Andy Narell joins forces with calypso legend Relator exploring the role of jazz in vintage calypso. They perform 15 classic compositions by Lord Kitchener, Lord Melody, Mighty Terrier, Roaring Lion, Spider, and Relator, alongside a group of world-class Latin-jazz cats who can swing the calypso and blow the jazz hot.

Candi Dulfer has recorded and/or performed with Prince, Van Morrison, Marcus Park, Dave Stewart, Beyoncé, Pink Floyd, Chaka Khan, David Satchob, Aretha Franklin, Elton John, Joe DeFrancesco and many others. This follow-up reflects her growth as a true jazz/funk player.

Doin’ The D features guest appearances by saxophonist Kenny G, trumpeter Rick Braun, special EFX guitarist Chichi Minucci, vocalist Marya Leak and many others; in addition to longtime collaborators Jeff Lederer and Bob James.

An acoustic recording with a musical “dream team” featuring Stanley Clarke, one of the most innovative bass players of the past three decades, Japanese pianist Hiromi, emerging rising star in the jazz scene, and versatile drummer Lenny White, best known for his Return to Forever work.

The tunes are from two sources (Ginoria Banksy, Goldplay, Seat), but done in an undeniably traditional jazz style, with acoustic piano, drums and upright bass. The result is a very organic recording with a lot of soul, and a style and sophistication that can only be found in the jazz idiom.

Mike Stern’s neighborhood spawned two coast and a stop in the Lane Star State to record with all of his friends on this CD: Richard Bona, Randy Brecker, Eric Johnson, Meschiak Marita & Wood, Esperanza Spalding, Steve Vai, Dave Weckl, and more.

A performance by the Yellowjackets is an experience that has as much to do with sight as it does with sound. Here they are, filmed at the New Morning, one of the most celebrated clubs in Paris in March 2006.
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26 Christian McBride
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By Ted Panken
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In my 11 years working as an editor at DownBeat, the afternoon of April 22, 2004, stands out as especially profound.

I spent the Thursday at New York’s Village Vanguard. The club had opened its doors to DownBeat for a photo shoot for our 70th anniversary issue. Jimmy Katz had plans to take photographs of a number of artists holding a photo of a musical legend they considered their hero. First to show up was Gary Smulyan, the winner of the baritone saxophone category in this issue’s 57th Annual Critics Poll.

As the afternoon progressed, a historic, multigenerational group of jazz artists descended into the basement club, including Horace Silver, Chico Hamilton, Benny Golson, Paquito D’Rivera, Matt Wilson, Matthew Shipp, Kenny Barron, Cedar Walton, Gary Bartz and Jon Faddis. The shoot was spectacular, and helped illustrate a special issue.

These artists did not show up because I set up the shoot. The came because of DownBeat. The magazine has that sort of pull. As shown in last month’s 75th anniversary issue, since 1934 DownBeat has served as a home to jazz like no other magazine.

I reminisce because this issue marks my last at DownBeat, as I move on to develop a career in law. I started working as an associate editor at DownBeat in 1998. The November 1999 issue marked my first as editor. Jon Faddis interviewed Milt Jackson for the cover. The trumpeter knew that Bags did not have much time left to live, and he convinced me that this would be a great feature. It proved to be just that.

Faddis and I had talked over the phone, but we had never met. After the story came out, Faddis came to Chicago for a Lester Bowie celebration concert. After the show, I introduced myself to him. He looked at me, and in a classic Faddis fashion, joked, “You’re just a baby!”

Well, I was only 24. I could not, however, apologize for my age. Today, I consider Faddis and many other musicians as friends and colleagues. Over the past 11 years I have grown up a bit (some may disagree), and have watched some dramatic changes in jazz. The industry has witnessed a paradigm shift, with the digital revolution, home recording, scaling back of the major labels and artists taking over their recording careers. New musicians have emerged to lead this music in exciting directions. Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, and today we watch the city slowly recover.

Bound copies of each year of DownBeat sit on a bookcase outside my office. When I look through a volume, it offers a genuine snapshot of the jazz scene from that year. I hope that over the past decade we have captured the essence the jazz scene in these pages.

This month’s Critics Poll serves as a glimpse into what a group of 120 critics from around the world believe has been the best in jazz and blues over the past year. The cover story on Christian McBride, the acoustic bassist of the year, looks at an artist who has emerged as a true spokesman for jazz. Ted Panken’s story on McBride appears on Page 26.

Traveling to jazz festivals is one of the perks of working as DownBeat editor. I went to Moscow, Idaho, during several Februarys for the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival. The enthusiasm of the students at the festival is one of the great wonders of the jazz world. One year, I rode in a van with Hank Jones, the newest inductee in the DownBeat Hall of Fame, from Moscow to Spokane, Wash. For an hour-and-a-half, late at night, we talked about his life in music. This stands as just one of the countless special moments of my time at the magazine.

Howard Mandel’s Hall of Fame story on Jones begins on Page 32.

While at DownBeat I have interacted with many of the winners in this year’s Critics Poll, from Sonny Rollins, Chick Corea and Steve Turre to Lee Konitz, Wayne Shorter and Roy Haynes. It has been a dream to work with musicians I consider my heroes. I could not have asked for a more rewarding professional experience.

Working at DownBeat means being part of a family. Kevin Maher and Frank Alkyer trusted me as editor, and I cannot thank them enough for giving me this opportunity and their guidance along the way. I also owe a debt of gratitude to everyone with whom I have worked at the magazine. I could not have done any of this without you.

Ed Enright has returned to DownBeat as editor, and Aaron Cohen is still onboard as associate editor. The magazine is in great hands, and will continue as a compelling and insightful view into the jazz world for years to come.
TALENT RUNS IN OUR FAMILY

CONGRATULATIONS
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DANIEL SADOWNICK  MARK SHERMAN  JEFF "TAIN" WATTS

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Nationwide Grassroots

I’m glad to see that cities like Atlanta, Baltimore and Santa Cruz have started holding grassroots house-party concerts (“The Beat,” June ’09). Here in Harrisburg, Pa., the all volunteer Central Pennsylvania Friends of Jazz is getting ready to celebrate its 30th Anniversary. We have presented a Who’s Who of jazz over those years with our monthly concerts. Glad to see that efforts like ours are being recognized. It ain’t easy!

Gary Hoffman
Harrisburg, Pa.

Poetic Pinpointing

I just read your April 2009 issue and was compelled to comment about Marcus O’Dair’s piece on Jon Hassell. I actually know about Hassell, so I didn’t expect to find an abundance of new information in this article. What I did find was a caliber of writing that kept me engrossed. O’Dair epitomizes how a professional reviewer can articulate his/her subject’s work with pinpoint poetics.

Roger Andris
St. Louis

Shorter’s Beautiful Soul

Dan Ouellette’s feature on Wayne Shorter (May ’09) was one of the greatest articles I’ve ever read in your magazine. Wayne is such a beautiful soul, one who embodies all of the best aspects of jazz music. Reading his words is every bit as exciting as hearing his music. He’ll surely go down in history as one of jazz’s greatest musicians as well as one of its greatest thinkers.

Max Marshall
Bloomington, Ind.

Thanks For Audio SMA

Thank you so much for including audio recording as a category in the Student Music Awards. The students take it very seriously and work all year doing recording projects for entry. There are lots of video festivals, awards and competitions, but the DownBeat Student Music Awards is the only national competition I am aware of for audio. It is much appreciated.

Steve Reynolds
Audio Instructor
The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts

Congrats on 75th

The highlight of your flawless July ’09 issue was Dave Dexter’s stunning Billie Holiday archives feature. Happy 75th!

Dennis Hendley
Milwaukee, Wis.

The 75th anniversary issue of Downbeat resembles a textbook of sorts of information that only DownBeat can furnish in one place. It is amazing to read articles written in the past with the viewpoint of what was then the distant future.

Lyn Horton
Worthington, Mass.

I would like to congratulate you on your 75 years in jazz. But in your 75th anniversary collector’s edition you left out Wynton Marsalis, the most important person in jazz since Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. Marsalis changed jazz for myself and many others. If he hadn’t come along we would have been in sad shape, yet even after being the first jazz composer to win the Pulitzer Prize, he still doesn’t get the respect he deserves.

Earl Belcher Jr.
earlsib@aol.com

Your collector’s edition was extremely well done and surely provided fascinating reading material for younger people. But as an individual who lived through most of those years, I found it downright depressing. My kind of jazz has been dead for a long time.

Irv Jacobs
La Mesa, Calif.
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Blanchard Brings It Back Home

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard Turns New Orleans Library Into Recording Studio

As usual, it was quiet in the Patrick Taylor Library in New Orleans. But this time, the hush was from anticipation.

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard’s sextet was set up to record between the two main rooms, with Blanchard’s trumpet and Walter Smith III’s saxophone in one brick and wood-paneled room facing the rhythm section set up in the alcoves. This was the first time Blanchard recorded in New Orleans, as well as the first recording ever made in the library. The resulting disc, Choices (Concord), is due out in August.

New Orleans native Blanchard got the idea for the setting from his wife and manager, Robin Burgess, but he had already wanted to record in the Crescent City.

“We’ve been trying to find ways to keep talking about New Orleans and the positive things happening here,” Blanchard said during the recording session, held this spring. “And then at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art’s gala next door, my wife walked through and fell in love with the building. Then I walked through and I loved the sound of it, but wasn’t sure it would work acoustically. We flew in our engineer, Frank Wolff, who thought it would work. Once that happened, it was just a matter of scheduling time.”

A few weeks after the sessions, Wolff said the recording worked out as he expected.

“It had somewhat of a live vibe,” Wolff said. “I recorded it with good preamps, and I almost didn’t compress or EQ while recording at all, which is unusual. The place is magnificent. It’s just cool and fun and relaxed, which is a great way to make music.”

Given that the library sits right on Lee Circle in New Orleans, there were other concerns for the recording, as well.

“We sent a request to the New Orleans police and fire departments asking them to use alternate routes so as not to interfere with the recording,” production manager Libra Lagrone said. “We don’t know if they met the request, but the recording was not interrupted. We asked for the streetcar not to run, but the reply to that was a big, fat no. The streetcar doesn’t have alternate routes.”

There were other benefits to recording in New Orleans. “The city has an influence on the band,” Blanchard said. “They have a chance to visit their favorite spots and hear other musicians. New Orleans has played a big role in their lives. Bassist Derrick Hodge wrote a tune that’s steeped in the tradition of New Orleans music, but it’s his own take on it, which brings a freshness to the genre. You can see by the composition and the way that [drummer] Kendrick Scott played it that New Orleans has had a huge impact on their lives. And Derrick has family here. Kendrick is from Houston, which is not far from here.

“Usually when we record, we’re in separate booths, and you never get a sense of what is going on until you hear it in the control room. Here it felt like we were recording in a cathedral. There was a lot of trust going on with the music. Not much was discussed in terms of arrangement and musical ideas. We had fresh ears and kept it honest and approached it as a live concept. It was a risk that was taken, and it took off. I’m proud to be a part of it.”

Blanchard paused before explaining the disc’s title.

“What we’re trying to say is that in general, there aren’t really any bad choices. You reap the action of the choices, obviously, but when I see my students beat themselves up over their choices, I say, ‘No, no, no. You don’t beat yourself up, because we don’t believe in good or bad choices in regard to the music.’ For us, it is all about experimentation and exploration.”

—David Kunian
**Mississippi-Chicago Connection:**
Guitarist Eddie C. Campbell (left), Chicago Blues Festival Coordinator Barry Dolins and guitarist Eddy “The Chief” Clearwater check out the historical marker that the Mississippi Blues Commission presented to Chicago on June 11 (during the city’s annual blues festival). The commission has unveiled more than 120 markers to designate important sites in the music’s development. Details: msbluestrail.org

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**Lincoln Center Auditions:**
Jazz at Lincoln Center and the U.S. Department of State are now accepting applications for bands that would like to take part in The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad Program. This initiative brings jazz, hip-hop and gospel groups to countries that seldom encounter U.S. musicians. Applications are due Aug. 10. Details: jalc.org/TheRoad

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**LaVette Online:**
Betty LaVette has released A Change Is Gonna Come Sessions, a six-song EP consisting mostly of jazz standards in a digital-only format through iTunes. Along with reinterpreting Sam Cooke’s title track, LaVette also covers “Lush Life” and “God Bless The Child.” Details: bettylavette.com

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**MaxJazz @ 10:**
The MaxJazz label will celebrate its 10th anniversary in September with pianist Mulgrew Miller’s four nights at Jazz at the Bistro in St. Louis Sept. 23-26. The company is also planning other events for later in the year. Details: maxjazz.com

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**RIP, Sam Butera:**
Saxophonist Sam Butera died of pneumonia in Las Vegas on June 3. He was 81. Butera was best known for the energetic wails he blasted in response to the singing team of Louis Prima and Keely Smith during the ’50s.

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**Colleagues Pay Musical Respects to Freddie Hubbard**

On May 4 at New York’s Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, below one of the largest freestanding domes in the world supported by massive granite columns, Freddie Hubbard was majestically memorialized by a full cast of jazz luminaries and a nearly full house of thousands of mourners.

The almost three-hour event, long on music and short on remarks, featured many of Hubbard’s best-known compositions, beginning with the sober “Lament For Booker” (written for Booker Little when he died in 1961 and played by four trumpeters—event co-organizer and Hubbard champion David Weiss, Eddie Henderson, Nabate Isles and Brian Chahley—with Howard Johnson supplying the bass lines on tuba). The evening concluded with the rousing “Birdlike” (buoyed by Joe Lovano on tenor sax and Randy Brecker on trumpet).

Even though the sonics of the cavernous house of worship were largely atrocious (even the high-peeling trumpets sounded muted), the spirit prevailed with the steady flow of musicians who came on the makeshift platform stage to pay homage to Hubbard, who died on Dec. 29 at the age of 70. While a hastily organized tribute took place at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem not long after his death (on Jan. 10), the memorial at St. John the Divine in Morningside Heights was a fully developed event that brought together former band mates who paid their respects with their notes (including, on an eulogist take of “Up Jumped Spring,” pianist Cedar Walton, tenor saxophonist Javon Jackson, flutist James Spaulding and drummer Al Foster). Hubbard’s wife of 30 years, Brigitte Hubbard, sat in the front row for the performances.

Speakers included Killer Ray Anderson, Hubbard’s boyhood friend from Indianapolis, who told stories of the young trumpeter and concluded, “Freddie’s here in spirit. He’s just gone to get himself some rest.”

Other attendees included journalist Stanley Crouch, who spoke there nearly 35 years earlier at Duke Ellington’s funeral. Wendy Oxenhorn of the Jazz Foundation of America, which ministered to Hubbard’s medical and housing needs for several years, co-organized the memorial.

Guitarist Russell Malone, who played on one of the memorial’s highlight tunes, “Little Sunflower,” said that he had mixed feelings about the evening.

“I’m certainly happy to be here among so many of Freddie’s friends,” Malone said. “But it’s so sad that he’s no longer here and that we’ll never hear his sound again, except on records.”

Wallace Roney, who led the trumpet charge on the vibrant “Straight Life,” commented back-stage that it was great to see so many people—musicians and audience members—honoring “one of the greatest trumpeters of all time. A lot of people talk about Freddie’s antics, but he was so genuine and he loved to have fun. This man enjoyed his life.”

“This is a celebration, but at the same time it’s a heavy loss for the community,” Lovano said before his appearance, “especially if you played with him. It’s moving how so many people from this community have come together tonight.”

Trumpeter Steven Bernstein attended without his instrument.

“I’m not playing,” Bernstein said. “I’m just here to pay tribute to a great trumpet player.” He remembered the summer between sixth and seventh grade in Berkeley, Calif., when a friend and young bandleader, Peter Apfelbaum, gave him a copy of Straight Life. “Peter wanted me to listen to it and work on playing it. I’m still working on it.”

—Dan Ouellette
Nina Simone Memorialized in North Carolina Hometown

Nina Simone left her hometown of Tryon, N.C., relatively early in life. Looking back, the singer/pianist’s caustic rebukes of American social ills, especially Southern racism, were widely heard. Still, Simone’s daughter, singer Lisa “Simone” Kelly, couldn’t be more elated about North Carolina’s tribute to her mother’s memory, which includes a scholarship, music festival and statue.

“Imagine your mom and the town where she was raised raising her name up in so many wonderful ways,” Kelly said. “It’s pure joy. She was able to excel in so many different areas in spite of the times and the more I immerse myself in my mother’s world, the more I understand her.”

Crys Armbrust, a professor of British literature, began planning the Eunice Waymon–Nina Simone Memorial Project (NSP) in 2007 (Waymon was Simone’s birth name). That year, the North Carolina plastics recycling company EcoResin donated $25,000 for the NSP scholarship fund, which selected its first winner this spring. Megan Elizabeth Miller will use the funds as a graduate student in classics at Oxford University this fall.

“Mom was all about education, graduated valedictorian, skipped grades,” Kelly said. “It makes sense that the project will be about educating youths of all races.”

Earlier this year, work began on the NSP-commissioned life-size bronze sculpture of Simone as well as the development of Ninafest, an international music festival that will be held in Tryon in 2010.

“It’s a trans-world music festival because Nina’s catalog does the same thing,” Armbrust said. “The industry could never quite figure out where to put her. As soon as you had a handle on her, she threw you a curve.”

Armbrust and Kelly are also aware that Simone’s intelligence and sensitivity as an artist contributed to the resentment she felt towards the South during the civil rights movement, which she vividly expressed in her song “Mississippi Goddam.” Armbrust says that, privately, her feelings were complex.

“She had an amazing intellectual acumen, and the realizations she had about the disparities of race and class were a burden she carried throughout her life,” Armbrust said. “It’s not as if she didn’t connect to North Carolina. Oftentimes, she came without telling anyone. A door would open and she’d walk in—and that must have been quite surprising for many of her relatives.”

Those relatives are also sure to respond to Zenos Frudakis’ sculpture of Simone, which will be on public display in downtown Tryon. Kelly, who recorded a tribute to her mother last year, *Simone On Simone* (Koch), served as the statue’s life model.

“I have my mother’s physique,” Kelly said. “Having seen my mom’s head on top of my body takes *Simone On Simone* to another whole level. It’s beyond anything I could have imagined happening with my life.” —Aaron Cohen
**EUROPEAN SCENE**

*By Peter Margasak*

**Pianist Liam Noble Offers Contrarian’s Homage to Brubeck**

British pianist Liam Noble doesn’t shy away from the reasons he recently decided to record a full album of Dave Brubeck music, simply entitled Brubeck (Basho).

“In some ways I thought it was a good way to be contrary,” Noble said. “I liked the idea of doing it and having a few people say they don’t like it.” He also realized the pragmatism of the concept; it could generate interest in his trio, with bassist Dave Whitford and drummer Dave Wickens, and he wouldn’t have to set aside time to write a whole new book of tunes.

But ultimately, Noble is a devoted fan of Brubeck. “I knew that there would be actual jazz fans—the ones that go to the gigs—who do like him and who don’t have the insiders/jazz musicians thing, that [Brubeck] is not a killing technician or that he doesn’t swing like Wynton Kelly or that he comes across as a bit stiff. None of those things seem important to me. I didn’t care about the technique as much as the sound.”

Noble’s thinking has paid off. Since Brubeck was released this past April the record has attracted new attention for the pianist, but the substance and merit of the recording easily trump the concept.

“Tunes like ‘Blue Rondo À La Turk,’ because they’re so well known, are almost listened to as pop records,” Noble said. “If you’re playing ‘A Love Supreme’ it’s a technical, spiritual and emotional odyssey to try and get into that music and bring something to it. I was almost thinking of Brubeck as a nostalgia thing, like the way the Bad Plus approach some material, pop tunes I imagine were part of their youth. That’s part of what I wanted to bring to this, to not be a jazz homage as much as playing music that I like.”

It certainly required some nerve to tackle Brubeck warhorses like “Take Five” and “Blue Rondo À La Turk.” Wisely, Noble radically revamps the arrangements of these pieces, while giving other, lesser-known works such as “Cassandra” and “Autumn In Washington Square” relatively straight readings. Extracting these pieces from Brubeck’s rather square persona also allows them to be heard with fresh, less biased ears.

Until the release of Brubeck, Noble’s reputation has largely been that of reliable, flexible sideman. But various gigs he’s had over the years—including significant associations with Moondog, Bobby Wellins and the fiery up-and-coming saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock—and recent collaborations with British pianist Liam Noble Offers Contrarian’s Homage to Brubeck

Indeed, prior to the Brubeck project, one of his most striking performances was an all-improvised session with Laubrock and drummer Tom Rainey on Sleepthief (Intakt). The recording is alternately explosive and ominous, but even in this context Noble’s dense, spiky sound is identifiable as the same one on the Brubeck album.

Noble is thinking of employing the Brubeck format for another trio recording, but he’s realizing that he might need to change his modus operandi when it comes to leading bands.

“I don’t like bossing people about,” he said. “So when I have bands they’ve been in pretty open contexts where you just give people the music and say, ‘Do what you like,’ and keep your fingers crossed.”

**Taylor's Mighty Growl, Personal Warmth Made Her Regal**

Internationally hailed as Queen of the Blues, Koko Taylor died in her home city of Chicago on June 3 following complications of gastrointestinal surgery. She was 80.

Taylor’s numerous awards included Grammy nominations and a NEA National Heritage Fellowship. Not long before a May hospitalization, Taylor had performed at Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the Blues Music Awards in Memphis. Still, Taylor’s life wasn’t defined by accolades, but rather her sincere rapport with audiences and by her humble and winning personality.

“I hope someday people will look up to me the way people looked up to her,” singer Shemekia Copeland said.

Born and raised near Memphis, Taylor—then-named Cora Walton—worked in a sharecropper’s cotton fields before moving to Chicago after World War II with the man she soon married, Richard “Pops” Taylor. Richard Taylor encouraged her to sing in South Side blues taverns, where her raw, powerful singing seized the notice of bassist/talent scout Willie Dixon. In 1965, Dixon brought her to Chess Records, and the ensuing million-selling “Wang Dang Doodle” would become her signature song. Taylor recorded nine albums for Bruce Iglauer’s Alligator label from 1974 until her death. Taylor’s last, Old School, was a triumph that she recorded with typical verve and charisma after a miraculous recovery from near-fatal intestinal bleeding in late 2003.

“Koko was the icon of female blues,” Iglauer said. “She was a model for up-and-coming singers, and she was determined to communicate with her audience in the most professional manner. She never drank, never partied. It was all about getting there on time and laying out the music.”

Guitarist Bob Margolin added, “Every time we hear a woman blues singer growl, Koko will live on.”

—Frank-John Hadley
California’s Jazz Bakery Forced to Move

News that the Jazz Bakery in Culver City, Calif., has been told to relocate has hit the Los Angeles jazz community hard. Earlier this year, the building’s owner gave Bakery president Ruth Price until the end of May to clear the building, to make way for a furniture store. But the crisis has forced Price into actions that she says will be beneficial.

“I always wanted to hire a professional fundraiser, but I never thought we could afford one,” Price said. “Now I know I can’t afford not to.”

She added that one gratifying development is how the new Grammy Museum has extended an offer of help.

“They couldn’t be nicer,” Price said. “They solicited us and offered their concert space for our fundraisers. Even after we relocate, I’d like to keep the Bakery’s relationship with the Grammy Museum going.”

In a posting on the Bakery’s web site (jazzbakery.org) in mid-June, Price stated that the club has found three potential sites for its new location. Price added that all three locations are on the West Side of Los Angeles.

The Bakery has always been a home for lesser known and developing musicians, a policy that Price insists on maintaining despite the economic uncertainties.

“Our last two bookings were set up long before we knew we would close,” Price said. “I could have cancelled them and done a big send-off party, but I wanted to remain true to what the Bakery has always done.”

—Kirk Silsbee

Soul Power Brings ’70s Musical Icons to Movie Theaters

When Muhammad Ali went to fight George Foreman in Zaire 35 years ago, the musicians on the bill (notably James Brown and B.B. King) were as stunning as the heavyweight champs. The fight—and some of the sounds—were captured in the celebrated 1997 documentary When We Were Kings. A new film, Soul Power, concentrates on the music and hits theaters nationwide this summer.

Director Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, editor on When We Were Kings, began thinking about making Soul Power while he was working on the preceding documentary’s dailies and watching the 125 hours of footage.

