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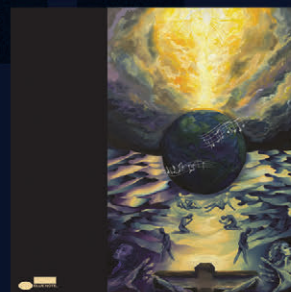
## JULIAN LAGE SCENES FROM ABOVE

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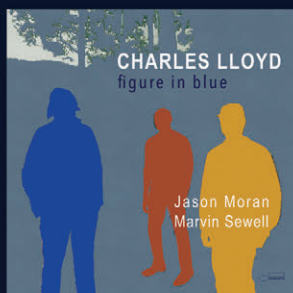
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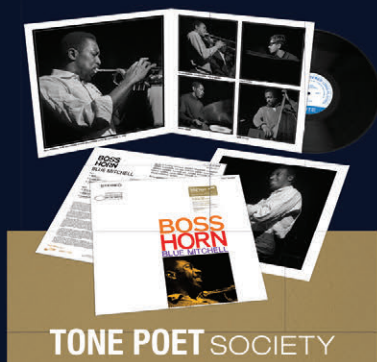
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# FEBRUARY 2026

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BY STEPHANIE JONES

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Nicole Zuraitis with journalist Ted Panken



A large portrait of Eric Darius, a Black man with short hair, wearing dark sunglasses and a white shirt with a black dotted pattern. He is holding a silver saxophone diagonally across his body. The background is dark with out-of-focus white light spots.

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## BY FRANK ALKYER



**DEC. 19, 2025—AS WE WRAP UP THIS ISSUE**

That gaggle of Snarky Puppy members on the cover, 20 of them to be exact, may be the most musicians ever on the front page of *DownBeat*. It's family. What bandleader Michael League has created is a vast community of creative souls who join together because the music is interesting, adventurous and fun, as writer Stephanie Jones captures beginning on page 22.

All right, can't make the gig, and you want something even more Snarkily immersive? Try the inaugural Snarky Puppy's Rabbit Hole, Aug. 3–7 in Tarrytown, New York. It's four days of music camp with performances, master classes, workshops, jam sessions and hanging out with members of the band. ([snarkypuppyrabbithole.com](http://snarkypuppyrabbithole.com))

the Lettuce Scholarship. The band has partnered with Music is a Language, a nonprofit group, to launch a full-tuition scholarship for a student to go to Berklee, the band's alma mater. If you'd like to help the cause, check out [lettucefunk.com](http://lettucefunk.com).

And then, there's Soulive, beginning on page 28. They hadn't recorded an album in some 15 years. You know, sometimes it's harder to get a small family, in this case a trio, together than a brood. But with all families, if you can offer up a sweet hang, everybody will show. And that's why Eric Krasno and the Evans brothers (Neal and Alan) headed to northern Iceland to record *Flowers*. It got hot in that beautiful, cold country!

Finally, all families lose loved ones. We've got three tributes on page 21: Gordon Goodwin, Phil Upchurch and Dick Dunscomb.

Mr. Dunscomb, an amazing leader in jazz education, was especially close to this writer's heart. As you know, there's a side of this magazine that is fiercely dedicated to education. So was Dick Dunscomb. He had a quiet, down-home approach, proving that it's not always the loudest voice that leads, it's the one who sees the map clearly.

Dick talked me into hosting a television show called *MusiciansStudio* from 2006 to 2008 — just two seasons of interviewing great artists about the life of being a musician. He also talked me into conducting a live interview each year with prominent jazz artists at The Midwest Clinic, an annual gathering of some 20,000 music educators that happens each December. In fact, as soon as this issue wraps up, I'll head down to interview drummer/educator Carl Allen for a feature to appear in a future DownBeat. No doubt, the family gathered in that room will be thinking fondly of Professor Dunscomb. **DB**





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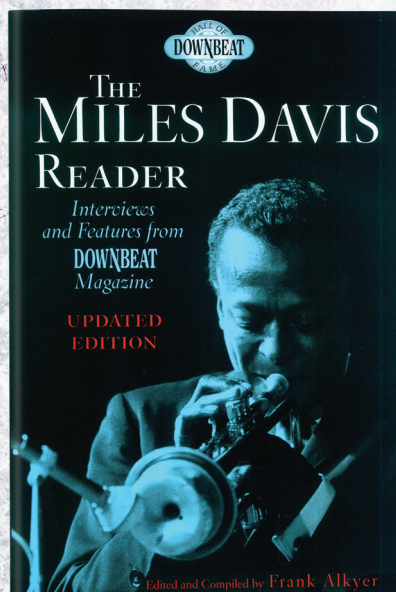


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### More Gary Bartz Love

I have never written to a magazine before in my 68 years on this Earth, but as a lifelong jazz fan and someone lucky enough to see Gary Bartz perform on several occasions over the years, including at the D.C. JazzFest, I felt compelled to write to say BRAVO and to offer much deserved praise for putting him on the cover.

Thank you for recognizing this musical genius in such grand fashion and for bringing a smile to a longtime fan.

JERRY ROSCOE  
VIA EMAIL



### Hall of Fame with a Tear

Once again, I was deeply saddened when I read that another jazz legend had passed away, NEA Jazz Master Jack DeJohnette. Sorrow turned to joy when I read in the December DownBeat issue that he was inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame. Thank you for a well written final interview with DeJohnette, and I'm glad he knew about the award before he died.

I first heard him on Pat Metheny's *80/81* record, and I was immediately impressed by his incredible distinct drumming style from the first track, "Two Folk Songs." More followed with the volcanic drumming on "Open" to the quiet cymbal playing on the ballads. This record was my introduction to discovering that a great drummer is more than a timekeeper, he propels the band and also colors the music.

I was privileged to hear him live several times with the Keith Jarrett Standards Trio and his other projects. The last time I heard DeJohnette was on Michael Brecker's final recording, *Pilgrimage*. It's another of my favorite records where his playing is exceptional.

He will be missed but will live on every time I listen to one of many of my records. To quote Charlie Haden from *80/81*, "Woooo! Jack DeJohnette."

It was also great reading that Emmet Cohen was voted top pianist in the Readers Poll. In the article Emmet mentioned the trio gig in Chicago that only had six people in the audience, one was me.

MARC NEBOZENKO  
EVANSTON IL

### Chaos: A Jazz Standard?

I've been a loyal reader and former contributor to DownBeat for years, tapping my foot to your vibrant coverage of jazz's highs and lows. But lately, I can't help but notice the recurring chorus in your pages: the world is in chaos, a dissonant mess, a perpetual jam session gone wrong. It's a familiar refrain — editorials, artist interviews and reviews all seem to lean into this apocalyptic groove.

I'm starting to wonder: When, according to

your staff and featured artists, has the world not been in chaos? Forgive my skepticism, but hasn't chaos been the rhythm section of human history since forever? From the swing era's wars to the bebop of civil unrest, the world's always been a bit offbeat.

The 1920s had their pandemics and economic crashes, the 1960s their revolutions and assassinations — yet jazz kept

swinging. So why does every issue make it sound like we're in some unprecedented cacophony? Is it chaos, or is it just the same old tune with a new arrangement?

Don't get me wrong — I love DownBeat's passion for music and its context. But maybe it's time to change the key. How about spotlighting artists who find harmony in the discord, who riff on resilience instead of despair? Chaos might be the backdrop, but jazz has always been about improvising through the noise. Let's hear more of that.

GLENN ASTARITA  
VIA EMAIL

**Editor's Note:** Thanks for the thoughtful note, Glenn. Maybe artists feel the chaos level has been turned up a few notches. I'm just happy not to be reporting on the pandemic in every article. Hopefully, this, too, shall pass.

### Groove Merchant, Rest In Peace

My father, John F. Howard, Jr. passed away [Sept. 16] at the age of 93. He was a lifelong DownBeat subscriber (I don't remember when it wasn't on our coffee table) and also a freelance writer for DownBeat in the '70s and '80s.

His photographs and record reviews and concert reviews were published by DownBeat, Jazz Podium and in newspapers. He was a huge advocate for jazz in the community, spending equal time in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. He was honored with a plaque from the City of Los Angeles for his contributions to jazz, and was a jazz disc jockey for several stations — KCBX (San Luis Obispo), KJAZ (Alameda), KRML (Carmel) and KLON (Long Beach) under his handle "The Groove Merchant."

Also, throughout California, he taught a course on "Jazz, Blues and Popular Music in the American Culture" at a number of community colleges. This, and so much more ...

ESTHER PARK  
VIA EMAIL

**Editor's Note:** We are so sorry for your loss. I never met your father, but I know of his work. Your words are beautiful. Let them serve as this magazine's tribute to your father's passing. Hugs from the DownBeat family.

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“It’s a fact — I love drummers,” says Jane Ira Bloom of working with Brian Shankar Adler. “I just light up next to the rhythmic energy of drums and percussion.”

## Jane Ira Bloom & Brian Shankar Adler Making Music in the Moment

By some conceptual standards, the art of an effective duo is rooted in a central paradox. The objective is to celebrate the intimacy of the close relationship while also suggesting an expressive world larger than the sum of its parts. Those twin senses of scale become all the more prevalent in the rare, “chordless” and bass-less meeting of percussion and a lone melodic voice.

Exhibit A: the inspired and symbiotic relationship of soprano saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom and drummer/percussionist and interdisciplinary artist Brian Shankar Adler. As heard on their debut album *once like a spark* (Adhyāropa), the duo speaks low and speaks volumes, simultaneously.

Key to the success of the endeavor is a kindred spirit and common adventurousness between the two, although their orbits vary widely. Renowned soprano saxophonist Bloom is highly laurelled, poll-winning, Grammy-earning and category-defying — as well as gravity-defying, having collaborated with NASA and her name attached to an asteroid (asteroid 6083janeirabloom). Adler is a jazz and so-called “world music” musician who has per-

formed with many established and emerging artists and seeks to banish musical boundaries in his work.

The common ground between them was Maine, where Adler has lived after putting in his growing time in New York, and where Bloom spends some quality time. Years ago, Adler bravely emailed Bloom about getting together to play. A bond was born and, after playing periodic live shows, a recorded document of their chemistry has finally gone public.

Bloom summarizes the duo’s evolution thusly: “We just started rehearsing together — freely improvising, playing some of my tunes and some of his tunes. The duo setting was kind of magical for us — felt both connected and totally free.

“I don’t like to overthink it too much. I think we shared a sound palette coming from interest in a wide range of improvisational genres — from more open forms of jazz to world music to contemporary new music. We played a few performances in art spaces in Lewiston and Portland, Maine, and things just started to develop. I wasn’t in a hurry to record anything because we were letting the music

evolve in its own way without any expectations. That’s when it’s the best.

“Years went by and then it felt like it would be fun to document what we were up to. I really didn’t have an album in mind when we went into the studio in Portland. It was just like an extension of our rehearsals together. It just flowed and there were so many first takes. The album actually took shape after some time went by and we listened back to what we did. Bingo.”

Adler has a somewhat different recollection of the duo’s initial stage, recalling that “the first time she came over to play, I was so nervous. Here was a hero, a legend — the Grammy Award-winning Jane Ira Bloom — coming over to my home to play with me! I had to take some deep breaths to keep cool.

“Once we started playing, the simpatico that you describe was there from the start. It was so easy. We played free, and it was as if we were playing a tune from the American song book. We played each other’s compositions, and the music came alive instantly. Over the years, we built up a hefty book of tunes and a musical language with which to communicate.”

Although the pair did some gigs with bassist Ken Filliano — who also joins in on the album track “Psalm” — the decision was to keep the recording primarily a twosome. “We both felt that less was more,” Bloom offers. “There is just enough room to express a composition and just enough space to go anywhere in the moment. We’re a couple of musicians who like to play with the negative spaces.”

The album’s title track, “once like a spark,” is borrowed from the e.e. cummings poem of the same name. Adler composed the piece 20 years earlier and it found an ideal home on this project. “When I came across this particular e.e. cummings poem, it felt like jazz,” he says. “The words jumped off the page like an uptempo improvisation. Cummings uses a lot of parentheses like a sub-narrative, which struck me as to how I like to imply pulse via the ride cymbal or a dialogue in comping phrases.”

Surprisingly, there are relatively few precedents to draw from when it comes to pairing percussion with a melodic instrument like soprano saxophone. Bloom says her attraction to this format is easy to understand. “It’s a fact — I love drummers. I just light up next to the rhythmic energy of drums and percussion. I think it must be because I always wanted to play drums. I love the freedom of being able to cre-



ate melody or harmony in the moment with the motion of drums.

"During the pandemic I did release a remote duo recording with Allison Miller called *Tues Days*, which explored the sax/drum duo. Ed Blackwell and Don Cherry come to mind as spirit guides in this journey, and Sonny Rollins always inspires me when I think about the act of creating in the moment without harmony. I think what Brian brings to the music that is so special is his ability on tabla as well as drumset and his diversity as a percussionist. His knowledge of both world and contemporary music percussion made this an excellent new adventure."

In Adler's case, he pursued adventures in duo-making during the pandemic, in remote liaisons with Kamala Sankaram, Mike Effenberg and Jesse Stiles. As an impressionable young player and listener, he recalls a deeply influential encounter at the old Knitting Factory in New York, circa 1999, when David Liebman met "Ra-kalam" Bob Moses.

"Their playing was so multidirectional," Alder says. "It was fire. I remember talking with Ra-kalam afterward, and he said something like: 'I always feel free to be myself in the music, but with Liebs, I feel completely free.' Well, that stuck with me, and that is how I feel playing with Jane. Charles Lloyd and Billy Higgins, on

*Which Way East*, is another important reference point. I was fortunate to study with both Ra-kalam and Billy, and their approaches have been hugely influential."

If jazz, per se, is the seedbed grounding this duo, pan-ethnic influences and directions come naturally to both musicians, a leaning reflected in the music they collectively created. North Indian Hindustani colors emanate from "Song For Khan" and "Psalm," keyed off of Adler's tablas, while his gamelan-like use of the percussion instruments known as chromatic discs steers "Together We" and "Shan Dara" in an Indonesian direction.

Bloom cites growing up steeped in the international scope of Nonesuch Explorer Series albums as a motivator for her various cross-global interactions, with such musicians as Geetha Ramanathan Bennett (veena), Miya Masaoka (koto), Min Xiao Fen (pipa), Jin Hi Kim (komungo) — "some seriously high-powered women instrumentalists."

Adler, who grew up in an ashram and is part Argentinian, has long followed his interests in the world's music along with maintaining strong jazz roots. "The way I see it," he observes, "music is interconnected and has the power to communicate beyond borders. Listening to and playing jazz, it's evident that the music has roots beyond America and

arms that extend to virtually every corner of the world. When approached with open ears, curiosity and a sense of respect for the traditions, the possibilities for exchange are really limitless."

Back on more definitively jazz-flavored turf, the album tune "Be Cowboy" is an angular post-bopper hinting at the influence of Ornette Coleman, about which Bloom mentions, "Ornette's music is always with me, especially what I learned first-hand from playing with his rhythm section (Charlie Haden and Ed Blackwell)." The comment serves as a reminder of Bloom's vast history — in, out of and around jazz — for more than four decades.

How has the meaning of music changed for Bloom over her creative life so far? "To start with," she notes, "I've learned that perfection is not required. I actually like hearing the struggle inherent in creative minds at work. Everything for me is about having a sound, and it's not always a linear path how you get there, so enjoy the ride."

Is this new album the start of a beautiful recording friendship, and a deeper link to the project, among her other pursuits?

"I'm totally on board with you and Humphrey Bogart," she quips. "It's been a joy making music in the moment with Brian."

—Josef Woodard



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Raphaël Pannier, left, and Khadim Niang joined together in a cultural music exchange to create *Live in Saint Louis, Senegal* on Miel Music.



## Raphaël Pannier & Khadim Niang The Paris-to-Senegal Connection

**KHADIM NIANG, A MASTER DRUMMER** IN the West African sabar tradition, was letting loose on a makeshift dance floor. His image flickering on a shaky Zoom connection supplied by the French Institute in Saint Louis, Senegal, he was — in a dazzling turn of percussive, sabar-style footwork — demonstrating how his troupe of seven drummers assimilated the unknowable five-beat rhythm of Paul Desmond's "Take Five" by fitting it into a very knowable 4/4.

Meanwhile, French drummer Raphaël Pannier, filling a Zoom box from Paris, was dutifully interpreting Niang's actions and words for an American writer in New York. Pannier's verdict: Despite a performative tactic that might have seemed unorthodox to Western eyes, Niang had successfully shown how he coordinated the different points of the rhythmic pattern in a way that his troupe could understand. While Niang personally grasped the concept of odd meters, he knew they would not.

"The guys wouldn't feel it," Niang, in Pannier's translation of the Senegalese's French, said. "Because they're a group, it wouldn't rock."

The issue of meter was one of several that cropped up as Pannier sought to bridge the cultural divide in a weeklong residency his jazz quartet spent with Niang and his troupe. The stay — the realization of a youthful desire of Pannier's that began to take shape with a May 2023 trip he took to Senegal followed by frequent messaging between him and Niang — yielded a concert and a live album documenting a remarkable meeting of minds and melding of spirits.

*Live In Saint Louis, Senegal* (Miel Music) represents most of what happened at the finale of the eight-day Saint Louis Jazz Festival in May 2024. "Take Five," which Niang wanted in the program because it was long a wish of his to play the tune, was just the starting point. Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman" and John

Coltrane's "Naima" also made the cut, as did originals written by Niang with and without the input of Pannier's band (Saxophonist Yosvany Terry, from Cuba, and pianist Thomas Enhco and bassist François Moutin, both from France, and both playing the acoustic and electric versions of their instruments).

Perhaps the knottiest issue Pannier's band encountered centered on conflicting concepts of narrative. Though his group thought in linear terms, the sabar tradition dictated a more circular approach in which the story was told in cycles that rotated constantly. The cycles might be precomposed or open. In the latter case, Niang would invoke a complex coded language that would signal to his band the cycles' start.

Broadly speaking, the sabar cycles might be seen as equivalent to Western-style choruses. But as the music unfolded, the two approaches didn't naturally match up. Reconciling them required some musical sleight-of-hand — a task, Pannier said, to which Moutin's powers of analysis were well-suited. Over an intense week of 12-hour rehearsals leading up to the concert, Moutin, who holds a degree in engineering, was able to pinpoint underlying structural elements of the sabar musical architecture by calculating where Niang's band started their cycles. Factoring in the information, the jazz musicians were able to adjust and form a functioning unit with their sabar counterparts.

Whatever the mathematical calculations, the spiritual dimension proved a bonding agent — especially on "Naima." The form-stretching treatment that emerged grew out of two sets of rhythms Niang had sent Pannier early in the period before the residency. The first set consisted of classic rhythms played at weddings or for royal occasions to which sabar griots, as an honored cultural class, were often invited. The second set consisted of Niang originals. Pannier decided that both sets of rhythms would work

in conjunction with "Naima" as a melodic base, and he strategically deployed them as he moved toward a final arrangement. But it was ultimately the classic set that spoke most deeply to Niang.

Niang, Pannier said, felt "there was some mysticism in the melody that fit the mysticism of the first rhythms," which, not incidentally, sabar drummers sometimes used to expel evil spirits. Beyond the strictly spiritual, Pannier's group often found common ground with Niang's by acting practically. Sabar drummers, for example, struck the head of their instruments with a hand and a stick; they did not use brushes or mallets, nor did they have cymbals. In addition, their dynamics varied little. Rather than compete, Pannier said he usually tried to draw on the tools of jazz to complement what they were doing.

But if it seems that the adjustments leaned more toward an accommodation of, rather than by, Niang's troupe, the long-term impact of the collaboration appears more complicated. That, in any case, is what Pannier learned in the Zoom call with Niang, 18 months after the concert.

The effect on his band's thinking, Pannier said, had been profound. Indeed, the extent to which the sabar drummers lived and breathed their rich vocabulary of musical codes "may," in his words, "have changed the way we see music and the investment we could have in music."

More surprisingly, perhaps, Pannier found that Niang had been inspired to venture outside his cultural comfort zone and take on a new project in which he was experimenting with jazz sounds. Niang, whose exuberant mood on the Zoom call turned reflective, said he hoped that by extending his musical reach, he might challenge sabar's association with the pop-oriented mbalax style — an outcome that, like his playing of "Take Five," would constitute a wish fulfilled.

"He always dreamed of bringing sabar outside of mbalax," Pannier said. —Phillip Lutz





Drummer Chad Taylor's quintet for his new recording, *Smoke Shifter*, from left: Bryan Rogers, Matt Engle, Taylor, Jonathan Finlayson and Victor Vieira-Branco.

## Chad Taylor Takes on Philly

**IT IS PERHAPS INEVITABLE THAT CHAD**

Taylor will forever be associated with Chicago. The drummer and composer played a vital role in the Windy City's late-'90s jazz renaissance, collaborating with a host of adventurous musicians including Fred Anderson, Jeff Parker, Nicole Mitchell, Joshua Abrams and others. For more than 25 years he has co-lead the innovative and mutable Chicago Underground Duo, along with its several variously scaled iterations, with the cornetist, multi-instrumentalist and "abstractivist" Rob Mazurek.

Many of the connections that he forged during that period remain active, not least the one with Mazurek: The pair reconvened in 2025 to release *Hyperglyph* (International Anthem), their first album as a duo in 11 years. But neither has called Chicago home in nearly a quarter century; Mazurek spent five years in Brazil before settling in Marfa, Texas, while Taylor embarked for New York in 2001 and has lived in Philadelphia for almost a decade. As of 2024, he added one more city to his collection of musical homes, assuming the role of artistic director of jazz studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

Taylor has fully immersed himself in the jazz community in every one of these locales, leaving his indelible rhythmic imprint. His time in New York is marked by tenures in the late jaimie branch's bracing group Fly or Die, Marc Ribot's Ayler-influenced Spiritual Unity quartet and Eric Revis' bold quartet. Since leaving the city, he's continued to work with some of its most adventurous residents, including ongoing collaborations with fiery saxophonist James Brandon Lewis and bassist Luke Stewart.

The drummer's latest album as a leader, *Smoke Shifter* (Otherly Love), is his strongest document to date of his time in Philly. Aside from trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson — an acquaint-

tance that Taylor had long wanted to work with — the remainder of the quintet is made up of Philadelphia locals. Saxophonist Bryan Rogers and bassist Matt Engle are longtime members of the scene (though Rogers recently returned from a lengthy sabbatical) who were students at the University of the Arts in the mid-'00s when they co-founded the audacious quartet Shot x Shot. Vibraphonist Victor Vieira-Branco is a more recent transplant that played with Mazurek during his time in São Paulo.

"I really wanted to showcase these great Philly musicians," Taylor said on a brisk November day, over lunch at a café in Philly's Chestnut Hill neighborhood. "I don't think a lot of people outside the city are aware of them, and they're all incredibly creative players."

Taylor landed in Philly after a Google search for "best neighborhoods on the East Coast to raise a family," looking for more affordable, less cramped surroundings for himself, his wife and his three daughters. Since his arrival he's shared stages frequently with hometown heroes like saxophonist Bobby Zankel and centenarian Marshall Allen, appearing as part of several diverse configurations of the latter's ever-changing Ghost Horizons ensemble.

He also joined with Philly percussionist Kevin Diehl and the legendary Joe Chambers to form the percussion trio Onilu, which released its self-titled debut in February 2025 via Eremite. When Diehl initially conceived the project, he had no idea that Taylor had studied with Chambers at the New School early in his career.

"Reconnecting with Joe was really amazing," Taylor said. "When I was studying with him I was 19 or 20 years old and had a chip on my shoulder — I was not a good student, I'll put it that way. But he was giving me all this incredible information that I didn't start using and practicing until

years later. A lot of what he taught me has become the foundation of my playing, so to work with him now, using all these ideas that I've developed from what he taught me, was really special."

Taylor also credits Chambers with encouraging him to compose, and to offer his works in whatever context he might find himself. "The worst thing that's going to happen is someone says, 'No,'" he shrugged. On *Smoke Shifter*, he carries that advice forward, including compositions by every member of the band except Finlayson.

Despite the multiple compositional voices, *Smoke Shifter* presents a band with a distinct vocabulary out of the gate, centered on the mesmerizing polyrhythms woven by Vieira-Branco and the band leader. Engle supplies buoyant and elastic bass lines bridging the percussive voices with the intricate, angular horn melodies. There is a touchstone in Andrew Hill-style modernism, but the compelling pieces are also sculpted by Taylor's distinctively sculptural approach to the kit. The music sounds nothing like the dizzying electronic mutations of *Hyperglyph*, but the two projects share undeniable DNA via the drummer's entrancing urgency.

Those unmistakable trademarks serve as a reflection of the qualities that Taylor seeks out in his sideman capacity.

"I have always been very intentional in the groups that I decide to work with," he explained. "I tend to gravitate towards people who want to develop their own sound, their own language and approach to music. But I'm at a point in my career where I'm trying to focus more on my own work as a leader."

That shift is due in part to the demands of his new role at the University of Pittsburgh. Taylor is the fourth artist to head the program, following founder Nathan Davis, Geri Allen and Nicole Mitchell. The school is unique in offering the country's only Ph.D. concentration in jazz studies, along with an undergraduate program bolstered by the resources offered by the institution's other disciplines.

"Believe it or not, jazz history is the No. 1 elective in the entire school," Taylor said. Prior to this interview, he had just wrapped up the 55th annual jazz seminar and concert, which brought renowned artists like Chambers, Joel Ross, Warren Smith, Bobby Sanabria and Sasha Berliner to the school for a week of workshops, discussions and performances.

"I believe this program is the future of jazz education," he continued. "It was hard to be a professional jazz musician when I was growing up, and it's only getting harder. Yet jazz music is still incredibly important and vital. For instance, so much of the business world is about collaborating, and jazz music is all about collaboration, taking your ego down a notch and learning how to listen. There are so many ways that you can take from jazz music and put it into other disciplines."

—Shaun Brady





"I always believe in having a positive message," says drummer Brandon Sanders. "I want to touch my audience's heart and get them to start listening to jazz."

# Brandon Sanders Does Something Great

**WHEN DRUMMER BRANDON SANDERS** walked onto the main stage at Dizzy's Club in November for the release of his third album, *Lasting Impression* (Savant/HighNote), he wasn't expecting the night to unfold the way it did. A year prior, he'd made his debut there at a late-night session. But this time, he returned as a headliner and delivered a sold-out performance, earning a standing ovation and afterwards selling boxes of CDs.

For Sanders, who didn't pick up a pair of drumsticks until age 25, moments like that aren't taken for granted. They're milestones in a journey he describes as improbable, humbling and fueled by a deep desire to reach people.

"I always believe in having a positive message," he says. "I want to touch my audience's heart and get them to start listening to jazz. I had a couple come to the show and said, 'Man, we never listened to jazz, but your performance really touched us.' That's what I'm trying to do."

At 54, he has been playing for nearly 30 years, but considers himself a novice, constantly practicing, trying to catch up to his peers.

He made his recording debut as a leader with 2023's *Compton's Finest*, a tribute to his hometown. With *Lasting Impression*, he's found his sweet spot, at ease as a leader.

The album features elite musicians deeply woven into his musical life: saxophonist Stacy Dillard, bassist Eric Wheeler, pianist Eric Scott Reed, vibraphonist Warren Wolf and vocalist Jazzmeia Horn. Wolf and Horn also appeared on his first record.

He aims to play with the best. When his men-

tor and producer Willie Jones III suggested he collaborate with veterans like Reed and Dillard, he jumped at the chance.

Sanders' compositions are shaped by the musicians he brings into the room. As a composer, he draws inspiration from Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn and Norman Connors, a drummer he believes deserving of more attention and recognition. Before writing, he studies his band's stylistic DNA.

"I try to learn their style — their cadences — before I start writing," he says. "Like with 'Tales Of Mississippi,' I wrote it with the vibes in mind. I was thinking about how I wanted it to sound and the story I wanted to tell."

Even standards on the album took shape through personal connection.

For "Soul Eyes," Sanders wanted to capture the vibe John Coltrane played. And when it came to "Our Love Is Here To Stay," he felt Horn's live arrangement needed to be documented.

Sanders' style of drumming is akin to his mentors' — drummers Kenny Washington, Marvin "Smitty" Smith and Lewis Nash. He rides the cymbals with a similar smoothness, color and versatility, supporting and pushing his bandmates when the zoom lens is cast on him. With the thought and precision he puts into his playing, it appears he's been drumming at a master's level his entire life. But his road to jazz wasn't just unusual — it was nearly accidental.

His childhood was surrounded by music. His mother was a violinist, his father and stepfather were horn players, and his grandmother owned the Kansas City jazz club Casablanca.

Sanders and his mother moved from Kansas City to Los Angeles when he was 22 months old, settling in the Compton neighborhood. He grew up around rappers such as DJ Quik and attended the same high school as Kendrick Lamar.

"If you weren't gangbanging or doing something illegal, the positive things you did were basketball and house parties," he says. "I used to have two turntables and a mixer."

He absorbed the rhythms and demands of the crowd long before he ever touched a drum set. His years as a DJ in Compton influenced the way he currently approaches his records and live sets, taking the listener on a journey.

At the urging of his grandmother, he returned home. She didn't want him to be victimized by the violent streets of Compton in the 1980s. Sanders attended the University of Kansas and joined the basketball team as a walk-on player.

