Joshua Myers

**Took So Long:** Invitation; You And I (We Can Conquer The World); Took So Long; People Make The World Go Round; Con Alma; Superstar; On Green Dolphin Street; You Don't Know What Love Is; Old Devil Moon; Don't Explain; (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman. (5:20)

**Personnel:** Nat Adderley Jr., piano; Belden Bullock, bass (2, 3, 5, 6, 10); Chris Berger, bass (1, 4, 7–9, 11); Vince Ector, drums (2, 5); Steve Johnson, drums (3, 6, 10); Tommy Campbell, drums (1, 4, 7); Dwayne "Cook" Broadnax, drums (8, 9, 11); Alana Adderley, vocals (10).

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

## Grant Stewart

### *Next Spring*

CELLAR LIVE

★★★

The warm-voiced Canadian tenor saxophonist Grant Stewart has worked with this group (bassist apart) for his last few albums, with 2022's *The Lighting Of The Lamps* a definite highlight in his progress since he started recording as a comparative youngster 30 years ago with *Downtown Sounds*. The continuity is important, since this is a group that plays like a group — check their consistency and evenness of delivery on "Nefertiti" — and not like a horn-man and a bunch of hired guns.

Stewart isn't any kind of radical and plays as if Blue Note Records founder Alfred Lion were still alive. But he's living and reliable proof that the hard-bop idiom, which may seem as old-fashioned as spear-point shirts and turn-ups when set against electronica and hip-hop situations, is far from exhausted and indeed still a rich vein. Stewart's solos are solidly built — try the excellent title track for a representative example — and if they are unsurprising in essence, they are far from predictable or generic.

Tardo Hammer has been with him since, I guess, *In The Still Of The Night*, which is now about 20 years old, and he is a key component



of the music, almost worthy, surely, of joint leadership credit.

If you want jazz that pushes boundaries, breaks envelopes, transgresses and subverts, then *Next Spring* probably isn't for you. If you buy into the quiet optimism of that title and enjoy this one knowing that there is probably another in the same vein already in the works, then there are deep pleasures to be had.

—Brian Morton

**Next Spring:** Next Spring; Kiss And Run; Nefertiti; Father Flanagan; I Know That You Know; May In June; Introspection; I Won't Dance; There's No You. (6:42)

**Personnel:** Grant Stewart, tenor saxophone; Tardo Hammer, piano; Paul Sikivie, bass; Phil Stewart, drums.

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



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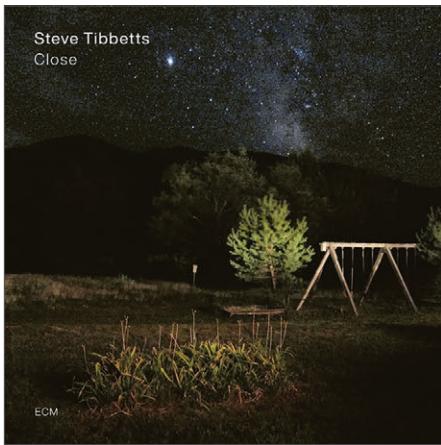
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## Steve Tibbetts *Close*

ECM

★★★½

Recording in St. Paul, Minnesota, guitarist Steve Tibbetts has produced his 11th album for ECM, inviting drummer-percussionists Marc Anderson and JT Bates to the sessions. Most of the compositions are divided into sub-tracks, lending a suite-like feel to this sonic tale-spinning. The mood is fairly constant throughout, involving a spacious contemplation that evokes a haunted landscape feeling.

## Brandon Sanders *Lasting Impression*

SAVANT

★★★½

*Lasting Impression* is Brandon Sanders' third album, and — to borrow an old expression — it is charmed in several ways. It is gifted by an assembly of talented storytellers, each with special moments to spin (as Sanders does on every track) but most notably on the title track and “Tales Of Mississippi.”

Tenor saxophonist Stacy Dillard takes the longest and deepest leap on this piece of southern motif. Warren Wolf's vibraphone resonates in spectacular fashion on Bobby Hutcherson's “8/4 Beat” and his mallets sync perfectly with Sanders' sticks on “No BS for B.S.” Vocalist Jazzmeia Horn's rendition of “Our Love Is Here To Stay” compares favorably with her “In A Sentimental Mood” on Sanders' previous release, *Compton's Finest*. Pianist Eric Scott Reed is always an inventive and creative performer and his tune “Shadoboxing” is festooned with an array of counterpunches to Sanders' gallops on the skins. There is room here, too, for an extended solo by bassist Eric Wheeler.

Sanders is endowed with an intuitive feel for selecting the right bandmates and repertoire to showcase, and there's no way he

Tibbetts pairs his acoustic guitars (six- and 12-strings) with his more volatile electric, matching them in ways that most practitioners wouldn't conceive, weaving them into an electroacoustic oneness. He also adds occasional piano. The title surely refers to “proximity” rather than “finishing,” as the acoustic strings are miked as absolutely close as possible, even as the electric strings rear up in the opposite direction, forming a huge skyward canopy.

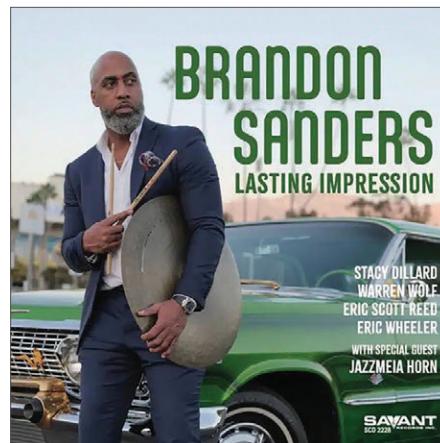
It's remarkable that Tibbetts settles these two forces into a dark harmony, surrounded by the biggest drum sounds possible, resonant with horizon-stretching bassiness. A frame drum can sound like a thunder-rumble. Intimacy co-exists with far vistas. Tranquility is attained, although Tibbetts ignites his electric engine, as a swooping beast, ascending and descending in turn. There is a very slow groove, but it remains a groove, nevertheless. We hear fingers rubbing massively, ambient guitar body creaks, these sounds becoming part of the ambiance. The heavy Tibbetts behemoth electric is contained within a controlled environment, blending grandeur and inner peace.

—Martin Longley

**Close:** We Begin; Away; Remember; Somewhere; Anywhere; Everywhere; Remember And; Remember And Wish; We End. (59:34)

**Personnel:** Steve Tibbetts, guitars, piano, percussion; Marc Anderson, percussion, loops; JT Bates, drums.

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



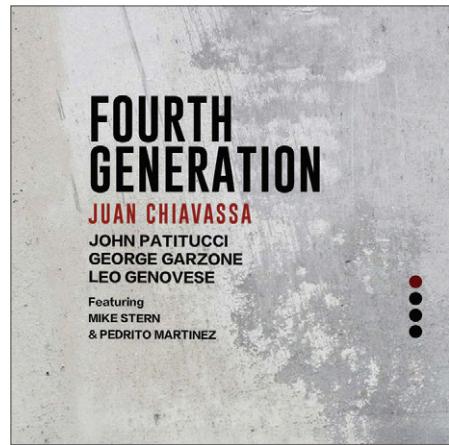
can go wrong with a gem from the genius of Stevie Wonder (which Horn brightens with her sparkling virtuoso lilt). To be sure, each musician has carved out individual space, but it's when they bring their unique visions as one that they truly create what Sanders knew they were more than capable of producing: a slam dunk for the former hoopster.

—Herb Boyd

**Lasting Impression:** 8/4 Beat; Lasting Impression; Our Love Is Here To Stay; Shadoboxing; Tales Of Mississippi; Soul Eyes; No BS For B.S.; Until You Come Back To Me (That's What I'm Gonna Do). (44:03)

**Personnel:** Brandon Sanders, drums; Stacy Dillard, saxophone; Eric Wheeler, Ameen Saleem (8); bass; Eric Scott Reed, Tyler Bullock (8); piano; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; Jazzmeia Horn, vocals.

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



## Juan Chiavassa *Fourth Generation*

WHIRLWIND

★★★½

In the years I worked DownBeat's “Jazz On Campus” beat it wasn't uncommon to hear about the kind of master/student synergy that's on display throughout drummer Juan Chiavassa's debut recording. Veteran saxophonist George Garzone sparkles when soloing with his protégé and the “faculty” is deep, with Leo Genovese on keys and John Pattitucci on bass. A “visiting prof” — guitarist Mike Stern — plugs in to contribute, too.

Chiavassa, a 34-year-old Argentinian native who anchored Stern's band for several years, chips in only one composition — the bonus jam focused on Stern — but from the boppish “The Other Mingus” to the free-time “To Michael Brecker” he displays exceptional scope as an accompanist. He's all over his kit on a run-through of Joe Henderson's “Caribbean Fire Dance,” provides expressive support on a bass-focused version of Wayne Shorter's “Penelope” and shifts gears nimbly to bolster Garzone's deep dig on Shorter's lesser-known “The Big Push.”

At 75, Garzone sounds energized throughout, nowhere more so than on his tribute to Brecker, a dark-hued, modal piece that features tremendously emotional playing from all before a hymn-like resolve that illuminates the lineage between Garzone, Brecker and John Coltrane.

Best of all, perhaps, is the quartet's interpretation of another Henderson gem, “Tetragon,” showcasing the tight communication between Chiavassa and Pattitucci, and a powerful take on Garzone's “Tutti Italiani” that highlights the composer's soaring tenor and the leader's well-tuned drums.