“There was so much dynamic material that I knew there would be a film there,” Levy-Hinte said. “It was like looking at a block of marble and seeing there will be a great sculpture.”

Scenes from Soul Power include Brown tearing through the film’s title track, Bill Withers’ subtle soul-folk blend, Congolese singer Tabu Ley Rochereau and a surprising moment when the Spinners’ Phillipe Wynne stepped into the ring with Ali. The film also shows how much West African audiences revered salsa musicians like Celia Cruz and the Fania All-Stars at that time.

“They had such an immediate, direct connection,” Levy-Hinte said. “Ray Barretto playing conga is not an accident—he’s back home.”

—Aaron Cohen

Enright Returns as DownBeat Editor

With this issue, DownBeat welcomes back former editor Ed Enright, who takes the place of outgoing editor Jason Koransky.

An accomplished baritone saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist, Enright served as editor of DownBeat from 1996–1999 and prior to that held several different positions within parent company Maher Publications starting in 1990. He has spent the last 10 years performing as a professional musician and working as a freelance writer for DownBeat and other publications.

“We’re happy to have Ed back as a permanent member of the DownBeat family,” said DownBeat publisher Frank Alkyer. “In fact, Ed has contributed so much to DownBeat consistently over the past two decades, it’s almost as if he never left.”

—Kirk Silsbee
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As part of a double headlining bill with Hank Jones at New York’s Iridium, saxophonist Frank Wess took part in the club’s “Jazz Masters Salute The Broadway Masters” series throughout March. Wess had just returned from Milan, where he had been working with trombonist Slide Hampton. The saxophonist has also played some U.S. dates supporting Once Is Not Enough (Labeth Music), his first nonet recording.

Why did you record a nonet now?
I always like that combination because you can sound small, you can sound big, you can sound like a big band, or like a small band. You’ve got a lot of choices. And with the doubles on different instruments it gives you even more room to move.

Do you write differently for a nonet than a sextet or octet?
Not really. It’s how you arrange and voice it. Tryin’ To Make My Blues Turn Green was my earlier octet recording.

Will you tour Once Is Not Enough?
I hope not! Traveling is much too difficult these days. The service is worse, the planes are less reliable; it’s too many people and not enough service. You never know what’s going to happen. And they always want to take your instrument and put it where it’s not safe. They took my saxophone once and the force of the plane landing bent my whole horn. I couldn’t play that night on the gig. They don’t care.

Hank Jones and yourself have been playing together in different bands for close to 60 years.
Yes, that’s right, since 1946. We were in Billy Eckstine’s band together. We did nine weeks at the Club Sudan in Harlem with Billy, at 138th Street and Lennox Avenue. We’ve recorded together off and on. We can always get together, we listen to each other. It’s not a problem. Hank does a lot of solo playing so he has a lot of his own stuff. Jones, he is still playing his ass off. He is beautiful.

Do you and he ever reminisce about the old days?
A little bit. Hank always remembers that gig at the Sudan with Billy Eckstine and Fats Navarro, who had a habit of jumping down off of the trumpet riser when it was time for his solo. The reeds were on the floor, then the trombones were higher, then the trumpets were on a riser above that. When Fats would come down for his solo he would jump from the trumpet riser and put his head in Art Blakey’s bass drum. This time he jumped off the riser—remember, Fats Navarro was a big boy—and when he hit the trombone riser his leg went right through it! But he stood up and played anyway. Hank always remembers that.
Cape Town International Jazz Festival Highlights South African, American Bonds

Trumpeter Hugh Masekela celebrated his 70th birthday in front of adoring fans on the closing night of the two-day Cape Town International Jazz Festival in South Africa on April 4. At a press conference a few days earlier, he spoke candidly about the music itself.

“The name jazz has been used very loosely and it has been imposed on every kind of music that is not classical or religious,” Masekela said in response to a question regarding the impact of South African jazz on the world at large. His comment, however, spoke volumes about the festival’s programming, which leaned heavily toward smooth jazz (Jonathan Butler with David Koz, Ringo Madingozi) and r&b (Incognito, Zap Mama). Nevertheless, straightahead artists such as Al Foster, Dianne Reeves and Dave Liebman helped balanced the equation.

Masekela, who was in exile from South Africa for more than 30 years, concentrated on material from his newest disc, *Phola* (40 Times Square), leading his band on tunes underscored with mindful socio-political messages at the jam-packed Kippies stage in the Cape Town International Convention Centre. While funk-leaning songs like “Malungelo,” “Weather” and “The Joke Of Life” and the plaintive cautionary tale “Sonnyboy” delighted fans, older hits such as “Grazin’ In The Grass” and “The Joke Of Life” and the plaintive cautionary tale “Sonnyboy” delighted fans, older hits such as “Soweto Blues” roused the enthusiastic crowd. Among the South African jazz talent represented, guitarist Louis Mhlanga delived one of that set’s most provocative solos, revealing the powerful influence of John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*. The Robert Glasper Experiment gave a particularly compelling set the night before joining Mos Def on the Moses Molelekwa stage. Featuring saxophonist Casey Benjamin, drummer Chris Dave and bassist Derrick Hodges, Glasper exhibited his love for hip-hop and funk more explicitly than he’s done with his trio.

On the Rosies stage, Reeves demonstrated how to deliver quality jazz and make it accessible for mainstream or neophyte jazz listeners. Elegant and warmhearted, she balanced jazz standards, r&b (the Temptations’ “Just My Imagination” rendered to sublime effect) and with charming originals (“Testify” and her signature, “Better Days”). Her most powerful move was when she segued from conventional jazz scatting during “A Child Is Born” into a South African chant—a la Miriam Makeba—then improvised her recollection of finally meeting South African hero Nelson Mandela a day prior to the show.

While Masekela played his horn sparingly, focusing more on the flugelhorn than the trumpet. But when he burst out with staccato-dotted melodies and brassy tone, he reminded the audience that he still has plenty of fire.

While Masekela made an ideal choice as the grand finale for the festival, he shared that time-slot with four other acts, notably Mos Def and the Robert Glasper Experiment, who were holding court outside at the Bassline stage, which catered to a decidedly younger crowd. Once Mos Def arrived onstage (30 minutes late), he enthralled the crowd with a mixture of jazz-leaning rap, pop songs and his hip-hop anthems from the ‘90s. At one point, he extrapolated the chant from John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*. The Robert Glasper Experiment gave a particularly compelling set the night before joining Mos Def on the Moses Molelekwa stage. Featuring saxophonist Casey Benjamin, drummer Chris Dave and bassist Derrick Hodges, Glasper exhibited his love for hip-hop and funk more explicitly than he’s done with his trio.

A brilliant modern improviser with a knack for unraveling polyphonic melodies based upon Xhosa songs known as amagwijo, Mrubata shared the frontline with trumpeter Marcus Wyatt, who emphasized cogent yet edgy improvisations. Guitarist Louis Mhlanga delivered one of that set’s most provocative solos, revealing the powerful influence of John Abercrombie and Pat Metheny. Mrubata, Mhlanga and Wyatt delved deep into cracking modern jazz, engaging in lively dialogue propelled by Kesivan Naidoo’s aggressive drumming and Herbie Tsoaeli’s bass lines. All of which demonstrated that some South African music that “jazz” is applied to, as Masekela suggested, is indeed credible, exciting jazz.

—John Murph

Budvar Cheltenham Jazz Festival Presents Jazz in Storybook Setting

In spite of a power failure that knocked out two shows and a travel fiasco that stranded Hugh Masekela’s band, this year’s Budvar Cheltenham Jazz Festival in England triumphed over adversity with a resoundingly strong program in the present tense. Celebrating its 14th year from April 28–May 4, Cheltenham is the country cousin to the London Jazz Festival. All the venues are within walking distance and the town makes for a smart backdrop, with its stately Regency architecture and tradition of cultural tourism.

This year, trumpet players took pride of place, with Arve Henriksen, Dave Douglas and Taylor Ho Bynum delivering three of the top performances. Henriksen’s playful, hauntingly beautiful set in the Pillar Room (a bar inside the city’s historic, 850-seat, flat-floor Town Hall) featured the trumpeter blowing airstreams and crystalline melodies, with or without mouthpiece, adding deadpan speech fragments and falsetto vocals, all manipulated with atmospheric electronics.

Douglas’s quintet conquered the crowd at the cozy Everyman Theatre with a powerful set that danced with declarative cheer. Bynum and drummer Harris Eisenstadt teamed with pianist Alexander Hawkins and bassist Dominic Lash in the Convergence Quartet at the Pittville campus of the University of Gloucestershire, offer-
For the past 30 years, April in Cleveland has been the crucial month for longtime jazz listeners and for youngsters seeking sage advice from the masters. Still considered one of the country’s preeminent educational jazz festivals, Tri-C JazzFest was chock full of concerts, master classes, jam sessions and student ensemble competitions that ran the course of the festival’s 11 days.

Two artists who have been perennial favorites at the festival kicked off the opening weekend. George Benson showed the crooner side of his personality for a tribute to Nat King Cole, with backing provided by a full string orchestra. The next evening the temperature rose with Eddie Palmieri and his La Perfecta II. Fronting a large unit that included a full percussion section and vocalists, Palmieri’s montuno groove afforded inspiration for dancing on such iconic pieces as “Azucar Pa’ Ti.”

Chicago flutist Nicole Mitchell and her Black Earth Ensemble emphasized richly variegated originals. While the soloists often soared into the stratosphere, tight ensemble passages put swing at a premium. “Afrika Rising” functioned as a travelogue in and of itself, with an engaging programmatic approach. Demonstrating that her talents went beyond just composing, Mitchell’s flute work was equally impressive, particularly on the tour-de-force “Journey For Three Blue Stones.”

Later in the week, Randy Weston and Roy Haynes played a double bill. Weston’s solo set touched on many of his original compositions before he waxed rhapsodic for a medley of Duke Ellington and Fats Waller numbers that tied together sections of stride and ballad artistry with earthy African rhythms. Haynes pulled out all the stops, while bolstering his status as one of the music’s most dynamic drummers. Alto saxophonist Jaleel Shaw and pianist David Kikoski made the most of their leader’s elated prodding.

The festival ended on a high note with the debut TCJF Soundworks, co-led by Cleveland’s Howie Smith and Glenn Holmes. Featuring trumpeter Sean Jones, the seven-piece band tackled the works of McCoy Tyner, who had been on the bill the first year of the festival. By varying ensemble combinations and touching on less obvious numbers such as “Three Flowers” and “Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit,” the diversity of Tyner’s music became fodder for performances that spoke well for the group’s viability as a repertory unit.

—Paul de Barros
Players

Logan Richardson

Determined
Concerto Designer

A son of Kansas City, where the codes of swing blossomed during the 1930s, saxophonist Logan Richardson knows about that hard-to-describe entity known as the "jazz tradition." But while he was playing standards like "Misty" at age 14, no such repertoire appears on Richardson’s sophomore release, *Ethos*, issued on Greg Osby’s imprint, Inner Circle.

On the disc, Richardson collages 15 compact originals into a quasi-concerto for alto framed by an ensemble, aligned in varying configurations of voice, vibraphone, guitar, cello, bass and drums. The proceedings demonstrate that Richardson’s ties to the jazz lifeline lie as much in his notion that “the tradition itself means to move forward”—an ethos that links him to Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman and Oliver Lake, all referenced therein—as in his command of the raw materials that such forebears deployed to fuel their musical production.

“When we learn about Bird and John Coltrane, we’re supposed to take in and draw from all their music, but also learn about ourselves,” Richardson said. “As a child, you naturally mimic whoever is around you—their laugh, the tone of their voice, how they say things, their personality—and then branch off and start developing your own ideals. But many musicians seem to think it’s cool to say back exactly what they were taught for the rest of their lives. That seems stagnant.”

Richardson’s career has been anything but stagnant since 2007, when he released *Cerebral Flow* (Fresh Sound), his similarly configured debut. Recently home from a week in Spain with Nasheet Waits’ Equality Quartet, he was anticipating a springtime Minnesota engagement with pianist Jason Moran, concerts with trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire and pianist Jesse Elder, and summer work with vibraphonist Stefon Harris. More consequentially, Richardson was a month removed from his first European leader tour, an eight-city Italian sojourn with Waits, Akinmusire, bassist Joe Sanders and vibraphonist Mike Pinto.

“The way the music transformed nightly turned me on, and I decided to make changes,” Richardson said. Whatever label accepts his next document will present a unit comprising Richardson, Waits, Moran, Akinmusire, bassist Joe Sanders and vibraphonist Mike Pinto.

“Pragmatically,” Richardson is not of the mindset to let opportunities slip by.

“I’m an extreme optimist, a major dreamer,” Richardson said. “I was never someone to get discouraged. If someone dissed me or made me feel bad, it made me come back stronger the next day. That’s maybe an element of coming up how I did. The ghetto of Kansas City. Not too much to no money. My mom was extremely supportive, and after years of showing my dedication—I didn’t date or go to parties because I thought it would interfere with my progress musically—I finally got my own horn.”

After briefly attending Berklee College of Music in Boston, Richardson moved to New York in 2001 to study at the New School. His teachers included Mark Turner and Steve Wilson, as well as Greg Tardy and Joe Chambers, both early employers, along with Waits, with whom he developed, as Richardson puts it, “a big brother scenario.” Until Waits brought him on the road in 2007, Richardson “made money and survived” as a woodwind repairman and instrument-builder at Manhattan’s Sam Ash Music store. During those years, he read *As Serious as Your Life*, Valerie Wilmer’s collective biography of the individualists of the ’60s whose spirit he seems to channel.

“She quoted Anthony Braxton that the next musicians will not only devise new musical systems but actually build their own instruments to bring forth new sounds and ideas,” Richardson said. “It made sense because of what I was doing and made me think on a different scale. You have to get lost to find the most beautiful oasis that nobody knows about. I spent so much time restricting and not letting everything in. Now I think that everything is valid, it’s just a matter of how it makes you feel.”

—Ted Panken
Shaynee Rainbolt, Golden Age Visitor

When singer Shaynee Rainbolt took the Jazz Bakery stage in Los Angeles last fall, her instrumental backing revealed a special format: a rhythm section with four trombones, conducted by Hollywood’s legendary Russ Garcia. As Rainbolt sang Garcia’s songs from her self-released *Charmed Life* CD, the composer himself led the crack ensemble. It was something new, yet with an unmistakable sense of an earlier era.

Rainbolt’s work with Garcia can be traced to her extensive background in the musical theater. When an injury laid her up for convalescence, she stumbled upon his music on the Internet. “His soundtrack for the movie *The Time Machine* just blew me away,” she said. “I researched him and found out about his work with singers and I knew I had to work with him. He had this backlog of material—often with his wife Gina’s great lyrics—and it was the natural progression for me to sing an album of Garcia [material].”

The 92-year-old Garcia was one of the busiest Hollywood arrangers in the 1950s and ’60s. He wrote for Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Mel Tormé and Julie London among many others. His arranging classes at the fabled Westlake School of Music included students Bill Holman and Jimmy Giuffre, and “Four Brothers” was written as a homework assignment for Garcia. He penned *The Professional Arranger Composer Book*, a groundbreaking text for budding music writers. Engineer Andy Waterman, who recorded *Charmed Life* in his Umbrella Media studio, studied Garcia’s book.

“It was an important part of my training,” Waterman said. “After I opened my studio, I did a number of projects with Russ. When we did the album with Shaynee, I was impressed with how controlled she sang. She’s got this trained, legit voice. She could have belted, but she understood the romance and drama of the songs. Russ’ style evokes the film noir era of Hollywood music—it has mystery, longing and darkness. He’s comfortable with the minor 9th.”

Rainbolt’s musical acumen isn’t the only aspect that impressed Waterman. “She’s representative of our new music business,” he said. “She conceived this album and made it happen. That’s a far cry from the days when singers did what were they told by record label a&r men.”

Garcia, who has been living in New Zealand since 1965, felt that Rainbolt’s project was worth interrupting his beatific lifestyle. “I work if I feel like it these days,” he said. “Shaynee sent me a tape and I liked it. She sang with a beat and she sang the meaning of the lyrics, I liked that. I also like how beautiful her voice is.”

—Kirk Silsbee
**Players**

**Jeff Albert**

Crescent City’s Next Wave Rolls Through Chicago

While trombonist Jeff Albert’s 20-plus-year career features music played with some first-generation musicians who helped define his hometown of New Orleans’ funk and db, he’s recently been collaborating with the free-improvisers who’ve built a community in Chicago.

“My initial connection to Chicago was through recordings,” Albert said. “I picked up some early Ken Vandermark 5 things, and really dug what Jeb Bishop was doing.”

Trombonist Bishop joined forces with Albert to form the Lucky 7s, which released *Farragut* (Lakefront Digital) in 2006 and just released *Pluto Junkyard* (Clean Feed).

“Jeb’s trio was here in the fall of 2003, and that performance opened my mind and ears,” Albert said. “It’s not that I started to copy Jeb’s stuff so much as hearing his stuff helped me find mine. Right around that same time, [saxophonist] Fred Anderson and [drummer] Hamid Drake did a show in New Orleans with [saxophonist] Kidd Jordan and [bassist] William Parker which was amazing, and it pushed me into exploring more of their music and the music of their associates.”

At that time, Albert’s already multi-faceted career had included recording stints with Deacon John’s Jump Blues, Gatemouth Brown and Aaron Neville, among other New Orleans greats. He also worked in horn sections behind Stevie Wonder, Bonnie Rait and Ronnie Milsap, and touring with the Tommy Dorsey and Harry James orchestras. Cruise ship and salsa gigs, playing with the reggae band Cool Riddums, Sista Teedy, and performing as an extra and substitute with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra took him down other avenues altogether.

Albert said that he and Bishop “eventually developed a friendship through some online trombonist communities. Initially, it was around exciting topics like the best way to remove the lacquer from vintage Conn trombones, but it moved into a genuine friendship that isn’t music-dependent.”

Hurricane Katrina’s disastrous impact on Albert’s hometown made this friendship a lifesaver.

“A couple of weeks after Katrina I was talking to Jeb about ideas for places to book my quartet in Chicago, because there wasn’t anything happening here yet, and I needed badly to play music for a variety of reasons,” Albert said. “He suggested that when I come up, we also do a co-op group with my band and some Chicago guys. This idea became the Lucky 7s. Quin Kirchner, who was the drummer in my quartet pre-Katrina, had

**Ben Wendel**

Intertwined Coasts

This past spring, saxophonist Ben Wendel returned to Los Angeles after a stint at New York’s Jazz Gallery in support of his debut, *Simple Song* (Sunnyside Records). For him, it was a typically busy week. Between juggling a self-managed solo career and various other side gigs, he also teaches weekly private lessons at University of Southern California as an adjunct professor. But even with a diverse resume that includes gigs with drummer Ignacio Berroa and rapper Snoop Dogg, writing music for film and television, playing with the reggae band Cool Riddums, Sista Teedy, and performing as an extra and substitute with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra took him down other avenues altogether.

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Eastman School of Music in New York. Whereas many aspiring jazz artists who make it to the East Coast tend to migrate to New York City—especially if they’ve gone to school in Manhattan—Wendel headed back to Los Angeles, which provided him with a diverse pool of musicians who weren’t necessarily jazz players.

“It’s such an industry town; you get a lot of experience doing commercial film work, you can also end up in different genres—hip-hop, rock—that’s why my resume is pretty wide-ranging.”

The city also allowed Wendel to focus on developing a singular voice.

“The city also allowed Wendel to focus on developing a singular voice.

“Here, people are more isolated and it gives you the space to hone your craft without all the intense, crazy pressure of New York. In New York, there are so many brilliant musicians—you can get lost in the mix and lose your sense of identity or a sense of where you’re headed. I feel lucky, because I’m entering my solo career a little older and I have a good network of friends. It won’t be like starting from ground zero.”

—John Murph
Late in the afternoon of Friday, May 8, Christian McBride stood in the foyer of David Gage’s Tribeca bass atelier, poised to play-test the latest addition to his arsenal. There was little time to spare—McBride had 15 minutes to retrieve his car from the parking lot, and it was a mere 90 minutes until gig time at the Blue Note with James Carter’s new band with John Medeski, Adam Rogers and Joey Baron. Still, McBride couldn’t restrain himself. Beaming at his new possession like a father cradling a newborn, he put forth an elegant, funky one-chorus blues that the prior owner, the late Ray Brown, might well have cosigned for his own. Then McBride packed with a single efficient motion, enfolded Gage and his wife with a hug and exited the premises, grabbing the car keys with two minutes to spare.

McBride was elated for reasons that had less to do with the excellence of the bass than with the pass-the-torch symbolism of the occasion. His new instrument had not come cheap, but he seemed to regard his possession of it to be more in the nature of an inheritance than the result of a transaction.

“It means the world to me, but I don’t think I’ll get that sentimental about it,” said McBride, who performed with Brown and John Clayton throughout the ’90s in the singular unit Super Bass. “In my heart I’ll know it’s Ray’s bass, but I’m going to play what I need to. We had a father-son type of relationship. I don’t want to sound selfish, but I feel I should have it, since John has one of Ray’s other ones.”

Barely out of his teens when he joined Super Bass, McBride, now 36, was anything but a neophyte. Out of Philadelphia, he moved to New York in 1989 to attend Juilliard, and quickly attained first-call status. By the fall 1993, when McBride made his first extended tour with Joshua Redman’s quartet with Pat Metheny and Billy Higgins, many considered him a major figure in the jazz bass continuum.

Perhaps this explains the vigorous criticism that certain elders launched McBride’s way in the latter ’90s, when he began to revisit the electric bass, his first instrument, as a vehicle to investigate more contemporary modes of musical expression.

He recalled a backstage visit from Milt Jackson after his band, opening for Maceo Parker, played a little tune that wasn’t a swing tune.

“Milt asked, ’Was it necessary?’” McBride laughed heartily. “I said, ’What do you mean, necessary?’ He said, ’That ain’t the kind of stuff you’re supposed to be doing.’”

“I stood there and took it, because I loved Milt. But I had to ask myself: At what point am I allowed to get away from bebop? Is there some graduation process where Ray Brown or Hank Jones or Tommy Flanagan comes to Bradley’s and gives me my diploma? Why do I feel that I’m going to get in trouble if I decide to get a little funky? I knew stretching out wouldn’t affect my bebop playing or make me alter my sound.”

Brown, a fixture on L.A.’s commercial scene who, as McBride notes, “played pretty good electric bass” himself, was anything but judgmental about his protege’s populist proclivities.

“Ray never said a negative thing to me,” McBride said. “His whole thing was about pocket. As long as it had a toe-tapping quality, he was into it. He loved that I brought my own thing to Super Bass as opposed to trying to play...
Acoustic Bass

216 Christian McBride

167 Dave Holland
94 Ron Carter
72 Charlie Haden
61 William Parker
46 Gary Peacock
43 John Patitucci
24 Barry Guy
24 George Mraz
23 Peter Washington
19 Charnett Moffett
18 Mark Dresser
like a bebop guy.”

Over the past decade, McBride’s penchant for adapting his “own thing” to any musical situation, however tightly formatted or open-ended, has brought him copious sideman work with a crew of auditorium-fillers, among them Sting, Bruce Hornsby, David Sanborn, Herbie Hancock and Metheny. Last year he concluded his four-year run as creative chair for Jazz at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, for which he had booked 12 concerts a year since 2005. Among the highlights were projects with Queen Latifah and James Brown (his idol), a 90th birthday celebration for Hank Jones and also such high-concept jazz fare as Charles Mingus’ *Epitaph*, McBride hasn’t neglected his jazz education commitments—per his annual custom since 2000, he spent a fortnight as artistic director at Jazz Aspen Snowmass, and he maintained his co-director post at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, an employer since 2005. If this weren’t enough, McBride also assumed artistic director responsibilities at the Monterey and Detroit Jazz Festivals last year, producing new music for the various special projects and groups represented therein.

The impact of all this activity on McBride’s Q-rating was apparent when the three Metheny devotees sharing my table at the Blue Note said that his name, and not Carter’s, was their prime incentive for shelling out the $35 cover. McBride did not disappoint. Playing primarily acoustic bass, he constructed pungent lines that established both harmonic signposts and a heartbeat-steady pulse around which the band could form consensus. He also brought down the house with a pair of astonishing solos. On the set-opener, “Mad Lad,” a stomping rhythm variant by Leo Parker, McBride bowed a fleet-as-a-fiddle, thematically unified stomp, executing horn-like lines with impeccable articulation, intonation and time feel. To open the set-concluding “Lullaby For Real Deal,” by Sun Ra, he declaimed a wild Mingusian holler, then counterstated Carter’s baritone sax solo, chock-a-block with extended techniques, with a theme-and-variation statement that ascended to the mountaintop, danced down again and concluded with an emphatic flavorsh! on the E string.