"I wasn't thinking about drums at all," he says. "Not until my college basketball eligibility ran out. Then I saw a set of drums at a church and thought, 'How do you play this?' It just captivated me."

He practiced obsessively for two years, then applied to Berklee College of Music, entering at the lowest rating ("a1") and graduating as an "8" — the highest level. At Berklee, he studied with masters like Joe Lovano and met Wolf, who encouraged him to start recording.

"The one thing that I've always appreciated about him is that he respects the history of the music, and he's just somebody who's serious about his craft," says Wolf. "And I think he recognizes that he's not trying to be the absolute top drummer out here. He's trying to just be an important component in someone's group and be a good leader."

Even with Wolf's encouragement, it was a while before Sanders started recording. With a master's degree in social work, he worked for years in the field and only moved to New York because his Boston landlord wanted her apartment back. Lewis Nash invited Sanders and his 10-month-old son to stay in his apartment until Sanders found a place.

With three albums in his catalog now, Sanders says he's only getting hungrier.

"When I leave a gig like Dizzy's, it motivates me," he says. "I'm like, OK, now you got to do more work. You got to get better." Sanders is already thinking about his next album — a project he hopes to record at the legendary Van Gelder Studio in early 2026.

"To be truthful," he says, "I want to be worldwide. I want people saying, 'Let's go hear Brandon Sanders' show.' Not from an ego standpoint, but because I believe I have something that can touch people. I want people to know it's never too late. I never thought at 25 I'd be a drummer. But if you stick with it and have some patience, you can do something great."

—Veronica Johnson



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## NOW JAZZ NOW

By Thurston Moore, Byron Coley and Mats Gustafsson with Neneh Cherry and Joe McPhee  
(Ecstatic Peace Library)

## Free Jazz and Improvisation on LP and CD 1965–2024

By Johannes Rød  
(Smalltown Supersound)

Original issues of most of the rugged recordings featured in the new coffee table book *NOW JAZZ NOW: 100 Essential Free Jazz & Improvisation Recordings 1960–80* on Ecstatic Peace Library are nearly impossible to find these days, although they may have been reissued in various iterations over the years. In his entry on *The Third World*, an obscure 1971 album billed to saxophonist and flutist Abdul Hannan, which features one of the earliest dates of the brilliant tenor saxophonist David S. Ware, writer Byron Coley recalls encountering the record regularly while perusing the bins of used records shops in Boston years back.

“Would that I’d have bought every copy I ever saw rather than the five or so I’ve gone through,” he writes. “I weep now when I look at the old set sale lists where I sold them for \$12.” That passage illustrates how many of the featured releases failed to sell many copies in their day — by dint of their uncompromising intensity or poor distribution — and how, over time, they’ve become storied collector’s items, many fetching hundreds of dollars, if not more, decades later. Some of this music remains challenging to the layman, while time has transformed other recordings into classics such as the 1961 Ornette Coleman album that gave the style its name.



Thurston Moore, an experimental guitarist best known as a founding member of Sonic Youth, operates the publishing imprint Ecstatic Peace Library with his wife, Eva Prinz, and they’ve billed this hefty 277-page volume as an art book for record collectors, a category that applies to its three primary authors: Moore, writer Byron Coley and saxophonist Mats Gustafsson. The trio collectively decided what fit the book’s billing, strictly limiting any musician to a single title regardless of how large and important their output may have been. They’ve embraced a nicely catholic sensibility, both in terms of geographic reach and stylistic prerogative, with the final tally all but certain to instigate passionate arguments about what was included and the countless recordings they omitted.

The book also includes a prologue in which Gustafsson offers some crucial free-jazz antecedents by artists as disparate as Mary Lou Williams, Charles Mingus, Lennie Tristano, Stan Kenton, Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor. The authors liberally toss around subgenres as they discuss a music that sought to rip them apart, but in her preface singer Neneh Cherry, the stepdaughter of the singular trumpeter Don Cherry, writes, “The term ‘Free Jazz’ might’ve been talked about by journalists, but I don’t recall the musicians referencing themselves in the world of Free Jazz. The musicians just played.”

The feverish prose, particularly by Gustafsson, provides unbridled enthusiasm more than verifiable information or analysis. And indeed, in a recent story published by the Guardian, Moore avers, “Enthusiasm is key, we didn’t want to couch it in too much of a smarty-pants vibe.” Obviously such a selection can’t help but be subjective, but it’s hard not to see some of the inclusions as much about celebrating ultra-rare items in the trio’s personal collections as it is about offering a guide to essential music.

The sole entry from the prolific Japanese alto saxophonist Kaoru Abe, for example, is *Winter 1972*, a solo album recorded during the titular period that didn’t surface until nearly three decades later when “a box of coverless vinyl copies suddenly showed up.” Luckily the music was eventually released on CD. Gustafsson offers an appetite-whetting description of *Oltre*, a 1963 quartet album led by the influential Italian pianist Giorgio Gaslini that has never been reissued in any format.

Occasionally Gustafsson will interrupt his gushing with trenchant musical observations, while Moore tends to offer broader context for each musician, although it’s sometimes contained within an impenetrable thicket of discographic data, to say nothing of mistakes like conflating a country like Algeria with an ethnic group like the Tuareg in an entry about pianist Dave Burrell as he provides context for the 1969 Pan-African Festival in Algiers.

Unsurprisingly, it’s Coley — the veteran writer — who delivers the most legible text. Despite the uneven writing, the book is gorgeous, with extensive photos of the featured albums, all drawn from their collections. Certain albums feature shots of album art long discarded in subsequent reissues. And while there are plenty of classics by the likes of Albert Ayler, John Coltrane, Roscoe Mitchell, Peter Brötzmann and Jan Garbarek included, I encountered a handful of recordings for the first time. There’s always more to learn. (ecstaticpeace.net)

*Free Jazz and Improvisation on LP and CD 1965–2024* is a seriously expanded version of a 2014 book also made by Norwegian art historian Johannes Rød, but that earlier out-of-print edition was limited to vinyl released between 1965 and ’85. The original book ran 128 pages, while this one has swelled to 382. The author included selective discographies of 185 labels spanning nearly six decades, with short texts providing thumbnail histories of labels as disparate as ESP-Disk’ and Black Saint along with Bird Notes, the ridiculously obscure vanity imprint of Swedish saxophonist Bengt “Frippe” Nordström, and Wobbly Rail, the five-year endeavor of Mac MacCaughan of the post-punk band Superchunk.

As with its predecessor, the book is beautifully designed with the selections arrayed by catalog number on ledgers. A section of album art spans the years covered by the book, but more than anything this seems designed as a kind of checklist for budding collectors of improvised music, stratifying the wild west of Internet discographies into something more approachable. (smalltownsupersound.com)

Both of these books reinforce that while much of this music remains well off the beaten path, its adherents are more passionate and obsessive than ever.

—Peter Margasak



# Gordon Goodwin: 1954–2025

**GORDON GOODWIN, AN AWARD-WINNING** saxophonist, pianist, bandleader, composer and arranger, died Dec. 8 in Los Angeles. He was three weeks shy of his 71st birthday. His passing was announced by his second wife, Vangie Gunn-Goodwin, who said that he died of complications from pancreatic cancer.

Goodwin was one of the most acclaimed jazz musicians of his generation on multiple fronts. His Big Phat Band, an 18-member ensemble consisting of some of L.A.'s finest jazz musicians, gained popularity for its classic jazz and contemporary jazz-funk fusion.

In addition to writing for his own band, Goodwin was an in-demand studio arranger whose resume included work with Johnny Mathis (for whom he also played piano), Ray

Charles, Natalie Cole, Christina Aguilera and Leslie Odom Jr.. He also wrote, arranged and recorded for film and television, winning a Grammy in 2006 for his work on *The Incredibles* and Daytime Emmys for the animated programs *Animaniacs* and *Histeria*. His arrangements were sought after by jazz educators.

Goodwin studied music at California State University, Northridge, graduating in 1981. While still a student, he wrote his first film score, for 1978's *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*. Upon graduation, he worked for drummer and bandleader Louie Bellson and spent much of the 1990s as musical director and pianist for Johnny Mathis.

He founded the Big Phat Band in 1999. It was intended for a single performance at his alma



mater and quickly gained a following. The band's first album *Swingin' For The Fences*, receiving critical acclaim and two Grammy nominations. They made nine more recordings, with 2014's *Life In The Bubble* winning a Grammy for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album. He also had success with the eight-piece Small Phat Band, which recorded 2016's *An Elusive Man*. **DB**

# Phil Upchurch: 1941–2025

**GUITARIST PHIL UPCHURCH PASSED** away on Nov. 23 at the age of 84. An artist with the ability to play in any setting, Upchurch appeared on more than 2,000 albums as a sideman with some 30 recordings under his own name.

In the jazz world, Upchurch played a list of musical royalty including Quincy Jones, Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Joe Williams, Grover Washington Jr., Oscar Brown Jr., Stan Getz, Woody Herman, Groove Holmes, Carmen McRae and more. That includes a decade performing in organ trios with Jimmy Smith.

Outside of jazz, his credits are equally lofty — Michael Jackson, Donny Hathaway, Curtis Mayfield, Bob Dylan, Chaka Khan, Luther Vandross, B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, Otis Rush, Jimmy Reed and Maurice White.

The self-taught wonder was born in Chicago and first appeared on stage at the age of 8. His father gave him a ukulele at 13. Upchurch played guitar, bass and drums, notching his first professional gig at age 16.

He was in demand as a session player around Chicago, especially for Chess Records. Those gigs included recording with Ramsey Lewis, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, The Dells, Etta James and many more.

His first hit came in 1960, "You Can't Sit Down (Pts. 1 & 2)" by the Phil Upchurch Combo. It sold more than 1 million copies.

Upchurch joined fellow Chicagoan Curtis Mayfield as a featured guitarist on the soundtracks to the films *Superfly*, *Claudine*, *Let's Do It Again* and *Sparkle*. He worked with Donny



Hathaway on all of his studio and live albums.

In 1974, Upchurch took a gig playing rhythm guitar and bass with George Benson, an association that lasted seven years, including Benson's multi-platinum-selling album *Breezin'*.

In 1976, he became the first musician in Chicago to establish a professional home recording studio, Central Sounds West. **DB**

# In Memoriam: Dick Dunscomb

**J. RICHARD DUNSCOMB, A LEADING** authority in the fields of jazz and music education, died Nov. 12. The octogenarian was recognized internationally as a guest conductor, author, adjudicator, clinician and consultant. He was a professor emeritus of music at Columbia College Chicago, where he formerly chaired the Music Department.

Dunscomb served as vice president of the board of directors for the Midwest Clinic and was on the board of advisors for the Chicago Jazz Institute.

Raised in Decatur, Illinois, Dunscomb played trumpet and earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Millikin University. His first

teaching gig was at Argo High School in suburban Chicago, followed by a stint at Champaign (Illinois) Central High School.

He developed the jazz program at Purdue University in Indiana and later started the jazz program at Florida International University in Miami. After the passing of composer/educator/bandleader William Russo in 2023, Dunscomb joined the faculty of Columbia College Chicago, helping to transform the school's music program into a modern, forward-facing institution.

Dunscomb was recognized with honors and awards for conducting, teaching and service from several universities. The International Association of Jazz Educators elected him to its



Hall of Fame, and the Midwest Clinic awarded Dunscomb the Medal of Honor.

A noted author, Dunscomb's most recent publication was *Jazz Pedagogy: The Jazz Educator's Handbook and Resource Guide* (with Dr. Willie Hill Jr.). **DB**





# SNARKY PUPPY

## DREAMS, PARTNERSHIPS

Snarky Puppy dreaming BIG and recording live with the Metropole Orkest for the new release *Somni*.





# & LESSONS LEARNED

BY STEPHANIE JONES   PHOTOS BY ANNEMONE TAAKE



"We're going to do what we want to do; that's how we got a fanbase in the first place," says Snarky Puppy leader Michael League.



## Dreams are slippery things. From devout Jungians to the astrologers of TikTok, every new generation seeks to uncover what dreams might reveal about the self.

When he set out to write music for *Somni* (GroundUP), Snarky Puppy's new live collaboration with The Metropole Orkest, bandleader and producer Michael League booked himself a residency in the Japanese countryside to meditate on dreams. He, too, grappled with those questions.

For three weeks, the Catalonia-based artist secluded himself from the world — no Zooms, no interviews, no dinner meetings — and immersed himself in writing. By the end of his residency, he had composed the entirety of *Somni*, eight songs inspired by different conventions of dreams and dreaming. But, he'd soon learn, the coming months of arranging, producing, recording and multimedia collaborating would reveal less about the meaning of dreams and so much more about the meaning of Snarky.

For two decades, the multiple Grammy Award-winning band has been releasing new music and touring internationally with different iterations of its 20ish-piece ensemble. Members have collaborated with icons including Herbie Hancock, Erykah Badu, Eric Harland, Ledisi, Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar, Nate Smith, Kirk Franklin, Chaka

Khan and David Crosby; among the current roster are Robert "Sput" Searight, Jamison Ross, Zach Brock, Jay Jennings, Larnell Lewis, Keita Ogawa, Jason "JT" Thomas and Nikki Glaspie. Over the years, casual fans have fallen in love with signature melodies and the way Snarky compositions unfold live, but true fans hold sacred the band's commitment to each member's unique expression and a relentless pursuit of what's next.

"One of the main things I've learned over 21 years with Snarky Puppy," says League, "is that when you make people feel small and when you limit them and when you force them to fit inside boxes, the final result may be more in line with what you envisioned originally, but it will never be better than when they feel liberated and able to express themselves."

Recorded over three nights and issued on Nov. 21, alongside its Blu-Ray film release capturing the live performances, *Somni* features the artists stretching their individual sounds way out into a shared musical terrain.

"There's a common theme throughout all the songs, which is that I was trying to develop motivic ideas slowly," says League. "Dreams don't have hard cuts. Maybe a dream starts with you going grocery shopping with your

mom and then the grocery store turns into a football stadium and then your mom turns into Michael Jackson. ... They all shift slowly."

He admits leaning into the long, deliberate and patient trek from one outpost to the next — a departure even from *Sylva*, the band's first release with Metropole — might feel disorienting to certain listeners.

"I recognize that there's a contingent of our audience that really likes the bombastic-ness of what we were doing when we were younger," he continues. "But we're not going to write that way or play that way because people want us to do that. We're going to do what we want to do; that's how we got a fanbase in the first place."

Working with Metropole — an orchestra known for interpreting contemporary music with an ability, according to conductor Jules Buckley, to "understand the DNA of the groove" — consistently inspires League and his fellow artists to enter new realms of creativity. Reflecting on Snarky's years-long partnership with the Holland-based ensemble that has collaborated with generational luminaries from Ella Fitzgerald and Dizzy Gillespie to Tori Amos and Arooj Aftab, he admits defying his own artistic instincts can be a helpful strategy.

"There's just a million things you can do with 54 musicians playing that set of instruments, and it's very easy to get locked into doing traditional things," says League. "But when you really step back and look at it like a



child, it's like, 'Man, we're capable of doing so much stuff that's not typical.' So on this record I tried to explore several ideas that are maybe lesser used."

Those ideas emerge as both direct and conceptual references to dreaming, through the album and on individual songs. The art-

mers named each kit for the familiarities of its sound and, perhaps, in tribute to the shifts-and-layers nature of dreams. "Bonzo" features a 24-inch kick, 13-inch rack and 16- and 18-inch floor toms.

"I'm a huge John Bonham fan," says Glaspie. Named for Mr. Hakim, "Omar" fea-

ers room is that he wanted to get away from his own — just a little: "Even though [Jules] had a role in the arranging of *Sylva*, when I hear that record, it just sounds like a lot of me." While League was present throughout the process of arranging *Somni*, engaging the other artists and delivering feedback in real time, his primary motive was encouraging them to express themselves as individual composers.

"I was like, 'I want to hear all the different personalities,'" says League. "And I think that's really the thing that takes this record to a place that *Sylva* never got to — you really hear the personalities of these three other arrangers, not just me. And I'm really grateful to them and I can't say enough wonderful things about them."

Buckley, who's known to assemble small teams for each of his own projects and those with Metropole, felt the collaboration could serve the album in ways he and League wouldn't be able to achieve alone.

"When certain arrangers write," he says, "you can tell right away, 'that's Nelson Riddle, that's Vince Mendoza, that's John Clayton' — it's just clear. What comes with that is essentially the taste of that composer-slash-arranger. ... When I look at my own writing, there are things I think I'm really good at and there are things I think I'm kind of crap at. So I'm not going to chuck my own ego in the way when I know that [other people are] going to do a way better job than me on it. I'd rather ask them to do it and then work more with my producer hat on, listening to what they've done."

Over the years, League has grown to embrace that actionable ideology. Like Buckley, he's learned to get out of his own way by relegating his ego to relinquish control. It hasn't been easy. When Snarky Puppy formed, the band members were in their 20s, full of big ideas and youthful hubris. Admittedly, and like many working artists, at times League would allow his desire for external validation to influence his playing and composing. Since those early days, he's worked to develop patience and perspective around the art of music making, and to trust not only his fellow artists but also himself.

"It can be easy for musicians, and artists in general, to get caught up in perfectionism and to get caught up in self-importance like, 'Everything I do has to be amazing so that people think I'm amazing, and say I'm amazing so that I can believe I'm amazing,'" he says. "When you're younger you want to do everything yourself, you want to test your limits, you want to see what you're capable of. Then as you get older you're like, 'I want people who are really good at things to do things,' [laughs]. When you've lived enough experiences where someone contradicting your vision or modifying your vision resulted in a better artistic

## 'There's just a million things you can do with 54 musicians playing that set of instruments.'

ists play sections of "Chimera" — the song that taps into the id energy of dreams — with cooperative defiance.

"Musically, the inspiration for the expression of these choruses is actually Ornette Coleman, kind of like 'Lonely Woman,'" says League. "We told the orchestra, just, like, don't play together: 'Here's your melody. I don't care if it's out of time. I don't care if you add notes. Just don't play it politely, and don't play it together.' That's the only direction I gave them."

"As You Are But Not As You Were" profers a more literal manifestation of dreaming in the marimba melody sequencing through the piece. The idea references the phenomenon of dream characters whose faces may change while the rest of them stays the same.

"The identity is the motif and the instruments are the faces," says League. "In this case, the philosophical concept was governing the composition process."

Introducing the balağma, or saz, a Turkish stringed instrument, provides a different color palette for "Between Worlds," serving the album's atmospheric tribute to lucid dreaming, while "Recurrent," the "chase dream" song, features the four drummers delivering solos on four distinct kits, each uniquely named and tuned. According to League, the quartet of kits allows both the music to expand and the artists' personalities to intensify: "[It] affords [us] the unique opportunity to get four different sounds and find the most appropriate sound for the different sections of each song."

To Glaspie, the band's newest full-time member, the concept, in and of itself, is utterly Snarky.

"Mike is a genius for giving everyone the space to be themselves," she says. "That's the best type of band leader and producer; you call people because you want them to do what they do, not to make them conform to whatever idea it is you have in your head." The drum-

tures a 20-inch kick, 12-inch tom, 14-inch floor tom and, to the left, another 18-inch kick. "It was a bebop kind of hybrid kit," she says. "Steve," the "snom kit" named for Steve Jordan, features a collection of snares the drummers would switch off to become toms, and the Snarkiest kit according to Glaspie is "Sput," named for Searight: "The 'regulation,' if you will."

But the secret is in the cymbals. "We had to make sure we had the sound in the cymbals that we needed for the songs and the specific parts that we were playing on those kits," says Glaspie. "So there was a lot of moving and talking: We worked together to figure out, 'OK, well, on this song, you're doing this so you probably need this ride.' It was incredible, and I can't believe it honestly came together in the way that it did. But that's a testament to everyone wanting to make the music happen. Because the music is the most important thing."

Loyalty to the music drives the legacy of Snarky Puppy, overriding vision, expectation and, to a degree, ego. When League asked Buckley to be a primary arranger for *Somni*, the savvy conductor suggested they use four arrangers for the project, prompting a partnership with Jochen Neuffer and Same Gale. The four artists assembled in Berlin to share space and talk down ideas, placing strong focus on dreamscaping. Song by song, they got to work.

"It was so cool, first off to not have to do all of it," says League, who arranged much of *Sylva* himself. For "Drift" — whose title and shifting sections capture a common through-feeling in dreams — he remembers handing off the music to Gale with the following directive: "I said, 'Sam, Gil Evans, five-part harmony, go in there.' And he's like, 'All right, give me an hour.'"

The other reason League sparked to the idea of inviting more voices into the arrang-





The Snarky drummers, clockwise from top left: Larnell Lewis, Jason "JT" Thomas, Nikki Glaspie and Jamison Ross. The song "Recurrent" features the four drummers soloing on kits specifically and uniquely configured, tuned and named for drum royalty: "Bonzo," serves as a tribute to John Bonham; "Omar" for Omar Hakim; "Steve" for Steve Jordan; and "Sput" for Snarky member Robert "Sput" Searight.

product, you welcome it and you listen for it."

The contradiction-seeking approach enhances Snarky's projects and, by extension, Snarky's sound. Ross has been a full-time member for more than a decade, joining the band on tour in São Paulo and recording *Family Dinner Vol. 2*, followed by many other acclaimed releases. And like the other members, his musical palate has always flexed strong tastebuds.

"When I first joined Snarky Puppy, the language which we used to communicate about the music was from the great jazz lineage," says Ross. "The Miles Davises, the Nefertitis, the Four & Mores, the Herbie Hancocks, the Ron Carters, the Freddie Hubbards — that's how we communicated."

Over time, he has witnessed his bandmates evolve their own artistry through diligent work and self-reflection: "In Snarky, everyone has spent time researching not only the music but themselves. ... When they first started, everybody was 19, 20. Now we're all 40-plus. That's a lot of time and experience of getting to know yourself, your own convictions, but also, to be able to swallow the amount of lineage that has come before you, and utilize it in creative spaces. So that's what you hear. And that's why this record is one of

my favorites."

Perhaps what Ross appreciates most about how Snarky Puppy has developed into a collective force is the freedom every player has to be themselves.

"I am being the same Jamison that I am being in every other project I work on with Snarky Puppy," he says. "When it comes to developing that sound, Snarky Puppy is a sum of its parts. The name is a sound combined. That's why if you ever see a different lineup of the band, with different guitar players and different drummers and different horn players, it changes."

But with that freedom, each member takes on the solemn responsibility of suppressing their ego and working in service to the music — and to a sound that may shift and evolve but never changes its DNA. "You know [*Somni* is] a Snarky Puppy record," says Ross. "The melodies are Snarky Puppy melodies. And when I say Snarky Puppy, I mean 'Thing Of Gold,' 'What About Me,' 'Lingus': the songs that blew the band up. As soon as I heard [these melodies], I said, 'Yeah. This is Snarky Puppy 101.'"

For League, integrating everyone's strengths, tastes and creative impulses, particularly as they all continue to mature as artists

and human beings, sets the band apart from other composition-driven projects.

"That's like the secret sauce of Snarky Puppy," he says. "You have 20 people all making these little changes, improvising just the right amount, within the construct of the song so that you stay on message, that you get all these different dimensions, rather than just like — the thing that Mike wanted when he wrote the tune. If the band has a superpower, that's what it is."

Some might say being part of Snarky Puppy, with its legacy of shapeshifting through a consistent yet evolving identity, is similar to entering the realm of dreams. As the band heads into its 22nd year as a collective of artists serving a collective of sound, League has entered a decidedly less "precious" phase of his artistry as a player and composer.

"I won't say that it started that way," he says. "I've written probably 150 songs or more. And then more you do it, the less worried you are about it being the most amazing thing that anyone's ever heard and that you've ever done. It just becomes, 'I feel a certain way; I want to write something about it; I want to execute it well so that people understand it and boom — I'm going to put it out into the world and start writing the next song.'"

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Soulive is, from left, Neal Evans, Alan Evans and Eric Krasno.



# SOULIVE STILL LIVE

BY GARY FUKUSHIMA PHOTOS BY KIM EVANS

**Neal Evans is telling a story about opening for the Dave Matthews Band for the first time. “This is a good one,” he says, recalling that they rolled up to the staging area in an old Eagle tour bus. “[The crew] were like, ‘Whoa, I haven’t seen one of these in like ...’” he chuckles at the memory.**

“The stage production manager was this really gruff cat, and he [told us], ‘You have 45 minutes — if you go over one second, you’ll never ever play on stage with Dave Matthews again.’ He was not joking. And we were just like [*shrugs*], ‘Cool.’

“We get on stage. He [said], ‘You got a clock?’ And we were like, ‘Clock? No, we don’t have a clock.’ We do our set, and two seconds under [45 minutes], we finished. We got off stage, and [Dave Matthews and] his whole production team were like, ‘Yeeaah!’” They had no idea how close they came to losing the biggest gig of their career up to that point.

They — keyboardist Neal Evans, his brother Alan Evans on drums and guitarist Eric Krasno, collectively known for the past quarter of a century as Soulive — are spending a few hours together with DownBeat. They are glad to talk about *Flowers*, their first full-length album in 15 years, but it’s also an opportunity to revisit the story of their unique rise to unprecedented fame as an instrumental organ trio swept up in the jam band craze that ignited in the 1990s well into the 2000s, electrifying large crowds in the same touring circuits powered by Dave Matthews Band, The Grateful Dead and Phish, swimming in a deep well of hundreds of

other groups. It’s also a chance to see how the three long-time friends and bandmates have grown, both collectively and individually, since their last interview for DownBeat — in 2003, when they found themselves on the cover of the February issue of that year.

At that time, the band was in the process of digitally recording all of their live shows for their third album for Blue Note, which was released the following year as the self-titled *Soulive (Live)* (2004). Back then Krasno and the Evans brothers were spending 150 days a year together on the road, so to them a documentation of their live performances was the best representation of who they were.

Today, the three spend far less time together. They are on video chat, each from their own home studios, separated by state lines and many miles: Neal Evans in Brooklyn, New York; Alan Evans in western Massachusetts; and Krasno across the country in Pasadena, California. The guitarist just returned from New Orleans, playing for a fundraising concert for Tulane University alongside Ivan Neville, Taj Mahal and Dawes, among others. He’s played with Lettuce (since before he joined Soulive), Derek Trucks, the Tedeschi Trucks Band and Robert Randolph, garnering





"I think that's where we're at now. Just us traveling to Iceland and being in this environment, it's already changed whatever you think of, what you thought that song was going to be," says Alan Evans.

eight Grammys along the way.

Neal is working on a project with producer/DJ Keith Shocklee (Public Enemy, the Bomb Squad), and he and Alan are co-producing an album for singer Lamar Williams Jr.

Alan remarks, "Kim, my wife, pointed out that this is the first thing that Neal and I have worked on together since before Soulive."

"Oh, man, I didn't even ... wow," says Neal, surprised.

"Throughout the whole [time], we've all worked on separate things, but Neal and I literally never worked on anything together outside of, what year, like '97 or '98 or something like that?"

"'97, yeah ... I didn't think about that," affirms Neal.

They all have their own lives and careers far away from each other, but they have remained close, getting together occasionally to perform

and record. But as the years advance, they can stack up in a hurry. Six have passed between their last recorded convening, a set of self-released EPs: *Cinematics, Vol. 1* (2018) and *Vol. 2* (2019). Once again the band has gotten back together, this time due to a fortuitous happenstance seized upon by Alan.

Near the Arctic Circle, on the remote peninsula of Tröllaskagi in Iceland, lies a resort built on a 15th century sheep farm. Guests can enjoy a number of amenities there: mountain biking or heli-skiing the rugged mountains, braving the frigid ocean waters via kayak or surfboard — or laying down tracks in a state-of-the-art recording studio converted from a century-old grocery store. Alan Evans had been to Flóki Studios several times as a producer and engineer. "I kind of developed a relationship with the people who run it, own it, whatever," he explains. "It's a multifaceted kind

of organization that they have, based out of Crested Butte, Colorado. They reached out to us about playing a festival [in Colorado] at the end of January. I just thought, if they want us to play this festival, wouldn't it be amazing if we recorded an album for them and it would come out the day of the festival? And they went for it."

Alan continues, "It's straight-up one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. Anywhere. I was really hoping that someday we could get over there, do something, and the opportunity presented itself. I just kind of threw a Hail Mary, wasn't really expecting them to go for it. And they did."

Incredible opportunities might be the *raison d'être* of this band. Soulive's rapid ascent in the early 2000s would lead many to believe that beyond being talented and energetic performers they were extremely shrewd marketers to accrue their large, loyal following. These guys must have really knew what they were doing.

"Yeah, we really didn't, man," says Alan.

Neal adds, "I mean, we just did what we thought. There was..."

"No blueprint," says Krasno, finishing Neal's thought. He remembers first hearing the Evans brothers in the late 1990s, when they were playing for the band Moon Boot Lover. "I remember just being blown away by these two, the way they locked in together and the way that they grooved and the pocket and [with] Neal, I had never seen anyone really rock bass with the left hand the way that he [did]."

Krasno continues: "And the way Al was playing drums; just crazy pocket, but he could feel so much space. So many dynamics in what they were doing, and I just remember being completely blown away. Fast-forward years later, that band broke up, and I came to see them as Soulive. And they played a gig."