It's a bold, unusual move for a nascent bandleader to eschew originals; in this case, it was a winning call.

—James Hale

**Fourth Generation:** Moon Germs; Caribbean Fire Dance; Hey Open Up; Penelope; Tetragon; The Other Mingus; The Big Push; Tutti Italiani; To Michael Brecker; Bonus Track Jam. (62:47)

**Personnel:** George Garzone, tenor saxophone; Mike Stern, guitar (1, 10); Leo Genovese, piano, electric piano; John Pattitucci, bass; Juan Chiavassa, drums; Pedrito Martinez, percussion (10).

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



Thomas organizes sound and texture in innovative ways on *Hikmah*.

## Pat Thomas *Hikmah*

TAO FORMS  
★★★½

Hikmah is the Arabic word for “wisdom.” At age 65, this Oxford-born pianist would have the necessary years of life and study to stake a claim on that word in any tongue. But Pat Thomas’

chosen language here is jazz, in the dialect of Cecil Taylor, Matthew Shipp or Paul Bley, but especially Sun Ra. In these eight improvised vignettes, Thomas unpremeditatedly cenotaphs Ra’s fearless explorations with a glint of the celestial keyboardist’s tongue-in-cheek humor.

For instance, on “For Joe Gallivan,” after an introductory series of clusters that move from tentative and spacious to frenetically dense,

Thomas settles into an almost-tonal Afro-Cuban-like merengue, like wicked ghouls dancing the salsa. “The Shehu” lopes along in a half-time feel, Thomas’ left hand holding steady like Gulliver while his right pulls mightily against it with the strength of a thousand Lilliputians. “For Toumani Diabaté” begins as a pensive chorale with deliciously threaded textures into near-familiar chordal structures, eventually deconstructing into a panoply of light flurries, concluding with some hypnotic, zither-like strumming.

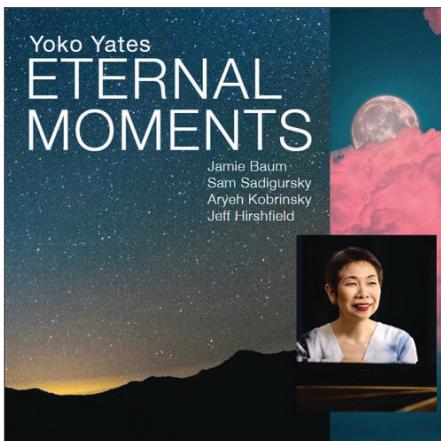
“Luqman The Wise” features the barely audible sound of Thomas caressing his hands and fingers over the frame and strings of the piano, with the occasional thump and pluck. “For Caroline L. Karcher” is a study in two-handed counterpoint, where Thomas manages to maintain the spontaneous themes in each hand throughout. But the perpetuation and burgeoning of motivic constructs undergird all of these pieces, evidencing Thomas’ unalloyed wisdom to organize sound and texture in a myriad of innovative and surprising ways.

—Gary Fukushima

**Hikmah:** Hikmah; For Joe Gallivan; The Shehu; For Toumani Diabaté; Luqman The Wise; For Caroline L Karcher; For McCoy Tyner, Sheikh Amadou Bamba. (51:10)

**Personnel:** Pat Thomas, piano.

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



## Yoko Yates *Eternal Moments*

BANKA  
★★★

New York pianist Yoko Yates delivers a pastoral chamber jazz suite in 10 parts with the same excellent quintet she unveiled on her 2022 album, *Mystic Life*. Yates’ writing and arranging integrate pairs of winds with pulsing rhythm section; soloists Jamie Baum and Sam Sadigursky soar. Many tracks offer rhythmic intricacy and surprise, though others, less satisfying, feel merely pretty.

The opener bristles with ecstatic, Whitman-esque wonder, as Sadigursky distinguishes him-

self immediately on bass clarinet with a legato flow, full sound and smart ideas. Flute aficionados will have no trouble identifying Baum’s full, silvery tone and lithe phrasing. “The Flower Before Its Last” opens a warm embrace to the natural world, clarinet and flute chatting like songbirds. The chipper and cheerful “Collage Of Life” bounces like a jumping jack. Gorgeous, ghostly winds hover over “Spirits Of The Night,” with Baum’s alto flute and Sadigursky’s bass clarinet organically developing the evocative theme and bassist Aryeh Kobrinsky offering a warm comment. The interlocking parts of “Song Of The Wind” suggest a hocket.

Yates excels more as composer and arranger than as a soloist, but her outing on the closing track, “Steps Of Spring,” has substantial verve. Sadigursky’s alto saxophone can feel practice room-y (“Aster”) and his B-flat clarinet is harsh in the highs. Hats off to drummer Jeff Hirshfield, whose tasteful understatement envelope the proceedings, especially on the pleasant waltz “Winding River.” Overall, a strong album, especially when agitation and engagement triumph over enchantment.

—Paul de Barros

**Eternal Moments:** Outer Space—Myriad Stars! Aster; The Flower Before Its Last; Winding River; Winter Calls; Collage Of Life; Spirits Of The Night; Song Of The Wind; Forgotten Paradise; Steps Of Spring. (57:40)

**Personnel:** Yoko Yates, piano; Jamie Baum, flute, alto flute; Sam Sadigursky, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone; Aryeh Kobrinsky, bass; Jeff Hirshfield, drums.

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

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# Makaya McCraven /

BY HOWARD MANDEL

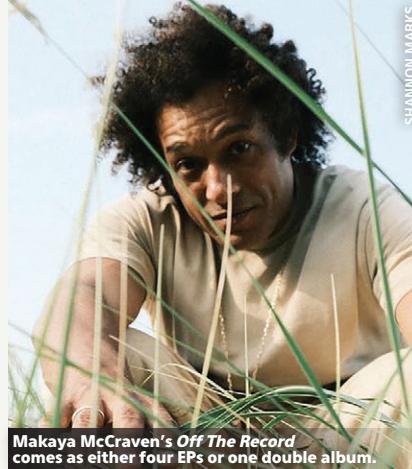
## Four-in-One Next-Gen Jazz

Makaya McCraven's *Off The Record* (International Anthem; ★★★★ 89:17), four simultaneously released, interconnected EPs also available as two LPs or two CDs, offers a nonstop soundtrack for chill listening. Drummer, composer, bandleader, producer, collagist, multi-instrumentalist — in that order — McCraven uses solid, quick and clever beats, performance recordings with a coterie of compatible collaborators, overdubs, samples, loops, diverse studio tools and effects to create a consistent sonic imprint (i.e., a recognizable style) unifying an admirably broad range of sound experiments.

Over a total of 81 minutes, *Off The Record* comprises excerpts of shows with fine performances by hot emerging stars from 2015, '17, '24 and '25, in London, Berlin, Brooklyn, Los Angeles and Chicago (hometown to many of them), seamlessly woven together or juxtaposed for contrast. First example: The EP *Techno Logic* (★★★★ 22:19) features Ben Lamar Gay on cornet, voice, percussion, synths, electronics and diddley bow and Theon Cross on tuba and electronics with McCraven on drums from three gigs over eight years, further treated with editing, "new composition" (does that include structuring? sequencing?) and his own overdubs with keyboards, synths, vibes and percussion. It starts drum-and-bass-like on "Gnu Blue" but it's actually Cross pumping his horn for that fast, deep line and decorations, over McCraven's wicked shuffle and behind LaMar's wordless call, suddenly interrupted by something akin to tape run backwards, which segues into "Technology," beeps, zips and bleets syncopated against a backbeat and LaMar uttering a warning that breaks into "Boom Bapped." "Strikes Again" (bow diddley or tuba? bottle? rhythm on rims?) suggests Black fife-and-drum, Gullah ring-shouts and Herbie Hancock's electro-acoustic "Watermelon Man" revision.

Tonal shifts, outside references, concise but effective statements and imaginative playing are characteristic of a lot of *Off The Record*, as well as use of repetition that hypnotizes or tests one's patience, and an overall mix that at times strikes as compressed or artificially reverberant, removing the listener a step from the real physical circumstances of the performances. Yet that's a feature, not a bug. It's helped make McCraven's music and indeed many of International Anthem's artists known and popular.

McCraven's beats are terrifically propulsive and fully realized across his kit, plus extras — "Choo Choo" opening *The People's Mixtape* (★★★★½ 22:02) is a classic percussion piece, comparable to *On The Corner* or Tony Williams' "Some Hip Drum Sh\*t." It leads into "The Beat Up," with McCraven syncing in a busy samba-like rhythm with excellent vibist Joel Ross. Enter



Makaya McCraven's *Off The Record* comes as either four EPs or one double album.

Jeremiah Chiu on modular synth and trumpeter Marquis Hill with a hard-boiled breakout: brilliantly employing a chorus? Electric bassist Junius Paul, as confident and lively as James Jamerson, Michael Henderson and Jamaaladeen Tacuma, keeps them on their toes.