At the Rose Theater two weeks earlier, McBride performed equivalent feats of derring-do with the Five Peace Band—Chick Corea and John McLaughlin’s homage to the 40th anniversary of their participation on Miles Davis’ *Bitches Brew*. Halfway through the final leg of a seven-month world tour, the band addressed the repertoire in an open, collective manner, and McBride switched off between acoustic and electric feels with equal authority. On one McLaughlin-penned piece, he laid down crunching funk grooves on the porkchop, at one point mirroring a staggeringly fast declaration by the leader so precisely as to give the illusion that the tones were merged into one hybrid voice.

“Technically, I could have done that 10 years ago, but I don’t think my confidence would have been there to try it,” McBride remarked. “From playing electric so much more on sessions and gigs, now I have that confidence on both.” He elaborated on the sonic personality that each instrument embodies.

“The acoustic bass is the mother, and the electric bass will always be the restless child,” he said. “Sometimes the energy of a restless child is cool to have around. It gets everybody up, and it keeps you on your toes. But the mother is always there, watching over everything—a wholesome feeling. The acoustic bass isn’t as loud, but it’s so big—it grabs all the music with a big, long arm. It encircles it. The electric bass is clearer, more in your face, but it doesn’t have that wisdom.”

From the jump, McBride conceptualized the acoustic as an oversized electric bass. “Clarity was always the center of my concept,” he said. “The instrument’s range and frequency means you can feel the pulse that makes you move, but it’s hard to hear the notes. Much as I hate to admit it, I mostly hated bass solos, because I could never understand what they were playing. Notes ran into each other, and some cats would be out of tune—outside of first or second position, it gets dicey. I found that cats who play very clear and have good melodic ideas tended to be from the low-action, high-amplified school. When they’d start walking, all the pulse would go. Then, bass players with a really good sound and feel, who make you want to dance, when they soloed it was, ‘Ummm ... go back to walking.’ “So my whole style was based on balancing
McBride has always prized himself on being able to take on multiple projects at the same time. But in 2008, he bit off more than he could chew. "By October, I was ready to collapse," McBride said. "Then I thought, 'Oh, I've got to go to Europe for five weeks; I can't collapse.' Everybody was like, 'Oh, I've got to go to Europe for five weeks;' I can't collapse.' Then I thought, 'I'm ready to sink my teeth into my own music and see what I can finally develop on my own. Maybe one day I can be the guy leading an all-star tour or calling some other cats to come on the road with me.'"

Towards that end, McBride was ready to tour with a new unit called Inside Straight, with saxophonist Steve Wilson, pianist Peter Martin, vibraphonist Warren Wolf and drummer Ulysses Owens, whom he had assembled for a one-week gig at the Village Vanguard during summer of 2007 and reconvened to play Detroit. "I hadn't played at the Vanguard since 1997, and thought it was time to go back," McBride related. "Lorraine Gordon said, 'Of course you're always welcome at the Vanguard. But don't bring that rock band you usually play with!'"

"Rock band" was a plugged-in quartet with Geoff Keezer, Ron Blake and Terreon Gully, which McBride first brought on the road in 2000 to support Science Fiction, the last of his four dates for Verve, to bring forth McBride's all-encompassing view of jazz.

"We're in a period where the less groove or African-American influence, the more lauded the music is for being intellectual, whereas the guys who are groove—that's [regarded as] old, we've been hearing that for over half a century, we need to come further from that. The more European influence you put in your music, the more you can be considered a genius. "At first, I thought it was racial. Maybe it is to a certain extent. But the white musicians I know who like to sink their teeth into the groove can't get any dap, either. Part of it might be backlash from when the labels were dishing out the cash to advertise and market some straightahead young lions who frankly didn't deserve it. The recording industry did real damage to the credibility of young jazz musicians who were really serious about building on the tradition. It almost took 'American Idol' twist—some new hot person every six months. When it happened to me in New York, I remember thinking, 'That could change tomorrow.'"

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Indeed, the group's extreme talent far exceeded its recorded documentation or gig opportunities. "We got defaulted as a fusion band, which was inaccurate," McBride said. "It seemed our gigs always got stuck in when I had two nights off with Pat or Five Peace Band, and it was hard to change hats quickly and think things all the way through. But we all like music that has a lot of energy. It could be funky or free, it could be bebop or dixieland swing, or it could rock. As long as that jazz feel is underneath, what's on top doesn't really matter."

Funk, freedom and rock are absent from Kind Of Brown (Mack Avenue), McBride's recent debut date with Inside Straight and his first all-acoustic presentation since Gettin' To It, his 1995 opening salvo on Verve. "I call it one of those 'just in case you forgot' recordings," said McBride, who will celebrate his 20th anniversary as a New Yorker this summer making weekly hits with a big band and recording Conversations With Christian, a still-in-process project comprising 20 duo performances and interviews with select friends and mentors. "I came to New York to play with all the great modern jazz musicians I could, and I became known doing that in the Paul Chambers—Ray Brown spirit," said McBride, noting that he has recently felt the itch to return to "some good foot-stomping straightahead."

McBride has traversed a conceptual arc not dissimilar to the path of such contemporaries as Roy Hargrove and Redman, who embraced contemporary dance and popular music during their 20s but recently have returned to more acoustic, swing-based investigations. "We were the generation that was able to assimilate all that had happened before us, and at some point decided to use hip-hop or certain types of indie rock, great music that not too many jazz people were keeping their ear on," McBride observed. "It's no different than what any other generation of jazz musicians did."

The notion of balance—triaulating a space between deference and self-interest, between pragmatic and creative imperatives, between acoustic and electric self-expression—is perhaps McBride's defining characteristic. "I've always tried to live in the middle," McBride said. "I'd be a good U.N. diplomat!"

During his teenage years in Philadelphia, at the urging of mentor Wynton Marsalis, McBride focused on the unamplified, raise-the-strings approach to bass expression, which "seemed to be the new religious experience for young bass players coming to New York," he said. As his reputation grew, he staunchly adhered to this esthetic even through several bouts of tendinitis—although once, upon bandleader Bobby Watson's insistence, he did relent and purchased an amp for a Village Vanguard engagement.

Not too long afterwards, Brown heard McBride for the first time. "Ray said, 'Why are you young cats playing so hard? You don't need your strings up that high.' I thought, 'Shut up, and listen to Ray Brown.' I saw him a few nights later, and it hit me like a ton of bricks. Ray seemed to be playing the bass like it was a toy. He was having fun. Playing jazz, he had that locomotion I heard in the great soul bass players, like James Jamerson, Bootsy Collins and Larry Graham. He wasn't yanking the strings that hard. He had the biggest, fattest, woodiest sound I'd ever heard, and most of it was coming from the bass, not the amp. At that point, I slowly started coming around. I was able to find a middle ground where, yes, it's perfectly fine to use an amplifier. It's not the '40s any more."

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"I intend to retain this attitude. 'You see musicians reach a point where they no longer have to take certain gigs—and they don't,' he said. "Some of us think, 'They've lost that edge; they don't have that passion like they used to.' I never wanted to become one of those guys. My chops start getting weird. The pockets start getting funny. There's a reason Ron Carter is still as active as he is. He's playing all the time. Ray Brown was like that. They keep that thing going."
The Colossus has seized the day, once again. Tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who was featured prominently in last month’s 75th Anniversary issue, has been named our Jazz Artist of the Year. To top it off, his CD *Road Shows, Vol. 1* (Doxy/EmArcy), which earned a 5-star review by Shaun Brady in *DownBeat’s* February 2009 issue, takes top honors as Jazz Album of the Year. We asked three of our critics to weigh in with their takes on what makes the man and his latest recorded release so appealing.

When questions about the vitality, relevance and enjoyment value of jazz today are raised, Sonny Rollins stands as our music’s irrefutable answer. He walks onstage slower and stiffer than in his youth, back slightly bent, but when he blows the tenor saxophone clenched between his lips, cleaving the air with the horn that is his lifeline to the world, he straightens, swells and looms, huge, a master of gritty beauty and earthy truth.

Truth and beauty, real because never predictable, suffuse *Road Shows, Vol. 1*. Rollins’ selected highlights from 27 years of performances worldwide. Genuinely modest, famously self-critical, he makes no promises about his shows except that he’ll try his best, but when he blows the tenor saxophone clenched between his lips, cleaving the air with the horn that is his lifeline to the world, he straightens, swells and looms, huge, a master of gritty beauty and earthy truth.

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by his revelations. He plays for us and we’re convinced that what he plays is what we, also, feel and would play if only we could.

With his passionate lyricism, expressive immediacy, warmth and humor, personal integrity and position of honor within the main course of jazz history, Sonny Rollins remains at age 79 more than a hero. He is in 2009 just what a record album called him in 1956: a colossus. Not a cold one, though. His music overflows with the heart and soul of a man.

—Howard Mandel

In light of the new (read: historical) Freddie Hubbard album Without A Song: Live In Europe 1969, resurrected from the Blue Note vaults posthumously, Sonny Rollins’ decision to cull through his audio archives now to compile last year’s Road Shows, Vol. 1 is indeed welcome. Equally important is that he’s calling the shots, agreeing to document what he deems are his best performances and having the freedom to release multiple volumes on his own Doxy label—all of which will become more fodder for the Sonny canon. These days if Rollins were attached to any record company—major or indie—it’s highly unlikely that he would have such creative license to release this new live material, which his fans have been craving.

What’s remarkable about Road Shows, Vol. 1 is the degree to which Rollins sustains his tenor saxophone solos, a rarity for improvisers. He’s arguably the only saxophonist alive who can never take too many choruses. He never rolls with the flow or engages in egotistic acrobatics. He gusts, he hushes, he swings. He’s an extemporaneous painter splashing color, a poet who chooses notes carefully, a choreographer who dances to the beat of his own phrases. In his playing, there is a searching ebullience, awestruck mystery, in-the-moment creativity.

My favorite moment comes when the band stops and lets Rollins sing alone at the end of the ballad “More Than You Know.” It’s heavenly.

—Dan Ouellette

When one considers the element of jazz greatness that’s so intriguing for listeners and players alike, the feeling of joyous collective freedom comes most clearly to mind. It is the elation of that “sound of surprise” when one hears something that lifts him/her to another place. It’s a zone that fans of tenor titan Sonny Rollins know well.

Rollins has made it clear for much of his 60-year career that he feels no need to be fashionable in his musical choices. The performances on Road Shows, Vol. 1, taped at seven venues across the globe circa 1980–2007, have little to do with his classic Blue Note and Prestige recordings, yet they show a musician honoring the past with continuing growth and change, much as the world around him shifts and moves onward.

We’re told that Rollins seldom feels that his concert recordings are worthy of release, yet the spirit embodied in his playing comes to the fore in his discovery of new vistas such as those heard here on the opening “Best Wishes” and “Blossom,” where he tears into the music with sweeping authority and abandon. There are moments of indecision on “More Than You Know,” while “Easy Living” is nonpareil. “Tenor Madness” works in small ways, and the calypso “Nice Lady” ably covers one of Rollins’ favorite genres. The closing “Some Enchanted Evening” is a slight disappointment, with Rollins merely skirting the melody repeatedly.

The sidemen play minor roles, but noteworthy are the contributions of drummer Al Foster, pianist Mark Soskin and trombonist Clifton Anderson.

Although this album is short of masterpiece status, it is a most worthy documentation.

—Will Smith
Pianist Hank Jones is a courtly gentleman of the old school, who wears a coat and tie for an interview conducted in his own lodgings and is forthright about his approach to music.

“I try to play evenly,” Jones says with genuine humility about his style, which is widely regarded as maintaining the highest standard for keyboard playing in the contemporary vernacular. “I don’t take too many excursions, I don’t go too far away from the melody, I don’t go out in the deep water. I want the listener to understand what I’m doing. I try to stay pretty much right down the middle and yet keep it interesting.”

In these efforts he has succeed magnificently, though he understates the depths he’s mastered—as well as the progressive broadening and continuity of what’s “right down the middle” of jazz that he has established and documented in more than 450 recordings under his own leadership and with the greatest vocal and instrumental stars from the ‘40s through today. At 91, Jones is universally acknowledged to be what his frequent collaborator Joe Lovano calls “a treasure”: a man of experience who embodies the wit, warmth, elegance, swing, sagacity, ongoing productivity and open-minded creativity we hope for from all artists and too rarely find. Besides the respect—no, awe—of his colleagues and international audiences, Jones has been the recipient of numerous honors, being designated a Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts, given a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and now inducted into Down Beat’s Hall of Fame.

The pianist takes this all in stride (pun intended) as befits a man who began professional life at age 13 under the esthetic sway of Fats Waller, Art Tatum, Earl “Fatha” Hines and Teddy Wilson. “I’m just trying to keep up with the other guys,” he insists, those “guys” being the pianists he’s known and admired. His conversation is laced with references to the late Oscar Peterson, Erroll Garner, Bill Evans, Tommy Flanagan and John Lewis, as well as George Shearing, Barry Harris, Marian McPartland and diverse next-generation players. But one wonders: Who can keep up with Mr. Jones?

His schedule of bookings would be a challenge for much younger musicians. When he sat down to talk in the comfortable apartment he sublets in Manhattan while his home in Cooperstown, N.Y., undergoes renovations, he was preparing for a concert in The Hague with the Metropole Orchestra. He was scheduled to perform in July in Donostia–San Sebastian, Spain, fronting his trio with bassist George Mraz and drummer Willie Jones III, as well as at the San Sebastian Jazz Festival in duet with Lovano (they issued Kids: Duets Live at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola in 2007).

He and Lovano are performing at George Wein’s reconstituted Newport Jazz Festival, and in Monterey with a co-led quartet completed by bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade. Jones is also the guest
Lucky Thompson’s promise of a gig on 52nd Street with Hot Lips Page. Promise realized, Jones went on to work with Andy Kirk, Billy Eckstine, Coleman Hawkins, Ella Fitzgerald and Ray Brown, enlisted in Norman Granz’s Jazz at the Philharmonic touring cast and by the 1950s was much in demand.

Jones accompanied, recorded and toured with Sarah Vaughan, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman and Cannonball and Nat Adderley’s band. He anchored the rhythm section for virtually everyone who recorded for the Savoy label. Then he served for 17 years in the CBS television studio band, limiting himself to sessions close to home—Billie Holiday’s ‘Lady In Satin’, John Coltrane’s ‘Bags And Trane’, Dakota Staton’s ‘The Late, Late Show’, Wes Montgomery’s ‘So Much Guitar’, Roland Kirk’s ‘We Free Kings’ and dates with Johnny Mathis and Bobby Darin. He sat in with the Thad Jones–Milt Lewis Orchestra when it was established at the Village Vanguard in 1968. In the mid ’70s Jones emerged from his staff job to labor on Broadway in Ain’t Misbehavin’ for five years. One might say Jones two-handedly restored Fats Waller’s reputation—hear his utterly enjoyable Waller tribute album A Handful of Keys.

After leaving the show over a contract dispute, Jones re-engaged with personal pursuits that he’d put on hold during his CBS tenure. He immersed himself in solo piano book outings and albums, acclaimed duets (“a very difficult format to work with ... the problem being two pianists seldom think alike harmonically”), tours and records with the Great Jazz Trio (combinations of Ron Carter, Buster Williams, Eddie Gomez and Tony Williams, Al Foster, Jimmy Cobb) and one-offs with brilliant, original talents like Charlie Haden (Steal Away), Dave Holland and Billy Higgins (The Oracle), and Mandinka bandleader Cheick-Tidiane Seck (Sarala).

Jones also sustained a long relationship with tenor sax/flutist Wess, most recently co-starring on Hank And Frank (2004) and Hank And Frank, Vol. 2 (2006). Whatever he does bears dependable attributes: the Hank Jones stamp of excellence, taste and style. “My style? How did it come about?” Jones is surprised to be asked. “After you’ve heard a lot, when you’ve digested many different styles, sooner or later you develop an idea of your own. You want to play your way. Which may or may not be similar to somebody else. If you’re lucky, it doesn’t sound like somebody else. That’s what students should aspire to: Develop their own style, their own interpretations. They can play the same compositions, but their own way. And it should be pleasing to listen to. Although that’s another matter, a matter of taste.

“The way I look at it, taste comes from listening to a great variety of people, and either accepting or rejecting portions of it all. What you retain is what you embody in your conception of what that particular composition should sound like. That becomes known as taste. The method you use, the dynamics, everything that goes into performing, that becomes your taste.

“I try to use my imagination and think of something that’s relevant, not only to the harmony, but to the melody, then you try to make something out of it. It’s like building a house. You start with a basic design, then you try to build it and embellish as you go.”

Asked about what he wants to do next, Jones says, “Oh, so many things,” but doesn’t detail them beyond, “I have more records in mind.” Asked what he likes to do besides make music, he pauses. “I like to watch TV, certain programs I like. I used to play golf a little bit, but I don’t do that any more. I don’t drink, don’t gamble, don’t play cards, don’t smoke, don’t do anything like that. Chase girls? No, I don’t do that!”

“You think what we were talking about concentration, right? What does it take to concentrate? First of all: Interest. You have to have interest in what you’re doing and be absorbed in what you’re doing, completely focused. That, combined with knowledge, with ability, with perception, with creativity—all of that’s involved.

“You think about what’s put before you, that’s what you concentrate on. You don’t think about why you’re doing it or how you’re doing it, but when you are doing it, you see the results. It’s a very strong force. I don’t know what’s involved. But when you have it, you can see it. If you don’t have it, you can see it. You can’t see it if you don’t have it.”
Oscar Pettiford

Bassist Oscar Pettiford was a driving force who illuminated the jazz scene through the 1940s and '50s. He picked up the torch from Duke Ellington bassist Jimmy Blanton, who had brought the instrument into the modern era through his pizzicato, hornlike solo lines before meeting an early death in 1942.

Pettiford was born on an Indian reservation in Okmulgee, Okla., on Sept. 30, 1922. One of 11 children, he played in a family band that toured all over the Midwest and the South. By age 10, he was fronting the band, singing, dancing and twirling a baton. Pettiford played piano, trombone and trumpet before moving into the ensemble as a bassist at age 14. Not enamored of bassists who did a lot of slapping or rode the instrument as if it were a horse, he gravitated toward “serious instrumentalists” — players such as Milt Hinton with Cab Calloway, Billy Taylor of Ellington’s band, Jimmie Lunceford’s Mose Allen and Fletcher Henderson’s Israel Crosby.

Hinton came to Minneapolis with Calloway in 1942 and found Pettiford working in a war plant. The family band had shrunk to five pieces and was struggling. Hinton encouraged Pettiford to not let his talent “go down the drain” and convinced him not to be afraid of New York. When Charlie Barnet’s band came to town two months later, Barnet hired Pettiford and took him to New York. There he worked with Thelonious Monk at Minton’s and Roy Eldridge at the Onyx Club on 52nd Street. Pettiford joined Dizzy Gillespie at the Onyx in a co-led quintet that was the first group to play the music that soon would be called bebop.

One of the numbers Pettiford contributed to the book was “For Bass Faces Only,” which Gillespie recorded with his big band in 1946 as “One Bass Hit.” Other well known pieces of his include “Something For You” (also recorded under the titles “Max Is Makin’ Wax” and “Chance It”), “Tri-Seriotism,” “Swingin’ Till The Girls Come Home,” “Bohemia After Dark” and “Blues In The Closet.”

After playing in California with Coleman Hawkins’ group and Boyd Raeburn’s big band, Pettiford joined Duke Ellington’s orchestra in the fall of ‘45 and in the next three years established himself as one of the top bassists in jazz. In ’49 while with Woody Herman, he broke his arm during a game with the band’s softball team. During his convalescence he took up the cello and came up with a dextrous pizzicato that was imbued with the feeling of Charlie Christian’s guitar style.

From ’52 to ’58, Pettiford led small groups and an innovative 13-piece band that was formed for a Town Hall concert and went on to play several times at Birdland. In ’58, Pettiford left for Europe and settled in Copenhagen, where he exerted a strong influence on the talented teenage Danish bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen.

On Sept. 8, 1960, Pettiford died at the hands of what doctors described as “a polio-like virus.”

Pianist Dick Katz, who played in Pettiford’s small groups and big band, said: “If I had to sum up Oscar, I would say that he should be ranked with the select group of great jazz artists, beyond merely one of the great jazz bassists.”
Tadd Dameron

Born Tadley Ewing Peake in Cleveland, Ohio, on Feb. 21, 1917, Tadd Dameron was a self-taught pianist who learned jazz rudiments from his saxophone-playing brother, Caesar, and was heavily influenced by Duke Ellington and George Gershwin.

His first professional playing took place during his high school years as a singer with trumpeter Freddie Webster. When the band's pianist quit, Dameron became the emergency replacement. He left Oberlin college in similar fashion when Blanche Calloway's orchestra came to play a prom and its pianist, Clyde Hart, fell ill. Tadd filled in and left town with the band. From Calloway he went to Zach Whyte's band, replacing Sy Oliver. In 1940 he moved to Kansas City, where he wrote for Harlan Leonard's Rockets. This is when he first met and jammed informally with Charlie Parker. Then, Dameron did war plant work in Chicago and Lima, Ohio, before coming to New York in '42 to write for Jimmie Lunceford, later contributing to the books of the Benny Carter and Teddy Hill bands.

Dameron met Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and Kenny Clarke at Minton's and sat in with the Gillespie–Oscar Pettiford group at the Onyx Club on 52nd Street. In the next few years his compositions, such as “Cool Breeze” and “Our Delight,” were played by Billy Eckstine and Gillespie's big bands. In '47 he led his own quintet on 52nd Street with Fats Navarro on trumpet and recorded for Savoy. His big break came in ‘48 when he led a sextet that was in residence as the house band at the Roost on Broadway and recorded for Blue Note. By using wide voicings, sometimes four octaves apart, he made the trumpet and two-tenor saxophone front line sound like a larger ensemble.

His writing for large orchestras was also unique. Dexter Gordon, commenting on playing Dameron’s charts in the Eckstine band, said, “The parts he writes are so melodic in themselves. It’s almost as if every part was lead, in that sense. Usually when a cat writes the secondary parts ... they vary as to the sound and the interest and so forth. But with Tadd, his parts were always beautiful. A lot of times I’d play the fourth parts and they were beautiful ... Tadd is really the romanticist of the whole period—he’s a poet.”

Dameron was a mentor to many, including Sarah Vaughan (who recorded what perhaps is his most beautiful song, “If You Could See Me Now”), Clifford Brown and Benny Golson (both of whom played in Dameron’s nonet that recorded for Prestige in '53).

In the early '50s Dameron became involved with heroin, and although he continued to record, his career was interrupted intermittently. In '58 he wound up in the Federal Narcotics Hospital in Lexington, Ky. During his rehabilitation he wrote the music for trumpeter Blue Mitchell’s LP Smooth As The Wind for Riverside, which came out in 1961. In June of that year, Dameron was released and resumed his life in New York. He was able to conduct the orchestra on his last album, The Magic Touch, and also subsequently wrote material for recordings by Milt Jackson, Sonny Stitt, Benny Goodman, Tony Bennett and Vaughan. Cancer took his life on March 8, 1965.

Dameron was an urbane, well-read man who once characterized himself by saying, “I’m the most misplaced musician in the business because I’m a composer. I’m not an arranger or a pianist. They forced me to be an arranger because nobody wanted to play my tunes unless I would write them out. I don’t like to arrange music. I like to direct the band, I like to rehearse the band. I like to supervise a date, to bring out the beautiful things that are happening in other arrangers.”

In 1953, while rehearsing his band for a recording date, he said, “Make those phrases flow. When I write something it’s with beauty in mind. It has to swing, sure, but it has to be beautiful.”

With Dameron long gone, his music lives on: “Hot House,” “Lady Bird,” “Our Delight,” “Casbah,” “On A Misty Night” and “Soultrane,” just to name a few. Many fine musicians continue his legacy by putting their own spin on these classics.
Rudresh Mahanthappa

Rising Star Jazz Artist
Rising Star Alto Saxophone
By Shaun Brady

To me, fusion was the Yellowjackets,” laughed Rudresh Mahanthappa. Despite his ambitious recent projects integrating jazz and South Indian music, and more recently electronics, the Brooklyn-based altoist rejects the fusion tag as inappropriate.