"Yeah, one gig," interjects Neal. "We had one gig."

Krasno responds, "You could say they did one gig without me, but not really because I ended up sitting in and playing." Not long after, Neal and Alan called Krasno to come over to jam with them. Krasno remembers, "That day was when we created *Get Down* with the first EP, which kind of became our first album, I guess."

From there, the trio started touring heavily. "It was just such a different landscape," Krasno offers. "There was very much a thing in the northeast where there were all these clubs. You could like kind of just do this circuit in the northeast and keep doing it, you know? So, [Neal and Al] had relationships with all these clubs, and we were able to grow a fan base very quickly."

"It was just different because that was the way musicians made it, you gigged and toured," says Neal. "Some of the first gigs were playing like a Friday night with a major touring band



opening up in front of a sold-out crowd, just because of these kinds of friendships that we had [made].”

Alan adds, “It was also a taper culture. It had reached this kind of zenith, because the taper culture has been around since the Grateful Dead, but at the point where we were, late ’90s, early 2000s, it was easier for people to come in

fired from the Dave Matthews tour, Soulive would open for other well-known artists from Common to John Mayer, from the Roots to the Rolling Stones, with chances to record and perform with many others: Matthews, John Scofield, Chaka Khan, Aaron Neville, Questlove, Reggie Watts.

But constant touring was a grind, and ulti-

Unlike the expansive, all-live album they recorded in 2003, this new offering sports 10 concise, well-constructed tracks, many of which contain a good deal of layering of extra sounds and textures, including some very Peter Gabriel-esque vocal tracks from singer Van Hunt on “Flowers At Your Feet.” It almost sounds like an indie album at times.

“All three of us, we record constantly on so many different things,” Krasno says, regarding the layering. “We tried not to overdo it because, you know, obviously we want to perform this music, too. But we didn’t think about it much. It was just kind of like, ‘Hey, right here would be great to layer a harmony, or right here it might be nice to have a rhythm part with a lead on top.’ So, it’s really kind of just based in the moment, based in the song.”

“All of us grew up listening to songs,” answers Neal. “It’s different when we’re going out as a live band, and we could play a 15-minute song, and that’s like cake just because we have that skill set. But we also have the skill set and understanding of music and song, structure and working with different artists, and it’s just kind of how we’ve evolved.”

“It was all just being in that space, too,” suggests Krasno. “When you’re looking at mountains and glaciers and water, and it was very peaceful. All of a sudden you can’t really deny your surroundings inspiring how you play.”

One of their tunes has a more Stateside feel to it. “Baby Jupiter” is named after the New York club Soulive used to play at every Wednesday from 1:30 to 4 a.m. Alan remarks in the album press release that track represents “the younger versions of ourselves, played by guys who actually know what they’re doing now.”

What do they know now that they didn’t then?

“You just get to a point where you kind of realize the things that actually matter,” Alan says. “You can spend hours on eight bars of a section of a tune or a solo or just getting a sound. ... The people who listen to your music or come to see you play, they don’t notice or care about that stuff. What they do care about is how it makes them feel. And that’s what I’ve come to realize: If you create something that people feel good about, you’re good.”

“You’re fighting to keep what [your initial idea] was instead of just allowing the natural process to take it to where it’s naturally going to end up being,” continues Alan. “I think that’s where we’re at now. Just us traveling to Iceland and being in this environment, it’s already changed whatever you think of, what you thought that song was going to be. So just allow it to happen.” He is talking about their album, but perhaps those sentiments have always been a mantra for their band of old souls continuing to live and evolve, from Manhattan Island to the outer reaches of an Icelandic peninsula. **DB**

## *‘All of a sudden you can’t really deny your surroundings inspiring how you play.’*

with gear and be kind of invisible. So, there was a lot of sharing of information over these networks. It made it so that our music went kind of — I don’t want to say viral — but in certain communities, it just spread really fast.”

By the turn of the millennium, Soulive’s notoriety caught the attention of Bruce Lundvall at Blue Note, who at the time was looking to expand the label to include music that could operate in spaces beyond traditional jazz. (Lundvall would soon sign another crossover artist, a promising young singer named Norah Jones.)

“That really took things international,” says Krasno. “The first time we ever went to Japan, we had a thousand people at our shows, and it was funny because we worked so hard building brick by brick in the States, and then all of a sudden, [with] the promo of Toshiba EMI, and Blue Note, we got to Japan, [where] we were bigger than anywhere else. ... And I remember we didn’t touch any gear while we were there, it was all first class, everything. And then we got back, and I remember our first gig back ... in our van, loading our own gear, and be like, ‘Oh, was that even real? What just happened, and how are we back to this again?’”

Neal remembers when he realized how big their band had become, walking by Tower Records on Broadway in Manhattan. “They had these massive billboards on the side ... it was Britney Spears, Soulive and then Mariah Carey. So that was amazing. But then to go to Japan, and we walked into Tower Records, and we had a section with cardboard cutouts of us, life-size things. We were like, ‘What in the world is going on here?’”

Not bad for a band that didn’t know what they were doing. In addition to not getting

mately the band stopped doing it, realizing there is more to life. Krasno moved to Pasadena to raise his family and do more session work in nearby Los Angeles. Neal, who as a student of Jaki Byard at Manhattan School of Music would put in 12 hours a day on piano, now barely touches the instrument. “For the past few years, I just play bass,” he confesses. Playing roots in his left hand since first learning piano at age 8, Neal finally picked up an actual bass and realized his hands somehow could play the same basslines he has known on keys all this time.

“I will attest to this ‘cause Neal was just up here,” says Alan. “Yeah, bro, it literally made no damn sense, man.”

He confesses that throughout his entire career, he has never practiced the drums very much. “The amount of time that I put into actually practicing is like probably one or two percent of my entire life,” he says. “It just bores me to tears. But whenever I do [play], I feel good.” It’s a similar situation with the band. “We don’t tour every day like we used to. But when we get together, it’s like instantaneous. We might as well have been on the road right there.”

The trio spent six days at Flóki, nearly the longest they have ever spent on a single project. Much of what they recorded they worked out as they went. Krasno says, “We did come into it with a bunch of ideas that we sent around, but really we let a lot of it happen in the room, too. ... What I love about playing with this group of musicians is about the spontaneous decisions that we make in the moment that play off of each other. A lot of that happened making this record, where we just trusted each other. And I think that maybe the years of playing together, the trust [we] built influences how we play.”





# LETTUCE

## Keepers of

Lettuce, from left, Eric Coomes, Adam Deitch, Ryan Zoidis, Eric Bloom, Adam Smirnoff and Nigel Hall.





# the Funk

BY BILL MILKOWSKI    PHOTOS BY SAM SILKWORTH





**They were Berklee misfits. Neither jazzy enough for the straightahead crowd at Boston’s highly prestigious College of Music nor heavy enough for the metal faction there, they found an outlet for their funky inclinations around the corner from Berklee at Wally’s Cafe, the hallowed jazz club on the South End founded in 1947 by Barbadian immigrant Joseph “Wally” Walcott.**

It’s a venue that continues to serve as an incubator for local talent. “We are really all graduates, not just of Berklee, but the School of Wally’s Jazz Café,” said Lettuce guitarist Adam Smirnoff (aka Shmeeans). “We’re all Wally’s stepchildren, and there’s not words to tell what that place means to us.”

Longtime Lettuce fans already know the origin of the band’s moniker. As the story goes, they would show up at Wally’s, asking other bands: “Let us sit in. Let us play a tune during your break. Let us borrow your bass amp.” And so the eager group became known as “the let us band,” which morphed into Lettuce. Whether that name also applied to the amount of “devil’s lettuce” they were smoking back at the Berklee dorms is unknown. Regardless, the name stuck. And their dedication to the funk hasn’t waned over three decades.

It is extremely rare to find a band that has stayed together as long as Lettuce has. The original core members — guitarists Smirnoff and Eric Krasno (of Soulive fame, see page 28), drummer Adam Deitch, bassist Erick Coomes (aka Maverick), saxophonist Ryan Zoidis — met at a five-week summer program at Berklee back in 1992 when they were just 16. They shared dorm rooms, favorite records and jammed a lot, drawing on their foundational heroes — James Brown; Maceo Parker; Earth, Wind & Fire; Tower of Power; Herbie Hancock and The Meters. They returned to Berklee as full-time students in 1994 and gigged around Boston officially as Lettuce before graduating in 1998.

Following a four-week Wednesday night residency in January of 2001 at the late, lamented New York club Wetlands, where guests like

trombonist Fred Wesley, turntablist DJ Logic and guitarist John Scofield would sit in with the band, Lettuce finally released its debut album in 2002, *Outta Here*, then followed up with 2004’s *Live At The Blue Note Tokyo* on Kufala Recordings. Among the 10 more studio albums and five live recordings they have released since, Lettuce’s fervent fanbase has indicated its favorites along the way on social media. One wag on Reddit mentioned that if he were a Major League Baseball player, his walk-up music would be the swaggering march “Blast Off” from 2008’s *Rage!* while another indicated that “Phyllis” from 2015’s *Crush* was perhaps the most transportive song ever.

More recently, Lettuce expanded its horizons with its most grandiose undertaking yet, *Lettuce With The Colorado Symphony*, recorded at Denver’s Boettcher Concert Hall in 2018 and released as a two-CD/three-LP set last February.

The group’s recently released 11th studio recording, the aptly named *Cook*, comes with a recipe book in the vinyl album for pairing foods with their new signature brand Red Crush and Orange Crush organic natural wines, in partnership with the Colorado-based winery Aquila Cellars. “Music and food are very related,” said Lettuce drummer Deitch. “Use the wrong ingredients in either and you can ruin the sound and the meal.”

Lettuce also recently announced its partnership with the nonprofit organization Music is a Language to fund a full-tuition scholarship for a deserving student to attend the prestigious Berklee College of Music, where the one-time misfits turned successful entrepreneurs got their start.

DownBeat caught up with the two Adams shortly before the release of *Cook*.

Adam Deitch grew up in a musical household in Nyack, New York. Indeed, both his parents, Bob and Denise Deitch, played the drums. “My dad was more into Billy Cobham, Buddy Rich and Alphonse Mouzon. Mom was more like a straight-pocket player who was into Bernard Purdie. My dad eventually switched over to piano, and they did duo gigs all around the East Coast for 15 years, playing lounges, clubs, weddings, parties and bar mitzvahs. I sat in with them occasionally. That was my training.” So in a sense, Adam remained in the family business while developing his own thing, branching out in ways of which neither he nor he parents would have ever dreamed.

Concurrent with playing in Lettuce during its early years, Deitch also landed more lucrative high-profile gigs with the Average White Band (1998–2001) and John Scofield (2001–2004). As he recalled, “I remember asking Average White Band for a \$300 raise so I could get \$1,500 a week. They said no. The month after that, Scofield called to go on tour. And the money was way better. And literally every free moment I had during my three years with AWB and my three years with Sco, I was doing a Lettuce gig.”

He first met Scofield when the guitarist sat in with Lettuce at Wetlands. As he recalled, “Eric Krasno (guitarist and co-founder of Lettuce who eventually split off to form Soulive) knew that John was looking for a drummer for this new funk-oriented project, and that I would be a perfect fit. So he arranged for Sco to sit in with Lettuce. We were all psyched to play with him. We all knew he was coming, so we learned one of his old tunes. And at one point during the set, he cut the whole band off and said, ‘Just me and the drums.’ And of course, I was totally freaking out, because he’s one of my heroes. Anyway, that night he ended up cutting the whole band off three more times, turning around and saying, ‘Just me and drums.’ And each time we’d play together he was smiling. And he called me the next day.”

Deitch appeared on Scofield’s free-spirited funk-fusion outing *Überjam* in 2002. The guitarist returned the favor by appearing on two tracks of Lettuce’s 2002 debut, *Outta Here*. Deitch next played on Scofield’s 2003 album *Up All Night*. He returned to the Scofield fold on 2013’s *Überjam Deux* and has hinted at another reunion with the guitar great in the fall of 2026.

Lettuce remains steadfastly committed to the funk on *Cook*, paying tribute to James Brown on “Clav It Your Way” and “The Mac” (dedicated to J.B.’s longtime alto saxophonist Maceo Parker), The Meters on “The Matador” and the slamming title track, and Tower of Power on “Grewt Up” and “Keep On” (co-written by TOP founder Emilio Castillo), the latter featuring Erick “Maverick” Coomes bub-



bling bass lines which come directly out of the Rocco Prestia school of rapid-fire 16th-note pulse playing.

“One of the things that brought our band together was our love for Tower of Power,” said Smirnoff. “Obviously, we have many influences, but that love of TOP is a big part of what united us. I think when you love something with all of your heart, all of your passion, you just tend to gravitate towards other people with those same passions and love. And for us, we gravitated toward each other because of this.”

Added Deitch, “When I was with Average White Band we got to open for Tower so many times, and Dave Garibaldi and Rocco were both so cool to me,” Deitch recalled. “And Emilio would let me play him some of my early Lettuce demos that I had recorded in my dad’s basement. I would bring it to him and put the headphones right on Emilio after sound check and he’d go, ‘Sounds good, man. You gotta keep that going, man.’ He was super supportive. So I love those guys. I was 22 years old and they were doing what they needed to do, which was inspire the youth. And that’s what they did for me.”

Lettuce stretches the boundaries beyond the strictly-on-the-one funk formula on a few adventurous tunes on the new album, including with three spacey, rubato interludes strewn throughout the record, each dubbed “Sesshins.” As Deitch explained, “We have this album that was kind of quietly dropped in 2020 called *Vibe*. It’s 100% improvised. It’s basically 45 minutes of ‘Let’s get in the studio, press record and see what happens.’ So the ‘Sesshins’ on the new record are like an ode to that, for all the people that want to hear us just create in the moment.”

Added Smirnoff, “We’ve actually been doing that concept now for the past few records from a creative process. (Indeed, 2015’s *Crush* contains four brief “Ludes” throughout the album). “We come into these sessions with a lot solidified ideas or partially finished ideas, then we work with each other to record them or to add things to them. And then at the end these sessions we say, ‘OK, now that we’ve done something so structured, let’s do something unstructured.’ Because we want capture some of the essence of our live shows to try and balance that structure and non-structure at the same time. So often we’ll go into the studio and at the end, we’ll just play with no solidified ideas, we’ll let things happen. And those interludes are pieces of that.”

“We’re just trying to put all our influences — Tower of Power, the J.B. thing, The Meters, hip-hop and collective improv — into one thing that tastes good,” said Deitch.

Elsewhere on *Cook*, Lettuce also pushes into some new territory on Deitch’s atmospheric “7 Tribes,” which features some nice muted trumpet playing by Eric “Benny” Bloom. “I was looking at our catalog and seeing how it was mostly

all blues scales and dominant stuff, so I thought, ‘Let’s bring in some other harmony and other scales.’ So I was going through some phrygian scales. Around the same time I was also really digging on this band Khruangbin (a trio from Houston, Texas, that blends global music with psychedelia, American soul, Thai rock and Iranian pop) and how they use some other harmony in their music. So I wrote that kind of Lebanese or Middle Eastern style funk tune and told the guys, ‘If we’re gonna play over this, it’s not going to be in your typical wheelhouse. You’re going to actually have to know the scale the tune is in and figure out what you’re going to play over it.’ And so that was a fun little exercise for us.”

The soul-jazz number “Breathe” features guitarist Smirnoff offering up a jazzy warm-toned solo replete with some mellow Wes/Benson-esque octaves work. “That’s a total ’90s hip-hop groove, which I grew up playing because I love that kind of shit,” said Deitch. “I just wanted the horn line to kind of mimic this rap that Sam Kininger, our old sax player, did over a track I recorded in the mid-’90s when I was in a band with Shmeeans and Maverick called Fat Bag. We were living in Yonkers, and I was making beats and trying to get my beat game up, because that was where hip-hop was then, and Sam ended up doing a jokey rap over one of them. And the rhythm of that rap became the horn line to ‘Breathe.’”

The misterioso number “Storms Coming” harkens back to some of the ’90s work of Wu-Tang Clan. “We did a bunch of touring with GZA, The Genius, one of the founding members of the Wu-Tang Clan,” said Deitch. “I’m trying to get him to rap on that one. But the idea was that it would be something dark and moody. A lot of our music is very uplifting, it’s super happy and brings you out of a bad mood type vibe. But ‘Storm’s Coming’ doesn’t have that immediate dopamine burst. It’s kind of like a brooding, almost horror movie vibe. And we need more stuff like that in our catalog.”

On the other side of the dynamic coin is “Gold Tooth,” a hard funk throwback to Zapp or P-Funk. “It’s also a throwback to the Lettuce tune ‘Outta Here,’ the title track of our first album,” Deitch added. “It’s that kind of groove where I’m just playing kick on the one and snare on the two, another kick on the three and another snare on the four. Sometimes all you need is the simplest groove on the drums like that and let the bass and the guitar and the horns do all the funky stuff. So by the drums being simple, the yin and yang of the tune changes. All the syncopation is within the guitar and the bass and the horns.”

Their cover of singer Keni Burke’s 1982 R&B hit “Rising To The Top” features some inspired vocals by New Orleans-based Nigel Hall, who also plays keyboards in Lettuce. Smirnoff

offers up some Wah-Wah Watson styled guitar effects on that tune, a trick he also successfully pulled off on “Phyllis” from *Crush*. Said Deitch, “Growing up in New York, hip-hop radio was big, R&B radio was big — 98.7 KISS and 107.5 WBLS, along with some of the underground stations. And they would always play that tune ‘Rise To The Top.’ It’s an R&B staple that the ’80s hip-hop crowd could still get with it and it still made sense. So I have many fond memories associated with that tune from New York radio, which was like my lifeline to what was hip, what was going on.”

The title track to *Cook* contains a hidden reference to another ’90s hip-hop influence. As Deitch explained, “When I lived with our bass player Maverick at Berklee, he brought in all these rap records to check out. One day he brought home this Snoop Dogg record that nobody knew. Snoop had just moved from Death Row Records to No Limit Records, and his first record on this new label with Master P, who’s a New Orleans guy, had a track called ‘Tru Tank Dogs’ (from 1998’s *Da Game Is To Be Sold, Not To Be Told*) that had this beat on it that we used to love. We’d listen to it all the time. And so the beat to ‘Cook’ is actually an ode to ‘Tru Tank Dogs’ by Snoop Dogg on that *No Limit* album.”

Though the band may have its origins at the Berklee, the members of Lettuce are currently spread out across the country. Drummer Deitch, guitarist Smirnoff and trumpeter Bloom have all been living in Denver for the past 10 years while keyboardist-singer Hall lives in New Orleans, bassist Coomes lives in Long Beach, California, and saxophonist Zoidis lives in Portland, Maine. But whenever they return to the bandstand or go back into the studio, they come together like one big, happy, funky family.

“At the time that I started playing guitar, I went through something as a kid where I had like full alopecia, losing my hair,” said Smirnoff, who is well-versed in the whole lineage of funky rhythm guitarists. “You know, I stopped playing sports. I didn’t wanna take my hat off, ever. I was just going through something as a kid. And I feel like something about connecting with this music and meeting these guys really, really brought me to a better place in my life.”

They’ve been hitting it together, strictly on the one, for the past three decades. And there’s plenty more funk to come from these Lettuce lads. “I’ve always kind of looked at funk as a regional thing,” said Smirnoff. “Minneapolis funk had its own thing and the Jamaica Queens funk sound had its own thing. The East Bay with Tower of Power and Cold Blood and Mike Clark had its own thing and Detroit with Motown has its own thing. And New Orleans, my goodness, talk about having your own thing. And to me, that whole scene has been the most-well preserved, historically, in this country. You can still go there on Jazz Fest and feel it.”

DB



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# 2026 JAZZ VENUE GUIDE

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## UNITED STATES



Jimmy's Jazz & Blues Club in Portsmouth, New Hampshire

## EAST

### CONNECTICUT

#### Firehouse 12

New Haven, CT

Firehouse 12's recording studio doubles as an intimate 75-seat auditorium, where its Jazz Series runs for 12 weeks during the spring and fall. On tap in 2025 were Darius Jones Trio, Joe Fiedler Trio, Ches Smith Clone Row and more.

[firehouse12.com](http://firehouse12.com)

#### The Side Door Jazz Club

Old Lyme, CT

Billed as the "only club" between Boston and New York City, The Side Door rests in the historic Old Lyme Inn. Recent acts include Camille Thurman, Papo Vázquez and Amir ElSaffar New Quartet.

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

### MARYLAND

#### An die Musik Live

Baltimore, MD

An die Musik Live is Baltimore's finest listening room. With plush chairs and great acoustics, this performance space in a historic rowhouse is intimate and inviting. Recent acts include Akiko Tsuruga, Alison Miller, Warren Wolf, Eri Yamamoto, Marty Ehrlich, Ethnic Heritage Ensemble and Nels Cline.

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

#### Keystone Korner Baltimore

Baltimore, MD

Back in the 1970s, the Keystone Korner San Francisco served as a magnet for jazz greatness. Todd Barkan has brought the vibe to the East Coast. Recent acts include Tammy McCann, Isaiah Collier and Bria Skonberg.

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

### MASSACHUSETTS

#### The Lilypad

Cambridge, MA

The Lilypad programs an array of musical styles with a heavy dose of jazz from local legends like The Fringe and saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi.

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

#### Scullers Jazz Club

Boston, MA

A fixture since 1989, Sculler's features top names on weekends like the John Pizzarelli, Steve Davis and Cyrus Chestnut as well as weekday sets by area musicians.

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

#### Wally's Café Jazz Club

Boston, MA

Founded in 1947, Wally's was the first Black-owned jazz club in New England — a tiny room showcases young talent.

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

### NEW HAMPSHIRE

#### Jimmy's Jazz & Blues Club

Portsmouth, NH

Jimmy's features exceptional music and cuisine. Visually breathtaking, the club is engineered for great acoustics, state-of-the-art production, sound and lighting. It's located in a restored 1905 building in downtown Portsmouth. Recent acts include Misha, Mavis Staples, Van Morrison, Chris Botti, Arturo Sandoval and Spyro Gyra.

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

### NEW YORK

#### Birdland

New York, NY

Planted in Manhattan's theater district, Birdland features some of the finest jazz players in the world. Recent acts include Stacey Kent, Frank Vignola's Guitar Night, Champion Fulton and Bill Charlap & Dee Dee Bridgewater.

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

#### Blue Note

New York, NY

The Blue Note preserves jazz history while

fostering innovation. Recent acts include Chris Botti, Robert Glasper, Cory Wong and Tank & the Bangas.

[bluenotejazz.com/nyc](http://bluenotejazz.com/nyc)

#### Daddy Rabbit at Adelaide's Salon

New York, NY

Daddy Rabbit is held in the intimate speakeasy space of Adelaide's Salon. Described by Forbes as "the most electrifying party in town," Daddy Rabbit places a grand piano in the room's center to create an immersive atmosphere for world-class musicians. Recent acts include Misha Piatigorsky, Khailah Johnson, Benny Benack III, Emily Braden and Steve Nelson.

[adelaide-salon.com](http://adelaide-salon.com)

#### Dizzy's Club

New York, NY

The entire Jazz at Lincoln Center complex offers fantastic listening experiences, but Dizzy's Club, with its glass-walled view of Central Park, presents something special. Recent acts include Christian Sands, Matt Wilson, the Carlos Henriquez Nonet and Wycliffe Gordon.

[jazz.org/dizzys](http://jazz.org/dizzys)

#### Jazz Forum Arts

Tarrytown, NY

The Jazz Forum is Westchester's only dedicated jazz club, presenting world-class artists in an intimate, art-filled listening room just north of NYC. The club offers an exceptional acoustics, stellar hospitality and a community atmosphere. Jazz Forum champions jazz legends, rising artists and educational programs that inspire the next generation. Recent acts include Joshua Redman Quartet, Bill Charlap Trio, John Pizzarelli Trio, Paquito D'Rivera Quintet and Ekep Nkwelle.

[jazzforumarts.org](http://jazzforumarts.org)

#### Jazz Gallery

New York, NY

The Jazz Gallery is an intimate listening room in the Flatiron District of Manhattan presenting established and emerging artists. Recent acts include Bill Frisell, Gerald Clayton and Jason Lindner.

[jazzgallery.org](http://jazzgallery.org)

#### Mezzrow

New York, NY

Inspired by the biography "Mezz" Mezzrow's *Really The Blues*, Mezzrow is an intimate, acoustically warm listening room dedicated to piano and small-group jazz. Audiences can hear musicians up close, without distraction. Recent acts include Ron Carter, Gene Bertoncini, Samara Joy, Bill Charlap and George Cables.

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

#### Nublu

New York, NY

This East Village club presents a variety of music in a three-level space. Recent performers include Samara Pinderhughes, Sara Serpa and Marta Sanchez. The two locations are 151 Avenue C, and Nublu Classic at 62 Avenue C.

[nublu.net](http://nublu.net)





Smoke Jazz Club in New York

## Ornithology

Brooklyn, NY

Ornithology has become a hip hit in Bushwick with packed houses in a cozy atmosphere.

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

## Smalls Jazz Club

New York, NY

Smalls promotes and presents jazz as well as providing a communal residence for the fans and artists. It offers intimate, underground energy, where audiences sit close enough to feel every note. Recent acts include George Coleman, Helen Sung, Gilad Hekselman, Peter Bernstein and Miguel Zenón.

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



## Smoke Jazz Club

New York, NY

Smoke embodies the classic New York jazz club: intimate, focused and dedicated to presenting the most acclaimed artists working today. Its well-regarded menu complements the experience, making Smoke an essential room for serious jazz fans. Smoke boasts a Grammy-nominated record label, Smoke Sessions Records, and a celebrated streaming concert series, Smoke Screens. Its annual Coltrane Festival is a must. Recent acts include the Bill Charlap Trio, the Al Foster Quartet with Chris Potter, the Eubanks Brothers Band, Branford Marsalis Quartet, Ravi Coltrane Quartet, Brad Mehldau Trio, Emmet Cohen Trio and the Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart Trio.

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

## The Stone at The New School

New York, NY

The Stone serves as a great listening room for creative improvisation beyond borders. Founded in 2005 by John Zorn.

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

## Village Vanguard

New York, NY

Founded in 1935, the Vanguard is the most-revered room in New York and continues to be a bucket-list destination for jazz lovers. Mondays with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra are a must.

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

## PENNSYLVANIA

### Chris' Jazz Café

Philadelphia, PA

Founded in 1989, it's the longest continuously operating jazz club in the history of Philadelphia.

The club mixes amazing locals with known national acts.

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

## The Deerhead Inn

Delaware Water Gap, PA

Located in the beautiful Poconos, the Deerhead is the oldest continuously running jazz club in the U.S. The list of greats who have played is nearly endless. The albums recorded there, legendary.

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

## MCG Jazz

Pittsburgh, PA

Since 1987, MCG Jazz has allowed audiences to witness world-class jazz artists and innovative performances in its intimate music hall. Recent include the WDR Big Band with Bob Mintzer and Dave Stryker; Joshua Redman Group with Gabrielle Cavassa; Béla Fleck; Edmar Castañeda & Antonio Sánchez; and Nicole Mitchell.

[mcgjazz.org](http://mcgjazz.org)

## Solar Myth

Philadelphia, PA

This hip, full-service operation offers a coffee shop, bar, record store ... oh, and live music. Recent acts include the Dezron Douglas Quintet, Bobby Zankel and Chávez/Ismaïly/Saunier.

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

## South Restaurant & Jazz Club

Philadelphia, PA

Southern cuisine and an intimate 75-seat space make South a must-stop up north. The club invites a stream of great local talent to play in one of the great jazz cities on earth.

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

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

### Blues Alley

Washington, D.C.

Founded in 1965, Blues Alley is the nation's oldest continuing jazz supper club, having showcased Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson, Grover Washington Jr., Ramsey Lewis and more in a small, intimate setting. Blues Alley offers an ambiance reminiscent of the jazz clubs of the 1920s and '30s. Open seven days a week, the club specializes in authentic Creole cuisine, steak and seafood. Recent acts include Stanley Jordan, Buster Williams, Monty Alexander, Jon Faddis and Bob James.

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

## SOUTH

## FLORIDA

### Heidi's Jazz Club & Restaurant

Cocoa Beach, FL

Heidi's nails ambiance, delivering regional artists in an intimate, 100-seat setting. Heidi's features local and touring jazz and blues artists.

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



## The Jazz Club of Sarasota

Sarasota, FL

The Jazz Club has presented legendary jazz musicians, such as David Brubeck, Benny Goodman, George Shearing, Zoot Sims and NEA Jazz Master Dick Hyman. It is one of the largest jazz clubs in the U.S., producing a major festival and over 100 events a year. Recent acts include Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band, Marcus Miller and Emmet Cohen.

[jazzclubsarasota.org](http://jazzclubsarasota.org)

## Judson's Live

Orlando, FL

Opened in January 2024, the club's first headliner was the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis. More recently artists like Sammy Figueroa, Haley Reinhart and top local talent have been featured.

[judsonslive.org](http://judsonslive.org)

## GEORGIA

### The Velvet Note

Alpharetta, GA

The Velvet Note delivers an intimate, world-class jazz experience in a setting as comfortable as your living room. Each of the club's 40 seats is close to the music. Add in exceptional acoustics, warm hospitality and top-tier musicians. Recent acts include Russell Gunn, Kate McGarry and Kenny Garrett.