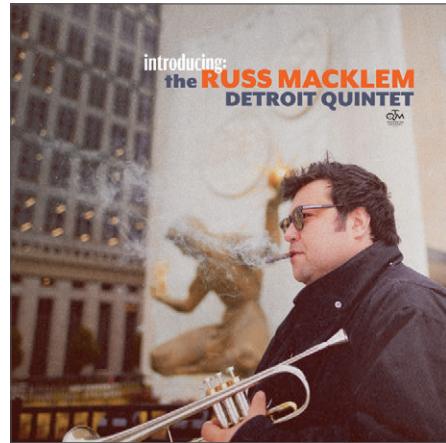
This is jazz. But so is "Lake Shore Drive Five," though it comes on with glistening arpeggios akin to Terry Riley's and Steve Reich-like phase-patterned vibes, against horn fanfare, rattles and a full-out traps onslaught. This EP is most the adventurous of the four, entirely performed and processed in 2025..

*Hidden Out!* (★★★★ 23:15) is at base McCraven drumming with Paul on double bass and Jeff Parker on guitar ("Battleship" and "Away" showcase his melodicism, "Dark Parks" his skronk) in 2017, McCraven going all out with Hill, Paul and saxophonist Josh Johnson from a week earlier on "Awaze," which I nominate for the single. "News Feed," introduced by a cookin' McCraven, should be the B-side. Again, he enhanced recorded material by editing, composing and overdubbing on keys, synths, vibes, percussion and guitar — a process completed between 2017 and 2015.

*PopUp Shop* (★★★★½ 21:41) is the oldest of the live performances here, with Parker on guitar, Benjamin J. Shepherd, bass guitar and Justin Thomas, vibes, from September 2015. It's also the oldest here of McCraven's processed works, or "collages," as the day after the gig he'd added keys and synths (maybe the throbbing pitches hovering bee-like through the end of "Los Gatos"?).

Heard straight through, *Off The Record* unfolds so readily, one can be lulled to take for granted the spectrum of moods evoked, from urgency to dreaminess, and the complex jigsaw puzzles McCraven constructs. But don't miss the trees for the forest. There's a lot here. Next-gen jazz, wide open, here and now. **DB**

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



## Russ Macklem Introducing The Russ Macklem Detroit Quintet

TQM

★★★★½

Trumpeter Russ Macklem is a Canadian who embodies the grit, grind and eloquence of Detroit jazz musicians. Like Detroiters Marcus Belgrave and Barry Harris, Macklem has spirit and fierceness, which comes across seamlessly on his second album, *Introducing The Russ Macklem Detroit Quintet*. His debut, *The South Detroit Connection*, was a raw live recording; this sophomore outing recreates that energy, but in a more polished studio version, comprising seven original compositions marvelously executed by his new Detroit-based quintet with alto saxophonist Kasan Belgrave, pianist Jordan Anderson, drummer Louis Jones III and bassist Noah Jackson.

Every tune hits personally for the trumpeter. From the first notes of "The Coyote pt. 1," Macklem showcases the tender side of his composing with Anderson's melancholy piano intro leading to his piercing trumpet solo, combining both hurt and perseverance.

As a Canadian with deep Detroit connections, Macklem also pays tribute to both his hometown and his new home. "Nostalgia: For A Past Life" is a standout ballad expressing the sadness of Macklem never being able to return to the life he knew as a child. It's reflective, wistful, rooted in memory; Macklem's tone is especially beautiful, and Belgrave's alto adds warmth.

"Theme For Detroit," the heart of the album, pays homage to the city's jazz legacy and channeling its indomitable spirit. There's no end to how hard the band swings. Macklem makes a clarion statement with this album: This is jazz steeped in the Detroit tradition, but alive in the present moment. —Veronica Johnson

**Introducing The Russ Macklem Detroit Quintet:** The Coyote pt. 1: I Will Persevere; Nostalgia: For A Past Life; Theme For Detroit; O.K. Valley; Mr. Anderson; The Coyote pt. 2. (41:55)

**Personnel:** Russ Macklem, trumpet; Kasan Belgrave, alto saxophone; Jordan Anderson, piano; Noah Jackson, bass; Louis Jones III, drums.

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



## Shoko Nagai's Forbidden Flowers

INFREQUENT SEAMS

★★★★

Japanese keyboardist and composer Shoko Nagai has charged an impressive group of collaborators with executing some highly complex music on this album. The quartet includes trumpeter Pamela Fleming, whose range runs from jazz to klezmer to reggae; violinist Pauline Kim Harris, best known as half of the avant-garde duo String Noise; and drummer Kate Gentile, a fixture of Brooklyn's jazz avant-garde who also loves death metal.

It would be an unorthodox instrumental palette even if Nagai was sticking to acoustic piano, but she doesn't; she rolls out a battery of keyboards and noisemaking devices ranging from Fender Rhodes to literal toys and uses them to create sounds that whiz, ping, squiggle and caper, like a cross between Hiromi Uehara's explosive prog fusion and the 1980s Synclavier experiments of Frank Zappa.

Everyone else is playing on the same level. Fleming offers everything from rippling fanfares to extended technique wheezes and puffs, while Harris's violin is sometimes a perfect harmony instrument and other times a gentle pluck and still other times a shrieking wet cat, and Gentile's percussion ranges from soft cymbal washes and subtle ticks and clatter to thundering art-rock beats. But the music, even as it leaps energetically from one idea to another, with some tracks lasting as little as 80 seconds, has a surprising amount of romanticism and sweep. It's almost grandiose at times, but also has a strange intimacy and precise focus that's mesmerizing.

—Phil Freeman

**Forbidden Flowers:** Three Years On A Stone; Breathing; Pineal Gland; The Future Is An Endless Series Of Blessings; Beyond The Crimson Border; Whispering To The Bubbling Wall; What Are The Hidden Things Of Life; The Cinderella's Crystal Chord; Find Treasure For The Secret Beyond The Veil; Hello Universe; Forbidden Flowers. (37:45)

**Personnel:** Shoko Nagai, piano, Farfisa organ, Moog synthesizer, Fender Rhodes electric piano, Nintendo DS, electronics; Pauline Kim Harris, violin; Pam Fleming, trumpet; Kate Gentile, drums and percussion.

**Ordering Info:** [infrequentseams.bandcamp.com](http://infrequentseams.bandcamp.com)

**Songs for Mbizo**  
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## Pierre Dørge Songs For Mbizo (Johnny Lives Forever)

STEEPLECHASE

★★★

Danish guitarist Pierre Dørge is so thoroughly identified with his 10-piece New Jungle Orchestra that finding him in a stripped-down, one-horn format like this can throw one for a loop. Push through it. *Songs For Mbizo* is a delight, as brimful of melodies as it is with Dørge's quirks.

A quartet with cornetist Kirk Knuffke (a frequent collaborator), bassist Thommy Andersson and drummer Martin Andersen (the orchestra's regular rhythm section), the album features the compositions of South African bassist Johnny "Mbizo" Dyani, another regular collaborator of Dørge's before his passing in 1986. (The album's subtitle, *Johnny Lives Forever*, references 1987's *Johnny Lives*, the album Dørge made to mark Dyani's death.)

Mbizo loved a good melody almost as much

as he loved a good groove, and the album suitably abounds in both. Not always at the same time, mind you; the gallop of "Heart With Minors Face," for one, is a far greater concern than a memorable tune, while "Embrace" takes a minute-and-a-half to even get to the rhythm. For each of these, though, there's a "Year Of The Child," where the Andersson's sly funk contains the melodic core, or two versions of "Song For Biko," on which Dørge and Knuffke serve up the hooks in both brisk swing and slow lope.

Title and composer credits notwithstanding, *Songs For Mbizo* sounds less like Dyani's music and more like Dørge's. The guitarist's sound is flush with African rhythmic, harmonic and textural concepts in its own right — it's what made Dyani such a complementary force — so even a tune called "Jo'burg-New York" fits his aesthetic without feeling like an affectation. Add in the Dørge-flavored guitar, with its thick, slightly abrasive chords and a sliver of distortion, and Knuffke's warm cornet pitch bends (and maybe it's the context, but he evokes Hugh Masakela here), and fans of the Dane's previous music will be right at home.

The album's highlight is "Year Of The Child." Andersson establishes a gentle, bobbing rhythm that Andersen illuminates with his toms and cymbals, while Knuffke renders the melody such that it manages to allude to both "Organ Grinder's Swing" and Albert Ayler's "Ghosts." Dørge evinces an impossibly light touch that makes his solo delectable.

—Michael J. West

**Songs For Mbizo:** Wish You Sunshine; Song For Biko; Confession Of Moods; Jo'Burg-New York; Embrace; Year Of The Child; Heart With Minor's Face; Blues For Ba Dick; All In All; Song For Biko. (58:45)

**Personnel:** Pierre Dørge, guitar; Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Thommy Andersson, bass; Martin Andersen, drums.