His resistance is justified. More properly, Mahanthappa could be considered a hybridist, having created a new form whose cross-cultural parentage is evident but inextricably blended. His music is marked not by the heavy accent of a non-native speaker, but by the lilting inflections of a fluid multi-lingual body just harmonizes a raga the same way they would harmonize ‘Bye Bye Blackbird,’” Mahanthappa said. “It’s pretty dreadful. Figuring out how to avoid that was important.”

While he welcomes the attention that’s been paid to his recent work, Mahanthappa expressed some trepidation that the focus has been more on process than on results. His influences, like those of frequent collaborators such as pianist Vijay Iyer and guitarist Rez Abbasi, are interwoven with his experience growing up as a first-generation hyphenate-American.

“The concept of the melding of these two cultures being more important than the music itself is disturbing to me,” he said. “People like me and Vijay and Rez are uniquely equipped to deal with this particular synthesizing of ideas, because we’re living it culturally every day. So it’s not so much about trying to achieve the goal of putting these two things together.”

Mahanthappa’s first explicit engagement with his heritage was at least as much a social as a musical statement. His 2004 CD Mother Tongue (Pi) confronted a certain American cultural ignorance, asking the question, “Do you speak Indian?” to a number of Indian-Americans and basing its melodies on their replies in several of the myriad languages actually spoken on the subcontinent.

Last year’s Kinsmen (Pi), the debut CD by Mahanthappa’s Dakshina Ensemble, a collaboration with Carnatic saxophonist Kadri Gopalnath, was lighter on the cultural critique but just as fraught with technical difficulties. The project had its inception more than 15 years earlier, when Mahanthappa’s brother bought him a Gopalnath album called Saxophone Indian Style on a lark. The music within had a profound impact.

Over the next several years, Mahanthappa caught Gopalnath live on a couple of the elder saxophonist’s rare U.S. visits, and in 2003 actually broached the subject of a collaboration. It became a reality a few months later under the auspices of New York’s Asia Society.

Mahanthappa visited Gopalnath in India in 2004. The music that resulted weaves together East and West like a tapestry, forming a rich, colorful image in its fullness. “There are a lot of bad fusion projects where somebody just harmonizes a raga the same way they would harmonize ‘Bye Bye Blackbird,’” Mahanthappa said. “It’s pretty dreadful. Figuring out how to avoid that was important.”

Growing up in Boulder, Colo., Mahanthappa’s Indian-American heritage had been, at most, a casual influence on his life. But later in his development, Mahanthappa felt compelled to explore the music. In 1994, he traveled to India’s Jazz Yatra Festival with a student group from Berklee College of Music and returned with an altered perspective.

“The music was incredibly inspiring,” Mahanthappa said. “I obviously felt connected to it, but I also felt like I could sit down with those records and play along with them, try to extract things the same way I did when I sat down with Coltrane records and Charlie Parker records.”

Shortly thereafter, fellow saxophonist Steve Coleman introduced Mahanthappa and Iyer, leading to a friendship and musical partnership that has flourished over the past decade. The two were in the initial stages of integrating Indian concepts into their own music, and each approached those concepts from a different angle—Mahanthappa interested in the melodic side, Iyer the rhythmic.

The altist’s first attempt to form a project exploring those interests came in Chicago in 1996, while he was earning his masters at DePaul University. The sax/guitar/tabla combo never gelled to his satisfaction at the time, but he revived the idea recently as the Indo-Pak Coalition, which also issued its first CD, Apta (Innova), last year. The trio features Abbasi and tabla player Dan Weiss.

“It’s three people who are dealing with the Western musical language and the Indian musical language at the same time,” Mahanthappa said. “So things are a little more malleable compositionally, in that we don’t necessarily have to adhere to Indian structural elements.”

Samdhí, the latest progression on Mahanthappa’s musical path, features guitarists David Gilmore, bassist Rich Brown, drummer Damion Reid, mridangam player Anand Ananthakrishman and Mahanthappa playing alto and laptop. The quintet further blurs stylistic boundaries, supplementing the composer’s Indo-jazz expression with a responsive, improvising computer instrumentalist.

“In doing Kinsmen I realized there were some more complex things I wanted to work on,” Mahanthappa explained. “I also want to get more inside of this electronic stuff. The idea for Samdhí was to integrate all of this into a new piece that was not so blatantly Indian.”

In addition to the aforementioned groups, Mahanthappa’s ongoing projects include Mauger, his collective trio with bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Gerry Hemingway; MSG, a trio with Irish bassist Ronan Guilfoyle and Indian-French drummer Chander Sardjoe; and Raw Materials, his ever-evolving duo with Iyer.

“I don’t feel like I’m still struggling to figure out how Indian I am or how American I am,” Mahanthappa concluded. “I’m very much at peace with the fact that it’s a constant exploration.”
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Shemekia Copeland

Rising Star Blues Artist/Group
By Michael Jackson

Despite her notoriety as the archetypal “blues belter,” Shemekia Copeland prefers the handle “Miss Meek.” Her offstage demeanour is disarmingly unassuming, the more remarkable given her blue-chip lineage as the daughter of Grammy-winning guitar slinger Johnny “Texas Twister” Copeland.

Turning 30 this year, Copeland has made a career shift after fulfilling her four-album contract with Chicago’s Alligator Records, with whom she waxed her bruisingly brilliant debut _Turn The Heat Up_ at age 19.

Copeland’s manager, John Hahn, struck a deal with Telarc to release this year’s _Never Going Back_, for which she brought in producer Oliver Wood and rootsy jazz heavies Marc Ribot, John Medeski and Chris Wood.

The dozen tracks on _Never Going Back_ cut a wide swath, embracing topical social criticism, a Percy Mayfield dialogue about suicide, the obligatory selection from her father’s canon and a surprising Joni Mitchell.

Anxious to evolve personally and also advance the blues genre, Copeland, modest yet very direct, is outspoken about contemporary society and its ills, yet full of admiration for her peers and elders.

_Never Going Back_ is taken from the title of the noirish Hahn/Wood narrative “Never Going Back To Memphis,” and though the abbreviation hints at her bold new direction, blues fans needn’t feel relegated. As Wood said, “Shemekia wanted to express herself differently than in the past, so we chose an eclectic bag of tunes. The songs were chosen for their message of empowerment, with a few quirky exceptions.” Wood said the intent was to take Copeland out of her blues comfort zone—they even ran a Hank Williams tune that didn’t make it on the CD—but Wood reminds, “Shemekia gives the blues to anything she sings.”

So, does _Never Going Back_ herald the end of Copeland’s days (to namercheck her previous Alligator releases) of being “wicked” and “talking to strangers”? “No!” she laughed during an interview at Buddy Guy’s Legends in Chicago. “Those records are a part of me. I had a good marriage with Alligator, it was just time to move forward.” In preparing for the new record, “We tried to pick songs that were a little deeper than the typical blues themes of partying and broken relationships,” she said.

The opener, “Sounds Like The Devil,” deals unequivocally with political and religious hypocrisy. “I’ve always been critical of the world, I just refused to talk about it,” Shemekia said. “I thought politics and religion were things nobody wanted to hear about musically. Why the hell would I force them to listen to that when they are on their off day, out Friday night having a drink? But with all the stuff going on right now, it was impossible not to deal with it.”

Despite her love of gospel and her own moral code, Copeland didn’t want to sound preachy, since the duplicity of those who labor their ethical point but don’t live it is at the root of her misgivings. “Guys who claim they live by the Bible but have bastard children, that is what ‘Big Brand New Religion’ is all about on my album,” she said.

Copeland grew up in what she contends was one of the roughest neighborhoods in Harlem; crack dealing was rife and she attended more juvenile funerals than she cares to remember. When she sings her father’s "Ghetto Child," she ain’t faking.

“Born a Penny” underscores her lack of pretension. “I was born a penny, and I don’t wanna be no dime,” she insists. “I know what I am, and you can’t make me be what I don’t want to be.”

Recent shifts in Copeland’s life have adjusted her outlook. She moved to Chicago a couple years back to be closer to bassist Orlando Wright, who plays with Buddy Guy and is now her fiancé. How does it feel being in the town that gave rise to Barack Obama?

“The world is definitely changing, although unfortunately we find it is somewhat the same, as much as it’s changed,” she said.

The night Obama was elected, Copeland was performing in a mess hall in Iraq as part of a Bluesapalooza tour. “It’s easy to sit in your quiet, safe house, not in a warzone, and talk crap about what goes on over there,” she said. “But those young men risking their lives for our country, all they want is a piece of home, a hug and a kiss. I wouldn’t hesitate to go back to Iraq for those guys.” Some of this philanthropy comes across in “Broken World,” a heartfelt track that Copeland described as “equal parts hope and frustration.”

Discussing her primary influences, two male soul singers stand out: Otis Redding and Sam Cooke. The blowtorch power of Tina Turner is also detectable in her early work. “Tina is such an awesome entertainer, and that aspect is important to me,” Copeland said. Gladys Knight, Mavis Staples and the late Koko Taylor are other women she admires. “With Koko every note comes from her toes up to her head. Mavis has the ability to just moan and give you goose pimples.”

But what of her less obvious interest in Joni Mitchell? Wood encouraged Copeland to make the plunge with “Black Crow” (from Mitchell’s 1976 folk/rock/jazz album _Hejira_). Mitchell wrote the song when traveling alone across America, and Copeland’s traversing of the globe from an early age has made her similarly wistful.

“I was hesitant at first doing one of Joni’s songs, but after listening to the lyrics I realized she had written it for me,” she said. “I mean, ‘I took a ferry to the highway/Then I drove to a pontoon plane/I took a plane to a taxi/And a taxi to a train.’ The other day I had finished a show and my mother called and asked, ‘What are you going to do now?’ I replied, ‘I’ve got to take a train to the bus and the bus to my car and then I have to drive home.’”

“‘Well,’ she said, ‘then I guess you are a black crow.’”

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It’s no accident that two of Chick Corea’s best-known bands have been named Circle and Return To Forever (RTF). The winner of this year’s Critics Poll in the Electric Keyboard/Synthesizer category has always been a step ahead of the next technological trends. But during 2008 and 2009, he’s also been going back to his own past, and showing how much his associations from the 1960s and ‘70s mean to today’s jazz audiences.

Last year, Corea appeared on DownBeat’s cover as RTF’s classic lineup of himself, Al Di Meola, Stanley Clarke and Lenny White reconvened for a wildly successful tour. The reunion has already resulted in the 2-disc Return To Forever Returns (Eagle Records) and the DVD Return To Forever Returns: Live At Montreux (Eagle Eye). A few months ago, he joined up with guitarist John McLaughlin—his colleague from Miles Davis’ seminal work in fusion—to form the Five Peace Band with such younger musicians as Christian McBride and Kenny Garrett along with drummer Vinnie Colaiuta (alternating on some live gigs with Brian Blade). This group’s self-titled live disc was released this year (Concord).

When he had the chance to take a short break between tours, a relaxed-sounding Corea made it seem like his own joviality and wise observations make him as much of a magnet for his new crew as his landmark music.

“Like his take on a seemingly easy life on the road with the Five Peace Band.

“One of the beauties of making music and working with artists in general—especially in jazz—is that age sort of disappears,” Corea said. “We’re commonly linked with the traditions we love and when we get together, there doesn’t seem to be any age barrier. Especially onstage. On the bus, I don’t follow the TV shows that the young guys had been watching—and I’ll be talking about Steve Allen—but, musically, the energy of the young guys is refreshing. It’s a nice exchange between what John calls us old hippies and the young cats.”

Still, it’s the ties between those old hippies that made the Five Peace Band happen after several years of percolating.

“I could roll it back to the ‘70s when John and I were running around with our bands and we became good friends since we first met,” Corea said. “Around 1969 we played a little bit together, recorded with Miles and developed a mutual admiration for each other that lasted through the decades. We always—in one way or another—would mention wanting to do something with each other. And while we sat in with each other, we never really did a project together. Then, when my schedule opened up, I proposed this project to John and it clicked in and we tried to nail a schedule down and it came together.”

Corea also mentions his 60th birthday celebration in December 2001 at New York’s Blue Note as his incentive to reconvene RTF and dive into building new performance opportunities with musicians like McLaughlin. That three-week event included Corea performing with veteran colleagues like Michael Brecker, Roy Haynes and Gary Burton, new partners like Gonzalo Rubalcaba, and such groups as Origin and his Akoustic Band. In his unique method of making his releases unabridged, the results comprised the 10-DVD box set Rendezvous In New York (Image Entertainment) in 2005.

“When I had that celebration at the Blue
Note and gathered a lot of the guys I worked with in bands of mine, the whole concept of not wanting to go back to something that ‘old’ left me,” Corea said. “The richness I had with music was actually the friendships I developed with my musical partners, and they were timeless. It all seemed fresh to me, even though we weren’t playing new compositions. The jam sessions seemed fresh, and I blew away the idea that reunions were bad. These relations are endless. So getting together with Stanley Clarke and Lenny White especially, it was a long time coming that we hadn’t played together, and it was very joyous.”

What has obviously changed is the electric keyboard’s inherent technology, though it’s a testament to Corea’s victory in this category that he continues to experiment with the sounds he gets from them.

“I play an extensive keyboard rig for Return To Forever and paired it down for the Five Peace Band,” Corea said. “I’ve been trying to work out what is the most suitable kind of instruments to use to get the kind of musical impact that I like. I’ve tried different approaches in programming sounds, improvising my sound design as I play. I also enjoy going back to getting the sound going from my old Fender Rhodes, while there’s a new Mini Moog Voyager that I enjoy playing. But to haul around a huge set of keyboards was like carrying a ball and chain, so I’m trying to make my rig compact. I’m also going to try a looser approach for my next tour. With the Five Peace Band, I used a couple Yamaha Motif keyboards and brought my own patches and only needed to use four of five different sounds that suited me for the kind of music I was playing.”

At first, Corea said that he felt trepidation about the ways that musical instrument companies have been trying to duplicate the sound of an acoustic piano in a digital format. Still, he recognized that it’s not just music, but the related worlds of film and computers that have accelerated the digital process with affordable software’s convenience. Meanwhile, he adds that Yamaha’s recent Avant model has made him more comfortable with the technology.

“If I’m playing a Fender Rhodes, I don’t think of it as a piano—not even remotely,” Corea said. “In the same way, when I play a digitized piano sound, I approach it as that instrument, not as a piano, and then I can kind of make it work. But now, with the Yamaha Avant, you sit down at that instrument and the in-built speakers bring it close to an acoustic piano feel. The keyboard is exactly an acoustic piano keyboard and whatever they did with the sampling gave it a wide dynamic range.”

Last year, Corea recorded with keyboardist Hiromi, and their pairing was released a few months ago as Duet (Concord). As he recalled meeting her in Tokyo when she was a teenager, he marveled at how she has become “quite a musician and a great young pianist.” Such an observation leads to the question of what advice he would give any young artist.

“Pleasure is being able to do what you like to do, and there’s so much in life that can go against that from authoritarian figures who keep you from pursuing something you would like to do,” Corea said. “So it’s a matter of strength and integrity for any young person to pursue something they’re interested in. As for education, the old concept of the apprentice system still works. You learn from one of the masters in your area, and that’s how I learned. Any successful person, if you look into it, they learned that way.”

Corea is giving himself plenty of time and space to keep making his own new pursuits throughout the rest of the year. In the fall, he’ll tour as a trio with Clarke and White. But he’s particularly looking forward to a rare summer tour as a solo act.

“I’ve never toured solo,” Corea said. “I’ve always done solo piano concerts as fillers—a couple here or there upon requests sometimes, but never a whole tour, especially during the active summer concert months. It’s going to be a refreshing relief after Return To Forever and the Five Peace Band. I get back to myself and see where the kid is.”

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## Official Results

### Historical Release

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Album Title And Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>Anthony Braxton</td>
<td>The Complete Arista Recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Miles Davis, Kind Of</td>
<td>Blue 50th Anniversary Collector's Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Dizzy Gillespie, Big Band, Showtime At The Spotlite</td>
<td>52nd Street, New York City, June 1946 (Upstate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Lester Young, The</td>
<td>Lester Young/Count Basie Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ornette Coleman,</td>
<td>Town Hall, 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Dave Brubeck, Live At The Monterey Jazz Festival</td>
<td>1956–1957 (Monterey Jazz Festival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Art Tatum, Piano Starts Here</td>
<td>(Sony Classics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nina Simone, To Be Free</td>
<td>(Columbia/Legacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Miles Davis, Broadcast Sessions</td>
<td>1958–1959 (Acrobat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Benny Goodman, The Columbia and OKeh Benny Goodman Orchestra Sessions</td>
<td>(Mosaic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Charlie Parker, Washington, D.C., May 22, 1941 (Upstate)</td>
<td>Return To Forever, The Anthology (Concord)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Jazz Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Album Title And Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Keith Jarrett, Standard Trio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Wayne Shorter, Quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>SFJAZZ Collective,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Branford Marsalis,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Dave Holland Sextet,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Charles Lloyd, Quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>The Bad Plus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ornette Coleman, Quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pat Metheny Trio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Brad Mehldau Trio,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>E.S.T.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bill Frisell Trio,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Jazz Group, Rising Star

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Album Title And Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mostly Other People Do The Killing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Vijay Iyer, Quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Fly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>SFJAZZ Collective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Miguel Zenón, Quintet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mike Reed’s People, Places &amp; Things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The Bad Plus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Jason Moran, Bandwagon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Matt Wilson’s Arts &amp; Crafts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Nîk Bârschi’s Ronin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mary Hailorcoon Trio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Big Band

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>196</td>
<td>Maria Schneider, Orchestra</td>
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<td>121</td>
<td>Mingus Big Band</td>
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<td>107</td>
<td>Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra</td>
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<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Vanguard Jazz Orchestra</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>Carla Bley, Big Band</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>Clayton–Hamilton Jazz Orchestra</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>ICP Orchestra</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Millenial Territory Orchestra</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Gordon Goodwin Big, Phat Band</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Charlie Haden, Liberation Music</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Peter Brötzmann, Chicago Tentet</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Charles Tolliver Orchestra</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Gerald Wilson, Orchestra</td>
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### Trumpet

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<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td>Dave Douglas, Wynton Marsalis</td>
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<td>143</td>
<td>Terence Blanchard,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Nicholas Payton</td>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Roy Hargrove</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>Enrico Rava</td>
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<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Tom Harrell</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Wadada Leo Smith,</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Kenny Wheeler</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Terell Stafford,</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Tomasz Stanko</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Steven Bernstein</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Jeremy Pelt</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Randy Brecker</td>
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### Soprano Saxophone

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<th>Artist(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>219</td>
<td>Wayne Shorter, Branford Marsalis</td>
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<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>David Liebman</td>
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<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>Jane Ira Bloom</td>
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<td>68</td>
<td>Evan Parker</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Steve Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Jane Bunnett</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Bob Wilber</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Chris Potter</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Roscoe Mitchell</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Joshua Redman</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Sam Rivers</td>
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### Soprano Saxophone, Rising Star

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<thead>
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<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Album Title And Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Christian Scott</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>Jeremy Pelt</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>Ambrose Akinmusire</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>Peter Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Sean Jones</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Ingrid Jensen</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Taylor Ho Bynum</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Avishi Cohen</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Corey Wilkes</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Maurice Brown</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Arve Henriksen</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Darren Johnston</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Joe Magnarelli</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Cuong Vu</td>
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### Trombone

<table>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>Artist(s)</th>
<th>Album Title And Details</th>
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<td>169</td>
<td>Steve Turre</td>
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<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Roswell Rudd</td>
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<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Conrad Herwig</td>
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<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Wyckiffe Gordon</td>
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<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Robin Eubanks</td>
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<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Ray Anderson</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>George Lewis</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Slide Hampton</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bob Brookmeyer</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Gianluca Petrella</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Wayne Wallace</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Wolter Wierbos</td>
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### Alto Saxophone

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<th>Artist(s)</th>
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<td>156</td>
<td>Ornette Coleman</td>
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<td>139</td>
<td>Phil Woods</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>Kenny Garrett</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>Miguel Zenó</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td>Greg Osby</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>Rudresh Mahanthappa</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Bobby Watson</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Anthony Braxton</td>
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<td>Bud Shank</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>John Zorn</td>
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### Tenor Saxophone, Rising Star

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<td>Marcus Strickland</td>
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<td>J.D. Allen</td>
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<td>Anat Cohen</td>
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### Baritone Saxophone

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<td>Ronnie Cuber</td>
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<td>Hamiet Bluiett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Rising Star</td>
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*August 2009 DOWNBEAT*
Following are the 120 critics who voted in DownBeat’s 57th Annual International Critics Poll. The critics distributed up to 15 points among up to three choices (no more than five points per choice) in each of two categories: Established Talent and Rising Stars.