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

## LOUISIANA

### Blue Nile

New Orleans, LA

Located in the heart of the historic Frenchmen Street, The Blue Nile has been the home to countless top funk, blues, soul and brass shows, featuring local, national and international acts. Recent acts include Kermit Ruffins & the BBQ Swingers, Big Sam's Funky Nation, Marco Benevento and the Krasno Moore Project.

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

## Kermit's Treme Mother-In-Law Lounge

New Orleans, LA

Founded by Ernie K-Doe in 1994, this low-tech beauty serves as a brass band haven. Kermit Ruffins opened it back up with great music and food often cooked by Ruffins himself.

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

## Preservation Hall

New Orleans, LA

Intimate, pure and swinging, several sets happen nightly at this famed French Quarter club. The emphasis is on traditional NOLA jazz.

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



## Snug Harbor Jazz Bistro

New Orleans, LA

For over 40 years, Snug Harbor has provided the best in live jazz with great regional cooking. It is the longest running music outlet





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this vision, giving you predictability in a world of improvisation.

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Sharp 9 Gallery in Durham, North Carolina

on the Frenchmen Street. Recent acts include Horico “Negro” Hernández, Delfeayo Marsalis, Sullivan Fortner, Jason Marsalis, Emmet Cohen, Donald Harrison Jr. and Alex Acuña.

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

### Tipitina's New Orleans, LA

Tipitina's delivers eclectic musical experiences including Galactic on New Year's Eve.

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

## NORTH CAROLINA

### Middle C Jazz Charlotte, NC

Awarded “Best Live Music Venue,” by the Charlotte Observer, Middle C offers a New York-style, upscale club setting with Southern hospitality. Experience a wide variety of jazz, sample the club's small plates and premium craft cocktails. Recent acts include Chris Botti, Arturo Sandoval and Yellowjackets.

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

### Missy Lane's Assembly Room DURHAM, NC

Here's an intimate club in downtown Durham offering exceptional sound, warm hospitality and soulful programming. It's a 120-seat listening room pairing world-class music with cocktails, coffee and Southern small plates. Recent acts include Kassa Overall, Aneesa Strings, Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah, Big Chief Donald Harrison Jr. and Julius Rodriguez.

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

### Sharp 9 Gallery Durham, NC

An intimate room with great acoustics, Sharp 9 seats 90 people and features over 150 concerts a year. Recent acts include Jazzmeia Horn, Walt Weisskopf European Qt, Kate McGarry, Geoffrey Keezer/Yvonnick Prené and Nicole Mitchell.

[durhamjazzworkshop.org](http://durhamjazzworkshop.org)

## SOUTH CAROLINA

### Forte Jazz Lounge Charleston, SC

Founded in 2019 by Joe and Rosie Clarke, Forte Jazz Lounge serves as a cultural centerpiece on King Street. Forte's stage showcases the full spectrum of jazz — plush VIP seating, bistro tables and theater-style seating — complemented by fine drinks and food. Recent acts include Brett Belanger Trio, Joe Clarke and Charles Grant.

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

### The Jazz Corner

#### Hilton Head Island, SC

Celebrating 25 years, this 99-seat venue offers gourmet food with two shows nightly. Recent acts include Quiana Parlor, Lavon Stevens, Martin Deas & Deas Guys and Martin Lesch.

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

## TENNESSEE

### Rudy's Jazz Room

#### Nashville, TN

Rudy's presents jazz nightly in an intimate setting. Chef and co-owner Michael Braden offers a New Orleans-style menu and a full bar.

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

## TEXAS

### Doc's Jazz Club

#### Houston, TX

Doc's Jazz Club (located in the historic Tower Theater, which originally opened in 1936 and was home to legendary performances by Ella Fitzgerald and Leon Russell) carries forward a legacy of unforgettable live music and elevated experiences. Blending fine dining with world-class jazz, Doc's brings joy by combining sensational entertainment, exquisite food and drinks, and timeless hospitality. Recent acts include Kyle Turner, Kim Prevost and Bill Solley, Doc Watkins and his Orchestra, The Jalen Baker Quartet, The Graeme Francis Quartet.

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

### Jazz, TX

#### San Antonio, TX

San Antonio's premier destination for live music, Jazz, TX, is located in the basement of the Bottling Department at Pearl Brewery. Since 2016, the venue has offered an intimate setting with a chef-run, scratch kitchen featuring South Texas cuisine. Guests enjoy jazz, blues and Latin artists both national and local. Recent acts include Jeff Hamilton, Tony Danza, Gunhild Carling, Doc Watkins and his Orchestra and Brian Newman.

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



### Scat Jazz Lounge Fort Worth, TX

Scat has been showcasing local and national jazz acts since the early '00s. Come down the alley and into the basement for a venue that was built around the stage. In addition to touring performers, the Lounge embraces the musical talent of North Texas. Recent acts include The Count Basie Orchestra, Eddie Gomez, Brad Leali, Stephane Wrembel and Shelley Carroll.

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

## MIDWEST

## ILLINOIS

### The Jazz Showcase

#### Chicago, IL

The Showcase was founded in 1947 by the late Joe Segal and is now operated by his son, Wayne, who maintains the club's high standards.

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

### The Green Mill

#### Chicago, IL

Featuring perhaps the coolest jazz club ambiance in Chicago, the Mill is an old Prohibition-era speakeasy.

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

### Andy's Jazz Club

#### Chicago, IL

Over the past 70 years, Andy's has live music and casual fine dining. The club presents four shows nightly featuring top Chicago jazz artists. It's a cultural treasure nurtured by Scott Chisholm and continued today by his sons Chris, Jeff and Brandon, who run the venue. Recent acts include Tom Garling Jazz Orchestra, Sabertooth, Donald Harrison Jr. with Abney Electrified, Jarrard Harris and Alex Hahan.

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

### Constellation

#### Chicago, IL

Constellation offers more than 200 concerts each year. It's focus is geared toward the outer edges of improvised music.

[constellation-chicago.com](http://constellation-chicago.com)

### Hungry Brain

#### Chicago, IL

Hungry Brain serves as an incubator for the city's up-and-coming musicians.

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

### Winter's Jazz Club

#### Chicago, IL

Located in mid-town Chicago, this intimate listening room brings in top-tier local and national artists. Recent acts include Benny Benack III, Karrin Allyson, Victor Goines, Joe Alterman Trio, Champion Fulton Trio, Leroy Jones Quintet, Dee Alexander, Denise Thimes, Pharez Whitted and the Ramsey Lewis Legacy Band.

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

## INDIANA

### The Jazz Kitchen INDIANAPOLIS, IN

This staple of the Midwest jazz scene for the past three decades offers nightly shows in this intimate, 140-seat supper club setting. Recent acts include John Scofield, Marion Meadows and a weekly Latin Dance Party.

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

## IOWA

### Noce

#### DES MOINES, IA

Noce elevates the careers of homegrown artists in the Midwest as well as building a following for top-tier performers. Recent acts include Matt Wilson, Benny Benack III, Jane Monheit, Stella Cole and Marquis Hill.

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



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## KANSAS

### Walker's Jazz Club

Wichita, KS

Walker's is a haven for jazz enthusiasts. Nestled in the heart of Wichita, the club curates talented musicians. Recent acts include Matt Wilson's Christmas Tree-O, Eugene Friesen and Howard Levy, Daruma, and Denny Jiosa.

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

## MICHIGAN

### Blue Llama

Ann Arbor, MI

Blue Llama features live jazz every night paired with Afro Caribbean cuisine. Recent acts include Pedrito Martinez, Sheila E and the E-Train, Etienne Charles, Michael Mayo, Stella Cole, Endea Owens and the Cookout, Arturo O'Farrill, George Porter Jr. and James Carter.

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

### Cliff Bell's

Detroit, MI

This classic art-deco club reopened in 2005 offering up-and-coming musicians and established artists.

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

### Dirty Dog Jazz Cafe

Grosse Pointe Farms, MI

The 65-seat suburban Detroit club offers music Wednesday through Saturday, offering a mix of regional and national acts.

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

## MINNESOTA



### Crooners Supper Club

Minneapolis, MN

Offering music, comedy and theater, Crooners attracts international, national and local artists to its main stage, intimate Dunsmore Jazz Room, seasonal outdoor Belvedere tent and the charming Maggie's Piano Lounge. Recent acts include Marilyn Mae, Jon Weber, Cornbread Harris,

Paulus Schafter, Ethan Iverson Bryan Eng and the Twin Cities jazz Festival.  
[croonerslounge.mn.com](http://croonerslounge.mn.com)

### Dakota Jazz Club

Minneapolis, MN

The Dakota is known for great acoustics and up-close sightlines. The club brings audiences within arm's reach of jazz innovators, both local and national. The menu blends chef-driven creativity with urban-chic atmosphere. Recent acts include Keb' Mo', Branford Marsalis, Hiromi, DakhaBrakha, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Joshua Redman and John Scofield.

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

### Jazz Central Studios

Minneapolis, MN

Jazz Central Studios is a performance venue unencumbered by commercial constraints, presenting live jazz several nights a week. Recent acts include Javier Santiago, Kenny Reichert, Severin Behnen, Michael O'Brien and David Hazeltine.

[jazzcentralstudios.org](http://jazzcentralstudios.org)

## MISSOURI

### Ferring Jazz Bistro

St. Louis, MO

The 200-seat Ferring Jazz Bistro hosts shows year-round, featuring national acts and area musicians. Recent acts include New Year's Eve with Victor Goines.

[jazzstl.org](http://jazzstl.org)

### Lonnie's Reno Club

Kansas City, MO

Experience Kansas City jazz at Lonnie's, a vibrant venue that blends style, history and the rich soul of the city. Located in the Ambassador Hotel, it celebrates the historic Reno Club, where Count Basie once performed. Recent acts include Lonnie McFadden, Sarah Reich, Shaun Munday, Tia Fuller and Ptaah Williams.

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

### Murry's

Columbia, MO

Local acts are presented Monday through Saturday. And the "We Always Swing" Sunday at Murray's concert series brings in big names. Recent bookings include Matt Wilson's Good Trouble, the Peter Bernstein/Bobby Broom Quartet and René Marie.

[murrysrestaurant.net](http://murrysrestaurant.net)

## OHIO

### BLU Jazz+

Akron, OH

BLU Jazz+ hosts live jazz performances in this subterranean club located in the heart of the Akron Historic Arts District. The club has New York speakeasy appeal and is dedicated to the local revival and celebration of jazz through its BLU Jazz Masterclass Foundation. Recent acts include Benny Benack III, John Papa Gros, Dan Wilson, Ava Preston and the Jonathan Scales Fouchestra.

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

### Bop Stop

Cleveland, OH

Great acoustics, views of Lake Erie and a swinging dose of local jazz: that's what makes the Bop Stop a first-rate jazz room.

[themusicsettlement.org/bop-stop](http://themusicsettlement.org/bop-stop)

### Caffé Vivace

Cincinnati, OH

Caffé Vivace is Cincinnati's premier jazz club. Designed by musicians for musicians, it offers an intimate listening experience with craft cocktails. Recent acts include Joshua Redman, Chris Potter, John Pizzarelli, Jeff Hamilton and Fred Hersch.

[jazzvivace.org](http://jazzvivace.org)

## WEST

### ARIZONA

#### The Nash

Phoenix, AZ

The Nash Jazz Club and Education Center — a non-profit organization

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named for drummer Lewis Nash — is the only dedicated jazz venue in Phoenix. Remodeled in 2024, The Nash presents 300 shows annually with a mix of student, local and world talent performing in an intimate, contemporary room. Recent acts include Ron Carter/Donald Vega/Lewis Nash Trio, Houston Person, Jazzmeia Horn, Brandee Younger and Lakecia Benjamin. [thenash.org](http://thenash.org)

### **The Ravenscroft** Scottsdale, AZ

With its intimate 200-seat Ravenscroft Hall and vibrant Jazzbird Lounge, the venue offers an array of artists — from Grammy-winners to emerging talents. Recent acts include Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart Organ Trio, Gerald Clayton, Camille Thurman, Humane Smith and Paul Cornish Trio.

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

### **The Century Room**

Tucson, AZ

Located in the historic Hotel Congress, the Century Room is Tucson's only dedicated jazz club. The 85-seat venue presents live jazz six nights a week. Programming is anchored by the Century Jazz Orchestra on Monday nights,

a Sunday night jam session, Thursday night organ lounge and weekend Signature Concerts. Recent acts include Bill Charlap Trio, Bill Frisell, Sullivan Fortner, Jon Cowherd/Tony Scherr/Brian Blad, Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart, The Bad Plus and Isaiah Collier.

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

## **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**

### **Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society** Half Moon Bay, CA

In 1964, Pete Douglas opened the club in his family's home. It closed after his passing, but his daughter reopened on the beach just south of San Francisco. Patrons and musicians have 180-degree views of the Pacific Ocean. Recent acts include Tia Fuller, Isaiah Collier, Harold López-Nussa, Randy Brecker, Kurt Elling, John Scofield and Sara Hanahan.

[bachddsoc.org](http://bachddsoc.org)

### **Black Cat**

San Francisco, CA

Black Cat is another beautiful club in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. Recent acts include Benny Benack III's New Year's blast.

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

## **Kuumbwa Jazz**

Santa Cruz, CA

Kuumbwa Jazz has been celebrating creativity since 1975. From grassroots beginnings, the venue presents over 130 concerts annually as well as year-round music education programs. Kuumbwa's welcoming listening room environment sets the stage for artists and audiences. Recent acts include Kandace Springs, Meshell Ndegeocello, Julian Lage, Storm Large, Branford Marsalis, Hiromi, Kenny Barron, Eliane Elias and Charles Lloyd.

[kuumbwajazz.org](http://kuumbwajazz.org)

### **Libretto**

Pasa Robles, CA

Libretto is a membership-based jazz club and listening room nestled in wine country. The intimate 62-seat venue is open Friday and Saturday, bringing the likes of John Beasley, Mike Garson, the Lao Tizer Quartet, the Larry Goldings Trio and the Gerald Clayton Trio.

[libretto Paso.com](http://libretto Paso.com)

### **San Jose Jazz Break Room**

San Jose, CA

The Break Room offers an intimate live music experience with capacity limited to 100. Nearly every seat is within 30 feet of performers who are at audience level, creating the feel of a private concert. Recent acts have included Brandee Younger, The Bad Plus, Theo Croker and Paul Cornish.

[sanjosejazz.org](http://sanjosejazz.org)

### **Mr. Tipple's Recording Studio**

San Francisco, CA

Intimacy, ambiance and local talent, Mr. Tipple's offers it up.

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

### **Yoshi's**

Oakland, CA

With a great Japanese menu and even better music, Yoshi's recently hosted Con Funk Shun and Boney James.

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

## **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

### **The Baked Potato**

Studio City, CA

Since 1970, fusion bands and electric groups have called this funky bar home.

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

### **Catalina Bar & Grill**

Los Angeles, CA

This sprawling performance space has hosted the jazz greats. Recent acts include Tierney Sutton and Pete Escovedo & Family.

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

### **Lou Lou's Jungle Room**

San Diego, CA

Lou Lou's Jungle Room revives The Lafayette Hotel's legendary Mississippi Room. With a restored 1940s clamshell stage and original sunken dance floor, the venue offers intimate seated shows or up to 500 standing guests.

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

### **Sam First**

Los Angeles, CA

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stage, removing the boundary between performers and audiences to promote in-person collaboration. Recent acts include Gerald Clayton, Brandee Younger Trio, Bill Charlap Trio, Anthony Wilson Nonet and the Larry Goldings/Peter Bernstein/Bill Stewart Organ Trio.

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

## Verse LA

Toluca Lake, CA

Verse offers an acoustically perfect experience designed by 18-time Grammy-winning mixer Manny Marroquin. It's where world-class dining meets the soul of live music. Recent acts include Terrace Martin, Robin Thicke, James Fauntleroy, Kamasi Washington, Keyon Harrold, Stephen Moccio, Robert Glasper, Stevie Wonder and Sabrina Claudio.

[verse.la](http://verse.la)

## COLORADO



### Dazzle

Denver, CO

Dazzle has been bringing Jazz to Denver for nearly three decades. Located at the Denver Performing Arts Center, Dazzle is a serious listening room for national touring acts and the best of local musicians. Recent acts include Stanley Jordan, Christian McBride & Ursa Major, Jazzmeia Horn, Nicholas Payton, Richard Bona, Cyrus Chestnut, Gary Bartz, Renee Marie, Stella Cole and Yellowjackets.

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

## NEVADA

### Vic's Las Vegas

Las Vegas, NV

Vic's Las Vegas Supper Club is an upscale-yet-approachable jazz experience. The venue combines world-class live performances with exceptional dining and craft cocktails. Recent acts include Jeff Hamilton, Shelly Berg, Tom Scott, Nicole Zuraitis and Lewis Nash.

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

## OREGON

### Christo's Lounge

Salem, OR

Since 2011 Christo's has featured the hottest jazz musicians from coast to coast. It's a small supper cub with an intimate vibe, stellar acoustics and fantastic Italian food. Recent acts include the Mel Brown Trio, Alan Jones Quartet, George Colligan Trio, Dan Balmer Group and Ron Jackson Trio.

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



### The 1905

Portland, OR

The home of Jazz in Portland has live jazz five nights a week with late shows on Fridays and Saturdays. The club showcases national and West Coast talent. Recent acts include Orrin Evans, Ben Wolfe, George Colligan,

Chuchito, Buster Williams, Chuck Israels and Vanessa Rubin.

[the1905jazz.club](http://the1905jazz.club)

## WASHINGTON

### Dimitriou's Jazz Alley

Seattle, WA

For 30-plus years, this magnet for big-name touring acts has served Seattle.

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

### The Emerald of Siam

### Thai Restaurant and Lounge

Richland, WA

This family owned and operated Thai restaurant features jazz every Wednesday including seasonal shows with local high school groups co-billing with the local Isolation Big Band. Weekend dinner and late-night shows feature touring and local jazz outfits. Recent acts include Rob Scheps, The Mary Lou and Stevie Show, Jonathan Scales Fourchestra and No-Soap Radio.

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

### The Royal Room

Seattle, WA

This funky, cool venue was the brainchild of musician Wayne Horvitz. The space hosts educational programs and evening sets by local musicians.

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



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





# PERFORMING ARTS CENTERS

## ALABAMA

### Carver Theatre for the Performing Arts

Birmingham, AL

The Carver Theatre for the Performing Arts, operated by the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame, stands as Birmingham's premier hub for jazz in Alabama. Rich in history and culture, the Carver hosts dynamic weekly events like the Live Jazz Happy Hour, celebrating both legendary and emerging artists. As a cornerstone of Alabama's jazz community, the theater continues to preserve, promote and inspire the state's vibrant jazz legacy. Recent acts include Veronica Swift, Ron Carter, Sherman Irby, Dee Lucas, and the UAB Jazz Ensemble.

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

## CALIFORNIA

### Lobero Theatre Santa Barbara, CA

Since 1949, the Lobero has offered the legends of jazz. Recently included among "The 11 Most Beautiful Theaters in the World" by Architectural Digest. On tap for 2026, Pancho Sanchez, Preservation Hall Jazz Band and Booker T. Jones, for starters.

[lobero.org](http://lobero.org)

### SFJAZZ Center

San Francisco, CA

With year-round concerts numbering more than 400 annually, SFJAZZ has become a

global leader in presenting jazz.

[sfjazz.org](http://sfjazz.org)



### The Soraya Northridge, CA

This beautiful, complex venue on the campus of California State University Northridge hosts its annual Jazz at the Naz festival presenting such groups as the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. It also has a jazz club that features a more intimate setting.

[thesoraya.org](http://thesoraya.org)

## ILLINOIS

### Jazz at the Logan

Chicago, IL

The jazz series at the Logan Center of University of Chicago runs September through May. Upcoming artists are Julia Keef Indigenous Jazz Ensemble, Tigran Hamasyan & Third Coast Percussion and Isaiah Collier's tribute to John Coltrane.

[chicagopresents.uchicago.edu](http://chicagopresents.uchicago.edu)



### Symphony Center Presents Chicago, IL

Symphony Center's Jazz Series runs September through June. On tap are José James and Lizz Wright; Nubya Garcia and Sömi; Miles Davis at 100 with Gonzalo Rubalcaba and John Beasley.

[cso.org/jazz](http://cso.org/jazz)

## MICHIGAN

### Paradise Jazz Series

## Detroit, MI

This series runs October through June with six concerts at the Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, home of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Coming up, Dianne Reeves, Arturo Sandoval and Christian McBride with Ursa Major.

[dso.org](http://dso.org)

## NEW MEXICO

### Outpost Performance Space

Albuquerque, NM

Outpost is Albuquerque's non-profit, member-supported, community-based performing arts center presenting world renowned and local jazz as well as other musical styles year-round in its intimate 150-seat theater.

[outpostspace.org](http://outpostspace.org)

## NEW YORK

### Jazz at Lincoln Center

New York, NY

This house of jazz opened in 2004 under the vision of Wynton Marsalis, now reaching audiences of some 3 million a year through concerts, tours and educational programs.

[jazz.org](http://jazz.org)

## NEW JERSEY

### NJPAC

Newark, NJ

The TD Jazz Series at the Newark Performing Arts Center hosts the Sarah Vaughan Jazz Vocals Competition and delivers the best in jazz. Upcoming, The Marcus and Riza Printup Quartet, the James Carter Quartet and Coltrane 100: Both Directions at Once.

[njpac.org](http://njpac.org)

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# INTERNATIONAL



Frankie's Jazz Club in Vancouver, Canada

and jazz standards.

[jazzat248@wordpress.com](mailto:jazzat248@wordpress.com)

## The Rex Jazz & Blues Bar

Toronto

With some 60 shows monthly, this musicians' congregating point is the place to catch a host of great Canadian talent. Recent acts include the Brodie West Quintet, the Ted Quinlan Quartet and the Brian Dickson Jazz Orchestra.

[therex.ca](http://therex.ca)

## Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill

Montreal

From midweek jams to weekend headliners featuring Montreal and Canadian talent, as well as touring musicians from the States, Upstairs offers a cool, throwback vibe.

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

## Yardbird Suite

Edmonton

Volunteer-powered by the Edmonton Jazz Society, Yardbird has been Edmonton's home for jazz since 1957. Located in the cultural hub of Old Strathcona, it's a featured destination for lovers of live jazz in a casual, intimate venue. Programming is dedicated to presenting the best in jazz, blues, soul and the indefinable.

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

## CANADA

### Dièse Onze

Montreal

This cozy club is a favorite spot for dedicated jazz fans and was the recent site of a recording by pianist Jean-Michel Pilc. Live shows are anchored by the Kim Richardson Trio and the Alex Bellegarde Latin Jazz Quartet.

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

### Frankie's Jazz Club Vancouver

Frankie's Jazz Club is a live jazz and blues

hub featuring the masters, rising stars and local legends. The goal? To present the finest weekly live jazz programming in the country.

Recent acts include Miki Yamanaka, Peter Bernstein, saxophonist Ralph Moore and artistic director Cory Weeds holding down his steady Weeds/Wine/Wednesday.

[frankiesjazzclub.ca](http://frankiesjazzclub.ca)

### Jazz@248

Ottawa

Ottawa's ultimate open jazz jamming club. The home for bebop, ballads, swing, bossa nova, Brazilian popular music, cool jazz, funk, Latin

## AUSTRIA

### Jazzit Musik Club

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- Edmonton Chamber of Commerce & Edify Magazine

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BIX Jazzclub in Stuttgart, Germany

served as a lively space for jazz, improvised music, avant-garde and contemporary art. Special emphasis is placed on promoting unconventional approaches and offering space for new trends beyond the boundaries of typical genres. Recent acts have included Artifacts Trio (Nicole Mitchell, Tomeka Reid, Mike Reed), Kassa Overall, Alabaster DePlume, Bill Frisell Trio.

**jazzit.at**  
**Jazzland**  
Vienna

Jazzland, the quaint cellar club billed as the oldest in Austria, celebrated its 52nd anniversary in 2024. Recent performances include Lew Tabackin, Jeremy Pelt, the Original Storyville Jazzband, the Vienna Composers Big Band and Rossano Sportiello.

**jazzland.at**



**Porgy & Bess**  
Vienna

The non-profit organization Porgy & Bess defines itself as a Jazz & Music Club with a multifaceted program. The main focus lies on the implementation of a structure that takes into consideration the Austrian jazz scene's wide range of ways to articulate itself as well as new development perspectives, such as collaborations with international guest musicians. Recent concerts have included Dave Holland, John Scofield, John Zorn, Charles Lloyd, Ambrose Akinmusire, Cyrille Aimée and Lakecia Benjamin.

**porgy.at**

**BELGIUM**

**Bozar**  
Brussels

Bozar offers a yearly jazz series of about 40 concerts illustrating the ambition of the center to play a significant role for jazz. Recent acts include James Francies Trio & Ben Heim, Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis, Arooj Aftab, Hamid Drake & Thurston Moore and the Julian Lage Trio.

**bozar.be**

**CZECH REPUBLIC**

**AghaRTA Jazz Centrum**  
Prague

AghaRTA is a basement venue housed in a building dating back to the 14th century. As one of the most popular jazz spots in Prague, this venue/bar/Arta Records label shop hosts local jazz artists nightly as well as international touring musicians.

**agharta.cz**

**The Jazz Dock**  
Prague

Hip architecture, high-end meals, great

drinks, a view of the Vltava River and concerts by top-shelf artists make this a bucket-list destination.

**jazzdock.cz**

**ESTONIA**

**Philly Joe's Jazz Club**  
Tallinn

Philly Joe's Jazz Club is Estonia's incubator for jazz, with a mission to elevate the Estonian jazz scene by nurturing local young talent while also welcoming world-class icons.

**phillyjoes.com**

**FINLAND**

**Storyville**  
Helsinki

This two-story venue has a piano bar above and a supper club below for four lively musical nights each week.

**storyville.fi**

**FRANCE**

**Duc Des Lombards**  
Paris

With weekend late-night jam sessions and series like The New Scene for up-and-coming musicians, Duc Des Lombards features European talent and U.S. artists.

**ducdeslombards.com**

**Le Caveau de la Huchette**  
Paris

Since 1946, this "temple of swing" has been a jazz staple in the Latin Quarter. It's home to music seven nights a week.

**caveaudelahuchette.fr**

**New Morning**  
Paris

Blues, klezmer, funk and disco nights mix with straightahead and fusion styles at this musical and social hot spot. Recent shows featured Immanuel Wilkins, October London and Sylvain Rifflet.

**newmorning.com**

**Sunset-Sunside**  
Paris

Open seven days a week, Sunset-Sunside hosts over 850 concerts a year with the legendary jam session every Monday. Recent acts include Mark Turner, Ravi Coltrane, Stochelo Rosenberg, Ben Sidran and Avishai Cohen.

**sunset-sunside.com**

**GERMANY**

**A-Trane**  
Berlin



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FEB  
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8PM

FEB  
WED **11**  
8PM

FEB  
THU **12**  
8PM

**Anat Cohen Quartetinho**  
Featuring Vitor Gonçalves,  
Tal Mashiach, and James Shipp  
ONSTAGE JAZZ CLUB

FEB  
SAT **14**  
8PM

**Love Inside Out**  
**Valentine's Day**  
**With Veronica Swift**  
Featuring Pacific Jazz Orchestra  
Chris Walden, conductor

FEB  
WED **18**  
8PM

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[a-trane.de](http://a-trane.de)

## **BIX Jazzclub** Stuttgart

Where vibrant jazz meets intimate ambiance. Known for acoustics, BIX brings world-class musicians to the heart of the city. Recent acts include Dominique Fils-Aimé, Bill Charlap Trio, Avishai Cohen Quintet, Jakob Manz and Nicole Zuraitis.

[bix-stuttgart.de](http://bix-stuttgart.de)

## **Ella & Louis Jazz Club** Mannheim

The club’s jazz concert series, curated by Thomas Siffeling since 2024, features renowned and upcoming artists in the unique setting of a baroque water palace built in 1727 and surrounded by the Holzhausen Park. Recent acts include Triosence, Julia Hülsmann Quartet, Anke Helfrich Trio and Philip Catherine.

[ellalouis.de](http://ellalouis.de)

## **Jazzclub Unterfahrt** Munich

One of Europe’s most renowned venues, Jazzclub presents concerts every day, showcasing international stars and local talent. Located in a listed former beer cellar, the club’s intimate atmosphere, excellent acoustics and award-winning programming make Unterfahrt a cultural landmark. Recent acts include Kenny Garrett, the Dave Holland Trio, Bill Frisell, Kurt Elling, Charlie Hunter and Bob James.

[unterfahrt.de](http://unterfahrt.de)

## **Jazz im Prinz Karl** Tübingen

The 45-year-old, membership-driven institution recently has presented Immanuel Wilkins.

[jipk.net](http://jipk.net)

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intimate performances. Recent acts include the Lars Danielsson Trio, James Brandon Lewis Trio, Theo Croker and Nils Wülker Quartet.

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

## **ITALY**

### **Alexanderplatz**

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Italy’s premier jazz club continues to emphasize small-group concerts.

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

### **Casa del Jazz**

Rome

With three venues, Casa del Jazz delivers a variety of concerts including plenty of jazz.