**Ordering Info:** [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk)

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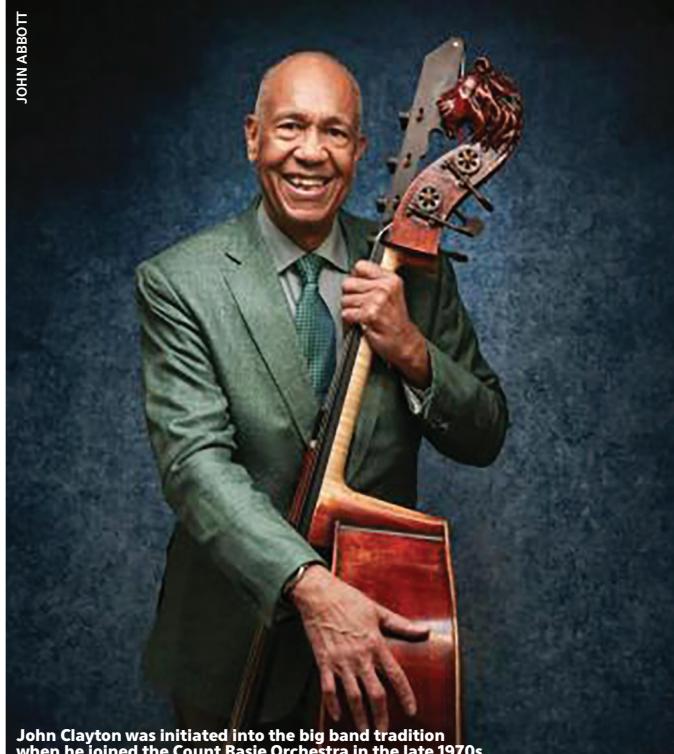
# FOR THE LOVE OF BIG BANDS

BY TERRY PERKINS

The popularity of big band music might have peaked in the 1930s and '40s, but despite the many changes on the jazz scene brought about by bebop, fusion and other influential genres, large-ensemble jazz continues to have appeal for listeners and players alike.



The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra recently celebrated its 40th year.



John Clayton was initiated into the big band tradition when he joined the Count Basie Orchestra in the late 1970s.

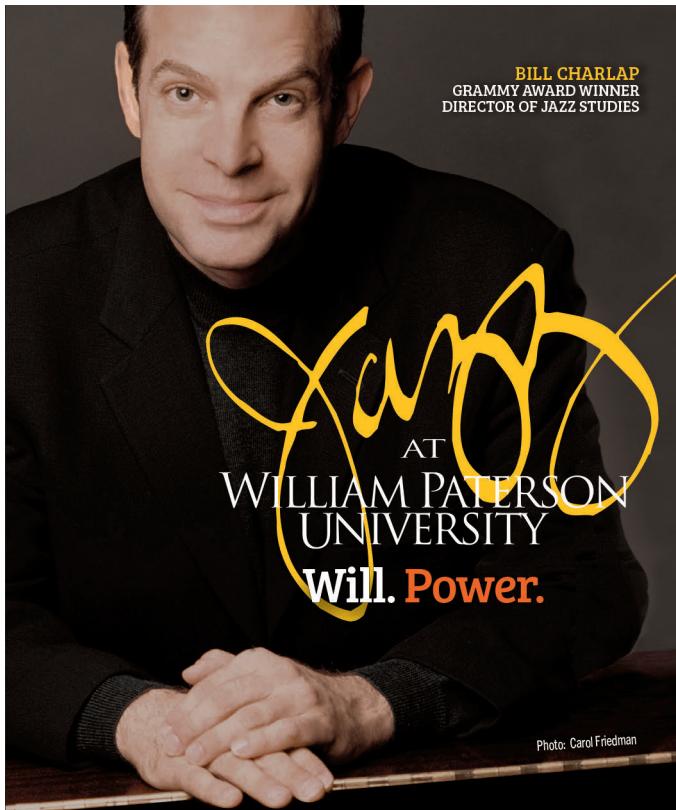


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In fact, groups such as the Maria Schneider Orchestra, Darcy James Argue's Secret Society, Christian McBride's Big Band, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and up-and-coming bands like the Jihye Lee Orchestra, Ingrid Laubrock's Orchestra and the Royal Krunk Jazz Orchestra underscore the continued contribution — and evolution — of big bands on today's jazz scene. DownBeat recently spoke with several big band leaders as well as musicians who play in contemporary large ensembles to discuss their continued appeal and the elements that contribute to a big band's success.

### JOHN CLAYTON

Renowned bassist, composer, arranger and co-leader of the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra for the past four decades, John Clayton was initiated into the big band tradition when he joined the Count Basie Orchestra in the late 1970s.

"Like many musicians, my first experience with big bands was in high school," he recalled. "After graduating from Indiana University, I played with Monty Alexander's Trio, then joined Basie. Those were wonderful years and a great training ground for me. It introduced me to that amazing level

of community that can exist in a big band. That's when I began doing a lot of writing for the band. I'd never taken writing classes or lessons, I just dove into the deep end of the pool. The guys in the band stomached my sad-ass charts until I got a handle on things."

Clayton then played with the Amsterdam Philharmonic Orchestra before moving to Los Angeles in 1985 and starting the Clayton-Hamilton Orchestra with drummer Jeff Hamilton — his best friend from college — and John's brother, Jeff Clayton.

"Jeff had lived in L.A. the whole time and knew the best people to call," said Clayton. "It was my responsibility to write the music and Jeff's to handle the finances. So as I liked to remind Jeff, he didn't have a damn thing to do for a long time! But we just celebrated the orchestra's 40th year, and my main focus next year is writing for Clayton-Hamilton. We have fun with the things we're playing, but it's not expanding quickly enough for me. We always have to keep fresh music coming in. Over the next couple years, we're going to do that."

"Big band has always been a really meaningful part of my heart and my love for music. When you're part of a big band or starting one, you need to have a concept, and what it's going to be stylistically. Basically, you've got to really love it, period. That's the common denominator. You find players that are like-minded. Then it feels more like a family than a collection of musicians reading black dots on paper. Number one, it's the music — you're not getting paid a lot of money in a big band. Everyone in the band is congregating because of the music."

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Christine Jensen

Jazz Orchestra and the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra. She played piano in her high school jazz band, then switched to cello. But her love of big bands didn't really blossom until she was enrolled in community college and met jazz pianist, composer and arranger Bill Potts.

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Dave Pietro

"Bill took me to hear the Basie Band, and it clicked that I needed to do that," explained Pilzer. "But instead of a clean switch to bass from cello, I decided to play saxophone and started on alto. Chuck Redd, who Bill was also mentoring, hooked me up with the community college big band, and I started by subbing on baritone sax. It was love at first honk. And I ended up going to Berklee."

After graduation, Pilzer earned master's degrees in jazz studies and saxophone performance at the University of Maryland and a doctorate degree from George Mason. After hearing the DIVA Jazz Orchestra several times live, Pilzer decided that was the band she wanted to join.

"Basically, I stalked the band," she said. "I knew I'd be a good fit in their style, so I sent a demo to them, and whenever I was on a CD, I'd send them a copy. I'd go see them live when I could. A band leader can't hire you if they don't know you exist. Finally, they called me for a gig, but I wasn't available. I thought they'd never call again, but they did, and my first gig with them was on bari. But I didn't play bari again for quite some time. Instead, I bounced around the sax section subbing as needed. So that became part of my value with Diva. I was reliable, I'd work on the music, I'd show up on time and they could pop me in anywhere in the section. And now on every gig with DIVA, I play bari."

"If you find a band that would be a great fit, and if you get a call to play for them, remember — treat every gig you do as important," concludes Pilzer. "When you get the music for the gig — do your homework. And one last piece of advice. Three words: *Bring a pencil.*"



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### CHRISTINE JENSEN

Saxophonist, composer and bandleader Christine Jensen has achieved critical acclaim for both her quartet and her Jazz Orchestra recordings *Treelines* (2011), *Habitat* (2014) and *Harbour* (2024). Both *Treelines* and *Harbour* won the Juno Award for Contemporary Album of the Year. She earned her bachelor's and master's of music degrees at McGill University in Montreal and now teaches at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Born and raised in Nanaimo on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Jensen and her sisters Ingrid and Janet all played music from an early age.

"In addition to playing in school bands, there was a local big band with a lot of seasoned musicians that played classics like 'Pennsylvania 6-5000' at the Moose Lodge," recalls Jensen. "They asked me to play baritone sax, and being part of that great big band musical machine was so much fun, it really fueled a passion in me."

After high school, Jensen attended McGill, where she played in large ensembles as well as with community big bands, developing her chops in the sax section and as a section leader.

"It wasn't something you did for money — it was for the love of the music and being able to play together and make that group sound," said Jensen. "I knew I had this music in my head I needed to get out there, and that spurred me on. I started running my own big band in 2005 with Montreal musicians — working on my own music."

Over the course of her acclaimed Jazz Orchestra recordings, Jensen has relied on a core group of Montreal musicians, adding special guests such as her sister Ingrid on trumpet. Now that she's teaching at Eastman, Jensen also gets to work with students in a big band setting.

"I love to share with my students the process I've gone through and work to put together a very high-level band with them," she explained. "All I ask is that they bring in their very best game and accept the challenge of making improvements as we go. I just hope I'm challenging them and that at the end of the day we're playing repertoire well. It's very different for me because it's sourcing repertoire outside my own music. So I bring the skills I've learned to the students and try to keep an open sensibility of contemporary themes, as well as working on the tradition and the beauty of it all."

#### DAVE PIETRO

Saxophonist Dave Pietro has released a string of well-crafted small group recordings as a leader, but his resume as a member of outstanding big bands is impressive — and extensive. That resume includes a lengthy membership in the Maria Schneider Orchestra, as well as Darcy James Argue's Secret Society, the Gil Evans Project and regular appearances with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. Pietro played with the Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra for more than two decades, and has also performed in the bands of Maynard Ferguson, Lionel Hampton and Woody Herman.

Pietro grew up hearing his father's collection of big band records, and he's been a fan ever since. He played in high school bands and the University of New Hampshire band before transferring to North Texas State (now the

University of North Texas) and playing and recording with the famed One O'Clock Lab Band there.