**Critics**

David Adler: Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Weekly, JazzTimes, Time Out New York, DB
Don Albert: DB, Jazz Journal International, Financial Mail
Frank Alkyer: DB
Glenn Astaria: All About Jazz, JazzReview.com, DB
Peter Bastian: JazzEthik, Jazzpodium, Jazz N'More
Raul Bernardo: Expresso
Larry Bimbaum: Stereophile
Dick Bogle: DickBogle.com
Brett Bonner: Living Blues Magazine
Fred Bouchard: DB, All About Jazz
Michael Bourne: DB, WBGQ-FM, Signal to Noise
Jack Bowers: allaboutjazz.com
Herb Boyd: DB, Network Journal, Amsterdam News, Black Scholar
Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum
Stuart Brooker: Toronto Life, Moviemakers, Work of Point, Signal to Noise
Forrest Bryant: DB, Jazz Observer
Nate Chinen: New York Times, JazzTimes, BBC
Aaron Cohen: DB
Thomas Conrad: Stereophile, JazzTimes
John Corbett: DB, Chicago Reader, WNUJ-FM
Owen Cordle: The News & Observer, JazzTimes
Joe Cunniff: DB
Barry Davis: DB
Paul de Barros: Seattle Times, DB
L.J. DeLue: Albany Times-Union, All About Jazz, DB
Joe Diliberto: Crlic
Len Dobbs: Coda, Mirror
Bob Eder: DB, CMJ Close Up
Bill Douthart: DB, Bigshot
Alain Drouot: DB, WNUJ-FM, Cadence
José Duarte: jazzportugal.ua.pt
Leila Dunbar: DB, Reuters
Alex Dutilh: Jazzman
Guido Endres: Jazz Podium
Ed Enright: DB
John Epholid: DB, Relix, Traps
Eric Fine: DB, JazzTimes
Maurizio Franco: Music Jazz, Musica & Dacchi, Musica Oggi, Radio Svizzera Italiana
Jack Fuller: Chicago Tribune
Ira Gitler: DB, Swing Journal, JazzTimes, Time Out New York, DB
Frank-John Hadley: DB
James Hale: DB, Signal to Noise
Dave Holland: BMI.com, Grammy.com
C. Andrew Hovant: All About Jazz, Jazz Review, DB
John Howard: DB, L.A. Jazz Scene
Michael Jackson: DB, Jazzwise
Robin James: Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder, DB
Todd Jenkins: DB, All About Jazz, Jazz.com, American Songwriter
Claudia Allaire Jenkins: DB, JazzTimes, Jazzwise, Independent Ear Blog, OpenSkyJazz.com
Fred Jung: All About Jazz
George Kander: JazzTimes, Hot House, All About Jazz
Bob Karlovits: DB
Yoshi Katsu: DB, San Jose Mercury News
Larry Kehl: East Bay Express, Oakland Magazine, San Francisco Performances, KPFM-FM
Jason Koransky: DB
Kiyoshi Yokomori: Swing Journal, NHK-FM, Jazz Tonight
John Kreierglers: The Pitch
David Kynan: Offbeat, Gambit Weekly, DB
Rob Leurentep: VRJT Radio
John Litveiler: Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago Sun-Times, SIMA.org.au, Coda
Jaap Luddeke: JazzFlits
Matthew Lurie: DB
Jim Macnie: DB
Howard Mandel: DB, NPR
Peter Margasak: DB, Chicago Reader, Signal To Noise
Jeff McCord: DB, Texas Monthly
John McDonough: DB, Wall Street Journal
Peter McElhinney: Style Weekly
Bill Meyer: DB, Chicago Reader, Signal To Noise, The Wire, Magnet, Dusted
Ken Micalef: DB, Remix, Modern Drummer
Virgil Miruca: DB, SteauaJazz Contex, Jazz.Pt Magazine, Jazz.Pu Magazine, Musica Progressiva
Massimo Miliano: II Manifesto, Rumore
Bill Mulkowski: JazzTimes, The Absolute Sound
Damien Morganstein: Jersey Jazz, Annual Review of Jazz Studies
John Murphy: DB, JazzTimes, Jazz Week, Washington Post Express, NPR, The Root
Mitch Myers: DB, Magnet, NPR News
Michael Nastos: All Music Guide, Cadence
Ron Netsky: City Newspaper, DB
Jon Newey: Jazzwise, Performing Musician
Stuart Nicholson: JD, Jazzyart, DJ, Jazzzeit, Jazz Special, DB, JazzTimes
John Norris: Coda
Jennifer Odell: DB, People, Utne Reader, MSN Music
Dan Ouellette: DB, Stereophile, Napster.com
Ted Panken: DB, Jazziz
Thierry Peremart: Jazzman, TDYK-FM, DB, JazzTimes, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, All About Jazz
Michael Point: DB, Blues Revue, Round Rock Leader
Norman Provizer: DB, KUVO-FM
Doug Ramsey: JazzTimes, Wall Street Journal
Guy Reinhard: Cric
Carl Richardson: The Absolute Sound, Playback Music Magazine, SDGate.org, Oakland Magazine
Russell Arthur Roberts: L.A. Jazz Scene
Chris Robinson: DB, Eashot Jazz
Jon Ross: DB
Antonio Rubio: Correo De Mierua, Jazz.Pt, DB
Mark Ruffin: DB, All About Jazz
Lloyd Sachs: DB, No Depression.com
Robert Rusch: Daddy’s Voice
Phil Schapp: DB, Stop Smoking
Chris Sheldon: Jazz Review
Bill Shoemaker: DB, Point of Departure
Kirk Silsbee: DB, Risin’ Dog, Mojo
Will Smith: JazzTimes, DB
Thomas Stauder: DB
Zan Stewart: Star-Ledger
W. Robert Stoklos: Jazzhouse.org
Andrew Sussman: Cric
Laurence Sviridov: DB, Otakar Svoboda: Czech TV, Czech Radio
Ron Sweetman: Coda
Eliot Tiegler: Television Week
Chris Walker: Mix, DB, JazzTimes, Double Bassist, LA Jazz Scene, California Tour & Travel
Hans Weng: Jazz Educators Journal
Jose Woodard: DB, Los Angeles Times, JazzTimes, St. Barbara Independent, Opera Now
Scott Yanow: JazzTimes, Jazziz, L.A. Jazz Scene

**Miscellaneous Instrument, Rising Star**

115 Toots Thielemans (harpsichord)
83 Erik Friedlander (cello)
58 Richard Galliano (accordion)
47 Scott Robinson (bass saxophone)
34 Steve Turre (conch shells)
33 Grégoire Maret (harmonica)
32 Dino Saluzzi (bandoneon)
32 David Murray (bass clarinet)
24 Howard Johnson (tuba)
23 Peggy Lee (cello)
21 Fred Longben-Holm (cello)

**Miscellaneous Instrument, Rising Star**

39 Edmar Castaneda (bassoon)
33 Grégoire Maret (harmonica)
29 Hendrik Meurkens (harmonica)
21 DJ Logic (turntables)
18 Scott Robinson (bass saxophone)
17 Ted Reichman (accordion)
16 Erik Friedlander (cello)
15 Peggy Lee (cello)
10 Gary Versace (accordion)
10 Marcus Rojas (tuba)
15 Dino Saluzzi (bandoneon)
3 Frederic Bieger (bass clarinet)
75 Dee Dee Bridgewater
74 Sheila Jordan
64 Diana Krall
51 Karrin Allyson
49 Tierney Sutton
42 Roberto Gambarini
39 Luciana Souza
38 Norma Winstone
31 Patricia Barber
20 Carol Sloane
18 Melissa Morgan
18 Male Vocals

245 Kurt Elling
107 Andy Bey
100 Mark Murphy
94 Tony Bennett
42 Kevin Mahogany
39 Bobby McFerrin
33 Freddy Cole
31 Thee Bleckmann
29 John Pizzarelli
25 Jon Hendricks
24 Bob Dorough
22 Bill Henderson
22 Jimmy Scott

**Male Vocals, Rising Star**

156 Charles Gates
50 Jamie Cullum
38 Sachal Vasandani
33 Ed Reed
32 Theo Bleckmann
30 Curtis Stigers
28 José James
27 John Pizzarelli
26 Kenny Washington
26 Tony DeSare
17 Ian Shaw

**Composer**

93 Wayne Shorter
85 Carla Bley
61 Dave Douglas
29 Benny Golson
26 Vijay Iyer
22 Dave Holland
Composer, Rising Star

22 Jim McNeely
21 Bob Brookmeyer
21 Wynton Marsalis
20 Anthony Braxton
17 John Zorn

44 John Hollenbeck
44 Guillermo Klein
39 Vijay Iyer
25 Ben Allison
22 Rudresh Mahanthappa
22 Jason Moran
20 Dave Douglas
16 Anat Cohen
14 Maria Schneider
14 Matt Wilson
13 Darcy James Argue
13 Harris Eisenstadt
13 Moppa Elliott

Arranger, Rising Star

44 John Hollenbeck
44 Uri Caine
41 Gerald Wilson
38 Vince Mendoza
36 Jim McNeely
35 Bob Brookmeyer
30 Claus Ogerman
28 Slide Hampton

24 Mat Domber
23 John Zorn
22 Matt Ballstisatsis
22 Todd Barkan
16 Branford Marsalis
14 Jeff Gauthier
13 Larry Klein

Blues Artist/Group

122 B.B. King
94 Buddy Guy
78 Taj Mahal
33 Derek Trucks
30 Bettye LaVette
30 Otis Taylor
24 James Blood Ulmer
20 Keb' Mo'
17 Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials
16 Shemekia Copeland
16 North Mississippi Allstars
12 Dr. John
12 John Mayall
10 Dr. John and the Lower 911, City That Care Forgot (429)

Blues Album

83 B.B. King, One Kind Favor (Geffen)
68 Taj Mahal, Maestro (Heads Up)

Arranger, Producer

195 Maria Schneider
201 Manfred Eicher
73 Carla Bley
58 Bill Holman
54 Steven Bernstein
46 John Clayton

Record Label

166 Blue Note
164 Sunnyside
163 Mosaic
164 HighNote
173 ECM
66 Concord
63 Nonesuch
53 Blue Note
51 Sunnyside
44 HighNote
33 Arbors
32 Concord
24 Mat Domber
20 John Zorn
17 John Clayton
16 Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials
15 Jeff Gauthier
12 John Zorn
10 Dr. John
10 Wynton Marsalis/Willie Nelson, Two Men With The Blues (Blue Note)

Blues Artist/Group

122 B.B. King
94 Buddy Guy
78 Taj Mahal
33 Derek Trucks
30 Bettye LaVette
30 Otis Taylor
24 James Blood Ulmer
20 Keb' Mo'
17 Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials
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Blues Album

83 B.B. King, One Kind Favor (Geffen)
68 Taj Mahal, Maestro (Heads Up)

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TELARC 83690

AAA

If you haven’t hipped yourself to Otis Taylor yet, please do. This gravel-voiced, Denver-bred stringster/vocalist is a true original who, as a lyricist, catapults the pain and pleasure of old-time blues into a sort of Oprah Winfrey present. You want contemporary vocabulary for the blues? How about depression, lesbian lovers and child molesting? Taylor brings present-day psychology to classic situations, too, like plain vanilla murder. With just a few words, often repeated obsessively, he sketches a situation then gnaws down the emotional bone.

Here, he performs with jazzers Jason Moran, Ron Miles, Tarus Mateen and Nasheet Waits, a change of pace that gives a rich new texture to his work. Unfortunately, echoey backup vocals and strings muck up some of the tracks, particularly the ones his daughter, Cassie, sings on.

Taylor starts with a classic persona, a traveler pining for someplace familiar, where he can find “some heat”—and he’s not just talking about the weather. Miles’ sweet, rolling cornet—as with Bill Frisell—leaves the singer’s languid longing, while Moran’s piano adds an irresistibly rococo touch. “Silver Dollar On My Head” recalls a Greek uncle whose grandmother applied this curious money cure, but at bottom it’s really about numbing yet another form of pain. “Lost My Guitar” is so obsessive/compulsive you know it’s not just about a guitar. “I’m Not Mysterious” is ostensibly about love between two young children, but the line “I got a little red wagon, you can use it anytime” erases any inkling of innocence. “Young Girl Down The Street” bumps and grinds with unadulterated lust, reinforced by Gary Moore’s insinuating electric guitar.

Banjo enters the picture on “Country Boy, Girl,” and so does a Lightnin’ Hopkins bravado, as the country narrator tells a city girl he’s got the goods. Moran totally gets the Taylor vibe on “Walk On Water,” which rises to a long jazz jam, with Miles and Moran churning the fat and Taylor doing a somber scat. The religious imagery is powerful. But the masterpiece here is “Dagger By My Side,” a classic “went down to the river” murder saga with the twist that the killer is suddenly stunned to realize his victim loves him—and that his life is over, too. Taylor’s all alone here, just him and his delta blues guitar; the effect is mesmerizing.

More’s the pity that other tracks have too much production goop. Cassie Taylor gives a shot at her father’s obsessiveness on “Sunday Morning” but winds up just sounding repetitive. Atmospheric cornet echo and African drums don’t make “Talking About It Blues” any more interesting, and Cassie’s re-do of Taylor’s classic “Mama’s Best Friend” (about his mother taking up with a woman and leaving his father) is a mess of whispered vocals. Ditto for “Maybe Yeah.” The production works better on the closer, “If You Hope,” with hymnal piano, uplifting cornet, Procol Harum organ, martial snare and throbbing guitar building to a ripe climax that makes you think Taylor’s declaration, “My love is blind,” may not be such a good thing. Great stuff.

—Paul de Barros

Pentatonic Wars And Love Songs: Looking For Some Heat; Sunday Morning; Silver Dollar On My Head; Lost My Guitar; I’m Not Mysterious; Young Girl Down The Street; Country Boy, Girl; Talking About It Blues; Walk On Water; Mama’s Best Friend; Maybe Yeah; Dagger By My Side; If You Hope. (68:35)

Personnel:
Taylor, vocals, guitar, banjo; Cassie Taylor, bass (2-5, 10, 11, 13); vocals (2-4, 10, 11, 13); Tarus Mateen, bass; Gary Moore (2, 4, 13), Harry Tuft (2), John Richardson (6, 7), guitar; Jason Moran, piano; Ron Miles, cornet; Nasheet Waits, drums; Brian Juan, organ (6, 13); Valerie Levy, cello (2, 3, 4, 13); Chuck Hubergen, violin (2, 3, 4, 13); Mohammed Ali (1), Mansur Mazrui, percussion; Jae Taylor, backup vocals (2).
Tortoise
Beacons Of Ancestrship
THRILL JOCKEY 210

I only half understand why the term “minimal” is used in reference to the skittish music of Tortoise. Sure, the Chicago-based progstrumental outfit has a few pieces that make hay with repetition, but the bulk of their tunes slice and dice their rhythms in genuinely unexpected ways, fracturing assumed trajectories and mocking a GPS musical culture that tells us exactly how a piece is going to get from A to B. Maybe those writers meant minimal as “stark,” though the band’s rich textures and inspired use of dissonance kind of deep-sixes that idea, too.

One thing’s certain, there won’t be anyone positioning Beacons Of Ancestrship as stark or minimal. Like the new Yeah Yeah Yeahs record, it’s a big bold statement that trades the ensemble’s signature guitar/vibes/snare sound for a Swan dive into the synth end of the swimming pool. It’s also a big enough break to flummox a couple people I tried to run a “Blindfold Test” on. With an esthetic based on experimentation, it’s no shock to see John McEntire, Jeff Parker and company amending their artistonic persona, but the shift of Beacons is hard on seismic.

The art of juxtaposition has been essential to Tortoise’s work, and it still makes for some of this program’s more arresting moments; these guys are masters at uniting oppositional fragments. But this baby has sweep. “Prepare Your Coffin” is all about liftoff and aggression. If the band once exploded Esquivel’s space-age bache-
lor pad music for a sense of cranky cool, they’re now firing photon torpedoes and having Todd Rundgren lead Return to Forever through ELP’s Tarkus. It has a certain cheese to it, but it’s also refreshing. The group hinted at such hummable melodies on 2001’s Standards, and this new disc inventively expands on them.

Tunefulness also provides an element that’s been lacking since Tortoise’s inception: emotion. Somewhere between the boho testosteron and hummable themes, I’m getting the feeling that these guys are really into their performance this time around. Previously they’ve been intriguing, but icy. “Xinyianghechengqi” is a big-bottomed rager—a Last Exit outtake sans Peter Brötzmann. The ersatz Brazilian beats of “Gigantes” conjure an algebra class taking place during Carnaval. At some points here, you wonder why it took ‘em so long to reveal their party side.

Rolling Stone once called ‘em a jam band; the Village Voice heard them as hip-hop. Never mind that tired “post-rock” tag. Might be best to consider this their disco album. —Jim Macnie

Beacons Of Our Ancestors: High Class Slim Came Floating In;
Prepare Your Coffin; Northern Something; Gigantes; Penumbra;
Yinxianghechengqi; The Fall of Seven Diamonds Plus One;
Mins; Monument Six One Thousand; De Chilly; Chartresk Foundation. (43:51)

Personnel: John McEntire, drums, modular synthesizer, ring modulator guitar, electric harpsichord, Jeff Parker, guitar, bass; Dan Bitney, bass, guitar, percussion; John Herndon, drums, vibes, keyboards; Doug McCombs, bass, lap steel.

Ordering info: thrilljockey.com

Jack DeJohnette/
Danilo Pérez/
John Patitucci
Music We Are
GOLDEN BEAMS KRM 1150

This all-star trio, briefly con-
summated on stage in 2005 and recently revived in the stu-
do, makes for a somewhat erratic but agreeably avant garde combination. The music is occasionally mellow and lyrical (“Soulful Ballad,” “Michael”) but more charac-
teristically simmering with a quiet but prickly intrigue of abstraction and inner tensions. Each man moves in a rooey orbit, often independent but always conscious of the others. The skittish, touch-and-go contacts can be playful, even when they sometimes contain more space than music. Other times the elements coalesce into a percus-
sive density. Expect some ups and downs.

Everybody doubles on “Tango African,” a relatively mellow tune with Argentine flavors in which the trio briefly becomes a sextet. DeJohnette overdubs a fragile but warm little descending theme on melodica, while Pérez converses with himself on piano and Fender, burrowing into the inner life of the music and forms around him. There are also a few stray guitar-like lines from Patitucci’s six string electric bass.

Silence and sound are equal partners in “Earth Prayer,” the first of three open collective improvisations, and frankly an utterly vapid still life that seems to evoke slow-motion images of a primordial nature stirring from a long sleep. Oddly, its random quality generates a certain level of anticipation, as if something might suddenly spring from this haphazard haze. But any sense of expectation is a red herring, since nothing ever happens. Such are the perils of chance. Similarly, “Ode To MJQ” comes to life so slowly from DeJohnette’s agoni-
zingly stark landscape of pings and clangs, the first four or five minutes could easily be dumped. But as his rolling toms toms begin to rumble, so does Pérez’s thorny imagination. We get still more open improvisation on “Earth Speaks,” but in considerably more lively and animated form. The piece grows in terse, per-
cussive little twitches in which each player caut-
iuously probes the other. But Patitucci’s morn-
ful bowed string bass ultimately becomes the controlling voice, imposing an almost classic rigor over the music. He casts a similar authori-
ty over the more somber “Panama Viejo.”

“Corbilla” is a high-energy ensemble piece that gives DeJohnette his best moments.
The HOT Box

CDs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITICS</th>
<th>John McDonough</th>
<th>John Corbett</th>
<th>Jim Macnie</th>
<th>Paul de Barros</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Otis Taylor</td>
<td>Pentatonic Wars And Love Songs</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortoise</td>
<td>Beacons Of Ancestorship</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack DeJohnette/John Patitucci/Danilo Pérez</td>
<td>Music We Are</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren Johnston</td>
<td>The Edge Of The Forest</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critics’ Comments

Otis Taylor, Pentatonic Wars And Love Songs
I love how these guys take vernacular vocabulary—flamenco, slamming backbeats, wah-wah bass guitar, Duane Eddy twang, industrial clanking—then recombine it into their own codes. Intellectual populism at the DNA level—and always highly listenable.
—Paul de Barros

Tortoise, Beacons Of Ancestorship
Constantly in motion but going nowhere, this whirlpool of disembodied techno synthetica pounds simultaneously on both one’s ear and one’s patience. Press kit shovelsh on the praise with words like “lo-fi noise ... processed ... robotic.” All true enough, but hardly words of praise where I come from.
—John McDonough

Tortoise has everything you need to make it the greatest indie band in the world. But culling the sum of the parts is not always enough for the Chicago band, and on record their main problem is one of over-reaching. In the most stripped-down passages, Beacons is the perfect mix of tensile strength and instrumental-rock intelligence.
—John Corbett

Jack DeJohnette/John Patitucci/Danilo Pérez, Music We Are
White-hot trio interplay (“Seventh D,” both movements) with especially wonderful Pérez (“Earth Speaks”) offset by startlingly weak free improvisations and droll melodica-centered songs. When all six of them are playing at once (each man his own partner), everyone seems to be trying to make space for his doppelganger, which makes for a clumsy mix of mixed-doubles.
—John McDonough

A melodica here, some bowed bass there—its potpourri vibe gets a little frustrating after a while. But the chemistry that each of these vignettes comprises is flatly amazing, and the trio’s deep interaction creates a through line for the zig-zagging agenda.
—Jim Macnie

I want to like this so much better than I do, especially after seeing the companion DVD, but for all the earnest, sensitive interaction, the music rarely takes off. “Panama Viejo” cuts to deep melancholy and “Ode to MJD” is smartly minimalist, but the rest comes off as slightly precious, even sentimental.
—Paul de Barros

Darren Johnston, The Edge Of The Forest
Three old horns find unexpectedly eccentric new voices in this soft-spoken mischief. There is an acerbic charm and emotional detachment at work that is cool, consistent, smartly calculated and positioned just so between straight jazz (“Apples”) and uneasy awkwardness. The ensembles often have a lovely quirky elegance. Worth the risk.
—John McDonough

It bubbles with exciting improv passages, it swings in about six singular ways, and it sends a message: out loud music is fun. The trumpeter brings a nice elan to the performances, and in several spots the tunes tilt toward that wondrous plane John Carter’s ensembles worked on.
—Jim Macnie

Wow! Son of Dave Douglas in a killer pianoless quintet with the chipper, silt-wide-open vibe of the Dave Holland classic Conference Of The Birds. Johnston’s all over the horn, soaring and sliding, but with crystal-clear ideas. The constant swarm of horn lines keeps interest high. Jumpy, sometimes whimsical music with lots of breaks in the time, doubled-up solos and great writing.
—Paul de Barros

Drummers never thrive, after all, in low gear, and this gives him license to fly. Pérez is the main counterweight, and rides DeJohnette with a punch, two-fisted dissonance, seasoned with aggressive vamps. He also engages Patitucci in an arresting sequence of soned with aggressive vamps. He also engages Patitucci in an arresting sequence of...
Joe Lovano Us Five

Folk Art
BLUE NOTE 84345

★★★★½

Joe Lovano’s recorded music continues to vary from album to album. He even flips the personnel based on the kind of music he’s playing. Two extreme examples say it all: Trio Fascination (1998) and Viva Caruso (2002), where small-group jazz with Dave Holland and Elvin Jones contrasts wildly with orchestral music performed as a tribute “from one great Italian tenor to another.” Lovano’s group Us Five expresses yet another divergence. Playing jazz but unconventionally so, this band peaks back the layers of sophistication jazz is so wont to entertain. Folk Art is more emotional than cerebral. And yet, the “folk art” abstractions and (relatively) simpler forms no doubt suggest a well-thought-out game plan.

Folk Art may be a concept album in that it stands apart with a theme, with different methods of achieving a certain satisfying small-group interplay. Each track, contrasting with the one that preceded it, still somehow manages to echo the theme that this music is more elemental, if only in execution. But before the new listener gets the idea this record could double as a field recording. Us Five starts out in a fairly conventional vein, with an uptempo swing number faintly echoing the changes to “Giant Steps.” The straightahead groove of “Powerhouse” is followed by a circle in a round of sorts, as the band plays off a simple progression. Where “Powerhouse” suggests jazz’s typical virtuosic impulse, “Folk Art” jumps right in with a plain execution, with more room for feeling the music.

A highlight of the CD is hit upon early with the percussion pause in this song’s middle, followed by a departure into a more conventional swing groove with piano and tenor before a return to a looser, John Coltrane-like coda with the original sing-songy theme. Ditto the Charles Mingus-flavored floating form of “Wild Beauty.” Hence, the template of unusual arrangements mixed with the unexpected is laid out. Us Five is brimming with talent: pianist James Weidman, bassist Esperanza Spalding and drummer/percussionists Otis Brown III and Francisco Mela are a true unit, navigating the twists and turns of this music as if they were its authors in place of Lovano (Lovano’s production, by the way, has the drummers in perfect left-channel/right-channel balance, e.g., the many-faceted flourishes of “Drum Song”). As the album progresses it becomes more and more organic in nature, both in its structures as well as its simple melodies. And Lovano uses this format to dig into not only his straight alto sax and alto clarinet but channels the spirit of Rahsaan Roland Kirk, adding his taragato, autochrome and gongs, so well. It’s as if he’s in a continual state of summing up even as he keeps on moving forward.

—John Ephland

Frank Wess Nonet

Once Is Not Enough
LABETH MUSIC 101

★★★★☆

As a youngster, Frank Wess was one of the two tenor sax sparkplugs in Count Basie’s ‘50s band. Here the veteran channels his glorious history with a midsize unit that packs an orchestral punch. The charts and the playing swing straight ahead without pretense. These are journeyman tunes in journeyman arrangements, played by a fine unit of seasoned players. Young pianist Gerald Clayton is the exception, and he shines discreetly on the ballads.

Except for three standards, it’s Wess’ book on this collection, and he proves himself a well-rounded writer. He offers swing bounces (“Once Is Not Enough,” “Sara’s Song”), a shuffle (“You Made a Good Move”), a wistful ballad (“Dementia”), a brisk “I Got Rhythm” variation (“Backfire”) and, of course, a blues (“Tryin’ To Make My Blues Turn Green”). “Dementia” and “Fly Me to the Moon” are flute features for Wess. Acquits himself well, though his attack doesn’t have the snap it ran on drums with Chick Corea. Now comes a live performance (at Yoshi’s in Oakland) with his recently reunited Quartet, a fluid group that originated in 1967 with bassist Steve Swallow and expanded its palette in the early ’70s with the addition of a then-teenaged Pat Metheny. Joining on drums is Metheny Group regular Antonio Sanchez.

The group’s sound—light and airy, grooving but mostly mellow, and built on a deit mix of acoustic and electric instruments—remains as appealing as it was the first time around. Thanks to myriad musical paths that Burton, Metheny and Swallow have traveled in the intervening years, the interplay and improvisations are more sophisticated than ever, beginning with Chick Corea’s buoyant “Sea Journey” and continuing with a set that includes a pair of floaty Carla Bley tunes and Keith Jarrett’s “Coral,” a gorgeous ballad. And Metheny’s guitar synthesizer (on his “Question And Answer”) and Sanchez’s earthy, urgent playing give the group a more contemporary musical tint.

The moods and textures here are impressively varied, too, with Swallow’s multicolor, shape-shifting “Falling Grace,” one of several showcases for the quicksilver grace of the bassist’s five-string work; Metheny’s laid-back, stairstepping “B And G” and darting, barn-burning “Missouri Uncompromised”; and Burton’s stately, classically influenced “Hullo, Bolinas.”