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

## **JAPAN**

### **Body & Soul**

Tokyo

Since 1974, this venue — which seats about 50 — has presented high-quality Japanese jazz artists.

[bodyandsoul.co.jp](http://bodyandsoul.co.jp)

### **Shinjuku Pit Inn**

Tokyo

Known for showcasing domestic artists, this 58-year-old venue (33 years in its current location) is a revered listening room.

[pit-inn.com](http://pit-inn.com)

CONTINUE ON PAGE 81



Delfeayo Marsalis 2025  
Photo: David Bazemore



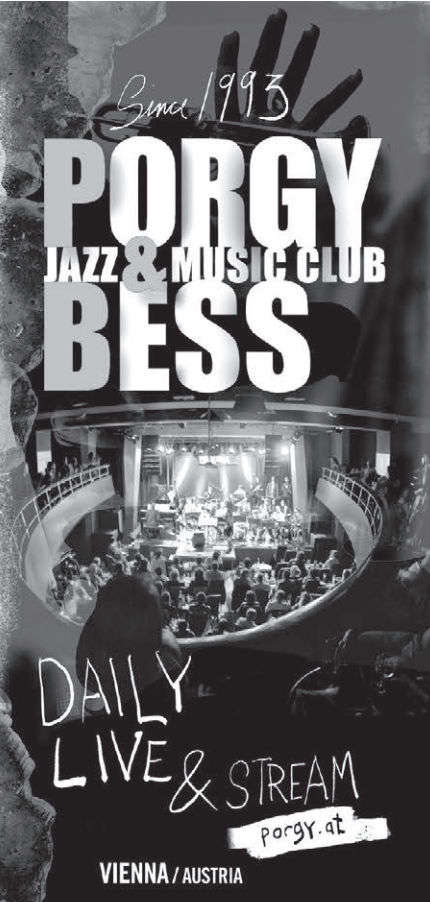

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# Reviews

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

The high-spirited Tomeka Reid Quartet demonstrate their hopping chops.

JASMINE KWONG



## Tomeka Reid Quartet *dance! skip! hop!*

OUT OF YOUR HEAD

★★★★

Over the past decade cellist Tomeka Reid's quartet has made its signature an ebullient, often off-kilter improvisation that luxuriates in confounding the expectations of listeners. Part chamber jazz and part folk-fusion, anchored in the virtuosic playing of Reid, guitarist Mary Halvorson, bassist Jason Roebke and drummer Tomas Fujiwara, the group's 2015 self-titled debut combined angular melodies with elegant swing and searing, gritty solo improvisations.

Now returning with its fourth album, *dance! skip! hop!*, following 2019's strings-focused *Old New* and 2024's freewheeling, electronically influenced *3 + 3*, Reid's quar-

tet delivers one of its most unfettered, confident explorations of their high-spirited sound.

The 10-minute opening title track is a perfect exemplar of the group's unbridled improvisatory interplay, building from Fujiwara's rustling brushwork and Roebke's sprightly plucking into a fractal, deep-swinging solo from Halvorson and a series of clattering drum solo hits that somehow simultaneously increase in tempo while making the track feel as if it is falling apart into a cacophonous dissolution.

The loose, ever-shifting feel continues on the solo, Latin-influenced bass-and-guitar opening of "a(ways) For CC and CeCe," featuring Reid's deeply expressive bowing and Fujiwara's textural cymbal work, once again ending on a note of unease as Halvorson's lines are pitch-bent through cassette manip-

ulations, while the down-tempo cello and bass balladry of "Under The Aurora Sky" crawls forward with a sludgy groove, equally finding eerie accents in Reid's scraping and squealing bowing.

Despite the record's title, this isn't music you can dance to since its rhythm and mood constantly shift beneath your feet. Yet, it is an album that is innately moving once you succumb to its free and unfurling form. With each track highlighting the ensemble as a whole, Reid expertly marshals her quartet through sinuous, undulating grooves and unexpected bursts of virtuosity that always keep the listener guessing. —Ammar Kalia

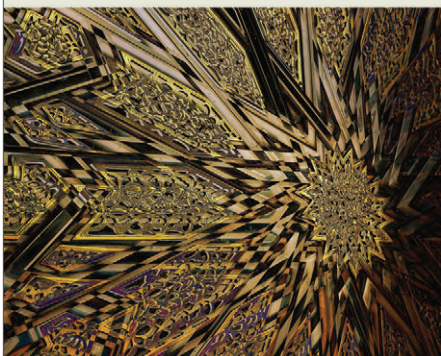
***dance! skip! hop!***: dance! skip! hop!; a(ways) For CC and CeCe; Oo long!; Under The Aurora Sky; Silver Spring Fig Tree. (48:41)

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

**Ordering info**: [outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com](https://outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com)



**KURT ELLING 和 WDR BIG BAND  
IN THE BRASS PALACE**



**Kurt Elling & WDR  
Big Band  
In The Brass Palace**  
BIG SHOULDERS

★★★★½

Kurt Elling's singing can make you feel richer just by the timbre of his voice. It's regal; it exudes big money. On this album, he wraps his soaring baritone with the WDR Big Band, featuring brawny arrangements by Bob Mintzer, Michael Abene, Tim Hagans and Jim McNeely. They up the ante of lustrous swing, delivering a brassy, testosterone-drenched sensation that transports you into Las Vegas extravagance.

Fittingly, Elling begins with a swank makeover of Joe Jackson's signature tune "Steppin' Out." (Elling covered this gem on his 2009 album, *The Gate*.) With the WDR, he croons Jackson's ode to a night on the town with the gusto of a high roller at the wheel of a brand-new Rolls Royce.

The album's emotional poignancy glows stronger when the glaring horn charts simmer down, as on the dreamy rendition of Duke Ellington's "I Like The Sunrise," on which Elling intones the lyrics about Black American liberation as if he's singing from a pulpit, particularly when it folds in some of Rumi's poetry in tribute to Chicago-famed saxophonist Von Freeman.

Elling's love for poetry comes through also on the ebullient interpretation of Wayne Shorter's "Speak No Evil," which is reimagined as "They Speak No Evil," thanks to Elling imbuing the song with lines from Robert Pinsky's poem "The City Dark."

But for all of its erudition, *In The Brass Palace* doesn't leave much room for Elling, the seducer, to come forth. Even during its quieter moments, there's a yearn for more intimate vulnerability. More naked sensuality with less brassy armor on a couple of amorous ballads would make this a sexier rendezvous.

—John Murph

**In The Brass Palace:** Steppin' Out; Desire; My Very Own Ride; I Like The Sunrise; They Speak No Evil; Current Affairs. (45:06)

**Personnel:** Kurt Elling, vocals; WDR Big Band, accompaniment; Bob Mintzer, conduction.

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

**Kris Davis  
& the Lutoslawski  
String Quartet  
The Solastalgia Suite**  
PYROCLASTIC

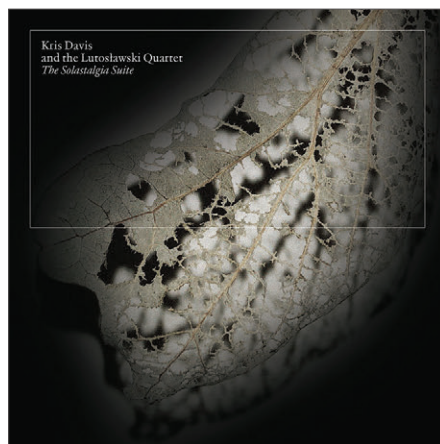
★★★★

The planet warms; politicians dawdle.

In response, Canadian-born pianist Kris Davis composed a suite shot through with so much angst and tension that it should be recommended listening while viewing countryman Edward Burtynsky's large-format photos of industrial wastelands. Davis' music weeps for the planet and rages against inaction.

Exploring this desecrated landscape with her is Poland's Lutoslawski Quartet, acerbic by any measure. Their squalling feature on "Pressure & Yield" is an ideal, nerve-battering expression of destruction, confusion and turmoil. No strangers to working with borderless composers — they've previously collaborated with Vijay Iyer, Craig Taborn, Uri Caine and others — the string quartet expresses chaos as readily as it cries. Davis takes them to some woolly places: weeping on "Ghost Reefs," a piece Davis says was influenced by former teacher Henry Threadgill; creating an eerie, post-apocalyptic landscape on "Life On Venus."

Commissioned by Wrocław's Jazztopad Festival, the suite illustrates how Davis employs



overtones and slightly discordant blends to create tension. While her writing (or the quartet's improvising) can veer into expected, stereotypical tension-building devices like scraping strings, overall this is highly effective string quartet composition.

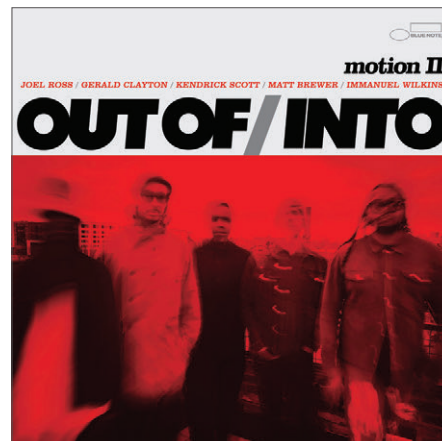
Expressive enough to transcend stylistic boundaries, this suite represents an impressive new step for Davis. She's previously explored the "cracks"; this setting adds a rich, new field of expression for her.

—James Hale

**The Solastalgia Suite:** Interlude; An Invitation To Disappear; Towards No Earthly Pole; The Known End; Ghost Reefs; Pressure & Yield; Life On Venus; Degrees Of Separation. (44:33)

**Personnel:** Kris Davis, piano; Roksana Kwasnikowska, Marcin Markowicz, violins; Artur Rozmyslowicz, viola; Maciej Mlodawski, cello.

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



**Out Of/Into  
Motion II**  
BLUE NOTE

★★★★½

Out Of/Into's mission is to walk a line between tradition and tomorrow. Thus, its brand: Out of the past, into the future. The all-star group got a big boost from the recent 85th anniversary of Blue Note Records, which made it the personification of its own past and future during a celebratory tour as the Blue Note Quintet in 2024. These six tracks are holdovers from the same sessions that made up *Motion I* last year.

Working within the confines of its own songbook, the group's A-list front line of Immanuel Wilkins and Joel Ross produces an accommodating, relaxed program that balances solo and ensemble values while catching something of the jazz mainstream today. Inventive without being innovative, the music is light, fluent and friendly, even in its tranquility, with few flourishes of iconoclasm.

"Brothers In Arms" is really two pieces in one, with no conspicuous connection. Part one is a lively but simple ensemble theme framing a couple of rounds of smart eight-bar solos where each of the principals extends the thinking of the other. After the last note fades, bassist Matt Brewer stretches out for an extended interlude, shifting the character to a more pensive intimacy. The somewhat plodding one-finger exercise of "Finding Ways" resists both easy logic and noticeable momentum before relaxing into the more rolling liquidity Ross brings to his vibes.

The energy level wanders sharply into a state of seclusion with "Juno," "Finding Ways" and a rather morose "Catalyst," then finds its most agreeable groove with "Nacho Supreme." The lesson is, the brightest place for jazz might be its history, which never seems to grow old fashioned for musicians like these who can connect to it.

—John McDonough

**Out Of/Into:** Brothers In Arms; Finding Ways; Juno; Familiar Route; The Catalyst; Nacho Supreme. (39:32)

**Personnel:** Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Joel Ross, vibraphone, marimba; Gerald Clayton, piano; Matt Brewer, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums.

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



# The Hot Box >

Critics	Ammar Kalia	John Murph	James Hale	John McDonough
<b>Tomeka Reid Quartet</b> <i>dance! skip! hop!</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
<b>Kurt Elling &amp; WDR Big Band</b> <i>In The Brass Palace</i>	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
<b>Kris Davis/Lutosławski Quartet</b> <i>The Solastalgia Suite</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★
<b>Out Of/Into</b> <i>Motion II</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★½

## Critics' Comments

### Tomeka Reid Quartet, *dance! skip! hop!*

Joyous, modern chamber jazz that doesn't sacrifice feel-good sensibility and humor for the sake of austere avant-garde posturing. —John Murph

By turns playfully bouncy and spookily trippy, Reid's compositions allow her quartet to go deep into textural details. As usual, Halvorson adds highly individualistic details. —James Hale

They must have known they had something. They opened and closed with "dance! skip! hop!" Swings from the first stroke, finds its groove, stays focused, yet cuts loose. Otherwise, there's plenty of cutting loose, but fewer grooves in between. Still, well worth your time. —John McDonough

### Kurt Elling & WDR Big Band, *In The Brass Palace*

The WDR Big Band provides all the brassy, bold backing vocalist Kurt Elling could ever want on this six-track record. It's lusciously swinging and dramatically dynamic stuff. —Ammar Kalia

The master of expressive vocal phrasing revels in the muscularity of the venerable German orchestra. The range of material is particularly novel. —John Murph

A natural big band singer, Elling finds a swank sweet spot with the WDR band. He projects the Sinatra swagger into some unfamiliar repertoire, using his lyrics and pitch-perfect pivots to find links. Some may seem awkward at first. But the art is in the effort. —John McDonough

### Kris Davis & the Lutosławski String Quartet, *The Solastalgia Suite*

Equal parts elegy and melodrama, this piano-and-string-quartet record plays like the moving score to an imaginary film of high stakes and deep emotion inspired by the climate crisis. While quieter moments like "Towards No Earthly Pole" feel too subtle to be understood, Davis' compositions are otherwise delightful. —Ammar Kalia

The specter of Olivier Messiaen's poignant compositions hovers throughout this haunting, commissioned work. —John Murph

Hardcore Third Stream jazz without the jazz. Davis deploys a rigorous classical austerity to alarm us with a suite of spikey environmental agit-prop. Music commands our attention without soliciting our enjoyment. Needs program notes to bring the music's ambiguities down to earth. —John McDonough

### Out Of/Into, *Motion II*

Out Of/Into continue to showcase the confident command of their improvisatory skills. Ross and Wilkins produce highlights, both proving that as the youngest members of the group they have plenty more creativity yet to come. —Ammar Kalia

The sophomore album from Blue Note Records' latest all-star ensemble boasts some sublime improvisation over six originals. Kendrick Scott's funky "The Catalyst" tops for being that joint that brings listeners returning for more. —John Murph

"Pleasant" is not the worst reaction, but perhaps not what's anticipated with a strong ensemble cast and rich compositional ingredients. Lacking a distinctive, demonstrative locus, *Motion II* never shifts beyond that bland descriptor. —James Hale



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## Christopher Hoffman *REX*

OUT OF YOUR HEAD

★★★★½

One thread connecting cellist Christopher Hoffman's diverse pursuits is collaboration. His prior recordings under his own name have realized very specific ensemble sounds, and he's effectively met the requirements of bandleaders as dissimilar as Henry Threadgill, Anat Cohen and James Brandon Lewis. It makes sense that *REX*, his first solo recording, is a response to the work of another creative individual.

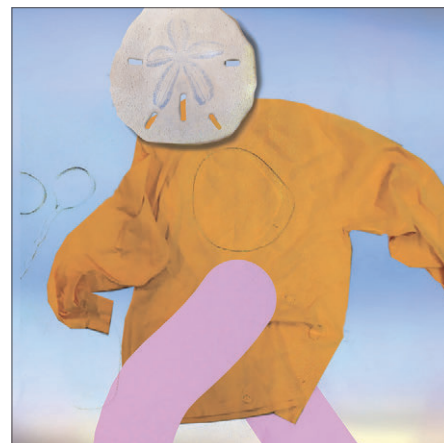
The interaction in this case is more forensic than collaborative. The album is named for painter and ornithologist Rex Brasher (1869–1960), whose property Hoffman purchased when he left Brooklyn in search of a more rural setting for family life in 2023. At that point, Hoffman was already exploring solo options; in 2020, he contributed an excellent set-long video (viewable on YouTube) made alone in a basement studio to the lockdown edition of Tomeka Reid's annual String Summit.

He found in his peregrinations around the property and investigations into Brasher's life story the impetus to get specific. Each of the album's 13 pithy pieces is named for a subject, circumstance or individual from Brasher's life. They do not, however, evoke either avian or rural vibes. Hoffman's effects-laden tone is bulked up, fuzzed out and pitched down; his pizzicato playing sometimes sounds like the work of a bass guitar. Each tune is cradled by cello-sourced rhythmic loops. While some of the tunes are merely novel, the best melodies are not just catchy, but also have a direct and soulful quality that makes one want to hear them sung by a human voice. —Bill Meyer

**REX:** Snow Owls; Buffalo Mountain; The Babbling; Heavy; Saboteur; Spindrift; Rex; Pal; Marie; All Together; Resting Place; Swallowtail Kite; Steer Home. (38:07)

**Personnel:** Christopher Hoffman, cello.

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



## SML *How You Been*

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★★½

If Los Angeles-based quintet Small Medium Large — better known as “SML” — has eluded you up to now, this is the perfect time to course correct and soak up the band's sophomore record, *How You Been*. Whether examining the collage-like character of the album's 13 tracks or contemplating the intricacy of SML's post-production approach to shaping individual parts, there's a vibrant undercurrent of Tetris-style analysis and creativity flowing through the project as a whole. Tetris is about working with an established set of pieces to create the best fitting entity in a confined space, while having free rein to achieve that objective using precise placement and big-picture evaluation. With *How You Been*, the only difference is that unlike Tetris, the album has a decisive ending.

Beyond this overarching parallel, *How You Been* also uses a far wider and more colorful palette of building blocks. Each track is flush with electronic sounds of all timbres, attacks, sustains and decays. Various rhythms move and arrange tones in ways that make every track feel like its own world. They alternate between entrancing in nature — through the pulsating synths of “Brood Board SHROOM” and the drone-like flow of organ-style tones on “Moving Walkway” — to boasting “chaotic good” energy through the competing instruments and motifs in “Taking Out The Trash” or the subtle ripples of droplet tones on “Plankton.” The mystery around the choices that led to *How You Been* in its final form is almost more intriguing than the music itself — but not by much. —Kira Grunenberg

## David Broza *BrozaJazz:* *Paris Alhambra*

BROZA

★★★★

David Broza's cosmopolitan background — Israel, England, Spain — is deeply inscribed in his music and his spiritual commitment best evidenced by his work on *East Jerusalem West Jerusalem*, which brought together Palestinian and Israeli musicians. How his heart must bleed now.

Broza has released a huge number of records, singing in Spanish, Hebrew and English, including a set of Leonard Cohen covers, and he's worked with such songwriting luminaries as Jackson Browne and Townes van Zandt.

The Paris Alhambra performance is a perfect illustration of his ability to blend together musical traditions from opposite ends of the Mediterranean — and across the Atlantic — into a whole for which only the portman-teau “BrozaJazz” applies. Omer Avital acts as music director and Broza has paid tribute to the bassist for turning the music in this new and glorious direction.

Turn at once to “Beduine Love Song” and the hair on your arms will start to tingle, and



that's only the beginning of the journey. So involving is he that there are moments when you will — whoever you are and wherever you came from — think that he is singing to you, in your own language, which is essentially what all jazz is about. Maybe this is what they mean, or should mean, when they talk about “peace process.” —Brian Morton

**BrozaJazz Paris Alhambra:** Prelude; Beduine Love Song; Rami-to de Violetas (Sigaliyot); Glayat Shana Tova Mi'shosh Ha'amitabed-fet; Thunder And Lightning Bass Intro; Thunder And Lightning (Re'amim U'brakim); Le Mujer Que yo Quiero (Ha'isha She'iti); Mitachati Ha'shamyrim (Under The Sky); Chileno Boys; Be'ilbech; Daniella; Yihyei Tov; Erev Shel Shoshanim; Magia Lo-Jam. (78:00)

**Personnel:** Itamar Borochov, trumpet; Eden Ladin, piano; David Broza, guitar, vocal; Omer Avital, bass; Itay Morchi, drums.

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





## Banana Hammond *Hard Music*

PJCE

★★★★½

## Christopher Brown *Sole City*

PJCE

★★★★½

Two debut albums herald the emergence of two prominent Pacific Northwest bands. *Hard Music* is an all-original program, with each member contributing music, while *Sole City* includes one cover (“Body And Soul”) and seven originals by leader/drummer Christopher Brown. Despite both albums being debuts, both Banana Hammond’s members and Brown could be considered veterans of the jazz scene with impressive credentials.

*Hard Music* gets its grit from a kind of classic return to the organ groove within a tightly knit rhythm section and the vocalic voice of tenor saxophonist Tim Wilcox. A tune like “Chuck’s Blues” gets its salt and pepper from the right ingredients of medium-tempo swing and a laid-back feel from not only Wilcox but guitarist Ryan Meagher and drummer Charlie Doggett, everything

buttressed by the in-the-pocket presence of organist Joe Bagg. A completely different vibe and expression comes with the measured, gently walking rocker “Summering” and “The Rain Before It Falls,” a tune that gradually rolls out the pretty theme via a conversation between Meagher and Wilcox as Bagg’s organ surrounds the proceedings en route to the ballad’s unfolding solos from the guitarist, saxophonist and organist. This gentle, oblique waltz serves as the penultimate piece that ends *Hard Music* with “A Atracao de Voce,” a light and fancy-free samba that reminds us that Banana Hammond, a tight and cohesive group, is a mixed stylistic bag, free of any “organic” conventions.

*Sole City*’s primary voice(s) from track to track finds tenor saxophonist John Nastos leading the charge, with pianist Greg Goebel following close behind. The architecture of the album, however, stems from Brown’s smart pen and arrangements. As a drummer-led band, Brown’s pen orchestrates in ways that has his drumming playing a completely supportive role, his one impressive standout soloing saved for the last, uptempo swinger “3 Up 2 Down.”

*Sole City* starts off on an easy swinging gait with what sounds like a theme song to the city they reside in, “Portland Showers.” Their approach to the standard “Body And Soul” is gentle and smooth, while “Melancholy Mary” invites us in with its slow drawl, again Nastos and Goebel guiding everyone along this very soulful dedication to a somebody who clearly serves as a source of inspiration: somebody you’d like to meet.

“Throwback,” on the other hand, is an example of the band’s ease and felicity with an uptempo swinger, Nastos and Goebel once again going back and forth with ongoing dialog while Brown and bassist Garrett Baxter keep the pace elevated. The tight arrangement keeps things sharp and to the point. “Taking Time To Think” returns us to a more solemn place, where Goebel’s piano sounds like a mini-orchestra as he flushes out the song’s lovely contours.

“3 Up 2 Down” goes up and down, this way and that as it slides into a medium tempo, propulsive swing that leads to yet another exclamatory solo from Goebel and a welcomed Baxter pause and more sassy playing from Nastos, setting the stage for Brown’s up-and-down drum explosions.

—John Ephland

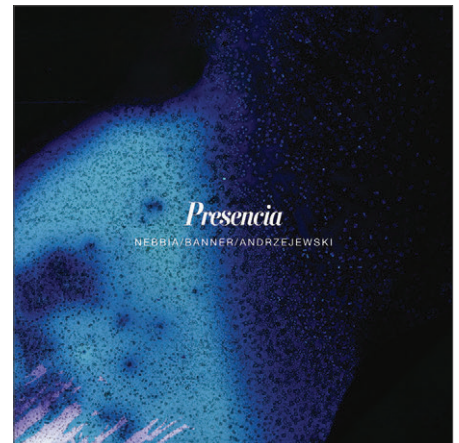
**Hard Music:** Fillmore; Lascivious Fandango; Chuck’s Blues; Build A Dream; #4; Aunt J; Summering; The Rain Before It Falls; A Atracao de Voce. (47:27)

**Personnel:** Tim Wilcox, tenor saxophone; Ryan Meagher, guitar; Joe Bagg, Hammond B-3 organ; Charlie Doggett, drums.

**Sole City:** Portland Showers; GG; ELEW’s Crown; Body And Soul; Melancholy Mary; Throwback; Taking Time To Think; 3 Up 2 Down. (52:00)

**Personnel:** Christopher Brown, drums; John Nastos, alto saxophone; Greg Goebel, piano; Garrett Baxter, bass.

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



## Camila Nebbia/ James Banner/ Max Andrzejewski *Presencia*

EARS&EYES

★★★★

This new Berlin trio draws its members from Argentina (saxophonist Camila Nebbia), England (bassist James Banner) and Germany itself (drummer Max Andrzejewski), already displaying a precisely honed rapport. Nebbia is on a comet-like rise, known for improvising, but here the concentration is on composition, which places her tenor playing in a remarkably revived arena. Banner also moves in moderne classical quarters, while Andrzejewski is familiar via his extreme collisions within the Training duo.

Already gigging prolifically, this trio’s connection is sharpening by the hour. All three players contribute pieces, and solos of abstraction remain a core tendency: Freedom is still here but writhing and storming out of its straitjacket. Nebbia still gusts with immense strength, but there are highly shaped precision soundscapes unfolding continuously, creating a vibrant haven for contrasting digressions. Extreme solos are deftly framed by intricate themes.

“Arid” is radically decelerated, with inner tenor tubings being savored, bass slugging, drums dragging. A deeply atmospheric space is found, eventually opening up to a free-jazz storm. Bowed bass and rubbed cymbals open “Lugar,” tenor seeking carefully, all glimmering with low-level activity, before becoming wild and untamed; then “Lattice” has a broken, arrested opening, piecing itself together, plumbing sonorities, drum-skins blessed with bassy-behemoth tones. Another highlight is “Plateau/Her Name Causes Shudders,” which is loaded with evolving detail, finer points gleaming. The session is well-recorded, miked intimately and beautifully harnessed in the studio.

—Martin Longley

**Presencia:** Choco; Arid; Sediment I; Lugar; Lattice; Meander; Plateau/Her Name Causes Shudders; Sediment II; Sad Song #1. (38:52)

**Personnel:** Camila Nebbia, tenor saxophone; James Banner, bass; Max Andrzejewski, drums.

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



# Jazz Greats From Every Era

**Oscar Peterson: *Around The World (Two Lions/Mack Avenue)*; ★★★★★½ 37:05** These never-before-heard live recordings from Detroit, Toronto, Basel and Auckland capture the remarkable pianist in concerts from 1969 to 1981, more than a decade before the stroke that significantly altered the quality of his playing. Peterson's skills are undiminished here. He takes the standard "The Lamp Is Low" at a ridiculous tempo, with bassist Sam Jones and drummer Bobby Durham in tow. His rendition of Neal Hefti's "Cute," with bassist Michel Donato and drummer Louis Hayes, is impossibly brisk while his unaccompanied version of his own "Place St. Henri" is so fast it sounds like an A.I.-enhanced take on a human performance. Peterson flaunts jaw-dropping facility on unaccompanied versions of Milt Jackson's "Reunion Blues" and a medley of Thad Jones' "A Child Is Born" and Jimmy Van Heusen's "Here's That Rainy Day." He engages in some cat-and-mouse exchanges with a colleague of equally daunting virtuosity, guitarist Joe Pass, on a dazzling duet rendition of "Stella By Starlight."

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

**John McNeil/Tom Harrell: *Look To The Sky (Steeplechase)*; ★★★★★ 41:09** Underrated, warm-toned trumpeter McNeil, who passed in 2024, joins fellow trumpeter Tom Harrell and the all-world rhythm section of pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Buster Williams and drummer Billy Hart on this 1979 recording, remastered for audiophile vinyl release. McNeil and Harrell make a compatible trumpet team, whether exchanging bop-fueled lines, as on their ripping renditions of Charlie Parker's "Chasing The Bird" and Sam Jones' "Unit 7," or melding into the gorgeous harmonic fabric of Harrell's waltz-time "Little Dancer" and the dreamy Jobim bossa nova that serves as the title track of this pleasing encounter. Their tightly navigated unison lines on Harrell's Latin-flavored "Terrestris" shows that this is more of a mutual admiration society than old-school trumpet battle.

Ordering info: [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk)

**Rahsaan Roland Kirk: *Vibrations In The Village: Live At The Village Gate (Resonance)*; ★★★★★ 69:59** These previously unheard tapes from two consecutive nights in 1963 find the iconoclast Kirk in classic form backed by a super rhythm tandem of bassist Henry Grimes and drummer Sonny Brown, along with a variety of pianists sitting in at New York's Village Gate. They come bursting right out of the gate on the whirlwind opener, "Jump Up And Down," which has Kirk alternating between manzello and stritch (sometimes simultaneously) while testifying on tenor sax over the course of 15 minutes. Grimes offers an extended solo on this burner while Brown fuels the kinetic proceedings with a relentlessly



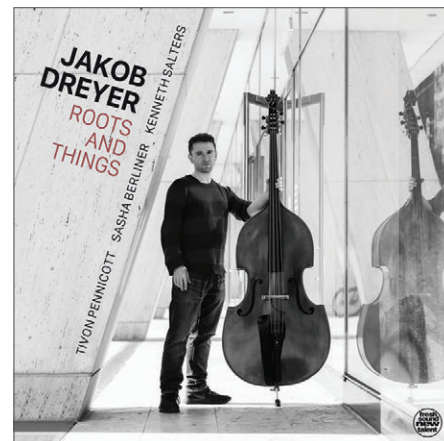
driving pulse. Kirk reveals a mellower side on the first half of Charles Mingus' "Ecclusiastics" before singing a tongue-in-cheek refrain about Alabama's segregationist governor, George Wallace, then unleashing another potent tenor solo. They wail unrestrainedly on an uptempo swinging rendition of "All The Things You Are." "Blues Minor At The Gate" has Kirk swinging confidently on manzello and stritch simultaneously. Then for "Three For The Festival" he adds tenor for an amazing one-man, three-horn front line. As the band drops out midway through this familiar set-closer, Kirk engages in an extended duet with himself on flute and nose flute. The one sour note here is "Oboe Blues," with Kirk struggling to find the correct intonation on his unwieldy new toy.