"The sound of all these human beings playing together in a big band is just glorious," said Pietro. "Then you add the excitement of hearing the individual voices of musicians come through in solos. As human beings, both of those things are vitally important to us. We need to feel part of a musical community, and we need to be heard as individuals and express ourselves on a per-

sonal level. When I can be part of a community like that — that's when I'm happiest."

Over the course of several decades, Pietro has noticed changing trends in the number of young musicians interested in big bands — as well as changes in the way solos are approached.

"I teach at NYU, and many of our students here are not as interested in playing in big bands," he said. "It's too bad because if you're a horn player, getting into a big band is a great way to network. But there are also many young

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players interested in doing it. I just played a gig in New Jersey with Helen Sung's big band, and the average age in the trumpet section was in the mid-20s and they were mostly female. So young players keep coming.

"These days, I play in bands where there is a lot of room for solo interpretation, and other bands that are mostly about execution of the notes on the page. I enjoy the challenges of both."

#### **TED NASH**

Alto saxophonist Ted Nash is best known for his 25-plus year tenure in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, but his resume also includes work with the bands of Lionel Hampton, Louie Bellson, Quincy Jones, Don Ellis, Gerry Mulligan and the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra. Nash won two Grammy Awards for his big band recording *Presidential Suite* and has composed music for two other big band albums, *Chakra* and *Portrait In Seven Shades* with the LCJO.

He also has more than a dozen small group recordings to his credit, but big bands have always attracted him.

"When I started playing professionally, big bands were kind of a love-hate relationship," he recalled. "When you're younger you go through identity crises — you think, 'I want to be a soloist, I want to be a star, I want exposure.' But as you get older you begin to realize — and I certainly have — that big bands are jazz's orchestral tradition. Over time, we've lost something in the way that musicians play together as an ensemble, like the sense of playing in balance, being in agreement and listening to each other."

"Now we're keeping that tradition alive and finding new ways to use the jazz orchestra to be expressive. I think it's a very exciting time for big bands."

Over the course of his musical career, Nash has expanded his palette from playing in big bands led by others and recording smaller ensembles under his own name to leading his own big bands. In the beginning, he found that leadership role challenging.

"Leading a big band can be daunting," he explains. "You're standing up in front of your peers, many of them great composers and musicians, and you're asking them to play your music."

"At first, you're a little insecure. Why are they here? Why am I so lucky to have these musicians playing my music? Then you realize that by playing in big bands we develop the ability to respect other's music and offer our services in ways that keep this music alive. Big bands represent a sense of community and harmoniousness. We have to drop our egos at the door, learn how to be flexible and how to respect each other."

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It is the vibratory activity of humans that is the hope of mankind, according to Kenny Werner.

# AI Performance for AI Audience

With the advent of AI, we may not have to focus our identities on our "level" of performance. No matter how great or amazing it is, AI will replicate it. And that's only for the present. In the future, we can expect that AI will greatly exceed anything humans can do. Why is that good news? Because of the Effortless Mastery side of the equation.

What is Effortless Mastery? Effortless Mastery is liberating the body from the mind and liberating the mind from the ego.

Now, if you liberate the body from the mind, why would you have to liberate the mind from the ego? Because a mind riddled with ego will not let the body play!

So now we have to ask, what's that all about? Well, trace it to the normal methods

of determining one's identity. What we do. In other words, we are what we do, or so we've been programmed to believe.

That means if your identity is, "I am a good musician," you're fine. But if your identity is "I am not a good musician," it could feel like a life of disappointment. And that's because the reason for playing has been misguided from the start.

One is drawn to play music because of how much one loves to play, but whether it be the result of parenting style, social or peer pressure, the effect of schools and especially music colleges, society encourages us to become increasingly aware of how well we play. The mind asks, am I a good player? Am I a good person? These values get confused with each other and as the ego dominates the mind

with its priorities. That is why it's necessary to liberate the mind from the ego. (At least for moments at a time.)

## Perceive Your Essence

Focusing on one's value as a musician or a person is a misuse of the gift of music. This develops what I call sonic narcissism. Now that we have technology that can mimic or even better the human product, it's an opportunity not to look at music as a product, but a path.

The introduction of tone to the human body causes a modulation of its vibratory nature. As the vibrations trend upwards in frequency, one is feeling, perhaps a muting of self-identification, and a palpable sense of spirit, the essence of the soul and all the sympathetic vibrations.

Moving their awareness from the preservation of flesh and bone to the resonance of vibration could very well change the course of history. Therefore, without focusing on one's "level," one begins to perceive their "essence" through the production of tone.

Since it is so persuasive to rate the musician's life by his level of play, he misses the true gift, vibratory transmutation; the production of happiness, an elevation from self-conscious to super-conscious focus; the Universal Mind.

This internal production of happiness, this inner elevation, is in fact the alchemy that authentically elevates the vibratory level of the listeners. As a lightbulb must vibrate internally in order to produce light externally, so too do humans have that potential functionality.

## Let the Body Play

It really is "Musician, heal thyself." Since we know from the mystics of the East, the Sufis and alike that elevating one's consciousness can be achieved by the repetition of one note — the root, the *sa* in Indian music, or two notes produced by the tamboura — we know that the gift is not dependent on what we achieve so much as what we surrender to. It doesn't relate in any way to virtuosity, though in the earthly sense that is undoubtedly attractive.

But the Kingdom of Heaven on earth doesn't belong to the virtuosos, or even music stylists. Not if one can (and one can) achieve nirvana with the patient sustain of one or two notes. If the musician connects with their voice, hands, embouchure or hands and feet and allow those parts of the anatomy to flourish through absolute trust, flesh becomes

imbued with intelligence. One literally lets the body play.

And as evidence that the Universe has compassion, when one renders their performance with absolute trust, they play better! How about that? By aligning with deeper connections to the Self, one even gets closer to the ego's goal. They actually play better, more flowing, mistakes are fun and so forth.

It is the vibratory activity of humans that is the hope of mankind. AI merely takes the sense (or pressure) of final product out of the equation. For all the great and inspiring artists we value and cherish, an overwhelming amount of souls marginalize themselves by comparison. Many souls who are self-professed musicians, amateurs, professionals, people playing for fun, family bands and alike may assume a subliminal inferiority. It breeds all sorts of ills: can't bring themselves to practice, rationalizing or overanalyzing a performance, or fear that you can't return to an instrument where you left at 11 years old.

Without ego, one can begin again this very day. You see, if the journey of music is an internal one, the musician can never fail. The ego is severely weakened because trust is not established by the belief one will play well. True trust rises within the body and mind when one acknowledges they may play well or badly, but their Spirit is unaffected.

### Trust Your Sound

Humans have a tremendous opportunity to take their focus off of the more shallow form of identity: how good am I.

The musicians we admire may not suffer so much from this because they have achieved worldly success. Not to say that they're rich or famous, but everyone admires their playing. This is the hope and dreams of all egos. (Of course, rich and famous would be a nice accompaniment!)

But try to understand that the trust in your sound comes from the certainty that every sound you make is the most beautiful sound there is; this is the stuff of spirituality, of spirit, not of weights and measurements. If there is a God, he she or they gave us yet another simple instrument to elevate earth to the level of heaven; sound, vibration, the committing of tone. And then through the gift of a human brain, sound can be organized into music.

If success is defined as the playing, the doing of music, we are liberated from our self-imposed limitations. I find that to be the true spirituality. When failure is a success, we are in spirit. Or as I like to say, there is this, and there is that, and when that becomes this, they will only be this.

### To Play Is To Succeed

Just as the past is a drag on the present and the future engenders fear, we strip away the notion of failure because to play is to succeed, because to play is to receive. Watch the hands play with trust, knowing that the hands play better without the imperative, without the judging, weighing and measuring. If this is and has always been the goal, the evolution of ego through tone into spirit, no one can fail.

Does it upset the concept of entertainment? Absolutely. We haven't gone far enough with the technology of AI yet.

Let AI marvel at its own accomplishments. Perhaps the next step is an AI audience to appreciate an AI performance. That would let us off the hook completely. Music made by robots for robots. And for us, let the music do what it may have been intended to do: elevate the spirit of the player, and therefore elevate the vibration of the audience.

"AI performance for AI audience" can spiral to infinity and leave us with our truth: the incredible joy of playing.

Amen.

## 'SOUL AND SCIENCE': DOCUMENTING ME AND MY MUSIC

**W**hen the celebrated author, composer and filmmaker Robert Fritz came to me with a proposal to create a documentary, I was at first hesitant.

There is much video available everywhere of me teaching the concepts from my book, *Effortless Mastery*, which has inspired thousands of people to help them rise above ego and find their voice in music. I really did not feel motivated to see an entire documentary of my teachings or my writings. In some ways, my shallower self would say under its breath, "Hey, I can actually play. I can compose, I wasn't born a teacher, author or speaker!"

But Robert said to me, "I don't care about your teaching or your book, I think your music is great and I want to do a documentary on you and your music."

I thought, "Yeah, I'm in!" Many of my favorite musicians and composers have come and gone and, due to the sheer impossibility of numbers, were not documented for future generations to learn from, savor and enjoy. Or just to be able to look back and say, "Yeah, I did that." So it is with tremendous gratitude that I thank Robert Fritz, the director and conceiver of this documentary film project, titled *Soul and Science: The Music Of Kenny Werner* (Long Productions).