—Philip Booth

Gary Burton, Pat Metheny, Steve Swallow, Antonio Sanchez

Quartet Live!
CONCORD Jazz 31303

★★★★½

Gary Burton in recent years has gone the reunion route, revisiting artistically and commercially successful projects of yore, including last year’s Grammy-winning pairing with Chick Corea. Now comes a live performance (at Yoshi’s in Oakland) with his recently reunited Quartet, a fluid group that originated in 1967 with bassist Steve Swallow and expanded its palette in the early ’70s with the addition of a then-teenaged Pat Metheny. Joining on drums is Metheny Group regular Antonio Sanchez. The group’s sound—light and airy, grooving but mostly mellow, and built on a deit mix of acoustic and electric instruments—remains as appealing as it was the first time around. Thanks to myriad musical paths that Burton, Metheny and Swallow have traveled in the intervening years, the interplay and improvisations are more sophisticated than ever, beginning with Chick Corea’s buoyant “Sea Journey” and continuing with a set that includes a pair of floaty Carla Bley tunes and Keith Jarrett’s “Coral,” a gorgeous ballad. And Metheny’s guitar synthesizer (on his “Question And Answer”) and Sanchez’s earthy, urgent playing give the group a more contemporary musical tint.

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—Philip Booth
Peter Zak
Seed Of Sin
STEEPLECHASE 31641

Pianist Peter Zak thrives in the classic piano-bass-drums format. His music always sustains a high degree of clarity, and his bands have an innate crispness. Bassist Paul Gill has been on all the trio records, while Quincy Davis makes his standout debut here on drums. Of the 10 tracks, three are originals, including the powerful “Horace’s Dream” and the contemplative “Shala.”

In his deft melodic artistry, Zak can be strong-fingered and assertive as a bandleader, and his disciplined rhythm section sticks close to him at all times. Davis provides dynamic counterpoint to Zak, and his frequent percussive flourishes are swinging and well conceived. The album closes with an eight-minute version of Herbie Hancock’s “King Cobra,” and the driving performance shows Zak, Gill and Davis in sync and having a ball.

—Mitch Myers

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Charnett Moffett
The Art Of Improvisation
MOTEMA 00021

Charnett Moffett is something of an overachiever, a virtuoso player of various basses who to his credit relentlessly tries on new sounds and goes where few of his colleagues dare to go—from fusion to free jazz. For his eighth recording as a leader, Moffett doesn’t break with that approach. It’s risky, and the results feel a bit scattered.

There are musical treasures to be savored here, though. “Elements” is an astonishing unaccompanied workout on upright bass, its Eastern-hinting, dissonance-edged theme driven by fleet runs, slaps and harmonics. Bowed bass tops the churning, two-chord groove of the piece “The Awakening.” Fluent fretless takes the lead on the Caribbean-tinged “We Pray,” which features layered bass rifts, and the pulsing “Swing Rock.”

On “Dreams,” inspirational spoken word, courtesy of Moffett’s sister Angela Moffett, is juxtaposed with rambunctious rhythm-section propulsion and RJ Avalone’s wandering trumpet. And the session closes out with the wah-wah bass incantations of “Star Spangled Banner,” a bracing, Hendrix-esque nod to musical freedom.

—Philip Booth

Ordering info: motema.com

ZOHO = Latin / Jazz with a New York vibe.
www.zohomusic.com

The Art Of Improvisation:
We Pray; Moses; The Story; Dreams; Elements Of Life; Call For Peace; The Awakening; Swing Rock; Enlightenment Part I; Enlightenment Part II; The Art Of Improvisation; Star Spangled Banner. (63:02)

Personnel: Charnett Moffett, upright bass, fretless electric bass guitar, piccolo bass; Will Calhoun, Eric McPherson, Charnett Max Moffett, drums; Scott Brown, keyboards; Pat Jones, acoustic guitar; Shane Barnes, electric guitar; RJ Avalone, trumpet; Angela Moffett, spoken word; Yungchen Lhamo, vocals.

GABRIEL ESPINOSA — From Yucatan to Rio
“Brazilian jazz filtered through Mexican sensibilities. Everybody is playing and singing a song for a raining time that just doesn’t quit. High octane throughout ... solid adult jazz that ... is sure to fit into the mix... delightfully winning set that’s hard to resist.” —Midwest Record

MR. GROOVE BAND — Rocket 88: Tribute to Ike Turner
Rocket 88 takes the listener through Turner’s music, in new recordings, featuring Nashville-based Mr. Groove Band with ex-Lets Rosie Busardi and Andrew Turner, Ike’s last wife, previously unissued, bonus track “Prancing” is a stunning, original Ike Turner instrumental from his 2007 GRAMMY winning Risin’ with the Blues sessions!

HENDRIK MEURKENS — Samba To Go!
“New York harmonica & vibes are Hendrik Meurkens, whose birth is the music of actually beautiful Brazil, in its class of his own. Chop and samba rhythms are the primary focus of this engaging 10-track session with Hendrik’s working quintet and guests.” —Mark Holton

BOB ALBANESE TRIO — One Way/Detour
With special guest Ira Sullivan on sax and flute. “Albanese shows a skillful, inventive, warm approach in any tempo. This is an exceptionally listenable recording that will have you wondering where this very talented pianist has been hiding all these years.” —Jazz & Blues Report

BOB MOYER — It Amazes Me...
Hailed by jazz piano legend Hank Jones as “one of the greatest and most underestimated musicians in the history of jazz.” New York saxophonist Bob Moyer in this ZOHO debut. “Slow, smoky ballads, lustrous sax, Penny Baron accompaniment, and impromptu touching vocals.” —Village Voice

BROTHERS OF THE SOUTHLAND — Brothers of the Southland
“Broders of the Southland are nothing less than revitalizing Southern rock by presenting the genre’s greatest musicians of several generations in a collaborative all-star format, including singers Be Bree on American Idol, Jimmy Hall of Wet Willie, Jeff Beck, Hank Williams Jr. Herry Paul, Lyle Lovett, Delbert McClinton, Van Zant (Allman Brothers Band), Jay By Adams (ZZ Top, The Band), and Steve Gurrin (Black Crowes, Jimmy Page).”

{Z} {M} {A}
Sax Aggression

From grainless introspection to acerbic ecstasy, alto saxophonist David Binney covers a lot of tonal ground on Third Occasion (Mythology 0006; 61:50) ★★★★★ and frequently extends the harmonic range with a small brass section. Pivoting on the panoramic “Squares And Palaces”—an exceptionally well-constructed 15-minute composition—the recording features a first-rate rhythm section: Craig Taborn, Scott Colley and Brian Blade. Sounding particularly dark and resonant, Colley plays a muscular role, freeing Blade to dance lithely. Third Occasion has a cinematic quality that accentuates the episodic nature of Binney’s nine originals.

Ordering info: davidbinney.com

There’s more than a hint of the exclamatory single-mindedness of John Coltrane’s Giant Steps to Jimmy Greene’s Mission Statement (RazDaz/Sunnyside 4608; 64:26) ★★★★½. The title makes it plain that Greene aims to lay his saxophone bona fides on the table, and those who haven’t heard the 34-year-old on his way up. He strings together long, pirouetting runs, accented by plangent squeals straight out of Trane’s book. Bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Eric Harland may be better known now as Charles Lloyd’s rhythm mates, but they’ve handled the diverse program—which features a first-rate rhythm section: Craig Taborn, Scott Colley and Brian Blade. Harland may be better known now as Lloyd’s nant layer. With Nasheet Waits playing the 39-year-old trio. He needn’t have worried; it was a decisive sound that Ehrlich matches on alto. After hammering away with an intensity that recalls the punk jazz/no wave era, Ehrlich turns a perfect trifecta by cranking up a retro-sounding metallic tone on the title composition—a corrosive sound that Ehrlich matches on alto. After hammering away with an intensity that recalls the punk jazz/no wave era, Ehrlich adds heat as the pace doubles and Alessi takes the piece out with a typically piquant solo. The following “Ga-Ga-Goosebumps” takes the listener in a completely different direction, shifting between Schuller’s martial-sounding snare intro to a series of staccato movements that drive home an insistent melodic line. Again, Musillami wastes no time making great use of his new bandmates’ strengths—in this case, Ehrlich’s burnish, burnished tone and Alessi’s terrific use of intervals. Not enough variety yet? Musillami turns a perfect tritector by cranking up a retro-sounding metallic tone on the title composition—a corrosive sound that Ehrlich matches on alto. After hammering away with an intensity that recalls the punk jazz/no wave era, Fonda and Schuller steer things into a near-rumba coda.

A blues dedicated to a flagging wisteria plant and a sharply etched anthem for composers who continue to work in pencil slow the pace and showcase Moran’s work-effective doubling of Alessi’s lead on “Wisteria Hysteria Blues” and lovely sprays of notes on “Graphite.”

In his liner notes, Musillami is candid about his concern over adding new voices to his 7-year-old trio. He needn’t have worried; it was a great decision.

—James Hale

Michael Musillami Trio + 3

From Seeds

PLAYSCAPE 020109 ★★★★½

Guitarist Michael Musillami has a tone that’s impossible not to love. Tart, yet round, he uses it on rapidly picked lines that sound like early John McLaughlin and in darting phrases that are accented by his long-time rhythm partners, bassist Joe Fonda and drummer George Schuller. On From Seeds Musillami has expanded his trio by adding saxophonist Marty Ehrlich, vibist Matt Moran and trumpeter Ralph Alessi. That makes for a potent sextet, and the guitarist’s writing provides a rich variety of settings.

Inspired by Thelonious Monk, “Splayed Fingers” zigzags between temps and is highlighted by a gorgeous, cascading line that’s essayed first by Moran and then echoed by Musillami and Fonda. Ehrlich adds heat as the pace doubles and Alessi takes the piece out with a typically piquant solo. The following “Ga-Ga-Goosebumps” takes the listener in a completely different direction, shifting between Schuller’s martial-sounding snare intro to a series of staccato movements that drive home an insistent melodic line. Again, Musillami wastes no time making great use of his new bandmates’ strengths—in this case, Ehrlich’s burnish, burnished tone and Alessi’s terrific use of intervals. Not enough variety yet? Musillami turns a perfect trifecta by cranking up a retro-sounding metallic tone on the title composition—a corrosive sound that Ehrlich matches on alto. After hammering away with an intensity that recalls the punk jazz/no wave era, Fonda and Schuller steer things into a near-rumba coda.
There’s something for everyone in this generous sonic souvenir of the world tour of the one-time-only supergroup assembled by leaders Chick Corea and John McLaughlin. The two-disc live set taken from the band’s European tour offers two hours of stylistically diverse but uniformly superlative music as it segues from full-band fusion fireworks to a delicate duet on a standard to impassioned blowing sessions and even some avant-garde experimentation. Throw in a guest appearance of historic importance and Five Peace Band Live delivers a substantial jazz experience of unusual quantity and quality.

In the more than four decades that have passed since Corea and McLaughlin worked together, they had never combined their talents in a touring group until the Five Peace Band project. They apparently wanted to make up for lost time as they attempt to demonstrate the full depth and diversity of their expertise by not only visiting the past and present of fusion but also delving into samba, bebop and several unusual hues of blues.

With alto saxist Kenny Garrett, a fellow Miles Davis alumnus, the band was intended to be an improv unit, as its temporary nature would imply. It is, however, a tribute to the leaders, but especially to the rhythm section of bassist Christian McBride and drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, that the live music doesn’t sound like just a high-level jam session.

The peripatetic Corea, seemingly involved in a major new project every year, provides more piano than usual, while McLaughlin’s playing retains its precise velocity even as his work has evolved to include silence as well as speed.

Half the songs are more than 20 minutes long, and all of them (with the exception of the glorious duet finale) offer at least a dozen minutes of music. Fusion fans expecting little more than greatest hits from the past will be surprised by the forward-looking nature of the majority of the material, as well as by its diversity. Three contemporary McLaughlin compositions and two by Corea, who also contributes an arrangement of Jackie McLean’s “Dr. Jackle,” wherein McBride delivers a breath-taking bass solo, provide the core of the concert.

Garrett, who distinguishes himself on every song, shines especially bright on McLaughlin’s “New Blues, Old Bruise,” a tune that also serves as a Colaiuta feature. But it is in the rapid-fire, three-way trading on “Señor C.S.” that he leaves no doubt his role in the band is that of an equal.

All the song titles are named after newsgroup personalities. Corea’s “Hymn To Andromeda,” ushered in quietly with just piano and bowed bass, is the set’s most ambitious and extended selection. The excitement of the new dominates the set but it is the sublime satisfaction of the old that is most rewarding. Herbie Hancock joins the band for a fascinating 20-minute revisit to the Davis era as the band navigates “In A Silent Way” and “It’s About That Time” with more creative confidence and seasoned sensibilities than in their youthful days.

The concert closer, a brilliantly nuanced and beautifully performed Corea/McLaughlin duet rendition of “Someday My Prince Will Come,” is a far cry from the frenetic full band opener “Raju” and serves as a fitting and proper denouement for the proceedings.

—Michael Point

Five Peace Band Live: Disc 1—Raju, New Blues, Old Bruise; Hymn To Andromeda (68:01). Disc 2—Dr. Jackle, Señor C.S., In a Silent Way’s About That Time; Someday My Prince Will Come (71:06).

Personnel: Chick Corea, piano and keyboards; John McLaughlin, guitar; Kenny Garrett, saxophone; Christian McBride, acoustic and electric bass; Vinnie Colaiuta, drums; Herbie Hancock, piano (7).

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

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BLUES

by Frank John Hadley

Chicago Stories

Nick Moss & The Flip Tops: Live At Chan’s, Vol. 2 (Blue Bella 1012; 79:10) *** 1/2

Whereas much Chicago blues today seems fit for a mausoleum, guitarist Moss’ take on the music sounds as fresh as the moment when it was recorded onstage in mid-2008. He’s reached his maturity, supplying a tough-minded precision and inventiveness to the utilitarian guitar licks required for his originals and old standbys like “Five Long Years” and “I’m Ready.” As a singer, Moss has improved by leaps and bounds. Guest guitarist Lurrie Bell also knows how to communicate emotions with ease, his 12-bar bona fides established in the 1980s.

Ordering info: bluebellrecords.com

Shirley Johnson: Blues Attack (Delmark 798; 63:45) ***

In a perfect world, Johnson would be headlining blues festivals all over. Formerly employed by Buster Benton, Johnny Christian and Eddie Lusk, on her own since the early ’90s, this Chicagoan exudes a wise self-containment whether singing Maurice John Vaughn’s shuffle “You’re Reckless” or taking a soul direction on the Ray Charles classic “Unchained My Heart.” She brings formidable interpretative honesty to a salty slow blues about cheating she penned with Vaughn, “You Shouldn’t Have Been There.” Trumpeter Kenny Anderson’s horn arrangements increase the appeal of five tunes.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Billy Boy Arnold/John Primer/Billy Branch/Lurrie Bell: Chicago Blues—A Living History (Raisin’ Music 1003; 34:48/40:09) ***

Four midfaders—harp players Arnold and Branch and guitarists Primer and Bell—lead the charge on a 21-song program that traces the music from its up-from-the-Delta urban beginnings in 1940 (the Sonny Boy Williamson I-identified “My Little Machine”) on to the ’90s (Buddy Guy’s “Damn Right, I’ve Got The Blues”). The ensemble performances are generally vibrant and satisfying, though vocals can tax your patience.

Ordering info: raisinmusic.com

And This Is Free—The Life And Times Of Chicago’s Legendary Maxwell Street (Shanachie 6801; 100:00 DVD/58:56 CD) ***

The DVD part of this multi-pack captures all the fascinating hustle and bustle of the West Side street marketplace in the mid-’60s. Foremost in quality is the titular Mike Sheia-directed documentary, filmed on 16 Sundays, with several blues and gospel performers featured. Also impressive: Shuli Eshel’s shorter film, Maxwell Street: A Living Memory—The Jewish Experience in Chicago. The modestly enjoyable CD comes packed with 17 studio-made tracks from guitarist Blind Arvela Gray (minus two left-hand fingers) and other local bluesmen.

Ordering info: shanachie.com

Zora Young: Sunnyland (Airway 4765; 56:57) ***

Long deserving of wider recognition, Young brings a jittery, caffeinated edge to her singing that deepens the tension present in songs she wrote or got from guitarist Hubert Sumlin, saxophonist-Sam Burckhardt or the Sunnyland Slim book. She’s absent on three songs and quick to yield to soloists on a few more—but that’s permitted because this is a democratic tribute to the late great pianist with the aforementioned and other pals of Slim together in the Windy City studio.

Ordering info: airwayrecords.com

Muddy Waters: Live At Chicagofest (Shout! Factory DVD 11304; 55:22) ***

Onstage in 1981, Waters displays the distinguishing features of a blues titan—start with complete control of a rich language of inflections and perfect constructions on the three basic chords. Mojo Buford on harp and the rest of the pick-up band address the emotionalism of “Mannish Boy” and 11 more favorites with fond regard. Rail-thin Johnny Winter joins singers Mighty Joe Young and Larry “Big Twist” Nolan as guests.

Ordering info: shoutfactory.com

Freddie Hubbard

Without A Song: Live In Europe 1969

BLUE NOTE 97093

By the time Freddie Hubbard made this European tour, he’d already scaled the heights of modern jazz. Though he was drifting as a recording artist, Hubbard was well established as a leading trumpeter and a celebrated sideman-turned-bandleader.

Here, he chose to showcase his talents with a lean, talented quartet. Pianist Roland Hanna provides apt counterpart to Hubbard’s brassy, lyrical styling, and driving drummer Louis Hayes is properly anchored by bassist Ron Carter. The first two tunes were representative of what Hubbard was working on at the time, as “Without A Song” and “The Things We Did Last Summer” both appeared on The Hub Of Hubbard in 1970.

Still, the heart of this collection finds Hubbard looking back at his roots and leading the way with chops intact. Averaging 10 minutes in length, these performances allow the players to solo extensively. Hayes stretches out nicely on “A Night In Tunisia” and Hanna takes plenty of spotlight time, but it’s Hubbard who makes the sparks fly on Red Garland’s “Blues By Five,” demanding comparison to Miles Davis.

“Body And Soul” is another highlight, as Hubbard takes the classic and makes it his own—far more than when he first recorded the ballad in 1963. “Space Track” is the title number from another 1970 Hubbard LP, and this arrangement again improves on the studio version. Closing with a vintage piece from his own repertoire, Hubbard puts the band through its paces on an abbreviated version of “Hub-Tones,” which only leaves us wanting more.

—Mitch Myers

Without A Song: Live In Europe 1969: Without A Song, The Things We Did Last Summer, A Night In Tunisia; Blues By Five; Body And Soul; Space Track; Hub-Tones. (89:39)

Personnel: Freddie Hubbard; trumpet; Roland Hanna; piano; Louis Hayes; drums; Ron Carter; drums.
**Martial Solal**

*Live At The Village Vanguard*

CAM 5030

★★★½

If anyone still had any doubts about pianist Martial Solal’s abilities, this dazzling solo set will erase them in no time. When this recording was made he had just turned 80, but his fingers are as nimble as ever and his mind is still impressively sharp. Moreover, he amazes without being bombastic or relying heavily on pyrotechnics.

Among the standards he tackles, “‘Round Midnight” is a favorite of his. His unique reading shows what an inexhaustible well of possibilities this piece offers. With “On Green Dolphin Street,” Solal gives a condensed jazz history lesson as he seamlessly weaves a musical patchwork. Solal is indeed a master at dislocating the material at hand, sometimes making it hardly recognizable, and at shifting tempos abruptly and effortlessly. And don’t forget his trademark humor.

To round out a program of standards, the French pianist includes a couple of originals. “Centre De Gravité” gives him the opportunity to explore the deepest tonalities of his instrument, sounding almost cavernous. The Thelonious Monk-ish “Ramage,” on the other hand, lends itself to the twists and turns Solal uses throughout the program and lands in a most unexpected spot, a nursery rhyme of his own creation. —Alain Drouot

**Live At The Village Vanguard**

Intro 1; On Green Dolphin Street; Lover Man; I Can’t Give You Anything But Love; Centre De Gravité; Ramage; 'Round Midnight; Have You Met Miss Jones; The Last Time I Saw Paris; Intro 2; Corcovado. (49:27)

**Personnel:**

Martial Solal, piano.

**Ordering info:** camjazz.com

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**The Dorf**

*The Dorf*

LEO 523

★★½

A progressive big band can’t exist without some form of underwriting. There’s not enough of an audience to support a large group of players using the format as something more than an exercise in nostalgia.

Saxophonist Jan Klare deserves praise for forming and maintaining the Dorf since November 2006, when it started monthly concerts at a jazz club in Dortmound, Germany. He’s recruited a pool of around 30 musicians, and between 15–25 come together once a month to spend the day rehearsing, developing new pieces by the leader and giving an evening concert.

Unfortunately, based on the group’s debut recording, the once-a-month gatherings have yet to yield compelling repertoire. Beyond the band’s impressive firepower, too many of the pieces draw on the bombast of rock and ‘70s fusion. “Blast” captures the high-speed exhilaration of heavy metal, with the horns adeptly aping chugging guitar riffs, but the effect falls limp when the screaming electric guitar solo kicks in. “Miniatures” finds Klare leading the group through a fast-moving shuffle where the ensemble’s skill with collective improvisation shines, while “Torn” has small groupings of players interacting on a high level. But too much of the album favors a monolithic attack, and when the ‘80s-sounding synthesizers kick in, it’s too much to bear. —Peter Margasak

**The Dorf**

Overture; Blast; Film; Technoid; Miniatures; Torn; Licht. (52:00)

**Personnel:** Jan Clare, composer; the Dorf, orchestra.

**Ordering info:** leorecords.com

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**John Surman**

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Photo: Robert Levin
Allen Toussaint

The Bright Mississippi

Nonesuch 481380

****

In his liner notes to The Bright Mississippi, producer Joe Henry recalls Bright Mississippi, the emotional center of which is Toussaint’s one vocal, on Leonard Feather’s “Long, Long Journey.” But with those rolling left-hand notes and buoyant stair-stepping rights, and the generosity and grandeur of his melting pot vision, Toussaint invokes nothing but joy.

—Lloyd Sachs

The Bright Mississippi

Egyptian Fantasy; Dear Old Southland; St. James Infirmary; Singin’ The Blues; Winnin’ Boy Blues; West End Blues; Blue Drag; Just A Closer Walk With Thee; Bright Mississippi; Day Dream; Long, Long, Journey; Solitude. (61:33)

Personnel: Allen Toussaint, piano, vocals (11); Don Byron, clarinet; Nicholas Payton, Marc Ribot, acoustic guitar; David Pitch, bass; Jay Bellerose, drummer; Marcus Gilmore, jazz; Brad Mehldau, piano (5); Joshua Redman, tenor saxophone (10).

Gary Husband’s Drive

Hotwired

Abstract Logix 015

****

Drummer/keyboardist Gary Husband was once considered a Tony Williams clone on steroids, his muscular fusion rhythms sandblasting records by Allan Holdsworth, John McLaughlin and U.K. funksters Level 42, among others. But in recent years, Husband has expanded his skill set and musical direction. Whether playing synths with McLaughlin and Billy Cobham or releasing solo piano recordings, Husband has shown himself to be a man capable of reinvention.

Hotwired debuts Husband’s visceral straight-ahead quartet Drive with stellar results. Britain’s finest typically do their homework. Here, Husband’s drumming is a study in the greats, with references to Elvin Jones and Williams creating combustible tinder under an equally flamboyant front line. “10/4” dances a winding odd-metered groove, as Julian Siegel’s tenor interweaves with Richard Turner’s blatting trumpet growls. Husband dons mallets for the atmospheric “The Agony Of Ambiguity,” then flows Elvin-like full-set triplets for the hard-bop “Deux Deux’s Blues,” which layers a meaty pulse under Wayne Shorter-esque melodic phrases.

“Take The Coltrane Around” is all speedy bebop, the album’s high-velocity showcase where Husband’s drumming recalls Ralph Peterson Jr. for firepower and unruly aggression. Opener “The Defender” offers another drag-the-river-for-bodies blowout, as the trumpet/tenor front line intimates curt New Orleans-inspired melodies while Husband kicks nasty Latin punches. Bonus track “Take 5” opens with Husband’s light-as-air drum solo before the quartet reinterprets it beyond anything Dave Brubeck would recognize.