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

**jaimie branch: *FLY or DIE II: bird dogs of paradise (International Anthem)*; ★★★ 44:56** Whether one appreciated Chicago-bred trumpeter jaimie branch (intentionally stylized as all-lower-case) during her brief but meteoric career, which ended with her shocking death at age 39 in August 2022, the intensity of her personal expression was undeniable. Originally released in 2019, her punk-meets-avant garde manifesto *FLY or DIE II: bird dogs of paradise* finds her shifting from introspective muted trumpet ("Birds Of Paradise") to furious open horn onslaughts (the politically charged "Prayer For Amerikkka, Pt. 1-2" and "Twenty-Three N Me, Jupiter Redux") to the uncharacteristically buoyant and vaguely calypso-flavored "Simple Silver Surfer" and darker explorations like the raucous title track. The ironic "Love Song (For Assholes And Clowns)" has her singing a gentle lament before building to a screaming, cathartic crescendo. An acquired taste, to be sure. But courageous in its own way.

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

DB



## Jakob Dreyer *Roots And Things* FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT

★★★★

*Roots And Things*, Jakob Dreyer's fine new recording, starts with the mesmerizing "The Fifth Floor" and ends with "Choral Diner," a devotional track featuring Dreyer's multi-dubbed bass. In between are full tunes and bridging snippets that attest to the depth of the quartet Dreyer has assembled for his third album as a leader. The album's 16 tracks, 15 of them Dreyer originals, include "June Tune," a cover of "With A Song In My Heart" in 5/4 time, and "Fight Or Flight," its toughest.

Tenor sax player Tivon Pennicott launches "Flight," a tune that ascends quickly, then reverses course. Vibraphonist Sasha Berliner competes with Pennicott in velocity, and their "conversation" explains the song's title.

The more you listen to *Roots*, the more you surrender to its fluidity. There's no weak cut, and playing it through only whets the urge to hear it again.

Other stimuli: "Hold On" wants to be a samba when it grows up. For now, it's a pulsating meditation distinguished by Pennicott's big tenor and a nervy Dreyer solo.

Grounded by Dreyer's bass, Kenneth Salter's feathery drums and Pennicott's snake-charmer sax, "June Tune" crests with a Berliner solo. If radio was open to a fresh jazz single, this tune with its earworm melody would fill the bill.

Salter rocks and Berliner shines on "Big Apple," a love song to Dreyer's adopted city. A blues with a memorable melody, it pushes everyone up front, especially Berliner. She solos, then Pennicott takes his turn, crafting passionate lines until Berliner guides the tune home.

—Carlo Wolff

**Roots And Things:** The Fifth Floor; Constellation; Follower; June Tune; Land of 1000 Blues; With A Song In My Heart; Bodega; Downtime; Fight Or Flight; MTA; Hold On; Room 1102; Roots And Things; Invisible; Big Apple; Choral Diner. (56:22)

**Personnel:** Sasha Berliner, vibraphone; Jakob Dreyer, bass; Tivon Pennicott, tenor saxophone; Kenneth Salter, drums.

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



The players are the composers on SFJAZZ Collective's *Collective Imagery*.

NINO FERNANDEZ



## SFJAZZ Collective *Collective Imagery*

SFJAZZ

★★★★★

Reviewing an album always comes with several challenges, and that task is compounded when the musicians are assigned to focus their compositions on works of art. But the SFJAZZ Collective completes this mission with flying

colors or in black-and-white, deftly drawing their inspiration from several different artistic creations.

Tenor saxophonist David Sánchez's "Listo" is an expansive example of the group's collective creativity. Soloists Chris Potter on soprano saxophone and Mike Rodriguez on trumpet add layers of invention to the sound portrait, and all the while, the rhythm section, notably Edward Simon on piano, keeps

the melody from drying up, amplifying Rodriguez's Clifford Brown-like filigree.

It makes no difference which painting inspired Sánchez, because the band, in both singular and ensemble ways, touches on each one. Vibist Warren Wolf's take on "The Files" has an audiobook flavor with a recitation linked directly to the FBI's COINTELPRO attack on Black activism.

Here, politics is wedded with art and music, creating a powerful emotional bridge that invites reflection. On Kendrick Scott's "The Child Opens Its Eyes To The Earth," there's a dramatic start with cinematic or cosmic elements, featuring Wolf and Simon, with Scott and bassist Matt Brewer melding their intentions. The horns evolve like a double helix on Rodriguez's "Walking In Rainbow Rain," and Simon's piano, as ever, provides a richly infused tonality.

Once again, the SFJAZZ Collective has played to its strengths, inspiring a deeper appreciation for the connection between art, politics and jazz.  
—Herb Boyd

**Collective Imagery:** Unknow Know With What Is; Walking In Rainbow Rain; Guardian Of The Oceans; The Files; The Child Opens Its Eyes To The Earth; Te Quiero Inti; Listo; Guardian Of The Forests. (50:11)

**Personnel:** Chris Potter, tenor and soprano saxophone; David Sánchez, tenor saxophone; Mike Rodriguez, trumpet; Warren Wolf, vibraphone; Edward Simon, piano; Matt Brewer, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums.

Ordering info: [sfjazz.org](http://sfjazz.org)

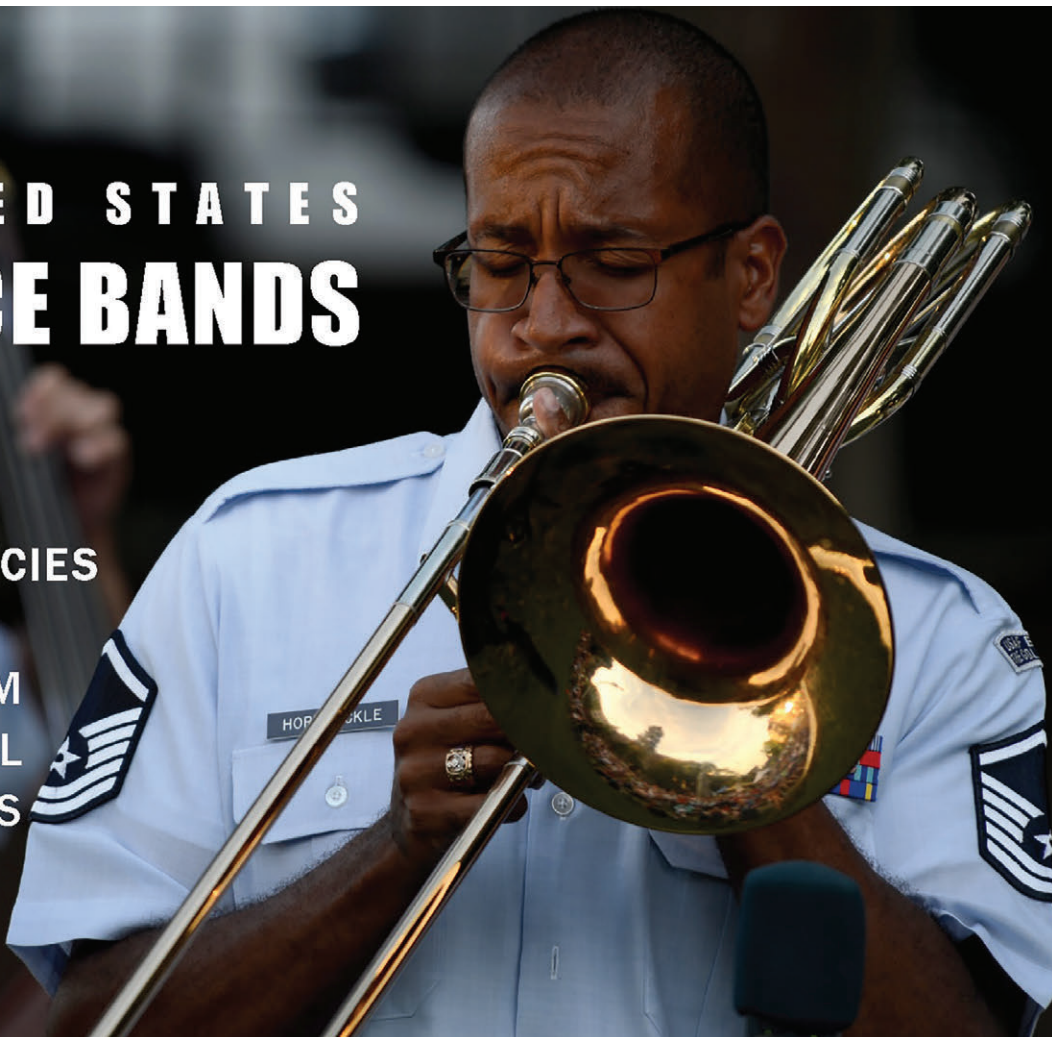


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# Genius That Keeps On Giving

Ray Charles was a genre unto himself. It's commonplace to point out that, across a 55-year recording career, he not only cut R&B, rock and pop singles, but also made jazz and country albums. What sometimes gets forgotten is that, no matter what style he was working in, there were audible elements of almost every kind of American music. As he himself put it, "If I like it, I'm going to sing it." There was a lot that Ray Charles liked.

There are few better examples of the breadth of his taste than *Ingredients In A Recipe For Soul* (Tangerine; ★★★★★ 37:53). Released in 1963, it arrived on the heels of his two-volume *Modern Sounds In Country And Western Music*, and picked up right where those albums left off, with a cover of a Johnny Cash hit. But where Cash's wan take on "Busted" capped each sad-sack line with a single chord from an autoharp, Charles leans into its blues roots, punctuating his phrases with a hard-swinging, Basie-esque burst of brass. He may be busted, but he's killing it. Contemporary listeners would doubtless have been happy if the whole album stayed in that sassy, soulful vein, but Charles, coming off such string-soaked smashes as "I Can't Stop Lovin' You," had other ideas. And so we get a lush, lachrymose reading of "That Lucky Old Sun," plus some tasty, Benny Carter-arranged blues on "In The Evening (When The Sun Goes Down)."

Carter wasn't the only jazz arranger Charles liked. Gerald Wilson wrote a lovely chart for "The Brightest Smile In Town," but it didn't make the cut for *Recipe*. Fortunately, you can find it on *No One Does Like ... Ray Charles* (Tangerine; ★★★★★½ 35:02), a collection of non-LP singles and studio leftovers that could be considered the mid-'60s album Charles should have made but didn't. Even better, the remastering is exquisite, with a soundstage wide and clear enough to pinpoint each instrument. From big band-style blues like "No One" to such vintage dance fare as "My Baby Don't Dig Me," to the bluesy novelty "At The Club," it's catnip for Ray Charles collectors, and just plain fun for '60s soul fans.

Thanks to the stylistic breadth of Top 40 radio in the '60s, it was easy for Charles to bounce between string-sweetened pop and blues-fueled soul, while expecting his listeners to follow happily along. That was less the case in the '70s, when listeners moved from AM to FM, and playlists were siloed by genre. Maybe that's why *Love Country Style* (Tangerine; ★★★★★½ 35:17) seems such a muddle. "If You Were Mine" opens the album with a tasty splash of New Orleans spice, "Ring Of Fire" gets retrofitted with a Muscle Shoals groove,



and the bass and drums inject enough funk sophistication into "Your Love Is So Doggone Good" that it somehow doesn't collapse beneath the weight of the wordless backing vocals and syrupy string arrangement. But "Good Morning Dear" is cornier than Iowa in August, while "I Keep It Hid" may as well have been a B.J. Thomas number.

Given that it opens with a sentimentalized "Till There Was You" followed by a weepy "If You Go Away," it would be easy to have similar reservations about *Come Live With Me* (Tangerine; ★★ 34:03). But wait a few tracks: It gets better. *Come Live With Me* was a project of the LP era, with a four-song "sweet" side up first, backed by a fabulously funky flip. There's nothing wrong with that as a concept, but this isn't his balladry at its best. "If You Go Away" never quite reaches the pathos its lyrics aim for, while the title tune, though hoping for the MOR opulence of his early-'60s hits, is undercut by Charles' constantly noodling electric piano.

That said, the funk is also a little funky, and not just in the musical sense. "Problems, Problems," for example, end with Charles inviting his love interest to "put your hands all over me," which seems cringe even before he groans, "aw, thank the Lord for the sense of touch." Some production choices age better than others.

On the other hand, Charles miraculously manages to turn the Maurice Chevalier chestnut "Louise" ("Every little breeze/ Seems to whisper Louise") into a gone-to-church soulful, wah-wah-flavored funk workout. And despite its preachy, think-before-you-leap lyrics, "Where Was He" delivers a near-irresistible blend of gospel harmony and Meters-style groove. It takes genius to ensure that even the mediocrities have moments of greatness. **DB**

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



## Erika Dohi *Myth Of Tomorrow* SWITCH HIT/FIGUREEIGHT ★★★★★

Keyboardist and vocalist Erika Dohi is constructing her own sonic world — into which she invites the rest of us from time to time. Her debut album, 2021's *I, Castorpollux*, drifted by like a half-remembered dream, piano and synth melodies laying a foundation for wavering vocals, horn lines swaddled in reverb and echo, and pulsing rhythms that owed more to minimalist classical and early '00s avant-garde electronic music than any type of jazz.

*Myth Of Tomorrow* is similar in some ways, but even more insular and introspective. Although the range of instruments is much wider — trumpet, flute and saxophone; traditional Japanese instruments like koto, taiko drums and various flutes; and several iconic/vintage synthesizers (Fairlight CMI, Oberheim) — it all feels like the product of one mind.

The first proper song, "Ame Onna," is a kind of cybernetic art-pop, with Dohi's vocals — switching between Japanese and English — sent through a vocoder filter until they sound like they're emanating from the universe itself. Behind her, programmed beats tick and squelch and instruments appear for a moment, then vanish. The featured soloists (trumpeter Adam O'Farrill on "Aratani," violinist Lauren Cauley on "Saturn Square Venus," David Leon on "In The Wild") add a more human element, resisting absorption into the digital illusion Dohi is conjuring around them. "Shahzad + Erika," a highlight, is a duet with Shahzad Ismaily, his synth drones rising like locusts to drown out her piano, which seems out of tune, or maybe just underwater.

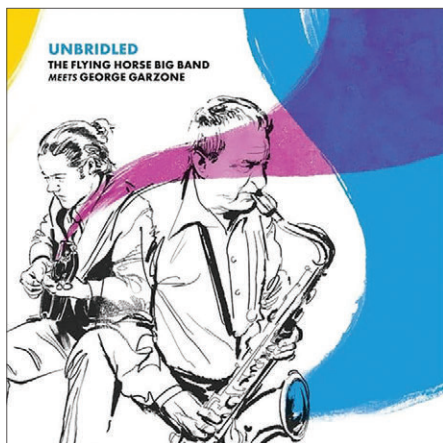
—Phil Freeman

**Myth Of Tomorrow:** Izanagi no Mikoto; Ame Onna; Aratani; Saturn Square Venus; In The Wild; Myth Of Tomorrow; Transplante; Shahzad + Erika; 1111/First Responders April 29, 2020. (41:54)

**Personnel:** Erika Dohi, composer, synths and vocal; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; David Leon, flute and saxophone; Morgan Guerin, bass synth and bass guitar; John Blackford, Fairlight CMI; Shahzad Ismaily, Oberheim; Lauren Cauley, violin; Miyama McQueen-Tokita, koto and vocal; Kyle Poole, drums; Kaoru Watanabe, taiko drums and Japanese flutes; William Brittle, vocal; Carol Feliz, spoken word.

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





**Flying Horse Big Band/  
George Garzone**  
*Unbridled*  
FLYING HORSE  
★★★★½

"Giant Steps" isn't typical big band fare. Yet Flying Horse Big Band's bold reimagining of the John Coltrane classic showcases the power of a full ensemble plus the complexity and drive that made the original so groundbreaking. It's certainly an assertive opening to *Unbridled*.

For over 10 years, saxophonist, composer and educator Jeff Rupert has directed the University of Central Florida jazz studies stu-

dent band, producing award-winning records for one of the few college groups to have their albums hit the top 50 in the Jazz Week charts.

The origins of his band's latest record date back to 2023 when Flying Horse was invited to appear with Garzone at the Jazz Education Network's 2023 convention. The music came together so well that Garzone and the band entered the studio the following day to document the performance.

Rupert's arrangements and compositions are lush, muscular and disciplined. He composed "Pharoah's Daughter," "Chasin' Tail" and "It Gets Better" for previous small group outings, reinterpreted here for big band. "Pharoah's Daughter" embodies stately grandeur and lyrical warmth. Garzone's flamboyant solos on both this track and the more adventurous "Chasin' Tail" further show why he is one of the most sought-after saxophonists in Boston and nationally.

*Unbridled* succeeds because it understands the strengths of big band jazz and refuses to treat it as a museum piece. It swings hard, experiments thoughtfully and delivers a listening experience that feels both nostalgic and boldly forward-looking. —Veronica Johnson

**Unbridled:** Giant Steps; Pharoah's Daughter; Chasin' Tail; Reflections; It Gets Better; Impressions. (36:38)

**Personnel:** Jeff Rupert, tenor saxophone, director; George Garzone, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 4, 7); plus 20 others.

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

**For Living Lovers**  
*Natural Name*  
SUNNYSIDE  
★★★★

Guitarist Brandon Ross and bassist Stomu Takeishi first worked together with Henry Threadgill's Make A Move band in the mid-1990s. They both have long resumes filled with associations with top avant-garde players. Suffice it to say that their playing on *Natural Name* does not sound like the music of any of them.

Ross and Takeishi, as the duo For Living Lovers, had previously recorded 2014's *Revealing Essence*. *Natural Name* is a mostly laid-back set of improvised duets that are subtle, make liberal use of space and silence, and generally set melancholy moods. Ross is mostly in the lead during the ensemble performances. The opener, "Pioneer," begins with echoey guitar and then settles into a relaxed tempo. "Pollinator" also starts with Ross wailing some high notes before evolving into relatively quiet interplay by the musicians. "Pan" continues the introspective mood.

It is not until "Race Face—O. People" that the musicians display some real fire, building from a two-note phrase and creating some lively ideas. It may not be a coincidence that this is one of



three pieces on this set that concludes with the applause of a live audience. After the somewhat downbeat "LARW," an episodic "Hammer" has plenty of passion and even becomes thunderous at one point. The intriguing outing concludes with the thoughtful "Open Circle," Ross and Takeishi echoing each other's ideas on the relatively exciting "Bullseye" and a surprising and haunting vocal by the guitarist on "From A High Place."

—Scott Yanow

**Natural Name:** Pioneer; Pollinator; Pan; Jenkins Of Alhambra (for Leroy); Broken Waves; Fallen Trees; Race Face—O. People; LARW (for Liv); Hammer; Open Circle; Bullseye; From A High Place. (50:18)

**Personnel:** Brandon Ross, guitar; Stomu Takeishi, acoustic bass guitar.

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



**James Suggs**  
*For All We Know*  
ARBORS  
★★★★

*For All We Know* is an album chock full of lauded compositions, from tried-and-trues like "St. James Infirmary" to '70s AM radio fodder like Goffin/King's "You've Got A Friend" and The Isley Brothers' "At Your Best You Are Love." Most are pleasing (if not radical) reworkings. For instance, "You've Got A Friend" takes on a form you might hear at the end of the night at a nondescript French Quarter club.

Oddly, yet imaginatively, Michael Jackson's "Black Or White" takes on the syn-copated groove of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground."

The cover of Deniece William's 1976 anthem "Free" has some truly lovely moments, and showcased perfectly smooth phrasing by Ms. Nash, but left me wishing the whole band had gone down to some dim, sexy lounge to play and really let loose ... before heading back to the studio to record one more take. Nearly all of my favorite soul-jazz albums capture that incredible chemistry (and exhibit an ease) that can only come from consistently gigging together: the communion of the music, not just playing the notes with mastery.

The reason why *The Real Book* (and *The Fake Book*) and the Beatles' songbook and the catalog of Stevie Wonder have each become invaluable sources of compositions for gigging jazz acts for decades is because strong, familiar melodies give us lovely launching pads for sweet imagination. We get a taste of it at the very end of "At Your Best," when the band lifts up in a synchronized leap at the sun, but with this album I was left wishing for more such imagination.

—Ayana Contreras

**For All We Know:** Grazing In The Grass; You've Got A Friend; At Your Best (You Are Love); Ping Pong Fellowship Pt. 1; St. James Infirmary; Black Or White; For All We Know; Free; For No One; Ping Pong Fellowship Pt. 2; Jealous Guy; My Shining Hour; Moten Swing. (71:07)

**Personnel:** James Suggs, trumpet and flugelhorn; Herlin Riley, drums and tambourine; Alejandro Arenas, upright bass and bass synth; Jeremy Carter, tenor saxophone; Seth Finch, keyboards; Allison Nash, vocal; Brandon Conley, trumpet.

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





## Jowee Omicil *sMiLes*

BASH! VILLAGE

★★★

Haitian Canadian multi-instrumentalist Jowee Omicil's homage to his influences, *sMiLes*, is an ambitious, cinematic album that at times recalls the high-concept collages of Kendrick Lamar or Jon Batiste. It's wildly inconsistent. Some tracks are dazzling; others, shrug-worthy.

In the dazzling column file the opener, a fetching, funky take on Abbey Lincoln's "Throw It Away" (later reprised as a remix) that nicely captures Lincoln's wise-naïf tone. "Shorter Way To

Marrakech" nods to the saxophonist of that name, with a playfully "out," Jay Clayton-like vocal by Moroccan Malika Zarra. "DessaLinnienne AyiTi Liberated" deconstructs the Canadian national anthem while also revealing Omicil's debt to Ornette Coleman, as he lands on notes outside the key. "JupiTeR" is a compelling alto sax meditation over pulsing keyboard swells; and the closing, title track, a gorgeous vocal duet with Dominique Fils-Aimé, breathes like a sighing hymn.

Elsewhere, the album dries to be boring. To wit: an aimless homage to Roy Hargrove ("BeaT CoiN"), a bouncy island ditty ("Soeur FeLiX") and an Afro-reggae dance track "Trip To GHanA." Pretension inflates a long, wannabe Abdullah Ibrahim solo piano piece, "LeTTre Du MALi PouR JonaTHan," as well as an introspective dramatic monologue about Miles Davis, "MiLes ConvoY." You have to hand it to Omicil: He aims high and sometimes hits his mark in an original and soulful style. —Paul de Barros

**sMiLes:** Throw It Away; BeaT CoiN; SOeur FeLiX; Trip to GHanA; Shorter Way to Marrakech; DessaLinnienne AyiTi Liberated; Okap To MinDeLo; JupiTeR; Throw It Away, Full of LoVe; LeTTre Du MALi PouR JonaTHan; MiLes ConvoY; Should I SMiLe (56:58)

**Personnel:** Jowee Omicil, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, Odisel saxophone, piano, keyboards, vocals (9); Randy Kerber, piano (2, 3), Fender Rhodes (1, 5); Jonathan Jurion, piano (1, 5), Fender Rhodes (2, 3), keyboards (8); Ludovic Louis, trumpet (2); Jenda Manga (1–3, 5), Darnine Nueva (2, 3), Yoann Danier (7), bass; Yoann Danier (1–3, 5, 12), Arnaud Dolmen (1–3, 5) drums; Mawuena Kodjovi, bass, guitar, drums, djembe, bamboo flute, hudu, pocket trumpet, shekere, backing vocals (4); Malika Zarra (5), Dominique Fils-Aimé (12), vocals; Yoyo On The Track (9).

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

## Zeena Parkins/ Cecilia Lopez *Redshifts*

RELATIVE PITCH

★★★

On *Redshifts*, Zeena Parkins and Cecilia Lopez create otherworldly sounds that, while improvised, fall beyond what one would think of as jazz. In the early 1960s, to demonstrate stereo systems, a series of sound effects records were made. While those tended to be gimmicky, unlike the much more serious *Redshifts*, the collaborations between Parkins and Lopez are distant relatives.

While one thinks of the harp as a soothing instrument, one that never generates complaints from neighbors for being played too loud, Zeena Parkins has in her career completely reinvented the harp, creating electronic sounds not associated with the instrument. Cecilia Lopez on electronics, synthesizer and an invention called RED that comprises large speaker wire nets used to create complex feedback, proves to be a very compatible musical partner. In fact, with the electronics dominating these performances, it is often difficult to know who is playing what and when the harp is being used.

One cannot imagine the opener, "Lullaby," putting anyone to sleep. However its colorful



feedback-type sounds could be a soundtrack for one's more adventurous dreams. Among the other selections are "Foton," which has an emphasis on high-pitched tones; the bubbling sounds and conversational interplay of "Blue Shift"; the rather monotonous 16½-minute drone piece ("Expansion Y Corrimiento Al Rojo"); and "Peculiar Velocities," which could have accurately been used as the title of this unusual album. —Scott Yanow

**Redshifts:** Lullaby; Foton; Blue Shift; Dogs Have Big Souls; Expansion Y Corrimiento Al Rojo; Gatos De Tripa; Peculiar Velocities; Absorption Line. (51:10)

**Personnel:** Zeena Parkins, harp, ebow piano; Cecilia Lopez, electronics, synthesizer, RED.

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



## Maria Corsaro *Love Makes The Changes*

LOLA

★★★

Maria Corsaro was making her living as a cabaret singer, but after hearing "My One And Only Love," recorded by Johnny Hartman and John Coltrane, she was captivated by the possibilities of adding improvisations to her performances. On *Love Makes The Changes*, her first record on her own label, she's backed by a quartet that includes pianist David Friedman, who also contributed the arrangements.

The set avoids obvious selections from the Great American Songbook, with the exception of "Secret Love." The arrangement Corsaro and Friedman fashioned tweaks the standard, merging it with "Never Said (Chan's Song)," a tune by Herbie Hancock and Stevie Wonder, written for the soundtrack of the film *'Round Midnight*. The lyrics mesh perfectly, with Corsaro's understated delivery underscored by Friedman's sparse piano and subtle fills from Mark Feinberg's saxophone and flute.

On "No More Blues," Corsaro plays with the lyrics Jon Hendricks wrote for his collaboration with Antonio Carlos Jobim, while the band lays down a mellow bossa nova pulse. The rest of the songs are presented in the kind of stripped-down arrangements you'd expect in a late-night club, with the melancholy performances of "How Glad I Am," "You Taught My Heart To Sing" and "I Have The Feeling I've Been Here Before" particularly moving.

Corsaro often shuffles the lyrics of the songs around, adding her own ideas to expand their emotional content. Her vocals are mellow and straightforward, sprinkled with a bit of vocalese phrasing, a few melismas and a handful of extended notes. —j. poet

**Love Makes The Changes:** If You Never Fall In Love With Me (Del Sasser); In April (For Nenette); Secret Love/Never Said (Chan's Song); (You Don't Know) How Glad I Am; No More Blues; You Taught My Heart To Sing; Love Makes The Changes; Portrait In Black And White (Zingaro); Stolen Moments; Walkin' Shoes; I Have The Feeling I've Been Here Before; That Day. (46:53)

**Personnel:** Maria Corsaro, vocals; Skip Ward, bass; David Silliman, drums; Mark Feinberg, saxophone, flute; David Friedman, piano.

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





## Lafayette Harris Jr. *All In Good Time*

SAVANT

★★★½

What a pleasure to hear pianist Lafayette Harris Jr.'s trio swinging like mad to kick off his 11th album and maintain that quicksilver pace into "It's Time," a deep dive into an early-'60s Max Roach album. Both tracks, and those following, prove how well his music is served by bassist Davis and drummer Jennings. Trumpeter Jeremy Pelt joins with swagger to pay tribute to "Maxwell," as Harris refers to the great drummer who was a mentor. "Write simpl[y] but

catchy," Roach once advised him: a dictum the pianist applies to his entire approach. This music is deft and never outstays its welcome.

A blues-oriented yet dapper player who makes familiar tropes seem fresh, Harris has the crisp, fleet right-hand attack and floating left accompaniment that exemplifies modernist (i.e., post-Nat Cole/Bud Powell/Herbie Nichols) style, sounding genuine, joyful and timely. His take on "Heartache" is elegant; his tune for brother and sis-in-law spiced with Charlie Parker quotes; with Pelt and saxophonist Person phrasing in slippery tandem and call-and-response on the "Blues," Harris delivers a satisfying late-night jam vibe.

The New Orleans staple "Iko Iko" is fun, as it must be; then Pelt turns the ballad "Time" smoky and dark, Harris echoing "Gloomy Sunday" over Jennings' cymbal wash. "We Are One" has, predictably, a gospel cast, and the finale "So Glad We Had This Time" is a sophisticated, perhaps wistful capper — as if to a set, an evening, a relationship. But Harris recorded this album while his happy marriage was imminent. So the upbeat wins! The good-time tracks here stick out. May good times never end.