Robert is and has been one of my mentors in how to negotiate this life of ours, and one of the things I respect most about him is that if he decides he wants to do something, he just does it. The confidence or balance that that kind of action requires is something most of us could learn a lot from.

One of the aspects of the documentary that makes me so grateful (and at the same time had me cringing) was the people he had lined up to speak about me and my music. A person can focus more on the mistakes he's made and perhaps not take in the love that people have had for him.

Then one has to evolve to the point where one can receive it, where one can feel they deserve a documentary. At the same time, I want to start a fund to do 100 documentaries on the musicians society missed. And what a loss! I remember I was just trudging through YouTube one day and I happened onto a documentary on Jaki Byard. I consider Jaki to be an unknown saint, and certainly my patron saint. Jaki was a virtuoso like few could claim, and he would display his virtuosity so naturally that people didn't realize what they were watching and hearing. At least not enough people. It didn't help Jaki that he had a great sense of humor about all of it, his gigantic talent as well. This made people tend to marginalize rather than appreciate him. I could relate to this so much because I, too, never took the whole music/art thing too seriously. To the public, that may translate into the belief that the artist is not serious. Well, I encourage everyone within earshot of this article to go to YouTube and look up "Anything For Jazz," the Jaki Byard documentary. It's a funky, not terribly well-done document to Jaki's life and music. And I hope you'll also appreciate *Soul and Science: The Music Of Kenny Werner* (he said, with still a trace of embarrassment).

DB

ROBERTFRITZ.COM



Robert Fritz

Pianist, composer, educator and author Kenny Werner is Artistic Director of the Effortless Mastery Institute at Berklee College of Music. Visit him online at [kennywerner.com](http://kennywerner.com).



Antonio J. García dispenses valuable advice on how to achieve your goals more quickly and be happier in the long run.

## Organizing Short-Term & Long-Term Goals

We have all met individuals who could not capitalize on the opportunities that had come their way to expand their satisfaction with their career and/or life. We may have been, or may still be, that person. During my 30-plus years teaching music industry courses, I coached my students as to how to accelerate the path towards their goals; but during my full-time teaching career I refrained from writing an article on the topic. After all, my role was to help my students surpass the competition.

Now that I am not focused on any one institution, I'd like to share my own ideas on this important subject. Perhaps the steps I outline below might assist you in capturing the most satisfaction out of your life, regardless of your occupation. Your goal is your happiness.

Helpful tip: Supplemental materials for this article, in addition to the unabridged text, can be found on my website, at [garciamusic.com/educator/articles/articles.html](http://garciamusic.com/educator/articles/articles.html).

### STEP 1: Self-Assessment

Prepare a prioritized list illustrating how you currently spend your waking time in an average week, ranked from most time to least. Typical entries might include such things as work, practice, classes and/or study (or one overriding career goal that encompasses those);

being with family; relaxing with friends; being active in your chosen institutions (church, community); having alone-time; and the like. Be as accurate as possible. List as few as five entries but no more than 10, and attach a percentage of your time to each that totals 100%. (This may take a couple of drafts and revisions, but the end result should look like Figure 1 shown in the online version of this article.)

Done? Now prepare a list illustrating what activities or goals you believe — regardless of time spent — are truly most important to you, ranked from most important to least. Entries might include any or all of the categories you've listed above, but add or substitute others below if they don't show up above yet are important to you. *Your goals should include the elements in life that would contribute most to your happiness.* Again, list as few as five but no more than 10 and attach a percentage of your importance to each that totals 100%. (See online Figure 2.)

Now compare the two (which might look like online Figure 3). Some food for thought:

- What does this comparison tell you?
- Does how you spend your time reflect what's most important to you? *Your goals should include the elements in life that would contribute most to your happiness.*
- If your time spent does not reflect your important goals, why not? Are you lying to

yourself about what's most important to you, just listing "important" topics that you think you or others want to hear? Be honest.

• Perhaps you already knew that your average week is out of balance. But how long do you expect it to be so before you re-balance it: weeks, months, years? It's common to compromise your balance for a period of time to address a specific goal over another. But for how long?

There's nothing wrong with making the most relaxing, non-constructive use of your time — if that truly matches your goals. If so, you should be a very happy person. But if you're frustrated at not achieving your goals and have discovered that you're not devoting anywhere near proportionate time to those goals, you now know a lot more about why you're frustrated. It's not so much that you haven't met your goals yet. What really frustrates you is that you've been concealing from yourself that you're not applying yourself towards your most important goals. People who have not yet achieved their goals while heartily pursuing them are typically happier than people who have goals but don't work sufficiently towards them.

### STEP 2: Self-Banking

A common phrase applicable to many challenges is "time and money." To attain a typical goal, you often need some combination of time and money. And here's how you attain them to a reasonable, useful degree:

• Repeat the following several thousand times: "I may have little control at the moment as to how much money I make. But I have much more control over how much I spend." How much money you make is of no use if you're not able to spend it towards a goal. After all, *your goals should include the elements in life that would contribute to your happiness.*

• Repeat the following as many times: "I will pay myself first." You pay your rent, your electric bill, your credit-card bill. Do you pay yourself? Do you allot money out of your income to give to yourself, to your savings? Why are you paying the shop online or at the mall, the local bar, the hi-tech store all your money for things that don't fit your goals? Put yourself before the material goods and luxurious services you might want.

• Pay yourself time first, as well as money. Just as you can allocate your income, you can allocate your time. *Time is valuable.* Spend it where it does you good; save it as it benefits you; invest it wisely.

### STEP 3: Self-Limitation

"OK, great. I'm convinced I can reallocate my time and money in a way that will make me happier — and might even allow me to relax as

much or more in the ways I ultimately want. But how do I go from the motivational rah-rah to a plan that will get me moving directly toward my goals?"

Most people kick themselves for not being able to plan well. But in my opinion, most people could plan really well. The problem is merely that they can't keep it all in their heads. Here's how to do it.

First, allow me to share with you what someone (I know not who) probably centuries ago realized is the life cycle of any idea, project or goal. See the life cycle diagram at right.

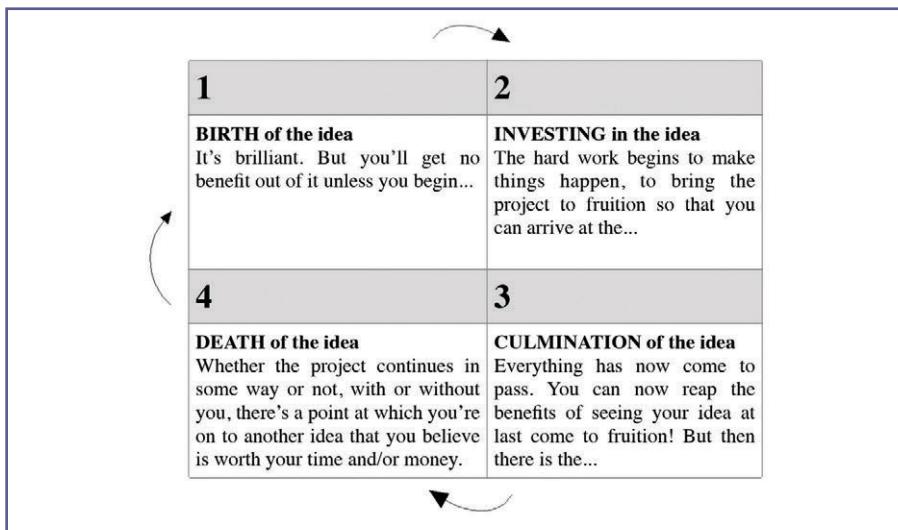
So you return to Phase 1 in the above cycle, but with another goal or project in mind. And you get that rolling into Phase 2 or maybe Phase 3, by which time you've got another great idea, which enters Phase 1 while other projects are already into Phases 2, 3 or 4 — and so on. Before long, you've got a dozen important goals underway, each seemingly at different micro-phases of the above "life cycle." Now, who can keep all that going in their head? Not I. But I can still get the projects done. And so can you, but not by overloading your brain. You need a plan — and you need some paper or a device; or else your head might explode.

#### STEP 4: Self-Organization

Take another look at your earlier list of what's most important to you. Think about those and make a list of related goals (some perhaps exactly as on that list, some perhaps a subset of an element on that list) according to which you believe you should be attempting to accomplish in the shorter-term (say, within a month or less) and which you want to achieve in the longer-term. Then add your targeted completion date, perhaps something like "two weeks from now" or "two years from now," or, better yet, showing the actual resulting date. (Your list might look like online Figure 4.)

Select one of your long-term goals, one that you expect means you'll have to achieve a half-dozen or so mini-goals or steps along the way in order to get the ultimate goal done on time. If your big goal is 18 months from now, you'll have to accomplish smaller step-goals by one, three, six, 10, 14 and 17 months from now. You're going to need those step-goal dates in your calendar.

But that's not enough. How many times have you arrived at a date on your calendar, found a deadline, and thought, "Darn! I didn't prepare for this deadline. I should have thought of this two weeks ago — or a month ago." Exactly! So you're going to need some "warning" notations in your calendar in the weeks preceding each of those step-goals so that you can think ahead to your deadlines in time. This type of "backdated calendar" is the most essential part of my own planning and success. And I'm betting that if you do it, you will find that you will arrive unpre-



pared at far fewer deadlines. You might even be prepared for all of them.