—Ken Micaleff

Luciana Souza

Tide

Verve 01646

****

Silky-voiced Souza keeps those lickety-split samba duos (some in breathtaking unison) with guitarist Romero Lubambo as the poison arrow in her quiver while she lobbs wistful pot-shots at gentle folk-pop. She’s co-writing tunes with husband/producer/bassist Larry Klein that recall pristine yearnings of Erin Bode and Joni Mitchell, but she won’t forget the carnival clubbing in Rio. If the subject matter is similarly jet-set—cariocas and angelenos share an arch hipness through endless partying and bottomless bottles—the delivery on the West Coasters is neurotic and non-plussed, more catatonic than laid-back.

Contrasting openers, salty “Adesus America” and smoky “Fire And Wood,” lay a sandy bed for an album that teeters between surefooted melodic charm and smoky “Fire And Wood,” lay a sandy bed

Ordering info: ververecords.com

Tide: Audeus America & Eu Quero Um Samba; Fire And Wood; Our Gilded Home: Love – Poem 60; Circus Life; Once Again; Tide; Sosu Para Mim; Chusa; Amulet. (42:41)

Personnel: Souza, vocals; Romero Lubambo (1, 3, 5, 8, 9); Larry Koonce (2, 4, 6, 7, 10); guitar; Larry Goldings, piano, organ; estey, Fender Rhodes, accordion; Larry Klein, bass; Vinny Colaiuta, drums; Cyro Baptista, percussion (2, 3, 5, 8, 9); Rebecca Piñero, background vocals (2, 5).

Ordering info: abstractlogix.com

Price: The Defender: Heaven In My Hands; 10/4; The Agony Of Ambiguity; Deux Deux’s Blues; Take The Coltrane Around; One Prayer; Angels Over City Square; Take 5. (40:14)

Personnel: Gary Husband, drums, piano, synthesizer; Richard Turner, trumpet, electronics; Julian Siegel, tenor and soprano saxophone; Michael Janisch, bass.
Dave Douglas & Brass Ecstasy

Spirit Moves
GREENLEAF 1010

As director of the Festival of New Trumpet Music over the past several years, Dave Douglas has evidenced a dedication to showcasing the varied potentialities of his instrument. His latest ensemble, Brass Ecstasy, expands that same impulse to the whole brass section, offering Spirit Moves as something of a CV for the modern brass band.

Of course, not every similarly composed unit can display the multitude of sounds and identities offered by Douglas’ all-star quintet. From lurching second-line revels to intricate chamber-jazz complexity, military band precision to smoke-filled nightclub swing, Brass Ecstasy thumbs its collective nose at those who might suggest that a bunch of horns and a drum kit is a somehow “limited” configuration.

The disc opens by transforming singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright’s torch-song lament “This Love Affair” into a gin-soaked stumble home, dripping with bitter remorse even without the benefit of Wainwright’s wry lyrics. It closes with a mournful take on Hank Williams’ “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” howled as if by four cats on a fence under the moonlight. The third of the album’s pop tunes is a wish-fulfillment emulation of the famed Stax Records horn section on Otis Redding’s “Mr. Pitiful.”

The rest of the album is made up of Douglas originals, deploying tightly interwoven horn lines to conjure both jaunty grooves (“Orujo”) and impressionistic storytelling (“The Brass Ring”). Making his advocacy more explicit are three tunes, situated at the record’s center, paying explicit homage to heirs and peers. “Bowie” is a lively example of the parade atmosphere and tongue-in-cheek humor favored by Lester Bowie; “Rava” evokes the ECM airiness of Italian trumpeter Enrico Rava; while on “Fats,” the band dons the convincing disguise of a hard-bop unit in honor of Fats Navaro.

—Shaun Brady

Spirit Moves: This Love Affair; Orujo; The View From Blue Mountain; Twilight Of The Dogs; Bowie; Rava; Fats; The Brass Ring; Mister Pitiful; Great Awakening; I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry. (53:13)

Personnel: Dave Douglas, trumpet; Luis Bonilla, trombone; Vincent Chancey, French horn; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Nasheet Waits, drums.

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com
**Top of the New Pops**

Young upstarts are rocking while one band of old-timers proves it’s still got something to say.

Bell X1: **Blue Lights On The Runway** (YepRoc 2175; 54:48) ****

The second-best band from Ireland, Bell X1 is the dark horse taking the country’s music-of-the-moment baton from the top group (see below). Led by songwriter/vocalist Paul Noonan, the group is everything U2 is not: a pop band with catchy melodies (the spirited “The Great Defector”), a literary sensibility (i.e., the leadoff gem titled “The Ribs Of A Broken Umbrella”) and an updated view of commercial musicality infused with subtle electronica. Bell X1’s music is fresh and smart and teeming with influences ranging from Talking Heads to the Beat poets. Immensely listenable on both music and lyrics levels.

Ordering info: yепроc.com

The Decemberists: **The Hazards Of Love** (Capitol 14710; 58:48) ****

Who says the rock opera is dead? Certainly not the Decemberists’ leader, Colin Meloy. Inspired by the ’60s British folk revival, he’s crafted an ambitious 17-song epic tale of two fantasy lovers. This is rock at its artesy best that takes the concept album in an impressive step further by mixing in a diversity of styles, from folk rock (the leadoff theme “The Hazards Of Love”) and “Won’t Want For Love,” sung by band member Becki Stark) to gripping prog rock and heavy metal (the thumping “The Abduction Of Margaret” and the turbulent “The Queen’s Reubke/The Crossing”). Interspersed throughout are simple, mood-enhancing instrumental interludes and reprises.

Ordering info: capitolrecords.com

Gomez: **A New Tide** (ATO 0070; 43:48) ****

Ten years after scoring the Mercury Prize for its debut, Gomez offers its sixth CD, which bursts with lyrical jewels glowing with shape-shifting experimentation. Gomez is the rare band with three leaders who write and sing superb tunes. On the new CD, the band expands its musical scope, embellishing its songs with unusual textural arrangements that a dynamics-loving jazz band could admire. “Mix” blends acoustic-guitar simplicity with electronic psychedelia, “Win Park Slope” transforms a Delta-blues twang into a cello-viola classical sway, “Natural Reaction” fluctuates tempo and key, and “Sunset” surprises with an avant swirl of clarinets and alto saxophone.

Ordering info: interscope.com

**John Stetch**

TV Trio (Interscope 12630; 53:48) ****

Cultural touchstones for anyone who has spent too much time indoors, television theme music is sonic crack, daring you to shake its hold on your brain. Just a few seconds of a theme can have a Pavlovian effect: signaling the imminent delivery of 30 or 60 minutes of escapist pleasure.

Pianist John Stetch mines those associations, but twists our expectations by channeling familiar themes—dating from Bugs Bunny cartoons to ’70s standbys like “Dallas” and “Love Boat”—through a post-modernist piano trio prism. Although few television themes outside of “Peanuts” have relied on a piano trio, Stetch, bassist Doug Weiss and drummer Rodney Green treat these pieces as they would any standard, despite the bombastic grandeur associated with the “Star Trek” theme or how much lyrics form an integral part of a theme like “The Flintstones.”

Stetch can find beauty in the banal, as he does when he transforms the cheesy theme from the low-budget, animated “The Mighty Hercules” into a gentle ballad that Bill Evans might have written. One of his better reconfigurations is finding a Monkish walz in the structure of “Rocky And Bullwinkle.”

Other interpretations seem to be fueled more by the content of the shows, with the theme from “The Waltons” yielding a bouncy, breezy song that might have you picturing John Boy as a budding hipster. “Dallas” eschews the boosterism of the original for a version that speaks to the melancholy of many of the show’s plot lines and the open spaces of J.R.’s environment. “The Six Million Dollar Man” lends itself to a mysterious introduction and a Latin beat.

In less-skilled hands, the conceit of TV Trio might not carry an entire disc, but Stetch makes these themes into something larger than the old shows themselves.

—James Hale

**TV Trio:** The Waltons; This Is It Bugs Bunny; Star Trek; Dallas; Love Boat; The Six Million Dollar Man; Rocky And Bullwinkle; The Mighty Hercules; The Price Is Right; All My Children; The Flintstones; Sanford And Son, Etc.

Personnel: John Stetch, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Rodney Green, drums.

Ordering info: johnstetch.com
Seamus Blake Quartet
Live In Italy
JAZZ EYES 005

Some live recordings capture that extra push that comes when musicians face a receptive audience. It is a bonus when, as here, such circumstances are also well-engineered by the sound man.

Italy has long been welcoming to visiting U.S. jazz musicians, and they show the love for Blake and his bandmates at these dates in Palermo, Senigallia and Cesenatico. I doubt I’m the first to extrapolate “kick-ass-ki” from pianist David Kikoski, but he certainly warrants the handle here. As superb a tenorist as Blake is (and few will avoid involuntarily nodding, at the least, to the gloriously funky feel of his altered saxophone sound on the party piece “Way Out Willy”), Kikoski solos with a massively energized, flawless articulation of his own, recalling the buoyant joy of Herbie Hancock at times. It’s important to emphasise that the success of this track would be impossible without the bouncy Astroturf laid down by Rodney Green and Danton Boller.

An abrupt mood change segues from “Way Out Willy” and the rugged opener “The Jupiter Line” to the second movement of Debussy’s string quartet, which begins like an Italian country folk song and then leaves impressionistic territory with Kikoski delving into more excavations. Blake’s “Fear Of Roaming” with its searching long tones whiffs of Kenny Garrett’s yearning esthetic, then breaks into swing sections. Like fellow Thelonious Monk Competition honorees Josh Redman and Eric Alexander, Blake has that liquid rhythmic flow and inexhaustible propulsion that sets him apart even when he’s peppering with occasional Breckerisms.

The second CD is a match for the first in its mix of material, including Brazilian singer Djavan’s melody “Ladeirinha,” Kikoski’s lapidary “Spacing,” a holdover from Blake’s old boss John Scofield in “Dance Me Home” and the mainstream fare of “Darn That Dream” and “The Feeling of Jazz,” the latter harking back to Ellington’s meeting with Coltrane. Blake suggests what Ellington may have heard in Monk or vice-versa with a nimble quote from “Trinkle Tinkle” during “The Feeling Of Jazz” and shows that formative influences on his own style may have come from Dexter Gordon (the phrasing in a snatch from “Laura”) and Stan Getz (the poised dynamics at the end of “Dream,” which Blake kicks off with dramatic a cappella). Critics like to mark these little reference points to prove we are listening, but from the applause at the end of “The Feeling of Jazz,” the Italians are glad to be there while the real thing is happening.

—Michael Jackson

Live In Italy:
Disc 1—The Jupiter Line; Way Out Willy; String Quartet In G Minor; Fear of Roaming (52:56)
Disc 2—The Feeling of Jazz;Spacing; Ladeirinha; Darn That Dream; Dance Me Home (53:34).

Personnel: Seamus Blake, tenor saxophone; David Kikoski, piano; Rodney Green, drums; Danton Boller, bass.

Ordering info: musiceyes.com
Jorma Kaukonen
River Of Time
RED HOUSE 217

Guitarist Jorma Kaukonen soared into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on his electrifying work with Jefferson Airplane, but his background and future belong to acoustic folk blues. Much of his post-psychedelic phase has flown under the radar as he’s run an innovative guitar camp in southeastern Ohio, only occasionally releasing finely crafted recordings.

River Of Time was recorded at Levon Helm’s studio in Woodstock, N.Y., and is in some ways a less ragged and raucoous folk blues companion volume to drummer Helm’s Dirt Farmer masterpiece. As such, it’s a satisfying showcase of casual instrumental virtuosity featuring an abundance of finger-picking finesse in the service of songs addressing the human experience with warm and relaxed ambiance. His precise but inspired playing is nothing less than masterful, and his deft guitar lines are artfully enhanced and embellished by mandolinist Barry Mitterhoff and multi-instrumentalist Larry Campbell. A couple of instrumental tracks, including a trio hollabaloo to his daughter, serve to further spotlight the excellent ensemble interaction.

Kaukonen’s vocals are straightforward and effective, never attempting more than they can achieve and communicating the essence of the song without distraction or adornment. They’re a perfect accomplishment to the succinct songs and the enlightened instrumental expertise that powers them.

—Michael Point

River Of Time: Been So Long; There’s A Bright Side Somewhere; Cracks In The Finish; Another Man Done A Full Go Round; Trouble In Mind; Izzy’s Lullaby; More Than My Old Guitar; Nashville Blues; A Walk With Friends; Operator; Preachin’ On The Old Camp Ground; River Of Time; Simpler Than I Thought; (Ain’t) No News; The Man; Pumpin’; Cross Your Heart; The Past Sure Is Tense; Bluebird ’N’ Smoke; China Pig. (52:32)

Personnel: Jorma Kaukonen, guitar; Lincoln Schleifer, bass; baritone guitar; percussion; Davy Knowles, mandolin; cittern; baritone guitar; percussion; duke; pedal steel; Barry Mitterhoff; mandolin; banjo; Teresa Williams; vocals (7, 8, 9); Myron Hart, bass (8); vocals (11); Levon Helm, drums (3, 5, 7); Justin Guip, drums (8, 10).

Ordering info: redhousetobesounds.com

As Mr. Kaukonen also glow smoke up their ass in aimless improvisations and meandering solos (“You Know You’re A Man”): “Well” is a lovely respite, Lucas issuing arcing, surreal guitar delays over alto and baritone swells as drummer Richard Dworkin rumbles mallets below.

The four-piece horn section adds a fresh dimension to Bechet’s material, as does Robyn Hitchcock’s clever impersonation on “China Pig.” Extra kudos to Lucas for a stunning solo version of “Sure ‘Nuff ’N’ Yes I Do,” which lends the album breadth. Ultimately, Fast ‘N’ Bulbous fails to find that Captain Bechet magic, but in revisiting his aroma they create something worth pursuing—next time.

—Ken Micallef

Waxed Oop: Sure ’Nuff ’N’ Yes I Do; Trust Us; Smithsonian Institute Blues; Dropout Boogie; You Know You’re A Man; Walt; Ice Rose; Click Clicky Cream For Crows; Who Is Uriah Heep; The Bipl; The Past Sure Is Tense; Bluebird ’N’ Smoke; China Pig. (62:50)

Personnel: Gary Lucas, guitar; Jesse Krakow, bass; Richard Dworkin, drums; Rob Henke, trumpet; Philip Johnston, alto saxophone; Joe Frieder, trombone; Dave Seiweloson, baritone saxophone.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

There is no doubt that on Revolutions, veteran keyboardist Jim Beard has surrounded himself with a well-rounded ensemble of talented players.

Beard may be best known for his work accompanying the late Michael Brecker, but Beard and conductor Vince Mendoza are equally simpatico associates whose careers have intersected for two decades. Choosing some tunes from Beard’s early albums as well as collaborating on new works, Beard and Mendoza came up with this decorative music project in 2005 for a Dutch radio broadcast, and then recorded again at a larger session in 2007. Beard’s compositions are well realized by Mendoza’s ambitious arrangements, and the flexible Metropole Orchestra from the Netherlands does a fine job giving Beard and Mendoza what they want.

Some noteworthy soloists make impressive contributions, including saxophonist Bob Malach, trumpeter Rudd Breus, guitarist Jon Herington and saxophonist Bill Evans. Beard’s orchestral music is sometimes too busy and not always swinging, but taken in a larger context his compositions accurately express his musical intents, interests and talents. Mixing old-fashioned film music esthetics with ambitious big band jazz, Beard’s music is most successful on the kinder, gentler arrangements. “In All Her Finery” is almost ornate in its orchestral delicacy, while “Crosstown Bridge” has a subtle, knowing ambiance in the style of Gil Evans’ work with Miles Davis on Sketches Of Spain. Occasionally bland but always well constructed, Revolutions is thoroughly modern music for a very large ensemble—the rest is a matter of taste.

—Mitch Myers

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Jorma Kaukonen
River Of Time
JORMA KAUOKEN
B l i v e r o f T I M E

When is a tribute band not a tribute band? Guitarist Gary Lucas and Microscopic Sextet alto saxophonist Phillip Johnston adapt the music of Captain Bechet (with original material) for their second outing as Fast ‘N’ Bulbous. The octet’s Waxed Oop recalls both Bechet’s torrid tales and a loose-knit open mic night. Though Lucas is a former Magic Band member, his take on the old cut out madgeone’s bdhegoning sounds doesn’t stick to formula. In fact, if no one told you Fast ‘N’ Bulbous was performing Bechet repertoire, you might never guess.

Sure, Fast ‘N’ Bulbous emit the bluesy scronch (“Dropout Boogie”) and animalistic rhythms (“Smithsonian Institute Blues”) of such Bechet classics as Trout Mask Replica or Safe As Milk, but they also blow smoke up their ass in aimless improvisations and meandering solos (“You Know You’re A Man”). “Well” is a lovely respite, Lucas issuing arcing, surreal guitar delays over alto and baritone swells as drummer Richard Dworkin rumbles mallets below.

The four-piece horn section adds a fresh dimension to Bechet’s material, as does Robyn Hitchcock’s clever impersonation on “China Pig.” Extra kudos to Lucas for a stunning solo version of “Sure ‘Nuff ’N’ Yes I Do,” which lends the album breadth. Ultimately, Fast ‘N’ Bulbous fails to find that Captain Bechet magic, but in revisiting his aroma they create something worth pursuing—next time.

—Ken Micallef

Waxed Oop: Sure ’Nuff ’N’ Yes I Do; Trust Us; Smithsonian Institute Blues; Dropout Boogie; You Know You’re A Man; Walt; Ice Rose; Click Clicky Cream For Crows; Who Is Uriah Heep; The Bipl; The Past Sure Is Tense; Bluebird ’N’ Smoke; China Pig. (62:50)

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Jim Beard with
Vince Mendoza & The Metropole Orchestra
Revolutions
SUNNYSIDE 1227

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—Mitch Myers

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com
**HISTORICAL**

**It Was A Very Good Year**

With Kind Of Blue, Time Out and Mingus Ah Um, Columbia Records ended the 1950s on a roll. While Kind Of Blue remains the record of note, parent company Sony/Legacy has come up with a remix and expanded version of another Miles Davis classic from the same year, Sketches Of Spain.

As for Mingus Ah Um, it’s coupled with another Charles Mingus album recorded in ’59 but also released in 1960, Mingus Dynasty. The Dave Brubeck Time Out release also fudges on ’59 by adding live Newport material from later years, including versions of Time Out’s “Take Five” and “Blue Rondo À La Turk.” A half-hour DVD of Brubeck recently reminiscing on the making of Time Out with archival clips of the group is also available.

According to Brubeck, before Time Out was issued Columbia Records had “never put a painting on the cover of a jazz album.” In the end, both Time Out (Legacy 739852; 38:39/54:19) **** and Mingus Ah Um (Legacy 748010; 76:28/14:28) ***** sported abstract modern art covers. Meanwhile, “Take Five” with “Blue Rondo À La Turk” became the first million-selling jazz instrumental single on the Billboard Hot 100, as the album went on to become the first jazz album to sell a million copies. While much has been said about the album’s odd time signatures, it’s listenability that’s kept Time Out off duty since its first release.

As a result, the performances are less exciting, with songs that were mostly interesting if not compelling. Still, Mingus Dynasty remains an important document of a creative artist at one of his peaks.

The most ambitious work in this batch comes with Davis’ Sketches Of Spain (Legacy 743949; 45:36/70:10) ********, his first post-Kind Of Blue recording and the third with arranger/composer Gil Evans. The story here is all those alternate endings and takes. Yes, there is a reason for including them, along with relevant, already released versions of “Maid Of Cadiz” (from the first Evans collaboration Miles Ahead) and “Teo” (from Someday My Prince Will Come). The only live version of the Adagio from Joaquin Rodrigo’s “Concierto de Aranjuez” and two takes of “Song Of Our Country” (from the Sketches sessions) are also here. Essentially, this edition is a study of a crucial period in Davis’ development. With Sketches Of Spain, Davis’ music continued its modal moves away from bebop’s busy density, opting to highlight his strengths, which emphasized feeling and lyric expression over technique. Evans’ compositions—especially “The Pan Piper,” “Saeta” and “Solea”—furthered these groundbreaking changes, so obvious with this passionate treatment of Rodrigo’s masterpiece.

By John Ephland

David “Fathead” Newman

The Blessing

Holds

The Blessing, which David “Fathead” Newman recorded just weeks before he passed away in January of this year, is a swinging, touching and soulful set. My focus rarely wavers from Newman throughout, as he injects as much personality, style and character into each melody as any great singer would, especially on “Someone To Watch Over Me,” “As Time Goes By” and Charlie Chaplin’s “Smile.” He rarely takes multiple solo chorus-es, but when he does he makes them count. On Milt Jackson’s blues “SKJ,” Newman says more in 24 bars than some less mature, chops-obsessed players say in a whole album. His highly inflected, vocalesque subtonic enunciates perfectly formed phrases that allow him to converse with himself. This solo is a clinic in subtlety, nuance and the communicative power of brevity.

Five rhythm players give the ensemble several timbral choices to consider. Pianist David Leonhardt’s “Romantic Night” and “Whispers of Contentment” make full use of these options, as Newman, guitarist Peter Bernstein and vibraphonist Steve Nelson divvy up the front line on both tracks, creating a dynamic and colorful soundscape. Using three chordal instruments can run the risk of cluttering the sound, but Bernstein, using three chordal instruments can run the risk of cluttering the sound, but Bernstein, Newman recorded just weeks before he passed away in January of this year, is a swinging, touching and soulful set. My focus rarely wavers from Newman throughout, as he injects as much personality, style and character into each melody as any great singer would, especially on “Someone To Watch Over Me,” “As Time Goes By” and Charlie Chaplin’s “Smile.” He rarely takes multiple solo chorus-es, but when he does he makes them count. On Milt Jackson’s blues “SKJ,” Newman says more in 24 bars than some less mature, chops-obsessed players say in a whole album. His highly inflected, vocalesque subtonic enunciates perfectly formed phrases that allow him to converse with himself. This solo is a clinic in subtlety, nuance and the communicative power of brevity.

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Ableton Live 8 Suite: Seriously ‘Warped’ DAW Platform

Ableton Live burst onto the scene in 2001 and changed the way a lot of people think about what a DAW can and should do. What’s more, the company has relentlessly delivered major updates every year in an industry marked by increasingly long development cycles and plagued by delayed releases—and this year is no exception. Once considered an upstart DJ tool with some recording capabilities, Ableton has transformed into a fully featured and mature DAW platform that continues to find ways to make major improvements without sacrificing stability.

The Ableton Suite includes the Live 8 program, as well as a core library of presets, loops and samples. You also get all of Ableton’s software instruments, a comprehensive set of orchestral samples, the new Latin Percussion library, version 2 of the Essential Instruments Collection, a huge two-DVD set of their Session Drums and a sizable set of third party content. All in all, this will take up almost 50 gigs of space when installed, but you have the option to only install certain components if you want to save space, or you could set up the library on an external drive if you use a laptop with limited space available.

The Live 8 program gets a revamped Warp engine. Warping has always been the signature feature of this program; it is the method that Live uses to detect and manipulate the tempo of sound clips. Live has always excelled at this, and the new version has a redesigned Warping Engine, as well as a new interface. Seasoned Live users may find it a little disorienting at first, as now clips are dragged to fit a static timeline, which is the opposite of the way Live has previously worked. It is more intuitive, though, and makes more sense—especially for new users. Live also automatically assigns Warp makers to transients, so it’s simple to move around individual elements within a clip. A new Complex Pro mode gives you even more control of intricate polyphonic material.

Also new to the program is the Groove Pool, a sophisticated set of tools for applying grooves to MIDI and audio clips on your projects. Grooves are templates that contain tempo and feel information. The coolest thing about this is it is a real-time process, so you can drag different grooves onto your track and audition them before committing them to the clip. You can also extract groove information from any audio clip by just dragging it into the pool, which you can then re-use in any other project you wish. I found this to be pretty amazing with audio clips when it worked, but a little inconsistent. It was, of course, spot-on with MIDI. Add to this the new audio quantization features and you have a robust set of tools to create exactly the feels you want.

There have also been some significant improvements in the interface, including Group Tracks. Using this feature it is simple to create submixes and apply effects to subsets of your tracks. You can also collapse them with a press of a button to preserve screen real estate—a nice touch. You can now preview audio and MIDI clips in the file browser, and you can zoom the interface up to 200 percent to make things clearer in crowded projects. Multiple tracks can be selected and adjusted at once—nice if you want to bring down the volume on five or six tracks at once. These, in addition to many more adjustments, continue to improve the workflow.