—Howard Mandel

**All In Good Time:** I Want To Be Happy; It's Time; For Maxwell; Good Morning Heartache; For Denise And Vincent; Long Hot Summer Blues; Iko Iko; Time; We Are One In The Spirit; I'm So Glad We Had This Time Together. (43:00)

**Personnel:** Lafayette Harris, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Jerome Jennings, drums; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet (3, 6, 8); Houston Person, tenor saxophone (6).

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

## Max Jaffe *You Want That Too!*

COLORFIELD

★★★½

Max Jaffe was going through some heavy musical changes, captured on his 2024 album *Reduction Of Man*. A wide-open drummer who'd worked with the likes of James Brandon Lewis, Elder Ones and Steph Richards, his practice began changing with his embrace of Sensory Percussion, an elaborate product that allows a custom drum kit to function as a sample-based orchestra. Jaffe put it and his standard drums through an improv-oriented workout that was raw, chaotic and occasionally meandering. Now relocated from New York to L.A., his music reflects that a different environment and what seems like more fluidity with the platform.

By and large the new album is chill, edges sanded away by pinpoint arrangements, sophisticated production and electronic sheen. Guitarist Jeff Parker makes his presence known with his trademark timbre on the opener "Up Top Up," a smoky, tuneful ballad over a loose swing and a reverb-soaked snare, digging in Jaffe's pretty melody, while the woozy electro-grooves on "Pedro Point" are splattered with ethereal harp accents and cascading arpeggios from Shelley Burgon and nicely scuffed guitar sound courtesy of Meg Duffy. While the various guests take solos, Jaffe



has replaced the spontaneity of the previous album with a highly compositional approach, whether on lush pop-leading excursions or solo pieces that suggest a jazz remix of an Autechre track. Jaffe's growth and writing is impressive, but sometimes the music is a little too L.A. in its smoothness.

—Peter Margasak

**You Want That Too! :** Up Top Up; Pedro Point; S-SNARE; Gulf Of Mexico; Wooden Wire Tap; Looking At The Inside Of Your Eyelids; Putney Waltz; Ancestral Creeks; In Green; Zen And Pteent. (33:47)

**Personnel:** Max Jaffe: drums, acoustic and electronic percussion, synthesizers, piano; Shelley Burgon, harp (2); Meg Duffy, electric guitar, MIDI guitar; Gavin Gamboa, piano, synthesizers (4, 6, 8); Logan Kane, double bass (4, 6, 9); Jeff Parker, electric guitar (1, 9); Daniel Rotem, soprano saxophone (4, 6), tenor saxophone (4, 6, 9); Spencer Zahn, fretless electric bass (1, 5, 8).

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



## The Architects *Ohm!*

SHIFTING PARADIGM

★★★★

The title of the Dan Bruce-led trio's *Ohm!* signifies on both the unit that measures electrical resistance (named for physicist George Ohm) and the spiritual resonance of that sound in South Asian religion, which stands for the presence of the divine. Electricity, one might believe, is only evidence of the divine. The Architects demonstrate that power through a collection of tunes that insists upon groove. The guitarist and composer Bruce packages this commitment to groove inside of an intense instrumental palette, which, at times, recalls what has come to be known as the avant-garde. Also featuring drummer Gabe Jones and bassist Jordan McBride, this debut recording showcases a fresh and inviting sound.

This convergence is apparent immediately on the title track, which opens with a statement from Bruce that Jones and McBride quickly re-energize. Yet after about a minute, that groove falls away as guest tenor saxophonist Jason Kush pushes the group into open improvisation. From there, McBride returns to a funk-driven aspect that feels spaced out (even with Bruce's children offering something more precious than mere background noise). The musicians then return with something resolute to close the tune. Another highlight is the guest appearance of vocalist Nadine Douds on the composition "Ice," whose voice underscores the album's central message of movement and interplay. The four short interludes titled "Incidentals," and featuring programming from Nathan Douds, play with the concept of electrical current and inject energy into the album throughout. This all makes for a well-conceived and sonically rich debut.

—Josh Myers

**Ohm!:** The Architects; Incidentals #2; Eh; Incidentals #4; Ice; Incidentals #1; Glimpse; Major Chord; Incidentals #3; Rare Birds. (43:37)

**Personnel:** Dan Bruce, guitar; Jordan McBride, bass; Gabe Jones, drums; Jason Kush, tenor saxophone (1); Reggie Watkins, trombone (10); Nadine Douds, vocals (5); Nathan Douds, keyboards, programming (2, 4, 6, 8–10).

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



## Impressing With Diversity

Though overcrowded, the piano trio tradition always benefits from fresh and inspired new additions to the ranks. Enter young Estonian-in-Sweden pianist **Britta Virves**, whose debut Whirlwind album *Simple Things* (★★★★ 41:58) hums and bristles with a melodic and sophisticated savvy setting her apart from the present post-Brad Mehldau norm. Classically trained but drawn deeply into jazz early on her path, Virves embodies the expressive link between Estonian and Nordic jazz cultures, among other cross-talk connections in her work. Apart from occasional small doses and detours, the album mostly savors the timeless beauty of the acoustic piano trio format.

Among the highlights are the rippled, syncopated 6/4 groove trickling through “Days Of Lily” (a tribute to her mother), the lyricism of “Before & After,” the agreeable romantic air that hovers around such tunes as “Hope” and the energetic fervor of “Bravery.” As if to create a suite-like persona with the album, it is framed by the brief intro/outro pieces “Intro” and “Stepping Out—,” which she does on a driving yet graceful end note.

Chicago’s **Sun Speak** is a power guitar trio spinoff, with a difference or three, as heard on *Probiotic Orchestrations* (★★★½ 42:27). The core duo of guitarist Matt Gold and drummer Nate Friedman, abetted by keyboardist and textural colorist Dan Pierson, succeed in blurring genres in fresh ways, from the Hendrix-y opening “With Our Chins To The Sky” through the West African-esque twist-up of “There’s A New Librarian In Town” and the surf-y twang of “Everything Is Clock.” Shades of post-rock, psychedelia and jazz-rock guitar prevail, with more emphasis on atmosphere-making than standard jazz values of improvisation or sophisticated harmonic strategies.

A well-established artist and educator with ten albums to her name, **Kerry Politzer** steps forth impressively on *Alternate Route* (★★★★ 56:28), calling on a superb cast of players, including guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel and alto/soprano saxophonist Jaleel Shaw. Kicking off in simmering samba mode with “Before It’s Too Late” (sporting a dazzling Rosenwinkel solo), things tilt in assorted genre directions, from the shuffling title track to the tango-pulsed “Stopped At A Green Light.” Meters change in “Changing Plans” and a gentle finale arrives in solo piano charmer “Tara.” The playing can feel stronger than the material it adorns, but *Alternate Route* remains a solid indicator of the leader’s sturdy musicality and promise.

To kick off his big band project full of big, diverse and sophisticated ideas, British flutist-composer-arranger **Gareth Lockrane** kicks off with a deceptive blast of simplicity, a short bluesy flute riff opening “All The



People.” What follows on *Big Band: Box Of Tricks* (★★★★ 77:04) is a bold addition to the tradition of intelligent big band thinking and playing. A follow-up to his 2017 big band outing *Fistfight At The Barn Dance*, Lockrane’s latest splits the difference between conventional big band values and the more innovative Maria Schneider-esque camp. The title track shows the influence of one of his acknowledged heroes, Wayne Shorter, with its harmonic feints and bustling counter lines, while he captures a cool, infectious elan on the 7/4 “Leviathan,” and pays balladic tribute to his father with “Memories I Widescreen,” closing out with the swing-is-the-thing energy of “Lockup!”

Flute in a big band context is a road less taken, but the bandleader also generously shares the spotlight with his gifted compadres, as with the tenor sax tete-a-tete from Graeme Blevins and Nadim Teimoori on “Dennis Irwin” (ode to the late, great bassist), guitarist Mike Ohram’s brainy burning on “Grooverider” and trombonist Trevor Mires’ sleek turn on “Captain Kirkland” (nod to Bill Shatner and Costco).

Elements of intricately devised funk, post-fusion and rock merge in a fresh way on **Robert Mitchell’s** *Little Black Book Vol. 1* (Whirlwind; ★★★½ 30:25), a punchy yet painterly journey through the British keyboardist’s wide-ranging musical voice, abetted by nimble guitarist Zayn Mohammed and drummer Laurie Lowe. Echoes of past jazz paradigms, from the tasteful fusion of David Sancious through M-BASE-like puzzles (he played with Greg Osby and Steve Coleman), blend with his new ideas. Feistier energies, as on “Be The Change,” “Jimi @ Granada” and “Touchstone” are counterbalanced by acoustic piano idylls and the Rhodes solo piece “When Will We Let The Light In.” **DB**

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



### Jeremy Rose *Infinity II* EARSHIFT

★★★★

Don’t dive into the new recording by Australian saxophonist Jeremy Rose looking for his latest tweaks on the straight-ahead tradition. Instead, for his 26th release, Rose reassembles his Infinity project and pushes jazz further into a detente with electronic music genres like ambient. At times *Infinity II* sounds like it’s splitting the difference between some of SML’s jazzier moments and *Promises*, the 2021 collaboration between electronic music star Floating Points, jazz legend Pharoah Sanders and the London Symphony Orchestra. In other words, it’s much more mesmerizing than finger popping.

Rose, who is based in Sydney, has played with internationally renowned guitarists like Lionel Loueke and Kurt Rosenwinkel. For *Infinity*, he gathered stellar locals including pianist Novak Manojlovic, drummer Tully Ryan, and synthesist Ben Carey. The 10 tunes effectively recall landscapes, seascapes and dreamscapes.

As was the case with the previous *Infinity*, this was recorded live, this time at Sydney’s Lazybones Lounge, a potent reminder that meditative music has a home far beyond the yoga studio. It begins with “Full Moon,” a tune that seeps into the consciousness like a gentle tide rolling in. Rose’s reeds lead, Ryan’s percussion follows, while Carey and Manojlovic added key accents. On “The Great Wave of Kanagawa” Ryan’s percussion briefly recalls the ‘90s sounds of drum and bass. “Resonance,” one of the most strident pieces is pointed enough to imagine an electric bass in the mix. Many of the titles of the other tracks, “Impermanence,” “Ephemeral Dance,” and “Tides,” describe their vibe well. It’s a meditative experience that never gets lost in the granola.

—Martin Johnson

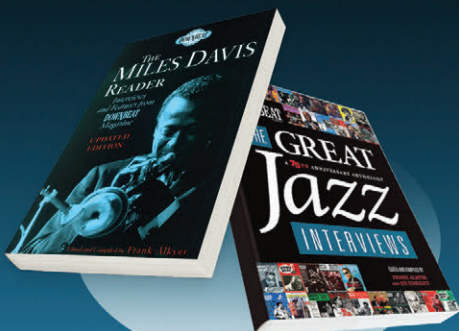
**Infinity II:** Full Moon; Futures; The Great Wave of Kanagawa; Resonance; Lexicon Quarter; Perpetual Motion; Impermanence; Ephemeral Dance; Tides; From Now On. (43:33)

**Personnel:** Jeremy Rose, tenor and soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Novak Manojlovic, keyboard and synthesizers; Ben Carey, modular synthesizer; Tully Ryan, drums.

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



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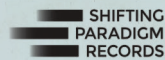
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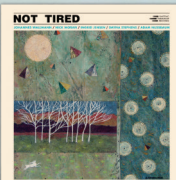
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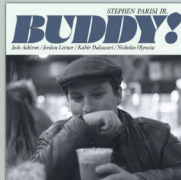
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"I'm very proud of the music that I've written so far, but I've got a lot more work to do," says drummer/composer Domo Branch.

# THE JOYFUL DRUMS OF DOMO BRANCH

It's wholly appropriate that Dominick "Domo" Branch would be doing a video via Zoom during the week of Thanksgiving. Though the drummer/composer currently lives in New Jersey, he's back home for the holidays in Portland, Oregon, happily discussing his latest album, *Hands Of Gifts* (Albina Music Trust).

Released on Halloween, Branch's sophomore album consists of original compositions largely based on the theme of gratitude plus "Our Man Bogle," which was

penned by Thara Memory, his late high school band director. The spirited opening track "Harlem Nights" pays tribute to the Upper Manhattan neighborhood that has

provided him with much inspiration.

The cheery title track, which showcases pianist Tyler Henderson's elegant extended solo, was written in gratitude for the opportunities that music has provided the composer. Memory gets a second nod with the closing number, "A Memory," a piece that's buoyed by saxophonist Abdias Armenteros' bright tone and Russell Hall's inspired bass lines.

"I started really writing music my sophomore year of college," Branch recalled. "I really got into it because I wanted to play sessions, but no one would take the session seriously unless they were reading original music.

"If I would go and play a session trying to learn new standards, people just started BS-ing. But when you bring your chart, or somebody else's chart is in front of them, they're going to take their time," he continued. "They're going to take it seriously, and then they want to create some real music. There's more of an investment there."

Another motivating factor was to overcome a certain stereotype: "I'm a drummer," he said. "And most people say drummers can't write, they're just timekeepers only beating on things. But I have a very musical brain. I can hear harmonies, and I can hear melodies."

Pianist Sean Mason, who's had Branch in his quintet and later his trio, agrees with his friend and collaborator's self-assessment. "Domo can hear the music. Drummers in general can't hear harmony because they don't play the piano," Mason explained, in a phone interview from his home in Charlotte, North Carolina. "That makes it very not fun to play with them, because they can't hear melodic storytelling. But Domo can hear harmony, and he understands the structure of the melody. So he puts melody first. He memorizes and really knows the melody of each song."

Mason first met Branch when trumpeter and Juilliard classmate Anthony Hervey assembled a session that also featured bassist Philip Norris. When Mason later had an every-other-Monday residency at Smalls, Manhattan School of Music undergrad Branch was there "almost every time," Mason marvelled, noting the session's 1–4 a.m. time slot. "Since he was younger than all of us, he always asked what he should be working on.

"Domo and I also share a comprehensive philosophy," Mason went on to reveal. "I like to use the entire piano when I play and not stick right in the middle. And he has that similar approach where he likes to use the entire drum kit."

Branch and Mason spent time together in Catherine Russell's band. Branch continues to play with the heralded vocalist, including dates welcoming in the new year. And he



cherishes the lessons learned from Russell and also her music director, guitarist Matt Munisteri.

"When playing with vocalists, the music isn't about you," Branch pointed out.

would have been, possibly, in the '60s just from the elder mentorship that I might've been able to receive.

"You're already hanging on the road and everything," he added. "But they're always

# 'Most people say drummers can't write, they're just time-keepers only beating on things. But I have a very musical brain.'

"You have to surrender to the vocals, and you have to surrender to the lyrics or the melody. Also, Catherine's is a jazz band but with more of a blues and soul and traditional swing sound versus if I'm playing with a new singer like Ekep Nkwelle. That's a completely different energy."

As with Russell, Manisteri has been a fount of musical knowledge for Branch. "He's always teaching me and telling me, 'Oh, man, listen to this record.' Or 'check this player out.' It reminds me of what it

mentoring and teaching, even though they're not necessarily trying to."

Having learned invaluable lessons from Manisteri — "He really wanted us to play the music for the music, not for ourselves" — and "big brothers" like pianist Taylor Eigsti and drummer Obed Calvaire, for whom he substitutes in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, mid-twentysomething Branch wants to repay the communities that nurtured him. He co-leads a Portland-based big band with producer/keyboardist Charlie

Brown III every holiday season. (The Brown Branch ensemble includes trumpeter Farnell Newton and saxophonists Nicole McCabe and Hailey Niswanger.)

"And I led a big band show last year in March at Dizzy's," Branch said. "It was a band of many different ages. I had some high school seniors, some college freshmen. The goal for that band was to give some students the opportunity to play in a world-class jazz club."

"You get there on time and are prepared. And I paid them," he explained. "I gigged a lot when I was growing in Portland, but I didn't have that kind of opportunity."

There's a sense of graciousness and joy when conversing with Branch, and that comes across on *Hands Of Gift*, too. "Blues For The World," the album's sole saxophone trio track, recalls the fun imbued by the Branford Marsalis' three-piece units of the late '80s and early '90s. "I used to listen to all of those records — even *Trio Jeepy* (a one-off album that featured Marsalis with bass legend Milt Hinton and drummer Jeff 'Tain' Watts).

"But I'm about to record another album that's going to be a completely different vibe — a protest album for all of us minorities out here, no matter the race," he shared. "I'm very proud of the music that I've written so far, but I've got a lot more work to do."

—Alexa Peters

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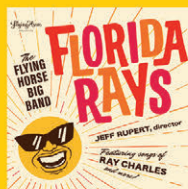


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"In order to bring something new to all of my bands, from time to time I need to disappear and make things on my own," says Mazolewski.

# WOJTEK MAZOLEWSKI GOES SOLO

"To go solo is a balancing act because on one hand you need to stand your ground but on the other you're stepping into a realm of extreme honesty," Wojtek Mazolewski says. "It's liberating and it's scary but it felt necessary to me. It was the only way to stay true to my creative instincts."

Over the past two decades, 49-year-old Polish bassist and composer Mazolewski has made his signature the restless pursuit of the ever-changing creative instinct. First coming

to prominence in the early '90s as part of the avant-garde, free-jazz influenced "yass" scene in his hometown of Gdansk, Poland, Mazolewski has since formed Pink Freud, —

an electronic and punk rock-influenced improvising group; seen the Wojtek Mazolewski Quintet, a virtuosic jazz group whose 2014 record *Polka* go platinum in Poland and ranked among DownBeat's top albums of the year; and played in the Tryp Tych Tryo with British jazz artists Tamar Osborn and Sarathy Korwar. With his latest album, *Solo*, he has now found an aspect of his creativity he has never explored before: playing alone.

Initially conceptualized as a bass score to accompany a theater show, Mazolewski decided to workshop his ideas during a series of solo concerts. Yet, while he was onstage he became so taken with the freeing sensation of individual improvisation that it blossomed into a distinct project of its own. "In order to bring something new to all of my bands, from time to time I need to disappear and make things on my own," he says over a call from his Warsaw home. "I decided I should try playing solo and once I started, it was an epiphany. After those first shows the music was flowing to me from every direction and I couldn't stop writing."

Influenced by solo records from the likes of Peter Brötzmann and Evan Parker, as well as the solo bass presence of Polish instrumentalist Helmut Nadolski — who Mazolewski describes as "a Viking of a man, the personification of a masculine creative energy" — Mazolewski enlisted producer Wojtek Urbanski and headed to the studio. As they worked their way through Mazolewski's mass of written compositions for bass, however, they began to hear other instrumentation embellishing his emotive melodies and eventually expanded the concept of a solo album to include double bass as well as electronics, flute, guitar and harp courtesy of featured artist Marysia Osu.

The result is the deeply moving, genre-breaking 12 tracks of *Solo*. Opening number "Monada" sets the tone with its scraping, eerie bowing and guttural vocalizations over rattling shaker to evoke a sense of hypnotic ritual music, while tracks like "La Cancion De La Liberation" and "Rodeo Spirit" move into more expansive, cinematic territory that evoke the vast, flat terrain of the Midwest. Other numbers "Sylfy" and "Dark Ecology" sink into the metallic rhythms of drum machines as Mazolewski's muscular bass playing becomes its own form of percussion, and on "Home Of The Warrior—Sil Daw Ban Yu Wa" Mazolewski pays tribute to the melismatic combination of harp and double bass produced by the likes of Charlie Haden and Alice Coltrane with London-based Polish harpist Osu.

Rather than use the unadorned largely solo bass format of the album to make an ego-driven display of virtuosity, on *Solo*, Mazolewski instead places emotive melody at the forefront, creating imaginative soundscapes where his instrumentation simply



serves to allow the listener to dream.

Nowhere is this impressionistic intention clearer than on album highlight "My Works Of Art," where Mazolewski pairs sparse bass plucking with a yearning spoken-word poem on the enduring force of his creativity. It marks another first for the record as it is the first time he has written a poem to accompany his music. "Poetry can make us bigger and better people and it has a huge potential to change society," he explains. "For years we have drifted from it in our fast-paced capitalistic world, but three or four years ago, for my own well-being, I started reading three poems every morning out loud, before I touched my phone or did anything. I read Patti Smith, Bob Dylan, Fernando Pessoa, Hiromi Ito, Pablo Neruda — they are all writers who have since changed my life for the better. That was the reason I found courage to express myself in words on this album, because until now I only thought I could express myself through music. It was another epiphany."

Mazolewski grew up playing multiple instruments while immersing himself in Poland's punk scene and formed his first band, Iwan Gro ny (Ivan the Terrible), at the age of 11. "When Poland was under Soviet rule there was no jazz or Western art allowed in the country, but once the Russians left in the early '90s, suddenly there was a flood of art coming in," he says. "I was 13 or 14 and buzzing at the chance to respond to this music. I became a part of the 'yass' revolution where mostly non-jazz players were bringing a new sound to the genre. The gigs were really crazy. Sometimes we'd improvise for six hours straight while people screamed and danced, and it gave us the feeling that music is a great force that is able to change the world."

Those freeform gigs coalesced into a distinct identity for Polish jazz, one that encompassed everything from the complex arrangements of composer Krystof Komeda to hip-hop and electronics, ultimately creating a scene that today thrives through genre-crossing groups like Bloto and EABS. "We kicked the door down and now young people feel free to play jazz every way they want to, which is really exciting," Mazolewski says. "It's total freedom, and for me that has meant more recently going from a dynamic, free-jazz style to pursuing melody."

It's a journey that is reflected on the lush melodies of *Solo* as well as in Mazolewski's forthcoming projects, including new records with Tryp Tych Trio and Pink Freud, as well as a Japanese jazz collaboration as Tokyo Spirit Band and new work with South African drummer Asher Gamedze. "I keep busy because I love my work," he laughs. "I'm always pursuing improvisation because it is truth. You go out there in front of people and you can't tell what's going to happen. You simply walk into it without hesitation, without looking back." Whether he's solo or not, for Mazolewski it seems the only way is forward."

—Ammar Kalia



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—DAVID FRIEDMAN

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—CONSTANCE TUCKER, ALL ABOUT VOCALS

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jungstratmann.bandcamp.com/album/confluence



PETER SMITH



"I was writing music that I felt was really honest," Rowe says of her new album, "and I wanted to share myself with these players I've met in the last five to seven years."

# ELLEN ROWE, IN A COVE ALL HER OWN

In the press release to Ellen Rowe's new album *Vinton's Cove* (Smokin' Sled dog), she speaks of it being "a balm for wounded souls" during challenging times. It's "a deeply personal exploration of nature, music and human connection."

And the front cover photograph of the album might allude to that. We see a small cove on Maine's Kezar Lake, where her family has shared a cabin since the mid-'50s. Indeed, one might suspect that the music inside exudes an atmosphere of calm, restful solitude, and tranquility.

A recording that took place at Willis Sound (a renovated church) in Willis, Michigan, *Vinton's Cove* begins with the easy swinging yet spritely "The Loons Of Vinton's Cove." Its up-tempo, sunny bounce stands in contrast to what follows: one of the album's strongest pieces, one that plays closer to Rowe's stated theme, the serene, imaginative "Refractions." It creates a mood that exudes that "balm" with measured musical gestures that float, sometimes crawl.

Now that's a balm that just might transport you to that very quiet, gentle cove. They are two of six originals by Rowe on *Vinton's Cove*. Rowe's jaunty "Clipped Blues" is followed by one co-written with vocalist Sunny Wilkinson (who guests on two tracks), the peppy, fancy-free "Phoenix." We may still be at the cove, but by now we are in new musical territory, suggesting that *Vinton's Cove* won't be your typical "concept" album.

Pianist and composer Rowe — professor of

jazz and contemporary improvisation at the University of Michigan and vice president of the International Society of Jazz Arrangers and Composers — leads her longstanding quartet with saxophonist Mike Sakash, bassist Dennis Carroll and drummer Pete Siers through 10 pieces, including two original takes on the standards "All The Things You Are" and "I'll Remember April" and delicate, tuneful approaches to Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now" and Kenny Wheeler's "Kind Folk."

"I was writing music that I felt was really honest," Rowe comments on the new album, "and I wanted to share myself with these players I've met in the last five to seven years."

A focus on her bandmates pervades everything here. "I'm not sure if there is a unifying theme throughout the entire album except wanting to have these particular players play this music. So I realized I had this material from being in this cabin and the lake. A lot of my music is based on a love of the outdoors. The cabin in Maine has been a blessing." An avid birder, Rowe says, "The one way I can deal with everything that's going on in the world right now is to get outside and go hiking."

Before joining the faculty at the Universi-

ty of Michigan in 1996, Rowe was director of jazz studies at the University of Connecticut. At Michigan, a position she will be retiring from in May, Rowe's first job was to lead their top jazz ensemble.

"Ed Sarath, who is still teaching, was chair of the department when I got here," she recalls from her office at the university. "He and I grew up together in Ridgefield, Connecticut. My very first jazz gigs were with him. Ed reached out to me and said there was an opportunity to add to the faculty. So I came in and created an Improvisation 1 and 2 course sequence. We added more people to the faculty and grew the curriculum and eventually got an undergraduate jazz major."

"I chaired the department for eight or nine years. Now I'm chairing the conducting department. I'm very glad that jazz has a table in the conducting department, because in a lot of schools it's pretty separate. And I'm trying to get more women in the program. I run the Sisters in Jazz collegiate combo competition [for the Jazz Education Network]."

Speaking of women in jazz, Rowe released *Momentum—Portraits Of Women In Motion*, featuring Ingrid Jensen, Tia Fuller, Marion Hayden and Allison Miller to critical acclaim in 2019. Her other titles include *Sylvan Way*, *Wishing Well*, *Denali Pass* and *Courage Music*. And Rowe's published compositions and arrangements have been performed and recorded by jazz ensembles and orchestras around the world, including the Vanguard Orchestra, BBC Jazz Orchestra, Berlin and NDR Radio Jazz Orchestras, and the London Symphony Orchestra.

*Vinton's Cove's* "Kind Folk" pointed to a special Kenny Wheeler connection. Rowe met the late trumpeter/composer at Banff in the mid-'90s. "We played his *Sweet Time Suite* from *Music For Large and Small Ensembles* with the big band. As for *Vinton's Cove*, I was listening to his 1997 album *Angel Song* ["Kind Folk" being one of the tunes], and was reminded of how much I loved it. Hearing Kenny play his music has had such a profound influence on me. And, yeah, playing the suite with him standing next to me, I'll never forget it as long as I live."

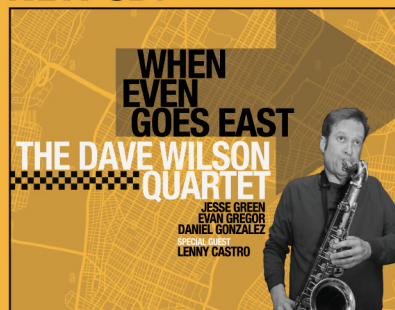
Another, earlier encounter had a similar effect on Rowe: working with the great pianist Marian McPartland.

"I got hooked up with Marian when I was in my master's program at Eastman School of Music in the early '80s," says Rowe. "My teacher/mentor Ray Wright had her in as a guest artist. He had me write something for her, and she subsequently asked me to do some arrangements; and then she asked me to transcribe two books of her solo piano. We have a scholarship in her name here at Michigan. She was extremely kind and supportive, and had me on her *Piano Jazz* show twice. It was nerve-wracking. But, of course, it was fun."

—John Ephland



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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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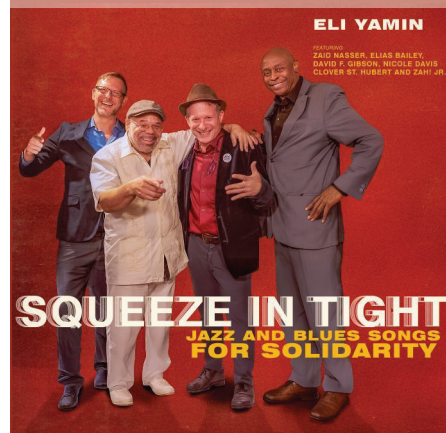
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Brian Bromberg (left) and José Valentino

# Brian Bromberg Shares Strategies to Succeed & Remain Influential

**I**n a musical field shaped by shifting industry paradigms, evolving consumer attention spans and a growing need for multi-dimensional artistry, few voices resonate with

the clarity and pragmatism of bassist and producer Brian Bromberg.

In a recent conversation with me, Bromberg opened up about the pressing real-

ities facing contemporary jazz musicians, and the philosophical, creative and entrepreneurial strategies that have kept him not just afloat — but deeply influential — across decades.



"We live in a singles-driven society now at commercial radio," Bromberg reflected. "Back in the day, we made records. A whole record was like a book of short stories — each song had a reason to exist. Now, it's more like, 'Drop a track and move on.'" That shift, he said, has deeply impacted how music is created, consumed and contextualized in listeners' lives.

And yet, rather than lament the evolution, Bromberg embraces the challenge.

"I still make records. I love the arc, the full statement. But I also get that if I want people

evolving role of the bass in contemporary music. Bromberg, known for his lyrical phrasing and unorthodox use of piccolo bass, sees bassists today not only as groove-makers but as holistic musicians and producers.