Now, remember the "life cycle of an idea" and how you'll have multiple projects going, each at their own stage of development in the life cycle? So you're going to have multiple goals in your calendar, each with its own step-goals — and each of those with their own warnings. And this backdated calendar is how you can keep the ball rolling on many simultaneous projects without feeling as though you have to keep it all straight in your head.

In this digital age, you can make entries in a computerized calendar, such as "DEADLINE: submit grant app!" E-copy that text and e-paste it backwards into a warning-date's entry, adding, say, "2 weeks to," resulting in "2 weeks to DEADLINE: submit grant app!" You can then e-copy that text and e-paste it further backwards into a warning-date's entry a total of four weeks previous to the deadline, then changing only the initial digit, resulting in "4 weeks to DEADLINE: submit grant app!" It saves you a lot of time not to have to re-type everything. You can also do this manually on a regular paper calendar.

So, let's review sample entries that might result from just one project: the one we mentioned where your big goal is in 18 months; and in order to get there, you have to accomplish smaller step-goals by one, three, six, 10, 14 and 17 months from now. Let's say it's a grant application; and let's assume that today is Jan. 1, with an application deadline of July 1 the following year.

See Figure 5 on my web site. You might need more warnings; you might need fewer. But I think you can see what I'm getting at. Can you imagine trying to keep all that in your head? But if it seems simple, remember that you also have such step-goals and warnings in your calendar for all your other projects. That's complex; but you'll find that you have measured out your overlapping plans in a doable fashion — and you

can wake up every day with an instant agenda as to what you need to do in order to accomplish your most important goals in life.

You can spend your life thinking about how challenging or even terrifying it is not to have achieved your goals yet or have known where your future lies. Or you can do your job, which is to accomplish steps towards those goals. By waking up each day with an agenda that will bring you closer to fulfillment, you're not thinking so much about how nervous you are: you're focusing on the task at hand. And if today's task means a well-earned morning or day off, well, so much the better for having budgeted the time to make that happen.

This process of breaking down a big project into goals, step-goals, warnings and then back-dating a calendar makes what I do possible. If you look at my datebook, you'll see such "warning" reminders all over it — plus many overlapping goals, step-goals and warnings related to different projects.

That's how I stay organized and on task to meet my goals.

#### Epilogue

I'm not egotistical enough to suggest that I'm the only one who can offer you useful tips like these. But I am savvy enough to know that many of your competitors can't imagine — or won't choose to accomplish — the steps I've outlined for you here. I am confident that if you apply these techniques, you will achieve your goals more quickly and be happier along the way — because *your goals should include the elements in life that would contribute most to your happiness.*

DB

Antonio J. García is a performer, composer, arranger, producer, clinician, educator and author in both instrumental and vocal genres. He is a Professor Emeritus and the former Director of Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. His books include *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers* (Kjos Music) and *Jazz Improvisation: Practical Approaches to Grading* (Meredith Music). Visit his website at [garciamusic.com](http://garciamusic.com).

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Alexa Tarantino's improvisation takes the listener on quite a journey — a magnificent way to tell a story.

# Alexa Tarantino's Alto Sax Solo on 'The Roar And The Whisper'

There's a lot to unpack in Alexa Tarantino's solo from the title track of her latest album, *The Roar And The Whisper* (Blue Engine), but first, an apology: The tune is in concert A♭ minor, which makes for a horrendous key signature. (If we had transposed it for alto saxophone, it'd be in F minor). It also means we have to use the deadly double-flat in places.

Why would Tarantino use such a difficult key? Well, you'd have to ask her, but I feel it's nice to hear different keys, as it adds variety to an album. Also, it shows her skill level to solo so fluently in a key that is considered

somewhat difficult.

This solo takes quite a journey. Let's look at range first. She starts out in the low register of the horn (another apology for all the ledger lines you'll have to deal with in concert pitch) but does a clever octave-displacement lick: ascending a step and then jumping into the next octave to descend a step. She repeats this idea two more times. At this point I'm already hooked.

She remains in the limited range defined by this lick until bar 6, at which point she starts to lead our ears up. The end of measure 8 has the intervals increasing, which ter-

minates in a high G♭, the highest pitch we've heard thus far. Tarantino leaves a well-placed pause here, before leading us back down. Then again back up to the downbeat of measure 19, where we hear a high A♭, a step higher than the previous high point.

Some points about this: This is the halfway point of her solo, and it is the beginning of the "second chorus" (the chord progression repeats but with a different ending, so not truly a second chorus but creates the impression of one). This makes it a great place to present a climax. Also, she precedes this high point with large intervals, just like she

did to the G $\flat$ , setting it up.

And just like before, Tarantino continues down into the lower register, but lower than before. All the way to a low F $\flat$  in bar 25, which we haven't heard since the first few measures. Then, instead of gradually leading us back up, Tarantino changes tactics and runs from this low range up to the high A $\flat$  in a single bar (bar 26). To keep this energy up (or possibly to make sure none of us missed it) she does the same thing two bars later, except this time leading from a low F natural to a high B $\flat$ , extending the range another whole step.

This is as high as she goes, and is about halfway through this second “chorus,” making it another good place for a climax. Then it’s a slow descent until the end. She ends on an Ab, which isn’t as low as where she started, but being the tonic it makes for a stronger resolution.

Then there is the rhythmic stuff. This tune is a slow swing feel, and Tarantino uses that to add to the drama. We hear eighth notes, triplets, 16ths, sextuplets and 32nds, but not in a straight line. Starting out with 16ths, but with a lot of space, and not hitting us with strings of 16ths until the end of bar 4. After a break in bar 5, she brings the rhythmic density back to triplets.

After hitting that first climax (the G $\flat$  at the beginning of measure 9) the rhythmic energy comes back even further to eighth notes. This provides a nice lull that dovetails with the drop in range that occurs here as well. But after a long rest from the end of bar 13 through the middle of 14, Tarantino skips over triplets and jumps right to 16ths, leading us toward the next climax. On the way to the large intervals that bring us to the high A $\flat$ , Tarantino decides to step up the rhythmic energy, but what do you do when you want to get more intense than 16ths but not go all the way to sextuplets? Quintuplets. Bars 17–18 are the only instances of this subdivision in this improvisation, with one exception.

After this second climax we have some quarter notes, rests and eighth notes, which really brings the energy down. But this time the respite isn't as long and she ratchets up the speed more quickly, with a half bar of 16ths (over the bar line) right into sextuplets, but with a run of 32nds. Only for half a beat, but this presages the resurgence of this rhythm later.

We also get a beat of quintuplets used to bridge from sextuplets to 16ths in bar 24. Before quintuplets were used to precede a climax, here it's being used to more smoothly bring us down from one.

And to get to the next one, she leaps straight into the foreshadowed 32nds. Bar 28, blurring from the low F of the previous mea-

sure to the high B♭ at its end (almost the full range of this improvisation), makes the previous culminations seem like teases (which, musically, they pretty much were). The vicissitudes that follow are all a way of tying up this statement and leading us gently into the ending melody.

We've already mentioned her intervallic approach, but take note of how it dovetails with these motions: from starting with those shifts in octave, to the increasing intervals in bar 8 leading up to the first climax, with a similar line of enlarging intervals over a static low note in bars 17 and 18 (joined with

the quintuplets) leading up to climax number two. Reintroducing large intervals in the middle of measure 24, which is sort of a fake-out to the seeming lead up in bar 26. With 16th notes, this doesn't carry the momentum of the other climaxes, and makes the actual climax two measures later seem more "authentic." What a magnificent way to tell a story. DB

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He can often be witnessed performing/rehearsing/teaching/pontificating online at [twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine](https://twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine). Find out more about Durso's music at [jimidurso.bandcamp.com](https://jimidurso.bandcamp.com).

Sheet music for a jazz piece, page 2. The music is in 4/4 time and starts with a bass line. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is 74 BPM. The piece begins with an A-flat major 7th chord (A-flat, C, E, G) at measure 1. The bass line consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Chords marked include D-flat major 7th (D-flat, F, A-flat, C), D major 7th (D, F-sharp, A, C), E-flat major 7th (E-flat, G, B-flat, D), A-flat major 7th (A-flat, C, E, G), G-flat major 7th (G-flat, B-flat, D, F), C major 7th (C, E, G, B-flat), B-flat major 7th (B-flat, D, F-sharp, A), A major 7th (A, C, E, G), and D major 7th (D, F-sharp, A, C). Performance markings include '3:02' at the beginning, '3' over groups of notes, '5' over groups of notes, '(b)' over some notes, and '6' over groups of notes. Measures 1-19 are shown, followed by a repeat sign and measures 23-35.

## P. Mauriat PMXA-67RBX & PMXT-66RBX Saxes

### Rolled-Tonehole Alto & Tenor Models with Free-Blowing Feel, Wide Dynamic Range

**P**. Mauriat's 20th anniversary PMXA-67RBX alto and PMXT-66RBX tenor saxophones were a hit when they were launched as part of a special limited-edition run at the 2023 NAMM Show. They easily sold out within their initial one-year production period, as professional and advancing student players were drawn to the free-blowing playability and huge tonal palette of the rolled-tone-hole instruments — which have a traditional Germanic bore with a slightly wider body tube flare, a bigger bow and a larger bell than French-bore saxophones. The horns' attractive price points, not to mention their cool black nickel plating and gold lacquer keywork, added to their uniqueness and significantly boosted their appeal.