New to the suite is Collision, an acoustic modeling synth designed to model mallet and bell instruments. This may sound kind of boring, but when you dive in, you’ll find that you can create some interesting timbres. Not only that, but it’s easy to use for a modeling synth, and that will help you with some of Live’s other offerings. Also added is the new Latin Percussion library, an incredibly comprehensive collection of loops and samples that sound great. There has also been a major upgrade to Ableton’s premier synth, Operator. The new version allows you to draw in your own waveforms, which makes for some truly outrageous sound design possibilities. I’ve only scratched the surface of the new release, but I can already tell that I’m going to spend a lot of time with this one.

I’ve been a Live user since version 1.5, and I can tell you this is a solid upgrade. If you are already a Live user, it is well worth the price. If you have not given Ableton a try yet, it’s an eye-opening experience. It is unlike any workflow you’re used to, and can be very inspiring based on that alone. I have also found that people new to computer recording find it easy to use, as they have no preconceived notions about how a DAW should look. Ableton is also a customer-oriented company with a strong user community. You can download a full featured time-limited version (for free) that will give you all functions for 14 days, or you can download a demo version that does not save but will not expire. A host of other new features include a looper, online collaboration and coming MAX support, so check out the latest version for yourself.

—Chris Neville
**Taylor T3 Semi-Hollowbody Guitar: Innovation That Inspires**

The T3 semi-hollowbody electric is the newest addition to the Taylor line of guitars. Combining innovation, versatility and playability, this axe is definitely worth a closer look.

Starting in 1974, Taylor built its reputation producing fine acoustic guitars. In fact, it was the first company to use a bolt-on neck design on steel string acoustic. With the company’s success in the acoustic market, co-owner Bob Taylor had no intentions of building an electric until he heard a new pickup invented by his design department. “I knew right then, we’re in the electric guitar business,” Taylor said. In 2007 the SolidBody model was introduced but was preceded by the electric/acoustic hybrid T5 in 2005.

The T3 was the next logical step for Taylor, according to Marketing VP Brian Swerdfeger. “At Taylor, we are not bound by tradition,” he said. “We are always innovating and improving on design, and the T3 is a testimony to this.” The T3 uses many of the same design elements found in the full hollowbody T5 but has a wood center block inside the chamber. Like the T5, the back and sides are constructed from a single carved-out piece of sapele wood with a beautiful book-matched quilted maple laminate top trimmed with a tasty white binding. Featuring chrome-plated hardware and a flawless high-gloss finish, this is an extremely attractive guitar.

The 21-fret neck of the T3 is also made from sapele wood and has a comfortable medium profile and nice hefty frets. One of the guitar’s unique features is Taylor’s patented T-Lock system, which uses a single bolt to attach the neck to a milled pocket in the body with exacting precision. This results in greater stability and a precise neck angle, not to mention a dream come true for your repairman.

There are two humbucker pickups mounted into the guitar’s top along with a six-way adjustable roller bridge and stop tailpiece. The T3 is also available as the T3/B with an optional Bigsby vibrato tailpiece installed, a first for the company. A three-way switch toggles between neck, bridge or combined pickup settings, and a master volume and tone knob complete the picture. At first glance, the T3’s electronics appear to be fairly standard, but there is much more here than meets the eye.

Taylor’s Style 2 HD (high-definition) pickups are custom made in house. “They are built to deliver the sweet tones of vintage humbuckers with the high output and versatility of modern design,” Swerdfeger said. There is no doubt that the HD pickups do deliver the goods, providing tons of gain while retaining warmth and smoothness. Working with the three-way toggle and control knobs, the T3 is capable of a wide array of great sounds, but the fun really begins when you access the guitar’s innovative electronic wiring.

Both the volume and control knobs have a pull switch built into them that greatly expands the T3’s versatility. A simple pull on the volume knob activates a coil splitter, delivering single coil capabilities to both pickups along with a host of additional tones. The tone knob pull switch is even more interesting: It places a second capacitor into the tone stack, resulting in completely new palette of lush warm tones.

This guitar plays extremely well, and the intonation is excellent. Its tonal capabilities are incredible and suitable for jazz, blues, rock, fusion or country. The pull knobs are definitely one of the T3’s strengths—I found myself using them frequently on the gig. As Taylor’s Swerdfeger said, “The T3 does not push you in any one direction, but you can go there if you need to.”

Taylor’s T3 exhibits the true versatility that many claim but few actually deliver. With a street price of around $2,400 for the stop tail model, it is an excellent value.

—Keith Baumann

**Toca Freestyle Djembe: Full-Bodied Satisfaction**

Toca Percussion has retooled its award-winning Freestyle djembe—a chaliced-shaped, single-headed hand drum with roots in the West African countries of Guinea and Mali.

Instead of employing the traditional method of carving the instrument from the trunk of a tree, Toca uses a patented shell made from synthetic PVC material for these djembes. This makes the Freestyle djembe among the lightest and most durable models on the market. The PVC shell produces a bright resonance that allows for easy tone production and makes the drum an excellent choice for school programs and drum circles.

Toca puts hand-selected goat skin heads on the Freestyle djembe, providing an important organic element often lacking in all-synthetic models. The skins on the four djembes I played all had excellent quality heads with even thicknesses and no blemishes.

The new Freestyle djembes feature a low mass bolt tuning system, unlike traditional djembes that use a somewhat complex rope tuning system. The Freestyle djembes are easily tuned with a small wrench that comes with the drums. The tuning mechanism provides for quick, practically effortless tuning of a wide range of tensions. The bolts on the Freestyle djembes have protective rubber sleeves on them, which protect the player’s legs and enhance the look of the drum. A non-slip protective rubber collar is located on the bottom of the instruments.

The new Freestyle djembes are available in two new hand-painted finishes—antique gold and antique silver—to give them a distinctive, North African look. They come with a choice of four different head sizes: 9-inch, 10-inch, 12-inch and 14-inch. The heights of the drums are relative to the head sizes, making the 12-inch and 14-inch versions more of a traditional djembe size and the smaller drums much like a North African dumbek. All sizes produce full-bodied sounds with sharp high-end slaps and satisfying bass tones.

—Doug Brush
1» **Aguilar’s Bass-Booster**
Aguilar Amplification has released the DB 751 bass amplifier, featuring a hybrid preamp that combines the tube-driven tone of the DB 750 with active boost and cut for great EQ control. The DB 751 also features Jensen XLR balanced output, quality whisper fans with speed control and detachable rack ears.
More info: aguilaramp.com

2» **A-T Realism in Stereo**
The AT8022 X/Y stereo mic has a coincident capsule configuration that provides smaller housing and produces a stereo image with spatial impact and realism. It also features a compact, lightweight design for camera-mount use. The AT8022 has an 80 Hz high pass filter for easy switching from a flat frequency response to a low-end roll off. It comes equipped with a professional stand clamp, windscreen and protective pouch.
More info: audio-technica.com

3» **Ellington Gets Real**
Hal Leonard now offers a collection of Duke Ellington’s best songs in *The Duke Ellington Real Book*. The melody/lyrics/chords book is presented in classic jazz-font notation and includes more than 100 tunes, including “Caravan,” “Come Sunday” and “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore.” Also new from the publisher is a CD-ROM version of the complete *Real Book* as well as a Play-Along Edition with accompaniment CDs for practice.
More info: hal Leonard.com

4» **Line 6 Extends a Hand**
Line 6 has released the X2 XDR955 handheld microphone system, the latest addition to its XDR95 series of digital wireless systems. With a rack-mountable receiver, the system also includes a cardioid microphone with a transmitter at its base and a frequency response of 10 Hz-20kHz for sound clarity at up to 300 feet. The wireless system also incorporates multiple layers of protection that shield its signal from static, interference and dropouts.
More info: line6.com

5» **Ludwig Applies the Gloss**
Ludwig had announced the new Element Lacquer Series drums. The drums feature 6-ply shells boasting inner and outer plies of marbled birch and a poplar core. Element Series Drums are reinforced with 2.5mm power snare hoops and are available in four configurations and four high-gloss lacquer finishes accented by the new Classic Keystone lug.
More info: ludwig-drums.com

6» **Affordable Martins**
With the economy in mind, C.F. Martin & Co. has announced the return of the 1 Series acoustic guitars, first introduced in 1993. The 1 Series is an affordable traditional solid wood guitar in the spirit of the Style 15 and Style 17 models, which Martin introduced during the Great Depression. Created from solid tonewoods, all four models feature Martin’s modified hybrid scalloped top bracing.
More info: martinguitar.com
Turn your world into a world-class recording studio.

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The H4n is our most sophisticated recorder. And with its simplified user interface, it’s never been easier to make incredible recordings.

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Record high-resolution audio at 24-bit/96kHz on SDHC media of up to 32GB. Time stamp and track marker functions give you greater control. You can even edit your recordings on the fly.

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Everything you need is included: a 1 GB SD card, windscreen, mic clip adapter, AC adapter, USB cable, protective case and Cubase LE recording software.

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World-class recordings for everyone.

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The first time I saw film footage of Wes Montgomery was when I got my hands on a well-worn videotape of his performance on the British television show “Jazz 625.” By looking closely at some of the simpler aspects of his approach, I began to internalize the feel, the phrasing, the narrative—all the things that are impossible to notate. It brought more to my own music.

One way that Montgomery would build interest was by switching from single-note lines to octaves to chord solos. But a more subtle way that he would keep the listener engaged, particularly on static harmony, was by changing up his harmonic and rhythmic approaches as the solo progressed. In fact, three of his original tunes on “Jazz 625” include long stretches of just one or two chords that lend themselves well to this sort of investigation.

First, let’s look at the harmonic side of things, starting with “Twisted Blues,” a 32-bar tune with the form divided ABAC. The A sections consist of eight bars of alternating G♭7 and G7 chords. Since G♭7 is the IV chord in a D♭ blues, Montgomery uses some of the same harmonic devices in the first A section that he would use on bars 5 and 6 of a 12-bar blues. In example 1, he uses the D♭ blues scale—with a slickly added 6th.

But when Montgomery returns to the same chord progression in the second A, he no longer treats the G7 as a passing chord. Instead, he now chooses to outline the G7 chord using Dmin9 and Dmin/maj9 arpeggios to express G13 and G13#11 (ex. 2), engaging the listener with a fresh sound.

In addition to mixing approaches from section to section, he would often change it up within a line. As the long and dramatic opening line to his solo on “Full House” moves from Fmin7 to B♭7 and back, he subtly incorporates a G minor idea (fifth measure of ex. 3), bringing in the 9th, 11th and 13th of F minor and giving even more motion to an exciting melodic statement.

When it came to rhythmic variation, Montgomery shined, playing over the barline and shifting phrases by one or two beats, creating polyrhythms by accenting small groupings and by contrasting rhythmically aggressive phrases of upbeats with phrases emphasizing the downbeat—all while maintaining a terrific swing feel and perfect time.

Looking again at the opening of his “Full House” solo, Montgomery creates an ear catching angular phrase by anticipating D♭7 by one-and-a-half beats (latter part of ex. 3). In the next A section, he continues to create rhythmic interest by accenting every two beats (with a slide and alternate fingering) and then going early to D♭7, this time by a beat (ex. 4).

The uptempo “Jingles” gives several examples of his interesting polyrhythms. Halfway into his first chorus of octaves, he plays two extended phrases accenting the dotted quarter note. To further heighten the effect, he begins the second of these phrases on beat 4 (ex. 5).

As he did on “Full House,” Montgomery then follows a rhythmically aggressive passage with a long line of quarter notes (ex. 6). This release heightens the overall sense of swing and drives the solo. His choice to play quarter notes also sets up his return to more over-the-bar-line and polyrhythmic playing in the following section.

Just as we study how Montgomery would shift gears rhythmically and harmonically, it’s also important to notice the timing of when he would do so. These choices result in a warm and swinging esthetic, always grabbing the listener’s ears while staying true to the composition.
Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5

Example 6
Anat Cohen’s Virtuosic Clarinet Solo on ‘Cry Me A River’

Anat Cohen delivers a spectacular clarinet solo on the standard “Cry Me A River,” from her 2007 album *Noir* (Anzic Records). Cohen not only showcases her technical virtuosity on the instrument, but also her musicality.

One aspect she demonstrates is her expansive range. Not only does her solo span over three octaves, from the low E♭ in Bar 10 to the very high G that appears in measures 20 and 24, but often Cohen plays runs that traverse an octave or more (measures 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27). Especially noteworthy are the flourishes in measures 20 and 21, where she runs a scale first from F# to a higher G in the space of one beat, and then in the next measure runs the scale down from G to a low F#.

Notice also how Cohen uses her range, not flaunting it all at once but reserving it for musical effect. For the first 15 bars her lines keep bouncing off high A♭, A, B♭ and C. It isn’t until measure 17 that a high D finally shows up, and then this (and the E♭ in the same measure) becomes the high point until the highest G finally enters in measure 20, a little over halfway through her solo. She returns to this high pitch at the start of the last A section, and holds it for a full measure. The earlier run was just hinting at this climax.

Cohen shows a tendency to resolve her lines to chord tones on strong beats. She lands on roots in measures 2, 5, 15, 19, 20 and 27, thirds in measures 7 and 10, and fifths in measures 11, 18 and 24. After all this emphasis on chord tones, Cohen wraps up her entire solo by resolving to a ninth, which she has not done anywhere else in the solo. Also worth observing is that although most of these resolutions occur on downbeats, she sometimes comes to rest on the third (measures 2, 19, and 27) and fourth (5) beats.

Cohen also builds her solo with scalar choices. The first nine measures are almost exclusively the C blues scale, with an emphasis on the flatted fifth. The next six measures are more modal, within C Aeolian but with some chromaticism based on the chord changes. There is the E natural and A natural, which are the thirds against the C7 and F7 in measures 12 and 13, and the flat and sharp ninths on the B♭7 chord in measure 10. Significantly, there are also flat sixths on the B♭7s in bars 10 and 14, which is the same pitch as the flat fifth she had used so much in the earlier section.

In the second half of measure 15, Cohen plays a G melodic minor run leading into the bridge. Here the song shifts to the key of G minor, and with the E natural as the fifth of Am7 and the F# as the third of D7, G melodic minor fits the chords of this section particularly well. Cohen plays this scale almost exclusively (adding E♭s in a few places as the flat ninth on the D chord, creating the harmonic minor scale) up until measure 22, where she starts playing an ascending chromatic run that spans two octaves over two measures, slowly and inevitably climbing up to the climax in measure 24.

For the last eight, Cohen recaps the elements she’s already set up, but not in such a sectional manner. There are measures of blues scale (25, 26, 30), C Aeolian (27, 29) and chromatic runs (28, 31). A very intriguing lick can be found in measure 26, where Cohen implies a counterpoint by creating a chromatic lower line that goes from C to B to B♭, with upper blues scale licks inserted between those notes.

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist in the New York area. He can be reached at jimidurso.com.
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New York’s Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra Opens Door to Eager Student Players

It’s Sunday brunch time at New York City’s Jazz Standard, and The Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra is already onstage and ready to test its mettle. As the room is packed with family and friends, musicians between the ages of 11 and 18 burn through such time-honored standards as “Cherokee,” “How Insensitive” and “Billie’s Bounce.”

“There are people who are worried about the future of jazz, but I’m not,” said the band’s artistic director, David O’Rourke. “I’m seeing 11-year-olds who want to play.” O’Rourke runs this weekly session during the school year for 25 students, where he rehearses them for a few hours before the band performs at 2 p.m. Guitarist O’Rourke generally doesn’t play with the band, figuring its better for the kids to be up there on the bandstand alone.

“He’s the type to show you how to swim and then throw you in the Atlantic to show you how to really swim,” said 16-year-old pianist Davis Whitfield, a five-year veteran of the program. “Dave never holds back and is always real in what he says and does.”

O’Rourke, who originally hails from the small town of Malahide just north of Dublin, Ireland, moved to the United States in 1989 and started teaching to pay the bills. Seven years ago while holding down a regular gig in the house band at Blue Smoke (the upstairs sister restaurant to Jazz Standard), he was approached to lead the Youth Orchestra by club owner James Polsky.

“Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra is cohesive with our club’s core, which is dedicated to fostering enthusiasm and appreciation for jazz,” said Seth Abramson, artistic director of Jazz Standard, which also hosts a Jazz Discovery program where local public schools can bring their students to an interactive performance free of charge during the weekdays of the school year. “The program introduces music to children at an early age, which ultimately creates a more well-rounded, cultured community.”

The open-door policy for students of varying skill levels and ages can make the orchestra especially fun to watch when it’s on—at a recent show the kids did a funky version of “Straight No Chaser” that had elements of New Orleans second line in it as the horn section nodded heads in unison.

Many of these students already attend performing arts schools and go on to conservatories as well as state schools with strong music programs. O’Rourke doesn’t have any empirical data about where they end up, but he has seen many of the estimated 130 young musicians who have passed through the program stick with music for college and post-graduate studies.

O’Rourke has done his best to prepare them for life after the Jazz Standard gigs, worrying that the full houses and nurturing atmosphere will give students a somewhat distorted picture of life as a working musician.

“Some of them haven’t thought it out,” O’Rourke said. “I’ll give them a scenario: You just got a call for a gig. It’s a wedding and the pay is $600, and rent is due. Do you take the gig or do you call your parents and ask them to subsidize your rent while you go out and sit in at jam sessions? Some of them understand and say: ‘You take the gig.’”

—Tad Hendrickson

Elmhurst College Honors Bill Holman with Honorary Doctorate

On Sunday, May 31, 650 new graduates of Elmhurst College rose and sang the alma mater during their college’s Commencement ceremony. Among the graduates was jazz arranger Bill Holman, an honorary degree recipient. As the crowd sang along, Holman leaned over to Director of Jazz Studies Doug Beach and whispered, “This is in E-flat. It should be in C.”

This acute musical ear is precisely how Holman earned his Doctor of Music degree from the liberal arts college in Elmhurst, Ill. Holman’s relationship with Beach started when they met back in college. Their correspondence through the years led to the strong relationship between Holman and Elmhurst College, which has been building for more than 20 years. Holman has now composed four commissions for the college’s jazz band as well as performed with his own band at the college’s annual jazz festival on multiple occasions.

“He’s always been one of my heros,” Beach said. “As an arranger myself, he is a role model. He has done so much for the college, I thought it would be nice if I could nominate him for an honorary degree.”

More than a year ago Beach started the honorary doctorate nomination process, which includes presenting each candidate’s work to the college’s deans, president and board of trustees.

As a widely admired jazz arranger, Holman has worked with many of his influences, including Charlie Barnet, Stan Kenton, Count Basie, Maynard Ferguson, Gerry Mulligan, Peggy Lee and Natalie Cole. In 1975, he started the Bill Holman Band, which has released three albums, one of which won a Grammy for Best Instrumental Composition. Still, he adds that his recent honor is particularly gratifying.

“It was humbling and rewarding to receive the degree,” Holman said.

—Katie Kailus
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“I got everything wrong,” trumpeter Hugh Masekela said, recalling his first Blindfold Test, in 1967, with Leonard Feather. He earned a better grade on round two, held 42 years later, on a New York press day to publicize a tour in support of Chola (Times Square), the latest refinement of his fusion of American jazz with South African township dance music.

Max Roach–Booker Little

“Tears For Johannesburg” (from We Insist: Freedom Now Suite, Candid, 1960) Roach, drums; Booker Little, trumpet; Julian Priester, trombone; Walter Benton, tenor saxophone; Abbey Lincoln, voice; James Scherik, bass.

I loved that. I don’t know who it is, but it reminds me a lot of the things that Max Roach was doing in the ‘60s, when he was into African activism, and got guys like Chief Bey to come and play. It could have been Charles Tolliver, or Booker Little, or Cecil Bridgewater. But I’m not good at guessing. 5 stars.

Dudu Pukwana

“Diamond Express” (from Diamond Express, Arista, 1975) Pukwana, alto saxophone; Mongezi Feza, trumpet; Frank Roberts, keyboards; Lucky Ranko, guitar; Ernest Othole, electric bass; Louis Moholo, drums.

I don’t know when it would have been, but that’s Dudu Pukwana on saxophone, when those guys were in London with Chris McGregor as the Blue Notes or later as the Brotherhood of Breath. The guitar player sounded like Lucky Ranko, and probably Mongezi Feza on trumpet. Dudu was one of the most beautiful players. That’s a wonderful South African groove. I wish that the South African musicians could be listening to stuff like this. 5 stars.

Wynton Marsalis

“Place Congo” (from Congo Square, JALC, 2008) Andre Haywood, trombone; James Zollar, trumpet; Sherman Irby, alto saxophone; Yakub Addy, master drum.

Wow, that’s beautiful. That sounded like something from the late ’60s or early ’70s. If Duke Ellington wanted to write an African suite, he would have done an arrangement like that—the voicings, the solos, the contemporary stuff. I suspected that it was him, but I have no idea if it was someone trying to imitate him. I keep hearing people like Chief Bey playing in the drum section. 5 stars.

Jerry Gonzalez and The Fort Apache Band

“To Wisdom The Prize” (from Molendo Café, Sunnyside, 1991) Jerry Gonzalez, flugelhorn, congas; Carter Jefferson, tenor saxophone; Joe Ford, alto saxophone; Larry Willis, piano; Andy Gonzalez, bass; Steve Berrios, percussion.

For a time, the piano player sounded like Larry Willis, who was with my first group. The piano solo, the voicings and so on, Larry did nice stuff like that. If it isn’t Larry Willis, then the guy tries to play like him—or he influenced Larry. The trumpet player with the beautiful fat tone, I don’t know who it might be. Maybe Eddie Henderson. 4 stars.

Amir ElSaffar

“Flood” (from Two Rivers, Pi, 2007) ElSaffar, trumpet; Rudresh Mahanthappa, alto saxophone; Zafer Tawil: violin, oud, dumbek; Tareq Abboushi: buzuq, frame drum; Carlo DeRosa: bass; Nasheet Waits: drums.

I got thirsty on that one. It was sort of Middle Eastern jazz or Arabic jazz, or maybe Saharan jazz. I had pictures of camels and a lot of sand and sandstorms, and I was dying for an oasis. But thematically, I enjoyed it. 3 stars.

Charles Tolliver

“Chedlike” (from Emperor March, Half Note, 2009) Tolliver, trumpet; orchestra. I loved it. If it wasn’t the Gil Evans band, then it was somebody who is a big fan of Gil Evans. I have all the things he did with Miles Davis. If the drummer isn’t Elvin Jones, it’s a great fan. The first night I came to New York, in September 1960, I saw Elvin Jones with John Coltrane. Reggie Workman and McCoy Tyner, and I’d never seen a drummer play like that. I don’t know the trumpet player. Could it be Johnny Coles? I’m not sure. 4 stars.

Brekker Brothers

“Wakaria (What’s Up?)” (from Return Of The Brecker Brothers, GRP, 1992) Randy Brecker, trumpet and flugelhorn; Michael Brecker, tenor saxophone; Armand Sabat-Lecco, bass, piccolo bass, drums, percussion, vocals; Max Risenhoover, snare programming, ride cymbal; George Whitty, keyboards; Dennis Chambers, drums.

I loved the arrangement. I have no idea who it is. With Miles Davis and Clifford Brown and Fats Navarro and Dizzy Gillespie, all those guys from that time, and of course Louis Armstrong before that, you could always tell who was playing. Later on, people became technically unbelievable, but you couldn’t really say, “There is so-and-so.” Having been away from the States for over 18 years, I haven’t followed any of the new developments. I loved the melody, a nice children’s song kind of thing. 4½ stars.

Dizzy Gillespie

“Africania” (from Gillesplana, Verve, 1961) Gillespie, trumpet; Leo Wright, flute; Lalo Schifrin, piano; Art Davis, bass; Chuck Lampkin, drums.

That felt to me like Dizzy Gillespie, though it could have been Jon Faddis. The flute sounded a little bit like James Moody—I don’t know how long ago it was done. I loved the piece, which is very Dizzy-esque. I don’t know who arranged it. I remember a time when Dizzy was doing a lot of work with Quincy Jones, but this sounds like something much later. Dizzy was the Svengali and God of the trumpet. So many people came from him. Harmonically, he was amazing. He did beautiful things on the Harmon mute—when he and Miles played it, I threw mine away.
Andy Martin Depends on Yamaha.

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-Andy Martin, International Soloist and Los Angeles Studio Trombonist

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