"Most bassists now aren't just bassists. They're producers, arrangers, composers. They hear the full picture," Bromberg explained. That full-picture awareness is what led him to create an internet radio station for bassists, giving a platform to players whose work might otherwise go unheard. "There are so many bassists doing amazing

business strategy. Those aren't opposites — they're partners.

## Authenticity in the Age of Algorithm

Bromberg's views on authenticity are central to his philosophy. "You can't waste people's time," he said. "They either get the music or they don't. If they get the music, then you can give them solos, concepts, artistry. But if you don't get the music right first, nothing else matters."

That's one reason why he insists on playing bass "like a producer."

"One of the greatest compliments I ever got was from a producer who said, 'You play bass like a producer, not like a bass player.' That's what it's about: serving the song, not your ego."

When asked about social media's impact, Bromberg was measured. "Social media is the highway — not the content. It can help spread great art or mediocre noise. The challenge is to use it to bring something of value to the world. If it's worthy, the world will respond."

## Philosophy Behind the Practice

What emerges from Bromberg's reflections is a consistent ethic: music comes from the human, not the instrument. "It's not about the bass," he concluded. "It's about the person behind it. Human being first. Musician second. Bass player third."

In a field often caught between innovation and tradition, Bromberg's grounded perspective offers both clarity and hope. He's not chasing the next trend — he's cultivating the next meaningful connection, one note and one listener at a time. As he put it, "You don't make records for bass players. You make them for yourself, hoping the music moves people enough to hear who you are in the music." **DB**

*'You don't just play music anymore. You take on 10 different roles if you want to survive and compete today.'*  
—Brian Bromberg

to hear it, I must consider format, radio time constraints and the fact that people's attention spans are shorter than ever."

## Navigating Artistry & Industry

For Bromberg, the tension between artistic integrity and commercial viability isn't new — but it is more pronounced than ever.

"When I write music, I don't think about the attention span. But when I produce, I must," he said. "Radio stations won't play a 6-and-a-half-minute track, no matter how musical it is. So, I have to tell the story in three to four minutes — still with integrity, but within the format."

As a longtime figure on the contemporary jazz scene, Bromberg's perspective is shaped by the demands of multiple roles: performer, composer, producer, educator and promoter. "You don't just play music anymore. You take on 10 different roles if you want to survive and compete today," he emphasized.

I reflected on this reality during our discussion, noting: "In our field, exploration, improvisation and documentation have always been part of the creative journey. But delivery — that's the highest order now. That's what makes or breaks the connection."

## Rise of the Bassist-Producer

Our conversation naturally turned to the

things — just not in a way that fits the traditional mold. I wanted to give them a chance to be heard."

The effort, which gained listenership in 127 countries, was short-lived due to funding issues, but it remains one of Bromberg's most rewarding projects. "It wasn't about style," he said. "It was about vibe. Classical, funk, jazz, Latin — didn't matter. If the bass had a presence and a voice, it deserved airtime."

## Education, Evolution & Entrepreneurship

As both of us have been immersed in the academy, our conversation turned toward higher education's role in preparing musicians for this new ecosystem. "School is a cocoon," Bromberg said. "It's not real life, but it gives you tools you can't get anywhere else. The problem is that many students graduate without the first clue about how to survive in the music industry."

He's optimistic, however, about programs that are beginning to bridge that gap. "As academia evolves, I'm seeing more openness to integrating entrepreneurship, marketing and real-world skills. That's vital. You can't teach the business of music without people who've lived it."

I noted that the next generation of jazz musicians needs both artistic exploration and

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Dr. José Valentino is a multi-Latin Grammy and Emmy award-winning artist, composer, producer and engineer whose career spans performance, recording and creative leadership. He has earned more than 40 Global Music Awards, including multiple Gold Medals in Latin Jazz, Big Band Jazz, Soloist and Instrumental categories, along with 55 DownBeat Student Music Awards — 42 as a competitor and 13 as a faculty advisor (record holder). His recent big band release, *Somos UNO*, features Brian Bromberg, Paquito D'Rivera, James Morrison and Francisco Torres, directed by Pete Madsen. He is an Associate Professor at the University of Florida and Founder and Director of the Music Business & Entrepreneurship program, and a U.S. Speaker on Creative Economy and Global Arts Entrepreneurship. For more information, visit [josevalentino.com](http://josevalentino.com).

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Brian Bromberg is a Grammy-nominated bassist, composer and producer whose genre-defying career spans more than four decades. Renowned for redefining the bass as a lead melodic voice, he has released over 30 solo albums across jazz, fusion, funk, Latin and contemporary instrumental music, including acclaimed recordings such as *You Know That Feeling*, *Downright Upright* and *The Magic Of Moonlight*. Bromberg has collaborated with a wide range of artists, including Stan Getz, Horace Silver, Sarah Vaughan, Sting, Michael Bubl  and Arturo Sandoval. A pioneer of the piccolo bass and a leader in instrument design through his B2 Series with Kiesel Guitars, Bromberg continues to innovate, inspire and elevate the art of bass playing. Visit [brianbromberg.net](http://brianbromberg.net).



KWAFU ALSTON



One interesting aspect of Harrold's improvisation is the way he manipulates rhythmic density.

## Keyon Harrold's Trumpet Solo on 'Well, Walk Then'

Trumpeter Keyon Harrold's improvisation on "Well, Walk Then," from his 2024 album *Foreverland* (Concord Jazz), starts with a slow and repeated minor

sixth (the fifth to the third of the key, which since this transcription is presented in concert pitch, means you get to read in the deadly and most evil key of E $\flat$  minor. Sorry

about that.) This is another case of the line between improvisation and composition being blurred: Are these first four measures part of the composition or part of the solo? If we were to hear live versions, would this idea recur? Was it written in the original chart, or did he plan it out in his mind, or did it happen spontaneously in this performance?

Regardless, Harrold makes a recurring motif out of it. This interval also appears leading into the ninth bar, as well as an octave up from bars 38–39, and kind of leading into measure 37.

I think it's clever how leading into bar 36 Harrold jumps up a fifth instead of a sixth, and then goes down and up (through the sixth) to the seventh. In the next bar he jumps from the fifth to the fourth (a seventh) and then comes down to the third. So he's alluded to that minor sixth without stating it, leading our ears to the minor sixth he finally gives us the next bar. We've heard this minor sixth before (multiple times), so all these pre-luding motions are more of a fakeout, giving us what we don't expect before resolving to where we thought we were heading.

Harrold returns to this motif again (with no fakeout) in bar 45 and repeats it for the conclusion of not just his solo, but the track itself, wrapping it up nicely.

He doesn't end with this phrase, though. First he adds a scalar run down to the tonic to make it sound more complete, and repeats this run. This would sound final, except then he finishes on the major sixth. This is clearly delving into compositional territory since the final chord is a major IV, not a chord we've heard in this section.

There is a manner in which it does give us some closure: the interval from the root down to the major sixth is the interval of a minor third. And do you know what the inversion of the major third is? Minor sixth. So he's closing up by flipping that motif upside down and using that to take us out of key. This may seem like a stretch to some of you, but, hey, that's what music theory is for.

There is also something called the Picardy third, which is when a minor-key composition ends on the tonic as a major chord, adding a bit of sunshine at the end. There is another approach where a piece will end on the IV chord, creating a more suspenseful effect (I've heard this in a number of big band arrangements). Harrold is combining both of those sounds, and hitting that major sixth (which is the major third of the IV chord) really sells it.

Another aspect of this improvisation that



makes it so effective is how Harrold manipulates the rhythmic density, and why. After those long tones, we get some syncopation, then 16ths, a long tone, sextuplets and then briefly 32nds. We get a couple of bars of relative space and then back to 32nds leading to a long tone in bar 21, and then sextuplets again (with a beat each of quintuplets and 32nds).

This back-and-forth continues, but at bar 41 we get sextuplets a tier faster than before. Even at the relaxed tempo of 60bpm this is still very fast, and Harrold plays a full measure of this, takes a bar off, and then another full bar. All this before dropping back to that slow opening motif.

Typically in this column I will just point out this use of rhythmic density and leave it at that. But for this improvisation there's an important aspect I want to highlight: what's happening in the rest of the ensemble when Harrold alters his rhythmic density.

Measure 21 is a great example. After four bars of 32nds, he hits us with a whole note. On its own this is a wonderful pivot, but it also comes after Harrold spent those four bars building from a low Eb on the bottom of the staff to a high Bb above the staff (an octave and a fifth), which adds to its effectiveness.

But there's another thing that happens here: The electric guitar switches from a clean sound to an overdriven one, and starts playing more of a drone-y countermelody rather than the light chordal effects it had been exploring previously. It's yet another place where we can question if this was planned out, or just happened, or somewhere in between, but we may never know. The main point is that improvisation often happens in relation to a background.

The drums are a large part of that. At bar 14 there is a subtle change in the drum groove, but this corresponds with one of Harrold's drops in rhythmic intensity. At measure 25 a similar thing happens. The drums go to straight eighths on the hi-hat. This brings the energy down just when Harrold plays a long note, and one that he's descended to.

But the rhythmic propulsion of the drums then increases steadily over the next eight bars, just as Harrold's intensity is also increasing. So they're helping each other make a statement. The piano starts playing glissandos in bar 41, just as Harrold is hitting his maximum speed for this solo.

Listen and you'll hear how this isn't just a soloist playing over a backing track, but a cohesive unit all acting toward the same goal. That makes for marvelous music. **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).



# NEW YEAR, NEW GEAR

## *A Preview of Musical Products on Exhibit at the 2026 NAMM Show*

With this year's NAMM Show right around the corner, we can look forward to plenty of new and innovative instruments and accessories coming out in 2026. A longstanding annual summit for the musical instruments industry, NAMM takes place Jan. 20-25 at the Anaheim Convention Center. DownBeat will publish its full NAMM Report in the April issue, but meantime we checked in with some of the convention's major exhibitors for an inside look at brand new musical instruments and equipment anticipated to generate a major buzz at this year's show.



### D'ADDARIO/RICO

D'Addario is expanding its XPND Pedalboard Series with two new products designed to simplify and strengthen modern pedalboard setups: the XPND Core Pedalboards and the Backline Core Pedalboard Transport Bags. Available in compact two-rail and larger four-rail sizes, XPND Core Pedalboards include pre-applied hook-and-loop strips and an integrated cable management system for clean, secure setups. D'Addario's new Backline Core Pedalboard Transport Bags are designed as the perfect companion to the Core Pedalboards.

The Rico Anti-Microbial Instrument Swab is designed to keep your instrument clean. Powered by Silvadur technology, silver ions inhibit bacterial growth for long-lasting protection. Its soft, machine-washable fabric removes 30% more moisture than traditional silk swabs and dries quickly. Available in two sizes: Large for alto/bass clarinet, alto/tenor saxophone and sax necks; Small for E-flat/B-flat clarinet and soprano saxophone.

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



### YAMAHA

The SLB300PRO SILENT Bass is Yamaha's next evolution of electric upright bass. Blending exquisite aesthetics with cutting-edge technology, it's crafted for serious musicians.

An ebony fingerboard and curly maple neck ensure superior response and feel, while the dedicated SRT Powered System delivers realistic acoustic resonance.

Yamaha's Band and Orchestra division is introducing the YAS-480SGLK alto and YTS-480SGLK tenor saxophones, the newest additions to the brand's 480 series. Designed

for saxophonists stepping up from student models, these intermediate instruments deliver reliable performance, ergonomic design and expressive tone. They feature a silver-plated body and neck and gold-lacquered keys, an eye-catching design that enhances stage presence.

**Sneak Preview:** Yamaha will also be unveiling a NAMM Show special instrument with exclusive features and elegant aesthetics. Check back in April for DownBeat's full report on the 2026 NAMM Show.

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



### VANDOREN

Vandoren's VK synthetic reed line is expanding with the introduction of the VK7 for tenor saxophone, which offers a similar bold, colorful sound and responsive feel that jazz and contemporary players appreciate in the company's alto model. Made from composite material, the tenor VK7 delivers consistent performance and offers a vibrant tonal palette with exceptional projection. Designed for saxophonists seeking durability and rich artistic expression, the VK7 is a new option for performers seeking the nuance of cane with next-level reliability. Available now in six strengths.

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

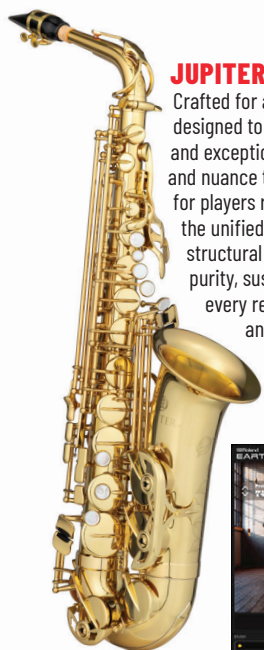


### ZOOM

The Zoom LiveTrak L6max is a battery-powered, portable digital mixer-recorder built for musicians who need pro-level control in a compact format. With six upgraded preamps, 12-track recording and flexible input options, it delivers clean, detailed audio in any environment. Each channel includes a three-band EQ, compressor and dedicated FX send for quick, intuitive shaping. The Zoom LiveTrak L12next blends digital power with an analog workflow, giving creators hands-on control with three multifunction knobs per channel for EQ, gain, pan, compression and sends. Its built-in recorder captures up to 14 tracks at 24-bit/96kHz plus a 32-bit float master mix.

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

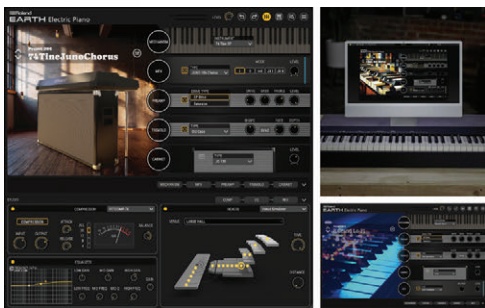




## JUPITER

Crafted for aspiring alto saxophonists, the Jupiter JAS1150 is designed to elevate the sax-playing experience with tonal flexibility and exceptional control. The JAS1150 delivers the responsiveness and nuance that saxophonists desire, making it a natural first choice for players ready to advance. Sheet rolled and seamed joined, the unified construction ensures consistent wall thickness and structural integrity throughout the instrument, enhancing tonal purity, sustaining resonance and amplifying projection across every register. Semi-ribbed construction reinforces key stability and contributes to clearer articulation, and the redesigned bell brace enhances tonal focus and projection.

[khs-america.com](http://khs-america.com)



## ROLAND

Roland's EARTH Electric Piano is a powerful software instrument on Roland Cloud that unifies decades of iconic electric piano sounds in one expressive interface. It features detailed multi-sampling, proprietary modeling and a wide library spanning tine, reed, electric grand, clavinet and vintage digital tones — including RD-1000, JD-800 and classic FM voices. Players have access to advanced shaping tools, including preamps, various tremolo types, cabinets, noise characteristics, Venue spatial effects, studio-grade effects and comprehensive plug-in support.

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



## EASTMAN/S.E. SHIRES

The new S.E. Shires Vintage LA Small Bore Trombone is inspired by the legendary Los Angeles-built small bores of the mid-20th century. This small bore trombone provides a warm, colorful and instantly familiar sound ideal for jazz and commercial settings. It features a two-piece yellow brass medium-weight bell, a lightweight .500 bore slide, vintage-style bracing and modern S.E. Shires precision.

**Sneak Preview:** Prior to the NAMM Show, Eastman will be adding an exciting new instrument with a unique and inspiring design to one of its leading product lines.

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



## JODYJAZZ

JodyJazz is debuting its Quasar Alto Saxophone Mouthpiece, a brand-new hard rubber alto saxophone mouthpiece. It has the brightest, strongest projection of any JodyJazz mouthpiece, and a new bullet-shaped chamber adds body and fatness to the sound. An innovative new Vibra Table increases reed vibration, making for a more free-blowing experience. The Quasar Alto is available in size 6, 7, 8 and 9\* tip openings.

JodyJazz has also released a Tenor edition of the DV JC JODY CUSTOM sax mouthpiece. Like the Alto model, it is based upon JodyJazz Founder & President Jody Espina's personal, custom-modified DV Tenor mouthpiece. The mouthpiece's special design has been refined to offer a unique balance of warmth, power and versatility. It's available size 6, 7, 7\* and 8\* tip openings.

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

JOSEPH CULICE



NAMM's TEC Awards will honor Smashing Pumpkins co-founder Billy Corgan with its TEC Innovation Award.

## SERIOUS STAR POWER

When the Anaheim Convention Center completes its annual transformation into a musical mecca this January, it won't just be the latest gear and gadgets catching attendees' eyes.

The live performances scheduled feature artists from nearly every genre, ranging from emerging talent to some of the most storied names in the business. And some of the biggest stars won't even be on stage. Kiss' Gene Simmons, Stevie Wonder and Kenny G are all regular NAMM attendees who "shop" the show floor for the latest gear.

For those looking for electric musical performances, their first stop will be Yamaha's annual Night of Worship, to be held on Jan. 22. Here, artists rooted in gospel and soul will help launch a weekend where sound and spirit intertwine.

The following evening, Yamaha's All-Star Concert on the Grand will light up the stage for a night of music from some of today's most exciting up-and-coming artists. With more acts yet to be announced, confirmed performers include The War and Treaty, the Grammy-nominated husband-and-wife duo whose genre-defying blend of blues, soul and Americana has made them one of the most soulful voices in contemporary music. Sharing the spotlight is Alana Springsteen, a Nashville-based singer-songwriter whose songwriting and evocative voice have earned her a breakout reputation in country and Americana circles.

Vocal powerhouse, musician and songwriter Sheléa will bring her rich vocal stylings to Yamaha's big concert. Sheléa is a Quincy Jones protégé and internationally respected for her interpretation of soul and jazz standards.

Beyond the Grand Plaza Stage, several events across the NAMM campus will feature big names. On Jan. 22, The Bass Magazine Awards Show, which is now officially part of The NAMM Show lineup, will honor bass legends like Les Claypool of Primus, Mike Dirnt of Green Day, and jazz-funk mastermind Marcus Miller, alongside rising trailblazers Laura Lee of Khruangbin and Blu DeTiger.

NAMM boasts a full slate of awards shows that recognize excellence in music gear, music retailing, professional audio, live sound and more. On Thursday evening, NAMM's TEC Awards will honor Smashing Pumpkins co-founder Billy Corgan with its TEC Innovation Award.

Wrapping up The 2026 NAMM Show on Saturday evening is the 14th annual She Rocks Awards. This annual celebration honors female leaders in the music industry. Singer-songwriter Rachel Platten and Carnie Wilson of Wilson Phillips will both receive She Rocks awards alongside a number of other honorees. Tune in to DownBeat's April issue for complete post-show coverage of all the big names that lit up the stages and the show floor during NAMM's 125th anniversary show. —Katie Kailus



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Nardis Jazz Club in Istanbul, Turkey

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## LATVIA

### M/Darbnīca

Riga

One of Riga's most popular cultural venues, M/ House of Jazz pairs a contemporary art gallery and bar with an elegant second-floor jazz club hosting Latvia's finest in jazz, blues and beyond. Recent acts include Jasper Hoiby Trio, Jam Session with Kamasi Washington band, Blackburn Brothers and Jam Session Season 5 opener Carl Winter Trio.

[mdarbnica.lv](http://mdarbnica.lv)

### VEF Jazz Club

Riga

Each concert offers jazz lovers local and international renowned musicians. Recent acts include Ari Hoenig, A Bu, Michael Pipoquina, Trio Vein and Seamus Blake.

[vefkp.lv](http://vefkp.lv)

## MEXICO

### Zinco Jazz Club

Mexico City

With a great menu and intimate, modern decor, this underground club has earned a reputation for hipness.

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

## THE NETHERLANDS

### Bimhuis

Amsterdam

This internationally acclaimed concert hall boasts a 51-year history and more than 300 concerts annually.

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

## NORWAY

### Victoria Nasjonal Jazz Scene

Oslo

Accommodate 300 people, this club reflects Norway's vibrant jazz scene.

[nasjonaljazzscene.no/en](http://nasjonaljazzscene.no/en)

## SCOTLAND

### The Jazz Bar

Edinburgh

Harnessing Edinburgh's creative talents into an offering of year-round live gigs, this award-winning basement venue is great for a

Saturday afternoon coffee, a fresh cocktail or a cold pint.

[thejazzbar.co.uk](http://thejazzbar.co.uk)

## SPAIN

### Jamboree

Barcelona

This classic club has hosted the greats since 1960 — from Duke Ellington and Ornette Coleman to Barcelona native Jorge Rossy.

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

### Sunset Jazz Club

Girona

Building a jazz community for over 24 years, Sunset's concerts attract attentive, respectful crowds, something musicians truly value. Recent acts include Bill Stewart and Jeff "Tain" Watts, who both want to return for the audience, and for the food.

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

## SWEDEN

### Fasching

Stockholm

Jazz club Fasching is one of Europe's oldest and most prestigious.

[fasching.se](http://fasching.se)

## SWITZERLAND

### Marian's Jazz Room

Bern

Since 1992, this 130-capacity room has been open from September through May. Known for great acoustics, its jazz festival (which runs March through May) features residencies.

[mariansjazzroom.ch](http://mariansjazzroom.ch)

## TURKEY

### Nardis Jazz Club

Istanbul

Opened in 2002, Nardis offers live jazz six days a week. Recent acts include Roberta Gambarini, Polly Gibbons, Jonathan Kreisberg, Eleonora Strino and Brian Charette.

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

### The Badau

Istanbul

Turkey's only gastro-jazz club, the room has become home to many local musicians as

well as international acts passing through the region.

[instagram.com/thebadau.istanbul](https://www.instagram.com/thebadau.istanbul)

## THE UNITED KINGDOM

### The 606 Club

London

Called "London's best music venue" by Jamie Cullum, the 606 Club was founded in 1976 and presents a wide variety British jazz. The Club is known for its authentic speakeasy atmosphere, as well as tasty British food and drink. Non-members welcome. Recent acts include Gwilym Simcock, Claire Martin, Joe Webb and Denys Baptiste.

[606club.co.uk](http://606club.co.uk)

### Cafe OTO

London

Cafe OTO offers space for creative new music and musicians going beyond the mainstream. Commissions, residencies and concert recordings are part of the programming.

[cafeoto.co.uk](http://cafeoto.co.uk)

### Jazz Cafe

London

With gourmet food and live concerts, Jazz Cafe has seated views upstairs and a downstairs dance floor. Funk and soul bookings share the marqu e with the likes of the Dele Sosimi Afrobeat Orchestra.

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

### Pizza Express Jazz Club

London

Since 1976, great pizza and jazz go together like peanut butter and jelly at this basement club in the heart of Soho.

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

### Ronnie Scott's

London

For more than 60 years, Ronnie Scott's has been at the heart of the London jazz scene, hosting the biggest names in the business. Recent acts include Anderson.Paak, RAYE, Christian McBride, Kandace Springs and Ang lique Kidjo.

[ronniescotts.co.uk](http://ronniescotts.co.uk)

### Toulouse Lautrec Jazz Club & Restaurant

London

Founded in 2008, Toulouse Lautrec is an independent South London venue dedicated to live music in an intimate, purpose-built space. Recent acts include Joe Alterman, The Fallen Heroes, Lianne Carroll, Alex Cosmo Blake and National Youth Jazz Orchestra.

[toulouselautrec.co.uk](http://toulouselautrec.co.uk)

### The Vortex

London

The Vortex Jazz Club is one of the U.K.'s premier jazz venues, programming almost 400 performances a year in an intimate space. A volunteer-led, the club has been serving as a platform for jazz, improvised and experimental music, while focusing on affordability and making the music accessible. Recent acts include Shabaka Hutchings & Pat Thomas, Kris Davis, Sultan Stevenson, Laura Jurd and Django Bates.

[vortexjazz.co.uk](http://vortexjazz.co.uk)



# Nicole Zuraitis

After earning the 2024 Best Jazz Vocal Album Grammy for her seventh album, *How Love Begins* (La Reserve), comprising 12 of her original songs, Nicole Zuraitis was nominated for another pair in 2025 for *Live At Vic's Las Vegas* and *All Stars Lead To You—Live*. In December, Zuraitis took her first-ever Blindfold Test.

## Carmen McRae

"Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most" (*Bittersweet*, Focus, 1964) McRae, vocal; Norman Simmons, piano; Mundell Lowe, guitar; Victor Sproles, bass; Curtis Boyd, drums.

Carmen McRae. Spectacular. She phrases so beautifully. Her voice has so much character. It's inimitable. It has a horn-like quality — and also a spoken tone aspect — that I love. I was laughing during the key change in the coda to "my condition must be chronic" because it felt like the band almost missed it, and she was singing a little harder, maybe because she was irritated. I've noticed that she sang with more technique on her early albums, and took more risks as she got older. This feels like peak Carmen, similar to when she did *The Real Ambassadors*.

## Alexa Tarantino

"Moon Song" (*The Roar And The Whisper*, Blue Engine, 2025) Tarantino, flute; Cécile McLorin Salvant, vocal, composer; Steven Feifke, piano; Philip Norris, bass; Mark Whitfield Jr., drums.

Cécile. Her voice is a beautiful instrument, and she uses its full facility, seamlessly. When I was learning, jazz was embracing the straight tone and instrumental sound of the voice. When she came on the scene, I was excited to hear her use a full vibrato. It's interesting to hear her use it in the upper register, which is pretty theatrical. Lately, I feel I'm always hearing Kate Bush in her — a fluttery, creepy, haunting sound. The song is beautiful. I can't place it. ... I love the voice-flute duo up front. Who plays flute like that? [afterwards] I've known Alexa since she attended Litchfield Jazz Camp.

## Samara Joy

"Reincarnation Of A Lovebird" (*Portrait*, Verve, 2025) Joy, voice, lyric; Jason Charos, trumpet; Kendrick McAlister, tenor saxophone; Dave Mason, alto saxophone; Donovan Austin, trombone; Connor Rohrer, piano; Paul Sikilvie, bass; Evan Sherman, drums.

Samara Joy. She also uses her full instrument. It's exhilarating to hear someone who loves to sing and loves the study of pedagogy. Her voice is unmistakable. I hear the influences of Sarah Vaughan and Ella, especially in the trills, and also how she drops the larynx and then lifts it up into straight tone. She's chosen to write lyrics and work with young players and arrangers, and it's exciting to watch her evolve while in the limelight. That speaks to her strength of character.

## Sarah Vaughan

"The Nearness Of You" (*Live In Japan*, Mainstream, 1973) Vaughan, vocal, piano; John Gianelli, bass; Jimmy Cobb, drums.

Sarah Vaughan, playing for herself. An accompanist would use the damper and voicing differently. What she played wasn't simple; just what was necessary. She was so harmonically creative, reharmonizing brilliantly and leading herself, going back and forth like a school of fish. I also love how she takes her time and relishes the sound of her amazing voice.

## Doug Wamble

"If I'm Evil" (*Blues In The Present Tense*, Halcyonic, 2022) Wamble, guitar, vocal; "Prometheus Jenkins" a.k.a. Branford Marsalis, tenor saxophone; Eric Revis, bass; Jeff Watts, drums.

Doug Wamble. I know the sound of his guitar and voice — his natural soul.



He has something to say, and he's not afraid to say it. When we were both in rotation at the 55 Bar, I was always blown away by his rapport with the band, and also his understatement. In the same set, he'd go from sounding like Nat "King" Cole to sounding like B.B. King. He's a deep musician. [afterwards] What a band!

## Ekep Nkwele/Vuyo Sotashe

"Skylark" (*Emmett's Place*, 2024) Nkwele, Sotashe, vocals; Emmett Cohen, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Kyle Poole, drums.

That's from *Emmett's Place*. You can tell it's live because the two microphones sounded different. Emmett is a very playful pianist. You hear the singers rooting for each other, spurring each other's momentum. One voice sounds highly influenced by Betty Carter, swinging her face off and fearlessly leaning in — I heard Abbey Lincoln in there, too. There's playfulness and super-heavy swing. Must be one of the Lincoln Center kids. The other voice is a stunning instrument with contralto qualities, in the pocket, more rooted, with a warm quality that feels like a hug. You hear so many influences, it's hard to tell who it's coming from. There's a yin and yang. You'll have to tell me. [afterwards] Ekep is so killing. She's going to be the next star.

## Shirley Horn

"Everything Must Change" (*May The Music Never End*, Verve, 2003) Horn, vocal; George Mesterhazy, piano; Ed Howard, bass; Steve Williams, drums.

Whenever I need to feel a lyric, I look at Shirley Horn because she sings for the story, not showmanship. You can hear her life as she sings the lyrics, but also speaks them, almost like poetry. It's a really hip arrangement, I think in 11/4, and then they break into a swing section and keep it in four until the end. That's why I love jazz. There are no rules.

## Betty Carter

"All Or Nothing At All" (*Feed The Fire*, Verve, 1991) Carter, vocal; Dave Holland, bass.

This is a swinging-ass bass player! Is it Christian? Then it's one of Christian's influences who played with Betty Carter. You could sing that bass solo. That's how musical it was. Dark and lyrical. That's another reminder to take your time, but only if you have something to say. And Betty Carter always has something to say. I love that song, but I thought she was brave to do it duo, because the bridge back into the "A" section is a tricky jump — you hear her struggling to find the center of the pitch on the way out. She sings like an instrument and her voice is unique. There is no other.

DB

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



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