Now, P. Mauriat continues the lineage of those 20th anniversary saxes with updated versions of the PMXA-67RBX (\$5,499 MAP) and PMXT-66RBX (\$6,499 MAP), which come with an upgraded Boston Sax Shop Accessories Kit that includes a box of five Boston Sax Shop-branded reeds (a hot commodity right now) and a T-bar style neckstrap that does a great job of holding its adjustment and helps take the "squeeze" off of the player's neck (especially on tenor).

There's nothing new about saxophones designed with "rolled" (or rounded off) edges on their toneholes. In the case of the PMXA-67RBX alto and PMXT-66RBX tenor, they're drawn directly from the body of the horn during the manufacturing process and require no soldering. A feature of many vintage saxophones made by companies like Kouf and Conn, drawn-and-rolled toneholes have their appeal among players who simply like the way they respond. They are, and always have been, a personal preference, and P. Mauriat has offered its own line of rolled-tonehole saxophones for about two decades, including the PMXA-67R alto and PMXT-66R tenor.

"A player who prefers a rolled-tonehole instrument is someone who wants an unlimited tonal palette, a player that wants unlimited dynamic range," said Jeremiah True, brand manager for P. Mauriat Musical Instruments. "It's going to allow them unlimited possibilities tonally and dynamics-wise."

Play-testing the new PMXA-67RBX and PMXT-66RBX left little doubt about their tonal and dynamic capabilities, not to mention their capacity for being pushed to juicy extremes. They struck me as being



pretty much resistance-free, with a stable low register, a super-pliable midrange and a singing, nearly effortless altissimo. Set up with D'Addario Jazz Select mouthpieces and #2½ Boston Sax Shop (Black Label) reeds, these saxes flat-out wailed.

True came up with a great analogy to describe the experience of playing the new models. "It's like the difference between a well-made traditional French-bore instrument that's set up properly and is like driving a really fast Lexus — it's got lane-assist and you know where the lines are — and a P. Mauriat rolled-tonehole horn with that Germanic bore that's more like driving a '69 Dodge Charger on wet pavement," he said. "You can just hammer down the gas and it's gonna take it all

— and you've got to keep it between the lines."

The black nickel finish on the PMXA-67RBX and PMXT-66RBX adds a more subtle, and overall pleasing, sonic effect. The extra layers of lacquer required to make the horns look amazing also give them a slightly darker sound, True said.

"Some saxophonists are using heavy screws or other ways of adding mass to their instruments to achieve a certain stability and darkness to their sound, and this produces that same effect," he said. "Rolled-tonehole instruments can get bright pretty easily because they're so free-blowing, and this black nickel finish kind of counteracts that."

"To my ears, it centers the tone and smooths the edges, helping to focus the sound. It goes so far as to help dial in that ideal sound where you have really nice lows, an appropriate amount of mids and just enough highs to give it some sparkle. You can definitely push it and brighten up the sound, but its natural state is to be a little darker and a little warmer."

Both new models feature ribbed construction, mother-of-pearl key touches and Pisoni pads with metal resonators. They come in rock-solid, flight-quality touring cases made in the Eminent luggage factory that are designed to fit into airline overhead bins.

—Ed Enright

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

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## Melissa Aldana

There's a new album on the horizon from saxophonist Melissa Aldana, *Filin*, that leans on the gentle side of her tenor voice and features Central and South American ballads of the past century. This was her first DownBeat Blindfold Test, conducted live at New York University's Jazz Studies Program in September with about 30 students bearing witness.

### Billy Hart Quartet

"Some Enchanted Evening" (*One Is The Other*, ECM, 2013) Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Ethan Iverson, piano; Ben Street, bass; Hart, drums.

It's just one note, and I know already. Mark Turner is one of the people I check out the most. I'm in love with his playing. He's just been a huge influence. He defines a period of my life, my early to late 20s listening to [Kurt Rosenwinkel's] *The Remedy*, hard-core: so much beauty. Also, Mark is one of the people that extended the upper register of the horn — playing lines up there — which is something I hadn't heard that much back then.

### Ben Webster

"Poutin'" (*King Of The Tenors*, Verve, 1953) Webster, tenor saxophone; Oscar Peterson, piano; Ray Brown, bass; J.C. Heard, drums.

The time period is the '40s, '50s. It's somebody that loves Ben Webster: his use of intervals, how he can go from the bottom of the saxophone to the high end with a clarity that's incredible. The groaning reminds me a lot of Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis. It's so crazy how with that vibrato — from Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young and Chu Berry — you can hear how there's millions of saxophone players that evolved from that sound. You can't play tenor sax without understanding where these people were coming from and how they were playing.

### Miguel Zenón & Luis Perdomo

"Silencio" (*El Arte del Bolero*, Vol. 2, Miel Music, 2023) Zenón, tenor saxophone; Perdomo, piano.

Miguel's a very important figure for Latin American musicians, and he's somebody I grew up listening to. He's always been an example of playing in a band and developing a sound with the same musicians, which has a lot to do with the way he created his band. I just saw him at the Village Vanguard two weeks ago and you've seen him: It's crazy! Intense! He was like, "Do you have your saxophone?" I said, "Yeah, but I'm good," and just walked away. Then something in me said, "What is your problem? Miguel Zenón invited you [to sit in] and you said no?" So I went back. "Of course I would love to play with you." We played "My Little Suede Shoes."

### McCoy Tyner/Joe Henderson

"We'll Be Together Again" (*Forces Of Nature*, Blue Note, 1966) Henderson, tenor saxophone; Tyner, piano; Harold Grimes, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

I don't want to stop listening to it. One note, the way that he articulates it, and you know that is Joe. He has a very particular way of playing arpeggios. Joe, to me, is what it means to have a huge sound even though we know that his volume was very soft. It's about the overtones and what's around your sound. He also has a sense of humor, like, "Catch me if you can. I'm too hip for you to catch me." I just love Joe Henderson. Is this late '60s?

### Nicole Glover

"Blues For Mel" (*Plays*, Savant, 2024) Glover, tenor saxophone; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Tyrone Allen II, bass; Kayvon Gordon, drums.

This is more of a modern player. Is this Nicole Glover? I can hear the things she loves through the talks we have had. I hear some Charlie Rouse in there. Not a lot of people of our generation have checked him out. She doesn't have the same intonation as him, but something about her vibrato and the tag,

"I had a dream of you putting a Michael Brecker tune into the Blindfold Test," said Melissa Aldana before about 30 jazz students at NYU.



ASHLEY KAHN

how she plays the notes. Also I can hear that she loves late-'50s, early-'60s Sonny. Every time we hang out, we talk about practicing, how she's developing and working on different ideas.

### Michael Brecker

"Song For Bilbao" (*Live By The Sea Jazz Festival, Tokyo*, YouTube video, 1997) Brecker, tenor saxophone; Pat Metheny, guitar; Joey Calderazzo, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

[immediately] I had a dream of you putting a Michael Brecker tune into the Blindfold Test. My dad is a saxophone player and he had posters all over the house of Michael, all of his CDs, so organized, and boxes of handwritten transcriptions of his solos. I grew up watching this video and another one, *Live In Barcelona* in 1988, with the Brecker Brothers. Michael's so funky but so tasty. If anybody else tries to be a copy of him, it sounds corny. But when Michael plays it's so soulful you just can't mess with that.

### Steve Lacy/Charlie Rouse

"Ask Me Now" (*That's The Way I Feel Now*, A&M, 1984) Lacy, soprano saxophone; Rouse, tenor saxophone.

This was "Ask Me Now." I never heard a tenor and soprano recording together. I was just thinking this is such a tricky song to play duo. There's this beautiful melody that is as important as the harmony, so as a saxophone player I always wonder when I'm playing a solo, "How can I outline the chord changes and still keep the beauty of the melody without getting in the middle of ..." [sings arpeggios]. He's playing a lot of great ideas. That [tenor player] was definitely somebody who loves Zoot Sims, the way he's playing on the bottom of the saxophone. [afterwards] Wow. I thought it was Charlie Rouse for a second. And Steve Lacy. It's beautiful.

### Zoh Amba

"Interbeing" (*Sun*, Smalltown Supersound, 2025) Amba, tenor saxophone; Lex Korton, piano; Caroline Morton, bass; Miguel Marcel Russel, percussion.

Zoh Amba. It sounds like a modern recording, the quality, and of the younger musicians, she's the one that sounds like that. I may be pronouncing her name wrong — I haven't done my deep dive into her yet. This reminds me of Albert Ayler. In his playing there's freedom but there's still melody and there's still a story in the music, and that's what I love. If I can close my eyes and have the emotional connection with the sound, then it sticks to me.

### Branford Marsalis Quartet

"Cheek To Cheek" (*Contemporary Jazz*, Blue Note, 2000) Marsalis, tenor saxophone; Joey Calderazzo, piano; Eric Revis, bass; Jeff Watts, drums.

This is one of my favorites of Branford: *Contemporary Jazz*, "Cheek To Cheek." A classic. I remember being 13, in my bedroom in Santiago, waking up early before going to school. I would have tea, some bread and avocado — that's a very Chilean thing to do — then put on my computer and using [the app] Transcribe I would slow down this solo and repeat it many times. I remember being astounded when Branford's doing the double-lip. To this day I never got that solo together all the way. I hope at some point I get a chance to have a deep dive into saxophones with Branford. **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.

# DAVID DETWEILER

PLAYS THE SYSTEM-76TULF

Dr. Detweiler is the Associate Professor of Jazz Saxophone at Florida State University.



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